



Erlanger, Kentucky

# Gallup Poll Takes Schools Beyond Academics

New data about student needs leads to creation of afterschool programs.



A Kentucky school district uses new data to measure youth perspectives

Teachers and administrators know every student by name in this small community outside Cincinnati. The staff of the Erlanger-Elsmere School District has even developed individual learning plans for each youth to help raise grade-point averages and test scores.

Nevertheless, many students have struggled, especially in middle school. Like a lot of school superintendents, Dr. Kathy Burkhardt knows that although her district worked to help those students, “We have been treating the symptoms, such as test scores and grade-point averages, but not the causes – such as feeling hopeless about the future, not feeling engaged or not having a strong support system in place to help them reach their goals.”

That’s beginning to change, thanks to the district’s use of new data to measure youth perspectives. A new version of the Gallup Student Poll opened the eyes of school leaders to the unfilled needs of their middle schoolers. The poll showed that many youths did not have high hopes about their future. School officials saw that they needed to nurture and engage middle schoolers beyond the classroom.

“The time they spend outside of school is just as

important to their development as the time spent during school,” Burkhardt says. The small district of seven schools serving about 2,200 students committed to do “whatever it takes to ensure that all of our students are continuously progressing and learning.”

## How the New Poll Works

The changes began when the Ready by 21 National Partnership and Gallup selected Northern Kentucky as the pilot site last year for an enhanced Gallup Student Poll, which asks students about their hope, engagement and well-being.

While the standard nationwide version of the student poll provides school districts with aggregated data reports by school and grade, this enhanced poll personalizes the data by connecting a composite of the hope, engagement and well-being data – called a “Ready for the Future” score – to individual student identifiers, allowing the school district to understand the perspectives of every student.

Eighty-three Northern Kentucky schools have administered the poll. Schools combined the Ready for the Future scores with academic and other data to identify the need for student interventions



and school-wide initiatives. The individual student identifiers helped determine how to allocate scarce resources for maximum impact.

“You really have to know your students to know the obstacles they are facing,” Burkhardt says. “It takes more time, but it’s worth it.”

For example: The hope-related items of the poll include such questions as, “I know I will graduate from high school” and “I know I will find a good job after I graduate.” Low scores on that section led the district to create more afterschool opportunities, especially ones that offered career and college exploration.

### Changes

To provide middle schoolers with more engagement opportunities, the district worked with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati to launch an afterschool program for middle schoolers last year. In addition, the nonprofit Brighton Center worked with the district to offer middle schoolers its afterschool Youth Leadership Development (YLD) program, which features health and fitness activities, art, service-learning projects, computer classes and academic help. Most importantly, the YLD program provides opportunities for youth to build decision-making, leadership and life skills. Community service events allow youth to apply these new skills.

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A typical day at the YLD includes students sharing their high and low points of the day, a staff member introducing a topic such as bullying, students leading a discussion on a topic of their choice, followed by skits and role plays to further explore the issue.

The program serves 80 youth in three convenient YLD locations in the community: Dayton, Newport and Silver Grove. This makes transportation to and from programming far easier for the youth involved.

A big part of the program focuses on helping youth feel hopeful about the future. Job shadowing, career exploration events and education about post-secondary opportunities help youth understand what is available to them and how to position themselves for success.

“The 80 youth who participate in the program are reimagining a new future for themselves,” says Connie Freking, the center’s youth services director. “One where goals are realized, friendship and connections are forged, and dreaming big is the new reality.”

Enhanced data from the Gallup Student Poll is now part of the Forum’s Ready Youth catalyst package, which provides tools and technical assistance to collect and analyze data about youth. Leaders use the findings to carry out community conversations that drive solutions.

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