



The
State
of the
Kid

2013

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At *Highlights for Children*, we strive to nurture not only the minds of children, but also their hearts and spirits. One way we do this is through our widely read magazine, *Highlights*, which acknowledges kids' thoughts and feelings and creates a safe place for thoughtful dialogue. Five years ago, we developed another platform for kids to share their musings—our annual State of the Kid™ survey. Each year, we ask kids for their thoughts on specific topics, such as reading, bullying, family, gender roles, or the future. Their responses—sometimes funny, sometimes poignant, always honest—give us better understanding about what it's like to be a kid today. Obviously, the more insight we have and share, the better we can nurture. This year, we asked our readers to comment on ideas related to our country, patriotism, their safety, and values.

Yet another way we keep our finger on the pulse of kids is by corresponding with them individually. For decades, we have had a custom of reading every letter and e-mail kids send us—more than 30,000 annually. We personally respond to every one of these messages. Not only is this a way for us to serve and help our readers, but it's also a way for us to learn from them. Their letters and e-mails—and survey responses— never fail to inspire us and bring us fresh perspectives.

I hope you'll take time to read this year's report and enable yourself to better see the world through the eyes of children. You'll be glad you did.

Christine French Cully

Christine French Cully
Editor in Chief, *Highlights* magazine

Our Contributors



Dr. Marvin Berkowitz

Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz is the inaugural Sanford N. McDonnell Endowed Professor of Character Education, Co-Director of the Center for Character and Citizenship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and University of Missouri President's Thomas Jefferson Professor. Since 1999 he has directed the Leadership Academy in Character Education in St. Louis. Born in Queens, N.Y., in 1950, he earned his BA degree in psychology from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1972, and his Ph.D. in Life-span Developmental Psychology at Wayne State University in 1977. His scholarly focus and expertise is in character education and development. He is author of

You Can't Teach Through a Rat: And Other Epiphanies for Educators (2012) and *Parenting for Good* (2005), and more than 100 book chapters, monographs and journal articles. He is founding co-editor of the *Journal for Research in Character Education*.



Dr. Michele Borba

Michele Borba, Ed.D. is an internationally renowned educator, award-winning author, and parenting, child and bullying expert. Dr. Borba is an NBC contributor who has appeared more than 100 times on the TODAY show and has been featured on countless national media shows. She is the award-winning author of 22 books translated into 14 languages. Her latest book is *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries*. Dr. Borba is a former classroom and college teacher and has had a wide range of teaching experience, including working with children with learning, physical, behavioral and emotional disabilities. She received a Doctorate in Educational Psychology and Counseling from the University of San Francisco and earned a Life Teaching Credential from San Jose State University.



Niri Jaganath

Having been born in South Africa and having survived everything from poverty to riots, Nirasha Jaganath, known as Niri, shelved her desire for writing in a turbulent time to pursue a career in software engineering. After she became a mom, Ms. Jaganath traded in the engineering rat race and returned to her passion as a blogger at MommyNiri.com. She has coupled her work in blogging to further several charitable projects and events, such as putting an end to teacher-funded classrooms, supporting Rwanda Path2Peace and Heart 4 Haiti, building playgrounds with Kaboom, hosting events to support Autism, and working on the End Child

Hunger campaign. In December 2010, she launched a Mommy Niri Cares holiday drive to provide items to children born into poverty. That spawned a newly launched site, MommyNiriCares.com, which focuses on using social media for social good. Ms. Jaganath has worked as an ambassador with several brands including Fisher Price, Hallmark, National Geographic Kids, PBS Kids and Carnival Cruise Lines.



Julia King

Julia King is the 2013 DC Teacher of the Year. She joined DC Prep – the highest-performing network of public charter schools in Washington – in 2010. Currently, she is a founding faculty member at DC Prep's newest school, the Benning Middle Campus, where she is the Assistant Principal. Prior to this role, Ms. King was a 7th grade math teacher and grade level lead at DC Prep's Edgewood Middle Campus, the top public charter school citywide, as well as a 5th grade Math and Reading teacher at the campus. Ms. King began teaching as a 2008 Teach For America (TFA) corps member at West Gary Lighthouse Charter School in Gary, Ind. Ms. King is

the 2010 winner of the TFA Sue Lehmann Excellence in Teaching Award, an award that recognizes TFA corps members who have made a significant impact on student achievement. Ms. King holds a bachelor's degree from The George Washington University and a master's degree from Dominican University.

