



Commission on the Status of Women

Girls Initiative 2020

MA Girls - What's Your Status?

The mission of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women and girls across Massachusetts, and to ensure that they can achieve full equity in all areas of life. The CSW is composed of 3 staff members and 19 volunteer Commissioners who are appointed by the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House, and the Caucus of Women Legislators. The Commission offers its sincere thanks to these appointing authorities for their ongoing support.

The Commission committed to working with regional and municipal women's commissions and non-profit partners to organize listening sessions centering girls' voices across the Commonwealth. While the COVID-19 pandemic meant changes to both the original plan that included an in-person girls summit and the responses we might have received, the project has provided an invaluable base of knowledge about girls' experience during the pandemic, which will guide our future work in this area.

The Commission's goals in this project are to report information on the status of girls at this moment in time during the pandemic; to release an informed policy and programming agenda that can be shared with commissioners, partners, and legislators; and to coordinate and lead expansion of girl-focused programming, support and advocacy, with the continued centering and amplification of girls voices.

Commissioners: Nina Kimball, Chair; Denella Clark, Vice-Chair; Rebecca Bact, Secretary; Sara Schnorr, Treasurer; Audrey Hall; Penny Blaisdell; Ruth Bramson, *Ad Hoc Girls Initiative Chair; Jean Fox; Marianne Fleckner; Liz Friedman; Allison Goldberg; Patricia Hohl; Leslie-Ann McGee; Maria Puppolo; Marlene Sallo; Wendy Silver; Phyllis Smith; Shaitia Spruell; Mary-dith Tuitt, *Ad Hoc Girls Initiative Vice-Chair

Staff: Jill Ashton, Executive Director; Sasha Heggie-Jackson, Program Director; Mel Soto, Events and Communications Coordinator; Sheila Vaidya Dibb, Girls Initiative; Carla Levy, Intern

Executive Summary

Evolution: In keeping with its mission, the MCSW committed to hosting a series of listening sessions and an in-person summit event for the girls and young women of the Commonwealth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MCSW reimagined and recreated the Girls Initiative to be a fully virtual event that spanned 18 moderated online sessions with an accompanying survey and participation gift.

Background: It is the intention of the MCSW to respond to the needs of women and girls, and in this project, to give a voice to our girls and young women, and to offer well-informed recommendations as programs and policies are being developed to meet the needs of the girls of Massachusetts. This was the first time since its conception that the MCSW took deliberative action in creating programming that would create space for girls' voices to be heard. Particular effort was made to include Regional Commissions, some of whom had groundwork already in place, and non-profit partners whose own missions and work already served the girls of the Commonwealth.

The Sessions: During the last two weeks of May, the Commission held 18 hours of moderated listening sessions that were, to the greatest extent possible, girl-led. 136 young women, aged 13 thru 29, participated. In some cases sessions were broken out by age or topic, but in all sessions the articulate, thoughtful voices of girls from across the Commonwealth discussed concerns over self-care, mental health, education, relationships, and financial well-being.

The Survey: As part of the Girls Initiative, a survey was created to accompany and amplify the voices of participants. Questions were centered around topics raised earlier in the planning process by both girls and partnering service agencies. In each topic area, respondents were specifically asked if the challenges they faced on a regular basis had been exacerbated, improved, or changed by the pandemic.

Methodology: Sessions were conducted on either the GoToMeeting or Zoom platform, with conversation led by a moderator and assisted by a silent proctor/facilitator/producer, who monitored security, contributed conversation prompts and led a parallel chat. Survey data was collected via a companion survey on the Google forms platform. A total of 136 girls both participated in a session and completed the survey; a small subset of girls returned for multiple sessions of their own accord. The data set, relative to the total population of the state, is a small sampling. However, the common threads found in the statements of girls across geographic and economic lines serve to show some universality. **In that spirit, this report has attempted to share, as space allows, the direct words of the girls of the Commonwealth.**

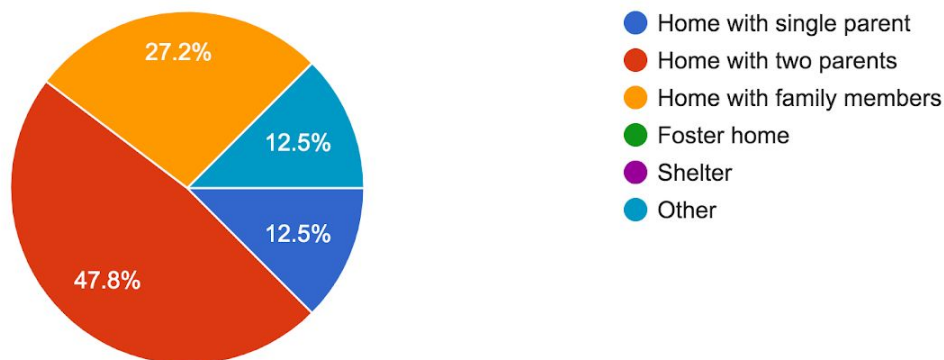
Challenges: It is clear that the virtual platform both limited access for some and increased it for others. A key challenge moving forward will be to diversify the program into providing both in-person opportunities, as originally envisioned, and virtual opportunities, which offered benefits that might not otherwise have been recognized. Secondly, growing and maintaining relationships with the girls and young women of the Commonwealth is going to be an integral part of ensuring that future programming, in whatever form, is met with a positive response.

Recommendations: 76% of the participants expressed strong interest in having a part in both future advocacy on the concerns they had raised, and in receiving mentorship and guidance. The MCSW is committed to building on the foundation work of this first Girls Initiative with the inclusion of girl-centered advocacy as part of its 2021 priorities.

Participant Statistical Data

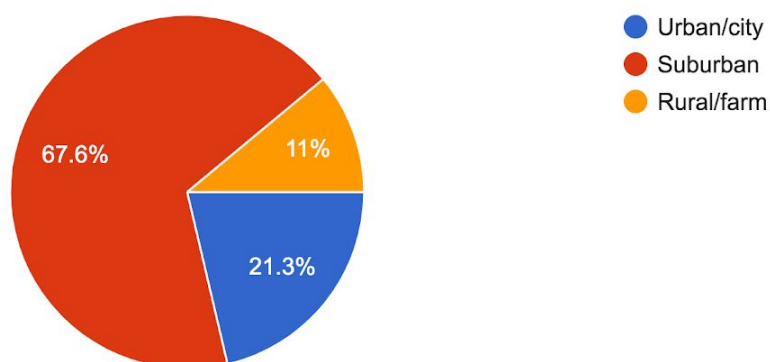
Living Situation

136 responses



Neighborhood

136 responses



The Initiative was able to reach girls in 47 different communities across the Commonwealth. The data above indicate a majority participation among girls in suburban two parent homes. In recreating the event on a virtual platform, it can be plausibly inferred that remote participation might be a challenge in homes lacking access to technology and/or family support and, therefore, that future outreach to girls in urban and rural areas must be diversified.

