



Center for Intersectionality
and Social Policy Studies



AFRICAN AMERICAN
POLICY FORUM

2015
(Research - 2012-13)

BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED AND UNDERPROTECTED





Our targeted effort to listen to girls of color and to the stakeholders who work with them confirmed that addressing the factors that contribute to their underachievement, push-out, and dropout from school requires a broader analytical prism. The recommendations below are informed by the voices of these young women and the stakeholders who are invested in their futures. These preliminary observations point toward the need for a wider range of information gathering and the development of policies sculpted to the contours of the lived experiences of girls of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE THE INCLUSION OF BLACK GIRLS AND OTHER GIRLS OF COLOR IN POLICY RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS.

The erasure of the concerns of Black girls and other girls of color in these arenas has marginalized their needs to their disadvantage. More resources must be devoted toward understanding the intersections of race, gender, and other factors so as to address their effects on girls who fail to finish school.

ENSURE AN EQUITABLE APPROACH TO FUNDING THAT SUPPORTS THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AS WELL AS THOSE OF MEN AND BOYS.

Philanthropic entities must promote an equitable funding strategy for supporting women and girls of color. This is essential to ensuring that research, policy and service delivery entities are able to continue to meet the needs of men and boys as well as those of women and girls.

DEVELOP ROBUST PROTOCOLS THAT ENSURE THAT SCHOOL PERSONNEL ENFORCE ALL STUDENTS' RIGHTS TO AN ENVIRONMENT FREE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND BULLYING.

Schools must take steps to educate both staff and students about what constitutes sexual harassment. Moreover, they should develop protocols to ensure that the appropriate interventions are available whenever accusations of sexual harassment arise.

REVIEW AND REVISE POLICIES THAT FUNNEL GIRLS INTO THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

The lack of counseling and other effective conflict intervention strategies leads many girls into contact with the juvenile justice system. Schools should review their current policies and develop more robust measures to ensure that student conflict is not unwarrantedly subjected to criminal sanctions.

DEVISE PROGRAMS THAT IDENTIFY THE SIGNS OF SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION IN ORDER TO SUPPORT GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN TRAUMATIZED BY VIOLENCE.

Schools must train educators to identify signs of sexual abuse and respond with therapeutic interventions. In so doing, they should develop protocols and policies that streamline their responses to suspected instances of abuse.

ADVANCE AND EXPAND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT GIRLS WHO ARE PREGNANT, PARENTING, OR OTHERWISE ASSUMING SIGNIFICANT FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

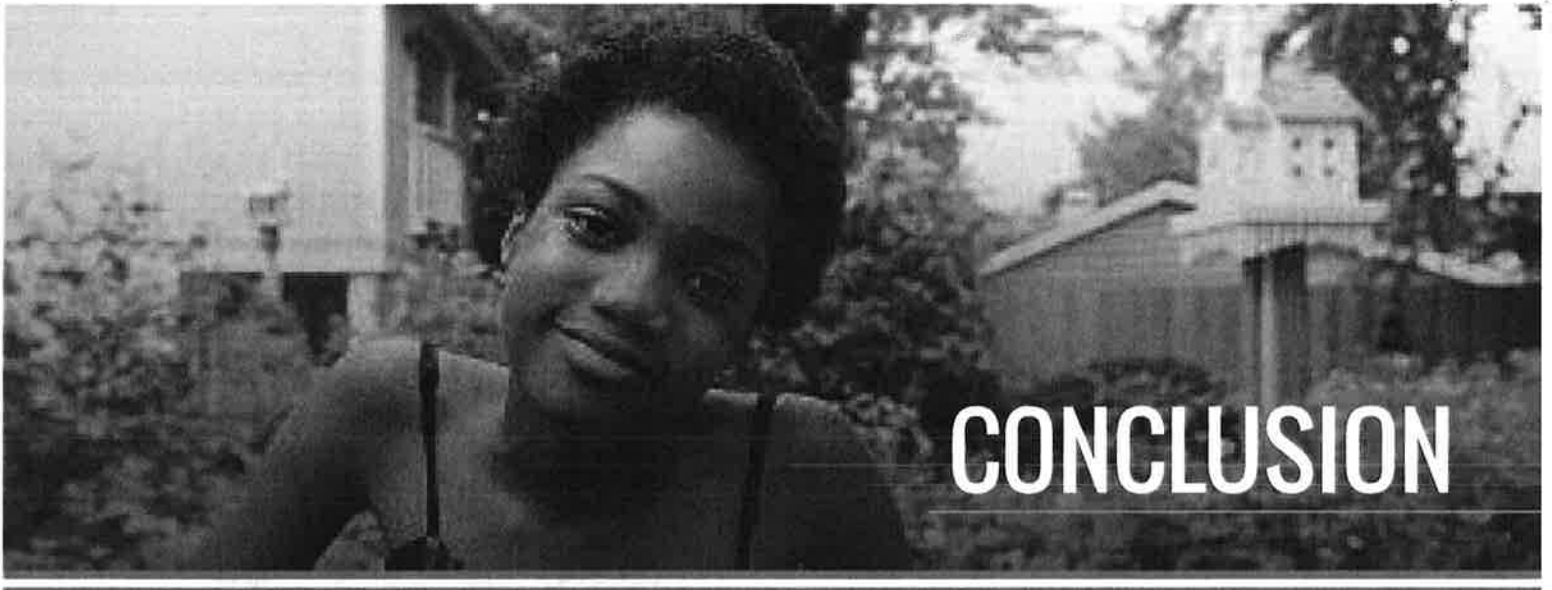
Lack of childcare, strict attendance policies, unsafe campuses, and untrained administrators contribute to school push-out of pregnant or parenting girls. Schools, stakeholders, and advocates must work to create policies that are sensitive to the needs of pregnant girls as well as girls who take on significant caretaking responsibilities.

