

## Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, January 8, 2014

### Departments of Justice and Education Issue School Discipline Guidance to Promote Safe, Inclusive Schools

The Department of Justice (DOJ), in collaboration with the Department of Education (ED), today released a school discipline guidance package that will assist states, districts and schools in developing practices and strategies to enhance school climate, and ensure those policies and practices comply with federal law. Even though incidents of school violence have decreased overall, many schools are still struggling to create positive, safe environments. Schools can improve safety by making sure that climates are welcoming, and that responses to misbehavior are fair, non-discriminatory, and effective.

Each year, significant numbers of students miss class due to suspensions and expulsions—even for minor infractions of school rules—and students of color and with disabilities are disproportionately impacted. The guidance package provides resources for creating safe and positive school climates, which are essential for boosting student academic success and closing achievement gaps.

"A routine school disciplinary infraction should land a student in the principal's office, not in a police precinct," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "This guidance will promote fair and effective disciplinary practices that will make schools safe, supportive, and inclusive for all students. By ensuring federal civil rights protections, offering alternatives to exclusionary discipline, and providing useful information to school resource officers, we can keep America's young people safe and on the right path."

The resource package consists of four components:

- The ***Dear Colleague*** guidance letter on civil rights and discipline, prepared by DOJ and ED, describes how schools can meet their legal obligations under federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating against students on the basis of race, color or national origin;
- The ***Guiding Principles*** document, prepared by ED, draws from emerging research and best practices to describe three key principles and related action steps that can help guide state and local efforts to improve school climate and school discipline;
- The ***Directory of Federal School Climate and Discipline Resources***, prepared by ED, indexes the extensive federal technical assistance and other resources related to school discipline and climate available to schools and districts; and
- The ***Compendium of School Discipline Laws and Regulations***, prepared by ED, is an online catalogue of the laws and regulations related to school discipline in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and compares laws across states and jurisdictions.

"Effective teaching and learning cannot take place unless students feel safe at school," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Positive discipline policies can help create safer learning

environments without relying heavily on suspensions and expulsions. Schools also must understand their civil rights obligations and avoid unfair disciplinary practices. We need to keep students in class where they can learn. These resources are a step in the right direction.”

The guidance package is a resource resulting from a collaborative project—the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI)—between DOJ and ED. The SSDI, launched in 2011, addresses the school-to-prison pipeline and the disciplinary policies and practices that can push students out of school and into the justice system. The initiative aims to support instead school discipline practices that foster safe, inclusive and positive learning environments while keeping students in school. The Department of Justice enforces Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or national origin in public schools, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin by schools, law enforcement agencies and other recipients of federal financial assistance.

The guidance package also results from President Obama’s [Now is the Time](#) proposal to reduce gun violence. It called on ED to collect and disseminate best practices on school discipline policies and to help school districts develop and equitably implement their policies. To both continue ED and DOJ efforts in connection with SSDI and fulfill the administration’s commitment to “Now is the Time,” the guidance package was developed with additional input from civil rights advocates, major education organizations and philanthropic partners.

To view the resource documents, visit [www.ed.gov/school-discipline](http://www.ed.gov/school-discipline) . State Education Agencies, Local Education Agencies and schools may also request a copy of the package by calling (877) 433-7827.