

Analyzing Teen Stress Symptoms

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[DOI: 10.15520/jassh55434](https://doi.org/10.15520/jassh55434)

According to data collected by the American Psychological Association for the Stress in America Survey, teen stress rivals that of adults. Results of the survey show that not only do teens identify that their stress levels are not healthy, but they also underestimate the impact stress has on their mental and physical health.

When anxiety spikes, teens get caught in a cycle of “what ifs” and “I can’ts.” Anxious teens tend to engage in a variety of cognitive distortions such as black and white thinking and overgeneralizing. Carving out regular time to work on positive reframing empowers your teen to take control over their anxious thoughts. It works like this:

1. Name a worry floating around in your brain right now.
2. What is the worry telling you?
3. Let’s break it down and see if that worry is 100% right.
4. How can we take that worry thought and change it to a positive thought?

For example, your teen voices a fear that the teens in their class don’t like them. Why do they think this? Because a boy in class laughed when they didn’t know the answer, and now they are scared that their classmates think they are dumb. Help them break down the reality of their situation: “I answer questions in class every day. A friend always sits with me at lunch. Now reframe the situation: “It hurt my feelings when the boy laughed, but I have other good friends in my class.”

- For teens, the most commonly reported sources of stress are school (83 percent), getting into a good college or deciding what to do after high school (69 percent), and financial concerns for their family (65 percent).
- Many teens report lying awake at night (35 percent), overeating or eating unhealthy foods (26 percent), and skipping meals (23 percent) due to stress in the past month.
- Forty percent of teens report feeling irritable or angry, 36 percent report feeling nervous or anxious, 36

percent report feeling fatigued or tired, and 31 percent report feeling overwhelmed due to stress in the past month.

- More than one-quarter of teens (26 percent) say they snapped at or were short with classmates or teammates when stressed in the last month. Fifty-one percent of teens say someone tells them they seem stressed at least once a month.
- Teens report that during the school year they have an average stress level of 5.8 on a 10-point scale, compared with a level of 4.6 during the summer.

SIGNS OF STRESS

All teens experience some amount of stress, and some stress can even be healthy. Many teens, however, struggle with significant stress levels that interfere with learning, relationships, and other areas of functioning. Stress can manifest in different ways, and some symptoms of stress mimic normal teen behavior. To that end, stress can sneak up on teens. It's important to know what to look for when it comes to teen stress:

- Emotional changes: Your teen might appear agitated, anxious, and/or depressed. Pay attention to changes in behavior.
- Physical changes: Teens under stress are likely to get sick more often and complain of headaches,

stomachaches, and other aches and pains.

- Behavioral changes: Look for changes in eating or sleeping habits, and avoidance of normal daily activities.
- Cognitive changes: You might notice decreased concentration, forgetfulness, and/or the appearance of carelessness.

COMMON TRIGGERS OF TEEN STRESS

All teens are different and stress can be triggered by a number of factors. The results of the Stress in America Survey show that there are some common sources of stress in the teen population. The best way to understand how your teen processes stress and where the stress stems from is to engage in open and honest communication about stress. It's important for parents to normalize the concept of stress and empower teens to utilize adaptive coping strategies.

Consider these potential sources of stress for teens:

Academic Stress

From grades to test scores to applying to college, teens experience high levels of school-related stress. Many teens worry about meeting academic demands, pleasing teachers and parents, and keeping up with their classmates. Poor time management skills or feelings overwhelmed by the amount

of work can play into academic stress as well.

Social Stress

Teens place a high value on their social lives. They spend the majority of their waking hours among their peers, and finding and keeping their tribes can include stress at times. Bullying and subtle instances of relational aggression are clear sources of stress on teens, but learning to manage healthy conflict and work through romantic relationships are no easy tasks for the developing teen. Peer pressure is an additional stress during the teen years. In an effort to establish and maintain friendships, teens can engage in behavior outside of their comfort zones to appease their peers.

