

COORDINATING COMMITTEE:

**National**

*Alliance for Education Justice*

**Washington, DC**

*Empower DC*

**Chicago, IL**

*Kenwood Oakland Community Organization*

**Baltimore, MD**

*Baltimore Algebra Project*

**Detroit, MI**

*Keep the Vote, No Takeover*

*Black Parents for Quality Education*

**Newark, NJ**

*Parents Unified for Local School Education*

**New York, NY**

*Alliance for Quality Education*

*NYC Coalition for Educational Justice*

*Urban Youth Collaborative*

**Philadelphia, PA**

*Philadelphia Student Union*

MEMBERS:

**National**

*Leadership Center for the Common Good*

**Oakland, CA**

*Oakland Public Education Network*

**Los Angeles, CA**

*Labor Community Strategy Center*

**Hartford, CT**

*Parent Power*

**Atlanta, GA**

*Project South*

**Miami, FL**

*Power U*

**Chicago, IL**

*Action Now*

**Wichita, KS**

*Kansas Justice Advocate*

**New Orleans, LA**

*Concerned Conscious Citizens Controlling*

*Community Changes*

*Coalition for Community Schools*

**Boston, MA**

*Boston Youth Organizing Project*

*Boston Parent Organizing Network*

**Detroit, MI**

*Detroit LIFE Coalition*

**Minneapolis, MN**

*Neighborhoods Organizing for Change*

**Eupora, MS**

*Fannie Lou Hamer Center for Change*

**Camden, NJ**

*Camden Comeback*

*Camden Education Association*

**Englewood, NJ**

*Citizens for Public Education*

**Jersey City, NJ**

*Parent Advocates for Children's Education*

*Concerned Citizens Coalition*

**Paterson, NJ**

*Paterson Education Organizing Council*

**Philadelphia, PA**

*Action United*

*Youth United for Change*

ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS

**Chicago, IL**

*Teacher's for Social Justice*

# Journey for Justice

## "A National Grassroots Education Alliance"

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Laurie R. Glenn

Phone: 773.704.7246

E-mail: [Irglenn@thinkincstrategy.com](mailto:Irglenn@thinkincstrategy.com)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2013

*"The time is always right to do what is right."*

*-Martin Luther King Jr.*

PRESS RELEASE

NATIONAL EDUCATION COALITION KICKS OFF CAMPAIGN  
TO STOP SCHOOL DESERTS

*25-City Alliance Demands Moratorium on School Closings*

**U.S.** – In light of school closings throughout the country targeting low-income communities of color, a national 25-city coalition is calling for a stop to the creation of school deserts through a moratorium on all school closings, turnarounds, phase outs and charter expansions. As the nation marks the 50th anniversary of the *March On Washington*, which served as a compelling force for civil rights progress, **Journey for Justice Alliance** members have come together with an agenda very similar to the one fifty years ago: racial justice and equal opportunity for all children – no matter their color, class or community – to a quality and safe education.

"A clear pattern of documented racial and economic discrimination has demonstrated that while there have been advances in the nation, as shown by the election of the nation's first black president, the federal administration's policies have embodied education strategies that continue to perpetuate racial and class bias in the access to quality education," said **Jitu Brown, education coordinator, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization**. "We stand here fifty years after a landmark movement set civil rights legislation in motion, dismayed at the unchecked and discriminatory actions that blatantly violate the human right to a quality education and are wreaking havoc, not only on our most vulnerable youth, but also on entire communities."

**SCHOOL DESERTS RESULT OF FEDERAL POLICY**

Students, parents, community members and advocates around the country are holding local actions this week, that while commemorating the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights activists, bring to light the deterioration of years of progress in race relations and human rights when it comes to national education policy and reform.

Activists in cities nationwide demand a stop to school closings as a reform strategy because it has:

- **Disproportionately targeted low-income communities of color as illustrated by a documented pattern of discrimination in school actions;**
- **Created school deserts – no right of access to public schools in communities serving the most vulnerable students;**
- **Failed to improve learning conditions or academic performance of displaced low-income students of color once transferred to their receiving school;**
- **Violated the human right for parental voice in decisions about their children's education; and,**
- **Destabilized entire communities already at risk due to volatile housing markets, gentrification, high mobility, poverty, violence, racism, and unemployment.**

"The current federal *Race To The Top* policy has had a discriminatory and disproportionate affect on low-income students of color and calls into question the very nature of public education which is supposed to provide equal educational opportunity for all children and ensure equity for those most at risk," said **Tre Murphy, community organizer, Baltimore Algebra Project**. "This injustice is a clear violation of human and civil rights and it is crucial that policymakers recognize the destabilizing impact, divestment and injustice that the current policies have brought about and take immediate steps to put a moratorium on closings and turnarounds."

