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The Prudential Spirit of Community Youth Survey: A Survey of High School Students on Community Involvement

Wirthlin Group

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The Prudential Spirit of Community Youth Survey

*A Survey of High School Students
on Community Involvement*

Conducted by: The Wirthlin Group

August 1995

NSLC
c/o ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Most of today's high-school teens (62%) feel their communities are good or very good places to live. But more say that conditions in their communities are getting worse (30%) than getting better (25%).

Crime and violence are the most pressing problems facing communities today, according to 36% of students. Other areas of concern are drug and alcohol abuse (cited by 18%), education (7%), economic problems (7%) and lack of youth programs (6%).

More than six teens in ten (62%) say the solutions to such problems lie in individual action rather than government programs. Only one in three (33%) favor government programs.

Almost all teens (95%) believe it is important for people to be involved in the community by volunteering their time to charitable, civic, cultural, environmental or political activities, and nearly two-thirds (62%) feel it is very important. Further, seven in ten (71%) feel their communities would be better places to live if more adults volunteered, and eight in ten (81%) feel it would be better if more students volunteered.

But a majority of students feel that both adults (56%) and students (70%) are doing only an average or poor job of volunteering their time to community activities.

Some 88% of teens believe an important factor in getting students involved in community activity is the encouragement of teachers, parents and other adults. But while 95% of teens believe it is important to learn the value and importance of community service, only four in 10 (40%) say schools convey that message well, and only three in 10 (32%) feel parents do.

While 67% of teens say their schools do not require community service for graduation, an identical percentage say such a requirement would be a good idea.

Half of all teens can name no one in particular whom they admire for their commitment to community service. Those who can name a role model most frequently cite a parent (14%), a peer or friend (12%), or a teacher (8%).

According to teens, the most important reasons students volunteer are: it makes them feel good about themselves (89%); they want to list some community service activities on their college applications (87%); they want to learn skills they cannot learn elsewhere (81%); they have roots in the community (78%); they feel they have to give something back to the community (75%); and they find it fun or have friends who do it (75%).

Teens believe the key reasons students do not volunteer are: they are too busy with part-time jobs, homework or other school activities (91%); they would rather keep their leisure time for TV, music, vacations and the like (71%); and they do not believe volunteering can make a difference (57%).

Teens also say students do not volunteer because: they do not know how to get involved (74%) or simply are never asked (60%).

67% of students interviewed say they volunteer their time to community activities. But only 20% are active in a meaningful way.

What kinds of community service interest students the most? Charitable activities, including non-profit or church organizations involved with the needy, youth, senior citizens, etc. -- 88%. Education activities such as tutoring, peer counseling, coaching sports and participating in student government -- 83%. Environmental activities such as cleaning up or otherwise improving parks, recreation facilities, etc. -- 82%. Cultural activities such as working with theater, music and arts groups -- 66%.

The importance of schools, parents and role models in motivating student interest in community service is apparent in the responses of teens who do volunteer vs. those who do not:

- Among volunteers, 44% say that their schools place a lot of emphasis on the importance of community involvement while only 31% of non-volunteers respond the same way.
- Forty-three of the student volunteers say their parents place a lot of emphasis on community involvement. Among non-volunteers, this percentage drops to 12%.
- And among volunteers, 59% can name a specific role model while only 30% of non-volunteers can do so.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a national survey of high school students in ninth through twelfth grade. A total of 993 students were interviewed by telephone. The interviewing was conducted in May and June 1995. About half the students were male (49%) and half female (51%). A profile of the sample for other demographic characteristics is shown below.

	Proportion of students in each subgroup
All students	100%
9th grade	27%
10th grade	25
11th grade	23
12th grade	24
Urban residents #	20%
Suburban residents	51
Small town/Rural residents	28
White	68%
African-American	15
Hispanic	12
Other	4
<u>Education of chief wage earner in the household</u>	
High school or less	25%
Some college	19
College graduate	34
Post-graduate work	13

Respondents self-defined the community in which they live as urban, suburban, small town or rural.

To ensure an adequate representation of urban and minority students, additional interviews were conducted in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami. About 175 interviews of the 993 were focused on these four cities.

The margin of error for any percentage result in the report is about 2% to 3% at the 95% confidence interval.

For more information about this study contact:

Ms. Becky Perez
The Prudential
751 Broad Street
16th Floor
Newark, New Jersey 07102

I

Overall Climate

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING FOR THEM

About four students in 10 (42%) say they are very satisfied with the way things are going for them. Another 50% say they are somewhat satisfied.

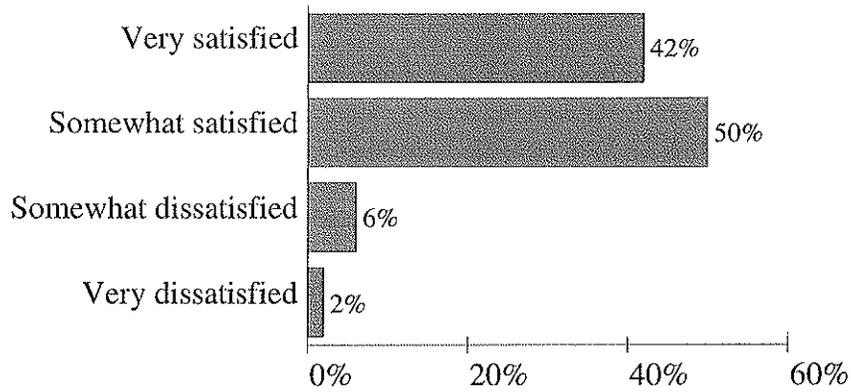
As shown below, the proportions of students who say they are very satisfied is higher among Whites and among children in households where the chief wage earner has a post-graduate degree.

