

An Open Letter to the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education

May 21, 2018

Ensuring that schools are safe spaces is essential to enable all students to learn and thrive. We appreciate that school safety and creating a positive and supportive school culture are priorities for Pittsburgh Public Schools. Safety is a top priority for us as well, which led us to engage in listening sessions with girls to hear about their experiences of feeling safe (or not) within school. During these sessions conducted with students from Planned Parenthood and Gwen's Girls, students shared that they are not safe at school, that sexual and other forms of harassment from classmates, teachers, and staff is a daily occurrence, that this experience is pervasive and severe, and that it is interfering with their ability to thrive. This conduct is common and often unchallenged. Additionally, students involved in the Women and Girls Foundation's GirlGov program talked with teachers in schools who said they lack sufficient information on how to effectively respond to or report sexual harassment.

Numerous national studies have shown that students, especially girls, experience sexual harassment frequently within their schools. The American Association of University Women study found that of 1,965 students surveyed, 48% of experienced sexual harassment during the 2010-2011 school year. We believe that all schools in Allegheny county can and MUST do better to prevent and respond to sexual harassment. As the #MeToo movement continues to garner national and international attention, we feel this is a crucial time to address sexual harassment and other forms of harassment within Pittsburgh Public Schools.

As the Black Girls Equity Alliance (BGEA)—a coalition comprised of individuals, community-based organizations, universities, and government entities that work with Black girls and acknowledge that their lives and experiences are unique within existing societal constructs—our mission is to eradicate inequities affecting Black girls in Allegheny County. Members working on this topic include representatives from Gwen's Girls, Planned Parenthood of Western PA, the Women's Law Project, FISA Foundation, GirlGov, PAAR, YUIR Pittsburgh, other organizations, universities, and government entities. **We invite the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education to collaborate with us to eradicate sexual and other forms of harassment within schools that impacts all students, regardless of gender identity.**

In particular, we ask that the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education:

1. Include language within the Strategic Plan: *Expect Great Things* describing a commitment to effectively prevent and respond to sexual and other forms of harassment.
2. Establish a full-time Title IX Coordinator for the district.
3. Collaborate with the Black Girls Equity Alliance and other external experts.
4. Establish a task force focused on eradicating sexual harassment to address:
 - a. Measures of students' experiences of sexual and other forms of harassment
 - b. Assessment of policies and procedures related to sexual harassment
 - c. District-wide training for all staff members to ensure understanding of policies and best practices for addressing sexual and other forms of harassment

We are hopeful that a collaboration between BGEA and the Pittsburgh Public School District will result in creating a positive and supportive school culture, free from sexual and other forms of harassment. We look forward to working together.

Gwen's Girls	Britney Brinkman, PhD	Allyce Pinchback	Amanda Cross, PhD	Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD
Jose Garth	M. Shernell Smith	Christine Gordon	Sara Goodkind, PhD	Betty Braxter, PhD
Jody Figas	Katie Horowitz	American Friends Service Committee	PGH	Pittsburgh for CEDAW Coalition
Julie Evans	FISA Foundation	Planned Parenthood of Western PA	Women and Girls Foundation	
Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR)	Julianna Wegner	Women's Law Project	Jessica Ruffin	
Lynn Knezevich	Alison Hall	Azadeh Masalehdan Block, PhD	YUIR Pittsburgh	
Education Law Center		Amanda Neatrou	Melissa Swauger, PhD	