



Wisconsin Girl Report

Powered by the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin





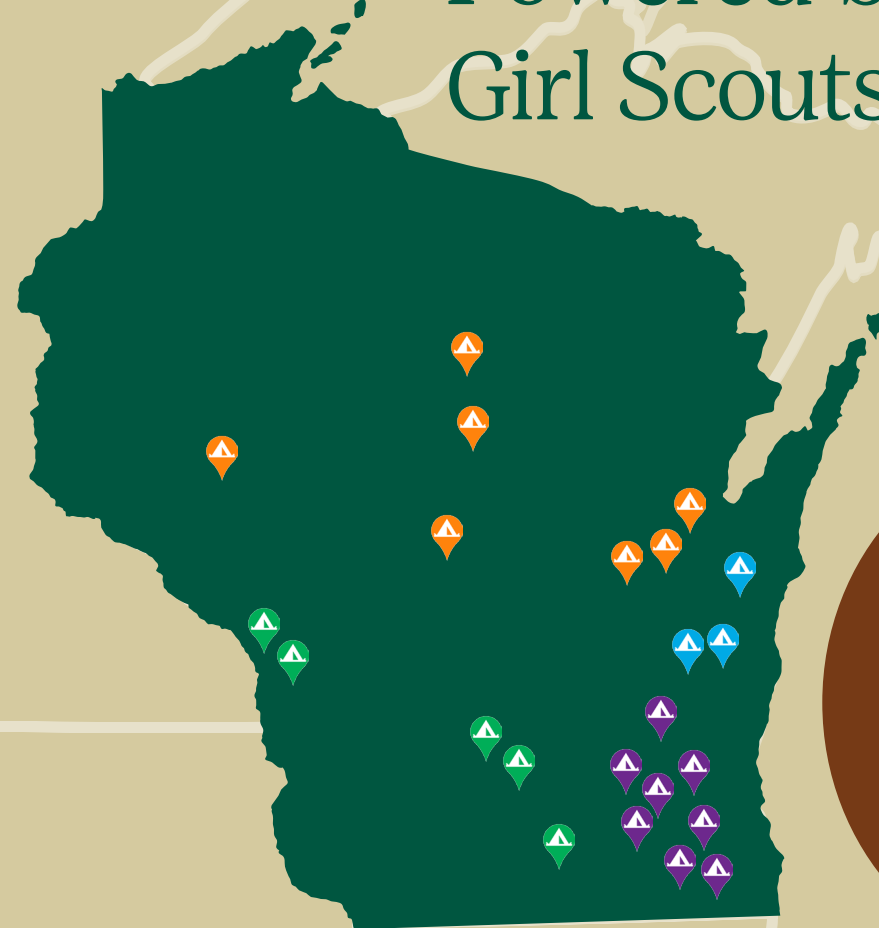
We are Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts bring their dreams to life and work together to build a better world. Through programs coast-to-coast, Girl Scouts of all backgrounds and abilities can be unapologetically themselves as they discover their strengths and rise to meet new challenges—whether they want to climb to the top of a tree or the top of their class, lace up for a hike or advocate for the environment, or make their first best friends.

Backed by trusted adult volunteers, mentors, and millions of alums, Girl Scouts lead the way as they find their voices and make changes that affect the issues most important to them. Find us online to join, volunteer, or donate today.



Powered by the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin



Four individual Girl Scout councils collectively serve over 30,000 girls across the state of Wisconsin.

With support from over 15,000 volunteers and contributions from funders and partners, Girl Scout councils in Wisconsin ensure every girl can reach her full potential.



Girl Scouts of Manitou
www.gsmanitou.org



Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes
www.gsnwgl.org



Girl Scouts of Wisconsin - Badgerland
www.gsbadgerland.org



Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast
www.gswise.org



Girls with limitless potential are also struggling under a set of circumstances unlike any prior generation.

For more than a century, Girl Scouts has created opportunities for girls to develop courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. Millions of Girl Scout alum are evidence of one undeniable fact: at Girl Scouts, we are experts on girls.

In our ambition to support communities where girls thrive, we are at a crossroads. While the girls we serve today have the resources and motivation to make their mark on the world, we also see girls struggling under a combination of circumstances unique to any prior generation. These challenges led us to commission the Wisconsin Girl Report.

In these pages, you'll find proof of both courage and struggle, of progress and pain. It's the story of girls who are navigating complex social environments that often seek to define them before they can define themselves. It's a world where the weight of external expectations and the erosion of real connection have contributed to unprecedented mental health challenges.



But amidst these challenges, we also find evidence of hope. Girls are making strides in the classroom and breaking barriers that once seemed insurmountable. Every year, we lead a new class of girls through the Girl Scout Gold Award - the highest and most prestigious achievement in Girl Scouting in which girls address a significant issue in their community. Through the vision and resolve of these young women, we find proof of the potential of girls.

The adult mentors who enable the Girl Scout experience in every community across the state of Wisconsin see this duality every day - the struggle of girls to manage an online persona, in-person relationships, and meet mounting academic pressures. We know it is not enough for us to simply acknowledge their struggles and cheer for their success. We must be relentless in our pursuit of a future where all girls have the ability to live their best life.

To the educators, parents, mentors, and leaders across the state, we ask you to join us in shaping a Wisconsin where girls can pursue their boldest ambitions. Lend your voice to amplify their needs, your wisdom to guide their paths, and your passion to fuel their dreams.

Denise Schemenauer

Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Manitou Council

Patti Shafto-Carlson

Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes

Ana Simpson

Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast

Lisa Smith

Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Wisconsin - Badgerland



Join.

A safe space for girls to learn, grow, and belong.



Volunteer.

Girls need caring adult mentors to prepare them for life.



Donate.

Connect with your local Girl Scout council to fund a girl's future.

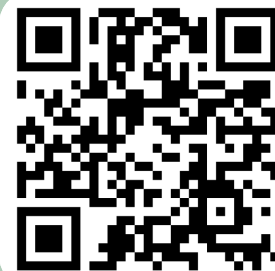


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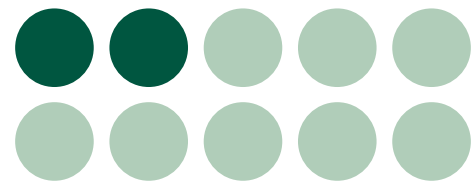


The State of Wisconsin Girls

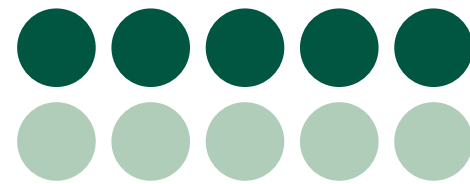
Summary findings from the 2025 Wisconsin Girl Report

Through a childhood eclipsed by a global pandemic and grounded in access to personal digital devices and social media, girls in Wisconsin are both the most connected generation and traumatized generation in history. The principal goal of this report is to investigate differences in the lived experiences between girls and boys in areas like academic achievement and rates of mental health challenges.

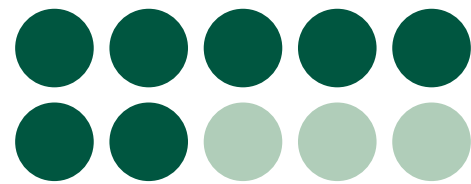
This research proves one undeniable fact: **girls and boys have largely different experiences growing up in Wisconsin.** Girls are simultaneously more academically motivated than boys, experiencing higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation, and abusing controlled substances more than boys across every measured category. Research also suggests that girls benefit from relationships with adult mentors and access to supportive environments; yet, these social resources are not accessible to all girls.



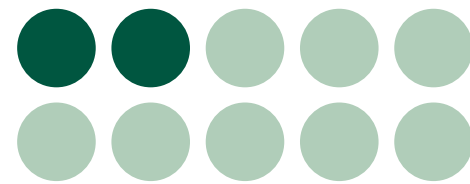
2 out of 10 high school girls report experiencing sexual violence.



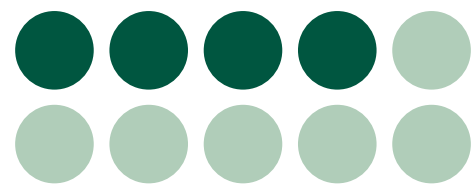
5 out of 10 high school girls report feeling sad or depressed every day for 2+ weeks in a row.



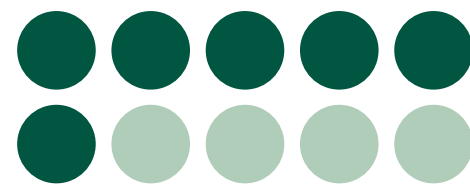
7 out of 10 high school girls report experiencing significant anxiety.



Only 2 out of 10 high school girls feel they can talk to an adult in their family about their feelings.



4 out of 10 high school girls report using tobacco through vaping.



6 out of 10 high school girls report not being physically active for the recommended time each week.



The Girl Scout Difference

We believe in building communities where girls thrive in partnership with educators, parents, and other organizations serving girls. The more champions a girl has, the better. Throughout the report, we'll highlight what Girl Scouts brings to the table:

- ✓ Safe, all-girl spaces designed with her in mind.
- ✓ A team of trained adults ready to support her big ambitions.
- ✓ Experiences proven to build her courage, confidence, and character.

Findings in the Wisconsin Girl Report are startling. But if it's one thing we know at Girl Scouts, it's this: when we show up to support girls, they're unstoppable. Look for these 'Girl Scout Impact' highlights for proof.

87%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts believe:

“Because of Girl Scouts, I am doing activities that I would not have done otherwise.”



Dimensions of Wellness

The Wisconsin Girl Report offers insight into four key areas of wellness that are critical for the holistic development of girls. With the resources and knowledge to thrive in these areas, girls are set up to reach their full potential.

Physical Health

For girls to thrive, communities should create conditions for girls to develop healthy bodies and live in healthy environments. Proper development of a girl's physical body requires access to nutritional foods, outlets for physical fitness, health education, and more. Girls also need safe, nurturing environments that support their growth, including access to safe housing, quality healthcare, and protective communities of peers and adults who are capable of supporting her overall development.

Academic Performance

Creating an educational environment which fosters curiosity, champions risk-taking, and encourages girls to try new things is necessary to level the playing field in the classroom. While girls face pressure to be high academic achievers, social influences create pressure that can limit academic success or narrow their chosen fields of study. Academic wellness for girls begins with high-quality early childhood education, equitable access to all fields of study including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) topics throughout their K-12 education, and programs which enable ongoing learning in higher education or technical training.

Emotional Wellness

When girls develop the ability to identify, express, and manage their feelings, they build a foundation for emotional resiliency. Nurturing these capabilities requires safe environments where girls learn to care for the full range of their emotions. This support system, coupled with the presence of caring adults, helps in the reduction of the mental health challenges girls face, including bullying, eating disorders, and depression.

Social Wellbeing

Robust ecosystems of support including strong family units, adequate economic resources, and opportunities to create and sustain social networks in their communities help girls build social skills and the social connections needed to thrive. In these environments, girls learn both their intrinsic worth – a precursor for healthy self-confidence – and receive necessary support to navigate complicated social situations. Disruptions to this social fabric such as childhood trauma, poverty, or the prevalence of substance abuse in the family can create significant challenges now and later in life.

Data Definitions

This report utilizes data from primary sources such as the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. No original research was conducted for the purposes of this report.

The definition of the most commonly used metrics referenced throughout the report are derived from these primary sources:

Sex: the determination of female/male populations based on the biological attributes of men and women (chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, etc.).

Age: the length of time during which a child has been alive.

Race: a sociological designation that separates people into groups that may share common outward physical appearances and commonalities of culture and history.

Ethnicity: the culture, language, religion, heritage, and customs that a family or people group acquired from a geographic region.

Place of birth: the location where a person was born.

Language: a system of communication (speech, writing, gestures, etc.) used by a particular country or community.

Household type: the composition of the household in which a child under the age of 18 lives. Household type captures makeup such as single parents, married couples, and cohabitating couples, as well as the relationship that ties the child to the householder.

The definition of “girls in Wisconsin” is defined as youth under the age of 18, unless otherwise noted, whose sex assigned at birth was marked as female.

Throughout the report, Girl Scout outcomes are reported to demonstrate the impact of youth-serving organizations on the well-being of girls. Included metrics are derived from Girl Scouts of the USA's Girl Scout Research Institute, the annual Girl Scout voice of the customer survey which includes a representative sample of Girl Scouts in Wisconsin, and organization measurements from Wisconsin Girl Scout councils.

DEMOGRAPHICS



Girls living in Wisconsin are diverse across every measure. Throughout this report, the experiences of Wisconsin girls vary across key demographics, so this section aims to clarify how girls identify and the definitions of these measures used by most reporting agencies cited in the report.

Key Facts: Demographics

- **One in three girls in Wisconsin are girls of color.**
Girls who identify as white and non-Hispanic make up 67% of the population.
- **One-third of Wisconsin youth do not live in a two-parent household.**
Over 400,000 youth in Wisconsin live in a single-parent or grandparent-led household.
- **1 in 4 students in Wisconsin attends a non-traditional school.**
Nearly 10% of students participate in the parent-choice program to attend private school.
- **1 out of 8 girls in Wisconsin lives below the poverty line...**
amounting to nearly 75,000 girls in the state.



Total Population Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2023, Wisconsin

	Total Youth	Percent of Youth
Female (0-17)	603,686	49%
Male (0-17)	640,392	51%

Total Population by Age Group Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2023, Wisconsin

	Under 5 Years		5 to 9 Years		10 to 14 Years		15 to 17 Years	
	Total Youth	%	Total Youth	%	Total Youth	%	Total Youth	%
Female (0-17)	150,169	25%	167,652	28%	173,828	29%	112,037	19%
Male (0-17)	157,705	25%	179,416	28%	181,008	28%	122,263	19%

Total Female Population by Race and Ethnicity Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B01001A-I, 2023, Wisconsin

	Female (0-17)	
	Total Youth	%
American Indian and Alaska Native	6,812	1%
Asian	22,035	4%
Black or African American	48,198	8%
Other Race	22,791	4%
Two or More Races	85,063	14%
White (Not Hispanic)	404,445	67%
Hispanic	81,066	13%

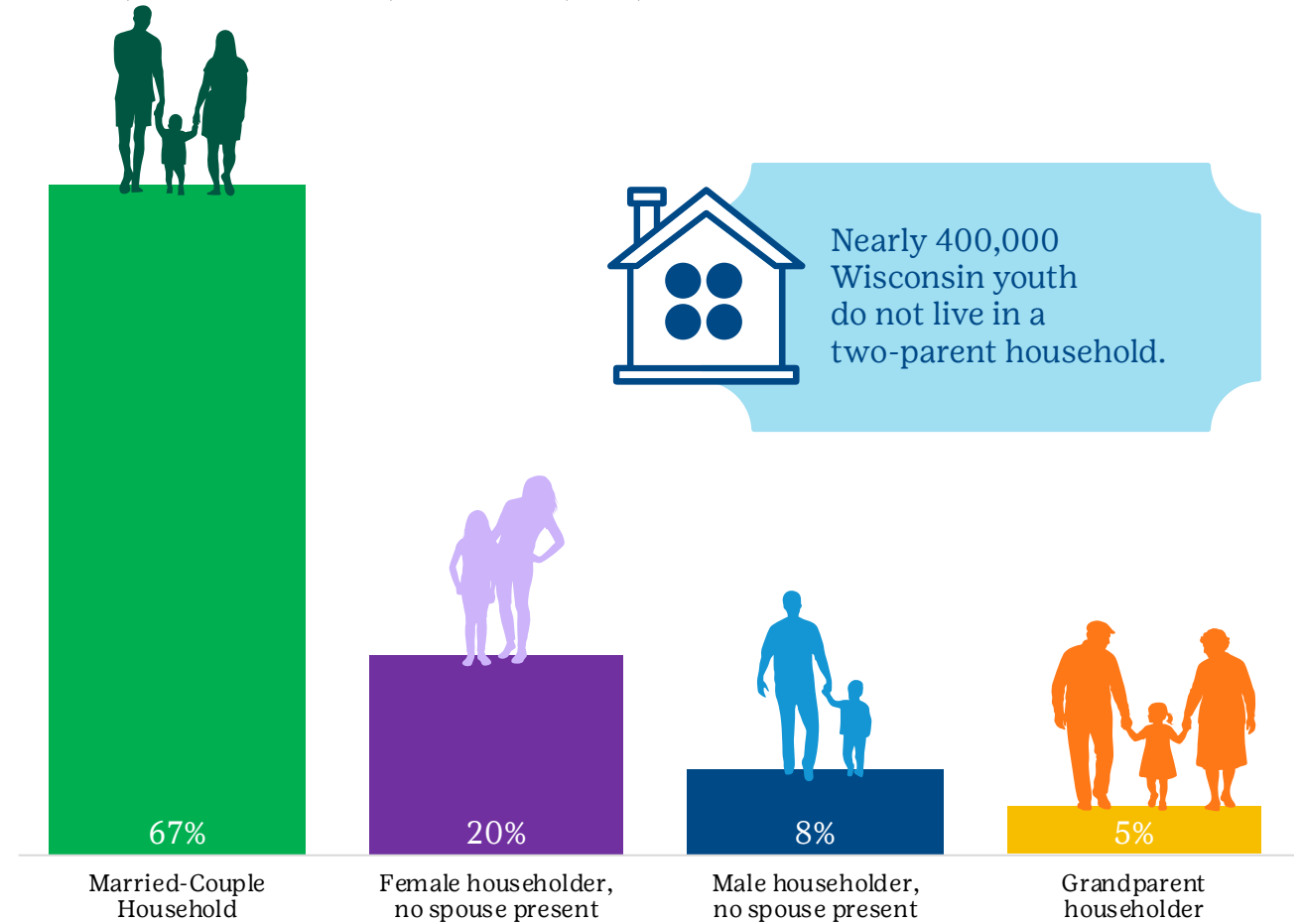


1 in 3
Wisconsin girls are girls of color.

