

Showdown at Gender Gap Academic Battle of the Sexes: Trumped Up or True?

Briefly

Female students have tightened or closed the achievement gap in several academic areas where they once lagged behind male classmates.¹ Although the gender gap has ignited major national dialog, it's no new phenomenon. One researcher cites 1992 as the tipping point, claiming after that year, on average, "females possess a significant advantage on most central educational outcome indicators."² In reporting recent gains that girls have made in the classroom, some media interpret statistics as "scores" in a competitive battle of the sexes—boys vs. girls—with girls emerging as the winners. They point to selected data to bolster their case:

- A higher percentage of girls (80%) than boys (73%) can recognize words by sight in first grade.³
- By the time they are high school seniors, girls outscore boys by 16 points on the National Assessment of Education Progress writing test.⁴
- While boys perform slightly better than girls in science at most grade levels, girls have eliminated the gap by their senior year.⁵

- Nationally, as calculated by the Manhattan Institute, 72% of female students and 65% of male students graduated from high school.
- The gender gap in graduation rates is even more evident for minority students; in 2003: 59% of African-Americans females graduated, while only 48% of African-American males graduated; 58% of Hispanic females graduated compared with 49% of Hispanic males.⁶
- In 1970, women comprised 42% of college undergraduates; by 2000, they made up 56% of the undergraduate population.⁷
- In 1970, women earned 5% of law degrees and 8% of medical degrees; in 2001, those numbers increased to 47% of law degrees and 43% of medical degrees.⁸

Others view the data differently and see no contest between genders. They congratulate women for their progress and insist one gender's success doesn't necessarily translate into the other gender's failure.

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¹ Freeman, C.E. 2004. *Trends in Educational Equity of Girls & Women: 2004*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Note: All statistics cited from this report are significant at the .05 level.

² Riordan, C. 1999. "The Silent Gender Gap." *Education Week*. Vol. 19, Issue 12, p. 46.

³ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

⁴ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

⁵ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

⁶ Greene, J.P. and Winters, M.A. 2006. *Leaving Boys Behind: Public High School Graduation Rates*. Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

⁷ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

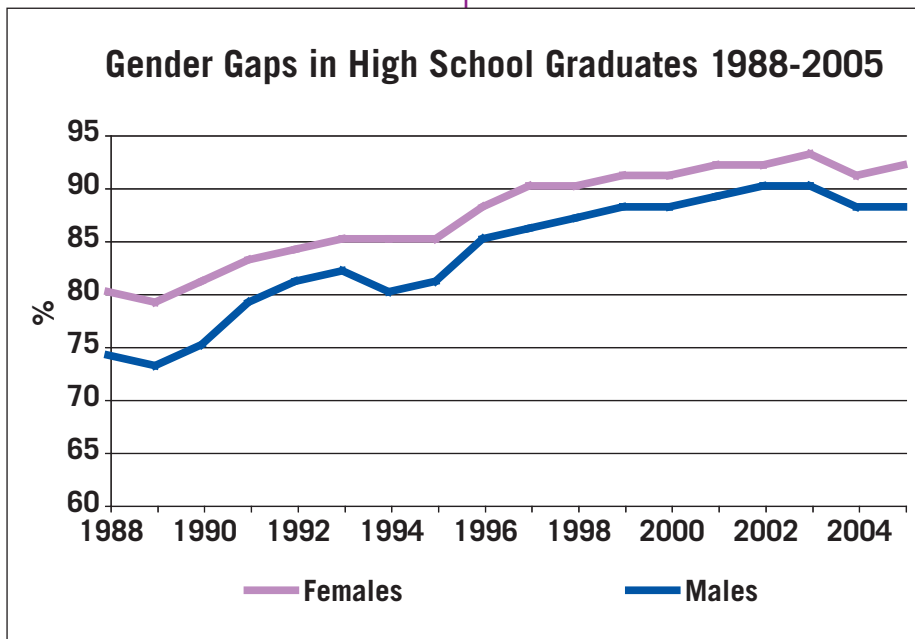
⁸ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

What about Indiana?

