



State of the  
**Florida  
Girl  
Report**



Presented by the Girl Scouts of Florida Association





# 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 their boots 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.

## The Girl Scout Impact



More than 50 Million women worldwide are Girl Scout alums.



50% of women serving in the 118th Congress are Girl Scout alums.



60K Girl Scouts each year travel the country or the globe.



50% of female business owners are alums.



700K Girl Scouts each year become entrepreneurs in the Cookie Program.



Girl Scouts earn 4 million badges annually.



4,000 Girl Scouts earn the prestigious Gold Award each year.

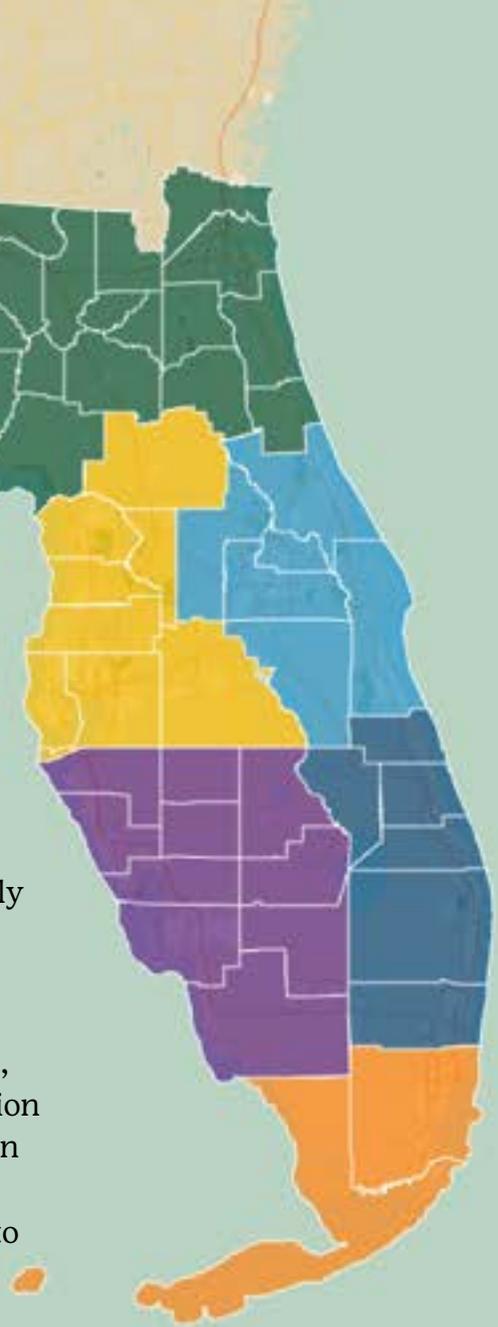


Girl Scouts serves girls in every zip code + 92 countries.

# The Girl Scouts of Florida Association

We are six individual Girl Scout councils that serve girls in every zip code across the state of Florida. Together, we provide girl-focused programming to 40,000 girls annually through the support of volunteers and contributions of donors and partners.

Though we operate as independent 501(c)3 organizations, our collective effort as the Girl Scouts of Florida Association aims to improve the quality of life for all girls in Florida. In advancing unified advocacy, marketing, and fundraising efforts, we boldly champion the needs of girls and work to build communities where they thrive.



Girl Scouts of Gateway Council  
Wendy Dordel, CEO



Girl Scouts of West Central Florida  
Mary Pat King, CEO



Girl Scouts of Citrus Council  
Crystal Jones, Interim CEO



Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Council  
Mary Anne Servian, CEO



Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida  
Lisa Johnson, CEO



Girl Scouts of Tropical Florida  
Chelsea Wilkerson, CEO



# State of the Florida Girl Report

The goal of this report is to raise awareness about the wellbeing of girls in the state of Florida. Over the last century, Girl Scouts has grown into the organization of choice to prepare girls for life in the real world. Today, Girl Scouts is also committed to improving the world for real girls. While the depth of our experience proves the undeniable potential of girls and women, it also confirms that **girls and boys have a uniquely different experience growing up in our communities.**

In order to ensure girls reach their full potential, we must first understand the circumstances impacting their daily lives. The State of the Florida Girl Report is an overview of girls' wellbeing in four overarching areas: physical health, academic performance, emotional wellness, and social wellbeing.

Using primary data sources such as the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control, and the Florida Department of Education, the report disaggregates data by sex to understand variances between girls and boys. When possible, we present girl-specific outcomes by race and ethnicity to offer a deeper understanding of a girl's multidimensional identity.

Importantly, this report does not offer a comparison to other states across the nation. Our focus is to improve the quality of life for all girls across Florida, irrespective of how those circumstances compare to other regions.



# Our Esteemed Review Panel

The State of the Florida Girl Report was deeply enriched by the dedicated time and attention of experts from Florida's higher education community. The Girl Scouts of Florida Association extends our sincere appreciation to the review panel for its thoughtful and thorough feedback, which elevated the discourse presented in this report.



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## Full of potential. Living in crisis.

For more than 110 years, Girl Scouts has created opportunities for girls to become leaders in every community, within every industry, at every level of influence. While our alums shatter glass ceilings, set records, and forge new paths, girls we serve today are intent on making their mark on the world starting now.

Yet, in pursuit of reaching their full potential, girls are challenged by a combination of circumstances unique to any prior generation. Accelerated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, girls are struggling in the classroom, in their relationships, and internally with mental and emotional health. The intricate role technology plays in their lives often exacerbates or distracts from these challenges.

In 2023, Girl Scouts of the USA commissioned a body of stakeholder interviews with girls, parents, and educators to better understand the lives of girls as the country emerged from the height of the pandemic. The Shine Scout Research called the role technology plays a “many-headed hydra” that caregivers and teachers do not know how to combat. Girls are “crumbling under comparison” brought on by social media.

As a common thread in the lives girls lead at school, in their homes, and in online social circles, Girl Scout volunteers are often in a position to see or hear about this complex web of lived experiences - a girls’ in-person life, her online persona, and her internal monologue. Often, these experiences are incongruent. Almost always, adults who care about girls are also looking for answers.

“*The emotional challenges are real. These kids have seen too much.*”

- Teacher, 2023. ShineScout Research.

It is this call for help, coupled with our bold commitment to ensure all girls in Florida are able to reach their full potential, that led the Girl Scouts of Florida Association to commission this report. In these pages, we present opportunities to learn, reflect, and take action in personal and systemic ways. Girls need adult champions. Girls need investments in their future. Girls need advocates in academia and policy-making, effecting change that will support their overall wellbeing.



**Crystal Jones**  
Interim Chief Executive Officer

girl scouts   
of citrus



Join.  
Volunteer.  
Donate.

Connect with your local Girl Scout council to become a champion for girls in Florida.

**Wendy Dordel**  
Chief Executive Officer

girl scouts   
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**Mary Anne Servian**  
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# Table of Contents

Summary Findings.....10  
Dimensions of Wellness.....12  
Data Definitions.....13

**Demographics of Florida Girls.....14**  
Population, Age, Race, and Ethnicity..... 16  
Place of Birth, Nativity, Mobility.....17  
Household.....18  
Disability Status.....19

**Physical Health.....20**  
Body Image and Weight.....22  
Healthy Habits.....24  
Health Insurance.....25  
Homelessness.....26  
Sexual and Physical Violence.....28  
Community Support and Safety.....30

**Academic Performance.....32**  
K-12 Student Enrollment..... 34  
K-12 Student Proficiency.....38  
Graduation Rate.....43  
College Area of Study.....44



**Emotional Wellness..... 46**

- Mental Health and Suicide.....48
- Mental Health Support at School.....50
- Family Mental Health.....52
- Bullying..... 54

**Social Wellbeing..... 58**

- Adverse Childhood Experiences.....60
- Living in Poverty.....62
- Substance Abuse..... 64
- Teen Birth Rate.....66
- Afterschool Programs.....69

- Overall Recommendations.....70
- Methodology.....72
- Sources and Citations.....73

With Appreciation to our Girl Scout  
Sister Councils serving the State of Indiana.

Thank you for blazing trails to lift up the voices of girls  
in the Indiana Girl Report. Your vision inspired our  
collective action in commissioning this report  
on behalf of girls in Florida.





# The State of Florida Girls

Summary findings from the 2024 State of the Florida Girl Report.

Girls in Florida are as diverse and complex as the challenges they face. Under a combination of circumstances unique only to girls, they navigate contradictory social expectations both online and in the real world, alarming levels of violence, significantly higher rates of substance use than boys, and escalating mental and emotional health challenges unrealized in prior generations.

Through investigating the differences between girls and boys in commonly-cited areas like academic performance, adverse childhood experiences, and substance abuse among youth, this report proves one undeniable fact: girls and boys have largely different experiences growing up in Florida. Compared to boys, three-times as many girls experience sexual violence, twice as many girls seriously consider attempting suicide, and significantly more high school girls abuse controlled substances.

However, this report also demonstrates the progress made on behalf of girls: lowering the number of uninsured girls living in the state, steady decreases in teen pregnancy, and improving the percentage of girls living in households below the poverty line. Taken together, these strides create the stability necessary for girls to thrive.

Importantly, as a foundational report, one key finding deserves urgent attention from data-collecting and data-reporting agencies: we must prioritize collecting, analyzing, and reporting on youth-centric data in ways that disaggregate metrics between girls and boys. Many key data sources sought for inclusion in this report did not allow for separating results by sex and in the following pages, we have demonstrated that doing so is imperative for the wellbeing of Florida youth.



## Quick Facts on Florida Girls

1 in 6

high school girls report experiencing sexual violence in the last year.

46%

of female K-12 students do not perform on grade level in math.

1 in 8

female students miss at least one day of school because they do not feel safe.

2X

as many girls seriously consider attempting suicide compared to boys.

8%

fewer female students declare a science or engineering major as they enter college.

90%

of girls graduated high school in 22-23, a 5% higher graduation rate than boys.

52%

of high school girls experienced symptoms of depression in the last year.

13%

fewer girls met grade-level math standards in the year following COVID-19.

1.5X

more high school girls vape nicotine compared to high school boys - a total of 20%.



# Dimensions of Wellness

The State of the Florida Girl Report offers insight into four key areas of wellness that are critical for the holistic development of girls. Inspired by the Indiana Girl Report, we believe these areas of wellness uniquely impact today's girls.



## Physical Health

For girls to thrive, communities should create conditions for girls to develop healthy bodies and live in healthy environments. Proper development of her 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 education 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 which necessitates the presence of caring adults. Together, these circumstances help in the reduction of the mental health challenges girls face, including bullying, eating disorders, and depression.



## Social Wellbeing

A robust ecosystem of support including a strong family unit, adequate economic resources, and opportunities to create and sustain social networks in her community helps girls build social skills and 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 Florida Department of Education. The definition of the most commonly used metrics referenced throughout the report are derived from those 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.

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





# Demographics of Florida Girls

Girls living in the state of Florida are diverse across every measure. The lived experiences of girls discussed throughout the report can vary across demographics, so this section aims to clarify how girls identify and the definitions of these measures used by most reporting agencies.

## Key Facts: Demographics

- **More girls identify with multiple races.**  
Nearly 1 in 4 girls living in the state of Florida identify with two or more races, a 5X increase in 10 years.
- **Fewer youth are living in single-mother households.**  
1 in 5 youth live in a home with a female head of household (22%) compared to 1 in 3 youth 10 years ago.
- **26% more girls are living with a diagnosed disability.**  
79K girls in Florida have a diagnosed disability compared to 63K a decade ago.
- **Over half a million youth in Florida are living in a households led by a non-parent.**  
345K youth live with grandparents and another 123K live with relatives. 88K youth live in foster placements or with other non-relatives.
- **Florida youth are experiencing more housing stability.**  
13% of youth in Florida moved houses within the last year, a decline of 5% compared to 10 years ago.



## Total Population Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2022, Florida

|               | Total Youth | Percent of Youth |
|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| Female (0-17) | 2,093,257   | 49%              |
| Male (0-17)   | 2,201,637   | 51%              |

## Total Population by Age Group Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2022, Florida

|               | 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) | 537,647       | 13% | 564,827      | 13% | 617,624        | 14% | 373,159        | 9% |
| Male (0-17)   | 563,703       | 13% | 598,155      | 14% | 642,573        | 15% | 397,206        | 9% |

## Total Population by Race and Ethnicity Under 18 Years

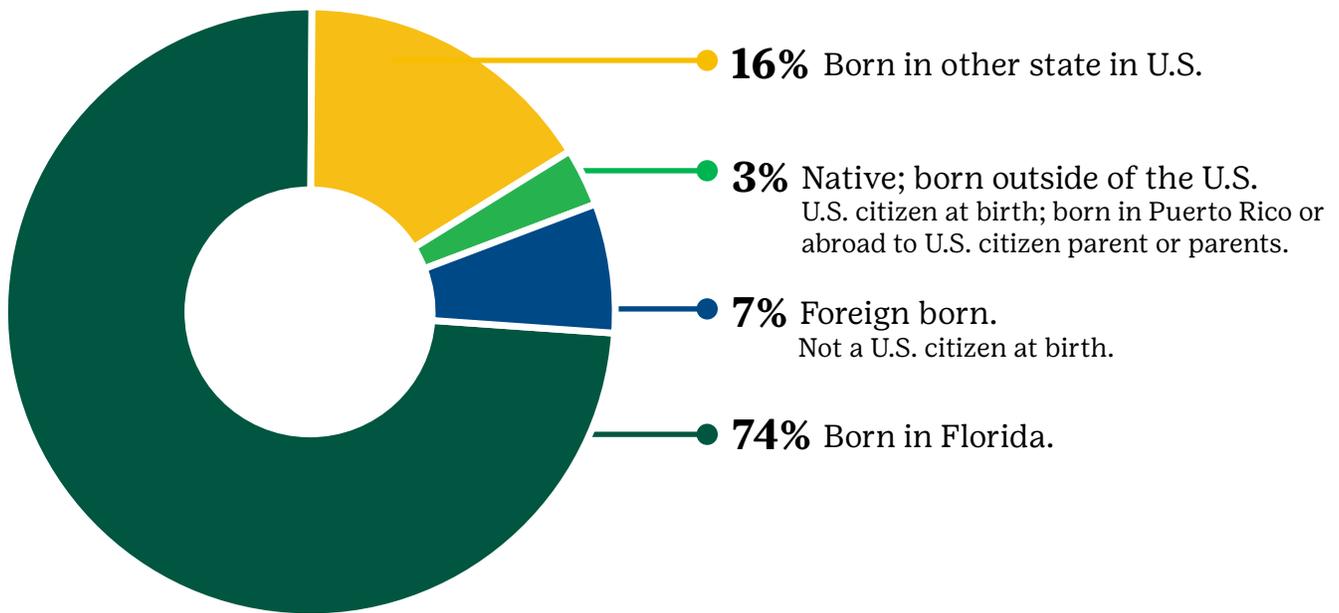
U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B01001A-I, 2022, Florida

|                 | Female (0-17) |     | Male (0-17) |     |
|-----------------|---------------|-----|-------------|-----|
|                 | Total Youth   | %   | Total Youth | %   |
| American Indian | 10,864        | 1%  | 11,498      | 1%  |
| Asian           | 54,876        | 3%  | 57,042      | 3%  |
| Black           | 402,209       | 19% | 416,465     | 19% |
| Native Hawaiian | 1,716         | 0%  | 1,086       | 0%  |
| Other Race      | 166,209       | 8%  | 167,179     | 8%  |
| 2 or More Races | 494,982       | 24% | 540,418     | 25% |
| White           | 962,401       | 46% | 1,007,949   | 46% |
| Hispanic        | 671,674       | 32% | 702,226     | 32% |

Note: The U.S. Census separates race and ethnicity into two demographic questions. Data presented here represents that separation.

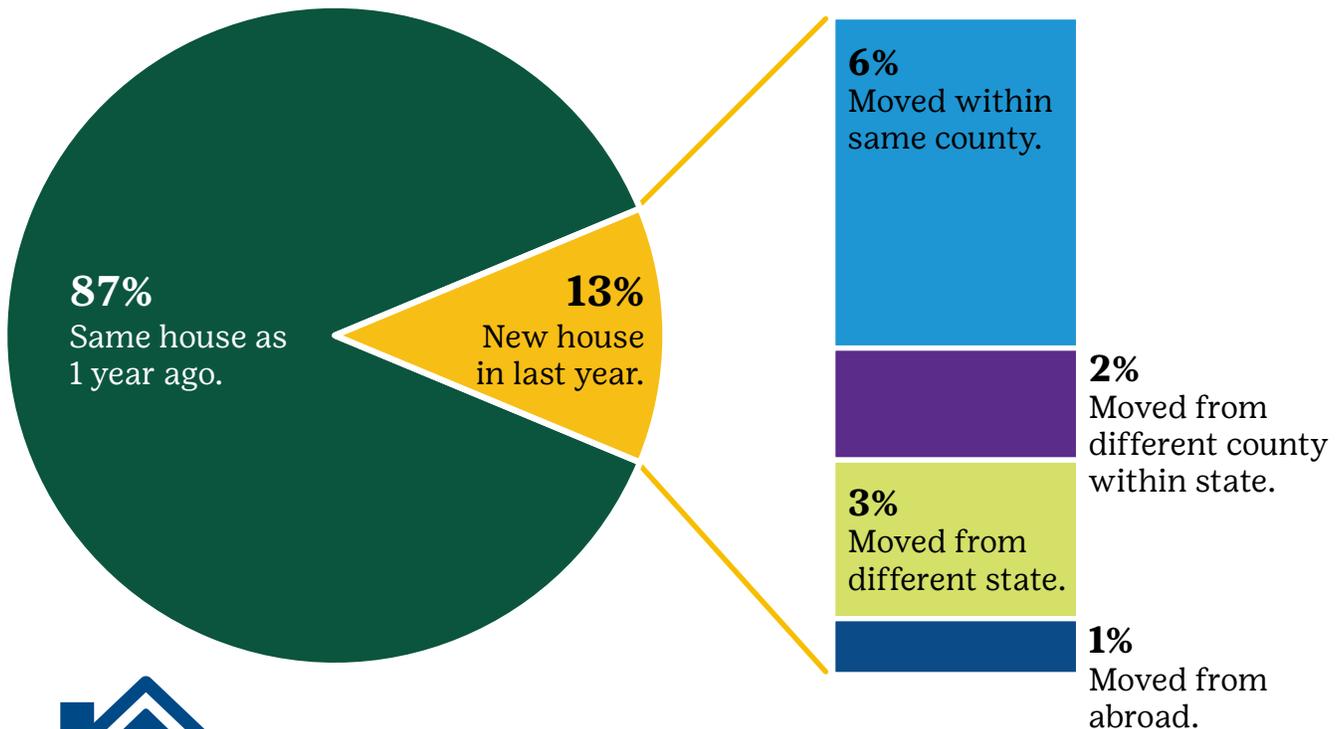
## Place of Birth by All Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B06001, 2022, Florida



## Mobility for All Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B07001, 2022, Florida

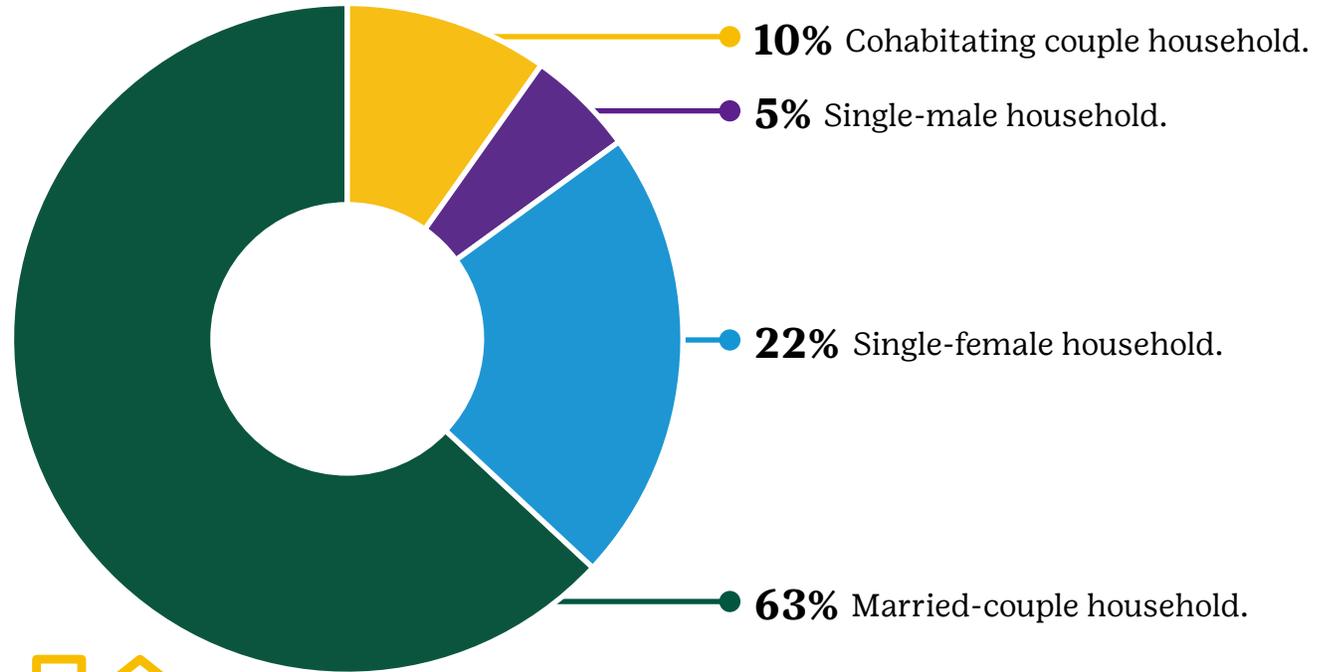


Florida youth experienced **more housing stability** compared to 10 years ago, when 18% of youth moved to a new house in the prior year.



