

## Volunteering

### Headline

Students who plan to complete four years of college are significantly more likely to participate in volunteer activities at least once a month than are their peers who do not plan to complete college, a discrepancy that increases with age.

### Importance

Adolescents who are involved in community service or who volunteer in political activities have been found to be more likely to have a strong work ethic as adults and more likely to volunteer and vote in the future.<sup>1</sup> Youth who volunteer are less likely to become pregnant or to use drugs. Volunteering in adolescence is also related to overall positive academic, psychological, and occupational outcomes.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Data from a study in 2002 show that teenagers ages 16 to 19 in the United States are more likely than any other age group under the age of 35 to have volunteered in the past year. Of those who volunteer, most work with either education or youth-service related organizations (34 percent) or religious organizations (31 percent). Forty-one percent of teen volunteers reported that they approached the organization for which they volunteer, rather than being asked by someone else to volunteer.<sup>5</sup>

### Trends

Among twelfth grade students, the percentage who volunteered at least once per month rose from 24 percent in 1991 to 35 percent in 2001, and was at 33 percent in 2006. Among tenth grade students, monthly volunteering fluctuated during this time period, but overall the percentage rose from 27 percent in 1991 to 30 percent in 2006. Among eighth grade students, volunteering at least once per month has fluctuated slightly over the past fifteen years, reaching a high of 29 percent in 2000. Overall, however, eighth grade participation has not changed significantly, remaining at between 26 and 29 percent between 1991 and 2006. ([See Table 1](#))

### Differences by Grade

Older students are more likely than younger students to volunteer at least once per month. In 2006, the percentage of twelfth grade students who volunteered at least once per month was 33 percent, higher than the percentage of tenth grade students (30 percent) and the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (27 percent). ([See Figure 1](#))

## **Differences by Gender**

Female students are more likely to volunteer than males, especially as they get older. ([See Table 1](#)) In 2006, for example, 39 percent of twelfth grade female students volunteered at least once per month, compared with 28 percent of twelfth grade male students. The gender gap is smaller but still significant among tenth grade males and females (7 percentage points) and eighth grade males and females (5 percentage points). ([See Table 1](#))

## **Differences by Parental Education**

Students whose parents have finished college or have gone to graduate school are the most likely to volunteer at least once a month. ([See Figure 2](#)) This is a consistent pattern over time and across grades. In 2006, for example, 18 percent of eighth grade students whose parents had less than a high school education volunteered at least once a month, compared with 36 percent of eighth grade students whose parents went to graduate school.

## **Differences by College Plans**

Youth who plan to complete college are much more likely to volunteer at least once a month compared with other youth. Among twelfth graders in 2006, 37 percent of those who planned to complete four years of college volunteered, compared with 21 percent of those without such plans. ([See Figure 3](#))

## **State and Local Estimates**

State estimates for 2003 are available for children ages 6-17 through the *National Survey for Children's Health* at <http://nschdata.org/anonymous/Dataquery/DataQuery.aspx?control=5> (Select Community and School Activities under Child Health Measures)

## **International Estimates**

None available

## **National Goals**

None available

## Definition

Volunteering includes all students who answered that they “participate in community affairs or volunteer work” once or twice a month or more.

## Data Source

Child Trends original analysis of Monitoring the Future data, 1991-2006.

## Raw Data Source

Bachman, Jerald G., Lloyd D. Johnston, and Patrick M. O'Malley. *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>-Grade Surveys), 1976-2006 [Computer files]. Conducted by University of Michigan, Survey Research Center. ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor].

ICPSR: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>

Monitoring the Future: <http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/>

## Approximate Date of Next Update

November 2008

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<sup>1</sup> Zaff, Jonathan and Erik Michelsen. (October 2002). *Child Trends Research Brief: Encouraging Civic Engagement: How Teens Are (or Are Not) Becoming Responsible Citizens*. Available at: [http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child\\_Trends-2002\\_10\\_01\\_RB\\_CivicEngagement.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2002_10_01_RB_CivicEngagement.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> National Commission on Service Learning (2001). *The Power of Service-Learning for American Schools* (Online). Available: [www.wkkf.org/pubs/PhilVol/Pub3679.pdf](http://www.wkkf.org/pubs/PhilVol/Pub3679.pdf)

