

## **U.S. students fine with life, but peers in other countries are happier**

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The good news is that American high school students are generally satisfied with their lives. But the United States still lags behind some other countries, where students are happier.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released its study of student happiness Wednesday. It found that American 15-year-olds, asked to rank their life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10, gave an average mark of 7.4.

The average score among OECD's 35 member countries was 7.3. But students in some member countries are doing remarkably better, such as in Mexico, where the average high schooler rated life satisfaction at 8.2 out of 10. The Netherlands and Iceland had a level of 7.8 and Finland had 7.9. American students reported higher levels of anxiety over tests, bullying or a feeling of not belonging at schools, compared with many of their peers.

### **Factors That Make Students Feel Good About Life**

What makes students feel good? According to the study, teacher and parental support, spending time with friends and being physically active make it more likely that a student will be satisfied with life. On the other hand, feeling anxiety over grades and spending too much time online are predictors of feeling dissatisfied. "In happy schools, teacher support — as perceived by students — tends to be much greater," said Andreas Schleicher, one of the authors of the report.

Does studying hard mean being miserable? Not always. In China, Korea and Japan, for example, students score well on reading and math, but are less satisfied with life, according to the study. And then there's Turkey, Greece and the United Arab Emirates, where students scored poorly and aren't too happy.

But the authors highlight the cases of the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland, where good grades and high spirits exist side by side.

"High learning outcomes don't have to come at the expense of good life satisfaction," Schleicher said.

### **Boys And Girls Have Different Views About Their Lives**

There are also some gender differences. Feeling very satisfied with one's life is more widespread among boys, while feeling low life satisfaction is more common among girls across most countries and cultures. Why that was the case was unclear from the report.

The 2015 study had a sample size of 540,000. Information was collected as part of the Program for International Student Assessment survey, or PISA, in 72 countries and is based on randomly sampled students who completed written tests and questionnaires. It was a pioneering international study that looked at student outcomes with a focus on their social and emotional well-being.

### **Not Everyone Agrees With The Methodology Of The Study**

Tom Loveless, a fellow with the Brown Center on Education Policy with the Brookings Institution, had doubts about the survey's methodology when looking at U.S. high school students. He said that at the time of the study, most 15-year-old sophomores would have spent only a little over a year in their current high school. Their well-being, therefore, could have been shaped by other factors.

"The characteristics that make up 'well-being' may be well established by then and influenced by parents, peers, schools and teachers ... prior to the 10th grade," Loveless said.

Commenting on the study, Randi Weingarten, the head of the American Federation of Teachers, lamented that American teenagers were found to be less happy than some of their peers from other countries. She said the focus should be not on tests, but on building a supportive environment. Weingarten criticized the Trump administration for seeking to cut funding for afterschool programs for low-income families.

"Countries and schools that do well fight the fixation on testing, focusing instead on children's joy in and out of the classroom. They maintain a bully-free and inclusive environment, form partnerships with parents and community, and limit internet use," Weingarten said in a statement. The study's results, she added, show why it's important to fund child nutrition, school climate, and before- and after-school programs.

### **There Is A Bright Side To The Study**

On the bright side, Schleicher said there are a few easy steps parents can take to make their children more satisfied with life.

"Just talking with their children is something that relates positively to life outcomes," including "having dinner together," Schleicher said. "These things are really simple for parents to do. They don't require an academic degree, they don't require hours of time."

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### **Directions for Response:**

***This week you need to write a response of TWO paragraphs. This should be done on a separate sheet of paper and follow this format:***

- 1) **1st Paragraph:** Write a summary of the article. Make sure you:
  - a) Use your own words
  - b) Choose only the most important details
  - c) Pay attention to the order of the details you include
- 2) **\*\*\*HELLO HELLO PAY ATTENTION: Your 2nd Paragraph Will Be DIFFERENT This Week!\*\*\***
  - a) We would like everyone to answer the following question in your 2nd paragraph: HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE A HAPPY LIFE? What would you need? What would you do? Who would be around you? This may be harder to answer than you think!!!