

Volunteering

Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being

More than a third of high school seniors report they volunteer at least once a month. Between 2010 and 2014, volunteering among tenth- and twelfth-graders increased.

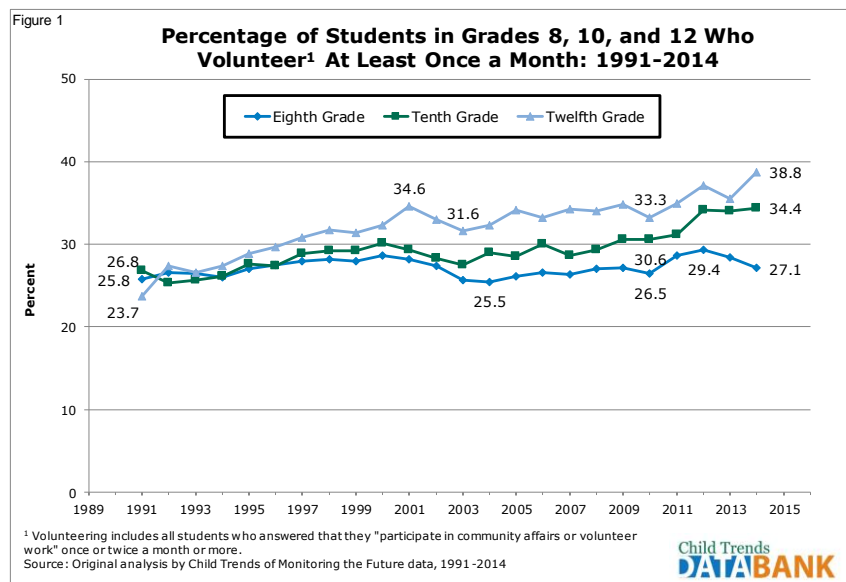
Importance

Volunteering in adolescence is associated with positive outcomes during the teen years as well as in adulthood. Teens who volunteer are less likely to become pregnant or to use drugs, and are more likely to have positive academic, psychological, and occupational well-being.^{1,2,3} Adolescents who are involved in community service or who volunteer in political activities are more likely as adults to have a strong work ethic, to volunteer, and to vote.⁴ Volunteering is also associated with the development of greater respect for others, leadership skills, and an understanding of citizenship that can carry over into adulthood.⁵ According to at least one study, the benefits of volunteering in adolescence may even reduce their risk factors for cardiovascular disease.⁶

Data from September 2014 indicate that U.S. teenagers, ages 16 to 19, are more likely to have volunteered in the past year than any other age group under the age of 35. Of those in this group who volunteer, most work with either education- or youth-service-related organizations (33 percent), or religious organizations (28 percent). Thirty-nine percent of teen volunteers reported that they approached the organization for which they volunteer, while 22 percent were asked by someone in the organization or at school, and 15 percent were asked by a relative or friend to join.⁷

Trends

Among twelfth-grade students, the proportion who say they volunteered at least once per month rose from 24 percent in 1991 to 35 percent in 2001. After a slight dip in 2003, the rate remained steady until 2010. Between 2010 and 2014, it increased from 33 to 39 percent. Among tenth-grade students, rates followed a similar pattern overall, increasing from 31 to 34 percent between 2010 and 2014. Among eighth-grade students, volunteering has fluctuated slightly over the past fifteen years, reaching a high of 29 percent in 2000, and decreasing to 26 percent in 2004. Between 2010 and 2012, the rate of volunteering among eighth-graders increased from 27 to 29 percent, but then decreased to 27 percent in 2014. (Figure 1)



(Figure 1)

