



THE 2026 STATE OF THE Georgia Girl Report



Powered by the Girl Scout Councils serving the State of Georgia

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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.

Full of Potential. Poised to Rise.

For more than a century, Girl Scouts has created the space for girls to become leaders - in every community, within every industry, at every level of influence. Across Georgia, our alums shape classrooms, boardrooms, courtrooms, and the community organizations that hold our state together. The girls we serve today are no less determined to make their mark. In fact, many of them already are.

Still, the girls of this generation reach for their potential against a set of circumstances no prior generation has faced. In the pages that follow, you will read that more than half of high school girls in Georgia report symptoms of depression; two in three do not have a caring adult to talk with about their feelings; half of parents cannot access the mental health care their daughters need. You will also read that Georgia girls now graduate high school at a rate of nearly 90% - five points higher than their male peers - and that girls are more likely to enroll in college within sixteen months of graduation compared to young men.

Both truths are real. Girls in Georgia are simultaneously excelling and struggling, and doing both under the weight of academic pressure, mental health strain, and the urge to maintain an in-person *and* online persona unrealized by prior generations.

At Girl Scouts, we sit in a rare position to see the whole picture: the in-person life at school and the online persona; the moments of celebration and the moments of grief; the courage in trying something new and fear of failure. That view, and our bold commitment to ensure every girl in Georgia can reach her full potential, led us to commission the State of the Georgia Girl Report.

Our aim in these pages is not diagnosis but investment. We present the state of girls' wellbeing across physical health, academic success, digital presence, emotional wellness, and social connection so that leaders across Georgia - educators, policymakers, philanthropists, faith communities, employers, and every adult who cares about a girl in her life - have the data and the direction to act.

Girls need adult champions. Girls need investments in their future. Girls need advocates in academia and policy-making. Girls need safe spaces to become the leaders our state is counting on tomorrow.

Girls need you.

Krystal Crawford

Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia

Jai Ferrell

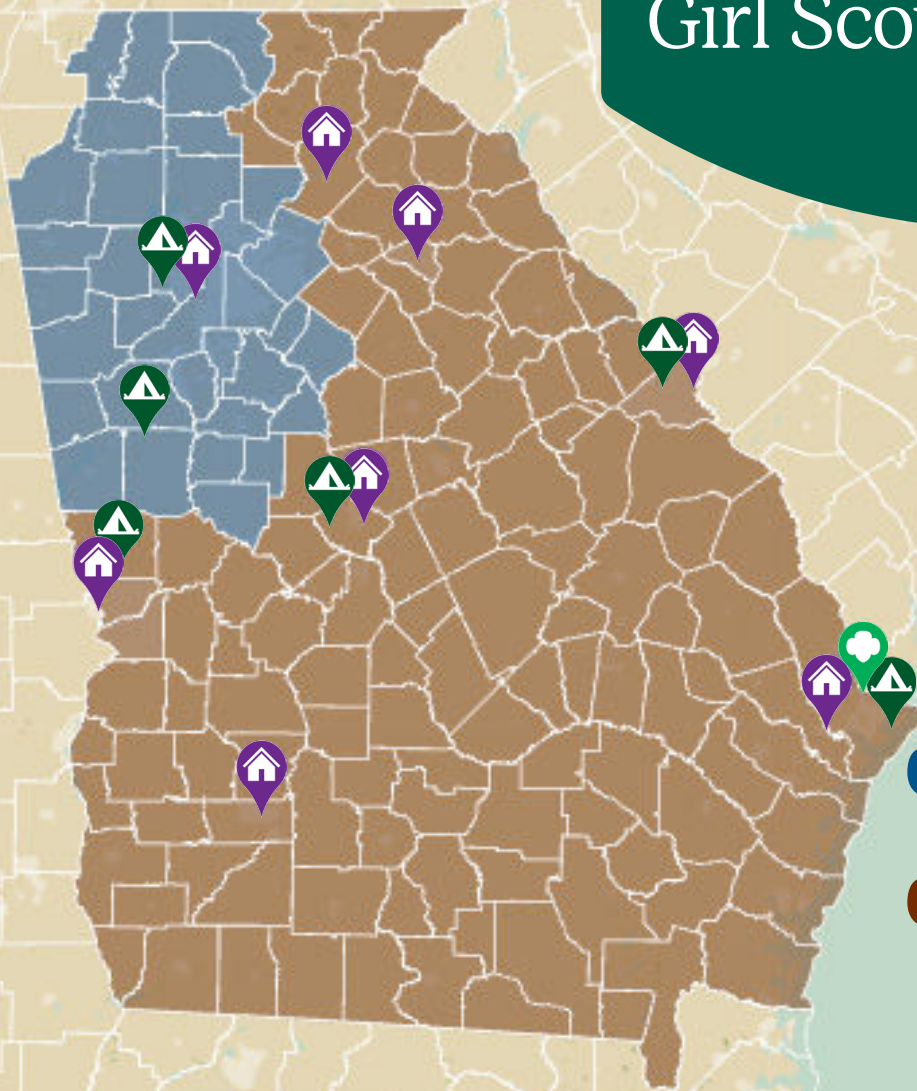
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta

This report was made possible through the
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Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta
www.girlscoutsatl.org



Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia
www.gshg.org

Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta and Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia collectively serve nearly 30,000 girls across the state of Georgia.

With support from over 16,000 volunteers and contributions from funders and partners, Girl Scouts ensures every girl in Georgia can reach her full potential.



Girl Scout Service Center



Girl Scout Camp



Girl Scout Historic Site

The State of Georgia Girls

Girls in Georgia are living a life, divided. She is the most academically ambitious, most college-bound, most goal-focused generation of Georgia girls on record. She is also the loneliest, and that feeling reaches far below adolescence. The principal goal of this report is to follow that arc through the differences observed between girls and boys in areas like academic achievement and rates of mental health challenges.

This research proves one undeniable fact: **girls and boys have largely different experiences growing up in Georgia.** In elementary schools, half of girls already report being left out by other kids. By middle school, that early exclusion lives alongside growing academic pressure and hardens into stress and anxiety. By high school, an increasingly complex social life, balanced between her in-person relationships and digital persona turns into depression and self-harm.

Across five dimensions of wellness - physical health, digital presence, academic success, emotional wellbeing, and social connection - the findings honor both sides of her story. Georgia girls graduate from high school at higher rates than boys and enroll in college in higher numbers within sixteen months of graduation. They take a larger share of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses. Their parents describe them as more engaged in school than the national average. This hard-earned progress is worth celebrating.

The emotional infrastructure that should hold up that progress, however, is thin. More than half of high school girls in Georgia report symptoms of depression in a given month. Twice as many girls as boys report intense anxiety. One in five has seriously considered harming herself in the past year. When she looks for the adult who can help, she often cannot find one: two in three high school girls lack a caring adult to talk with about their feelings, and half of parents cannot access mental health care for their daughter even when they seek it.

Neither truth cancels the other. The girl who is rising and the girl who is struggling are the same girl. What she is asking of Georgia - of every adult who cares about her - is the recognition that both belong to her, and both start earlier than we think.

90%

of Georgia girls graduated high school in 2025.

Five points higher than boys and up nearly seven points in a decade.

2 in 3

high school girls lack a caring adult to talk with about their feelings.

58%

of upper-school girls in Georgia experienced signs of depression.

Compared to 39% of boys.

1 in 5

middle and high school girls has seriously considered harming herself in the past year.

Girls cite family reasons and school pressure as the primary drivers of self-harm.



Learn.

Discover more about
the power of
Girl Scouts.



Join.

Girls need caring
adult mentors to
prepare them for life.



Fund.

Connect with your
local Girl Scout
council to fund a
girl's future.



Dimensions of Wellness

The State of the Georgia Girl Report offers insight into five 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.



Digital Wellness

Forming an online persona is not a choice, but a developmental expectation for today's girls, inseparable from how she learns, connects, and understands herself. Digital wellness encompasses the complex web of circumstances that shape her in-person life, her online identity, and the internal monologue she carries between the two. It requires media literacy to critically consume image-driven content, adults who help close the gap between the girl she lives and the girl she performs, and platforms and policies that protect her.



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.

Our Esteemed Review Panel

The State of the Georgia Girl Report was deeply enriched by the dedicated time and attention of a diverse community of experts across the state. Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta and Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia extend sincere appreciation to this review panel for its thoughtful and thorough feedback, which elevated the level of discourse presented in this report.



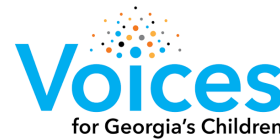
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Chair of the Regional Advisory Board

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Data Definitions

This report utilizes data from primary sources such as the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control, and the Georgia 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.

The definition of “girls in Georgia” is defined as 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 in Georgia, and organization measurements from Georgia Girl Scout councils.

Methodology

The Georgia Girl Report is a comprehensive collection of metrics that serve as indicators of well-being for Georgia girls. Metrics are grouped into five distinct categories - Physical Health, Digital Wellness, 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 Georgia 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 in Georgia. 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 Girl Scout councils serving Georgia. 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 Georgia.

Data Collection

In an effort to present an unbiased and factual account of the status of girls in Georgia, all data was obtained from publicly available primary sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Georgia 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 Georgia, data are disaggregated by several variables including state, sex assigned at birth, and race and ethnicity. Definitions of each variable are derived from its source. The ability to disaggregate and report on data is limited to the availability of statewide empirical sources. As such, the Girl Scout Councils serving the state of Georgia acknowledge 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 State of the Georgia Girl Report is commissioned by the Girl Scout Councils serving the state of Georgia. Representatives of the independent Girl Scout councils serving the state determined the scope of the report and included metrics. An independent analyst assembled metrics as outlined above. A panel of peer reviewers was assembled by the Girl Scout Councils and asked to review the drafted data and narrative for feedback and bias, sharing feedback with an independent analyst.

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



Girls living in Georgia are diverse across every measure. Throughout this report, the experiences of Georgia 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

- **44% of households in Georgia face financial hardship.**
The rate of poverty is decreasing among households with girls, but the portion facing rising costs and stagnant wages is increasing.
- **3 out of 5 girls in Georgia are girls of color.**
Specifically, 31% of girls in Georgia identify as Black or African American - more than twice the representation as the national average (13%).
- **Girls identifying as more than one race are the fastest growing demographic in Georgia.**
Georgia experienced a 2.5x increase over the last five years.
- **43% of youth in Georgia do not live in a two-parent household.**
Nearly one-third of youth live in a single parent household while 10% live with a grandparent.
- **1 in 7 girls attends a private school.**
Girls are more likely than boys to attend a private school, with a 26% increase in private school enrollment among girls over the last five years.

“Being in Girl Scouts helped me learn to love myself.
I learned to love me for me.

- Georgia Girl Scout, Cadette (6th-8th grade), 2025



Population, Race & Ethnicity

In 2024, Georgia’s total youth population reached 2.5 million young people under the age of 18. Boys narrowly outnumber girls across the state and within every age group, consistent with national patterns. Over the five years between 2019 and 2024, Georgia’s youth population grew by more than 2%, with most of that growth concentrated among girls: the female youth population grew by approximately 2% while the male youth population grew by 0.2%.

Georgia is home to 1.2 million girls under the age of 18.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table S0101, 2024, Georgia

	Total Youth	Percent of Youth
Female (0-17)	1,237,779	49%
Male (0-17)	1,293,352	51%

Girls identifying as White (Non-Hispanic) make up the largest demographic of female youth in Georgia, comprising 39% of the population. Girls identifying as Black or African American make up the second-largest demographic at 31%, followed by girls identifying as Hispanic at 17% – a departure from national trends in which Hispanic youth are typically the second-largest demographic.

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

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B01001B-I, 2024, Georgia

	Female (0-17)	
	Total Youth	%
American Indian and Alaska Native	6,309	1%
Asian	53,255	4%
Black or African American	389,204	31%
Other Race	93,454	8%
Two or More Races	169,758	14%
White (Not Hispanic)	485,811	39%
Hispanic	204,907	17%

3 in 5

Georgia 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%.

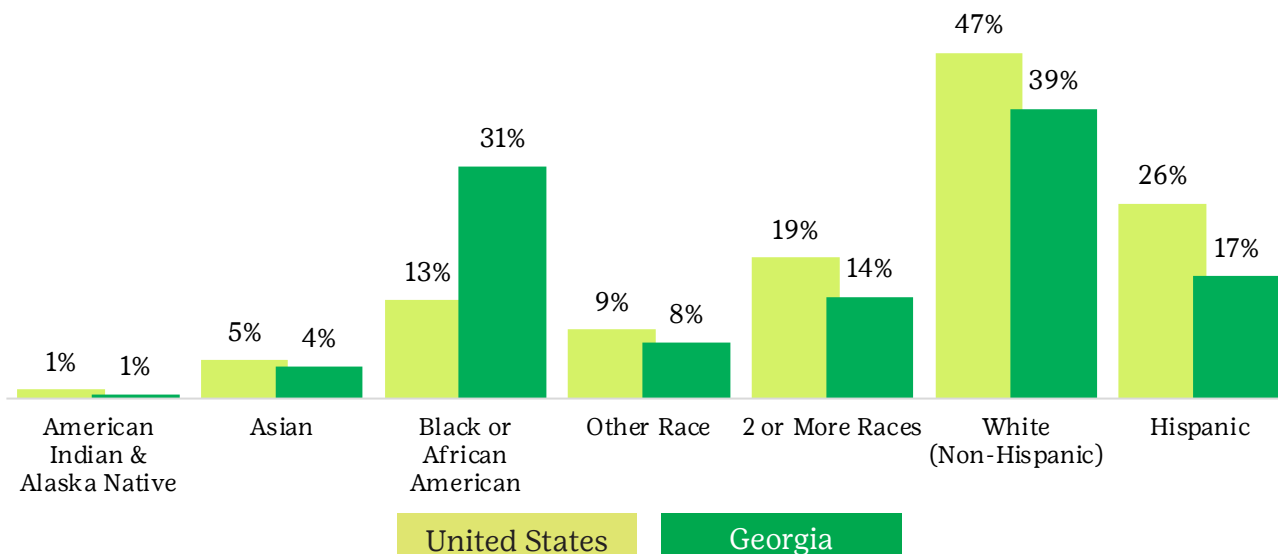
Race & Ethnicity, continued.

Notably, the representation of girls identifying as Black or African American in Georgia is more than double the representation across the country. Over the last five years, growth in Georgia's female youth population has been concentrated among girls identifying with more than one race or as Hispanic – a pattern consistent with demographic shifts across the South.

One-third of girls in Georgia identify as Black or African American - twice the representation as the national average.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B01001B-I, 2024, Georgia

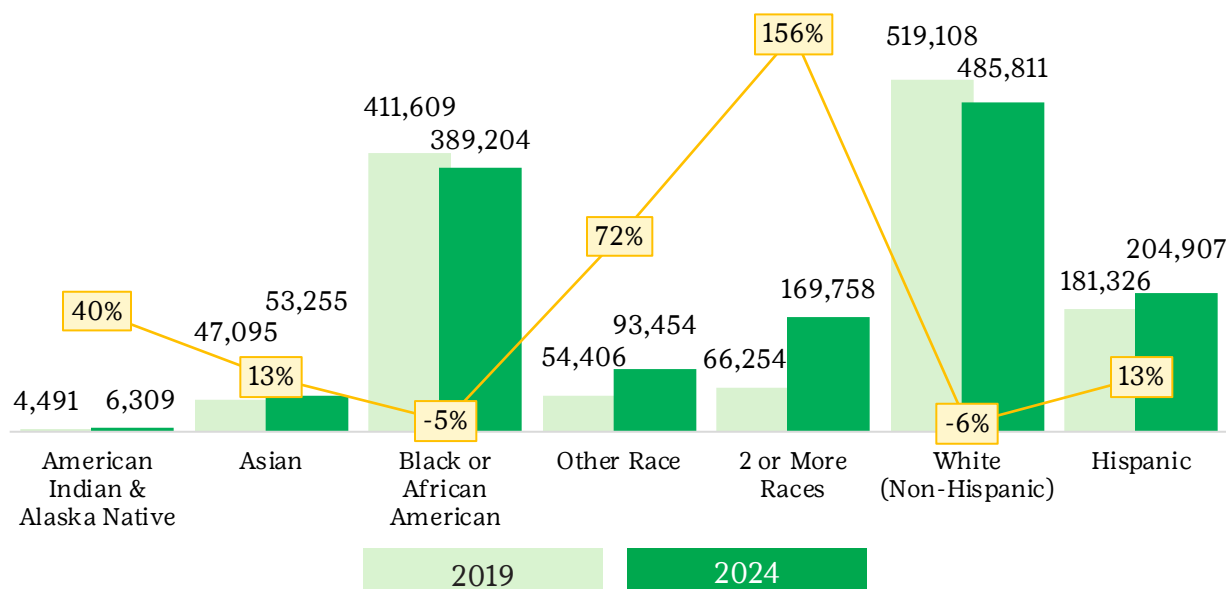
2024 Female Youth Population by Race and Ethnicity, U.S. vs Georgia



Population increases over the last five years among girls in Georgia have largely been concentrated among girls identifying as 2 or More Races.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B01001B-I, 2019 and 2024, Georgia

Georgia Girl Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2019 vs 2024

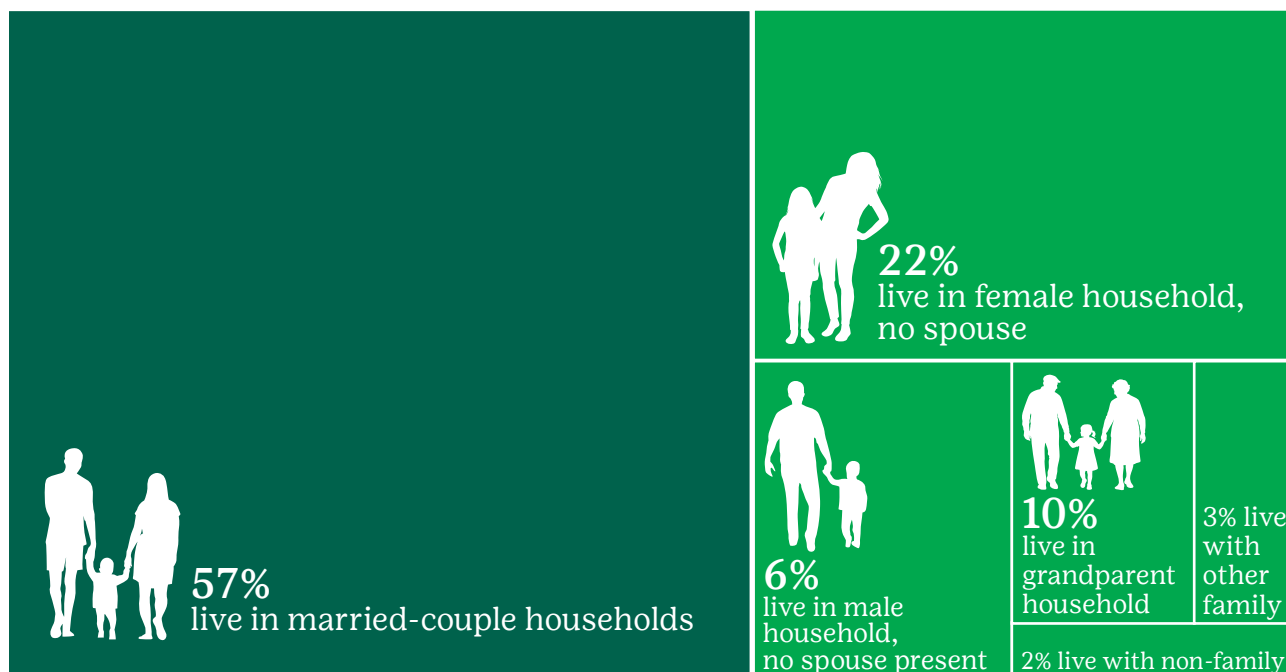


Family Type

The structure of families in Georgia varies widely from a “traditional” two-parent household. **Over one million youth in Georgia are living in households without married parents**, accounting for 42% of all young people in the state. Of those, approximately 700,000 are living in single-parent households and nearly 250,000 are living with a grandparent. In total, more than 15% of youth in Georgia are living in a household with a grandparent, other family, or non-family.

