

The Youth of Hampton Roads



THE YOUTH OF HAMPTON ROADS: PRIDE OR PROBLEM?

More than 400,000 people in Hampton Roads (some 26 percent of our population) are under 18 years of age. They represent our hopes and dreams for the future and accordingly benefit from huge investments we make in their health, education, artistic and spiritual growth, and entertainment. Still, even as we delight in bragging about their accomplishments and exploits, they also generate significant worries and concerns when they encounter problems. Malnutrition, illness, educational failures, antisocial behavior, anomie and brushes with the law are among the major causes of worry and uncertainty about a significant number of our youth.

What is the actual state of our youth and how are they doing in some critical areas? Are they sources of pride, or problems, or both? We provide some evidence here.

DEMOGRAPHICS

As the overall population of Hampton Roads has grown, so has the number of children in the area. Those under age 18 grew by more than 67,000 between 1990 and 2000, a 20 percent increase. **However, contrary to the belief of some that our population is progressively becoming younger, the percentage of youth below age 18 increased by only .1 percent during this period. Indeed, the number of preschool-aged children fell by nearly 8 percent (Table 1). This presages a maturation of our population in the future.** By contrast, the proportion of youth in Richmond grew by about 2.5 percent during the same time period.

Though 68 percent of children in Hampton Roads live in married-couple families, this measure varies widely among localities (Table 2). Among the larger cities within the region, only 54.5 percent of youth live in married-couple families in Portsmouth and 55 percent in Norfolk, but more than 75 percent in Chesapeake, Isle of Wight and Virginia Beach. Related to this, Portsmouth and Norfolk also have the highest incidence of situations where grandparents are responsible for their own grandchildren.

These familial arrangements are particularly significant when one considers the economic impact family status likely has on a child (Graph 1). **In every locality considered here, married-couple families earn at least \$32,000 more than a family headed by a single mother.** Families headed by a single father fare much better, but an average income gap of \$26,796 still exists. Thus, taking Hampton as an example, families headed by a single mother earn only 37 percent of the income earned by married-couple families; families headed by a single father earn 62 percent of what the two-parent families make.

When children live in a family headed by a single mother, they are much more likely to be in poverty. A 2006 National Bureau of Economic Research study by Hoynes, Page and Stevens found that the entire increase in the national poverty rate between

**TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS, YOUTH IN HAMPTON ROADS
1990 AND 2000**

Age Group	Number 1990	Percent of Total Population	Number 2000	Percent of Total Population
Under Age 5	110,241	8.5%	101,518	7.1%
Ages 5 to 9	86,739	6.7%	129,065	9.3%
Ages 10 to 14	86,492	6.7%	108,094	7.5%
Ages 15 to 17	47,688	3.7%	60,644	4.2%
TOTAL	331,660	26.3%	399,321	26.4%

Source: U.S. Census

TABLE 2

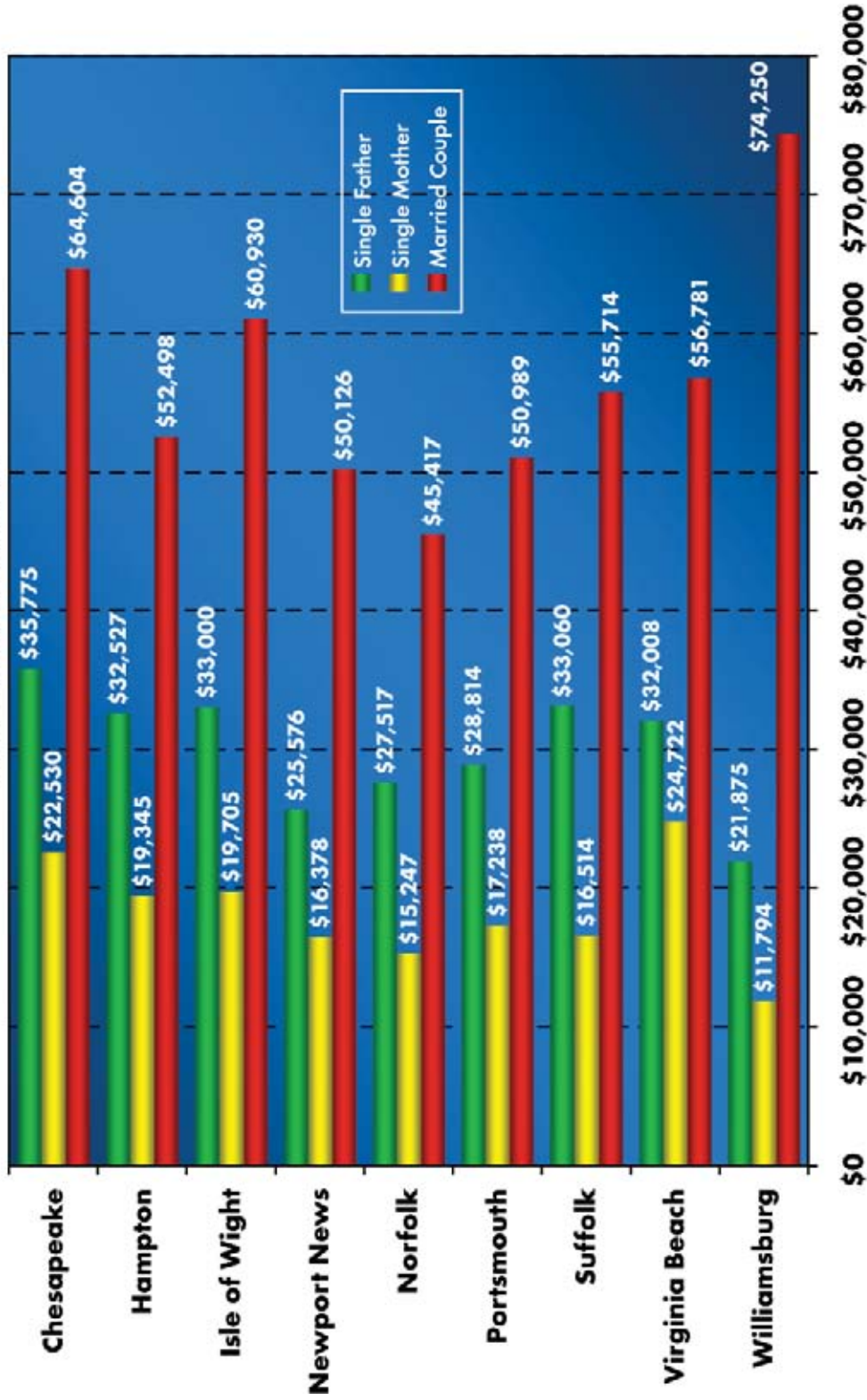
FAMILIES AND MARITAL STATUS IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2000

