

Boys and Men in VA: Setting the stage

Challenges and opportunities
facing boys and men in Virginia, focus on education

Helping boys and men
from all backgrounds
thrive today and in the
future.



Shaping policy and public conversation
with reliable, non-partisan research.

This is not a zero-sum game.

Supporting boys and men does not mean pulling back from girls and women.
We rise or fall together.

Beliefs that guide our work.

01 Boys and men play a positive role in society.

Rapid economic and social change has left some behind.

02 They deserve solutions, not blame.

The forces disrupting male wellbeing lie outside the individual – where policy can act.

03 Men and women rise together.

We reject zero-sum thinking. Real progress requires collaboration and mutual respect.

04 Focus on the most disadvantaged.

We focus on those research shows are hurting most – including Black and working-class men.

From knowledge to voice to action.

We build the evidence base, raise the issues into the mainstream, and work with policymakers to turn findings into outcomes.

01 · KNOWLEDGE

Build the evidence base.

Original research and commissioned work from leading scholars — identifying causes and effective interventions.

RECENT RESEARCH

Boys and Men in HBCUs
The Male Loneliness Crisis
Men in Teaching

02 · VOICE

Raise awareness in the mainstream.

Reach policymakers, media, and the public so boys and men feel heard, needed, and valued.

RECENT MEDIA COVERAGE

The New York Times · The Atlantic
Ezra Klein Show · PBS NewsHour
The Economist · WSJ · Hechinger Report

03 · ACTION

Advise, partner, and incubate.

Counsel policymakers, support partners, and launch initiatives where no one else is leading.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

Policy · field building · program incubation

incl. the Male Educator Network and the Higher Education Male Achievement Collaborative

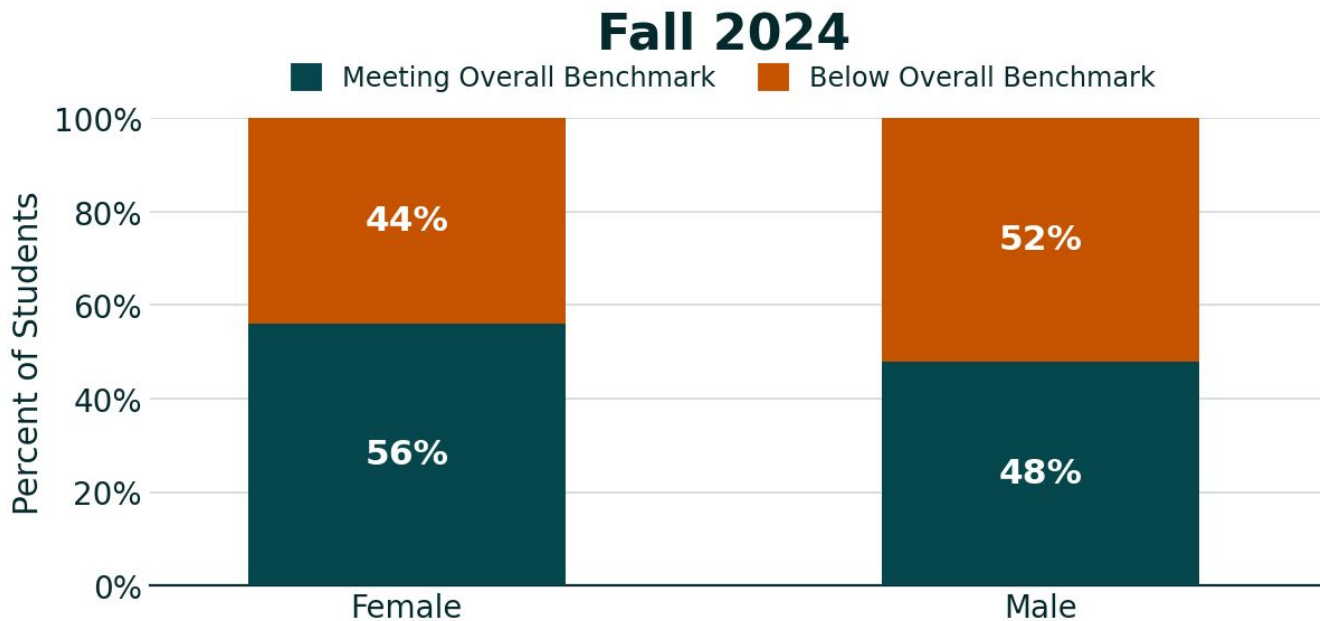
Key metrics U.S. and VA

MEASURE	NATION	VIRGINIA
Male share of suicides	80%	79%
Grade 4 reading gap, boys vs. girls	-8.3 pts	-13.5 pts
Young men (18-24) enrolled in college	35.5%	37.3%
Prime-age men (25-54) not in the labor force	10.8%	12.1%
Share of teachers who are men	23%	19%

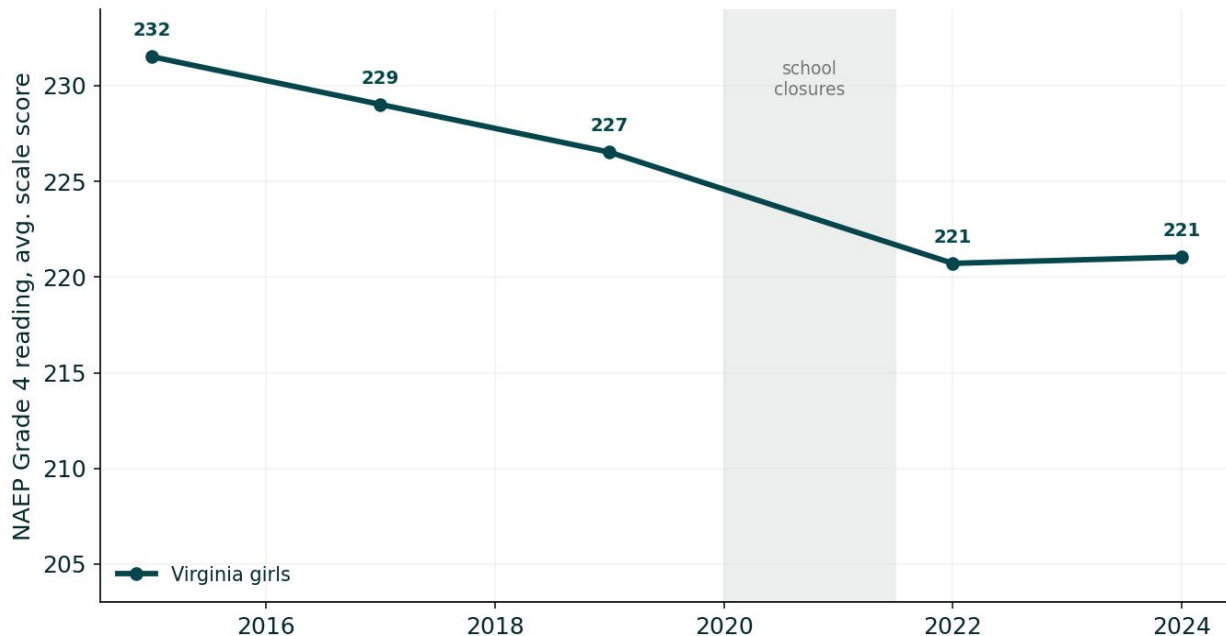
What Virginia's data shows.