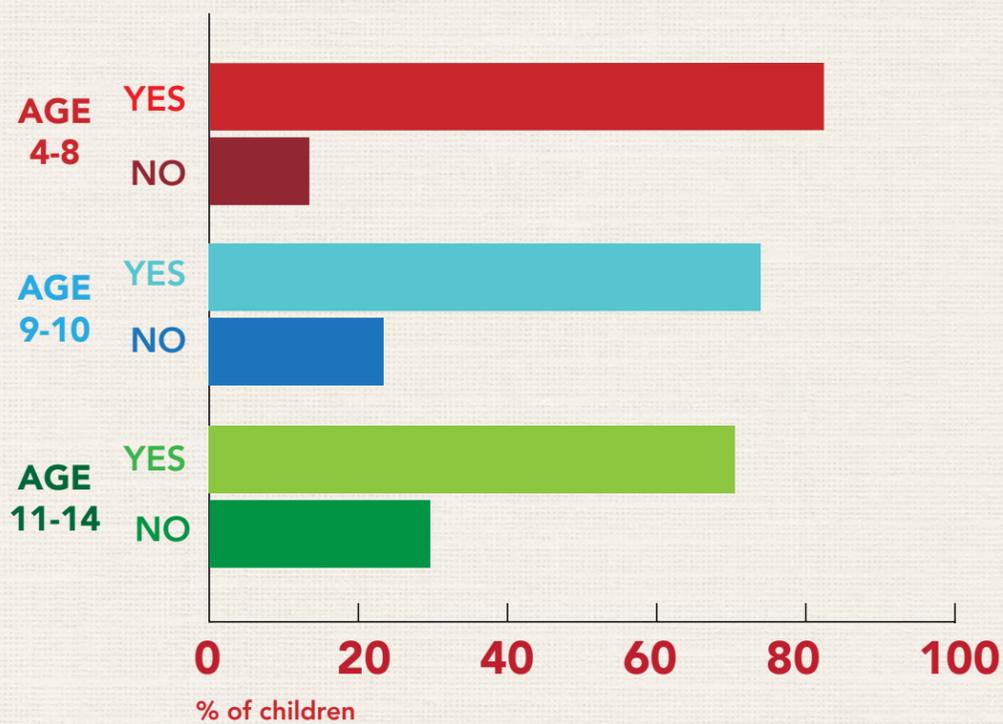
“Do you think the United States is the best country in the world? Why?”

At Highlights, we encourage children to think of themselves as citizens of a global world. At the same time, we think it's important that they respect their home country and appreciate the freedom it offers. According to a 2010 Gallup poll, patriotism among adults in the U.S. is on the rise, with one in three Americans describing themselves as "extremely patriotic." We wondered: Do children share this sense of patriotism?

When asked whether their home country is the best, the majority of kids responded with a resounding "Yes!" The survey showed that 77.9% of children believe the U.S. is the best of the best. In contrast, 22.1% of children

felt that the U.S. is not a perfect country or felt that it is not possible to select the "best" country. The data also reveals that boys were more likely than girls to state that the U.S. is the best country. Older kids, however, were less likely to affirm that the U.S. is the best.

As for their reasoning, most kids stated that "freedom" (21.3%) was the reason why the U.S. ranked above all other countries. More general responses which included key words like "awesome" and "great," ranked second (12.5%). Older children who did not feel that the U.S. is the best (18.1%) often referred to other countries in their responses, showing perhaps greater awareness to the world around them.



Because we are safe and laws help us stay safe. Also some countries dont let you be what ever you want but when I grow up Im going to be the president a artist a author a coast guard person a person who works at Target a song writer a singer and open up my own candy shop

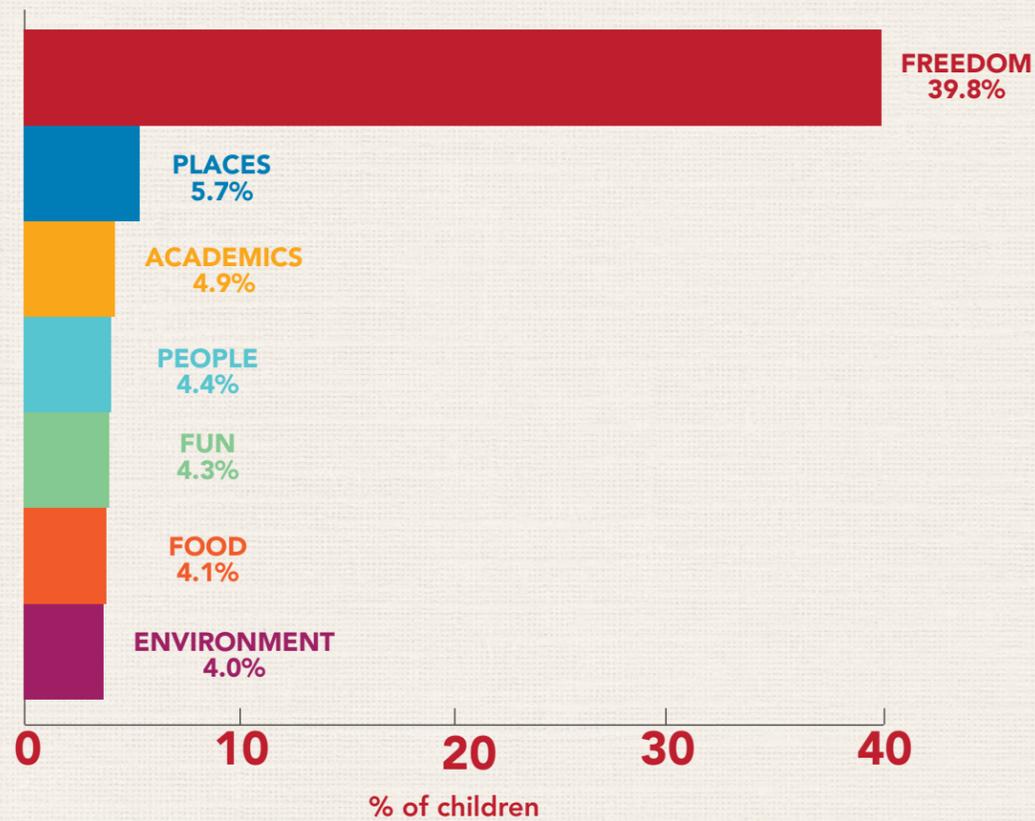
I can grow up to be anything I want!

