

BLACK GIRLS IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO  
Progress, Power and Possibility



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## Introduction

In an era when race and gender are at the forefront of American discourse, less attention is focused on these intersections as they pertain to youth. African-American girls, in particular, are often overlooked in these conversations. Little is known about the lives of African-American girls as evidenced by the lack of scholarship devoted to this population. This project represents an attempt to better understand the multitude of factors that operate on Black girls as they navigate through adolescence and transition into adulthood.

Our focus is on African-American/Black girls, ages 12-19, in Franklin County, Ohio. While we attempt to be comprehensive, we recognize this report largely discusses a specific segment of the Black girl population. Due to constraints and challenges, our data and analysis do not focus on Black girls living in primarily White middle/upper income neighborhoods. This is not to say that population should not be studied; rather, there are a number of significant challenges in doing so that we were unable to address in this project.

While this report is intended to address the challenges that Black girls face, we also aim to highlight the successes of Black girls and the structures that support them.



## Literature Review

Living at the intersection of various systems of oppression—racism, sexism, and oftentimes poverty—the experience of African-American girls in the United States is unique. The literature on Black girls elucidates some of the distinct challenges faced by this group, including high violence exposure rates, educational discrimination, and increasing health risks. Researchers also highlight positive trends and resiliency strategies unique to Black girls. However, there are gaps in available research. As Rozie-Battle (2002) notes, many studies on Black youth focus on males because their problems manifest in more overt ways like overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system. An overview of the literature on Black girls is presented below.

### Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Poverty has long been associated with negative outcomes for children, and Black children are far more likely than their White counterparts to live in poverty. According to U.S. census data, in 2008 the overall poverty rate for Black children under the age of 18 was an alarming 35.4%, compared to 11.9% for White, non-Hispanic children of the same age (U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, Black girls experience increased risks for an array of negative outcomes. Research shows that structural issues like high rates of poverty and unemployment are associated with an increased likelihood that African-American adolescents will experience violence in their neighborhoods, families, and personal relationships (Kennedy, 2008). Poverty and violence can have serious effects on mental health, as research has found these to be associated with higher levels of depression among adolescents (Fitzpatrick et al., 2005; Goodman, 1999). Further research on adolescents' reactions to violence exposure shows African-American girls may be especially at risk for negative mental health outcomes. Chen (2009) compared community violence exposure rates and resultant behaviors and found that among African-American and Asian-American adolescents, African-American males experienced the highest rates of violence exposure, but African-American females showed the highest levels of internalizing behaviors, which could lead to mental health problems.

Other studies show a correlation between socioeconomic status and age of first sexual activity. Murray (1994) confirmed previous studies that showed coital initiation happens earlier among adolescents of lower socioeconomic status, and posits factors such as restricted life options and the sense of powerlessness associated with poverty may contribute to this. Beyond increased risks, financial strain among disadvantaged families has been consistently linked to negative school outcomes (Coley, 2000). Clearly, socioeconomic disadvantage is a key factor impacting Black girls' development. However, research shows that Black girls demonstrate a high level of resiliency, embracing orientations toward the future, showing a strong sense of faith, and focusing on career goals and aspirations, despite growing up

in violent, economically disadvantaged neighborhoods (Rozie-Battle, 2002). The topic of resiliency will be explored more fully below.

## **Black Girls' Experience in the Classroom**

The socioeconomic disadvantage that many African-American girls face in their neighborhoods also influences the quality of education available to this population of students. While only 5% of White students attend a school where 75% or more of the student population is from low-income families, nearly half of Black students attend these schools (Condition of Education, 2004). Faced with fewer resources, high teacher turnover rates, high student-teacher ratios, and greater student needs, these schools lag behind in levels of academic achievement. Although Black girls overall have higher rates of academic achievement than Black boys, they fare worse than their White counterparts with lower levels of high school graduation and college degree attainment (U.S. census bureau, 2004). Furthermore, dropout rates for White girls steadily declined between 2000 and 2008 to end at 4.2% while Black girls' dropout rates fluctuated between 2000 and 2008, standing at 11.1% in 2008 (Digest of Education Statistics).

Beyond these quantitative indicators, it is not easy to gain a clear picture of how Black girls are faring in the educational system because the research in this area focuses mainly on African-American males, overshadowing the unique experiences of Black girls in the classroom (Rollock, 2007). The literature on African-American adolescents in general shows clear associations between experiences of racial discrimination in the classroom and negative outcomes such as declining grades, increases in depression and anger, decreases in self-esteem, and greater association with friends who are uninterested in school (Wong, et al., 2003). Discrimination in schools affects Black girls from all social class backgrounds. Interestingly, one study found that Black girls from higher social class backgrounds showed more vulnerability than their more disadvantaged peers when it came to discrimination negatively affecting values of academic importance (Chavous et al., 2008).

A myriad of variables affect Black girls' performance in the classroom. Ford (1994/1995) studied gifted African-American females and found that over half were teased by their peers for high levels of achievement. This, coupled with the perception that their teachers did not understand them, resulted in underachievement for some gifted African-American girls. A more recent study looked at how some teachers place more focus on socializing Black girls to display "ladylike" behavior and emphasize ideal femininity in the classroom, a practice that was shown to have negative effects on Black girls' academic achievement (Morris, 2007). Black girls also continue to be underrepresented in math and science-oriented fields, and it was suggested that this is due to school counselors' lowered expectations for Black girls, combined with the effects of gender discrimination and poverty (West-Olantuji, 2010). Given these factors, it becomes clear that change is needed in order to offer Black girls a fair chance for success in the classroom.

## **Black Girls and Health**

Health is central to the well-being of youth, and the literature on Black girls and health shows both positive and negative indicators for this population. In terms of risk behaviors like smoking and drinking alcohol, Black girls are less likely than their White counterparts to engage in these behaviors (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009). Then, although Black girls are more likely than White girls to be arrested for drug use, national trends show that Black girls use drugs less frequently (Brubaker, 2010; Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009; Boyd, 2006). These low levels of risk behaviors and Black girls' responsible behavior are favorable for their health. Nonetheless, there are factors out of the control of Black girls that can contribute to increased risk behaviors. One study looked at the relationship between media portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos and health outcomes among African-American adolescent girls. The study found that perceiving more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap videos placed African-American girls at an increased risk for engaging in binge drinking, marijuana use, and sexual involvement with multiple partners (Peterson et al., 2007). Cultural stereotypes and media's negative portrayal of African-American women clearly affect even the health of Black girls.

When it comes to diet and nutritional health indicators, Black girls do not fare as well as other female adolescents. Research shows that in comparison with White adolescent girls, Black girls consume more sugary, high-fat foods (Arcan, 2009). Over-consumption of sugary, high-fat foods has been linked to obesity, heart disease, and diabetes later in life (Must et al., 1999). Also, Black girls on average consume less than the suggested level of essential micronutrients, and although all girls exhibited a pattern of declining nutrient density as they aged, this pattern was most pronounced for African-American girls (Affenito, 2007). Negative health effects of a poor diet are then compounded by a lack of adequate physical exercise. Research demonstrates that almost half of African-American girls do not get adequate daily physical exercise, contributing to obesity rates nearly twice those of White girls (Arcan, 2009; Affenito, 2007; Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009). There is a variety of reasons why Black girls may not engage in regular physical activity. One interesting study looked at rates of sports participation and attributed lower rates of participation among urban Black girls in part to gender and race discrimination brought about, for example, by inadequate school resources (Sabo and Veliz, 2008). Another study compared attitudes toward physical activity and found that Black girls' greater acceptance of larger body size is a contributing factor for less physical activity (Mabry, 2003). Improving access to healthy foods, safe and structured physical activity opportunities, and health education will be important in boosting health outcomes for African-American girls.

Sexual health is also an important indicator of well-being among adolescents, and Black girls face a myriad of disadvantages in this area. Race differences in the probability of teenage pregnancy are pronounced, with national rates estimated at 12% for non-Hispanic White teens, 27% for non-Hispanic Black teens, and 35% for Hispanic teens (CDC, 2004). Among girls experiencing teenage pregnancy, Black girls were the most likely to label their pregnancies unintended or unwanted (CDC, 2004). Several risk factors that disproportionately affect minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged girls play a part in predicting the likelihood of teenage pregnancy. Having a mother who also had an adolescent birth, having a mother with a low level of education, and not growing up in a household with both biological parents are all correlated with higher rates of teen pregnancy (CDC, 2004). One study also found that girls' attitudes toward pregnancy were important, and that a positive orientation toward early motherhood was associated with higher rates of teenage pregnancy (Afable-Munsuz et al., 2005). This

study specifically found that among urban, low-income African-American adolescent girls, pregnancy was widely viewed as a way to feel more loved, closer to one's family and boyfriend, and a way to stay out of trouble (Afable-Munsuz et al., 2005). Clearly, the reasons for Black girls' high rates of teenage pregnancy are complex.

Other facets of sexual health such as STD rates and sexual violence are also important to examine. Alarming, rates of HIV/AIDS among young Black women have skyrocketed in recent years. Although young Black women ages 13 to 24 account for only 14 percent of women in this age bracket, they account for 60 percent of cumulative AIDS cases among females in this age group (Young Women of Color and the HIV Epidemic, Advocates for Youth). This and other high rates of STD contraction present a major health concern. Data shows that African-American female adolescents report inconsistent condom use, and one study posited this could be related to fear of abuse because of negotiating condom use (Raiford, 2009). Sexual violence is not a foreign problem for Black girls growing up today; in fact, one researcher found that one in four African-American adolescent girls reported an attempted sexual assault (Kennedy, 2008). While some of the negative sexual outcomes are clearly out of the personal control of Black girls, other sexual risk taking behaviors are under the realm of personal control and further research is needed to see how Black girls are empowered to make healthy sexual decisions. Recent research has found that fathers' education and communication style, girls' self-esteem, and higher levels of ethnic identity were associated with lower levels of sexual risk-taking (Peterson, 2007; Plybon, 2009; Belgrave, 2000). The importance of instilling positive self-identity and high levels of self-esteem necessitates a look at these phenomena as they relate to Black girls.

### **Self-Esteem among Black Girls**

Euro-centric feminine ideals are popularized in mainstream media and are widely cited as contributing to girls' self-image and self-esteem. However, research in the area of self-esteem, Black girls, and femininity shows largely favorable outcomes for Black girls. Some studies have shown that Black girls are able to resist feminine ideals that do not fit with their cultural norms, and therefore do not strongly identify with mainstream "White" images of beauty or femininity (Duke, 2000; Rozie-Battle, 2002). Research about Black girls' self-perceptions demonstrates that they do not embrace the thin, blue-eyed, blond-haired image as ideal, and instead tend to evaluate themselves and others on personality and character as opposed to appearance (Duke, 2000). Not surprisingly, then, research shows that African-American girls report lower levels of body dissatisfaction than other racial groups (Nishina, 2006). Similarly, Bangston and Zhou (2002) found that Black adolescents report higher self-esteem than their White, Asian or Latino peers. Holsinger (2005) discusses differences in socialization and self-esteem, arguing that White girls are raised to be more dependent and accepting of traditional gender roles than African-American girls who are more likely to be socialized to be independent and self-reliant. Because of this, he argues Black that girls have higher self-esteem and fewer mental health issues (Holsinger, 2005).

However, not all of the literature supports this picture of Black girls as self-confident and easily able to reject traditional ideals. One study argues that because so many Black female adolescents grow up in father-absent families, they are socialized to develop certain traits such as assertiveness, confidence,

and reliance that are traditionally not associated with femininity. The majority of Black girls in this study who perceived themselves to have more masculine traits were unhappy and desired instead to have more traditionally feminine traits (Mandara, Murray, & Joyner, 2005). Another study found that the number of Black adolescent girls with eating disorders has risen dramatically and stood as high as 10% (Vander, 2004). This is an indication that perhaps it is not possible to make blanket assumptions about the positive self-images of Black girls.

Although the research is not entirely clear as to how Black girls fare in terms of self-esteem, the literature does offer some insight into what factors contribute to higher and lower self-esteem within this population. First, media portrayals of Black women as sex objects have been shown to negatively affect Black girls in several ways. This is shown to be correlated with Black adolescent girls emphasizing the importance of beauty and appearance (Gordon, 2008). Furthermore, girls who perceive sexual stereotypes of Black women in rap videos are shown to be at greater risk for having a negative body image and engaging in destructive behavior such as binge drinking (Peterson et al., 2007). Other research suggests a negative relationship between rates of self-esteem among adolescent Black girls and racial socialization messages encouraging Black girls to embrace mainstream culture (Thomas & King, 2007). A strong association with African-American identity has been shown to positively influence self-esteem among Black girls (Turnage, 2004). To combat these negative influences, it appears that African-American mothers can greatly influence their daughters' self-concept with strong relationships and healthy communication patterns (Turnage, 2004; Thomas & King, 2007). Nonetheless, despite potential positive influences and bolstered self-esteem, Black girls still encounter mental health problems, as the next section illustrates.

