

**DECLARE
EQUITY**

FOR GIRLS

it's time!

ABRIDGED VERSION

**CRITTENTON SERVICES
OF GREATER WASHINGTON**

“This report verifies what educators across the country have seen with our own eyes. Our girls who live in challenging circumstances need us to stand up for them! The obstacles of poverty, racism, lack of health care and housing can affect their lives forever. Equity in educational access and opportunity is a justice issue. Educators are thankful to Crittenton for this important report.”

Lily Eskelsen Garcia
President, National Education Association

“There’s overwhelming evidence that the conditions in which our young people live, learn, and play have great impact on their health and the opportunities available to them now and in the future. Kaiser Permanente is deeply committed to the wellbeing of our nation’s youth and we are pleased to participate in the release of this important report, calling us all to advocate for policies, programs, and a culture that moves girls in the District of Columbia closer to the bright future they deserve.”

Celeste James, Executive Director, Community Health, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States

About Crittenton Services of Greater Washington

Crittenton Services of Greater Washington (Crittenton) empowers the most vulnerable teen girls to overcome obstacles, make positive choices, and achieve their goals through programs in schools in Washington, DC, and Montgomery County, MD. Our mission is to ensure that every teen girl—her race, ethnicity, and family income notwithstanding—has the support, knowledge, and skills she needs to thrive. We focus on the “whole girl” and her strengths, not her deficits. Participation is always voluntary, and any girl can join a group.

Each year, we provide nearly 500 sixth- to twelfth-grade girls with experiences that will help them to develop invaluable social, emotional, and leadership skills; enable them to make healthy choices; and bolster their motivation to learn, succeed in school, and go to college. Most importantly, they attain a belief in their ability to succeed, even in challenging situations.

Since 1983, we have served more than 9,000 teen girls. The results have been life-changing: Crittenton girls are staying in school, avoiding pregnancy, becoming leaders in their schools and communities, graduating from high school, and going on to college and careers.

