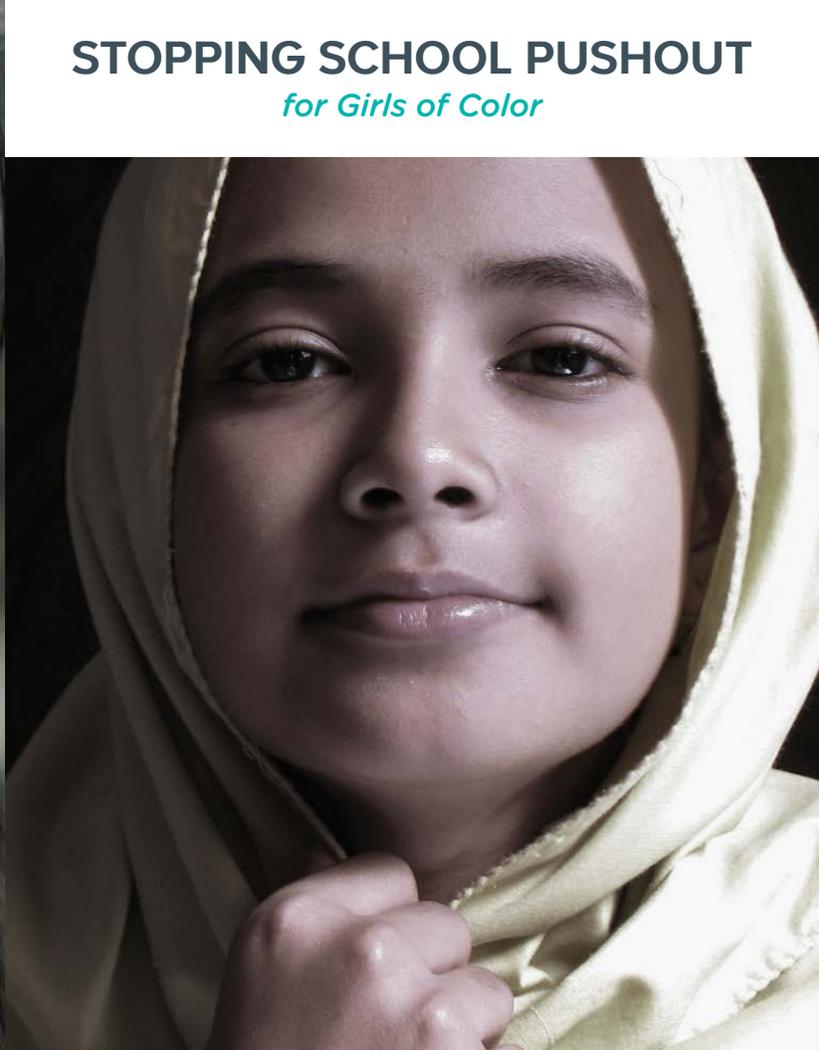


LET HER
LEARN

STOPPING SCHOOL PUSHOUT
for Girls of Color



ABOUT THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

The National Women's Law Center is a non-profit organization that has worked for more than 40 years to expand opportunities for women and their families, with a major emphasis on education and employment opportunities, women's health and reproductive rights, and family economic security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GIRLS OF COLOR

Girls of color—a group that includes Black, Latina, Asian, Native American,¹ and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls—face many overlapping yet varying barriers to succeeding in school.² For example, the National Women’s Law Center 2017 Let Her Learn Survey (“Let Her Learn Survey”) found that 55 percent of Latina girls, 38 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls, and 30 percent of Black girls worry about a friend or family member being deported.³ This survey also showed that being called a racial slur is a common experience shared by all girls of color, with one third to one half of them saying they have had this experience (Asian and Pacific Islander girls reported the highest rate), compared to just more than one eighth of white girls.⁴ And national data shows that Black girls are 5.5 times more likely and Native American girls are 3 times more likely to be suspended from school than white girls.⁵ In addition to these barriers, girls of color are more likely to attend under-resourced schools that are not culturally competent or personalized to their needs or interests, which negatively affects their educational opportunities and future earnings.

Yet, despite these obstacles, the Let Her Learn Survey also revealed that girls of color, as well as girls overall, are motivated to graduate and continue their education and want help doing so. For example, approximately nine in ten girls across all races said that they wanted help applying to college⁶ and personalized graduation plans.⁷ Policymakers, schools, and communities can address the challenges faced by girls of color to better support them and help them succeed in school.

When reading other reports in this series, it is important to note the role that intersectionality⁸ plays in creating additional issues for particular girls of color. For example, rates of sexual trauma are similar for girls of all races and ethnicities.⁹ But certain girls of color who have experienced trauma face additional barriers when compared to other girls of color or white girls. For instance, until Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act (“VAWA”) in 2013, Native American tribes were not allowed to prosecute non-Native assailants who sexually assaulted Native American victims on tribal land.¹⁰ Thus until the most recent reauthorization of VAWA, federal law effectively sanctioned the rape of Native American girls and women. This example highlights one way in which race and gender intersect with other barriers, such as sexual violence and trauma.

It is also important to note that there are sub-issues within certain racial and ethnic groups, such as immigration status and English proficiency, which affect the educational experiences of girls of color. This report does not delve into those issues in detail but rather focuses on broader educational barriers facing girls from each racial/ethnic group and offers recommendations to remove those barriers.

METHODOLOGY for Let Her Learn Survey and Focus Groups:

To better understand what healthy and safe schools look like for all girls, the National Women's Law Center collaborated with Lake Research Partners to conduct a study of girls from January 5-19, 2017. The study included an online survey of 1,003 girls ages 14-18 nationwide. Black, Latina, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and LGBTQ girls were oversampled. The data were weighted by age, race, and census region to reflect the actual proportions of the population. Oversamples were weighted down to reflect their proportions in the population. The margin of error is +/- 3.1%. The margin of error is higher among subgroups. The study also included six focus groups on barriers facing girls who are survivors of sexual assault and girls who are either currently pregnant or those who are parenting children. The focus groups were conducted in Washington, D.C., Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA. The focus group guide and nationwide survey were reviewed by Schulman Institutional Review Board to ensure they protected the well-being of all girls involved in the study.

Background on Girls of Color

One barrier that is prevalent for all girls of color is the persistence of implicit and explicit biases based on racist and sexist stereotypes. These stereotypes are borne out in different ways across each group of girls and have different effects.