Because there are so many other places in the world filled with so many different cultures you cant really say that the U.S. is the best country if you havent seen all the other countries in the world.

“What do you think is the best thing about living in the United States?”

The survey revealed that more kids felt “freedom” was the best thing about living in the U.S. (39.8%). Specifically, some kids mentioned “freedom of speech,” “freedom of religion,” “liberty” and “rights.” U.S. cities, states, and landmarks came in

second (5.7%). Food and education were frequently mentioned. Boys were more likely to reference food, whereas girls mostly commented on education. Younger children were less likely to mention freedom in their responses, but rather commented on family.



“It is intriguing that even very young children overwhelmingly value freedom more than anything else in their esteem for the U.S. Freedom is both abstract and foundational to our way of being, so it is heartening to see this recognized by American children as important to them, more so than more concrete and personal benefits.”

—Dr. Marvin Berkowitz

*TOP SEVEN RESPONSE CATEGORIES REPRESENTED



Have mac and cheese and
cool animals and trains
I like how we have freedom
and get so many amazing
opportunities. I also think that
our history isn't boring in
any way. It's actually really
cool how we earned our freedom.
I like how friendly people are.



I would live in Greece.
Or maybe France. Or England. Or
Scotland! I can't decide, but I really
want to go to Scotland.

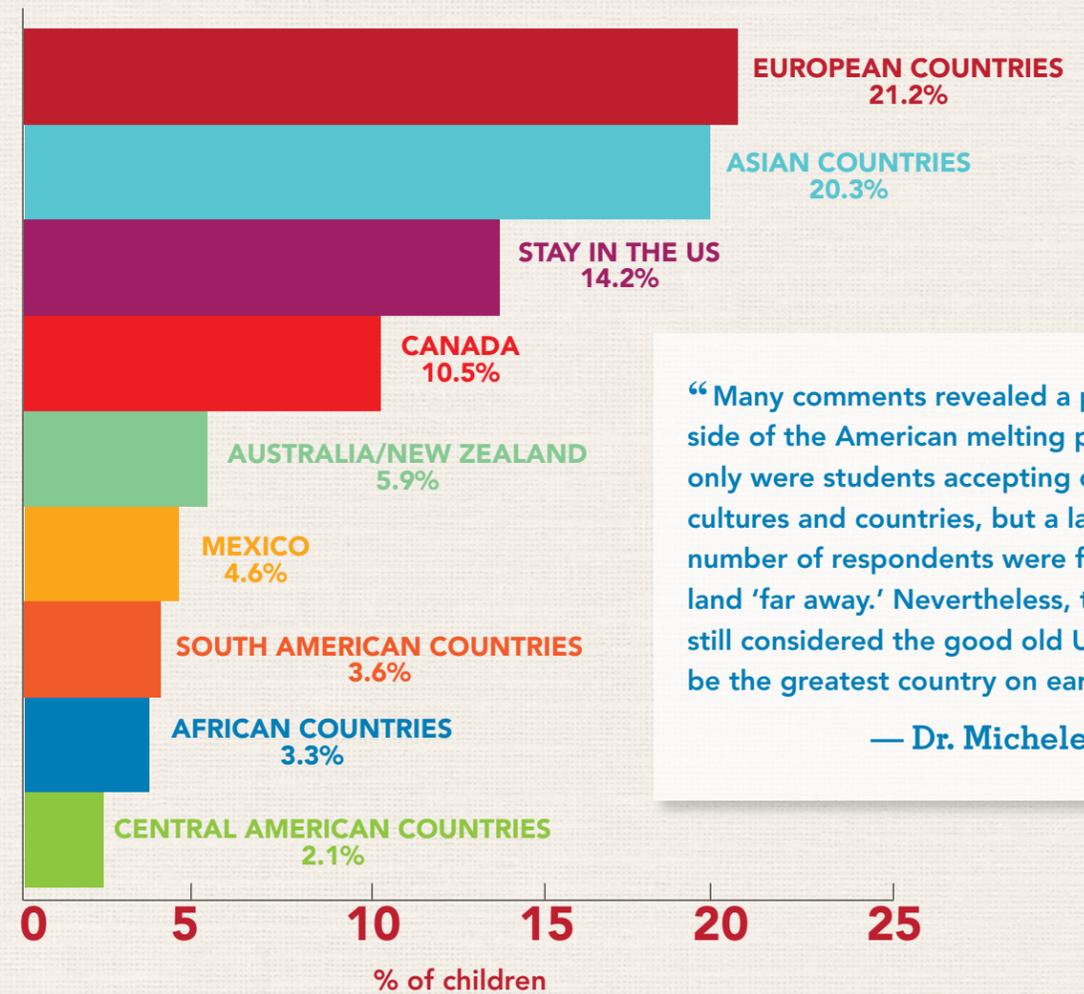
Canada because they also speak
English and have many of the
rights we have.

