THE 2026

Delmarva Girl Report









Powered by Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay

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We are Girl Scouts.

Girl Scouts discover who they are, tap into the power inside them, and build the confidence to let it shine.

Through programs from coast to coast and overseas, girls of all backgrounds and abilities come as they are and create their own paths. Each step becomes a part of the journey, and along the way, they explore their passions, develop hands-on skills, and discover the tools they need to lead with joy, on their own terms.

Challenges don't stop Girl Scouts. They discover their strengths in science labs and on hiking trails, at cookie booths and in front of city councils. Backed by volunteers, mentors, and millions of alums, they are part of a lifelong sisterhood of powerful change-makers who are always on their side.

Girl Scouts. Because the world deserves to see their full potential—and they deserve to experience it.

For more than a century, Girl Scouts has created the space for girls to become leaders.

In every community, at every level of influence. Across the Delmarva Peninsula, our alums lead classrooms and courtrooms, run businesses and nonprofits, and serve as the backbone of communities from Wilmington to the Eastern Shore. The girls we serve today are no less determined to make their mark. **Many of them already are.**

Yet these girls reach for their potential against a set of circumstances no prior generation has faced. In the pages that follow, you will read that girls in Delaware graduate high school at a rate of 92% - more than five points higher than their male peers. Girls consistently outperform boys in English Language Arts, earn higher grades, and are more engaged in school.

You will also read that the proportion of girls who say they have no one to talk to about a personal problem has nearly doubled in a decade. That one in five girls who dated experienced emotional abuse from a partner. That 12.3% of high school girls have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse.

Both truths are real. Girls on the Delmarva Peninsula are simultaneously excelling and struggling — outperforming in the classroom while navigating a social landscape defined by rising isolation, pervasive digital pressure, and alarmingly high rates of violence.

At Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay, we sit in a rare position to see the whole picture. Our volunteers witness both the courage and the quiet pain. That vantage point, and our commitment to ensuring every girl in our region can reach their full potential, led us to commission the Delmarva Girl Report.

Our aim in these pages is not diagnosis but investment. We present the state of girls' wellbeing so that every adult who cares about a girl in their life — educators, policymakers, parents, mentors, employers, and community leaders — has the data and the direction to act.

Girls need adult champions. Girls need investments in their future. Girls need safe spaces to become the leaders our communities are counting on.

Girls need you.

Theresa Young
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay





Powered by the Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay

Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay serves over 4,000 girls across 14 counties in Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia.

With support from nearly 3,000 volunteers and contributions from funders and partners, Girl Scouts ensures every girl in Delmarva area can reach her full potential.

Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay
www.gscb.org

Girl Scout Camp

The State of Delmarva Girls

The Delmarva Girl Report presents a comprehensive portrait of girls enrolled in Delaware public schools and the broader population of girls growing up across the Delmarva Peninsula. Drawing on primary-source data from institutions such as the Delaware Department of Education and the U.S. Census Bureau, this report examines the wellbeing of girls across four dimensions: physical health, emotional wellbeing, academic performance, and social wellbeing.

The data reveal a generation defined by duality. Delmarva girls are outperforming boys academically, earning higher grades, graduating at higher rates, and demonstrating stronger literacy skills at every level. They are more engaged in school, more likely to have a mentor, and more likely to volunteer in their communities. At the same time, they are experiencing a crisis of connection, safety, and mental health that has deepened dramatically over the past decade and accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Girls report persistent sadness and hopelessness at rates far exceeding boys. They are bullied and cyberbullied at nearly double the rate of their male peers, and middle school cyberbullying is the only bullying metric that has worsened over the decade. Sexual violence, dating abuse, and adverse childhood experiences affect girls at rates that demand urgent intervention. Meanwhile, the protective factors that buffer against these risks such as organized activities, volunteerism, family communication, and social connection have all declined.

Racial and economic disparities compound these challenges. Black and Hispanic girls face higher rates of poverty, social isolation, and neighborhood violence, while Multi-racial girls report the highest rates of sexual violence and cyberbullying. The gap between the highest- and lowest-performing racial groups exceeds 43 points in reading and 52 points in math — disparities far larger than any gender gap.

This report is intended not as a diagnosis but as an investment — a foundation of evidence for educators, policymakers, philanthropists, parents, and every adult who cares about a girl in her life. The data are clear. The need is urgent. The opportunity to act is now.

92% of Delaware girls graduate high school within 4 years.
Five points higher than boys and up four points from a decade ago.

47% of high school girls report persistent feelings of sadness.
50% higher than the rate reported by high school boys.

1 in 3 middle school girls have experienced cyberbullying.
A 7-point increase from 2013 - the only bullying metric moving in the wrong direction.



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

Volunteer.
Girls need caring adult mentors to prepare them for life.

Donate.
Fund a girl's future with a gift to Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay.

Collaborate.
Create meaningful experiences for girls in Delmarva.

Dimensions of Wellness

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

Physical Wellness

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

Academic Wellness

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, and programs which enable the pursuit of education after high school.

Emotional Wellness

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

Social Wellness

Robust ecosystems of support including strong family units and opportunities to engage with the social fabric of their communities help girls build social skills and connections needed to thrive. In these environments, girls learn their intrinsic worth and receive necessary support to navigate social situations. Disruptions to this social network such as childhood trauma, poverty, or substance abuse in the family can create lifelong challenges.

The Girl Scout Difference

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

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

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

84%

of Delmarva Girl Scouts believe:

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



Data Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the purposes of this report, girls shall refer to youth under the age of 18, unless otherwise noted, whose sex assigned at birth was marked as female.

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

Methodology

The Delmarva Girl Report is a comprehensive collection of metrics that serve as indicators of well-being for girls in the region. 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 Delaware Department of Education. Data visuals are intended to present data in an easily readable format to understand comparisons or trends over time.

Agency Data

The report includes vignettes regarding the impact of Girl Scouting on girl members served by Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay. All Girl Scout outcomes or participation measurements are derived from the Girl Scouts of the USA's Girl Scout Research Institute; Girl Scout Voices Count, an annual voice of the customer survey; or the Girl Scout council. 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 the Delmarva region.

Data Collection

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

Disaggregating Data

To meet the objectives of the report in understanding differences between girls and boys in the Delmarva region, 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, Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay 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 analysis.

Process

The Delmarva Girl Report is commissioned by Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay. Representatives from the council determined the scope of the report and included metrics. An independent analyst assembled metrics as outlined above.

Accuracy

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

DEMOGRAPHICS



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

Key Facts: Demographics

- **165% increase in girls identifying as multiracial in the last decade.** The fastest growing demographic in the Delmarva region.
- **42,000+ young people under 18 live below the federal poverty line.** Black and Hispanic youth face poverty rates nearly three times higher (21%) than White peers (7%).
- **1 in 4 Delmarva girls live with a single mom.** This rate has held steady for over a decade.
- **35% increase over the last decade in youth who speak a language other than English at home.** Spanish-speaking households increased 40% in the last 10 years.

Population & Age Distribution

The Delmarva Peninsula is home to over 160,000 girls under the age of 18. Consistent with national trends, girls slightly outnumber boys across all age groups. While the youth population increased modestly over the last decade, this growth is concentrated among youth ages 10-to-14. The under-5 cohort shrank, reflecting declining birth rates that mirror national trends.

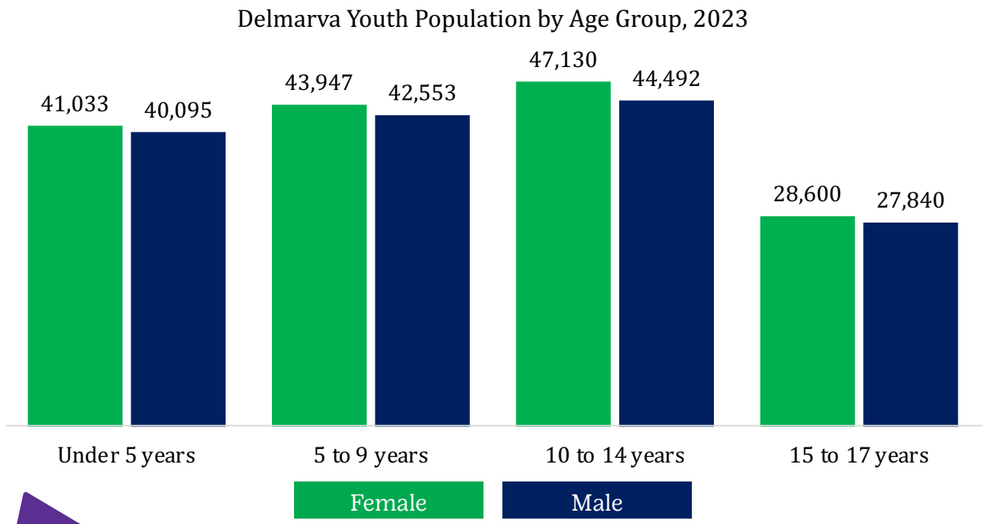
The Delmarva Peninsula is home to over 160,000 girls under 18.

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2023.

	Total Youth	Percent of Youth
Female (0-17)	160,710	51%
Male (0-17)	154,980	49%

Across every age group, girls outnumber boys in the Delmarva region.

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2023.





81%

of Delmarva Girl Scouts develop a strong positive identity through the program, agreeing **"I am happy with myself most of the time."**

Race & Ethnicity

Girls identifying as White (Non-Hispanic) make up the largest demographic of female youth in the Delmarva region, comprising 47% of the population. Girls identifying as Black or African American make up the second largest demographic, representing 22% of all girls under 18, and Hispanic or Latina girls make up 14% of the girl population.

The fastest growing demographic over the last decade is the next largest racial identity - girls identifying with more than one race - experiencing 165% growth in 10 years. During this timeframe, the entire girl population experienced rapid diversification: a 44% increase among girls identifying as Hispanic or Latina; girls identifying as Some Other Race doubled; White (Non-Hispanic) girls declined by 13%.

Girls identifying as White are the largest demographic but comprise less than half of the total girl population in the Delmarva region.

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Tables B01001B-I, 2023.

	Female (0-17)	
	Total Youth	%
Asian	5,321	3%
Black or African American	35,959	22%
Other Race	8,249	5%
Two or More Races	22,715	14%
White (Not Hispanic)	76,103	47%
Hispanic	25,236	16%

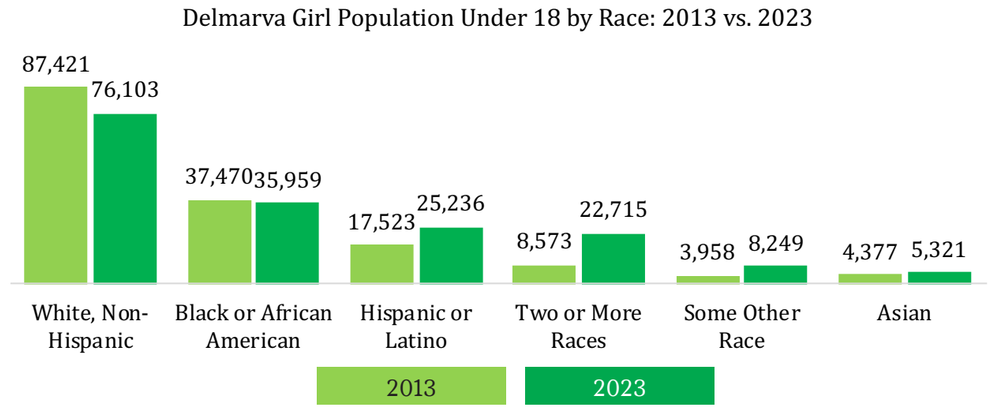
Over half

of Delmarva girls are girls of color.

