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Pittsburgh Public Schools
Board of Directors
341 S. Bellefield Avenue
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***The Education Law Center's Statement in Support of Pittsburgh Public Schools
Policy 1012.1: Engagement with English Learner Parents/Guardians and Students***

On behalf of the Education Law Center and the parents, students and community members with whom we work, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the District's proposed policy 1012.1 on engagement with limited English proficient families and students, who are most often immigrant and refugee families.

The Education Law Center is a non-profit, legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania, from birth through twenty-one, have access to a quality public education. For decades, the Education Law Center has been at the forefront of reforms that ensure equity and access for English Learners (ELs) and limited English proficient (LEP) parents, here in Pittsburgh and across the State. We work with local, state, and national groups to ensure that schools and districts are providing the resources and supports immigrant and refugee students need to succeed in the educational environment.

Policy 1012.1 is a proposed policy meant to foster effective engagement with limited English proficient parents and students. This policy builds on the English Learner Working Group Recommendations that were unanimously acknowledged and approved by the Board in October. These recommendations, which are rooted in a negotiated individual case settlement with the Education Law Center, came out of a two-year long process that brought together district administrators, community leaders, service providers, and advocates in partnership to identify the most serious and pervasive barriers affecting access and engagement for LEP students and families – especially students with disabilities.

From this partnership, the working group developed a set of practices and procedures rooted in best practices, model programs, and the lived experiences of students and families. The Recommendations that the board adopted address many of the concerns and barriers consistently raised by immigrant and refugee families within the District – including communication between LEP parents and schools, meaningful and culturally competent engagement of LEP families, targeted training opportunities for District staff, and collaboration between the District and immigrant and refugee communities.

Policy 1012.1 represents the next positive step forward in this work. Through the adoption of the October Recommendations, the District demonstrated an interest in making PPS schools more welcoming, affirming, and culturally competent places for students and families. By codifying and embedding these recommendations into the District's policies through the adoption of policy 1012.1, the Board will show that this is more than just an interest, that the District is committed to making these goals a reality and to ensuring that immigrant and refugee students have access to the resources, supports, and services they need to succeed in school.

The Education Law Center, along with our partners and collaborators, strongly encourage the Board to adopt policy 1012.1.

We also encourage the Board to direct the Office of the Superintendent to put in place a robust set of administrative regulations and accountability mechanisms to implement and monitor Policy 1012.1, and we encourage the Office of the Superintendent to develop these systems with community input and transparency. Policy 1012.1 and the LEP Recommendations came out of a joint working group between the District and community stakeholders, and emblematic of the effective and valuable work that can be accomplished when the District collaborates with families and communities. We commend the District for its commitment to recognizing parents, families, and community members as critical partners in this work, and encourage the District and the Office of the Superintendent to continue to do the same as they develop procedures and systems for implementing Policy 1012.1.

ELC and the community members of the English Learner Working Group understand that addressing the unique needs of LEP families can be challenging – especially when the population is as diverse in culture and language as the immigrant and refugee population in Pittsburgh. The policy before you represents a much-needed step toward fully and effectively addressing the unique challenges – and also building on the assets – of these communities. We applaud PPS for its leadership in the region and in the state when it comes to meeting the needs of English Learners and limited English proficient families. We are hopeful that the Board will continue this legacy and adopt Policy 1012.1, along with the appropriate resources, supports, and accountability measures, to ensure this policy is implemented effectively.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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