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Research to Action: Make Girls a Priority in Florida

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Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center

The Policy Center is a private nonprofit organization and an outgrowth of the Justice for Girls Movement, which began in Florida more than 20 years ago. Nationally recognized, the Policy Center's mission 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 is to inform policies, programs, and services by the best available data and to ground them in the experiences of girls and young women. The Policy Center partners with girls. Together, they work across systems including school, diversion, detention, probation, court, lock-up, and re-entry.

Since the Policy Center opened in 2013, the research team has published numerous reports on girls in the juvenile justice system. The research has led to the Policy Center's ongoing strategic reform platform, the development and implementation of innovative girl-centered program models, 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 (2013). Our research helps communities better understand issues their girls face, informs the advocacy agenda platform that includes increased resources, policy and practice reforms, and the interventions that support girls' well-being and future opportunities.

seethegirl.org

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The Florida Women's Funding Alliance (FWFA) envisions a Florida where women and girls thrive. FWFA is dedicated to transforming the lives of women and girls through our collective voices and resources. It offers members the opportunity to interact and connect with staff and board members of foundations and other organizations working to transform the lives of women and girls in Florida.

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Make Girls a Priority in Florida

The Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center was commissioned by the Florida Women’s Funding Alliance to conduct research on the status of girls in Florida. The first publication, *The Status of Girls in Florida: Educational Attainment and Disparities by County* (2019), found that some girls are progressing in school and moving forward, girls are closing some of the gender gaps in testing, and a greater share of young women ages 18–24 are enrolled in college. Despite these gains, the data shed light on the invisible groups of girls who are falling further behind. The second publication, *The Status of Girls Well-Being in Florida* (2019), investigated the indicators of well-being. This third publication of the Status of Girls series, *Research to Action: Make Girls a Priority in Florida*, highlights where to invest to improve outcomes for girls.

The data show that many girls are in peril. They experience alarming rates of violence and victimization in their communities, schools, and homes. The rates of hopelessness, suicide ideation, and substance use among girls must compel our communities and state to take action.

Every year, we lose girls to school dropout, suicide, sex trafficking, and juvenile justice system involvement. The time is overdue to make girls a priority in the state of Florida. There are simply too many girls at great risk for trauma, mental health challenges, exploitation, and system involvement. And, we can learn from the girls themselves about how to best support them.

Why the time is NOW!

Victimization is rampant.

Violence and victimization occur in homes. In 2018, 7,500 girls were removed from their homes due to physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, or parental drug abuse. Gendered sexual violence is evident; one in ten girls reported having been raped. Sexual exploitation is rampant; during 2018, there were 1,500 sexual exploitation investigations, a number that increases every year.

The threat to girls’ emotional well-being warrants serious attention.

What girls experience in community, schools, and homes is apparent in their well-being indicators. Using the YSAS 2018 survey of middle-school and high-school students, more than half of girls reported feelings of sadness. One-third reported feeling “sometimes life is not worth it.” And one-fifth reported suicide ideation. More than half of girls reported use of substances, with alcohol, vapor products, and marijuana being the most common. Most notably, one in four girls reported a lack of access to a parent for help with their problems.

Invest in innovative, local, girl-centered services specifically designed to address the needs of girls.

Rely on interventions backed by research to create safety and reduce the risk to girls for depression, suicide, anxiety, substance use, and increased stress in adulthood.

Many girls feel unsafe at school.

Overall, one-third of girls reported feeling unsafe at school. One-tenth avoided school because of those feelings. Girls who feel unsafe in school reported higher instances of bullying, hopelessness, and sadness. They were also more likely to receive school suspensions.

Although physical bullying is more prevalent among boys; two-thirds of girls reported verbal bullying, and one-third reported cyberbullying. Verbal bullying is defined as taunting, teasing, calling names, or excluding or ignoring others in a mean way. Cyberbullying is defined as sending mean messages or posting hurtful information on the internet. One-fourth of girls reported having no teacher to talk to, one on one. Black girls in middle and high school are more likely to report a suspension (Black girls 15%, multi-racial and Native American girls 8%, Hispanic girls 6%, White girls 4%, and Asian girls 2%). Suspensions push girls out of school and increase the disconnection.

Educational attainment varies by race, ethnicity, and geography.

Although graduation rates are at an all-time high, cohort-based dropout calculations are limited and create barriers for understanding the true numbers and reasons that youth are not enrolled in school. In 2018, 12,000 girls ages 16–19 were not enrolled in school and were not in the labor force. Native American girls and some rural communities had dropout rates two times higher than the statewide average of 3%.

One-fifth of girls in third grade were reading below Level 1 on the FSA-ELA. Retention was highest in third grade. Of the 8,033 girls retained in 2017, 40% were Black, and 37% were Hispanic.

Girls have high rates of juvenile justice system involvement.

Florida relies too heavily on the juvenile justice system due to a lack of alternatives. In 2018–2019, 9,000 girls were arrested, over 2,000 detained, and 317 were locked up and sent away from their communities. Florida has

higher arrest and incarceration rates among girls ages 10–17 when compared to Texas, California, and New York.

Priority Populations

Certain groups of girls are at far greater risk for trauma, mental health challenges, exploitation, and system involvement than their peers. These inequities are important, as they call for different interventions for girls who are falling behind. Our research clearly shows

that the groups of girls in the greatest danger are girls of color, girls from rural areas, and girls that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Today with COVID-19, many girls feel more isolated due to physical distancing

and increased fear. Current data show an increase in child removals from home for reasons such as parents' inability to cope, parental drug abuse, physical abuse, and domestic violence. It is vital that we continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on girls' well-being and their existing struggles with suicide ideation, depression, victimization, lack of support and family connection.

Recommendations

Our recommendations include changes to policy, programming, public education and awareness, process, and training for each of the major findings.

Kickstart the movement.

Convene a two-day Summit on Making Girls a Priority in Florida.

Bring together policymakers, citizen leaders, advocates, funders, appointed officials, researchers, and practitioners with girls and youth who identify as female to review the findings from the Status of Girls research and discuss systemic reform. Focus on their needs. Elevate the voices of girls, highlight the research findings, and build awareness locally and statewide.

Launch a campaign to Make Girls a Priority in public awareness and education.

Problem: Victimization of girls, K–12

Solution: Create a culture of nonviolence through policy and practice.

- Address sexual violence.
- Educate on affirmative consent.
- Invest in primary prevention approaches.
- Build skills to prevent violence. Include empathy, communication, and conflict management.

Problem: Lack of emotional well-being

Solution: Fund school-based mental health services.

- Critically review the use of the Baker Act (ensure parental notification, set age limit at 10).
- Support recommendations of the Safety Commission (access to counselors).
- Train frontline workers.
- Expand trauma assessment tools.

Problem: Lack of school safety

Solution: Change discriminatory policy and practice.

- Address bullying.
- End discrimination based on hair or dress codes.
- Ban policies that push girls out of school.
- Stop criminalizing normal behavior.
- Place girl advocates in schools.
- Pilot school and community partnerships.

Problem: Disparities in educational attainment

Solution: Implement responsive practices.

- Invest in high-quality Pre-K.
- Ban suspensions of K-3 students.
- Implement interventions for students who are falling behind.
- End discriminatory disciplinary practices.

Problem: High rates of juvenile justice system involvement

Solution: Change discriminatory policies.

- Ban arrests for children under 10.
- Reintroduce and pass the Kaia Rolle Act.
- Release low-risk youth from custody.
- Use community-based services.
- Ban solitary confinement of children.
- Implement specialized respite services.
- Get training out to domestic violence shelter workers.
- Fund alternatives to detention.
- Fund a female-only probation unit for girls with extensive trauma.

Partner with girls to impact change.

Girls must be leaders in design, content, and execution.

Girls learn to be activists for positive change.

Enables adults to learn about what girls experience at school, in their communities, and with the families.



Get busy.

Provide spaces for local communities to review and use data to improve their programming.

- Shift training and practice in education, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems.
- Engage girls in creating the solutions they need.
- Analyze and report all data by race and ethnicity within gender to accurately calculate trends.
- Increase the types of data to improve responses. Include immigrants, refugees, homeless, and LGBTQ girls.
- Train law enforcement, judges, state attorneys, and public defenders in topics such as predatory males, coercion tactics, adultification, girls' adolescent development, racial bias, data trends, historical and racial trauma, intrafamily conflict, crisis management, and de-escalation techniques.

Make Girls a Priority in Florida

Introduction

The Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center was commissioned by the Florida Women’s Funding Alliance to research the status of girls in Florida. This new research follows the release of the Institute for Women Policy Research (IWPR) Status of Women series specific to Florida. The first publication in the new series, *The Status of Girls in Florida: Educational Attainment and Disparities by County* (2019),¹ found that groups of girls are progressing in school and moving forward, girls are closing some of the gender gaps in testing, and a greater share of young women ages 18–24 are enrolled in college. Despite these gains, the data shed light on the invisible groups of girls who are falling further behind.

The second publication, *The Status of Girls Well-Being in Florida* (2019),² investigated middle- and high-school girls’ indicators of well-being (depression, suicide ideation, substance use supports) in their community, schools, and homes. The research shows where girls are faring well and where we are failing to recognize their needs. The data also illuminate the geographical, racial, and sexual orientation differences for girls in Florida.

