

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Council Committee on Education to conduct hearings to examine the Philadelphia School District's discipline policy and the recent report "Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia" by the Advancement Project and Youth United for Change, which documents the negative and disproportionate effect of zero tolerance discipline policies on poor and minority students.

WHEREAS, School discipline policies and practices should be designed to protect students from harm, to create healthy and productive learning environments, to assist youth in learning from their mistakes, and to maximize students' opportunities to learn; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia and local charter schools have become overly-reliant on zero tolerance school discipline, including the use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary transfers to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests; and

WHEREAS, Disciplinary practices in Philadelphia schools are getting harsher while similar districts are experiencing extremely positive results with school disciplinary approaches focused on prevention and effective intervention that are more cost-effective and have been highly successful in addressing school-based misconduct, promoting a positive school climate, and making schools safer; and

WHEREAS, The report "Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia" establishes that the Philadelphia School District's discipline practices are outside of the national norms, and enforced inappropriately; and

WHEREAS, Students within the School District of Philadelphia are arrested or suspended out-of-school over three times more often than students elsewhere in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, The report "Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia" concludes that the combination of zero tolerance policies and practices and the over-policing of students has turned many Philadelphia schools into hostile and alienating environments for young people, making them less safe; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia schools appear to be punishing the same behavior far more harshly than they have in years past, and also appear to be criminalizing their students far more often than other Pennsylvania school districts for the same behaviors; and

WHEREAS, Black and Latino students are disproportionately subjected to school-based arrest and exclusionary discipline measures, and the evidence suggests that they are being punished more harshly than their peers for the same behavior; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia students lose well over 100,000 instructional days a year due to zero tolerance disciplinary practices; and

WHEREAS, There are strong negative relationships between disciplinary rates and academic achievement, meaning that Philadelphia schools with high suspension and arrest rates are far more likely to have low graduation rates and low academic achievement levels; and

WHEREAS, The report “Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia” documents that the discipline practices being used by the PSD are exacerbating the dropout crisis and racial achievement gap in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Zero tolerance results in thousands of Philadelphia youth becoming far more likely to drop out and wind up being incarcerated every year, creating a School-to-Prison Pipeline that has dramatic implications for the health of our neighborhoods, the allocation of tax dollars, and the long-term safety and prosperity of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Other urban school districts, specifically Baltimore, have seen great improvement in school climate using alternative discipline methods, and restorative Justice models; and

WHEREAS, The key to school safety is creating healthy learning communities where students are engaged and where the relationships between students and school staff are strong; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committee on Education is authorized to hold hearings to examine the Philadelphia School District’s discipline policies and to examine the new report “Zero Tolerance in Philadelphia.”

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Committee on Education will release a report on it’s findings and suggestions on how the Philadelphia School District can shape a more effective and equitable discipline policy.