

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD

Toolkit for Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

Empowers Black and Brown Parents and Guardians to:

- Be effective advocates for their children.
 - Protect their children from the discriminatory disciplinary policies that fuel the school-to-prison pipeline.
 - Respond to excessive and wrongful punishment of their children.
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created by

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The free information provided in this toolkit does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all tips, content, downloadable guides, and materials available in this toolkit are for general, informational, and educational purposes only. The toolkit should be used at parents/guardians discretion.

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

Many don't know that prisons are built based on the number of third-graders who fail - this is how the term school-to-prison pipeline was coined. The school-to-prison pipeline is a disturbing national trend where Black and Brown children are disproportionately funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems because of harsh, excessive, and wrongful punishments, and discriminatory disciplinary policies. Black and Brown students are more likely than their white peers to face the most severe punishments. Because of lost instructional time in the classroom, suspensions and expulsions are connected to lower graduation rates and higher rates of subsequent criminal activity.¹

Justice reform needs to start in the schools and parents are in need of resources to help them powerfully advocate for their children. As a natural extension of our advocacy work to derail the school-to-prison pipeline, [The Honey Brown Hope Foundation](#) created the "How to Advocate for Your Child: Toolkit for Black and Brown Parents and Guardians." The toolkit includes:

10 Recommendations for Advocacy



10 recommendations to empower parents and guardians with tips to protect their children from harsh, discriminatory policies fueling the school-to-prison pipeline.

Parent-Teacher Conference Guide



Guide to assist parents and guardians in asking the right questions to advocate for their child during Parent-Teacher Conference.

Sample Letters & Worksheets



Sample letters and worksheets to download and customize when advocating for your children.

Guide to Handle Discipline Issues



A guide on how to advocate for your child and escalate your concerns after a suspension, expulsion or excessive punishment.

1. [Breaking Schools' Rules](#), a multi-year school discipline study in Texas from the Council of State Government

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10 Back-to-School Starter Tips

For Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

- 1 Read the parent/student handbook that includes the school code of conduct and make sure your child knows and follows them. For an even playing field, make sure that your child's educator follows the rules and guidelines and applies them in a fair, equitable manner.
- 2 Don't allow your child to make an oral or written statement regarding a disciplinary investigation without your presence and approval.
- 3 Don't allow your child to sign any written statement without your permission and presence.
- 4 For your child's school record, submit a letter to the principal, area superintendent, and the superintendent of schools at the beginning of the school year, notifying them that your child is not to be questioned about a disciplinary issue without your presence or permission.
- 5 Don't attend a disciplinary action meeting without a witness or recording it.
- 6 Make sure you get all the facts from your child and conduct your own investigation.
- 7 Create a file with all notes from the teacher/principal and parent-teacher conference meetings.
- 8 During the teacher/parent conference, ask the teacher specific questions about your child's conduct, progress and academic struggles, and what you need to do to assist him or her.
- 9 Develop a parent co-op group where parents help each other to effectively navigate through the school and the State Board of Certified Educators (SBEC) complaint process.
- 10 Become and stay proactively engaged in your child's education.



Parent-Teacher Conference Guide

For Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

You may have seen the images of long lines at popular events being compared to low attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Establishing a relationship with your child's teacher is perhaps the most effective way to prevent and resolve discipline issues.

Because Black and Brown children are excessively punished, overly expelled, and suspended in school, it is important for Black and Brown parents to stay informed, present, engaged and vigilant. **The "Parent-Teacher Conference Guide" will empower parents/guardians with the right questions to:**

1. Advocate and obtain feedback about their child during conferences with their child's educators.
2. Monitor, document, and evaluate their child's progress so they can set high expectations for him/her.
3. Understand the teacher's approach to instruction, classroom management, and discipline.
4. Gain clarity about demographic data, rules, policy, and procedures.

During the conference, you should **ask the questions below**, **take notes** and **consider recording your meeting** to ensure that you capture all the pertinent information and answer to your questions. **After the conference**, don't forget to **write an email** to thank the teacher for his/her time and recap the discussion.

Get Feedback About Your Child

- What level of supervision does my child work best under?
- How does my child engage or disengage during the conflict?
- Where does my child sit?

Learn How Parents Can Help

- How can I prepare my child for success (academic, emotional, and behavior)?
- What resources are available to help my child improve and succeed?
- What is the best way to contact you?

Examine Classroom Management

- How do you maintain a peaceful classroom?
- How do you resolve classroom conflicts?
- How often do you call campus police to gain control of the classroom?
- What's the average # of students he/she suspends/expels?

Confirm Data and Policies

- Ask questions to gain clarity about the handbook or posted policies.
- Ask about the school's demographic data on suspension and expulsions.
- Ask for documentation about your child's attendance.