Percent who are very satisfied

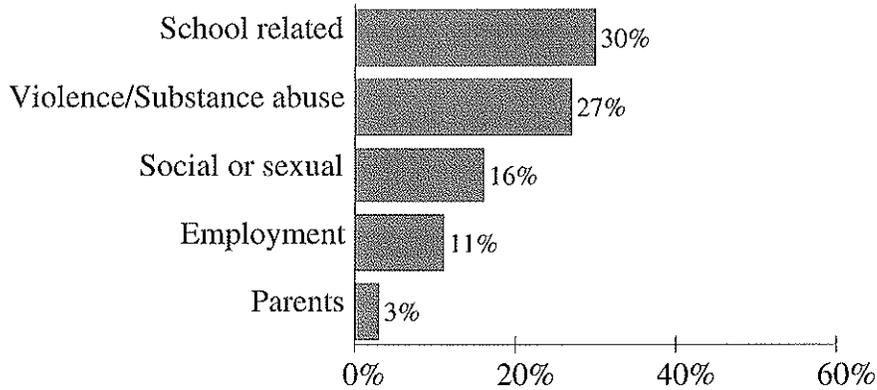
All students	42%
Whites	46%
African-Americans	32%
Hispanics	35%
Education of household's <u>chief wage earner</u>	
Some college or less	39%
College graduate	41%
Post-graduate degree	53%

Although most students are at least somewhat satisfied with the way things are going, they say they face a number of problems. Thirty percent say their single biggest problem is related to school and academic work, while 27% mention violence or drug and alcohol abuse. Sixteen percent mention something related to their social group or to sex, and 11% mention concerns about finding or holding a job. Only 3% say trouble with their parents is their greatest problem.

Students' Satisfaction with Their Personal Lives



Major Problems Students are Facing



Question: "In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own life?"

Question: "What do you think is the single greatest problem you face today?"

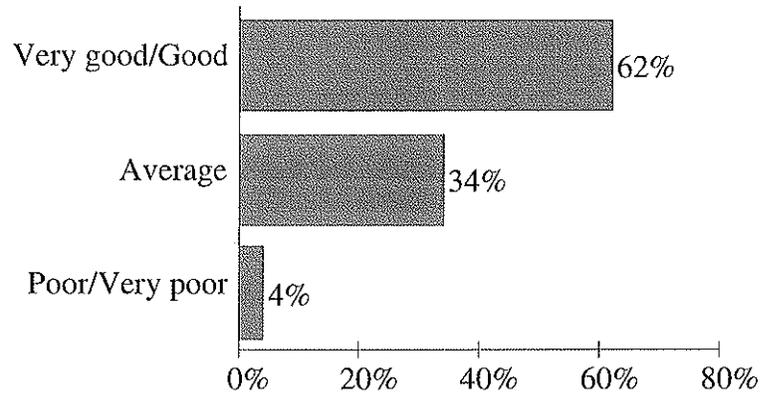
SIX IN 10 STUDENTS SAY THEIR COMMUNITIES ARE GOOD PLACES TO LIVE

Sixty-two percent believe the overall condition of their communities are very good or good; a third (34%) say it is average, and only a handful (4%) say it is poor or very poor.

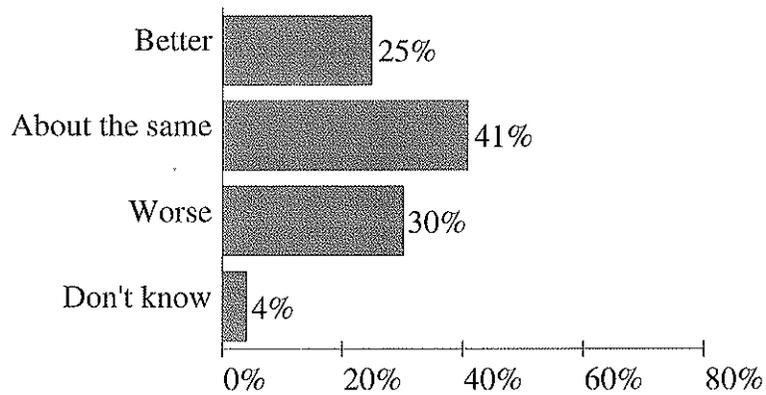
Suburban residents (67%) and small town residents (65%) are more likely to rate their communities above average than are urban residents (43%). White students have much higher opinions of their communities (71% above average) than do African-American students (31%) or Hispanic students (44%).

But only a quarter of the students think their communities are getting better. Slightly more (30%) say their communities are worse than they were five years ago. Among White students, 28% think their communities are not as good as they were. This figure is 29% among African-American students, but it is 40% among Hispanic students.

Students' Ratings of Their Communities as Places to Live



The Community Compared to the Past



Question: "Thinking now about the overall condition of your community, how would you rate your community as a place to live?"

