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LOUISIANA'S RATE OF SUSPENSIONS & EXPULSIONS FOUND TO BE FAR ABOVE NATIONAL RATE

EXCESSIVE PUNISHMENT OF MINOR, SUBJECTIVE OFFENSES RESULTS IN RACIAL DISPARITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Baton Rouge, Louisiana – Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) joined today with education advocates, parents, and students on the steps of the Louisiana Capitol Building to release "Pushed Out: Harsh Discipline in Louisiana Schools Denies the Right to Education." According to the report, Louisiana's expulsion rate is five times the national rate, nearly 16,000 middle and high school students drop out each year, and public schools in the state dole out over 300,000 out-of-school suspensions a year. Within the state-run Recovery School District direct operated schools, the expulsion rate is ten times the national rate and 1 in every 4 students was suspended in a single year, twice the statewide rate and over four times the national rate

State law, as currently written, contributes to the problem, allowing principals to suspend students for a wide range of minor misbehavior, including "willful disobedience," disrespecting school staff, and using "unchaste or profane language." For many public school students and parents, these figures merely reflect what they already know to be true from experience. Working in her community, Ashana Bigard hears these stories repeatedly. "Two middle school students asked why students at their school get suspended for wearing the wrong color undershirt underneath their uniform shirt and for wearing the wrong color socks. They expressed their concerns about being suspended for such minor infractions and then missing school and falling behind."

Moreover, the overuse of harsh discipline disproportionately affects some Louisiana school children over others. African American students make up 44% of the statewide public school population, but 68% of suspensions and 72.5% of expulsions. And in school districts with a larger percentage of African American and low-income students, there are higher rates of suspension and expulsion. These districts tend to have fewer resources for positive interventions.

"Pushed Out" makes specific recommendations to change the trend, such as abandoning zero tolerance policies and implementing Positive Behavior Support approaches which, where implemented, have led to a 50% drop in suspensions and violent acts and large increases in academic performance. The report gives specific recommendations to Louisiana state government for how to reduce the number of children who are pushed out of school and thereby lose their right to an education.

The report's findings support two bills filed this legislative session, SB 628 introduced by Senator Ann Duplessis, that would eliminate subjective behavior as a suspendable and expellable infraction in Louisiana; and Senator Sharon Weston Broome's SB 527 which requires local school districts to provide training to teachers on effective classroom management techniques. Full copies of the report are available upon request.

The full report can be downloaded at http://www.nesri.org/fact_sheets_pubs/Pushed_Out_Report.pdf.

A fact sheet with findings from the report can be downloaded
at http://www.nesri.org/fact_sheets_pubs/Pushed_Out_Report_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

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