



City of Philadelphia

City Council
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Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the joint City Council Committees on Education and Children & Youth to hold hearings on the prevalence of the usage of exclusionary school discipline and the use of collective punishment practices in public schools across Philadelphia, and on how these and other policies and practices perpetuate anti-blackness and anti-Black racism and harm students academically, socially, emotionally to the detriment of their health, well-being, and future life outcomes.

WHEREAS, The education system in the United States was built upon a foundation of anti-Blackness, anti-Black racism, and racial discrimination, borne of American Slavery, the vestiges of which continue to plague our education system today; and

WHEREAS, Exclusionary school discipline policies and practices continue to function as an instrument of racial discrimination and segregation that pushes Black children out of our public schools and into the school-to-prison pipeline; and

WHEREAS, As outlined in its 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, *Accelerate Philly*, the School District of Philadelphia has committed to “advancing equity through everything we do and every decision we make” and committed to ensure that “students’ potential will not be limited by practices that perpetuate systemic racism and hinder student achievement” through the implementation of Guardrail 4, which is aimed “addressing racist practices”; and

WHEREAS, In March of 2022, former School District of Philadelphia Superintendent Dr. William Hite stated that “some of our students are forced to witness and endure acts of hatred because of the color of their skin, are dehumanized for where they come from and how they look, and live within conditions that place their bodies under constant attack, rendering them voiceless by the very system that is supposed to protect and empower them.” He further committed to “expand[ing] [the School District of Philadelphia’s] efforts and take collective action, challenging and changing the ways in which our norms, values, and structures uphold systems of racism”; and

WHEREAS, During the School District of Philadelphia’s search for a new superintendent in that same month, Dr. Tony Watlington-then a candidate for the position-stated that Black and Brown children, who make up the majority of the School District of Philadelphia’s student population, “are often the furthest from justice”; and

WHEREAS, The School District of Philadelphia’s commitment to racial justice and equity prompts a need to delve into how its policies and programs, as well as practices at the school-based level, that may reinforce systems of racial oppression, including anti-Blackness, and perpetuate racial inequities and disparities that School District leadership has purported to eliminate; and

WHEREAS, Leading researchers and scholars on education have increasingly focused on the prevalence of anti-Blackness in schools, and specifically how certain policies and practices may dehumanize Black and Brown students and their families. For example, Dr. Joi A. Spencer, Dean of the School of Education at the University of California, Riverside, and Kerri Ullucci, Professor of Diversity and Equity in Education at Roger Williams

University, have extensively studied the existence and pervasiveness of anti-Blackness in schools, highlighting that “anti-Blackness is all around and unseen” in schools, and emphasizing how inequitable resources and the policing of appearance and behavior can enforce a “less than” school culture that is dehumanizing; and

WHEREAS, It is well documented that exclusion from school causes student to pay a high cost: it removes students from learning environments, denies them access to teachers and instruction, and leads to negative short-term and long-term outcomes for individuals and communities, including exponentially increasing the likelihood that students will not return to school and face greater risks of justice involvement. *See, e.g., American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discipline and Policies in Pennsylvania Public Schools*, at 7 (Feb. 2015); and

WHEREAS, Studies confirm that despite exhibiting the same rates of student misbehavior Black and Brown students are more likely to experience school expulsion than their white peers and in response to this troubling data, the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that adult decision-maker bias, culturally biased school codes, curricula, and school practices contribute to the disproportionate expulsion and exclusion of Black and Brown students; and

WHEREAS, A recent seminal report from the Education Law Center-PA has highlighted an alarming prevalence of practices infused with anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism in Pennsylvania public schools. Relying on the perspectives and lived experience of Black girls attending Philadelphia public schools, this report, *We Need Supportive Spaces That Celebrate Us: Black Girls Speak Out About Public Schools* found that “anti-Black racism at their school was pervasive and impacted all facets” of their educational experience and was universally experienced by students who participated in qualitative fact gathering. The report further explained: “Specific instances of anti-Black racism that Black girls shared included: being subjected to racial slurs directed at them and their peers, often without any response from adults; facing discriminatory discipline on the basis of their race and gender; being exposed to harmful curriculum and teaching practices; being deprived of necessary supports, resources, and access to specialized, adequately trained personnel; and being targeted or at higher risk of discipline due to racism and sexism.” This reporting underscores the need for a comprehensive racial equity audit of all public schools in Philadelphia to ensure that school policies and practices do not perpetuate anti-Blackness, anti-Black racism or reify institutional racism; and

WHEREAS, Subjective and vague discipline practices have been found to similarly perpetuate anti-Blackness in schools. Beyond individualized knee-jerk issuance of detentions and suspensions (which disproportionately impact Black and Brown students), school-based collective punishment practices—from the elimination of recess to the implementation of silent lunches—may operate to perpetuate systems of anti-Blackness, in addition to erasing joy from the school experience; and

WHEREAS, In order to eliminate anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism in Philadelphia schools, each and every one of the Philadelphia’s public schools’ policies, programs, and practices must rest on a foundation of dignity for young people and their families; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia schools must be spaces that uplift the dignity, potential, and right to self-determination of young people and their families; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Council of the City of Philadelphia, Authorizes the joint City Council Committees on Education and Children & Youth to hold hearings on the prevalence of collective punishment practices across Philadelphia public schools , and on how these and other policies and practices perpetuate anti-blackness and anti-Black racism to the great detriment of our schoolchildren and our communities.