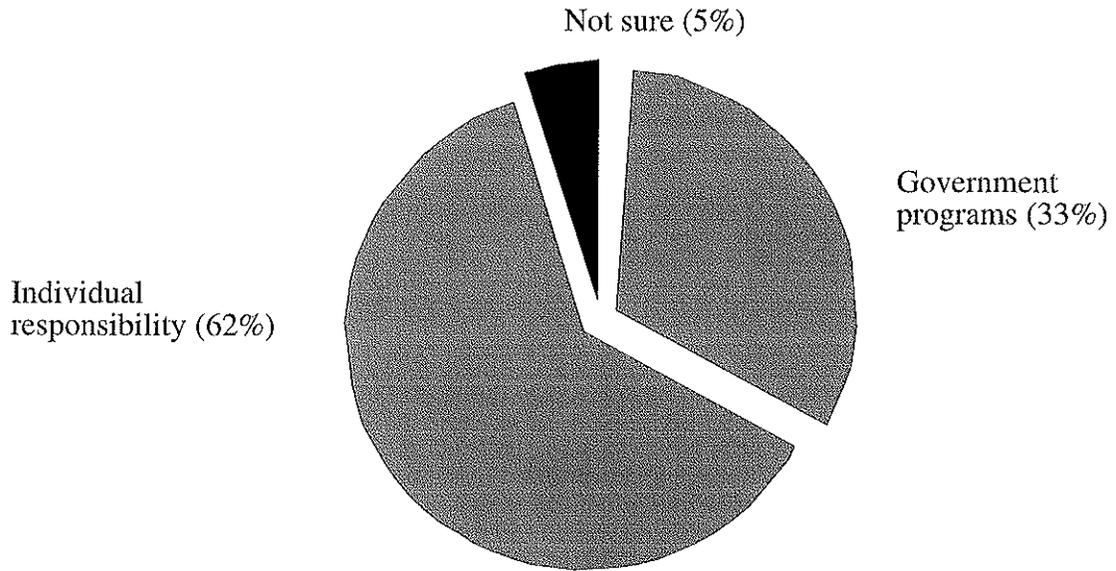
Question: "Compared to five years ago, would you say that your community is getting better as a place to live, is about the same, or is it getting worse?"

MORE THAN SIX IN 10 TEENS SAY INDIVIDUAL ACTION, NOT GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS, IS THE BEST SOLUTION TO COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Students were asked what they think are the most pressing problems facing their communities. Topping the list are crime (27%) and drugs and alcohol (18%). Seven percent of the students mention the economy and employment, while the same number mention the educational system. Six percent mention a lack of youth programs.

Students were next asked if they favored government programs or individual responsibility as a means of solving community problems. Almost twice as many (62% vs. 33%) favor individual responsibility over government programs.

Favor Individual Responsibility or Government Programs



Question: "Now I would like you to think about solving community problems. Do you favor governmental programs aimed at solving community problems or do you favor individual responsibility as a means of solving community problems?"

ALMOST ALL STUDENTS BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO BE INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES BY VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME

Some 95% of students say it is important for people to volunteer their time to community activities. And 62% say it is very important.

LESS THAN THIRTY PERCENT OF STUDENTS THINK THEIR PEERS ARE DOING A GOOD JOB OF VOLUNTEERING

Seven in 10 students say their peers are doing an average or better job of volunteering now. Three in 10 (29%) think they are doing a poor job.

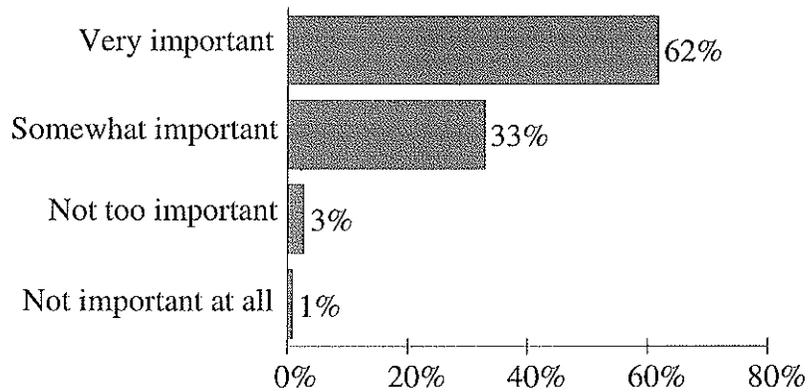
Forty-three percent of students say that adults in their communities are doing a good job of volunteering, with 41% saying average and 15% saying poor.

Seven in 10 students (71%) think their communities would be better places to live if more adults volunteered. Eight in ten (81%) think their communities would be better if more students volunteered.

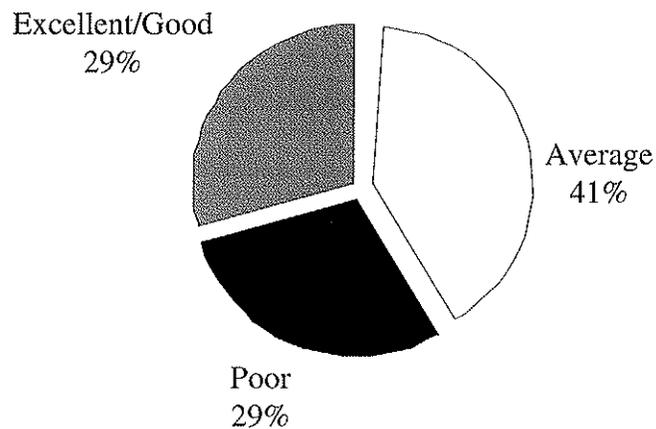
"Do you think your community would be a better place to live if more adults (more students) volunteered their time to community activities, or would it not make much difference?"

