

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 2010 -2011

YouthTruth, an initiative of The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), is a national survey project that provides comparative data to schools, districts, education networks,¹ and 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 school, education, and foundation leaders to increase their effectiveness and impact. We are currently recruiting networks and districts that oversee high schools to participate in YouthTruth for the 2010-2011 school year.

History

YouthTruth was developed in 2008 by CEP and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The work emerged from CEP's history of developing comparative assessment tools for foundations based on the surveys of grantees, applicants, and others. During an initial planning phase, CEP and the Gates Foundation worked with an Advisory Group of education researchers and practitioners to analyze the landscape of beneficiary and student feedback efforts and develop the YouthTruth survey and implementation plan. In 2008–2009, CEP piloted the YouthTruth survey with more than 5,300 students; during the 2009-2010 school year, the project expanded to survey more than 15,000 students from 66 additional high schools, across eight districts and networks from Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. To date, YouthTruth has partnered with 12 districts and networks and surveyed over 21,000 students.

What's Unique about YouthTruth

- ❖ **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 broader national YouthTruth sample. This comparison enables a relative understanding of each school's strengths and weaknesses and also facilitates comparisons across networks – and potentially in the future, across education strategies. YouthTruth directly leverages CEP's nine years of experience providing comparative constituent feedback to funders, an approach that is well cited for its simultaneous rigor and accessibility.
- ❖ **A focus on school leaders and students.** YouthTruth closes the feedback loop with school leaders and students. School leaders and students are rarely an audience for survey data. When school leaders are given access to their students' survey results, they typically don't receive help interpreting them. Students even more infrequently see the results of their feedback. Not only does YouthTruth confidentially share each school's results with its school leadership team, but we also

¹ We define education networks as intermediaries that manage portfolios of schools, either under a common governance structure in the case of charter management organizations or as a means for advancing a common reform agenda.

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provide a summary of results that is designed specifically to be shared with students. By doing so, we engender the support of participating schools and students and gather more honest and accurate data.

- ❖ **Actionable feedback that drives change.** YouthTruth data is designed to inform school improvement efforts and promote improved 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 many schools and helped spur new orientation programs for incoming freshmen, more targeted professional development programs for teachers and staff, and more coordinated curriculum planning across subjects. Schools have also incorporated YouthTruth into their ongoing school improvement plans. YouthTruth data can further be utilized at the network and funder level to compare student experiences across schools and potentially even support Race to the Top and i3 applications.

"[YouthTruth] is the best qualitative data I've received about our school, and it's the best vehicle for student voice I've seen in any school." School administrator at a YouthTruth school

The Benefits of Participating in YouthTruth

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

- Compare how the perceptions of students vary within a specific high school and across a portfolio of schools
- Receive customized YouthTruth reports that display quantitative and qualitative student data in a user friendly format and capture students' perceptions about:
 - their level of engagement with their school,
 - their relationships with adults in school,
 - the rigor of their classroom instruction,
 - their school culture, and
 - their communication about future goals and aspirations with adults in and out of school
- Connect and collaborate with other school leaders who are using perceptual and outcome data to drive school improvement efforts

Each participating network/district receives:

- An aggregated report that summarizes student feedback from its portfolio of schools and compares its portfolio's results to the broader YouthTruth dataset

Each participating school receives:

- A YouthTruth report summarizing its students' feedback. Student feedback is presented in a comparative format and segmented by grade level
- A summary report designed to be shared with students
- A table summarizing all qualitative responses provided by students



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
- Co-host a launch meeting (or conference call) with CEP for participating schools in their district or network
- Designate a staff member who will oversee the YouthTruth process at participating schools
- Provide up to five custom questions to be added to surveys of schools in their network (optional)
- Co-host a regional convening with CEP for schools in their portfolio to reflect on the YouthTruth data
- Review an aggregate YouthTruth report that summarizes their district/network's results during Summer 2011

Key Responsibilities of Participating Schools

By participating in YouthTruth, school leaders agree to:

- Promote YouthTruth on campus using CEP-provided materials
- Host a Kick-Off YouthTruth Assembly (or classroom presentations) in which students watch an MTV-produced video about YouthTruth
- Survey at least 60% of the student body during the one-month survey period (Survey period for Round 1 is November 2010; Survey period for Round 2 is January 2011)
- Confidentially discuss the results of their YouthTruth report with CEP after survey administration
- Participate in a regional convening with other schools in their network or district in order to:
 - Learn from other schools' strengths and discuss opportunities for improvement as reflected in YouthTruth report results
 - Discuss how to move from data to action
- Share YouthTruth results with students before the end of the school year

YouthTruth 2010-2011 Timeline

We are currently recruiting schools for Round 1 and Round 2 of YouthTruth. We request that networks/districts recruit schools in groups of eight or more and that all schools participate during the same round as the rest of their network/district.

Key Round 1 deadlines include:

- Deadline for participation: **September 1, 2010**
- Survey administration in participating schools: **November 1, 2010 – November 30, 2010**
- CEP distributes school reports to participating schools: **March 1, 2011 – March 25, 2011**
- Regional meeting to discuss results with groups of participating schools: **March 18, 2011–April 8, 2011**

Key Round 2 deadlines include:

- Deadline for participation: **October 1, 2010**
- Survey administration in participating schools: **January 3, 2011 – February 4, 2011**
- CEP distributes school reports to participating schools: **April 4, 2011 – April 29, 2011**
- Regional meetings to discuss results with groups of participating schools: **April 25, 2011 – June 3, 2011**



Interested in Learning More?

If you are interested in participating in YouthTruth, please contact: Valerie Threlfall, Director of CEP's West Coast Office, at valeriet@effectivephilanthropy.org or 415-391-3070 ext. 136.

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