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The Status of Girls in North Carolina 2013



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President's Message

As President of Meredith College, I am pleased to present this research report on the *Status of Girls in North Carolina*. The report should inform educators, policy makers, legislators, health professionals and others on the ways that girls are and are not thriving in our state. Equally, it should inspire all North Carolina citizens to action in enhancing the ways that we can promote the well-being of girls—the very children who will so meaningfully affect the future well-being of us all.

Recognizing the impact of girls and women in our society—as primary providers of education, health care, and home stability, for instance, and with an increasing leadership presence in corporations and not-for-profit institutions—the report identifies particular attributes of North Carolina girls' lives in the 21st century that we should celebrate and those we should mobilize to change. At the very least, we must realize that as girls thrive, they create better (safer, more affluent, healthier, better educated, more stable) families and communities where all people can flourish.

Although we educate both men and women at the graduate level, Meredith's proud history as a women's college at the undergraduate level flourishes as we pay attention to girls, the pipeline of future students at Meredith College and future leaders for our state, nation and world. Ultimately, we may agree that if we want the citizens of North Carolina to have better lives, we must pay attention to this pipeline and ensure that girls have opportunities, education and support for fulfilling their dreams and leading lives of wisdom and good judgment, confidence and integrity.

I am indebted to Amie Hess, assistant professor of sociology, and her undergraduate research assistants Bailey Dunn and Heather Losee for their work in compiling the data for this report, as well as the faculty and staff who provided research, ideas and support. Special thanks goes to the graphic design students at Meredith under the instruction of Dana Gay, associate professor of art, for the layout and design of the report.

I hope you are inspired by this report to preserve and enhance the quality of life for North Carolina's girls.



Jo Allen
President
Meredith College

The Status of Girls in North Carolina Executive Summary

Prior to the release of *The Status of Girls in North Carolina*, a report by Meredith College, little data had been compiled to document the status of girls within the state. This report closes that intelligence gap by providing detailed information about the dynamics that impact girls' lives in North Carolina. Focusing on data from seven content areas—demographics and poverty, education, media engagement, physical health, mental health, sexual health, and leadership and civic engagement—the report highlights areas in which girls in North Carolina are making strides, areas in need of improvement and areas of disparity among girls.

To prepare the report, information was collected from more than a dozen different national and state datasets. Many of the statistics within the report have been computed for the first time for North Carolina girls, or for specific subpopulations. Where possible, the report makes comparisons among girls by age, grade level or racial and ethnic status, and differences between girls and boys are evaluated where appropriate. The outcomes for girls in North Carolina are compared to national data and some trends over time. This process has revealed many areas in which data on the lives of girls is insufficient. As an institution, Meredith considers this report to be a baseline of information and hopes to update, augment and expand the findings at regular intervals in the future.

Demographics and Poverty

Girls in North Carolina are being raised in increasingly diverse family structures with increasingly diverse incomes. Poverty rates among North Carolina's girls are high, but not all girls are equally at risk for living in poverty. One in three African American, Latina and American Indian girls ages 5-17 are living in poverty; among girls under 5 years old, the number jumps to nearly 50%. Children growing up with a single mother are likely to be classified as poor or low-income. In North Carolina, almost 21% of families are headed by a single mother, and in 2011, over 44% of those families lived below the poverty line.

Education

In the 2011-12 academic year, more than two-thirds of girls in elementary and middle school passed End of Grade (EOG) examinations in science, math and reading. The passing rate for EOG exams taken by African American and Latina girls in elementary and middle school is lower than that of white and Asian girls of the same age. The gap in achievement persists into high school, but it does narrow. Girls throughout the state are overcoming the stereotype that they are either not interested or not skilled in science or math. Three out of four girls in North Carolina's high schools passed End of Course examinations in Biology and Algebra I, and young women make up nearly half of the students enrolled in the state's science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)-focused high schools. The dropout rate in North Carolina has been on the decline since 2005, but a girl's likelihood of dropping out of school varies considerably based on her race or ethnicity.

Media Engagement

Like their contemporaries across the country, girls in North Carolina spend a significant amount of time consuming traditional and new media. Television consumption rates have decreased over the last five years, with 40% of middle school girls and over 30% of high school girls in the state spending three hours or more watching television on an average school day. The rate of girls in North Carolina engaging in social media has increased, with girls using social media to connect with peers and participate in online communities. However, one in five high school females and one in four middle school females reports being cyberbullied or harassed through new media technologies, which include texting, social media, instant messaging and email.

Physical Health

With a national emphasis on childhood obesity, the physical health of girls in North Carolina is a key component to determining their overall status. Rates of obesity across the state have held steady over the previous decade, while rates of girls considered overweight are on the rise. However, the rate of girls describing themselves as overweight is higher than the number of girls who are classified as such. These girls are susceptible to developing risky and problematic behaviors to combat what may or may not be an actual weight problem.

Mental Health

North Carolina's female teens fare relatively well compared to the national average in self-reports of depression and serious consideration of suicide. Many young women, in both middle and high schools, and across races and ethnicities, experience depression-like feelings of sadness. One in four girls in middle school has seriously considered suicide. Young women in North Carolina's high schools report persistently high levels of depression, but low rates of suicide or attempted suicide.

Sexual Health

Rates of teenage pregnancy have declined steadily over the previous two decades, but the pregnancy rate for girls in North Carolina remains slightly higher than the national average. The percentage of young women who have engaged in sexual intercourse prior to graduating high school has also decreased, and the young women who do have sex while in high school are more likely to be in their junior or senior year. Parents and families are communicating their expectations to young women about sex—over 80% of North Carolina's high school females report talking to their parents or another adult family member about sex. Despite the rise in communication about sex, women in North Carolina contract certain sexually transmitted diseases at rates higher than the national average.

Leadership and Civic Engagement

The number of girls in North Carolina participating in leadership and civic activities is on the rise. Young women (including, but not solely, teens) report volunteering within their communities and one-third have made a donation of at least \$25 to a charitable, political or nonprofit organization. As a result of legislation geared toward advancing girls' opportunities in schools, over 40% of high school females participate in school sports. While the rates of participation are higher for male students, the disparity between males and females has decreased substantially since 1990.

Part of empowering girls in North Carolina to thrive is to know the ways in which they already succeed and where they would benefit from additional support. Findings from the report suggest that girls are experiencing success in their academic and leadership pursuits and improvements in areas of physical, mental and sexual health. While some findings of the report are encouraging, it also highlights the tremendous differences among girls, in terms of both racial and ethnic status and age. This challenge requires a solution to strengthen positive life outcomes among all girls in North Carolina.

To read the full report, visit meredith.edu/status-ncgirls

To learn more about Meredith College, visit meredith.edu/about

Demographics, Poverty and Economic Security

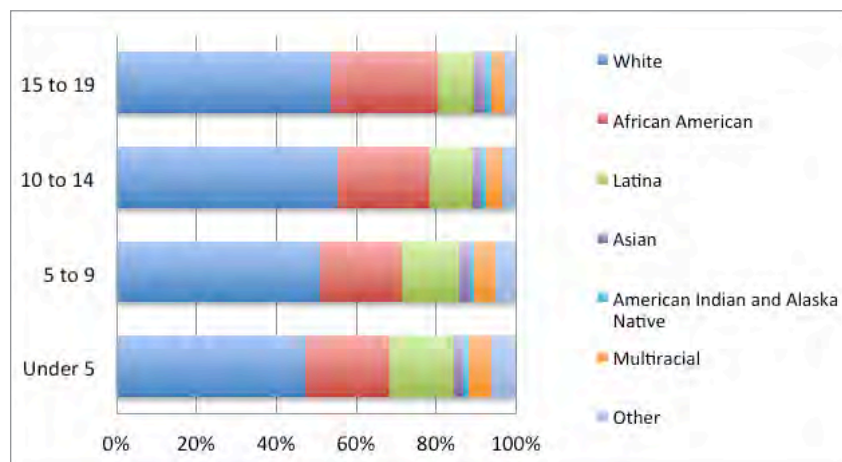
Females make up 51.3% of North Carolina's current population of over 9.5 million residents.¹ The total female population of youth under 20 in North Carolina is 1,249,843, slightly more than 13% of the state's total population.² Females in North Carolina are at great risk for poverty. This is particularly true of single mothers and very young girls. Almost half of North Carolina's children are either low-income or poor.³

Demographics

North Carolina has experienced annual population growth rates averaging almost 2% over the last two decades.⁴ In 2010, North Carolina's population grew by about 1.5%, outpacing the United States growth rate as a whole. Between 2000 and 2010 North Carolina added almost 1.5 million residents, making it one of the fastest growing states in the country.⁵ The Raleigh-Cary area ranks as the fourth fastest growing metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in the country.⁶ The growth has primarily been concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the state. While some areas of the state are seeing a lot of growth, other areas are experiencing population losses. Over half of all rural counties have experienced population loss. Counties in the central region were those most likely to experience high growth between 2010 and 2011, while counties in the eastern region were most likely to experience population loss.⁷

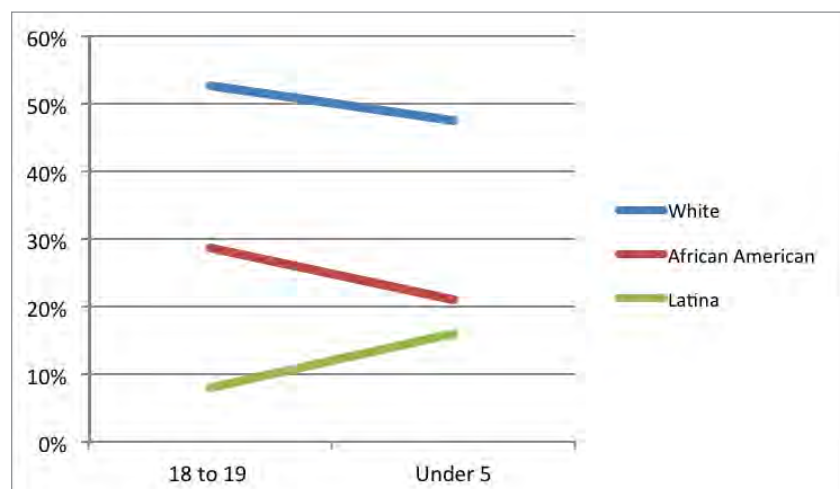
While overall birth rates have remained relatively constant in North Carolina, the racial/ethnic makeup of the girls who call North Carolina home is clearly changing.