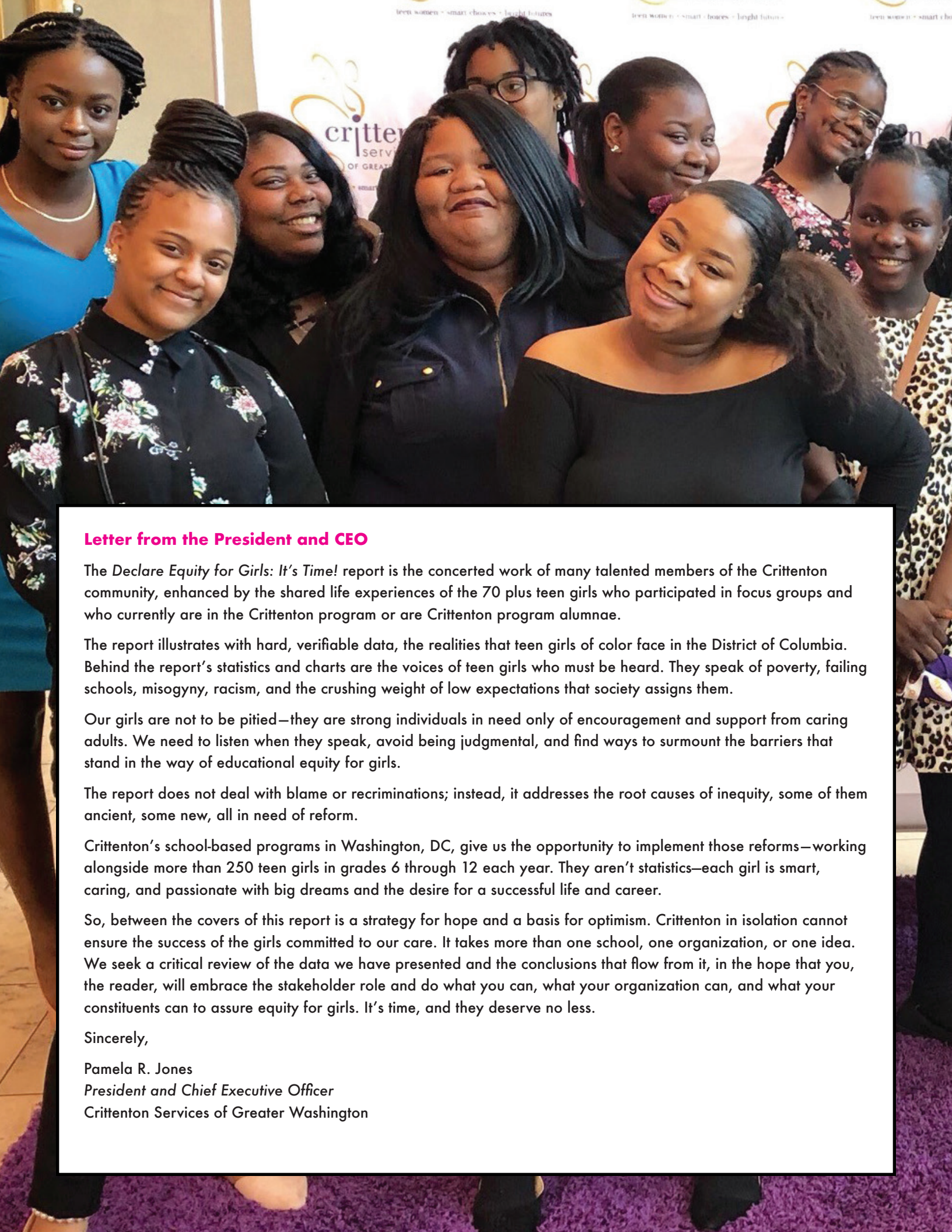
Acknowledgments

Crittenton is grateful to everyone who contributed to this report. It would not have been possible without the girls and young women who so generously shared hours of their time and their thoughts, ideas, and feelings with us.

The team responsible for conducting the research and producing this report was led by Crittenton consultant Dr. Cherri Waters and Nicki Sanders, MSW, Crittenton Director of Programs, and included Nikole Donovan, MSW, LMSW, Crittenton Senior Program Manager; Sharyn Dougherty, MPH; Maxine Robinson, BS; and Cassandra Volcy, MPA, Crittenton Youth Development Program Coordinators; as well as consultants Irwin Royster; Kalisha Dessources, MEd, Director of the National Philanthropic Collaborative of Young Women’s Initiatives; and Brechaye Milburn, MSW. Sara Kugler, The National Crittenton Foundation, Director of Advocacy and Communication, and Catherine Hill, PhD, Executive Director of the Women’s Caucus in the Maryland General Assembly, graciously agreed to review the report draft, and their input made it better. The Crittenton Board of Directors and staff are grateful for the insightful leadership of Dr. Cherri Waters. Dr. Waters’s compassion and dedication is reflected in our findings, which point the way forward to true equity for the girls of DC.

Generous support from the Department of Health (DC Health), Community Health Administration, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States, and AT&T made this project possible.

Abridged and Full report available at www.crittentonservices.org



Letter from the President and CEO

The *Declare Equity for Girls: It's Time!* report is the concerted work of many talented members of the Crittenton community, enhanced by the shared life experiences of the 70 plus teen girls who participated in focus groups and who currently are in the Crittenton program or are Crittenton program alumnae.

The report illustrates with hard, verifiable data, the realities that teen girls of color face in the District of Columbia. Behind the report's statistics and charts are the voices of teen girls who must be heard. They speak of poverty, failing schools, misogyny, racism, and the crushing weight of low expectations that society assigns them.

Our girls are not to be pitied—they are strong individuals in need only of encouragement and support from caring adults. We need to listen when they speak, avoid being judgmental, and find ways to surmount the barriers that stand in the way of educational equity for girls.

The report does not deal with blame or recriminations; instead, it addresses the root causes of inequity, some of them ancient, some new, all in need of reform.

Crittenton's school-based programs in Washington, DC, give us the opportunity to implement those reforms—working alongside more than 250 teen girls in grades 6 through 12 each year. They aren't statistics—each girl is smart, caring, and passionate with big dreams and the desire for a successful life and career.

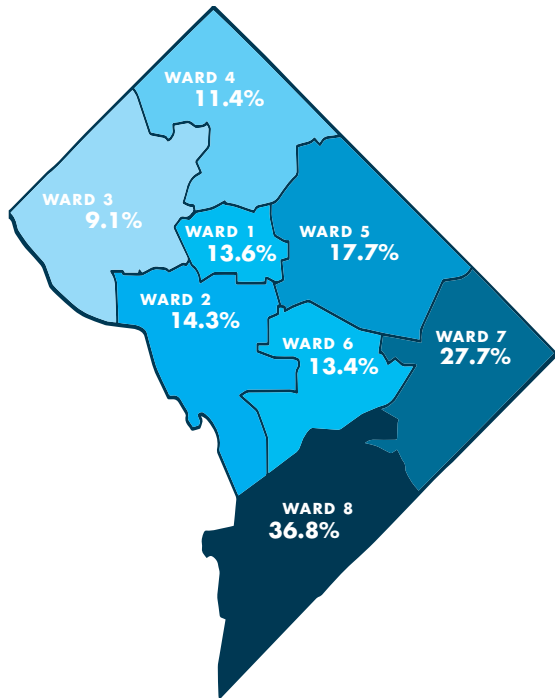
So, between the covers of this report is a strategy for hope and a basis for optimism. Crittenton in isolation cannot ensure the success of the girls committed to our care. It takes more than one school, one organization, or one idea. We seek a critical review of the data we have presented and the conclusions that flow from it, in the hope that you, the reader, will embrace the stakeholder role and do what you can, what your organization can, and what your constituents can to assure equity for girls. It's time, and they deserve no less.