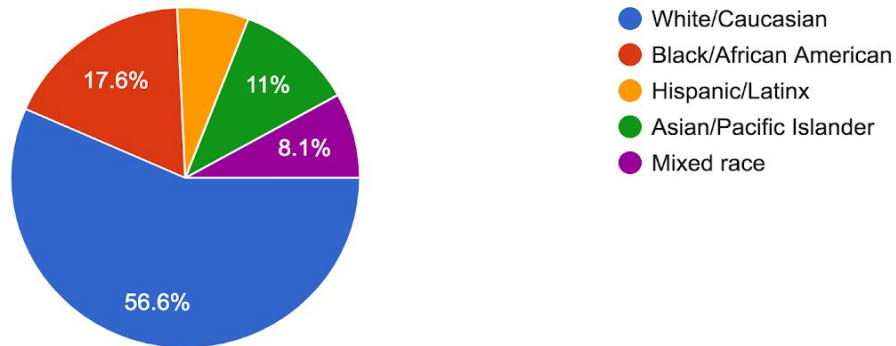
Participant Statistical Data

6.7%



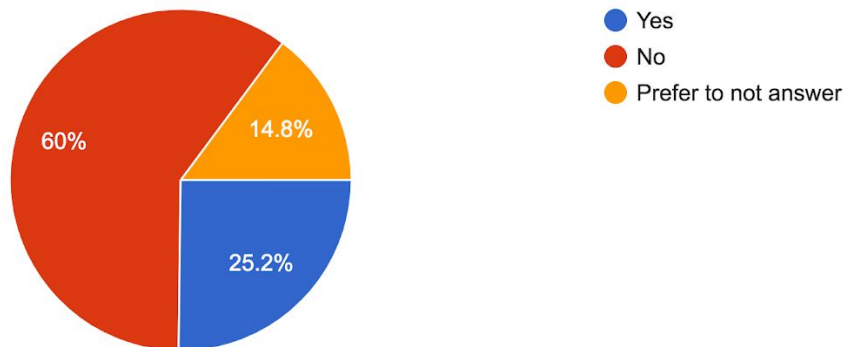
Race/Ethnicity

136 responses



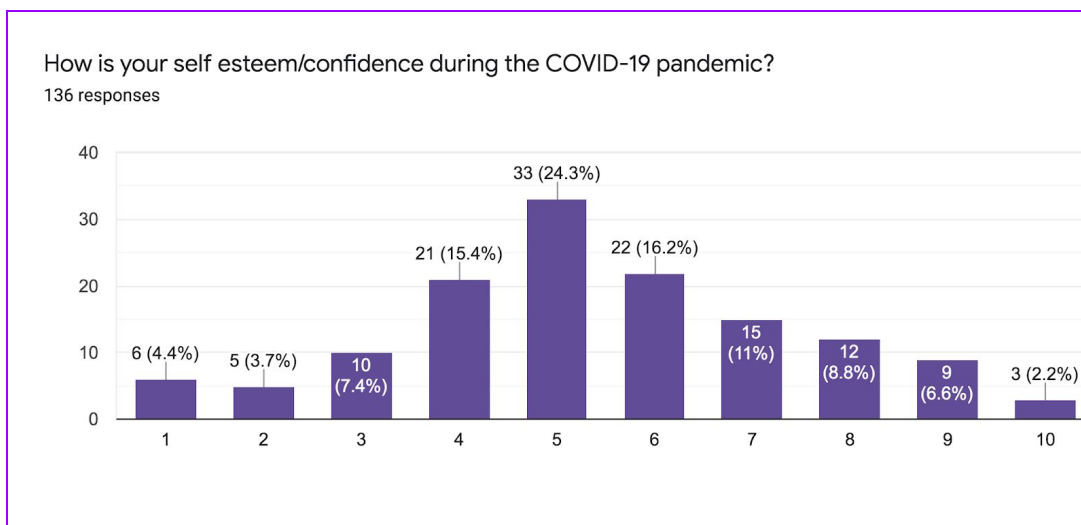
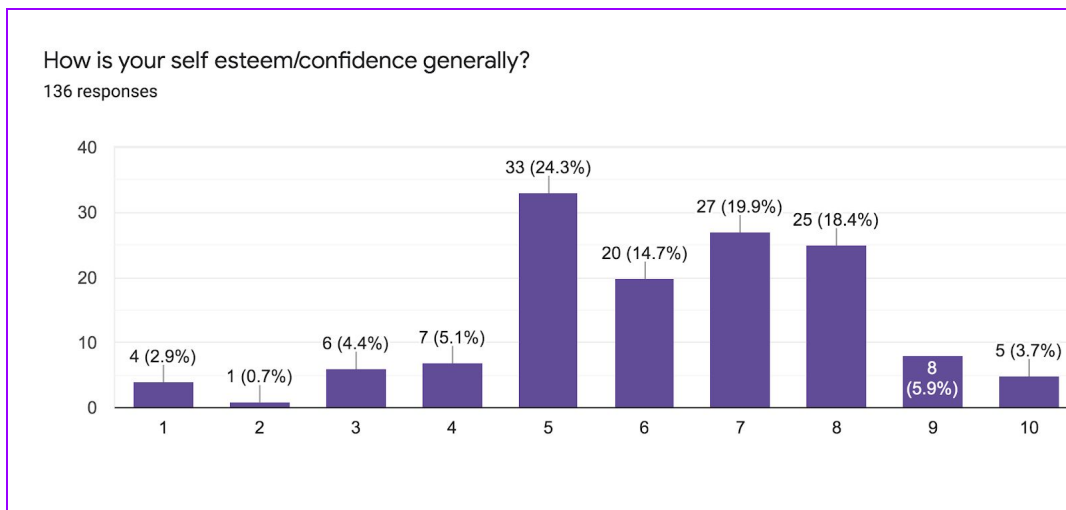
OPTIONAL: Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

135 responses



The demographic and geographic diversity of participants sparked substantive conversations among girls of similar age and disparate backgrounds, and the benefits of diversity in voices is an area to be explored. Gender and sexual identity, with just over 25% of respondents identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community (with only one respondent skipping the question), is a topic that participants specifically requested be explored and discussed further in future events, and has been noted as an area of interest for future programming.

Self-esteem and Confidence (from low self esteem (1) to high (10))



Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

I have a lot of time on my hands with nothing to do. I have found that I am much more critical of myself while at home, and I focus a lot on negative things.

it just seems like a weird time. If i ever leave, I'm always looking at other people outside seeing what they're doing/how they're acting. You hear everyone talking about a new normal, but no one really knows what's normal anymore.

It has been hard to stay active or eat healthy. But it has also been hard to get dressed and do other things for myself. I am a healthcare worker and finishing my final semester of nursing school. My priorities have not been self care.

In a non-pandemic situation I think I have average self esteem. I have days where I struggle, and days where I think I can take on the world. During this pandemic I feel like I can't accomplish anything. I feel like I am failing at parenting, providing, and life in general.

Analysis and Policy Advocacy:

GIRLS SELF-ESTEEM, CONFIDENCE, SELF-CARE, & MENTAL HEALTH

The concerns of the girls and young women who participated in the Initiative were clear, both in data and commentary, in the area of mental health. This is one of several areas of concern where the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have crystallized and exacerbated struggles already present.

As one Commissioner who moderated specifically noted,

“I heard participants share a common thread about isolation and depression.”

From participants:

“It is a stressful and isolating time so teenage girls are becoming more depressed and anxious.”

“...in my opinion mental health is the most significant issue that young women (and men for that matter) have had to deal with in this time and it is definitely worse since covid-19. I personally know a lot of people (young and old) dealing with anxiety, depression, and stress caused by other problems that covid-19 has brought just as the loss of jobs, homes, schools, etc...”

“I think one of the worst challenges is people who are stuck in households with people who are abusive verbally, physically, or emotionally. This has definitely gotten worse because of quarantine because people are trapped inside with them.”

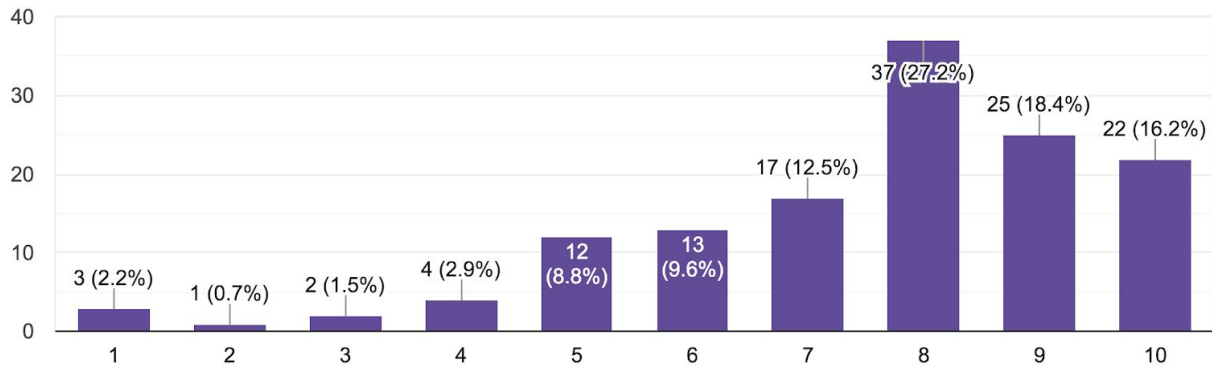
To that end, the following are bills currently in the Senate that merit support and advocacy:

- An Act relative to mental health peer specialists certification [S.1144](#)
- An Act to protect children's mental health services [S.1154](#)
- An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education in Massachusetts high schools [S.2114](#)
- An Act relative to mental health education [S.244](#)
- An Act relative to safety and violence education for students (the SAVE Students Act) [H.4431](#)

Family *from more difficult/unhealthy (1) to easier/healthier (10)*

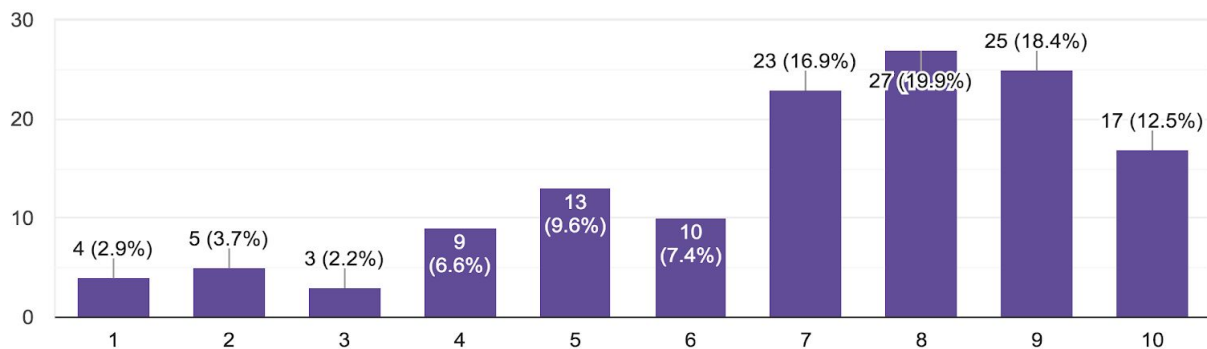
How is your relationship with your family usually?

