

YouthTruth

"I take a lot of surveys and I have no idea what happens to the results and I'm surprised if I see any changes, but I feel YouthTruth is a survey that really catered to us and let us see what we need to work on, what we are strong at and what we are weak at."

Alex, a student at a YouthTruth school

YouthTruth 2011 – 2012

YouthTruth, an initiative of The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), is a national survey project that provides comparative data to schools, districts and networks, and education funders summarizing students' perceptions of their high school experiences. The goal of YouthTruth is to demonstrate the power of comparative feedback from students – the ultimate beneficiaries of school improvement efforts – and to create insights that will enable those who manage, lead, and fund schools to increase their effectiveness and impact. We are currently recruiting networks and districts to participate in YouthTruth 2011-2012.

History and Background

YouthTruth was developed in 2008 by CEP and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The work emerged from CEP's ten-year history of developing comparative assessment tools for foundations based on the surveys of grantees, applicants, and other stakeholders. During an initial planning phase, CEP and the Gates Foundation worked with an advisory group of education researchers, practitioners, and students to first analyze the landscape of student feedback efforts and then to develop the YouthTruth survey and implementation plan. In 2008, CEP piloted the YouthTruth survey with 20 high schools. Since that time, we have worked with 144 additional schools from 21 districts and networks such as Aspire Public Schools, Atlanta Public Schools, Friendship Public Charter Schools, High Tech High, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the Oakland Unified School District. As of the end of the 2010-2011 school year, YouthTruth has surveyed approximately 71,000 students from across the country. YouthTruth funders currently include The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the California Endowment, the East Bay Community Foundation, Foundation for the MidSouth, Knowledgeworks Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation.

What's Unique about YouthTruth

Student survey programs are in operation across many school districts nationwide. However, most programs lack effective mechanisms for a) sharing student survey data back with schools and b) helping school and district leaders to incorporate student feedback into strategic planning and school improvement efforts. As a result of these limitations in how data is collected and reported back, student survey data is often overlooked and rarely acted upon. YouthTruth is positioned to address these challenges and seeks to become a leading tool for gathering student feedback and sharing actionable insights with school leaders, districts, networks, and funders. There are three distinctive attributes that set YouthTruth apart from other survey efforts:

- ❖ **Detailed comparative data.** YouthTruth provides rich comparative data in a user-friendly format. Participating schools' results are compared to that of peer schools in their district or network as well as to the schools that make up the national YouthTruth sample. This comparison enables a relative understanding of each school's strengths and weaknesses and also facilitates comparisons across

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networks. YouthTruth directly leverages CEP's ten years of experience providing comparative constituent feedback to funders, an approach that is well cited for its simultaneous rigor and accessibility.

- ❖ **Engaging school leaders and students.** Not only does YouthTruth confidentially share each school's results with its leadership team, but we provide a summary of results that is designed specifically to be shared with students. By closing the feedback loop with participants, we engender the support of participating schools and students and gather more honest and accurate data. We encourage participating schools to use YouthTruth as a platform for aligning their school community in a broader school improvement campaign and to involve students in the survey kick off and administration processes as much as possible.
- ❖ **Actionable feedback that drives change.** YouthTruth data is designed to inform school improvement efforts and promote better decision making by school leaders, those who manage schools, and those who fund schools. Already in its short history, YouthTruth has facilitated tangible changes at participating schools. In a recent survey of participants, 98% of school leaders said that they had either used or planned to use YouthTruth data to make specific changes at their school.

What Participants Are Saying About YouthTruth

Feedback from YouthTruth participants has been extremely positive. A recent independent evaluation of YouthTruth describes that "YouthTruth has been designed and implemented in a high quality fashion, has already contributed to some changes in school activities, and is highly likely to result in more in the future [and that] school leaders overwhelmingly believe that YouthTruth has been valuable for their school." In a related survey of participating principals:

- ❖ 91% of respondents said that YouthTruth was superior to most other survey efforts at their school;
- ❖ 99% would like their own school to repeat YouthTruth over time; and
- ❖ 100% would recommend that other schools participate in YouthTruth.

"YouthTruth is the single best thing we have done as a school to learn from our students."

