

## Dating

### Headline

Dating continues its slide in popularity among teens, with increases between 2002 and 2003 in the percentage of tenth and twelfth graders who never go on dates. In 2003, 37 percent of tenth grade students and 25 percent of twelfth grade students reported that they never go on dates. ([See Figure 1](#))

### Importance

Dating, spending time with a current or potential romantic partner, is viewed as a major developmental marker for teens and also as one of the more challenging adjustments that adolescents face.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, dating relationships can be central to the lives of teens and can be associated with both positive and negative developmental outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Teenagers who date frequently have been found to have slightly higher levels of self-esteem and are more likely than infrequent or non-dating teens to perceive themselves as popular.<sup>3</sup> These teens also report higher levels of autonomy than their peers.<sup>4</sup> However, teenagers who date frequently have lower levels of academic achievement and academic motivation.<sup>5</sup> They are also more likely than their peers to report conflict with their parents<sup>6</sup> and to suffer from depression.<sup>7,8</sup>

While teenage dating has been common in the U.S. since the 1920s, every generation has its own style of dating and popular dating activities. Today's teens describe a progression from mixed-sex group outings, to pairing off within the group, to individuals going on dates with one another.<sup>9</sup> Popular dating activities include going out to dinner or the movies, "hanging out" at school or the mall, and visiting each other's homes.<sup>10</sup>

### Trends

Students in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades are less likely than they were in 1991 to ever date. The shift in behavior is more pronounced for twelfth grade students, where the percentage who did not date at all rose from 14 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 2003. ([See Figure 1](#)) The percentage who went on one or more dates per week declined from 34 percent to 27 percent during that time period. ([See Figure 2](#)) Between 2002 and 2003, the percentage of tenth grade students who never date increased from 34 percent to 37 percent and the percentage of twelfth grade students who never date increased from 23 percent to 25 percent.

### Differences by Race

White students in the tenth and twelfth grades were significantly more likely than black students to date in 2003. ([See Figure 3](#)) For example, among twelfth grade students, 29 percent of white students reported frequent dating (one or more times per week) compared with 20 percent of black students. Among tenth grade students, 34 percent of white students reported that they never date compared with 40 percent of black students.

## **Differences by Age**

In 2003, more than one-half (53 percent) of eighth-grade students reported never dating compared with 37 percent of tenth graders, and 25 percent of twelfth graders. ([See Figure 1](#))

The percentage of students who date one or more times per week increased with age from 7 percent among eighth grade students to 14 percent of tenth grade students and 27 percent of students in the twelfth grade. ([See Figure 2](#))

## **Differences by Gender**

In 2003, females in the eighth grade were more likely than their male peers to report never dating and less likely to report dating frequently. For tenth- and twelfth-grade students, female students were slightly more likely than male students to report dating frequently (15 percent versus 12 percent and 29 versus 25 percent, respectively). Gender differences for tenth- and twelfth-grade students who report never dating were not significant in 2003. ([See Table 1](#))

## **State and Local Estimates**

None

## **International Estimates**

None

## **National Goals**

None

## **Definition**

The *Monitoring the Future Survey* asks students “On average, how often do you go out with a date (or your spouse, if you are married)?” The response categories are: never; once a month or less; 2 or 3 times a month; once a week; 2 or 3 times a week; over three times a week.

Frequent dating is used here to describe youth who report going out on one or more dates each week.

## **Data Source**

Data for 1976-2003 from original analysis by Child Trends of *Monitoring the Future* data.

## 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), 1976-2003 [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/>

## Next Update

November 2005

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<sup>1</sup> Quatman, T., Sampson, K., Robinson, C., & Watson, C. M. (2001). Academic, Motivational, and Emotional Correlates of Adolescent Dating. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 127(2), 211-234.

<sup>2</sup> Furman, W. (2002). The Emerging Field of Adolescent Romantic Relationships. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11(5), 177-181.

<sup>3</sup> Quatman, T., Sampson, K., Robinson, C., & Watson, C. M. (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Dowdy, B. B., & Kliwer, W. (1998). Dating, Parent-Adolescent Conflict, and Behavioral Autonomy. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 27(4), 473-492.

<sup>5</sup> Quatman, T., Sampson, K., Robinson, C., & Watson, C. M. (2001).

