



STUDENT INPUT: A Missing Link in Education Reform

YOUTHTRUTH'S POWERFUL STUDENT SURVEY DATA HELPS EDUCATION FUNDERS, DISTRICT AND NETWORK LEADERS, AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS MAKE MORE INFORMED DECISIONS TOWARD IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH.

As the debate about education reform continues, a growing number of education leaders are receiving valuable input from some of their most important, but often overlooked, constituents: the students. These leaders are part of a national survey project called YouthTruth, a unique and transformative initiative of the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) that began with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The premise behind YouthTruth is simple: comparative data detailing students' perceptions of their high school educational experience helps leaders understand how educational reform strategies are being experienced. Over time, YouthTruth plans to explore how students' perceptions link to their educational outcomes, in hopes of providing powerful near-term indicators for tracking longer-term school improvement. In this way, YouthTruth builds on CEP's long history of providing comparative data and insight to the leading philanthropic funders across the country.

Since 2008, 164 high schools and 71,000 students from Washington State to Florida have participated in the YouthTruth project. During the 2010-2011 school year alone, the YouthTruth project worked with 118 schools across 15 districts and school networks, and tripled the number of students surveyed over the previous academic year.

ENGAGING THE SKEPTICS

When YouthTruth enters a school, the biggest cynics are often the students. As one student said, "I need to know that you are going to listen and take my feedback seriously."

That's why YouthTruth offers an MTV video and other tools to help schools engage students in the survey process. School leaders also commit to sharing results with students before the school year ends.

This invested approach inspires greater participation. To date, YouthTruth averages a 77 percent survey response rate across all partner schools, and 98 percent of school leaders have made or plan to make changes based on the data received through YouthTruth.

YouthTruth gives our students the opportunity to speak about the type of school they need and deserve.

– Dr. Darian Jones, Principal of the Carver School of Health Sciences and Research in Atlanta

The YouthTruth survey collects student perceptions across five major themes:

- **Relationships with teachers**
Whether students feel that their teachers support them personally and academically
- **School culture and attitudes**
The degree to which students experience a fair, respectful, and motivating culture
- **Future goals and aspirations**
The extent to which students feel prepared for future goals and aspirations
- **Life outside of high school**
How home and community issues impact students' school work and future plans
- **Rigor of classes and instruction**
Whether students feel challenged to work hard, think critically and believe that their teachers are of high quality

YOUTHTRUTH IS ACTIVELY RECRUITING ADDITIONAL FUNDERS AND PARTICIPANTS.

For more information:

Valerie Threlfall, Director of YouthTruth Project

Center for Effective Philanthropy

(415) 391-3070 ext. 136

valeriet@effectivephilanthropy.org

youthtruthsurvey.org

YOUTHTRUTH OFFERS A UNIQUE APPROACH THAT YIELDS RESULTS.

Detailed comparative data:

YouthTruth's approach offers a relative understanding of each school's strengths and weaknesses as compared to peer schools, across districts and within a broader national sample. Participating districts and networks also receive aggregated reports that compare their district or network to others across the country and highlight the relative distribution of their schools.

A focus on school leaders

and students: YouthTruth closes the feedback loop by confidentially sharing results with each school's leadership team and creating a summary report specifically designed for students. YouthTruth also helps schools interpret their data and offers time for action planning by bringing schools from common networks together to compare results and identify best practices.

Actionable feedback that drives change:

The data YouthTruth gathers is designed to inform school improvement efforts and promote improved decision-making. Already, YouthTruth has facilitated such tangible school changes as new orientation programs for incoming freshmen, more targeted professional development for teachers and staff, and more coordinated curriculum planning across subjects.