GAO

September 2024

K-12 EDUCATION

# Nationally, Black Girls Receive More Frequent and More Severe Discipline in School than Other Girls

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Nationally, Black Girls Receive More Frequent and More Severe Discipline in School than Other Girls

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal data show that many girls are struggling across almost all measures of well-being—including substance use, experiences of violence, mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Girls' well-being can be affected by their experiences in public schools, and the detrimental effects of removing students from the classroom for discipline (exclusionary discipline).

GAO was asked to review the effect of disciplinary policies and practices on girls in U.S. public schools. This report (1) examines what national data show about discipline disparities among girls in K-12 schools across various student characteristics, including race and disability, and school characteristics; (2) identifies factors that contribute to differences in discipline among girls in school; and (3) describes girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school.

To understand discipline patterns for girls, GAO conducted descriptive and regression analyses using 2017–18 Education civil rights data (2020–21 data was anomalous because in-school attendance was affected by COVID-19) and a dataset that captures student infractions and associated disciplinary actions. To identify factors contributing to differences in discipline among girls, GAO reviewed empirical research and interviewed stakeholders specializing in the discipline and experiences of girls in schools.

To examine girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school, GAO analyzed nationally representative survey data from the 2017, 2019 and 2022 National Crime Victimization Surveys, School Crime Supplement.

View GAO-24-106787. For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (202) 512-7215 or nowickij@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Among girls, Black girls faced more and harsher forms of discipline than other girls and had the highest rates of exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions. According to GAO's analysis of the most recent Department of Education data before the pandemic, in school year 2017–18, Black girls comprised 15 percent of all girls in public schools but received almost half of suspensions and expulsions. Further, GAO's analysis of school year 2017–18 infraction or behavior data showed that Black girls received harsher punishments than White girls even when the infractions that prompted disciplinary action were similar. For example, Black girls had higher rates of exclusionary discipline compared to White girls for similar behaviors such as defiance, disrespect, and disruption. The data also show that in every state in the U.S., Black girls are disciplined at higher rates. When they also had a disability, exclusionary discipline rates of Black girls grew larger.

National Rate of Out-of-School Suspension for White Girls Compared to Black Girls
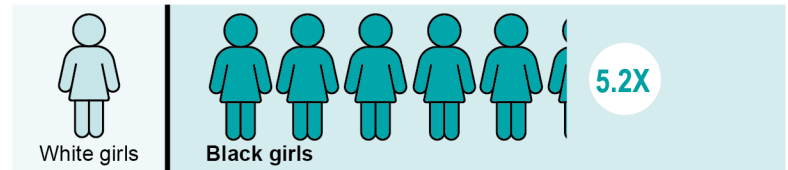
Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education school year 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data. | GAO-24-106787

GAO's review of empirical studies identified multiple forms of bias as factors that contribute to the higher discipline of Black girls. For example, one study found that adultification—a form of racial and gender bias in which adults view Black girls as older and more promiscuous than their same-age peers—leads to harsher punishments for Black girls. Another study found that colorism—a form of racial bias against those with darker skin—is a factor in disproportionate discipline of girls. Stakeholders GAO interviewed also noted that girls in school are often subject to gender stereotypes that punish girls for failing to conform to traditional expectations of femininity. For example, officials from an organization representing school counselors and psychologists noted that many teachers encourage girls to uphold a quiet, docile form of femininity and "to act like ladies."

GAO's analysis of nationally representative survey data found that over half a million girls (an estimated 5 percent) reported feeling unsafe in school. In addition, Black girls reported feeling less safe in schools than other girls. For example, Black girls more frequently reported that they were afraid of being attacked on school property than White girls. National data also show differences among groups of girls when looking at connectedness, which includes a sense of being supported and belonging at school. For example, more Black girls disagreed that teachers at their schools treat students with respect than White girls or Asian girls and more frequently felt that school rules were unfair.

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Abbreviations

CCD	Common Core of Data
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
Education	Department of Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
Justice	Department of Justice
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning
OCR	Office for Civil Rights
Section 504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended
SCS	School Crime Supplement, National Crime Victimization Survey
SY	School Year
SWIS	School-Wide Information System
Title II	Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
Title VI	Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
Title IX	Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

September 10, 2024

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House of Representatives

The Honorable Ayanna Pressley
House of Representatives

How students are treated in schools can profoundly influence their experiences and have a lingering effect into adulthood. Recent federal data show that many girls are struggling across almost all measures of well-being—including substance use, experiences of violence, mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.[1] For example, in 2021, nearly 60 percent of girls experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Our prior reports on discipline disparities, dress code discipline, and school policing shed light on the differential experiences of students in U.S. public schools.[2] These reports show that girls are increasingly treated and disciplined differently than their peers, which can cause them to feel unsafe and uncomfortable at school.

You asked us to review the effect of disciplinary policies and practices on girls in U.S. public schools. This report (1) examines what national data show about discipline disparities among girls in K-12 schools across various student characteristics, including race and disability, and school characteristics; (2) identifies factors that contribute to differences in

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[1]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report*: 2011–2021.

[2]See, GAO- *K-12 Education: Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities*, GAO-18-258 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 22, 2018); GAO- *K-12 Education: Department of Education Should Provide Information on Equity and Safety in School Dress Codes*, GAO-23-105348 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 25, 2022); and GAO- *K-12 Education: Differences in Student Arrest Rates Widen When Race, Gender, and Disability Status Overlap*, GAO-24-106294 (Washington, D.C.: July 08, 2024).

discipline among girls in school; and (3) describes girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school.

To examine discipline disparities among girls in K-12 schools, we conducted several analyses. First, we conducted descriptive analyses using Education's School Year (SY) 2017–18 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC or civil rights data).[3] We did not use the SY 2020–21 civil rights data (the most recent) because of anomalies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[4] Using the SY 2017-18 civil rights data, which were the next most recent data, we developed a regression model to explore whether certain school characteristics, such as the poverty level of the school, were associated with higher rates of discipline.[5] We also used these data to perform a decomposition analysis.[6]

To determine whether there were different disciplinary consequences among groups of girls for similar behaviors, we analyzed 2017-18 data from the School-Wide Information System (SWIS).[7] SWIS captures

[3]The Civil Rights Data Collection is a generally biennial survey that is mandatory for all public schools and school districts (preschool–12th grade) in the 50 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, that receive federal financial assistance from Education. The data contain information about school characteristics and programs, services, and outcomes for students. Among other things, the CRDC captures data on six broad categories of discipline: out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, referrals to law enforcement, expulsions, corporal punishment, and school-related arrests. It does not capture data on less-severe disciplinary actions, such as detentions. We examined discipline in five types of public schools: traditional, magnet, charter, alternative, and special education schools.

[4]In November 2023, Education released civil rights data for SY 2020–21, which was the first full school year under the COVID-19 pandemic. We did not use that year in our analysis because Education cautioned users to consider the impact of the coronavirus pandemic when comparing the data from the SY 2020-21 to previous years. See app. I for more information.

[5]A generalized linear regression analysis allowed us to test the association between a given school characteristic and the number of girls receiving a given disciplinary action, while holding other school characteristics constant. We conducted several sensitivity analyses to ensure our results held under various statistical assumptions. However, regression modelling cannot be certain to fully control for all factors, including those that might drive the discipline of girls in schools.

[6]We modeled what the national discipline gap would be if Black girls' enrollment patterns mirrored those of White girls, while holding within-school discipline rates for Black and White girl's constant. To do so, we redistributed Black girls' enrollment to be proportional to White girls' enrollment, holding the school-level discipline rates for Black and White girls' constant. Please see the technical app. III for more information.

[7]University of Oregon (2024). School-wide information system: Dataset D0126. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon.

behavior incidents and additional disciplinary outcomes from 5,356 schools in 48 states. To increase the reliability of the SWIS data, we matched the SWIS data with 2017-18 discipline data from the civil rights data and tested for associations with race, student behavior, and the types of discipline girls received, resulting in a sample of 4,613 schools across 36 states.[8]

We also analyzed the data by major and minor infractions, as defined by SWIS; and by "subjective" or "objective" infractions. We considered subjective infractions to be those that required interpretation by school staff and objective infractions to be those based on more defined criteria. To determine whether an infraction was subjective or objective, we performed a content analysis.[9] Specifically, to categorize infractions as subjective or objective, two analysts independently reviewed each infraction type and compared it to infraction definitions in the SWIS, applying professional judgement, as appropriate. If the analysts disagreed about the categorization, a third analyst reviewed the infraction type. We had the maintainers of the SWIS data review and verify our subjective/objective categorization of the SWIS variables; they concurred with all our categorizations. See appendix IV for more information.

To identify factors that contribute to discipline disparities and differential experiences among girls in school (e.g., by race, disability, and gender identity), we identified and reviewed 100 empirical studies. Twenty-six of these met our criteria for rigor.[10] We also interviewed researchers and officials from national organizations specializing in the discipline and experiences of girls in schools. This included interviews with organizations of national teachers, school counselors, and school psychologists.

To describe girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school, we analyzed SY 2017, 2019, and 2022 data (the three most recent surveys)

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[8]Data were weighted to match the demographic distributions of traditional public schools in 36 states. For a list of these states, see app. IV.

[9]Prior researchers have used various methods, such as an expert panel, to categorize subjective and objective/less subjective infractions and may have categorized certain infractions differently. Researchers have also noted that the decision to issue an infraction can be inherently subjective and is subject to individual teacher tolerances for behavior. See Girvan et al., "The Relative Contribution of Subjective Office Referrals to Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline," *School Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2017): 392-404.

[10]For more information about our literature review, see app. V.

from the National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement (SCS). The SCS is co-sponsored by Education and the Department of Justice and is a nationally representative survey of students' perceptions of safety, trust, engagement, belonging in schools, and school climate (e.g., school fairness, crime, bullying, resources).[11]

To obtain perspectives on the issue of discipline and directly capture the experiences of girls who had attended K-12 public schools, we circulated an anonymous questionnaire for women ages 18 to 24 through social media and a national organization in February through April 2024. In the questionnaire, we asked respondents for their views about girls' discipline, treatment in schools, and their perceptions of safety, trust, and belonging in K-12 schools. We received 31 completed questionnaires, which we reviewed for common themes. We selected for presentation in our report illustrative examples that represent the range of perspectives from questionnaire respondents. Information obtained from the questionnaires is not generalizable (see app. VI).

We assessed the reliability of data from the datasets we used through discussions with knowledgeable officials, reviewing key documents, and conducting tests with the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2023 to September 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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[11]The survey sample includes approximately 7,100 U.S. school students in 2017, about 7,000 students in 2019, and over 5,500 in 2022. We used the appropriate survey weights to produce national estimates of all public-school students ages 12–18. The school survey generally asks questions related to students' experiences with, and perceptions of crime and safety at school, including preventive measures employed by schools, students' participation in after-school activities, students' perception of school rules and enforcement of these rules, the presence of weapons, drugs, alcohol, and gangs in school, student bullying, hate-related incidents, and attitudinal questions relating to the fear of victimization at school.

Background

School Discipline and the "Push Out" of Girls

Schools employ different types of discipline to address problem behaviors in students, which generally fall into three categories: (1) exclusionary, (2) non-exclusionary, and (3) restorative. Exclusionary discipline removes students from their learning environments by, for example, suspending or expelling them. Our prior work notes that exclusionary discipline results in short- and long-term negative outcomes for students due to lost instructional time, including increased risk for failing standardized tests and increased rates of dropouts and incarceration.[12]

Non-exclusionary discipline provides consequences to address behavior but does not remove students from the learning environment. Restorative practices are intended to build relationships, strengthen communities, and achieve discipline through participatory learning and decision-making (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Examples of Exclusionary, Non-exclusionary, and Restorative Discipline in Schools

Exclusionary discipline
- Out-of-school suspension
- Expulsion

Non-exclusionary discipline
- Detention
- Saturday school

Restorative discipline
- Restitution
- Community service

Source: GAO summary of Department of Education reports. | GAO-24-106787

Researchers and advocates have noted that the practice of "push out"—the overuse of discipline and practices that remove students from school—leads those students to underachieve, drop out, or become

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[12]See GAO-18-258. For example, one study cited in our prior work showed that a single in-school suspension is predictive of significant risk for academic failure (greater than 25 percent chance of failure) on a state-wide standardized test, while controlling for individual and school level characteristics. See Danielle Smith, Nickolaus A. Ortiz, Jamilia J. Blake, Miner Marchbanks III, Asha Unni, and Anthony A. Peguero. "Tipping Point: Effect of the Number of In-school Suspensions on Academic Failure," *Contemporary School Psychology,* 25 (Dec. 2021): 466–475.

involved in the juvenile justice system. Some reports have noted that girls who are pushed out can face more negative educational and economic consequences than boys in similar situations.[13] Further, girls who are pushed out are more likely to experience gender-based violence and participate in risky behaviors, which increases risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system, according to researchers.[14] Girls' behavior in school can be affected by a confluence of challenges that they experience inside and outside of the classroom (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: Examples of Health and Social Challenges That Girls Disproportionately Experience

Compared to boys, girls experience more of the following:
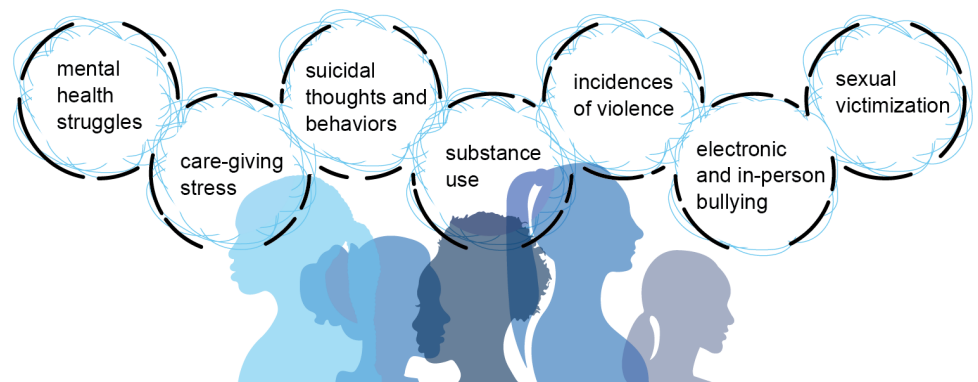
Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report: 2011–2021 and research studies on youth caregiving. | GAO-24-106787

Role of Education and Justice

Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Justice's Civil Rights Division are responsible for enforcing certain federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in schools, including in administering student discipline. Examples of these federal laws include:

[13]NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., National Women's Law Center, *Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity* (New York, NY.: 2014); African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality And Social Policy Studies, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* (New York, NY: 2015).

[14]Yasmin Vafa and Rebecca Epstein, *Criminalized Survivors: Today's Abuse to Prison Pipeline for Girls.* (2023).

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin by recipients of federal funding[15];

- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits sex discrimination in education programs that receive federal funding[16];

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504) which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funding; and[17]

- Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities (such as public schools districts, public colleges and universities, and public libraries), whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.[18]

In addition, Justice enforces Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title IV), which authorizes the Attorney General to address certain equal protection violations based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in public schools and institutions of higher education.[19]

As part of their enforcement responsibilities, both agencies investigate complaints or reports of possible discrimination. Education also collects data about disciplinary actions and protected characteristics, and carries out agency-initiated investigations, called compliance reviews, that target problems that Education has determined are particularly acute. In

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[15]42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d – 2000d-7. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. According to Education guidance, although Title VI does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, Title VI's protections from race, color, and national origin discrimination extends to students who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, or citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity. See *Dear Colleague Letter: Protecting Students from Discrimination, such as Harassment, Based on Race, Color, or National Origin, Including Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics* (May 7, 2024). https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-202405-shared-ancestry.pdf.

[16]20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 – 1689.

[17]29 U.S.C. § 794.

[18]42 U.S.C. §§ 12131 – 12165.

[19]42 U.S.C. §§ 2000c – 2000c-9.

addition, Justice has the authority to file suit in federal court to enforce the civil rights of students in public education.

In July 2022, Education issued guidance related to disciplinary removals of students with disabilities who receive services under Section 504.[20] The guidance states that if a proposed disciplinary removal would constitute a significant change, an evaluation is required to determine if the student's behavior was caused by or directly and substantially related to the student's disability. If so, the school is prohibited from carrying out any discipline that would remove the student from the educational setting. Instead, the school must determine and implement the proper placement for the student, including any additional or different services or change in educational setting, to address the disability-based behavior.

Further, in 2023, Education and Justice issued a joint resource on confronting racial discrimination in student discipline.[21] The resource describes how Education and Justice resolved investigations of 14 school districts in 10 states nationwide under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The investigations demonstrate ways in which school districts can take steps to proactively improve the administration of student discipline. Also in 2023, Education issued guiding principles for creating and sustaining effective discipline policies. It includes strategies schools can adopt that are responsive to student's needs, such as teaching them skills to manage behavior and learn from mistakes, and to facilitate their learning.[22]

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[20]Education issued guidance on the actions schools must take to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability when disciplining students. *Supporting Students with Disabilities and Avoiding Discriminatory Use of Student Discipline Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,* describes the rights of students with disabilities under Section 504, i.e., students who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Education also issued *Questions and Answers: Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities and IDEA's Discipline Provisions*. IDEA-eligible students are identified as having one or more of different disability categories, such as intellectual disabilities or hearing and visual impairments.

[21]U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, *Resource on Confronting Racial Discrimination in Student Discipline*, (Washington, D.C.: May 2023).

[22]U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates*, (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2023).

Black Girls Faced More and Harsher Forms of Discipline Compared to Other Girls

Schools Disciplined Black Girls, Especially Black Girls with Disabilities, at Higher Rates than Other Girls

Push Out to Alternative Schools and Juvenile Justice Facilities

Our analysis of national civil rights data found that Black girls are disproportionately transferred to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons and placed in juvenile justice facilities. Although Black girls comprised 15 percent of all girls enrolled in public schools in fiscal year 2017–18, they accounted for 47 percent of all girls transferred to alternative schools and 34 percent of the girls placed in juvenile justice facilities.

Source: GAO analysis of national civil rights data, school year 2017–18. tetiana/stock.adobe.com (photo). | GAO-24-106787

Black girls had the highest rates of exclusionary discipline and were the most disproportionately disciplined group of girls in schools in SY 2017-18, according to our analysis of Education's civil rights data. For example, Black girls comprised 15 percent of girls enrolled in public schools that year but received almost half of the exclusionary discipline.[23] This included 45 percent of out-of-school suspensions, 37 percent of in-school suspensions, and 43 percent of expulsions. Other groups of girls also experienced disproportionate discipline for some categories of discipline—American Indian/Alaska Native girls, Multiracial girls, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls—but to far lesser extent than Black girls (see fig. 3).[24]

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[23]We used the term "disproportionate" to describe instances in which a group of girls was overrepresented among girls disciplined compared to their representation in the overall population of girls.

[24]The federal data sources we cite in this report use the terms "Black or African American," "Hispanic or Latino" (which refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race), "American Indian or Alaska Native," and "two or more races" in their data collection. We use the terms Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Multiracial for the purposes of this report.

