

Volunteering

Headline

Students who plan to complete college are much more likely than other teens to volunteer at least once a month. Among twelfth graders in 2003, 36 percent of those who planned to complete four years of college volunteered, compared with 19 percent of those without such plans. ([See Figure 3](#))

Importance

Adolescents who are involved in community service or who volunteer in political activities have been found more likely to have a strong work ethic as adults and are more likely to volunteer and vote in the future.¹ 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.^{2,3,4}

Recent data 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.⁵

Trends

Among twelfth grade students, the percentage who volunteered at least once per month rose from 24 percent in 1991 to 32 percent in 2003. Among eighth and tenth graders, the percentages fluctuated between about 25 percent and 30 percent during the same time period. ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Gender

Female students are more likely to volunteer than males. ([See Table 1](#)) In 2003, for example, 37 percent of twelfth grade female students volunteered compared with 27 percent of twelfth grade male students. The gender gap is smaller among eighth grade students (27 percent compared with 24 percent).

Differences by Parental Education

Students whose parents have finished college or have gone to graduate school are most likely to volunteer at least once a month. ([See Figure 2](#)) This is a consistent pattern over time and across grades. In 2003, for example, 17 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. (See [Figure 3](#)) For example, among twelfth graders in 2003, 36 percent of those who planned to complete four years of college volunteered, compared with 19 percent of those who did not.

State and Local Estimates

None available

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, 1991-2003.

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), 1976-2003 [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 Date of Next Update

November 2005

¹ 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/K6Brief.pdf>.

² National Commission on Service Learning (2001). *The Power of Service-Learning for American Schools* (Online). Available: <http://servicelearningcommission.org/slcommission/report.html>

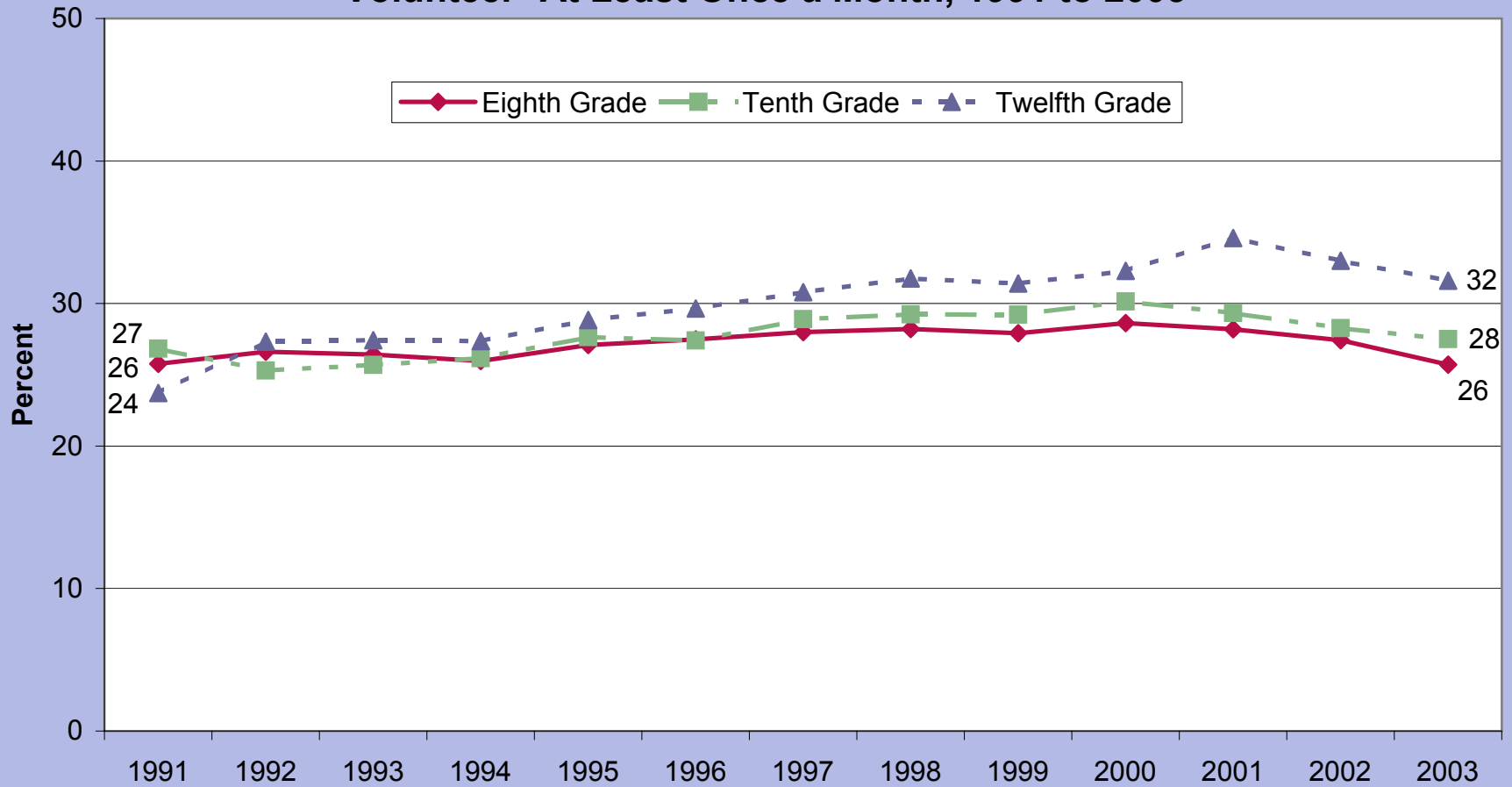
³ Johnson, M., Beebe, T., Mortimer, J. & Snyder, M. (1998). "Volunteerism in Adolescence: A Process Perspective," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(3), 309-331.