Notify School About Not Questioning Child

Form For Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

Did you know that as soon as you drop your child off each day, you're handing over your parental rights to the school?

"In loco parentis" is a Latin legal term that means the schools act in place of the parent or instead of the parent. In other words, it gives educators the legal right to exercise the same degree of control over a student that a parent is privileged to exercise when the child is in school. Under "In loco parentis," an educator is immune from criminal prosecution or criminal penalties when in the performance of those duties.

The "Notification for School Not to Question Child Without Parent/Guardian Present or Written Consent" will empower parents/guardians with information to notify the school campus and district that their child should: not be questioned or requested to sign any documents by school officials, CPS personnel, campus resource officers and/or law enforcement without your presence or written consent.

- 1 [Click here to download and customize](#) the "Notification for School Not to Question Child Without Parent/Guardian Present or Written Consent" Form.
- 2 Complete the "Notification for School Not to Question Child Without Parent/Guardian Present or Written Consent" Form.
- 3 Submit the form to School Campus by using "School Campus Acknowledgement Receipt."
- 4 When you submit to the school campus, please make a copy of "Notification for School Not to Question Child Without Parent/Guardian Present or Written Consent" and the "School Campus Acknowledgement Receipt."
- 5 Send/submit signed "Notification for School Not to Question Child Without Parent/Guardian Present or Written Consent" and the "Acknowledgement Receipts School Campus" to School District's Student Affairs department.
- 6 Add copies to "Records and Receipts File" highlighted on pages 7 - 8 of the toolkit.



Records and Receipts Guide

For Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

When contacting different people and places, it's a good idea to document date, time, who you spoke to, and why. The young people call this "keeping receipts." 😊 This guide includes a checklist and worksheet that are designed to help parents/guardians start a file with information about their child.

Below is a checklist for suggested information and documentation to include in your records/receipts file.

- 📁 File for letters and notes from doctors, therapists, educators, etc.
- 📁 File for medical records and reports.
- 📁 File for results of tests and evaluations.
- 📁 File for notes from meetings about your child.
- 📁 File for IEP (Individualized Education Program) and/or IESP (Individualized Education Service Plan).
- 📁 File for personal notes, chat history, and emails about your child's academic and behavioral progress.
- 📁 File for your child's report card and progress reports.
- 📁 File for copies of all signed releases and information about your child.



Please use the sample record-keeping worksheet below to document issues, interactions, and next steps to advocate for your child.

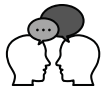
[Click here to download Word document version of the worksheet you can customize.](#)



Detail Issue/Topic



List documentation from your files to support advocacy for your child. *See file checklist on page 5 of the toolkit.*



Who did you speak to regarding this issue? Include name of school/agency/ organization/company; contact person; date of contact; phone number; email; result of the discussion, and what action was taken on behalf of your child.



List referrals or other people or organization(s) that may be helpful to resolve or escalate your issue.



5 Steps to Advocate for Your Child After Discipline Issue

Guide for Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

According to data, Black, Brown, and special needs students are disproportionately and excessively punished; suspended and expelled; pushed-out of school; and set-up for the school to prison pipeline that funnels youth out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

This five-step guide is designed to help and guide parents/guardians on how to advocate for their children after any suspension or disciplinary issue. You should use it immediately after you get a call or letter from the school about an incident involving your child.



Suspensions and expulsions are connected to lower graduation rates and higher rates of subsequent criminal activity. Children of color are more likely than their White peers to face the most severe punishments.

Source: [Breaking Schools' Rules](#), a multi-year school discipline study in Texas from the Council of State Government



In Fort Bend ISD (Texas), Black students were 6 times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions than White students and 4 times as likely to be placed on in-school suspensions. 28% of students in the district are Black, but accounted for more than 50% of all students disciplined with in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, alternative school, and juvenile justice placement.

Source: Houston Chronicle, Fort Bend ISD still disproportionately disciplines black students, advocacy groups say, November 2019, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Fort-Bend-ISD-still-disproportionately-14846736.php>



STEP 1: GATHER THE FACTS

- **Advocate for your child whether you need to correct him/her or not** | The data shows us that Black and Brown students are excessively punished and don't receive the grace of simply being a child who makes a mistake. Talk with your child to get his/her version of exactly what happened as soon as possible and get him/her to write it down. This will give you a clear understanding of the details related to the incident, how to address the situation, and how to best advocate or correct your child's behavior.
- **Review school policy** | Obtain a copy of the school or district's disciplinary policies in writing to review the policy and verify if the school violated its own policy. After reviewing these policies, make note of information relevant to the incident that you want to ask your child or school.
- **Gather witness statements** | Request written statements about the alleged offense from any witnesses and a copy of any administrator, teacher, and student statements about the charge/incident.
- **Review options for special needs students** | Students who have Individual Educational Plans, called IEPs in most schools and are special education students, have very specific rights concerning suspension. Discipline for special education students has specific requirements. There are parent centers in every state to provide assistance. In addition, there are other organizations that can help parents understand what their child and family's rights are in the case of suspensions. Parents should call 1-888-248-0844.





