

E. O. SMITH
HIGH SCHOOL

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- **ConnectEdu**, previewed in the last issue of this publication, is no longer available due to external issues that prevented implementation.
- The schedule has been set for administration of the CT Academic Performance Tests (**CAPT**). Sophomores (and juniors who have not yet achieved proficiency in any one subtest) will complete the various parts on 3/4, 3/5, 3/6, 3/11, and 3/14.
- **TheNational College Fair**, presented by the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, will take place at the **Connecticut Expo Center** on Thursday, April 3 (9 a.m.-11:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.) and Friday, April 4 (9 a.m.-11:30 a.m.).
- Parents in need of health insurance for their children may want to consider **Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth**. Call 1-877-CT HUSKY or visit the web at www.huskyhealth.com for information.

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What Are the Chances You'll Read This?

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) recently released a report, entitled "To Read or Not to Read", revealing a trend that portends troubling consequences for the country's future. The contents of the report and its predictions are the subject of this piece.

So, what is the problem?

In brief, Americans are losing both an inclination and ability to read. According to the report, "There is a general decline in reading among teenage and adult Americans. Most alarming, both reading ability and the habit of regular reading have greatly declined among college graduates."

What kind of reading is being considered? And from what sources is this data derived?

The NEA study examined all kinds of reading, including the online version seemingly preferred by younger people. And the sources tapped were wide-ranging, most notably statistics from the Census Bureau, U. S. Department of Education, Department of Labor, and academic and corporate studies as well.

Is this more of an issue for teenagers?

While it is a major concern among teenagers (the study reported that 15- to 24-year-olds devoted just seven minutes a day to voluntary reading while finding time to watch 120-150 minutes

of television daily), older people apparently aren't spending much time with written words either. Those between the ages of 35-44 read only 12 minutes a day. Some good news is that Americans 65+ read about an hour daily.

The NEA Report predicts grave consequences for our country if this trend continues. What are they?

The short answer appears in the preface of the report—"These negative trends have more than literary importance. As this report makes clear, the declines have demonstrable social, eco-

nomics, cultural, and civic implications." Not surprisingly, the report confirms that poor readers are often poor students. And they tend to be financially poor later on in life, earning well below what proficient readers make. Moreover, proficient readers make better citizens—they are more inclined to vote, volunteer, and participate in civic events. They also visit museums and exercise on a regular basis.

Has anyone voiced skepticism about this report?

For sure. Although no one necessarily debunks the findings, some are raising questions about what it means to read in today's wired world. What is meant by wired may be Google's attempt to redefine the reading experience with its Kindle device. Or wired may mean that we're so stressed these days that we tend to read for gist, raising questions about what it means to have read something—or skimmed it, or if it's even necessary to read a whole book to make the claim we've actually read it (refer to *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* by Pierre Bayard).

What is being done at EOS to address this issue?

The staff is examining student data on reading, considering the various ways that students are asked to read, and exploring ways to enhance both their interest in and ability to read.

Below are just some of the findings in the NEA Report

- **Young adults are reading fewer books in general.**
- **There is less reading for pleasure in late adolescence than in younger age groups.**
- **Even when reading does occur, it competes with other media.**
- **American families are spending less on books than at any other time in the past two decades.**
- **Good readers generally have more financially rewarding jobs.**
- **College attendance no longer guarantees active reading habits.**

Roaming Numerals

Below is information included in the 2007 PSAT School Report

- 239** juniors took test
- 200** chose to participate in The College Board's Student Search Service
- 137** self-reported grade averages of "B" or higher
- Data from the Nelson-Denny Reading Survey administered to freshmen in September
- 92** percent of students in English 9A performed at 10th grade level or above
- 47** percent in English 9B tested at 10th grade or above
- 34** percent in English 9B scored at 7th grade or below
- 69** percent of 9G performed at 7th grade or below

Major Decisions: What Students Say They Intend To Study

Students sitting for the PSAT back in October were asked, as part of a pre-test survey, to select a major area of study they wish to pursue in higher education. Most all juniors replied, with 38 opting out.

Among the 201 respondents (101 males, 99 females), the highest percentage of responses (22.4%) fell into the "Undecided" category. Of note, males were decidedly more undecided than females as fully 1/3 selected this choice while only 11.1 % females did.

