

Participation in School Athletics

Headline

While the gender gap in sports participation is small in the eighth grade, by twelfth grade boys are much more likely than girls to participate in school athletic teams (62 percent versus 49 percent). ([See Figure 1](#))

Importance

School athletic teams provide safe, supervised activities for youth. Furthermore, a recent national study has shown a positive association between participating in school sports and lower rates of tobacco, drug and alcohol use (though a higher level of smokeless tobacco use was reported).¹ Youth who participate in sports were also more likely to disapprove of their peers' substance abuse.² In addition, participating in sports is associated with increased levels of self-esteem and motivation, overall psychological well-being, and better body image for girls.³ Some research efforts, however, have not found these positive relationships for some groups of youth, finding, for example, higher rates of alcohol use for some groups of youth who participate in school sports activities.^{4,5}

Trends

Rates of school athletic team participation were relatively constant from 1991-2001. For eighth graders, participation ranged from approximately 67 percent to 70 percent; for tenth graders, 60 to 63 percent; and for twelfth graders approximately 54 to 56 percent. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Gender

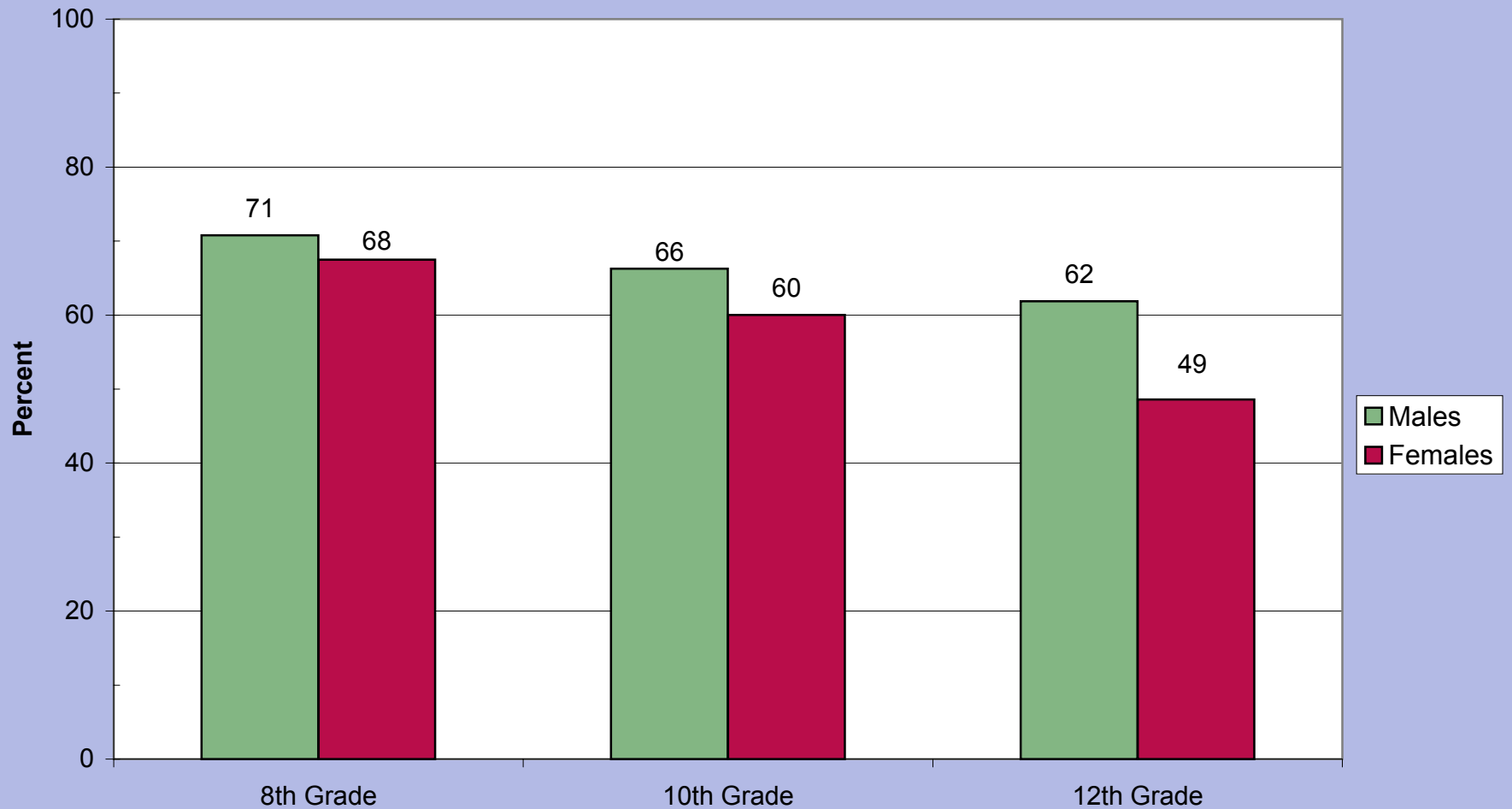
Females are less likely to participate in school sports than males, with this gap expanding at older ages ([See Figure 1](#)). This gap became smaller in the last decade for eighth and tenth graders, but not for those in twelfth grade. Among twelfth graders in 2001, 62 percent of males and 49 percent of females participated in school athletic teams. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Parental Education

