

10-YEAR
PROGRESS
REPORT

Working Together for Change:

Addressing Systemic Inequities
Affecting Black Girls in Pittsburgh
and Allegheny County



Black
Girls Equity
Alliance
A Gwen's Girls Initiative

Executive Summary

Almost a decade ago, [Inequities Affecting Black Girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County](#) documented systemic barriers that impede the well-being of Black girls. This new report revisits the data points reflected in that report to assess progress made in addressing these inequities through the collective, community-led efforts of the Black Girls Equity Alliance.

Key findings include:

- Black girls' poverty rate has gone down but racial disparities in poverty rates have not.
- Suspension rates of Black girls have gone down in almost all Pittsburgh Public Schools high schools.
- The number of Black adolescent girls being removed from the home by the child welfare system has decreased significantly, and, of those removed, most are now placed in foster or kinship care rather than congregate care.
- Pittsburgh Public Schools have dramatically decreased their referrals of Black girls to the juvenile court.
- Total referrals of Black girls to the juvenile court in Allegheny County are way down, as are racial disparities in juvenile court referrals.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations focused on continuing to create systemic and public policy change that will support the thriving of Black girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. These include:

- Implement policies and programs that help eliminate poverty and income insecurity.
- Prohibit the imposition and eliminate the debt from fees and fines on young people and their families due to legal system involvement.
- Require and fund anti-racial-bias training for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.
- Continue to invest in trauma-informed and holistic approaches to school discipline and work to reduce suspension rates even further.
- Continue school-based efforts to reduce the number of youth referred to juvenile court.



Introduction

In 2016, *Inequities Affecting Black Girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* was released. It provided a data snapshot of systemic barriers that impede the well-being of Black girls and prompted a collective conversation about how to address them.

That fall, Gwen's Girls, a Pittsburgh agency founded in 2002 to support and empower Black girls, held its first annual Equity Summit, where this report was presented. The Summit was attended by more than 200 people and generated collective enthusiasm for addressing the systemic inequities revealed and discussed. As a result, Gwen's Girls convened a follow-up meeting, open to anyone interested, which was attended by service providers, system professionals, academics, and other community members, to discuss action steps. As we began to meet regularly, we recognized that we needed to name our growing collective.

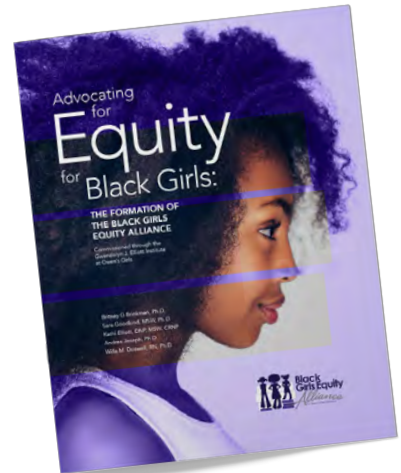


We decided on the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) to specify our focus, while emphasizing that changing our systems to better support those most marginalized will make these systems better for all young people. As its name indicates, the BGEA is an alliance rather than a separate entity, and it is convened by Gwen's Girls with leadership from Dr. Kathi Elliott, CEO of Gwen's Girls. From the beginning, the work of the BGEA has been community-driven, emerging through extensive, authentic engagement in what became four workgroups (now called action teams) that meet regularly and work collaboratively to improve our youth-serving systems.

This new report aims to assess the progress that has been made and to document areas where there is still work to do.

Black Girls Equity Alliance

The work of the Black Girls Equity Alliance is guided by a set of collaboratively developed values. These values, and the history of the Black Girls Equity Alliance, are detailed in [*Advocating for Equity for Black Girls: The Formation of the Black Girls Equity Alliance*](#).



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 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 Crenshaw¹, Patricia Hill Collins², 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, and ableism all inform Black girls’ lives.

4 Utilize community-based participatory research methods. Community-based participatory action research has been advocated as an approach for research to uproot inequities because it engages researchers, community members, and 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.³

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 use a trauma-informed lens to understand how Black girls’ experiences of personal and community trauma influence their reactions, behaviors, and perspectives.⁴ We celebrate the strengths of Black girls throughout everything we do.

This report, like all of our work, is grounded in these values. In the pages that follow, we present data from our 2016 report alongside current data, highlighting bright spots and concluding with recommendations for continuing to improve our policies and systems to support Black girls’ thriving.

¹ Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–168.

² Collins, P. H. (2009). *Another kind of public education: Race, schools, the media, and democratic possibilities*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

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

⁴ Classen, C. C., & Clark, C. S. (2017). Trauma-informed care. *APA Handbook of Trauma Psychology*, 2, 515–541

BGEA Membership

Over the past decade, many organizations and individuals have contributed to the formation and continued efforts of the Black Girls Equity Alliance reflected in this report. We are grateful for the important contributions of the over 50 organizations and numerous individuals active in this collective work.

Please visit the [BGEA website](https://bgeapgh.org/) to see a list of organizational and individual members and to learn more about our history, current work, and how to get involved.

<https://bgeapgh.org/>



BGEA Approach, Focus Areas, and Results

The Black Girls Equity Alliance is a coalition of organizations, advocates, systems leaders, community members, and girls dedicated to building a city, county, state, and country where Black girls can thrive.

Our work was initially organized around four workgroups: Health and Wellness, Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Education. After a strategic planning initiative, the workgroups were transformed into action teams with names more aligned with their desired results: Comprehensive Sex Education, Mandated Reporter Implicit Bias Training, Juvenile Justice, and Eliminating School Dress Codes. Each team meets monthly and works towards a set of community engagement, public policy, and systems change goals.

Comprehensive Sex Education

The Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) action team has focused on education and community-focused goals since its inception as the Health and Wellness workgroup. In 2019, the group released a BGEA report on the state of sex and sexuality education for Black Girls in Allegheny County. This report was rooted in reproductive justice and found access to CSE was inconsistent and non-systematic. Additionally, the providers who were surveyed indicated barriers to offering CSE.

As a result of our data and advocacy, Pittsburgh Public Schools updated its sex-education policy in 2022 to be more inclusive and meet current standards. The action team members, including Planned Parenthood of Western PA and Pittsburgh Action Against Rape, are working with sex-ed providers and PPS to ensure the curriculum is properly implemented.

Additional action team activities include a mental health intervention which was piloted at Urban Pathways Charter School in 2024 and working with PPS to acknowledge sexual harassment in schools. The latter led to a campaign called End Street Harassment PGH which brought awareness to street harassment on city streets.





Mandated Reporter Implicit Bias Training

At the BGEA's inception, the Child Welfare workgroup was focused on the disproportionate rate of adolescent Black girls being placed in congregate care, especially for what child protective services calls parent-child conflict or the inability of youth to remain at home due to disagreements, arguments, or struggles for power with their parents. As both the nation and state shifted from their reliance on group home settings, Allegheny County's Department of Human Services has made great strides in both reducing the overall number of children in out-of-home placements, and also in congregate care.

Most recently, the Mandated Reporter Implicit Bias Training action team (which emerged out of what had been the Child Welfare workgroup) has been focused on creating a training for systems professionals (social workers, educators, and medical professionals) who play a pivotal role in children's lives as child protective services (CPS) mandated reporters. The training's primary goal is to teach participants the role of implicit racial bias in our decisionmaking and encourage them to refer families to community-based services when safe and available. Overall, poverty is too often confused with neglect, and the BGEA aims to ensure families are connected with vital resources that can prevent family policing. This action team has presented this training at conferences and child welfare offices throughout the county.

Juvenile Justice

Since the 2016 Inequities Report revealed alarming rates of racial disproportionality in referrals of girls to the juvenile court in Allegheny County, the Juvenile Justice workgroup (now action team) has been focused on understanding the sources and reasons for these referrals, with the goal of eliminating these racial disparities and reducing referrals to the juvenile court. The action team held listening sessions with police officers, teachers, school administrators, and others who play a role in referring young people to the legal system. We also analyzed school discipline, summary citation, arrest, and referral data, and our action team has included young people who have played key roles in helping the adults understand young people's experiences.

