

How do U.S. high school students feel at school?

School Report

Yale *Center for Emotional Intelligence*

Emotion Revolution Survey

School Report: N4 Schools

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Emotion Revolution Survey Results: N4 Schools

This document summarizes the findings from the Emotion Revolution survey. The report consists of two parts. First, we present an overview of the survey aims, methods, and overall findings. Second, we report specific findings for the N4 Schools and compare them to the results of the national sample of high school students.

1. Overview of project aims, methods, and overall findings

The Emotion Revolution survey asked high school students across the US about their emotions and experiences at school. The aim of the survey was to examine how students feel at school, how their educational and social experiences at school relate to their feelings, and how they aspire to feel at school. Students were first asked open questions; they wrote down three emotions they typically experience at school, and three emotions they would like to experience at school. Then, students were asked to rate how frequently they experienced certain emotions at school, by rating a list of 28 emotions on a response scale from 0 = *never* to 100 = *always*. Finally, students were asked to report how often they made certain educational and social experiences at school, rating a list of 23 such experiences at school on a scale from 0 = *never* to 100 = *always*).

In order to reach as many students as possible, the link to the online survey was distributed through Facebook, youth serving organizations, a large list of schools and school districts, and Lady Gaga's social media channels.

The survey was accessed approximately 46,000 times and approximately 22,000 high school students between the ages of 13 and 19 years provided sufficient answers to be included in the analysis sample. The sample was diverse in terms of gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, school types and geography.

In the overall sample, the results showed that students experience predominantly negative emotions at school. 75.4% of the emotions students wrote down were negative. The top five most frequently mentioned negative emotions were feeling tired (mentioned by 39.3% of the students), stressed (29.4% of the students), bored (26.4% of the students), anxious (12.3% of the students), and annoyed (10.3% of the students). The most often mentioned positive feelings were feeling happy (mentioned by 22.7% of all students) and feeling excited (5.1% of all students).

Negative emotions prevailed also in the rating scales. Here, students reported being stressed on average 79.8% of their time at school. On average, students felt bored 69.5% of the time, frustrated 65.4% of the time, and nervous 59.5% of the time. The most frequently experienced positive emotions were feeling accepted (55% of the time) and happy (51.5% of the time).

The most frequent educational experience at school was that students felt they could do well when they put effort into their schoolwork (on average 74.4% of the time). The students experienced also frequently positive relationships with peers (i.e., classmates helping each other out, experienced on average 62.3% of the time at school) and positive relationships with teachers (i.e., at least one teacher knows students' interests, 62.3%). Students also felt frequently that they received support for persistence in their work (on average 61.1% of the time) and that their school valued scores on standardized tests more than anything else (64.1% of the time).

We examined which experiences at school were most strongly related to the students' feelings. Students were more likely to have positive emotions when they experienced learning as relevant to their goals in life. Negative emotions were related to experiences of bullying and to being treated meanly and cruelly by other people.

Students were asked to describe how they aspired to feel at school and answered most frequently that they wanted to feel happy (mentioned by 58.9% of all students), excited (27.5% of all students), energized (13.1% of all students), relaxed (9.4% of all students), and interested (7.3% of all students).

The patterns of results were similar across demographic groups, including gender identity, sexual orientations, socioeconomic status and school type. However, small differences between demographic groups were also observed. Gender and sexual orientation minority students expressed more often the desire to feel socially accepted and safe, and reported more often feeling depressed and being bullied. Students with lower socioeconomic status tended to report less frequent positive and more frequent negative emotions than students with higher socioeconomic status.

2. Results for N4 Schools

In this section we describe the results for the N4 Schools and compare them to the complete sample of our survey, which we call the national sample.

The students of the N4 Schools were surveyed between May 12th and July 1st, 2015. The survey link was accessed 250 times and 181 students were included in the study. In order to be included, respondents had to be between 13 and 19 years old, attending the 9th to 12th grade, living in the US, and they had to have answered at least six questions.

The N4 Schools sample was 65.1% female, 33% male, and 2% other gender identity. The students rated the socioeconomic status (SES) of their family on a scale from 0 = *lowest* to 10 = *highest*. In the N4 Schools, the mean score of this SES rating was 6.42 (standard deviation: 2.00). In comparison, the average SES rating for the national sample was 6.46 (standard deviation: 1.96).

45.3% of the students at N4 Schools identified as White/Caucasian, 23.6% as Hispanic, 11.7% as Black/African American, 7.1% as Biracial or Multiracial, 5.4% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 3.1% as Asian/Asian American, and 3.7% as other.

The first set of survey questions asked how students felt at school. Students were offered an opportunity to describe these feelings in their own words (open-ended responses) and to write down up to three different emotions they most frequently experienced at school. The five most frequent answers at the N4 Schools were:

1. Tired (41.9% of students felt this way)
2. Happy (29.6% of students)
3. Stressed (25.5% of students)
4. Bored (25.3% of students)
5. Annoyed (7.3% of students).

Four of the five most frequent emotions written down by the students were the same in the N4 Schools and the national sample (tired, bored, happy, and stressed). The fifth most frequent emotion was annoyed in the N4 Schools and anxious in the national sample.

Next, the students were asked to describe how they would like to feel at school, and were again given the possibility to write up to three answers into open text fields. The five most frequently mentioned emotions at N4 Schools were:

1. Happy (62.1% of students wanted to feel this way)
2. Excited (27.2%)
3. Energized (13.7%)
4. Relaxed (9.6%)
5. Awake (7.1%).

Four out of five of these most frequent answers (happy, excited, energized, and relaxed) were the same in the N4 Schools and the national sample. Students at N4 Schools expressed the wish to feel awake among the five most frequent emotions, while students in the national sample expressed the wish to feel interested in the fifth place.

In order to get a more comprehensive picture of students' emotional experiences at school, we asked students to rate how often they experience 28 specific emotions that are influential for both school success and student health and well-being (e.g., interested, grateful, afraid). The students were asked to rate how often they experienced each of the 28 emotions at school. The response scale ranged from 0 = *never* to 100 = *always* and the responses can therefore be interpreted as percentages of time students experience these emotions. The results are summarized in Figure 1.

The students at the N4 Schools experienced all positive emotions more frequently than the national sample. Most negative emotions were similarly frequent or only slightly different in the N4 Schools and the national sample, including the emotions angry, ashamed, bored, frustrated, lonely, mad, miserable, nervous, scared, and stressed. The feelings afraid, discouraged, hopeless, and sad were less frequent at the N4 Schools than in the national sample, with differences of more than five percentage points between both samples.