136 responses



How is your relationship with your family during the COVID-19 pandemic?

136 responses



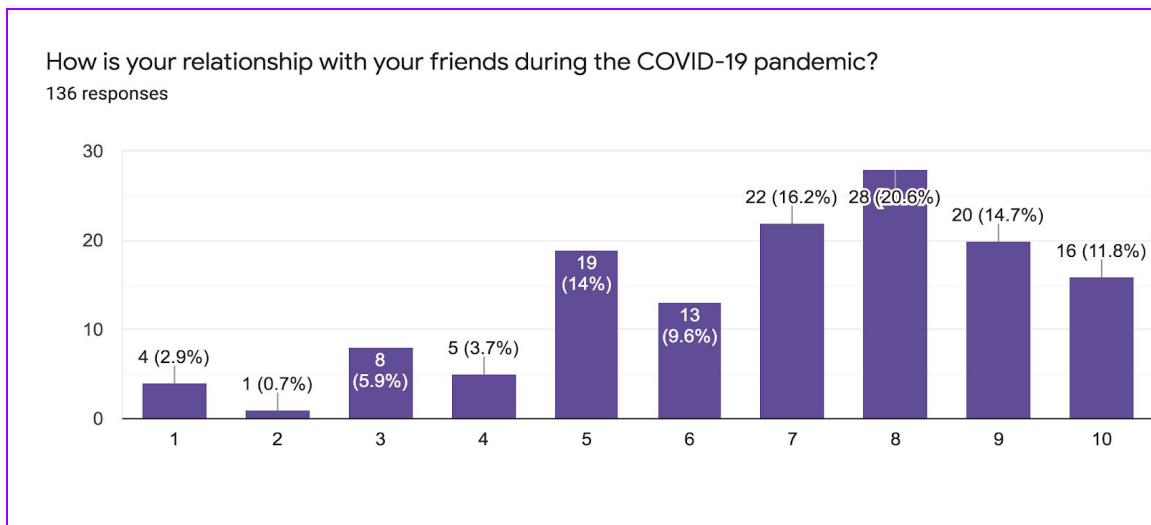
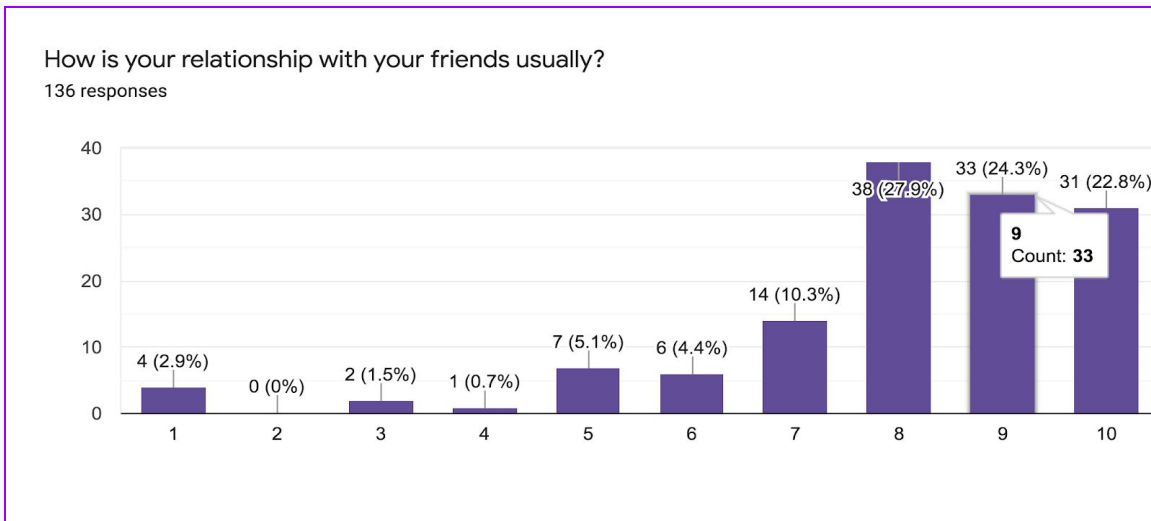
Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

I am close with my parents and my sibling but lately my sibling and I cannot even be in the same room. My sibling and parents are fighting with each other constantly and it is ruining our entire family dynamic.

Family life has always been strained, but taking care of a parent with mental health issues during a pandemic has been challenging.

We have always been tight-knit and spend a lot of time with each other. We do have arguments, but they are no worse than they usually are. Spending so much time together during the pandemic has been unusual and uncomfortable, but I would say that it is no less healthy.

Friends *(from very difficult/unhealthy (1) to very healthy (10))*



Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

My friends are going through the same, so they're focusing on their own lives. Not being able to see each other has put a strain on my relationships because there is only so much you can do over social media

Quarantine has put me in a position where I can focus on my relationship with my real friends instead of the people I just surround myself with.

My friendships are struggling, I try to reach out and we talk daily but it's repetitive. ... when you do the same thing every day, it becomes difficult to answer these (usual conversation) questions, and keep the conversation interesting.

I think that social media for me has been a blessing because it allows me to communicate with my friends that are not only in my town but also all over the state. We are able to snapchat, text, zoom, facetime, or do a google hangout which keeps us connected even though we are all apart.

Not getting to see my friends has negatively affected my relationships with them. I text and call my best friends as often as possible. However, I have lost contact with most of my friends who I was not as close with. It is almost impossible to make new friends.

Analysis and Policy Advocacy *FAMILY & FRIENDS, RELATIONSHIP STABILITY and SAFETY*

Participants spoke at length about challenges and changes their relationships are facing: both the difficulties in maintaining relationships at a distance, and the hardships of being with family .

This may be a clear area of advocacy for, not legislative action, but the funding of girl-serving organizations. A portion of the statement of Deborah Re of Big Sister Association of Greater Boston speaks to this:

“A key strategy for preventing the effects of adverse childhood experiences is connecting girls to a caring adult, or mentor. It is critically important that the MA Commission on the Status of Women and Girls advocate for sustained funding that supports mentoring relationships that are essential to girls’ development. We know that only .3% of funding during COVID-19 is being allocated for girl and women serving organizations.”

The following organizations participated, at varying levels, in the Girls Initiative.

Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

Girls Inc. of the Valley

Girls Inc. of Lynn

Girls Inc. of Worcester

Girls LEAP

Edward Kennedy Institute

Girl Scouts (of Eastern MA)

Girl Scouts of Central and Western Mass

YW Boston

I Have a Future

Girls Rock Campaign Boston

Massachusetts Girls State (American Legion Auxillary)

Middlesex District Attorney's Office

Vital Village Community Engagement Network

Strong Women, Strong Girls

Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts

Chica Project

Mayor's Office of Women's Advancement

Boston Centers for Youth and Families

Dream Big!

Boston Glow (Girls' Leadership Organized Women)

ASPIRE

Youth Options Unlimited Boston

Flying Cloud Institute

Title IX Girls Running Club

WAM Theater

Science Club for Girls

Girls on the Run, Heart and Soul (Western MA)

GRLZ Radio

Rights of Passage and Empowerment (ROPE)