Figure 1. Percent of girls in North Carolina, by race/ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010.

North Carolina's shifting demographics are particularly noticeable among the youngest girls in the state. The share of girls in North Carolina of Latina origin and those identifying as multiracial is growing while the percentage of both white and African American young girls in North Carolina is declining.

Figure 2. Percentage of North Carolina females by age and race/ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010.

Immigration Status

Ninety-seven percent of girls under 18 in North Carolina and 92% of women 18 and over are native born.⁸ Orange County has the largest proportion of foreign-born girls under 18 at slightly over 9%. Of those young women, almost 3% are naturalized citizens, while 6.18% are non-citizens.⁹ Only in Orange, Duplin, Lee, Chatham and Forsyth counties are more than 5% of girls under 18 non-citizens. North Carolina's female immigrant population is primarily clustered in the central (Piedmont) region. Two of the top ten counties are in the Eastern region of the state.¹⁰

Family Demographics

North Carolina's children are growing up today in a variety of family configurations. At present, data is difficult to find on all the possible configurations that exist.¹¹ The information available shows the majority of children are growing up in homes with two married parents, but those numbers have declined since 2000.¹² Children in North Carolina are now more likely to grow up in a single parent household than they were a decade ago.

Table 1. Percentage of North Carolina children by family type

	2000	2010
Married Couple	73%	67%
Single Mother	22%	27%
Single Father	5%	6%

Sources: U.S. Census, 2010; U.S. Census, 2000.

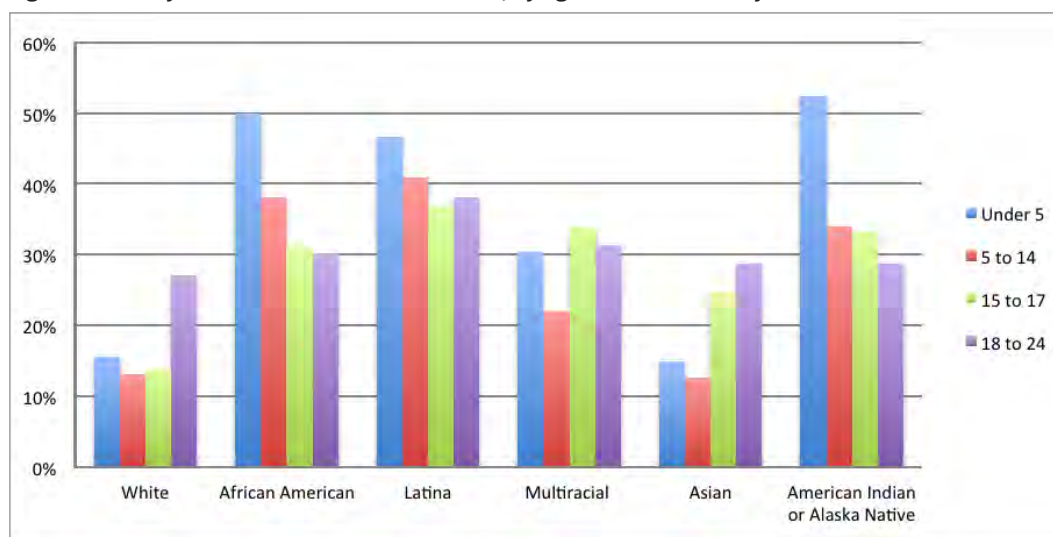
The percentage of children in North Carolina living with single parents, particularly single mothers, has increased while the percentage of children living within a two-parent married family declined between 2000 and 2010. Additionally, there is a small, but increasing, number of children growing up in homes with same-sex parents. There are 3,380 same-sex couples raising their "own"¹³ children in North Carolina.¹⁴ Approximately 2.6% of children in North Carolina are living with same-sex couples.¹⁵

Child Poverty

North Carolina, like the rest of the nation, is slowly emerging from the recession. The state's struggling economy directly impacts North Carolina's children. The latest data on the economic security of North Carolina's girls and young women shows the growing poverty rate of the youngest girls and the severe economic struggles of families headed by women. According to the current federal poverty guidelines, a child is considered poor if she lives in a family of four whose income falls below \$23,050.¹⁶ Most poverty experts agree that it takes an income at least twice the federal poverty line for a family to survive and cover key expenses.¹⁷

Nationally, about 21% of children live in poverty while approximately 44% are considered low-income (defined as twice the poverty line).¹⁸ Twenty-five percent of North Carolina's children are poor.¹⁹ North Carolina has the 10th highest rate of child poverty nationally and saw an increase of approximately 10% in the number of poor children between 2009 and 2010.²⁰ An additional 23% of the state's children are considered low-income. Almost half of the state's children are in or near poverty.

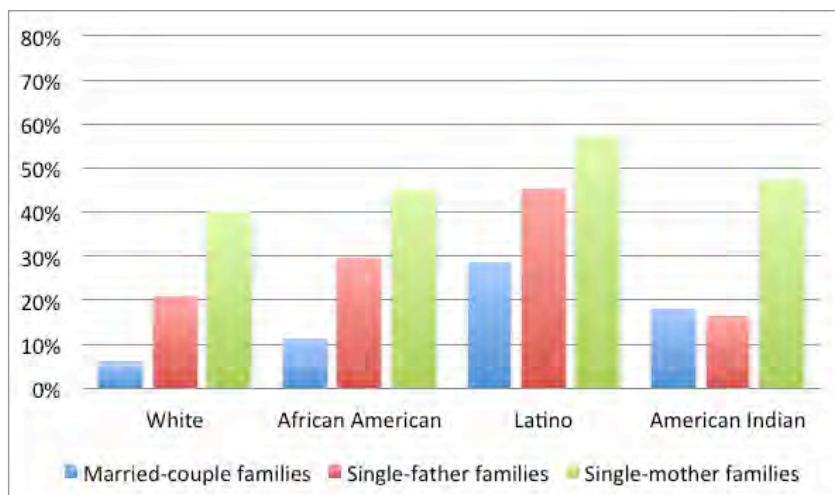
Figure 3. Poverty status of North Carolina females, by age and race/ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010.

Poverty rates among North Carolina's girls are high, but not all girls are equally at risk for living in poverty. First, non-white girls, with the exception of those of Asian descent, are at far greater risk of living in poverty when compared to their white counterparts. This pattern holds at all ages. Second, the youngest girls—those under 5 years old—are most likely to be poor across racial and ethnic categories.

In the same way that the relative risk of a girl living in poverty differs by her age and racial/ethnic status, it also differs by family type. While the median income for families in North Carolina is \$52,920, that average hides quite a bit of disparity.²¹ For example, among families headed by a single mother, the average annual income is just slightly over \$25,000. This means that children growing up in with a single mother are very likely to be poor or low-income. Families headed by women make up almost 21% of families in North Carolina, and in 2011, over 44% of those families lived below the poverty line.²²

Figure 4. Percentage of families living in poverty with children, by race/ethnicity

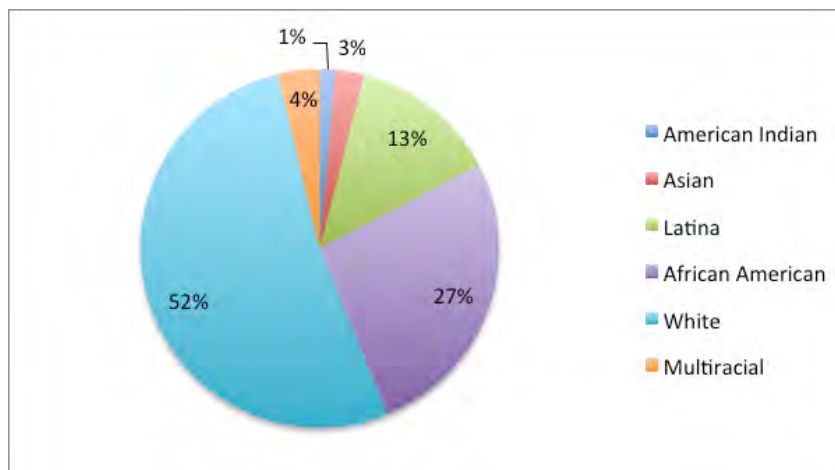
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011.

