

May 21, 2019

Delay Vote for Community Input - Proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – City of Pittsburgh and School District of Pittsburgh

Dear Pittsburgh Public School Board Members,

We, the undersigned, have concerns that language in the Proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) could have negative consequences for Black students, LGBTQIA students, and students with disabilities. We strongly urge the Board of Directors to solicit meaningful stakeholder input and delay a decision to allow time to incorporate feedback.

We recognize the many positive steps that the Board has taken over recent years to adopt policies that reflect the District's commitment to equity and inclusion - from Community Schools and restorative practices to the K-2 suspension ban and becoming a sanctuary campus. The adoption of an MOU represents another important step and should be carefully crafted to promote school safety while limiting unnecessary student contact with the justice system. As the document is currently written, we are concerned that it does not strike the appropriate balance of these two equally important objectives.

For example, the proposed MOU requires a far broader range of incidents be reported to City of Pittsburgh Police¹. This goes beyond what is required by Pennsylvania law, which does not prescribe the automatic and immediate involvement of law enforcement in at least 13 of the incidents listed in the MOU. The reporting of students to City of Pittsburgh Police should not be ingrained in the MOU even if it is the School Police's current practice. The MOU is your opportunity as a Board to set clear boundaries between schools and police. Distinguishing between discretionary and mandatory notifications does not prevent the District from contacting law enforcement when the matter is truly serious or dangerous.

Additionally, the proposed MOU will permit City of Pittsburgh Police to come on school grounds to arrest a student for past, non-school related incidents². We believe that City of Pittsburgh officers should be prohibited from making arrests at school for non-school related incidents except in emergency situations. Several districts have adopted such policies, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, to minimize disruption to the learning process and protect student privacy.

We urge you to take the necessary time to carefully consider the proposed MOU and delay the vote to allow for meaningful community input where parents, students, and stakeholders can be heard and contribute to a fully-informed decision.

Respectfully submitted,

ACLU Pennsylvania
Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)
Education Law Center
Education Rights Network
FISA Foundation
Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence
Gwen's Girls, Inc.
Homewood Children's Village
National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh
New Voices for Reproductive Justice

One Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network
Pittsburgh Local Task Force on the Right to Education
Strong Women, Strong Girls
Women's Law Project
Youth Undoing Institutional Racism
Haylee Ebersole
Sara Goodkind, Assoc. Professor, University of Pittsburgh
Yvette Shipman, Program Manager, Union Project

cc. Aimee Zundel, Solicitor PPS

¹ Section II, Part A (page 5-6)

² Section I, Part D, Number 3, Part b, Subsection v (page 2)