

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE YOUTH FOR POSITIVE CHANGE PROGRAM

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This paper provides data on issues surrounding the Youth for Positive Change (YPC) program that were raised by Board Member Korenstein in her April 27, 2004 memo to Ted Bartell and Hector Madrigal. Specifically, Board Member Korenstein asked PERB to determine whether on-campus intervention provided by the YPC program a) recaptures Average Daily Attendance (ADA) by providing in-school, on-campus intervention rather than out-of-school, off-campus suspensions, and b) stems recidivism, as students actively participate in the disciplinary process. In order to evaluate these possible outcomes, we focused on the following data sources: 1) number of suspensions, 2) attendance rates, and 3) crimes per thousand students enrolled.

The Youth for Positive Change program is being used at three high schools in LAUSD. Verdugo Hills High School is the model school site, with Venice High School and Belmont High School being project demonstration sites. The program is described as:

a 501 (c) 3 non-profit association that promotes healthier living physically, mentally, and socially. The organization services youth ages 12-25 in the secondary campuses. The organization achieves this goal by implementing Student-to-Student Assistance Programs: Peer Mediation—Conflict Resolution, Peer Counseling/Peer Mentoring, Preventative Health Programs and Community Youth Health and Leadership Initiative Symposiums that empower youth.¹

The basic tenet of the program is to address disciplinary issues through a progressive model of discipline, wherein students are taught to acknowledge their problematic behavior, given the tools to modify their behavior, and take ownership of the consequences. This goal is met primarily by using peer mentoring and counseling, as well as in-school intervention and Saturday school instead of out-of-school suspensions.

Verdugo Hills High School began using the program in the 1998-99 school year, and the program is now operating full-time (32 hours per week). Venice High School and Belmont High School began using the program in the 2002-03 school year on a part-time basis (16 hours per week). However, while Venice began delivering services to students during the 2002-03 school year, Belmont did not do so until the 2003-04 school year (see Table 1). The first three years of each school's program are funded by the California Endowment. Year 1 consists primarily of needs assessment and appraisal of the school environment, as well as part-time service delivery

¹ Information about the program can be found at: www.y4pc.org.

by a college student counselor. Year 2 includes service delivery by a program director and program technician, who coordinate the peer assistance and mentoring. Because data for 2003-04 is not yet available, Belmont High School is not included in the analyses.

Table 1. Schools Using the Youth for Positive Change Program in LAUSD

School Name	Date of Implementation
Verdugo Hills High School	1998-99
Venice High School	2002-03
Belmont High School	2002-03 (needs assessment only) 2003-04 (service delivery)

In order to assess whether the YPC program at Verdugo Hills and Venice High Schools is having an impact on suspensions, attendance, and/or crime rates, we gathered data from LAUSD’s Decision Support System (DSS), the School Information Branch, and the Los Angeles School Police Department. We used the School Characteristics Index (SCI) to identify comparison schools similar to those using the YPC program. The characteristics used to calculate the SCI include student mobility, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as a school’s percentage of emergency and fully-credentialed teachers, percentage of English language learners, average class size, and multi-track year-round educational program participation. The index can be interpreted as representing that part of performance attributable to background variables. Thus, schools with indexes close in numerical value are described as facing similar overall educational challenges and opportunities.² Table 2 shows the YPC schools’ SCI scores, as well as the SCI scores of the two schools immediately above them and immediately below them in a rank-ordered list of LAUSD high schools. In data tables, YPC schools are presented right justified in bold capital letters, and comparison schools are presented left justified in title case. The data tables are rank-ordered by a school’s performance on the target data element (e.g., attendance rate). This array provides a useful “at-a-glance” ranking because the predicted ranking for a YPC school is at the median. When a YPC school is ranked above the median, it is considered outperforming similar schools. Similarly, a ranking below the median indicates under-performance by the YPC school.

² Technical Design Group of the Advisory Committee for the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. *Construction of California’s 1999 School Characteristics Index and Similar Schools Ranks* (April 2000). www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/tech0400.pdf

Table 2. SCI Scores for YPC Schools and Similar Schools

School Name	2003 SCI
Van Nuys	149.9
Kennedy	150.5
VERDUGO HILLS	151.0
Grant	151.2
Cleveland	153.8
Canoga Park	145.4
Carson	147.1
VENICE	147.7
Hamilton	147.8
North Hollywood	150.0

Although the YPC Collaborative listed the attendance and suspension rates in its publication, *Administrative Support Personnel Professional Development Resource Book*, data were only provided for the 2002-03 school year. Rather than attempt to recreate the data files for prior years and additional schools, we drew all data for this report from central sources (e.g., DSS and LASP sources). Using these sources, we can be confident that data for multiple years and schools are consistent.

