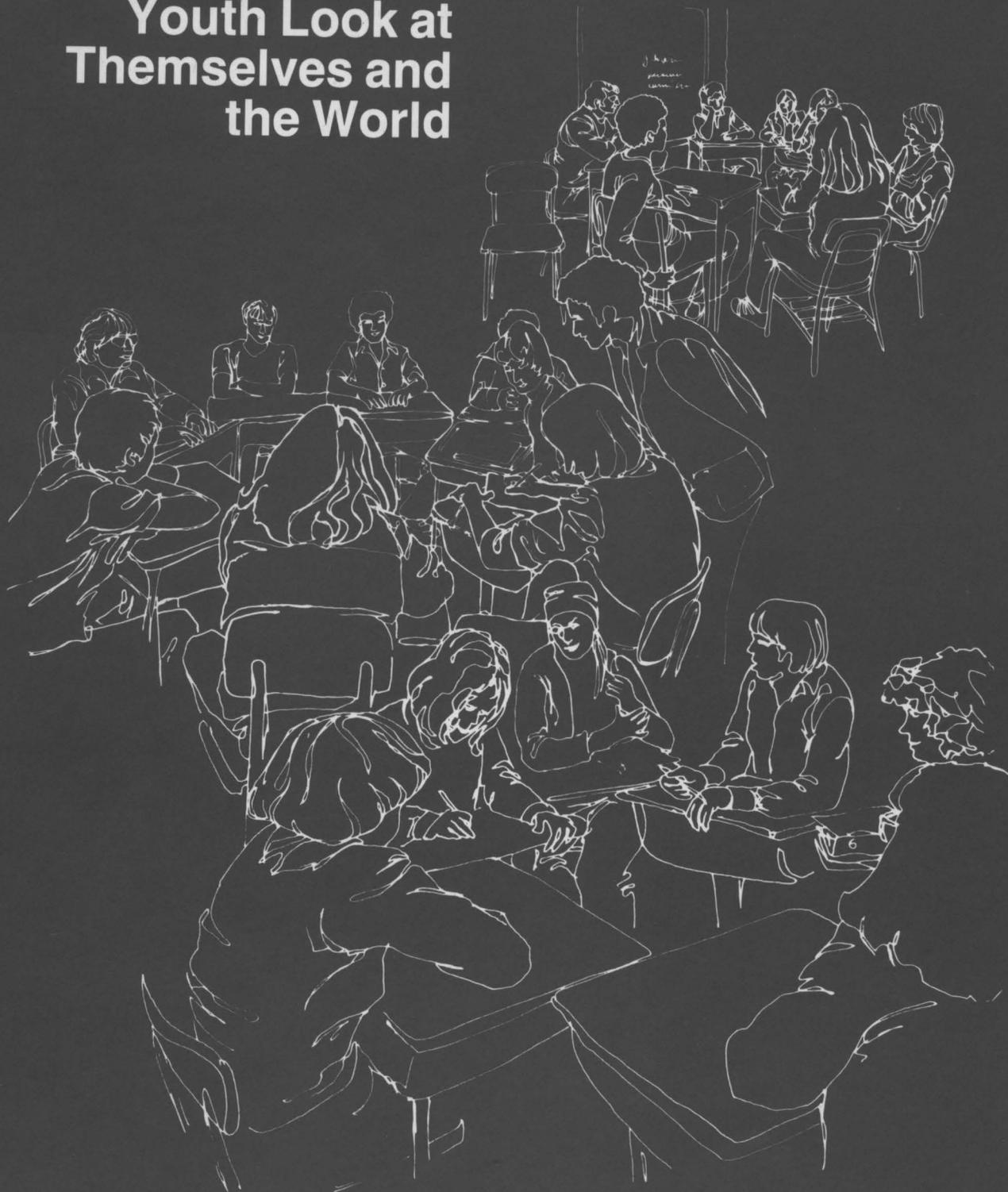


# MINNESOTA YOUTH POLL:

Youth Look at  
Themselves and  
the World



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Photo on page 15 by David S. Strickler, Strix Pix.

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# **MINNESOTA YOUTH POLL:**

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the World**

by  
Diane Hedin  
Kurt Hannes  
Rebecca Saito

Center for Youth Development and Research  
University of Minnesota

In cooperation with  
Kwame McDonald  
Gail Feichtinger

Minnesota Governor's Council on Youth

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

The purposes of this study were to learn which local, state, national, and international issues are of most concern to young Minnesotans and to find out how they think adults perceive young people. This Minnesota Youth Poll, a project of the Center for Youth Development and Research, University of Minnesota, was done in preparation for a major state youth conference held in May 1985 and sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Youth. The issues which were identified through the poll set the agenda for the youth conference. Nearly 1,600 youth, ages 10-18, participated in this statewide study.

While the major emphasis was on youth priorities in the public arena and their level of interest in working on critical local and national problems, we also were interested in their perceptions of the images that adults hold of children and youth. Actually, these two topics are intertwined; we think that youth's interest and involvement in public affairs is strongly related to the amount of confidence they feel that adults have in the young and adult encouragement of youthful participation in the wider society.

The first section explores the images of youth, and asks young people to talk about how they see key adults in their lives — their parents, teachers, and other authorities — relating to them. The second section looks briefly at youth in their families, and focuses on the level and types of conflicts between adolescents and their parents. The final section focuses on public issues, and asks youth to set forth their concerns at the school, neighborhood, state, national, and international levels. Since reform of schools and education is currently a key state issue, students' views about their schools were pursued in detail. A series of other policy issues affecting youth, such as national service, confidential health care, the drinking age, and a subminimum wage were also explored. Youth commitment to solving community problems and their sense of obligation to society also received attention. Youth opinions about our national leadership was the final topic.

## METHOD

Approximately 1,600 elementary, junior high, and senior high school students in urban, suburban, and rural schools participated in this poll, which was conducted in November, 1984. The schools were in Detroit Lakes, Tracy, Fergus Falls, Cook, Cass Lake, New Ulm, Bemidji, Coon Rapids, Moundsvew, Crystal, Anoka, Minnetonka, Osseo, Hopkins, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester, and Duluth. This is not a random sample of youth in the state, but is representative of Minnesota children and youth by location, gender, and race. The elementary sample included 431 students in grades 5 and 6;

30% were from rural schools, 42% from suburban schools, and 28% from urban schools. In the elementary sample, 86% were white, 9% black, 3% Oriental, 1% Native American and 1% Hispanic; 51% were male and 49% female. There were 1,166 secondary students, 41% in junior high and 59% in senior high schools; 38% were rural, 36% suburban, and 26% urban youth. Among the secondary students, 88% were white, 4% black, 1% Oriental, 3% Native American, and 4% Hispanic.

The opinions and ideas of the students were obtained through both group and individual questionnaires. The strength of the Youth Poll method is that it combines the best of both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. The group discussions focus on both the meanings and assumptions young people use to understand their world, and offer an in-depth understanding of the adolescent experience. The individual questionnaires provide quantifiable data so that we can estimate the percentages of young people who hold particular opinions. Together, they offer rich and complex information about Minnesota youth.

In each school, the questionnaires were administered in a required course in the junior and senior high schools and in typical elementary classrooms (i.e., not programs for the gifted or special education). This was done to ensure that a representative sample of youth participated. An individual questionnaire (see Appendix A for both the elementary and secondary versions) was given to each student, followed by the group questionnaire (see Appendix B for the two versions). For the group discussion, the students were asked to sit in self-selected groups of 4 to 6 people. In the senior high schools, one member of each group acted as both recorder and discussion leader. In the elementary and junior high, project staff were the recorders. The recorder reads the questions, which have been designed to elicit discussion, explanation and elaboration, and writes down as much of the commentary as possible.

The group questionnaires were then analyzed using qualitative methods. This involved first separating the questionnaires by area of residence (urban, suburban, and rural); by grade level (elementary, junior high, and senior high) and by gender. (Gender differentiation is possible only in the single-sex groups, and these tend to decrease with age since students are allowed to choose the groups in which they participate.) The answers to each of the questions were then scrutinized for recurring themes and ideas.

The responses from the individual questionnaires were machine scored, and frequencies, cross-tabs, correlations, and t-tests were run according to the major variables of age, sex, race and socio-economic status.

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*“How could I know what someone  
thinks of me unless they tell me?”  
(6th grader)*

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## Section I:

# YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT IMAGES

In another recent Minnesota Youth Poll on the Nuclear Threat (Hedin et al., 1985), half of the participants expressed the belief that their opinions were not valued by the government and that they could have little or no effect on government nuclear policy. We were struck by the number of youths who indicated that, in their view, government would not listen to them because they were regarded as “stupid” or somehow “inferior.”

In this poll we wanted to focus more directly on the range of state and national public policy issues affecting youth. However, we also wanted to return to the question raised in the earlier poll: youth perceptions of the way adults see them. A youth poll conducted earlier this year in the Chicago area (Popowski, 1985) found that a dismaying 97% of the participants thought that adult images of them were predominantly negative. Participants used words like “irresponsible,” “rude,” “loud-mouthed,” and “lazy” to describe how they thought adults saw them. We wondered if Minnesota youth have a similar view of adult perceptions. This is of crucial importance to adolescents who are building their own self-images by internalizing *their* conceptions of how they think that *others* around them perceive them. Cooley (1902) called this process the “looking-glass self.” It is not the actual responses of others that are the essential element in the process of self-development, but rather one’s *perceptions* of what one believes one is seeing “reflected” in the faces and views of others in the social environment.

Thus, the actual perceptions of adults who serve as “significant others” in the social world of Minnesota young people would be of less relevance to adolescent self-images than would their conceptions of what adults think about them. We therefore wished to explore youth’s views of adults’ ideas about young people and whether they influence their ideas about participation in national, state, and local concerns. We would hypothesize that the more negatively youth believe they are perceived by adults, the less likely they would feel that their involvement and participation in the wider community would be accepted. Though one might argue that the opposite outcome was also possible — that youth would become mobilized because adults underestimate them — we believe that adult support and encouragement is essential and think it unlikely that many adolescents would take action to contradict what they see as adult misperceptions.



Each Youth Poll participant was given an opportunity to respond to three questions relating to adult images of youth. A group discussion format was used to encourage and promote an active and free exchange of opinion. The results represent the views of approximately 1,600 Minnesota youth from across the state and at elementary, junior high, and senior high levels.

#### **POLICE, SENIOR CITIZENS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS**

“What do you think the following groups of people think of people your age?” was the first question student groups were asked. Participants supplied answers for each of four adult categories: police, senior citizens, teachers, and parents. We hoped that by specifying a variety of adult roles we would gain a richer profile of participant opinions.

Some of the participants, especially those in elementary schools, had a difficult time responding to this. Developmentally, they may have been unprepared for the task of “stepping outside themselves” to see how others might view them. One sixth grader explained her dilemma, saying, “How could I know what someone thinks of me unless they tell me?” — an excellent suggestion for accurate information but an indication that she did not understand the process of “taking the role of the other” through observation and experience.

The familiarity between participants and the categories of adults appeared to be another factor in the way they responded. Parents and teachers, more a part of their day-to-day experiences, generated far fewer negative images than police and senior citizens who for most would be only peripherally involved. All of the categories, however, elicited a range of opinions on adult images of youth. These were then organized into five clusters ranging from extremely negative to extremely positive.

Taken as a whole, some two-thirds of all Youth Poll participants indicated that they believe they are negatively

perceived by adults in the four adult categories (police, senior citizens, teachers and parents). *Nearly half* of their responses fit into the “extremely negative” cluster. These participants reported that adults see them as “troublemakers,” “drug-gies,” “delinquents,” “thieves,” “losers,” and “vandals.” Less extreme but still negative are descriptions like “brats,” “pests,” “stupid,” “irresponsible,” “rude,” “selfish,” “uncaring,” “loud,” and “obnoxious.”

Only 25% of participants offered positive images. They said that adults see them as “wonderful,” “special,” “great,” “sweet,” “cute,” “mature,” “responsible,” “funny,” “helpful,” and “smart.” The remaining 9% provided neutral responses like “it depends on how we act,” “we’re growing up too fast,” “they wish they were our age,” “they like us if we’re smart,” or “they have mixed feelings.”

Females were as likely to believe that adults held negative images of them as males and, in fact, males were slightly more likely to see themselves as positively perceived. In view of male reputations for delinquency and troublemaking and their higher rates of arrest and institutionalization, we were startled by this finding. These gender differences were consistent even for the police category. However, more males than females (54% vs. 40%) thought adults saw them in *extremely* negative terms. While overall negative perceptions were slightly higher among females, those males who thought adults held negative views of them felt them more acutely.

When we compared adult images of youth by geographic setting, we were surprised to learn that urban participants were no more likely than those in the suburbs to view adult images as negative (68% each), and both were only slightly more negative than those of participants in rural areas (65%). The story in Minnesota appears to be homogeneity. We hypothesize that such social influences as education and the media have combined to produce a climate for youth which, in many ways, is indistinguishable across geographic settings. This is a theme

which will surface repeatedly in this Youth Poll.

The results of our analysis by grade level conformed more to our expectations: the older the youth, the more likely they were to believe they are viewed with suspicion and alarm. Table 1 shows that, from the perspective of Youth Poll participants, the movement from elementary to junior high school represents a major shift in how adults view youth. Junior high signals the onset of largely negative images which continue throughout the high school years. Although elementary students were more positive in their assessment of adult images than older students, even here negative images outdistanced positive ones by 49% to 39%. By junior high, negative images had climbed to 71% and positive images had dropped to 20%. Senior high students showed a very slight increase in the positive category (23%) but negative images remained almost constant at 72%.

The difference between elementary students and those in junior and senior high schools is further illustrated by the ways in which adult images were described. Elementary students, in most cases, used such relatively mild terms as “mischievous,” “pest,” “noisy,” “sassy,” and “clumsy.” Junior and senior high students posited much more extreme views, tending to emphasize images like “druggies,” “sex maniacs,” “rowdies,” “delinquents,” “hateful,” and “no good” or “worthless.”

