



# Status of Girls in Florida: Educational Attainment and Disparities by County

## Executive Summary

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### **About the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center**

The Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center (Policy Center) is a private not-for-profit organization and an outgrowth of the Justice for Girls Movement that began in Florida more than 15 years ago. With national recognition for its work, the mission of the Policy Center is to engage communities, organizations, and individuals through quality research, advocacy, training and model programming to advance the rights of girls, young women and youth who identify as female, especially those impacted by the justice system. The goal of the Policy Center's girl-centered research inquiry is to ensure that policies, programs, and services are informed by the best available data trends and grounded in the experiences of girls and young women. The Policy Center partners with girls to provide services and interventions across systems (school, diversion, detention, probation, court, lock-up, re-entry).

Since the Policy Center opened in 2013, the research team has published numerous research reports focusing on girls in the juvenile justice system. The research has led to the Policy Center's ongoing strategic reform planning, the development and implementation of pilot intervention models serving girls, and the passage of fundamental and historic legislation. The Policy Center's community reform model is highlighted in the *Georgetown Journal of Law and Policy*. The research helps communities better understand the issues their girls face, as well as provides a platform to advocate for more resources, changes to policy and/or practice, and create interventions that support girls' health and future opportunities.

<https://www.seethegirl.org>

### **About Florida Women's Funding Alliance**

Florida Women's Funding Alliance (FWFA), an affinity group of Florida Philanthropic Network (FPN), envisions a Florida where women and girls thrive. The FWFA mission is to transform the lives of women and girls through members' collective voices and resources. FWFA offers FPN members an opportunity to interact and connect with other staff and board members of foundations and other grantmaking organizations working to transform the lives of women and girls in Florida.

<https://www.fpnetwork.org/fwfa>

### **About Florida Philanthropic Network**

Florida Philanthropic Network is a statewide association of grantmakers working to build philanthropy to build a better Florida. FPN's members are private independent, corporate and family foundations, community foundations, public charity grantmakers and corporate giving programs – from Miami to Jacksonville; Naples to Pensacola – who hold more than \$6.5 billion in assets and invest more than \$430 million annually (excluding members located outside Florida) to improve the quality of life for our citizens. FPN members share a commitment to promoting philanthropy, fostering collaboration and advancing public policy in Florida.

<https://www.fpnetwork.org/>

## Introduction

The *Status of Girls in Florida: Educational Attainment and Disparities* report is the first in a series of three publications on the status of girls across Florida's counties. This report series was commissioned by the Florida Women's Funding Alliance, an affinity group of Florida Philanthropic Network. This first publication shows that specific to educational status, it would appear that girls across Florida are faring well, however, this is not true for all girls. In particular, there are notable disparities for girls of color and girls living in rural communities. Information for this report is drawn from state and national data sources, including the Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, U.S. Census Bureau, and the CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. The research entailed reviewing the data for girls and examining the critical intersection of race, gender, and geography rather than just reporting the broad trends. Researchers examined important indicators linked to educational achievement including economic disadvantage, English language learners, third grade testing in Language Arts, college readiness testing, and access to scholarship opportunities. Further, experiences in school including sense of safety, suspension, and arrest trends were examined. The power of analyzing the data through multiple lenses increases our understanding of what is happening to all girls and compels us to dig beneath the surface.

## Key Findings

This research provides baseline data to assess the educational status and disparities for girls and young women in Florida. The research reveals increasing graduation rates and decreasing high school dropout rates for girls. Additionally, girls are closing some of the gender gaps in testing, and a greater share of young women ages 18- 24 are enrolled in college. The data points suggest there are groups of girls who are progressing in school and moving forward — but without a deeper look, we miss the invisible



group of girls who are falling further behind. The key findings for each educational indicator are summarized below.

### **Educational Status: graduation, dropout, and college enrollment rates**

- Some rural communities had double the proportion of girls who dropped out of their cohort compared to the Florida average.
- Graduation rates for girls differ by race: Asian girls have the highest graduation rate (95%), followed by White (89%), Pacific Islander (89%), Hispanic (85%), American Indian (82%), Black (80%) and girls of two or more races (80%). An estimated 12,000 young women ages 16-19

are not enrolled in school, have not completed high school and are not in the workforce.

- The proportion of American Indian girls who dropped out of their graduation cohort (6%) was double the proportion of their female peers and higher than American Indian boys in Florida.
- A higher proportion of young women ages 18-24 are enrolled in college (47%) compared to their male counterparts (37%). This pattern is true across racial categories.

**Educational Achievement Indicators: economic disadvantage, English language learners, testing scores, college readiness, and college scholarship opportunities**

- In 2017-2018, more than half (57%) of girls and boys enrolled in public schools in Florida are economically disadvantaged (eligible for free or reduced lunch). Economic disadvantage varies widely by race/ethnicity: 77% of Black, 67% of Hispanic, 55% of American Indian, 53% of Pacific Islander, and 39%

of White girls were economically disadvantaged.