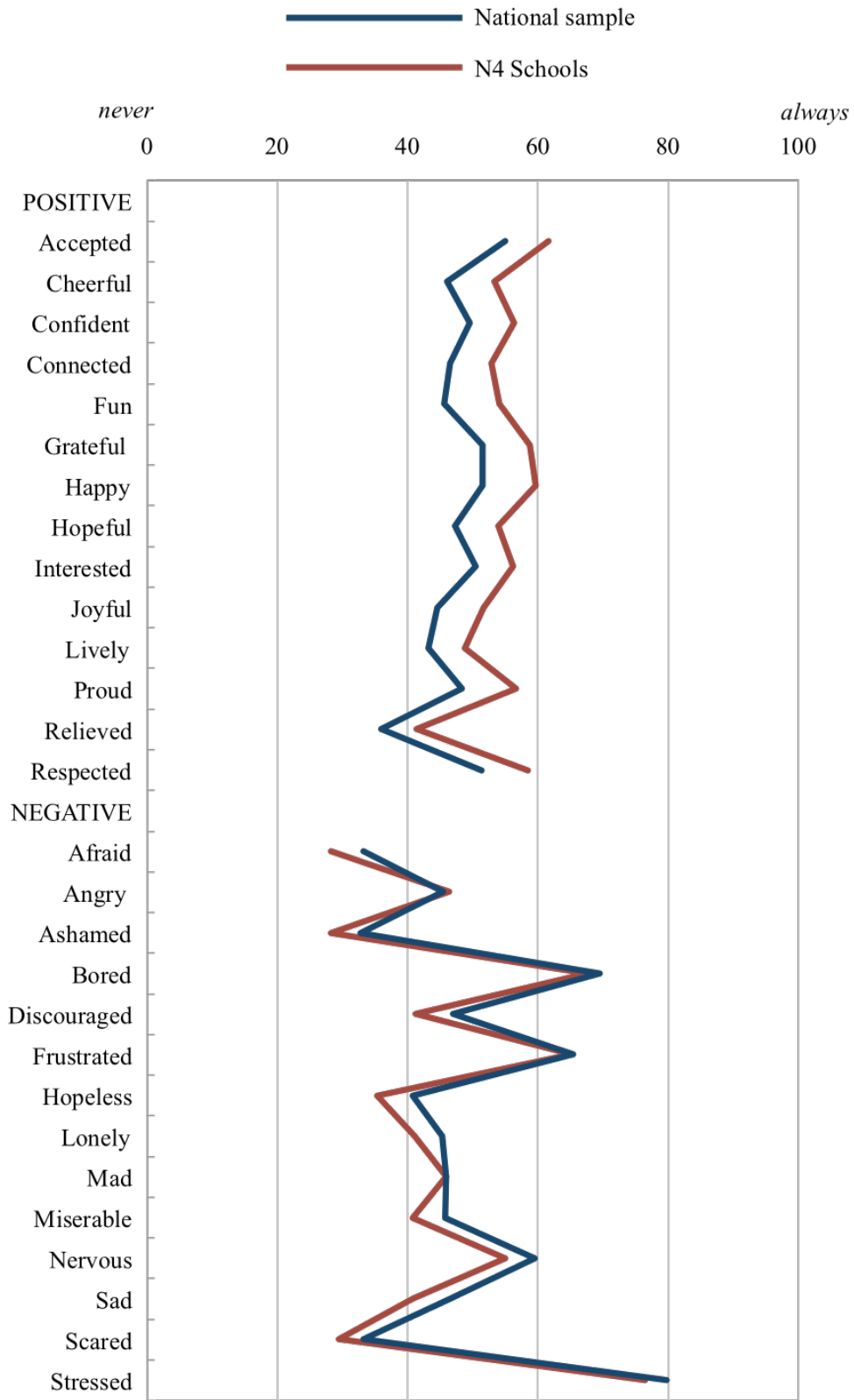


Figure 1: Emotion Rating mean scores in N4 Schools (=red), compared to the mean scores in the complete sample (=blue).

The final set of questions in the survey asked about common educational and social experiences at school. Students were asked to rate how often they experienced each of the 23 school experiences on a response scale from 0 = *never* to 100 = *always*. The results are documented in Figure 2.

On average, the students in the N4 Schools experienced beneficial experiences more frequently than students in the national sample. Four experiences were similarly frequent in the N4 Schools and the national sample: the feeling that competition among students was encouraged, the experience of receiving support to complete projects from start to finish, the feeling that students get along well, and the feeling that bullying was a problem in the attended school. The most frequent beneficial experience was having the confidence of being able to do well if putting enough effort into the schoolwork (experienced on average 79.8% of the time in the N4 Schools). Also frequently, the N4 Schools students experienced learning about communication skills (62.9% – 68.8%). Positive relations to teachers were also experienced often in the N4 Schools: 69.7% of the time students felt that there was an adult they could go to if they had a personal problem, and 69.5% of the time they felt that at least one teacher knew their interests.

Two experiences that can hinder learning and well-being were less frequent in the N4 Schools than in the national sample. For instance, students in the N4 Schools felt less often than students in the national sample that other people had been mean and cruel to them (less than 30.0% of the time in the N4 Schools). Also, the experience that scores in standardized tests mattered more than anything else was less frequent in the N4 Schools than in the national sample (51.5% of the time in the N4 Schools). The experience that bullying at school was also rare (less than 35.0% of the time at N4 Schools).

