

April 12, 2011

Dr. Eric J. Becoats
Superintendent
Durham Public Schools
511 Cleveland Street
P.O. Box 30002
Durham, NC 27702

RE: Language Access at Durham Public Schools

Dear Dr. Becoats:

We are writing on behalf of English language learner students and their families who have experienced ongoing and pervasive discrimination while attending Durham Public Schools (“the District” or “DPS”). These children and parents report that they have limited access to language interpreters, are unable to read and understand important school documents, and, most alarmingly, that students often experience a hostile environment where they are made to feel unwelcome and unwanted in their neighborhood schools. The overwhelming majority of these students and their parents are Latino.

or information.¹

In other circumstances, bilingual employees, primarily support and custodial personnel, are asked to stand-in for qualified interpreters. This leads to miscommunication and privacy violations as the impromptu “interpreter” has little knowledge of the terms and concepts peculiar to the program and has not been trained in

Parents do not receive translated report cards. Parents do not receive translated teacher notes. Parents do not

Although not specifically mandated by NCLB, we note with concern that the average student teacher ratio in ESL classes in the District is approximately 50:1. See www.dpsnc.net/programs-services/esl/how-does-

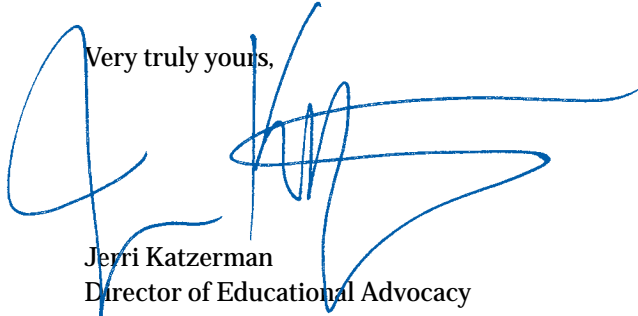
At Rogers-Herr Middle School, students report that they were singled out by a substitute science teacher because of their Hispanic ancestry. Latino students from three separate periods indicated that all students were asked to stand at the beginning of the class. Students were then directed to sit one by one, with the exception of youngsters with Hispanic surnames who were left standing for an extended time then seated last. The same odd scenario was repeated in second and fourth periods. Some students observed that the teacher was videotaping the Latino youngsters with his cell phone. A parent of one of those students complained to the school and questioned the reason for the videotape. Although the school promised to look into the situation, the parent has never received a response.⁸

A hostile learning environment denies LEP students the opportunity to fully participate in their educational programs. Students cannot focus on their education if they feel unsafe, unwelcome, and unsupported. The exis~~2~~

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you and resolve these matters in an amicable fashion. To that end, we ask that you kindly respond within ten (10) business days. If we are unable to reach an agreement, we will be filing a complaint with the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

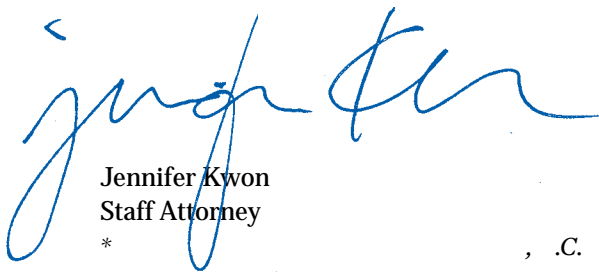
Thank you for your attention. We look forward to your prompt response.

Very truly yours,



Jerri Katzerman
Director of Educational Advocacy

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Jennifer Kwon
Staff Attorney

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