



Children's Environment and Behavior

High Engagement in School

Children's future economic status and productivity in the workforce are determined in part by their performance in school. Research has shown that

children and adolescents who are highly engaged in school perform better in terms of test scores, attendance, and advancement from grade to grade. Studies also indicate that low-income children are less successful in school than children from families with higher incomes.

Changes in welfare are likely to prompt changes in the lives of low-income children that may affect their engagement in school. Children whose parents obtain stable employment may be better able to focus on schoolwork. Knowing that they need to work as adults, these children may become more engaged in the learning process. Conversely, children whose parents end up in unstable, low-paying jobs with shifting work schedules may find it harder to become engaged in the educational process.

To assess school engagement, parents were asked about the extent to which their children did

schoolwork only when forced to, did just enough schoolwork to get by, always did homework, and cared about doing well in school. The responses to these four questions were combined to generate a measure of school engagement.

Nationally, 41 percent of all children were described as being highly engaged in school. In low-income families (below 200 percent of the poverty level), 34 percent of children were highly engaged, compared to 45 percent of children in higher-income families, a statistically significant difference.

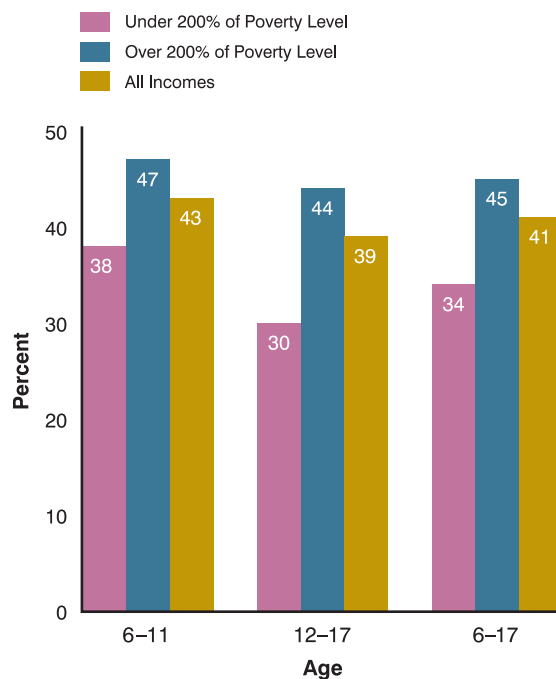
Differences in engagement by family income were evident in young children and in adolescents. Of children age 6 to 11, 38 percent in low-income and 47 percent in higher-income families were highly engaged. This gap widened somewhat for children between the ages of 12 and 17, with 30 percent and 44 percent, respectively, being highly engaged.

In the 13 states surveyed, 35 percent to 43 percent of all children were highly engaged in school. None of the states was above the national average, but four were below it: Alabama, California, Colorado, and Mississippi.

Among children from low-income families, 28 percent to 38 percent were highly engaged in school. Texas was above the national average; Alabama and Mississippi were below it.

For children age 6 to 11 in low-income families, 29 percent to 40 percent were highly engaged in school. None of the states surveyed was above

Children Highly Engaged in School, by Age and Family Income, 1997



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

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Assessing
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An Urban Institute Program
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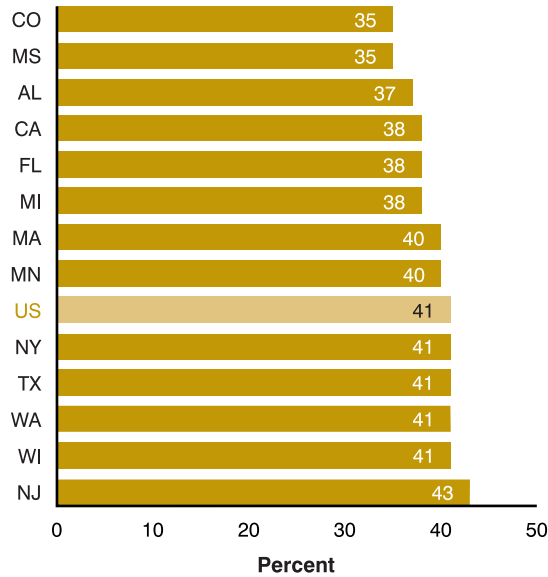