The Juvenile Justice action team discovered that school-based arrests were a primary driver of high referral rates of Black girls to the juvenile court. Typical adolescent behaviors that are ignored or excused among White youth are too often criminalized among Black youth. We also discovered that many adults were calling police, and police were arresting young people, because they encountered young people who were in need of mental health services or other supports and they did not know where else to turn.⁵

In response to collective advocacy efforts, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services issued a call for proposals for a pre-arrest diversion initiative that could connect young people and their families with existing but

fragmented services and supports. Gwen's Girls submitted a proposal to create and implement [Caring Connections for YOUth](#) (CC4Y), which is a community-led initiative developed by the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) that provides access to supports and services to any youth, up to age 18, living in Allegheny County, as a diversion from the legal systems. CC4Y began working with youth and their families in 2023.

The Juvenile Justice Action Team has also been active in advocacy around the closure and reopening of the Shuman Juvenile Detention Center, working to ensure that juvenile detention remains a last resort and that the reopened center operates in a safe, trauma-informed manner.

Eliminating School Dress Codes

In 2023, the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA) initiated formal efforts to collect community input on the impact of school dress codes on Black girls and their families. This feedback was gathered through focus groups with Black girls participating in the Black Girls Advocacy and Leadership Alliance (BGALA) and from youth and adult attendees at Gwen's Girls conference convenings. Based on this input, the action team drafted proposals for changes to the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) Code of Conduct and dress code policies.

Last year, BGEA, in partnership with organizations such as the ACLU and Education Law Center (ELC), successfully advocated for amendments to the PPS dress code language. These changes, approved by the school

board, introduced equity-centered language around enforcement and prohibited the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices for dress code violations.

Currently, the updated PPS dress code policy reflects the standards of the Pittsburgh Crown Act and specifically affirms students' rights to wear protective hairstyles, hair wraps, coverings, beads, and other cultural or religious adornments. Additionally, the new language directs school staff to avoid objectifying students or having inappropriate conversations with them regarding their dress and appearance. The BGEA action team is working to support the updated policy's consistent implementation across the school district.

⁵ For more details, see the BGEA reports [Institutionalized Inequity: Pathways to Juvenile Justice for Black Girls in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County](#) and [Understanding and Addressing Institutionalized Inequity: Disrupting Pathways to Juvenile Justice for Black Youth in Allegheny County](#).

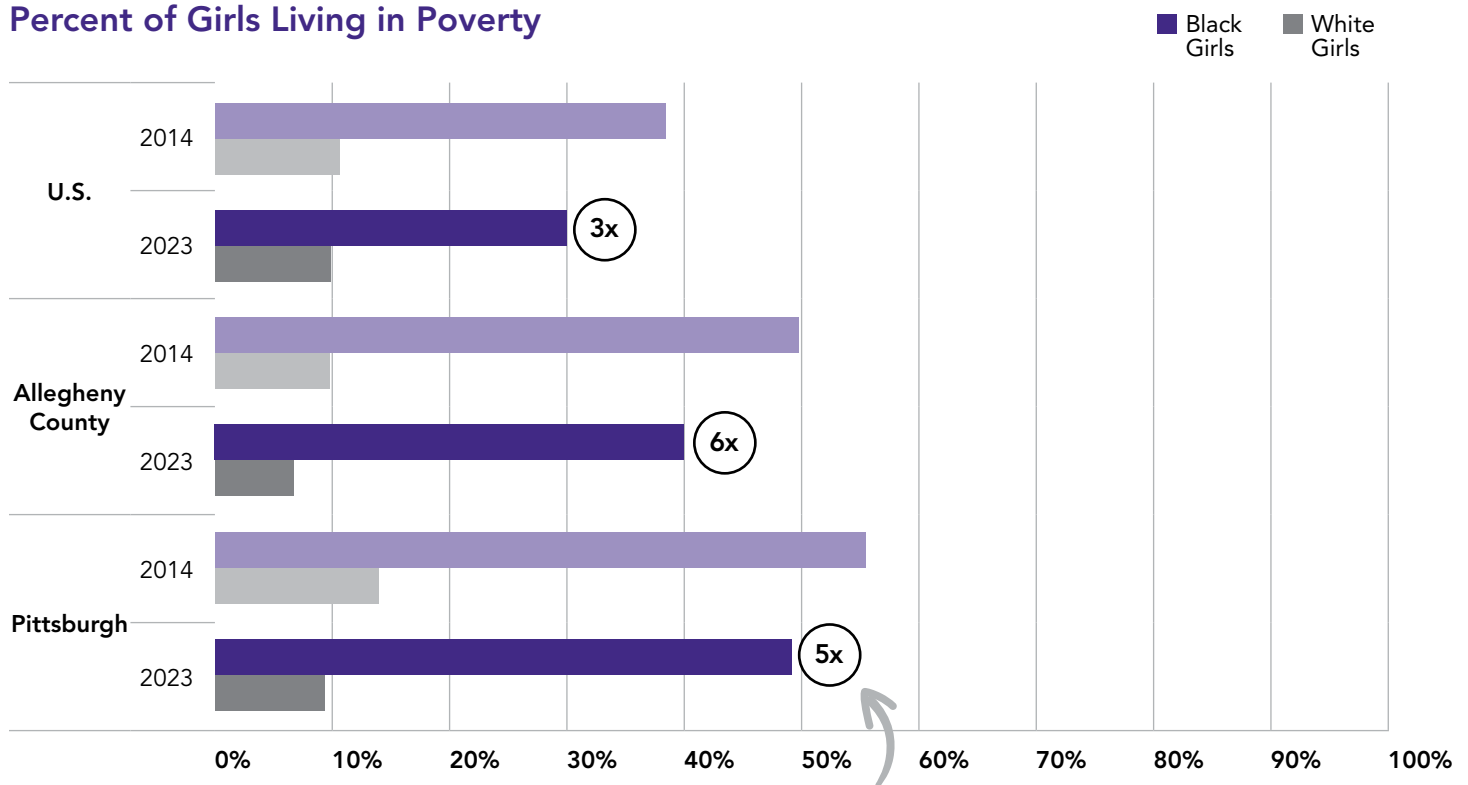
While we cannot isolate our coalition as the sole cause of improvement in the areas captured by data below, we firmly believe in the power and role of community-based advocacy. The BGEA has been a recognized leader countywide in each of our areas of expertise. We hope to continue our collaborative work in the future, especially in light of federal funding cuts that will disproportionately impact Black families and all families facing poverty.

Poverty

Poverty rates have gone down over the past decade for both Black and White girls – in the U.S., Allegheny County, and the city of Pittsburgh. *Nevertheless, Black girls are much more likely than White girls to be living*

in poverty. While nationally Black girls are 3 times more likely than White girls to be living in poverty, in Allegheny County Black girls are over 6 times more likely than White girls to be living in poverty, a disparity which has increased over the past decade.

