



July 28, 2020

Via Email

Dear Members of the Dallas ISD Board of Trustees:

We write on behalf of the Texas Organizing Project, Texas Appleseed, and the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition to encourage the DISD Board of Trustees to adopt its proposed suspension ban and build up the infrastructure to eliminate racial disparities in school discipline. The Texas Organizing Project is a grassroots statewide organization, led by people of color, that fights for racial and social justice for all Texans. Texas Appleseed is a public interest justice center based in Austin that works to dismantle unjust laws and policies that unduly burden historically underserved Texans. The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition is a statewide non-profit organization that is dedicated to ending mass incarceration and fostering safer communities across Texas. In this moment of an international reckoning with various manifestations of racial injustice, we applaud the DISD Board of Trustees for entertaining a K-12 suspension ban, but we also offer our recommendations for policies and practices that will honor the spirit of such a proposal.

As indicated by the suspension ban even being proposed, the school-to-prison pipeline remains a pernicious civil rights violation for so many young people across Texas. Through the use of exclusionary discipline and school policing, thousands of young Texans are pushed into contact with the criminal legal system each academic year from conduct that occurs in their schools. According to data from the Texas Education Agency, 6,802 Black students and 5,906 Latinx students were suspended out-of-school from DISD during the 2018-2019 school year, as compared to only 363 white students.¹

According to the most recent federal data, Black students represented 22.6% of the DISD student population during the 2015-2016 academic year, yet they accounted for 46.7% of out-of-school suspensions.² Latinx young people represented 70.1% of the student population during the same school year, yet their level of enrollment was not reflected in the calculus,

¹ Texas Education Agency, Discipline Reports, Dallas ISD District Summary, available at https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/cgi/sas/broker?_service=marykay&_program=adhoc.D_D_P_select_district.as&agg_level=DISTRICT&referrer=Download_District_Summaries_NAME.html&test_flag=&_debug=0&school_yr=19&report_type=html&list_by=name&namefrag=dallas&numbfrag=&Download_Selected_District=Next

² 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection, U.S. Department of Education, *Dallas ISD*, available at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=30332&syk=8&pid=2278#>

physics, and chemistry courses offered by the district.³ These data demonstrate that there is much work that remains to deliver a quality education for all young people. Currently, school pushout and under-enrollment in gifted & talented programs work together to make Black and Latinx children, LGBTQ young people, and kids with disabilities feel as though they don't belong in their school environments.

Particularly, in the wake of the police murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Tony McDade, the proposed suspension ban in Dallas ISD represents a tangible step in advancing anti-racist principles within one of the largest school districts in the country.⁴ We urge the Board of Trustees to formally adopt a policy to ban suspensions for all K-12 learners. Moreover, we advise the district to not carve out exceptions for cases of violence or drug use, as currently exists for the statewide ban on pre-K-2 suspensions in the Texas Education Code.⁵ Finally, we encourage the district to not use disciplinary alternative education placements in the place of suspensions; instead, the district should invest more resources into multi-tiered systems of support and social emotional learning that will keep young people in school as campus officials address behavioral concerns.

Such audacious steps are especially necessary during the time of the coronavirus pandemic, where so many young people are grappling with significant trauma and mass loss. In addition to instituting the suspension ban, DISD should divest from the DISD Police Department and invest funds into hiring school psychologists and school counselors. The presence of trained mental health professionals could greatly improve the school climate for historically underserved students and create a more holistic and responsive learning environment for all.

Students and school staff members across Dallas deserve attentive, trauma-informed care as they return to school and seek to heal from the events of 2020. DISD can use the opportunity presented by the 2020-2021 academic year to fundamentally transform the culture of its schools and finally move away from the zero tolerance approach that has characterized school discipline for decades. We invite you to contact our organizations with any questions you may have about these recommendations.

³ See *id.*

⁴ Eva-Marie Ayala, *Is banning school suspensions the 'bold' step Dallas needs to help Black students?*, *Dallas Morning News*, June 25, 2020, available at <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2020/06/25/is-banning-school-suspensions-the-bold-step-dallas-needs-to-help-black-students/> (last visited on July 28, 2020)

⁵ Texas Education Code Sec. 37.005

Sincerely,

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cc: Dr. Michael Hinojosa (via U.S. mail)