## Household Type for Total Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B09005, 2022, Florida



More youth are living in two-parent households compared to 10 years ago (73% vs 61%).

## Relationship to Primary Householder for Total Youth Under 18 Years

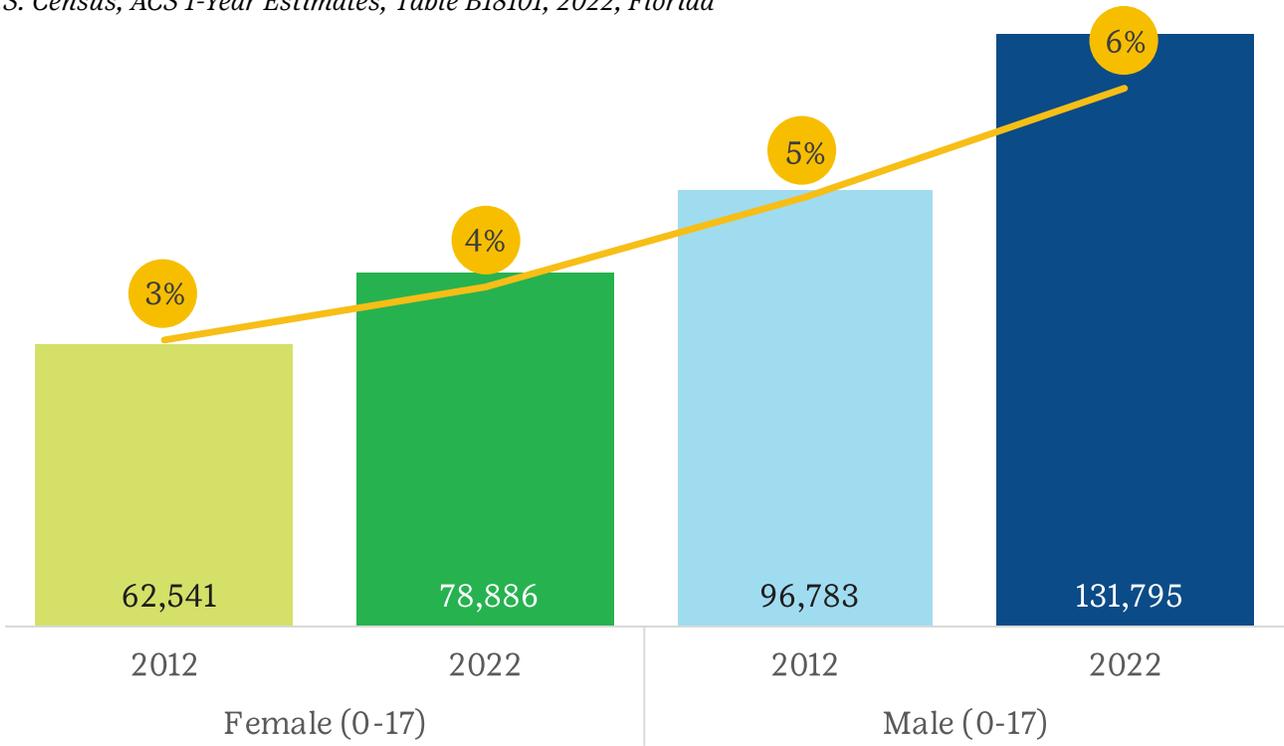
U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B09018, 2012 and 2022, Florida

|                                       | Total Youth | %   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| Own child                             | 3,728,761   | 87% |
| Biological child                      | 3,507,580   | 82% |
| Adopted child                         | 82,376      | 2%  |
| Stepchild                             | 138,805     | 3%  |
| Grandchild                            | 345,426     | 8%  |
| Other relatives                       | 123,276     | 3%  |
| Foster child or other unrelated child | 88,121      | 2%  |

**Over half a million**  
Florida youth live in households led by a non-parent.

# Disability Status

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B18101, 2022, Florida





# Physical Health of Florida Girls

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

Proper development of girls' physical bodies 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

- **Girls have a distorted view of their body.**  
36% of girls believe they are overweight, but only 32% meet the medical definition of being overweight or obese.
- **4 out of 5 girls spend more than 3 hours a day on screens.**  
Girls spend more time on screens than boys, with 79% reporting they spend 3+ hours on screens compared to 71% of boys.
- **Fewer girls in Florida are uninsured.**  
7% of girls in Florida are not covered by health insurance, a 3% decline over the last 10 years.
- **Violence against girls is increasing.**  
3X more high school girls than boys in Florida experienced sexual violence in the last year - a 30% increase in 5 years.
- **2/3 of homeless girls in Florida identify as Black or Hispanic.**  
37% of female students experiencing homelessness identify as Black or African American. 36% identify as Hispanic or Latina.



# Body Image and Weight

Children's body weight has important implications for their overall physical health and wellbeing. It is also undeniably influenced by false messages and external pressures, requiring adults to carefully navigate support to young girls in taking care of their body while maintaining a positive body image. Today, girls in Florida face two competing challenges:

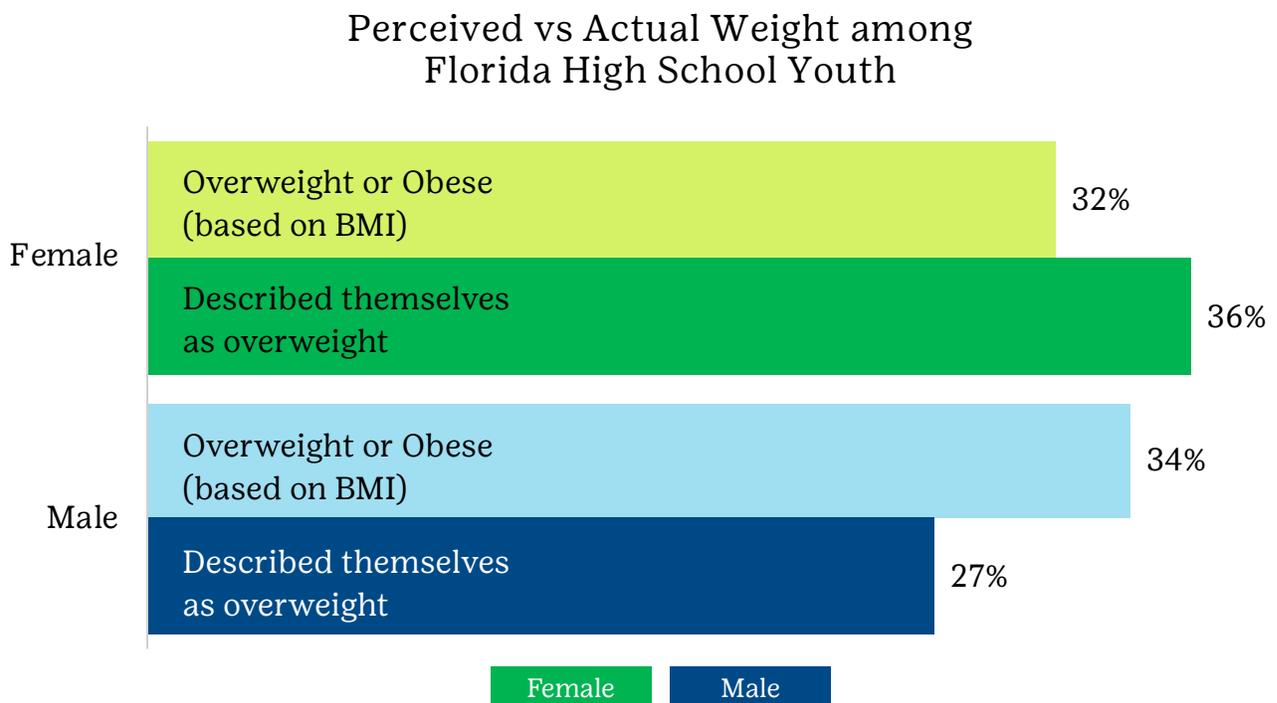
On one hand, roughly 1/3 of high school girls are overweight or obese, based on the medical benchmarks utilizing Body Mass Index (BMI). On the other hand, girls' perception of their body weight is disproportionate: 36% of high school girls in Florida described themselves as overweight, yet only 32% met the medical criteria.

By comparison, boys are experiencing the opposite trend: compared to girls, more high school boys are actually overweight or obese (34%); yet, only 27% would describe themselves as overweight. The opposing gap in the perception high school youth have of their bodies suggests that, to significant degrees, girls and boys are receiving very different messages about an acceptable body weight, and neither will lead to healthy lifestyles.

Childhood obesity poses serious risks to physical and emotional health. Children with obesity are more at risk to develop autoimmune diseases such as arthritis and type 1 diabetes; are at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease; and have a mortality rate 3x higher than the normal population. Childhood obesity also contributes to negative body image, putting girls at risk for eating disorders, social isolation, and reduced physical activity ([Marcus, 2022](#)).

## While high school girls have a more negative view of their body compared to boys, fewer girls are actually overweight.

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida 2021*





A DEEPER LOOK

# Body Image and Weight by Race and Ethnicity

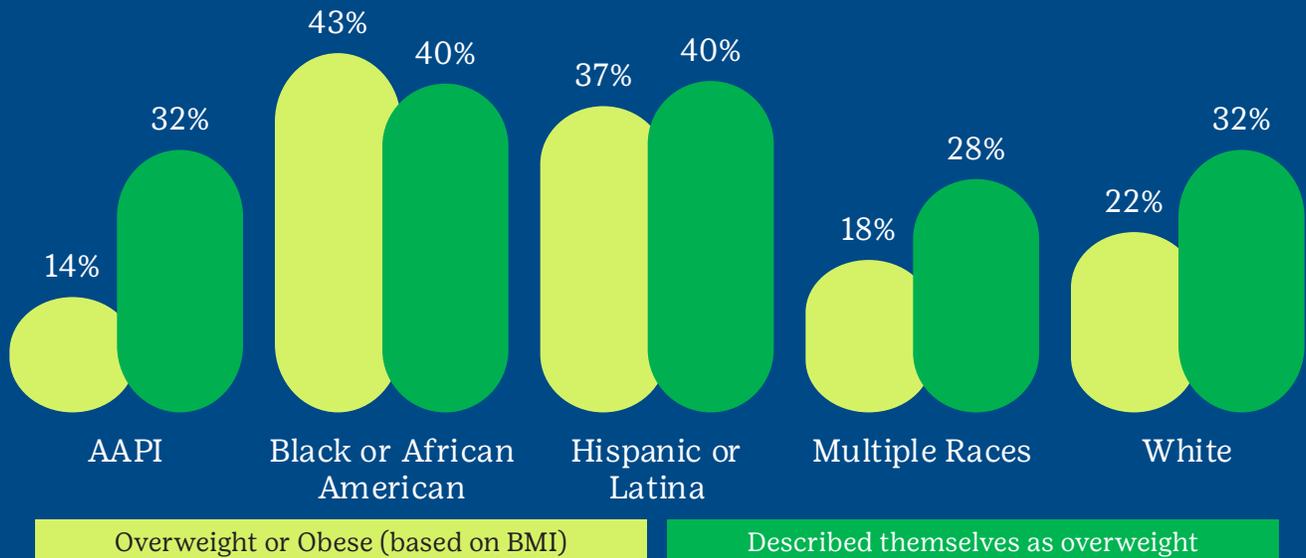
Trends in weight and poor body image among teenage girls are even more concerning within certain race and ethnicity groups. Two themes emerge:

First, poor body image is more pronounced among girls who identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI): while only 14% meet the medical criteria for overweight or obese, 32% describe themselves as overweight. Similarly, girls who identify as White or with Multiple Races have a larger gap than the overall difference in body weight vs body image of 4%.

Secondly, nearly 2 in 5 girls who identify as Black / African American or Hispanic / Latina meet the medical criteria for being overweight or obese. While this may suggest that Black and Hispanic girls are more likely to experience childhood obesity, it's important to acknowledge that some research suggests the use of BMI to calculate obesity risk is inaccurate for girls in some race and ethnicity groups, such as Black and Hispanic girls ([Flegal, 2010](#)). In this case, it's important to apply cultural sensitivity to teaching girls how to take care of their bodies.

To help girls thrive, adults must model and teach appropriate, culturally sensitive care and attention to healthy physical developments while maintaining a positive self-view. This is perhaps even more critical among the 1 in 3 girls who do meet the medical criteria for being overweight, as research suggests that over-correcting may lead girls into unhealthy weight control practices like restricting food. Appropriate strategies include sensible eating through food education, encouraging physical activity, and developing healthy sleep habits.

Perceived vs Actual Weight among Florida High School Girls by Race and Ethnicity, 2021



# Healthy Habits

Learning how to care for their physical needs is a key skill adolescents must develop before the independence of young adulthood. Healthy habits like eating balanced meals, getting enough physical activity and sleep, and limiting screen-time overall are shown to create a foundation of general wellness later in adulthood ([Harris, 2005](#)). While high school girls in Florida exhibit slightly healthier eating habits than boys, more girls report worse overall habits such as eating breakfast every day, being physically active for 60 minutes or more, limiting screen time, and getting 8 or more hours of sleep.

**80%**  
of high school girls in Florida are getting less than 8 hours of sleep.

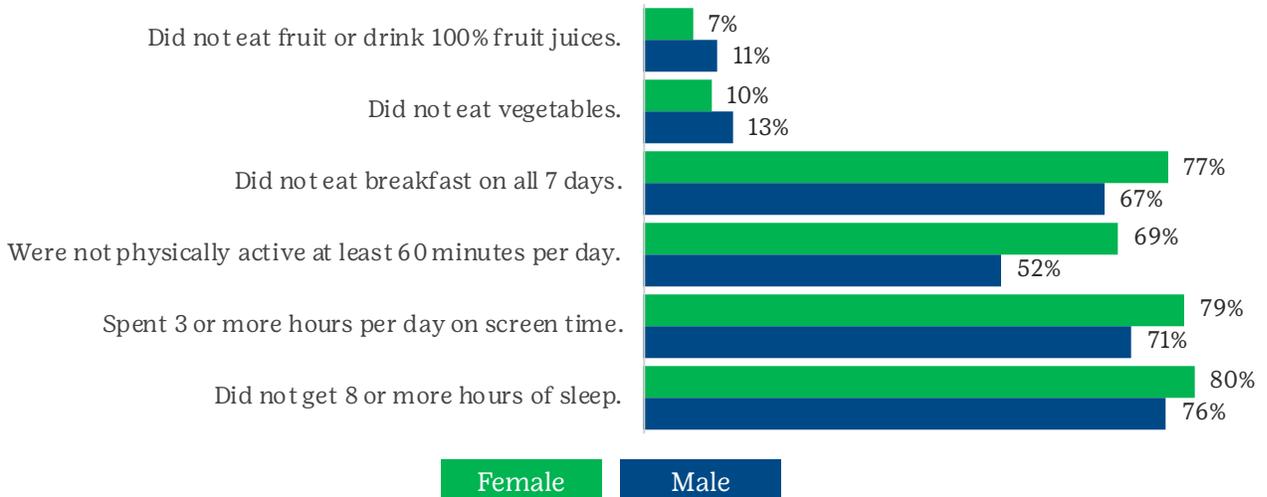
Specifically, insufficient sleep among adolescents was recognized as a serious health risk in 2010. The American Medical Association (AMA) and American Academy of Sleep Medicine jointly adopted a resolution outlining the public health issue related to insufficient sleep of youth, reporting health-related consequences such as depression, increased obesity risk, and threats to academic success. More than 80% of high school girls in Florida report receiving less than 8 hours of sleep ([AMA, 2010](#)).

Adults must not only help girls with healthy habits now, but build knowledge and skills to support healthy development as an independent young adult.

## High School girls in Florida are more likely to report poorer healthy habits like physical activity and adequate sleep.

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida 2021*

Prevalence of Exhibiting Overall Healthy Habits in Prior 7 Days Among Florida High School Youth, 2021



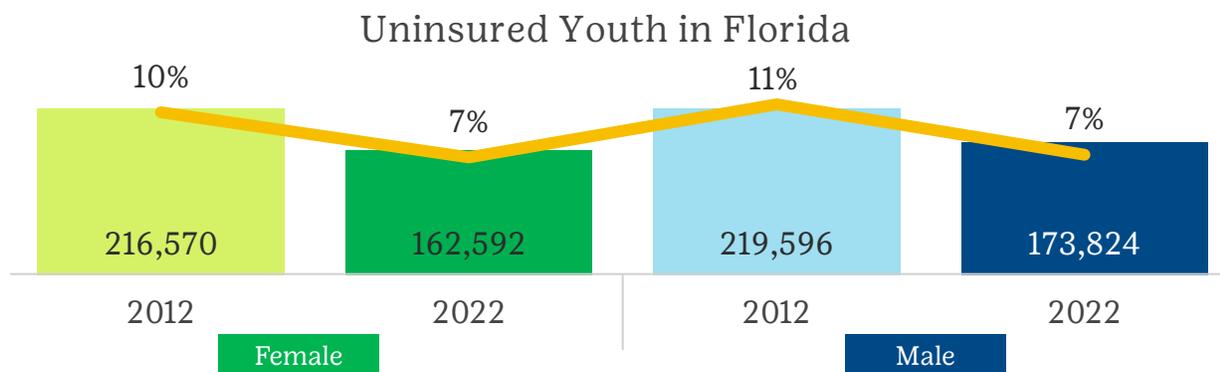
# Health Insurance

The availability of affordable, adequate health insurance is a critical component of girls' overall physical wellbeing. Research shows that the lack of access to health insurance delays young people from receiving healthcare services they need throughout their development, contributing to poorer health outcomes later in life. At a societal level, communities bear significant costs when children remain uninsured: in the first-ever cohort study to follow the longitudinal outcomes of insuring uninsured youth, researchers found that insuring uninsured children not only improves their health, but saves nearly \$3,000 per insured child per year.

In Florida, the number of uninsured youth has declined by roughly 3% over the last 10 years. Among girls, 50,000 fewer girls are living without healthcare insurance than in 2012. While the positive trend is notable, more than 160,000 (7.3%) of girls remained uninsured in 2022. Utilizing the estimated \$2,886 cost savings per insured youth per year, the total economic impact of covering uninsured youth in Florida is over \$1B, adjusting for inflation ([Flores, 2017](#)).