Differences by Grade

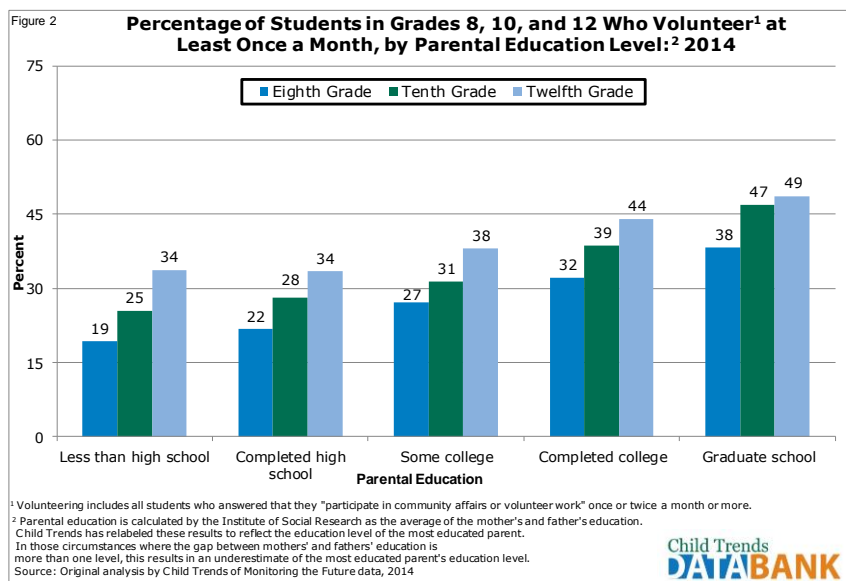
Older students are more likely than younger students to volunteer at least once per month. In 2014, 39 percent of twelfth-grade students reported they volunteered at least once per month, compared with 34 percent of tenth-grade students, and 27 percent of eighth-grade students.

Differences by Gender

Female students are more likely to volunteer than males, especially as they get older. In 2014, for example, 43 percent of twelfth-grade females said they volunteered at least once per month, compared with 35 percent of twelfth-grade males. This gender gap is similar at tenth grade (eight percentage points), and smaller, but still significant, at eighth grade (three percentage points). (Appendix 1)

Differences by Parental Education

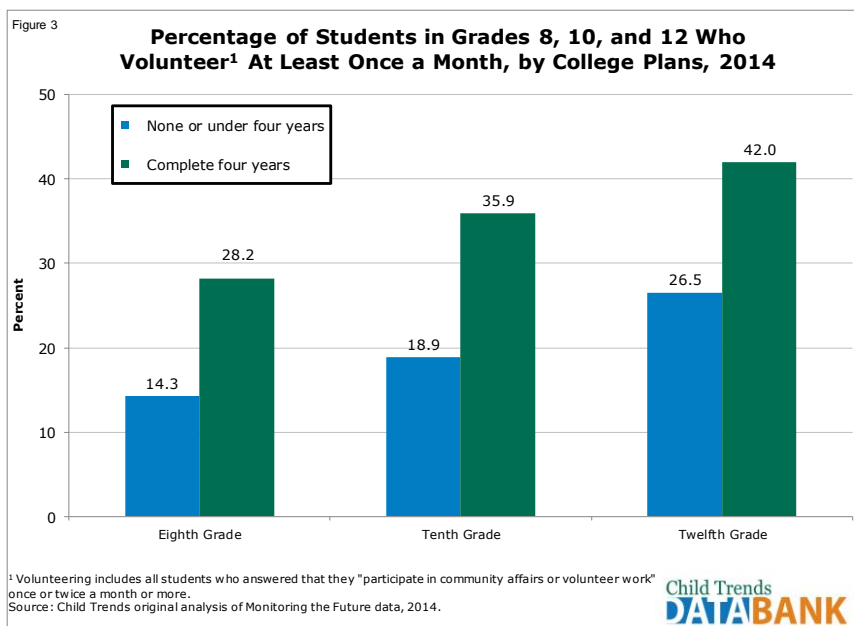
Students with a parent who has finished college or has gone to graduate school were more likely to report they volunteer at least once a month than were students with a parent with lower education levels. This is a pattern consistent over time and across grades. In 2014, for example, 19 percent of eighth-grade students whose parents both had less than a high school education volunteered at least once a month, compared with 38 percent of eighth-grade students, both of whose parents had a graduate degree. (Figure 2)