# Journey for Justice

## "A National Grassroots Education Alliance"

### NATIONAL DEMANDS MIRROR RIGHTS ESTABLISHED BY UNITED NATIONS

Despite research showing that closing public schools does not improve test scores or graduation rates, and in fact creates documented learning setbacks and destabilization for most displaced students, mass closings have continued to occur primarily as a result of federal **Race To The Top** policy. The fall out of these actions has been disproportionately borne by low-income communities of color and violates the [United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 26](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml) (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>) establishing the inalienable human right of every child to a quality education.

Calling on the American promise to provide for the right to equal access and opportunity to quality education, the **national Journey for Justice Alliance demands include:**

- **Moratorium on school closings, turnarounds, phase-outs, and charter expansions until a new process can be implemented nationally.**
- **Our proposal for Sustainable School Transformation to replace failed, market-driven interventions as support for struggling schools.**
- **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to be held accountable for discriminatory, top-down policies that target communities of color and have not improved student outcomes.**

"We have called on policymakers at the federal and district level to do the right thing. We've filed Title VI Civil Rights complaints and we've presented proposals for sustainable, community-driven school transformation. As we see the circumstances for black America no different today than 50 years ago – and have witnessed the largest mass school closings in U.S. history this year -- we are not going to give up. We will march and rally as long as needed until we see a stop to the disruptive and painful school closings that unfairly target poor students of color, sacrifice their education and their futures, and destroy our communities," said **Amatullah Mervin, community organizer, Boston-area Youth Organizing Project.**

### DENIAL OF PARENT VOICE IN DECISIONS VIOLATES HUMAN RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In the process of closing schools, districts have implemented an opaque process that has eliminated the voice of the people, ignoring parent and community input and proposals for school improvement while brokering neighborhood schools to private companies.

This elimination of community engagement has eradicated the voice of minority, low-income parents and violates the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26:3** establishing that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

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 trend incentivized by federal policy. A 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.

"School officials and public leaders have made it clear that the voice of parents, students and community members do not matter when it comes to education decisions." said **Karran Harper Royal, Coalition for Community Schools.** "Studies have shown that our students are better served when school improvement is a process that engages all of those who are directly impacted. What we are calling for is the consideration of an alternative, research-based plan for community-driven sustainable school improvement. This is about our lives and our future. It is a human right."

### LOCAL ACTIONS RAISE VOICE FOR NATIONAL DEMANDS

The **Journey for Justice** members and groups holding local actions across the country included: **Oakland, Calif.; San Jose, Calif.; Los Angeles; Hartford, Conn.; District of Columbia; Atlanta; Miami; Chicago; Wichita, Kan.; New Orleans; Baltimore; Minneapolis; Camden, N.J.; Englewood, N.J.; Paterson, N.J.; Jersey City, N.J.; Newark; New York; North Carolina, Boston; Detroit; Eupora, Miss.; Jackson, Miss.; Philadelphia; South Carolina.**

Highlights of local actions include:

- **Atlanta: "From Commemoration to Action" Community Block Party at the Georgia State Capitol Building.**
- **Chicago: "Education is a Human Right" one-day boycott of Chicago Public Schools, rally and march to City Hall.**
- **Columbia, S.C.: 100 Hood March & Midnight School for the "Day of Dignity" at the South Carolina State Capitol Building.**
- **Detroit: "Education is a Human Right Day" rally to "Save Oakman School" and demand an end to school closings and school sabotage.**
- **Eupora, Miss.: "Unity in Our Community" rally on justice in education.**
- **Jackson, Miss.: "Day of Dignity" with speakers, music, action center, & community groups at the Mississippi State Capitol Building.**

- **New Jersey: “We Say No” March on Trenton** where the cities across the state will participate in the march including Newark, Irvington, Jersey City, Camden, Trenton, Montclair, Paterson, Asbury Park, Cherry Hill, Bayonne, East Orange to protest destruction of our neighborhoods, education and housing.
- **New Orleans: An education forum** to highlight the lack of progress in the rebuilding schools and the affect of the takeover of public education post Katrina, and call for a return of schools to local control.
- **Wichita, Kan.: “Save Our Schools (SOS)” press conference and rally at Southeast High School** to demand a stop to neighborhood school closings.

“On the anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech on civil rights, it is more relevant than ever that thousands of youth and parents make their voices heard that the discrimination, inequity and the dismissal of the parental right to participate in decisions about our children’s education will not be tolerated. Our young people, our parents and our communities are not giving up this battle to keep our schools open, public, safe and equitable – we will continue to march, to rally and to advocate for the rights of our children for as long as it takes to restore justice,” said **Ms. Helen Moore, Keep the Vote/NoTakeover.**

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

Journey for Justice (J4J) is an emerging alliance of grassroots community-based organizations from 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 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 equality in education for all students and sustainable, community-driven school reform for all school districts across the country.

*Go to the [Journey 4 Justice Facebook Page](#) to get copies of the J4J Fact Sheet, Proposal for Sustainable School Transformation and more information on local actions.*

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