Note: The U.S. Census separates race and ethnicity into two demographic questions. Data presented here represents that separation. Column will not add up to 100%.

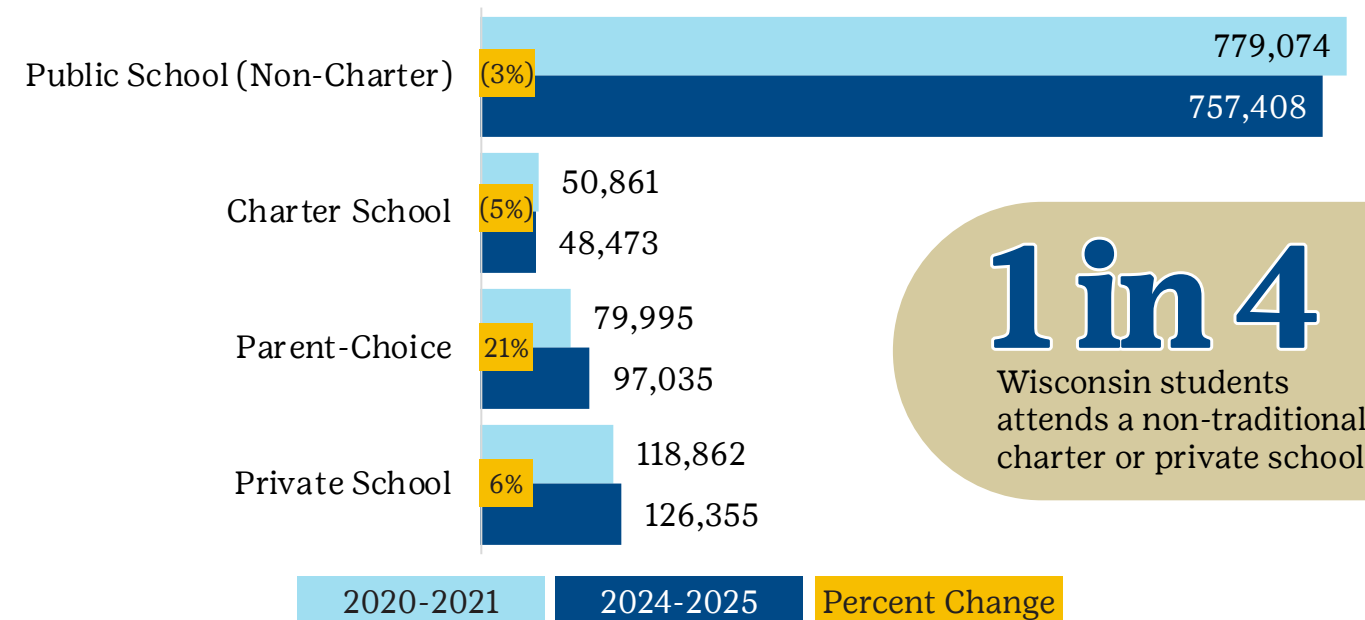
Household Type for Total Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B09002, 2023, Wisconsin



Total Student Enrollment by School Type

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2020-2021 and 2024-2025 Enrollment



1 in 4

Wisconsin students attends a non-traditional charter or private school.



1 out of 8

girls in Wisconsin lives below the federal poverty line.



1 out of 10

youth in Wisconsin speak a language other than English at home.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Celebrating Differences

At the center of Girl Scout culture is the Promise and Law, a set of commitments Girl Scouts keep for themselves, each other, and their communities. Recited at the beginning of Girl Scout programs, these words remind girls of a key tenant: **be a sister to every Girl Scout.**

This simple practice creates important habits: 75% of Girl Scouts in Wisconsin say they celebrate people from a variety of backgrounds in Girl Scouts. Beyond learning about cultures and customs, Girl Scouts also develop skills to resolve conflict, work through differences, and engage in civil discourse.

75%

 of Wisconsin Girl Scouts celebrate people from a variety of backgrounds in Girl Scouts.

PHYSICAL HEALTH



For girls to thrive, communities should create conditions for them to develop healthy bodies and live in healthy environments.

Proper physical development for girls requires access to nutritional foods, outlets for physical fitness, health education, and more. Girls also need safe, nurturing environments that support their growth, including access to safe housing, quality healthcare, and protective communities of peers and adults who are capable of supporting their holistic development.

Key Facts: Physical Health

- **1 in 5 high school girls has experienced sexual violence...**
a rate nearly three times higher than that of teenage boys.
- **High school girls abuse controlled substances more than boys.**
2 out of 5 high school girls engages in vaping tobacco.
- **1 in 3 girls is living with a lifelong health condition...**
representing an increase of 20% over just the last five years.
- **Girls are more likely than boys to develop unhealthy eating habits.**
Twice as many girls as boys develop binge eating habits. 1 in 8 girls struggles with skipping meals or fasting.
- **Twice as many girls as boys engage in zero days of physical activity...**
amounting to 1 in 8 girls ages 6-17.



Overall Health

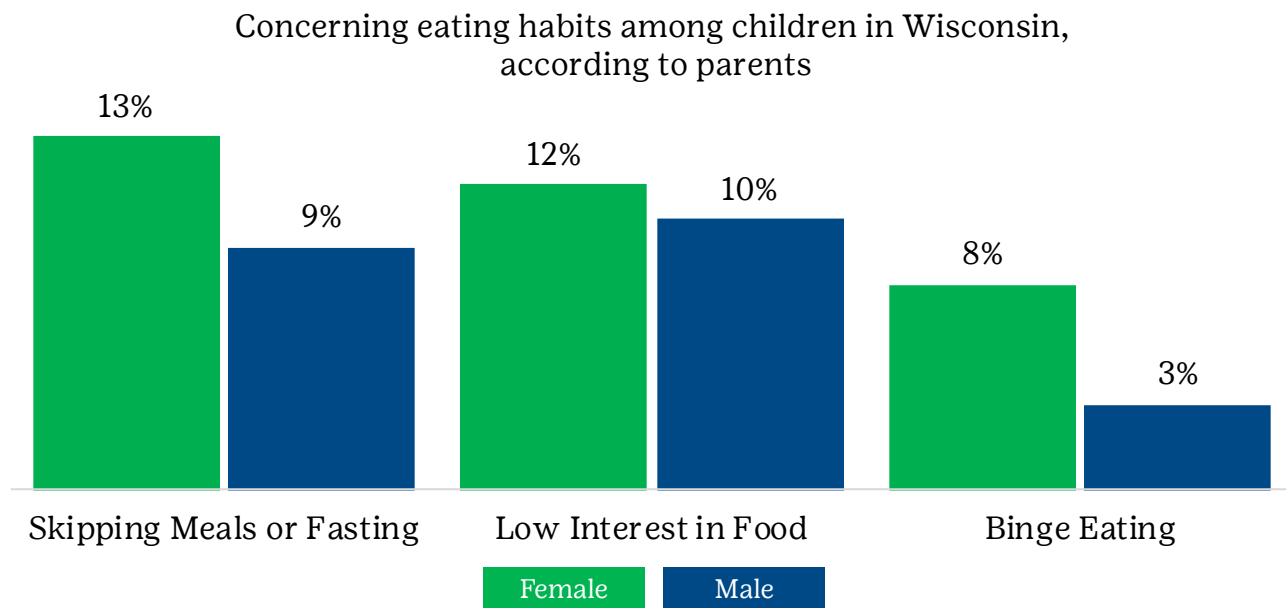
Learning how to care for their physical needs is a foundational skill girls must develop before the independence of young adulthood. Research shows that forming healthy habits like eating balanced meals, getting enough physical activity and sleep, and limiting screen-time overall are proven to support general wellness later in adulthood ([Harris, 2005](#)).

For girls in Wisconsin, the skill of developing healthy eating habits is threatened by external pressures and social beliefs. The National Survey of Children's Health found that girls are more likely than boys to develop concerning eating habits, with 13% of girls ages 6-17 years skipping meals or fasting compared to 9% of boys.

Research shows that girls face biased social expectations about their weight and size, contributing to body dissatisfaction and distorted eating habits. Internalizing these beliefs has been long-linked to serious physical and emotional consequences, including eating disorders, depressive symptoms, and lower rates of physical activity ([Gordon, 2021](#)).

Girls in Wisconsin are more likely than boys to demonstrate concerning eating habits, including twice as many girls engaging in binge eating.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin



Healthy Sleep Habits

Practicing good sleep hygiene is a growing focus of wellness practitioners as both youth and adults struggle to manage the impact of screens on sleep. The challenge of insufficient sleep among adolescents was recognized as a serious health risk in 2010. The American Medical Association and American Academy of Sleep Medicine reported consequences such as depression, increased obesity risk, and threats to academic success ([AMA, 2010](#)).

75% of Wisconsin high school girls do not receive at least 8 hours of sleep per night.

Overall Health, continued.

Coupled with concerning eating habits are lower rates of physical activity. At all ages, girls in Wisconsin are less physically active than boys and a significant percentage are not receiving the recommended amount of exercise per day. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children between the ages of 6-17 need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day ([CDC, 2024](#)).

In Wisconsin, parents report that 13% of girls engaged in zero days of physical activity, a rate twice as high as boys. Less than half of girls met the recommended level of exercise outlined by the CDC ([National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023](#)).

When asked directly, girls in high school report even lower rates of physical activity. Only 40% of high school girls report receiving the recommended level of physical activity compared to 58% of boys.

While physical activity in young people is proven to contribute to positive physical health, reducing the risk of illness and obesity, it also promotes positive outcomes in other areas of wellbeing such as mental health and social connectedness ([Kemel, 2022](#)). Encouraging a larger portion of girls to participate in even low-intensity physical activity, then, is an important factor in overall wellbeing.



Twice as many girls as boys in Wisconsin engaged in zero days of physical activity in the last week.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin

13% of girls, ages 6-17
7% of boys, ages 6-17

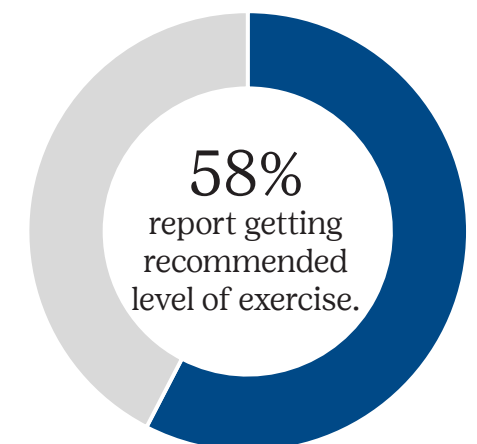
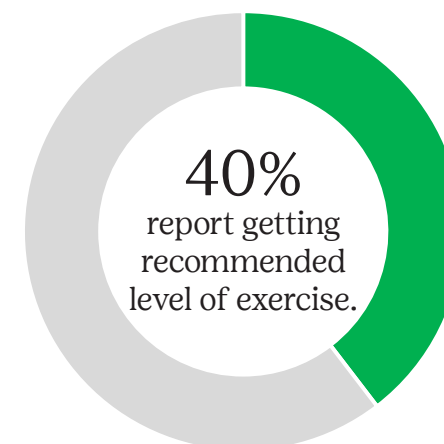
60% of high school girls are not getting the recommended level of physical activity - a rate 50% higher than boys.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin

High school students reporting they were physically active at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more days per week

Female High School Students

Male High School Students





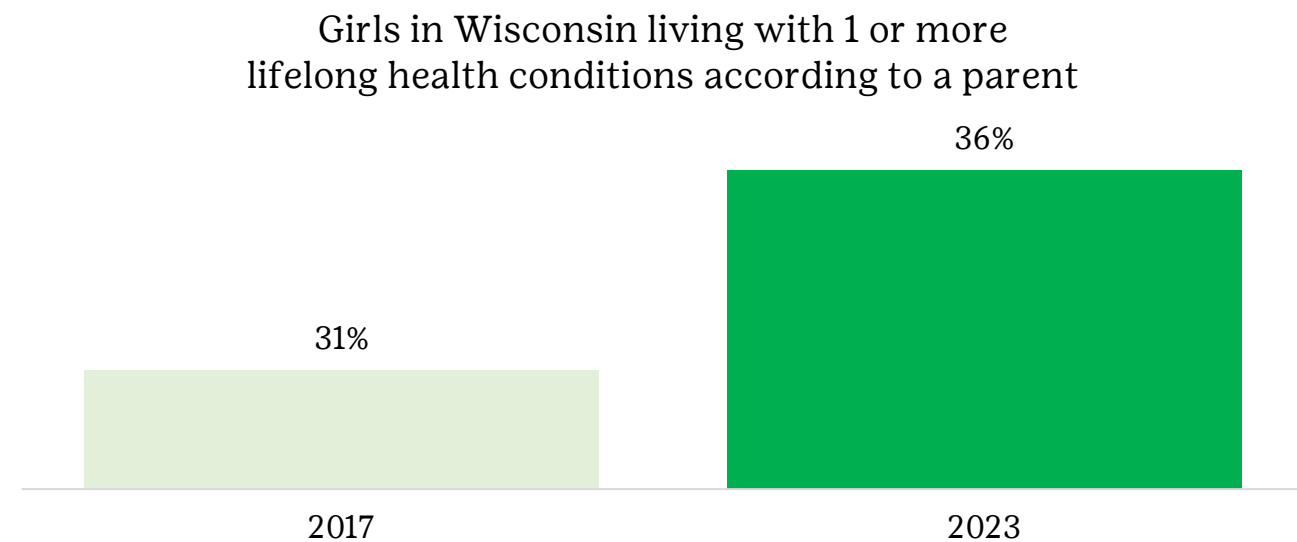
Lifelong Health Conditions

While all young people must learn to care for their bodies through healthy eating habits, physical activity, and good sleep practices, a growing number of girls will also need to monitor and manage a lifelong health condition. **One in three girls in Wisconsin is living with a lifelong health condition - a 20% increase from just five years ago.** The increase is driven by rises in new cases of ADHD, autism, asthma, and prediabetes.

Researchers point to several contributing factors to explain the rise in diagnoses. Among them is the advancement of medical testing and diagnostic criteria, especially among girls and women. A rise in girls diagnosed with cognitive differences and behavioral conditions is widely explained by increased awareness, as well as a deeper understanding in the symptoms displayed by girls ([Qin, 2024](#)).

One in three girls in Wisconsin is living with a lifelong health condition - an increase of nearly 20% in the last five years.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2016-2017 and 2022-2023, Wisconsin



As important as the contributing factors to this rise in diagnoses is the impact of receiving diagnoses for youth. Researchers have long studied the impacts of *living with* a lifelong health condition and are now turning to understand the experience of youth *receiving* a diagnosis. The key finding: it's disruptive.

As girls learn they have a lifelong health condition, they are likely to experience identity challenges, disruptions to their relationships, and struggle with an altered view of their future ([Kirk, 2019](#)). For adults passionate about supporting girls, research is clear: while it's important to assist girls in understanding their conditions, we must also help girls process having a condition in the first place.

Lifelong Health Conditions, continued.

A significant period of disruption for girls newly diagnosed with a lifelong health condition is adolescence. In the Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted among high school students in 2023, one in eight girls reports having a physical disability or lifelong health condition - a rate 34% higher than boys.

For adolescents already experiencing a period of rapid and often asynchronous cognitive and social-emotional development, the addition of daily regimens required for many chronic conditions presents a unique challenge. Especially for girls with cognitive conditions such as ADHD, anxiety, depression, and autism spectrum disorder, the ability to adhere to schedules, self-care routines, and take on an increasing role in medication management is increasingly difficult ([Lerch, 2019](#)). Researchers point to the important relationship between the child-caregiver as girls increase their level of independence. Caregivers and adults supporting girls with lifelong health conditions can offer support by:

- Slowly provide opportunities for an increasing level of independence (managing daily routines, speaking and advocating at medical appointments).
- Increase the network of adult supporters and accepting peer groups, offering guidance on disclosing diagnoses within safe relationships.
- Make decisions together when possible, including changes to routines or treatments.

All girls need peer, adult, and community support to reach their full potential; for girls managing lifelong health conditions, their need for support is even greater.

One in eight high school girls reports living with a physical disability or chronic health condition.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023.



Sexual Violence

Girls in Wisconsin experience sexual violence at a rate nearly three times higher than boys with devastating physical and emotional consequences. One in five high school girls reports experiencing sexual violence compared to fewer than one in ten high school boys. The trend is worsening compared to 10 years ago, which is startling considering that multiple studies prove survivors often under-report their experiences.

One in five high school girls in Wisconsin has experienced sexual violence.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

Percent of Wisconsin high school students reporting experiencing sexual violence



Sexual Violence, continued.

The increasing rate of sexual violence within dating relationships is of particular concern as these early introductions to romantic relationships increase the risk of intimate partner violence in the future (Piolanti, 2023). Studies show that girls who experience teen dating violence during adolescence are more vulnerable to a recurrence of intimate partner violence later in life, not to mention increases in high-risk behaviors such as marijuana and alcohol use and poor mental health outcomes.

