

June 26, 2018

Dear Denver Public Schools Board of Education Members,

We are writing to you on behalf of many Denver Public Schools school-building leaders and educators who are extremely concerned about the inhumane separation of children from their parents at our nation's southwestern border and the traumatic life-long impact on these and other children that may be occurring. Specifically, school leaders have been distressed to see the ripping of children from the safety of their parents after fleeing violence and extreme poverty in their home nations.

As Denver Public School leaders and educators, we work tirelessly and worry every minute of the day about the well-being of children, and we want to make it clear to our community and DPS families that Denver Public Schools will not be silent on this issue. That is why we are reaching out to you today to gain your support in sharing Denver Public Schools' concerns clearly and loudly.

We know that on October 17, 2017, the Denver Public Schools Board of Education adopted Resolution 3831, on becoming a Trauma-Informed School District, which acknowledged the serious consequences on children of traumatic childhood events. We, as Denver Public Schools leaders, believe that the policy of "family separation" at the southwest border is really a policy of deportation and incarceration that causes immense trauma on children.

Specifically, we are also concerned about how this separation policy and images from the southwest border are impacting our DPS children. We hear from concerned parents that their children here are being traumatized by a fear that they will be taken from the safety and comfort of their parents after seeing these images and hearing these stories.

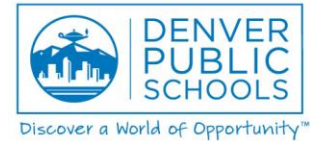
We understand the long-term psychological impacts of childhood trauma especially as it relates to education. Research has shown that children who have experienced childhood trauma suffer physical changes to their brain development which can lead to long-term effects to a child's emotional regulation, cognitive ability, self-esteem, physical health and other social/emotional challenges.<sup>1</sup> These long-term impacts lead to traumatized children being more likely to fail a grade in school, score lower on standardized achievement tests, achieve lower grades, struggle more with receptive and expressive language, and have behavior problems which are all barriers to educational access.<sup>2</sup>

As such, we care deeply about the long-term impacts on the mental and emotional well-being of these children due to the trauma being caused at our nation's southwestern border. We also know that the faces of those children suffering these traumatic events at the border often reflect the faces of many of Denver Public Schools' own school children, thereby possibly triggering

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, A., Spinazzola, P., Ford, J., Lanktree, C., Blaustein, M., Cloitre, M., et al. (2005). Complex trauma in children and adolescents. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35(5), 390-398

<sup>2</sup> The Heart of Learning & Teaching Compassion, Resiliency & Academic Success Wolpow, Ray; Johnson, Mona M.; Hertel, Ron; Kincaid, Susan O. 2009 <http://k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools/HeartofLearning.aspx>



secondary trauma and extreme fear in our Latinx and immigrant communities.

In the recent materials supporting the Trauma-Informed District Resolution, it was noted that the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defined a trauma-informed organization as an organization that “recognizes the signs and symptoms and impact of trauma in students, families, staff, and communities; as well as the impact of generational, historical and organizational trauma.”

As such, we ask you the Denver Board of Education to pass a resolution as a trauma-informed organization that acknowledges the widespread trauma occurring not only at the border, but also, in our historically marginalized Latinx and immigrant communities.

As expressed in the Safe and Welcoming School District Resolution 3761, adopted February 16, 2017, you expressed the district’s commitment “to providing safe and welcoming spaces where all students are able to focus on their education, secure in the knowledge that the District will support their safety and emotional well-being regardless of immigration status, national origin, race, or religion.”

As Denver Public Schools leaders, we also ask you to say clearly to DPS parents and students that we expressly disavow recent comments made by the Secretary of Education indicating that principals and teachers can report students and families in their schools to immigration officials. We ask you to reiterate that all children and families are welcome and safe in DPS schools.

We, the signatories of this letter, believe that the purpose for inflicting this trauma upon these children is for political gain and posturing in our nation’s political debate regarding immigration law reform. As lifelong educators, we feel strongly that such a purpose is immorally harmful to children and families and contrary to our district and our nation’s values.

Therefore, we ask you, the Denver Public School District Board of Education, to stand together with us to demand the immediate end to forcible and traumatic separation of children from their parents at our nation’s southwestern border by the federal government. We also ask that the board demands that the federal government recognize and act quickly to address the trauma caused to children and families by this immoral separation policy and address the secondary trauma caused to the Latinx and immigrant communities in our nation. We also ask you as the board reiterate your previous call on the United States Congress to commit to the immediate passage of comprehensive immigration reform.

Finally, as school-building leaders and educators, we ask that you, along with district leadership, look into the possible need for increasing or shifting resources to better support students who may have had their own immigration struggle and who may have increased emotional needs triggered by the stories and images from the southwest border.