<sup>6</sup> Dowdy, B. B., & Kliwer, W. (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Quatman, T., Sampson, K., Robinson, C., & Watson, C. M. (2001).

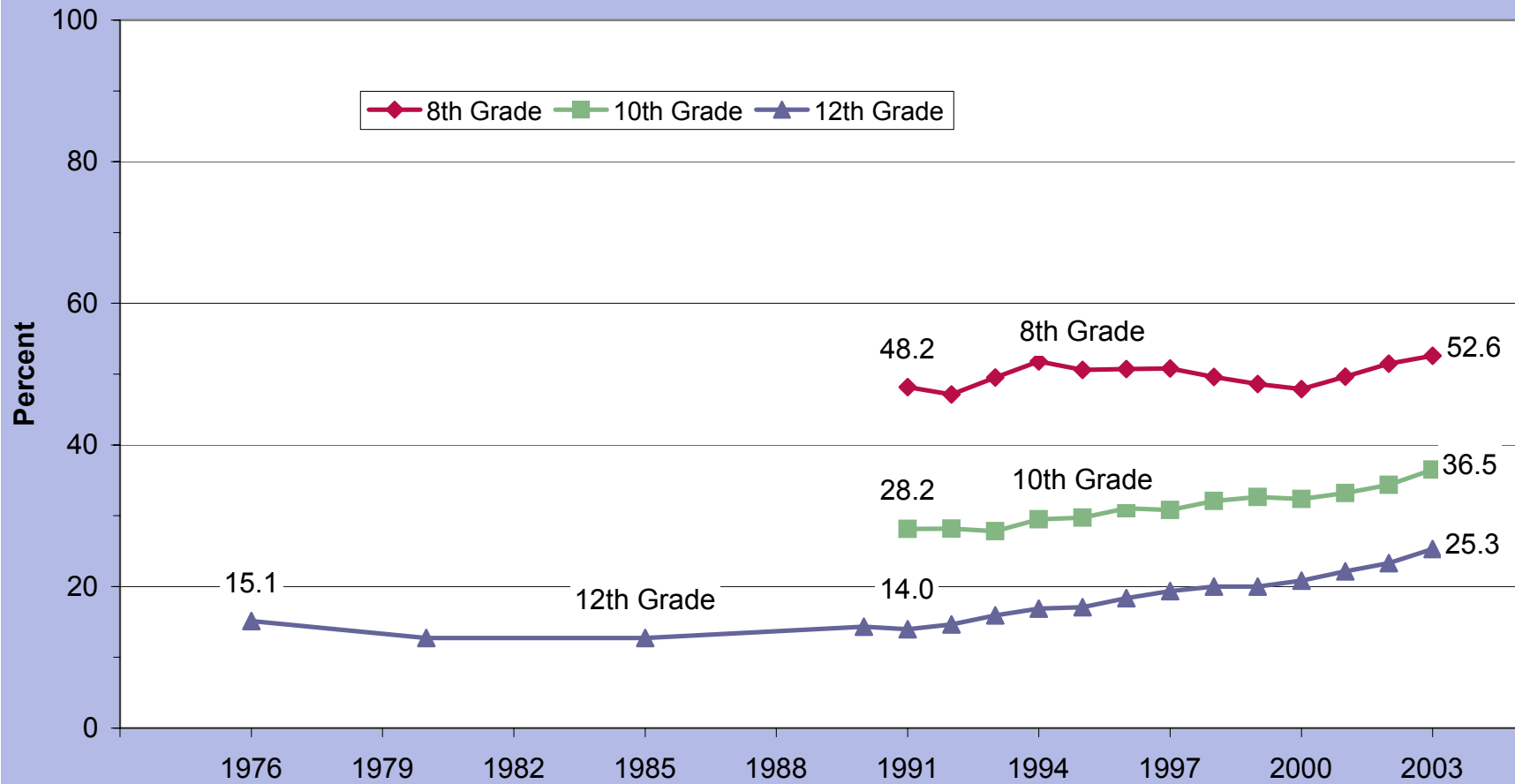
<sup>8</sup> Joyner, K., & Udry, J. R. (2000). You Don't Bring Me Anything but Down: Adolescent Romance and Depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41(December), 369-391.

