THE GREAT UNEQUALIZER:

How Denver's Pre-K System Fails the Children of Southwest Denver and Other Low-Income Communities of Color

BY PADRES & JÓVENES UNIDOS

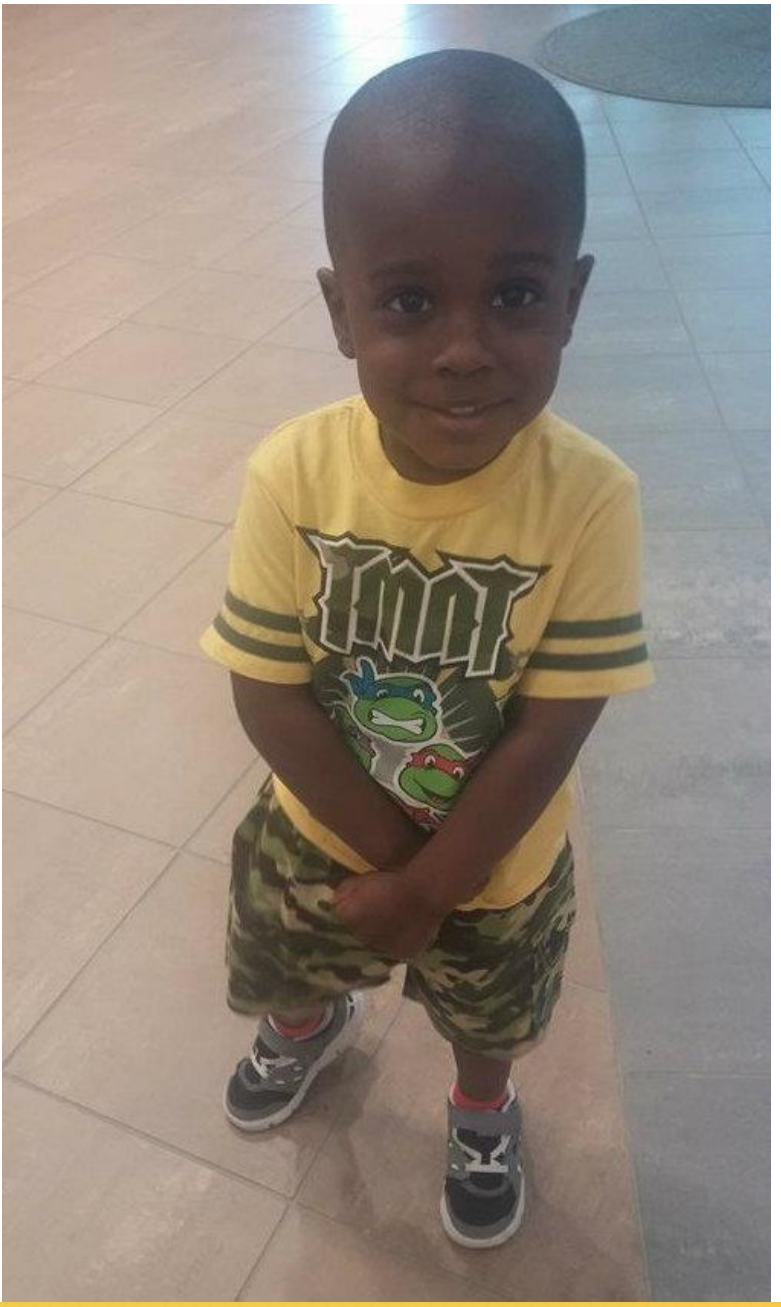
February 2016

Padres & Jóvenes Unidos

Is a multi-issue organization led by people of color who work for educational equity, racial justice, immigrant rights, and quality health care for all

PJU Theory of Change

- ✓Organizing the people most affected by the problem to lead the campaign to create change
- ✓Grounding advocacy in grassroots-directed, and often participatory research
- ✓Using strategic communications to raise public awareness of the issues
- ✓Building unity with allies
- ✓Pushing for policy change that addresses root causes of racial injustice
- ✓Holding institutions accountable for implementation



We can no longer put a Band-Aid on our nation's preschool-to-prison pipeline, which pushes our youngest black and brown children out of the education system for minor offenses.