Black Girls

Stereotypes of Black girls and women as “angry” or aggressive, and “promiscuous” or hyper-sexualized¹¹ can shape school officials’ views of Black girls in critically harmful ways.¹² As a result, Black girls are more likely than white girls to be punished for behaviors that challenge our society’s dominant stereotypes of what is appropriate “feminine” behavior—such as being candid or assertive and speaking up when something seems unfair or unjust. Stereotypes of Black women as hypersexual and aggressive may also “underlie the implicit bias that shapes many educators’ views of Black female students.”¹³ These stereotypes are counter to our society’s dominant stereotypes of what is appropriate “feminine” behavior, and “in response to Black girls’ nonconformity to gender stereotypes, educators [may be] more inclined to respond harshly to the behaviors of [Black] girls.”¹⁴

These implicit biases can lead to the setting of lower academic expectations for Black girls, including an increased risk of repeating a grade. In fact, Black girls make up disproportionately high shares of girls who are retained¹⁵ in every single grade. For example, in the 2013-14 school year, Black girls made up 15.6 percent of girls in school, but about a quarter of girls retained in first grade (24.7 percent), second grade (27.7 percent) and fifth grade (25.6 percent); more than a third of girls retained in third grade (34.5 percent); and 39.5 percent of girls retained in fourth grade.¹⁶ One 2014 study showed that students who repeated a grade in elementary school were 60 percent less likely to graduate from high school than students with similar backgrounds who were not retained.¹⁷

Latina Girls

*Mendez v. Westminster School District of Orange County*¹⁸ ended school segregation in California and was the first federal court case in favor of school desegregation. In the 1940s, Westminster School District operated two separate schools—a two-room shack for Latinx¹⁹ students and a school on a tree-lined street with better books and facilities for white students.²⁰ Sylvia Mendez was eight years old when her aunt tried to enroll Sylvia and her brothers in the white school, but was rejected because of her Mexican heritage.²¹ With Sylvia as lead plaintiff, parents and other community members successfully sued the school district, resulting in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit holding that school segregation violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Seven years later, *Brown v. Board of Education*²² struck down “separate but equal” educational facilities nationwide.

Latina students also face perceptions from adults that they are hypersexual and violent,²³ and they suffer the brunt of anti-immigrant sentiments and resentment toward undocumented individuals from non-Latinx peers.²⁴ According to the Let Her Learn Survey, almost a quarter (24 percent) of Latina girls report being harassed because of their name or family's origin.²⁵ These xenophobic sentiments are exacerbated by Latina girls' proximity to community and family members who may be undocumented. For example, more than half (55 percent) of Latina girls say they are worried that a friend or family member will be deported.

According to the Let Her Learn Survey, 55 percent of Latina girls, 38 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls, and 30 percent of Black girls worry that a friend or family will be deported. Of girls who "worry about any friends or family members being deported":

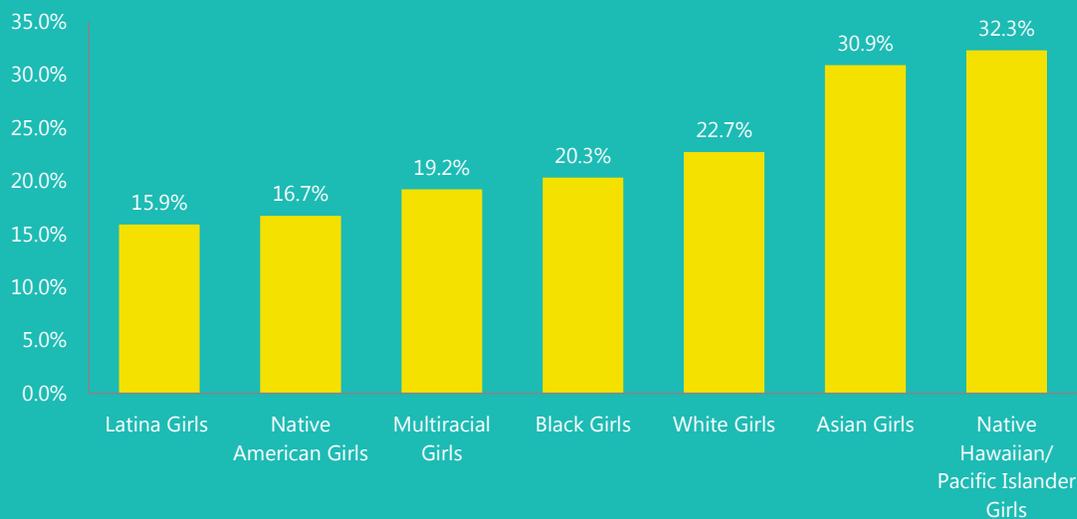
- Nearly half (49.6 percent) say they have trouble concentrating in school.
- Nearly one third (32.3 percent) say someone has used a racial slur against them.
- More than a quarter (25.2 percent) say they have been bullied or harassed since the 2016 Presidential election.
- More than one fifth (22.6 percent) say they have been harassed because of their name or family's country of origin.

Studies also show that Latina girls are at risk of conforming to stereotypes associated with being Latina. Latina girls face "pressure to succeed on top of the expected pressure that they will not perform as well" as others.²⁶ This phenomenon is heightened when Latinas feel isolated or face daily discrimination because "their confidence in themselves, their self-worth, and the belief that they can complete tasks successfully suffer."²⁷ In addition, family and societal expectations of Latina women based on stereotypical gender roles may cut against Latina girls' desire to engage in academic pursuits, such as attending college.²⁸ These factors may contribute to academic barriers for Latina girls, who have the lowest rate of participation in pre-college entrance exams for girls (**Figure 1**).



Latina girls have the second highest rate of repeating a grade for girls of color throughout K-12, including almost a third of girls retained in first, second and third grade (31.6 percent, 33.5 percent, and 31.9 percent, respectively). This may be due to limited English proficiency combined with a lack of dual-language programs and lower preschool attendance. The Let Her Learn Survey revealed that one in five Latina teen girls (22 percent) are learning English and some estimates show that almost half of all Latinas start school with Spanish as their first language.²⁹ Although dual language proficiency is an asset, schools often track English learners into remedial programs that slow their academic progress.³⁰ Latinx children are also less likely than Black and white children to attend preschool—likely because of limited affordable options and language barriers that exist between school personnel and Latinx parents,³¹ which may also disadvantage Latina girls in terms of early academic success.

Figure 1. Percentage of High School Girls Who Took the SAT/ACT in the 2013-14 School Year by Race/Ethnicity



Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Girls do not take the SAT/ACT every year. Therefore, the percentage of girls who take the exam will likely not equal 100% in a single school year.

