Project Focus: An Analysis of Local Public Health Policy Development in Addressing Wellness for Girls of Color in Boston Public Schools

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Scholarly Report submitted in partial fulfillment of the MD Degree at Harvard Medical School

Date: 18 February 2019

Student Name: Kia Byrd, MPH

Scholarly Report Title: Project Focus: An Analysis of Local Public Health Policy Development in Addressing Wellness for Girls of Color in Boston Public Schools

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Abstract

Title: Project Focus: An Analysis of Local Public Health Policy Development in Addressing Wellness for Girls of Color in Boston Public Schools

Kia Byrd, Lynese Wallace, Aishatu Yusuf, Ayanna Pressley

Purpose: Girls of color disproportionately experience school discipline compared to White girls. The City of Boston and the National Black Women’s Justice Institute created Project Focus: GOC in an effort to advance more equitable school discipline policies and school culture reform. I examined how the experiences of Boston, school-aged girls of color are translated into local public health policy.

Methods: The Kingdon model for political change—examining problem, policy, and political streams—was employed to analyze the policy development process. Public hearings were held to identify specific concerns on the topic; database searches were used to identify current school reform policy research and options; and statements from political actors and BPS representatives in local press were evaluated to elucidate respective positions on school culture reform.

Results: Problem Stream The most recurring issues voiced by community members on the subject of school culture reform were a lack of cultural competence by faculty; a need for more trauma-centered support; and a prevalent culture of low expectations. Policy Stream A number of policy options for reform have been implemented in progressive locales such as Baltimore, San Francisco, and Fort Lauderdale. Political Stream Former councilor Ayanna Pressley’s political record has shown consistent support for issues related to girls and women of color, including support for school culture reform. Local political actors and stakeholders endorsed support for changes to BPS school discipline policies, though following the 2018 Massachusetts congressional elections, no current political figure leads the Project Focus initiative at present.

Conclusions: The Kingdon model is applicable to local policy-making regarding school discipline and culture reform in BPS and can serve as a helpful framework to predict and promote policy change in local public health. In order for policy change to occur, there needs to be a “window of opportunity” and someone to drive the process. While a number of policy makers have expressed interest in this issue, the current lack of a long-term local political champion for these issues may halt implementation of many proposed changes for reform.
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Glossary of Abbreviations

GOC Girls of Color
HWFC Healthy Women, Families, and Communities
NBWJI National Black Women’s Justice Institute
BPS Boston Public Schools
ABCD Action for Boston Community Development
YWCA Young Women’s Christian Association
NDC Neighborhood Development Corporation
Introduction

Organization Background

This practicum project, in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the MPH degree in Health Policy at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, was conducted in conjunction with the City of Boston in the office of former City Councilor At-Large Ayanna Pressley. At the time of the project, Councilor Pressley represented the entire city of Boston and was responsible for responding to the needs of 22 diverse neighborhoods, in addition to issues that impacted the entire city. In 2009, Pressley made history as the first woman of color ever to serve on the Boston City Council in its over-100-year history. She has a record of consistently advocating for marginalized communities and has made issues related to women and girls among her most important priorities during her time on the Council. Pressley also served as the founder and Chair of the Committee on Healthy Women, Families and Communities, with much of her policy work focusing on addressing the unique needs of girls and women and the factors that destabilize families and communities.

Project Background

My project focused on advancing more equitable school discipline policies and school culture reform in Boston Public Schools. I had the opportunity to work on an initiative, titled Project Focus: Girls of Color, under the umbrella of the Boston City Council HWFC Committee. Project Focus: GOC is a policy initiative, in collaboration with the National Black Women’s Justice Institute. Local interest in the issue of school disciplinary policies among girls of color was spurred following an incident in May 2017. At a charter school in the Malden community, Black female students faced detention and suspension for reportedly wearing braided hair extensions, which constituted a violation of the school’s dress code policy at the time. The policy initiative from the office of Councilor Pressley was created to examine the effects of disproportionate school disciplinary action on girls of color and to craft policy recommendations that aim to create more supportive environments for them. Specifically, my practicum project focused on examining the process by which the personal and collective experiences of Boston, school-aged girls of color are translated into local public health policy.