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

The girl population diversified significantly over the last 10 years.

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Tables B01001B-I, 2023.



Language Spoken at Home

85% of Delmarva youth speak only English at home, but language diversity grew significantly over the last decade. The number of non-English speaking homes rose 35%, with Spanish-speaking families increasing by 40%.

1 in 6
youth on the Delmarva peninsula speak a language other than English at home - a 35% increase in the last 10 years.



Family Type

The structure of many families in the Delmarva region varies from a “traditional” two-parent household. **1 out of 3 youth live in households without married parents.** Of those, over 70,000 young people are living in single-mother households - a metric that has not noticeably improved over the last decade.

Household Type for Total Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B09002 and B09018, 2023.



Disability Status

Among Delmarva youth ages 5-17, 5% of girls have a diagnosed disability compared with 9% of boys. The gender gap is substantial: boys are nearly twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with a federally-identified disability.

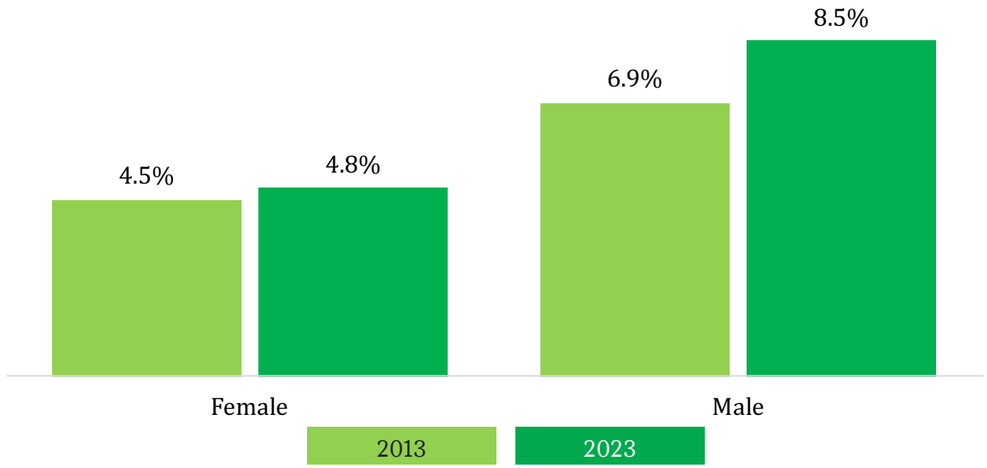
Research has long shown that girls are often under-diagnosed or misdiagnosed with mental, emotional, or learning differences while boys may be over-diagnosed (Quinn & Madhoo, 2014). The lower observed disability rate among girls in the Delmarva peninsula likely understates the true number of girls living with a disability, particularly for conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder, which often present differently in girls than in boys.

5%
of Delmarva girls live with a federally classified disability, a rate nearly 50% lower than that of boys at 9%.

U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B18101, 2023.

Boys are nearly twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with a disability.
U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates, Tables B18101, 2023.

Disability Rate, Ages 5–17, by Sex: 2013 vs. 2023





94%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts say their troop makes them feel welcomed.

Poverty & Financial Hardship

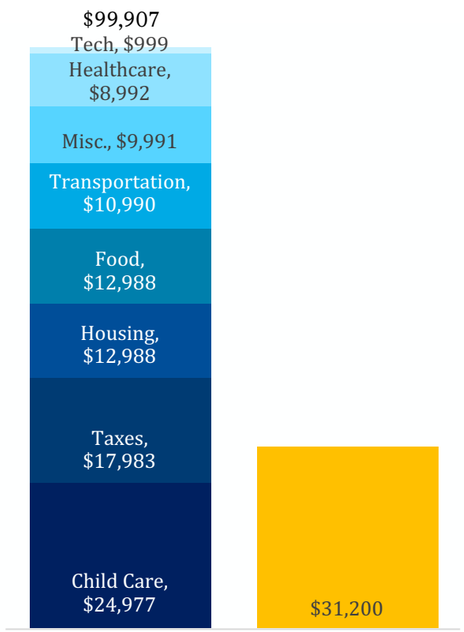
The Delmarva peninsula has experienced a net decline in the number of youth living below the federal poverty line over the last decade, but this is a complicated measure of success. In 2013, nearly 1 in 5 girls in the region (19%) lived below the federal poverty line - a marginally higher rate than boys at 18%. With a regional average of 17% in 2023, the rate has improved slightly, but groups like United for ALICE argue this is not a true representation of affordability.

ALICE, an acronym to describe households earning above the federal poverty level but not enough to afford basic expenses, described **an additional 34% of households in the Delmarva region in 2024 that did not have enough income to meet basic needs** (United for ALICE, 2024). These households are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, yet Employed.

Accounting for broader expenses such as housing, childcare, and transportation, the ALICE Essentials Index is argued to be more representative of the economic realities of today's families. **40% of Delmarva households were below the ALICE Threshold in 2024.**

The Federal Poverty Level methodology has not been updated since the 1960s, so improvements against this measurement are viewed as obsolete while a growing portion of families in the Delmarva region are falling into the affordability trap of rising costs and stagnant wages.

ALICE Threshold vs Federal Poverty Level, Delmarva, 2024, Family of Four



ALICE Household Survival Budget, United for ALICE. U.S. Census, Federal Poverty Measure.



93%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts say Girl Scouts is a place where they belong.

DATA HIGHLIGHT: RACE & ETHNICITY

Poverty & Financial Hardship

The financial health of Delmarva girls presents two competing truths: the portion of girls living beneath the federal poverty level is declining, while the cost of living to afford basic needs rises to affect a growing portion of the total population.

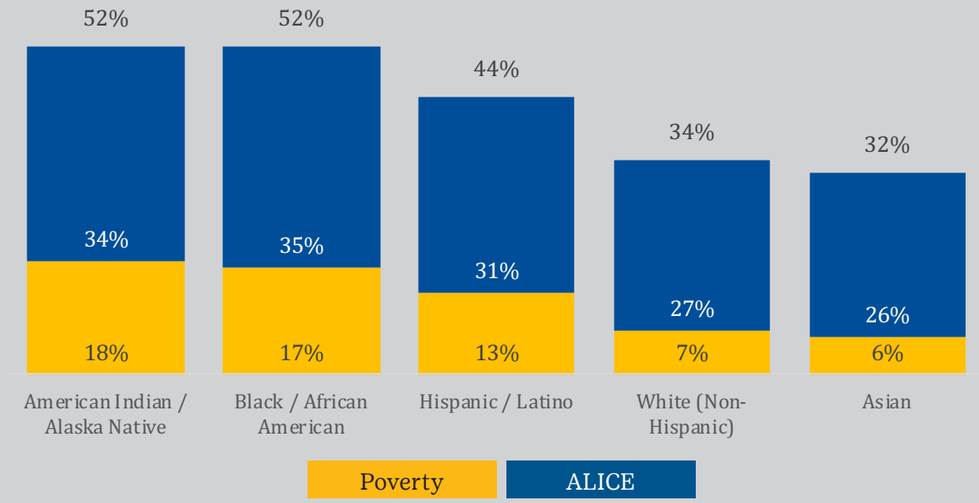
However, among many girls of color, both measures are worsening. Girls of color experience considerably higher rates of poverty compared to girls identifying as White (Non-Hispanic). The same trend holds among ALICE households: a higher portion of households identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native and Black or African American meet the ALICE criteria compared to households identifying as White.

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). The mental health of Black girls is also disproportionately affected by the stress of living with insufficient resources, added layers of discrimination, and exposure to violence (Williams, 2003).

Households identifying as Black/African American and American Indian/Alaskan Native experience the highest affordability constraint.

ALICE Threshold, United for ALICE, 2024; U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2024.

2024 Total Delmarva Households by Poverty and ALICE Status



PHYSICAL HEALTH



Girls must learn to develop healthy bodies and live in healthy environments in order to thrive. Proper development of a girl's physical body requires access to nutritional foods, outlets for physical fitness, health education, and more.

Girls also need safe, nurturing environments that support their growth, including access to safe housing, quality healthcare, and protective communities of peers and adults who are capable of supporting her overall development.

Key Facts: Physical Health

- **1 in 8 high school girls have been forced into sexual activities.**
  The rate of experiencing sexual abuse among girls is 4x higher than boys.
- **Over half of high school girls are trying to lose weight.**
  Girls describing themselves as overweight has tripled in 10 years.
- **2 out of 5 high school girls have used e-cigarettes or vaping products.**
  Girls are using these tobacco products more than boys - a reversal of historical substance use patterns.
- **1 out of 4 girls in Delaware is underinsured.**
  Several Eastern Shore counties are federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas.
- **Alcohol use decreased among high school girls over the last decade.**
  50% have never consumed alcohol, up from 37% 10 years ago.

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 the Delmarva region face two competing challenges:

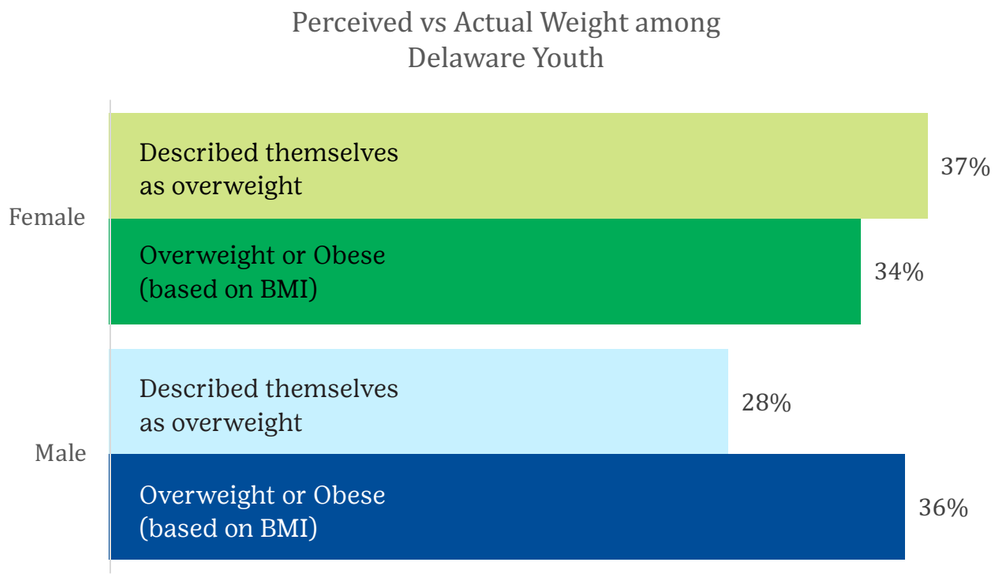
On one hand, over 1/3 of high school girls are overweight or obese, based on the medical benchmarks utilizing Body Mass Index (BMI). On the other hand, girls' perception of their body weight is disproportionate: 37% of high school girls in Delaware described themselves as overweight, yet only 34% met the medical criteria.

By comparison, boys are experiencing the opposite trend: compared to girls, more high school boys are actually overweight or obese (36%); yet, only 28% would describe themselves as overweight. The obesity rate of boys also rose sharply over the last six years - from 16% to 22% according to the tracking of the National Survey on Children's Health. 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, Delaware, 2023; National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Delaware.



