

# High School Survey of Student Engagement 2005

# What We Can Learn From High School Students

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## Introduction

Improving high schools is currently a priority for federal and state governments, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. Many federal and state policies in this regard, including the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, emphasize school accountability in terms of student performance on standards-based tests. However, such tests do not typically identify the specific educational processes that lead to the outcomes the tests assess. They may document whether students and schools “measure up,” but they do not point to student behaviors and school features that can be changed to improve the test results. This is where student engagement data can be helpful.

Research indicates that engaged students get more from school on all levels than do their disengaged peers (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; National Research Council, 2004; Norris, Pignal, & Lipps, 2003). Yet, until recently, engagement data have not been collected using a single instrument across various types of high schools in different settings. HSSSE results can be used almost immediately to help schools identify where to focus attention and resources to enhance student learning and school effectiveness.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) provides the largest national database on student engagement.

Following its inaugural administration in 2004, HSSSE was completed by an additional 80,904 high school students in 2005. Each school receives a customized report, and HSSSE results are being used to better understand the school environment from the students’ perspective. Educators can use these data right away to make changes in programs and processes to enhance student learning and success. As discussed on p. 13, changes that schools have made include creating homework hotlines, providing classes for parents in English as a second language, partnering with neighboring schools to sponsor career days, establishing a school-wide reading period, and integrating community service projects as part of graduation requirements.

In addition, schools can compare their results against all other participating schools, providing valuable comparative information. Schools also receive a copy of their raw data, which allows them to perform additional analyses to answer questions of local interest.

In this report we provide a profile of the HSSSE respondents, highlight selected findings from the 2005 survey, and briefly review how some schools have used their HSSSE results. A list of selected resources is also included.



## Profile of HSSSE 2005 Respondents

The student respondents were from 87 schools in 19 states; 73% of the students across the participating schools completed surveys. While respondents were disproportionately from the Midwest, the total respondents mirrored national gender and racial distributions for high school students, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Also, HSSSE respondents were similar to national data regarding the percentage of students enrolled in schools of different sizes and socio-economic levels and located in various types of school districts. HSSSE schools ranged in size from 117 to 3813 students, with a mean of 1262 students. Table 1 shows the portion of 2005 respondents from various types of schools.

### Grade Level

Of the HSSSE 2005 respondents, 29% were in the 9th grade, 30% in the 10th grade, 23% in the 11th grade, and 19% in the 12th grade.

### Gender and Race

Respondents were almost evenly split between males (49%) and females (51%). Figure 1 provides a profile of the HSSSE 2005 students by race/ethnicity. The gender and race breakdowns were similar for HSSSE respondents in 2004 and 2005.

### Course Grades

Almost three fifths of the students reported that their grades in high school have been mostly As (16%), mixed As and Bs (32%), or mostly Bs (10%). Another 22% of the respondents reported they have mainly received mixed Bs and Cs. Females (55%) were more likely than males (42%) to report mostly As or mixed As and Bs.

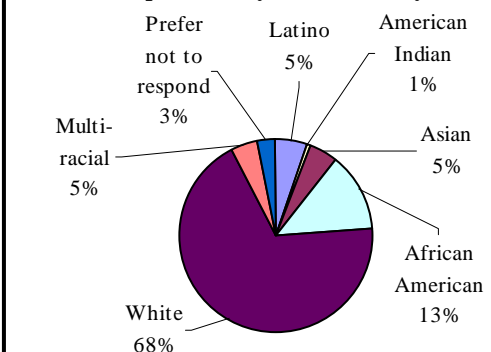
### Primary Language

More than half of the Latino (55%) and almost half of the Asian (49%) students reported that English is not the main language used in their homes. In contrast, only 2% of the White, 3% of the African American, and 13% of the American Indian students said English is not the primary language in their homes.

**Table 1: Respondents by Type of School**

Location	HSSSE Respondents <sup>1</sup>
Large city (>250,000 pop.)	12%
Mid-size city (250,000 or less)	13%
Urban fringe, large city	37%
Urban fringe, mid-size city	18%
Large town (>25,000 pop.)	1%
Small town (25,000 or less)	5%
Rural	14%

**Figure 1:  
Respondents by Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Percentages in all tables and figures may add to more or less than 100 because they are rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents who marked "Other" for their race made up 0.1% of HSSSE respondents and are not included in the tables and figures by race. Throughout the Overview, racial/ethnic categories have been shortened to one term: Latino for Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; American Indian for American Indian/Native American; Asian for Asian/Pacific Islander; African American for African American/Black; White for White/Caucasian; and Multiracial for Multiracial/Multiethnic.

