

Advocating  
for  
**Equity**  
for  
**Black Girls:**

**THE FORMATION OF  
THE BLACK GIRLS  
EQUITY ALLIANCE**

Commissioned through the  
Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute  
at Gwen's Girls

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**BLACK GIRLS EQUITY ALLIANCE  
MISSION STATEMENT:**

To eradicate  
inequities affecting  
Black Girls in  
Allegheny County.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

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# Executive Summary

This report describes the development of the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA). BGEA is comprised of individuals, community-based organizations, universities, and government entities that work with Black girls. We acknowledge that their lives and experiences are unique within existing societal constructs. **Our mission is accomplished by informing providers, communities, and systems about best practices for supporting Black girls and advocating for policy changes that will improve their lives.**

The Black Girls Equity Alliance is overseen by the Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute. The Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute (GJEI) is an interprofessional research and consultation institute formed to support research, provide training, and serve as a clearinghouse for best practices in research and programming for girls and young women, with an emphasis on the experiences of Black girls. GJEI led the formation of a regional alliance focused on Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (and Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh is located) bringing together numerous agencies to advocate with and for Black girls.

**BGEA is divided into four working groups**, each one working to address the inequities Black girls experience in their respective systems:



**HEALTH AND WELLNESS**



**CHILD WELFARE**



**JUVENILE JUSTICE**



**EDUCATION**

Much of the work of GJEI and BGEA would not be possible without the generous support of the FISA Foundation and the Heinz Endowments. This report represents the views of the authors alone.



# Why Black Girls?

## A National Perspective

A growing body of work demonstrates the inequities and disparities that Black girls experience in several social systems. For example, **Black girls in the U.S. are five times more likely than White girls to be suspended from school**, often for subjective behaviors.<sup>1</sup> They are also **three times more likely than White girls to be referred to**

**the juvenile justice system**,<sup>2</sup> even though there are no meaningful differences in the types of behaviors that lead to juvenile court referrals among Black and White girls.<sup>3,4</sup> Within physical and mental health realms, scholars often report the discrepancies between Black and White girls; however, they are often presented as individual issues,

with insufficient recognition of the systemic causes and barriers to access for appropriate mental and physical health care.

Nationally, **37% of Black girls live in poverty**, compared with just 12% of White girls.<sup>5</sup> Living in poverty increases girls' risk of abuse and exploitation, which also increases involvement in the child welfare system. Researchers found that **Black girls living in impoverished neighborhoods experience depression more often than their White counterparts and have less access to treatment**.<sup>6</sup> Thus, inequities that Black girls face in various systems are interrelated and compounding, all of which are magnified by implicit and explicit bias and the adultification of Black girls.<sup>7</sup> As Epstein and colleagues note, "Adultification contributes to a false narrative that Black youths' transgressions are intentional and malicious, instead of the result of immature decision-making—a key characteristic of childhood" (p. 6).<sup>8</sup>

# 5x

more likely than White girls to be suspended from school

# 3x

more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile justice system

# 37%

of Black girls in the U.S. live in poverty compared with just 12% of White girls increases girls' risk of abuse and exploitation



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Civil rights data collection. Washington, DC: Author.  
<sup>2</sup> Hockenberry, S., and Puzanchera, C. (2018). Juvenile court statistics 2016. Pittsburgh, PA: NCJJ.  
<sup>3</sup> Goodkind, S. (2016). *Inequities affecting Black girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh, PA: FISA Foundation and Heinz Endowments.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, J. M., Jr., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C., & Bachman, J. (2008). Racial/ethnic and gender differences in school discipline among American high school students: 1991-2005. *The Negro Educational Review*, 59(1/2), 47-62.  
<sup>5</sup> Children's Defense Fund (2015). *Child poverty in America 2014: National analysis*. New York, NY.  
<sup>6</sup> Bridge, J. A. et al. (2018). Age-related racial disparity in suicide rates among US youths from 2001 through 2015. *JAMA Pediatrics* 172(7), 697-9.

# What is Happening in Western Pennsylvania?

The oppression of Black girls exemplified by national statistics on their victimization and system involvement is mirrored in local statistics in Western Pennsylvania. In fact, it is these statistics that motivated local service providers,

systems professionals, academics, and other community members to come together to form the Black Girls Equity Alliance. The particular experiences of Black girls are often rendered invisible, even by those invested in social justice who are focusing either on the experiences of girls (which too often becomes the experiences of *White* girls) or the experiences of Black children (which too often becomes the experiences of Black *boys*). Black girls have unique experiences of marginalization that racial and gender frameworks often miss when these forms of oppression are examined separately. It is thus important to utilize an intersectional perspective.<sup>7</sup> The variables of race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, and social class are essential to explore when working with Black girls. Examining these intersections provides a better understanding of Black girls' particular experiences.

