



**TEN THINGS
YOU SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT
GENERATION Z**

**A Primer for
Administrators
and Teachers**

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DEFINING GENERATION Z

Generation Z is loosely defined as being born in the late 1990s through 2010 (2, 3, 6, 10). Gen Z students are the first generation to grow up completely immersed in technology, with online and social interactions shaping much of their perspectives on the world and themselves.



The information consumption of Gen Z is staggering compared to previous generations (1, 4, 8, 10). Unlike their precursors, Gen Z has never known a time without constant access to information and media (4). The connectivity has created an emotional pull to technology with 90 percent of Gen Z students admitting they would be upset if they had to give up their Internet connection (6). Nearly half are connected to technology for more than 10 hours per day (12).

However, the highly connected Gen Z students are not sitting idly with the technology—they are using it to shape their voices, innovate, and demand change on issues that are important to them. Having witnessed milestone realities in the world, such as terrorism and controversial debates on human rights, Gen Z students are aware and actively trying to instill change on social issues that they believe are meaningful in making the world a better place (3, 8).

Generation Z is also shaping up to be one of the most entrepreneurial generations yet. In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, 70 percent of Gen Z teens already consider themselves self-employed through jobs such as teaching piano lessons or selling items on eBay. In contrast, only 12 percent indicated that they held a traditional job, such as waiting tables (12). Building skills in their free time supports the entrepreneurial surge as 64 percent of Gen Z teens willingly share their knowledge with others online in collaborative settings (6).

As one of the most diverse generations (3, 5, 12), Gen Z students are working toward equality in all that they do—from their education to their peer groups and all the way up to national social issues.

CONNECTED SINCE BIRTH

Generation Z's fluency in technology drives interactions inside and outside the classroom (1, 5, 7, 8). "The most important thing to know about us is that we're a very connected generation, during school and in our everyday lives," said Liam Jameson, a high school senior from West Des Moines, Iowa.

ONE

With an abundance of connectivity also comes an emotional attachment to the constant stream of media. So much so that 79 percent of Generation Z youth display symptoms of emotional distress when kept away from their personal electronic devices (6). With media and information consumption a normal part of life for Generation Z, some students see this as their great advantage. For instance, according to Kevin Fang, 17, Generation Z is poised to help teachers with technology as much as teachers can help students in learning. "It would be useful if both generations came together," said Fang. Sixteen-year-old Riya Aggarwal, a sophomore from Austin, Texas, agrees: "We know all the tips and tricks, and we're willing to help teachers navigate technology in our learning environment."

A desire to build a more collaborative school culture through the vehicle of technology fits with many Gen Z student perspectives. They already have a more collaborative relationship with the adults in their lives, including teachers, when compared to previous generations (2). Not only are students eager to help educators with technology, they also want to shatter common notions about social media use. According to Zak Malamed, 22, stereotypes that social media tools are used for negative motives are misleading. Malamed, founder and executive director of Student Voice, a nonprofit aiming to bridge the gap between students and education communities, asserts that social media is not predominantly used by Gen Z students for ulterior motives. In contrast, according to CBS News, students' strongest learning experiences have the potential to come from social media (8).



ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATORS

What do Gen Z students wish teachers knew about them? That they are ripe with potential to solve some of the world's greatest challenges and that they desire learning environments that support their curiosity to innovate (4). "I want to help people, heal them, inspire them; and I want to innovate, invent, and discover," said Lily Czechowicz, 17.



Innovation is just the beginning. More than half of Generation Z respondents in a recent *Forbes* study revealed interest in starting a company for reasons such as "I want to have an impact" (11). Seventeen-year-old Kevin Fang echoes this sentiment: "I want to be an entrepreneur. It's all about connecting people these days. A good idea will come."

One of the best ways teachers can support entrepreneurial tendencies in the classroom is to engage students in active learning (4). "I learn best in a hands-on environment. This way I get to see things happening firsthand instead of just going by what the textbook says," said Emma Stivers, 16, from Lexington, Kentucky. Gen Z also favors a relaxed environment where students have flexibility and space to let their creativity thrive (4).

"Teachers should know that our generation is innovative. There are so many students with such great potential."

**—Ryan Longenecker, 15,
Bettendorf, Iowa**

Time spent outside the classroom proves equally influential in building entrepreneurial roots. Just ask Rachel Gardner, a high school senior, and she'll tell you that she is already an entrepreneur having founded Chap Research, a student STEM innovation program. "I want to make something cool that helps people. If I'm able to change the culture along the way in shaping female engineers, that would be good," said Gardner.

DIVERSE & MULTICULTURAL

Generation Z is more diverse than any generation before it (1, 3). According to the Census Bureau, by 2020 50.2 percent of children under 18 will be part of a minority race or ethnic group (12). However, an increase in diversity is also coupled with a more positive view of ethnic diversity than seen in previous generations (12).

