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Our high school kids: tired, stressed and bored

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New survey findings suggest that when asked how they feel during the school day, USA high school students consistently invoke three key feelings: "tired," "stressed" and "bored."

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The researcher who led the study warns that such negative feelings can influence young people's attention, memory, decision making, school performance and social lives.

"It's hard to concentrate and it's hard to do well in school if your brain is constantly having to respond to stress," said Marc Brackett, a researcher in the Yale University Department of Psychology and director of the Yale

Center for Emotional Intelligence.

The new findings, out Friday, are from a survey conducted in collaboration with the Born This Way Foundation, the charitable organization founded by the singer Lady Gaga. The survey was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The student sample is huge: 22,000 high school students from across the USA.

The message is clear: our high schoolers are none too happy, at least when they're in school.

Researchers distributed a brief online questionnaire that featured the question: "How do you currently feel in school?" Three blank spaces followed, with room for any answers they felt were appropriate.

Eight of the top 10 responses were negative.

"Tired" was most often invoked — 39% of students wrote that.

"Stressed" came in second, at 29%. "Bored" was third, at 26%.

By contrast, the two most frequently invoked positive emotions were "happy" (22%) and "excited (4.7%).

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Parents and educators should be alarmed by the findings, Brackett said.

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"I think they point to the fact that we need to be attending to the feelings of our nation's youth," he said. "Unless what they're learning is engaging and interesting, they're going to be bored — the boredom is related to the quality of instruction."

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In the sample, female respondents outnumbered males about two-to-one — 65% identified themselves as female and 32% as male; 3% indicated "other."

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But Brackett said the findings were "pretty much identical" across genders.

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"It's a shame that much of our nation's education system is not focused on helping kids figure out their own goals, but rather (on) a standardized curriculum," he said.

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