Native American Girls

There is a long history of schooling that is openly hostile toward Native American culture. During the 19th and 20th centuries, missionaries and the federal government (through the Bureau of Indian Affairs) forced Native American children to abandon their tribal identities and cultures by enrolling them in Native American boarding schools. Using harsh practices, these institutions forbade students from speaking in their native language, replaced students' traditional names with European-American names, and forced students to change their appearance to conform to Euro-American cultural norms. Administrators of these schools made their racist intentions clear from the outset: to remove Native American children from tribal villages to bring them from "savagism to civilization."³³ In addition to exterminating tribal identities, Native American boarding schools also promoted a sex-stereotyped curriculum. Girls learned to cook, clean, sew, and do laundry for the school, while boys learned trades like blacksmithing and shoemaking.³⁴

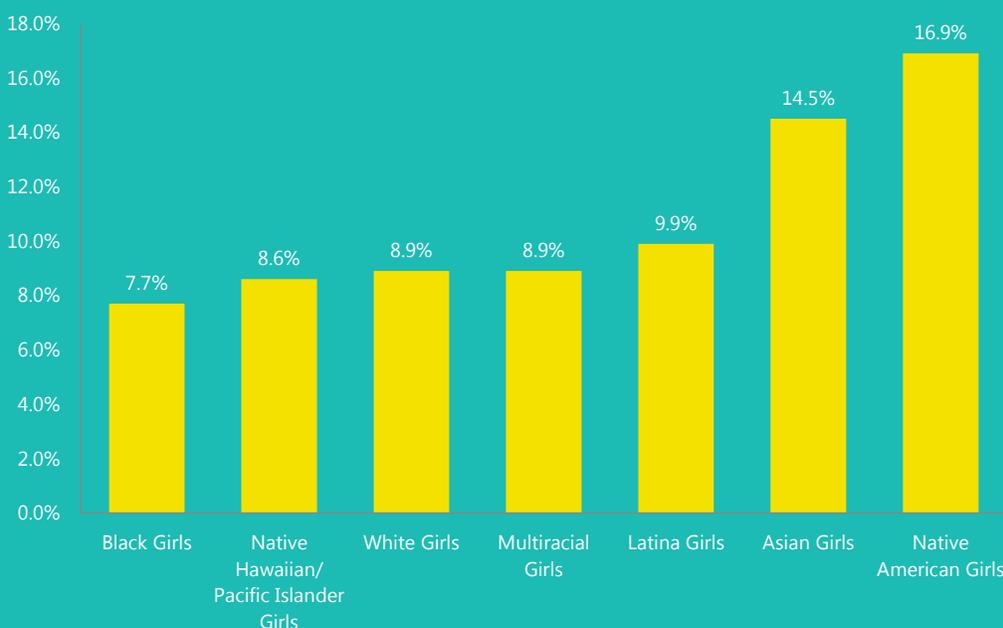
Although Native American boarding schools are largely defunct today, stereotypes persist in schools in which there are a significant number of Native American students. For example, one 2002 study of an Alaskan school district found that the perception that Alaskan Native students and villages were "unhealthy"—rife with depression, despair, and dysfunctional home lives—caused school administrators to preemptively doubt whether Alaskan Native students could perform well on standardized tests without being removed from tribal villages and families.³⁵ The district's racism was further institutionalized through disproportionate referrals for special education services and the implementation of a policy that tracked Alaskan Native students into boarding schools where the goal was to unlearn "unhealthy" village behavior.³⁶

What's more, Native American students largely perceive a cultural bias against them in pedagogical practices, which in turn contributes to school pushout. According to a 1995 study, "only 8 [percent of Native American] students who drop out do so because of academic failure. Most complain about boredom, and perceived hostility from classmates and teachers which creates a hostile school climate."³⁷ According to the Let Her Learn Survey, Native American girls were the second most likely to report being called a racial slur.

The Let Her Learn Survey also found that nearly half (48 percent) of Native American girls say that not having access to the courses they want makes it hard to go to school.³⁸ Another data point shows that Native American girls would take advantage of more

rigorous academic opportunities if offered: Despite being the group of girls most likely to attend a school without a physics class (**Figure 3**), Native American girls represented the highest percentage of girls enrolled in physics (**Figure 2**). Nonetheless, Native American girls are retained at rates disproportionate to their enrollment of 1.1 percent of the student population: they make up two percent of girls retained in twelfth grade and 3.4 percent of girls retained in seventh grade.

Figure 2. Percentage of Girls Enrolled in Physics in the 2013-14 School Year by Race



Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).³⁹

Asian and Pacific Islander Girls

Asian and Pacific Islander girls face stereotypes of the “Oriental woman” or “Geisha girl” who is docile, subservient and submissive to men, but quietly hypersexual.⁴⁰ This stereotype is “detrimental to the development of positive self-identity” for Asian girls who do not fit the physical mold of this stereotype, as well as restrictive and reductive to girls who do.⁴¹ In addition, the “Geisha girl” fallacy attempts to paint all Asian and Pacific Islander girls and women with one broad brush—despite the diversity of cultures that are categorized as “Asian,” as well as regional, linguistic, and cultural differences within national identities. It also emphasizes an “exotic” or “otherness” among Asian and Pacific Islander girls that may manifest itself in

Despite being the group of girls most likely to attend a school without a physics class, Native American girls represented the highest percentage of girls enrolled in physics.

more outward displays of national origin discrimination. For example, the Let Her Learn Survey found that one in four Asian and Pacific Islander girls report being harassed because of their name or family's origin. The same survey revealed that 46 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander girls report being called a racial slur—higher than any other group of girls. Asian and Pacific Islander girls are also likely to have ties to recent immigrant communities—much like Latina girls. Almost three quarters of Asian adults were born outside the United States and more than half of Asian immigrant adults say they do not speak English well.⁴² The Let Her Learn Survey found that more than 1 in 6 (17 percent) Asian girls report they are learning English and 38 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander girls say they are worried that a friend or family member will be deported.⁴³

25 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander girls report being harassed because of their name or family's origin.

46 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander girls report being called a racial slur—higher than any other group of girls.

Asian girls are also susceptible to the model minority myth—the assumption that people of Asian descent are by nature academically gifted, hardworking and upwardly mobile. Similar to the “Oriental Woman” stereotype, the model minority myth fails to account for the diversity within the racial group broadly defined as “Asian.” While many South and East Asian groups (e.g., people with Indian or Japanese ancestry) do tend to have higher rates of high school, bachelor's and advanced degree completion overall, for the most part Southeast Asians (e.g., people of Hmong, Cambodian and Laotian descent) have high school completion, bachelor's and advanced degree attainment rates lower than those of Black, Latinx and Native Americans.⁴⁴ As a result, administrators may be slow to recognize a need for greater academic counseling and resources among certain Asian subgroups and girls who do not meet the stereotype.⁴⁵

The model minority myth also puts additional pressure and stress on Asian girls who struggle academically, which if unaddressed could create or contribute to mental health issues. Additionally, educators

and administrators who buy into this stereotype may also use the model minority myth as a stand-in to explain behavior that would otherwise be attributed to signs of trauma.⁴⁶ For example, at a 2015 NWLC listening session, a panelist who grew up in a Korean immigrant family relayed a story of how her guidance counselor dismissed her manic behavior, depression and suicidal thoughts as simply being overworked at school. In fact, the panelist was manifesting trauma from being sexually abused as a child.⁴⁷

Although rates of retention for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls are generally proportional to their enrollment in elementary school, data shows that in high school these girls are held back at rates higher than their enrollment. For example, although Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls make up 0.4 percent of girls enrolled in school, they are 0.7 percent of girls who repeat the ninth and tenth grade. Across all grades, Asian girls are retained at disproportionately lower rates when compared to their enrollment⁴⁸—although the overall rate may mask higher rates of retention for certain subgroups of Asian girls.