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Figure 3: Representation of Girls Who Received Discipline Compared to Overall Population of Girls, by Race or Ethnicity, School Year 2017–18

The chart shows whether each group of girls was underrepresented or overrepresented among girls who received discipline. For example, Black girls were overrepresented by about 30 percentage points because Black girls made up about 15 percent of girls' enrollment but received nearly 45 percent of girls' out-of-school suspensions.

In-school suspension
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	21.3
White	-13.7
Hispanic	-3.6
Asian	-4.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.4
Multiracial	0.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.1

Out-of-school suspension
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	29.5
White	-20.1
Hispanic	-5.9
Asian	-4.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5
Multiracial	0.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0

Expulsion
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	27.7
White	-16.2
Hispanic	-7.0
Asian	-4.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2
Multiracial	0.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.2

Corporal punishment
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	31.9
White	-5.8
Hispanic	-20.0
Asian	-5.1
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.6
Multiracial	-1.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.3

Referral to law enforcement
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	17.3
White	-13.3
Hispanic	-1.3
Asian	-3.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9
Multiracial	0.3
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0

School-related arrest
Underrepresented ◄ ► Overrepresented

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage point difference
Black	20.8
White	-16.6
Hispanic	-1.4
Asian	-4.2
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.8
Multiracial	0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.7

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Nationally, the largest difference in exclusionary discipline rates was between Black girls and White girls, with Black girls receiving

exclusionary discipline at rates 3 to 5.2 times that of White girls (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Discipline Differences between Black and White Girls, School Year 2017–18
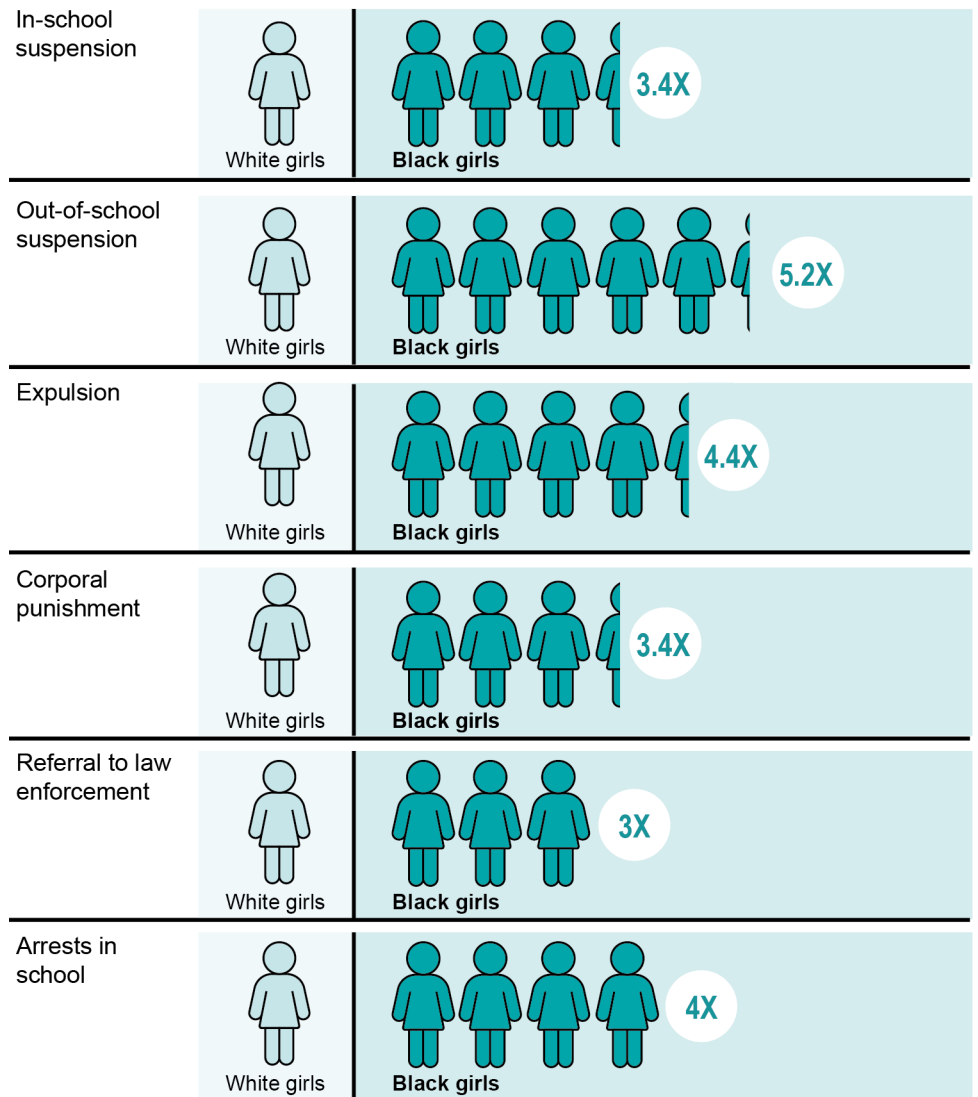
In-school suspension

White girls | Black girls **3.4X**

Out-of-school suspension

White girls | Black girls **5.2X**

Expulsion

White girls | Black girls **4.4X**

Corporal punishment

White girls | Black girls **3.4X**

Referral to law enforcement

White girls | Black girls **3X**

Arrests in school

White girls | Black girls **4X**

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, school year 2017-2018. | GAO-24-106787

Note: Discipline differences are defined as the ratio between the discipline rate for Black girls and White girls.

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This pattern also held at the state level, with every state disciplining Black girls more than White girls. The out-of-school suspension rate for Black girls ranged from 1.3 times the rate of White girls in Hawaii to 20.5 times the rate of White girls in the District of Columbia.[25] Regionally, the differences in out-of-school suspension rates between Black and White girls were generally higher in the Upper Midwest and lower in the Northeast (see fig. 5).

Figure 5: Differences in Suspension Rates between Black and White Girls, by State, School Year 2017–18
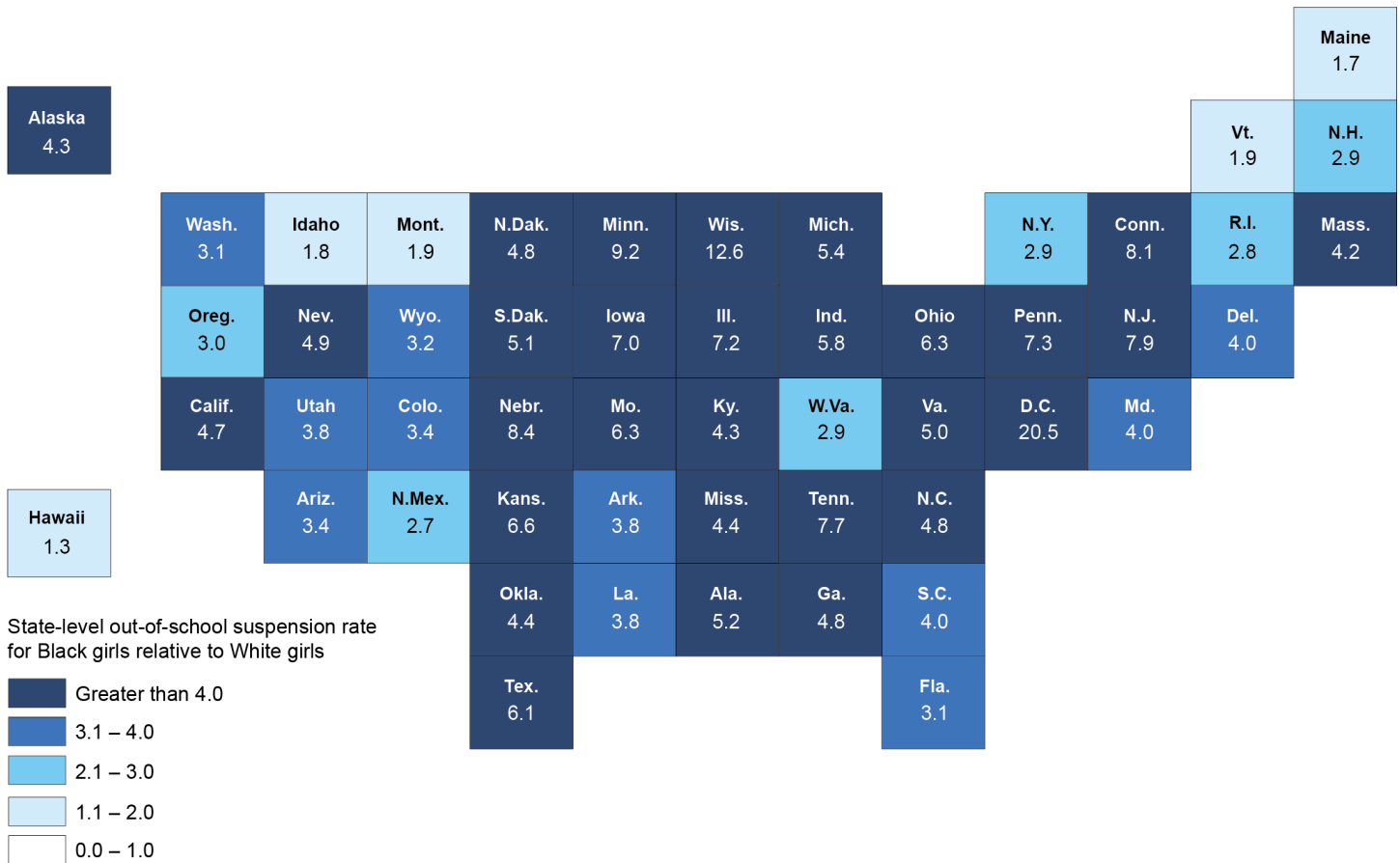
													Maine 1.7
Alaska 4.3											Vt. 1.9	N.H. 2.9	
	Wash. 3.1	Idaho 1.8	Mont. 1.9	N.Dak. 4.8	Minn. 9.2	Wis. 12.6	Mich. 5.4		N.Y. 2.9	Conn. 8.1	R.I. 2.8	Mass. 4.2	
	Oreg. 3.0	Nev. 4.9	Wyo. 3.2	S.Dak. 5.1	Iowa 7.0	Ill. 7.2	Ind. 5.8	Ohio 6.3	Penn. 7.3	N.J. 7.9	Del. 4.0		
	Calif. 4.7	Utah 3.8	Colo. 3.4	Nebr. 8.4	Mo. 6.3	Ky. 4.3	W.Va. 2.9	Va. 5.0	D.C. 20.5	Md. 4.0			
Hawaii 1.3		Ariz. 3.4	N.Mex. 2.7	Kans. 6.6	Ark. 3.8	Miss. 4.4	Tenn. 7.7	N.C. 4.8					
				Okla. 4.4	La. 3.8	Ala. 5.2	Ga. 4.8	S.C. 4.0					
				Tex. 6.1				Fla. 3.1					

State-level out-of-school suspension rate for Black girls relative to White girls

- Greater than 4.0
- 3.1 – 4.0
- 2.1 – 3.0
- 1.1 – 2.0
- 0.0 – 1.0

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

[25]The discipline rate takes into account the number of girls of each race or ethnicity enrolled in all public K-12 schools in a state. For example, the discipline rate for Black girls is calculated by dividing the number of Black girls who received out-of-school suspensions in a state by the number of Black girls enrolled in public K-12 schools in that state.

When girls' race and disability status intersect, even starker differences in discipline are evident, especially for Black girls. National civil rights data show that across all races, girls with disabilities almost always experienced higher rates of discipline compared to girls without disabilities (see fig. 6).[26] This was particularly acute for Black girls with disabilities, who received out-of-school suspensions at almost 1.7 times the rate of Black girls without disabilities and 3.6 times the rate of White girls with disabilities.

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[26]Data by race do not include students with disabilities who receive services only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504). In this report, "students with disabilities" refers to students who receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, unless otherwise specified.

Figure 6: Discipline Rates for All Groups of Girls by Discipline Type and Disability Status, School Year 2017–18

In-school suspension

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	10.6	7.7
White	4.3	2.3
Hispanic	4.2	2.8
Asian	1.0	0.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	5.8	4.4
Multiracial	5.8	3.4
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2.6	2.1

Out-of-school suspension

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	13.7	8.8
White	3.8	1.7
Hispanic	4.1	2.4
Asian	1.1	0.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	6.0	4.4
Multiracial	6.6	3.3
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5.5	3.2

Expulsion

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	0.5	0.3
White	0.1	0.1
Hispanic	0.1	0.1
Asian	0.0	0.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2	0.1
Multiracial	0.2	0.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1

Corporal punishment

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	0.2	0.2
White	0.1	0.1
Hispanic	0.0	0.0
Asian	0.0	0.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.1	0.1
Multiracial	0.1	0.0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0

Referral to law enforcement

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	1.2	0.6
White	0.4	0.2
Hispanic	0.5	0.3
Asian	0.2	0.1
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.7	0.5
Multiracial	0.6	0.3
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.4	0.3

School-related arrest

Group	With disability	Without disability
Black	0.3	0.2
White	0.1	0.0
Hispanic	0.1	0.1
Asian	0.0	0.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2	0.1
Multiracial	0.1	0.1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3	0.2

Legend: ■ With disability □ Without disability

Note: Data by race do not include students with disabilities who receive services only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504).

While the general pattern within racial groups was that students with disabilities had higher rates of discipline compared to those without disabilities, that was not always the case across racial groups.

Specifically, Black girls and, in some cases, American Indian/Alaska Native girls without disabilities experienced higher rates of discipline than girls with disabilities of other races.

For Similar Infractions or Behaviors, Black Girls Are Removed from Class More Often than Other Girls

As figure 7 shows, for disciplinary referrals involving similar infractions or behaviors, Black girls often had higher rates of exclusionary discipline compared to White girls, according to our analysis of SY 2017–18 SWIS data.[27]

For disciplinary referrals involving truancy, American Indian / Alaska Native girls received higher rates of exclusionary discipline compared to Black and White girls.

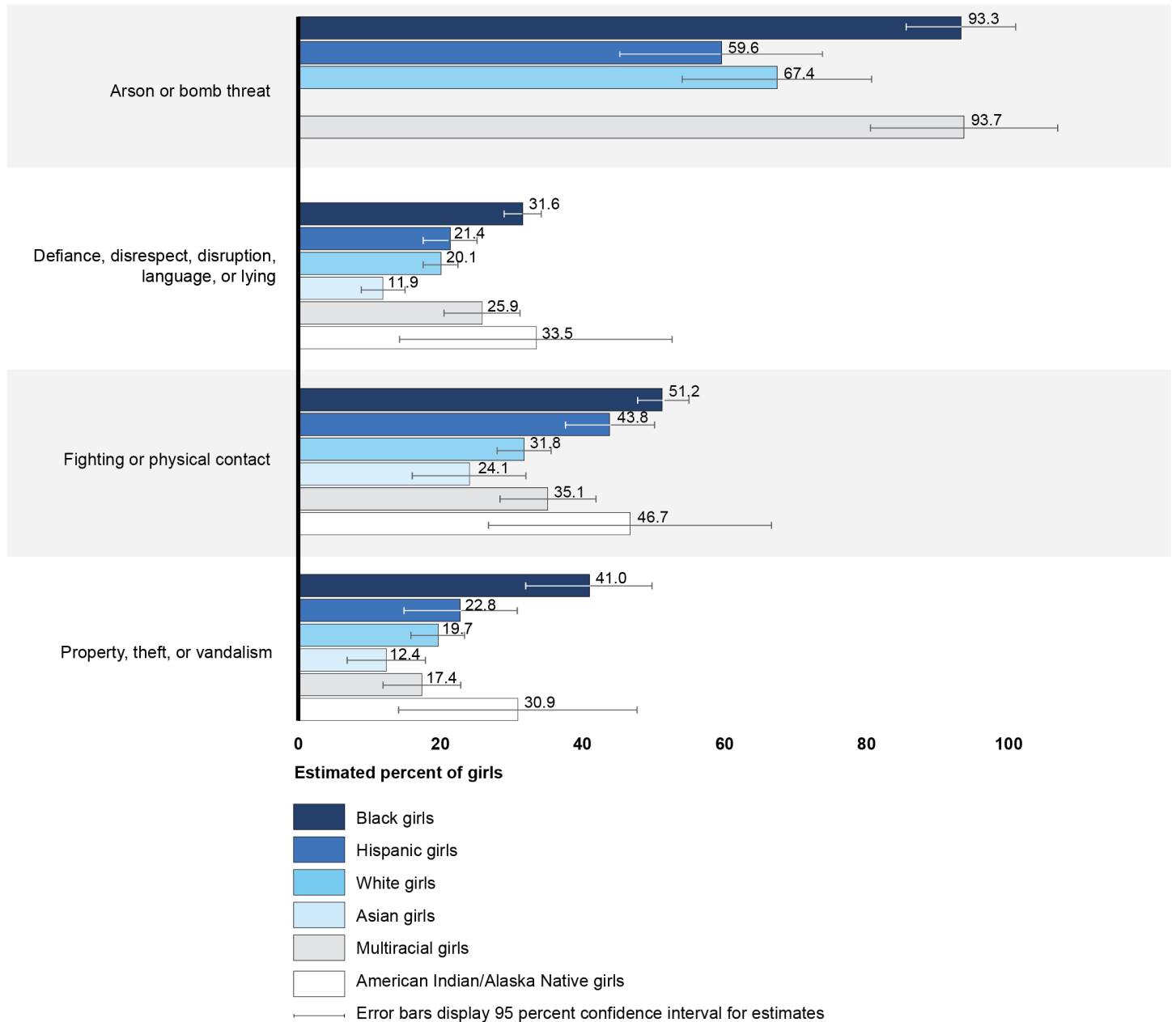**How We Used the 2017–18 School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Data.**

We conducted several analyses to determine if different races of girls are disciplined differently for similar behaviors. To do this, we merged a dataset—SWIS—that contains data on girls' infractions in 4,613 schools with Education's Civil Rights Data Collection. By applying statistical weights to the SWIS data, our merged dataset matches the demographic profile of schools across 36 states—which enroll 60 percent of students in the U.S. SWIS contains categories of behaviors (considered both major and minor) that can result in different disciplinary outcomes (see app. IV for full list).

Source: GAO summary of School-wide information system | GAO-24-106787

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[27]SWIS data capture multiple aspects of the disciplinary referral process, which can include handling behaviors/infractions in class, sending students to the office, and other discipline outcomes. In SWIS data, approximately 80 percent of disciplinary referrals only involve a single behavior. For approximately 20 percent of disciplinary referrals that involve multiple behaviors or infractions, we cannot ascribe which specific behavior led to a specific discipline outcome.