Household Type for Total Youth Under 18 Years

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B09002 and B09018, 2024, Georgia



83%

of youth in Georgia speak only English at home - a larger portion than the national average (78%).



Disability Status

4% of girls in Georgia live with a federally classified disability – nearly 50,000 girls in total. The disability rate of girls is noticeably lower than that of boys by 2 points.

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 Georgia 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.

Researchers including Quinn and Madhoo find that adults supporting girls must develop a broader understanding of mental and emotional disabilities in order to properly evaluate the unique symptoms of girls.

4%

of girls in Georgia live with a federally classified disability, a rate 33% lower than that of boys at 6%.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Table B18101, 2024, Georgia

“...in order to properly evaluate the **unique symptoms of girls.**”

85%

of Georgia Girl Scouts believe they can **make a difference in the world.**



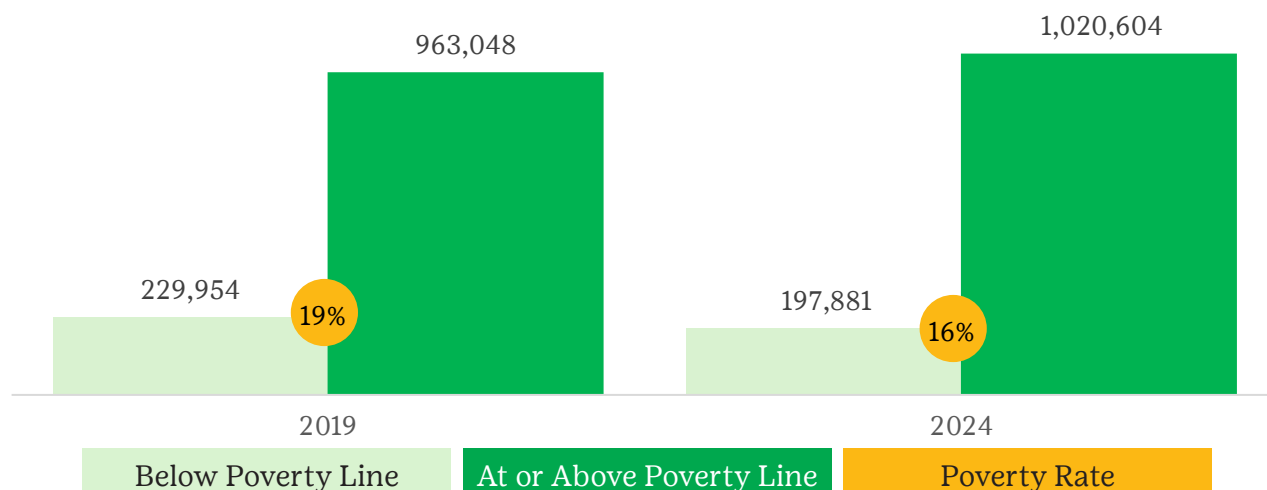
Poverty & Financial Hardship

Georgia has experienced a net decline in the number of youth living below the federal poverty line over the last five years, but this is a complicated measure of success. In 2019, 1 in 5 girls (19%) in Georgia lived below the poverty line. By 2024, the rate had improved to 1 in 6 girls (16%), a reduction of nearly 30,000 girls living in poverty across the state.

The portion of girls living in poverty declined by 3 points in 5 years.

U.S. Census, ACS 1-Year Estimates, Tables B17001, 2019 and 2024, Georgia

Poverty Status of Georgia Girls, 2019 vs 2024

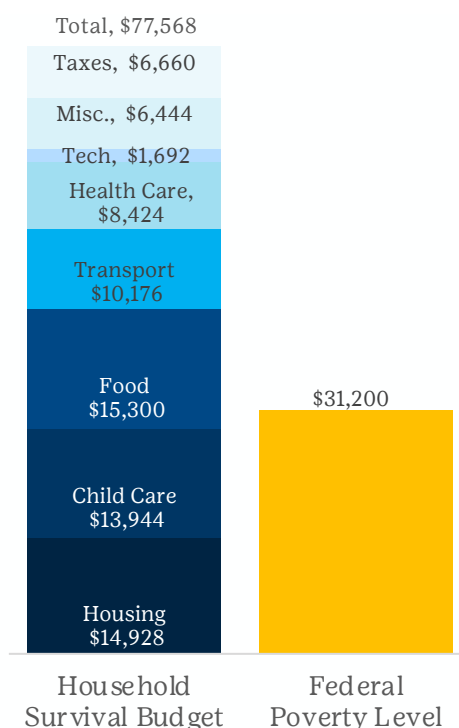


Living above the poverty threshold does not indicate affordability of basic needs, according to groups like United for ALICE. ALICE, an acronym to describe households earning above the federal poverty level but not enough to afford basic expenses, described **an additional 30% of households in Georgia 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. **In Georgia, 44% of households were below the ALICE Threshold in 2024, higher than the national average at 41%, placing Georgia 43rd among all states for financial hardship.**

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 Georgia are falling into the affordability trap of rising costs and stagnant wages.

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



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



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

A Sense of Belonging

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

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

To be friendly and helpful;

To be considerate and caring;

To be a sister to every Girl Scout.

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



92%
of Georgia Girl Scouts agree,
**"I can be myself in
Girl Scouts."**

“Girl Scouts is like being in a family - we look out for our troop and support other troops. **We're a sisterhood.**

- Georgia Girl Scout, Cadette (6th-8th grade), 2025

Poverty & Financial Hardship, continued.

Research shows that growing up without sufficient resources to meet basic needs contributes to significantly worse outcomes for children, lasting well into adulthood. Le Menestrel & Duncan, 2019, found children living below the poverty line are more likely to:

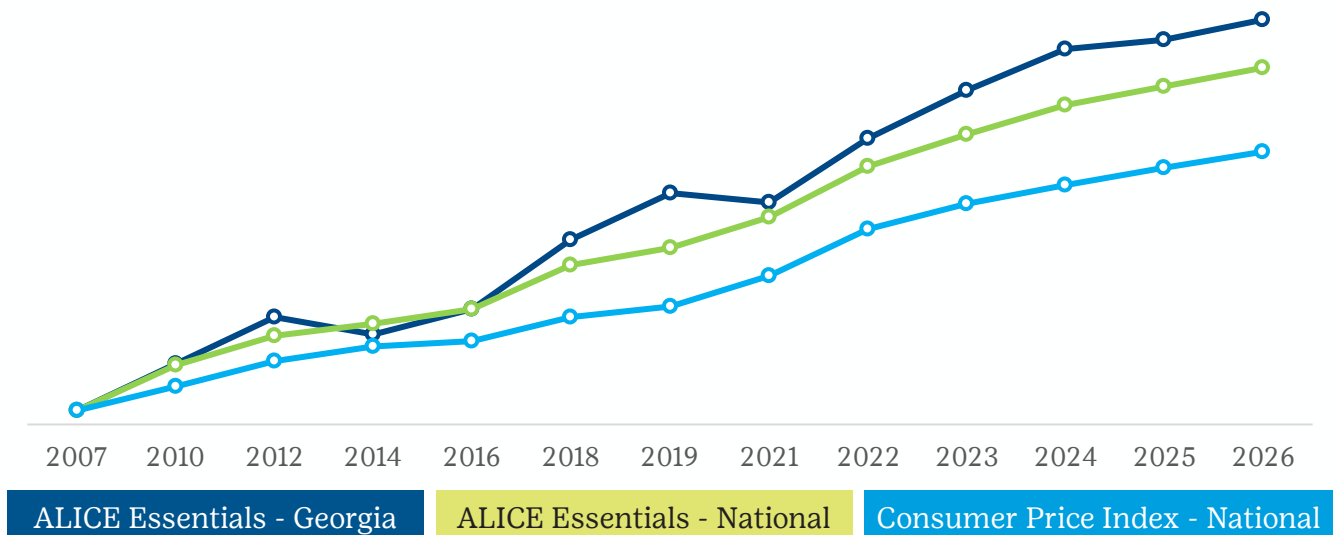
- ▶ experience asthma, obesity, and learning disabilities;
- ▶ repeat grades and graduate from high school at lower rates;
- ▶ earn less at age 30 than their peers.

In Georgia, the gap to close the affordability trap is widening: the ALICE Essentials Index is rising faster in the state than the national average and rests well above the National Consumer Price Index. In short, while the poverty rate is declining among girls in Georgia, the cost to afford basic needs is rising.

The cost of covering basic living expenses is rising faster in Georgia than the national average and the Consumer Price Index.

ALICE Essentials Index, United for ALICE, 2007-2026; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007-2026.

ALICE Essentials vs Consumer Price Index



90%

of Georgia Girl Scouts want to make the world a better place to live in.



DATA HIGHLIGHT: RACE & ETHNICITY

Poverty & Financial Hardship

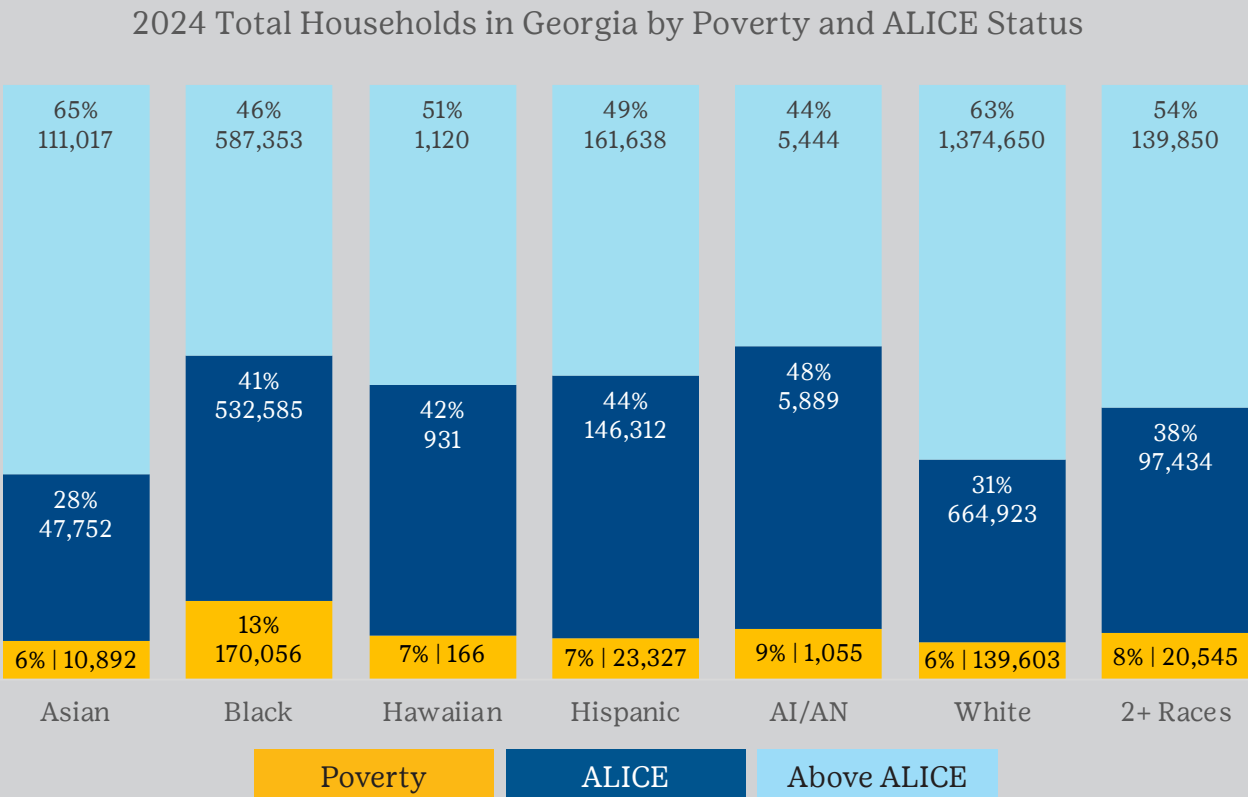
The financial health of Georgia girls presents two competing truths: the portion of girls living beneath the federal poverty level is declining, while the cost of living to afford basic needs rises to affect a growing portion of the total population.

However, among many girls of color, both measures are worsening. Girls of color experience considerably higher rates of poverty in Georgia compared to girls identifying as White (Non-Hispanic). The same trend holds among ALICE households: a higher portion of households identifying as 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).

Black households experience the highest poverty rate and second highest rate of households below the ALICE threshold.

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





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 5 high school girls has experienced sexual dating violence.**
A rate nearly five times higher than that of teenage boys.
- **1 in 4 teenage girls reports not getting any physical activity.**
Over the last week, 26% of middle & high school girls report getting 0 days of physical activity.
- **1 in 12 girls is reported as developing unhealthy eating habits.**
Among middle and high school girls, this ratio climbs to 1 in 5.
- **One-third of teenage girls report feeling unsafe at school.**
Only 50% of girls feel like students treat each other with respect.

“ Girl Scouts has really **boosted my confidence.**

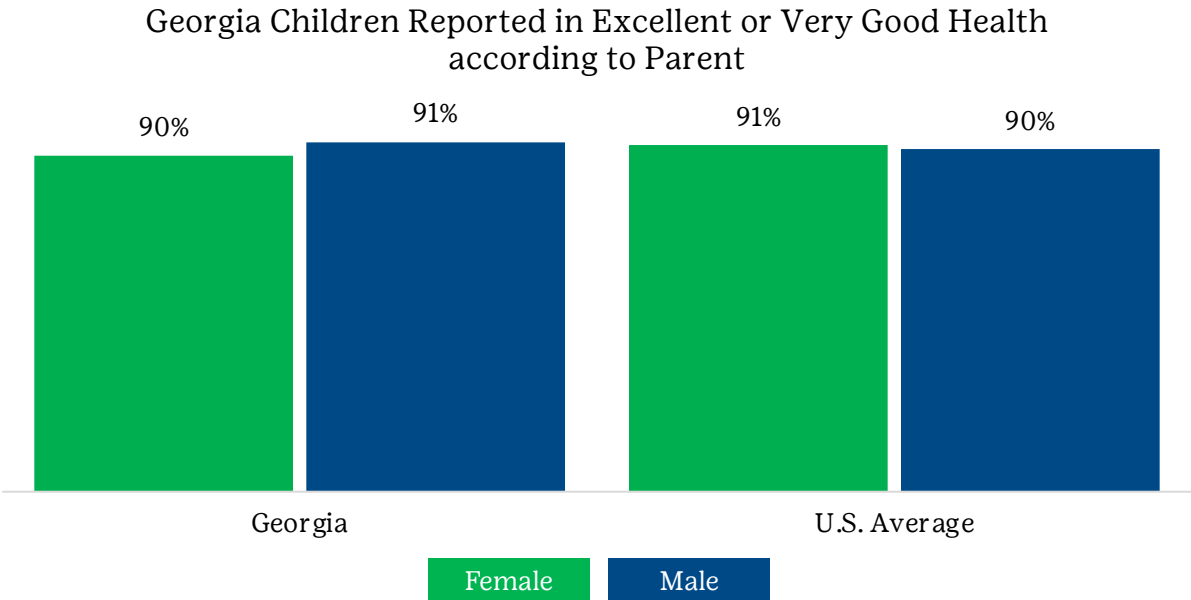
- Georgia Girl Scout, Cadette (6th-8th grade), 2024

Overall Health

Most parents of girls in Georgia report that their daughter is in good physical health. According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, **90% of girls in Georgia are described by their caregiver as having “excellent or very good” overall health.** While there are marginal differences between boys in the state and the national average for girls, the more noticeable comparison may be the optimism of parents compared to the data presented throughout the remainder of this section.

