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JOSEPHSON INSTITUTE'S REPORT CARD ON AMERICAN YOUTH: There's a Hole in Our Moral Ozone and It's Getting Bigger

Survey of 29,000 high school students reveals entrenched habits of dishonesty in the workforce of future – stealing, lying, and cheating rates climb to alarming rates

LOS ANGELES – Josephson Institute's 2008 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth, a report on the attitudes and conduct of 29,760 high school students, reveals entrenched habits of dishonesty in today's young people — and that doesn't bode well for the future when these youngsters become the next generation's politicians and parents, cops and corporate executives, and journalists and generals.

STEALING. In bad news for business, more than one in three boys (35 percent) and one-fourth of the girls (26 percent) — a total of 30 percent overall — admitted ***stealing from a store within the past year***. In 2006 the overall theft rate was 28 percent (32 percent males, 23 percent females).

Students who attend private secular and religious schools were less likely to steal, but still the theft rate among non-religious independent school students was more than one in five (21 percent) while 19 percent who attend religious schools also admitted stealing something from a store in the past year.

Honors students (21 percent), student leaders (24 percent) and students involved in youth activities like the YMCA and school service clubs (27 percent) were less likely to steal, but still more than one in five committed theft.

Twenty-three percent said they ***stole something from a parent or other relative*** in the past year (the same as 2006) and 20 percent confessed they ***stole something from a friend***. Boys were nearly twice as likely to steal from a friend as girls (26 percent to 14 percent).

LYING. More than two of five (42 percent) said that they sometimes ***lie to save money***. Again, the male-female difference was significant: 49 percent of the males, 36 percent of the females. In 2006, 39 percent said they lied to save money (47 percent males, 31 percent females).

Thirty-nine percent of students in private religious schools admitted to lying as did 35 percent of the students attending private non-religious schools.

More than eight in ten students (83 percent) from public schools and religious private schools confessed they ***lied to a parent about something significant***. Students attending non-religious independent schools were somewhat less likely to lie to parents (78 percent).

CHEATING. Cheating in school continues to be rampant and it's getting worse. A substantial majority (64 percent) ***cheated on a test*** during the past year (38 percent did so two or more times), up from 60 percent and 35 percent in 2006. There were no gender differences on the issue of cheating on exams.

Students attending non-religious independent schools reported the lowest cheating rate (47 percent) while 63 percent of students from religious schools cheated.

Responses about cheating show some geographic disparity: Seventy percent of the students residing in the southeastern U.S. admitted to cheating, compared to 64 percent in the west, 63 percent in the northeast, and 59 percent in the midwest.

More than one in three (36 percent) said they ***used the Internet to plagiarize an assignment***. In 2006 the figure was 33 percent.

IT'S WORSE THAN IT APPEARS.

As bad as these numbers are, it appears they understate the level of dishonesty exhibited by America's youth. More than one in four (26 percent) confessed they ***lied on at least one or two questions on the survey***. Experts agree that dishonesty on surveys usually is an attempt to conceal misconduct.

Despite these high levels of dishonesty, these same kids have a high self-image when it comes to ethics. A whopping 93 percent said they were ***satisfied with their personal ethics and character*** and 77 percent said that ***"when it comes to doing what is right, I am better than most people I know."***

A complete set of data generated by the survey is available at <http://charactercounts.org/programs/reportcard>

This report addresses honesty and integrity and is the first based on the extensive data gathered. Additional reports, to be issued in the coming months, will focus on violence, drug use, and other issues. Some will analyze the impact of sports, religious convictions, and other factors on young people's values, attitudes, and behavior.

Following a benchmark survey in 1992, Josephson Institute has conducted a national survey of the ethics of American youth every two years. Data was gathered through a national sample of public and private high schools. Surveys were conducted in 2008. For the general questions (over 20,000 responses), the accuracy is well within +/- 0.007 or 0.7%; for breakdowns of 10,000 the accuracy is +/- 0.98%; and even when there are just 1,000 responses, the accuracy is +/- 3.1%. Almost all standard errors of differences are much less than 1% for even small samples. These statistics have been verified by the Department Chair, Decision Sciences & Marketing, Graziadio School of Business & Management, Pepperdine University.

About Josephson Institute of Ethics

Josephson Institute of Ethics, a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization based in Los Angeles, CA, created and administers the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a partnership of more than 900 educational and youth-serving organizations committed to improving the ethical quality of America's young people through character education. CHARACTER COUNTS! is the nation's most widely implemented approach to character education.

An extensive library of materials for teachers, parents, coaches, and others interested in character education, as well as transcripts of Institute president Michael Josephson's daily radio commentaries, are available at no charge at www.charactercounts.org.

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