Family Discord

Stress trickles down, and anything that impacts the family can affect the teen. Unrealistic expectations, marital problems, strained sibling relationships (including sibling bullying), illness in the family, and financial stress on the family can all trigger a spike in teen stress.

World Events

School shootings, acts of terrorism, and natural disasters worry parents, but they also trigger stress for teens. Teens are often privy to the 24-hour news cycle, and hearing bits and pieces of scary news, both domestic and abroad, can leave teens wondering about their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

Traumatic Events

Death of a family member or friend, boyfriend or girlfriend break-ups, accidents, sickness, or enduring emotional or physical abuse can have a lasting impact on teen stress levels. It's also important to note that teen dating violence affects approximately 10% of teens.

Significant Life Changes

Like adults, teens experience stress due to significant life changes. Moving, starting a new school, and changes in the makeup of the family (including divorce and blended families) can trigger stress for teens. Not knowing how to cope with big changes is overwhelming and can be confusing for the developing teen.

What You Need To Know

If you think someone you care about may be suffering from high stress, anxiety, or any other mental health condition, contact a mental health professional in order to receive a proper diagnosis and support.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze the reasons why teenagers are stressed.

In observing the data, several elements were noted that instigated stress with teens. Survey data was used to address the research questions posed in this study.

To investigate these questions in great depth, the researchers posed the following questions:

- What are the demographics of students who participate?
- What does the data reveal about the correlation of stress to various groups of students?
- What does the data suggest about teen stress in correlation with school violence?

Participants

For this investigation, researchers gathered data from participants' input in surveys. The participants represented various ability and cognitive levels. The charts included below give a description of the participants, demographics, grade level, and areas where stress was indicated.

Located in a middle class district, High School A has 1809 students and about 99 teachers. Recently, there have been a few shifts in administration, but only a small percentage of teacher turnover. In 2017-2018, High School A had a principal for over twenty years. Since her removal from office, a male principal has taken her place. This is his first year as a principal.

Approximately forty eight percent of the study body participates in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF, homeless, foster or migrant. This has increased since last year (46.9%) Percent of students have disabilities while only 21.1 percent are gifted and talented. 1.7% percent are retained. There is an annual dropout rate of 1.8% and a drop out recovery of 9.4%.

Over half of the faculty has advanced degrees (63.6%) and 83.8% are on continuing contracts. Several teachers are retirees. Students have a 92.9% attendance rate, and teachers have a 95.8% attendance rate. Even though High School A serves a diverse community, the district has many resources compared to surrounding districts which are more rural and the population is very poor.

Within this study, the authors focused primarily on the classes of one teacher. The teacher has three Academic Enrichment classes. Specifically, this instructor is a National Board Certified Teacher with a doctorate and many years of experience.

In the chart below, it shows students' attendance, discipline referrals, report scores and description of the types of teachers.

Opportunities

	Our School	Change from Last Year	High Schools with students like ours
Principal's years at school	14.0	Up from 13.0	3.0
Student teacher ratio in core subjects	31.5 to 1	Up from 30.3 to 1	28.5 to 1
Prime instructional time	87.7	Down from 93.6%	88.6
Opportunities in the arts	Excellent	Up from Good	Excellent
Opportunities in foreign languages	Excellent	N/A	Poor
Dual enrollment courses offered	4.0	N/A	12.0
Are online or blended courses offered?	N/A	N/C	N/A
AdvancEd (SACS) accreditation	Yes	No change	Yes
Parents attending conferences	97.5	Up from 92.3%	99.2
Character development program	Excellent	No change	Good
Average age of books/electronic media in the school library	14.0	N/A	13.3
Number of resources available per student in the school library media center	8.8	N/A	19.8
Bandwidth capacity per student	>100 Mbps	N/C	N/A
District issued technology devices per teacher	1.3	N/C	1.7
Percent of classrooms with wireless access	51-75%	N/C	N/A
District issued learning devices per student	0.3	N/C	1.2
Dollars spent per pupil	\$6,588	Up 2%	\$7435
Percent of expenditures for instruction	65.3	Up from 64.9%	60.1
Percent of expenditures for teachers' salaries	66.6	Up from 65.8%	61.9

