



APRIL 2008

STATUS OF GIRLS IN MINNESOTA Research Overview

Research and Writing by the Institute for Women's Policy Research
In Partnership with the Women's Foundation of Minnesota

Acknowledgements | Institute for Women's Policy Research

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Acknowledgements | Women's Foundation of Minnesota

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STATUS OF GIRLS IN MINNESOTA

Research Overview

“... you don't know what you can do until you do it, and then you know you can do more.”

Women's Foundation of Minnesota's girlsBEST Fund program participant, age 15

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GIRLS IN MINNESOTA ARE FULL OF PROMISE AND potential. Whether at home, in school, or out in the community, they work hard, they get good grades, and hold high aspirations for their futures. By and large, girls in the state take responsibility for their bodies and avoid many risky behaviors.

At the same time, many girls in Minnesota are confronted with many challenges due to poverty, racism, sexism, language and cultural barriers, and physical and sexual abuse. They also suffer from lower self-esteem and report higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts relative to boys. In addition, differences between the social, economic, and health conditions of girls of color and white girls in the state are stark.

The foundations of women's economic stability and independence, academic and career opportunity, and physical and emotional well-being are established in childhood and adolescence. A healthy girl who believes in herself, is confident in her talents and abilities, and respects herself and her body will be ready to pursue her dreams and succeed in her adult life. This girl will become a resilient woman, able to take on the many challenges she confronts throughout life, and ready for opportunities as they present themselves.¹

As such, promoting a positive future for girls now is crucial to the long-term social and economic health of Minnesota communities. Ensuring the healthy development of girls so that they can face the future and succeed as adults requires that schools, government, and the business sector offer an environment that encourages them to thrive today.

Girls face both old and new challenges that, left unaddressed, pose serious threats to their well-being and success as adults. They face intense pressures to not only prepare for

careers and higher education, but also to conform to popular ideals of body size, sexual attractiveness, and women's traditional roles. More than previous generations they must navigate pressures around sex and drugs, and like countless generations before them, they are at risk of violence.

As girls enter adulthood they confront a whole new set of gender-related challenges. When they leave home and school, many enter a labor market where the two sexes work in largely different types of jobs and traditionally female work pays less. Many who go to college find that men and women often study different disciplines, with male-dominated fields yielding better pay and earnings growth down the road.

Despite the great strides women have made in education and in the working world, young women face a greater likelihood of poverty and economic hardship as they enter adulthood than do young men. Women are still largely absent from the highest positions of leadership in all kinds of institutions, and the disparity is particularly striking for women of color. In addition, girls and women still do a disproportionate share of caretaking within the family.

Social change is needed to ensure that all women enjoy full economic, political, and social equality. When educational, economic, and political systems encourage and support girls in reaching their full potential, the benefits of their success will multiply throughout their communities.

The *Status of Girls in Minnesota* represents a collaborative effort by the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) to provide detailed information on the status of girls in Minnesota.

With the data and policy implications outlined in the research overview and full report, the Women's Foundation of



YouthCare (Minneapolis) trains young women from low-income communities to be mentors and leaders. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

¹ For a review of research on healthy youth development, see Debra Hilken Bernat and Michael D. Resnick, 2006, *Healthy Youth Development: Science and Strategies*. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, (Nov) Supplemental: S10-S16.

Minnesota will engage 15 communities as part of its statewide Road to Equality Tour in 2008. In each community, we will hold a public meeting to introduce the research and focus groups with community, business, and political leaders. Information gathered from the Tour will inform the Foundation's future public policy priorities and focus.

Both the Women's Foundation and IWPR hope that this overview and the full report will serve as a tool for advocates, researchers, and policymakers in developing a set of interventions that will ensure girls' economic, social, and political equality.

The *Status of Girls in Minnesota* draws on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Minnesota Student Survey Inter-agency Team, the Minnesota Department of Health, the Minnesota Department of Education, and other sources to examine the economic, social, physical, and psychological well-being of girls in the state. Each section of the research overview introduces key issues and data related to girls in Minnesota, as well as a set of recommendations for policy change, program improvement, and advocacy efforts to improve the status of Minnesota's girls. □

SECTION 1

Socioeconomic Landscape

IN MINNESOTA, FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES AND those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups are at particular risk of living below the poverty line, and while boys and girls in the state have similar poverty rates in childhood, girls are more likely to be poor in adulthood. Poverty among female-headed families of color foretells an ominous future for girls of color in the state, in which many are likely to experience a life of low earnings, high poverty, and sole child rearing responsibility.

- **Poverty rates for girls and boys of color are dramatically higher than those of white girls and boys (7.3 and 6.8 percent, respectively).** African American girls and boys have the highest poverty rates (43.4 and 41.4 percent, respectively) among children in Minnesota, followed by American Indian girls and boys (41.5 and 28.8 percent, respectively).

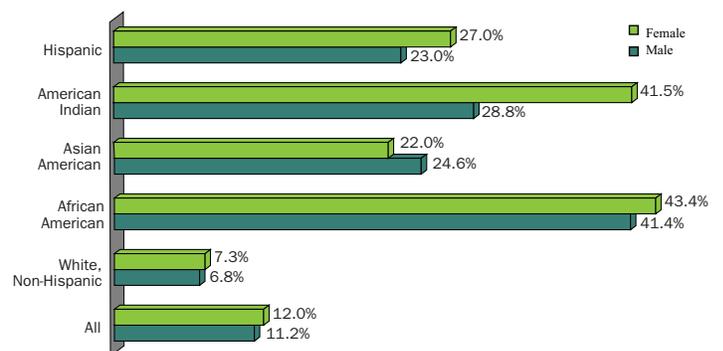
- **Forty-five percent (or 62, 869) of the state's poor children live in the state's seven-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area** (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington; data not shown). The other 55 percent (or 76,840) of poor children live in Greater Minnesota. Poverty ranges from low to high across counties, urban or rural.

- **Among poor families with children, female-headed families make up the largest share, at 60.3 percent.**

They are 71.5 percent of poor African American families with children and 67.2 percent of poor American Indian families with children. They are also a large share of poor white families with children, at 59.5 percent.