Sincerely,

Pamela R. Jones
President and Chief Executive Officer
Crittenton Services of Greater Washington



INTRODUCTION



**Percentage of Poverty
by Ward, 2016**

Each year, Crittenton Services of Greater Washington (Crittenton) delivers programs in the District of Columbia to more than 200 bright, strong, and resilient girls with big hopes and dreams. Our school-based programs focus on the health, healthy development, and wellness of sixth- to twelfth-grade girls.

Crittenton delivers programs in schools in the communities that have the District's lowest median family income and its highest unemployment rate, the highest percentage of children under age 19 living in poverty, highest teen birth rate, and highest percentage of families headed by single women. These communities also have the highest number of recorded incidents of violent crime.

Keenly aware that girls living in these communities face multiple barriers to academic success, we began a process of listening carefully and intentionally to girls and young women to answer two questions:

1. What are the major barriers to success for girls living in communities of concentrated disadvantage?
2. What can be done to reduce those barriers?

This executive summary is an abridgment of the resulting report, *Declare Equity for Girls: It's Time*, released on December 10, 2018. The report presents the results of focus group discussions with 71 teen girls and young women combined with hard data on academic outcomes that capture the disparities between the District's eight wards.

The consensus of the focus group participants was that:

- The environment in their schools often is not conducive to learning.
- Their home and community environments can create additional challenges.
- They do not feel safe and respected either in school or in their communities.
- The interplay of school, inside-school, and outside-school factors contribute to high rates of absenteeism and school suspensions and low rates of academic achievement.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS **NOT CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING**

Chief among the girls' observations about their schools was that "drama" and conflict between students, teachers, and school staff often created an environment that resulted in disconnection from school. Although some girls reported a connection to a teacher or other adult in the school and had positive attitudes about their experiences, others described an unhealthy environment in which students could neither concentrate on their school work nor feel safe.

What the girls described as "drama" is often, in fact, the result of trauma. In the District, 32% of youth aged 12 to 17 have experienced violence in their neighborhoods; and 24% live with economic hardship. Violence, bullying, and physical fighting are daily occurrences in some schools; and it should come as no surprise that researchers attribute bad behavior as essentially a psychological and biological response to trauma.

"The drama stops people from learning."

"I don't have any negative feelings towards my school because after a while, you just zone out."

CHALLENGES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL WEIGH HEAVILY ON GIRLS

Home environments, too, directly affect girls' ability to succeed academically. Over 20,000 children live in poverty in Wards 7 and 8. The resources necessary to address their needs are in short supply. Lacking those resources, girls experience housing instability, nutrition insecurity, the need to assume adult responsibilities at home. The stress on girls who are pregnant or parenting is greater because they are burdened by parenthood in ways that boys are not.

The focus group participants also described the lack of respect they experience in schools and the community at large. They have experienced repeated sexual and other harassment from their male peers and found that adults frequently do not take their complaints seriously. Instead, they were punished for standing up for themselves.

Gun violence was central to the fears expressed by focus group participants who pass locations where persons have been shot every day, who hear gunshots in the night, and see weapons displayed in their neighborhoods.

"She says, 'Y'all never come to school.' But she doesn't know what is really going on at home. She sent my mother to court because my mom had a job, and my sister had to stay home to take care of the baby."

