

Youth Readiness for the Future

A Report on Findings from a Representative Gallup Student Poll Sample

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GALLUP® Student Poll



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In 2009-2010, the Gallup Student Poll gave nearly 450,000 of America's young people a voice to convey their daily experiences and aspirations for the future. The online measure, administered in participating schools, tracks the hope, engagement, and wellbeing of students. To date, research has shown that hope, engagement, and wellbeing are positioned as actionable targets and indicators of future success, with links to attendance, grades, achievement scores, retention, and employment.

This report highlights some of the findings from a representative sample of American youth, aged 10 to 18 years, collected in late June/early July of 2010. A scorecard describing the results from this sample and a psychometric review of poll are presented at www.gallupstudentpoll.com.

One-Third of American Students Surveyed Are Ready for the Future*

Students who are ready for the future are also hopeful for the future, engaged at school, and thriving in life (i.e., high wellbeing). These students possess high levels of motivation and describe their lives in very positive terms. Furthermore, these students report that the conditions at their school promote involvement and enthusiasm.



* Students are considered "Ready for the Future" if they meet criteria for being hopeful, and engaged, and thriving (i.e., the highest classification of wellbeing). While 53% are hopeful, 63% are engaged, and 70% are thriving, only 34% meet the scoring criteria for all three of the highest categories in hope, engagement, and wellbeing classification systems on the Gallup Student Poll.

The 34% of students who are ready for the future are more likely to succeed academically and maintain good health over time. For example, high school freshmen judged to be ready at the beginning of an academic year, go on to complete 20% more credits and have GPAs that are one-letter grade higher than peers who are not ready.** Students ready for the future report they have fewer health concerns that interfere with daily functioning and get better daily rest than do their peers.

Half of American Students Are Hopeful

Over half of the students (53%) surveyed in 2010 are hopeful, possessing numerous ideas and abundant energy for the future. The remaining students are stuck (31%) or discouraged (16%), lacking the ideas and energy they need to navigate problems and reach goals. Hope varies little across age and grade levels.

Review of the individual items contributing to the Hope Index suggest that surveyed students are generally confident in their future but lack the necessary strategies to reach the big goals of graduation and employment. Specifically, 92% of students in the sample strongly believe that they will graduate school, but only 62% of respondents strongly believe that they can come up with many ways to get good grades. Nearly half of American students strongly believe that they will find a good job after graduation, but only one-third of them (35%) strongly believe that they can find ways around any problem that might arise in life.

Nearly two-thirds of American Students Are Engaged at School

Nearly two-thirds of American students (63%) are engaged. Engaged students are highly involved with and enthusiastic about school. These students arrive at school prepared and eager to learn; they likely promote excitement about learning in those around them.

About 23% of students are not engaged — going through the motions at school. These students, while not overtly negative, may blend into the learning landscape and may not be maximizing their own learning potential or facilitating the learning process in others. Those students who are actively disengaged (14%) are likely undermining the teaching and learning process for themselves and others. They require many resources and particular attention from teachers and administrators.

Student engagement peaks during elementary school, decreases through middle school and early high school, plateaus a little, and then increases through the rest of high school — seemingly after some of the most actively disengaged students drop out of school. This downward trend suggests that we may be losing the hearts and minds of some students in middle school, with involvement in and enthusiasm for school declining from grades 5 through 10. Examination of the items that comprise the Engagement Index suggests that this engagement decline is largely attributable to students receiving less praise and recognition as they age. Around 74% of fifth-grade students gave a 5 (out of 5) to the item “In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork.” Only 31% of ninth-grade students gave a 5 to this item. A national discussion about praise may be needed to resolve adults’ uncertainty about how to praise students effectively and when it is appropriate.

** Academic results of students ready for the future are based on a subsample of freshmen who participated in the March 2009 poll.

Over Two-Thirds of American Students Are Thriving

Evaluative wellbeing, how we think about our lives, is measured by the Gallup Student Poll Wellbeing Index. When students were asked to respond to the questions based on the classic Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale*** (also known as the ladder questions), the average response was 7.71. When asked: “On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?” students’ average response was 8.33.

The wellbeing classification system of thriving, struggling, and suffering is used to summarize a student’s responses to both ladder questions. Over two-thirds of students (70%) are thriving; they think about their present and future life in positive terms, generally they have their basic needs met, they tend to be in good health, and they have strong social support. Just under one-third of students (30%) are struggling or suffering. Those individuals with low wellbeing tend to lack adequate personal and social resources. Evaluative wellbeing varies little across grade levels.



Helping Students Get Ready for the Future

Strengths-Based Education

Implementing strengths-based education (see www.strengths.org) can enhance hope. In addition, a school’s ongoing commitment to develop the strengths of each student can increase student engagement. It begins with educators discovering what they do best and developing and applying their own strengths while they help students identify and apply their strengths in the learning process so that they can reach previously unattained levels of personal excellence.

Talented, Engaged Teachers

Schools that select for talent have more engaged teachers. Engaged teachers have engaged students (i.e., increasing employee engagement in a school by 1 unit would increase student engagement by 0.5 units). Engaged schools, made up of engaged professionals and students, perform better on standardized tests.

