

GIRLS FOR GENDER EQUITY

POLICY AGENDA

SEPTEMBER 2017

Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is an intergenerational advocacy organization committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. Through youth organizing, leadership development, and community-building for gender and racial equity, GGE challenges structural forces-- racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, economic inequality — that work to constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of trans and cis girls and young women of color, and gender non-conforming youth of color.

At GGE, our work centers girls and gender non-conforming young people. We work in partnership with communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.

GGE mobilizes young people of color locally and nationally, particularly girls, queer, trans, and gender nonconforming youth ages 11-24 to work as a collective towards systemic change in all of the support networks that shape their development and achievement.. To do this, we undertake policy advocacy, community organizing campaigns, as well as youth of color-centered programming to achieve safety and equity in the social, political, educational, athletic, economic, health, and media spaces in which girls and women live and work.

CREATING AN INTERSECTIONAL POLICY AGENDA

Our mission envisions a society with optimal physical, economic, educational, and social systems to support the growth and well-being of our community. Our programs reflect this mission. They are designed and implemented to develop strengths, skills, and self-reflection. Our young leaders are often asked to participate in advocacy, education, and community organizing at the local, regional and national levels.

The young people who are a part of GGE work to make the world a better, and safer, place. These young people care about a broad range of issues. From criminal justice reform to gender justice, from violence against women and girls to education reform, from immigration reform to the movement for Black lives, these young people care about making policy change on issues that impact their everyday existence. Accountable to and led by the work of these young people, the GGE team embarked on a process to create an intersectional policy agenda that reflects this vision.

METHODOLOGY

To develop this agenda, we sought to contextualize GGE's analysis and work within a larger scope of the movements for justice that we move in -- and those that we want to engage in. The team developed a landscape analysis of policy platforms that featured potential overlap areas with GGE's agenda. This analysis included the policy platforms of coalitions, campaigns, networks, organizations, and political/governmental bodies. We looked at agendas that ranged from short-term, very focused agendas to visionary documents meant to serve as a beacon for radical change that may take decades of organizing and movement building.

With this understanding of the social justice landscape, the GGE team developed and synthesized results from a stakeholder survey and stakeholder conversations with key local, state, and national partners. Once research and stakeholder data were collected, GGE narrowed and prioritized this information, all while contextualizing for current political realities, staff capacity, and stakeholder relationships.

This policy agenda is a result of those conversations and analysis. We landed on a set of policy priorities that are deeply rooted in our values, our partnerships, and the communities to which we are accountable. Our agenda acknowledges political realities and pushes our movements forward, blending the art of the possible with a broad vision for change.

LOCAL | STATE | NATIONAL

Girls for Gender Equity is based in Brooklyn, New York and works directly with New York City and New York State community organizations and government. Because of our deep local expertise, we have also been invited to inform and influence national conversations and policies. Additionally, through our leadership in the NYC Young Women's Advisory Council, we are engaging with women and girls of color in cities and states throughout the country to support and create similar processes with our partners and stakeholders. In these ways, the scale and scope of our work is both local in practice and national in scope. This policy agenda reflects this frame.

MOVING THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER

At this time, when we are facing multiple social and political threats, we hope this agenda reinvigorates conversations about intersectional movement building, one of GGE's core values.

In the coming five years, GGE will focus our attention on shifting policies, as well as mobilizing community in the following arenas:

- Decriminalizing schools
- Creating safe learning and community environments
- Supporting young people's free expression of gender and sexuality

The leadership and needs of young women, girls, queer and TGNC youth of color are the cornerstone of both our vision and our process. This agenda is driven by the perspectives of GGE's youth activists who are part of our broad community of young leaders.

DECRIMINALIZING SCHOOLS

Schools serving young people of color increasingly rely on local law enforcement and the criminal justice system to maintain disciplinary order. However, the very institutions meant to support young people through their growth have become places where young people of color experience both criminalization and violence. Girls and TGNC youth of color have become targets for this criminalization, encountering disproportionately harsh discipline practices with consequences that can potentially follow them throughout their lives. We believe that girls and TGNC young people of color deserve environments in which they are not disciplined for who they are, but environments that focus on transformative justice, healing, and self-determination.

Address responses to vague and subjective status offenses that tend to be used disproportionately against girls and gender non-conforming people of color

Girls of color tend to be disproportionate targets of school discipline, particularly for students with disabilities - and disproportionate punishment grows worse for girls with darker skin¹. Vague status offenses with subjective applications are the most disproportionately applied, because they don't correspond to students' actions, but rather authority figures' interpretation of these actions. Eliminating these vague statutes (e.g., "Defying authority"²) is an important step towards eliminating the disparity in disproportionate punishment.

Redirect funding from law enforcement officers in schools to funding alternative safety measures

Rather than creating safety, law enforcement instead has a history of brutality and terror in communities of color, serving as a gateway into a system that disproportionately targets youth of color. The continued presence of law enforcement officers in schools opens the door to criminalization for student offenses that can easily be dealt with outside of the criminal legal system. While students in schools without a police presence - whiter, wealthier students - are disciplined without criminal repercussions, students in schools that have a regular law enforcement, usually in schools with a high population of young people of color, presence are subjected to criminalization early in their youth, opening up the door to more draconian enforcement later in life.

Increase the number of trained and supervised guidance counselors and Social Workers away from New York City Police Department presence in schools

We know that in NYC schools, school safety positions are often held by Black women. We acknowledge that a shift in policy may result in the loss of these jobs. To that end, we commit to

¹ *Schools' Discipline for Girls Differs by Race and Hue*, New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/11/us/school-discipline-to-girls-differs-between-and-within-races.html>

² *Ending the School-To-Prison Pipeline*, Urban Youth Collaborative
<http://www.urbanyouthcollaborative.org/ending-school-to-prison-pipeline/>

thinking about alternative positions, such as peacekeepers and counselors, that could be open to previous school safety officers.

CREATING SAFE LEARNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS

Our homes, schools and communities should be places where young people thrive, where they are free from bullying, harassment, violence and sexual assault. In many cases, not only are schools the sites of this kind of harm, but they are also inadequately equipped to support survivors of violence and harassment. We believe that schools should be places that accept and support students to succeed, and that policy solutions must address the needs of students who have historically been marginalized. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer (LGBQ) and TGNC students face increasing rates of bullying and harassment, as well as depression and homelessness. Our work with young women and TGNC youth of color shows the need for services for sexual assault survivors. We will support policies to ensure that teachers, counselors and health care providers in schools are equipped to provide culturally competent services to students and that young people have the resources to make healthy-informed decisions about their lives.

Fund and support the development of trauma and healing informed student services

Young people's exposure to trauma deeply affects their ability to learn, and chronic exposure to family or community violence is linked with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive issues that make learning difficult, and is associated with higher rates of school dropout.³ Trauma-informed and restorative practices can decrease suspension rates and help keep girls in school.⁴ These practices should be culturally relevant, and should include healing work. Girls of color - especially low-income and disabled girls - are particularly susceptible to childhood and chronic trauma. For this reason, trauma-informed student services are particularly important for girls of color, who are at the crosshairs of structural racial and gender violence.

Supportive and comprehensive resources for survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Creating and sustaining an atmosphere of safety, trust, confidentiality, and openness is crucial to creating a welcoming learning environment. Research on school-based prevention programs show evidence that students can be effectively engaged on this issue. Such programs can increase safety, and also help reduce stigma and self-blame for sexually abused youth.⁵ GGE calls for:

³ http://coe.ucsf.edu/coe/spotlight/ucsf_hearts.html

⁴ <https://acestoohigh.com/2014/01/28/hearts-el-dorado-elementary/>

⁵ Finkelhor D. The prevention of child sexual abuse. *Future of Children*. 2009;19:169-194.

Wurtele SK, Kenny MC. Partnering with parents to prevent childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse Rev*. 2010;19:130-152.