Physical Activity

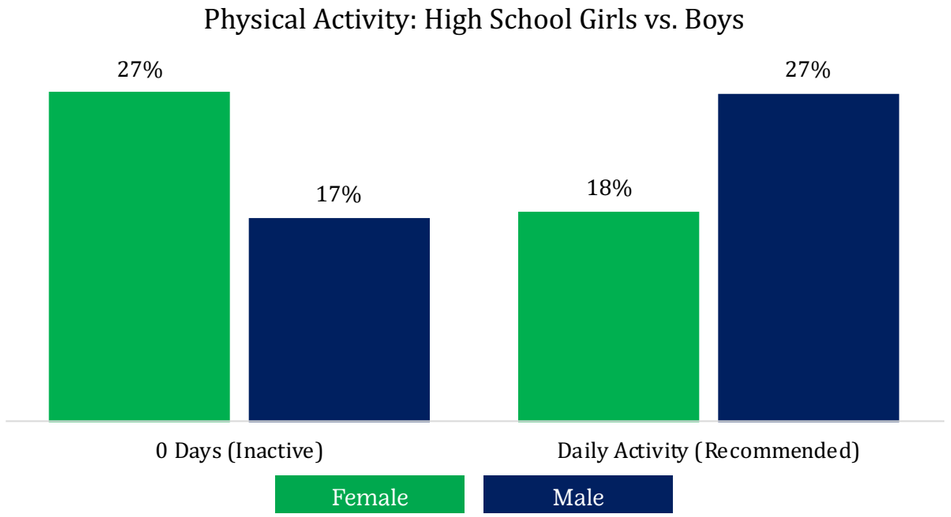
Across every age, girls in the Delmarva area are reported as being less physically active than boys and a significant percentage are not receiving the recommended amount of exercise per day. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children between the ages of 6-17 need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day (CDC, 2024).

When asked directly, more than 1 in 4 high school girls (27%) reports experiencing 0 days of physical activity compared to 17% of boys. The portion of high school girls meeting the recommended daily activity level is only 18%, nearly 10% lower than their male peers. Differences among middle school girls are more pronounced: 17% of middle school girls report daily activity compared to 32% of boys.

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

More than 1 out of 4 high school girls reports experiencing 0 days of physical activity in a week.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



Healthy Sleep Habits

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

82%

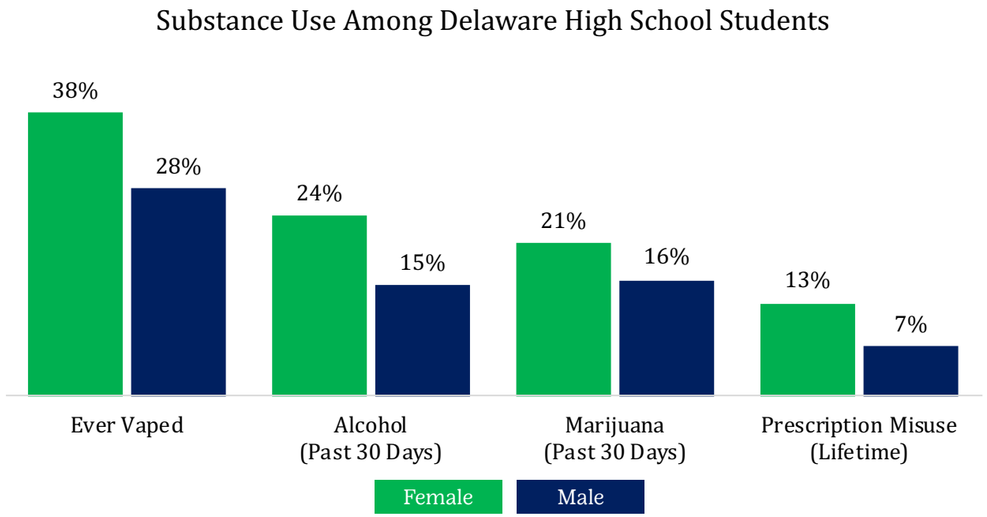
of Delaware high school girls do not receive at least 8 hours of sleep per night.

Substance Abuse

Substance use among Delmarva youth presents a mixed picture: traditional substances like cigarettes and alcohol have declined dramatically over the past decade, while vaping has emerged as a major new concern, particularly for girls. The use of controlled substances during adolescence can lead to immediate consequences as well as long-term substance use disorders and other challenges, including cognitive and physical impacts.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, **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). Similarly, research suggests that early-onset cannabis use contributes to higher risks of cognitive impacts such as a decline in IQ, memory, and processing speed (Gonzalez, 2012).

More high school girls than boys abuse controlled substances across every measure, including nearly 2 out of 5 vaping tobacco.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



Ten-year substance use rates among high school youth in Delaware mirrors the national trend: accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana declined significantly between 2013 and 2023 according to data reported in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In 2023, 50% of high school girls report never drinking alcohol compared to 37% in 2013. **This decline in alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use is one of the most positive trends in adolescent health data.**

However, the rapid uptake of vaping, particularly among girls, is a significant countertrend. Research published in JAMA Pediatrics (Miech, 2023) documents that nicotine vaping among adolescents carries risks of nicotine addiction, respiratory harm, and increased likelihood of subsequent cigarette use. The gender reversal in vaping (girls now leading boys) warrants particular attention in prevention programming.

Lifelong Health Conditions

While all young people must learn to care for their bodies through healthy eating habits, physical activity, and good sleep habits, a growing number of girls in Delaware will also need to manage chronic health conditions. **1 in 3 girls in Delaware are reported to be living with a lifelong health condition**, according to parents. While girls are less likely than boys to be diagnosed with a lifelong health condition, diagnoses are increasing, driven by rises in ADHD, autism, asthma, and prediabetes.

Several contributing factors explain the lower diagnosis rate between girls and boys and the increases in diagnoses over the past five years. The advancement of medical testing and diagnostic criteria is illuminating conditions that were once under-reported for girls. A rise in females diagnosed with cognitive differences and behavioral conditions is widely explained by increased awareness, as well as a deeper understanding in the symptoms uniquely displayed by girls (Qin, 2024).

At the individual level, researchers have long studied the impacts of living with a lifelong health condition; recently, attention turned to the experience of youth receiving a diagnosis. **The key finding: it's disruptive.** As girls learn they have a lifelong health condition, they are likely to experience identity challenges, disruptions to their relationships, and struggle with an altered view of their future (Kirk & Hinton, 2019).

For adults supporting girls, the implication is clear: it is important to help girls understand their conditions, but it is equally important to help them process the experience of having a condition in the first place.



1 in 3

girls in Delaware are reported to be living with a lifelong health condition.

U.S. Census, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 1.9.

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Safe Spaces

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

In Girl Scouts, this sense of belonging is built through intentional programs promoting sisterhood and wellbeing.

92% of Girl Scouts in Delmarva feel girls in their troop genuinely care about each other.



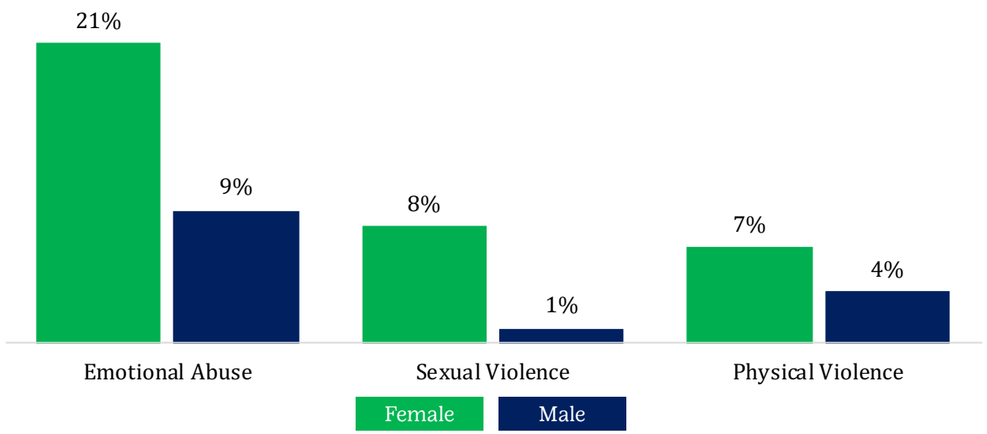
Dating Violence

Dating violence is a pervasive and deeply gendered experience for girls on the Delmarva Peninsula. Among high school girls who dated in the past year, nearly twice as many girls as boys report experiencing physical dating violence. More alarming is the rate of emotional abuse: 21% of girls in a dating relationship reported that a partner controlled, threatened, or emotionally hurt them at least once. By comparison, 9% of boys report the same.

Emotional dating violence has worsened over the decade. The proportion of girls reporting six or more instances of emotional control by a partner 60% - from 5% in 2013 to 8% in 2023. For boys, the rate actually decreased from 3% to 2%, causing the gender gap to widen dramatically. This trend may reflect increased recognition and reporting of emotional abuse, but it also signals a growing pattern of controlling behavior in adolescent relationships.

Sexual dating violence adds another devastating dimension: 8% of girls who dated reported that a partner forced them to do sexual things they did not want to do, compared with 1% of boys.

1 in 5 high school girls in a dating relationship experienced emotional abuse by a partner - twice the rate of boys.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



1 in 6
high school girls reports being forced into sexual activities.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

Sexual Violence

Rates of experiencing sexual violence are among the most drastic differences in the lived experiences of girls and boys in the Delmarva peninsula. **Four-times more high school girls than boys report being forced into a sexual activity within the last year - a total of 1 in 8 girls.** Over the last ten years, the trend in experiencing sexual violence has worsened for girls (a rise of 20%) while the trend among boys improved from 5% to 3%.

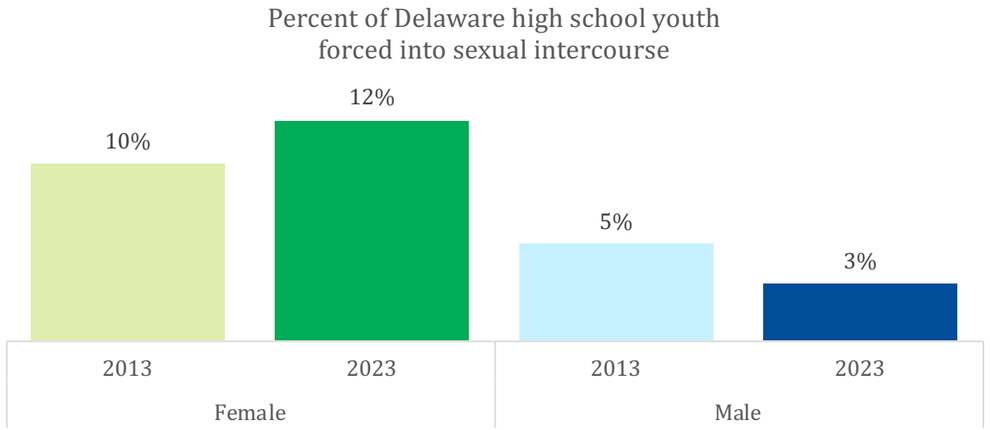
Peer-reviewed research consistently establishes that the consequences of experiencing sexual violence extend far beyond the immediate event. In a study of youth survivors (Clarke, 2023):

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

These negative effects are also 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.

Trends in the rate of experiencing sexual abuse worsened for girls and improved among boys.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2013, and 2023.



