

Students in high-achieving schools are now named an ‘at-risk’ group, study says

October 01, 2019

Communities touting the best-ranked schools are often the most in-demand among families. But this competitive environment can come at a psychological cost to those attending them. Emerging research is finding that students in “high-achieving schools” — public and private schools with high standardized test scores, varied extracurricular and academic offerings, and graduates who head off to top colleges — are experiencing higher rates of behavioral and mental health problems compared with national norms.

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“When parents ask me where all of this pressure is coming from, I ask them: Where is it not?” says Suniya Luthar, a professor of psychology at Arizona State University, whose research in the 1990s first uncovered the unique vulnerabilities of privileged but pressured youths. The unrelenting pressure on students in high-achieving schools comes from every direction, from overly invested parents who want A’s, coaches who want wins for their own personal reputations and school administrators who feel pressured to get high standardized scores in their school, which then prop up real estate values in the area.