- City-wide policy that requires teaching students in grades pre-K-5th grade, age-appropriate techniques to recognize child sexual abuse and tell a trusted adult.
- Trainings for all school personnel on childhood sexual abuse that focus on prevention as well as resources that support survivors.
- Continue to engage in efforts to examine how mandatory reporting policies continue to surveil families of color

Full implementation of Title IX

Girls deserve learning environments that are free from harassment and discrimination. Title IX protects all students in learning institutions receiving federal funding, requiring reasonable accommodations for young women and TGNC students to stay in school. Monitoring full implementation of Title IX is imperative for young women and TGNC young people of color to have the accommodations they need to stay and be successful in school. GGE will monitor implementation with a particular focus on:

- Ending sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools
- Ensuring equitable access and resource provision to out of school programs
- Ensuring equitable access and resources to pregnant and parenting students

Culturally responsive, intersectional feminist education curricula (K-12)

A culturally responsive, intersectional, feminist curriculum acknowledges the diverse and intersectional backgrounds that students come from, as well as education to understand and address how structural, institutional, and interpersonal power, violence, and oppression shape our worldview and interactions with other people. Curriculum should be reflective of all students' backgrounds, identities, and experiences.

New York State should convene a task force to assess cultural relevance of curricula across subject areas in middle and high school to explore the grounding of curriculum in core content that challenges racism, ableism, and sexism, and is LGB and TGNC-affirming.

Full implementation of the Dignity for All Students Act

The Dignity For All Students Act was signed in New York State in September of 2010, and took effect statewide by July of 2012. The legislation seeks to create an environment free of harassment and discrimination in schools, specifically addressing harassment and discrimination on the basis of a student's race, color, weight, ethnicity, religion, religious practices, disabilities, sexual orientation, gender, or sex.⁶ Guidance from the state clarifies that transgender students are protected under DASA as well, as the legislation clarifies that its definition of gender includes gender identity, citing the US DOE's inclusion of protections for transgender students under title IX.⁷ It is important to ensure that DASA is attached to funding to ensure meaningful implementation of the law.

⁶ <http://legislation.nysenate.gov/pdf/bills/2009/S1987B>

⁷ http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/documents/Transg_GNCGuidanceFINAL.pdf

Full implementation would mean that all schools across the state would:

- Revise their codes of conduct to create school environments free from harassment and discrimination
- Partake in trainings on how to implement successful anti-harassment programs in schools
- Have at least one employee per school trained in non-discriminatory instructional and counseling methods
- Document each material account of bullying and report to the New York State Education Department with open source data released at least annually.

DASA also outlines the provision of grants to be disbursed to assist school districts in implementing these guidelines. New York State should appropriate sufficient funds for these purposes.

NYPD accountability in and adherence to policies set forth to promote human dignity and reduce community harm

The New York City Police Department has a long and documented record of disproportionate enforcement on New York City residents of color, particularly Black and Latin[x] residents.⁸ Girls and gender nonconforming youth of color experience this discrimination as well, many times in similar ways to their cisgender male peers, and other times in ways that are distinctly related to their gender, or the ways police officers perceive it. Trans and gender non-conforming youth are routinely profiled by the NYPD⁹, and stand to gain greatly from efforts for police accountability.

The NYPD should implement and review existing reforms, such as the patrol guide changes adopted in 2012 responding to the treatment of transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers¹⁰ and the limits on the use of condoms as evidence of prostitution-related charges¹¹, both of which highly impact girls and gender nonconforming youth of color. Similarly, the NYPD should work with community members to develop, enact, and effectively implement a Department policy specifically designed to prevent, detect, and ensure accountability for police sexual misconduct against members of the public.

We also call for the passage of common-sense reforms backed by community advocates, such as:

- **The Right To Know Act**, which requires that police officers provide identification for themselves at the end of an encounter, and to provide a specific reason for their law

⁸<https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/newly-released-nypd-data-shows-shocking-disparity-stop-and-frisks>

⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/nyregion/arrests-by-the-fashion-police.html>

¹⁰<https://www.nyclu.org/en/press-releases/nypd-patrol-guide-changes-respect-rights-transgender-new-yorkers>

¹¹<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/13/nyregion/new-york-police-to-limit-seizing-of-condoms-in-prostitution-cases.html>

enforcement activity obtaining objective proof that voluntary and informed consent to search was given.