Question 1: Does participation in the YPC program lead to fewer suspensions and stem recidivism?

In 1997-98, Verdugo Hills High School had the median suspension rate of its comparison schools. Since then, the school’s suspension rate has dropped such that it currently has the lowest rate among its comparison schools (see Table 3). Not only did the suspension rate decrease, the rate of decrease was the highest among comparison schools.

Table 3. Suspensions at Verdugo Hills High School, 1997-98 through 2002-03

School	Enrollment						Suspension Rate					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
VERDUGO HILLS	2097	2136	2157	2112	2338	2481	13.1	4.7	4.9	2.1	1.1	1.3
Cleveland	2395	2591	2731	2815	3080	3400	3.1	3.6	7.7	8.5	6.2	5.6
Kennedy	2785	2672	2683	2665	2987	3023	27.0	33.7	21.7	15.3	18.5	14.9
Grant	3275	3322	3387	3289	3448	3413	16.0	15.0	18.5	18.6	22.9	20.3
Van Nuys	3501	3586	3686	3698	4064	4094	10.4	25.5	25.6	18.5	17.7	22.1

After one year of participation in the YPC program, Venice High School experienced an increase in suspensions; in 2002-03, Venice exhibited the highest rate of suspensions among its comparison schools (see Table 4).

Table 4. Suspensions at Venice High School in 2001-02 and 2002-03

School	Enrollment		Suspension Rate	
	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03
Carson	3603	3653	7.3	7.8
Hamilton	2950	3093	12.7	10.1
North Hollywood	4415	4624	14.5	14.8
Canoga Park	2326	2373	21.4	20.0
VENICE	3124	3187	16.3	22.6

Because a primary focus of the YPC program is on students' active participation in the disciplinary process, we would expect to find that participation in the YPC program would stem recidivism. If this were true, the proportion of suspension incidents to the proportions of students suspended would be closer to a one-to-one ratio than at similar schools not using the YPC program. Table 5, which shows the ratio of the number of suspensions to the number of students suspended, indicates the level of recidivism at each school: lower numbers indicate lower recidivism. Verdugo Hills High School had the lowest recidivism among its comparison schools. After one year of participation in the YPC program, Venice High School had the highest recidivism rate of its group of schools in 2002-03.

Table 5. Suspension to Student Ratio, 2001-02 and 2002-03

School Name	2001-02			2002-03		
	Number of Suspensions	Number of Students Suspended	Suspension to Student Ratio 2001-02	Number of Suspensions	Number of Students Suspended	Suspension to Student Ratio 2002-03
VERDUGO HILLS	27	25	1.08	34	31	1.09
Cleveland	191	171	1.12	190	154	1.23
Kennedy	554	448	1.24	450	336	1.34
Grant	790	500	1.58	693	459	1.51
Van Nuys	697	492	1.42	904	587	1.54
Carson	264	203	1.30	286	232	1.23
Hamilton	375	299	1.25	313	255	1.23
North Hollywood	638	468	1.36	685	492	1.39
Canoga Park	498	328	1.52	464	302	1.54
VENICE	509	337	1.51	720	385	1.87

Question 2: Does participation in the YPC program lead to higher attendance rates and, subsequently, higher ADA?

Because a primary focus of the YPC program is on improving attendance with a progressive discipline and attendance program, we would expect to find that attendance rates at the YPC schools would increase, as would the ADA funding associated with these rates. According to the 2002-03 attendance data, the YPC schools had similar, if not higher, attendance rates compared with their similar schools (Table 6). Verdugo Hills High School had the highest attendance rate among its comparison schools. Examination of historical attendance data from 1997-98 (one year before program implementation began) revealed that Verdugo Hills had the lowest attendance rate of its comparison schools at the time, and their net increase in attendance between 1997-98 and 2002-03 was the largest among these schools.

After one year of YPC program participation, Venice High School was at the median among its comparison schools. In 2002-03, if each of the comparison schools had the same attendance rate as Verdugo Hills High School, the change in the number of ADA days for these four schools would be a net increase of 36,310 days, or a 1.5% increase. In contrast, if each of Venice’s comparison schools had the same attendance rate as Venice High School, the change in the number of ADA days would be a net decrease of 31,253 days, or 1.0%.

