

Girls and Education

This political moment demands the creation of holistic and affirming schools where students have access to the resources they need to meaningfully engage in education that centers their freedom, self-expression, joy, and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated longstanding educational inequities imposed upon students, largely along race and class lines. While it is important to address challenges related to COVID-19 safety in educational institutions, we feel it is critical in this political moment to center educational justice for Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. In doing so, we acknowledge the urgency of this moment and the historical need for gender equity issues to be intersectional. The education system has created insurmountable barriers to attaining a quality education for Black and Brown girls and gender expansive youth of color in particular through zero-tolerance policies, the positioning of police in schools, the absence of culturally-responsive teaching and curriculum, systematic underfunding, interpersonal and institutional racism perpetuated by teachers and administrators, and the normalization of cultures that function to control young people – the enforcement of dress codes, for example. With school operation changing nationwide, we must use this moment to change how schools serve girls, Black and Brown girls and non-binary youth of color, and ensure healing-centered, restorative, anti-racist learning settings when schooling resumes.

New York State has and continues to violate students' constitutional right to a “sound and basic education” by leaving schools without necessary funding to achieve that minimum standard — disparities that disproportionately impact school districts serving Black and Latinx students. Efforts to transition to remote learning exposed the “digital divide” experienced by many young people of color who live in homes without internet access. As an additional burden, many girls, especially Black and Latinx girls, have assumed caregiving roles or essential work outside the home to support their families. The school year ahead must reckon with new disparities and respond to the collective trauma of living through stress, grief and new realities due to the pandemic.

Too often, students are criminalized in educational institutions, particularly Black girls and gender expansive youth of color. School police and an atmosphere of control lead to disproportionate punishment and school pushout. In the wake of national resistance to the violence of policing, students, families, educators and communities across New York raised

RECOMMENDATIONS

- + **Eliminate top-down decision-making in schools and democratize the learning environment** to shift away from zero-tolerance policies or practices that control young people in schools.
- + **Incorporate culturally affirming teaching through culturally diverse teachers and resources** in virtual and in personal classrooms
- + **Move away from standardized tests as a measure of academic progress.**
- + **Remove technological barriers to education.** The government must liaise with tech corporations to develop creative, immediate solutions that provide free internet access to all students and end “digital redlining”. All high school students, priority given to low- income and students of color, should be given their personal laptop, free of charge and support for reliable internet access.
- + **Remove all law enforcement from schools and reappropriate that funding to schools.** The school police system siphons resources away from classrooms, curriculum, and restorative practices and exposes young people to the threat of police intervention.
- + **Fund and sustain restorative justice training, staffing, and implementation supports.**
- + **End the school-to-prison pipeline**, wherein student behavior is criminalized.
- + **Ensure funding for mental health services to provide in-school therapeutic support for young people**, especially Black, Latinx and gender expansive students at all levels in the education system.
- + **Provide social services services and funding to low income, students of color and immigrants in need** to ensure they have access to food, shelter and supplies like computers so they can stay in school or continue to learn.

alarm for the financial cost of school police, a system that siphons resources away from classrooms, curriculum, and restorative practices. Amid the pandemic, the people of Rochester successfully pushed their decision makers to remove police from Rochester Public Schools. New York City proposed the transfer of control over school policing from the NYPD to the DOE over the course of two years. At a time of tremendous momentum to disentangle police from school buildings, New York's largest school district has not moved forward meaningful reforms, ignoring the ways systemic racism and institutional violence permeate our school system. We must continue to push for restorative justice, the removal of police from schools, and culturally responsive education, a movement that has been led by Black women and femmes for decades.

Education is a human right for students of all identities. Equitably reopening schools must include attending to the social, health and emotional support that many students will need, especially Black and Latinx students who may have lost loved ones and face financial insecurity. COVID-19 relief packages must pay special attention to historically sidelined populations so that the additional cost schools face to reopen and the state and local budgets decimated by the pandemic do not hinder these students' learning. These populations include: Black and Latinx students, low income students, those with disabilities, English learners, students who are homeless and those in the juvenile justice system. The government must target funding to schools and districts hardest hit by the pandemic and, to maintain equity, it should protect the highest need districts from disproportionate cuts in public funding. To supplement online learning for these marginalized groups, local governments and school districts should create and fund "learning pods" and other innovative solutions to ensure that their education is not further compromised.

This political moment requires the creation of holistic and affirming schools where students have access to all the tools and resources needed to meaningfully engage in education that centers their freedom, self-expression, joy and well-being.

- + **Target public funding to students hardest hit by the pandemic**, including Black and Latinx students, low income students and those with disabilities, English learners and those in the juvenile justice system.
- + **The government should prohibit the use of public funding for privatization efforts** such as vouchers, tax credits, "scholarships" and other funding mechanisms that benefit wealthier private schools or initiatives.
- + **Local governments and school districts should equitably support learning "pods" or other solutions** to supplement the online learning of low income Black, Latinx and other students of color, those with disabilities and special needs.
- + **Protect students' civil rights by not giving waivers of requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act or the Disabilities Education Act to ensure all students have access to a high quality education.**