

# STRONGER, SMARTER, BOLDER: GIRLS TAKE THE LEAD

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

girls  
inc.

Inspiring all girls to be  
strong, smart, and bold

A rigorous comparative study by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) found that Girls Inc. girls have an advantage over their peers in more than 20 key areas. The findings demonstrate that girls not only thrive at Girls Inc., they are also more likely than other girls to see themselves as leaders, with the skills and capabilities of influencing and improving their local communities. These impressive findings led Girls Inc. to develop this major report. It highlights some of the most recent and significant research on girls, pointing to 11 key issues that shape their lives, and the connection to how the Girls Inc. Experience provides girls with the fundamental supports and opportunities to navigate the barriers they face.

While there are more women today in key leadership positions than ever before, there is still a pervasive gender gap in top leadership. Informed by both the AIR study and an understanding of what is happening in girls' lives, **Stronger, Smarter, Bolder: Girls Take the Lead**

proposes four crucial supports that allow girls to reach their potential and become strong leaders: **the right relationships; encouragement to develop and use their voices; a positive self-image; and intellectual confidence.**



### EVALUATING THE GIRLS INC. EXPERIENCE

At the heart of Girls Inc. is a comprehensive approach to whole girl development that equips girls to navigate gender, economic, and social barriers and to grow up healthy, educated, and independent. This approach—the Girls Inc. Experience—is the foundation of Girls Inc. programming, and it engages girls in opportunities and activities that develop skills and instill leadership characteristics. At Girls Inc., leadership development is woven throughout every girl's experience, regardless of age or curriculum. In the AIR assessment, participation in Girls Inc. programming is shown to make a measurable and marked difference in the lives of girls.

In 24 dimensions, Girls Inc. girls did significantly better than girls who had not had the Girls Inc. Experience. Girls Inc. girls were more likely to engage in pursuits and express beliefs that lead to physical and mental wellbeing, academic achievement, and strong character and leadership. (See back for full list of Positive Performance Measures.)

### FUELING THE STRENGTH IN EVERY GIRL

Plenty of work remains to erase the inequities that prevent girls from reaching their full potential as successful adults and leaders. By focusing on proven strategies and effective advocacy, organizations like Girls Inc. will play a crucial role in shaping whether and how our society rises to that challenge in the coming decade.

Key to this is a multi-layered understanding of girls and the issues that they face, both at the demographic and the more personal, individual level. Having established itself as an expert with a proven solution that works, Girls Inc. is now ideally positioned to advance the right policy initiatives, structures, and best practices to address the unique challenges that await girls, equipping them with the skills and tools to achieve their goals and take charge of their futures.

The **Stronger, Smarter, Bolder: Girls Take the Lead** report answers the question, "What can Girls Inc. and other successful youth serving organizations do for girls to allow them to take full advantage of their leadership potential?"

The answer lies in giving girls tools and opportunities. With these key supports, girls change their own circumstances. They change the circumstances of others around them. They change the world.



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### RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP & STUDY DETAILS

Girls Inc. has long known through daily observation, as well as internal evaluation, that the Girls Inc. Experience has positive and lasting effects for the girls who participate. In 2017, to back that understanding with independent research, Girls Inc. entered into a partnership with AIR, a not-for-profit research organization with best-in-class experts focused on social science research, evaluation, and technical assistance. With funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc., the Cummins Foundation, and the Girls Inc. National Board, the AIR research team, led by principal investigator Dr. Allison Dymnicki, examined the role of Girls Inc. in helping girls attain various outcomes. This study documents the ways in which girls are benefitting from Girls Inc. programming. The ultimate intent: to show what difference a high-quality Girls Inc. Experience makes in the lives of girls.

From 2017 to 2019, AIR implemented a quasi-experimental research study with four Girls Inc. affiliates and their school districts in small, medium, and large communities that were reflective of the larger Girls Inc. network.

The data from the study came from two main sources:

- a self-reported outcomes survey taken by girls age 9–18 that measures indicators of success in three areas (Strong/Healthy Living, Smart/Academic Success, and Bold/Life Skills, Character, and Social/Emotional Development), and
- school-related academic and behavioral data from partner schools.

To examine the impact of Girls Inc. on participants' academic and behavioral outcomes, compared to similar non-participating girls, AIR followed a three-stage approach. First, researchers used propensity score matching to identify a group of non-participating girls who were similar to Girls Inc. participants in the four selected districts. Second, AIR conducted multilevel regression models to examine differences in academic and behavioral outcomes between Girls Inc. girls and similar non-participating girls, separately for each district. Third, the research team pooled the individual district effects for each outcome across the four districts using meta-analysis. Statistical sampling techniques ensured that the groups of girls were as similar as possible, allowing for confidence that any positive results are due to Girls Inc. programming rather than other factors.

### POSITIVE PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Girls Inc. girls outperform peers in the following areas:

#### ACADEMIC RECORD OUTCOMES

1. Standardized English/language arts test scores
2. Standardized math test scores
3. School attendance
4. Suspensions from school

#### STRONG OUTCOMES

1. Exercise regularly
2. Play on a sports team
3. Happy with my body

#### SMART OUTCOMES

1. Science is fun
2. Science confidence
3. Understand science
4. Enjoy seeing how things are made
5. Curious about science
6. Want a science job
7. Excited about science
8. Enjoy science games
9. Math is fun
10. Math confidence
11. Reading confidence
12. Postsecondary readiness
13. School engagement

#### BOLD OUTCOMES

1. Leadership
2. Positive relationship with adults
3. Stands up for fairness and beliefs
4. Civic efficacy