High School Students

Students = (n=1809)	Our School	Change from last year	High Schools with students like ours
Percentage of students served by gifted and talented programs	21.1	Up from 16.7%	25%
Enrollment in career/technology courses	1690 or 93%	Up from 996	1519
Number of students in dual enrollment courses	80	N/A	71
Success rate of students in dual enrollment courses	96.0	N/A	71
Attendance Rate	92.9	Down from 98.5%	94.6%
Annual dropout rate	1.8	Down from 2.3%	1.8
	Our School	Change from Last Year	
Percent of students served by gifted and talented program	30.0	N/A	
Percent of students retained	1.6	Down from 2.6	
Chronic Absenteeism Rate	23.3	N/A	
Percent of classrooms with wireless access	100	Change from 91-100%	
Percent of students served by 1:1 Learning	10	N/A	

Results of Teacher, Student and Parent Opinion Surveys 2018

	Teachers	Students	Parents
Number of surveys returned	88	255	30
Percent satisfied with learning environment	56.80%	35.70%	66.60%
Percent satisfied with social and physical environment	38.60%	37.30%	31%
Percent satisfied with school home relations	58%	71.10%	51.70%

Evaluations by Teachers, Students, and Parents

	Teachers	Students*	Parents*
Number of surveys returned	71	317	68
Percent satisfied with learning environment	74.7	70	67.7
Percent satisfied with social and physical environment	58.3	61	64.7
Percent satisfied with school-home relations	65.2	82.3	59.7

High School A Teachers

	Our School	Change from Last Year	High Schools with students like ours
Percentage of teachers With advanced degrees	63.6	Up from 55.2%	64.2
Percentage of teachers on continuing contract	83.8	Up from 83.3%	81.0
Teachers returning from previous year	92.2	Up from 90.5%	88.0
Teacher attendance rate	95.8	No change	95.4
Average teacher salary	\$49,313	Up 1.0%	49,480
Professional development days/teachers	9.8 days	Up from 7.4 days	11.7 days
Percentage of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers	0.5	Down from 2.3%	1.2
Percentage of teacher Vacancies for more than 9 weeks	0.0	N/A	0.4

