Eliminate Bias and Discrimination Against Black Students

IDRA Public Comment for HB 392, Presented by Dr. Altheria Caldera to the Texas House State Affairs Committee, April 29, 2021

Dear Chairman Paddie and State Affairs Committee members:

My name is Altheria Caldera, I am an Education Policy Fellow at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We support HB 392, the "CROWN Act."

For many Black people, hair is not just a fashion statement or passing trend; our hair is directly linked to cultural identity. Still, many Black students in Texas schools experience bias and punishment for wearing hairstyles that are inappropriately prohibited by school districts' codes of conduct. In fact, students unfairly receive in-school and out-of-school suspensions for hairstyles that express their cultural heritage. Punishing students for expressions of identity and race is harmful to both the punished students and to the entire school community that observes the marginalization of Black communities and cultures.

HB 392 would prohibit discrimination in school dress and grooming codes, preventing schools from discriminating against and punishing students who wear hairstyles that are commonly or historically connected with race. This discrimination contributes to the over-suspension of Black students – an issue that Texas has failed to resolve.

For years, advocates have recommended that school districts revise their dress codes to remove hair bias from their policies and practices, but Black students still are being punished for their hairstyles. This month in Texas, a mixed-raced student who wore his hair in a braid received in-school suspension for violating the school's dress code. Other high-profile incidents involve Black students being denied participation in extracurricular activities or graduation ceremonies due to their hair styles.

In 2020, Dallas ISD took steps to eliminate this inequity by amending its dress code, stating, "Natural hair and natural hair styles will not be discriminated against or penalized in any way." But such changes must not be left up to individual school districts. To prevent discrimination against Black students, Texas must codify its opposition to hair bias by passing the "CROWN Act."

Recommendations
- Adopt HB 392 to prevent bias and discrimination based on hair;
- Eliminate all racially-biased policies that result in the over-suspension of Black students; and

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- Adopt policies that promote culturally sustaining educational practices, including ethnic studies programs and schoolwide restorative practices.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Ana Ramón, IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy, at ana.ramon@idra.org.

Resources

Caldera, A. (2018). Suspendable and Expendable, Kicking Out and Throwing Away Black Girls: An Analysis of a School District's Policies and Practices. *Texas Education Review, 7*(1), 30-47.

Dallas ISD. (June 25, 2020). Recently Adopted Policies. Recently Adopted Policies and 2020-2021 Student Code of Conduct, webpage. Dallas Independent School District.

IDRA. (2021). Ending Harmful Discipline to Create Safer Schools, webpage. San Antonio: Intercultural Development Research Association .

Stunson, M. (2021, April 16). 'This is a racial issue.' Boy punished for hairstyle at Texas school, mom says. Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

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