Girls of color disproportionately experience school discipline compared to White girls. In Boston schools, the relative racial makeup of the female student population is 40.00% Black, 37.28% Latina, and 12.50% White. According to a NBWJI summary report of local discipline.
Black girls are nearly six times more likely than White girls to be arrested at school and five times more likely to receive at least one suspension. Latina girls are also two times more likely than White girls to receive at least one suspension. Black girls account for 77.78% of school arrests among female students; Latina girls account for 17.78% and White girls 4.44%. Additionally, among the cases where physical restraints were employed on a female student, 76% of cases were among Black girls. Nationally, emerging research illustrates that boys, African Americans, and students with parents having low education are more likely to be suspended and expelled. African-American communities, historically, face high rates of incarceration in the United States. This social phenomenon is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline and describes the process by which frequent school expulsions and suspensions may lead students, who are disproportionately students of color, into the criminal justice system. Additionally, exclusionary practices lead to more time missed from school; and poor attendance is associated with an increased risk of failure to graduate high school. Educational attainment is an important social determinant of health. Lower educational attainment is associated with higher rates of diabetes, liver disease, and cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, educational attainment appears to be associated with all-cause mortality, with more education generally associated with lower mortality rates. With a firm understanding of the importance of addressing the social determinants of health, Pressley and the City of Boston HWFC Committee embraced this issue as it relates to stabilizing families, reducing and preventing violence and trauma, combating cycles of poverty, and improving community health.

Student Role

My specific roles and objectives for the project included engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes around creating supportive school environments for GOC; conducting literature reviews and investigating participatory research and policy recommendations in other major cities; providing policy recommendations for public schools in Boston; and communicating project updates effectively with the media and general public by generating opinion pieces, media releases (Appendix A), and developing a press conference. I was also able to contribute to the publication and release of a 16-page summary report documenting policy recommendations for improving student access to more supportive school environments.
Methods

To analyze the local policy movement associated with Project Focus: GOC, I employed the Kingdon model of political change described by John Kingdon. This model focuses on three “streams”—the problem stream, policy stream, and political stream—all of which, according to Kingdon, must be present for the creation of a policy window. The policy window is described as “an opportunity for advocates of [policy] proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems.” The problem stream describes the recognition of a problem considered to be pressing by the government or the public. To evaluate whether addressing school culture and disciplinary action against girls of color was a pressing concern in Boston, Councilor Pressley’s office, on behalf of the HWFC Committee held two public hearings to gather testimony from girls of color and parents regarding their experiences with school policies and the impact on their (or their child’s) well-being. Hearings were held in September and October 2017 and were scheduled for three hours in duration. Participants were recruited through advertisements via the Councilor’s official City of Boston Facebook page and events announcements in local media online outlets. Participants were given three minutes to present testimony and later engaged in a question and answer portion with two members of the HWFC Committee. Following the hearings, I reviewed an online recording of the September hearing and extracted common themes and experiences vocalized by the students and parents. I also made note of the number of testimonies and the diversity of schools and organizations that the girls and parents represented.

The policy stream describes the presence of an environment where a number of proposals, potential solutions, and alternatives exist and are discussed or revised to address the problem. To determine if an active policy stream was present to address the issue of school discipline and culture reform in schools, I worked in conjunction with Councilor Pressley’s Research Director and the NBWJI Policy Fellow to perform literature reviews using the EBSCOhost database (Harvard University Library Services) and identify policy recommendations addressing similar issues in other major US cities. Search phrases for database searches included ‘girls of color,’ ‘Black girls,’ ‘discipline in schools,’ ‘schools,’ and combinations of stated phrases. Select articles from the search results were chosen and assessed for proposed recommendations and policy proposals.
The political stream describes the current political climate—including changes to an administration, election cycles, shifts in local or national moods, or changes to political agendas—that may be amenable to addressing a problem. To determine if sufficient political capital exists to implement school policy changes in Boston, I participated and engaged in conference calls and email conversations with community partners and organizations with a vested interested in the well-being of girls of color. I evaluated statements from political actors and BPS representatives in local press and media to elucidate respective positions on school climate and culture reform. I also examined participation at a press conference, organized by Councilor Pressley’s office, to make public the release of policy recommendations calling for reform in BPS.

**Results**

*The Problem Stream*

The first of two council hearings was conducted on September 11, 2017 from 4:30-7:30 pm EST in Boston, Massachusetts. Hearings were conducted in response to Council Docket #0820, which was proposed to discuss “a policy reform and public education project with the NBWJI and the Boston City Council.” A total of 17 testimonies were given at the “listen-only” hearing. Eight testimonies (47.06%) were given by current students in BPS, two (11.76%) by recent graduates from BPS (within two years), three (17.65%) by parents of current BPS students, one (5.88%) by a home-schooled student, and three (17.65%) by representatives from community organizations with an interest in school culture reform (Table 1). Racial make-up of participants giving testimony included 13 Black, 3 Latina, and 1 White (Table 1). Testimonies represented experiences at six different BPS schools and four community organizations.