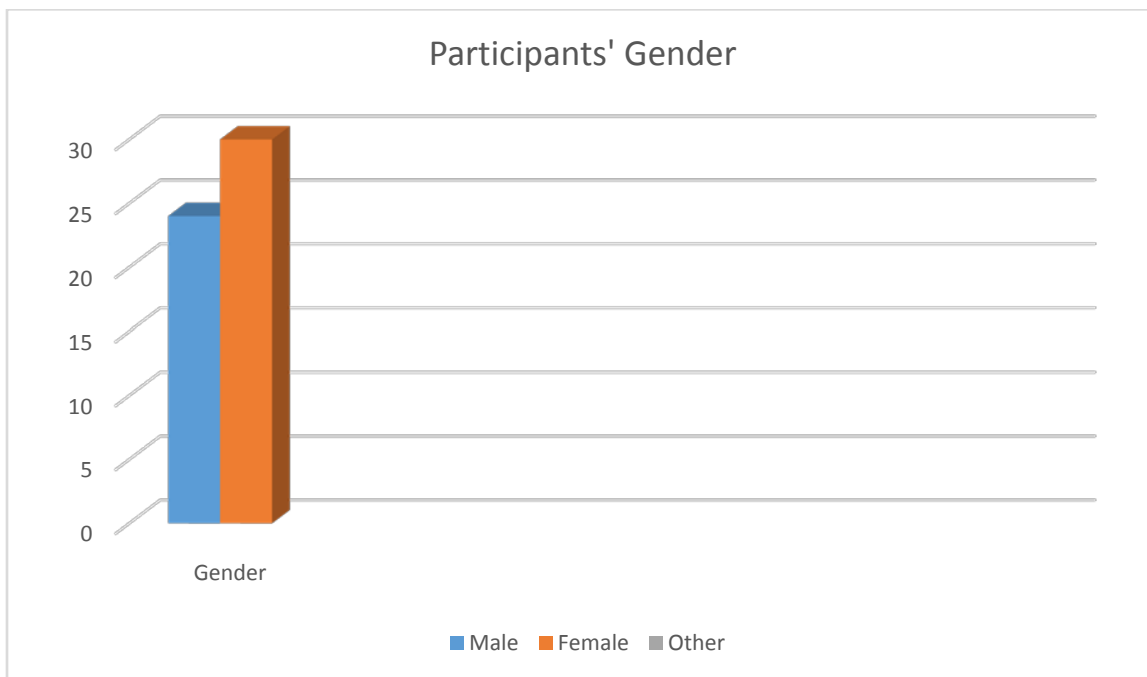
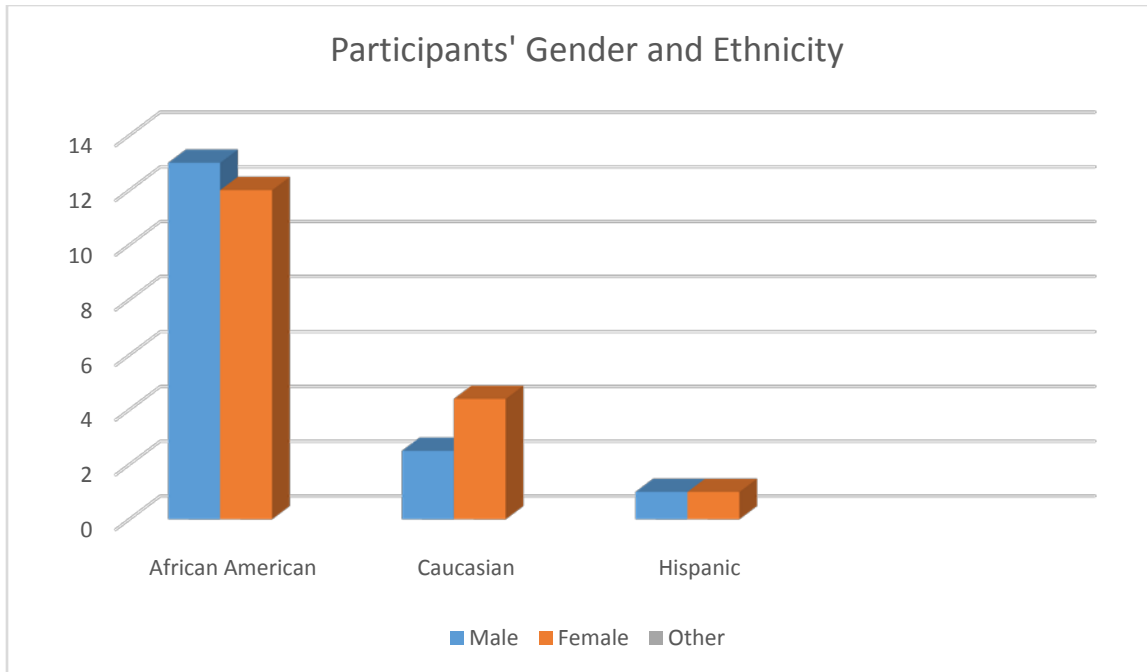
State Ratings History of the School