THREE

According to Emma Stivers, 16, the topic of racial discrimination is important to her and her peers because regardless of race or ethnicity, Generation Z believes that people should not be stereotyped. "Individuals should be seen as human beings instead of the color of their skin," said Stivers.

Stivers does not stand alone in her convictions. Other Gen Z students also rate tolerance of diverse perspectives as a paramount value. "It is important to me to not discriminate, to view everyone as equal and to give everyone a fair chance. I am very passionate about making sure that every single human being—no matter their race, class, age, sexual preference, or political view has the same basic rights of freedom," said Ryan Longenecker, 15. When compared to older generations, Gen Z is more likely to have social circles that include diverse ethnic groups, races, and religions (5).

With a prediction that in the next 10 to 30 years there will be no ethnic majority in the United States (5), it is clear that Generation Z is poised to celebrate diversity and instigate change on racial and ethnic issues.



CHANGEMAKERS

Though every generation has its plights, Generation Z students have had a front-row seat to many societal and cultural shifts—all of which have shaped their views of self and society (3). They have witnessed the first African American president, dealt intimately with cyberbullying, and seen the conflict and acceptance of gay marriage (2). This depth of societal and cultural awareness has opened Gen Z students' eyes to the problems of the world and ways they can help resolve them (3).



"We are growing up in a much more stressful world than the one that they [previous generations] grew up in. Politics, laws, and society as a whole is different from what it was 5, 10, or 20 years ago—it affects everyone," said Colin Daniels, 17, from New Canaan, Connecticut.

"I value that everyone feels accepted and included. This drives me towards many liberal causes like Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ, and education equality."

—Ian Coon, 18, Waukee, Iowa

As informed participants on national and global issues, Gen Z students are not interested in waiting for change; rather they see themselves as the changemakers. In fact, 38 percent of the Gen Z population say they will invest in something that changes the world (6).

"The most effective way to combat things like racism, homophobia, sexism, and xenophobia is to open our hearts, minds, and eyes to that which we do not understand," said Lily Czechowicz, 17.

Coon, 18, shares Czechowicz's point of view by investing his time in supporting issues of LGBTQ rights, poverty, homelessness, immigration, and diversity. With a mission to change the judgments they see in the world around them, Gen Z students are slated to push for change in all that they do (3).

LEARNING DIFFERENTLY

What do Gen Z students think of their current learning environments? According to Gianna Borer, 14, the focus on education seems to be less and less on meaningful experiences and more on memorization. "School often confuses memorizing with learning. Memorizing information and using it to take a test isn't learning; it's moving information from one place to another. There are other ways for a student to show their proof of learning that can engage them," said Borer.

FIVE

Rather than rote recollection, Generation Z wants to see a learning environment in which students are shown the love of learning as a lifelong endeavor (4). "School should be a way for people to find their interests. We don't currently develop interests. Most students take certain classes to play the GPA game and they don't have a way to expand on what interests them. They might not know that they are actually a really good writer when they only study chemistry," said Kevin Fang, 17.

Ian Coon, a high school senior, summarizes Gen Z's ultimate goal in creating a synergistic classroom setting: "Teachers should work on providing the space and empowering students with a voice to make their goals and dreams a reality."

Part of providing the space and empowerment stems from allowing students to explore freely without imparting boundaries as well as to encourage creativity (4). Gen Z has a desire to explore different interests and disciplines without being locked into only one path of study, and students are seeking learning environments that support this effort (4).



EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATES

Sixty-four percent of Generation Z students consider earning an advanced degree a life goal (6). Compared to Millennials at 33 percent and Generation X at 25 percent, Gen Z also clocks in with estimates that 50 percent will be university educated (6). With such a strong focus on formal education, it's no wonder that Gen Z students are taking an active role in their schooling by voicing their opinions.



"I think there are a lot of problems with equity in education that don't get talked about," said Andrew Brennen, 20. For some Gen Z students, equity comes in the delivery of educational content. "My generation does not hate the idea of school or the idea of learning, but rather how those ideas are implemented in school. A large part of our generation wants to learn, but they want to learn in a way that they believe will help them in life—in a way that they can still apply 20 years after they graduate high school," said Ryan Longenecker, 15.

Gianna Borer, 14, shares a similar sentiment that improvements to education could make significant impact in how students learn: "The way to improve education is through student voice. Rather than sitting at a desk being taught to, students should be put in the driver's seat of their education."

Citing individualized learning as an important factor (4, 7), students such as 18-year-old Liam Jameson value a school system that emphasizes knowledge development rather than teaching to tests.

"The greatest tool an educator can give their students is a desire to learn; without it we are as independent and free thinking as a herd of cattle."

—Lily Czechowicz, 17,
Belvidere Illinois

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

SEVEN

As constant consumers of information, Generation Z youth are aware not only of the culture at large but also of their own ability to become involved in topics and issues that matter to them (8). For example, Gianna Borer, 14, reveals that bullying and discrimination are on the top

of her list when it comes to being socially conscious: "As a society we tell people to be themselves, but people are often put down for doing so. Everyone is different, but those differences shouldn't separate us. Those differences should bring us together."

