

# Journey for Justice

## "A National Grassroots Education Movement"

### MEMBERS:

**Ambler, PA**  
*Mattison Avenue Elementary School*

**Atlanta, GA**  
*Project South*

**Baltimore, MD**  
*Baltimore Algebra Project*

**Boston, MA**  
*Boston Youth Organizing Project*

**Chicago, IL**  
*Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization*

**Cleveland, OH**  
*Common Good Ohio*

**Detroit, MI**  
*Keep the Vote/NO Takeover*

**Eupora, MS**  
*Fannie Lou Hamer Center*

**Hartford, CT**  
*Parent Power*

**Kansas City, MO**  
*Full Potential*

**Los Angeles, CA**  
*Crenshaw High School  
Labor Community Strategy Center*

**Newark, NJ**  
*Parents Unified for Local School Education (PULSE)*

**New Orleans, LA**  
*Friends and Family of Louisiana's  
Incarcerated Children  
Parents Across America  
C6*

**New York, NY**  
*NYC Coalition for Educational Justice  
Alliance for Quality Education  
Urban Youth Collaborative  
Make the Road NY*

**Oakland, CA**  
*Santa Fe Elementary*

**Philadelphia, PA**  
*Philadelphia Student Union  
Youth United for Change  
Action United*

**Washington, DC**  
*Empower DC  
Alliance for Education Justice  
Leadership Center for the Common Good*

**Wichita, KS**  
*Sunflower Action*

**Technical support provided by:**  
*Annenberg Institute for School Reform*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2013**

### PRESS RELEASE

## **18 CITIES CALL ON DUNCAN & DEPT. OF EDUCATION TO END DISCRIMINATORY CLOSINGS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

### **National "Journey for Justice" Movement Gains Speed In Wake Of Mass School Closings & Turnarounds That Violate Civil Rights & Promote Divestment In Low-Income Communities of Color**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Students, parents and advocacy representatives from 18 major United States cities testified today at a community hearing before **Arne Duncan** and the **U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C.** on the devastating impact and civil rights violations resulting from the unchecked closings and turnarounds of schools serving predominantly low-income, students of color.

Approximately 500 students, parents and community representatives, impacted or at risk of impact by school closings, represented 18 cities from across the country at the hearing including: **Ambler, Pa.; Atlanta; Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Cleveland; Detroit; District of Columbia; Eupora, Miss.; Hartford, Conn.; Kansas City, Mo.; Los Angeles; Newark; New Orleans; New York; Oakland, Calif.; Philadelphia; and Wichita, Kan.**

"Cities across the country are experiencing the racially disparate effects of top-down, neglectful actions by the closing and turnaround of schools serving low-income students of color. The devastating impact of these actions has only been tolerated because of the race and class of the communities affected," said **Reverend Krista Alston, parent leader with the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization in Chicago**. "Hundreds of youth and parents are making their voices heard today and it is crucial that policymakers hear the issues, recognize the discriminatory and destabilizing impact these closings and turnarounds have brought about and take immediate steps to put a moratorium on school closings to stop the divestment in our youth."

As publicity for the hearing intensified, cities including Philadelphia, New York and Detroit accelerated activities and debates to address the devastating impact and civil rights violations resulting from school actions. On Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the **Philadelphia City Council voted 14-2 in favor of Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS) nonbinding resolution for a one-year moratorium on school closings**. Debate heated up in New York City as representatives took the issue to the state capitol and Detroit confirmed that the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights had launched a probe into its Title VI Civil Rights complaint.

**Demands of the U.S. Department of Education include a moratorium on school closings** until a new process can be implemented nationally, the **implementation of a sustainable, community-driven school improvement process** as national policy, and a **meeting with President Obama** so that he may hear directly from his constituents about the devastating impact and civil rights violations the current policy is perpetuating.

The community hearing was followed by a candlelight vigil at the Martin Luther King Memorial to continue to raise the voices of those impacted by the destabilization and sabotage of education in working and low-income communities of color.

### **FEDERAL POLICY CAUSED CURRENT ISSUES**

Despite current research showing that closing public schools does not improve test scores or graduation rates, closings have continued primarily because current federal **Race To The Top** policy has incentivized the closing and turnaround of schools by supporting privatization.

