

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia
Office of the Chief Clerk
Room 402, City Hall
Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 170439)

RESOLUTION

Authorizing the Joint City Council Committees on Education and Children and Youth to hold hearings reviewing the impact of permanently prohibiting the suspension of elementary-aged students from the first through fifth grades in The School District of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Suspensions harm our youngest learners. The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania reports that whenever a school suspends a student it increases that child's likelihood of future educational barriers and challenges, including discipline, and truancy, which feeds the school-to-prison pipeline; and

WHEREAS, In 2014, U.S. Department of Education and Health and Human Services reported that suspension and expulsion can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education. Young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as ten times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and hold negative school attitudes. Evidence supports the notion that expulsion or suspension early in a child's education is associated with expulsion or suspension in later school grades; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Education and Health and Human Services also reported that suspension and expulsion practices have the potential to hinder social-emotional and behavioral development. They also remove children from early learning environments and the corresponding cognitively enriching experiences that contribute to healthy development and academic success later in life. Adverse expulsion and suspension practices may also delay or interfere with the process of identifying and addressing underlying issues, which may include disabilities or mental health issues; and

WHEREAS, In a recent survey, the U.S. Department of Education found that 220,000 students out of a total enrollment of 50 million were referred to law enforcement; 70,000 students were subject to school-related arrests in the 2013-2014 school year. A total of 2.8 million students received out-of-school suspensions; and

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WHEREAS, The 2007 Children's Defense Fund's report, "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline," found that students who are suspended or expelled are three times more likely to drop out of school. Students who drop out of school are three times more likely to be incarcerated; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia ("District") continues to suspend students from first through fifth grades at alarming rates. According to Pennsylvania's most recent Safe Schools Report, the District meted out 615 suspensions to Kindergarteners; 1,081 to first graders; 1,779 to second graders; 2,192 to third graders; 2,295 to fourth graders; and 2,260 to fifth graders during the 2015-16 school year; and

WHEREAS, According to the Civil Rights Data Collection ("CRDC") published by the U.S. Department of Education, over 93% of the suspensions the District issued in the 2013-14 school year to first through fifth graders, almost all of whom are ten years of age or younger, were for "conduct" offenses and not weapons offenses. Punishment for subjective conduct offenses have shown to invite racial biases; and

WHEREAS, The District disproportionately suspends African American students. The CRDC reports that African American students, both male and female in the District are 2.65 times more likely to be suspended at all and 3.08 times more likely to be suspended multiple times than their white peers; and

WHEREAS, The CRDC reports that the District disproportionately suspends students with disabilities. According to the 2013-14 CRDC data, students with disabilities are 1.33 times more likely to be suspended in the District than students without disabilities; and

WHEREAS, The use of discriminatory and ineffective discipline techniques disproportionately affects households that live close to or below the federal poverty line; and

WHEREAS, It is imperative that the District invest in training and resources that will enable school communities to build the skills and provide the services necessary to ensure a high-quality education to all students in a positive and affirming school climate; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby authorize the joint City Council Committees on Education and Children and Youth to hold hearings reviewing the impact of permanently prohibiting the suspension of elementary-aged students from the first through fifth Grades in The School District of Philadelphia.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the fourth of May, 2017.

Darrell L. Clarke
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Michael A. Decker
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmembers Reynolds Brown and Gym

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Reynolds Brown, Gym, Blackwell, Parker, Greenlee and O'Neill