3 year-old Joah has been suspended from school 5 times.

In the Summer and Fall of 2015, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos completed a major research effort to better understand Denver's pre-K system, particularly within Southwest Denver.

1500 Doors knocked, plus 100's more conversations at libraries, shopping centers, schools, etc.

330 Families surveyed on their experiences with Denver's pre-K system

90% Identified as Latino, and vast majority were Spanish-speakers

QUESTION:
How often are students suspended, expelled, or asked to leave for disciplinary reasons?

FREQUENTLY 16%

OCCASIONALLY 25%

41% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEIR PRE-K SITES WERE USING HARSH DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

Ending Racial Disparities in Early Childhood Discipline:

Suspensions and expulsions of our youngest children should never be a tool in our toolbox.

The “Padres Approach”

Problem:

✓ Students of color are being suspended and expelled from preschools at a higher rate than white students

Impact:

✓ Kids see suspensions and expulsions as a “norm”

✓ Creates a culture that makes students feel like they don’t belong in school from an early age

✓ Kids are academically behind

✓ Parents have a lack of trust with resources

Root cause:

✓ Implicit bias

✓ Institutional racism

Solutions:

✓ Denver Public Schools District: amend disciplinary policy to eliminate suspensions and expulsions from pre-K to second grade

✓ State of Colorado: pass legislation that eliminates suspensions and expulsions for children from pre-K to second grade

Rocky Mountain News

FRIDAY 8/22/08 ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Board approves new DPS discipline policy

USA TODAY

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Colorado school expulsions drop following law

AP 5:36 p.m. EDT March 28, 2014

DENVER (AP) — Fewer Colorado students are being expelled in the wake of a statewide reform measure, according to a new study that could amplify Colorado's voice in a growing nationwide debate over whether discipline procedures are setting students — particularly those from minority communities — on a path to prison and failure.

"Colorado School Discipline Report Card: Year One" was released Friday by Padres y Jovenes Unidos. The group, which has worked on the issue for more than two decades, analyzed data for 2012-13, the first full school year since the adoption in 2012 of Colorado's so-called Smart School Discipline Law.

The study found an overall 25 percent drop from the previous year in expulsion rates, from 0.24 per 100 students to 0.18. But statistics compiled from school districts also

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Fewer students expelled after new Colorado law

By SPECIAL TO THE DENVER POST and THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
March 29, 2014 at 9:29 am

Fewer Colorado students are being expelled in the wake of a statewide reform measure, according to a new study that could amplify Colorado's voice in a growing nationwide debate over whether discipline procedures are setting students — particularly those from minority communities — on a path to prison and failure.

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Padres & Jóvenes

Results of New DPS Discipline Policies

- ✓EXPULSIONS dropped 66%
- ✓OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS decreased 21%
- ✓GRADUATION rates increased by 10%
- ✓At a high school of color where Jóvenes Unidos has had a chapter for 8 years
  - Police tickets went down 72%
  - Expulsions went down 82%
  - Out-of-school suspensions went down 35%

Statewide Changes Since Passage of Smart School Discipline Law in 2012

Out-of-School Suspension Rate	Down 17%
Expulsion Rate	Down 36%
Referral to Law Enforcement Rate	Down 23%

http://padresunidos.org/sites/default/files/media-root/ES2JT/PJU%20REPORT%20CARD%2004-2016%20Final%20Compress_0.pdf

“Too often we forget that discipline really means to teach, not to punish. A disciple is a student, not a recipient of behavioral consequences.”

-Daniel Siegel

“If a child doesn’t know how to read, we teach. If a child doesn’t know how to swim, we teach. If a child doesn’t know how to multiply, we teach. If a child doesn’t know how to drive, we teach. If a child doesn’t know how to behave, we teach? Or punish?”