UNSAFE AND DISRESPECTED

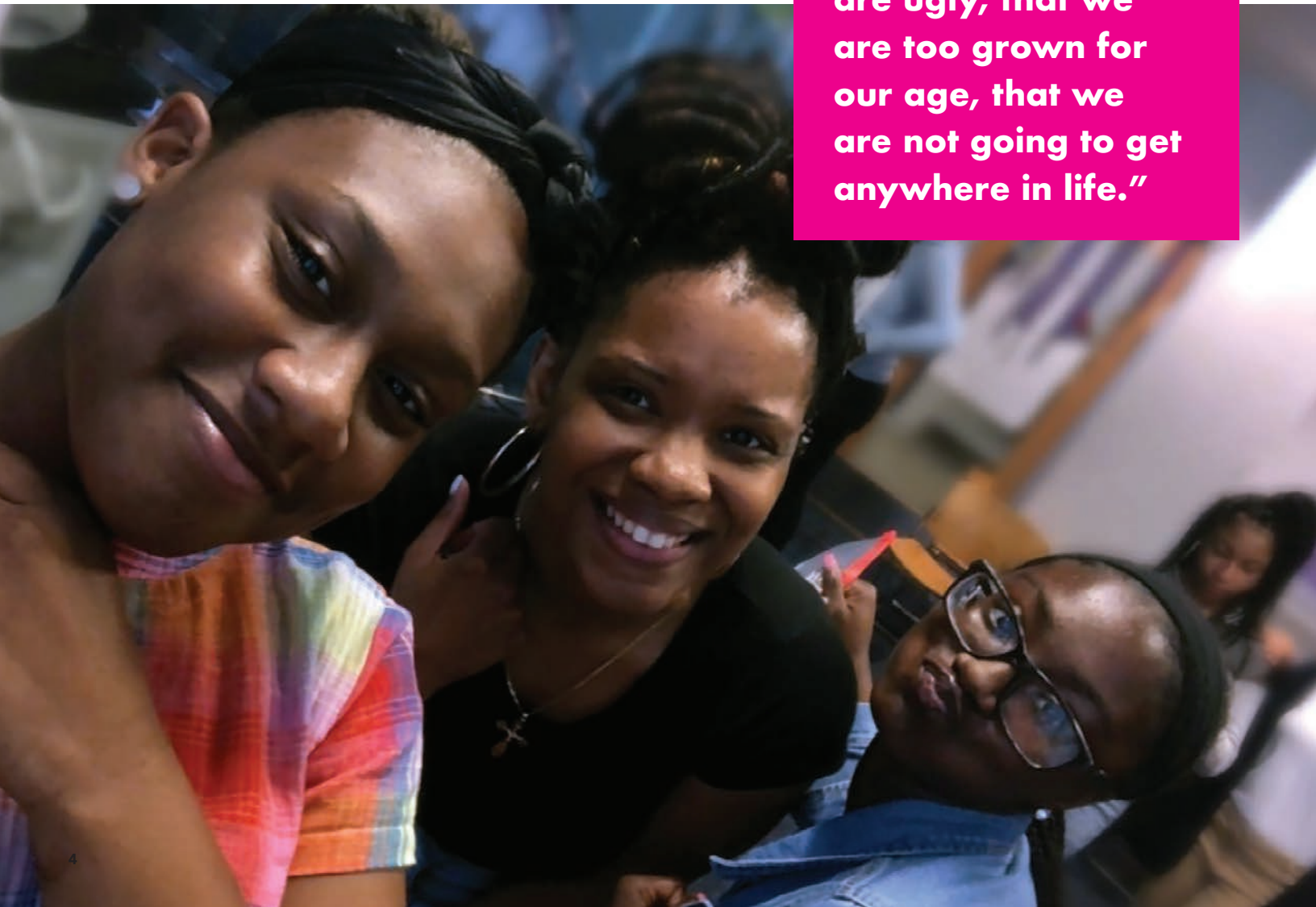
IN SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

Girls reported that they are regularly “put down” both by their fellow students and adults who comment on girls’ looks and dress and reinforce the profoundly negative stereotypes attributed to black girls. The focus group participants observed that boys do not face this kind of disrespect, at least not to the same degree, and that boys are favored in the schools.

The implicit message the girls receive is that girls matter less and their educational opportunities matter less as well. No wonder, then, that girls feel disconnected from school unless there is a caring adult in their lives who counter the devaluing message.

“What if you go to school by yourself and you have to walk through a whole crowd of men. They’re saying, ‘Come here, little this or that.’ I keep walking, and one of them starts following me. I don’t want to run because he could chase me. Why can’t we have school buses?”

“They think that we are ugly, that we are too grown for our age, that we are not going to get anywhere in life.”



HIGH ABSENTEEISM, DISCRIMINATORY DISCIPLINE, LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Absenteeism is endemic in DC schools. During the 2016-2017 school year, almost 25% of students age 5-18 were truant—accumulating more than ten absences during the school year. Absences increase in high school, rising to nearly 50% in some schools.