	If more adults volunteered	If more students volunteered
Community would be a better place to live	71%	81%
It wouldn't make much difference	28	19

Importance of Community Involvement



Ratings of Students' Community Involvement



Question: "How important do you feel it is for people to be involved in volunteering their time...?"

Question: "Would you say that students, like yourself, in your community do an excellent, good, average or poor job of volunteering their time outside of school to help make the community a better place to live?"

TWO-THIRDS OF STUDENTS SAY THEY ARE CURRENTLY DOING SOME VOLUNTEER WORK. BUT ONLY A FIFTH ARE ACTIVE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

Among all teens, 67% say they are currently volunteering some time to a community activity, but some of these activities turn out to be more school related, and a number of students are involved only infrequently. Only 20% of all students average more than 20 hours a year in volunteer activities.

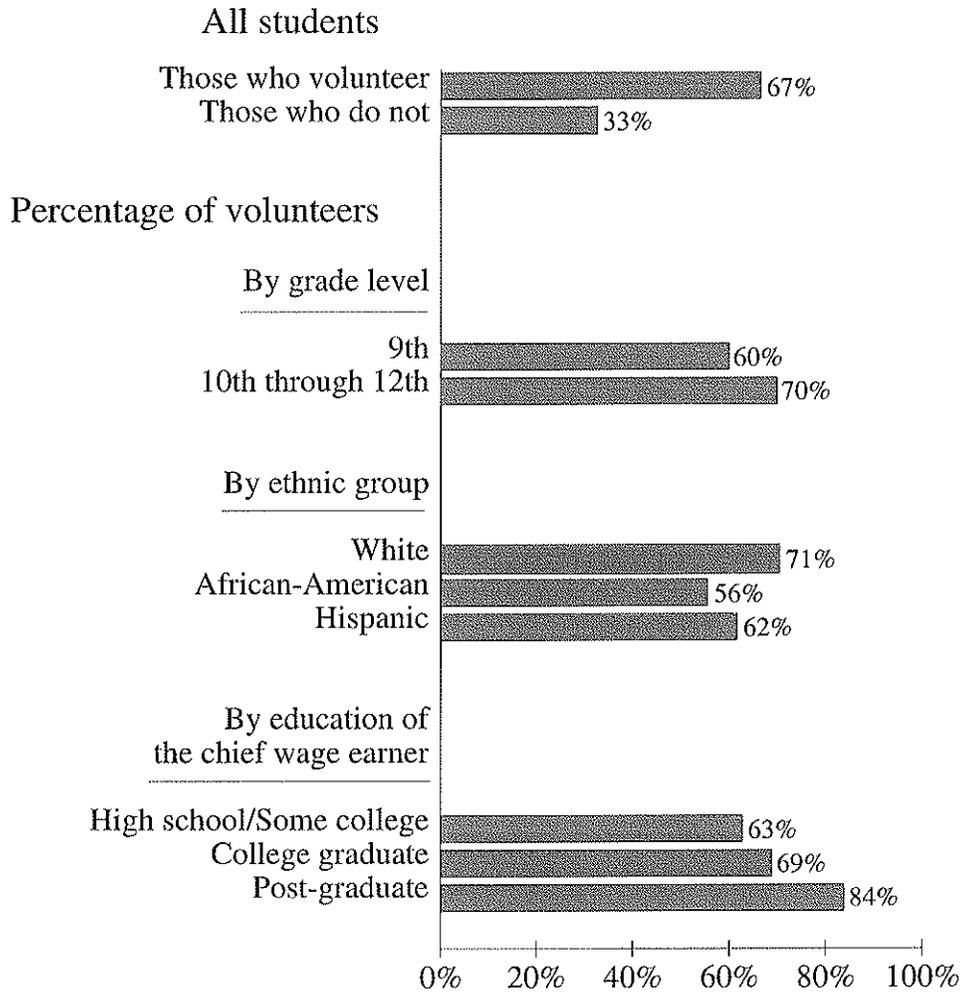
Involvement tends to increase among students at higher grade levels. And volunteer levels are higher among White students and quite high among students in households where the chief wage earner has a post-graduate education.

Level of involvement

	Reported level of involvement #
High	4%
Moderate	16
Low	47
None	33

Based on the reported number of hours that students devote to volunteer activities. Low involvement represents a group of students who average about 20 hours per year of volunteer time or a half hour per week. The moderate and high involvement groups average about 175 hours of volunteer time per year or about three and a half hours per week.

Students who Volunteer



Question: "Do you, yourself, volunteer your time to any community activities?"

II

Encouraging Student Involvement

Barriers and Motivators

FOUR STUDENTS IN 10 SAY THEIR HIGH SCHOOL ENCOURAGES COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Half of urban students (49%) say their schools place a lot of emphasis on volunteering. This proportion is 42% among suburban students and 30% among small town and rural students.

Among students who currently volunteer any time, 44% say their schools place a lot of emphasis on community involvement. Among students who do not volunteer this figure is 31%.

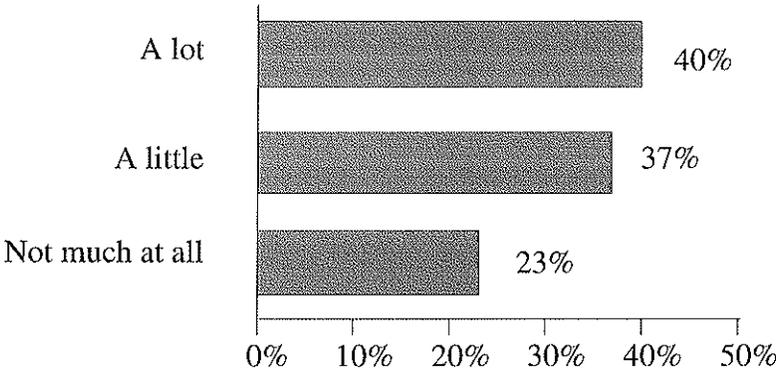
About a third of students say their parents and other family members encourage community involvement. This figure is highest among students in households where the chief wage earner has a post-graduate education (44%), and lowest in households where the chief wage earner has a high school education or less (24%).

Forty-three percent of students who volunteer say their parents place a lot of emphasis on community involvement. This proportion drops to only 12% among those students who do no volunteer work.

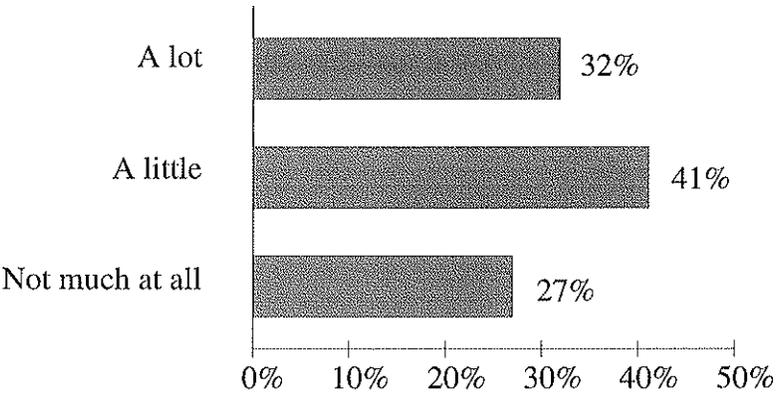
Among all students, 24% say their high schools have a community service requirement for graduation. Two-thirds (67%) say their schools do not have a requirement. Students in the northeast (33%) and in urban schools (32%) are somewhat more likely to report that community service is a graduation requirement.

Emphasis on Volunteering From School and Others

Emphasis From School



Emphasis From Parents and Other Family Members



Question: "How much does your school emphasize the importance of community involvement?"

Question: "How much do your parents or other family members emphasize the importance of community involvement?"

NINETY-FIVE PERCENT OF TEENS BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEARN THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Sixty percent think it is very important for young people to learn the value of community service, and another 35% think this is somewhat important.

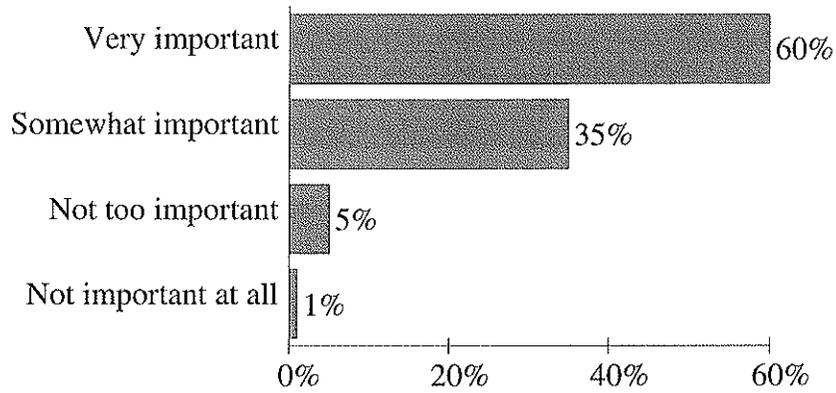
The percentages of students who think it is very important to learn the value of community service are highest among Hispanics (71%) compared to African-Americans (62%) or Whites (57%). Students who currently volunteer are more likely to say it is very important to learn the value of community service (70%) than are students who do not (40%).

TWO-THIRDS OF STUDENTS SAY IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR THEIR HIGH SCHOOLS TO REQUIRE A COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITY FOR GRADUATION

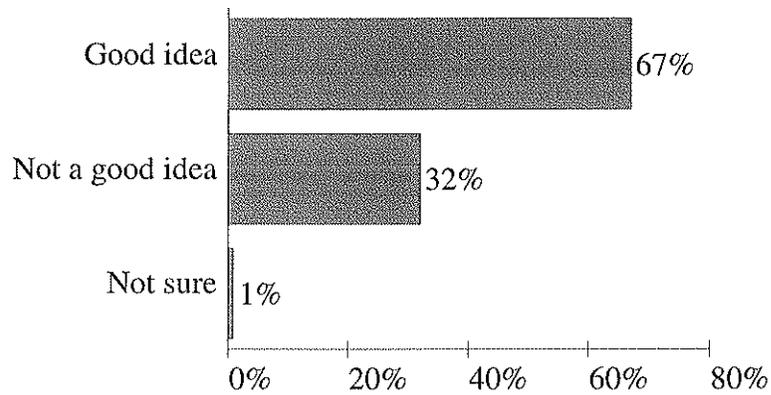
Among volunteers, 71% think a community service requirement is a good idea. In addition, more than half (59%) of the students who are not volunteers agree.

Female high school students are more likely to think community service should be a graduation requirement (74%) than are male students (60%). Female teens are also more likely to think it is very important for young people to learn the value of community service (67%) than are male teens (53%).

Importance of Young People Learning the Value of Community Service



Should High Schools Require Community Service?



Question: "How important do you think it is for young people to learn the value of community service or do you think it is not a good idea?"

Question: "Do you think it is a good idea for school to require their students to take part in community service activities in order to graduate?"

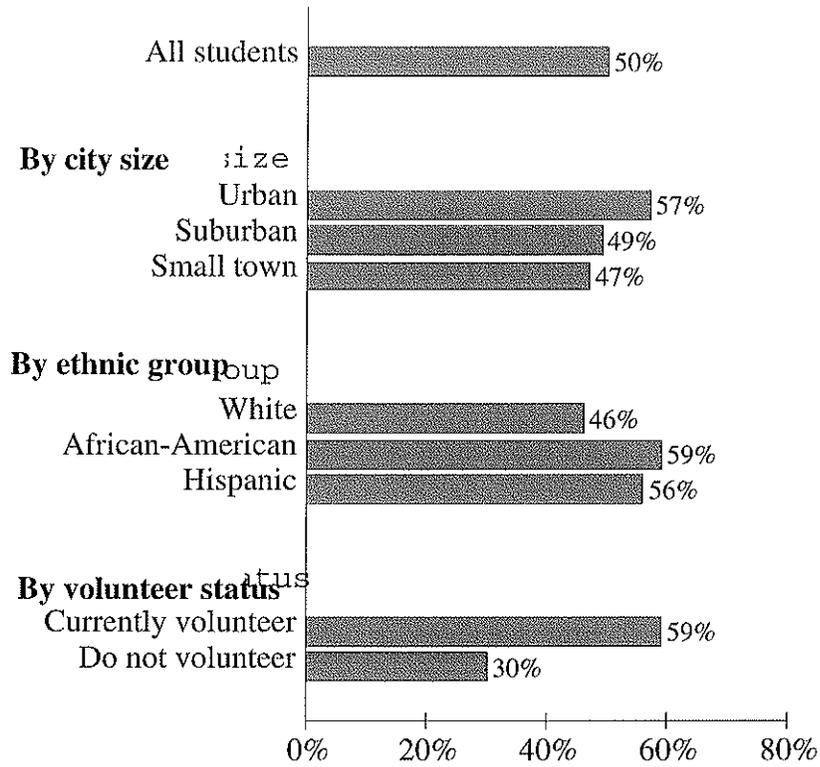
HALF OF ALL TEENS CANNOT NAME ANYONE THEY ADMIRE FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

Even among those students who are currently volunteers, only 59% can name someone they admire because of their community service.

Among students who do name someone, a parent is most frequently mentioned (14%) followed by a friend (12%), a teacher (8%) or a religious leader (5%).

Urban and minority students are more likely to name someone than are suburban, small town or White students.

Existence of Community Service Role Models



Question: "Can you think of anyone in particular whom you admire because of their commitment to community service?"

THE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS THAT STUDENTS VOLUNTEER ARE THAT IT MAKES THEM FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES (89%), THEY HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED BY SOMEONE TO VOLUNTEER (88%) AND THEY WANT TO HAVE THE ACTIVITY ON THEIR COLLEGE APPLICATION (87%)

Students were asked how important each of nine factors is as a reason why young people volunteer for community activities. More than half the students (57%) say that getting the activity on a college application is a very important reason to volunteer. Another 30% feel this is somewhat important.

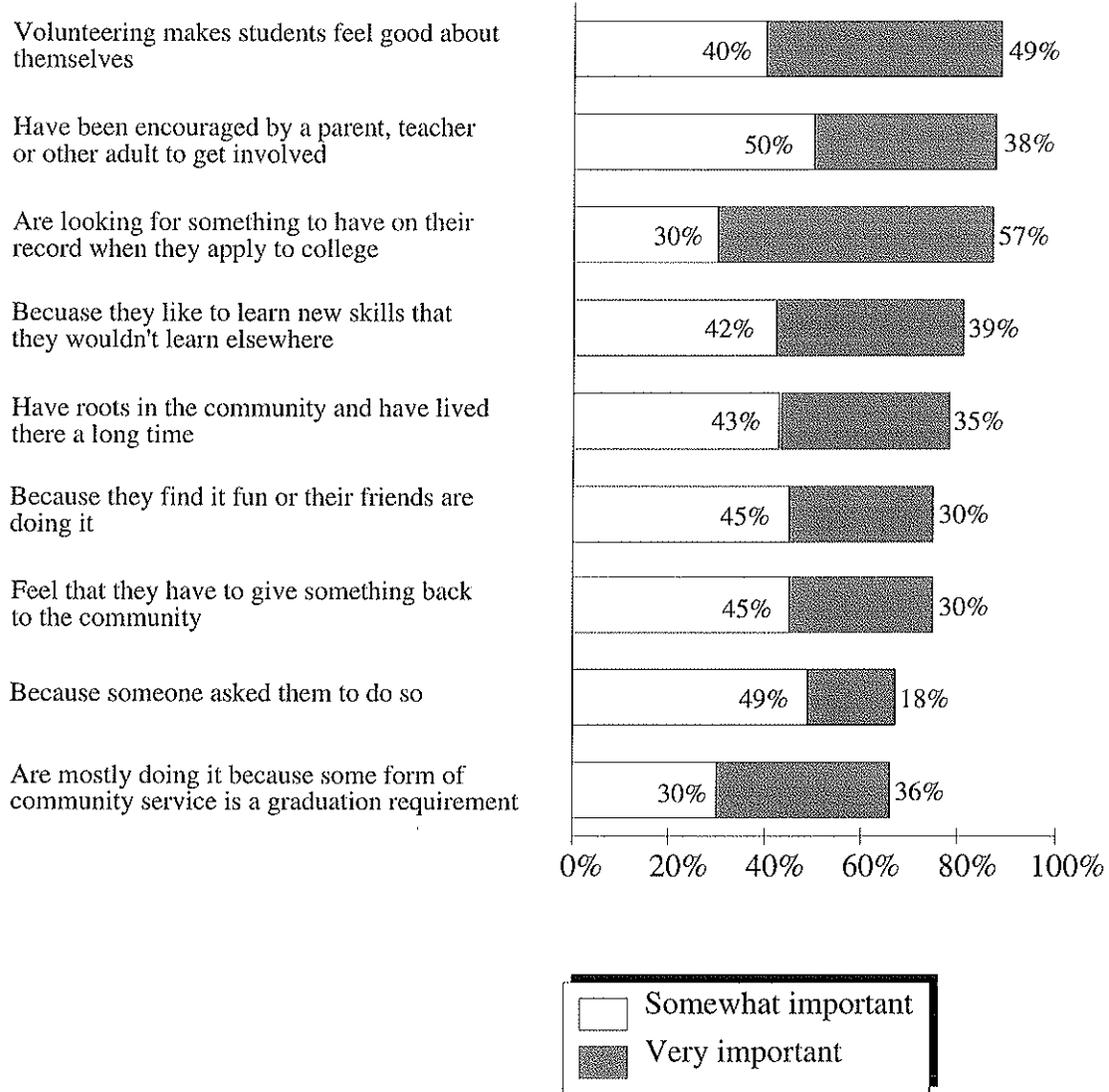
Almost half the students (49%) say teens volunteer because it helps them feel good about themselves, and 38% say it is because volunteers have been encouraged by their parents, teachers or other adults. About 40% of students think learning new skills is very important, and about a third say that having roots in the community is very important.

