



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JUNE 20, 2019

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City Unveils Long-Anticipated School Climate Reform Package

NEW YORK, NY – This afternoon, the Mayor's Office and New York City Department of Education announced a new "School Climate Reform Package," following through on select recommendations that the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline issued in [2015](#) and [2016](#). Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF-NY) was part of this Leadership Team, and appreciates the inclusion of a formal proposal to limit the length of long-term suspensions to twenty days, potentially restricting the practice of suspending students for shockingly long periods of time, including up to 180 school days. Curbing the use of suspensions is a long-standing concern of youth, families and advocates. During the last school year, there were more than 2,300 suspensions reported where students were removed from their schools for 30 days or more, and we applaud the Department of Education for proposing this essential revision to the Student Code of Conduct.

"Limiting suspensions to twenty days will change people's lives," said Malachi Jones, a high school junior in Brooklyn and education advocate with the CDF-NY. "Long-term suspensions have had such a negative impact on students, where they fall behind in their schoolwork, are pushed along a path of dropping out of school, and can't meet educational requirements because of everything they've missed out on. This is a great opportunity to not only reduce the length of suspensions, but to lower their use, too."

The package also includes provisions aimed at limiting the scope and damaging impact of school-based policing. For years CDF-NY worked within the Leadership Team to formulate amendments to the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the NYPD and the DOE, knowing that the policing of young people attending school often facilitates school pushout and the school-to-prison pipeline. First established in 1998, the MOU arose during an era of zero-tolerance and transferred authority over school safety agents from the then-Board of Education to the NYPD. [After a long wait](#), we are encouraged to see that the City has committed to many of the Leadership Team's progressive recommendations, yet we are disheartened that the MOU has fallen short of what could have been groundbreaking change. Especially considering today's announcement follows a budget season where the city failed to divest from school policing strategies, we are eager to utilize this positive momentum and continue our work pushing for transformative remedies to the damaging and disparate impact of policing on young people's access to education.

"We cannot continue to witness kids being suspended and policed when really they need support and resources," said Gary Edwards, a high school senior in Brooklyn and also an education advocate with CDF-NY. "Schools are asking for resources like restorative practices, and we thank the City for investing in alternatives to the harsh treatment of students. We will move forward now more loudly refusing to accept the criminalization of students in school."

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The Children's Defense Fund 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.