9 out of 10 girls in Georgia are reported as being in excellent or very good health according to their parent, slightly lower than the national average.

U.S. Census, National Survey of Children’s Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 1.1, Georgia.



“My favorite part of Girl Scouts is camping! We do so many things I never get to do anywhere else.

- Georgia Girl Scout, Junior (4th-5th grade), 2024



One in four teenage girls reports not getting an hour of physical activity over the last week.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey, 2023-2024.

27% of girls, grades 6-12

25% of boys, grades 6-12

Healthy Behaviors

Girls must develop the foundational skills to care for their physical needs during adolescence before the independence of adulthood. Learning how to build healthy habits such as eating balanced meals, getting physical exercise, and maintaining a positive self-view are proven to support long-term physical wellness later in adulthood (Harris, 2005).

Girls in Georgia are developing the skill of learning healthy eating habits under the threat of external pressures and harmful social beliefs. **According to parents in the National Survey of Children's Health, 1 in 12 girls in Georgia presents concerning eating habits**, such as binge eating, skipping meals or fasting, or unusually low interest in food.

1 in 12

girls present concerning eating habits, like skipping meals or binge eating, according to their parents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 1.4.

Research shows that girls face biased social expectations about their weight and size, contributing to body dissatisfaction and distorted eating habits (Gordon, 2021). As girls internalize these beliefs, extensive bodies of research prove that serious physical and emotional consequences develop, including eating disorders, depressive symptoms, and lower rates of physical activity.

Setting girls up for long-term physical health requires that communities create a culture that fosters healthy eating habits without attaching judgment to girls' physical appearance.

One in five middle or high school girls has avoided food, thrown up, or used laxatives in order to lose weight - twice the rate of boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey, 2023-2024.



Healthy Behaviors, continued.

Coupled with concerning eating habits are lower rates of engaging in physical activity, compared to boys. **According to the National Survey of Children's Health, more than 1 in 10 girls in Georgia engaged in zero days of physical activity over the last week according to their parents.** When asked directly in the Georgia Student Health Survey, 27% of middle and high school girls say they did not participate in any physical activity over the last week.

1 in 10 girls in Georgia lacked any physical activity over the last week.

U.S. Census, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 1.1, Georgia.

Children engaging in 0 days of physical activity within the last week, according to parents.



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends children between the ages of 6 and 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Parents report that more than 8 in 10 girls are not receiving the recommended level of physical activity.

Physical activity in young people contributes to positive physical health by reducing the risk of illness and obesity, while also promoting positive outcomes in other areas of well-being such as mental health and social connectedness (Kemel, 2022). Encouraging a larger portion of girls to participate in even low-intensity physical activity is an important factor in their overall well-being.

43%

of girls ages 8-10 say their body and how it looks is a top concern.

Girl Scouts of the USA and Flamingo, Body Appreciation Program Survey, 2025

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 Georgia will also need to manage lifelong health conditions. **Two out of every five girls in Georgia are reported to be living with a lifelong health condition**, according to their parents. While girls are less likely than boys to be diagnosed with a lifelong health condition, diagnoses are increasing, driven by rises in new cases of ADHD, autism, asthma, and prediabetes.

Several contributing factors explain the lower diagnoses 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.

Two out of five girls in Georgia are reported to be living with a lifelong health condition.

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



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 Georgia feel girls in their troop genuinely care about each other.



Safety

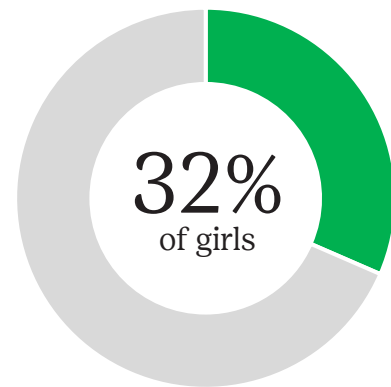
The physical and emotional safety of girls at home, at school, and within their relationships is a foundational requirement of healthy development. Research repeatedly establishes the link between feeling safe and a range of positive developmental outcomes:

- Experiencing sexual violence is proven to produce negative health outcomes across several domains, including increased anxiety, worsening sleep, loss of appetite, and disruption to education (Clarke, 2023).
- Feeling unsafe at school is proven to create psychological distress that undermines academic achievement and contributes to a wide range of mental health problems (Valente, 2022; Bayram Özdemir, 2024).
- Girls are more likely than boys to be victims of certain forms of abuse, linked to short- and long-term health consequences including physical, mental, and emotional health.

According to the Georgia Student Health Survey administered to students in grades 6 through 12, **1 in 3 girls “somewhat” or “strongly” agree that they feel unsafe at school** – a slightly higher portion than upper-school boys. Worry about being hurt by another student follows the same pattern: 1 in 4 girls in grades 6 through 12 worries about being hurt by another student, a slightly higher portion compared to upper-school boys.

Feeling safe in spaces like home and school is fundamentally necessary for positive mental and emotional development. When this feeling of safety erodes, girls fall into a persistent state of vigilance, disrupting optimal wellbeing (Valente, 2022). This critical link between the well-being of girls and their experience feeling safe at school requires a coordinated community response.

Female Upper School Students Strongly or Somewhat Agreeing: "I have felt unsafe at school"



Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey - Middle and High School, 2023-2024.

Half of girls in middle and high school believe students treat each other with respect - a smaller portion than male students.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey - Middle and High School, 2023-2024.

Students in Upper School Agreeing: "Students at my school treat each other with respect"



Sexual Violence

The most-recent Georgia Student Health Survey administered through the Georgia Department of Education does not include questions on the prevalence of sexual violence. The prior student survey administered through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found in the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey that **1 in 5 high school girls experienced sexual dating violence, compared to 1 in 25 of high school boys.**

Peer-reviewed research consistently establishes that the consequences of experiencing sexual violence extend far beyond the immediate event. In a study of youth who experienced sexual violence (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.

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

- Survivors 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.



One in five high school girls in Georgia has experienced sexual dating violence, a rate 4X higher than that of high school boys.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Georgia, 2021

Percent of High School Students Reporting Experiencing Sexual Dating Violence



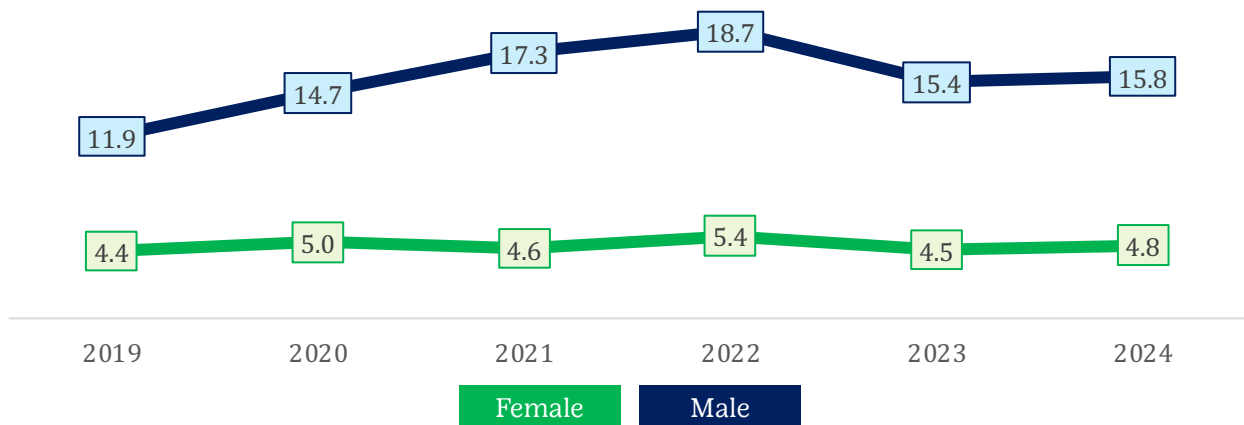
Violent Deaths

While the experiences of feeling unsafe and worrying about violence are more prevalent among girls in Georgia, violent deaths in the state disproportionately impact boys. According to the Georgia Violent Deaths Reporting System, violent deaths among youth are three times more likely to occur among boys compared to girls in Georgia.

Violent deaths are 3X more likely to occur among boys compared to girls in Georgia.

Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Violent Deaths Reporting System, 2019–2024

Incident Rate of Violent Deaths among Georgia Youth ages 0-19, per 100,000



75%

of Girl Scouts in Georgia say: “it’s important to me to make a difference in my community.”



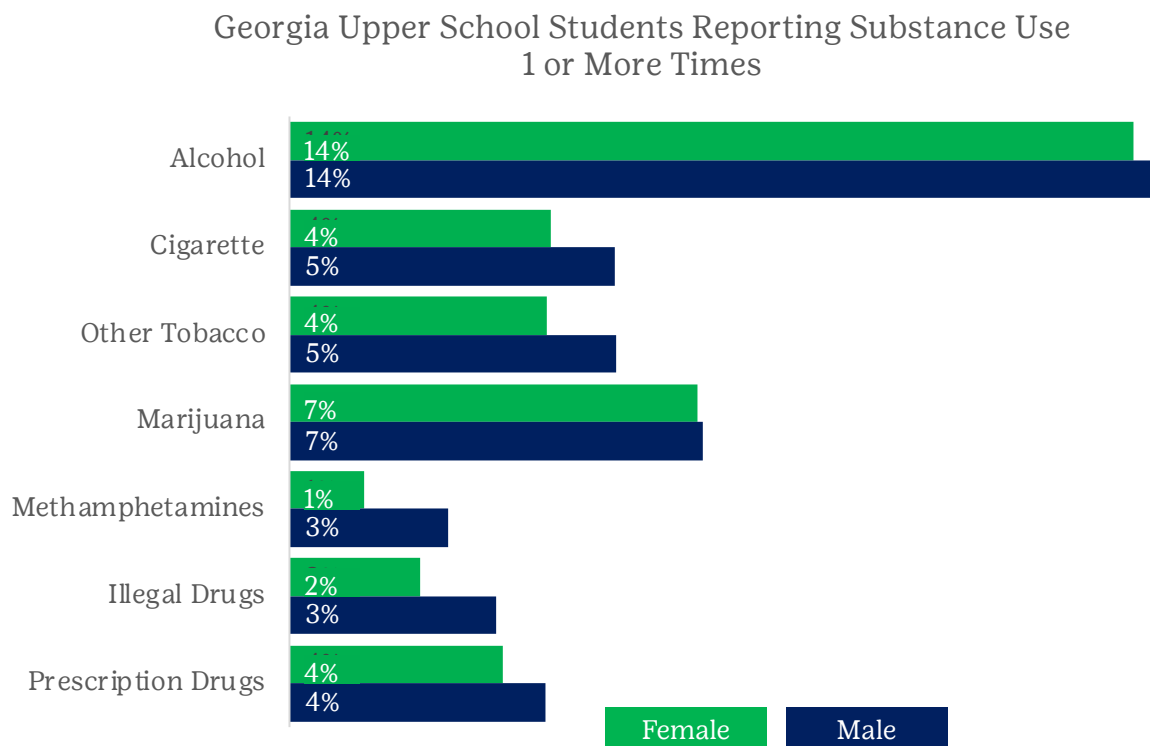
Substance Abuse

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. Even in circumstances where adolescent use of controlled substances is low, research shows that the perception youth have of substance use is itself a leading indicator of a risky future relationship with controlled substances.

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).

1 in 7 middle and high school girls have used alcohol; 1 in 14 have used marijuana at least one time.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024



Interestingly, across Georgia, more boys than girls report using controlled substances – a notable departure from emerging national trends in which adolescent girls have begun to report substance use at rates equal to or higher than their male peers. The types of controlled substances most used by adolescents remain consistent, however, dominated by the use of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco products.

Although Georgia's patterns may appear comparatively favorable for girls, any use of controlled substances is becoming more risky: contamination of illicit drugs with deadly substances like fentanyl has dramatically increased the risk of fatal overdose among adolescents who do use. Between 2019 and 2021, the rate of adolescent drug overdose deaths nationally nearly doubled, with fentanyl-involved fatalities accounting for the majority of cases (Friedman, 2022). The toxicity of today's drug supply means that even one-time experimentation can carry irreversible consequences.

Substance Abuse, continued.

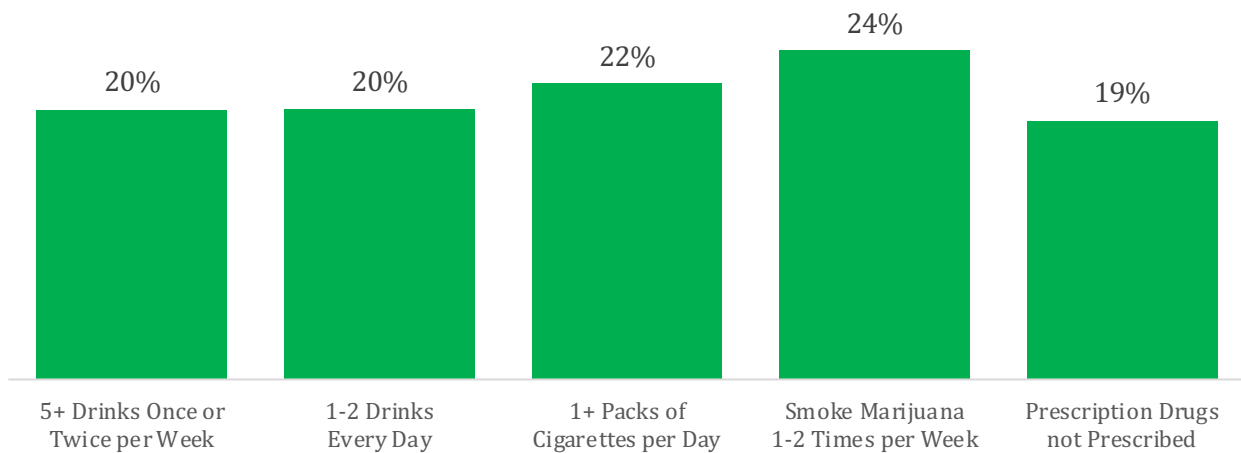
On average, 1 in 5 middle and high school girls in Georgia perceive no risk to substance use behaviors, including using prescription drugs without a doctor's orders and smoking a pack of cigarettes per day. **This perception gap is itself a leading indicator: youth who perceive low risk in substance use are significantly more likely to use substances in the future, even when current use rates are low.**

Combating the role of social media in positively portraying substance use remains one of the largest challenges communities face in dissuading drug and alcohol use among teenagers. Studies show that a more frequent use of social media among girls increases the use of controlled substances (Ohannessian, 2017). This compounding effect between substance use and social media increases the urgency for more direct interventions and conversations among teenage girls.

1 in 5 middle and high school girls perceive no risk to substance use behaviors, including using prescription drugs without doctor's orders

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024

Georgia Girls in Middle and High School reporting
No Risk to Substance Use Behaviors



“ This has been amazing...
I cannot express how much
**being a Girl Scout has impacted
me on a deeper level.**
I feel so much more confident.

- Georgia Girl Scout,
Junior (4th - 5th Grade), 2025



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.



85%

of Georgia Girl Scouts believe adults in Girl Scouts help them achieve their goals.

“My troop leader is awesome! **She cares about us all so much!**

- Georgia Girl Scout,
Brownie (2nd - 3rd Grade), 2024



DIGITAL WELLNESS



Forming an online persona is not a choice, but a developmental expectation for today's girls, inseparable from how she learns, connects, and understands herself.

Digital wellness encompasses the complex web of circumstances that shape her in-person life, her online identity, and the internal monologue she carries between the two. It requires media literacy to critically consume image-driven content, adults who help close the gap between the girl she lives and the girl she performs, and platforms and policies that protect her.

Key Facts: Digital Wellness

- **2 out of 3 girls in Georgia spend 2+ hours per day on a screen,** not including time needed to complete school work.
- **High school girls are 2X more likely to experience cyberbullying.** A total of 1 in 5, compared to boys.
- **1 in 8 middle school girls experience harassment each month online** and 1 in 9 receive threatening text messages.
- **64% of teen girls in the U.S. use artificial intelligence chatbots.** 3 out of 10 use AI chatbots on a daily basis, including 16% who engage with it constantly.

“I’m really **learning how I feel about myself** through Girl Scouts.

- Georgia Girl Scout, Cadette (6th-8th grade), 2024



A New Landscape

The digital environment surrounding Georgia girls as they come of age has no historical parallel. **The sharp rise in adolescent mental health challenges over the last decade began in tandem with the rise in teen social media use around 2012**, particularly as image-based platforms and social feedback mechanisms such as likes and shares became central to daily life. Studies which randomly assign young people the task of significantly reducing social media usage consistently find improvements in mood and well-being and those improvements are largest among adolescent girls, who consume image-driven social platforms at higher rates than boys (Twenge, 2022).

The notion that digital experiences are universally bad, however, also misses the point: a study from Georgia State University finds that **teenagers who use social media more frequently show higher levels of empathy** (McDonald, 2026). Similarly, a comprehensive study uncovered the multi-faceted complexities of social media use by adolescent girls - benefits from ‘active digital socialization’ that increase a girls’ sense of belonging and the consequences of connectivity (Belfort, 2026).

This section names both sides of that terrain – the costs Georgia girls carry from managing multiple personas and the genuine benefits digital life delivers – so that adults, educators, and policymakers can respond with proportionate support and action rather than avoidance or alarm. This is, after all, the new normal.



