



A MEASURE POLICY BRIEF:
THE INNOCENCE INITIATIVE
a lived-experience data black paper

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ABOUT THE INNOCENCE INITIATIVE

The creation of the Innocence Initiative was inspired by the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality's Initiative on Gender Justice & Opportunity's publication of *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, describing research on adultification bias led by Dr. Jamilia Blake. The study, which revealed that adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers even at early ages, suggested a root cause for punitive treatment against Black girls in school and the juvenile justice system. The study provided language and data to corroborate a form of discrimination commonly faced by Black girls.

After receiving the first social equity grant from Impact Austin, The Innocence Initiative launched in 2019 to address adultification bias within Austin, TX. Over the course of three years, a collaboration of five organizations led by Measure, translated national research into local action using a participatory action research model to ignite community mobilization and engage in collaborative thinking to disrupt adultification bias against Black girls and achieve equity (1).

As a result of this initial phase of The Innocence Initiative, three key themes emerged:

- Solutions to adultification bias must be community-led.
- Stereotypes that harm Black girls must be dismantled.
- Policies and practices must be reformed to protect Black girls.

Using the themes identified by the community to disrupt adultification bias Measure has:

1. In partnership with Lone Star Justice Alliance trained over 1,000 attorneys, advocates, and community members in adultification bias and how to protect Black girls.
2. Published "Hey Sis, Just Be You," a comic book to raise awareness of adultification bias, distributed to over 15,000 homes by Austin Women magazine and the Austin library.
3. Established the Travis County Girls Squad in partnership with Hearts 2 Heal, which directly supports Black girls ages 13-17 through resources for mental health, education, and basic needs. Four cohorts of 10 girls have completed the program.

Source

1. Initiative on Gender Justice and Equality. (2021, June 18). *The innocence initiative: Translating national research into local action in Central Texas*. The Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/report/the-innocence-initiative-translating-national-research-into-local-action-in-central-texas/>

4. Hosted FREE workshops in partnership with national stakeholders, educators, civil rights, and advocacy organizations. Which served as a first step in learning what adultification bias is and how community members can change the narratives dictating how our children are viewed and treated in schools and the justice system. In 2022, 100% of workshop attendees reported feeling more familiar with adultification bias and 73% said they felt more equipped to protect Black girls after attending the workshops.

As the initiative moves into it's next phase, it is essential that we continue to dream of an anti-racist future where Black girls flourish. To achieve this, we will continue to build upon the award-winning Innocence Initiative to aggressively dismantle the mindsets, behaviors, and structures that perpetuate the "Jezebel" stereotype which assigns unfair sexual judgments upon Black girls.

WHAT IS ADULTIFICATION BIAS?

According to Georgetown Law's Center on Poverty and Inequality, adultification bias is defined as a "social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in



the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalization." (2) When a society embraces harmful stereotypes such as "Black girls are promiscuous" or "Black girls are aggressive", these stereotypes may lead to unfair treatment of Black girls in school, the justice system, and at home.

WHY DO WE NEED POLICIES TO PROTECT BLACK GIRLS RIGHT NOW?