- **Lower incomes among families of color and female-headed families make housing less affordable, whether owned or rented.** Nearly 51 percent of African American household

Figure 1. Poverty Rates Among Boys and Girls Under 18 in Minnesota, 2005



Notes: See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2006. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research

Table 1. Families with Related Children Under 18 in Poverty in Minnesota, by Family Type and Race and Ethnicity, 2005

	All	White, non-Hispanic	African American	Asian American	American Indian	Hispanic
Number of Poor Families With Children Under 18	65,329	39,326	12,844	3,858	2,021	6,318
Married Couple Families	28.4%	28.2%	23.0%	48.6%	6.5%	40.5%
Male Headed Families	11.3%	12.2%	5.4%	15.0%	26.2%	10.8%
Female Headed Families	60.3%	59.5%	71.5%	36.4%	67.2%	48.7%
All Poor Families with Children	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

NOTES: See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2006.

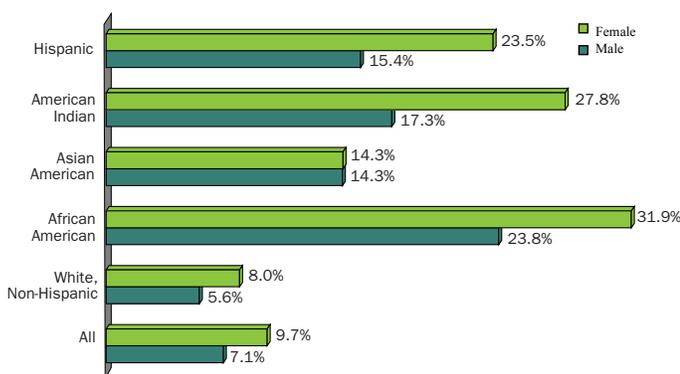
owners and 59.5 percent of African American household renters spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing, compared with 25.2 percent of white household owners and 42.5 percent of white household renters (data not shown).

It should be noted that the Federal Poverty Threshold is intended for use as a statistical yardstick, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is not a measure of what people and families need to live. It allows for consistent comparisons over time, but is largely inadequate in determining a family's basic needs.¹ The inadequacy of this measure would indicate that even more of Minnesota's girls are living in families where income falls short of meeting basic needs.

Creating economic justice for girls depends largely on their families' ability to meet their basic economic needs. Addressing wage discrimination and closing the gaps between men and women and white women and women of color are key to ensuring the well-being of all children, especially girls and young women of color.

Minnesota must open doors to quality employment that offers health and other important benefits. Devising anti-poverty policies that target the needs of female-headed families and families of color also will promote healthier, more stable home and community environments for both girls and boys. □

Figure 2. Poverty Rate Among Women and Men 18 and Older in Minnesota, 2005



NOTES: See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2006. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

KFAI Radio's "Youth News Initiative: Girls of Color Voicing Their Choice" (Minneapolis) is creating the next generation of diverse female leadership in public broadcasting through training and mentoring. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

Recommendations for Change

1. Local governments can adopt regional or county-level Family Budgets, such as those developed by the JOBS NOW Coalition in Minnesota.ⁱⁱ A Family Budget or other such measure could replace the official poverty line as the basis for public program eligibility, opening up services to a larger number of families in need.
2. Expanding Minnesota Family Investment Program to support higher education opportunities for single-headed households, low-income parents, and teen mothers will increase their earnings potential,ⁱⁱⁱ as well as create a culture of learning within families and allow parents to serve as role models and supporters in their girls' educations.
3. State investments in full-day early care and education interventions for low-income and poor children would help to offset some of the negative effects of poverty on children and would also provide single-mother and dual working parent families with safe, quality environments for their children while they work. Expanding child care resources for low-income families would also decrease the need for teen girls to spend precious time caring for siblings when they could be studying or participating in extracurricular activities.



SECTION 2

Security, Safety, and Risky Behaviors

DURING A PERIOD IN LIFE WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE should be able to take advantage of all opportunities available to them through school and extracurricular activities, many girls and boys face challenges beyond their years. Some are confronted with threats to their basic safety and security, including family and dating violence, sexual abuse, victimization, and homelessness.

Physical and Sexual Abuse

The high percentage of American Indian, African American, and Hispanic girls reporting physical and sexual abuse is startling. While most of Minnesota's girls see school as a safe place and are free from physical and sexual violence in the home, responses from girls of color about racism, victimization, and abuse paint a very different picture.

- **American Indian and African American girls are the most likely among all girls to have been physically abused,** with between one in four and one in five reporting abuse by a family member inside or outside of the home. Also experiencing high levels of abuse, 18.0 percent of Asian American and Hispanic girls in the state are abused by a family member in their household, and 19.0 percent are abused by a family member outside of their home, respectively.

- **Girls are far more likely than boys to have been sexually abused** by a family member in their household (4 percent of girls compared with 2 percent of boys) or non-family member (8 percent of girls compared with 3 percent of boys).

- **Hispanic girls are more likely than girls in other racial and ethnic groups to be sexually abused** by a family member in their household (9 percent) or a non-family member (13 percent), followed closely by American Indian and African American girls.

Girls who face abuse in the home and who feel vulnerable going to and from school and while at school are left without a safe space for healthy development. Girls of color in Minnesota experience this type of vulnerability considerably more than do white girls, exposing yet another area of disadvantage that they face. Without a safe haven and proper support, these girls are at risk of engaging in negative behaviors that compound their challenges (*see Section 4: Mental Health*).

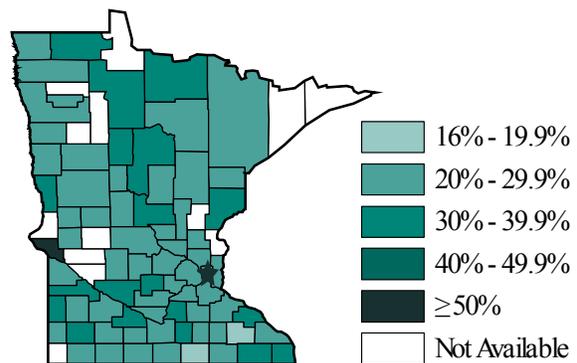
Table 2. Percent of Students Reporting Physical or Sexual Abuse by Gender and Race and Ethnicity, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004

	Victim of Physical Abuse by Family Member in Household	Victim of Physical Abuse by Family Member not in Household	Been Sexually Abused by a Family Member	Been Sexually Abused by a Non-Family Member
All				
Girls	12.0%	14.0%	4.0%	8.0%
Boys	10.0%	11.0%	2.0%	3.0%
White				
Girls	11.0%	11.0%	3.0%	7.0%
Boys	9.0%	9.0%	1.0%	3.0%
African American				
Girls	19.0%	22.0%	6.0%	11.0%
Boys	18.0%	19.0%	4.0%	7.0%
Asian American				
Girls	18.0%	19.0%	3.0%	8.0%
Boys	16.0%	17.0%	3.0%	4.0%
American Indian				
Girls	21.0%	26.0%	7.0%	11.0%
Boys	15.0%	18.0%	3.0%	6.0%
Hispanic				
Girls	18.0%	19.0%	9.0%	13.0%
Boys	13.0%	16.0%	3.0%	5.0%

NOTES: Responses are for 6th, 9th and 12th grade students combined. See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Minnesota Student Survey.

SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Map 1. Percent of Girls Reporting Alcohol Use in the Past Month



SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Risky Behaviors

- **American Indian girls are the most likely to smoke cigarettes among girls or boys from any racial or ethnic group**, with a striking 27.2 percent (more than 1 in 4) reporting daily use. African American girls are the least likely to smoke cigarettes of girls or boys from any racial or ethnic group with 7.0 percent reporting that they do so daily (data now shown).

- **Girls are less likely than boys to drink heavily** (6-19 or 20 or more drinks in the past month), although they are slightly more likely than boys to have consumed 1-5 drinks in the past month (19.3 percent compared with 16.9 percent; data not shown).

- **Girls are more likely than boys to use drugs or alcohol to relax, to escape their problems, or because they're feeling sad, lonely, or angry.** American Indian girls are the most likely of girls or boys of any race or ethnicity to give these reasons for drug and alcohol use (data not shown).

- **Girls in Big Stone County are the most likely to drink of girls and boys of any county**, with 50.0 percent reporting alcohol consumption in the past month. Koochiching (38.9 percent), Morrison (37.0 percent), and Yellow Medicine (36.7 percent) follow Big Stone, with large shares of girls having at least one alcoholic drink in the past month.

- **Girls in Cass County are the most likely among girls in the state to have used drugs within the past year**, followed by Koochiching, Hubbard, Itasca, and Douglas. In these counties, an average of 7.4 to 8.5 percent of girls report some type of drug use within the past 12 months.

Homelessness

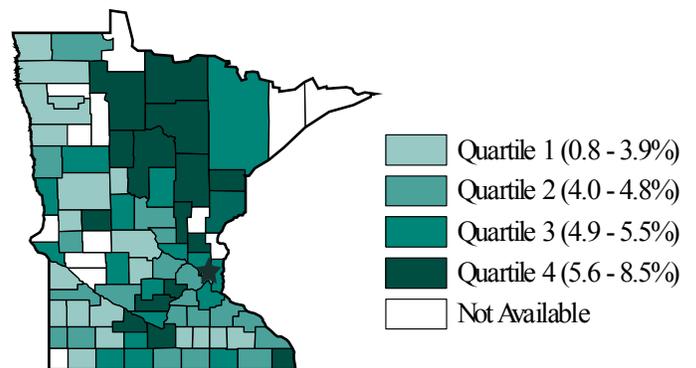
- **Girls and youth of color are at much higher risk of homelessness** than boys and white youth.

Girls in Minnesota outnumber boys in arrests for one offense only: *prostitution*.^{iv} They make up 79 percent of juveniles receiving a disposition (equivalent to a sentence) for this crime. Girls make up about one third of all juveniles brought in for fraud, forgery, counterfeiting, and offenses against children and family.^v

Homelessness among Minnesota's youth leads to very gender specific vulnerabilities. Many homeless girls under the age of 17 end up trading sex for shelter, food, clothing, or other basic needs (16 percent compared with 5 percent of boys).^{vi} For these girls, many of whom may have been victims of physical and sexual violence in their homes, survival comes with incredible risks.

Fully ensuring the safety and security of Minnesota's girls in their homes, schools, and communities is fundamental to their ability to survive and succeed in life. □

Map 2. Girls Composite Drug Use Score, by County*



* Scoring is based on the average percentage of girls and boys reporting any marijuana, ecstasy, narcotic, crack, amphetamine, methamphetamine, LSD, barbituate, and "other prescription drug" use in the past 12 months.
SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Recommendations for Change

1. Advocates for girls in Minnesota should convene a statewide task force on the well-being of girls of color in Minnesota. This task force should draw on experts in the areas of domestic abuse and sexual violence, homelessness, and mental health to address the wide ranging vulnerabilities experienced by girls of color in Minnesota.
2. The particular challenges and issues faced by girls of color in their respective communities should be studied to learn more about the different ways that girls deal with abuse and violence. For example, research might focus on American Indian girls' greater engagement in risky behaviors, like cigarette, alcohol, and drug use, and whether it is a direct response to abuse and lack of safety. Research might also look at why African American girls use cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs at lower rates than other girls, given the high level of abuse that they face in their communities.
3. School and community programs should be established to educate girls and boys about the pervasiveness and harmfulness of physical and sexual violence against girls and women, in the home, in the school, in the community, and in the media. Girls should also have access to programs that teach them how to maximize their safety and provide them with support when they have experienced violence.

SECTION 3

Reproductive Health

ACCESS TO SEX EDUCATION AND CONTRACEPTION is critical to girls' ability to take care of themselves, their bodies, and their futures. Ensuring that youth understand their own sexuality, how to have safe intimate relationships, and the risks associated with unsafe sex must be a priority. Girls' autonomy over their bodies and their future education, career, and family plans should be encouraged through comprehensive sex education and access to contraception.

While Minnesota girls generally approach pregnancy, STDs, and HIV/AIDS in a more responsible manner than boys, being more likely than boys to engage their partners in discussions about prevention, they still show a certain degree of ambivalence toward using contraception. The average response from sexually active girls of color as to whether they use birth control or condoms falls between 'sometimes' or 'usually' (data not shown).

