



La Reyna's Journal

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A journal to write about anything that's on my mind.

Thursday, May 01, 2008

State of Minnesota's Girls of Color Report

This following article is from Kare11.com concerning Minnesota's girls/women of Color:

Report card on girls in Minnesota finds large ethnic gaps

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Girls in Minnesota on the whole perform above the national average in many key indicators of future success, but girls of color in the North star state are faring worse than their counterparts across the nation. That's a key finding released Monday by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, in it's "Status of Girls in Minnesota" report. "Families being able to meet their children's basic economic needs has a big impact on how children fare both in their adolescents and also in adulthood," said Erika Williams, who directed the study for the Women's Policy Research institute. "Poverty rates for girls and boys of color are dramatically higher than those of white girls and boys in the state," Williams explained, "As they move into adulthood women remain in

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poverty while that gap narrows for men."A staggering 43 percent of all African American girls in Minnesota are in households where the income is below the federal poverty line, which is the government's yardstick for determining eligibility for many assistance programs."In Minnesota female-headed families and those from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups, in particular, are at higher risk of living below the poverty line."On the bright side, Minnesota's girls overall are doing better the their peers around the nation. "Our research shows that Minnesota girls are full of promise and potential," said Lee Roper-Baker, who heads the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, "They work hard at home, in school and in their communities, they earn good grades, and they hold high aspirations for their futures.""By and large, girls in our state take responsibility for their bodies, and avoid many risky behaviors," Roper-Baker said, "At the same time there are many roadblocks to girls' success."She said racism, sexism and poverty all play roles in creating that gap. The foundation wants lawmakers to consider the opportunities they have to make a difference in the lives of young women."This research tells a story of two Minnesota's," Erica Williams told reporters at the Capitol, "One in which girls are largely doing pretty well, are working pretty hard, have low poverty rates overall."Her report suggest that Minnesota's high performing children may be hiding the jarring discrepancies that exist between white girls and girls of other races and ethnicities."Another in which girls of color have drastically higher poverty rates, and actually are more likely to be poor than girls of color in the nation as a whole."Girls of color are also far more likely to become teen mothers than their white counterparts in Minnesota, according to the study, and more likely to report sexual abuse outside and inside their home.It's a problem, the study suggests, that is both

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a cause and a symptom of living in poverty."Teen pregnancy among girls of color both limits their opportunities for education and economic stability, and results itself from limited opportunity," Representative Neva Walker of Minneapolis remarked.Representative Walker, who said she became a mother as a teenager herself, says the average parent struggles enough with raising kids."But just imagine how, if you would've had that child at 13 or 15 or 17, if you would be having that child without community support, without family support, without having the educational needs or financial opportunities to take care of your child."The group hopes the research will be put to use in the debate at the Capitol and in communities as they struggle with budget cuts, some for programs that help single mothers heading households."When girls don't a future for themselves outside of motherhood it puts them at risk," Walker said, "When girls don't have access to contraception or sex education because of lack of means or health care, it puts them at risk."For Walker it was an emotionally charged day at the Capitol. She's retiring from the legislature after this session, and was planning to make one last run at getting a comprehensive sex education bill passed in the House."Prevention is the key," Walker offered, "We have to do better for our girls. We have to make sure our girls are starting off on the same level plane as our boys going into adulthood." Sandra Vargas, who heads the Minneapolis Foundation, argued that spending priorities at the Capitol end up costing the state and its taxpayers more in the long run."Instead of putting investment up where it prevents and does early intervention," Vargas told reporters, "As a state we'd rather wait until a family and these young girls get pregnant and hit the criminal justice system, or some other kind of system, where it will cost taxpayers millions of dollars."As a long time

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administrator in Hennepin County she's seen how society as a whole is forced to deal with the lifelong costs of not helping children when they need it the most."We do not have the political will to do prevention and we do not have the political will to do early intervention," Vargas said, "Some how we have found we've got the political will to build more prisons."Suzanne Koeplinger, the director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Research Center, said girls of color are more often forced to deal with issues others can avoid."Many of our girls are facing challenges beyond their years including threats to their basic safety and security," Koeplinger told reporters, "The high percentage of American Indian, African American and Hispanic girls reporting sexual abuse is startling, and quite frankly, it's unacceptable."Self-esteem trends are also disturbing, given research that shows that girls self-esteem actually erodes over time while boys opinions of themselves improve with age. That's a trend that cuts across all racial and ethnic groups, according to the report.The Women's Foundation is launching what it calls the Road to Equality Tour to 15 communities in Minnesota, to gather more information and seek practical solutions.

Posted by Stephanie at 6:57 AM 

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