

GALLUP®

Gallup Student Poll  
Engaged Today —  
Ready for Tomorrow

FALL 2015 SURVEY RESULTS

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# Gallup Student Poll

## Engaged Today — Ready for Tomorrow

### FALL 2015 SURVEY RESULTS

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## Introduction

Education is a critical part of the journey to a thriving life. Americans expect their schools to help students chart a path to productive, fulfilling futures in an increasingly complex world. To do so, school leaders and educators need metrics that help them monitor all of the aspects of education that make a difference in students' success, beyond test scores and report cards.

The Gallup Student Poll (GSP) helps K-12 schools define and measure school success with a focus on the outcomes that matter most — great jobs and great lives. The survey, with nearly 4 million completed to date, was launched in 2009 as a way to add the voices of U.S. students to the national dialogue about education reform.

The 24 core items on the survey measure four dimensions of student success:



**Engagement:** The involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Engaged students are excited about what's happening at their school and what they're learning. These students contribute to the learning environment, and they are psychologically committed to their school.



**Hope:** The ideas and energy students have for the future. Hope has been linked to student success in school. Hopeful students are positive about the future, goal-oriented and can overcome obstacles in the learning process, enabling them to navigate a pathway to achieve their goals.



**Entrepreneurial Aspiration:** The talent and energy for building businesses that survive, thrive and employ others. By identifying and nurturing students' entrepreneurial talent, educators can empower the next generation of innovators to spur and sustain long-term economic energy.



**Career/Financial Literacy:** The information, attitudes and behaviors that students need to practice for healthy participation in the economy. Wise economic choices can contribute to a thriving life.

The aim of the Gallup Student Poll is to enable superintendents, principals and educators to take direct action based on the results to provide a more robust educational experience: one that builds engagement, creates hope for the future, fosters talent and prepares students to participate meaningfully in our nation's economy by finding or creating a good job.

When students know what they do best and have opportunities to develop their strengths, they are more motivated and enthusiastic about learning and are more likely to be engaged at school.

TO DATE, NEARLY

4 million

SURVEYS COMPLETED

A 2015 nationally representative poll of the nation's adults suggests there is strong public support for this approach.<sup>1</sup> Results from the survey show that about four in five U.S. adults say engagement and hope for the future are very important measures of school effectiveness. In contrast, just one in 10 U.S. adults say the same about standardized tests. In another study, more than eight in 10 of the nation's superintendents say that students' engagement with classwork and hope for the future are "very important" measures of a public school's effectiveness, equaling the importance placed on high school graduation rates.<sup>2</sup>

Consensus is growing among educators and the general public that multiple measures are important to gauging a school's effectiveness. Cognitive development and academic achievement are just parts of a more complex equation that ultimately defines student success.

GOOD FOR SOME

Standardized  
Tests and Grades

TO

GOOD FOR ALL

Strengths,  
Skills and  
Experience

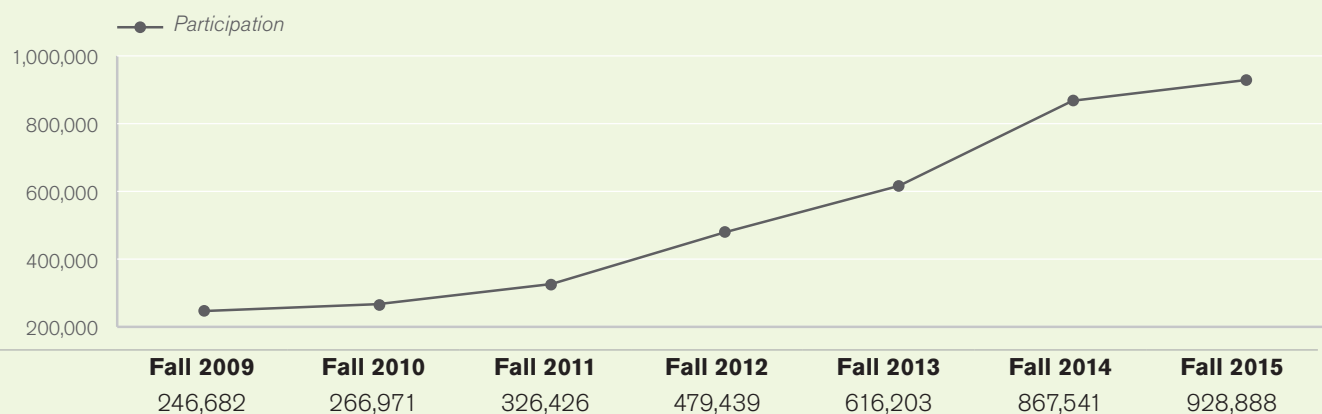
Engagement,  
Hope, Entrepreneurship,  
Career/Financial  
Literacy