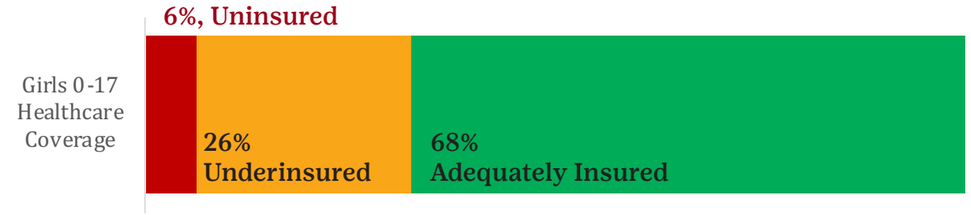
Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare is a critical determinant of physical health outcomes for Delmarva girls. The NSCH reports that 92% of Delaware girls are covered by health insurance, a slight decrease from 94% reported six years earlier. Among insured girls, 26% report that their coverage is not adequate to meet their needs, compared with 23% of boys.

Rural areas of the Delmarva Peninsula face particular challenges in healthcare access. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, several Eastern Shore counties in Maryland and the entirety of Virginia's Eastern Shore are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care. These shortages disproportionately affect lower-income families and families of color, compounding existing health disparities.

Nearly 1 in 3 Delaware girls are uninsured or underinsured.

National Survey on Children's Health, 2022-2023, Delaware.



73%

of Girl Scouts in Delmarva say: "it's important to me to make a difference in my community."



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Focused on the Future

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

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

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

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



76%

of Delmarva Girl Scouts believe adults in Girl Scouts help them think about their future.

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS



When girls develop the ability to identify, express, and manage their feelings, they build a foundation for emotional resiliency. Nurturing these capabilities requires safe environments where girls learn to care for the full range of their emotions.

This support system, coupled with the presence of caring adults, helps in the reduction of the mental health challenges girls face, including bullying, eating disorders, and depression.

Key Facts: Emotional Wellbeing

- **Nearly half of girls in Delaware report signs of depression.**
  Girls experiencing symptoms of depression is 2.5X higher than boys.
- **1 in 4 high school girls seriously considered death by suicide.**
  The rate increased nearly 10 points from a decade ago.
- **3x as many girls as boys intentionally harmed themselves in the past year.**
  A total of nearly 1 out of 3 high school girls.
- **1 in 3 middle school girls experienced cyberbullying.**
  Incidence of cyberbullying increased 7 points in 10 years.

Mental Health Conditions

A national dialog on youth mental health emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as sharp changes in daily norms highlighted – and exacerbated – mental and emotional challenges. Even before that period, **the rate at which girls were being diagnosed with mental, emotional, intellectual, or behavioral (MEIB) conditions was already on the rise** (Slomski, 2023). Internalized conditions such as anxiety, depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and autism spectrum disorder account for the most significant increase in mental and emotional health diagnoses among girls nationwide (Keyes, 2023).

In Delaware, nearly 1 in 4 girls ages 3 to 17 are reported as having a mental, emotional, or behavioral health concern according to their parent. The remainder of this section examines how this prevalence appears in the day-to-day lives of girls in the Delmarva region – in stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and the structures that should support them.



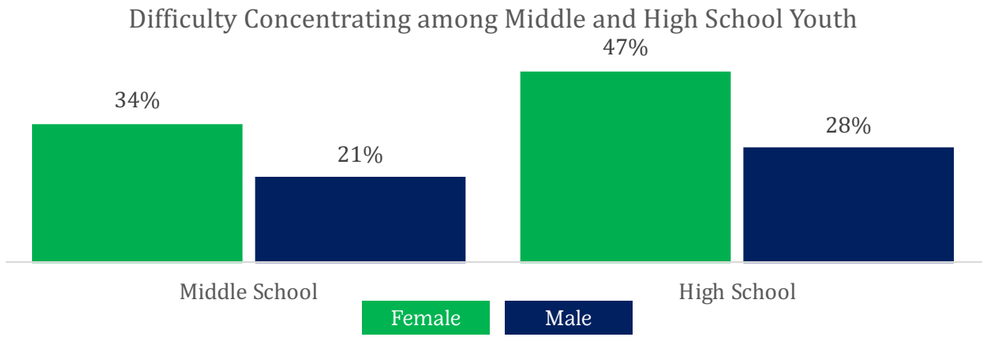
1 in 4

girls ages 3-17 in Delaware are reported as having a mental, emotional, or behavioral health concern.

U.S. Census, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 2.10, Delaware.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey administered to middle and high school youth in the region captures a more intimate look at the specific challenges youth with an MEIB experience. When asked about difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition, 47% of high school girls report serious difficulty compared to 28% of boys.

Teenage girls report more difficulty concentrating than boys.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

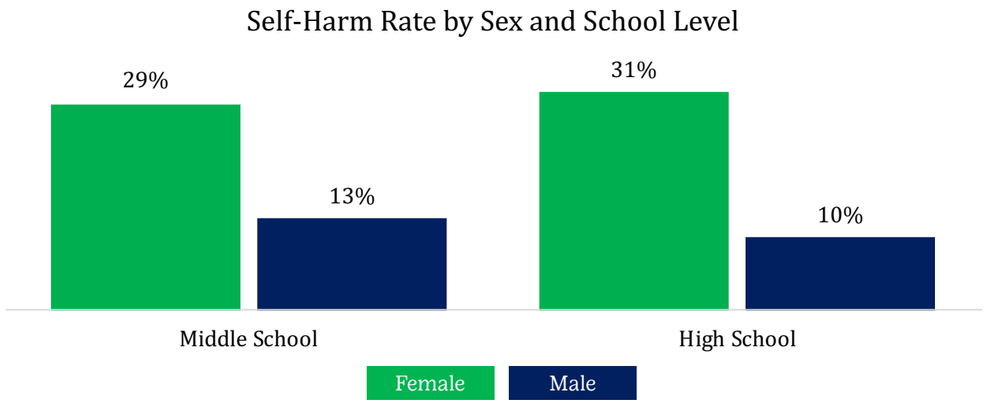


Self-Harm

Non-suicidal self-injury is one of the most visible behavioral health concerns facing adolescent girls today. A 2024 meta-analysis found that self-harm was twice as prevalent among female adolescents as male adolescents (Moloney et al., 2024).

On the Delmarva peninsula, data is consistent with this pattern, presenting trends at the higher-end of reported prevalence rates from across the country. Nearly one in three teen girls in Delaware (29% of middle school girls and 31% of high school girls) reported intentionally hurting themselves in the past year, rates three times higher than their male peers. The consistency of this finding across both school levels suggests that self-injury is not a behavior girls grow into during high school but one already entrenched by middle school, underscoring the need for earlier intervention.

Roughly 1 in 3 middle and high school girls report intentionally hurting themselves compared to 1 in 8 boys.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.





7 in 10

girls ages 5-13 report feeling lonely, a rate that worsens with age.

Girl Scouts of the USA, State of the Girl, 2026.

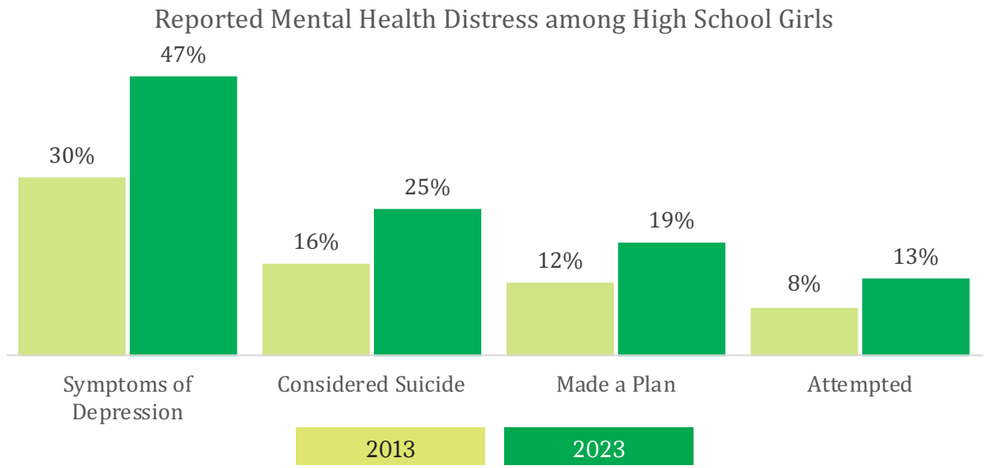
Depression & Suicidality

Among the most pressing concerns for girls' mental health is the prevalence of depression. The U.S. Surgeon General declared a national state of emergency regarding youth mental health in 2021, and data in the Delmarva region mirrors that national crisis. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey finds that 47% of high school girls experienced symptoms of depression compared to 30% of boys.

The internalized weight of stress, anxiety, and depression carries Delmarva girls toward dangerous outcomes at rates higher than their male peers. 1 out of 4 girls seriously considered suicide and 1 out of 8 actually attempted death by suicide compared to 40% fewer boys.

Nearly 1 out of 2 high school girls report experiencing signs of depression, leading to 1 in 8 attempting death by suicide.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



Early detection prevents worsening mental health symptoms, yet girls' distress often goes unrecognized. Signs like irritability, low mood, and social isolation are commonly mistaken for puberty (Vucenovic, 2023). Girls also tend to internalize (deep sadness, prolonged hopelessness) while boys externalize, and internalizers are rarely flagged for school-based intervention. As one researcher noted, girls are often perceived as "academic superstars using perfectionism to cope with significant underlying distress" (Weist, 2018).

Improving how adults identify these signals is only half the work. There is a growing need to improve the skills and mechanisms by which mental health challenges are identified in girls; but so is the need to nurture preventative factors. The shift from intervention to prevention rests on youth–adult relationships (Sieving, 2017) - strong parent-child bonds, trusted adults at school, and mentors in out-of-school settings.

Death by suicide is **the second leading cause of death** among young people in Delmarva, ages 10-19.

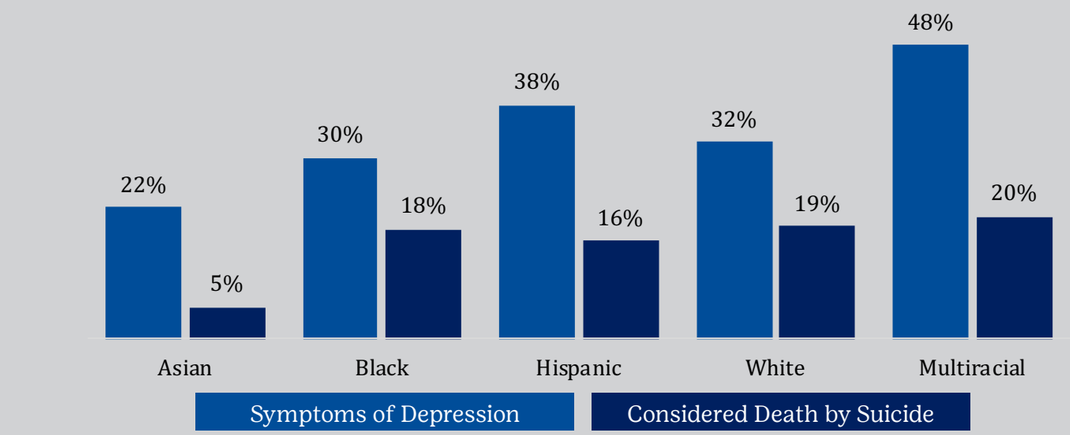
DATA HIGHLIGHT: RACE & ETHNICITY

Emotional Wellbeing

Mental health challenges among high school girls are slightly more pronounced among certain race or ethnicity groups. Girls who identify with more than one race are twice as likely to report experiencing symptoms of depression compared to girls identifying as Asian. Similarly, the suicidality rate is 4x higher among multiracial girls compared to girls identify as Asian.