- **The Police Statistics and Transparency Act**, which would allow the state to capture and publicly report vital information about policing

Support initiatives that allow pregnant and parenting students to continue their education

For a variety of structural reasons, young women of color are more likely to give birth than their white counterparts.¹² Because young parents can so rarely count on the supports they need in school, parenting - either by choice or circumstance - has become one of the myriad reasons girls of color are pushed out of schools. Young parents deserve the same access to education as their peers.

For this to be a reality, New York City public schools should:

- Expand funding for programs for pregnant and parenting young people, such as New York City's Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) program
- Improve availability and accessibility of school-based day-care programs;
- Implement meaningful and comprehensive training for school administrators, guidance counselors, social workers, and other education professionals on the legal rights of pregnant and parenting students;
- Create spaces in schools where nursing student parents can breastfeed and/or express breast milk; and
- Ensure that pregnant and parenting students know their rights and have resources to advocate for themselves.

¹² <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing/trends/index.html>

SUPPORTING FREE EXPRESSION OF GENDER & SEXUALITY

For LGBTQ and TGNC youth of color and young women and girls of color, institutions meant to keep them safe are often instead sites of harm at best ignored by these institutions and at worst perpetrated by the institutions themselves. The complicity of schools in the harming of LGBTQ and TGNC young people of color is unacceptable. We believe that young people are capable decision-makers about their own health. Young people deserve access to a full range of health care services, including sexuality education.

Require medically accurate, age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, comprehensive sexuality education in grades K-12

It is impossible for young women and TGNC youth to keep themselves safe when their knowledge on how to do so is limited. Comprehensive, medically accurate, and culturally appropriate sexuality education is an important at all ages, and should be required in public schools at every grade, in every year. Additionally, it is imperative for students to receive sexuality education from educators who are adequately prepared to do this. New York City should require and provide funding for adequate training for educators to provide sexuality education in an accurate and appropriate manner. The New York City sex education mandate should reflect the national sexuality education standards, and adequate funds should be appropriated to adequately meet these standards.

Eliminate dress code violations

Dress code violations are also often leveraged disproportionately against girls and gender nonconforming students of color, particularly when they are vague or subjective. Clothing is often considered “inappropriate” in racialized and gendered contexts, meaning that girls of color and TGNC students are often targets of these violations. Moreover, dress codes often situate girls and young women as sexual objects and distractions to their male peers.

Push for research investment on gender-based violence against trans and GNC youth

Without including questions that ask whether respondents are transgender, no official information exists about the ways transgender students experience violence. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the issues facing transgender students, it is imperative to expand data collection efforts. Data is often required for a full and in-depth understanding of student issues, and to set effective policies that will support students. The exclusion of transgender students from large data collection instruments serves to obscure issues and delay solutions.

This lack of data could be remedied by adding a question to the Civil Rights Data Collection measure to quantify incidences of bullying, and the collection of data on the impact of school discipline policies on LGBT youth.

Safe and affirming bathrooms in publicly-funded places

Transgender students routinely avoid school, and experience staggering dropout rates.¹³ Trans and gender nonconforming students require safe and affirming learning environments.

Department of Education guidelines on affirming trans students should be fully implemented in all schools.

¹³ https://www.nyclu.org/sites/default/files/publications/dignityforall_final_201508.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Atlas: DIY
Brooklyn Movement Center
Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Coalition for Educational Justice
Communities United for Police Reform (CPR)
Demos
Dignity in Schools New York
Feminist Teacher
Girls Inc.
Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence
Law@theMargins
Little Red School House & Elisabeth Irwin High School
MomsRising.org
NAACP Legal Defense Fund
National Women's Law Center
Parent Action Committee(PAC)
PowHer NY
Race, Gender, Sexuality and Criminalization Social Justice Institute, Barnard Center for
Research on Women
Research Alliance for NYC Schools, NYU
The Center for Court Innovation
The National Crittenton Foundation
United State of Women - Civic Nation
Vera Institute
Women & Justice Project
Youth Represent