Seventy-six percent of Gen Z is also concerned about man's impact on the planet (6). "Peace, global warming, and setting aside our differences are causes that I think are important because the world is constantly at war," said Colin Daniels, 17.

What do Gen Z teens plan on doing about the issues that mean so much to them? For starters, they plan to use their own voices to build awareness. "I want to leave a legacy of people that are determined to make the world a better place and show that every voice, no matter how small, matters," said Lauren Hart, 16, from Lexington, Kentucky.

"By the time I leave Earth, I want to have made significant change in people's lives. I want to put all of my effort into trying to create better opportunities and lives for other people. I want to help advance the world and leave a legacy having been a leader who made positive change—someone who helped his family, friends, state, country, and world," said Ryan Longenecker, 15.



CREATIVE & ENGAGED

To understand Generation Z students is not just to view their perspectives in the classroom, but to look outside the classroom as well. How are Gen Z students spending their free time? Where are they placing value on their engagement?

EIGHT

According to recent research, 85 percent of Gen Z students conduct research online. Thirty-three percent view lessons online to educate themselves (6).

Generation Z students are also actively involved in online collaborative communities, with 60 percent saying that they like to share their knowledge with others online (6). High school senior Rachel Gardner embodies this statistic as she spends her free time doing robotics and self-studying Chinese through various online resources.

Kevin Fang, 17, agrees that free time is better spent engaging in activities that are both creative and enjoyable while, in turn, preparing him for the future. "I'm usually doing computer science—coding and making my own games and applications. On the weekends I have more time to try new hobbies, like digital art and experimenting with different activities. I also like to research what other people do for a living."

With self-teaching in areas of interest a common thread, Generation Z students are also highly skilled in processing the information they voraciously gather (5). Gen Z has a unique characteristic that previous generations do not: the ability to traverse multiple streams of information simultaneously (5). Generation Z students are using all of this to their advantage by fostering technology and online tools to explore their interests.



EDUCATION PRESSURE

“Somebody once told me a joke, saying, ‘When did high school become a four-year audition for college?’ It’s one of those jokes that is funny because it’s true. Many students will agree that their main motivation for working hard in high school is so they can get into a good college,” said Lily Czechowicz, 17.

Czechowicz’s perspective reflects many Gen Z students who are struggling to live in the present while feeling adequately prepared for the future. In fact, one-third of Generation Z are worried about finding a job after graduation (10).

More than half of Gen Z youth also note parental pressure to gain professional experience during high school as a common concern (6). “I definitely feel a lot of pressure for college. It is stressful that it is already something I have to think about,” said Donovan Sandoval, 14, from Palatine, Illinois.

Lauren Hart, 16, agrees that both family and self-inflicted pressure are mounting for her and her peers: “I feel a lot of pressure to prepare myself for the future. Not only does my school and family bring attention to this, but I also keep myself aware of what I need to do now in order to have a successful future ahead of me.”

“I often have to remind myself to live in the present because if all I do is plan for the future, I will miss out on what is happening right in front of me.”

—Emma Stivers, 16,
Lexington, Kentucky

To live up to the pressure and prepare themselves for the future, 77 percent of Gen Z students are extremely interested in volunteering their time to gain work experience (6). Additionally, 50 percent of Gen Z students participate in internships in order to advance themselves professionally during high school (6).

GROWTH MINDSET

Is failure good or bad? Ask Generation Z teens and they'll tell you it's not only good but also an important part of self-development.

"We are surrounded with sayings like 'never give up' and 'failure is not an option.' These are ridiculous notions! Of course failure is an option; if we never failed, we would never grow into our own unique selves," said Lily Czechowicz, 17.



Having a growth mindset, or the belief that intelligence can be developed, is seen in Generation Z through failure and perseverance (13). According to Emma Stivers, 16, her most coveted value is perseverance: "I believe that you should never give up, no matter what, because eventually hard work will pay off."

"We need to follow our dreams and never give up, but also take a hard look at reality. Take risks and don't be afraid of failure."

—Lily Czechowicz, 17,
Belvidere, Illinois

Likewise, Ryan Longenecker, 15, states perseverance as a critical part to his learning experiences. "I remind myself every time I feel like quitting, like it is too hard to keep going, that without effort I cannot get better," said Longenecker.

By accepting failure as an essential piece of personal growth, Generation Z is able to thrive when faced with challenges. Gen Z students are also open to setbacks because they can be used as a tool for learning (13).

However, despite accepting failure as a normal part of life, some Gen Z students don't necessarily believe that failure should be promoted. "Failure certainly is a reality in life and it shouldn't be something that is discouraged, but it should not be encouraged. On the pathway to success, you'll encounter failure, but you shouldn't try to fail. If you can succeed, then succeed," said Zak Malamed, 22.

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