Florida is home to over 1.4 million girls enrolled in K–12 public schools. The data show that many girls are in peril. They experience alarming rates of violence and victimization in their communities, schools, and homes. The rates of hopelessness, suicide ideation, and substance use among girls must compel our communities and state to take action.

We have presented the data in Tallahassee to state leaders and have briefed many communities. The media have covered our findings.

We use the term “well-being” to mean school connectedness, safety, access to safe adults, freedom from violence and victimization, and overall physical and emotional health.

This third publication of the Status of Girls series, *Research to Action: Make Girls a Priority in Florida*, bases its recommendations on the findings from the first two research publications. This report highlights where we can invest in girls who are at the greatest risk for trauma, mental health challenges, exploitation, or system involvement. This includes raising community awareness and addressing policies and practices that perpetuate trauma and disparate educational and well-being outcomes for girls in Florida.

The situation is urgent. One in three girls in middle and high school reports feeling that “sometimes life is not worth it.” These indicators and experiences are current in girls’ lives. Their experiences of relate to their educational and health outcomes. These girls are the next generation of women in Florida. They matter. We know less about the needs of invisible populations of girls; over 12,000 girls who are neither in school nor in the labor force, those who are trans female, or those who are victims of sex trafficking. Information specific to these populations is lacking, because they are not reflected in school survey data. Likewise, there is no current research on the impact of COVID-19, particularly on victimization, emotional well-being indicators, and educational attainment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed stark racial disparities in health and education. The moment calls for critical reforms.

The Status of Girls Research series has identified gender, racial, and systemic inequities in multiple indicators from well-being, safety, and education, to arrest and incarceration. We must address a lack of interventions, gendered violence towards girls, and systemic racism in communities and institutions. In response, we must enact policies and effective practices that ensure equitable futures for women. We must not let the outrage on this situation fade. We must do better.

Report Focus

The multi-faceted recommendations in this report are intended to provoke a meaningful dialogue about the current status of girls in Florida and the vision for the future. The reform recommendations follow the major findings of the research: 1) Victimization of girls in Florida is rampant; 2) Girls' emotional well-being is threatened; 3) Many girls don't feel safe in school; 4) Educational attainment varies by race, ethnicity, and location; and 5) Girls have high rates of juvenile justice system involvement.

The issues are entrenched and complex; they require policy and programming reforms and new processes. We must prioritize girls of color, LGBTQ girls, girls living in rural communities, and girls who are not in school and not working. And we must listen to the girls themselves. They are the most impacted, and it is vital to include their voices. The consequences for girls of COVID-19 and unaddressed safety issues remains unknown.

The report concludes with sample policies and legislation in other states, promising programs or initiatives, and resources and toolkits for funders and community leaders. The appendix is not exhaustive but is a sample listing.

As advocates, we call for interventions informed by research and grounded in girl-centered policy. We must create safety nets and opportunities for connection in the community so that girls can feel safe in relationships, are truly safe in their communities, and see a future of hope. We want all girls to be able to fully engage with their families and society.



Now is the time to Make Girls a Priority in Florida.

Urgency for Action

The negative lived experiences of girls abruptly interrupt their childhood and impact their futures as they experience high rates of victimization, a lack of safety, school push out, or justice system involvement.

Effective policies and services have the potential to generate a high return on the investment needed to realize them—improving girls’ lives in the present, as they transition into adulthood, and for the next generation.

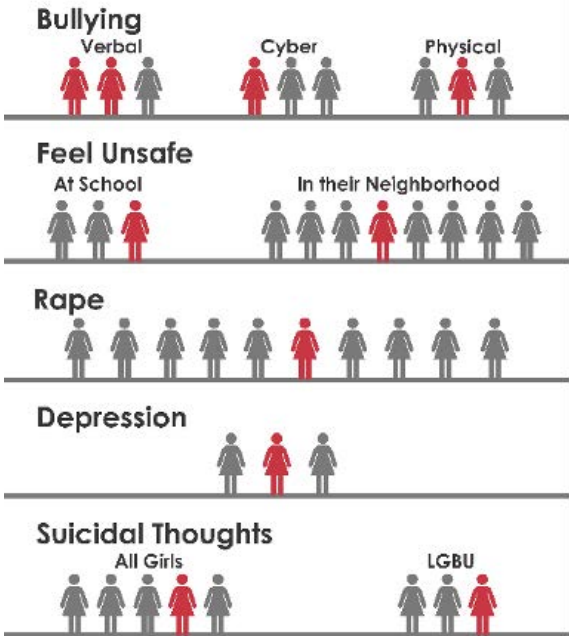
All children deserve equal access to opportunities. The differences for and among girls are important, as they suggest different interventions for ensuring equity for the girls who are highly vulnerable and falling behind, such as girls of color, girls living in rural communities, and girls who are LGBT.

Focused Attention for Priority Populations

Reforms must be based in research and aligned with proven strategy, thoughtful public education, and consensus building. And they must include the voices of girls. The goal of reform is to enact policies and programs that enhance the agency of girls and young women and ultimately result in gender and racial equity.

Specific recommendations under each major research finding directly impact the well-being and educational attainment of all girls with emphasis on priority populations. The research findings outlined below underscore disparities and needs of these specific cohorts of young people.

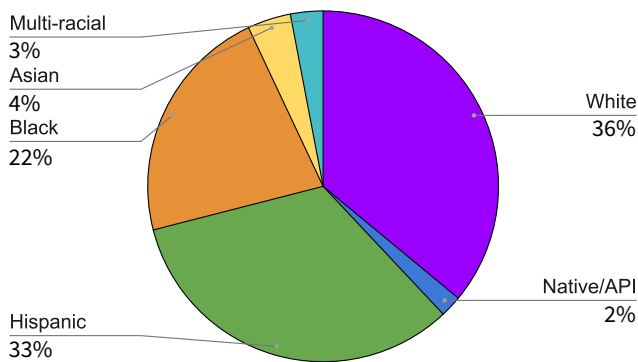
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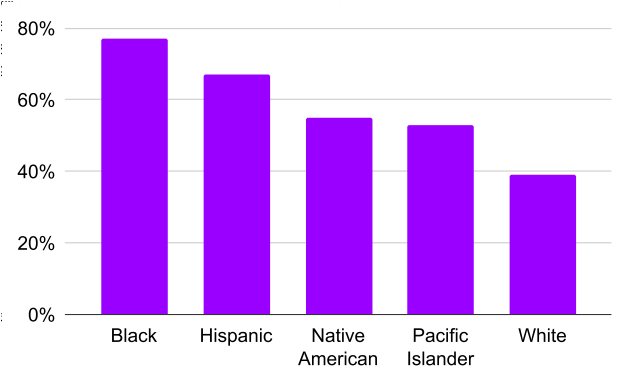
THE CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN

ADVANCED POLICY CENTER FOR THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Girls enrolled in Florida’s public schools, by race and ethnicity



Girls' economic disadvantage* by race and ethnicity, 2017–2018



* (eligible for free or reduced lunch in school)

Girls of Color

The following are comparisons of girls of color to their peers.

- Black girls reported lower proportions of A's and B's and high rates of feeling unsafe in school. Although the rates are improving, Black girls in third grade have higher proportions of reading below grade level, the highest suspension rates, and the lowest graduation rates.
- Native American girls reported higher proportions of rape, substance use, and lower grades. Alaskan Native girls are also more likely to report violence with a weapon.
- Asian girls are less likely to report that they can talk to a parent if they have a personal problem.
- Hispanic girls are falling behind in school, with lower proportions receiving A's and B's and a high retention of third-grade girls.
- Multi-racial girls are more likely to report higher proportions of bullying.

Economic disadvantage varies widely by race and ethnicity: 77% of Black, 67% of Hispanic, 55% of Native American, 53% of Pacific Islander, and 39% of White girls were economically disadvantaged (eligible for free or reduced lunch in schools).

Girls Living in Rural Communities

Of girls in the survey sample, 20% reported living “on a farm or in the country.” There were greater disparities among this group in receiving D's and F's, bullying, and less access to parents or teachers for help. Some rural communities had double the proportion of girls who dropped out of school compared to the Florida average.

Girls who Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB), or Unsure of their Sexual Identity

- More than one-fifth or 22% of girls in the survey sample identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual identity (LGBU). There were wide disparities among this group for sexual and physical victimization, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts. Although 10% of girls who identify as heterosexual report not going to school because they felt unsafe at school or unsafe going to or from school, those numbers are significantly higher among girls who identify as lesbian or gay, 18%; bisexual, 15%; and unsure of their sexual identity, 15%.
- Comparable well-being indicator data are not available for students who may identify as transgender, although the research literature suggests disconnection from school, childhood and adult victimization experiences, homelessness, and exploitation.

