

## New Research Reveals Most Influential Driver of Happiness Among Gen Z Is Sense of Purpose in School and Work

*Less than half of younger Gen Zers feel motivated to go to middle school or high school, Gallup-Walton Family Foundation survey finds*

**WASHINGTON, D.C., April 10, 2024** — Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation, in partnership with Dr. Arthur C. Brooks, Professor of Management Practice at the Harvard Business School, today released a [new survey](#) to better understand what exactly defines and drives a sense of happiness among Gen Z.

The research reveals that the most influential driver of Gen Z's happiness is their sense of purpose at school and work. However, just 48% of Gen Zers enrolled in middle or high school feel motivated to go to school, and only 52% feel they do something interesting every day.

At least six in 10 Gen Zers who are happy also say they feel they do something interesting every day (60%), are motivated to go to work or school (60%) and that the things they do at work or school are important (64%). Meanwhile, Gen Zers who are not happy are about half as likely to say they agree with each of these statements.

"The findings underscore the importance of purpose in your daily life, including within and outside of school, to your overall happiness and wellbeing for Gen Z," said Stephanie Marken, the head of education research at Gallup. "But the research also confirms that just under half of Gen Zers do not feel as if what they do each day is interesting, important or motivating, which is the key to unlocking greater purpose and meaning in their lives."

Dr. Brooks added, "Generation Z — the future of our country — has witnessed significant declines in happiness, and we must learn why. By partnering in this landmark study of adolescents and young adults, researchers, policymakers and parents will better understand what is happening and the changes we need to make."

The survey was conducted among more than 2,000 12- to 26-year-olds.

In addition to having meaningful experiences at school and in the workplace, Gen Z's happiness is deeply connected to how secure and rested they are in their personal lives. The survey found other key drivers of happiness among Gen Z include their ability to fulfill basic needs. The strongest predictors of happiness, beyond purpose in school and work, include:

- Whether an individual reports having enough time during the week to sleep and relax.
- Emotions and the prevalence — or lack thereof — of social pressure. Gen Zers who spend a lot of time comparing themselves to others are notably less likely than their peers to say they are happy and are about twice as likely to say they always or often feel anxious.
- Positive social connections: Happy members of Gen Z are at least twice as likely to say they feel loved by, supported by and connected to others.

"Gen Zers are telling us their happiness is directly linked to feeling a sense of purpose at school and work. Expanding meaningful and engaging learning experiences, including career pathways, can lead to more

fulfilled and motivated young people,” said Romy Drucker, Education Program Director at the Walton Family Foundation.

Overall, about three-quarters (73%) of Gen Zers would agree they consider themselves at least somewhat happy. However, this percentage declines noticeably as Gen Z reaches adulthood. Whereas 80% of 12- to 14-year-olds consider themselves happy to some degree, just 68% of 24- to 26-year-olds agree.

Within the adult population of Gen Z, there are further happiness divides. Gen Z adults who have any level of postsecondary education, are married and have children are markedly happier than their peers. This finding is in line with previous Gallup research that suggests married adults — particularly those with children — are most likely to be thriving in their overall wellbeing.

In addition, Gen Z adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another non-heterosexual orientation are 16 percentage points less likely to say they are happy than heterosexual Gen Z adults. This is particularly important because Gallup research suggests one in five members of Gen Z identify as LGBT.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted Nov. 27-30, 2023, with a sample of 2,271 12- to 26-year-olds nationally. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who are randomly selected using address-based sampling methodology. Gallup also recruits using random digit-dial phone interviews that cover landline and cellphones.

Overall, 1,078 12- to 18-year-old children nationally were reached through adult members of the Gallup Panel who indicated they had at least one child 18 or younger living in their household; the additional 1,193 18- to 26-year-old respondents are members of the Gallup Panel. For the total sample of 2,271 Gen Z respondents nationally, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 1,078 12- to 18-year-old Gen Z youth recruited through a parent or guardian, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 4.0$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 1,193 18- to 26-year-old Gen Z youth nationally who are Gallup Panel members, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 4.7$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

## **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 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](http://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.

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