# 55%

of Black girls in Pittsburgh live in poverty compared with just 15% of White girls

# 2/3

of Black girls in Pittsburgh under age 5 live in poverty



Black girls are more likely than White girls to experience teen dating violence, rape, and other violent threats or injuries

## Systemic Inequities Affecting Black Girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

**In Pittsburgh, 55% of Black girls live in poverty**, compared with 15% of White girls.<sup>10</sup> Focusing on young girls, **two-thirds of Black girls in Pittsburgh under age 5 live in poverty**. Living in poverty makes girls more vulnerable to abuse, a vulnerability exemplified in data from a recent survey of a representative sample of youth in Allegheny County, which revealed that Black girls disproportionately experience many forms of victimization and trauma.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, this survey found that **Black girls are more likely than White girls to experience teen dating violence, rape, and other violent threats or injuries**.

**HEALTH AND WELLNESS:** A large body of research demonstrates a range of **physical and mental health inequities experienced by Black girls**, including rates of depression and ADHD, obesity and Type 2 diabetes, asthma, and STIs and teen pregnancy rates. Yet, many local Black girls are not receiving needed medical care.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, **27% of Black girls**, compared with 10% of White girls, reported that during the previous year they had **believed they needed to see a doctor, nurse, or to go to the emergency room but were not able to go**. Further, in Allegheny County, one-quarter of Black adolescent girls reported feeling depressed in the previous year.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Epstein, R., Blake, J., & González, T. (2017). *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-168.

<sup>10</sup> Allegheny County Department of Human Services. (2016). *The state of girls in Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh, PA: Author.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, E. et al. (2015). *Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

# 60%

of Black girls' juvenile justice referrals in Allegheny County in 2018 were for "school-related" offenses

# 3x

as likely as White girls to be suspended from school, with 20% of Black girls receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions each year



**EDUCATION:** Black girls in Pittsburgh Public Schools are more than **three times as likely as White girls to be suspended** from school, with 20% of Black girls receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions each year.<sup>14</sup> At times, Black girls are pushed out of school for behaviors that other girls do but for which they are not disciplined.<sup>15</sup> Racialized and gendered stereotypes about Black girls, including the adultification that many experience, may cause teachers and other authority figures to label them insubordinate or disrespectful.<sup>16</sup> Black girls are especially likely to be disciplined for subjective behaviors, such as defiance and disrespect. In the 2017-2018 school year, Black youth in Allegheny County were approximately **10 times more likely than White youth to be suspended for conduct** (the only subjective

category).<sup>17</sup> The higher suspension of Black girls from school can influence their academic achievement. They are often tracked into lower-level sections of courses such as math and science and encouraged to excel in sports and music.<sup>18</sup> The school-to-prison pipeline has been well documented for Black boys but less so for Black girls. It is notable that **60% of Black girls' juvenile justice referrals in Allegheny County in 2018 were for "school-related" offenses**, while for White girls, just 38% of referrals were school-related.<sup>19</sup>

**CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE:** Black girls in Allegheny County are **four times more likely than White girls to be referred to the child welfare system**, to be investigated by child welfare, to have

their cases accepted for service, and to be removed from their homes.<sup>20</sup> **Black girls are 13 times more likely than White girls to be arrested by the Pittsburgh Police.**<sup>21</sup> Black girls in Allegheny County are referred to the juvenile court at a rate ten times that of White girls.<sup>22</sup> Complicating the problem further, Black girls in Allegheny County are **less likely to benefit from diversion programs**, with only 40% of Black girls in diverted from formal processing in the juvenile justice system, compared to 47% of White girls.<sup>23</sup> In sum, Black girls are experiencing numerous, interrelated systemic inequities that cannot be addressed by supporting individual girls, but rather require organized, collective advocacy for structural change.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Civil rights data collection. Washington, DC: Author.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout*. New York: The New Press.

<sup>16</sup> Epstein, R., Blake, J., & González, T. (2017). *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*. Washington, DC: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality.

