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Religiosity, Education and Civic Belonging:

Muslim Youth in New York City
Public Schools

Preliminary Findings of a Citywide Opinion Survey
of Muslim High School Students

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Focus of the Research

About 1 in 10 students in New York City's public schools is Muslim—nearly 100,000 in all—yet they remain one of the most misunderstood segments of the student population.

Recent studies of non-Muslim teenagers suggest that religious commitment and involvement are linked to positive self-esteem, better than average academic achievement, and positive social and civic attitudes. But can the same be said for Muslim teens who, since the events of 9/11, often perceive the larger society as increasingly intolerant of their religious and ethnic identities?

Through a combination of survey research, focus groups, and ethnography, the **Muslim Youth in NYC Public Schools Study** explores the intersection of religious and civic identities among Muslim adolescents in NYC:

- How does school climate impact students' religiosity, self-esteem and social adjustment inside the school community?

- How socially engaged are Muslim youth inside their schools and home communities, and what attitudes do they have about civic and political engagement in society more broadly?

- To what extent are Muslim teenagers susceptible to religious doubting as a consequence of growing up Muslim in post-9/11 America?

- What role does religiosity play in how Muslim students cope with or rebound from stress or other problems facing them inside and outside of school?

Goals of the Study

- To raise critical awareness among educational policy makers, school administrators, classroom teachers, and educational researchers about the complex factors that shape the identities and lives of Muslim youth in New York City public schools;

- To enhance the sensitivity and effectiveness of school personnel, city agencies and private community organizations who work with Muslim youth, especially with regard to school counseling, multicultural education, conflict resolution, and curriculum development; and,

- To advance the comparative study of religiosity among youth in public schools and thus contribute knowledge about the relationship of religiosity to coping, resiliency, academic achievement, and civic identity, especially among youth of minority religions in the USA today.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this preliminary report is to engage a diverse public in an informed discussion of the prevailing assumptions and pervasive misconceptions of what it means to grow up Muslim in a post-9/11 school climate. This report is intended not only for scholars and academics, but also for educators, schoolteachers, and anyone else in the public or private sectors who are engaged in the delivery of educational or social services to Muslim youth.

❖ **Telephone Survey**

- Muslim students, Non-Muslim students, and Muslim students in private Islamic schools

❖ **Focus Groups**
- **Muslim teenagers**

- **Adult stakeholders**: parents; social studies teachers; Muslim educators in public schools; guidance counselors; and, school social workers

- **Muslim young adults** (post-secondary/working/college)

❖ **Ethnography**
- **Participant-observation** in a NYC high school

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Snapshot of the Sample

Our sample consists of 633 high school students divided into three cohorts: Muslim students in public schools (n = 323; 58% female, 42% male); a comparison group of non-Muslim students in public schools (n = 227; 59% female, 41% male); and one cohort of Muslim private school students (n = 83; 65% female, 35% male).

The sample of Muslim public school students represents over 90 schools, mostly across Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx, and a smaller number of schools in Staten Island and Manhattan. The private school sample represents six Islamic schools located in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. Students in all high school grade levels were represented. Students were recruited directly from schools with the assistance of assistant principals, teachers and members of student organizations. In addition, both faith-based and non-sectarian community organizations helped to advertise the study to the students and families they serve.

Grade Level	Muslim Public %	Muslim Private %	Non-Muslim Public %	Total %
9	18	46	23	24
10	28	19	22	25
11	28	22	29	27
12	26	13	26	24

Table 1: Grade Levels of Students

The average age of all students in the three cohorts is 16 years old. Fifty-five percent of the Muslim public school students were born abroad compared to 36% of the private school cohort and 30% of the non-Muslim. With the exception of African American parents, 80% of Muslim parents and 59% of non-Muslim parents were born outside the USA. The sending countries of Muslim immigrant households in our public school sample are found in over a dozen regions around the globe: 50% are from Southern Asia, 23% from the Middle East, 7% from Western Africa, and 5% from the Caribbean. Large majorities of students from all three groups report speaking a second language other than English at home.