### **Instructional Track**

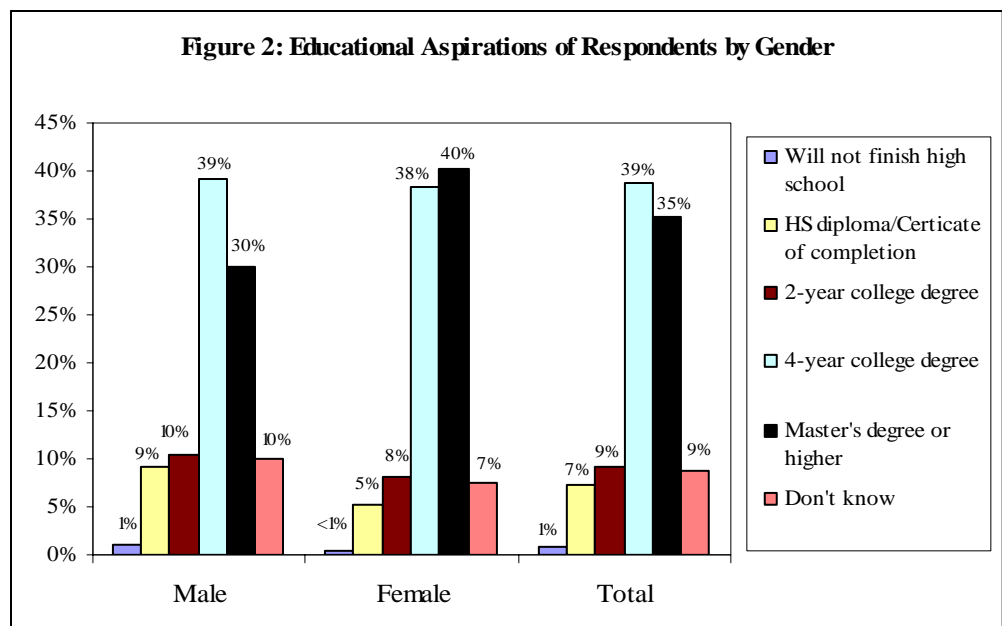
Students were asked to identify the category or instructional track for most of their courses. Almost three fifths (59%) of the respondents indicated that most of their courses were in general/regular education. More females (30%) than males (25%) indicated that their courses were primarily honors/college prep. Asian students also were overrepresented in the honors/college prep track and among students primarily taking courses for college credit (Table 2).

<b>Table 2: Instructional Track of Respondents by Race/Ethnicity</b>						
	<i>Regular/ General</i>	<i>Special Education</i>	<i>Courses for College Credit</i>	<i>Honors/ College Prep</i>	<i>Career/ Vocational</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
<i>Latino</i>	65%	4%	3%	13%	2%	14%
<i>American Indian</i>	54%	11%	3%	16%	5%	11%
<i>Asian</i>	46%	1%	6%	38%	1%	7%
<i>African American</i>	68%	3%	4%	16%	2%	6%
<i>White</i>	58%	2%	3%	30%	2%	5%
<i>Multiracial</i>	62%	3%	4%	23%	1%	7%
<i>Prefer not to respond</i>	46%	4%	3%	29%	2%	16%
<i>Total respondents</i>	59%	2%	3%	27%	2%	6%

### **Postsecondary Aspirations**

Virtually all of the respondents said they would complete high school, but only 7% said their ultimate goal was a high school diploma. More than four fifths of the respondents (83%) indicated that they would enroll in some form of postsecondary education after high school (Figure 2).

- Almost one tenth (9%) reported that their highest degree would be a two-year associate degree, whereas almost two fifths (39%) expected to complete four years of college, and 35% aspired to a master's degree or higher.
- Female respondents (40%) were more likely than males (30%) to aspire to a master's degree or higher.



## Selected Results

This section highlights selected results pertaining to the nature and frequency of student engagement in various activities as well as student attitudes toward their learning experiences.

### How Do Students Spend Their Time?

How students spend their time, in and out of class, has a significant bearing on what students get out of school (Finn, 1993). Time devoted to selected activities is depicted in Table 3. More than 20% of all respondents spent at least 11 hours a week in each of the following: working for pay, watching television, and socializing with friends.

- More than half (57%) of 12th graders compared to 43% of 9th graders spent at least eight hours per week socializing with friends.
- Females (30%) were almost twice as likely as males (16%) to spend at least eight hours per week talking on the phone.
- Males were more likely than females to spend at least eight hours a week playing video games (25% compared to 3%), exercising (24% to 13%), and watching television (42% to 32%).
- During the past year, more than half of the respondents (54%) said they spent no time volunteering, and 61% had *never* participated in a community-based project as part of a regular class.