When we looked at categories of police, senior citizens, teachers, and parents separately, we discovered significant differences. Police images were overwhelmingly negative (84%), followed by senior citizens (66%), teachers (61%), and parents (54%). Positive images were most likely to be registered for parents (34%). Senior citizens and teachers were nearly equal in positive images at 28% and 27%, respectively, and police trailed with 12%.

Some of the comments by Youth Poll participants help to illustrate their perceptions of adult images in each of the four categories.

#### Police

- Average, normal people. Not much. Nice kids. (Elementary)
- Dumb girl and crazy boy. They think girls are sugar and spice and boys are creeps. (Elementary)
- Regular kids. Some probably think we’re troublemakers. They’re less apt to believe us but believe us more than little kids. (Junior High)
- They think we’re all brats. They watch us when we go into the Target Stores. (Junior High)
- Rebellious. Delinquent troublemakers. (Senior High)
- We are reckless and try to do things just to upset them. All we want to do is party. (Senior High)

#### Senior Citizens

- They like us and think we’re angels. They like us because we’re young. They like us to work for them. (Elementary)
- We’re loud. We’re the ones that always mess up their areas. (Elementary)
- We cause a lot of trouble. We aren’t like they were when they were young. (Junior High)
- Older people in the neighborhood hate children. They’re always calling the police, saying we’re too loud, giving them a headache. They don’t want you to go in their yards. (Junior High)
- Devils. Menaces. Junkies. (Senior High)

**Table 1  
Adult Images of Youth by Grade Level\***

Category	Elementary %	Junior High %	Senior High %
Negative Image	49	71	72
Neutral Image	12	9	5
Positive Image	39	20	23

\*These figures are based on an aggregation of all four adult categories.

#### Teachers

- They like our age group but we are trouble sometimes. (Elementary)
- We’re selfish. They expect us to do what they tell us. If you are a good student they will treat you better. (Elementary)
- They know who is good and who isn’t. Drugs and alcohol are the determining factors. (Junior High)
- Some like you and some don’t. Some don’t give you a chance. (Junior High)
- We’re immature, unreasonable, irresponsible, and ignorant. (Senior High)
- We’re all sniffing glue in the parking lot. They think we’re all dirtballs. (Senior High)

#### Parents

- We are their lovable child. They understand and care about us. They help us and are proud of us. (Elementary)
- We are lazy, too mature too fast, too sassy and spoiled. (Elementary)
- Some parents think their kids can be trusted but not many. (Junior High)
- They love us but don’t understand us. (Junior High)
- Parents don’t trust kids. They always think we’re going to do something wrong. We’re growing up faster than they realize. (Senior High)
- They think we’re rebellious and have no respect for authority. (Senior High)

#### ACCURACY OF PERCEIVED IMAGES OF YOUTH

The profile of adult images of youth as perceived by participants suggests, in general, that youth believe adults do not value them and do not treat them with respect or trust. We wanted to learn more about this. Specifically, we wanted to know if Minnesota youth agreed with these perceived adult images or if they had a different view of themselves. We asked, “Do you think these peoples’ pictures of youth are correct? If not, what are you and your friends really like?”

The largest proportion, 45%, said that adult images are not correct. Thirty percent qualified their responses; they believed that some images are correct but not others or that youth have both negative and positive features. The smallest proportion of participants, 25%, said that they agreed with adult images. In all, a striking three-fourths of participants disagreed entirely or in part with the perceptions they attributed to adults.

The following comments illustrate participant opinion on what they and their friends are really like:

- Wild and playful but wanting to learn. (Elementary)
- More responsible than adults give us credit for. (Elementary)
- We can be nice and we can be mean. We have our moods like everyone else. (Junior High)
- We can be responsible but they don’t understand that we want to have fun and not be serious all the time. (Junior High)
- We’re generally nice. Don’t want to do damage. We

goof-off a lot but we're more good than bad. (Junior High)  
We want to have fun growing up but learn the skills to do well in the future. Be independent and resourceful. (Senior High)

We like to have fun but the majority of us would not harm any person or property. (Senior High)

A developmental trend is seen in the analysis of attributed adult images of youth by grade level and gender. Females were more likely than males to disagree with adult images. Interestingly, the gender gap narrows with age. Elementary students gave a 38% acceptance rating of adult images but by junior and senior high school this has dropped by about half to 18% and 21%, respectively. It appears that as youth mature they are more likely to see adult images as negative and to hold positive images of themselves. Earlier we saw that the junior high school years signal an abrupt change in the way that adults view youth — at least from the vantage point of Youth Poll participants. Here we see the opposite. Youth Poll participants appeared to be saying that by the time they become initiated into junior high school life, they no longer turn to adults for their definitions of self and friends. It must be remembered, though, that the younger students thought adults held more positive images of them so that the difference between the elementary and older students may also be related to the fact that the younger students have less to disagree with adults about.

Geographic setting provides another measure of the difference between youth and adult perceptions. Urban and suburban participants were less likely to agree with attributed adult images than were rural participants, despite earlier indications that there were no significant differences among these three groupings in terms of their perceptions of adult images. It would appear that something in the rural landscape provides incentive for rural youth to conform more to adult views.

If adult images are not correct, what are Minnesota youth really like? In sharp contrast to perceived adult images, participants saw themselves and their friends in an overwhelmingly positive way. Overall, the picture which youth have of themselves is virtually opposite to the one they think adults have.

Females were more likely than males to hold a positive view of themselves and disagree more with their perceptions of adult attitudes. This is striking in view of the lack of gender differentiation in perceptions of adult images of youth. Females seem better prepared than males to break with the negative youth images which are attributed to adults.

There is a clear pattern in the developmental trend of positive self-regard among Youth Poll participants. Among those in elementary school, 57% reported a positive self-image while only 17% held negative views. Participants in junior high reported a 9% increase in positive regard. By senior high, 70% of participants thought of themselves and their friends in a positive way while only 30% reported a negative image. This development in positive self-regard occurs while perceptions of adult views are growing increasingly negative. The explanation may lie in the increasing use of peers as the "mirror" adolescents look at for definitions of self as they move through adolescence. During childhood, parents and other adults are the "mirror" for the "looking-glass self" but during adolescence contemporaries are more likely to become the source of self-definition.

## HOW TO CHANGE ADULT IMAGES

As Minnesota youth grow older, they are less likely to agree with adult negative images and more likely to see themselves and their friends in a positive fashion. In view of this, we asked, "What could be done to get adults to change their opinion of young people?" Participants offered a list of suggestions, including things youth could do, things adults could do, and things both could do together.

To create more positive images, participants thought that youth should *provide tangible help to adults*, such as doing chores:

Work for them. Clean up our room and the house. (Elementary)

Do your work and not goof off. We could do good things. (Elementary)

We could cook supper for mother. Clean up our room and the house. (Elementary)

Do things for them — carry out garbage, do household chores, walk old ladies across the street. (Senior High)

Another suggestion was for youth to *obey, to cooperate, and to be respectful*:

Don't mouth off to anyone. Quit all the complaining. (Elementary)

We could do what we are told and not what we want. (Junior High)

Do what you're supposed to and be well-mannered. (Senior High)

Participants also thought that *going to school and getting good grades* would improve their image among adults:

Getting good grades is important in our house. (Junior High)

Students should go to school everyday and try their best to get good grades. (Senior High)

Changing themselves would not be enough, said many Youth Poll participants. Adults must also be willing to change if the conflicts between youth and adults are to be reconciled. The most important tasks that participants recommended for adults were to *listen to, respect, and trust youth*:

They could learn more about us if they listened. (Elementary)

Keep their noses out of our business. They have private lives and so do we. They always listen in on our phone conversations. We deserve respect too. (Junior High)

Look at the positive things. Maybe if adults were more aware of the positive things young people do, they would trust us more. (Senior High)

Another suggestion was for adults to *spend more time with youth*:

Have parents do things with us to find out what we like to do. Spend more time with us. (Elementary)

They could spend time with us to better understand what we're really like. (Junior High)

*Getting adults to remember how it was to be young* and to recognize that times are changing was linked with understanding by many participants:

Have adults think back to when they were kids. Have adults open their minds so they can understand fads. (Elementary)

Think back to when they were kids and what they wanted to do. (Junior High)

Realize that times have changed and kids' ways have changed right along with times. (Senior High)

Finally, participants thought that adults should *treat them more fairly*:



Some parents abuse their kids. (Elementary)

If they would overlook the faults of youth in the past and treat us better they could give us a chance to prove ourselves today. (Senior High)

They need to realize that one bad apple doesn't spoil the bunch. Not every teenager is bad. (Senior High)

The importance of both adults and youth modifying their behavior and attitudes was emphasized by many participants. They argued that, for adult images to change, both adults and youth would need to work together. Two main areas were identified for improvement. The first of these, and the most important, was *communication*:

Have kids talk to their parents. Have the parents talk back. (Elementary)

Communicate. Talk to one another. Find out what's going on. (Senior High)

It all comes down to communication. (Senior High)

The second was that adults and youth *participate together* in various activities:

We could stay home together or go to church together. (Junior High)

We need to find some common interests. It was easier when we were younger because then we went along with what they wanted. Now we have to force ourselves. (Senior High)

As we began to look more closely at the suggestions and especially as we looked at how the three categories (changes in youth, in adults and in both) interrelate, we began to detect some interesting patterns. As a group, 56% of Youth Poll participants favored youth actions for changing adult images of youth while 27% favored adult actions and only 17% indicated actions taken together. However, females by a 17% margin

were more likely than males to place the responsibility for image change on the shoulders of adults. It may be that they are more attuned to and have more sophisticated concepts about relationships than males and are therefore better able to see adult images of youth as separate from themselves. Males, in contrast, were more likely to attribute image change to their own actions.

The analysis of age differences proved equally interesting. There was a consistent pattern from high reliance on youth responsibility for change in elementary school (81%) to a somewhat lower reliance in junior high (60%). By high school, the balance had shifted dramatically away from youth (30%) and toward adults (50%). It would seem that the cognitive level and egocentricity of elementary students combined with the belief that they are powerless to effect changes in adults results in the idea that, if change is desired, it must come from themselves. By junior high school this belief seems to be losing strength as youth take a more assertive stance toward adults. Senior high school represents even further self-assertiveness of youth to the point where they seem quite willing to point the finger at adults. One high school student proclaimed, "We don't need to change for our parents or adults. We need to be who we are for ourselves. Good or bad, that's who we are." Another added, "It's not up to the kids to change. Adults have to prove themselves."

Geographic setting also provided clear differences in how participants viewed youth roles in comparison with adults. Rural students were most likely to think that responsibility for change belongs to youth. Regardless of residence, the largest group, however, thought that change needed to come primarily from youth.

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*You get into conflicts with parents every day. It's a clash of viewpoints. We're more free-spirited than they are and they grew up in tamer times.*

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## SECTION II

# YOUTHS' VIEWS ON FAMILY RELATION- SHIPS AND CONFLICTS

Youth Poll participants have indicated that, among adults, parents are most likely to hold positive images of youth. Yet the theme of family conflict looms large in American society and is viewed as a root cause of everything from alcohol and drug abuse to international conflict. How much conflict is there between adolescents and their parents, according to the younger family members? Participants at the elementary and junior high levels were asked two questions which focused upon the parent-youth relationship: "In general, how well do you think kids get along with their parents?" and "What kinds of things do parents and their children argue about?" To senior high students, we also posed two questions but with a more direct focus upon conflict in their own families. We began with the statement, "We hear a lot about the conflicts between parents and their children." Then we asked, "Is it accurate or exaggerated?" Next we asked, "What are the things that seem to cause conflict in your family?" Although the questions for senior high students are somewhat different than those for the younger students, both sets elicited information about the conflictual nature of families. Here is what we discovered.

### PARENT-YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS

Compared with junior high students, elementary students were far more likely to view the relationship of parents and children as positive. More than half of elementary students issued positive statements while those holding this opinion at the junior high level slipped to fewer than a third. Some of these positive statements were:

Pretty well. I get along with parents better than other adults. They care for you and don't want you to get into trouble. (Elementary)  
Good. Super well. They wanted kids and so they had us. (Elementary)

Pretty good. Kids love their parents a lot. (Elementary)

Really well because we have developed a trust. (Elementary)

Parents are mostly fair. (Elementary)

O.K. Boys get along better with their mothers than their fathers and girls are better with their fathers. Mothers expect more of their daughters and fathers more of their sons. (Elementary)

Junior high students, on the other hand, were much more likely than elementary students to see their relations with parents as mostly negative. In fact, this does not seem surprising in view of the earlier finding that, from the standpoint of participants, adult images of youth become increasingly negative with the advent of adolescence. Youth Poll participants appeared to make note of this shift with clear recognition of its implication for conflict:

Much of the time not good. They take out their problems on us. Some people hit their kids. (Junior High)  
Parents always want you to talk to them and tell them everything. But when you want help they say they can't help you. Parents don't take the time to care or spend time with you. (Junior High)  
Not very good. With mom, she's afraid something will happen to her baby — I'll get into trouble. She expects me to be like my brother. Because he got into trouble, she expects me to. (Junior High)

When your mom and dad get divorced and your mom gets another dad it's a lot of pressure on me. I don't get along with my step-dad. (Junior High)

Not very well. We're going through a lot of changes. They disagree with everything and they try to be right when they're really not. (Junior High)

One in four of both elementary and junior high students reported that youth relations with parents depend upon circumstances, how family members are feeling or that sometimes relations are positive while other times they are more negative.