## **Mental Health Outcomes**

Although the mental health needs of adolescents has been an important area of research for some time, only recently have researchers started to consider the distinctive role that race, gender, and socioeconomic status play in mental health outcomes. Using data from a large, nationally representative survey, African-Americans overall were shown to have lower rates of mental health problems and use of mental health services compared to Whites (Harris, Edmund, and Larson, 2005). Whether this is a matter of less need or underutilization of services, however, is in question. Copeland (2006) discusses how underutilization of mental health services among African-Americans has been widely documented and includes both structural and non-structural barriers. Looking specifically at African-American adolescents, Copeland (2006) argues that the gap between need for and utilization of services is especially serious for this population, and attributes this gap to structural barriers like location and cost as well as interpersonal barriers like cultural misunderstandings between largely White mental health service providers and their Black adolescent clients.

Numerous factors put African-American female adolescents at high risk for mental health problems like depression. Female gender, low socioeconomic status, high levels of family stress, substance abuse in the home, and frequent residence transition have all been established as risk factors for depression among African-American adolescents (Grant, 2004; Tandon and Soloman, 2009; Goodman, 1999; Hammack, 2004). African-American adolescents' disproportionate representation in less advantaged

neighborhoods also leads to higher rates of violence exposure, which has been shown to be correlated with negative psychological health outcomes (Kennedy, 2008; Tandon and Soloman, 2009). It appears that violence exposure is particularly harmful to African-American girls' mental health. One study, which compared community violence exposure rates and resultant internalizing behaviors among African-American and Asian-American adolescents, found that even though African-American males were more likely to be exposed to violence, African-American females were more likely to demonstrate internalizing behaviors, which can adversely affect mental health (Chen, 2009). Mental health stressors, however, are not limited to those African-American girls living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Wight et al. (2005) found that African-American teens living in neighborhoods composed predominantly of non-Hispanic Whites were at an elevated risk for depressive symptoms. Researchers posit that this could be related to the "out-group" stress felt by African-American teens living in White neighborhoods, making them especially vulnerable to emotional distress and stigma (Wight et al., 2005).

Aside from depression, a second important indicator of mental health is suicide rate. Historically, Black youth suicide rates have been extremely low, but disturbingly these numbers have been on the rise in the past decade (Joe, 2007). Hispanic and Black, non-Hispanic female high school students in grades 9-12 reported a higher percentage of suicide attempts (11.1% and 10.4%, respectively) than their White, non-Hispanic counterparts (6.5%) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Research on adolescent suicide, however, has focused on the majority population and therefore is still a poorly understood phenomenon among minority populations. It is important, then, to recognize that Black girls increasingly face an uphill battle when it comes to mental health outcomes, though each individual girl's experience is unique.

### **Crucial Protective Factors**

Whether impacting self-esteem, academic achievement, or overall mental health of Black girls, several factors have been found to play a vital role in Black girls' well-being. Research has supported the contention that greater levels of religiosity—including church attendance, belief in God, and self-identification with a religious community—serve as protective factors for African-American adolescents. One study found greater religiosity among Black girls to be associated with higher self-esteem and more positive psychological functioning (Ball, Armistead, and Austin, 2003). Other studies demonstrate the correlation between religiosity and lower incidence of risk behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol among African-American adolescents (Berg et al., 2008; Steinman and Zimmerman, 2004).

Then, in addition to greater levels of religiosity, maternal support may help Black girls maintain higher self-esteem and positive orientations toward the future. Boyd, Ashcraft and Belgrave (2006) discuss research that has demonstrated positive, strong relationships between African-American mothers and daughters, and linked these relationships to self-esteem, good coping strategies, and strong ethnic identity among the girls. A further study found that maternal support contributes to Black girls' development of resilience and hope in the future (Davis, 2007). Given this evidence, it seems Black girls' relationships with their mothers play an important role in their overall development.

Racial socialization and strong identification with the Black community have also been shown to positively impact Black girls' decision-making and risk-taking behaviors. Black girls are dually socialized to learn how to function within their own culture and mainstream culture, and overall, it appears that Black girls are better off when they embrace positive views of their culture and feel good about their ethnic identity. For example, higher levels of ethnic identity are associated with less risky sexual behaviors (Belgrave, 2000). In addition, strong ethnic identity has been directly linked to higher disapproval of drug use and lowered intentions to use drugs (Cornielle, 2007). One part of ethnic identity is gender role socialization, and as aforementioned, Black girls are not typically socialized into traditional feminine roles but rather encouraged to embrace concepts like perseverance, self-reliance and sexual equality as part of womanhood. This works in Black girls' favor. One study showed that most Black girls embrace egalitarian gender roles, which then correlates with higher levels of self-esteem (Buckley and Carter, 2005). One researcher, however, warns against an overly simplistic interpretation of protective factors. Bennet (2007) conducted a study among Black girls and did not find support for the aforementioned conclusions but rather found complex relationships between risk and protective factors; he contends that more research is needed to definitively establish a link between ethnic identity and decreased risk behaviors. Nonetheless, the fact that African-American culture emphasizes religion, more flexible gender roles, cultural ties, and the centrality of African-American mothers may serve as protection for Black girls that are continually faced with a myriad of individual and contextual risk factors.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Although the literature on Black girls' development has been growing in recent years, there is still the need for more studies that focus on Black girls' unique experience in light of sexism, racism, and classism. Studies that generalize about all adolescents, all Black youth, or all teenage girls fall short of providing this rich contextual understanding. In addition, there are certain areas of study that merit more attention. For example, the educational literature has focused mainly on African-American boys but must recognize the specific challenges faced by Black girls and seek to further understand how this affects academic achievement. Also, alarming trends of increasing suicide attempts and skyrocketing rates of HIV/AIDS infection among young Black females necessitates additional research.

In terms of study populations, the majority of studies that do focus specifically on Black girls are conducted in low-income, urban neighborhoods. While many Black girls are living in poverty, there are also a significant number living in more socioeconomically advantaged situations. The distinctive experience of these Black girls has been largely overlooked in the literature. Similarly, rural Black girls have not been extensively investigated as a unique population.

The literature is beginning to emphasize the need for culturally relevant prevention and intervention efforts, but research is still developing in the area of service provision and the implications of race and gender (Brubaker, 2010). As researchers demonstrate that correlates to risk behaviors, psychological well-being, and achievement are unique for Black girls, the literature is increasingly calling for culturally specific interventions (Cornielle, 2005; Mabry, 2003; Guthrie, 2001). This has important practice

implications for educators, social workers, community workers, health professionals, and others who are providing services to Black girls.

## **Conclusion**

The literature on Black girls in America reveals the complex interplay that individual, familial, and societal-level factors have on the development of Black girls. From growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods to attending under-performing schools to facing mainstream media images that discount their value, many Black girls continue to face innumerable challenges as they grow and develop. Nonetheless, they exhibit a certain level of resiliency and hope, thought to be influenced in part by protective factors such as strong ethnic identity, maternal relationships, and religiosity. As the research on Black girls develops, the need for culturally relevant service provision becomes clear. The remainder of this report explores the unique experiences faced by Black girls in Franklin County and the perspectives of service providers serving these girls.

## Quantitative Overview

### Overview and Data Limitations

Searching existing data and reports for information on Black girls in Franklin County generates limited useful material. Very little data is precise enough to account for a specific location, race, sex, and age range. Even when the location is broadened to statewide, the available information still is not always broken down by race, sex, and age simultaneously. There certainly are some exceptions to this generalization, notably data related to teen pregnancy, as both age and (generally) sex are inherent.

The data provided in the remainder of this chapter touch upon numerous aspects of Black girls' lives; however, this information is in no way comprehensive. Among the notable research gaps is a dearth of statistics regarding self-esteem, self-perception, and peer influence. Information on extracurricular activities and community involvement is limited, as is information related to religiosity. Finally, while the literature notes an alarming increase in HIV cases among Black girls, surprisingly little data is available at the local level. Additional focused research is necessary to provide a more inclusive picture of the experiences of Black Girls in Franklin County and Central Ohio.

The first portion of this chapter provides a broad overview of the available data for Black girls in Franklin County. The subsequent section features state-level Ohio data in an effort to cover some of the issues for which Franklin County and Central Ohio data remains elusive.

### Franklin County

With the population of the United States expected to become a “minority majority” by 2042, Franklin County, like the rest of the nation, is in the midst of demographic transitions. Youth are and will continue to be a force driving this shift. While African-Americans accounted for 19.8% of Franklin County residents in 2005, 35.7% of youth (age 19 and younger) were African-American.<sup>1</sup> (See Table 1 for distribution of Black girls in Franklin County by age group.)

**Table 1:** Distribution of Black or African-American Females by Age Group in Franklin County<sup>2</sup>

Age Group	Number of Black Females
Under 5 years	10,462
5 to 9 years	8,157
10 to 14 years	9,093
15 to 17 years	5,238
18 and 19 years	3,676

Looking at the upper age brackets, Black male teenagers slightly outnumbered their female counterparts in 2009. Of the Black or African-American population ages 15-19 years, 8,991 were male compared to 8,914 females.<sup>3</sup>

While Franklin County boasts a significant African immigrant population, the vast majority of Black girls in the county are native born. Of the 32,950 Black or African-American females under 18 years old, only 2,205 (6.7%) are foreign-born.<sup>4</sup>

Socioeconomic data for African-American youth is difficult to ascertain as poverty data at the household level infrequently details the exact demographics of household members. Data from the 2009 American Community Survey sheds some light on poverty status in the past twelve months for Black or African-American girls. Among Black females in Franklin County under age 18, 15,887 of them were in poverty, though this varied considerably by age (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Distribution of Black Females in Franklin County with Income in Past 12 Months Below Poverty level<sup>5</sup>

Age Group	Number of Black females in Poverty
Under 5 years	5,604
5 years	826
6 to 11 years	4,174
12 to 14 years	3,033
15 years	635
16 and 17 years	2,520
18 to 24 years	8,491

Although gender-specific data is lacking, some comparisons are available to understand the extent of poverty in the African-American community versus other racial and ethnic groups. Data from 2005 report that 44.2% of Black or African-American individuals under age 18 lived in poverty in the past 12 months.<sup>6</sup> This is notably higher than the statistics for Franklin County as a whole (20.1%), as well as Hispanics/Latinos (17.0%), Whites (11.7%), and Asians (6.4%) for the same age group.<sup>7</sup>

The impact of the recent economic recession has not been fully calculated at the local level for specific demographic and age groups; however, the 2009 American Community Survey provides some insights into the labor force participation of Black girls. Of the 7,796 African-American or Black females in Franklin County ages 16 to 19 years, 3,782 are listed in the labor force, with 1,982 holding jobs.<sup>8</sup> Eighteen hundred were reported as unemployed, with the remaining 4,014 not in the labor force.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of education, school enrollment rates for Black girls are generally high (in the 94% to 99% range) for ages 5 through 17.<sup>10</sup> These values are comparable to both the statistics from central Ohio and the state as a whole.

Franklin County is home to 16 public school districts. Data for on-time high school graduation for females by race is shown in Table 3. The graduation rates for Black girls in comparison to their counterparts of other races yield mixed results across districts.

**Table 3:** High School Graduation Rate for Female Students, 2008-2009 School Year. Public School Districts in Franklin County, Ohio<sup>11</sup>

District	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black (Non-Hispanic)	Hispanic	Multiracial	White (Non-Hispanic)
<b>Bexley City</b>					>95%
<b>Canal Winchester Local</b>		>95%			>95%
<b>Columbus City</b>	76.3%	78.4%	61.1%		73.4%
<b>Dublin City</b>	>95%	>95%	92.3%	>95%	>95%
<b>Gahanna-Jefferson City</b>	>95%	>95%			>95%
<b>Grandview Heights City</b>					>95%
<b>Groveport Madison Local</b>		88.2%			86.8%
<b>Hamilton Local</b>		90.9%			92.2%
<b>Hilliard City</b>	>95%	92.0%	93.3%	>95%	>95%
<b>New Albany-Plain Local</b>		>95%			>95%
<b>Reynoldsburg City</b>		86.3%		>95%	>95%
<b>South-Western City</b>	84.6%	79.8%	74.4%	90.0%	92.3%
<b>Upper Arlington City</b>	>95%				>95%
<b>Westerville City</b>	92.3%	81.0%		>95%	>95%
<b>Whitehall City</b>		93.3%			94.1%
<b>Worthington City</b>	>95%	>95%	>95%		>95%

Enrollment in Columbus City Schools unquestionably surpasses other districts in Franklin County. During the 2009-2010 school year, Columbus City Schools boasted 51,352 students, greatly exceeding the enrollment of the next most-populous districts: South-Western City (20,035), Hilliard (14,797), and Westerville (13,875).<sup>12</sup> Due to the quantity of Black girls attending Columbus City Schools, further analysis of their experiences there is merited.

