

GRASS ROOTS COALITION CALLS FOR NEW MAYOR AND CPS HEAD TO ENFORCE THE REFORMED STUDENT DISCIPLINARY POLICY

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CHICAGO— As the City of Chicago braces for a historic mayoral race, a citywide grassroots coalition is calling for a public commitment from Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials and mayor hopefuls to reduce the rate of student suspension and expulsions by 40 percent next school year.

The High Hopes Campaign, a group of community and clergy leaders, argues that Chicago schools are in a crisis. The leaders say this is an immediate issue that the incoming mayor and CPS board president Mary Richardson-Lowry must address as the city moves forward in elections and choosing a new school CEO.

High Hopes leaders are proposing for CPS to take a more holistic approach to student discipline practices by including more peer juries and peace circles. Also, they encourage CPS to invest in more intervention strategies rather than punitive discipline.

“The high rate of expulsions and suspensions is troublesome. This election presents an opportunity for city officials to take responsibility for our faltering school system and implement strategies like Restorative Justice,” said Rev. Calvin S. Morris P.H.D., Executive Director of Community Renewal Society.

Since 2007, CPS’ policy has called for restorative justice over “zero tolerance,” but few schools have implemented these methods.

In the 2008-2009 school year, more than 43,000 students were suspended and 600 were expelled, according to CPS data.

Chicago currently leads the nation with the highest rates of student suspension and expulsion, according to Catalyst Chicago. Coalition leaders point out that punitive discipline is a direct contributor to failing classes and high dropout rates.

Studies show that a student who is suspended just once is three times more likely to drop out of school. African-American male students represent a disproportionate amount of suspensions, 50 percent, and expulsions, 60 percent.

The coalition hopes that these statistics will move the next mayor and CPS head to enforce the reformed discipline methods.

The High Hopes coalition will hold a campaign launch rally at 10:30 a.m., Saturday, Nov 13, at First Baptist Congregational Church, 1613 W. Washington Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

High Hopes Campaign is a coalition of Chicago-based community organizations including the Community Renewal Society, Enlace Chicago, Family Focus Lawndale, MAGIC and POWER-PAC with other organizations. They join together in advocating for CPS to reduce suspensions and expulsions through the implementation of restorative justice programs and other proven strategies.

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