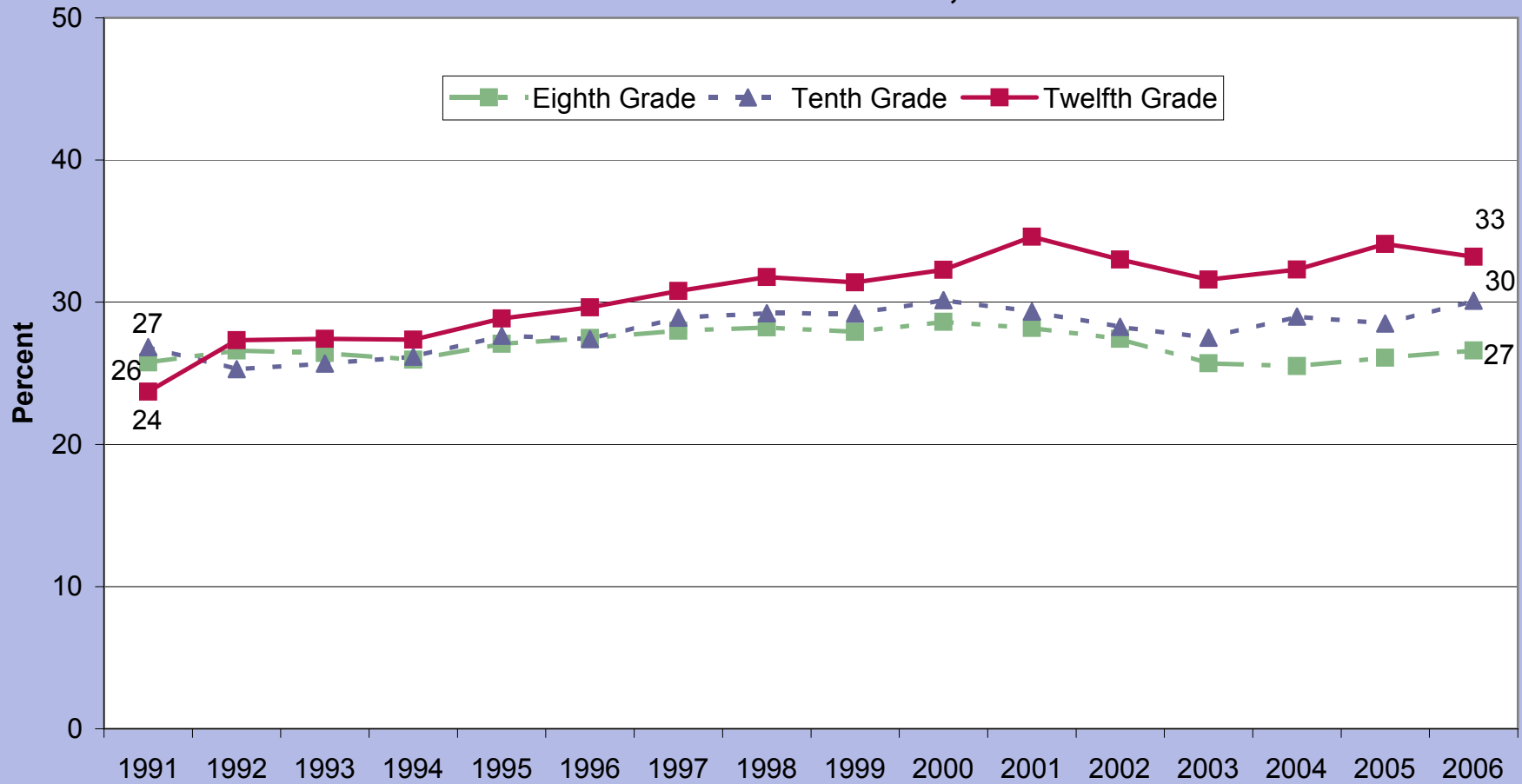
<sup>3</sup> Oesterle, S., Kirkpatrick, M., Mortimer, J. (2004). “Volunteerism during the Transition to Adulthood: A Life Course Perspective” *Social Forces* 48 (3) pg. 1123.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, W. & Streb, M. (2001 August 1). “The Impact of Service-Learning on Political Participation.”

