

TRENDS & TUDES

Keeping you connected to today's youth audience

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EDITORIAL

Our Take On It


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Education matters – and not only to students, teachers and parents. While the reasons for educators' and parents' interest in the state of education are easily apparent, this topic resonates even for those without school-age children or outside the education profession. Some people may be concerned about education because of its impact on their taxes; others may care about its implication for the state of the future workforce. The connection between education and the overall well-being of a country has been noted by both ancient and modern observers:

"The legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution." – Aristotle¹

"The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." – Franklin D. Roosevelt²

How well do Americans feel that their education system is performing? The answer seems to depend on the closeness of their connection to the system itself. In the most

Continued on page 2
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The Dog Better Not Eat My Homework! Students', Parents' and Teachers' Views on Homework



Heavy loads of homework are often cited as a contributing factor to the perception that American kids today lead overscheduled and overburdened lives. So many may be surprised by results of this year's *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience*, revealing that parents, teachers and students view homework as important; and that most parents think that the right amount of homework is being assigned. Each year *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* examines key issues in American public education. Harris Interactive is proud to have conducted the Survey of the American Teacher on behalf of MetLife® annually since the Survey's inception in 1984. This year, teachers, students and parents were interviewed about their experiences with homework. All three groups agree that homework is important, that homework facilitates learning, and despite recent coverage in popular media reporting the contrary,

that teachers assign about the right amount of homework.

Why do eight in ten students (77%), parents (81%) and teachers (83%) believe that doing homework is important? Its perceived utility may be one reason. Most parents (89%) as well as teachers (91%), and even students (69%), agree homework helps students learn more in school. Even more teachers (98%) and parents (93%) agree that homework develops students' sense of responsibility. There is also consensus among all three groups about the role homework will play in preparing students for life beyond high school. More than half of students (56%) and parents (64%) think doing homework will help a lot to reach post-high school goals, and more than half of teachers (55%) strongly agree that homework will play a very important role in preparing students for their lives beyond 12th grade.

Continued on page 2

Our Take On It

Continued from page 1

recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* (2007), 31 percent of parents rate the overall quality of the education that their child receives as excellent. An additional 47 percent of parents rate the quality of education as good, with the remaining 22 percent giving it a fair or poor rating. A recent Harris Poll indicates that the general public may be harsher in their assessment. When asked to rate the quality of public education, fewer than two in ten adults give a rating of very good or excellent to either elementary or secondary education (grades K-6, 17%; grades 7-12, 14%). Adults are twice as likely to rate the quality of public education in the United States as fair or poor as they are to rate it as very good or excellent. This applies to both the elementary (39% poor/fair) and secondary school (45% poor/fair) levels.³

There are other indications that Americans are concerned about the state of education, as well as their general outlook for the country. U.S. adults' confidence in the leaders of major educational institutions (such as colleges and universities) is down five points in the past year, from 37 percent who had a "great deal of confidence" in these leaders in 2007 to 32 percent in 2008.⁴ Interestingly, teachers are seen as among the top three most prestigious occupations in the United States. Over half of adults (54%) perceive teachers as having "very great prestige."⁵

Of particular concern is a finding from a recent Harris Interactive/France 24/International Herald Tribune poll⁶ that half of Americans (52%) believe that the U.S. is doing badly with regard to education today. Only two in ten Americans (19%) say that the U.S. is doing well in this area. The public's assessment of education reflects their negative point of view about the general situation of the United States. Half of Americans (52%) think that the U.S. is doing badly, while only 19 percent believe it is doing well. Furthermore, six in ten Americans

Continued on page 3

TRENDS & TUDES

The Dog Better Not Eat My Homework!

