

Attitudes to School Life: Their influences and their effects on achievement and leaving school

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates students' attitudes to school life. Such attitudes may have implications for students' achievement and other educational outcomes as well as being a measure of educational outcomes in their own right. The study uses data from the first two waves of the 1995 year 9 cohort in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) project. This study examines three aspects of students' attitudes to school life: possible changes over time, the influence of individual and school-level variables on attitudes; and the effect of these attitudes on achievement and leaving school. The four dimensions of attitudes to school isolated here are students' general satisfaction with school, their attitudes to their teachers, their views on the opportunities their school provides, and their sense of achievement.

The main findings on the four dimensions of Attitudes to School Life are as follows:

- There appears to have been a decline between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s in year 9 students' general satisfaction with school and a smaller decline with their attitude to teachers;
- Only a small to moderate proportion of the variation in attitudes to school life is due to between school differences. Students' attitudes to their teachers display the largest between school differences;
- Students whose parents have more education are generally happier with school;
- Female students show higher levels of general satisfaction with school life, are more positive about their teachers and are more satisfied with their achievement at school;
- Students from non-English speaking backgrounds show higher levels of satisfaction with school on all four dimensions;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students show no difference compared to other students on the General Satisfaction, Teacher and Opportunity scales but are less satisfied with their achievement at school;
- Students from Catholic and Independent schools have higher levels of general satisfaction and are substantially more satisfied with their teachers.;
- The main findings from the analyses on the consequences of attitudes to school life on self perceived achievement in year 10 and leaving school are:
- Both the General Satisfaction and Sense of Achievement scales positively influence self-perceived (year 10) achievement;
- Of the four dimensions of Attitudes to School Life, only the Sense of Achievement dimension influences students leaving school during year 10.