Broader, long-lasting impacts exist for youth experiencing any form of sexual violence that pose particularly devastating mental health consequences (Clarke, 2023). In a study of youth who experienced sexual violence:

- 90% presented with post-traumatic stress symptoms shortly after the assault; 72% continued to show symptoms a year later.
- 89% experienced immediate depressive symptoms and 76% showed signs of anxiety; those symptoms persisted in more than half of survivors.

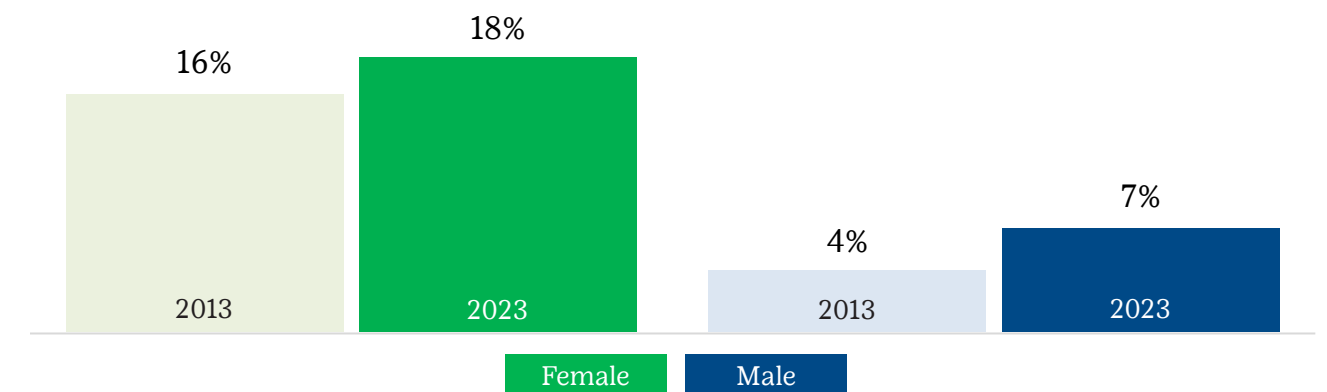
The negative effects survivors of sexual violence experience are shown to transcend beyond mental and emotional health consequences, deeply impacting physical health, social relationships, and academic performance (Clarke, 2023).

- Participants in the study were twice as likely to report problems with sleep than before the incident (87% of teenagers), as well as an increase in headaches, stomach pains, and a loss of appetite.
- The education of teenage survivors was disrupted, with 47% experiencing long absences from school (more than 30 days).
- 25% of teenage survivors report starting self-harm behaviors after the assault.

One in five high school girls in Wisconsin has experienced sexual dating violence, an increase over the last ten years.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

Percent of Wisconsin high school students reporting experiencing sexual dating violence



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

A Sense of Belonging



When girls experience life's challenges - small bumps or significant traumas - research shows one of the most important layers of support is the reassurance that comes from a community who cares.

In Girl Scouts, this sense of belonging is built through intentional, regular traditions like the Promise and Law, as well as programs promoting sisterhood and wellbeing.

92%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts feel like Girl Scouts is a place they belong.



Substance Abuse

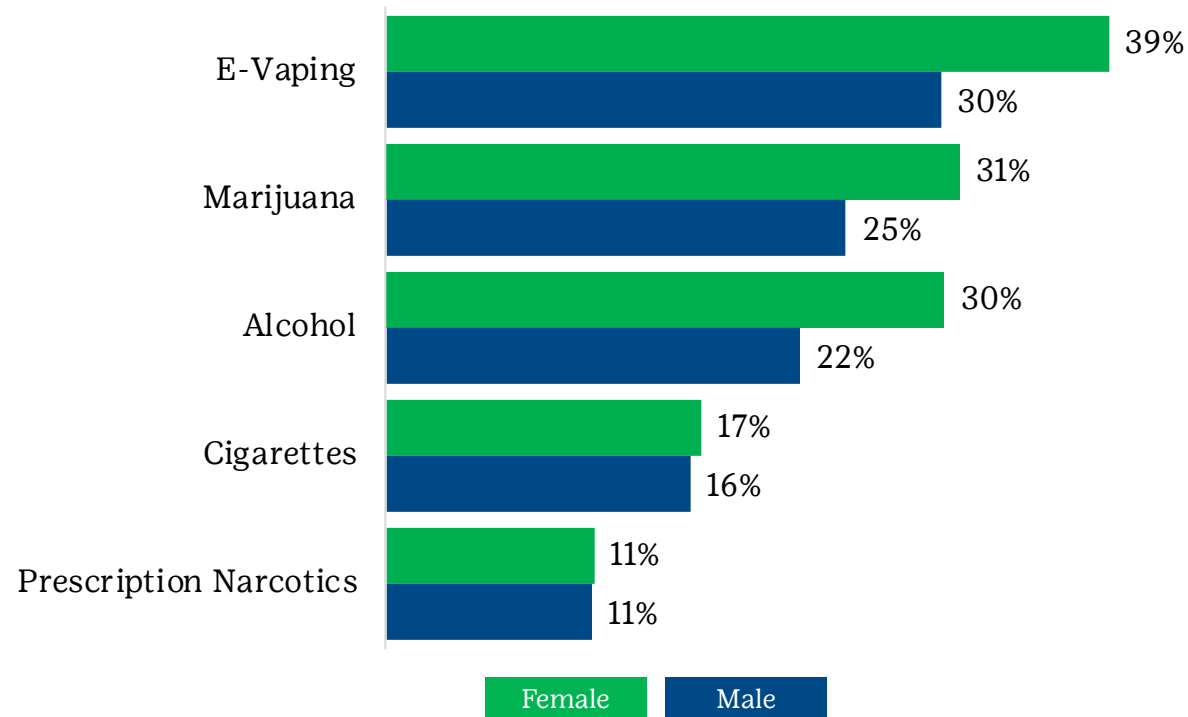
High school girls in Wisconsin report using controlled substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco at higher rates than boys across every measured category. **One in three high school girls reports using vaping tobacco, marijuana, or tobacco**, and one in ten girls reports misusing prescription medications as a narcotic.

The use of controlled substances by youth can lead to immediate consequences that impact overall well-being and increase the likelihood of poor long-term health outcomes, including a significant risk for long-term substance abuse.

Across all categories, more high school girls in Wisconsin abuse controlled substances compared to their male peers.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

Substance Abuse among Wisconsin High School Youth



According to the Surgeon General, people who use alcohol before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder, compared to those who have their first drink at age 20 or older ([Office of the Surgeon General, 2016](#)).

Research also suggests that early onset use of marijuana contributes to higher risks of cognitive impacts such as a decline in IQ, memory, and processing speed ([Gonzalez, 2012](#)). Notably, other factors such as the frequency of use also determine the degree of physical impacts, but with one in three high school girls engaging in marijuana use in Wisconsin, girls are more likely to face long-term health consequences than their male peers.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Future-Focused Girls

When girls face social pressure toward unhealthy choices like substance abuse, an important preventative skill researchers promote is **future orientation** - setting goals and understanding long-term consequences.

Throughout the entire Girl Scout program, girls examine the future and their role in it, including learning to set personal and group goals.

- Girl Scout Daisies in kindergarten or 1st grade learn to care for their communities, observing the impact of littering as they care for local parks.
- Girl Scout Brownies in 2nd or 3rd grade set a Cookie Program goal with their troop, planning a fun trip and selling boxes of Girl Scout cookies to meet it!
- Girl Scout Seniors or Ambassadors in 9th through 12th grade pursue the Girl Scout Gold Award, creating a sustainable solution to a community problem.

Developing a future orientation empowers girls to envision the life they want and make choices to achieve their goals.

75% of Wisconsin Girl Scouts agree:



“My troop leader helps me think about my future!”



ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



Encompassing the academic performance observed in classrooms, the skills to pursue career interests, and the personal motivation to succeed, life readiness means girls are prepared to thrive in the real-world.

An educational environment which fosters curiosity, champions risk-taking, and encourages girls to try new things prepares them for an evolving job market. Beyond academic success, life readiness also means girls are equipped with practical skills and personal traits needed to make informed decisions, overcome obstacles, and thrive in various environments.

Key Facts: Academic Performance

- **41% of girls achieved college-ready proficiency on the ACT.** Compared to 31% of boys who achieved the same assessment level, more girls are progressing in English Language Arts.
- **By 8th grade, girls close the math achievement gap.** While girls trail boys in math proficiency during the 3rd grade assessment by 4%, this gap is closed during the 8th grade assessment.
- **Girls comprise a larger portion of AP students than boys.** 57% of all students completing AP exams in Wisconsin are female.
- **Fewer girls than boys are entering advanced STEM fields.** While 42% of boys declare an advanced science or engineering field as their first major, only 25% of girls choose the same path.

Throughout this section, source data which includes students identifying as nonbinary is provided as a footnote. While the purpose of this report is to identify distinctions between students identifying as female or male, the outcomes of these students is provided in recognition of their achievements and with the intention of transparency.



K-12 Academic Performance

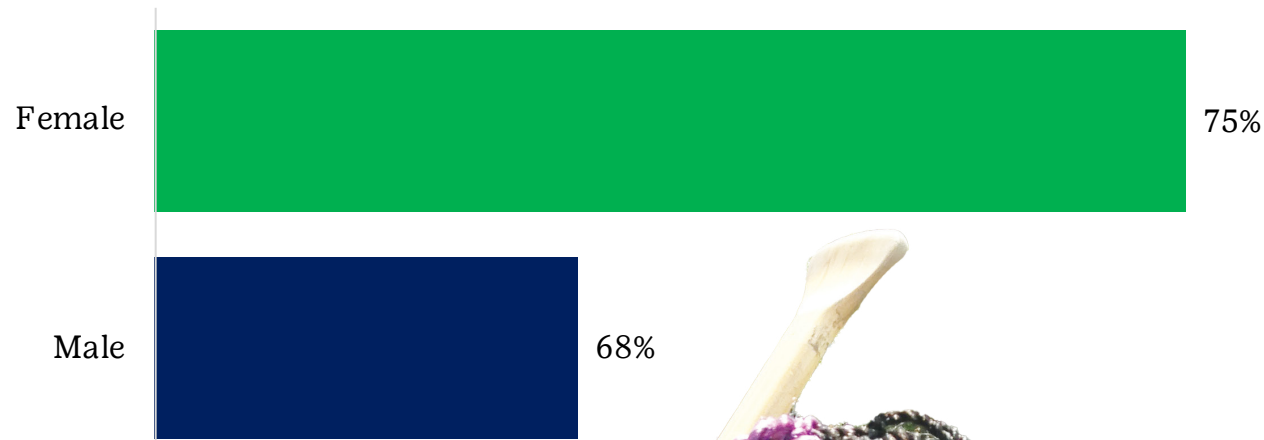
A significant portion of a child’s development occurs in an academic setting, creating an entwined relationship between academic performance and personal identity. Researchers consistently draw relationships between overall child wellness and academic performance, meaning, child wellness impacts academic performance and vice versa ([Kaya, 2021](#)).

For girls, this relationship is complicated by a greater level of external pressure to excel academically. The experience of girls in Wisconsin seems to align with the outcomes of studies which show girls face higher expectations than boys to do well in school ([Sicard, 2021](#)). Wisconsin girls are significantly more likely than their male peers to report earning A’s and B’s in school.

High school girls are much more likely to report earning mostly A’s and B’s in school compared to boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

High School Students reporting grades are mostly A's and B's



83%
of Wisconsin Girl Scouts develop the confidence to be good at many different things.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Academic Success: Lifelong Impact

Girl Scouts is the perfect companion to a strong education for girls, now and in the future.

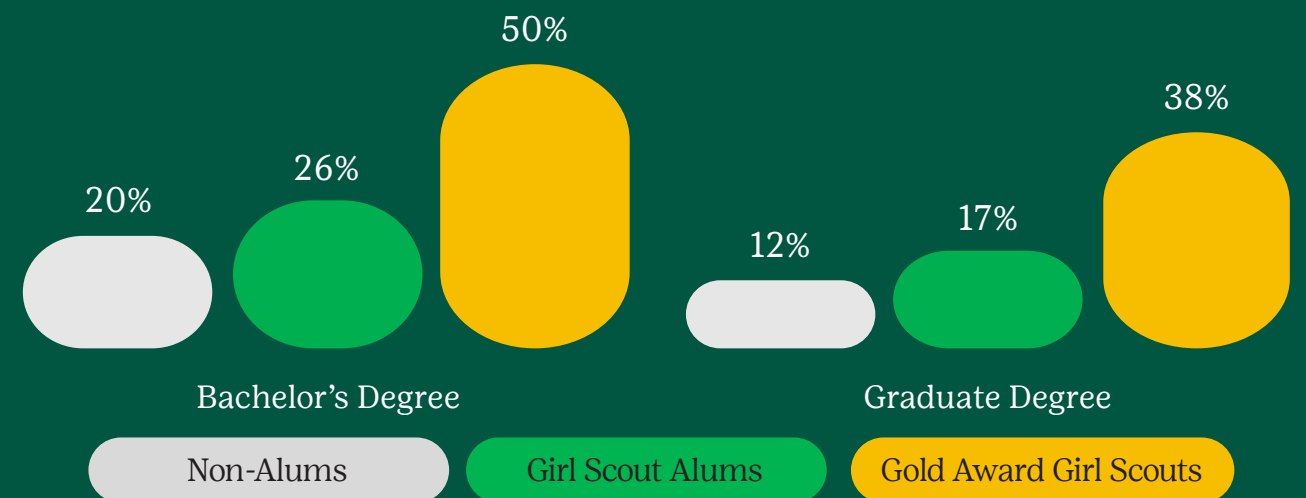
First, Girl Scouts doesn’t feel like school, and that’s the point! Girls learn skills they won’t find in a classroom (like entrepreneurship) through immersive programs (like the renowned Girl Scout Cookie Program). These experiences are based on experiential, hands-on activities that build skills, curiosity, and camaraderie with peers.

Importantly, one of the most critical outcomes of the Girl Scout program is increasing girls’ confidence and courage to try new things. Emphasizing resilience sets girls up for success in the classroom *and* in life.

Research proves it: the Girl Scout Alum Study found that Girl Scout alum attain a higher level of education than their peers, and the difference more than doubles among girls who earn the prestigious Girl Scout Gold Award.



Highest Education Complete



K-12 Student Proficiency: English Language Arts

The Wisconsin Forward Exam has been used to measure students' progress in mastering the Wisconsin Academic Standards since 2016. Administering assessments to students beginning in grade 3, the exam measures performance in English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. The numeric score students receive varies by assessment and grade, falling into one of these four levels:

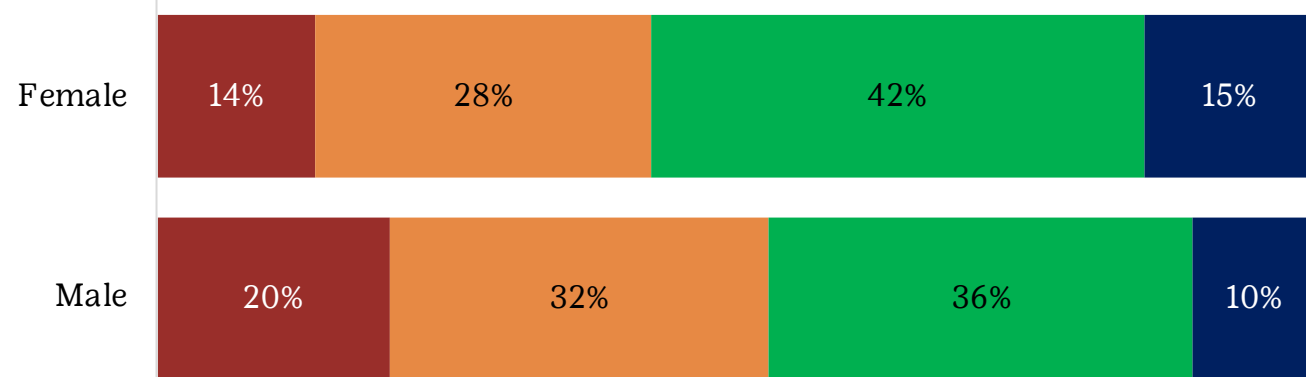
Indicates on- or above-grade-level.			
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Developing	Approaching	Meeting	Advanced
The student is at the beginning stages of developing the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level needed to be on-track for future learning.	The student is approaching the knowledge and skill expectations described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level needed to be on-track for future learning.	The student is meeting the knowledge and skill expectations described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level and is on-track for future learning.	The student demonstrates a thorough understanding of the knowledge and skills described in the Wisconsin Academic Standards for their grade level and is on-track for future learning.

The English Language Arts assessment is administered annually to students in grades 3 through 8, with the 3rd grade assessment considered a pivotal year for reading evaluation as students transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn.' The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that three quarters of 4th grade students who are poor readers in 3rd grade will remain poor readers in high school, ultimately predicting graduation rates (AECF, 2010). While Wisconsin girls outperform their male peers in the ELA assessment, 43% of girls are on track for continued academic challenges without the necessary reading skills to excel.