Large majorities of Muslim students in both public and private schools self-identified as Sunni, with slightly more "Shi'ite" identification in the private school cohort. About 60% of the non-Muslim public school students self-identify with Christianity, of whom one-third are Catholic, 22% identify as either Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish; and 18% report no religious choice.

The Impact of School Climate on Students' Religiosity, Self-esteem and Social Adjustment inside the School Community

As one of many anchors of identity, religiosity—the extent that religious beliefs inform identity and behavior without regard to religious practice—is important for Muslim girls and boys in New York City high schools.

> *Though racial and ethnic identities also are significant, religiosity is a prominent aspect and this is seen in the fact that Muslim students are almost three times more likely to consider religion as very important in their daily lives compared with their non-Muslim peers.*

Like other high school students, Muslim teenagers also report facing some of the common problems—teasing, taunting, fights, racial tensions, theft and so on—that students sometimes experience in urban high schools and most of these appear unrelated to being Muslim.

> *Yet 17% of Muslim students, most of whom are of either Arab or South Asian ancestry, report having been the object of bigotry, often in the form of teasing or offensive taunting about being Muslim and a "terrorist." Arab students are twice as likely to be targeted, and girls more often than boys.*

As important as religiosity might be, it says little about how satisfied or not Muslim students feel about life inside their schools.

> *While allowing that public schools have their share of problems like drugs, violence and bigotry, 8 in 10 students think their schools are "pretty cool" and 85% say they feel safe.*

When asked in focus groups if they would switch to any other school if given the chance, virtually all the students said they like where they are. Moreover, religiosity does not appear to be an impediment to social interaction among Muslim and non-Muslim youth anymore than race or ethnicity. Friendships and socializing are commonplace among Muslim and non-Muslim youth.

Measures of self-esteem for Muslim public school students are comparable to those of non-Muslim students.

> *Although religiosity per se does not appear directly linked to self-esteem for Muslim students in public schools, religious doubting in some students is linked to the events of 9/11. In this regard, the post-9/11 climate does appear to explain some of the difference in self-esteem scores among Muslim students.*

It also bears mentioning that race appears to explain some of the differences in self-esteem scores among Muslim and non-Muslim students. This lends some support to the argument that the post-9/11 climate is fostering a conflation of ethnic and religious identities, or a "racialization" of religious identity, among immigrant Muslim Americans.

Social Engagement of Muslim Youth inside Their Schools and Home Communities and Their Attitudes about Civic and Political Engagement in Society More Broadly

Student volunteerism—joining student organizations and clubs, running for student government, playing sports, doing community service and the like—is said to be a predictor of civic and political engagement into adulthood. How involved are Muslim students in their schools and communities and is religiosity a factor?

Regardless of religious background, the majority of survey participants are not involved in school-sponsored programs.

> *Only about a third of all Muslim and non-Muslim students participate in one or more activities. Muslim girls are as likely as boys to volunteer for programs—and even surpass them, in some cases—with the exception of sports, where boys are involved twice as much.*

Muslim students spend a good deal of their free time staying close to home and socializing with family, relatives and friends, but compared to their participation in school-sponsored programs, twice as many take part at least several times a month in community service projects, organized recreational activities, and minority youth programs.

> *Again, girls are as involved as boys in most cases, and compared to non-Muslim girls, they are half as likely to be involved in sports-related recreational programs.*

Although religiosity cannot be ruled out as a factor in someone's decision to participate in school or community programs, the survey found no direct correlation with religiosity. It bears mentioning, however, that students in our focus groups remarked that due to religious or cultural norms related to gender, dress and modesty, Muslim girls generally have less choice than boys in how to spend their free time.

Compared to non-Muslim students, Muslim students in both public and private schools generally reported less trust in institutions of political power—the federal government and elected offices and the military.

