

# EDUCATION DAILY<sup>®</sup>

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## Study: Teens feel more pressured to achieve academically

But students remain optimistic about individual abilities

By James Michael Brodie

America's teenagers are less satisfied with the direction of the country and say they are feeling more pressure to succeed in high school and beyond, but they remain overwhelmingly optimistic about their abilities, according to *The State of Our Nation's Youth 2008-2009*. The survey of youth attitudes was released Tuesday by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Inc.

The telephone survey of 1,006 students in grades 9-12 and between ages 13 and 19 found 53 percent of students felt "hopeful and optimistic" about the direction of the country, compared to 75 percent five years ago. In schools, nearly 80 percent of teens said increased pressure to earn good grades "creates a problem" for them, and one in five students spends at least 10 hours a week on homework.

Yet 93 percent are still "very or fairly confident" they will reach their career goals, according to the study. Sixty-six percent said they would describe themselves as optimists, and 70 percent expressed a desire to attend a four-year college.

The results came a day after the Partnership for a Drug-Free America released its 20th annual study, which showed 73 percent of teens surveyed for *The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) Teens 2007 Report* said school stress is the primary reason for drug use. This marks a shift from previous surveys that indicated the No. 1 reason for drug use was to "look cool."

Peter D. Hart, who has conducted the Alger Association survey for the past five years, said this generation of students reflects the sensibilities of a post-9/11 world, where, for the first time in several generations, there may not be an expectation that young people will exceed their parents' financial successes.

"Young people were affected by 9/11," Hart said, and today feel like "society is pressing in on them." He said the results of the Alger Association survey provide "a portrait of a generation who believe in themselves and their abilities, despite anxieties about the country."

At an event to mark the release of the Alger Association survey, teens speaking on behalf of the survey said the push for school accountability is trickling down to influence student attitudes. "We are coming into an earlier adulthood," said David Miller, 17, a senior at Livermore (Calif.) High School.

Sarah Barrett, a 17-year-old junior at Norris High School in Lincoln, Neb., said "There's a lot of pressure on teens everywhere to go to college, but to a good college. It is very competitive."

Devron Lovick, 16, a junior at Horsham, Penn.'s, Hatboro-Horsham High School, said administrators and colleges place too much importance on standardized test results and pay too little

### Other pressing issues

According to a survey of youth attitudes released Tuesday, high school students are feeling increased pressure to succeed in school and beyond. Yet *The State of Our Nation's Youth 2008-2009* survey found students were concerned about issues outside K-12 classrooms as well. According to the survey of 1,008 ninth- through 12th-grade students:

- 75 percent said the presidential election will make a substantial difference in the direction of the nation.
- Students' top concerns were the economy and jobs (34 percent), the Iraq war (31 percent) and global warming (28 percent).
- 72 percent described global warming as an "urgent or serious problem," though 58 percent do not consider themselves "environmentalists."
- One in three said the most important school subjects were science and technology, while 38 percent wished their schools had up-to-date technology.
- Teens were divided on immigration, with 49 percent saying it was more positive than negative, while 40 percent held the opposing view.

attention to actual learning. "Different achievements that people have are becoming worth less" than scores on a standardized exam, he said.

### Online pros, cons

Some students surveyed also pointed to online access as a double-edged sword.

"We use the Internet to be connected. Suddenly, David, who lives in California, can communicate with me immediately rather than by snail mail," said Thomas Maranges, an 18-year-old graduate of St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "A lot of people in my generation don't know how to write a letter, but they don't feel they need to, because we are all connected."

But this increased connectivity has led to new issues for students and administrators. The survey indicated online harassment remains a problem for teens, as 16 percent of students surveyed reported they have been victims of cyberbullying. About 30 percent said they saw online bullying as a larger threat than traditional bullying in schools, according to the report.

"The Internet is empowering," which makes it easier to bully online, Maranges said. "You don't have to be able to bench-press 400 pounds to be a bully. When you don't have to look someone in the eye, when you are not faced with the intrinsic humanity of your victim, you can do a lot of damage."

The State of Our Nation's Youth 2008-2009 is available at [www.horatioalger.org/pdfs/0708SONY.pdf](http://www.horatioalger.org/pdfs/0708SONY.pdf).