

# PASSAGE

POSITIVE & SAFE SCHOOLS ADVANCING GREATER EQUITY  
AN ACTION & LEARNING NETWORK

## FACT SHEET

### 1. What is PASSAGE?

PASSAGE, which stands for “Positive and Safe Schools Advancing Greater Equity,” is an action and learning network that aims to examine racial and other disparities in school discipline and find ways to move away from punitive, exclusionary approaches that contribute significantly to persistent achievement gaps. The work will be achieved through partnerships between the school district and the community in each of four major cities, with support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. The participating cities will also share best practices and positive approaches they have developed through the learning network.

### 2. Why focus on discipline issues?

Across the nation, the past decade has seen increasing public scrutiny of the set of discipline policies and practices that result in disproportionate numbers of low-income students, particularly students of color, leaving school and, in some cases, entering the criminal justice system. According to Dignity in Schools, nationally, Black students are 3.5 times more likely to be expelled than their White counterparts, and Latino students are two times more likely.<sup>1</sup> Gender also has an impact: while male students are suspended and expelled in much higher numbers than female students, girls of color are suspended even more disproportionately than boys of color. Similarly, studies have shown that these disparities exist for other populations such as special education students, students in foster care, and LGBTQ students.

PASSAGE will complement efforts already under way in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. Over the past two years, MNPS has participated in a national collaborative with seven other districts led by CASEL – the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning – to improve student outcomes by emphasizing social and emotional learning at the classroom, school, and district levels.

### 3. Who pays for the work?

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools has committed the time of high-level staff and in-kind resources to developing a district-community partnership for PASSAGE. The Atlantic Philanthropies have provided limited seed funds to support the community-based work and funds for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University to support the initiative in each site and lead the cross-site learning network.

### 4. What other cities besides Nashville are involved?

Nashville is participating in PASSAGE along with the three largest school districts in the country: New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

## **5. How will the community in Nashville be involved?**

A steering committee will help identify participants for a district-community action team that will include a diverse and broad range of community-based organizations and representatives of constituency groups, including school and district staff, parents, students, government agencies, university partners, and others. Oasis Center will act as lead partner, with the role of primary point of contact and coordinator for the action team.

## **6. What will the district-community action team do?**

PASSAGE will connect school personnel and community partners to learn together in a safe space and in a way that ensures community stakeholders are involved as full partners in building a culture of collective problem solving. The action team will look at district data, policies, and practices; identify strategies that will address discipline issues; and monitor the implementation and results of these strategies.

## **7. What outcomes can we expect from PASSAGE?**

We expect that powerful ideas for addressing school discipline issues will emerge from what schools and communities can envision together in response to the diverse needs of students. PASSAGE aims not only to reduce overall suspension and expulsion rates, but also to reduce discipline disparities among groups of students, develop more positive approaches in policy and practice, strengthen professional development, and create long-term shifts in school culture.

## **8. What is the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University?**

AISR is a national policy-research and reform support organization that develops, shares, and acts on knowledge which improves the conditions and outcomes of schooling in America, especially in urban communities and in schools attended by traditionally underserved children. AISR conducts research and works across the country with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement – school districts, community groups, researchers, national and local school reform organizations, and funders – to build capacity in school districts and communities to attend to the political, social, and cultural dimensions of systems change, as well as the technical aspects.

## **9. What are The Atlantic Philanthropies?**

The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of those who are unfairly disadvantaged or vulnerable to life's circumstances. At the heart of Atlantic's work is the belief that all people have the right to opportunity, equity, and dignity. Atlantic is a limited-life foundation that makes grants through five program areas: Ageing; Children & Youth; Population Health; Reconciliation & Human Rights; and Founding Chairman Programs. Atlantic's investment in PASSAGE aims to prevent, through school discipline reform, unreasonable expulsions and criminalization of U.S. youth.

## **10. Where can I get more information?**

Contact Tony Majors, Chief Support Services Officer, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools  
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<sup>1</sup> [www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/DSCFactSheets\\_WhosGettingPushedout.pdf](http://www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/DSCFactSheets_WhosGettingPushedout.pdf)