Percent of Girls Living in Poverty



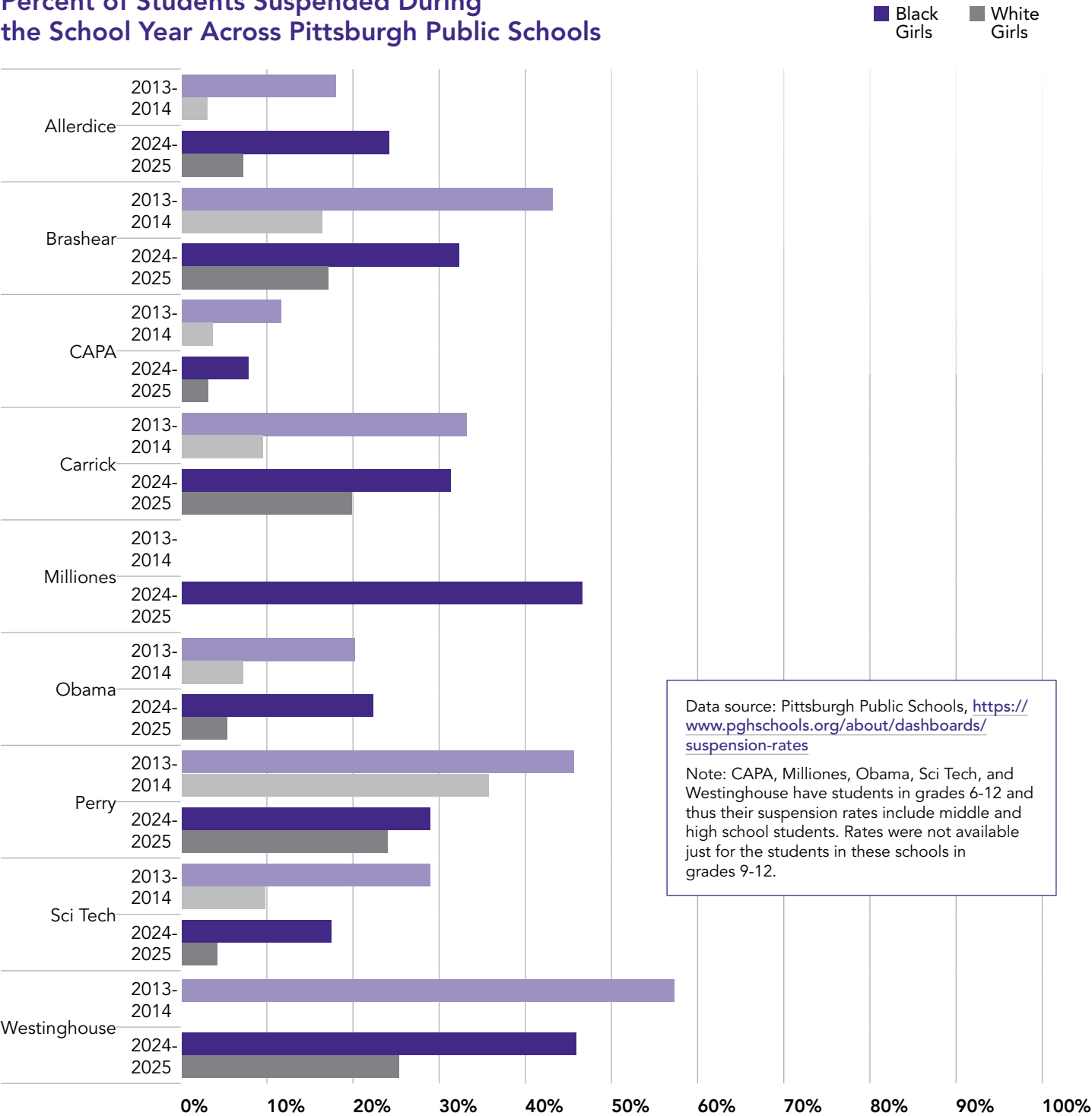
Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, <https://data.census.gov/>

Almost half
(49%)
of Black girls in
Pittsburgh are living
in poverty.

School Discipline

This chart displays out-of-school suspension rates in Pittsburgh high schools for two different school years - 2013-14 and 2024-25. The bars represent the proportion of Black and White girls, respectively, who received an out-of-school suspension that year, out of the total number of Black and White girls in each school. Out-of-school suspension rates have gone down for Black girls at all Pittsburgh

Percent of Students Suspended During the School Year Across Pittsburgh Public Schools

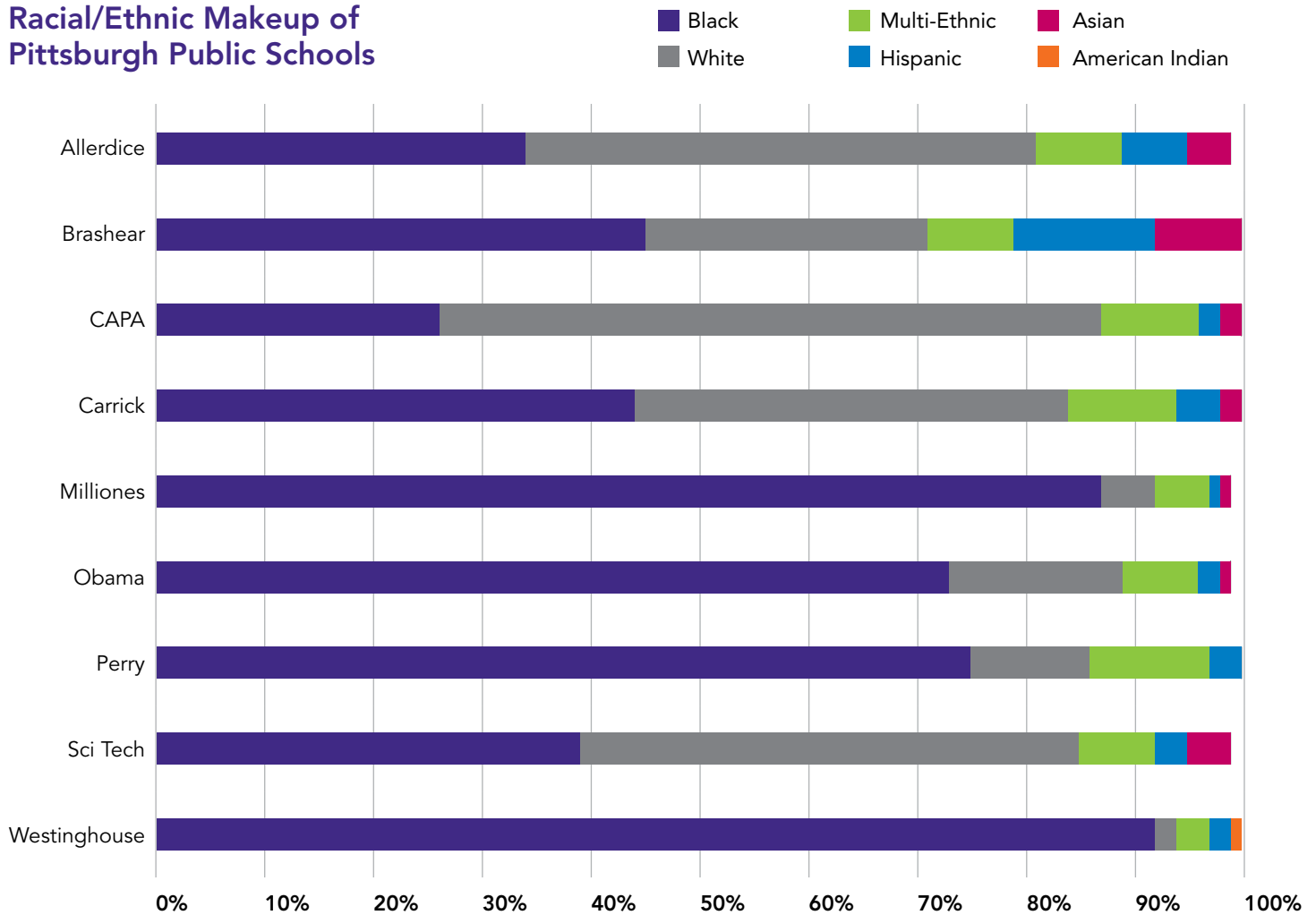


Public Schools high schools except Allderdice and Obama (and perhaps Millions, for which we do not have 2013-2014 data).

Current suspension rates for Black girls are highest at Millions (46%), Westinghouse (45%), Brashear (32%),

Carrick (31%), and Perry (28%). With the exception of Obama, the schools with the highest suspension rates of Black girls are also the schools with the highest proportion of Black students in their school populations, which are presented in the chart below.

Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Pittsburgh Public Schools



Data source: [A+ Schools 2024 Report to the Community on Public School Progress in Pittsburgh](#)

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE:

Progress in the Making

Barak Obama Academy of International Studies has one of the lowest suspension rates for PPS high schools juxtaposed with one of the highest rates of students who identify as Black girls. The BGEA interviewed **Principal Yalonda Colbert** to receive insight into how she has been able to develop a restorative and holistic approach to school discipline.

"I will take a cuss out."

Principal Colbert made this announcement at the beginning of her interview. It demonstrates a leader who understands

adolescent misbehaviors or challenges are not cause for condemnation. Initially, she served in the role of assistant principal and was met with a pile of paperwork to process for students who had been issued three-day suspensions on her first day. She vowed to reform this practice.