#### *Black Girls in Columbus City Schools*

In the 2009-2010 school year, Black non-Hispanic females comprised approximately 30% of the overall enrollment in Columbus City Schools.<sup>13</sup> This percentage is notably higher than all other racial and ethnic groups for females, with White females ranking second at only 13.2% of the district's population.<sup>14</sup> Black girls generally are distributed evenly across grades, with most grade levels containing approximately 1,100 to 1,200 Black girls.<sup>15</sup> Two grade levels that deviated from this range included 9<sup>th</sup> graders (1,489 Black girls) and 10<sup>th</sup> graders (1,259 Black girls).<sup>16</sup>

The overall graduation rate of Columbus City School students was 73.9% for the class of 2008; it fell slightly to 72.7% in 2009.<sup>17</sup> Black girls surpassed this rate by graduating 78.4% in the 2008-2009 school year, including 7.6% of those Black girls who graduated with honors.<sup>18</sup> The graduation rate for Black girls

surpassed the graduation rate of all other racial groups, male or female.<sup>19</sup> Girls in all racial and ethnic categories outperformed their male counterparts; only 69.7% of Black boys in Columbus City Schools graduated, and only 3.0% of those boys earned honors distinction.<sup>20</sup>

While a dress code and other disciplinary policies are clearly articulated,<sup>21</sup> disciplinary challenges remain. Disciplinary rates for both Black girls and boys peak in late middle school and early high school and then decline in subsequent grades.<sup>22</sup> Disobedient and disruptive behaviors are the most commonly cited causes for disciplinary actions among Black girls in the eighth and ninth grades.<sup>23</sup> Table 4 displays data on disciplinary rates for Black girls by grade level.

**Table 4:** Disciplinary Rates per 100 Students for Black Girls in the Columbus City School District, 2009-2010 School Year<sup>24</sup>

Grade	Expulsions	Out of School Suspensions	Other Discipline Types	All Discipline Types
Kindergarten	0	5.9	3.1	9.0
1st Grade	0	7.4	3.7	11.1
2nd Grade	0	11.4	6.0	17.4
3rd Grade	0	13.9	6.7	20.6
4th Grade	0	15.4	8.7	24.1
5th Grade	0.1	17.8	5.8	23.7
6th Grade	0.2	70.8	22.3	93.3
7th Grade	0.6	108.2	39.8	148.6
8th Grade	1.5	111.5	34.8	147.7
9th Grade	2.2	159.5	24.5	186.1
10th Grade	1.8	103.4	14.5	119.8
11th Grade	0.9	74.8	7.6	83.3
12th Grade	0.2	43.4	3.9	47.5

Another issue facing African-American girls is teen pregnancy. Franklin County data from 2001 indicate that Black females have higher birth rates than most of their demographic counterparts, with the exception of Hispanics in the 15-17 year age category (See Table 5). More recent data confirm this trend; in 2004, the Black teen<sup>25</sup> birth rate (77.9 per 1,000) was more than double that of White teens (34.2) but still trailed behind Hispanics (145.7).<sup>26</sup>

**Table 5:** Births and Fertility Rates for Teenage Girls, 2001<sup>27</sup>

		Franklin County		Central Ohio*	Ohio
		Count	Rate**	Count	Count
Girls under age 15	White	10	0.4	14	110
	Black	17	1.7	17	154
	Native American	0	0	0	0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	1
	Hispanic	2	2.3	8	6
Girls ages 15-17	White	280	19.3	438	3,130
	Black	227	44.6	229	1,600
	Native American	4	42.6	4	17

Asian/Pacific Islander	10	13.8	13	32
Hispanic	44	100.9	318	270

\* Central Ohio data refers to Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union counties.

\*\* Per 1,000 women in the specified age and race group

While many teen pregnancies result in babies, other young prospective mothers opt for induced abortions. In 2009, Black girls in Franklin County terminated their pregnancies in this manner a total of 262 times.<sup>28</sup> The breakdown by age group is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Number of Resident Induced Abortions by Black Girls in Franklin County, 2009<sup>29</sup>

Age	<15	15	16	17	18	19
Number of resident induced abortions	8	23	28	36	71	96

Accidents were the leading cause of death for Franklin County Black girls ages 5 to 14 years old from 2000-2002 (8.56 per 100,000).<sup>30</sup> For the age group 15-24, accidents and homicides tied as leading causes of mortality (7.88 per 100,000), followed by diseases of the heart (3.94) and congenital malformations, deformations, and chromosomal abnormalities (3.94).<sup>31</sup>

## Ohio

Due to the scarcity of information on Black girls in Franklin County and central Ohio more broadly, state-level data complements and expands upon the experiences of Black girls. The 2007 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) analyzes Black girls of high school age in Ohio.<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all of the statistics in this section are from the YRBS.

The YRBS addresses certain measures of mental health for Black girls in Ohio. Approximately one-quarter (25.7%) of non-Hispanic Black females “felt sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row so that they stopped doing usual activities during the 12 months before the survey.” This value was lower than that of their non-Hispanic White female counterparts (29.6%). The seriousness of this depression indicator should not be overlooked, as 13.4% of non-Hispanic Black females had seriously considered attempting suicide in the twelve months prior to the administration of the survey, and 8.9% had created a plan for suicide in the past year.

Behavioral indicators provide a wide range of data related to drugs/alcohol, physical activity/extracurricular involvement, and violence. Among the findings for non-Hispanic Black female high school students in Ohio:

- Nearly half (45.5%) had used marijuana at least once in their lives, compared to only 28.4% of their non-Hispanic White counterparts. In contrast, cocaine use (of any form) was much lower for Black girls (1.0%) compared to Whites (7.4%). Alcohol use, defined as at least one drink on one day of their lives, yielded similar data for Black and White girls (66.6% and 78.6%, respectively).

- The fact that 27.4% of Black girls had not participated in at least sixty minutes of physical activity within a week of the survey is supported by high percentages of participation in sedentary pastimes. These included watching television for three or more hours on an average school day (reported by 59.7% of Black girls in Ohio), and three or more hours of computer time for non-school-related endeavors (23.2%). Similarly, more than half (52.7%) of Black girls were not involved in school or community sports teams in the year prior to the survey.
- Physical altercations led 42.8% of Black girls in Ohio to report being involved in a physical fight at least once in the previous year. Weapons including guns, knives, and clubs were carried by 7.5% of Black girls within thirty days of the survey.

Data related to physical health addresses eating habits and weight issues. Reported dietary habits indicated that a majority (84%) of Black girls' diets contained less than five servings of fruits and vegetables in the five days prior to the survey. Despite these reported eating habits, less than 30% (28.4%) described themselves as being slightly or very overweight. According to a report from the 2008 Ohio Family Health Survey, however, half of Ohio's African-American children (10-17 years) are overweight or obese; African-American girls are disproportionately affected.<sup>33</sup> See Figure 7.

**Figure 7:** Rates of Overweight and Obesity Among Girls (10-17 years) in Ohio by Race

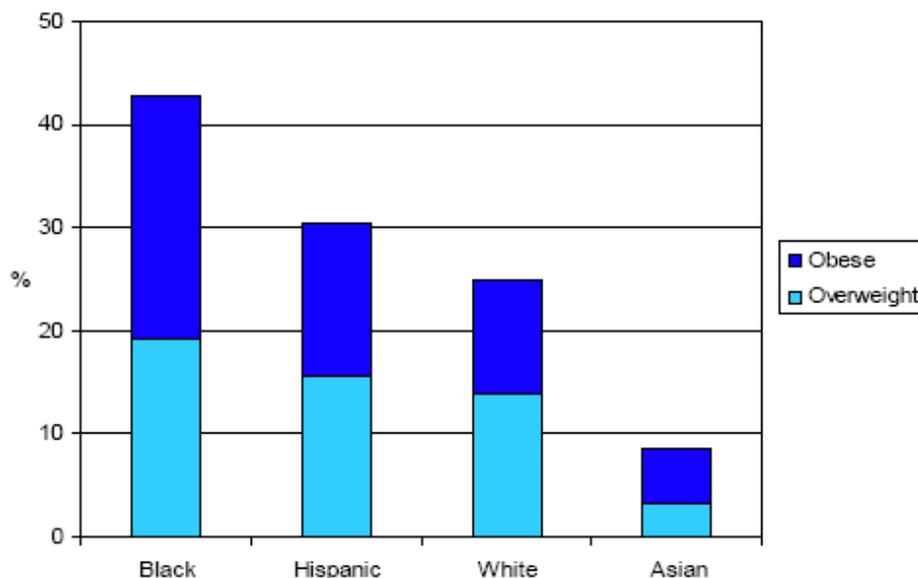
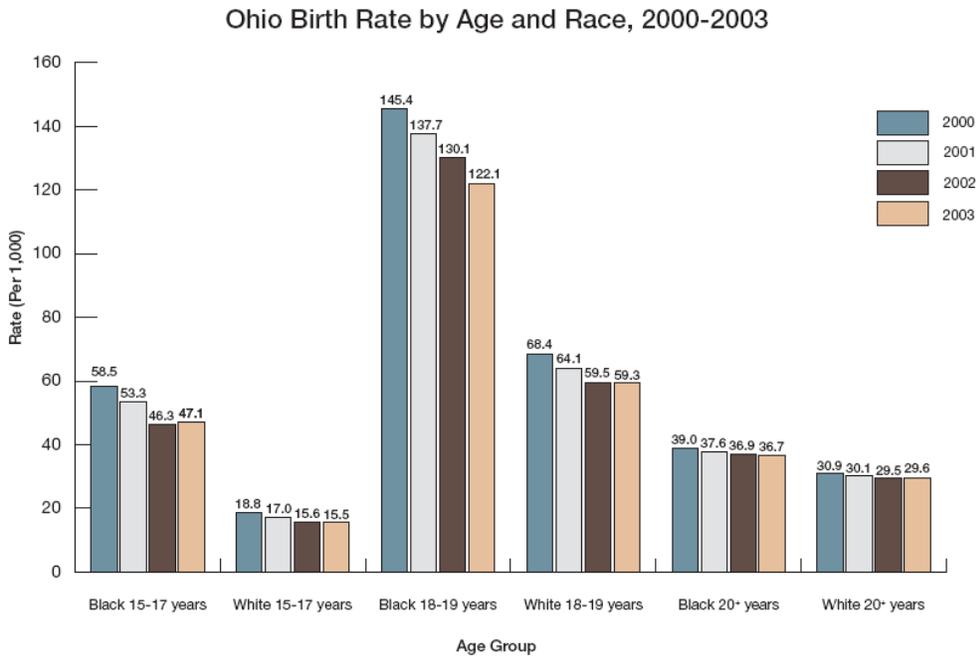


Figure 7 is from *The Ohio Family Health Survey report*<sup>34</sup>

Finally, as in Franklin County, Black girls in Ohio have higher birth rates than their White counterparts.<sup>35</sup> The data in Figure 8 displays trends over time for Black and White teens in three different age groups.

**Figure 8: Ohio Birth Rate by Age and Race, 2000-2003**



*Figure 8 is from The Teen Births in Ohio, Ohio PRAMS 2000-2003 report<sup>36</sup>*

Birth rates for Black girls are more than double that of White girls until reaching the age of 20 and beyond, at which time birth rates are generally comparable. Birth rates for teens generally declined across all groups from 2000-2003.

# Opportunity Mapping

## Overview

An extensive body of research has established that neighborhood conditions and proximity to opportunities such as high performing education or sustainable employment have a critical impact on quality of life and self-advancement. Although individual characteristics play a role in determining who excels in our society, neighborhood conditions are critical in promoting or impeding people, even for the most motivated individuals. For many low-income communities, particularly communities of color, neighborhood conditions limit access to opportunity and advancement. Residents concentrated in highly impoverished communities lack access to steady employment, essential services, and good schools, and often live in unsafe environments. In these neighborhoods, under-resourced schools struggle to meet the myriad needs of children in poverty; parents shop at grocery stores with overpriced and low-quality food; and people motivated to work lack connection to meaningful, sustainable employment. This geographic isolation from opportunity creates artificial barriers to improvement for these residents and significantly diminishes their quality of life. The impact of this opportunity isolation is profound for both the individual and the entire community.