About a third of students also feel that having community service as a graduation requirement is a very important reason. Three students in 10 think that being with their friends and having fun volunteering or giving something back to the community are very important reasons.

Relatively few students (18%) say that a very important reason for volunteering is because someone asked them to do so.

Among students who are now volunteers, 42% say being encouraged by their parents or another adult is a very important reason for volunteering. Among non-volunteers, only 29% think this is a very important reason. Similarly among volunteers, 35% say that being with their friends and doing something that is fun is a very important reason for being involved. Among non-volunteers, only 19% think this is a very important reason for volunteering.

Why Students Volunteer



Question: "...I am going to read you a list of reasons why students might be willing to volunteer their time to community activities. For each one, please tell me whether you think each is a very important reason, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all as a reason why most students volunteer?"

KEY REASONS TEENS DO NOT VOLUNTEER ARE: THEY ARE TOO BUSY, THEY WOULD RATHER KEEP LEISURE TIME FOR THEMSELVES, AND THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW TO GET INVOLVED

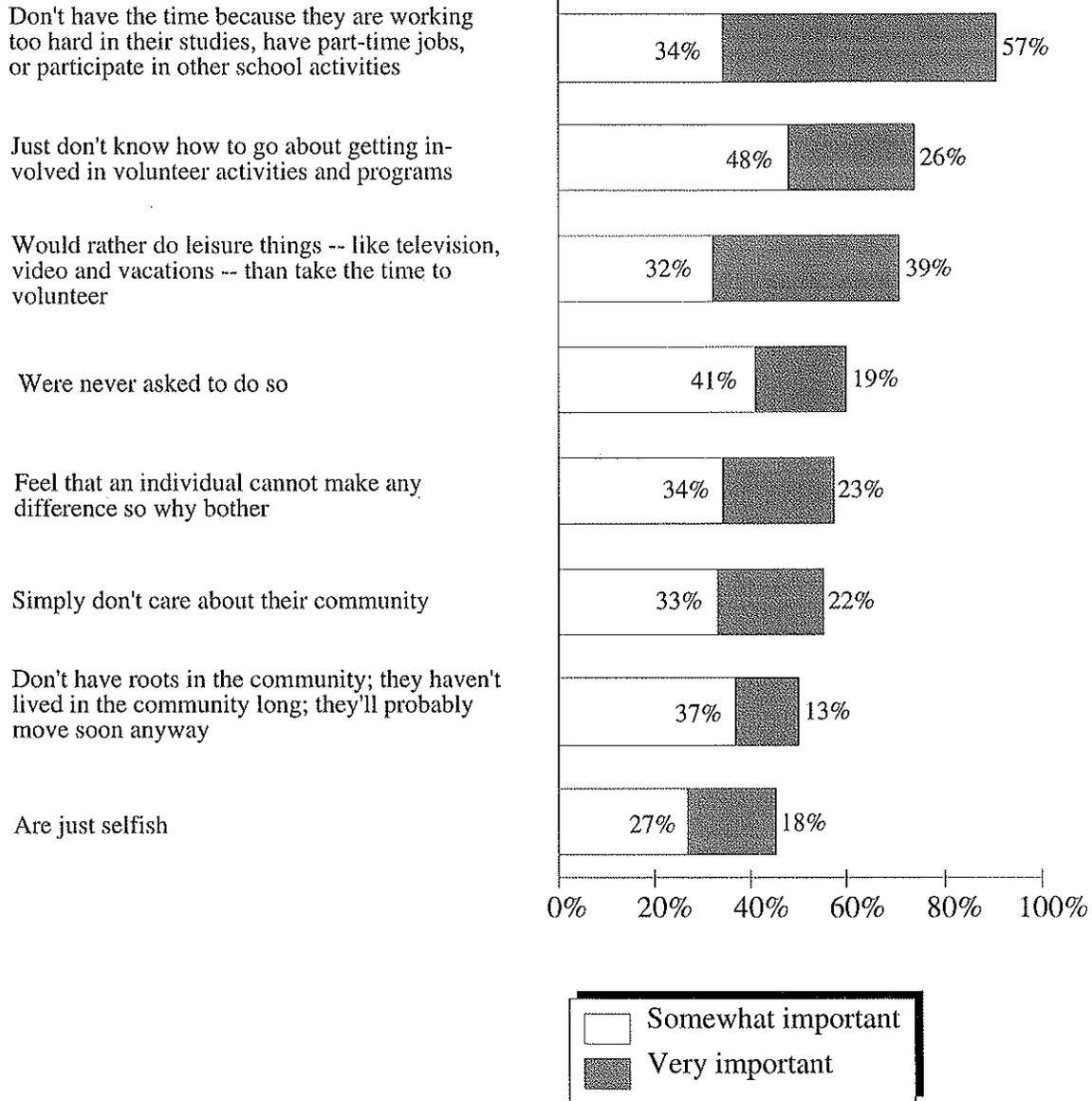
Over half the respondents (57%) say students do not volunteer because of other commitments including jobs, homework and other school activities. Another 34% feel this reason is somewhat important. Seventy-one percent of students say not wanting to give up leisure time is an important reason for not volunteering.