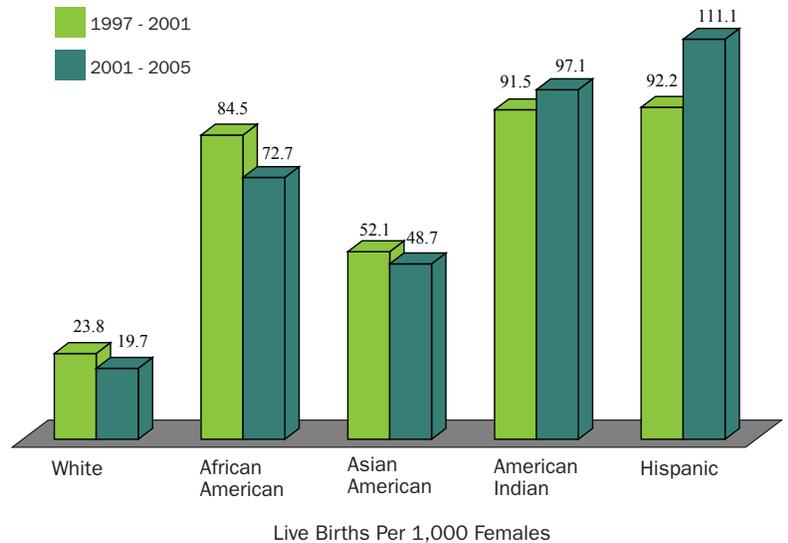
Teen Pregnancy

While Minnesota's teen birth rates are low compared with those for the nation as a whole, birth rates in the state actually *increased* for Hispanic and American Indian girls between the time periods 1997-2001 and 2001-2005. Birth rates fell for white, African American, and Asian American girls between these time periods.

- **Teen birth rates in Minnesota are drastically higher for girls of color than for white girls.** While white girls aged 15 to 19 in Minnesota had 23.8 live births per 1,000 females between 1997 and 2001 and 19.7 per 1,000 between 2001 and 2005, Hispanic girls had 92.2 live births between 1997 and 2001 and 111.1 between 2001 and 2005, and American Indian girls had 91.5 and 97.1 live births within those time periods.

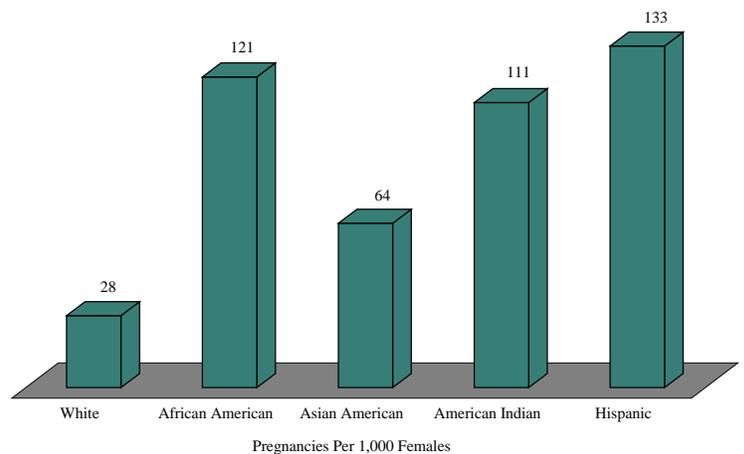
- **Pregnancy rates for girls aged 15 to 19 also vary substantially by race and ethnicity.**² As shown, pregnancy rates range from 28 per 1,000 females for white girls ages 15 to 19 to 133 per 1,000 for Hispanic girls ages 15 to 19. Numerous studies have linked poverty, lack of access to health insurance, limited educational expectations and opportunities, and lower career opportunities and aspirations to increased likelihood of unintended adolescent pregnancy.^{vii}

Figure 3. Birth Rates for Minnesota Girls Aged 15 to 19, by Race and Ethnicity, 1997-2001 and 2001-2005



SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics 2004 and 2007.

Figure 4. Pregnancy Rates for Girls 15 to 19, by Race and Ethnicity, 2002-2004



NOTES: Pregnancy rates refer to the number of live births plus the number of fetal deaths plus the number of induced abortions per 1,000 females in the population of the specified age. SOURCE: Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPP) 2006. Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

² Pregnancy rate refers to the number of live births plus the number of fetal deaths plus the number of induced abortions per 1,000 females in the population of the specified age.

Recommendations for Change

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

The increase in rates of STD infections among adolescents in the state is also cause for deep concern. For example, adolescents saw a 3 percent increase in the incidence of chlamydia between 2005 and 2006.^{viii} If national trends are any indication, findings from a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that girls of color are heavily affected by STDs, with one in two African American girls testing positive for an STD compared with one in five white and Hispanic girls and one in four girls overall.^{ix 3}

- **Girls are more likely than boys to communicate with their sex partners about disease and pregnancy prevention.** African American girls are the most likely to discuss STDs/HIV/AIDS with their partners, followed by white girls and American Indian girls (data not shown).

- **Girls aged 15 to 19 account for 35 percent of cases of chlamydia** among women all ages, whereas boys aged 15 to 19 are only 18 percent of cases among men.^x Likewise, adolescent girls have a higher incidence of gonorrhea than adolescent boys, making up 33 percent of cases among women whereas boys make up 14 percent of cases among men.^{xi}

- **The human papillomavirus (HPV) is a serious threat to girls as well**, as it is a highly common STD and can lead to cervical cancer. Unfortunately, statistics on transmission rates in Minnesota are not available.^{xii} However, the CDC now reports that nationally, nearly one in five adolescent girls aged 14 to 19 has HPV.^{xiii}

Guaranteeing Minnesota girls' health and reproductive rights will mean engaging teens in sex education that underscores both the importance of talking with sex partners about pregnancy and STDs and of using contraception to safeguard their sexual health and future opportunities. □

³ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also find, however, that among adults, African American women's greater incidence of STDs (compared with white women, for example) is not linked to riskier sexual behavior, but rather to the higher prevalence of STD infections within their pool of sexual partners as well as other social factors (e.g., sex ratios in communities, incarceration, health care access and quality, poverty, etc.), which combine to put them at greater risk.^{xiv}

1. Minnesota should implement mandatory, comprehensive sex education programs in its public schools. These sex education programs should focus on how to avoid unintended pregnancy and STDs and provide information about sex that will empower girls to both delay and prepare for sexual activity.
2. Sex education programs should also address the economic and life-altering impacts of having children at an early age. Girls of color disproportionately face socioeconomic inequities that make them more vulnerable to pregnancy at an early age. Numerous studies have linked poverty, lack of access to health insurance, limited educational expectations and opportunities, and lower career opportunities and aspirations to increased likelihood of unintended adolescent pregnancy.
3. Improving access to and the quality of reproductive health care for girls of color will be of utmost importance in reducing racial and gender disparities in the incidence of STDs and HIV and the high levels of pregnancy among these teen age girls in the state.