We use “LGBU” because these data were obtained from the FL 2018 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) where students were asked to choose the answer that best describes them. The answer options were limited to heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual or “unsure.” LGBU is not intended to exclude any individual. The YRBS administered for 2021 will include the following additional answer options: “I describe my sexual identity some other way,” “I am not sure about my sexual identify (questioning),” and “I do not know what this question is asking.” Survey data are not available to match youth who may identify as trans female.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to COVID-19, many girls are feeling more isolated as a result of physical distancing, coupled with increased fear. We do not yet know the long-term impact of this pandemic on our youth. We do know from our direct experience with girls and families in Florida that the existing inequities have been exacerbated by COVID-19, which further jeopardizes their well-being. Distance or remote services have been challenging, especially for those living in rural or economically disadvantaged communities. Families of color and families led by single mothers have borne and will continue to bear the brunt of the impact of COVID-19.³ This impact is exacerbated for those involved in the justice system.

- In comparison to March–August, 2019, child removal from home due to parents' inability to cope, parental drug abuse, and physical abuse has increased. There has been an even higher increase in child removal from home due to parent domestic violence during same months in 2020.⁴
- In Florida, over 100,000 children under the age of 18 have tested positive for COVID-19 (data are not available by gender).⁵
- As of December 8, 2020, 68 youth and 173 staff tested positive for COVID-19 in juvenile detention centers (data are not available by gender).⁶
- As of December 8, 2020, 18 girls and 40 staff tested positive for COVID-19 in girls' residential commitment programs in Florida.⁷

Kickstarting the Reform Movement

The time is overdue to make girls a priority in the state of Florida. We must begin now and sustain the commitment to needed change. The sections that follow include policy, programming, process, training, and public awareness recommendations that are directly based on the most critical Status of Girls research findings. The recommendations include both short- and long-term

strategies aimed at addressing disparities at the state level and across communities. While we recognize there are multiple places to intervene, the intention of this report is to help build a strong foundation that will lead to sustained shifts in policy and practice and improve the well-being of all girls in Florida.

These recommendations are meant to kickstart the overdue reforms for girls in the state of Florida.

Partner with girls to convene a summit.

Bring together policymakers, citizen leaders, advocates, funders, appointed officials, researchers, and practitioners with girls, young women, and youth who identify as female to review the Status of Girls research series findings and discuss systemic reform;

A Forum titled *Make Girls A Priority* is the first step. It will bring together a range of stakeholders from research, academia, government, the private sector, nonprofit service providers, advocates, philanthropy, and others to gather with girls and young women and review the research and engage in facilitated dialogue about gender, racial, geographical inequities. The Forum will offer a chance to discuss strategies that can break down barriers and create more ladders of opportunity for all girls—especially girls who are currently left out (girls of color, LGBTQ). It will highlight a range of issues, including victimization, emotional well-being, vulnerability to violence, trafficking, school push out, and justice system involvement. We will distribute the Status of Girls Research Series.

Girls and youth who identify as female must be engaged to provide leadership in the design, program content, and execution. An intentional partnership with girls accomplishes the following:

- Enables adults to learn about what girls experience at school, in their communities, and with their families.
- Enriches the conversations.

- Allows girls to be part of the change that impacts them directly.
- Builds girls’ skills and knowledge of strategies to change their communities and schools in positive ways.
- Fosters relationship skills for connecting to adults and other allies.
- Offers learning and sharing about other youth movements.
- Allows developing young leaders to speak out.
- Strengthens the support networks between youth and adults and strengthens the movement for change.

The Summit offers youth an opportunity to engage as equal partners on the planning committee—from start to finish. This requires stipends to ensure access for youth from diverse backgrounds and experiences. To ensure the safety of all participants, the Summit would be held on a virtual platform, which helps to include more youth and stakeholders. The Summit should be held when young people are available. If that is during school hours, school officials must allow students to receive credit for their Summit attendance.

Launch a Make Girls a Priority public education campaign.

Elevate the voices of girls, highlight the research findings, and build awareness both in local communities and across the state.

A strategic public information campaign can generate media coverage. It can educate the public about the plight of girls in Florida and engage citizens in the reform efforts. By highlighting the urgent needs of girls in Florida, the campaign can promote a reform agenda targeting opinion leaders and policymakers at the local and state levels. A well-crafted public education campaign can also mold support for the reform agenda—the policy, program, and process initiatives in this report.



Create a Resource Clearinghouse for girls and parents.

The data and experiences of girls call for adults to make themselves accessible to girls in a way that is welcoming, non-judgmental, and genuinely supportive. Our state and local communities must prioritize and expand access to resources for girls.

- Fund listening sessions with girls and families across communities to provide insight on resources needed and how to disseminate information.
- Fund the creation of a Resource Clearinghouse for girls, parents, and guardians that sends a clear message to girls—we have heard you, we see you, and we want to get you the resources you need in “real time.”
 - Connection with others, decreasing isolation.
 - Access to a therapist or nurse by phone.
 - Resources and opportunities specific to what girls shared in listening sessions.

Research Findings and Recommendations

The reform recommendations below follow the major findings of the research series:

- 1) **The victimization of girls in Florida is rampant.**
- 2) **The threat to girls' emotional well-being warrants serious attention.**
- 3) **Many girls don't feel safe in school.**
- 4) **Educational attainment disparities vary by race, ethnicity, and geography.**
- 5) **Girls have high rates of juvenile justice system involvement.**

Recommendations address the disparities of specific populations, including girls of color, girls who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual identity, girls living in rural communities, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on girls' well-being.

Finding 1:

The victimization of girls in Florida is rampant.

The following data points are from 2017 and 2018.

- Almost one in ten or 9% of high school girls reported forced sexual intercourse (rape).
- Almost one in ten or 9% of girls reported physical dating violence.
- 7,500+ girls were removed from home in one year due to physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, or parental drug abuse.
- One in ten or 10% of births to mothers under age 18 were cases of statutory rape, due to age of the father, whose ages were missing on 41% of birth certificates for those babies.
- 1,500+ investigations, and 400 individuals were verified as child victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

Attitudes about relationships and sexuality begin early in a child's life. When the level of sexual violence and exploitation as reflected in this research is inadequately addressed, both boys and girls learn that violence is an accepted form of behavior.

Public health experts underscore the importance of primary prevention—preventing sexual violence before it occurs. This requires a comprehensive approach that

includes preventative interventions at the individual, community, and societal levels.⁸ We must shift the dialogue from the current focus on harm reduction to primary prevention.

Our research identified statutory rape as an area of concern that warrants more attention. There are limited data on the scope of statutory rape. The response to it varies among states. Some make a concerted effort to prosecute statutory rape cases. Others have mandatory reporting that highlights concerns, as reflected in the Florida legislature's decision to exempt certain providers from a reporting requirement in the state's law on child abuse. It requires that "known or suspected child abuse involving impregnation of a child under 16 years of age by a person 21 years of age or older...[be reported] immediately to the appropriate county sheriff's office or other appropriate law enforcement agency." The requirements do not apply to "health care professionals or other persons who provide medical or counseling services to pregnant children when such reporting would interfere with the provision of medical services." Health care professionals or other persons who provide medical or counseling services to pregnant children are not required to report statutory rape in Florida due to medical professional concerns that prosecution could discourage

girls from obtaining medical care or services if they disclose information about partners or abuse.⁹

- (see Appendix 1 Federal Office of Health and Human Service Statutory Rape: A Guide to State Laws and Reporting Requirements)

Policy Recommendations

Create a culture of nonviolence.

Develop and implement policies and practices that create a culture of nonviolence, including sexual violence.

Implement affirmative consent education in elementary, middle, and high school.

- (see Appendix 1 for Washington State S.B. 5395 Sexual Health Education language that is inclusive. This includes bystander skills; see Kentucky H.B. 296 An Act relating to Health Education)

Mandate training for child welfare investigators, law enforcement, public defenders, and judges on coercive tactics used by older men to exploit, abuse, and victimize girls.

Understand how the adultification of Black girls negatively impacts their culture and their continued victimization.

Programming Recommendations

Invest in primary prevention.

Invest in shifting the focus from risk reduction to primary prevention of sexual violence. Build bystanders' knowledge and skills; mobilize men and boys as allies; focus on male audiences in targeted peer groups, including discussing consent starting in kindergarten.

- (see Appendix 3 for the Stop Sexual Violence: Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence, a toolkit designed to be used by communities to focus on prevention activities that had the greatest potential to reduce sexual violence, and provide opportunities to support and empower girls and women)

Build skills.

Implement developmentally appropriate skill-building interventions to prevent sexual and physical violence before it happens—pre-K to high school. Include empathy, communication, conflict management, emotional regulation, problem-solving, relationships, bystander skills, and consent.

Process Recommendations

Facilitate dialogue.

Convene community leaders, policymakers, school administrators, educators, parents, students, and professionals from local rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, girls and women's organizations, and boys and men's organizations to openly discuss the urgency of physical and sexual violence and its impact on girls.

Increase access to experts.

Increase access to expertly trained health educators, school nurses, and counselors specific to sexual violence and exploitation in public schools.

Reduce victim-blaming messaging and increase reporting safety for victims.



Public Awareness Recommendations

Raise awareness and increase education about statutory rape.

Conduct further research specific to Florida on the connection between statutory rape, victimization, exploitation, and teen pregnancy with a particular focus on predatory “older partners” and coercive tactics to inform recommendations for policy, prevention, and services. Consider the coercive and exploitative tactics used by predatory older adults to manipulate girls while balancing the potential unintended consequence that may result in discouraging young girls from seeking services and needed supports.

