

FAQs for Developmental Assets Survey Results Release

March 17, 2011

Version2

THE BASICS

1. Now that we have the survey results what does it tell us?

This isn't really a set of answers but a conversation starter. It is important to remember that the survey is a snapshot of what our youth think and feel as reflected by their responses to the questions. Some questions ask how they have felt in the past 30 days and can be impacted by events occurring prior to their taking the survey. That being said, the survey tells us that our youth overall are doing well, but that we, as adults in the community, have areas for improvement.

2. How many PAUSD students are represented in this survey?

This survey represents the voices of 4055 students. 633 Fifth graders, 739 seventh graders and 2683 high schoolers.

3. What % of PAUSD students are reflected in these results?

Based on 11th day enrollment numbers:

- Elementary School – 5th grade only 73%
- Middle School – 7th grade only 83%
- High School – 9th – 12th grade 74%

4. How representative was the sample (of gender or the various demographic/ethnic groups on our campuses)?

It was representative ethnically and by gender.

5. How reliable is this data? How do you know that students told the truth?

1. The Search Institute has been conducting the DA survey for 45 years and has numerous mechanisms for filtering out invalid surveys.
2. Search eliminated 54 surveys from the total set of High School surveys collected by PAUSD. (2683 valid surveys remained)
3. The survey was anonymous, voluntary and confidential.

6. Since so many other school districts in Santa Clara County took this survey, how do our results compare with other districts or communities in the County ?

1. County results will be available through Project Cornerstone on March 24th, however the Search Institute cautions against comparing a community to aggregated data from many communities.
2. The DA survey results offer a given community a focused look into the particular strengths and needs of their youth. As such, the DA survey results serve as a very useful tool for developing community-specific strategies to improve the health and well-being of young people.
3. Because each community is unique, comparing results from various communities is of less value than staying focused on what youth are “saying” in their own community.
4. Comparing to previous County DA results from '05 is not very useful due to the increase in number of students taking the survey and the change in mix of students between high school students and lower grade students.

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CONTEXT : THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

7. What are Developmental Assets?

1. Developmental assets are the positive values, relationships, and experiences that youth need to thrive.
2. Youth with low asset levels are more likely to engage in risk behaviors and fail to achieve at school.
3. Youth with high asset levels are more likely to choose healthy activities, succeed in school, and avoid risk behaviors.

8. This data is reported in a very different way – via “assets”. Do you have suggestions that would help us put this data into perspective?

The Developmental Asset results are very different than the type of results most people are used to – and therefore, need careful consideration.

1. Each Developmental Asset is usually determined from a combination of responses from multiple questions.
2. Particular survey questions relate to a given asset. Responses are evaluated by the Search Institute to determine either *the presence or absence of an asset in a youth's life “in order to simplify survey reporting and focus on overall trends. In reality...young people experience assets by degrees, and not as an “all or nothing” proposition.” (page 3-1)*
3. **For context and perspective, it is likely useful to consider the Asset report in combination with the actual breakdown of student responses to survey questions. (see appendix B)**
4. Try to think of the “data” as Palo Alto’s student voices, telling us what they experience in our community and what they need from us – their parents, their schools and other community adults.

9. How do you explain the diminishing number of assets as youth reach adolescence?

1. The Search Institute reports that this phenomena is experienced consistently throughout the many years this survey has been administered. Some pull back from students and risk taking is considered normal for adolescent development.
2. For a more information refer to The Asset Challenge for All Communities (section 1-8)

THE RESULTS

10. Were the results as you (PSN) expected?

We received this data just this week and expect to spend a lot more time on this, but the initial read of the data was what we expected to see.

High school students:

1. A number of strengths among our teens
2. Some gaps in assets that would provide direction for how/ where the adult community (parents, schools and community) can improve its support of Palo Alto youth
3. Students express a strong connection to each other and their schools and a lot of respect for their peers
4. Students express that they don't feel valued by the adults in the community.

As expected the middle school students have more developmental assets than the high school students but begin to taper off when compared to the elementary students. There we see:

1. Some gaps in the area of planning and decision-making along with a lower sense of personal power.
2. Students are making good choices and avoiding risky behavior.
3. Amount of time dedicated to creative activities declines.