Barriers to Success in School for Girls of Color

In addition to facing biases informed by race and sex stereotypes, girls of color are more likely to attend under-resourced schools with inexperienced teachers, fewer curricular options and guidance counselors, and an increased law enforcement presence. Black and Native American girls are also subject to disproportionate exclusionary discipline that presents an additional barrier to staying on track academically, and all girls of color lack culturally responsive, personalized learning environments that could increase achievement.

Under-Resourced Schools

In general, girls of color are more likely to live in economically distressed neighborhoods with fewer public resources and under-resourced schools.⁴⁹ This means that girls of color are more likely to attend schools with inexperienced and uncertified teachers. For example, high schools with a population of at least 90 percent students of color averaged more than twice as many teachers in their first year of teaching as high schools with a population of at least 90 percent white students.⁵⁰ And other research has found that in majority student-of-color schools, students have less than a 50 percent chance of being taught by a math or science teacher who has a license and degree in the relevant field,⁵¹ notwithstanding research showing that teachers with coursework in the subjects they teach have a stronger positive effect on student learning outcomes.⁵²

In addition, most girls of color—especially Native girls—are more likely than white girls to attend high schools with fewer math and science courses. In particular:

- Native American girls are most likely to attend high schools with no chemistry class (38.6 percent), no calculus (38.6 percent) and no physics class (30.1 percent).
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls are second most likely to attend high schools without these classes (34.1 percent, 34.1 percent and 13.9 percent, respectively).
- Black girls are third most likely (28 percent, 28.4 percent and 18.6 percent, respectively).⁵³

Attending these schools limits academic opportunities for girls of color who lack the necessary classes to start college without having to take remedial classes. Additionally, lacking a full array of math and science classes makes it difficult for girls of color to

pursue fields of study that lead to careers in high-paying STEM fields. The Let Her Learn Survey found that 59 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls, 53 percent of Latina girls, 48 percent of Native American girls, and 47 percent of Black girls said that not having access to the courses they want makes it hard to go to school.⁵⁴ When asked if they could change one thing about their school, many girls of color said they would change the class offerings and requirements.⁵⁵

Figure 3. Percentage of Girls Attending High Schools without STEM in the 2013-14 School Year by Race

	Black	White	Asian	Native American	Latina	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Multiracial
% of Girls Who Attended Schools with No Chemistry Classes	28.0	17.8	13.4	38.6	21.1	34.1	19.3
% of Girls Who Attended Schools with No Calculus Classes	28.4	17.8	13.4	38.6	21.1	34.1	19.3
% of Girls Who Attended Schools with No Physics Classes	18.6	10.0	6.6	30.1	13.3	13.9	11.3
% of Girls Who Attended Schools with no Biology Classes	4.0	1.9	2.3	4.7	3.4	4.7	2.6

Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

In addition to being more likely to attend schools that fail to adequately prepare students for college and high-growth, high-paying careers, living in distressed neighborhoods can create toxic stress, which may increase mental and physical wellness issues—a factor that may be exacerbated for girls who have experienced trauma as well as girls with disabilities.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, girls of color are less likely to have access to a school counselor to help them cope with stress and trauma: In high schools where students of color make up at least 90 percent of the student body, the counselor-to-student ratio is 309:1, compared to 278:1 in high schools where the student population is 90 percent white.⁵⁷ While both fall short of the National Association of School Psychologist's recommendation of 250:1,⁵⁸ heavily white high schools are much closer to meeting the goal than heavily student-of-color schools are.

WHAT GIRLS SAY:

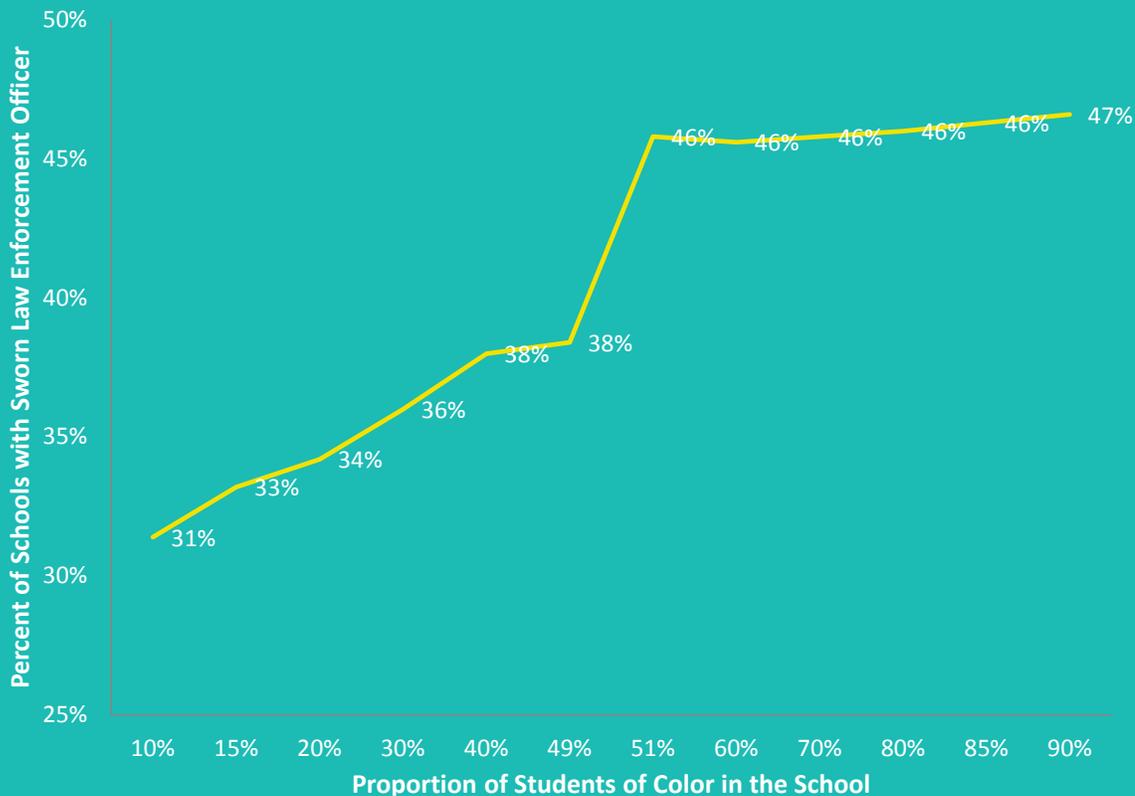
“When you are going through something . . . I know personally I start to shut down . . . it would be nice to have someone to go to talk about that.” She also added that she doesn't appreciate having to “choose school over her mental health sometimes.” Girls also said access to school counselors would be helpful, with one girl saying, “I don't even know who my counselor is.” Another said her school has one counselor serving 600-700 students and that accessibility is a problem. One participant shared that she missed school for mental health reasons while another highlighted the urgent need for on-site mental health care: “You never know . . . you could have a breakdown at any moment.”