Finding 2:

The threat to girls’ emotional well-being warrants serious attention.

- More than half or 53% of girls reported sadness, 37% reported hopelessness, and 18% reported suicide ideation. They experienced less safety in school, bullying, less safety in neighborhoods, substance use, and school suspensions or arrests at younger ages.
- One-fourth or 25% of girls reported a lack of access to their parent for help with problems. One-tenth or 10% of girls reported a lack of access to a safe adult.
- More than one in ten or 13% of girls reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhood.
- Over half or 53% of girls reported substance use; alcohol, vapor products, and marijuana are the most frequently used. Girls who felt unsafe at school or in their neighborhoods, who had no access to a parent or teacher, or who had failing grades reported a higher incidence of substance use.

Safety and mental health are two of the most important aspects of a girl’s overall well-being. Existing models of care fail to adequately address the urgent and complex needs of girls and young women in every corner of the state of Florida.

Convene focus groups.

Gather youth from diverse backgrounds for their input on a media-driven marketing campaign designed for middle- and high-school students. Include informed consent, sexual violence and exploitation, coercion, unequal partnerships, options, and resources.

Develop and execute a public information campaign.

Create a statewide public awareness campaign that targets potential offenders and partners with diverse stakeholders, including rape crisis centers.

Although Florida has the third-highest percentage of mentally ill, uninsured people in the country, the state ranks 49th out of 50 states in spending for mental health services.

These gross funding inequities are only part of the problem. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, as of September, 2020, the current supply of Florida’s working mental health professionals meets only 17% of the need.¹⁰

Local community services are neither adequate nor accessible for girls and their families. Providers struggle to meet the need for services due to state contract restrictions and woefully inadequate funding.

In 2018–2019, more than 37,000 children were “Baker Acted” statewide, this is a 53% increase compared to 25,000 in 2012.¹¹ Data show that as the number of juvenile arrests decrease, the number of juvenile Baker Acts increase.



Florida statute has no minimum age for a child to be Baker Acted when there is reason to believe that the child is mentally ill.¹² In 2017, the legislature convened a task force to examine Baker Acts for children 17 and younger.¹³

According to Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice, 36% of the youth in their care have a mental illness. These numbers are disproportionately higher for girls. Of girls in custody, 54% have a history of mental health issues, and 54% have a history of substance abuse.¹⁴

There is an urgent need for quality, affordable access to trauma-informed mental health services in our schools and in local communities throughout the state.

Policy Recommendations

Support the reintroduction, passage, and implementation the RISE from Trauma Act.

H.R. 3180/Senate Bill 1770 Resilience Investment, Support and Expansion from Trauma Act (RISE from Trauma Act) is sponsored by Rep. Danny Davis and Sen. Dick Durbin (both from Illinois). This bill will expire with no movement in 2020. The bill establishes and extends programs to coordinate and support services for infants, children, youth, and families who have experienced or may experience trauma. These programs support:

- Coordinating bodies to create strategic plans to address trauma based on community needs.
- The performance partnership pilot program for children who have experienced trauma (through FY 2024).
- Recruitment into the AmeriCorps and the National Health Service Corps from communities that have high levels of trauma.
- Grants for comprehensive services and long-term case management to individuals who have been hospitalized for drug overdoses, suicide attempts, or violent injury.
- Grants to states to ensure that health insurance plans comply with mental health parity rules.
- Grants for arts programming for children who have experienced trauma.

- Clinical and early childhood workforce development programs, training and support programs, and toolkits for front-line service providers.
- Grants for clinical training in institutions of higher education, expansion of the Teacher Quality Partnership grants program, grants to support and prevent childhood exposure to substance abuse and violence, and establishment of the National Law Enforcement Child and Youth Trauma Coordinating Center to assist local juvenile justice agencies.

Critically review the use of The Baker Act on children.

F.S. 394.451 is also known as The Florida Mental Health Act or The Baker Act.

- Reduce the Number of Children Who Are Baker Acted: Train those in education, law enforcement, and community-based programming to identify children who truly need involuntary examinations or emergency mental health services and educate the family on how to support the child in crisis.
- Increase the Medicaid payout for mental health professionals.
- Enact parental notification for Baker Acts: Support the development of policies and parameters to ensure parental notification when a Baker Act is being used.
- Restrict age limits for the use of the Baker Act: Research best practices and policies specific to the minimum age limit for children and the use of the Baker Act (or involuntary examination and 72-hour observation) to implement protocols statewide.



Support the Safety Commission recommendations.

Support Recommendations of the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Public Safety Commission to increase access to counselors in school and access to mental health supports.

Florida CS/SB7040 (2020 sponsor Sen. Manny Diaz) and CS/HB 7065 School Safety (sponsor Rep. Ralph Massullo) provided for the number and ratio of students to school social workers, school psychologists, and certified school counselors employed by the district or charter school and the total number of licensed mental health workers. (see Appendix 1)

Implement screening for mental health needs.

Advocate for legislation that supports universal screening for mental health.

- A sample bill from Denver, Colorado, requires a mental health check-up as part of preventive care. (see Appendix 1)

Programming Recommendations

Increase private and public investments.

Expand access to quality, gender-responsive, community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment programs specifically designed to address the complex needs of girls.

- Support school-based or school-linked mental health services.
- Increase community mental health professionals in schools so girls can receive “real time” assessments and counseling, and so that families can link to community resources.
- Have an advocate in local districts. Families need support to access services and to ensure that services are appropriate. A knowledgeable

advocate can accompany the family throughout the process and help improve outcomes.

- Invest in respite beds at the community level. More alternatives are needed for girls and families experiencing family conflict as preventative options. Short- and long-term housing alternatives for girls in crisis outside of the juvenile justice system are critical.

Process Recommendations

Monitor well-being indicators.

We now have a baseline. Continue to monitor homes to gauge the impact of COVID-19 on girls’ well-being, considering existing problems of suicide ideation, depression, victimization, lack of support and family connection. Collaborate with the Florida Department of Health to add questions on the impact of the pandemic as part of the existing annual student survey.

Expand research efforts.

Continue looking at data through the lenses of gender, race, and ethnicity. Currently, Florida has no data marker on school surveys for youth to identify as transgender. While the 2021 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey will expand its answer options (“I describe my sexual identity some other way,” “I am not sure about my sexual identity [questioning],” and “I do not know what this question is asking”), these responses still omit trans youth. Include all needed variables for gender identity, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. In addition, monitor homelessness and changes in poverty by demographics.

Expand trauma assessment tools.

Call for the Florida Department of Health, Department of Children and Families and Department of Juvenile Justice to expand trauma assessments tools and to develop treatment and services guidelines that identify historical, structural, and personal racism.

Training Recommendations

Increase training for frontline workers.

Frontline staff, including school personnel, social services agencies, law enforcement, and probation officers must understand the early warning signs of mental health conditions and how to support a child in crisis and link them to services.

Provide specialized training.

Provide specialized trauma training for therapists working in counseling or services to address sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sex trafficking, and the impact of justice system involvement.

Promote formal partnerships within circuits.

The State Attorney's offices can provide training targeted to prosecutors and support pilot programming. In-office trained staff can assess the trauma and mental health needs of girls referred for prosecution. These staff would assess needs and risks and recommend the appropriate community or juvenile justice system responses.

Promote formal partnerships with state agencies.

The Florida Department of Children and Families could implement a comprehensive training initiative for child protective investigators that work with girls who are victims of sexual abuse, exploitation, and trauma.

Finding 3:

Many girls do not feel safe at school.

- Almost one-third or 29% of girls do not feel safe at school.
- More than one in ten or 11% of girls did not go to school because they feel unsafe.
- Avoiding school because of feeling unsafe varied by race and ethnicity: 8% of White girls, 12% of Black girls, 14% of Asian girls, 13% of Hispanic girls, and 7% of Multi-racial girls.
- One-fourth or 25% of girls reported having no access to a teacher to talk to privately.
- Although physical bullying is higher among boys; verbal (63%) and cyber (35%) bullying is highest among girls. Verbal bullying is defined as being taunted, teased, name-calling, or excluded or ignored in a mean way. Cyberbullying is defined as mean emails, text messages, or posting of hurtful information on the internet.
- More than one in seven or 15% of Black girls in middle and high school have received a suspension in their lifetime—higher than Multi-racial 8%, Native American 8%, Hispanic 6%, White 4%, or Asian 2%.

Safety is crucial for educational attainment, advancing in opportunities, experiencing connectedness, and feeling supported when there is a problem or incident. Success at school is directly linked to feeling safe enough to engage in academics and school activities. Getting to and from school, the threat of sexual harassment or bullying, and the punitive nature of zero-tolerance policies are all issues. Research shows that girls who do not feel safe in school also report higher instances of bullying, hopelessness, and sadness. They are also more likely to be suspended from school.

Research shows that a school climate that is positive, inclusive, and accepting is a key component of an effective school.¹⁵ We recognize that school personnel must navigate many competing priorities. Our research underscores the necessity of a school culture that promotes safety and supports girls who are marginalized or show signs of trauma or other behavioral health challenges. Effective administration must include alternatives to traditional referrals, school suspension, and the punitive practices that disproportionately impact girls of color.

Policy Recommendations

Support passage of components of the School Safety bill.

