

## Religious Services Attendance

### Headline

Between 2002 and 2003, the percentage of tenth- and twelfth-grade students who attended religious services at least once a week decreased significantly from 42 percent to 40 percent among tenth graders and from 35 percent to 33 percent among twelfth graders. ([See Figure 1](#))

### Importance

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many children and teens.<sup>1</sup> Teens who attend religious services are less likely to take risks or enjoy danger, engage in violent behaviors, or to get in trouble with the police.<sup>2</sup> These teens are also less likely to skip school and to be suspended, expelled, or sent to detention.<sup>3</sup> Teens who attend religious services are more likely to volunteer in their communities, participate in student government, and play sports or exercise regularly.<sup>4</sup> These teens are also less likely than those who do not attend religious services to drink alcohol and to use illicit drugs.<sup>5</sup> In addition, teens who attend religious services tend to hold more conservative attitudes toward sex and to have lower levels of sexual experience.<sup>6</sup>

### Trends

Between 1991 and 2002, the percentage of tenth-grade and twelfth-grade students who attended religious services at least once a week increased very modestly. ([See Figure 1](#)) However, between 2002 and 2003, the percentage of tenth- and twelfth-grade students who attended religious services at least once a week decreased significantly from 42 percent to 40 percent among tenth graders and from 35 percent to 33 percent among twelfth graders. While there was no significant change between 2002 and 2003 among eighth graders, between 1991 and 2003 the percentage of eighth grade students who attended religious services at least once a week decreased modestly from 47 percent to 44 percent.

### Differences by Race and Ethnicity

Among twelfth-grade students, black youth are more likely than white youth to attend religious services. In 2003, 45 percent of black twelfth graders attended religious services regularly compared with 31 percent of white twelfth graders. ([See Figure 2](#)) Among younger students, there are no significant differences by race.

### Differences by Gender

In 2003, females in the twelfth grade were more likely than males in the twelfth grade to attend religious services (35 percent versus 30 percent, respectively). ([See Table 1](#))

## Differences by Parental Education

Students whose parents have graduated from college are more likely than students whose parents are less well-educated to attend religious services. For example, among tenth grade students in 2003, almost half (49 percent) of those whose parents had completed college regularly attended religious services compared with 23 percent of those whose parents had not completed high school. ([See Figure 3](#))

## Differences by College Plans

Students who plan to complete four years of college are more likely than students who do not have such plans to attend religious services. For example, in 2003, 46 percent of eighth graders who planned to complete four years of college attended religious services at least weekly compared with 29 percent among those eighth-graders who did not have such plans. Similar differences are found among tenth and twelfth grade students. ([See Table 1](#))

## State and Local Estimates

None available

## International Estimates

None available

## National Goals

There are no national goals for religious attendance, but recent federal faith-based initiatives recognize the importance of religious organizations in youths' lives.

More information is available at:  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/>

## Definition

Students were asked, "How often do you attend religious services?" This indicator reflects those who answered "about once a week or more."

## Data Source

Child Trends' original analysis of Monitoring the Future Survey data, 1976 to 2003.

## 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/>

## Approximate Data of Next Update

November 2005

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<sup>1</sup> Bridges, Lisa J., and Kristin Anderson Moore. (September 2002). "Religious Involvement and Children's Well-Being: What Research Tells Us (And What It Doesn't)," Child Trends Research Brief. Washington D.C., Child Trends. <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ReligiosityRB.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Christian and Robert Faris. (2002). *Religion and American Adolescent Delinquency, Risk Behaviors and Constructive Social Activities*. National Study of Youth and Religion. Chapel Hill, NC. <http://www.youthandreligion.org/publications/docs/RiskReport1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> National Center on Addition and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. (2001). *So Help Me God: Substance Abuse, Religion, and Spirituality*, pp 8-12.