School administrator at a YouthTruth school

How Schools, Districts and Networks Are Using YouthTruth to Inform Decision-Making

YouthTruth provides schools with richer data about their student experience than they typically would have access to and is increasingly informing school leaders' programmatic and policy decisions. More than nine of every ten school leaders reported in a third-party evaluation that YouthTruth data have been useful in efforts such as developing school improvement plans, designing targeted professional development opportunities, and recognizing staff for good work. Many schools have also used YouthTruth data to help inform requests for resources such as additional counseling staff or facility improvements. Among the most frequent areas in which changes have been made in response to YouthTruth data are relationships at school (88%), discipline



policies and enforcement (89%), and curriculum and instruction (88%).¹ Below are some specific examples of how schools, districts, and networks have used YouthTruth data to make more informed decisions in pursuit of better student outcomes.

- ❖ YouthTruth survey results have highlighted that students at some schools find discipline policies to be inconsistently and unfairly applied. In response, school leaders at one school reframed their approach to discipline by hosting a behavioral discipline training for staff. The school made accompanying changes to expectation posters at the school, increasingly rewarded students for demonstrating positive behaviors, and teachers have taken more time to understand the reasons behind student behavior. This has resulted in improved culture at the school. Another school created a student court in response to concerns about discipline, such that students now adjudicate the infractions of their peers. Ratings on questions about whether discipline is fairly applied at the school have since increased.
- ❖ In response to lower relative ratings on the strength of student-teacher relationships, many schools have instituted advisory periods, which provide consistent non-instructional time with an adult, or instituted new professional development programs. At one large public high school, all teachers and students now participate in advisory periods around major school events, such as progress reports, report cards, and the PSAT. During these advisories, teachers and students focus on a range of issues, including bullying, course selection, and tracking students' individual academic progress.
- ❖ The YouthTruth survey indicated that students at a participating school wanted more academic rigor and extended opportunities for learning. In response to this feedback, the school has taken several steps: instituting a modified block scheduling on Wednesday/Thursday, adding study hall periods where teachers are available to help students, adding a homework center so students have opportunities to write after school, and expanding afterschool math tutoring programs.
- ❖ Students' results are disaggregated by grade level in the YouthTruth report. This allowed school leaders at one school to see that they needed to integrate freshmen more effectively in the school community as ninth-graders were rating consistently lower throughout the survey relative to their peers. In response, the school implemented a new orientation program and a Freshman Seminar course that focused on relationship building and self-esteem awareness. Many schools comment on the helpfulness of seeing results disaggregated by grade level.

"YouthTruth data is a very powerful resource to start conversations and motivate change."

School administrator at a YouthTruth school

What Participants Receive

By participating in YouthTruth, school and district/network leaders are able to:

- Compare how the perceptions of students vary within one high school and across a portfolio of schools
- Receive customized YouthTruth reports that display quantitative and qualitative student feedback in a user friendly format and capture students' perceptions about:

¹ In an independent evaluation, school leaders were asked to describe the types of changes that they had already made or planned to make in response to YouthTruth data by issue area.



- their relationships with teachers in school²
- the rigor of their classroom instruction²
- the degree to which their school culture is fair and respectful
- the challenges that make it hard for them to do their best
- their future goals and aspirations.
- Connect and collaborate with school leaders and learn best practices through regional convenings
- Access “YouthTruth in Practice,” an online discussion forum for YouthTruth participants nationwide which summarizes school-level best practices and documents how school leaders are utilizing YouthTruth data to drive change.

What It Costs to Participate in YouthTruth

Participating networks/districts (or individual schools not associated with a network) must pay to participate in YouthTruth 2011-2012 on a per-school basis. Please note that costs below reflect subsidized prices which assume significant ongoing philanthropic support for the YouthTruth program. To fund their share of participation, districts/networks (and schools) may elect to raise funds from local funders. Limited philanthropic support, coordinated by CEP, may also exist for districts/networks that are unable to pay on their own. Please contact CEP for further information.

Services and Deliverables to Participating Schools

For each school participating in YouthTruth, a district/network (or school) must pay a combination of survey administration costs and costs associated with the production of customized YouthTruth school report(s). The total cost per school is \$2,100 plus \$1 per student respondent to cover survey administration costs.

What Schools Receive	Cost
Survey Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a survey administration toolkit (including log-in codes) • Access to YouthTruth website for tracking activities • Management of ongoing school communications 	\$1 per student respondent
Customized YouthTruth School Report(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A customized report summarizing student feedback across five major themes. Student perceptions are presented in a comparative format and segmented by grade level. • Customized analysis on grade level and class type • A summary report designed to be shared with students • A table of all qualitative feedback provided by students as part of the survey • One hour conference call with CEP staff discussing school results 	\$2100 per school
Follow-On Analysis (Requested by Schools) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional tables and analysis (provided only with district/network permission) 	\$100 per report

² In 2011-2012, YouthTruth is planning to pilot an optional module that details students’ perceptions about relationships with teachers and rigor at a classroom level (per teacher) for both English and Math with selected districts/networks.