> *But despite these misgivings—no doubt owing to their perception that US domestic and foreign security polices are unjustly directed at Muslims—they express confidence in the legal system and law enforcement. They also voice strong approval for all conventional forms of civic and political participation such as community service and voting.*

Religious Doubting and Growing up Muslim in post-9/11 America
Although most Muslim students in public schools feel comfortable about their religious identities and harbor few uncertainties in regard to religious beliefs,

> *12% of Muslim public school students and 9% of those in private schools admit to some doubts in the past 12 months. By comparison, 30% of those students who identified as Christian admit to some religious doubting.*

Any number of factors may precipitate religious doubting among adolescents of any faith, and Muslim youth are no exception. The findings of the survey make one thing certain, however:

> *The terrorist attacks of 9/11 have caused some youth to question their religiosity. Almost a third of the Muslim students (31%) report that 9/11 made them feel uncomfortable about their Muslim identity and 16% say it made them question their religious beliefs.*

The Role of Religiosity in regard to Coping with and Rebounding from Stress inside or outside of School

A majority of Muslim students in public schools (56%) believe they face more stress in their lives than non-Muslim teenagers, and one out of four often experiences stress at school and at home, which is slightly more than what private school students report. Three out of four Muslim public school students described having been "really stressed out" at some time in the past 12 months. Of these students, about 16% said they had been victims of ethnic or religious bigotry in school.

> *Thus, while the majority of students experience little or no stress in school on account of being Muslim, ethnoreligious bigotry toward Muslim students in the post-9/11 climate should be a cause for concern for teachers, guidance counselors and school social workers.*

In dealing with and rebounding from stressful situations, Muslim students rely on a combination of social support and religious practices. For social support, Muslim students say they are more likely first to talk to a friend, followed by a sibling or relative, and then a parent. About 17% said they sometimes turn to an imam or other religious person. Half the students turn to prayer outside of the five regular prayer times and a third of them find comfort in reading or listening to the Qur'an. Fewer than 5% turn to drugs or alcohol as a means of coping or escaping from stress or anxiety.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

RELIGIOSITY

Beliefs versus Practice

Religion is considered "somewhat" important in the daily lives of majorities of Muslim students (98%) and non-Muslim students (71%). Muslim students, however, are almost three times more likely to consider religion as very important in their daily lives (73%) compared to their non-Muslim peers (27%).

While nearly all of the Muslim students say that acts of worship—e.g., prayer, fasting, attending mosque services and so on—are very important, in actuality their frequency of religious practice varies, just as it does for many of the non-Muslim youth in the survey. Ninety-four percent of Muslim students report that they pray compared to 74% of non-Muslim students affiliated with a religion. About three-in-4 Muslim students pray on a daily basis compared to half (51%) of self-identified Christian students, and slightly fewer Muslims (25%) attend mosque services once a week compared to their Christian peers (30%).

Religious Doubting

Our study finds that only12% of Muslim students admit to having doubted the beliefs or teachings of their faith in the past 12 months, compared to 23% of students from Christian denominations and 47% of students from all other traditions (an aggregate of students who identified as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish or "Other").

One-in-4 Muslim students say that stressful situations in general have caused them to have some have doubts about their Muslim faith or identity in the past 12 months and 16% of the students report that the events of September 11th made them question the basic beliefs or teachings of Islam.

Religiosity and Gender

The survey finds little difference in the responses of girls and boys on most questions related to either religiosity or the importance of religion in students' daily lives and in their interpersonal relationships.

On the question of wearing Islamic attire in public, about one-third of the students (boys and girls together) consider it "very" important, with girls about twice as likely as boys to think so (43% to 24%). A plurality of the students (46%) say it is "somewhat" important and about one-in-5 finds it not very important.

Race, Ethnicity and Religious Identity

Muslim students value religion as an important element of identity as young adults, but they also see race and ethnicity in the mix. The majority of Muslim students (61%), compared to 37% of their non-Muslim peers, report that they favor religious identity over ethnicity. When asked, for example, how important it is to marry someone who is Muslim and from the same ethnic group as theirs, only 13% say it's very important.

The importance of ethnic identity for Muslim teenagers does not disappear, however. In fact 66% of the Muslim students, even more than their non-Muslim peers (51%), feel that ethnicity is also important in their self-image and in their interpersonal relationships.

A third of the Muslim students (31%) report that 9/11 made them feel uncomfortable about their Muslim identity.