	Married-Couple Family	Single-Parent Family	Percent Married
Chesapeake	38,655	12,399	75.7
Hampton	19,568	11,185	63.6
Isle of Wight	5,125	1,554	76.7
Newport News	26,959	16,977	61.4
Norfolk	26,249	21,465	55.0
Portsmouth	11,446	9,575	54.5
Suffolk	10,621	4,783	68.9
Virginia Beach	81,225	25,472	76.1
Williamsburg	5,069	1,732	74.5
Hampton Roads	220,477	103,793	68.0
Virginia	645,504	236,689	73.2
Source: U.S. Census			

1980 and 2006 could be accounted for by the rise in the proportion of families headed by single mothers. The data presented in Graph 1 provide strong support for this notion in Hampton Roads.

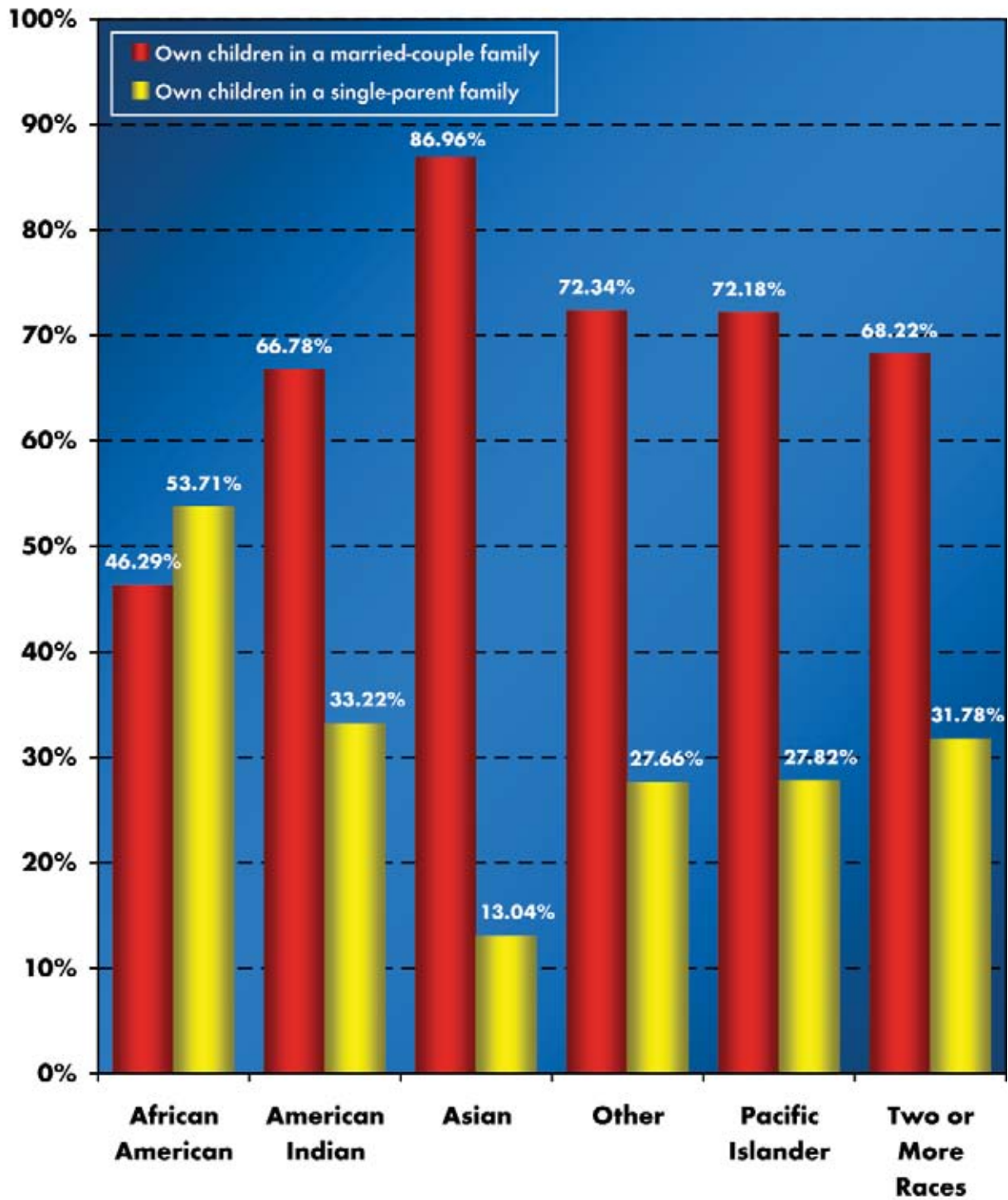
The racial disparities in familial arrangements are astonishingly large (Graph 2). More than 81 percent of white families are headed by married couples, but only 46 percent of African American families fall into the same category. Notably, the comparable percentage for Asian Americans is almost 87 percent. As we shall see, these family relationships directly influence the progress of our youth. Young people in single-parent families are much more likely to grow up in poverty and subsequently to have problems in school and with the law.