Table 3: Time Spent per Week in Selected Activities									
Activities	Percentage of respondents devoting 0 to 20+ hours per week								
	0	1	2	3-4	5-7	8-10	11-15	18-19	20+
Preparing for class	6%	14%	12%	18%	20%	13%	10%	2%	4%
Doing volunteer work	54%	17%	11%	10%	5%	2%	1%	0%	1%
Working for pay	40%	6%	6%	10%	9%	7%	8%	3%	10%
Watching television	5%	9%	10%	19%	20%	15%	11%	2%	9%
Participating in school-sponsored activities	36%	8%	7%	9%	10%	10%	12%	3%	5%
Chatting or "surfing" online	22%	15%	11%	14%	14%	10%	7%	2%	6%
Socializing with friends	5%	5%	6%	14%	20%	18%	14%	4%	13%
Playing video games	49%	13%	8%	9%	8%	5%	3%	1%	4%
Exercising	17%	15%	13%	18%	18%	9%	5%	1%	3%
Talking on the phone	14%	23%	13%	14%	13%	8%	6%	2%	7%

**School-Sponsored Activities.** More than one third (36%) of the respondents were not involved in school athletics, clubs, student government, publications, or other school-sponsored activities. However, two fifths (40%) devoted at least five hours in a typical week to such activities. Students differed in their involvement in school-sponsored activities depending on their instructional track and race.

- More than two fifths of the regular education students (42%) and almost half of the career/vocational education students (49%) reported that they spent *no* time in school-sponsored activities.
- Students enrolled primarily in honors/college prep courses (44%) were far more likely than classmates in other instructional paths to participate more than seven hours per week in school-sponsored activities.
- Latino students (51%) were more likely than students in other racial groups to report that they were not involved in *any* school-sponsored activities (American Indian, 41%; African American, 41%; White, 34%; and Asian, 33%).

**Preparing for Class.** Overall, respondents spent relatively little time preparing for class.

- Half (50%) devoted four hours or less per week to homework, reading, rehearsing, etc. (Table 3).
- One fifth (20%) spent one hour or less and 32% spent two hours or less per week in such class preparation.

Despite devoting little time to preparing for class, more than three fifths (61%) of the respondents indicated that their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on spending a lot of time studying and on school work.

Most students also reported they completed their assignments without devoting much time to homework. More than four fifths (81%) of the respondents indicated that they frequently (often or very often) come to class with readings or assignments completed. Coming to class with assignments completed was the behavior most highly correlated with a number of positive attitudes, such as taking pride in school work, valuing rewards at school, putting forth a great deal of effort at school, and placing a high value on learning.

Female students studied more than males, devoting on average two more hours per week to studying than did their male classmates.

- More male respondents (26%) than females (14%) devoted no time or only one hour per week to class preparation. Females (56%) were more likely than males (43%) to report spending more than four hours per week in such preparation.
- Almost three fifths (59%) of the females compared to about two fifths (41%) of the males reported that they come to class with assignments completed *very often*.

There were also differences in study patterns based on instructional track and race.

- On average, students enrolled primarily in honors/college prep courses spent twice as much time per week preparing for class than did students enrolled in special education and career/vocational courses.
- Asian students (18%) were far more likely than other racial groups to report spending more than 15 hours a week preparing for class (Latino, 5%; American Indian, 6%; African American, 5%; and White, 6%).

**Working for Pay.** Employment during high school has been found to be negatively correlated with grades, participation in school-related activities, and other student outcomes (Marsh & Kleitman, 2005). HSSSE respondents varied by grade level (Table 4) and instructional track in time devoted to working for pay. For example, 7% of the 9th graders compared to 43% of the 12th graders worked more than 10 hours a week. Almost one fourth (24%) of the 12th graders worked more than 20 hours per week. Students enrolled primarily in career/vocational courses (25%) were more than twice as likely as other students to work more than 20 hours per week.

Table 4: Time Spent per Week Working for Pay									
Grade level	Percentage of respondents devoting 0 to 20+ hours per week								
	0	1	2	3-4	5-7	8-10	11-15	16-19	20+
9th	46%	9%	9%	13%	11%	6%	3%	1%	3%
10th	44%	7%	7%	10%	10%	7%	6%	2%	6%
11th	35%	5%	5%	8%	9%	8%	11%	5%	14%
12th	29%	3%	3%	6%	7%	8%	13%	6%	24%
Total respondents	40%	6%	6%	10%	9%	7%	8%	3%	10%

**Reading.** Overall, respondents did not spend much time on assigned reading or reading for pleasure.

- Four fifths (80%) of the students said they spent three hours or less reading assigned materials each week.
- More than three fourths (77%) reported spending three hours or less on personal reading in books or magazines, and 84% devoted three hours or less to personal reading online.

