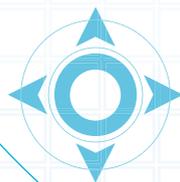




# WHERE THE GIRLS ARE

THE FACTS ABOUT GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION





**WHERE THE GIRLS ARE:  
THE FACTS ABOUT GENDER  
EQUITY IN EDUCATION**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





*Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education* presents a comprehensive look at girls' educational achievement during the past 35 years, paying special attention to the relationship between girls' and boys' progress. Analyses of results from national standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the SAT and ACT college entrance examinations, as well as other measures of educational achievement, provide an overall picture of trends in gender equity from elementary school to college and beyond. Differences among girls and among boys by race/ethnicity and family income level are evaluated. Together these analyses support three overarching facts about gender equity in schools today:

### **1. Girls' successes don't come at boys' expense.**

Educational achievement is not a zero-sum game, in which a gain for one group results in a corresponding loss for the other. If girls' success comes at the expense of boys, one would expect to see boys' scores decline as girls' scores rise, but this has not been the case. Geographical patterns further demonstrate the positive connection between girls' and boys' educational achievement. In states where girls do well on tests, boys also do well, and states with low test scores among boys tend to also have low scores among girls.

High school and college graduation rates present a similar story. Women are attending and graduating from high school and college at a higher rate than are their male peers, but these gains have not come at men's expense. Indeed, the proportion of young men graduating from high school and earning college degrees today is at an all-time high. Women have made more rapid gains in earning college degrees, especially among older students, where women outnumber men by a ratio of almost 2-to-1. The gender gap in college attendance is almost absent among those entering college directly after graduating from high school, however, and both women and men are more likely to graduate from college today than ever before.

### **2. On average, girls' and boys' educational performance has improved.**

From standardized tests in elementary and secondary school to college entrance examinations, average test scores have risen or remained

stable for both girls and boys in recent decades. Similarly, both women and men are more likely to graduate from high school and college today than ever before.

### **3. Understanding disparities by race/ethnicity and family income level is critical to understanding girls' and boys' achievement.**

Family income level and race/ethnicity are closely associated with academic performance. On standardized tests such as the NAEP, SAT, and ACT, children from the lowest-income families have the lowest average test scores, with an incremental rise in family income associated with a rise in test scores. Race/ethnicity is also strongly connected to test scores, with African American and Hispanic children—both girls and boys—scoring lower than white and Asian American children score.

Gender differences in educational achievement vary by race/ethnicity and family income level. For example, girls often have outperformed boys within each racial/ethnic group on the NAEP reading test. When broken down by race/ethnicity, however, this gender gap is found to be most consistent among white students, less so among African American students, and least among Hispanic students. Similarly, boys overall have outperformed girls on both the math and verbal portions of the SAT. Disaggregated by family income level, however, the male advantage on the verbal portion of the SAT is consistently seen only among students from low-income families. Gender differences seen in one group are not always replicated within another group.

Drawing from educational indicators from fourth grade to college, this report examines gender equity trends since the 1970s. The results put to rest fears of a “boys’ crisis” in education, demonstrating that girls’ gains have not come at boys’ expense. Overall, educational outcomes for both girls and boys have generally improved or stayed the same. Girls have made especially rapid gains in many areas, but boys are also gaining ground on most indicators of educational achievement. Large discrepancies by race/ethnicity and family income

level remain. These long-standing inequalities could be considered a “crisis” in the sense that action is needed urgently. But the crisis is not specific to boys; rather, it is a crisis for African American, Hispanic, and low-income children. 

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