



For Immediate Release

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Media Contact:

Dakota Hall, dakota@litmke.org, (414) 807-9859

Samy Nemir, solivares@populardemocracy.org, (929) 285-9623

New Milwaukee Discipline Policy Proposes to Call Police on Elementary Students

Youth leaders call for NO vote and more student input to reform racist discipline policies

MILWAUKEE, WI -- A new Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) policy will be proposed tonight to the Milwaukee Board of School Directors requiring all school administrators to engage the police when children are “suspected of criminal activity”. This Administrative Policy 8.23 (8b) is one of [9 policy revisions](#) proposed by the Committee on Legislation, Rules and Policies for the 2018-2019 school year.

“We need to stop calling the police on black children in their own schools.” said **Joya Headley, Youth Leader with Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT) and a Senior at Milwaukee School of Languages**. “Black students are unfairly suspected all the time and already experience harsher discipline. Involving police is the problem, not the answer.”

MPS was required to revise its discipline policies by June 18th, 2018 as a condition of its Resolution Agreement with the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR). In January 2018, the OCR wrapped up a [three year investigation](#) of Milwaukee schools, which found racial discrimination in MPS discipline policies. They concluded that the District’s discipline of black students was in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1962 that prohibits educational discrimination based on race.

“These policy changes do not adequately address the core issues found by the Office of Civil Rights, do not address youth concerns and input, and will further harm young people by entrenching the school to prison pipeline.” said **Kyle Pfister, co-founder of public health advocacy group Ninjas for Health**. “We can’t rush this bad policy to just to meet a deadline. Go back to the drawing board and come back with a plan that truly reforms the root causes of our poor outcomes for black and brown students.”

The OCR report cited more than 100 examples in a two-year period (2014-2015) in which black MPS students were expelled from school when white students were only suspended for similar behavior. An expulsion doubles the likelihood a student will dropout of school entirely, contributing significantly to the school-to-prison pipeline.

“Milwaukee’s school discipline code has already been shown to be racially biased, steering more Black students into the criminal legal system. These students deserve to be in school, not in prison,” said **Dmitri Holtzman, Director of Education Justice Campaigns at the Center for Popular Democracy**.

“Milwaukee already leads the nation with the highest incarceration rate of black young men. This was an opportunity for MPS to transform its school discipline code and become a national leader in inclusive school policies. Instead, if these revisions go through as they are, MPS will surely receive national attention for all the wrong reasons.”

In the 2016-17 school year, Black students accounted for 53% of all MPS students, yet 83% of all suspensions and 87% of expulsions. The District suspended 10,267 students in one year, which is 13% of the total enrollment and 4x the Wisconsin average. School referrals to police are reserved in the vast majority of cases (84.6%) for black students. As a result, MPS' graduation rate is 35 % lower than surrounding districts with black students graduating 15% less than their white peers. Millions of public dollars are diverted from the famously tight MPS budget to fund policing of young people in their own schools instead of funding counselors to help them overcome challenges and succeed.

“We can bridge this lack of empathy by uplifting the experiences and ideas of youth. We're telling you we're being treated like criminals and the statistics back us up.” said **Leticia Alvarez, Youth Leader with LIT and Senior at Riverside High School**. “Our leaders should listen to the voices of students who are black, Latinx, LGBTQ+, or disabled who fear for their safety when school issues are escalated to police.”

MPS' list of proposed new discipline policies neglect to include a single reform requested by Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT), a Milwaukee non-profit led by young people that's committed to justice for Black and Brown youth. LIT's recent report which was co-authored by Center for Popular Democracy (CPD) “[From Freedom to Failure: Dismantling Milwaukee's School to Prison Pipeline with the Youth Power Agenda](#)” researched school discipline from a youth perspective made 14 concrete suggestions for form including:

- removing police from schools
- removing metal detectors
- ending suspensions and expulsions
- increasing the number of trauma-informed counselors and social workers
- reducing classroom sizes

“Given the severity of the problem at MPS, I'm stunned at how little they're proposing to change our discriminatory discipline procedures,” said **Dakota Hall, Executive Director of LIT**. “I personally attended all [seven MPS listening sessions](#) with black and brown MPS students. They took zero of our suggestions, yet found the time to recommend calling the police on children in their classrooms. They obviously aren't listening.”

LIT is calling on the MPS School Board of Directors to vote NO on this first draft of the new discipline policies, facilitate a public opportunity for students to openly debate and comment, and then schedule a vote on a more robust set of policy reforms before school starts in August. If this requires a deadline extension, it's worth it to ensure MPS discipline is in full compliance with the US Civil Rights Act.

For example, two specific policy changes show good intention, but need more work to be strengthened:

- **Improve Discipline Data** 8.23 (8b): This new data collection must include which teacher or administrator requested discipline and why, as well as enough student demographics to monitor established MPS disparities in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability. Current data collection does not allow measurement of known disparities in LGBTQ+ discipline.
- **Firearm Prohibition** 8.23 (1a): LIT supports MPS' continued prohibition of firearms, despite Wisconsin Republican calls for arming teachers. We request that police be required to disarm when entering schools as well.

Leaders Igniting Transformation sees this MPS policy setback as further proof that Milwaukee's young people must lead the way to create real reforms in their schools and communities. “Everyone should be angry that we're passing policies to criminalize black student behavior in elementary school.” said Hall, “We do not accept this status quo for our future generation.”

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Milwaukee School Board of Directors meets tonight (5/31) at 6:30pm at MPS Central Services (5225 W Vliet St)