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Figure 7: Estimated Percent of Girls Receiving Exclusionary Discipline, by Infraction Type, School Year 2017–18

Arson or bomb threat
- Black girls: 93.3
- Hispanic girls: 59.6
- White girls: 67.4
- Multiracial girls: 93.7

Defiance, disrespect, disruption, language, or lying
- Black girls: 31.6
- Hispanic girls: 21.4
- White girls: 20.1
- Asian girls: 11.9
- Multiracial girls: 25.9
- American Indian/Alaska Native girls: 33.5

Fighting or physical contact
- Black girls: 51.2
- Hispanic girls: 43.8
- White girls: 31.8
- Asian girls: 24.1
- Multiracial girls: 35.1
- American Indian/Alaska Native girls: 46.7

Property, theft, or vandalism
- Black girls: 41.0
- Hispanic girls: 22.8
- White girls: 19.7
- Asian girls: 12.4
- Multiracial girls: 17.4
- American Indian/Alaska Native girls: 30.9

Estimated percent of girls

Legend:
- Black girls
- Hispanic girls
- White girls
- Asian girls
- Multiracial girls
- American Indian/Alaska Native girls
- Error bars display 95 percent confidence interval for estimates

Source: GAO analysis of School-Wide Information System, School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Note: This figure displays infractions with statistically significant differences in exclusionary discipline between Black girls and White girls. For a full list of infractions, including those with non-significant differences, see app. IV. Omitted bars for some racial/ethnic groups of girls are due to lack of precision in the estimates.

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Across different types of infractions, our analysis of SWIS data show that Black girls received more exclusionary discipline than White girls.[28] For example:

- Major Infractions.[29] For disciplinary referrals involving behavior SWIS identified as a "major" infraction (behaviors that involve sending a student to an administrator), an estimated 42 percent of Black girls received exclusionary discipline compared to an estimated 32 percent of White girls exhibiting similar behavior.[30] Moreover, when we used a regression to hold the number of major infractions among groups of girls within a school constant, Black girls received in-school and out-of-school suspensions more often than White girls.[31]

- Minor Infractions. For disciplinary referrals involving behavior SWIS identified as a "minor" infraction (behaviors managed by staff), an estimated 16 percent of Black girls received exclusionary discipline compared to an estimated 9 percent of White girls exhibiting similar behavior.[32]

We also categorized and analyzed discipline outcomes by subjective infractions (which require interpretation by school staff) and objective infractions (which contain more defined criteria) (see fig. 8).[33]

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[28]For disciplinary referrals involving multiple behaviors/infractions (approximately 20 percent of all infractions), SWIS data does not designate which specific behavior/infraction led to exclusionary discipline. In these instances, we associated each infraction type/behavior with exclusionary discipline.

[29]SWIS data defines major behaviors as those involving sending a student to an administrator, whereas minor behaviors are managed by staff. Minor behaviors are less severe but are nonetheless recorded for monitoring purposes.
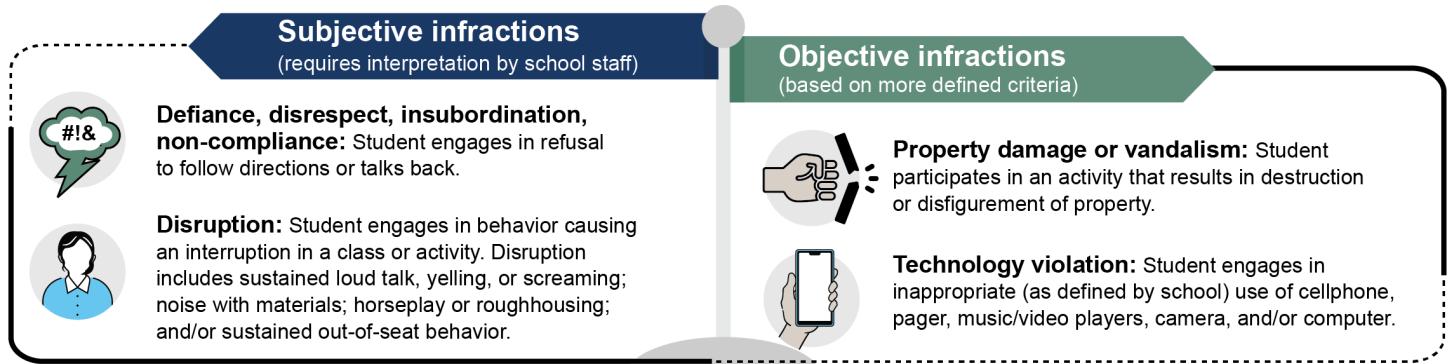
[30]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error is 3 percent for Black girls and 3 percent for White girls.

[31]Using a Poisson regression, we controlled for the number of major infractions in a school for each racial group of girls, the number of incidents in a school that involved more than one infraction for each racial group of girls, and demographic characteristics of schools. For more information about this model, see technical app. III.

[32]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error is 4 percent for Black girls and 2 percent for White girls. On average, schools suspended and expelled all girls for a total of 62.5 days for major infractions and 19.6 days for minor infractions. We found that the number of days that different groups of girls were suspended/expelled from schools were not statistically different from each other.

[33]To determine whether an infraction was categorized as "subjective" or "objective," we performed a content analysis. See app. IV for more information.

Figure 8: Examples of Subjective and Objective Infractions, 2017–18 School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Data

Subjective infractions
(requires interpretation by school staff)

Defiance, disrespect, insubordination, non-compliance: Student engages in refusal to follow directions or talks back.

Disruption: Student engages in behavior causing an interruption in a class or activity. Disruption includes sustained loud talk, yelling, or screaming; noise with materials; horseplay or roughhousing; and/or sustained out-of-seat behavior.

Objective infractions
(based on more defined criteria)

Property damage or vandalism: Student participates in an activity that results in destruction or disfigurement of property.

Technology violation: Student engages in inappropriate (as defined by school) use of cellphone, pager, music/video players, camera, and/or computer.

Source: GAO analysis of School-Wide Information System infraction definitions, School Year 2017-18. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

Note: We determined whether an infraction was categorized as "subjective" or "objective" by performing a content analysis of School-Wide Information System (SWIS) infraction definitions.

- Subjective Infractions. Black girls and American Indian/Alaska Native girls were disciplined for subjective infractions at higher rates than White girls. Specifically, an estimated 18 percent of Black girls and 16 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native girls received disciplinary referrals involving infractions identified as subjective, compared to 9 percent of White girls.[34] Furthermore, an estimated 30 percent of Black girls received exclusionary discipline for incidents that involved these infractions compared to 18 percent of White girls.[35]

- Objective Infractions. An estimated 16 percent of Black girls and 21 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native girls received disciplinary referrals involving infractions identified as objective. In contrast, an estimated 7 percent of White girls received disciplinary referrals involving infractions identified as objective.[36] Furthermore, 41 percent of Black girls received exclusionary discipline for incidents that involved one of these infractions compared to 30 percent of White girls.[37]

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[34]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error is 3 percent or Black girls, 2 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native girls, and 1 percent for White girls.

[35]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error for both Black girls and White girls is 2 percent.
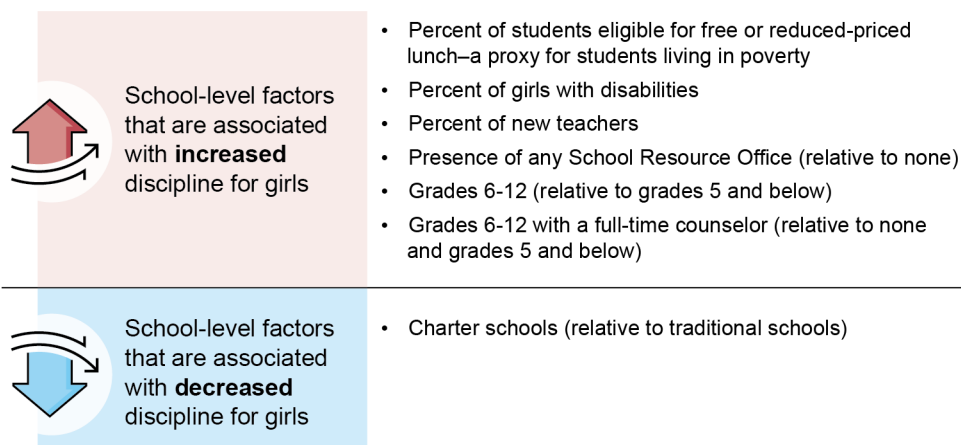
[36]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error is 3 percent for Black girls, 10 percent for American Indian / Alaska Native girls, and 1 percent for White girls.

[37]Using a 95 percent confidence interval, the margin of error for Black girls is 4 percent and 3 percent for White girls.

Certain School Characteristics Are Associated with More Discipline of Girls

Our regression analysis found that certain school characteristics were associated with increases or decreases in exclusionary discipline for all girls (see fig. 9).[38] In addition, schools with higher percentages of Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Multiracial students were associated with increased out-of-school suspensions of girls overall. In contrast, schools with higher percentages of Asian students were associated with decreased in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of girls overall.

Figure 9: School-level Factors Associated with Girls' Exclusionary Discipline

School-level factors that are associated with **increased** discipline for girls
- Percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch–a proxy for students living in poverty
- Percent of girls with disabilities
- Percent of new teachers
- Presence of any School Resource Office (relative to none)
- Grades 6-12 (relative to grades 5 and below)
- Grades 6-12 with a full-time counselor (relative to none and grades 5 and below)

School-level factors that are associated with **decreased** discipline for girls
- Charter schools (relative to traditional schools)

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2017-18. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

Note: Selected characteristics are independent variables from our generalized linear regression analysis describing the association between certain school characteristics and girls' discipline. Separate regressions were performed for each type of exclusionary discipline. Characteristics listed were statistically significant at least at the 95th percentile for each type of exclusionary discipline.

We also performed a regression analysis of school characteristics associated with the discipline of Black girls specifically. Holding other school characteristics constant, schools with higher percentages of Black students were associated with decreased suspensions, expulsions, referrals, and arrests of Black girls, in particular. A similar pattern is true for the discipline of Hispanic girls. Schools with a higher percentage of Hispanic students were associated with decreased suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement for Hispanic girls, holding other school characteristics constant.

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[38]We also performed Poisson regressions for the discipline outcome variables of corporal punishment, referrals to law enforcement and school-related arrests. For more information about these models, see technical app. III.

Most of the Discipline Gap Between Black and White Girls Is Driven by Differences in Discipline Within the Same Schools

What Explains the National Discipline Gap?

The decomposition analysis models a counterfactual scenario. In this report, the model displays how large the racial gap in discipline would be for Black girls and White girls if they were to hypothetically attend the same schools.

Using a decomposition analysis allowed us to test whether the higher discipline rate of Black girls is largely driven by differential discipline within the same schools or a function of going to high discipline schools.

Source: GAO analysis of national civil rights data, school year 2017–18. Photo: vectorwin/stock.adobe.com (left photo) and JackF/stock.adobe.com (right photo). | GAO-24-106787

We found that the discipline gap between Black and White girls is mainly driven by differential discipline within the same schools, not enrollment patterns across schools. A common theory that attempts to explain racial disparities in discipline is that Black girls attend schools with strict discipline policies and thus are disciplined at higher rates because of the schools they attend. According to this theory, schools serving Black students are more likely than other schools to adopt strict "zero-tolerance policies" for dealing with student misbehavior, and this explains the higher rates of discipline of Black girls.[39] However, while Black girls were indeed disproportionately enrolled in schools with the highest rates of suspensions and expulsions, according to our decomposition analysis of civil rights data, the national discipline gap between Black and White girls is mostly attributed to differences in the discipline of Black and White girls within the same schools.[40]

Specifically, a decomposition analysis found that differences in the schools that Black girls and White girls are enrolled in does not explain most of the discipline gap.[41] Rather, these enrollment patterns account for less than half of the discipline gap in suspensions and expulsions between Black girls and White girls. Even if Black girls attended the same schools as White girls, our analysis showed that they would still be disciplined at higher rates than White girls. This is because differences in how Black girls and White girls are disciplined within the same school are responsible for most of the gap across the three categories of discipline we examined (see fig. 10).
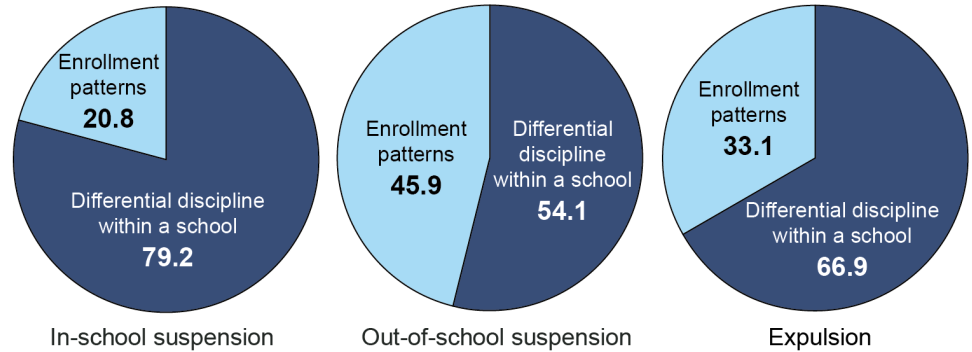
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[39]See, for example, Jayanti Owens and Sara S. McLanahan, "Unpacking the Drivers of Racial Disparities in School Suspension and Expulsion," *Social Forces*, vol. 98, no. 4 (2020): 1548–1577.

[40]See app. III for more information about schools with the highest discipline rates.

[41]For more information about the decomposition analysis, see app. II.

Figure 10: Results of Decomposition Analysis on National Discipline Gap Between Black and White Girls, School Year 2017-18

Portion of national discipline gap between Black and White girls explained by:

Enrollment patterns 20.8
Differential discipline within a school 79.2
In-school suspension

Enrollment patterns 45.9
Differential discipline within a school 54.1
Out-of-school suspension

Enrollment patterns 33.1
Differential discipline within a school 66.9
Expulsion

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Multiple Forms of Bias Cited As Factors That Contribute to Discipline Disparities for Black Girls

Racial, Gender, and Disability Biases Are Cited As Factors Contributing to Discipline Disparities for Black Girls

In our literature review, we identified multiple forms of bias as factors that contribute to discipline disparities for Black girls—factors that also emerged as key themes in our interviews with national organizations. Of the 26 studies we reviewed that identified factors that contribute to girls' discipline, including discipline disparities, 13 found that race or racial bias were contributing factors in the higher discipline rates of Black girls compared to other groups of girls.[42] For example, one study found that, even after controlling for a number of factors—such as student behavior in school; student attitudes towards school; academic performance; and school characteristics—Black girls were three times more likely than

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[42]The other studies in our review used different designs and methodologies to examine factors that contribute to discipline or discipline differences, including some studies that only examined the discipline of Black students (within differences), Black and Hispanic students, American Indian/Alaska Native students, and studies that analyzed teacher characteristics, such as race.

White girls to be suspended.[43] Another study found that, while racial differences in school composition accounted for 20 percent of the racial gap in discipline between Black and White elementary school girls, the differential treatment of Black girls explained 25 percent of the differences in suspensions and expulsions, specifically.[44]

Colorism, a form of racial bias that favors lighter skin tones, can also impact the discipline and treatment of groups of girls, according to empirical research we reviewed and stakeholders we interviewed. For example, a study in our review found that, when controlling for school and student variables, Black girls with the darkest skin tone were twice as likely to be suspended as White girls; this relationship didn't hold for Black girls with lighter skin complexions.[45] Stakeholders we interviewed also noted that Native American, Hispanic, and Multiracial girls with darker skin tones may be subject to racial bias and disciplined more harshly than their peers. Another study found that in Florida middle and high schools, Puerto Rican, Dominican, West Indian/Caribbean, non-Hispanic Black, and Haitian girls had significantly higher probability of suspension in 2018 compared to White girls, after controlling for select student characteristics. The authors of this study stated that some of the findings imply the importance of skin tone and appearance related to perceived threat and discipline.[46]

Stakeholders we interviewed noted that racial bias, whether conscious or not, causes teachers and school administrators to punish Black girls more frequently and more harshly and to support them less in the classroom. Similarly, some of the respondents ages 18–24 who completed our

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[43]Jacob Erickson and Jennifer Pearson, "Excluding Whom? Race, Gender, and Suspension in High School," *Education and Urban Society,* vol. 54, no. 4 *(*2022): 389-422.

[44]Using a linear prediction model, the study measured differential treatment on a subsample of students that attended the same school as another student of a different race. The study also found that ten percent of this racial gap was explained by differences in girls' behavior records at start of school. Owens and McLanahan, "Unpacking the Drivers of Racial Disparities in School Suspension and Expulsion," 1548-1577.
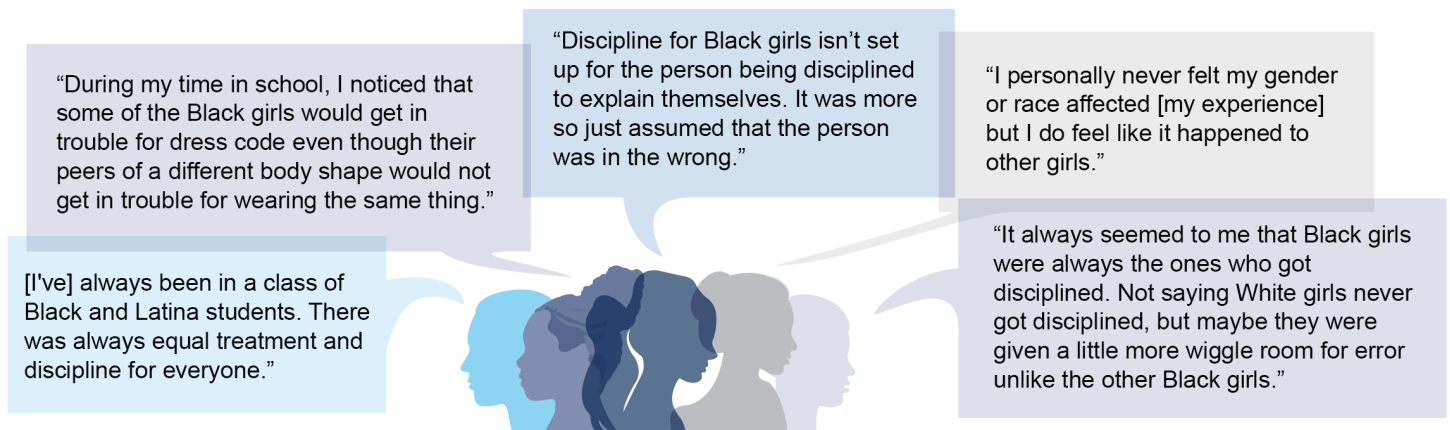
[45] Jamilia Blake, Verna Keith, Wen Luo, Huong Le, Phia Salter, "The Role of Colorism in Explaining African American Females' Suspension Risk," *School Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 32, no.1 (2017): 118–130.

[46]Peter Lehmann and Ryan Meldrum, "Racial and Ethnic Identity, Gender, and School Suspension: Heterogeneous Effects Across Hispanic and Caribbean Subgroups," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 60, no.2 (2023): 167-212.

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questionnaire noted differences in the treatment of girls in school (see fig. 11).

Figure 11: Examples of the Range of GAO Survey Responses about Girls' Discipline in Schools

What we heard about girls' discipline in school:

"During my time in school, I noticed that some of the Black girls would get in trouble for dress code even though their peers of a different body shape would not get in trouble for wearing the same thing."

"Discipline for Black girls isn't set up for the person being disciplined to explain themselves. It was more so just assumed that the person was in the wrong."

"I personally never felt my gender or race affected [my experience] but I do feel like it happened to other girls."

