



Numbers & Norms Lesson Guide

Adolescence is a unique time filled with developmental challenges and opportunities. Empowering teens to better understand and navigate this unique moment in their lives is an essential role for educators. This resource will help educators create meaningful opportunities for teens to explore and shape the wider world in which they live through the utilization of data and fact-based reasoning.

This guide, in conjunction with its corresponding PowerPoint, is meant to support those who are professional classroom teachers as well as informal educators, including young people presenting to their peers. The lesson can be facilitated in 45 minutes to one hour (or even over several sessions), depending on the depth of conversation and activities that are facilitated

Why engage youth in data discussions?

Teens spend an increasing amount of time filling out surveys, to say nothing of their daily sharing of personal data through the use of technology like social media and apps. However, teens rarely see or understand the results of this sharing, potentially impacting the quality of their investment in surveying efforts and creating scenarios where they may unknowingly share overly sensitive information. Not discussing data and its collection, or connecting teens to the problem-solving, fact-based process that these data conversations ignite, is a missed opportunity.

Engaging teens in the data discovery processes can be beneficial for all involved, including educators and the program (or community) that is being studied. The following are just a few of the potential benefits:¹

- **Teens** – gain lifelong skills to analyze data and reflect deeply on their autonomy and the relationship they have to their community
- **Educators and other Facilitators**– gain a deeper perspective on the stories and connections *behind* the data that can foster a fresh and more intricate perspective
- **Programs/Communities** – gain teen-driven conclusions and recommendations for addressing concerns and opportunities; this relevancy increases impact

Do young people even care about data and facts?

Teens want to be equipped with facts, especially facts that are immediately relevant to their lives. Popular culture is rife with misperceptions of all kinds, and when it comes to teens, stereotypes thrive that paint a negative, counter-factual portrait of young people and the lives they lead. These stereotypes sometimes have cultural and regional variations, but broadly share several common themes: drug use, bullying, apathy, as but a few common examples. A major problem is

¹ Flores, K. S. (2008). Youth participatory evaluation: Strategies for engaging young people. New York: Jossey-Bass



that like many stereotypes, data illuminates that these perceptions aren't based in fact. Through our work across Colorado it's clear that teens simultaneously delight in, and are challenged by, data that contradicts these negative portrayals. Take for example our *On The Rise* campaign. This campaign shared statewide survey data through social and digital media, highlighting factual statistics that showed most Colorado teens are engaging in healthy, positive activities and *not* marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drug use. Teens reacted with surprise, skepticism, enthusiasm, and everything in between- but what they did *not do* is ignore the content. Teens want to be equipped with relevant facts.

Additionally, facts elevate conversation. Discussions and campaigns aimed at teens sometimes rely solely on vague, emotional appeals like “drugs are bad,” “drugs will ruin your life” or “drugs hurt your family.” These statements lack factual conviction. In school, youth are taught to use evidence to establish credibility. Emotional appeals *backed by* factual evidence ground conversations in reality and allow for the possibility of both a deeper understanding of the content and better recall of the issues discussed afterward.

How to start the conversation

In Colorado, a number of data sources exist and can be used to supplement this exercise. For example, [Healthy Kids Colorado Survey \(HKCS\)](#) is a large data that may have relevant information detailing responses from teens in your local community. However, the accompanying PowerPoint will present data solely from the [Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey \(RACYS\)](#). Conducted every two years, RACYS is a state-wide 125-question survey that examines teen's behavioral health, which are questions around social, emotional, and mental health, along with questions specifically about substance misuse. The survey also examines risk and protective factors for behavioral health. Risk and protective factors are individual, familial or community characteristics that research shows contribute to either positive or negative health outcomes.

To help your teens process this information, Rise Above Colorado created six fact sheets, comprised of: a full survey overview, and individual overviews of alcohol, marijuana, prescription pain relievers, prescription stimulants, and Meth.

Step 1: Presentation

Understanding data, perception, and fact-based reality.

The supplementary [PowerPoint presentation*](#) facilitates engagement in the RACYS findings by first helping your teens better understand their own perceptions to teen substance use. With the term *perceptions* we specifically mean how teens *understand and interpret their world*.

Focusing on this examination of how they understand and interpret their world, the PowerPoint presents the RACYS survey data, allowing time and space to discuss gaps that may exist between their perceptions and the reality captured by the survey data. Correcting misperceptions, and discussing *why* those misperceptions exist, is an effective strategy for prevention based on



social norming theory.² On The Rise utilizes this strategy by means of the Science of the Positive³ and positive youth development, both of which are evidence-based approaches that focus on growing the healthy, positive factors in our communities to mitigate against negative influences.

**Extensive facilitator notes can be found on the bottom of each slide in the Notes section of the PowerPoint. These notes, also compiled in the accompanying [Instructional Notes](#), will help you steer the conversation and stimulate responses by providing prompting questions and displaying informative visual content on each slide.*

Step 2: Small Group Discussions

Reflection and action.

Break the group into smaller groups of 3-5 and pass out the [2018 RACYS Overall Fact Sheet](#). You can disseminate the following discussion questions as a handout to each group and/or simply share them conjointly using the related PowerPoint slide. Feel free to adjust the questions as needed to align with your goals, especially if you adapted the presentation to highlight data from HKCS or another data set. The questions are designed to have your teens think critically about data, culminating with action steps to address issues that may have arisen from their small group discussions.

An outlet that's immediately available to harness their action steps is [IRiseAboveCO.org](#), which is a "for teens, by teens" website designed specifically to be a space for teens to get additional *facts* as well as *tools* to rise above. Specifically, the [Together We Rise](#) page is available for teens to safely submit and explore written stories, poems, photos, videos, etc. We encourage your teens to contribute content of their own, which could potentially be further shared to Rise Above Colorado's social media platforms, helping to push back against negative teen misperceptions and positively impact the lives of others. For ideas and instructions on how your teens can individually (or collectively) submit content, click [here](#).

² Perkins, H. & Berkowitz, A. (1986). Perceiving the community norms of alcohol use among students: some research implications for campus alcohol education programming. *International Journal of the Addictions*, (9-10): 961-76.

³ Linkenbach, J. (2013). *Applying the Science of the Positive to health & safety*. Bozeman, MT: Montana Institute, LLC. Available online at: www.MontanaInstitute.com. [[Workshop Manual](#)]

For additional information on framing HOPE and CONCERN: **Linkenbach, J. (2017, July). *Integrating hope and concern into your communications*. A plenary workshop activity at the Montana Summer Institute on Positive Community Norms, Big Sky, MT.**



Numbers & Norms Discussion Questions:

1. What surprised you the most from the presentation?

2. What was the biggest gap between your perceptions and the reality presented within the data?

3. Why do you think misperceptions exist? What information do teens use to form their perceptions?

4. How might these misperceptions influence youth attitudes and behavior? How can we shift misperceptions closer to reality?

5. What concerns do you have after seeing this data?

6. What makes you hopeful after seeing this data?

7. Looking at the protective factor statements, which do you believe has the most potential for making positive changes in your community? Why?

8. What are concrete actions YOU can make to engage with and support your community?