Principal Colbert started by talking to a group of Black girls who shared insight into how she could encourage teachers to reshape how they approach classroom discipline. She followed their suggestions with

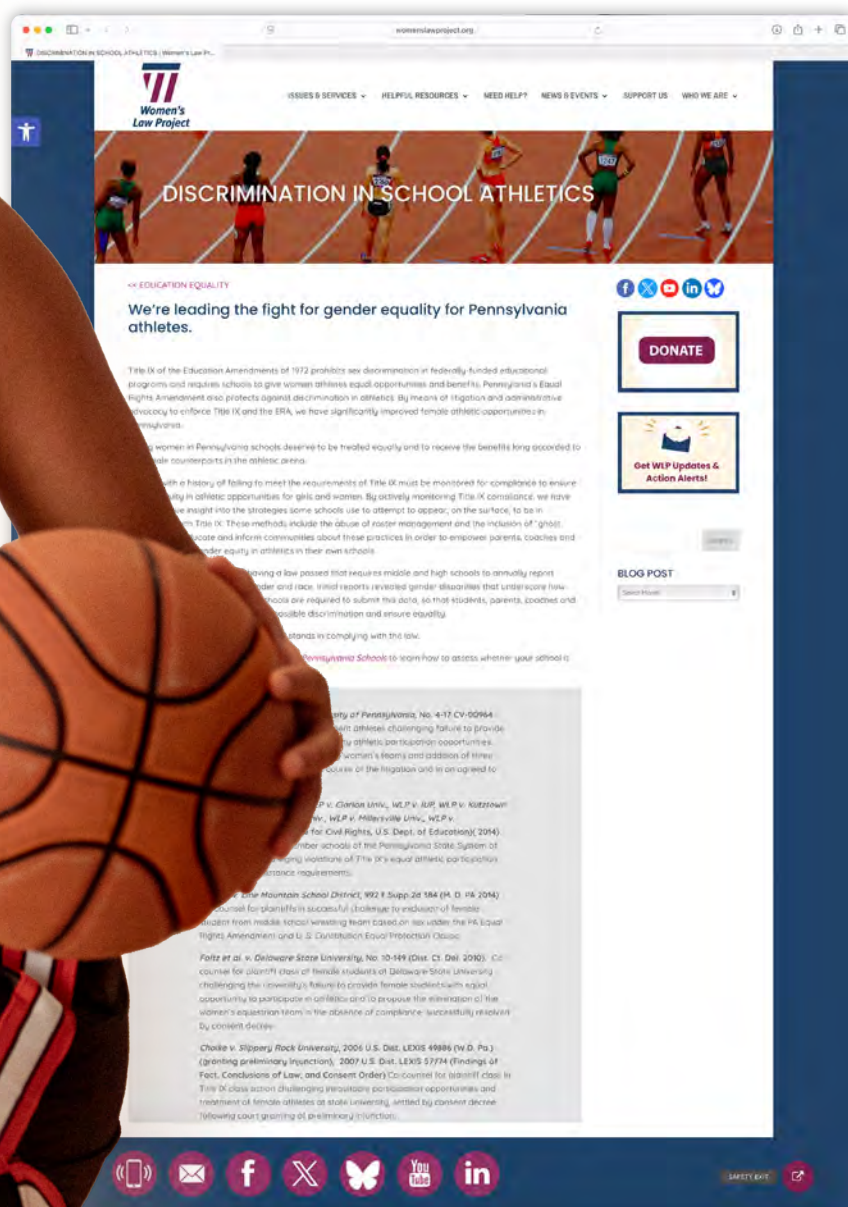
a series of classroom visits to collect data and offer her staff hands-on coaching. Her time spent talking to students and responding to their feedback on the school, administrators, and staff has built trust and fostered a sense of belonging.

Throughout the interview, Principal Colbert stressed her belief that a principal's primary responsibility is to ensure her students "have a safe space to practice, grow, and learn." Her commitment to restorative practices and trauma-informed approaches is the first step.



Athletic Opportunities

In our 2016 report, we reported on athletic opportunities available to girls in Pittsburgh Public Schools and other public high schools throughout Allegheny County. This has not been an area of focus for the Black Girls Equity Alliance, but athletics can play an important role in girls' school engagement, health, leadership development, and pathways to college. Thus, this remains an area in which it is important to ensure equity. [The Women's Law Project](#) continues to do essential advocacy work in this space, including through their Fairplay website and with [A Guide to Gender Equity in Athletics in Pennsylvania Schools](#).



Violence and Abuse

The 2016 report included teens’ self-reported rates of experiences of violence and abuse, collected through the 2014 Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey. We know that poverty increases girls’ risk of abuse and exploitation, and the Black Girls Equity Alliance has supported policy efforts to address poverty. BGEA members have also been leaders of local efforts to reduce gender-based

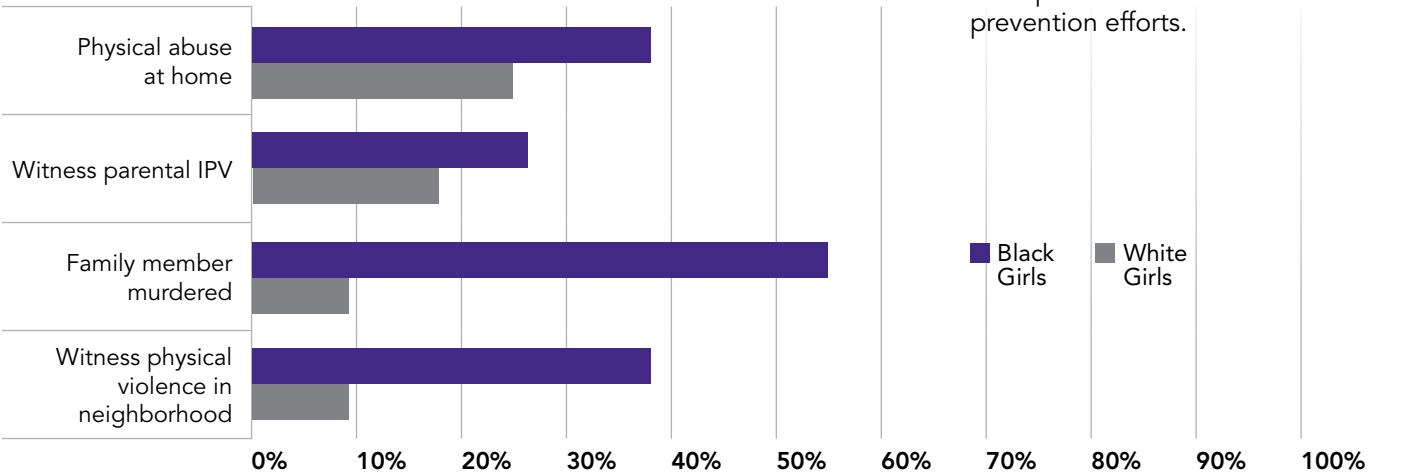
violence through initiatives like “[Expect Respect](#)” and “[Coaching Boys into Men](#),” which support young people in developing healthy relationship attitudes, skills, and practices.

In the 2023 Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey, which includes data collected from students at 9 Pittsburgh Public schools and

8 Allegheny Intermediate Unit schools, Black girls report higher rates of physical abuse and family and neighborhood violence than White girls, as seen in the chart below:

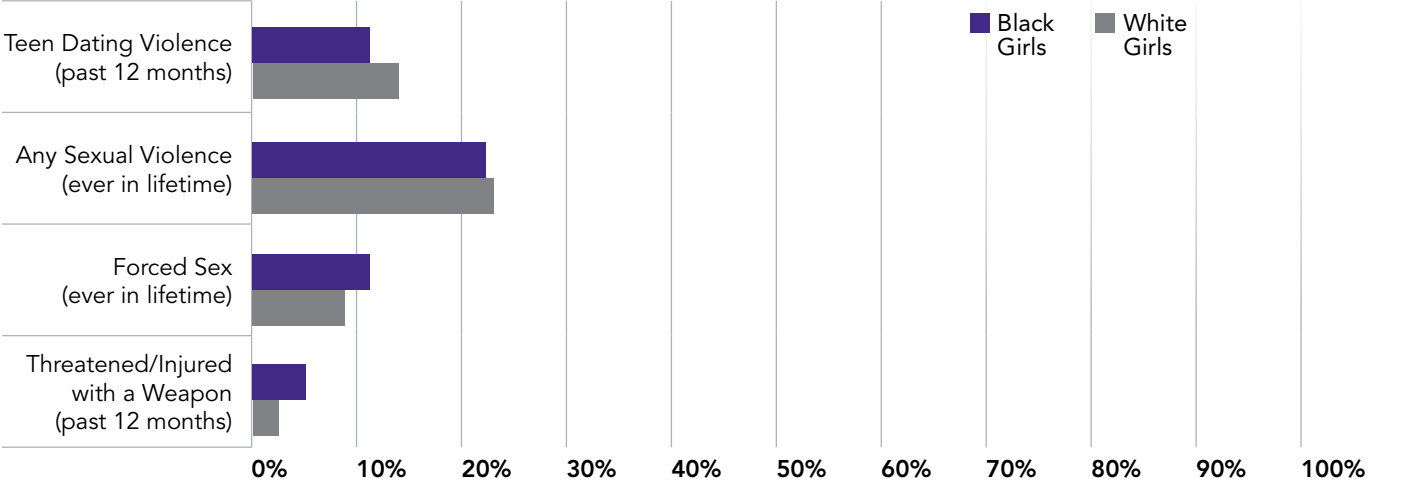
However, there are no statistically significant differences between Black and White girls’ reports of dating and sexual violence or of being threatened or injured with a weapon, as seen in the chart below. Nevertheless, these rates of victimization are too high and an important area for continued prevention efforts.