Investing in Girls Alliance of Central MA

Today's Girl Tomorrow's Woman

Boston Women's Fund

YWCA SEMA

Girls Inc. of the Berkshires

Investing in Girls Alliance

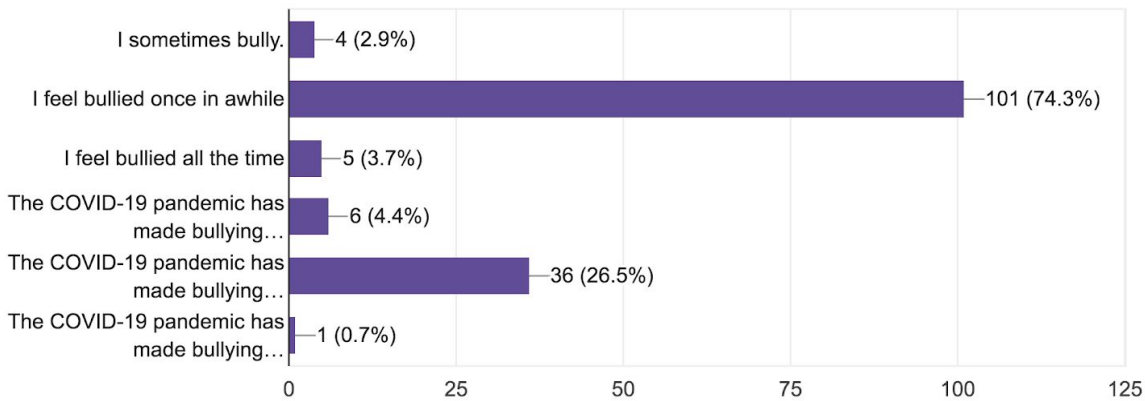
Girls Inc. of Lowell

Girls' Club of Greenfield

Bullying

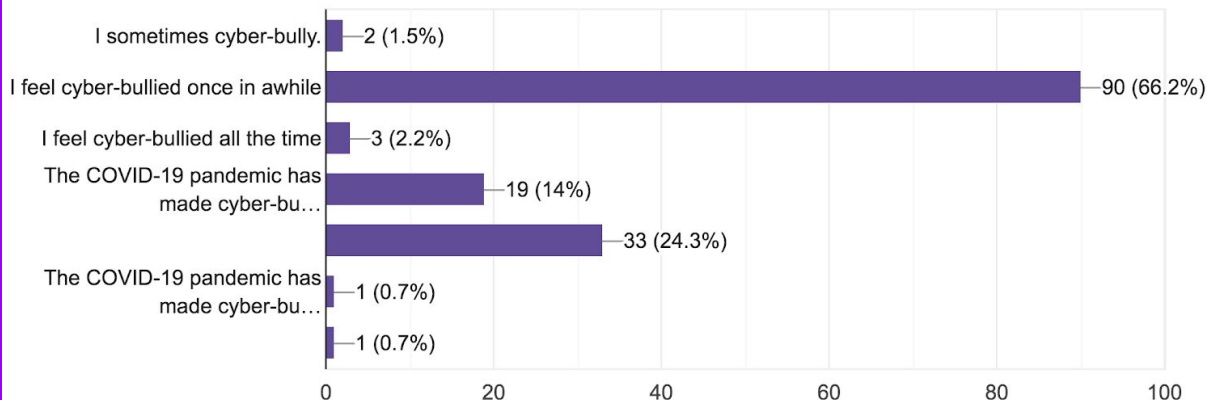
What is your experience with bullying?

136 responses



What is your experience with cyber-bullying?

136 responses



Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

Cyber bullying has increased because many people have become judgemental during this time and we also have nothing to do but sit on our phones.

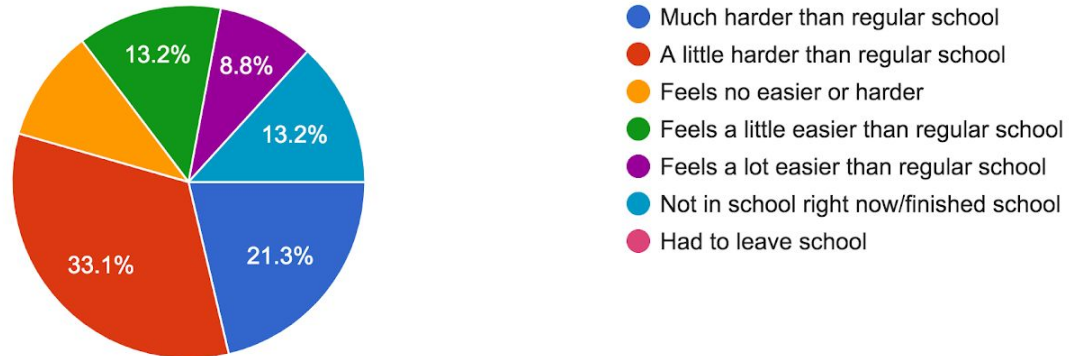
People feel the need to be really hurtful and violent with their opinions on covid19. For me I am a nursing graduate and my mother is a nurse on a covid unit. It is very real for us and isn't a political debate. It is literally life and death. I take it really personally that people do not believe in it or are not following guidelines because it directly affects my family.

However when you go online with chats in the community- the negativity can really settle in you. There is no hope- as everyone seemingly vents online now, and the negative comments about how the world is right now can make you want to throw your phone away. If anything it has taught me to step away, and zone into real life- not technology.

Education

How has your transition to online schooling been from "regular" (in-person) school?

136 responses



Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

Not all of my professors have been easy to contact, I can't get an explanation when I need one while doing my work. I learn better while sitting in a classroom setting because there is structure and less distractions.

Online schooling has been stressful, as I am generally a good student when attending school. The lack of classroom time and face-to-face interaction has been a bit discouraging, and sometimes online school can be far too draining with the level of workload.

Because my school is now on a pass/fail system my motivation is sometimes lacking. Because I am not getting as much credit I have less motivation to show up and do the work.

I feel like it's just tedious. The work is generally more annoying than it was in school. I don't want to write a letter from the point of view of my "hero". And I don't want to keep a journal. In all honesty, I prefer the busy work. Or, I wish they just made it more fun. Why can't I pick my own topic to write about? Something important to me like the civil rights movement? Or maybe start a podcast or something. I just feel like being forced to do these things makes school harder.

We just recently started learning new content. I was frustrated that it took so long because I like learning new things. Doing review for 2 months got boring. The amount of time I spend doing school work has been cut in half and I do not have anything else to do so I wish I could have more and harder schoolwork. Also, no one joins the class video calls and they are awkward.

it's just weird cause it's a completely different method and there's no one holding me accountable

Online school is most difficult because the support systems that I was used to did not translate over -- office hours, help rooms, and friends who have taken the same classes were not available once classes went online. The work was mostly the same, but I found it slightly harder to complete it entirely on my own.

I feel as if it's more challenging to learn and understand the subject matter. I personally learn better in an in-person, classroom setting where I can easily raise my hand or go to the teacher for help. My school has been pretty understanding and accommodating. For example, we now have Wednesdays as consolidation days in order to make up or get a head start on any work. It's just that doing class over a zoom call is very different and even though we already did most of our work online, doing tests online is new.

if my teachers actually checked in on us; mental health checks are important and they don't even email me back about an assignment, nevermind checking in on us.

Reducing the amount of assigned work, or giving a longer time frame for bigger assignments would be more helpful.

I wish that this was used as a chance to get away from rubrics and the basics to explore new learning possibilities.

I would like if there was more school, and that it counted as actual grades. My school is doing the pass/ or fail option. I feel like if it were grades (0-100 for each assignment) it would make you work harder for your work, and take more pride in it. For those who are doing the online school, I understand how it must feel as your educational experience feels stripped. I hope for all students to feel empowered to push through until the last day.

if educators were provided with better tools and guidance on how to manage online platforms and still be effective for students. also, provide resources for mental health, space, finance, etc for educators and students to have the best possible space to release pent up energies and stress. genuine check-ins would be appreciated.

It would be great if teachers could coordinate when they want to assign projects and larger work loads.

If zoom was mandatory and teachers taught online they could give out less work

I believe brief training on how to use softwares such as ZOOM & SKYPE would be helpful.

I think I need to meet with classmates more to discuss material. I miss study groups and seeing others in class. Online it feels like I'm learning on my own so I suggest reaching out to friends in class and skyping them from time to time to support each other's learning experiences!

Online school could be better if every student had the equipment and internet necessary to complete school work. School work should be adjustable to fit students' needs.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ADVOCACY for Bullying and Education

75% of the Initiative's participants are actively in school, ranging in grade from 7th grade to college post-graduate. Education weighed heavily on them, as evidenced by the amount of time spent on the topic in all sessions and on the extensive commentary made in the survey, which was given extra space above. Within those sessions, the disparities between urban and suburban districts relative to funding and the ability to pivot into distance learning were notable and merit further inquiry.

As a subset of education, comments and responses on bullying indicate it to be of ongoing concern to students. While social and emotional health was meant to be a priority in education funding in the coming year, pandemic deficits have left much undecided.

As the State Legislature prepares to enter its budget discussions for FY2021, much is still unknown...and it is partly that unknown that is affecting the students. Advocacy for full funding of the Student opportunity Act as passed in November 2019 could be the clearest path for ensuring that disparities already existing, now exacerbated by covid-19, are addressed.