Cause for Concern

Residents should celebrate the increasing diversity among the girls in North Carolina. However, the increased likelihood of poverty among non-white and very young girls is troubling. North Carolina needs to find a way to support all its residents. The rate of poverty in families headed by a lone woman (single-mother) is also cause for concern. Mothers must be supported with adequate wages and affordable, high-quality childcare in order to provide for their families.

Education

There is much to celebrate in the educational achievements among girls in North Carolina. In the 2010–11 school year, an overwhelming majority of 5th through 8th grade girls were at or above a Level III passing score in End of Grade (EOG) examinations in math and reading and 75% of 8th grade girls passed the science EOG examination. However, there are serious racial/ethnic disparities among North Carolina's female students.

Figure 5. Female school enrollment, 2011–12

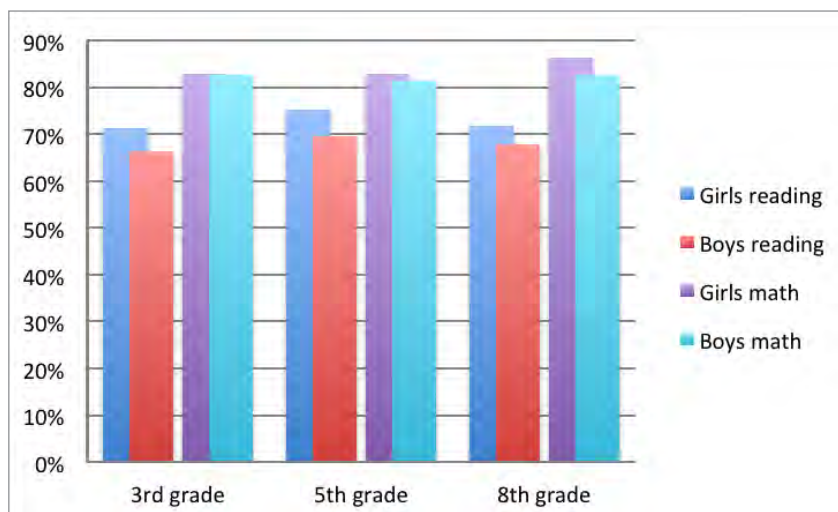
Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

As with the overall demographics of North Carolina's children, North Carolina's student population is also changing. The percentage of both African American and white students declined between 2007 and 2011. During that same period the percentage of female students of Latina and Asian descent and those reporting multiple races increased.²³

Test Scores

North Carolina's female students perform well on the state's standardized testing measures.

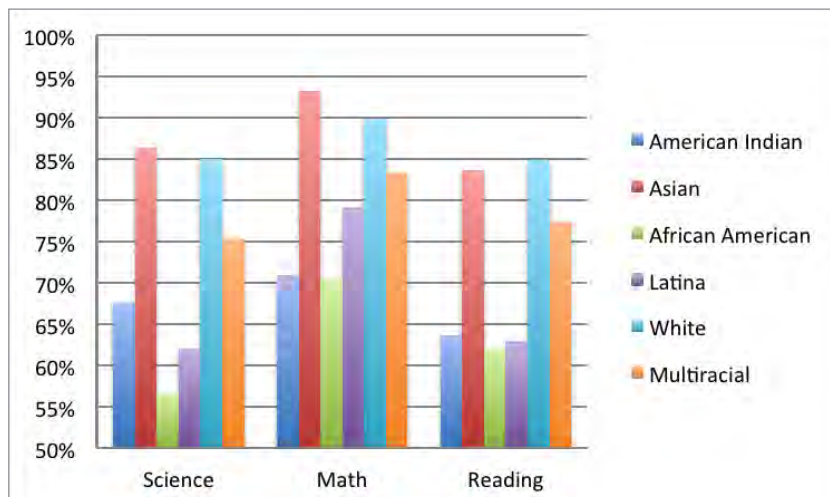
Figure 6. Percentage of passing EOG scores, by grade and gender, 2011–12



Source: Department of Public Instruction, Reports of Disaggregated State, School System and School Performance Data for 2010–2012.

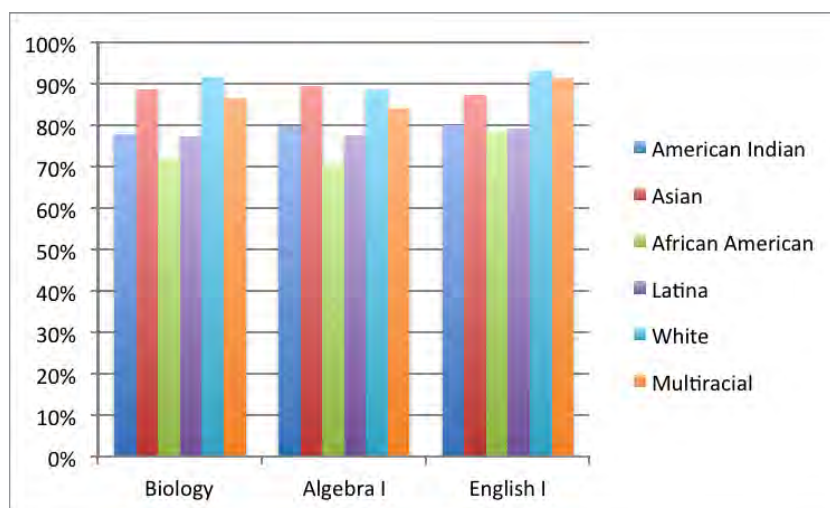
Girls perform on par with boys on EOG exams regardless of subject or grade level. This includes both math and sciences—subjects in which girls have historically under-performed.

Figure 7. Percentage of 5th grade females with passing EOG scores, by race/ethnicity, 2011–12



Source: Department of Public Instruction, Reports of Disaggregated State, School System and School Performance Data for 2010–2012.

The passing percentage of 5th grade girls EOG exams reveals the disparity among girls across racial and ethnic categories.

Figure 8. Percentage of females with passing End Of Course scores, by race/ethnicity, 2011–12

Source: Department of Public Instruction, Reports of Disaggregated State, School System and School Performance Data for 2010–12.

The racial gap does seem to be narrowing somewhat among girls in high school. The gap in test scores between African American and white young women in high school is roughly the same in mathematics, but is substantially improved in both science and English.

STEM Education

North Carolina has 131 science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)-focused high schools. Girls currently make up 49% of the enrolled study body of North Carolina's STEM-focused high schools.

Table 2. Enrollment in North Carolina's STEM schools by gender

	Female	Male
STEM high schools	49%	49%
Non-STEM high schools	51%	51%

Source: Corn et al, 2011.²⁴

Part of the emphasis on STEM education targeted at young women is to counter prevailing stereotypes that females are either not interested in or not skilled in the sciences or mathematics. It is commendable that North Carolina has made a concerted effort to get young women into these schools, though it should be noted that girls are not evenly represented at all STEM high schools. A lower proportion of girls attend engineering-focused STEM schools and a higher proportion of girls attend high schools focused on health and life sciences, for example.²⁵

Graduation and Dropout Rates

Despite making up slightly less than half of the students enrolled in North Carolina's schools, females make up slightly more than half of high school graduates.²⁶

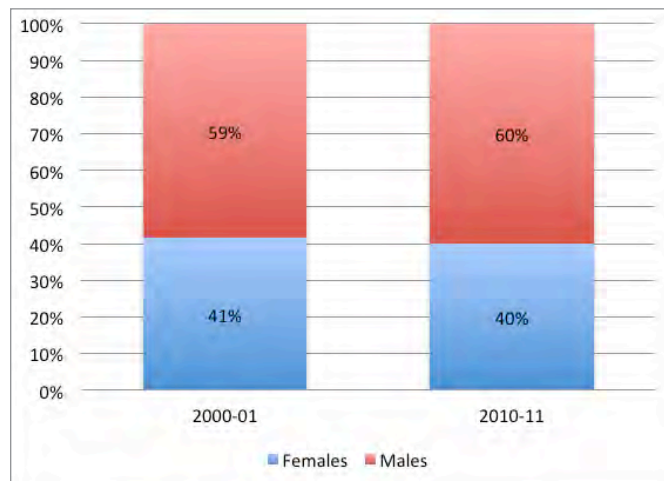
Table 3. Percent of female graduates, by race/ethnicity

	2005	2010
American Indian	1%	1%
Asian	2%	2%
Latina	4%	6%
African American	30%	32%
White	63%	58%

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

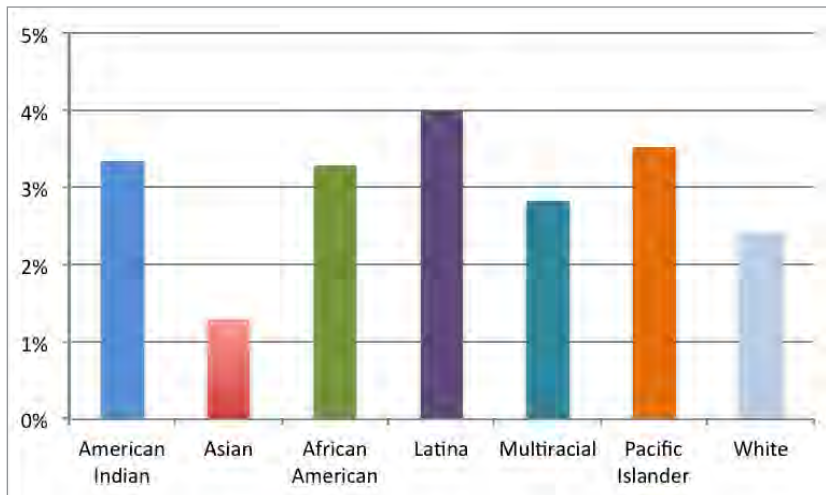
Consistent with the changing demographics among young people in North Carolina, in 2010 white young women make up a declining share of graduates compared to just five years earlier.