A number of themes arose from the collective testimonies. Among the most recurring issues voiced by participants were the following: a lack of cultural competence exhibited in the curriculum, by faculty, and by the administration; a need for more trauma-centered support practices; a prevalent culture of low expectations in schools; discipline for dress code violations; and exclusionary practices aimed at victims of bullying. One parent of a current BPS student had the following to say about a lack of cultural competence in schools:

“Educators with the best intentions still lack the cultural competency and ability to engage our girls and often times label them as defiant when they are just trying to be
expressive or have an opinion. And [girls of color] are even considered rude if they
disagree.”

A student, who self-identified as Muslim, commented that at times, her behavior in school is
misinterpreted as negative or inconsiderate by faculty. She explains the following:

“As a Muslim female, I try to stay away from contact with males. I try to avoid hand-
shakes or even a pat on the back from a teacher. I think male teachers should be more
conscious of physical contact.”

On the topic of dress code, many girls discussed their frustration with seemingly impractical and
unfair school policies and consequent time away from class. Some students cited the expensive
costs of uniforms and body size as reasons for being “improperly dressed.” One student
commented on the shame of being labeled as “distracting:”

“One thing that I would say is that I don’t like when I’m [considered] a ‘distraction’ to
other students…not saying that I wear revealing things, but like, when girls wear things
and we’re distracting other students and we’re asked to leave, I think that’s something
that should be addressed. Especially if boys can wear what they want, and girls have to
change to fit protocol. And we lose track of our goals just because of what we’re
wearing.”

Another student commented that her body appeared more developed relative to her other
classmates. Often times, girls are asked to go home to change clothes if they are found to violate
school dress code policies. The student had the following to say:

“If you go to school and you have bigger breasts, you can’t wear certain things because
it would be more distracting to guys or to the teachers. So, they tell you that you have to
wear a size bigger…Girls with smaller breast or smaller bodies can wear the same exact
thing, and it’s fine with the school policy.”
The students, furthermore, discussed the prevailing school cultures of low expectations for girls of color. They discussed unchallenging school curricula, teachers with poor expectations, and counselors who discouraged their dreams.

“I had test-taking anxiety. So as a student who sucked at taking exams…I flunked. And there you have my grades being publicized to other colleges and other professors, and [they’re] saying I’m a C student. You feel your identity is based on that grade. And when you have other factors weighing in on that—that you’re a person of color, that you have an accent, that you are a female—you start believing ‘maybe I am just a C average student’ not the A student that’s going to succeed… [When I applied to college], I had a professor look at my GPA. She looks at my GPA and says ‘oh, you should apply to community colleges,’ as if this was all that I could aspire to. And mind you this was in an AP course. And it’s like, if this professor doesn’t believe in you, why should you believe in yourself?”

Testimonial narratives further reveal that the current school climate and policies at BPS seemingly fail to take into account the social context and backgrounds of many students. Students discussed domestic and societal challenges—such as having parents in the criminal justice system, as well as having personal or secondary experiences with drugs, gang activity, or gun violence—and the impact that those issues have on their ability to be fully engaged at school. Participants proposed several ideas to improve the culture of schools in Boston, such as hiring more teachers of color, providing more mental health services, training faculty in proper responses to traumatic experiences, and promoting more opportunities for cultural expression in the classroom.

Policy Stream

In assessing policy options available for addressing issues related to school discipline and culture reform, we implicated literature searches and reviews of policy reports. An EBSCO database search using keywords ‘girls of color’ and ‘schools’ yielded 101 search results. A search using keywords ‘girls of color’ and ‘school discipline’ yielded 6 search results. An alternate search using ‘Black girls’ and ‘school discipline’ yielded 20 search results. Review of a random selection of the articles illustrated a variety of policy options and recommendations regarding school culture and discipline policy reform: creating spaces for GOC to share their
experiences, promoting initiatives to recruit and retain more teachers and faculty of color, and developing faculty trainings in culturally appropriate responsiveness.

