

Screen Zombies: Is There One Living in Your House?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has released the [scores](#) for this year's reading and math evaluations. And it's not flattering. The Nation's Report Card revealed that math scores for fourth-graders fell five points since 2019, while those for eighth-graders tumbled eight points. This is the steepest decline since testing began over 30 years ago. In both grades, reading scores declined by three points.

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona [reacted](#) immediately to these dismal findings. "Results in today's Nation's Report Card are appalling and unacceptable," he said. "This is a moment of truth for education."

Meanwhile, students entering college this year [lack](#) many of the academic skills necessary for success, particularly in math. Undergraduate enrollment is also down about 10 percent as many young people choose options other than higher education.

Many justifiably blame these failures on the [COVID pandemic](#) with its school closures and attempts at distance learning via screens. The teachers' unions in particular, which strongly advocated for these shutdowns and their extension, should be held accountable for this catastrophe in learning.

As Mr. Cardona indirectly noted, the schools are dumbing down our young people. But let's take a look closer to home.

On Halloween, I came across this online [article](#) by Joy Pullmann: "Study: Outside of School, America's Teens Average 70 Hours per Week Glued to Screens." And that doesn't include watching television.

As cited by Pullmann, the Institute for Family Studies and the Wheatley Institute conducted a [survey](#) of 1,600 teens ages 11 to 18 in May 2022. Participants reported “using digital media an average of 10 hours and four minutes *per day*, on such entertainment activities as social media, video chat, texting, shopping, and gaming.” Researchers found that teens living with both their biological married parents spent an average of nine hours per day on their devices, while those in all other household situations were plinking away on their devices for nearly 11 hours daily.

That headline and the article left me shaking my head in disbelief. Even after reading it a third time, I couldn’t buy into those figures.

So, let’s pretend the poll is faulty and chop those figures in half. Let’s say that the average teen in America spends five hours per day or 35 hours a week attached to a device. If that were the case, then that time would be the rough equivalent of a week spent in school. As Pullmann writes,

“The study points out that high screen time for adolescents is correlated with depression, loneliness, lack of sleep, and negative body image. It does not mention the opportunity cost of diverting young people’s free time to entertainment consumption instead of personal development that benefits others, such as learning to repair bicycles, playing outside, testing out jobs through work and internships, or working to save for college or marriage.”

We can’t blame this one on the schools. No, this catastrophe lies squarely on the parents’ shoulders.

And catastrophe is not too strong a word. As Pullmann writes, this is “a national crisis.” Here, she references a report issued nearly 40 years ago:

“‘If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists

today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war,' wrote the National Commission on Excellence in Education in the famous 1983 report, '[A Nation At Risk](#).' 'As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.'"

Since then, the academic performance of our young has only worsened.

Both the educational failures of our schools during the pandemic and the damage done to our young by social media share one thing in common: screens. These electronic pushers of digital dopamine have made addicts out of many of America's young people.

Parents can't necessarily reverse the effects of school closures on their children's education, but they can limit the hours kids spend viewing junk and playing games online. Raising bright, good kids means more than serving up a healthy supper or driving them to dance lessons. As Pullmann, who's the mother of six, writes,

"If your children enter adulthood having done nothing with 25,000 hours of their lives they can never get back, and with their brains destroyed by [internet slot machines](#), that's on you. You're the one paying for their phone and letting them self-destruct. Tell them to get a job or read some books or do anything but sabotage themselves and our society."

It's long past time to turn off the screens.

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