This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

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Children Highly Engaged in School, by State, 1997

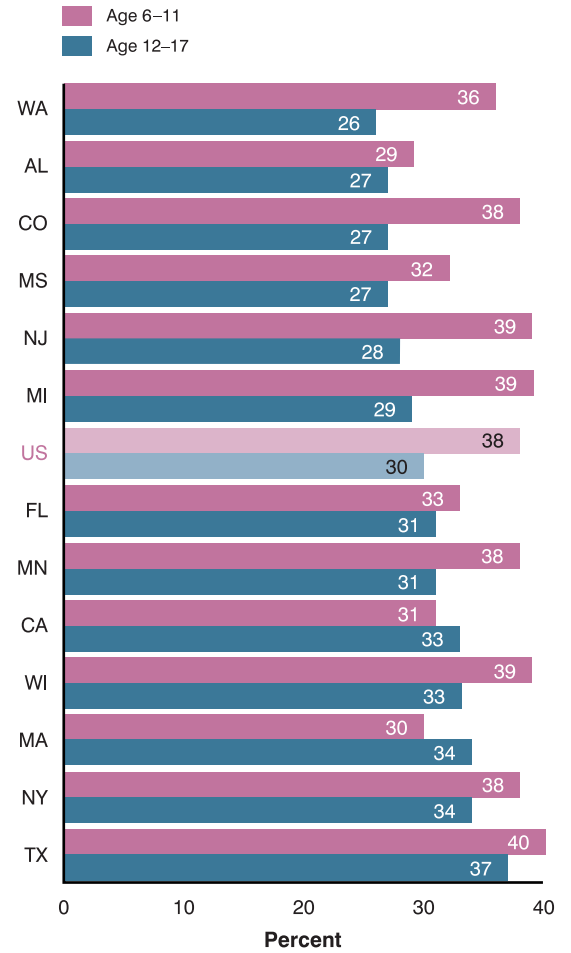


Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

the national average of 38 percent, but Alabama, California, Massachusetts, and Mississippi were below it.

Among 12- to 17-year-olds in low-income families, those highly engaged in school ranged from 26 percent to 37 percent. In Texas, the percentage was above the national average of 30 percent, but none of the states dropped below the national average.

Low-Income Children Highly Engaged in School, by Age and State, 1997



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

The engagement scale was developed by Jim Connell and Lisa Bridges at the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

Children (%) Highly Engaged in School, 1997

Age	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
Under 200% of poverty level														
6-11	28.6	31.4	38.1	33.1	30.4	38.6	37.9	32.5	39.5	37.8	39.7	35.5	38.8	38.2
12-17	27.1	33.1	27.4	31.0	34.1	28.7	30.7	26.6	27.8	33.8	37.2	26.3	33.4	29.8
6-17	27.9	32.1	33.4	32.1	32.2	34.0	34.6	29.7	34.2	36.0	38.5	31.5	36.3	34.4
Over 200% of poverty level														
6-11	44.6	43.5	39.5	45.9	41.9	42.4	42.6	47.7	50.3	46.6	38.8	50.3	44.5	47.1
12-17	44.5	44.2	32.7	40.2	45.2	37.3	40.6	36.2	42.5	42.4	47.0	41.5	41.3	43.8
6-17	44.5	43.8	36.2	43.1	43.4	39.7	41.5	41.4	46.7	44.5	42.8	45.9	42.8	45.4
All incomes														
6-11	36.5	37.5	39.0	39.9	38.4	41.0	41.2	38.6	47.3	42.7	39.2	44.9	42.5	43.3
12-17	37.3	39.4	31.0	35.9	41.9	34.7	38.0	31.1	38.5	39.1	42.5	36.9	39.1	38.6
6-17	36.9	38.4	35.2	37.9	40.1	37.8	39.6	34.8	43.3	41.0	40.8	41.1	40.8	41.0

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded.

Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute