



Teens and School

by Reginald W. Bibby

Life for teens at school on the upswing *School today positioned to be a highly positive experience*

As teenagers head off to high schools and secondary schools across the country this fall, there are many good reasons to believe that they are in for an experience than will be an upgrade from what many of their Boomer and Post-Boomer parents knew.

A major new national survey of some 5,500 Canadian teenagers carried out by sociologist Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge has found that their enjoyment of school has been at its highest level in almost three decades. Confidence in people who are in charge of schools has been higher than that shown leaders in any other sector. A majority of teens have been positive about their courses and teachers. Close to half claim their teachers have had a significant influence on their lives – a level that readily exceeds the acknowledged impact of television, the Internet, or advertising. And they also have been feeling safer at school.

Such are some of the headline findings of a new national survey of 5,500 teenagers that Professor Bibby completed in late 2008 that appear in his new book, *The Emerging Millennials*. The project is the latest in a series of youth and adult surveys that he has conducted dating back to the mid-1970s. James Penner served as the Associate Director.

- Some 53% of teens reported high levels of enjoyment from school, up from 44% in the early 90s. Only 1 in 10 said that they were receiving little or no enjoyment from school.
- Close to 70% told us they have high levels of confidence in the people in charge of schools; that compares, for example, to 52% for the music industry and 47% for the federal government.
- Six in 10 indicated that most of their courses are “fairly interesting; the same proportion said that, “All in all, my teachers are genuinely interested in me.” Both levels were up slightly from 2000.
- Some 45% said their lives are being influenced by their teachers; the level in 2000 was 36%.
- Despite widespread adult anxiety about violence in schools, 84% of teens said that they feel safe at school, up from 78% in 2000. That said, 15% expressed concern about being bullied at school.
- Overall, differences between males and females tended to be small.

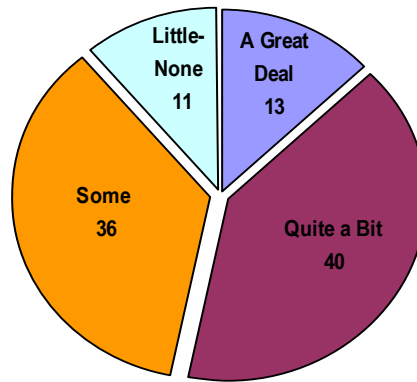
Life for teens at school is not perfect. One in 3 pointed out that they are troubled by conflict with other students, while 1 in 4 said the same thing about conflict with teachers. Some things, it seems, never change.

Still, life for teens at school appears to be looking up. And why not? In the post-1960s, the Boomers have led the way in insisting we have better schools, complete with better-trained administrators and teachers and specialists who, together, can elevate the educational experience of teenagers. If young people were not feeling more positive about school than their predecessors, it would be a searing indictment of educators and governments. Teens are also reporting higher levels of enjoyment from parents; that positive impact seems to be spilling over to school. Close to 60% who say they are enjoying mom or dad say the same about school, versus about 40% of those who are not receiving much enjoyment at home.

One final note. Teenagers’ enjoyment from school obviously is tied to the positive presence of good friends: 94% say that at least one of their closest friends goes to their school. But in the midst of “good friends and good times,” their No. 1 personal concern is not money or sex or looks or conflict, but **pressure to do well at school**. The pressure is heightened by the twin facts that 95% place importance on getting a good education and no less than 7 in 10 have their sights set on a university diploma.

The good news is that growing numbers are finding extra joy and help along that tough trek. Parents and grandparents take heart: **life at school has definitely changed – for the better.**

Enjoyment Received from School (%)



Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials* and Project Teen Canada 2008.

Enjoyment from Parents and Enjoyment from School

% Indicating Receiving a High Level of Enjoyment from School

<i>Enjoyment from Parents</i>		<i>Enjoyment from School</i>		
		Hi	Lo	Totals
Mother	Hi	57%	43	100
	Lo	38	62	100
Father	Hi	58%	42	100
	Lo	41	59	100

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Teen Canada 2008.

Some School Characteristics by School System

% Indicating "A Great Deal" or "Quite A Bit"

	Enjoyment of School	Confidence in Leadership	Pressure to Do Well	Feel Safe At School	Expect Grad from Univ
Nationally	53%	69	75	84	68
Public system	53	63	76	83	69
Catholic system	54	72	80	85	68
Quebec public	56	79	72	81	65
Private non-religious	49	64	76	92	77
Private Christian	44	71	64	91	60
Private Other Faith	59	75	86	93	94
Aboriginal	74	74	76	77	39

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials* and Project Teen Canada 2008.

Reginald Bibby has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through eleven best-selling books. His most recent book is *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation is Responding to Change and Choice* (for details see "reginaldbibby.com"). The current Project Teen Canada survey was concluded in late 2008, and consists of a highly representative sample of more than 5,500 teenagers. Results are accurate within about plus or minus 3 percentage points, 19 times in 20.

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