



# WomanView

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## Girls Continuing Success in School Is Not at the Expense of Boys' Education

In 1992 the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published a report that exposed girls' shortcomings in the education they were receiving. The study revealed that girls received less attention in the classroom than boys and that girls were not well represented in math-related fields. The report brought attention to the "girls' crisis" in the education system, and the increased attention brought about criticism that boys would now be the new disadvantaged group. Books such as *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* (Sommers, 2000) and headlines that read "At Colleges, Women Are Leaving Men in the Dust" emerged as backlash to girls and women's successes. A new report by AAUW discredits the myth that gender equity in school has created a crisis in boys' education. *Where the Girls Are: The Facts About Gender Equity in Education* is a comprehensive look at women's education progress in the last 35 years. In order to represent the overall picture of trends in gender equity in the complete span of education, from elementary to college, researchers analyzed results from national standardized tests (college entrance exams, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and other measures of educational achievement) and assessed differences among girls and among boys by race/ethnicity and family income level. What they found were three clear facts about gender equity in schools today.

The first is that girl's successes do not come at the expense of boys. There is a positive connection between girls' and boys' education achievement. In states where girls score high on tests, boys do also; in states where girls have low test scores, boys will as well. In the last 35 years women have dramatically increased their rates of earning college degrees. After directly graduating from high school, both men and women are likely to attend and graduate from college today, more than ever before. This is not surprising given the economy in recent years. Young high school graduates realize that a bachelor's degree is necessary for almost every job. Attending college has become the rule and not the exception, and both men and women have responded in large numbers.

A second finding is that over the last 35 years both girls' and boys' educational performance has improved. Average test scores on standardized tests from elementary to college entrance exams have either risen or remained the same. Graduation rates for both high school and college have steadily risen. Test scores tell a mixed picture on gender. Across all racial groups girls generally outscore boys on the NAEP reading test. The math portion of the NAEP has inconsistent results. The researchers also examined the results of the SAT and ACT exams, which play a critical role as gatekeepers to college and hence the higher earnings associated with college and professional credentials. The SAT exam is intended to predict first-year college grades. The exam shows boys with an advantage overall on both the math and verbal portions. On the ACT exam, boys outperform girls on math and girls outperform boys on the English exam.

And, third, when the researchers compared race/ethnicity and family income to educational achievement, they found them to be closely related. When test scores are compared, children from

families of the lowest income bracket have the lowest average test scores. Incremental rises in family income resulted in incremental rise in test scores. Race and ethnicity are also strongly connected to test scores. Generally, African American and Hispanic boys and girls score lower than white and Asian American children on the exams. There is a critical need to find solutions for the disparities of girls' and boys' educational achievement as it relates to race/ethnicity and family income.

The gains that girls have made in attending and graduating from both high school and college have not hampered boys' access to quality education. Overall both have improved or stayed the same. The result of the AAUW report demonstrates that boys in general are not in crisis in their education. Those in crisis are African American, Hispanic, and low-income children, boys and girls alike, as the large discrepancies among race/ethnicity and income reveal. If you would like to see the complete study, go to <http://www.aauw.org/research/WhereGirlsAre.cfm> .

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