Until the Legislature takes up the FY2021 budget, the majority of action right now is coming directly from DESE; they are providing guidance documents for districts almost daily and have initiated a Return to School workgroup that is meeting infrequently and that includes only one student, from Granby, on the entire panel. The workgroup is currently accepting public comment at this email address: RTSWG@mass.gov

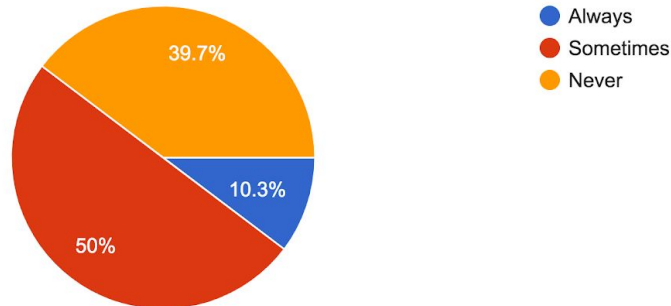
A unique perspective on education: From the 25% of participants who are in the workforce, this statement from a teacher expressing her frustration stood out:

"As a teacher, where most of my colleagues are women, it's become evident to me that a lot of people don't respect teachers' role as an expert in education. I believe a lot of that lack of respect is linked to the fact that teaching has long been a profession dominated by women. I wish people were more aware of how much work it takes to become a teacher and to remain a good teacher despite all the obstacles thrown in our way. I think the pandemic has caused many people to either feel very humbled about how difficult teaching is as so many parents have needed to homeschool/ monitor their children, or has driven people to criticize teachers for the way schools have handled remote learning. I've personally heard people both praising teachers for all they do during this time, and people accusing teachers of being lazy and not earning their paychecks during remote learning."

Finances, Job Security, and Employment

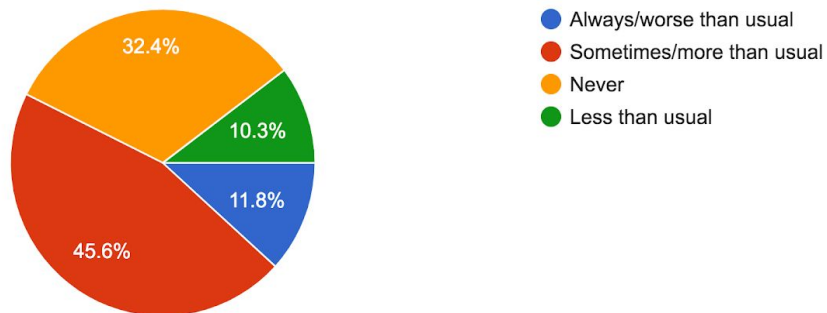
Do you or your family feel financial challenges usually?

136 responses



Do you or your family feel financial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

136 responses



Individual Responses, in Girls' own words:

I think the ability to work and bring in income has been a bit harder, and so my guardian is working two jobs back to back to make sure we can pay rent. But having an EBT Card has been helpful.

My parents are still able to work, but my sister and I are unable to work. My sister works so that she can help out my parents with paying for college. I work so that I can save up and pay for food and essentials by myself.

My hours at work were significantly cut. Going through the unemployment system has been hell. It has been a struggle to obtain basic necessities. I haven't been able to pay a bill outside of rent for 2 months.

Unemployment took forever to connect my family with the funds they were missing. We are getting by now but it is rough. I also have personal financial obligations (I'm an essential worker who can not collect unemployment and also did not get a stimulus because I'm technically a dependent) so for me personally, saving up to move out of home when I graduate has been put off so I can get by with the things I need to pay during this time.

Analysis and Policy Advocacy, *FINANCES, JOB SECURITY AND EMPLOYMENT*

As noted earlier, more than half of the participants came from suburban, dual-parent homes. That factor, combined with age (63 of the 136 participants can be assumed to be under the age of 17, based on their grade), likely means some measure of insulation against daily financial struggle.

The extensive comments of some participants paints a different picture, one where older teens and college students are experiencing significant difficulties in finding and/or retaining summer jobs as the economy contracts and as many of the typical job markets - pools, summer camps, restaurants - have had to make drastic changes and cuts to weather the pandemic.

The oldest group, 25 participants who self reported as post-school and working, also self-reported the most stresses, particularly in dealing with the unemployment system.

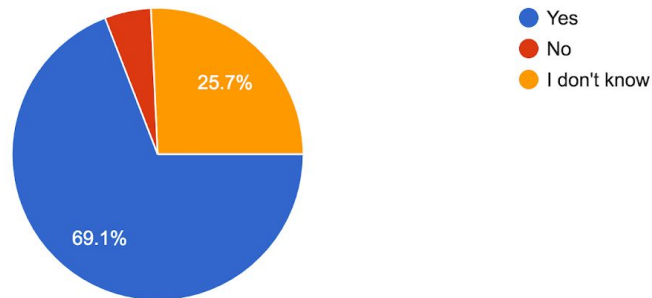
This area has a robust list of bills that can be considered for advocacy of passage & funding:

- **Endorsed:** An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools [H.1959](#), [S.1274](#)
- An Act encouraging teen employment [S.1070](#)
- An Act relative to creating an opportunity wage for teens [H.1671](#)
- An Act suspending student loan debt due to the COVID-19 emergency [H.4729](#)
- An Act establishing the COVID-19 Quarantine Assistance Fund [HD.4926](#)
- An Act providing additional support to those affected by the novel coronavirus through the unemployment insurance system [S.2618](#)

Looking Ahead

Would you like to have more opportunities like this for engagement/leadership/empowerment/advocacy (ie., how to be activist or at least be heard)?

136 responses



Across multiple sessions, interest in continuing this program was strong.

As one Commission moderator noted:

“ (I) found that the participants seemed to have an incredible appetite for a safe place to talk with others.”

From a participant:

“Young women in my school community I feel have a hard time finding resources for safe spaces where we can discuss issues that all women face without feeling uncomfortable or judged. This has worsened during the pandemic because there are less things we can do in person so there need to be more online options.”

From an integral partner moderator:

“Regular mentoring events would be helpful, both topic specific and open.”

It is now incumbent on the Commission, having begun the process of hearing girls voices, to listen and respond to them. This means not only to acknowledge and address areas of advocacy that directly affect the girls and young women of the Commonwealth, but to assist them in self-advocacy by means of mentorship and guidance.

Appendix I

GIRLS INITIATIVE EVENT 2020 - ORIGINAL PLANS

The vision for these Listening Sessions is conscious of our intention to center girls' voices in a conversation about their experiences and concerns. Attendees will include girls, leaders from partner organizations, and regional and state commissioners. Sessions will be structured as a moderated discussion that will be largely informed by the topics identified in the two surveys we shared in early February. Moderators will be a leader from partner organizations and a girl (or girls) who you have identified as interested in participating. The number of moderators should be chosen based on the number of expected participants. Prior to Listening Sessions, moderators will be equipped with a toolkit that includes talking points and ground rules that will help center their focus.

Listening Sessions must ensure seating to accommodate all participants. The Commission will encourage moderators to make use of white boards to track discussion. A proposed checklist and rules which can be edited and expanded based on your needs.

Agenda

- Introduction from State or Regional Commissioner(s) about the role of MCSW and the purpose of our involvement.
- Introduction of moderators
 - Personal introductions
 - Statement about disclosing personal information*
 - Setting the rules and expectations for the session
- Moderated discussion (minimum 1.5 hours): key areas of discussion identified by the survey
- Final thoughts and closing statements
 - Opportunity to reflect on discussion and key findings
 - Reminder about June Summit
 - Sharing relevant resources: MCSW webpage, name and contact of local representative (etc.)



THE MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON
THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Girls Summit

