



Secretary King Calls for Charter Schools to Lead on Rethinking Student Discipline

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Contact: Press Office, (202) 401-1576, press@ed.gov

U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. today called for charter schools to become leaders in rethinking student discipline so that more students remain in the classroom and have the opportunity to learn.

King urged charter schools to “focus on innovating to lead the way for our children,” in a speech at the [National Charter School Conference](#) in Nashville. “In every school, no matter how successful, we know there is more we can do to reach the students who are not yet succeeding and more we can do to equip students with not just the fundamental academic skills but the socioemotional skills needed for success in life.”

In an effort to shine a light on best practices in school discipline, the Department has supported the creation of a [suite of resources](#) by the [National Charter Schools Resource Center](#) to help charter school leaders as they rethink discipline practices. These resources include a toolkit for practitioners, a set of case studies that chronicle many of the choices and implementation dynamics experienced by charter school leaders, and a compendium of professional development tools.

The impact of out of school suspensions and expulsions on students is devastating — suspended students are less likely to graduate on time, and more likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, and enter the juvenile justice system. What’s more, we know that students of color are more likely to be disciplined with out-of-school suspensions than their white peers.

The U.S. Department of Education’s [Office for Civil Rights](#) recently unveiled [new data](#) from the 2013–14 school year that show the number of students losing critical learning time due to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions is staggering. Nationwide, 2.8 million K–12 students received one or more out-of-school suspensions. But more troubling are the racial disparities in the data: Black K–12 students are 3.8 times as likely to receive out-of-school suspensions as white students.

The charter sector, like traditional public schools, is showing improvement in this area, but there is more work to be done to ensure all students are in the classroom learning every day.

“Discipline is a nuanced and complicated issue,” King said. “Yet the public discussion of these issues is often binary—pitting one extreme against another. It’s ‘zero tolerance’ or chaos. Authoritarian control or no discipline at all. So, I’ll say up front: I am not here to offer any hard-and-fast rules or directives; but I believe the goal for all schools should be to create a school culture that motivates students to want to do their best, to support their classmates and to give back to their community, and to communicate to our students and educators in ways big and small that their potential is unlimited,” King said.

The Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice have worked closely with educators and education leaders across the country through the [#ReThinkDiscipline campaign](#), which was launched at the White House a year ago, to support local and statewide initiatives that build positive school climates and develop less punitive approaches to school discipline. The campaign builds on the work of the [President’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative](#) to address opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. Across the nation, educators are creating stronger school communities by adopting creative strategies that reimagine the role of discipline in their schools.

A group of national charter school partners is collaborating with the Department to support charter schools’ adoption of guiding principles and best practices for school climate and approaches to discipline that strengthen the school community. Organizations on the steering committee include [NewSchools Venture Fund](#), the [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#), the [Charter School Growth Fund](#), the [Black Alliance for Educational Options](#) and [Democrats for Education Reform](#).

In the 2016 [Investing in Innovation Program](#), the Department supports innovative approaches to creating a supporting school climate. This priority builds on the [#ReThinkDiscipline](#) campaign to increase awareness about

the detrimental impacts of exclusionary discipline, the Department's investment in [School Climate Transformation Grants](#) to help states and districts strengthen behavioral supports for students, and a [school discipline guidance package](#) to clarify schools' obligation not to discriminate on the basis of race in discipline.

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