(Florida) CS/SB 7040, 2020 (sponsor Sen. Manny Diaz) and CS/HB7065 School Safety (sponsor Rep. Ralph Massullo) that includes universal supports for schools to promote psychological well-being and safe and supportive environments. It also requires school officers to complete mental health crisis intervention training and de-escalation skills to ensure student and officer safety.

Convene decision-makers.

Florida Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Children and Families, and Department of Juvenile Justice must discuss and address the impact of racism and historical trauma.

Develop, implement, and evaluate policy reforms.

Inclusive policies must specifically address bullying, subjective discrimination based on hair and dress, and any policies that push girls out of school. (see Appendix 1)

- Assess anti-bullying and other school policies. (see Appendix 3 for resource toolkits to assess current policies and practices and sample changes from other jurisdictions)
- Assess bias based on hair. Protect against racial discrimination that often targets Black people based on hair texture and hairstyles. (see Appendix 1 for California Senate Bill No.188 Chapter 58 the “Crown Act”)

- Review the dress code and advocate for policies that do not suspend students for violations.
 - Policy for students in Prek-K–5 in public and charter schools can not be suspended or expelled for uniform violation. (see Appendix 1 for Louisiana Act No. 248)
- Review school suspensions. Policies must aim to end discriminatory discipline practices. (see Appendix 1 for U.S. House of Representatives H.R. Ending PUSHOUT Act of 2019, Michigan Public Act 360-366 of 2016; 394-402; 361 and District of Columbia Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018)

Programming Recommendations

Provide access to real-time support.

Invest in school-based interventions that provide in-school, real-time supports.

Create safe educational spaces.

Create Sanctuary Spaces inside schools for girls that promote connectedness and safety.

- PACE Center for Girls program model is research-based and emphasizes academics and social services and has been proven to keep girls out of the juvenile justice system. (see Appendix 2)
- Columbus Ohio Prep School for Girls is an all-girls school that practices a restorative school discipline. The administration focuses on the underlying causes of behavior. (see Appendix 2)

Pilot the placement of girl experts and advocates.

Place specially trained girl experts and advocates onsite in identified elementary, middle, and high schools with high rates for truancy, referrals, and suspension for girls. The role of the girl expert is to provide real-time individualized interventions.



Pilot school and community-based partnerships.

Pilot a partnership with a community-based organization to provide onsite or real-time girl-centered interventions in under-resourced elementary, middle, and high schools.

- The Girl Matters program provides intensive in-school services for teachers as an alternative to suspension and to help girls develop social and emotional skills needed to keep them feeling connected to school. (see Appendix 2)

Process Recommendations

Promote dialogue and engagement.

Create opportunities for dialogue and engagement between educators and the girls they serve with the goal of reviewing policies and practices that disenfranchise cohorts of girls.

Conduct focus groups.

Engage girls in developing ideas for a safe culture in school. Focus groups led by school districts in partnership with local universities can help everyone understand safety. Guiding questions for focus groups include: a) Why do you think so many girls do not feel safe in school? b) What would make you feel safer?/What does safety look like? c) What is happening in the school environment or community that makes girls feel hopeless? d) How is the pandemic impacting school experience and safety?

Training Recommendations

Ensure proper implementation of reform policies and practices.

Provide effective training for school officials, educators, and other school personnel on the proper implementation of policies and practices outlined above.

Finding 4:

Educational attainment disparities vary by race, ethnicity, and geography.

Third-grade students are reading below grade level.

- Statewide average: 17% of third-grade girls were on Level 1 (the lowest level) on the FSA-ELA.¹⁶
- Over one-fourth or 26% of third-grade Black girls were on Level 1.
- One in five or 20% of Hispanic girls in were on Level 1.
- Girls from rural county school districts had higher percentages of girls reading at Level 1 than the statewide average of 17%. For example, 35% in Desoto, 32% in Jefferson, 31% in Putman, 29% in Marion, 26% in Hamilton, 25% in Gadsden, 25% in Hendry, and 25% in Madison—all rural counties. Retention rates are the highest in third grade.
- 8,033 girls were retained in the third grade. Of those, 40% were Black, and 37% were Hispanic.

Dropout rates—the statewide average is 3%.

- 6% of Native American girls (twice the average)
- 4% of Black girls
- 3% of Hispanic girls and Multi-racial girls
- 2% of Pacific Islander girls, White girls, and Asian girls.

Graduation rates—the statewide average is 86%.

- 95% of Asian girls
- 89% of White girls and Pacific Islander girls
- 82% of Native American girls
- 80% of Multi-racial girls
- 80% of Black girls

Reading proficiency in third grade is a strong predictor of future academic and life outcomes. A longitudinal research study showed that the rate of youth not graduating from high school was four times greater among those not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.¹⁷ Third-grade reading proficiency must be an essential goal of every school district—the foundation central to every state’s and school district’s long-term strategy to raise student achievement. When students can master reading by the end of third grade and are not living in poverty, the graduation gaps by race and ethnicity begin to close.¹⁸

Policy Recommendations

Ban the suspension of K–3 girls statewide.

- The District of Columbia Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018, limits the use of suspension and the number of days students Pre-K to 12 can be subjected to a suspension. Louisiana Act No. 248 bill prohibits suspending pre-K–8 students for uniform violations. (see Appendix 1 for the bill)

Meet the ten-point checklist requirements of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to improve quality early education, which includes requiring degreed teachers in Pre-K.

Fund schools to create smaller classes, especially now with COVID-19.

Hold all schools that receive public funds—including charter and private schools—to the same high standards for safe facilities, well-qualified staff, and high-quality curriculum and instruction.

Require school districts to assess their policies and practices that push out girls, especially girls of color.

- See the Be Her Resource Toolkit, which presents guiding principles and policy recommendations

to improve relationships between school officers and girls and to reduce disproportionate rates of contact with the juvenile justice system. (see Appendix 3 for the toolkit) Recommendations include restorative justice practices, gender and race bias, and cultural competency trainings for school resource officers, similar to what is outlined in Illinois: 105 ill. comp. stat. 5/10-22.6, 2016. (see Appendix 1 for the bill)

Programming Recommendations

Invest in high-quality Pre–K, interventions, high-speed internet, and responsive practice.

Fund high-quality, full-day pre-K for all children ages 3–4.

Ensure resources and interventions for students who are falling behind and those at risk of failing to achieve proficiency by third grade. Include reading supports, college readiness and preparation, access to scholarship opportunities, and dropout prevention with specific attention to students most disproportionately impacted, which includes girls from rural communities.

Invest in high-speed broadband internet and ensure that all students have access to adequate devices. Advocate for school districts to specifically determine which students do not have access to internet.

Identify and expand programs that can help address retention, school disconnection, and disparities that impact education attainment—pregnancy, caregiver roles, homelessness, poverty. (see Appendix 3 for practices to improve educational environments)

- The Restorative Practices Toolkit is a guide to resources for educators on restorative practices and a “whole-school approach.”
- The Minnesota Department of Education’s Restorative Interventions Implementation Toolkit helps guide educators to assess readiness, implementation, and outcomes of restorative justice curriculum.

Improve the accuracy and availability of data by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Although graduation rates are at an all-time high, the use of the cohort-based dropout calculations are limiting and create barriers for understanding the true numbers and reasons that youth are not enrolled in school. It is critical to analyze and report all data by race and ethnicity within gender. This would allow for the calculation of school discipline trends for girls of color in Florida and emerging national themes that are related to experiences of girls and dropout rates. Also, increasing the types of data available will help improve responses to specific needs. We need more information about well-being of students who are immigrants, refugees, or homeless.

Engage girls in creating solutions.

Create committees where girls are included as part of the solution and development of models. It is critical that we hear from girls what needs to change so that they feel safer in all of these spaces.

Seek innovative pilot interventions.

Call for proposals to address the needs of girls of color, girls living in rural communities, and LGBTQ girls. Support convenings to share local data and to elicit from community members their policy and practice recommendations.

Identify data markers.

Track and analyze life span indicators, including Pre-K, early childhood, adolescence, and adult women.

Finding 5: Girls have high rates of juvenile justice system involvement .

- In 2018–2019, 9,000 girls were arrested, over 2,000 were detained, and 317 were locked up and sent away from their communities. Compared to states of similar size, Florida has the highest arrest rate (976 per 100,000)¹⁹ girls ages 10–17, followed by Texas (734),²⁰ California (648),²¹ and New York (320).²²
- Florida also had the highest incarceration rate (45 per 100,000 girls in placement) followed by Texas (43), California (41), and New York (25).²³
- Girls are more likely than boys to be arrested for nonviolent offenses. Girls are arrested and detained for family-related conflict and technical violations of probation due to unaddressed trauma.
- The needs of girls in the Florida juvenile justice system continue to differ from those of boys. Girls have higher proportions of experiences in out-of-home placements, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, trauma, witnessing violence, mental health diagnosis, self-mutilation, suicide ideation, suicide planning, and somatic problems.
- During the 2019–2020 school year, 1,526 girls came into contact with law enforcement for the first time at school. Though they were all eligible to have received a civil citation alternative to arrest, 22% of girls were still arrested.
- In 2019, Black girls made up 21% of the general population of girls ages 10-17, but they represent 44% of arrested girls, 51% of probation caseloads, 54% of girls in locked residential programs, and 49% of girls transferred or charged into the adult criminal justice system.

