

April 2, 2021

Florida Board of Education



Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Commissioner Richard Corcoran,

We are students of the University of Florida and residents of Gainesville. As active members of our community, we acknowledge the ways our citizens are uplifted, and ways in which they are disempowered. A current crisis in Florida is the mass incarceration of Black youths. Florida prosecutes more children as adults for felonies than any other state. [Of these cases transferred to adult court, 76.5 % were Black or Latinx.](#) Schools are one of the greatest incarceration indicators through the school-to-prison pipeline. Black youths are punished under a punitive school system with legal ramifications as they are [3 times more likely](#) to be arrested at school than their white peers. This hampers their future opportunities and discourages them to reflect on their mistakes. Students deserve a system that will protect, empower and educate them. We are reaching out to the Florida Department of Education to urge your support for increased funding and resources for our students and their education.

We call upon our leaders to support increased funding for mental health resources in Florida schools, as proposed under the [2020-2021 Mental Health Assistance Allocation Plan](#). Many Black youths that fall victim to the school-to-prison pipeline are students with mental health disorders and disabilities. Students can also be experiencing [psychosocial disorders](#) due poverty, abuse or neglect. Usually these students are categorized as demonstrating problematic behaviors instead of mental health illnesses. There are many areas in Florida that lack the adequate funding and staffing to ensure that the needs for these students are met. In [Gainesville](#), our student-to-counselor ratio surpasses the national recommendation. At the statewide level, our national [recommendation](#) of school psychologists is 5,694; Florida only employs 1,452 . We also promote that school districts hire diverse mental health workers to eliminate any racial biases and students feel comfortable confronting identity-based issues.

Secondly, we urge you to review the correlation between the curriculum and student delinquency. Black students need a year-round curriculum that showcases Black excellency and empowerment. There are many educational programs that minimize the contributions of Black Americans, leaving students without leaders that inspire through cultural achievement. A study found that participation in a high school [ethnic studies course increased student attendance by 21 %](#) and increased the grade point averages and earned credits of students. Students need to have an environment that values their presence. We are aware of the recent mandate that requires school districts to submit their Black curriculum reports, however there many flaws which are created because [schools do not have the proper guidelines and resources.](#) Additionally, such guidelines should be produced by Black educators and community leaders.

We ask our state's educational leaders to listen to the needs of our Black students. Florida is known as "The Sunshine State," yet it fails to provide a bright future for its youth. Decreasing the rate of Black youths going straight to prison from school, would enable them to pursue higher education and enlist in the workforce; this would stand as personal achievements for them and the Florida economy. It is time for Florida to lead the fight against youth incarceration. Most importantly, it is time we show support for our youth. We look forward to hearing from you, and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

UF International Human Rights