



# StudyTime Student Experience Survey

## - Summary

### **Purposes of this Survey**

- To better understand what it is like to be a secondary school student in 2017, and the key issues that students are facing.
- To give students a voice on their education.
- To understand students' views on how to improve the education system.
- Provide insight into the types of solutions and resources that could assist high school students with their learning experiences.

### **How we collected our data**

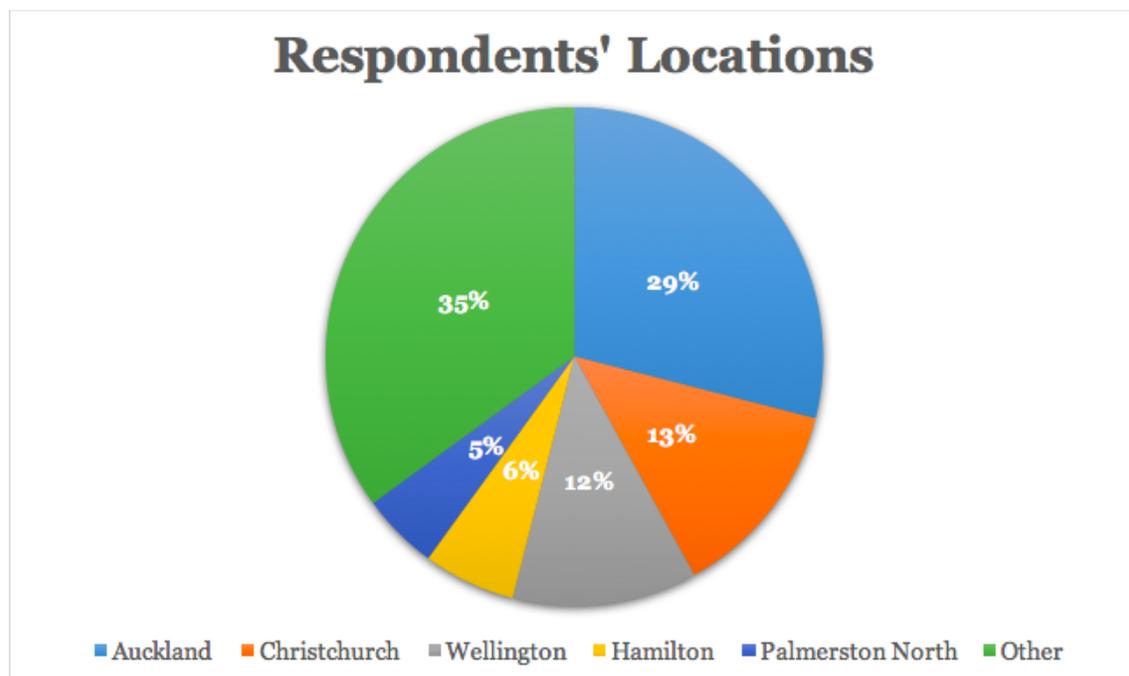
We collected data using The *StudyTime Student Experience Survey*, consisting of twenty-three items that were advertised and completed through Facebook advertisements. Facebook advertisements were only targeted by age (15-18 year olds). No further targeting was undertaken, so we could have a broad sample.

Participation was voluntary, and secondary school students were offered an incentive for their participation – each student that completed the survey went in the draw to win 1 of 5 gift vouchers of their choice.