## The prevalence of girls living without health insurance improved compared to 10 years ago.

*U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B27001, 2022, Florida*



### GIRL SCOUT IMPACT *Her Mind and Body*

Girl Scouts aims to create a girl-centric environment free of social pressure but full of supportive encouragement to love her body while learning healthy habits. Earning badges like the Simple Meals badge or participating in extensive outdoor programming encourages girls to eat well and get moving *with confidence!*

# 75%

of Florida Girl Scouts have a positive self-identity:

**“I really like the way I look!”**



# Homelessness

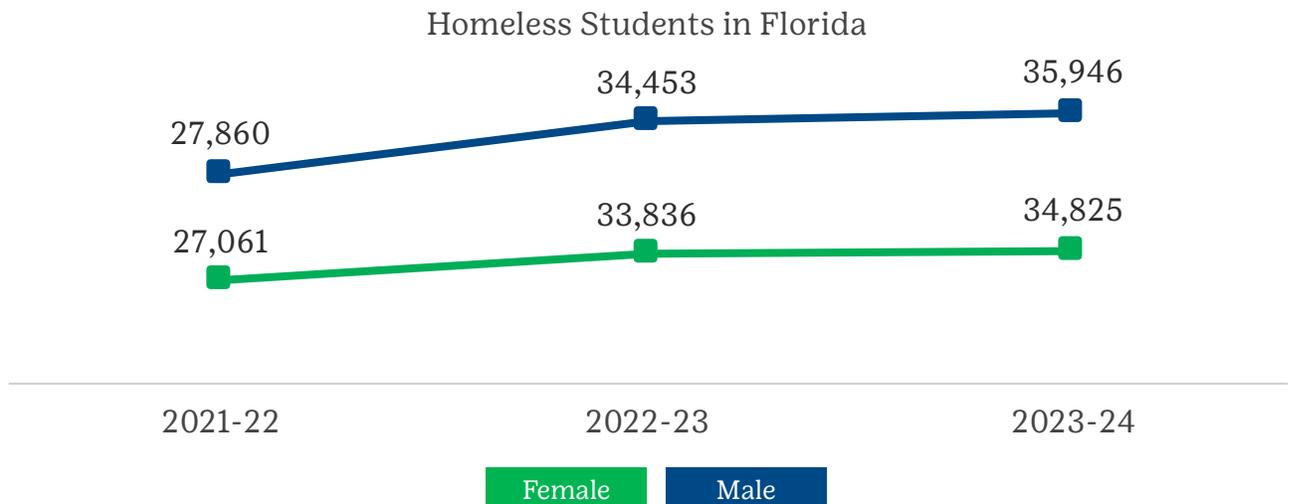
Just as a girl's community is an important factor in her positive development, so, too, is the physical environment in which she lives. In the state of Florida, an increasing number of students are experiencing the crisis of homelessness. The Florida Department of Education utilizes the definition of homelessness provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act: individuals lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Students, then, are defined as primarily experiencing:

1. Living in emergency or transitional shelters;
2. Sharing the housing of other persons due to the loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons;
3. Living in cars, parks, campgrounds, or similar places not ordinarily used for regular sleeping accommodations;
4. Living in hotels or motels due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations.

In total, nearly 100,000 Florida students were reported as homeless in the 2022-2023 school year, and 70% of these students are found to be “doubling-up” in shared housing situations. Among those students identified by sex in the chart below, girls are slightly less likely to experience homelessness compared to boys. The impact of experiencing homelessness for Florida's girls presents immediate challenges and poses long-term risks for impacted individuals. Girls experiencing homelessness are more likely than boys to report being physical abused, emotionally abused, and forced into unwanted sexual acts. Compounded with the shame associated with their living situation, these traumatic experiences can perpetuate negative outcomes for girls such as higher risk of depression, substance abuse, and chronic conditions ([Gultekin, 2019](#)).

## The number of girls experiencing homelessness in Florida has increased three years in a row.

*Florida Department of Education, Enrollment Demographics, Survey 3 – Spring*





A DEEPER LOOK

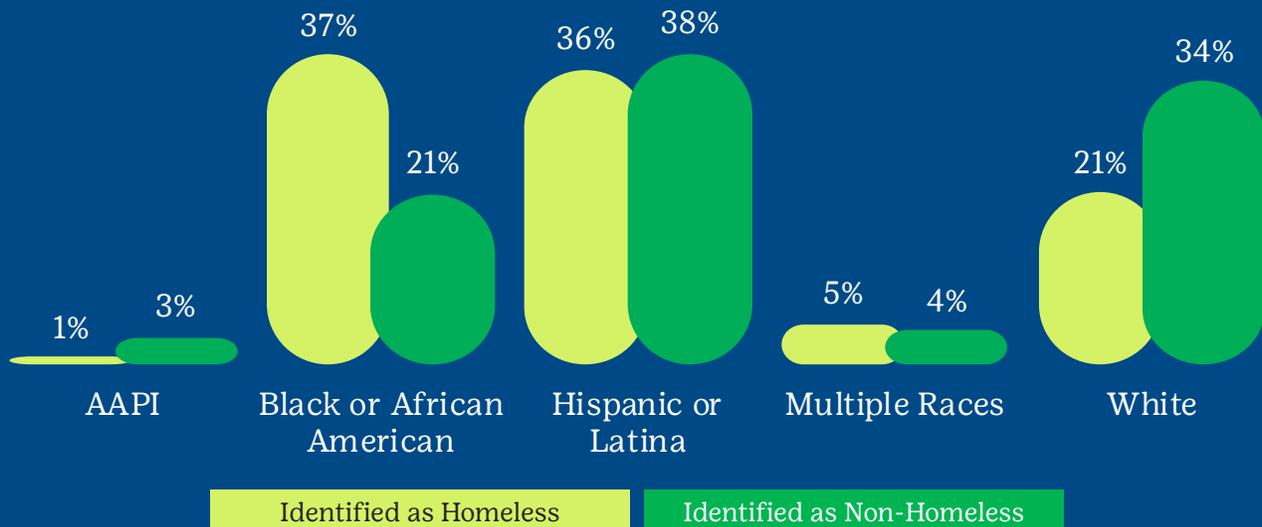
# Homelessness by Race and Ethnicity

Students identified as homeless by the Florida Department of Education are disproportionately students who identify as Black or African American. 37% of all female students identified as experiencing homelessness are Black or African American compared to 21% of students identified as non-homeless. The 16% difference in the representation of Black or African American students is especially troubling as research indicates that Black students are less likely to disclose their homeless status due to perceived hostile racial climates, indicating the portion of Black students experiencing homelessness is likely higher ([Edwards, 2020](#)).

In this study, Black students illuminated the interconnectedness of systems such as the foster care system, public assistance, and education as compounding the experience of homelessness. As an example, students previously reporting high academic performance who then experienced homelessness and required public assistance were rezoned to a new, lesser-resourced school with lower academic outcomes. As a result, academic performance suffered ([Edwards, 2020](#)).

36% of the homeless female student population identify as Hispanic, slightly lower than the portion of female Hispanic students identified as non-homeless. Female students who identify as white had the lowest overall representation among students experiencing homelessness, comprising 21% of the female homeless population and 34% of the non-homeless population. It's critical, then, to address female students experiencing homelessness understanding the intersectionality of the student's race and other factors impacting life at home and school.

Portion of Homeless Female Students in Florida by Race and Ethnicity, 2023-2024



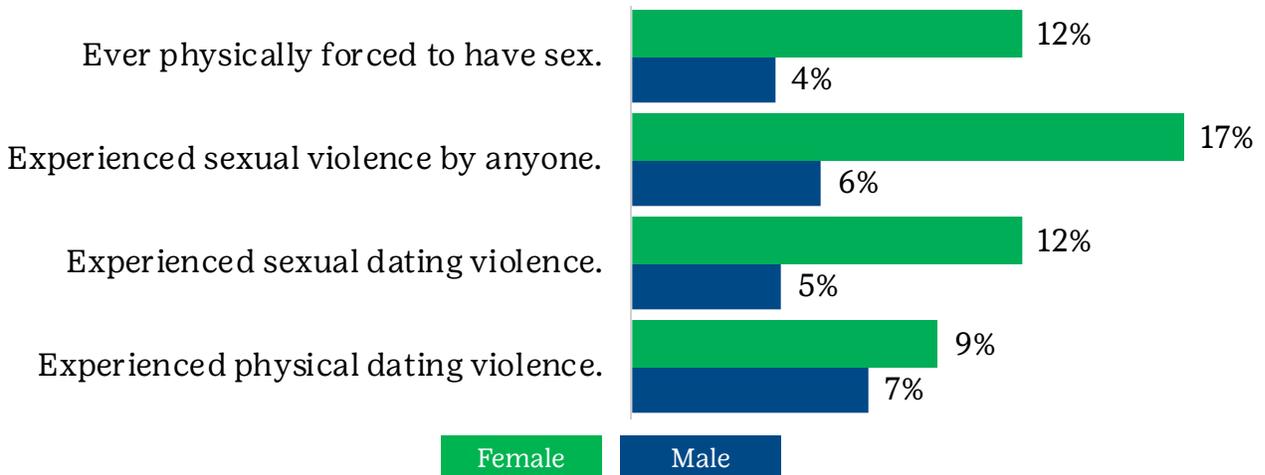
# Sexual and Physical Violence

Girls in Florida experience higher rates of sexual and physical violence compared to boys, with devastating emotional and physical consequences in the near-term and far-lasting impacts long after adolescence. In 2021, 17% of high school girls in Florida reported experiencing sexual violence – a rate three times higher than boys and a 30% increase from 2017. The trend is disturbing and startling, especially considering that multiple studies find that acts of sexual violence are often under-reported by survivors.

## 3x More High School Girls Report Experiencing Violence Compared to High School Boys

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2021*

Prevalence of Experiencing Physical and Sexual Violence among High School Youth, Florida, 2021



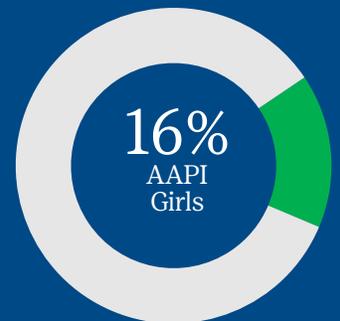
The correlation between experiencing sexual violence and other negative health outcomes is significant ([Clarke, 2023](#)). In a study of youth who experienced sexual violence:

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



### A DEEPER LOOK Sexual Violence by Race & Ethnicity

Among the 17% of high school girls in Florida who report experiencing sexual violence, variances among girls by race and ethnicity indicate some girls are more at risk of being targeted:



# Sexual and Physical Violence, continued

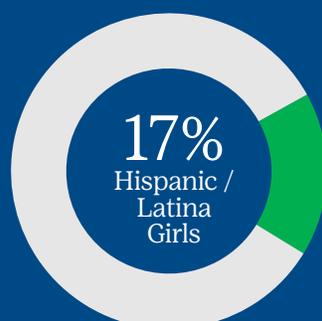
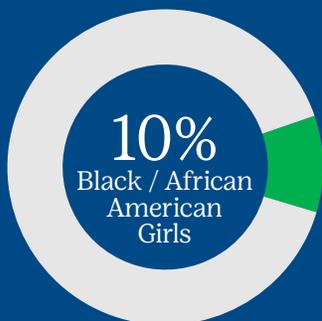
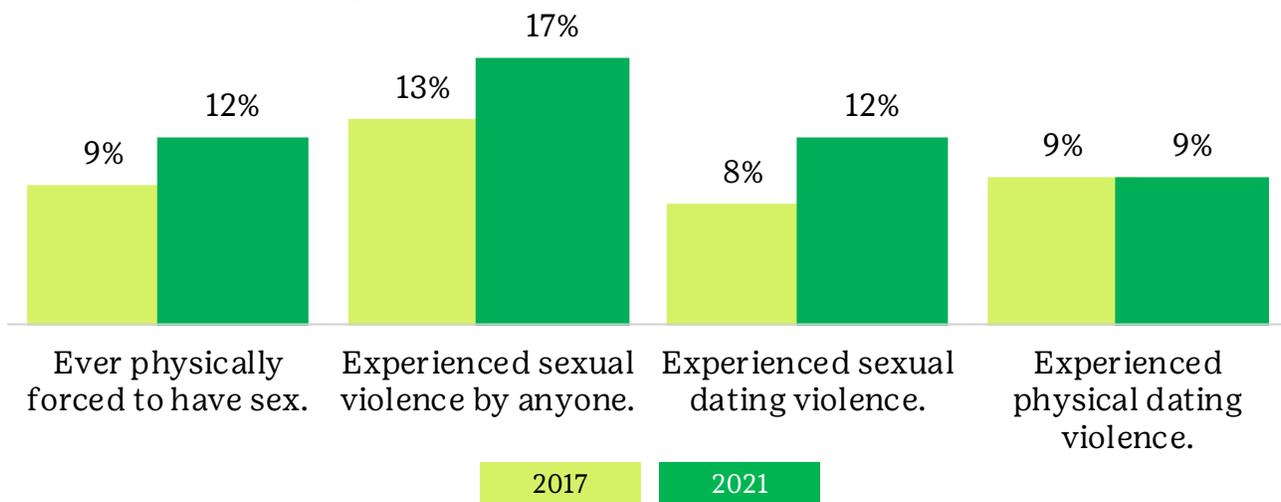
The negative effects survivors of sexual violence experience are shown to transcend beyond mental and emotional health consequences, deeply impacting physical health, social relationships, and academic performance ([Clarke, 2023](#)).

- 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.

## The Prevalence of Florida High School Girls Experiencing Physical or Sexual Violence Increased Significantly in the last 5 Years

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2021*

Prevalence of Experiencing Dating Violence among High School Girls, Florida, 2017 - 2021



# Community Support and Safety

The involvement of non-parental adults in the lives of youth has long been recognized as an important aspect of overall wellbeing. Research shows that adolescents with non-parental adult support have more positive attitudes towards school, including higher motivation and feelings of self-competence; youth have higher levels of self-esteem and self-concept; and lower rates of behavioral and emotional challenges have been reported by youth with strong ties to a non-parental adult ([Sterrett, 2015](#)). When youth feel supported by adults in their community, the likelihood of experiencing most other positive life outcomes increases.

It is concerning, then, that 52% of girls in Florida do not feel supported by their community – 10% more than boys. This trend is also worsening slightly – in 2016, 48% of girls were reported as not feeling supported by their community. The sentiment of feeling supported by a community exists in various contexts as “neighborhood support,” “neighborhood cohesion,” or “social capital.” Researchers at the Maternal and Child Health Bureau present participants statements such as “people in my neighborhood help each other out” and “we watch out for each other’s children in this neighborhood” in order to score this question ([Bureau, 2020](#)).

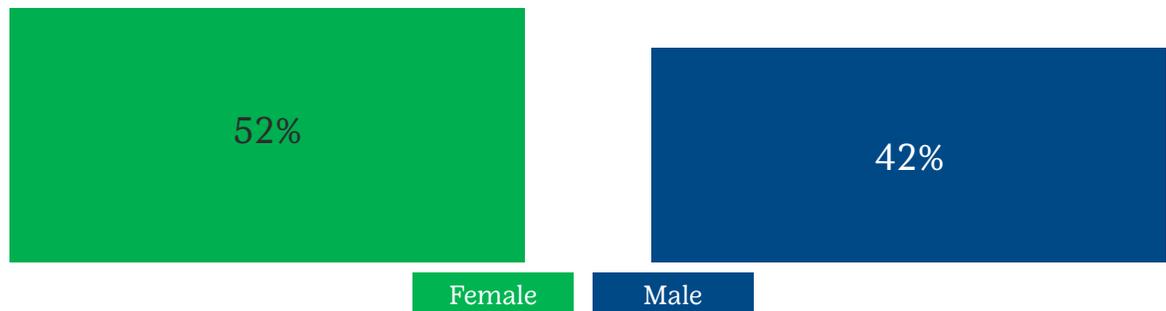
Reversing this feeling is all-at-once extremely simple and very challenging: the ability of a community to extend support to youth relies on youth being present in the community. While participation in extracurricular activities continues to increase slightly compared to the previous generation ([Bureau, 2020](#)), nearly half of parents report feeling overprotective of their children, a fear that causes parents to shield children from non-parental adults ([Minkin, 2023](#)).

However, the Search Institute’s framework for creating strong developmental relationships with youth offers practical, simple elements that most adults can implement with the youth in their lives ([Search Institute, 2023](#)). These include expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power with youth, and expanding their possibilities. Institutions like schools and providers like Girl Scouts play key roles in building these supportive relationships with girls.

## More than half of girls do not live in a supportive neighborhood according to a survey conducted of parents in Florida.

*National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022, Florida*

Child does not live in a supportive neighborhood,  
according to parent/guardian.





GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

# Creating a Sense of Belonging

When girls experience life’s challenges, one of the most important layers of support is reassurance from a community of peers and adults who care.

In Girl Scouts, this sense of community is built through a foundation of simple, core values. Girl Scouts in kindergarten through adulthood regularly commit to upholding one another through promises recited regularly in the Girl Scout Promise and Law:

*To be friendly and helpful;*

*To be considerate and caring;*

*To be a sister to every Girl Scout.*

These simple building blocks make a big difference: a report from the Girl Scout Research Institute in 2020 called “Girls Speak Out About Mental Health” found that Girl Scouts creates an accepting, safe environment that supports positive mental health and allow girls to try new things.

90%

of Florida Girl Scouts:

“In Girl Scouts,  
I feel like I belong.”





# Academic Performance of Florida Girls

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 often 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 STEM topics throughout K-12 instruction, and programs which enable ongoing learning in higher education or technical training.

## Key Facts: Academic Performance

- **43% of girls score below grade-level in English Language Arts.**  
Although girls outperform boys on ELA assessments, 2 in 5 girls test below grade level in Florida.
- **Girls experienced more significant learning loss in mathematics during COVID-19 compared to boys.**  
Girls' on-grade-level assessment scores dropped 13% in two years compared to 9% among boys.
- **High school girls achieve a graduation rate 5% higher than boys.**  
A larger percentage of girls complete their high school education.
- **Fewer girls are entering STEM fields.**  
Although women make up 52% of the college-educated population in Florida, only 32% enter a science or engineering field - 8% lower than men.



## K-12 Student Enrollment

The state of Florida serves the third-highest population of students in the country, behind California and Texas. More than 2.8M K-12 students enrolled in the 2023-2024 academic school year, of which 49% were girls. The characteristics of individual students are known to impact their academic performance, such as socioeconomic status (SES), cognitive ability, and family dynamics. The Florida Department of Education offers student support services for students meeting many of these characteristics.

Academic performance is strongly correlated with economic access ([Hanushek, 2019](#)), so the prevalence of students living in economically disadvantaged households is one of the most important factors in student success. More than 50% of K-12 girls in Florida live in “economically disadvantaged” households qualifying for free or reduced lunch according to the National School Lunch Program. The academic performance of students in lower socioeconomic households has remained unchanged over time: although academic achievement has grown in the last several decades, the gap between lower-SES students and higher-SES students remains consistent – we are not closing the gap ([Hanushek, 2019](#)).

A student’s unique capacity for learning is assessed with three standard definitions: students with disabilities, students with exceptionalities, and students identified as gifted. Definitions for each are specified on page 37, but in general indicate that a student has an inherent physical, emotional, social, or learning difference requiring academic accommodations.



1 in 6

Florida girls receive  
learning accommodations.

Girls are less likely than boys to be characterized as having a disability (11.0% vs 19.5%) or learning exceptionality (16.6% vs 25.0%) but slightly more girls than boys are gifted students (5.6% vs 5.4%).

Importantly, research has long-reported that girls are often under-diagnosed with mental, emotional, or learning differences while boys can be over-diagnosed ([Quinn, 2014](#)).

With a known 1 in 6 girls receiving academic accommodations for learning exceptionalities, adults interacting with youth must expand our understanding and approach to supporting neurodiverse girls. Knowing the prevalence of under-diagnosis among girls only increases this priority.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

# Academic Success Now and in the Future

In many ways, Girl Scouts is the perfect companion to a strong education for girls.

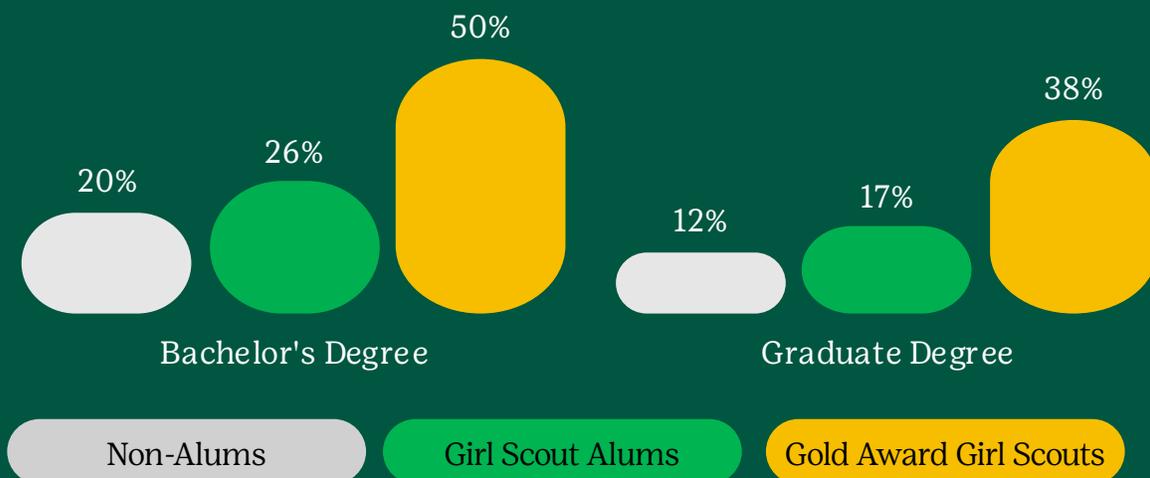
First, Girl Scouts doesn't feel like school, and that's the point! Girls learn skills they won't find in a classroom (like entrepreneurship) through immersive hands-on program (like the renowned Cookie Program).

