



North Carolina Youth: Service, Safety and Civics

When measuring how children are faring, an exclusive focus on deficits ignores a large component of child well-being—those outcomes we want to encourage (reading, volunteering, playing sports, being civically engaged, living in safe neighborhoods). In this special section of the *2006 North Carolina Children's Index*, new sources were used to highlight the positive daily and weekly habits of our young people. These indicators reflect specific strengths that help our children develop into capable, caring and involved adults.

All data are for North Carolina children and youth unless otherwise noted.

Positive Home Habits



Children Use Computers for Fun and Learning

Having access to a computer at home allows children to engage in a number of activities that can help improve their academic skills, such as educational games and word processing.²⁷ Computer familiarity can also benefit young adults as they enter an increasingly technologically-advanced workplace. However, time spent using computers detracts from time that children could be engaged in other beneficial activities such as exercise, reading or spending time with family.²⁸ Eighty-six percent of eighth graders use a computer at home. National data reveal that 80 percent of high school students use a home computer to complete school assignments—almost 70 percent use word processing programs and 20 percent use spreadsheets or database programs.²⁹

Parents are Reading to Their Children

Parents are children's first and most important teachers. Therefore, it is crucial that positive behaviors are supported and encouraged in the home. Being able to read is one of the critical components of achieving success in school and in life. The National Education Goals Panel includes "regular reading to children" as one of the most important activities parents can engage in with their children to improve school readiness.²² Reading to young children helps them learn the alphabet, builds vocabulary and gives them knowledge about the world.²³ Fifty percent of children ages 0-5 are read to every day by a family member.

Youth are Reading at Home

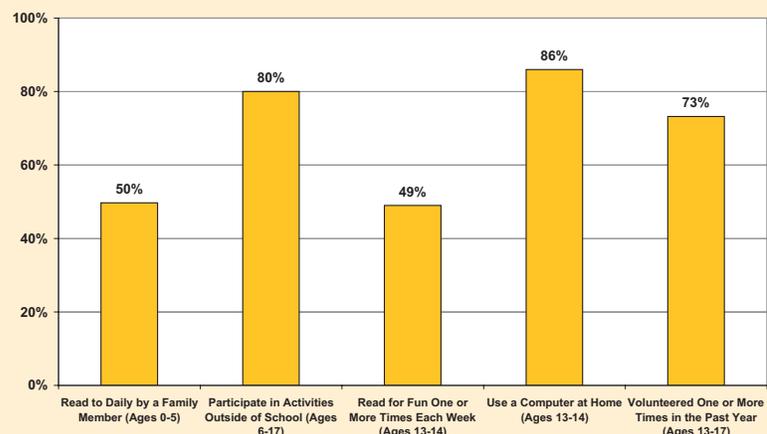
Having books in the home and/or access to a newspaper exposes children to literacy activities and provides the backdrop for developing positive reading experiences.²⁴ Additionally, research using the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) shows a positive relationship between having reading materials in the family and students' scores on tests of reading skills.²⁵ Eighty-nine percent of eighth

graders report that their families have more than 10 books at home. Reading for fun and/or reading the newspaper each week are signs that children are developing positive reading habits and skills that will serve them well by expanding their understanding of the world around them, ideas and other people and places.²⁶ Forty-nine percent of eighth graders report reading for fun each week and 75 percent of all high school students report reading the newspaper at least once a week.

Most Children Have Rules Limiting T.V. Time

Watching television keeps children from engaging in other activities that are known to improve academic, social and health outcomes. The more television children watch, the less they can participate in other activities, such as reading, exercising or doing

What's RIGHT with N.C. Children



Data Sources: Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (2005); National Survey of Children's Health, Data Resource Center on Child and Adolescent Health website www.nchsdata.org; North Carolina Civic Education Consortium (2003); North Carolina Youth Civic Index Survey, website <http://www.civics.uncc.edu/index.html>; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), website <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

Positive Home Habits *(continued)*

Positive Home Habits

	Ages	2003
Literacy Activities		
Read to Daily by a Family Member	0-5	49.7%
Live in Homes with More than 11 Books	8th Grade	89.0%
Read for Fun One or More Times Each Week	8th Grade	49.0%
Read the Newspaper Each Week	13-17	75.4%
Use a Computer at Home	8th Grade	86.0%
Parents Have Rules about Watching T.V. ^a	8th Grade	57.0%
Watch One Hour or Less of T.V. on a School Day	8th Grade	25.0%
Do Homework Every Day ^b	8th Grade	92.0%
Attend Religious Services at Least Once a Week	0-17	64.1%
Parent Feels that Their Neighborhood is Safe for Children	0-17	86.8%

a Data from 2002.

b Data from 2000.

Data Sources (in order): Questions where age range is 0-17 or 0-5, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (2005). National Survey of Children's Health, Data Resource Center on Child and Adolescent Health website www.nschdata.org; Questions where age range is 13-17, North Carolina Civic Education Consortium (2003). North Carolina Youth Civic Index Survey, website <http://www.civics.unc.edu/index.html>; Questions where age range is eighth grade, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), website <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>.

their homework. Research shows a link between television watching and numerous negative effects among children and adolescents, including increased aggression, poor body image, obesity and substance abuse.³⁰ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents limit their children's media time to no more than two hours a day.³¹ One-in-four eighth graders reports watching one hour or less of television on school days with an additional 40 percent reporting watching two to three hours daily. Additionally, more than 50 percent of eighth graders have parents who impose limits on their television viewing.

