



girlsBEST* Initiative

2002 - 2007

* GIRLS BUILDING ECONOMIC SUCCESS TOGETHER

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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*With contributions from the
Women's Foundation of Minnesota's
Internal Evaluation Team*

June 2007

“I feel like I can do anything I want. As long as I work hard, I know that I can achieve my dreams. It’s just a matter of time. I mean I’m just in high school now. Every goal I make I achieve them. And being in this organization makes me even more confident...because now I have the power. I’m more confident to speak out about my opinions. I’m just more confident that I can achieve things.”

~ girlsBEST Initiative girl participant

Two Personal Stories from girlsBEST Grantees

American Indian Family Center:

“The GirlsBEST program really had an impact on my life. If I had never participated, I could tell you, I would never have become the person that I am today. Over the years, I have grown close to the girls that have been coming to this program and when I see them outside of the group they come up and we talk awhile, like sisters. I have learned to become a better person and also I learned how to communicate. I am a better public speaker... I have learned about becoming economically self-sufficient. The GirlsBEST group has always been there when we need help and they have always been there when something happened... I liked the opportunities that they gave us and I think most of the opportunities we had I took advantage of and I never regretted anything we have done in this group. I have been a very active participant of this group and I think I would enjoy seeing a new generation of young women in this program.”

Dream Girls (Family Pathways Youth Service):

“One of the girls who had experienced a very difficult year last year and had dropped out of participation. She had become very defiant, disrespectful, started hanging with a negative crowd and was making bad choices and getting in trouble in school. She was very unhappy. With the encouragement of her Kinship mentor and her DG mentors she came back to the group and admitted that she now realizes that her choices now a big the difference in her future. She decided that she was not going to let her boyfriend run her life. She stopped smoking and started to study more. ‘I know now that if I had kept on like I was I’d end up like my mom and dad. I want better than that.’ ”

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girlsBEST* Initiative, 2002 - 2007
(*girls Building Economic Success Together)
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Introduction

The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, in one of the first programs of its kind in the nation, created the girlsBEST Initiative; a five-year grants program focused on preparing girls for an economically secure future. The Initiative provided grants to a diverse array of programs in the metro area and in greater Minnesota, all focused on serving girls of color, low income and other under-represented girls. Over its five-year span, the girlsBEST grantees provided girl-specific programming intended to:

- strengthen girls’ self-esteem
- provide academic enrichment and college preparation
- offer business and entrepreneurial skill-building
- build leadership and encourage activism on behalf of women and girls

The girlsBEST Initiative also sought to decrease sexist attitudes and increase commitment to the wellness and economic well-being of Minnesota girls, by supporting two venturesome programs focused specifically on changing public awareness and public attitudes.

This final report is intended to provide a context for, and a summary of the outcomes and lessons learned in this venturesome Initiative. Findings are drawn from extensive external evaluations conducted over the life of the Initiative, as well as from reports provided by girlsBEST grantees. This is a summary of those evaluation findings and reports, describing what are considered to be the most salient outcomes from girlsBEST. The report also offers a set of lessons learned, derived from extended discussions among the external evaluators and the internal staff team about the meanings of the data and the implications for future Foundation programming in particular, and for future youth development and girls’ programs in general.

History of the girlsBEST Initiative

The Women’s Foundation created girlsBEST in response to community input and research. Foundation staff reviewed research about Minnesota women and girls conducted from 1997 to 2001, and the Foundation also organized a statewide “listening tour” that involved nearly 200 women and girls in focus group conversations. The results of the listening tour are summarized in a report called *Listening to Women for a Change*¹.

¹ Women’s Foundation of Minnesota. FY 2002 Mid-Year Report. *Listening to Women for A Change*. Johnson, et. al.

The focus groups and the extant research demonstrated that most Minnesota girls face gender-specific barriers that discourage the vision and skill-building for a secure economic future. Among the barriers were poverty, low wages, lack of job opportunities and training. Other identified barriers included:

- wage discrimination
- sexism in academic counseling
- lack of leadership and athletic opportunities for girls
- teen pregnancy
- poor self-esteem and body image
- violence against girls by men and boys.

Pervasive sexism was described as a major issue, along with racism and the lack of culturally appropriate services for women and girls. Women reported that leadership development opportunities and mentoring for young girls were sorely lacking. Women in all communities observed that these issues are highly interconnected and cannot be addressed one at a time.

A common theme of the listening tour was the need to build opportunities for girls throughout the state. In every community, women stressed the importance of investing in girls as the best way to create opportunities and equality for women. Women of all ages talked about media messages that both devalue girls and send negative lessons about body image and sexuality. Girls, particularly, spoke of poor self-esteem and negative body image. Everyone spoke about unsupportive environments that provide little leadership opportunity, limited girl-specific programming, and that tend to encourage marginal planning for the future.

From these experiences the Foundation developed girlsBEST. Since its inception, the Initiative has focused on preparing girls for an economically secure future by supporting girl-specific programs that strengthen girls' self-esteem, leadership and activism. girlsBEST (Girls Building Economic Success Together) was formally launched in 2002. The program involved two phases: a nine-month planning grant, and, a four-year implementation phase. During 2002, the Foundation awarded 18 planning grants to organizations around the state.

Eleven (61%) of the organizations awarded planning grants continued on to the implementation phase. During the life of the Initiative, four grantees were added to the girlsBEST family; a total of 15 girlsBEST grants. Over time, three grants were terminated, and one organization elected not to continue participation in the Initiative.

To date, the Women's Foundation has awarded more than \$1 million to girlsBEST programs. In 2006, the foundation secured a gift of \$1 million dollars restricted to help create a permanent funding stream for girls. As was true of the first generation of girlsBEST programs, this permanent source of funding is the first of its kind in the nation.

girlsBEST Initiative Outcomes

Each of the participating girlsBEST grantees developed their programs to address one or more of the following Initiative-wide outcomes:

1. Individual girls will increase readiness to achieve economic well-being
2. Supportive environments will lead to increased readiness of girls to achieve economic well being.
3. The public will increase recognition of the values of women and girls to society, and decrease sexist attitudes.
4. Activism will be built for girls' economic well-being in Minnesota.
5. Under-served and under-represented Minnesota girls will benefit.

Theory of Change

girlsBEST was built on an assumption that girls' progress toward economic well-being is incremental. To achieve economic well-being requires that girls have repeated exposure to knowledge and experiences that will allow them to take action to achieve it. girlsBEST also sought to build activism on the part of girls, and so the program model was designed to provide repeated skill-building opportunities and leadership experiences to move girls from an early awareness of the barriers they confront to an ability to confront those barriers.

The girlsBEST theory of change was derived from research on international poverty eradication conducted by Swedish researcher, Nina Strandberg of the Swedish Kvinnoforum/Foundation of Women's Forum, commissioned by the United Nations Division on the Advancement of Women. Strandberg's research suggested that women's empowerment is a process of moving from *awareness* of the barriers to women's full equality, to a sense of *agency*, in which women feel able to take action to improve their own situation, and ultimately to take *action* to change the structures that prevent full equality.

For the purposes of girlsBEST, the assumption has been that girls would pass through three distinct, although not necessarily linear, stages of development on the road to economic independence. Building from Strandberg, the three stages have been defined for girlsBEST as:

1. Awareness - Gender awareness, self esteem and personal leadership: Girls will become aware of sexist power structures that limit their economic futures, and will see themselves as entitled to better lives. Their self-esteem and self-confidence will increase, and they will then begin to take on leadership roles within the girlsBEST group.

2. Agency - Leadership and agency linked to economic well-being: Girls begin to define their personal economic goals and act on them. They might, for example, decide to go to college and will set appropriate goals for academic success in high school. In this stage, it is hypothesized that girls will also begin to believe in their ability as a group to achieve their goals. They take that leadership into the larger community, making their community aware of the work they are doing to help build economic power for girls.

3. Activism - Activism and advocacy: At the final stage, girls begin to voice their concerns about gender inequality in the job market and in the larger community. They organize and begin to take action to help change structures that limit women's economic power.

Program Tracks

The girlsBEST program activities were provided in three program “tracks,” although it should be emphasized that the sites provided comprehensive programming. However, the tracks serve to illustrate the wide array of program outputs and services that were intended to achieve the program’s overarching outcomes.

The three program tracks were: 1) **Academic** in which girls were provided with the knowledge and skills needed to graduate from high school and enter post-secondary education or employment preparation; 2) **Entrepreneurial** activities focusing on girl-planned and girl-led businesses and money-making ventures, and 3) **Public Education** or advocacy activities in support of women’s equality. Each is described in more detail below.

1. Academic Track. Program emphases and activities fitting in an academic track were those aimed at formally enhancing girls’ opportunities for economic success by providing mentoring, tutoring, and other support services such as study skills training, encouraging high school graduation, and preparation for post-secondary education. All of the girlsBEST sites provided some level of academic programming, ranging from girls doing research on various career pathways to formal presentations on career choices. Four of the sites explored college preparation to some degree, and three sites explore college prep intensely, including academic tutoring and college admissions test preparation.

The academic track also included more formalized instruction or exposure to various forms of economic and financial literacy. Many of the activities are experiential, including stock market games, scenario planning for career and lifestyle choices. Some of the activities around financial literacy were culturally specific, such as “Financial skills for Native Girls.”

2. Entrepreneurial Track. In these girlsBEST activities, girls learned economic literacy and career awareness by doing and by meeting and networking with women business owners and professionals. In one site, a girl designed and operated business, Stompin’ Grounds Coffee Shop has now celebrated its third anniversary, an expansion and a continued increase in its customer base. In tiny Warren, Minnesota girls learned entrepreneurial skills by running the school store, and they have developed a T-shirt airbrushing and heat press business. At El Colegio charter school, the Cambio! girls have operated a school store. Also in this track were a wide variety of experiential learning activities, including art and media development, product development, often for sale to support the program, girl-led fundraisers, and networking with businesswomen.

3. Public Education. Here girls learned about and became aware of issues, factors and forces that prevent women from achieving economic success and personal power, and to varying degrees, learned how to be advocates to change community opinions. Just two of the sites were directly engaged in the public education track, but their efforts have been persuasive.

The What About Us? program of Asian Media Access was a project planned and designed by a core group of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) teen girls, entirely focused on

public education. Its purpose was to educate peers, parents and the larger community about gender inequality and sexual violence in the Asian community. The Redwing Higher Self program was designed to teach girls about positive body image, and importantly, to educate young girls and the entire community about the problem of eating disorders and body image. The program is predicated on the belief that these issues represent significant barriers to women's economic success.

Notable Practices

Over the five year life of the Initiative, evaluation confirmed that there were several program components that contributed to the girlsBEST outcomes: They included:

- mentoring and supporting girls to build their comfort, confidence and self-esteem
- a strong focus on cultural awareness, identity and appreciation, particularly among girls of color
- the development of leadership, primarily experientially, and
- outreach to younger, and under-represented girls.

Following are examples of the notable practices documented.

Mentoring and Supporting Girls. All of the sites focused in various ways on creating nurturing, supportive environments and relationships in which girls engaged with each other and with caring adults. In various ways, the programs provided environments and experiences in which girls felt valued, competent and capable. This element is one of the keys, if not the key, to successful program development and implementation with girls.

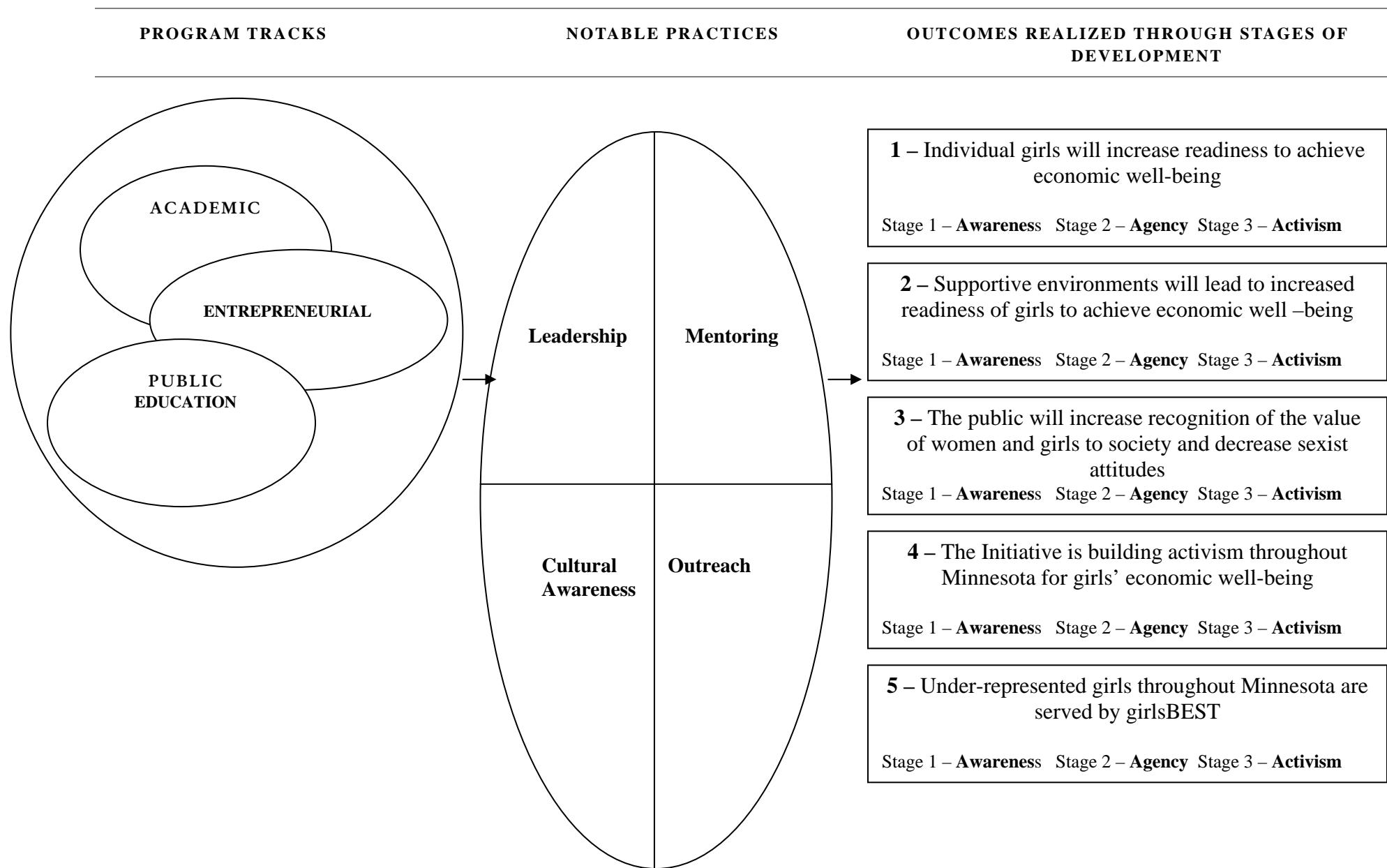
Focus on Cultural Awareness. A majority of the girls participating in girlsBEST were girls of color. Many sites provided various activities and forums in which girls learned more about their culture, participated in cultural events and ceremonies, met with or learned about celebrated women of color, and were helped to understand and appreciate the unique assets and the unique challenges they face.

Leadership Development. Programs also emphasized leadership development in ways ranging from specific workshops on leadership, to opportunities to learn about and meet with women leaders, to hands-on opportunities to plan and lead programmatic activities. Staff interviews in nearly all sites confirmed that one of the factors contributing to the growth in self-confidence and leadership skills is the Initiative's requirement that girls be allowed to take leadership.

Outreach to Under-Represented Girls. With varying degrees of intensity and success, the sites all also actively engaged in outreach to under-represented girls.

The following graphic illustrates the girlsBEST outcomes, theory of change, program tracks and notable practices.

girlsBEST Theory and Model of Change



girlsBEST Five Year Summative Evaluation Methods

This report is a summary of the findings from five years of girlsBEST. Also incorporated are the evaluator's observations about the strengths and accomplishments of girlsBEST, the value and validity of the developing program model and the lessons for the next phase of girlsBEST. The report is based on a large number of data sources, including:

- Electronic surveys administered over two years, beginning in 2005 and repeated in 2006. Survey findings provide a significant source for conclusions and observations about outcomes for girls
- Interviews with all (11) site mentors over two years, beginning in 2005 and repeated in 2006
- Interviews with community leaders, as recommended by site mentors (2006)
- Interviews with (9) site evaluators (2005)
- Focus group with metro area girls BEST participants (April, 2007)
- Focus groups (3) with Asian Media Access/What About Us? participants (2005, 2006)
- Analyses of case studies of two (2) sites developed by Dr. Melanie Hickey Peterson (2006)
- Content analysis of site evaluation reports – 2004, 2005, 2006
- Content analysis of Initiative evaluation reports – planning phase, 2004, 2005, 2006
- Participation statistics provided to the Foundation in Diversity Surveys from sites (2005-2007)

Participation in girlsBEST: Serving Under Represented Girls

Well over 3000 girls participated in girlsBEST programs over its five-year history. These figures do represent some level of duplication in counting long-term participants, including girls who participated in one-time only activities, such as large group presentations on issues of gender inequality, body image and other topics. Overall, the range in participation was from a low of six per site (per year) to a high of 765 per site. The median participation (by site) was 39 overall.

All of the sites enrolled a smaller number - a core group - of girls. Core groups were defined as consistent, longer-term participants, many of whom continued their participation in the sites for four or more years. In many cases, core groups were the planners and advisory boards of girlsBEST sites. A total of 628 girls made up the core groups. Each year, the core group of girls ranged from about 100 (or about 9 core girls per site) to 264 (or about 24 girls per site). The number of core group participants grew from 107 in 2004 when records were first required to 257 in 2006. The growth in core participation came in spite of barriers to girls' consistent participation including transportation issues and work and school issues.