<sup>17</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Education Safe Schools Online, <https://www.safeschools.state.pa.us>.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, T. T. (2018). Black girl cartography: Black girlhood and place-making in education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 42(1), 28-45.

<sup>19</sup> Juvenile Offense Trends: Interactive Dashboard, <https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/>

<sup>20</sup> Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning, March 27, 2019 (based on 2018 data).

<sup>21</sup> Pittsburgh Bureau of Police, Crime Analysis Department, 2018 data & U.S. Census Bureau 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

<sup>22</sup> Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Annual Reports. Accessed online at: [https://www.alleghenycountycourts.us/annual\\_reports/default.aspx?show=jk1ESCr7p60PFtIFDv8bppeHmgcUjgHf](https://www.alleghenycountycourts.us/annual_reports/default.aspx?show=jk1ESCr7p60PFtIFDv8bppeHmgcUjgHf) and Puzzanhera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2018). "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2017."

<sup>23</sup> Goodkind, S. (2016). *Inequities affecting Black girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh, PA: FISA Foundation and Heinz Endowments.

## Gwen's Girls

**G**wen's Girls, a 501(c)(3) organization was founded in 2002 by retired Pittsburgh Police Department Commander Gwendolyn J. Elliott. Elliott was one of the first female police officers for the Pittsburgh Police Department and went on to become the first Black female commander. During her law enforcement career, Commander Elliott also worked with the Office of Family, Violence, Youth, and Missing Persons. Witnessing the community, school, and home-life factors that made girls vulnerable to violence, abuse, neglect, and subsequent child welfare and juvenile justice involvement, Elliott established Gwen's Girls Incorporated to respond to the needs of girls. Specifically, community agencies lacked the resources to cater to the unique

needs of girls, and thus Gwen's Girls established its mission: **"To empower girls and young women to have productive lives through holistic, gender-specific programs, education, and experiences."**

Following the death of Gwen Elliott in 2007, the founding Executive Director Lynn Knezevich continued the work that she and Elliott started. For the past 17 years, Gwen's Girls has served over 5,000 girls through after-school, residential, school-based and community-based programs and services. On average, Gwen's Girls provides support to 100 girls and their families on a daily basis. Ms. Knezevich retired in 2015. The legacy continues through Gwen's daughter, Dr. Kathi R. Elliott, the current Executive Director of Gwen's Girls (2015-present). As a visionary leader, Dr. Elliott is purposed to lead Gwen's Girls in becoming a

well-recognized forerunner in the integration of evidence-based clinical prevention and intervention policies and practices that enhance the child and social welfare system. In addition to direct service, Gwen's Girls is committed to advancing knowledge, research, and advocacy around issues that affect girls- particularly black girls. **The goal is to change and shift the narrative of "fixing" the girl to "fixing" the systems that are supposed to nurture and protect them.** Dr. Elliott expanded the membership and function of the GJEI, as well as led the convening of the inaugural Equity Summit to address the racial and gender biases that exist within the juvenile justice, health and wellness, child welfare, and education systems. This also led to the formation of BGEA. Information about both of these system-changing initiatives is described below.

## The Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute

**I**n 2015, Gwen's Girls established the Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute (GJEI) in conjunction with local practitioners and university researchers to expand its service provision to include advocacy and program delivery for systemic change. In the vein of breaking barriers, the Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute was created to **focus on the importance of systems change** by harnessing the expertise of individuals to engage in research, provide training, and serve as a clearinghouse for best practices in research and programming to empower young women and girls.

The mission of the Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute is to provide expertise in the fields of research and training

for individuals and organizations working with girls. GJEI board members carry out this mission by pursuing grant-funded research endeavors, presenting at local

and national conferences, writing publications, offering a speaker's bureau, and serving as a research advisory board for research to be conducted at Gwen's Girls.

### GJEI ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

- **Kimberly Booth**, Allegheny County Juvenile Probation
- **Betty Braxter**, Ph.D., CNM, University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing
- **Britney G Brinkman, Ph.D.**, Point Park University
- **Amanda Cross, Ph.D.**, University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development
- **Willa Doswell, RN, Ph.D., FAAN**, University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing
- **Sara Goodkind, Ph.D., MSW**, University of Pittsburgh
- **Nancy Hubley, Esq.**, Education Law Center
- **Andrea Joseph, PhD**, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- **Lynn Knezevich, MSW**, Gwen's Girls volunteer and past Executive Director
- **Azadeh Masalehdan Block, Ph.D., MSW**, California University of PA
- **Jessica Ruffin, MBA**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Angela Steele, MSW**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Melissa Swauger, Ph.D.**, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