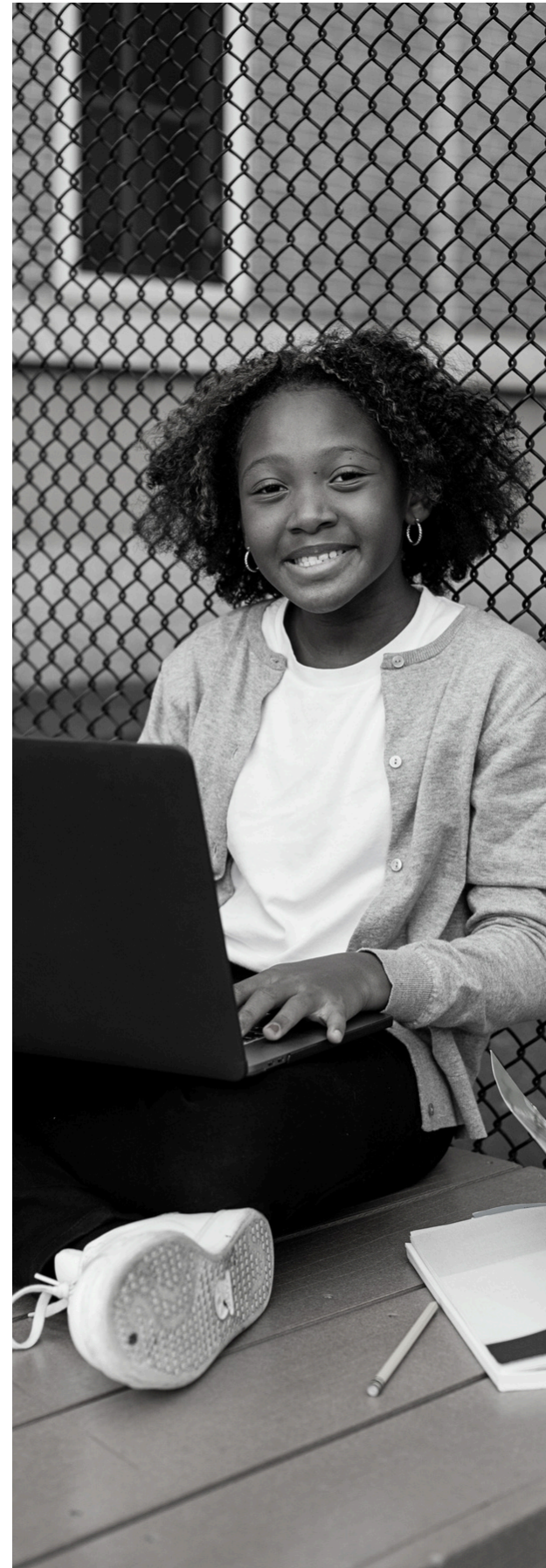
Black girls need policy change now. More research and evidence-based solutions can be developed to combat institutionalized racism in the education and juvenile justice system.

Black girls receive disproportionate rates of punitive treatment in the education and juvenile justice systems. Black girls were the only group across all races/ethnicities for girls where a disparity was observed. Black girls received in-school suspensions (11%) and out-of-school suspensions (13%) at rates almost two times their share of total student enrollment (7%). (3)

In partnership with a group of the Measure Advocacy team, a volunteer group of community members, this policy brief has been developed to recommend urgent changes that are needed to protect Black girls in Central Texas.

Sources

2. Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., & Gonzalez, T. (2017). *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*. The Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>
3. OCR. (2021). *An Overview of Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Public Schools for the 2017-18 School Year*. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf>





"When you fail to disaggregate data, Black girls disappear"
- Jameila 'Meme' Styles

GAPS IN DATA

LIMITATIONS IN DATA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA

The desire to be seen is universal. And, as anyone who has ever felt invisible by systems of oppression can attest, being seen is essential to our sense of well-being. To be seen is to be acknowledged as a whole person, as a member of a community, group, tribe, or nation. In some cases, being seen can even be a matter of life and death. Disaggregated data allows us to see—and solve for—the unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and environmental resources that contribute to disparities. Systems must begin collecting and reporting data in a way that includes all members of our society so that we can make informed decisions that positively impact those most affected.

Invisible populations are often underserved by systems of oppression and lack the resources they need. This is especially true for marginalized groups who face discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or immigration status. When these groups are not visible in data collection and policymaking processes, their unique needs are often overlooked, leading to disparities in education, health, and economic outcomes.

Data is a critical tool for understanding the disparities that exist in our world, and disaggregating data by race and gender is essential to uncovering the truth. When data is disaggregated, it allows us to see the unique needs of different groups of people and ensure that everyone has access to resources. To understand the outcomes specific to Black girls, data needs to be disaggregated by both gender and race. For example, when you count how many children have been expelled from school, data disaggregated by gender and race would separately show how many White girls vs Black girls have been expelled from school. This type of disaggregated data can help illuminate how adultification bias is manifesting in schools, child welfare systems, and many institutions that touch the lives of Black girls.



