

Engagement, Performance on Standardized Tests, and the Gallup Student Poll

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Being engaged promotes productivity and retention (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). This research on employee engagement is clear, and the latest research on student engagement (Gallup, 2009a; Gordon, 2006) and student achievement makes a strong case for building engaged schools.

Engagement and Performance on Standardized Tests

Engagement data provides school leaders with information about the conditions that keep students and staff involved in and enthusiastic about school. These data provide a leading indicator of future performance. In a series of studies, Gallup research has demonstrated that student and teacher engagement is associated with future performance on high-stakes tests. For example, engaged students are more than twice as likely to outperform a comparison group of randomly selected students on standardized tests (Gallup, 2009a). Furthermore, in a study of three Texas districts, schools with an engaged professional staff passed more students on standardized tests than did schools with a less engaged staff (Gallup, 2009a).

“If we can’t have great places for teachers to work, we won’t have great places for students to learn.”

Gary Gordon, Building Engaged Schools

Engagement and Findings From the March 2009 Gallup Student Poll

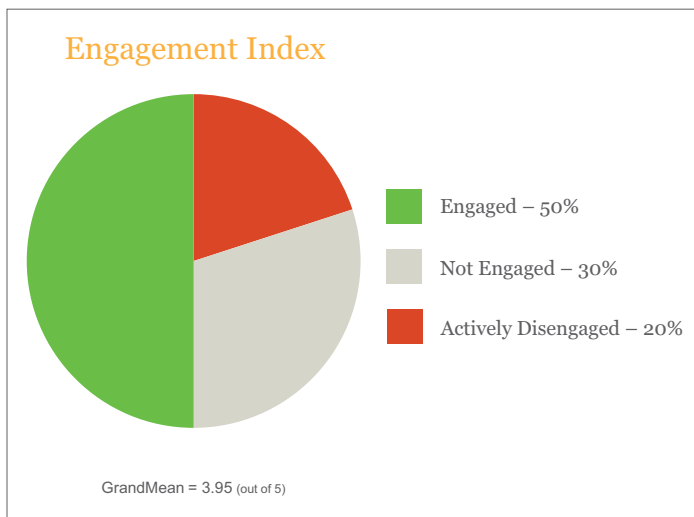
The Gallup Student Poll surveyed 70,078 students in grades 5 through 12 from 335 schools and 59 districts located in 18 states

and the District of Columbia. The online poll was completed on school computers during one of four March fielding options; polls were open Tuesday through Friday during school hours. The following items, which constitute an internally consistent scale (alpha=0.71), were used to measure engagement:

- I have a best friend at school.
- I feel safe in this school.
- My teachers make me feel my schoolwork is important.
- At this school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good schoolwork.

Based on the March 2009 Gallup Student Poll, half of students are engaged; they are highly involved with and enthusiastic about school. The other half of students are either going through the motions at school (30%) or actively undermining the teaching and learning process (20%). Student engagement peaks during elementary school, decreases through middle school and 10th grade, and plateaus 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 5th through 10th grade. Student responses to “My teachers make me feel my school work is important” account for some of the engagement decline across the grade levels, suggesting that students see school as less important and relevant as they advance through grades. Student responses suggest that a lack of recognition or praise in the last seven days and too few opportunities to do what they do best also may contribute to the engagement slide.

The Gallup Student Poll revealed that a school's commitment to strengths is associated with higher student engagement. It showed that 79% of students who strongly agreed with "My school is committed to building the strengths of each student" were engaged at school, compared to 11% of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.



Poll data also demonstrated a strong link between experienced well-being, measured by the Positive Yesterday Index, and engagement. The poll displayed that 73% of students who had a positive yesterday (respect, interesting, smile/laugh, energy) were engaged at school, compared to 12% who had a negative yesterday.

Student engagement is not associated with class size or income (Gallup, 2009b).

Building Engaged Schools

What is the one intervention that will most positively influence student achievement? Principals engage the staff by getting them excited about the future. When Gallup studied the impact that leaders have throughout an organization, the single most powerful question was whether their leadership made them "feel enthusiastic about the future." The results showed 69% of employees who strongly agreed with this statement were engaged in their jobs, compared to a mere 1% of employees who disagreed or strongly disagreed. In turn, engaged teachers get students excited about their future. Together, engaged students, teachers, and principals build engaged schools.

References

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