Importantly, one of the most critical outcomes of the Girl Scout program is increasing girls' confidence and courage to try new things. Emphasizing resilience and team-building sets girls up for success in the classroom today and tomorrow.



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

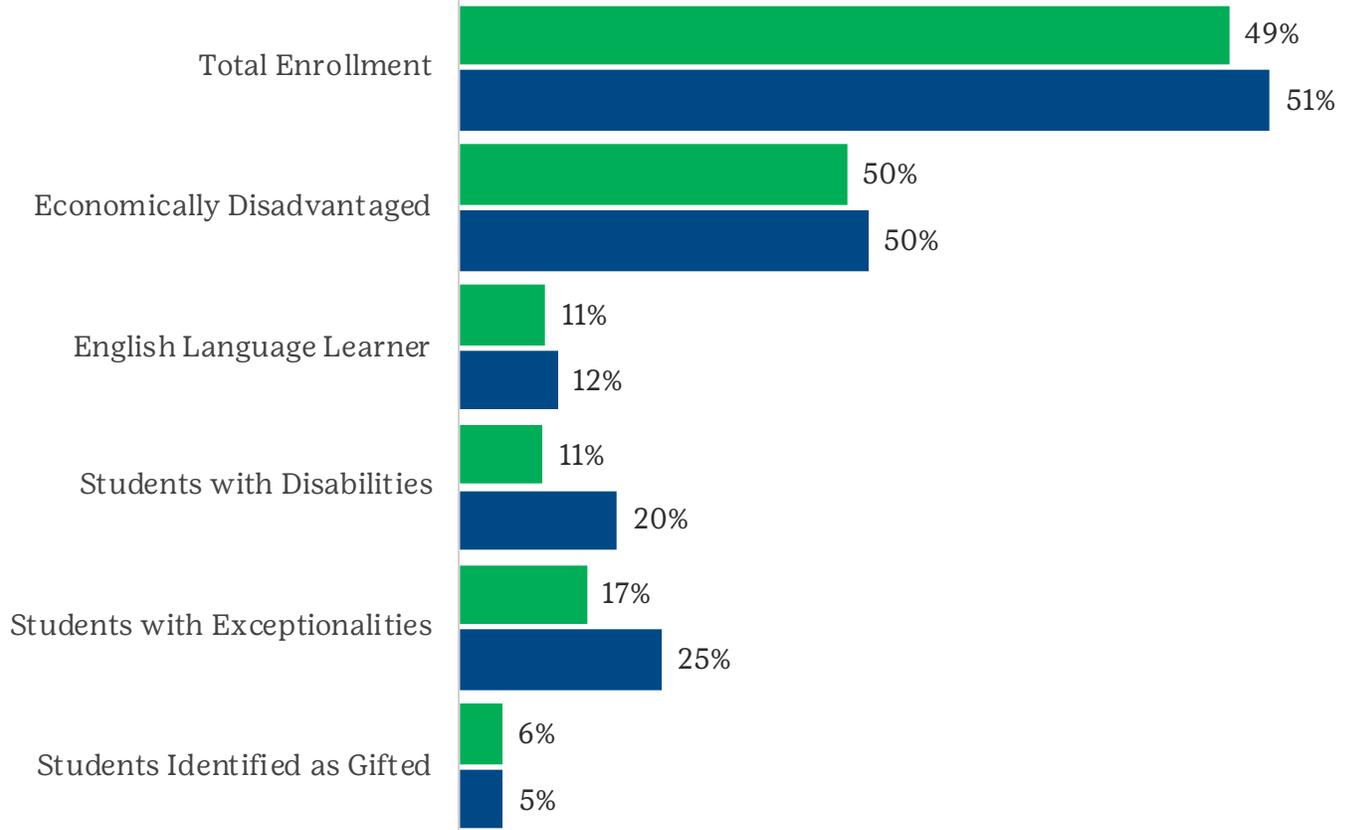
## Highest Education Complete



# K-12 Student Enrollment, continued

## 2023-2024 Student Enrollment Characteristics, Largest 5 Demographics

Florida Department of Education, 2024



|                                    | Female      |     | Male        |     |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-----|
|                                    | Total Youth | %   | Total Youth | %   |
| Total Enrollment                   | 1,398,494   | 49% | 1,473,815   | 51% |
| Economically Disadvantaged         | 704,163     | 50% | 742,644     | 50% |
| English Language Learner           | 158,472     | 11% | 178,573     | 12% |
| Students with Disabilities         | 153,745     | 11% | 287,602     | 20% |
| Students with Exceptionalities     | 125,832     | 17% | 367,730     | 25% |
| Students Identified as Gifted      | 77,881      | 6%  | 80,280      | 5%  |
| Students Experiencing Homelessness | 34,825      | 2%  | 35,946      | 2%  |
| Students in Military Families      | 19,643      | 1%  | 20,335      | 1%  |
| Students in Migrant Families       | 4,789       | 0%  | 4,983       | 0%  |

# K-12 Student Enrollment, continued

## 2023-2024 Student Enrollment Characteristics Definitions

Florida Department of Education, 2024

| Characteristic                 | Definition - Florida Department of Education  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Economically Disadvantaged     | Students determined to be eligible for free and reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program.  |
| English Language Learner       | Students whose native language is other than English or who comes from a home in which language other than English has had a significant impact on the level of English proficiency.  |
| Students with Disabilities     | A student who is documented as having an intellectual disability; a hearing impairment, including deafness; a speech or language impairment; a visual impairment, including blindness; an emotional or behavioral disability; an orthopedic or other health impairment; an autism spectrum disorder; a traumatic brain injury; or a specific learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or developmental aphasia. |
| Students with Exceptionalities | Identifies the primary exceptionality for students who require special instruction or related services to take full advantage of or respond to educational programs and opportunities because of a physical, mental, emotional, social or learning exceptionality.  |
| Gifted Students                | A student who has superior intellectual development and is capable of high performance.   |
| Homeless                       | A student who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime primary residence.  |
| Migrant                        | A migratory child is a child whose parent or guardian is a migratory agricultural worker or migratory fisher, and who, in the preceding 36 months, has moved from one school district to another, to accompany such parent or guardian in order to obtain temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing work as a principal means of livelihood.  |
| Military                       | A child of a military family including children of 1) active duty members of the uniformed services; 2) members or veterans of the uniformed services who are severely injured and medically discharged or retired for a period of 1 year after medical discharge or retirement; and 3) members of the uniformed services who die on active duty or as a result of injuries sustained on active duty for a period of 1 year after death.          |



# K-12 Student Proficiency

The Florida Department of Education’s Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (F.A.S.T.) Assessments aim to evaluate students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills in alignment with the state’s updated B.E.S.T. (Building Excellence in Student Thinking) Standards adopted in 2020 ([Florida Department of Education, 2024](#)). The assessment scores indicate students’ proficiency in the tested subject, represented in five levels.

| Indicates on-grade-level performance.                         |   |  |   |  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Level 1   | Level 2   | Level 3  | Level 4                                   | Level 5  |
| <b>Well Below Grade Level.</b>                                | <b>Below Grade Level.</b>                                     | <b>On Grade Level.</b>                                 | <b>Proficient.</b>                        | <b>Exemplary.</b>                                |
| Likely to need substantial support for the next grade/course. | Likely to need substantial support for the next grade/course. | May need additional support for the next grade/course. | Likely to excel in the next grade/course. | Highly likely to excel in the next grade/course. |

Notable differences in academic performance between girls and boys underscore how inconsistent academic development is for youth in Florida. A significant percentage of students are not achieving proficiency standards. In addition, the variance in proficiency scores of girls and boys in subjects like English Language Arts (ELA) and math suggests that several influences in and outside of the classroom are shaping academic performance.

While girls outperform boys on the ELA assessment (56% on grade level compared to 50%), 43% are not meeting proficiency standards. For all students in Florida, proficiency worsens slightly in mathematics, with 46% of girls and 44% of boys testing at Level 1 or Level 2. The ‘learning loss’ observed during the years most heavily impacted by the pandemic are evident in the declining scores between the 2018-2019 academic year and 2021-2022.



# K-12 Student Proficiency - ELA

**K-12 girls are outperforming boys on the ELA F.A.S.T. Assessment; yet, 43% of girls are not meeting proficiency standards.**

*Florida Department of Education, 2023-2024 Academic Assessments*

2023-2024 English Language Arts  
F.A.S.T. Assessment



**The gap in English Language Arts performance widens between girls and boys beginning in middle school.**

*Florida Department of Education, 2023-2024 Academic Assessments*

|            | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) All Grades | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 3-5 | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 6-8 | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 9-12 |
|------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Female     | 56%                                   | 57%                                   | 56%                                   | 56%                                    |
| Male       | 50%                                   | 53%                                   | 48%                                   | 50%                                    |
| Difference | <b>6% Higher</b>                      | <b>3% Higher</b>                      | <b>8% Higher</b>                      | <b>6% Higher</b>                       |



## K-12 Student Proficiency, continued

A prevailing stereotype suggests that girls excel in ELA while under-performing in math and science, often attributed to inherent developmental differences. However, studies indicate that these disparities are more influenced by social pressures and instructional biases than biological factors. As an example, countries with a higher level of displayed gender stereotypes also present with higher gender gaps in STEM assessments ([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.

Additionally, teachers may unconsciously exhibit instructional bias, favoring boys in science discussions or promoting more challenging math tasks, which reinforces the notion that boys are naturally better in these subjects ([Copur-Gencturk, 2023](#)). This bias can create an environment where girls feel less capable in science, further perpetuating the performance gap.

Instructional practices and curricular choices can exacerbate these differences. For example, the use of gender-stereotyped materials in classrooms can influence students' interest and engagement levels. Studies show that when girls are presented with role models in STEM fields, their performance and interest in these subjects significantly increase ([Gladstone, 2024](#)). Conversely, when instruction is not gender-inclusive, it can lead to a sense of alienation among girls, which impacts academic outcomes ([Master, 2014](#)).

The role of societal norms and educational practices is shaping academic performance of boys and girls in Florida. By addressing implicit personal and institutional biases in order to foster inclusive academic development, adults can bridge the performance gap and encourage girls to excel in both ELA and science.

# 46%

of girls in Florida are not meeting academic standards in math.

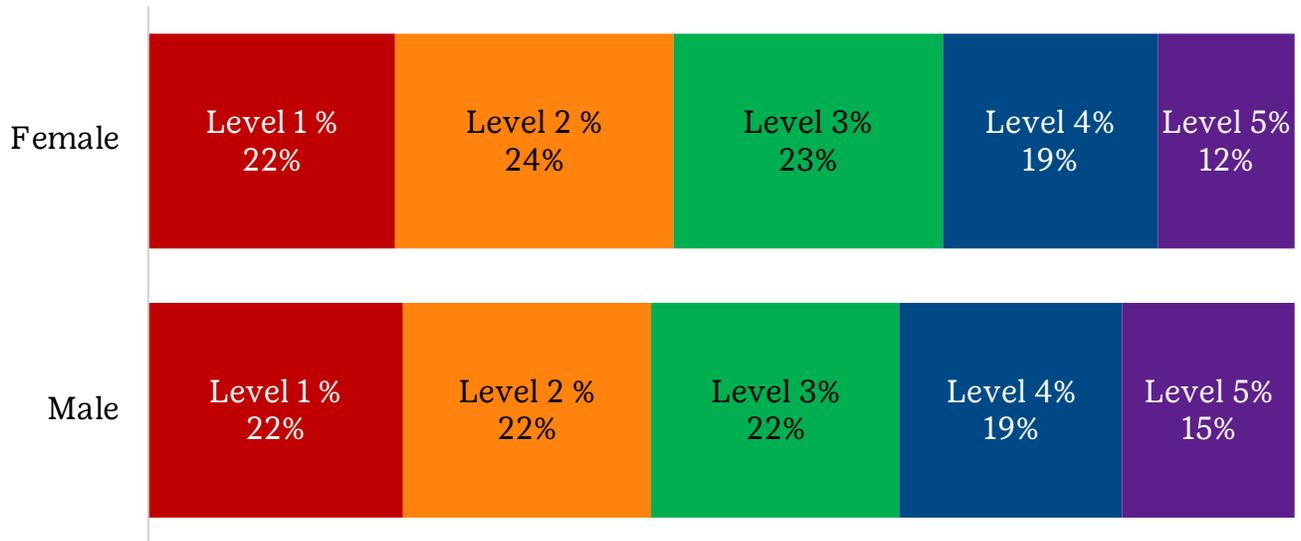


# K-12 Student Proficiency - Mathematics

54% of girls in grades K-12 meet mathematics proficiency standards, slightly behind the 56% of boys.

*Florida Department of Education, 2023-2024 Academic Assessments*

2023-2024 Mathematics F.A.S.T. Assessment



Girls close the gap in mathematics in middle and high school, improving from a (5%) difference in boy’s performance to +1%.

*Florida Department of Education, 2023-2024 Academic Assessments*

|            | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) All Grades | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 3-5 | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 6-8 | On Grade Level (Level 3-5) Grades 9-12 |
|------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Female     | 54%                                   | 56%                                   | 59%                                   | 42%                                    |
| Male       | 56%                                   | 61%                                   | 59%                                   | 41%                                    |
| Difference | <b>2% Lower</b>                       | <b>5% Lower</b>                       | <b>Equal</b>                          | <b>1% Higher</b>                       |



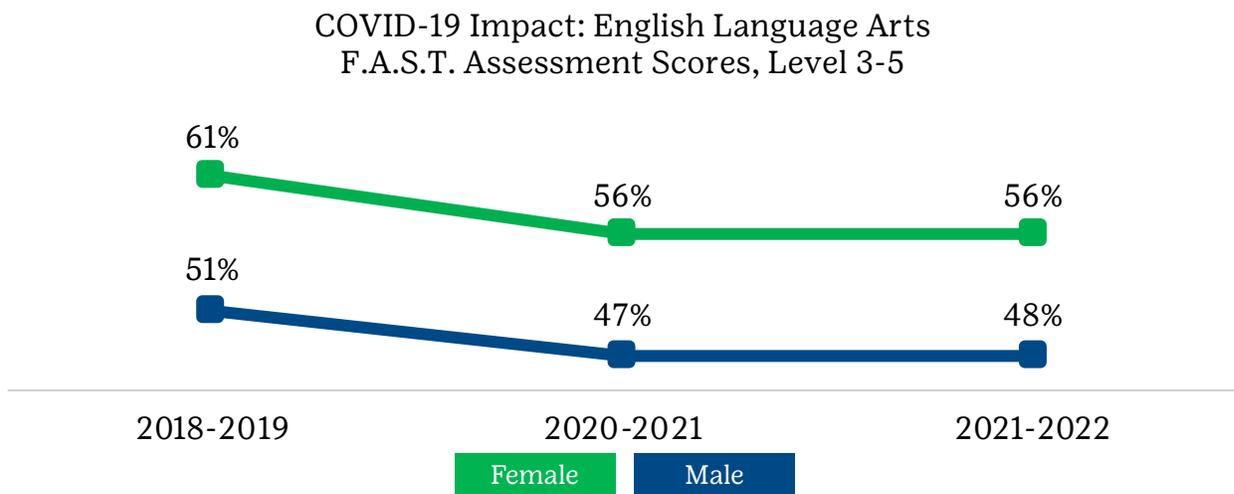
## K-12 Student Proficiency, continued

The academic disruption that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic created ‘learning loss’ among all students. Relative to historical years, these losses were substantial. However, documented learning loss was steeper among some student subgroups including students living in low-income households, students who identify as Black or Hispanic, and communities lacking access to high-speed internet ([Fahle, 2023](#)).

In Florida, declines among girls were more significant than boys in both ELA and math. Between the 2018-2019 academic year assessments and the 2020-2021 assessments, girls’ math proficiency declined by 13% while boys declined by 9%. In ELA, girls declined by 5% while boys declined by 4%.

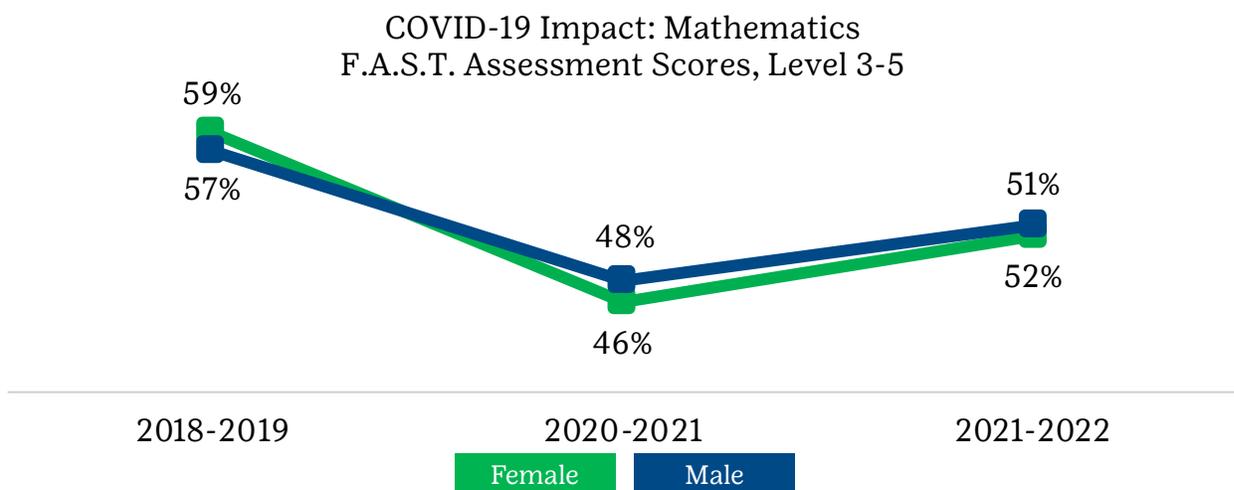
### Girls experienced a slightly steeper decline in on-grade-level performance during COVID-19 in ELA - a 5% decline vs 4% in boys.

*Florida Department of Education, 2018-2022 Academic Assessments*



### The significant learning loss in mathematics during COVID-19 was more pronounced for girls who declined by 13% compared to 9% in boys.

*Florida Department of Education, 2018-2022 Academic Assessments*



# Graduation Rate

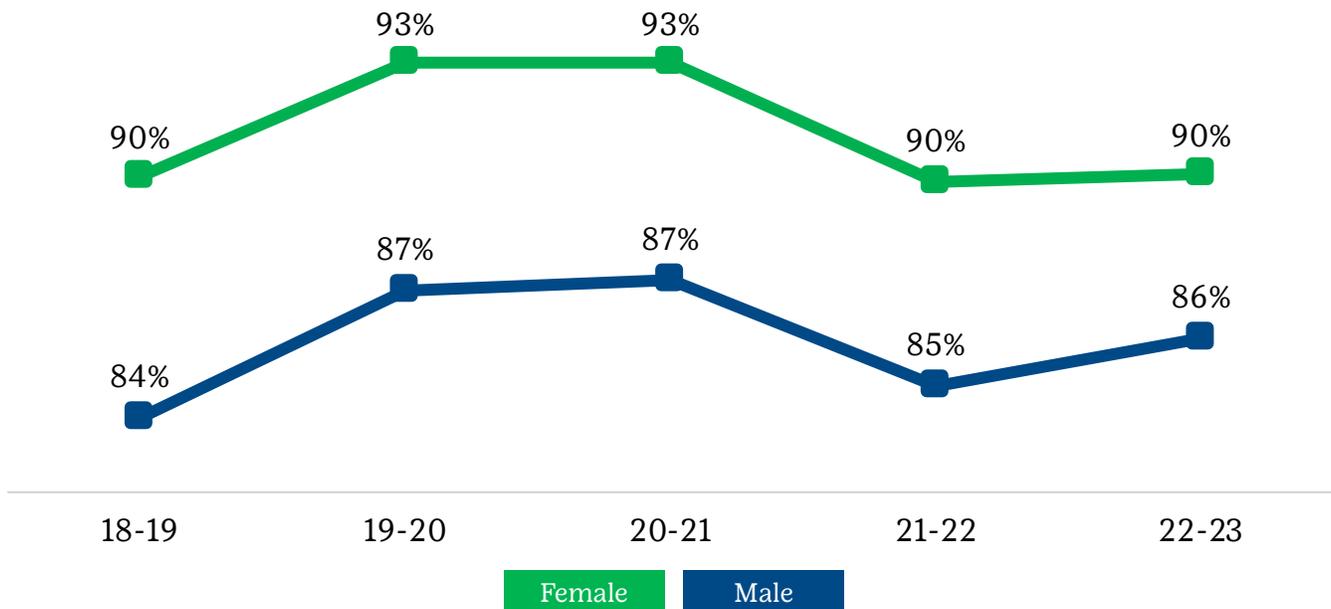
Most students in the graduating class of 2023 began high school during the first academic year impacted by COVID-19. Over the course of the last five years, students in Florida have maintained a consistent graduation rate of 88% on average, with girls graduating at a higher rate than boys in each of those years. Notably, the graduating classes seemingly impacted by the learning disruptions of COVID-19 experienced slight declines in the graduation rate but not lower than the rate of the 2018-2019 class.