– NWLC Focus Group Participants

Moreover, majority student-of-color schools may use their limited resources to increase the presence of law enforcement, which actually can be detrimental, to students' safety. Almost half (46.6%) of high schools with 90 percent or more students of color have at least one law enforcement officer, compared to just under a third (31.4%) of high schools with 90 percent or more white students (**Figure 4**).⁵⁹

In recent years, cell phone videos have captured numerous incidents of school police violently intervening in routine disciplinary matters involving Black and Latina girls. In October 2015, a police officer in Columbia, South Carolina flipped a Black girl out of her desk for refusing to leave the classroom and arrested another Black student who spoke out against the violence.⁶⁰ In April 2016, video emerged of a San Antonio police officer slamming a 12-year-old, Latina middle-school student against a brick sidewalk. A loud crack followed by a gasp from the crowd is audible as well as students saying, “She landed on her face!”⁶¹ In Rolesville, North Carolina, a police officer lifted and hurled a Black, 15-year-old female student to the ground in January 2017—allegedly giving her a concussion and causing the school to rethink its use of school resource officers.⁶²

Figure 4. Percentage of High Schools with a Sworn Law Enforcement Officer in the 2013-14 School Year by Student-of-Color Enrollment

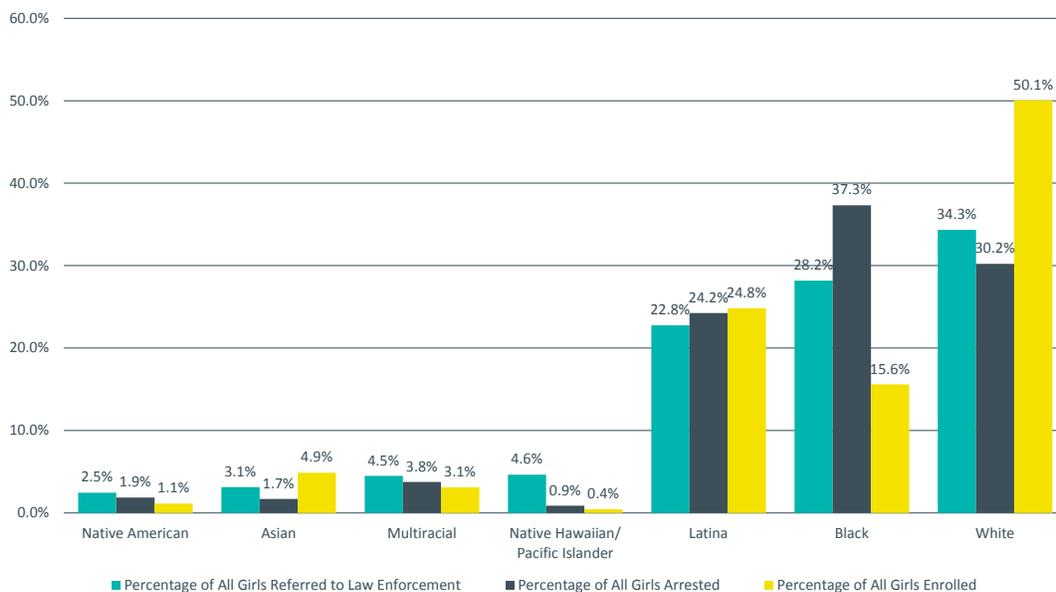


Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).



Perhaps as a result of an increased law enforcement presence in schools with a higher proportion of students of color, overall national rates of school-based arrests and referrals to law enforcement are disproportionately high for Black, Native American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls (**Figure 5**). These disproportionate rates of involvement in the juvenile justice system contribute to school pushout for these girls and increase the risk of their being involved in the criminal justice system as an adult.

Figure 5. Percentage of Girls Referred to Law Enforcement or Arrested at School in the 2013-14 School Year by Race



Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

Disproportionate Discipline for Black and Native American Girls

Black and Native American girls are disproportionately subject to exclusionary discipline, which results in lost class time and increased school pushout. These uneven rates of discipline are not because of more frequent or serious misbehavior. Black girls are 5.5 times more likely to be suspended than white girls (**Figure 6**). They are also more likely to receive multiple suspensions than any other gender or race of students.⁶³ Data also shows that this disproportionate discipline starts as early as preschool, with Black girls making up 20 percent of girls enrolled, but 54 percent of girls suspended from preschool.⁶⁴ Evidence shows that Black girls are often disciplined for minor or subjective

offenses, which may be informed by implicit biases and race- and sex-based stereotypes. For example, Black girls who are outspoken in class, who use profanity or who confront people in positions of authority—as well as Black girls who are perceived as dressing provocatively—are disproportionately disciplined using exclusionary methods.⁶⁵ Indeed, Black girls are at greater risk than other girls of receiving citations for talking back to teachers and for dress code violations,⁶⁶ as well as for much less severe behaviors such as chewing gum, defiance, and failure to comply with prior discipline.⁶⁷ Exclusionary discipline deprives Black girls of classroom learning and contributes to school pushout. Such harsh discipline may also contribute to Black girls having the highest rate of retention for all girls.⁶⁸