Centro, Inc. (Minneapolis) apprentices Latina teens as dance instructors, developing their skills to claim and establish their own leadership and economic power. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.



"We are the ones responsible for ourselves. It's important for young women dealing with these messages from the media to have and reach out to an understanding source. It's difficult to know who truly has your best interest."

Women's Foundation of Minnesota's girlsBEST Fund program participant, age 18

SECTION 4 Mental Health

DURING ADOLESCENCE, GIRLS ARE EXPOSED TO A mix of messages, images, and environments that affect their self-esteem. For many girls, it is a time when gender roles related to dating and sexuality become entrenched, when body image and living up to society's physical standards feel overwhelmingly important, and at the same time, when there is substantial pressure to excel in school.

On the whole Minnesota's girls feel worse about themselves than boys do, and poor self esteem is correlated with a number of other unhealthy attitudes and behaviors. Girls are more likely than boys to see themselves as overweight, to employ unhealthy methods of weight control, to feel that they're no good and can't do anything right, and to think about and attempt suicide.

Self-Esteem and Body Image

- **Girls have lower self-esteem than boys**, with girls being more likely to feel that *they don't have much to be proud of* (21.8 percent compared with 20.5 percent of boys), that

they are no good (33.3 percent compared with 24.5 percent of boys), that *they can't do anything right* (22.0 percent compared with 16.8 percent of boys), and that *their life is not very useful* (17.6 percent compared with 16.1 percent of boys).

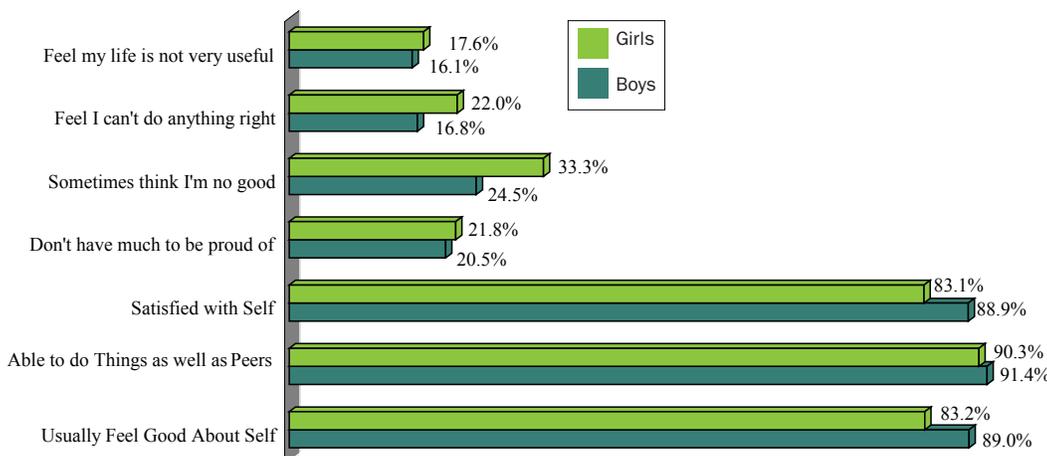
- **Girls have lower levels of self-esteem than boys within every racial and ethnic group and at each grade level.**

Whereas boys' self esteem gradually increases from 6th to 9th to 12th grade, girls' self esteem drops in the 9th grade (with the exception of African American girls).

- **Lower self-esteem in girls is strongly correlated with binge drinking, smoking, prescription drug abuse, and using drugs to escape their problems or to deal with sadness, loneliness, or anger.** Higher self-esteem in girls is associated with healthy behaviors like greater communication with a sexual partner about STDs or pregnancy and use of condoms.

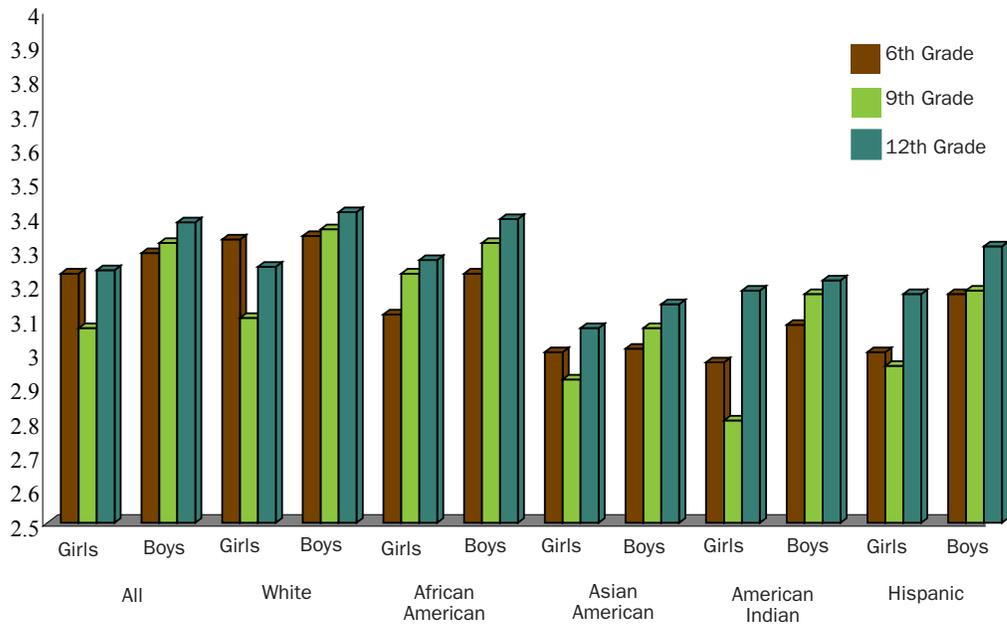
- **Girls of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are less body-satisfied than boys.** Hispanic and white girls are the least likely to see themselves as about the right weight (data not shown).

