



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OCTOBER 7, 2015**

## **Students Who Feel Emotionally Unprepared for College More Likely to Report Poor Academic Performance and Negative College Experience**

*National survey of 1,502 first-year college students examines challenging transition from high school to college*

NEW YORK, NY, October 8, 2015—The JED Foundation, Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and The Jordan Porco Foundation today released the results of a national “First-Year College Experience” survey, exploring the challenges associated with young adults’ transition from high school to college. Results have significant implications for parents, educators and students alike, revealing important touch points for better communication, programming and meaningful intervention. Among the most critical findings, the Harris Poll of 1,502 U.S. first-year college students uncovered that emotional preparedness – defined by the organizations as the ability to take care of oneself, adapt to new environments, control negative emotions or behavior and build positive relationships – is a major factor to students’ success during their first year of college.

Specifically, students who said they felt less emotionally prepared for college than their peers were more likely to have a lower grade point average (GPA) (on average, 3.1 vs 3.4) and rate their overall college experience as “terrible/poor” (22% vs 5%).\* Further, a majority of all students (60%) wish they had gotten more help with emotional preparation for college; certain groups of students were more likely to agree with this statement than their counterparts; those with a lower GPA (66% vs 55% higher GPA), regularly consumed drugs or alcohol (65% vs 58% who did not), considered transferring or transferred to a different school (70% vs 56% who did not), took a leave of absence after the first term† (77% vs 58% who did not), and rated their overall college experience as “terrible/poor” vs “fair” or “excellent/good” (85% vs 68% & 51%).

### **Stress Beyond Academics**

Students reported that the first-year of college is full of emotional challenges that span far beyond academics. Among myriad challenges, pressures such as paying for college expenses (40%), making new friends (30%), keeping in touch with family and friends not at their college (28%), and being independent (16%) were reported as being “extremely or very challenging,” and nearly half of students (45%) felt that “it seems like everyone has college figured out but me.”

Stress is a common theme among first-year college students; what is concerning, however, is that 50% of students reported feeling stressed most or all of the time and 36% did not feel as if they were in control of managing the stress of day-to-day college life. What’s more, students with lower GPAs were more likely than those with higher GPAs to say they did not feel in control of the day-to-day stresses of college (45% vs 31%).

“Survey data indicate that college readiness requires far more than just a solid academic foundation – a finding that seems counter to conventional higher education preparation. It is clear that emotional preparedness should be better integrated into the work that high school communities are doing to guide students through the transition into college,” said John MacPhee, Executive Director, The JED Foundation. “We are proud to work with Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and The Jordan Porco Foundation to highlight the emotional complexity of this important milestone in a young adult’s life, and to ultimately inform resources for students, school administrators and parents to help students thrive.”

### **Challenges to Getting Support**

More than half of students (51%) found it difficult at times to get emotional support at college when they needed it, and more than 1 in 10 students (11%) said they did not turn to anyone for support when needed. Certain groups are more likely to turn to no one for support, including: males vs. females (16% vs 6%) and those who rate their first term experience as “terrible/poor” or “fair” vs “excellent/good” (15% and 16% vs 7%).

When they do seek support, college students are much more likely to turn to friends (76%) or family members (64%) than university staff (24%). However, a large majority of students (65%) said they tended to

keep their feelings about the difficulty of college to themselves; African American students are more likely to say this than white students (75% vs 61%).

### **Risk of Substance Abuse**

Almost a third of students (30%) reported regularly consuming drugs or alcohol during their first term, which can have serious consequences on students' health and well-being. Specifically, these students were more likely than non-regular drug/alcohol users to rate their emotional health worse than their peers (39% vs 32%) and experience negative emotions such as stress (56% vs 47%), anxiety (43% vs 36%), and feeling overwhelmed (47% vs 40%). Further, these students were more likely to say they had difficulty getting the emotional support that they needed during their first college term (61% vs 47%) and expressed a greater desire for help with emotional preparation for college (65% vs 58%).

"Transitions – from middle to high school, and high school to college – are danger points for kids and stress and substance use, and we urge parents to be particularly attentive and communicative at these times," said Sean Clarkin, EVP, Research and External Relations, Partnership for Drug-Free Kids. "Given that 20% of students said they used drugs or alcohol when stressed or overwhelmed in high school, the potential escalation of these behaviors in college is concerning."

### **Rethinking College Preparation**

The vast majority of students (87%) reported that during high school, there was more emphasis on being academically ready rather than emotionally ready for college, and 50% said their independent living skills need improvement.

The survey data showed that among pressures students faced when choosing which college to attend, most students felt "a great deal of pressure" to attend a well-known college (57%) and agreed that their high schools placed greater emphasis on college prestige than "fit" (52%).

"As high school seniors start applying to college around this time of year, parents and people influential in their lives can play an important role in helping children build confidence and life skills. It is important to guide them toward choosing a college that best fits their needs first and foremost — not only in an academic sense, but also relative to emotional needs," said Marisa Giarnella-Porco, Co-Founder, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Jordan Porco Foundation.

Students, parents and school administrators are encouraged to visit [www.SettoGo.org](http://www.SettoGo.org) – a new online resource to help prepare for the transition to college and beyond – from developing basic life skills and building social-emotional competence, to learning the fundamentals of mental health and substance abuse and navigating the transition itself. The full suite of Set to Go resources will become available in early 2016.