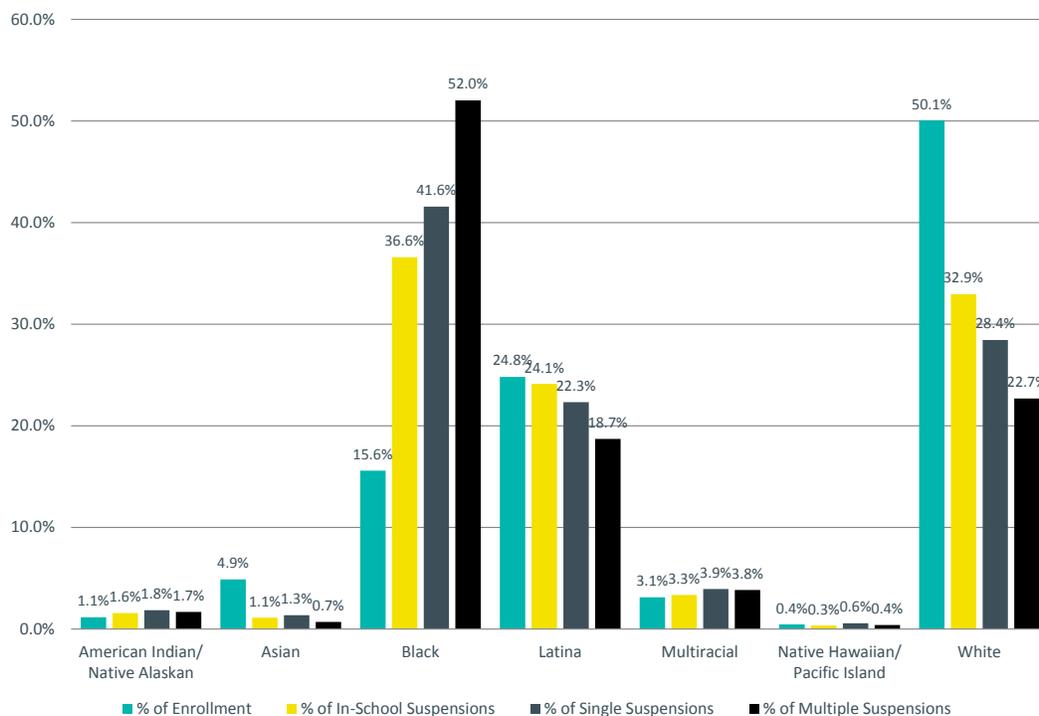
Ironically, the quality of assertiveness generally has led to positive public perceptions of Black women in leadership roles.⁶⁹ In fact, the Let Her Learn Survey found that Black girls were more likely than any other group of girls to see themselves as leaders. However, in the school setting, assertiveness can often be misidentified as “talking back” or “defiance,” which puts them at greater risk for inequitable discipline.⁷⁰

Although expulsions are less common, Black girls are 6.1 times more likely to be expelled from school than white girls. To make matters worse, they are 2.5 times more likely to be expelled without educational services.⁷¹

Native American girls also face disproportionate discipline rates; they are 3 times more likely to be suspended than white girls.⁷² In many ways, it appears that the harsh response to Native American girls is a holdover from the government-approved boarding schools. Discipline within those schools was severe and generally consisted of confinement, deprivation of privileges, corporal punishment or restriction of diet. Although greater analysis is necessary to determine particular reasons for Native American girls' disproportionate rates of discipline, anecdotal evidence from areas with high proportions of tribal youth show that higher rates of exclusionary discipline and referrals to law enforcement may be harsh responses to normal childlike behavior.⁷³



Figure 6. Rates of Suspensions for Girls in K-12 in the 2013-14 School Year by Race



Source: NWLC Calculations from 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

Lack of Culturally Responsive Personalized Learning Environments

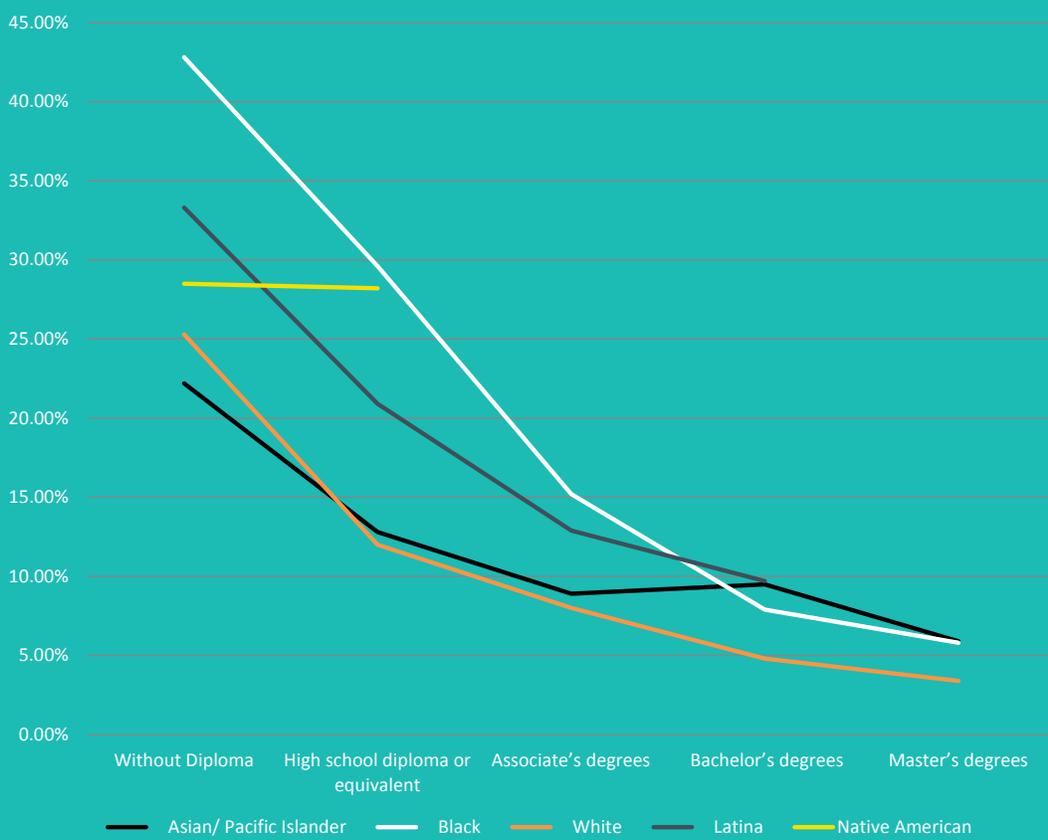
Girls of color do not have access to culturally responsive, personalized learning environments. Personalized learning “refers to a diverse variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.”⁷⁴ Teaching that is culturally responsive recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning.⁷⁵ It is characterized by a number of elements that are also features of personalized learning, including communication of high expectations, parental/community involvement, student-centered instruction, instruction that encourages multicultural viewpoints, and the teacher playing a facilitator role. Evidence suggests that culturally responsive pedagogy can benefit girls of color by encouraging students to be in touch with their racial and cultural heritage, which in one study of Black girls, correlated to more commitment to schoolwork, better grades and a desire to go to college.⁷⁶ In a number of studies, culturally responsive teaching has shown greater engagement in various groups of students⁷⁷ with promising results—including narrowing achievement gaps and increasing college enrollment for Alaskan Native students and empowering Latina and Black girls from low-income families to embrace and explore technology.⁷⁹

However, as illustrated above, too often biases and stereotypes take the place of culturally responsive teaching.⁸⁰ This is meted out in lower expectations⁸¹ for students of color and a classroom environment that emphasizes Eurocentric ideals instead of cultural diversity. For example, to the extent that a school spends any time on the contributions people and women of color have made to America, this time is often confined to designated cultural heritage months instead of being integrated throughout the curriculum and school year. Indeed, curricula and emphasis on Eurocentrism “are deeply embedded within the fabric of educational routines”⁸² and create discriminatory educational barriers for students of color.⁸³

Breaking down educational barriers for girls of color is key to ensuring their economic stability.