It's important to note that there can be limits to data disaggregation. If the sample sizes are too small, then disaggregation can be a threat to privacy because it may be possible to identify the individuals represented in the data. We believe that part of caring about Black girls means caring about their privacy as well.

So, what is the solution? We need to find a balance. We should disaggregate where possible at the most granular level because it allows us to hold institutions accountable for disparities. But, if the populations are too small, then we should move up one level in granularity to disaggregate the data. For example, if individuals could be identified at the classroom level, then publish the data at a school level. If they could be identified at the school level, publish at the district level, etc. Privacy concerns are important, but they should not be used as an excuse to allow Black girls to disappear in the data.

COVID IMPACT ON DISCIPLINARY DATA

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on education at all levels, and the data on disciplinary actions is no exception.

During the pandemic, some Region 13 school districts reported a reduction in overall incidents and a decrease in disciplinary actions against African American students (4). However, districts should not be quick to claim that these are improvements as other factors likely contributed to the decreased incidents, as the discipline looked differently in a distant learning environment vs physically opposed to policy and practice change. For example, it's possible that the reduction can be partially attributed to the fact that many schools were forced to switch to a distance learning format. In a physical classroom environment, it was easier for teachers

Source

4. Austin ISD strategic plan 2020–25. Austin Independent School District. (n.d.). 2021–2022 Scorecard. Retrieved August 10, 2022, from <https://www.austinisd.org/strategic-plan>



and staff to identify and report disruptive behavior. However, in an online setting, it is much more difficult to keep track of every student's whereabouts and activities. As a result, some incidents may go unreported. Additionally, the discipline that did occur may have looked differently in a distance learning environment as opposed to a physical classroom.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on educational institutions. One of the most significant changes has been the shift to remote learning, which has had a significant impact on disciplinary data. The n-size of reported incidents dramatically decreased while students were learning from home, skewing the data. This means any year-over-year comparisons must be carefully viewed through this lens. The pandemic continues to create new challenges for educators, such as how to effectively discipline students who are not physically present in the classroom. These challenges underscore the importance of accurate and reliable data when making decisions about disciplinary policy. It will be interesting to see how these changes play out in the coming years. As more and more schools move to remote learning, we will likely see a continued skewing of disciplinary data. This could have several implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers. It is important to be aware of these changes so that we can adjust our approach to discipline accordingly.

Although the data looks promising on paper, it's important to take a closer look at the underlying causes before drawing any conclusions. Only then can school districts accurately gauge whether or not there has been a genuine improvement in the overall treatment of African American students.

UPDATES FROM THE 2020 POLICY BRIEF

CROWN ACT

Recommendation: Eradicate race-based hair discrimination to protect Black city employees.

Result:

In March 2020, the Innocence Initiative Policy Brief made recommendations to former City of Austin City Councilmember Greg Casar and the Human Resources Department to address race-based hair discrimination in the city. In August 2020, the City of Austin approved the creation of the Civil Rights Office (OCR). This office is charged with investigating and taking action on civil rights violations and cooperating with other authorities involved in civil rights issues. Measure worked closely with this newly formed office to educate community members on what hair discrimination looks like and where the CROWN Act stands federally. As a result of this collaboration, the City of Austin passed the Austin CROWN Act in June 2022. This act makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate against employees based on their hairstyles. The passage of this resolution is a major victory in the fight against hair discrimination, and Measure is proud to have spearheaded the work to make it happen.

HB 3485

Recommendation: Require the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to expand the data currently collected to include a breakdown of race by gender to increase transparency on the academic performance of Texas schools.