Figure 5. Self Esteem, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004



NOTES: Responses are for 6th, 9th, and 12th grade students combined.
SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Figure 6. Composite Self-Esteem Scores for Girls and Boys by Race/Ethnicity and Grade Level, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004



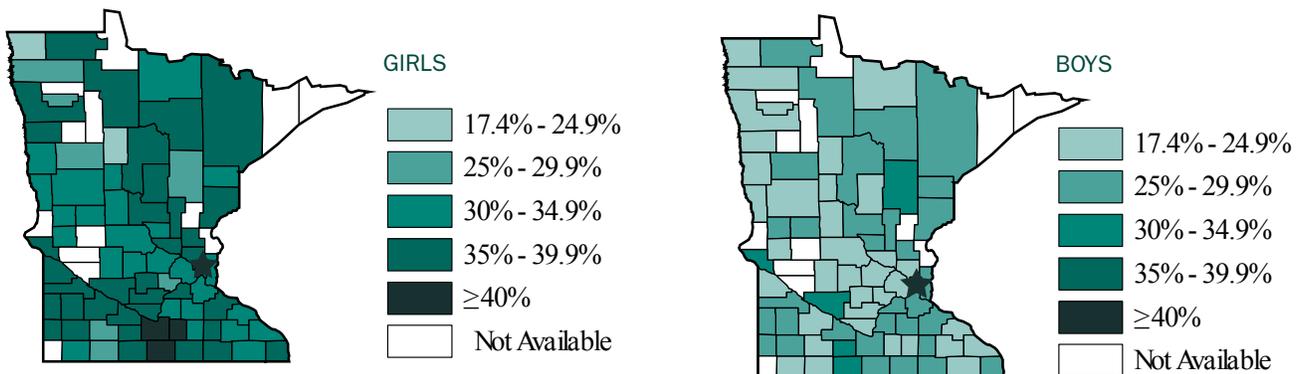
NOTES: All self esteem questions were combined into one Self Esteem variable. Higher scores indicate higher levels of self esteem. See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Minnesota Student Survey.
 SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
 Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Suicide

- Girls of color are at a greater risk of attempted suicide than boys,⁴ particularly American Indian girls who are more likely to think about and attempt suicide than girls or boys of any racial and ethnic group. Hispanic girls are also at a high risk of suicide.

- Counties in Minnesota with the highest percentages of girls reporting suicidal thoughts and attempts fall outside of the state's seven county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Promoting girls' mental health will require that girls have positive, healthy messages about their bodies, access to support

Map 3. Percent of Girls and Boys Who Have Ever Had Suicidal Thoughts

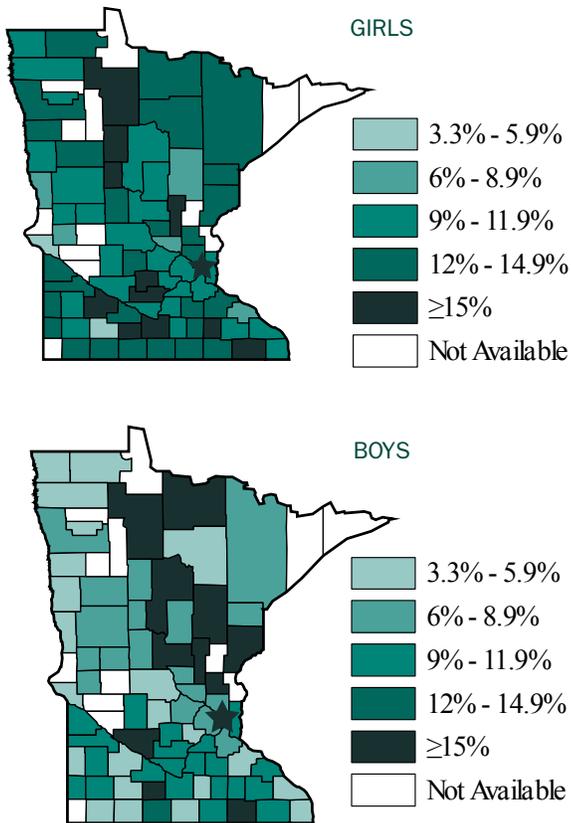


SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

⁴ Boys, however, are more likely to die from suicide than girls.^{xvii}

networks to combat depression and suicidal thoughts or as they confront physical and sexual abuse and victimization in their homes, schools, and communities. □

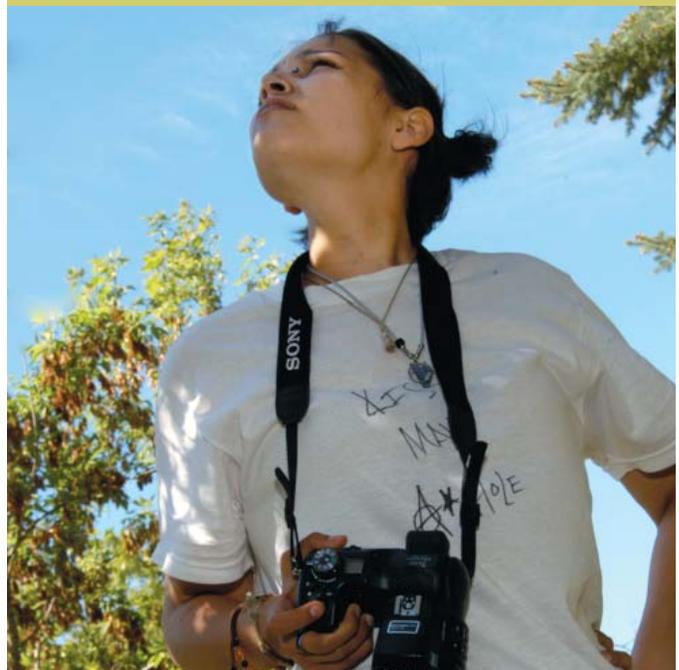
Map 4. Percent of Girls and Boys Who Have Ever Attempted Suicide



SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Recommendations for Change

1. Early intervention is key to successful treatment of eating disorders.^{xv} School counselors, teachers, and parents need training in identification and treatment options. Reducing girls' exposure to television and other forms of mass media could help modify their perceptions of normal female weight, and increase opportunities for healthy physical activity.^{xvi}
2. Minnesota's public school system should ensure that health curricula include information about eating disorders like anorexia, bulimia, and other levels of disordered eating behaviors.
3. A comprehensive approach to supporting girls and their healthy emotional development should be at the center of any policy or program designed to address the high levels of suicidal thoughts and attempts by Minnesota's girls. Parents, schools, family doctors, and experts in the areas of adolescent depression and counseling should come together to develop a network of support that gives girls of different economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds plenty of support options.



Sisters in Leadership (Ogichidaakweg) empowers Native American girls in Cass, Kego and S lakes on the Leech Lake Reservation and Nett Lake on the Bois Forte Nation Reservation to build artistic skills in digital photography and videography. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

SECTION 5

Education

GIRLS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND ACCESS TO higher education influences their career opportunities, earnings, and professional advancement later in life. For girls in low-income families, higher education can serve as a gateway to economic stability and a better life. Access to higher education for girls of disadvantaged backgrounds proves difficult, however. Even with aspirations of going to college, many may not know how to make that dream a reality.

Despite their increased level of education, women's earnings continue to lag behind men's, and segregation in the labor market persists, with women much more likely than men to be concentrated in low-paying occupations.

In Minnesota, girls report higher grades than boys, spend more time studying, report a more positive outlook on school, and hold higher aspirations for their educational futures than boys. However, they are less likely to be considered college-ready by standardized testing, with test scores in math and science that lag behind boys' scores considerably. Girls are also spending much more time on household chores and caring for siblings than boys.

- **Girls of every racial and ethnic group are more likely to spend a substantial amount of time (six or more hours per week) studying than their male counterparts.** White and Asian American girls are the most likely of all girls and boys to devote this much time to studying.

- **Girls of every racial and ethnic group are also far more likely than boys to spend a substantial amount of time doing chores at home or babysitting, and this is especially true among girls of color.** Nearly a quarter of Hispanic girls and more than a quarter of African American, Asian American, and American Indian girls devote six or more hours per week to helping out at home with chores and babysitting.

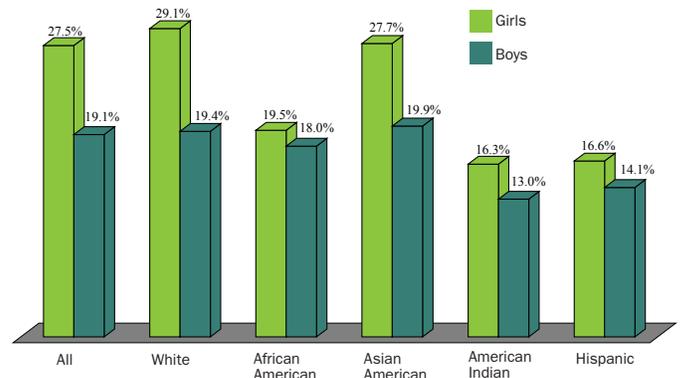
- **ACT data for Minnesota show that girls in Minnesota are substantially less college ready than boys,** with only 28 percent of girls compared with 36 percent of boys meeting the college readiness benchmarks in all four areas: English, Math, Reading, and Science (data not shown).

- **Girls have higher aspirations than boys.** White, American Indian, and Hispanic girls are all more likely than their male counterparts to want to attend college and/or graduate school. American Indian girls are the second most likely

“Even though my mother was always saying we needed to go to school and go to college, there was never initiative in it because I was the first generation to go to college and graduate and come out. So my mother did not teach me in essence what she did not know. She desired for us to go to school and she knew it was important for us to go. But she didn't know how to get there and how to support me to get there.”

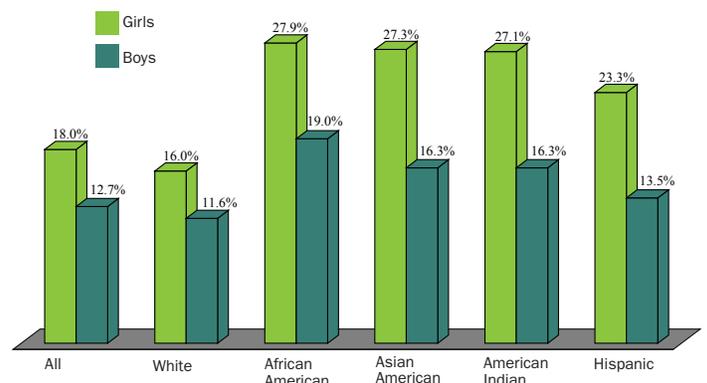
Women's Foundation of Minnesota's girlsBEST Fund program mentor and former participant, age 27

Figure 7. Percent of Boys and Girls Spending 6 or More Hours on Studying, by Race and Ethnicity, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004



NOTES: Responses are for 6th, 9th, and 12th grade students combined. See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls of Minnesota* report for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Minnesota Student Survey.
SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Figure 8. Percent of Boys and Girls Spending 6 or More Hours Doing Chores/Babysitting, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004

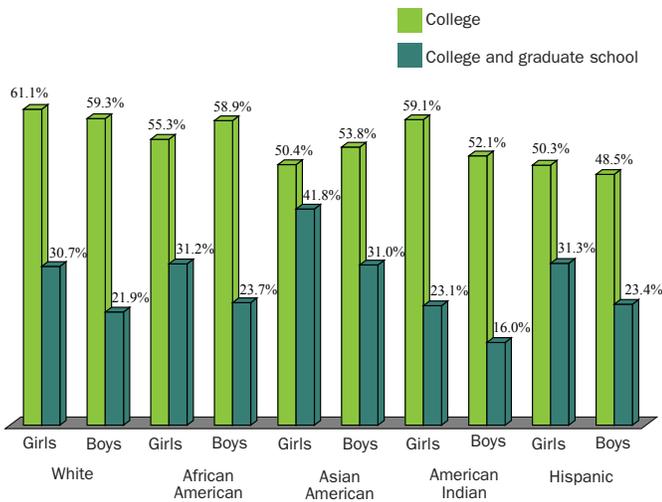


NOTES: Responses are for 6th, 9th, and 12th grade students combined. See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* report for more information on how race and ethnicity categorized in the Minnesota Student Survey.
SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research

group of girls to say that they want to finish high school only (data not shown), but are also the second most likely to say that they want to go to college. White girls are the most likely to say they want to go to college and Asian American girls are the most likely to say they want to go to both college and graduate school.