Girls in the focus group also addressed unwarranted suspensions. The researchers found that the suspension rate for girls of color, nationwide, was an astounding three times the rate of white girls. In the District, the statistic is even more disturbing. The suspension rate for white girls is 0.3%; that for black girls is 7%. The girls in the focus groups reported suspensions being imposed capriciously for trivial offenses and that, in their experience, girls are treated differently than boys.

Suspension, intended to be remedial, is far from it. Studies cited in the report found that, in an effort to impose discipline and order in the classroom, school officials instead encourage subsequent misbehavior by the suspended student and increase the student's disconnection from the school. Unsurprisingly, suspension from school is a major contributor to the racial achievement gap.

Low Academic Achievement

Disparities in academic achievement are among the most potent and persistent causes of inequality in this country. The District uses standardized testing to measure academic achievement and to assess readiness for promotion to the next grade and college. The assessment rates students on a five-point scale. A score of Level 4 or Level 5 demonstrates that a student is ready for promotion or college. A score of 1 or 2 is essentially a failing grade.

On the 2016-2017 tests, the disparities in scores for black girls in the District are stunning. Nearly 35% of black girls at Banneker High School “exceeded expectations” and 86% “met or exceeded expectations.” In sharp contrast, none of the black girls at the four neighborhood high schools in Wards 5, 7, and 8 “exceeded expectations,” and more than two-thirds did not pass the exam. Based on their scores, more than half of Ward 7 and 8 black girls in the eighth grade were not ready for promotion to the ninth grade.

Notwithstanding students’ low test scores and high rates of absenteeism, some schools promoted, indeed graduated, their students—a practice a former teacher characterized as a “culture of passing” students who will enter the workplace without even basic reading skills. The net result for underperforming black girls is a greater risk for marginalization and multigenerational poverty.

“They suspend people for petty reasons. Somebody could curse out a teacher. They won’t get suspended. But if you’re not in class and you’re walking in the hallway, you can get two or three days suspension. You don’t have a pass, two or three days. You are late for lunch. How are you going to be late for lunch?”