[I've] always been in a class of Black and Latina students. There was always equal treatment and discipline for everyone."

"It always seemed to me that Black girls were always the ones who got disciplined. Not saying White girls never got disciplined, but maybe they were given a little more wiggle room for error unlike the other Black girls."

Source: Selected responses to GAO's survey of females ages 18-24 on their experiences in schools. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

Research we reviewed found that adultification bias—a form of gender and racial bias where Black girls are viewed as older and more promiscuous—is a key factor in the severity of Black girls' discipline. For example, one survey-based experimental study found that a sample of adults saw Black girls as acting more adult-like and, consequently, were more likely to support comparatively harsh punishments for Black girls than for other students.[47] Specifically, they saw Black girls as acting older than their age, more dangerous, and more experienced with sex than their male and female peers. This study also found that when students are seen as more adult-like, adults were more likely to recommend more severe forms of discipline for them. Stakeholders we interviewed noted that adultification bias can also result in Black girls being perceived as needing less nurturing, support, and help in school.

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[47]Sally Nuamah and Quinn Mulroy, "'I Am a Child!': Public Perceptions of Black Girls and Their Punitive Consequences," *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*. Vol 8 (2023): 182–201.

Changing Expectations of Girls in Society and School

We interviewed school counselors and psychologists who noted that cultural and mainstream media representations of girls have changed how adults see girls and how girls see themselves. They noted that in the last 20 to 30 years, girls have seen images of strong, powerful women celebrated in media, entertainment, and literature. However, in school, when girls behave in a manner that emulates those images, these behaviors are not celebrated or valued. Instead, they noted these behaviors are perceived as misbehavior, oppositional, or as a rejection of the school climate.

Source: GAO analysis of interviews with national organizations. Photo: tashechka/stock.adobe.com (photo). | GAO-24-106787

Stakeholders we interviewed noted that girls, particularly Black girls, are subject to gender biases and stereotypes that punish girls in school for failing to conform to traditional expectations of femininity. Officials representing school counselors and psychologists noted that many teachers encourage girls to uphold a quiet and docile form of femininity or "to act like ladies." Girls who responded to our questionnaire voiced similar sentiments (see fig. 12).

Figure 12: Examples of the Range of GAO Survey Responses about Girls' Experiences in Schools

What we heard about how girls were treated in school:

"We were told to act like a lady or told 'that's not how ladies talk' when we got in trouble, especially in an altercation with a man."

"I don't think that there was much of a difference, but I feel like more was expected of us. The boys would usually act out but when we did punishments seemed harsher."

"Girls were always held to a higher standard than boys and therefore disciplined more by teachers or administrators. The expectations for us were higher (even though we were all just kids) and when we didn't meet those expectations, our consequences seemed harsher than those for boys."

"In [school], it felt to me like girls were expected to "know better" than boys from a younger age. They were expected to be more mature/appropriate/understanding/empathetic. Girls would receive shame/disapproval from teachers more often than boys when we misbehaved, adults were more likely to give boys the benefit of the doubt, or just shake their heads because 'boys will be boys' or 'they're just young'."

"I don't have any memory of bad experiences regarding treatment or discipline while in school. I believe the only aspect that separated the girls from the boys were the dress code requirements. But I personally saw no issue with them."

Source: Selected responses to GAO's survey of females ages 18-24 on their experiences in schools. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

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Stakeholders also noted that LGBTQ+ girls can face additional biases that can lead to increased discipline, particularly as it relates to dress code violations and displays of affection.[48] A study we reviewed found that teenage girls who report same-sex attraction are at an increased risk of exclusionary discipline, after controlling for demographic factors and their behavior. This study also found that the disparities were greater for girls than boys.[49]

Studies in our review examined disability status as a mediating or exacerbating factor in discipline. For example, one study found that, for Black students, being identified as having an emotional disability is associated with a higher likelihood of receiving out of school suspensions than their peers for similar behaviors.[50]

Empirical Studies and Stakeholders We Interviewed Identified Few Factors that Reduce Discipline Disparities for Black Girls

Studies that explored the impact of protective factors—school or student-level factors that may prevent push out—found mixed or no effects on the discipline of Black girls (see fig. 13).

[48] While a number of variations on this acronym are currently in use to describe individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, in this report, we define LGBTQ+ as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. The "plus" is meant to be inclusive of identities that may not be covered by the acronym LGBTQ+, including asexual, nonbinary, and individuals who identify their sexual orientation or gender identity in other ways.

[49] Joel Mittleman, "Sexual Orientation and School Discipline: New Evidence from a Population-Based Sample," *Educational Researcher,* vol. 47, no. 3 (2018): 181-190.

[50] Ceema Samimi, Noah Jefferson, Shelby Flanagan, and Yolanda Anyon, "Intersections of Disproportion: A Critical Quantitative Examination of Dis/ability and Gender in Black Students' School Discipline Outcomes," *The Urban Review*, vol. 55 (2023): 456–475.

Figure 13: Examples of Suggested Strategies or Factors to Reduce Push Out
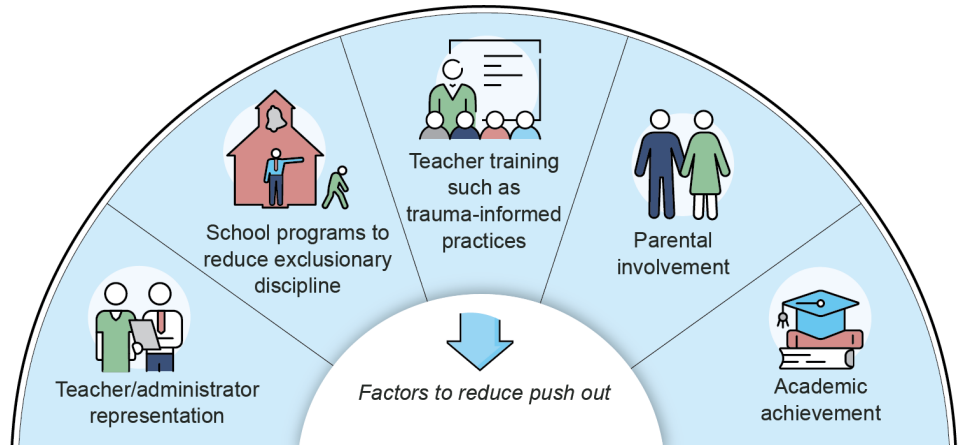
Source: GAO analysis of empirical studies and stakeholder interviews. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

For example, two studies examined exposure to same-race teachers and the effects on discipline. One study found that exposure to same-race teachers lowered the likelihood of exclusionary discipline among Black girls.[51] However, another study found that when teachers were asked to recommend discipline outcomes for Black and White girls based on mock infraction files, there was no significant difference between Black and White teachers in the severity of discipline recommended.[52]

Researchers and officials we interviewed from national organizations cautioned that school programs intended to reduce exclusionary discipline are complex and may not have the intended result for Black girls. Researchers noted that if discipline reduction programs are not implemented with fidelity, or wholeheartedly embraced by school staff, these programs will not be effective.

In a study examining the impact of a trauma-informed intervention on school discipline of court-involved youth, Black girls received higher rates

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[51]Constance Lindsay and Cassandra Hart, "Exposure to Same-Race Teachers and Student Disciplinary Outcomes for Black Students in North Carolina," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* vol. 39, no. 3 (2017): 485–510.

[52]Jamilia Blake, Lyric Jackson, Naomi Ruffin, Phia Salter, Haoran Li, Courtney Banks, and Kayce Williams, "Black Girls and School Discipline: The Role of Teacher's Race, Pubertal Development, and Discipline Philosophy on Discipline Decisions," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2022): 128–137.

of referrals for trauma-informed discipline and increased suspension rates compared to their White and Hispanic peers.[53] Another study examined changes to New York City Schools' disciplinary policies intended to reduce suspensions and found that the suspension rate of White and Asian girls decreased, but the suspension rate of Black girls increased.[54]

Studies found that even after controlling for factors such as parental involvement and school performance, Black girls were still disciplined at higher rates than White girls. For example, one study found that even high-achieving Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school compared to similarly successful White girls.[55] This study also found that racial differences in suspension rates among groups of girls were in fact largest among girls at the highest levels of academic achievement.

Nationally, Black Girls Had the Lowest Perceptions of Safety and Connectedness at School and More Commonly Reported That School Discipline Was Unfair

While over half a million girls reported feeling unsafe in school, a larger percentage of Black girls reported this feeling, according to our analysis of a nationally representative 2022 survey of public-school students ages 12 to18.[56] Students' feelings of safety in the learning environment can support or inhibit attendance and academic performance, according to the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. In addition, an estimated seven percent of girls reported that they avoided an area of

[53]The trauma-informed intervention in this study was designed as an alternative to traditional school exclusionary discipline policies and seeks to manage distractions that may inhibit learning but is viewed as support, rather than punishment. Beverly Baroni, Angelique Day, Cheryl Somers, Shantel Crosby, and Megan Pennefather, "Use of the Monarch Room as an Alternative to Suspension in Addressing School Discipline Issues Among Court-Involved Youth," *Urban Education*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2020): 153–173.

[54]E. Christine Baker-Smith. "Suspensions Suspended: Do Changes to High School Suspension Policies Change Suspension Rates?," *Peabody Journal of Education,* vol. 93, no.2 (2018): 190–206.

[55]Peter Lehmann and Ryan Meldrum. "School Suspension in Florida: The Interactive Effects of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Academic Achievement," *Justice Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2021): 479–512*.*

[56]Using the National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement for 2022, we estimated that 593,239 girls disagreed they felt safe in school, with a 95 percent margin of error of 108,610.
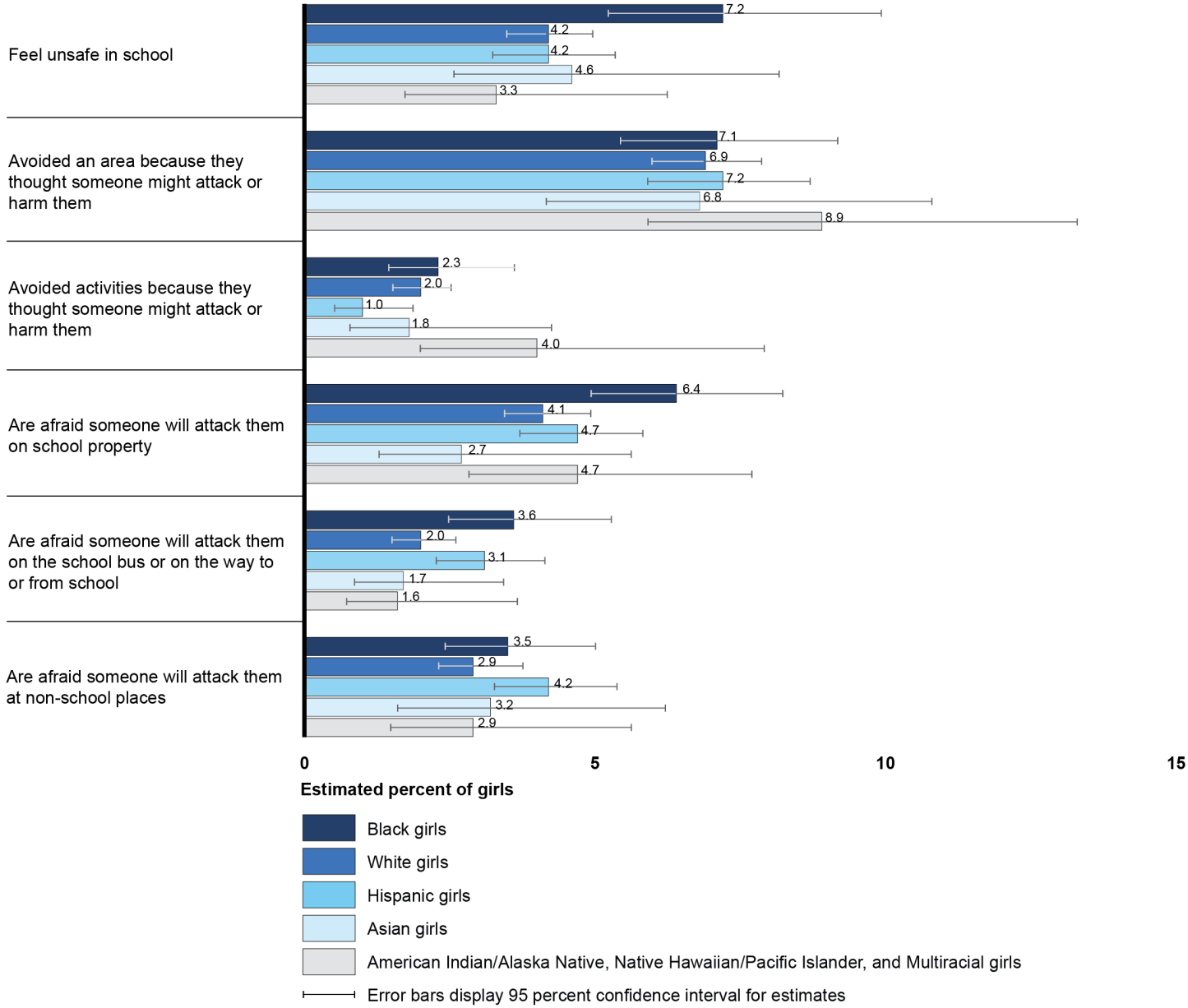
school because they thought someone might attack or harm them.[57] Across multiple measures of school safety, a higher percentage of Black girls felt unsafe in school than White girls. For example, a higher percentage of Black girls reported they were afraid of being attacked by someone on school property compared to White girls (see fig. 14).

[57]This estimate has a 95 percent margin of error of 0.68 percent, according to our analysis of National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement for 2017, 2019, and 2022.

Figure 14: Estimated Percentage of Girls Reporting Issues around Feeling Unsafe in School, 2017, 2019, and 2022

Estimated percentage of girls
who reported that they:

Estimated percent of girls

- ■ Black girls
- ■ White girls
- ■ Hispanic girls
- ■ Asian girls
- ■ American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial girls
- ├──┤ Error bars display 95 percent confidence interval for estimates

Source: GAO analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement for 2017, 2019, 2022. | GAO-24-106787

Note: We pooled the data for 2017, 2019, and 2022 to ensure sufficient sample size for reliable estimates. American Indian/Alaska Native girls, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls, and Multiracial girls are combined in this figure because we were unable to produce separate, reliable estimates for these groups. For questions where the student was asked whether they agree with a statement on a

four-point scale, we combined responses for "Agree" with "Strongly agree" and "Disagree" with "Strongly disagree."

Our survey responses also included a variety of perspectives on feeling safe in school (see fig. 15).

Figure 15: Examples of the Range of GAO Survey Responses About Girls' Feelings of Safety in School

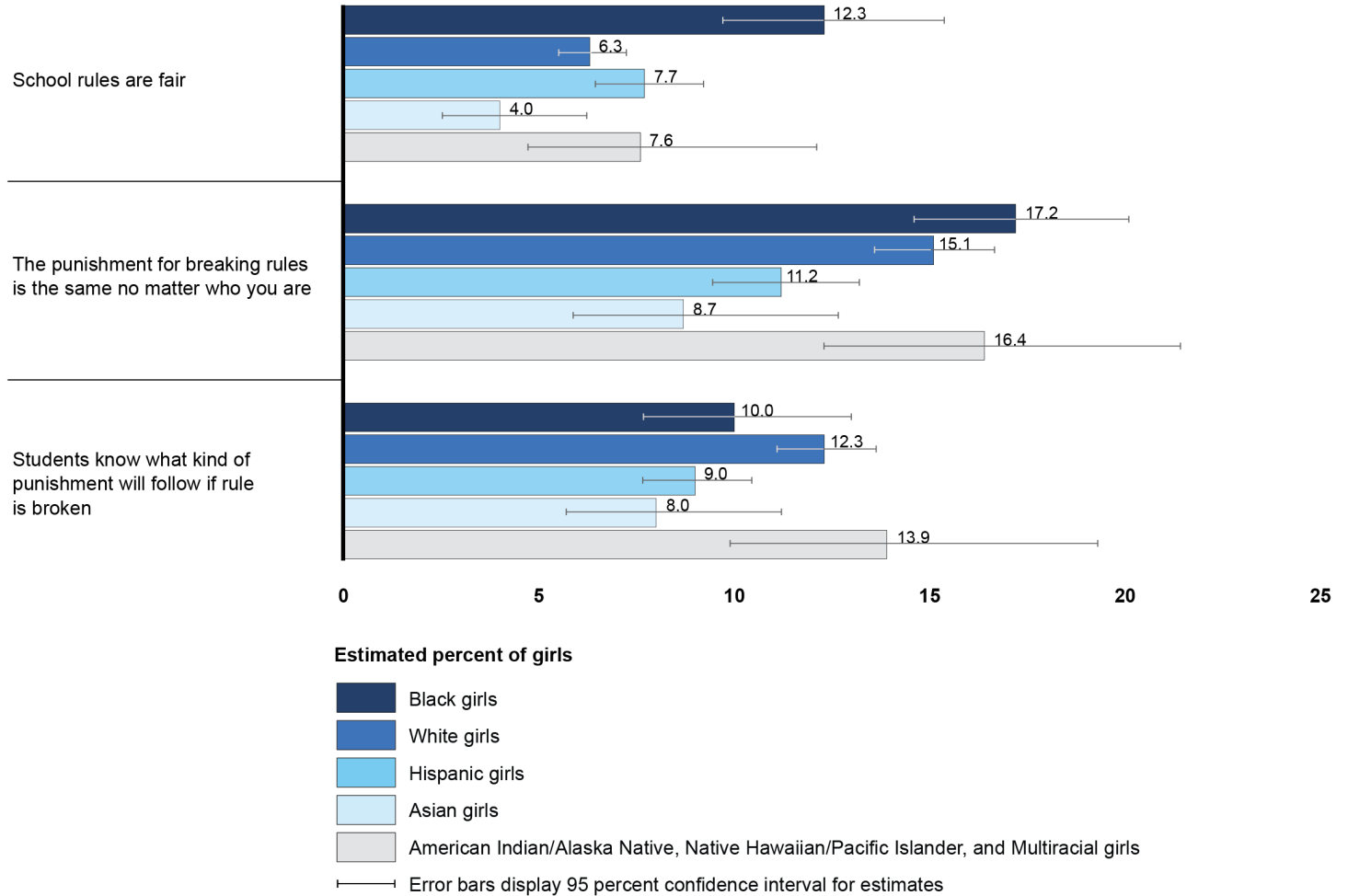**What we heard about girls' feelings of safety in school:**

"I never felt safe or like I belonged in my school. [If I could do schoolwork] from home, I would. I hated being in school. The hallways are stressful, and I was always unsure if someone would fight me for being pushed into them. Overall, the general environment was poor."

I always felt like I was safe, and I belonged when I was in elementary school. For that reason, I was very participatory in both class and after school activities. This sense of safety and belonging definitely diminished as I progressed through middle school and high school, and definitely led me to opt out of participating as much (both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities)."

"I did not like being in certain classes because of how teachers interacted with female students, and I did not want to participate to draw attention to myself."

