



For Immediate Release

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SCHOOL-JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP TASK FORCE CALLS ON NEXT MAYOR TO REDUCE SUSPENSIONS, SUMMONSES, AND ARRESTS IN SCHOOLS

NEW YORK CITY, May 30, 2013 – The next mayor of New York City should quickly establish an inter-agency initiative, in collaboration with the courts, to significantly reduce suspensions, summonses, and arrests of public school students while shifting to positive approaches to discipline, a blue-ribbon task force is recommending today.

The recommendations are being unveiled this morning by the New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, which under the leadership of former New York Chief Judge Judith Kaye spent the last two years examining the issue of harsh or excessive discipline in the city's public school system as well as alternative approaches from across the city, state, and country.

"The goal for our next mayor is simply stated: keep our kids in school and out of court," said Judge Kaye. "During the 2011-12 school year, there were 69,694 suspensions and 2,548 summonses and arrests. All of the research shows that excessive reliance on suspension and arrest leads to high rates of school failure. We cannot afford the high costs of such an approach for the city's children and families."

The 45-member Task Force, including a broad array of city officials and education and justice system experts, found the number of school suspensions in New York City had grown 40 percent since 2006 and that black students were four times more likely to be suspended than white students.

Moreover, nearly three out of every four of the 882 arrests counted in the 2012 school year were for misdemeanors; 64 percent of the youth arrested were sent to adult Criminal Court, and students as young as 11 were being arrested.

"The research shows that youth with a first arrest are almost two times more likely to drop out compared to peers with no arrest," said Kim Sweet, a member of the Task Force and the executive director of Advocates for Children of New York. "And youth with a court appearance following their first arrest are nearly four times more likely to drop out. It is paramount for the next mayor of New York City to reduce the number of suspensions and school-related arrests and summonses. We are seeing too many children whose lives are being ruined unnecessarily."

The Task Force was convened in June 2011 by the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children in collaboration with Advocates for Children of New York. In releasing its findings, the Task Force offered a five-point plan of action to make the school system safe for all children.

“Our primary recommendation is for the next mayor to lead an initiative that establishes a shared goal among agencies and the courts to keep more students safely in school, while reducing the use of suspensions and school-based summonses and arrests,” said Kathleen DeCataldo, the executive director of the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children.

“We really need the next mayor to bring everyone together on this issue. That includes key city agencies, the court, parents, youth, law enforcement, prosecutors and the defense community, teachers, principals and community organizations and advocates,” she continued. “It’s that important.”

In addition to setting shared goals to avoid suspensions, arrests and summonses, the panel recommended development of a “Graduated Response Protocol” to encourage resolution of student misbehavior at the school level. It also concluded the Department of Education must implement positive, alternative approaches to discipline; improve educational planning for court-involved students; and improve the process of re-enrolling youth who had been suspended or arrested.

“Our recommendations have the potential to establish New York City as a national leader in school and justice reform,” added Judge Kaye. “This task force includes members of the education and justice communities who do not typically collaborate or find themselves on the same side of the table, and yet they agreed the city has a problem here that must be addressed.”

The Task Force is releasing its findings today during a special forum at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, whose president praised Judge Kaye “for her remarkable leadership on this important issue.”

“Our concern for justice and youth development requires a careful look at the intersection of our schools and courts,” added President Jeremy Travis. “This report provides a valuable roadmap for improving outcomes for young people.”

The New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, working with Advocates for Children of New York, sponsored the New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force with support from the law firm of Skadden Arps and a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies.

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