Attitudes toward Religious Values and Morality

A plurality of Muslim students (40%, with 22% remaining "neutral") thinks that "a person can have good values and be a decent human being without religion or belief in God." In other words, many of the Muslim students accept the secular moral view, as do 65% of their non-Muslim peers, that religious beliefs needn't be a precondition to being a good, moral person.

Attitudes toward Religion in the Public Square

A majority of Muslim students (56%), compared to 39% of non-Muslims, think that religious viewpoints have a place in public discourse, and six-in-10, compared to four-in-10 non-Muslims, believe that religious organizations should express their opinions on social and political issues.

LIFE INSIDE SCHOOL

Satisfaction

In general, Muslim students' assessment of their school climate runs counter to the one commonly imagined by their parents, who perceive schools as havens for drugs, sex and violence—the kind of climate that invites hostility toward Muslim youth. Even while allowing that their schools a typical share of problems like violence and bigotry, 8 out of 10 students think their schools are "pretty cool" with 85% saying they feel safe.

Non-Muslim students express similar levels of positive satisfaction about their safety, the quality of teaching and the fairness of discipline in their schools. Thus, it is safe to presume that religiosity is unrelated to how satisfied or safe Muslim public school students feel inside schools. Indeed, no statistical correlation could be found between any of the variables measuring religiosity and school satisfaction.

Problems

Although their perception of school climate is less negative than what parents might presume, Muslim teenagers report facing some of the problems that all students sometimes experience in urban high schools. For reasons unrelated to being Muslim, 50% say that in the past 12 months they got into a verbal fight at least once or twice; 25% had something stolen; 18% were offered drugs; and 11% got into a fist fight. Non-Muslim students report similar experiences.

Asked if any bad things had happened to them in the previous year because of their race or religion, 17% of the students (n = 51), most of whom are of either Arab or South Asian ancestry, said yes. The Arab students were twice as likely to experience a bigoted offense in school. Teasing and taunting are their most common complaints: being called a "terrorist;" feeling the brunt of an ethnic slur or an offensive remark about Islam; or

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being mocked for an article of clothing, usually a headscarf (hijab) worn by girls. More girls (58%) than boys (42%) are the targets of these sorts of bigoted behaviors.

Social Involvement

On average, only about 32% of all Muslim and non-Muslim students participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., student organizations or clubs, student government, arts or recreational activities, and so on. In other words, regardless of religious background, most students simply are not involved in school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

Of those students who do participate, similar percentages of Muslim and non-Muslim students engage in a variety of programs, with only one exception: team sports. In this category some 34% of the participants are Muslim compared to 54% who are non-Muslim. Although proportionately larger numbers of non-Muslim boys and girls engage in extracurricular sports, boys are more likely to participate regardless of religious affiliation. In other words, this 20% gap appears largely connected to gender, and indeed no statistical correlation with religiosity could be found.

But aside from this one discrepancy, the participation of Muslim girls in other extracurricular activities often exceeds boys in many categories.

- Nat'l Honor Society: girls, 52%; boys, 34%

- Service Clubs: girls 47%, boys 33%

- Academic Clubs: girls 38%, boys 41%

- Yearbook/Newspaper: girls 33%, boys 21%

- Student Government: girls 29%, boys 29%

- Band: girls 26%, boys 16%

- Drama: girls 21%, boys 19%

- Hobby Clubs: girls 19%, boys 34%

LIFE OUTSIDE SCHOOL

Social and Civic Trust

Social Trust

Some observers theorize that rising Islamophobia since 9/11 and following the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London is contributing to the psychological alienation of Muslim youth growing up in the West. The implication of this is that Muslim youth could be expected to exhibit low levels of social trust in people from different religious or ethnic groups, making them more likely to keep to themselves and avoid friendships with non-Muslims.

For the most part this does not appear to be the case among the population studies here, even though 69% of the students think that Muslim Americans are looked at with suspicion and a plurality (34%) are convinced that Islam is neither respected nor tolerated by most Americans, a perception that ironically even a larger percentage of non-Muslim students (49%) readily admit.