Differences by Race/Hispanic Origin⁸

In 2014, Hispanic students in eighth- and tenth grades were significantly less likely than their black or white peers to report volunteering at least once a month. In eighth grade, 19 percent of Hispanic students volunteered,

compared with 30 and 27 percent of white and black students, respectively. Additionally, among eighth-graders, white students were more likely to volunteer than black students. In tenth grade, 28 percent of Hispanic students volunteered, compared with 35 percent of white and black students, each. There was no significant difference by race or Hispanic origin in 2014 among twelfth-graders. (Appendix 1)



Differences by College Plans

Youth who plan to complete college are much more likely to report they volunteer at least once a month than are

other youth. Among twelfth-graders in 2014, 42 percent of those who planned to complete four years of college volunteered, compared with 27 percent of those without such plans. (Figure 3) This pattern is consistent over time and across grades.

State and Local Estimates

State estimates for 2011/12 are available for children ages 12-17 from the *National Survey of Children's Health* at <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2519&r=1>

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) has calculated rates of volunteering for teenagers and young adults, by state, using the Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplements, for 2002 to 2009. Available at http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/FS_10_gen_vol_final.pdf

International Estimates

None available.

National Goals

None.

What Works for this Indicator

See Child Trends' LINKS database ("Lifecourse Interventions to Nurture Kids Successfully"), for reviews of many rigorously evaluated programs, including the following which have been shown to be effective at increasing volunteering:

- Quantum Opportunities Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=quantum-opportunities-program-gop
- Youth Corps (American Conservation and Youth Service Corps): www.childtrends.org/?programs=youth-corps
- Teen Outreach Program: www.childtrends.org/?programs=teen-outreach-program-top

Related Indicators

- Youth Employment: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=youth-employment>
- Youth Voting: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=youth-voting>
- Attendance at Religious Services: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=religious-service-attendance
- Religiosity Among Youth: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=religiosity-among-youth
- After-School Activities (archived): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=after-school-activities

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, 1991-2014.

Raw Data Source

Bachman, Jerald G., Lloyd D. Johnston, and Patrick M. O'Malley. *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (8th, 10th, and 12th-Grade Surveys), 1976-2014 [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/>



Appendix 1 - Percentage of Students who Volunteer¹ at Least Once a Month, by Grade Level: Selected Years, 1991-2014

	1991	1992	1995	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Eighth Grade	25.8	26.6	27.1	28.2	27.9	28.6	28.2	27.4	25.7	25.5	26.1	26.6	26.4	27.0	27.2	26.5	28.7	29.4	28.4	27.1	
Gender																					
Male	21.2	22.9	24.2	24.3	23.9	24.6	23.6	23.5	24.0	22.8	23.1	23.9	24.0	24.7	24.7	22.7	25.8	26.5	26.9	26.0	
Female	30.3	30.1	30.2	32.1	32.1	32.5	32.4	31.3	27.2	28.1	29.0	29.2	29.0	29.5	30.0	30.2	31.5	32.3	30.1	28.9	
Race/Hispanic Origin																					
Non-Hispanic white	25.7	26.3	27.9	29.0	28.6	28.8	29.1	28.4	26.5	26.6	28.1	29.0	28.4	29.0	28.9	28.2	29.9	31.9	30.7	30.1	
Non-Hispanic black	26.7	29.3	30.0	33.2	28.7	30.2	31.0	29.6	27.3	25.4	23.1	25.3	24.8	26.0	23.1	26.1	26.8	26.4	27.4	26.6	
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19.5	22.9	21.4	21.3	19.4	
Parental Education²																					
Less than high school	22.5	23.6	20.1	20.2	21.1	21.4	24.9	18.1	16.9	18.5	20.7	18.0	18.3	19.0	19.2	18.5	19.6	20.4	19.9	19.2	
Completed high school	24.2	25.6	24.7	25.7	24.0	25.8	24.3	24.4	20.2	19.8	20.7	23.5	21.0	22.4	22.9	21.6	24.3	22.0	22.7	21.8	
Some college	26.1	26.2	28.2	27.8	28.2	29.2	26.7	26.7	24.9	25.6	24.5	25.1	26.3	24.8	25.4	25.0	26.6	27.4	26.9	27.1	
Completed college	27.3	27.4	28.6	31.1	32.1	30.4	31.7	31.6	29.2	29.3	30.6	30.5	29.6	30.9	31.8	30.1	33.0	32.7	32.9	32.2	
Graduate school	30.0	32.9	35.8	34.6	34.7	37.4	38.1	35.3	35.6	34.1	35.5	35.7	39.6	38.1	37.8	36.9	38.6	43.3	39.0	38.3	
College Plans																					
None or under 4 years	18.9	20.6	16.8	19.4	16.7	17.5	17.5	15.4	13.3	15.1	15.3	15.5	14.4	15.8	16.5	14.8	15.8	15.2	16.3	14.3	
Complete four years	26.9	27.8	28.7	29.4	29.5	30.1	29.5	28.6	26.9	26.7	27.4	27.8	27.6	28.3	28.2	27.6	29.7	30.3	29.2	28.2	



