



**Washtenaw School  
Justice Partnership**

*Scott Menzel, Co Chair*

*Washtenaw Intermediate School District*

*Hon. Darlene O'Brien, Co Chair*

*Washtenaw County Trial Court*

*Renee Adorjan, MDHHS*

*Mikel Brown, Community Representative*

*Sally & Tom Brush, Task Force for Educating At-Risk Youth*

*Jerry Clayton, Washtenaw County Sheriff*

*Pam Cornell-Allen, Ozone House*

*Joan Doughty, Community Action Network*

*Belinda Dulin, Dispute Resolution Center*

*Ben Edmonson, Ypsilanti Community Schools*

*Linda Edwards-Brown, Washtenaw County Juvenile Court*

*Lisa Gottlieb, Washtenaw ISD*

*DaQuann Harrison, Ypsilanti Youth*

*Celeste Hawkins, Ypsilanti Community School Board*

*Holly Heaviland, Washtenaw ISD*

*Diane Hockett, Washtenaw ISD Board*

*Nicole Holden, Lincoln Consolidated Schools*

*Derrick Jackson, Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office*

*Brian Mackie, Prosecutor*

*Cory McElmeel, Ann Arbor Public Schools*

*Deborah Shaw, Washtenaw County Juvenile Court*

*Elizabeth Spring, Community Mental Health*

*Peri Stone-Palmquist, Student Advocacy Center*

*Sarah Van Zoeren, EMU School of Social Work*

5/24/2016

**House Education Committee Public Testimony  
HB 5618, HB 5619, HB 5620**

The School Justice Partnership of Washtenaw County strongly supports HB 5618, HB 5619, and HB 5620, as amended. These bills align with the work our local and statewide collaborative has focused on since the fall of 2013.

Countywide School Justice Partnerships formed across the state with the goals of reducing absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions and ultimately, increasing graduation rates. Our local partnership believes that these goals are essential to increasing student achievement.

A broad cross-section of our community leaders have come together, including school district superintendents, trial court judge, prosecuting attorney, sheriff's department, juvenile court workers, DHHS, Community Mental Health, nonprofit agencies and youth to address these goals. From the very beginning, our partnership agreed on the need not just for local changes to policy and procedure, but also the need for state policy changes.

Teachers and students deserve and need school environments that are safe, supportive, and conducive to teaching and learning. We consider it important that the bills require consideration of restorative practices, which can be used preventatively as well as in response to wrongdoing.

We know that students need to be in school to learn. Researchers have associated out-of-school removal with greater risk of school failure and risk of repeating a grade, dropping out, and becoming involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems. Researchers have also found that higher rates of out-of-school suspensions actually predict higher future rates of misbehavior and damage perceptions of school safety. We need responses to wrongdoing that help get to the root of



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the problem and truly hold students accountable in ways that teach.

We recognize that certain students are disproportionately impacted and harmed by harsh school discipline, including students with disabilities, those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (such as abuse, neglect, homelessness, violence, divorce), and minority students.

Alternatives to out-of-school exclusion that focus on building relationships and skills have been shown to be more effective in improving school climate, safety, and student achievement without significant increases in costs. These bills explicitly ask that school districts consider more restorative and less punitive approaches to school discipline. If Michigan is going to truly become a top state in educational performance, we need to address areas that perpetuate the achievement gap and disadvantage whole groups of students. These bills represent an important step on the journey to ensuring all students are successful in school and, ultimately, in our communities.

We applaud these bills.

Hon. Darlene O'Brien  
Probate Judge  
Washtenaw County Trial Court

Scott Menzel  
Superintendent  
Washtenaw County  
Intermediate School District

Washtenaw School Justice Partnership Co-Chairs

<http://attendancematters.weebly.com/>