Continued from page 1

Table 1
The Importance of Homework – Students, Parents and Teachers

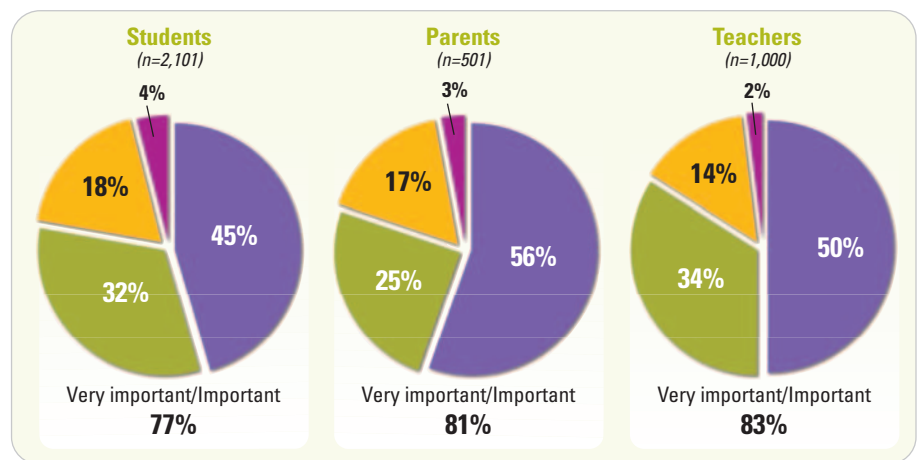
Q705 (Students): How important is doing homework?
Base: All Students

Q650 (Parents): In your opinion, how important is doing homework?
Base: All Parents

Q585 (Teachers): In your opinion, how important is doing homework?
Base: All Teachers



Very important Important Somewhat important Not important



Source: *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience (2007)*

Not all teachers value and use homework in the same way. Differences emerge when we look at new teachers – those who have been in the classroom for fewer than 5 years – versus those who have been teaching for more than 20 years. The most experienced teachers are more likely than new teachers to believe that doing homework is important (87% vs. 74%); to believe strongly that doing homework helps students learn more in school (60% vs. 36%); and to agree strongly that homework helps students reach their goals for after high school (60% vs. 48%). Teachers with more experience also approach applying homework differently: they are more likely to frequently use homework to develop students' interests (57% vs. 41%), to review completed homework assignments in class discussions most or all of the time (76% vs. 59%) and to

speak at least once a week to their students' other teachers about how much homework they are assigning (41% vs. 21%). More experienced teachers are also more likely than new teachers to feel extremely or very prepared to create engaging homework assignments (74% vs. 58%).

Homework is a part of daily life for most students, particularly those with high grades. Students who get mostly A's are more likely than those who get both A's and B's, and those who get C's or below to have homework assigned every day (52%, 43%, and 34% respectively). Three-quarters of students (77%) are assigned homework at least three days a week, including 42% who are assigned homework every day. Nearly half (46%) of 7th-12th graders have homework every

Continued on page 3

(59%) think that the U.S. is moving in the wrong direction.

How do Americans' views stack up to residents of the five biggest European countries? Across the board, more residents of France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Spain believe their respective countries are moving in the wrong direction than believe their countries are moving in the right direction. In Italy (65%), France (56%) and Great Britain (54%) these numbers account for the majority. Spaniards (30%) and Germans (28%) are most likely to believe their countries are doing well, followed by the British (20%) and Americans (19%). The French (7%) and Italians (4%) are least likely to think their country is doing well.

No more than two in ten residents of any of these countries believe that their country is doing well when it comes to education and about half or more believe their country is doing badly. Two-thirds of Italians (64%) and nearly six in ten French (57%) and Spanish (56%) say their country is doing badly when it comes to education. About half of Americans (52%) and Germans (49%) rate their countries this poorly regarding education, compared to 45 percent of the British.

Given that these countries combined are responsible for educating over 96 million children, the public's lack of confidence in their schooling is troubling indeed.

¹ Politics 8.1; 1337a10-16, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. by Jowett, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press (1985).

² *The Wit and Wisdom of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Government and Democracy*, p. 29, eds. Peter and Helen Beilenson, Peter Pauper Press (1982).

³ *The Harris Poll* #45, June 2, 2006

⁴ *The Harris Poll* #22, February 28, 2008

⁵ *The Harris Poll* #77, August 1, 2007

⁶ Harris Interactive/France 24/International Herald Tribune, February 8, 2008

TRENDS & TUDes

The Dog Better Not Eat My Homework!

Continued from page 2

day, compared with just over a third (35%) of 3rd-6th graders. What do parents think about this? Most parents (60%) report that their students receive about the right amount of homework. While 15% say their children receive too

much homework, even more (25%) say their students receive **too little**.