Child Abuse and Trauma (Ever in Lifetime)



Data Source: Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey

Violence Victimization

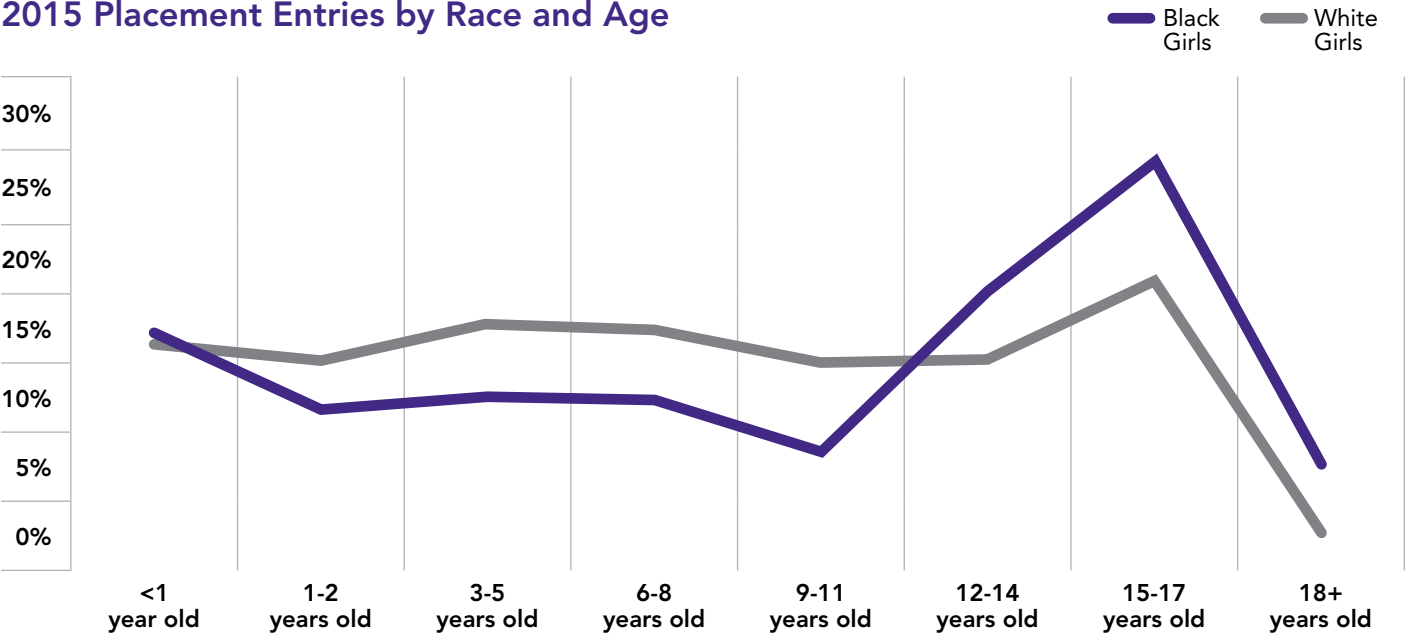


Data Source: Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey

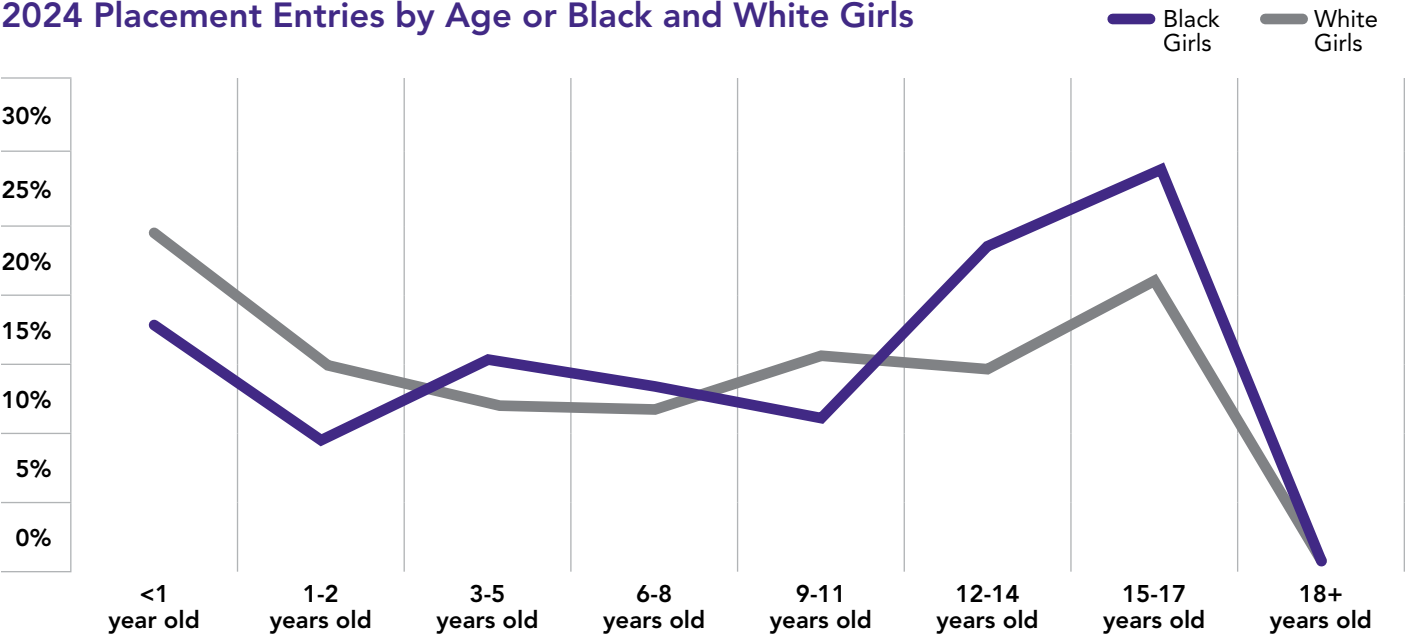
Child Welfare System

In contrast to White girls, a higher proportion of Black girls placed in out-of-home care enter placement as teens (as seen in the two charts below). This was true in 2015 and in 2024.