Girls identifying as multiracial are more likely to report experiencing signs of depression and suicidal ideation.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



The suicidality rate of Black or African American high school girls has **doubled in 10 years.**

Adverse Childhood Experiences

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

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

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

The landmark ACEs study in 1998 found that children who are subject to four or more ACEs are up to 12 times more likely to experience consequences, such as alcohol and drug abuse, or chronic diseases, such as cancer and diabetes (Felitti, 1998). While data measuring that level of prevalence is not available for Delmarva youth, available data shows that high school girls report experiencing adverse childhood experiences more than boys across nearly every reported measure.



1 in 4

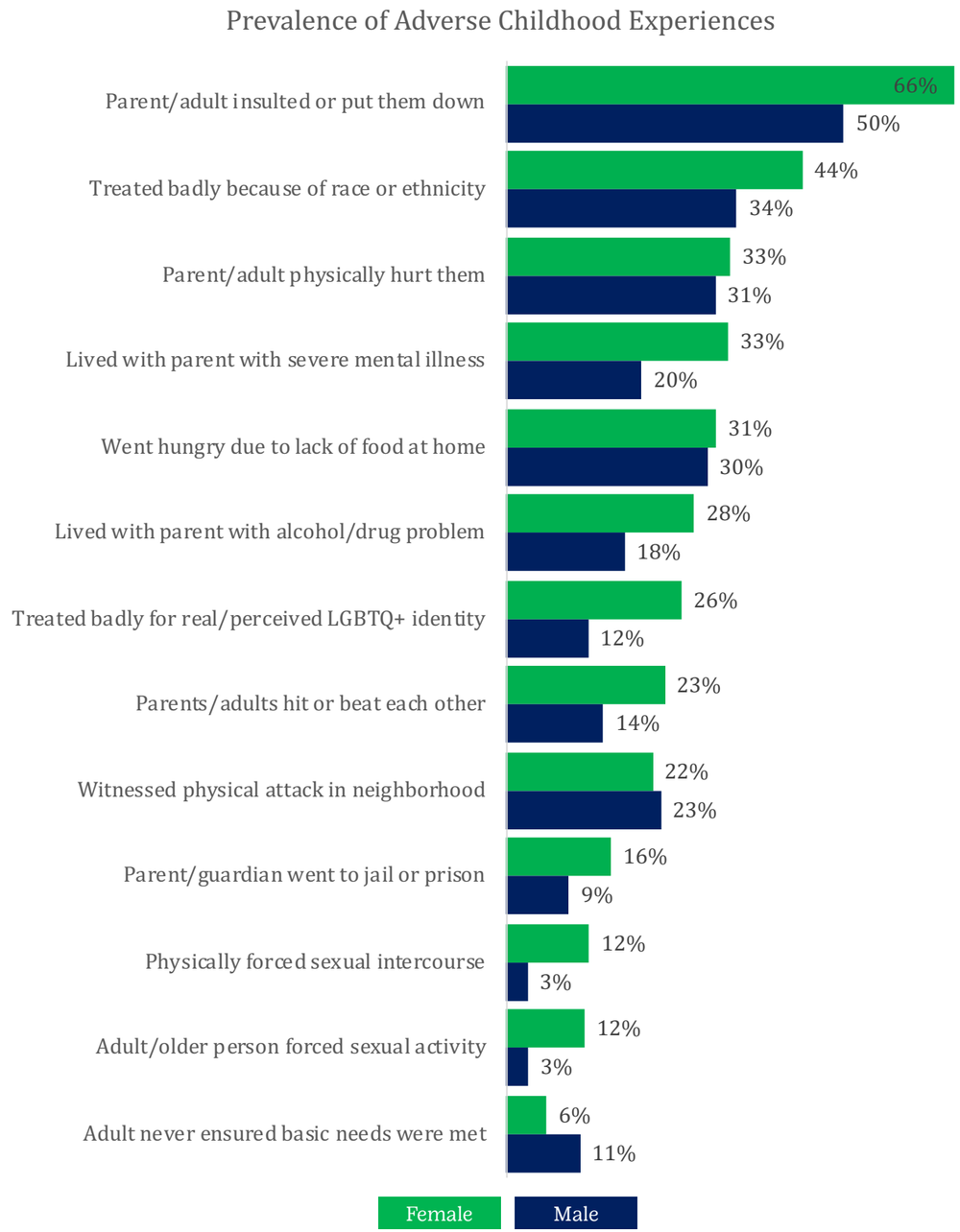
high school girls has seriously considered death by suicide in the last year.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, continued.

In nearly every measured category, high school girls report higher rates of adverse childhood experiences compared to boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



Access to Mental Health Care

Decades of research demonstrate that youth–adult connectedness is a key protective factor for adolescent health. The presence of caring, non-parental adults reduce the prevalence and severity of mental health challenges (Sieving, 2017), yet 1 out 4 high school girls in Delaware report they would not talk with an adult about a serious personal problem.

The absence of such an adult relationship leaves Delmarva girls without one of the strongest known buffers against depression, anxiety, and self-harm.



27%

of high school girls in Delmarva would not talk with anyone about a serious personal problem - a rate nearly 2x higher than a decade ago.

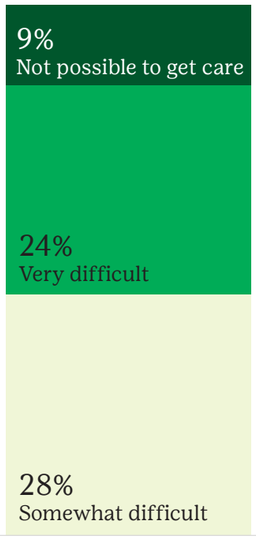
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

When parents do seek mental health care for their daughters, they encounter system-level barriers. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, 62% of parents of girls ages 3 to 17 in Delaware report having difficulty accessing mental health care for their daughter, with 1 in 4 finding it very difficult or impossible to obtain treatment.

Delays in early intervention for youth displaying mental health challenges often produce long-term consequences. **Youth are more likely to require more intensive, costly services later if left untreated**, and display a higher prevalence of major depressive episodes in adulthood (Vucenovic, 2023).

For girls in the region already at elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and self-harm, system-level barriers to care compound the individual crisis.

Difficulty obtaining mental health treatment, reported by parents



Delaware Girls

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Caring Adults. Lifesaving Relationships.

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

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

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

Girl Scouts presents families with an opportunity to participate in an activity together, while also introducing new caring adults into the lives of girls, expanding their network of support. For a generation navigating pressures no adult had at their age, one more caring, consistent voice in the room is not a nice-to-have - it is a protective factor with a research base.



93%

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

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, and programs which enable the pursuit of education after high school.

Key Facts: Academic Performance

- **Girls outperform boys in English Language Arts assessments.** Still, more than half do not achieve proficiency in the subject.
- **Less than one-third of girls in Delaware achieve proficiency in math.** Math performance fell significantly since the learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **1 out of 4 girls in Delaware achieves proficiency in Science.** The rate is similar to that of boys, yet reflects the need for progress.
- **The dropout rate has quadrupled since the low of 2019.** Nearly 4% of girls dropout of high school, up from under 1% in 2019.

K-12 Academic Performance

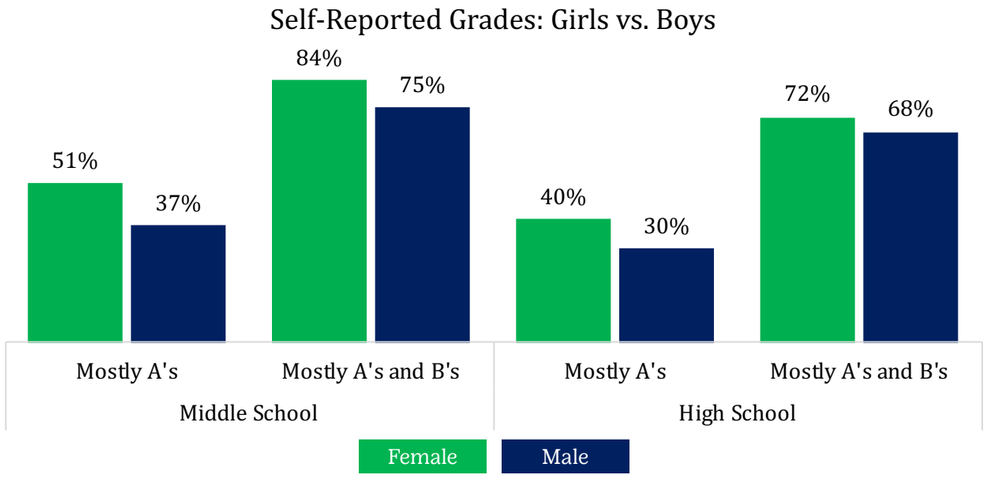
Education is the gateway to economic opportunity, civic participation, and lifelong wellbeing. For girls on the Delmarva Peninsula, academic performance reveals a story of both strength and challenge. Girls consistently outperform boys in English Language Arts, earn higher grades, graduate at higher rates, and are more engaged in school. At the same time, a persistent and widening gender gap in mathematics, dramatic learning losses from the COVID-19 pandemic, and a sharp recent increase in dropout rates signal areas of concern that demand attention.

The data in this section primarily pertains only to the state of Delaware as state-to-state education data are incomparable.

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

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

Girls self-report receiving better grades than their male peers.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



K-12 Student Achievement

The Delaware System of Student Assessment, referred to as DeSSA, measures students' proficiency in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students receive a numeric score that places them in one of four achievement levels. Notable differences in academic performance between girls and boys underscore how inconsistent academic development is for youth in the state.

Overall, a noticeable 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.

Indicates on- or above-grade-level.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Minimal / Below	**Partial / Basic**	**Proficient / Meets**	**Exceeds / Advanced**
A student's performance in the tested domain shows minimal understanding and evidence of an inability to apply the fundamental skills and knowledge articulated in the Delaware content standards.	A student's performance in the tested domain shows a partial or incomplete understanding of the fundamental skills and knowledge articulated in the Delaware content standards.	A student's performance in the tested domain indicates an understanding of the fundamental skills and knowledge articulated in the Delaware content standards. Students in this category show mastery and have adequate understanding of the Delaware content standards at grade level.	A student's performance in the tested domain goes well beyond the fundamental skills and knowledge required for students to be at adequate understanding. Students in this category show mastery and thorough understanding of the Delaware content standards beyond what is expected at the grade level.



74%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts feel **more confident at school** because of Girl Scouts.

K-12 Proficiency: English Language Arts

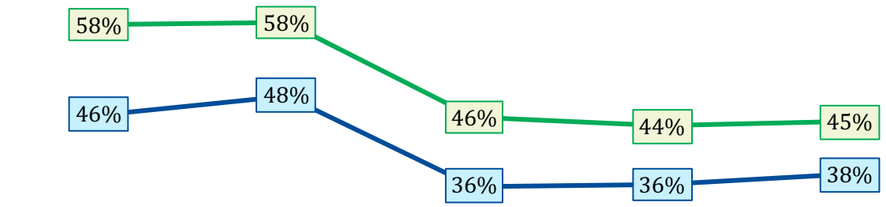
Girls in Delaware consistently outperform boys in English Language Arts, though both genders have experienced substantial declines since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024-2025, 45% of girls scored proficient or above in ELA compared with 38% of boys, a 7-point gap. This gap, while significant, has actually narrowed from 12 points in 2014-2015, driven primarily by steeper declines among girls.