As a group, the more popular majors chosen were Health Professions/Sciences (12.9%), Visual & Performing Arts (10.4%), Engineering (9%), Other (6%), Business Management (5.5%), Education (5.5%), and Psychology (5%). Reflecting a national trend, English Literature garnered just 2% of the total while Math & Statistics numbered 1%. Majors getting shut out completely (as in 0%) were Engineering Technologies, Liberal Arts & Humanities, Parks/Leisure/Fitness, Social Service Professions, and

Theology/Religious Vocation.

Gender disparities were found in Computer Science (M=5%, F=0%), Education (M=2%, F=9.1%), Engineering (M=12.9%, F=5.1%), Health Professions (M=6.9%, F=19.2%), Psychology (M=2%, F=8.1%), Visual/Performing Arts (M=7.9%, F=13.1%) and Other (M=8.9%, F=3%).

If past practice is any predictor, these students will change majors at least a few times before they graduate from higher education.

CT Virtual High School Takes Flight With Pilot

A pilot project recently took flight that is designed to expand educational opportunities for students statewide. Launched in January and funded by the CT General Assembly within the 2008 budget, the CT Virtual Learning Center is a statewide program for high school students that allows them to take online courses at no cost to school districts. Enrollment in these courses is now being accepted.

"We want to use online courses to increase awareness to high quality content so that every student in CT will have access to the courses they need when they need them," announced Governor Jodi Rell when news of this program went public. "In preparing our young people for the 21st century workforce, it is necessary that we employ these same powerful tools to improve access, equity and employment readiness." The state has created a high speed optical computer network, called the Connecticut Educational Network, that connects each school district to all others in the state.

So, it's set up to work in this way—students remain enrolled in their current schools and are extended the option to register for courses offered online and taught by state certified teachers employed by school districts elsewhere in the state (refer to www.ctvirtuallearning.com for a list of available courses). Doug Melody, Director of Guidance, will serve as EOS' liaison with the state.

There are two primary objectives for this pilot program as it relates to EOS students. The first is to offer courses for students who have already failed them and are otherwise eligible for summer school according to school policy (a minimum of "50" for a final grade). Students may be able to earn credit in courses like Algebra, Geometry, English, Civics (Politics), or Health. The other objective is to broaden the curriculum by offering electives that are not presently available at EOS. An example would be Mandarin Chinese.

For anyone wondering, the curricula for these interactive online courses have been approved by the CT State Department of Education's Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction and, as mentioned earlier, are being delivered by CT certified teachers.

This new initiative appears to be in line with other programs and policies implemented across the country. Michigan, for example, is the first state requiring students to complete at least one online course in order to graduate high school. Connecticut, by virtue of this recent launch, is endorsing the value of such an experience while not going so far—yet—as to mandate it for graduation.

Compelling arguments may be offered on all sides of the debate over online learning. For now, this pilot has taken flight. Reservations are being accepted, and passengers will, for sure, be screened.

Choosing One's Level Of Engagement

With the course selection process in full swing, teachers are making recommendations in “core” courses for students while the latter choose their electives for the 2008-09 school year. These choices in many ways provide a prelude to the lifestyle decisions they will need to make (or have made for them) in adulthood. How so?

Well, the weight of one's course load directly impacts the amount of work—and, presumably, time—devoted to life as a student. With the weighted grade point system that determines relative position in class (EOSHS does not rank students numerically but does provide normative data to colleges in the form of bar graphs depicting student achievement), it should be well known that the greater challenge delivers a potentially greater reward—not withstanding the intrinsic benefits of learning. So, not unlike the world out there beyond

school, students wishing to “earn” more (with weighted grades as the form of currency) will typically be required to devote longer hours to their chosen commitments.

Viewed in this perspective, accumulated earnings over the course of four years may give students more flexible freedom with postsecondary options. Of course, it may also make them better prepared for the challenges of higher education and the more expansive world of work.

The expectations of A, B, and G levels are quite distinct and differentiated. Each comes with a price, and the costs need to be evaluated in the context of other related issues. Thus, a critical priority to address when selecting courses is the level of challenge that may be appropriate for each student while recognizing how these choices impact the lifestyle one wishes to lead and how much stress one is willing to absorb.