Girls outperform boys in the English Language Arts assessment, with 57% of girls meeting proficiency expectations compared to 46% of boys.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

2023-2024 ELA Forward Assessment Performance, 3rd Grade Students



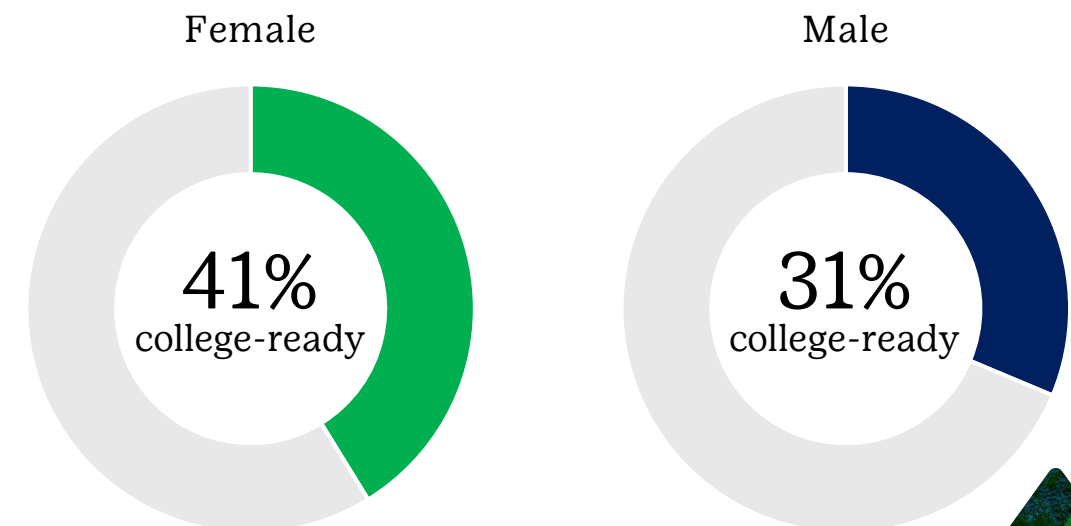
K-12 Student Proficiency: English Language Arts

Girls in the United States have consistently surpassed boys in English Language Arts assessments, with researchers offering varying explanations ranging from cognitive development (girls are more easily able to utilize both hemispheres of the brain necessary for writing and reading comprehension tasks) to social pressure (reading and writing are generally regarded as feminine in nature) (Reilly, 2018). As Wisconsin girls conclude their primary education and participate in the ACT exam, their ELA scores validate these trends, with 10% more girls than boys achieving college-readiness proficiency on the ACT.

10% more girls than boys achieved college-readiness proficiency on the ACT English Language Arts assessment.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

2023-2024 ACT English Language Arts Performance



71%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts are more confident in school because of Girl Scouts.



K-12 Student Proficiency: Mathematics

Prevailing stereotypes have long held that girls excel in ELA while underperforming in math and science, often attributed to inherent developmental differences. However, multiple studies have debunked this belief, finding that disparities are more often influenced by social pressures and instructional biases than biological factors. Case in point, countries with the largest gender gaps in STEM assessments present the most overt gender stereotypes ([Kuchynka, 2022](#)).

Social pressures significantly affect students' academic engagement and self-perception. Research by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) demonstrates that girls often experience a lack of encouragement in STEM fields, leading to lower self-confidence in science and math ([Hill, 2010](#)). In contrast, boys are socialized to embrace competitiveness and assertiveness, traits that enhance their performance in these areas.

While girls trail boys in achieving math proficiency in third grade, by 8th grade, they close this gap.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

	Math Proficiency (Level 3-4) 3rd Grade	Math Proficiency (Level 3-4) 8th Grade
Female	54%	51%
Male	58%	51%
Difference	4% Lower	Equal

Girls in Wisconsin are beginning to narrow this gap. Although 4% fewer girls achieve proficiency in the mathematics Forward Assessment in 3rd grade, by 8th grade, girls close this gap, with an equal number of girls and boys achieving proficiency. Celebrating this progress is also an opportunity to focus on the larger gap: 45% of all 8th grade students in Wisconsin are still not meeting state standards in mathematics.

90% of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say they learn by doing activities, not just listening.



K-12 Student Proficiency: Mathematics

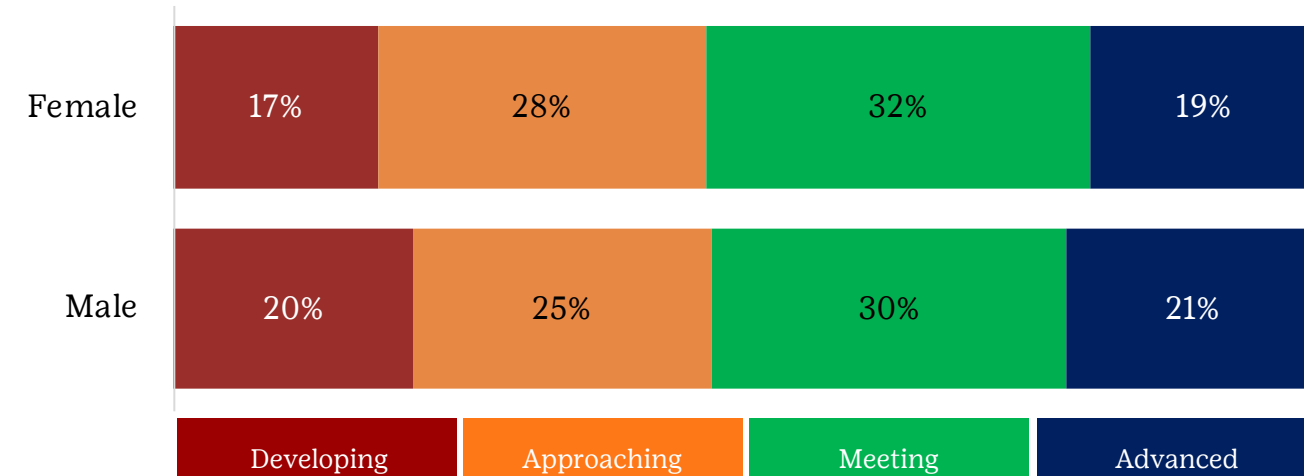
While an equal number of girls achieve proficiency levels in the 8th grade Forward Assessment as boys, this progress decreases through high school. As girls prepare for graduation and complete the ACT, only 25% achieve college-readiness scores in mathematics compared to 30% of boys.

For girls, addressing this achievement gap will require a multi-pronged approach including overcoming social pressures proven to significantly affect students' academic engagement and self-perception.

By 8th grade, girls in Wisconsin closed the proficiency gap in math, with 51% of both girls and boys scoring Meeting or Advanced on the Forward Math Assessment.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

2023-2024 Math Forward Assessment Performance, 8th Grade Students



Less than 100 students identifying as non-binary participated in this assessment with 60% achieving proficiency with scores in the Meeting or Advanced levels. Note: Data excludes students who did not participate in the Forward Assessment. Percentages will not add up to 100.



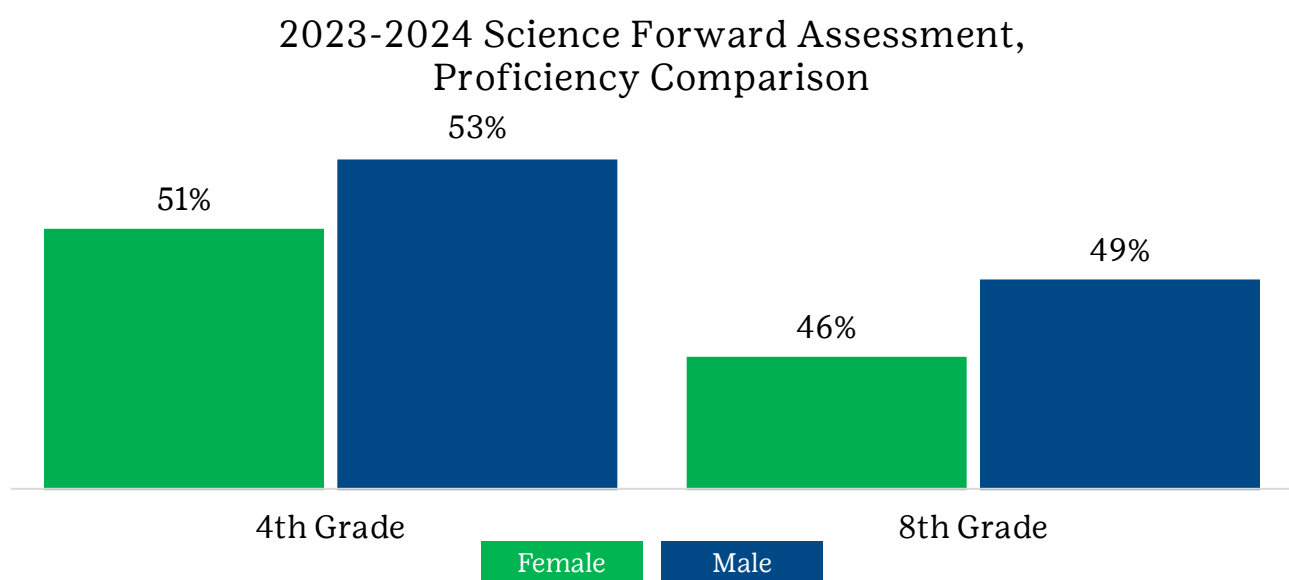
K-12 Student Proficiency: Science

As the nation continues to struggle with the widely-reported gender gap in advanced STEM fields, educators and researchers are paying specific attention to science proficiency in schools. Studies endeavor to identify the root cause of the low entrance of women into the STEM workforce while technological development grows ([Verdugo-Castro, 2022](#)). The answer to closing the gap is complex, but evidence suggests it requires interventions as early as elementary school to grow girls' STEM confidence and interest, as gender differences in STEM are shown to be developed as a mental model as early as 6th grade ([Brauner, 2018](#)).

The Wisconsin Forward Assessment results demonstrate this decline: for both boys and girls, proficiency achievement decreased between the 4th grade science assessment and the 8th grade assessment, most significantly among girls. Only 46% of 8th grade girls achieved proficiency scores, indicating a significant need to promote holistic interest in STEM.

Wisconsin girls trail boys in science proficiency and experience a decline in proficiency achievement between 4th and 8th grade.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024



28%
of Wisconsin girls achieved college-ready scores in science on the ACT.

Adults have a significant role to play in increasing the confidence and competence of girls in STEM fields. On one hand, research shows that instructional bias can contribute to a STEM divide. Teachers may unconsciously favor boys in science discussions, reinforcing the notion that boys are naturally better in these subjects ([Copur-Gencturk, 2023](#)). On the other hand, a series of studies found that group mentoring with girls and adults involved in STEM fields increased girls' intentions to enroll in STEM electives in school ([Stoeger, 2017](#)).



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Nurturing STEM Leaders

The Girl Scout STEM program is designed to provide hands-on experiences that spark curiosity for life. With adult guidance, exposure to a wide-variety of activities, and a team of peers, Girl Scouts develop four key skills:

- STEM Interest**
A positive affect and curiosity towards STEM.
- STEM Confidence**
Feelings of self-efficacy in relation to STEM.
- STEM Competence**
Ability to think scientifically when working to solve a problem.
- STEM Value**
Understanding the role STEM plays in making the world a better place.

A 2022 study conducted by the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) found that girls who participate in just one STEM event grow in all four STEM outcomes, **including two-thirds of teenage Girl Scouts expressing an interest in a STEM career.**

By comparison, a study released by [the Pew Research Center](#) found that only 9% of all teen girls share a similar interest in STEM. *That's the Girl Scout difference.*

63% of Girl Scout teens who do STEM want to have a STEM career, compared to 9% of non-Girl Scouts.

61% of Wisconsin Girl Scouts completed a STEM activity like building robots or designing video games.



Student Engagement

Many of the key outcomes students need from school to be successful in life are not academic in nature. In a pivotal longitudinal study, school performance emerged as the least important indicator of life-satisfaction (Layard, 2014). Utilizing 40 years of cohort data, the study identified key variables to being life-ready, defined with attributes across economic, social, and personal domains. Evaluating family background (economic and psycho-social family dynamics), child characteristics (including intellectual performance and emotional health), and adult outcomes (such as income, employment, and physical health), research found that emotional wellbeing such as self-discipline and social behavior were the most reliable indicators of life-satisfaction.

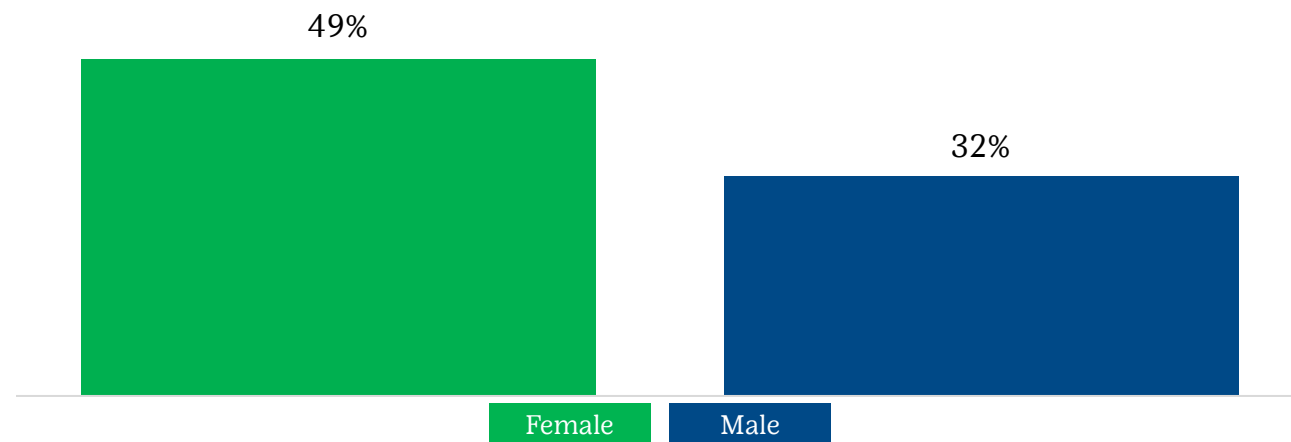
Student engagement includes measures that indicate how young people are developing attributes such as goal-setting, grit, and personal motivation. As Layard identified, these non-cognitive skills are much more reliable predictors for achieving success later in life. As young people spend a significant portion of their development in a school setting, these critical life-skills are often developed within the context of school.

By that measure, 49% of girls in Wisconsin are poised for success. About half of parents of girls indicate their daughters are always engaged in school, compared to only 32% of parents of boys. Additional concrete measures of engagement in school indicate that, overall, girls exhibit a higher level of commitment to success in school compared to their male peers.

A higher portion of girls than boys in Wisconsin demonstrate academic engagement according to parents.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin

Parents believe child is always engaged in school



81%

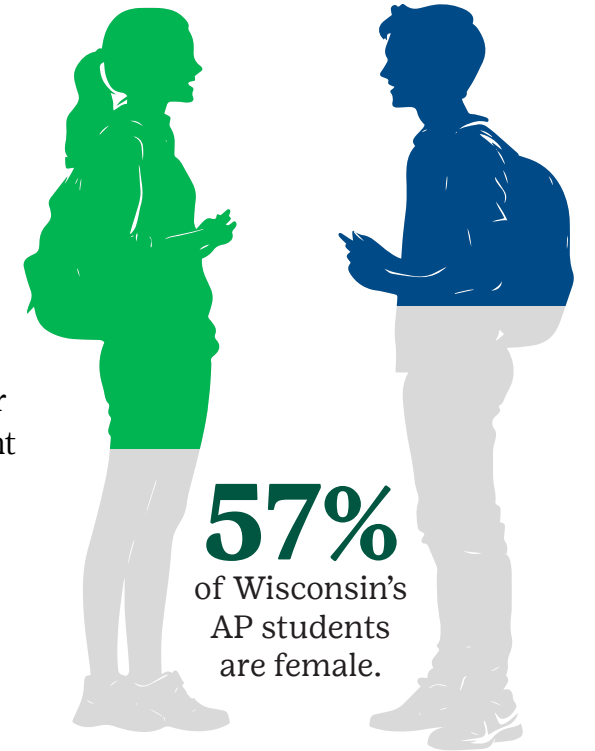
of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say the adults in Girl Scouts help them reach their goals.

Student Engagement, continued.

A tangible result of highly motivated students is enrollment in advanced courses. Most studies find strong relationships between enrollment in these courses and success during post-secondary education (Ogut, 2021) but few found a broader correlation to success outside of higher education - meaning, little linkages exist between advanced courses and life outcomes.

In one of the only comprehensive evaluations of the Advanced Placement program, researchers uncovered two competing truths. **On one hand, evidence shows a genuine increase in scientific skill through participation in advanced courses.** The study also found that advanced courses increase stress and lower student confidence in their ability to be successful in college and career.

Girls in Wisconsin are using these skills to achieve higher graduation rates compared to their male peers, consistent with historic national trends. Researchers studying school achievement and graduation rates find that “high school females put greater effort into school” due to the ‘social cost’ (Reeves, 2023). Boys report negative social outcomes for trying hard and performing well in school while girls report positive results. This leads to girls placing a high level of personal value on academic achievement (Workman, 2020).

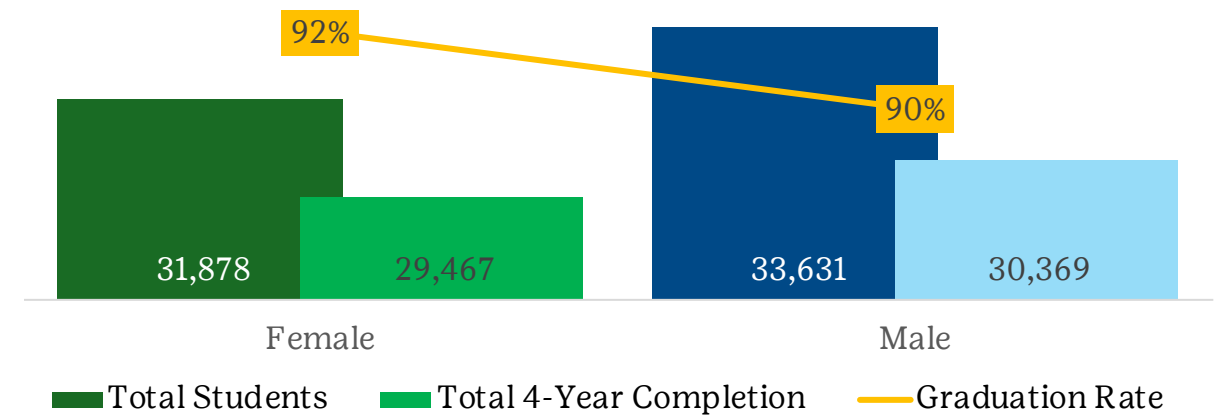


Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

A higher portion of Wisconsin girls are completing high school in a four-year timeframe compared to boys, with a 92% graduation rate.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

2024 Graduation Rate



Less than 100 students identifying as non-binary were members of the class of 2024 with an 84% graduation rate.