Opportunity mapping is a research tool that the Kirwan Institute uses to better understand and represent the dynamics of “opportunity” within metropolitan areas. The purpose of opportunity mapping is to illustrate where opportunity rich communities exist (and assess who has access to these communities) and to understand what needs to be remedied in opportunity poor communities. Opportunity mapping builds upon the rich history of using neighborhood based information and mapping to understand the challenges impacting our neighborhoods.

The central premise of opportunity mapping is that residents of a metropolitan area are situated within an interconnected web of opportunities that shape their quality of life. Opportunity mapping provides an analytical framework to measure opportunity comprehensively in metropolitan regions and determine who has access to opportunity rich areas. Opportunity mapping also provides a framework to assess what factors are limiting opportunity in a community and can assist in identifying what measures are needed to remedy these impediments to opportunity.

Mapping opportunity in the region requires selecting variables that are indicative of high (and low) opportunity. In this context, high opportunity indicators would be the availability of sustainable employment, high performing schools, safe environments, access to high quality health care, adequate transportation, quality child care, and institutions that facilitate civic and political engagement. These multiple indicators of opportunity are assessed in a comprehensive manner at the same geographic scale, thus enabling the production of a comprehensive “opportunity map” for the region.

## Opportunity Mapping for Black Girls in Franklin County

With a neighborhood opportunity map of Franklin County (**Map 1**) as an underlay, several quantitative measures pertaining to Black girls were overlaid to create the following maps:

Map 1	Neighborhood Opportunity Map – Franklin County, Ohio
Map 2	African-American Girl Population and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 3	Median Household Income of African-American Population
Map 4	African-American Girls in Poverty and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 5	African-American Female Student Enrollment and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 6	High School Graduation Rates and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 7	High School Graduation Rate of African-American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 8	High School Graduation with Honors of African-American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity
Map 9	Disciplinary Action on African-American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 10	Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 6-8 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map
Map 11	Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 9-12 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

To visualize where Black girls live in Franklin County, the distribution of the Black girl population (ages 10-19) is mapped with the Franklin County Opportunity Map as an underlay (**Map 2**). This map clearly shows that Black girls are isolated in areas with Very Low or Low Opportunity. It is also notable that the areas with highest concentration of Black girls are within the Columbus City School District boundary.

**Map 3** and **Map 4** show the economic opportunity of African-American households and Black girls in the region. **Map 4** locates Black girls (ages 12-17) living in poverty, showing further concentration of them in neighborhoods with lower opportunity. In addition to the visible clusters of low income households, the isolation of the African-American population in the east side of the county is evident in **Map 3**. Although this is based on data from the 2000 U. S. Census, a similar pattern can be seen in **Map 5**, with a much higher percentage of Black girl student enrollment in Columbus City Schools in the 2008-2009 school year.

### Enrollment and High School Graduation Rate

**Map 5** shows the percentage of Black girls enrolled in secondary schools in Franklin County, Ohio in the 2008-2009 school year. The concentrations of Black girls (**Map 2** and **Map 4**) and African-American households in general (**Map 3**) are clearly reflected by the proportion of Black girls enrolled in secondary schools in Franklin County. All schools with higher percentages of Black girl enrollment (above 20%) are from Columbus City School District, with only one exception—Reynoldsburg Junior High School with 20.4%, from Reynoldsburg City School District. One exception within Columbus City School District was Clearbrook Middle School, where all 66 students enrolled in 2008-2009 school year were male.

On the other hand, the lowest enrollment rates of Black girls are found in schools from a few districts located in High or Very High Opportunity areas. The table below shows the average enrollment rate of

Black girls in schools in each school district in Franklin County, which clearly indicates the level of concentration of Black female students in secondary schools in the county.

School District Name	Average Black Female Enrollment
Upper Arlington City	0 %
Grandview Heights City	0 %
Dublin City	1.3 %
Hilliard City	2.7 %
Worthington City	2.98 %
New Albany-Plain Local	3.6 %
Bexley City	3.9 %
Hamilton Local	4.3 %
South-Western City	5.9 %
Canal Winchester Local	8.3 %
Gahanna-Jefferson City	9.6 %
Westerville City	9.97 %
Whitehall City	14.6%
Groveport Madison Local	14.7 %
Reynoldsburg City	17.3 %
<b>Columbus City</b>	<b>32.1 %</b>

**Map 6** displays total graduation rates for all 43 high schools located in Franklin County in the 2007-2008 school year. While all red circles (high schools with graduation rates of 80% or below) are located within the Columbus City School District boundary, a few high schools in the district show good performance: Centennial High School (92.8%), Eastmoor Academy (92.4%), Columbus Alternative High School and Independence High School (above 95%). In a few other school districts all high school graduation rates were higher than 95%—Bexley City, Canal Winchester, Dublin City, Grandview Heights, New Albany-Plain Local, Reynoldsburg, Upper Arlington City and Worthington City.

When focused on graduation rates for Black girl students (**Map 7**), lower graduation rates (80% or below) are found mostly in Columbus City Schools and in only a few other districts including Hilliard City, Whitehall, South-Western City, Westerville. A few other school districts did not have data for Black female students' graduation rates, possibly due to insufficient enrollment rates—Dublin City, Upper Arlington City, Bexley City, Worthington City, Grandview Heights, New Albany-Plain Local.

Within Columbus City School District where Black girl enrollment is most concentrated (average Black girl enrollment 32.1%), high school graduation rates of Black girls are slightly higher compared to graduation rates for all students: more schools in Columbus City School District show higher than 80% graduation rates (more green and blue circles) in Map 7 compared to school-wide graduation rates in Map 6.

This was not the case for schools in other school districts with lower Black girl enrollment rates. In Hilliard School District and South-Western City School District, which had only 2.7% and 5.9% Black girl

enrollment rates respectively, graduation rates for Black girls were lower than school-wide graduation rates as shown below.

School District	High School	Total Grad. Rate	Black Girl Grad. Rate
Hilliard City	Hilliard Davidson	Above 95%	72.2%
	Hilliard Darby	93.5%	69.2%
South-Western City	Central Crossing	85.2%	71.4%
	Westland	83.5%	67.9%

The picture gets worse when looking at Black girls who graduate high school with honors (**Map 8**). Only three high schools in Columbus City School District had above 5% Black girls graduating with honors—Marion-Franklin High School with 7%, Northland High School with 12.6%, and Independence High School with 15%. In fact, all other high schools in the district had no Black girls (0%) graduate with honors.

### Disciplinary Action

#### **Map 9.** Disciplinary Action on African-American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

More Black girls in Columbus City School District receive disciplinary actions than in other districts. Out of 26 secondary schools in Franklin County with more than 100 disciplinary actions per 100 Black female students each, 21 were Columbus City Schools and the ten schools with the highest counts of disciplinary actions were in the Columbus City School district. However, a few schools in the district were found at the lower end in counts of disciplinary actions (50 or less)—Columbus Alternative High School (29.2), Fort Hayes Metro Education Center High School (15.3), Special Education Center (20.4), and Welcome Center at Mifflin Middle School (35.7).

Similar patterns are visible when disciplinary actions on students of all races and genders are mapped for middle school (**Map 10**) and high school (**Map 11**).

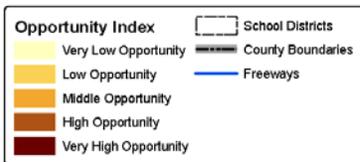
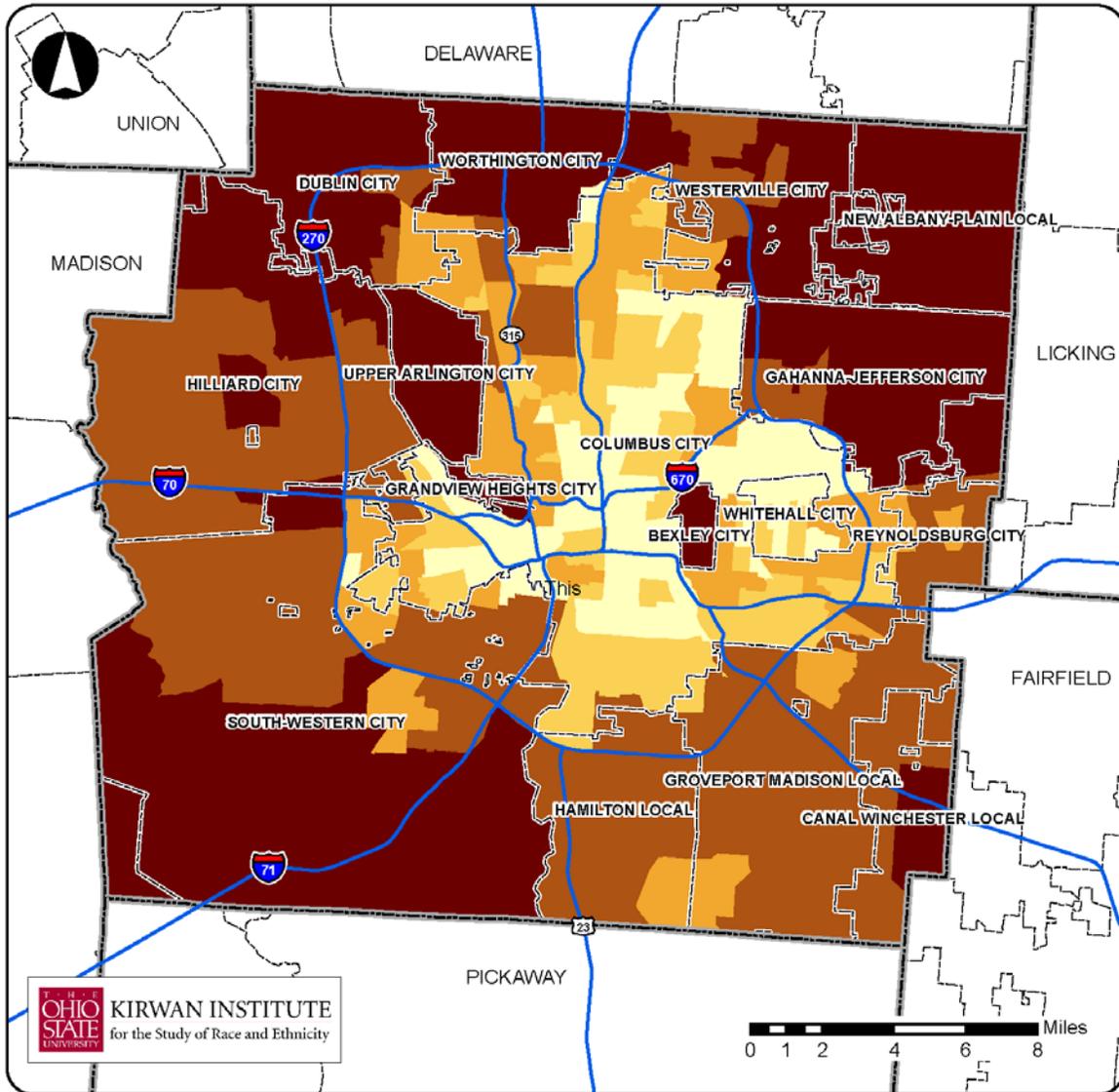
#### **Map 10.** Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 6-8 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Out of 24 middle schools that had 71 or more counts of disciplinary actions per 100 students, 22 were from Columbus City School District and the other two were from Groveport Madison School District (Groveport Madison Junior HS and Groveport Madison North MS) while none of the Columbus City Schools had 20 or less counts of disciplinary actions. Lowest counts of disciplinary action were from Dublin City School District (Willard Grizzell Middle School with 2.03, Henry Karrer Middle School with 3.07), Upper Arlington School District (Hastings Middle School with 3 and Jones Middle School with 4.3) and Gahanna-Jefferson School District (Gahanna East Middle School with 5.2).

#### **Map 11.** Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 9-12 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Thirteen out of 15 high schools that had 71 or more counts of disciplinary actions per 100 students were from Columbus City School District while the lower counts of disciplinary actions were from Upper Arlington High School (3.8), Dublin Jerome High School (4.35), Grandview Heights High School (6.75), Worthington Kilbourne High School (8.7), and Dublin Coffman High School (8.85).