2015 Placement Entries by Race and Age

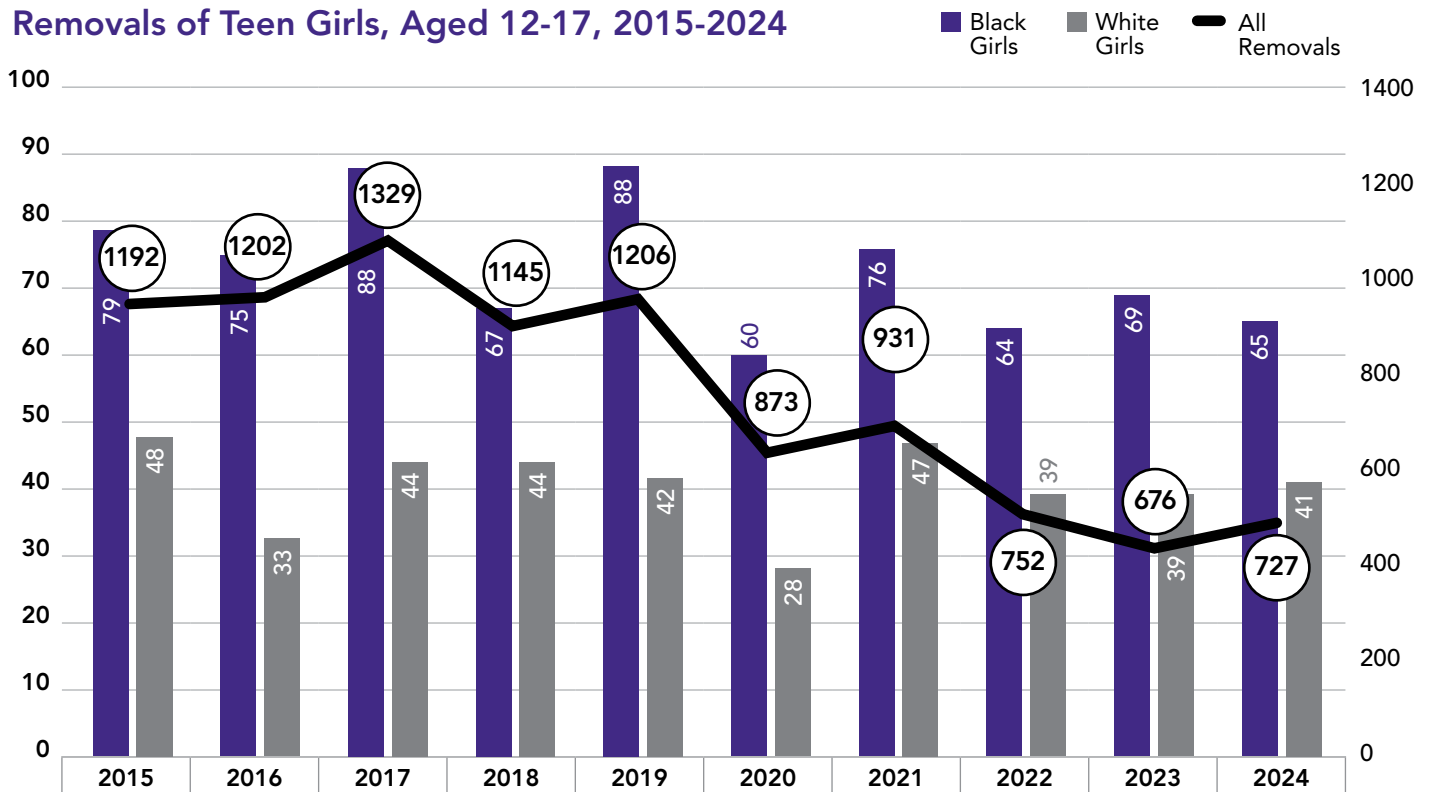


2024 Placement Entries by Age or Black and White Girls



Data Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services (2016; 2025).

Removals of Teen Girls, Aged 12-17, 2015-2024

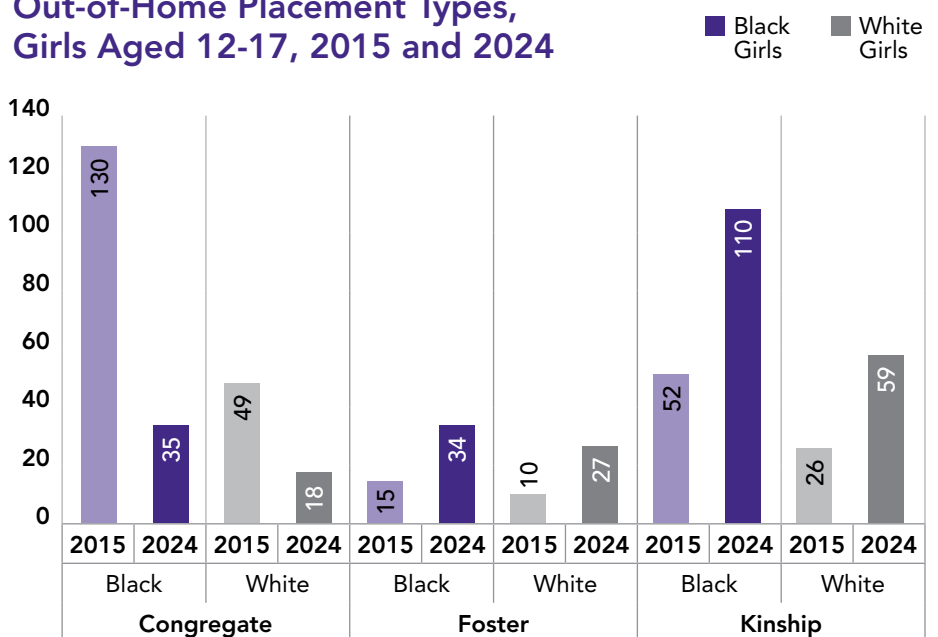


Data Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

However, what these two charts do not show is that the number of teens in Allegheny County being removed from home and placed in care has decreased significantly over this period, as shown in the chart above.

An even larger change from 2015 to 2024 is the type of out-of-home placement. In 2015, Black girls involved in child welfare as adolescents were often placed in congregate care facilities, such as group homes or other institutional facilities. Placement in congregate care is associated with worse outcomes for girls, including subsequent legal system involvement. The chart at right shows a monumental decrease in the placement of Black (and White) teen girls in congregate care, commensurate with a large increase in their placement in kinship and foster care.

Out-of-Home Placement Types, Girls Aged 12-17, 2015 and 2024



Data Source: Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

Juvenile Justice

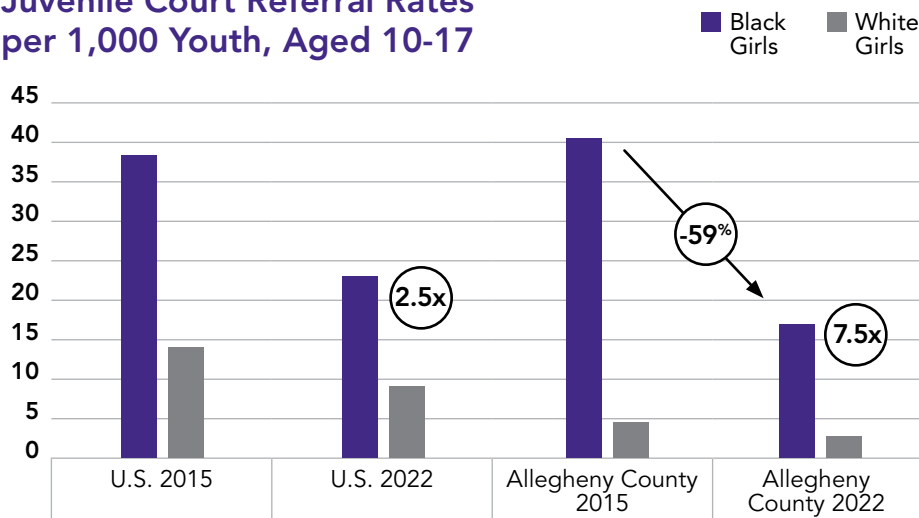
Using the most up-to-date data available at the time, our 2016 report documented that nationally, Black girls were referred to the juvenile court at a rate 3 times that of White girls.⁶ However, Black girls in Allegheny County were, at that

time, referred to the juvenile court at a rate 10 times that of White girls.

Looking now at the most recent data available, the good news is that racial disproportionality in juvenile court referrals of girls has gone

down both nationally and locally (as seen in the chart below) – and overall referral rates have decreased significantly across all groups. In 2015, Black girls in Allegheny County were referred to the juvenile court at a rate of 41 per 1000 Black girls aged 10-17. In 2023, this rate had fallen to 17, a 59% decrease.

Juvenile Court Referral Rates per 1,000 Youth, Aged 10-17

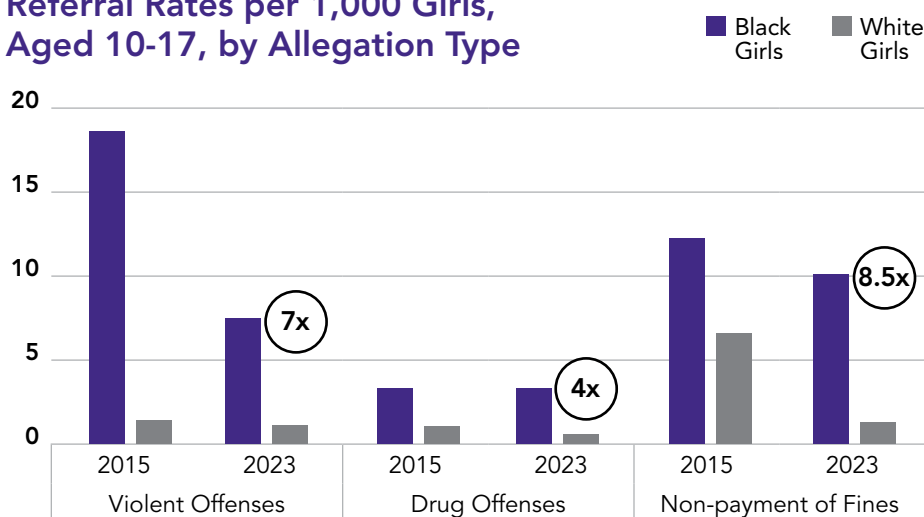


Data sources: National Center for Juvenile Justice, Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Office. Note: In this chart, juvenile court referral rates for Allegheny County do not include referrals for "Failure to Comply," since these are not included in the U.S. juvenile court referral rates.