STEP 2: MAKE WRITTEN REQUESTS

The power of the pen is a mighty tool when advocating for your child.

- Request a meeting with your child's teacher and the school principal in writing.
 - Ask school administrators to provide a written account of infraction or charges against the student.
 - Give written notification or reiterate that your child is not to speak or write about a school infraction without your presence and/or permission.
 - Ask for whatever accommodations you need to ensure you can participate fully in the meeting. For example, you can request an evening meeting or have a translator.
- Request and obtain a copy of your child's school records, including records for attendance, grades, and disciplinary policies in writing (if you don't have a copy).



STEP 3: MEET WITH SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

A face-to-face meeting (in-person or virtual) helps you gather additional information about the incident that verifies your child is being treated fairly and ensures that your child's educational progress is not harmed or interrupted.

- **Bring a Witness:** Take someone with you who can help you advocate for your child: a relative, friend, neighbor, community service agency representative, or clergy. Take your son/daughter to the meeting with you if he/she can act respectfully, but do not allow him/her to speak or be questioned.
- **Tape the Meeting:** Ensure that the meeting is accurately documented and to avoid the "he said, she said" after the meeting scenario.
- **Verify the Facts and Impact of Suspension:** Here are questions and topics to guide the discussion.
 - Please advise what rule did my child break? May I get a copy of this rule?
 - What is the standard punishment for breaking this rule? Is there a level of degree for punishment? Are these punishment levels in writing?
 - Why is my child receiving this level of punishment?
 - State whether you have not been notified about any issues.
 - Where was my child when this happened? Who and where was the teacher in charge? Was anyone around when this happened? Do you have a written account of their statements and would you provide me with a copy of their statements?
 - Were other students involved in this incident? If so, were they reprimanded? If their punishment was different, ask why?
 - How will this suspension or expulsion affect my child academically?





STEP 4: ADVOCATE FOR ALTERNATIVE DISCIPLINE & RESOURCES

How could this incident have been handled differently? Are there alternative discipline options?

- May my child finish punishment during in-school suspension?
- May my child change his seat in class or be transferred to a different class?

What can the school do now to help my child and to avoid this problem in the future? For example, ask:

- Is there help for homework in the community or tutoring help?
- Can my child make up schoolwork and tests?
- Make sure you get any services offered that may help your child, such as: counseling; tutoring; conflict resolution training classes; testing for learning disabilities; mentoring programs; peer mediation programs; special education services; special language programs; drug counseling; mental health services; anger management; social skills; youth leadership activities; sports; camps; after-school programs; and/or community service activities.



STEP 5: DOCUMENT

As your children would say, “keep your receipts.” Or in other words, be sure to document the meeting with a written follow-up about agreed upon next steps.



Know Your Right to Access Your Child's School Record

Guide for Black and Brown Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians who are proactively advocating for their children and responding to school discipline issues may have the need to access their child's education records. **This guide includes your rights to access your child's school record through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), tips to request records, and a sample letter to request records.**

? WHAT IS THE FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects students' educational records. It gives parents the right to inspect and obtain a copy of their child's educational records from public, private, and religious schools of former and current students. FERPA also allows parents the right to seek to have their child's records changed and to have some control over the release of personal information. When a student turns 18 years old, or enters a postsecondary institution at any age, the rights transfer from the parents to the student. Under FERPA, education records include all the student's work and information:

- **Directory Information** | FERPA defines "directory information" as information contained in a student's education record that generally would not be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. Directory information could include:
 - Student name, address, telephone, email address, date and place of birth, dates of attendance, and grade level; participation in officially recognized activities and sports; weight and height of members of athletic teams; degrees, honors, and awards received; and the most recent school attended.
- **Classroom** | Class schedule, classroom-based assignments, projects, and completed written assignments/journal entries.
- **School-campus Level** | Data collection logs/sheets, inter-district memos, behavior rating scales/questionnaires, discussions and email communications between guidance office and parents; and all curricular planning information maintained by the guidance office/counselor regarding weekly, direct social skills instruction.
- **Third-party** | Third-party information/documentation exchanged with any and all third-parties, wrap-around service providers/evaluators, reports, and/or anecdotal records of any kind.
- **Special Needs Records** | Parents whose children receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have more rights and remedies regarding their children's education records. For information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), check with the school district's local special education director, or state special education director. Records should include:
 - Draft copies and notes from multi-disciplinary team/Evaluation Report (ER) review meetings, and IEP (individualized education program) and/or IESP (individualized education service plan) records.