"I used to feel like school was my safe space until a certain situation happened and then I felt like school was the most uncomfortable space I could be in. Something happened every day and eventually I ended up leaving and switching schools. So, I firmly believe that safety and belonging affect attendance and participation."

"I've always felt safe in school, so I feel like it positively affected my experience because I had almost perfect attendance and looked forward to attending school."

Source: Selected responses to GAO's survey of females ages 18-24 on their experiences in schools. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

National data also show differences among groups of girls' feelings about the fairness of school rules and discipline. Black girls generally disagreed at higher rates than White girls, Asian girls, and Hispanic girls that school rules were fair (see fig. 16).

Figure 16: Estimated Percentage of Girls Reporting Feelings of Unfairness in School, 2017, 2019 and 2022

**Estimated percentage of girls
who disagreed that:**

School rules are fair
- 12.3
- 6.3
- 7.7
- 4.0
- 7.6

The punishment for breaking rules
is the same no matter who you are
- 17.2
- 15.1
- 11.2
- 8.7
- 16.4

Students know what kind of
punishment will follow if rule
is broken
- 10.0
- 12.3
- 9.0
- 8.0
- 13.9

0   5   10   15   20   25

Estimated percent of girls

■ Black girls

■ White girls

■ Hispanic girls

■ Asian girls

■ American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial girls

├───┤ Error bars display 95 percent confidence interval for estimates

Source: GAO analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement for 2017, 2019, 2022. | GAO-24-106787

Note: We pooled the data for 2017, 2019, and 2022 to ensure sufficient sample size for reliable estimates. American Indian / Alaska Native girls, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls, and Multiracial girls are combined in this figure because, we were unable to produce separate, reliable estimates for these groups. For questions where the student was asked whether they agree with a statement on a four-point scale, we combined responses for "Agree" with "Strongly agree" and "Disagree" with "Strongly disagree."

Our survey responses also included similar concerns about fairness. They noted that dress code policies, in particular, were not always fair and singled out girls for punishment (see fig. 17). Our prior work on dress code discipline found that an estimated 90 percent of dress codes prohibit

clothing typically worn by girls as opposed to 69 percent that prohibit items typically worn by boys.[58]

Figure 17: Examples of GAO Survey Responses About Girls' Feelings of Fairness in School

What we heard about girls' feelings of fairness in school:

"For the most part [discipline] was fair, but sometimes it would not be fair, especially if you were not White."

"In terms of discipline, I feel as though it was pretty fair. I never saw directly opposite treatment of males and females."

"Most of the time, we were disciplined because of what we were wearing and not because of how we behaved. I was slut shamed because my skirt was an inch too short or my shirt showed too much of my shoulders."

"Discipline was unfair in elementary and middle school because in my experience, girls were held to a higher standard earlier on than boys (i.e., we're expected to grow up faster/understand more)."

"Discipline was completely unfair when it came to matters involving personal appearance and dress code issues. Girls were made to feel as if they were a distraction to boys and responsible for boys' poor behavior."

Source: Selected responses to GAO's survey of females ages 18-24 on their experiences in schools. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

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[58]GAO-23-105348

Why School Connectedness Matters

School connectedness, defined by the CDC as students' belief that adults and peers in their school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals, has been linked to positive educational, behavioral, and health outcomes in adolescence and into adulthood. When students feel connectedness in school, they are less likely to experience:

- Poor mental health
- Sexual health risks
- Substance use
- Violence

Source: GAO summary of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention information on school connectedness. pikselstock/stock.adobe.com (photo). | GAO-24-106787

We also found differences when looking at national data on connectedness among groups of girls. School connectedness includes a sense of being cared for, being supported, and belonging at school, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More Black girls disagreed that teachers at their schools treat students with respect than White girls, Hispanic girls, or Asian girls (see fig. 18).

Figure 18: Estimated Percentage of Girls Reporting They Did Not Have Feelings of Connectedness in School, 2017, 2019, and 2022
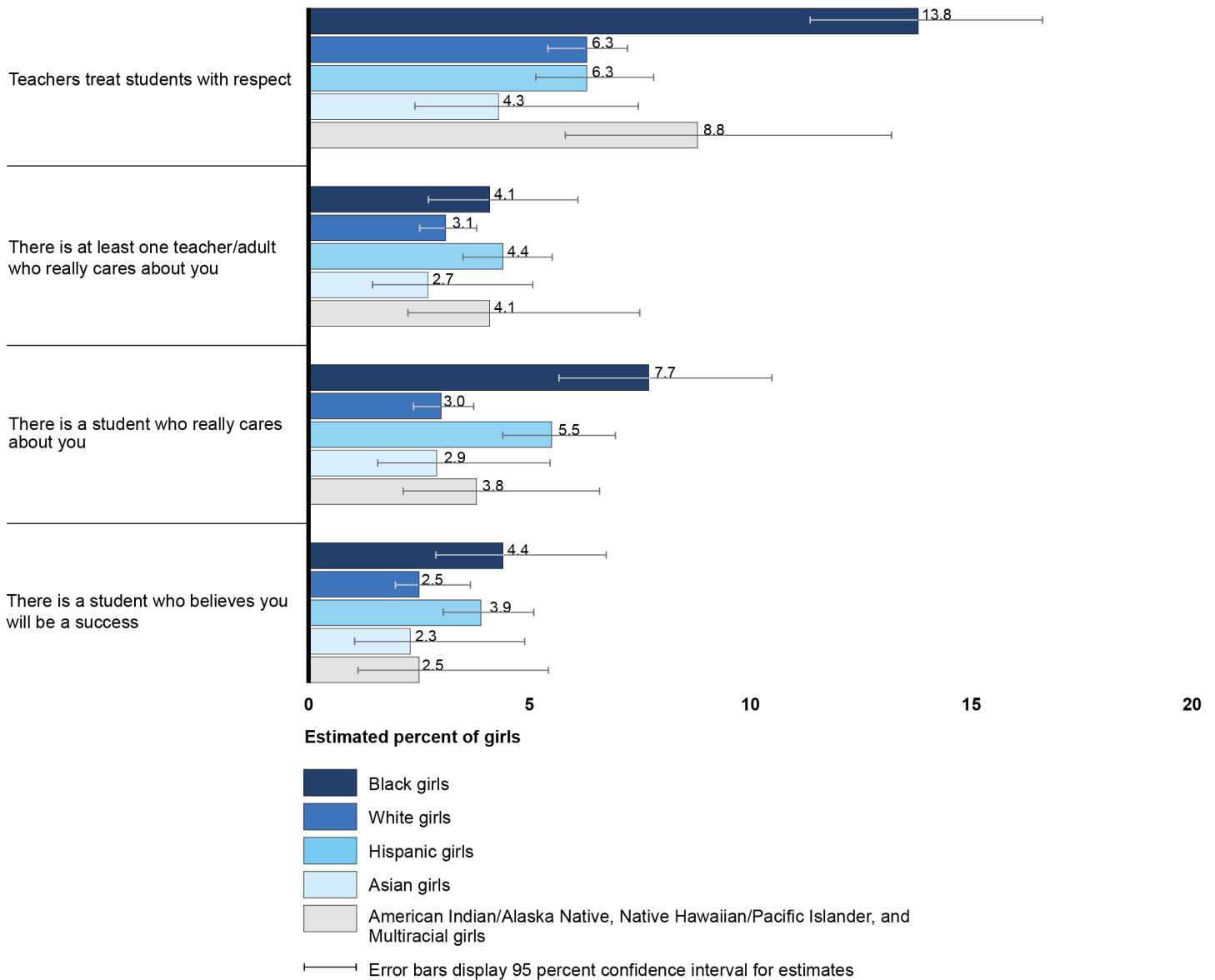
Estimated percentage of girls
who disagreed that:

Estimated percent of girls

Legend:
- Black girls
- White girls
- Hispanic girls
- Asian girls
- American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial girls
- ⊢—⊣ Error bars display 95 percent confidence interval for estimates

Note: We pooled the data for 2017, 2019, and 2022 to ensure sufficient sample size for reliable estimates. American Indian/Alaska Native girls, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls, and Multiracial girls are combined in this figure because, we were unable to produce separate, reliable estimates for these groups. For questions where the student was asked whether they agree with a statement on a

four-point scale, we combined responses for "Agree" with "Strongly agree" and "Disagree" with "Strongly disagree."

Our analysis of student survey data found that an estimated 7.3 percent of girls disagreed that teachers at their schools treat students with respect.[59] Although most girls agreed that there was at least one teacher or adult who cared about them, the number of girls who disagreed is significant. Specifically, we estimate that in 2022, over 300,000 girls disagreed there was a teacher or other adult at school who really cares about them.[60]

Relatedly, fewer Hispanic girls (an estimated 58 percent) and Black girls (an estimated 61 percent) reported participating in any school activity compared to White girls (72 percent).[61] In addition, responses to our questionnaire addressed connectedness in schools (see fig. 19).

Figure 19: Examples of a Range of GAO Survey Responses About Girls' Connectedness in School

What we heard about girls' feelings of connectedness in school:

"Being part of a student sports team improved my sense of belonging and enjoyment in school."

"I had undiagnosed ADHD [from K-12], and not once did teachers think that I had different processes of learning. They instead labeled me in a certain way, and I was made to feel stupid."

"I think because I had great teachers who truly believed in me, I had a great experience for the most part. I think some of my teachers made it important for their students to feel accepted and valued."

"As someone who is a person of color, I think we [were] treated poorly and never the first choice for anyone to call on."

"[About] half of my teachers gave room for me to express my difficulties and the other half could [not] care less and it showed. The teachers that cared--I ended up getting better grades in their classes."

Source: Selected responses to GAO's survey of females ages 18-24 on their experiences in schools. GAO (icons). | GAO-24-106787

[59]The estimate has a 95 percent margin of error of 0.73 percent.

[60]We estimated that 337,853 girls disagreed that there was a teacher or other adult at school who really cared about them, with a 95% margin of error of 91,628.

[61]The 95 percent margins of error for these estimates are 2.59 percent for Hispanic girls, 3.87 percent for Black girls, and 1.89 percent for White girls.

GAO-24-106787 K-12 Education
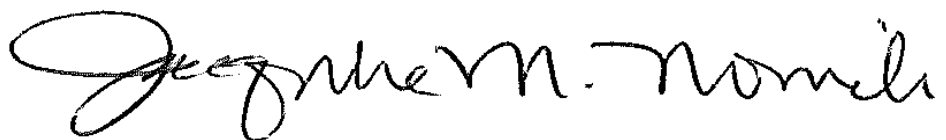
Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Departments of Education and Justice for review and comment. Both agencies provided written technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 16 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committee, the Secretary of Education, the Attorney General, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or nowickij@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Jacqueline M. Nowicki, Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report (1) examines what national data show about the discipline of girls in K-12 schools across various student and school characteristics; (2) identifies factors that contribute to differences in the discipline of girls in school; and (3) describes girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school. The following appendices describe methodologies we used to address these objectives:

- **Appendix II:** Descriptive analyses related to discipline of girls using Department of Education's (Education) the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) and girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school using the Department of Justice's (Justice's) and Education's National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement (SCS).

- **Appendix III:** Regressions using CRDC data to explore whether certain school characteristics are associated with higher discipline of girls, analyses identifying schools with the highest discipline rates, and decomposition analyses quantifying how much of the racial gap in discipline would be reduced if Black and White girls went to the same schools.

- **Appendix IV**: Analyses on behavior incidents and disciplinary outcomes using the School-Wide Information System (SWIS) data.

- **Appendix V**: Review of empirical literature on factors contributing to discipline disparities for girls.

- **Appendix VI:** Online questionnaire and responses about girls' experiences in K-12 schools.

In addition, we interviewed 18 stakeholder organizations, including educational organizations, organizations representing school counselors and school psychologists, and organizations specializing in the discipline and experiences of girls in schools. We selected these organizations for interviews based on their knowledge of schools' discipline practices, familiarity with the experiences of girls, or experience in reviewing student discipline data.

Lastly, we reviewed documents from Education and Justice and interviewed agency officials about the datasets used in this report. We also reviewed guidance and resource documents and documents about completed investigations of schools' and school districts' actions related to the discipline of girls in K-12 public schools.

We conducted this performance audit from April 2023 to September 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Descriptive Analyses Using Education's Civil Rights Data Collection and School Crime Supplement

Analysis of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection

To answer the first question regarding the discipline of girls, we analyzed the restricted use version of Education's school year (SY) 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC or civil rights data). The civil rights data is a biennial survey that is mandatory for nearly every public school and school district (pre-K–12th grade) in the 50 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Although Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) generally collects these data biennially, OCR skipped the planned 2019-2020 collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In November 2023, Education released its most recent civil rights data for SY 2020–21. We did not use the SY 2020-21 CRDC data because it was the first full school year under the pandemic, and based on our analysis, anomalous. According to CRDC data, in-person enrollment was low, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in-person enrollment varied by race, with White students more likely to attend school in person than Black, Hispanic, and Asian students. Our review of CRDC data also found declines in discipline likely due to decreased in-person enrollment during this time. Education cautioned users to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when comparing the data from the SY 2020–21 to previous years.[1]

The civil rights data provide school-level counts of the numbers of students enrolled in each school and the number of students disciplined across six different categories (see table 1).

Table 1: Civil Rights Data Collection Discipline Variables and Definitions

CRDC Variable	Definition
In-school suspensions	An instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his or her regular classroom(s) for at least half a day for disciplinary purposes but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel.
Out-of-school suspensions	An instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for at least half a day (but less than the remainder of the school year) for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center). Out-of-school suspensions include removals in which no educational services are provided, and removals in which educational services are provided (e.g., school- provided at home instruction or tutoring).[a]
Expulsions	An action taken by the local educational agency of removing a child from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes; expulsions can include the provision of educational services for this period
Corporal punishment	Paddling, spanking, or other forms of physical punishment imposed on a child.

[1]OCR plans to resume its biennial data collection schedule with the SY 2023-2024 collection.

CRDC Variable	Definition
School-related arrest	An arrest of a student for any activity conducted on school grounds, during off-campus school activities (including while the student is taking school transportation), or due to a referral by any school official. All school-related arrests are considered referrals to law enforcement (police).
Referral to law enforcement	An action by which a student is reported to any law enforcement agency or official, including school police, for an incident that occurs on school grounds, during school-related events, or while taking school transportation, regardless of whether official action is taken. Citations, tickets, court referrals, and school-related arrests are considered referrals to police.

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

[a]For students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for at least half a day for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center). Out-of-school suspensions include both removals in which no individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education plan (IEP) services are provided because the removal is 10 days or less as well as removals in which the child continues to receive services according to his/her IFSP or IEP.

We calculated discipline rates as the percentage of all girls, or all girls within a demographic group, across different categories. To do this, we divided discipline counts for a specific group of girls by the enrollment counts for that same group. The counts of each discipline category in the SY 2017-2018 civil rights data represent the number of girls that received that disciplinary action rather than the number of discipline incidents. This means calculated rates account for any girl that received a specific disciplinary action, regardless of the number of times she was disciplined. We excluded observations from preschools.

The CRDC collects all enrollment and discipline counts by four main demographic characteristics: sex, race and ethnicity, disability status, and English learner status. The main limitation of this analysis is that discipline rates by race exclude students receiving disability services only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, because Education does not collect racial data on these students.[2] Education collects discipline counts by race only for students without disabilities and students with disabilities that receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

To calculate discipline rates by race, we used the counts of students without disabilities and students with disabilities who received services under IDEA. We assessed the reliability of the CRDC data by reviewing technical documentation, consulting subject matter experts, and

[2]Our prior work on policing in K-12 schools has recommended that Education collect more data on students receiving services under Section 504. See GAO-24-106294.

performing electronic testing. We determined these data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of our analysis.

Analysis of School Crime Supplement of National Crime Victimization Survey

To examine girls' perceptions of safety and belonging in school, we analyzed Education's and Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement (SCS). The SCS is administered biennially as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey. However, the SCS was postponed from 2021 to 2022 as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person learning. The survey is co-designed by Education's National Center for Education Statistics and Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics and is a nationally representative survey of students between the ages of 12 through 18, enrolled in U.S. public and private elementary, middle, and high schools. The survey sample included approximately 7,100 U.S. school students in 2017, about 7,000 students in 2019, and over 5,500 in 2022.

The SCS generally asks questions related to students' experiences with, and perceptions of crime and safety at school, including preventive measures employed by schools; students' participation in after-school activities; students' perception of school rules and enforcement of these rules; the presence of weapons, drugs, alcohol, and gangs in school; and student bullying, hate-related incidents, and attitudinal questions relating to the fear of victimization at school. Misreporting may be a source of measurement error, as it often is for self-reported data in general.

We analyzed the public use data file of the survey for 2017, 2019, and 2022, the most recent data available at our time of analysis. We used the appropriate survey weights to produce national estimates of all public-school students ages 12–18. We assessed the reliability of the SCS data by reviewing technical documentation, consulting subject matter experts from Education, and performing electronic testing. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of our analysis.

Because our focus was on public schools, we excluded students who attended private schools for each survey year in our analysis. For 2022, we also restricted our analysis to students who attended school in person at least some of the time because many SCS questions are not relevant for students in a virtual environment.

Because the National Crime Victimization Survey and School Crime Supplement Survey sample represents the U.S. population 12 years and older, population estimates can be generated from the sample cases. To produce nationally representative estimates, we apply the SCS weights,

which are a combination of household-level and person-level adjustment factors (including non-interviews).

The sample is only one of a large number of samples that might have been drawn. Since each sample could have provided different estimates, we express our confidence in the precision of the particular sample's results as a 95 percent confidence interval (i.e., the estimate plus or minus a margin of error). This is the interval that would contain the actual population value for 95 percent of the samples that could have been drawn.

In some instances, we consolidated responses to related survey questions. For example, to estimate the percentage of girls who participated in any school activities, we created a new variable that indicated whether they participated in at least one of seven distinct types of school activities listed in the SCS. For questions where the student was asked whether they agree with a statement such as "School rules are fair" on a four-point scale, we combined responses for "Agree" with "Strongly agree" and "Disagree" with "Strongly disagree."

Appendix III: Technical Appendix for Regression and Analyses of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

Regression Analysis

Using the 2017–18 CRDC and the Common Core of Data (CCD), a comprehensive, annual, national statistical database of all public elementary and secondary schools and local educational agencies, we developed a generalized linear regression analysis to explore whether certain school characteristics were associated with higher discipline of girls in general and for different groups of girls.[1] Specifically, the regression tests the association between a given school characteristic, such as the poverty level of the school, and the number of girls receiving a disciplinary action, holding other school characteristics constant.

We performed a separate regression for each type of discipline: out-of-school suspensions, in-school-suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, school-related arrests, and corporal punishment. Our independent variables were primarily selected based on factors that Education's Office for Civil Rights and other researchers had identified as potential drivers of school discipline rates in our previous reporting.[2] Table 2 describes the dependent and independent variables in our regression analysis.

