



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Secretary DeVos Hosts School Safety and Climate Listening Sessions

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos today hosted two listening sessions on school safety concerns and the current climate in schools nationwide. The discussion focused on the Dear Colleague Letter (DCL or the guidance) regarding Title VI, which prohibits racial discrimination, and school discipline that was jointly issued by the Departments of Education and Justice on January 8, 2014. The two sessions were one hundred minutes each, grouped as follows:

1. Fifteen participants representing themselves or organizations that shared positive experiences under the current guidance. Organizations and individual participants included:

- National Education Association
- Association of American University Women
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense & Education Fund
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- Educators for Excellence
- An administrator from Illinois
- A teacher from California
- A teacher from Massachusetts

- A teacher from New York
- A teacher from Minnesota
- An administrator from Connecticut
- Professors from two state universities

2. Fourteen participants representing themselves or organizations that shared concerns about the current approach. Organizations and individual participants included:

- The School Superintendents Association
- National School Boards Association
- Center for Educational Opportunity
- Manhattan Institute
- Parent2Parent Network
- A former teacher and union leader from North Carolina
- A former teacher from North Carolina
- A special education teacher from Ohio
- A teacher from Ohio
- A former teacher and administrator from California
- A parent from California
- A teacher from New York
- A school board member from Maryland
- A student from Maryland

Secretary DeVos was joined by John Gore, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, for both sessions. The Department of Education officials and staff present included:

- Candice Jackson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Office for Civil Rights
- Jason Botel, Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Ebony Lee, Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy

At the request of many of the participants, the sessions were closed to the press to protect the identities of participants who fear retaliation, are in active litigation or shared deeply personal stories involving family members and/or minors.

Each session took place in the Secretary's Conference Room to foster a candid exchange between the Secretary and stakeholders who presented varying perspectives on how school discipline policies should or should not change.

The Secretary opened each session by marking the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and highlighting the continued need to achieve the full realization of his life's work. She discussed the clear problem, revealed both in the data and in the stories told, of disparate treatment in discipline. She welcomed the participants to share their perspectives on how to best protect all students' civil rights and promote positive school climates, and asked how the current approach is helping or hurting those efforts.

Topics discussed during the first session included: the need to address the unique needs of students holistically; how the guidance helped force conversations around school discipline practices; how implementation of reforms has been problematic in some instances; and the importance of a safe school climate to improving student achievement.

Topics discussed during the second session included: teachers being denied discretion in discipline decisions, leading to disruptions and violent episodes; legal and procedural flaws in the previous administration's approach of enforcing the guidance; districts underreporting school discipline issues; and the impact of school violence on both teacher retention and student well-being.

Today's sessions build upon extensive outreach the Department has conducted on school discipline. In addition to the organizations listed above, the Department has heard from representatives from the following organizations:

- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of School Resource Officers
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
- ThirdWay Solutions
- Communities for Just Schools Fund

- Center for Evaluation and Education
- American Institutes for Research
- Advancement Project
- Progressive Policy Institute
- Dignity in Schools
- National Urban League
- National Women's Law Center
- Girls for Gender Equity
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network
- The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Southern Poverty Law Center

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