- 01 The starting line.** Under half of boys arrive at Kindergarten ready
- 02 Learning to read.** A 13.5-point collapse for 4th-grade boys – with no recovery.
- 03 The middle grades.** The gap compounds with race.
- 04 Finishing high school.** Girls out-graduate boys; boys drop out at 1.7× the rate.
- 05 The path to campus.** Men's enrollment is drifting down; deepest where disadvantage concentrates.
- 06 The result.** A 10-point degree gap among young Virginia adults.

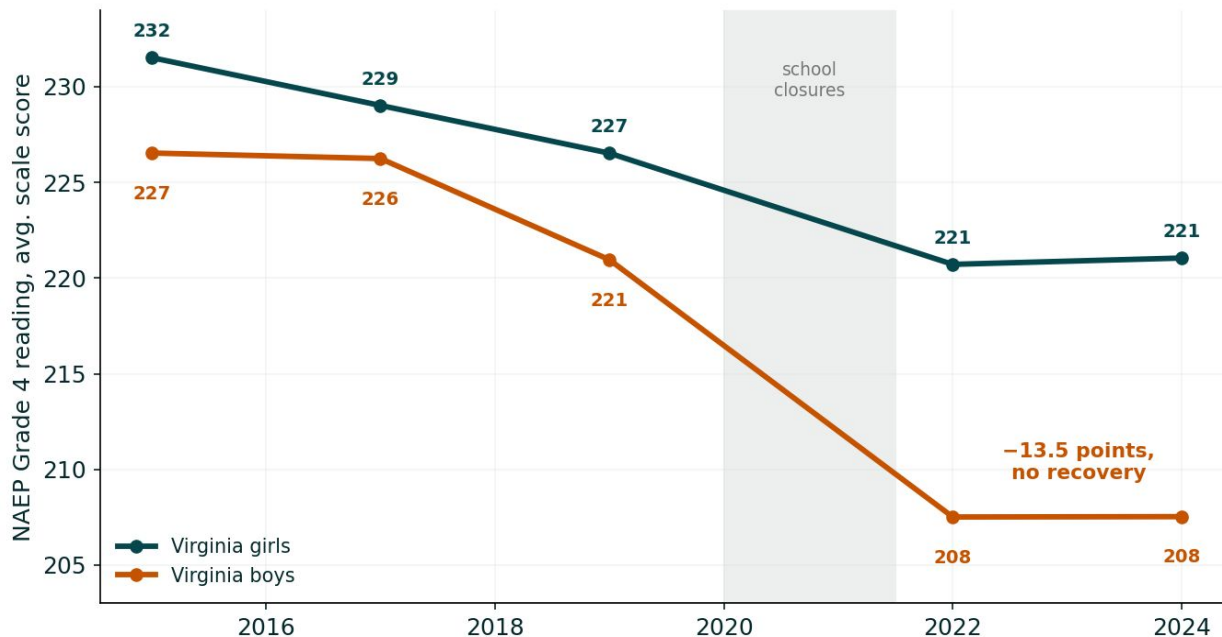
Virginia boys are behind even at Kindergarten



Girls reading is down: a dip, then stable.



Boys are down far more, large gap remains



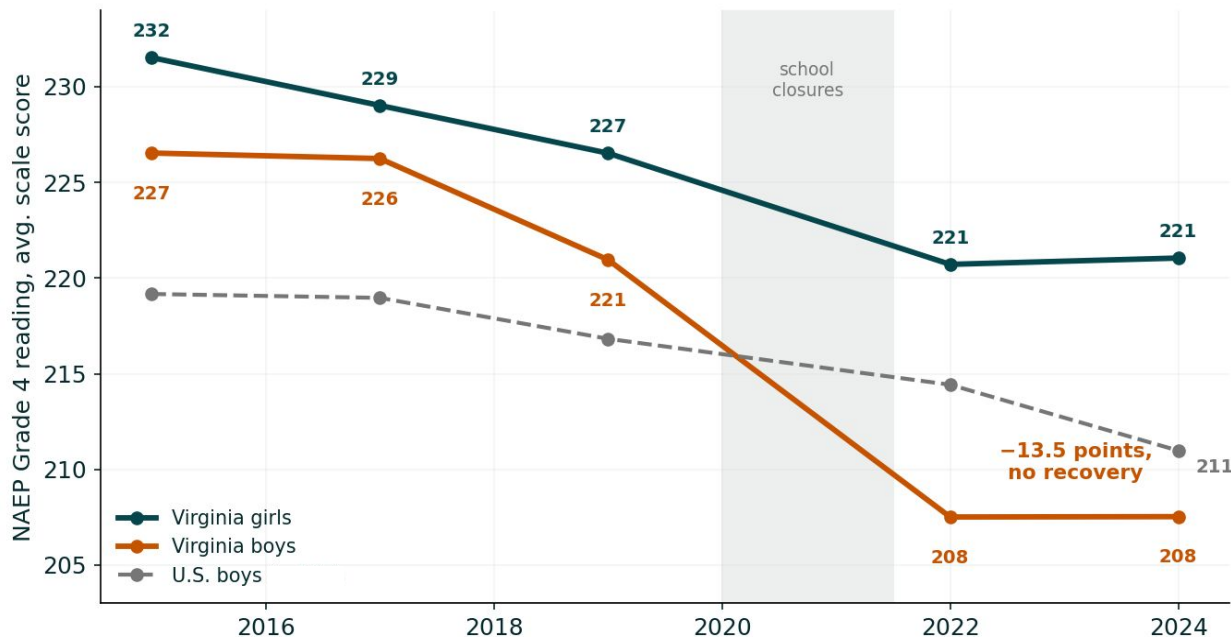
WHAT TO NOTICE

–13.5

points, 2019→2022, VA boys
(girls: –5.8)

Same test, same schools, same years. Boys fell more than twice as far – and stayed there.

A Virginia story, not a national one.