GRAPH 1
MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME BY FAMILY TYPE
HAMPTON ROADS, 2000



Source: U.S. Census

GRAPH 2
FAMILY TYPE BY RACE IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2000



Source: U.S. Census

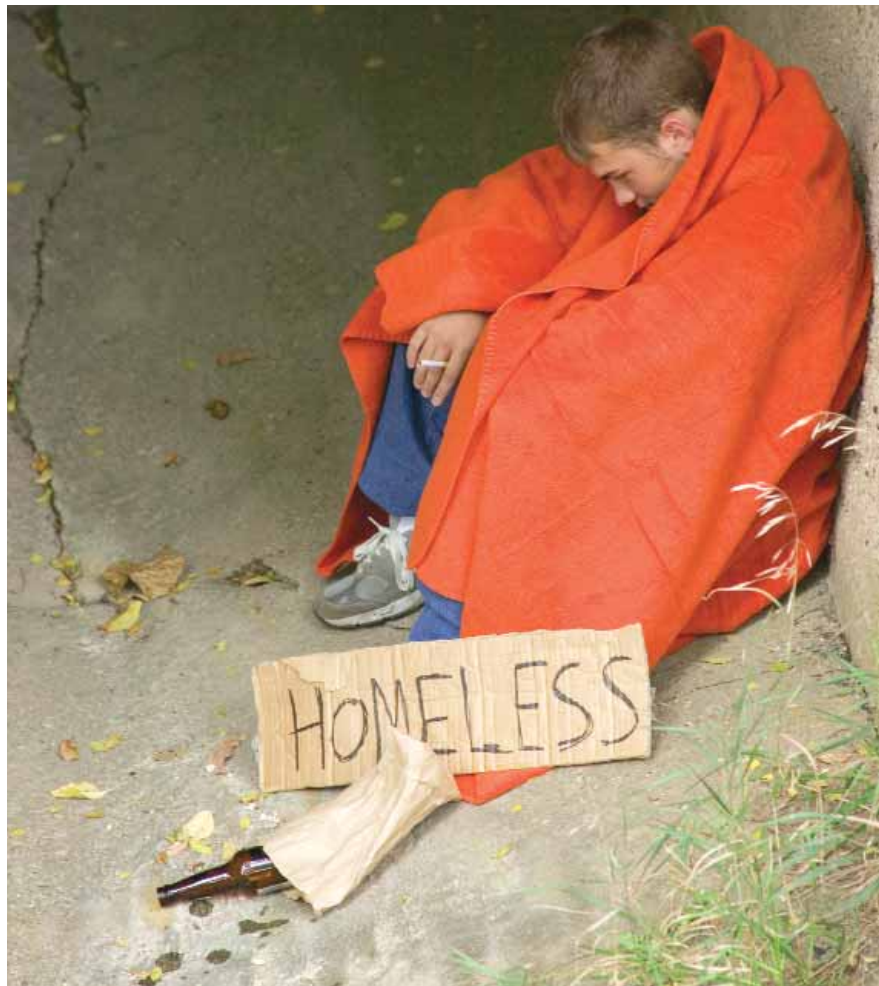
POVERTY AND CRIME

Though the region overall falls slightly under the national average for poverty rates of 17.6 percent, as Graph 3 illustrates, almost 25 percent of children in Portsmouth live in poverty and almost 27 percent are in the same status in Norfolk. Conversely, the percentage of children in Williamsburg living in poverty is only 10 percent.

