

# Coalition for Fairness & Equity in Schools



**MISSION:** To develop a community-based group that works collaboratively with educators and policy-makers to ensure a quality public education for all Delaware students.

**VISION:** We envision an education system that fosters a positive environment where:

- All students are educated and respected;
- Discipline policies and procedures are fair, equitable, applied consistently and clearly understood;
- Children are given opportunities to learn from their mistakes and grow; and
- Families and communities are engaged in the process.

**BACKGROUND:** Delaware, like many states around the country, is part of a disturbing national trend known as the “school to prison pipeline.” In the 2012-2013 school year, public school students in Delaware received in- or out-of-school suspensions at a rate of 39%, including students who were removed from school on multiple occasions. The number of individual students suspended or expelled during that same time period was 18,053, or 13.7% of the overall Delaware student population. Students with disabilities are being suspended from school at about twice the rate of their peers. Astoundingly, while only about 10% of the children in Delaware’s public schools have an identified disability, over 70% of juvenile offenders struggle with behavioral/mental/emotional issues and/or substance abuse, and almost 50% have serious learning disabilities. The odds for suspension and expulsion soar even higher depending on the students’ race. African American and Latino students are suspended 3-4 times more than their white peers, even when they represent a substantially low enrollment rate overall. Research shows that extended absences and exclusionary practices cause students, many of whom are already struggling academically, to fall behind and never catch up. This leads to a series of issues that negatively affect their lives and the community as a whole.

New federal discipline guidance developed jointly by the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice instructs schools to commit to regular evaluation of the school discipline policies and practices, and to monitor progress toward the schools climate and discipline goals. This process requires schools to first collect and publicly report disaggregated student discipline data, and to solicit feedback from students, staff, families, and community representatives. Schools should involve the full array of community stakeholders in reviewing and analyzing disciplinary data

Over the past several months ACLU-DE convened a diverse group of community members focused on eliminating the use of zero tolerance practices and ending discriminatory practices. The coalition seeks to partner with districts and schools to implement the following recommendations:

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### PRIORITY 1

**Request public annual release of discipline data for each district and school, including disaggregated data, types of offences, data by grade level and length of time for ISS and OSS.**

Purpose: Provide transparency for greater accountability and targeted interventions.

### PRIORITY 2

**Create district level community-based advisory committees to annually review discipline policies and data, and provide recommendations that promote equity and restorative strategies.**

Purpose: Identify resources and provide independent oversight, greater accountability and transparency.

### PRIORITY 3

**Create school level teams (school staff, parents, community advocates, and student representatives) in schools with excessive or disparate discipline rates.**

Purpose: Develop corrective action plans and implementation oversight.

### PRIORITY 4

**Increase professional development opportunities for school personnel focused on cultural competency, classroom management, trauma-informed interventions and asset development, including a follow-up component to monitor effectiveness.**

Purpose: Improve cultural competency among school staff and provide additional research-based strategies that positively impact school climate.

### PRIORITY 5

**Provide advocacy training to families in various venues that include topics such as school codes of conduct, asset development, cultural competency and leadership opportunities sponsored by school districts.**

Purpose: Help educate families to engage with school staff and support learning at home in partnership with community/social service agencies.

### PRIORITY 6

**Create student-led councils to provide input and leadership that support positive behavior.**

Purpose: Increase opportunities to engage students in the process and provide opportunities to develop leadership skills.

The proceeding recommendations were developed with the cooperation of a diverse group of stakeholders and represents our Coalition Members.

**COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION**

Marie-Anne Aghazadian  
Executive Director  
Parent Information Center of Delaware

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**COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Adriana Bohm  
School Board Member  
Red Clay School District

Susan Brown  
Parent Leader

Eve Buckley  
Co-Organizer  
Friends of Christina School  
District Parent Advocacy  
Network  
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Community Advocate

Samtra Devard  
Hope Center of Delaware

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Community Advocate

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Parent Leader

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Board Member  
ACLU-DE

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Concerned Citizen

Dr. Melva Ware  
Community Advocate

## **GOVERNMENT**

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Wilmington City Council

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Wilmington City Council

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Wilmington City Council

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19<sup>th</sup> District

DE House of Representatives