

Girls Inc. is committed to advancing the rights and opportunities of girls and young women,

with a particular focus on the needs of girls from low-income communities and girls who face multiple, intersectional challenges. Informed by the voices of girls themselves, we advocate to break through the barriers girls face and to reform systems that impede their success.

THE FACTS ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Girls of color, girls with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by punitive school policies and practices that result in suspensions and expulsions, and are often excluded from school for minor offenses tied to sex and race stereotypes (such as “being loud,” “showing attitude,” “defiance,” or dress code violations, including for wearing their hair naturally), and for behaviors (like truancy or getting into fights) that may be symptomatic of unaddressed trauma or mental health issues.¹ Data collected in 2014 by the Office for Civil Rights found that Black girls are six times more likely than White girls to be suspended.² Perceptions that Black girls are less innocent than White girls may contribute to these disparities in punishment.³

Suspensions and expulsions increasingly drive youth into the juvenile justice (JJ) system, either through school-based arrests or because youth who are not in school are more vulnerable to child sex trafficking or other circumstances that can lead to increased likelihood of arrest.⁴ Studies show that girls are the fastest growing population in the JJ system, with girls of color, LGTBQ+ and gender-nonconforming youth, and girls with disabilities overrepresented relative to their school enrollment or share of the overall population.⁵

Often, punitive responses to minor offenses do little to improve student behavior. Suspending students for being absent or tardy, for example, keeps them out of school more and pushes them farther away from the education and services they need to succeed.⁶ Harsh school discipline practices that do not consider the issues underlying a student’s behavior can compound the problems vulnerable girls face, while doing nothing to address the trauma girls experience due to violence in their schools, relationships, families and communities.

THE BIG PICTURE

Access to education is key to a girl’s ability to lead a healthy, fulfilling, and meaningful life. When girls are disproportionately pushed out of the classroom by overly punitive school policies, they can easily fall behind in their coursework, become disengaged in school, believe themselves to be bad students, or drop out. Girls who are pushed out of school do not get the resources they need to heal and succeed, and instead are put at an increased risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system.



WHAT WE CAN DO

- Reform overly punitive and exclusionary school discipline practices and promote alternative, positive approaches to school discipline - such as Restorative Justice practices.
- Eliminate dress code and hair policies that discriminate against students based on race, sex, and gender identity stereotypes.
- Strengthen enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to eradicate gender- and race-based discrimination in K-12 schools, including harassment and violence.
- Advocate for legislation that helps youth who have experienced trauma with their social, emotional, psychological, and developmental needs.
- Ensure all schools have strong, well-trained Title IX coordinators who conduct training for school staff and students, and who are consulted about school policies and practices.
- Ensure that educators and students receive race and gender-responsive, trauma-sensitive, and culturally-competent training to properly identify symptoms of trauma and appropriately respond to victims and connect them with services to address their needs.
- Increase transparency and accuracy in schools' annually reported discipline data and encourage schools to implement data systems that track, identify, and publicly report (in a timely manner) any discipline disparities based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.



END NOTES

1. National Women's Law Center. (2017). *Stopping School Pushout: Overview and Key Findings*. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resources/stopping-school-pushout-overview-and-key-findings/>.
2. U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. (2014). *Data Snapshot: School Discipline*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/CRDC%20School%20Discipline%20Snapshot.pdf>.
3. Georgetown Law. (2017). *Black Girls Viewed As Less Innocent Than White Girls, Georgetown Law Research Finds*. Retrieved from <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/news/press-releases/Black-Girls-Viewed-As-Less-Innocent-Than-White-Girls-Georgetown-Law-Research-Finds.cfm>.
4. National Women's Law Center. (2017). *Stopping School Pushout for: Girls Involved in the Juvenile Justice System*. Retrieved from https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/final_nwlc_Gates_JuvenileJustice.pdf.
5. Ibid, see 4.
6. Ibid, see 1.