Evaluation efforts principally focused on the core girls not only for pragmatic reasons of consistent availability, but also because of the probability that steady incremental change toward economic well being would more likely be observable. Participation data are provided in Table One below.

**Table One: Participation in girlsBEST
Five Year Summary**

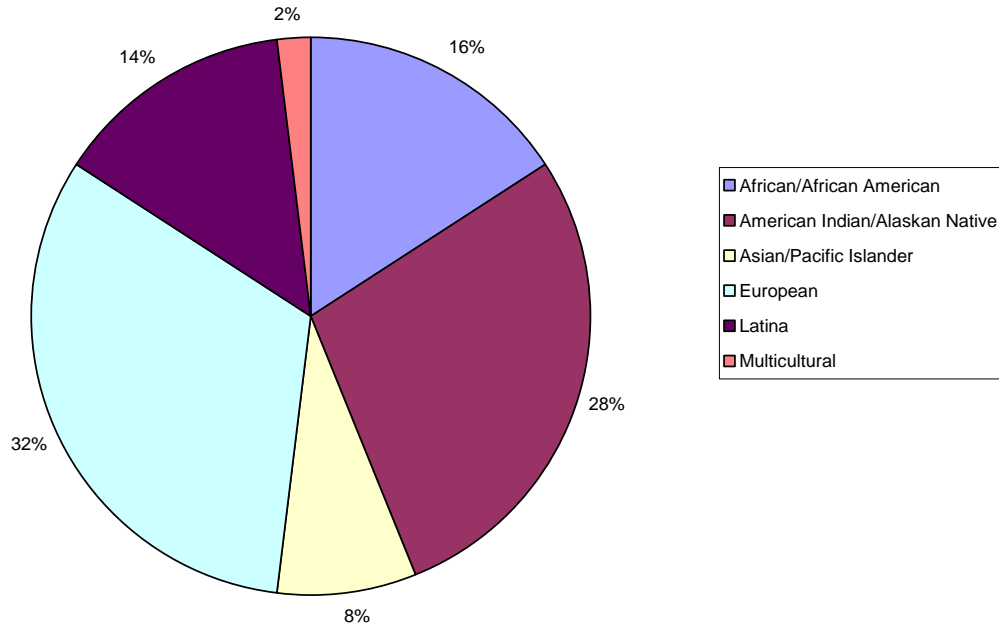
	Planning	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTAL¹
Number of participating girls	N/A	1489	575	1628	1232	4924
Number of Core Group girls	N/A	N/A	107	264	257	628

¹ These are duplicated totals. Figures also include girls served once, as well as core group girls served consistently over a longer period of time.

girlsBEST served girls of color

A substantial majority of the girls served in the Initiative were girls of color. Consistently, over 60% of the core group of girls were American Indian, African or African-American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latinas, or girls of multi-racial backgrounds. The following chart following provides information on participation by race/ethnicity.

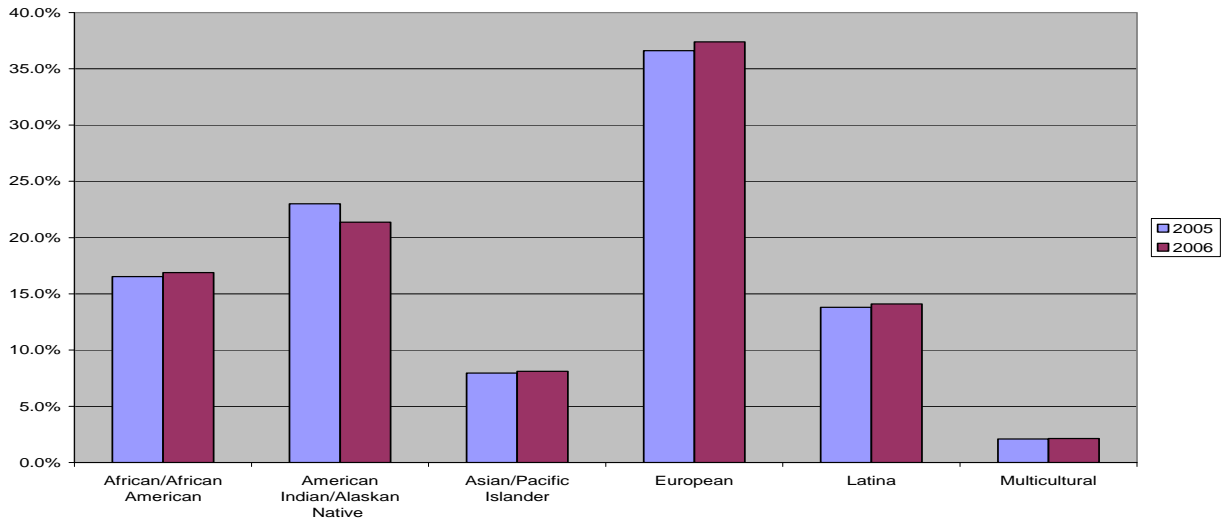
girlsBEST Initiative Five Year Core Group Participation by Race/Ethnicity



Native American girls were served in two projects, the metro American Indian Family Center and the outstate Ogichidakweg project, serving girls on two northern Minnesota reservations. About 28% of the core group of girls was American Indian. African and African-American, Latina and Asian American girls were principally served by the metro area projects, and together represented 32% of participants: 16% African American, 14% Latina, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander and 2% bi- or multi-racial respectively.

It should be noted that these participation figures were somewhat more variable in the first two years of the Initiative, but have been remarkably consistent, very nearly equivalent, for the last two years. This confirms that participation increased substantially from 2004 and stabilized in terms of attracting and retaining a core group of under-served girls. The chart below shows core group participation by ethnicity over the past two years.

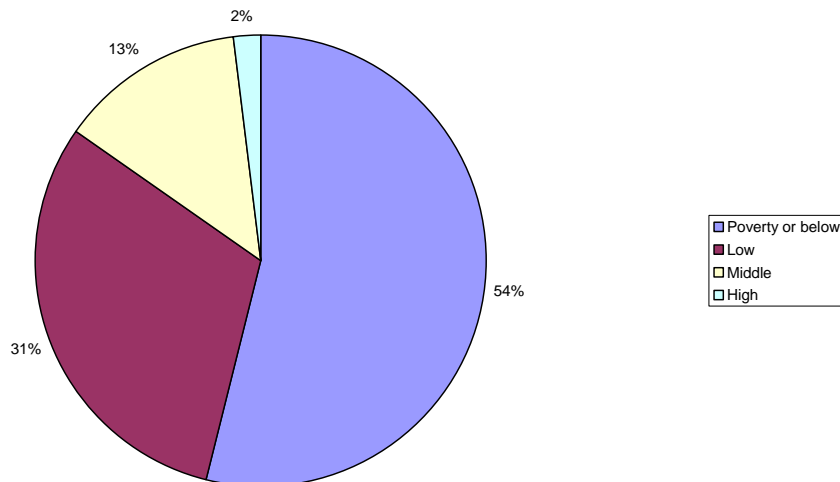
Participation by Race/Ethnicity 2005-2006



girlsBEST served low income girls

The girlsBEST sites also consistently served a very large majority of girls who lived below the federal poverty line or in low income households. Over the five year life of the Initiative, a majority (85%) of the core participants either lived below the federal poverty line (54%) or were low income (31%). Program staff have confirmed that these programs were important contributors to the lives of girls with few monetary advantages. Site mentors also noted, however, that the challenges of poverty made programming sometimes quite difficult.

girlsBEST Initiative 5 Year Participation by Income



**Findings Outcome One:
Individual girls will increase readiness to achieve economic well being.**

Stage One: Awareness

To increase girls' readiness to achieve economic well-being requires knowledge, skill development and behavior change. At the awareness stage, girls need to become aware of the need for economic self sufficiency, the importance of goal-setting and planning, and their options for post-secondary and career choices. Also of importance is girls' emerging self-confidence and sense of self-esteem. In addition, the first stage involves the development of specific financial knowledge and skills, specific career possibilities, and how current behaviors will affect future possibilities. Our findings substantiated that stage one knowledge and skills were obtained in a significant number of core group girls. (See Chart page 13). There are three over-arching findings from Outcome One – Stage One Awareness.

girlsBEST participants have developed a base of knowledge, and the fundamental underpinnings, of economic well being

The findings from two years (2005 -2006, 2006 – 2007) of survey work clearly substantiated that participants have learned:

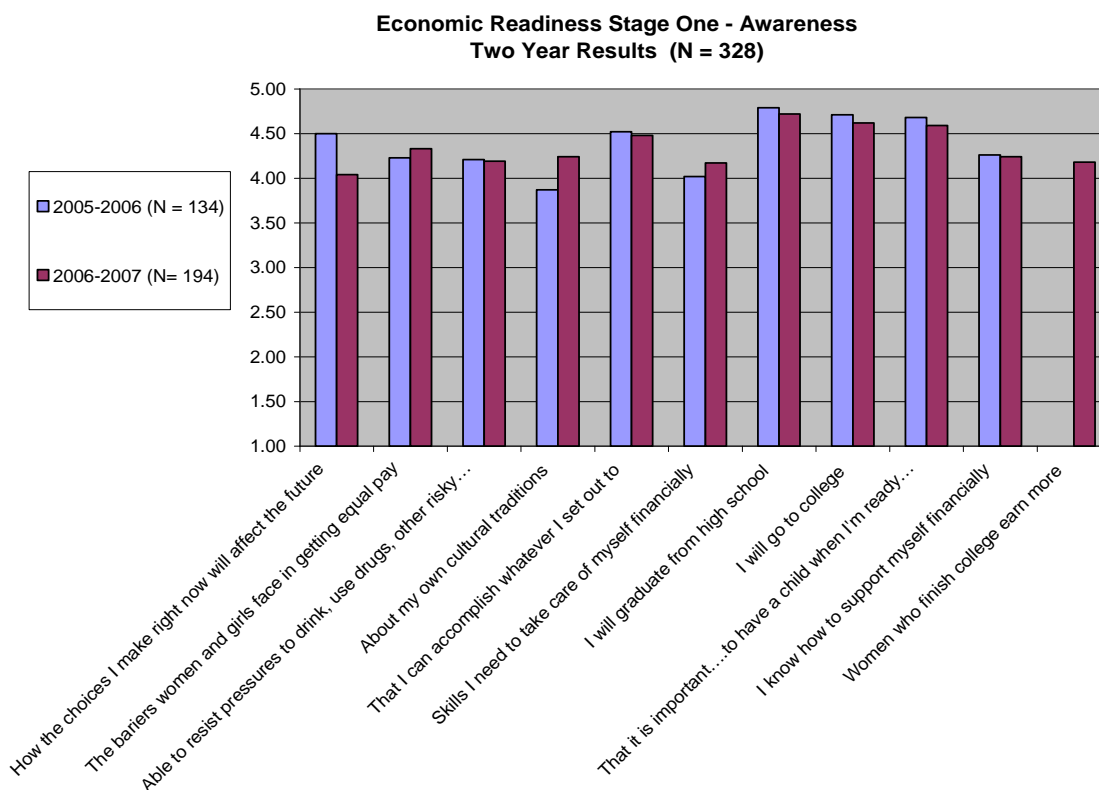
- **About the effect of current choices on future success.** Survey data confirmed that girls understand the effects of present day choices on their future success. A very substantial majority, 82%, of girls agreed that the choices they make right now will have an important effect on their future success. This is a significant outcome of girlsBEST given the importance of high school completion and adequate preparation for college in insuring economic well-being.
- **The importance of resisting pressure to drink, use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors.** Importantly, 85% of respondents agreed that they had the knowledge to resist these behaviors which are strongly correlated to a lack of economic security for girls and women.
- **The importance of delaying pregnancy.** An overwhelming 94% of girls agreed that it is important to delay having a child until "I'm able to support a child." This is also a very significant finding given the strong, causal, link between teenage pregnancy and poverty.

Data indicated that a very significant proportion of girlsBEST program participants intend to graduate from high school and go on to college.

- **High school graduation.** Nearly all (96%) of the girls responding to program surveys agreed or strongly agreed that they would graduate from high school.
- **College attendance.** Nearly equal proportions of the girls (94%) agreed that they will go to college.

- **High aspirations.** The survey required girls to specify the highest level of education they will have completed in seven years. A clear majority, (64%) of the girls reported that they would have an Associate degree, a Bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree.
- **No previous educational role models.** Most site mentors suggested this level of aspiration is significant, given the proportion of low income girls, many of whom have no educational role models in their families, and few in their communities.

The chart below shows each of these elements of stage one of economic awareness. The table provides mean scores (on a scale of 5 strongly Agree to 1 strongly Disagree) over the past two years of survey work.



In addition to girls’ knowledge, skills and beliefs in the future, there is a limited, albeit significant, core of evidence suggesting that a higher than expected proportion of girls has completing high school successfully and entered college. In one site, which emphasizes college preparation for immigrant and refugee girls, 100% of this year’s graduating class of 13 has entered college or technical college. Here is how participants in a spring focus group talked about their college experiences:

College visits. “The coolest thing that has happened is that we went on a campus visit to St. Benedict/St. John’s university. It is really big.”

I feel like I’m already in college. “The coolest thing is that I have never been in college before. I had a chance to go see St. Kate’s college in St. Paul. And also I had a chance to see St. John’s too... we had a chance to attend a lot of workshops

which encouraged us to go to college and it helped us to prepare to go to college. For me when I spent a lot of time in (Name of program) I just feel like I am already in college.”

A way to pay for college. “It helps us see that there is always a way to pay for college like there are scholarships and financial aid. And grants. Student loans. Like you shouldn’t be discouraged just because it is a \$30,000 a year college. There are other ways to get there if you really want to get there and go to college.”

Participants in the other girlsBEST sites also focused on college, college preparation and college exposure. Here are some of their comments about college:

Confident about college. “My first field trip was going to Mankato State University. It was an amazing experience. We got to talk with Native students about the school; we also toured part of the school. After the tour we talked with someone from the financial area. She talked with us about scholarships, and tuition fees. After we came home, I was excited. I really felt confident in going there for my college year...”

Getting into college. “It helped me a lot. It taught me about college and getting into college, which colleges I should apply to. I have been thinking about it a lot now. It also talks about being a leader. It is about finding myself and moving on to being someone.”

Sites emphasized the importance of education in various ways. Here’s how staff and evaluators described the emphasis on high school graduation in and the results of that emphasis:

Graduation rates doubled. “Our original goal was to increase the high school graduation rate and post-secondary education rate. Last year’s seniors all graduated from high school and all chose some type of secondary enrollment. We’re seeing that this works. In 2005 we saw the highest graduate rate ever for Latinos. We had 16 graduates; in the past it would be about 6 out of 45-65 Latino students.”

Graduation the most important goal. “Many of the girls interviewed and observed talked often of graduating from high school. Most participants are motivated by the number of credits they get for attending, participating and being group leaders. A couple of the participants shared plans for pursuing post-secondary education....girls were encouraged to talk and write about ideas and plans for the future...Most find graduation from high school the most important and immediate goal...”

“Girls Can Do College.” “The large majority of our girls come from immigrant or refugee backgrounds where higher education is only reserved for males or the rich, therefore the main focus here would be to advocate for gender equality among their peers, family members, and communities in supporting girls towards the completion of a college degree within the United States. Our program is a resource that will increase the girls’ capacity to make informed decisions

(concerning college) so they can promote gender equality among their communities concerning higher education.”

girlsBEST girls demonstrate a striking sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. This has been an emphasis in programming, is a key determinant of future well being and is the strongest outcome of girlsBEST

All of the girlsBEST programs have actively made efforts to boost young women’s sense of confidence and self esteem. Over the past five years, site evaluators, program mentors and the girls themselves have talked about the increased sense of self-confidence as the most important outcome of the program. The effects of that enhanced self-confidence can be seen in various ways.

Findings from surveys, focus groups, staff interviews and site evaluations confirm that girls responding to our survey show a highly developed sense of self and a strong sense that they can accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish. Survey findings indicated:

- **Ability to meet personal goals.** An overwhelming 93% of the respondent girls said they believe they can accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish.

In a focus group with metro area girls conducted in the last year of girlsBEST, girls spoke with assurance about their five year goals:

Helping others. “Traveling the world. Being a nurse. That is my goal. And just helping other people and getting to know different cultures and how they are comparing to America because we think it is bad here but it is really not. We have the best resources and yeah, I just want to make a difference in other parts of the world because they need it and we should be able to help them.”

Political aspirations. “In five years I will be done with school and by then I would like to run for office. I really do want to run for office. I want to run for Jim Ramstad’s seat and in five years he will be gone and if not, I will just run against him. And before that I will be running for school board probably. The district that I belong to has a lot of problems. Such as not enough attention toward the kids with disabilities.”

Ministry. “In five years I will be done with college and maybe going to New York. There is a church down there and I want to go preach the gospel to other people.”

Teaching. “My real dream would be like to be in New York and go to school. NYU because they have like a beautiful campus and NYU is such a like a neat place but like lack of financial support, it is probably not going to happen. So I’ll be out of college here. A college here in MN and then go on to some career that has to do with teaching or helping people, counselor or something.”

Physician. “I would like to be doctor. I want to go to medical school and I want to be a family physician.”