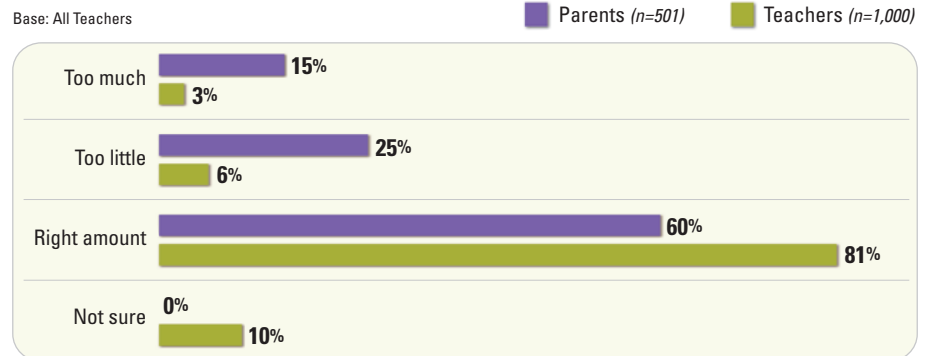
Table 2
Parents' Perceptions of Amount of Homework

Q640 (Parents): Do you think your child's teachers assign too much homework, too little homework or the right amount of homework?

Base: All Parents

Q570 (Teachers): Do your students' parents think you assign too much homework, too little homework or the right amount of homework?

Base: All Teachers



Source: *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience (2007)*

Whether it is indeed too much, too little or just the right amount, students are finding ways to engage in other activities while they do their homework. Over half (55%) listen to music and nearly half (45%) watch TV while they're doing homework. Two in ten students talk on the phone (20%), instant message or email (20%) or text message (17%) while they do their homework. All of this activity may come at a price: nearly half (46%) of students do not get as much sleep as they say they should. Among elementary school students, 29 percent say they do not get enough sleep, and among secondary school students, 57 percent say they do not get enough sleep.

Creating homework interesting enough to keep students engaged appears to be easier for teachers who have longer tenure, as discussed above, and according to students, the appeal of homework may differ quite a bit by subject. Students rate science homework the highest, with nearly a quarter (23%) of students saying science has the most interesting homework, followed by math (21%). Social studies/history garnered 15 percent of the votes, and English/reading earned 14 percent. Foreign language fared particularly poorly, with only 4 percent of students rating that homework as the most interesting.

Continued on page 4

The Dog Better Not Eat My Homework!

Continued from page 3

However, when an assignment does capture a student's imagination and attention, it truly resonates, as is apparent from their descriptions of their favorite homework assignments:

"I had to make a biography of my life for every year I was alive. I made a book with pictures of me. I still have it."

(3rd grade boy)

"When I had to ask my parents what they did at school when they were kids."

(3rd grade girl)

"Book report on a mystery and then do a project to hide clues to the mystery."

(4th grade girl)

"The best homework assignment I had was when I need to do a family tree. I learned a lot about my family history."

(5th grade girl)

"Do a community service project involving something we enjoyed doing. I held a food/toys drive for the King County Humane Society."

(10th grade girl)

"A fake trip to Peru. We had to do a brochure and a presentation. It was so much fun."

(11th grade girl)

"Make up a lab/hypothesis for Physics and use school laptops and video cameras to conduct whatever experiment you created."

(12th grade boy)

Whether it's about English, Spanish or fractions, parents, particularly elementary school parents, report using homework as a point of discussion. Overall, two-thirds of parents (66%) speak with their children at least twice a week about their homework, including four in ten parents (40%) who report that their child discusses his or her homework with them every day. Over half of elementary school parents (56%) say that their child discusses his or her homework with them every day, whereas only 22% of secondary school parents report speaking to their child about homework on a daily basis.

TRENDS & TUDes

Four in ten parents (43%) feel unprepared or only somewhat prepared to help their child with his or her homework. A majority of secondary school parents (57%) feel less than well prepared to help their child with his or her homework, compared to 29 percent of elementary school parents. Parents' feelings of preparedness are related to their own education level. Parents who have a college degree or more are more likely than other parents to feel prepared or very prepared to help with homework (74% vs. 49%). But subject-wise, parents are least likely to feel prepared to help their child with foreign language (43%) and math (43%) homework.

Perhaps even when parents don't feel well prepared, the way they can best help their students may be by inculcating strong

study habits. Readers alarmed by the rates at which students multi-task may be relieved (or further alarmed) when thinking about the context of the increasing demands for multi-tasking in the workplace. While technology may influence the nature of how some assignments are completed, it's not yet advanced enough for learning in the style of the movie, *The Matrix*, where gigabytes of information are transferred directly into a student's brain. Until that day arrives, it appears homework will remain an important part of the learning process.

