



**EDUCATORS
FOR EXCELLENCE**

80 Pine St., 28th Floor
New York, NY 10005
212-279-8510

December 8, 2017

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

On November 17, 2017, you met with a handful of teachers and organizations to hear their experiences with the previous administration's guidance on reducing discipline disparities in our schools. As reported in several news outlets, we understand that this meeting was part of a broader review of 2014's "Dear colleague" letter and other civil rights protections. We are worried that this administration will rescind this guidance that is aimed to end disproportionate discipline, so that all students can enjoy educational opportunity. These include students with disabilities, boys and girls of color, English learners, and Native American, low-income, and LGBTQ students. To this end, we call on the U.S. Department of Education to support students of all backgrounds and abilities by keeping the school discipline guidance released by the Departments of Education and Justice in 2014.

We recognize that a negative school climate, overly punitive discipline policies, and a lack of focus on supporting the whole child can keep our students from reaching their full potential. Student data from the Civil Rights Data Collection also tells us that suspended, arrested, or expelled students are disproportionately students of color. We have seen firsthand how exclusionary practices negatively impact students' trajectories and feeds the school-to-prison pipeline. Once suspended or expelled, students are more likely to drop out of school and be incarcerated. Students should be in class, not handcuffs.

The federal guidance from 2014's "Dear colleague" letter was formulated in response to our students' struggles for equitable disciplinary practices and path to academic success. This federal guidance remains essential for holding our school systems accountable at the local level and for keeping this issue at the center of the national dialogue so that communities can work together to create solutions that bring an end to racial and discipline disparities and support so that all students can succeed in our nation.

We urge you to keep the school discipline guidance released in 2014.

All students deserve a Department of Education that will stand up for policies that improve their educational experience and lead to their long-term success.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
Allies for Educational Equity
Center for American Progress
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Educators for Excellence
Feminist Majority Foundation
Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Education Association
National Network of State Teachers of the Year
People For the American Way
Stand for Children
TASH
Teach Plus
The Arc of the United States
The Education Trust
The National Indian Education Association
The New Teacher Project
YWCA USA