Honor roll designation, self-

confidence, involvement in extra-curricular activities, employment, and postsecondary aspirations may be just some of the factors to consider when committing to courses and levels. Much like adults who must decide how they will juggle careers with family life, community involvement, and leisure activities (work-life balance?), so too must teenagers make these choices in terms of how they will spread their commitments.

It certainly makes sense to identify personal goals and evaluate the effort required to achieve them. Wise choices are usually informed choices, and they generally result in satisfying outcomes. As one moves through life, this lesson becomes increasingly obvious: either you take the necessary time to make informed decisions, or the decisions—by default—will be made for you. When it comes to choosing courses, recognizing your level of engagement should matter.

SOS Resources

Books that may provide ideas to reduce stress

Doing School: How We Create a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic and Miseducated Students by Denise Pope

The Price of Privilege by Madeline Levine

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee by Wendy Mogul

The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon by David Elkind

The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap by Alvin Rosenfeld

College Unranked: Affirming Educational Values in College Admissions by Lloyd Thacker

Luck Is No Accident: Making the Most of Your Life and Career by John Krumboltz

An SOS to Parents: Strategies To Reduce Stress For Your Child

In this age of the stressed out, over-scheduled, attention challenged, and hyperactive child, help is being offered by a few professors at Stanford University (the West Coast version of Harvard) with the hope that kids can learn to both reduce and manage the stress in their lives. Called the SOS (Stressed-Out Students) Project, it is a research and intervention program that, among its many initiatives, offers strategies to assist parents in reducing stress for their children. Below are just some of the suggestions the SOS Project offers that may be helpful;

Define success on your terms—the American way tends to emphasize measurable achievement (SAT scores, GPA, college admissions, etc.) when defining success. Be clear on what success looks like for your family and be certain your children understand.

Create a family plan—determine and establish the level of extracurricular activity and academic challenges

that works for your family.

Insist on food and sleep—a critical factor in youth wellness and achievement is sitting together regularly for family dinners. Additionally, and not surprisingly, sleep is essential, with teenagers needing on average 9.5 hours of sleep nightly. Make each a priority.

Let kids make mistakes and fail—especially when the stakes are relatively low. Constantly coming to the rescue of our children denies them the opportunity to cultivate resilience in the face of challenges.

Debunk the college myths—Send the message to your kids that finding the right “fit” for them is far more important than getting into a “brand name”.

For more ideas on how to nurture a healthy perspective, check the sidebar on this page.



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Check out Access Channel 17 for more
news in our school community



Spark Notes On Recently Published Research

CT Voices for Children published its annual *State of Working Connecticut* report. Findings include that CT's labor force is among the most educated in the nation: 38.6% of workers hold bachelor's degrees or higher, 25.8% have some college education (but no degree higher than an associate's), and only 10% have less than a high school education. This report also indicated that education is a strong predictor of income in Connecticut. The average hourly wages by degree are as follows: bachelor's = \$26.39, some college = \$15.54, high school = \$14.86, and less than high school = \$9.79. When comparing these figures with national and regional averages, Ct workers earned higher median wages in every educational category except for those who did not earn a high school diploma,

So, what does it take for a college student to be transformed into an adult? This was the subject of a study conducted by researchers at BYU, and their findings were recently reported in the *Journal of Family Psychology*. Asking the parents of 392 students from four campuses (a public on the West Coast, another in the Midwest, a private liberal arts college, and a private religious university in the mid-Atlantic region) if their kids had reached adulthood, only 16% of the moms and 19% of the dads agreed. The students felt similarly (16%). They differed, however, on what makes an adult, with students saying financial independence and a successful career count while parents emphasize the importance of responsible behavior. Both groups agreed on one trait that makes an adult: self-reliance.

Confirming what intuition might otherwise tell us, several studies have linked high school dropout rates with increased health care costs, welfare dependency, lower income, and shorter life spans. And now a new study, called *School or the Streets: Crime and California's Dropout Crisis*, adds crime to the list of consequences. The study reports that a ten percent increase in graduation rates alone would prevent 500 homicides and over 20,000 aggravated assaults annually in California.

The high school dropout issue has become a growing concern in Connecticut as well, with various types of alternative programs introduced to engage disaffected learners and reduce the rate of dropouts. Locally, Region 19 is opening the Depot Campus this month, an off-site option located in the old Reynolds School.