### **How Do Students Interact with Teachers?**

Relationships between teachers and students are an important aspect of the student experience. Teacher support has been linked to increased student learning, greater school satisfaction, and more positive attitudes toward school (National Research Council, 2004).

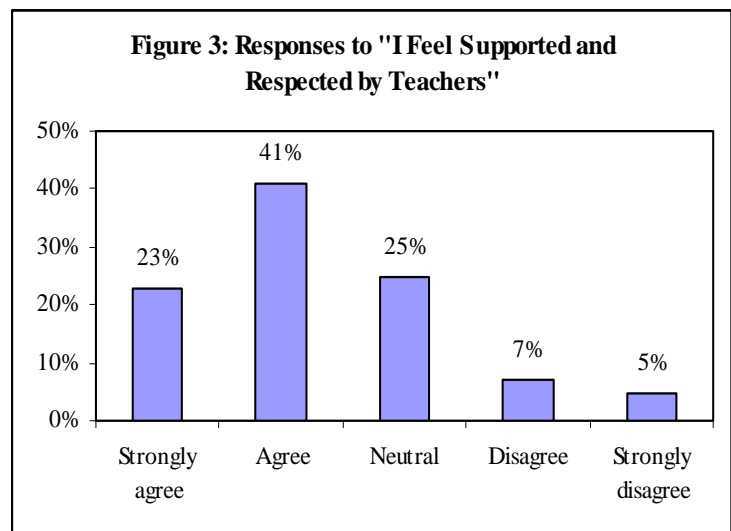
- More than half (52%) of the students had not discussed ideas from their readings or classes with a teacher outside of class during the school year. Only 15% had frequently (often or very often) had such conversations.
- Three fifths (60%) had not communicated with a teacher by email.
- However, 7 out of 10 respondents (70%) agreed they had many opportunities to ask teachers questions about their work.

Less than half (48%) of the respondents said they had frequently discussed grades or assignments with a teacher.

It is important for students to receive feedback on their assignments from their teachers. In fact, students indicating that they frequently received prompt feedback from teachers were more likely to report being challenged to do their best work at school and that their school work makes them curious to learn other things.

- Half of the respondents indicated that they never (9%) or only sometimes (41%) received prompt feedback from teachers on assignments or coursework.
- American Indian students (17%) were more likely than other racial groups to report that they *never* received prompt feedback from teachers (Latino, 14%; Asian, 9%; African American, 8%; and White, 9%).
- Less than half of the students (47%) said that their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on providing helpful comments on student performance.

Students also were asked whether adults at their school supported and cared for them. The good news is that almost two thirds (65%) of the students agreed or strongly agreed that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well, and a comparable percentage (64%) said that they were supported and respected by teachers (Figure 3). However, it is disappointing that more than one third of the respondents did not voice agreement on either item.





- Respondents who strongly agreed (23%) that they were supported and respected by teachers differed in many respects from the students who strongly disagreed (5%). Those strongly agreeing were far more likely to say:

- ♦ they take pride in their school work (86% compared to 28%),
- ♦ what they learn at school is useful (75% to 19%),
- ♦ they have opportunities to ask teachers questions about their school work (89% to 25%), and
- ♦ they are challenged to do their best work at school (75% to 18%).



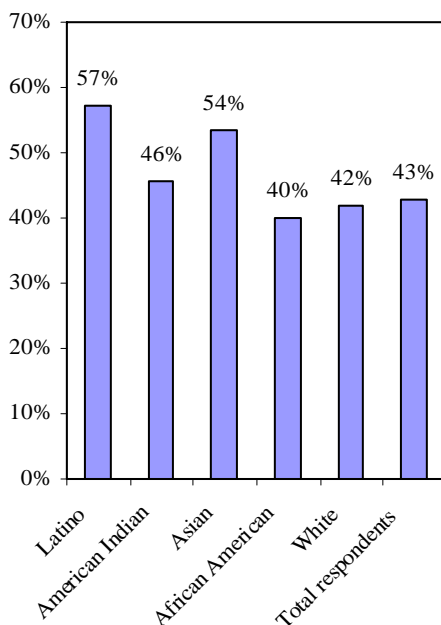
- About two thirds (65%) of the students strongly disagreeing that they were supported and respected by teachers were males.

### **How Engaged are Students in Class Assignments and Discussions?**

Students are more likely to benefit from school when their assignments are challenging and they have opportunities to actively participate in classroom discussions and small group activities (National Research Council, 2004).

