



NEWS RELEASE

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Hundreds of education justice activists to descend on first presidential debate to challenge Clinton, Stein and Trump on their public education record

CHICAGO – As Democratic and Republican frontrunners prepare to square off during the first scheduled presidential debate, education justice activists from across the United States will converge on Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, on Monday, September 26th, to demand Sec. Hillary R. Clinton and Donald Trump release a comprehensive education platform that focuses on the impact of the austerity agenda on Black and Latino students, parents and educators. The diverse, intergenerational, multiracial coalition also said Green Party nominee Dr. Jill Stein must also be held accountable.

Organizers will include hundreds of activists, parents and students from a coalition of grassroots community-based organizations, in 24 U.S. cities. The group, Journey For Justice Alliance (J4JA) will release a seven-point platform that tackles school privatization, the school-to-prison pipelines, standardized testing and a myriad of failed education interventions that have led to massive school closings, charter proliferation and other schemes that have not improved education outcomes in urban communities.

Activists plan to erect a “Tent City” near Hofstra University in the morning before engaging in a “Public Education Nation” forum at Eisenhower Park at 1 p.m. Later parents, students and activists will lead a demonstration to the university where they will rally as early as 6:00 p.m. Organizers say people from across the country will participate in a speak out and demand both candidates address their concerns.

“We are appalled by the silence of the presidential candidates on public education,” said Jitu Brown, national director J4JA. “Are they tone deaf to the tens of thousands who have protested, boycotted, waged hunger strikes and teacher strikes demanding an end to corporate education interventions and finally, equity in public education?”

“Clinton, Trump and Stein have been eerily silent on the impact of these bad policies that have harmed African American and Latino students most,” said Brown, who gained international attention as the organizer and participant in a 34-day hunger strike to save Dyett High School in Chicago. “Our alliance is requesting a listening session with the presidential candidates on public education. If our voices matter, neither can ignore our concerns as defenders of public education in our respective communities.”

Added Natasha Capers, public school parent from the New York City Coalition for Education Justice, “What does Clinton, Stein or Trump have to say about the failing schools narrative that has led to school closings and the loss of veteran Black teachers? It matters to me as a parent who will be the next U.S. Education Secretary.”

The Journey for Justice Alliance’s education platform is based on peer reviewed, evidence based education practice and the lived experience of our over 40,000 members; Black and Brown parents and students across the United States. It includes:

1. **A Moratorium on School Privatization:** The evidence is clear and aligns with the lived experience of parents, students and community residents in America’s cities; school privatization has failed in improving the education outcomes for young people. There is no choice in Black and Brown communities in this country. We want the choice of a world class neighborhood school within safe walking distance of our homes. We want an end to school closings, turnarounds, phase-outs, charter expansion. We have an evidence-based solution for America’s struggling schools.
2. **Federal funding for 10,000 Sustainable Community Schools:** We know what works. America ranks 19th in the world in education; but 2nd when poverty is not a factor. Schools that are successful in this country are grounded in 5 pillars; relevant, rigorous and engaging curriculum, supports for quality teaching and not punitive standardized tests, appropriate wrap-around supports for every child, student centered school climate and transformative parent and community engagement. Sustainable, high quality neighborhood schools that embody the 5 pillars and serve as community hubs for parents, students and community residents; are working in America. This includes investment in early childhood education in America’s schools. Strong, sustainable schools help to create high quality Pre-K-12th grade systems of education in our communities. These are the interventions we recommend for struggling, underserved schools-NOT school closures or privatization.
3. **End Zero Tolerance Policies in Public Education NOW:** Zero tolerance is an education policy rooted in racism and the criminalization of Black and Brown youth. It has not made our schools safer. It has ruined the lives of tens of thousands of America’s Black and Brown children who were seen through a lens of hate as opposed to care and concern. We want an immediate end to zero tolerance policies expressed by out of control suspensions and expulsions and the over-policing of our schools. We want resources dedicated to the expansion of full restorative justice initiatives in every school; leadership development programs for youth and federal penalties for school districts that continue to use this harmful policy.
4. **National Equity Assessment:** America does everything but equity. Closes schools. Online charter schools. Zero tolerance policies to push out students. Creates a charter industry. Puts a media spin on mediocre corporate education interventions. Anything but equity. Equitable schools are spaces where inspiration happens. One child can dream and explore, while another child rebels from being treated like they don’t matter. We call for a national equity assessment for public schools in the United States. Inequity goes far beyond the funding of public schools. We are clear that inequity expresses itself in curriculum, teacher supports, wraparound supports, and student climate and community engagement. We are proposing that America moves policy and resources to respond to the results of this assessment, which should be completed by June, 2017.
5. **Stop the Attack on Black Teachers:** J4J is deeply concerned that across the United States, the number of Black teachers is in sharp decline. We know that students do better overall academically

when they are taught from someone in their own racial group. A study of 9 American cities; Boston, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, New Orleans, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington DC all noted a decline in the number of Black teachers. All of these cities curiously are places where school privatization has taken root. We are teaching our children a very immoral and dangerous lesson; that Black people are not fit to lead. America's colleges of education are not producing Black and Brown teaching candidates. J4J is calling for federal support for the Grow Your Own Teachers Initiative to create a pipeline of Black and Brown teachers in school districts that serve children of color. We are also calling for the ending of *biased basic skills* exams which eliminate Black and Brown teaching candidates; when we know the basic skills exam has no bearing on teacher quality.

6. **End State Takeovers, Appointed School Boards and Mayoral Control:** We have a crisis in school governance. State takeovers, mayoral control and appointed school boards exists primarily in cities that serve primarily Black and Brown families. That is a voting rights issue and we want it to stop. We need the elimination of these oppressive structures that ignore the voices of concerned constituents and grease the rails for politically connected charter and contract school operators. We want elected, representative school boards. While they are not a panacea, we view democracy as a necessary ingredient in moving towards an equitable school system.
7. **Eliminate The Over-Reliance Of Standardized Tests In Public Schools:** J4J wants an end to punitive, high stakes standardized tests. Require districts to use tests for assessment only, with multiple assessment tools utilized to evaluate student growth and needs. Multiple studies have confirmed that standardized tests are an excellent indicator of one's zip code, not their aptitude. In America, standardized tests have long been used to support white supremacy and we argue that the intent is the same today. If W.E.B. DuBois understood this in 1940, why do we continue to be tone deaf today? Standardized testing has been used to purge school districts of veteran Black teachers and to inflict harmful school closings on Black and Brown communities. Today parents of all races are in a full scale revolt against standardized testing. We encourage the federal government to listen.

Black and Brown parents from across the nation have been outspoken in their opposition to the destruction of community schools at the expense of publicly-funded, privately operated charter schools. "The charter takeover of my city has devastated the education quality for our children," said Nikkisha Napoleon, a public school parent in New Orleans. "If Clinton, Trump (or even Stein) is elected in November will it be more of the same—targeted attacks on predominantly African-American school districts across the country?"

"These candidates have done little to define what will be their national education agenda," said Hiram Rivera, public school parent and director of the Philadelphia Student Union. "If they are silent now about what is happening in our communities, they'll be silent once one of them reaches the White House. We cannot withstand another eight years of broken promises and attacks on our children."

The Journey for Justice Alliance (J4J), a national network of intergenerational, grassroots community organizations led primarily by Black and Brown people in 24 U.S. cities. We assert that the lack of equity is one of the major failures of the American education system.