Schools must honor a parent's request to review his/her child's education records within 45 days of receiving the request. When requesting information under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), **consider the tips below and use the Toolkit's Sample FERPA letter.**

SAMPLE FERPA REQUEST LETTER

[Click here to download Word document version of sample letter you can customize.](#)



TIPS FOR REQUESTING RECORDS

- **Name and Address of the Public Body/School That You Are Contacting:**
- **Date Requested:**
- **Request Submitted By:** ___ E-mail ___ U.S. Mail ___ Fax ___ In Person
- **Name of Student:**
- **Street Address:**
- **City/State/County Zip (Required):**
- **Telephone (Optional):**
- **E-mail (Optional):**
- **Fax (Optional):**
- **Records Requested:** (Identify as many specific details as possible so the requested body can identify the information that you are seeking.)

Additional Considerations When Submitting A Request

- **Document Request:** When submitting a request, remember to always make a copy for your personal file.
- **Ways to View Records:** You can request to view records on the school's premises or to receive a copy.
 - **Copies:** State the number of copies you are requesting and whether you would like electronic copies or paper copies.
 - **Fees:** You can be charged a nominal fee to copy records if you want copies, but they cannot charge you to just examine them on their premises. If you are requesting that the public body waive any fees for copying the documents, state if you are requesting a fee waiver and why. You must attach a statement of the purpose of the request.
- **Limitations:** No student or parent/guardian can request to look at the records or parts of records that include personal information about another student.





For three decades under the leadership of our Founder and Executive Director Tammie Lang Campbell, The Honey Brown Hope Foundation has contagiously spread hope among young people and their families.

We work from the schoolhouse to the courthouse and jailhouse to offer programming, resources and support that align with our causes:

Civil Rights | Diversity Appreciation | Environmental Stewardship

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Share you feedback about the Toolkit.

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Sign up for updates on Foundation's advocacy and work.

CLICK HERE TO

Submit Toolkit Partner Interest Form.

CLICK HERE TO

Request presentation on Toolkit topic.

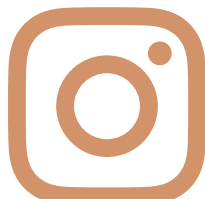
CLICK HERE TO

Donate and support advocacy work to derail the school-to-pipeline .

CLICK HERE TO

Contact the Honey Brown Hope Foundation.

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ABOUT TOOLKIT AUTHOR TAMMIE LANG CAMPBELL

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Nationally Recognized Activist

Zealous Advocate for Black and Brown Parents, Guardians, and Students



Many Texans know Tammie Lang Campbell from a variety of perspectives: Founder and Executive Director of the Honey Brown Hope Foundation; an ACTivist who acts; author; speaker; and simply as #MommaCampbell.

In a climate where the marginalized are left feeling hopeless by the bitterness of social and environmental injustices, her organization, The Honey Brown Hope Foundation, offers programming, resources and support that align with its causes: civil rights; diversity appreciation and environmental stewardship. Founded in 1991, the organization is a nationally recognized, award-winning 501(c) 3 non-profit that plants seeds of hope from the schoolhouse to the courthouse and jailhouse.

With nearly three decades of service to the community, Campbell has: locally and nationally addressed school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affecting Black and Brown students; advocated for policy reform; created and distributed over 200,000 "We Love America Healthy, Clean and Green" calendars to promote environmental stewardship; and hosted "History Talks" that have shared untold history of civil rights era with over 5,000 youth and their families.

She is a sought after mediator, speaker, and social commentator who has written editorials for the Houston Chronicle and has been featured nationally on/in CNN, World News ABC, Crisis Magazine, The Griot, and Texas Monthly Magazine.

As a natural extension of her work, she has most notably served as Harvard University's Civil Rights Project: School-to-Prison Pipeline Roundtable participant; First Female President of NAACP-Missouri City & Vicinity Branch; Education Chair of Texas State NAACP Conference; Senior Fellow of the American Leadership Forum Houston/Gulf Coast Chapter: Class XLIX; Fort Bend District Attorney Brian Middleton Criminal Justice Committee Chair; and Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg's Transition Team member.

Campbell is the recipient of the following awards: Aetna Insurance/ Magic Johnson, KPRC Local 2 Jefferson, Top 25 Women of Houston, The Houston Sun's Woman of Power and Purpose, Jasper, TX Key to the City, YMCA Minority Achievers, North Houston Frontiers' Drum Major, Anti-Defamation League, and National NAACP-Kraft Foods Image. In 2005 and 2006, Campbell was recognized in Sophisticate's Black Hair Magazine as the "Role Model Beyond Beauty." She has also been recognized by both Texas and Hawaii House of Representatives.

Campbell is a graduate of Alcorn State University and considers her two adult children, Shar-day and Dennis Jr., as her greatest blessings.

For more information about her work, please visit www.honeybrownhope.org.