Youth with better-educated parents are far more likely to participate in school sports than are youth whose parents completed fewer years of school. For example, among tenth grade students, 48 percent of those whose parents did not complete high school participated in 2001, compared to 76 percent among those whose parents had attended graduate school. ([See Figure 2](#))

Figure 1

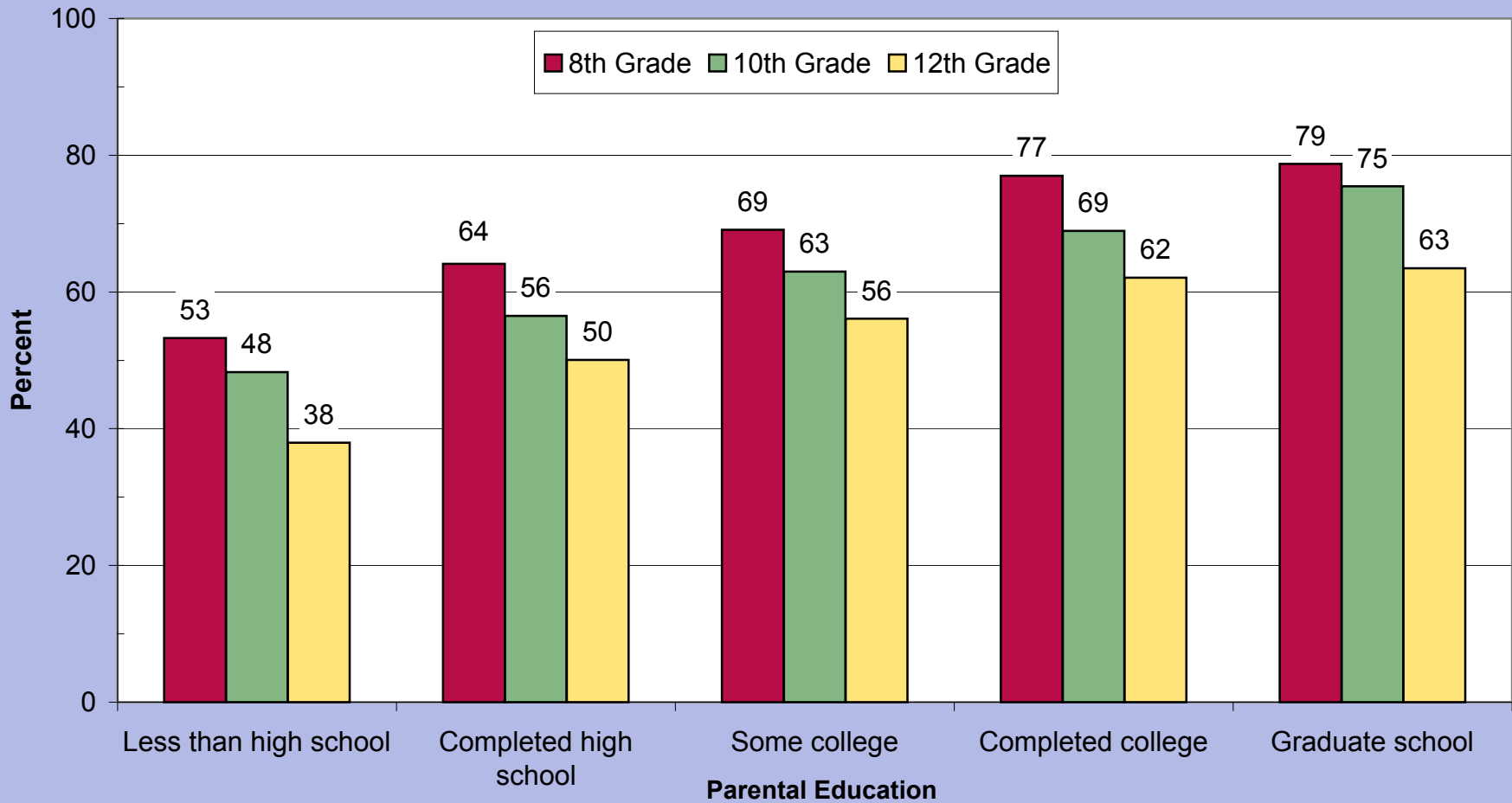
Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Participate in School Athletics, by Gender, 2001



Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 2001

Figure 2

Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Participate in School Athletics, by Parent's Education, 2001

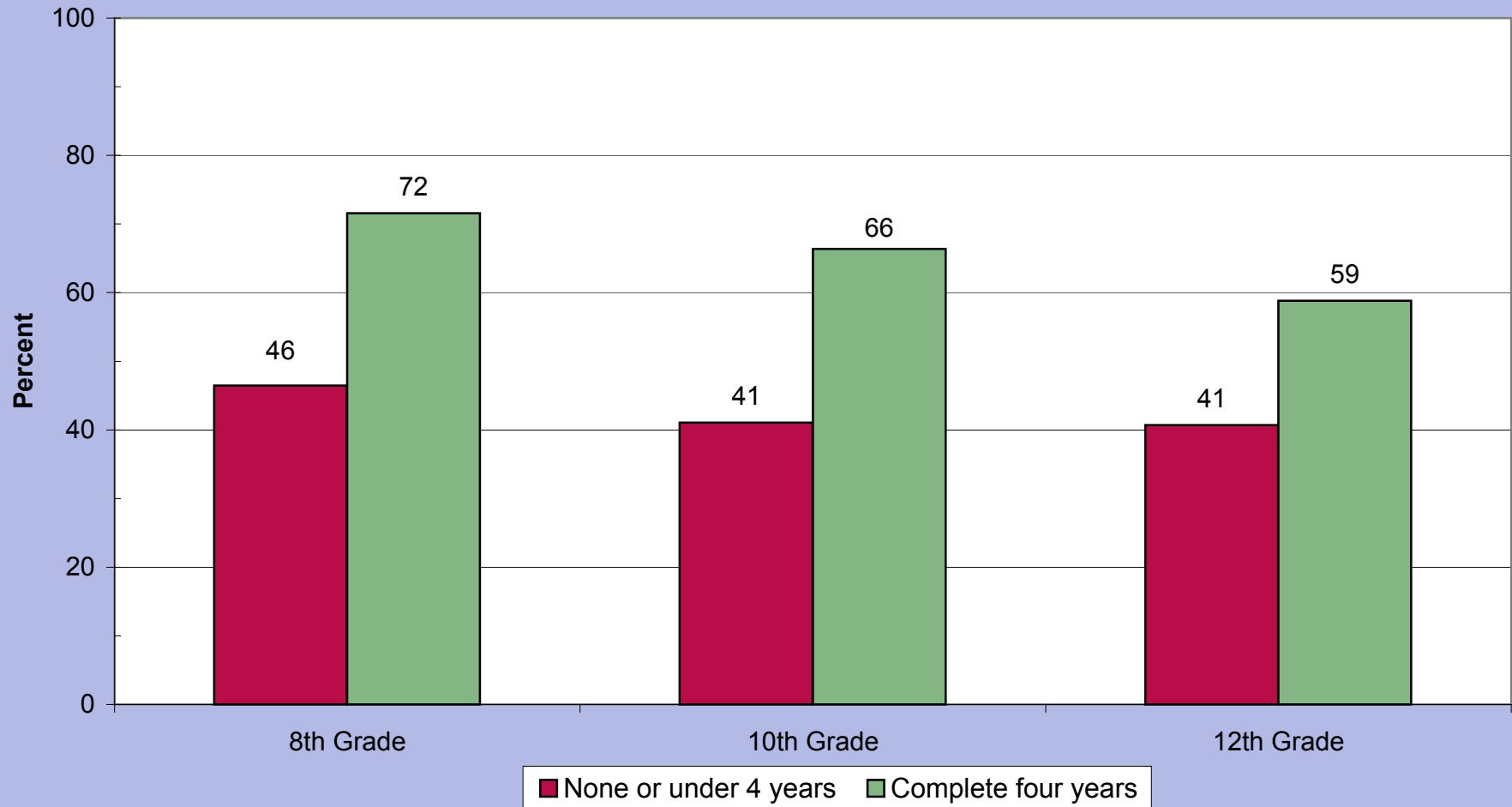


Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 2001



Figure 3

Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Participate in School Athletics, by College Plans, 2001



Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 2001

Table 1

Participation in School Athletics, 1991-2001

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Eighth Grade	69.6	67.3	66.6	66.5	68.1	67.4	66.7	68.7	67.7	67.3	69.1
Gender											
Male	73.4	71.0	71.1	70.2	72.5	69.8	68.0	71.7	69.0	69.2	70.8
Female	66.2	64.0	62.7	63.2	64.3	65.6	65.5	65.8	66.6	65.8	67.5
Race											
White	71.1	68.7	70.0	69.8	69.5	70.7	70.1	71.2	70.0	70.2	72.6
Black	73.8	68.4	61.8	62.4	69.7	64.5	63.0	64.9	69.5	63.4	67.3
Parental Education¹											
Less than high school	54.3	47.7	51.5	51.0	50.5	53.4	52.3	53.0	55.0	47.5	53.3
Completed high school	66.1	63.7	63.8	63.9	64.8	64.2	61.5	63.0	63.3	64.3	64.1
Some college	73.3	67.6	69.9	69.5	73.8	69.4	70.5	70.2	69.6	69.8	69.1
Completed college	73.6	75.5	70.1	72.3	71.3	75.3	71.6	74.0	74.1	74.0	77.0
Graduate school	76.6	76.7	73.4	74.4	74.9	77.7	74.8	76.6	75.4	75.8	78.7
College Plans											
None or under 4 years	49.9	46.9	47.9	51.0	51.3	50.5	50.2	49.4	46.8	46.8	46.5
Complete four years	72.7	70.4	69.0	68.7	70.3	70.0	68.9	70.9	70.2	69.5	71.6
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Tenth Grade	60.2	62.9	62.0	61.8	62.6	61.5	61.7	61.6	62.2	61.5	62.9
Gender											
Male	68.7	69.8	68.0	69.2	68.2	65.5	66.0	67.8	68.1	65.5	66.3
Female	51.9	56.6	56.5	54.9	57.5	57.7	57.5	56.1	57.4	58.3	60.0
Race											
White	61.8	64.6	64.1	64.0	63.6	63.5	63.3	63.6	65.4	63.8	65.2
Black	55.7	62.8	59.9	57.2	62.3	56.5	62.5	58.8	57.2	55.7	60.9
Parental Education¹											
Less than high school	44.5	40.1	43.6	42.7	40.9	42.7	44.2	46.7	44.0	45.9	48.3
Completed high school	54.4	56.8	58.9	53.2	54.3	53.7	56.3	53.6	54.0	51.7	56.5
Some college	59.8	63.6	62.8	62.0	62.6	62.4	60.5	64.7	65.2	61.4	63.0
Completed college	67.2	72.6	65.5	70.3	71.8	68.3	68.8	68.1	70.0	69.9	68.9
Graduate school	70.9	74.6	72.1	74.0	74.9	73.5	72.7	72.9	71.9	75.9	75.5
College Plans											
None or under 4 years	38.9	42.7	41.3	39.9	39.9	40.3	42.0	45.5	39.0	39.4	41.1
Complete four years	64.6	66.9	66.0	66.5	66.2	65.1	64.8	64.4	66.0	65.0	66.4
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Twelfth Grade	56.2	55.6	55.7	56.3	55.1	55.1	55.5	55.9	54.3	55.0	55.0
Gender											
Male	64.9	63.8	65.5	66.1	62.4	62.7	63.4	63.0	62.3	64.2	61.9
Female	47.0	48.0	46.2	47.5	48.1	48.0	48.4	48.7	47.3	46.9	48.6
Race											
White	57.0	57.3	56.7	57.7	54.9	56.8	56.3	57.7	56.5	57.4	57.5
Black	56.2	50.9	52.9	59.7	56.7	53.1	52.9	54.1	50.1	55.4	57.9
Parental Education¹											
Less than high school	41.3	46.7	44.4	41.7	38.7	35.5	37.2	41.3	43.5	33.2	38.0
Completed high school	50.3	49.1	52.8	51.2	48.4	50.7	50.1	52.5	49.5	53.5	50.1
Some college	60.3	54.9	55.8	57.1	53.2	54.5	55.5	57.4	54.6	56.8	56.1
Completed college	61.7	63.8	60.8	61.8	62.2	60.7	60.6	59.1	57.3	58.6	62.1
Graduate school	66.4	67.5	66.4	68.4	68.0	62.5	66.7	66.2	65.8	63.0	63.5
College Plans											
None or under 4 years	42.6	41.0	40.0	44.0	41.2	41.6	39.8	42.2	43.3	42.0	40.7
Complete four years	61.5	60.7	60.4	60.0	58.8	59.0	60.3	59.9	57.8	58.4	58.8

¹ 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 result is an underestimate of the most educated parent's education level.

Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 1991-2001