- More than two fifths (42%) of the students (37% of females and 47% of males) indicated that they had *never* or only *sometimes* worked on a paper or project using information from several sources, such as books, interviews, Internet, etc.
- About two thirds (66%) of the respondents said that they frequently (often or very often) worked with other students on projects/assignments *during* class.

**Figure 4: Students by Race Who Never or Only Sometimes Contributed to Class Discussions**



- Close to half (46%) of the honors/college prep students said that they frequently put ideas together from different subjects, whereas less than one third (32%) of the general educational students said they did so.
- Only 37% of all respondents indicated that they frequently made presentations in class.

Students who frequently contributed to class discussions were more likely to say that they have a voice in classroom decisions. They also were more likely to value learning and take pride in their school work.

- Yet, less than three fifths (57%) of the respondents said they frequently contributed to class discussions.
- African American (60%) and White students (58%) were more likely than other racial groups to frequently contribute to class discussions; Latino and Asian students were the least likely to do so (Figure 4).
- Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) said they frequently asked questions in class.

### **How Much Do Students Write?**

Comparing the findings from surveys of college freshmen with HSSSE data reveals that while most high school students plan to pursue some form of postsecondary education, many may not be adequately prepared for the amount of writing that will be expected of them in college (HSSSE, 2005).

- More than one third of the respondents (36%) reported that they had not written *any* papers more than five pages long during the current school year (44% of 9th graders compared to 24% of 12th graders) (Table 5).

<b>Table 5: Number of Papers More Than Five Pages Long Written by Respondents by Grade Level</b>					
<i>Number of written papers</i>	<i>Grade level</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>9th</i>	<i>10th</i>	<i>11th</i>	<i>12th</i>	
<i>0</i>	44%	40%	30%	24%	36%
<i>1</i>	21%	22%	25%	25%	23%
<i>2-3</i>	19%	22%	26%	29%	24%
<i>4-5</i>	7%	8%	9%	11%	8%
<i>6-7</i>	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%
<i>8-10</i>	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
<i>11-14</i>	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
<i>15-19</i>	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%
<i>20+</i>	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%

- Respondents tended to write more short papers; but still less than two fifths (39%) had written more than three papers 3-5 pages long during the current school year.
- Females (42%) were more likely than males (30%) to say they frequently (often or very often) prepared more than two drafts of a paper.

### **How Often Do Students Discuss Ideas and Work on Projects Outside Class?**

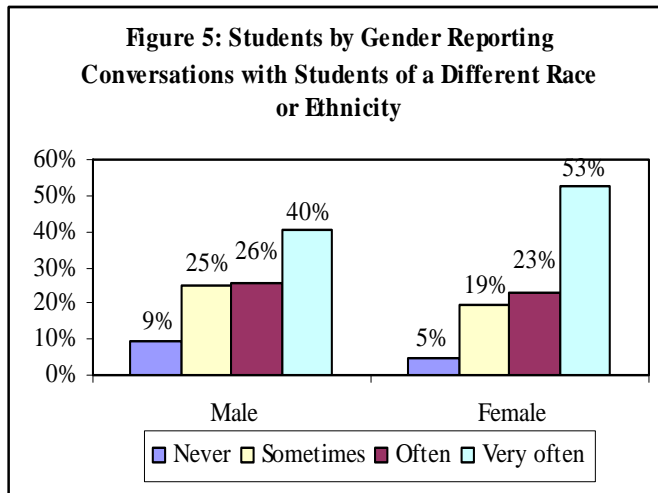
Engaged students typically discuss class topics with peers and others outside the classroom (Daniels & Arapostethis, 2005). Thus, students were asked questions about how classroom activities have nurtured such outside conversations and collaboration.

- Only one fifth (20%) of the respondents frequently (often or very often) worked with other students on projects or assignments outside of class.
- A larger percentage of Latino (40%), African American (39%), and American Indian (35%) students reported that they *never* worked on projects with other students outside of class when compared to Asian (23%) and White (31%) students.
- Almost two fifths (39%) of the respondents frequently discussed ideas from their classes with others, such as family members or friends (45% of females compared to 32% of males).
- Males (22%) were more likely than females (13%) to say that they *never* engaged in such discussions with family or friends.



## **What Do Students Say About Experiences with Diversity?**

Meaningful, substantive interactions with people from different backgrounds are important to prepare students for life after high school.



- Only 7% of the respondents said that they *never* participated in a conversation with a student of a different race or ethnicity, and almost half (47%) indicated that they very often had such conversations.
- Female respondents (53%) were more likely than males (40%) to report that they very often engaged in conversations with classmates of a different race or ethnicity (Figure 5).
- About two fifths (42%) also said they very often had serious conversations with students who differed from them in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values; females (48%) were more likely than males (35%) to do so.

- Only 37% of the respondents reported that views of different races, religions, genders, or political beliefs are frequently (often or very often) considered in class discussions or assignments.
- Less than half (43%) said that their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds and beliefs.
- Almost one fourth (23%) indicated that their school places *very little* emphasis on encouraging such contact.

## **How Do Students View Their School?**

Students who think they are not respected or who feel socially isolated do not perform to their full potential (National Research Council, 2004). Accordingly, respondents were asked a number of questions about the school environment, their sense of belonging, what their school emphasizes, and how their school experience has affected them.

- More than half (53%) of all respondents agreed that they care about their current school; 9th graders (56%) were more likely to agree or strongly agree than were 12th graders (50%).
- Less than one third of all respondents (31%) agreed that school rules are fair; Asian students (38%) were the most likely to agree with this sentiment, while African American students (24%) were least likely to agree.
- Less than half (47%) of the students agreed that they would select the same high school again if given the opportunity.
- Only half (50%) said that their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on treating students fairly.
- About two thirds (67%) of the respondents said that people at their school, overall, accept them for who they are.

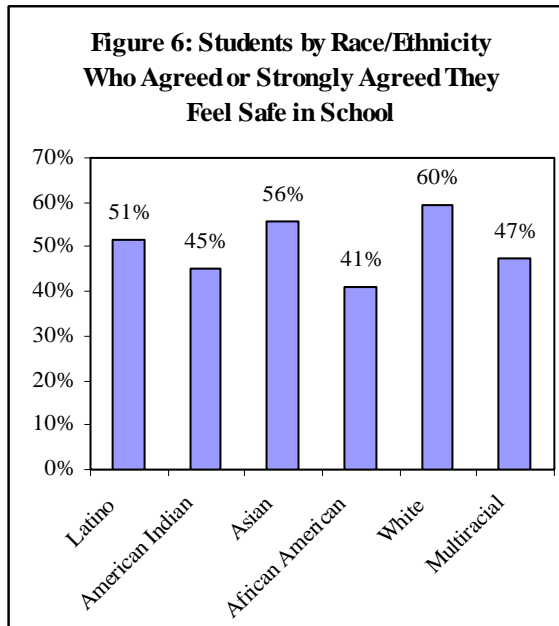


Only slightly more than half (55%) of the respondents agreed they feel safe at school. Those strongly agreeing that they were supported by teachers were far more likely than those strongly disagreeing to say they feel safe in school (74% compared to 19%).

- African American students (41%) were far less likely than White students (60%) to agree they feel safe at school (Figure 6).
- Ninth graders (52%) were less likely than 12th graders (61%) to say they feel safe.
- Less than half (41%) of the special education students agreed that they feel safe at school.

Students were asked their perceptions of selected school emphases. Three fourths (75%) of the respondents said their school places substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on continuing education beyond high school. Interestingly, respondents were more likely to say their school places substantial emphasis on athletic achievement (72%) than on academic excellence (63%). Indeed, 41% said their school places *very much* emphasis on athletic achievement, whereas only 27% indicated that academic excellence is emphasized to that degree.

Table 6 depicts students' perceptions of the extent that their high school contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in various areas. More than two thirds (67%) of the respondents thought their high school education contributed substantially to their writing ability, even though the vast majority reported that they have not written many papers at least five pages long (see p. 8).



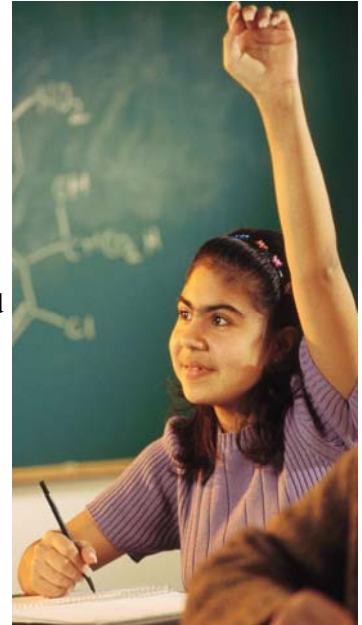
**Table 6: Students' Perceptions of School Contributions to Their Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development in Selected Areas**