## About the 2015 Gallup Student Poll

This report presents results from the 2015 Gallup Student Poll survey conducted nationwide in America's schools with students in grades five through 12. A total of 3,300 schools participated in the GSP, representing over 550 unique school districts across 46 states from Sept. 28 to Oct. 30. Gallup provided comprehensive scorecards to the schools and districts, and an overall scorecard with responses from more than 900,000 U.S. public school students.

In the years since the GSP's 2009 launch, the numbers of students participating in the survey have more than tripled, which reflects the growing interest in additional measures to inform school success planning.

U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTICIPATION OVER TIME



1 Calderon, V. J. (2015). Americans say there is more to school success than test results. Retrieved from: [http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/184793/americans-say-school-success-test-results.aspx?g\\_source=](http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/184793/americans-say-school-success-test-results.aspx?g_source=)

2 Calderon, V. J., & Hodges, T. (2016). K-12 leaders: Student engagement, hope top measures of a school. Retrieved from: [http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/188012/leaders-student-engagement-hope-top-measures-school.aspx?g\\_source=CATEGORY\\_EDUCATION&g\\_medium=topic&g\\_campaign=files](http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/188012/leaders-student-engagement-hope-top-measures-school.aspx?g_source=CATEGORY_EDUCATION&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=files).

The 2015 GSP captures valuable insights:

- Are students engaged with school? Does **engagement** vary by grade level, and if so, to what extent?
- Are students **hopeful** about the future? Do they have a concrete, positive vision for their future? Can they develop multiple pathways and overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams?
- Are some students aspiring to join the next generation of successful business builders who employ others? Do talented young **entrepreneurs** have the support and developmental opportunities they need to be successful?
- Are students prepared to participate in a meaningful way in the **economy**? Do they know about banking or how to save and spend money in a healthy way?

Gallup shares the results with schools, districts and the public to inform educational strategies and improvement plans. Local, regional, state and federal policymakers can use these results as they endeavor to make schools more effective and to involve individual students more productively in their own goal setting and learning.

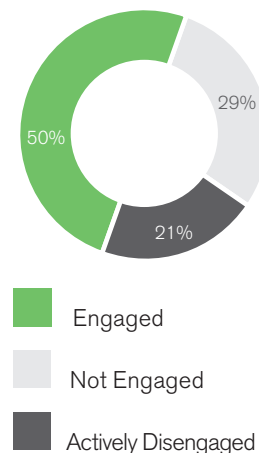
## Detailed Findings

### Engagement

The GSP contains nine questions that measure students' engagement -- their involvement in and enthusiasm for school. Based on their responses, Gallup classifies students as engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged. The more engaged a student is, the more likely he or she is to feel emotionally connected to the school. Studies suggest there is a link between engagement and school success.<sup>3</sup> Overall, half of the students surveyed in 2015 are engaged in school, 29% are not engaged and 21% are actively disengaged.

Reviewing engagement results for each of the nine items offers a more complete picture of areas where schools are succeeding and falling short in their efforts to engage students. For example, seven in 10 students (71%) strongly agree that they have a best friend at school. This suggests schools are relatively successful in providing an environment where students can build relationships with one another. However, just under one in four (23%) say that at school, they get to do what they do best every day. This is an important discovery because research suggests that helping students find and develop their strengths is key to helping them achieve their full potential in life.