Result:

According to a recent study, Black and brown students are more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled from Texas schools (5), which can lead to learning setbacks and a higher risk of dropping out. Concerns were raised by the community around current data collection and reporting practices relating to school discipline, particularly concerning the lack of data disaggregation by both race and gender and the difficulty that individuals face in comprehending available data. During the 87th Texas Legislative Session, Measure worked closely to advise State Representative Vikki Goodwin's office in

Source

3. OCR. (2021). An Overview of Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Public Schools for the 2017-18 School Year. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-exclusionary-school-discipline.pdf>

addressing these concerns on ways to help in understanding and remedying discrepancies in disciplinary outcomes. As a result, H.B. 3485 was filed to address these concerns by requiring each public school district to include certain disaggregated information regarding disciplinary measures in its PEIMS report. The bill provided for the compilation of a related report that will be made publicly available online and emailed to parents, guardians, or other persons having lawful control over a student. H.B. 3485 successfully passed out of the House but did not get read on the Senate floor in time for passage. Measure continues to support this initiative leading into the 88th Texas Legislative session.

BLACK AUSTIN FUND

Recommendation: Increase funding for programs that support physical fitness, mental wellness, education, workforce development, and mentorship of Black girls.

Result:

In August 2022, The Austin Community Foundation, a public charity focused on closing the opportunity gap, announced the launch of The Black Fund, a new network established in response to systemic inequities impacting Black people in Austin (6).

The Black Fund is committed to investing more than \$1 million in the Black community over the next three years. The new fund will distribute funding through grants to Black-led and Black-serving nonprofits working in impact areas that include:

- Education
- Health and wellness
- Power building, organizing and advocacy
- Wealth building

“The creation of the Black Fund is an opportunity for Austin to intentionally invest in equity, embrace the unique assets of the Black community and support long-standing, impactful initiatives of Black-led and Black-serving organizations.”

- Colette Pierce Burnette, co-founder of the Black Fund and former president of Huston-Tillotson University

Source

5. The Black Fund. Austin Community Foundation. (2022). Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www.austincf.org/community-impact/black-fund/>

METHODOLOGY

School discipline data and student demographics data for the 2017-2018 school year were exported from the [Office of Civil Rights Data online portal](#) for individual ISDs in Region 13 as mapped and assigned by Texas Education Agency (TEA). (7) The Region 13 Educational Service Center includes 17 counties in Central Texas.

Data was provided as counts of individual disciplinary actions for all students, reported by racial/ethnic groups and gender. The analysis was restricted to disciplinary outcomes for female students in this population.

DATA ANALYSIS

Rates of disciplinary outcomes were calculated for each racial/ethnic group as the number of each type of disciplinary action associated with the group divided by each racial/ethnic group's total enrollment. Black and Hispanic student disciplinary outcome rates were divided by the analogous rate for White students to determine the degree to which Black or Hispanic students were more or less likely to experience these outcomes compared to the reference group.

LIMITATIONS

The analysis was done using data associated with the 2017-2018 school year, as these were the most recent data that were available on the Office of Civil Rights Data portal. Trends observed within this timeframe may not reflect current trends. This underscores the importance of frequent reporting under policy recommendations.

Without the disaggregation of all disciplinary data by race and gender, we're unable to track if policy is performing as intended and breaking the school to prison pipeline, respectively for male and female students of color.