URGE THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER INFORMATION GATHERING INSTITUTIONS TO TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS TO REFINE STATISTICAL REPORTING ON DISCIPLINARY MATTERS WHILE DISAGGREGATING ACHIEVEMENT DATA ALONG RACIAL AND GENDER LINES.

To grasp the full dimensions of the educational crisis with greater clarity, it is essential that data be disaggregated by race and gender. While existing data can give us some sense of underlying patterns, the adoption of a common policy for collecting and reporting data by the Department of Education would enhance the scope and reliability of research in this field. Going forward, the Department should conduct race and gender-sensitive analyses of its raw data and include that information in its annual reports.

DEVELOP THE PUBLIC WILL TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES FACING BLACK GIRLS AND OTHER GIRLS OF COLOR THROUGH ELEVATING THEIR EXPERIENCES AND ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THEIR WELFARE.

Girls of color must have the opportunity to actively engage their teachers, school administrators, community leaders, families and other stakeholders about their experiences in school and in other institutions that shape their lives. Because the public discourse about girls of color has been so limited, town halls, community hearings, listening sessions and other opportunities to break the silence around their welfare must be encouraged. Leadership at all levels of government and within civil society should meet this challenge by acknowledging the importance of ensuring equitable opportunities for girls of color and by providing the resources necessary to secure these goals.

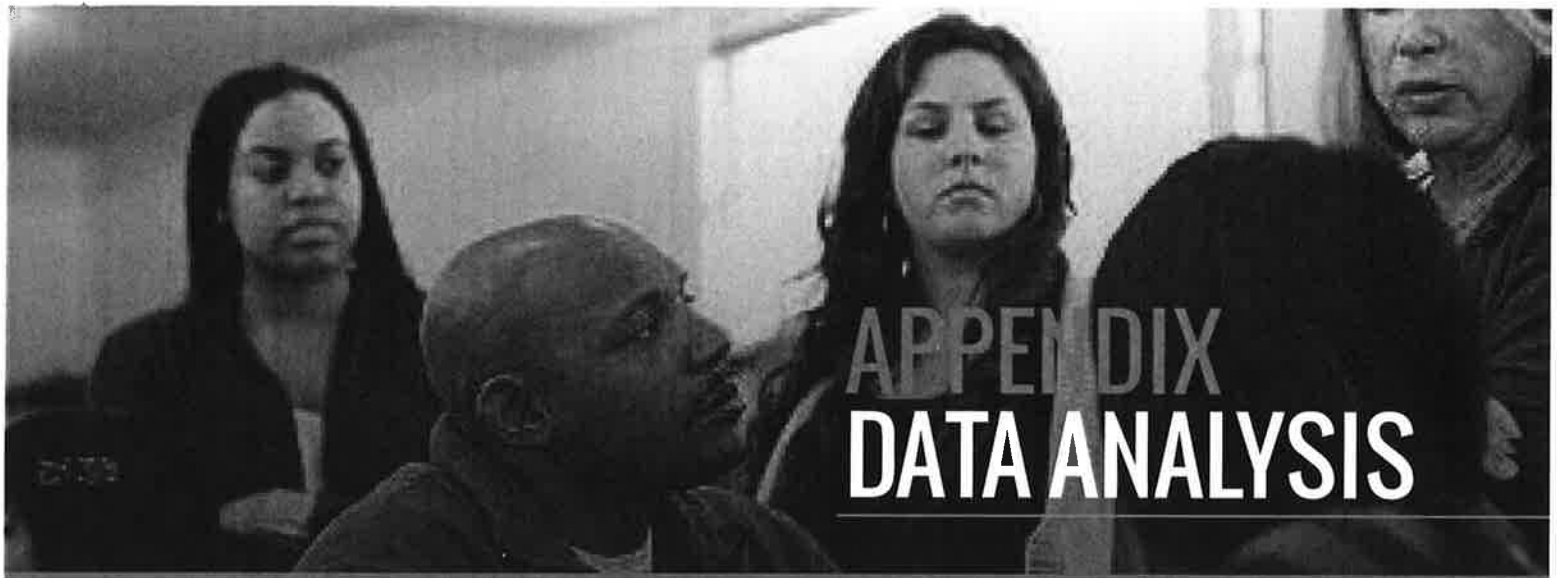


We can no longer afford to leave young women and girls of color at the margins of our concerns with respect to the achievement gap, the dropout crisis, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Instead, we must develop gender and race-conscious prisms that capture the vulnerabilities they experience today.