# Formation of the Black Girls Equity Alliance

In 2016, Gwen's Girls held its first annual Equity Summit, where over 150 local practitioners, community members, and policymakers gathered together to learn about research about Black girls within the community. Data from the report *Inequities Affecting Black Girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* were presented, with discussions about the inequities Black girls were facing throughout numerous systems in the region. Many attendees

expressed an interest in continuing the dialogues after the summit and working to take actionable steps to address the disparities. In the spring of 2017, the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) was formed. The Black Girls Equity Alliance is overseen by the Gwendolyn J. Elliott Institute and is comprised of individuals, community-based organizations, universities, and government entities that work with Black girls and acknowledge that their lives and experiences are unique within existing societal constructs. Gwen's Girls hosted additional Equity Summits in 2017 and 2018 and will continue to host summits each fall.

BGEA works as an interprofessional alliance<sup>24</sup> seeking to inform providers, communities, and systems about best practices for supporting Black girls and advocating for policy changes that will improve their lives. Individual and organizational members work collaboratively, sharing resources, and decision-making power. Ultimately, BGEA has created a space for collaborative interdisciplinary initiatives, data-driven problem solving, participatory action research, and the honing of community resources to better serve the needs of Black girls across institutions in the realms of health and wellness, education, juvenile justice, and child welfare. Members of BGEA come from a range of backgrounds, training, and credentials, but we work toward common goals with some shared values.

## BGEA Values

- 1 Center the voices of Black girls:** "Nothing about us, without us," is a guiding principle of all our work. We integrate the expertise, voices, and lived experiences of Black girls throughout our work. Black girls' perspectives inform the research projects we undertake, the areas of advocacy we pursue, and the strategies for change we engage. Black girls are directly involved in all of the activities of BGEA.
- 2 Emphasize structural changes:** We believe that adults are integral to undoing the gendered racism within our systems that disproportionately impact Black girls, and we should not simply expect Black girls to be "resilient" in the face of structural inequities. Data about the discrepancies in outcomes for Black girls must be understood within a framework of equity that addresses the systemic barriers that lead to inequities in individual girls' experiences.
- 3 Apply an intersectionality framework:** Our work with Black girls is situated within an intersectionality framework, building upon the work of Black feminist activists and scholars, including Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>25</sup> Patricia Hill Collins,<sup>26</sup> and others. Intersectionality theory provides a framework for exploring how Black girls' multiple social identities are important in understanding their individual lived experiences and as such we examine how sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism all inform Black girls' lives.
- 4 Utilize community-based participatory research methods:** CBPAR has been advocated as an approach for research to uproot inequities because it engages researchers, community members, practitioners to work collaboratively to generate ideas and solutions. We integrate research, advocacy, and practice, using CBPAR to help bridge the gaps that commonly exist between researchers and community members.<sup>27</sup>
- 5 Create opportunities for Black girls to thrive:** As we work to uproot the structural causes of the inequities Black girls experience, we support and promote programs and approaches that create opportunities for Black girls to thrive in the face of these challenges. We emphasize empowerment models that promote self-worth, self-efficacy, and critical consciousness-raising. We recognize that Black girls engage in forms of resistance to oppression that are often minimized, silenced, or punished. We utilize a trauma-informed lens to understand how Black girls' experiences of personal and community trauma influence their reactions, behaviors, and perspectives.<sup>28</sup> We celebrate the strengths of Black girls throughout everything we do.

<sup>24</sup> Arredondo, P., Shealy, C., Neale, M., & Winfrey, L. L. (2004). Consultation and interprofessional collaboration: Modeling for the future. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 60*(7), 787-800.

<sup>25</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 139*-168.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, P. H. (2009). *Another kind of public education: Race, schools, the media, and democratic possibilities*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

<sup>27</sup> Wallerstein, N. B., & Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health promotion practice, 7*(3), 312-323.

<sup>28</sup> Classen, C. C., & Clark, C. S. (2017). Trauma-informed care. *APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology, 2*, 515-541.