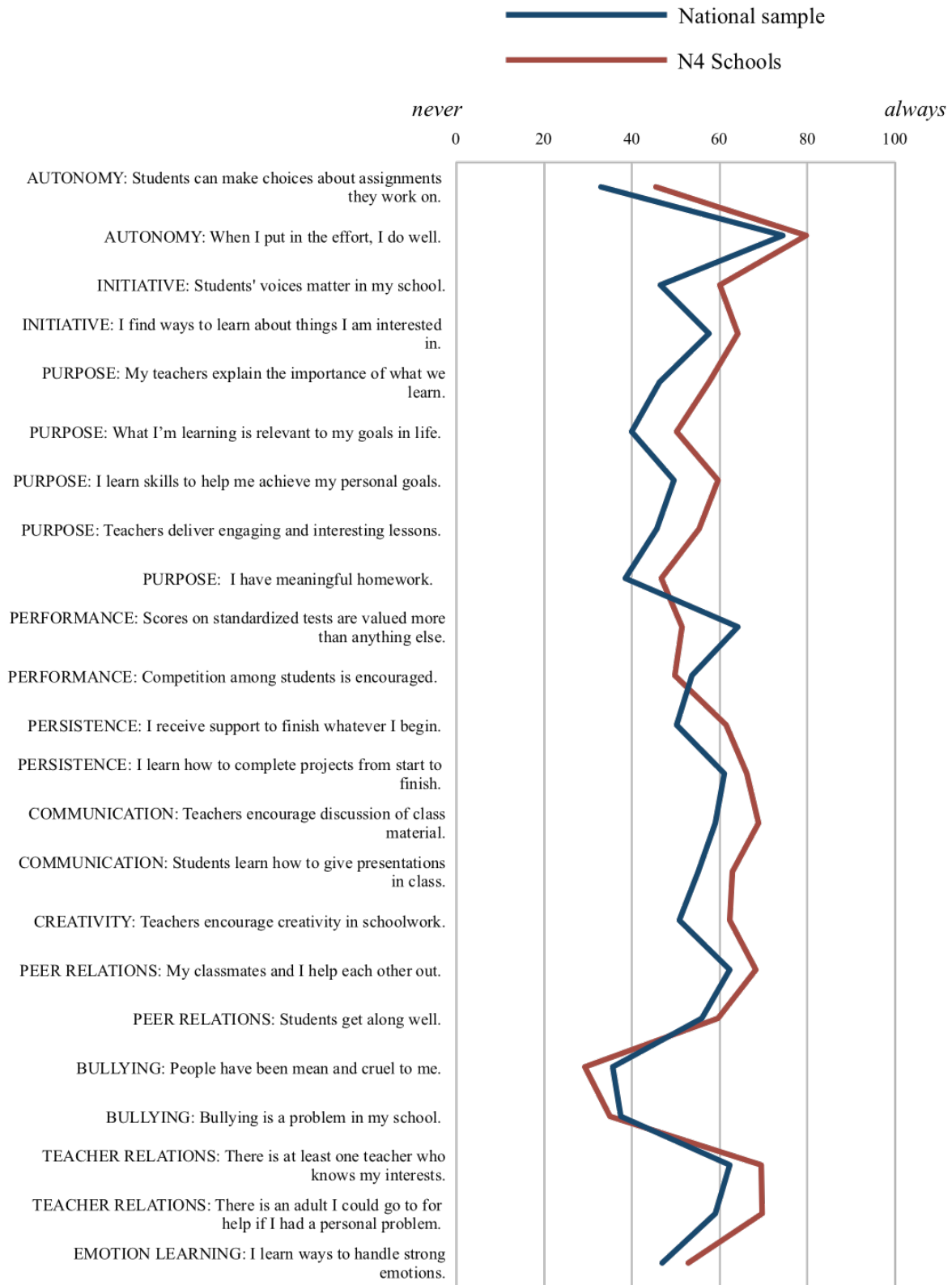


Figure 2: School climate rating mean scores in N4 Schools (=red), compared to the mean scores in the complete sample (=blue).