Services and Deliverables to Participating Districts/Networks

For each district/network participating in YouthTruth, we offer a range of support services to manage the implementation of YouthTruth in associated schools. We also provide each district/network with a customized report that summarizes student feedback from its portfolio of schools and compares its portfolio’s results to the broader YouthTruth dataset. This report includes a written summary of key trends across participating schools, a comparative “snapshot” of school-level results, customized analyses of how student perceptions differ by student demographics, and analyses of up to five custom questions provided by the district/network which are asked of all of its participating schools.

Finally, we offer a convening (virtual or in-person) for participating schools from a given network/district where school leaders reflect on their YouthTruth data, strategize how to share YouthTruth data with their school community, and plan how they will respond to student feedback.

What Districts/Networks Receive	Cost
Survey Administration and Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custom question development and programming • Access to YouthTruth website for tracking activities • Coordination and communications across schools • Network preview call of participating schools’ results 	\$700 per district/network
Customized YouthTruth District/Network Report(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A customized report summarizing student feedback across key themes and comparing school-level results within a district/network. • Customized analysis on differences in student perceptions by key demographics • One hour conference call with CEP staff discussing network level results 	\$1800 per district/network
Convenings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person convening (for networks with more than 5 schools) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlight trends across the district/network ○ Discuss strategies for sharing YouthTruth results with staff and students ○ Forum for exchanging best practices, as reflected by YouthTruth data ○ Action planning in response to YouthTruth data • Virtual convening (for networks with at least 3 schools) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlight trends across the district/network ○ Discuss strategies for sharing YouthTruth results with staff and students ○ Action planning in response to YouthTruth data 	\$1250 plus travel and materials (optional) \$500 (optional)

Key Responsibilities of Participating District and Network Leaders

By participating in YouthTruth, district and network leaders agree to:

- Work with CEP to recruit participating schools
- Designate a staff member who will oversee YouthTruth at participating schools and serve as CEP’s liaison
- Provide CEP with selected school-level data (e.g. student counts) in a timely manner
- Provide up to five custom questions to be added to surveys of schools in their network (optional)
- Review their YouthTruth District/Network Report with CEP in a one-hour conference call
- Co-host a regional convening with CEP for their schools to reflect on YouthTruth data and plan for responding to student feedback (optional)



Key Responsibilities of Participating Schools

By participating in YouthTruth, school leaders agree to:

- Host a Kick-Off YouthTruth Assembly (or classroom presentations) in which students watch the YouthTruth video
- Survey at least 60% of the student body during the one-month survey period
- Participate in a one-hour confidential conference call reviewing their school's YouthTruth report
- Share their school's results with staff and students before the end of the school year
- Participate in a regional convening with other schools in their network or district to reflect on YouthTruth data and plan for responding to student feedback (optional)

YouthTruth 2011-2012 Timeline

We are currently recruiting schools for participation in both Round 1 and Round 2 of YouthTruth 2011-2012. We request that that all schools from a given district/network participate during the same round.

Key Round 1 deadlines include:

- "Early-bird" deadline for participation (\$200 discount per school): **August 15, 2011**
- Deadline for participation (secured by 50% of total estimated payment): **September 1, 2011**
- Survey administration in participating schools: **November 2011**
- CEP distributes school reports to participating schools: **March 2012**
- Convenings to discuss results with groups of participating schools: **March/ April 2012**
- Final payment due to CEP: **April 30, 2012**

Key Round 2 deadlines include:

- "Early-bird" deadline for participation (\$200 discount per school): **October 1, 2011**
- Deadline for participation (secured by 50% of total estimated payment): **November 1, 2011**
- Survey administration in participating schools: **January 2012**
- CEP distributes school reports to participating schools: **April 2012**
- Convenings to discuss results with groups of participating schools: **April/May 2012**
- Final payment due to CEP: **May 30, 2012**

Interested in Learning More?

If you are interested in participating in YouthTruth, please contact: Valerie Threlfall, Vice President of the YouthTruth Initiative, at valeriet@effectivephilanthropy.org or 415-391-3070 ext. 136.

To learn more about YouthTruth, please visit our website at www.youthtruthsurvey.org.