# Map 1. Neighborhood Opportunity Map Franklin County, Ohio

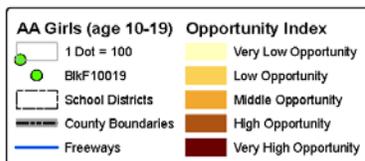
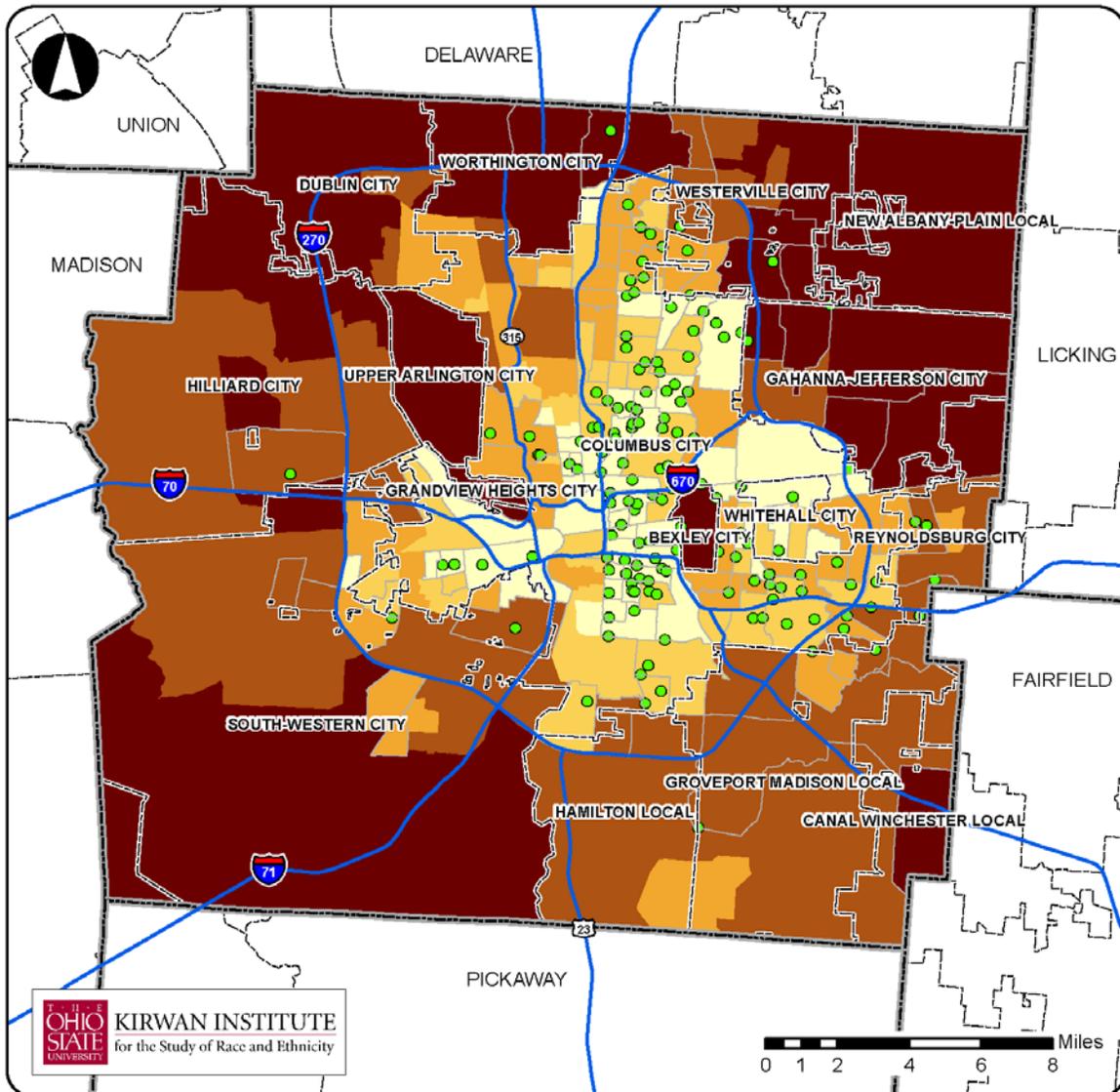


This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity in Franklin County, Ohio.

Date: August 12, 2010

# Map 2. African American Girl Population and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio

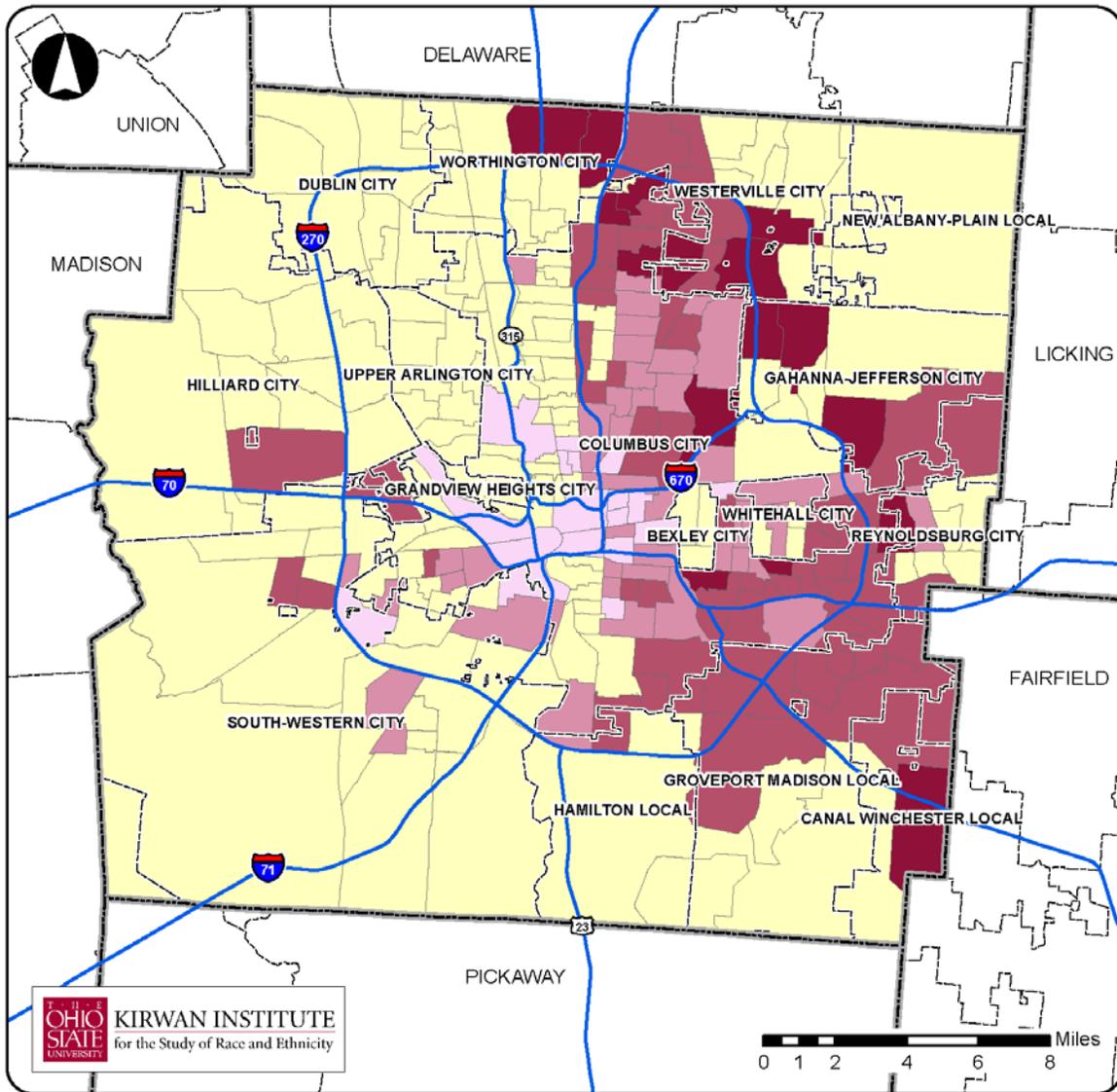


This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of African American girl population (ages 10-19) in Franklin County, Ohio.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 3. Median Household Income of African American Population

Franklin County, Ohio



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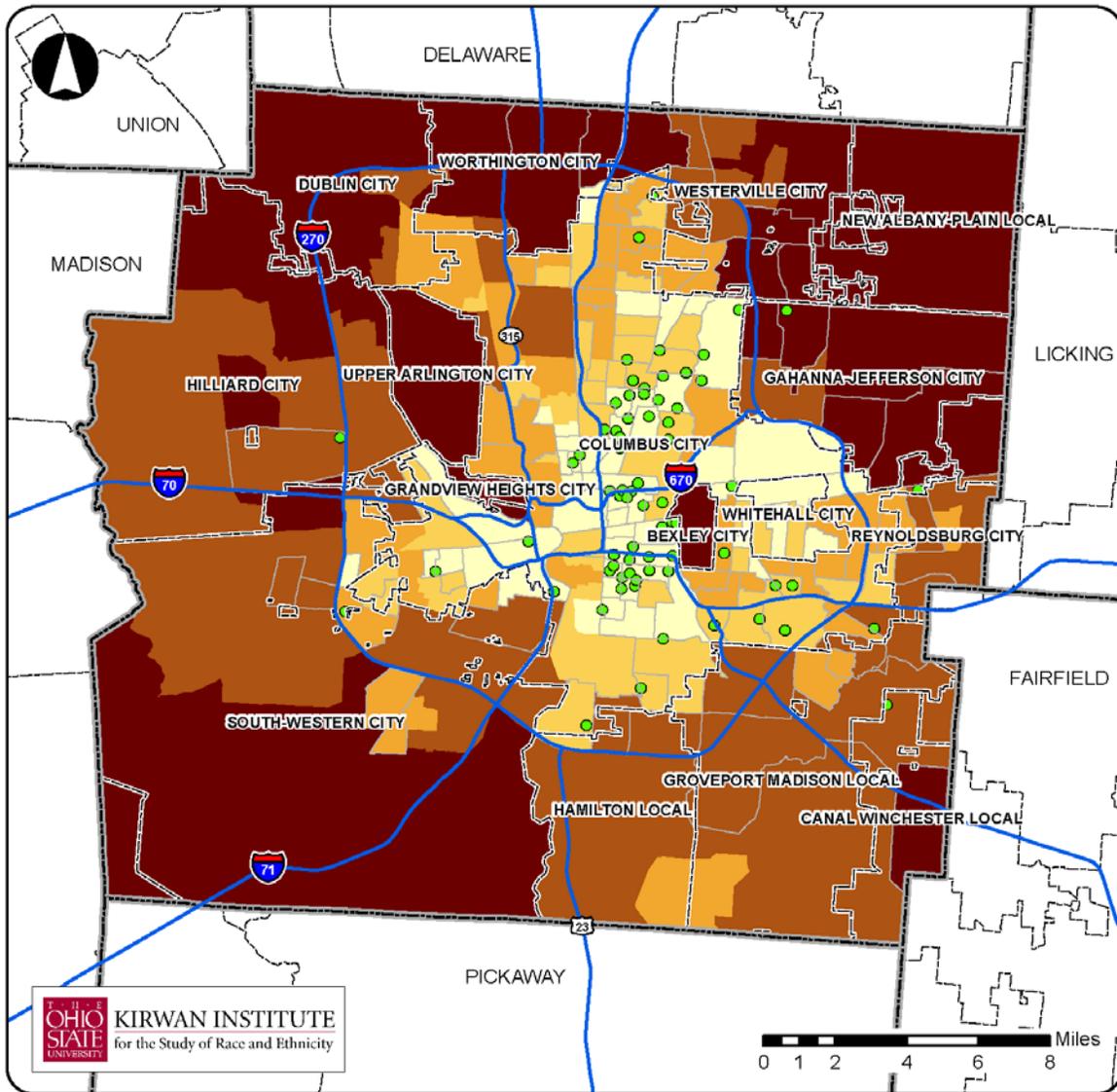
<b>AA HH Med Income</b>	School Districts
\$20,000 or below	County Boundaries
\$20,001 - \$30,000	Freeways
\$30,001 - \$50,000	
\$50,000 or higher	
No AA Population	

This opportunity map displays the distribution of median household income of African American population in Franklin County, Ohio.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 4. African American Girls in Poverty and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio



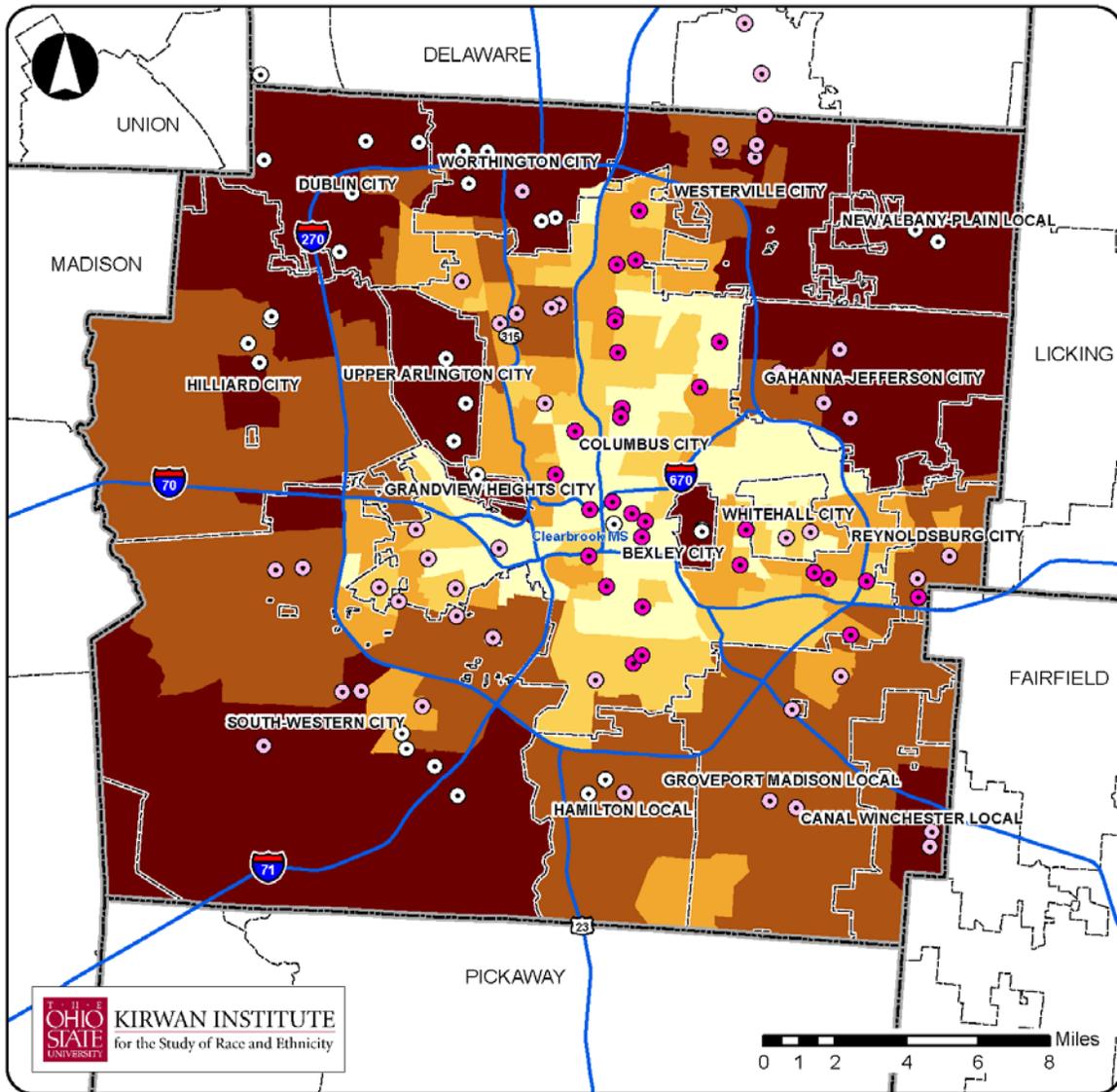
AA Girls in poverty	Opportunity Index
1 Dot = 30	Very Low Opportunity
BFovF12017	Low Opportunity
School Districts	Middle Opportunity
County Boundaries	High Opportunity
Freeways	Very High Opportunity

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of African American girls (ages 12-17) in poverty in Franklin County, Ohio.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 5. African American Female Student Enrollment and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio



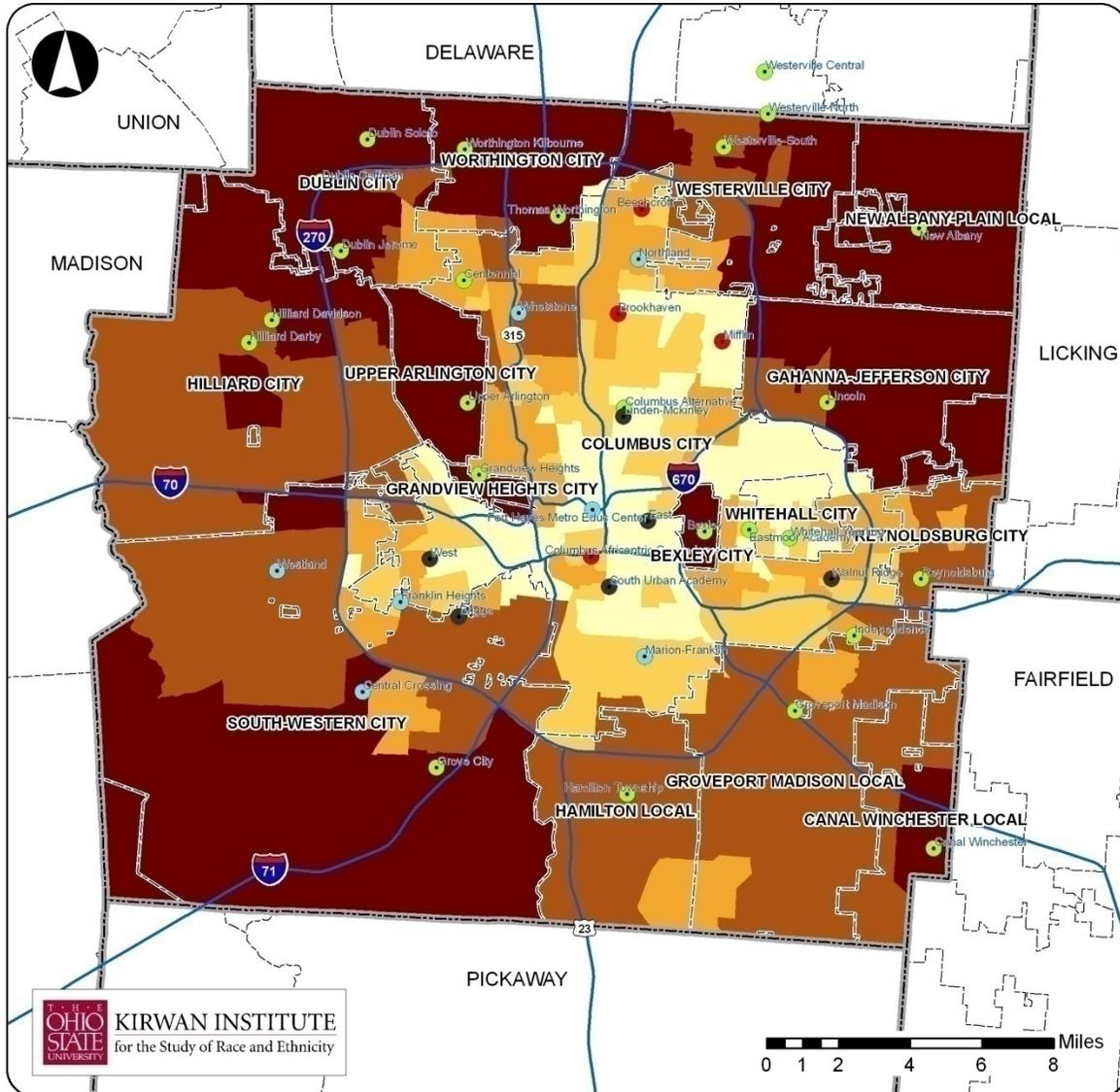
% AA Girl Enrollment	Opportunity Index
○ (white with black outline)	Very Low Opportunity
○ (pink with black outline)	Low Opportunity
● (solid pink)	Middle Opportunity
— (dashed line)	High Opportunity
— (solid line)	Very High Opportunity
— (dotted line)	School Districts
— (thick solid line)	County Boundaries
— (blue line)	Freeways

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of African American female student enrollment for 2008-2009 school year in secondary schools in Franklin County, Ohio.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 6. High School Graduation Rates and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio

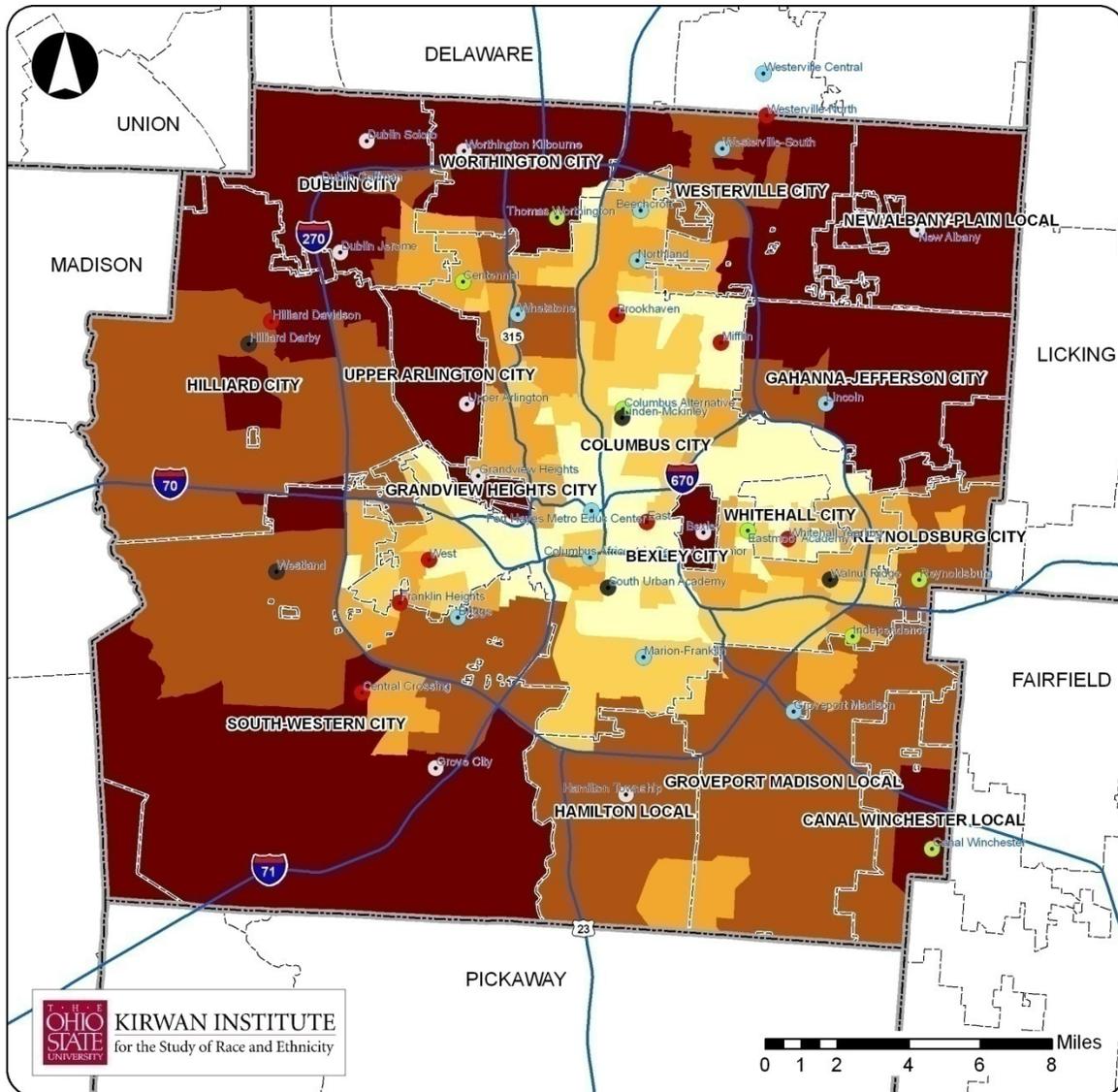


High Sch. Grad. Rate	Opportunity Index
● 70% or below	Very Low Opportunity
● 70.01 - 80%	Low Opportunity
● 80.01 - 90%	Middle Opportunity
● Above 90%	High Opportunity
○ School Districts	Very High Opportunity
— County Boundaries	
— Freeways	

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of high school graduation rates for 2007-2008 school year.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