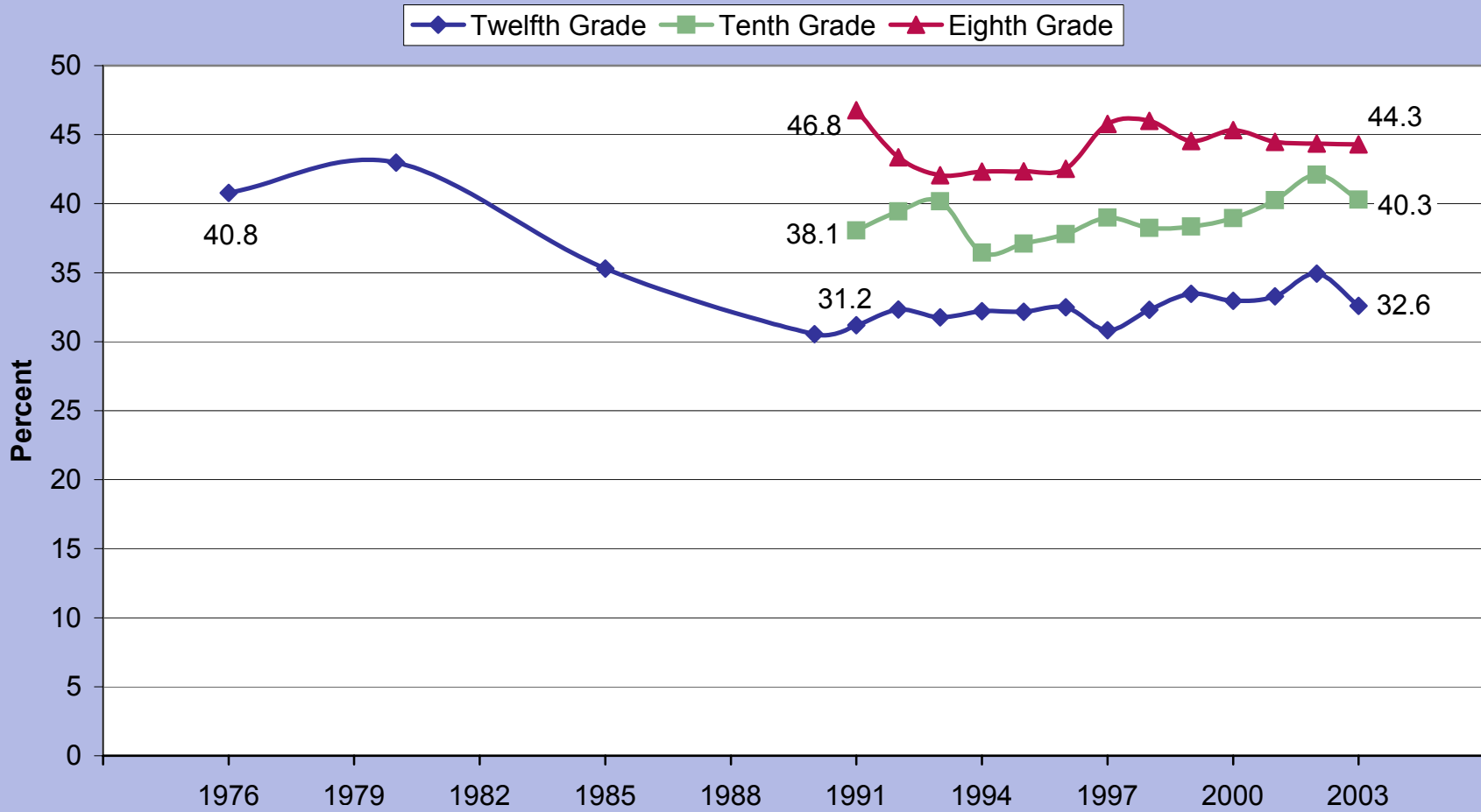
<http://www.casacolumbia.org/pdshopprov/files/91513.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Bridges, Lisa J., and Kristin Anderson Moore. (September 2002).