<sup>9</sup> Feiring, C. (2002). Learning the Ways of Romance. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Readings on Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood* (pp. 173-182). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1

### Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th Grade Students who Never Date, by Grade, Selected Years 1976-2003

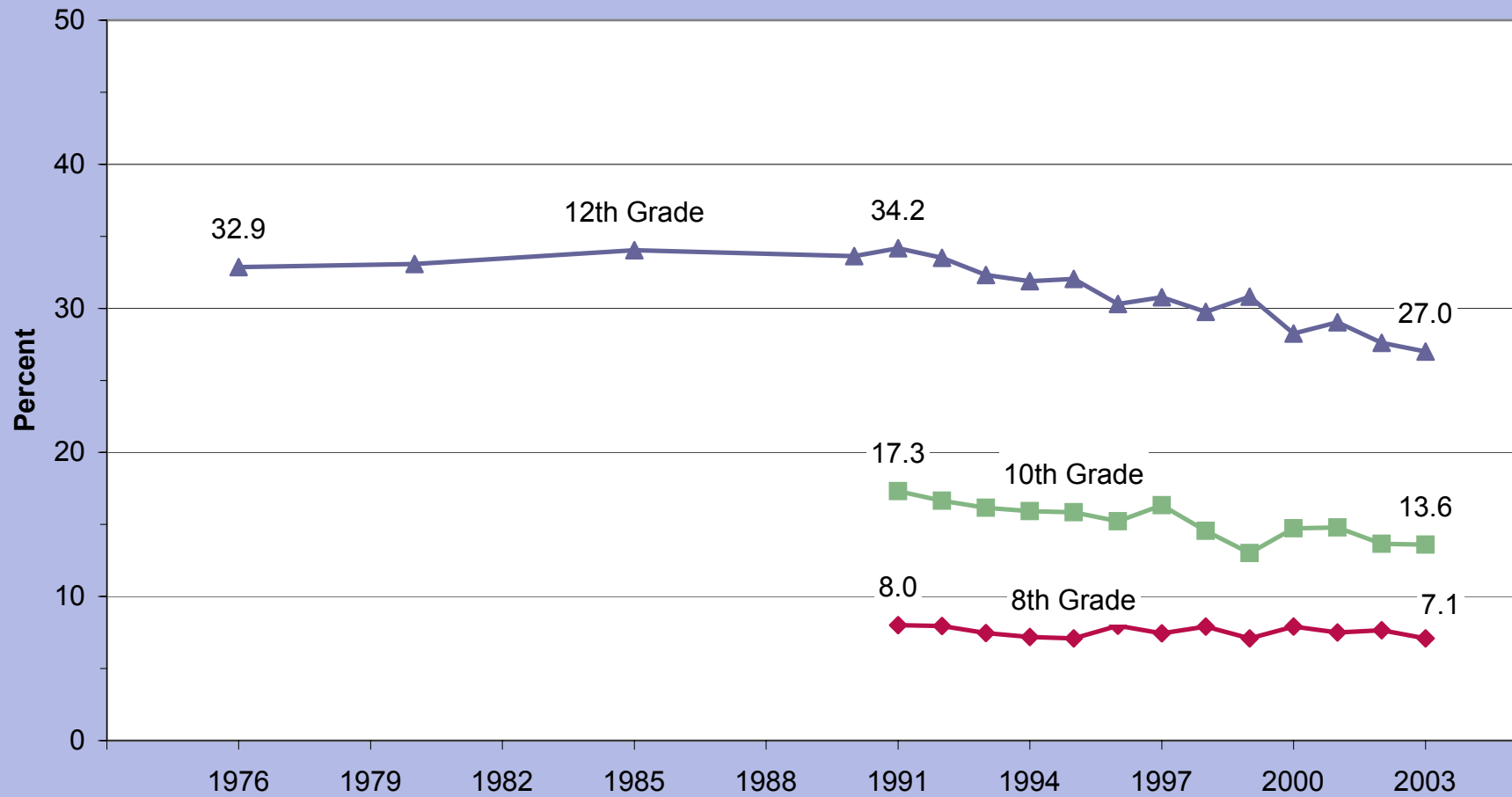


Source: Child Trends analysis of Monitoring the Future Data, Selected Years, 1976- 2003



