

Securing the Education Pipeline for Georgia's Children through Community-Empowered Local School Councils

**Policy Recommendations to the Georgia General
Assembly & Georgia Department of Education**

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES BY RACE | GEORGIA 2011-2012

Source: Georgia Department of Education

14.5

suspensions per 100
BLACK students



7.2

suspensions per 100
MULTIRACIAL students



5.2

suspensions per 100
LATINO students



3.1

suspensions per 100
AMERICAN INDIAN students



4.2

suspensions per 100
WHITE students



Black students received out-of-school suspensions at **3.5 times** the rate of White students.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION RATES BY DISABILITY STATUS | GEORGIA 2011-2012

Source: Georgia Department of Education

13.8

suspensions per 100
STUDENTS W/DISABILITIES



7.4

suspensions per 100
GENERAL EDUCATION
students



Students with disabilities received out-of-school suspensions at **1.9 times** the rate of general education students.



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As organizations that work on behalf of parents and youth in Georgia to secure the education pipeline, we commend the General Assembly on its efforts to find ways to improve our education system and involve parents, guardians, families and communities. We urge the General Assembly to continue to invest in strategies that unite parents, teachers, and others. Georgia's Local School Councils (LSC), which are already in existence, could be such a strategy.

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that Georgia is among the five states with the highest number of young adults between the ages of 16 and 21 who are not in school and who have not completed a high school education.¹ Georgia's 2012-2013 high school graduation rate has slightly improved, yet still places us at the bottom of the nation.² Nationally, the number of high-suspending elementary schools outnumbered the lower-suspending elementary schools in only seven states— Delaware, Florida, South Carolina, Louisiana, North Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi.³

Securing the Education Pipeline for Georgia's Children through Community-Empowered Local School Councils, outlines solutions to improve educational outcomes for children by strengthening the Local School Council (LSC), which was created with the intent "...to help local boards of education develop and nurture participation, bring parents and the community together with teachers and school administrators to create a better understanding of and mutual respect for each other's concerns, and share ideas for school improvement."⁴ The report walks through the creation of the LSC; the successes of parent advisory bodies; as well as recommendations to strengthen the LSC.

Georgia's model is based on years of research and decades of lived experiences. First, as perhaps best stated by a researcher in 1999, "...mutually responsive relationships seem more likely to flourish if such programs focus more on the interconnectedness of parents and teachers through their mutual commitment to children and on exploring ways to enhance and celebrate this connectedness."⁵ Indeed, research has shown that when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and actually like school more.⁶ The more parents participate in schooling in a sustained way, at every level, the better for student achievement.⁷

Additionally, when parents come to school regularly—through a vehicle such as a LSC— parents help students realize that "school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life."⁸ In fact, "the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage parent involvement at school."⁹

Given this research background, pursuing and investing in strategies that actively involve parents and bring all members of the school community together is the best choice. Georgia is fortunate to have such a model *already in existence* with our local school councils. And we have seen, when supported, how LSCs can have a major impact. **Local School Councils are a powerful tool for transforming Georgia's schools. We must secure the education pipeline and increase our graduation rates.**

Strengthening Local School Councils in Georgia: Recommendations for the Georgia General Assembly

Recommendations for the Georgia General Assembly

What follows are recommendations to the Georgia General Assembly to elevate the function of local school councils (LSC) as governance bodies for school districts and to keep school districts accountable for discipline policies and practices:

1. Fund the LSC Mandate

Fund the LSC mandate to provide: professional development training for all LSC members on their roles, rights and responsibilities; regular leadership training opportunities designed to improve shared decision making skills and collaboration within the school; best practices and evidence-based solutions to discipline; and general funds to address other hurdles to academic achievement for LSC members. The Georgia General Assembly should augment Title I funds to improve the effectiveness of LSCs and their collection and analysis of pertinent school data—starting with the state’s Priority and Focus Schools, as designated by Georgia’s ESEA Flexibility Request, dated February 6, 2012.¹⁰

2. Strengthen LSC Advisory and Governance Abilities

Position LSCs to have “oversight and response” capabilities for school climate. Provide that LSCs review all cases in which a discipline code of “Other” is assigned in a disciplinary situation and where the school’s average ISS (in school suspension) and/or OSS (out-of-school suspension) rates exceed three days. Additionally, award LSCs the authority to trigger the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices or similar research-proven positive behavior modification methods in their schools. Although there is free training given by the Georgia Department of Education (DOE), only the local school boards are able to request implementation of PBIS.