The timeline reveals a clear inflection point. Prior to the pandemic, ELA proficiency rates were relatively stable: 58% for girls and 46% for boys in 2014-2015, with similar rates through 2018-2019. The 2020-2021 school year brought a devastating decline: girls' proficiency fell to 46% and boys' to 36%. While the narrowing gender gap might appear positive, it reflects the fact that girls' proficiency fell 13 points compared with 12 points for boys. Four years later, neither group has recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Girls consistently out-perform boys in English Language Arts; yet still experienced significant learning loss during COVID-19.

Delaware Department of Education, Assessment Performance Data, 2014-2015 through 2024-2025.

English Language Arts Proficiency 10-Year Trend



Less than half
of girls in Delaware achieve proficiency in English Language Arts.

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Academic Success: Lifelong Impact

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

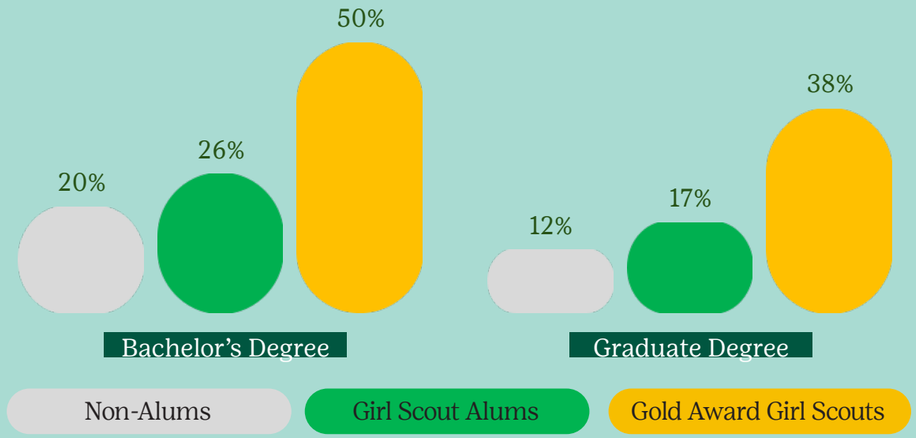
First, Girl Scouts doesn't feel like school, and that's the point! Girls learn skills they won't find in a classroom (like entrepreneurship) through immersive programs (like the renowned Girl Scout Cookie Program). These experiences are based on experiential, hands-on activities that build skills, curiosity,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



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

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

Highest Education Completed



K-12 Proficiency: Mathematics

A prevailing stereotype suggests that girls excel in ELA while under-performing in math, often attributed to inherent developmental differences. Multiple studies have established that these disparities are more influenced by social pressures and instructional biases than by biological factors. As an example, countries with the largest gender gaps in STEM assessments present the most overt gender stereotypes (Kuchynka, 2022).

Social pressures also contribute to achievement gaps. Research from the American Association of University Women 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.

Not until the COVID-19 pandemic did this national trend present itself in Delaware. The proficiency difference between girls and boys shifted from +0.6% to -4.2%. The pandemic saw both groups drop dramatically, but boys recovered faster, and the gap has widened every year since.

Math proficiency of girls declined by nearly 5 points in the last 10 years, eliminating the positive margin over the performance of male peers.

Delaware Department of Education, Assessment Performance Data, 2014-2015 through 2024-2025.

	Math Proficiency 2014-2015	Math Proficiency 2020-2021	Math Proficiency 2024-2025
Female	39.1%	25.5%	31.7%
Male	38.5%	26.5%	35.9%
Difference	**0.6% Higher**	**1.4% Lower**	**4.2% Lower**



Since COVID-19,

the math achievement gap widened to over 4%

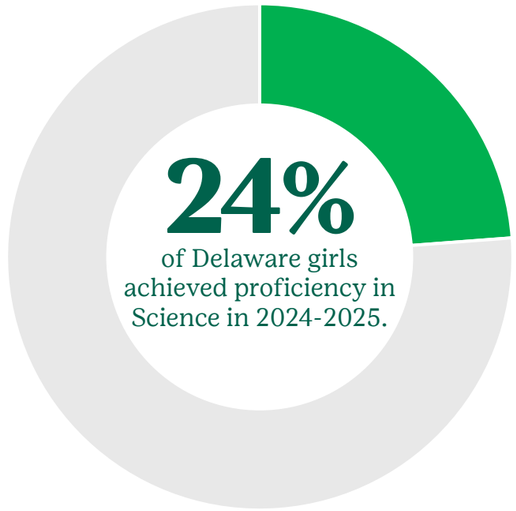
between girls and boys in Delaware. 10 years prior, girls out-performed boys.

K-12 Proficiency: Science

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

The DeSSA Science and Social Studies assessments, introduced in 2021-2022, provide a more recent snapshot of the proficiency challenges the nation is facing. Of little importance is the variance between proficiency levels between girls and boys. Of utmost importance is the state's proficiency in science: **fewer than 1 in 4 girls and boys achieved proficiency in science in 2024-2025.**

Proficiency in Science among Girls



24%

of Delaware girls achieved proficiency in Science in 2024-2025.



70%

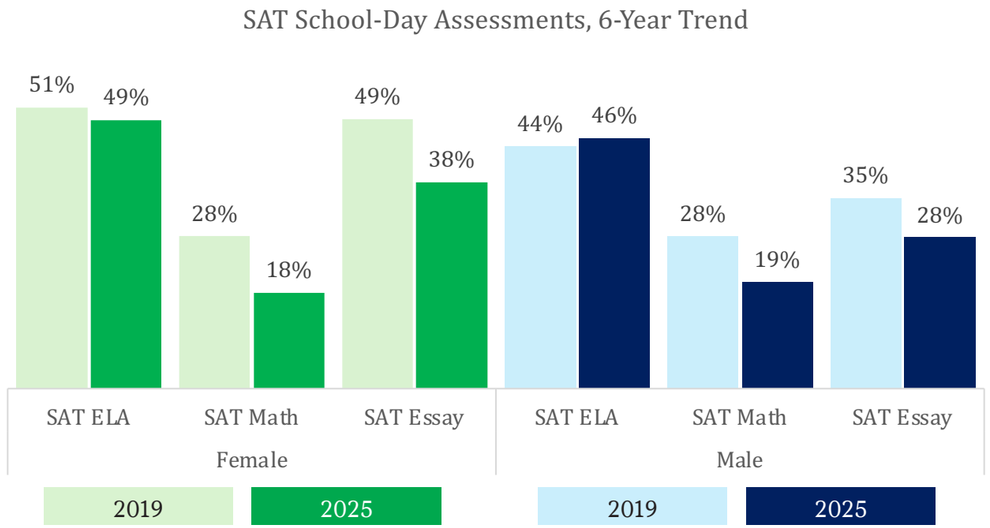
of Delmarva Girl Scouts are a leader in more activities because of Girl Scouts.

SAT School-Day Assessments

The SAT School-Day, administered to all Delaware 11th graders, serves as a key measure of college readiness. In 2024-2025, girls outperformed boys in SAT ELA (+3.4%) and the SAT Essay (+10.1%), but trailed in SAT Math (-1.9%). Most notably, students in the state across both genders experienced significant declines in performance since the 2019 assessment year. The math decline is particularly alarming: girls lost more than 10 points of proficiency in just six years, translating to a significant reduction in college readiness.

High school girls are experiencing lower performance on SAT School-Day assessments than pre-COVID.

Delaware Department of Education, Assessment Performance Data, 2014-2015 through 2024-2025.





70%

of girls have thought seriously about their careers by ninth grade.

Girl Scouts of the USA, 2026 State of the Girl Report.

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Nurturing STEM Leaders

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

STEM Interest
A positive affect and curiosity towards STEM.

STEM Confidence
Feelings of self-efficacy in relation to STEM.

STEM Competence
Ability to think scientifically when working to solve a problem.

STEM Value
Understanding the role STEM plays in making the world a better place.

A 2022 study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute found that girls who participate in just one STEM event grow in all four STEM outcomes, **including two-thirds of teenage Girl Scouts expressing an interest in a STEM career.**

By comparison, a study released by Junior Achievement found that only 9% of all teen girls share a similar interest in STEM. ***That's* the Girl Scout difference.**

63%

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

58%

of Delmarva Girl Scouts completed a STEM activity like building robots or designing video games.

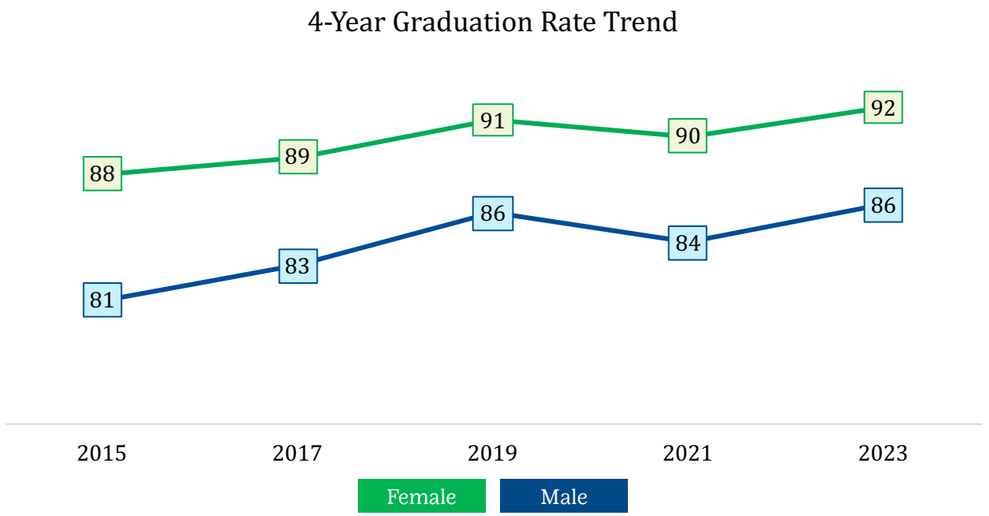


Graduation Rate

Graduation rates represent one of the strongest academic outcomes for Delaware girls. In 2023, 5% more girls than boys achieved a 4-year graduation rate. **Over the course of the last decade, students in Delaware have meaningfully improved their high school graduation rate**, with girls graduating at a higher rate than boys in every year.

Both girls and boys have achieved meaningful improvements in the 4-year graduation rate.

Delaware Department of Education, Student Graduation Data, 2015 through 2023.



The differences in graduation rates between girls and boys in Delaware are consistent with national trends. The Brookings Institution's analysis of the substantial gender gap in high school graduation rates – consistently 6 percentage points nationally – finds that **high school girls put greater effort into school because of differential social costs faced by boys and girls** (Reeves & Kalkat, 2023).

Boys report negative social outcomes for trying hard and performing well in school, while girls report positive social outcomes for working harder, putting more effort into homework, and placing more personal value on academic achievement (Workman & Heyder, 2020). Differences in graduation rates, in other words, reflect differences in the social expectations placed on girls and boys.

58%

of high school girls do not believe they are smart enough for their dream job.

Girl Scouts of the USA, 2026 State of the Girl Report.