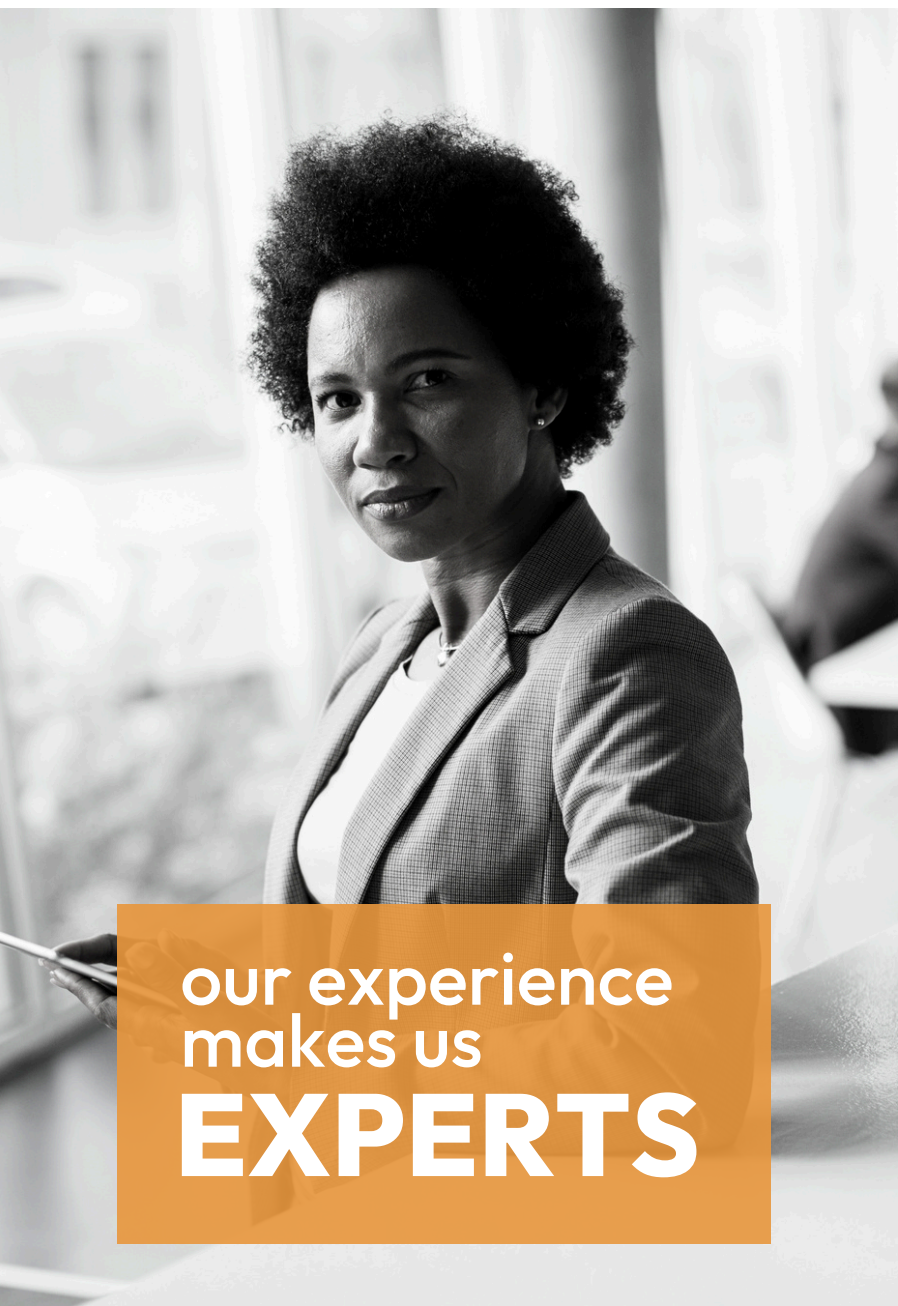
Source

6. About education service center region 13. Education Service Center Region 13. (n.d). Retrieved December 7, 2022, from <https://www4.esc13.net/about>

LIVED-EXPERIENCE DATA & STORYTELLING

“I find it disturbing that Black girls are continuously overly sexualized in the media and are disciplined at higher rates than White girls in schools. They need better protection.”

- Community member



“Throughout my career I’ve had to remain aware and navigate how my natural hair would be perceived in white spaces. With the passing of the Austin CROWN ACT, I finally feel safe to embrace my natural hair in the workplace.”