However, the federally incentivized privatization of schools has resulted in unchecked actions and processes where the primary fallout is on those in low-income communities of color including:

- **Displacement and destabilization of children and neighborhoods already in potentially vulnerable situations;**
- **Significant negative impacts to learning;**
- **Increased violence and threats of physical harm as a result of re-assignment; and,**
- **Destabilization at schools receiving the displaced students.**

“For low-income, minority students the only outcome within the current strategy is failure. By choosing not to make an investment in these students and schools, this creates an unstable environment that leads to significant learning setbacks,” said **O’Cynthia Williams, parent leader with NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, New York**. “The current federal **Race To The Top** policy has essentially doomed these students because of their demographic.”

### **SCHOOL CLOSING & TURNAROUND PROCESS VIOLATES CIVIL RIGHTS**

More than 10 cities have filed, or are in the process of filing, Title VI Civil Rights complaints with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, citing the closing of schools and the criteria and methods for administering those actions as discriminatory toward low-income, minority communities.

Representatives from cities filing Title VI Civil Rights complaints testified at the hearing on the civil rights violations and the destabilization of their children and their communities. Case studies were presented illustrating the lack of transparent criteria and processes used for school closing and turnaround actions, specifically, the disproportionate number of actions affecting minority students compared with overall student populations, the history of neglect and deprivation of resources and the sabotage of performing schools serving predominantly minority communities to force situations for closure.

“The closing of schools is going unchecked and is a veiled attempt to destabilize communities and speed gentrification of poor neighborhoods,” said **Cheyenne Walker, student from Keep the Vote/NO Takeover, Detroit**. “These are serious actions to take without understanding the impact in a community and this ongoing neglect and disregard sends a message that these students are not worthy of investment and that educating low-income African American students is less important than the education of their peers. This is a civil rights issue.”

### **CALL FOR COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS FOR SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION**

In the process of closing these schools, districts have implemented an opaque process that fails to reveal actual criteria for school actions and, at the same time, has eliminated the voice of the people in the communities directly impacted. Parent and community input and proposals for school improvement have been ignored as neighborhood schools are brokered to private companies. This elimination of community-driven school improvement has eradicated the role of minority, low-income parents in protecting the interests of their children’s educational opportunity.

Additionally, the current issues with the elimination of voice and accountability to the public do not improve by turning schools over to private brokers. A recent study from the **Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University** cited that many of the authorizers for charter schools fail to provide accountability for these schools and thus fail to deliver on the original charter promise of accountability for flexibility.

“We don’t just have failing schools; we have a failing system of epidemic proportions. Community and parent voices have been removed from the process and the privatization has removed all checks and balances so that the system is no longer accountable to the public,” said **Karran Harper-Royal, parent with Parents Across America, New Orleans**. “The answer is not charter schools, the answer is fortifying traditional public schools through a community-driven process.”

The hundreds of participants in the hearing have called on the Department of Education to issue a moratorium on school closings until a new national policy has been formed.

“To have effective and sustainable school transformation the people directly impacted need to help shape what that change looks like,” said **Kayla Oates, student from Fannie Lou Hamer Center in Eupora, Miss**. “It is now up to policy-makers at the federal level to do the right thing, put a stop to these discriminatory actions and create a national policy where those of us who are directly impacted can help reform our schools and our education. This is about our lives and our future.”

In the wake of the hearing, the 18 participating cities, along with additional cities in the process of organizing, have formed a national movement to unite students, parents and advocacy organizations across the country to spread awareness of mass school closings and their impact on targeted communities.

### **ABOUT JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE ALLIANCE**

Journey for Justice is an emerging alliance currently comprised of grassroots community-based organizations from 18 cities across the United States representing constituencies of youth, parents, and inter-generational organizations who have been impacted by the closing, turnaround, and charter expansion of schools in communities of color. The goal of the Journey for Justice alliance is to bring the voice of those directly impacted by discriminatory school actions into the debate about the direction for public education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to promote sustainable, community-driven school reform for all school districts across the country.

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