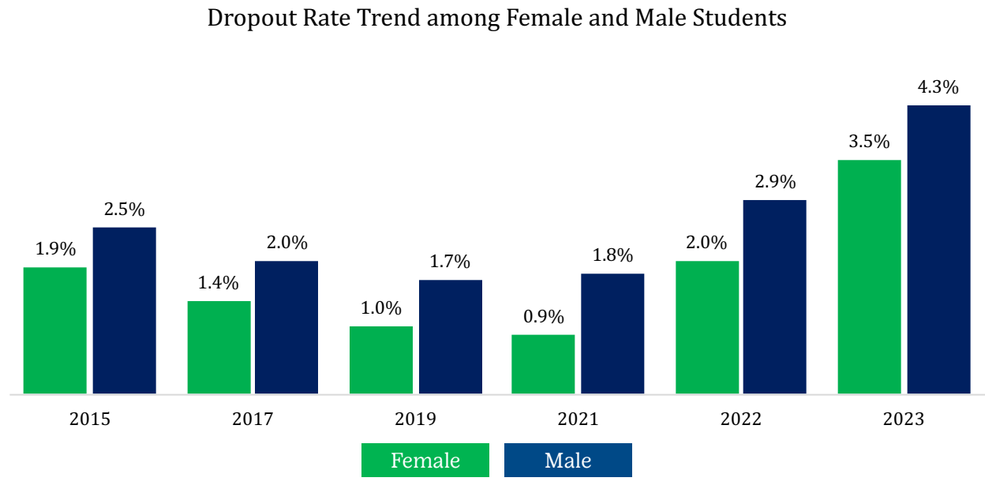
Dropout Rates

While graduation rates have improved, dropout rates have spiked in the most recent data. In 2023, 4% of girls dropped out, up from a decade low of 0.9% in 2021. The 2022 and 2023 school years saw dramatic increases: the girl dropout rate nearly quadrupled from its 2021 low, and the boy rate more than doubled.

This spike coincides with the post-pandemic period and may reflect delayed effects of disrupted schooling, mental health challenges, and economic pressures. Prior to the pandemic, dropout rates had been on a steady downward trajectory. The reversal is sharp and unprecedented in the available data.

The dropout rate for girls nearly quadrupled between 2021 and 2023, erasing a decade of progress.

Delaware Department of Education, Student Dropout Data, 2015 through 2023.



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Future Possibilities

Girl Scouts gives girls permission to be beginners - to pick up a tool, try a skill, or stand in front of a room for the first time knowing they might stumble. What makes the experience different is that stumbling isn't the end of the story.

Over time, girls stop measuring themselves by whether they got it right and start measuring themselves by whether they showed up. That quiet shift, from fearing failure to expecting growth, is one of the most powerful things Girl Scouts builds.

1 in 2

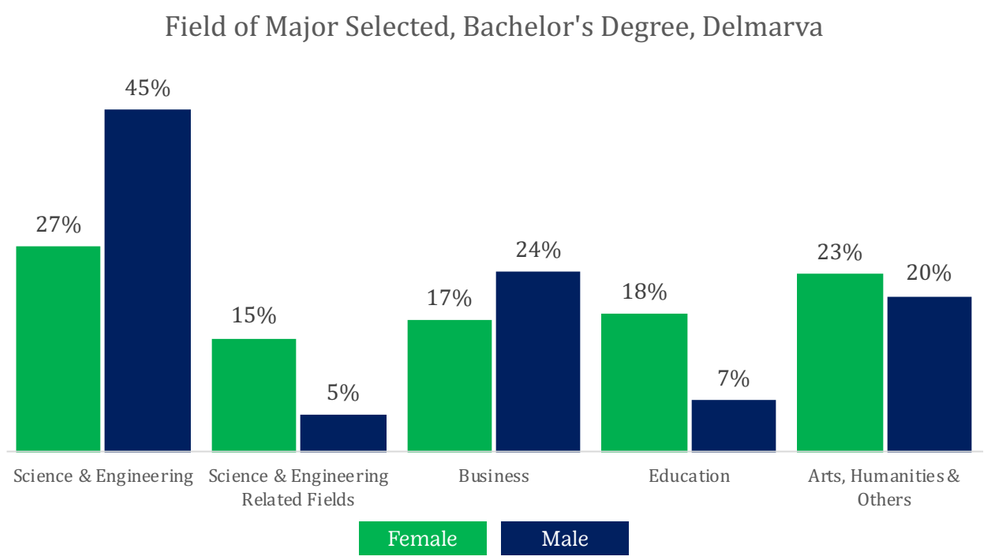
Delmarva Girl Scouts tries new things even when she's afraid of making mistakes.

College and Career Readiness, continued.

Despite achieving similar levels of proficiency in science as boys, girls are selecting STEM fields at an alarmingly low rate. 16% fewer women select STEM as their first major when entering college – a fact concerning both because achieving representation in these fields increases the female perspective in cutting-edge fields and serves to address a critical gap in the STEM workforce. **As the largest population of college attendees in the region, girls remain the best opportunity to create a large generation of STEM employees needed to advance technology innovation.**

One-third fewer women in the Delmarva region enroll in STEM degree programs compared to men.

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1502: Field of Bachelor's Degree for First Major, 2023.



By 2030, the United States will face a

shortage of 1.4 million STEM workers

concentrated in advanced manufacturing and semiconductors according to the Semiconductor Industry Association (2023).

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Confidence Requires Practice.

The confidence a girl builds in Girl Scouts is not built in a moment - it is built in thousands of small ones.

Every **badge she earns** is evidence she can start something and finish it.

Every **troop meeting she leads** is proof her voice belongs at the table.

Every **hard thing she tries** - a ropes course, a pitched Cookie booth, a Bronze Award project - teaches her that difficulty is a place she can survive.

These are the years in which a girl's sense of self hardens into something durable, and research from the Girl Scout Research Institute confirms that what she builds in the troop room does not stay there.

The Girl Scout Alum Study finds that women who spent seven or more years as Girl Scouts report higher life satisfaction, higher educational attainment, and greater civic participation into their twenties and thirties than peers who never joined the program.

The girl who learns at ten that she is *capable* of hard things becomes the woman at thirty who *does* hard things.



86%

of Delmarva Girl Scouts agree:

"I am glad I'm me."

SOCIAL WELLNESS



Robust ecosystems of support including strong family units and opportunities to engage with the social fabric of their communities help girls build social skills and connections needed to thrive. In these environments, girls learn their intrinsic worth and receive necessary support to navigate social situations. Disruptions to this social network such as childhood trauma, poverty, or substance abuse in the family can create lifelong challenges.

Key Facts: Social Wellbeing

- **Girls are bullied at higher rates than boys across every measure.** 45% of girls have experienced bullying in-person at school compared with 32% of boys.
- **Less than half of high school girls feel close to people at school.** Boys are more likely to feel closer to people at school than girls.
- **2 out of 3 high school girls do not have an adult to talk with about their feelings.**

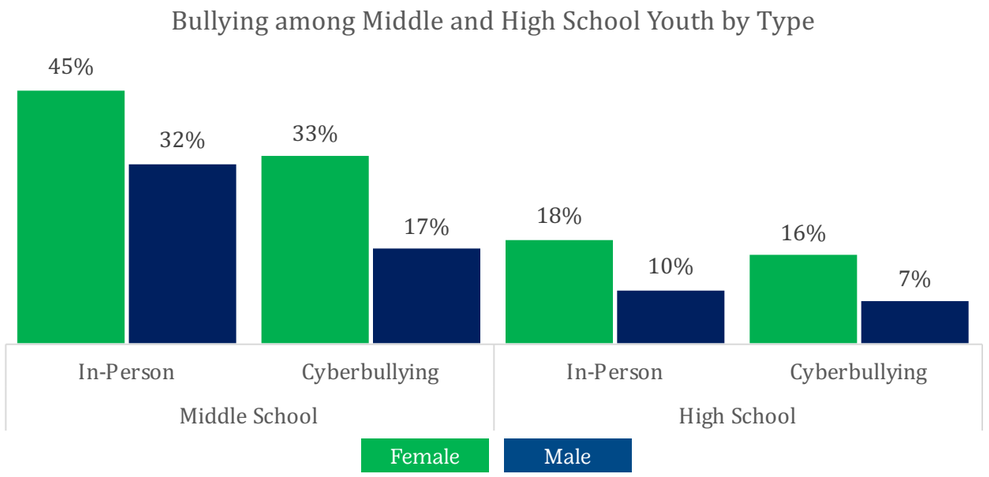
Bullying

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

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

Although in-person bullying has modestly declined over the last decade, it remains one of the most consequential social challenges facing girls in the Delmarva region. In high school, **twice as many girls report being bullied on school property compared to boys** (18% vs 9%). In middle school, the rates are far higher: 45% of girls reported ever being bullied on school property, compared with 32% of boys. Rates in some Eastern Shore counties are even more pronounced, such as Kent County where 30% of high school girls report bullying on school property.

Girls in Delaware experience bullying more than boys at every age level, in both cyberbullying spaces and in-person spaces.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

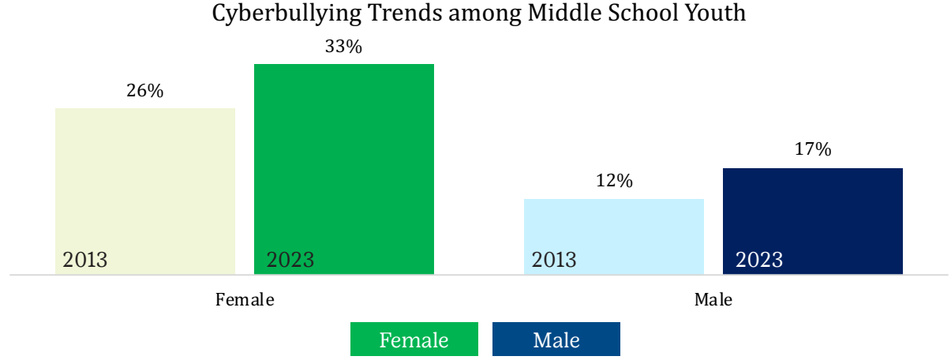


Bullying, continued.

The rate of cyberbullying among middle school girls has surged over the last decade (from 26% to 33%), the only bullying metric that has increased during this time period. As these interactions migrated to online channels, schools and parents have struggled to identify and mitigate it. One of the most devastating attributes of cyberbullying is its private yet pervasive nature: it can remain nearly invisible to adults while infiltrating her most important social networks (Horner, 2015).

Middle school girls in Delaware are twice as likely as boys to experience cyberbullying, with 1 in 3 reporting instances of bullying. Research on the enduring nature of online content – content that can be viewed repeatedly and shared widely – finds particularly devastating emotional, social, and physical impacts on victims of cyber-bullying (Horner, 2015). When youth are targeted based on real or perceived aspects of their identity, the negative consequences are amplified: bias-based bullying – whether related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, weight, or appearance – produces higher levels of emotional, social, physical, and academic distress than bullying without an identity-based dimension (Bayram Özdemir, 2024).

Rates of middle school youth experiencing cyberbullying have increased significantly over the last decade, now an experience of 1 in 3 girls.
Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



The majority of teen girls who use social media say they've been contacted by unwanted strangers online.

Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media, and AI Chatbots", 2025.