On the other hand, 74% of the students think that not knowing how to go about getting involved is a very important (26%) or somewhat important (48%) reason for lack of participation.

The other reasons are not selected as very important by as many students. Still, half or more say important reasons for not volunteering include: never being asked (60%), feeling an individual cannot make a difference (57%), not caring about the community (55%), and not having roots in the community (50%). Less than half (45%) think students do not volunteer because they are selfish.

Interestingly, among students who volunteer now, about half (51%) say they also have part-time jobs. Among students who do not volunteer, 48% say they have part-time jobs.

Why Students do not Volunteer



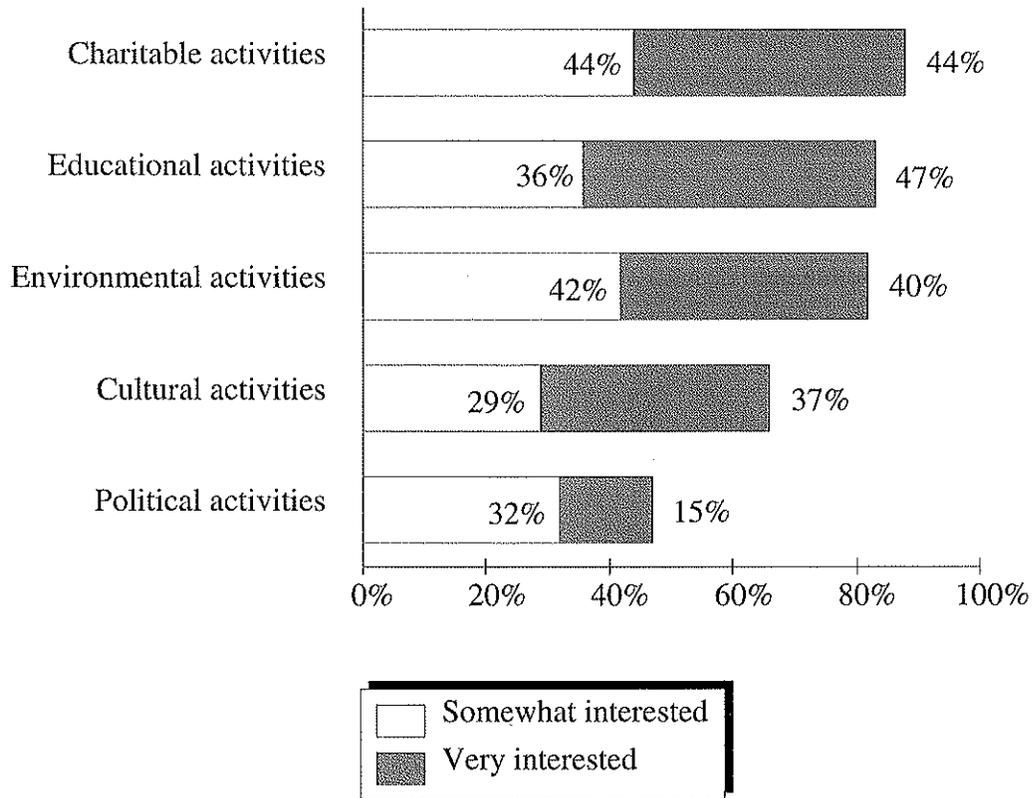
Question: "...I am going to read you a list of reasons why students might not be willing to volunteer their time to community activities. For each one, please tell me whether you think each is a very important reason, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all as a reason why some students may not volunteer in their communities?"

CHARITABLE, EDUCATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES HAVE THE GREATEST ATTRACTION TO YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Eight-eight percent of students say they would be very or somewhat interested in charitable activities. Eight-three percent feel the same way about educational activities, and 82% say they would be interested in environmental activities.

Cultural activities draw somewhat less enthusiasm, while relatively few students say they would be interested in political activities.

Volunteer Activities That Most Interest Students



Question: "How interested are you, yourself, in volunteering for (activity)?"