

# Experiences.

## Examining the Experiences of Girls of Color in Independent Schools



This study examined the experiences of Black girls, Asian and Asian-American girls, and Latinx girls (also referred to as Girls of Color) who attend elite, predominantly White, all-girls independent schools.

- What are the particular needs of each group?
- How can schools support the academic, social, and emotional needs of Girls of Color more broadly?
- How can we ensure magic, joy, and pride is experienced by all students?

## Strengths of Girls of Color at Hathaway Brown

### Strong Voices

The upper school girls explained that they felt supported, encouraged, and validated by many faculty members, which nurtured their ability to speak out and use their voices. They find it helpful when faculty and staff encourage them to ask questions, actively participate both in class and extracurricular activities, and reach out when they need support.

#### HB Can Continue to Foster This By:

- Pairing Girls of Color with faculty mentors who can offer guidance and support. (The school should think about compensating faculty of color who choose to engage in this type of mentorship.)

### Cohesiveness

In focus groups, we learned that Girls of Color often voluntarily form and participate in racial affinity groups in order to support each other and enjoy time together. Girls of Color, particularly Black girls, shared that they appreciate the opportunity to connect with and support each other, and to share perspectives and experiences that resonate with one another. Black girls are seeking support and inclusivity in the Aspire Program's office.

#### HB Can Continue to Foster This By:

- Making a concerted effort to create and sustain supportive affinity spaces for other groups of Girls of Color (Latinx, Asian American, Middle Eastern North African, etc.)
- Having teachers and administrators at Hathaway Brown focus on supporting younger non-Black Girls of Color by establishing affinity spaces for these students in addition to Black students.

- Encouraging Girls of Color across identity groups to gather and share their experiences
- Finding a faculty or staff member to serve as an advisor to these affinity groups.
- Connecting students to outside affinity-related community organizations if there is no adult at HB.
- Asking: In your current affinity spaces, who is welcomed and who is excluded? How are these spaces and groups established, and what are the norms and procedures of initiating discussions between members of these groups?

### Adaptability

Being able to adapt and respond to different professional, academic, and cultural environments is a strength that is connected to cultivating skills of resilience, which is a competency that will serve Girls of Color well in the future.

#### HB Can Continue to Foster This By:

Understanding that as much as adaptability is a strength, it can easily transform into a situation of assimilation for Girls of Color. We view assimilation as the process in which Girls of Color are either encouraged to or feel the pressure to adapt in various ways to an institution rather than expressing and being their authentic selves.

#### Strengths Noted About HB in Support of Girls of Color:

- The school has a diverse board of trustees that is actively prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.
- The curriculum is inclusive.

## Challenges that Girls of Color Experience at Hathaway Brown

### Lack of Racial Diversity

The most frequently mentioned theme was the lack of racial diversity, both in the student body and among administrators, faculty, and staff, so Girls of Color also struggled to find adults who they were comfortable speaking with about discomfort, questions, frustrations, microaggressions, and other sensitive topics.

#### This May Be Addressed Through:

- Strategic recruitment initiatives for students of color
- Strategic hiring and retention initiatives for faculty, staff, and administrators of color.

### Racial Microaggressions, Stereotypes and Some Overt Racism

Students talked about encountering stereotypes in explicit and implicit ways, including assumptions that they were less academically capable or driven, and that they received financial assistance at Hathaway Brown.

#### This May Be Addressed Through:

- Anti-racism programming and professional development initiatives that help to ameliorate such events and prepare faculty members and administrators to feel more confident in addressing/processing negative racialized encounters, practices, and policies.

- Engagement of White faculty in professional development that is focused on critical and culturally responsive pedagogies could support Girls of Color in feeling that they can be their authentic selves and take up more space in classrooms that are led by White faculty members.

### Finally, Girls of Color often struggled when taking on the role as intermediaries between their families and Hathaway Brown.

#### This May Be Addressed Through:

- Enhanced communication and family support—Girls of Color should not shoulder the burden of taking on adult-like roles
- Creating racial/ethnic affinity groups for parents and caregivers would create a stronger support network for families of color and enable them to feel more confident navigating Hathaway Brown's policies, practices, and traditions.
- Create spaces for families to engage in critical conversations about their child's educational experiences at Hathaway Brown and reflect on their own experiences in society, as it connects to their different identities.

## Four Schools: 166 people, 46 at HB.

(This is a preliminary report as we only have HB results so far, and are awaiting information from work done at three other schools.)

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### At HB, focus groups were held with the following constituent groups:

1. Middle School Girls of Color  
(mainly 8th grade students)
2. High School Girls of Color  
(mainly 12th grade students)
3. Faculty Members, and
4. Administrators

### We paid special attention to:

- the strengths of Girls of Color
- the challenges they face at these institutions
- support systems that are existing or need to be created for this population of students.

Many Girls of Color expressed that Hathaway Brown creates a supportive, genuine, and cooperative environment that supports their personal and academic trajectories.

Administrators and faculty members also characterized Girls of Color as leaders.