

# Measuring Youth Development: Creation & Analysis of Oregon's Positive Youth Development Benchmark

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## Abstract

Public health benchmarks are indicators for well-being and health status that help inform program planning and policy development. In Oregon, recent efforts by a group of state agencies and community partners led to the adoption of a Positive Youth Development (PYD) benchmark by the Oregon Progress Board in 2006. The PYD benchmark was developed and tested to measure the status of youth across the state by adding questions to the Oregon Healthy Teens survey (YRBS). We hypothesized that, if our measures are valid, we should find strong associations linking high levels of PYD to lower levels of risk behaviors and higher levels of positive, healthy behaviors. We selected ten major health behavior areas, such as nutrition, physical activity, substance use, and grade performance, and analyzed the association between PYD and health behaviors; results fully validated our expectations. Results indicated strong relationships between high levels of PYD and a) reduced levels of risk behaviors and b) increased levels of positive, healthy behaviors among Oregon youth. The creation of this benchmark allows better planning, development and monitoring of PYD programs by state agencies, schools and community partners. In addition, results reinforce the finding that the promotion of such programs that boost one or more elements of PYD may help reduce risky behaviors and improve positive, healthy behaviors among adolescents.

## Purpose

- To accurately measure the Positive Youth Development characteristics of Oregon youth by creating a valid Statewide Benchmark

## Hypothesis

If our benchmark questions accurately capture PYD, we will find a strong association between higher levels of PYD and:

- Lower levels of risk
- Higher levels of healthy behaviors

## Methods

- Six questions representing five components of PYD theory were included on the 2006 Oregon Healthy Teens (OHT) survey
- OHT was administered to 3,615 eighth graders and 2,602 eleventh graders from randomly selected Oregon secondary schools
- Two-way tests of association ( $\chi^2$  tests with Rao-Scott corrections) were produced for each of the 6 PYD questions against questions representing ten different risk areas
- Risk areas included: nutrition, physical activity, suicide, sexual behaviors, tobacco, alcohol and drug use, grade performance, suspension from school and physical fighting
- Three possible benchmarks were tested using all 6 questions; one was selected
- Benchmark was also tested against all 10 risk areas using  $\chi^2$  tests

## Final Benchmark

The PYD state benchmark is: "Percent of teens who report positive youth development attributes; a) 8th grade; b) 11th grade."

PYD attributes are defined as answering at least 5 of 6 questions positively (Excellent/very good/good or Very much true/pretty much true responses)

## Key Results

Results provided strong evidence that students with higher levels of PYD are less likely to incur health behavior risks and more likely to adopt healthy, positive behaviors. At both the 8th and 11th grade levels, students that met the PYD Benchmark were more likely to:

- Have had at least 3 servings of fruits and vegetables a day during the past 7 days;
- Have been physically active at least 3 days a week for 60 minutes or more during the past 7 days;
- Have not seriously considered suicide during the past 12 months;
- Have never had sexual intercourse;
- Have not smoked tobacco at all during the past 30 days;
- Have not used marijuana, inhalants, prescription drugs, stimulants, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and/or LSD during the past 30 days;
- Have not consumed any alcohol during the past 30 days;
- Have mostly A and B grades.

## What is Positive Youth Development?

"Youth development is an approach that focuses on young people's capacities, strengths and developmental needs – not solely on their problems (risks, or negative behaviors). The approach calls for a shift from crisis management and problem reduction to strategies that increase youth contact with positive, supportive relationships and challenging, meaningful activities." (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine)

## Conceptual framework for developing PYD measurement tools

Dimension	PYD Component	Component Description
Individual	Competence	Belief in individual ability to do something well
Individual	Confidence	Feeling of empowerment and control over the future
Individual	Health	Physical, emotional or mental health
Environmental	Support	Connectedness to family and the school community
Environmental	Service	Engagement in the community

## PYD Question Wording

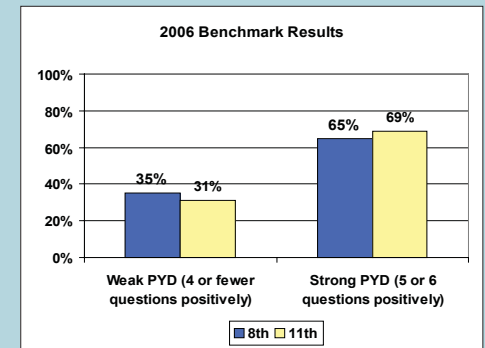
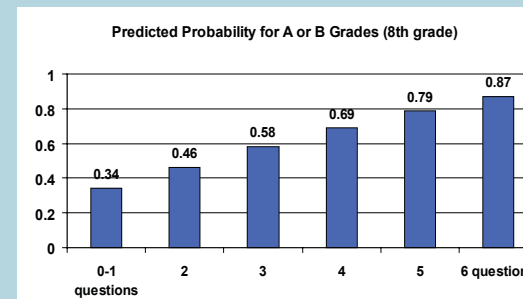
PYD Component	Question	Answer choices
Health (2)	"In general, would you say your [physical/emotional] health is...?"	Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor
Competence	"I can do most things if I try."	Very much true, Pretty much true, A little true, Not at all true
Confidence	"I can work out my problems."	Very much true, Pretty much true, A little true, Not at all true
Support	"There is at least one teacher or other adult at my school that really cares about me."	Very much true, Pretty much true, A little true, Not at all true
Service	"I volunteer to help others in my community."	Very much true, Pretty much true, A little true, Not at all true

## Levels of Statistical Significance for the Relationship between Individual PYD Questions and Health Risk Behaviors

	Physical Health		Mental Health		Confidence		Support		Service		Competence	
	8th	11th	8th	11th	8th	11th	8th	11th	8th	11th	8th	11th
Nutrition	***	***	***	**	***	**	***	**	***	***	***	**
Physical Activity	***	***	***	***	***	***	*	*	***	***	***	***
Suicide	***	**	***	***	***	*	***	**	***	-	***	***
Sexual Activity	-	*	***	*	-	-	***	**	-	*	-	-
Tobacco Use	***	*	***	***	***	***	***	**	***	***	*	**
Drug Use	***	-	***	***	*	***	*	***	***	***	***	-
Alcohol use	**	-	***	-	***	-	**	***	***	***	***	-
School Suspension	-	-	**	-	**	-	*	-	*	*	***	-
Physical Fighting	-	-	***	-	*	*	***	***	**	-	**	-
Grades	***	***	***	**	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***

## Levels of Statistical Significance for the Relationship between PYD Benchmark (at least 5 of 6 questions answered positively) and Health Risk Behaviors

	Nutrition	Physical Activity	Suicide	Sexual Activity	Tobacco Use	Drug Use	Alcohol Use	School Suspension	Physical Fighting	Grades
8th	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	**	***	***
11th	***	***	***	**	***	***	**	-	-	***



## Individual PYD Question Results