Homework Everyday

Homework has been shown to help improve students' academic performance. Homework helps students learn valuable study skills and helps deepen students' understanding of a subject.³² Researchers using results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests found that student performance on reading

assessments improves as the amount of homework done on the average school day increases.³³ Additionally, for students in middle and high school, doing homework is linked to higher test scores.³⁴ Ninety-two percent of eighth graders report doing some homework every day.

Religious Service Attendance

Children and youth who attend religious services regularly are more likely than their peers to think positively about themselves, to feel satisfied with their lives and to be hopeful about their future.³⁵ They are much less likely than their peers to engage in risky behaviors such as not wearing seat belts or using alcohol and drugs.³⁶ They are also less likely to be violent or have problems at school or with their parents.³⁷ Sixty-four percent of parents report that their children attend religious services at least once a week.

Safe Neighborhoods

Families who live in safe neighborhoods are more likely to have the sort of strong social bonds with their community that help families succeed.³⁸ Parents who feel that they live in a safe neighborhood are more likely to allow their children to play outdoors and interact with other members of the community. Research has shown that children whose parents do not think their neighborhood is safe watch more television than their peers.³⁹ Spending time outdoors allows children to get more exercise and to learn about their community. Relationships formed with peers and adults help support positive child development.⁴⁰ Eighty-seven percent of parents believe that the neighborhood they live in is usually or always safe for their children.

Positive Social Indicators

Social Engagement

North Carolina's children and youth are very involved in their communities. Eighty percent of school-aged children participate in organized activities outside of school. More than 3-of-every-4 high school students participate in school clubs and sports. Participation in extracurricular activities helps children learn new skills, explore their independence and form new friendships with peers and adults.⁴¹ Research repeatedly demonstrates positive relationships between participation in extracurricular activities and educational attainment, physical health and improved social skills.⁴²



Civic Engagement

Democracy in the United States is founded upon the idea of a civically-engaged citizenry—people actively participating in the world around them and government. Civic engagement is a term used to describe a number of activities including voting, connecting with others about important issues, being a member of community organizations and volunteering. Civically-engaged adolescents have

been found to have more socially responsible attitudes and stronger work ethics than their peers; engaged teenagers tend to do better in school and are less likely to become teenage parents or use drugs.⁴³ The indicators used here all look at activities in which youth engage to voice their social and political views. At least 1-in-3 high school students have participated in

some type of political expression in the past year.

Adolescents who are involved in community service are not only helping their communities, but also themselves. Research has found that volunteering is associated with positive psychological, social and intellectual outcomes.⁴⁴ More than 7-out-of-every-10 high school

Positive Social Indicators

	Ages	2003
Social Engagement		
Participated in Activities Outside of School	6-17	80.0%
Participated in School Clubs/Sports	13-17	76.8%
Civic Engagement (in the past year)		
Volunteered One or More Times	13-17	73.2%
Written to the Paper or Called a Talk Show About an Important Issue	13-17	10.2%
Contacted a Public Official to Express Opinion	13-17	13.0%
Signed an Email Petition	13-17	23.2%
Boycotted a Product for Ethical Reasons	13-17	34.0%
Socialize or Work with Other Races and Ethnicities ^a	13-17	72.8%

^a Six or More times in the last 12 Months.

Data Sources (in order): Participate in Activities Outside of School, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (2005). National Survey of Children's Health, Data Resource Center on Child and Adolescent Health website www.nschdata.org; All other data, North Carolina Civic Education Consortium (2003). North Carolina Youth Civic Index Survey, website <http://www.civics.unc.edu/index.html>.

Positive Social Indicators *(continued)*

students report volunteering one or more times in the past year, with 1-in-3 reporting frequent volunteering.

Socialize With Other Races and Ethnicities

Interracial socializing and friendship have been linked to increased social competence and multicultural sensitivity.⁴⁵ Additionally, research shows that students with interracial friendships have higher educational aspirations and outcomes.⁴⁶ William Julius Wilson, a Harvard professor of sociology, argues that having relationships across the racial divide is needed to combat “the rising inequality in American society.”⁴⁷ Seventy-three percent of high school students report socializing or working with people of a different race or culture several times in the last year.

Conclusion

Positive indicators allow us to measure our hopes for our children and youth rather than measuring only what we hope they avoid. In doing so, the data help paint a more complete picture of the experiences of youth and allow us to better understand the real life experiences of all of our children. Continuing to collect such data is an important step in being able to monitor the positive development of North Carolina’s children and youth.

A look at the positive indicators of child and youth well-being in North Carolina shows that many of our children and youth are very engaged in their families, schools and communities. Although researchers do not have all the measures they would want to assess positive development, these indicators illustrate that many of North Carolina’s children and youth are achieving the types of positive outcomes wanted for all children. North Carolina must build upon these strengths as it works to improve the lives of the state’s children.



...[M]any of North Carolina’s children and youth are achieving the types of positive outcomes wanted for all children. North Carolina must build upon these strengths as it works to improve the lives of the state’s children.