Justice systems across the country are reforming due to documented abuse and failures as well as the high cost of incarceration. At the same time, the specific experiences and needs of girls cycling in and out of the justice system are too often overlooked or ignored.

Nothing in current Florida law prevents the arrest of young children, even those under 10. In 2018–2019, Florida police arrested 71 girls aged 10 and under.²⁴ A lack of alternatives in the community fuels this use of the juvenile justice system. Such policies disproportionately impact girls with less serious offenses.

Girls are being pushed out of school and into the juvenile justice system for minor reasons—disorderly conduct (dress code violations, tardiness, disrupting class) and for fighting with peers at school.²⁵ It isn't that girls from marginalized communities and girls of color seriously misbehave more frequently than other girls. Research shows that overly punitive, discriminatory policies are often coupled with counterproductive and dangerous enforcement of school rules and increase girls' likelihood of being pushed out of school through suspensions and school arrests.²⁶ Less is known about how girls impacted by the justice system are experiencing their communities, schools, and home lives. Many of these girls are exposed to multiple forms of trauma, including disconnection from their community, school, and homes, which can significantly impact their well-being.

Policy Recommendations

Advocate for policy reforms.

Reintroduce and pass the Kaia Rolle Act.

- The “Kaia Rolle Act” was added as an amendment from House democratic leader Kionne McGhee to HB7065 companion bill to SB 7040, which died in the 2020 session. Kaia Rolle was a 6-year old girl who was arrested at school in Florida. The story made national headlines. We must prevent this from happening to other children. The bill was amended to state that a child 7 or younger may not be adjudicated delinquent, arrested, or charged with a violation of the law. We support the original bill, which limited arrests of children under the age of 10.

Ban arrests for children under age 10.

The only exception would be that they are an imminent threat of serious harm to another individual.

- See Appendix 1 for District of Columbia General Order Metropolitan Police OPS 305 01. Officers cannot handcuff children aged 12 and under unless the juvenile presents a danger to themselves or others.
- See Appendix 1 for states that have set limits. Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 602 state the minimum age of delinquency in California is 12 except if a child under 12 commits a murder, or rape. Louisiana law La. Child. Code Ann. art. 804(3) and Texas Law, Tex. Fam. Code Ann. § 51.02(2)(A) have set the minimum age for delinquency at 10.

Support pre-arrest diversion components of the School Safety bill SB7040.

- See Appendix 1 for Florida SB 7040, 2020, filed by bill that includes implementation of school code of conduct policies to include criteria for assigning a student to a civil citation or similar prearrest diversion program as an alternative to expulsion or referral to law enforcement agencies. All civil citation or similar prearrest diversion programs must comply with s. 985.12.

Establish protocols between schools and law enforcement.

Define the roles of school resource and law enforcement officers to minimize pushout or criminalization of students.²⁷

- See example MOU for Project FOCUS in Boston between public schools and Boston Police Department, which expresses that law enforcement must only intervene if a student's behavior is a violation of the law, including using, possessing, or distributing alcohol, illegal drugs, and weapons; engaging in gang activity; or incidents of violence. (see Appendix 3)

Amend domestic violence statutes.

Florida law should redefine domestic violence statutorily to exclude cases of intrafamily or home-based conflict by minors, eliminating mandatory arrest and detention provisions for domestic violence by minors, and mandate that home-based intrafamily conflict be handled first through the Department of Children, Youth and Families before a youth is charged with domestic violence.

Amend probation policies.

Shape the statute on technical violations of probation and eligibility for commitment. Mandate training for juvenile probation officers, DJJ commitment managers, and juvenile judges on best practices for non-lawbreaking behaviors.

Modify DJJ policy.

Change YES plan and safety plans to anticipate needs and behaviors based on trauma. Incorporate options when there is family conflict, curfew violations, runaway behaviors, substance use, and not going to school. Implement policies that send data back to the staff or judges that make probation or commitment recommendation. Require that needs and specific types of trauma, such as parent incarceration, death of parent, or sexual abuse guide the development of programs.

Release from custody youth who pose no safety threat.

To the maximum extent possible, release youth from custody to their families and refer them to community-based services during this national emergency of COVID-19, unless there is clear evidence that release would present an unreasonable safety risk to the community.

End harmful institutional practices.

Work with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice to end the institutionalized practices of locking youth in solitary confinement (“medical confinement”), which further traumatizes youth in custody, when youth or staff test positive for COVID-19.

Programming Recommendations

Increase specialized respite services.

Increase services—short-term residential, non-residential, community-based—designed to work with girls and their family members to resolve conflict and reunite families. Respite services provide a safe space. They help prevent girls from going further into the juvenile justice system and help keep families together.

Pilot specialized services.

In existing domestic violence shelters, fund alternatives to detention that provide crisis beds, independent living opportunities, therapeutic substance abuse treatment, and alternatives to traditional schools that meet the needs of youth.

Pilot a female-only probation unit for girls with extensive trauma.

Field test and evaluate the impact of pilot programs in a community, such as girls-only, opportunity-based probation to document long-term outcomes.

Training Recommendations

Increase awareness and understanding of intrafamily conflict.

Train stakeholders on intrafamily conflict (which currently results in domestic violence charges against teenage girls) versus intimate partner violence and the developmentally appropriate system responses and treatment responses.



Develop guidelines and training curriculum.

Convene law enforcement, judges, state attorneys, public defenders, service providers, and advocates to develop guidelines and training curriculum content to the statutes amended (noted above) and to accompany the implementation of updated domestic violence statutes. Ensure that stakeholders understand the complex nature of intrafamily “violence.”

Develop and implement training standards.

Credentials and training needs differ by role of the service provider, but training standards and a developmentally

appropriate curriculum will ensure that staff attain basic competencies. These include intergenerational and historical trauma, systemic racism and bias, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents, and attachment and its impact on all members of the family.

Expand the training framework.

Ensure that training includes an intersectionality framework and adultification concepts. Training must draw on research on differences for girls living in rural communities, best practices for girls who identify as LGBTQ in schools, community-based organizations, and juvenile justice systems.

The Way Forward

The Status of Girls research series documents our progress over the past decades. Gender gaps in testing are closing, and more girls are graduating from school and going to college. Many girls are on track for a prosperous future. However, we must also attend to the challenges that remain and the girls who are being left behind or who are simply invisible.

This report is meant to kickstart a statewide movement. We need specific short- and long-term strategies for overdue and urgently needed reforms. Changing the status quo will require bold leadership and an intentional commitment of time and resources. We must begin by making girls a priority in our local communities and in Florida. When we invest in the well-being of girls, we also invest in our community, our state, and our nation.



Appendix

This appendix is a sample of policies, practices, and resources. We know there are more great resources out there—we invite you to share them. Send info to Takeata King Pang, Executive Director of Women’s Foundation of Florida.

takeata@womensfoundationfl.org

Appendix 1: Sample Policies and Legislation for Review and Consideration

Victimization of Girls

Federal Office of Health and Human Services

- Statutory Rape: A Guide to State Laws and Reporting Requirements

This report is a compilation of state laws and reporting requirements. It provides an overview of state statutory rape laws and reporting requirements and summarizes laws for each state and the District of Columbia. This report is not a legal document but contains useful information to state and federal policymakers on how state statutes address statutory rape.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/75531/report.pdf>

Kentucky

- HB 296 An Act relating to Health Education

This Kentucky bill will require all K–12 public schools to provide comprehensive sexual education. The curricula should be age-appropriate, culturally competent, trauma-informed, and inclusive of all protected groups. The bill defines what the curricula must include, such as consent, gender expression, gender identity, human reproduction, healthy relationships, pregnancy prevention, and sexual development. Instruction must be medically and scientifically accurate and be rooted in research. The bill allows instructors to answer any question regarding sex education initiated by a student.

<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/lrcsearch#tabs-6>

Washington

- Engrossed Substitute S.B. 5395 Sexual Health Education

This Washington state bill requires all K–12 public schools to provide comprehensive sexual health instruction by the 2022–2023 school year. Instruction must be inclusive for all students regardless of their protected group, medically and scientifically accurate, and age-appropriate. Some of the topics that must be included are affirmative consent, bystander training, disease prevention, human development and reproduction, and pregnancy prevention.

<http://lawfilesexet.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5395-S.SL.pdf?q=20201113113036>

Girls' Emotional Well-being

Federal H.R. 3180/Senate Bill 1770

- Resilience Investment, Support and Expansion from Trauma Act (RISE from Trauma Act)

The RISE from Trauma Act sponsored by Rep. Danny Davis and Sen. Dick Durbin. This bill will expire with no movement in 2020. This bill establishes and extends various programs to coordinate and support services for infants, children, youth, and families who have experienced or may experience trauma. These programs include:

- Grants to establish coordinating bodies to create strategic plans to address trauma based on community needs.
- Extension through FY2024 the performance partnership pilot program for children who have experienced trauma.
- Recruitment from communities that have high levels of trauma into the AmeriCorps and the National Health Service Corps programs.