This is how girlsBEST participants described their sense of self and their progression from shy to self-confident:

More confident now. “When I first came into this group I was clueless about everything. But I have changed a lot. I’m more confident now. If it wasn’t for this group I would never feel comfortable talking about issues like gender inequality or sexual violence. But now that I’m in this group I feel a lot more confident and I feel like if I can change, if I can become more confident, then other young girls can too.”

Self – esteem. “At first I was like so down. And I had like no self-respect or self-esteem. Now I have self respect and I have self esteem. It’s like I now know that everything I’ve been learned throughout these whole, like years, (is true). It’s really helped me.”

Learning to be strong. “A lot of girls are pretty shy like me. I didn’t like public speaking but I attended a conference at a Wisconsin university. It was about finding your voice. I was supposed to talk about my own problems in front of the people but I couldn’t do it and I don’t know why. I was so close to doing it but I couldn’t do that. Now (after girlsBEST) I encourage young girls like me to speak up. They have to say things to other people. If you have a message you can say it and you don’t need to be afraid. It is like learning to be more strong...”

Learning to take risks. “Yeah, like take the risk. Like you don’t know what you can get from it until you try and you won’t ever know until you do try and knowing that whatever risk you take will be a great one but the good ones are the ones that you can look back on and realize like wow, I did that and accomplished this.”

I have power now. “I feel like I can do anything I want. As long as I work hard, I know that I can achieve my dreams. It’s just a matter of time. I mean I’m just in high school now. Every goal I make I achieve them. And being in this organization makes me even more. Because now I have the power to – I’m more confident to speak out about my opinions. I’m just more confident that I can achieve things.”

Site mentors have historically reinforced the girls’ assessments, suggesting that an increase in self-confidence has been “common.” Here is how site mentors described this change in the girls’ sense of self-worth.

Self confidence builds leadership. “Through the program they would be more apt to not be afraid to take a chance because they have confidence in themselves that they can do something. They have the confidence to go to college or tech school. They’re looking not only at tomorrow, they’re looking ahead to the rest of their life.”

Increase in confidence. “An increase in confidence has been common. They come in quiet and shy and evolve in group to a point where they are articulating their thoughts and answering questions.”

Increase in confidence. “The level of confidence has increased. They’re more confident in group, more capable of articulating their thoughts. ..We have one girl who’s been a core member for about three years, it’s been wonderful to watch her grow.”

Girls have mastered basic financial literacy in girlsBEST, learning how to take care of themselves financially and developing optimism that they can take care of themselves financially

Economic education, presented in various hands-on ways, was a fundamental curriculum element in most of the girlsBEST programs. Girls participated in a variety of experiential activities, designed to show them the effects of various lifestyle choices, such as not finishing high school or early pregnancy. In several of the programs, financial education was provided in a culturally appropriate context. In three sites, girls learned the economic fundamentals by actually operating school stores and small businesses. The specific findings indicated that:

- **Financial knowledge.** 81% of core girls reported that they have acquired the knowledge and skills they need to take care of themselves financially because of girlsBEST.
- **Belief that they can take care of themselves.** A large proportion of core girls (82%) expressed confidence that they will be able to take care of themselves financially.

A girl in one of the girlsBEST sites made this comment to the interviewer, illustrating the importance of financial skill-building:

“When we are older, we will be able to live our lives on our own and by ourselves. We can handle financial responsibilities, use skills that we acquired. We can look back and see what we’ve done. We can do it without worrying about what is going to happen.”

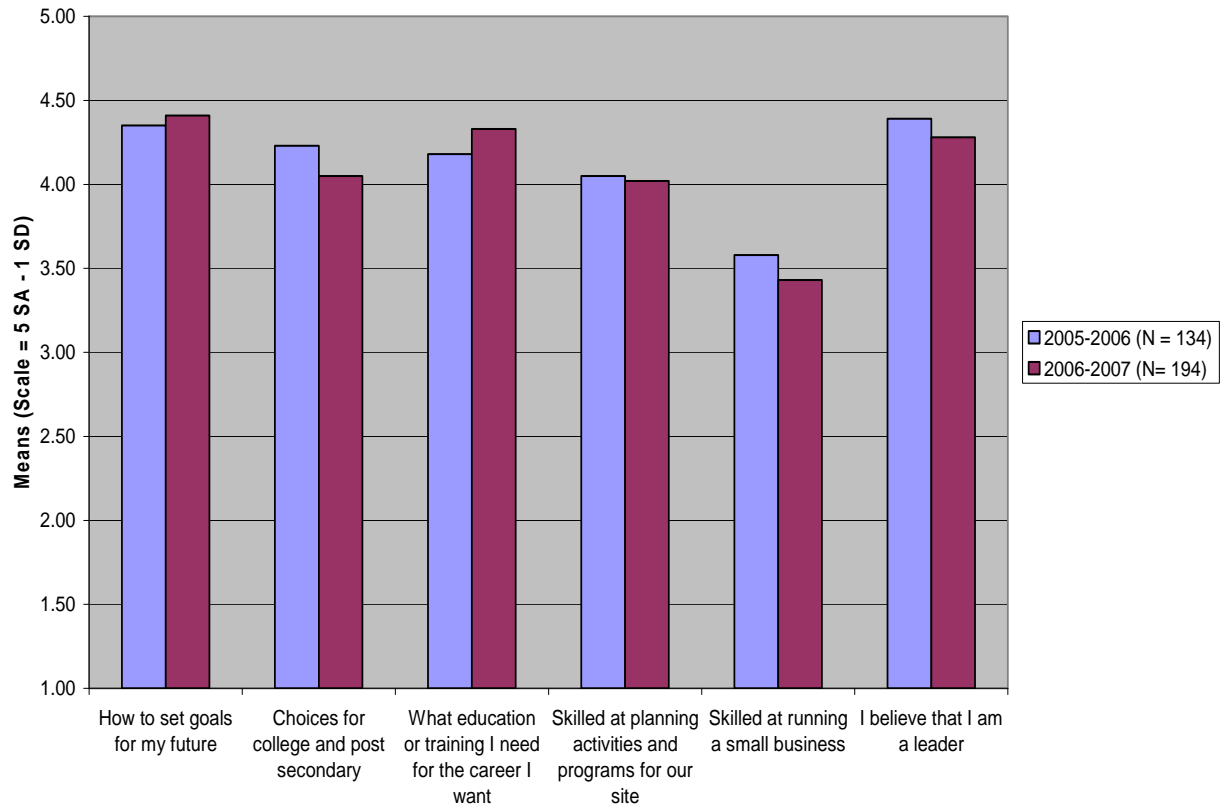
**Findings Outcome One:
Individual girls will increase readiness to achieve economic well being.**

Stage Two: Agency

In stage two, Agency, it has been presumed that girls will not only define their goals for economic well being, but will also begin to act on them. Agency includes the making of choices about college and career, as well as the acceptance of various leadership roles, including planning of site activities and management of site-based businesses. Of importance at this stage is that girls begin to believe in their own capacity as leaders. There are two key outcomes defining Stage Two Agency.

The findings related to outcome one, stage two, from the girls’ survey are below. The table provides mean ratings over the two years of survey administration on several items related to the acquisition of Agency.

**Economic Readiness Stage Two - Agency
Two Year Results (N = 328)**



Core participants in girlsBEST have acquired skill in planning for post-secondary education and for career pathways

Girls' survey responses, as well as other data sources, confirmed that the girls are acquiring agency, learning about:

- **Needed education and training.** A very substantial majority (85%) of core participants agreed that because of girlsBEST they know about education and training requirements for the career they plan to have.
- **College choices.** A high percentage of girls (83%) reported that they know about choices available to them for college or post-secondary education.
- **Knowing how to set goals.** Nearly all (93%) of the girls reported that they know how to set goals for their future.

Core participants in girlsBEST acquired skills in planning activities for the sites, in exercising leadership and in some sites, in running a small business

At the behest of the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, all of the girlsBEST sites were to be girl led. Girls had various opportunities to plan activities and programs for the sites and to build leadership skills. As noted in the site descriptions some of the programs developed girl-led businesses, including Cambio! GIRLS, and Stompin’ Grounds. At least one other site, Ogichidakweg, developed a business focus, selling girls’ photography and digital art. In several programs, girls engaged in various money-making ventures. Findings pertaining to the acquisition of planning and leadership skills follow:

- **Planning programs and activities.** Nearly three quarters (73%) of girls agreed that they had developed skills in planning programs and activities for their girlsBEST site. Mean ratings over both years of our surveys were in the 4.0 (of 5) range.
- **Running a small business.** About half of the girls reported that this question applied to them. Of the respondents, 88% agreed that they had developed business-related skills.
- **Belief in their capacity as leaders.** A high proportion of girls (87%) indicated a belief in their own leadership ability. Mean ratings over two years clearly supported girls’ strong sense of leadership ability.

In focus groups and interviews during the Initiative, girls described their leadership skills this way:

I have what it takes. “I have the self confidence that I can be a leader for my age. A person doesn’t have to be an adult to lead. I am capable and feel ready for leadership. I can do what it takes.”

Leadership roles. “(Name of program) has taught me to become more of a leader, don’t be afraid of who you are at all and by that I became the vice president of my community college for students. Then I moved on to being the platform representative of my region for the Minnesota State Community College association and that gave me the power because I do know what I am doing and know that I will make a difference within my community but also with students that I work with”.

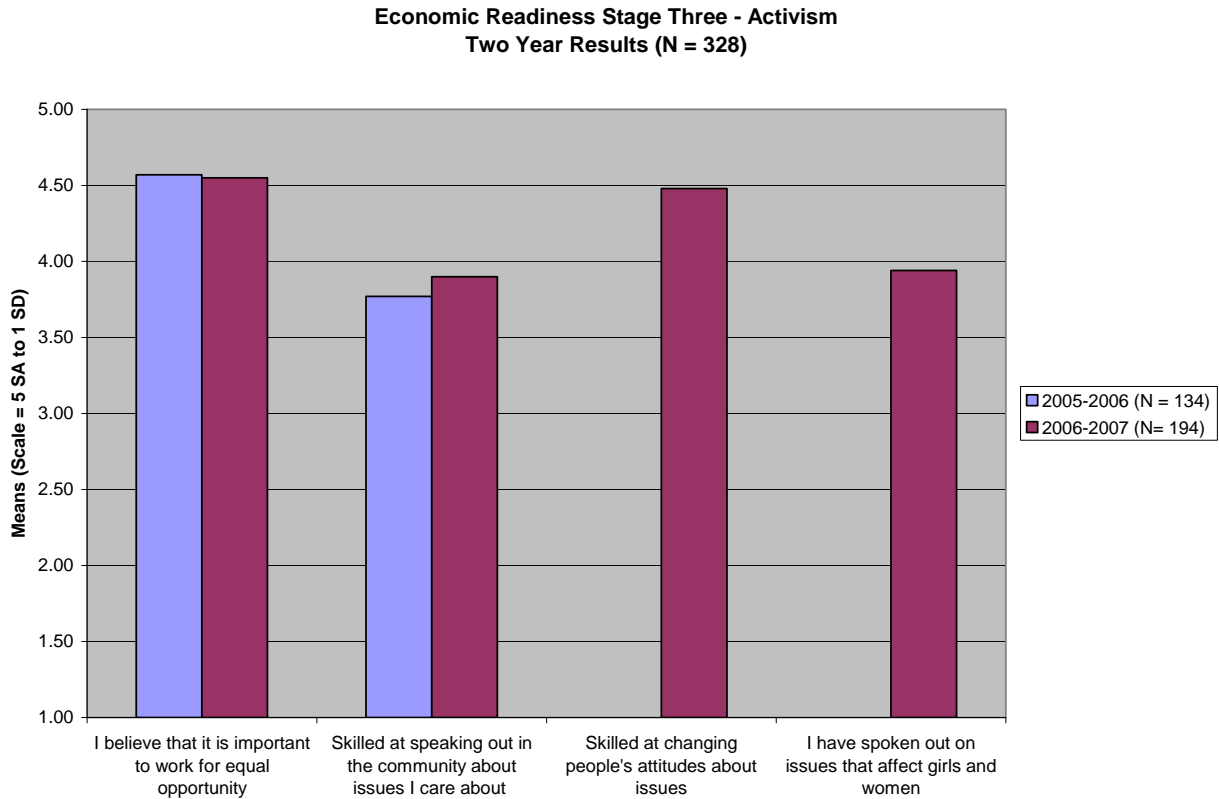
A leader. “Like when I first joined the program I didn’t know what it was about and how it would affect me and like all the new opportunities that they would open for me and like in the whole process I have made a lot of friends. I have learned skills that have helped me throughout my personal life and my high school as in being a part of more things. Being like a leader. Like I am on the prom committee and I am one of those things...a leader.”

I see myself as a leader. “I am a leader in my church. With the teens, my age. I see myself as a leader at school.”

**Findings Outcome One:
Individual girls will increase readiness to achieve economic well being.**

Stage Three: Activism

Both survey data and the views of site mentors indicated that some proportion of the girls have moved on to stage three. While this may not have been as widespread or focused on social justice as originally envisioned in the girlsBEST Theory of Change, many of the girls have found issues about which they care deeply and have taken strong activist stances. The survey findings pertinent to stage three are displayed below. They support a key overarching conclusion: girls understand the importance of working for equal opportunity and have developed the skill sets to work in support of equal opportunity.



Data confirm that girls understand the importance of working for equal opportunity and have developed public speaking and advocacy skills

Survey findings show that nearly all of the core girls agreed about the importance of working for equal opportunity for girls and women. Moreover, data also supported the program's assumption that girls begin to speak out about issues like these when provided the opportunity and the skills to do so.

- **Commitment to work for equal opportunity.** Nearly all, (95%) of respondents agreed that it is important to work to insure equal opportunity for girls and women. This is an important, if unintended, outcome of girlsBEST.
- **Skills for speaking out on issues of importance.** A substantial majority of girls (66%) agreed that the girlsBEST program has provided them with the skills they need for speaking out in the community.
- **Persuasion skills.** Girls also agreed, on an item new to the girls' survey in 2006, that they have acquired skills in changing people's attitudes about issues affecting women.
- **Activism in the community.** It is also of significance that survey data also indicated that "because of girlsBEST I have spoken out in the community about issues I care about." Seventy- six (76%) percent of the girls responding to this survey question in 2006 agreed that they had spoken out. It should be noted, however, that a large number of respondent girls skipped this question, so the proportion of girls who have taken one or more activist stances in the school or community may be lower.

As has been noted, two of the girlsBEST sites focused on community activism: changing body image and portrayal of women in media, and sexual violence, teen pregnancy and gender inequality in the pan Asian community. In these two sites, the Redwing Go GIRLS!™ and the metro area Asian Media Access/What about Us? projects, girls were provided with specific communication skills and opportunities to take those skills out into the community. Here are a few voices of girls from these two girlsBEST programs. Girls talked about first learning the importance of speaking out, gaining knowledge about the issues and then developing the confidence that they can change attitudes:

You need to stick up for what you believe in. "By being in the group I feel that I have learned that you need to as an individual really stick up for what you believe in and not care what others think....(Name of project) has really empowered me to be a stronger person and an advocate for women and their rights and these are just a few of the qualities that I will take with me next year as I move on."

Being active about our opinions. "I think that (Name of project) is activism because we are out there doing things and being active about our opinions. We do lot in our community and we try to spread the word everywhere we can."

I learned a lot. "In the beginning I didn't even know what gender inequality is. I was just like, what? I know the gender word and I know inequality. But together, what's the definition? I learned a lot."

I want to do something. "And that is when I became aware of it and so then I was like ok and then you start learning this stuff new stuff and then you learn all these things that really ticks you off sometimes and then after you get pushed to that point then you think like I want to do something to like to stop there. So there is a process to it."

Our voices are heard. “This is what this was all about. It is all about getting these kids aware of what is going on in our community and what needs to be heard. Our voices are heard through this way.”

Community leaders confirmed that girls have been effective in their activism. One noted that parents’ attitudes have been considerably changed. Another community leader confidently predicted that these girls would build from their present successes to advocate for social justice:

Changing parents. “I think that some of the parents who get involved with this and see more to help themselves and their children by being exposed through their children will be more changed than you or I can imagine.”

A chance to fight for social change. “The breakthrough will come when they have a chance to be proud of themselves and go on and fight to start working toward social change.”

