



## Frequently Asked Questions About the Youth Experience Survey

The Youth Experience Survey (YES) is an important part of the Evidence2Success prevention framework. YES is a self-report survey that is administered in middle and high schools. YES data, interpreted by community and public system representatives, drive key decisions about priorities and programming choices as the initiative rolls out in the partner neighborhoods and can be used to gauge progress in improving community-wide outcomes over time.

### What is the Evidence2Success Youth Experience Survey?

As part of the Evidence2Success effort in your community, YES asks young people about their experiences and well-being in five critical areas of life: behavior, education, emotional well-being, positive relationships and physical health.

The survey also helps identify risk and protective factors, which are scientifically validated characteristics of children and their environment. Risk factors increase the likelihood of developing problems in the future. Perceived availability of cigarettes, alcohol and illegal drugs, for example, is a risk factor that makes it more likely for children to become involved in drugs as well as violent behavior. As examples of protective factors, parents, friends and education professionals can model positive behaviors, uphold clear standards for behavior and provide opportunities, skills and recognition for meaningful involvement. These protective factors help to buffer a child from risk factors such as living in a neighborhood with a high perceived availability of drugs.

By identifying these positive and negative influences, communities can work to prevent problems before they occur.

### What can the survey results help us to understand?

YES provides a point-in-time snapshot of issues affecting local youth development. Survey data also show how this group of youth is doing in comparison to other youth. This knowledge helps a community decide what actions to take in order to help its young people. With this knowledge, the community board can choose tested, effective programs to strengthen prioritized protective factors or decrease prioritized risk factors.

### Who takes the survey?

YES is administered to public school students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. Parental consent is required for youth to participate in the survey. (Consent procedures may differ by school system; many districts have a passive consent process.) Students must be able to take the survey unassisted in English or Spanish in order to participate.

### How is YES administered?

YES is administered in school during regular class time. The school district can elect to administer YES on paper or online, depending on a variety of considerations, including technology infrastructure. A spring administration is preferred because students can respond to questions about their school based on their experiences in the past several months.

### Do youth have to participate?

No; participation in YES is always voluntary. Youth are informed of their right to decline to participate. They may skip any questions they do not wish to answer, and they may stop at any time.

### How were the survey questions selected?

The survey questions are derived from over 20 years of extensive research in the field of prevention science and related fields. The questions have been tested on large, diverse samples of youth to ensure that they are accurate and consistent measures of well-being. The survey is reviewed and approved by the local school district before it is administered.

### How do we know youth give honest responses to survey questions?

Research on student self-reporting of substance use and antisocial behavior indicates that young people tend to be honest about their behavior and experience on anonymous, confidential surveys. Analysis strategies allow screening for dishonest or exaggerated responses. If a survey does not meet the criteria for honesty, it is eliminated from the data set.

### Can the Youth Experience Survey be shortened?

The survey takes 50 minutes to administer — approximately one class period. Setting aside this short amount of time will reap long-term rewards through improvements to school curricula and programming that increase

each student's likelihood of success in school. The more complete the baseline information provided by YES, the more complete the picture of well-being for local youth will be. Additionally, the programs that are chosen through the Evidence2Success process can be better targeted to the needs of local youth.

We can work with you to ensure that the survey does not pose undue burden to the students and does not take more than one class period to administer. Several options exist, including shortening the survey (by removing some of the items we measure) or administering a paper-and-pencil survey. In our experience, this often saves time, since students do not need to move to their computer lab and get set up.

### Why do some of the questions seem deficit oriented or phrased in a negative way?

The survey assesses risks to youth well-being as well as protection provided through strengths, positive relationships and many other factors. Risk and protection are both of great importance. Specific questions that hone in on risk contribute to the completeness of the picture of well-being and provide valuable information for choosing programs.

### Do we have to include questions that aren't acceptable to our community (on sex, drugs, etc.)?

These are serious problems in some communities, although they may not be evident on the surface. In fact, risky behaviors like these are seen in youth in every community in the United States. Research shows that asking these kinds of questions does not increase the incidence of these problems. The survey is voluntary; parents can come to the school to review a hard copy of it. Since parental consent is required, parents who are uncomfortable with the content can request to have their children complete another activity during the survey period. Students may skip any question they do not want to answer and may stop participating at any time.

### What if our results make our schools or partner neighborhoods look bad?

Getting accurate information about what's going on with local youth is the best way to start making things better. Evidence2Success takes a strengths-based approach to presenting that information. School system leaders should use the survey as part of a data-driven approach to improving youth well-being and opportunities for success in school. The survey is a vital element of local Evidence2Success efforts, providing a foundation for multiple public system and community partners to commit to taking collective responsibility for improving outcomes.

### Can we use the data we already collect to set priorities?

YES is critical to Evidence2Success. Reviews conducted by the Foundation and its partners show that most surveys do not cover all the areas this survey measures. In particular, YES provides information on risk and

protective factors that allows public agencies, schools and communities to get ahead of the game by identifying potential problems before they occur. Administrative data may be used in addition to the survey. Instead of YES, other surveys that provide accurate measures of youth well-being and risk and protective factors may be used for setting priorities. Accurate data on risk and protection help communities choose the most needed prevention programs for their youth.