The differences in graduation rates between girls and boys are consistent with national trends. In 2023, the Brookings Institute released a study by Reeves and Kalkat noting the substantial gender gap in high school graduation rates – consistently 6% nationally ([Reeves, 2023](#)). Researchers studying school achievement and graduation rates find that “high school females put greater effort into school” due to the ‘social cost’ for both male students and female students based on their academic achievement. According to a study by Workman and Heyder, boys report negative social outcomes for trying hard and performing well in school while girls report positive results from working harder in school, putting more effort into homework, and placing more personal value on working hard to achieve ([Workman, 2020](#)). In short, the social expectations for girls and boys are different: girls are expected to do better in school, while boys are discouraged from putting in effort to excel academically. .

## High school girls achieve a graduation rate 5% higher than boys.

*Florida Department of Education, 2023-2024 Academic Assessments*

5-Year Florida Graduation Rates



# College Area of Study

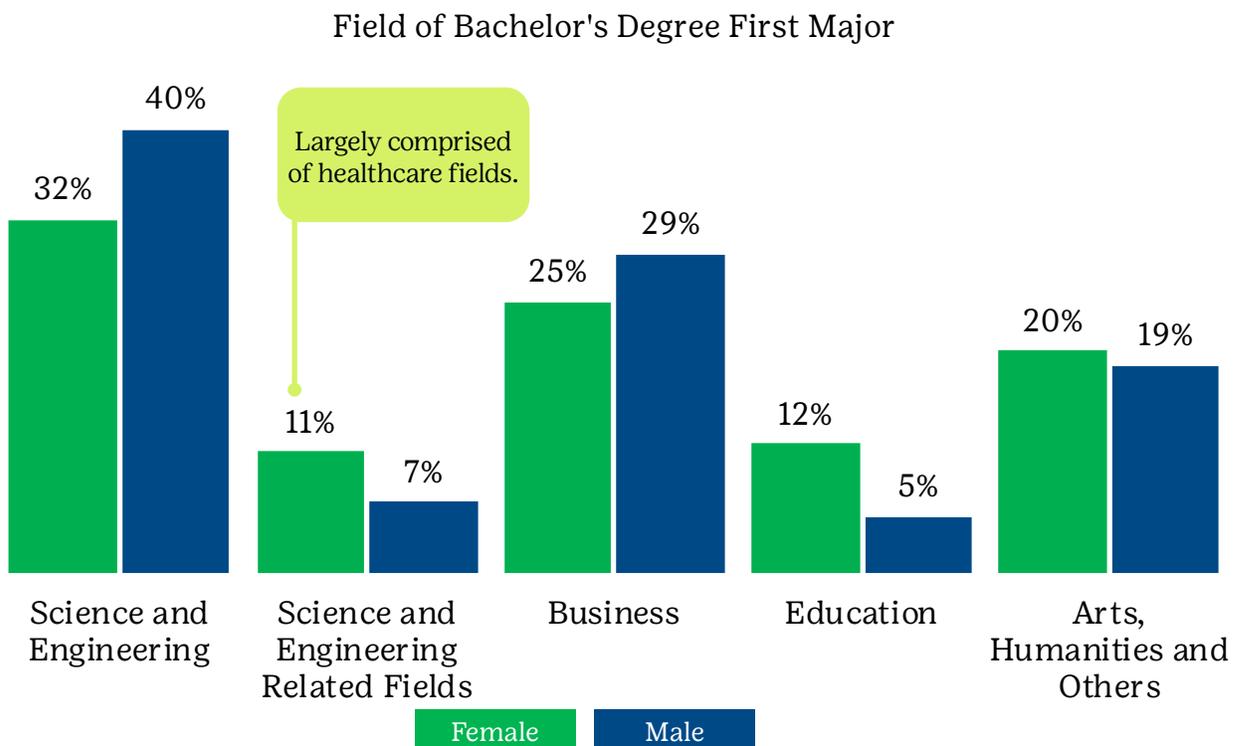
Students experience one of the first opportunities for independent decision making in the direction of their career as they enter college. Women make up 52% of the college-educated population in Florida. In 2022, only 32% of women 25 and older selected a science or engineering degree as their first major when starting a bachelor's degree program – 8% fewer than their male counterparts.

A continuation of the separation we begin to see in mathematics assessments during high school as girls trail boys in proficiency standards, the selection of non-STEM majors in college is the beginning of the gender disparity America continues to see in its STEM workforce. A 2023 Gallup poll found that women make up only 34% of the STEM workforce despite making up over half of the college-educated workforce in the U.S. More women are enrolling in similar fields of study such as healthcare, where 11% of women first major as they enter college compared to 7% of men ([Walton Family Foundation-Gallup, 2024](#)).

The good news is the gap is improving: only 24% of women in Florida declared a STEM major in 2017 compared to 32% in 2022. The percentage of women entering business also increased by 5% during the same time frame, perhaps indicating that efforts to close the gender gap in these areas throughout youth development and education are generating progress in a positive direction.

## Women entering a four-year degree program are selecting historically female-dominated fields such as healthcare, education, and humanities, trailing men in STEM and business.

*U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S1502, 2022, Florida*

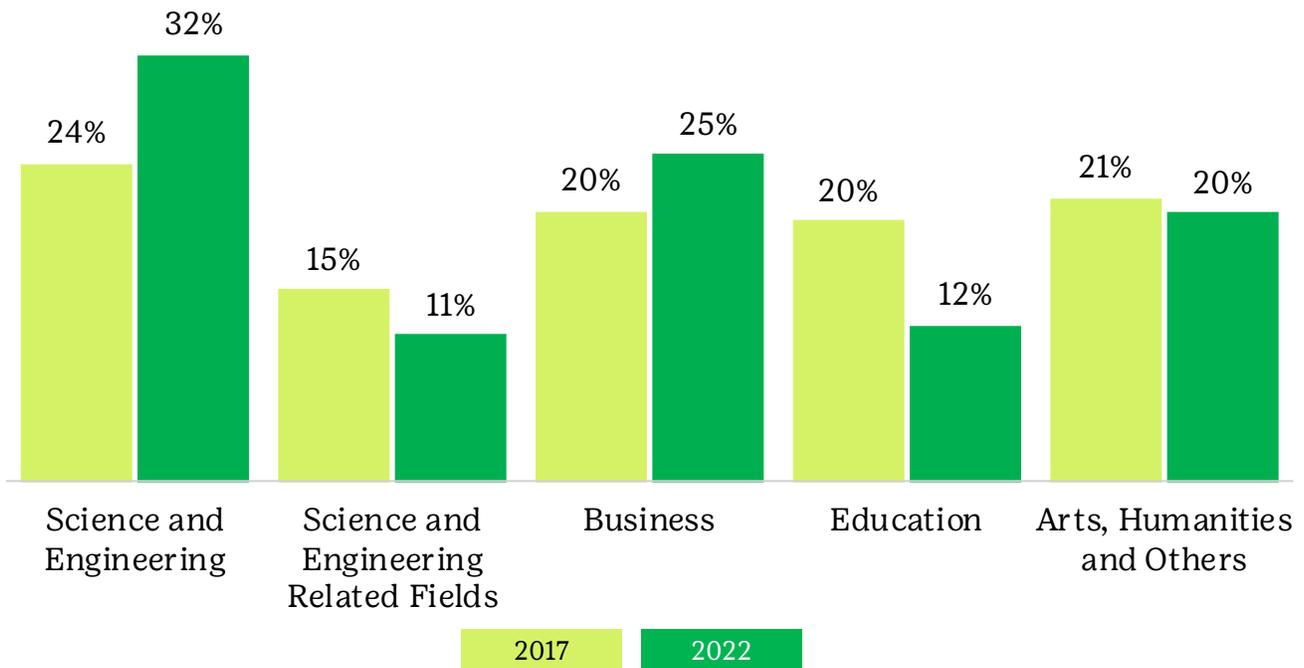


# College Area of Study, continued

The percentage of women beginning STEM and business majors increased over the last 5 years.

*U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S1502, 2017 and 2022, Florida*

Field of Bachelor's Degree First Major Among Women  
2017 vs 2022



## GIRL SCOUT IMPACT Future Possibilities

One of the four areas of focus in the Girl Scout program is STEM, preparing girls with the skills and confidence to take on challenges in a field largely underrepresented by women.

62% of Florida Girl Scouts participated in a STEM program in the last year, and, more importantly, persisted through mistakes. 62% of Florida Girl Scouts report, “even if I am afraid of making mistakes, I still try new things.”

# 1 in 4

Girl Scouts is interested in pursuing a career in STEM compared to 1 in 7 non-Girl Scouts.





## Emotional Wellness of Florida Girls

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, which necessitates the presence of supportive adults.

Together, these circumstances can help girls manage the emotional impact of challenges such as bullying, eating disorders, and depression.

## Key Facts: Emotional Wellness

- **Half of high school girls meet a clinical definition of depression.**  
52% of high school girls report feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row - a 40% increase in 10 years.
- **1 in 4 high school girls seriously considered attempting suicide.**  
In the last 10 years, the number of girls who have contemplated suicide increased by more than 60%.
- **1 in 8 high school girls has missed school because they felt unsafe.**  
Girls are 1.5x more likely than boys to stay home from school after experiencing bullying.
- **Twice as many girls as boys are victims of cyber-bullying.**  
Cyber-bullying is a pervasive and damaging form of bullying occurring online in social platforms, impacting 1 in 6 high school girls.





# Mental Health and Suicide

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, America’s youth experienced a significant increase in reported mental health challenges. In 2023, the Washington Post published a summary of results from the Center 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](#)).

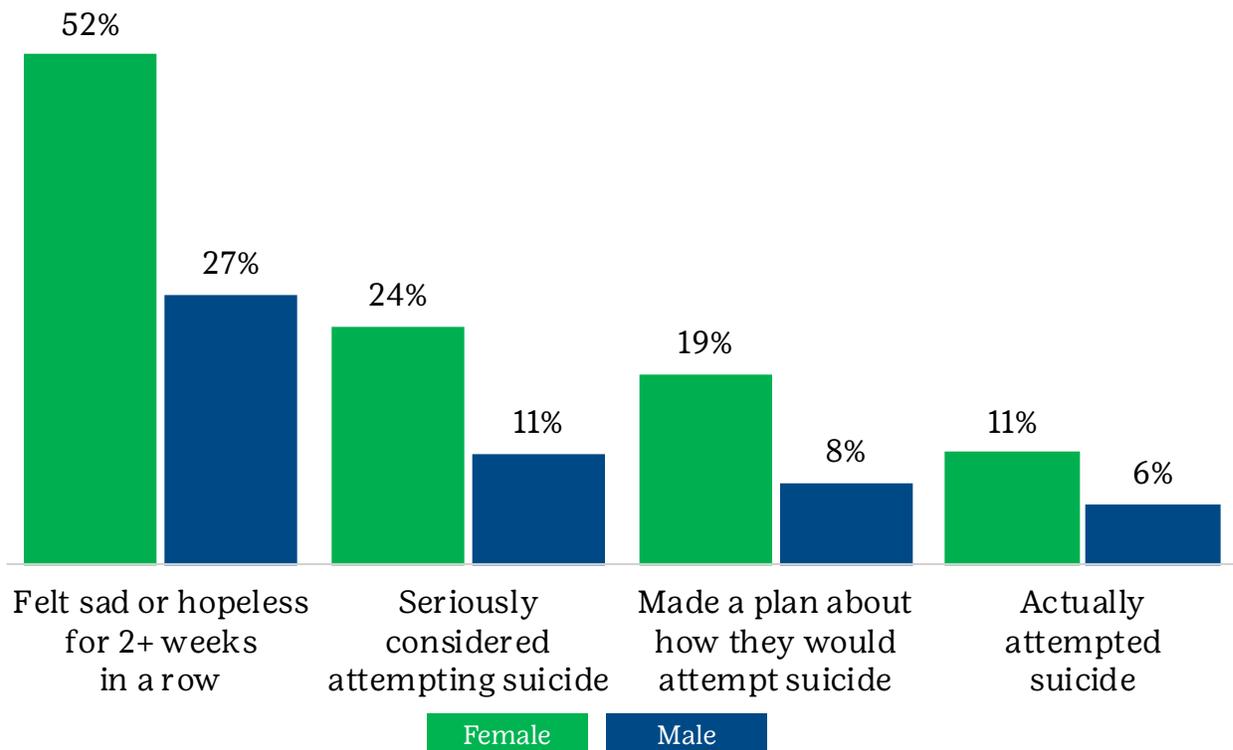
Florida’s youth mirror that troubling trend: in 2021, high school girls report experiencing mental health challenges at twice the rate of high school boys among all four measured indicators. One in four high school girls report seriously considering attempting suicide and one in ten high school girls report actually attempting death by suicide.

The dramatic increase in the prevalence of high school girls experiencing mental health challenges is also cause for concern: in the last 10 years, every measured indicator saw a significant increase in high school girls reporting mental health challenges, including a 74% increase in girls making a plan about how they would attempt suicide (from 11.1% to 19.3% in 2021).

## High School Girls Report Experiencing a Higher Level of Mental Health Challenges Compared to High School Boys

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2021*

Mental Health Challenges Reported by Florida Youth, 2021



# Mental Health and Suicide, continued

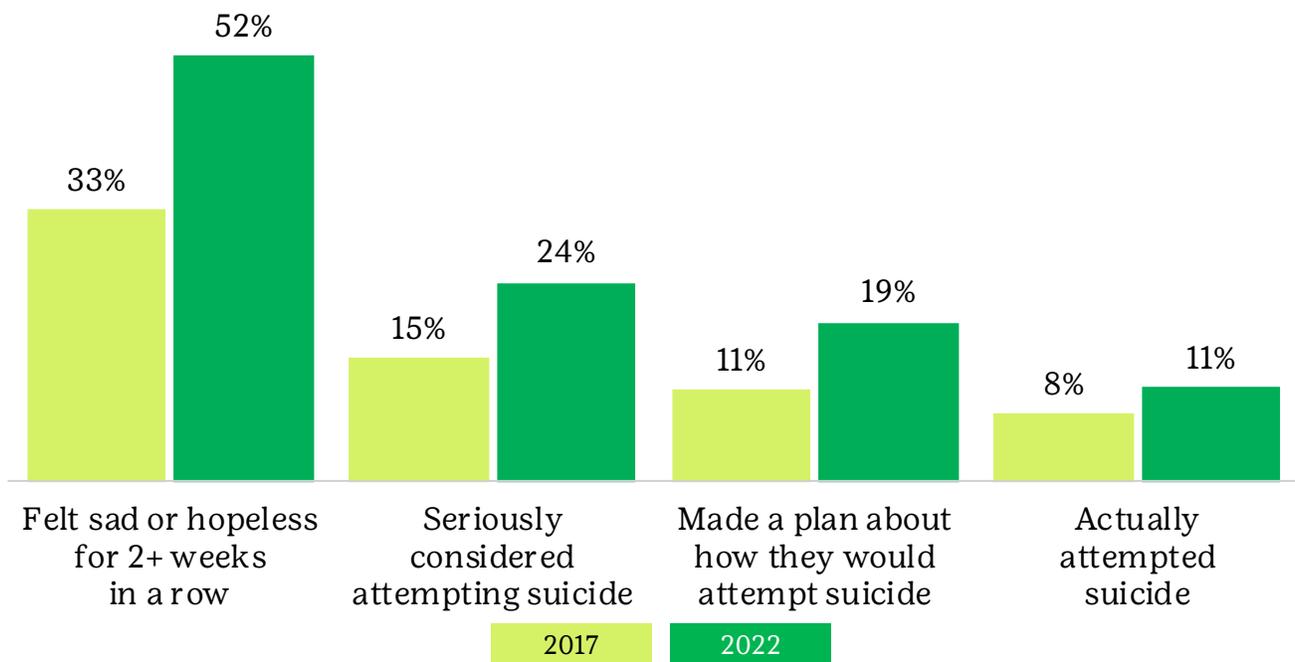
Multiple theories and interventions have been developed to specifically reduce the rate of depressive symptoms and aid the sense of hopelessness that girls have long been challenged with during adolescence. One intervention known as the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) is based on cognitive behavioral prevention and the belief that peer and mentor-based support is an important component in positive mental health.

For years, this program was primarily offered in co-ed environments to youth; however, a study in 2015 found that girls-only groups were more effective than co-ed groups in reducing adolescent girls' hopelessness, and girls attended girls' groups more often than co-ed groups ([Chaplin, 2015](#)). The notable success rate of this program signals that girls require a specific, targeted approach in addressing the growing crisis of mental health concerns.

## The Prevalence among High School Girls Experiencing Mental Health Challenges increased significantly in the last 10 years.

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2011 and 2021*

Mental Health Reported by High School Girls, Florida



One in four high school girls in Florida has seriously considered attempting suicide and one in ten eventually attempt death by suicide.





# Mental Health Support at School

In addition to group-based experiences which specialize in the reduction of depressive symptoms, research also shows that school-based interventions have a positive impact on lowering signs and symptoms of depression (Das, 2016). These interventions may consist of targeted group-based activities or cognitive behavioral therapy offered in a school environment.

Unfortunately, the number of mental health providers in the Florida school system are not able to meet demand: the number of mental health providers per student is far below the recommended ratio by leading agencies. In general, the Florida Department of Health finds that among the 400,000 total youth in Florida in need of behavioral, emotional, or mental health services, only about half are receiving the needed level of care.

## Florida’s Availability of In-School Mental Health and Medical Providers Far Below Recommended Ratio.

|                       | Florida Ratio | Recommended Ratio |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| School Counselor      | 437:1         | 250:1             |
| School Social Workers | 1782:1        | 250:1             |
| School Psychologists  | 1898:1        | 500:1             |
| School Nurses         | 2109:1        | 750:1             |

*Florida Department of Education, 2022*

*Recommended School Counselor Ratio: American School Counselor Association*

*Recommended School Social Worker Ratio: School Social Worker Association of America*

*Recommended School Psychologist Ratio: National Association of School Psychologists*

*Recommended School Nurse Ratio: National Association of School Nurses*





A DEEPER LOOK

# Mental Health by Race and Ethnicity

Mental health challenges among high school girls are slightly more pronounced among girls who identify with certain race or ethnicity groups. 58% of high school girls who identify with multiple races demonstrate signs of experiencing depression, and 23% attempt death by suicide. 8% of girls who identify as AAPI or White, by comparison, attempt suicide compared to the 11% average among all Florida high school girls.