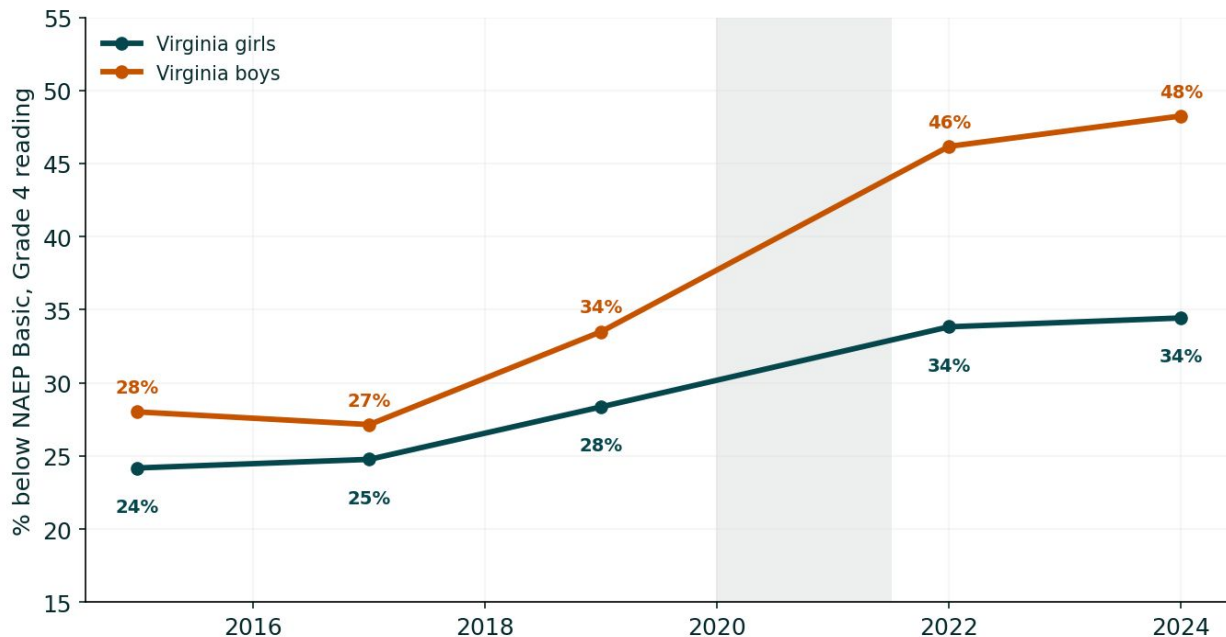
WHAT TO NOTICE

—2.4

points: U.S. boys over the same
2019–22 window

U.S. boys slid gradually over
the decade. Virginia boys fell
off a cliff in one window

The bottom fell out for boys.



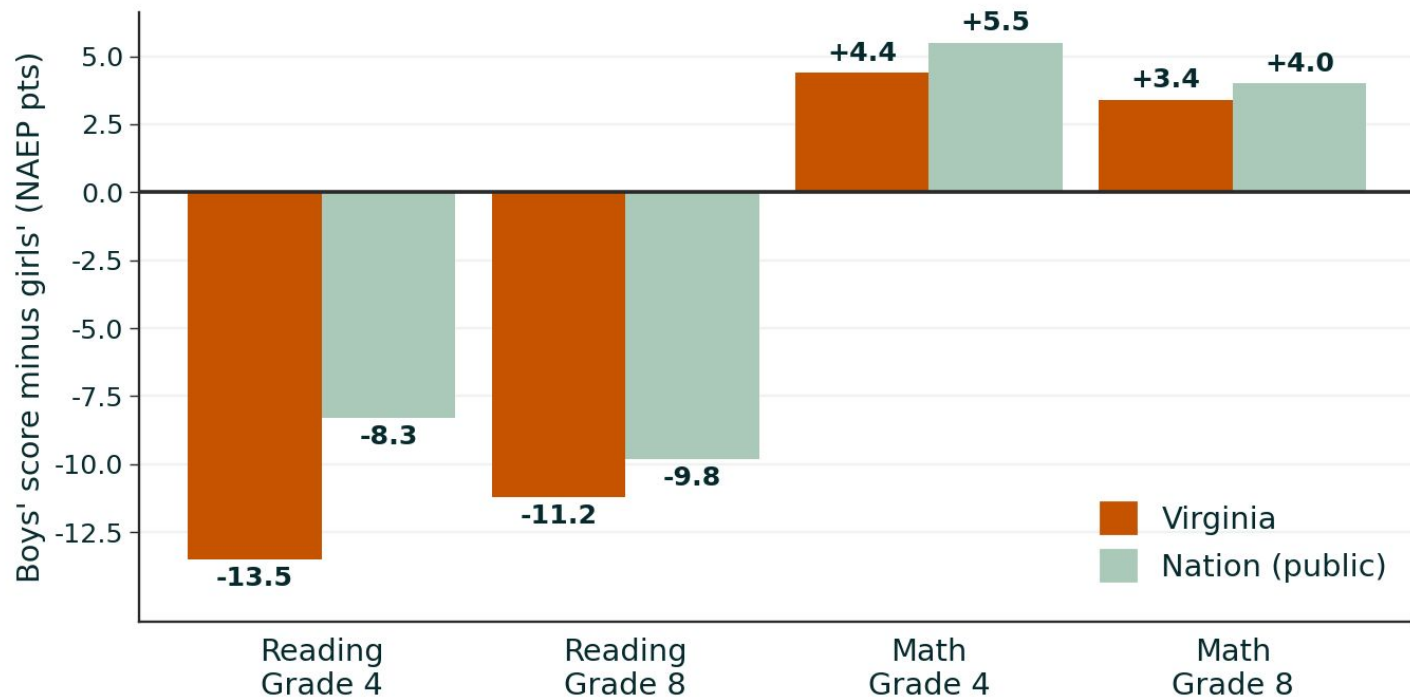
WHAT TO NOTICE

48%

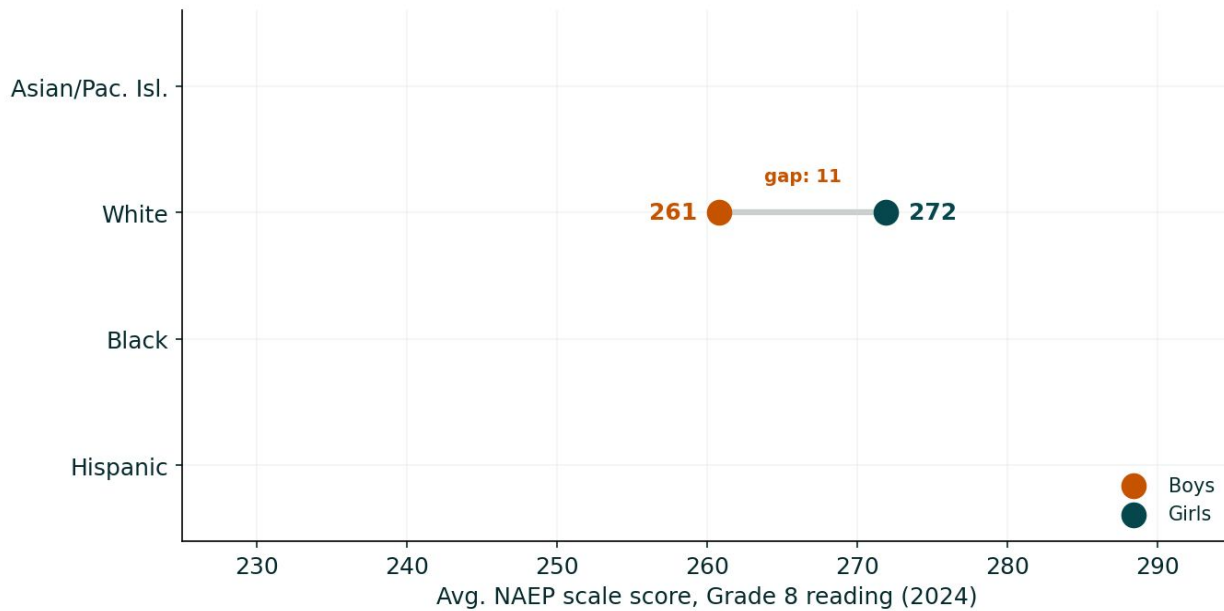
of VA 4th-grade boys below
NAEP Basic (34% in 2019)

The collapse is concentrated
among struggling readers.
These are the 4th graders the
Virginia Literacy Act must
reach.

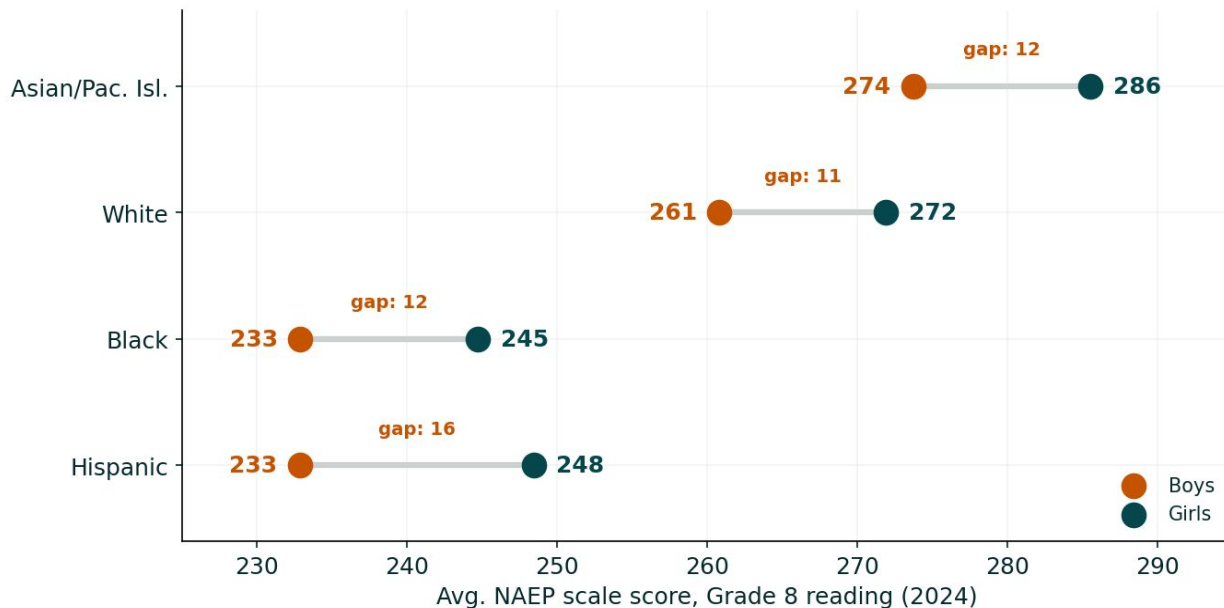
Worse than the nation in reading; a math edge remains.



The gap persists in 8th grade, across races



...and the gap is larger among some groups



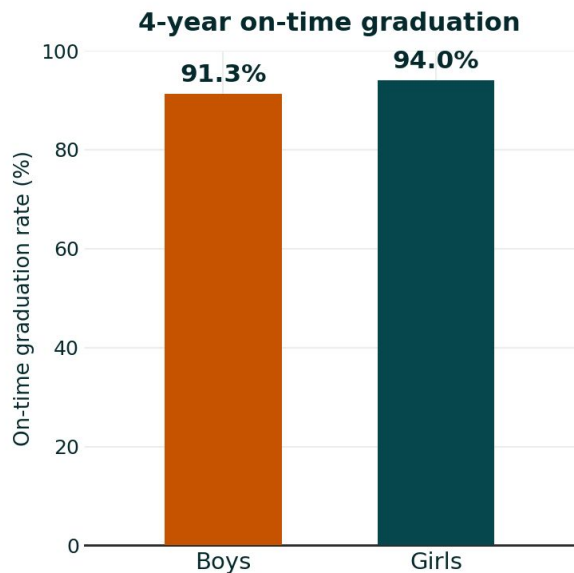
WHAT TO NOTICE

16 pts

the gender gap among Hispanic students

Black and Hispanic boys score roughly 40 points below white girls – gender stacks on top of every other gap.

Most boys still graduate on time...

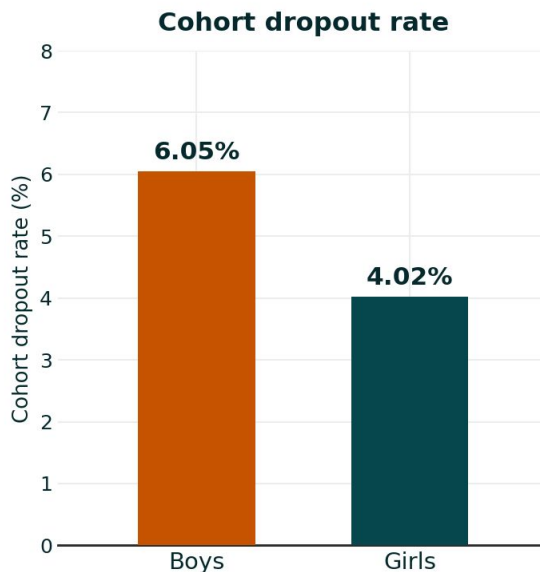
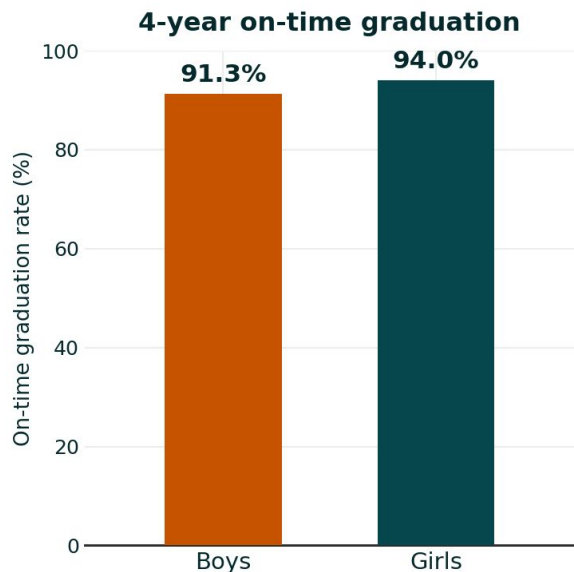


WHAT TO NOTICE

The graduation gap is real but modest – 2.7 points.

Source: VDOE cohort class of 2025.

...but boys drop out at 1.5× the rate.



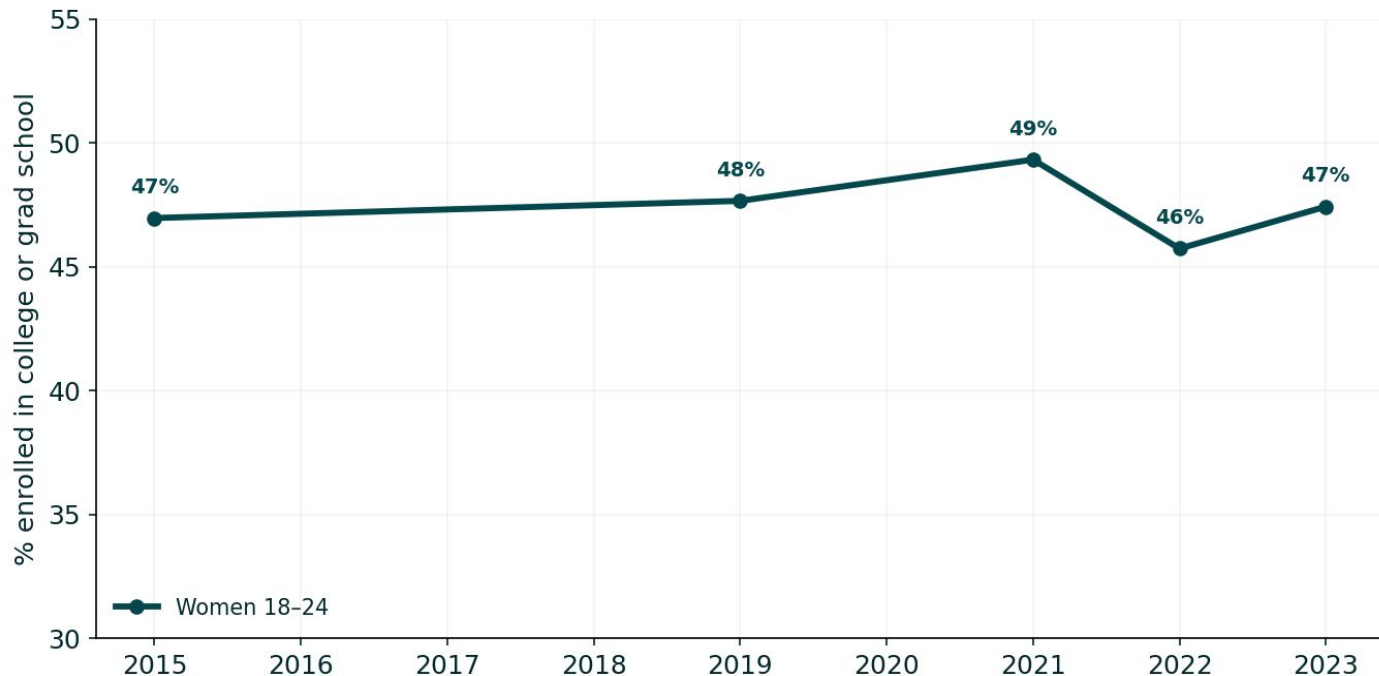
WHAT TO NOTICE

1.5×

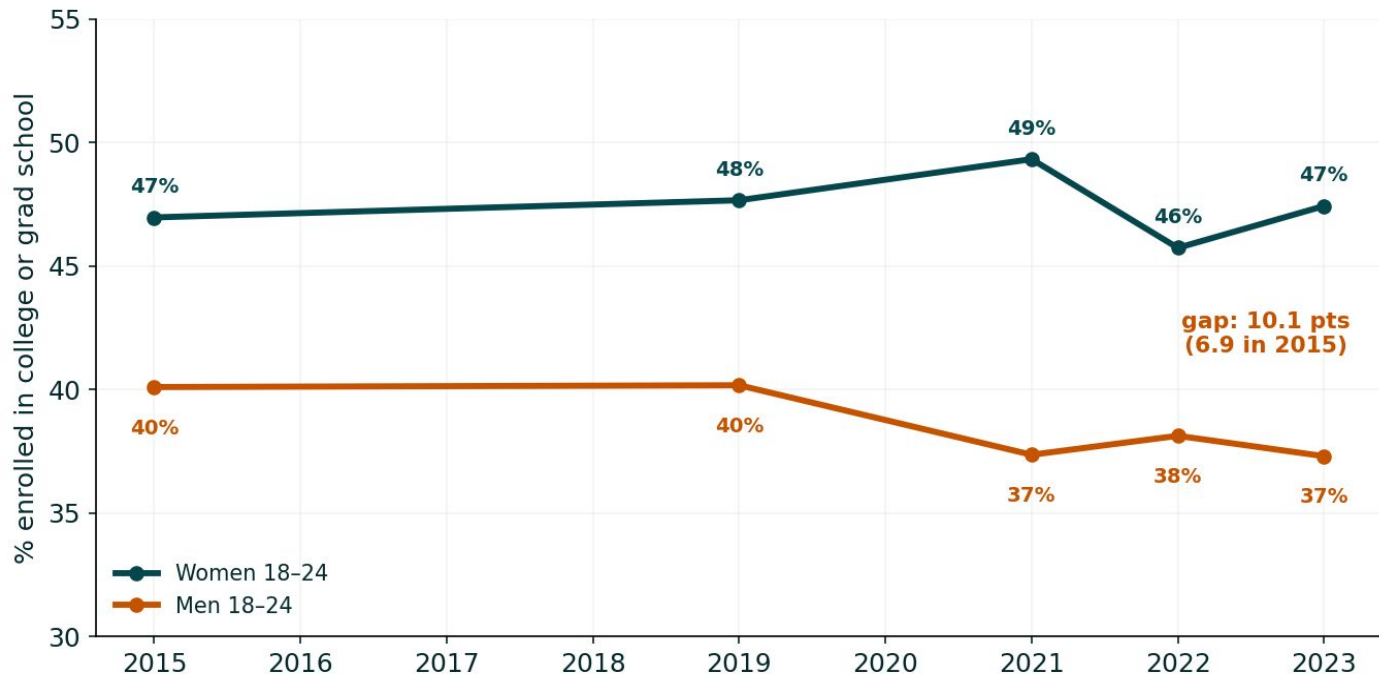
boys' dropout rate vs. girls'
(6.05% vs. 4.02%)

Dropout is where boys pull away – and where the pipeline to postsecondary starts leaking.

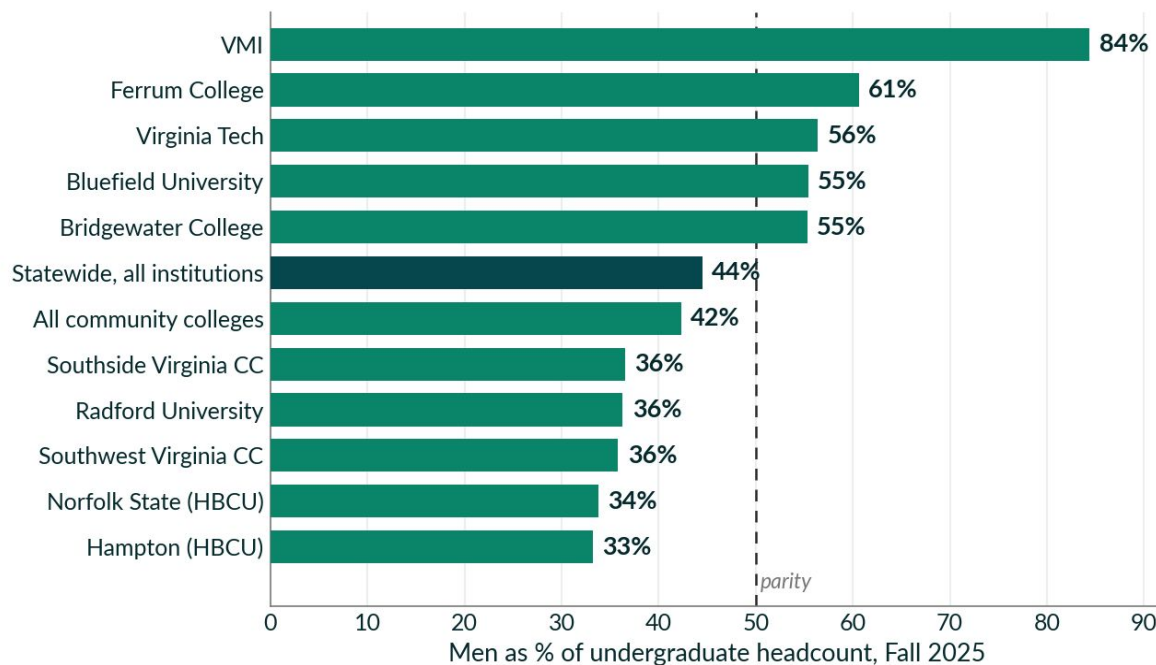
Women's enrollment: steady for a decade.



Men started lower — and are drifting down.

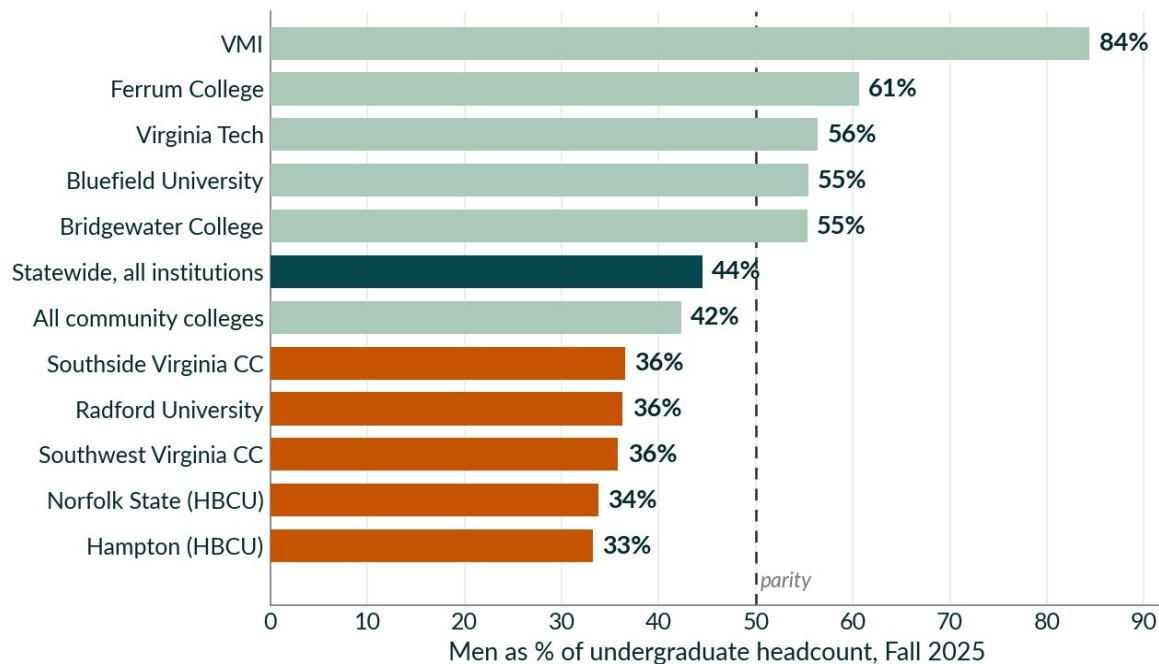


Men's share of undergrads varies widely.



Note: Excludes single-sex institutions and colleges originally founded as women's colleges.

Deepest where disadvantage concentrates.



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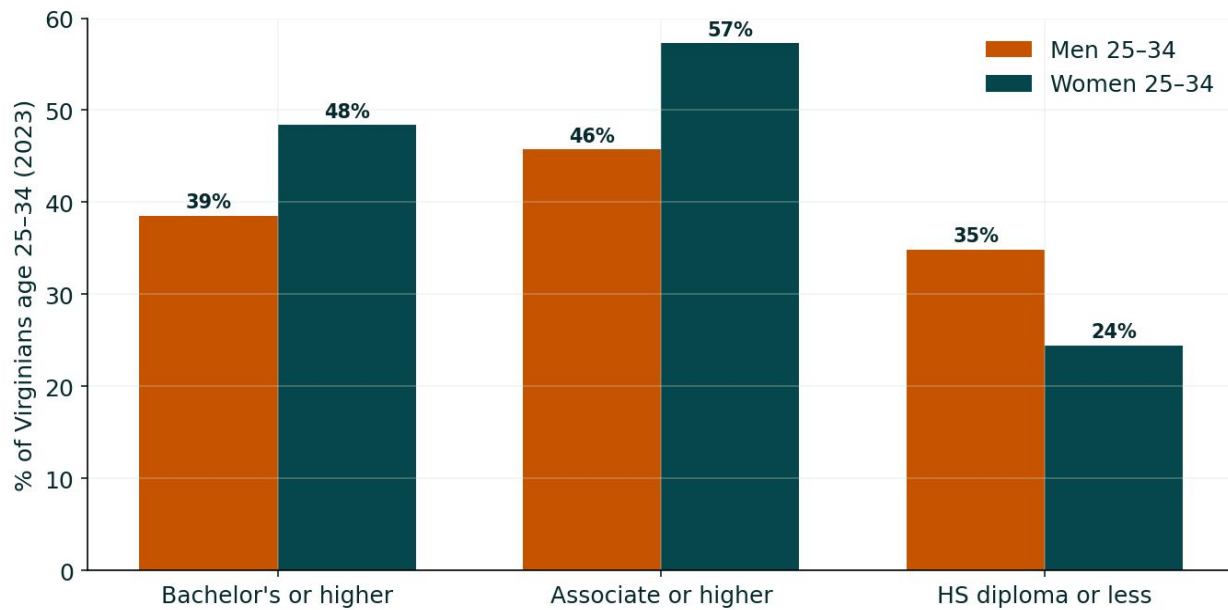
WHAT TO NOTICE

33%

men at Hampton; 34% at
Norfolk State

The lowest shares are at
HBCUs and at community
colleges and regional
universities serving
first-generation students.

A 10-point degree gap among young adults.



**38% v
48%**

BA+ attainment, men vs. women

About a third of young Virginia men stopped at a high-school diploma or less.

Source: ACS 2023, ages 25–34.

WHY?



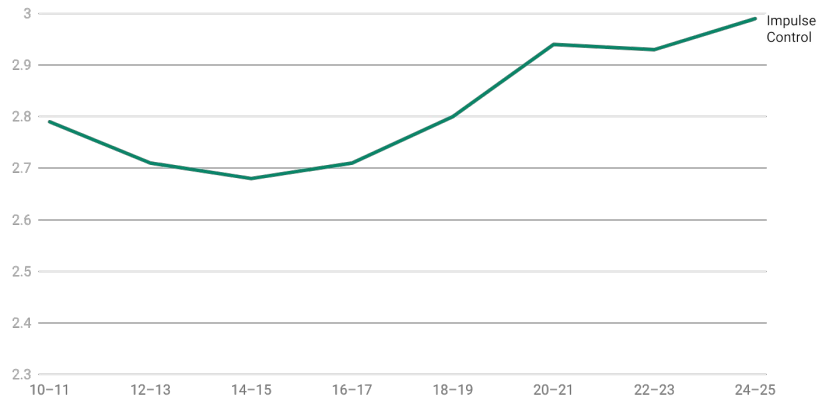
Brain development

Skills like self-regulation develop later in boys – the female brain matures earlier where school rewards it most.

The developmental gap

Changes in the magnitude of impulse control and sensation-seeking with age, by sex

Girls



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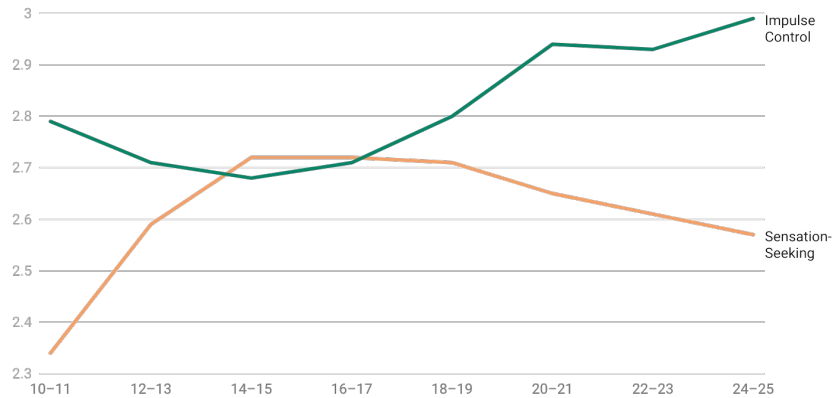
Figure shows estimates marginal means for IC and SS by sex. The differences between males and females are significant at every age. Source: Elizabeth P. Shulman and others, "Sex differences in the developmental trajectories of impulse control and sensation-seeking from early adolescence to early adulthood," data from Table 2, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (44, 2015).

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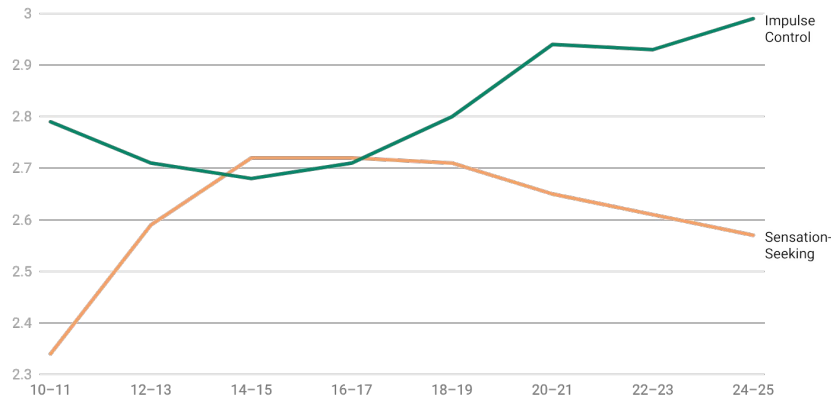
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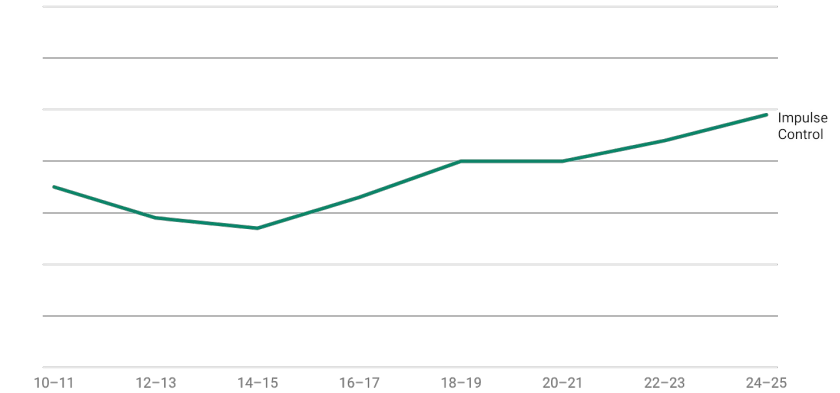
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Boys



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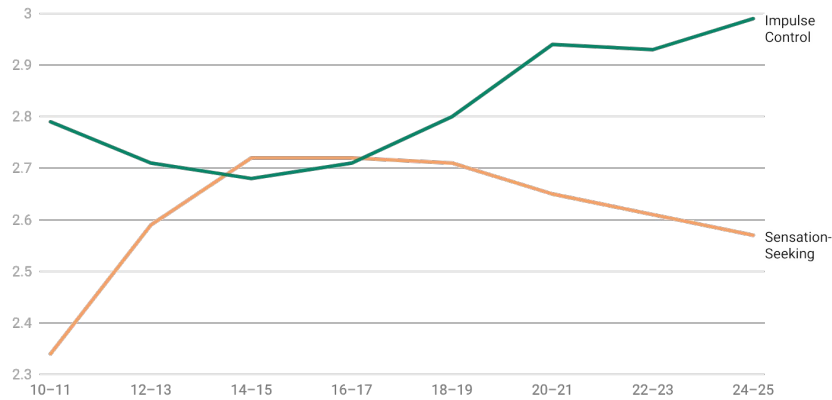
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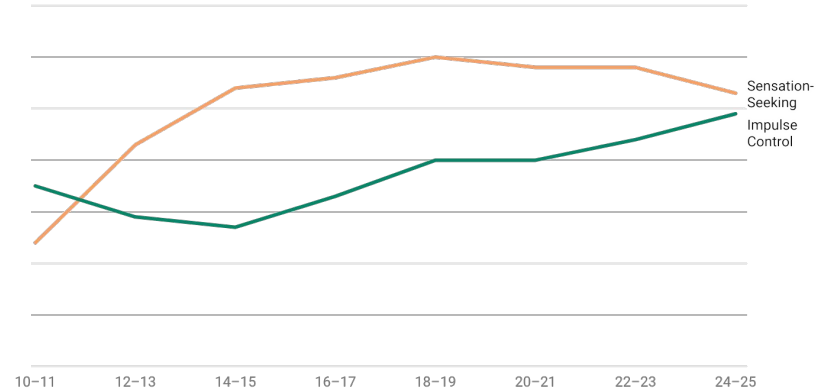
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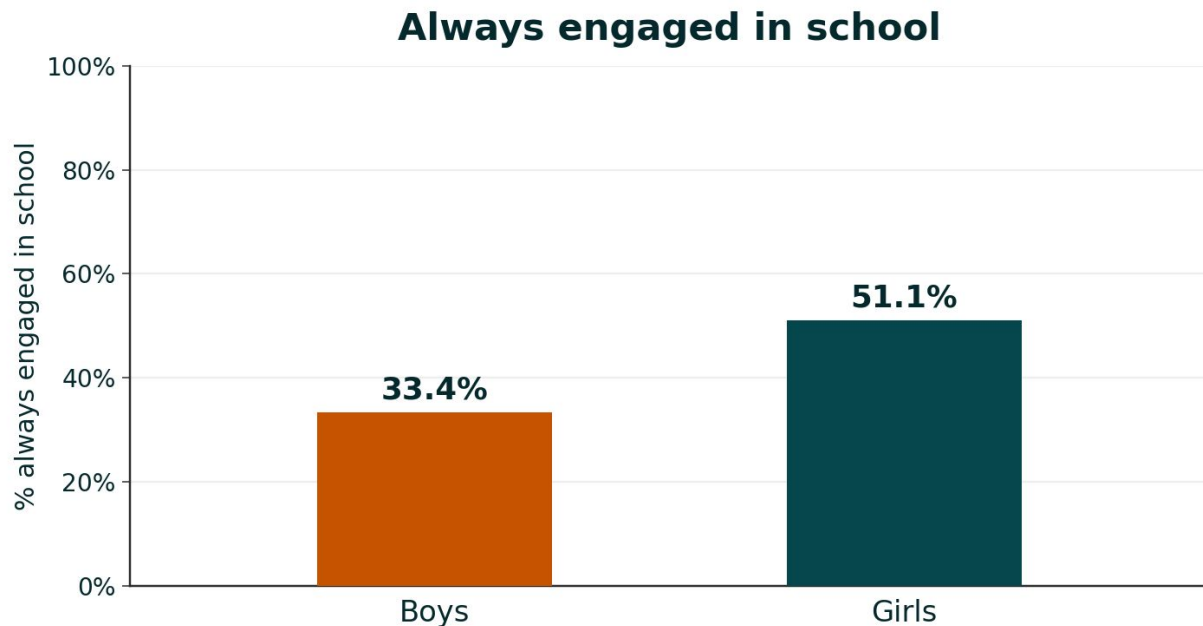
WHY?



Schools themselves do not engage boys

- Still learning what drives disengagement
- And what we can do about it

Boys are far less engaged in school



Source: National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) 2023–24, ages 6–17

WHAT TO NOTICE

33%

of boys are always engaged –
vs. 51% of girls

Girls are about 1.5× as likely as
boys to be fully engaged. The
gap is wide.

WHY?



Boys more impacted by environment and disadvantages

- Exposure to disadvantaged neighborhoods and schools
- Residential moves during childhood
- Growing up in single-parent households
- Income instability or sudden economic shocks

Potential areas of focus Virginia.

Some possibilities, but there are many other options

01 · MALE TEACHERS

Bring men back to the classroom.

Men are under 1 in 5 VA teachers — and falling.

- Get the data
- Build interest early
- Leverage alternative pathways
- Call men in
- Retention

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01 · MALE TEACHERS

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02 · BOYS' LITERACY

Rebuild boys' reading skills and foster enjoyment in school

Little has been tried targeted to boys academics and wellbeing- now is the time

- Get the data
- Set bold goals
- Screening plans for boys
- Pilot innovative programs

Dig deeper into the data

Virginia already screens and intervenes under the Virginia Literacy Act. The missing step is looking at that data through a gender lens – so the state can target, not guess.

- **Get the right data at every level.**

Break out reading results by sex at the school, district, and state level – screener already collects it.

- **Pinpoint where in the journey the gap opens.**

- Is it word recognition and decoding? Fluency? Comprehension? Interest and reading volume? Each points to a different fix
 - a granular look tells you which.

- **Follow the gap across the map.**

Set a gender-specific goal and try things.

The gaps are large enough to warrant an explicit target

THE GOAL

Attach a boys' reading target to the literacy work Virginia is already doing – a measurable goal to raise boys reading level by a set date, tracked in the VLA reporting the state already produces.

THE ACTION: TRY THINGS

- Australia & the UK ran national boys'-literacy pushes in the 2000s, but we did not take systematic lessons
- Some types of phonics and tutoring programs impact reach boys more
- Interest & choice: boys may read more when they have more opportunity to engage

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03 · POSTSEC PATHWAYS

Build pathways in CTE and higher ed

Many men succeed in these programs, but barriers to access

- Get the data
- Expand CTE options
- Support navigating pathways
- Stackable opportunities



Thank you!

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