Suspension Rates for Black Girls

UNITED STATES

8%*

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

7%*

WARD 7

23%**

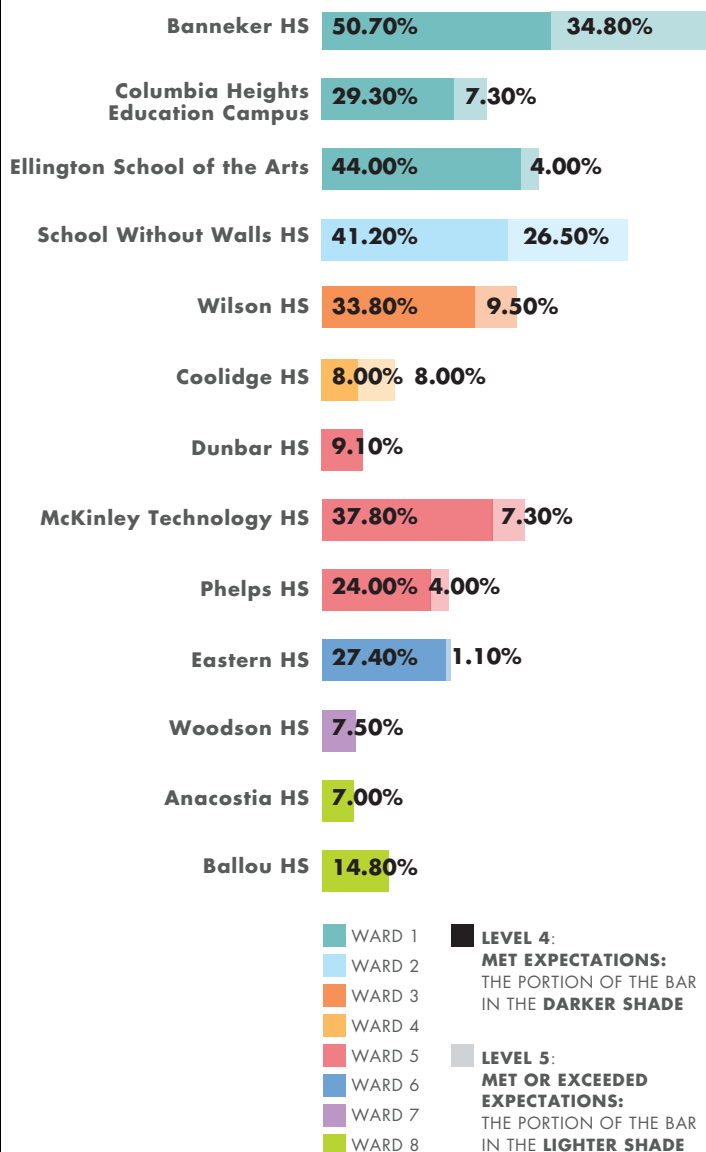
WARD 8

25%**

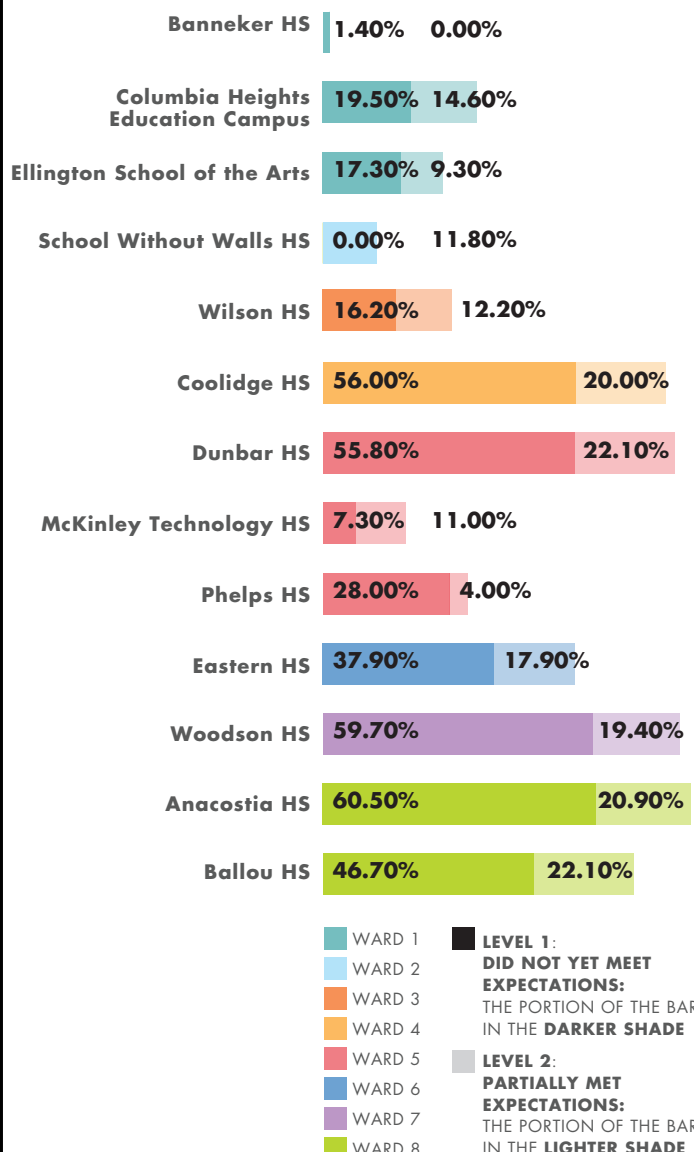
* 2015-2016 Suspension Rates for Girls by Race/Ethnicity and State