**Findings Outcome Two:
Supportive environments will lead to increased readiness of girls
to achieve economic well being.**

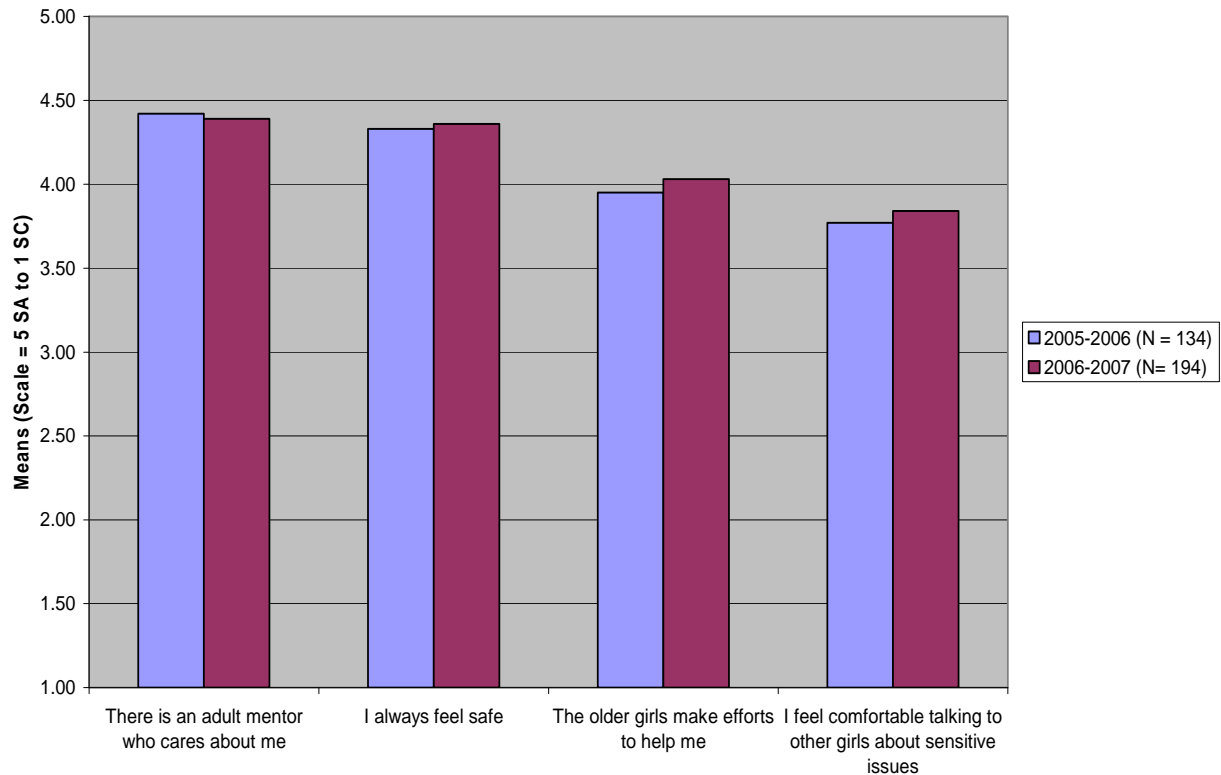
Stage One: Awareness

The data strongly suggest that providing girls with a supportive environment has been the key to successful programming with girls and to achieving important outcomes. On the girlsBEST continuum, we have learned that at the awareness stage, girls should experience trusting relationships with peers, opportunities to get help from older girls in the program, and a safe environment. We have also learned that it is important for girls at this stage of development to develop a trusting relationship with an adult mentor, and to experience opportunities for relationships with professional women in the community. Findings clearly supported the existence of these elements of support and nurture in girlsBEST, and their perceived utility in helping girls grow. Summary findings support two conclusions.

girlsBEST has consistently provided girls with adult mentor(s) who care about them, an environment in which they always feel safe, and in which older girls provide help and support

- **Girls had adult mentors.** A significant majority of survey respondents (88%) agreed that there has been an adult mentor in the girlsBEST program who cares about them. Just 11% of respondents said they weren't sure.
- **Girls felt safe.** An equal proportion of girls, (89%) reported that they always felt safe at girlsBEST. Only 10% disagreed or were uncertain about safety.
- **Older girls helped them.** A substantial proportion of girls (77%) agreed that the older girls involved in the program made efforts to help them. This was an emphasis in most of the sites, with older girls encouraged to mentor younger girls, and with program graduates encouraged to return as volunteers and as role models.

**Supportive Environments Stage One - Awareness
Two Year Results (N = 328)**



The following are comments from girls in several focus groups about the impacts of these safe, supportive environments:

Courage to go out there and speak up. “At my school, we had a little abuse thing. I was like so nervous. In my freshman year of high school I was like I didn’t want to say anything. I was in class with my hood on my face. And my head was in my sleeve. I stayed that way the whole time. And my teacher tried to get me to read and no, I was not reading. I didn’t say anything. And then once when I had to do a presentation I looked at everybody and I just put the paper on my face and read the whole time. I was like so nervous. I am in girlsBEST now and I talk to my teachers and other adults and they give me courage to go out there and speak up instead of staying here and being afraid.”

They make everyone feel comfortable. “I am not an out going person and didn’t know what (Name of program) was and I like love being in it because they make everyone feel comfortable.”

Speaking out. “It is like speaking out. In my freshman year I sat in the back of the classroom so the teacher wouldn’t pick on me. When I came into the program I didn’t talk that much. Like this year they encouraged me more and I do speak.”

They care. “It’s great to have (adult mentor) and other staff to help out. They’ve been supportive in the things we want to try. For our fundraiser we had to find

\$400 and we just went to professional Hmong women and asked them to help. They gave us all of it and that made us feel good that they care and they want us to succeed.”

Throughout the Initiative, in interviews and in site evaluation reports, mentors and evaluators have spoken and written at length about the importance of mentors and role models for the girls. Sometimes the mentors were program staff. Sometimes they were women in the community volunteering their time to work with the girls. Some girls had mentors through Kinship programs. The evidence in the youth development literature strongly confirms the importance of a trusted, non family adult in the lives of young people. The evidence from girlsBEST suggests that this may be even more important for disenfranchised young women. Here’s how mentors and evaluators described the need for and some of the outcomes of adult mentoring:

I care about them. “They know I care about them and trust them. They see me in a different setting [than classroom teacher] and we can build a more personal relationship.”

It’s possible. “Having somebody just tell you that you can be successful, it’s possible. Constantly reinforcing that through our adult mentors. Constant encouragement that you can do this. Getting their self-esteem to the point that they believe they can. Tutors. Having one-on-one mentors has been helpful. I have seen such progress.”

I’ve seen her come alive. “... I’ve seen her come alive. Last semester she got straight A’s ... Every time she gets an A, she calls me. She gets excited when she’s doing well.”

Makes them want to do better. “... helps them to realize their potential. Some are troubled kids... being in the program with us they get to see us who have been in similar situations, they look up to us and it makes them want to do better. Like getting a C is great and I say, no it’s not.”

Rapport and trust. “Establishing rapport and trust. In our community, that’s been the biggest one. They like us, they trust us, they want to come to group.”

Feeling supported. “They get a lot of praise and they feel supported. Somebody is interested in what they think. Adults typically don’t ask them what they think.”

Mentors also suggested that has been very important to provide an environment in which girls feel safe, because they are sometimes unsafe in their homes and their neighborhoods. At least one site mentor suggested that to provide this kind of safe place, she often has had to sacrifice programming to support discussion:

Safe environment. “The environment needs to be a safe environment—both physically and emotionally—which can be painstaking to create. A closed group where there is not a lot of incoming and outgoing is best, otherwise you have to recreate that environment.”

A safe space. “We’re a cocoon, an incubator, giving them a safe space to turn into who they’re going to become. They feel valued in the program. We provide a good climate to be nurtured. They get to do leadership things they don’t get to in the dominant community.”

A safe environment to make mistakes. “To prepare girls for a secure economic future we think they need three main things: skill building, a supportive environment with strong female role models; and a safe environment in which to make mistakes, to learn from those and create a new path.”

Emotional and physical safety. “We happen to have girls who haven’t been friends. They won’t fight in front of me, but they need to feel safe to express themselves. To know their voice will be heard, know that somebody cares about more than whether they are in class or not.”

girlsBEST has provided a space in which girls can support one another

As survey data have clearly indicated, girls have felt the support not only of adults in the community and in the school, but have also grown to support each other.

Comfortable talking about sensitive issues. Two thirds (67%) of the girls agreed that they always felt comfortable talking with other girls in the program about sensitive issues.

This is how year five participants in several metro-area girlsBEST sites described their relationships with the other girls in the program:

The support of other women. “We talk about what is on our minds right now and other issues. We negotiate and talk things out. I would say about 1/3 of the group are Spanish speakers and then we have some kids who don’t speak English at all so we have to translate and even with the kids who don’t speak any English and the kids who speak not fluent English like we all get along well with each other. It is a good group. So kind of having this support of other woman that you can talk to about things kind of helps with the things that you worry about.”

Opening Up. “I learned that many girls had similar issues that they were dealing with and not only me and that opened me up to become more open with everyone else. I was able to understand that whatever happens it will be ok.”

I know how they feel. “Some people there were ...that I didn’t get along with but now as the group has gone on it seems like I am getting closer and closer to them as I have been talking to them because I know how they feel and what they have done and what they are going through and all that.”

Better in groups. “Like when I first joined the program I didn’t know what it was about and how it would affect me and like all the new opportunities that they would open for me and like in the whole process I have made a lot of friends... It has also shown me like, like you can do things a lot on your own but it is also better to do things in groups because you get other people’s opinion and you can make things more better.”

This is the way one of the site mentors described the ways in which girls have come together to support one another:

Reach out to everybody. “I’ve been so impressed at how they reach out to other people, other girls, and embrace them. All the girls aren’t at the same level (socially, economically), but they reach out to everybody. So girls with a lot of differences come together to work on a common goal. They’re developing friendships they never would have had if it wasn’t for this group.”

**Findings Outcome Two:
Supportive environments will lead to increased readiness of girls
to achieve economic well being.**

Stage Two: Agency

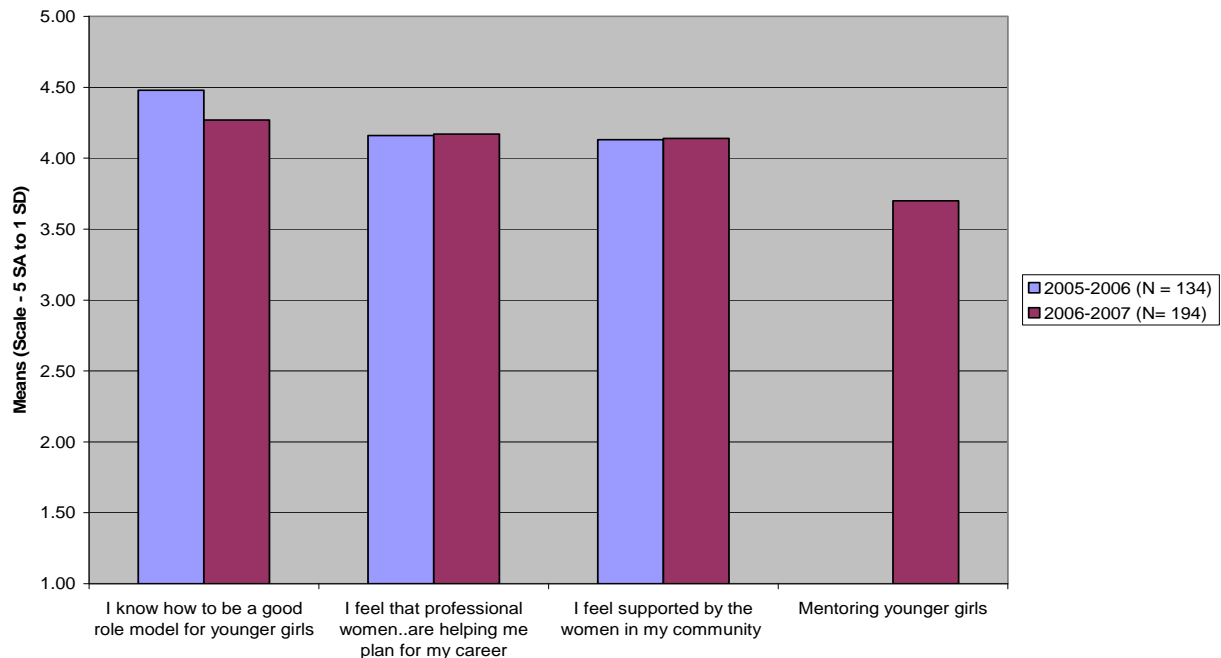
At stage two, agency, it was anticipated that girls should experience strong support from female mentors in the community and should feel that they have strong connections to women in the community. And, as they begin to feel more competent and capable, girls should begin to help out younger girls by modeling the kinds of behaviors they have seen from older women. These kinds of environments have clearly been created, and survey data and other findings support the assumption that this will help girls on the road to economic well-being. Stage Two findings confirm two principal outcomes. One, girls have both experienced and benefited from the support of professional women in their community, and, that girls have begun to help and mentor younger girls.

**girlsBEST participants have received and believe they have benefited from the support and
career mentoring provided by women in the community**

Survey data indicated that a significant majority of girls believe that they have been and are:

- **Supported by women.** A substantial majority (82%) of girls in the Initiative feel that they are supported by women in the community.
- **Helped by women.** Eighty-three percent (83%) of girls also believe that professional women in the community are helping them plan for a career.

**Supportive Environments Stage Two - Agency
Two Year Results (N =328)**



Evaluation reports and mentor interviews have consistently described support from female professionals in the form of resources, such as, for example, a check for \$2000 to purchase a machine to improve a girl-led business. In addition, professional women have made presentations, provided direct teaching and financial literacy activities, as well as providing one on one mentoring and other kinds of support. Data clearly indicated that the girls believe that the women in the community care about and support them. This has been particularly helpful for girls when the mentor is a woman just like them:

Latina role models. “For our program, it’s been good that we’ve had young Latina women teaching the programs. The girls are seeing Latina role models—they’re warm and committed. The majority have been program participants, so they’ve had very direct, lengthy involvement. The leader of one program has a full-time job and the leader of the other is enrolled in college.”

Exposure to women. “They need exposure to women who are economically successful and they need to get to know them enough that they are true role models.”

Here’s how one of the girls spoke of the support she receives from her mentor:

A push. “I don’t have female role models and now I have someone to talk to...she helps me set my goals and gives me a push.”

Girls in the girlsBEST Initiative have learned the skills to and are providing mentoring for younger girls

In our surveys over two years, we asked girls if they knew how to be good role models for younger girls. Overwhelmingly they said yes. In the last year of the Initiative, we also asked girls if they have mentored younger girls, and that response was also affirmative.

- **Knowledge to be a role model.** Girls agreed that they were able to mentor younger girls, with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had acquired such skills.
- **A majority are mentoring younger girls.** Significantly for this program, a substantial majority of girls (69%) agreed that they were mentoring younger girls in the program.

**Findings Outcome Two:
Supportive environments will lead to increased readiness of girls
to achieve economic well being.**

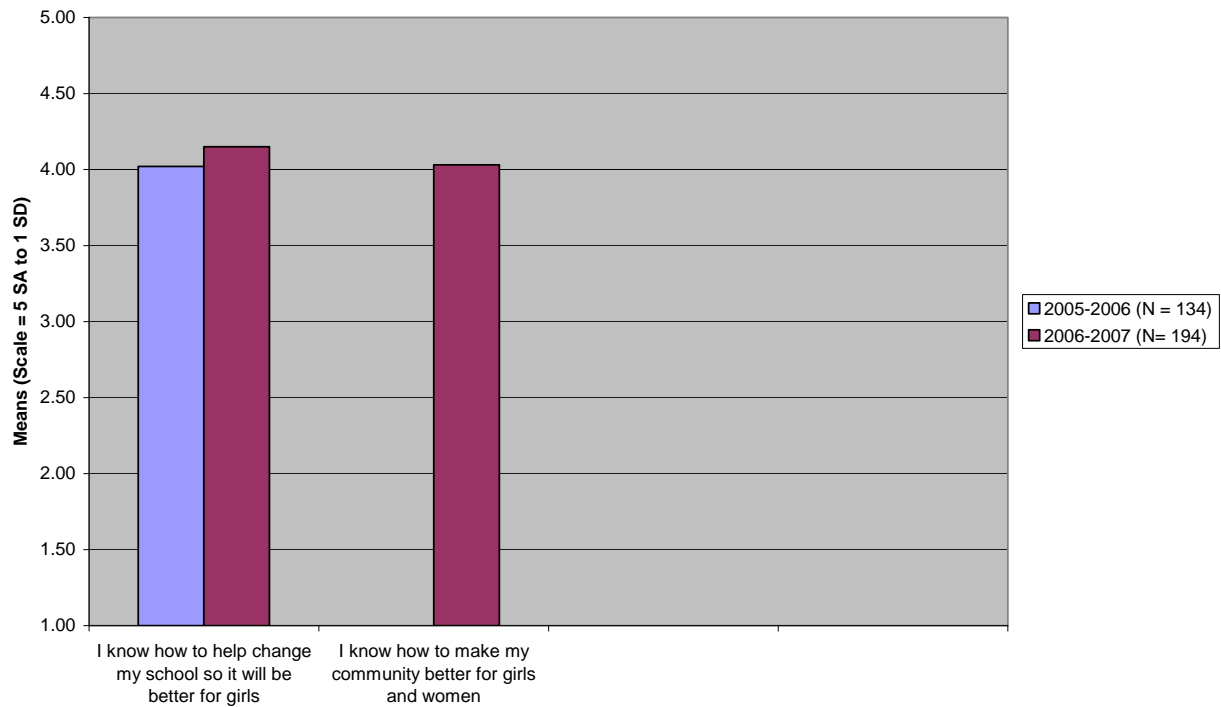
Stage Three: Activism

Two key findings substantiate the movement of girls to activism given consistent participation and ongoing skill development. Findings confirmed that girlsBEST has promoted activism on various causes and in various ways, and that girls have taken strong leadership stances both in school and in their communities.

Girls involved in the Initiative are practicing activism on behalf of women and girls in each of the sites. Activism takes many forms, including what can be described as simply volunteerism. Girls' activism also spans a variety of issues and is not exclusively focused on social justice and equal rights for women.

