

AAUW Capitol Hill Lobby Corps
Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education
May 22, 2008

I. SUMMARY

Message: AAUW released a new research report providing the most comprehensive analysis to date on trends in educational achievement by gender, race, ethnicity, and income. Please read *Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education*, and use it to inform coming discussions on education legislation.

II. REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education, presents a comprehensive look at girls' educational achievement during the past 35 years, paying special attention to the relationship between girls' and boys' progress. Analyses of results from national standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the SAT and ACT college entrance examinations, as well as other measures of educational achievement, provide an overall picture of trends in gender equity from elementary school to college and beyond.

Girls' Academic Success Does Not Penalize Boys

- In states where girls do well on standardized tests, so do boys. On the other hand, in states where girls do not do well on standardized tests, neither do boys.
- Standardized test performance in elementary and secondary school has improved or remained stable for both sexes across the board.

In addition, both women and men are now more likely to take college entrance examinations such as the ACT and the SAT, and more men and women graduate from college today than ever before. The proportion of young men graduating from high school and earning college degrees is at an all-time high. While older/nontraditional female college students outnumber their male counterparts in earning college degrees, the gender gap is almost absent among those entering college directly after high school.

Even though more women than men are earning college degrees, men continue to out-earn women in the workplace almost immediately after graduation. AAUW's report *Behind the Pay Gap*, released last year, found that one year after graduation, women earned 80 percent of men's wages; ten years out of college, women earned only 69 percent of men's earnings. A sizeable portion of these pay gaps cannot be explained by choices men and women make (such as field of study, choice of job, and time out of the workforce to care for children).

Income More Influential than Gender

- Children from the lowest-income families have the lowest average test scores on standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Consistently, a rise in family income is associated with a rise in test scores.
- Differences in educational achievement vary by race/ethnicity and family income level. For example, girls often outperform boys within each racial/ethnic group on the NAEP reading test. When broken down within ethnic groups, this gender gap is found to be most consistent among white students, less so among African American students, and least among Hispanic students.

AAUW researchers and many others agree that part of the achievement gap results from differences in family income, but the true extent of the overlap between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status is masked by limitations of available federal data sources.

Conclusion

This examination of gender trends in educational achievement since the 1970s, using leading educational indicators from fourth grade to college, shows that girls' gains have not come at boys' expense. Overall, educational achievement has improved or stayed the same, and more men and women are graduating from college than ever before. Girls have made rapid gains in many areas, but boys are also gaining ground on most indicators of academic achievement.

III. TALKING POINTS

About the Report

- *Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education* is the most comprehensive look to date at girls' educational achievement during the past 35 years.
- The report looks at student performance on standardized tests in elementary and high school and the SAT and ACT college admission tests. The data are broken down by gender within race and family income levels.

Major Conclusions

- **Educational achievement is not a zero-sum game.**
 - As girls have done better in schools, so have boys.
- **Overall, both boys and girls have shown steady improvement over time.**
- **Understanding disparities by race/ethnicity and family income level is critical to understanding girls' and boys' achievement.**
 - The trends in academic performance by family income level and race are fairly consistent. On average, white and Asian American students earn higher test scores than African American and Hispanic students do. Also, on average, students from higher-income families earn higher test scores than students from lower-income families earn. But low performance is NOT inherent to any one group.

Extra Info

- The proportion of young men graduating from high school and earning college degrees is at an all-time high.
- While older/nontraditional female college students outnumber their male counterparts, the gender gap in enrollment is almost absent among those entering college directly after high school.
- Even though more women are earning college degrees, men continue to out-earn women in the workplace, and the gap in pay is evident almost immediately after graduation.