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*Good. Super well. They wanted kids and so they had us.*

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Some do and some don't. Some kids don't at all and some parents beat their kids. It depends upon the mood of the parents and the kid. (Elementary)

Pretty good, but we argue a lot. They love you and understand but sometimes they think the opposite of us. (Elementary)

Some good and some bad. It depends upon the kid. (Junior High)

Good, but sometimes they worry too much and try to protect you more than you want. (Junior High)

Female and male participants on the elementary school level were similar in their views of parent-youth relationships. Fifty-six percent of elementary females and 59% of elementary males said youth

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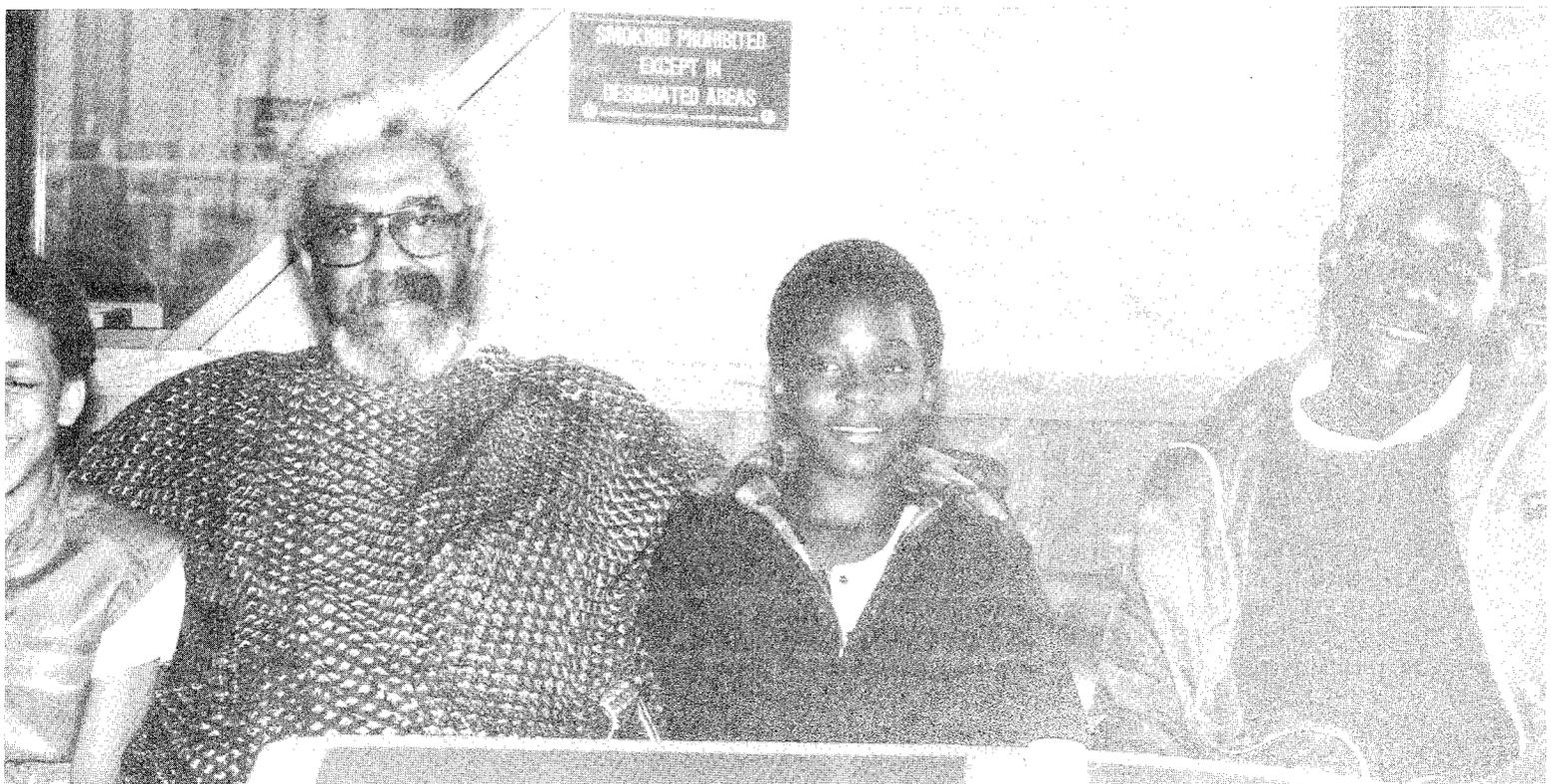
*Good, but sometimes they worry too much and try to protect you more than you want. (Junior High)*

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relations with parents were mostly positive. Negative relations were reported by only 19% of females and 18% of males.

However, on the junior high level the picture is quite different. Perhaps in support of earlier maturation and more independent thinking by females, junior high females (18%) were much less likely than males (48%) to describe youth relations with parents as positive. More than twice as many said that relations were mostly negative. As with findings on image, the change in levels from elementary to junior high represents a major shift in female perceptions of relationships with adults; a smaller shift occurs for males who appear to be more parent-oriented and conforming at this age.

The developmental trend toward increasingly negative relations with parents as students proceed from elementary school to junior high appeared again in the analysis by geographic setting. We saw a decline in positive responses and an increase in negative ones across grade levels in each of the three settings. Interestingly, the difference between positive and negative was most pronounced among urban participants where those holding positive views dropped from 52% in elementary school to 29% in junior high and those holding negative views increased threefold from 16% to 48%. Suburban participants also registered significant changes. From elementary to junior high, those making positive statements dropped nearly in half from 50% to 27% and those making negative statements increased from 28% to 36%. Rural participants changed the least with 58% of rural elementary students saying that youth relations with parents were mostly positive compared with 48% for those in junior high. Mostly negative relations increased from 13% to 37%. It may be that rural youth are happier or more conforming in their relations with parents than suburban and especially urban youth.



Senior high students were asked slightly different questions about youths' relationships with parents. Yet the results were consistent with earlier patterns and, in fact, the senior high data continued the trend toward more conflict. Fifty-eight percent of senior high participants thought that reports on the conflicts between parents and their children were accurate. Here are some of their comments:

Parents are always making kids sound like the worst people in the world.

Yes, it's accurate. You get into conflicts with parents every day. It's a clash of viewpoints. We're more free-spirited than they are and they grew-up in tamer times.

Accurate because I have a lot of friends who call me up to talk about problems. I know two people who ran away.

Thirty-four percent of senior high participants thought that conflicts between parents and their children were exaggerated: Most is exaggerated. Kids make it sound the worst so they can get sympathy.

Exaggerated. Sometimes if one person says something about a conflict another may add to that, making it sound worse.

We think both kids and parents exaggerate the other person's faults and thus the conflicts get out of hand.

Exaggerated. Arguments aren't that bad unless there's a broken home situation. My parents and I argue. We only hate for a minute and then it's over.

Some feel kids and parents get along pretty well. You only hear the bad stuff.

The remaining 8% thought that the issue of whether conflicts between parents and their children were accurate or exaggerated varied somewhat and was dependent upon circumstances, how people were feeling, or timing:

It depends on the family and on the situation. Sometimes my mom doesn't want to accept that I'm getting older.

Not everyone has major conflicts all the time with their parents. Everybody has them though.

Conflicts do exist but not all the time.

The gender difference which appeared among junior high students surfaced again in high school, though the gap was not nearly as pronounced. Seventy-one percent of high school females said that conflicts between parents and their children were accurate while 49% of the males took this position. This 22% difference compares to a 30% difference among females and males in junior high. This is what we would expect; females appear to assume a clear developmental lead at the onset of adolescence, but the gap between females and males diminishes as the latter mature quickly at the end of the junior high years.

Students in senior high in all three geographic locations were more likely than those in junior high to see reports of conflict as accurate. This pattern toward increasing levels of conflict and negative relations with parents as perceived by Youth Poll participants, is consistent with earlier findings on adult images and the tendency by youth to more strongly disagree with perceived negative adult images as they grow older.

#### KINDS OF THINGS THAT CAUSE ARGUMENTS

Even in families where the relational climate is warm and pleasing to members, there are times when conflict erupts. With this premise in hand, we questioned elementary and junior high students about the kinds of things that parents and children argue about. To senior high students we posed a more direct question: "What are the things that seem to cause conflict in your own family?"

The largest cluster of elementary participants pointed to household chores as likely to lead to arguments between parents and their

children. This was followed by curfew and bedtime; choice of television programs, movies, music, and books; school related issues such as attendance, homework and grades; and general trouble caused by children. Other important issues included dating and choice of friends; money; where and when youth go and what they do; and parental attitudes and habits. Drinking and drugs elicited only slight mention and sex did not draw a single comment.

Junior high participants offered a somewhat different profile in terms of how they rated these issues. Curfew, school, and decisions about dating and choice of friends were listed most frequently. Chores, the leading cause of arguments among elementary students, dropped to second place. Clothes and appearance surfaced as a major issue, as did drinking, drugs, and parties. Youth choices regarding TV, movies, music, and books became less important but where youth go and what they do remained constant. Sex and pregnancy appeared, but the number expressing these issues remained low.

The way in which participants explained key issues and also how they linked these with others is illustrative of their thinking, as these verbatim comments show:

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*Homework, about the old days, clean your face, eat your vegetables, change your clothes, pick up your room, keep the yard clean, take out the garbage, wash dishes, staying out after dark, don't watch too much TV, go to bed.*

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They don't want us dating until we're in senior high and they don't like us to wear makeup yet. (Elementary)

Mother yells at me if the house is messy. We have to clean it up or we won't go anywhere. (Elementary)

We might want to go to a game and they say next time and when next time comes around they have a meeting or something. (Elementary)

Homework, about the old days, clean your face, eat your vegetables, change your clothes, pick up your room, keep the yard clean, take out the garbage, wash dishes, staying out after dark, don't watch too much TV, go to bed. (Elementary)

Parents want kids to be like they were. How late you stay out, money, who you hang around with, friends. (Junior High)

Makeup — what kind of warpaint we wear. (Junior High)

Anything you can think of — going places, doing things, dirty rooms, what kind of clothes you wear, MTV, what shows to watch, grades, your friends, types of friends. (Junior High)

Time when you have to be doing homework, what you've been doing, why you are always running around, if your friends drink or smoke, argue about their dad — if they want to go away with their dad for a little vacation and the mother gets jealous. Parents shouldn't fight about their kids. (Junior High)

Not surprisingly, females and males at both elementary and junior high levels had somewhat different views. According to elementary females, the issues most likely to lead to arguments were chores; choice of TV, movies, music, and books; and clothes and appearance (10% each). Elementary males named



chores as their primary hassle (13%), followed by curfew and bedtime (12%) and TV, movies, music, and books (11%). Two issues for which the largest gender differences appeared may reflect a tendency on the part of parents to be more protective of daughters than sons. Clothes and appearance were issues for 10% of females compared with only 3% of males. Nine percent of females and only 5% of males said that dating and choice of friends could be a problem. Males, in contrast, were more likely to indicate curfew, bedtime and money as likely causes of arguments.

Junior high females were more likely than elementary females to say that dating, choice of friends, and clothes and appearance caused arguments. Less problematic, however, were chores and parental attitudes and habits. Junior high males were very much like elementary males in terms of chores and curfew, but differed dramatically in raising the issues of drinking, drugs, and parties. School-related issues were also more likely to cause argument for junior high males than for those in elementary school.

Junior high females, like elementary females, differed substantially from their male counterparts. As with elementary students, dating, choice of friends, and clothes and appearance were major issues for females but not for males. Drinking, drugs, and parties, however, yielded a 12% response rate by males compared with only 5% by females. Females were also less likely than males to select chores as a primary problem area and school-related issues were a concern to fewer females than males. Again, sex and pregnancy remained minor issues for both genders.

Senior high students were much more homogeneous than either elementary or junior high students — yet the approach they took to family conflict differed substantially. Some of this may relate to the wording of the questions. But what is revealing was the tendency for senior high students to begin to view family conflict apart from themselves. Almost all of the elementary and junior high students saw themselves as provoking conflict. By senior high nearly one in five students identified the locus of conflict as parents, siblings, or the family as a whole.

Still, the leading cause for conflict, according to senior high participants, was curfew. Parental attitudes and habits and school-related issues tied for the number two problem while others selected drinking, drugs, and parties, chores, dating and choice of friends. Choices about TV, movies, music and books caused far fewer conflicts for senior high students than their cohorts in junior high, but automobile usage, as one would expect, caused more. Sex and pregnancy was a small source of conflict to more senior high students, but only by a 1% margin over junior high students (3% as compared with 2%).

In terms of gender, senior high females were much more likely than males to see dating and choice of friends as causing conflict and were somewhat more likely to see parent attitudes and habits as problematic. Males, by a 6% margin, were more likely than females to anticipate conflict in household chores. Males also indicated slightly more conflict with siblings and with the family as a whole.

The verbatim comments of senior high students give further insight into the way they viewed family conflict:

Forcing you to do something for your own good because it will be better for you in the long run.

Age differences. Parents always want you to be just like them when they were kids.

The family not being together, use of drugs and alcohol by children and parents, lack of communication, not meeting parents' expectations.

Not having a job, being lazy, watching too much TV, loud music, beating up younger brother, problems at school, or they have a bad day at work.

Alcohol, chores, sibling rivalry, parents not listening because they have the upper hand. They just don't trust us when we say we're going out.

Not doing what you're supposed to do. Parents think they know everything.

### SECTION III

# CONCERNS ABOUT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, THE STATE, THE NATION, AND THE WORLD

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*Teenagers should help the community right now; we could help with world peace, open communication with young people of other countries, do something about the crime rate, drug abuse.*

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To find out which local, state, national, and international issues are of concern to young people, we asked them a series of questions about the key changes they believe are needed in each of these domains and what immediate actions they would like to see the governor of Minnesota and the president of the United States take. During the pretest, we found that elementary and junior high students had great difficulty with the general question, "What three changes would you make in your community, country or world to make it a better place?" When asked to consider issues and problems in the larger world, they either had no response or gave very vague answers. This is itself valuable information, suggesting that early adolescents are primarily interested and knowledgeable about their immediate environment, their school and neighborhood. This is probably a consequence of their educational level and their stage of cognitive development, in which they are tied to their concrete experiences and have limited capacity to really understand abstract problems and issues they have not directly seen or encountered.

However, the younger students could relate to state and national issues somewhat more easily through two other questions about the priorities they would like to see the president and the governor adopt. It may be that when the students are asked to consider all of these issues together, it is difficult to sort out priorities, but less so when they can focus just on the state or just on the nation. A surprisingly large proportion of the respondents were aware of the distinctions between what are considered to be state issues (education, taxes, legal ages for drinking, etc.) and what are national issues (defense, foreign relations, programs for the disadvantaged, etc.) and directed the governor and president to work on issues actually in their purview.

#### LOCAL AND STATE PRIORITIES

A picture of the most important local and state issues was derived from the following questions:

If the governor walked into this classroom right now and you could ask him anything you wanted, what would you ask him to change?

If you could change three things to make your school a better place, what changes would you make?

What three changes would you make in your neighborhood to make it a better place? (Asked of elementary and junior high students only.)

Table 2 illustrates which issues students would direct the governor to work on. Overall, 58% of the discussion groups

Table 2  
Rank Order of Issues for Governor  
All Ages

Issue	Group Responses, %
Improve school	58
Legal ages for voting, working and drinking	52
Decrease taxes	32
Jobs and unemployment	27
Social programs	20

mentioned education, making it the number one priority for all age groups and geographic locations. By gender, however, females mentioned this most frequently, but the first priority of males was minimum age requirements for drinking, voting, driving, and working. Overall, 52% of the respondents wanted the governor to make changes in these legal ages. The third most important issue, cited by 32% of the groups, was taxes, followed by jobs and unemployment (27% of the groups) and social programs, e.g. shelters, AFDC, food stamps, and social security (20% of the groups).

An in-depth discussion of the top five concerns follows.

#### Recommendations for School Improvement

Almost everyone is concerned about the quality of public education in Minnesota. Much of the criticism of the schools has been focused on the alleged decline in academic "excellence," which often means, in concrete terms, concern about lower test scores, neglect of the rigorous academic subjects for "soft electives," and lack of sufficient emphasis on either basic skills or higher level thinking skills. The reforms recommended by various business groups, legislative and governmental commissions, education organizations, and citizens groups include requiring all students to study a basic curriculum, state standardized testing, upgrading the teaching profession through higher salaries and better recruitment, using new technology, and allowing students and parents to choose the school of their choice.

Students in the Youth Poll agreed that changes should be made in public education. When asked which youth issues they would like the governor to work on, almost 60% of the groups said "education and the schools."

What do students, the consumers of education, believe should be done to improve their schools? The students offered advice on school reform in two forms — first through their responses on the individual questionnaire to specific reform proposals as described above and then through group discussions which asked them to think more broadly about changes needed in their schools.

The most striking difference between the students' views and those of the reform proposals from business, government, and civic groups is that students tended to believe change is needed in the informal or hidden curriculum while adults focus on the formal curriculum. This theme was especially prominent in the group discussions in response to the following question: "If you could change three things to make your school a better place, what changes would you make?" Only 15-25% of the responses emphasized improvements in the academic area. The rest focused on organizational and structural features of the school, such as the relationships between students and teachers, amount of time spent in class, school rules, quality of the facilities, etc. Elementary students were least likely to focus on the academic curriculum (15% of responses) while high school students were somewhat more attuned to these issues (25% of responses).

#### THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Approximately three-quarters of the responses focused on noncurricular matters, offering four major recommendations. The most frequent suggestion (52% of responses) was to make daily life more pleasant and less regimented. The next most frequent idea (about 15%) was that relationships between students and teachers should be improved. Finally, more discipline (7%) and more extra-curricular activities (7%) were suggested.

A little more than half of the responses dealt with changes needed in the overall environment and organization of the school to reduce its most distasteful features. The suggestions included shorter classes, longer lunch hour, better food in the cafeteria, student lounges, less homework, more time between classes, and nicer school buildings. There were no differences among elementary, junior high, or senior high students in their level of concern about these issues:

- Better cooks, get a different basketball coach, no seventh hour when you get to high school. (Elementary)
- Not putting names on the board, more time to work instead of homework. (Elementary)
- Less homework, close the pit (a place to smoke), freedom to leave campus. (Junior High)
- More opportunity to meet friends. I don't have any old friends. (Junior High)
- Students should help make the rules on the bus and in the classroom. (Junior High)
- Shorter days, later starting, help pick the teachers. (Junior High)
- Too crowded — more passing time. Need a lounge or place to be. (Senior High)
- The discipline is too strict. We need a pass for everything and it's getting sickening. (Senior High)

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*Students should help make the rules  
on the bus and in the classroom.  
(Junior High)*

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On the individual questionnaire, students were asked their opinion about lengthening the school day and school year. Not surprisingly, few supported the following statement: "The school day and school year should be lengthened so that all Minnesota students (grades K-12) spend more time in school." Only 10% of elementary students and 7% of junior and senior high students agreed with this proposition. A similar proportion was undecided (12% of elementary and 10% of secondary students), while the vast majority (78% of elementary and 83% of secondary students) disagreed with the statement.

Many of these comments seem to imply that school is an unavoidable burden which at best can only be a tolerable experience. Most seem resigned to the fact that it could never be a stimulating, vibrant, and exciting learning environment and their proposals for change reflect this sense of apathy and resignation. The recommendations to make it shorter and to have more diversions, more free time, and less regimentation can best be understood in this context. To some, school appears to be an impediment to other, more important activities, as a junior high group charged:

School starts too early and lasts too long — the whole day is shot.

#### A VOUCHER PLAN

Clearly, students are frustrated with many aspects of their school experience. We wondered how they would react to a radical plan for changing the way in which students receive their education — an educational voucher program. On the individual questionnaire, students at all grade levels were asked whether they agreed with the following statement:

I would support a plan in which much of the state education money which now goes to public schools would instead go directly to families. They would then be able to send their children to any public, parochial or private school they choose for free or reduced cost.

The support for a voucher plan declines with age. A majority (51%) of elementary students supported it while 19% were in opposition. More junior high students supported the proposal (39%) than rejected it (25%). This is reversed at the high school level where only 24% supported it and 43% were opposed. At all grade levels, a large proportion, about a third of the students, remained undecided. It is not surprising to find so many students without a clear position since it is a comparatively new issue. In fact, the poll was taken before there was widespread discussion of the proposal. Since students were not asked any open-ended questions about a voucher plan, we are uncertain as to why the younger students showed far more support for it than the older ones. We might speculate that loyalty to the school (i.e., school spirit) is important to high school students and may explain their reluctance to change schools at that point in their academic career.

#### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND STAFF

Another aspect of the hidden or informal curriculum which received considerable attention was the relationship between students and staff. Nearly 15% of the responses were a plea for more empathy, trust, and mutual respect. Sometimes the focus was on the teacher's ability to teach or mastery of the subject matter. Often the students discussed the teacher's capacity to relate to them as young people and their ability to teach effectively their subject matter simultaneously:

Teachers are too hard on the kids — they don't explain things well enough. The principal — she's always busy and you can't talk to her. (Elementary)

Sometimes when you're early to school, they won't let you in even when it's cold. The rules are too strict. Teachers don't trust kids. (Elementary)

Have more teachers that treat kids on a one-to-one basis and are more modern teachers. (Junior High)

Get rid of the mean teachers. Some are really good, but there are some who shouldn't even be here. They hate kids. (Junior High)

More individual contact with teachers and principals to reduce stereotypes by administration. (Senior High)

When you get in trouble, they should talk it over with you first, not treat you like a number. (Senior High)

Have teachers hired by ability and compatibility with students and not seniority. (Senior High)

A very different perspective on the hidden curriculum was offered by a small percentage of students. About 6% of the responses argued that the climate of the school could be improved by more strict discipline, a change often recommended in current school reform proposals. To young people, this clearly is a minority opinion:

Send kids that make a lot of trouble to another school, a school where all the bad kids go. (Elementary)

Adults should have more authority. Get a paddle for the bad kids. (Elementary)

Have the teachers be more strict. Kick out the punkers. (Junior High)

Take all the druggies out, stop swearing. (Junior High)

Get rid of some people who are a hindrance to the education of others because if they aren't learning and are preventing the education of others, they forfeited their right to an education. (Senior High)

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*Have teachers hired by ability and compatibility with students and not seniority.*

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#### THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

A minority of the respondents focused their attention on the formal academic program of their school. There was a trend toward more interest in academics as students grew older, with 15% of the elementary, 22% of the junior high, and 25% of the senior high responses calling for changes in this area. Recommendations were offered in four general areas: course content, class size, teaching methods, and staff selection.

Changes recommended in the academic curriculum ranged from advocating that specific courses be offered or required to general statements that "better" or "harder" courses were needed. Some respondents expressed a desire for school to be a more challenging place in terms of the quality and content of the curriculum — students want to receive a better education.

Everyone should take some sort of computer class. (Elementary)

Wider range of classes, college prep courses, more advanced classes. (Senior High)

Bigger and more advanced science classes. (Senior High)

The quality of education. We feel we have learned a lot, but not up to our potential. There is a limit to how much one can learn in school. We can learn a lot more than we are being taught right now. (Senior High)

Programs for higher learners, smarter kids' classes should be started earlier. By the time we get to high school, it is too late. Some kids are bored stiff because the programs are too easy. (Senior High)

I think we should make curriculum harder from grade one. Foreign language, math, science should be required. Foreign countries (Japan) all have better, tougher programs and I think we will be at a disadvantage later on. (Senior High)

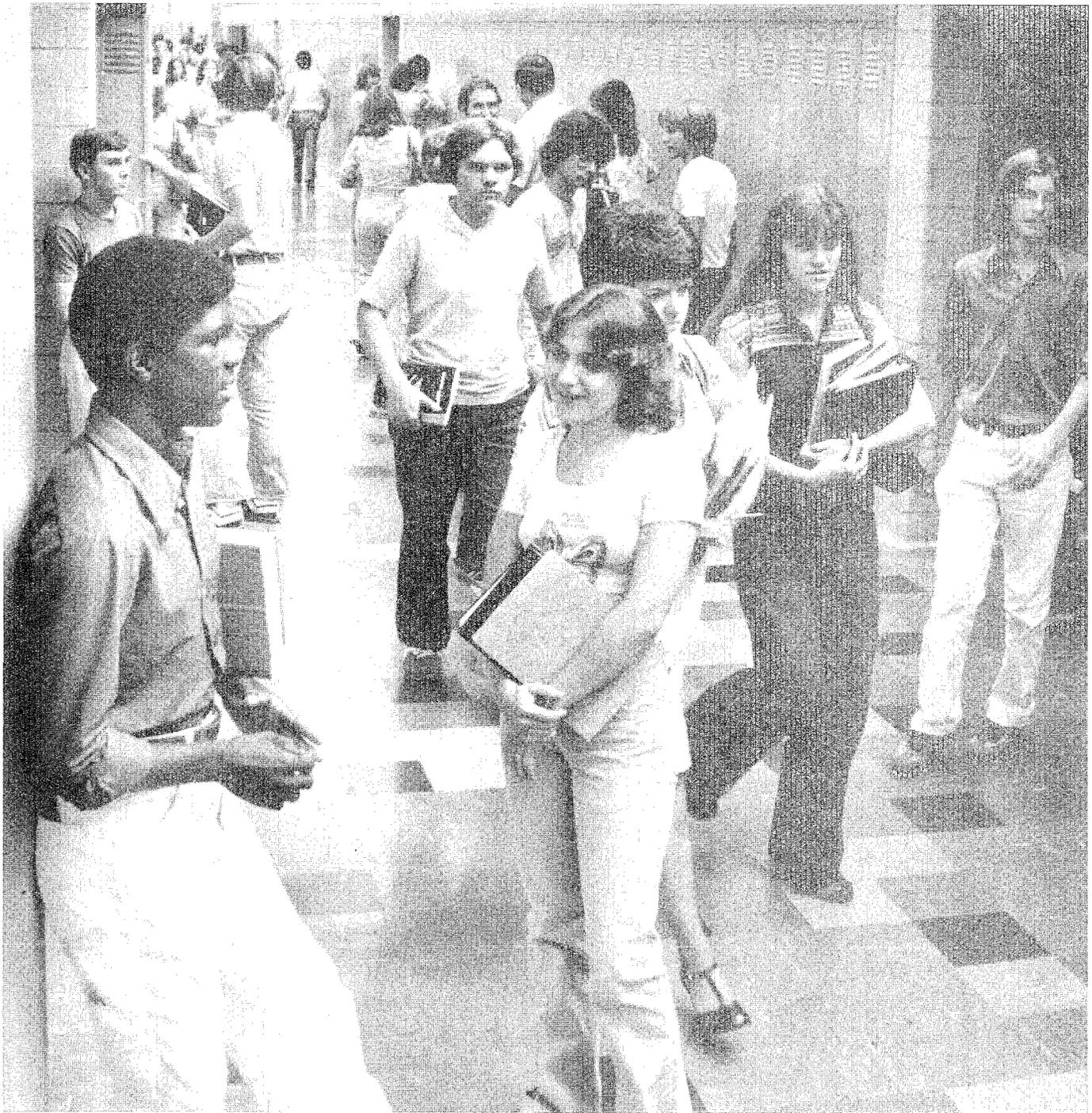
No required classes such as health. (Senior High)

More electives, more programs for higher potential students. (Senior High)

Students at all levels recommended that class size be decreased, that teachers "teach better," and more interesting methods be employed. These suggestions were stated quite vaguely with few specifics:

Better teaching methods. (Junior High)

Get rid of the bad teachers. (Junior High)



Merit system rather than seniority would improve teaching. (Senior High)  
More hands-on experience. (Senior High)  
More real teachers, educated ones. (Senior High)  
Fewer lectures, more discussions, more field trips. (Senior High)

#### **REQUIREMENT FOR COMPUTER "LITERACY"**

Students were asked in the individual questionnaire to give their opinions on a number of specific curricular changes. It is interesting to note that few of these issues were brought up spontaneously in the group discussions, with the exception of learning to use the computer. This suggests that these changes in

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*Fewer lectures, more discussions,  
more field trips. (Senior High)*

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the formal curriculum are not very much on the minds of Minnesota students. Nevertheless, we found that the majority of both elementary and secondary students think that students should be required to know how to use a computer in order to graduate from high school. Approximately half of elementary and secondary students supported this plan, while about a third

opposed it. Specifically, 51% of elementary, 50% of junior high, and 54% of senior high students believed that they should learn to use the computer; 36% of the elementary, 35% of the junior high, 28% of the senior high students disagree, and the rest were undecided.

#### MATH AND SCIENCE REQUIREMENTS

Secondary students were also asked whether "high school students should have more required classes in math and science." About half thought there should be more requirements, while about a third did not. Fifty percent of the junior high and 54% of senior high students supported this proposition; 35% of junior high and 28% of senior high were opposed and the rest remained undecided.

#### SEX EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Most of the debate about curriculum modifications has centered around whether "the basics" need more emphasis. Some have argued that there are too many courses that focus on students' personal development such as driver's education, parenting, drug education, and sex education. We wondered whether students agreed with the need to de-emphasize the courses that are geared to such personal issues. We asked whether they thought "all youth in Minnesota should be required to have instruction in sex education in school." Sixty-four percent of elementary, 69% of junior high, and 73% of senior high students supported this idea; while 13% of elementary, 7% of junior high, and 10% of senior high students did not. The rest were undecided. In other words, Minnesota students think sex education is as important, if not more important, than math, science and computers. In relation to sex education, students do not agree with critics who want to de-emphasize courses dealing with personal and family issues.

We also asked when sex education should start. A clear trend showed that the younger the students, the earlier they thought sex education should begin. The majority recommended 4th through 6th grade, with 56% of elementary, 48% of junior high, and 38% of senior high students arguing for this grade level. The second most frequent suggestion was during junior high, in the 7th or 8th grade. 27% of elementary, 37% of junior high, and 49% of senior high students gave this recommendation.

#### ELECTIVES VS. REQUIREMENTS

We also wondered where students stood on the controversy surrounding electives. In many reform proposals, electives are viewed with alarm as a retreat from "excellence." They are thought to be responsible for "watering down" the curriculum and diverting students from the basics. The assumption seems to be that "excellence" resides in the subject matter itself regardless of the attitude or motivation of the learner. The majority of students (64% of both juniors and seniors) strongly opposed the proposals for fewer electives. Fewer than a fifth of the students supported more requirements. It is interesting, though, that on the three questions regarding requirements (computers, math and science and sex education), a majority of students supported requirements in each area. One wonders where the students do not think requirements are needed.

#### Legal Ages

Youth in Minnesota rank legal age restrictions as second highest on their list of concerns; 52% of the groups listed this issue. As children grow older and move through adolescence, gaining adult rights and experimenting with "adult" behaviors becomes increasingly important. Since adulthood is so often viewed as a legal status, rather than one where there is evidence of

**Table 3**  
Voting, Working, Quitting School and  
Drinking Age Preferences

Issue	Age	Elementary %	Jr. High %	Sr. High %
Voting	Below 18	69	49	22
	18	18	41	71
	Above 18	13	10	7
Work	Below 16	78	77	52
	16	12	19	43
	Above 16	11	4	5
Quit School	Below 16	15	15	5
	16	31	32	36
	Above 16	54	52	59
Purchase Alcohol	Below 18	11	20	7
	18	9	25	37
	19	12	14	32
	Above 19	67	42	25

maturity, it is not surprising that adolescents believe that it is through doing what only adults may do (e.g., smoke, drink, vote, drive) that one *becomes* an adult. One might expect that the desire to engage in these so-called adult behaviors would increase with age. Indeed, the data support this notion; legal age issues are far more important to those in senior high school than to those in the 5th or 6th grade.

More specific information on this issue was gathered through the individual portion of our poll. Specifically, we asked participants to tell us what they believed the legal age for voting, gainful employment, quitting school, and purchasing alcohol should be. Table 3 summarizes this information by grade level:

#### VOTING AND WORKING AGE

A majority of students at all grade levels preferred a lower legal age for employment. Elementary and junior high participants wanted to vote prior to reaching age 18 while most senior high students were comfortable with the current legal voting age. In addition, there was a strong tendency for younger students to prefer a lower age for voting and working than their older peers. For the most part, then, youth in Minnesota want to be able to vote and work earlier.

#### COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE

Quite surprisingly, the majority of students in all three age categories thought that the legal age at which they should be allowed to quit school ought to be raised above the current age of 16. This reinforces the data from the group discussions, which indicated that youth believe the number one statewide priority should be education. Minnesota youth value their education and see it as extremely important. In fact, they believe it is so important that they are willing to accept additional restrictions on their freedom in order to obtain a high school diploma. To youth, a diploma is the stepping-stone to other opportunities, especially postsecondary education.

#### DRINKING AGE

This survey was undertaken at a time when raising the legal drinking age in Minnesota from 19 to 21 was being considered seriously by the state legislature. While some states continue to allow 18-year-olds to drink and purchase alcoholic beverages, others, like Minnesota, place the age limit at 19; still others do not allow purchase of alcohol until 21. To reflect these options,

we have divided the age preferences into four categories in Table 3: below 18, 18, 19 and above 19.

Table 3 indicates that the majority of elementary students believed the legal drinking age should be raised above age 19. Almost half of the junior high students also agreed while only a quarter of the high school students supported this change. About a third of the high school participants believed the current age of 19 should remain; however, slightly more than a third preferred age 18. It is surprising that only 7% of these older youth stated a preference for a legal drinking age of below age 18.

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*If you can be married, raise a kid,  
get drafted, work for a living, and  
get tried as an adult, you should be  
able to walk into a bar legally!*  
(Senior High)

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In the discussion groups, the students offered explanations for their age preferences. Among those who supported lowering the drinking age to 18, most cited other adult responsibilities which accrue at that age as justification for their viewpoint:

If you can be married, raise a kid, get drafted, work for a living, and get tried as an adult, you should be able to walk into a bar legally! (Senior High)

I feel if you're old enough to vote and to die for your country, you're old enough to drink. (Senior High)

The drinking age should be the same as the draft and voting age. (Senior High)

#### CONFIDENTIAL HEALTH CARE

Adolescent health and mental health issues ranked high on the list of problems. One of the questions on the individual questionnaire related to this concern. Students were asked whether they thought they should be able to receive confidential health care. The question was stated as follows:

Youth under 16 should be able to go to a doctor for problems related to sex, drugs, or family concerns without their parents being informed.

At each grade level, the largest proportion of students approved the availability of confidential health care. Support increased with age; 47% of elementary students, 65% of junior high, and 68% of senior high students agreed with the statement. Those who were undecided decreased with age — 23% of elementary, 20% of junior high, and 18% of senior high students. Obviously, this issue becomes more salient as one grows older.

#### Taxes

Minnesota taxes ranked third on the list of items the governor should attend to, with one-third of the groups mentioning it. Twice as many males as females cited this issue. Older students gave this issue less import than younger students; elementary students ranked taxes second while both junior and senior high participants ranked it fourth.

Most responses requested either a tax decrease on specific items, e.g. "lower land taxes," "lower food taxes and income taxes," etc., or an overall decrease in taxes. Comments remained vague and terse, leading us to conclude that taxes are not really *their* issue, but were mentioned more as a rote recitation of an issue they know is important because it is discussed constantly in the media and by politicians. Further, the poll was taken during the 1984 presidential campaign, and taxes were a major issue.

#### Jobs and Unemployment

The majority of Minnesota youth want to be able to hold jobs before they are 16, the current legal working age. In addition, they do not want a subminimum wage for youth under 18 nor do they want a 15-hour per week limit. These responses and the fact that "jobs and unemployment" were ranked fourth among statewide concerns (27% of the groups listed it), indicates the high salience of this issue. Many Minnesota youth want to work and are concerned that employment opportunities will not be, or perhaps are not, available to them.

Many responses specifically requested more job opportunities for youth, while others expressed a more general concern about jobs and unemployment in the society at large:

More jobs for teenagers — we wouldn't be in trouble cause we'd be off the streets. (Junior High)

More job opportunities for young people and older people. (Junior High)

More jobs! Especially for people without experience. People take out loans to get through college, then can't get a job after they have graduated to pay off their loans. They get screwed. (Senior High)

#### Social Programs

About one-fifth of the groups demonstrated concern for the disadvantaged in our society (e.g. the homeless, the poor, the elderly). Female participants were much more concerned about social programs for these populations than male participants; this issue is ranked third among statewide concerns by females while males ranked it fifth. This issue is cited as a concern at both the state and national levels and will be addressed further in the section regarding national issues.

#### Neighborhood Concerns of Younger Students

The elementary and junior high students were asked to focus specifically on their neighborhoods and offer suggestions for the most needed improvements. Both groups of students ranked *aesthetic improvements* in the physical environment, such as a cleaner and quieter neighborhood, better garbage collection, repairing the streets and painting and fixing up houses as their number one choice. Almost three-quarters of both junior high and elementary students suggested such changes and every group except suburban junior high students rated them as their most frequent neighborhood concern:

Neighbors should mow their lawns and stuff. (Elementary)  
Improve the roads and have more trees; pick up the garbage. (Elementary)

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*No pollution, man. Less noise, better  
houses. (Junior High)*

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No pollution, man. Less noise, better houses. (Junior High)  
Clean it up. Grass on the hills, get houses fixed up. (Junior High)

Better recreational facilities such as swimming pools, parks, and roller skating rinks, etc., were the next most frequent suggestion from rural and suburban respondents (about 70% of the groups argued for such proposals). In fact, this was the number one neighborhood issue for suburban junior high students. This recommendation was one that directly benefited them, in contrast to the first, which would have relatively equal value to any community member. Suggestions about recreation seemed to be oriented particularly to improving the quality of leisure time options for early adolescents:

A bowling alley, recreational facility, more restaurants, a McDonalds. (Elementary)

A place to play and more sidewalks so no one runs us over. Bike paths. People should be more understanding about our outdoor games. (Elementary)

Public indoor pool — free. Gym equipment, more arcades, an ice-cream man. (Elementary)

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*Everybody starts trouble too much.  
Cleaner and better people.  
(Elementary)*

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For urban students, two issues tied for second place at about 60% — reducing crime and improving the relationships and level of cooperation among their neighbors. Both of these concerns related to changes in the people in their community, in contrast to the first two, which related to changes in the physical environment. Among many of the urban students, there appeared to be a pervasive sense of fear and conflict. These two issues — crime and neighborhood cooperation — were the third and fourth most frequently mentioned neighborhood problem for suburban and rural youth:

Everybody starts trouble too much. Cleaner and better people. (Elementary)

People should stop setting fires, teenagers breaking into cars. (Elementary)

My neighborhood is real prejudiced. We're the only black people in the neighborhood and we get blamed for stealing and stuff when the girls across the street actually did it. (Elementary)

Stop men from snatching little kids and raping women. Don't beat up old ladies. (Elementary)

Have clubs or meetings to get to know everybody, more lights on the streets, more police protection. (Junior High)

Not so many rowdy kids, more cops around patrolling, get rid of bullies and people who vandalize. (Junior High)

A lot of girls in my neighborhood are afraid to go out alone, even during the day. I'm afraid some guy is going to attack me. I have my brother go with me everywhere. (Junior High)

The other frequent recommendation from about one-third of the groups was to rid their neighborhoods of undesirables — sometimes these were the elderly, sometimes younger children, sometimes they were categorized as "troublemakers":

Throw out the druggies. (Junior High)

Get rid of the old people. Get rid of the little kids. (Junior High)

Get rid of some neighbors because they ripped off my brother's car stereo. (Junior High)

The desire to evict people who were either older or younger than they may be an acceptance of our society's increasing tendency to age segregation. Not only do elderly people want to retreat to their own "retirement communities," but some teenagers seem also to want to create their "Sun Cities" or perhaps more accurately, "Fun Cities."

## NATIONAL ISSUES

Two questions offered students the opportunity to state what they believed were the most important national issues. The first, asked of students at all grade levels, solicited their priorities for presidential action. The question was:

We have a newly elected President of the United States.

What do you think are the most important problems he needs to deal with right away?

### The Threat of Nuclear War

The vast majority of the discussion groups (84%) said that the number one priority for President Reagan was prevention of nuclear war. Although the question merely asked for a list of national issues, many chose to expand their responses, revealing their deep fear and sense of urgency about the nuclear threat:

We can't say if a nuclear war will happen — we can only hope that it doesn't. (Elementary)

World peace. We want this to be a civil place to live. (Junior High)

Stopping war — I want to live to see the year 2000. (Junior High)

Most importantly is the nuclear situation, something has to be done, and soon! (Senior High)

A nuclear war will be started by a little country, then everything will go! (Senior High)

A second theme centered around the need for arms limitations and the uselessness of increasing and expanding our nation's arsenal:

The missiles — stop making them! Everytime we make one, Russia makes one, too! (Elementary)

There's a certain point to stop. You can only kill and defend so much. (Senior High)

Nuclear war — they should stop making nuclear weapons and try to make peace instead! (Junior High)

If we build more and more nuclear bombs, then the countries will get scared and attack us. (Elementary)

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*World peace. We want this to be a  
civil place to live. (Junior High)*

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Younger respondents tended to express their concern in more concrete terms than their older peers. Their major concern centered on the amount of money being spent, rather than the effects of nuclear weapons on their future or the future of others.

