

Testimony of the Children's Defense Fund – New York  
Before the Committee on Education

“Oversight - Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs”

New York City Council  
September 21, 2016.

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The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life, and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF-New York's unique approach to improving conditions for children combines research, public education, policy development, community organizing and statewide advocacy activities, making us an innovative leader for New York's children, particularly in the areas of health, education, early childhood and juvenile justice. Through CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign – a national initiative to stop the funneling of thousands of children, especially poor children and children of color down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction and incarceration – CDF-NY works to replace punitive school discipline and safety policies in New York City schools with social and emotional supports that encourage a positive school climate.

Thank you to Chair Dromm and to the members and staff of the City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify before this oversight hearing examining the Department of Education's (DOE's) current Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and policies. We understand that the academic life of a school and the capacity for meaningful, authentic instruction is strongly linked to the social and emotional climate of the school,<sup>1</sup> and that student perceptions of a positive school climate are associated with higher academic achievement.<sup>2</sup> When reviewing plans for and progress towards expanding and improving CTE programs we recommend that attention be paid to school climate and progressive approaches to classroom management. While CDF-NY supports the intent of Intro 1099, a CTE reporting bill, we ask that the Council incorporate available school discipline data into the demands of the bill to strengthen and create a more holistic annual report of CTE programming.

### **Overview**

This school year marks year two of the City Council's Restorative Justice Initiative, a pilot program whereby 15 schools across the five boroughs are resourced with a full-time school-based restorative justice coordinator and positioned in a network of 25 schools all implementing whole-school restorative justice models. Of the 115 schools invited to apply to the Restorative Justice Initiative, based on criteria that they had disproportionately high rates of suspension when compared to their borough, 14 schools were dedicated CTE schools, and two of the currently participating 15 schools are CTE schools. The reality that two high schools dedicated to CTE are also now dedicated to restorative justice provides an opportunity to collect best practices and share knowledge across the 47 New York City high schools dedicated to CTE and the more than 25,000 students that attend CTE schools full-time.

As a result of the Council's successful passage of the amended Student Safety Act in October 2015, the NYPD posts a quarterly report containing data on handcuffing events, criminal summonses, arrests, and violation activity disaggregated by school building. In the first and second quarters of 2016, 17 and 24 dedicated CTE schools, respectively, were represented in the data. In the second quarter, the most recently published report, one CTE school in particular represented 11 of the 1010 reported incidents. We encourage the DOE and Council to support CTE schools in creating safe and supportive climates for learning that do not set students on a path of disengagement from school but instead utilize alternatives to suspensions, arrests, and summonses, and prevent and address safety concerns in a way that protects the health, well-being and potential of New York City's students.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, D., Fisher, D., and Frey, N. (2015). *Better than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<sup>2</sup> Skiba, R.J. (2016). Conclusion: Moving Toward Equity in School Discipline. In R.J. Skiba et al. (eds.), *Inequality in School Discipline*. Bloomington, IN: The Equity Project, Indiana University.

### **Intro 1099-2016**

We support the goals of Int.1099, the bill before the committee today that would require the DOE to annually report information related to CTE programs. While this data will be an important resource in efforts to expand access to CTE programs and strengthen CTE pathways, we ask that the Council take a step further to include reporting on school climate indicators. To intervene in existing discipline patterns and prevent harsh or disproportionate reliance on exclusionary disciplinary practices, schools and their stakeholders can track and disaggregate discipline data by offense type and student characteristics (e.g. student race/ethnicity, gender, disability status). Through the Student Safety Act, the DOE is already reporting on the number of teacher removals, the number of principal's suspensions, and the number of superintendent's suspensions all disaggregated by school building and race/ethnicity, gender, grade, year of birth, whether the individual is receiving special education services, and whether the individual is an English language learner. This available discipline data can help to gauge the quality of the school environment for students as well as educators in CTE schools, can help stakeholders to identify patterns of disciplinary exclusion and assess the kinds of alternative interventions and practices that are needed, and complements the mission of Int.1099.

