



February 28, 2019

Philadelphia Board of Education  
Education Center  
440 N. Broad Street  
Suite 101  
Philadelphia, PA 19130  
[schoolboard@philasd.org](mailto:schoolboard@philasd.org)

**RE: Policy 805 Opposition**

**Via E-Mail and Mail**

Dear Chair Wilkerson and Members of the Philadelphia Board of Education:

On behalf of Advancement Project's national office, we write to urge you to oppose Policy 805. Advancement Project is a national multi-racial civil rights organization that has pioneered work to end the school-to-prison pipeline across the US over the past 20 years. We work closely with the Philly Student Union, a grassroots organization that is dedicated to ensuring that Black and Brown children succeed and thrive in schools across Philadelphia.

We are concerned that Policy 805 will exacerbate the school-to-prison pipeline and harm school climate for students of color. The policy reinforces a troubling nationwide trend of policies that seemingly invest in the safety of students, but actually perpetuate, and may even worsen, the disproportionate criminalization of Black and Brown students, LGBTQIA+ youth, and students with disabilities.

In addition to the personal stories that the Board of Education has heard from parents and young people in Philadelphia, relatively recent government studies and reports confirm that the school-to-prison pipeline is alive and well. Last year, the Government Accountability Office published a report that concluded that Black children, while representing only 15.5% of public school enrollment across the country, account for 39% of all students suspended from school.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data Collection of the U.S. Department of Education, Black students comprised 51.1% of the enrollment in Philadelphia public schools, yet they accounted for a striking 70.6% of out-of-school suspensions and 75.2% of expulsions.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, 6,834 young people in Philadelphia were referred to law enforcement during the 2015-2016 academic year, and 407 young people faced school-related arrests during the same time period.<sup>3</sup> Such high levels of exclusionary discipline, paired with the

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<sup>1</sup> Government Accountability Office, *Highlights: Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities*, March 2018, available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690827.pdf> (last visited on February 28, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> 2015-2016, Civil Rights Data Collection, U.S. Department of Education, April 2018, available at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=27031&syk=8&pid=2278> (last visited on February 28, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*



prospective use of more metal detectors and the actual use of school police officers, contribute to militarized, harmful learning environments for many Black and Brown children within Philadelphia.

Particularly concerning Policy 805, the Board of Education should reject policies that harden schools in the name of school safety, while meaningfully engaging the Philadelphia community in determining what will truly make young people feel safe in school. School climate should not be undermined in the effort to provide safety. For example, investing in more metal detectors at Workshop, SLA, and SLA Beeber would only stand to make Black and Brown young people feel even more unwelcome in school, leaving them to feel like suspects instead of scholars. Studies have shown that the presence of metal detectors in their schools can detrimentally impact how students perceive safety.<sup>4</sup>

Policy 805 would also contribute to the continuing trend of policies and actions that do not properly serve the majority-Black population of the Philadelphia School District like: school closures, inadequate investments in nursing and counseling services, and harmful budget cuts over the past several years.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the Philadelphia Board of Education should host community forums to receive input from community members and students on emergency preparedness plans. Additionally, the Board of Education should mandate a risk assessment tool for new school safety allocations that includes a review of current spending and the effectiveness of current measures used, among other criteria.

More broadly, rather than invest in measures that criminalize youth and remove them from the classroom and their families, the Philadelphia Board of Education should create and fund programs that increase the presence of counselors, mental health professionals, and restorative justice practices in schools – all of which improve safety and climate while supporting students' needs. We released a report with the Alliance for Educational Justice in August 2018 entitled *We Came To Learn*, which calls for police out of schools across the country and offers recommendations to combat the hardening of schools; we hope that this report will be useful as the school board contemplates alternative policies.<sup>6</sup> Increasing funding for metal detectors and more law enforcement personnel in Philadelphia would only intensify the mental and physical harms experienced by Black and Brown children, LGBTQIA+ youth, and children with disabilities, while increasing the potential for taking them off of an academic track and putting them on a track to jail.

For all of these reasons, we ask that you vote against Policy 805. Concerning school safety matters, in part, Pennsylvania education law calls for the availability of student assistance programs and behavioral health professionals to provide assistance to the school entity.<sup>7</sup> This provision of state law demonstrates the approach that the Philadelphia Board of Education should prioritize as it contemplates emergency

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<sup>4</sup> Abigail Hanson, Marci Hertz, and Thomas Simon, *Impacts of Metal Detector Use In Schools: Insights From 15 Years of Research*, Journal of School Health (2011)

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Jon Hurdle, *Philadelphia Officials Vote to Close 23 Schools*, The New York Times, March 7, 2013, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/education/philadelphia-officials-vote-to-close-23-schools.html> (last visited on February 28, 2019); Valerie Strauss, *Girl dies after getting sick at school without nurse*, The Washington Post, October 11, 2013, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/12/girl-dies-after-getting-sick-at-school-without-nurse/?utm\\_term=.be95e31a2792](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/12/girl-dies-after-getting-sick-at-school-without-nurse/?utm_term=.be95e31a2792) (last visited on February 28, 2019); Bessam Idani, *In Philadelphia's education crisis, who is harmed?*, The WHY, February 29, 2016, available at <https://why.org/articles/in-philadelphias-education-crisis-who-is-harmed/> (last visited on February 28, 2019)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/>

<sup>7</sup> PA ST 24 P.S. § 13-1303-B



preparedness policies. We invite you to contact Advancement Project and the Philly Student Union to discuss meaningful policies that the Philadelphia Board of Education can enact to ensure that all children in Philadelphia have access to an enriching and holistic learning environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Judith A. Browne Dianis".

Judith A. Browne Dianis  
Executive Director <sup>i</sup>

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