65%

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

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

Quick Stats

- 95% of U.S. teens say they have access to a smartphone at home
- 1 in 4 teen girls across the country use TikTok “almost constantly”
- Two-thirds of girls use an AI chatbot, with 3 in 10 using it daily
- Nearly all girls say they use the internet daily, with 2 out of 5 online “almost constantly”

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

Daily Digital Engagement

Two out of three girls in Georgia spend two or more hours per day on a screen outside of time required for schoolwork, according to their parent, **representing a 50% increase in girls experiencing substantial daily screen-time over the last 5 years.**

The composition of girls' screen time differs sharply. Adolescent girls are the heaviest users of image-driven social platforms – the same platforms most strongly associated with declines in adolescent mental health (Twenge, 2022). Time alone is therefore a weak measure of impact; what a girl is doing with that time, and what those platforms are doing to her, is where the balance of risk and reward lies.

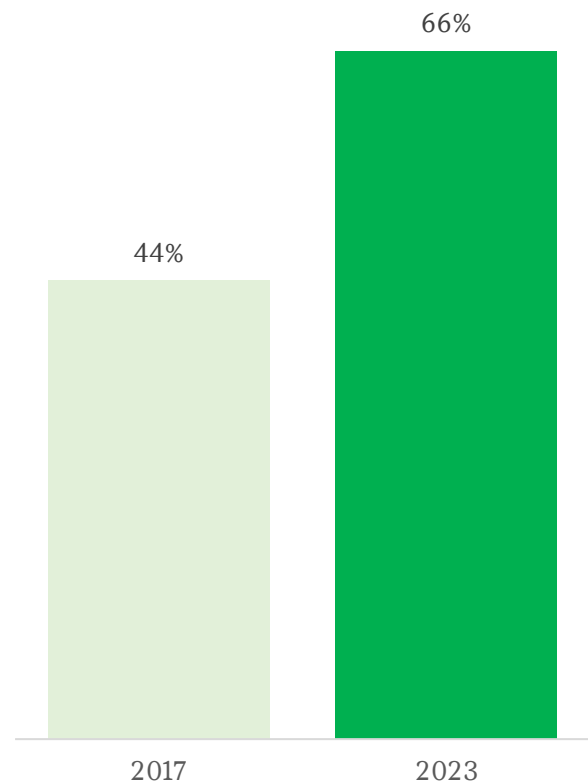
Girls report real benefits from being online, and the research bears them out. A Georgia State study found a slight bump in empathy among teens who use social media to engage with peers (McDonald, 2026). For girls with fewer in-person options — those in rural communities, underrepresented at school, or managing a chronic condition — digital platforms are a protective factor, offering peer support and belonging (Odgers and Jensen, 2020).

But the same device delivers manipulated images and curated lives that barely resemble reality, and girls pay a steeper price than boys: lower self-esteem, worse body image, poorer sleep, and higher rates of depression (Kelly, 2018). Even a five-day screen break sharpens a preteen's ability to read emotional cues (Uhls, 2014). The tool that can teach empathy erodes it when left unattended.

50% more girls are experiencing 2+ hours of time on electronic devices compared to 2017.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2016-2017 and 2022-2023, Georgia.

Girls Spending 2+ Hours per Day on an Electronic Device, according to Parent



89%

of teen girls use YouTube - the most-used site by all U.S. teens.

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

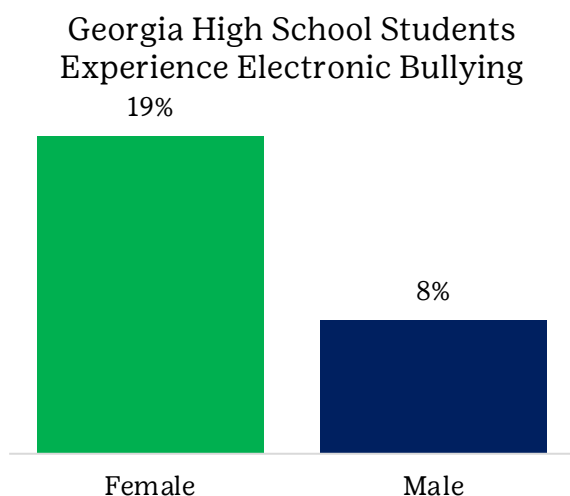


Cyberbullying

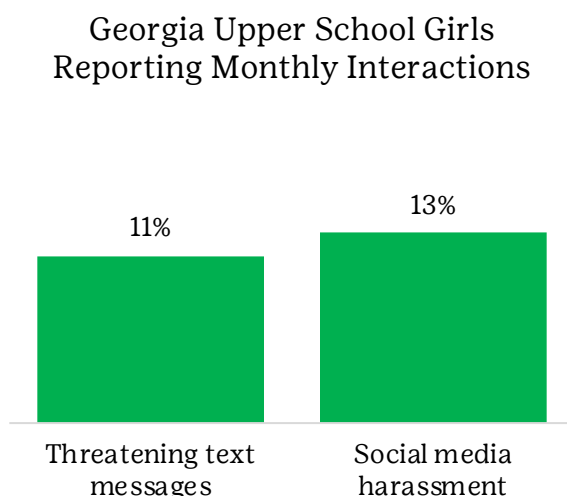
One of the most visible negative consequences of increased, and often private, use of electronic devices and social media among teens is the growing prevalence of electronic or online bullying, often called cyber-bullying. As these interactions migrated to online channels, schools and parents have struggled 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).

In Georgia, high school girls are more than twice as likely as boys to experience cyberbullying, with 1 in 5 reporting instances of bullying. The Georgia Student Survey adds depth to this experience, finding 1 in 8 middle and high school girls receive harassment through social media and 1 in 9 girls reports receiving threatening text messages.

1 in 5 teen girls reports experiencing cyberbullying - twice the rate of boys. Many girls are harassed through private, social channels.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2021, Georgia.



Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024

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).



41%

of teen girls say they're online
"almost constantly"

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

Social Media & Self-Image

Even absent overt harassment, the everyday content of image-driven social platforms shapes how girls see their own bodies, achievements, and social standing. Research on the relationship between girls' body image and social media finds that internalizing the idealized lives portrayed on her content feeds is linked to serious physical and emotional consequences, including eating disorders, depressive symptoms, and lower rates of physical activity (Gordon, 2021).

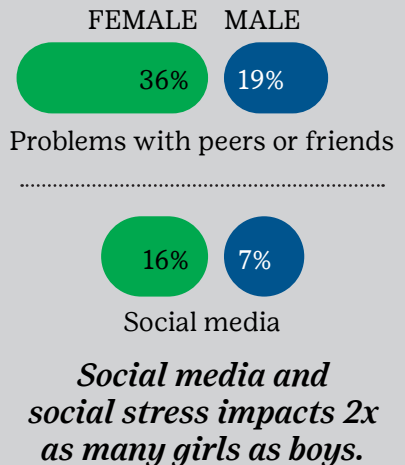
The mechanism does not require a bully; the mechanism is the feed itself.

The gender pattern is consistent across studies. In summarizing the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey findings that gave rise to the national dialogue on adolescent mental health, the Washington Post reported that "girls are engulfed in a growing wave of sadness, violence, and trauma" (St. George, 2023) – a wave the CDC and subsequent research have attributed in significant part to the design of the digital environment adolescent girls inhabit (Slomski, 2023).

Specifically, several tests confirm social media algorithms quickly display content biased toward the gender of the adolescent user, including content promoting unrealistic beauty standards and body types for girls (CCDH, 2022).

For Georgia girls, this pressure shows up in data on stress. Three out of four girls in Georgia report stress about school; one-third report stress with peers or friends; and twice as many girls as boys are aware that social media causes stress.

Causes of stress among Georgia teens

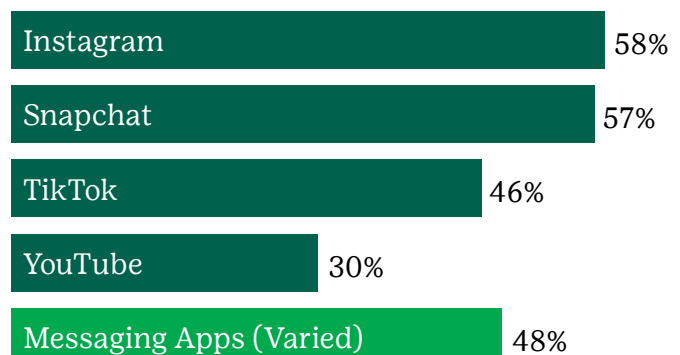


Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024

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

Teen girls must navigate a three-pronged threat in their use of social media platforms: persistent bullying from within their peer network, a wave of biased, image-based content in feeds, and contact from unwanted strangers targeting profiles of young girls. In a study from Common Sense Media in 2023, the majority of girls who use Instagram (58%) and Snapchat (57%) say they have been contacted by strangers in ways that make them feel uncomfortable on these platforms.

Unwanted Contact by Strangers on Social Media, Reported by Teen Girls



Common Sense Media, Teens and Mental Health: How Girls Really Feel About Social Media, 2023.

Digital Media Benefits

A full picture of digital wellness requires naming what girls gain from digital life, not only what they lose. For many Georgia girls, 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.



71%

of teen girls of color encounter identity-affirming content on social media.

Common Sense Media, Teens and Mental Health: How Girls Really Feel About Social Media, 2023.

A multitude of 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 things¹

41% of girls find AI to be more helpful with homework than their parents²

68% of teen girls report using social media to show their creative side³

38% of Hispanic girls use Instagram to take action on issues she cares about¹

57% of teen girls find people to support them through tough times on social media³

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



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Confidence that doesn't Depend on *Likes*

The confidence a Georgia girl builds in Girl Scouts is not the kind that lives or dies on a follower count.

Through hands-on badge work, service projects, and the Cookie Program, **she builds evidence about herself that no algorithm can revoke:** proof that she can plan something, finish something, learn something hard, and try something new.

In a Girl Scout troop, the adults and peers who see her in that work know the whole girl behind the confidence, including the parts of her that don't always feel easy to be. Girl Scouts also creates **intentional digital spaces**, bringing girls together through a familiar digital medium, with the active participation of adults who care.

The culture created through that sisterhood allows girls to experience vulnerability and security in a safe and supportive setting - without the comments and likes.



85%

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

“I am autistic so a lot of things aren't easy for me. My troop leaders took the time to know me and **my friends helped me feel special** and to try new things.

- Georgia Girl Scout,
Brownie (2nd - 3rd Grade), 2024

POWERED BY THE GIRL SCOUT COUNCILS SERVING THE STATE OF GEORGIA



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

- **More than half of girls in Georgia report signs of depression,** and 1 in 5 have seriously considered self-harm in the past year.
- **Girls are twice as likely as boys to report always feeling stressed.** One-third of high school girls also report feeling intense anxiety.
- **2 out of 3 high school girls lack a caring adult to talk with about their feelings.**
- **50% of parents of Georgia girls report difficulty accessing mental health care for their daughter.** 1 in 5 report it's very difficult or impossible to obtain treatment.

“ I love my Girl Scout troop. **We're like a family and they mean the world to me.**

- Georgia Girl Scout, Junior (4th - 5th grade), 2024

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 Georgia, 1 in 5 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 Georgia girls – in stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and the structures that should support them.



1 in 5

girls ages 3-17 in Georgia 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, Georgia.

Chronic stress in adolescence is increasingly recognized as more than a temporary mood; rather as a biological event with measurable consequences across multiple areas of a girl's life. The American Academy of Pediatrics has framed prolonged adversity in childhood as “toxic stress” – a term reserved for the kind of chronic stress that, without intervening relationships, predicts long-term risks for disease and mental disorders (Shonkoff, 2012).

For girls in particular, stress presents particularly devastating consequences for mental health: internalizing conditions such as depression and anxiety have risen sharply in adolescent girls, with chronic stress serving as the leading mechanism increasing the gender gap (Keyes & Platt, 2023).

A significant portion of girls are at risk of assuming these negative outcomes: according to the 2024 Georgia Student Health Survey, **9 out of 10 girls in middle and high school report feeling stressed, and 1 in 3 reports always being in a state of stress – twice the rate of boys.**

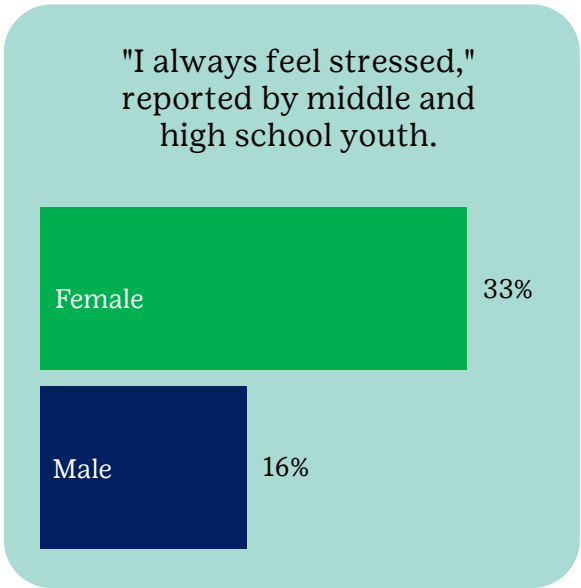
Stress & Anxiety

The Georgia Student Health Survey offers a view into the prevailing sources of stress for reporting youth.

Most concerning is the macro-view of these causes: across every measured category, girls in Georgia experience more stress than boys.

Beneath the overall trend is an echo of the challenges in balancing strong academic performance with the pressure to perform. The dominant contributor to chronic stress for teenage girls is school: 3 out of 4 girls report stress about school, nearly 2x higher than boys.

Researchers studying the disproportionate prevalence of mental health challenges in adolescent girls point to a higher rate of stressful events in girls' lives, compounded by underdeveloped emotional regulation skills during adolescence (Vucenovic, 2023). The result is a generation of girls reporting persistent, high-intensity stress - a precursor to deeper mental health struggles.

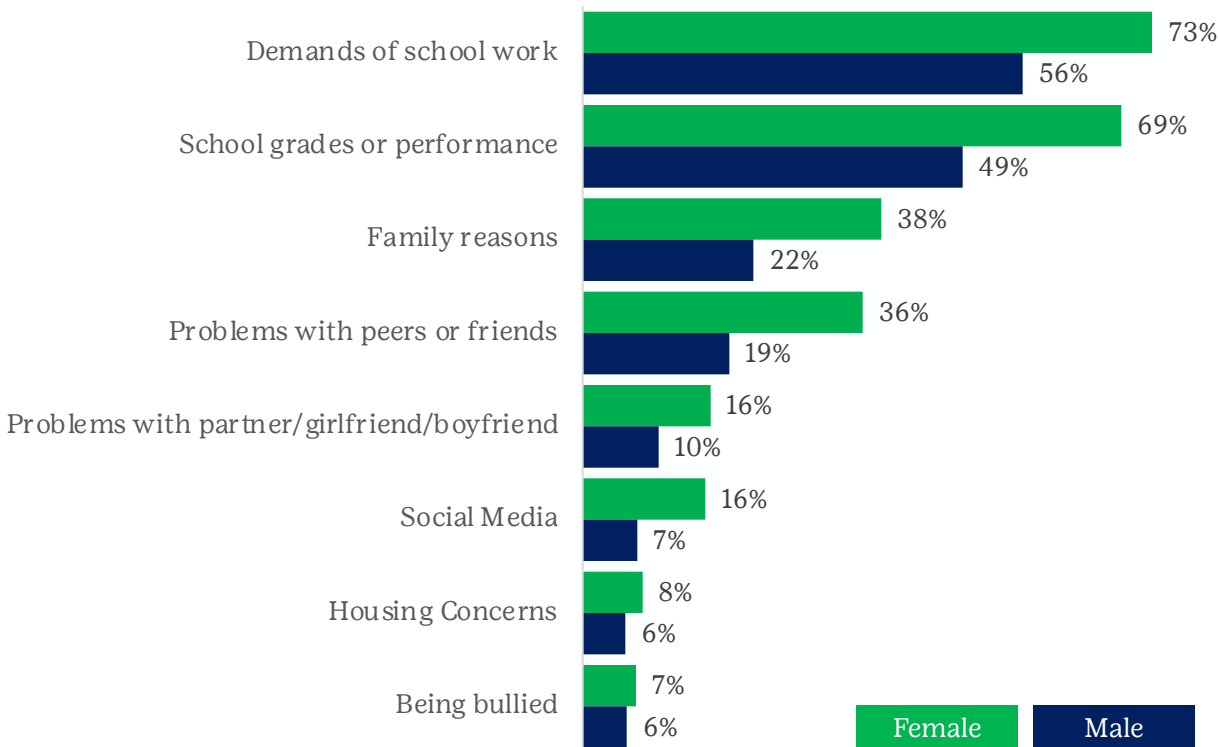


Georgia Department of Education,
Georgia Student Health Survey –
Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

School is the leading cause of stress for Georgia girls, with 3 out of 4 girls reporting school-related stress - 50% higher than boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

Causes of Stress among Middle and High School Youth

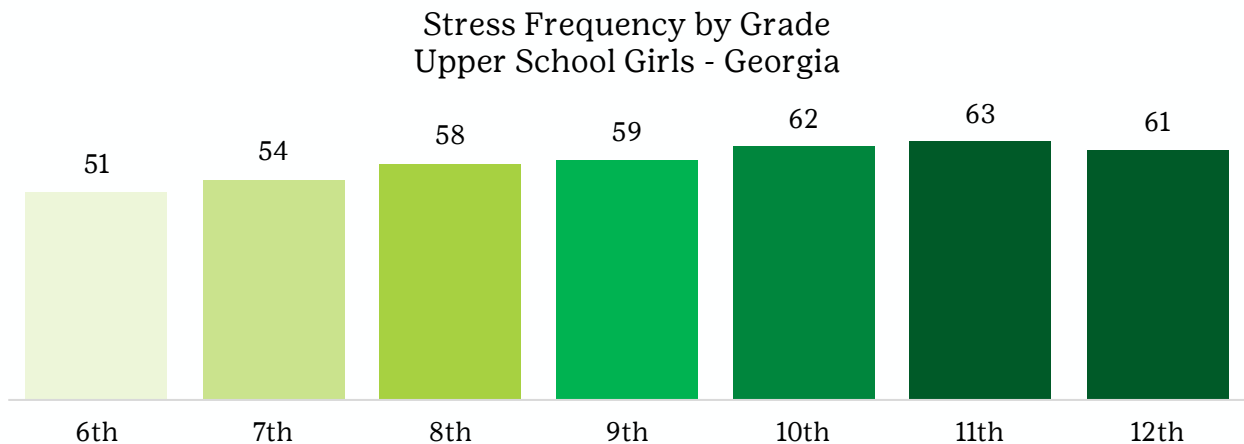


Stress & Anxiety, continued.