In Indiana, gender gaps exist in both directions depending on academic subjects and students' ages. Some assessments show no significant gaps at all. As examples, ISTEP scores indicate:⁹

- The percentages of male and female students who pass the ISTEP language arts exam in grades 3 and 6 are higher than in 1999, and the gender gap in 2006 was no different than seven years ago.
- Scores on the ISTEP math exams for grades 3, 6 and 8 for boys and girls were higher in 2006 than in 1999. Boys continue to do better than girls, but the gap between the genders has remained relatively constant.
- Despite these mixed ISTEP scores, nationally, boys continue to score higher than girls on Advanced Placement exams; in Indiana, boys outscore girls on the SAT test in both language arts and math. However, Indiana's SAT scores

may be influenced by the fact that more female students take the SAT (54%) than males (46%), which could mean that only the highest-performing male students take the SAT.¹⁰



- The Indiana gender gap in high school graduates has been an average of 3.7% over the last seven-teen years.
- Although more high school girls in Indiana plan to attend college than boys (55.8% of females to 44.2% of males), enrollment numbers have remained virtually unchanged in the past decade.¹¹ The good news is that college continuation rates among all Hoosiers have increased for the past two decades,¹² and Indiana ranks 10th in the nation for the percentage of

BACHELOR'S DEGREE GRADUATION RATES FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX YEARS AFTER ENROLLMENT*: INDIANA, 1999 COHORT

# of Years from Enrollment to Graduation	Graduation Rates		
	Men	Women	Overall
4 years	32.1%	39.5%	36.1%
5 years	50.2%	54.5%	52.5%
6 years	54.9%	58.3%	56.7%

Source: Education Trust.

*Aggregate graduation rates for first-time full-time bachelor's degree seeking freshmen who started at public and private nonprofit Indiana 4-year degree granting colleges and universities in Fall 1999.

students who enter college after high school graduation.¹³

⁹ All Indiana education data, unless otherwise noted, were provided by the Indiana Department of Education with analysis by the Indiana Youth Institute.

¹⁰ Data from The College Board, www.collegeboard.com.

¹¹ Indiana Pathways to College, www.inpathways.net/male_grads_02.xls citing data from Mortenson, T. Education Trust.

¹² Cited in Gille, S. and Rasmussen, K. 2005. *College Access in Indiana and the United States: A Status Report*. Indiana Pathways to College Network. Indianapolis.

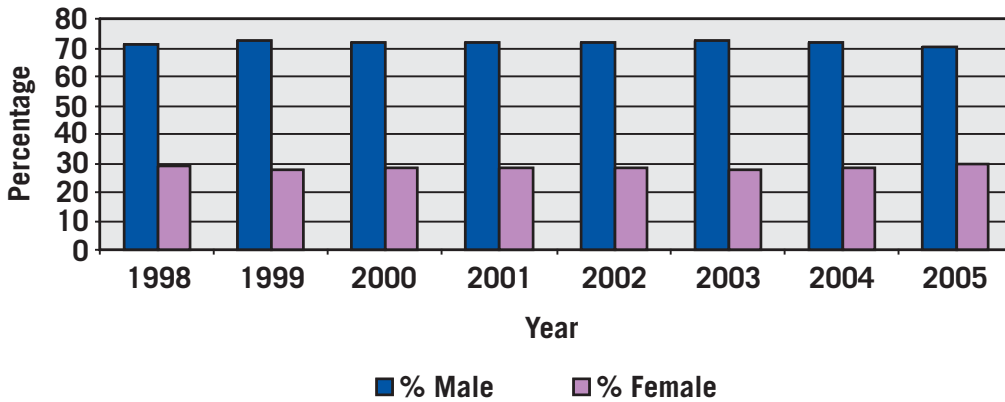
¹³ Gille, S. and Rasmussen, K. 2005.

Behavior and disabilities: The critical gender gap

The more serious gender gap—one with obvious academic fallout—is in the area of behavior and disabilities. A larger number of boys than girls drop out of school, are suspended or expelled, are enrolled in alternative education programs, are diagnosed with learning and developmental

disabilities, and are designated for special education services. In Indiana, males account for almost 68% of public school suspensions and 70% of expulsions. The suspension/expulsion numbers have not improved for either gender in the past several years.