Figure 2

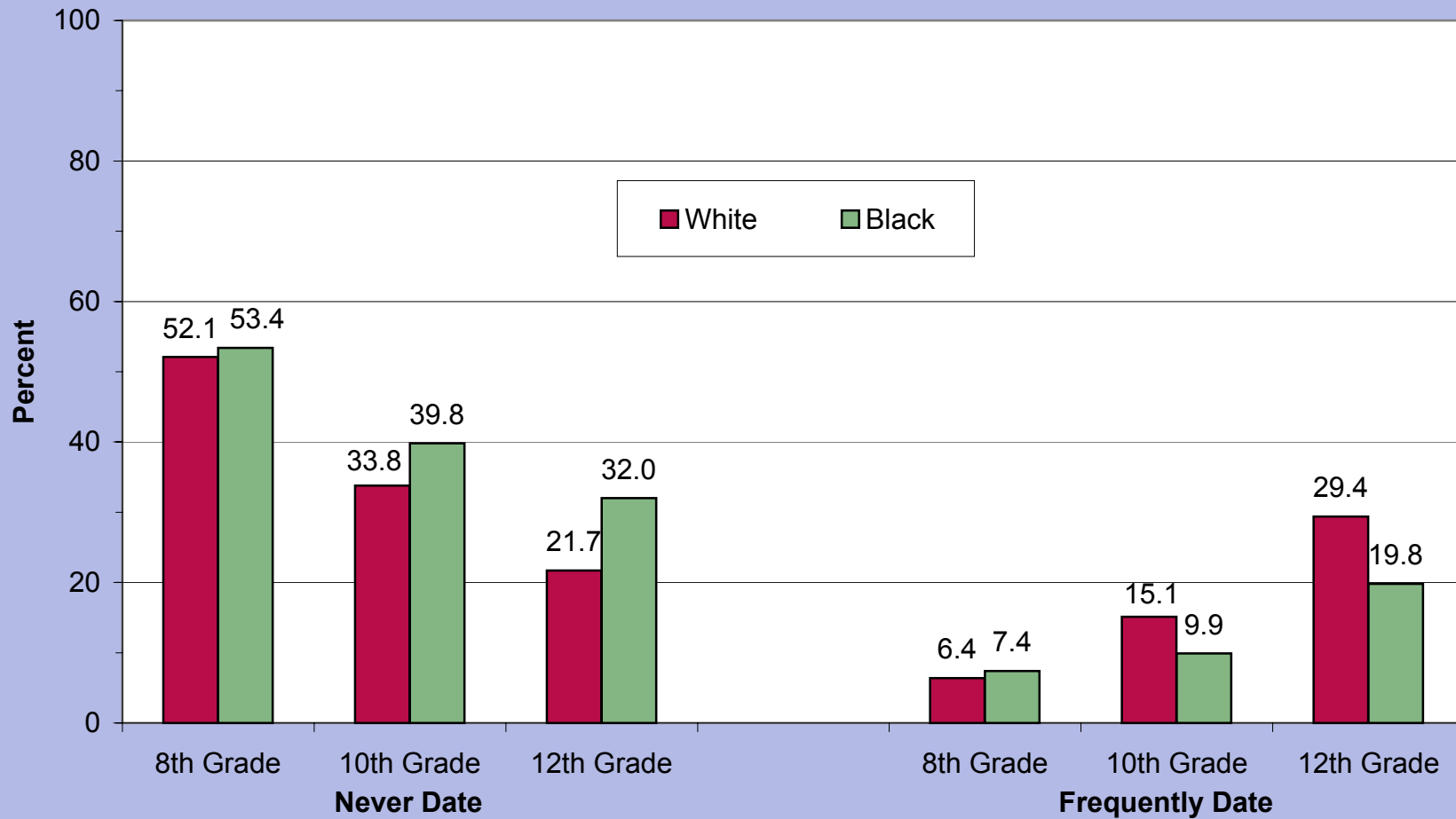
## Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th Grade Students Who Date Frequently, by Grade, Selected Years 1976-2003



Note: Frequent dating is used here to describe youth who report going out on one or more dates each week.  
Source: Child Trends analysis of Monitoring the Future Data, Selected Years, 1976- 2003

Figure 3

### Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th Grade Students Who Never Date and Who Date Frequently, by Grade and Race, 2003



Note: Frequent dating is used here to describe youth who report going out on one or more dates each week.  
Source: Child Trends analysis of Monitoring the Future Data, 2003