Table 2: Variables Included in Our Regression Model

Outcome (or dependent) Variables	Independent variables
Number of girls receiving the following disciplinary actions: • out-of-school suspension • in-school suspension • expulsion	Percent of the student population that are: boys, girls, White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, girls with disabilities, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
	Grades offered: Grade 6 or above, or grade 5 and below only, Interactions of Grade 6 or above with SRO variable and school counselor variable
	Population density: Rural, Suburban, Urban

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[1]We used a generalized linear regression because our outcome variable is the count of students who received a disciplinary action. Count data are not appropriate for a traditional normal linear model because the data will be positively skewed. Further, discipline outcomes are relatively rare events, so we cannot justify assuming a normal distribution. We used a Poisson regression because it had smaller differences between the predicted values and the actual values than a negative binomial regression. Additionally, while the data are over-dispersed (i.e., the variance of the count variable is much larger than the mean of that variable), there have been issues cited that using a negative binomial regression with fixed effects will not yield consistent estimates.

[2]GAO-18-258. Differences between our independent variables and those in GAO-18-258 are because our regression analysis focuses on girls' discipline and on the intersectionality between race, gender, and disability and discipline. We also added the student-teacher ratio to account for differences in class size.

Outcome (or dependent) Variables	Independent variables
• referral to law enforcement • school related arrest • corporal punishment	Interactions between student demographic variables: percent of the student population that are: Hispanic girls (IDEA), Black girls (IDEA), Asian girls (IDEA), American Indian/Alaska Native girls (IDEA), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls (IDEA), White girls (IDEA), or Multiracial girls (IDEA)
	School Type: Alternative (Yes/No), Special Education (Yes/No), Charter (Yes/No), Magnet (Yes/No), Traditional (Yes/No)
	Fixed effects: state-level fixed effects to help account for differences in state law, policy, or other factors that may affect school discipline
	School Personnel: Any presence of a sworn law enforcement officer, presence of a full-time school counselor, percent of teachers with 2 or fewer years of experience, student teacher ratio
	Exposure: Total Girls Enrollment. The exposure variable is the number of times the disciplinary event could have happened.

Source: GAO Analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core of Data School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Note: The regression for the outcome corporal punishment only includes states that report positive values for corporal punishment. We also perform separate regressions for the number of Black girls receiving each disciplinary action, the number of Hispanic girls receiving each disciplinary action, and the number of White girls receiving each disciplinary action. For the regressions of each race, the exposure variable is the total girls enrolled of that race. We could not perform this analysis for other groups of girls because of sample size restrictions. Where the term IDEA appears in parenthesis after a category, e.g., Black girls (IDEA), that means that these are girls who receive services under IDEA. This analysis excludes girls with disabilities who receive services only under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504) because the CRDC does not disaggregate discipline outcomes by race and 504 status. The suburban category above combines the CCD's definitions for suburban and town.

Schools that met the following criteria were excluded from our regression model:

- Schools that are not present in both the CRDC and CCD. This restriction ensures that we have information on the share of students that have free or reduced-price lunch and the school's urbanicity.[3]

- Schools that are ungraded. This restriction ensures we can determine if the school offers grade 6 or above (a variable for the regression). Fewer than one percent of schools were excluded for this restriction.

- Schools that only enroll preschool students. Pre-school disciplinary data are reported separately and differently than K-12 disciplinary

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[3]Free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligibility is top coded at 100 percent. Starting in SY 2016-17, states could report FRPL and/or Direct Certification counts for each school. In SY 2017-18, some states reported solely Direct Certification data, while others provided a mix of FRPL and Direct Certification. For those schools that used Direct Certification counts, and FRPL was missing, we used the Direct Certification counts as a proxy.

data in the CRDC. About one percent of schools were excluded for this restriction.

- Schools that are juvenile justice facilities. Schools identified as a juvenile justice facility in the CRDC can identify as both a juvenile justice facility and one of the other school types in our analysis (i.e., traditional, charter, alternative, and special education schools). Due to this overlap, and because it is reasonable to expect discipline within a juvenile justice facility could function differently than discipline in other schools, we excluded these schools from our regression model. Fewer than one percent of schools were excluded for this restriction.

- Schools that only enroll male students. Our analysis focuses on the discipline outcomes of girls. As a result, male-only schools will not contribute to the dependent variable and are removed from our analysis. Fewer than one percent of schools were excluded for this restriction.

- Schools with fewer than five girls enrolled. Smaller schools can have minor fluctuations in the number of students receiving a given disciplinary action and this can have a large effect on the discipline rate. Fewer than one percent of schools were excluded for this restriction.

These sample restrictions reduced the number of schools included in the regression from 97,632 schools to 85,510.

The CRDC and CCD data are recorded at the school level. Therefore, our regression analysis does not describe the relationship between individual student characteristics (e.g., sex, race, disability status) and discipline, and as such does not speak to how individual characteristics are associated with discipline. Rather, our regression results describe the association between school characteristics and school discipline. Our regression cannot capture all school-level variables that can affect school discipline, such as student behavior at the school. As a result, our regression results are not causal estimates of the effect of school characteristics on discipline.

The regression results in table 3 are incidence rate ratios. An incidence rate ratio greater than one means there is a positive association (higher incidence) between the outcome (dependent variable) and the independent variable, holding all else constant. For example, alternative schools are positively associated with out of school suspensions for girls, relative to traditional schools. An incidence rate ratio less than one means there is a negative association (lower incidence) between the dependent

variable and the outcome variable. For example, charter schools are negatively associated with out of school suspensions for girls, relative to traditional schools.

The variable coefficients in table 3 can be interpreted two ways:

- Binary variable coefficients: The estimate is the rate ratio comparing the group of interest to the omitted group, holding all other variables in the model constant. The farther away the incidence rate ratio is from one, the larger the effect is for that variable. For example, girls attending alternative schools were significantly more likely to experience an out of school suspension, expulsion, referral, or arrest than girls attending traditional schools, holding other school characteristics constant. The dummy variables in the regression are:
  - Urbanicity (urban or suburban, relative to rural)
  - School type (alternative, charter, magnet, or special education, relative to traditional)
  - Grades offered 6 and up (grades offered 6 and up relative to grades offered 5 and below)
  - Counselor (at least one full-time counselor relative to no full-time counselor)
  - School resource officer (SRO) (any SRO presence or relative to no SRO presence)
  - Counselor-grades 6+ interaction (having a full-time counselor at a school offering grades 6 and up relative to no full-time counselor at a school offering grades 5 and below)[4]
  - SRO-grades 6+ interaction (any SRO presence at a school offering grades 6 and up relative to no SRO presence at a school offering grades 5 and below)
- Continuous variable coefficients: The estimate is the rate ratio for a one unit increase in the variable, holding all other variables in the model constant. For example, schools with a higher percent of new teachers are associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, expulsions,

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[4]Interactions (i.e., combining counselor with schools offering grades 6 and up) should be interpreted differently than other dummy variables because interactions are interpreted relative to the main effect of each variable in the interaction (e.g. the individual variables grades 6 and up and counselor).

referrals, or arrests for girls, holding other school characteristics constant. The continuous variables in the regression are:

- Percent of Enrollment: female, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, American Indian/Alaska Native girls, Black girls (IDEA), Hispanic girls (IDEA), Asian girls (IDEA), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander girls (IDEA), Multiracial girls (IDEA), American Indian/Alaska Native girls (IDEA)[5]

- Share free or reduced-price lunch

- Percent of new teachers

- Student-teacher ratio

Table 3: Associations of School Characteristics with Girls Disciplinary Actions, School Year 2017–18

VARIABLES	Number of girls that received an out of school suspension	Number of girls that received an in-school suspension	Number of girls expelled	Number of girls referred to law enforcement	Number of girls who received a school-related arrest	Number of girls who received corporal punishment
% Girls Enrolled	0.979***	0.985***	0.972***	0.971***	0.967***	0.993
	(0.00182)	(0.00284)	(0.00725)	(0.00461)	(0.0109)	(0.0107)
% Boys Enrolled = o,	-	-	-	-	-	-
% Black Students Enrolled	1.009***	1.000	0.999	0.996*	0.993	1.008*
	(0.000690)	(0.000884)	(0.00272)	(0.00233)	(0.00575)	(0.00415)
% Hispanic Students Enrolled	1.003***	1.000	0.994*	0.998	1.005	0.992**
	(0.000695)	(0.000873)	(0.00306)	(0.00219)	(0.00502)	(0.00417)
% Asian Students Enrolled	0.992***	0.980***	0.975***	0.996	0.976***	0.957
	(0.00115)	(0.00171)	(0.00526)	(0.00955)	(0.00635)	(0.0497)
% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander Students Enrolled	1.015***	1.014*	0.946**	0.964***	0.960**	1.012
	(0.00471)	(0.00785)	(0.0240)	(0.0116)	(0.0160)	(0.0288)
% Multiracial Students Enrolled	1.030***	1.034***	1.015*	0.986**	1.028	0.997
	(0.00217)	(0.00265)	(0.00829)	(0.00691)	(0.0175)	(0.0106)
% American Indian/Alaska Native Students Enrolled	1.006***	1.002	1.017	0.994	1.009	1.011
	(0.00214)	(0.00295)	(0.0137)	(0.00458)	(0.0147)	(0.00832)
% White Students Enrolled = o,	-	-	-	-	-	-

[5]Where the term IDEA appears in parenthesis after a category, e.g., Black girls (IDEA), that means that these are girls who receive services under IDEA.

VARIABLES	Number of girls that received an out of school suspension	Number of girls that received an in-school suspension	Number of girls expelled	Number of girls referred to law enforcement	Number of girls who received a school-related arrest	Number of girls who received corporal punishment
Share Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	1.013***	1.012***	1.010***	1.011***	1.009***	1.013***
	(0.000321)	(0.000395)	(0.00139)	(0.000984)	(0.00238)	(0.00255)
% Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	1.015***	1.005***	1.018***	1.019***	1.032***	1.024***
	(0.00118)	(0.00123)	(0.00361)	(0.00275)	(0.00513)	(0.00885)
% Black Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	1.007***	1.006***	1.007***	1.009***	1.012**	1.001
	(0.000629)	(0.000792)	(0.00250)	(0.00197)	(0.00451)	(0.00366)
% Hispanic Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	0.997***	0.998**	1.001	1.001	1.001	1.004
	(0.000614)	(0.000766)	(0.00298)	(0.00194)	(0.00422)	(0.00387)
% Asian Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	0.988***	0.986***	0.995	0.985	0.980*	1.000
	(0.00171)	(0.00241)	(0.00675)	(0.0119)	(0.0108)	(0.0226)
% Hawaiian Native Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	1.003	1.001	1.031	1.025**	1.049***	1.017
	(0.00427)	(0.00575)	(0.0225)	(0.0100)	(0.0137)	(0.0444)
% Multiracial Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	0.999	0.996***	1.008	1.006**	1.002	1.004
	(0.00115)	(0.00142)	(0.00521)	(0.00306)	(0.00608)	(0.00683)
% American Indian/Alaska Native Girls (IDEA) Enrolled	1.003	1.000	0.993	1.014***	0.998	0.993
	(0.00176)	(0.00243)	(0.0123)	(0.00431)	(0.0136)	(0.00724)
% White Girls (IDEA) Enrolled = o,	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban	1.081***	0.940***	1.112	1.091	0.813	0.518***
	(0.0182)	(0.0202)	(0.0760)	(0.109)	(0.261)	(0.107)
Suburb	1.055***	1.054***	1.087	0.946	0.896	1.121
	(0.0148)	(0.0172)	(0.0630)	(0.0767)	(0.239)	(0.0883)
Rural = o,	-	-	-	-	-	-
Alternative School	1.835***	0.925	2.925***	2.029***	3.691***	0.414
	(0.0773)	(0.0690)	(0.397)	(0.188)	(0.626)	(0.338)
Charter School	0.790***	0.556***	0.508***	0.254***	0.135***	0.619
	(0.0217)	(0.0256)	(0.105)	(0.0261)	(0.0304)	(0.265)
Magnet School	0.906***	0.951*	0.996	0.979	1.025	0.865
	(0.0186)	(0.0279)	(0.0643)	(0.0487)	(0.104)	(0.216)
Special Education School	0.411***	0.987	0.341***	0.570**	0.364***	0.376
	(0.0490)	(0.0889)	(0.0942)	(0.144)	(0.127)	(0.226)

VARIABLES	Number of girls that received an out of school suspension	Number of girls that received an in-school suspension	Number of girls expelled	Number of girls referred to law enforcement	Number of girls who received a school-related arrest	Number of girls who received corporal punishment
Traditional School = o,	-	-	-	-	-	-
% New Teachers (<=2 years experience)	1.007***	1.003***	1.011***	1.006***	1.013***	0.996
	(0.000447)	(0.000573)	(0.00165)	(0.00154)	(0.00413)	(0.00311)
Full Time Counselor Indicator	1.014	1.348***	0.856	1.369	2.825	0.738**
	(0.0305)	(0.0546)	(0.174)	(0.615)	(2.575)	(0.0992)
Any SRO Presence Indicator	1.104***	1.275***	1.532**	1.841***	0.719	0.911
	(0.0312)	(0.0427)	(0.330)	(0.412)	(0.353)	(0.0967)
Student-teacher ratio	0.984***	0.985***	0.995	0.989***	0.995	0.971**
	(0.00212)	(0.00220)	(0.0109)	(0.00336)	(0.00600)	(0.0139)
Grades 6+	3.545***	4.637***	11.16***	7.022***	5.179***	1.207**
	(0.0607)	(0.104)	(1.295)	(0.561)	(1.291)	(0.114)
Grades 6+ * Full-time Counselor Indicator	1.658***	1.386***	2.420***	1.625	1.087	1.150
	(0.0541)	(0.0603)	(0.507)	(0.732)	(1.000)	(0.205)
Grades 6+ *Any SRO Presence Indicator	1.105***	0.957	0.882	0.823	2.008	0.957
	(0.0334)	(0.0347)	(0.193)	(0.186)	(1.064)	(0.140)
Constant	0.00510***	0.00553***	2.44e-05***	0.000409***	3.35e-06***	0.00888***
	(0.000656)	(0.00116)	(1.36e-05)	(0.000133)	(4.02e-06)	(0.00527)
Observations	81,218	81,217	80,931	81,108	80,568	3,682

Source: GAO Analysis of U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core of Data School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Note: Estimates are incidence rate ratios. The regression for the outcome corporal punishment only includes states that report positive values for corporal punishment. The exposure variable is total girls' enrollment. Excludes ungraded schools, preschools, juvenile justice facilities, and schools with fewer than five girls enrolled. Robust standard errors are in parenthesis. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Analyses of Schools with the Highest Discipline Rates

Using 2017–18 CRDC and CCD data, we described schools that had the highest exclusionary discipline rates for girls. These high discipline schools were defined as having in-school suspension rates, out-of-school suspension rates, or expulsion rates in the top 1 percent of schools. The discipline rate was calculated separately for each type of exclusionary discipline using the below equation.[6]

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[6]The discipline rate is top coded at 100 percent.

$$Discipline\ Rate\ = \frac{Number\ of\ girls\ disciplined\ (IDEA + 504 + Without\ Disabilities)}{Number\ of\ girls\ enrolled\ (IDEA + 504 + Without\ Disabilities)} * 100$$

The discipline rate for all girls included girls served under IDEA, girls served under Section 504, and girls without disabilities. This analysis excludes schools that enroll fewer than five girls because small schools can have minor fluctuations in the number of girls receiving a given disciplinary action and this can have a large effect on the discipline rate. We also apply this enrollment restriction to non-high discipline schools, enabling us to compare the high discipline schools to the average school. Excluding schools that enroll fewer than five girls remove about two percent of schools from the analysis.

Decomposition

We performed a decomposition analysis to determine the share of the national discipline gap for in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), and expulsions that can be attributed to each of these two channels: (1) within-school differences in discipline rates and (2) between-school differences driven by different enrollment patterns for Black and White girls. We found that although both channels (within-school and between-school differences) contributed to the national discipline disparity, within-school discipline differences accounted for the majority of the discipline gap between White and Black girls.

For this analysis, we dropped preschool only schools, ungraded-only schools, and juvenile justice facilities. We also dropped 39,815 schools with fewer than five Black girls enrolled, to reduce the potential impact of outliers from schools where discipline rates were calculated based on a very small number of students. Although these represented 41.87% of total schools, these schools enrolled less than 1.5% of all Black girls.

We estimated an adjusted discipline gap representing what the national discipline gap would be if Black girls' enrollment patterns mirrored those of White girls, but within-school discipline rates for Black and White girls were unchanged. In this simulation, we redistributed enrollments of Black girls to be proportional to White girls' enrollment, holding the school-level discipline rates for Black and White girls constant. Thus, any observed discipline disparity in the simulation resulted from differences in within-school discipline rates. We found differences in enrollment patterns explained less than one-half of the discipline gap between White and Black girls for ISS, OSS, and Expulsions (see table 4).

Table 4: Results of GAO's Decomposition Analysis of the Discipline Gap Between Black and White girls

	Discipline rate White girls	Discipline rate Black girls	Adjusted (counterfactual) discipline rate Black girls	Unadjusted discipline gap	Adjusted (counterfactual) discipline gap	Portion of gap remaining after controlling for differences in enrollment patterns
ISS	2.59	7.80	6.72	5.22	4.13	79.24
OSS	1.91	8.82	5.65	6.91	3.74	54.08
Expul	0.08	0.32	0.24	0.24	0.16	66.91

Source: GAO Analysis of U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core of Data School Year 2017-18. | GAO-24-106787

Note: The discipline rates for White and Black girls are the actual (unadjusted) discipline rates in the set of schools included in our analysis. The adjusted (counterfactual) discipline rate of Black girls is the discipline rate of Black girls if Black girls' enrollment patterns mirrored those of White girls, but their school-level discipline rates remained unchanged. The unadjusted discipline gap represents the actual discipline gap between Black and White girls among the schools included in our analysis. The adjusted (counterfactual) discipline gap shows the discipline gap if Black girls' enrollment patterns mirrored of those of White girls, but their school-level discipline rates remained unchanged. If 100 percent of the discipline gap were explained by enrollment patterns, the unadjusted discipline gap would equal the adjusted discipline gap. The final column shows the portion of the gap that is unexplained by differences in enrollment patterns among the schools included in our analysis.

Appendix IV: Technical Appendix for Analyses Related to School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Data

Summary of School-Wide Information System

The School-Wide Information System (SWIS) is an administrative system for tracking infractions and their associated administrative consequences for the infraction. We used data from SWIS from the 2017–18 school year. The 2017–18 data was comprised of 5,356 schools across 48 states. We filtered data from SWIS file to exclude:

1. Non-traditional schools

2. States that had fewer than 10 schools that use SWIS as their administrative system

3. Schools that did not have an ID from which we could match it to the CRDC

4. Schools that with data missing on the following variables:
   a. Enrollment
   b. Free or reduced-price lunch
   c. School Resource Officer presence
   d. Counselor presence
   e. Percent new teachers
   f. Techer/Student ratio
   g. Grade six and above indicator
   h. Location (rural or urban)

5. Schools that are ungraded

6. Schools that only enroll preschool students

7. Schools that are juvenile justice facilities

8. Schools with fewer than five girls enrolled

The final dataset was comprised of 4,613 schools across 36 states.