Since 2005, the dropout rate in North Carolina has decreased by almost a third.²⁷ In the 2011–12 school year, the dropout rate fell to 3.1%.²⁸

Figure 9. North Carolina high school dropout rates by gender

Sources: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, Consolidated Data Reports, 2000–01 and 2011–12.

Young men are approximately 20% more likely than young women among North Carolina's high school students to drop out.²⁹ This gender disparity has remained consistent for the past ten years.

Figure 10. Female dropout rates by race, 2011–12

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee, Consolidated Data Reports, 2011–12*.

As with other measures of educational success, among females there is racial and ethnic variation in terms of who drops out. Young women of Asian descent are very unlikely to leave school prior to graduation, while American Indians have the highest dropout rate of North Carolina's high school females, at slightly over 3.5%.

Cause for Concern

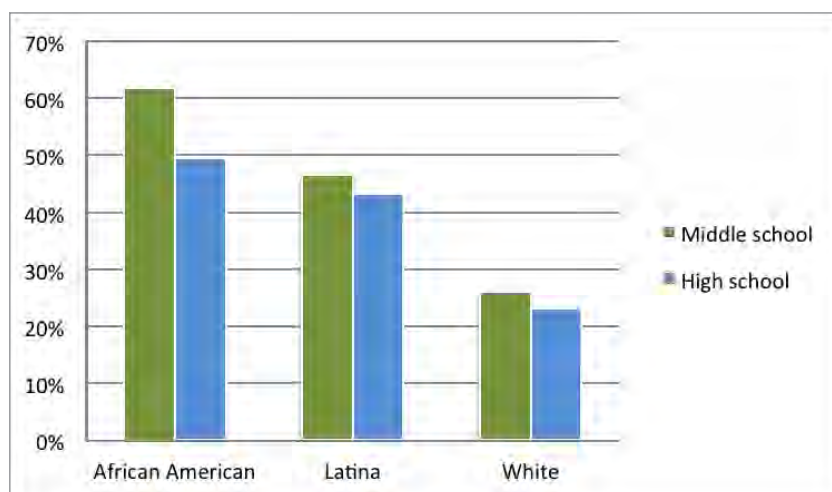
For all the good news about girls' education in North Carolina, there are some troubling realities. There are serious racial gaps in the educational achievement of girls in the state. This good news/bad news story is echoed in the dropout statistics. More attention needs to be paid to ensuring that all of North Carolina's girls are positioned to succeed academically.

Media Engagement

Girls in North Carolina spend a lot of time engaged with both traditional and new media. Though rates of television consumption have decreased in the last five years, almost 40% of middle school girls and more than 30% of high school girls in North Carolina watch over three hours of television on an average school day.³⁰ At the same time, rates of social media usage are increasing.

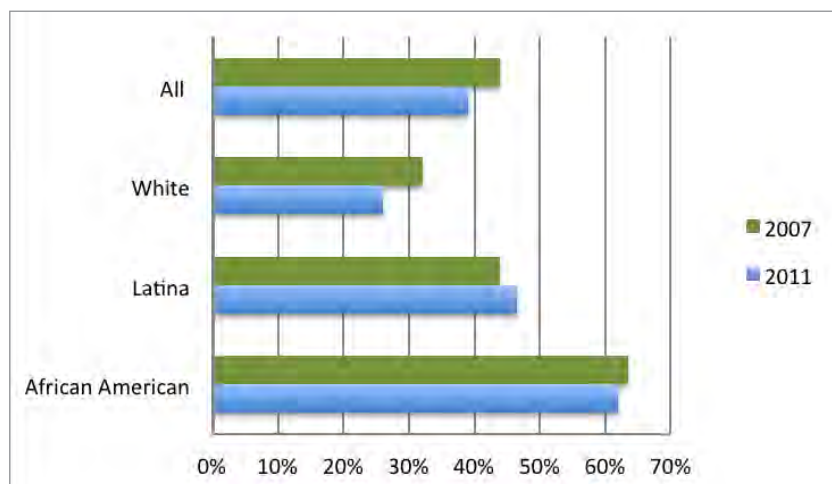
Television Consumption

Girls in North Carolina—like young people across the country—continue to watch television. The primary concern over television (and other forms of media consumption) is that when young people are watching many hours of television, it is often at the expense of other activities such as school work, play or physical activity.

Figure 11. Percentage of North Carolina girls watching over 3 hours of television on a typical school day, 2011

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

Consumption rates across all racial/ethnic groups decrease between middle and high school. African American and Latina girls are significantly more likely than their white counterparts to consume large amounts of television on school days.

Figure 12. Percentage of North Carolina middle school females watching over 3 hours of television on an average school day, by race/ethnicity

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

Looking at trends over time, rates of consumption have decreased slightly among middle school girls for all groups except Latinas. This trend is similar among Latina high school students, as well, where the percentage of girls watching over three hours of television has increased over the last five years.

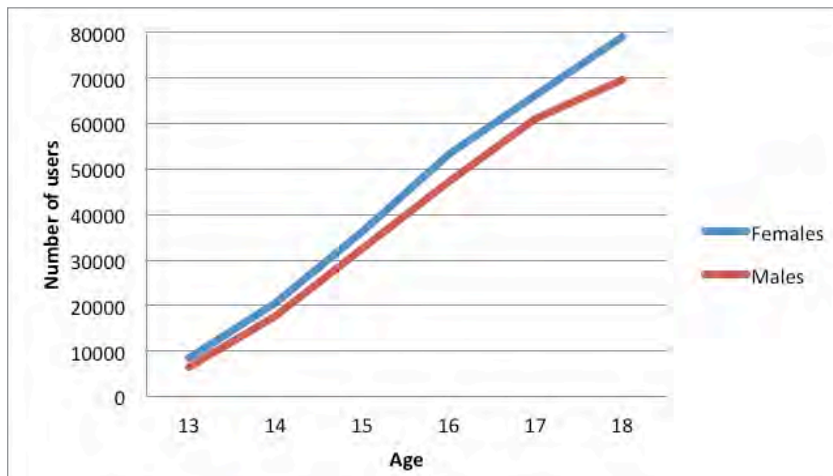
Males are significantly more likely to use computers (for non-academic purposes) for over three hours on a typical school day than females, while they watch television at comparable rates.³¹

New Media

Nationally, 80% of teens report using online social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. Over 95% of U.S. teens use the Internet, and almost half of American teens have purchased items online.³²

Over 70,000 of North Carolina's youngest female teens—girls between the ages of 13 and 15—have a Facebook account and they are about 20% more likely than their male teen counterparts to have a Facebook account.³³

Figure 13. North Carolina youth Facebook users, by age and gender

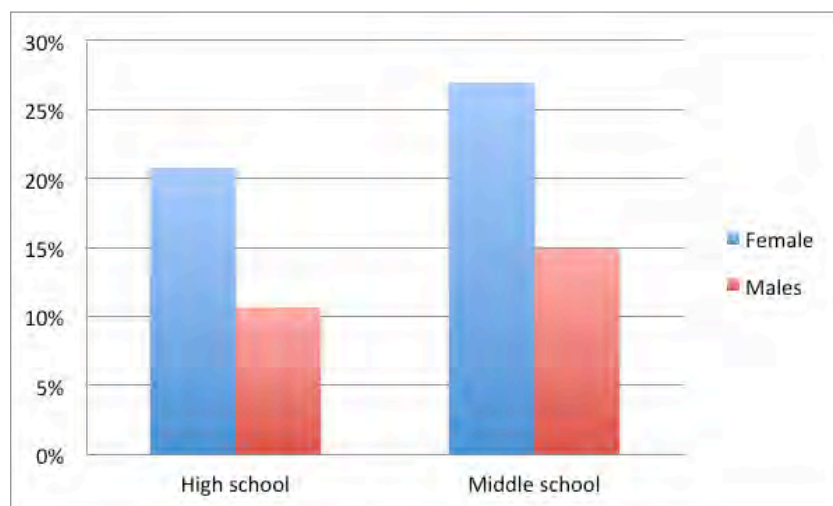


Source: Facebook.com.

North Carolina teens start out using Facebook at similar rates—10% of 13-year-old boys and 14% of 13-year-old girls have Facebook accounts.³⁴ But by age 15, social media usage—at least among Facebook users—diverges among young women and young men. At every age, a larger percentage of young women have established a Facebook presence relative to young men.

The ways in which teens communicate is changing. Nationally, almost one-third of teens between the ages of 14–17 own a smart phone.³⁵ Research from the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* finds that female teens between 14–17 are the most frequent texters (as compared to the male counterparts or younger girls), averaging over 180 texts per day. Sixty-three percent of teens report texting every day as a means of staying in touch with friends, while almost 29% of teens nationally report using social networking site messaging systems to communicate with peers. The Pew research project finds both face-to-face interactions and daily phone calling as a means of communicating with friends are both declining—though phone calls are declining more rapidly. Only 19% of teens report talking daily with a friend on a landline, and 39% use a cell phone daily to talk to friends.