### **About the Survey**

The survey was fielded online by Harris Poll among 1,502 U.S. first-year college students between March 25 and April 17, 2015. Survey respondents were students 17-20 years old, graduated from high school, are in the second term of their first year at college, and attending at least some classes in-person at a 2- year or 4-year college. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, visit [www.SettoGo.org](http://www.SettoGo.org) or email [info@jedfoundation.org](mailto:info@jedfoundation.org).

### **About The JED Foundation**

The JED Foundation is a leading nonprofit working to protect the emotional health of teenagers and college students. Our programs are inspiring a new national dialogue on mental health, encouraging millions of young people to speak up and take action, and changing the way academic institutions create healthier campus communities and prevent substance abuse and self-harm. These programs include: **The JED and Clinton Health Matters Campus Program**, a groundbreaking self-assessment and feedback program that helps colleges create more comprehensive solutions to support their students; **ULifeline**, an online resource that helps students understand and address mental health conditions like depression and anxiety disorders; the **Half of Us** campaign, with MTV, which uses online and on-air programming to share stories and encourage help-seeking; the **Love is Louder** movement that helps individuals, communities, and schools build resiliency, create connectedness, and promote acceptance; **Transition Year**, an online resource for parents aimed at helping to ensure a smooth, healthy transition into college life; and a portfolio of resources that helps campuses promote emotional health and protect at-risk students. Learn more at [www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org). Follow us on social media: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Google+](#)

### **About Partnership for Drug-Free Kids**

The **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids** is dedicated to reducing substance abuse among adolescents by supporting families and engaging with teens. We develop public education campaigns that drive awareness of teen substance abuse, and lead teen-targeted efforts that inspire young people to make positive decisions to stay healthy and avoid drugs and alcohol. On our website, [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org), and through our toll-free helpline (1-855-DRUGFREE), we provide families with direct support and guidance to help them address teen substance abuse. Finally, we build healthy communities, advocating for greater access to adolescent treatment and funding for youth prevention programs. As a national nonprofit, we depend on donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and the public sector and are thankful to SAG- AFTRA and the advertising and media industries for their ongoing generosity. We are proud to receive a Four-Star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest and most-utilized independent evaluator of charities, as well as a National Accredited Charity Seal from The Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance.

#### **About The Jordan Porco Foundation**

The **Jordan Porco Foundation** is committed to preventing suicide in the high school, college, and college entry student population. Through awareness, education, and innovative programming, the Jordan Porco Foundation is reducing stigma around mental health and help-seeking, creating open conversations about the prevalence of suicide and mental health issues in the young adult population, and saving lives. The Foundation's programs include Fresh Check Day, where the Foundation works closely with colleges to plan and fund celebratory fair-like events on campus in an effort to bring awareness to mental health resources and coping strategies on their campuses. Fresh Check Days include interactive booths, food and entertainment, prizes and relevant giveaways to engage the students. Since 2012, nearly 50 Fresh Check Days have been hosted in six states. Nine Out Of Ten is a program of The Foundation which fosters peer-to-peer suicide prevention by providing tools to educate students about the warning signs and resources available to help their friends and peers. The Foundation is currently developing 4 What's Next, a future-focused high school program that identifies, trains, and empowers high school student leaders to engage in honest discussions and peer-to-peer education about mental health, personal wellness, and transitioning to life after high school. Learn more at [rememberingjordan.org](http://rememberingjordan.org), [freshcheckday.com](http://freshcheckday.com), [nineoutoften.org](http://nineoutoften.org). Follow us on social media: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

###

\* Compared to students who said they felt more emotionally prepared for college than their peers

† Small base (n<100) – results should be interpreted as directional only.

#### **About The Jed Foundation**

The Jed Foundation ([www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org)) is a leading nonprofit working to protect the emotional health of teenagers and colleges students. Our programs are inspiring a new national dialogue on mental health, encouraging millions of young people to speak up and take action, and changing the way academic institutions create healthier campus communities and prevent substance abuse and self-harm. These programs include: **The Jed and Clinton Health Matters Campus Program**, a groundbreaking self-assessment and feedback program that helps colleges create more comprehensive solutions to support their students; **ULifeline**, an online resource that helps students understand and address mental health conditions like depression and anxiety disorders; the **Half of Us** campaign, with MTV, which uses online and on-air programming to share stories and encourage help-seeking; the **Love is Louder** movement that helps individuals, communities and schools build resiliency, create connectedness and promote acceptance; **Transition Year**, an online resource for parents aimed at helping to ensure a smooth, healthy transition into college life; and a portfolio of resources that helps campuses promote emotional health and protect at-risk students. Learn more at [www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org).

Learn more by visiting [www.jedfoundation.org](http://www.jedfoundation.org), [www.thecampusprogram.org](http://www.thecampusprogram.org), [www.halfofus.com](http://www.halfofus.com), [www.loveislouder.com](http://www.loveislouder.com), [www.ulifeline.org](http://www.ulifeline.org), and [www.transitionyear.org](http://www.transitionyear.org).

PRESS CONTACT:

**Suzanne Yergensen**

**Makovsky** for The Jed Foundation

Direct: (212) 508-9675

Email: [syergensen@makovsky.com](mailto:syergensen@makovsky.com)