

Ready Youth

Leveraging the Power of the Gallup Student Poll

Imagine . . .

your community having comprehensive data to show whether or not young people are on the path to success. Then imagine that data getting into the hands of people prepared to do something about it.

Getting children and youth ready for the future requires tackling all aspects of their well-being, from health and safety to social and emotional connections to academic success. Schools are awash in data – graduation rates, attendance and course completion metrics. Communities can access abundant data from public systems tracking risky behaviors – juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, substance abuse. Unfortunately, to know if young people are truly ready for the future, this data is not enough.

Now, by asking young people themselves, community leaders can measure:

- Young people's ideas and energy for the future.
- Their involvement in and enthusiasm for school.
- How they think about and experience their lives.

These simple pieces of information are better than almost any other measure – including GPA and standardized test scores – at predicting of whether or not young people will be successful in college, work and life. Ready Youth combines this new data with other data sets and proven stakeholder engagement strategies to help leaders find and fill the readiness gaps that prevent their young people from succeeding.

What is Ready Youth?

Ready Youth is a campaign that starts with a new kind of data, then uses that information to help communities catalyze solutions. The process begins with a powerful measure of youth voice: the Gallup Student Poll, which each year measures the hope, engagement and well-being of several hundred thousand young people. (See box on right.) Rather than letting this valuable data sit on the shelf, Ready Youth uses it to ignite conversations – conversations that drive solutions. Ready Youth engages a wide array of community members in conversations to address areas of need, then generates strategies and recommendations for making immediate improvements.

School districts that use the Gallup Student Poll receive an online scorecard showing their data by school and grade. Through the Forum for Youth Investment's partnership with Gallup, communities that participate in Ready Youth also receive a data table with the community-wide results by students' zip code, gender, age, race/ethnicity and living arrangement. This reduces the risk of unproductive comparisons between schools, and allows for better comparisons with other youth and community data.

The Forum will work with Ready Youth communities to identify existing data on children and youth that can be combined with poll findings. The result: a customized picture of a community's young people. Leaders can examine previously unconnected data in new ways, allowing them to take stock of how youth are doing in various aspects of their lives, and how they perceive themselves and their place in the community.

“A growing . . . body of research is finding that students with high levels of hope get better grades and graduate at higher rates than those with lower levels, and that the presence of hope in a student is a better predictor of grades and class ranking than standardized test scores.”
— Allie Grasgreen, “Here's Hoping,”
Inside Higher Ed, July 6, 2012.

The **Gallup Student Poll** takes less than 10 minutes to complete online. It measures:

- *Hope* – the ideas and energy that young people have for the future
- *Engagement* – involvement in and enthusiasm for school
- *Well-being* – how young people think about and experience their lives

Since its launch in 2009, Gallup has collected more than two million responses from 5th through 12th graders in public schools. **Only 1/3 of respondents are hopeful, engaged and thriving**, and yet Gallup's research finds that these three variables drive students' achievement, retention and future employment. Learn more at www.gallupstudentpoll.com.



How Does Ready Youth Work?

The Forum works with communities every step of the way, providing materials, training and consultations. Through both cohort and personalized technical assistance and coaching, we help communities launch the poll, analyze the data and facilitate solution-focused conversations through community gatherings and campaigns.

The Forum helps communities think through and implement Ready Youth from start to finish, including:

- **Identifying a lead organization:** often a community partnership or coalition with the capacity to negotiate, plan, convene and communicate.
- **Defining what to study:** both the geographic area to be covered as well as other types of data that could be combined with the student poll results.
- **Collecting and presenting data:** preparing for the poll to be administered through schools each October and making meaningful the community-wide aggregated data tables sent in January.
- **Holding community conversations:** involving students, business owners, elected officials, teachers, parents and others to generate action to address specific findings or to compile more data (e.g. the presence of afterschool programs in neighborhoods where youth report low levels of engagement).
- **Getting commitments and tracking progress:** to capture action steps that spring from the community conversations, so that when communities repeat the poll and reconvene stakeholders, they can expect to see change in their young people's hope, engagement and well-being.

From Data to Action

Each community will identify local strategies to increase young people's hope, engagement and well-being that reflect their context and highest priorities. We anticipate commitments like:

- **Parents** will talk with their kids regularly about their goals and future plans
- **Businesses** will offer job-shadowing and career talks to add relevance to coursework
- **Teachers and principals** will ensure every student has at least one ongoing adult champion in the building, and that classes connect their content to readiness for college and careers
- **Civic leaders** will pursue efforts to improve school and neighborhood safety
- **Community partners** will provide mentors and teach problem-solving skills

"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."

***—Dr. Kathy Burkhardt, Superintendent,
Erlanger-Elsmere Independent School District***

A Case in Action

Leaders in Indianola, Miss., launched Ready Youth in 2012. That fall, 1,500 students in the city's elementary, middle and high schools participated in the enhanced Gallup Student Poll. Some findings were reassuring; others were troubling. Sixty-four percent of the youths described themselves as "thriving," leaving 35 percent "struggling." Almost half checked in as "discouraged" or "stuck." Only 44 percent were engaged in their schools and community; about one-fourth were "actively disengaged." A surprising number of high schoolers felt unsafe.

The school district and its local partners discussed the findings through focus groups and presentations with community leaders, parents and students. In 2013, the partners began addressing the issues through such measures as training teachers to better engage students, creating a safety strategy for the high school, and winning nearly \$1 million for new afterschool and mentoring programs. Indianola conducted the poll again, and continues to hold community conversations and explore solutions through Ready Youth.

"It's causing us all to become more enlightened about what children need. Now we have children speaking about their own issues." – Dr. Earl Watkins, Conservator (former), Indianola School District.

Join the movement to get all young people Ready by 21. To talk about how to bring Ready Youth to your community, contact Ian Faigley at (202) 207-3334 or ian@forumfyi.org

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan action tank dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. www.forumfyi.org. Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment to make a measurable difference in the lives of children and youth. www.readyby21.org.