⁴ Morgan, W. & Streb, M. (2001 August 1). "The Impact of Service-Learning on Political Participation."

⁵ 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 Volunteer¹ At Least Once a Month, 1991 to 2003

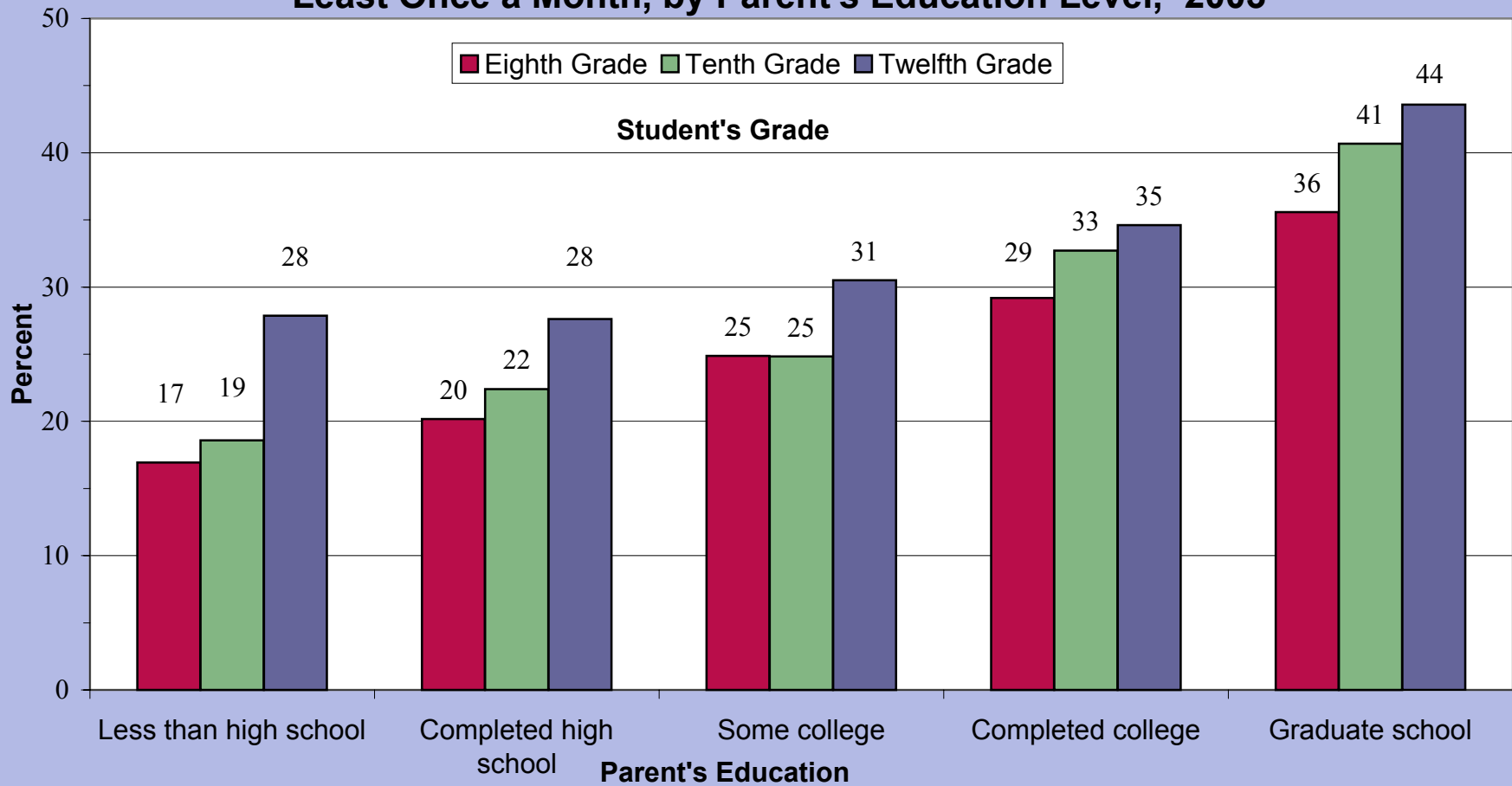


¹ Volunteering includes all students who answered that they "participate in community affairs or volunteer work" once or twice a month or more.

Source: Original analysis by Child Trends of Monitoring the Future data, 1991-2003

Figure 2

Percentage of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Volunteer¹ At Least Once a Month, by Parent's Education Level,² 2003



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, 2003.



Figure 3

Percentage of Students who Volunteer¹ at Least Once a Month by College Plans, 2003



¹ 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, 2003.