The question remains, then, as to whether their hard work and interest in school will pay off in terms of their potential career paths and earnings later on in life, particularly for girls of color. □

Figure 9. College Plans and Beyond for Girls and Boys by Race/Ethnicity, Minnesota Student Survey, 2004



NOTES: Responses are for 6th, 9th, and 12th grade students combined. See the Methodology Appendix in the full *Status of Girls in Minnesota* for information on how race and ethnicity are categorized in the Minnesota Student Survey.
 SOURCE: Minnesota Student Survey Interagency Team 2005.
 Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Recommendations for Change

1. Schools in Minnesota should address girls' lower standardized test scores, particularly in math and science, by combating gender stereotypes about these subjects and finding ways to make the learning environment more hospitable to girls.
2. School and community programs can be developed and expanded to encourage girls to pursue math and science, starting with the very young. Programs should focus on showing girls the types of careers available in nontraditional fields for women, which not only offer economic security, but also the opportunity for careers at the forefront of new research, technological, and medical developments. These programs might include mentoring and hands-on activities as well as access to online resources.
3. Financial aid for higher education should be targeted at girls of color, whose disproportionate representation among the poor limits their access to further schooling. Expanding access for girls of color can help move them into better paying work and can help to reverse the depressed economic conditions that communities of color often experience.



The YWCA Duluth's Girl Power! program connects girl participants to activities and experiences intended to inspire learning and nurture curiosity as a means to future economic success. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

Fostering Leadership and Confidence Among Minnesota's Girls

RESEARCH ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND political participation suggests that providing young people with opportunities for direct access to political figures, and to take part in shaping decisions about policies affecting their lives, can combat the political disengagement that many feel.^{xvii} Programs that provide positive, efficacy-building, and skill-enhancing experiences to diverse young people may help them to seek out leadership positions as young people and later in life.

Minnesota's girls deserve opportunities to build their sense of agency and confidence in their ability to lead and change their communities. Minnesota can expand leadership among girls and women in the state by fostering confidence and voice among its girls. Youth development programs should provide mentorship, role-modeling, and skill-building to provide girls with the type of positive reinforcement and support that they need to overcome the challenges they face. □

Recommendations for Change

1. Minnesotans should invest in a leadership pipeline for girls by expanding programs like girlsBEST that offer rural girls, young girls, and girls of color opportunities for skill-building, leadership training, and mentorship.
2. Investments in quality, comprehensive after-school programs, sports, and other positive activities for girls will help provide girls with safe, confidence-building environments.
3. State and local governments can create internship opportunities for girls, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to give them exposure to decision-making processes.



Asian Media Access' "What About Us?" (Minneapolis) is a girl-led public awareness campaign denouncing sexism and celebrating the value of girls in the Asian American, Pacific Islander and Hmong communities. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

Women's Foundation of Minnesota: girlsBEST Fund

IN 2002, THE WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA launched the girlsBEST (girls Building Economic Success Together) Fund, a grantmaking and public awareness initiative to build the economic power of girls, ages 10-18. The girlsBEST Fund is one of the first philanthropic initiatives of its kind in the nation. Specifically, girlsBEST programs are designed to strengthen girls' self-esteem, build girls' aspirations for the future, provide academic enrichment and college preparation, offer business and entrepreneurial skill-building, build leadership, and encourage activism on behalf of equality for women and girls.

Grants go to girl-driven programs that have the support and involvement of women, mentors, community organizations, schools and other organizations serving women and girls, with priority given to underrepresented and underserved girls and communities. The girlsBEST Fund has achieved significant success, particularly in creating model programs that develop girls' self-esteem, self-confidence and high aspirations for the future. In turn, girls participating in these programs are now exercising leadership in their schools and communities, making the community a better place for girls and women.

Four key program components of the girlsBEST Fund have been recognized as notable practices,^{xviii} including:

- **Mentoring.** Mentoring and supporting girls to build their comfort, confidence and self-esteem.
- **Cultural Awareness.** Providing girls with a strong focus on cultural awareness, identity and appreciation, particularly among girls of color.
- **Leadership.** Developing girls' leadership, primarily through hands-on experience.
- **Outreach.** Outreach to younger, underserved and underrepresented girls.

Conclusion: Moving Girls Forward

MOVING MINNESOTA'S GIRLS FORWARD AND building their chances for future success is critical not only to their own lives, but to communities all across the state. Just as girls' challenges are shared obstacles that impede Minnesota from reaching its full potential, girls' triumphs are shared successes, as they bring their experiences to bear on their adulthood and the nurturing of their own families.

Creating an environment that nurtures girls to be confident, competent, and capable, and that is ripe with opportunities for economic independence, career growth, and leadership, benefits not only girls, but every Minnesotan. Progressive policy, continued advocacy, and increased philanthropy, as well as mentorship and community support, will be key to ensuring that girls continue moving forward. □

To view a PDF of the full report, visit www.wfmn.org.



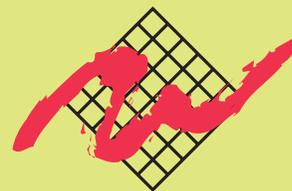
The Science Center at Maltby Nature Preserve (Randolph) engages girls (ages 10-18) in authentic science. Professional female scientists serve as mentors as girls develop social, leadership and teamwork skills. The nonprofit is a Women's Foundation grantee.

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For the complete list of references from *Status of Girls in Minnesota*, visit www.wfmmn.org to see a PDF of the full report.



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