A full copy of this report may be downloaded at the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher website.

<http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/10124301191202765628V1FTeacherSurveyHomeworkFinal.pdf>

Table 3
Subject With Most Interesting Homework

Q620 (Students): Which subject has the most interesting homework?

Base: All Students

	Total	Grade Level			Grades	
		3-6	7-12	Mostly A's	A's and B's	C's and below
Base:	2,101	922	1,179	558	961	523
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Science	23	24	23	26	24	21
Math	21	30	15	22	22	19
Social Studies/History	15	15	15	15	16	16
English/Reading	14	14	14	19	13	12
Foreign Language	4	*	6	4	4	4
Art	1	*	1	1	1	1
Spelling	1	2	-	*	1	1
Biology	*	-	*	-	*	-
Creative Writing	*	1	*	1	*	1
Speech	*	*	*	*	*	-
Language Arts	*	-	*	-	*	-
Something else	1	*	2	*	2	2
None	14	11	17	10	13	19
No answer	3	2	3	1	3	3

Source: The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience (2007)

Recent Research for Public Release

Wake Up Moms and Dads! You know Far Less About Your Teen Daughter Than You think, According to a New WE tv Poll.

Almost Half (47%) of Teenage Girls Say They Have Never Spoken With Their Parents About Sex, Drugs, Cigarettes, or Alcohol, and Over One-third Say They Can't Talk to Their Parents About Anything.

It is hardly shocking that teenage girls today suffer significant anxiety and stress, but according to a recently released poll commissioned by the cable network WE tv and conducted by Harris Interactive, many are struggling with a much bigger issue – poor communication with their parents.

The poll, released to coincide with the March 10th premiere of the docu-series, *High School Confidential*, indicates that many parents who think they are staying in close touch with their teenage daughters' lives may be operating under a misassumption. Although over three quarters (78%) of parents are sure that their daughters can talk to them about anything, only slightly more than half (54%) of high school girls surveyed agreed that they could chat about anything with their parents. In addition, 34% of teens disagree with the statement "I can talk to my parents about anything." As a result, parents may be surprised to learn they are far less informed than they believe. While a whopping 73% of parents report that they know much of what is happening in the lives of their adolescent daughters, only 45% of the teenage respondents concur that their parents know a great deal about what is *really* going on with them.

More details on this survey are available at:

http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters/clientnews/2008_WeTV.pdf

Contact Us

To make suggestions regarding this newsletter or to discuss a business issue involving youth or the people and issues that influence today's youth, please contact us at **877.919.4765** or info@harrisinteractive.com.

For more information, please contact us at:
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or visit our website at
www.harrisinteractive.com

TRENDS & TUDES

Team Spotlight

Michelle Gosney

*Research Manager
Youth and Education Research*

Michelle is a Research Manager on the Youth and Education team at Harris Interactive in Rochester, NY. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Marketing at SUNY Oswego. After working several years as a sales rep for Nabisco Foods (Oreo's and milk anyone?), Michelle joined the Youth and Education team at Harris Interactive in 1998. For nearly ten years now, she has enjoyed working with school districts all over the country, assisting them in efforts toward continuous improvement through the Harris Interactive School Poll. She also works with clients in the Youth market and finds the blend of youth and education research interesting, rewarding, and important.



Michelle and the family Bichon Frise.

Away from work she loves spending time with her husband and two children. She and her family enjoy cuddling their adorable Bichon Frise and two cats. Michelle also enjoys music, theater, the outdoors, and the NY Yankees!

What's New With Youth?

Order Your Copy of YouthPulseSM 2007

You need to know almost as much about the youth market as you would if they were all your own children. How they spend their time, how they spend their money, their hopes, fears and aspirations, and which parts of the kid experience are totally different today than they were a decade – or even a year – ago.

To learn more about YouthPulse or to purchase the 2007 study, contact us at 877.919.4765 or by email at info@harrisinteractive.com.

Request Your Complimentary Copy of the US/China YouthPulse Comparison Study

This report highlights key insights into how technology impacts the lives today's youth in three geographic locations; Shanghai, Hong Kong and the U.S.; and offers information on hopes, dreams and fears, relationships with family, and technology and media usage. To receive a full copy of the report, contact us at 877.919.4765 or by email at info@harrisinteractive.com.

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