<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ReligiosityRB.pdf>

Figure 1

## Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Attended Religious Services At Least Once a Week, Selected Years 1976-2003

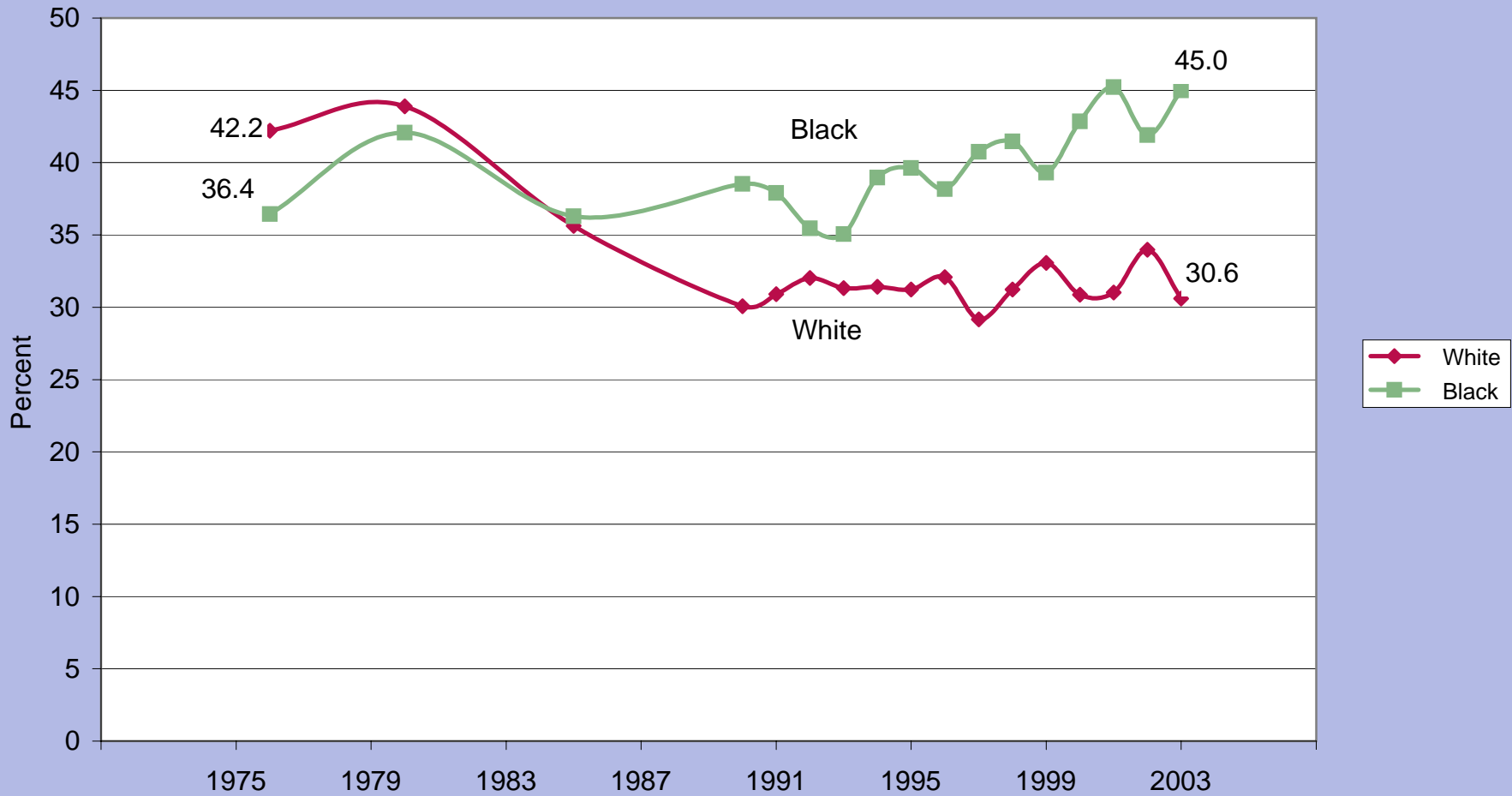


Note: Data for 1997-2003 exclude students living in California

Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, Selected Years 1976-2003

Figure 2

### Percentage of Twelfth Grade Students Who Attended Religious Services At Least Once a Week, by Race, Selected Years 1976-2003