ENGAGEMENT INDEX



#### ITEM RESPONSES

#### STRONGLY AGREE

At this school, I get to do what I do best every day.	23%
My teachers make me feel my schoolwork is important.	44%
I feel safe in this school.	42%
I have fun at school.	28%
I have a best friend at school.	71%
In the last seven days, someone has told me I have done good work at school.	40%
In the last seven days, I have learned something interesting at school.	43%
The adults at my school care about me.	39%
I have at least one teacher who makes me excited about the future.	55%

Engagement decreases steadily from fifth grade through junior high and high school, before reaching the lowest point in the junior year. In fifth grade, three-quarters of students feel involved in and enthusiastic about school, but by 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the same is true for only about one-third of students. Understanding the reasons for this general decline and developing targeted interventions to slow or reverse the trend could be a turning point for U.S. schools.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, G. (2006) Building engaged schools. Gallup Press.



% ENGAGED, BY GRADE



A look at engagement levels for each item by grade shows drops in every item for older students. The table on page 8 reflects the percentage of students who strongly agree — or provide the most extreme positive response — for each item. Most item means (item average on a five-point scale) are lowest for sophomores or juniors before rebounding slightly for seniors. One exception is the “best friend” item, which is lowest for seniors. While more than four in five (84%) fifth-graders strongly agree they have a best friend in school, the same is true for just over half (55%) of seniors.

One of the steepest declines occurs in scores for the item, “The adults at my school care about me.” Nearly three times as many fifth-graders (67%) as juniors (23%) strongly agree with this statement. Students in elementary schools likely have more connections with adults in their school and opportunities to build relationships with their teachers. The data suggest that in high schools, which typically have larger enrollments and larger classroom sizes than elementary schools, students do not have a sense that they are individually known at school.

Compared with the other items, a relatively low percentage of fifth-graders (34%) strongly agree that they have an opportunity to do what they do best at school. However, just half of that percentage of juniors (17%) strongly agree with this statement. This seems to indicate that students are using their strengths less instead of more as they move closer to graduating. Studies suggest that students benefit from educational experiences that help them determine where their talents lie.<sup>4</sup> This may make them better equipped to succeed in school and to ultimately choose the best career path for their lives.<sup>5</sup>

4 Harter, J. K. (1999). Youth perceiver and student outcomes: A four-year longitudinal study. *Gallup Educator*, 4(5).

5 Williamson, J. (2002). Assessing student strengths: Academic performance and persistence of first-time college students at a private, church-affiliated college. Doctoral dissertation, University of Sarasota.

% STRONGLY AGREE, BY GRADE	All	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
At this school, I get to do what I do best every day.	23	34	29	24	20	20	17	17	20
My teachers make me feel my schoolwork is important.	44	68	59	47	39	36	29	28	29
I feel safe in this school.	42	63	53	43	36	33	30	31	35
I have fun at school.	28	47	38	28	22	24	18	17	18
I have a best friend at school.	71	84	82	79	73	64	61	57	55
In the last seven days, someone has told me I have done good work at school.	40	49	50	45	40	36	31	31	32
In the last seven days, I have learned something interesting at school.	43	60	55	45	38	36	31	32	33
The adults at my school care about me.	39	67	55	42	33	27	23	23	27
I have at least one teacher who makes me excited about the future.	55	71	68	60	52	46	43	44	47

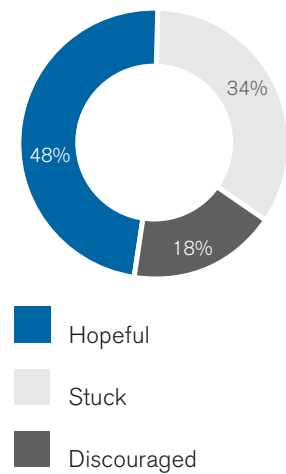
## Hope

Hope is the ideas and energy students have for the future, and Gallup's Hope Index comprises seven items. Based on students' responses to the items, Gallup categorizes them as hopeful, stuck or discouraged. Overall, 48% of students surveyed in the 2015 Gallup Student Poll are hopeful, 34% are stuck and 18% are discouraged.