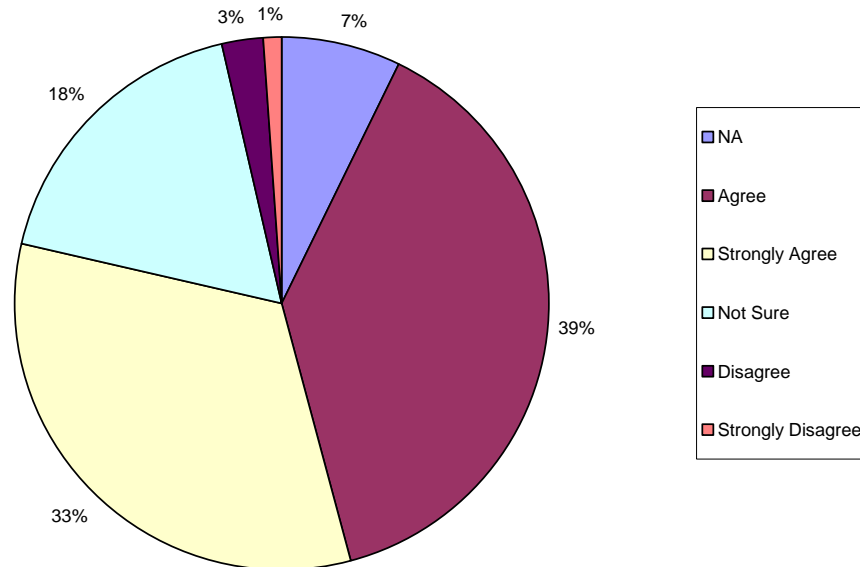
To varying degrees, girls are practicing activism on behalf of women and girls in each of the girlsBEST sites. Girls' activism and advocacy has spanned a variety of issues, from advocating for decreasing sexual violence, and protesting the objectification of women and girls in media and popular culture, to voter registration, to various advocacy campaigns for increased educational funding, for increased representation of girls and women in the building and construction trades. Moreover, girls also took on a variety of what might be called voluntary activities in communities, including such things as disease "walks" and other prevention activities, visiting nursing homes and other institutions, and working in shelters and other nonprofit agencies.

**Supportive Environments Stage Three - Activism
Two Year Results (N = 328)**



The girls’ survey asked girls if they believed that they had the knowledge or skills necessary to “change their school to make things better for girls.” The answer was overwhelmingly yes as the following graphic suggests. Nearly 80% of the girls agreed or strongly agreed they knew how to make changes in their school to improve things for girls. A strong base of knowledge and awareness of issues has provided the basis for progressing to activism.

girlsBEST Composite Results - I Know How to Change My School to Make it Better for Girls
(N = 328)



Site mentors, girls, and community leaders have all observed that girls are making a difference in their communities.

With respect to the girlsBEST Theory of Change, site mentors reported that girls did not move directly from awareness of issues to agency to activism, but instead progressed in different ways along the girlsBEST theory of change, depending on their interests.

Here is how the site mentors described the process of girls moving into stage three and taking strong activist stances. Some said that it is not a clearly linear process, because they are teens:

It’s not sequential. “Most girls start in the activist stage, but don’t already have the awareness. I don’t know that the stages progress that way [as shown in the model]. They can be in different stages at different times, not necessarily in sequential order. Girls are involved for 2 to 4 years. I’ve seen that over time, they’ve covered all those stages.”

A growth stage. “As they become more aware, there’s like a growth stage where they’re almost more combative. They realize they’re not being treated fairly and it’s very disconcerting.”

Here is how a sample of site mentors described how they believe that the girls have progressed to activism. Quotes also described some of the results of this activism.

Internalizing. “Part of the cool part is their internalizing. They might learn that something is sexist and that increases their awareness. Once they have the awareness they start speaking up more. We did a project on domestic abuse. Some of the girls went home and talked to their families about it. They put up a display. It was very powerful for them to see people from outside the school look at their work; also, some of the pieces will go on a national tour.”

We want this changed. “They have increased confidence and self-esteem, the ability to speak up. With experience, knowledge and practice, they are able to speak up, have the ability to say ‘We want this changed’, rather than getting in somebody’s face. They’re starting to think about how they present things, talk about things. Before, they might say this isn’t fair and get in your face about it. Once they’ve been exposed, they understand there are many sides to issues.”

Reaching out to the next level of girls. “Activism for these girls will probably be much more subtle than for Anglo girls because it’s not safe for them. The fact that they’re willing to do *anything* is an improvement. They’re reaching out to the next level of girls.”

Girls have taken on leadership roles and activist stances in their schools and communities

As the preceding section makes clear, site mentors described a variety of examples of the ways in which girls have taken on leadership roles, and worked to create changes in their schools and communities. Girls have lobbied legislators, conducted voter registration campaigns and taken on other leadership activities.

For example, the I Am! and GO GIRLS!TM program in Red Wing offers lessons on such topics as assertiveness, courage, self-esteem, identity, respect, individuality, health, and body image. Girls have participated in workshops on lobbying and have extensively lobbied legislators and mounted sophisticated letter writing campaigns and boycotts of stores and media products that portray an unhealthy body image. Girls spoke extensively in schools and in community forums, and have become very self-confident as this quote suggests: “I will use the confidence I developed through talking with power executives to encourage me to remember I can talk to anybody at any power level.” Here is how a mentor describes them:

“They get much more confident in standing up to peers and speaking their truth. They are more confident with speaking out about size prejudice and correcting those that make negative comments based on a person’s size or weight. They’re vocal about injustices done to girls and women—such as wage inequality, lack of representation in politics, lack of representation in movies. They continue to carry on with what they’ve learned years beyond the program. They carry it into life and it helps them to be more independent and therefore economically successful. They learn to be independent and strong in who they are, to be assertive, express their voice.” [Quoted with permission]

Other site mentors offered the following observations:

“Taking leadership roles. I’ve seen girls take leadership roles in school and in their community, helping promote positive decision making...”

Winning awards. “We had one girl who wouldn’t speak in front of five people in group, but eventually spoke in front of 40 adults at the Minnesota Conference on Adolescent Females. One girl on the panel won an Anne Bancroft Award, which changed her life.”

Findings Outcome Three: The public will increase recognition of the values of women and girls to society and reduce sexist attitudes

Two of the girlsBEST sites were focused on addressing outcome three – the Asian Media Access What About Us? project (WAU) and the I Am and GoGirls™ project in Red Wing. Findings in this section are specific to these projects.

Teens from both groups were educated on the issues of gender inequality, as they pertain to sexual violence in the Asian community, and to the impact of negative media images on girls, body image and eating disorders. In both sites, participating girls developed knowledge and skills – notably media and presentation skills - that have, in turn, helped to build their self-confidence and sense of power to change. Correspondingly, girls in both programs have taken their personal leadership into the larger community. Girls speak to adults and the larger community about the “right and wrong” of gender inequality and sexual violence in the AAPI community, and have made presentations to teens and community members about body image and eating disorders.

While some progress toward reduction of sexist attitudes has been assessed, neither site has accumulated sufficient evidence to verify that widespread attitude change has occurred.

What About Us? (WAU)

WAU was designed as a three year public education campaign to increase awareness of the prejudices and inequality ingrained in Pan Asian cultures, to raise the status of girls and women in Hmong society, and to prevent sexual violence towards girls and women. The program sought to increase overall public recognition of the value of AAPI women and girls, to decrease sexist attitudes and, improve the equality of women. WAU activities principally involved the use of various forms of media (videos, television, PSAs, posters, postcards, web articles

The public information campaign was two-tiered. First it used conventional media to raise awareness of issues. Second, it used direct access and presentations to Asian teens to reinforce the messages.

At least in part because of the efforts of WAU, the Star Tribune ran an intensive, but controversial, investigative report in October of 2005, called "Shamed into Silence" to portray gang rape and other sexual violence in the Hmong community, and the resulting, and growing, problem of runaway girls who are victims of assault.

In 2006, WAU teens produced a video, *No Means No*, to communicate about sexual violence and to prevent it in the AAPI community where, as noted, talking about sexual violence is largely taboo. The teens produced this media package based on response to surveys administered to over 500 Asian teens in the project's first year, and on other research done by AMA. The WAU group also produced a teen pregnancy prevention video in association with the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women of Minnesota, called *Making the Right Decision*.

In addition, the WAU teens produced and widely distributed eleven public service announcements listed below:

- Make the Right Choice [in collaboration with Lauj Youth]
- Think About It [in collaboration with Southeast Asian Community Council SEACC]
- Sexual Violence
- Sexual Harassment
- Teen Pregnancy
- Respect
- Think About It
- A Dream Lost
- Don't be Part of Statistics
- Don't Fear Losing Face
- Communications

The teens have also produced a number of postcards, both black and white and color, incorporating the messages, "Don't be afraid to lose face, be afraid to lose the one you love," and "Whose job is that? Everyone." Moreover, the teens developed a variety of gear, including T-shirts, key chains and stickers and a teenage pregnancy prevention poster in four Southeast Asian languages (Hmong, Khmer, Laos and Vietnamese).

These are findings, quoted from the final AMA – What About Us? evaluation report in 2006:

- **Communications skill development.** WAU girls report that they are learning many media-related skills, (public speaking, speech, media development) all of which have helped them better communicate with peers, and with parents and other adults, about issues of gender inequality and sexual violence. These are practical skills that the girls use to communicate as WAU leaders. They are also skills that make the girls feel more capable and self-confident. In a core group survey, we asked the girls if the program had provided them with skills and knowledge that make it easier to talk with their parents and with others in the community about gender and gender issues. A significant majority (72%) of respondents said that the program has given them skills to talk with their parents and 67% reported that they had gained knowledge that made it easier to talk with others in the community.
- **Media skills development.** Several of the community leaders/key observers interviewed pointed out that the teens in AMA/WAU have become very skillful in the use of media, a vehicle that they described as extremely important in the lives of young people. As one said, the “kids today are so technologically advanced.” Another pointed out that this tech-savvy generation can be motivated by these media vehicles that they know and regularly use. Here is how he described it:

“These are kids we have allowed to become comptrollers of something that they’ve heard and seen work all their lives. Media takes the mind of people and leads them out to a whole new way of thinking and acting. So they see this as a powerful tool and they’ve taken advantage of it. I believe they can get the generation that we think we are losing.”
- **Inspiring other teens to take action.** Among students who participated in a peer-led discussion of *No Means No*, a significant proportion (76%) said that they now believe it is important for them to take action against sexual violence. Among the Healthy Lifestyles workshop participants, very nearly all (94%) said they thought it necessary to take action.

- **Teens talking to others.** The WAU participants are convinced that they are changing the way their peers, their parents and others think about gender equity, teen pregnancy and sexual violence. Teens said that they regularly “spread the true word about gender inequality” in ongoing conversations with peers, as well as in the more formal peer-peer education sessions facilitated by WAU. When we asked the core group in a survey who they shared information with, a majority said that they regularly shared information with their brothers and sisters, sometimes with other family members, and substantial proportions with other teens. Nearly three fourths (74%) of the core group said they had shared information about gender inequality and equal opportunities for girls and women with other teens; a nearly equal proportion (68%) said they talked about teen pregnancy with other teens, and a majority (53%) said that they discussed sexual violence with other teens.
- **Less likely to talk to parents.** While the majority of WAU core group reported that they did talk to their parents about these issues, teens clearly have some problems discussing these issues openly with their parents. Only about one third reported that they could “always” talk honestly with their parents, and 47% said they could “sometimes” talk honestly with parents.
- **Changing attitudes.** The WAU core group reports that they have changed their mothers’ minds about gender equity “some,” although they are less likely to believe they have changed their fathers’ minds. They do believe that they have changed the opinions of people they have talked with about gender equity, teen pregnancy and sexual violence. The mean response to that question about changing opinions was a 3.3 on a four-point scale of 1 (No) to 4 (Yes, A Lot).
- **Getting kids aware.** In interviews the WAU teens said they knew they couldn’t change the world, but they did believe they were making other teens aware of issues they might not otherwise be aware of. Here is how one participant put it:

“This is what this was all about. It is all about getting these kids aware of what is going on in our community and what needs to be heard. Our voices are heard through this way.”
- A leader in a partnering organization said that the media vehicles were quite effective in communicating new information and opening up opportunities for teens, especially girls, to talk about issues. She said that the videos made the girls more willing to talk about issues they were normally reticent about:

“In focusing on culture, it really communicated the idea of healthy sexuality, sexual relationships, from the adult perspective. And I think in another sense it gave the girls a lot of good talking points. Or things to think about when they’re thinking about relationships with boys. And you know what, I don’t have to have sex if I don’t want to. After that I think the girls were more prone to come out and talk about different pressures that they’re experiencing. Sexual pressures. I thought it was really powerful. It really opened up dialogue.”
- **Changing behavior.** The WAU teens believe they can see changes in the behavior of their peers. This is what they say about Hmong boys:

“I will tell you right now. All the Hmong boys are slowly changing. They are slowly thinking about how valuable their girlfriends or the person. Boys know better now. They know that if they treat her wrong or something, they know about vocal girls now. They really do.”

- **Changing the community - Limited empirical evidence.** Data sources provide limited evidence of widespread change in attitudes in the Hmong community. The survey administered to 478 Asian teens in winter 2006 provided virtually identical responses to those received two years ago on a series of items about gender equity, sexual violence and parents’ aspirations. It should be noted that these surveys were not administered to the same sample, however, it was administered to an equivalent group. Moreover, the baseline responses suggested that among pan Asian teen respondents there was a high awareness of the issues that WAU has raised, such as the prevalence of sexual violence, cultural stigmas associated with sexual violence and gender inequality in the Asian community. Finally, some of the questions tapped into individual beliefs about such topics as equality of Asian girls in American society and equality between Asian girls and boys. The questions seemed to elicit aspirational responses rather than a reflection of the actual discrimination that teens perceive in Asian cultures. For these and perhaps many other reasons, survey data collected this year provided a virtually identical picture to that provided at baseline, meaning that there has been little change, or more accurately, no measurable change in the teen community, at least as this method was able to assess change.
- **Changing the community - Affective evidence.** As noted the teens believe they are changing the opinions of those with whom they speak. They recognize that to change the whole community is a lot of work. Most said they remained committed to do the task ahead. This is how two of them described the task ahead.

“I see the difference and I am like wow, I am making a change even though it is not drastic. It is some change and it makes you happy and you are like oh my gosh. You keep coming back and wanting to change more and more.”

“I come back because I am making a slow difference. Even though it is hard work... it is harder to make a difference in the whole community of Hmong people and other Asian people. No matter hard it is, in the long wrong, you are going to say I did this and changed this and I made a difference in this community so that is why I keep coming back.”

- **Taking the lead.** In doing the learning and the work around sexual violence the girls in WAU became aware of a significant problem of runaway young Asian teens, who have been victims of sexual violence or who run away to avoid early marriage or other exploitation. The girls learned that runaways younger than 14 have no place to go, yet they are a significant proportion of the problem. Girls are often married at this age. With the assistance of their mentors, the What About Us? participants developed and presented a proposal to the Asian Media Access Board of Directors to attach a shelter for homeless Hmong girls to the AMA capital campaign and building project. The proposal was made to, and approved by, the AMA board in April.

I Am and Go Girls!™

This program was intended to increase self esteem, prevent eating disorders, increase confidence and educate about the role of media in shaping self-image for girls. The I Am program is for pre-teens in grades 6-8, and GoGirls!™ is for grades 9-12. Among the emphases of Go Girls is the promotion of responsible advertising in support of positive body images for girls on the part of media and major retailers.

The curriculum was designed to both strengthen girls' understanding of healthy body image and to build their sense of personal esteem, and to encourage them to engage in activism to create change socially, politically and personally. The groups have been encouraged to undertake public speaking, fundraising and letter writing campaigns.

The program emphasizes increasing the girls' media savvy and body image awareness. As the evaluation report indicated, "the groups seem self aware...that this type of activism must start with high self-esteem." Survey data analyzed by the program indicated success in improving self esteem. Staff suggests that when the teens present to other teens, they focus on sending the "empowering" message of stronger self-image.

The two programs have provided a variety of presentations to area teens about body image, eating disorders and activism. In addition they have received formal training in lobbying and have been involved in Lobby Day at the Minnesota State Capitol to advocate for increased funding for eating disorder education. Interestingly, girl participants agreed to use their consumer power to both support products, such as movies and magazines that incorporate healthy images of girls, and to boycott products that do not. Girls are actively engaged in letter writing campaigns in support of their boycott.

Girls in the program have said this about their lobbying and public presentation experiences:

Breaking the gender barrier. "This will help me to have a voice when I get a job and it teaches me to be confident in myself. Women have come so far gaining rights for themselves, but we still have a long way to go. This is another step to break the gender barrier."

Support products I like. "I will support movies that I like and not support the movies that are, in my opinion, wrong. And I will tell the producers if I like their production."

The following data were provided in the 2006 final report on I Am and Go Girls!™ (GC):

- 19 I AM girls participated in an event called "**Throwing Your Weight Around**" in which they presented to 60 girls in 3rd-5th grades on the topic of accepting yourself and others differences.
- 91 % of the "veteran" GG completed the year with the following attendance: 2 at 100%; 4 at 94%; 3 at 88% and 1 at 81% (Stage One)
- GG collaborated with 5 other organizations to bring Erin Walsh (National Institute on Media and the Family) to Wabasha, Lake City, Cannon Falls, and Red Wing. The girls introduced Erin at each of the schools. Over 1,000 students were reached over the two days she presented. Two girls were key in meeting with the high school principal and superintendent to get

approval for a full school assembly for her visit in Red Wing. In addition they also hosted a community event with over 100 community members in attendance. There was an information table with GG literature at this event.