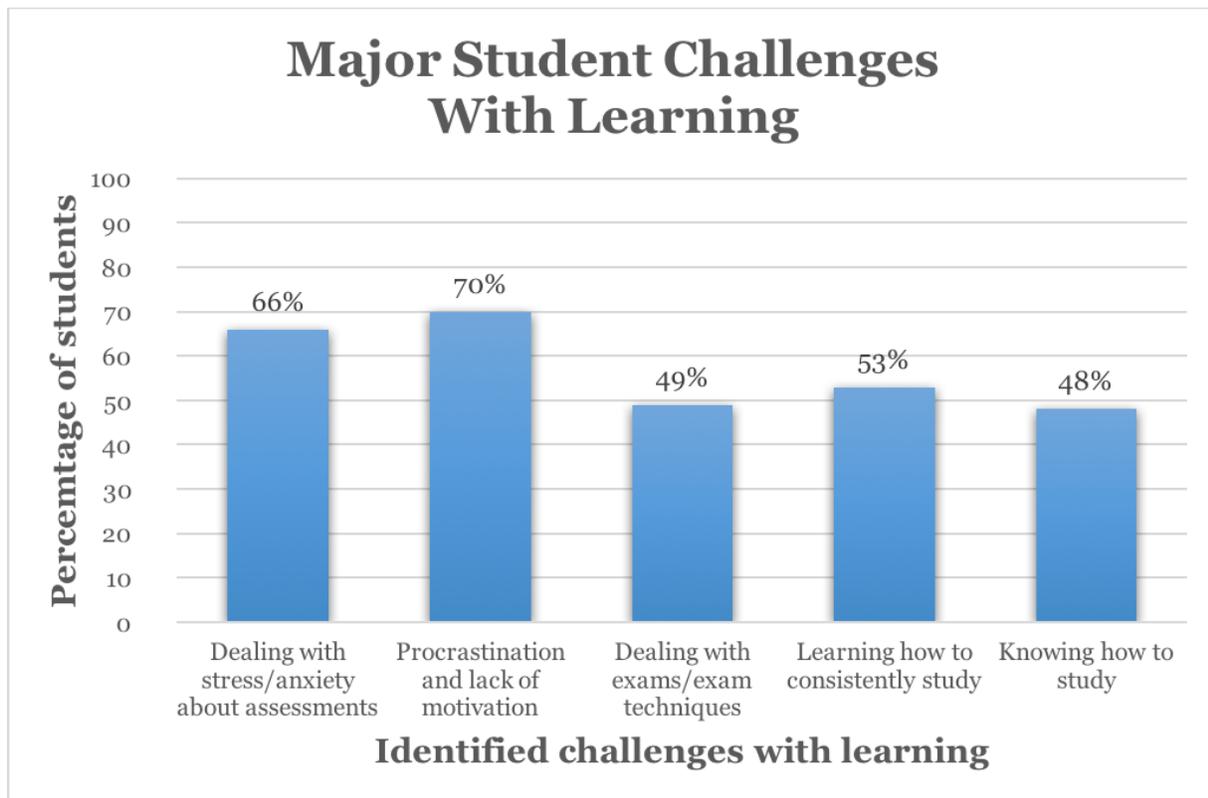
The survey took place between August and the beginning of October, 2017; most responses were in August and September.

## What demographics did the respondents have?

- Participants in this survey consisted of NCEA students (n = 5176) from throughout New Zealand. The sample had the following demographics:
  - 78% of participants were female, 20% were male, and 2% fell into the 'other' category
  - The majority of the sample came from Auckland (29%), Christchurch (13%), Wellington (12%), Hamilton (6%) and Palmerston North (5%). This is displayed in the pie chart below.
  - There were a range of students in NCEA levels 1 (27%), NCEA level 2 (36%) and NCEA level 3 (34%).
  - We also asked students whether they suffered from a disability or a mental health issue. From the sample, 11% of students reported suffering from anxiety and 8% reported suffering from depression.



## What are some of the major challenges to students' learning?



The above graph displays the five most common responses from high school students when asked “*what do you find challenging about learning (pick as many you’d like)*”.

Of the 5761 students who participated, 3631 (70%) selected ‘procrastination and lack of motivation’, followed by ‘stress/anxiety about assessments’ (66%), and ‘learning how to consistently study’ (53%). A little under half of all students selected ‘dealing with exams/exam technique’ (49%) and ‘knowing how to study’ (48%) as challenges encountered with learning.

#### **What are some the *top* challenges to students’ learning?**

Students were then asked to select what they found to be the **most** challenging aspect learning.