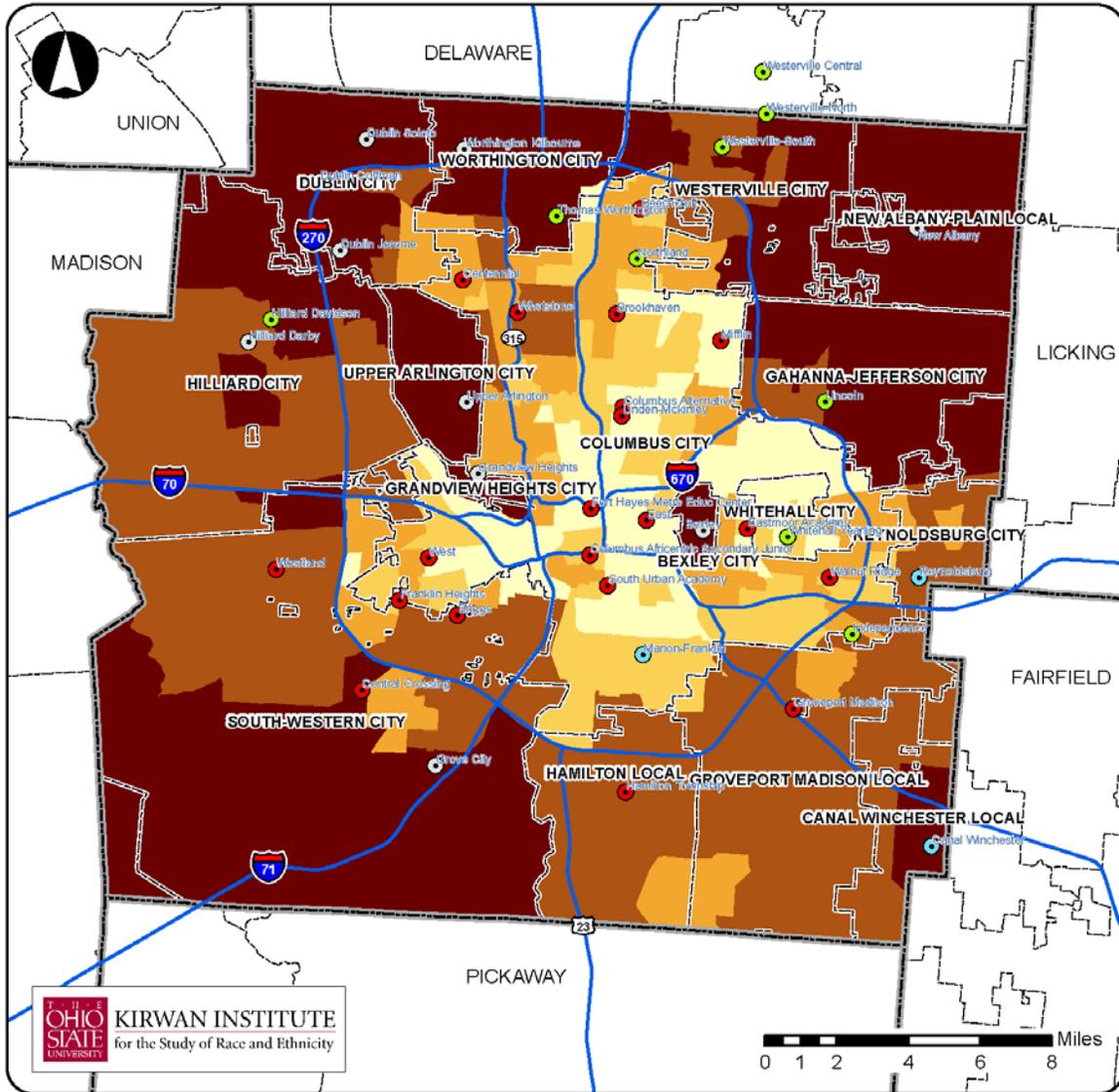
# Map 7. High School Graduation Rate of African American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Map Franklin County, Ohio



This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of high school graduation rates of African American girls for 2007-2008 school year.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 8. High School Graduation with Honors of African American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Franklin County, Ohio



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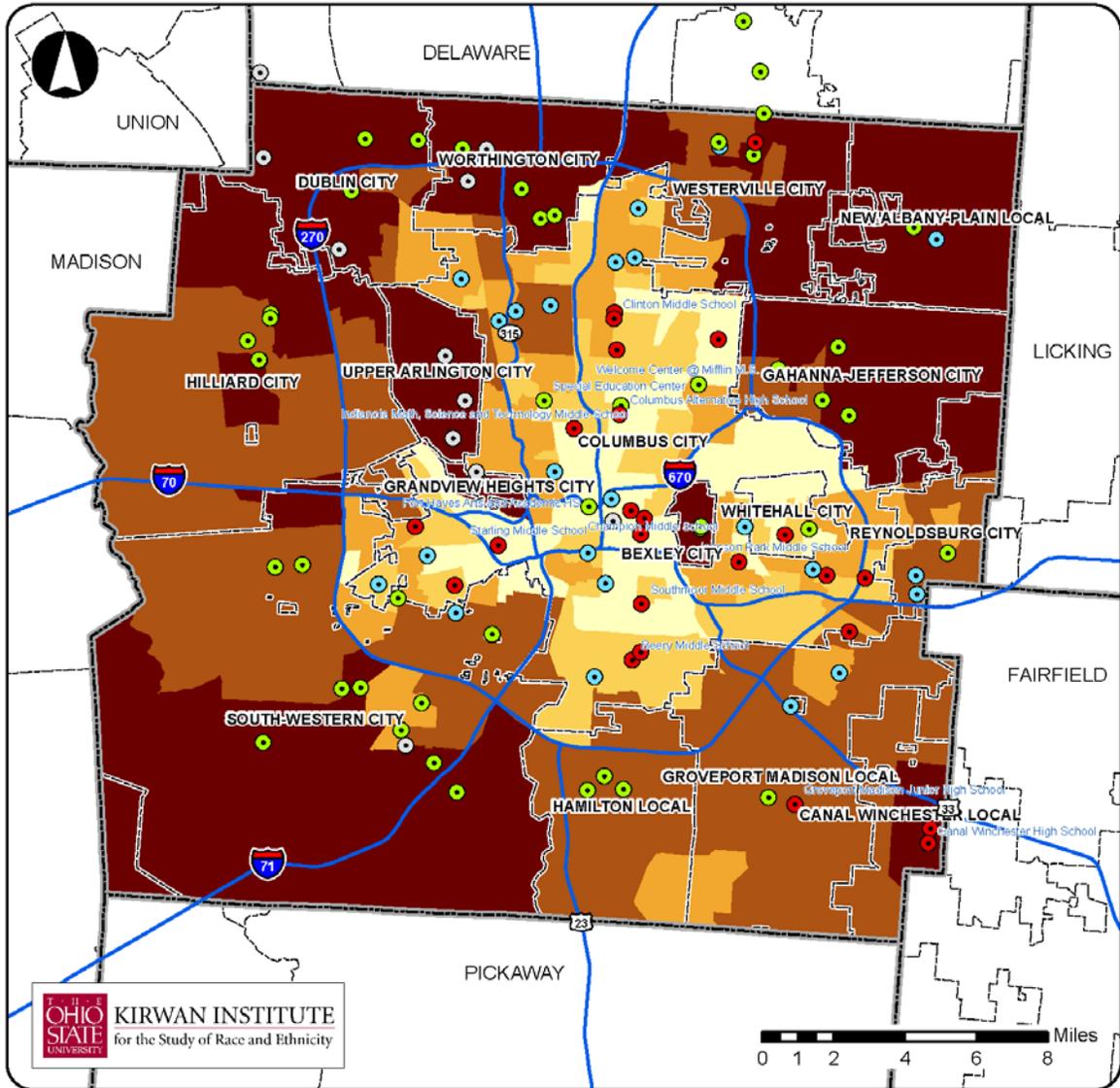
HS Grad Honors - AA Girls	Opportunity Index
5% or below	Very Low Opportunity
5.01 - 10%	Low Opportunity
Above 10%	Middle Opportunity
No Data for AA Girls	High Opportunity
School Districts	Very High Opportunity
County Boundaries	Freeways

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of rates of high school graduation with honors for African American girls in 2007-2008 school year.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 9. Disciplinary Action on African American Female Students and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio



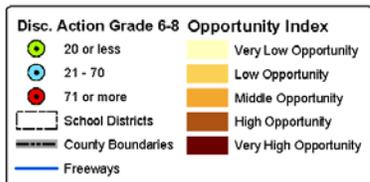
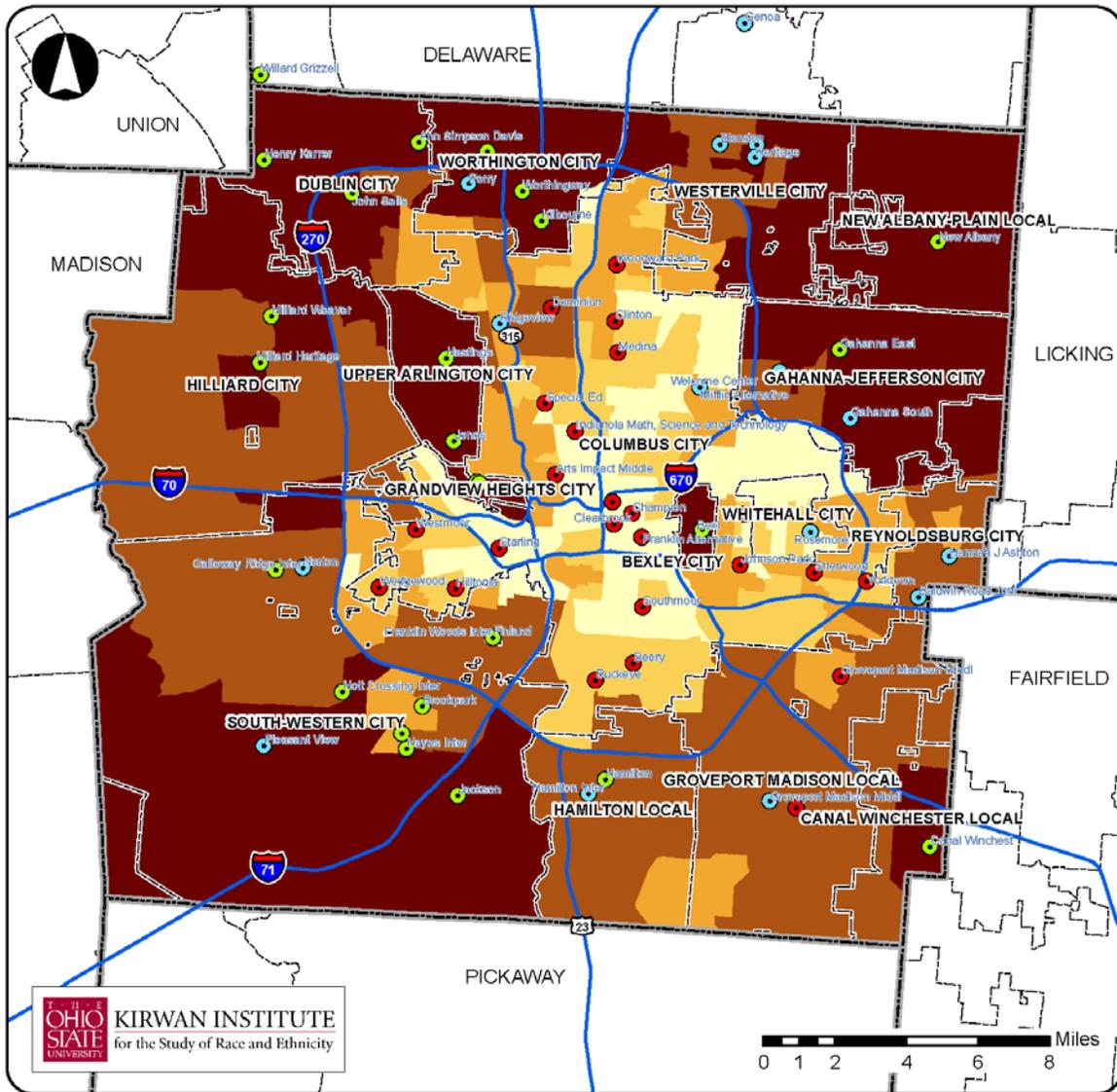
Disc. Action per 100 AA Girls	Opportunity Index
50 or less	Very Low Opportunity
51 - 100	Low Opportunity
101 or more	Middle Opportunity
No Data for AA Girls	High Opportunity
School Districts	Very High Opportunity
County Boundaries	Freeways

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of disciplinary actions per 100 African American female students in secondary schools for 2008-2009 school year.