- GG presented to 5th and 6th graders in Wabasha, 7th grade health classes in Red Wing, 8th, 9th and 10th grade health classes in Goodhue, 11th and 12th grade psychology classes in Red Wing, and 10th grade health classes in Lake City.
- GG presented to the following community groups: Wabasha Mentor Program; Rotary; Higherself Board; Girls Scouts; and I AM Orientation.
- GG participated in the annual Diversity Festival; Autumn Fest; Children's First; Crazy Days; River City Days Parade and Art and Soup Fundraiser.
- GG presented to mothers and daughters at Media Mania an event of Lake City Girl's Circle. GG were invited to speak at the 16th Annual Minnesota Coalition of Adolescent Females Conference in Plymouth, MN on March 27, 2006. They had over 100 adults in their breakout. (Stage Three)
- GG were invited to present at the State AAUW Convention which was held in Red Wing, MN in April. The feedback was very positive and two women came up wanting to start a GG group in their community. Over 30 women were in attendance.

Findings Outcome Four: The Initiative builds activism throughout the state for girls' economic well-being

Data provided in grantee evaluation reports indicated that at least six of the sites identified progress in this area within the context of working on other Initiative outcomes. As has been noted, the data suggested that girls have developed and are practicing leadership skills, and are exercising those skills in activism for various causes and issues. There is also evidence that the successes of the girlsBEST sites, and the accomplishments and leadership stances of the girls, have led to increased partnerships that benefit the girlsBEST programs, as well as community-level changes and institutional changes.

Increased Partnership

There is evidence that the sites have and are continuing to develop community partnerships to provide a more comprehensive array of services and supports for girls. Here are some key examples:

- The AIFC program has developed a strong ongoing partnership with the Saint Paul Public School. The district refers girls to the program, and in return AIFC works with the system to encourage girls' school attendance and to provide academic supports.
- The Dream Girls developed a partnership with area businesses that allowed them to start a poster business. The professionals from two firms taught the girls how to use software programs to produce print materials, and the firms have provided document printing for cost.
- Dream Girls has also developed numerous collaborative partnerships in the community, including Pine Technical College, the Mora Business and Professional Women and the local Kinship program which has provided one on one mentors for the girls.

Community Changes

There are also indications of increased community support for the girlsBEST programs. The following are examples”

- Site mentors suggested that the girls' consistent, and sometimes gutsy, presentations to community groups have increased support in the communities for girls. For example following a presentation to a Business and Professional Women's Association in one site, the girls in the program received an unsolicited check for \$2000.
- Two girls involved in the Stompin' Grounds program have received community awards. One received the Staples Community Foundation's Youth of the Year award; another received one of two Outstanding Youth Worker awards from the Staples Motley Area Chamber of Commerce. As one of the girls wrote, "Hopefully they will see that we are doing good things and will stop in for some coffee to support us."

- The Ogichidakweg program has engendered increased in-kind support for the program including space and janitorial services for summer workshops at two community centers, donated space and equipment, lunches for summer workshop participants, and transportation costs. These increased levels of tribal and local government support have clearly indicated that the program is developing a stronger local support network.

Institutional Changes

At least two significant institutional changes have been documented in girlsBEST sponsor sites. In one site, girls participating in the site receive a scholarship if they are admitted to college. In another, the school district has elected to significantly expand girls programming.

- St. Cloud State University has made a commitment to provide scholarships to high school girls successfully gaining entrance to SCSU as a result of the support they have received from the Sisters in Action program.
- The Moorhead school district requested Mas Que Suenos to offer sessions at the Area Alternative school, now with approximately 75% Hispanic enrollment. The alternative school sessions, planned by the girls, are offered for credit. Additionally, the district has granted permission to offer a second Mas Que Suenos meeting at the high school, giving the program the potential to reach as many as 50 Latinas each week.

While this clearly suggests that there is increased ongoing collaboration within communities to serve girls, there is not enough information to confirm that such increased collaboration also “builds activism for girls’ economic well-being throughout the state.”

Summary of Findings and Outcomes

There is strong evidence that the girlsBEST programs were successful in achieving both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, and in providing important knowledge to the youth development field about programming for girls. The evidence confirms that girlsBEST:

- **Reached and benefited a significant number of low income and under-served girls.** The girlsBEST sites focused considerable effort on outreach to under-served girls; those efforts clearly proved successful.
- **Helped build a cadre of self confident girls.** The majority of core group girls show a highly developed sense of self and a strong sense that they can accomplish whatever they aspire to. This is one of the stunning accomplishments of girlsBEST, and its strongest outcome. An overwhelming 93% of core group girls believe “I can accomplish whatever I set out to.” Evidence suggests that this outcome derives from the strong support of multiple mentors, including: site mentors/staff, professional women in the community, women of the same cultural heritage as participants, women business owners, and older girls and peers. Moreover, girls have had numerous opportunities to exercise leadership in their communities, with the strong support and encouragement of other women

The girls in the program often told us in interviews and focus groups that they felt very sure they could do anything they wanted. Here is how one girl described her try-out for the football team, and another described her belief in her ability to accomplish her goals:

“I saw that I could do anything that the men could do. Like I knew that I could do anything. If it wasn’t for the group telling me that, and the girls saying that they can do anything that the guys do. ...We can do anything they can do and if it wasn’t for them telling me that, I wouldn’t have joined.”

“I do feel self confident. I feel like I can do anything I want. As long as I work hard. I know that I can achieve my dreams. It’s just a matter of time. I mean I’m just in high school now. Every goal I make I achieve them. And being in this organization makes me even more confident. Because now I have the power to – I’m more confident to speak out about my opinions. I’m just more confident that I can achieve things.”

This is how another girlsBEST core participant described her journey to self-confidence:

“At first I was like so down. And I had like no self-respect or self-esteem. Now I have self respect and I have self esteem. It’s like I now know that everything I’ve been learned throughout these whole, like years, (is true). It’s really helped me.”

- **Provided the fundamental underpinnings of economic well being.** Girls involved in the Initiative gained far more than simply an understanding of financial management skills, although it is clear they learned basic financial literacy. Economic well-being is strongly founded on the ability to envision the future and set goals. In girlsBEST, girls

clearly learned to set goals; 93% of the 328 core group girls responding to surveys over two years agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how to set goals. Over 85 % of the girls agreed that they knew what kind of career they wanted to have and that they knew what education or training they needed to prepare for that career. This is how one girl described the results of the girlsBEST emphasis on economic well-being:

“When we are older, we will be able to live our lives on our own and by ourselves. We can handle financial responsibilities, use skills that we acquired. We can look back and see what we’ve done. We can do it without worrying about what is going to happen.”

- **Built aspirations for educational success.** Importantly, 82% of girls said that the program has helped them understand that the choices they make today directly affect their futures. If education is the key to economic well-being, it is significant that 96% of participating girls plan to graduate from high school, and 94% of girls believe that they will attend college. Site mentors reported that few girls had parents will post-secondary background. The sites were able to provide girls with what then would be an otherwise unobtainable sense of the importance of higher education. This is how a 2005 participant described success:

“In my view, achieving success in life means that I have an education... Education is my first step of being successful. Not having goals for school would bring me nowhere...”

- **Achieved educational success.** The girlsBEST sites’ emphasis on the importance of academic achievement, high school graduation and college was successful in increasing graduation rates and in enrolling young women in college. Several of the sites maintained statistics on graduation and/or college entrance to track progress toward academic goals. In two projects, staff reported that all eligible girls graduated from high school during the past two years. In another site, 27 girls enrolled in college during the final two years of the (2004-2006) program. In another site, largely serving Latinas, the program was very successful in increasing high school graduation rates, and encouraging college attendance. Here is how the site mentor described these outcomes:

“In 2006 all the girls who were seniors graduated from high school. They would not have graduated if we were not working with them. They didn’t even know the requirements for graduation. In our community, the minority student graduation rate is very low. Additionally, 75-80% have gone to college.”

When surveyed about educational aspirations over the past two years, nearly half of the girls (49%) reported that they would complete a four year degree (31%) or a graduate course of study (18%). Another 15% of girls reported that they intended to attain a two year technical college or AA degree.

- **Developed leadership skills.** A significant 87% of the core group of girlsBEST participants agreed or strongly agreed that they are leaders, in their schools and in their communities. Girls were given many opportunities for leadership: ranging from the simple planning of project activities to school involvement to more complex leadership activities such as launching community drug awareness presentations. Participants have received community

leadership awards, scholarships and fellowships for their leadership abilities. This is what a leader in one community said of the girls in the program:

“With the energy and enthusiasm and the right training I personally can say there’s a great possibility that these young people can be real leaders. It’s my guess that it can fairly well happen because what’s being planted here are the tools to do a lot of things. They might even go into politics with it. This is a tool that can be activated in so many ways.”

- **Built a degree of activism among young women.** Some girls clearly did adopt an activist stance as a result of their experiences in girlsBEST, campaigning for equal rights for girls and women. In one case, the girls in What About Us? decided to tackle head-on the problems of sexual violence and teen pregnancy in the Hmong community that result in many very young girls becoming homeless. The girls chose to address this problem by going to the board of Asian Media Access and asking for approval to begin raising funds for a homeless shelter for Hmong girls as part of AMA’s capital campaign. The AMA board approved the girls’ recommendation and fund-raising for a homeless shelter for Hmong teens has begun. In another site, the Redwing Higher Self I Am and Go Girls, girls have participated in workshops on lobbying and have extensively lobbied legislators and mounted sophisticated letter writing campaigns and boycotts of stores and media products that portray an unhealthy body image. In other sites, individual girls have taken leadership on such things as voter registration campaigns, a campaign to save a teacher’s job, drug awareness and disease awareness presentations. This does quite clearly show that girls’ leadership development can lead to activism – for various causes and issues. This is how two site mentors described girls’ activism:

“It has significantly helped to make strong, more confident girls so that they realize they can impact and make change in the world. Adults and teachers say they can see a difference in girls and their confidence. They are making a difference by educating people about things they feel strongly about.”

“They have increased confidence and self-esteem, the ability to speak up. With experience, knowledge and practice, they are able to speak up, have the ability to say ‘We want this changed’, rather than getting in somebody’s face. They’re starting to think about how they present things, talk about things. Before, they might say this isn’t fair and get in your face about it. Once they’ve been exposed, they understand there are many sides to issues

Here is how a girlsBEST core participant described her movement to activism, and the realization that you need to speak out on issues that are important:

“By being in the group I feel that I have learned that you need to as an individual really stick up for what you believe in and not care what others think.... (girlsBEST) has really empowered me to be a stronger person and an advocate for women and their rights and these are just a few of the qualities that I will take with me next year as I move on.”

- **Increased commitment to work for equal opportunity.** It is of significance that nearly all (95%) of survey respondents in 2006 indicated that it is important to work for equal opportunity for girls and women. This strongly supports the girlsBEST program model, emphasizing a focus on equality for girls and women, and steady incremental progress toward advocacy.
- **Enhanced institutional and community support for girls programming.** Through persistence and accumulated successes, the girlsBEST sites have succeeded in enhancing institutional and community support for girls' programming. From guaranteed admission and scholarships at St. Cloud State University for girls graduating from the Sisters in Action program to expanded programming for the alternative high school in the Moorhead Mas Que Suenos program to increasing community support for the Stompin' Grounds coffee shop in Staples, the program has been successful in building institutional support and enhanced opportunity for girls.
- **Pilot tested and confirmed the value of this model of girl-specific programming, documenting its key elements.** The Women's Foundation of Minnesota has learned much about this model and approach to programming for girls. Its essential elements of mentoring, safe and supportive environments, cultural awareness, focus on leadership experiences and self-esteem, have been validated in a variety of ways, both in the outcomes achieved and in the professional judgment of the competent and committed women who have worked with the Foundation to provide programs for girls over the past five years.

Successes and Challenges

The girlsBEST Initiative has encountered and created some significant successes, particularly in creating model programs in which girls develop self-esteem, self-confidence and high aspirations. In turn, those self-confident girls are exercising leadership in their schools and communities, making the community a better place for girls and women. The signal successes of girlsBEST are these:

- Creating a safe, supportive and nurturing environment in which girls can thrive;
 - Developing consistent programming strategies that retain girls in programs, allowing programs to address the comprehensive dimensions of girls' economic readiness;
 - Culturally appropriate and sensitive programming;
 - Engendering self-confidence and self-esteem in girls;
 - Building girls' aspirations, particularly for college;
 - Enhancing graduation rates and college admissions;
 - Providing leadership opportunities for girls, in programs and in the communities;
 - Increasing activism on various issues and causes.
 - Developing a sustainable model of girls programming
- **Creating a safe, supportive and nurturing environment.** The girlsBEST Theory of Change has assumed that the creation of supportive environments for girls will lead to increased economic readiness. As the data reported over the past five years confirm, the sites have clearly done an extraordinary job of establishing safe, nurturing and supportive environments for girls. As one of the site mentors indicated in a 2005 interview:

“We’re a cocoon, an incubator, giving them a safe space to turn into who they’re going to become. They feel valued in the program. We provide a good climate to be nurtured.”

An important element of this nurturing environment has been the site mentors themselves. They understood that many of the participants came from under-resourced schools and sometimes from troubled families, and recognized how important it is for girls to receive consistent support from a caring adult. It is significant that many of the site mentors are of the girls' own culture, providing another dimension of role modeling. A variety of data, including site reports and surveys of girls, confirmed that the girls felt a strong connection to the site mentors, and believed that adults in the girlsBEST program cared about them.

In addition, girls developed relationships with professional women in the community, sometimes with former girlsBEST participants. In several projects, with the St. Cloud State University Sisters in Action program arguably the most developed, girls of color were matched for an intensive one on one relationship with a female student of color. As one of the mentors suggested, these relationships with older women have helped teach the girls that anything is possible:

“[It’s important] Having somebody just tell you that you can be successful, it’s possible. Constantly reinforcing that through our adult mentors. Constant

encouragement that you can do this. Getting their self-esteem to the point that they believe they can. Having one-on-one mentors has been helpful. I have seen such progress.”

- **Consistent programming strategies and consistent participation.** In five years of hard work, the girlsBEST sites developed a consistent and comprehensive approach to girls’ programming. Sites have demonstrated that each of the three program tracks: academic, entrepreneurial, public education played an important role in building girls’ self-esteem, knowledge, communication and leadership skills and commitment to advocacy. In addition, although it was sometimes difficult given the challenges of poverty, the sites also succeeded in building and sustaining a core of consistent participants who were able to benefit from the program model.

In terms of programming strategies, sites learned that developing girls' economic readiness requires a broad-based menu of academic activities, particularly college preparation, entrepreneurial opportunities, mentoring and support. These strategies have been effective in encouraging high academic aspirations, high school graduation and college entrance.

In addition, the sites learned that career emphases, often in conjunction with business and professional mentors, were important in forging girls’ aspirations. Financial literacy skill-building, often derived from experiential games and activities, has also proved important in building girls’ knowledge about the necessary elements of future success.

And a number of sites experimented with entrepreneurial activities, providing girls with what they called motivating and fun opportunities to develop concrete future skills.

The sites have also encouraged, albeit occasionally with difficulty, consistent participation in programs. Site mentors have stated that a core of consistent participants has been key to their success in providing comprehensive services to girls. As one mentor said, “I have seen such progress. Sometimes it’s simple things, but it’s the consistency that matters.” Here is how another mentor described the increasing consistency in participation:

“This year, it’s been that we’ve had 90% attendance in all of our programs. Overall, I would say it’s that girls went through multiple programs (e.g., started in middle school and continued into high school). So we’ve had continuity and consistency in attendance and participation.”

- **Culturally appropriate and sensitive programming.** Program mentors understood that cultural contexts, norms and traditions have a profound influence on girls’ economic conditions. Given that influence, programs emphasized culture in various ways, ranging from the American Indian Daughters of Tradition curriculum, to the Ogichidakweg model which emphasized youth leadership and youth organizing approaches that are culturally appropriate and effective in a reservation context. Girls in the AIFC program have had opportunities to participate in coming of age ceremonies, participated in costume making and decorating, and one of its girls has become an accomplished hoop dancer. The Moorhead Mas Que Suenos and Quinceaneras programs have a predominantly Latina staff and its programs heavily emphasized Hispanic culture and issues. So too did the Cambio! program which now enrolls girls of various ethnic backgrounds. What About Us? which served girls of a variety of Asian backgrounds, largely Hmong, emphasized education about its core

issues of gender inequality and sexual violence in ways that both embrace and seek to change the dominant culture.

Girls were provided with numerous opportunities to meet with women of color in various leadership roles, as well as having opportunities to hear from research about celebrated women of color. In one of the sites this year, girls had an opportunity to meet Nobel Prize winner, Rigoberto Menchu. In one site, Moorhead, the site evaluator reported last year that all of the girls nominated a Latina as a role model they hope to emulate. There is evidence that the girls have learned more about their own cultures, and their own unique cultural assets. This learning has helped to develop a strong sense of self-confidence and pride in self.

- **Engendering self-confidence and self-esteem in girls.** Survey data and site-based evaluation data clearly revealed that girls involved in girlsBEST developed a very strong belief in themselves and their ability to accomplish “anything I want.” An overwhelming 93% of the core girlsBEST participants agreed they can accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish. In focus groups and interviews, girls exuded self-confidence. They spoke enthusiastically about their goals, their aspirations and their firm belief in their ability to attain them. Site mentors reinforced the girls’ assessments, reporting that an increase in self-confidence has been “common.” The mentors often shared stories of shy girls who couldn’t make a phone call to an adult, who have become self-possessed and accomplished public speakers. This is a stunning success for the Initiative, and it is the program’s strongest outcome.

This is just one of numerous quotes from girls describing their sense of self-confidence:

“I’m really self-confident. I feel very confident about my goals in life. Because I want to be the President of the United States...I just want things to change. That’s what I want to do. And I feel confident that I will succeed in life, no matter what.”