Nearly a quarter of students (24%) reported ‘*procrastination and lack of motivation*’ to be their most challenging aspect of learning, while just over one fifth (21%) identified ‘*dealing with stress and anxiety about assessments*’ as their biggest challenge. Students also reported

*'knowing how to study'* as their most challenging aspect of learning (8%) followed by *'dealing with exams/exam techniques'* (5%), and *'learning how to consistently study'* (5%).

### **How do students' feel about exams?**

In another question, students were asked to report *"How anxious do exams make you feel?"* on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all anxious) to 5 (extremely anxious). Over one third (34%) of students reported that *'exams made them feel extremely anxious'* (5) with the majority (88%) selecting a rating of 3 or above. Of the sample group of 5761 students, only 149 (3%) reported that exams *'did not make them feel anxious at all'* (1).

This survey was not conducted during the high school exam period, so is particularly striking as there was an extended time before exams were to begin.

The data, combined with the data about main challenges students face, suggests that: (a) the assessment of high school students is anxiety and stress provoking; (b) students display maladaptive study habits, such as procrastination. Which is likely to influence their stress and anxiety; and (c) that students feel as though they don't know how to study effectively.

It appears that there is a need for resources, advice, and interventions that mitigate these *challenges* through providing high school students with appropriate study skills and techniques, and information about dealing with the pressures of high school, and the mental health issues they might be experiencing.

Students aren't getting the strategies that are needed to have resilience when things are going wrong, or are uncertain about their future.

### **Student Perceptions of the Current Education System**

The following quotes were drawn from students' responses to the question – *"If you could change one thing about the education system, what would it be?"*

*“...I want to go to university, **I can't think of one person at my school who I can talk to about university, i will be looking at a \$100,000 student loan after high school, who can I go see for support or even to ask about scholarships?** Our schooling system gives us the right resources to succeed but without a structure it's all pointless, were left on our own, these organisations don't work together like a schooling system should.”*

*“There should be more systems in place for those studying with mental or physical health issues, and for those who don't learn in a traditional way. **I think it is absurd to make a child or teen who works well and excels in one or a certain area be pushed through very standardised testing and told they are stupid** instead of being taught the thing they excel at properly and receiving grades or credits for that instead.”*

*“We're told we come to school to learn but actually we come to school to get NCEA credits. It's not the same thing. We should be at school because learning is good for us, it should be interesting and fun and it should force us to broaden our minds- not destroy independent thought and creativity...that's not what learning is. **Exams should be a cool opportunity to see what we know and what we don't, not a measurement of how smart or dumb we are.**”*

*“Tests put unnecessary stress on students because there is only one chance to prove yourself on that topic that may not be formatted in a way that accurately represents what the student knows. All the information learned for these tests are forgotten straight after anyways because all students are working towards are grades rather than knowledge. **We need a new way to measure the growth of students that takes place over time using various mediums.**”*

*“I think that it is difficult and extremely draining having every single piece of work you do be worth credits. I think NCEA needs to have a mixture of non-assessed work, and fewer assessments. We do more assessments than necessary, getting far more credits than necessary. **This doesn't make us feel reassured, it just means we have to get top results in more assessments, ending in more stress.** Schools need to communicate more with the annual calendar of assessments. It is unfair for students to be expected to finish portfolios, assessments and study for derived grade week. There are big crush weeks of assessment that I believe need to be changed so that the assessments are spread throughout the year. “*

*“The exam system itself is not at all, in my opinion, an accurate measure of someone's intelligence or understanding of the topic. **In the exam environment, you are essentially marked on; 1. your ability to retain information and remember it quickly (memory) 2. your calmness in the test (very smart people often don't show their average internal results in exams because it's difficult to focus in such a stressful environment) and little else.** This I feel hinders a lot of*

*good students or discourages them from trying at all, as if it won't work regardless of what they try or if the pressure is too much. If I could change one thing I would replace the exam system with something else, or alter it to avoid these factors.”*

*“Training for kids on how to **maintain their sanity in the face of constant assessments, homework and testing.**”*

*“...for the love of everything pure in this world, **TALK AND TEACH PEOPLE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH. It is imperative that people can go day to day without wanting to die.** I'm going off on tangents, but the educational system is flawed, and is a long way away from being perfect, but eventually we'll get there. This survey is a good start.”*

*“The fact that there also **isn't an awful lot of help offered to students who suffer from mental illness within the education to help them through these difficult times in relation to their study and helping them deal with the stress and pressure of exams is almost appalling.**”*

*“I would also like to say that I know we are very lucky here in NZ to have a good education system however **we still have the extremely high domestic violence, obesity and suicide rates which I think is horrific and I believe that our school system is very closely related to these issues.**”*

*“**Rather than just not necessarily giving up on students who are average/below average but lowering their opportunities due to their capabilities they've shown throughout a school year, have teachers or people to talk to them and ask what they really want in life...**I see some people at my school who have a lot of potential but don't shine because they're not getting the top grades.”*

*“Everyone just has different strengths. And it's up to the education system to be give everyone the opportunity to showcase that.”*

The above quotes provide examples of common themes that were evident from the students' responses – the pressures of exams, assessments and the high workload, and the need for resources to help students to cope with such pressures.

## **How well is high school is preparing students for exams, self-directed learning and the future?**

Students were asked to report “*how well do you think your education is preparing you for the future world*” on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) – 5 (extremely well). Only 4% of students reported that they thought their education was preparing them for their future ‘extremely well’, with 68% of students responding between 1 – 3. Students were also asked to provide a reason for their response. The most common theme that emerged was that schools failed to teach students the ‘big picture’ and ‘life skills’ - like how to learn. This is reflected in students responses to the following question: “*If you had to learn a new skill tomorrow (e.g. a new language, instrument or programming language) from scratch, and you had no guidance apart from a book and some videos, how confident are you that you would be able to learn this skill to a good level within 1-2 months?*”. Students were asked to respond on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all confident) - 5 (extremely confident). The results display that 68% of students gave a rating of 3 or lower, with only 6% of students feeling ‘extremely confident’. This data suggests that high school students feel as though their education is not equipping them with the skills to learn independently.

Furthermore, students were also asked to estimate *how prepared they felt for their exams based on what they had learnt in the classroom*. Students were asked to respond on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all prepared) – 5 (extremely prepared).

The results suggests that students generally felt underprepared for exams, with 67% of students giving a rating of 3 or lower, and only 2% of students feeling extremely prepared (5).

- This data illustrates that students:
  - (a) feel that there is a lot of emphasis and pressure placed on exams and assessment, and that their learning in the classroom fails to adequately prepare them for these exams. This is likely to influence the student’s stress and anxiety around assessments.
  - (b) that the students in this survey view the education system in its current form as providing little benefit for their future, which may explain student’s reporting

of procrastination and lack of motivation as a leading challenge they face with their learning.

(c) that students feel that they need more education and resources around learning strategies, self-care, well-being and mental health.

### **Overall, what are the key findings?**

This survey provides us with insight into high school student's views and perceptions of the current education system in New Zealand, and some of the challenges that these students are facing.

The data we collected from this survey suggest that the learning experience for high school students in New Zealand is stressful and may be anxiety-inducing for the students, particularly around times of assessment or examination. Particularly, this survey suggests that students feel that what they learn in the classroom doesn't equip them for their exams, and that they feel ill-equipped with the skills and resources required to study effectively and prepare for their exams independently. In turn, a large majority of students feel anxious about assessments and exams.

Further, the data implies that students feel that their high school education is doing little to prepare them for their futures. Specifically, students feel that their learning experience fails to teach them 'learning skills' and 'life-skills' that will be necessary when they complete their secondary school education. Perhaps this partly explains students lack of motivation to engage in their learning, and procrastination.

This survey provided students with the opportunity to voice their opinions on New Zealand's education system. These findings suggest that the current state of implementation of education in New Zealand may not be serving the students well, and creates great levels of stress and anxiety.

