

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos

Cc: Candice Jackson, Office for Civil Rights

Brandon Sherman, Senior Counsel, Office for Civil Rights

Jason Botel, Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Hans Bader, Office of General Counsel

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20202

Dear Madam Secretary,

Last week, a meeting was held at the U.S. Department of Education to hear from organizations, parents and educators asking you to rescind department guidance that offers direction to schools on avoiding discriminatory use of school discipline policies.

Today, we are joining with other educators, labor leaders, students, and parents in calling on the Department of Education to not only keep the 2014 guidance in place, but also to increase federal investment in programs that actually work to create safe schools for educators and students. We believe that no one should fear being assaulted at school, and we believe that we must work together to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

Significant research shows that racial bias in the use of discipline policy in schools is real. Federal civil rights data consistently show that black students are almost four times more likely to be suspended than their white peers for the exact same infractions. Ninety percent of total suspensions are for non-violent behaviors, including subjective behaviors such as willful defiance and disrespect.

There are alternative pathways to safe and respectful school climates. We, the undersigned, work at a school in Saint Paul, Minnesota that has successfully used this guidance to implement a restorative model in our school. Restorative practices focus on intentional relationship building and shared problem solving. When restorative practices are successful, not only do educators and students benefit, but families also feel safe and welcome at their child's school because they have deep, lasting relationships within the school community.

As a community at Eastern Heights Elementary we have started by asking the questions, "How can all students, families and staff feel a sense of belonging and significance?" "How can we create a school culture that has fair processes for students, families and staff to make things right when mistakes are made?" "How can we address challenging behavior in a way that encourages all community members to take responsibility for their actions, to see the impact of their behaviors on the person they

harmed and the community?" "How do we allow those impacted by the behavior to be a part of the process and have their voice heard so the person responsible is motivated to repair harm by the power of relationships rather than the power of someone's rule?" "How can we support our community members through conflict and give them a chance to learn from their mistakes and repair the harm that was done?"

Restorative Practices proactively build a school community based on cooperation, mutual understanding, trust and respect, and responding to conflict by including all people impacted by a conflict in finding solutions that restore relationships and repair the positive behavior.

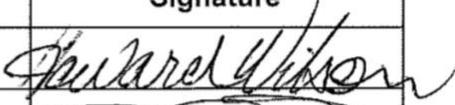
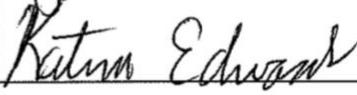
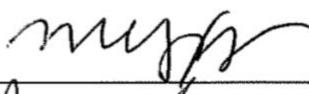
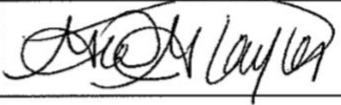
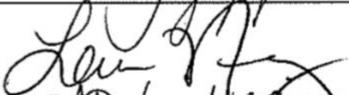
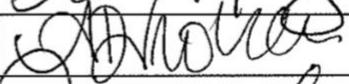
Restorative Practices has impacted our school in multiple ways, some small and some big. Circle process is becoming "normalized" for our students in multiple environments. Each day increasing numbers of students are experiencing different circle processes. Increasing numbers of students are feeling heard, understood and participatory in problem resolution and relationship restoration with each other and with staff. Increasing numbers of families are expressing a feeling of hope and more positive relationships with staff who are supporting student success with Restorative Practices.

We urge you and your staff to meet with organizations representing educators and students, and advocacy groups that have been at the forefront of these efforts. We urge you to explore models that engage students, educators, and researchers to better understand how to build school communities that work.

The 2014 guidance does not solve the problem of bias in school discipline, but it is a foundation on which we can build. Instead of rescinding the guidance, the Department should keep it in place, *and* invest in alternative practices that actually work to make schools places for all students to learn.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Title/ Position	Printed Name	Signature
Principal	Howard Wilson	
Restorative Practices Coordinator	Robin Gray King	
School Counselor/ Restorative Practices	Julia Mullan	
Leadership Kindergarten Educator	Katina Edwards	
Leadership First Grade Educator	Liv Roque <i>absent</i> <i>Mayer xy</i>	
Leadership Second Grade Educator	Pang Thao	
Leadership Third Grade Educator	Gia Taylor	
Leadership Fourth Grade Educator	Mary Jeffers	
Leadership Fifth Grade Educator	Laura Nunez	
Leadership Specialist	Angie Wroblewski	
Leadership Special Educator	Jodi Larson	