With direction from NBWJI, we also examined current school discipline and culture reform policies being implemented in other major US cities such as Baltimore (MD), San Francisco (CA), and Fort Lauderdale (FL). The Baltimore City Public Schools District has incorporated “Levels of Intervention and Disciplinary Response” guidelines into their Code of Conduct. In an effort to shift towards more progressive disciplinary measures, City Schools outlined multiple intervention strategies that teachers and administrators could attempt prior to out-of-school exclusionary action. Intervention strategies included daily progress sheets, mindfulness or reflection exercises, schedule changes, and peer mediation. From 2016 to 2017, out-of-school suspensions in Baltimore dropped by nearly 20% from 8,500 to 6,800 suspensions. In California, a statewide school discipline reform initiative led to the passage of a 2014 bill that would no longer allow students to be expelled for being deemed “willfully defiant” or disruptive of school activities. During the 2012-2013 academic year, 43% of all suspensions in California were for willful defiance; and African-American students made up 19% of willfully defiant suspensions, despite comprising only 6% of state enrollment. Between 2011 and 2017, willful defiance suspensions dropped by 79 percent for African-American students. In Broward County, FL, school districts have implemented the PROMISE Program—Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Interventions, Supports, and Education. This program was designed as an intervention-based program for students facing suspension or expulsion. Interventions provided include direct tutoring and academic assistance, counseling, social skills and conflict resolution instruction, restorative justice supports, and referrals to social services. Our review of the current policy literature revealed a robust set of policy options that served to inform school reform options for BPS.

Political Stream

I examined campaign and news sources documenting local policymakers’ and stakeholder positions on issues related to girls of color, school culture reform, as well as relevant responses and commentary from BPS representatives in local media. Pressley’s commitment to issues related to girls of color were articulated in her 2017 City Council campaign:
“Since her first day in office, Ayanna has been unwavering and unapologetic in her advocacy on behalf of girls and women. She has been fighting to dismantle barriers to their development and advancement, and to address those issues that disproportionately and adversely impact them - issues often ignored in city halls and state houses across the nation.”

Because of her commitment to girls and women of color, she was invited as a speaker for the 2016 United State of Women Summit in Washington, DC. Specifically related to the issue of school culture reform, Pressley expressed the following:

“The school-to-prison pipeline is growing for girls…That’s why I started Project Focus: Girls of Color to empower girls of color as policy stakeholders and school culture reformers. I want to ensure that here in Boston, our policies and programs are co-constructed with our girls and have the intended outcomes that lead to safe and productive school environments for all students.”

Other influential local politicians like Tito Jackson, Boston City Council’s Education Committee Chair at the time, were also vocal about the culture of suspensions in Boston Public Schools. During 2017, Jackson entered Boston’s mayoral raced and had the following to say in response to rising school suspension rates:

“The disciplinary system in the Boston Public Schools is a work in progress. In some situations, it's exceptional, but in some situations, there are schools that are using out-of-school suspension as a way to not deal with the issues that they should be dealing with.”

Additionally, following several legal challenges, recent negotiations between the Greater Boston Legal Services and BPS have led to new district policies that no longer permit suspensions for students in kindergarten through second grade. In 2019, those restrictions will be extended to students in grades three through five, with the exception of very serious offenses. The interim superintendent of BPS voiced support for these changes:

“Boston Public Schools is proud of the steps that have been taken to better serve students of all backgrounds, including those with high needs, and our ongoing focus on making
sure that students are provided with opportunities for growth and success. We thank the Greater Boston Legal Services for its continued participation in the BPS Code of Conduct Advisory Council and for joining our long-standing efforts toward reducing out-of-school suspensions and expanding restorative justice practices.”

A press conference, which served as the official release of Project Focus policy recommendations, drew a multitude of stakeholders. Among the eight speakers at the conference, four represented local BPS institutions or community organizations, including Boston Preparatory Charter Public School, Boston Collegiate Charter School, and the Boston Young Women’s Christian Association. Organizations represented in the audience included the following: ABCD Health Services, Big Sister Boston, BPS, Boston Student Advisory Council, Boston Compact, Educators for Excellence, BPS parents, YWCA Boston, Massachusetts School Psychologist Association, and Codman Square NDC.

Discussion

The City of Boston HWFC Committee and NBWJI released a joint 16-page report, School Culture & Discipline Reform in Boston-Area Primary and Secondary Schools, detailing policy recommendations for Boston Public Schools. The report described the specific recommendations, ways to implement the policies, and examples of policy implementation in schools in other major US cities. Recommendations employed cooperative governing practices, such as “co-construct dress code policies with students…and implement enforcement modalities that are anchored in principles of dignity and respect,” as well as offered opportunities to improve wellness supports, such as investing in additional school counselors and therapists. (Appendix B).