- Black woman

our experience
makes us
EXPERTS

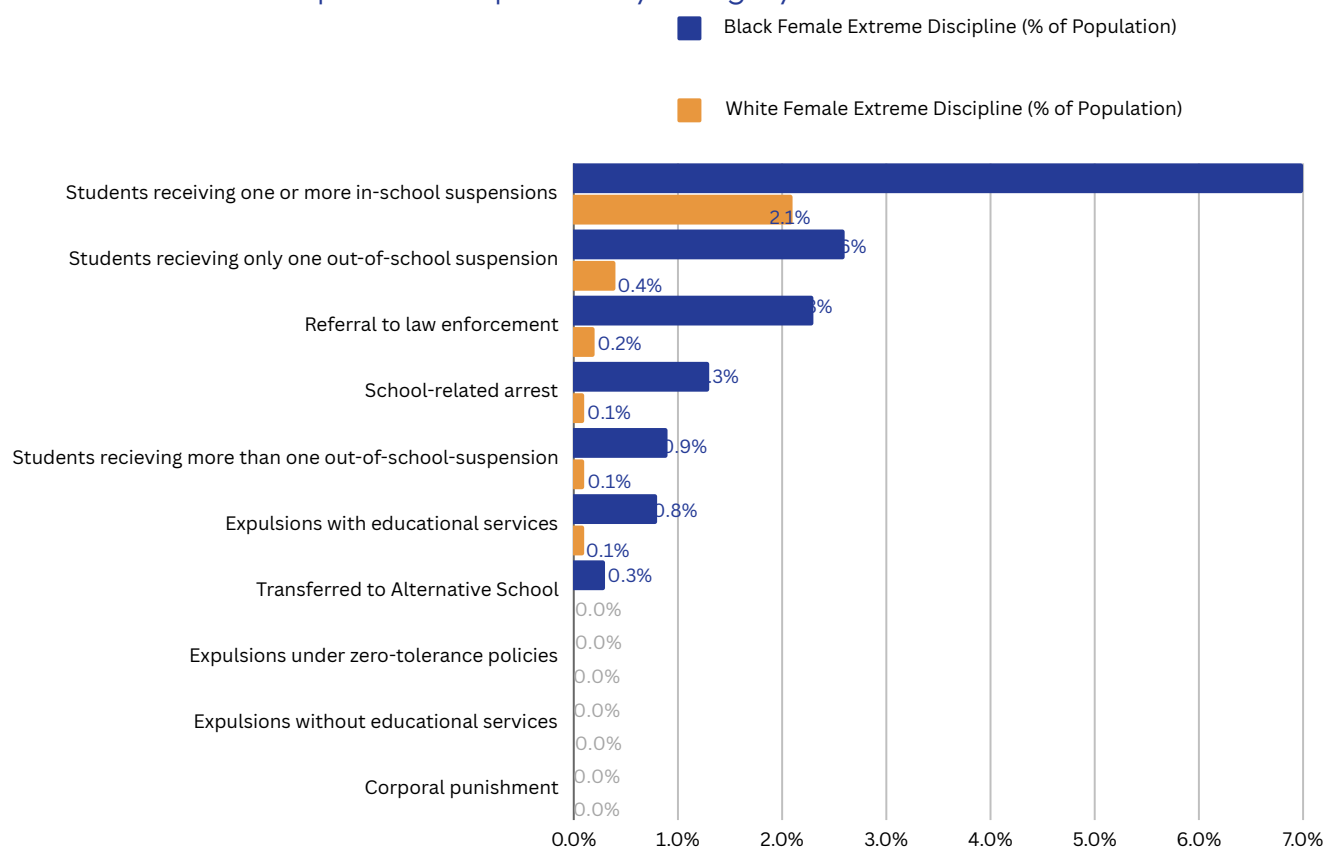
“Learning about adultification bias has sparked a conversation between my black girlfriend and myself. Now I understand her experience more, this has given me pause to think about my niece and how we treat her and my nephews and how we raise them. As well as encouraging me to do more in my community, both at work and at home to stop the bias.”

- White man

THE DATA

1. Black female students are 15 times more likely than white female students to be subjected to a school-related arrest (8).
2. Black female students are 10 times more likely than white female students to be expelled under zero-tolerance policies.

