



February 12, 2019

Press Statement

For Immediate release through February 19, 2019

Subject: Central Valley Movement Building - SUSD Settlement Response

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“DOJ Settlement with Stockton Unified School District: Good Step Forward, But Not Far Enough”

Central Valley, CA... In January of 2019, the California Department of Justice settled a complaint against Stockton Unified School District (SUSD) for “system-wide violations of civil and constitutional rights of African American and Latino/a students and students with disabilities,” including high rates of referrals of these groups to law enforcement and on-campus arrests.

For Central Valley Movement Building (CVMB), one of our main objectives has been uniting and amplifying grassroots voices calling for the removal of Student Resource Officers (SROs) from schools throughout the Central Valley of California and across the nation. As part of our collective work with Dignity in Schools Campaign California, CVMB released a press statement during the National Week of Action in October 2018 detailing not only high suspension rates of black and brown students in the Central Valley, but disproportionate rates of referral to law enforcement as well.

In 2015-16 alone there were a reported 1,383 referrals to law enforcement in school districts including Elk Grove Unified (872 referrals), Stockton Unified (307 referrals) and Clovis Unified (203 referrals). Furthermore in 2015-16, for the nearly 1.1 million students enrolled in Central Valley schools, districts employed only 1,315 counselors, versus 1,345 full-time police and security officers.

Considering such high rates of suspensions, referrals to the police, and arrests of black and brown students, including students with disabilities, we see the recent legal settlement with SUSD as a step forward in dismantling the ongoing discriminatory practices we have witnessed on campuses throughout the country.

The settlement with SUSD includes five years of state monitoring of the district that requires staff and administrators to stop referring students to law enforcement for “low-level disciplinary conduct, including disorderly conduct, disturbance or disruption in school or public assemblies, school trespassing and loitering, use of profanity, and fighting that does not involve physical injury or a weapon.”

However, the settlement does not go far enough. Although our communities have made strides to reform school discipline by way of interventions of parents, local education activist groups, Assembly Bill 420 (willful defiance), and programs like positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), statistical data still shows a repeated pattern of discrimination in suspensions and referrals to the police.

The data supports the argument that police on school campuses do not make our schools safer.

The presence of SROs on campus undermines the agency and responsibility of students, school administrators, and staff, as well as the communities they serve, to build transformative and positive school cultures that teach respect for students and commitment to academic success.

The settlement also calls for the creation of an Advisory Committee to include students, parents, educators, and community members for the purpose of providing “comments to the Department [DOJ] and the District on changes to [district] policies and procedures, the diversion program established alternative to citations and bookings, and submit recommendations to reduce the disproportionalities in the student referrals to law enforcement...”

CVMB agrees that the Advisory Committee is a crucial part of this agreement, and that it must be comprised of those who are truly representative of the community such as our partners at Fathers & Families of San Joaquin.

Nonetheless, we continue to see how the presence of SROs and referrals to police are feeding our children into the school-to-prison pipeline. Therefore, we contend that the solution to system-wide discrimination and violations of student rights requires not just changes in programs but also systemic changes in the culture of schools and districts.

Instead of continuing to invest in the policing of schools, which does not make schools safer, we call for a commitment to community-centered alternatives like PBIS, cultural sensitivity training for administrators and teachers, and to shift money (including not using Local Control Funding Formula money) and resources away from contracts with the police departments and toward student support services like social workers and counselors.

We urge all the stakeholders in the Stockton area and throughout the Central Valley to monitor the progress of the DOJ settlement, and continue to demand accountability and action in order to remove the threat of SROs and similarly failed disciplinary procedures in order to make schools truly safer for our children.

For more information about the Central Valley Movement Building please go to our website: www.cvmb.org or email us at : cvmbconnector@gmail.com. Also, for more information about the Dignity in School Campaign, California go to the website: <https://dignityinschools-ca.org/>

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