A Child's Day: Parental Interaction, Extracurricular Activities, and School Engagement: 2023

Current Population Reports

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INTRODUCTION[1]

Children's interactions with parents, involvement in extracurricular activities, and engagement in school are linked to emotional support and security, social and cognitive development, academic success, social skills, and other aspects of child well-being (Eisenberg et al., 2004; Kalb and van Ours, 2014; Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen, 2014; Felfe et al., 2016; Barger et al., 2019). Past reports have explored variation in child-parent interaction, extracurriculars, and school engagement by race, ethnicity, poverty status, and other social characteristics. However, little is known about these patterns following the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report uses the Survey of Income Program Participation (SIPP) to examine various child well-being measures. The last report examining child well-being using SIPP data was released in 2018 using Wave 1 of the 2014 SIPP.[2] We provide updated estimates in this report using the 2023 SIPP, with particular attention to the most recent data as well as to trends over time. First, we provide estimates related to family and household characteristics. Second, we discuss patterns in parental interaction. More specifically, we showcase trends in how frequently children are read to, how often they go on outings with parents, and how often they eat dinner with their families.

[1] The U.S. Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product (Data Management System [DMS] number: P-7516454; Disclosure Review Board [DRB] approval number: CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077). All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are statistically significant at the 90 percent significance level, unless otherwise noted.

[2] Brian Knop and Julie Siebens, "A Child's Day: Parental Interaction, School Engagement, and Extracurricular Activities: 2014," *Current Population Reports*, P70-159, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2018.

Survey of Income and Program Participation Child Well-Being Data

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) collects information on a variety of child well-being indicators to illustrate what children experience daily, including differences in family living arrangements and economic and social environments. There is a section of the survey that asks questions specific to child well-being, such as performance in school, participation in extracurricular activities, and parental engagement (refer to Appendix Table 1 for survey questions and measures used in this report). For questions about extracurricular activities and school experiences (expulsion/grade repetition/gifted classes), a parent is asked if each item applies to any children, and then a follow-up question identifies which child(ren). For questions about parental engagement, parents are asked about involvement for all their children in the home who are in the age universe for the question. In pre-2014 panels, parents were asked each well-being question separately for each child in the age universe for the question.

Third, we turn our attention to extracurricular activities, including participation in clubs, lessons, sports, and religious activities. Finally, we conclude the report with educational experiences such as being highly engaged in school, taking gifted classes, repeating a grade, and being suspended or expelled.

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HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

In 2023, there were 72.4 million children under the age of 18 (Table 1). Of these, 22.1 million were 5 years of age or under, 24.4 million were aged 6 to 11, and 25.8 million were aged 12 to 17.[3] Over one-quarter (25.9 percent) of these children were Hispanic, while 48.6 percent were non-Hispanic White, 13.5 percent were non-Hispanic Black, and 6.2 percent were non-Hispanic Asian. The remaining 5.7 percent of children were non-Hispanic and identified as another race or multiple races.[4]

Most children (65.1 percent) lived with two married parents, while a minority (20.0 percent) lived with their mother only. Less commonly, children lived with two unmarried parents (5.2 percent), their father only (5.1 percent), or a guardian (4.5 percent).[5] Living with two married parents was more common for children under the age of 5 (68.6 percent) than children aged 12 to 17 (61.3 percent), likely due to parental divorce (Brand et al., 2019; Wiborg, 2024). Most children lived with at least one sibling (76.3 percent). Children aged 6 to 11 were the least likely to be in a household without siblings present. Sixty-one percent of all children lived with only biological or adopted siblings, 8.8 percent lived with only half siblings or stepsiblings, and 6.5 percent lived with a mix of biological or adopted and half-siblings or stepsiblings.

Reference Parent

Respondents in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) child well-being section are parents living with their children under the age of 18. In households in which two parents are present, the mother is the reference parent. We ask reference parents questions for each child. If the mother is not available for an interview, the father of the child is asked to provide proxy responses for her. If only one parent is present, that parent is considered the reference parent. If neither parent is in the household, the householder is the reference parent. If there are two fathers or two mothers present, the parent listed first is the reference parent. Reference parents include biological, step, and adoptive parents, but may be other relatives or nonrelatives. In these data, 92 percent of the children had a female reference parent—usually the mother. Data obtained from males who were the reference parent are included with the data from females. Respondents 15 to 17 years old, who themselves may be parents, had their child well-being reported by their parents when they live with them in the household. In this report, unless otherwise noted, the term "parent" is used to refer to the reference parent.

Less than one-third of children lived with at least one foreign-born parent, and this percentage did not vary significantly across age groups. While 40.3 percent of children had a parent with a college education, 26.8 percent had a parent that completed some college education but did not hold a bachelor's degree. While 22.1 percent of children had a parent whose highest completed education was a high school degree, 10.9 percent of children had a parent with less than a high school education. One-half of children had a parent working full-time, or at least 35 hours per week. One-fifth of children (19.6 percent) had a parent working part-time, and 30.9 percent had a parent who did not work any hours for pay. These estimates differ depending on the sex of the reference parent. In analyses not shown in Table 1, children with male reference parents were more likely to have a parent working full-time (68.0 percent) than those with female reference parents (47.9 percent). Conversely, children with female reference parents were more likely to have parents who did not work any hours for pay (31.8 percent) than children with male reference parents (20.6 percent).

There were 9.5 million children (13.8 percent) living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold. An additional 18.5 percent of children lived in households with incomes at 100 to 199 percent of the poverty threshold. Thirty-nine percent of children lived in households with incomes 400 percent of the poverty threshold or higher. This percentage did not vary among the age groups shown. Over one-half of children (57.1 percent) received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Medicaid; or a free or reduced-price school lunch.

[3] The estimates of children in different age groups were not significantly different from each other.

[4] The estimates for non-Hispanic Asian (6.2 percent) and non-Hispanic other or multiple races (5.7 percent) were not significantly different from each other.

[5] The estimates of children living with two unmarried parents (5.2 percent), living with their father only (5.1 percent), and living with their guardian only (4.5 percent) were not significantly different from each other.

Table 1.

Children Under the Age of 18 by Selected Characteristics: 2023

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	All children			0 to 5 years		6 to 11 years		12 to 17 years	
	Number	Margin of error[1] (±)	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total children	**72,370**	**274**	**100.0**	**22,140**	**100.0**	**24,420**	**100.0**	**25,810**	**100.0**
Sex[2]									
Male	36,950	194	51.1	11,390	51.5	12,450	51.0	13,110	50.8
Female	35,430	204	49.0	10,750	48.6	11,970	49.0	12,700	49.2
Race and Hispanic Origin[2, 3]									
Non-Hispanic White alone	35,190	466	48.6	10,620	48.0	11,720	48.0	12,850	49.8
Non-Hispanic Black alone	9,741	361	13.5	2,909	13.1	3,454	14.1	3,378	13.1
Non-Hispanic Asian alone	4,515	452	6.2	1,395	6.3	1,589	6.5	1,531	5.9
Non-Hispanic other	4,153	431	5.7	1,429	6.5	1,356	5.6	1,368	5.3
Hispanic (any race)	18,770	222	25.9	5,781	26.1	6,304	25.8	6,686	25.9
Presence of Parents[4]									
Married—two parents	47,140	1,077	65.1	15,180	68.6	16,130	66.1	15,830	61.3
Unmarried—two parents	3,753	483	5.2	1,662	7.5	1,083	4.4	1,008	3.9
Mother only	14,470	933	20.0	3,985	18.0	4,839	19.8	5,643	21.9
Father only	3,723	492	5.1	541	2.4	1,482	6.1	1,700	6.6
Guardian	3,286	451	4.5	773	3.5	888	3.6	1,625	6.3
Presence of Siblings[4]									
Only biological or adopted siblings	44,140	1,118	61.0	12,530	56.6	16,270	66.6	15,340	59.4
Only half or stepsiblings[5]	6,372	639	8.8	1,707	7.7	2,019	8.3	2,646	10.3
Biological/adopted and half-siblings/stepsiblings	4,698	651	6.5	1,377	6.2	1,732	7.1	1,589	6.2
No siblings	17,160	870	23.7	6,525	29.5	4,400	18.0	6,236	24.2
Parental Nativity[2, 6]									
No foreign-born parents	50,200	961	69.5	15,470	70.0	16,660	68.4	18,080	70.1
At least one foreign-born parent	22,030	1,001	30.5	6,625	30.0	7,693	31.6	7,714	29.9
Reference Parent's Educational Attainment									
Less than high school	7,853	780	10.9	2,045	9.2	2,679	11.0	3,129	12.1
High school graduate	15,980	1,079	22.1	4,874	22.0	5,619	23.0	5,488	21.3
Some college	19,380	1,034	26.8	5,484	24.8	6,370	26.1	7,526	29.2
Bachelor's degree or higher	29,160	1,120	40.3	9,735	44.0	9,755	39.9	9,668	37.5
Reference Parent's Work Status[7]									
No job or no hours worked	22,380	1,042	30.9	7,504	33.9	7,363	30.2	7,511	29.1
Worked part-time (1–34 hours)	14,200	960	19.6	4,425	20.0	5,034	20.6	4,745	18.4
Worked full-time (35+ hours)	35,790	1,155	49.5	10,210	46.1	12,030	49.2	13,560	52.5
Household Poverty Status[8]									
Below poverty level	9,523	872	13.8	2,787	14.6	3,693	15.2	3,043	11.8
At or above poverty level	59,520	970	86.2	16,280	85.4	20,560	84.8	22,680	88.2
100 to 199 percent of poverty	12,750	882	18.5	3,393	17.8	4,513	18.6	4,840	18.8
200 to 299 percent of poverty	11,480	842	16.6	3,054	16.0	4,010	16.5	4,412	17.2
300 to 399 percent of poverty	8,314	743	12.0	2,543	13.3	2,678	11.1	3,092	12.0
400 percent of poverty or higher	26,980	1,102	39.1	7,291	38.2	9,354	38.6	10,340	40.2
Program Participation									
Received aid from at least one of the following:[9, 10]	41,280	1,158	57.1	11,180	50.5	15,000	61.4	15,100	58.8
Free or reduced-price school lunch[10]	26,040	959	36.1	1,963	8.9	12,490	51.1	11,590	45.3
Medicaid	30,170	1,148	41.7	9,437	42.6	10,480	42.9	10,260	39.7
SNAP	13,910	983	19.2	4,272	19.3	5,049	20.7	4,594	17.8
TANF	1,723	399	2.4	425	1.9	604	2.5	695	2.7
WIC	4,801	454	6.6	4,785	21.6	X	X	X	X

Footnotes available at end of table.

Table 1.
Children Under the Age of 18 by Selected Characteristics: 2023—Con.
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	All children			0 to 5 years		6 to 11 years		12 to 17 years	
	Number	Margin of error[1] (±)	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Material Hardship									
Any household hardship (food, bill-paying, or housing)	23,370	1,080	32.3	6,740	30.5	7,964	32.6	8,668	33.6
Food hardship	13,470	893	18.6	3,823	17.3	4,363	17.9	5,289	20.5
Bill-paying hardship	7,499	663	10.4	2,061	9.3	2,683	11.0	2,756	10.7
Housing hardship[11]	11,910	821	16.5	3,517	15.9	4,020	16.5	4,371	16.9

X Not applicable.
[1] Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error (MOE) is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.
[2] Measured at the time of interview in 2023. All other items are based on the reference period (January 2022 to December 2022) in part or in full.
[3] "Other" race category includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.
[4] Based on the household in the last month of the reference period (December 2022). Presence of parents and siblings refers to individuals who share the same household with the child.
[5] Includes "other" siblings.
[6] Based on the place of birth of one or more of the child's parents. A parent born in the United States is considered native born. A parent born outside of the United States is considered foreign born. If the child had zero parents in the household, nativity status is based on the child's reference parent. Excludes cases with missing parental nativity (less than 1 percent of cases).
[7] Based on the average number of hours worked per week during the last month of the reference period (December 2022).
[8] Annual poverty rates are calculated using a household income-to-poverty ratio, including Type-2 individuals. Type-2 individuals are those who lived in the household for any period of time during the reference period but are not present in the household at the time of interview. Excludes cases not in universe for annual poverty estimates (less than 5 percent of cases).
[9] "Cannot be determined" was classified as not receiving benefits. Less than 1 percent of cases were in this category.
[10] Excludes cases with missing school lunch information (less than 1 percent of cases).
[11] Includes problems with pests, plumbing, holes in the floor, and cracks in the ceiling or walls.
Note: SNAP is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and WIC is Women, Infants, and Children.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

Receiving aid from at least one of these programs was least common among young children (less than 6 years old, 50.5 percent). Medicaid was the most common form of aid overall (41.7 percent of all children), followed by free or reduced-price lunches (36.1 percent), SNAP (19.2 percent), WIC (6.6 percent), and TANF (2.4 percent).

One-third of children lived in a household experiencing a material hardship such as trouble acquiring enough food, trouble paying bills, or physical housing issues involving pests, plumbing, or holes or cracks in the floors, walls, or ceiling. While 13.5 million children (18.6 percent) lived in a household experiencing a food-related hardship, 7.5 million children (10.4 percent) lived in a household that had trouble paying bills, and 11.9 million children (16.5 percent) lived in a home experiencing physical housing issues.

PARENTAL INTERACTION

Figure 1 presents three measures of child-parent interaction collected in the 2023 SIPP by race and Hispanic origin. Reference parents with children under the age of 6 were asked to report how many times per week they went on outings with children and read to them. About 80.5 percent of all children under age 6 went on two or more outings per week with their reference parent. Hispanic children were less likely to go on outings with their reference parent than non-Hispanic Asian children and non-Hispanic White children.[6]

[6] Non-Hispanic White children were significantly more likely to go on outings with a reference parent than non-Hispanic Asian children. Non-Hispanic other or multiple race children were also more likely to go on outings than non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic children.

Non-Hispanic White children were more likely to go on outings than non-Hispanic Black children. Two-thirds of all children under the age of 6 were read to at least 5 days a week by a reference parent. Non-Hispanic White children were more likely to be read to (77.5 percent) than non-Hispanic Black (58.0 percent) and Hispanic children (51.1 percent of children).[7]

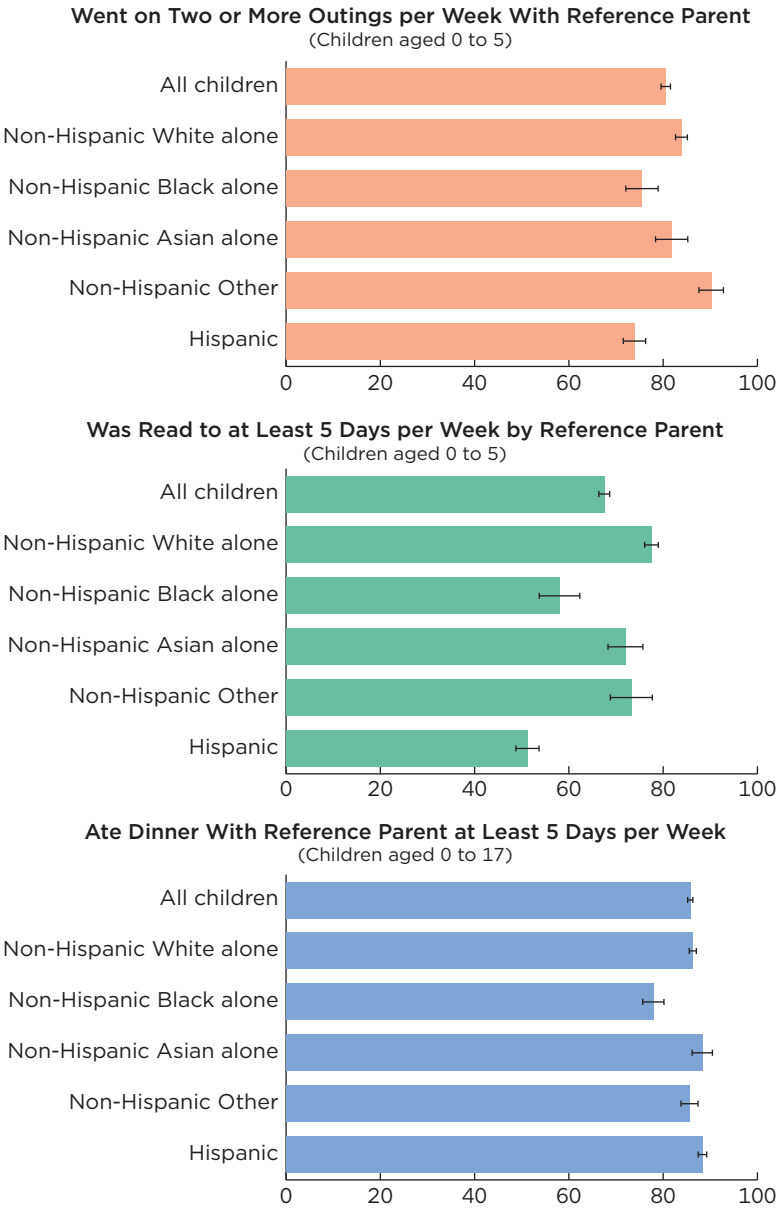
Information on eating dinner with reference parents was collected for all children under the age of 18. About 85.8 percent of children ate dinner with their reference parent at least 5 days a week. Non-Hispanic Black children were less

[7] Note that the percentage of children under the age of 6 who were read to at least 5 days a week by a reference parent did not differ statistically for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children.

likely to eat dinner with a reference parent (77.9 percent) than non-Hispanic Asian (88.3 percent) and Hispanic children (88.3 percent), non-Hispanic White children (86.3 percent), and non-Hispanic other or multiple race children (85.6 percent).

Figure 2 displays the percentage of children who went on two or more weekly outings with the reference parent, were read to by a reference parent five or more times a week, and ate dinner with the reference parent five or more times a week from 2014 to 2023. Estimates for dinners and reading are relatively constant over time.[8] In 2023, 67.4 percent of children were read to by a reference parent five or more times per week, compared to 65.1 percent of children in 2014.[9] Similarly, in 2023, 85.8 percent of children ate dinner with their reference parent at least 5 nights per week, compared to 86.3 percent in 2014.[10] Notably, for both reading and dinners, estimates neither increased nor decreased between 2019 to 2023 despite changes to family life over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that there were some years within the period that saw changes.

Figure 1.
Percentage of Children With Selected Indicators of Parental Interaction by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2023



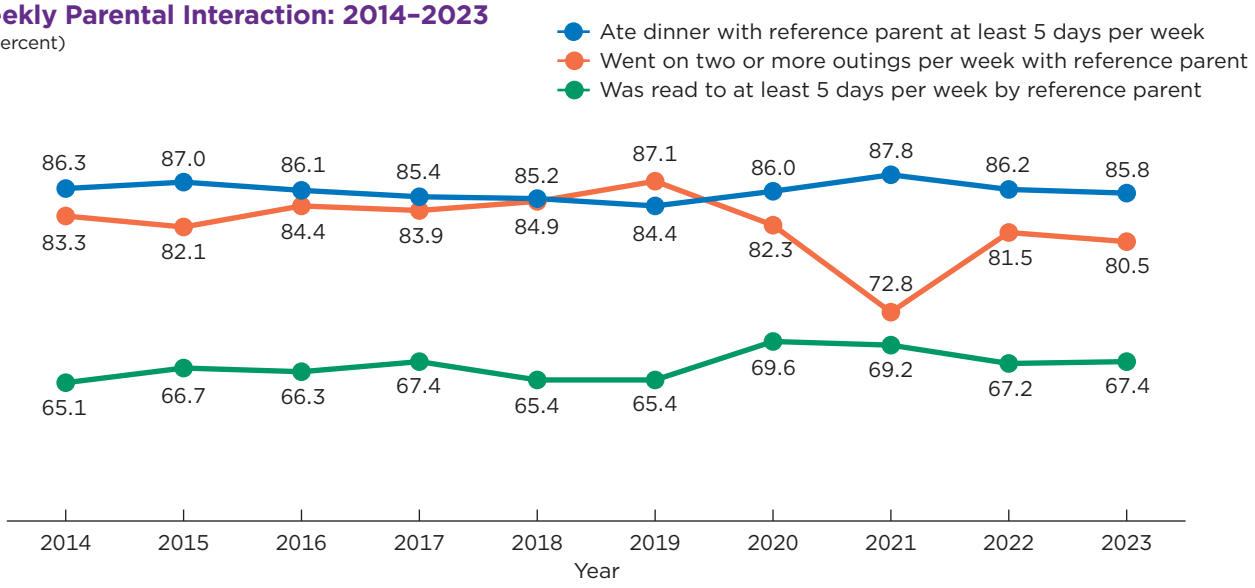
Note: Age and parental interaction are based on the last month of the reference period (December 2022). Race and Hispanic origin are measured at the time of interview. Estimates reflect whether the child participated in the activity with the reference parent in the household. "Other" race category includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races. Bars represent the upper and lower bounds of a 90 percent confidence interval.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

[8] Although there was no significant difference between the percentage of children who were read to by their reference parent five or more times a week or ate dinner with the reference parent five or more times a week in 2014 and 2023, there were year-to-year changes over the period. The percentage of children who ate dinner with a reference parent five or more times a week increased from 86.0 percent in 2020 to 87.8 percent in 2021, but it declined back to 86.2 percent in 2022. The percentage of children who were read to by their reference parent five or more times a week increased from 65.4 percent in 2019 to 69.6 percent in 2020.

[9] The difference was not statistically significant.

[10] The difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 2.
Weekly Parental Interaction: 2014–2023
(In percent)



Note: Dinners correspond to reference parents of children aged 0 to 17. Outings and reading correspond to reference parents of children aged 0 to 5.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 (Waves 1–4), 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

The percentage of children experiencing two or more outings per week with the reference parent was stable between 2014 (83.3 percent) and 2018 (84.9 percent), and then increased in 2019 (87.1 percent). It then decreased to 82.3 percent in 2020 and to 72.8 percent in 2021, likely due to changes in public life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of children who went on two or more outings per week with their reference parent rebounded quickly after 2021, but the percentage of children experiencing two or more outings per week in 2022 and 2023 remained lower than the 2019 percentage.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, lessons, and religious groups help children develop new skills, boost confidence, and improve social and teamwork abilities (Morrisey and Wilson, 2005; Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen, 2014; Kennewel et al., 2022). They teach time management, discipline, and resilience while providing opportunities for fun and stress relief (Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin, 2003). Participation in these activities can also enhance academic performance and prepare kids for future college and career opportunities (Eccles et al., 2003; Morris, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many extracurricular activities were cancelled or postponed. As schools and communities reopened, many extracurriculars returned. Others, however, suffered permanent closure or have not fully recovered, which may affect participation levels.

Table 2 shows the percentage of children aged 6 to 17 who participated in sports, lessons, clubs, and religious activities in 2023. Of the 50.2 million children in this age range, 38.4 percent played sports, 26.8 percent took lessons, and 21.9 percent were involved in clubs. About 7 percent of children were involved in all three of these activities. About 41 percent participated in religious activities at least once a month or more, and this was more common among 6- to 11-year-olds (43.3 percent) than 12- to 17-year-olds (39.7 percent).

Figure 3 displays the percentage of children aged 6 to 17 participating in sports, lessons, and clubs by family poverty status in 2023. Across all three of these activities, participation was highest among those in families with incomes 200 percent of the poverty threshold or higher and lowest among those in families below the poverty threshold.[11] For example, only 1.2 percent of children in families below the poverty threshold participated in all three activities, compared to 8.8 percent of children in families with incomes 200 percent of the poverty threshold or higher.

[11] Participation was significantly lower in sports, lessons, and clubs for children in families below the poverty threshold than children in families with 200 percent of the poverty threshold or higher. However, participation in sports and lessons was not significantly different between those in families with incomes below the poverty threshold and those in families with incomes 100 to 199 percent of the poverty threshold.

The percentage of children aged 6 to 17 involved in extracurricular activities from 1998 to 2023 is presented in Figure 4. Participation in clubs showed a general downward trend from 1998 (34.8 percent) to 2020 (26.8 percent), although there were slight year-to-year fluctuations over this period.[12] The percentage of children taking lessons was stable from 1998 (28.9 percent) to 2019 (29.1 percent), while participation in sports climbed between 1998 and 2020 (from 35.5 percent to 39.4 percent).[13] From 2014 to 2019, children's involvement in religious activities declined, from 53.5 percent of children in 2014 to 47.3 percent of children in 2019.[14] Participation in all four extracurricular activities (clubs, lessons, sports, and religious activities), as shown in Figure 4, declined from 2020 to 2021. This was likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. Club participation decreased by 8 percentage points over this period (to 19.3 percent in 2021), lessons declined by 7 percentage points (to 25.2 percent in 2021), sports decreased by 11 percentage points (to 28.5 percent in 2021), and religious activities fell by 12 percentage points (to 38.2 percent in 2021). While participation in sports rebounded to 38.4 percent in 2023—with no significant difference from 2019 levels—clubs, lessons, and religious activities did not rebound in a similar way, with 2023 participation rates remaining significantly below 2019 participation rates.

[12] There was no significant decline between 1998 and 2000 or between 2014 and 2016. Following the decline in 2021 and 2022, there was a small but significant increase between 2022 (19.8 percent) and 2023 (21.8 percent).

[13] Participation in sports declined between 2006 and 2011 (42.3 percent to 34.7 percent) but increased again between 2011 and 2014 (from 34.7 percent to 41.6 percent).

[14] Once a month or more.

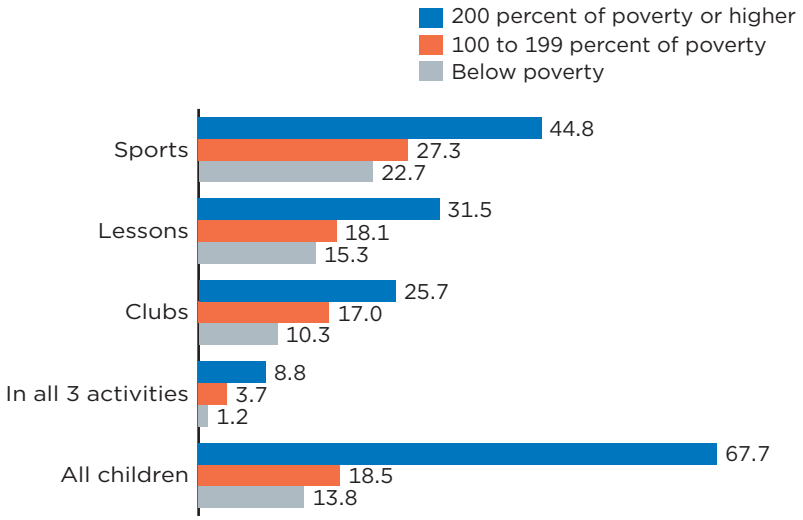
Table 2.
Participation of Children Aged 6 to 17 in Extracurricular and Religious Activities: 2023
(Numbers in thousands)

Activity	Total	Age of child	
		6 to 11 years	12 to 17 years
Number of children	50,230	24,420	25,810
Margin of error[1]	343.9	309.0	338.4
Percent participating in:			
Sports	38.4	37.0	39.7
Lessons	26.8	27.7	25.9
Clubs	21.9	20.9	22.8
Sports and lessons only	7.3	7.6	7.1
Sports and clubs only	5.9	5.4	6.4
Lessons and clubs only	4.5	4.0	5.0
All three activities	6.8	7.0	6.6
Religious activities once a month or more	41.5	43.3	39.7

[1] Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error (MOE) is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

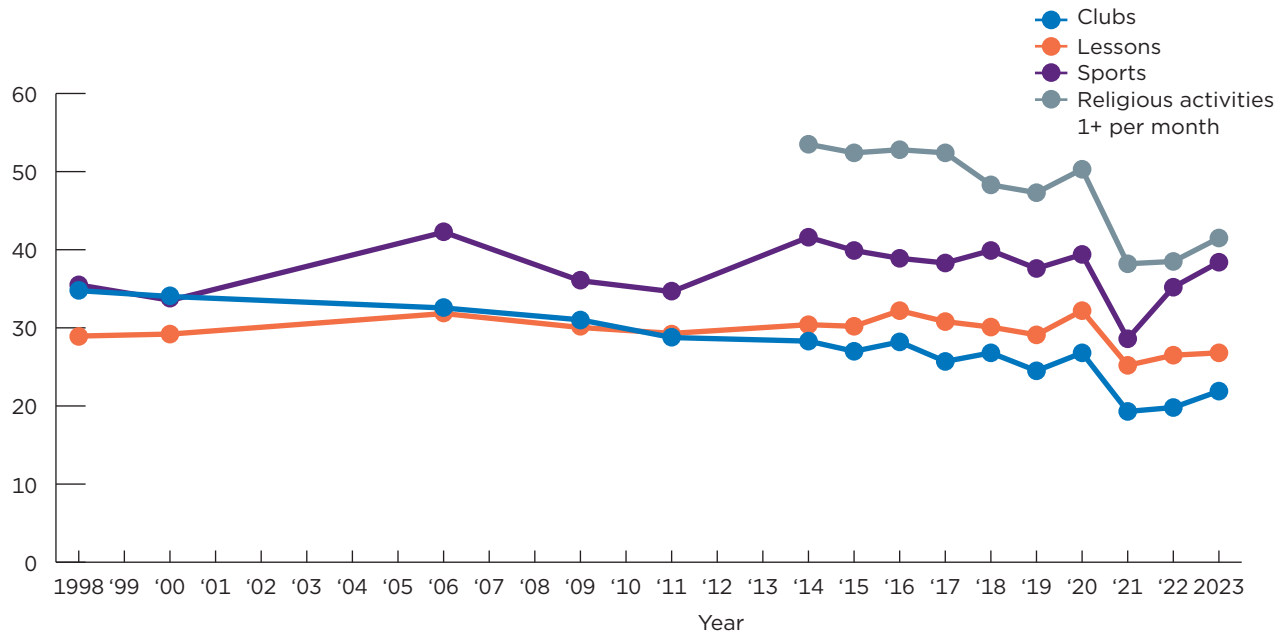
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

Figure 3.
Percentage of Children Aged 6 to 17 Participating in Extracurricular Activities by Family Poverty Status: 2023



Note: Percentage of children in specified activities may exceed the total due to children participating in more than one activity.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

Figure 4.
Percentage of Children Aged 6 to 17 Involved in Extracurricular Activities: 1998–2023



Note: Questions about religious activities were only present from 2014 onwards, following the SIPP redesign in 2014.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1996 (Waves 6 and 12), 2004 (Wave 8), 2008 (Waves 4 and 10), 2014 (Waves 1–4), 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Educational experiences by socioeconomic characteristics are presented in Table 3. Of the 50.2 million children aged 6 to 17 in 2023, 9.8 million (19.4 percent) were in gifted classes, 14.2 million (28.3 percent) were highly engaged, 2.5 million (4.9 percent) had ever repeated a grade, and 2.3 million (4.7 percent) had ever been expelled or suspended from school.[15, 16] Children who had ever been expelled or been suspended were more likely to be male—61.7 percent compared with 38.3 percent female. Children who had ever repeated a grade were also more likely to be male (56.0 percent) than female (44.1 percent). In contrast, children who were highly engaged in school were more likely to be female (58.0 percent) than male (42.0 percent). Although non-Hispanic White children were 48.9 percent of the 6 to 17 age group, they represented only 39.6 percent of those ever expelled or suspended and only 41.5 percent of those who had ever repeated a grade.[17] Conversely, non-Hispanic White individuals were 56.0 percent of those in gifted classes. Non-Hispanic Black children were 13.6 percent of the population but were around one-quarter (23.8 percent) of those ever expelled or suspended and 23.0 percent of those who had ever repeated a grade.[18] Non-Hispanic Asian children were the least likely of any racial or ethnic group to have ever been expelled or suspended, and similarly, they were the least likely to have ever repeated a grade.[19] Finally, although Hispanic children were one-quarter of all those aged 6 to 17, they represented only 16.1 percent of those in gifted classes.

[15] Highly engaged children are children who only do schoolwork when forced "none of the time," care about school "all of the time," do homework "all of the time," and do just enough to get by "none of the time."

[16] The difference in estimates for children who had ever been expelled or suspended (2.3 million) and those who had repeated a grade (2.5 million) was not significant.

[17] The difference in estimates for children aged 6 to 17 who had ever been expelled (39.6 percent) and those who had repeated a grade (41.5 percent) and who were non-Hispanic White was not significant.

[18] The difference in estimates for non-Hispanic Black children who had ever been expelled or suspended (23.8 percent) and those who had ever repeated a grade (23.0 percent) was not significant.

[19] Of the 3.1 million non-Hispanic Asian children aged 6 to 17, 23,000 (0.7 percent) were ever expelled or suspended; this was statistically significantly different from the percentages of non-Hispanic White (3.8 percent), non-Hispanic Black (8.2 percent), non-Hispanic other or multiple races (7.2 percent), and Hispanic (4.9 percent) children aged 6 to 17 who had ever been expelled or suspended. Of all non-Hispanic Asian children aged 6 to 17, 45,000 (1.4 percent) had ever repeated a grade; this was statistically significantly different from the percentages of non-Hispanic White (4.2 percent), non-Hispanic Black (8.3 percent), non-Hispanic other or multiple races (6.5 percent), and Hispanic (5.1 percent) children aged 6 to 17 who had ever repeated a grade.

Table 3.

Educational Experiences of Children Aged 6 to 17 by Socioeconomic Characteristics: 2023

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total			Expelled or suspended		Repeated a grade		In gifted classes		Highly engaged[2]	
	Number	MOE[1] (±)	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	**50,230**	**344**	**100.0**	**2,337**	**100.0**	**2,479**	**100.0**	**9,761**	**100.0**	**14,240[3]**	**100.0**
Sex[4]											
Male	25,560	261	50.9	1,442	61.7	1,387	56.0	4,706	48.2	5,977	42.0
Female	24,680	241	49.1	896	38.3	1,092	44.1	5,054	51.8	8,259	58.0
Race and Hispanic Origin[4, 5]											
Non-Hispanic White alone	24,570	484	48.9	926	39.6	1,029	41.5	5,467	56.0	7,367	51.8
Non-Hispanic Black alone	6,832	336	13.6	557	23.8	570	23.0	1,299	13.3	1,547	10.9
Non-Hispanic Asian alone	3,120	348	6.2	23	1.0	45	1.8	704	7.2	1,150	8.1
Non-Hispanic other	2,724	352	5.4	195	8.4	178	7.2	716	7.3	868	6.1
Hispanic (any race)	12,990	440	25.9	636	27.2	657	26.5	1,575	16.1	3,304	23.2
Presence of Parents[6]											
Married—two parents	31,960	862	63.6	911	39.0	1,081	43.7	6,791	69.6	9,237	64.9
Unmarried—two parents	2,091	342	4.2	124	5.3	84	3.4	245	2.5	609	4.3
Mother only	10,480	722	20.9	817	35.0	799	32.3	1,850	19.0	2,606	18.3
Father only	3,182	403	6.3	203	8.7	209	8.5	629	6.4	1,082	7.6
Guardian	2,513	360	5.0	282	12.1	303	12.2	246	2.5	702	4.9
Presence of Siblings[6]											
Only biological or adopted siblings	31,610	872	62.9	991	42.4	1,007	40.6	6,316	64.7	9,374	65.9
Only half-siblings or stepsiblings[7]	4,665	479	9.3	382	16.3	478	19.3	680	7.0	1,151	8.1
Biological/adopted and half-siblings/stepsiblings	3,321	514	6.6	168	7.2	198	8.0	379	3.9	665	4.7
No siblings	10,640	664	21.2	797	34.1	795	32.1	2,385	24.4	3,046	21.4
Parental Nativity[4, 8]											
No foreign-born parents	34,740	742	69.3	1,875	80.2	1,902	76.8	7,322	75.0	9,597	67.5
At least one foreign-born parent	15,410	745	30.7	462	19.8	1,573	23.2	2,438	25.0	4,613	32.5
Reference Parent's Educational Attainment											
Less than high school	5,809	606	11.6	357	15.3	358	14.5	541	5.5	1,528	10.7
High school graduate	11,110	780	22.1	543	23.2	530	21.4	1,278	13.1	2,820	19.8
Some college	13,900	804	27.7	944	40.4	1,028	41.5	2,502	25.6	3,507	24.6
Bachelor's degree or higher	19,420	844	38.7	493	21.1	562	22.7	5,440	55.7	6,381	44.8
Reference Parent's Work Status[9]											
No job or no hours worked	14,870	807	29.6	721	30.8	1,059	42.7	2,232	22.9	4,206	29.6
Worked part-time (1–34 hours)	9,779	748	19.5	402	17.2	388	15.7	1,905	19.5	2,977	20.9
Worked full-time (35+ hours)	25,580	934	50.9	1,215	52.0	1,032	41.6	5,624	57.6	7,052	49.5
Household Poverty Status[10]											
Below poverty level	6,736	682	13.5	483	21.0	509	20.7	671	6.9	1,654	11.7
At or above poverty level	43,240	772	86.5	1,815	79.0	1,944	79.3	9,063	93.1	12,520	88.3
100 to 199 percent of poverty	9,353	692	18.7	498	21.7	623	25.4	1,380	14.2	2,438	17.2
200 to 299 percent of poverty	8,422	653	16.9	397	17.3	338	13.8	1,308	13.4	2,339	16.5
300 to 399 percent of poverty	5,770	544	11.6	260	11.3	236	9.6	1,090	11.2	1,630	11.5
400 percent of poverty or higher	19,690	867	39.4	659	28.7	746	30.4	5,284	54.3	6,110	43.1

Footnotes available at end of table.

Table 3.
Educational Experiences of Children Aged 6 to 17 by Socioeconomic Characteristics: 2023—Con.
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total			Expelled or suspended		Repeated a grade		In gifted classes		Highly engaged[2]	
	Number	MOE[1] (±)	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Program Participation											
Received aid from at least one of the following:[11, 12]	30,100	912	60.1	1,867	79.9	1,830	73.8	4,152	42.6	7,724	54.4
TANF	1,298	312	2.6	165	7.1	132	5.3	92	0.9	321	2.3
SNAP	9,643	750	19.2	799	34.2	863	34.8	1,203	12.3	2,084	14.6
Medicaid	20,740	911	41.3	1,417	60.6	1,478	59.6	2,496	25.6	5,116	35.9
Free or reduced-price school lunch	24,080	912	48.2	1,489	64.1	1,479	60.0	3,337	34.3	6,152	43.4
Material Hardship											
Any household hardship (food, bill-paying, or housing)	16,630	868	33.1	1,296	55.4	1,220	49.2	2,512	25.7	3,790	26.6
Food hardship	9,651	726	19.2	698	29.9	794	32.0	1,138	11.7	2,277	16.0
Bill-paying hardship	5,439	527	10.8	571	24.4	414	16.7	799	8.2	1,070	7.5
Housing hardship[13]	8,390	637	16.7	851	36.4	645	26.0	1,453	14.9	1,734	12.2

[1] Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error (MOE) is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.

[2] Child only does schoolwork when forced "none of the time," cares about school "all of the time," does homework "all of the time," and does just enough to get by "none of the time."

[3] Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.

[4] Measured at the time of interview in 2023. All other items are based on the reference period (January 2022 to December 2022) in part or in full.

[5] "Other" race category includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races.

[6] Based on the household in the last month of the reference period (December 2022). Presence of parents and siblings refers to individuals who share the same household with the child.

[7] Includes "other" siblings.

[8] Based on the place of birth of one or more of the child's parents. A parent born in the United States is considered native born. A parent born outside of the United States is considered foreign born. If the child had zero parents in the household, nativity status is based on the child's reference parent. Excludes cases with missing parental nativity (less than 1 percent of cases).

[9] Based on the average number of hours worked per week during the last month of the reference period (December 2022).

[10] Annual poverty rates are calculated using a household income-to-poverty ratio, including Type-2 individuals. Type-2 individuals are individuals who lived in the household for any given amount of time during the reference period but no longer live in the household at the time of interview. Excludes cases not in universe for annual poverty estimates (less than 5 percent of cases).

[11] "Cannot be determined" was classified as not receiving benefits. Less than 1 percent of cases were in this category.

[12] Excludes cases with missing school lunch information (less than 1 percent of cases).

[13] Includes problems with pests, plumbing, holes in the floor, and cracks in the ceiling or walls.

Note: SNAP is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and TANF is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

Educational experiences also varied by household composition. Over 60 percent of children aged 6 to 17 lived with two married parents in 2023, yet they represented only around 40 percent of those who had ever been expelled or suspended. Among those who had ever repeated a grade, 43.7 percent were living with two married parents.[20] Children living with their mother only or a guardian were overrepresented among those who had ever been expelled or suspended and those who had ever repeated a grade. Among all children aged 6 to 17, 21.2 percent lived in a household with no siblings. In comparison, among those ever expelled or suspended, 34.1 percent were not living with siblings. Among those who ever repeated a grade, 32.1 percent did not live with siblings.[21]

School experiences varied by some parental characteristics. Compared to children with a native-born parent, children with a foreign-born parent were less likely to have ever been expelled or suspended and less likely to have ever repeated a grade, but also less likely to be in gifted classes. Parental education and work appeared to positively affect children's own educational experiences. Nearly 40 percent of all children had a parent with a bachelor's degree, yet this percentage was higher among those in gifted classes (55.7 percent) and among those highly engaged in school (44.8 percent). In contrast, of those ever expelled or suspended and

[20] The difference between estimates for the percentage of those who had been expelled and living with two married parents (39.0 percent) and those who had ever repeated a grade and living with two married parents (43.7 percent) was not significant.

[21] The difference between estimates for those not living with siblings who had ever been expelled (34.1 percent) and those who had ever repeated a grade (32.1 percent) was not significant.

those who had ever repeated a grade, only one-fifth were children whose parent had a college degree. While reference parent work status did not appear to be associated with children's likelihood of being expelled or suspended or highly engaged in schooling, those in gifted classes were more likely to have a reference parent who worked full time. Although a similar percentage of students who repeated a grade had parents who did not work and parents who worked full time, students with parents who did not work were overrepresented, since they made up 29.6 percent of all students and 42.7 percent of students who repeated a grade.

Economic status was linked to several child educational outcomes. While 13.5 percent of all children aged 6 to 17 were living below the poverty line, this percentage was higher among those ever expelled or suspended (21.0 percent) and those who had repeated a grade (20.7 percent), but lower among those in gifted classes (6.9 percent).[22] The percentage of all children aged 6 to 17 living below the poverty line (13.5 percent) was not significantly different from the percentage of children living below the poverty line who were highly engaged in school (11.7 percent).

Three-fifths of all children received economic support in the form of TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, and/or free or reduced-price school lunches. This percentage was higher among those expelled or suspended or those who had repeated a grade, at 79.9 percent and 73.8 percent, respectively. The percentage receiving aid was lower among those in gifted classes (42.6 percent) and those highly engaged (54.4 percent). Lastly, while roughly one-third of children lived in a household experiencing a material hardship, this percentage was higher among those ever expelled or suspended (55.4 percent) and those who had ever repeated a grade (49.2 percent), and lower among those in gifted classes (25.7 percent) and who were highly engaged (26.6 percent).[23, 24] Overall, this suggests that socioeconomic advantage can foster greater success in a school setting.

High engagement in school for children ages 6 to 17 was also linked to participation in extracurricular activities, clubs, and other school experiences. This is presented in Table 4. For example, 34.5 percent of children who participated in sports were highly engaged, compared to 24.7 percent of students who did not participate in sports. Similarly, children who participated in lessons and in clubs were more likely to be highly engaged (32.0 percent and 33.5 percent, respectively) than those who did not participate (27.2 percent and 27.1 percent,

Table 4.
Percentage of School-Enrolled Children Aged 6 to 17 Who Were Highly Engaged in School by Select Characteristics: 2023

Characteristic	Number of school-enrolled children (in thousands)	Percent highly engaged[1]
Total	**49,970[2]**	**28.5**
Margin of error (MOE)[3]	729	1.5
Extracurricular Activities		
Participated in sports	19,290	34.5
Did not participate in sports	30,680	24.7
Participated in lessons	13,440	32.0
Did not participate in lessons	36,530	27.2
Participated in clubs	10,960	33.5
Did not participate in clubs	39,000	27.1
Number of Activities		
0	21,990	23.5
1	15,670	30.6
2	8,892	33.3
3	3,412	38.1
School Experience		
Ever repeated a grade	2,474	11.2
Never repeated a grade	47,490	29.4
Ever suspended or expelled	2,327	7.3
Never suspended or expelled	47,640	29.5
In gifted classes	9,752	44.0
Not in a gifted class	40,210	24.7

[1] Child only does schoolwork when forced "none of the time," cares about school "all of the time," does homework "all of the time," and does just enough to get by "none of the time."
[2] Details may not sum to totals due to rounding.
[3] Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A MOE is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the MOE in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate. This number when added to or subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent confidence interval.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

[22] The difference between estimates for children who had ever been expelled and those who had ever repeated a grade was not significant.

[23] The difference between estimates for children in a household experiencing material hardship who had ever been expelled (55.4 percent) and those who had ever repeated a grade (49.2 percent) was not significant.

[24] The difference between estimates for children in a household experiencing material hardship who were in gifted classes (25.7 percent) and who were highly engaged (26.6 percent) was not significant.

respectively).[25] Further, the number of activities a child engaged in was related to high engagement in school. While only 23.5 percent of children who were not involved in activities were highly engaged, 38.1 percent of children engaged in three activities were highly engaged. High engagement had an inverse relationship with being suspended or expelled and a positive relationship with being in gifted classes. For example, only 7.3 percent of children who had ever been suspended or expelled were highly engaged, compared to the 29.5 precent of children who had never been suspended or expelled. In contrast, 44.0 percent of children in gifted classes were highly engaged, compared to only 24.7 percent of students not in gifted classes.

[25] The difference in estimates for children who participated in lessons (32.0 percent) and clubs (33.5 percent) and who were highly engaged was not significant.

Figure 5 displays the percentage of children aged 6 to 17 who had ever been expelled or suspended, had ever repeated a grade, were in gifted classes, and were highly engaged over time. Three of these trends—expulsion, repeating a grade, and gifted classes—were generally stable over time.[26] The final trend—highly engaged in schooling—shows a statistically significant decline over time. While 35.3 percent of children were highly engaged in 2014, this dropped to 28.5 percent by 2023.

[26] The percentage of children who had been expelled or suspended was significantly higher in 2014 (6.0 percent) than in 2023 (4.6 percent), but there were no significant changes in the percentage of children who had been expelled or suspended between 2015 and 2019. The percentage of children who had repeated a grade was significantly higher in 2014 (7.6 percent) than in 2023 (4.9 percent), but there were no significant changes in the percentage of children who had repeated a grade between 2015 and 2020. The percentage of children in gifted classes was significantly higher in 2014 (22.1 percent) than in 2023 (19.4 percent), but there were no significant changes in the percentage of children in gifted classes from 2016–2022.

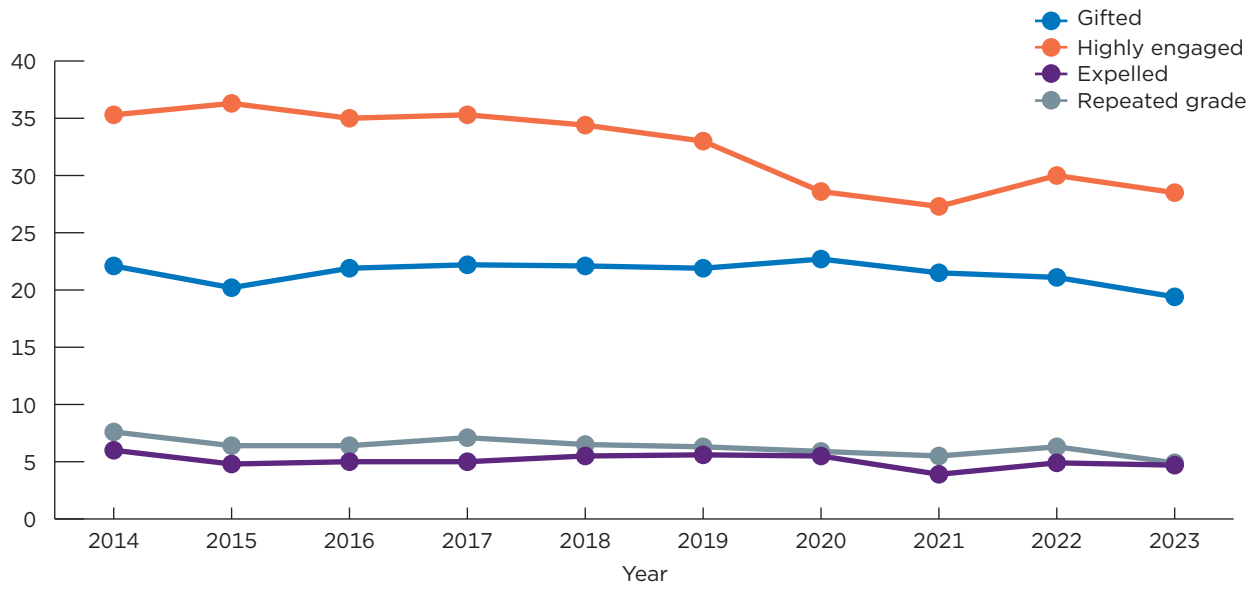
The decline in children being highly engaged in school predated the COVID-19 pandemic.

SUMMARY

This report presents recent estimates on various child well-being measures, highlighting children's interactions with parents, involvement in extracurricular activities, and engagement in school. The results confirm previous research that shows that parents are highly engaged with their children (Bianchi, 2011; Altintas, 2016). Most young children (under 6 years old) are read to at least five times a week and go on multiple weekly outings with their reference parent. A majority of all children eat dinner with their reference parent at least five nights per week.

Children's participation in extracurricular activities has changed since the 1990s. Children's participation in sports

Figure 5.
Percentage of Children Aged 6 to 17 by Educational Experiences: 2014–2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 (Waves 1–4), 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation (weighted public-use SIPP; DMS number P-7516454, DRB approval number CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-077).

was about 3 percentage points higher in 2023 than in 1998, although there were year-to-year fluctuations during that period. Children's participation in lessons was about 2 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 1998, although there were year-to-year fluctuations during that period. Declines were larger for participation in clubs and religious activities; however, participation in clubs was about 13 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 1998, and children's participation in religious activities was about 12 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 2014. These changes in children's lives may reflect broader social declines in religious and organizational participation as well as changing parenting norms (Jones, 2021; Schlachter and Marshall, 2024).

Children's educational experiences vary by individual and family characteristics. Male children are more likely to have been expelled, been suspended, or repeated a grade. This is consistent with other research, which finds that on average males have worse educational outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015; Autor et al., 2016). Family characteristics also matter; children in married two-parent families are less likely to experience poor educational outcomes. Children who live with biological or adopted siblings are also less likely to have been expelled or suspended. These associations may reflect a mechanism whereby family stability and structure support better education outcomes for children (Magnuson and Berger, 2009; Lee and McLanahan, 2015). Conversely, these associations may be confounded by other factors which influence both family structure and child educational outcomes (Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Parental education, income, and receipt of federal programs are also associated with children's educational outcomes.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between the estimates being compared does not include zero.

Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the U.S. Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process, including the overall design of surveys, wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and the statistical review of reports. Additional information on the SIPP can be found at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp.html> (main SIPP website), <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/guidance/users-guide.html> (SIPP Users' Guides), and <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html> (SIPP Source and Accuracy Statements).

CONTACTS

Additional information on family statistics can be found by contacting the SIPP Coordination and Outreach Staff at <sehsd.sipp.coordination.outreach.staff.list@census.gov> or 1-888-245-3076. For further information on the content of this report, contact the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch at 301-763-2416.

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Appendix Table 1.

Selected Measures of Child Well-Being Question Text

Child well-being measure	Question text	Answer choices	Universe
Shared mealtimes	How many days in a typical week did reference parent eat dinner with child/children?	0. None 1. One day 2. Two days 3. Three days 4. Four days 5. Five days 6. Six days 7. Seven days	Children 0 to 17 years old
Reading practices	How many days in a typical week did reference parent read to child/children?	0. None 1. One day 2. Two days 3. Three days 4. Four days 5. Five days 6. Six days 7. Seven days	Children 0 to 5 years old
Outings	How many days in a typical week did reference parent take child/children on any kind of outings?	0. None 1. One day 2. Two days 3. Three days 4. Four days 5. Five days 6. Six days 7. Seven days	Children 0 to 5 years old
Extracurricular activities	Does child play on a sports team in or out of school? Does child take lessons after school (music, dance, language, etc.)? Does child participate in any clubs or organizations after school or on the weekends?	1. Yes 2. No	Children 6 to 17 years old
Religious involvement	In the past year, how often did child/children go to religious services or religious social or school events?	1. Never 2. Several times a year 3. About once a month 4. About once a week 5. Every day or almost every day	Children 6 to 17 years old
Academic performance	Has child repeated a grade or been held back? Has child ever been suspended or expelled from school? Is child in a gifted class/classes?	1. Yes 2. No	Children 6 to 17 years old
School engagement	Does child care about school? Does child only do schoolwork when forced? Does child do just enough to get by in school? Does child do homework?	1. All of the time 2. Most of the time 3. Some of the time 4. None of the time 6. Not enrolled	Children 6 to 17 years old

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Survey of Income and Program Participation.