Umm, well it would be the United
Kingdom, of course. I could sit
there all day and listen to their accents.

“If you could live in a country other than the United States, which country would it be?”

Our survey respondents seemed to indicate a preference for staying close to home. Canada was the most-commonly cited country to live in (10.5%); however, 14.2% indicated they would not want to live anywhere but the U.S. Europe was the most popular continent

(21.2%), with the United Kingdom (9.6%) and France (8.2%) leading the pack. Asia (20.3%) was the second most-frequently mentioned continent, including specific references to China (5.9%) and Japan (4%). Girls were more likely to mention a European country, whereas boys preferred Asian countries.



“Many comments revealed a positive side of the American melting pot. Not only were students accepting of other cultures and countries, but a large number of respondents were from a land ‘far away.’ Nevertheless, they still considered the good old USA to be the greatest country on earth.”

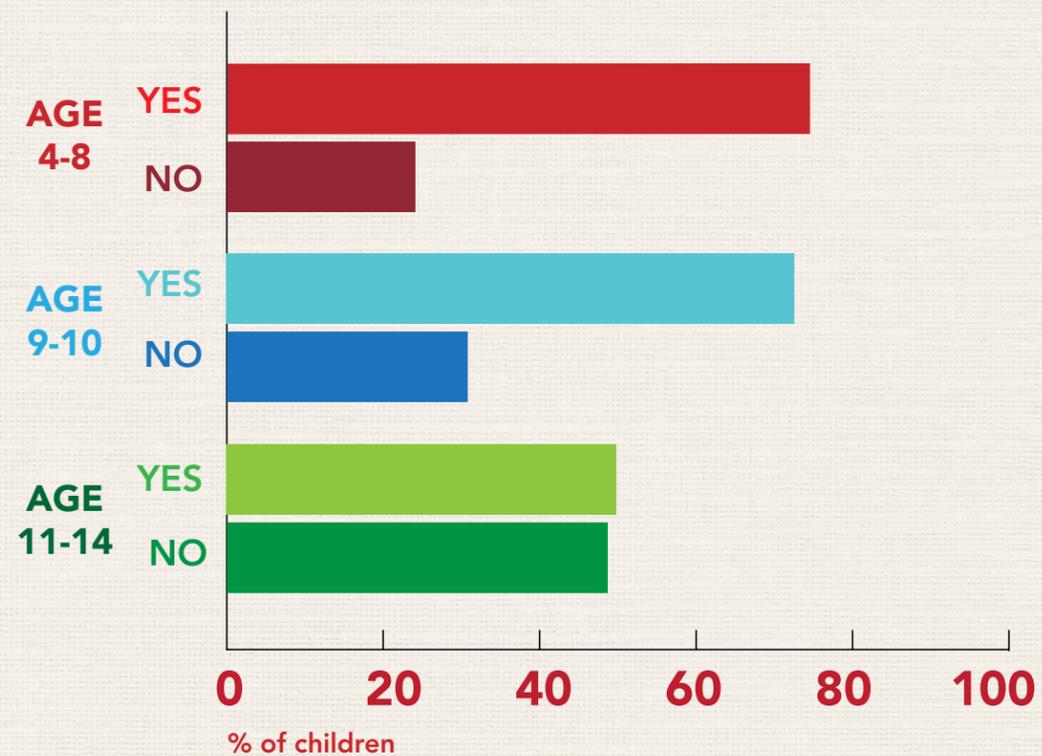
— Dr. Michele Borba

*TOP NINE RESPONSE CATEGORIES REPRESENTED

“Do you think it is safer to be a kid today than when your parents were growing up?”

Perhaps more than ever before, the issue of safety has become part of our national dialogue, in particular among parents, teachers and politicians. So we wanted to know how much of the conversation—and the concern—was being absorbed by our children. According to

our survey, a significant overall portion of children (68%) felt that it is safer to be a kid today than when their parents were growing up. Older children (11-14), however, were less likely to agree with that statement (51%). There was no large difference between genders on this question.