	1991	1992	1995	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Tenth Grade	26.8	25.3	27.6	29.2	29.2	30.1	29.3	28.3	27.5	29.0	28.5	30.1	28.6	29.3	30.6	30.6	31.2	34.2	34.1	34.4
Gender																				
Male	22.6	20.5	23.2	25.5	24.7	26.0	24.0	23.6	22.8	25.3	24.2	26.8	26.0	26.5	27.1	27.1	27.6	29.7	30.6	30.6
Female	31.2	29.9	32.3	33.1	33.5	34.4	34.5	33.0	32.1	32.7	32.9	33.6	31.3	31.9	33.8	34.1	34.7	38.8	37.8	38.6
Race/Hispanic Origin																				
Non-Hispanic white	27.7	25.8	27.5	29.0	30.3	30.6	30.7	29.8	28.4	28.9	29.3	30.3	28.9	31.5	32.1	31.6	32.0	35.4	35.5	35.2
Non-Hispanic black	29.1	26.8	29.6	34.4	28.0	32.2	27.7	29.4	27.3	27.1	27.0	29.8	28.4	29.1	29.9	28.2	33.0	33.4	30.3	34.6
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24.9	24.8	24.6	26.2	28.1
Parental Education²																				
Less than high school	18.4	22.6	21.4	21.4	20.7	22.8	21.5	18.4	18.6	23.0	19.1	19.7	24.6	18.9	22.9	22.9	22.0	22.7	23.2	25.5
Completed high school	22.8	23.1	21.5	23.5	24.2	25.1	24.7	21.8	22.4	23.5	21.8	23.8	22.1	22.3	26.3	22.9	24.3	25.8	26.0	28.2
Some college	26.6	23.0	27.6	29.9	28.7	28.8	28.1	28.8	24.8	26.6	25.8	28.8	25.9	29.3	30.6	28.6	29.2	31.6	31.2	31.4
Completed college	31.4	28.9	31.1	33.5	34.8	34.4	34.2	32.9	32.7	31.6	32.3	34.1	33.1	34.0	33.9	34.9	36.5	37.8	39.1	38.7
Graduate school	36.3	32.3	38.2	40.5	38.7	41.9	40.2	41.2	40.7	41.1	41.4	40.8	41.7	42.1	42.2	45.7	44.1	49.0	50.5	47.0
College Plans																				
None or under 4 years	17.3	18.3	15.0	16.2	14.9	15.7	14.9	14.1	13.4	16.2	14.3	15.7	16.0	15.6	16.1	15.6	14.3	18.6	16.1	18.9
Complete four years	29.0	26.9	30.1	31.9	31.7	32.6	31.8	30.7	29.9	30.8	30.5	31.9	30.3	31.1	32.1	32.5	33.2	35.4	35.6	35.9