2014	Good	At-risk
2013	Good	At-risk
2012	Excellent	Good

DATA PREPARATION AND ANALYSIS

Of the total number respondents, thirty are female and twenty-four are male. For thirty five students, the gender is unknown. The students are a combination of African American, Caucasian and Latino. There is a total of twenty-six African Americans; twenty-seven are classified Caucasian, and two Hispanic. Most are ninth graders and occasionally, there is an upper classman in the group. Students' ages range from

fourteen to fifteen years old. The school in which these students are enrolled is metropolitan. However, it is a small southern city in comparison to other cities such as Charlotte, NC, Charleston, SC, and Columbia, SC. Within this particular school, there are four Academic Enrichment teachers in which each teacher has three classes. This is a total of twelve Academic Enrichment classes. However, please note that this study only focuses on the students of one Academic Enrichment teacher.

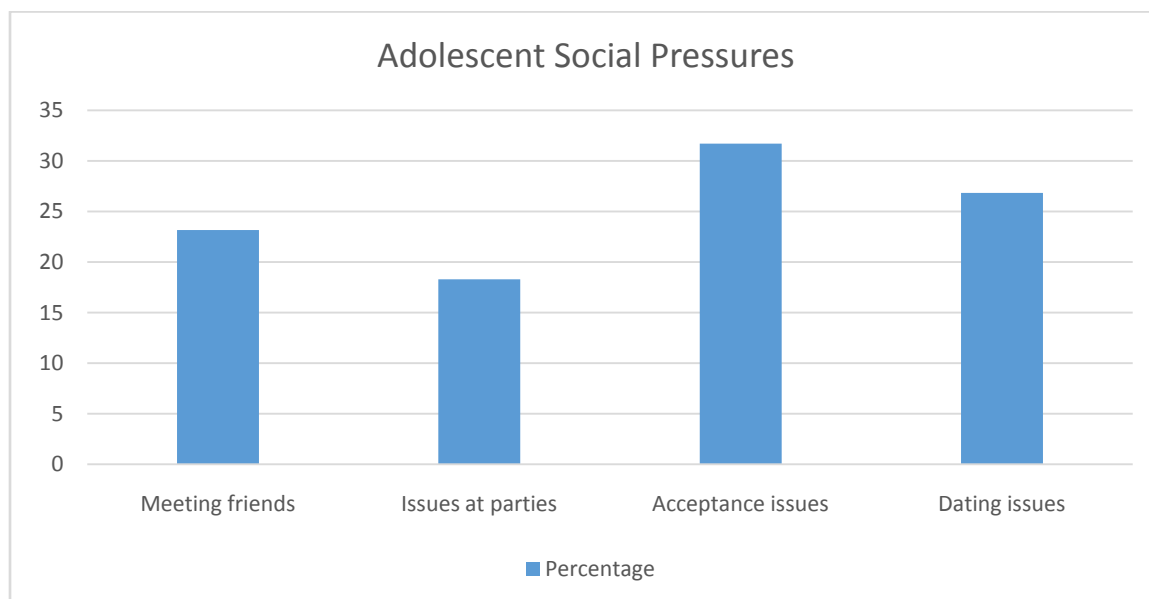


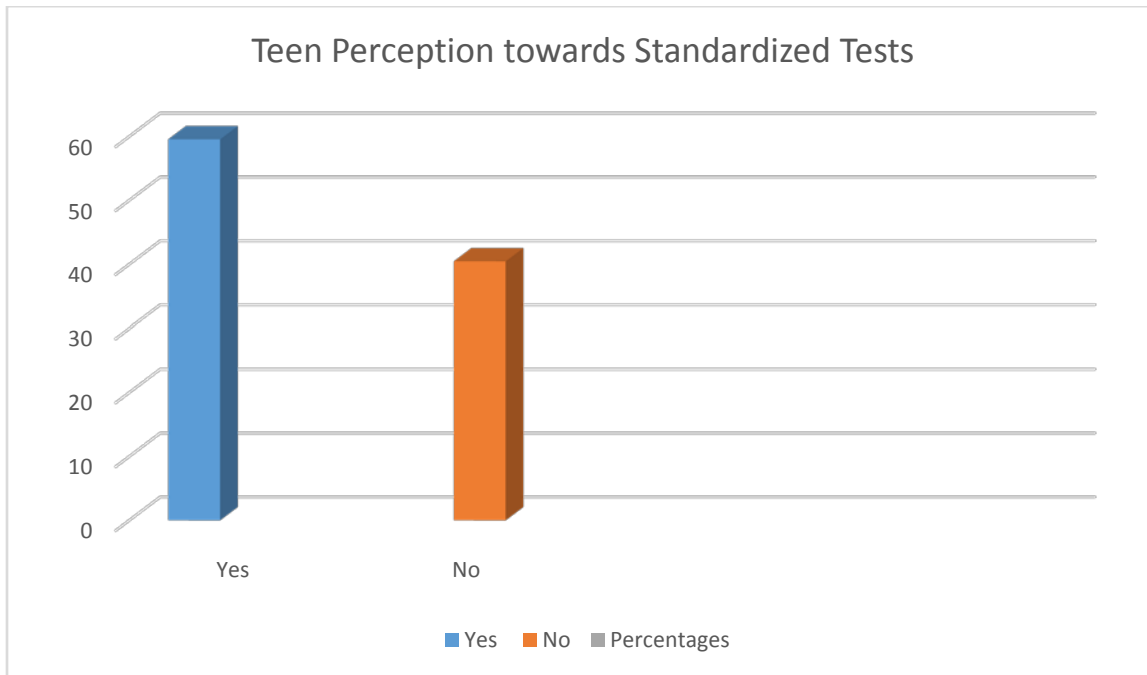
Consider these potential sources of stress for teens:

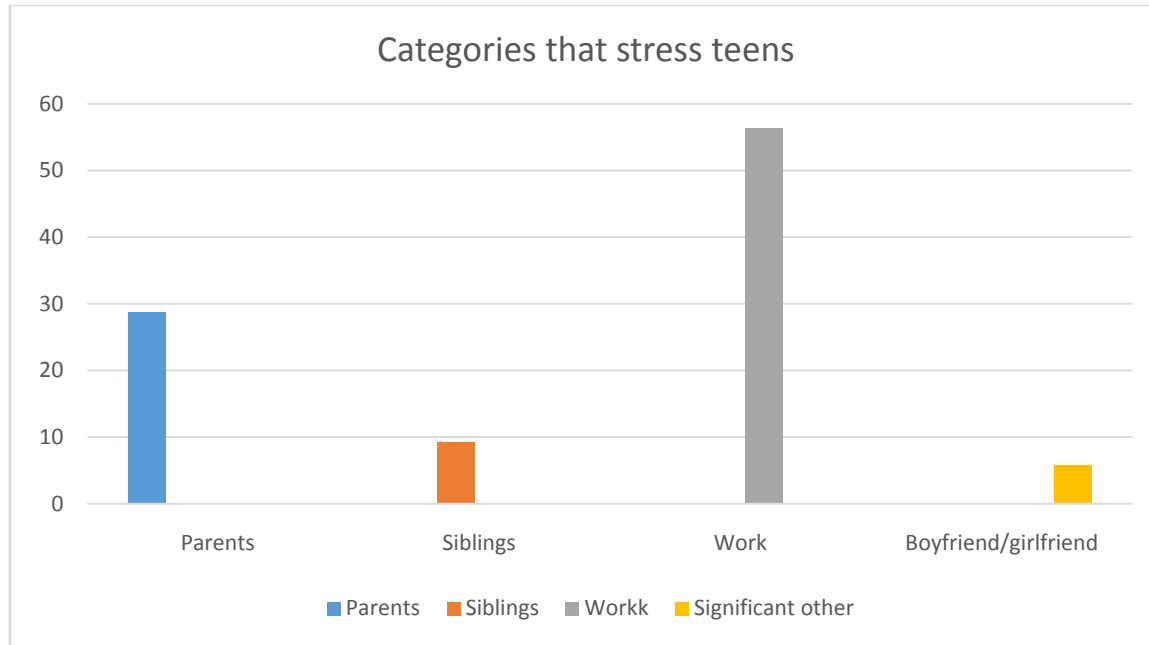
Social Stress: During adolescence, students not only go through emotional but social changes as well. Peer pressure impacts teens in either a negative or positive way. Bullying and subtle instances of relational aggression are clear indicators of stress on teens. They must also learn to manage conflict and work through romantic relationships, and this is not easy for a developing teen. Oftentimes, teens engage in behavior outside of their comfort zones in order to appease their colleagues and peers. It is imperative that teens find and keep their “tribes.” However, it is almost impossible and highly stressful at times. The highest percentage for social pressures among teens were acceptance issues at 31.71%. 26.83% struggled with dating issues. On the other hand, 23.17% found meeting friends was a challenge while issues at parties was 18.29%.

