

ASQ Survey: Engineering Not on Radar for Kids or Parents

When it comes to kids' dream jobs, engineering has its own problem to solve. An overwhelming 85% of kids aged 8-17 say that they are not interested in a future engineering career for a variety of reasons, according to recent surveys of youth and adults conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of American Society for Quality (ASQ). The ASQ survey among youth ages 8-17 as well as among parents aimed to provide a better understanding about the perceptions of selecting an engineering career in light of a troubling shortage of U.S. engineers, which will reach 70,000 by 2010 based on an estimate by the National Science Foundation.

Harris Interactive fielded the online youth survey on behalf of the American Society for Quality between Nov. 20 and Dec. 1, 2008, among 1,277 U.S. youth ages 8-17. Harris fielded a separate online survey between Dec. 15 and Dec. 17, 2008, among 2,196 U.S. adults ages 18 years of age or older, of whom, 584 were parents of children ages 17 and under. These online surveys are not based on probability samples and therefore no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology statement for both studies is available.

Survey results indicate the top reasons why kids may not be interested in pursuing engineering:

- Kids don't know much about engineering (44%).
- Kids prefer a more exciting career than engineering (30%).
- They don't feel confident enough in their math or science skills (21%) to be good at it— despite the fact that the largest number of kids ranked math (22%) and science (17%) as their favorite subjects.

Findings from the adult survey on this topic show:

- Only 20% of parents of children under 18 have encouraged/will encourage their child/children to consider an engineering career.
- The vast majority of parents (97%) said they believe that knowledge of math and science will help their children have a successful career.

The survey also found the following gender differences in career interests and intent:

- More girls say their parents are likely to encourage them to become an actress (21%) than an engineer (10%). Other careers that parents encouraged girls to think about include doctor (33%), lawyer (25%), teacher (31%), veterinarian (23%), nurse (20%) and businessperson (17%).
- Boys (24%) are significantly more likely than girls (5%) to say they are interested in an engineering career.
- 31% of boys vs. 10% of girls say their parents have encouraged them to think about an engineering career.

"It's clear that there is a low level of interest and knowledge about engineering careers for both parents and children," said Maurice Ghysels, chair of ASQ's K-12 Education Advisory Committee. "Educators and engineers need to work more closely together to get students excited about the profession and spotlight interesting role models."

In an effort to raise awareness of engineering as a career choice, ASQ is developing a webinar for young people, parents and educators. The webinar will be available on the ASQ Web site during National Engineers Week, February 15-21. Titled "Real World of Engineering," it will feature ASQ members and engineers. The webinar is designed to provide middle/high school students and parents a clear view of what engineers do and the skills necessary to become an engineer, and provide them inside perspective from engineers working on interesting projects. More information on the webinar will be available soon at the website indicated, below.

On the Web: www.asq.org/education

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