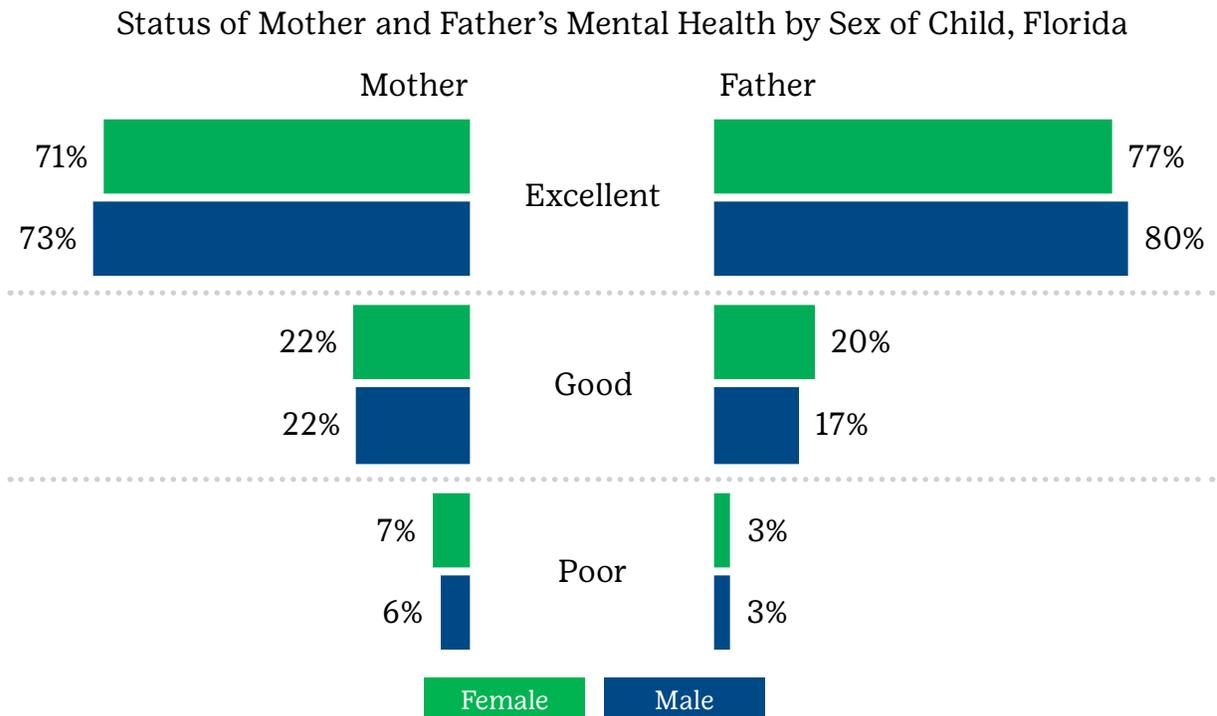
# Family Mental Health

The mental health crisis that America’s youth are experiencing is a long-term threat to community health. First, 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](#)).

In 2022, data showed that more girls than boys are living in households with a mother or father who are, themselves, experiencing mental or emotional health problems: 7% of girls live with a mother with “fair or poor” mental and emotional health compared to 6% of boys. Additionally, based on these findings, the significant increase in mental and emotional health challenges faced by young women risk an even larger portion of future generations experiencing the same intergenerational cycle.

## Girls are more likely than boys to live with parents who are experiencing mental or emotional health challenges.

*National Survey on Children’s Health, Florida, 2021-2022*





GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

# The Power of a Caring Adult

For adults who want to support girls caught in the rapid rise of mental health challenges, knowing where to start can feel daunting. Fortunately, a critical component of positive mental health for youth is also not complicated:

Be a caring, compassionate adult mentor. In Girl Scouts, adult volunteers like troop leaders are proven to support overall positive mental health in girls. In fact, in a 2020 study focused on mental health support, girls cited their troop leader as the #1 source of positive mental health - above friends, family, and school.



Honestly, my troop leader saved my life.

89% of Girl Scouts in Florida report that their troop leader “cares about me as a person” and 84% describe that their troop leader “makes me feel important.” Donating time to build positive relationships with girls is perhaps the most simple, yet effective, way to sew more systems of support into our communities for girls.





# Bullying

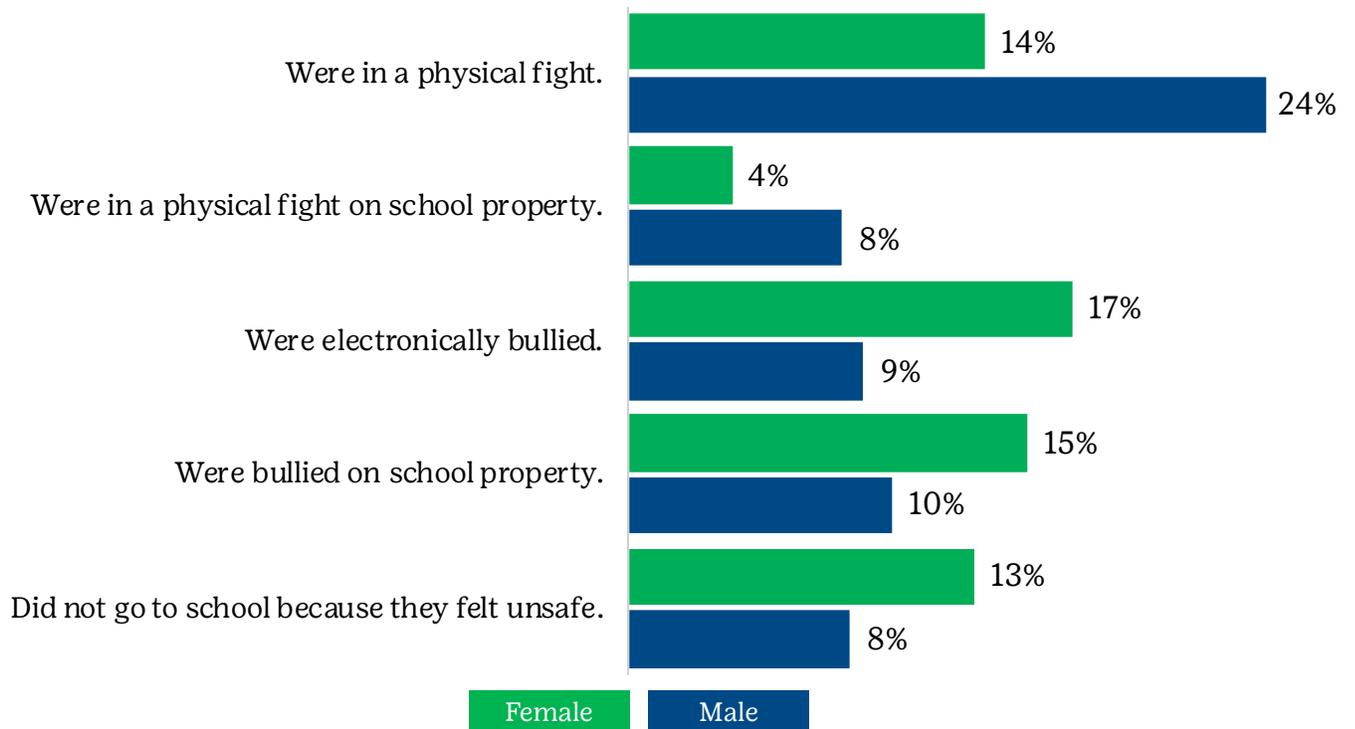
One out of every eight high school students in Florida reports experiencing bullying. The ways in which students engage in bullying behavior has evolved significantly over the prior decade, with a growing number of students experiencing electronic bullying, more commonly known as cyber-bullying. As bullying behavior among youth migrates to digital channels, schools and parents struggle to identify and mitigate the challenge.

While boys continue to experience more overt bullying behavior, with nearly one in four boys reporting being in a physical fight compared to one in eight girls, girls are twice as likely to experience cyber-bullying (17% of high school girls compared to 9% of high school boys). One of the negative impacts of bullying occurring through peer relationships at school is the increased likelihood that students avoid attending school. Girls are 1.5x more likely to stay home from school because they felt unsafe compared to boys, with 13% of high school girls missing out on at least one school day in the last year due to the experience of bullying.

## Girls experience more subtle forms of bullying than boys and report staying home from school due to feeling unsafe.

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2021*

Prevalence of Bullying Among High School Youth, Florida



# Bullying, continued

The mental and emotional effects of bullying overall have been widely researched and reported, which include a decrease in self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and a feeling of isolation. However, the rise in cyber-bullying introduced new negative impacts.

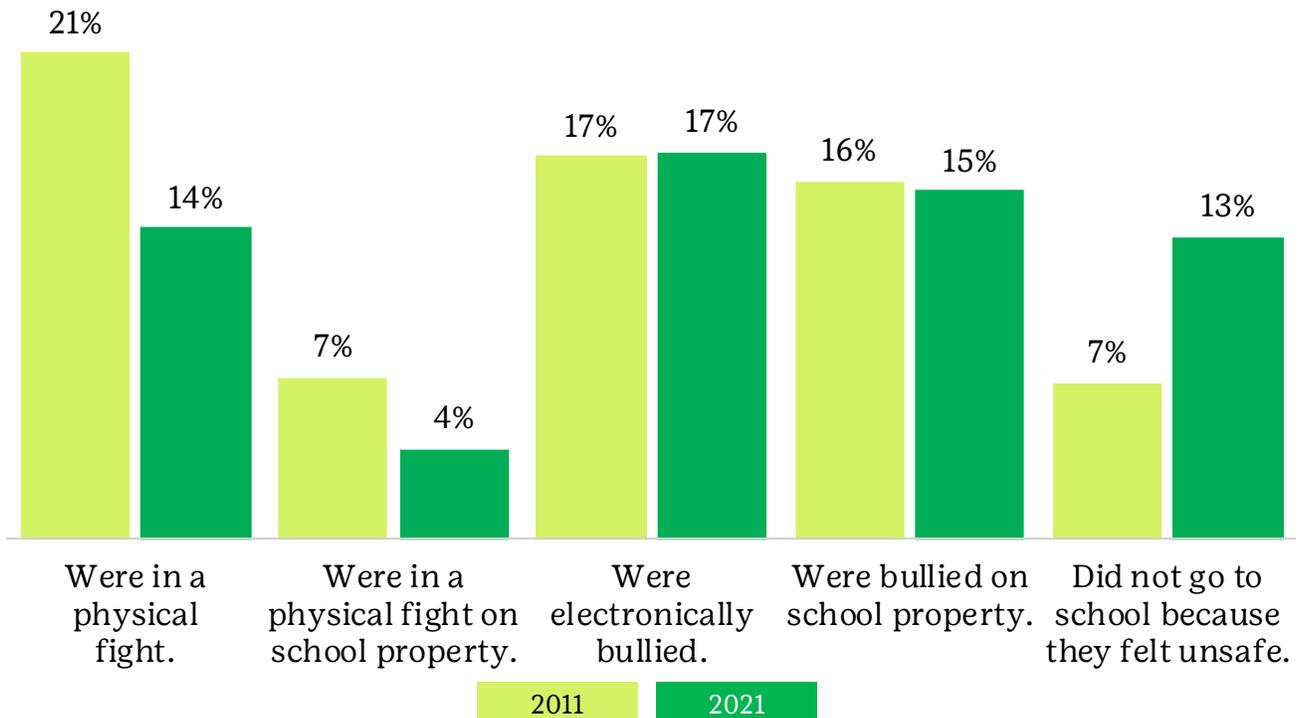
In a study among adolescents on their perception of electronic bullying participants note that the enduring nature of online content, with its ability to be viewed repeatedly and shared widely, has a particularly devastating impact emotionally, socially, and even physically ([Horner, 2015](#)). Students experiencing bullying report behaviors such as poor self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, and suicidal ideation.

**1.5X**  
as many girls stay home from school because they feel unsafe.

**Over the last decade, high school girls report a decrease in traditional forms of bullying; yet, the slight increase in cyber-bullying resulted in nearly doubling the rate of truancy.**

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2011 and 2021*

Prevalence of Bullying Among Florida High School Girls, 2011 vs 2021





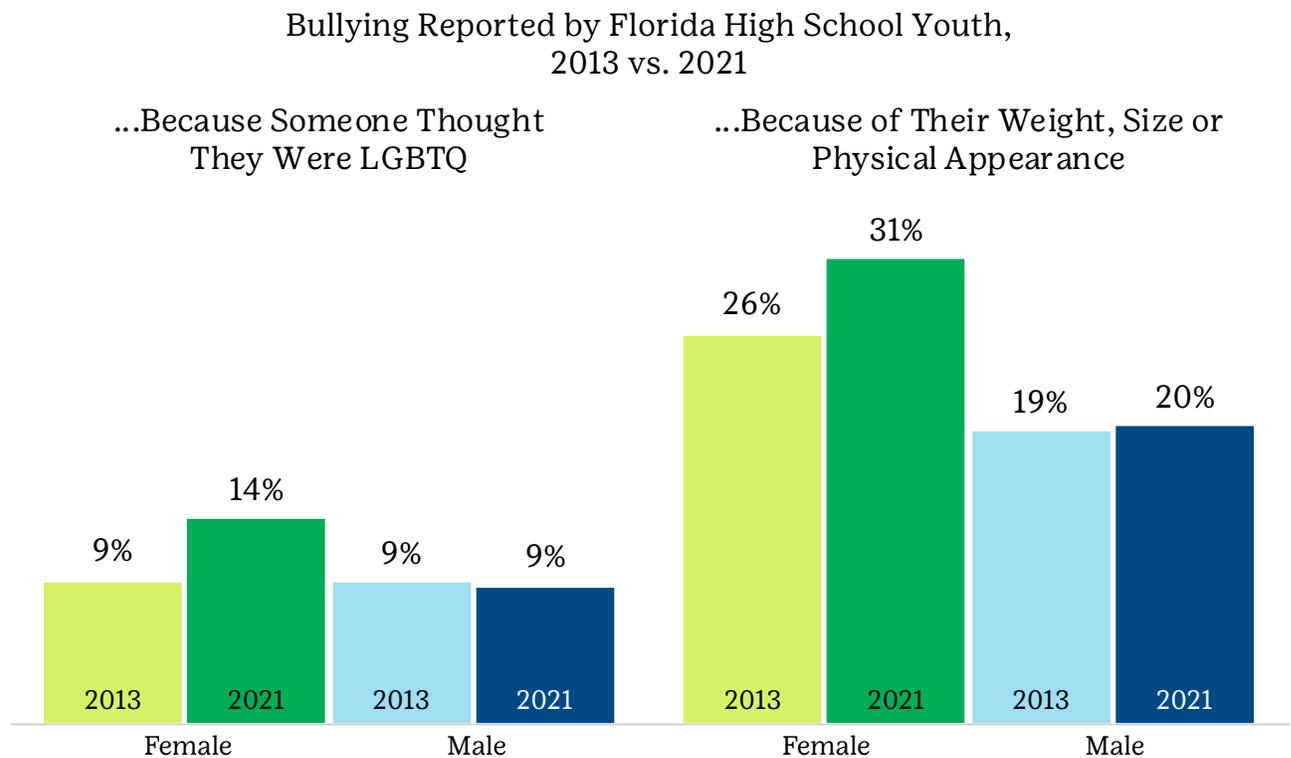
# Bullying, continued

While bullying in all forms is damaging for its victims, when youth are targeted based on real or perceived aspects of their identity, the negative consequences are more significant. Referred to as biased-based bullying, research indicates that its victims experience higher levels of emotional, social, physical, and academic distress (Bayrum, 2024). Increase in stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of bullying can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, and sleep disturbances (Holt, 2015). Moreover, youth who are bullied may engage in harmful behaviors, including substance abuse and self-harm, as coping mechanisms for their pain (Horner, 2015).

Socially, bullied youth often struggle with forming and maintaining healthy relationships, leading to social isolation and decreased academic performance (Bayram, 2024). It's notable, then, that girls are more likely than boys to be victims of bias-based bullying. A common misconception is the tendency for boys to experience more teasing and bullying if perceived, as an example, to belong to the LGBTQ community. In fact, 14% of girls are bullied because someone thought they were LGBTQ compared to 9% of boys. Over the last several years, bias-based bullying worsened, increasing the urgency to address hate and bias in our communities.

## More girls are the victims of bias-based bullying than boys, and it's getting worse.

*Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Florida, 2013 and 2021*





GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

# Values, Safety, and Friendship

For decades, bullying has been among the top concerns expressed by parents in raising their children. In 2023, it still ranked as the second deepest worry of parents, behind mental health, according to the Pew Research Center's Parenting in America Today.

The complexity of addressing bullying behaviors increases as young people take these interactions online. Cyber-bullying is private, yet pervasive: hiding in plain sight from the adults who care about girls while infiltrating her most important social networks.

At Girl Scouts, we take a holistic approach to addressing this complex challenge.

Starting with foundational values taught through the Girl Scout Promise and Law at every level, Girl Scouts learn to not *be* the bully, and intervene when possible.

Girl Scouts also creates a safety net of friends and caring adults who can support girls through tough relationships, helping to navigate bullying interactions.

Importantly, Girl Scouts fosters a safe environment. The physical and psychological safety of members is a top priority, ensuring girls have a cherished part of their lives free of judgment and full of support.

99%

of Florida Girl Scouts  
feel safe in this  
organization.



## Social Wellbeing of Florida Girls

A robust ecosystem of support including a strong family unit, adequate economic resources, and opportunities to create and sustain social networks in her community helps girls build social skills and 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.

## Key Facts: Social Wellbeing

- **Girls are exposed to more childhood trauma than boys.**  
Twice as many girls in Florida experience 4 or more adverse childhood experiences compared to boys, including abuse and neglect.
- **Black girls are 4X more likely to live in poverty than White girls.**  
43% of girls who identify as Black or African American live below the poverty line compared to 11% of girls who identify as White.
- **Girls use controlled substances at a higher rate than boys.**  
More high school girls use nearly every measured controlled substance compared to boys, including 1.5X more girls vaping nicotine.
- **The teen birth rate in Florida decreased more than 50% in 10 years.**  
13 teens gave birth per 100,000 females age 15-17, a decline from 28 teen births 10 years prior.
- **69% of girls are involved in organized activities after school...**  
but demand is still high. For every youth enrolled in a program, three more are waiting for space, affordable options, or transportation.





# Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur during childhood. These traumatic events can occur when youth under the age of 18 directly experience tragedy such as:

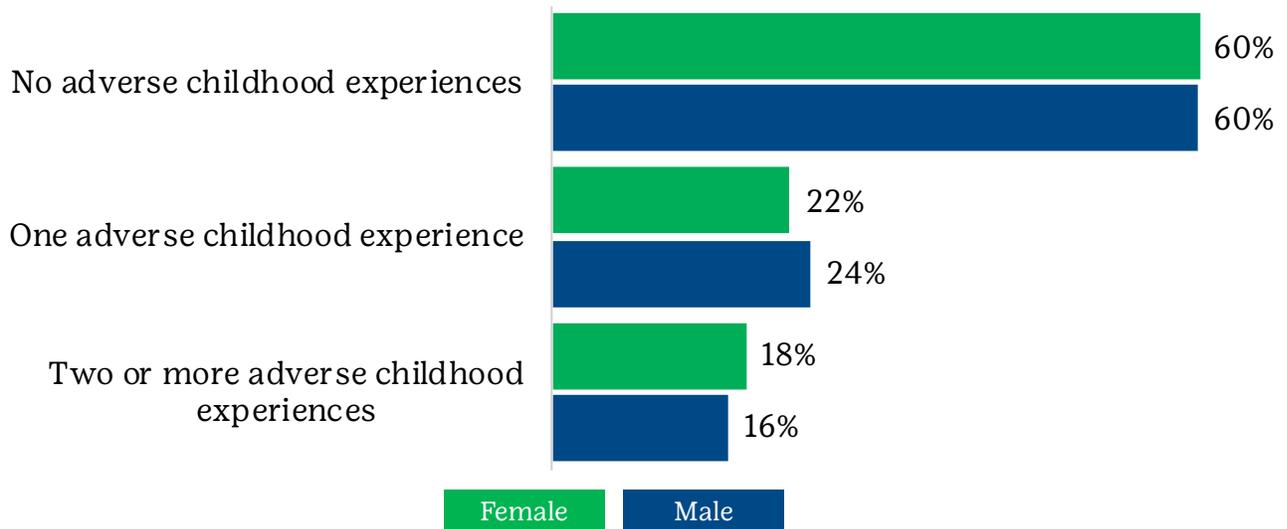
- violence, abuse, or neglect;
- an environment which undermines their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with substance abuse problems or household members being in jail or prison;
- situations that impact physical wellbeing such as not having enough food to eat ([Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023](#)).

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 putting people at risk for heart disease and depression later in life. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities, which directly and indirectly affects health and wellbeing ([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, chronic diseases such as cancer and diabetes, and maternal health challenges such as pregnancy complications ([Felitti, 1998](#)).

## According to parents, 40% of girls experienced at least one adverse childhood experience - nearly equal to the prevalence of boys.