Stress in Georgia rises steadily as students progress through middle and high school. 51% of 6th-grade girls report feeling stressed sometimes or always, climbing to 61% by 12th grade. The trajectory underscores the cumulative weight of the academic, social, and developmental pressures girls navigate as they approach adulthood.

Experiencing stress increases through school, increasing from half to nearly two-thirds of girls reporting experiencing stress

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.



Along with chronic levels of stress, Georgia girls are also experiencing a concerning level of anxiety, contributing to the broader mental health crisis. Research shows that girls often experience these internalized symptoms of mental health challenges while boys exhibit externalized behaviors, making it more difficult for girls to receive targeted interventions in schools. **In fact, they may actually be “academic superstars using perfectionism to cope with significant underlying distress”** (Weist, 2018). In Georgia, girls are nearly twice as likely as boys to experience intense anxiety: 35% of girls in middle and high school report intense anxiety, compared to 17% of boys.

35%

of teenage girls in Georgia report feeling intense anxiety - nearly twice as high as boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.





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.



89%

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



Depression & Suicidality

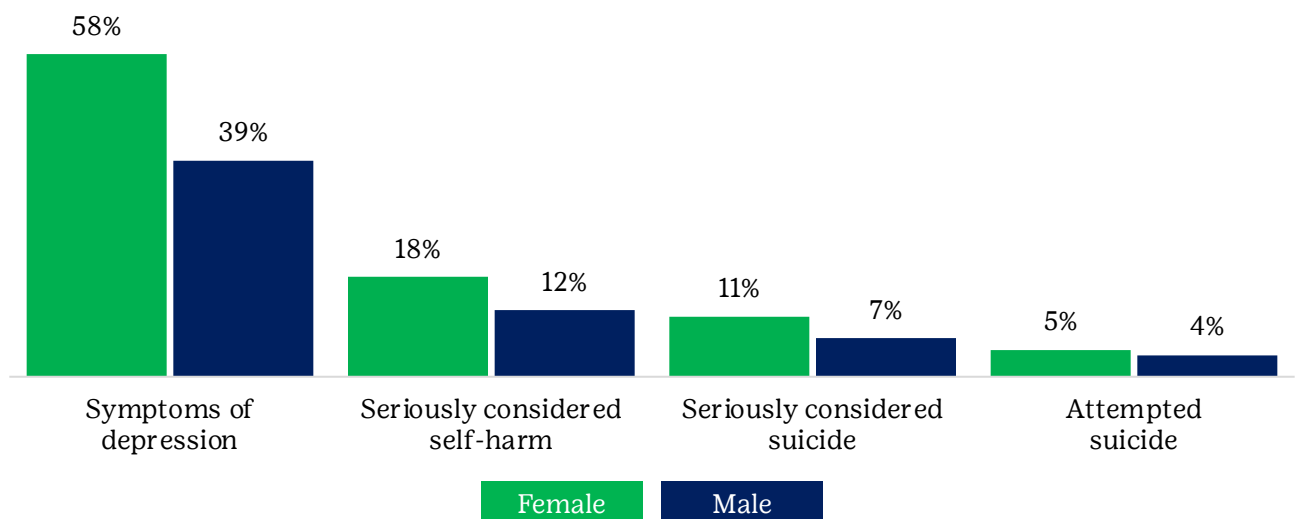
Among the most pressing concerns for Georgia girls' mental health is the prevalence of depression. The U.S. Surgeon General declared a national state of emergency regarding youth mental health in 2021, and Georgia's data mirrors that national crisis. The Georgia Student Health Survey finds that 58% of girls in middle and high school experienced symptoms of depression in the past 30 days, compared to 39% of boys.

The internalized weight of stress, anxiety, and depression carries Georgia girls toward dangerous outcomes at rates higher than their male peers. 18% of girls in middle and high school seriously considered harming themselves in the past year, compared to 12% of boys. Girls in Georgia are also more likely than boys to seriously consider attempting suicide (11% versus 7%) and to actually attempt it (5% versus 4%).

3 out of 5 middle and high school girls report experiencing signs of depression, leading to 1 in 10 seriously considering suicide.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

Upper School Students Reporting Instances of Mental Health Distress



Multiple theories and interventions have been developed to specifically reduce the rate of depressive symptoms to lower risks of suicidality in adolescent girls.

One intervention, the Penn Resiliency Program, is based on cognitive-behavioral prevention and the belief that peer- and mentor-based support is a key ingredient in positive mental health. A pilot study comparing girls-only and co-ed group formats of the program found that **girls-only groups were more effective in reducing adolescent girls' hopelessness**. The study also found that girls attended the girls-only groups more reliably than the co-ed alternative (Chaplin, 2008). **The notable success rate of girls-only formats signals that interventions for adolescent girls require a targeted approach, not a generic one.**

Depression & Suicidality, continued.

Among girls in Georgia who have seriously considered harming themselves, half report family reasons as the source of distress. Research has long established the intergenerational pattern of mental health: children whose parents have mental or emotional health problems are more likely to present with similar problems themselves (Landstedt, 2019).

Strong support and stability in the home in addition to family characteristics like talking together and working through problems promotes positive mental health for girls (Bethell, 2022). The strong link between the family environment and self-harm signals that interventions for girls cannot focus solely on the individual; they must engage the family system that surrounds her.

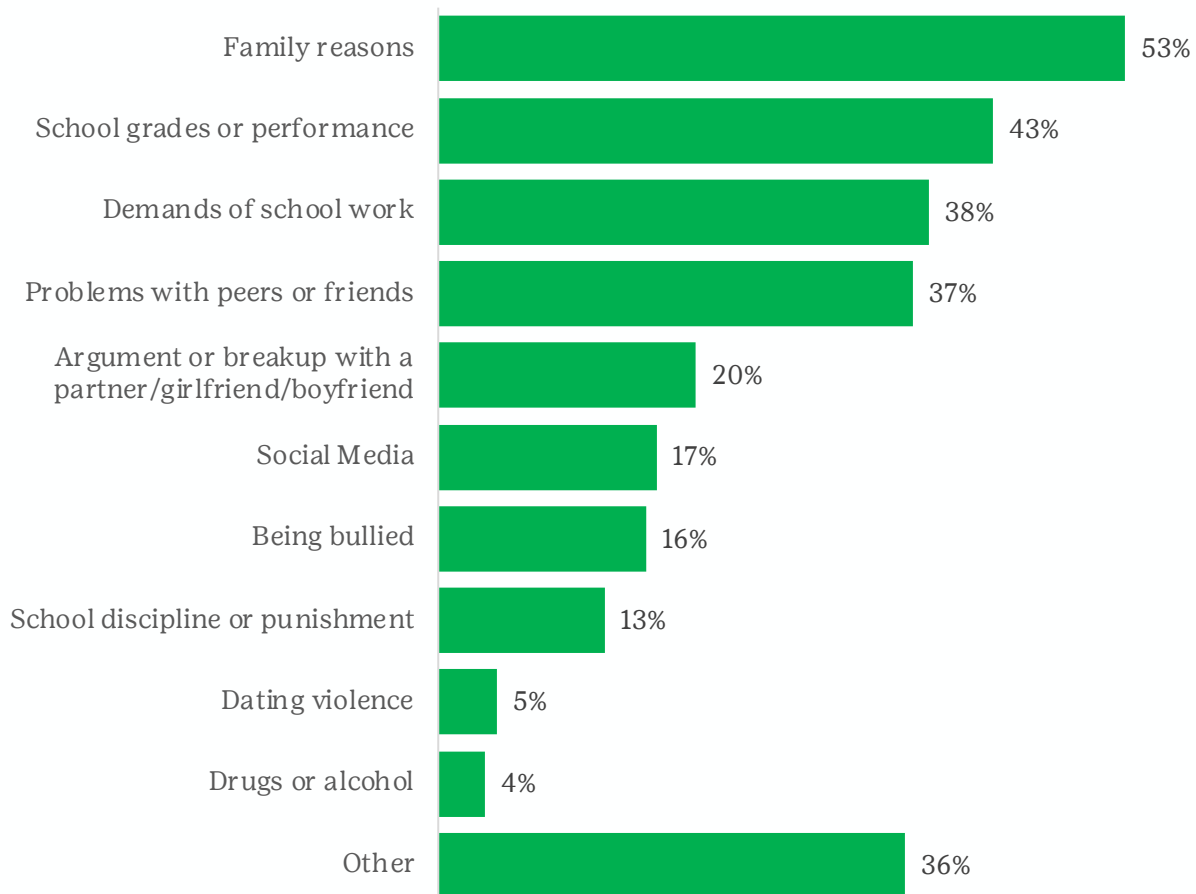


Death by suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people in Georgia, ages 10-14.

Family and school are the top reasons girls cite considering self-harm.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

Reasons girls in middle and high school report considering harming themselves in the past year



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 reduces the prevalence and severity of mental health challenges (Sieving, 2017), yet 2 out of 3 high school girls in Georgia report they do not have a caring adult to talk with about their feelings – a rate higher than their male peers.

Out-of-school adult support is documented further in Social Wellness; in the context of mental health, **the absence of such an adult relationship leaves Georgia girls without one of the strongest known buffers against depression, anxiety, and self-harm.**

65%

of high school girls in Georgia lack a caring adult to talk with about their feelings compared with 56% of boys.

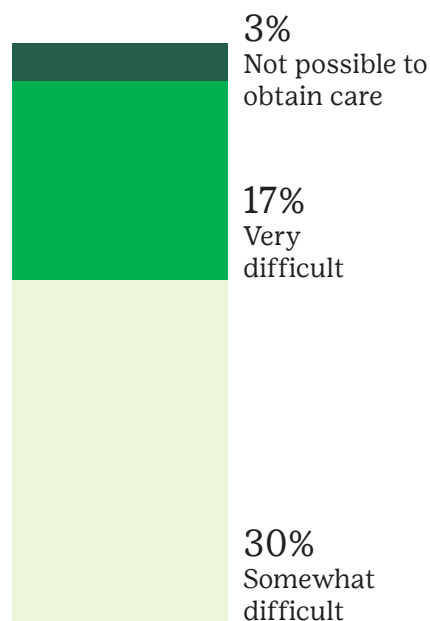
Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

When parents do seek mental health care for their daughters, they encounter system-level barriers. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, 50% of parents of girls ages 3 to 17 in Georgia report having difficulty accessing mental health care for their daughter, with 1 in 5 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 Georgia girls already at elevated risk of depression, anxiety, and self-harm, system-level barriers to care compound the individual crisis.

Difficulty in obtaining mental health treatment, reported by parents



Georgia



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.



90%

of Georgia Girl Scouts agree:
“I am glad I’m me.”



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.**
At the same time, more than half of girls across 3rd through 8th grade are not proficient in ELA.
- **Georgia girls are closing the math achievement gap.**
Girls trail boys in achieving math proficiency in 4th grade but close the gap by 8th grade and surpass boys in Algebra in high school.
- **Chronic absenteeism affects 1 in 5 Georgia girls.**
20% of girls are absent from school more than 15% of the year.
- **Girls comprise a larger portion of AP students than boys.**
4% more girls are enrolled in AP or Honors courses than boys.
- **Girls are pursuing higher education more aggressively than boys.**
12% more Georgia girls are enrolling in college within 16 months of graduation than their male peers.

“Girl Scouts really **inspires me to work harder** at everything I do.

- Georgia Girl Scout, Brownie (2nd - 3rd grade), 2025



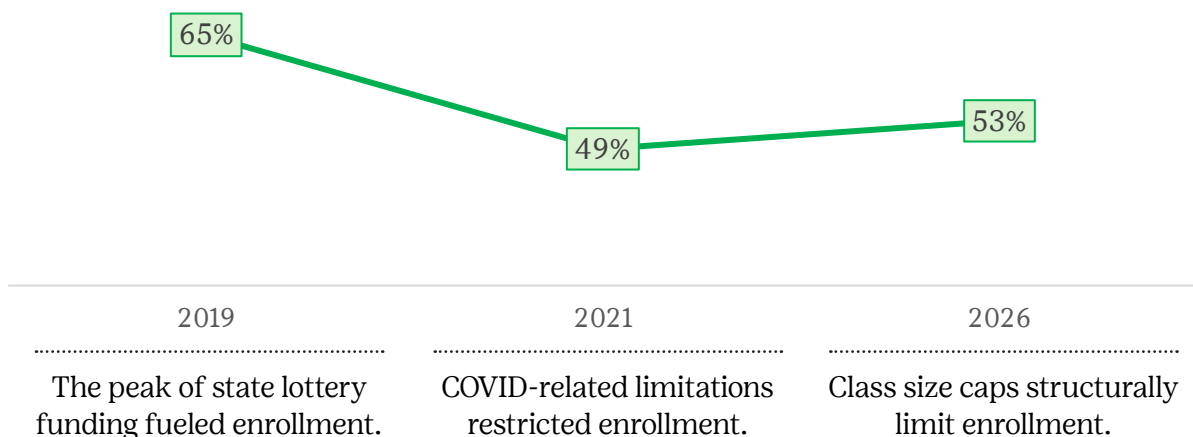
Early Childhood Education

Georgia's investment and success in establishing a state-funded early childhood education program is unmatched in the U.S. Georgia was not just the first, but one of the best: the state was recently recognized as the first universal program in the nation to meet all ten quality benchmarks of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER, 2026). Commitment to quality education produces results: in a longitudinal study of Georgia's 3rd grade class, **students participating in the universal Pre-K program demonstrated higher end-of-course scores** in every subject area compared with students who did not enroll in Pre-K education (Early, 2019).

Over half of 4-year-old girls are enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K program.

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2026.

Percent Enrollment in Georgia Pre-K
Female, 4 Year Old



The benefits of early childhood education for participants across the demographic spectrum are substantial; however, research indicates gains for girls are more pronounced and long-lasting than they are for boys. Several studies have found that **girls experience larger cognitive and achievement outcomes compared to boys** and also experienced slightly higher behavioral and mental health outcomes as a result of participation in early childhood education (Garcia, 2018; Magnuson, 2019).

As demonstrated later in this section, girls in Georgia are experiencing lags in literacy and English Language Arts compared to national averages; these investments in early childhood education programs are a meaningful investment in girls' futures to level these lags.

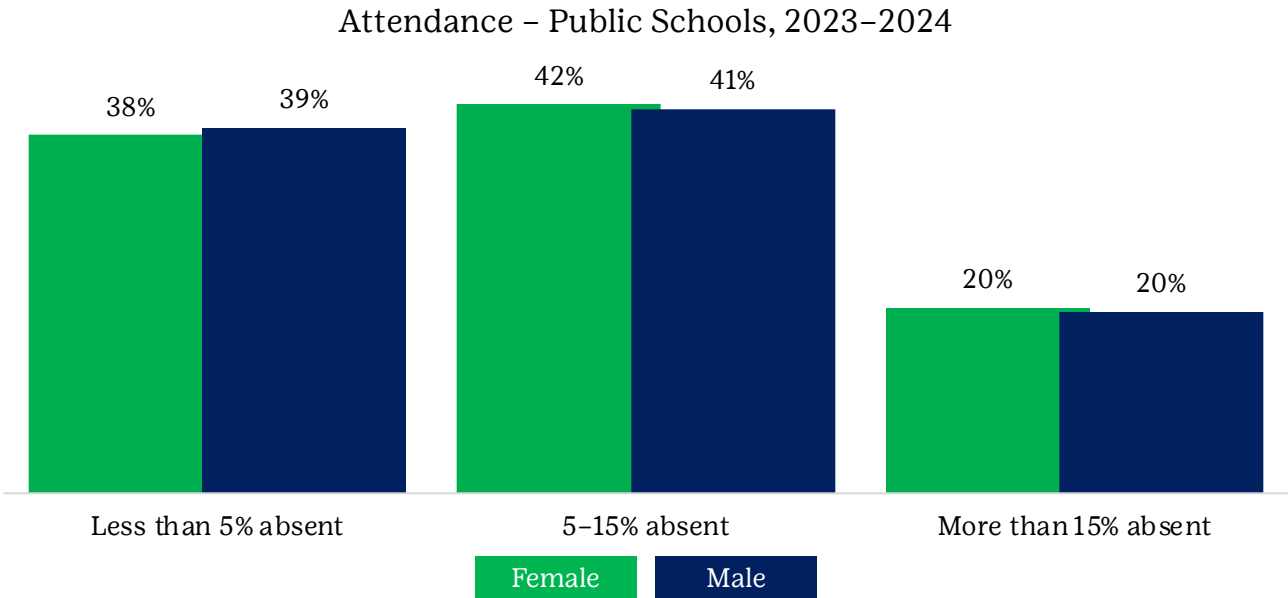


School Attendance

Consistent school attendance is the fundamental precondition for academic engagement and achievement. The Georgia Department of Education tracks absenteeism in the state by a student’s share of school days missed: less than 5%, between 5% and 15%, and chronic absenteeism of more than 15%. Across the state, girls and boys are absent at nearly identical rates, but the headline finding is the prevalence of chronic absence: **nearly 1 in 5 girls in Georgia is chronically absent from school, missing 28 or more school days per year.**

Chronic absenteeism affects 1 in 5 girls in Georgia.

Georgia Department of Education, Student Attendance – 2023-2024, Public Schools.