Beyond whether or not a student has been suspended,<sup>3</sup> we understand that factors like whether or not a student receives a summons or has been arrested are indicators of a student's likelihood of leaving school.<sup>4</sup> However, because the Student Safety Act reporting on summonses, arrests, and violation activity is disaggregated by school building rather than school, the data available, though much needed and important, is incomplete. Going forward, we encourage the Council and the DOE to consider enhancing the established reporting requirements for law enforcement activity in schools to better enable stakeholders to study the impact of school safety practices and encourage investment in prevention and intervention strategies that work.

### **Principles of Career and Technical Education**

Research on high school non-completion highlights a web of sociological, psychological, economic, and institutional factors that contribute to students leaving high school before they receive a diploma.<sup>5</sup> CTE programs address some of the specific drivers that fuel student dropout, especially through fostering a feeling of connectedness to school.<sup>6</sup> Much of the available research on CTE indicates that, by providing alternative pathways to engage students and offering strong teacher-student relationships and a relevant curriculum that students enjoy participating in<sup>7</sup>, CTE programs encourage high school attendance<sup>8</sup> and completion<sup>9</sup> in ways that are different from traditional academic high schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Carpenter, D.M., and Ramirez, A. (2007). More Than One Gap: Dropout Rate Gaps Between and Among Black, Hispanic, and White Students. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 19:32-64.

<sup>4</sup> Brownstein, R. (2010). Pushed out, *Education Digest*, Vol. 75, No. 7, pp. 23-27.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, Michelle. 1991. *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban High School*. Albany: State University of New York Press. See also Orfield, Gary, ed. (2004). *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

<sup>6</sup> Kemple, J. & Snipes, J. (2000). *Career academies: Impacts on students' engagement and performance in high school*, New York, New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

<sup>7</sup> Symonds, W. C., Schwartz, R. B. & Ferguson, R. (2011). *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, Pathways to Prosperity Project.

<sup>8</sup> Chadd, J., & Drage, K. (2006). No Child Left Behind: Implications for career and technical education. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 31(2), 79-99., Plank et al. 2008

<sup>9</sup> Castellano, M., Sundell, K., Overman, L., & Aliaga, O. (2012). Do career and technical education programs of study improve student achievement? Preliminary analyses from a rigorous longitudinal study. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, (21)2, 98-118.

As the Committee report notes, students in CTE programs appear to outperform other students on several metrics including high school graduation rates and daily attendance.<sup>10</sup> Further, a 2014 report by the Community Service Society found that New York City public high school students enrolled in CTE schools, which typically serve low-income students and students with below average 8th grade test scores, are much more likely to graduate than their peers in non-CTE schools.<sup>11</sup> Rates of graduation and daily attendance are advanced by school connection - the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as care about them as individuals.<sup>12</sup> Reform initiatives such as CTE enhance school connection through increased comprehension of job and industry, career planning, knowledge and skills related to particular types of work<sup>13</sup>, and through providing high interest technical learning that is relevant and purposeful.<sup>14</sup>

### **School Pushout and the Need for Investment in Restorative Practices**

School pushout occurs when students are prevented or discouraged from continuing their education and results from numerous circumstances, including the absence of qualified and caring teachers,<sup>15</sup> a lack of appropriate academic support,<sup>16</sup> irrelevant curriculum,<sup>17</sup> and the imposition of harsh disciplinary actions that limit educational opportunities and exclude or make students feel unwelcome<sup>18</sup>. Among many harsh disciplinary actions, suspension is often the first step in a chain of events leading to negative short- and long-term consequences, including academic disengagement, decreased academic achievement, and leaving school.<sup>19</sup> Research has demonstrated that even a single suspension or summons increases the odds of low achievement and leaving school altogether.<sup>20</sup> Effective schools are characterized by strong teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships and low suspension rates,<sup>21</sup> and absenteeism and dropout rates are lower in schools where students feel safe and perceive discipline to be fair and effective<sup>22</sup>.