**Sources:** U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
**Date:** August 12, 2010

# Map 10. Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 6-8 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio

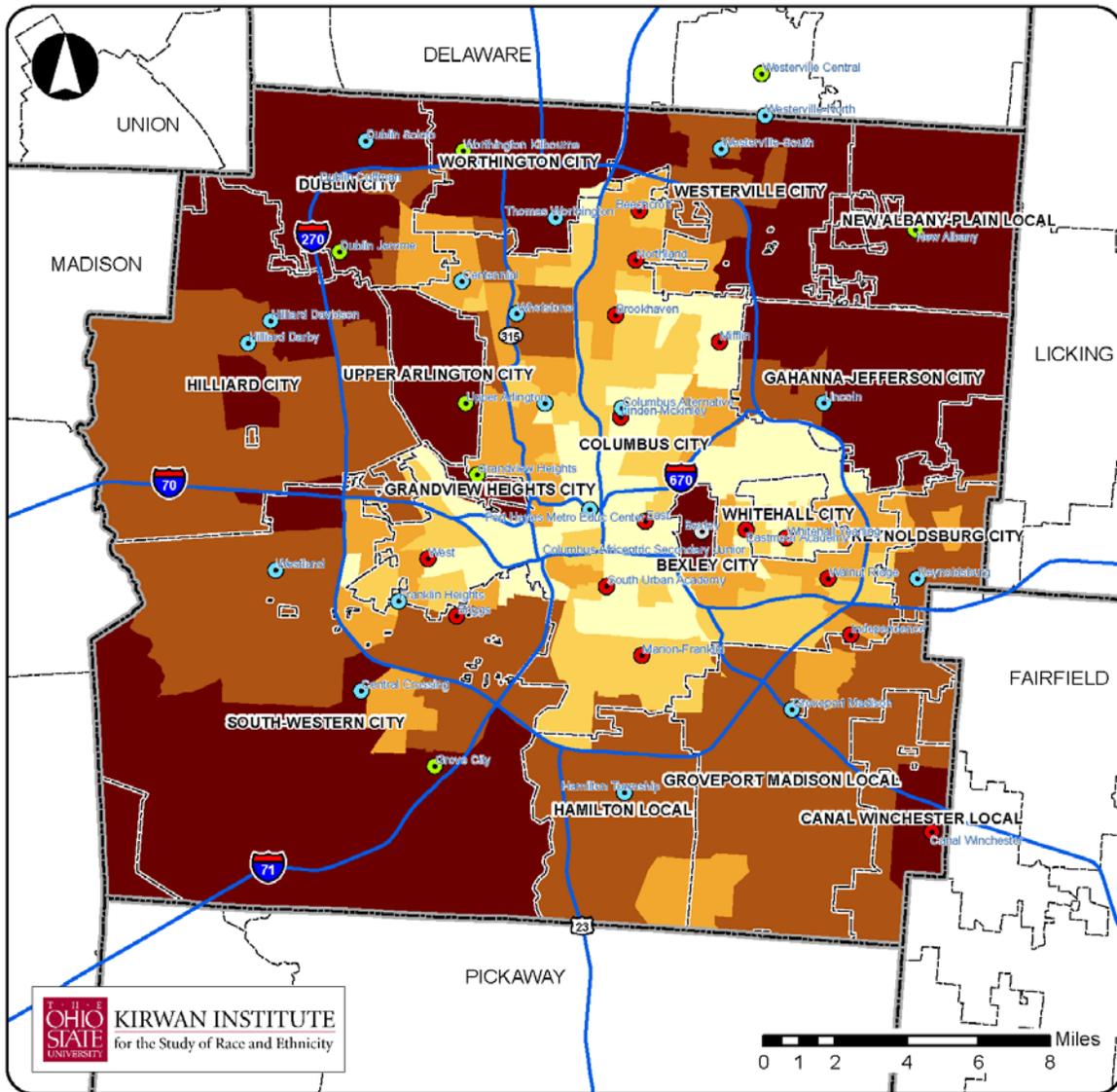


This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of average disciplinary actions per 100 students in grades 6-8 for 2008-2009 school year

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
Date: August 12, 2010

# Map 11. Disciplinary Action on Students in Grades 9-12 and Neighborhood Opportunity Map

Franklin County, Ohio



Disc. Action Grade 9-12	Opportunity Index
● 20 or less	Very Low Opportunity
● 21 - 70	Low Opportunity
● 71 or more	Middle Opportunity
○ No Data	High Opportunity
□ School Districts	Very High Opportunity
▬ County Boundaries	Freeways

This opportunity map represents a comprehensive index of several factors measuring neighborhood quality and opportunity with an overlay of average disciplinary actions per 100 students in grades 9-12 for 2008-2009 school year

Sources: U.S. Census 2000, Ohio Department of Education.  
Date: August 12, 2010

# Service Provider Interviews

## Overview

In phase II of this project we looked at the goals, challenges, observations and experiences of agencies serving Black girls in Franklin County. We explored the types of services and support offered, the goals of existing programs, and the need for additional programs. We understand that service provision can happen both formally and informally, and spans a number of different types of organizations. To this end, we reached out to governmental agencies including schools and hospitals, national organizations with a presence in Columbus, religious institutions, and community-based organizations.

We amassed a list of more than one hundred service providers and reached out to them both via email and phone calls. Of those contacted, we interviewed 36 people. It is important to note that while we reached out to service providers across the county, by and large those contacted represent organizations primarily serving lower income African-Americans, most often in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. A few organizations indicated that while African-American girls were represented in their client base, there was not a significant enough population to be able to generalize to the entire population.

The voices of all the participating service providers help shape the landscape of services available and utilized by Black girls in the Columbus Region. The following represents the questions and responses garnered during this interview process:

*What types of services and support do you offer for African-American girls?*

A range of services is available to African-American girls focusing on academic, social, psychological and spiritual development. Those programs focused on learning and education include: community and school based mentoring, education programs, truancy programs, after school tutoring and learning programs, financial literacy classes, art enrichment, and summer camps. There are also a range of prevention programs focusing on developing healthy relationships, increasing self-esteem, preventing violence, developing conflict resolutions skills, educating girls about reproductive health care and sex education, and teaching about the dangers and effects of alcohol and drug use and addiction. Finally, there are a number of programs aimed at redressing existing issues such as a program to stop recidivism for violent and non-violent offenders, programs for pregnant teens, and support programs for youth with incarcerated parents. In addition to programs focusing on the physical health of Black girls (most often those related to reproductive issues), there are a number of programs available to address mental health issues.

*Are any of your services designed exclusively for African-American girls?*

Overwhelmingly the majority of programs were not designed exclusively for African-American girls, although in many instances they were the primary beneficiaries of the programs. Some service providers expressed frustration that more programs were not designed for African-American girls, while others thought that to do so would be discriminatory. Many articulated the

challenges related to designing and implementing a program designed exclusively for African-American girls including: a lack of awareness of existing research-based programs, a shortage in culturally competent staff to run such a program, a lack of available funding for such a program, or the inability for a service provider to discriminate on the basis of race or gender. Several mentioned the tendency for the field to adapt programs designed for African-American boys and apply them to girls, often with poor results.

*If yes, what is the focus of these services (i.e. mental health, self-esteem, relationships, etc.)?*

Programs that were dedicated specifically to African-American girls include a scholarship program aimed to support excellence in the arts, a program providing college tours for African-American girls, and an education program focused on sexual and reproductive health. Several programs were functionally dedicated to African-American girls and include a focus on academics, decision making, mental health, and reproductive health.

*If no, do you feel it would be helpful to have services that focus exclusively on this group? If you had adequate funding to implement some of these services exclusively for African-American girls, what topics/issues would you focus on?*

Many expressed an interest and need for dedicated programming for African-American girls. Service providers discussed a desire for programs that focused on: development of self-esteem and self worth, healthy living, sexual health, dating violence, obesity and nutrition, enhancing financial skills, anger management and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Some expressed a desire to keep programs diverse and inclusive as they identified specific benefits that arise from integration.

*What is your goal/what do you hope to achieve with African-American girls through the programming that you do?*

Service providers named a range of goals across social, psychological, and academic spectrums. Several programs aimed to increase academic performance, promote graduation, and help African-American girls get to college. Some programs focused on helping girls define their career path, and more broadly embrace a vision of a hopeful future. A few agencies had programs to help girls increase their self-esteem, including one program that explicitly focused on improving media literacy. Other programs hoped to foster better decision making skills including those around violence, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Similarly, a number of programs and services were aimed at keeping girls sexually, physically and psychologically healthy. Finally, one group aimed to instill a sense of civic responsibility and community ownership in African-American girls.

*In your experience working with African-American girls (ages 12-19), what are some of the main issues African-American girls are presented with?*

Service providers were able to identify a number of challenges African-American girls face, ranging from the personal to the structural. Many recognized the challenging community and home environments many girls are experiencing. In neighborhoods of concentrated poverty,

schools are likely to be lower performing, and there is a likelihood that a number of institutional factors in schools may negatively affect the girls including a lack of cultural competency amongst school personnel, and students of color being subjected to more frequent and harsher disciplinary measures. Those girls residing in lower income neighborhoods also have a higher likelihood of experiencing or witnessing violence and/or trauma, being exposed to drugs or alcohol, not experiencing a supportive home or community environment, being raised in a single parent household, and/or not being adequately supervised by a parent or caregiver.

Service providers also mentioned that African-American girls are experiencing harmful media messages about what it means to be a Black girl or woman in our society, and many experience racism as part of their daily lives. As a result service providers feel that many girls have lower levels of self-esteem, a lack of self pride, few role models (that are not hyper-sexualized), and poor conflict resolution or socialization skills. Many felt that as an extension African-American girls are turning toward physical violence, or engaging in unhealthy romantic relationships. This is compounded by the message girls receive that there are few options for a “good man” so girls are more reluctant to leave a relationship, even when violent, and many may engage in sexual behavior to gain acceptance from men, resulting in pregnancy or STIs.

A few service providers mentioned that African-American girls take on a number of different roles and identities both at home and at school. Many girls are given the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings at home, and girls may have to conform to different norms in the home, the school and the community. As a result of the above experiences, some felt that African-American girls have grown up too fast, and taken on too much responsibility.

*In terms of African-American girls, have you seen any trends or changes over time in presenting problems or resiliency, service demand, or changes in services provided?*

While some felt that the challenges facing African-American girls and their corresponding responses have remained consistent, others felt that the type and extent of problems were substantially worse. Service providers pointed to an increase in risky sexual behavior resulting in an increase in pregnancy rates for the first time in the past 20 years, and an increase in STIs including HIV. Others pointed to an increase in violence and gang activity, decreases in teen employment, and an increase in drug problems in Black girls’ homes and communities.

The feedback was not all negative, however. Several service providers reported an increase in African-Americans participating in some form of higher education, and as one respondent stated, “African-American girls have to be doing something right. They have the lowest rates of alcohol and tobacco use across all adolescent populations.”

Nearly all respondents indicated that there was a greater demand for services given the economic recession, and indicated a general lack of availability in funding for programs. Some pointed to the tendency to adopt programs designed for African-American boys for girls, and indicated that it is a problematic and ineffective way to design programming.

*What are the barriers you face in providing services to African-American girls?*

Universally, service providers indicated that funding was their largest barrier to providing services to African-American girls. This includes: an inability to secure funding for a program dedicated to African-American girls (particularly given the shortage of grants and resulting steeper competition), a shortage of funds that can be used for transportation to get girls or families to existing programs, an inability to hire support staff, a lack of space—particularly for private counseling—and a lack of funds to sponsor programmatic activities such as field trips or cultural events. Service providers also indicated a challenge in finding culturally competent support staff, and being able to retain staff when project-specific funding is constantly in flux.

Apart from financial barriers, other issues mentioned included a lack of trust on the part of the girls' families, including reluctance to allow teens to participate in programs related to sexual reproduction or sexual health. Others identified the challenge of working in such a limited sphere of influence. They felt that despite their best efforts the African-American girls were still returning to the problematic experiences in their homes and schools. One respondent also addressed the difficulty in establishing programs for school age children, outside of regular school hours. Programs have the potential to reach the most students when they are built into the curriculum; however, most schools located in high poverty, segregated neighborhoods are under resourced and many are eliminating all non-academic programs from their curriculum. Thus service providers and programs are getting squeezed out of schools and into time slots where they are in greater competition for students' time and attention.

*What do you need to be able to provide more services or improved services for this population?*

Service providers reiterated the need for money and in this case African-American womanpower, but also felt that additional supports could improve services for African-American girls. One service provider stressed the need for agencies to partner together rather than competing for grant dollars and students' participation. Another mentioned the need not only to collaborate, but to coordinate services across institutions (school, churches, county programs, etc.) and across family members. Service providers should be working to ensure that girls are not overwhelmed by services, but are receiving the right interventions at the right time. Another mentioned the need to bring the experiences of African-American girls into public discourse.

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## End Notes

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