*National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022, Indicator 6.13, Florida*

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for Youth 0-17 Years, Florida, 2022



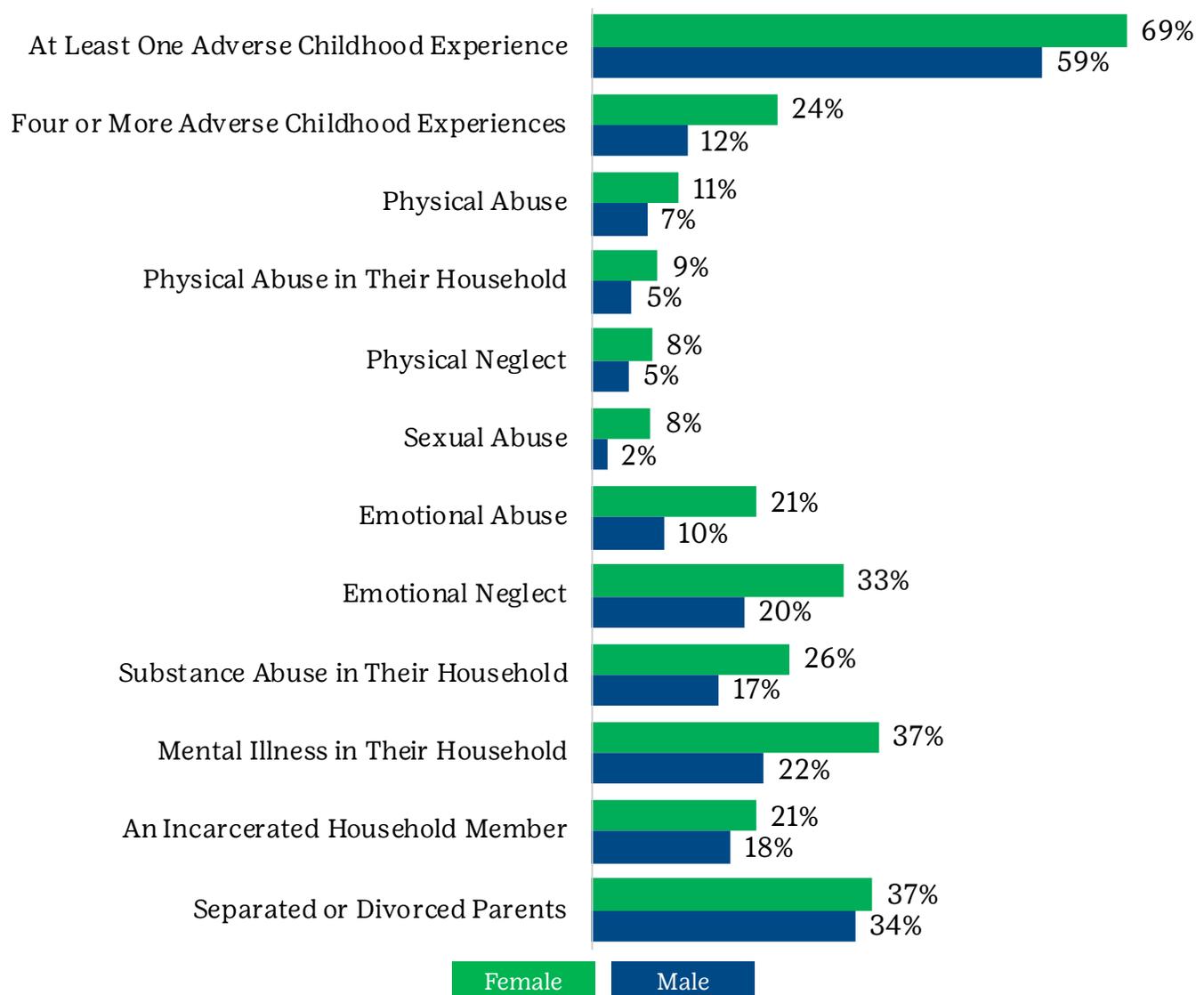
# Adverse Childhood Experiences, continued

In parent-reported findings through the National Survey of Children’s Health, 40% of girls were found to have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience. However, this figure dramatically increases for older youth when surveyed directly. 69% of high school girls reported at least one adverse childhood experience compared to 59% of high school boys. More high school girls reported experiences with all of the eleven indicators – 15% more high school girls have experienced mental illness in their household than high school boys; 13% more high school girls have experienced emotional neglect; and 12% more high school girls reported four or more adverse childhood experiences than their male peers.

## According to high school girls, 70% have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, 11% more than boys.

*Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 2023*

Adverse Childhood Experiences as Reported by Florida High School Students, 2023





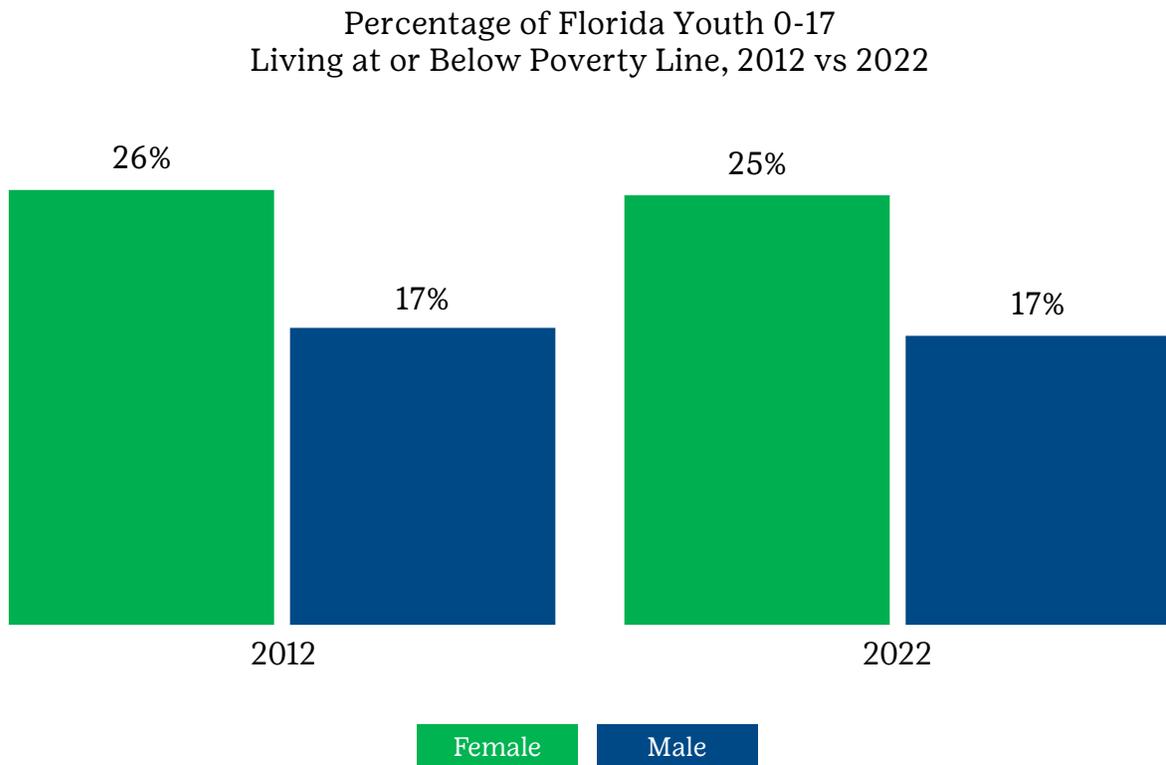
# Living in Poverty

Among the adverse childhood experiences that impact the development and wellbeing of youth in Florida is the experience of living in households below the federal poverty line. The circumstance of growing up without sufficient resources to meet basic needs is shown to contribute to significantly worse outcomes for children, lasting well into adulthood. Studies show that among several health measures, children living below the poverty line fare worse than non-poor children, including the presence of asthma, obesity, and a learning disability; poor children were more likely to experience academic delays including repeating grades and lower rates of high school graduation; poor children were also shown to earn less later in life at the age of 30 years old ([Le Menestrel, 2019](#)).

It is therefore noteworthy that the percentage of children living below the federal poverty line in Florida has decreased over the last 10 years. 26% of girls in Florida lived in low-income households in 2012 compared to 17% of girls in 2022. However, a slightly higher percentage of girls live in low-income households compared to boys.

## Though the rate has improved over the last 10 years, 1 in 6 youth in Florida still live below the poverty line.

*U.S. Census, American Community Survey, B17001, 2012 and 2022*





A DEEPER LOOK

# Living in Poverty by Race and Ethnicity

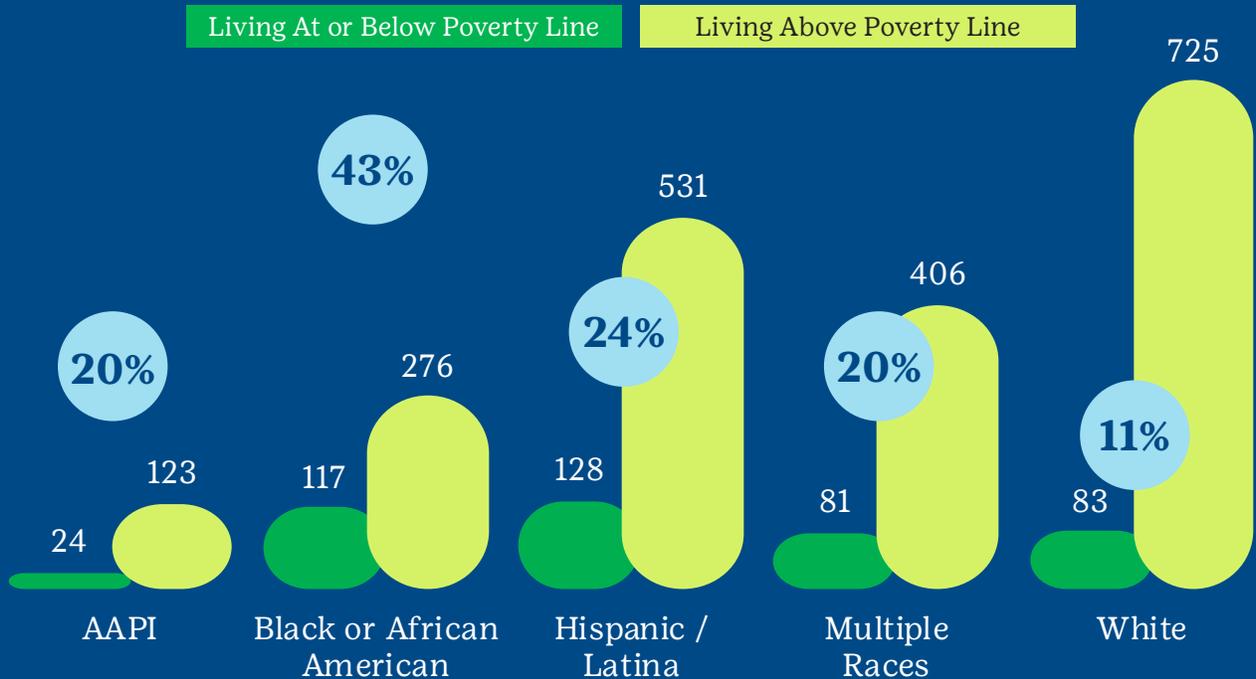
Although there are promising improvements in the total number of youth living below the federal poverty line, the disparity by girls along race and ethnicity identities is a growing concern. 4X as many Black or African American girls are living in poverty compared to girls who identify as White. More than 128,000 girls who identify as Hispanic are living in poverty in Florida, comprising the largest single demographic by sex and gender.

Studies consistently show that the barriers all youth living in poverty face are systematically compounded for Black girls, who often experience lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and limited long-term earning potential as a result of living in households experiencing poverty ([Bazzell, 2019](#)). Additionally, the mental health of Black girls is disproportionately affected by the stress involved in living with insufficient resources and added layers of social discrimination and exposure to violence ([Williams, 2020](#)).

# 4X

more Black girls are living in poverty than White girls.

Number of Girls (0-17) in Florida by Poverty Level by Thousands, 2022





# Substance Abuse

The use of controlled substances such as alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, or the misuse of prescription medication by youth can lead to immediate consequences that impact overall well-being and increase the likelihood of poor long-term health outcomes.

Between 2020 and 2021, reported use for almost all substances among adolescent youth decreased dramatically after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. School closings, quarantine requirements, and social-distancing regulations limited opportunities for youth to obtain and use controlled substances.

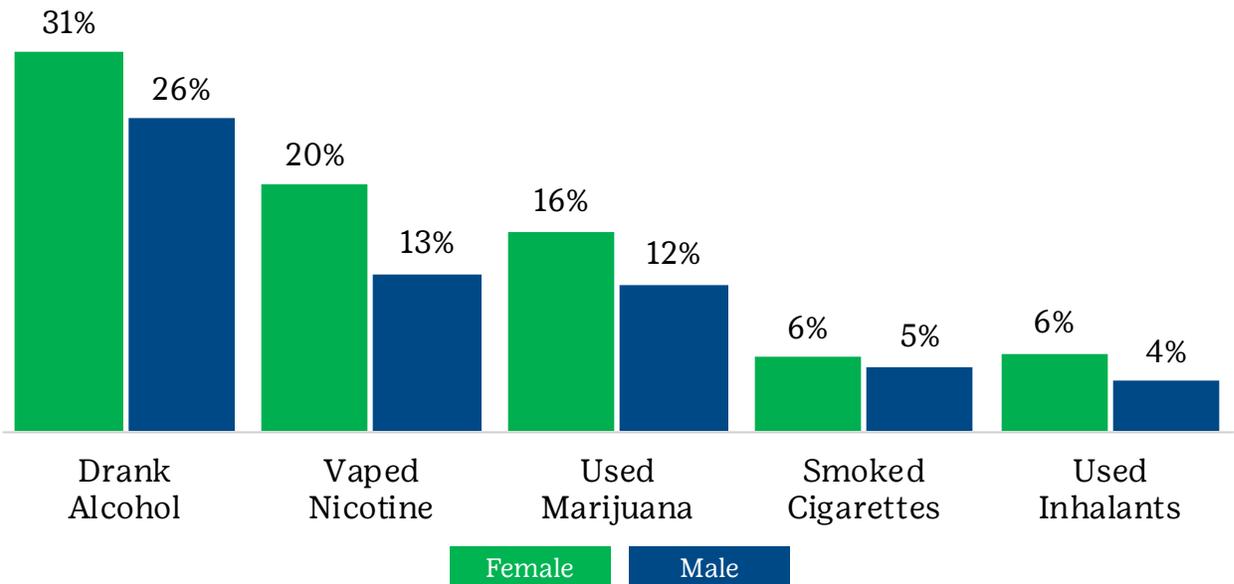
The types of controlled substances most commonly used by adolescent youth remained consistent, though. Alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco products account for most of the reported use. Between 2013 and 2023, the rate of girls who report they ever drank alcohol, as an example, decreased by 15%; but, in all measured areas, more girls now report using controlled substances at a higher rate than boys, and in some cases, this margin increased over the last 10 years. In 2013, 2% more boys reported using marijuana products than girls (24% vs 22%); by 2023, roles reversed, with 4% more girls reporting the use of marijuana than high school boys (16% of girls vs 12% of boys).

  
**High school girls use controlled substances at a higher rate than high school boys.**

## High school girls consistently use controlled substances at a higher rate than high school boys.

*Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 2023*

Percentage of Florida High School Youth Reporting Substance Abuse by Type, 2023



# Substance Abuse, continued

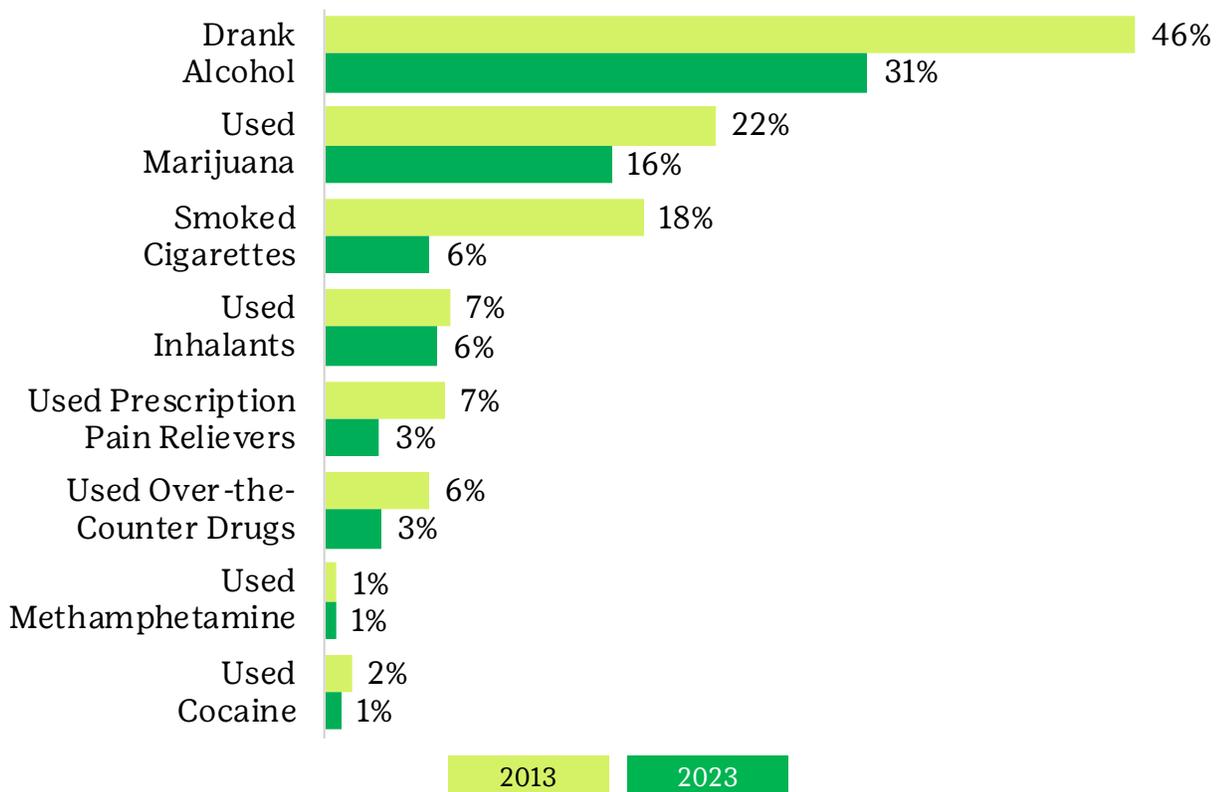
While the usage of controlled substances decreased over the last decade, deaths caused by overdose dramatically increased during the pandemic ([Friedman, 2022](#)). The illicit drug supply is growing contaminated with manufactured chemicals such as fentanyl and synthetic opioids, heightening the risk of their use. In 2019, the number of deaths caused by drug overdose among adolescents was 2.4 per 100,000; by 2021, the rate doubled to 5.49 – an increase of 94% in a single year. Fentanyl-involved fatalities was the primary contributor to the dramatic rise in overdose deaths, accounting for 77% of total adolescent casualties.

The negative effects of controlled substance use are vast and widely reported. According to the Surgeon General, the majority of adults who meet the criteria for having a substance use disorder started using during teen and young adult years: people who use alcohol before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder later in life, compared to those who have their first drink at age 20 or older ([Office of the Surgeon General, 2016](#)).

## The rate of substance abuse by high school girls decreased significantly over the last 10 years, largely attributed to declines during COVID-19.

*Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, 2013 and 2023*

Percentage of Florida High School Girls Reporting Substance Abuse by Type, 2013 vs 2023





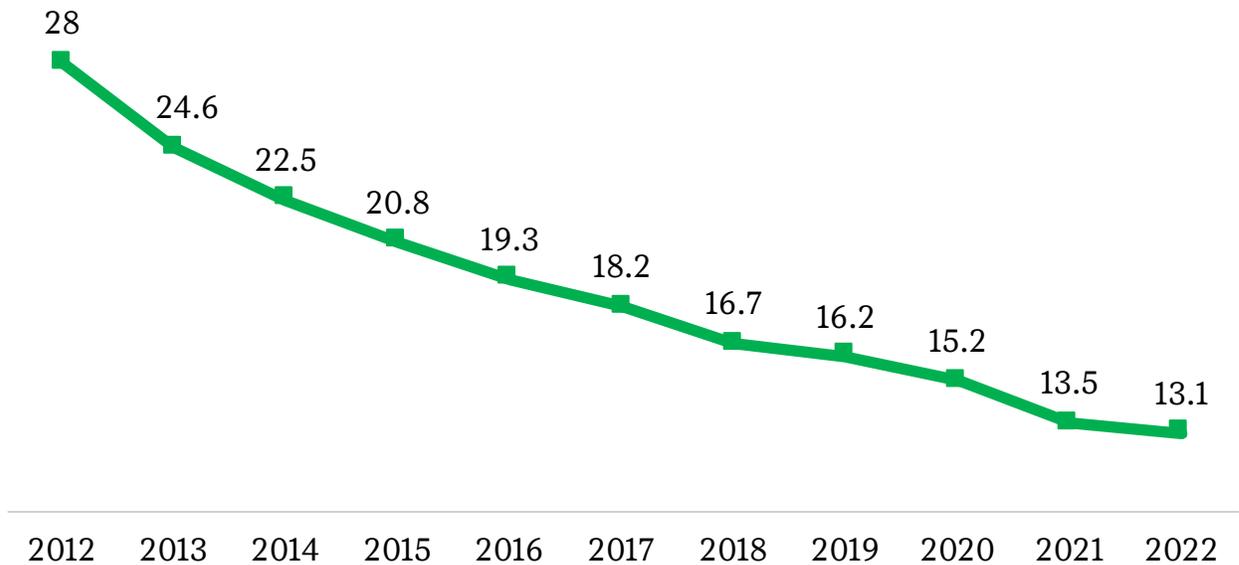
# Teen Birth Rate

The Teen Birth Rate in Florida has been declining steadily over the last 10 years, seeing a 50% reduction over the last decade. In 2022, the number of births per 1,000 females age 15-19 reached an all-time low of 13.1 births. The overall decline demonstrates considerable improvement across the state; however, this level of decline is not consistent in all counties. County-level results indicate that many areas experience a significantly higher Teen Birth Rate than the state average, reaching as high as 51.3 births per 1,000 females in Franklin County, as an example.

**The teen birth rate among Florida teens decreased by more than 50% over the last 10 years.**

*National Center for Health Statistics, 2012 - 2022*

Teen Birth Rate per 1,000 Females age 15-19, Florida



## GIRL SCOUT IMPACT Setting Big Goals

In Girl Scouts, girls learn to set big goals, then develop skills to meet them. In fact, Girl Scout alums are 10% more likely to have achieved their goals in life compared to non-alums.

# 95%

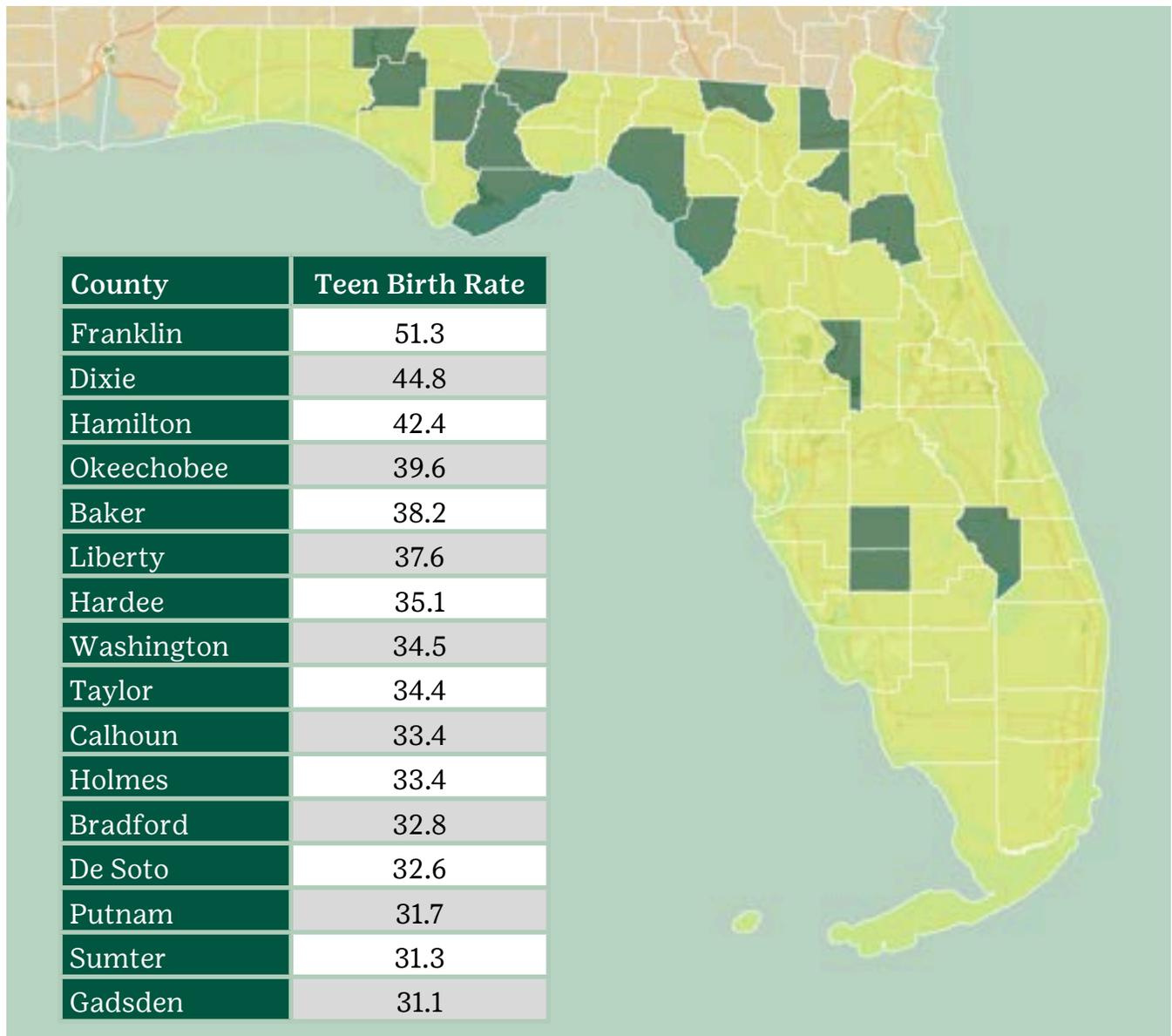
of Girl Scout alums who spent 7+ years in the program are now satisfied with their life overall vs 80% of non-alums.

# Teen Birth Rate, continued

Teen pregnancy is shown to impact multiple areas of development for young women. Becoming a teen parent can reduce the number of years of schooling and is shown to pose long-term challenges to a woman's earning potential ([Kane, 2013](#)). In the near-term, research has found that teen mothers are twice as likely to experience postpartum depression compared to women aged 25 and older ([Kingston, 2012](#)) and another study reported that teen mothers experienced additional increased mental health concerns, including having higher rates of depression ([Biello, 2010](#)). Considering the multiple, complex effects of teen pregnancy, the downward trend is a positive sign for girls in Florida.

**16 counties in Florida report teen birth rates twice as high as the state average, with 30+ teen births per 1,000 females age 15-19.**

*National Center for Health Statistics, 2020*





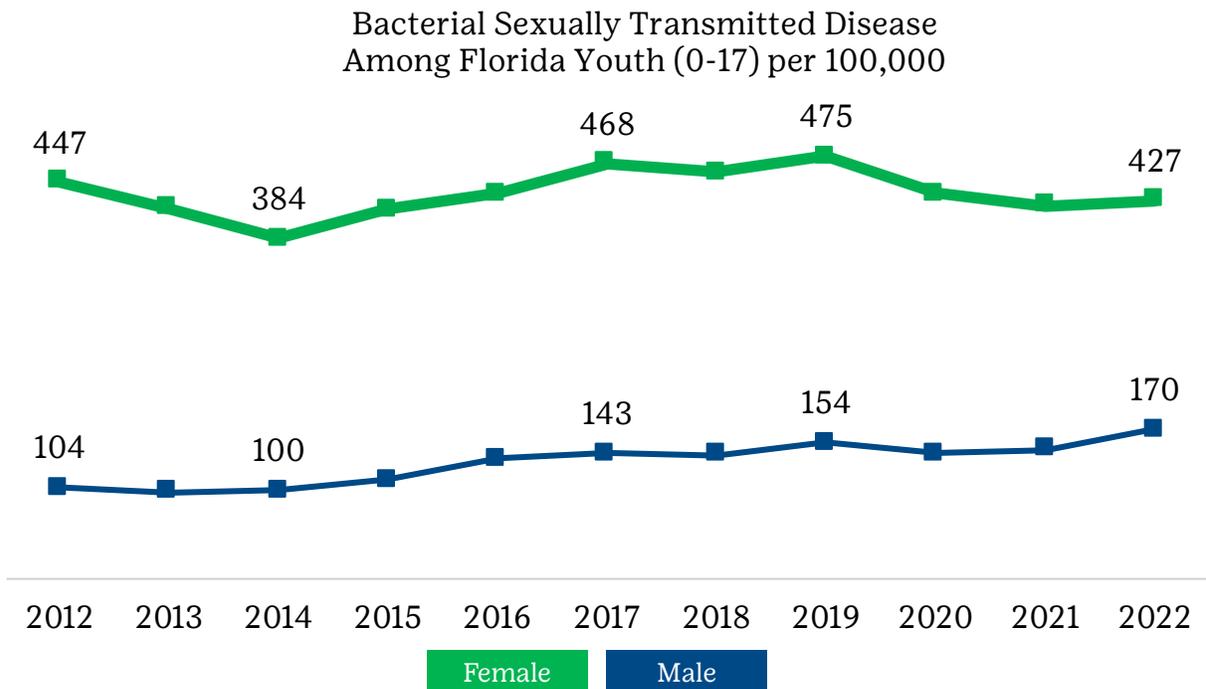
# Teen Birth Rate, continued

However, results from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey administered to high school youth in the state of Florida shows teens continue to engage in risky sexual behavior. Between 2011 and 2021, the percentage of girls in high school who reported ever having sexual intercourse dropped from 44% to 36%; however, in 2021, more high school girls report not using a condom during sex – an increase from 42% in 2011 to 53%. While the introduction of additional contraceptive measures in the last decade could contribute to this decline, in 2021, three out of four high school youth indicated they did not use newly available contraception such as a birth control pill, IUD, or a shot.

Inconsistent use of contraceptives may be contributing to the rise in the rate of sexually transmitted diseases among youth in Florida. In 2012, the Bacterial STD rate for youth under the age of 17 was 271 per 100,000 people. In 2022, the rate climbed to 296. What is more concerning is the consistently higher rate of infection between girls and boys: girls age 0-17 in the state of Florida are 2.5x more likely to have a bacterial STD than boys (427 per 100,000 girls compared to a rate of 170 for boys). Research has shown the challenge of diagnosing STDs among girls may contribute to a higher rate. Nevertheless, the type of intervention and support needed to prevent and treat STDs in girls is a clear urgent public health need.

## Florida girls have a rate of contracting bacterial sexually transmitted diseases 2.5x higher than boys.

*National Center for Health Statistics, 2012 - 2022*



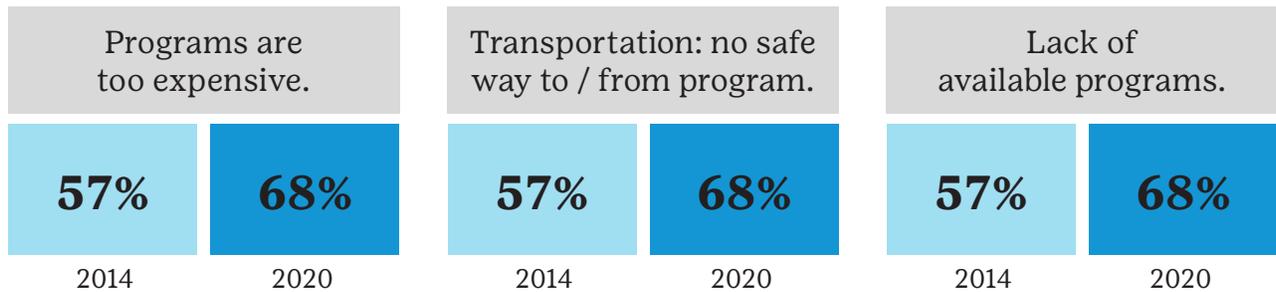
# Afterschool Programs & Organized Activities

Participation in afterschool programs or organized activities are an important component of a young person’s social development. Outside of the classroom, these experiences offer youth important opportunities to practice social skills and develop supportive relationships. Studies also show that afterschool programs accelerate students’ academic performance and aid in improvements in mental and physical health ([The Afterschool Alliance, 2023](#)). 72% of students in Florida afterschool programs are receiving homework help and 86% are taking part in physical activities.

Families often rely on the practical application of afterschool programs, providing safe, reliable options for childcare between school and the end of the workday. This keeps demand high: over 500,000 youth were enrolled in an afterschool program in Florida in 2020; yet 3 times as many children were waiting for a spot. Despite widespread public support in the state, the availability and affordability of afterschool programs can create barriers for families – in 2020, 68% of families reported that afterschool programs were too expensive and 45% found programs were simply unavailable in their community.

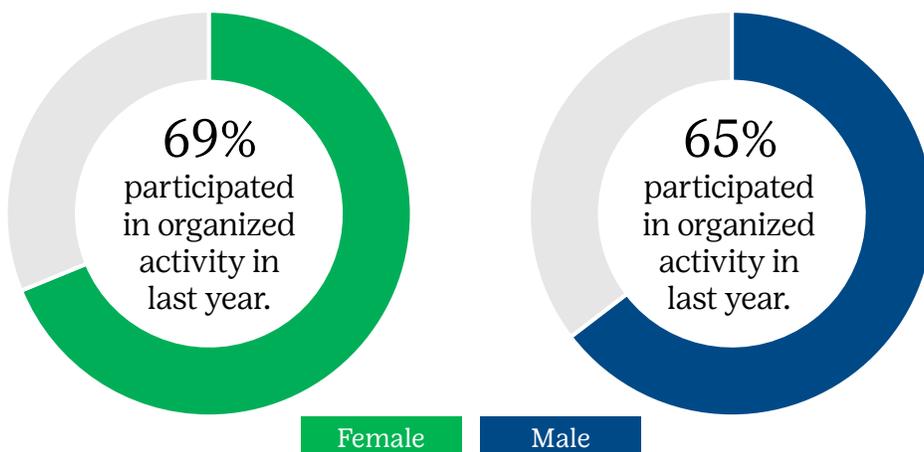
## Cost and access are roadblocks to afterschool program participation for Florida families.

*Florida After 3 PM, 2020*



## Florida girls are more likely than boys to participate in organized activities such as sports, lessons, and clubs.

*National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022*





# Key Recommendations

The State of the Girl Report reflects the commitment of the Girl Scouts of Florida Association to ensure all girls can reach their full potential.

In hopes that leaders across the state, at all levels of influence and across multiple industries, work to improve their specific areas of impact on behalf of Florida girls, we present these recommendations as overarching improvements or actions all adults can take.

 For Girls.



## Seek to Understand

The overarching finding of this report is simple: girls have a uniquely different experience growing up in Florida compared to boys, and that experience differs significantly from the challenges faced in prior generations.

To ensure girls are able to reach their full potential, we must seek to understand their experience. On a personal level, listen to and believe girls. Ask questions with curiosity and empathy to girls in your circle.

At a larger level, institutions must commit to collecting and reporting youth data with differences by sex easily available. Clearly, beneath that separation are important differences that require special attention.



## Unbox Her Potential

Several troubling trends presented in the report fundamentally stem from unrealistic expectations placed on girls. From the distorted views girls have of their body to increases in depression and anxiety to lower academic performance in math, often, girls are adapting to the damaging demands of social pressure.

Unboxing her potential means allowing girls the space to *not* fit a mold. As we widen the view of who girls are and what they can become, we also remove the pressure to fit one definition of girlhood: one body size, with a limited range of emotions, with limited options for her future. Instead, we create room for exploration, failure, and triumph.



## Give Her a Girl Squad

It's worth stating again: girls have a uniquely different experience growing up in our communities compared to boys or prior generations. Girls, then, benefit in deep, important ways from a supportive, all-girl environment that is often not available through family or school.

An all-girl environment is shown to present better outcomes in mental health interventions and create better academic performance. In Girl Scouts, we've seen this for over a century. We champion safe spaces for girls because it works. Find girls' sports, girl clubs, a great group of female friends, or a Girl Scout troop.

It'll change her life.



# Methodology

The State of the Florida Girl Report is a comprehensive collection of metrics that serve as indicators of wellbeing for Florida 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 Florida Department of Education. Data visuals are intended to present data in an easily readable format to understand comparisons or trends over time.

## Data Collection

In an effort to present an unbiased and factual account of the status of girls in the state of Florida, all data was obtained from publicly available primary sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Florida Department of Education. 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. 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 Florida.

## Disaggregating Data

To meet the objectives of the report in understanding differences between girls and boys in the state of Florida, 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 Florida Association 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 State of the Florida Girl Report is commissioned by the Girl Scouts of Florida Association. The CEOs of its six member organizations and their respective staffs determined the scope of the report and included metrics and an independent analyst assembled metrics as outlined above. Through unpaid collaborations with peer reviewers in institutions of higher learning across the state of Florida, the areas of analysis and related charts and graphs were reviewed for themes, context, and unintended biases.

## 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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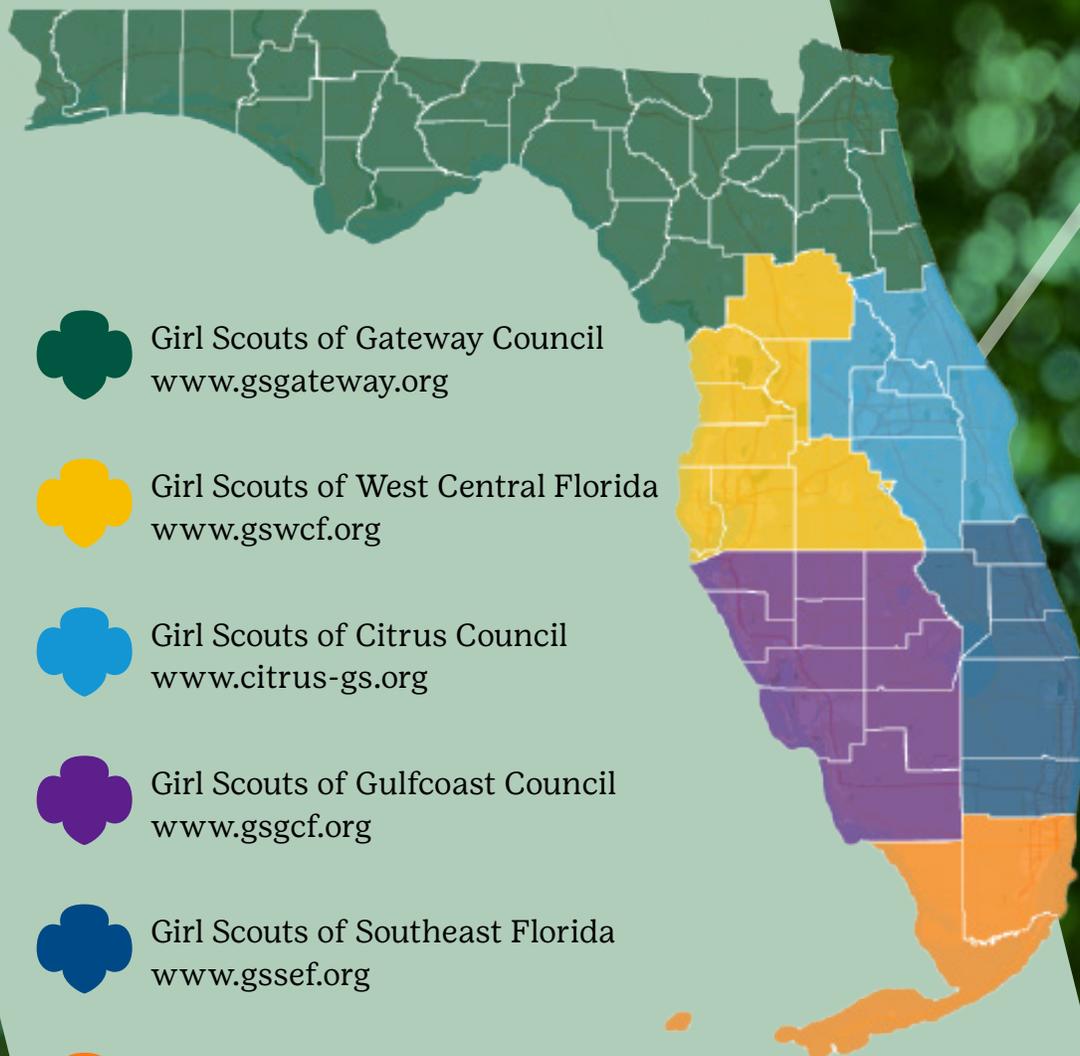
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