College and Career Readiness

Navigating the school-to-work transition for young people can often feel abrupt, particularly during times of economic or industry turbulence. Many students begin to bridge this gap with career and technical training programs at school or work/community commitments outside of school settings. Although researchers are conflicted on whether working while in school is beneficial or consequential, it's important to understand the differences in participation in these experiences between girls and boys in Wisconsin.

- More girls in Wisconsin are working while in school, with 56% of parents of girls reporting their daughters work outside the home compared to 52% of parents of boys.
- 38% of Wisconsin girls are participating in community service compared to 34% of boys.
- High school girls make up 42% of students participating in career and technical training education programs while boys comprise the remaining 58%.

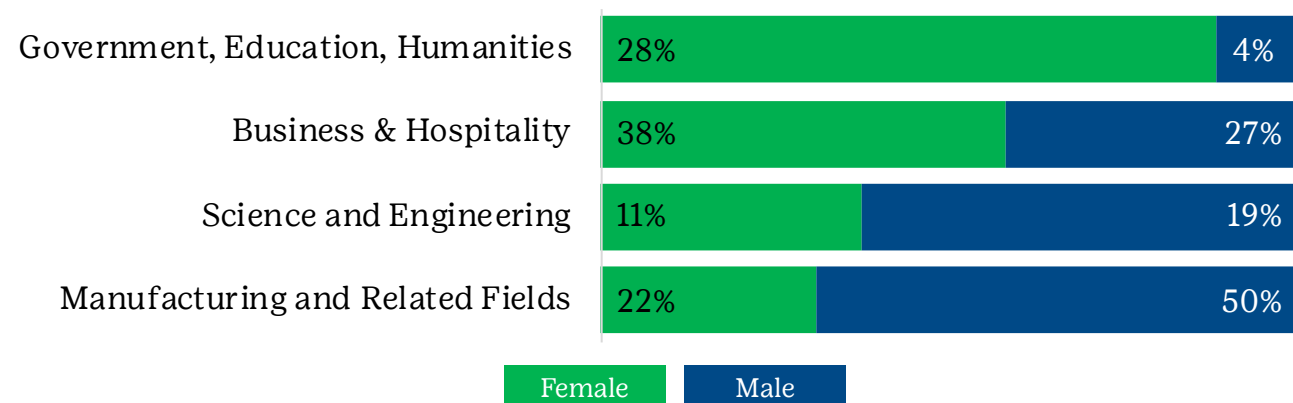
Researchers evaluating the impact of students working outside of school identified a significant differentiator in the work demand: students with high-demand jobs (>10 hours per week) showed the worst outcomes - low academic achievement and low engagement. Importantly, students with low-demand work commitments presented with the most favorable outcomes, exhibiting higher grades, higher motivation, and higher life aspirations compared to non-working students ([Singh, 2007](#)).

Similarly, integrated career and technical education programs create low-demand commitments during school hours, introducing students to a variety of career opportunities and skills. In Wisconsin, the types of programs students participate in vary significantly by gender, with girls dominating hospitality and humanities areas while boys highly participate in manufacturing and engineering programs.

Girls participate in hospitality and health science career and technical education programs, while boys favor manufacturing and construction.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

Enrollment by Gender in 2024 Community and Technical Education Programs, Grouped by Type



Graduation and Beyond

Decisions about life after high school mark one of the first pivotal steps towards independence and autonomy for young adults. The path to higher education is chosen by most American high school graduates. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 62% of high school graduates in 2022 enrolled in college by the fall ([NCES, 2023](#)).

In Wisconsin, girls are significantly more likely than boys to pursue higher education directly following high school, many choosing in-state colleges or universities.

28% more girls than boys enroll directly into a post-secondary education program following high school, with 14,000+ girls enrolled in an in-state institution compared to 11,000+ boys.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023-2024

2023-2024 Post-Secondary Enrollment following Graduation among Wisconsin Youth



As evidence suggests, obtaining a college degree leads to several improved life outcomes, including higher earning potential and job stability. The Pew Research Center evaluated attitudes and evidence surrounding college completion in 2024, asking, 'Is it still worth it?' By several measures, the answer is yes ([Fry, 2024](#)).

- 78% of young women holding a bachelor's degree or higher were employed full-time, compared to 69% of young women with only a high school education.
- The median household income of young women holding a bachelor's degree or higher is \$65,000 compared to \$36,000 among young women with only a high school education.
- Young women holding a bachelor's degree or higher experienced less job loss during the COVID-19 recession than young women completing some college or only high school education.

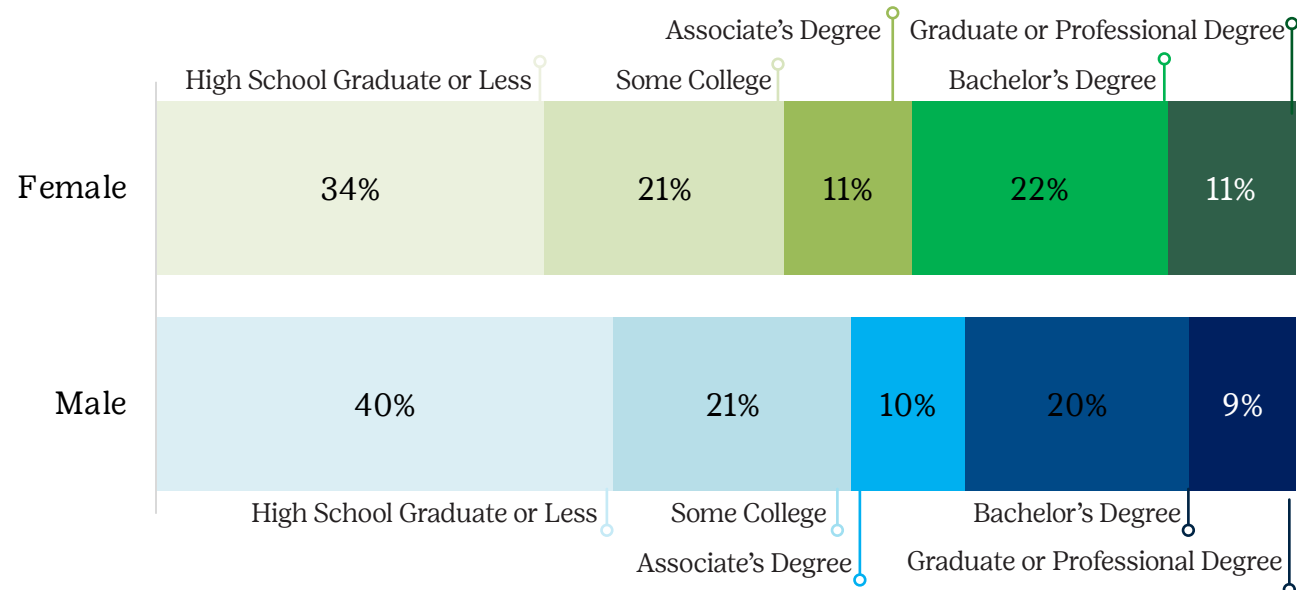
By these measures, girls in Wisconsin are well-positioned to continue building a successful life after completing school, but notable differences emerge as students first select their course of study in college.

Graduation and Beyond, continued.

Consistent with the higher rates of college enrollment among young women, more female residents of Wisconsin hold post-secondary degrees compared to men, with 34% of women holding a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 29% of men.

More women than men in Wisconsin hold post-secondary degrees, with 34% of female residents earning a bachelor's or higher vs. 29% of men.

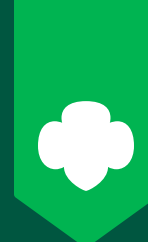
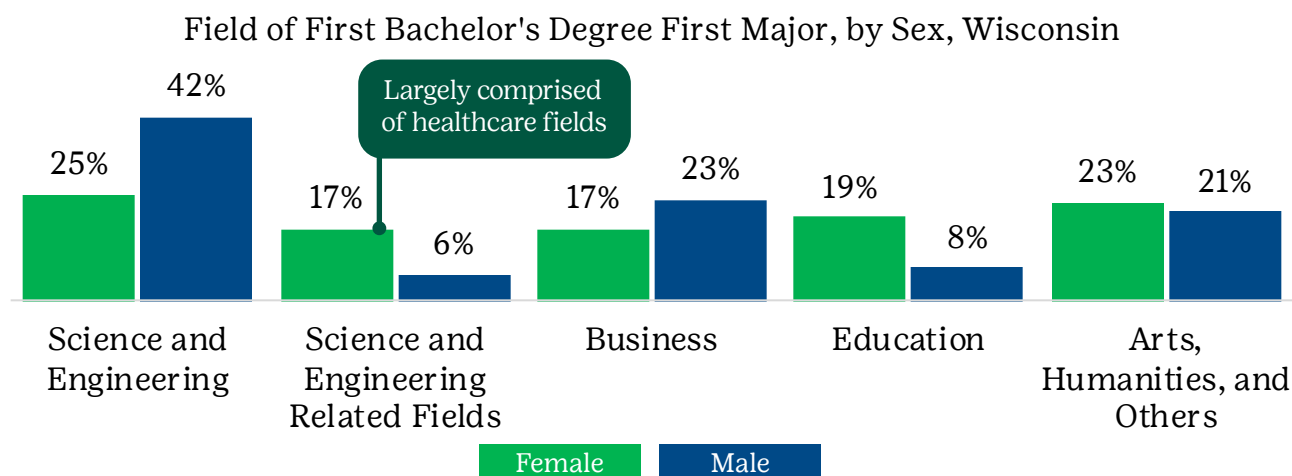
U.S. Census, American Community Survey, Table B15001, 2023, Wisconsin



Yet, young women are selecting advanced degrees in STEM at staggeringly lower rates compared to young men. Evaluating the first major declared by college students, 19% fewer women pursue science and engineering than men - 25% vs. 42%. Science and engineering-related fields describe largely care-taking healthcare fields predominantly occupied by women. Women are also slightly less likely to pursue high-earning business degrees, with 17% of female students selecting these fields compared to 23% of men.

Women are pursuing STEM and business-related bachelor's degrees at a significantly lower rate than men, trailing 17% in STEM and engineering.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S1502, 2023, Wisconsin



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Sales Skills + Service

The best outcome for our future is a world where young people do not have to choose between the benefits of learning fundamental job skills and positively contributing to their community.

In Girl Scouts, both are embedded into the annual program.

Girl Scout entrepreneurship programming, including the iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program, helps girls develop concrete business skills like setting goals and making a plan, as well as social characteristics necessary for success, like upholding commitments and meeting new people.

Evidence of Girl Scouts taking action in their communities is visible in towns and cities across Wisconsin. Contributions from Girl Scouts leave an impact on animal shelters, elementary schools, and neighborhood parks. Best of all, a girl's contribution to her community leaves a lasting impact on herself.

It's the best of both worlds: learning to run a business in the same community she volunteers to improve.

71%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts participated in entrepreneurship programs in 2024.

65%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts participated in community service projects in 2024.



EMOTIONAL WELLNESS



When girls develop the ability to identify, express, and manage their feelings, they build a foundation for emotional resiliency.

Nurturing these capabilities requires safe environments where girls learn to care for the full range of their emotions. This support system, coupled with the presence of caring adults, helps in the reduction of the mental health challenges girls face, including bullying, eating disorders, and depression.

Key Facts: Emotional Wellness

- **Half of high school girls meet a clinical definition of depression.**
53% of high school girls report feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row, which is 11% more than boys.
- **1 in 4 high school girls seriously considered attempting suicide.**
30% more girls than boys experience suicidal ideation - 26% of all high school girls versus 20% of high school boys.
- **Parents struggle to obtain mental health care for their daughter.**
52% of parents of girls find difficulty in obtaining needed mental health treatment, with 1 in 5 noting it is extremely difficult or impossible.
- **1 in 4 middle school girls feel unsupported by adults at school in stopping bullying behavior.**
Girls increasingly struggle with cyberbullying, leaving them feeling isolated from adult support at school.



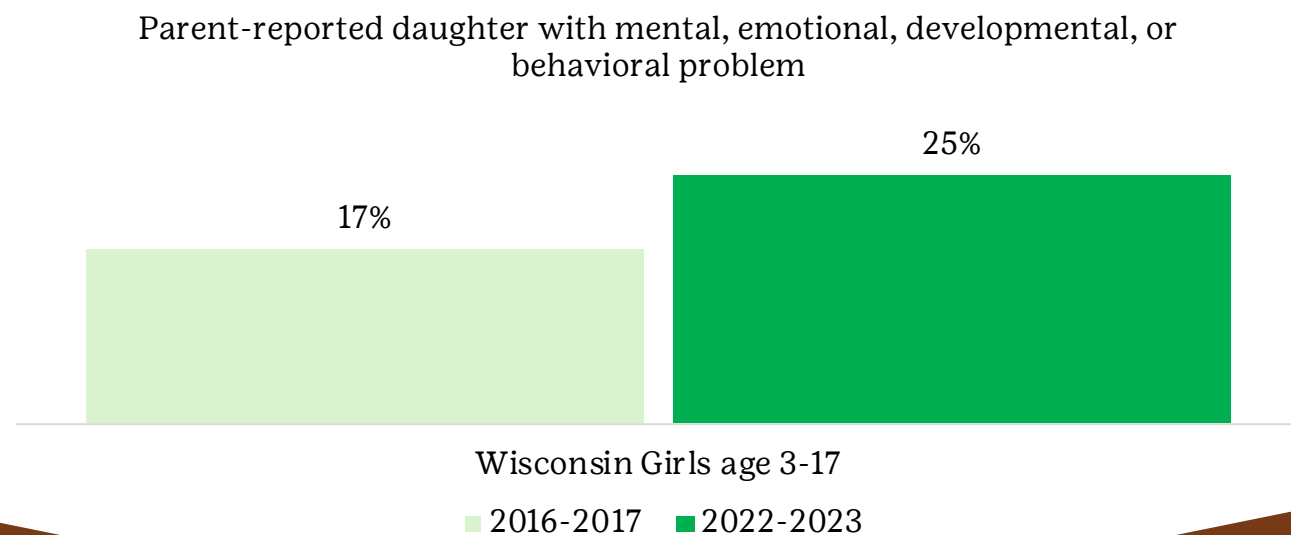
Mental Health Conditions

A national dialog on youth mental health emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as the sharp change in daily norms highlighted or exacerbated mental and emotional challenges. Prior to this, girls being diagnosed with mental, emotional, or behavioral (MEB) conditions was already on the rise ([Slomski, 2023](#)). Between 2017 and 2022, the rate of girls in Wisconsin having a diagnosed MEB condition increased by 43%.

Internalized conditions such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder account for the most significant increase in mental and emotional health diagnoses among girls nationwide ([Keyes, 2023](#)). Researchers point to a wide variety of circumstances behind the increase, largely citing an increase in awareness and evaluation criteria that account for how mental and emotional conditions appear in girls compared to boys.

The number of girls struggling with mental or emotional problems has increased 43% in the last five years, from 17% to 25% of girls.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2016-2017 and 2022-2023, Wisconsin



Nearly 1 in 2 high school girls in Wisconsin experiences symptoms of depression, an increase of 36% in the last 10 years.

Mental Health and Suicide

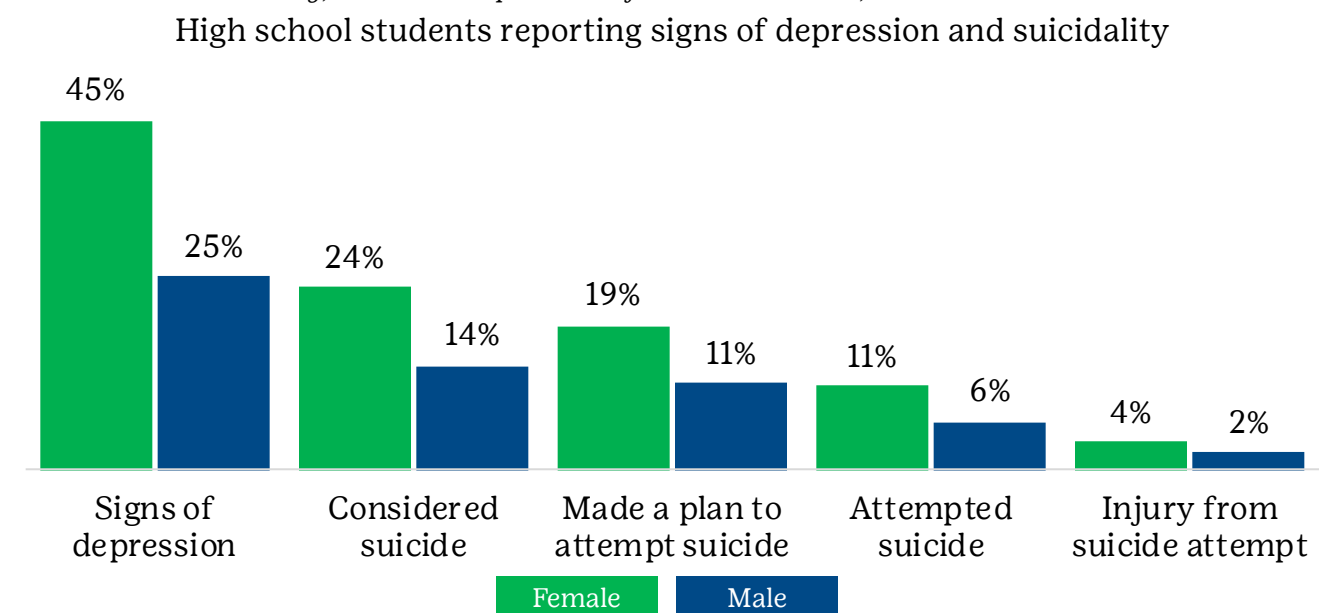
Among the most concerning shifts in youth mental health is the startling rise in suicidality among young people. Experts warn that this crisis is “broad and deep in almost every community in the country” ([Lowrie, 2023](#)). In 2023, the Washington Post published a summary of results from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Administered to a nationally representative sample of students in public and private schools, the report demonstrated that “girls are engulfed in a growing wave of sadness, violence, and trauma,” according to the CDC ([St. George, 2023](#)).