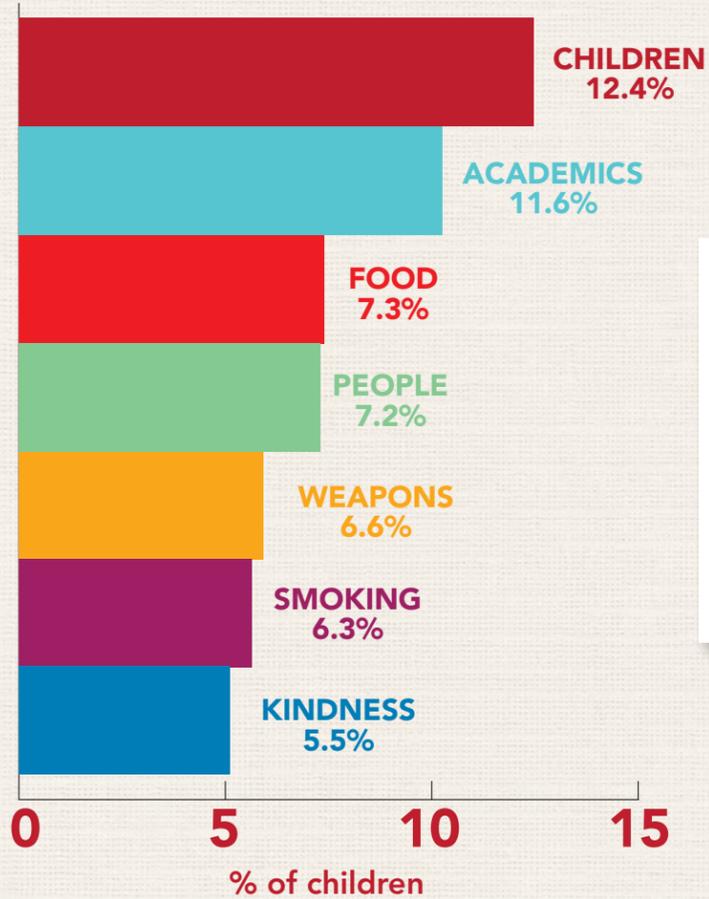
“So many kids believe they are safer today. I’m beginning to think that it is our duty to make that belief a reality.”
— Niri Jaganth



“If you could make one new law for our country, what would it be?”

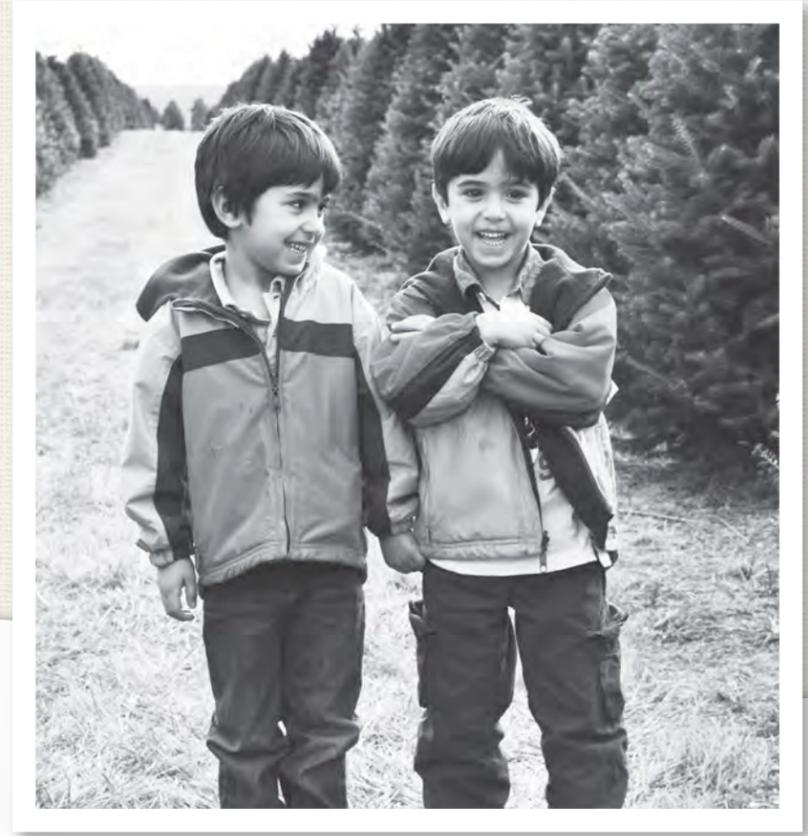
The interconnected themes of freedom and safety showed up again in our question about what new laws kids would like to introduce. The greatest number of responses concerned laws for or about children (12.4%), including suggestions to let kids do “whatever they want.” Laws relating to school and academics (11.6%) were also

mentioned frequently. In this category, kids most often suggested “no homework” or “education for everyone.” Other popular responses included laws about guns (6.6%) and a ban on smoking (6.3%). Older children, ages 11-14, were more likely to mention laws about guns, and girls were more likely to comment on smoking.



“Not having older kids mention texting and driving as a law is concerning since the impact of them together is either not clearly understood or given the importance it deserves.”
— Niri Jaganth

*TOP SEVEN RESPONSE CATEGORIES REPRESENTED



I hereby decree that there will be a sale on ice cream evry Friday

Meatless Mondays. It would save 1,000 animals.

To change the price of cigarettes to 1 million per pack.

I would make a law that everyone in the world should have a loving and caring friend to count on.