A strong link between chronic absenteeism and lower academic achievement has been documented through several studies, including a comparison of absence rates occurring among siblings, neutralizing many other factors that impact academics such as home environment (Gottfried, 2011). **For girls, the absenteeism challenges are multi-pronged:** as demonstrated in this report, girls are more likely than boys to miss school days after feeling unsafe and girls report experiencing mental health challenges and dating violence at higher rates than boys. These circumstances create tension between safety and school attendance.

76%
of Georgia Girl Scouts feel
more confident at school
because of the program.

School Engagement

Many of the key outcomes students need from school to be successful in life are not academic in nature. In a pivotal longitudinal study, school performance emerged as the least important indicator of life-satisfaction (Layard, 2014). Utilizing 40 years of cohort data, the study identified key variables to being life-ready, defined with attributes across economic, social, and personal domains. Evaluating family background (economic and psycho-social family dynamics), child characteristics (including intellectual performance and emotional health), and adult outcomes (such as income, employment, and physical health), research found that emotional wellbeing such as self-discipline and social behavior were the most reliable indicators of life-satisfaction - attributes present in how students *show up* at school, not perform at school.

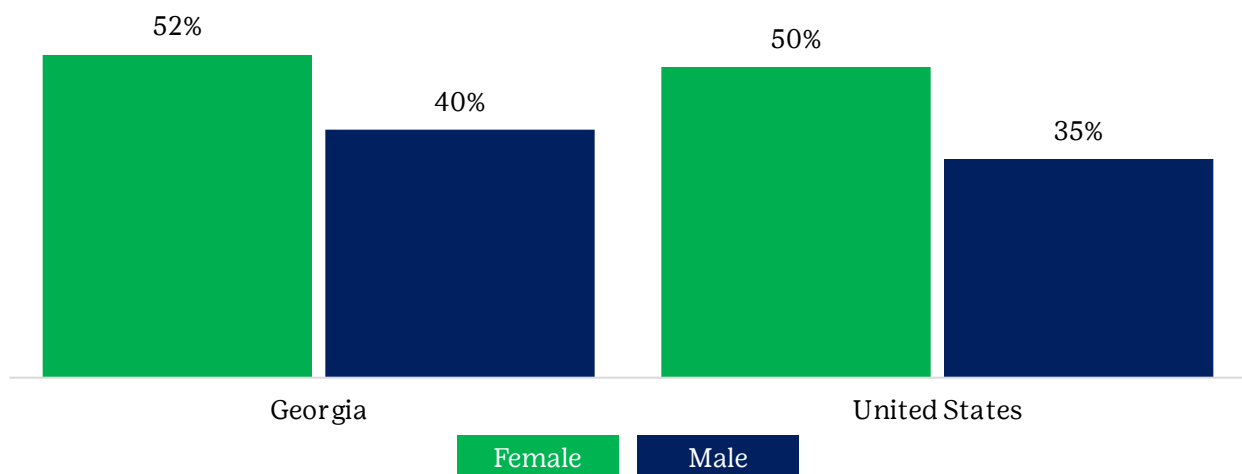
Student engagement includes measures that indicate how young people are developing attributes such as goal-setting, grit, and personal motivation. As Layard identified, these non-cognitive skills are much more reliable predictors for achieving success later in life. As young people spend a significant portion of their development in a school setting, these critical life-skills are often developed within the context of school.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health, parents of girls in Georgia report higher rates of school engagement than parents of boys, and Georgia rates exceed the national average for both sexes. 52% of Georgia girls are described by their parent as “always engaged in school,” compared to 40% of Georgia boys and 50% of girls nationally.

A higher portion of girls in Georgia are described by parents as always engaged in school, exceeding the rate for boys, national average for girls.

U.S. Census Bureau, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 5.2

Engagement in School, According to Parent.



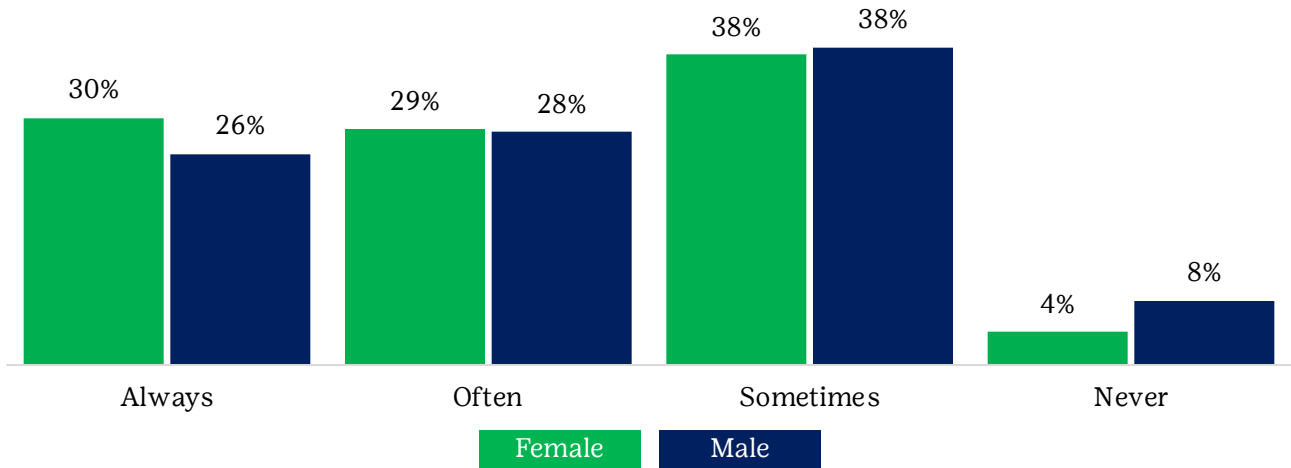
School Climate

The roots of engagement begin in elementary school. According to the 2024 Georgia Student Health Survey, 30% of elementary-age girls report they “always” like school, compared to 26% of elementary-age boys. The pattern is consistent through the middle of the scale, but the most striking gap appears at the “Never” end: nearly twice as many elementary boys as girls report they never like school (8% versus 4%). The early divergence in school affinity – present as early as 3rd grade – sets the stage for the engagement and academic gaps observed in later grades.

Elementary-age girls are more likely than boys to consistently like school.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Elementary School, 2023-2024.

I like school, according to elementary school students.



Girls in Georgia’s upper grades also report a more positive perception of their school’s academic expectations than their male peers. According to the 2024 Georgia Student Health Survey, 84% of female upper-school students agree that their school has high standards for achievement, compared to 78% of male students. The variance mirrors research showing that girls often feel a more profound amount of pressure to perform well academically while boys experience negative social consequences by pursuing academic achievement (Workman & Heyder, 2020).



K-12 Student Achievement

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System 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 Georgia. **Overall, a significant percentage of students are not achieving proficiency standards.** In addition, the variance in proficiency scores of girls and boys in subjects like English Language Arts (ELA) and math suggests that several influences in and outside of the classroom are shaping academic performance.

Indicates on- or above-grade-level.			
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Beginning Learner	Developing Learner	Proficient Learner	Distinguished Learner
Students at this level do not yet demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards. The students need substantial academic support to be prepared for the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness.	Students at this level demonstrate partial proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards. The students need additional academic support to ensure success in the next grade level or course and to be on track for college and career readiness.	Students at this level demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards. The students are prepared for the next grade level or course and are on track for college and career readiness.	Students at this level demonstrate advanced proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards. The students are well prepared for the next grade level or course and are well prepared for college and career readiness.



81%

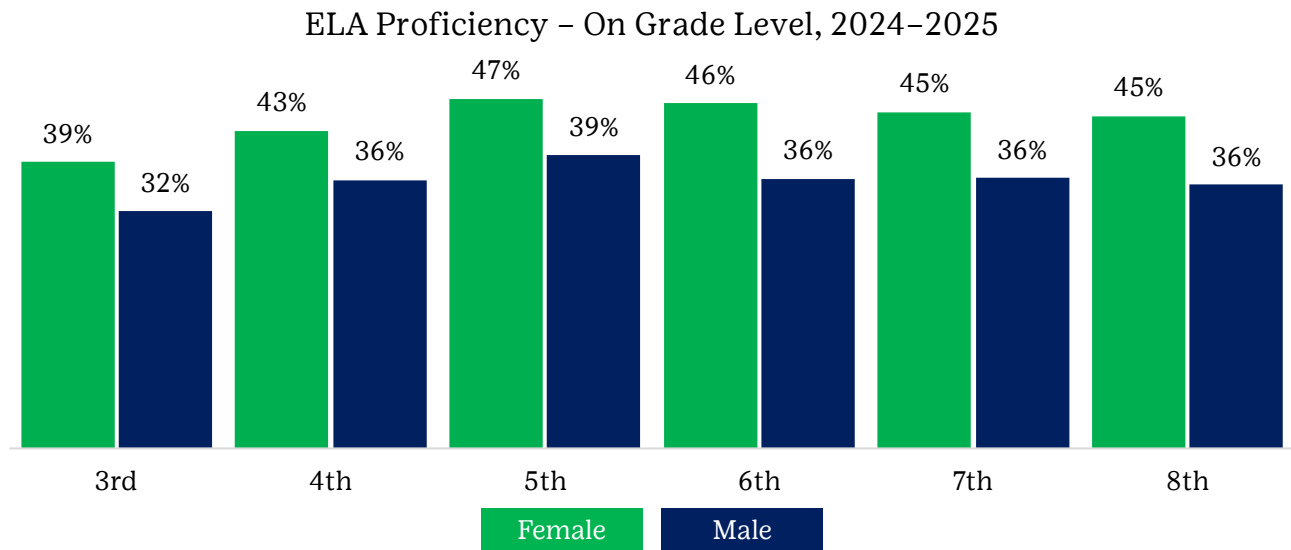
of middle and high school girls in Georgia **feel successful at school.**

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023-2024.

K-12 Proficiency: English Language Arts

Girls in Georgia outperform boys in English Language Arts proficiency across every grade level. The gap is widest in the middle grades and narrows somewhat by high school – as girls complete American Literature in high school, they maintained a 7% achievement gap above boys, with 44% achieving proficiency compared to 37% of boys. Notably, however, fewer than half of girls across all grades score Proficient or Distinguished at any tested grade, signaling that even the higher-performing group of female students is not, on average, reading and writing at grade level.

Girls outperform boys in the English Language Arts assessment at every grade level, by an average of 6 percentage points.
Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade Assessments, English Language Arts, 2024-2025



Girls in the United States have consistently surpassed boys in English Language Arts assessments. Researchers offer varying explanations – ranging from cognitive development to social pressure – including evidence that girls are more easily able to utilize both hemispheres of the brain in writing and reading-comprehension tasks (Reilly, 2018).

The Georgia data follow that national pattern; what is distinctive in Georgia is the size of the gap itself, which remains stable from 3rd through 12th grade.

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

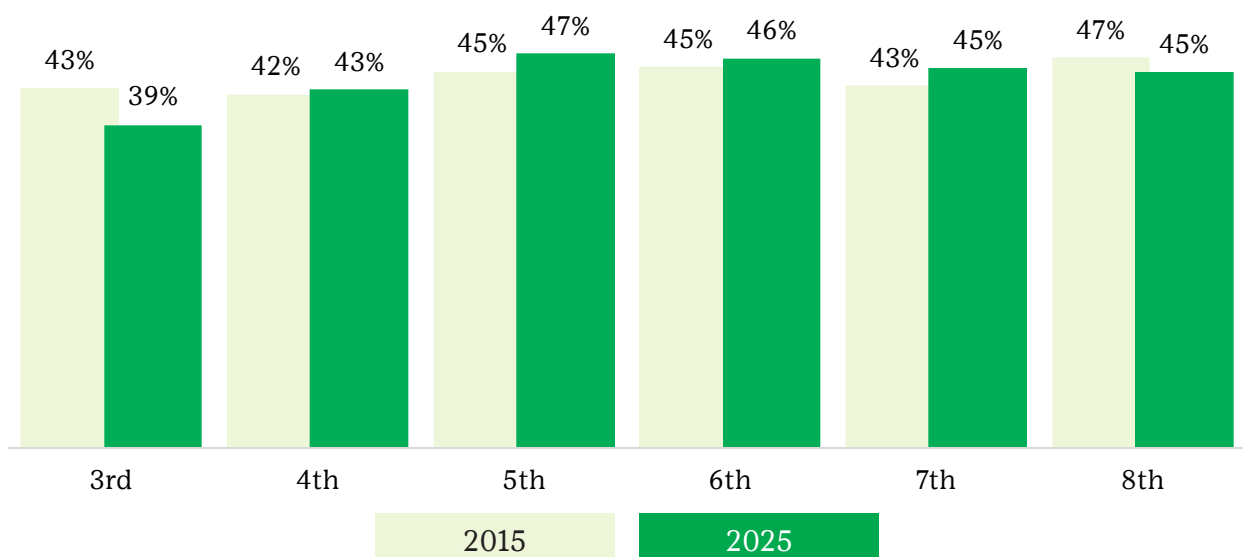
K-12 Proficiency: ELA, continued.

The 10-year trend in girls' ELA proficiency shows moderate improvement overall with one particularly striking concern: **the decline in proficiency among 3rd grade girls**. The Annie E. Casey Foundation notes that this year marks a transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” and is often regarded as a landmark year in literacy proficiency. Over the last 10 years, Georgia saw a notable decrease in the portion of 3rd grade girls achieving proficiency, from 43% of girls in 2015 to 39% of girls in 2025.

While most grades demonstrate small gains in ELA proficiency, girls at the critical 3rd grade level dropped 4% in 10 years.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade Assessments, English Language Arts, 2014-2015 and 2024-2025.

Girls' ELA Proficiency – On Grade Level, 2015 vs 2025



“

Coding with Girl Scouts is fun because **all girls are welcomed**, despite their differences in abilities. She still talks about working on the computer and feeling so welcomed!

- Parent of a Georgia Girl Scout, Brownie (2nd - 3rd grade), 2024





GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Academic Success: Lifelong Impact

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

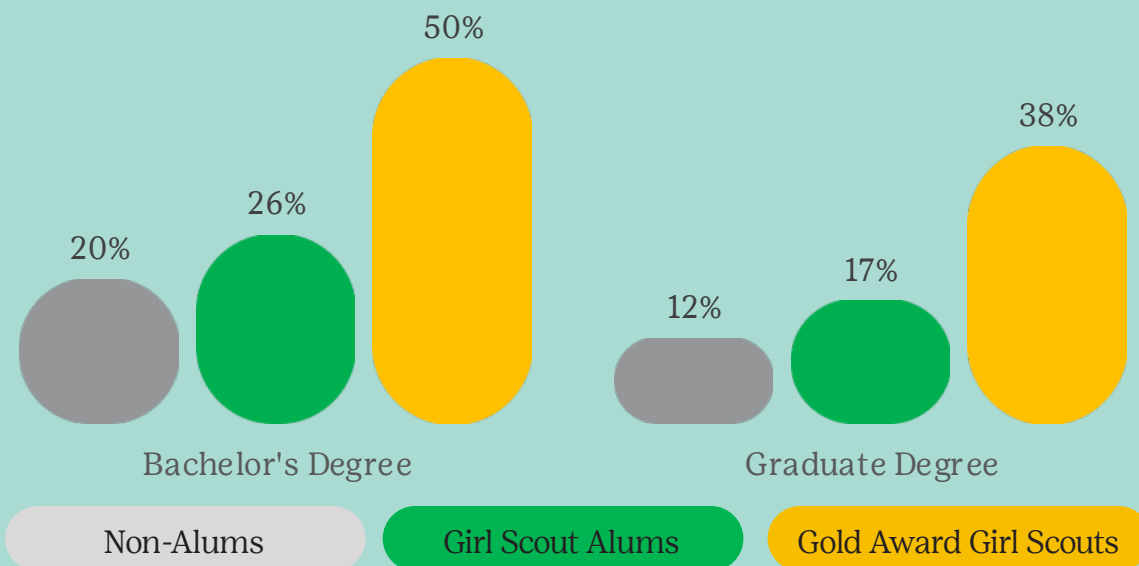
First, Girl Scouts doesn't feel like school, and that's the point! Girls learn skills they won't find in a classroom (like entrepreneurship) through immersive programs (like the renowned Girl Scout Cookie Program). These experiences are based on experiential, hands-on activities that build skills, curiosity,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





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.

In Georgia, the gender gap in math proficiency is narrower than the stereotype implies; in fact, by 8th grade, girls close the achievement gap. Girls trail boys slightly in math proficiency from 4th through 7th grade, then move to slightly surpass boys in 8th grade. Crucially, however, fewer than half of girls in any tested grade achieved proficiency, a finding that mirrors the on-grade-level gap in ELA.

While girls trail boys in achieving math proficiency in 4th grade, by 8th grade, they close this gap and surpass boys in high school algebra.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade Assessments, Mathematics, 2024-2025.

	Math Proficiency (Level 3-4) 4th Grade	Math Proficiency (Level 3-4) 8th Grade	Algebra Proficiency (Level 3-4) High School
Female	47%	47%	46%
Male	51%	47%	45%
Difference	4% Lower	Equal	1% Higher



By high school,
Georgia girls close the math achievement gap,
with 46% of girls achieving proficiency in Algebra compared to 45% of boys.

