

# Rigor Asked for in High Schools

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Editor's note: In the following article from *The New York Times* it is once again illuminated that happiness can be experienced in work and striving, that youth continues to be generally idealistic and diligent, and that good teachers will challenge students. Teens are malleable; they will rise to challenges.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The campaign to make high school more demanding seems to be picking up support from the people who have the biggest stake in the matter: the students themselves.

Almost nine in ten students say they would work harder if their high school expected more of them, a survey finds. Less than one-third of students say their school sets high academic expectations, and most students favor ideas that might add some hassle to their life, such as more rigorous graduation standards and additional high-stakes testing.

"The good old times in high schools are being replaced by good old hard work," said Peter Hart, whose Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted the survey for the "State of Our Nation's Youth Report" released Tuesday. "There's a recognition among students that they have to be more ready to compete."

The nonprofit Horatio Alger Association, which provides college scholarships and mentoring to needy students, issued the annual report on youth attitudes. The findings are based on a phone survey of 1,005 students in high school last May.

Improving high schools has become an urgent topic in education, as mounting research shows many students aren't ready for college or work after graduation—if they get that far. The call for change has come from President Bush, governors, employers, and college faculty.

Now students are saying it, too.

Julie Hetcko, 16, of Lincoln, Nebraska, who will be a senior in the fall, has taken three Advanced Placement courses and is looking for other ways to prepare for college. High schools that don't offer some type of advanced coursework, she said, are holding students back.

"Times are changing," she said. "I don't think people realize how much students are trying to excel, trying to get into college. It's important that adults and parents know that it's not just a walk in the park. We want to work for our grades."

When given options for improving high schools, 95 percent of students agreed that more real-world opportunities, such as internships, would help at least somewhat. More than 90 percent also favored two other ideas: earlier counseling in high school about how to prepare for college, and more opportunities to take college-level courses for free.

Majorities of students said other changes would help, too, including increasing the availability of after-school and summer school, requiring students to pass math and English exams to graduate, and requiring four years of math and courses in biology, chemistry, and physics.

The students' call for more rigor comes as 41 percent of them said the pressure to get good grades is a major problem for them, about the same level as the last two years. One-third of students said getting good grades is very important when it comes to fitting in with their friends—a factor cited more often than having a car or being involved in sports.

More than three in four students plan to go to a four-year university. A total of 83 percent said high school is preparing them "adequately" for college, although a smaller number, 71 percent, said high school, is getting them sufficiently ready for the work world.

Most of the students surveyed were enrolled in public schools, with the rest attending private school, home school or another type of school. Students aged 13 to 19 took part.

The survey has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Among other findings:

- More than two in five students say at least half the students they know cheat on tests.
- More than six in ten students say they have a cell phone.
- Nine in ten students say they have at least one family member in whom they can confide.
- About half of students say they eat a meal with their family every day.
- Almost three in four students say they would admire a professional athlete less if they found out the athlete had taken illegal steroids.

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