- Approximately 10% of students are English language learners and 24% of Hispanic girls are English language learners.
- According to Florida law, third graders who do not score Level 2 or above on the statewide Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) for English Language Arts (ELA) must be retained. Statewide in 2017- 2018, nearly one in five (17%) of third grade girls were on Level 1. School districts in rural regions have higher proportions of girls on Level 1. Further, one in four (26%) third grade Black girls in Florida were on Level 1.
- There were 8,033 girls retained in the third grade and the majority were Black (40%) or Hispanic (37%).
- Overall performance in math, reading, and writing for college placement testing varied by race/ethnicity: 83% of Asian, 76% of White, 63% of Hispanic, 58% of American Indian/ Alaskan Native, 56% of Hawaiian Pacific Islander, and 52% of Black girls who took the placement test met or



exceeded the cut-off score.

- In 2017-2018, the majority (59%) of the Bright Futures Scholarship recipients were White: 24% Hispanic, 7% Pacific Islander/Asian, 5% Black, 0.3% American Indian/ Alaska Native, and 4% were of another race.

### **School Experience: sense of safety, suspension, and school arrests**

- Of the five Florida counties included in Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data (Broward, Duval, Miami-Dade, Orange, and Palm Beach), approximately 9% of girls who identify as heterosexual report not going to school because they felt unsafe at school or unsafe going to/from school. This was higher among those who identify as lesbian/gay (18%), who identify as bisexual (15%), and who identify as questioning or “unsure” of their sexual identity (15%).
- Overall, the number of out-of-school suspensions has decreased about 23% for girls during the five-year period. There are considerable disparities in the proportion of girls receiving out-of-school suspensions, with a statewide average of three per 100 girls, but also as high as 16 per 100 female students depending on the county. Five-year trend data is not available by race/ethnicity within gender; as a result, researchers are unable to calculate school discipline trends for girls of color in Florida.
- In general, school-based arrests are decreasing for both boys and girls in Florida, and more boys are arrested in school than girls. Black girls are overrepresented in the number of girls arrested in school. Although Black girls represent 22% of the girls enrolled in school in Florida, they represent 57% of those arrested at school.

## **Moving Forward**

This first publication of the three-part research series raises many questions that warrant attention – not only about school experiences and achievement, but also about the overall health and well-being of girls in Florida. The focus of this research is not to ask why some girls are not performing better academically, or to negatively label children at risk of falling off the path to graduation. Rather, the focus is to use the information to better understand *how, where, and why* current educational practices *are creating racial and gender disparities and not helping all girls*. School is the one area where all girls are required to participate and therefore this research helps provide a baseline of how girls are doing. There are groups of girls experiencing disparate trends that particularly raise concern (girls of color, girls living in rural communities, girls who are economically disadvantaged, girls who are not enrolled in high school and not in the work force, third grade girls who are on Level 1 on statewide FSA for English Language Arts, LGBT youth who report feeling unsafe at school). Without delving deeper as to why some girls within these groups are falling behind, there are long-term consequences (including school failure, intergenerational poverty, etc.).

The second publication of the series will focus on the Status of Girls' Wellness and Victimization trends to explore the root causes of disparities and lived experiences of girls. Research suggests that girls' well-being and future opportunities are important factors related to school achievement. Below, several research questions will be explored for the second publication:

- Are there commonalities of experiences in wellness indicators (e.g., school connectedness, safety) across subsets/cohorts of girls?
- Are there commonalities of experiences in victimization and disconnection indicators (e.g.,



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exposure to trauma) across subsets/cohorts of girls?

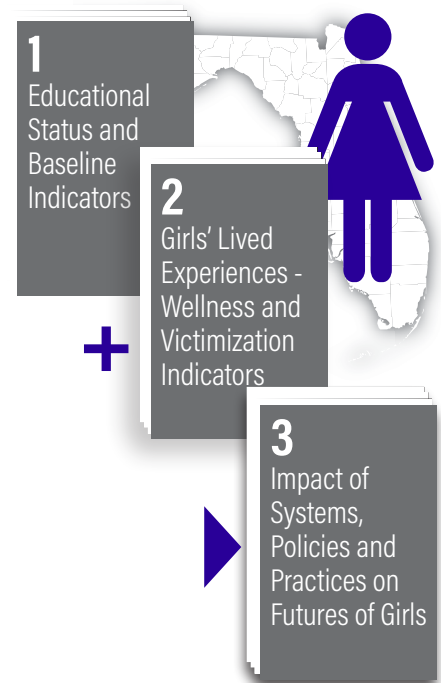
- What can we learn from girls who are meeting benchmarks and progressing academically as well as from girls who are falling behind?
- What do girls want us to know about their school experiences, their needs, their strengths, and their lived experiences?
- What can we learn from communities that have closed the disparity gaps and what can we learn from communities where the gaps are significant?

Researchers will hear from girls to assess whether the data is reflective of their experiences. Girls' voices will inform the focus of the third publication which seeks to look at systemic issues and their access to services/resources.

Most importantly, this in-depth research series will inform the development of

robust recommendations designed to address root causes versus surface, short-term recommendations. The findings will address the overarching questions about the girls who are falling behind.

### Status of Girls Series



Visit [www.seethegirl.org](http://www.seethegirl.org) for the full report. To receive a copy, contact Blythe Zayets, Director of Development at [bzayets@seethegirl.org](mailto:bzayets@seethegirl.org).