- **Building girls’ aspirations, particularly for college.** The girlsBEST Initiative has been successful in building confident girls who aspire to high school completion and to post-secondary education. Nearly all (96%) of the participating (survey respondent) girls agreed or strongly agreed that they would graduate from high school. Nearly equal proportions of the girls agreed that they will go to college. When asked to specify their highest level of educational attainment, a clear majority, (64%) of the girls reported that they would have an Associate degree, a Bachelor’s degree or a graduate degree.
- **Enhancing graduation rates and college admissions.** In addition to building girls’ aspirations, the girlsBEST program has succeeded in increasing high school graduation rates, significantly so among immigrant girls and girls of color. Sites that tracked graduation and college admission reported significant increases in both graduation and college entrance. This strongly suggests that the program’s emphases on college visits, orientations, and hands-on college preparation have been successful. This is also another indicator of the success of girlsBEST programming in finding various ways to convince young women that their economic futures will be significantly improved with educational preparation.

- **Providing leadership opportunities for girls, in programs and in the communities.** The Women’s Foundation has been insistent on, and has modeled various ways for, girls taking leadership in the program sites. Mentors were encouraged to include girls in planning of site activities and in site governance. Mentors were also encouraged to provide girls with opportunities, and appropriate skill – building, to allow them to also exercise leadership in the community. This emphasis has proved important in encouraging girls to take a lead on issues of importance to them, and in encouraging institutions and communities to be more aware of the enormous contributions that girls can make. One of the mentors said in an 2005 interview that this has meant that the school has more “girl power:”

“There’s a lot more girl power in this school. More girls are involved in things, in leadership since the girlsBEST group has been around. There’s more awareness of sexism, financial differences, things like unequal earnings based on gender.”

Another mentor said that after four years of implementation, the girls’ increasing leadership has helped the community understand the importance of girls, and in turn helped girls learn that the community cares about them:

“The opportunity to organize within their own communities, the opportunity to be seen as a responsible contributor to the community, the opportunity to be seen by the next generation as role models. Being placed in that position motivated them to realize they weren’t invisible and people did care what their actions were.”

- **Activism on various issues and causes has been increased.** It is clear that the participants in girlsBEST have been leaders and important contributors to their schools and communities, taking activist stances on a wide range of issues. Although reasons of methodology did not permit measurement of community attitude change, community leaders and others have suggested that this level of activism has, in turn, created expanded community awareness of issues affecting girls and greater willingness to support ways to address those issues. That is an important beginning in achieving one of the Initiative’s intended outcomes – increasing the perceived value of girls and women in the society.
- **Developing a sustainable model for girls’ programming.** The outcomes of girlsBEST clearly support the validity and value of this model and approach to girls’ programs. The model, its program tracks and best practices, successfully implemented in sites across the state, have created a roadmap from which organizations, schools and communities can create programs that lead to significant attitude, skill and academic gains for girls.

Challenges

The girlsBEST programs have also encountered challenges. Many related to the girls’ life circumstances of racism, poverty and low expectations. Some girls came from families with a history of drug abuse. Many lived in resource-poor, rural communities, with few opportunities for girls. Other challenges were institutional, such as the need to insure consistent funds for programming. Other challenges related directly to the Foundation’s expectations for evaluation, program outcomes, and reporting requirements of sites. The most significant challenges of the Initiative were:

- Multiple barriers of poverty
- Resources for sustainability
- **Multiple barriers of poverty.** Given the Initiative’s success in enrolling under-served and low income girls, it is unsurprising that many of the girls experienced barriers. Mentors suggested that girls experience a variety of difficult family and living situations, including: poor community role models, limited expectations, family financial and social pressures. Site mentors have had to address issues of drug abuse, mental health issues, family dysfunction. Mentors said that many of the girls needed extensive assistance, even case management. Many suffered the effects of racism and low expectations. Here is how site mentors defined these barriers:

“Often, it’s their personal lives, being low income, sometimes from a large family, having multiple responsibilities. They have difficult home lives. That’s a tough reality that about half of the girls face. They need something positive in their lives. Sometimes they’ve been in trouble and we want to help them see that healthy, positive changes are important. Some of these girls need intensive case management. We meet as a group every other week, but some girls need guidance daily, or 2-3 times a week. Finding those resources has never been easy. We’ve taken a lot of it on.”

“There are multiple barriers: immigration, you can’t open a checking or savings account without a social security number, poverty; some come from unsafe, abusive homes, so just to get to school is huge. These are in addition to issues such as body image, eating disorders, drugs and alcohol.”

“They live in unenriched environments and are disenfranchised at school very early. They don’t have the money to be in sports or to rent band equipment and they don’t have the transportation to get there.”

These barriers presented significant programming challenges in the girlsBEST sites. However, the site mentors have been quite resourceful in developing partnerships and finding referral resources and maximizing services available to girls. However, as the Initiative moves forward into a next phase, it will be important to understand that poverty and disenfranchisement are important issues, requiring substantial support for girls. As one of the site mentors pointed out, those who provide this kind of programming for girls have “taken a lot on.”

- **Resources for sustainability.** Toward the end of the five year Initiative, sites struggled to find sufficient soft-money resources to sustain programs. The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota has made various efforts to help sites secure funding, including consultation on fund-raising and a limited matching grants program for sites that are successful in fund raising. While all of the girlsBEST sites have found sufficient funds to sustain some level of programming, it has proved somewhat difficult to find consistent resources to continue the consistent and comprehensive programs that characterized girlsBEST.

Lessons Learned in girlsBEST and Future Steps

- **Girls' programming is a critical, ongoing need**

Programs that serve the unique needs of girls are necessary and important contributors to girls' future success. Sustained experience with girlsBEST has confirmed the value of the girlsBEST model in building self-confident, motivated, girls who have set goals for the future financial independence. However, despite the success of girls-only programs, they remain largely available, particularly to girls living in poverty, to girls of color and or girls in small, rural communities. The research base from which girlsBEST was derived indicated a generalized lack of program and leadership opportunities for girls in the state. That program void continues. The Foundation's work to provide both technical assistance and matching funds support to the original girlsBEST grantees will allow them to continue programs and services for girls. Additionally, the Foundation's creation of a permanent endowment to sustain girls' programming is an important step forward for women and girls in Minnesota.

Based on the successes of girlsBEST, the Foundation has elected to continue girlsBEST into a second phase. To assist this, and other goals, the Foundation has moved toward creating a permanent source of support for girls' programming by launching a four-year, \$15 million comprehensive campaign. One of the goals of the campaign is to create a permanent fund for girls – the first such fund in the nation for any women's fund. The campaign is designed to double the Women's Foundation of Minnesota's endowment, amplify its voice, and accelerate its investment in social change. Specifically, the campaign will direct the following resources to girls programs:

- **Create a permanent funding stream for girlsBEST.** As was noted, girlsBEST was the first program of its kind in the nation when launched in 2002. The Women's Foundation of Minnesota will designate \$3.3 million to create a permanent girlsBEST fund.
- **Double the Women Foundation of Minnesota's endowment for future giving.** The campaign will add \$11 million to our endowment, doubling the number of grants the Women's Foundation can give to nonprofit organizations in Minnesota championing equality for women and girls. At the present time, the Foundation is forced to turn away 80 percent of the funding requests it receives annually.

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- **The girlsBEST program model, of sustained, consistent and comprehensive services and activities to girls has proved both workable and effective. It is an important guide for effective future programming.**
-

Evaluation evidence has largely confirmed that helping girls build their readiness to achieve economic well-being is a complex undertaking. In achieving important outcomes of self-confidence, enhanced educational attainment and post-secondary participation, a focus on the future and a set of practical and leadership skills, the sites have proved their efficacy in helping girls prepare for a successful future. In so doing, the girlsBEST sites have provided clear evidence that a single program strategy is not sufficient. Instead, the data confirm that girls achieve success in a mix of academic programming, career and entrepreneurial activities and opportunities to work toward public awareness of issues they care about. The next generation of

girlsBEST funding will support continuation of a comprehensive model of girls' programming. And the Foundation will encourage sites to work toward the sustained participation of girls in programs.

In the Foundation's plans for the next generation of girlsBEST, grantees will be encouraged to plan and develop programs and services in each of the three primary areas or program "tracks." The following are activities which sites are being asked to plan and for which they will be supported:

- **Academics:** Career-awareness activities; mentoring younger girls; academic and personal goal-setting; college visits; financial literacy activities; healthy behaviors/sexuality programs; college planning workshops; college applications; tutoring; college admission prep; summer camp (instruction/social).
- **Entrepreneurship:** Networking with business women; fundraising; career fairs; non-traditional skill-building; girl-planned and operated businesses; arts and media skill-building; project/product development; business visits; outreach about non-traditional careers.
- **Public awareness:** Legislative lobbying; presentation skill-building; petition drives and issue advocacy; cable access education programs.

-
- **Girls need consistency and supportive environments. Among the essential elements of supportive environments is honoring and celebrating girls' cultural heritage.**
-

The girlsBEST sites have excelled in creating a climate in which girls are nourished and supported. This has been particularly important given the program's success in recruiting and engaging under-served girls. Programs have worked hard and successfully to create trusting relationships between girls and adult mentors, and among peers. That has, in turn, led older girls to provide nurturing and mentoring of younger girls. The Initiative has demonstrated the importance of site mentors in establishing a safe and nurturing environment. This has proved particularly true when site mentors are of the girls own cultural community. girlsBEST has also demonstrated that learning about and celebrating one's own culture enhances self esteem.

Going forward into the second phase of girlsBEST, sites will be encouraged to embed cultural awareness into programming, while maintaining the focus on attracting girls from communities of color. Evaluation in the second phase will focus on documenting the various ways in which such environments are created, as well as their effects on self-esteem, educational attainment and leadership skill.

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- **Girls excel in environments in which they feel valued, competent and capable. These environments have led to stunning gains in girls' self-confidence and competence in their personal lives and the larger community.**
-

The girlsBEST sites have clearly demonstrated the value of providing girls with supported opportunities to achieve success. Adult mentors are critical in creating such environments through activities, such as one-on-one tutoring or other ongoing relationships with girls, providing praise while consistently voicing high expectations, encouraging discussions about issues. Equally important are opportunities for leadership and for contributing to the community. Girls thrive when they are given opportunities to take risks, to speak out and to achieve success. Findings clearly show

that those opportunities built self-confidence. Girls in this program have felt a sense of agency; that they have the confidence, the skills and the ability to make change. Girls have consistently reported that they feel competent and powerful. They also report that they have had success in changing attitudes and opinions.

Given the lessons learned about supportive environments and leadership opportunities, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota has identified several model practices which will be incorporated into the next generation of girlsBEST programs:

1. **Mentoring and supporting girls:** Sites will be asked to provide girls with adult mentors, tutors and other ongoing supports. These can include one on one or group mentoring opportunities, emphasizing cultural connections and relationships with professional women.
2. **Focus on cultural awareness:** Sites will be encouraged to provide activities and forums in which girls can learn more about their culture, take part in cultural events, meet with and research celebrated women of color, and come to understand the unique assets and unique challenges of their cultural communities.
3. **Leadership development:** One of the most important factors contributing to growth in girls' self-confidence and leadership skills is allowing girls to take leadership within their girlsBEST programs. Girls should be given multiple opportunities to plan events and carry them out, even when staff knows they might not succeed. Programs can also emphasize leadership development through workshops and opportunities to meet with women leaders.
4. **Outreach to under-represented girls:** Sites should be continuously and actively engaged in outreach to underrepresented girls.

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- **Girls need multiple exposures to ideas, skills and experiences. This suggests the efficacy of the stages of change and further suggests the need for continuous, sustained programming for girls.**
-

The Theory of Change underlying girlsBEST is that girls progress in stages from an early awareness stage to one in which they are able to take leadership in the larger community. It suggested that there is a kind of continuum of knowledge, to skill, to accomplishment. Evaluation evidence has confirmed the validity of this theory. With multiple exposures to ideas and to opportunities, a number of girls did move towards activism. Girls and site mentors consistently reported that they needed first to become familiar with issues, such as wage inequality, before they were able to understand the importance of taking action. To take action, girls consistently reported that they needed to develop basic skills and have opportunities to practice those skills. Throughout the life of the Initiative, core girls moved progressively to a greater awareness of the issues and barriers affecting women and to a commitment to take action.

Evaluation evidence suggests that progress along a continuum of change is not necessarily linear. As one site mentor pointed out, these are adolescents. Progress toward advocacy seems dependent on various factors including the perceived importance of the issues, girls' level of interest and skills, and the availability of opportunities to act. This confirms that moving girls toward efficacy and ultimately advocacy requires frequent and continuous exposure to ideas, multiple opportunities for learning, supported opportunities for practice. From a programmatic perspective, this suggests the need for continuous and sustained programming with a core group of over a number of years.

Episodic programming and/or irregular participation does not appear to lead to the kind of outcomes intended. The lesson is that change of this depth takes time and effort.

The next generation of girlsBEST will be focused on applying the model and these lessons with a new group of programs. Programs have received considerable technical assistance in the model during a planning stage; planners and program staff have been briefed on model practices and the theory of change. Foundation staff will continue to work with sites over a period of up to three years as they implement, assess and fine-tune programs.

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- **Clarity of Foundation expectations is important. A limited number of achievable outcomes would help focus program resources and enhance accountability.**
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The girlsBEST Initiative was a venturesome and ambitious model, with five over-arching program outcomes. girlsBEST sites were encouraged to choose one or two of the Initiative outcomes on which to focus their efforts. As data were analyzed and reported, it became clear that at least two of the stated outcomes represented either an essential value of girlsBEST – serving under-served and under-represented girls – or was an integral part of the emerging model – creating and sustaining supportive environments for girls. As such, both needed to be addressed in all programs; not simply a few programs. Moreover, while each outcome was important, sites suggested that number of outcomes sometimes tended to dissipate focus. The important lesson is to focus resources and energy on the most central and important outcomes.

Given this lesson, the next generation of girlsBEST will focus on two essential outcomes:

- To increase the readiness of girls to achieve economic independence and well-being
- To increase public education, activism and advocacy on behalf of girls' economic independence and well being throughout Minnesota

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- **Baseline data and clear parameters for evaluation are important to accountability and learning.**
-

girlsBEST site mentors sometimes complained that evaluation expectations were not clear. Over the past several months, an internal-external evaluation team has been identifying indicators and measures of the two Initiative outcomes. An evaluation plan, with timelines and responsibility designations, has been developed and will be shared with grantees. The evaluation plan includes clear plans for baseline data on academic achievement, graduation rates and college placements. Girls will be surveyed on entrance and exit and the program will implement pre-and post-program measures of self esteem. Evaluation will largely be a Foundation responsibility, but all expectations of grantees will be clearly described and frequently communicated. That will minimize any concerns that arose during the first phase of girlsBEST.

A diverse girlsBEST advisory committee will continue to conduct site visits, program visits and review evaluation data to make grant recommendations to the board of trustees. This group now includes past girlsBEST program mentors and girls, in addition to community members and girls, trustees and staff. The foundation's leadership and programmatic staff will also continue to offer technical skills through evaluation and structured program visits that identify groups' key capacity building needs.

girlsBEST Site Descriptions

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American Indian Family Center, St. Paul

American Indian culture is the foundation on which the AIFC girlsBEST project was based. The project focused on connecting girls with American Indian women who have not only achieved economic success by western standards, but also have a strong sense of their American Indian identity and culture. The project was designed to: create a supportive environment in which girls feel supported, increase girls' knowledge about careers and career goal-setting, and increase knowledge of financial planning.

Asian Media Access, Minneapolis

What About Us? (WAU) was planned and designed by a core group of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) teen girls. Its purpose was to educate peers, parents and the larger community about gender inequality and sexual violence in the Asian community. WAU was built on the belief that by openly discussing sexual violence and gender inequality, prevention strategies can be established. WAU participants learned hands on skills in media development and public presentation, and have developed an array of promotional materials, both print and video. The teens also participate in a regular local access cable broadcast, in which they discuss the issues of gender inequality, sexual violence, and teen pregnancy with community leaders.

El Colegio, Minneapolis

Cambio!, means change in Spanish. Cambio was offered as a credit class for students at El Colegio charter school, and it was intended to provide a supportive environment for girls and to increase their readiness to achieve economic well-being. Girls participating in Cambio met once each week during the school day. Curricula included: financial literacy education, provided by a female financial advisor and including a variety of exercises, including how to open a savings account, how to develop a budget and how to apply for a loan. In addition, the Cambio girls put their financial skills into practice, managing a school store. Girls were also provided various opportunities to learn about college and college life. In 2005, a participant in the group received an Ann Bancroft grant, receiving \$500 to help train a dog through the program Helping Paws. In spring 2006, this dog graduated from the program and was placed with a family. The girl, who helped train the dog, attended the dog's graduation ceremony and made a public presentation.