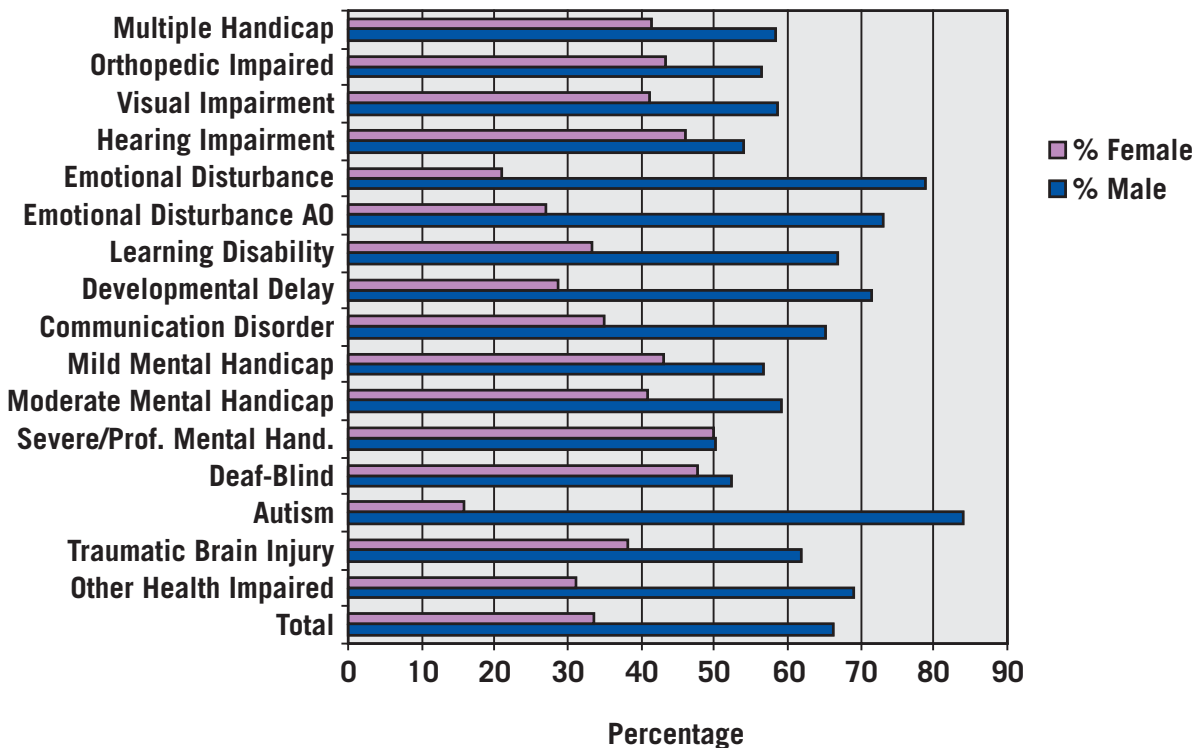
Expulsions: Indiana, 1998-2005



Other troubling statistics include:

- In 2005, of Hoosier students who drop out of school, 60% are male.
- In 2004, 60% of students who repeated grades were male.
- A disproportionate number of students diagnosed with autism, emotional disorders, and developmental delays are boys. It is important to

Special Education Enrollment: Indiana, 2005



note that autism was added as a classification for special education enrollment in the early 1990's. It is unclear how much of this increase is due to changes in how autism is identified and classified, or whether it is due to a true increase in prevalence.¹⁴ Further, it is not understood why boys are diagnosed with autism more frequently than girls.

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Autism Information Center, www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.htm.

- Boys outnumber girls in special education enrollment by a 2:1 ratio; while long-term trend data are unavailable for Indiana, gender differences in special education enrollment are probably long-standing. Nationally, data as far back as 1986 show up to a 2:1 ratio of boys to girls enrolled in special education.¹⁵

Closing the gaps

The academic achievement gaps that exist in today's schools—in Indiana and across the country—are serious and complex. They should not be trivialized or reduced to a “battle of the sexes” competition. No single program or initiative can boost the academic achievement levels of all students. Further, this is not a zero sum game in which one gender “wins” at the expense of the other; neither gender should receive preferential treatment over the other. According to the Education Equity Center, providing additional assistance to boys does not mean attention should be taken away from girls. Rather, gender issues should be addressed in terms of all children.¹⁶ A combination of action steps is necessary to address the multi-faceted problem. Among strategies that may prove successful are:

- Local assessment.** Examine your own school district. In some topics in some grades, one gender might be doing better than the other. In other topics in other grades, the other gender might be doing better. Is the state data on behavioral differences true for your school district? Determine needs and address your unique, local situation accordingly.
- Early intervention.** One of the clearest predictors of adolescents' educational performance is their scholastic performance at young ages.¹⁷ As an example, girls and boys performed similarly on overall mathematics assessments in kindergarten, but by the end of the third grade, boys scored higher (87%) than girls (83%).¹⁸ In developing writing skills, three-fourths of the achievement gap—with girls outperforming boys—is apparent by the fourth grade.¹⁹
- After-school programs.** Consistent participation in high-quality activities over a significant period of time contributes to a decrease in the achievement gaps that exist between children of different races, ethnicities and economic classes.²⁰ Currently, females are more likely to participate in after-school activities, with the exception of athletics.²¹
- Data-driven focus.** Research supports that certain factors increase the risk of academic failure. These criteria include socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, grade-retention history, and neighborhood. Identifying at-risk teens and offering them effective programs can boost academic performance.²² Additionally, accurate data are needed to get a true picture of students' education performance. Indiana recently amended the formula used to calculate graduation rates and track dropouts, which hopefully will result in a more accurate count of dropouts and graduates. Work still needs to be done on reporting standardized test scores and other data.
- College-prep counseling.** More Hoosier girls than boys are taking the necessary steps to enroll in college. Whereas 55% of female high school juniors have completed algebra and geometry classes, only 48% of their male classmates have earned similar credits. Girls outnumber boys by 4% in advanced placement classes. Almost 70% of female juniors have taken the SAT, compared with 56% of the males.²³
- Healthy relationships with caring adults.** All kids benefit from positive relationships with parents, teachers, and after-school youth workers.

