

January 8, 2014



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Statement from Chris Korsmo on school discipline guidelines from the Obama administration

Today the Obama administration issued school discipline guidelines aimed at ending racial disparities in how different groups of students are disciplined. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights is currently conducting discipline reviews in two Washington school districts, Seattle and Yakima.

These recommendations come at a critical time for our state and students. Students can't learn if they aren't in the classroom. If we are serious about closing our state's opportunity and achievement gaps, we need to find ways to keep kids in school and learning.

A report issued last year from Washington Appleseed found that thousands of Washington students are excluded from school each year due to school discipline. Students of color, low-income students, and special education students are disciplined at higher rates than other students.

The school house, the place we all hope can serve as the "great equalizer," is closing its doors to an alarming number of the very students who need the most support.

Last year, Washington legislators took an important step toward transforming school discipline when they passed SB 5946, which keeps more students in school by limiting the number of days students can be removed from class and unifies the way school districts publicly report discipline data.

The data show that changing school discipline policies and practices works. Since Baltimore City Public Schools began implementing discipline reforms in 2008, out-of-school suspensions have dropped from one in five students to one in eight, and the dropout rate fell by almost four percentage points in three years (from 7.9 in 2008 to 4.2 in 2011).

Locally, Highline School District recently implemented the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program in their schools with significant reductions in students losing instructional time due to out-of-school suspensions.

Learn more about transforming school discipline at <http://educationvoters.org/advocacy-agenda/k-12/transforming-school-discipline>.

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