The expansion of technology provides many potential opportunities for the empowerment of young women. Blogs and Twitter are forums in which young women are giving voice to their unique perspectives on society and creating communities of learning and shared experience. However, there is a darker side to social media. Many young people, particularly females, report bullying and other forms of electronic harassment.

Figure 14. Percentage of North Carolina students who report being electronically bullied, 2011

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

One in five high school females and one in four middle school females reports being “electronically” bullied. This means being bullied or harassed via electronic technologies such as texting, instant messaging, social media and email. Female students in North Carolina are significantly more likely to report such bullying than males.³⁶

Cause for Concern

Concerns about media overconsumption are mounting—from worries about obesity and lack of exercise to girls’ exposure to harmful media images. North Carolina’s African American and Latina young women are more likely to watch more hours of television on an average school day than white young women. Though rates of excessive television consumption are decreasing among young women in North Carolina, rates remain high. While media in and of itself is not inherently negative, time spent watching TV or interacting with social media, video games, or other media content is time not spent on school work or engaging in physical activities. In addition, new forms of technology and media allow for unprecedented access to peers. For many of North Carolina’s teens and pre-teens, this results in bullying and negative interactions.

Physical Health

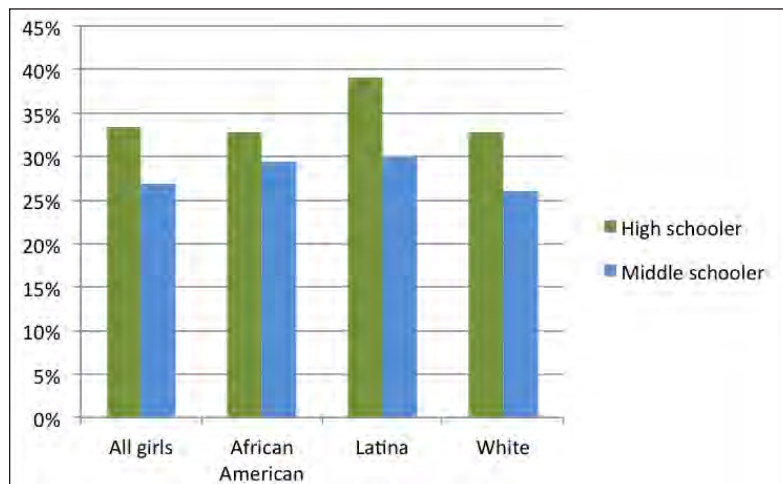
The growth of childhood obesity has become a pressing national concern. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified childhood obesity as having both immediate and long-term effects on health and well-being. Children and adolescents who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem. Children and adolescents who are obese are likely to be obese as adults and are therefore more at risk for adult health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke.

Table 4. Percentage of North Carolina high school females who are overweight/obese

	Overweight	Obese
African American	23%	15%
Latina	17%	12%
White	13%	8%

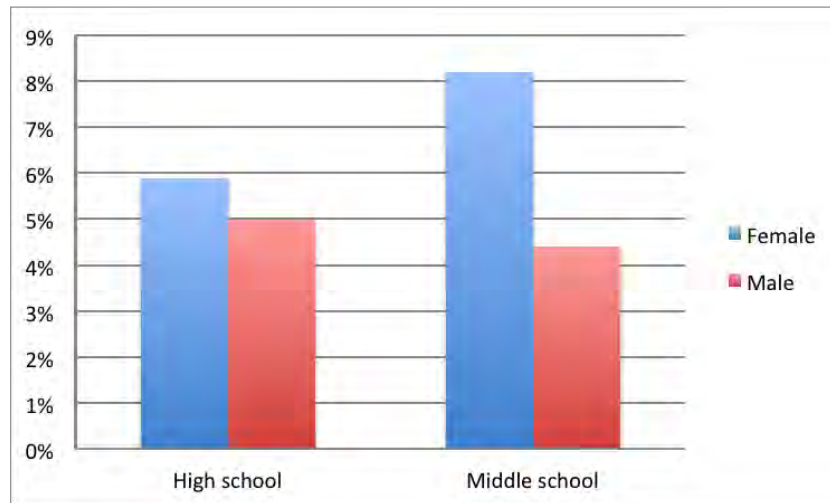
Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

Over one-third of North Carolina's African American female high school students are considered overweight or obese, and are significantly more likely to be overweight than their white counterparts. While these rates are high, the rates of obesity among all high school females have been relatively constant over the past decade—9.0% in 2001 and 10.9% in 2011, although the percentage of overweight female teens significantly increased in this same period—from 12.8% to 16.4%. Rates of obesity are higher among young men than young women, both in North Carolina and nationally.³⁷

Figure 15. North Carolina females students' perceptions of themselves as overweight

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

Both pre-teen and teen females describe themselves as overweight at rates higher than the incidence of being overweight or obese in the population of girls. Rates of negative self-perception increase between middle and high school for young women. By high school, females are significantly more likely to view themselves as overweight than males. Young women in most racial groups have lower rates of obesity and are less likely to be overweight than young men. The point is not that young men have deluded themselves, but rather that young women are highly vulnerable to struggles with body image issues. This can lead young women into risky behaviors to manage their weight, including problematic eating, vomiting, and the use of laxatives or other pills.³⁸

Figure 16. Percentage of North Carolina students who vomited or took laxatives to lose weight

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

Negative body image perceptions are higher among high school females than girls in middle school, but problematic body behaviors are higher among younger teens and pre-teens. While the rates are relatively low—less than 10%—this is cause for concern. Middle school girls have significantly higher rates of problematic eating behaviors, including skipping meals and not eating for 24 hours in order to lose weight, than high school females.³⁹ Middle school girls are significantly more likely than same-aged boys to engage in these risky behaviors, despite middle school boys and girls having similar perceptions of themselves as overweight.

Cause for Concern

While young boys and girls worry about their weight at relatively similar rates, a small but significant percentage of young girls are engaging in problematic behaviors to control what may or may not be an actual weight problem. The focus on youth obesity is important. Obesity is linked to very serious negative health outcomes. But this focus must be balanced with the awareness that girls are inundated with messages about their bodies. These messages have led many of North Carolina's young women to develop negative self-perceptions and some young girls to highly worrisome body control behaviors.

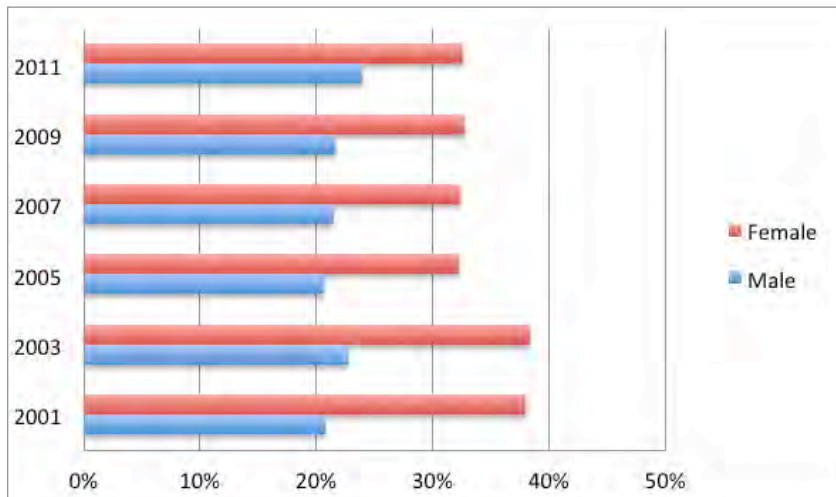
Mental Health

Mental health is increasingly a part of the national conversation. North Carolina's female teens fare slightly better than teens nationwide in self-reports of depression and are less likely to seriously consider suicide. However, girls in North Carolina are significantly more likely than boys to report feeling sad or hopeless.⁴⁰

Depression

The percentage of high school females who reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past 12 months is more than one and a half times higher than the percentage of high school males who reported these feelings.

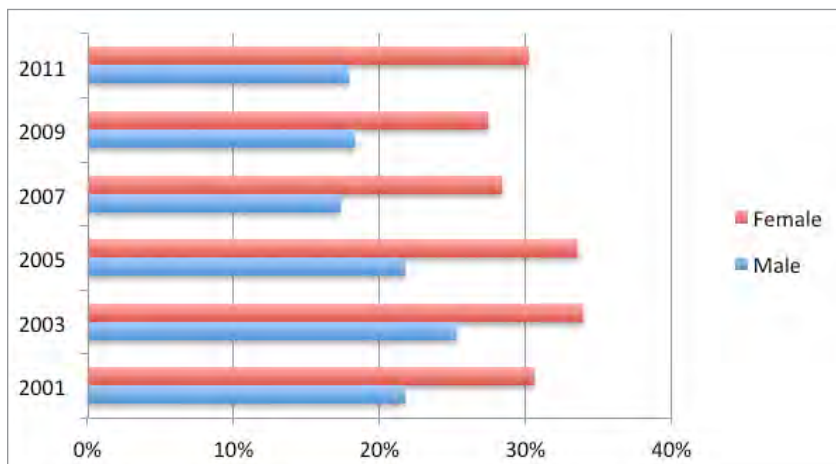
Figure 17. Percentage of high school students feeling sad/hopeless for two or more continuous weeks



Sources: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009, 2007, 2005, 2003 and 2001.