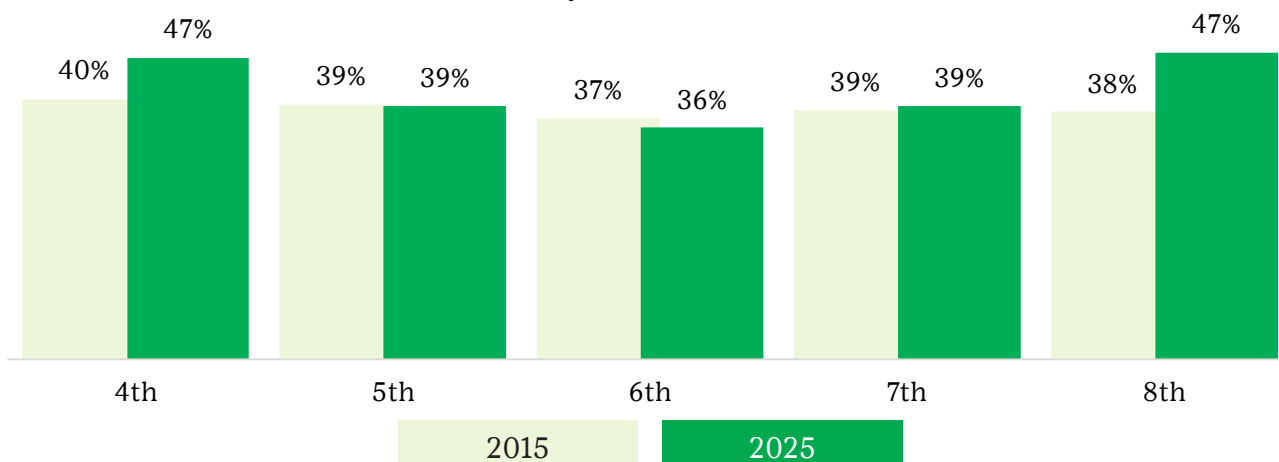
K-12 Proficiency: Mathematics, continued.

The 10-year trend in girls' math proficiency in Georgia is mixed. While middle grades show moderate variances in on-grade level performance, significant improvements occurred among fourth and eighth grade. The 9-point gain posted by eighth-grade girls scoring on grade level is a notable improvement that suggests middle-grade math instruction and improvements in the social encouragement are taking root.

Georgia girls made significant gains in math proficiency in 4th and 8th grade over the last decade.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade Assessments, Mathematics, 2014-2015 and 2024-2025.

Girls' Math Proficiency – On Grade Level, 2015 vs 2025



Adults play a significant role in shaping girls' confidence and competence in math. Teachers may unconsciously favor boys in mathematics discussions or assign boys more challenging math tasks, reinforcing the notion that boys are naturally better at the subject (Copur-Gencturk, 2023).

At the same time, when girls are presented with same-gender role models in mathematics, their performance and interest in the subject increase (Master, 2014; Gladstone, 2024). Each of these influences compounds over years of schooling, shaping the field of study girls choose in high school and the careers they pursue in adulthood.

89%

of Georgia Girl Scouts believe they can be good at many different things.

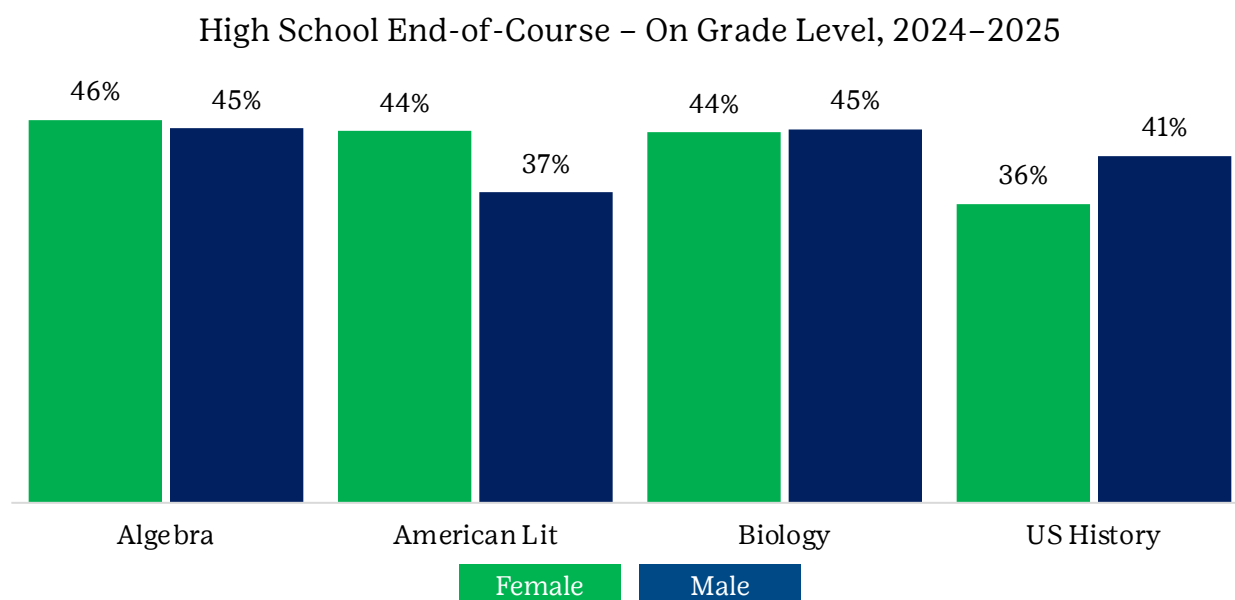


High School End-of-Course Assessments

High school students in Georgia complete End-of-Course assessments in four required courses – Algebra: Concepts & Connections, American Literature & Composition, Biology, and United States History. Comparisons among female and male students in high school follow the K-8 trajectory: girls outperform boys in English Language Arts–related courses by a significant margin, while boys outperform girls in some STEM and social-studies courses.

High school girls outperform boys in American Literature and Algebra, reversing a decades-long trend.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Milestones End-of-Course Assessments, 2024-2025



83%

of middle and high school girls in Georgia agree “my school has high standards for achievement” compared to 78% of boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024



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.**

63%

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

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.***

58%

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



Learning Differences & Advanced Coursework

Self-disclosed data from the Georgia Student Health Survey shows that girls are less likely than boys to report having a federally classified learning condition – a finding consistent with the broader research that girls are systematically under-diagnosed with mental, emotional, and learning differences (Quinn & Madhoo, 2014). Boys self-disclose higher rates of every measured condition: Learning Disability (4.9% vs. 4.6%), Emotional Behavioral Disorder (1.9% vs. 1.8%), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (5.8% vs. 4.3%), and Physical Disability (1.2% vs. 0.8%).

The largest gap appears in ADHD, which research has long shown is meaningfully under-identified in girls. Girls with ADHD often present with inattentive, rather than hyperactive-impulsive, symptoms which are often less visible to teachers and parents and more likely to be mis-attributed to anxiety, perfectionism, or social struggles (Quinn & Madhoo, 2014).

34% fewer girls than boys self-disclose an ADHD diagnosis; researchers link to under-identified.

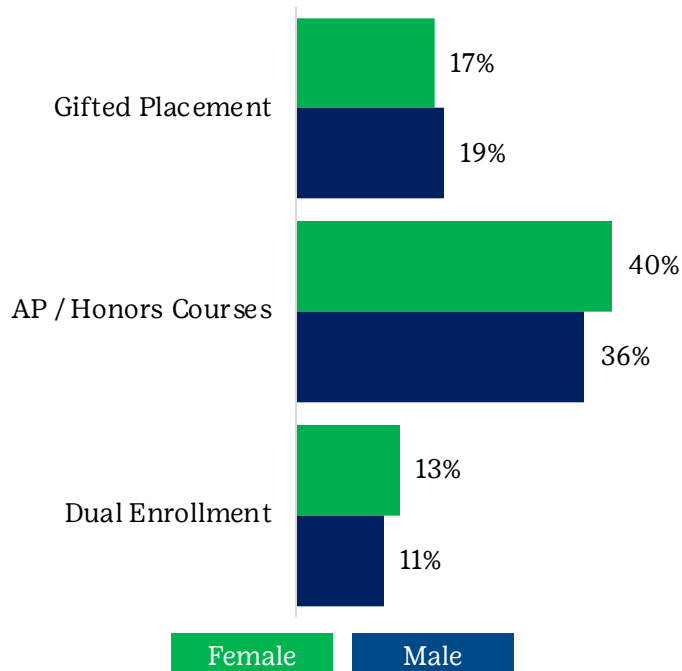
On the other end of the academic spectrum, Georgia girls outpace boys on most measures of advanced coursework — more take AP and Honors classes, and more enroll in Dual Enrollment for college credit. Boys lead only in Gifted Placement, by just over a point. **The gap is telling: Gifted is the only advanced track that requires adult nomination, while AP and Dual Enrollment are driven by the student herself.**

Research links advanced coursework to post-secondary success (Ogut, 2021), but a comprehensive AP evaluation surfaced a trade-off: the program builds real scientific and analytic skill while also raising stress and eroding confidence in college and career readiness. For girls already carrying the emotional and social pressures documented elsewhere in this report, that trade-off deserves attention.

High school girls in Georgia self-enroll in more advanced coursework yet are not placed in Gifted programs at the same rate as boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Survey, 2023-2024.

Gifted, AP/Honors & Dual Enrollment
– Self-Disclosed

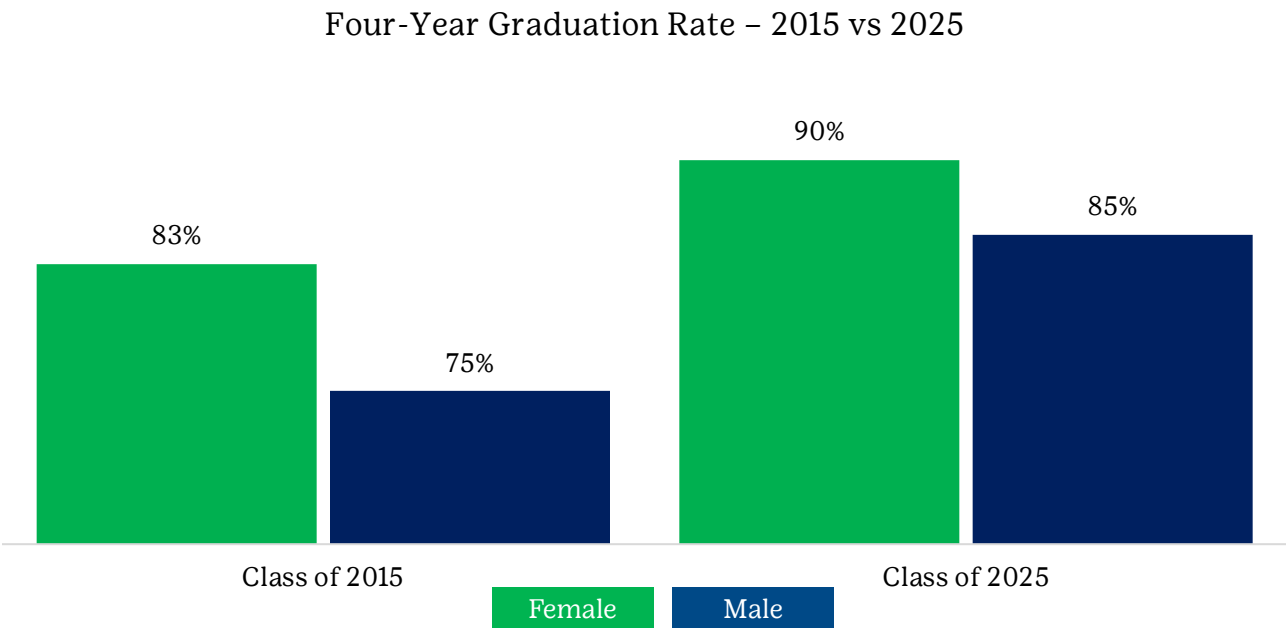


Graduation Rate

Most students in the Class of 2025 began high school during the academic year most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. **Over the course of the last decade, students in Georgia have meaningfully improved their high school graduation rate**, with girls graduating at a higher rate than boys in every year. The Class of 2025 achieved a milestone, with 90% of Georgia girls graduating within four years, compared to 85% of boys.

Girls in Georgia have improved the 4-year graduation rate by nearly 7 points over the last decade, finishing the Class of 2025 at 90%.

Georgia Department of Education, Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate, 2014-2015 and 2024-2025.



The differences in graduation rates between girls and boys in Georgia 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.

“Girl Scouts helps me work hard to achieve my goals. I love being successful!

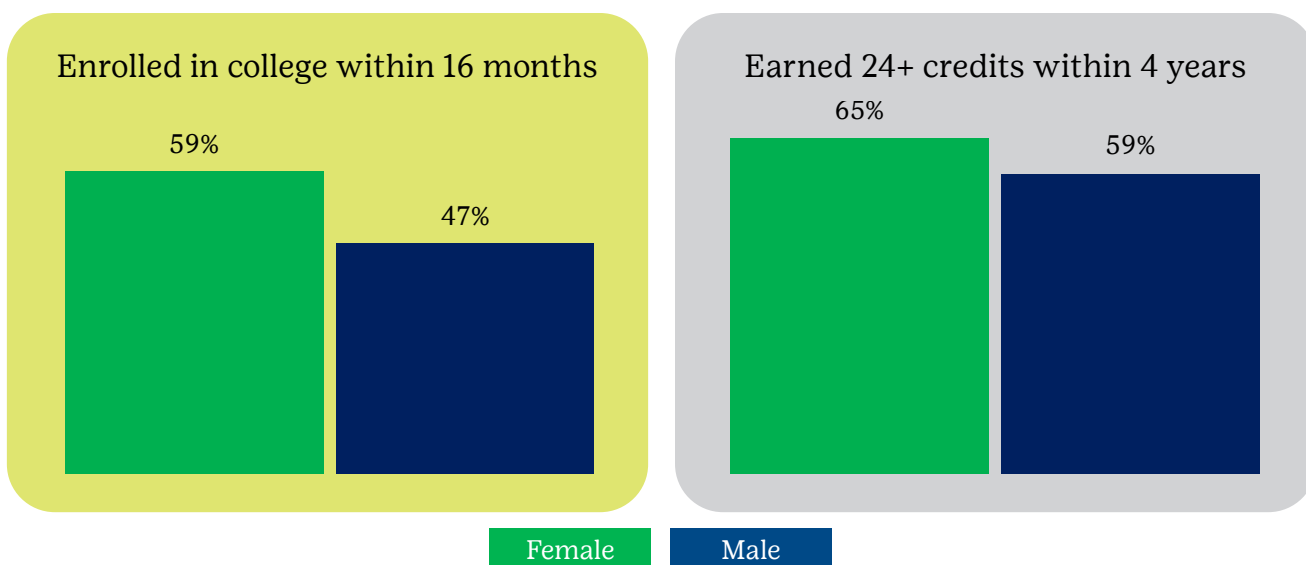
- Georgia Girl Scout, Daisy (Kindergarten - 1st grade), 2025

College and Career Readiness

Navigating the school-to-work transition for young people can often feel abrupt, particularly during times of economic or industry turbulence. Entering high school during a period marked by the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst the disruptions to learning and increases in life stressors detailed throughout this report, **the Class of 2025 enrolled an impressive portion of girls from its graduating class into a post-secondary program.** 59% of female graduates enrolled in college within 16 months of graduation – 12 points higher than male graduates. Female graduates also earned 24 college credits within four years at higher rates than their male peers (65% versus 59%), an indicator of sustained engagement in higher education.

Among Georgia’s Class of 2025, girls display a higher level of post-secondary motivation than their male peers.

Georgia Department of Education, C12 Graduation Report, Class of 2025.



Across the country, more young women are enrolling in higher education than men. The Pew Research Center evaluated attitudes and evidence surrounding college completion in 2024, asking, ‘Is it still worth it?’ By several measures, the answer is yes ([Fry, 2024](#)).

- 78% of young women holding a bachelor’s degree or higher were employed full-time, compared to 69% of young women with only a high school education.
- The median household income of young women holding a bachelor’s degree or higher is \$65,000 compared to \$36,000 among young women with only a high school education.
- Young women holding a bachelor’s degree or higher experienced less job loss during the COVID-19 recession than young women completing lower levels of education.

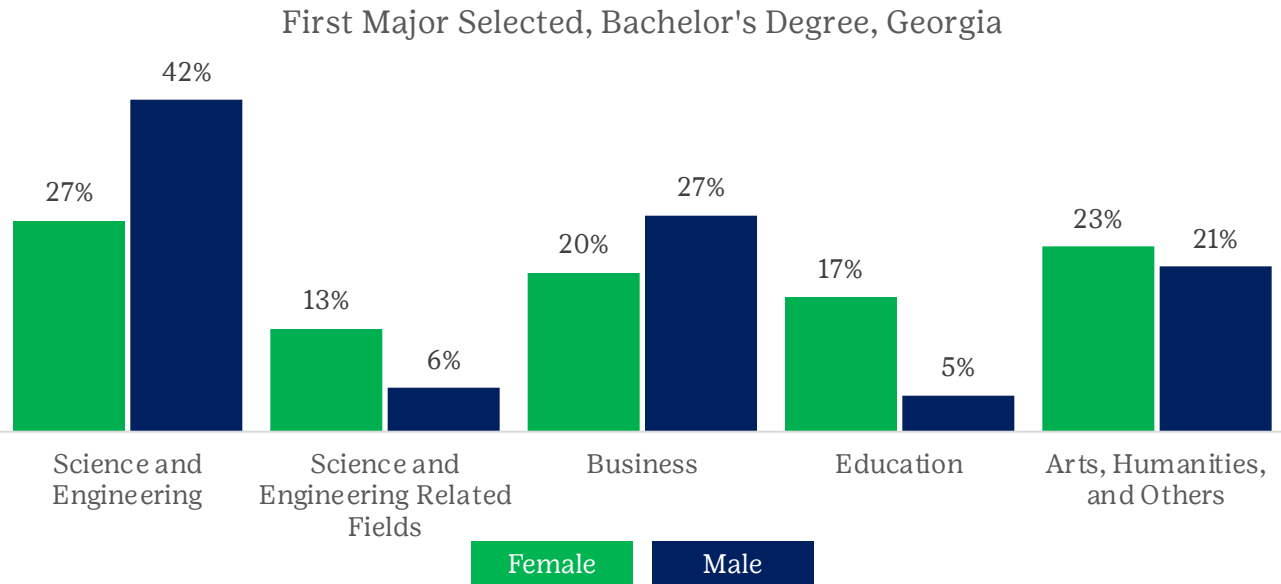
By these measures, girls in Georgia are well-positioned to continue building a successful life after completing school, but notable differences emerge as students first select their course of study in college.