ABCD (pending)
178 Tremont St, Boston, MA 02111
June 3, 2020

Draft Schedule of Events

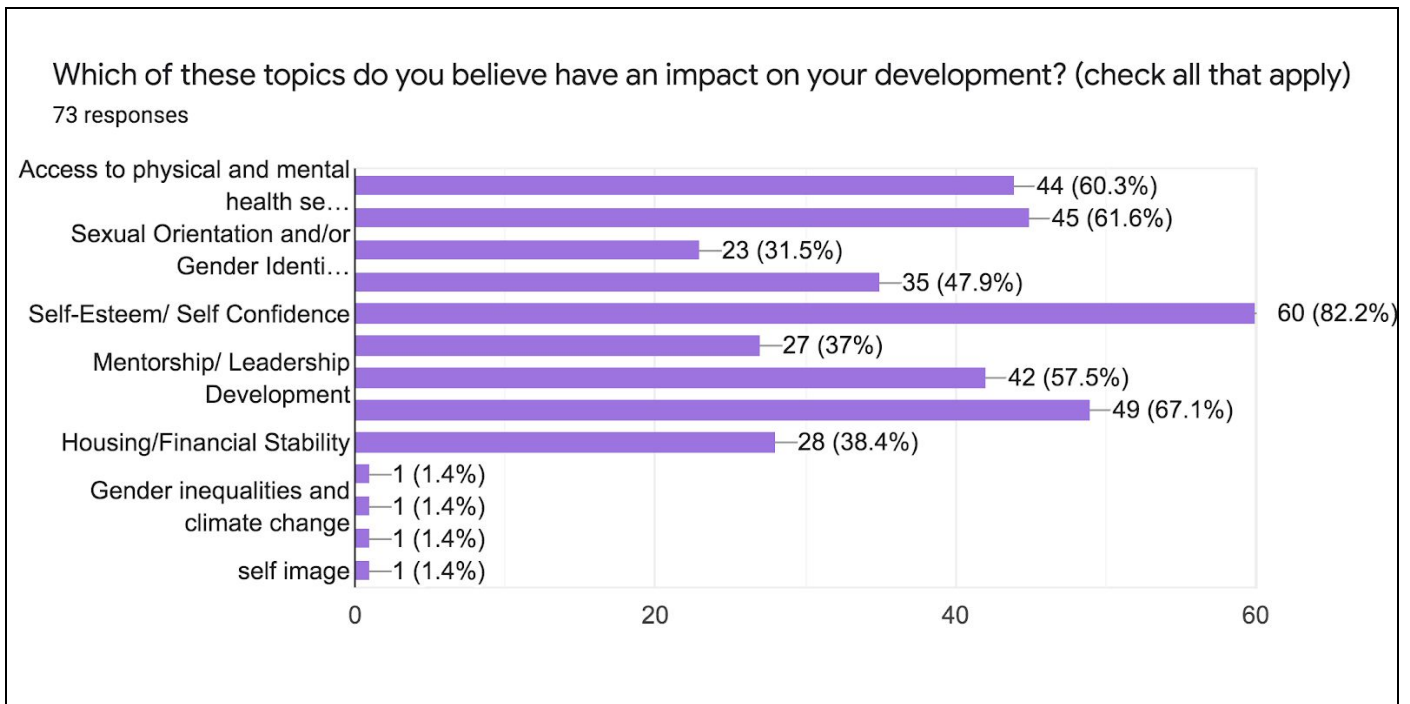
MCSW Welcome Address and Opening Remarks MCSW Representative and a Legislator	10:00 AM – 10:15 AM
Remarks from girl(s) Girl(s) who attended a Listening Session or was highlighted by their organization (TBD)	10:15 AM – 10:30 AM
First Breakout Sessions (topics TBD)	10:30 AM – 11:45 PM
Lunch and Fireside Chat Catering (TBD) Export (TBD)	11:45 AM – 12:45 PM
Second Breakout Sessions (topics TBD) Girls, Experts (TBD)	12:45 PM – 1:45 PM
Closing remarks	1:45 PM – 2:00 PM

Potential Topics for Discussion: mental health, healthy relationships, self-esteem
Potential Speakers: Speaker DeLeo, Mia Roberts (Big Sister Boston), mental health expert

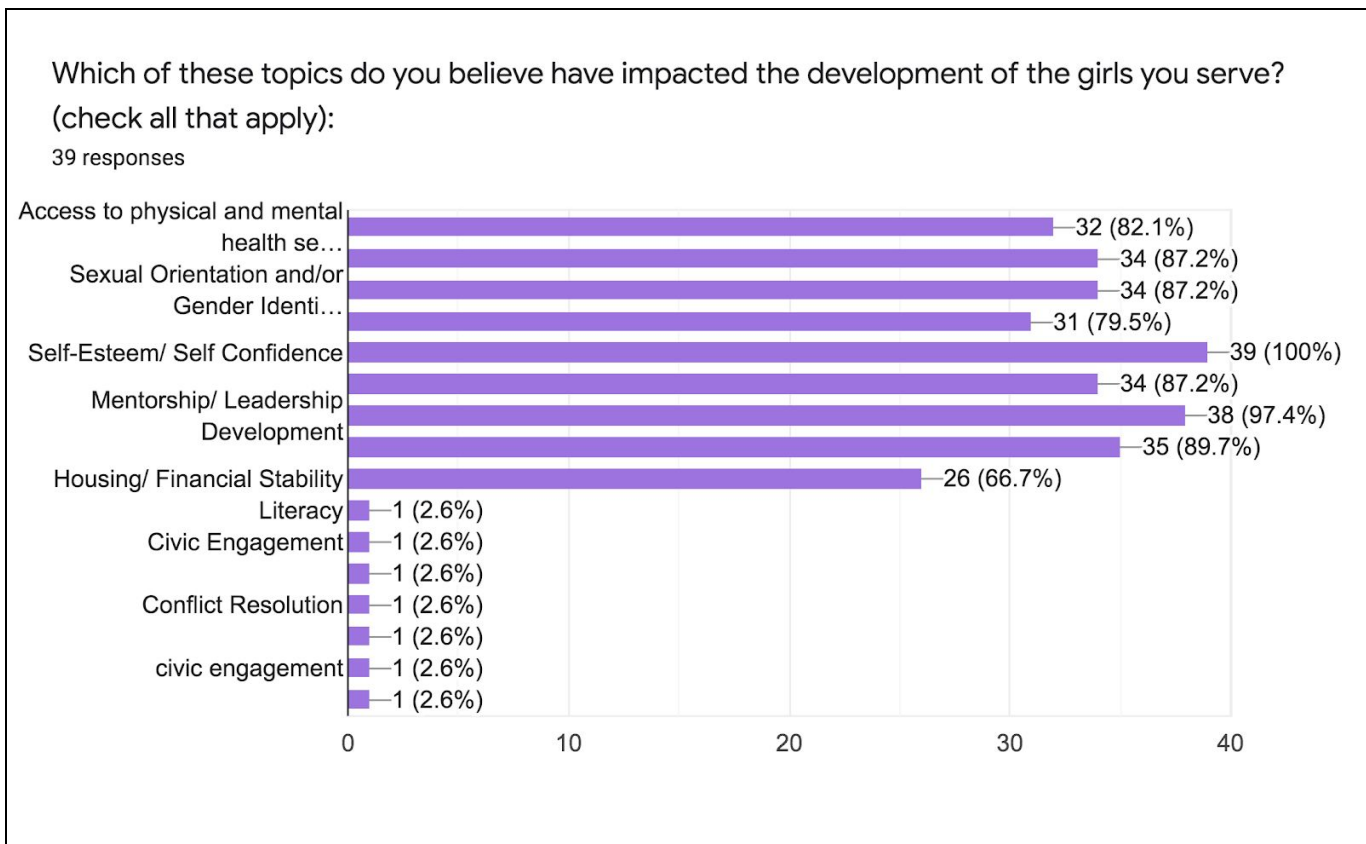
APPENDIX II

February 2020 Survey Data

73 responses from girls:



39 responses from Providers:



APPENDIX III

GIRLS INITIATIVE EVENT 2020 REIMAGINED: A SUMMARY

Primary goal of 3/26/20 mtg:	reframing of listening event(s) to online forums
Secondary goals:	rename/retag, improve inclusion, reimagine Summit event
Partner Agencies (partial list):	Girls Inc (multiple communities), ROPE, Flying Cloud, YWCA (multiple communities), Women's Fund of Western MA, CSW (multiple counties), Girl Scouts of MA (multiple units), Science Club for Girls, Girls Leap
Partner Communities:	351 cities and towns, divided by 11 Regional Commissions <i>(discuss reaching out to school superintendents/MASC/MASS to share as well)</i>
Possible calendar:	Tues/Weds/Thurs/Fri through *entire month of May* late afternoon/early evening times, multiple times per day Summit - late June
Format:	Zoom (preferred) or GoToMeeting (video limitations) or Google Meetup (being used by some school districts)
Breakout:	by age/school grouping, special grouping and by topic.
Age breakouts:	middle school, high school, post hs/college/working
Special groups:	graduating 8th graders, graduating high school seniors, ESL <i>(Spanish/Portuguese/other as available?)</i>
Special Topics:	choose from lists below
Topics as highlighted by multiple survey data sets: self-esteem/self confidence, healthy relationships, bullying/cyberbullying, access to health services, mentorship/leadership development, gender identity, racial inequity	
Topics as arisen/highlighted/crystallized with Covid19 pandemic response: income loss/financial challenges, food insecurity, childcare (siblings/dependents/self), anxiety/depression, housing insecurity and/or domestic violence, relationships/relationship health	
Conversation guides: girl-led wherever possible, with appropriate adult/professional* support available	
New name:	<i>MA Girls: What's Your Status?</i>
New tag:	<i>#GirlStatusMA</i>
Advertising:	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, email blasts via partner agencies, superintendents (via MASC/MASS), WGBH, press releases
New Summit:	Submitted video/photo/tiktok/artwork/music compilation/celebration, to be released on date tba, pre-6/30 (summer solstice?), with an eye towards legislative action/support forward
Gift to Girls:	All those who submit receive MCSW Girls pin (to be designed), tote bag

APPENDIX IV MARKETING

Eventbrite Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/104529448394>

Shortened: <https://tinyurl.com/mcswgirlstatus>

Hyperlink: [Register Here For MCSWGIRLSTATUS](#)

Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/MassCSW>

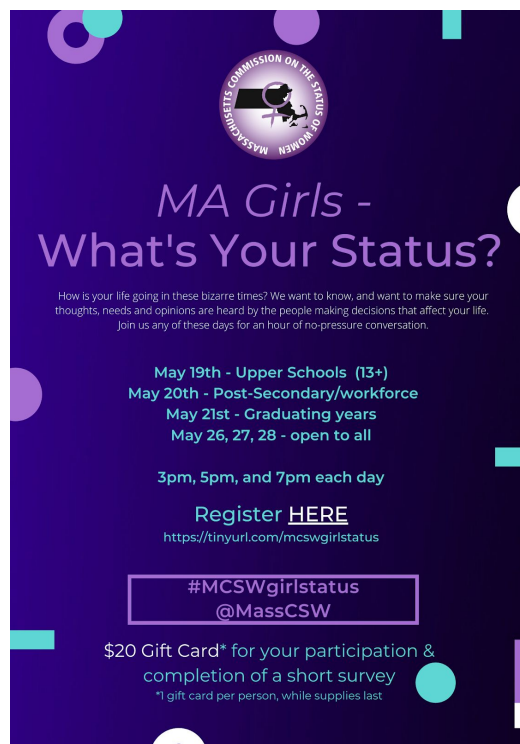
Twitter hashtags:
#MCSWgirlstatus
#girlstatusMA
#mapoli

Twitter callout: @MassCSW

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MassCSW/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/masscsw/>

Incentive: \$20 virtual Target gift card emailed to each girl who participates, one per email address



APPENDIX X

MARKETING RESULTS:

Facebook:

- May 22nd post > 1,632 people reached, 134 engagements, 18 shares
- May 18th post > 5,424 people reached, 255 engagements, 43 shares
- May 11th post > 7,572 people reached, 450 engagements, 66 shares
- **TOTAL: 14,628 people reached, 839 engagements, 127 shares**

Twitter (impressions= number of times user saw the tweet on Twitter):

- May 27th post > 1 RT, 2 likes, 168 impressions
- May 26th post > 2 RT, 1 like, 279 impressions
- May 22nd post > 6 RT, 5 likes, 747 impressions
- May 18th > 6 RT, 6 likes, 724 impressions
- **TOTAL: 15 RT, 14 likes, 1,918 impressions**

Linkedin:

- May 22nd post > 13 likes, 375 views of post in feed.
- May 18th post > 17 likes, 418 views of post in feed.
- May 11th > 2 likes, 329 views of post in feed.
- **TOTAL: 32 likes, 1,122 views of post in feed.**

Instagram:

- May 11th post > 13 likes
- May 18th post > 6 likes
- May 22nd post > 6 like
- **TOTAL: 25 likes**

Eventbrite:

- 2160 total views

APPENDIX VI

SESSION ATTENDANCE

DAY	DATE	TIME	MODERATOR(S)	REGISTRANTS	PARTICIPANTS
Tues	May 19	3pm	Leslie Ann McGee	36	15
Tues	May 19	5pm	Jean Fox & Margaret Adams	16	10
Tues	May 19	7pm	Marydith Tuitt & Erika Butler	28	16
Weds	May 20	3pm	Audrey Hall, Heather Panahi & Tonisha Pickney	24	14
Weds	May 20	5pm	Leslie-Ann McGee & Jackie Nicholson	9	5
Weds	May 20	7pm	Nina Kimball & Marianne Fleckner	9	0
Thurs	May 21	3pm	Wendy Silver & Marlene Sallo	11	4
Thurs	May 21	5pm	Marydith Tuitt & Emma Garrison	7	2
Thurs	May 21	7pm	Mel Soto	(2)	0
Tues	May 26	3pm	Emma Garrison	18	13
Tues	May 26	5pm	Shaitia Spruell & Marianne Fleckner	11	6
Tues	May 26	7pm	Michelle Lanteigne & Linda-Jeanne Mack	6	7
Weds	May 27	3pm	Mia Roberts	12	3
Weds	May 27	5pm	Sydney Weekes & Soha Habib	4	0
Weds	May 27	7pm	Denella Clark & Margaret Adams	6	5
Thurs	May 28	3pm	Raquel Saenz	7	4
Thurs	May 28	5pm	Marydith Tuitt & Mel Soto	8	4
Thurs	May 28	7pm	Heather Panahi/interns	26	26
TOTALS				238	124**

**136 completed surveys, reflecting a difference of 12 accounted for by phone-in and non-eventbrite attendance

52% attendance vs. total registration

While there was disappointment expressed at the low turnout in some sessions, intimate sessions allowed for a far greater degree of personal interaction between the participants and the moderators. Conversely, a larger group offered attendees the ability to be observer-participants instead of active participants. The largest group, 26 girls, while impressive in appearance, lacked the ability to give everyone interested in speaking as much time/opportunity as they would have liked. It would appear the “sweet spot” in virtual *video* conferencing lies somewhere between 8 and 18. If the event were held non-video, chat only, a larger group might be manageable, particularly with multiple moderators. This alternative scenario would also offer an opportunity for girls who could not speak freely in their homes - but could text - to participate.

MCSW Girls Initiative
MA Girls - What's Your Status?
TOOLKIT



Purpose

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women is proud to be working with regional and municipal women's commissions and non-profit partners to organize a series of Virtual Girls Listening Sessions to amplify and center girl voices across the Commonwealth during this unprecedented time. This work is imperative for the expansion of girl-supportive programming and legislation. The findings of these sessions will be used to inform multiple future advocacy events. Ultimately, the goal for this initiative will be to release an informed policy and programming agenda that can be shared with commissioners, partners, and legislators.

Our vision for these Virtual Listening Sessions is conscious of our continuing intention to center girls' voices in a conversation about their experiences and concerns.

***We created this toolkit to provide support for moderators and event coordinators.
Please reference this toolkit prior to and during Listening Sessions.***

Structure

Attendees will include girls, leaders from organizations, and regional and state commissioners. Sessions will be structured as a moderated discussion that will be in some part informed by the topics identified in the two surveys we shared in early February, though it is anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will have affected some of these. Moderators will be a leader from your organization and a girl (or girls) who you have identified as interested in participating.

Prior to Listening Sessions, moderators shall be equipped with a toolkit that includes technology instruction, talking points, ground rules and mandated reporter instructions that will help center focus, protect privacy and care for situations requiring professional intervention.

Virtual Listening Sessions must endeavor to accommodate as many participants as technology and time allows. We encourage moderators to make use of the technology's capabilities to guide and track discussion. You can find our proposed checklist and rules which you can choose to edit and expand based on your needs.



Format

- Welcome from State/Regional Commissioner(s)/partnering agency member about the role of MCSW/agency and the purpose of this project
- Introduction of moderator(s)
- Statement about disclosure/girls needing assistance:
- Girl participant introductions - first name, city/town, age/grade as comfortable
- **Moderated discussion that may be directed towards key areas of discussion - *this should comprise bulk of hour***
- Final thoughts and sharing relevant resources

DISCLOSURE INFORMATION:

Within these discussions may arise sensitive topics surrounding abuse, neglect, sexual assault or harassment. Massachusetts law requires professionals whose work brings them in contact with children to notify the Department of Children and Families (DCF) if they suspect that a child is being abused, neglected, or both.

Massachusetts law requires mandated reporters to immediately make an oral report to DCF when, in their professional capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering from abuse and/or neglect. A written report is to be submitted within 48 hours. In addition to filing with the Department, a mandated reporter may notify local law enforcement or the Office of the Child Advocate of any suspected abuse and/or neglect. You are required to report any physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse; any indication of neglect, including malnutrition; any instance in which a child is determined to be physically dependent upon an addictive drug at birth; any suspicion of child sexual exploitation or human trafficking; or death as a result of abuse and/or neglect.

In the context of these online, public forums, MCSW will provide a statement that moderators will provide phone (for immediate concerns) and/or email to connect girls with appropriate support and assistance.

Virtual Meeting Tech:

****Please sign in early to ensure you have no tech issues and are ready to start on time****

Staff will be on hand to tech these sessions. We will try to limit any controlled muting/silencing of participants. Participant video is not required.

Platform (UPDATED 5/20) Zoom; direct link to all sessions ***for that day***:

Weds. 5/20: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87826291838>

Thurs. 5/21: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89342653544>



Conversation Guides:

The broad goal is to allow our participants a true chance to share their thoughts. This might mean, at times, directing the conversation *slightly* with some leading questions. Depending on the age group/range of the girls in your session, your tone and tenor will be important.

Keep things casual and conversational.

