

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. I, 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.

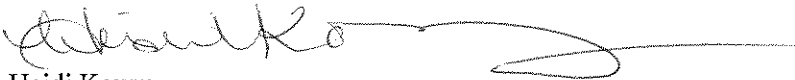
Maxfield Elementary is in the second year of being a restorative practice pilot site. Our staff is dedicated to helping our scholars to solve problems in a restorative way and to learn from mistakes. We serve a scholar population in which, 30% of our scholars are homeless, 24% receive special education services, 98% receive free lunch, and 90% are students of color. Through restorative practices we have seen scholars take responsibility for their actions and repair harm they have made with others in our school. We have scholars who are able to self-regulate and quickly re-engage in learning when they are dysregulated. Through the work of restorative practices we have been able to fully support and teach students social emotional skills, rather than punishing them for behaviors that are a result of dysregulation.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi Koury", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heidi Koury

Maxfield Elementary School

St. Paul, Minnesota