3. Provide State Oversight of Local School Councils

Provide state oversight of LSCs to ensure accountability of the school. Any school, whether traditional or charter, found not to have an active LSC should receive a reduction in the school’s College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score or other similar statewide accountability instrument. Additionally, the Georgia General Assembly should mandate that local school council performance be added to the school district’s Superintendent’s performance measurement for parental engagement.

4. Compare Incident Data Rates

Require each school to compare its discipline incident rate to the national average incident rate. Schools with higher incident rates should: (1) receive immediate implementation of PBIS, restorative practices or other similar research-proven positive behavior modification methods, if not already in place; and (2) if in place, the Georgia Department of Education should conduct a review and provide recommendations for improvement that include additional support for the successful implementation of the positive behavior modification program.

5. Clarify Discipline Data Reporting

Provide clarification for required school referrals to juvenile and adult courts. Appropriate codes should be added to the student discipline data reporting guidance to ensure accurate reporting of disciplinary referrals to alternative education programs.

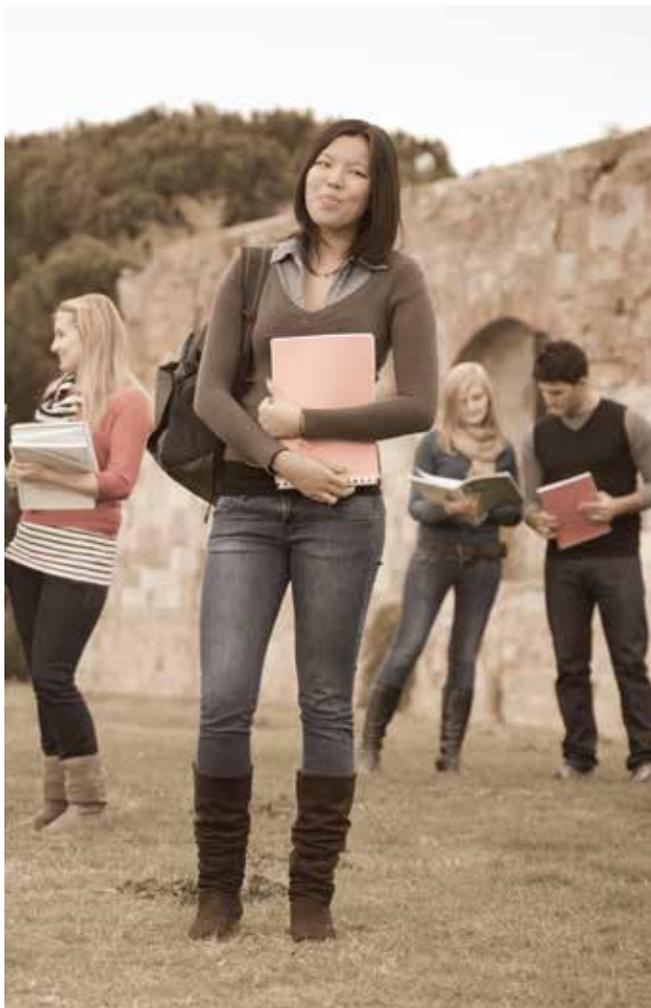
6. Provide Resources, Training, and Support

Ensure that adequate resources, training, and support services are available to every school to implement PBIS, restorative practices, or other similar research-proven positive behavior modification methods. The Georgia DOE strongly recommends full implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).¹¹ We applaud the Georgia General Assembly and the Governor for supporting additional funding for PBIS, a step forward for Georgia’s children.

7. “Returning Child” from Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

Amend laws requiring DJJ and local districts to make every effort to return a child who has been in DJJ’s custody to a traditional school setting immediately upon release. Such children should have appropriate government and community-based support services, and not be sent to an alternative school or removed from the school system, if their reentry assessment indicates that they are not a serious risk to themselves or to others.

Strengthening Local School Councils in Georgia: Recommendations for the Georgia Department of Education



Recommendations for Georgia Department of Education

What follows are recommendations to the Georgia Department of Education to keep school districts accountable for discipline policies and practices:

1. Ensure the Transparency of Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA)

Make RESA offices more regionally accessible; create clearer communications for parents/guardians about the function of RESAs; and recommend that each school provide to parents/guardians a formal plan for mainstreaming their students into the traditional school setting. We applaud the Georgia Department of Education in acknowledging the strategic use of RESAs as a catalyst for implementing PBIS statewide.

2. Develop a School Improvement Plan Guide

Develop a school improvement plan guide that includes a progressive discipline model, such as improving school disciplinary policies and implementing measures that meet the requirements of the Child in Need of Services article of the Juvenile Code.¹² Ensure the guide provides educational instruction/programs designed to meet the unique needs of students in a wide variety of settings that result in increased student achievement.

3. Review Student Codes of Conduct

Review school districts' student codes of conduct to ensure that the policies reflect a progressive discipline model.

4. Report All School Data Publicly

Post reports online regarding progress toward meeting the school's student achievement goals, including *discipline*.

The Coalition

Atlanta Community Engagement Team (ACET)

Atlanta Community Engagement Team (ACET) is a network of community-based organizations engaged in organizing, advocacy, and leadership development to address the needs and circumstances of Black men and boys in Atlanta, Georgia.

Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett SToPP)

The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett SToPP) formed in 2007 by a small group of parents who grew to understand the magnitude of the school-to-prison pipeline in their own community.

The vision of Gwinnett SToPP is to lead a parent-driven, community-centered partnership to:

- Reduce both the number of children removed from the classroom and the duration of the absence;
- Educate parents and the community on the characteristics, contributors and consequences of the pipeline;
- Monitor district trends, policies and practices that contribute to the pipeline to ensure transparency and accountability; and
- Recommend national best practices to dismantle the pipeline.

In 2011, Gwinnett SToPP launched the Parent Leadership Institute (PLI). PLI is an extensive grassroots school-advocacy training program for parents. PLI pairs grassroots community leadership training with education advocacy training and school discipline reform tools. Project teams implement a school-community project in their immediate school cluster designed to influence a feeder into the School to Prison Pipeline, ultimately improving the climate for learning in schools. Gwinnett SToPP is an active member of the national Dignity in Schools Campaign and sits on the steering committee of the organization.

The Interfaith Children's Movement

The Interfaith Children's Movement (ICM) is a statewide grassroots, advocacy movement dedicated to improving the well-being of children in Georgia. ICM was founded in 2001 in response to the adverse conditions affecting children in our state, including high rates of juvenile justice involvement, educational failure and child sex trafficking. ICM provides education, advocacy, mobilization, networking and information resourcing on children's issues and seeks to establish a statewide network of interfaith communities that will:

- become educated about the issues and policies affecting children;
- become active in advocacy and policy-making processes;
- establish environments of nurture, education and protection for children; and
- promote the common good for all children.

ACLU of Georgia

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advances the cause of civil liberties in Georgia, with an emphasis on the rights of free speech, free press, free assembly, freedom of religion, due process of law, and takes all legitimate action to the furtherance of such purposes without political partisanship.

Structurally, the organization is comprised of two separate corporate entities, the American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia, and the ACLU Foundation of Georgia. Both are statewide organizations with the same overall mission that share office space and employees.

The ACLU of GA is committed to challenging the "school to prison pipeline," a disturbing national trend wherein children, disproportionately children of color, are being funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The ACLU of GA is working to challenge numerous policies and practices within public school systems and the juvenile justice system that contribute to the school to prison pipeline.

Advancement Project

Advancement Project is a multi-racial civil rights law, policy, and communications "action tank" that advances universal opportunity and a just democracy for those left behind in America. For the past ten years, Advancement Project has focused on the use and devastating effects of harsh school discipline policies and practices, and the increased role of law enforcement in public schools. We work at both the national level and on the ground with our community partners to reform practices that lead to the criminalization of students.



Endnotes

¹ Education Week. Diplomas Counts 2013, State Highlights Report, available at http://www.edweek.org/media/diplomascout2013_release.pdf.

² U.S. Department of Education. Consolidated State Performance Report, school years 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/index.html>.

³ D. Losen, C. Hodson, M. Keith II, K. Morrison, and S. Belway, Are We Closing The School Discipline Gap? (February 2015), available at <http://www.schooldisciplinedata.org/ccrr/index.php>.

⁴ O.C.G.A. 20-2-85 (a).

⁵ Sumsion, J. (1999). A neophyte early childhood teacher's developing relationships with parents: An ecological perspective. *Early Childhood Research & Practice* [Online], 1(1) (November 1, 2000), available at <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v1n1/sumsion.html>.

⁶ Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, "A New Wave Evidence", (2002), available at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/introduction.pdf>.

⁷ Michigan Department of Education, "What Research says about Parent Involvement in Children's Education: In Relation to Academic Achievement", (2001), available at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_14732_7.pdf.

⁸ Id

⁹ Id

¹⁰ Georgia Department of Education, ESEA Flexibility Request (Feb. 6, 2012), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/ga.pdf>.

¹¹ Joint House and Senate Education Committee Georgia Department of Education Presentation, Jan. 30, 2013 (on file with author).

¹² O.C.G.A. § 15-11-380. Article 5.

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