Don't spend money on nuclear war. Spend it on us! (Elementary)

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*Don't spend money on nuclear war.  
Spend it on us! (Elementary)*

---

If we keep on making bombs, then the country loses money and there won't be any money left over. (Elementary)

**The Economy**

The second most frequently cited national issue was the economy; 73% of all the groups made some reference to this issue. This category included items such as: taxation, deficit spending, inflation and the national debt. The most common theme, expressed without much elaboration by most respondents, was the desire to have taxes lowered:

Reduce the national debt without raising taxes. (Junior High)

Taxes — cut back on spending instead of raising taxes. (Senior High)

Some respondents criticized specific expenditures; others made recommendations:

He's taxing the poor more than the rich and he should tax the rich more. (Junior High)

(We shouldn't be) sending money to other countries while our own country is going broke. (Junior High)

**Programs for the Disadvantaged**

Young people traditionally have identified with the underdog in society, and the Youth Poll participants are no exception. Overall, 38% of the respondents expressed opposition to the cutbacks in social programs, indicating a great concern for the poor and the elderly, the jobless and the homeless, the disadvantaged and the needy. This was also identified as a state issue by about a fifth of the respondents, making it a key concern at both the state and national levels:

Why do they turn off people's heat so they will die? (Elementary)

Make sure people aren't laying out on the street — give them a home. (Elementary)

He should give more money and food stamps to people who don't have jobs. (Junior High)

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*Don't use government money for war funds, use it to help poor people, to help educate them so they can go out and get some jobs. (Senior High)*

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More social programs for the elderly and tax the rich, not the poor. (Junior High)

Don't use government money for war funds, use it to help poor people, to help educate them so they can go out and get some jobs. (Senior High)

We wish that no one would be poor or starving. (Senior High)

Quit making the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Stop the famine in Ethiopia. Let Reagan send money and food to them. Stop politics from getting in the way of human values. (Senior High)

Most common perhaps was the concern over the instability of social security. "After all," one respondent mused, "old people don't work but they still need money."

The issues which Minnesota youth listed as the most important national concerns closely parallel those of their parents and other adults throughout the nation, according to a series of Gallup Polls. For example, Gallup found that 83% of adults favored a nuclear freeze and 48% favored cuts in defense spending. Adults listed economic issues, including taxes, deficits, and the high cost of living among their top three concerns. A majority of adults in the midwest supported increased spending for social programs and social security. Thus, there is a striking similarity between the views of youth and adults. In an era where youth are assumed to have a separate "youth culture" — a culture allegedly composed of "troublemakers," "druggies," delinquents," "thieves" and "losers" — it is most interesting that the national priorities of these "obnoxious pests" so closely parallel those of adults.

**Changes Needed in Community, Nation, and World**

A second question, posed only to senior high school students, asked them to list the major changes that they thought were needed in the community, the country, and the world. Their responses are shown in Table 4. Even though the question provided the opportunity to name local, state, and international issues as well as national ones, the top two items on the list were the same as those raised by the question about the president's priorities. The difference in percentages arises from the fact that on this list the high school students also added local and state issues, reducing the votes for the top issues.

The third most frequent response was that there ought to be more *recreational and therapeutic services for teenagers*. Rural youth were slightly more concerned about this than urban or suburban youth, which may simply reflect the scarcity of options in rural areas:

More activities centers for teenagers. There's nothing else for teens to do except get themselves in trouble. (Junior High)

Have more support groups for youth in trouble or having problems. We should be given a chance to prove ourselves. The bad ones are the only people recognized and the straight ones are punished or suffer for it. (Senior High)

*Environmental concerns, improved relationships with other countries, and reducing crime*, all received attention from a fifth of the responding groups:

Table 4  
Recommendations of Changes Needed to Improve Community, Country, or World

Issue	Group Responses, %
Reduce threat of nuclear war	48
Provide aid to the needy and poor	27
Provide more services/programs for teenagers	22
Protect the environment	20
Improve relationship with other countries	19
Reduce crime	17
Improve public education	14

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*Improved foreign relations; we are too selfish and stubborn. (Senior High)*

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Better communication with other countries — real conferences, accomplishing substantial things. (Senior High)

Improved foreign relations; we are too selfish and stubborn. (Senior High)

Law enforcement should be enforced more. They seem afraid to enforce the law with the rich. (Senior High)

A cleaner, pollution-free community. (Senior High)

#### WHAT YOUTH CAN DO ABOUT COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL PROBLEMS

We were interested in learning whether young people think they can have a role in solving problems in their neighborhoods, communities, nation and world. We asked students at all three grade levels the following question: "What kinds of problems do you think young people can do something about or help prevent?"

#### Helping Adolescents

For all age groups, the most frequent focus was on problems that directly affected their age group. For the elementary and junior high students, the most common strategy was that they themselves should avoid drinking, using drugs, smoking, vandalism, shop-lifting, etc., as a way to reduce or prevent delinquency in the wider community. More than half of the students took this point of view. The younger students seemed to not believe that they could influence anyone else's attitudes on behavior, and instead, chose to work on improving their own:

Being smart enough not to smoke, drink or take drugs. Not fighting, being trusting of your friends. (Elementary)

No littering, no stealing, clean up after pets, no vandalism. (Elementary)

That's a hard one — drugs, say no. No fights. (Elementary)

Stop rule breaking by compromising with the teacher. (Junior High)

Earn your parent's trust (Junior High)

Keep the feeling in your family good. (Junior High)

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*Stop rule breaking by compromising with the teacher. (Junior High)*

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About 15% of the elementary and junior high school students took a more active approach. They argued that, more than regulating themselves, they could actually influence other young people. Some took an indirect approach, such as reporting negative behaviors to authorities. Others chose to try to influence friends and acquaintances directly. Another group believed that setting a good example for others was important:

Help friends with homework, just be their buddy. (Elementary)

We could report things we see or know about since we're on the inside. (Junior High)

Report people who have drugs. Stopping your friends who have them. (Junior High)

Ask people what kind of problems they have. If people beat other kids, call hotline. Put more programs on TV showing what you can do. (Junior High)

Don't put so much pressure on other people about sex. (Junior High)

Encourage friends to not hot-rod when driving. Don't let friends drive if they're high. (Junior High)

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*Report people who have drugs. Stopping your friends who have them. (Junior High)*

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#### Other Local and National Concerns

Approximately 30% of the elementary and junior high students focused on local and national issues which were not directly linked to the personal concerns of adolescents. Beautifying and cleaning up their schools and neighborhoods were most frequently cited, followed by crime prevention and service to the elderly:

Litter, we could clean up. We could report crime. Pollution — we could walk and ride bikes instead of having Mom drive us. (Elementary)

If someone is breaking into a house, I can call the police and not just ignore it. (Elementary)

Fix the factories so not so much smoke is coming out to pollute the air. (Elementary)

Invite the elderly to your home and feed them. Invite them so they won't be alone. (Junior High)

Cut old people's grass, rake leaves, shovel. (Junior High)

While more than 80% of the high school groups cited teenage issues as their major target, these older adolescents were also more likely to believe that young people could do something about a wider range of issues. These included stopping nuclear war, helping the disadvantaged, improving the environment, reducing crime, and reducing unemployment. The high school students also tended to assume a more active profile in naming strategies for achieving change:

Drinking and driving. Try to make kids realize that you don't need alcohol. Help the younger kids understand this. (Junior High)

Try to get kids off the streets and give them something creative and useful to do. (Senior High)

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*Try to get kids off the streets and give them something creative and useful to do. (Senior High)*

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*We don't feel that as long as we are young people that we can change much because to a great extent, we don't have control of our own lives or the environment around us.*  
*(Senior High)*

parents can't do anything, so how could I? (Junior High)  
 We can't do anything about really important things, like violence and sex and things like that. (Junior High)  
 The older students spoke vividly about their powerlessness: We don't feel that as long as we are young people that we can change much because to a great extent, we don't have control of our own lives or the environment around us. (Senior High)  
 Nothing. People do what they want to do. (Senior High)  
 Not much. They don't think we know what we're talking about. (Senior High)

**Relationship Between Most Important Issues and Ones That Can Be Changed**

We analyzed the relationship between the issues high school students considered to be most important (discussed earlier) and the ones they said they could do something about. There was some similarity between the two lists as shown in Table 5, but also some striking differences:

The most dramatic difference was that specific adolescent health and mental health problems such as drug and alcohol abuse and teen pregnancy did not appear on the list of most important community and national issues, but were among the most frequently mentioned targets for youth activism. It is possible that the issue we called "more teen programs/services" is closely related to these adolescent health problems. Typically, the call for more teen programs and services meant more recreational facilities, but a few groups described how drug and alcohol use and abuse as well as vandalism and other forms of delinquency were caused by lack of outlets for youthful energy. Thus, the two may be closely related in the minds of the adolescents though they did not tend to spell out the connection.

Help organize environmental groups to clean up the forest and ditches and plant more trees and shrubs. (Senior High)  
 If you know people who will be alone, invite them over. Send a car. Become aware of the signs of depression ahead of time. (Senior High)  
 We can make our concerns about nuclear weapons known. (Senior High)  
 Encourage girls to use some kind of birth control to cut down on pregnancy. (Senior High)

**Powerlessness**

About 10% argued that, as teenagers, they could not have any impact on solving community problems. This figure may actually understate their sense of powerlessness, especially among early adolescents. Almost a fourth of the elementary and junior high groups left this question blank, implying that they could not think of any ways in which they could work on community issues. While many expressed their lack of efficacy through silence, a few offered clear rationales for believing they could have little influence:

It wouldn't make any difference. We're too little. They wouldn't listen to us. (Elementary)  
 There's nothing you can do. I'm worried about older neighborhood kids beating up younger kids. But the kid's

**Table 5**  
**Relationship Between Most Important Issues and Problems Youth Can Help Solve**  
**% of High School Groups Offering Each Suggestion**

Most Important Issues	Problems Youth Can Help Solve
Reduce nuclear threat (48%)	Drug and alcohol abuse (46%)
Provide aid to the needy and poor (27%)	Reduce crime (26%)
Provide more teen programs/services (22%)	Teen pregnancy (21%)
Protect the environment (20%)	Aid to the needy and poor (14%)
Improve foreign relations (9%)	Environmental protection (13%)
Reduce crime (17%)	Nuclear threat (8%)
Improve schools/education (14%)	Improve schools/education (7%)

The other major difference was that international issues such as reducing the threat of nuclear war and improving relationships with other countries ranked very high as public issues, but few felt they could do anything about these problems. This is probably a very realistic assessment of their current knowledge and ability to influence public affairs. Adolescents are *isolated* from the world beyond their schools and peer groups. They have relatively *little knowledge* about national and international issues such as national defense and foreign relations, they have *little political power*, and they are *not taken seriously* by governmental leaders. On the other hand, they are experts on the problems that adolescents encounter and they have the capacity to influence their peers and younger youth in ways that adults do not.

#### OBLIGATION TO COUNTRY AND COMMUNITY

Many people do feel a sense of efficacy relative to improving the lives of other adolescents in their community and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to aiding the needy and the poor and protecting the environment. But do they feel obligated to act on these feelings? To find out, we asked the senior high students the following question: "What do people your age believe they owe their community and country?"

##### No Sense of Obligation

The most frequent response was "nothing" or "not much" with a third of the students taking this position. Also included in this category were those who said they had never thought about or didn't care to think about this question. Their reasons for not feeling obligated were: 1) they did not think they had received much from the community or country, 2) they disapproved of current government policies, or 3) they had little voice in influencing local and national policies:

Nothing. They did nothing for me.

Nothing, we haven't lived long enough to owe people.

Nothing, they owe us.

I don't think we owe them nothing (sic) because no matter what we do, they're hitting on us. They never listen to what we've got to say.

Not a damn thing because of wasted spending policies (insane weapons).

##### Active Contribution

On a more positive note, providing tangible service to others, including military service, was the next most frequent category of responses. Some of these students also advocated working actively for a political candidate or party. Almost a fifth of the senior high respondents argued that youth should help actively to create a better society:

Contribute as much as we're able to instead of living off the rest. Contribute new ideas which help improve things in the country.

Teenagers should help the community right now; we could help with world peace, open communication with young people of other countries, do something about the crime rate, drug abuse.

Try to save the U.S. from a nuclear war. Prevent presidents with only charisma and weak programs from winning second terms.

We feel we owe our community and country a reasonable amount of help, but we don't think we'd be willing to fight — although we might.

When the time comes, we should do what we can to defend the country.

Our generation plans to make this world a better place with a turn of the old to the new.

#### Citizenship as Appropriate Attitudes

The third major theme, expressed by 17% of the groups, was that young people are obligated to what is traditionally viewed as the basis of good citizenship: loyalty, patriotism, and respect. The emphasis here was on what a good American *thinks* or *believes*, *not so much on what they do*, as an active contribution:

Respect and loyalty, be a benefit to the community, be a decent person.

Faithful to the community and country.

Obeys the laws, stay informed, responsibility to government.

The drive and determination to make this country strong and powerful.

#### Become Well-Educated

A final theme, discussed by 10% of the groups, was that what young people owed their country was to become well educated and use their education for their own and the community's benefit:

Use our education by becoming responsible citizens.

Get an education and make something of yourself.

We owe them well educated, upstanding individuals who are willing to take over and do a good job.

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*Use our education by becoming responsible citizens.*

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#### Minnesota's "Peace Corps"

Two questions on the individual questionnaire also dealt with the obligation to society issue. Secondary students were asked whether they approved of the idea of a state service program (a Minnesota version of the Peace Corps) and the likelihood that they would sign up for such an option. The first question was as follows:

Several states and Canada have voluntary community service programs for 16-22 year olds. They involve a year of full-time service to the community doing such things as working in hospitals and schools, building nature trails, working with the poor and elderly, etc. Youth get paid just enough to live on and at the end of the program, they get a cash bonus and a scholarship to further their education. Do you think Minnesota should set up such a program?

Almost three-quarters of secondary students approved of this idea. This is a strong endorsement of the idea that youth can and should provide tangible help to their community and state.

Students were also asked whether they themselves would sign up for a state service program. Almost half said they would like to participate in such a program. Relatively few of the secondary students stated that they would *not* sign up, but almost two-fifths were undecided.

The responses to the questions about a state service program seem surprising in light of how the high school students talked about their obligations to their community and country. Almost one-third said they had no obligation at all, yet only a handful



did not support a state service program and fewer than 20% said they would not join such a program. However, this may be less of a contradiction than it appears on the surface. The key is that the state service program was described as a voluntary one, not an obligation mandated by the government. Because adolescence is a period of life in which the wish to be independent and in control of their lives is very strong, the notion of "owing the community and country something" is not accepted very easily. It appears that many young people are willing to serve society, but on their terms, not because they are required or obliged to do so.