Higher Self, Redwing

"The I AM(It's All About Me) and **GO GIRLS!**TM programs were designed to increase self-esteem, prevent eating disorders, increase confidence, improve body image, educate about the role of the media in shaping girls' self-image and in general to help girls build more healthy lives. The I AM program offered to girls in 6-8th grades, combined dance and other physical movement to help girls feel more comfortable in their bodies while incorporating lessons on assertiveness, courage, self-esteem, gossiping, peer pressure, identity, respect, individuality, health, media and body image. **GO GIRLS!**TM (Giving Our Girls Inspiration and Resources for Lasting Self Esteem) involved girls in 9-12th grades working together to promote responsible advertising and to advocate for positive body images of youth by the media and major retailers. Throughout, the girls were engaged in numerous public speaking opportunities (locally and nationally), fundraising and letter writing campaigns, conference participation and other advocacy activities

Family Pathways Youth Service

Dream Girls provided girls in the rural community of Mora with skills and awareness for a positive economic future. The program was comprised of *Dream Girls*, for grades 8-12 and *Junior Dream Girls* for grades 5-7; senior girls provided mentoring for younger girls. Dream Girls were girls who are striving to become “Determined, Responsible, Educated, Achieving, and Motivated girls and young women, learning to live life by choice, not chance.” Through a variety of activities that build girls’ self-esteem and confidence, *Dream Girls* worked to create a supportive environment for girls to make positive decisions about their economic future. A number of the participants had individual mentors through a local Kinship program. Girls participated in college tours, and a variety of career exploration events. This past year, in partnership with local tech firms, the girls developed a business, producing posters to promote local events.

Mujeres Unidas of the Red River Valley, Moorhead

Two girls clubs, **Quinceaneras** and **Mas Que Suenos**, were created to prepare girls for high school success and college by increasing girls’ awareness of post-secondary options, providing active academic support with college entrance exams and linking girls to Latino student activities and experience at Moorhead State University and other area colleges. Quinceaneras was for younger girls ages 9-14, and Mas Que Suenos was for older teens. In Mas Que Suenos, the curriculum was culturally based, and the focus was very strongly on improved academic performance and graduation. Graduation rates among Latinas increased significantly over the course of the program, and the school district allowed them to expand into the area alternative learning center.

Partners for Quality Education, Staples

Stompin' Grounds Coffee Shop is a girl-run business that first opened its doors in April, 2003. Stompin' Grounds is a coffee shop that the original group of girls visioned, planned and developed and “sold” to the community as a self-sustaining enterprise. The coffee shop provides hands-on training in business operations, including purchasing, marketing, and customer relations. A core group of girls took responsibility for data entry, ordering of supplies for the coffee shop, counter work and other tasks. Over the years the coffee shop became a community gathering place, offering activities ranging from children’s story nights to sessions on abstinence education to open mike nights for local talent. The girls have used the space to help educate the community about women’s issues. During its third anniversary year, the Stomping Grounds expanded both indoors and outdoors. This year, Stompin' Grounds has moved closer to its goal of being a self-supporting nonprofit business, with sales expected to exceed \$58,000.

St. Cloud State University Women's Center, St. Cloud

Sisters in Action was intended to increase high school graduation and college enrollment through mentoring of junior high and high school-aged girls of color in the St. Cloud Area School District. Mentors were racially and ethnically diverse women students from St. Cloud State University (Sisters in Action); several were international students of African heritage, matched with recent immigrant girls of Somali or Ethiopian origin. Participating girls were identified as needing help with academic achievement and/or behavior at school, and who were capable of succeeding in college. Through group mentoring activities, girls built their awareness of a range of issues including college preparation, women’s employment, career awareness, nutrition and healthy eating, healthy relationships, racial and cultural diversity and a range of social justice issues. In addition, one on one weekly sessions provided opportunities for work on academic, personal and social goals, and for helping the girls meet their personal goals. SCSU

has committed to providing a substantial scholarship for mentees who are admitted to the University.

In Progress, Cass Lake

Ogichidaakweg (Sisters in Leadership) was a mentoring project designed to teach American Indian girls the techniques and skills of digital photography, video production and writing, and to nurture their public voices, leadership and academic readiness. The program began on the Leech Lake reservation in 1998, subsequently expanding to the Bois Forte nation. Each year, a core group of mentors planned and conducted ten-day summer digital media arts workshops for teens at various sites in the Leech Lake and Bois Forte nations. Student digital artwork was exhibited in a number of venues in and outside of the reservation communities, including a Saint Paul Art Crawl, the Walker Art Center and the National Media Education Conference. A business venture sold girls' photographs and note cards.

Warren Alvarado Oslo High School, Warren

GIRLS (Gaining Real Leadership Skills) focused on leadership development, entrepreneurial skill development and activism. The girls operated the school store at the Warren Alvarado Oslo High School and an air-brush T-shirt making business. Various female professionals helped the girls with buying, with technical skills such as bookkeeping and accounting, and other management skills. Girls planned and participate in bi-weekly and monthly skill-building events, many of which including practice at public speaking. Girls were regularly involved in developing and delivering sales presentation and soliciting new business accounts, as well as making presentations about their program to school board members.

Women's Initiative for Self-Empowerment and the Minnesota African Women's Association, St. Paul and Minneapolis

The **Girls Getting Ahead Leadership Program (GGAL)** was a collaborative project of five immigrant and refugee organizations, intended to prepare immigrant and refugee girls in the Twin Cities to apply for and go to college. Girls (and their parents) attended a variety of workshops on various aspects of preparing for college, such as financial aid and taking college entrance tests. Guest speakers, including admissions officers and minority students, provide the girls with first-hand knowledge of college expectations and college life; the girls have also visited several college campuses. Girls also participated in one on one meetings with mentors who helped them set goals and create action plans for college preparation.

Faribault Youth Enrichment Services, Faribault

The **FRIENDDS** program sought to “bolster self-esteem, develop leadership skills, and explore careers with professional women in the community.” Girls were also encouraged to volunteer in the greater Faribault community. Members met for twice a week after school workshops that emphasized interpersonal problem solving and communication skills, such as issues the girls have with sexuality and relationships with boyfriends, academic problems, getting along with teachers, split up of parents, etc. Some of the activities were largely social activities, including attendance at the Chanhassen Dinner Theatre, also an opportunity to practice the social skills the program emphasizes. In other sessions, the girls visited with persons in various career areas, and in various community service projects. Several times each year, the girls made a presentation to parents and community persons, including a talk and a visual display, on a topic of personal interest. **(Project not continued from year two)**

Guadalupe Alternative Programs, St.Paul

Sista/sista. This program was a leadership and mentoring program for high school-aged girls attending Guadalupe Alternative Program. The program encouraged girls to gather systematic information about work or post-secondary education through conversations with business and professional women, and through college visits. Girls focused on recruiting new participants to the group, and in serving as role models for junior high girls at the school. Girls have arranged to have a state legislator visit the school, developed a Dios de los Muertos presentation on famous women, and also developed a breast cancer awareness program. **(Project not continued from year two)**

Women's Transitional Housing Coalition, Duluth

Home Girls was a training program for girls in the construction trades, designed to involve young women in confidence-building and training activities in the construction trades. The program grew out of a Women In Construction training project at WTHC, when a group of women decided to begin their own women-owned company, and use the profits to provide training for at-risk girls. The program was designed and governed by a girls' advisory council, which served as both a training opportunity, and provides direction to the project. Through the project, staff made various presentations to at-risk girls about opportunities in the construction trades. In addition, direct participants attend workshops on careers and career options. Girls also had the opportunity to participate in hands-on workshops where they built things like compact disc racks, chairs, and a playhouse that was subsequently auctioned off. Several girls attended a week-long skill development camp. Home Girls also hosted a Women in Construction Expo. (The Foundation worked with Home Girls to modify their program model to include a core group of younger girls because the girls making presentations in the community were over the age eligibility for girlsBEST. However, in 2005, the project elected not to continue in girlsBEST. **(Project elected not to continue in girlsBEST)**)

Survey Findings: girlsBEST 2005 – 2006

Survey Findings

Outcome 1: Economic Readiness Stage One Awareness

	2005-2006 (N = 134)	2006-2007 (N= 194)
	Frequency	Percent
How the choices I make right now will affect the future	4.5	4.04
The barriers women and girls face in getting equal pay	4.23	4.33
Able to resist pressures to drink, use drugs, other risky...	4.21	4.19
About my own cultural traditions	3.87	4.24
That I can accomplish whatever I set out to	4.52	4.48
Skills I need to take care of myself financially	4.02	4.17
I will graduate from high school	4.79	4.72
I will go to college	4.71	4.62
That it is important....to have a child when I'm ready...	4.68	4.59
I know how to support myself financially	4.26	4.24
Women who finish college earn more		4.18

Outcome 1: Economic Readiness Stage Two Agency

	Frequency	Percent
How to set goals for my future	4.35	4.41
Choices for college and post secondary	4.23	4.05
What education or training I need for the career I want	4.18	4.33
Skilled at planning activities and programs for our site	4.05	4.02
Skilled at running a small business	3.58	3.43
I believe that I am a leader	4.39	4.28

Outcome 1: Economic Readiness Stage Three Activism

	Frequency	Percent
Skilled at speaking out in the community about issues I care about	3.77	3.9
I believe that it is important to work for equal opportunity	4.57	
I have spoken out on issues that affect girls and women		3.94

Outcome 2: Supportive Environments Stage One Awareness

	2005-2006 (N = 134)	2006-2007 (N= 194)
	Frequency	Percent
There is an adult mentor who cares about me	4.42	4.39
I always feel safe	4.33	4.36
The older girls make efforts to help me	3.95	4.03
I feel comfortable talking to other girls about sensitive issues	3.77	3.84

Outcome 2: Supportive Environments Stage Two Agency

	Frequency	Percent
I know how to be a good role model for younger girls	4.48	4.27
I feel that professional women are helping me plan for my career	4.16	4.17
I feel supported by the women in my community	4.13	4.14
Mentoring younger girls		3.70

Outcome 2: Supportive Environments Stage Three Activism

	Frequency	Percent
I know how to help change my school so it will be better for girls	4.02	4.15
I know how to make my community better for girls and women		4.03
I had a chance to be a leader in one or more of our activities		3.97

HOW DO YOU FEEL AT OR BECAUSE OF girlsSBEST?

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
There is an adult mentor who cares about me						
Strongly Agree	69	54%	104	54%	173	54%
Agree	45	35%	63	33%	108	34%
Not Sure	14	11%	21	11%	35	11%
Strongly Disagree			2	1%	2	1%
Disagree			1	1%	1	0.31%
Always feel safe						
Strongly Agree	59	46%	94	49%	153	48%
Agree	54	43%	77	41%	131	41%
Not Sure	12	9%	14	7%	26	8%
Disagree	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Comfortable talking to other girls about sensitive issues						
Agree	51	40%	79	41%	130	41%
Not Sure	34	27%	41	21%	75	24%
Strongly Agree	31	24%	52	27%	83	26%
Disagree	10	8%	16	8%	26	8%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%	3	2%	5	2%
Supported by the women in my community						
Agree	60	47%	90	47%	150	47%
Strongly Agree	44	34%	68	36%	112	35%
Not Sure	20	16%	26	14%	46	14%
Disagree	4	3%	5	3%	9	3%
Strongly Disagree			2	1%	2	1%
Able to resist pressures to drink, use drugs, other risky...						
Strongly Agree	57	45%	85	45%	142	45%
Agree	53	41%	75	39%	128	40%
Not Sure	8	6%	17	9%	25	8%
Disagree	8	6%	11	6%	19	6%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%	3	2%	5	2%

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Professional women..are helping me plan for my career						
Agree	62	48%	82	43%	144	45%
Strongly Agree	45	35%	75	39%	120	38%
Disagree	4	3%	26	14%	30	9%
Not Sure	17	13%	7	4%	24	8%
Strongly Disagree			1	1%	1	0.31%

The older girls make efforts to help me

Agree	62	49%	86	46%	148	47%
Strongly Agree	34	27%	61	32%	95	30%
Not Sure	25	20%	7	4%	32	10%
Disagree	3	2%	32	17%	35	11%
Strongly Disagree	3	2%	3	2%	6	2%

WHAT DO YOU KNOW BECAUSE OF girlsBEST?

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
The barriers women and girls face in getting equal pay						
Agree	59	54%	77	41%	136	43%
Strongly Agree	50	45%	77	41%	127	40%
Not Sure	16	15%	26	14%	42	13%
Disagree	1	1%	4	2%	5	2%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%

What education or training I need for the career I want

Agree	54	42%	57	29%	111	37%
Strongly Agree	46	36%	98	50%	144	48%
Not Sure	17	13%	21	11%	38	13%
Disagree	2	2%	4	2%	6	2%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
How the choices I make right now will affect my future						
Strongly Agree	76	58%	67	34%	143	47%
Agree	39	30%	66	33%	105	35%
Not Sure	10	8%	28	14%	38	13%
Disagree			13	7%	13	4%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
About my own cultural traditions						
Agree	49	36%	80	43%	129	44%
Strongly Agree	32	24%	76	41%	108	36%
Not Sure	24	18%	17	9%	41	14%
Disagree	10	7%	6	3%	16	5%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
How to set goals for my future						
Agree	58	47%	76	40%	134	44%
Strongly Agree	55	44%	94	49%	149	49%
Not Sure	9	7%	11	6%	20	7%
Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Strongly Disagree			1	1%	1	0.33%
How to be a good role model for younger girls						
Strongly Agree	69	53%	61	32%	130	42%
Agree	50	38%	91	47%	141	45%
Disagree	1	1%	4	2%	5	2%
Not Sure	6	5%	27	14%	33	11%
Strongly Disagree			2	1%	2	1%
How to help change my school so...better for girls						
Agree	65	50%	76	39%	141	46%
Strongly Agree	33	25%	64	33%	97	32%
Not Sure	23	18%	35	18%	58	19%
Disagree	2	2%	5	3%	7	2%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%

WHAT DO YOU KNOW BECAUSE OF girlsBEST?

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
What skills I need to take care of myself financially						
Agree	65	49%	80	41%	145	48%
Strongly Agree	33	25%	68	35%	101	33%
Not Sure	23	17%	29	15%	52	17%
Disagree	2	1%	2	1%	4	1%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
The choices I have for college or post secondary education						
Agree	57	43%	24	38%	81	45%
Strongly Agree	48	36%	21	33%	69	38%
Not Sure	19	14%	10	16%	29	16%
Strongly Disagree			2	3%	2	1%
Disagree			1	2%	1	1%
Women who finish college earn more than women who don't						
NA			20	14%	20	14%
Agree			54	39%	54	39%
Strongly Agree			46	33%	46	33%
Not Sure			17	12%	17	12%
Disagree			2	1%	2	1%
Strongly Disagree						

WHAT SKILLS HAVE YOU DEVELOPED IN girlsBEST?

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Planning activities and programs for our site						
NA	10	8%	11	6%	21	7%
Agree	65	50%	80	42%	145	45%
Strongly Agree	32	24%	57	30%	89	28%
Not Sure	22	17%	37	20%	59	18%
Disagree	2	2%	4	2%	6	2%

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Speaking out in the community about issues I care about						
NA	6	5%	12	6%	18	6%
Agree	51	40%	70	36%	121	38%
Strongly Agree	35	27%	54	28%	89	28%
Not Sure	29	22%	43	22%	72	22%
Disagree	7	5%	12	6%	19	6%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Running a small business						
NA	27	21%	13	20%	40	21%
Not Sure	42	33%	15	23%	57	29%
Agree	38	29%	17	26%	55	28%
Strongly Agree	15	12%	11	17%	26	13%
Disagree	5	4%	4	6%	9	5%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%	6	9%	8	4%
Mentoring younger girls in the program						
NA			31	19%	31	19%
Agree			64	40%	64	40%
Not Sure			47	29%	47	29%
Strongly Agree			36	22%	36	22%
Disagree			8	5%	8	5%
Strongly Disagree			7	4%	7	4%
Changing people's attitudes about issues						
NA			3	5%	3	5%
Agree			25	40%	25	40%
Strongly Agree			22	35%	22	35%
Not Sure			8	13%	8	13%
Disagree			2	3%	2	3%
Strongly Disagree			0%	3%	2	3%

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
I had a chance to be a leader						
Strongly Agree			27	43%	27	43%
Agree			19	30%	19	30%
Not Sure			9	14%	9	14%
Disagree			4	6%	4	6%
Strongly Disagree			4	6%	4	6%

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE because of girlsBEST?

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
That I can accomplish whatever I set out to						
Strongly Agree	78	61%	109	58%	187	59%
Agree	41	32%	66	35%	107	34%
Not Sure	7	5%	9	5%	16	5%
Disagree	2	2%	3	2%	5	2%
Strongly Disagree			1	1%	1	0%
That I will go to college						
Strongly Agree	95	76%	130	70%	225	72%
Agree	25	20%	44	24%	69	22%
Disagree	1	1%	3	2%	4	1%
Not Sure	4	3%	9	5%	13	4%
That it is important to work for equal opportunity						
Strongly Agree	79	62%	115	61%	194	61%
Agree	44	34%	65	35%	109	34%
Not Sure	4	3%	5	3%	9	3%
Disagree	1	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Strongly Disagree			1	1%	1	0%

	2005		2006		Composite	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
That I will graduate from high school						
Strongly Agree	107	84%	148	79%	255	81%
Agree	16	13%	30	16%	46	15%
Not Sure	5	4%	6	3%	11	3%
			2	1%	2	1%
That I know how to support myself financially						
Strongly Agree	61	48%	87	46%	148	47%
Agree	43	34%	69	37%	112	35%
Not Sure	20	16%	24	13%	44	14%
Disagree	4	3%	6	3%	10	3%
Strongly Disagree			2	1%	2	1%
That it is important....to have a child when I'm ready...						
Strongly Agree	95	92%	134	71%	229	72%
Agree	26	25%	42	22%	68	22%
Disagree	1	1%	1	1%	2	1%
Not Sure	6	6%	6	3%	12	4%
Strongly Disagree			5	3%	5	2%
I believe that I am a leader						
Strongly Agree	72	56%	96	51%	168	53%
Agree	40	31%	66	35%	106	34%
Not Sure	11	9%	15	8%	26	8%
Disagree	4	3%	6	3%	10	3%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%	5	3%	6	2%