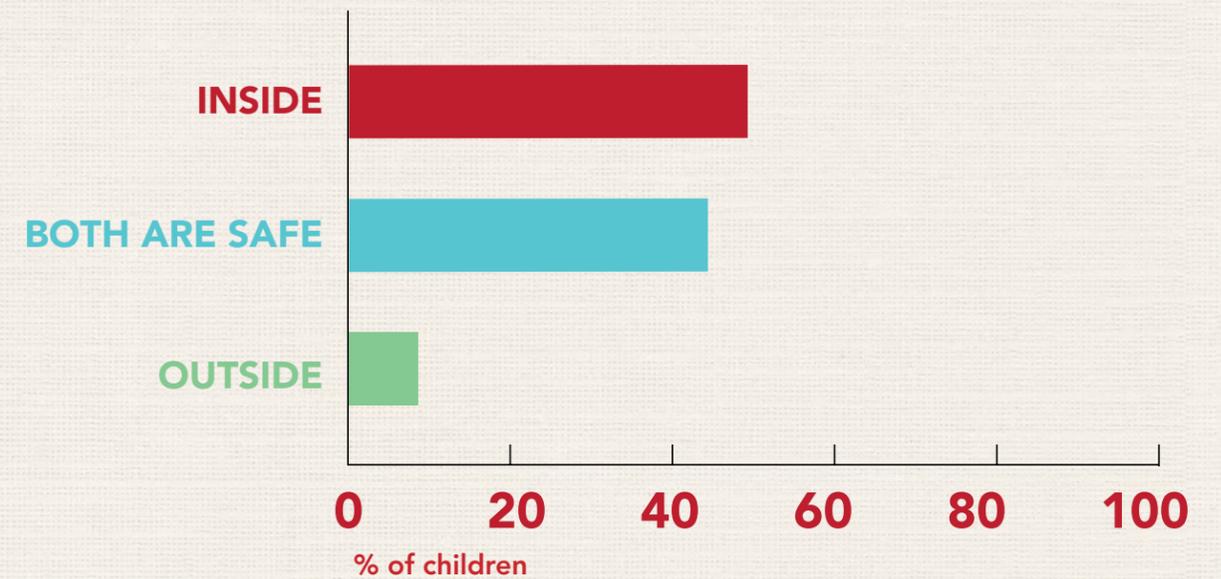
“Which is a safer place to play? Inside? Outside? Or both?”

Nearly half of the survey participants (49.9%) decided that it was safer to play inside rather than outside. Only 7.6% felt that outside was safer, but a significant number (42.5%) cited both as

safe. Younger children (ages 4–8) were more likely than older kids (ages 9–14) to cite outside as the safer place to play. Girls preferred inside, and boys were more likely to name both.

“Kidnappings, school shootings and the Boston marathon bombings are just a few tragedies that have plagued the news recently and they appear to be affecting children’s perceptions of safety. Most feel it is safer to be indoors than outdoors. Are children fearful of the world or concerned about their safety? Are frightening news feeds clouding their feelings of security? Those are questions to consider as we raise today’s youth.”

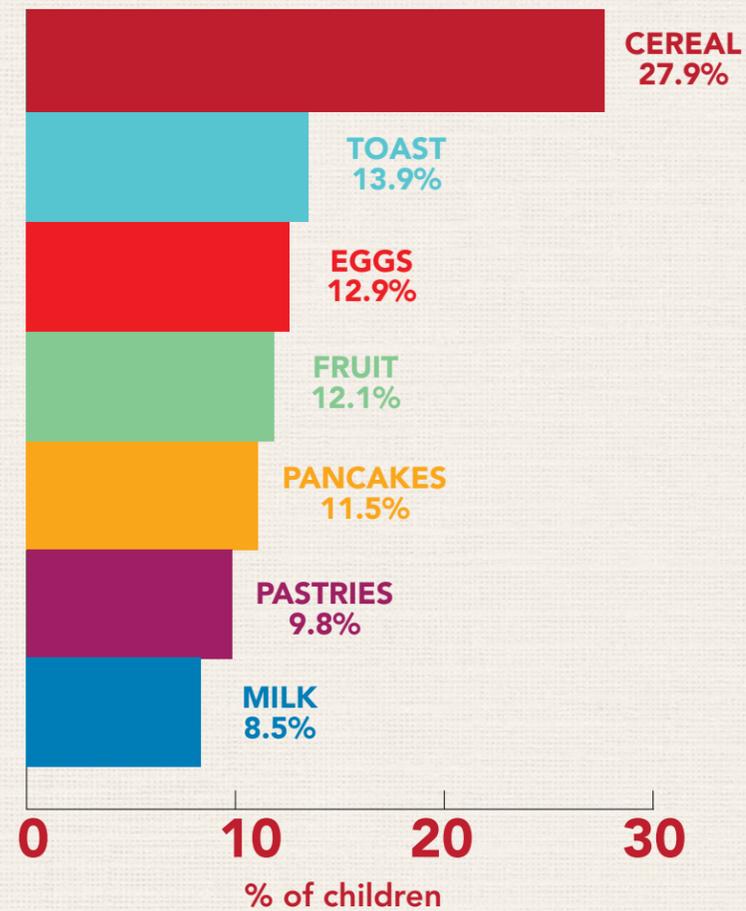
— Dr. Michele Borba



“Did you eat breakfast today? If yes, what did you have for breakfast?”