# Black Girls Equity Alliance Working Groups

Given the identity-based bias Black girls experience for both their race and gender, collaborative, multi-systems work is needed to reduce their vulnerability across communities and within systems. The Black Girls Equity Alliance consists of four working groups—Health and Wellness, Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Education—each one dedicated to a system that Black girls often interface with during their daily lives. GJEL committee members serve as workgroup leaders in their area of expertise and collaborate with community leaders, practitioners, and researchers. The four BGEA workgroups have conducted research and/or engaged with stakeholders to effect change for Black girls. Below, we provide examples of some of the initiatives led by the working groups. Additional information about each of these initiatives will be available in reports released by each working group and made available on the Black Girls Equity Alliance website.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Working Group Coordinator:  
Britney G Brinkman, Ph.D.

The purpose of the Health and Wellness working group is to promote the health and well-being of Black girls across physical and mental health domains. Our goal is to support Black girls in obtaining accurate health information and services by building the capacity of providers to deliver trauma-informed care and comprehensive sex education. The Health and Wellness group works to support holistic well-being for Black girls by addressing barriers to comprehensive, evidence-informed, and culturally responsive care.

### Comprehensive sex education:

One of the subcommittees of the Health and Wellness working group includes researchers, clinicians, and individuals from local organizations focused on reproductive health. The subcommittee completed a needs assessment examining access to comprehensive sex education throughout Western Pennsylvania. Members of this committee also partnered to analyze county-wide STI and teen pregnancy rate data. Together, results from the comprehensive sex education survey and the county-wide STI and teen pregnancy rate data will assist the committee in understanding possible service delivery gaps and develop steps to create data-informed interventions to curb the rate of STI's and unwanted pregnancies among girls. Ultimately, this multi-agency



collaborative will empower Black girls to make informed decisions about their health, sexuality, and family planning.

### Intersectional trauma-informed

**care training:** Another subcommittee of the Health and Wellness group focuses on trauma-informed care training providing a socio-historical and intersectional perspective on the intergenerational and present-day traumas experienced by Black women and girls. The group emphasizes training in trauma-informed care *specifically for Black girls*. We developed a Professional Learning Community (PLC) entitled, Pathways to Resiliency and Well-Being for Black Girls Who Have Experienced Trauma. This PLC helps participants comprehend the neurobiology of trauma; understand the historical, social, and political context of the traumatization of Black girls; and prepare participants to implement an organizational initiative, pilot program, or change to service delivery that will provide pathways to resilience and well-being for Black girls who have experienced trauma.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

Working Group Coordinators: Kimberly Booth, MA & Sara Goodkind, Ph.D.

The purpose of the Juvenile Justice working group is to collaborate with local law enforcement officials to identify communities with the highest referral rates for Black girls, the associated behaviors, and changes to partner with local diversion programs, community members, and policymakers to reduce rates of referral. Given the high referral rates across similar communities to the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, the juvenile justice and child welfare workgroups have partnered to focus their advocacy and systems change efforts on communities with the highest referral rates. We have focused on outreach and community engagement with individuals, groups, and agencies working on these and similar issues. Of particular concern in both systems is inequitable treatment regarding status offenses and minor charges. In child welfare, these present as parent-child conflict, truancy, or “acting out” behaviors. In the juvenile justice system, Black girls are sometimes referred for offenses for which other youth may be referred to services.

BGEA is partnering with leaders within law enforcement and the judicial system to understand the referral and placement trends of girls within our county. Through data-sharing agreements, this workgroup has been able to identify communities with the highest referral rates for Black girls. This information has been used to



collaborate with diversion programs, as well as to inform practitioners and elected officials. Given the findings highlighted through data-sharing, funding was obtained from local community foundations to create a publicly available and searchable database to increase research related to juvenile justice inequities. This new data source, called a data dashboard, has enabled us to pinpoint the neighborhoods from which Black girls are referred and for which offenses. The data particularly highlighted the fact that many referrals of Black girls come from school police and/or what are termed “school-related” offenses. As a result, the juvenile justice workgroup has been meeting with the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police as well as Pittsburgh Public Schools Police to learn more about their interactions with Black girls and their arrests and referrals of Black girls. We have also collaborated with the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police’s Crime Analysis Department to gain an understanding of arrest and citation patterns for Black girls in Pittsburgh.

### **CHILD WELFARE**

Working Group Coordinator:  
Angela Steele, MSW

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The purpose of the Child Welfare group is to analyze the underlying reasons Black girls have disproportionately high child welfare referral rates and use these findings to inform and improve service delivery. This workgroup also focuses on Black girls’ experiences in the child welfare system and has specifically focused on truancy and the experiences of LGBT and gender non-conforming youth. We have supported broader efforts by local child welfare system leaders to provide anti-racism/anti-bias training led by Joyce James for all employees within the Allegheny County Children, Youth, and Families Department. These trainings emphasize the systemic nature of racism and offer steps to address it.

### **EDUCATION**

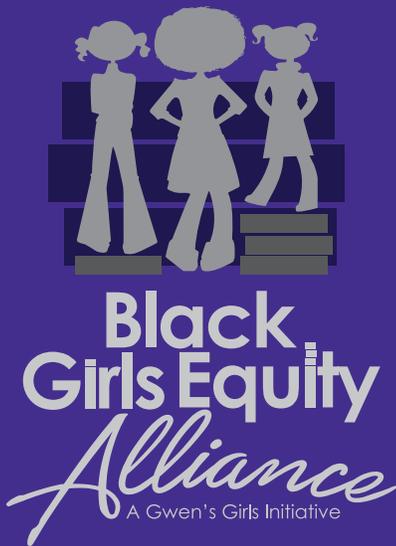
Working Group Coordinator:  
Amanda Cross, Ph.D.

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The purpose of the Education workgroup is to foster collaboration between school districts and community organizations to address issues that disproportionately impact Black girls in school, including sexual harassment and suspensions. The Education working group has stressed several initiatives, including raising awareness and partnership advocacy efforts on racially disproportional school suspensions, truancy, academic achievement, and sexual harassment within schools.

### **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Listening sessions with girls, which explored their experiences of safety within schools, revealed narratives of girls feeling vulnerable and unheard within their schools when reporting their experiences of unwanted physical touching or commentary about their bodies from peers. These stories aligned with national data revealing the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in school systems. As such, the BGEA education subcommittee collaborated with partner agencies to write an open letter to the Pittsburgh Public School Board of Education and provided 11 accounts of data-driven or practice-informed testimony at the monthly school board hearing. This effort of civic engagement garnered media attention from media sources such as *The Incline* and the local *National Public Radio* outlet *WESA*. Coverage included the problem of sexual harassment in schools, suggestions made by the Alliance in its open letter and testimonies, and an invitation to review girls’ testimonies and sign onto the *P.A. Says No More* campaign to end gender-based violence. The sexual harassment subcommittee also developed a community-based research project to survey Black girls throughout Western Pennsylvania regarding their experiences of sexual harassment in schools and street harassment.



For more information on how you can be involved with or support the work of the Black Girls Equity Alliance, please contact us:

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## Alliance Members

### ORGANIZATIONS

- A Second Chance, Inc.
- American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania
- Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST)
- Alliance for Police Accountability (APA)
- Adagio Health
- African American Strategic Partnership
- Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- Allegheny County Juvenile Probation
- Allies for Health + Wellbeing
- Amachi Pittsburgh
- Brilliantly Blessed Community Health and Wellness
- Center for Family Excellence
- Center for Victims
- Chatham University
- Communities in Schools Pittsburgh
- Educational Compliance Associates
- Education Law Center
- FISA Foundation
- Gateway Health
- Healthy Start, Inc.
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Infinite Life Solutions
- Macedonia FACE

- Mecca Educational Consulting Services
- New Voices for Reproductive Justice
- Office of Mayor Peduto, City of Pittsburgh
- Pittsburgh Action Against Rape
- Pittsburgh for CEDAW Coalition
- Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania
- Point Park University
- Robert Morris University
- Social Justice Institutes at Carlow University
- Staunton Farm Foundation
- Strong Women Strong Girls Pittsburgh
- The Midwife Center for Birth and Women's Health
- The Pittsburgh Promise
- The Pittsburgh Foundation
- Three Rivers Youth
- United Way of Southwestern PA
- UPMC Children's Hospital, Department of Pediatrics, Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine
- University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development (OCD)
- University of Pittsburgh, Office of Diversity and Inclusion

- University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work
- Women and Girls Foundation
- Women's Law Project
- Youth Support Partner Unit
- YWCA of Pittsburgh

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- Dr. Tyra Good
- Lynn Knezevich
- Zabi Mulwa
- Maria Searcy
- Dr. Christine White Taylor
- Caroline Zieth

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

- Friends Service Committee Pittsburgh
- Jewish Healthcare Foundation
- Rosalie Smiley, PhD, MPH, LSW
- Cecile Springer
- The Opportunity Fund
- The Pittsburgh Chapter of the Links, Incorporated
- The Rock Family Foundation
- Youth Undoing Institutional Racism (YUIR)/America



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