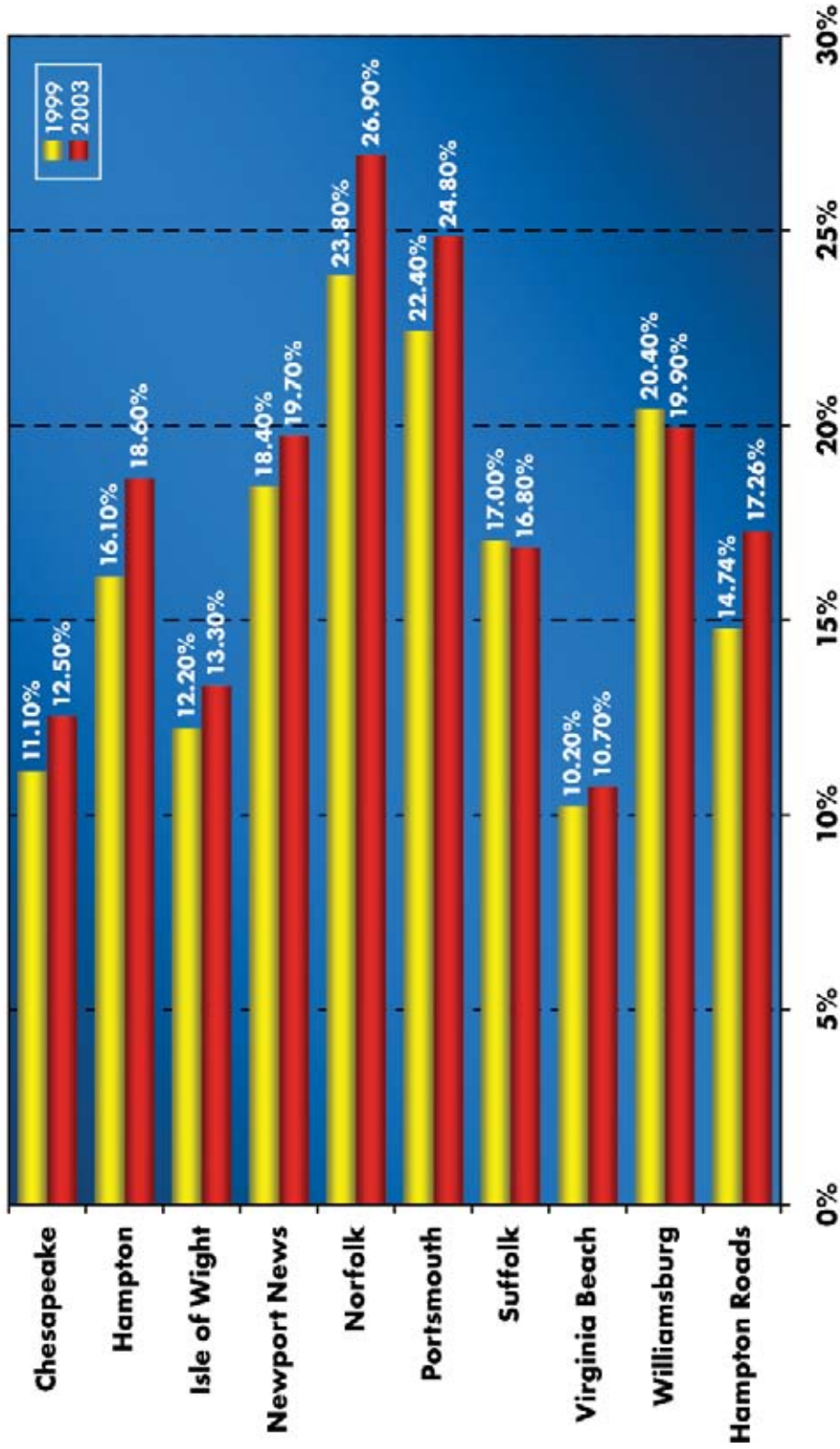
It's of interest that nearly every locality in Hampton Roads, except Suffolk and Williamsburg, experienced a slight rise in its child poverty rate between 1999 and 2003. Still, compared to other selected metropolitan areas in the South in 2003, Hampton Roads is not an outlier. Our child poverty rate falls in the middle of similar cities throughout the southeastern United States, though it is higher than Richmond's. However, our rate is lower than rates in cities such as Jacksonville and Charleston and almost 2 percent lower than the U.S. rate.