Table 1

## Percentage of Students Who Report That They Never Date, Selected Years 1976-2003

	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Eighth Grade</b>	-	-	-	-	48.2	47.1	49.5	51.8	50.6	50.7	50.8	49.6	48.6	47.9	49.6	51.5	52.6
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	-	-	-	-	42.0	41.0	43.4	46.6	44.0	44.2	45.3	43.0	43.8	42.4	44.6	45.9	47.6
Female	-	-	-	-	54.4	53.0	55.4	56.9	56.8	57.1	56.1	56.1	53.1	53.1	54.3	56.8	57.5
<b>Race</b>																	
White	-	-	-	-	48.5	46.0	49.1	51.6	49.7	49.9	49.9	48.2	48.5	46.5	48.7	50.7	52.1
Black	-	-	-	-	50.7	55.4	53.6	55.5	54.9	56.3	56.7	53.9	51.4	49.8	54.6	53.0	53.4
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	-	-	-	-	47.3	47.4	50.1	49.0	48.2	52.8	48.0	51.3	46.6	48.1	48.4	52.8	57.2
Completed high school	-	-	-	-	48.8	46.6	49.8	52.7	49.3	48.3	52.1	48.4	48.5	45.9	48.2	49.2	49.6
Some college	-	-	-	-	47.5	47.4	48.2	50.6	48.6	51.6	48.8	48.0	47.5	45.9	47.6	49.4	51.5
Completed college	-	-	-	-	49.4	46.6	49.0	51.8	52.9	49.8	50.4	50.6	48.2	49.0	50.9	51.8	53.1
Graduate school	-	-	-	-	43.3	45.6	49.1	49.7	49.2	50.1	50.9	48.2	48.1	45.5	48.0	53.5	52.9
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	-	-	-	-	44.4	42.7	44.0	46.0	43.0	44.6	43.9	42.4	44.1	43.4	47.7	45.7	46.6
Complete four years	-	-	-	-	48.8	47.8	50.4	52.6	51.6	51.7	51.7	50.4	49.2	48.6	49.9	52.1	53.4
	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Tenth Grade</b>	-	-	-	-	28.2	28.2	27.8	29.5	29.7	31.0	30.8	32.1	32.7	32.4	33.2	34.4	36.5
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	-	-	-	-	27.1	28.8	27.8	28.1	29.6	29.9	29.6	31.6	31.0	31.8	32.3	33.2	36.4
Female	-	-	-	-	29.2	27.7	28.1	31.2	30.0	32.4	32.1	32.6	34.2	33.0	33.9	35.2	36.6
<b>Race</b>																	
White	-	-	-	-	24.3	24.8	25.5	27.3	26.9	27.9	28.2	28.7	30.1	29.2	30.8	30.9	33.8
Black	-	-	-	-	37.9	37.9	36.6	36.0	39.0	39.2	38.2	37.1	38.1	40.3	43.2	42.6	39.8
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	-	-	-	-	33.8	33.5	30.4	33.0	33.4	36.9	38.3	38.7	38.2	40.1	38.1	38.6	37.6
Completed high school	-	-	-	-	27.3	28.6	27.1	28.8	28.8	30.4	30.8	31.1	31.8	32.0	32.9	32.4	35.3
Some college	-	-	-	-	26.9	26.5	26.8	28.7	27.3	29.8	28.8	30.7	30.9	30.2	31.5	33.8	34.3
Completed college	-	-	-	-	26.4	26.3	28.7	29.2	30.1	30.3	29.9	29.7	33.1	30.4	32.5	33.0	36.9
Graduate school	-	-	-	-	28.0	27.0	26.9	28.3	31.3	31.4	29.4	32.5	31.0	31.6	31.8	34.9	38.5
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	-	-	-	-	26.8	28.4	29.4	30.8	30.5	30.1	30.7	31.6	33.5	33.7	33.7	34.6	37.6
Complete four years	-	-	-	-	28.6	28.0	27.5	29.2	29.5	31.2	30.8	32.1	32.5	32.0	33.1	34.3	36.2
	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Twelfth Grade</b>	15.1	12.7	12.7	14.3	14.0	14.7	15.9	16.9	17.1	18.3	19.4	20.0	20.0	20.8	22.2	23.3	25.3
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	14.7	12.0	13.0	14.4	13.7	15.2	15.9	17.2	16.9	18.1	19.3	20.2	19.4	20.6	22.5	23.5	26.0
Female	15.5	13.6	12.5	14.0	14.3	14.2	15.9	16.5	17.2	18.4	19.3	19.6	20.5	20.7	21.8	22.9	24.8
<b>Race</b>																	
White	14.3	11.6	10.6	11.6	11.9	12.1	12.2	13.5	14.2	15.4	17.4	17.3	17.1	18.2	19.4	21.2	21.7
Black	16.7	16.8	17.9	21.0	20.4	20.0	23.5	24.1	22.5	22.8	23.5	25.5	26.0	25.4	27.5	29.9	32.0
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	17.7	15.8	17.0	21.2	18.9	23.4	22.6	24.8	22.1	24.4	26.5	24.4	26.5	21.6	28.8	28.7	29.3
Completed high school	14.2	12.3	12.7	13.4	14.1	14.4	16.8	17.3	17.0	17.6	17.1	20.8	19.8	19.4	21.6	23.6	25.1
Some college	14.0	11.0	11.4	13.3	13.0	13.0	13.9	15.4	15.0	17.3	17.6	17.4	18.3	20.5	20.0	21.3	23.6
Completed college	13.4	12.2	11.0	12.5	11.9	13.3	13.1	14.8	16.8	17.3	19.8	19.1	19.0	19.9	21.4	22.2	23.8
Graduate school	15.5	13.5	12.9	13.7	14.9	12.5	15.6	14.9	17.4	18.9	20.1	20.4	21.0	22.3	23.9	23.2	25.1
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	15.1	12.5	12.9	15.3	15.3	16.1	18.1	17.8	17.9	19.1	19.1	22.8	22.0	20.7	25.2	25.8	27.1
Complete four years	15.1	12.7	12.6	13.9	13.6	14.1	15.1	16.5	16.9	18.1	19.3	19.1	19.3	20.8	21.4	22.6	24.8

