
NESRI NATIONAL ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

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June 26, 2006

Ms. Marlene Canter, President, LAUSD Board of Education
Mr. Roy Romer, Superintendent of Schools
333 South Beaudry Avenue
24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Re: Letter of support for "Positive Behavior Support" discipline policy

Dear Ms. Canter and Mr. Romer:

We would like to convey our support for the proposed LAUSD "Discipline Foundation Policy: School-wide Positive Behavior Support." This policy represents a proactive approach to discipline which emphasizes supportive and collaborative interventions to promote positive student behavior. Such a policy can improve the school environment and help to ensure that

The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) is a human rights organization seeking to strengthen protections for economic and social rights in the United States. Our Human Right to Education Project works in collaboration with parents, youth, educators and advocates to document human rights violations in schools and develop recommendations for how schools can create safe and welcoming environments where all young people can learn.

In 2005, NESRI began a research project in New York City and Los Angeles to document the impact of school discipline and safety policies on students' human rights to education and to dignity. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with over 80 students and parents, as well as 40 educators, academics and advocates working on school discipline and safety issues. Our findings reveal that school discipline policies which focus on punitive responses to behavior and the exclusion of children from the classroom environment have the effect of disengaging students from learning, placing them behind in school work, and in some cases pushing them out of school. From our preliminary findings, we have concluded that discipline policies should focus on preventive strategies to keep students engaged, and supportive services including counseling and mediation that address the causes of student behavior and help meet their needs. Through this approach, the proposed discipline policy for LAUSD has the potential to create a more safe and effective environment for learning.

We affirm the recommendations of Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE) to create a new comprehensive discipline policy through a participatory and collaborative process with parents and students. Such a process is essential for protecting the fundamental human rights to dignity and a quality education guaranteed in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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We urge the Board of Education to consider the following human rights principles in the implementation of the new policy:

Ensure the Right to Dignity

In order to ensure that the inherent dignity of the child is protected, discipline policies and practices should not humiliate, degrade or disengage students. School staff and students should work together to create a positive school climate where all members of the school community treat one another with respect.

Ensure the Right to Education

In order to ensure that students' right to education is guaranteed, out of class or out of school removals should be minimized. School staff should receive the training and support necessary to effectively carry out preventive plans, counseling, and other positive discipline programs. When disciplinary interventions or removals do occur, students should have continuous access to quality educational services.

Ensure Parent Participation in Implementation and Monitoring

Parents have a basic human right to participate in the educational system. Parents should participate as partners in designing and implementing discipline policy in schools and in determining preventive and disciplinary interventions involving their children. Parents should participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the new discipline policy and should have access to relevant information.

We wish to congratulate you again on your efforts to create a proactive and positive discipline policy and urge you to adopt the proposed "Discipline Foundation Policy: School-wide Positive Behavior Support." If you have questions or would like additional information please contact me at 646-342-0541 or liz@nesri.org.

Respectfully,

Catherine Albisa
Executive Director
NESRI

Elizabeth Sullivan
Human Right to Education Project Director
NESRI

Cc: All Board of Trustees
Rosa Hirji, Project Director, CADRE