#### **WILL THIS GENERATION DO BETTER THAN PREVIOUS ONES?**

Part of the American dream has been the perception that each generation will be better than the previous one and that there are no limits to growth and improvement of the individual and the country. Youthful idealism contributes to this belief. The younger generation assumes that it will be able to solve the problems that mystified elders. We wondered if young Americans still accept this premise and used the following question to explore this issue: "When you become adults, will you do a better job of solving national and world problems than your parents' generation? Why or why not?"

A majority of elementary (60%), junior high (58%), and senior high (54%) students do think they will be more successful than the previous generation. Older students tended to hold this opinion with less certainty. Urban youth at all grade

levels were more likely to view themselves as more capable than the older generation. For example, 77% of junior high students in urban schools in contrast to 50% in rural schools and 60% of suburban schools held this view.

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*Today's kids have a better grasp on problems and issues and we can cope better. (Elementary)*

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The most frequent reason for optimism was that youth think they are better educated and know more than previous generations. This assertion stands in dramatic opposition to the current criticisms of American education, that we are "a nation at risk" because of the ignorance and miseducation of the young. Obviously, young people do not feel that way. About two-fifths of the students spoke about the "education gap" between them and their parents:

There's better schools now. We will know more. (Elementary)

Today's kids have a better grasp on problems and issues and we can cope better. (Elementary)

We won't make the same mistakes. We'll have better information from the past. (Elementary)

Teaching has become more elaborate and we learn more. We also are more informed because of TV and the media. (Junior High)

Our knowledge is better. The average kid knows more than a kid used to. (Senior High)

Our generation is more educated than previous generations and will probably be more informed or knowledgeable about future issues. We're more aware of the dangers of some of the things that are going on. (Senior High)

We've learned from their mistakes. We are better educated and more concerned about world affairs. (Senior High)

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*Parents don't always vote. I would vote. (Elementary)*

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To the elementary and junior high students, their superior knowledge of and comfort with technology in the form of computers was the next most important reason. Senior high students were not quite as likely to cite technology as giving them the edge over the previous generation. It may be that the oldest teenagers in the poll are not as familiar with computers as their younger brothers and sisters:

We have more Apple II's. We can manage better. (Elementary)

We'll do better because of computers. (Junior High)

We'll make new discoveries, like better medicine. We know more because we'll have better computers. (Junior High)

We've grown up in the shadow of nuclear war. We got computers. We'll learn how to make technology work for us. (Senior High)

High school students said that they would be better able to cope with the future because they "cared" more about national and international problems than their parents' generation. This was their second most frequent response, with approximately 20% of the groups taking this position. About 10% of the elementary and junior high students also stated that they were more involved and concerned about public issues than were the older generation. They viewed themselves as independent thinkers and better problem solvers:

We believe strongly about things. We believe in our country. (Elementary)

Parents don't always vote. I would vote. (Elementary)

We'll be more independent and we'll speak out. (Junior High)

We're responsible, we're thinkers, we're better because we're young and strong. We don't want to fight over stupid things. We can change so that only guilty people will be killed during the war. (Junior High)

We care about what happens. We don't want to put our kids through the constant worry of being blown up. (Senior High)

Every generation learns from the previous generations. We are less prejudiced than our parents since they learned prejudices from their parents around the time of World War II. (Senior High)

We're not so ignorant and apathetic. We control our destinies. We are not trained seals. (Senior High)

One-fourth of the elementary and junior high and 40% of the senior high students thought their generation would not be more effective than their elders. They cited several reasons for this assumption: 1) young people will do about as well as the previous generation, no better and no worse; 2) youth have meager knowledge and interest in public affairs and don't know what to do; 3) people their age have little power and influence and therefore, cannot obtain the information and skills necessary to solve these problems, and 4) national and world problems have grown more complex and intractable:

If your parents can't solve it then maybe you can't either. (Elementary)

Parents know more. They teach you everything you know. (Elementary)

We're just the same as everyone else. (Elementary)

The problems will be worse, and besides parents are doing the best they can. That's all you can ask for. (Junior High)

By that time, there will be a nuclear war; things just keep getting worse. (Junior High)

They screwed it up too much already. (Senior High)

We probably won't. We have nuclear war to worry about, but we aren't as aware of how bad war really is because we haven't lived through one. (Senior High)

As students grow older, they speak more about their own and their peers' apathy and discouragement about being able to make a difference. We found almost no evidence of such pessimism among the elementary students, and little among the junior high respondents. The younger students emphasized their lack of knowledge and the complexity of world problems, but tended not to criticize their own level of commitment and concern. But by the time they reach high school age, a sense of lethargy and apathy is present for about 15% of the students. This explains why they are more likely than the young students to not feel they will surpass their elders in finding solutions to world problems:

We won't do better because we are lazy and don't care. (Senior High)

No, because a great number of people in our generation could care less. About a third of them won't live past the age of 25. (Senior High)

Kids of our age don't care much. (Senior High)

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*Kids of our age don't care much. (Senior High)*

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## THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The final public policy issue in this poll deals with the 1984 Presidential election and explores the political allegiances of Minnesota youth and the qualities they look for in our national leadership.

### The Candidates

We asked the students whom they would have voted for had they been allowed to participate in the national elections. Fifty

percent stated they would have voted for Ronald Reagan, 43% indicated Walter Mondale, and 5% were not sure; the remaining 2% of the votes were write-ins which included Gary Hart, followed by Jesse Jackson, Jimmy Carter and John Anderson.

According to an analysis of the actual 1984 presidential election results by the Minnesota Secretary of State Office, Election Division, Mondale received 49.7% of Minnesota votes while Reagan received 49.5%. Although youth poll participants would have re-elected Ronald Reagan by a slight margin, there are many similarities between the voting patterns of Minnesota youth and their parents.

According to both the Minnesota Youth Poll and the Gallup Poll, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, November 3, 1984, the strongest Reagan support in Minnesota came from rural Minnesotans. Fifty-eight percent of rural Youth Poll participants would have voted for Reagan while 35% would have voted for Mondale. Similarly, 52% of outstate Gallup Poll participants stated in October 1984 that they planned to vote for Reagan while 39% indicated they would vote for Mondale. The relationship in candidate preference for rural youth and rural adults in Minnesota is very strong.

At the same time, Gallup also reported that voters in the Twin Cities metro area differed from their rural neighbors in that they slightly preferred Mondale (49% vs. 45% Reagan). In order to establish comparable data, we combined our urban and suburban populations, most of whom were in fact Twin Cities metro area residents. The results were virtually identical to Gallup's figures: 48% of metropolitan area Youth Poll participants preferred Mondale while 45% preferred Reagan.

The "gender gap," as it was commonly called during the presidential campaign, refers to gender differences in candidate preference. The Gallup Poll, as reported in the November 3, 1984 edition of the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, indicated that Minnesota women preferred Mondale while male Minnesotans preferred Reagan. Female youth poll participants also gave more support to Mondale than did males; however, unlike their adult counterparts, female youth would have re-elected Reagan, albeit by a small margin (6%). Fifty-three percent of males and 50% of females in our poll would have voted for Reagan; 40% of males and 44% of females indicated Mondale as their choice for president.

Except for high school males, there were no remarkable differences between elementary, junior high and senior high school students in terms of the margin of support for Reagan or Mondale. Consistent with their adult male counterparts, high school males showed exceptionally strong support for Reagan; more than twice as many high school males would have voted for Reagan than for Mondale.

### What Do We Look For in a Leader?

The reasons people choose a particular candidate give us an indication of the tone and timbre of our nation as a whole. The character of a candidate's support tells us what qualities are important to Americans as they search for a national leader. Thus, the young people's explanation for their support of Reagan or Mondale reveals their conceptions of the key features of national leadership.

### Pro-Reagan

Those Youth Poll participants who favored Ronald Reagan did so most often because they believe he is experienced and has done a good job as president. Many felt he needs more time

to finish his projects and therefore should be given a second term. Most respondents did not, however, cite specific actions by the president:

We're better off than we were four years ago. (Elementary)  
Because he's done a good job and I like him. (Junior High)  
He knows what to do. He has experience. He can handle it. (Senior High)

Reagan's stance on economic issues was given as a reason for respondents' preference by 18% of pro-Reagan voters, ranking it second among reasons for favoring this candidate. We interpreted "economic issues" in a broad sense; most frequently, it meant taxes, but it also included such items as the deficit, references to the economy in general, fiscal conservatism, etc.:

Reagan wants no increases in taxes; he's got class. (Junior High)

Reagan is going to try to cut the deficit. (Junior High)  
If I had voted for Mondale, I would have gotten more financial aid for college, but by the time I got out of school the economy would have been so screwed up, it wouldn't matter. (Senior High)

He helped my dad's company with tax benefits. (Senior High)

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*Reagan wants no increases in taxes;  
he's got class. (Junior High)*

---

Similar to the predominant anti-Carter explanations of why voters elected Reagan in 1980, 13% of Youth Poll participants cited anti-Mondale reasons for their Reagan preference in 1984. Most responses referred to physical characteristics of Mondale which they found offensive; others believed he was inexperienced or incapable of handling presidential responsibilities:

I just don't like Mondale — he looks weird. (Junior High)

I voted for Reagan because I don't think Mondale would have done anything. (Junior High)

Because I think he knows more than Mondale . . . besides, Mondale is ugly. (Junior High)

Mondale never sleeps, his eyes are all baggy. (Senior High)

Mondale's inexperienced. (Senior High)

If Mondale got in office he wouldn't be able to handle it. (Senior High)

Mondale's a dirtball. (Senior High)

On the other hand, positive personal characteristics of Ronald Reagan ranked fourth in the list of reasons for favoring him. Eleven percent of respondents cited personal qualities in Reagan as their explanation for their choice:

He's nice (old — I like old people). (Elementary)

Reagan's older and so he knows more than Mondale. (Junior High)

He's smarter and he knows what's going on in the world. (Junior High)

He's a cool guy! (Senior High)

. . . grandfather image (Senior High)

He shows leadership ability. (Senior High)

## Pro-Mondale

Historically, voters often express dissatisfaction with the current administration as a reason for favoring a non-incumbent candidate. For example, 1980 Reagan voters gave anti-Carter rather than pro-Reagan reasons for their preference. Our Youth Poll participants were no exception to this pattern; 26% cited anti-Reagan themes as reasons for their preference of Walter Mondale. Of these responses, most (16%) specifically cited Reagan's age as a major factor:

He might die in office; he's too old. (Junior High)

Mondale is younger and Reagan is at the age when people go insane. (Junior High)

When Reagan gets too old, he won't care who dies; he'll get senile. (Senior High)

Others used more general terms to describe their dislike for Reagan. Responses from Mondale supporters ranged from disliking personal characteristics of Reagan to a general feeling that he was not effective during his first term in office:

Reagan looked drunk on TV. (Elementary)

I wasn't satisfied with Reagan's first four years. (Junior High)

When Reagan started, he promised a lot of things he didn't give. (Junior High)

Because I don't like Reagan. (Senior High)

I would vote for Mondale mostly because Reagan is a liar. (Senior High)

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### *Mondale would give more money to the disabled. (Elementary)*

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Mondale's defense posture was the second most frequently cited reason for favoring him. Arms limitations, reduction or freezes on the number of nuclear weapons, and a stronger orientation towards peace were given as some of the positive aspects of Mondale's stance on defense:

He (Reagan) is wasting too much money on defense. (Elementary)

He wants to ban warheads, nuclear bombs and stuff like that. (Junior High)

He'd really cut the arms race. (Junior High)

Reagan wanted star wars and I don't. I like the nuclear freeze. (Junior High)

Eleven percent of responses referred to personal characteristics of Mondale in their explanation of their selection:

He is sweet. (Senior High)

Honest. (Senior High)

He's a humanitarian. (Senior High)

He's a cool dude. (Senior High)

He is more of a family person. (Senior High)

Respondents believed Mondale would have increased the depth and scope of social programs; i.e., he cares about the disadvantaged and would have provided for them. A concern for the elderly, the poor, the disabled, and people in general was viewed as an important value for a president to have:

Mondale would give more money to the disabled. (Elementary)

Reagan doesn't care about the people out on the streets and Mondale does. (Junior High)

Because he can help you get jobs, help the blacks, poor people, and any other problems that would occur. (Junior High)

He believes poor people should pay less taxes and Reagan wanted to cut social security. (Junior High)

Mondale was for the poor. (Senior High)

According to a Gallup Poll (1984) adults also agreed that "Mondale is seen as more concerned about group needs than Reagan." When participants were asked to rate each candidate's concern for the needs and problems of people in 14 different population categories, the public gave more positive ratings for Mondale than Reagan for 12 of the 14 groupings. Reagan was believed to be more concerned than Mondale with regard to "business executives" and "wealthy people." Mondale, on the other hand, was believed to be more concerned for the needs of unemployed people, elderly, black people, women, poor people, etc.

## Trends and Patterns

Many of the comments on personal characteristics are suggestive of the way in which one might talk about a favorite movie star rather than the leader of one of the most powerful countries in the world. A startling finding is that there is relatively little difference between elementary, junior high and senior high students in the way they focus on superficial characteristics, such as "He's ugly" (junior high); "He looks weird" (junior high); "his eyes are all baggy" (high school); or "Reagan looked drunk on TV" (elementary). Similarly, the more thoughtful responses about issues and more substantive personal characteristics were more or less equally distributed among the youngest and the oldest respondents. The oft-heard criticism that students' thinking skills do not improve with the number of years in school seems to be reinforced by these data.