The Project Focus: GOC policy initiative had a number of strengths in its implementation (Figure 1). At the time of creation of the policy initiative, controversial concerns over discriminatory school policies in Massachusetts were national news. During May 2017, national news outlets such as CBS News, The Washington Post, The Huffington Post, Today News, and Newsweek, in addition to all major Boston and Massachusetts news sources, had reported on the Malden hair-braid extension incident within the month. As the news cycle for this issue reached its peak, Councilor Pressley announced the creation of Project Focus, appropriately capitalizing on the public energy fueled by the media. Additionally, the concerns
identified in the initiative—issues concerning school discipline and culture reform—appeared to resonate well with the concerns of the local community. The 2017 public hearings and focus groups hosted by the HWFC drew over 100 girls of color attending Boston-area primary and secondary schools, parents or guardians, and school personnel. Common topics of concern in BPS that I extracted from the public hearings—such as expectations for low achievement, a lack of cultural competence among school faculty and administration, and discipline for dress code violations—appeared to also represent concerns of girls of color in a national context.² From this perspective, the initiative does well in identifying and articulating a specific problem.

Another strength of the policy initiative included the robust set of policy research and policy options accessible to address issues of school discipline and culture reform. Councilor Pressley’s partnership with the NBWJI served as a means to engage the policy stream. The NBWJI is a national institute focusing on advancing policies for women and girls of color and conducts independent research on the criminalization of Black women and girls. Their partnership provided an avenue for developing policy options, tapping into NBWJI existing research and analysis from sources such as the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, and examining policy reports and practices from other major US cities and larger scale organizations, such as the New-York based organization, Girls for Gender Equity.

Events affecting the political stream presented the greatest challenges to a more sustained momentum around Project Focus policy changes. From 2017 to present, there appeared to be a robust political response to rising suspension rates from local Boston politicians, with City Council members and local organizations making public statements to press regarding a need for changes to the school discipline code, specifically. BPS representatives also voiced a receptiveness to work with local community, legal, and political organizations to continue addressing the needs of all students.³ In late January 2018, however, Pressley announced that she would challenge long-term incumbent Mike Capuano for the US House of Representatives Massachusetts District 7 congressional seat. Over the course of the following months, she would spend increasing political energy and resources distinguishing her politics and ideas from the progressive incumbent’s and addressing her reasoning behind challenging a member of her party. Consequently, responsibility for coordination of the Project rested largely with the staff research director and the policy intern, with few other political resources at our disposal. Election cycles
are extremely impactful mechanisms by which political streams can shift in or out of favor of policy issues. In this case, attention towards the November 2018 congressional race shifted momentum away from the former councilor’s Project Focus initiative. Furthermore, other local and national public health issues may have overshadowed the issue of school culture and discipline reform in the months leading up to the Project Focus recommendation release. In February 2018, the school shootings in Parkland, Florida made headlines, spurring national and local conversations on school shootings and gun reform. Locally, politicians and community leaders focused political energy on the March for Our Lives movement, which drew increasing attention to data showing a recent increase in gun violence in Boston."

This analysis illustrates that the Kingdon theoretical ideas of problem, policy, and political streams are applicable to the local policy-making process regarding school discipline and culture reform in Boston Public Schools. Though each of the Kingdon concepts proved to be present in this effort, the lack of a long-term champion and standing local political advocate to take a leadership role on the issue may halt the implementation of many of the proposed changes going forward (Appendix B). The Kingdon model thus serves as a helpful framework that leaders in local policy and public health can use to predict and promote policy change in public health.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley and former Chiefs of Staff Eric White and Jessica Taubner for my orientation to the project. I would also like to thank Research Director Lynese Wallace and NBWJI Policy Fellow Aishatu Yusuf for assistance with project coordination and establishing a policy research agenda. Aishatu Yusuf was also primarily responsible for assembling the final policy report released at the March press conference. I owe thanks to Pressley office staff Ronald Claude and Luz Villar for administrative support. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to Amy Rosenthal and the entire Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health Department of Health Policy for project mentorship and guidance.
References


Tables and Figures

Table 1: September Public Hearing Participant Characteristics

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<td>Representative from Community Organization</td>
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Figure 1: Abbreviated timeline of Project Focus: GOC policy development process

May 2017: The Impetus
Black female students at a Malden charter school face detention and suspensions for braided hair extensions.

June 2017: Project Focus Announcement
Councilor Pressley announces the partnership with the National Black Women’s Justice Institute.

Sept/Oct 2017: Committee Hearings
The Committee invites girls to testify on their public school experiences during hearings.