Variable Definitions in School Wide Information System

To analyze the SWIS, we created several variables:

1. Major/Minor. Officials who maintain SWIS data define major behaviors as those involving sending a student to an administrator, whereas a minor behavior is managed by staff. Minor behaviors are less severe but nonetheless recorded for monitoring purposes. Within SWIS, individual behaviors are tracked. Minor behaviors are distinctly labeled in the system. For example, M-Disrespect is defined as Minor Disrespect, whereas Disrespect is Major Disrespect. With this distinction we were able to decide whether a behavior was Major or Minor.

2. Subjective/Objective. To determine whether an infraction was categorized as "subjective" or "objective," we performed a content analysis.[1] Specifically, to categorize infractions as subjective or objective, two analysts independently reviewed each infraction type and compared them to infraction definitions in the SWIS, applying professional judgement, as appropriate. If the analysts disagreed about the categorization, a third analyst reviewed the infraction type. We also had the maintainers of the SWIS data review and verify our subjective/objective categorization of the SWIS variables; they concurred with all of our categorizations. We used the following coding:

   a. Subjective

      i. Defiance/Disrespect/Insubordination/Non-compliance
      ii. Lying/Cheating
      iii. Disruption
      iv. Dress code
      v. Other
      vi. Inappropriate display of affection
      vii. Gang affiliation display
      viii. All minor behaviors except for tardy and technology violation

   b. Objective

      i. Abuse language/Inappropriate language/Profanity
      ii. Fighting/Physical Aggression
      iii. Harassment
      iv. Tardy
      v. Skip class/Truancy
      vi. Property Damage/Vandalism
      vii. Forgery/Theft
      viii. Use/Possession of Tobacco
      ix. Use/Possession of Alcohol
      x. Use/Possession of Combustible Items

---

[1]We considered subjective infractions to be those that required interpretation by school staff and objective infractions to be those based on more defined criteria. Prior researchers have used various methods, such as an expert panel, to categorize subjective and objective/less subjective infractions and may have categorized certain infractions differently. Researchers have also noted that the decision to issue an infraction can be inherently subjective and is subject to individual teacher tolerances for behavior. See Girvan et al., "The Relative Contribution of Subjective Office Referrals to Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline," *School Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2017): 392-404.

     xi.   Vandalism
    xii.   Bomb Threat/False Alarm
   xiii.   Arson
   xiv.   Use/Possession of Weapons
    xv.   Use/Possession of Drugs
   xvi.   Minor Technology Violation
  xvii.   Technology Violation
 xviii.   Inappropriate location/Out of bounds area
   xix.   Skip Class
    xx.   Truancy
   xxi.   Fighting
  xxii.   Bullying

3. Discipline Type. To distinguish between discipline types, we used the following coding:

   a. Exclusionary

      i.   Time in Office
     ii.   In-School Suspension
    iii.   Out of School Suspension
    iv.   Expulsion
     v.   Bus Suspension
    vi.   Alternative Placement

   b. Restorative

      i.   Conference with Student
     ii.   Parent Contact
    iii.   Individualized Instruction
    iv.   Other Admin
     v.   Restitution
      i.   Community Service

   c. Non-exclusionary

      i.   Loss of Privileges
     ii.   Time Out/Detention
    iii.   Saturday School

4. Behaviors (Collapsed). To collapse behaviors, we used the following coding:

   a. Bullying

     i.   Bullying
    ii.   Harassment/bullying

   b. Defiance/Disrespect/Disruption/Language/Lying

     i.   Abusive Language
    ii.   Defiance
    iii.   Lying
    iv.   Disruption
     v.   Minor Inappropriate Verbal
    vi.   Minor Defiance
   vii.   Minor Disruption
  viii. Minor Disrespect
    ix.   Disrespect

   c. Dress Code

     i.   Dress Code
    ii.   Minor Dress Code

   d. Gang affiliation display

   e. Fighting/Physical Contact

     i.   Fighting/ Physical Aggression
    ii.   Minor Physical Contact
    iii.   Fighting

   f. Bomb Threat/Arson

     i.   Bomb Threat
    ii.   Arson
    iii.   Use/Possession Combustible

   g. Other

     i.   Other Behavior
    ii.   Minor Other
    iii.   Minors
    iv.   Minor Unknown

   h. Property Theft/Vandalism

    i.   Property Damage/Vandalism
    ii.   Forgery/Theft
    iii.   Minor Property Misuse

  i. Technology Violation

    i.   Minor Technology Violation
    ii.   Technology Violation

  j. Truant/Tardy/Skip/Out of Bounds

    i.   Tardy
    ii.   Skip Class
    iii.   Minor Tardy
    iv.   Out of Bounds
    v.   Skip Class
    vi.   Truancy

  k. Use/Possession

    i.   Tobacco
    ii.   Alcohol
    iii.   Drugs

  l. Weapons

    i.   Weapons

Structure of School-Wide Information System

We formatted data from SWIS so that for each school, the number of distinct students who had each administrative decision and behavior was counted. For analyses that cross-tabulated administrative decisions with behavior, we formatted the data so for each school, the number of distinct students who had each possible combination of administrative decision and behavior was counted. We formatted the data in this way because the SWIS does not track which administrative decision belongs to which behavior, and so we had to assume that each behavior applied to each administrative decision.

Data Reliability of School-Wide Information System

To assess the reliability of the data from the School Wide Information System, we compared totals of suspensions as reported in the SWIS data with total suspensions as reported to the Civil Rights Data Collection in the 2017–18 school year. The largest discrepancies between the CRDC and School Wide Information System were large (>|100|, Max = 171), but

95% of the discrepancies were less than 20 suspensions so we deemed the data reliable for our purposes.

Weighting of School-Wide Information System

The School Wide Information System is an unrepresentative sample. Schools opt into the system. We used a logistic regression to create weights that made the demographic characteristics of the schools within the School Wide Information System more closely resemble the demographic profile of states with 10 or more schools that used the School Wide Information System. We made this adjustment because schools within the School Wide Information System form a biased sample – they differ in many ways from schools in the population. Weighting allowed us to reduce bias due to demographic characteristics. We then predicted whether a school was in the SWIS sample with the following equation:

$$
\begin{aligned}
InSWIS = (&FemaleEnrollment\ +\ PercentAsianFemaleEnrollment\\
&+\ PercentBlackFemaleEnrollment\ +\ PercentHispanicFemaleEnrollment\\
&+\ PercentTwoMoreRacesFemaleEnrollment\\
&+\ PercentNativeAmericanEnrollment\\
&+\ PercentHawaiianPacificIslanderFemaleEnrollment\\
&+\ ShareFreeReducedLunch\ +\ SchoolResourceOfficer\ +\ PercentNewTeachers\\
&+\ TeacherRatio\ +\ Grade6Higher\ +\ Enrollment\_IDEA) * State\ +\ Rural\\
&+\ Urban\ +\ Counselor\ +\ Counselor * Grade6Higher\ +\ SchoolResourceOfficer\\
&* Grade6Higher\ +\ PercentIDEAFemale\ +\ PercentIDEABlackFemale\\
&+\ PercentIDEAHispanicFemale\ +\ PercentIDEATwoMoreRacesFemale\\
&+\ PercentIDEANativeAmericanFemale\ +\ PercentIDEAWhiteFemale\\
&+\ PercentIDEAAsianFemale\ +\ PercentIDEAHawaiianPacificIslanderFemale
\end{aligned}
$$

Variable definitions for the variables in the above equation can be found in appendix II.

We used this predicted probability of being in the SWIS sample to give more weight to schools in the SWIS that resembled schools not in the SWIS sample. More specifically, to create weight adjustments, we cut the predicted probability of being a school in the SWIS into quintiles, and then for each quintile the weight was the inverse probability of being in the SWIS.

Examination of covariate balance before and after the propensity score weights were applied revealed the distribution of the categorical and continuous variables became more equal in most instances. In the few cases where the distributions became more unequal, the difference (both absolute and relative) was small.

Our estimates are not guaranteed to generalize to the population covered by the CRDC, due to differences in the characteristics of schools choosing to participate in SWIS. However, we adjusted the data from 36 out of 48 states to have demographics that more closely resembled the CRDC population. The states included are AZ, CA, CO, CT, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NV, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TX, VA, VT, WA, WI, WY. States that were not included had no or less than 10 schools that used SWIS.

Regression of School-Wide Information System

We used Poisson regressions to predict the rate of in and out of school suspensions as measured by the CRDC. We controlled for the variables listed in the weighting section via the predicted probability of being in the SWIS sample, as well as the number of major infractions for each combination of race/ethnicity and gender in each school, and the number of incidents that contained more than one infraction for each combination of race/ethnicity and gender in each school. We also applied weights described in the weighting section to weight the regressions.

To better understand factors that contribute to differences in discipline of girls, we conducted a review of relevant peer-reviewed research published between 2013 and 2023 that examined discipline in K-12 schools in the United States. To identify potential studies for inclusion in our review, we worked with a GAO research librarian to conduct a total of three rounds of searches of various databases such as Scopus, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Dialog, and ProQuest We performed these searches using variations of keywords related to discipline (such as "discipline," "expulsion," "suspension," "citations," or "zero tolerance"), school settings (such as "school" or "K-12"), and gender (such as "gender," "sex," "girl," or "female"). We identified a total of 216 studies from these searches.

To assess the relevance of these studies, we reviewed their abstracts to determine whether they addressed factors that contribute to the discipline of girls or discipline disparities. We determined that 100 of the 216 studies were relevant to our objective and would be further reviewed. We excluded studies if:

- they focused on the long-term impacts of discipline disparities or exclusionary discipline, unless the study specifically focused on differential impacts for girls;

- were descriptive studies documenting discipline disparities without controlling for measures of student behavior type (e.g., infraction type);

- they were studies or reports that did not contain original empirical analysis, (e.g., reviews of studies or theoretical analyses or legal reviews);

- they included research solely based on qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups; or

- they did not focus on girls' discipline or did not include analysis of girls' discipline.

The 100 shortlisted studies were then independently reviewed by two GAO economists or analysts to evaluate the quality and robustness of the methodology. We compared the economists' and analysts' assessments and discussed and reconciled differences. For example, GAO examined the sample size and validity of the key outcome indicators, the rigor of the methodology, and the robustness of findings in the presence of any data or methodological limitations.

Twenty-six studies met our scope and criteria for rigor to describe factors that contribute to differences in the discipline rates of girls in school. The scope of review included studies that identified contributing factors to disparities that were both positive and negative. Discipline outcomes included in- or out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, arrests and referrals, transfers to juvenile justice facilities, transfers to alternative schools, corporal punishment rates, and restraint and seclusion. These studies provided additional information and context related to factors that contribute to the differential discipline and experiences of girls.

Appendix VI: Online Questionnaire and Responses about Girls' Experiences in K-12 Schools

We administered an anonymous web questionnaire to women ages 18–24 about their experiences in schools. The questionnaire was disseminated through a national organization, Girls Inc. and through social media from February 26 to April 30, 2024. We received responses from 31 women. Although the questionnaire was anonymous, we asked respondents to identify their race/ethnicity at the end of the questionnaire to ensure we captured variation related to respondents' racial/ethnic identities; the breakdown is in table 5.

Table 5: Counts of Responses to GAO Questionnaire

What is your race or ethnicity (select all that apply)?

American Indian or Alaska Native	0
Asian	2
Black or African American	13
Hispanic or Latina	3
Middle Eastern or North African	1
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0
White	14
Total	**33**

Source: GAO analysis of responses from women on their experience in K-12 schools. | GAO-24-106787

Open-ended responses:

Note: Some comments have been edited for brevity and readability.

Q1: What did you notice about how you and other girls were treated and disciplined when you were in school?

"I felt singled out over boys especially with issues regarding dress code. It was really unfair."

"Everyone was talked to when they had bad behavior, but it was dependent upon parent carry-over if their behavior got better. I feel like I was well-disciplined at home to act better at school than some other girls. I also noticed children [who didn't have siblings] acted more poorly such as backtalking and being self-centered."

"As someone who is a person of color, I think we would be treated poorly and never the first chosen for anyone to call on."

"I felt like diagnoses like ADHD, ADD, etc. were passed over, and girls were left without the proper resources to work through the world of neurodivergence."

"Most of the time we were disciplined because of what we were wearing, and not because of how we behaved. A lot of times, when I would get [disciplined for dress code] I was almost treated like I purposely dressed that way to impress the male gaze. In plain terms, I was slut-shamed, because my skirt was an inch too short, or my shirt showed too much of my shoulders."

"I didn't notice much abnormal between the treatment of girls versus boys until maybe middle school. Then I started to notice there was much more discipline directed towards boys in my classes. Overall, we were treated pretty well with a lot of programs focused on expanding resources and academic opportunities towards women and girls. There were a few teachers, however, who expressed some uncomfortably skewed positive sentiments towards girls in the classes. The best way to put it may be despite being given equal opportunities, girls in my classes were treated more gingerly and with care to varying degrees of severity and comfortability."

"I went to a charter school, which had a uniform, but it always felt like the boys' shorts could be shorter than our shorts or skirts, but they were never called out nearly as much. In addition to this, let's say there was a couple being a typical teenage couple in the hallway, the girls were always told to "get off" or "break it up" instead of addressing the boy or the couple as a whole. [Regarding] the classroom, most treatment felt fairly equal minus the horseplay boys would get away with sometimes."

"I definitely feel that race had an effect on discipline while I was in school. In my opinion, girls of a different race sometimes were disciplined more."

"During my time in school I noticed that some of the Black girls would get in trouble for dress code even though their peers of a different body shape would not get in trouble for wearing the same thing."

"I don't think there were many differences in girls' discipline from boys, except for in the area of dress codes. Some girls were given discipline like having to change or going to detention for what they were wearing, including tank tops with straps that were too skinny and shorts or skirts that were considered too short. This was mostly in middle school, whereas in high school the rules were more relaxed."

"I don't think I noticed any specific differences in the way I was disciplined but I do feel like, at times, I was sometimes favored and disciplined not as strictly as others. I'm not sure if that was related to me being a girl or being someone who was generally not in trouble often."

"From being in school, it always seemed to me that Black girls were always the ones who got disciplined. Not saying White girls never got disciplined, but maybe they were given a little more wiggle room for error unlike the other Black girls."

"[Girls were] fairly treated. [It] depends on the area as well. Sports were heavily male focused."

"I had the experience of going to a public co-ed school from K-8, and a private Catholic all-girls school from 9-12. I can tell you that I had a particularly difficult time adjusting to the all-girls Catholic school environment. We had uniforms, but it was hard for me to follow the nuances of the uniform (I.e., forgetting to take my winter coat off after arriving at school and therefore having detention). I remember there was one particular time we got detention for going to the car (in the school parking lot) during the lunch hour because we didn't want to sit in the cafeteria, even though we had appropriately signed ourselves out and followed the rules. I got in trouble specifically during religion class because I spoke up for the rights of queer/ LGBTQIA individuals but was also told I had no critical thinking skills by a biology teacher because I didn't participate enough in class."

"There was a lot more emphasis on girls following the dress code than boys. They were so antsy about our shorts being the right length and we weren't allowed to wear tank tops because our shoulders were "distracting"? Like the boys wearing baggy basketball jerseys with their nips hanging out isn't distracting somehow..."

"We were mostly disciplined for what we wore or how we looked, and it felt like we were constantly [being] criticized, which took away from our education."

"Girls were always held to a higher standard than boys and therefore disciplined more by teachers or administrators. The expectations for us were higher (even though we were all just kids) and when we didn't meet those expectations, our consequences seemed harsher than those for boys."

"[The] majority of my schooling through K-12 has always been predominantly an all-girls class. In regards to race, I've always been in a class of Black and Latina students. There was always equal treatment and discipline for everyone."

"Girls were disciplined lightly compared to the boys in all school [grades]. However, the expectation for girls to show up clean, well-mannered, and social was apparent."

"We were told to act like a lady or told 'that's not how ladies talk' when we got in trouble, especially [in] an altercation with a man."

"As I rarely got into trouble in school it is hard to fully answer this. However, I did enjoy talking a lot during school and when I was disciplined, I was treated fairly."

"[I remember some] inappropriate comments from male teachers. [There was] weird favoritism in athletics, fostering more of a toxic, competitive environment and a lack of team unity, pitting girls against each other, tone-deaf remarks. I have been out of public school for 5+ years, so things could have changed. Despite some negative experiences, my experience in public school was relatively positive. I learned a lot and encountered some really wonderful teachers, and thankfully that was the majority of my experience."

"I noticed that [some people] were treated more poorly than others. People with a higher status or people whose parents were more involved with the school were never treated like that."

"Girls were often disciplined the most for dress code violations and were often held to higher standards for classroom behavior than male peers."

"I noticed that [girls] were not treated as fairly as boys were and often got harsher punishment."

"Reflecting on my personal experience, I don't have any memory of bad experiences regarding treatment or discipline while in school. I believe the only aspect that separated the girls from the boys were the dress code requirements. But I personally saw no issue with them."

"I don't think that there was much of a difference, but I feel like more was expected of us. The boys would usually act out but when we did punishments seemed harsher."

"I think the most noticeable thing was the dress code. Administrators and teachers were very strict about things like the length of girls' shorts, wearing tank tops, and they banned leggings from my middle school one year. There was no dress code for boys (that I knew of), but they were very particular about what girls wore."

"In elementary and middle school, it felt to me like girls were expected to "know better" than boys from a younger age. They were expected to be more mature/appropriate/understanding/empathetic. Girls (in my experience at least) would receive shame/disapproval from teachers more often than boys when we misbehaved, adults were more likely to give boys the benefit of the doubt, or just shake their heads because 'boys will be boys' or 'they're just young'. In high school I feel like I didn't experience this as much."

"Those that got good grades could avoid punishment. Due to their responsibility with their work, adults pushed off their behavior. Girls were treated differently when wearing tank tops based on chest size. Smaller-chested students could wear revealing shirts, and nothing would happen. When a larger-chested woman wore a revealing top, they were talked to."

"Growing up I was raised with all girls and my mom. My mom passed away when I was 12, and I didn't really have support. I thought I was okay, but I always needed extra attention because that's what I'm used to in my household. In middle school, there was a women's empowerment program for students like me. That was a great thing and it taught me a lot of things that I use now in my daily life (sexual education, eating education—how to properly use a knife and fork, table courtesy, etc.) Going into high school was a bit different. There wasn't that same support. There were select teachers who would really take the time and really care. I was extremely bad in high school, and I had my own counselor. I wish I didn't have to act out to get that attention, but it helped me become who I am today."

Q2: Do you think the discipline of you and other girls was fair, unfair, or both when you were in school? Please explain.

"[Discipline] was completely unfair when it came to matters involving personal appearance and dress code issues. Girls were made to feel as if they were a distraction to boys and responsible for boys' poor behavior."

"I felt it was very fair. The punishment was nothing crazy. It was just a talking to and a note home. Nobody in my class really ever did anything bad enough to need more than that."

"I would say no, [discipline was not fair] because girls of color always had the shorter end of the stick."

"In terms of discipline, I feel as though it was pretty fair. I never saw directly opposite treatment of males and females."

"Yes, I do think it was unfair. We were consistently treated like our bodies were simply objects for men and boys to look at. What we wore didn't inhibit our ability to learn, so if the boys in our class were "distracted" by what we were wearing then the boys should have been the ones disciplined and told to act differently. The boys were never disciplined for how they dressed."

"I don't remember much discipline being inflicted. In part I think this was just due to who I was as a kid. I was pretty quiet, and mostly kept to myself."

"While I agree that certain areas of the body should not be exposed at school, the frequency of which girls are dress coded vs boys is drastically different."

"I would say it was fair in my experience, I personally never felt my gender or race affected [my experience] but I do feel like it happened to other girls.

"I think it was it a bit unfair because the girls would feel like they're a distraction even [though] they're not doing anything wrong."

"I think it was unfair to discipline girls based on what they were wearing, as it was more of a distraction from our learning for teachers to point out what students were wearing than for students ever being distracted by another student's clothes."

"I believe it was fair. I never saw any instances of girls being treated unfairly at my school."

"[Discipline was] unfair. Discipline for Black girls isn't set up for the person being disciplined to explain themselves. It was more so just assumed that the person was in the wrong."

"[Discipline was] fair but again depends on the area."

"Public school is hard for me to remember if I'm being honest. I left when I was 13 and I'm 24 now. I think it was mostly fair though. I went to a predominantly White suburban school. If anything, I think they were probably harder on the boys than on the girls. When I left, we were all getting to an age where our parents were helping with homework less and the boys were less likely to turn it in. The only discipline regarding gender I remember is the boys being reminded that if their grades slipped because they didn't turn their homework in, they wouldn't be able to go to football practice."

"I was not disciplined all that much since I was a goody-two-shoes in school, but there were several times in middle school where the whole grade was punished for something a few bad actors did. [Also], sometimes there were a few boys who could get away with things because the teachers were too tired to control them, I guess."

"[Discipline was] unfair. They didn't take body size into consideration either so it felt like only certain girls would get in trouble and boys could wear whatever they wanted."

"I think [discipline] was unfair. Our punishments were worse, we got called out more in class, and some female teachers unfortunately picked on certain girls."

"I think treatment and discipline were both fair and unfair at times. I found that if the class was taught by a male teacher, they would have very high standards while also being harsh, demanding, and never fully understanding—especially of problems that are typical for girls to face within their personal life or life in general. However, I found that female teachers have a different approach to discipline and treatment. They still held high standards within the classroom but would show more compassion and more understanding to certain situations and problems."

"Other than the social standards that were put on us, overall, I and other girls were given grace when we did not understand a subject and were properly scolded for being rude or disruptive."

"[Consequences depended on who the disciplinarian was]. For the most part [discipline] was fair, but sometimes it would not be fair, especially if you were not white."

"[Discipline was] fair. The teachers I had treated everyone fairly."

"[I] have never really been in a situation to be disciplined. I was always treated fairly."

"I say [discipline was] both [fair and unfair] because it always depended on the person."

"[Discipline was] unfair at times because the dress code violations were targeted [at] girls who had more mature and sexualized bodies."

"[I am] leaning towards unfair. While boys would be disciplined, I think the girls had it worse. There was also a bit of public humiliation that would come with the discipline."

"I believe that the discipline of girls was fair. In situations where an issue arose, it appeared to be handled in about the same manner as any other student."

"[Discipline was] a little bit of both fair and unfair. We didn't really get into trouble, but when we did, we were almost instantly met with suspensions or detentions."

"I think discipline-wise girls were treated fairly. I never heard of any harsh or extreme discipline for girls in school."

"[Discipline was] unfair in elementary and middle school because in my experience, girls were held to a higher standard earlier on than boys i.e., we're expected to grow up faster/understand more."

"I was never too involved in the discipline process. I knew I would be dress coded if I wore anything other than a sweatshirt or regular shirt, so I never did. The white female students that were in the higher-level courses were never disciplined properly. They were always disrespectful to both teachers and students. The white male students in these courses acted the same way as well. There was limited diversity in the higher-level courses, allowing them to get away with even saying racist things. When disciplining cheating, there was little to none of it in higher level courses. Again, this isn't too much about gender more about race. Teachers had more trust that higher-level students wouldn't cheat, and the opposite is true. They care more about their grades."

"I don't think [discipline] was fair. If you had good grades, I felt like they made it okay for you to be bad versus me being bad with bad grades."

Q3: How did your feelings of safety and belonging impact your experiences (e.g., attendance, participation, enjoyment, success) in school?

"Our small school was full of cliques. I was a nerd and did not fit in. This made me hate school and I didn't want to go. Music programs were the only redeeming part. I didn't feel mentally safe or relaxed due to constantly feeling like I didn't fit in and was always at risk of being bullied/made fun of by the cool kids. If I have kids someday, I probably will consider homeschooling or private schooling due to my experiences in public school. The social aspects made me hate my school years."

"I enjoyed school a lot and felt very safe and encouraged to be there."

"I think it was all good. They would make sure we [came to school]."

"I felt safe in school for the majority of the time I was there, and it never impacted my attendance or participation. As I got older, I grew more worried as our school experienced several safety incidents that resulted in real lockdowns."

"I felt relatively safe at school. However, there was an incident my junior year of high school that made me feel very unsafe and led me to spend a few hours a day in the nurse's office because of panic attacks. Most of the time I felt safe and that I belonged enough in my school environment to not affect my attendance and success in school. If I had any doubts or insecurities about my abilities on projects or presentations, then there was an impact on my experiences."

"At the time I had a severe chronic illness which drastically affected my attendance and participation. This made me feel like I didn't belong more than my gender identity did, which definitely affected my overall academic experience. Again, as a woman, there were certain teachers who made me feel supported, accepted, and respected more than others."

"At my charter school, I felt extremely safe and remember it being really odd the first time we had police come in with K-9 dogs."

"I would say overall I personally felt pretty safe. I attended school every day and felt encouraged and supported."

"I think because I had great teachers who truly believed in me, I had a great experience for the most part. I think some of my teachers made it important for their students to feel accepted and valued."

"There was one teacher that I felt less comfortable around because he had a reputation for acting creepy around the girls. That made me a bit more wary in his class, and I also felt like he did have a bias favoring the boys in the class, which decreased my enjoyment of my favorite subject in school (history), which he taught. I would say overall, though, that I felt like I belonged in school because there were a lot of other girls who looked like me, as it was a predominantly white public school. I think this made it easier for me to succeed and enjoy school since my identity was so represented."

"I believe sometimes teachers were a little harsher about a student missing class (lack of attendance). When I would miss classes sometimes, I felt that teachers were rude to me and did not care about the reasons I was missing classes."

"[How I felt at school] made me surround myself with others who I felt had similar experiences to me."

"Safety was not a concern. Enjoyment was fulfilled."

"I was a white person around almost all white people. I felt safe. Our teachers really cared."

"I did not feel respected in middle school. People who knew me personally would treat me well most of the time but the student body in general was not respected in middle school or high school. In middle school it sometimes felt like we were expected to act like adults but were treated like children in a way that almost felt condescending. In high school they cared more about our test scores than the fact that kids were committing suicide over their stress."

"Feelings of safety and belonging weren't much of an issue for me fortunately and didn't affect any aspects of my experience in school."

"I struggled within my high school and middle school years, I was constantly burnt out and overwhelmed by the workload and schedule of school. I would get assigned so much homework that required me to stay up late, which made me get a constant lack of sleep. Then I would have to wake up early to make it to school on time just to do it all over daily, 5

days a week. Nonetheless, I always made sure I would do my very best. However, due to some of these issues some of my grades would be impacted and my overall enjoyment of school plummeted. I would have conferences with my teachers about this and let them know of my personal struggles and I would always get undermined and get told that I wasn't working hard enough, or I wasn't smart enough. Which was always hard to hear because in reality I always did the best I could and always made sure my work would be completed. After a while, hearing the same thing from multiple teachers became very discouraging for me. This impacted me to not participate in class by raising my hand in fear I would say the wrong answer and being in fear for the teacher to embarrass me in front of the class for saying the wrong answer. I would also have to miss some days of school simply for my mental health. At times I would be very drained to even try to go to school and would lack a lot of motivation. Overall, I believe I did struggle with feelings of safety and belonging in school."

"I had high feelings of safety and belonging, so my school experiences were pretty positive."

"I loved my high school because it was extremely diverse. I always felt safe and loved partaking in clubs like student government and student council. I would be excited to show up for school for the most part."

"My feelings of [safety] and belonging impacted my experiences because it allowed me to feel eager to participate and explore different extracurricular activities."

"I had an enjoyable experience. When it came to participation and enjoyment with after-school activities (athletics), it was a hit or miss. When I attended school there was a toxic competitive environment, with tone-deaf remarks from staff at times. I have had a great experience at public school, and it is largely due to the wonderful teachers and educators who made my experience enriching. Whoever assumes the position to be a role model and source of guidance with young kids, take that responsibility seriously. Be empathetic to those you teach, and make sure you support their talents and encourage them to be their best self. Be patient, motivating, and adaptable to what they need."

"There was a time period when I hated being at school. I used to feel like school was my safe space until a certain situation happened and then I felt like school was the most uncomfortable space I could be in. Something happened every day and eventually I ended up leaving and

switching schools. So, I firmly believe that safety and belonging affect attendance participation etc."

"Being part of a student sports team improved my sense of belonging and enjoyment in school."

"It mostly impacted my enjoyment and participation of being in school. I did not like being in certain classes because of how teachers interacted with female students, and I did not want to participate to draw attention to myself."

"I generally felt like I could attend school. I had friends and teachers who positively impacted my school experience. There were times, however, when I experienced insecurity and being made fun of. I believe these things happened because the hobbies and activities I chose to engage in weren't popular at that time."

"I've always felt safe in school, so I feel like it positively affected my experience because I had almost perfect attendance and looked forward to attending school."

"For the most part, I felt safe in school. There were times when teachers would say offhand comments about what a girl was wearing that made me uncomfortable. A few times, a male teacher would make a comment about how I looked. Whether they meant it maliciously or not, it still made me uncomfortable. Also, the banning of leggings made me feel uncomfortable, but nothing impacted my attendance, just my enjoyment."

"I always felt like I was safe, and I belonged when I was in elementary school. For [that] reason, I was very participatory in both class and after school activities. This sense of safety and belonging definitely diminished as I progressed through middle school and high school, and definitely led me to opt out of participating as much (both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities)."

"I never felt safe or like I belonged in my school. Whenever I knew I didn't have schoolwork, or I could do it from home I would. I hated being in school. The hallways are stressful, and I was always unsure if someone would fight me for being pushed into them. Overall, the general environment was poor."

"I stopped going after I was old enough to understand that there was a lot of favoritism. I realized that in order for me to pass, I just had to do my

[classwork/homework], and no one would bother me. So, I would miss days of school and make up all my missing work on a Friday and try my best to get good grades."

Q4: If you had social, emotional, or academic difficulties in school, how did teachers and administrators react or respond?

"Teachers and administrators love their cool kids and athletes. They don't care about everyone. They merely give lip service to it. Anyone with half a brain can see through their facade."

"My teachers were supportive and encouraging when I felt I could not do an assignment."

"[Teachers and administrators] would react well to [difficulties we had in school]! [They would] try and take us out in the hall and talk through [things] with us."

"I had undiagnosed ADHD for my entire K-12 career, and not once did teachers think that I had different processes of learning. They instead labeled me in a certain way, and I was made to feel stupid. An excellent example of this was the Gifted Program since it was mostly based [on] standardized testing. I think this program instilled deep feelings of academic worthlessness in me."

"Most of my teachers were typically very understanding, though they didn't always know how to help in emotional situations. My high school was very strict when it came to academics, so I think that also affected how teachers and administrators felt about academic difficulties."

"I think overall it was good. We did have a guidance counselor in K-12th grade, but I don't remember ever really going to them. I personally rarely sought this sort of help in [school]. I always turned towards my parents or brother."

"My teachers in high school pushed us to advocate for ourselves and were very flexible if there were things outside of school influencing our work. I was extremely grateful for that, and I still am to this day."

"I felt I had some academic difficulties, but my teachers always did their best to help and accommodate those difficulties."

"When I was in school my [Career and Technical Education] teachers were generally supportive and understanding if I had any academic difficulties. They would give out extra help to their students and they created a safe space for us to express our concerns."

"I don't think I noticed much difference between how [teachers and administrators] would react between myself and the boys in school. I also did not face many challenges in school, though. I did not interact much with administrators as a result."

"I believe I had academic and emotional difficulties in school, but unfortunately, I only think the teachers I was more involved with (through clubs) were the only teachers who truly noticed or asked if I was okay."

"[Teachers and administrators acted] like they weren't shocked. [In a way they seemed unphased]."

"I had academic difficulties, but the school handled it super well. They adapted easily and understood my accommodations."

"The only memory I have of difficulties in K-8th is in 2nd grade I called someone a [word omitted]. I didn't even know what that word meant. I had heard it from a neighbor kid and decided to use it. The kid immediately tattled on me. I said I was sorry. Later that night my mom got a call from the teacher. She was very upset. She asked me if I had said the word and I said yes. She wanted to know where I had heard it and I told her. I remember she was upset because the teacher never once talked to me about it, she had only called my parents to tell the story."

"Some of my teachers were helpful and respectful. I remember my calculus teacher in particular held afterschool help sessions and brought us snacks. But administrators were never your friend. It always felt like they expected stuff to be your fault."

"[Teachers and administrators] scheduled meetings with counselors or parents, and they acted pretty fast."

"My attendance was poor and teachers and administrators absolutely hated it. Some teachers would make comments and call me out in front of the whole class, make sly comments, and talk about me to other teachers. I maintained As and Bs despite my attendance. There was only ever one teacher in all of middle or high school who talked to me privately

and tried to accommodate me without overstepping any boundaries and making me overshare."

"I felt my teachers were not that supportive of me, my emotional, or academic difficulties. [The] majority of their reactions showed me that they did not truly care or try to understand me. I also felt a lack of support to at least try to get me on the right track to become a little more successful in classes."

"I didn't have these difficulties so the were no reactions from my teachers."

"I would say about half of my teachers gave room for me to express my difficulties and the other half could [not] care less and it showed. The teachers that cared—I ended up getting better grades in their classes."

"I have had teachers who made sure I advocated for myself, and truly gave me a space to feel safe. I remember my "Race, Gender, and Equity" class and it was phenomenal. My teacher showed so much compassion and was so kind. I will always remember that class and what she helped me with as a student."

"Some teachers would be very helpful while others would brush certain situations off."

"[The] teachers I had relationships with responded with care."

"Some of my teachers responded well and helped me— [these were] mostly female teachers. Two teachers [in particular] ignored me and did not check on me when I was visibly upset during class, one male and one female."

"I believe one challenge I was facing near my senior year was academic difficulties. After expressing my concerns for a particular class, a counselor assigned to me insisted that I stay in it anyway, in order to 'challenge' myself. Though this response may have been meant to be sincere, I proceeded to have trouble keeping up in that class for the remainder of the semester. [I also had] a complication with scheduling a particular class because [someone claimed it didn't exist], which [I later found out wasn't true when I saw the class happening]."

"My teachers would ask me what was wrong if they noticed a change in my behavior, grades or attendance. [They] comforted me if I was going

through something, gave advice, and checked on me to make sure that things were changing for the better."

"I was always very shy, but my teachers were generally understanding of that. [This was] mostly true of my female teachers (a couple of male teachers were not as understanding)."

"I have had many good personal experiences with female teachers going out of their way to help me or look after me before/during/after difficult moments that they either witnessed, or that I came to them to discuss. Administrators were not always as sympathetic, and I often felt dismissed by them."

"The only difficulty I had in my high school years was when my grandfather died. Some teachers were accommodating and would excuse work. Others were very unforgiving and didn't help in the process."

"I really only had one teacher who really pushed me to seek counseling."

Q5: Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experiences with discipline, safety, or belonging in school?

"I'm so glad to be out of school! I'd rather adult a million times over than deal with petty high school social garbage ever again!"

"I attended charter middle and high schools, so we were required to have a uniform, and our academic success was very important. I think that also affected how girls, and students in general, were treated."

"It's hard to adequately answer the survey because there was such a great skew in my relationships with my teachers. In some cases, my relationship was great and there was zero differential treatment between girls and boys. In others, at the time it felt like a really great supportive relationship, but in hindsight it was inappropriate between a teacher and a young female student. Retrospectively, my perception of a lot of teacher relationships has shifted. At the time I felt safe in situations that were maybe not ideal."

"I would say overall having a sense of belonging was difficult. I didn't really always feel like I belonged. I am Hispanic [and] went to a predominantly White school, so it was different sometimes but not bad."

"Unfortunately, there were some fights happening in the school, but the teachers and administrators would try to break them up as quickly as possible."

"I think one place that may have felt less welcoming was gym class. One aspect that made gym/health classes more welcoming was when we would engage in more physical activities other than traditional sports, such as yoga and dance. Having a wider range of ways to stay healthy was more inclusive to everyone and often reduced the feeling that gym was aimed more at boys than girls."

"I've always felt like I belonged in school, and I've never felt unsafe while being there. Looking back at it while being older just made me realize maybe some things weren't as perfect as I thought they were while I was attending public school."

"For girls, school is hard, but for boys it's hard too. It's a different kind of hard for each. I think that's why my parents went the all-girls school route for me. Kids, parents, teachers, everyone's trying their best; but it shapes our experiences. I'm grateful to have an education."

"Group punishment in middle school taught me that people do not care to figure out who actually committed wrongdoing and would rather punish the innocent than let the few troublemakers go unpunished. I never broke a rule in middle school yet regularly got lectured about how terrible we were and had recess taken away because a few kids got into a fight."

"I had a good experience in school. The only feelings of [not] belonging and safety were in middle school, and it was because I wasn't into the boys yet or have my period yet, so I felt like I was behind the curve compared to other girls my age."

"I just wish there were more spaces to discuss mental health issues, especially for kids [who face] adversity."

"I believe these things in schools can definitely be better and it takes a team effort! Not just from staff but students as well."

"I am not sure if [what I shared] represents the experience of other female students. I simply read the questions and sought to answer them as honestly as I could based on my personal experience."

"There should be more diversity in classes. [There should be] a better system for discipline when there are fights. [There should be] a safe place for people to go when they are in emotional distress, and a protocol for when someone must be out for a period of time."

Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact	Jacqueline M. Nowicki, (202) 512-7215 or nowickij@gao.gov.
Staff Acknowledgments	In addition to the contact named above, Sherri Doughty (Assistant Director); Alison Grantham (Analyst-in-Charge); Rayna Ketchum; Najma Knobloch; Lydie Loth; Abigail Loxton; Katie McElroy; Samuel Portnow; and Tatyana N. Walker made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Melinda Bowman; Charlotte Cable; Elizabeth Calderon; Caroline Christopher; Caroline DeCelles; Brian Egger; Tangere Hoagland; Dana Hoping; Jeffrey Larson; Anjalique Lawrence; Jean McSween; John Mingus; Shannon Murphy; Mathew Naven; Carl Ramirez; Lindsay Shapray; Norma Jean Simon; Curtia Taylor; Jeff Tessin; Kelly Whitt Troutman; and Trevor Osaki.