Table 6. Attendance Rates at YPC Schools and Similar Schools

School	Enrollment		Attendance	
	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03
VERDUGO HILLS	2338	2481	92.3	92.3
Cleveland	3080	3400	92.1	92.2
Kennedy	2987	3023	91.7	91.7
Van Nuys	4064	4094	91.7	90.9
Grant	3448	3413	90.0	88.7
Carson	3603	3653	92.8	93.2
Canoga Park	2326	2373	89.2	89.3
VENICE	3124	3187	88.3	89.6
Hamilton	2950	3093	87.7	88.8
North Hollywood	4415	4624	86.6	91.2

Table 7 shows the change in attendance rates between 2001-02 and 2002-03. The rate at Verdugo Hills, which had the highest attendance rate in its group, remained constant from 2001-

02 to 2002-03 and was at the median of its group of comparison schools. This finding of no change in attendance is not surprising, given the fact that the school has been implementing YPC since 1998, and attendance rates would likely stabilize in that time. Venice’s improvement in attendance was slightly above the median of its comparison schools. The lack of sizeable gain in attendance is also not surprising given the recency of program implementation and the part-time nature of the program at this school.

Table 7. Change in Attendance Rates from 2001-02 to 2002-03

School	Change (2003 minus 2002)
Cleveland	0.1
VERDUGO HILLS	0.0
Kennedy	0.0
Van Nuys	-0.8
Grant	-1.3
North Hollywood	4.6
VENICE	1.3
Hamilton	1.1
Carson	0.4
Canoga Park	0.1

Question 3: Does participation in the YPC program lead to lower crime?

Because the YPC model seeks to use on-campus intervention programs to address discipline, tardiness, and truancy issues, one might expect a drop in the incidents of student crimes in and around the YPC schools. A crime is defined as an incident that involves an LAUSD student, employee, or property. These incidents may occur on campus or while students are directly en route to or from school. For the purposes of this report, the crime rate is defined as number of crimes per one thousand students enrolled.

Table 8 lists the number of crimes per one thousand students enrolled in 2001-02 and 2002-03. Both Verdugo Hills and Venice High schools had crime rates at the median among its comparison schools. Table 9 shows the change in crime rates from 2001-02 and 2002-03. While both Verdugo Hills and Venice High schools exhibited a modest decrease in crime rates (-1), Verdugo Hills was ranked above the median and Venice was ranked below the median. Since the YPC program has been in place in Verdugo Hills for many years, we examined historic crime

rates and found that the crime rate has decreased nearly one percent since 1997-98, one year prior to the YPC program's implementation at Verdugo Hills.

Table 8. Crimes per 1,000 Students in 2001-02 and 2002-03

School Name	2001-02		2002-03	
	Enrollment	Crimes per 1,000	Enrollment	Crimes per 1,000
Grant	3448	18	3413	17
Cleveland	3080	10	3400	19
VERDUGO HILLS	2338	22	2481	21
Van Nuys	4064	15	4094	21
Kennedy	2987	21	3023	22
Canoga Park	2326	24	2373	15
Carson	3603	22	3653	15
VENICE	3124	18	3187	17
Hamilton	2950	42	3093	22
North Hollywood	2950	23	4624	23

Table 9. Change in Crimes per 1,000 Students from 2001-02 to 2002-03

School Name	Change in Crimes per 1,000 (2003 minus 2002)
VERDUGO HILLS	-1
Grant	-1
Kennedy	1
Van Nuys	6
Cleveland	9
Hamilton	-20
Canoga Park	-9
Carson	-7
VENICE	-1
North Hollywood	0

Conclusions and Considerations

The Youth for Positive Change program has been implemented at Verdugo Hills High School since 1998-99. To date, the school has seen a reduction in out-of-school suspensions and number of crimes per thousand students, as well as an increase in attendance since the program's inception. The model put forth by YPC, wherein on-campus intervention and suspensions are used to address disciplinary and behavior problems, appears to be effective at this school. Data from the other two YPC sites—Venice High School and Belmont High School—is inconclusive

at this time, as these schools are in the early stages of implementation. Over time, it will be possible to evaluate whether the YPC model was also effective at these sites, and if it might be a program to consider implementing more widely in LAUSD high schools.

It is important to note the following considerations when interpreting the data contained in this report:

1. In order to accurately gauge the effectiveness of the program, it would be important to measure changes in students' coping skills, social skills, and change in classroom behavior as indicators of program success. We do not have the data to do so, and this would require a more in-depth study that is beyond the scope of this response. In addition, there has not been a specific evaluation of staff professional development and school culture that would promote successful implementation of such a program.
2. The school was the unit of analysis in this study. We were unable to follow individual students who have had direct exposure to YPC.
3. This study only examined officially reported data on suspensions. YPC offers students alternatives to suspensions, and these alternatives are not reported as suspensions, which could artificially lower the suspension rate.
4. A cost/benefit analysis is not provided in this study. Although program staff cites \$25,000 to \$35,000 as the cost to implement the program, these amounts have not been verified and would not account for indirect costs associated with various program components (e.g., office space, supplies, additional staff and resources for Saturday schools, etc.).