** 2015-2016 High School Equity Reports

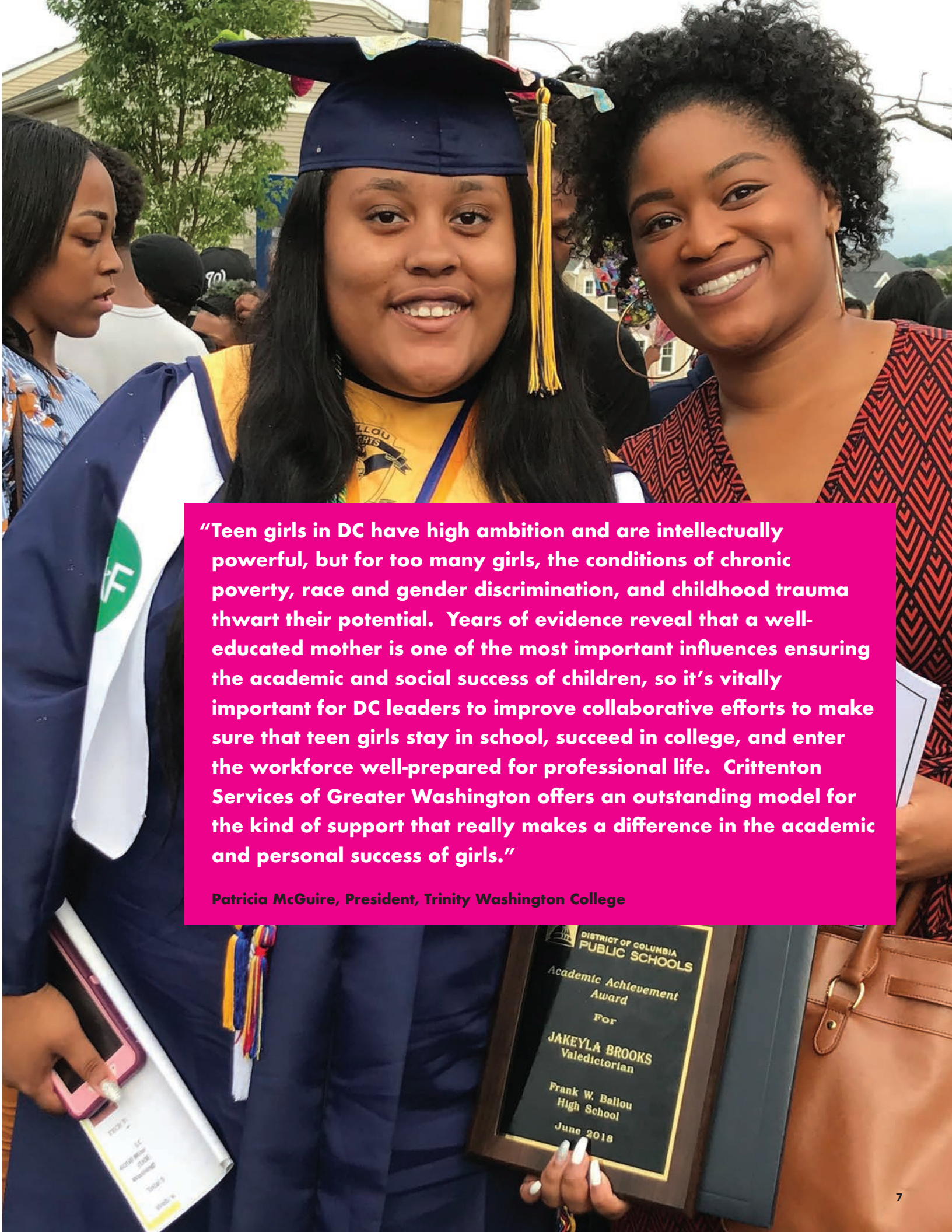
Percentage of Black 9th to 12th grade girls who were ready for college or promotion to the next grade, 2016-2017



Percentage of Black 9th to 12th grade girls who were not ready for college or promotion to the next grade, 2016-2017