Girls in Wisconsin are similarly struck by this national crisis. In every measurement, high school girls are more likely to experience mental health challenges compared to boys, including nearly half of teenage girls demonstrating signs of depression and one in five seriously considering attempting suicide. This trend culminates in a significant crisis in the state: the Wisconsin Department of Health Services reported that death by suicide as the second leading cause of death among young people in 2023.

Researchers point to several factors contributing to the stark increase. Coupled with difficulty developing emotional regulation skills, girls are also experiencing “a higher rate of stressful events” which contribute to a disproportionate prevalence of mental health challenges ([Vucenovic, 2023](#)).

High school girls are experiencing a higher rate of severe mental and emotional distress, with twice as many girls attempting death by suicide as boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023



Death by suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in Wisconsin, ages 5-25 (DHS).

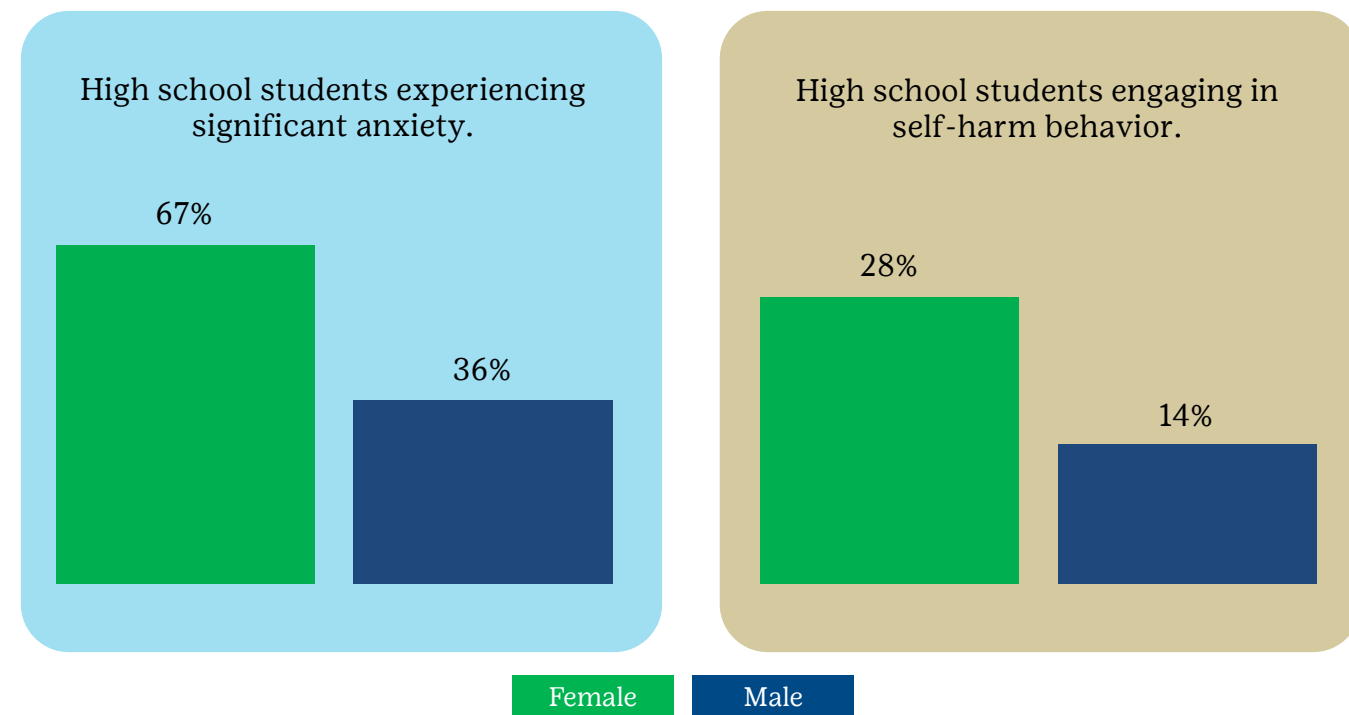
Mental Health and Suicide, continued.

While research shows early detection and support for youth experiencing mental health challenges prevent worsening symptoms, mental health issues among girls often go unrecognized. Symptoms such as increased irritability, low-mood, and social isolation are often mistaken as traits associated with puberty ([Vucenovic, 2023](#)).

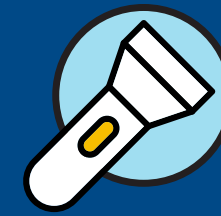
In addition, girls often exhibit more internalized symptoms like deep sadness and a prolonged sense of hopelessness, while boys tend to exhibit more externalized behaviors. Research shows that children experiencing internalized concerns are rarely identified for targeted interventions in schools, and in fact, they may actually be “academic superstars using perfectionism to cope with significant underlying distress” ([Weist, 2018](#)).

For girls in Wisconsin, these internalized struggles are evident in the rate of high school students experiencing significant anxiety or engaging in self-harm behavior.

In both cases, teenage girls are nearly twice as likely as boys in self-report challenges, indicating a significantly different experience with internalized mental and emotional health between young women and men.



There is a growing need to improve the skills and mechanisms by which mental health challenges are identified in girls; but so is the need to nurture preventative factors. A key aspect of shifting from intervention-based solutions to prevention-based solutions focuses on the role of youth-adult relationships ([Sieving, 2017](#)). Extensive research supports the role of positive parent-child relationships, relationships formed with adults in school settings, and mentor-based relationships formed with adults in out-of-school settings.



A DEEPER LOOK

Mental Health by Race and Ethnicity

Girls of color largely report higher rates of mental health challenges than girls who identify as White. Girls who identify with more than one race have the highest rate of displaying signs of depression, with nearly two in three feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row. Among high school girls identifying as Black, the rate of reporting mental health challenges is higher than girls who identify as White in every measure, including 2.5x more Black girls attempting death by suicide.

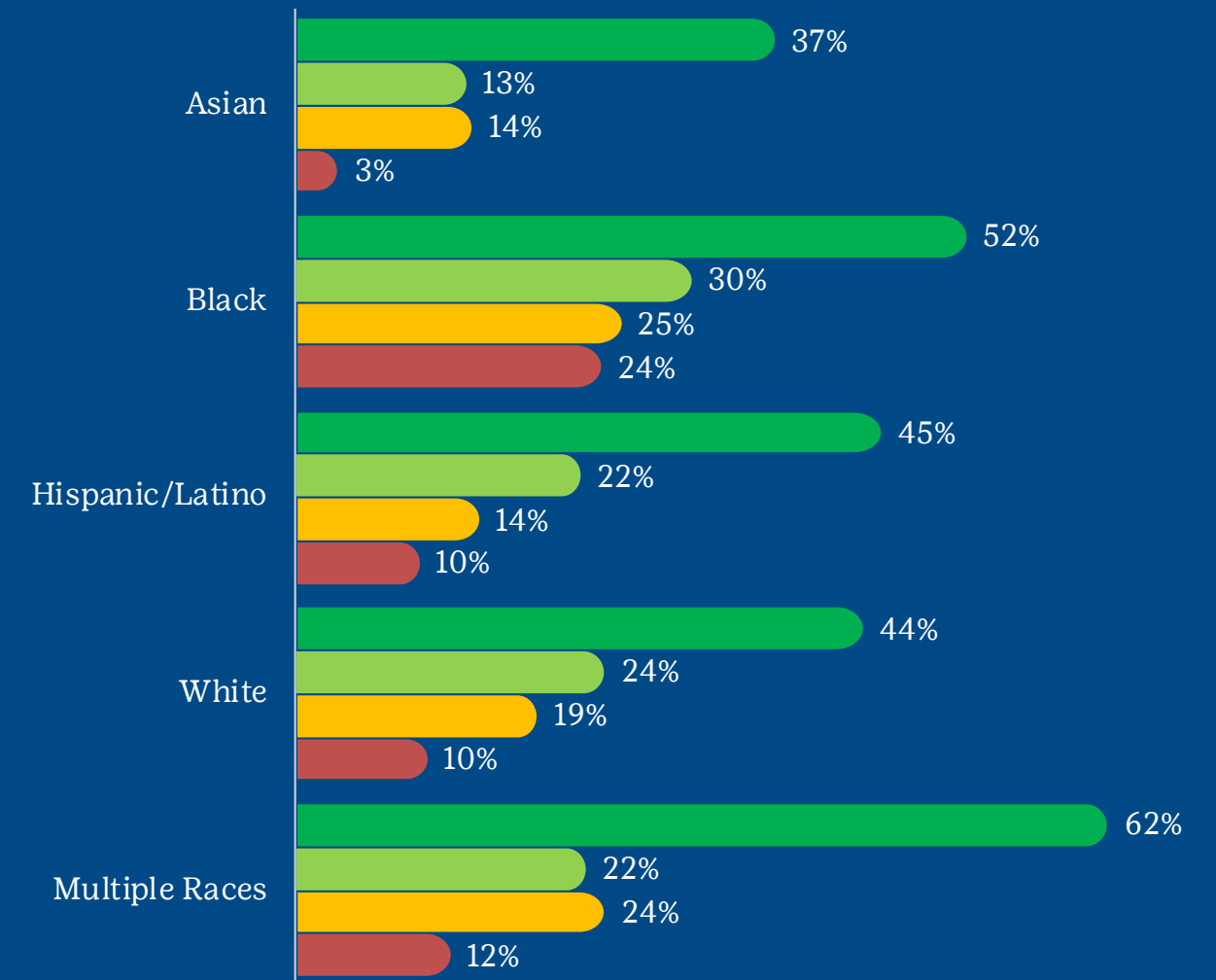
Felt sad or hopeless
2+ weeks in a row

Seriously considered
attempting suicide

Made a plan about how they
would attempt suicide

Actually attempted
suicide

Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges among Wisconsin High School Youth by Race and Ethnicity



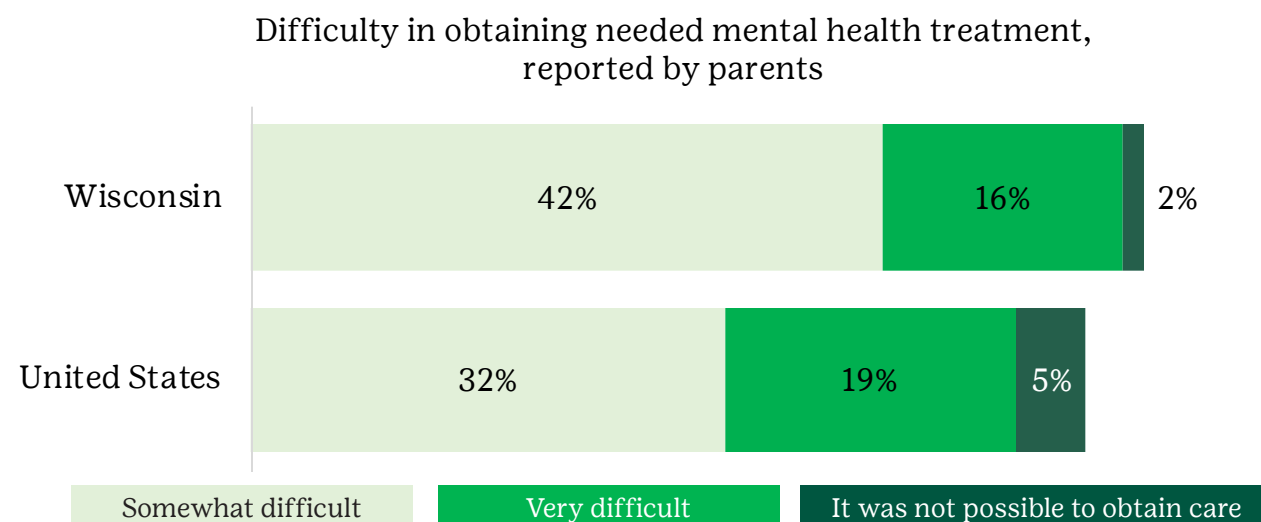
Access to Mental Health Care

As the severity of mental health challenges increases, so does the need for specialized treatment, illuminating another layer of the crisis in Wisconsin: access to care. **60% of parents of girls age 3-17 experience difficulty obtaining necessary mental health care**, with nearly one in five caregivers noting it is very difficult or not possible to obtain mental health treatment.

Delays in obtaining early interventions for youth displaying mental health challenges often creates long-term consequences. Youth are more likely to require more intensive, expensive services in the near future if left untreated and also display a higher prevalence of experiencing a major depressive episode in adulthood ([Vucenovic, 2023](#)).

60% of Wisconsin parents of girls report difficulty obtaining needed mental health treatment, compared to the national average of 56%.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin



79%
of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say they're a happier person because of Girl Scouts.

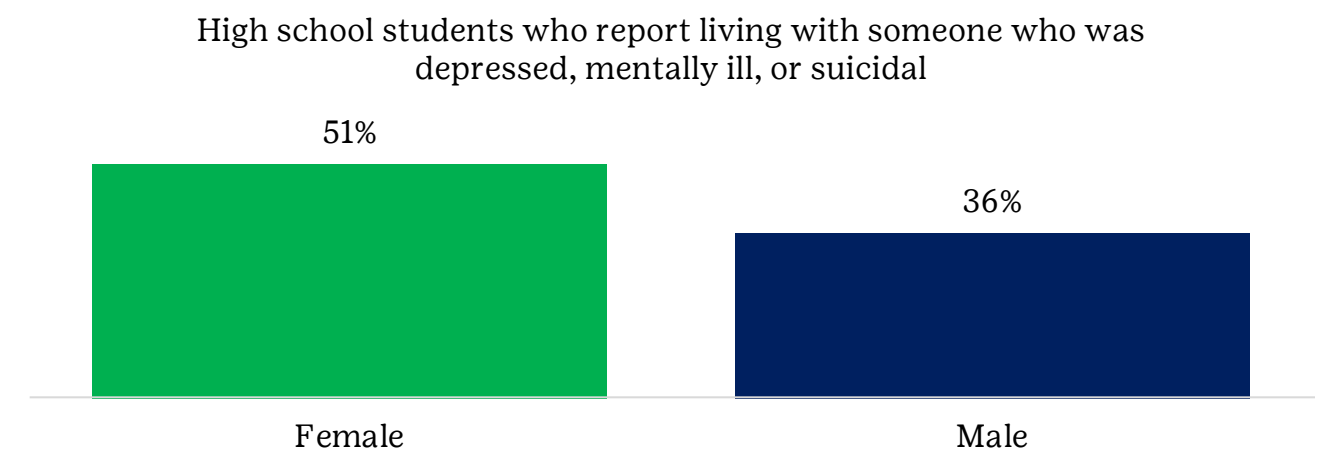
Family Mental Health

Girls' mental health is intricately linked to that of their parents. Research has established that intergenerational patterns develop for mental health; meaning, children whose parents have mental health problems are more likely to present with similar problems themselves ([Landstedt, 2019](#)). Many mental health disorders are proven to be hereditary, increasing the likelihood of child diagnoses.

More girls than boys are living in households with a mother or father who are, themselves, experiencing mental or emotional health problems: **51% of high school girls report living with someone who has experienced mental health challenges compared to 36% of boys.** Based on these findings, the significant increase in mental and emotional health challenges faced by young women risks an even larger portion of future generations experiencing the same intergenerational cycle.

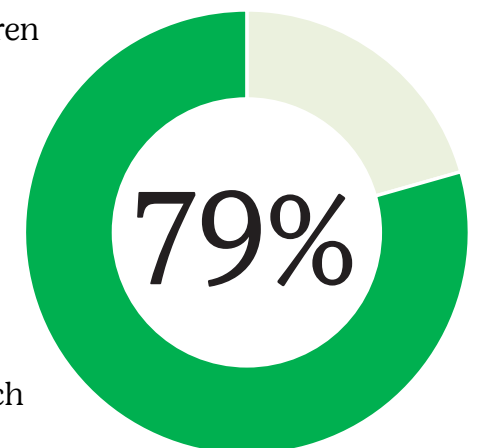
One in two high school girls reports living with someone who has experienced a significant mental health challenge.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023



Family dynamics serve to model important relationships for children and also insulate kids from extreme stressors ([Zhuo, 2022](#)). Research shows that families can frame even significant stressors as temporary and changeable, while also relying on inter-family relationships to create comfort and calm.

