

## **Education Law Center applauds change in Philadelphia's student discipline policy**

### ***Ban on suspensions of young children will be extended to grades 1-2 in fall***

June 21 - The School Reform Commission today in its final meeting formally adopted an important change in the School District's student conduct and discipline policy, extending the existing ban on out-of-school suspensions of kindergartners to also cover grades 1 and 2. This means that students in those grades cannot be suspended unless it is shown that their behavior resulted in serious bodily injury.

The majority of out-of-school suspensions are given to students for minor, nonviolent instances of misbehavior. It is also undisputed that consistent and significant racial disparities exist in how suspensions, at all levels, are issued – Black and Latino students are much more likely to be targeted for suspensions, as are students with disabilities. This disparity begins as early as preschool and continues through school despite the fact that Black and Latino students are no more likely to violate school rules than their White peers.

“Out-of-school suspensions are developmentally inappropriate for our youngest learners and do not make our schools safer,” said Education Law Center Attorney Yvelisse Pelotte. “While a ban will not likely address the root cause of these disparities, it is an excellent first step.”

The District's ban on kindergarten suspensions, implemented in fall 2016, led to a significant reduction in the number of kindergartners who were suspended in the 2017-18 school year. That means these students had more instructional days and are more likely to continue on the path to educational achievement. “We are optimistic that extending the ban will give children in first and second grade the same opportunity to remain where they belong — in the classroom,” Pelotte said.

Superintendent Hite listened and responded to students and advocates who urged the District to curtail the practice of out-of-school suspensions and to phase out suspensions of young children. The Education Law Center urged this change and looks forward to continued collaboration with the School District and our other partners to ensure smooth implementation of the new policy, age-appropriate alternatives to out-of-school suspensions, and continued work to address the racial disproportionality in student discipline.