Tackling the obstacles that girls of color face to succeeding in school is critical for their future economic stability. Across all races and ethnicities, obtaining a high school diploma greatly reduces the likelihood of living in poverty for women of color, and rates of poverty decrease as women of color obtain higher degrees (Figure 7). The generally higher rates of poverty for women of color, particularly for Black and Latina women without a high school diploma, underscores the importance of eliminating the barriers they face to educational achievement.

Figure 7. Poverty Rates of Women 18+ in 2015 by Race/Ethnicity and Education Attainment⁸⁴

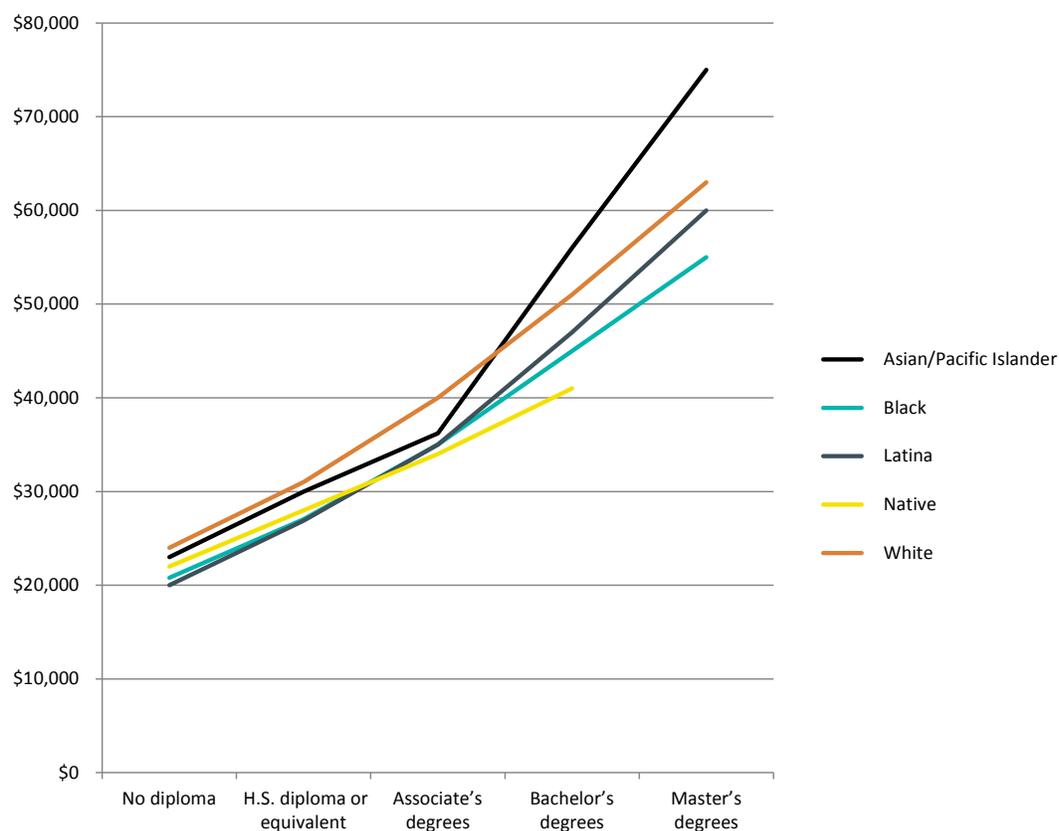


Source: NWLC calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 Current Population Survey using IPUMS. Data for some groups of women are not available due to small sample sizes.



The same correlation is true for educational attainment and annual earnings for women of all races and ethnicities (**Figure 8**). The economic success of women of color is particularly important not just for them, but also for their families and communities. More and more, women are becoming breadwinners for their families. For example, in 2015, more than two in five households with children under 18 had mothers who were the sole or primary provider for the family.⁸⁵ Rates are higher for Black and Latina women than white women—more than 70 percent of Black women and 40 percent of Latina women are the sole or primary breadwinners for their families compared to almost 25 percent of white women.⁸⁶ An additional 22 percent of all households had mothers who were co-breadwinners, earning anywhere from 25 to 49 percent of the family's earnings.⁸⁷

Figure 8. Annual Earnings of Full-time, Year round Women Workers in 2015 by Race and Education Attainment



Source: Earnings for all women, Asian/Pacific Islander women, Black women, Latinas, and white women are from U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 Current Population Survey using IPUMS. Earnings for Native women are from U.S. Census Bureau 2015 American Community Survey 1-year estimates using IPUMS. Data for some groups of women not available due to small sample sizes.

Recommendations for Helping Girls of Color Succeed in School

Policymakers, educators, and communities can do more to help girls of color succeed in school. The recommendations below describe ways to address the various educational challenges faced by these diverse groups of girls. With greater attention and support, they can overcome the barriers they face and thrive in school.

Policymakers

- Policymakers should engage girls of color in the process of crafting solutions to the educational barriers they face, making sure to include a diverse set of voices. (One way of doing this is by creating youth advisory committees like the Young Women's Initiatives, first launched in New York City, <http://www.shewillbe.nyc/>.)
- Congress should provide additional funding and infrastructure support to the U.S. Department of Education so that it can annually release the universal Civil Rights Data Collection, ensure that all school districts report accurate data, and adequately investigate and enforce civil rights violations.
- The U.S. Department of Education should improve the Civil Rights Data Collection by:
 - Further disaggregating race/ethnicity by Asian/Pacific Islander subgroups while continuing to cross-tabulate by race/ethnicity, gender, English Learner status and disability.
 - Using reported data to highlight disparities (e.g., in resources or discipline) and encouraging schools/districts to take action to remedy disparities.
- Federal and state policymakers should take the following steps to increase access to STEM programs and curricula for girls of color:
 - Congress and state legislatures should support and enact policies and initiatives to increase numbers of underrepresented students in STEM fields.
 - The U.S. Department of Education should grant funds to educational institutions to increase oversight and auditing of grantees to ensure that girls and young women have equal access to STEM programs and curricula.
 - State legislatures should require schools and districts to annually report enrollment in STEM courses, disaggregated by race/ethnicity (including further disaggregation for Asian/Pacific Islander subgroups), grade level, special education status and English Learner status.

- States can attract and retain teachers working in high-need fields and locations by offering forgivable loans and scholarships.⁸⁸
- State legislatures can take steps to help stop the school-to-prison pipeline by:
 - Eliminating laws that require schools to have zero-tolerance policies.
 - Encouraging or requiring schools to replace all suspensions and expulsions in grades pre-K through 5, and suspensions and expulsions for nonviolent offenses in grades 6 through 12, with alternative forms of discipline such as restorative justice and behavioral counseling.
 - Amending the criminal penal code to exclude elements of minor crimes used in school arrests.
 - Requiring all school districts—especially those with disproportionately high rates of suspensions or expulsions—to include in their School Improvement Plans how they will reduce the use of exclusionary discipline for minor or subjective offenses.