Juvenile crime rates tend to reflect economic and social indicators, some of which are demographic and economic, but others of which are cultural. When a youth is referred to a judicial or court service unit in the region, this is referred to as a "juvenile intake." The referral might come from neighbors, school personnel or a variety of other individuals, in addition to police. A referral does not necessarily result in an arrest.

Referral rates to a court service unit vary across our region, but generally are highest on the Peninsula, and in those areas where poverty rates also are high (Graph 4). Intake is, however, the first step into the juvenile justice system, and as such, these figures present a window on approximate juvenile crime and antisocial behavior. The intake rates of juveniles in Hampton Roads are well below those of Richmond and Charleston and are about 2.5 percent below the U.S. rate. This is, by all odds, a bit of good news.



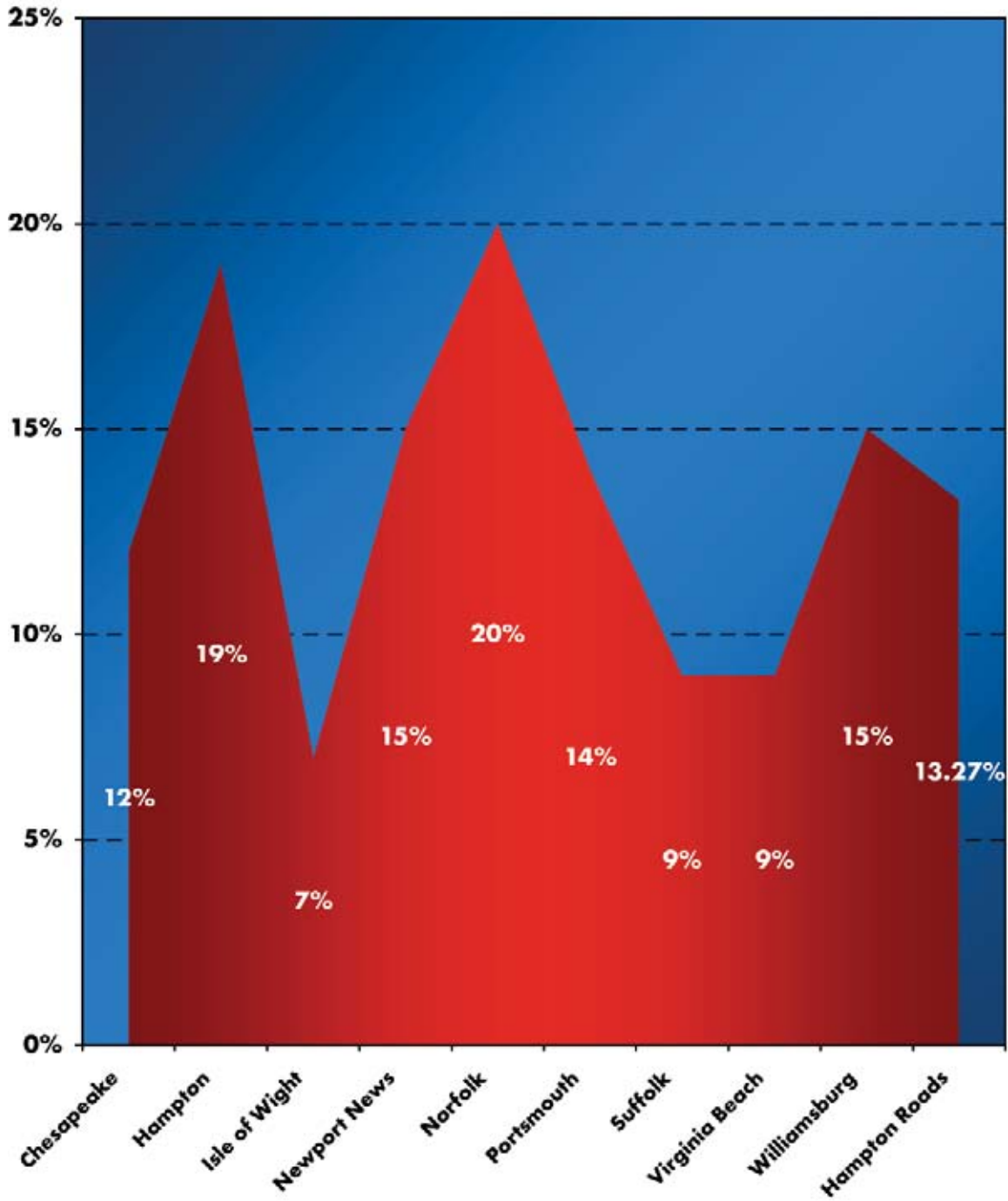
GRAPH 3
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION UNDER AGE 18 IN POVERTY
IN HAMPTON ROADS, 1999 AND 2003



Poverty defined as \$18,660 for two adults and two children in 2003; \$16,700 in 1999.