Hopeful students are generally more engaged with school, positive about the future, goal-oriented and can overcome obstacles, enabling them to navigate a pathway to achieve their goals. They possess the requisite energy to achieve their dreams. Stuck students may lack ideas and have difficulty making progress toward their goals. Discouraged students have difficulty identifying goals for the future and lack the motivation, energy or resources needed to achieve their goals. Research suggests that hopeful students do better in school and at work than their low-hope peers.<sup>6</sup>

Among the items in the Hope Index, students are most likely to strongly agree that they know they will graduate from high school (80%). Nearly two-thirds strongly agree that they have a great future ahead of them (64%) and that they will find a good job in the future (63%). In contrast, roughly one in three strongly agree that they can find many ways around problems (35%) and that they have a mentor who encourages their development (33%).

HOPE INDEX



### ITEM RESPONSES

### STRONGLY AGREE

I know I will graduate from high school.	80%
I have a great future ahead of me.	64%
I can think of many ways to get good grades.	50%
I have many goals.	56%
I can find many ways around problems.	35%
I have a mentor who encourages my development.	33%
I know I will find a good job in the future.	63%

High school seniors are the most likely to strongly agree that they know they will graduate from high school (86%) -- this confidence appears to rise steadily over time in school, with fifth-graders being the least likely to strongly agree (74%). Conversely, the proportion strongly agreeing that they have many goals seems to remain fairly consistent across grade levels. High school students, who are closer to graduation and the workforce, are less likely than younger students to agree they will find a good job in the future.

<sup>6</sup> Rand, K. L. & Cheavens, J. S. (2009). Hope theory. In Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology, eds. S. J. Lopez and C. R. Snyder. Oxford University Press, NY (323-334).

% STRONGLY AGREE, BY GRADE	All	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
I know I will graduate from high school.	80	74	77	79	79	81	82	84	86
I have a great future ahead of me.	64	69	69	67	64	62	59	59	63
I can think of many ways to get good grades.	50	58	56	52	48	46	42	42	45
I have many goals.	56	56	56	56	56	56	55	55	58
I can find many ways around problems.	35	37	35	33	33	32	33	35	40
I have a mentor who encourages my development.	33	49	42	35	30	27	25	25	28
I know I will find a good job in the future.	63	74	72	67	62	57	53	52	54

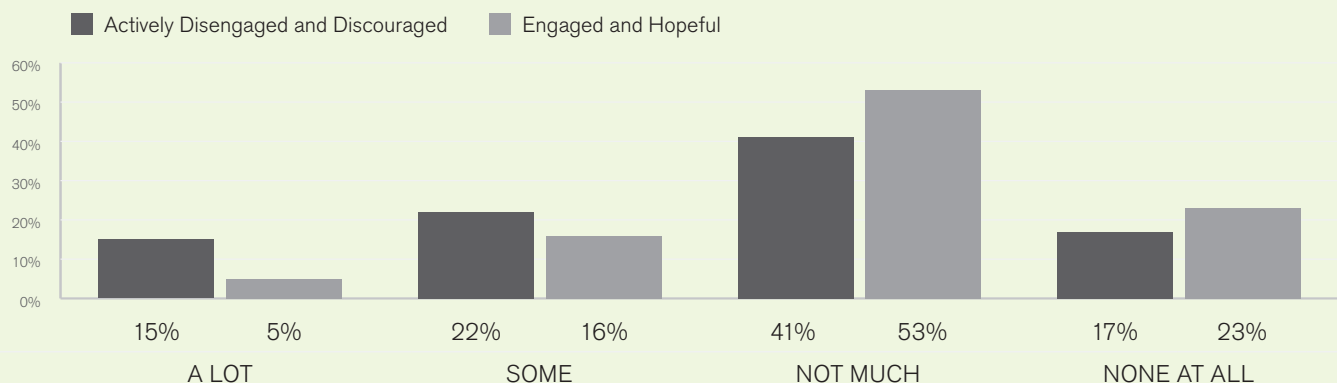
### Engaged and Hopeful Students: Key Findings

The 2015 Gallup Student Poll results reveal that engagement declines as students progress from later elementary grades through middle school and high school. The percentage of hopeful students decreases as well, though to a lesser degree. Both of these metrics are powerful in their own right. However, examining the combined effects of hope and engagement can bring into focus the outcomes that are at stake when schools lose the hearts and minds of older students.

When looking at the two measures together, about twice as many students are engaged AND hopeful in fifth (48%) and sixth grade (45%), compared with sophomore (23%) and junior (23%) students. Further, about half as many students are actively disengaged and discouraged in fifth (5%) and sixth grade (6%) as are students in their sophomore (12%) and junior (12%) years. This is important because students' levels of hope and engagement seem to correspond with other education-related outcomes, including self-reported absenteeism and grades during the previous school year, as well as college aspirations.

Students who are actively disengaged and discouraged (15%) in school are three times more likely than their engaged and hopeful counterparts (5%) to say that they missed a lot of school last year without good reason or because of sickness. Students who are engaged and hopeful are about 1.4 times more likely than those who are actively disengaged and discouraged to report that they missed no school at all last year (23% vs. 17%, respectively).

#### HOW OFTEN DID YOU MISS SCHOOL LAST YEAR WITHOUT GOOD REASON OR BECAUSE YOU WERE SICK?



\*Data not shown for "Don't know" responses.

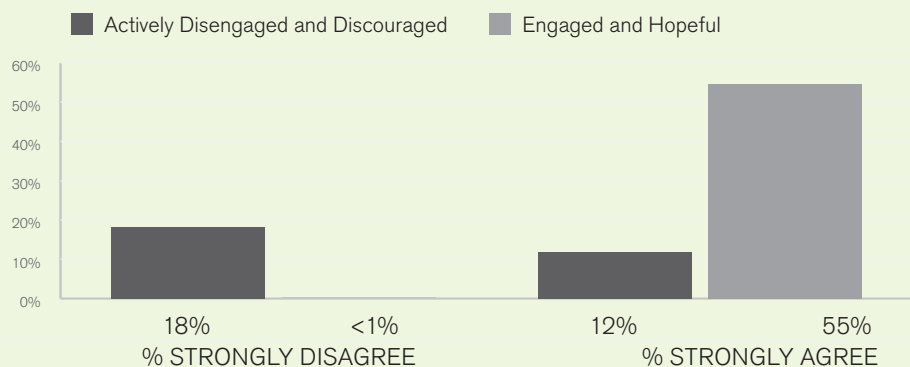
GSP data also demonstrate a link between engagement and hope and how students feel about their academic performance. Engaged and hopeful students have a higher probability of strongly agreeing they do well in school, compared with other students. These students are about 4.6 times more likely than their actively disengaged and discouraged counterparts to strongly agree that they do well in school.

Engaged and hopeful students are about

**4.6x**

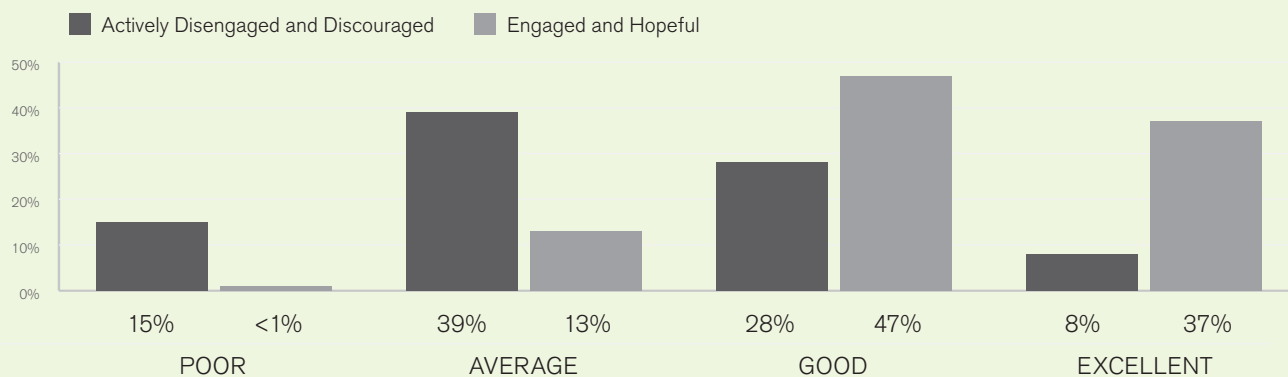
MORE LIKELY than their actively disengaged and discouraged counterparts to strongly agree that they do well in school.

“COMPARED TO MOST STUDENTS, I DO WELL IN SCHOOL.” (% WITHIN CATEGORY)



Furthermore, students who are engaged and hopeful are 2.3 times more likely to report that they have good or excellent grades (84%) compared with their actively disengaged and discouraged peers (36%), who are more likely to say their grades are poor.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES THE GRADES YOU GET IN SCHOOL?



\*Data not shown for “Don’t know” responses.

There also seems to be a relationship between students' engagement and hope and their reported plans after high school.

High school students who are engaged and hopeful are about

**1.6x**

MORE LIKELY to report that they will be going to either a two-year or four-year college after high school, compared with actively disengaged and discouraged high school students.

In contrast, high school students who are actively disengaged and discouraged are over

**4x**

MORE LIKELY to say that they don't know what they are doing after high school and nearly

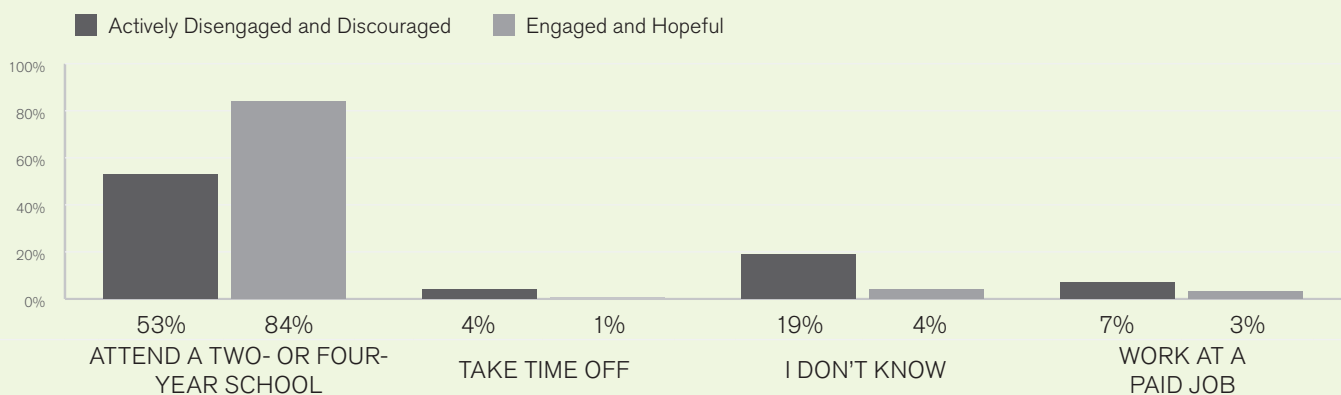
**4x**

MORE LIKELY to say that they will take time off than engaged and hopeful high school students.

We cannot be sure of the direction of these relationships. It is possible that hopeful and engaged students are more likely to report that they receive higher grades and miss less school. But it is also possible that students who receive higher grades and miss less school are more likely to be hopeful and engaged students because of this feedback. There may also be a reciprocal feedback loop: Higher engagement and hope leads to higher education aspirations and better student attendance and performance, which in turn builds even more engagement and hope.

Because of common method bias and because these findings are based on self-reported data within the same survey instrument, more research needs to be done to understand the relationships between engagement and hope and student performance in school. These results suggest there may be benefits for schools that purposefully focus on creating a more hopeful, engaging environment for students.

AFTER I FINISH HIGH SCHOOL, I WILL MOST LIKELY ...



\*Data not shown for the following responses: Attend training to learn a skill or trade; Enter the military; Volunteer or serve on a mission; Start my own business; or Other

### Entrepreneurial Aspiration

Small companies create 64% of new private-sector jobs in America, the U.S. Small Business Administration reports.<sup>7</sup> A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that 20% of gross job creation comes from startups.<sup>8</sup> Gallup studied 4,000 entrepreneurs in the U.S., Mexico and Germany, and found successful entrepreneurs possess 10 talents that contribute to their success.<sup>9</sup> With business closures recently outpacing new business startups in this country, it is critical to identify talented entrepreneurs early and provide them with the development and resources they need to be successful.<sup>10</sup> Our national, state and local economies depend on making more good jobs. Young people are the best hope for our economic future.