	<i>% indicating their school experience contributed substantially (quite a bit or very much) to personal gains</i>
<i>Writing effectively</i>	67%
<i>Learning on your own</i>	65%
<i>Working well with others</i>	64%
<i>Preparing for college</i>	64%
<i>Thinking deeply and critically</i>	61%
<i>Using computing and information technology</i>	61%
<i>Speaking effectively</i>	59%
<i>Developing clear career goals</i>	51%
<i>Developing personal values</i>	50%
<i>Learning work-related skills</i>	50%
<i>Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds</i>	49%
<i>Understanding yourself</i>	49%
<i>Solving real-world problems</i>	45%
<i>Making your community a better place</i>	34%

## **Do Students Have a Voice in What They Do at School?**

Students were asked about their role in deciding what they study and in determining other aspects of their school experience. Having a voice in influencing classroom decisions has been related to greater student ownership and investment in learning activities (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

- Almost half (49%) of all respondents indicated that they have a voice in making classroom decisions. Students who strongly agreed (16%) reflected different attitudes toward their school experience than did students who strongly disagreed (6%) that they have such a voice. Those strongly agreeing were far more likely to indicate that:
  - ♦ they are supported and respected by teachers (81% compared to 25%),
  - ♦ what they learn at school is useful (73% to 23%),
  - ♦ they feel safe at school (69% to 25%),
  - ♦ they worked harder than they expected to work in school (59% to 26%),
  - ♦ they take pride in their school work (86% to 34%) and
  - ♦ they place a high value on learning (90% to 36%).
- More than half of the respondents (56%) agreed that they get to make choices about what they study at school.
- Almost two fifths (39%) indicated that they help determine how their school work is assessed.



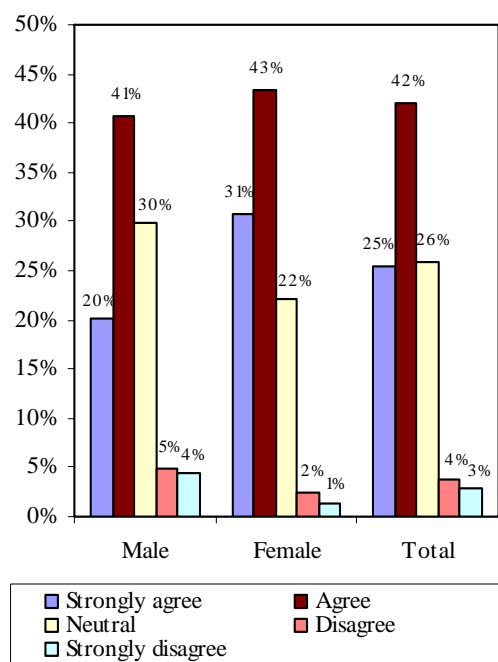
## **How Do Students Feel About Learning, Grades, and School Work?**

As noted previously (see pg. 5) students with positive attitudes about school work are more likely to come to class with their assignments completed.

- More than two thirds of the students (67%) agreed that they take pride in their school work, with females (74%) far more likely to do so than males (61%) (Figure 7).
- African American students (72%) were more likely than other racial groups to voice such pride (Asian, 69%; White, 68%; Latino, 59%; and American Indian, 55%).
- The vast majority of the respondents (84%) agreed it is important to make good grades (89% of the females and 79% of the males).
- About two thirds (68%) of the respondents agreed they place a high value on learning (74% of the females and 64% of the males).

Slightly more than half of all respondents (53%) agreed that what they learn at school is useful. Asian (62%), Latino (60%), and African American (58%) students were more likely than White (51%) or American Indian (47%) students to voice this sentiment.

**Figure 7: Responses to "I Take Pride in My School Work" by Gender**



About 9 out of 10 respondents (88%) agreed they have the skills necessary to complete their school work (Figure 8). However, only 38% agreed that the support they get at school encourages them to learn more, but only 35% said they are excited about their classes.

Only slightly more than half (53%) of the respondents agreed that they put forth a great deal of effort in their school work.

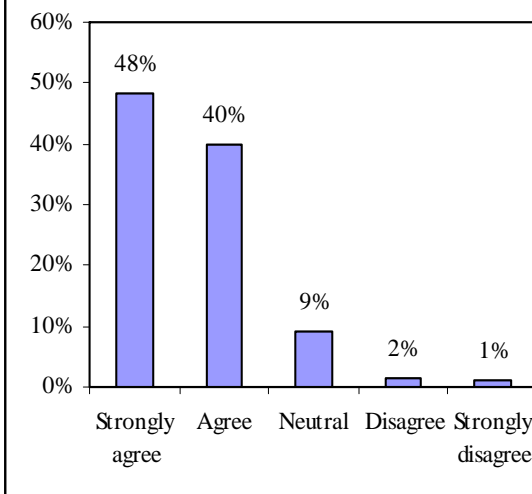
- African American (60%) and Asian (60%) students were more likely than White (53%), Latino (52%), and American Indian (48%) students to agree that they devote a great deal of effort to school work.
- Only 43% of all respondents agreed that they worked harder than they expected to work in school (39% of males compared to 47% of females).
- African American (49%), Latino (47%), and Asian (47%) students were more likely than White (42%) and American Indian (41%) students to say they worked harder than they expected to work.
- Only about half (51%) agreed they are challenged to do their best work at school, and less than half (47%) said that their school work makes them curious to learn about other things.

