



Washington Technology Magnet Secondary School

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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

December 4, 2017

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 Washington Technology Magnet 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.

At Washington, we have begun implementing the Restorative Practices Framework to build positive relationships between students themselves, as well as parents and school staff members. By building these relationships, students feel more connected with the school and are able to focus more on their academics. We have held over 600 Community Building and Content circles and just last week had our Asian Cultural Celebration and Community Dinner with over 600 students, staff members, and their family members.

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,

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