Figure 1. Sum of Black Female Extreme Discipline % of Population and Sum of White Female Extreme Discipline % of Population by Category



Source: Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) for Region 13 2017-18 School Year

Source

7. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2017-18) Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/flex/Reports.aspx?type=school>

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

SCHOOL POLICY CHANGES

- Mandate data collection to include a breakdown of campus discipline data by gender and race.
- Eliminate any disciplinary actions in school dress code policies related to hair style, texture, and color.
- Eliminate the discretionary removal of children from the classroom and school transportation services.

CITY COUNCIL POLICY CHANGES

- Collect data on youth served by city programs by gender, race, economic status and provide a yearly update on KPIs.
- Evaluate transportation planning approaches that incorporate community design and policies that prioritize protection of Black girls.

STATE POLICY CHANGES

- Require the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to expand the data currently collected to include a breakdown of race and gender to increase transparency on the academic performance of Texas schools.
- Adoption of the CROWN ACT.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL POLICY CHANGES

#1. MANDATE DATA COLLECTION TO INCLUDE A BREAKDOWN OF CAMPUS DISCIPLINE DATA BY GENDER FOR EACH RACE.

Reports of school disciplinary actions should be published and made easily and widely available to the public by the start of the next academic year regardless of state and/or federal requirements for such data. The reports should be shared with caregivers in a timely manner and included as part of the annual demographics report.

#2. ELIMINATE ANY DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS IN SCHOOL DRESS CODE POLICIES RELATED TO HAIR STYLE, TEXTURE, AND COLOR.

Adopt specific wording in dress code policies that prohibit discrimination against any student for hair style, texture, and color. Use gender-neutral language and avoid subjective terminology such as “distracting” or “provocative.”

#3. ELIMINATE THE DISCRETIONARY REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES.

The Safe Schools Act of 1995. Sec. 37.002 provides teachers the authority to remove students from the classroom at the teacher’s discretion. This use of discretion contributes to Black students being disproportionately removed from the classroom and thus calls for its elimination. (8)

The Safe Schools Act of 1995. Sec. 37.0022 provides the driver of a school bus transporting students to or from school or a school-sponsored event the authority to remove students from the bus at the driver’s discretion. This use of discretion puts Black girls who are disproportionately at risk for trafficking in danger due to adultification bias and thus calls for its elimination. (9)

The removal of students should not be used as a punitive punishment but as a last resort, along with resources provided for counseling and other restorative justice practices. These two provisions of the Safe Schools Act pose a serious threat to Black students, and should be removed in order to ensure safety for all students.

Sources

8. Texas Education Code § 37.002 (2019). <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.37.htm>

9. Texas Education Code § 37.0022 (2019). <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.37.htm>



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITY COUNCIL POLICY CHANGES

#1. COLLECT DATA ON YOUTH SERVED BY CITY PROGRAMS BY GENDER, RACE, ECONOMIC STATUS AND PROVIDE A YEARLY UPDATE ON KPIS.

To ensure that public school districts and city-funded youth programs are adequately meeting the needs of their participants, a database must be maintained with records of KPIS from the previous school year. This data should include not only a description of the youth-serving programs offered by the district or city but also information on the success/failure rate of said programs. In addition, the gender, race, and economic status of the participants should be included in the database. By mandating that this information be submitted at the end of each school year and approved within two months, administrators will be able to review the data and make necessary changes to improve the effectiveness of their programs. Such a system would help to ensure that public school districts and city-funded youth programs are accountable for the resources they receive and provide evidence-based services that meet the needs of all participants.

#2. EVALUATE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING APPROACHES THAT INCORPORATE COMMUNITY DESIGN AND POLICIES THAT PRIORITIZE PROTECTION OF BLACK GIRLS.

The issue of human trafficking is a pressing one that disproportionately affects Black girls. Over the last two years, Black girls in Austin are most likely to be victims of human trafficking, at 5.4 victims per 100,000 residents, compared to the overall population average of 0.9 victims over the last 10 years. This is a pressing issue that demands action from city officials. One way to protect Black girls is to evaluate the city's bus stop locations and transportation policies using Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM).