Experts say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day and **Highlights** readers seem to agree. A substantial number of participants (89.9%) said they had eaten breakfast the day of the survey. So, what exactly do kids eat? Cereal was the most popular choice, mentioned by 27.9% of kids. Toast or bread products (13.9%) were the second highest category,

followed by eggs (12.9%). Some responses included non-traditional breakfast foods, such as pizza and noodles (2.8%). Older kids, ages 11-14, were more likely to mention healthier foods such as fruit, yogurt, and juice. Responses from younger children included processed bakery products more often than those from older children.



*TOP SEVEN RESPONSE CATEGORIES REPRESENTED



Yummy French toast and Greek yogurt!

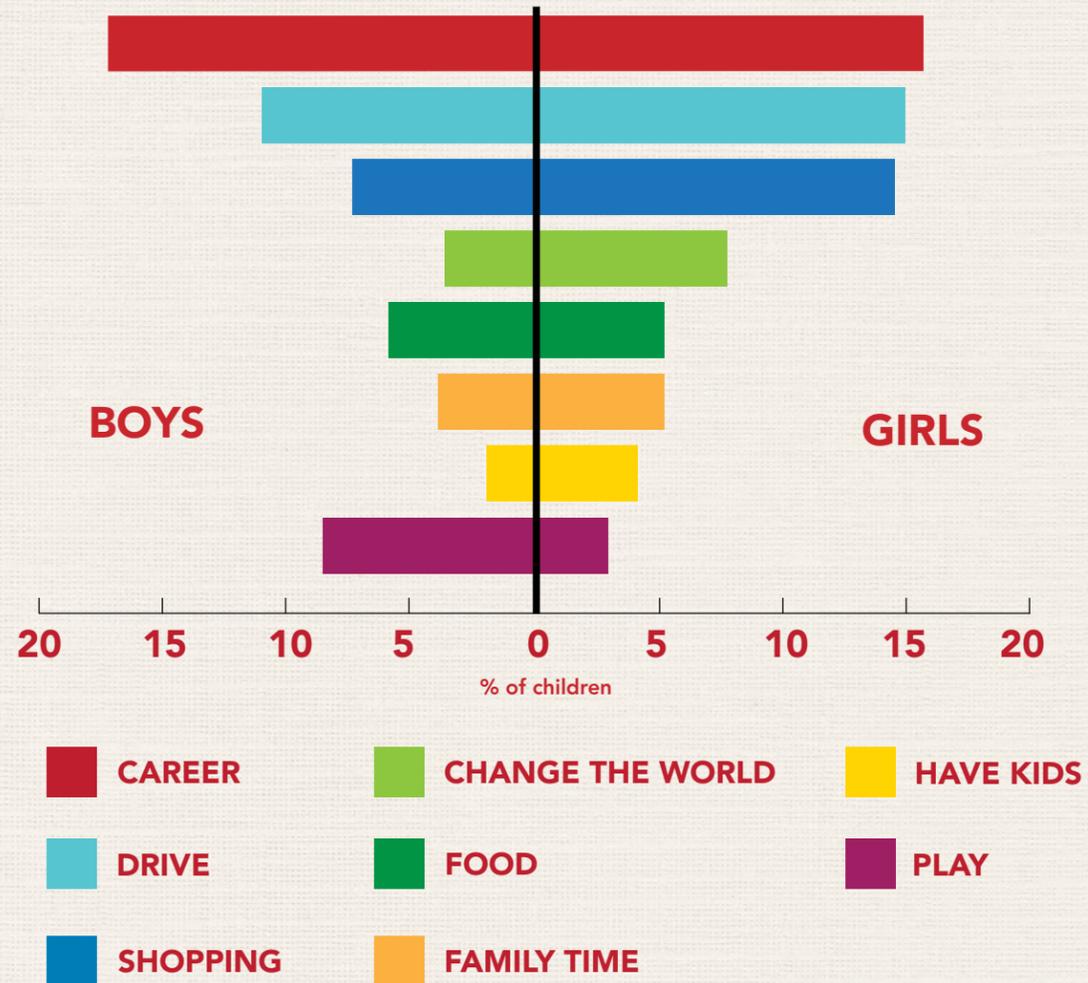
Pancakes! Sweet buttery pancakes! With bacon and apple juice!

My mom's homemade granola cereal. It's very good and pretty healthy too (except for the calories)

“If you were a grown up for just one day, what would you do?”

Our request for kids to imagine themselves as adults for a day brought forth a wide variety of answers, and suggested that kids view adulthood as a mix of responsibilities and freedoms. A significant portion of children (16.4%) said they would get a job, with specific mentions of doctors, teachers, scientists, and artists. Some kids said they

would take this chance to drive (14%), while others said they would go shopping (13.2%). Girls were more likely to mention shopping than boys. Interestingly, a significant number of older children (10.5%) said they would want to help or change the world in some way, as did 7.9% of all girls. We were also happy to see that both boys and girls (4.1%), indicated they would want to have children.