1991 1992 1995 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

Twelfth Grade	23.7	27.3	28.9	31.8	31.4	32.3	34.6	33.0	31.6	32.3	34.1	33.2	34.2	34.0	34.8	33.3	34.9	37.1	35.5	38.8	
Gender																					
Male	20.1	23.6	23.1	26.4	27.3	25.2	30.3	27.5	26.8	28.4	28.7	28.2	29.9	31.3	28.8	30.0	30.3	32.4	31.5	34.6	
Female	27.5	31.0	34.1	37.1	35.1	39.3	38.5	38.4	36.7	35.9	39.3	38.5	38.3	37.0	41.1	37.5	40.1	42.4	40.2	42.9	
Race/Hispanic Origin																					
Non-Hispanic white	23.5	27.6	28.2	31.7	32.5	32.8	35.4	32.5	31.3	31.7	33.9	33.3	35.6	35.4	34.0	35.2	34.2	36.2	36.8	38.1	
Non-Hispanic black	26.8	29.9	30.2	34.2	31.1	30.0	37.4	36.6	35.1	35.6	35.0	30.5	33.7	31.3	39.3	32.1	37.7	36.0	38.4	42.5	
Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	26.2	31.1	36.8	28.4	33.6	
Parental Education²																					
Less than high school	22.4	21.0	21.5	19.7	21.2	25.6	31.5	28.7	27.9	29.2	26.0	26.5	25.2	26.8	31.5	24.0	30.5	36.4	28.6	33.8	
Completed high school	21.5	23.5	24.9	28.2	24.5	32.2	27.0	29.2	27.6	26.2	29.3	26.8	30.0	29.2	29.7	27.4	30.4	32.3	32.5	33.5	
Some college	22.5	25.8	27.6	30.5	32.2	29.7	33.4	29.9	30.5	29.7	31.2	30.3	34.1	32.1	30.3	33.7	32.0	37.3	33.5	38.0	
Completed college	26.2	30.3	33.2	36.1	36.7	36.1	38.1	36.1	34.6	37.9	38.8	38.2	38.5	37.8	43.4	37.8	39.3	38.9	40.9	44.0	
Graduate school	31.9	41.3	38.9	44.4	41.1	38.0	47.6	48.6	43.6	40.9	44.7	47.8	44.6	44.6	43.9	47.9	45.0	46.7	43.0	48.6	
College Plans																					
None or under 4 years	16.8	16.2	16.6	20.4	18.9	20.0	24.0	21.2	18.5	21.9	22.7	21.3	20.9	23.0	21.9	27.8	22.1	25.5	23.5	26.5	
Complete four years	26.7	31.5	33.1	35.5	35.3	36.3	37.6	36.6	35.7	35.2	37.4	36.7	37.8	36.6	37.2	41.0	37.8	39.8	38.6	42.0	

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

² 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, 1991-2014.

Endnotes

¹ National Commission on Service Learning. (2001). *The power of service learning for American schools* [Electronic Version]. Retrieved February 25, 2009 from <http://nslp.convio.net/site/DocServer/learningindeed.pdf?docID=1201>

² Oesterle, S., Kirkpatrick, M., & Mortimer, J. (2004). Volunteerism during the transition to adulthood: A life course perspective. *Social Forces*, 48(3), 1123.

³ Morgan, W., & Streb, M. (2001). Building citizenship: How quality service-learning develops civic values. *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(1), 154–169

⁴ Zaff, J. F., & Michelsen, E. (2002). *Encouraging civic engagement: How teens are (or are not) becoming responsible citizens*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Available at: <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=encouraging-civic-engagement-how-teens-are-or-are-not-becoming-responsible-citizens>.

⁵ Morrissey, K. M., & Werner-Wilson, R. J. (2005). The relationship between out of school time activities and positive youth development: An investigation of the influences of community and family. *Adolescence*, 40(157), 67-85.

⁶ Schreier, H. M. C., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Chen, E. (2013). Effect of volunteering on risk factors for cardiovascular disease in adolescents: A randomized controlled trial. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 167(4), 327-332.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). *Volunteering in the United States, 2014*, Tables 1, 5, and 6. Washington, DC: Author. Available from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>

⁸ Hispanics may be any race. Totals for blacks and whites in this report do not include Hispanics.