



Racially Just Utah is a racially- and ethnically-diverse coalition with a mission to positively and proactively ensure racial equality in Utah through policy, accountability and education.

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**For immediate release
August 17, 2015**

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US Dept of Education to Investigate SLC School District for Discrimination Against Minority Students

AUGUST 17 – The U.S. Department of Education’s (DOE) Office of Civil Rights will investigate multiple allegations of racial discrimination against students of color in the Salt Lake City School District.

The investigation comes in response to a complaint about, among other issues, disproportionate disciplinary treatment of Black, Latino, Polynesian and Native American students in the District. Salt Lake City School District Board Member Michael Clara filed the complaint with DOE’s Office of Civil Rights in June of this year. Mr. Clara is also an active member of the Racially Just Utah (RJU) coalition.

The phenomenon of disproportionate disciplinary against racial minority students in public schools is known as the “School-to-Prison Pipeline.” Its prevalence in Utah has been well documented in recent years, including two separate reports by the University of Utah’s S.J. Quinney College of Law (see links at end), as are major gaps in graduation rates for white and non-white Utah students.

Disproportionate disciplinary action against minority students has serious repercussions for basic academic achievement. Students who are suspended and expelled often fail to graduate. In 2012-13, 86% of white students in Utah graduated from high school; by comparison only 70% of Latino, 70% of Black and 80% of Asian/Pacific-Islander students did (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015).

School-based police officers (commonly referred to as School Resource Officers or SROs) are a primary issue that School-to-Prison Pipeline experts and activists point to as exacerbating disproportionate minority contact between law enforcement and students of color. SROs from the Salt Lake City Police Department are used in many Salt Lake City schools, and are partially funded by the city.

Last week, the Office of Civil Rights sent Mr. Clara a response to the complaint he filed in June (see attached letter), confirming that they will investigate whether:

- students of color in the Salt Lake City School District are subjected to exclusionary disciplinary action in a discriminatory fashion,
- the assignment of SROs at Northwest and Glendale Middle Schools is based on the racial composition of the student body at those schools and results in disproportionate minority contact with law enforcement,
- students of color are disproportionately assigned to Horizonte Instruction and Training Center (an alternative school in the District), and
- the District retaliated against Mr. Clara for his outspoken advocacy on “School-to-Prison Pipeline” issues by assigning the SRO to “intimidate” him at School Board Meetings.

It is unclear precisely how long the investigation will last, but the Office of Civil Rights has promised it will be “prompt.” If the allegations are confirmed and a resolution cannot be negotiated, the District is at risk for losing federal funding and could be further disciplined by the Department of Justice.

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Additional information for background:

[Letter from Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights confirming investigation will take place](#)
[“From Finger Paints to Finger Prints: Utah’s School to Prison Pipeline”](#)
[“Disparities in Discipline: A Look at School Disciplinary Actions for Utah’s American Indian Students”](#)