*TOP EIGHT RESPONSE CATEGORIES REPRESENTED



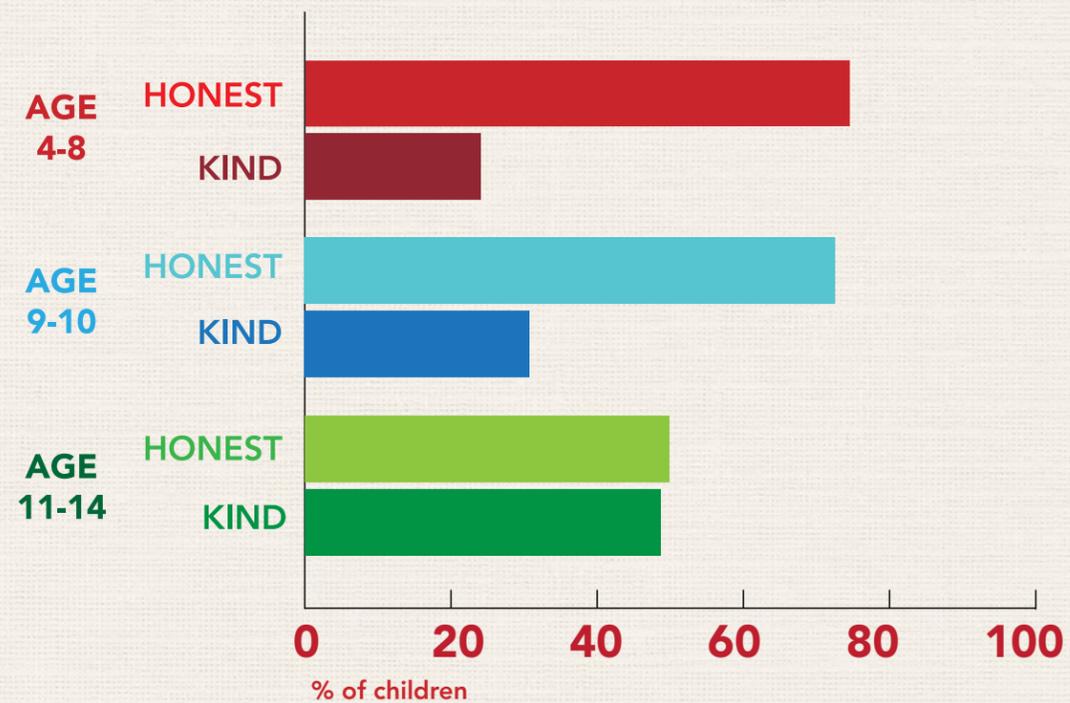
Adopt a puppy go to the circus and go to Paris.

Drink coffee and watch the news

Go watch a movie (all by myself) stay up till 10:00pm and eat bonbons.

“Is it more important to be kind or honest?”

Part of the editorial mission at Highlights is to spur our readers to explore issues and ideas to help nurture their moral development. Kindness and honesty are essential values for human interaction, and we wanted to encourage kids to think about how they work together. A majority of the overall responses (63.6%) identified honesty as more important than kindness. However, as with other questions, there was a split by age: older kids (11-14) were more likely than younger children (4-8) to feel kindness was more important than honesty (41% vs. 37%). There was not a big difference between boys and girls for this question.



“Children never cease to amaze, inspire, and surprise me with their thoughtful insights and keen observations. It is deeply heartening to see children across the country engage in a thoughtful dialogue about the importance of attributes like kindness and honesty. I fervently believe that in addition to rigorous academics, it is equally important to integrate character education into the classroom. In my work at DC Prep, character counts and we teach it explicitly – holding students accountable for their actions and ensuring that they are good citizens at school, as well as in their broader community.”

— Julia King



“If you were making a movie about your life, what would the title be?”

Not surprisingly, this question generated a lot of creative responses. After reading through many of these biopic titles, we are ready to head to the movie theater! (Hollywood, are you listening? Your next blockbuster is waiting.)

Mid-life-crisis

The life of a girl That changed the World of Cooking.

Never Sleep in the subway

Maybe not what I wanted but it's the way life rolls

It is dough time in Doughnutville

How to deal with life (in a reasonable way)

Funny-odd-old-school





The purpose of this research was to obtain feedback from readers of **Highlights** magazine about their perspectives on patriotism, safety, and values. Highlights promoted the survey through e-mail campaigns to magazine subscribers. Participants could complete the survey online at Highlights.com. A total of 1,409 surveys were completed. The data from these surveys were collected in the spring of 2013.

For each of the open-ended questions in the survey, text analysis software was used to categorize the large quantity of verbatim responses. The statistical confidence level for the results in this survey is 95%, +/-3%.

[Special thanks to the kids who sat down to write Highlights about their lives.](#)

[The State of the Kid would not have been possible without the assistance of Sequent.](#)

Highlights®

