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Youth, Parents and Teachers Join National Week of Action to End Pushout in Georgia Schools

90% OR NOTHING Graduation March on Georgia

Georgia – The Gwinnett Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP), in partnership with ACLU of Georgia, Georgia Safe Schools Coalition, Interfaith Children's Movement (ICM), and Lambda Legal are bringing their voices to the 4th Annual Dignity in Schools Campaign National Week of Action on School Pushout with a Graduation March on Georgia, Wednesday, October 2, 2013, 4pm-7pm. The goal of the march is to raise graduation rate awareness and educational expectations for students of color and students with disabilities in Georgia. The Graduation March on Georgia, will begin at Neal Blvd and Scenic Hwy in Lawrenceville and conclude with a rally at the Lawrenceville Historic Square.

During the week of September 28 to October 5, members of the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) will hold rallies, marches, forums and trainings aimed at calling on states and school districts to prioritize funding for hiring counselors, school psychologists, community intervention workers and the implementation and training of teachers and school personnel in positive discipline practices like Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Members of the DSC will also be calling on their school districts to address disparities in punishment and referrals to criminal justice, which disproportionately impact low-income youth, youth of color, LGBTQ, and students with disabilities.

The 2011 graduation rates for African American students in Georgia is 59.8% with a 2013 goal set by the Georgia Department of Education of 66.5%.¹ Gwinnett STOPP is issuing a call to action to raise graduation rate expectations to 90%. Students with disabilities, gay, transgender students, and Hispanic students suffer the same low expectations in Georgia's and Gwinnett's educational policy. Gwinnett STOPP believes that bringing together a coalition of like-minded student and adult groups will encourage elected officials to question why it is necessary to lower their educational expectations for youth of color and students with disabilities when crafting and examining the impact of educational policy in Georgia.

For decades thousands of Georgia students of color and students with disabilities have been quietly pushed into underperforming disciplinary alternative schools² and psycho educational facilities.³ At the same time, these same students are grossly excluded from general, gifted and advanced classrooms all across Georgia.⁴ Now is the time to bring those educational policies forward for closer examination.

While we all applaud Governor Deal's juvenile justice reform initiative, the Governor, Superintendent Barge and the State Board of Education must engage the reformation of long-standing educational policies and practices contributing to the overrepresentation of minorities and students with disabilities in our youth incarceration facilities and their under-representation in rigorous classroom settings.

¹ <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Accountability/Documents/4-Year%20Cohort%20Grad%20Rate%20Performance%20Targets%2002.26.13.pdf>

² <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/School-Improvement/Pages/Alternative-Education-Program-and-Magnet-Schools.aspx>

³ <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local/special-ed-program-lacks-accountability-audit-find/nQnrb/>

⁴ <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch>

We are calling upon citizens from across Georgia to join us as we march to reverse the disturbing trend of setting low educational expectation policies for communities of color, LGBTQ students and students with disabilities in Georgia.

Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline

The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP) formed in April 2007 to lead a parent-driven, community centered partnership approach to dismantling the school to prison pipeline in Gwinnett County. Gwinnett STOPP seeks to build and strengthen relationships with community leaders in two constructive ways. The first way is to increase public awareness of the injustice that all children face within the educational system as it relates to the pipeline and the judicial process. Secondly, by promoting policy changes through data accountability and fact-based incident reporting which serve to support and strengthen the dismantling of the school to prison pipeline in Gwinnett.

ACLU of Georgia

The purpose of this Association shall be to advance the cause of civil liberties in Georgia, with emphasis on the rights of free speech, free press, free assembly, freedom of religion, due process of law and to take all legitimate action in the furtherance of such purposes without political partisanship.

Dignity in Schools Campaign

The Dignity in Schools Campaign is a coalition of more than 70 youth, parents, educators, civil rights organizations, and social justice advocates working to ensure the human right of every child to a quality education and to be treated with dignity. The DSC challenges the systemic problem of “push out” and promotes local and national alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment and removal in our nation’s schools.

Georgia Safe Schools Coalition

The purpose of the Georgia Safe Schools Coalition (GSSC) is to eliminate LGBTQ oppression in Georgia schools. We educate and advocate on issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning students and families. GSSC works to address the intersections among various systems of oppression, understanding that one cannot eradicate transprejudice and heterosexism without simultaneously working to end all forms of injustice. By serving as a resource for Georgia students, educators, and families, we strive to engender positive social growth among Georgia’s youth, and to foster a safe and affirming school climate for all.

Interfaith Children’s Movement

The Interfaith Children's Movement (ICM) is a grassroots, advocacy movement dedicated to improving the well-being of children in Georgia. ICM is founded on the conviction that people of all faiths can, and must, work together — across boundaries of religious institutions and spiritual practices — to improve the lives and well-being of all children. ICM calls upon the thousands of faith communities to put their faith in action and bring their compassion and commitment to the fight against social inequities that threaten our children’s ability to realize their potential.

About Lambda Legal

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and those with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

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