

October 7, 2014

Chancellor Fariña and Mayor de Blasio:

Across the city, educators, students, and parents like us are working to create school communities in which everyone feels safe and that their voice is heard. We are calling on you to support these efforts and to take a strong stand toward ending student pushout and the school-to-prison pipeline in New York City. The move from punitive discipline to restorative approaches is part of a burgeoning national movement to transform school climate. New York City should be at the forefront of this movement.

Last year in New York City schools, black students, who comprise less than a third of the student population, served more than half of suspensions citywide. Students with disabilities, making up twelve percent of the student body, served a whopping thirty percent of principal and superintendent suspensions. Are our black students or students with special needs more disruptive, or more dangerous, than their white peers? No.

We know what schools need to make a transformational shift from punitive to positive and end these disparities. Policy change has to happen, but it must be coupled with education, resources, and a commitment rooted in school communities. Funding for Restorative Justice coordinators at schools is necessary to sustainably support rollout of alternatives in schools as this movement grows. Here is what we know will help our schools transform:

- Support 20 “deep dive” schools in the 2014-2015 school year by funding Restorative Justice Coordinators in these schools who can sustainably rollout school-wide change over a 3-5 year period
- Provide professional development city-wide to school staff (including non-UFT staff) in restorative discipline approaches
- Change the Discipline Code to end suspensions for the racially charged “defying authority” (B21) and require that positive interventions are implemented before a student may be suspended (except for in the most extreme circumstances)

Implementing restorative approaches is no easy task. We can no longer rely on teachers, social workers, or guidance counselors to do this work in addition to their full time positions. School climate change is a process that takes years and needs the focus that a full time coordinator would afford.

The moment is now; this is the right administration to position New York City as a leader in ending discriminatory discipline.

Signed,

1. UFT Chapter, Harvest Collegiate High School
2. UFT Chapter & Learning Support Team, The Bronx Lab School
3. Restorative Justice Committee, Lower Manhattan Community Middle School
4. Restorative Justice & Culture Team & Student Support Services, Dreamyard Preparatory School

5. Principal, MS 325 Bronx
6. Restorative Justice Team, University Neighborhood Middle School
7. Principal, Lyons Community School
8. UFT Chapter, MS 324 Patria Mirabal
9. Restorative Justice Supporters, High School of Fashion Industries
10. Restorative Coordinator, The James Baldwin School
11. UFT Chapter, City As School High School
12. UFT Chapter, Schuylerville Prep High School
13. UFT Chapter, Bronx International High School
14. Restorative Justice Team, Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School
15. The Movement of Rank & File Educators (MORE Caucus)

Add your school team to the letter at bit.ly/ZeWiXc