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WHAT WOULD HONEST ABE LINCOLN SAY?

NATIONAL ETHICS SURVEY ON AMERICAN YOUTH FINDS ONE IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLERS STEALING FROM A STORE IN THE PAST YEAR, TWO IN FIVE LYING TO SAVE MONEY, AND EIGHT OUT OF TEN LYING TO THEIR PARENTS

Josephson Institute of Ethics' Report Card on American Youth's Values and Actions Surveyed 43,000 High School Students in Public and Private Schools

LOS ANGELES – What would Honest Abe Lincoln say about the values of today's American youth? In a survey released today by the Josephson Institute of Ethics on the values and ethical actions of more than 40,000 high school students, the gap between what students believe and their actions does not bode well for future generations.

This report comes on the heels of a report issued in October of 2010 on bullying in American high schools.

Survey highlights: while 89 percent of students believe that being a good person is more important than being rich, almost one in three boys and one in four girls admitted stealing from a store within the past year. Moreover, 21 percent admitted they stole something from a parent or other relative, and 18 percent admitted stealing from a friend.

On lying, more than two in five said they sometimes lie to save money (48 percent of males and 35 percent of females). While 92 percent of students believe their parents want them to do the right thing, more than eight in ten confessed they lied to a parent about something significant.

Rampant cheating in school continues. A majority of students (59 percent) admitted cheating on a test during the last year, with 34 percent doing it more than two times. One in three admitted they used the Internet to plagiarize an assignment.

"As bad as these numbers are, they appear to be understated," said Michael Josephson, president of the Institute and a national leader in ethics training. "More than one in four students confessed they lied on at least one or two survey questions, which is typically an attempt to conceal misconduct."

Josephson said the results of this survey, conducted in 2010, are slightly better than those of the 2008 survey. "We show some improvement in ethical behavior, but the baseline of values remains alarmingly low compared to what they believe," he said, adding that a whopping 92 percent of students were satisfied with their personal ethics and character.

What would Lincoln say to our youth? A great believer in human potential, he might patiently remind them, "You have to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was."

Following a benchmark survey in 1992, Josephson Institute has conducted a national survey of the ethics of American youth every two years. Data was gathered through a national sample of public and private high schools. The most recent survey was conducted in 2010. For the general questions (over 40,000 responses), the accuracy is well within +/- 0.005 or 0.5%; for breakdowns of 20,000 the accuracy is +/- 0.69%, and for 10,000 the accuracy is +/- 0.98%; and even when there are just 1,000 responses, the accuracy is +/- 3.1%. Almost all standard errors of differences are much less than 1% for even small samples. These statistics have been verified by the Department Chair, Decision Sciences & Marketing, Graziadio School of Business & Management, Pepperdine University.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Josephson Institute of Ethics has conducted a study of the Ethics of American Youth every two years since 1992. The Institute also administers the national CHARACTER COUNTS! program, a values-based school climate initiative to build character and positive life skills, promote social and emotional learning, and enhance academic performance. Learn more at www.charactercounts.org.