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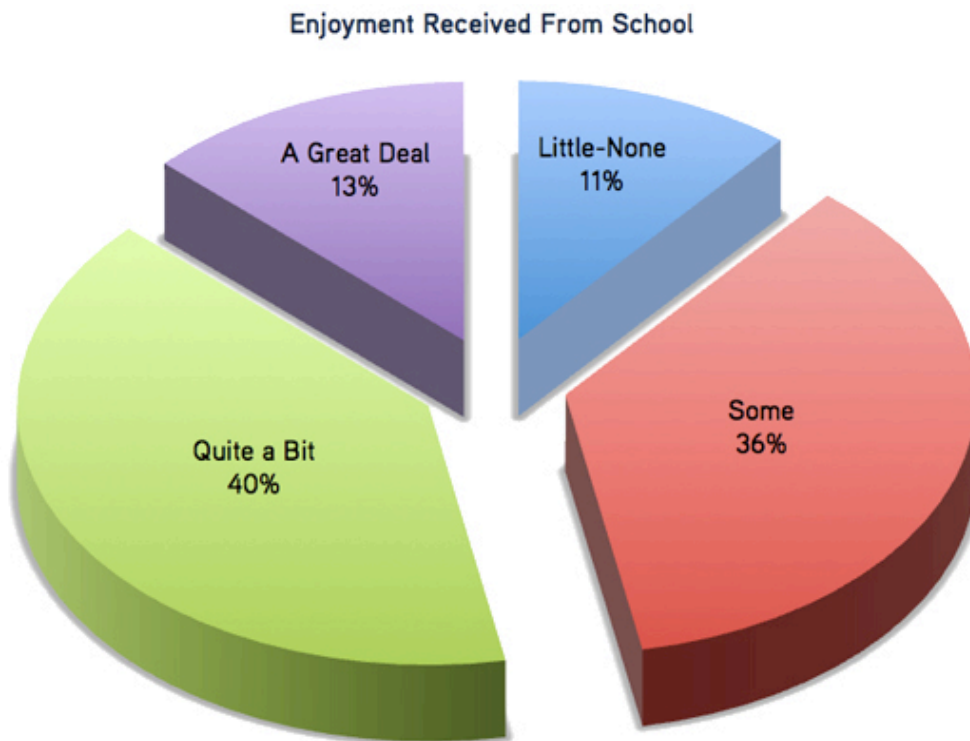
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School life better for kids than it's been in years: researcher

By Misty Harris, Canwest News Service August 26, 2009

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Reginald Bibby, whose findings are based on a nationwide survey of some 5,500 teens, reports that enjoyment of school is at its "highest level in almost three decades." This chart shows the percentage of students indicating their enjoyment received from school.

Photograph by: Reginald W. Bibby, The Emerging Millennials and Project Teen Canada 2008

This sortable table contains the results of a new national survey on teens and school. The results, broken down by the different school systems in Canada, shows the percentage of students indicating "A Great Deal" or "Quite A Bit" to each of the characteristics.

| | Enjoyment of School | Confidence in Leadership | Pressure to Do Well | Feel Safe At School | Expect Grad from Univ. |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Nationally | 53% | 69% | 75% | 84% | 68% |
| Public System | 53% | 63% | 76% | 83% | 69% |
| Catholic System | 54% | 72% | 80% | 85% | 68% |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Quebec Public | 56% | 79% | 72% | 81% | 65% |
| Private Non-Religious | 49% | 64% | 76% | 92% | 77% |
| Private Christian | 44% | 71% | 64% | 91% | 60% |
| Private Other Faith | 59% | 75% | 86% | 93% | 94% |
| Aboriginal | 74% | 74% | 76% | 77% | 39% |
| Nationally | 53% | 69% | 75% | 84% | 68% |

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, The Emerging Millennials and Project Teen Canada 2008.

In a post-Columbine age of school shootings and bullying, the news seems nothing short of radical: according to a leading Canadian sociologist, young people's educational experience is actually better now than it's been in generations.

Reginald Bibby, whose findings are based on a nationwide survey of some 5,500 teens, reports that enjoyment of school is at its "highest level in almost three decades."

Although 15 per cent of our young people still harbour concern over bullies, the vast majority nonetheless feel safe at school — 84 per cent, compared to 78 per cent in 2000. Nearly half say teachers significantly influence their lives — a proportion that outstrips television, the Internet and advertising — while confidence in those running the education system trumps that which teens have in leaders of every other sector, including police, government, courts and the media.

"Life for teens isn't perfect," says Bibby, whose 2008 survey data appears in the new book *The Emerging Millennials*, "but the improvements we're seeing here are precisely because of concerns over violence in schools, and schools' attempts to address those issues."

