

**Panel #2: Education: Overcoming Systemic Racism and Historic Harm**  
**Organization: Alliance for Girls**

Good afternoon, my name is Gabrielle Battle. I am a graduate of Duke University and a current member of civil society. My work focuses on identifying the systemic harms that Black girls face globally.

Black girls in the United States are disproportionately impacted by institutional racism within the education system. For Black girls, their race cannot be decoupled from their gender identity, resulting in intersecting layers of oppression. In the education system one of the ways that this discrimination manifests is in disproportionate punishments. The U.S. Department of Education 2015-16 Civil Rights Data found that Black girls are five times more likely than White girls to be suspended at least once.

In 2017, I worked with Alliance for Girls, the United States largest regional alliance of girls serving organizations, to rewrite the sexual harassment policy within the Oakland Unified School District in California. Our research found the Black girls were being suspended and expelled at disproportionately high rates. We also found that Black girls were experiencing constant sexual harassment in their schools and because the policies within the district were so vague, Black girls were often blamed for their own harassment and punished.

Reform efforts are most successful when Black girls are included in all aspects of the process. This ensures that systems are best equipped to meet their unique needs.

Alliance for Girls created the Meeting Girls Needs Initiative, which comprised girls of color, community leaders, and attorneys. We re-wrote the sexual harassment policy and created a toolkit for educators to help them better meet the needs of Black girls. Both the toolkit and the policy were unanimously approved and implemented by the Board of Education.

As we begin to think about more robust actions that must be taken by member states, I implore us to remember that it is integral to amplify the lived experiences of Black girls to inform systemic reform efforts. Black girls are the true experts of their lived experience and know what aspects of the system need reform. However, too often, their experiences are overlooked.

Racially inclusive pedagogy must be intersectional. Strengthening initiatives to combat historic racism in the education system should not just focus on reforming classroom material, but it should focus on the classroom environment itself. Black girls must be provided with a platform to help identify processes to hold these systems accountable.