



Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

The Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Children with
Special Needs,
need Parents
with Special
Skills!**

District of Columbia Youth, Parents, Teachers and Advocates Call upon D.C.'s State Education Agency to Reform School Pushout Policies

AJE Sends Letter to D.C.'s Office of the State Superintendent of Education along with Statements from Parents, Youth, Teachers and Advocates across the District Demanding District-Wide Discipline Regulations

Washington, D.C. – Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. (AJE), DC's federally designated Parent Training and Information Center, led the call among youth, parents, teachers and advocates today in asking Superintendent Jesús Aguirre to follow through on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)'s promise to issue District-wide discipline regulations that would provide uniform and minimum safeguards to students in DC's public and public charter schools. Finalizing and implementing these regulations would help reform a number of harmful, unreasonable and discriminatory discipline policies and practices among schools in DC.

Each year, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools suspend thousands of students even though research has established that suspensions are ineffective at addressing misbehavior, that harsh discipline policies do not make safer schools, and that suspensions and expulsions are harmful to students.¹ Students who are suspended or expelled are more likely to experience decreased academic achievement, increased behavioral problems, failure to graduate on time, and involvement in the juvenile justice system.² Additionally, students of color and students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at higher rates than their white and non-disabled peers. In DC, African-American students are nearly six times more likely to be suspended and expelled than white students.

To address this issue and as part of the 5th Annual National Week of Action Against School Pushout, AJE delivered 50+ postcards with statements from parents, students, teachers and advocates, along with a letter signed by nine supporting organizations to OSSE. The letter and

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics, "Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion," *Pediatrics* 131, no. 3 (Mar. 2013): p. 2; Russell Skiba et al, "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?" A Report by the American Psychological Association Task Force 63 (2006); Dignity in Schools Campaign "Fact Sheet: School Discipline and the Pushout Problem," available at, http://www.dignityinschools.org/files/DSC_Pushout_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

² Deborah Fitzgerald Fowler. "Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline: Dropout to Incarceration," (Austin, TX: Texas Appleseed, Oct. 2007), p. 26-27 and 70-71, available at, <http://www.texasappleseed.net/pdf/Pipeline%20Report.pdf>; Tony Fabelo et al. "Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement" (Council of States Governments Justice Center and The Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A&M University, July 2011), p. 59, available at, http://justicecenter.csg.org/files/Breaking_Schools_Rules_Report_Final.pdf.

postcards demand that OSSE commit to finalizing and implementing district-wide discipline regulations by the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. In the letter, AJE also recommended that OSSE invest in alternatives to suspension, such as restorative justice and positive behavior interventions. Along with AJE, a number of organizations signed in support of the letter, including Bread for the City, Dignity in Schools Campaign, School Talk, The Amara Legal Center, The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, The Critical Exposure Fellowship, Took Crowell Institute for Youth, UDC Juvenile and Special Education Law Clinic and University Legal Services.

OSSE already recognizes that school pushout is a problem, and AJE believes it is time for OSSE to take action in the best interest of D.C. youth. It has been five years since OSSE first published draft discipline regulations which were never finalized. In June of this year, OSSE issued a [report](#), which highlights the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline practices and the troubling facts that in DC students of color, students with disabilities and students from low-income households are disciplined at unacceptably higher rates than their peers.³ The report also provides several helpful recommendations about how we can reduce out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in the District, including that OSSE issues state-wide discipline regulations which establish uniform minimum standards that will guide how DC's public schools and public charter schools must develop and implement their student codes of conduct. AJE and these supporting organizations urge OSSE to finally follow through with these recommendations because the community is calling for reform.

Weadé Wallace, Executive Director of AJE, stated, "Effective alternatives to suspension and expulsions, such as restorative justice, make the most of our investment in education, by allowing students to spend more time learning in school, rather than suffering the harmful consequences of being denied access to education." She went on to say, "Students in D.C. cannot afford to wait another year for OSSE to implement discipline regulations and to invest in alternatives to suspension. Fostering positive school climates through school-wide restorative justice programs, and eliminating racially disproportionate discipline practices and push-out of students into the prison pipeline must be a priority for the District."

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Founded in 1996, AJE educates parents, youth, and the community about the laws governing public education, specifically as they relate to children with special needs. AJE is the federally designated Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia and the mandated Parent Center under the Blackmon/Jones Consent Decree. AJE seeks to empower youth and parents to be effective advocates to ensure students receive an appropriate public education. AJE provides advocacy, support, training, and legal representation to parents and students enrolled in local schools.

³ The Office of the State Superintendent of Education. "Reducing Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions in District of Columbia Public and Public Charter Schools" [hereinafter "OSSE Report"] (June, 2014), available at, http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/OSSE_REPORT_DISCIPLINARY_G_PAGES.pdf.