Self-reports of depression have declined for young women over the past decade while rising slightly for young men during this same period.

Figure 18. Percentage of middle school students feeling sad/hopeless for two or more continuous weeks

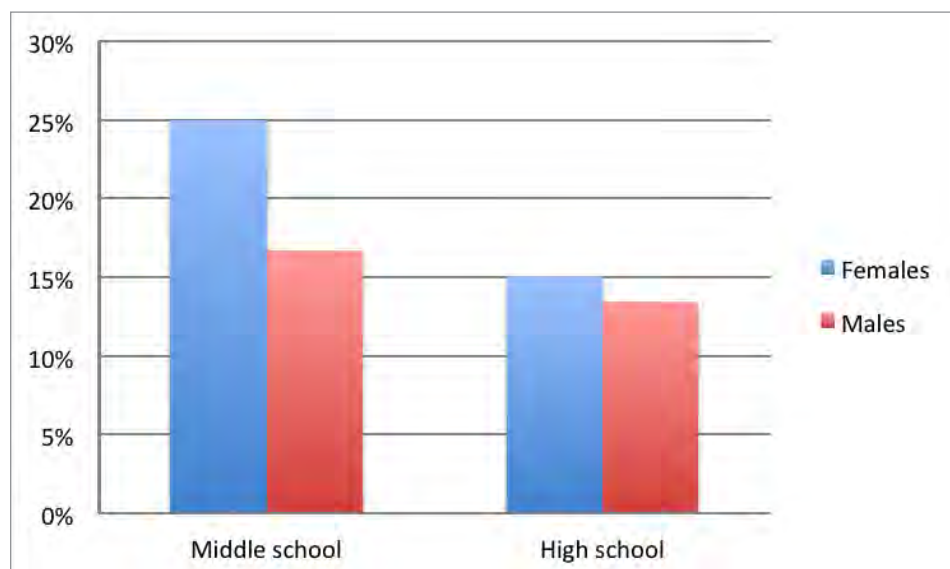


Sources: Adapted from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011, 2009, 2007, 2005, 2003 and 2001.

Like their high school counterparts, almost one-third of North Carolina's female middle school students report feelings consistent with depression, and report these feelings at significantly higher rates than adolescent boys.

Suicide

Young women in North Carolina report high rates of hopelessness and extreme sadness. For some this leads to thoughts of suicide. However, less than 4% of North Carolina's high school-aged young women made suicide attempts that resulted in medical attention.⁴¹ High school aged females in North Carolina are less likely than high school females nationally to have seriously considered suicide. Nationally, almost 20% of high school females have considered a suicide attempt, while in North Carolina the rate is 15%.⁴²

Figure 19. Percentage of North Carolina youth who have seriously considered suicide, 2011

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

One in four middle school girls in North Carolina seriously considered suicide in 2011. Among teens in North Carolina, girls are significantly more likely than boys to consider suicide; however, young men are more likely to actually attempt⁴³ and commit suicide.⁴⁴ Rates of youth suicide in North Carolina are 12.5 per 100,000 people for males aged 15–19 and 3.6 per 100,000 for females aged 15–19.⁴⁵ The national rate of suicide among adolescents aged 15–19 is 6.9 per 100,000.⁴⁶

Cause for Concern

Many young women in North Carolina experience severe depression-like feelings of hopelessness and sadness. Young women are more likely than their male counterparts to seriously consider suicide. Young adolescent females—those in middle school—are most likely to consider suicide among youth in North Carolina. Among high school females, Latinas are most likely to report feeling suicidal, while African American middle school girls are the most likely to report these feelings, followed very closely by Latinas.

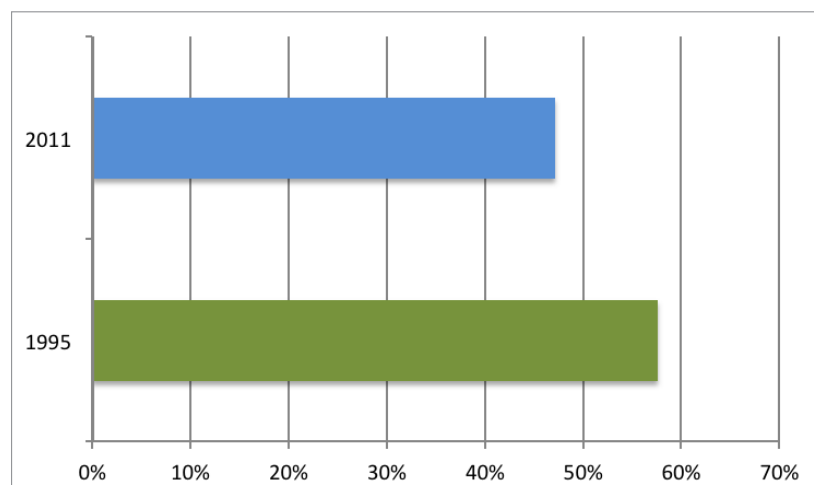
Sexual Health

By 8th grade most North Carolina youth have received some sort of sexual health education. Most, about 80%, have had abstinence-only or abstinence-focused education. But 85% of 8th grade students say that they have also been taught about HIV or AIDS infection.⁴⁷

Sexual Activity

Almost half of North Carolina's female students have sexual intercourse prior to graduating high school.⁴⁸ However, rates of sexual activity among youth in North Carolina have decreased over the last 20 years. Parents in North Carolina are talking with their kids about sex. Three out of four teens report that a parent or other adult in their family talked with them about sex.⁴⁹ However, parents are significantly more likely to talk with females than males. The high level of parental involvement in setting expectations for their children in this area is good, but when parents fail to communicate these expectations with young men, it places more of the burden of sexual responsibility with girls.

Figure 20. Percentage of North Carolina high school females who have ever had sex



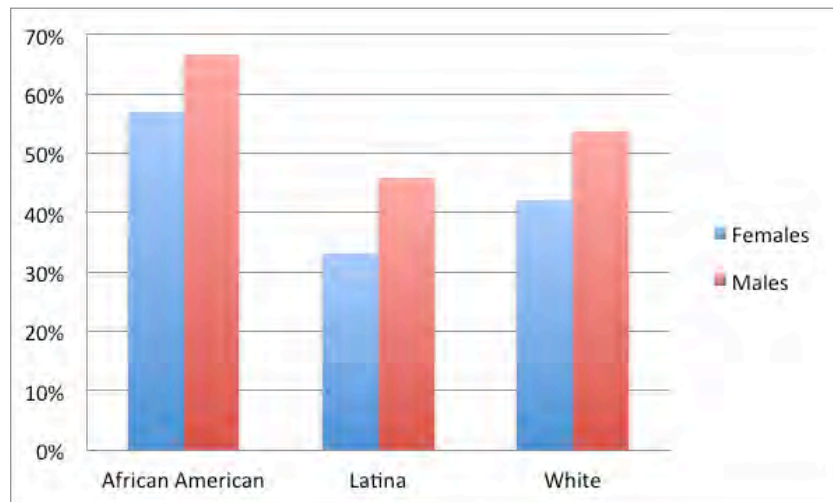
Rates of sexual activity among North Carolina's teens vary by both race and grade-level.

Table 5. Percentage of North Carolina high school students who have ever had sex by grade level, 2011

	Females	Males
9th grade	33%	38%
10th grade	41%	46%
11th grade	55%	62%
12th grade	63%	66%

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

As students progress through high school, they are more likely to have engaged in sexual intercourse. A significantly higher percentage of juniors and seniors (both male and female) have had sex as compared to students earlier in their high school career.

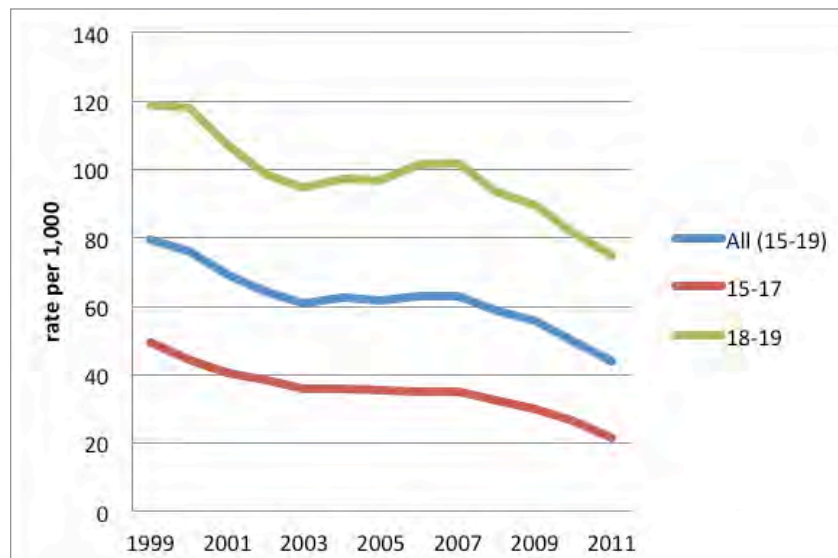
Figure 21. Percentage of North Carolina high school students who have ever had sex by race, 2011

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

African American females are significantly more likely to have had sex than their white or Latina counterparts.

Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The pregnancy rate among teens 15–19 in North Carolina is 43.8 per 1,000, and the live birth rate for teens in North Carolina is 38.3 per 1,000.⁵⁰ North Carolina's teen birth rate is 33rd among the 50 states, and is slightly higher than the national average of 34.2 per 1,000.⁵¹

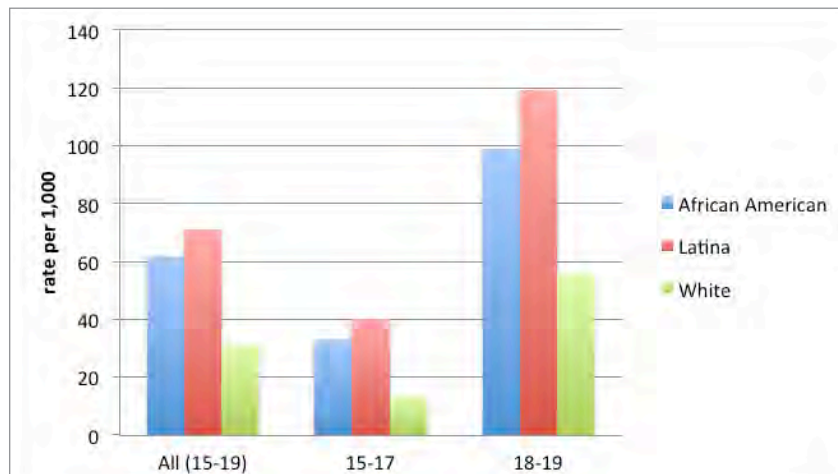
Figure 22. Rates of pregnancy among teens in North Carolina, by age

Source: North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics.

Since the 1990s, there has been a steady decline in rates of teenage pregnancy in North Carolina. Younger teens have a much lower rate of pregnancy than older teens, but the rate of decline among the older group

is slightly sharper.

Figure 23. Rates of pregnancy among teens in North Carolina by age and race, 2011



Source: North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics.

While African American young women report the highest rate of sexual activity, Latinas have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy at 71.1 per 1,000, followed by African American females at 61.6, and white females at 30.8. Latinas have the highest rate of pregnancy among both younger and older teens.

Table 6. STD incidence rates (per 100,000) among North Carolina teens aged 15–19, 2011

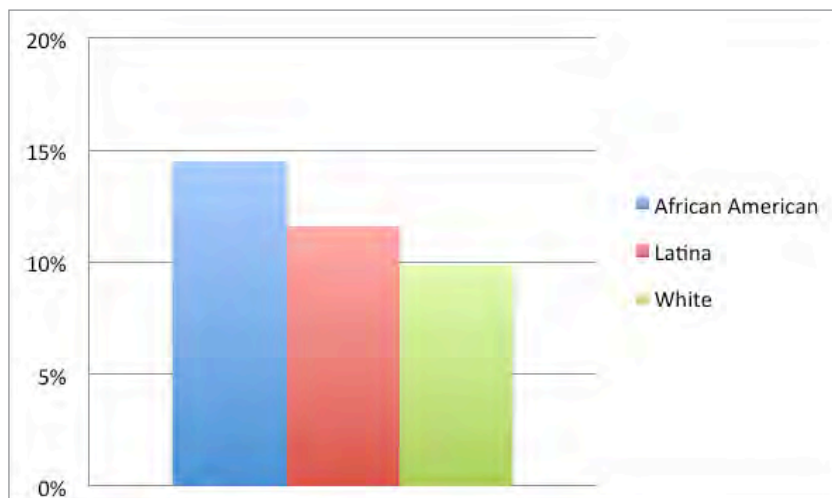
	Females	Males
HIV	3.7	23.9
Chlamydia	4,884.2	793.2
Gonorrhea	1,012.4	378.1

Source: N.C. Division of Public Health, Communicable Disease Branch, 2011 HIV/STD Surveillance Report.

Young women in North Carolina have higher rates of both chlamydia and gonorrhea than their male counterparts. Females aged 15–19 make up 29% of all chlamydia cases reported in North Carolina in 2011 and 19% of gonorrhea cases. Young women aged 20–24 have the highest rates of these sexually transmitted diseases in the state. Together, young women (aged 15–24) make up almost half of newly diagnosed STDs in the state. Female teens in North Carolina also have higher rates than the national average of 3,416.5 per 100,000 for chlamydia and 556.5 per 100,000 for gonorrhea.⁵²

Sexual Violence

Young women in North Carolina are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to be the victims of sexual violence—specifically rape. In 2011, slightly over 12% of female high school students were physically forced to have sex against their will, compared with fewer than 6% of high school males.⁵³ The North Carolina female to male ratio is 2:1, which is lower than the national reported numbers on rape, where among young people ages 15–17, the ratio of reported rapes is 4:1 females to males.⁵⁴

Figure 24. Percentage of North Carolina female high school students who have been raped, 2011

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011.

African American females report being sexually victimized at a higher rate than either white or Latina young women, though this is not a statistically significant difference. The percentage of female high school students in North Carolina reporting that they have been forced to have sexual intercourse has been consistent at 12% since 2005.⁵⁵

Cause for Concern

The data on sexual activity and teenage pregnancy in North Carolina reveals both good and bad news for girls. Rates of sexual activity are declining, and younger females—those in 9th and 10th grades—are less likely to have had sex than their older peers. However, among students who are sexually active, girls are less likely than their male counterparts to have used a condom during their most recent sexual encounter. Given the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, the fact that almost half of girls did not use a condom suggests that there is work to be done educationally. And, as in other aspects of girls' lives in North Carolina, there are clear racial/ethnic disparities in sexual health, including level of sexual activity, sexual violence and pregnancy.

Leadership and Engagement

Young women in North Carolina are active members of their communities. Young women are taking on school leadership positions, are civically engaged, and are participating in organized athletics at higher rates than ever before. These are part of a cluster of leadership behaviors thought to be positively associated with future academic and occupational success.⁵⁶

Civic Engagement

In terms of the number of volunteer hours per resident, North Carolina ranks 47th out of the 50 states. North Carolina's youth aged 16–19 are volunteering at a lower rate than the national average, 16.9% versus 26% respectively.⁵⁷ College students' rate of volunteering is fairly close to the national average; however, both teenagers and young adults in North Carolina fall short of the national rate. Females in North Carolina are volunteering at a higher rate than males, which corresponds to the national trend.

Table 7. North Carolina Volunteering by Special Population and Gender, 2008–10

Population	Median Hours	NC Rate	National Rate
Baby Boomers	60	27%	29%
College Students	*	27%	27%
Millennials	52	19%	21%
Older Adults	75	23%	24%
Teenagers	*	17%	26%
Young Adults	50	18%	22%
Male	52	21%	23%
Females	52	26%	30%

Source: Corporation for National and Community Service, *Volunteering in America, 2010*.

Based on further analyses for youth specifically, there is a slight difference in male and female civic engagement behaviors in North Carolina. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement has broken apart civic engagement into 11 distinct behaviors. Table 8 illustrates the rates for each engagement indicator for males and females in North Carolina and nationally. For two age groups (16–18 and 18–21), there was insufficient data to break out North Carolina data, so data is given for young adults, which includes teens.⁵⁸

Table 8. Civic Engagement Rates by Gender for U.S. and North Carolina

Age 16–29	North Carolina		National	
Civic Engagement Behaviors	Female	Male	Female	Male
Volunteered	24%	18%	25%	19%
Fixed something in the neighborhood	6%	1%	4%	4%
Attended public meeting	6%	5%	4%	5%
Donated \$25 or more	34%	26%	33%	26%
Contacted or visited public official	11%	10%	12%	13%
Bought or boycotted products	10%	11%	12%	12%
Used Internet to express opinions (frequently, a few times a week or more)	6%	8%	7%	9%
Voted in local elections (all or most of the time)	61%	51%	60%	56%
Talked politics (frequently, at least a few times a week)	26%	31%	27%	32%
Did or received favors for neighbors (frequently, at least a few times a week)	14%	12%	15%	13%
Held group membership	42%	36%	41%	37%

Source: CIRCLE Analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) 2011 September Volunteering Supplement and November Civic Engagement Supplement.

The civic participation of North Carolina's teens and young adults closely matches the level of participation nationally, including the different participation rates between males and females for the majority of civic engagement indicators. In North Carolina, females are partaking in civic engagement behaviors at a substantial rate. For example, at least one-quarter of the state's females regularly talk about politics, vote, are members of civic groups, and have donated \$25 or more—and in some areas like voting, the rate is much higher.