<sup>1</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 rounded up this value to the nearest whole year of education. 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: Child Trends analysis of Monitoring the Future Data, Selected Years 1976-2003

Table 2

Percentage of Students Who Report That They Date Frequently,<sup>2</sup> Selected Years 1976-2003

	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Eighth Grade</b>	-	-	-	-	8.0	8.0	7.5	7.2	7.1	8.0	7.4	7.9	7.1	7.9	7.5	7.7	7.1
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	-	-	-	-	9.1	8.7	8.2	8.3	7.7	9.6	8.9	9.9	7.7	9.6	8.9	9.0	8.6
Female	-	-	-	-	6.9	7.0	6.6	6.0	6.4	6.2	6.1	5.8	6.4	6.3	6.1	6.1	5.7
<b>Race</b>																	
White	-	-	-	-	6.9	7.2	6.4	6.4	6.2	6.5	6.8	6.2	5.8	7.0	6.5	6.6	6.4
Black	-	-	-	-	10.1	7.5	8.1	8.3	7.2	7.7	7.1	8.4	6.6	8.1	6.7	7.7	7.4
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	-	-	-	-	11.8	10.7	10.3	9.2	11.6	11.3	10.2	11.6	10.1	10.5	12.2	10.5	8.3
Completed high school	-	-	-	-	9.1	8.4	7.8	7.3	7.3	8.5	7.1	8.3	7.9	7.8	7.8	7.5	7.7
Some college	-	-	-	-	7.8	7.2	7.0	6.8	5.8	6.7	6.9	7.5	6.5	6.8	6.0	7.8	6.9
Completed college	-	-	-	-	5.7	6.6	6.4	6.6	5.7	6.9	7.6	6.3	6.3	6.8	6.7	6.9	6.1
Graduate school	-	-	-	-	7.7	7.9	6.6	7.2	7.3	8.0	6.9	8.0	5.6	9.6	9.0	7.8	6.7
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	-	-	-	-	13.7	13.0	13.4	11.4	12.5	12.6	12.0	15.0	10.1	12.7	11.8	12.2	13.2
Complete four years	-	-	-	-	7.1	7.1	6.6	6.6	6.4	7.1	6.9	7.1	6.7	7.3	7.0	7.1	6.4
	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Tenth Grade</b>	-	-	-	-	17.3	16.6	16.2	15.9	15.8	15.2	16.3	14.6	13.0	14.7	14.8	13.7	13.6
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	-	-	-	-	13.5	12.8	13.0	13.1	12.5	13.3	14.6	12.7	11.4	13.9	13.1	12.1	11.5
Female	-	-	-	-	20.9	20.2	19.1	18.6	19.1	17.0	17.8	16.2	14.5	15.5	16.4	15.3	15.4
<b>Race</b>																	
White	-	-	-	-	19.1	18.4	16.8	16.7	16.9	16.7	17.3	16.2	13.8	16.2	15.8	15.1	15.1
Black	-	-	-	-	11.7	11.3	12.5	11.3	12.1	10.5	11.7	9.7	8.7	10.2	9.5	9.5	9.9
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	-	-	-	-	16.7	18.1	18.5	17.5	17.2	14.8	16.1	14.4	12.1	12.1	14.6	13.9	15.8
Completed high school	-	-	-	-	18.1	17.3	18.5	18.3	17.6	17.4	16.5	16.6	14.9	17.0	15.8	14.8	15.0
