



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Federal Office for Civil Rights Opens Investigation of Race-Based Discrimination and School Pushout at BASIS DC Public Charter School

Washington, D.C. – The United States Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (“OCR”) has opened an investigation into allegations that school discipline practices at one of DC’s “highest performing” public charter schools unlawfully discriminate against and harm black students.

On January 29, 2019, OCR notified [Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.](#) (AJE) that the office would open an investigation into allegations of racial discrimination raised in a complaint filed by AJE alleging that BASIS DC’s discipline policies and practices violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program receiving federal funds. In 2012, BASIS DC opened as the first BASIS curriculum school located outside of Arizona. BASIS DC sits in the center of downtown DC, has 600 students in grades 5-12 and has been [rated](#) one of the District’s “highest performing Tier 1 DC Public Charter Schools.” At the end of school year 2016-17, BASIS DC reported a population of 35.8% black students, 39% white students, 8.6% Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian students, 8.5% Hispanic/Latino students and 8% multiracial students.

AJE filed this complaint in order to supplement and support earlier allegations of improper disciplinary practices at BASIS DC that OCR had already agreed to investigate based on an initial complaint filed pro se in May 2018 by a parent, Yumica Thompson. At the time unrepresented by legal counsel, Ms. Thompson alleged in her complaint that BASIS DC discriminated against her child on the basis of race when a teacher contacted law enforcement regarding an innocent remark made by the student on May 4, 2018, [resulting in his interrogation by the police and FBI](#) and a school lock down. Ms. Thompson had not even been contacted by the school informing her what had happened until after her 12-year old autistic son had been interrogated by law enforcement officers from the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force for hours.

“Race-based discrimination in the District’s public education system still persists, and every day students of color are systematically pushed out of schools, particularly some of the District’s “highest performing” schools,” said Stacey Eunnae, the AJE attorney who filed the complaint. “The issues raised in our complaint are not new, although the landscape of DC’s public education system has changed. Around the time BASIS DC opened, DC’s population had shifted so much that the District was no longer majority African-American. Also, DC’s public schools have been seeing the first real increase in student enrollment since the time of [Brown v. Board of Education](#).”

The complaint was filed on behalf of Ms. Thompson’s son-- an African American middle-school student who was removed from class for discipline referrals *more than 80 times* during the 2017-18 school year--

-and other students at BASIS DC like him who may have received harsher and more frequent punishment because of their race. AJE provided OCR with information from a former BASIS DC employee asserting that teachers at BASIS DC are not “educated on how to interact with [African-American students]” and had problems “targeting black males within the school.” ProPublica recently released [data](#) showing that black students at BASIS DC were 5.7 times more likely to be suspended than white students and that 71% of their total out-of-school suspensions were issued to black students, as compared to 13% of white students.

“It deeply saddens me that my children attend a school with [nearly the same number of black students as white students](#) but there is a significant disparity in how African American students, especially boys, are pushed out of class and disciplined,” said BASIS DC parent, Ms. Thompson. “OCR agreeing to investigate my concerns gives me a beacon of hope that a necessary systemic change will come.”

While suspensions and expulsions have decreased in DC over the past five years, the racial disparity in both exclusionary discipline and graduation rates has actually grown [wider](#).

Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas, Executive Director at AJE, stated that “it is our hope that this complaint and investigation serve as an agent of change in dismantling systems of institutionalized racism in public education.”

About Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

[Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.](#) (AJE) seeks to empower families, youth, and the community to be effective advocates to ensure that children and youth, particularly those who have special needs, receive access to appropriate education and health services. We promote school and agency accountability to ensure that all children, youth, and families receive proper services and supports to succeed.

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