



THE COUNCIL OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK

July 7, 2014

The Honorable Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
253 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña,
New York City Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña,

Our educational system and its unnecessarily harsh mechanisms for discipline are failing young men of color. We write to you today as elected officials invested in progressive educational policies, and as a delegation of young men of color from diverse backgrounds who have experienced these biases first hand.

Last year, there were 53,465 total suspensions. 93% percent of all suspensions involved students of color. Black students topped the list, receiving 53% of all suspensions. The second most common behavior for which students are being suspended are "B21" violations or 'Defying Authority', a vague, subjective infraction. This is a hyper-racialized catchall infraction that unfairly targets black and Latino students.

Stop and frisk has disproportionately criminalized young men of color on the streets of our city, and harsh disciplinary practices are doing the same thing in our public schools. In fact, many neighborhoods with the most frequent stops and frisks are the same communities where young men of color are regularly suspended from school. This is not a coincidence. It's unfair and it's wrong, and you must take real action to stop it.

It's entirely within your power to work with schools to develop and implement better protocols for de-escalating conflict, by facilitating parental involvement and engaging community allies with a track record of providing support services that keep students out of the principal's office. The Department of Education should revise the 2014-2015 Discipline Code to require guidance interventions as a mandatory precursor to any suspension, with the exception of serious infractions.

Our city's failed approach to discipline should be replaced with policies that provide students and educators with better tools for transforming conflict into opportunities for learning and growth.



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This is known as the restorative justice approach to conflict resolution, and it has been used successfully in other large urban school systems like Los Angeles. We urge you to follow their lead.

The Los Angeles Unified School District saw suspension rates drop by 40% to 50% within one year of their restorative justice implementation, specifically in schools that had some of the highest suspension rates. In 2013, Los Angeles boldly eliminated suspensions for 'willful defiance', as a means to end the racial disparities in their school discipline. Their efforts should be replicated here.

It is our collective responsibility as public servants to keep our young people, especially our young men of color, in the classroom. Racial disparities in school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline are civil rights issues, just like stop-and-frisk. Your leadership can help tackle them.

Sincerely,

Council Member Ritchie Torres

Council Member Rafael Espinal

Council Member Antonio Reynoso

Council Member Donovan Richards

Council Member Carlos Menchaca