Source: U.S. Census

GRAPH 4
JUVENILE INTAKE RATES IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2004



Number of cases per 100 adolescents ages 13-17 referred to intake in a court service unit for a complaint, 2004.

Source: Anne E. Casey Foundation

HEALTH

Children born to a single mother usually start out at a disadvantage. Non-marital births have nearly doubled in the past 25 years and Hampton Roads has seen no exception to that trend (Table 3). In 2004, 37.57 percent of all births in Hampton Roads occurred where an unmarried mother was involved (but 45.8 percent in Norfolk and 50.3 percent in Portsmouth). The U.S. rate was 34 percent.

Critically, Hampton Roads produces a relatively high percentage of babies born with low birth weights (9.49 percent compared to 7.8 percent nationally). Though medical advances have done much to improve the outcomes of children born with weights under 5.5 pounds, these children still face educational disabilities and health problems such as respiratory infections at higher rates than normal birth-weight babies.

TABLE 3

BIRTH DATA FOR HAMPTON ROADS, 2004

2004	Chesapeake	Hampton	Isle of Wight	Newport News	Norfolk	Portsmouth
Total Live Births	2,975	1,977	355	3,206	4,094	1,647
Non-marital Live Births	982	877	133	1,406	1,877	825
Percentage	33	44.4	31.8	43.9	45.8	50.3
Low Birth Weight <5.5 lbs	260	196	26	307	423	199
Percentage	8.7	9.9	7.3	9.6	10.3	12.1
Began Prenatal Care in First 13 Weeks	2,607	1,649	332	2,743	3,333	1,237
Percentage	87.6	83.4	93.5	85.6	81.4	75.1

2004	Suffolk	Virginia Beach	Williamsburg	Hampton Roads
Total Live Births	1,186	6,665	676	22,781
Non-marital Live Births	408	1,886	182	8,559
Percentage	34.4	28.3	26.9	37.57
Low Birth Weight <5.5 lbs	121	582	48	2,162
Percentage	10.2	8.7	7.1	9.49
Began Prenatal Care in First 13 Weeks	1,061	5,922	572	19,456
Percentage	86.5	88.9	84.6	85.4

<http://www.vdh.state.va.us/HealthStats/stats.asp>

When teenagers have babies, the progeny nearly always are born out of wedlock. The region has significantly higher teen pregnancy rates than both the nation-at-large and comparable metropolitan areas (Table 4). Not surprisingly, this affects infant mortality. Infant mortality in Hampton Roads is significantly above the national average, particularly in those areas that have the highest teen pregnancy rates and lowest prenatal care percentages.

If we had a magic wand available for our use, there would be few more auspicious times we could wave it than to reduce the number of teenage births in Hampton Roads. Children born to teenage mothers usually cannot be supported financially by their parents even when the father takes responsibility. Hence, they are born into poverty and frequently end up being raised by grandparents. In the most heart-rending cases, a new child enters a home in which the mother is 15 years old and the grandmother is 30 years old. This is a recipe for poverty and

TABLE 4
TEENAGE PREGNANCY DATA AND INFANT MORTALITY, HAMPTON ROADS, 2004

Statistic	Chesapeake	Hampton	Isle of Wight	Newport News	Norfolk	Portsmouth
Total Teen Pregnancies	450	379	47	536	841	367
Preg. Rate/1,000 for Population Ages 10-19	27.1	35.8	21.6	40.3	52.5	53.4
Pregnancies Ages <15	9	6	0	8	27	11
Preg. Rate/1,000 Population Ages <15	1	1.3	0	1.1	3.5	3
Pregnancies Ages 15-17	155	114	22	141	258	120
Preg. Rate/1,000 Population Ages 15-17	28.8	37.5	33.4	35.7	61.4	57.4
Pregnancies Ages 18-19	286	259	352	387	556	236
Preg. Rate/1,000 Ages 18-19	107.2	93.6	71	170.3	136.1	203.8
Infant Death Rate/1,000 Live Births	10.4	14.2	11.3	10.3	10.5	12.8

Statistic	Suffolk	Virginia Beach	Williamsburg	Hampton Roads
Total Teen Pregnancies	192	921	78	3,811
Preg. Rate/1,000 for Population Ages 10-19	34.3	28.8	16.1	35.26
Pregnancies Ages <15	6	15	3	85
Preg. Rate/1,000 Population Ages <15	2.1	.9	1.5	1.8
Pregnancies Ages 15-17	71	252	21	1,154
Preg. Rate/1,000 Population Ages 15-17	38.9	25.2	17.8	35.8
Pregnancies Ages 18-19	115	654	54	2,572
Preg. Rate/1,000 Ages 18-19	134.3	125.5	31.1	121.9
Infant Death Rate/1,000 Live Births	10.1	7.8	4.4	10.0

deprivation, and the truth is, this is an area where Hampton Roads does not fare well compared to other metropolitan regions and the nation.