- Grants for comprehensive services and long-term case management to individuals hospitalized for drug overdoses, suicide attempts, or violent injury.
- Grants to states to ensure that health insurance plans comply with mental health parity rules.
- Grants for arts programming for children who have experienced trauma.
- Establishes clinical and early childhood workforce development programs, training and support programs, and toolkits for front-line service providers.
- Grants for clinical training in institutions of higher education, expands the Teacher Quality Partnership grants program, provides grants to support and prevent childhood exposure to substance abuse and violence, and establishes the National Law Enforcement Child and Youth Trauma Coordinating Center to assist local juvenile justice agencies.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3180/text>

Colorado

- House Bill 20-1086

This is the first bill in Denver to require mental health checkup similar to annual physician or dentist visit.

This Denver bill requires health insurance coverage of a preventative, annual mental health wellness exam of up to 60 minutes that is performed by a qualified mental health care provider. Coverage must comply with federal mental health parity laws and not require deductibles, copayments, or coinsurance for the exam.

https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2020A/bills/2020a_1086_ren.pdf

School Safety and Educational Attainment

Florida

- H.B. 7065 (2020) the “Kaia Rolle Act”

Children under age 7 may not be adjudicated delinquent.

Eskamani and Sen. Randolph Bracy (D-Orlando) filed bills to set limits on juvenile arrests, but they were never heard. They would have prevented children under age 12 from being arrested, unless they are an imminent threat of serious harm to another individual. Michigan

Michigan

- Public Act 360-366 of 2016; 394-402; 361

Ends mandatory expulsions and suspension and encourages restorative practices.

Public Act 360-366 repeals zero-tolerance laws, requiring that certain factors, like age and disciplinary history, must be considered before suspending a student. It mandates schools to implement restorative justice in their discipline practices.

<https://www.studentadvocacycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/RethinkDiscipline-KeyChanges.pdf?189db0>

Public Acts 394-402 of 2016 limit the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

[http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(vicvib1jy2qslrdav0smteuq\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-380-1307](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(vicvib1jy2qslrdav0smteuq))/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-380-1307)

Public Act 361 declares that a school board or its designee must consider using restorative practices as an alternative or addition to suspension or expulsion. It also details what a restorative practice may include, such as victim-offender conferences.

<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2015-2016/publicact/htm/2016-PA-0361.htm>

District of Columbia

- Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018

Establishes limits on the use of suspension.

District of Columbia Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018, limits the use of suspension of students Pre-K–8 and grades 9–12, unless the student has caused or attempted to cause bodily injury or emotional distress to another person. Students cannot be suspended five consecutive school days in grades K–5 and ten consecutive days in grades 6–12. Students in grades 9–12 cannot be suspended for a school dress code violation. The bill also notes that students cannot be denied access to academic work to earn credit during their suspension.

https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/page_content/attachments/District%20of%20Columbia%20Student%20Discipline%20Guide.pdf

<https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/22-157.html>

Louisiana

- Act No. 248

This bill prohibits suspending pre-K–5 students for uniform violations.

No public or charter school can suspend or expel a pre-K–5 student from school or from riding a school bus for a uniform violation that is not tied to willful disregard of school policies.

<http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=960304>

Virginia

- § 22.1-279.3:1 of the Code of Virginia

Relating to school principals; incident reports.

Laws passed in Virginia to remove the option for schools to insist students be charged with disorderly conduct if they misbehave in school and to give school leaders more power to decide whether a student’s behavior requires police involvement. The Governor is expected to sign.

<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+ful+SB729ER&201+ful+SB729ER>

California

- Senate Bill No. 188 CHAPTER 58 “the Crown Act”

Anti-Discrimination Hair Bill

First passed in California, the CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair) Act provides the right for all to wear natural hairstyles without fear of repercussions at school and work. This Act specifies that hair discrimination targeting hairstyles associated with race is racial discrimination. This bill has inspired similar legislation in New York and New Jersey.

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB188

United States House of Representatives

- H.R.5325 Ending PUSHOUT Act of 2019

To reduce exclusionary discipline practices in schools, and for other purposes.

The Ending Punitive, Unfair, School-based Harm that is Overt and Unresponsive to Trauma Act of 2019 aims to strengthen data collection related to exclusionary discipline, eliminate the discriminatory use and overuse of exclusionary discipline, and prevent criminalization and pushout of students from school. A special focus and mention of Black and brown girls and support for students with mental health needs or trauma experience is mentioned. This bill is built from the research of Monique W. Morris, Ed.D.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5325/text>

Juvenile Justice Involvement

District of Columbia

- General Order Metropolitan Police OPS 305 01

No handcuffing policy under age 12.

Officers cannot handcuff juveniles age 12 and under unless the juvenile presents a danger to themselves or others. When handcuffing juveniles aged 13–17, officers must consider the severity and circumstances of the offense.

https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/GO_305_01.pdf

Florida

- SB 578: Juvenile Justice

Sets a limit on the age a child can be adjudicated delinquent, arrested, or charged with a crime; authorizes children of at least a specified age, rather than of any age, to be taken into custody under certain circumstances; requires that children who are taken into custody pursuant to certain circuit court orders be treated in a specified manner and be detained only pursuant to specified findings.

Florida

- Florida CS/SB7040 (2020 sponsor Sen. Manny Diaz) and CS/HB 7065 School Safety (sponsor Rep. Ralph Massullo)

Support for the reintroduction of following components of the bill:

- Universal supports for schools to promote psychological well-being and safe and supportive environments.
- School code of conduct policies to include criteria for assigning a student to a civil citation or similar prearrest diversion program that is an alternative to expulsion or referral to law enforcement agencies. All civil citation or similar prearrest diversion programs must comply with s. 985.12.
- Requires school officers to complete mental health crisis intervention training using a curriculum developed by a national organization with expertise in mental health crisis intervention. The training must improve officers' knowledge and skills as first responders to incidents involving students with emotional disturbance or mental illness, including de-escalation skills to ensure student and officer safety.
- Provides for number and ratio of students to school social workers, school psychologists, and certified school counselors employed by the district or charter school and the total number of licensed mental health.
- CS/CS/SB7040: Implementation of the Recommendations of the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Public Safety Commission sponsored by Sen. Manny Diaz adopted the Kaia Rolle Act as included in the

House companion bill HB7065 sponsored by Rep. Ralph Massullo. The House version adopted the Kaia Rolle Act added by an amendment from the House Democratic Leader Kionne McGhee.

- CS/CS/SB7040 Implementation of the Recommendations of the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Public Safety Commission (sponsor Sen. Manny Diaz) and CS/ HB7065 School Safety (sponsor Rep. Ralph Massullo) both include amendment that adopted the Kaia Rolle Act.

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2020/7040>

Texas

- Texas Law, Tex. Fam. Code Ann. § 51.02(2)(A) sets the age when a child is can be considered delinquent at the age of ten.

<https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/FA/htm/FA.51.htm#51.02>

California

- California law Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 602 state the minimum age of delinquency in California is 12 years old except if a child under 12 commits a murder, or rape.

http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=WIC§ionNum=602

Louisiana

- Louisiana law La. Child. Code Ann. art. 804(3), set the minimum age of delinquency at age ten.

<http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/Law.aspx?p=y&d=73392>

Appendix 2: Promising Initiatives

Victimization of Girls

Open Doors Outreach Network

Open Doors Outreach Network is a program that operates in partnership with Voices for Florida. Open Doors works with individuals who have been sexually exploited and are victims of human trafficking. It serves individuals ages 10–24 regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Individuals receive care management and counseling services from a team of clinicians, advocates and survivor mentors.

<https://www.seethegirl.org/what-we-do/programming/>

Girls' Emotional Well-being

Girl Matters: Continuity of Care Model Programming

The goals of the model are to slow down the conveyor belt of girls going deeper into the justice system and stop the revolving door of girls who cycle in and out due to unaddressed mental health needs by increasing access to therapeutic services and providing advocacy within a continuity of care with girls who are on probation, in detention, in residential placement, or transitioning back to the local community. The model not only addresses the immediate needs of girls but focuses on their overall health in the context of their experiences. The services address high-risk behaviors that have become girls' strategies to cope or disassociate (substance use, withdrawal, aggression, running away) through therapeutic interventions that help girls develop coping skills, and increase their sense of self and value. Services are provided when a girl transitions to another phase in the juvenile justice system. Staff is available for girls 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

<https://www.seethegirl.org/what-we-do/programming/>

Young Women's Freedom Center (San Francisco)

A leadership and advocacy organization that works with systems-impacted girls, women, and transgender, gender non-conforming (TGNC) people. They conduct peer-based outreach, advocacy, and crisis intervention. They partner with other organizations to provide educational opportunities to acquire high school diplomas, GEDs, and navigate college.

- Leadership development
- Housing and reentry
- Court support and advocacy to reduce sentencing
- Advocacy and support for pregnant and parenting mothers
- Training and Education

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

School Safety and Educational Attainment

Girl Matters: It's Elementary®

The goal of Girl Matters®: It's Elementary is to reduce the suspension/expulsion of elementary school girls by intervening early with comprehensive girl-centered, culturally competent services that increase school connectedness and promote educational success and well-being. The Girl Matters program provides intensive in-school services to provide teachers an alternative to suspension and help girls to develop social and emotional skills needed to keep them feeling connected to school. Staff help identify, assess, and better respond to the mental health needs of girls that can result in suspension, transfer to alternative schools, Baker Acts, or even arrests. Girls receive individualized interventions that address underlying issues contributing to their acting out behaviors (trauma, family stressors) and are provided with one-to-one sessions focused on their personal safety, relationships, communication, emotions and identity.

