

Unprecedented Gen Z Research Panel to Track Behavior, Sentiments on K-12 Education and More Over Time

Gallup and Walton Family Foundation Launch Gen Z Research Panel

WASHINGTON, D.C. — September 14, 2023 — Gallup and Walton Family Foundation today unveiled the Gen Z Panel, one of the largest and most comprehensive national research panels to track sentiment and behavior of this generation over time. Having the ability to compare this youngest generation to older ones will reveal new insights as to how this generation is different from those before.

“This is a critical moment for youth and for the adults supporting them,” said Romy Drucker, director of the Education Program at the Walton Family Foundation. “This partnership with Gallup will generate insights and perspectives to help us all be better guides, better listeners, and better partners as the next generation rises.”

Overall, the survey shows that 47% of Gen Z is thriving today, lower than older generations – millennials (59%), Gen Xers (57%) and baby boomers (52%). Furthermore, Gen Z Americans are thriving at a lower rate than millennials were at the same age, according to Gallup polling. In 2014, 60% of 18- to 26-year-old millennials were considered thriving, 13 percentage points higher than today’s 18- to 26-year-olds.

Some of Gen Z’s struggles with wellbeing may be related to their mental health: More than a third of Gen Z rate their mental health as “poor” (10%) or “only fair” (26%), higher than any other generation. Additionally, 54% of Gen Zers report feeling anxious a lot of the prior day, compared with 44% of millennials, 42% of Gen Xers, 33% of baby boomers and 25% of the silent generation. And mental health is having a measurable impact on their academics as Gen Z students with fair or poor mental health are 59% more likely to say they have missed school in the past month than those with excellent mental health.

Despite struggling with mental and emotional wellbeing, the majority of Gen Z are optimistic about their future. Even among those who rate their mental health as “only fair,” 65% agree or strongly agree that they have a great future ahead of them. Optimism about the future is especially prevalent among Black Gen Zers, 45% of whom strongly agree they will have a great future, compared with 30% of Hispanic Gen Zers and 31% of White Gen Zers.

Another challenge for Gen Z, however, is that only about four in 10 (44%) Gen Z students report feeling prepared for their future. This lack of confidence may reflect the extent to which students feel their schools are preparing them for future careers. Most Gen Z middle and high school students say their schools do not provide practical learning experiences that could help them enter the workforce. When asked if their school offers opportunities to learn skills like applying for a job or interview prep, only 29% and 34% of Gen Z students agree, respectively. Further, only half of Gen Z students say their schoolwork challenges them in a good way (52%).

The most common barrier to Gen Z members’ goals and aspirations is lack of financial resources (64%). Cost is especially concerning for Gen Z middle and high school students who wish to go to college, as just over half (53%) believe they will be able to afford it.

When asked what they hope for most in their future, more than two-thirds (69%) of Gen Z rank earning enough to live comfortably as one of their top three hopes. Black Gen Z Americans are particularly interested in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities: Four in 10 Black Gen Z Americans (41%) say they want to start their own business, compared with 36% of Hispanic Gen Z Americans and 25% of White Gen Z Americans.

Overall, less than half of Gen Z members express a lot of confidence in the medical system (45%), military (40%) and police (38%); less than one-quarter trust the criminal justice system (23%), large technology companies (17%) or the news (16%). Only teachers (63%) and science (71%) are trusted a lot by this generation.

“Empowering Gen Z to achieve their goals and aspirations requires that schools provide students with relevant experiences and education that will help them navigate the workforce,” said Stephanie Marken, Gallup partner and executive director for education research. “For those students who want to pursue postsecondary education, we have work to do to communicate affordable paths to education and training beyond high school so that every student can realize post-high school dreams.”

About Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving K-12 education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.