

Academic performances and attitudes toward education in BC adolescents. Adolescent Health Survey (1993).

School is an important arena in the life of adolescents, as one quarter of their time is spent in this environment, and it is expected that our schools will prepare our youth for a successful transition to the workforce. The Adolescent Health Survey (1993), therefore, asked students a number of questions about school including: How they feel about school, how they are doing in school, how frequently they skip or cut classes, and their expectations for completing their education.

Performance at School

Self-assessed school performance provides a favourable indicator of student functioning at school. Sixty-two percent of all students in B.C. rate their performance at school as above average, 27% as just average, and only 11% as below average. This pattern is quite similar across all grade levels; however, slightly more males than females rate their performance as below average (ie, 13% vs. 10%).

Feelings About School

Student feelings about school are also generally positive. Seventy-nine percent of all students in B.C. indicate they like school to some degree (ie, some, quite a bit, or very much). Approximately 21% of students say they either don't like or hate school. Male and female students express a similar range of feelings about school, but more males than females at all grade levels say they don't like it or hate it (ie, 24% vs. 18%).

Expectations for Completing Education

Most students in B.C. expect to pursue their education beyond high school. Overall, 19% of students plan to attend a college or technical school, while 58% plan to be university graduates.

The proportion of female students who expect to graduate from university is higher than that of male students (63% vs. 53%). Conversely, the proportion of students who expect to get college or technical school training is slightly higher among males than females (21% vs. 17%). However, the proportion of students of both sexes who expect to be university graduates generally declines as grade level increases, while the proportion who expect to receive a college/technical training increases with grade level.

Only 8% of all students expect to either not finish high school or just complete high school. This percentage is fairly constant across all grade levels, but is slightly higher among males in comparison to females (10% vs. 6%).

Overall, 16% of students either do not have expectations for completing their education or have expectations which do not include college, technical or university training. This percentage is fairly consistent across both gender groups and all grade levels.

School Avoidance/Skipping

Despite the favourable views on self-assessed school performance, feelings about school, and expectations for completing education, skipping or cutting classes is fairly common among B.C. students. Thirty-four percent of all students indicated they had missed full days of school because of skipping one or more times in the four weeks preceding the survey.

The rates of skipping are almost identical for male and female students, but increase steadily with grade level. Among grade 7 students, 17% of males and 14% of females had skipped classes one or more times in the previous four weeks (respectively 5% and 3% had skipped 3 times or more), yet among grade 12 students the same proportions rise to 54% and 50% respectively (22% and 18% 3 times or more).

Correlates of School Performance & Expectations for Completing Education

School performance is important because of its association with successfully completing high school and, conversely, the risk of dropping out of school.

Many student attributes are positively associated with school performance: of all students who assessed their performance as above average as compare to those who assessed their performance as below average, 60% vs 38% have a father with a post-secondary education, 57% vs 39% a mother with a post-secondary education, 79% vs 66% live with both parents, 65% vs 56% are religious persons, 42% vs 18% have high self-esteem, 73% vs 46% don't skip school, 84% vs 59% like school, and 95% vs 76% have post-secondary plans. By comparison, of all students who assessed their performance as below average, only 38% have a father with a post-secondary education.

Conversely, a number of student attributes are negatively associated with school performance: of all students who assessed their performance as below average as compare to those who assessed their performance as above average, 56% vs 35% consumed alcohol in the past month, 42% vs 19% have tried marijuana, 43% vs 18% smoke cigarettes, 30% vs 13% considered suicide, 31% vs 16% were physically abused, 17% vs 10% were sexually abused, 16% vs 5% have emotional distress.

Comparisons with Other Surveys

Recent state-wide surveys of grade 7 to 12 students in Minnesota (1989) and in Alaska (1990) provide several points of comparison for some of the indices of school performance and attitudes toward education.

In Minnesota, just 45% of students rate their school performance as above average, and in Alaska the percentage is almost the same at 44%. By comparison, 62% of students in B.C. rate their performance at school as above average.

Seventy-nine percent of students in B.C. indicated they like school to some degree (ie some, quite a bit, or very much). This is almost the same as the 80% observed among 7th to 12th grade students in the Minnesota survey and the 78% in the Alaska survey.

Thirty-four percent of students in B.C. indicated they had missed full days of school because of skipping one or more times in the month preceding the survey. This percentage is somewhat higher than the 25% of students in the Minnesota survey and 30% of students in the Alaska survey who reported skipping school.

Copies of Adolescent Health Survey reports are available from The McCreary Centre Society. To obtain an order form and fee schedule write to: Adolescent Health Survey, The McCreary Centre Society, 401 North Esmond Avenue, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 1S4. Phone: (604) 291-1996 Fax: (604) 291-7308