



ADOLESCENCE: 6 FACTS TO KNOW



Adolescents often get a bad rap, with many adults complaining that they are lazy, surly, and disrespectful. But a new report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine presents teens, tweens and young adults in a different light. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*, identifies the period from age 10 to 25 as a unique opportunity to make progress and to recover from past adversity. The study addresses multiple aspects of adolescent life, including the legal system as well as education and health. Clocking in at nearly 500 pages, the report is a consensus-based study produced by top experts with deep knowledge of this period of life.

The report focuses on eliminating or reducing inequities, culminating in more than 20 different recommendations for schools, health, child welfare, and the justice system. Contained within its pages are hundreds of facts and research findings about multiple aspects of adolescent life. This newsletter highlights six of these facts, pairing them with relevant National Education Policy Center resources.

1. **FACT:** Adolescence is a time when optimal development is stimulated through exploration, making and learning from mistakes, and trying on identities.

NEPC RESOURCE: A [study](#) co-authored by UCLA professor John Rogers found that when urban high school students took on identities as “critical researchers” examining their communities’ struggle for educational justice, they developed and used high-level academic skills in language arts, social studies, and math. The study appears in a [special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist*](#), edited by University of Colorado professor Ben Kirshner.

2. **FACT:** Secondary schools that combined academic and technical curricula increased annual earnings by 11 percent overall and by 17 percent for men, according to a [randomized controlled study of career academies](#).

NEPC RESOURCE: Although rigorous, academic career academies can generate positive results, a concern is that they might devolve into old-fashioned vocational education, which has often devolved into a warehousing of students from low-income families, students of color, and students with disabilities. An [NEPC legislative brief](#), entitled *Linking Learning to the 21st Century: Preparing All Students for College, Career, and Civic Participation*, offers a model for the combining of academic and technical curricula. It provides statutory language designed to increase the odds that all students will attend secondary schools that prepare them for college, civic life, and careers.

3. **FACT:** Marketers, retailers, and credit card companies increasingly target youth as they reach adolescence, in an effort to harness their \$211 billion-plus in spending power.

NEPC RESOURCE: In their book, *Sold Out: How Marketing in School Threatens Children's Well-Being and Undermines their Education*, Alex Molnar and Faith Boninger, co-directors of NEPC's Commercialism in Education Research Unit, provide an in-depth look at the ways in which corporate marketers target children and adolescents in home and at school.

4. **FACT:** The Harlem Children's Zone, which employs wraparound services such as health care, laundry, and summer learning, [has led](#) to not only short-term boosts to test scores, but to long-term benefits such as increased rates of college attendance and decreased rates of teen pregnancy and incarceration.

NEPC RESOURCE: The Children's Zone adopts many practices of community schools, a longstanding model that focuses not just on academics but on students' physical and emotional needs. Learn more about the approach from this [NEPC/Learning Policy Institute report](#).

5. **FACT:** Despite the growing societal acceptance of people who identify as GLBTQ, there is evidence that things may be getting worse for GLBTQ youth. Mental health disparities, for instance, [appear to be widening](#). And [homophobic school bullying](#) may be getting worse.

NEPC RESOURCE: Interested in learning about how to make schools safer for GLBTQ students? Read *Safe at School: Addressing the School Environment and LGBT Safety through Policy and Legislation*, an NEPC legislative brief.

6. **FACT:** Parental involvement is even [more strongly associated](#) with academic outcomes in secondary school than in elementary school, and the implications are longer lasting.

NEPC RESOURCE: An NEPC policy memo, *Recasting Families and Communities as Co-Designers of Education in Tumultuous Times*, offers recommendations for meaningfully engaging historically marginalized communities and families in education. An NEPC policy brief, *Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times*, by [Beatriz Arias](#) and [Milagros Morillo-Campbell](#), is also available in Spanish

*(Promoviendo la participación de los padres de estudiantes que aprenden inglés:
Desafíos en tiempos de conflicto).*

High School and/or Secondary School

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

The National Education Policy Center (NEPC), housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, produces and disseminates high-quality, peer-reviewed research to inform education policy discussions. Visit us at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu>