

The road to equality

■ Data that show girls have the grades but don't test as well as boys raise multiple concerns

By Robert Wolfington III
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MARSHALL — Despite statistics that show young girls study more and get better grades on average than boys, they are still performing lower on standardized tests, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota said Monday.

During a stop in Marshall on Monday, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota presented its study on the status of girls in Minnesota counties.

Lee Roper-Batker, president and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, said girls work hard and bring home strong grades, but struggle on standardized exams.

"We know girls are working very hard in their family," said Roper-Batker. "They're more apt to do child care chores at home, they study more than boys, they earn better grades than boys, but when it

Johnson said in addition to the report, the foundation is looking to gather information from each community to compare to the study.

Johnson said the poverty rate for girls in Minnesota is most evident in African Americans and American Indians.

The study said 43 percent of African American girls, 42 percent of American Indian girls, 27 percent of Hispanic girls, 22 percent of Asian girls and 7 percent of white girls under the age of 18 in Minnesota live in poverty.

Johnson said female-headed households make up the poorest in the state on average.

Roper-Batker said the foundation is working to help girls in Minnesota with programs like Girls Building Economic Success Together, a program utilized in the Marshall area.

"We started girlsBEST as a strategy to boost girls' future economic well-being," said Roper-Batker. "In Marshall, Western Community Action runs two funds that we're funding right now as part of our girlsBEST fund."

Johnson said the girlsBEST program has been successful in communities around the state, including Staples where a community center and coffee shop started by teen girls called Stomping Grounds has been a benefit to young girls.

Johnson said it proved to be a good leadership opportunity and an example of something the foundation looks to support.

While the percentage of teen pregnancy is going

down, Roper-Batker said it is still a concern throughout the state.

"We are seeing a trend overall for teen pregnancy going down," said Roper-Batker. "However, for the Hispanics and American Indian girls it is on the increase."

Roper-Batker said it's important to encourage girls to look at alternative career paths.

"Girls are still being tracked into certain careers," Roper-Batker said. "(We're seeing a) lack of girls seeing vo-tech as a viable option for some of those non-traditional career paths which can create financial security for them later on."

Roper-Batker said following the tour throughout Minnesota, the foundation will go back and review its data compared to what it hears from communities in the state and release an addition study.

"After these presentations we're going to synthesize this information into another report where we're looking at people throughout the state to say these are the three top issues in the state we would like the foundation to address and move the needle of equality for young girls," said Roper-Batker.

For a complete look at the study, visit www.wfminn.org.

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comes to standardized tests, they lag behind boys.

"Our ACT data are 26 percent are prepared to meet the college benchmark as compared to 38 percent of boys," she said.

Roper-Batker said the report, compiled based on data collected in most of the counties around Minnesota, raise concerns about socioeconomic, security and safety, reproductive and mental health issues for girls in the state.

Carol McGee Johnson, vice president for the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, said the group's goal is to "paint a picture of the road to equality in Minnesota."

As part of that picture, the foundation is visiting 15 communities throughout Minnesota during the month of May. Marshall was the first scheduled stop.



Photo by Robert
Wolfington III
**Carol McGee
Johnson**, vice
president for
the Women's
Foundation of
Minnesota, pres-
ents a study titled
"Status of Girls in
Minnesota"
Monday afternoon
at Southwest
Minnesota State
University.



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