Table 1

Students who Volunteer¹ at Least Once a Month by Grade Level, 1991-2003

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Eighth Grade	25.8	26.6	26.4	26.0	27.1	27.5	28.0	28.2	27.9	28.6	28.2	27.4	25.7
Gender													
Male	21.2	22.9	23.4	22.8	24.2	23.9	23.6	24.3	23.9	24.6	23.6	23.5	24.0
Female	30.3	30.1	29.6	29.1	30.2	31.0	32.4	32.1	32.1	32.5	32.4	31.3	27.2
Race													
White	25.7	26.3	27.5	26.6	27.9	27.8	28.5	29.0	28.6	28.8	29.1	28.4	26.5
Black	26.7	29.3	27.2	27.4	30.0	29.6	32.0	33.2	28.7	30.2	31.0	29.6	27.3
Parental Education²													
Less than high school	22.5	23.6	22.3	21.7	20.1	22.2	22.7	20.2	21.1	21.4	24.9	18.1	16.9
Completed high school	24.2	25.6	23.9	23.5	24.7	24.4	25.6	25.7	24.0	25.8	24.3	24.4	20.2
Some college	26.1	26.2	26.6	25.7	28.2	27.7	28.6	27.8	28.2	29.2	26.7	26.7	24.9
Completed college	27.3	27.4	28.9	27.8	28.6	30.3	29.3	31.1	32.1	30.4	31.7	31.6	29.2
Graduate school	30.0	32.9	33.0	32.6	35.8	35.8	34.7	34.6	34.7	37.4	38.1	35.3	35.6
College Plans													
None or under 4 years	18.9	20.6	19.3	17.6	16.8	18.3	18.9	19.4	16.7	17.5	17.5	15.4	13.3
Complete four years	26.9	27.8	27.8	27.3	28.7	29.0	29.5	29.4	29.5	30.1	29.5	28.6	26.9
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Tenth Grade	26.8	25.3	25.7	26.2	27.6	27.4	28.9	29.2	29.2	30.1	29.3	28.3	27.5
Gender													
Male	22.6	20.5	21.1	21.7	23.2	23.2	23.7	25.5	24.7	26.0	24.0	23.6	22.8
Female	31.2	29.9	30.3	30.7	32.3	31.8	34.1	33.1	33.5	34.4	34.5	33.0	32.1
Race													
White	27.7	25.8	26.2	26.7	27.5	27.7	29.0	29.0	30.3	30.6	30.7	29.8	28.4
Black	29.1	26.8	28.8	25.1	29.6	27.3	30.5	34.4	28.0	32.2	27.7	29.4	27.3
Parental Education²													
Less than high school	18.4	22.6	20.4	20.1	21.4	22.0	23.3	21.4	20.7	22.8	21.5	18.4	18.6
Completed high school	22.8	23.1	22.0	22.5	21.5	23.1	24.4	23.5	24.2	25.1	24.7	21.8	22.4
Some college	26.6	23.0	24.8	24.6	27.6	27.5	27.8	29.9	28.7	28.8	28.1	28.8	24.8
Completed college	31.4	28.9	29.9	29.3	31.1	29.7	33.3	33.5	34.8	34.4	34.2	32.9	32.7
Graduate school	36.3	32.3	34.7	38.3	38.2	35.8	37.7	40.5	38.7	41.9	40.2	41.2	40.7
College Plans													
None or under 4 years	17.3	18.3	16.4	16.2	15.0	15.7	15.3	16.2	14.9	15.7	14.9	14.1	13.4
Complete four years	29.0	26.9	27.8	28.4	30.1	29.6	31.4	31.9	31.7	32.6	31.8	30.7	29.9
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Twelfth Grade	23.7	27.3	26.6	27.4	28.9	29.6	30.8	31.8	31.4	32.3	34.6	33.0	31.6
Gender													
Male	20.1	23.6	22.0	24.2	23.1	23.3	26.3	26.4	27.3	25.2	30.3	27.5	26.8
Female	27.5	31.0	30.9	30.2	34.1	36.1	35.4	37.1	35.1	39.3	38.5	38.4	36.7
Race													
White	23.5	27.6	27.1	27.0	28.2	30.7	31.1	31.7	32.5	32.8	35.4	32.5	31.3
Black	26.8	29.9	29.5	30.6	30.2	29.8	32.2	34.2	31.1	30.0	37.4	36.6	35.1
Parental Education²													
Less than high school	22.4	21.0	21.4	20.3	21.5	30.2	19.9	19.7	21.2	25.6	31.5	28.7	27.9
Completed high school	21.5	23.5	24.8	22.6	24.9	23.9	27.0	28.2	24.5	32.2	27.0	29.2	27.6
Some college	22.5	25.8	26.1	26.4	27.6	26.5	28.8	30.5	32.2	29.7	33.4	29.9	30.5
Completed college	26.2	30.3	29.2	32.9	33.2	34.2	35.1	36.1	36.7	36.1	38.1	36.1	34.6
Graduate school	31.9	41.3	35.0	39.2	38.9	38.9	41.7	44.4	41.1	38.0	47.6	48.6	43.6
College Plans													
None or under 4 years	16.8	16.2	18.3	18.3	16.6	20.0	19.7	20.4	18.9	20.0	24.0	21.2	18.5
Complete four years	26.7	31.5	29.7	30.6	33.1	32.9	34.7	35.5	35.3	36.3	37.6	36.6	35.7

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, 1991-2003