In general, though, personal qualities and characteristics of candidates were viewed as important by both Mondale and Reagan supporters. The difference in the adjectives they used to describe those characteristics was substantial. Pro-Reagan students tended to use terms such as "grandfather image," "older and wiser," "smarter," "responsible." Pro-Mondale students used terms such as "honest," "humanitarian," "trustworthy," "good," "a family man." Descriptions might be thought of in terms of "respect versus benevolence" — an accurate symbol or indicator, perhaps, of the dichotomous values of our nation.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT IMAGES

The majority of Minnesota students (66%) believed they were negatively perceived by adults. Participants assume police officers hold the most negative image of youth (84%), followed by senior citizens (66%), teachers (61%), and parents (54%). Only 25% of students offered positive images; the remaining 9% thought adults had a neutral picture of them.

Compared with elementary students, junior and senior high students believed they were viewed much more negatively by adults. Surprisingly, gender was not a major differentiating factor, although males tended to use more extreme adjectives to describe adults' perceptions of them.

### Accuracy of Images

Three-fourths of participants disagreed entirely or in part with the images they believe adults have of them. However, elementary and rural students were most likely to accept and conform to adult views.

### Youths' Views of Themselves

In contrast to perceived adult images, the majority of youth described themselves in positive terms. Males, however, held a less positive view of themselves than females. Similarly, a developmental trend was evident in the data; as age increased, so did positive self-regard.

### Changing Youths' Image

In response to our request for recommendations on how to change adult perceptions, Youth Poll participants offered suggestions in terms of: what youth could do (56%), what adults could do (27%), and what both could do together (17%). Elementary and rural students were most likely to think that responsibility for change belonged to youth.

## YOUTHS' VIEWS ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICTS

### Degree of Conflict

Elementary students were far more likely than junior and senior high students to view parental/child relationships positively. In fact, only 18% of elementary students believed familial relationships were mostly negative; twice as many junior high and three times as many senior high students described families in this light.

### What Triggers Conflict?

The arenas which most frequently cause arguments and conflict varied slightly from one age group to the next. Household chores; curfews; choice of television programs, movies, music, etc., and school-related issues were listed by elementary students as likely to incite a family argument. Added to this list for junior and senior high participants were: dating/choice of friends, clothes/general appearance, and alcohol/drugs/parties.

## CONCERNS ABOUT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, THE STATE, THE NATION, AND THE WORLD

### Local and State Priorities

Among local and state concerns, education was identified as the number one priority. Second on the list was minimum age requirements for drinking, voting, driving, and working, followed by taxes, jobs and unemployment, and social programs.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

#### The Hidden vs. Formal Curriculum

Recommendations for school improvement fell into two broad categories. The first of these, gaining three-fourths of responses, focused upon noncurricular matters such as making daily life more pleasant and less regimented and improving relationships between students and teachers. Only about a fourth recommended changes in the formal curriculum.

#### Voucher Plan

A proposed voucher plan whereby state education money would be sent directly to families drew support from a slight majority of elementary students (51%) but by junior high, this had dropped to 39% and senior high students were even less supportive at 24%. Since students were not asked open-ended questions about this, we are uncertain why younger students were more favorable to the voucher plan.

#### Requirements

The majority of elementary and secondary students thought that computer literacy should be a requirement for high school graduation. About half the secondary students also thought there should be more requirements in math and science. Required sex education courses gained the support of three-fourths of secondary students and 64% of those in elementary school.

## LEGAL AGES

### Voting and Working

The majority of students indicated support for a lower legal age for employment. Similarly, most elementary and junior high students wanted to vote before age 18, though the preference by high school students was to leave the voting age at 18.

### Compulsory School Attendance

That Minnesota youth value their education was reinforced by the finding that the majority of students in all three grade levels thought that the legal age for quitting school should be raised above the current age of 16.

### Drinking

The legal age for drinking drew less uniform responses. The majority of elementary students believed the legal drinking age

should be raised above age 19. Fewer than half of junior high students agreed with this while only a third of high school students did.

### TAXES

Twice as many males as females cited taxes as a priority. Younger students were also more likely than older ones to name this, suggesting that adult discussions in the home may be shaping younger students' opinions on this issue.

### JOBS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The majority of Minnesota youth want to hold jobs before the currently allowed age of 16. Furthermore, they do not want a subminimum wage for youth under 18 and they do not want a 15-hour-per-week limit placed on their employment.

### SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Approximately one in five focused attention on a variety of social programs for populations like the poor, the homeless, and the elderly. Female participants were much more outspoken on this than males, ranking it third among statewide concerns compared with fifth for males.

### NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERNS

Elementary and junior high students rated aesthetic improvements in the physical environment as their first priority. Better recreation facilities was the next most frequent recommendation, followed by reducing crime, improving cooperation among neighbors and ridding the neighborhood of "troublemakers" and "undesirables."

### National Priorities

#### PRIORITIES FOR PRESIDENTIAL ACTION

Students said that their top three priorities for presidential action were: reducing the threat of nuclear war (84% of the groups); improving the economic climate (73%); and increased spending for social programs serving the poor, elderly, and jobless (38%).

#### NEEDED CHANGES IN COMMUNITY, COUNTRY, AND WORLD

The most needed changes in the community, country, and world, according to senior high school students, were similar to those listed for the presidential priority question. The top two concerns were the same: reducing the threat of nuclear war (48% of the groups), and aid to the needy and poor (27%). Local and state issues also included more services and programs for teenagers (22%); protecting the environment (20%); reducing crime (17%); and improving public education (14%).

#### PROBLEMS YOUTH CAN HELP SOLVE

The community and national problems youth think they can help solve included: adolescent problems such as drinking, using drugs, vandalism, and teen pregnancy (75% of responses); protecting the environment, helping the disadvantaged, reducing crime, and preventing nuclear war (about 10% each). The pattern is clear — children and youth are far more likely to believe that they can take action on problems that affect their age groups than on community, state, or national issues.

#### OBLIGATION TO THE COUNTRY

Senior high school students do not feel a strong sense of obligation to their country and community in terms of actually improving the society through their efforts. One-third said they

owed it nothing; another one-fifth believed they owed their country appropriate attitudes of loyalty, patriotism and respect, and one-tenth said they were obliged to become well-educated. Only one-fifth said they ought to provide tangible services to others.

#### State Service Corps

Minnesota youth strongly support a state service program (a Minnesota version of the Peace Corps). Almost three-fourths of secondary students approved of the idea and almost half said they would sign up for such a program. Its voluntary, as opposed to obligatory, nature seems to be a key variable for this widespread support.

#### 1984 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Had the Youth Poll participants voted in the last election, they would have elected Reagan by 7 percentage points: Reagan received 50% of their vote, Mondale 43%. Rural youth were most pro-Reagan; metro youth were most pro-Mondale.

#### Qualities of a National Leader

Youth Poll participants who said they would have voted for Ronald Reagan did so because he had done a good job and was experienced. They approved of his economic policies and his positive personal characteristics. Mondale supporters most often listed a dissatisfaction with Reagan as the reason for their preference, followed by Mondale's defense posture, his concern for the disadvantaged, and positive personal characteristics.

#### YOUTH VS. THE OLDER GENERATION

A majority of youth believed they will be more successful than the previous generation in solving national and world conflicts. Better education was cited as the major reason for their optimism. Older students were less likely to hold this opinion. Older students spoke more about their own apathy toward trying to make a difference.

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- Popowski, Karen. *Chicago Area Youth Poll: Youth Views on Volunteering and Service Learning*. Chicago: Cook County Sheriff's Youth Services Dept., 1985.



6. Check the activities in which you are involved (you can check more than one):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> athletic team   | <input type="checkbox"/> student government      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> band, orchestra, chorus                               | <input type="checkbox"/> cheerleader, dance line |
| <input type="checkbox"/> school newspaper, yearbook                            | <input type="checkbox"/> church youth groups     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> youth groups, such as Scouts, 4-H, Junior Achievement |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other school clubs, please specify _____              |  |

Please circle the one response that best applies to you:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. The school day and school year should be lengthened so that all Minnesota students (grades K-12) spend more time in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
*8. I would support a plan in which much of the state education money which now goes to public schools would instead go directly to families. They would then be able to send their children to any public, parochial or private school they chose for free or reduced cost.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9. High school students should have more required classes in math and science.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10. Every student should be required to know how to use a computer in order to graduate from high school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11. There should be fewer electives and more required courses in high school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
*12. Several states and Canada have voluntary community service programs for 16-22 year olds. They involve a year of full time service to the community doing such things as working in hospitals and schools, building nature trails, working with the poor and elderly, etc. Youth get paid just enough to live on and at the end of the program, they get a cash bonus and a scholarship to further their education. Do you think Minnesota should set up such a program?	SA	A	U	D	SD
*If you do not understand the question please ask for clarification.					
13. If Minnesota had such a program of state service (described in # 12 above), I would sign up for it.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. All youth in Minnesota should be required to have instruction in sex education in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. When should sex education start? (Check one)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Kindergarten-3rd grade <input type="checkbox"/> 9th-10th grade					
<input type="checkbox"/> 4th-6th grade <input type="checkbox"/> 11th-12 grade					
<input type="checkbox"/> 7th-8th grade					
16. Employers should be able to pay youth under 18 less than the minimum wage.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17. Youth under 18 who are still in school should not be able to work at a paid job for more than 15 hours per week during the school year.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. Youth under 16 should be able to go to a doctor for problems related to sex, drugs or family concerns without their parents being informed.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19. Girls under 16 should be able to get an abortion without their parents being informed.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20. Since extra-curricular activities, like band, debate, sports, school clubs, are not a part of the regular academic program, students should be required to pay a fee for participation.	SA	A	U	D	SD

For the next questions, write in the age you think would be best:

21. Currently, young people can first vote in state and national elections when they are 18 years old. I think the voting age should be \_\_\_\_\_.
22. Currently young people can quit school at 16. I think the minimum age for leaving school should be \_\_\_\_\_.
23. In Minnesota, the drinking age is now 19. I think people should be able to buy alcoholic beverages at age \_\_\_\_\_.
24. Right now, young people can hold a regular job at 16. I think that people should be able to start working at age \_\_\_\_\_.

## ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like some information about the members of your discussion group:

Number of students in each grade: 5th\_\_\_\_\_ 6th\_\_\_\_\_ 7th\_\_\_\_\_ 8th\_\_\_\_\_ 9th\_\_\_\_\_

Number of: Females\_\_\_\_\_ Males\_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions for the Recorder

The recorder's job is most important. Without clear, accurate and complete notes of the group discussion it is hard to use the information. Unless your writing is clear and the record is as complete as possible, we will not have a good understanding of your group's opinions.

The recorder's job is to write down as much as possible of what is being said during the group discussion. Don't decide what would be important for us to know — tell us as much as you can about what people actually said. Direct quotes to include slang or casual remarks are encouraged. Be as objective as possible. Please try to encourage *everyone's* participation and opinions.

Please read this to your group:

I'm going to be asking you several questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. We will not be using names to identify your remarks so please feel free to say whatever you want in answer to these questions. My job, as recorder, will be much easier if you each speak one at a time, clearly, and slowly.

What do you think the following groups of people think of people your age? Police? Senior citizens (old people)? Teachers? Parents?

Do you think these peoples' pictures of youth are correct? If not, what are you and your friends really like?

What could be done to get adults to change their opinion of young people?

In general, how well do you think kids get along with their parents? What makes you think this?

What kinds of things do parents and their children argue about?

If you could change three things to make your school a better place what changes would you make?

What three changes would you make in your neighborhood to make it a better place?

What kinds of problems do you think young people can do something about or help prevent?

When you become adults will you do a better job of solving national and world problems than your parents' generation? Why or why not?

We have a newly elected president of the United States. What do you think are the most important problems he needs to deal with right away?

Take a vote in your group. How many would have voted for Reagan? \_\_\_\_\_ How many would have voted for Mondale? \_\_\_\_\_  
Another candidate, name \_\_\_\_\_ Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

Why would you have voted for the candidate you chose?

The governor of the state of Minnesota is concerned about some of the problems and needs of people your age. If the governor walked into this classroom right now and you could ask him anything you wanted, what would you ask him to change?

What are *your* most important needs that you would discuss with the governor?

# HIGH SCHOOL GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like some information about the members of your discussion group:

Number of: Freshmen\_\_\_\_\_ Sophomores\_\_\_\_\_ Juniors\_\_\_\_\_ Seniors\_\_\_\_\_

Number of: Females\_\_\_\_\_ Males\_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

## Instructions for the Recorder

The recorder's job is most important. Without clear, accurate and complete notes of the group discussion it is hard to use what you have done. Unless your writing is clear and the record is as complete as possible, we will not have a good understanding of your group's opinions.

The recorder's job is to write down as much as possible of what is being said during the group discussion. Don't decide what would be important for us to know — tell us as much as you can about what people actually said. Direct quotes of slang or casual remarks are encouraged. Be as objective as possible. Encourage *everyone's* participation and opinions.

Please read this to your group:

As group members, please try to make it easy to record your comments by talking slowly and clearly. This does not mean that your ideas need to be well planned or carefully worded, although clarity would certainly help. In addition, you don't have to agree with each other; disagreements can tell us just as much.

What do you think the following groups of people think of people your age? Police? Senior citizens (old people)? Teachers? Parents?

Do you think these peoples' pictures of youth are correct? If not, what are you and your friends really like?

What could be done to get adults to change their opinion of young people?

We hear a lot about the conflicts between parents and their children. Is it accurate or exaggerated? Why do you feel this way?

What are the things that seem to cause conflict in your own family?

What do people your age believe they owe their community and country?

If you could change three things to make your school a better place what changes would you make?

What three changes would you make in your community, country or world to make it a better place?

What kinds of problems do you think young people can do something about or help prevent?

We have a newly elected president of the United States. What do you think are the most important issues he needs to deal with right away?

Take a vote in your group. How many would have voted for Reagan? \_\_\_\_\_ How many would have voted for Mondale? \_\_\_\_\_  
Another candidate, name \_\_\_\_\_ Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

Why would you have voted for this candidate?

When you become adults will you do a better job of solving national and world problems than your parents' generation? Why or why not?

The governor of the state of Minnesota is concerned about some of the problems and needs of people your age. If the governor walked into this classroom right now and you could ask him anything you wanted, what would you ask him to change?

What are *your* most important needs that you would discuss with the governor?



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