

Via Email (lgetty1@pghschools.org)

November 22, 2021

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Testimony Submitted to Pittsburgh Public Schools Board of Directors

Education Law Center

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The Education Law Center urges the Board to align its actions with its long-voiced commitment to equity and inclusion and **refrain from reinstating the policy that suspends students for non-violent level one repeated infractions**. The proposed resolution would represent a giant step backward in the District's efforts to replace punitive disciplinary measures with the meaningful supports students need to learn and thrive.

As we have testified previously, the District's data reveals that Black students and students with disabilities are suspended at a disproportionately high rate. Reinstating this policy will exclude them from learning and lead them down a pathway that pushes them out of school and into carceral systems, without addressing the underlying issues that give rise to the student's behavior. Reinstating this policy perpetuates the systemic racism the District strives to dismantle.

On behalf of the students and families we serve, we encourage you to support appropriate policies and practices that meet the mistakes students make with proven approaches that keep students in school and let them learn. We also encourage you to ensure that school personnel are trained and supported with a broad range of resources to manage behaviors in developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive ways.

In this moment, more than ever, students need compassion and restorative practices to help them heal from the trauma of a still-ongoing pandemic. Instead of addressing non-violent student behavior with exclusionary discipline, the District should double down on its commitment to meeting the needs of its students and creating a positive school environment for everyone.

We encourage you to listen to students, families, and community members and to adopt policies and support practices that are informed by those most impacted by exclusionary discipline and to find ways to support school personnel and students that promote positive school environments where all children are welcomed and all can thrive.

Who we are: The Education Law Center (ELC) is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all Pennsylvania’s children, from birth through twenty-one, have access to a quality public education. For 45 years, ELC has provided legal advice, consultation, and technical assistance to thousands of parents, advocates, and other professionals on issues of public education. Our work focuses on ensuring that the students, families, and communities most impacted are centered in the decision-making process and part of co-constructing solutions.