In 2022, at the national level, Black girls were 2.5 times more likely to be referred to the juvenile court than White girls, and in 2023, in Allegheny County, Black girls were 6.5 times more likely to be referred than White girls (a smaller racial disparity than shown in the chart at left, because this disparity decreased from 2022 to 2023). While this is still a really distressing, unacceptable rate of racial disproportionality, it represents an enormous amount of progress in addressing local racial disproportionality in juvenile court referrals of girls.

Notably, in 2022, the juvenile court referral rate of Black girls in Allegheny County was 25% lower than the national referral rate for Black girls. So why is racial disproportionality in juvenile court referral rates of girls still so high in Allegheny County? Because referral rates of White girls in Allegheny County are about 75% lower than referral rates of White girls nationally.

Allegheny County Juvenile Court Referral Rates per 1,000 Girls, Aged 10-17, by Allegation Type



Data source: Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Office, <https://www.alleghenycourts.us/family/departments/juvenile-probation/reports/>

Approximately one third of juvenile court referrals for Black girls in Allegheny County were for assault in 2015, and in 2023 one quarter of juvenile court referrals for Black girls in Allegheny County were

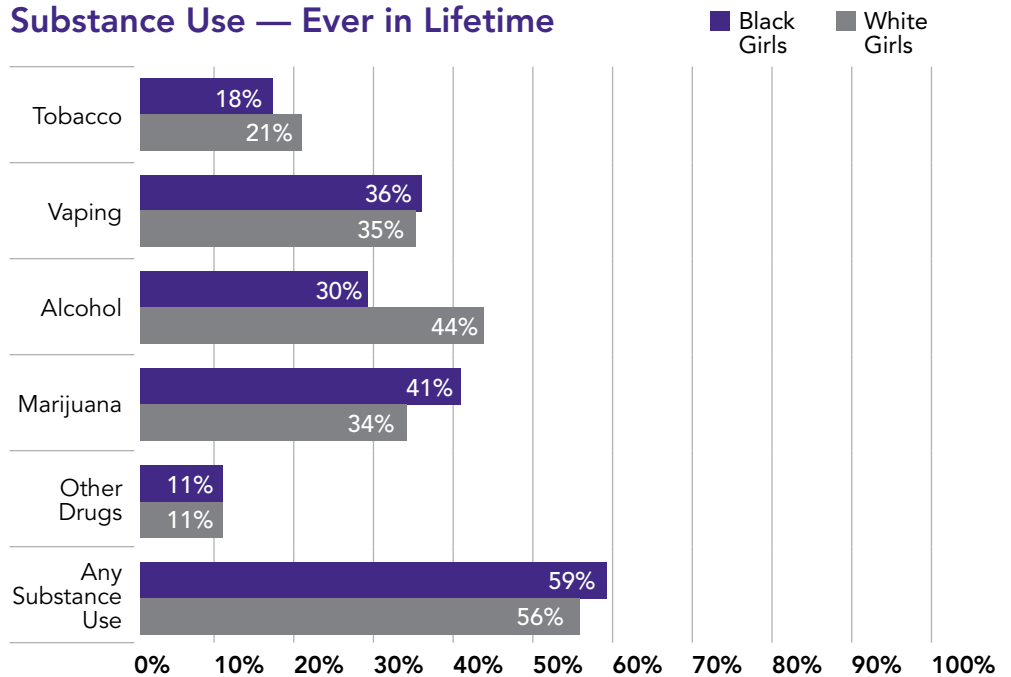
⁶ Comparisons of rates of referrals of Black and White girls to the juvenile court were done by calculating relative rate indices.

for assault. In the 2023 Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey, 29% of Black girls and 10% of White girls reported being involved in a physical fight in the past year, suggesting that Black girls are three times as likely as White girls to engage in fighting. Yet *Black girls in Allegheny County are 8 times more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for simple assault and 12 times more likely for aggravated assault.* Overall, Black girls are 7 times more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for violent offenses, as seen in the bottom chart on the previous page.

Rates of substance use are similar among Black girls and White girls in Allegheny County (see chart at right), yet *Black girls in Allegheny County are four times more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for drug offenses* (as seen in the chart on the previous page).

Black girls are also over 8 times more likely than White girls to be referred to the juvenile court for non-payment of fines (down from 14 times more likely in 2015), probably because they are disproportionately living in poverty and simply cannot afford to pay their fines. Juvenile court referrals for “failure to comply,” which are usually for non-payment of fines, remain an area of concern, as referrals for failure to comply continue to constitute a larger proportion of total juvenile court referrals for Black girls than for any other group (37% of total juvenile court referrals of Black girls in Allegheny County in 2023).

Substance Use — Ever in Lifetime



Black and White girls have similar rates of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use (none of the differences in this chart are statistically significant).

Data source: Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey (2023), <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Services/Health-Department/Community-Indicators-and-Health-Data/Chronic-Disease-Epidemiology/Resources-Reports-and-Publications/Healthy-Allegheny-Teen-Survey>

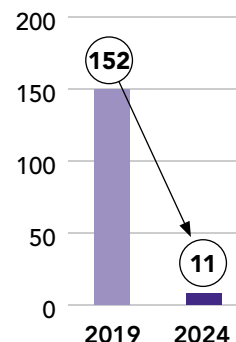
Spotlight on positive change:

In 2024, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) police made **11** referrals of Black girls to the juvenile court, down from **152** in 2019.

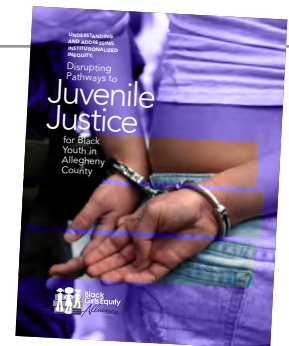
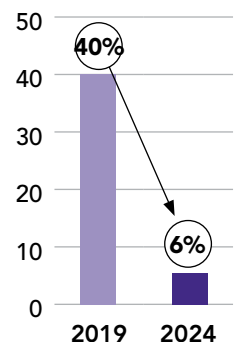
In 2019, as documented in an earlier [BGEA report](#), PPS police were the single largest juvenile court referral source of Black girls in Allegheny County, accounting for over **40%** of all referrals of Black girls that year. In contrast, in 2024, PPS police made just **6%** of the total juvenile court referrals of Black girls in Allegheny County.

[Data source: JCMS Juvenile Involvement Dashboard, Allegheny County Department of Human Services]

Number of Referrals



Referral Percentages



Key Takeaways

- Black girls' poverty rate has gone down but racial disparities in poverty rates have not.
- Suspension rates of Black girls have gone down in almost all Pittsburgh Public Schools high schools but remain high in many schools, and racial disparities persist.
- The number of Black adolescent girls being removed from the home by the child welfare system has decreased significantly, and, of those removed, most are now placed in foster or kinship care, rather than congregate care, which before was much more common.
- Pittsburgh Public Schools have dramatically decreased their referrals of Black girls to the juvenile court.
- Referrals of Black girls to the juvenile court in Allegheny County are way down. In fact, Black girls in Allegheny County are now referred to the juvenile court at a lower rate than that of Black girls nationally. Racial disproportionality in juvenile court referrals of girls is down too.
- Yet the low rate of referral of White girls to the juvenile court in Allegheny County reminds us that we can do better for our Black girls, and racial disparities in juvenile court referrals, while down significantly, are still far too large.

There is a lot of good news, but we still have work to do.

The following recommendations are aimed at creating systemic and public policy change that will better support Allegheny County's Black girls to thrive.

Recommendations

Implement policies and programs that help eliminate poverty and income insecurity.

Almost 50 percent of Black girls are living in poverty, making them six times more likely than their counterparts to face economic insecurity. Unsurprisingly, all areas discussed in this report – public system involvement, school suspensions, and poor educational outcomes – are correlated to a family’s access to financial resources.

As a result, Allegheny County must deeply invest in solutions to combat poverty, including, but not limited to:

- Targeted anti-poverty programs like permanent free school meals, housing vouchers, and universal basic income strategies.
- Ensure access to affordable childcare, maternal healthcare, and paid family leave.
- Transform systems that criminalize poverty like family policing and school pushout policies.
- Center the voices of Black girls in funding strategies and public policymaking.