College and Career Readiness, continued.

Despite closing the achievement gap by 8th grade and narrowing the gap in science to 1% in high school, girls are selecting STEM fields at an alarmingly low rate. 15% 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 state, girls remain the best opportunity to create a large generation of STEM employees needed to advance the state’s technology innovation.**

One-third fewer women in Georgia enroll in STEM degree programs compared to men.

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S1502: Field of Bachelor's Degree for First Major, 2024, Georgia.



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).



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

- **Nearly half of high school girls in Georgia do not feel close to people at their school.**
Compared to 39% of boys, 48% of girls.
- **Teenage girls report struggling to feel connected to an adult.**
2 out of 3 middle and high school girls report lacking a caring adult to talk with about their feelings.
- **32% of middle and high school girls experienced loneliness in the past 30 days.**
A rate 10 points higher than boys.

“Each and every one of us is totally together. Whenever a new Girl Scout joins us, we welcome her in the same way they welcomed me: **in a great, loving way.**”

- Georgia Girl Scout, Junior (4th - 5th grade), 2024

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 Georgia youth, nor is first-person reported data which is regarded as more reliable, available data shows that more than two out of five girls have experienced at least one ACE according to parents.

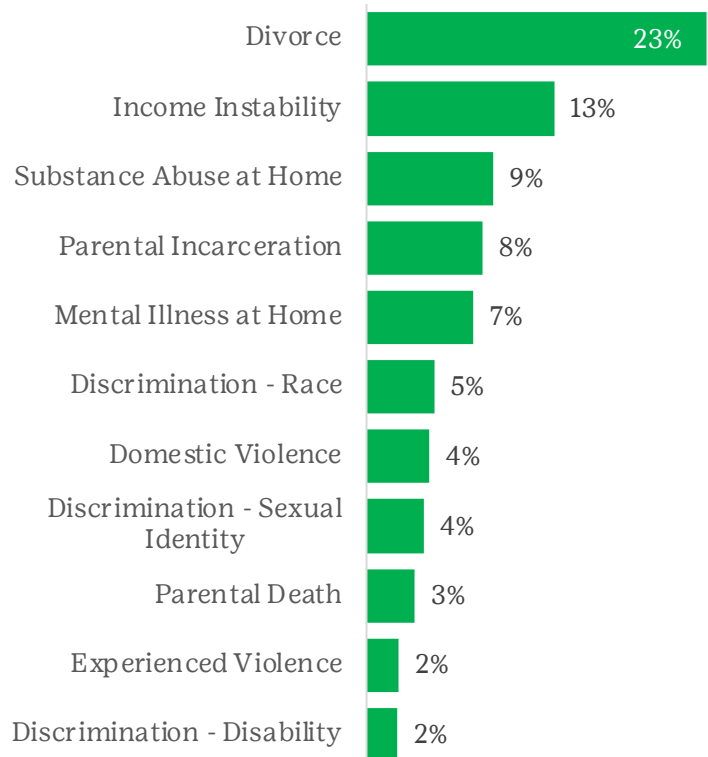
2 in 5

Georgia girls are reported to experience at least one adverse childhood experience.

According to parents, 2 out of 5 Georgia girls have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience - divorce being the leading cause.

National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Georgia

Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences among Girls, according to Parent



Social Connection: Peer Relationships

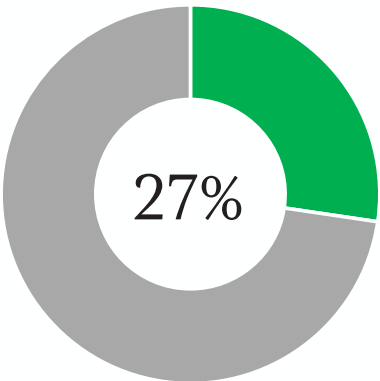
A girl’s sense of belonging in her school environment shapes much more than her daily comfort. Decades of research demonstrate that youth–adult connectedness and school attachment serve as key protective factors for adolescent health, predicting better mental health, stronger academic engagement, and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

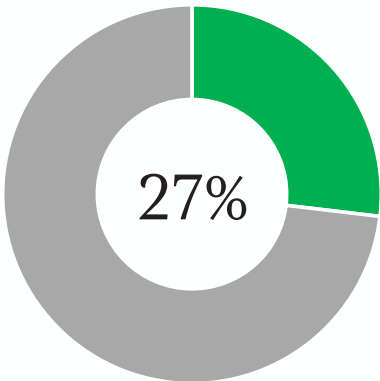
1 in 4 girls do not feel like they fit in.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey, 2023–2024.

Elementary school girls who do not get along with other students.



Middle and high school girls who do not feel like they fit in.



Patterns in belonging begin early: trends observed through the Georgia Student Health Survey among elementary school students can become more prevalent as students enter middle and high school. This holds true among girls feeling like they fit in with other students and observing that students treat each other with respect.

Research demonstrates a strong link between feeling welcomed at school and outcomes such as mental health, academic success, and peer relationships. **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 at ages 19–28 (Allen, 2025). In other words, the effects of not fitting in are enduring beyond a child’s teenage years.

Half of middle and high school girls feel students do not treat each other with respect.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

Elementary School Girls
Students do not treat each other well.

41%

Middle & High School Girls
Students do not treat each other with respect.

50%

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](#)).

25% of high school girls in Georgia report not having an adult to talk with if they have a problem. This trend is also observed by caregivers, though to a lesser degree: according to parents of girls, 1 in 10 girls lack an adult mentor outside the home.



One in four middle and high school girls reports not having an adult at school they can talk with if they have a problem.

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 Georgia 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](#)).



GIRL SCOUT IMPACT

Sisterhood, IRL

The friends she needs, in real life.

At a time when one in four girls does not feel close to people at school, the question of whether she belongs is not academic. Belonging is a feeling that shapes her afternoon, her weekend, and increasingly, how she interacts with 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 including 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.

89%

of Georgia Girl Scouts say:

Girls in my
troop make me
feel welcome.



“My troop leaders care a lot about making sure every girl feels like they belong. **We try to make everyone feel like a friend.**

- Georgia Girl Scout, Junior (4th - 5th grade), 2024

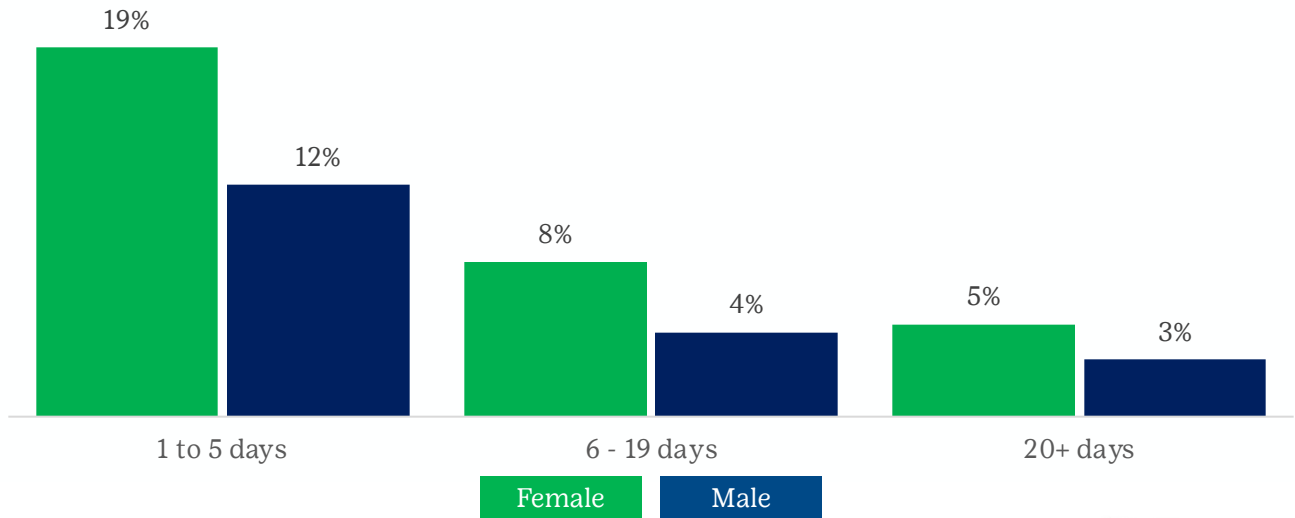
Social Connection: Loneliness

Loneliness during adolescence is increasingly recognized as a public health concern. Research linking adolescent social isolation to measurable mental health decline – including elevated rates of depression and anxiety – cites the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media. Among teenagers, these two forces decrease time spent in face-to-face relationships and intensify image-based comparisons (Twenge, 2022). The pattern is most pronounced among adolescent girls.

1 in 3 middle and high school girls in Georgia experiences loneliness each month – a rate 50% higher than that of boys.

Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Student Health Survey – Middle and High School, 2023–2024.

Experienced loneliness in past 30 days.
Middle and High School students.



Closely related to this rise in loneliness is the experience many Georgia girls report of feeling that their own behavior and personality are shifting in ways that impact their social relationships. One in three middle and high school girls in Georgia reports experiencing drastic changes in her own behavior and personality that affect her social relationships.

Taken together, this internal tension may contribute to the rise in loneliness of Georgia girls as teenagers struggle with navigating increasingly complex social relationships while also navigating internal emotional changes.



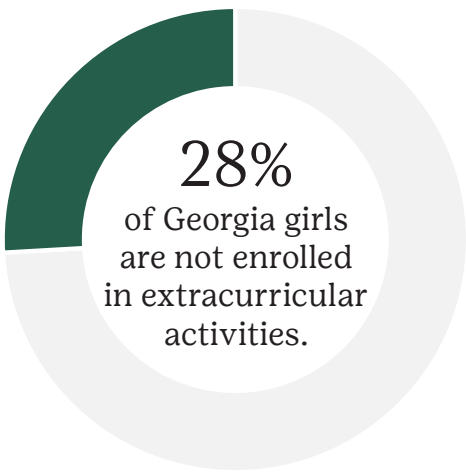
One in three middle and high school girls report experiencing drastic changes in their behavior or personality, impacting social relationships.

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 Georgia, 1 in 4 girls is not involved in any out-of-school activity. For the three-quarters of Georgia 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 Georgia After 3 PM, a report of The Afterschool Alliance, 54% of children in Georgia would participate in an afterschool program if one were available – a rise of over 12% in a single year (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 Georgia youth who experience barriers to accessing afterschool programming will miss out on this important protective factor.

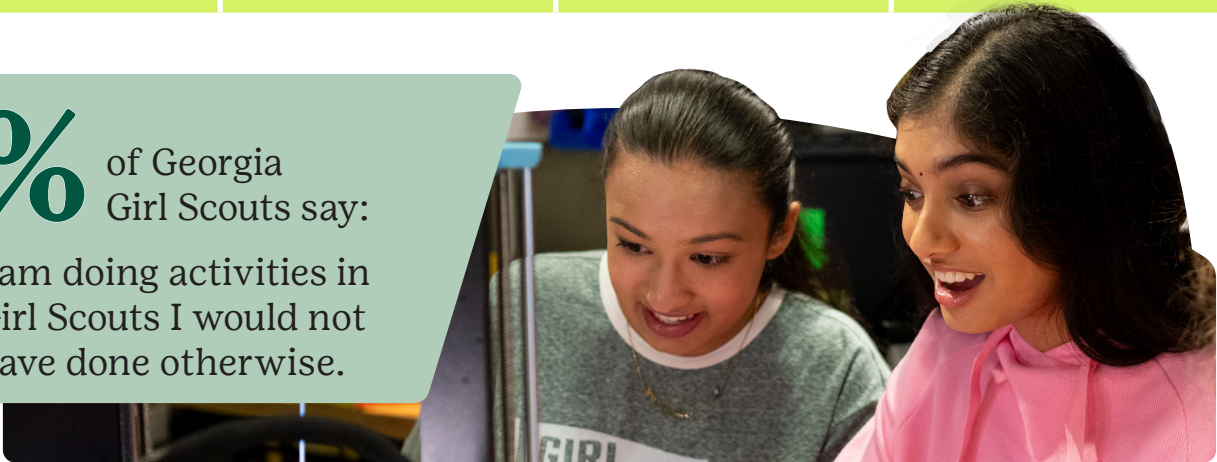


3 out of 5 families report cost as a barrier to participation in afterschool programming in Georgia.

Georgia After 3 PM 2026, The Afterschool Alliance.

Program Cost	Lack of Reliable Transportation	Inconvenient Locations	Programs Unavailable
58%	49%	46%	40%

87% of Georgia Girl Scouts say:
“I am doing activities in Girl Scouts I would not have done otherwise.”



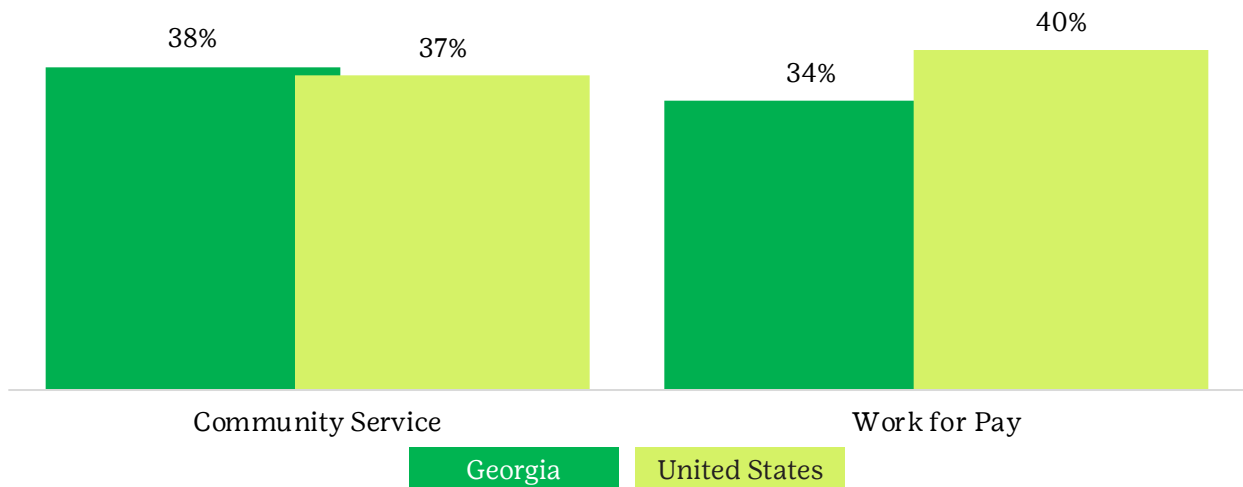
Out-of-School Involvement: Service & Work

Experiencing community service or working outside the home during adolescence offers young people an important view into the power of their contributions to the broader community. For girls in Georgia, about one-third are participating in either experience and most are more likely to engage in community service than to work for pay.

Girls are slightly more likely to be involved in community service than working for pay outside the home.

U.S. Census, National Survey of Children's Health, 2022-2023, Indicator 5.7 and 5.8.

Girls Participating in Community Service and Work for Pay,
Georgia vs United States



Research is conflicted about whether working outside of school during secondary education is beneficial or consequential. A landmark study in this area finds that the impact of working during school years depends significantly on the demand of the job: students with high-demand jobs of more than 10 hours per week tend to show worse academic outcomes, but students in low-demand work commitments often exhibit higher grades, higher motivation, and higher life aspirations than non-working students (Singh, 2007).

Engaging in community service has proven to increase social capital of young people, deepen self-understanding, and increase support systems for young people (Flanagan, 2014). In preparing girls for the school-to-work transition or increasing the likelihood of achieving success in post-secondary education, community service offers girls experience and exposure to life outside an academic setting.

It's worth noting the underlying gender bias in out-of-school engagements between girls and boys in Georgia: **early in adolescence, more girls are contributing to their communities without compensation than those that are.** This early introduction to the worth of work may contribute to the well-documented challenge of the “pay ask gap,” aiming to combat the U.S. gender pay gap by coaching women to ask for their worth (Roussille, 2024).



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 Georgia 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.



81%

of Georgia Girl Scouts completed community service.

91%

of Georgia Girl Scouts ran their own business through the iconic 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 Georgia-specific data in areas like sexual violence, mental health by race, and eating disorders 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.

Georgia Specific. Georgia must invest in state-level girl-specific data on emerging issues - including topics we may *want* to avoid but need to know.



CALL TO ACTION - PHYSICAL

Valuing Her Body



The physical health of Georgia's 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 value 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.

Nutrition. Georgia girls exhibit healthier eating habits than the national average - a strength worth protecting through equitable food access, nutrition education, and vigilance against disordered eating.

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





CALL TO ACTION: DIGITAL Engage, Don't Avoid

Georgia'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 judgement 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.

Advocate for Design. Georgia is leading the country with in-school phone management policies - momentum must be continued to keep pace with AI-enabled harms.



CALL TO ACTION - EMOTIONAL Adults Who Care



The crisis of mental and emotional health challenges for Georgia's girls 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

Close the STEM Gap

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. Georgia 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

Her People, Her Place

By many accounts, Georgia 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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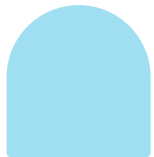
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Georgia Girls Need You.



Learn.

Discover more about the power of Girl Scouts.



Join.

Girls need caring adult mentors to prepare them for life.



Fund.

Connect with your local Girl Scout council to fund a girl's future.



Find more information at
www.GeorgiaGirlScouts.org.

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