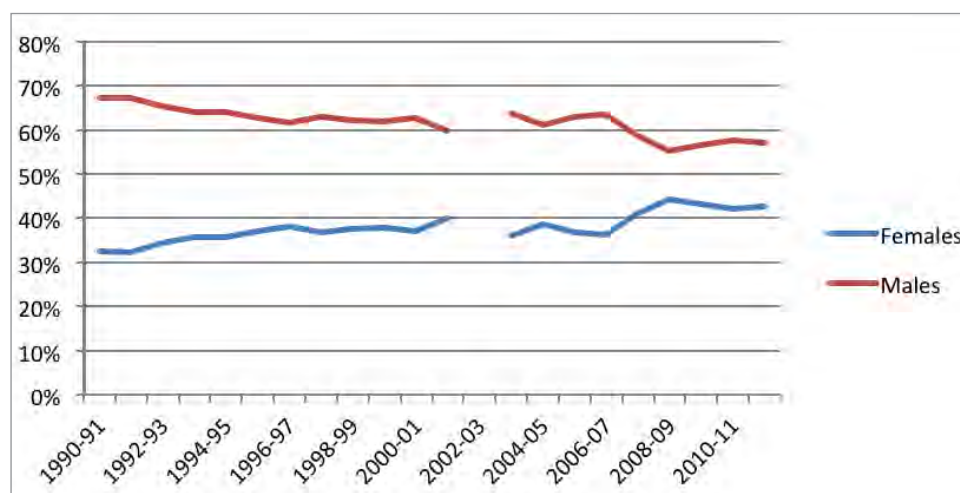
Student Government

National data indicate a potential to increase female participation in student councils. In 2011, a survey conducted by the National Association of Student Councils asked student council advisors across the U.S. what percentage of student council members during the 2010–11 school year was female. Omitting single gender schools, results reveal a median female membership of 70% and an average female membership of 65.3%. Approximately 26% of schools reported a female membership range of 80–90% and 65% reported a female membership of 60–79%. The ability to generalize these results is compromised by a response rate of only 7.2%. Within North Carolina, only two advisors completed the survey.⁵⁹

School Athletics

Since the 1990–91 academic year, there has been a steady increase in the number of both male and female high school athletes. However, as a percentage of students, only females have seen an increase in participation in school athletics.

Figure 25. Percentage of students participating in North Carolina high school athletics by gender



Source: North Carolina High School Athletic Association, *Female Athletes Participation Numbers 1990–2012 and Male Athletes Participation Numbers 1990–2012*.⁶¹

Title IX

2012 marked the 40th anniversary of a critical law put in place to provide equal opportunities for women. Title IX (1972) states in part that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Title IX has increased female participation in sports exponentially. In response to greater opportunities to play, the number of high school girls participating in sports has risen tenfold in the past 40 years, while six times as many women compete in college sports.⁶⁰ Though most known for increasing females’ access to athletic opportunities, Title IX actually promotes women in ten areas: access to higher education, employment, standardized testing and technology, education for pregnant and parenting students, career education, math and science, learning environments, and sexual harassment.

This trend indicates a gradual increase in reported female participation in high school athletics. However, it should be noted that this could be because of increases in not just the participation in existing sports, but also the introduction of new sports for females or the initiation of reporting on existing sports. For instance, lacrosse had no reported participation numbers until 2001–02. It is unclear as to whether this sport did not exist in North Carolina high schools until then or participation was just not reported.

Cause for Concern

There is a paucity of data on girls' leadership in North Carolina. Efforts need to be expanded to collect evidence of the work undertaken by young women in our state and document the future leaders among the girls of North Carolina. The data that is available reveals mostly positive trends. Over the past 20 years, female participation in school athletics increased by ten percentage points; however, females remain far less likely to play a sport in high school than their male peers.

Gaining Ground, Losing Ground

Women across the United States are forging new ground. In January, history was made when 101 women were sworn in to the 113th Congress.⁶² Women now hold 20% of the seats in the U.S. Senate, including one woman from North Carolina, and 18.6% of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, including two women from North Carolina. Among the women who are a part of the political leadership in Washington, D.C., there is much diversity. Women represent both major political parties, and make up a part of the most racially, ethnically, and sexually diverse Congress in history. In North Carolina, women currently make up almost 22% of the state legislature—a figure that is down slightly from 24% in the 2012 legislative session.⁶³ While women are making progress in North Carolina politics, it wasn't until 2009, when Beverly Perdue was sworn in as governor, that the state had a female executive. Of North Carolina's 74 governors, only one has been a woman. Of course, political representation is just one area in which some signs of change can be seen for women both nationally and locally. It is important to consider the areas in which girls in North Carolina are gaining ground and where they are losing it. But, it is imperative to think about which girls are gaining and which are losing. North Carolina must become a place where all girls can thrive.

One of the most persistent findings of this report is that there are tremendous differences in outcomes for girls based on their racial or ethnic background. When almost half of girls of color are growing up in families living in poverty, they face enormous barriers to future success. These effects can be seen in childhood and adolescence in lower educational achievements, higher rates of teen pregnancy, and higher rates of obesity. As the demographics of North Carolina shift, residents must find ways to enable all girls to become strong, successful leaders.

Gaining ground

There are many areas in which girls in North Carolina are excelling.

In education...

- Girls make up half of the enrolled students in the state's STEM-focused high schools.
- The percentage of girls passing EOG exams and EOC scores are equal to (or in some cases better than) boys across all grades and subjects. This is particularly true for white, Asian, and multiracial girls and young women.
- The racial gap among girls in education appears to narrow as girls move into high school.

In health...

- Female teens in North Carolina are less likely to seriously consider suicide when compared to girls nationally.
- The percentage of high school females who report feeling suicidal and feelings of extreme hopelessness have both declined significantly over the last decade.
- Rates of sexual activity among high school females has decreased over the past 20 years.
- North Carolina parents are talking to their teens (both male and female) about sex. 80.9% percent of females and 72.1% of males had talked with a parent or other adult family member about sex.
- Teen pregnancy rates have declined among all age groups in North Carolina.

In leadership...

- One in four young women (including, but not solely, teens) in North Carolina report volunteering, and one-third have made a donation of at least \$25 to a charitable, political, or nonprofit organization. Young women are active in their communities, but more data is needed.
- Over 40% of high school females are playing high school sports. The rates are higher for males, but the gap in athletic participation between females and males has decreased substantially since 1990.

Losing Ground

Many areas remain in which the collective efforts on behalf of the girls and young women of North Carolina need to be redoubled.

In economic security...

- One in two American Indian or African American girls under the age of 5 in North Carolina is living in poverty. Over 40% of Latina girls under the age of 5 is poor.
- The average annual income of a family headed by a single mother is just slightly over \$25,000. Children living with a single mother are likely to be poor. Over 40% of families headed by women across all racial groups are living in poverty.

In education...

- Though this gap diminishes somewhat as girls move into high school, a substantially lower percentage of African Americans, Latina, and American Indian girls are passing EOG exams in science, math, but particularly reading.
- Latinas have the highest dropout rate among female teens in North Carolina, followed by Pacific Islanders, American Indians, and African Americans. Though these rates are still quite low, all below 4%.

In media consumption...

- Rates of excessive television consumption have declined significantly among girls in North Carolina over the past decade. However, almost 40% of middle school girls watch over three hours of television on an average school day. African American and Latina girls are significantly more likely than white girls to consume large amounts of television.
- Both middle and high school females are significantly more likely than males to report being bullied electronically. One in five high school females and one in four middle school females have been bullied via text message, instant message or social media.

In health...

- Rates of obesity have been holding steady at around 10% of young women; however, the rate of teen women defined as overweight has increased significantly over the previous decade.
- More than one-third of African American high school females in North Carolina is considered overweight or obese.
- The percentage of females who view themselves as overweight increases between middle and high school. By high school young women view themselves as overweight at rates higher than the incidence of being overweight or obese.
- Though rates are relatively low, middle school girls are significantly more likely than boys to manifest body image problems in eating behaviors such as vomiting or taking laxatives, skipping meals, or not eating for 24 hours in order to lose weight.
- While the percentage of young women in North Carolina experiencing extreme and sustained feelings of hopelessness is lower than high school females nationwide, one in three North Carolina high school females reports these depression-like symptoms.
- One in four middle school girls in North Carolina has seriously considered suicide.
- The percentage of middle school girls who report having received education on the HIV or AIDS virus declined significantly between 2001 and 2011.
- Though the teen pregnancy rate has declined since 1999, the teen birth rate of 38.3 per 1,000 is higher than the national average of 34.2 per 1,000.
- North Carolina's Latinas have the highest rates of teen pregnancy at 71.1 per 1,000.
- Young women in North Carolina have high rates of sexually transmitted diseases. In 2011, females 15–19 had an incidence rate of newly diagnosed gonorrhea cases of 1,012.4 per 100,000 and a whopping 4,884.2 per 100,000 for chlamydia. These rates are higher than the national average for teen women.

In compiling the report, many areas were identified in which more information is needed. There are areas in which national data is available, but scant information available at the state level. For example, anecdotally, it is known that young women across the state are key leaders in their schools, youth organizations, and communities, yet there is very little state-level data on girls' leadership activities in North Carolina. Also, more regional analysis is needed. In the same way that girls are examined across age, grade-level and racial and ethnic categories, it is reasonable to assume that girls fare differently depending upon where in North Carolina they live. Communities are likely to have varying levels of resources and support programs that directly or indirectly contribute to the welfare of girls and young women. Meredith College considers this to be a baseline report and hopes to update, augment, and expand the findings at regular intervals in the future.

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Report prepared by Amie Hess, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Contributors:

Susan Fisher, Associate Professor of Nutrition, Health and Human Performance

Stephanie Little, Assistant Professor of Exercise and Sports Science

Tabitha Underwood, Assistant Director, Student Leadership and Service

Undergraduate research assistants: Bailey Dunn and Heather Losee

Undergraduate contributors: Martha Louise Hobby and Emily Smith

Design: Karen Baltimore, Graphic Design student

Produced by: Department of Marketing at Meredith College



Office of the President
3800 Hillsborough Street
Raleigh, NC 27607

meredith.edu