Fully 53 per cent get high levels of enjoyment from school, a concentration not seen since the early '80s. Just 19 per cent of modern teens have a close friend who was the victim of gang violence, compared to 35 per cent in 1992; and 32 per cent are close with someone who was physically attacked at school, down from 45 per cent in 1992.

Bibby, a professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge, credits parents for having better relationships with their kids (enjoyment of moms and dads was correlated with enjoyment of school), as well as educators for better equipping themselves to meet students' needs.

Although he says it only makes sense that young people would be doing better given the "enormous resources" pumped into them, Bibby predicts the findings will nevertheless be met with skepticism.

"Adults often work from the position that it's written in the stars that the teen years are going to be rough," says Bibby. "So when we report good news, people are always surprised."

Former school principal Henry Lise, who recently retired after four decades in education, believes the most influential changes have come in the last 10 years.

"Students aren't made to feel dumb like they used to be," says Lise, who lives just north of Newmarket, Ont., "and I think we've really tackled the whole issue of bullying. Now, if you see bullying and don't do anything about it, you're considered a participant."

According to health researcher Candace Lind, who conducted a two-year study of what makes an educational environment successful, increased attention to students' mental health — as opposed to just their physical well-being — has been a driving force.

Lind, an assistant professor of nursing at the University of Calgary, also credits stronger mentorship, healthier relationships among peers, and more "human" staff-student interaction. Of the latter, Lind explains that some institutions now invite students to address teachers by first name, which she says has a "huge" positive effect.

Technology is likewise being praised by experts as a boon. Bertha Dawang, who works with youth ages four to 18 as part of the Montreal day-camp Explorations, believes the Information Age has fostered more conscientious students and schools that are "better than they ever were."

"When I was young, my mom would say, 'There are kids starving in India.' Now you can go on the Internet and actually see it," says Dawang, who's worked more than 50 years in education. "It's led to kids who are more considerate and understanding of each other."

mharris@canwest.com

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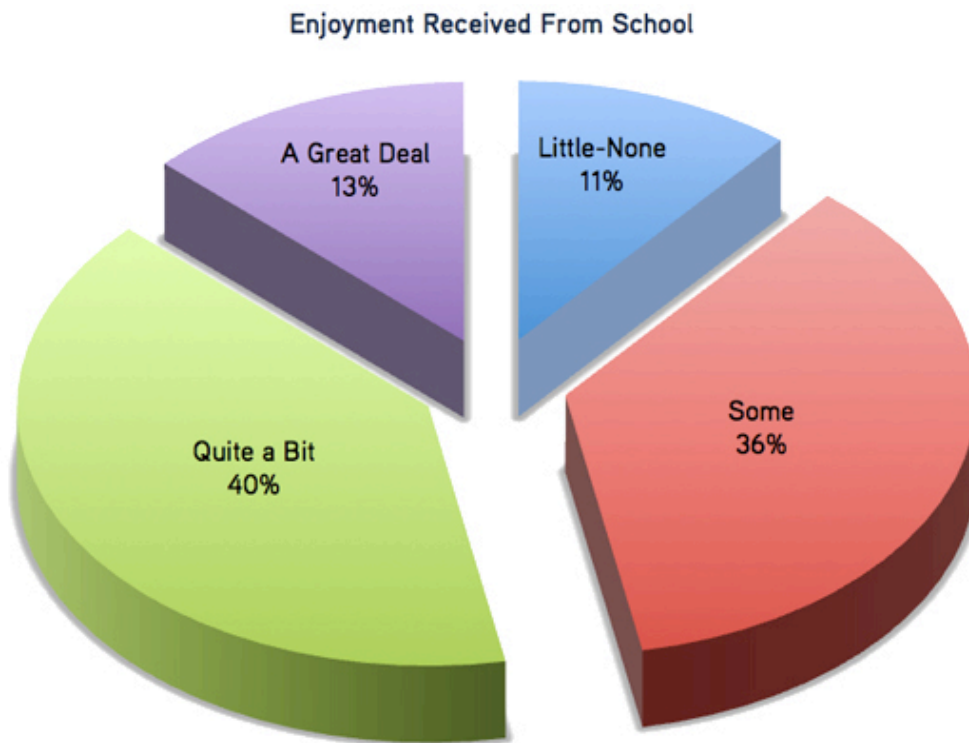
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Reginald Bibby, whose findings are based on a nationwide survey of some 5,500 teens, reports that enjoyment of school is at its "highest level in almost three decades." This chart shows the percentage of students indicating their enjoyment received from school.

Photograph by: Reginald W. Bibby, The Emerging Millennials and Project Teen Canada 2008

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