



PO Box 2651, Champaign, IL 61825-2651

December 9, 2019

Dear Members of the Champaign Board of Education and Superintendent Zola,

The American Civil Liberties Union of Champaign County and the NAACP Champaign County Branch are deeply concerned about the increasing racial disparities in both achievement and disciplinary action in the Unit 4 Schools. Ten years after the consent decree to improve racial equity was terminated in 2009, we would expect to find significant improvement. Instead, tragically for the students and families of Champaign, the situation has deteriorated.

The disparity in English language and math proficiency between white students and black students has widened into a chasm. Only 8% of black children attending Unit 4 schools are proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and only 6% of black children are proficient in math, compared to 47% ELA proficiency and 49% math proficiency for white children. Proficiency rates for black children in Unit 4 are roughly half the rate for black children statewide [Illinois State Board of Education 2018].

According to The Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University, which collects data nationwide, there is a gap of more than three grades between white and black students in Champaign schools. White students test 1.45 grades above average while black students test 2.14 grades below average. [<https://edopportunity.org/discoveries/white-black-differences-scores/>]

In Champaign, white students are 7.1 times more likely to take Advanced Placement classes in high school than black students. This disturbing ratio compares unfavorably to 2.4 in adjacent Urbana, 1.9 in Illinois and 1.8 nationwide. [ProPublica: <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/district/1709420>]

One factor may be disparities in access to gifted education at the elementary level. According to data presented to the Education Equity Excellence Committee on August 29, 2019, black students are seriously under-represented in the Unit 4 gifted programs in contrast to white and Asian students. Our goal is not to reduce access for those groups, but to understand why black students are under-represented and how this disparity can be remedied to benefit all Champaign

students. We urge the school district to collect clearer data on its gifted education programs and to ensure that gifted education does not contribute to re-segregation and disparities in educational outcomes.

The consent decree also addressed racial disparities in discipline. In 2009 black students were 5.5 times more likely to be suspended than white students. [Monitoring Report number 5, June 22, 2009] According to data from last year, black students were 8.7 times more likely to be suspended than their white peers [Education Equity Excellence Committee, April 30, 2019]. This indicates that the situation has worsened substantially.

We know that Unit 4 has attempted to improve racial equity, but it is clear to both organizations that more effective measures must be implemented without delay. Please let us know when you can meet with us to specify how you intend to address these inequities and better serve *all* the students of your school district. Please respond by email to info@aclu-cu.org.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Champaign County and NAACP Champaign County
Carol Spindel and Minnie Pearson, Presidents

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