

Coalition wants school discipline changes

Matthew Albright, The News Journal 7:05 p.m. EDT June 10, 2014

Coalition says suspensions put kids on fast-track to prison and set them up for failure



(Photo: SUCHAT PEDERSON/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

Out-of-school suspensions in Delaware are disproportionately affecting black, Hispanic and special-needs students, putting them on the fast-track to prison and setting them up for social failure, a group of Wilmington and New Castle County leaders and state activists say.

Calling themselves the Coalition for Fairness & Equity in Schools, they are urging the Delaware Department of Education to more openly report who is being suspended – and for what. They also are pushing school districts to work more closely with communities to find other ways to maintain a positive school climate.

"When it comes to violence in the City of Wilmington, one of the root causes is education. It's not the kids with high school diplomas who are on the corner with a gun," said Wilmington Councilman Nnamdi O. Chukwuocha.

"But, unfortunately, our system is pushing students out of school with these no-tolerance discipline policies."

Led by the the [American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware](http://www.aclu-de.org/) (<http://www.aclu-de.org/>), the group includes Wilmington and New Castle County council members and 30 representatives from groups including the [Christina Cultural Arts Center](http://www.ccacde.org/) (<http://www.ccacde.org/>), [United Way](http://www.uwde.org/) (<http://www.uwde.org/>), [Urban League](http://mwul.info/?page_id=180) (http://mwul.info/?page_id=180) and the [Delaware Adolescent Program](http://www.dapi.org/aboutus.htm) (<http://www.dapi.org/aboutus.htm>).

DeWayne Wickam column: [We're kicking boys out of school before kindergarten](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/06/07/kicking-boys-school-kindergarten/10186021/) ([/story/opinion/contributors/2014/06/07/kicking-boys-school-kindergarten/10186021/](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/06/07/kicking-boys-school-kindergarten/10186021/))

Shannon Griffin column: [School discipline is broken and in need of a fix](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/01/09/school-discipline-is-broken-and-in-need-of-a-fix/4395949/) ([/story/opinion/contributors/2014/01/09/school-discipline-is-broken-and-in-need-of-a-fix/4395949/](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/01/09/school-discipline-is-broken-and-in-need-of-a-fix/4395949/))

Story: [High black student suspension rate seen as concern](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2014/03/21/high-black-student-suspension-rate-seen-as-concern/6718993/) ([/story/news/education/2014/03/21/high-black-student-suspension-rate-seen-as-concern/6718993/](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2014/03/21/high-black-student-suspension-rate-seen-as-concern/6718993/))

The advocates contend that out-of-school suspensions put students behind academically and squash their interest in school. About 14 percent of Delaware students were suspended or expelled at least once in the 2012-2013 school year, according to state figures; about one in 10 received an out-of-school suspension.

Many students are suspended multiple times. Overall, 51,165 suspensions were assessed in that period in Delaware.

The coalition says those suspensions disproportionately impact minority and special-needs students. According to their figures, black and Latino students are suspended three to four times more frequently than white students, even though they make up a smaller segment of the school population.

Their stats also say students with disabilities are suspended about twice as often as their classmates.

Those numbers come from Delaware state data the ACLU obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and analyzed itself. The Coalition is calling the Delaware Department of Education to regularly make that information public so communities can know what portion of suspensions are going to students of certain races, genders, English proficiency and disability status.

While the state [Department of Education](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/) (<http://www.doe.k12.de.us/>) worked with the ACLU to provide the data, spokeswoman Alison May said in some cases it left out figures that included only a small number of students, fearing those students could be identified and the state could run afoul of federal student privacy laws. May said that could complicate the process of publicly releasing data in the way the group is suggesting.

The coalition also is calling for school districts to engage parents, teachers and staff in ways to create positive school climate without pushing students out. It is recommending that districts:

- Create district-level advisory committees to annually review discipline data and policies.
- Create school-specific teams when individual schools have excessive disciplinary rates.

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- Better train school staff on skills to improve school climate.
- Educate families about school codes of conduct and school climate.
- Create student-led councils to provide input and develop leadership skills.

New Castle County Councilman Jea Street said he's been trying to get schools to change these policies for decades. He hopes the coalition will bring new voices to the discussion.

"It's time for new players. It's time for new warriors," Street said. "That's the reason I'm excited about this."

Street and Chukwuocha each introduced resolutions at their respective council meetings urging the state and school districts to enact these recommendations.

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June 11, 2014, 8:04 a.m.



I-495 closure:
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[Krispy Kreme closer to New Castle opening \(/story/money/business/2014/06/10/delaware-krispy-kreme-doughnut-store-opening-soon/10289581/\)](#)

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[\(/story/news/crime/2014/06/10/police-scene-reported-pike-creek-shooting/10301571/\)](#)

[One killed, two hurt in Pike Creek shooting \(/story/news/crime/2014/06/10/police-scene-reported-pike-creek-shooting/10301571/\)](#)
June 11, 2014, 8:39 a.m.

