



Empowerment, Education, Accountability

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U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Opens an Investigation Concerning Gwinnett County Public Schools IE² Partnership Contract

Georgia – The Snellville, GA-based Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP) announced Wednesday, November 4, 2011 that the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights has opened an investigation into the discrimination complaint filed on behalf of over 158,000 students in Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS), Georgia's largest school district.

The complaint alleges that the school district subject students with disabilities, English Language Learners and students according to race to different performance targets established under the district's Investing in Educational Excellence (IE2) contract. During the most recent information from the Georgia Department of Education Report card, this treatment affects more than 67% of the total student population.

"Gwinnett County Public Schools expect students to enter the same school building yet sit at separate academic tables," said Marlyn Tillman, of Gwinnett STOPP.

The accountability and performance objectives featured in the IE2 contract allow GCPS to bypass 13 existing state educational laws—regarding education certification for teachers, class size requirements, expenditure controls, and ELL programs, among others—are dependent upon different aggregate performance benchmarks segregated by race, national origin, and disability. GSTOPP alleges that these performance objectives violate Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title 34 - Education of the Code of Federal Regulations, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

"The truth of the matter is Gwinnett bartered away high expectations for students with disabilities, black, Hispanic and English Language Learners in Gwinnett in exchange for five, possibly ten years, of complete "flexibility" from state educational laws. The frightening thing is it was apparently easy to do. We are concerned that the other school districts will blindly take the lead from Gwinnett - it is not only our duty, but it is our obligation to ask the federal government to get involved. GCPS has literally left parents in our community with no other option ", said Jennifer Falk, another coalition leader of Gwinnett STOPP.

Governor Perdue signed and approved the IE2 legislation, HB1209, during the 2008 session of the Georgia Legislature. In December of 2008, Gwinnett County Public Schools pursued an IE2 contract with the Governors' Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) and the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). The contract is to include accountability for each school with the district that exceeds performance requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in exchange for flexibility across educational rules established by GDOE. By 2015, over 180 Georgia school districts are required to "opt in" or "opt out" of this legislation.

Gwinnett SToPP is a grassroots parent-led, community-centered organization in Gwinnett County. Members of the coalition, in addition to parents, include the ACLU of Georgia, the Georgia State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Rho Kappa Lambda Chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and other community stakeholders. Gwinnett SToPP is an active member of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) and regularly partners with other state and local organizations.

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