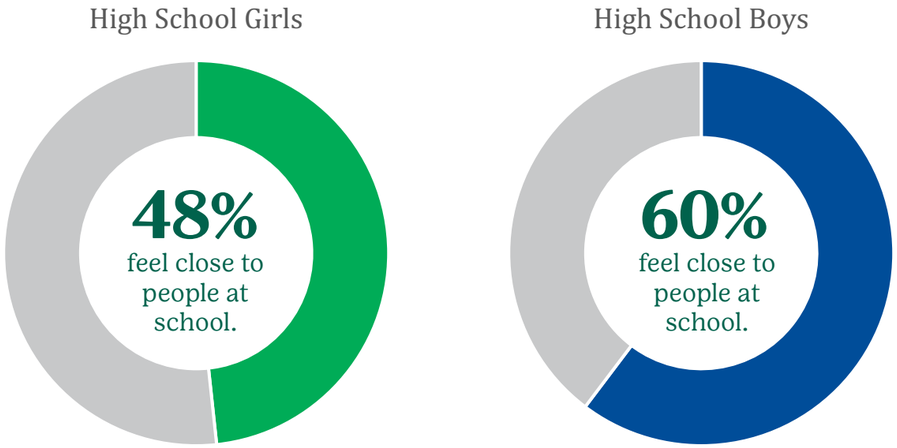
Social Connection: Peer Relationships

A girl's sense of belonging in her school environment shapes much more than her daily comfort. Decades of research demonstrate that youth–adult connectedness and school attachment serve as key protective factors for adolescent health, predicting better mental health, stronger academic engagement, and lower rates of risky behavior (Sieving, 2017).

When connection breaks down – when girls feel that their peers do not respect them, that new students are not welcomed, or that they themselves do not fit in – the consequences extend well beyond the social and into academic and emotional domains.

Less than half of high school girls feel close to people at school - a rate 12-points lower than that of high school boys.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.



Adolescents who feel they do not belong at school face serious and well-documented consequences across academic, psychological, and social domains – consequences that land with a particular force on girls. A landmark longitudinal study tracking over 1,500 participants from adolescence into adulthood found that low school belonging at ages 15–16 was associated with elevated depression, anxiety, and stress that persisted into young adulthood (Allen, 2024). In other words, the effects of not fitting in are enduring beyond a child's teenage years.



65%
of girls who use voice-assisted devices see them as a friend.

Girl Scouts of the USA, Survey: Girls and Artificial Intelligence, 2026.

GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Sisterhood, IRL

At a time when one in two high school girls does not feel close to people at school, the question of whether she belongs is not academic. It is the question that shapes her afternoon, her weekend, and increasingly, the phone in her hand.

Girl Scouts answers that question in one of the oldest and simplest ways available: with a room full of girls who have already agreed, in the Girl Scout Promise and Law, to treat each other as sisters. **Welcome is not implied in a troop: it is the entry condition.**

Research from the Girl Scout Research Institute confirms that all-girl environments produce measurably better outcomes for adolescent girls: better mental health, more academic risk-taking, and greater willingness to try new things.

In a season of American girlhood when belonging is scarce, a Girl Scout troop is where she can count on finding it.

97%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts say:

"I can be myself in Girl Scouts."



Social Connection: Peer Relationships, continued

Undeniably, digital spaces play a complicated role in the social connections for girls in the Delmarva region. Although the prevalence of cyberbullying is evidence of just one of the many documented downsides of social media, a full picture of the digital landscape requires also naming what girls gain from digital life.

For many girls on the Delmarva peninsula, particularly those in rural counties, in under-resourced schools, or in communities without local access to specialized services, digital access is the mechanism that delivers what proximity does not. She uses her phone to research colleges her family has not visited, to find scholarship programs and application deadlines, and to connect with communities of interest that are simply not present in her physical geography.

For girls whose identities are underrepresented in their local environments, including LGBTQ+ girls, girls of color in majority-white schools, and girls with disabilities, **online communities provide a validated sense of belonging and access to peer support** that has documented protective effects on mental health. Digital tools deliver educational content, career exposure, and civic-participation opportunities at a scale unavailable to any prior generation.



60%

of high school girls in Delaware would not talk with their friends about a serious problem in their lives.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Delaware, 2023.

A multitude of beneficial social outcomes from the use of digital devices and social media have been reported by researchers and first-person from girls themselves.

- **51%** of Black girls use YouTube to explore interests or learn new things[1]
- **41%** of girls find AI to be more helpful with homework than their parents[2]
- **68%** of teen girls report using social media to show their creative side[3]
- **38%** of Hispanic girls use Instagram to take action on issues they cares about [1]
- **57%** of teen girls find people to support them through tough times on social media[3]

[1] *Common Sense Media, 2023* | [2] *Girl Scouts of the USA, 2026* | [3] *Pew Research Center, 2025*

Social Connection: Adult Support

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

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

The majority of teens report not having an adult to talk with about their feelings - more than two-thirds of high school girls.



Two out of three high school girls report never or only sometimes having an adult to talk with about their feelings.

In addition to the benefits of mentorship for youth, research also indicates the evolving nature of positive mentor relationships. Studies show the solution to creating a wider network of support for girls in Delmarva does not require formal, long-term mentor relationships.

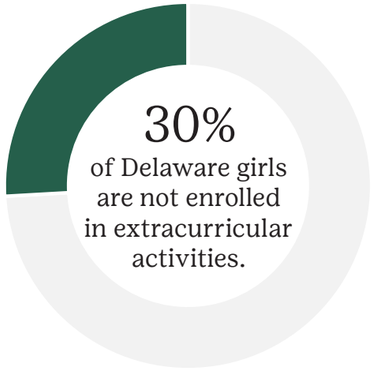
In fact, recent studies demonstrate short-term relationships with adult mentors can serve as transitional support through specific periods of time or targeted support to meet specific objectives (Cavell, 2021).

Out-of-School Involvement

Participation in afterschool programs and organized activities is an important component of a young person's social development. Outside the classroom, these experiences offer youth opportunities to practice social skills, build supportive peer relationships, and develop the personal characteristics that contribute to long-term success. Research demonstrates that high-quality out-of-school programs accelerate students' academic performance and contribute to improvements in mental and physical health.

In Delaware, nearly 1 in 3 girls is not involved in any out-of-school activity. For the girls who do participate, the type of activity varies: girls participate in clubs and lessons at higher rates than boys, but are less likely to participate in sports.

According to Delaware After 3 PM, a report of The Afterschool Alliance, 53% of children in Delaware would participate in an afterschool program if one were available – a rise of over 13% in a decade (Afterschool Alliance, 2025). **Parents also recognize the benefits: nearly 9 out of 10 families with children in afterschool programs recognize their children building life skills like social skills and decision making.** The significant portion of Delaware youth experiencing barriers to access in afterschool programming will miss out on this important protective factor.



2 out of 3 families report cost as a barrier to participation in afterschool programming.

Delaware After 3 PM 2025, The Afterschool Alliance.

Program Cost	Inconvenient Locations	Lack of Reliable Transportation	Programs Unavailable
63%	**53%**	**49%**	**39%**

73% of Delmarva Girl Scouts say:

"It's important to me to make a difference in my community."



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Business & Service: **Both, Not Either**

For a generation of girls told to pick a lane: earn or give, hustle or contribute, career or calling. **Girl Scouts refuses the choice**. In the same program year, the same girl runs a business and improves a neighborhood.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program is the largest girl-led entrepreneurship program in the world. Every year, a Delmarva girl sets a sales goal, greets a stranger at a booth, tracks inventory, budgets her troop's earnings, and negotiates when things go wrong. The skills she practices there - setting a goal, making a plan, keeping a promise - are the same ones she will use in her 20s at a first job or a first company.

In the same troop, in the same year, she is also planning service projects for the animal shelter down the road, the elementary school her sister attends, the neighborhood park that needs a hand. **Community service is not the polite cover for entrepreneurship. It is the parallel curriculum in what her business skills are ultimately for.**

Girl Scouts is what happens when a girl learns to run a business in the same community she volunteers to improve.



72%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts completed community service.

92%
of Delmarva Girl Scouts ran their own business through the Girl Scout Cookie Program.

CALL TO ACTION: DEMOGRAPHICS

Collect Girl Data

This report was made possible because agencies collect and publish youth data by sex. Yet many important data sources still cannot be disaggregated by gender, and county data across the three-state region of the Delmarva peninsula remains incomplete. Continued investment in girl-specific data collection is a precondition for continued progress.

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

Data Availability. Curators of youth data hold a special responsibility to publish data in publicly accessible formats. Data without gatekeeping.

Delmarva Specific. States must invest in county-level girl-specific data on emerging issues to uniquely understand the Delmarva peninsula.



CALL TO ACTION - PHYSICAL

Trusting Her Body

The physical health of Delmarva girls depends on the environments and resources around them - the places she moves, the meals she eats, the messages she hears (and sees). Building healthy girls will require adults to secure the physical, nutritional, and safety conditions that let her trust her own body.

Movement. Girls engage in less physical activity than boys. We must protect movement time in schools and model movement as a daily habit.

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

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



CALL TO ACTION - EMOTIONAL

Adults Who Care

The crisis of mental and emotional health challenges for girls in the Delmarva region requires community-wide investments, but not necessarily in the extension of professional services. The most protective intervention research has ever documented is not a policy or a program - it is a caring, consistent adult in her life.

Show Up. Girls benefit when the adults in their daily lives can be present, attentive, and easy to bring a hard message to without fear of being minimized or judged.

Get Trained. Seek out training and research that recognizes girl-specific symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental or emotional challenges - often internalized beliefs vs externalized behaviors.

Normalize. Girls must grow up in a state where conversations about mental health are neither remarkable nor stigmatized. Girls need to see that talking about how she feels is a normal part of growing up.



CALL TO ACTION: ACADEMIC

Science Proficiency

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

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

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

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



CALL TO ACTION - SOCIAL

Safe Online Spaces

Delmarva's girls are the first generation for whom the online life is not optional. The most protective adult response is neither surveillance nor surrender: it is participation, media literacy, and platform advocacy that meets girls where they already live. The efforts girls make to maintain a digital persona will not benefit from the judgment of adults, but their curiosity and wisdom.

Learn the Platforms. Adults must become literate in the digital spaces where girls spend their time - not to surveil, but to understand what she encounters and to help her navigate it.

Critical Consumption. Media literacy - the ability to recognize the role of algorithms, identify manipulated images, and question online truths - must be part of developmental learning.

Create Community. In a region where distance and rural geography limit where girls can physically gather, connect girls to safe, moderated, age-appropriate digital spaces designed for her development - not her data.



CALL TO ACTION - SOCIAL

Her People, Her Place

By many accounts, Delmarva girls belong to the loneliest generation on record. Still, their fundamental needs for social development remain unchanged - having a small, consistent group of peers who know her, and a place outside her home and classroom where she is free to try, fail, and try again.

Her Circle. Every girl needs a consistent peer group where the terms of belonging are agreed and stable - not a friend group re-negotiated in the school hallway every week - protecting against isolation and bullying.

Her Space. Communities should invest in accessible, affordable, and welcoming programs that invite every girl into a safe space beyond her bedroom and classroom.

Room to Try. In these spaces, girls need permission to attempt things she cannot attempt at school - take a real risk, fail visibly, change her mind about who she is going to be - without social and school consequences.



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She counts on us.
We count on you.

Every data point in this report represents a real girl on the Delmarva Peninsula - one who deserves adults willing to champion her potential.

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

Volunteer.
Girls need caring adult mentors to prepare them for life.

Donate.
Fund a girl's future with a gift to Girl Scouts of the Chesapeake Bay.

Collaborate.
Create meaningful experiences for girls in Delmarva.

Discover more at www.gscb.org.