Positive teacher-student and peer relationships as well as communal problem solving to prevent exclusion of students from the classroom make up the essence of restorative discipline. In addition to

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<sup>10</sup> The Council of the City of New York, Committee on Education. (2016). Committee Report and Briefing Paper of the Human Services Division. Retrieved from (<http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2824178&GUID=A03EB6F9-52E4-415A-982C-241B3070E66A&Options=&Search=> See also "Benefits of a CTE Program of Study: CTE Facts & Figures," Department of Education NYCCTE, Retrieved from <http://www.cte.nyc.gov/site/content/benefits-cte-program-study>.

<sup>11</sup> Treschan, L., and Mehrotra, A. (2014). Challenging Traditional Expectations: How New York City's CTE High Schools are Helping Students Graduate. New York, NY: Community Service Society.

<sup>12</sup> Blum, R. (2005). School Connectedness: Improving the Lives of Students. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Retrieved from <http://cecp.air.org/download/MCMonographFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Plank, S., S. DeLuca, and A. Estacion. 2005. Dropping Out of High School and the Place of Career and Technical Education: A Survival Analysis of Surviving High School. St. Paul, MN: National Research Center for Career and Technical Education.

<sup>14</sup> Aliaga, O., Kotamraju, P., Stone, J. R. (2012). A typology for understanding the career and technical education credit-taking experience of high school students. Louisville, KY: National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Louisville.

<sup>15</sup> Valenzuela, A. (1999). Subtractive schooling: U.S.–Mexican youth and the politics of caring. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>16</sup> Youth United for Change. (2011). Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia. Philadelphia, PA: Author. Retrieved from <http://youthunitedforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/pushed-out.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Symonds, W. C., Schwartz, R. B. & Ferguson, R. (2011). Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education, Pathways to Prosperity Project.

<sup>18</sup> Dignity in Schools Campaign. (2010). Fact Sheet on School Discipline and Pushout Problem. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/DSC%20National%20Pushout%20Fact%20Sheet%2012.10.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Skiba, R.J., Arredondo, M.I., Gray, C., and Rausch, M.K. (2016). What Do We Know About Discipline Disparities? New and Emerging Research. In R.J. Skiba et al. (eds.), *Inequality in School Discipline*. Bloomington, IN: The Equity Project, Indiana University.

<sup>20</sup> Kirk, D.S., and Sampson, R.L. (2013). Juvenile arrest and collateral educational damage in the transition to adulthood. *Sociology of Education*, 86: 36-62.

<sup>21</sup> Losen, D.J., and Haynes, L. (2016). Eliminating Excessive and Disparate School Discipline: A Review of Research and Policy Reform. In R.J. Skiba et al. (eds.), *Inequality in School Discipline*. Bloomington, IN: The Equity Project, Indiana University.

<sup>22</sup> Gonzalez, T. (2015). Socializing schools: Addressing racial disparities in discipline through restorative justice. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Research for policymakers*. New York: Teachers College Press.

supportive relationships, academic rigor, and responsive teaching, dedicated CTEs would do well to develop restorative school environments. Restorative justice as an approach to improving the learning environment and student behavior is based on three core principles: repairing harm, involving stakeholders, and transforming community relationships.<sup>23</sup> Restorative practices are predicated on the positive relationships that students and adults have with one another.<sup>24</sup> Research shows that students like school better, have more fun, and learn more when they have opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions.<sup>25</sup> Dedicated CTE schools may be able to reduce the exclusion of students through suspensions, summonses, and arrests by collaborating with school stakeholders to build a whole-school restorative support system, ensuring teachers have the needed resources and knowledge to support students, and helping teachers' enactment of responsive and engaging curricula that shows respect for all.<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It is our hope that the Council continue dialogue with the DOE on the value of sustainable investment in restorative justice in schools and ending disparities in school pushout. We are grateful to the Council for funding the 2015-16 and 2016-17 Restorative Justice Initiative and for the continued commitment to matters of school climate. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

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<sup>23</sup> Macready, T. (2009). Learning social responsibility in schools: A restorative practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 25, 211-220.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, D., Fisher, D., and Frey, N. (2015). *Better than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<sup>25</sup> City, E.A. (2014). Talking to learn. *Educational Leadership*, 72(3): 11-16.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, M.G. (2013). Disrupting the Pipeline: The Role of School Leadership in Mitigating Exclusion and Criminalization of Students. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 26(2): 61-70.