In the main, Muslim students show levels of social trust comparable to their non-Muslim peers. Three out of four Muslim students report moderate to high levels of trust in people of different racial and religious groups, which is identical to the levels of trust reported by non-Muslims students regarding Muslims. With respect to

the specific religious groups of Catholics and Jews, 77% of the Muslim students place moderate to high levels of trust for the former, but their level of trust dips to 69% for the latter.

Muslim students might prefer to sit together in the school cafeteria based on their shared ethnicity just as other ethnic or racial groups do, but differences based on religion appear largely irrelevant in choosing friends. This is perhaps partly due to social pressure that Muslim students feel from being a minority, but also partly stems from their exposure to the tremendous ethnic diversity of most high school populations in New York City. Most Muslim students (86%) believe that students in their schools make friends with other students from different racial or ethnic groups. The vast majority (95%) of the students report that some (40%), most (33%) or almost all (22%) of their school friends are non-Muslim. Conversely, 7 out of 10 non-Muslim students report that some of their friends are Muslim.

Civic Trust

To gain a sense of the students' attitudes toward the civic and political engagement of adults, the survey asked students to say how much trust or confidence they place in seven societal entities: elected officials; the legal system; public schools; the federal government; the news media; the military; and the police or law enforcement.

Muslim and non-Muslim students alike place relatively high trust in public schools, the legal system and police/law enforcement. Both groups tend to have very low trust in the news media (Muslims, 63% and non-Muslims, 44%) and the least trust in elected officials (62% and 49%, respectively).

Compared to non-Muslim students, larger percentages of Muslim students in both public and private schools generally place less trust in institutions of political power: the federal government, elected offices, and the military. A plurality of Muslim public school students (48%) has low trust in the federal government, while a majority (51%) feels likewise about the military. This is understandable in the post-9/11 climate in which many of the students in the study are of South Asian or Arab ancestry and have kinship, cultural and historical connections to countries caught up in the US government's "War on Terror." These students usually perceive homeland security policies as unfairly targeting Muslims in general and Arab and South Asian Americans in particular.

Another reason for students' ambivalence towards institutions of political power is likely reinforced by their mistrust of the news media, which they see as biased in its coverage of Islam and framed mostly by events associated with radicalism and violence since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Social Issues

The opinions of Muslim students on social issues, with a few interesting exceptions, tend to reflect viewpoints consistent with social conservatives.

On the questions of the death penalty and abortion, Muslim public school students generally fall in line with more liberal social values. A slight majority of Muslim students (51%) oppose the death penalty—a significant contrast to the majority of Muslim private school students who favors it (66%). On the question of abortion, a majority of Muslim students (54%) oppose making it illegal, as do a solid majority of their non-Muslim peers (67%). This pro-choice position contrasts with the more socially conservative views of Muslim private school students in the study who favor making abortion illegal (54%).

Civics Knowledge

Familiarity with civic and political processes and staying informed about news and current events are said to be basic preconditions to a participatory democratic society. In this regard, Muslim students' knowledge of the American political system compares favorably with, and in some cases exceeds, that of other students.

As for staying on top of news and current events, a majority of Muslim students are as likely as non-Muslim students to read a newspaper at least several times a week and a plurality (46%) say they get news from the Internet just as often. Discussing current events with family members is an activity which 63% of the Muslim students participate at least several times a week as do 71% of non-Muslim students.

About 21% of the Muslim students compared with only 6% of the non-Muslim students report using the Internet at least several times a week for information about their religion. On a daily basis, however, Muslim students from both the public and private schools are almost six times more likely to be searching for music (34%) than anything related to Islam (6%).

Civic Participation and Engagement

Muslim students—both public and private—express overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards all conventional forms of American civic and political participation. Nine out of 10 Muslim students think that civic and political engagement is important—activities ranging from doing community service to keeping up on current events, from going to the voting booth to voicing their opinion in print, or by walking with others in a march.