About two fifths (38%) of the students said they frequently (often or very often) enjoyed tasks that require a lot of mental effort.

- Almost half of the students enrolled primarily in honors/college prep courses (48%) or courses for college credit (47%) compared to about one third of the general education students (34%) said they frequently enjoyed completing such tasks.
- Students who enjoyed tasks requiring a lot of mental effort also exhibited more positive attitudes. They were more likely to place a high value on learning, take pride in their school work, be excited about classes, and say that their school work makes them curious to learn about other things.

Another item asked students if they learned something from discussing questions that have no clear answers, and 45% of the respondents said that they frequently did. This item was highly correlated with the same positive attitudes noted above as well as with students having a voice in classroom decisions. Not surprisingly, students enrolled primarily in honors/college prep courses (55%) or courses for credit (53%) were more likely than those in the general/regular (42%) and career/vocational (41%) tracks to say they frequently learned a lot from discussing questions with no clear answers.

**Figure 8: Responses to "I Have the Skills and Abilities to Complete My Work"**



## How Schools Are Using Their HSSSE Results

This section highlights some ways HSSSE schools have effectively used their results to guide meaningful reform efforts. These ideas have been distilled from a larger piece, *Using HSSSE Data*, that is included in each school report and is available on the HSSSE web site.

HSSSE schools report that the data have been extremely beneficial as a basis to alter school practices and enhance student learning. Since state and district requirements impact curriculum decisions, HSSSE data should be used to complement these curricular frameworks.



- HSSSE data indicated that students in an urban high school were writing very few papers longer than five pages. In addition, more than half of the students said they never or seldom received prompt feedback on their work from teachers. The teachers indicated that they did not have time to provide prompt feedback on long written assignments, given the multiple demands on their time. Thus, the school recruited parent and other community volunteers to assist teachers with paperwork and other routine activities. This gave teachers more time to provide prompt, helpful feedback to students on their written work. The quality of student writing improved significantly as a result.
- School administrators at a mid-size suburban high school noticed that only 10% of their students participated in community service, an activity that the community highly values. To address this need, the school implemented a new graduation requirement that mandated community service for all students and also created a community service fair where students could learn about the opportunities available to them. To foster collaboration and share resources, the school partnered with another small high school to create the fair and organize community service projects.

All of these strategies were effective, and none were costly!

- Teachers and students at one large high school brainstormed about ways to increase student study time after learning that 55% of their students spent three hours or less per week preparing for all of their classes. Among strategies adopted were a peer tutoring program in the library during school hours, a homework hotline staffed by volunteer teachers and honor students two evenings each week, brief quizzes over homework at the beginning of class on a random basis, and periodic bonus questions on assigned readings.



- Personnel in a rural high school were discouraged to find that their students read much less than the other HSSSE respondents in terms of both academic and personal reading. The school staff began a campaign to encourage reading for all students. Homeroom was extended by 10 minutes, and a 20-minute school-wide reading period was implemented each morning. All school staff members participated in the initiative. In addition, the faculty increased the students' reading requirements throughout their classes and established reading incentive programs. Incentives included bonus points for participating in a student-led book discussion group, participation in monthly read-a-thons, and recognition at a school assembly for students who met their reading goals.



## Final Word

There is good reason why so many different groups are trying to improve America's high schools. The 180,000 high school students who have completed HSSSE since 2004 indicate that they spend relatively little time studying outside of class. In fact, involvement in and commitment to educationally purposeful activities steadily decreases from the first year of high school to the senior year. Given that the vast majority of students want and need to continue their education, high schools simply must expect more from students at every grade level.

HSSSE data also suggest that school priorities, at least as perceived by students, should be revisited, as most students believe that athletics receive more attention than academics. In addition, the results show that certain groups of students — men and students of color except for Asians — are less engaged and less likely to be taking classes that will prepare them for college-level work. Most important, *all* students must feel safe and secure in their high schools if improvement efforts are to have the desired results.

HSSSE provides much needed information to fill a knowledge gap on the high school student experience. Academic performance measured by achievement tests is important to be sure. As a complement to such test results, student engagement data can identify where changes are needed to enhance student learning and school effectiveness.

### High School Survey of Student Engagement

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