Although no one was injured and no property was damaged, Kiera was arrested, charged with two felonies, suspended from school for 10 days, and sent to an alternative school. Public outcry resulted in the dropping of the felony charges and Kiera graduated from high school, but her family accumulated significant legal fees and it may take years to remove the felony arrest from her records. While Kiera continues to pursue her passion for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in college, such overly punitive practices often discourage African American girls from pursuing STEM and even from staying in school. Experts note that many students subjected to overly punitive discipline practices suffer from feelings of disengagement from the learning environment and stigmatization.

African American girls are especially vulnerable to being targeted for overly punitive discipline. During the 2011-2012 school year, 12 percent of African American girls in K-12 schools received an out-of-school suspension—six times the rate of white girls—and more than any other group of girls and most boys. Although African American girls comprise less than 17 percent of all female students, they were 31 percent of girls referred to law enforcement, and 43 percent of girls subjected to school-related arrests. African American girls being pushed out of school and into the juvenile justice system are fueling the school-to-prison pipeline and making girls the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system population. Oftentimes, African American girls are penalized for minor and subjective offenses, such as “disrespect.” The report examines the role of race and gender stereotypes and bias and

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr. ~
how they contribute to discipline disparities and other disparities impacting the educational outcomes of African American girls. For instance, educators’ stereotypes of African American girls as “loud” and disrespectful often result in interpretations of African American girls’ behavior, such as “speaking up” or being assertive, as confrontational, or not “ladylike” (all code for not conforming to society’s standard of feminine behavior). The report calls for an end to such discriminatory practices based upon race and gender. Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibit such discriminatory practices and policies in public schools, and federal oversight and enforcement is key to addressing such prevalent disparities.

Among the report’s recommendations to address such disparities is a recommendation for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights to investigate the extent to which school discipline policies disproportionately impact girls of color. Another recommendation is for schools and districts to provide girls, particularly those with a history of trauma, with culturally appropriate social and emotional learning programs that teach skills for responding to conflict in constructive ways. Early screening for trauma will also help to appropriately identify victims, provide them with needed services, and prevent them from being improperly targeted as aggressors. The educational success of African American girls, and all students, depends upon the implementation of such alternatives to overly punitive discipline practices that push students out of school and


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