¹⁵ Per the Indiana Department of Education, Indiana special education data was collected by gender beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, as required by the 2004 reauthorization of Part B, IDEA (P.L. 108-446): Smith, T.M., Aronstamm Young, B., Bae, Y., Choy, S.P. and Al Salam, N. 1997. *The Condition of Education 1997*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997.

¹⁶ Froschl, M. and Sprung, B. 2005. *Raising and Educating Healthy Boys: A Report on the Growing Crisis in Boys' Education*. Educational Equity Center, Academy for Educational Development. New York.

¹⁷ Redd, Z., Brooks, J., and McGarvey, A. 2002. *Educating America's Youth: What Makes a Difference*. Child Trends Research Brief. Washington D.C.: Child Trends. Available at: www.childtrends.org/Files/K4Brief.pdf

¹⁸ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

¹⁹ Newkirk, T. 2003. “The Quiet Crisis in Boys' Literacy.” *Education Week*, September 10, 2003. As cited in Froschl, M. and Sprung, B. 2005.

²⁰ Miller, B. 2003. *Critical Hours: After-School Programs and Educational Success*. Quincy, Mass.: Nellie Mae Educational Foundation.

²¹ Freeman, C.E. 2004.

²² Redd, Z., Brooks, J., McGarvey, A. 2002.

²³ Indiana Guidance Report. Learn More Indiana Resource Center, 2004.

Resources

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education, is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education. NCES provides national and state education data, and in 2004, published *Trends in Educational Equity of Women & Girls*. This report lists indicators that examine the extent to which males and females have access to the same educational opportunities, avail themselves equally of these opportunities, perform at similar levels throughout schooling, succeed at similar rates, and reap the same benefits from their educational experiences.

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_6/6_4/8_1.asp

Educational Equity Center, Academy for Educational Development is a national nonprofit organization that promotes bias-free learning through innovative programs and materials. EEC's mission is to decrease discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability, and level of family income. The Center provides information, training, and research for educators, administrators and parents, as well as links to organizations that promote equity in education.

www.edequity.org/

Indiana Pathways to College Network (IPCN) is a statewide organization that promotes access to college and successful completion of college for Indiana's youth. IPCN provides information, data, and training on college access and student and institutional performance.

www.inpathways.net/index.htm

Indiana Guidance Report, published by the Learn More Resource Center, is a statewide survey that provides data on education and career expectations, interests, experiences and perceived limitations of students in grades 9 and 11 for school counselors, teachers, educators, administrators and policy makers.

www.learnmoreindiana.org/@counselors/counselors_hs/indiana_guidance_report/

**For additional county data,
visit the Kids Count in Indiana
online database at www.iyi.org.**

Indiana Youth Institute Resources

IYI Weekly Update, a free, electronic newsletter featuring useful information such as training opportunities, free resources, new reports about youth, and a “Grant Tip of the Week.” Subscribe at http://www.iyi.org/weekly_updates/subscribe.asp

Kids Count in Indiana Data Book and online database, including state and county statistics on Indiana children and youth to support grant proposals and program initiatives. Access the database at <http://iyikcdb.iyi.org>

Virginia Beall Ball Library, a free lending library of youth development and nonprofit management materials, which can be borrowed easily by youth workers throughout the state, either on-site, online or through our toll-free main number. Search the catalog or sign up for an account at <http://www.iyi.org/library>

Youth Service Help Line, 877-IYI-TIPS, providing free phone assistance to youth organizations seeking quick answers to questions about fundraising, youth development and legal matters.

Free custom research on Indiana youth.

IYI's Web site, www.iyi.org, an online source for new reports on children, data for grant proposals, information about IYI's programs and library materials, and links to other valuable sources of youth development information.

Regional trainings, taught by nationally regarded instructors, offered at convenient locations across the state, on topics such as fundraising and working with youth.

Professional Development Grants, mini-grants for qualified youth workers to attend their choice of seminars, workshops, and conferences.

Kids Count in Indiana Conference, an annual fall conference designed to give Indiana youth workers the inspiration, networking opportunities, information and tools they need to serve children effectively.

Statewide assistance, providing free local service in all 92 Indiana counties. Call 1-800-343-7060 for information about how to contact the IYI Regional Field Representative near you.



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