

# Increasing School Connectedness for Girls:

## Restorative Justice as a Health Equity Resource

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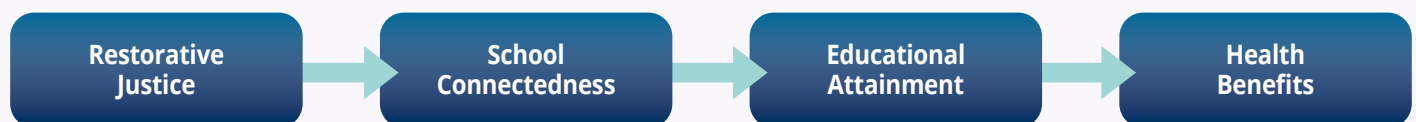
### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Education is one of the great equalizers in society.

The further a child progresses in school, the more likely she is to be set up for lifelong success, including financial stability, employment, good health, and higher life expectancy. Her children are also more likely to experience good health and educational attainment.

Today, girls are graduating high school at higher rates than ever before. But marginalized girls—including girls of color, girls who are LGBTQ or gender nonconforming, and girls who have experienced trauma—are being left behind. These girls have a higher risk of experiencing trauma, are less likely to finish high school, and are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system.

- Girls tend to have unique adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). For example, girls report sexual abuse more often than their male counterparts.
- Black girls represented 53.6 percent of all girls with multiple out-of-school suspensions, despite representing only 15.6 percent of the female enrollment.



## Feeling connected to school is crucial to health and school success.

School connectedness, defined as students' feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in school, results in improved academic performance. It also reduces high-risk behavior and poor health predictors, including emotional distress, suicidal ideation and behavior, substance use, and early sexual activity.

- **Students who report higher levels of school connectedness are less likely to leave school, accrue absences, or engage in unhealthy behaviors.**

By contrast, removal from the classroom can foster feelings of distrust and being unwelcome, disconnecting girls from school. Marginalized girls are disproportionately subjected to punitive and exclusionary discipline practices, punished or even referred to law enforcement at school for acting out, disrespect, or defiance—all of which may be behavior that is expressive of trauma—rather than being met with supportive and healing responses.

- **Black girls are over 5 times more likely than white girls to receive at least one out-of-school suspension.**

## Restorative justice in school can help marginalized girls thrive.

School-based restorative justice as a policy and practice intervention can help schools build a path toward greater school connectedness for marginalized girls—leading to greater educational attainment and lifelong health and success.

Over the last ten years, evidence has increasingly shown that restorative justice promotes positive student and teacher relationships and peer-to-peer relationships, healthier school climates, increased feelings of self-efficacy, improved academic performance, and social and emotional skill development.



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