Some college	-	-	-	-	18.6	16.3	15.9	14.7	16.2	15.3	16.8	13.6	12.3	15.2	15.7	14.1	13.5
Completed college	-	-	-	-	17.4	16.6	14.2	15.8	15.1	14.0	15.8	14.3	11.7	14.9	13.6	11.9	12.8
Graduate school	-	-	-	-	14.2	15.8	13.3	12.9	13.2	14.0	15.3	14.1	13.4	13.1	14.3	14.9	11.8
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	-	-	-	-	21.1	20.8	19.4	17.4	18.3	17.5	19.2	16.8	13.4	18.3	15.8	15.8	15.0
Complete four years	-	-	-	-	16.4	15.8	15.5	15.5	15.4	14.8	15.8	14.2	12.9	14.3	14.6	13.4	13.3
	1976	1980	1985	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Twelfth Grade</b>	32.9	33.1	34.0	33.6	34.2	33.5	32.3	31.9	32.1	30.3	30.8	29.8	30.8	28.3	29.0	27.6	27.0
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	27.7	28.5	29.5	30.5	30.7	29.6	29.4	28.7	28.3	28.2	28.6	26.9	28.3	26.4	26.8	26.4	24.6
Female	38.1	37.6	38.2	37.0	37.8	37.2	35.1	34.5	35.5	32.5	32.8	32.5	33.1	30.2	31.3	28.5	28.9
<b>Race</b>																	
White	34.0	34.6	36.5	36.5	37.1	36.8	35.2	35.4	35.0	33.1	33.7	32.7	33.8	30.9	31.7	29.1	29.4
Black	27.1	25.1	24.9	23.6	22.2	24.0	24.1	22.1	22.5	21.5	21.4	20.8	20.8	19.2	21.1	19.6	19.8
<b>Parental Education<sup>1</sup></b>																	
Less than high school	32.3	34.2	31.7	30.4	30.9	27.8	29.9	26.7	28.9	26.1	23.9	25.1	27.9	29.3	28.3	25.5	24.5
Completed high school	35.6	36.3	36.3	37.0	36.6	35.7	33.7	33.7	34.1	33.5	33.7	32.0	30.7	28.9	30.1	29.8	28.6
Some college	32.4	33.4	35.1	34.5	34.0	34.2	33.3	33.2	34.0	31.2	31.0	31.7	32.9	30.0	29.9	27.4	26.9
Completed college	29.0	29.3	32.7	32.6	35.0	32.5	32.6	32.8	31.3	29.4	31.3	28.6	31.1	28.6	28.9	27.3	27.8
Graduate school	30.0	28.4	30.1	29.1	30.7	33.3	28.8	28.1	27.9	28.1	29.5	27.0	27.9	23.5	26.0	26.5	25.5
<b>College Plans</b>																	
None or under 4 years	38.6	40.0	38.8	37.5	37.2	37.5	34.8	35.7	35.7	32.8	33.1	31.3	32.2	30.2	29.8	28.8	28.8
Complete four years	27.7	28.2	31.2	32.0	33.0	32.2	31.4	30.6	30.8	29.6	30.2	29.4	30.5	27.5	28.9	27.3	26.5

<sup>1</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 rounded up this value to the nearest whole year of education. 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.

<sup>2</sup>Frequent dating is used here to describe youth who report going out on one or more dates each week.

Source: Child Trends analysis of Monitoring the Future Data, Selected Years 1976-2003