-Herner

Development of Children

1 – 2 Years

-Imitate adult actions

-Speak and understand words and ideas

-Experiment with objects

-Walk steadily, climb stairs and run

-Recognize ownership of objects

-Develop friendships

-Solve problems

-Show pride in accomplishments

-Begin pretend play

2 – 3.5 Years

-Enjoy learning new skills

-Learn language rapidly

-Gain increased control of hands and fingers

-Act more independently

3.5 - 5 Years

-Develop a longer attention span

-Talk a lot, ask many questions

-Test physical skills and courage with caution

-Reveal feeling in dramatic play

-Like to play with friends, do not like to lose, share and take turns sometimes

5 – 8 Years

-Gain curiosity about people and how the world works

-Show more interest in numbers, letters, reading and writing

-Gain more confidence and use words to express feelings and cope

-Play cooperatively

-Develop interest in final products

Community Voices:

HARSH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

"**They suspended my son a lot**
I spoke with the counselor but he ignored me and didn't speak respectfully to me."

"My experience is that they do not have enough commitment to all children. Some children are very restless and they just tell them sit here or they put them on the side **SO they do not learn what they need to learn."**

"My child was **suspended twice** because he would distract other kids. He would always be sent home."

"One of the girls that I would pick up would always cry when I would drop her off. I found out that **the teacher would hit the children** because she was trying to 'educate' them . . . and no one would do anything about it.

"In **one year they called three times** telling me that my 4-year-old had misbehaved and that **I had to go pick him up and take him home**. . . .

Padres & Jóvenes Parent Leader Lorena Limón and her son Yinsen

In Colorado,

- ✓We are striving for the *elimination of and moratorium on suspensions and expulsions* from Preschool to grade 2.

- ✓We promote the use of *age-appropriate practices* that advance the social and emotional well-being of our youth from preschool to second grade.

- ✓We believe we can do this without a major fiscal impact – *we DO have the tools in our toolbox.*

Every year, as many as **8,710** 3- and 4- year-old children may be expelled from or pushed out of their state-funded preschool or prekindergarten classroom.

A disproportionate number of these children are African American and Latino boys and girls, and these early childhood expulsions are happening at a rate more than **3X** that of their older peers in grades K– 12.

In child care centers, expulsion rates are **13X** what they are in K–12 classrooms, with as many as **39%** of child care providers reporting at least one expulsion in the past year.

US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014). Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education Highlights. Issue Brief #2.

States and Cities across the country are taking action to end harmful disciplinary practices in early childhood

Connecticut 2015: No child enrolled in public preschool shall be suspended or expelled unless they are in possession of a violent weapon & drugs or sexual nature that endangers other persons.

New York City 2015: Ban on expulsion and suspension for all pre-K -2. Programs are expected to implement positive behavior guidance strategies; "Proactive Measures, Positive Reinforcements, Responsive Strategies"

California 2015: Ban on expulsion and suspension for all pre-K to grade 3 for "willful defiance."

Chicago 2014: Ban on expulsion and suspension for all pre-K to grade 2 except where behavior poses an imminent danger

Minneapolis 2014: Prohibits suspensions for Pre-K through 1st grade for nonviolent behavior

Dayton 2014: Moratorium on out-of-school suspensions for prekindergarten students

New Jersey 2007: Ban on expulsion and suspension for all preschool students

Rochester 2008: Suspension of students in the Pre-K program prohibited

Georgia (introduced): Too Young to Suspend Act; prohibiting schools from suspending in pre-K through grade 3.

Buffalo 2013: All students may not be suspended for non-violent infractions

Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood:

Expelling preschoolers is not an intervention. Rather, it disrupts the learning process, pushing a child out the door of one early care and education program, only for him or her to be enrolled somewhere else, continuing a negative cycle of revolving doors that increases inequality and hides the child and family from access to meaningful supports.

A Joint Statement with the National Association for the Education of Young Children and 30 others including those representing

- ✓teachers and principals
- ✓health specialists
- ✓ECE providers

Questions?

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