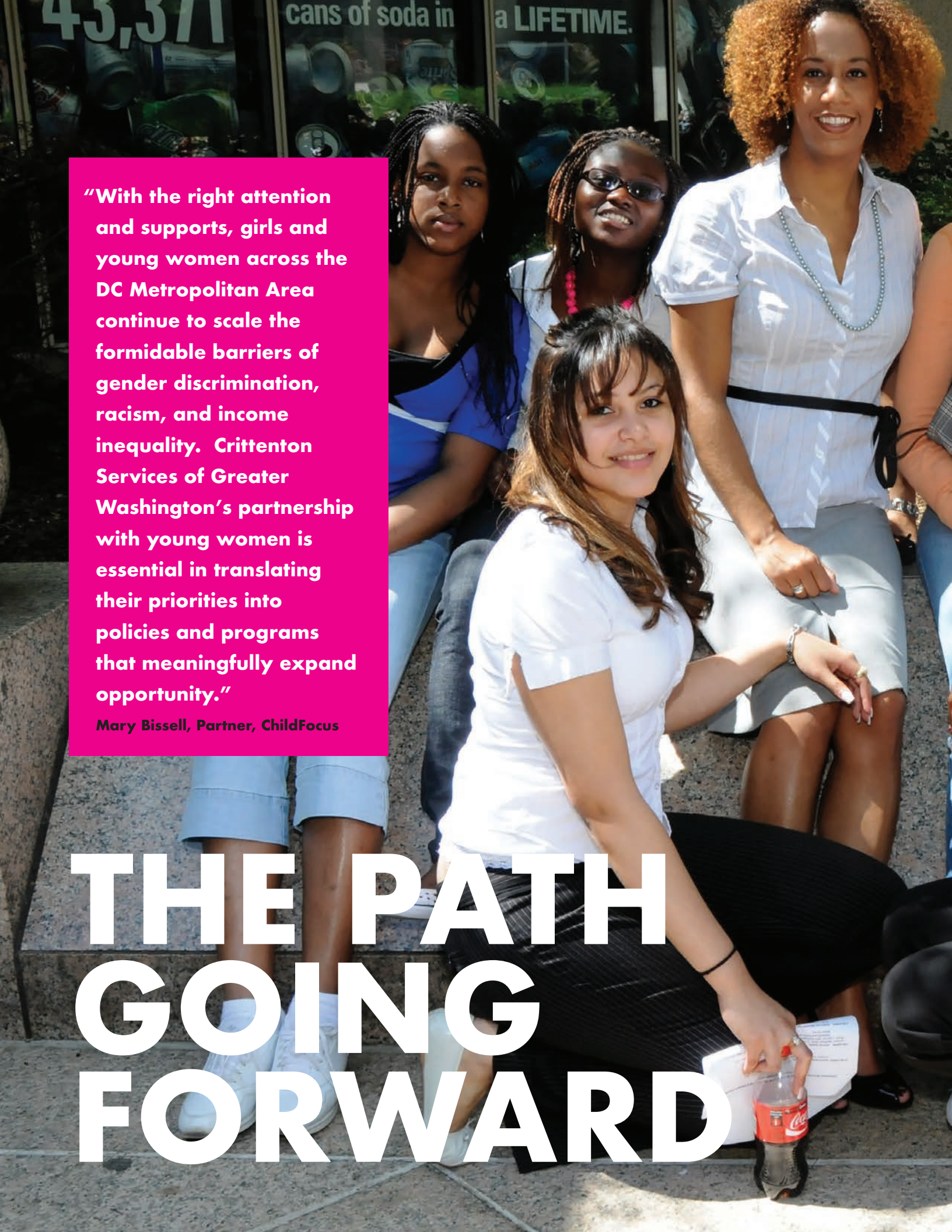


“We must be smart because they keep passing us.”



“Teen girls in DC have high ambition and are intellectually powerful, but for too many girls, the conditions of chronic poverty, race and gender discrimination, and childhood trauma thwart their potential. Years of evidence reveal that a well-educated mother is one of the most important influences ensuring the academic and social success of children, so it’s vitally important for DC leaders to improve collaborative efforts to make sure that teen girls stay in school, succeed in college, and enter the workforce well-prepared for professional life. Crittenton Services of Greater Washington offers an outstanding model for the kind of support that really makes a difference in the academic and personal success of girls.”

Patricia McGuire, President, Trinity Washington College



"With the right attention and supports, girls and young women across the DC Metropolitan Area continue to scale the formidable barriers of gender discrimination, racism, and income inequality. Crittenton Services of Greater Washington's partnership with young women is essential in translating their priorities into policies and programs that meaningfully expand opportunity."

Mary Bissell, Partner, ChildFocus

THE PATH GOING FORWARD



All children need schools that are safe, supportive, engaging, and challenging to reach their full potential.

The barriers to success faced by black girls both inside and outside school are formidable but hardly insurmountable. District leaders and schools have taken promising steps that demonstrate their commitment to educational equity. For example, Mayor Bowser's "Every Day Counts" initiative holds promise for reducing absentee rates and the DCPS contract with CASEL, a leading expert on school-based social and emotional learning interventions, can lead to safer school environments. The City Council's increase in funding for students living in foster care, students who are homeless, those that are overage for their grade and are receiving SNAP or TANF funds, should enable low-income students to have the same kinds of enriching opportunities and services as their higher-income peers.

More, though, is needed. Paramount are measures discussed in the report that can make schools places where girls can feel safe, be safe, and learn. Among them:

- Whole-school, whole-child evidence-based interventions that will lead to healthier and more nurturing school environments.
- Reduce counter-productive suspensions by addressing the root causes of misbehavior and avoiding arbitrary and capricious imposition of suspensions.
- Implicit bias training to ensure that the imposition of discipline is not biased.
- Elimination of disciplinary policies that unfairly target black girls.
- Establishment of trauma-informed training of teachers and counselors to recognize signs of, and to deal appropriately with, trauma.
- Development of early-warning systems to identify incipient problems before they lead to academic failure.
- Proactively addressing sexual harassment and demeaning of black girls.
- Engage the experts on the subject—the girls affected—when crafting solutions to the barriers that girls face.

This is a strategy for hope and a basis for optimism. Crittenton in isolation cannot ensure the success of the girls we serve. It takes more than one school, one organization, or one idea.

Crittenton seeks a critical review of the data we have presented in our report and the conclusions that flow from it in the hope that stakeholders will do what they can, what their organizations can, and what our constituents can to assure equity for girls. It's time!

DECLARE EQUITY FOR GIRLS it's time!

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