Academic stress: Teens experience high levels of school related stress from grades to test scores to applying to college. Many worry about the many academic demands in addition to pleasing their teachers and parents while keeping up with other social aspects of their lives. Poor time management skills or feeling overwhelmed by the demands of school can play into academic stress as well. In the survey, 59.55% indicated that standardized tests made them anxious. Only 40.45% stated that they were not overwhelmed by taking standardized tests such as the SAT, state mandated end of course or end of the year assessments or the ACT. 67.82% are afraid of failure in regards to many factors, but most certainly, academic issues.

Other sources of stress include world events, traumatic events family discord, and significant life changes.







FINDINGS

Based on all the data, the results suggest that the majority of students do not ask for help when they are stressed. Only 43.68% ask for help when experiencing stress while 56.32% do not ask for help. Third parties outside of family members used as student confidantes was very low. 6.98% asked a counselor for help while 15.12% asked a friend. 16.28% asked another person other than family. More students asked their mothers for advice as compared to their fathers. 52.33% confided in their mothers; 9.30% sought help from their fathers.

Most students have decided about their future plans. 82.02% of students plan to matriculate into college. 4.49% have other career options, and 1.12% chose vocational training. 12.36% either do not know (1.12%) and others are still trying to figure it out.

CONCLUSION

Implications and recommendations

The implementation of programs and strategies to assist students in conquering their fear of failure would be beneficial. 67.82% are afraid of failure; only 32.18% do not fear failure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the acts of violence nationwide, it is imperative that the educational community address issues relating to teen stress that can lead to devastating or tragic occurrences. For example, in Walterboro, SC RaNiya Wright, was killed after a fight in school. Bullies allegedly banged her head against a wall and the floor.

In 2018, there were 82 school shooting incidents in the United States, the highest there have ever been since 1970. Since 1970, there have been 1, 300 school shooting incidents. 2018 had the greatest

number of incidents. The next highest year was 2006 with 59 incidents. California, Texas, and Florida are the top three states in the United States with the most incidents. 669 incidents occurred outside on school property; 588 occurred inside the school building. There are more male shooters than female shooters. 1,129 incidents the shooter was male, and 57 incidents the shooter was a female.

LIMITATIONS

In this study, it would have been beneficial to compare the results with the other academic enrichment classes across the district and the state.

REFERENCES

School Safety. (October, 2018) *The K-12 School Shooting Statistics Everyone Should Know*.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questions

1. Are you stressed?
2. If you are stressed, do you ask for help?
3. If you are stressed, who do you ask for help?
4. Are you afraid of failure?
5. Do you have social pressures?
6. What are your plans after high school?
7. Are you anxious to take standardized tests?
8. What stresses you the most?
9. What do you enjoy the most?
10. Do you exercise?

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