Community Wellbeing Audits

Historically, community audits focused on aspects of ill-being such as premature births and murders. Now, through the collaboration between Gallup, Healthways, and America’s Health Insurance Plans, we have representative wellbeing data for adult Americans living in each of the 435 congressional districts (see www.ahiphiwire.org/wellbeing/). Given coverage of all communities and the breadth of wellbeing domains measured (life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behaviors, work environment, basic access), community leaders can begin discussions of what is working for adults and how that could affect the wellbeing of young people.

*** The Wellbeing Index is based on the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale, which asks people to evaluate their present and future lives on a scale with steps numbered from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst possible life and 10 is the best possible life. Those that rate today a “7” or higher and the future an “8” or higher are considered to be “thriving.” Those that rate today and the future a “4” or lower on the scale are considered to be “suffering.”

Experienced wellbeing — how we feel about our lives — is measured by the Gallup Student Poll Positive Yesterdays Index. Approximately 55% of American students answered “yes” to all four items that make up the index, indicating that they had a positive yesterday. Regarding item-level responses, 76% reported that they learned or did something interesting yesterday and 77% indicated they were treated with respect all day yesterday. Most students (86%) had enough energy to get things done yesterday and 89% indicated that they smiled or laughed a lot yesterday.

Registering for the Fall 2010 Fielding of the Gallup Student Poll

Districts and school administrators may register at www.gallupstudentpoll.com for the fall administration of the Gallup Student Poll. There are three field periods beginning on Tuesday and ending Friday:

- Tuesday, September 28 through Friday, October 15, 2010
- Tuesday, October 5 through Friday, October 22, 2010
- Tuesday, October 12 through Friday, October 29, 2010



Measuring the Hope, Engagement, and Wellbeing of America's Students

The conversation about the future of American youth starts with a shared understanding of what is right with our students, rather than what is wrong. Through a review of social science and educational research, Gallup researchers chose three variables (hope, engagement, and wellbeing) as the targets of the Gallup Student Poll. These three items met the following five criteria: (1) they can be reliably measured, (2) they have a meaningful relationship with or impact on educational outcomes, (3) they are malleable and can be enhanced through deliberate action, (4) they are not measured directly by another large-scale survey or testing program, and (5) they are not associated with income status. Here are the fundamental findings that are incorporated into the Gallup Student Poll project.

- **Hope** — the ideas and energy we have for the future. Hope drives attendance, credits earned, and GPA of high school students. Hope predicts GPA and retention in college, and hope scores are more robust predictors of college success than are high school GPA, SAT, and ACT scores.
- **Engagement** — the involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Engagement distinguishes between high-performing and low-performing schools.
- **Wellbeing** — how we think about and experience our lives. Wellbeing tells us how our students are doing today and predicts their success in the future. High school freshmen with high wellbeing earn more credits with a higher GPA than peers with low wellbeing.

Starting a Community Discussion About the Gallup Student Poll and Raising the Graduation Rate

The Gallup Student Poll gives American students a voice. It also provides schools and communities with meaningful data about their young people. With this new information, communities can expand discussions about solutions to the dropout crisis. Involved youth, concerned parents, educators, after-school program staff, and business and community leaders are charged with the goals of doubling hope, building engaged schools, boosting wellbeing, and raising the graduation rate.

Survey Methods

The Gallup Student Poll representative survey was conducted with Gallup Panel members from Monday, June 11 through Tuesday, July 6, 2010. 2,555 survey invitations were delivered to youth aged 10 to 18 years and 642 usable surveys were returned (25% completion rate).

Gallup Panel members are aged 13 and up and are recruited by phone through random selection methods and can be surveyed across multiple modes of data collection. In order to identify the sample of 10 to 18 year olds, Gallup identified households within the Panel that were known to either have a panelist in this age range, or whose household was known to have a child in the age range (as verified in a January 2010 profile survey). The survey was conducted by both mail and Web to accommodate those households that lack internet access or who do not prefer to respond to surveys online. The survey was mailed or e-mailed directly to the young panelists in the specified age range and also e-mailed or mailed to the parents of the young panelists, seeking their consent for their child to respond to the survey.

The Panel is weighted so that it is demographically representative of the U.S. youth population. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 4.95 percentage points. Margins of sampling errors vary for individual subsamples. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of polls.



Measuring the Hope, Engagement, and Wellbeing of America's Students

1. Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

2. I know I will graduate from high school.
3. There is an adult in my life who cares about my future.
4. I can think of many ways to get good grades.
5. I energetically pursue my goals.
6. I can find lots of ways around any problem.
7. I know I will find a good job after I graduate.
8. I have a best friend at school.
9. I feel safe in this school.
10. My teachers make me feel my schoolwork is important.
11. At this school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
12. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork.
13. My school is committed to building the strengths of each student.
14. In the last month, I volunteered my time to help others.

Please think about yesterday, from the morning until the end of the day. Think about where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, and how you felt as you respond to the next six items.

15. Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?
16. Did you smile or laugh a lot yesterday?
17. Did you learn or do something interesting yesterday?
18. Did you have enough energy to get things done yesterday?
19. Do you have health problems that keep you from doing things other people your age can do?
20. If you are in trouble, do you have family or friends you can count on whenever you need them?

For more information, visit www.gallupstudentpoll.com.

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