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11. Did anything in the results surprise you?

In this first look at the data a few things we noticed are below. Further conversations with the students are planned including focus groups that should help us better understand what the youth are telling us.

For high school students:

1. The assets dipped lower for eleventh graders and then back up for twelfth graders.
2. Results in the "support" category are lower than we would have hoped.
 - i. 32% of the students reported that they have positive family communication
 - ii. 35% of the students reported that they have a caring neighborhood
 - iii. 39% of the students reported that they have a caring school climate
 - iv. 33% of the students reported that they have parents actively involved in helping in school success

For middle school students:

1. Results in the "support" category are lower than we would have hoped as well, especially a caring neighborhood and school climate. However, when you look at the actual question "In my neighborhood, there are a lot of people who care about me" the results reflect that 50% of those surveyed either agree or strongly agree and 36% are not sure. This is one of many areas where focus groups will give us more insight.
2. The external assets for empowerment were also lower than expected.
 - i. Community values youth 40%
 - ii. Youth as resources 47%
 - iii. Safety 46%

12. What are some of the obvious gaps that our survey results revealed?

1. Once again, Much more will be revealed as we pore over this data over the next few weeks, but a very early, initial look reveals that we need to find better ways to show youth that community adults:
 - i. Truly CARE about them
 - ii. Want and value youth VOICES and their contributions to our community
 - iii. Set rules that are fair and consistent
 - iv. Improve in modeling positive behaviors
 - v. Can create more supportive and caring environments in our schools and neighborhoods
2. Section 7 in the Full Report – "Taking Action" – offers great guidance to what young people, educators, parents and other caring adults within the community can start doing TODAY to build an asset-rich community for youth.
3. A number of these suggestions are already underway in Palo Alto schools and community.

13. What does the data suggest we should do to improve the health of our youth– as a community, as a school system, as families, as peers?

1. Continue to work on communication and engagement with our youth at the family level, school level and community level (not limited to your neighborhood students)
2. For more detailed recommendations refer to section 7 Taking Action in particular:
 - I. Strengthening the Foundation of Developmental Assets
 - II. Characteristics of Healthy, Asset-Building Communities
 - III. Creating an Asset-Rich Community

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14. Now that the results are in – what does PSN (the many youth-serving agencies, individuals, City and school district), peers, families and Palo Alto community plan to do?

1. Again, the survey results have just been received.
2. PSN committees and the school district need to fully study the survey results in order to better understand what our youth are “saying” in the results – and therefore what our next steps should be.
3. PSN expects that the results may generate even more questions – and we would like to conduct student focus groups in order to gather the true (deeper) meaning behind particular results.
4. See Section on “Asset Challenge for all Communities” – page I-8.
5. The DA survey report itself, along with the Search Institute and Project Cornerstone’s many resources provide easy access and solid ideas for actual steps communities can take to close the gaps identified in our results.

15. How do we know that more assets means fewer risky behaviors?

The Search Institute has surveyed nearly 3 million youth over the past 20 years and has demonstrated a compelling correlation to the number of assets students have and the less likely they are to engage in high-risk behavior. Assets may be viewed as tools/coping strategies that students have to deal with difficult choices.

16. What is the right number of assets?

The Search Institute makes the following distinctions:

1. Thriving/optimal is 31- 40 assets
2. Adequate is 21-30 assets
3. Vulnerable is 11-20 assets
4. At risk is 1-10 assets

17. How many assets do our kids have?

The PAUSD high schoolers, on average, have about 21 assets which is right on the cusp between adequate and vulnerable. 68% of 7th graders and 82% of 5th graders have 21 or more assets. Good work is underway. The voices of our students will guide our work going forward.

18. How do I, as a parent, know how my kids are doing?

One way is to go over how your child responds to some or all of the questions on the Youth Assessment survey http://www.projectcornerstone.org/pdfs/evaltoolkit/phase1/PCyouthassessment_41assets.pdf

Or check this Parent Guide for a quick assessment tool.

<http://www.projectcornerstone.org/pdfs/assettips/1PowerfulParenting.pdf>