

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

POST-EVENT PRESS RELEASE

Sunday, November 13th

Regional School Assembly Celebrates St. Louis region's commitment to closing the school discipline gap

ST. LOUIS - Nearly 600 community members gathered this evening at the Regional School Assembly: Keeping Our Kids in the Classroom to discuss on-going efforts to eliminate out-of-school suspensions for pre-kindergarten through third grade students, a signature call to action of the Ferguson Commission's report in 2015.

"We cannot afford to be silent, complacent, or apathetic when it comes to the nation's greatest resource, which is our children," said Reverend Karen Anderson, President of the board of Metropolitan Congregations United. "We as a community must take creative action across the region if we are going to change the trajectory of outcomes and provide a better future for our children."

The event, held at Maplewood Richmond Heights High School, was part of a collective effort by several community organizations, including: FOCUS St. Louis Impact Fellows, Forward Through Ferguson, Metropolitan Congregations United, Ready by 21 St. Louis, West County Community Action Network, and Educators for Social Justice.

At the Regional School Assembly, Stacy Clay, Deputy Superintendent of Student Support Services for St. Louis Public Schools reported on the impact of an April 2016 change in out-of-school suspension policy for their youngest students. "School suspensions this year in Saint Louis Public Schools are only 20% of what they were at this time last year," he shared.

Representatives from 20 school districts across St. Louis City, St. Louis County and St. Charles County were present at the gathering. Superintendents and other leadership announced their support of policy changes that reduce and eliminate out-of-school suspensions, choosing one of three levels of commitments (*listed below*).

Maplewood Richmond Heights committed to changing their policy for next school year, 2016-2017. Normandy and Ladue committed to changing their policy for the 2018-2019 school year. Additionally, 17 school districts (*listed below*) committed to reducing out-of-school suspensions exploring alternative disciplinary practices.

Through meetings with school district officials, advocates heard that it is not enough to change school district policy around this issue. Many superintendents called for additional resources

and support from the community as the districts implement alternative school disciplinary practices that keep child and teacher well-being at the center.

“We can’t just make demands on our schools without offering to partner with them to help improve things,” said Dr. Jason Purnell, Principal Investigator and Project Director, For the Sake of All. “We are all in this together.”

Affirming that changes in school discipline policies and practices will take support from more than just school districts, the event organizers and other key community partners presented their commitments (*listed below*) to moving racial and educational equity work forward.

Sunday’s event featured performances from Freedom Arts and Education Center, A- Ladies A Capella Group from Webster Groves High School, and AfroKuumba dancers with Alicia Sunshine School of Dance.

Organizers of the initiative are planning a series of meetings in the coming weeks with funders, districts, and community leaders to continue discussions and build a model for funding school support.

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(School district commitments by tier and event organizer commitments given during the event available upon request. Discipline data by school district can be found here: bit.ly/STLDistrictProfiles)

School District & Community Partner Commitments

School District Commitments

Tier 1: We commit to reducing OSS for pre-k - 3rd graders, while exploring alternative forms of school disciplinary practices and supports that keep child and teacher well-being at the center.

- Affton
- Bayless
- Brentwood
- Clayton
- Ferguson-Florissant
- Hancock Place
- Hazelwood
- Jennings
- Kirkwood
- Orchard Farm
- Pattonville
- Ritenour
- Special School District,
- St. Charles City
- University City
- Webster Groves
- Wentzville

Tier 2: We commit to changing school district policy to eliminate OSS for pre-k-3rd graders in the 2018-2019 school year and implement alternative forms of school disciplinary practices and supports that keep child and teacher well-being at the center.

- Ladue
- Normandy

Tier 3: We commit to changing school district policy to eliminate OSS for pre-k-3rd graders in the 2017-2018 school year and implement alternative forms of school disciplinary practices and supports that keep child and teacher well-being at the center.

- Maplewood Richmond Heights

Event Organizer Commitments

- **Educators for Social Justice** commits to continuing to educate teachers, parents, and community members about how to interrupt institutionalized racism as it is manifested through the school-to-prison-pipeline. We will partner with other organizations to develop and support socially just, equitable and sustainable practices in schools and communities.

- The **West County Community Action Network (WE CAN)** commits to continuing to support keeping kids in the classroom by engaging with schools to improve school discipline practices while partnering with other organizations to develop and monitor a racial justice assessment tool that facilitates equitable, supportive schools in West County and the wider St. Louis region.
- **Metropolitan Congregations United** commits to continue the work of breaking the school to prison pipeline in the St. Louis region. MCU will continue to remain the organizing force behind research, legislation, policy, and practice that seeks to decriminalize black and brown youth. MCU also commits to continuing partnerships with other organizations in the community who have centered their work around the health and wellbeing of our children, our communities, as well as dismantling of racial inequity.
- **FOCUS Impact Fellows** class of 2016 commits to continuing to support keeping kids in the classroom by creating a group of leaders passionate for this cause, creating a video sharing youth voices on suspension, and creating an advocacy piece prior to wrap up in January 2017.
- **Ready by 21 St. Louis** is committed to keeping kids in the classroom by working with all leaders in the community - young people, educators, organizers, funders, and service providers - to make sure the St. Louis region has the resources needed to eliminate out of school suspension for pre-kindergarten through third grade students. Ready by 21 St. Louis is committed to holistic child wellbeing and ensuring young people have the social emotional supports they need to be successful in the classroom.
- **Forward Through Ferguson** commits to helping the region articulate a vision for the path toward Racial Equity and working with coalitions in St. Louis to build dedicated capacity and resources for Racial Equity work. Forward Through Ferguson also commits to providing citizens with the knowledge and tools needed to help drive change at the policy level with accountability to affected communities, and to continuing to catalyze coordinated action on the Ferguson Commission's recommendations with partners across the region.

Other Community Partners Sign On

We commit to keeping kids in the classroom by participating in regional work to decrease school suspension and increase school supports that keep child and teacher well-being at the center.

- Alive & Well
- Black Leadership Roundtable
- Children Services Fund
- For the Sake of All
- Shut It Down
- St. Charles Community and Children's Resource Board
- St. Louis Region Community that Cares

About the Event Organizers

FOCUS St Louis Impact Fellows: a leadership program in which fellows gain a deeper level of understanding on a selected community issue, meet and work with the area's top experts and key players, and apply leadership competencies and innovative thinking to move the issue forward. The inaugural class is using the Ferguson Commission report as a guidepost and framework for their work.

Forward Through Ferguson: Forward Through Ferguson is designed to be a catalyst for the regional ecosystem needed to realize positive lasting change as outlined in the Ferguson Commission report.

Metropolitan Congregations United: an interdenominational, multi-racial community organization of religious congregations in the St. Louis Metropolitan Region that are working for a common purpose: to create a better life for all residents.

Ready by 21: Ready by 21 St. Louis is a collaborative effort to ensure that all young people in the St. Louis region are safe and healthy, are in positive relationships with others, are academically successful, are empowered to be leaders in their community and are aware of, pursue, and achieve fulfilling and practical careers.

West County Community Action Network: a coalition of people who live and work in West County, STL and who seek to promote justice for all.

Educators for Social Justice: a grassroots, teacher-led professional development group dedicated to developing and supporting socially just, equitable, and sustainable practices in schools and communities