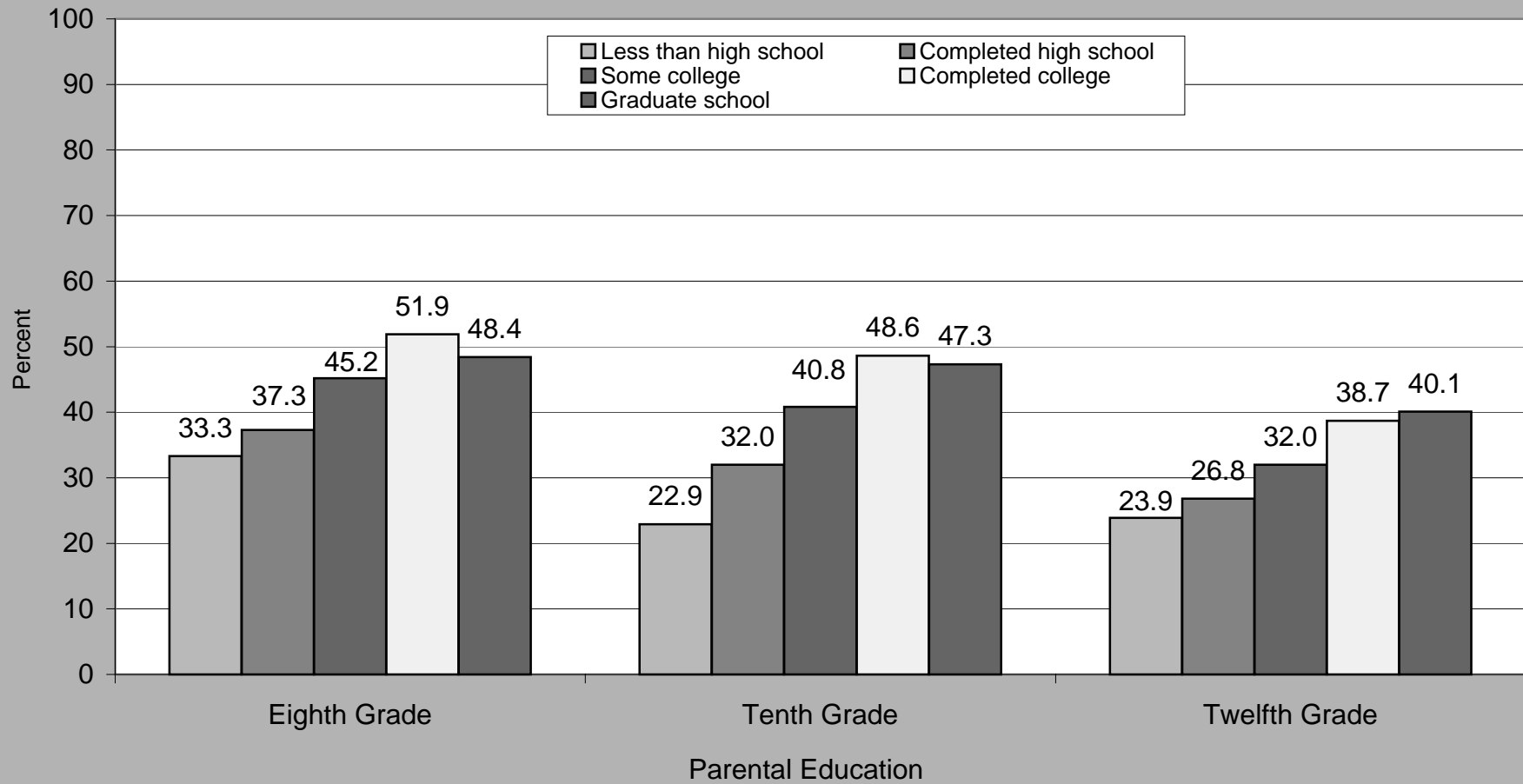


Note: Data for 1997-2003 exclude students living in California

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

Figure 3

## Percentage of 8th, 10th, and 12th Graders Attending Religious Services at Least Once a Week, by Parental Education Level, 2003



Note: Data for 1997-2003 exclude students from California.

<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 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: Child Trends original analysis of Monitoring the Future data, 2003.