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (December 2002). “Volunteering in the United States Summary.” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.toc.htm>

Figure 1

### Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Volunteer<sup>1</sup> At Least Once a Month, 1991 to 2006

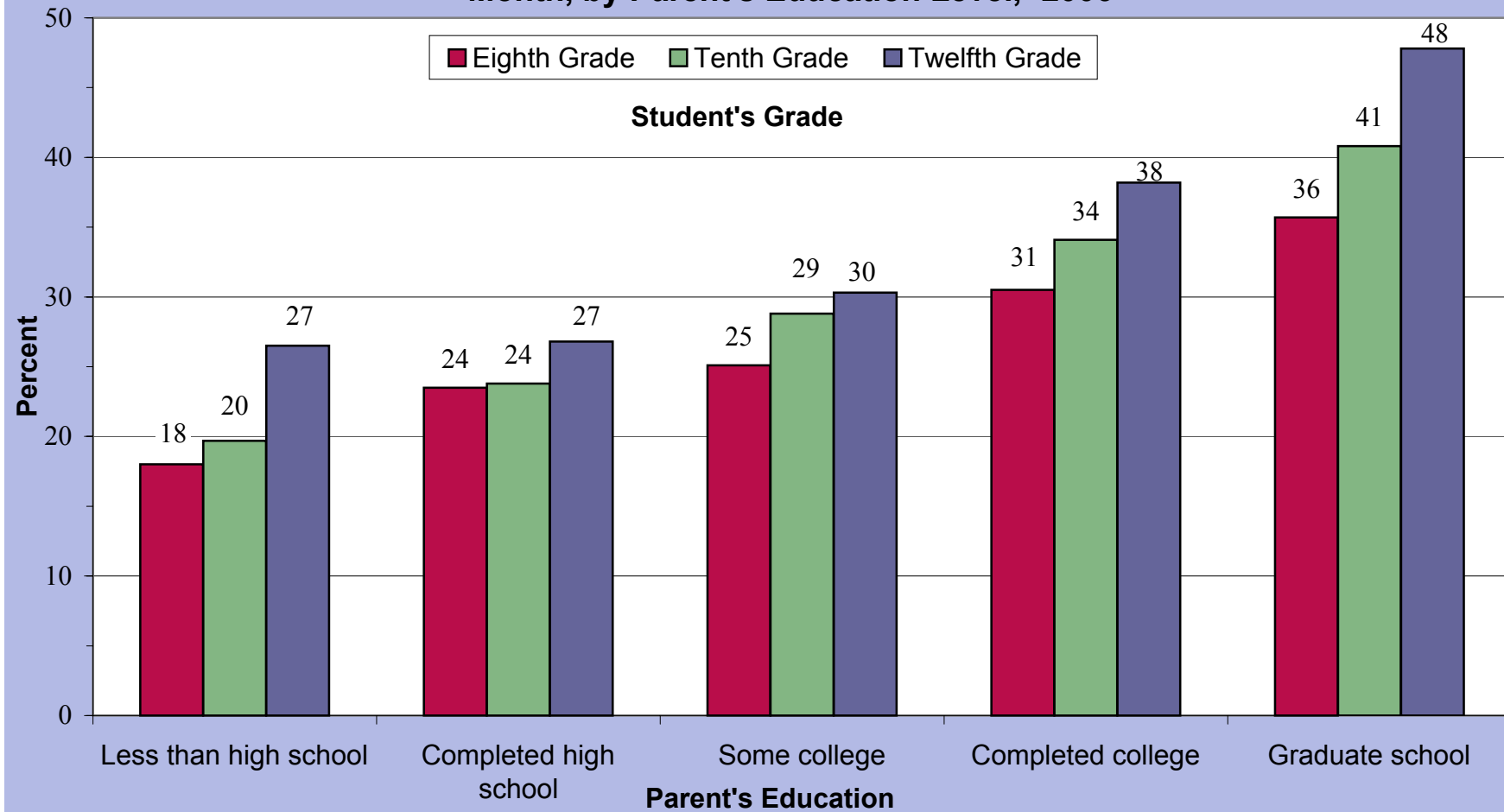


<sup>1</sup> Volunteering includes all students who answered that they "participate in community affairs or volunteer work" once or twice a month or more.

Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 1991-2006

Figure 2

## Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Volunteer<sup>1</sup> At Least Once a Month, by Parent's Education Level,<sup>2</sup> 2006



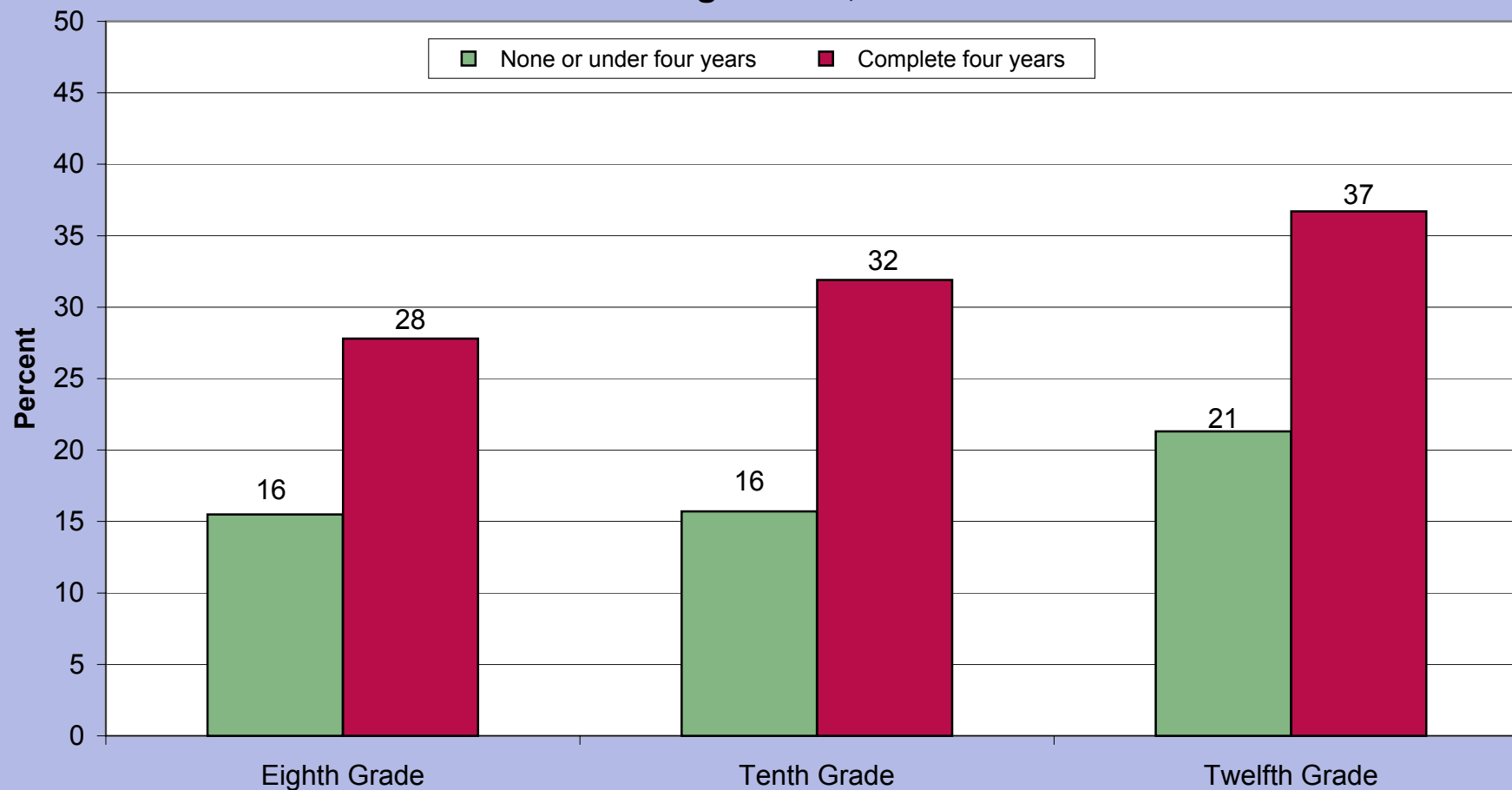
<sup>1</sup> Volunteering includes all students who answered that they "participate in community affairs or volunteer work" once or twice a month or more.

<sup>2</sup> Parental education is calculated by the Institute of Social Research as the average of the mother's and father's education. Child Trends has relabeled these results to reflect the education level of the most educated parent. In those circumstances where the gap between mothers' and fathers' education is more than one level, this results in an underestimate of the most educated parent's education level.

Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 2006.

Figure 3

### Percentage of Students Who Volunteer<sup>1</sup> At Least Once a Month by College Plans, 2006



<sup>1</sup> Volunteering includes all students who answered that they "participate in community affairs or volunteer work" once or twice a month or more.

Source: Child Trends original analysis of Monitoring the Future data, 2006.