Comparisons of regional per capita income levels often focus on educational attainment and similar variables. However, the source of educational attainment differentials often begins with teenage birth rates. Children born to teenagers start with a disadvantage and they never catch up. Thus, it already may be determined that per capita income and economic growth in Hampton Roads will lag other regions in 2025 because of the excessively high level of teenage births and underweight births we are recording now.

EDUCATION

Graduation from high school has become a virtual necessity for anyone who wishes to aspire to a prosperous life in the United States. Graph 5 provides discouraging news with respect to Hampton Roads. Whereas more than 76 percent of Virginians who are ninth-graders graduate from high school four years later, most communities within Hampton Roads fall below that level, with Norfolk graduating only 39 percent of its ninth-graders four years later.

The comparatively low high school graduation rates within our region reflect a variety of factors, many of which we already have noted. One can, however, use nationally standardized tests to measure the learning and progress of the region's students. The limited amount of evidence available concerning the performance of Hampton Roads students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that is given to students in grades 4, 8 and 12 suggests that our students perform at about the national average (see <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>). For example, as a state, Virginia's science achievement scores are above the national average. Only 20 percent of K-12 Virginians perform below what is termed the "basic" level on the science portion of the NAEP, while the national average is 34 percent. Further, the gap between white and African American students has been narrowing in the Commonwealth and the same trend appears to hold in Hampton Roads.

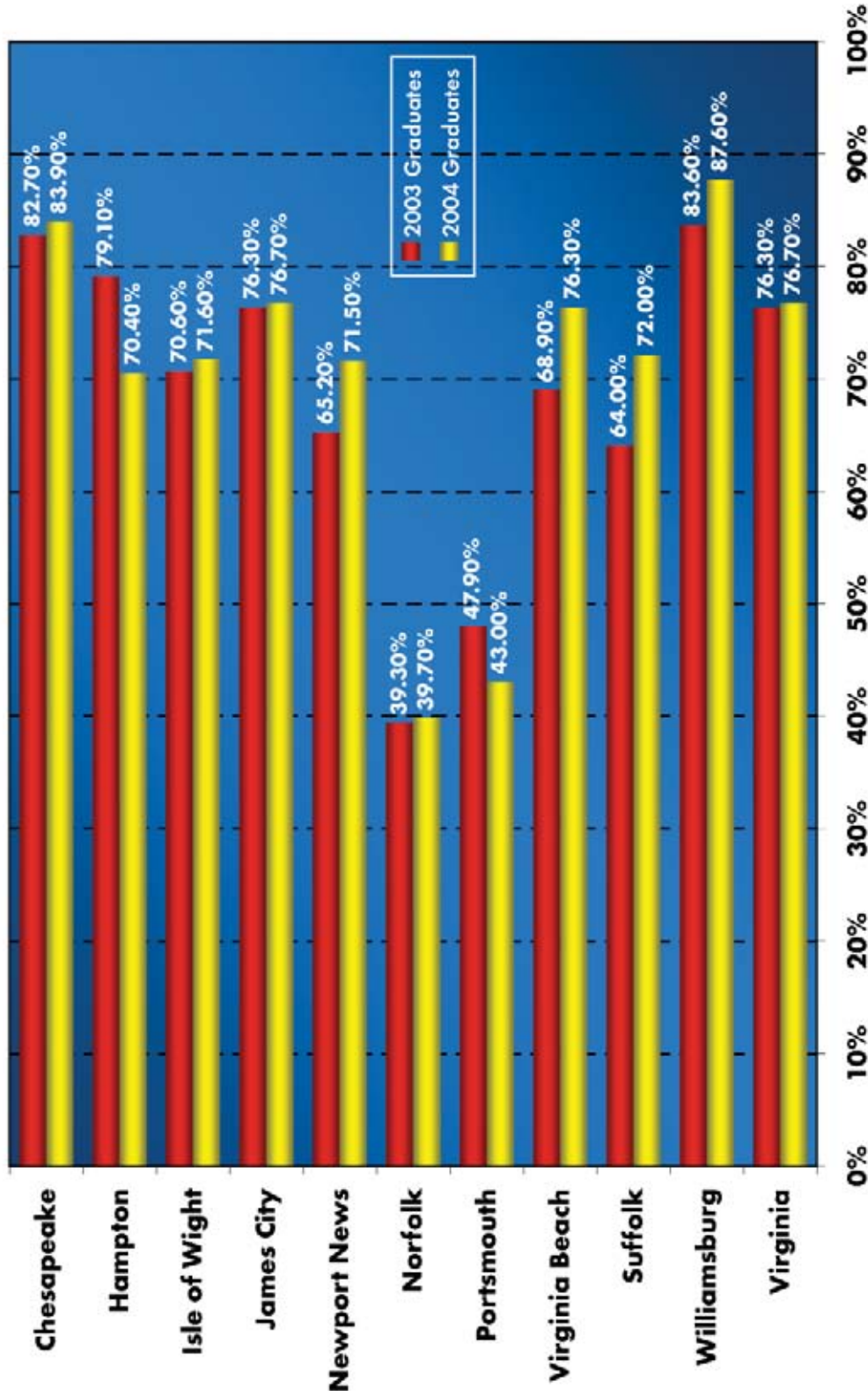
On the other hand, while the performance of high school juniors and seniors on the well-known Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is not reported on a regional basis, evidence from Old Dominion University strongly suggests that the average SAT score of a Hampton Roads high school junior or senior is 10 points to 20 points below Virginia and national averages. There is a strong correlation between high school graduation rates and SAT scores, resulting in students in jurisdictions such as Virginia Beach and Poquoson scoring well above state and national averages, but those in cities such as Norfolk and Portsmouth scoring well below these averages.

