YouthTruth 2019 Executive Summary

Overview

As part of the 2023 Strategic Plan, Simon Youth Foundation (SYF) has ambitious plans to launch new Academies and reach even more students across the country. As our footprint expands, SYF is focused on meeting the unique needs of our partner districts and students. Starting in 2015, SYF partnered with the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) – a national nonprofit – to capture, analyze and act on data about our students and their satisfaction with our grant investments.

Specifically, CEP conducted the nationally normed YouthTruth Student Survey in 2015, 2017 and 2019 that asked our students to evaluate their experiences across six key themes (see chart below). In December 2019, CEP compiled our student responses and provided SYF ratings in comparison with 547 schools nationwide. Through these national comparable demographic sets, SYF is able to identify key areas in which our programs excel and themes where there is room for further investment and support to our public school partners.

Results

While once benchmarked, in year-over-year comparisons, SYF YouthTruth results from 2015, 2017 and 2019 show several positive trends for Simon Youth Academies during the same time periods in comparison to other high schools in the national normative set. Each year SYF participation has increased. In 2015, 58% of SYF students surveyed at 19 Academies responded; in 2017, 76% of SYF students surveyed at 21 Academies responded; in 2019, the response rate increased to 79%, with a total of 27 Academies participating, providing an opportunity to compare multiple data sets and identify trends and opportunities.

Benchmarked results from 2015 through 2019 show that SYF Academies are closing the gap in the themes of Relationships with Peers (IV) when compared to the national data set. SYF Academies remain consistently higher in the themes of Academic Rigor (II) and College and Career Readiness (VI). These year-over-year benchmarked trends document and show the positive results of professional development programming provided by SYF through activities such as Kappa Delta Pi membership, access to specialized trauma informed training, and SYF’s Annual Conference.

A highlight of the 2019 benchmarked trends and insights is that Simon Youth Rose Tree Media Academy (Media, PA) scored the highest of all 37 Academies in the Relationships with Teachers (III) theme and in the 100th percentile of the entire dataset nationally. This Academy also experienced 15% increases in the themes of School Culture (V) and College and Career Readiness (VI). Guided by a Superintendent that began her career as a teacher at the Academy, the staff has put significant effort into making sure students feel supported and encouraged by their teachers. They help students set daily goals, and meet with them regularly to work through problems and challenges in their assignments. Academy teachers and administrators take student feedback to heart, using the data to improve the student experience at their Academy. Simon Youth Rose Tree Media Academy was also featured in the national Case Study of SYF’s use of student voice to drive changes across our national network of Academies. You can read the full Case Study at syf.org/youthtruth.

In 2019, and consistent with years past, SYF students reported an overwhelmingly positive perception of their Academy experiences, with percentages above the national norms in critical areas, as noted in the table on the second page.
### 2019 Theme and Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Simon Youth Academy Responses (27)</th>
<th>National School Data Set (547)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Student Engagement</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Academic Rigor</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Relationships with Teachers</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Relationship with Peers</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. School Culture</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. College &amp; Career Readiness</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2019 Benchmarked Trends

- SYF Academies demonstrated the largest positive differential in the themes of Relationships with Teachers (III) and School Culture (V) when compared to the national data set.

- Though Relationships with Peers (IV) is SYF’s lowest percentage theme, peer belonging and collaboration across all Simon Youth Academies is trending positively from 2015 to 2019 at an increase of 5%, while the typical high school rating nationally is trending downward at a 20% decrease from 2015 to 2019.

- Unlike national trends that report increased bullying, there was a decrease in the percentage of SYF students who report being bullied by their peers, from 19% in 2017 to 8% in 2019. This statistic reinforces that SYF professional development around the reduction of bullying and positive school culture is impactful.

### Additional Insights

- Consistent with 2015 and 2017, SYF students said Relationships with Teachers (III) are what they like most about their school.

- The percentage of SYF students who seriously considered suicide in the previous year stayed consistent from 2017 to 2019 at 23%, reinforcing the ongoing need for professional development training and services to deepen educator understanding of the different forms of grief and trauma as well as grief counseling for students.

- 69% of SYF students identified their home life as a main source of hardship for performing their best in school; 20% above the national average of 49%. In addition, 71% of SYF students considered dropping out of traditional high school because of personal problems at home. This statistic reinforces the positive work of SYF, the identified need for our Academies and the value of our partnerships with school districts to support students with difficult life circumstances.
2020 Action

It is imperative SYF continue to prioritize providing Academy educators with critical professional development opportunities that focus on furthering positive trends in key theme areas from the YouthTruth Student Survey. Working closely with CEP, SYF will further analyze and communicate the results to our partner school districts. The overall results will be shared with all SYF Academies, with detailed plans for how teachers can use the data to inform next steps for their individual Academies.

Each Academy that participated in the survey is offered site specific training and support sessions led by CEP. During these sessions, CEP will provide teachers and administrators with knowledge to:

- Analyze their individual data set;
- Prioritize efforts to address areas for improvement;
- Measure the effectiveness of those efforts, and
- Communicate their findings to their students and school districts

The 2020 SYF Annual Conference will offer sessions focusing on identified growth areas that impact Simon Youth Academy educators and students. Professional development opportunities for Academy staff will focus on social emotional learning, classism, impact bias, grief and trauma.

Additionally, SYF is committed to supporting the positive trends in relationships with teachers at Simon Youth Academies by providing Academy teachers with additional professional development shaped by positive psychology, participation in the Bader Fellowship Program, Enhancement Grants for professional development or student-focused programs and our annual Teacher and Administrator of the Year programs.

Finally, these results will inform our overarching communications strategy for 2020 and beyond. As SYF is a demonstrated leader in many areas, the Foundation can leverage these results to increase awareness of our role and impact in the education space.