<https://www.seethegirl.org/what-we-do/programming/>

Columbus City Prep School for Girls

An all-girls school that practices a restorative school discipline. Administration focuses on addressing the underlying causes of behavior. Each student is paired with an adult to receive one-on-one care and support. The school offers a Student Wellness Center and a Learning Lounge Inspiration Stations. These are quiet therapeutic spaces where girls can engage in yoga, meditation, music, and reading. Teachers are trained to use alternatives before taking disciplinary action. Additionally, the principal provides ongoing training and programming for both teachers and parents.

<https://www.ccsosoh.us/columbuscityschoolforgirls>

PACE Center for Girls

PACE Center for Girls is a non-residential, alternative high school. The Program model is research-based and emphasizes academics and social services and has been proven to keep girls out of the juvenile justice system. Girls and young women are provided with education, counseling, training, and advocacy. While at PACE, girls are offered small classes, a personal counselor, and emotional support. They are able to catch up academically, graduate, and go on to college or begin their careers.

<https://www.pacecenter.org>

Juvenile Justice Involvement

See Above (Girl Matters®: Continuity of Care Model Programming)

Focused Attention for Priority Populations

Literacy Innovation in Rural Education through Collaboration (LIREC)

LIREC is a project specifically designed for rural settings and focuses on building sustainable local capacity instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Their efforts target professional educators and learning organizations to provide Professional Learning Opportunities and Summer Learning Labs related to research-based literacy instruction. It also offers an online network to address rural teaching inquiries and works to increase access to high-quality early reading materials. A major component of LIREC is community engagement, working to help communities identify and leverage their own resources. LIREC is funded by a federal Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant.

<https://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=3256>

The Supporting LGBTQ Youth Certificate Program

Offered through the Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR), this certificate program is aimed at helping shape organizational cultures and approaches to support the safety and well-being of LGBTQ youth. This includes guidance on how to develop effective policies, training, and data evaluation efforts; better identify and effectively engage LGBTQ youth and their families; build community capacity to serve this population; and develop comprehensive and multi-faceted strategies and supports that promote positive youth development. Attention is paid to the prevalence of multi-system involvement and compounding issues of implicit bias and stigma, racial and ethnic disparities, homelessness and commercial sexual exploitation of LGBTQ youth.

<https://cjjr.georgetown.edu/certificate-programs/supporting-lgbtq-youth/>

Black Girls Create

Black Girls Create is a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) program developed by Dr. LaShawnda Lindsay to provide STEM opportunities for underserved girls and to foster a desire to pursue careers in the STEM fields. The program uses evidence-based methods to interest more Black girls in STEM and show them the opportunities STEM presents. The program is funded by the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation and Remmer Family Foundation. Black Girls Create builds on the notion of providing informal learning spaces to underserved girls with access to quality and culturally relevant STEM activities in their schools. The research will determine the impact a gender-specific, culturally responsive program will have on Black girls' self-efficacy in science, math, and technology, as well as how it will impact the racial and gender identifies of Black girls.

<https://www.wcwonline.org/Active-Projects/the-black-girls-create-project-a-pilot-culturally-responsive-informal-stem-learning-program>

Young Women's Freedom Center (San Francisco)

(See description under Girls' Emotional Well-being)

Appendix 3: Additional Resources and Toolkits

Victimization of Girls

Trauma/Healing Centered Schools and Community

Gender and Trauma: Somatic Interventions for Girls in Juvenile Justice

In light of the prevalence of trauma exposure among system-involved girls, Georgetown’s Center on Poverty and Inequality’s report discusses ways that are trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and culturally competent yoga and mindfulness programs can address impacts of trauma.

<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/gender-and-trauma-1.pdf>

Children’s Resilience Initiative—Walla Walla, Washington

Children’s Resilience Initiative launched in 2009 in Walla Walla, Washington, and continues to inform people and organizations about adverse childhood experiences, helps implement trauma-informed and resilience-building practices, and helps evaluate the impact of those practices. Recently, CRI signed a contract with Head Start Trauma Start and began implementing a training program.

<https://communityresiliencycookbook.org/tastes-of-success/the-walla-walla-washington-story/the-walla-walla-washington-update/>

Stop Sexual Violence: Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence

A toolkit developed by the Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This was designed to be used by communities to focus on prevention activities that had the greatest potential to reduce sexual violence; and provide opportunities to support and empower girls and women.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

Girls’ Emotional Well-being

PRAPARE Implementation and Action Toolkit

The Protocol for Responding to and Assessing Patients’ Assets, Risks, and Experiences (PRAPARE) is a national effort to help healthcare providers collect and apply the data necessary for them to understand their patients’ social determinants of health. PRAPARE is a standardized risk assessment tool and a process for addressing social determinants of health.

<https://www.nachc.org/research-and-data/prapare/toolkit/>

School Safety and Educational Attainment

Massachusetts Advocates for Children Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative: Helping Traumatized Children Learn

In collaboration with Harvard Law School, educators, parents, communities, and mental health professionals, Helping Traumatized Children Learn works to ensure that children exposed to family violence succeed in school. This report contains an educational policy agenda that will assist schools in becoming supportive environments for children with trauma.

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Helping-Traumatized-Children-Learn.pdf>

Compassionate Schools—Learning and Teaching Support, Washington State

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Compassionate Schools Initiative provides resources to schools aiming to consider a trauma-responsive infrastructure. Compassionate Schools focus on helping teachers understand brain development, interpret and negate behaviors with compassion, implement social-emotional curricula, and more. The initiative cites decreases in absenteeism and disciplinary referrals and increases in engagement and achievement. Schools develop the program based on the handbook and implement what works best for its teachers.

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/health-safety/mental-social-behavioral-health/compassionate-schools-learning-and-teaching-support>

Be Her Resource Toolkit (National Black Women’s Justice & Georgetown)- 2018

The Be Her Resource Toolkit focuses on school resource officers and girls of color, offering findings from focus groups and interviews with school resource officers and girls of color. Based on their findings, the toolkit presents guiding principles and policy recommendations to improve relationships with officers and reduce disproportionate rates of contact with the juvenile justice system.

https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/05/17_SRO-final-Acc.pdf

Education Law Center: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools

This issue brief details how educators can begin to understand the role of trauma and its effect on learning and how educators can effectively respond to children affected by trauma. It also discusses evidence-based approaches, including the initiatives in Massachusetts and Washington, and recommendations for teachers and administrators.

<https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf>

Restorative Justice and School Connectedness for Girls Issue Brief

Georgetown’s Law Center on Poverty and Inequality’s issue brief on Increasing School Connectedness for Girls through Restorative Justice as a Health Equity Resource discusses the potential of restorative justice in schools and policy recommendations.

<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/03/Restorative-Justice-as-a-Health-Equity-Resource.pdf>

Restorative Interventions Implementation Toolkit

The Minnesota Department of Education’s Restorative Interventions Implementation Toolkit helps educators assess readiness, implementation, and outcomes of restorative justice curriculum and can be used as guidance for implementing school-based restorative models .

Restorative Practices in Schools Toolkit

The Restorative Practices toolkit is a free, online guide to resources for educators regarding restorative practices in schools. It includes definitions, implementation, sustaining, evaluating, and “whole-school approach” resources.

Juvenile Justice Involvement

Alliance for Girls—Achieving Equity for Girls of Color: Meeting Girls’ Needs Initiative

This toolkit is designed for community-based organizations to launch a “Meeting Girls’ Needs Initiative” in local schools. Based on the success of a pilot project in Oakland to increase equity for girls and reduce the school-to-prison pipeline, this toolkit is designed to help other communities launch a similar initiative.

<https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/Achieving-Equity-for-Girls-of-Color-MGN-Model.pdf>

Focused Attention for Priority Populations

Let Her Learn Toolkit (National Women’s Law Center)

This toolkit provides information on disproportionalities in school discipline for Black girls, civil rights laws that protect students, and a checklist for determining whether a school’s policies are fair. It also provides action steps for parents and community members.

https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/final_nwlc_NOVO2016Toolkit.pdf

Sample Policy Recommendations from Girls in Boston/Project Focus

The National Black Women’s Justice Institute and Boston City Councilor At-Large Ayanna Pressley’s initiative for safe learning conditions for girls of color, Project Focus, led focus groups and public hearings. Their policy recommendations are a summary of evidence-based practices and innovative solutions informed by their project (including protocol agreement between Boston Public Schools and Boston Police Department).

https://950b1543-bc84-4d80-ae48-656238060c23.filesusr.com/ugd/0c71ee_771165dfa8bc4af19374610989ab1e4a.pdf

Know Your Rights Resource Guide—La Villita Se Defiende

The Know Your Rights Resource guide is a 90-minute program guide and compilation of resources for facilitators/social workers to use to teach youth about their rights and support services as immigrants.

<https://www.alliance4girls.org/assets/docs/Resource-docs/KYR-for-Youth-Package.pdf>

<https://www.alliance4girls.org/resources/>

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