All additional recommendations in this report are anchored by the BGEA’s call for systems leaders, county officials, funders, universities, and community members to make a strong commitment to alleviate the economic distress affecting far too many of Allegheny County’s Black families.

Prohibit the imposition and eliminate the debt from fees and fines on young people and their families due to legal system involvement.

The overlapping effects of marginalization on Black girls and gender-expansive youth must be confronted in order to end their criminalization. Despite the progress noted in this report, Black girls remain overrepresented in the juvenile legal system. They are also facing much higher rates of poverty. Therefore, imposing fines and fees upon these young people and their families only exacerbates systemic disparities. These fees and fines essentially criminalize them for their poverty by pushing them deeper into the system when they can’t pay and can follow them into adulthood. In the absence of state-level jurisdiction prohibiting this practice, county courts must prohibit the imposition of fees and fines on young people and their families due to legal system involvement.



Require and fund anti-racial-bias training for mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

Without proper training and a clear understanding of marginalization and oppression, mandated reporters yield a dangerous power that can harm children rather than protect them. Due to explicit and implicit bias, Black parents are more likely to be met with judgment and viewed harshly than white parents. Where a white parent could be viewed as

going through typical experiences of raising children or struggling through poverty, Black parents are too often labeled as neglectful. Consequently, Black families are disproportionately pushed into the child welfare system.

To protect against the continued use of the child welfare system as an inappropriate policing of Black families and to ensure that reports are only made due to objective concern of serious threat to a child's wellbeing, it is crucial that all mandated reporters in Allegheny County undergo training to understand, identify, and correct any biases they may have.

At the time of this report, both [The Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) and [Children's Rights](#) are working to transform mandated reporting laws across the country. The latter is actively calling for a mandated supporter versus reporter framework and has an active working group in New York. Funding community-

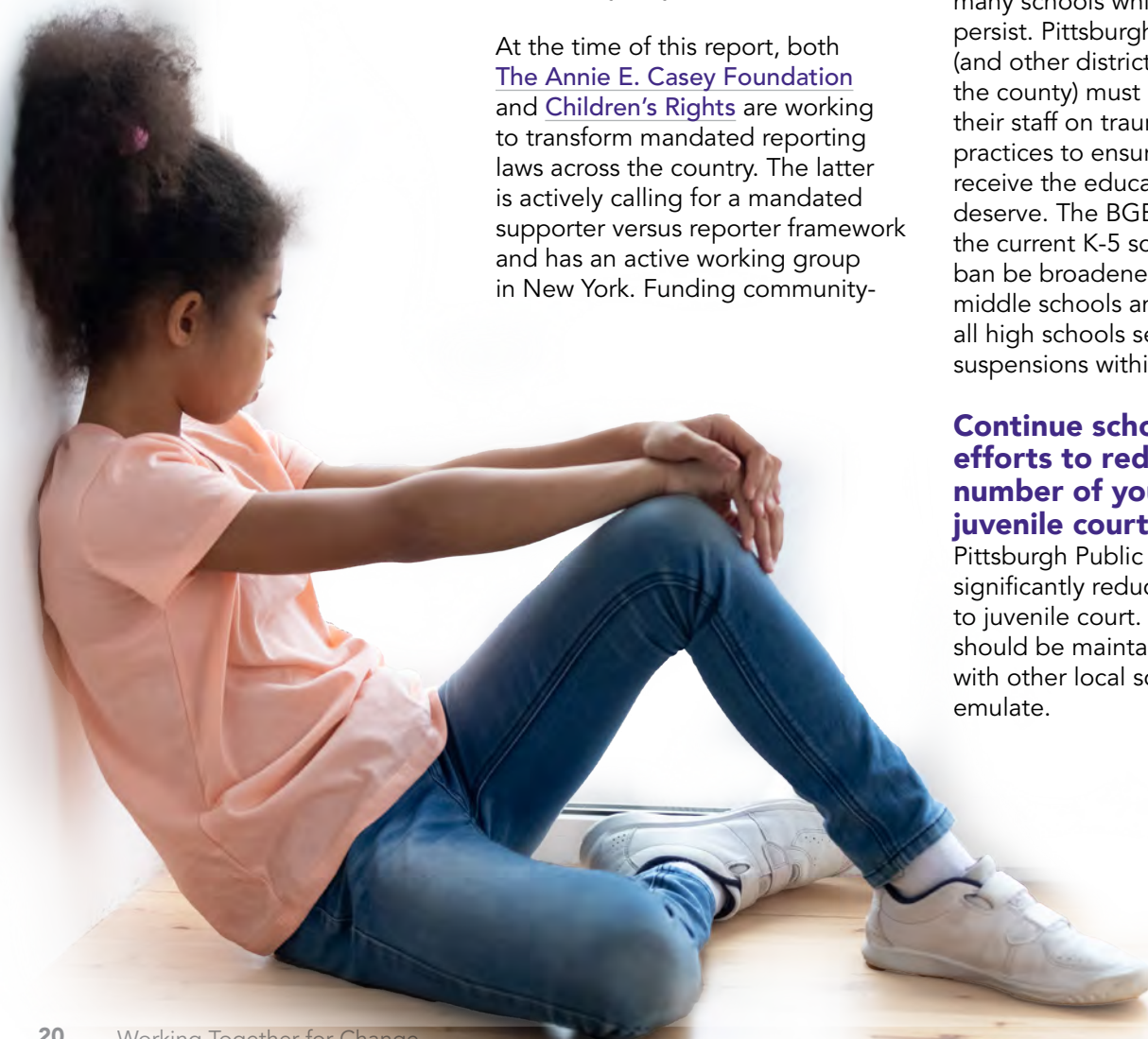
based services is a critical component of making this shift. The BGEA supports the Annie E. Casey Foundation's recommendation that states and local jurisdictions should look closely at how the Family First Prevention Services Act can be used for this purpose.

Continue to invest in trauma-informed and holistic approaches to school discipline and work to reduce suspension rates even further.

High school suspension rates for Black girls have gone down districtwide, but remain high in many schools while racial disparities persist. Pittsburgh Public Schools (and other districts throughout the county) must continue to train their staff on trauma-informed best practices to ensure all students receive the education that they deserve. The BGEA recommends the current K-5 school suspension ban be broadened to include middle schools and administrators at all high schools set goals to reduce suspensions within five years.

Continue school-based efforts to reduce the number of youth referred to juvenile court.

Pittsburgh Public Schools has significantly reduced referrals to juvenile court. These efforts should be maintained and shared with other local school districts to emulate.



Methodological Appendix

Data for this report were compiled and analyzed through a collaborative effort. Throughout the report, the sources of data are indicated; this appendix provides additional detail on the data sources and methods used to produce the statistics contained in the report.

Poverty rates were calculated using publicly available data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

Information on school discipline was obtained from the Pittsburgh Public Schools [dashboard](#). Details on the racial/ethnic makeup of school populations was obtained from the A+ Schools [2024 Report to the Community](#).

Throughout the report are data provided by the [Health Allegheny Teen Survey](#). The Healthy Allegheny Teen Survey (HATS) was developed in partnership with the Allegheny County Health Department and the University of Pittsburgh for students in grades 9th-12th. The survey was administered anonymously and virtually through an online platform. Questions assessed strengths, barriers to care, and health behaviors. Data collection for the survey took place from April 4th-June 2nd, 2023 and September 19th-October 31st, 2023. During this period, a total of 4324 surveys were collected from students in grades 9-12 in nine Pittsburgh Public schools and eight Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) schools. The AIU schools were selected from under resourced communities, where it was expected that students faced systemic challenges. 143 surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses (If fewer than 10% of survey questions were answered, the survey was dropped from the dataset). Results reported here include only students who identified as female (cisgender or transgender female) and those who identified as White or Black (if "Black" was selected along with other race options, those students were included in the "Black" category). A total of 1778 surveys met this criterion and were included in the analysis. The number of students identifying as female and Black was 938 (53%) and the number of students identifying as female and White was 840 (47%).

Information on child welfare involvement was provided by [Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#).

Juvenile court referral rates were calculated from numbers provided in the [Allegheny County Juvenile Probation annual reports](#) and population data made available by the National Center for Juvenile Justice in their [Easy Access to Juvenile Populations database](#). Relative rate indices were calculated by dividing the juvenile court referral rate for Black girls by the juvenile court referral rate for White girls. using population data available from NCJJ. Information on the sources of juvenile court referrals was obtained from the JCMS Juvenile Involvement Dashboard created by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.



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