Schools

- Schools and districts should support girls of color by rigorously enforcing anti-discrimination policies and addressing discriminatory or offensive conduct by teachers or students.
- Schools should publicly report student academic data cross-tabulated by gender and race, including further disaggregation for Asian/Pacific Islander subgroups (to the extent possible without compromising student privacy), to ensure that the academic needs of all boys and girls are not masked and interventions can be better targeted.
- Schools should set high expectations for all students regardless of race or gender, including by:
 - Talking early and often with students about their short- and long-term aspirations. For example, school personnel should discuss with all students issues such as the clubs they want to join, sports they want to play, classes they want to take, how to manage school with family responsibilities and jobs, and college and career goals.
 - Providing guidance on prerequisites for post-secondary education.
 - Providing resources to monitor students' course loads and ensure that post-secondary requirements are met.
 - Encouraging teachers to share information about their own college experiences with students.
- Schools should provide educators and school personnel training, including:
 - Gender and racial bias training to root out discriminatory discipline practices and ensure that schools are encouraging and supporting the academic success of Black and Native American girls.
 - Training on how to lend support and set high expectations for all students.
 - Training to recognize signs of trauma that may underlie perceived “defiant” or “disrespectful” behavior, understand the effects of trauma on children, and learn ways to appropriately address trauma and not re-victimize students.

- Schools can and should create inclusive, multicultural environments where programming, activities, and curricula incorporate and value the history, culture, and identities of Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander people and provide all students with culturally appropriate social and emotional learning programs.
 - Support dual language education for Latinx and Asian/Pacific Islander students, and for English Learners in particular, which build on the existing linguistic strengths of students and allow them to continue to build on their content knowledge instead of falling behind due to time spent on English acquisition courses.
 - Offer quality after-school and summer enrichment programs that can provide the support that English Learners need to catch up to their peers both academically and linguistically.
 - Create programs that teach skills for self-expression and responding to conflict.
- Schools can implement policies to decrease exclusionary discipline and reduce racial disparities, including:
 - Eliminating school dress codes, which tend to target Black and Latina girls for having more developed bodies and in some cases, may target clothing worn by certain races or ethnicities.
 - Ending corporal punishment in all grades as well as suspensions for willful defiance and other subjective offenses, and eliminating all suspensions in preschool through 5th grade.
 - Regularly conducting school climate surveys to determine whether students feel welcome and safe at school.
 - Annually reporting discipline data to the public, including specific reasons for disciplinary action, length of time and nature of disciplinary intervention used, and number of instruction days lost.
 - Conducting regular audits of discipline policies and data to identify and address disparities, limit the use of discipline practices, and support inclusive, culturally-responsive alternatives to exclusionary discipline to help reduce racial and gender disparities, such as restorative justice.
 - Replacing the presence of law enforcement in schools, such as Student Resource Officers (SROs), who have been shown to increase youth involvement with the juvenile justice system, with guidance and mental health counselors who are culturally responsive and trained in youth behavior.
- Schools can improve working conditions to improve teacher motivation and help retain effective teachers in high-need schools by making sure teachers have:
 - Supportive leadership.
 - The ability and time to collaborate with colleagues.
 - Meaningful professional development.
 - Opportunities for professional growth.
 - Opportunities for mentorship.

Parents/Guardians and Advocates

- Parents/guardians and advocates should look at their schools' discipline policies and ask them to revise any rule or policy that seems to unfairly target girls of color. Parents should encourage schools and districts to use tools like the *Let Her Learn* toolkit (<https://nwl.org/resources/let-her-learn-a-toolkit-to-stop-school-push-out-for-girls-of-color/>) and the 2014 federal joint discipline guidance issued by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice⁸⁹ to develop alternatives to harsh discipline practices, such as restorative justice.
- Parents/guardians and advocates can look at the latest Civil Rights Data Collection to look up rates of suspension, expulsion, school-based arrests, and referrals to law enforcement for different groups of girls of color.
 - Parents/guardians and advocates can also look to see if educational resources, such as the number of experienced certified teachers, counselors, school law enforcement officers, and advanced science and math classes, are distributed equitably among majority student-of-color schools and majority white schools within the district.
 - Parents/guardians and advocates in areas with large numbers of Asian and Pacific Islander students should urge their schools and districts to publicly report data in a manner that further disaggregates Asian/Pacific Islander subgroups.
- Parents/guardians and advocates should inform their school boards or other appropriate local or state officials if their schools fail to give them proper notice of disciplinary actions or the opportunity to participate in disciplinary actions.
- Parents/guardians and advocates can hold community forums and public meetings to discuss civil rights protections related to school discipline and develop community responses to schools or districts that continue discriminatory practices or policies. Organizers of any such forums should be sure to include and prioritize the voice of students and invite elected officials as well as local news media to attend.
- Parents/guardians and advocates can create or join affinity groups with likeminded individuals, such as the PTA/PTO, and push their schools to adopt culturally responsive methods and curricula, and personalized learning approaches.

- 1 Native American are girls who were identified as Native American, American Indian or Native Alaskan.
- 2 Although multiracial girls may face similar barriers to girls of color generally, research on this topic is limited. However, this report does include data on multiracial girls where available.
- 3 National Women's Law Center's Let Her Learn Survey was conducted online from January 5-19, 2017 by Lake Research Partners. The questions reached a total of 1,003 girls ages 14 to 18 nationwide. Black girls, Latinas, Asian/Pacific Islander girls, Native American girls, and LGBTQ girls were oversampled. The samples were drawn from online panels. The data were weighted by age, race, and census region to reflect the actual proportions of the population. Oversamples were weighted down to reflect their proportions in the population. The margin of error is +/-3.1%. The margin of error is higher among subgroups.
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- 5 National Women's Law Center calculations using data from U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), 2013-14 Public Use Data File available at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov>. CRDC Public Use Data file contains rounded or suppressed data to protect the identity of individuals and to prevent disclosure of protected information. For more information, see the Public-Use Data File User's Manual for the 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection. In addition, the Let Her Learn Survey found that 18 percent of Black girls, 16 percent of Native American girls and 14 percent of Latina girls said they've been suspended from school compared to eight percent of white girls and six percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls. National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey.
- 6 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. In total 91 percent of girls said help applying to college would help a lot, somewhat or a little in improving school, including 98 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls, 94 percent of Latina girls, 92 percent of Native American and white girls, and 87 percent of Black girls.
- 7 National Women's Law Center, Let Her Learn Survey. In total 90 percent of girls said creating graduation plans specifically designed for them—tailored to their needs, skills and interests would help a lot, somewhat or a little, including 94 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander girls, 93 percent of Native American girls, 91 percent of Latina girls, 90 percent of white girls, and 87 percent of Black girls.
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