Feb 2018: Stakeholder Feedback
Staff elicit feedback on draft recommendations from Boston Public Schools.

Mar 2018: Press Conference
Councilor Pressley holds a joint press conference with NBWJI to release school policy recommendations.
Appendix A
Draft of Press Release distributed to news outlets regarding the press conference

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 7, 2018
CONTACT: Lynese Wallace, w: 617-635-4217, c: 413-949-3636

***MEDIA ADVISORY***

Councilor Ayanna Pressley to Hold Press Conference for Project Focus Policy Recommendation Release
Creating Positive School Environments for Girls of Color

BOSTON—At-Large Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley will hold a press conference for her Project Focus: Girls of Color Initiative. The press conference will inform the public of the current and historical climate of school discipline in Boston-area primary and secondary schools. The press conference will further serve as the public release of policy recommendations that call for reform to school practices that have disproportionate impacts on girls of color. The policy recommendations are the capstone of a partnership between Councilor Pressley, Chair and Founder of the Committee on Healthy Women, Families, and Communities and Dr. Monique Morris, co-founder of the National Black Women’s Justice Institute (NBWJI).

The release of the Project Focus policy recommendations follows a series of city hearings held in September and October of 2017. These hearings and focus groups brought together more than 100 girls of color and parents to discuss their experiences in schools and a diverse set of administrators and school personnel to articulate school policies and their goals for a more welcoming learning environment.

Pressley and NBWJI have worked to synthesize current research and policy data, comments from Boston Public Schools and importantly, suggestions from girls of color to craft a comprehensive set of policy recommendations that can be adapted in local school reforms.

Councilor Pressley stated: “Our experience in listening to girls of color and their parents has shown the light on equal access to supportive educational environments as a push-out issue in our schools. This issue calls for urgent action and a commitment to examining the implicit biases that shape existing school disciplinary practices. Our goal is for schools and communities to view this report and its recommendations as tools for implementing student-centered policies and support structures that facilitate the physical and mental well-being of our girls.

Developing this initiative has been a collaborative process. It strives to bring together students, parents, faculty, school administrators, and community organizations to continue the important dialogue on the school-to-prison pipeline for girls of color and the impacts on their educational, economic, and social opportunities.

I’m really excited that this initiative has galvanized so much support and that a number of community partners have come together to affirm a vision for safer and more inclusive school environments for girls of color.”
WHAT: Press conference for release of Project Focus: GOC school policy recommendations; Local partners from Boston Public Schools, private and charter schools, community organizations, and the general public have been invited to participate.

WHEN: Monday, March 12, 2018 at 10 am

WHERE: Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington St, Roxbury, MA 02119

###
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

1. Develop a robust continuum of alternatives to exclusionary discipline and eliminate the use of suspension and expulsions for pre-K and grades K-2.

2. Exclusionary discipline, such as suspension and expulsion, should only be considered once an array of alternative, non-exclusionary discipline practices have been exhausted and resulted in no progress.

3. Co-construct dress code policies with students, particularly girls of color, and implement enforcement modalities that are anchored in principles of dignity and respect.

4. Create responses to dress code violations that do not negatively impact student instruction time.

5. Review and develop codes of conduct and other related school mandates to include equity policies with a robust articulation of gender and sex equity and student-focused responses to sexual harassment and assault.

6. Diversify teaching, administrative, and school leadership staff, and invest in additional school counselors and therapists on campus.

7. Create and conduct an annual review of school policing agreements and policies to ensure all agreements between the school and school-based law enforcement reflect the current needs of the student body and faculty.

All agreements need to specify the roles and responsibilities of school police and include a requirement of training specific to children and adolescent mental health and cognitive development.

8. Create a parent council that consistently aims to engage all parents/guardians across the spectrum of gender, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race, ethnicity, age, language, religion, legal involvement, citizenship, and immigration status.

9. Provide educators, school leadership, administrative staff, and school-based law enforcement with training and relevant documentation to understand and recognize signs of behavior that may potentially be connected to a diagnosed or undiagnosed disability. Students that have been diagnosed with a physical or mental disability should be afforded the same alternatives to exclusionary discipline as other students in the school.

10. Employ trauma-informed and healing-responsive strategies to improve school safety and wellbeing.

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NBWJ and City of Boston. Policy recommendations at a glance. School Culture & Discipline Reform in Boston-Area Primary and Secondary Schools. Mar 2018
Appendix C

Poster for MPH Practicum Night  
*Project Focus: Crafting School Policies to Support GOC*