Although majorities of both Muslim and non-Muslim students say they spend at least several times a week simply socializing with friends, others are regularly involved in a variety of community service programs, organized recreational activities and minority youth programs. Six-in-10 Muslim students—just slightly more than non-Muslim students—report that they volunteer for community service at least several times a month. Muslim girls are as likely as boys to be doing community service activities at least several times a month.

About 44% of the Muslim students—compared to 61% of the non-Muslim students—participate at least several times a month in some form of recreational program. As in the case with extracurricular sports programs at school, Muslim boys are nearly three times more likely than girls to participate in these kinds of programs. In fact, Muslim girls are half as likely (28%) compared to non-Muslim girls (57%) to be involved in recreational programs at least several times a month.

Although their legal status as minors limits the scope of their political engagement, Muslim students are about as involved as their non-Muslim peers. About one-in-4 Muslim students has written either to an elected official or a newspaper, and a third of the Muslim students compared to one-quarter of the non-Muslim students reports having taken part in a protest rally. And if they were old enough to vote today, 89% say they would vote and 65% say they would vote for a candidate from the Democratic Party.

Discrimination: Perceived versus Experienced

A plurality of Muslim students (43%) feel that Americans in general are respectful and tolerant towards them, yet a large majority (69%) also thinks that mainstream society is suspicious of them and nearly all of them (90%) feel that discrimination against Muslim Americans has increased since 9/11. It comes as no surprise then that 64% of the students think that a Muslim wearing Islamic attire would face discrimination in the workplace.

With regard to actual experience, 36% of the students report having faced some form of discriminatory verbal incident at least once or twice (25%) or multiple times (11%) in the past 12 months. Private school students report dramatically more: half of the 83 students in the sample (55%) report being the object of an ethnic slur or being called a terrorist.

Less common but no less upsetting is a host of other incidents experienced by either the students themselves or members of their families. For example, 28% of the students report being stopped by a law enforcement officer as a result of racial profiling; being turned down for a job (12%); having a possession damaged or destroyed (11%); and being physically assaulted (7%).

Asked to describe other types of discrimination not mentioned on the survey, one of the most recurring is the uncomfortable and sometimes unfriendly gaze or body language of strangers. This often occurs when either the student or someone in their company is dressed in Islamic garb, specifically a female family member or other close relative.

SELF-ESTEEM and LOCUS OF CONTROL

Self-Esteem
Research suggests that self-esteem and locus of control are associated with prosocial attitudes and behaviors such as volunteering and civic/political engagement. Both are linked in education to motivation, achievement and resiliency.

Personal self-esteem is understood as an individual's general sense of self-worth and locus of control describes the extent to which an individual believes he or she can influence the outcome of events in his or her life. A person's locus of control can be either "internal" or "external." For example, a person who takes responsibility for a low exam grade and believes she can improve the next time reflects an "internal" locus of control; conversely, blaming a lousy grade on chance, bad luck or some other outside interference indicates an "external" locus of control.

Our survey finds that the self-esteem of Muslim public school students, as measured by a standard self-esteem scale, is comparable to and in fact just slightly "higher" than that of non-Muslim students. The averages of the self-esteem scores, which do not prove "low" or "high" self-esteem but rather indicate relative differences in scores between students, show that the scores for girls are slightly lower than for boys across all three samples of students, both public and private.

Race and the impact of 9/11 appear to explain some of the differences in self-esteem scores. A statistical analysis shows a significant correlation between race and self-esteem scores of both Muslim public school students and non-Muslim students, but none in the case of Muslim private school students. (This latter finding is not surprising for two reasons: the racial and ethnic diversity of private Muslim schools is generally far less diverse than public schools and they tend to downplay distinctions based on race, ethnicity and national identity in the name of Muslim unity.)

Religious doubting associated with 9/11 also appears to have some bearing on the self-esteem of Muslim students in public school settings. A statistical analysis found that some of the difference in self-esteem scores between Muslim and non-Muslim students can be attributed to religious doubting associated with the events of 9/11.

Locus of Control
The scores for "locus of control" of Muslim students in public schools fall comfortably in range for "internal" locus of control, as do the scores for non-Muslim students and Muslim students in private schools.