It's notable, then, that nearly 80% of teenage girls would not talk with a family member about their feelings. A strong parent-child connection could create an environment for persevering through relational challenges like conflict and even systemic challenges such as food insecurity or threats to safety ([Bethell, 2022](#)), but teenage girls in Wisconsin currently report feeling unsupported in this important relationship.



of teenage girls in Wisconsin would not talk with an adult in their family about their feelings.



Bullying

The Pew Research Center has found bullying ranked among the top concerns of parents for over a decade ([Minkin, 2023](#)). During that same time frame, bullying has evolved significantly, with a growing number of students experiencing electronic bullying, more commonly known as cyber-bullying. As bullying behavior among youth migrates to digital channels, schools and parents struggle to identify and mitigate the challenge.

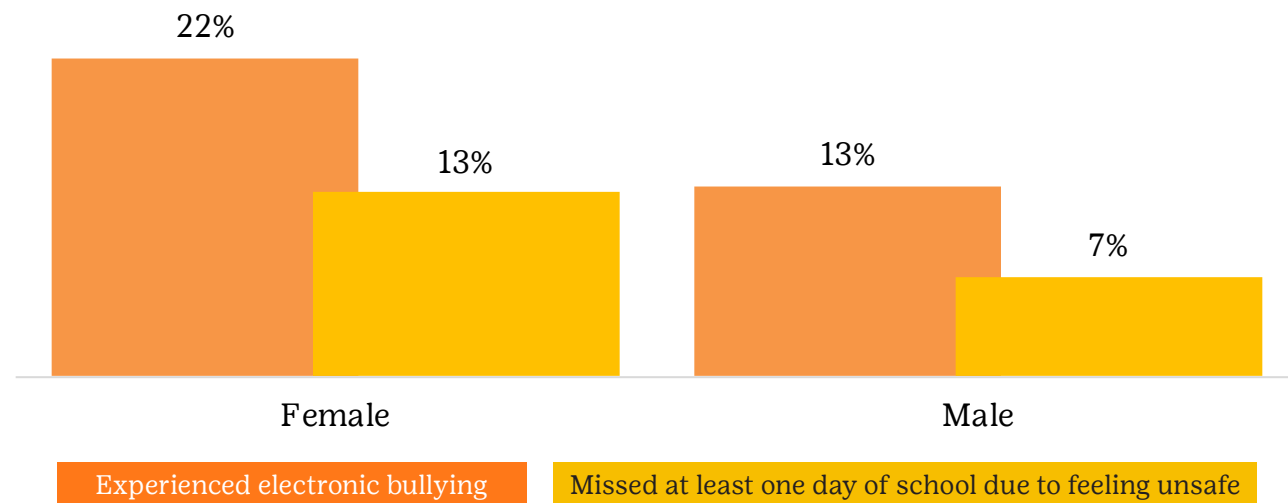
Research has long proven the negative ramifications of bullying, inspiring policies and programs to curtail the toxic behaviors in schools and online. The increase in stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of bullying can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, and sleep disturbances ([Holt, 2015](#)). Moreover, youth who are bullied may engage in harmful behaviors, including substance abuse and self-harm ([Horner, 2015](#)).

While school prevention programs have little purview over the spaces where cyber-bullying thrives, school attendance and performance are still negatively impacted. **One in eight high school girls miss school due to feeling unsafe.**

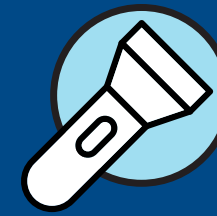
High school girls are more likely to experience cyberbullying compared to boys, and miss school due to feeling unsafe.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

High school students reporting bullying experiences in Wisconsin



Feeling safe in spaces like home and school are fundamentally necessary for positive mental and emotional development ([Valente, 2022](#)). When this feeling of safety erodes, the psychological distress it creates can undermine academic achievement and create a wide range of mental health problems ([Bayram, 2024](#)). This critical link between the mental wellbeing of girls and their experience being bullied online and feeling safe at school requires a coordinated community response - one which also recognizes the differences among girls of color.

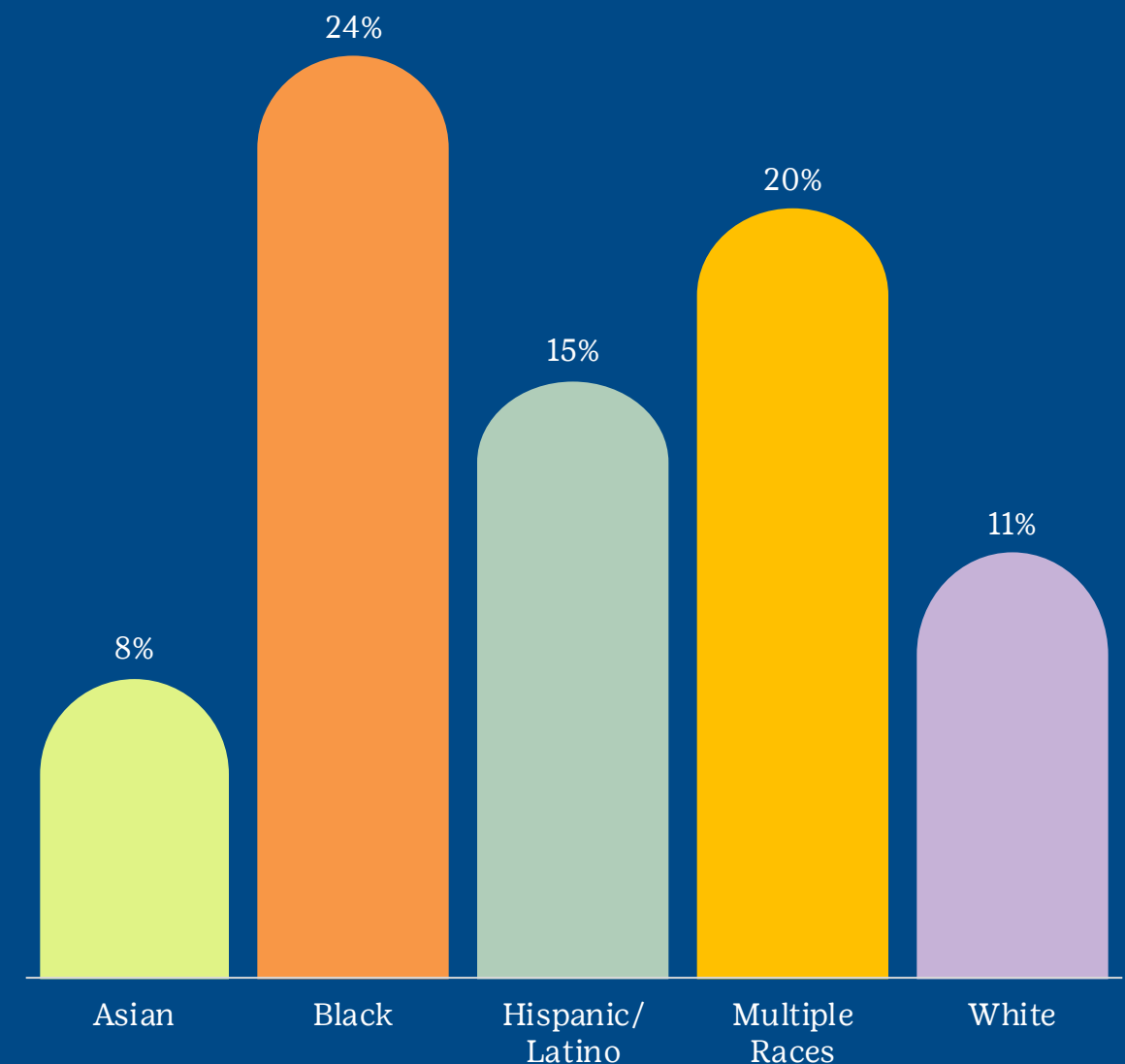


A DEEPER LOOK

Bullying and School Safety by Race and Ethnicity

Girls of color are more likely to miss at least one day of school due to feeling unsafe compared to girls who identify as White, exacerbating the negative academic impacts of truancy and psychological impacts of not feeling safe at a fundamentally critical space for youth development. Girls who identify as Black are also significantly more likely to have experienced a physical fight at school, with 22% reporting being involved in physical bullying compared to only 4% of girls who identify as White. These differences require tailored approaches from the adults and systems best positioned to curtail bullying - families, schools, and youth organizations.

High school girls reporting missing at least one day of school due to feeling unsafe, by Race and Ethnicity



Social Media and Technology

Deeply entwined into the emotional wellness of girls in America is their relationship with social media and technology. The sharp rise in mental health and related challenges in young people began in tandem with the rise in teen use of social media around 2012, specifically as social media's image-based content and social interactions such as likes and retweets emerged (Twenge, 2022). Studies which randomly assign young people the task of significantly reducing social media usage consistently find improvements in mood or wellbeing, notably among the largest users of social media - young girls.

Girls in Wisconsin follow the national trend of using social media and technology significantly more than their male peers. 83% of teenage girls report using social media "several times per day" compared to 77% of boys. Combating the use of social media has been met with a wide range of practices in schools and at home; yet **51% of teen girls still report using their phones between midnight and 5 AM on school nights.**

More than four out of five high school girls report using social media several times per day - a significantly higher percentage than teen boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023

High school students reporting using social media several times per day



Among the most dire challenges facing caregivers, school officials, and policymakers is the increased use of aggressive bullying tactics teens leverage through technology or social media. In 2025, state legislators in Wisconsin aimed to curtail the rise in "sextortion" - the use of social media and, most recently, artificial intelligence, to blackmail victims using the threat of distributing explicit images.

Bradyn's Law was drafted in memory of a 15-year-old student who died by suicide after falling victim to an online sextortion scheme. The bill, signed into law in June 2025, makes sexual extortion a standalone crime in Wisconsin and includes penalties for offenders including fines, felony charges, and prison time. It's a first-of-its-kind bill, signaling the state's firm commitment to curtailing the negative use of technology and social media.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Caring Adults. Lifesaving Relationships.

Positive, caring relationships between girls and adult mentors can create a life-changing bond, protecting against mental health challenges and the turbulence of adolescence.

In Girl Scouts, these relationships have been part of our ethos for over a century.

A 2020 study from the Girl Scout Research Institute found that girls cite their troop leader as the number one source of positive mental health - above friends, family, and school.

Girl Scouts presents families with an opportunity to participate in an activity together, while also introducing new caring adults into the lives of girls, expanding their network of support.

92%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say their troop leader cares about them as a person.



SOCIAL WELLBEING



Key Facts: Social Wellbeing

- **1 in 6 girls has witnessed physical violence in her neighborhood.**
Parents report that neighborhoods are safer for boys than for girls.
- **High school girls report struggling to feel connected to an adult.**
25% of high school girls report not having a teacher or another adult to talk with if they have a problem.
- **Less than half of girls live in families that demonstrate resilience.**
Boys are more likely to belong to families that work together, stay hopeful, and demonstrate other key resiliency qualities.
- **More than one-third of high school girls are not enrolled in an activity outside of school.**
A slightly higher percentage of girls reports not participating in an out-of-school activity compared to boys.

Robust ecosystems of support, including strong family units, adequate economic resources, and opportunities to create and sustain social networks in their communities, help girls build social skills and the social connections needed to thrive.

In these environments, girls learn both their intrinsic worth – a precursor for healthy self-confidence – and receive necessary support to navigate complicated social situations. Disruptions to this social fabric, such as childhood trauma, poverty, or the prevalence of substance abuse in the family, can create significant challenges now and later in life.



Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood when youth directly experience tragedy, such as:

- violence, abuse, or neglect;
- an environment which undermines their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with substance abuse problems;
- situations that impact physical well-being such as not having enough food to eat ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024](#)).

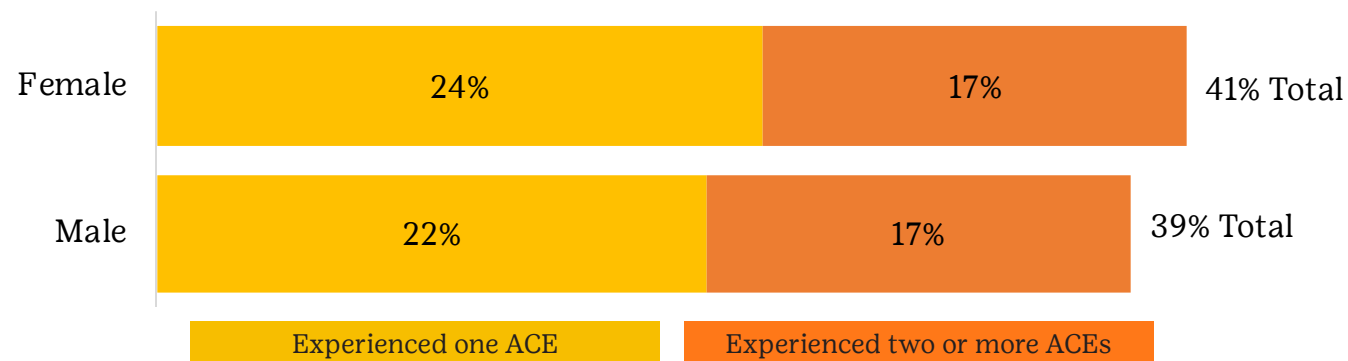
The presence of multiple ACEs throughout a child’s life has been repeatedly linked to short- and long-term negative life outcomes. For example, research finds that ACEs are related to poor mental health and suicidal behaviors in adolescence, as well as an increased risk for heart disease and depression. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities, which directly and indirectly affect health and well-being ([Merrick, 2015](#)).

The landmark ACEs study in 1998 found that children who are subject to four or more ACEs are up to 12 times more likely to experience consequences, such as alcohol and drug abuse, or chronic diseases, such as cancer and diabetes ([Felitti, 1998](#)). While data measuring that level of prevalence is not available for Wisconsin youth, available data shows that more than two out of five girls have experienced at least one ACE according to parents, who often under-report children’s tragedies. Importantly, first-person youth surveys administered to high school youth in Wisconsin exclude ACEs measurements, creating a gap in available data to evaluate girls’ ACEs risk.

Two out of five girls have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience according to parents.

National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for Youth 0-17 in Wisconsin, reported by parent



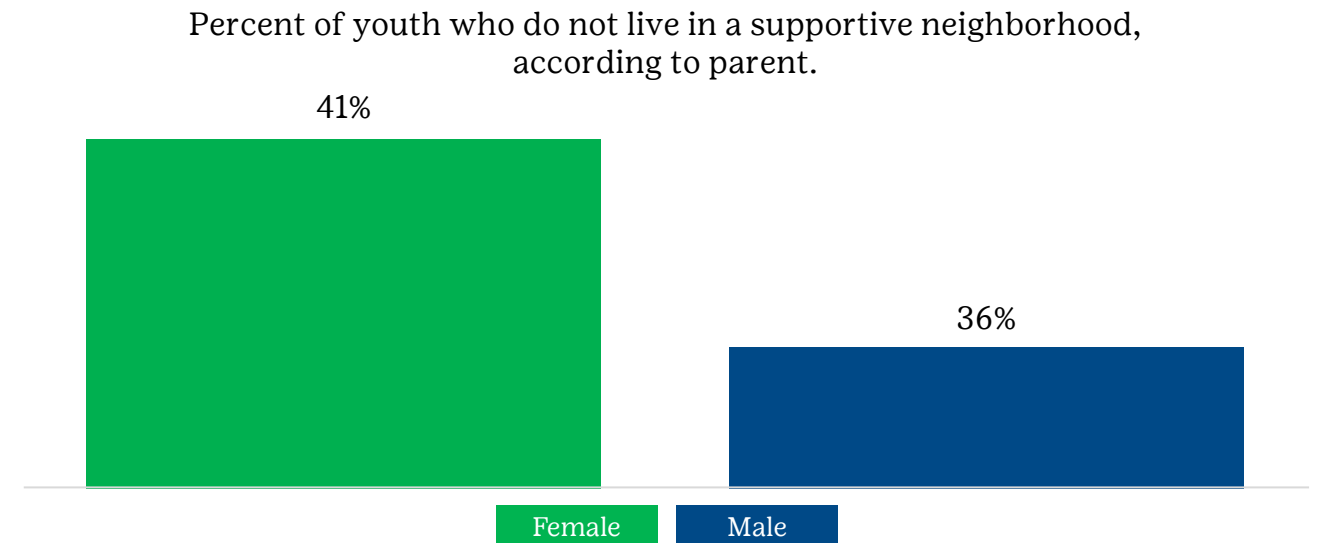
Neighborhood & Community

Although the definition of neighborhoods and ways in which families participate in their local communities continues to shift across generations, studies still conclude that deeper connections to neighborhoods contribute to positive youth outcomes. Research finds that neighborhoods which promote intersections and create activity spaces for multi-generational interactions generate a higher level of social capital for young people and present positive implications for behavioral and emotional health ([Browning, 2014](#)).

Especially for girls, a feeling of attachment to their neighborhood is associated with higher academic outcomes and deeper relationships with caring adults ([Plybon, 2003](#)). Many girls in Wisconsin lack this important tether to their community, with two out of five girls living in unsupportive neighborhoods, according to their parent.

According to parents, neighborhoods are more supportive of boys than girls, with two out of five girls living in unsupportive neighborhoods.

National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin



Neighborhoods can also contribute to the adverse childhood experiences of girls, posing a threat to their physical and emotional safety. In Wisconsin, one in six girls has directly witnessed violence in her community, with significant variations by race and ethnicity: one in three girls who identify as Black and one in four girls who identify as Hispanic or Latina report the same.

Improving connectivity to local communities requires a multi-faceted approach, including coalition-building across organizations and institutions that control activity spaces, promoting community engagement, and ensuring safety for children and families.

1 in 6
Wisconsin girls has witnessed physical violence in her neighborhood.



Social Connection: Adult Mentor

Decades of research suggests youth obtain a multitude of benefits in expanding key adult relationships beyond immediate caregivers. An adult mentor is defined broadly as a non-parental adult promoting positive youth development through a relationship with a specific child ([DuBois, 2002](#)). Among the extensive list of benefits, mentors generally:

- **Prevent poor youth outcomes.** The presence of an adult mentor is shown to reduce behaviors such as substance abuse ([Thomas, 2013](#)).
- **Promote academic achievement.** Students receiving informal mentorship at school attain higher academic proficiency and attend college at a higher rate ([Kraft, 2023](#)).
- **Promote positive mental health.** Mentors cultivate positive self-esteem and emotional well-being, serving to protect against mental health challenges ([Claro, 2021](#)).

25% of high school girls in Wisconsin report not having a teacher or another adult to talk with if they have a problem. This rate is significantly higher for girls of color, with 45% of girls identifying as Asian and 31% of girls who identify as Black or Hispanic lacking a mentor outside the family.



One in four high school girls reports not having a teacher or another adult to talk with if they have a problem.

In addition to the benefits of mentorship for youth, research also indicates the evolving nature of positive mentor relationships. Studies show the solution to creating a wider network of support for girls in Wisconsin does not require formal, long-term mentor relationships. In fact, recent studies demonstrate short-term relationships with adult mentors can serve as transitional support through specific periods of time or targeted support to meet specific objectives ([Cavell, 2021](#)).



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

A Girl Community IRL Supportive Friends In Real Life

Girls have uniquely different experiences growing up in their communities compared to boys. A supportive, all-girl environment is beneficial in deeply meaningful ways beyond finding a cool group of friends (but that's great too).

Studies show access to an all-girl environment presents better outcomes in mental health interventions and supports improvements in academic performance.

In Girl Scouts, we've seen the power of a girl-first program for over a century. It creates an atmosphere that allows girls to try new things, take bigger risks, and feel safe. That's just one reason why 97% of girls in Wisconsin say they feel safe in Girl Scouts.

91%

of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say:

“Girls in my troop care about each other.”



Social Connection: Family Relationships

A child's first meaningful relationship is typically formed with their adult caregiver. Throughout early childhood development continuing through adolescence, a significant body of research demonstrates the lifelong importance of children building strong relationships with parents and other adults. One pivotal longitudinal study confirmed that early secure parental relationships are the building blocks of emotional regulation skills. Additionally, children with more secure parental attachment early in life later showed to display a higher value of adults overall in early adolescence ([Boldt, 2020](#)).

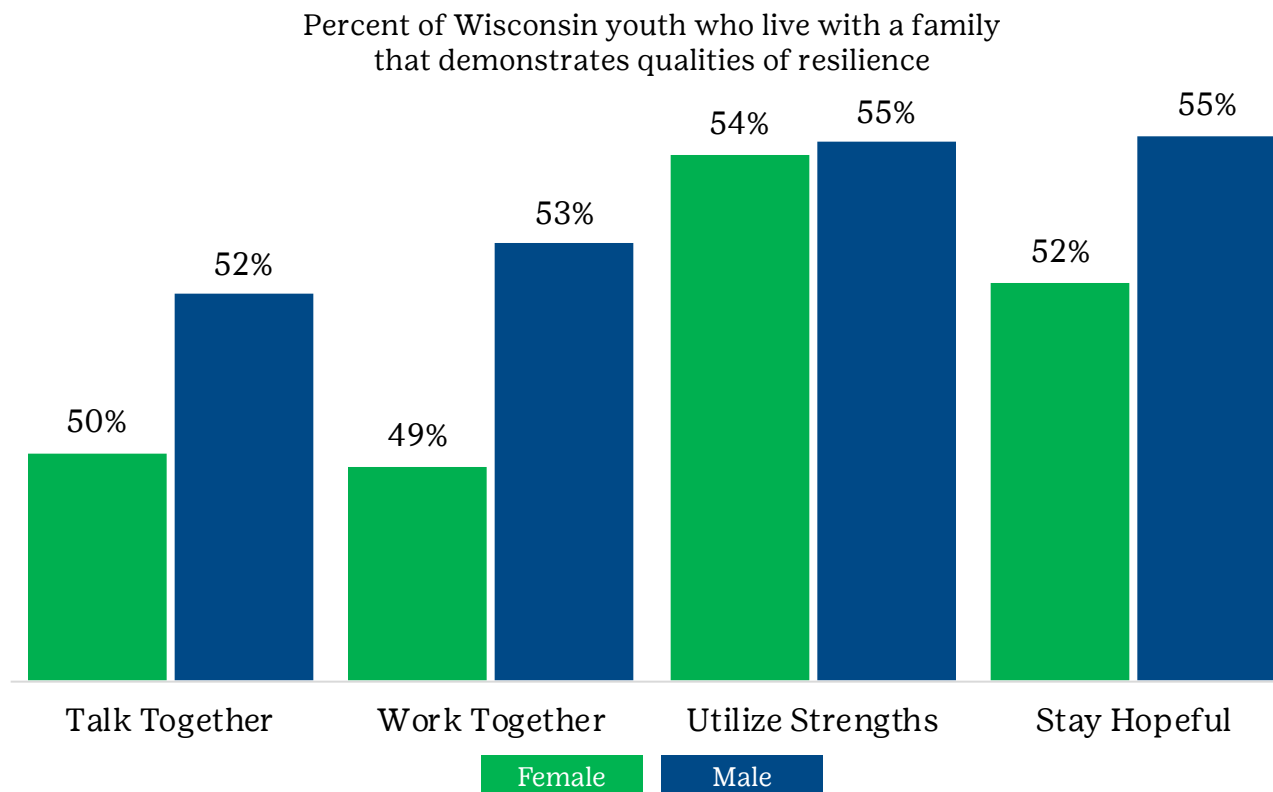
The National Survey of Children's Health measures the resiliency of a family through a composite score of four key characteristics:

- Talk together about what to do when the family faces problems;
- Work together to solve problems;
- Draw on the strengths of the family to overcome problems;
- Stay hopeful in difficult times.

Studies show that family resilience is an important protective factor against adversities and stressors and presents a critical environment for developing positive social skills ([Bethell, 2022](#)). Notably, girls in Wisconsin are much less likely than boys to live in families who demonstrate these qualities.

Less than half of girls in Wisconsin live in families who demonstrate qualities of resilience, a slightly lower rate than boys.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Wisconsin



Afterschool Programs & Organized Activities

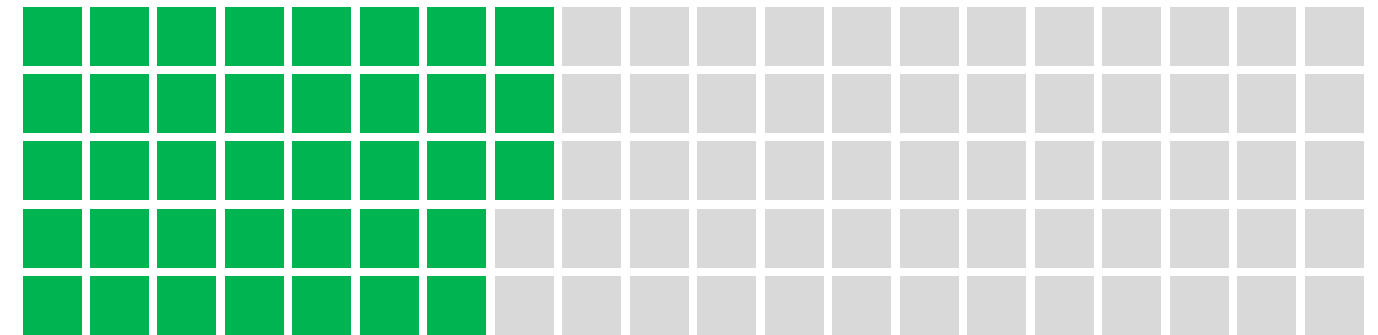
Participation in afterschool programs or organized activities is an important component of a young person's social development, not to mention the potential benefits in developing skills and knowledge not accessible in the classroom. These experiences offer youth opportunities to practice social skills and nurture supportive relationships, with research demonstrating these programs accelerate students' academic performance and aid in improvements in mental and physical health.

Given the benefits, an area of concern for girls in Wisconsin is their lack of participation in organized activities. More than one-third of high school girls report not participating in any organized activity outside of school, a slightly higher percentage than their male peers.

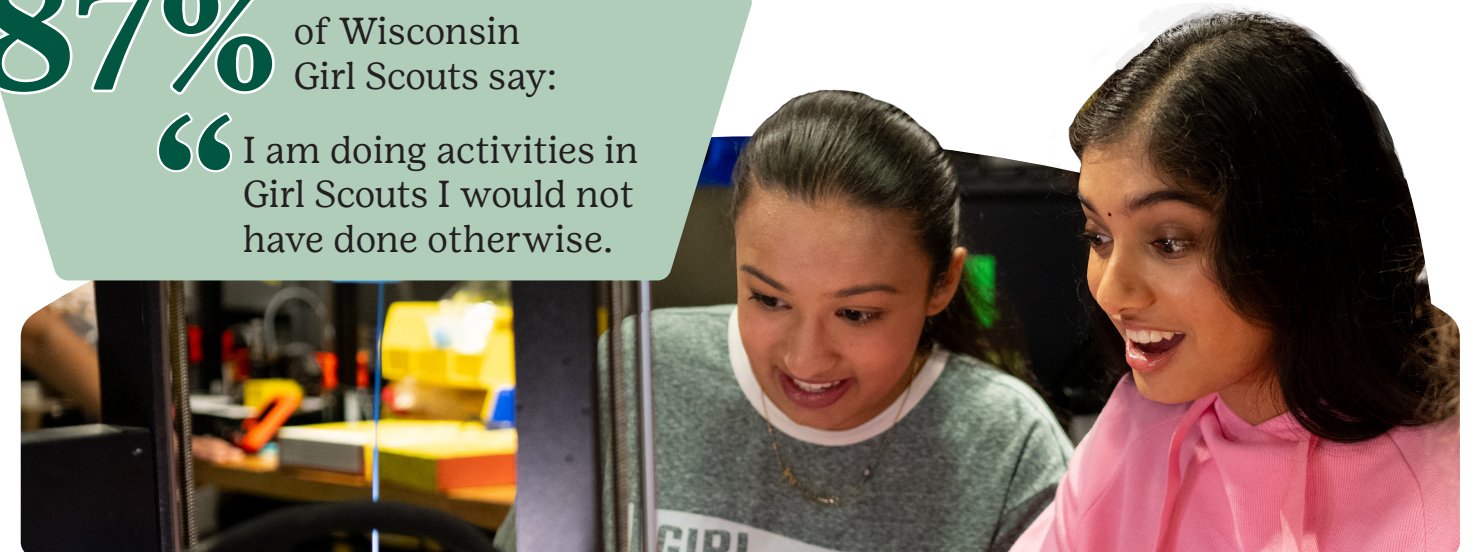
As the avenue to receive other benefits noted as protective factors for youth development throughout the report, including accessing caring adult mentors, physical activity, and a supportive group of peers, encouraging the participation of girls in activities is an important component of their overall wellbeing.

38% of high school girls are not enrolled in any organized activity outside of school compared to 35% of high school boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2023



87% of Wisconsin Girl Scouts say:
 “I am doing activities in Girl Scouts I would not have done otherwise.”





CALL TO ACTION - PHYSICAL HEALTH

Boys as Girl Advocates

Many pressing threats to the physical and emotional well-being of girls is the risk of abuse. One in six high school girls reports experiencing sexual violence - a call to action for male advocates.

Improving the lives of girls in Wisconsin will require changing patterns of abuse and promoting healthy relationships, modeled by the men who care about girls.

Male Role Models. Both girls and boys must see male adults actively support, encourage, and appreciate girls.

Body Autonomy. All youth must receive consistent messages about the respect of a person's body, understanding consent and autonomy.

Safe Spaces. Girls benefit from single-gender peer groups which recognize the unique experiences of girlhood in America.



CALL TO ACTION - LIFE READINESS

Close the STEM Gap

Careers in science, technology, engineering and math are projected to grow twice as fast as all other occupations through 2030. By that time, the acceleration of AI technology alone is expected to create a workforce shortage of 1.4 million technicians. Wisconsin needs a passionate, trained, and representative STEM workforce, and this report shows that girls are ready.

Early Introduction. Girls form their STEM identity by 3rd grade. We must nurture interest in STEM early and often.

Group Experiences. Girls' intentions to pursue STEM benefit from group experiences with supportive peers and STEM mentors.

Variety. Girls must be exposed to the vast field of STEM and its value in everyday life to sustain interest and progress through advanced topics.





CALL TO ACTION - EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Rally for Mental Wellness

At the risk of creating ongoing generational mental health challenges, our community must come together to holistically support positive mental wellness for girls. Death by suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in Wisconsin. A challenge of this magnitude requires a web of support sewn into the everyday experiences of girls across the state.

Caring Adults. Girls need the team of adults involved in their daily lives to advance their own understanding of promoting positive mental health, identifying warning signs specific to girls, and offering support.

School Support. Education institutions need the resources and training required to identify signs of distress in girls, especially high-achieving girls often overlooked for interventions and extra support.

Normalize. Girls must feel safe and supported in bringing concerns to trusted adults. Caregivers should normalize conversations around mental health and promote practicing emotional regulation.



CALL TO ACTION: SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Mentor Girls

The strength of a girl's network of adult relationships can shape her self-image, resiliency, and overall well-being. These connections, when imbued with empathy, trust, and understanding, serve as both a safety net for life's challenges and a springboard for girls to reach their full potential. For most girls in Wisconsin, these networks are not yet strong enough.

Get Informed. Adults must invest sincere effort into understanding the realities girls face. Read, ask questions, and proceed with curiosity.

Lean In. The most daunting challenges girls are facing are also the most internalized. Addressing mental health, self-image, and even traumatic experiences will require adults to lean in with empathy.

Reach Out. Creating a network of support outside of a girl's family requires that adults reach beyond their immediate circle to volunteer, engage, and nurture new relationships with girls in their community.





CALL TO ACTION: DEMOGRAPHICS

Collect Girl Data

The ability to evaluate the status of girls in Wisconsin throughout this report was made possible through publicly available data with the ability to disaggregate by sex. Institutions must commit to collecting and reporting youth data with differences by sex made available. As demonstrated throughout this report, beneath that data are important distinctions to understand and address.

First-Person. Prioritize and expand data collection directly from adolescent youth. Girls understand their experience best.

Data Availability. Curators of youth data hold a special responsibility to benefit youth advocates and providers: make data publicly available.

Coalition Building. Institutions and organizations involved in the lives of girls must come together around research to mobilize on behalf of girls.



Methodology

The Wisconsin Girl Report is a comprehensive collection of metrics that serve as indicators of well-being for Wisconsin girls. Metrics are grouped into four distinct categories - Physical Health, Academic Performance, Emotional Wellness, and Social Wellbeing - leveraging publicly available data from primary sources and peer-reviewed research included in adjacent citations. Sources of charts and graphs are included beneath each heading or parent table, derived from data collected by credible sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Data visuals are intended to present data in an easily readable format to understand comparisons or trends over time.

Agency Data

The report includes vignettes regarding the impact of Girl Scouting on girl members in Wisconsin. All Girl Scout outcomes or participation measurements are derived from the Girl Scouts of the USA's Girl Scout Research Institute; Girl Scout Voices Count, an annual voice of the customer survey; or Girl Scout councils serving Wisconsin. Cited research of the Girl Scout program is intended for programmatic reporting only and is not intended to inform the status of all girls in Wisconsin.

Data Collection

In an effort to present an unbiased and factual account of the status of girls in Wisconsin, all data was obtained from publicly available primary sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Data sets were downloaded from open sites and analyzed using common mathematical formulas and computations. All data is anonymized and not based on any single individual experience. No primary research was conducted for the purposes of this report.

Disaggregating Data

To meet the objectives of the report in understanding differences between girls and boys in Wisconsin, data are disaggregated by several variables including state, sex assigned at birth, and race and ethnicity. Definitions of each variable are derived from its source. The ability to disaggregate and report on data is limited to the availability of statewide empirical sources. As such, the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin acknowledges the limitations of this data collection and reporting method as being unable to report on the multiple intersectionalities of the target audience and marginalized populations not often included in such analysis.

Process

The Wisconsin Girl Report is commissioned by the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin. The CEOs of the independent Girl Scout councils serving the state and their respective staffs determined the scope of the report and included metrics. An independent analyst assembled metrics as outlined above.

Accuracy

Primary data accessible through publicly available sources were assembled for this report. All reasonable efforts were made to ensure accuracy and to remove research bias from the final findings. However, readers should be aware of the limitations and possibility of tabulation errors that exist in source data. National, state, and local agencies often depend on individuals and communities for reporting accuracy and as such, metrics may be under-reported or unavailable. Data from different sources should not be compared due to different methodologies employed in each data source.



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Join.

A safe space for girls to learn, grow, and belong.



Volunteer.

Girls need caring adult mentors to prepare them for life.



Donate.

Connect with your local Girl Scout council to fund a girl's future.

