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New Report Sheds Light on the School Suspension Crisis in Virginia; Offers a Promising Path Forward

Charlottesville, Virginia (May 19, 2016) – Virginia schools have a crisis on their hands. Waves of students are being pushed out of school though the widespread, discriminatory overuse of suspension and expulsion.

A new [report](#) released today by the JustChildren Program of the Legal Aid Justice Center reveals that, last school year, Virginia schools issued over 126,000 out-of-school suspensions to approximately 70,000 students. The report details disturbing findings from the 2014-15 school year, including:

- One-fifth of all suspensions were issued to pre-kindergarten and elementary school students;
- The majority of suspensions were for relatively minor, non-violent, subjective misbehavior like “disruption,” “defiance,” and “disrespect;”
- African American students and students with disabilities were suspended at hugely disparate rates; and
- Statewide suspension rates flattened out after years of steady progress.

“Suspension hurts everyone. Suspended students are at a significantly greater risk of academic failure, dropping out, and becoming involved in the justice system,” said Angela Ciolfi, JustChildren’s Legal Director and co-author of the report. “Worse yet, suspension damages school climate, public safety, and the economy.” The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice have been pushing states across the country to reduce school exclusion, and many states have made tremendous strides in limiting the use of suspension and expulsion, investing in prevention and alternatives, and holding districts accountable.

JustChildren’s report also provides information about proven behavioral interventions and alternatives to suspension and expulsion, including MyTeachingPartner, social and emotional learning, multi-tiered systems of support, threat assessments, and restorative practices. These programs and frameworks have been shown to *both* improve school safety and climate *and* reduce suspensions and disparities. “What’s so sad is that we know what works,” said Jason Langberg, a JustChildren attorney and co-author of the report. “We just haven’t had the political will to abandon the failed ‘zero tolerance’ mentality and to begin providing educators with the resources they need to ensure schools are safe and supportive.”

The report concludes with common sense recommendations for lawmakers and policymakers. JustChildren calls upon the General Assembly, Virginia Board of Education, and local school board members to act with a sense of urgency in promoting positive school climate and keeping students in school and on a path toward graduation and success in adulthood.

To read the report, visit www.justice4all.org/suspension.

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Through litigation, education, organizing, and lobbying, JustChildren strives to ensure that Virginia’s most vulnerable young people receive the services and support they need to lead successful lives in their communities. The Legal Aid Justice Center has been providing legal representation for low-income individuals in Virginia since 1967. Its mission is to serve those in our communities who have the least access to legal resources.