Studies suggest that self-esteem and locus of control are directly correlated: when one changes, so does the other in the same direction, up or down. Our findings are consistent with this rule: we find that as self-esteem rises, for example from one school year to another, internal locus of control also rises for all the students in our study.

Our survey finds no positive correlation between locus of control and any variables of religiosity for Muslim public school students. However, a positive correlation, albeit a very modest one, is evident for Muslim private school students. One possible explanation is that the religious climate of a private school fosters an overt link between religiosity and academic achievement in a way that is not possible in a secular public school environment.

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It bears mentioning that no evidence in our analysis suggests an inverse correlation between locus of control and religiosity for Muslim students in public or private schools. We add this observation because other studies suggest that external locus of control is associated with some forms of religious fundamentalism, as when a believer explains specific events in his or her life as a function of God's will.

STRESS

A majority of Muslim students in public schools (56%) believe that they generally experience more stress in their lives than non-Muslim teenagers.

It is well-established that if left unchecked or unmanaged, stress can lead to depression, anger, alienation and withdrawal, all of which can seriously interfere with a child's or young adult's mental, social and educational well being. Whatever its sources may be—family problems, troubles at school or work, ups and downs in relationships, illness or serious accident—most people manage to develop individual coping strategies and social support to help them manage and rebound from stress. Does being a Muslim adolescent in the post-9/11 climate make him/her more susceptible to stress than other youth? Can religiosity be a source of stress for some or conversely can it work as a coping mechanism for others? Does stress make a Muslim teenager more vulnerable to religious doubting?

Stressors
About one-in-4 Muslim public school students report that they often or always experience stress at school, just slightly more than what private school students report. About a quarter of both Muslim public and private school students say that their homes are often a source of stress. The survey does find a modest statistical correlation between stress at school and at home.

When using public transportation, private school students are more likely to sometimes experience stress (36%) compared with their peers in public schools (27%). It bears mentioning, however, that a majority (62%) of public school students and private school students (55%) report that they rarely or never face stress on public transportation.

Three-in-4 students described having been "really stressed out" at some time in the past 12 months. Of these students, about 16% said they had been the object of ethnic or religious bigotry in school.
The survey also finds a correlation between religious doubting and stress. For those public school students who admitted to some religious doubting and also had been "really stressed out" in the past 12 months (n=63), there is significant correlation with feelings of stress at home, at school and at the mosque.

Coping and resiliency
The survey finds that regardless of being in a public or private school, Muslim students appear to rely on a combination of social support and religious practices for dealing with and bouncing back from stressful situations.

In dealing with stress or anxiety, Muslim students report they are more likely first to talk to a friend, followed by a sibling or relative, and then finally to a parent. The importance of closeness and trust in the person or persons to whom students is evident in the fact that they are more likely to keep their problems to themselves than to seek help from an adult at school, an imam or a professional counselor.

Some students find personal spirituality helpful. Half the students turn to prayer outside of the five regular prayer times and a third of the students find comfort in reading or listening to the Qur'an.

The survey also finds that the more students feel religion is important in their daily lives, the more likely they are to turn to personalized spiritual practices rather than seeking out the advice of an imam or other religious person.

A third of the students—both boys and girls—sometimes turn to recreational activities to reduce stress, but boys are three and a half times more likely than girls to do this often or always. Fewer than 5% of the students report turning to drugs or alcohol as a means of coping or escaping from stress or anxiety.

Anecdotally, it has been suggested that some Muslim youth, feeling stigmatized or conflicted by their Muslim identity, either change their Muslim-sounding names or feign belonging to a different ethnic group so as to "pass" for someone who isn't Muslim. Our survey finds that just under a third of the students (29%) have at some point used a non-Muslim sounding name, but only 9% say they have tried to pass as someone of a different ethnic or racial group.

(A caveat is necessary on the matter of changing a personal name. The wording of the specific survey question makes it hard to know the intention of the student. In focus groups, students explain that friends who couldn't pronounce their given names sometimes make up a nickname which sticks; in other cases, students deliberately change their names to avoid being taunted or treated as different.)