The implications of this SAT score evidence are discouraging for students who wish to pursue higher education. In our most urban cities, approximately 60 percent of ninth-graders do not graduate from high school four years later and as many as 30 percent to 40 percent never graduate from high school, even with a G.E.D. diploma. Clearly, these students are ineligible for admission to four-year state universities. However, a large proportion of those who do graduate are unlikely to be admitted to most of the Commonwealth's four-year public universities.

The average SAT score of a new freshman student at Old Dominion University approximates 1070 (about 60 points above the national average) and students with an SAT below 830 are not admitted. Even a student with an 830 SAT score would have to have a 3.9 high school grade point average to be considered for admission, and a student with a 970 SAT score would have to present a 2.7 high school GPA. Depending upon the year, this means that half or more of the students who actually do graduate from one of our urban public high schools are not admissible at Old Dominion.

This is not the end of the world for such students; other four-year opportunities exist, and Tidewater Community College (TCC) and Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC) are quite viable alternatives. TCC, after all, advertises "From here, go anywhere," and many students do exactly that, often while working and raising families, or during or after military service. Even so, no one would confuse the products of a typical high school of Hampton Roads with the graduates of a typical high-achievement high school in Northern Virginia.

GRAPH 5
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN HAMPTON ROADS, 2004-2005



Percentage of children who graduate high school, based on 9th-grade membership 4 years earlier.

Source: www.vakids.org

WHAT DOES THIS EVIDENCE SAY TO US?

At the beginning of this chapter, we asked whether the region's youth are a source of pride or a source of problems. The honest answer is – they are both. While Hampton Roads is home to hundreds of thousands of healthy young people who are growing up in two-parent, stable homes, achieve well in school and will graduate from high school, it also includes 100,000 or more young people below the age of 18 who are much less fortunate. It probably is unfair to label such youngsters as “problems,” but more accurate to refer to them as societal challenges. The members of this youthful underclass, who constitute almost 10 percent of our regional population, frequently exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Born to a teenage, unmarried mother**
- **Born underweight (below 5.5 pounds)**
- **Born into poverty**
- **Raised by grandparents or relatives**
- **Record low achievement in schools**
- **Likely to have multiple brushes with the law**
- **Unlikely to graduate from high school in four years**
- **Unlikely to be admissible to a four-year public institution such as Old Dominion University.**

Not all members of the youthful underclass exhibit all of these characteristics, but a depressingly large number do. These young people start behind other children and not surprisingly, therefore, usually finish behind. Very few things in life are inevitable, but honesty requires us to say that the deck is stacked against these young people from the time they leave the hospital nursery. Twenty years later, these same individuals will struggle in labor markets, earn low incomes, perhaps become parents before they should and experience frequent brushes with the law.

Yes, a majority of youth within the region do not fit this general stereotype and we are blessed with tens of thousands of highly motivated, high-achieving youth. Still, the evidence we have reported here should be sobering to anyone who believes that the general prosperity of the region has rubbed off on nearly everyone.

Many of those who read the State of the Region report live stable lives in fairly well-defined environments. Hence, we may not have frequent contact with youth who were born underweight to an unmarried mother, grew up in poverty, became parents themselves at age 15, dropped out of school, subsequently earned no more than the minimum wage and ended up in prison. Familiar or not, each individual in such a circumstance nevertheless represents both a personal human tragedy and a distinct challenge to the entire body politic.

In an earlier chapter, we pointed out that, one way or another, the region is going to pay for the costs of traffic congestion. We'll pay either through the costs of traffic jams and congestion if we choose to ignore the problem, or we'll pay by increased expenditures on transportation. The same circumstance applies to the challenges presented by our youth. We can ignore the facts presented here, but inevitably we will pay for that inattention by confronting the issues of public health problems, children without parents, dysfunctional behavior, lower incomes, elevated crime rates and, ultimately, the higher taxes that must be levied and paid to deal with these situations.

Alternatively, we have the opportunity to devise intelligent public policies that will address these challenges at their roots, especially where the high incidence of teenage, underweight births is concerned. Such policies will cost more now, but generate substantial benefits later. As the muffler commercial advises us, “You can pay me now or pay me later.” So it is in Hampton Roads with respect to our youth.