Because of the great value talented entrepreneurs bring to communities and the U.S. economy overall, Gallup added items to the Gallup Student Poll to help schools begin to think about developing business builders earlier in their lives. Entrepreneurial aspiration is the talent and energy for building businesses that survive, thrive and employ others. The Gallup Student Poll contains four items that gauge students' level of aspiration to start a business and their access to the resources needed to be successful in this venture.

Just 16% of students from the 2015 Gallup Student Poll strongly agree they will invent something that changes the world; more students (24%) strongly disagree with this statement. One in four students strongly agree they plan to start their own business. However, aspiration seems to outpace access to the knowledge and skills students need to be successful; just over one in 10 (13%) students strongly agree they are learning how to start and run a business, and nearly three times as many (37%) strongly disagree with this statement. Few students indicate they have their own business, but it is critical to find and support these young risk-takers to help them develop business focus and access resources to build a business that survives, thrives and employs others.<sup>11</sup>

1 in 4

students STRONGLY AGREE they plan to start their own business.

ITEM RESPONSES	STRONGLY AGREE
I will invent something that changes the world.	16%
I plan to start my own business.	25%
I am learning how to start and run a business.	13%
I have my own business now.	6%

7 U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy (2012). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from: [https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/FAQ\\_Sept\\_2012.pdf](https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/FAQ_Sept_2012.pdf)

8 Haltiwanger, J., Jarmin, R. S., & Miranda, J. (2011). Who creates jobs? Small vs. large vs. young. Retrieved from: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16300.pdf>

9 Badal, S. B. (2014). 10 Talents that drive entrepreneurial success. Retrieved from: <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/168527/talents-drive-entrepreneurial-success.aspx>

10 Clifton, J. (2015). American entrepreneurship: Dead or alive? Retrieved from: <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/180431/american-entrepreneurship-dead-alive.aspx>

11 Badal, S. B. (2014). Why business focus is a crucial entrepreneurial talent. Retrieved from: [http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/171260/why-business-focus-crucial-entrepreneurial-talent.aspx?g\\_source=entrepreneur&g\\_medium=search&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/171260/why-business-focus-crucial-entrepreneurial-talent.aspx?g_source=entrepreneur&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles)

Older students from the 2015 survey score somewhat lower than younger students on these items. Across all of the entrepreneurial items, female students are less likely to agree compared with their male peers. Overall, boys are somewhat more likely than girls to strongly agree that they will invent something that changes the world (19% vs. 13%); to strongly agree they are learning how to start and run a business (14% vs. 12%); and to strongly agree they have their own business now (8% vs. 5%).

Gender differences are not uniform across grade levels. Something seems to happen between middle school and high school that changes girls' entrepreneurial aspirations. In middle school, female students are at least equally likely as male students -- or, in some cases, more likely -- to agree that they are learning to start and run a business, that they plan to start their own business and that they will invent something that will change the world. However, in high school, female students are less likely than their male counterparts to agree with each of these three items.

Women own fewer businesses than males in the U.S. and employ far fewer people in those businesses. There is opportunity to begin changing this landscape by helping girls think early about the possibility of starting and growing a business in the future, as well as working to ensure that they have ongoing mentorship, advocacy and role models needed to sustain interest in and success with building a business. Schools and other organizations should help support all aspiring business builders to ensure they have access to the mentors, resources and information they need to be successful.



### Career and Financial Literacy

In 2015, Gallup added additional items to learn about students' experiences with work and earnings. Career and financial literacy is having the information, attitudes and behaviors students need to practice for healthy participation in the economy. Schools, parents and community leaders must start early and be intentional in helping children develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors necessary to get a good job doing what they do best and to learn how to make strong financial choices. Gallup finds that the whole world wants a good job, which is an important ingredient to a thriving life filled with purpose and financial freedom.<sup>12</sup> Every student deserves the opportunity to participate fully in the U.S. economy.

It takes time and practice to learn how to work, earn, save, share and spend wisely. Gallup finds that almost half of Americans are unprepared for a financial emergency,<sup>13</sup> and less than six in 10 are financially literate.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Gallup Student Poll data suggest that many students are not getting the instruction and experiences they need to land successfully in the economy.

About one in five (17%) students strongly agree that they currently have a paid job. This proportion is higher for seniors in high school, with 40% strongly agreeing. Male students (19%) are slightly more likely than female students (15%) to strongly agree they have a paying job now. About four in 10 students surveyed strongly agree they are learning how to save and spend money, and 45% of students strongly agree they have a bank account with money in it. Opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities they enjoy -- where they can use their strengths and do what they do best -- are critical for finding good jobs in the future. Nearly seven in 10 strongly agree with this statement, though 14% strongly disagree.

ITEM RESPONSES	STRONGLY AGREE
I have a paying job now.	17%
I am learning how to save and spend money.	42%
I have a bank account with money in it.	45%
I am involved in at least one activity, such as a club, music, sports or volunteering.	68%

12 Clifton, J. (2011). The coming jobs war. Gallup Press.

13 Newport, F. (2016). Half of Americans unprepared for sudden financial need. Retrieved from: [http://www.gallup.com/poll/188009/half-americans-unprepared-sudden-financial-need.aspx?g\\_source=FINANCIAL\\_WELLBEING&g\\_medium=topic&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/188009/half-americans-unprepared-sudden-financial-need.aspx?g_source=FINANCIAL_WELLBEING&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles).

14 McCarthy, J., & Pugliese, A. (2015). Two in three adults worldwide are financially illiterate. Retrieved from: [http://www.gallup.com/poll/186680/two-three-adults-worldwide-financially-illiterate.aspx?g\\_source=financial%20literacy&g\\_medium=search&g\\_campaign=tiles%20](http://www.gallup.com/poll/186680/two-three-adults-worldwide-financially-illiterate.aspx?g_source=financial%20literacy&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles%20).

## Conclusion

The Gallup Student Poll provides actionable data for schools using multiple measures to help prepare students for the future. Engaged and hopeful students are excited about learning and have a positive vision for the future. They are empowered to make their dreams a reality. By giving young, talented students access to caring teachers and mentors, as well as helping them gain critical skills and experiences they need to be successful, they have the greatest chance to land a good job where they are engaged and can do what they do best every day.

## Demographics

### PARTICIPATION BY GRADE

5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
142,869	131,489	134,692	131,238	111,087	103,246	90,964	83,303

\*U.S. public school students

### ARE YOU OF HISPANIC, LATINO OR SPANISH ORIGIN — SUCH AS MEXICAN, PUERTO RICAN, CUBAN OR OTHER SPANISH ORIGIN?

Yes	29%
No	62%
Choose not to answer	10%

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBES YOUR RACE? PLEASE MARK ALL THAT APPLY.

White	57%
Black or African-American	19%
Asian	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3%
Choose not to answer	20%

### WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

Male	49%
Female	49%
Choose not to answer	3%

Note: Percentages are rounded.

## Methodology

The Gallup Student poll is offered at no cost to schools and districts in the United States during the designated field period one time per year. The online poll is completed by a convenience sample of schools and districts during school hours each fall.

Fifth- through 12<sup>th</sup>-graders are eligible to participate. The 2015 survey was available Sept. 28 through Oct. 30, 2015. Gallup surveyed 928,888 public school students, and some private schools were included. Results in this report represent U.S. public school students only. The survey is available in English and Spanish only.

Schools participating in the annual Gallup Student Poll are not randomly selected, and participating U.S. schools are not given any incentives beyond receipt of school and district-specific data. Gallup recommends that schools conduct a census of eligible student populations within a school, but participation rates vary and are determined by school personnel. The primary application of the Gallup Student Poll is as an additional element to the school success equation beyond typical cognitive measures.

The data are not statistically weighted, and results from this survey represent the views of students who participated in the survey and cannot, with a high degree of confidence, be projected to the broader population of students or schools in the U.S. Gallup education researchers and consultants developed the questionnaire. In some cases, reported frequencies may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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