- *"Thank you for sharing, please tell me (more) about that..."*
- *"Could you explain what you mean by...?"*
- *"Can you tell me something else about...?"*

Areas for Discussion

- self esteem and self confidence
- healthy relationships
- bullying/cyberbullying
- mentorship/leadership development
- income loss/financial challenges

Keep in mind:

- ***Girls as Experts***
 - o Girls are experts on their particular experiences, needs, and perspectives. Set the correct tone by letting girls know that you are there to learn from them.
- ***Neutrality and Impartiality***
 - o While it is important to be an active listener, you should avoid expressing opinions or imposing judgment on participants.
 - Avoid phrases like: "I can't believe that" or "How can you be so sure?"
 - o Avoid asking leading questions: the purpose of these sessions is to allow girls to express themselves based on what they feel, not according to what they think you want to hear.
 - Avoid starting questions with "Don't you think..."
- ***Encourage Participation***
 - o While some voices may dominate the conversation, it is important to hear from as many girls in the group as possible.
 - Do your best to address questions to individuals who have not had the opportunity to speak.
 - Politely refocus discussion to be more inclusive.
- ***Language considerations/reference and use of key terms/acronyms***
 - o The identified target range for the girls is up to 20 years of age. A 13 year old may not have the same lived experiences as a 20 year old, so be careful to use language and terminology that is accessible to all



Definitions and Terms to consider

- **Bullying:** unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.
 - Verbal Bullying: saying or writing mean things
 - Social Bullying: hurting someone's reputation or relationships
 - Physical Bullying: hurting a person's body or possessions
- **Cyberbullying:** bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Commonly occurs on:
 - Social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat
 - Over SMS text or texting apps like WhatsApp
 - Email
- **Financial stability:** not having to worry about paying for expenses or taking care of obligations.
- **Gender identity:** One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- **Healthy relationships:** Healthy relationships allow us to feel supported and safe. COMMUNICATION and BOUNDARIES are the two major components of a healthy relationship. This applies to our relationships with members of our family, romantic partners, and friends.
- **Housing stability:** consistent access to housing in the absence of threats, having choice over when and under what circumstances a household wants to move.
- **Mental health services:** mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health services involve the assessment, diagnosis, treatment or counseling in a professional relationship to assist an individual or group in alleviating mental or emotional illness, symptoms, conditions or disorders.
- **Mentorship:** the influence, guidance, or direction given by a trusted counselor or guide.
- **Physical health services:** physical health is defined as the condition of your body, taking into consideration everything from the absence of disease to fitness level. Good healthcare can help prevent illness, as well as detect and treat illness.
- **Racial inequalities/disparities:** unequal outcomes in areas like income, education, and health based on race.
- **STEM:** an acronym for the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.
- **STEAM:** an acronym for the approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking.
- **Self-esteem:** belief and confidence in your own ability and value.
- **Sexism:** prejudice or discrimination based on gender.
- **Sexual orientation:** refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to other people. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.
- **Stereotypes:** ideas about how people will act based on the group to which they belong such as identifying certain characteristics as belonging only to boys or girls.



Moderator Sample “Script”

Note - the goal of these one hour sessions is for organic, free-flowing conversation initiated and maintained as much as possible by *the girl participants*.

This means:

- *(We love you but...) this is not about you :D*
- *Ask open, leading questions where necessary, then allow the conversation to go where it may.*
- *Keep the tone conversational, casual, pressure-free, welcoming, and age-appropriate.*
- *Don't interrupt or talk over the girls, as their conversation will truly get muted in this online forum*
- *Don't pressure anyone to answer a particular question, to open their camera, or to verbally contribute.*
- *Try to follow chat prompts and private messages from the session producer. Please refrain from using another device/phone/text during your session - it's very **obvious on screen when your attention is elsewhere**.*
- Welcome all ! We are so happy to have you join us here. MCSW is a state commission that works to get women's and girls' issues recognized and addressed by the state, so having you be part of this is fantastic.
- I/We recognize that it can be hard talking honestly with a group of strangers, but hopefully we can all get comfortable - fast - and make this a good experience for everybody.
- ***I do need to mention one thing: if there is anyone here who needs immediate help with something, we are posting a phone number and email link in the chat box right now.***
- Now that that's out of the way: It's so nice to meet all of you. We'll just jump right in! How is everyone doing? Can I get a hand signal, or something quick in the chat from everyone?
- Next I'm going to work my way around, and each of us can do a quick intro - ***whatever info you're comfortable sharing***. Name, town, situation, whatever. You can absolutely put it in the chat if you want.
- So - how many of you are having a lot of these online meetings? School/work where people are talking ***AT*** you? Can I get a show of hands for that? Good, well - we are going to try to avoid that today. Let's see if we can make this work with no one muted, just taking turns. And definitely use the chat as part of our conversation.
- Now - does anyone want to jump in with something they'd like to talk about?
- I'm wondering if the group would like to talk about family, or whomever you're living with. How's it going at home?
- Everyone talked a lot, even before everything turned covid, about cyberbullying and just being online all the time. How is your online life going, overall?
- What have you been reading/listening to/watching lately?
- Are you doing anything special to take care of yourself?

- What has been the hardest thing in your life lately?
- What are you looking forward to? Are you making plans? What plans? Does it seem like this will never end?
- What kinds of support do you wish you had? or do you wish you had more opportunities for leadership and supporting others?
- (For those of you in school): How is school going? What are you missing the most? What do you not miss at all?
- Has school been successful in offering people mental health, general health care services if they need it?
- What do you think it's going to feel like to go *back* to school? Will things be different? Do you think you'll go back different? With more or less self-confidence?
- What's been the hardest thing so far in this weird time/great pause?
- What has really been a struggle for you?
- Has there been anything good in your life that's come from all this?

We would like to thank you all for being here today. Is there anything we should have done differently? Don't forget to fill out the survey, if you haven't already done so - are there any questions about it? And remember that if you do plan on submitting a personal item - photo, TikTok, music, recipe, whatever - we need it by the end of the month. Any questions on those items? ok, Thanks again!

APPENDIX IX: VIRTUAL GIFT CARD MANAGEMENT PLAN

After a comprehensive discussion of concerns about process, including security, during the 4/30 full Commission meeting, on Friday, May 1st, Commissioner Marianne Fleckner reached out to the state Ethics Commission with questions. Her message to sister Commissioners the next day:

“Good news! I spoke with Mike McDonald, the Attorney on call last Friday regarding our question on whether or not the MCSW, an independent state agency, can purchase 415/\$20 gift cards for people, (mostly girls), who attended/participated in an online Girl’s Conference. We went over many pieces of the law, he asked a number of questions, and felt very comfortable with what we intend to do is in compliance with the law.”

With the good news that the Ethics Commission gave the green light on the project, and remaining cognizant of concerns raised by several Commissioners relative to security and theft, the recommended process forward was as follows:

- Girls sign up via Eventbrite, which will ask for an email address.
- Girls receive an email confirmation that includes a link to the online session that they registered for
- Girls receive link to online companion questionnaire (via Google), which also grabs email addresses
- *Eventbrite attendee list and Google form data is downloaded, email lists are compared*
- Girls whose email addresses appear in both data sets are each sent a single virtual gift card, with a limit of one per email address (not one per completed survey or session)
- Virtual gift card data is uploaded to Google form, leaving a clear list of each individual email address and the unique gift card number that was sent to it.

Two possibilities for fraud identified; 1. that someone poses as a girl merely for the gift card, or 2. any girl/any person registers multiple email addresses with the express goal of getting multiple gift cards. In each case, the potential fraudsters would have to be willing to complete the full questionnaire for each email address, and duplicate/verbatim/joke answers are easily discoverable in the data. There were also expressed concerns that the gift cards might not be used by the girls, for various reasons that might include the money being taken by a parent, an inability to make an in-person purchase, etc..

The general consensus was to be that though these concerns are valid, it is hoped that cases such as these are in the minority.

Gift cards were distributed via the Target Cashstar program. In the interest of time, the distribution was done via the Target system; however, the program offers the option for the client to receive the virtual card data and distribute independently.

APPENDIX X: Areas of Growth

Timing/Scheduling

- Allow more lead time for Regional Commissions and girl-serving organizations to promote and/or organize girls' participation in one or more of the listening sessions. This could help ensure higher numbers and a broad cross-section of girls from diverse reference groups, e.g. geographic, race/ethnicity, age, etc.

Marketing

- Provide additional promotional material to partner organizations so they can help promote the initiative and their participation in it. Use photos to tell the story and short engaging text.
- Expand advertising for the events to meet the needs of more girls...i.e. invite girls from residential programs, foster care, schools, living in family shelters

Moderator

Strongly recommend training time and co-host interaction prior to sessions

Maintaining Contact

- Provide regular and highlight reports on what was learned to the participants and to partners to affirm that their participation was important and help inform enhancements to partner programming and support.

Program Growth

- Consider making this initiative a type of long-term campaign with listening sessions at regular intervals, e.g. quarterly, or semi-annually. This will build participation over time and greater partner involvement in legislative advocacy that emerges.
- Diversify sessions by including both in-person and remote options

Sessions of special interest

- It may be beneficial to hold a listening session with girls' parents/caregivers as well.