

Resolution of Kentucky's Christian County Public Schools Discipline Investigation

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The U.S. Department of Education announced today that its Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has reached an agreement with the Christian County Public Schools in Kentucky to improve the district's disciplinary system so that all students will receive equitable treatment. In addition, the district will impose less frequent exclusionary discipline and will increase students' educational opportunities.

OCR's investigation revealed that the majority of the violations listed in the district's disciplinary code were open to interpretation and undefined, leaving administrators broad discretion in assigning sanctions. This practice left students and their parents and guardians without adequate notice of the specific behaviors that may result in discipline and what sanction would be imposed. In addition, the district had no safeguards in place to ensure that discretion is exercised by referring teachers and other staff in a non-discriminatory manner.

"We are thrilled that Christian County Public Schools have recommitted to ensuring that all district students will have an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in school," said Catherine E. Lhamon, assistant secretary for the Office for Civil Rights. "This comprehensive resolution demonstrates the district's commendable leadership."

The investigation also showed that black students were disproportionately over-represented in referrals for disciplinary action and for assignment at least once to in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension in each of the four school years that OCR reviewed (2008-2009 through 2011-2012).

For the period under review, black students were also disproportionately over-represented in referrals to School Resource Officers (SROs). For example, in school year 2010-2011, black students composed 33.8 percent of the district's enrollment, but represented nearly 65 percent of the students referred to SROs. OCR noted that, although expulsion was rarely assigned by the district, when the district took the extreme step of expelling students, over two-thirds of the expulsions were black students.

The investigation also revealed that black students were consistently more likely than white students to be assigned in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension when their first disciplinary referral was for violations that were subjective in nature, such as Deliberate Classroom Disruption, Disorderly Conduct, Failure to Follow Directives, and Profanity/Vulgarity. For example, in school year 2010-2011, black students were nearly 3.5 times more likely than white students to receive out-of-school suspension for Profanity/Vulgarity.

In resolving this compliance review, the district has agreed to take a number of corrective measures, including the following:

- Ensure to the maximum extent possible that misbehavior is addressed in a manner that does not require removal from school;
- Collaborate with experts on research-based strategies designed to prevent discrimination in the implementation of school discipline;
- Provide students who engage in disruptive behaviors with support services designed to decrease behavioral difficulties;
- Review and revise the disciplinary policies, and implement disciplinary practices that will effectively promote the fair and equitable administration of discipline;
- Provide training for staff and administrators on the disciplinary policies, and implement programs for students and parents and guardians that will explain the district's disciplinary policies and behavioral expectations;
- Effectively address school climate issues;
- Improve the disciplinary data collection system in order to evaluate discipline policies and practices.

OCR will closely monitor the district's implementation of the agreement to ensure that the commitments made are implemented in a timely and effective manner. And, that the district's discipline policies and practices are administered in a nondiscriminatory manner.