

# I JUST WANT TO LEARN

## GIRLS OF COLOR AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE IN MASSACHUSETTS

### BACKGROUND

Our "I Just Want to Learn" report follows Massachusetts Appleseed's previous work, *Protecting Girls of Color from the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, which demonstrated the disproportionate punishment of Black girls in schools.

### WE FOUND THAT BLACK GIRLS ARE:

**5x** more likely to be suspended or expelled than white girls.

**4x** more likely to be arrested at school compared to their white peers.

### OUR "I JUST WANT TO LEARN" REPORT SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND:

*Why are girls of color in Massachusetts disciplined at much higher rates than their white peers?*

We interviewed **11** girls of color in Massachusetts public schools to bring visibility to their experiences with exclusionary discipline.

### CONTACT US

@massappleseed

www.massappleseed.org

### KEY FINDINGS

#### 1. STUDENTS ARE DISCIPLINED FOR OTHERS' ACTIONS

- Many girls reported being disciplined for actions they did not commit.
- *"I always used to get in trouble for things I didn't do...It makes me feel disgusted."* – Anne, 9th grade

#### 2. INEQUITABLE DRESS CODE APPLICATION

- Black girls are disproportionately targeted for dress code violations.
- *"Girls of Black backgrounds that have a shaped body...get dress coded for wearing the same thing somebody of a different race and different body would be fine wearing"* – AJ, 8th grade student

#### 3. RACIAL BIASES IN THE CLASSROOM

- Teachers display racial biases in the classroom, which negatively impacts the girls' sense of safety and well-being.
- A teacher called one student's behavior "ghetto".

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### KEY FINDINGS (CONT.)

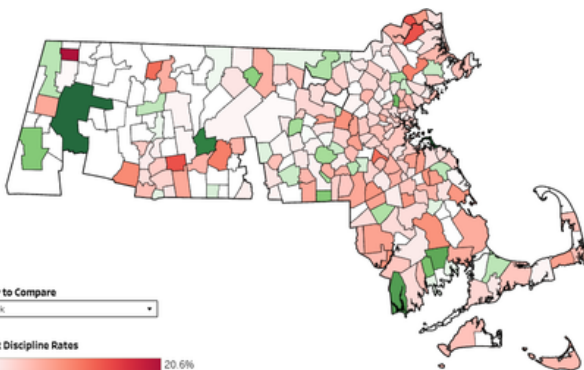
#### 4. SCHOOL DISCIPLINE LEADS TO INCREASED STAFF SCRUTINY

- Students who face discipline experience increased negative scrutiny from school staff.
- “The school always has an extra eye on you after you get in trouble.” -Mya, 9th grade student

#### 5. EARLY EXPOSURE TO DISCIPLINE

- **65%** of participants were first disciplined in grades 3-5.
- **35%** were first suspended or expelled in grades 7-8.

CLICK ON THE MAP TO INTERACT WITH OUR MA SCHOOL DISCIPLINE DATA DASHBOARD



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### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR:

#### THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

- **Ban** the suspension and expulsion of students for *dress code violations*.
- **Ban** the suspension and expulsion of *young students*.

#### THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Diversify curriculums** to reflect non-white histories and cultures.
- **Require rigorous training** for teachers and educational staff on *anti-racist practices, cultural competency, and trauma-informed learning*.

#### SCHOOL COMMITTEES & SUPERINTENDENTS

- **Hire** more *social workers* and *school counselors*.
- **Implement anonymous reporting** on inappropriate behavior from teachers and faculty.

#### TEACHERS & ADMINISTRATORS

- **Let students explain their side** of the story before subjecting them to discipline.
- **Institute periodic check-ins** between teachers and students.