Our limited findings suggest that Black girls in New York and Boston sometimes encounter inhospitable conditions in institutions that are purportedly there to serve them. Like their male counterparts, many find themselves on pathways to diminished life opportunities without the promise of public and private interventions designed to focus on their needs.

We hope that this modest report begins to cast light on the lives of these girls. Ultimately, we hope that our effort to listen to Black girls is broadened to include other girls of color and is replicated nationwide. Ideally the conversation that *Black Girls Matter* engenders – both within communities of color and among philanthropists, stakeholders, policy makers, and advocates – will lead to more concerted efforts to include girls in studies about school discipline, push-out, and the pathways to underachievement, low-wage work, poverty, and incarceration.

We hope that ongoing efforts to address the crisis that faces boys of color will create opportunities to address the serious barriers facing their female peers. We encourage all stakeholders, researchers, funders, and concerned members of the public to broaden their understanding of the current crisis facing youth of color, and to commit to expanding both the conversation and the resources necessary to address these concerns.



RACE/ETHNICITY AND GENDER DISAGGREGATED STATISTICS

The primary objective of this study was to integrate a gender lens into an analysis of the racial/ethnic disparities in school attachment and completion. Our approach was to separate males from females in each racial/ethnic category so that we could compare all groups against one another and then examine the disparate situations that people face within genders. We drew on nationwide noncompletion rates as well as graduation and discipline rates in the New York City and Boston public school districts.

DISCIPLINE IN BOSTON AND NEW YORK CITY

To analyze disciplinary patterns, we utilized data from the 2011–2012 school year released by the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (OCRD) in 2014. These data were extracted using a tool from the OCRD website that generates its own reports according to the selected search terms for each district. The present report does not discuss the disciplining of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or students with disabilities. However, those concerns are important factors to consider in future research.

There are many types of disciplinary measures used in public schools, including in-school suspension, out-of school suspension, and expulsion. This study uses the most expressive indicators for disciplinary action in both districts. In Boston, we considered the values for out-of-school suspension, expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and school-related arrests. In New York City, we examined in and out-of-school suspensions, expulsion, and referrals. The data allow comparison of differences among the gender-disaggregated racial/ethnic categories.



FROM OUR DATA

NONCOMPLETION RATES²⁸

- ▶ **The magnitude of the disparities in non-completion rates between Black girls and white girls are consistently similar, and sometimes greater than the disparities between Black boys and their white male counterparts.**
- ▶ **Nationally, after Latino boys, Latina girls have the highest non-completion rates, surpassing both Black and white boys and girls.**
- ▶ **For all groups, noncompletion rates show a declining trend. The relative position of each group, however, has remained constant.**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE DATA

There were numerous possible discrepancies in the data collected at the district, state, and national levels that made our work more difficult than necessary. The data was collected at different times, using an array of sampling techniques, reporting mechanisms and definitions of academic status and racial/ethnic categorization. Thus, our ability to use it to assess qualitative questions about the disproportionate use of harsh disciplinary measures on Black girls and to evaluate their levels of academic achievement are sometimes not as robust as we would prefer. With that reservation, we offer the following recommendations:

1

Ongoing efforts to collect and analyze data on educational matters that focus on boys of color should embrace girls as well. Fortunately, this is an easy goal to achieve because the process of collecting data on boys already involves its disaggregation by gender and race/ethnicity.

2

All data produced for public consumption should provide the information required to analyze race/ethnic disparities both within and across genders. This process involves reporting disaggregated data by gender and race and supplying the necessary materials to test the statistical significance of the differences discovered.

3

Researchers and other data users should critically examine the language used to describe the data collected. Terms such as “dropout” and “graduation rate,” for example, often connote failure or a lack of effort on the part of students rather than a focus on the role that school environments sometimes play in undermining the success of their students.

4

Researchers and data users should develop a single methodology to assess the most commonly used indicators and protocols for the academic achievement gap that can be implemented across disparate districts and states. Advocates and policy makers would then be better situated not only to identify the need for targeted interventions for different groups of boys and girls but also to measure the affect of such interventions.

5

The Office of Civil Rights Data Collection should continue to improve the quality of its data so that it generates results that its consumers can have more confidence in. This is especially important for intersectional research. Otherwise, the educational barriers faced by Black girls and other girls of color will remain largely invisible.

6

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and other agencies should work together to improve the data collection process and to enhance the accessibility of the data that they synthesize. They should strive to eliminate the multiple and overlapping sources of data that currently exist, and the gaps in the evidence that is now collected. Ideally, they should facilitate a single entry point for the gathering of different sources of data.