RECOMMENDATIONS TEXAS STATE POLICY CHANGES

#1. REQUIRE THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY (TEA) TO EXPAND THE DATA CURRENTLY COLLECTED TO INCLUDE A BREAKDOWN OF RACE BY GENDER TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF TEXAS SCHOOLS.

The inclusion of data on the intersectionality of both gender and race will provide a more complete understanding of academic inequalities and the implications of the power dynamic and oppression faced both within and among groups. The transparency of this data will lead districts to improve their comprehension of their demographic and take a stronger, holistic approach. A better understanding of these dynamics is necessary in order to develop interventions that address the needs of all students. Additionally, this data can help to identify patterns of inequities that can be addressed at a systemic level. Ultimately, creating a more just and equitable society for all.

#2. ADOPTION OF THE CROWN ACT

Measure advocates for the adoption of legal wording similar to that of the Austin CROWN Act that prohibits discrimination against hair texture or style. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects against discrimination due to race and thus covers natural representation of hair. The state should recognize that Afros, braids, locks, and twists are natural representations of Black hair. This legal wording protects Black women and men from discrimination in their workplace and school for having natural hair that may be seen as “unprofessional” despite the understanding that Eurocentric features form the foundation of perceived professionalism.



ABOUT MEASURE

Measure, an Austin-based nonprofit, works to support people impacted by social disparities and the accompanying narrative. Measure believes that, when used strategically, data provides a common language upon which community members can meet and increase their knowledge about the causes and work together to create equitable change and increase awareness. Measure has a mission to mobilize communities that are furthest from the opportunity to fight against systematic disparities in health, economics, criminalization, and education through the Measure CARE Model and our other anti-racist evaluation tools. The organization's vision is for Powerful Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities to have access to information that will support them to self-advocate toward an antiracist and equitable future.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

The Innocence Initiative is a community based project aimed at eradicating adultification bias in Central Texas and has been made possible through the generous support from Impact Austin, St. David's Foundation, and various community members.



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9. Texas Education Code § 37.0022 (2019). <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/ED/htm/ED.37.htm>



ABOUT OUR DATA ACTIVISTS



ANGEL CARROLL

Angel Carroll-Grays is an Austin area native and proud alumna of Texas Tech University. As the Director of Community Engagement & Strategic Partnerships, Angel drives Measures' community power-building strategy engaging with Black, Brown, and Indigenous organizations, foundations, and corporate partners to advance Measures' mission to use data and education to eliminate social disparities.



RYAN JONES

Ryan is focused on the intersection of data and restorative action, believing it takes many pulling hands to bend the arc of the universe towards justice. After getting a cross-disciplinary degree in Mechanical Engineering and Global Health and Health Policy from Harvard University, Ryan spent the early years of his career in the non-profit space, building healthcare infrastructure in rural Haiti. It was there Ryan recognized the transformative power of data, which led him to dive deep into the world of analytics and data science. Ryan now works in ag-tech, leveraging analytics to make farming more sustainable and profitable.



BRITTANY PAXMAN

Brittany is a Managing Partner at Communications Consulting Firm Point 600. She focuses on data analytics for corporate communications. Previously, Brittany was a senior partner at ICF Next where she led the marketing and communications analytics team.

Brittany serves as the Secretary for the MEASURE Board of Directors and volunteers on the advocacy committee as a data activist. She is currently on the Austin Young Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Committee where she is serving as the chair of the advocacy committee. Brittany studied Public Relations and Computer Science at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating in 2009.



KIM CHAPLIN

Kim Chaplin is a performance-driven Total Rewards executive with 20+ years of experience consulting with executive teams, designing innovative, strategic people programs, and translating strategies into programs and processes. She is passionate about centering on DEI, innovating people programs using data, and improving the individual experience.



WILLIE MANN