

# 2012-2013 Healthy NewsWorks Evaluation Summary

## Introduction

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Serving a dozen in the Greater Philadelphia region, Healthy NewsWorks intersects journalism and health education, empowering students ages 8-13 to promote health awareness in their schools and communities. Teachers, parents, student volunteers, principals, and Healthy NewsWorks staff and volunteers support students to assemble health-based newspapers that feature their own articles and illustrations. The students have covered many diverse topics in health, ranging from lice prevention and bullying to gardening and hand washing. Healthy NewsWorks is not only relevant, but also necessary in an era when the achievement gap is further segregating subgroups in American public schools and chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes are increasing steadily.

While the culture at each school accounts for some differences in program structure, every site produces a school newspaper, which involves interviewing, reporting, writing, researching, and illustrating. Once a week, during or before school, students spend 45 minutes to 1 hour developing these skills. Each program serves a group of students (approximately 8-30). In some schools a classroom of students is chosen by the principal. In other schools, students are selected by their teachers or they are required to write an essay and submit teacher recommendations in order to join the program, which is a testament to their eagerness and level of dedication.

## Evaluation Methods & Findings

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### Student Reporter Pre-Post Tests

Student reporters were given a pre-test in September or October 2012 which asked about key journalistic concepts that would be taught over the school year. The same test (post-test) was given in May 2013 to catch any changes in knowledge. Two reviewers scored each pre- and post-test using the following scale:

2 = Student could clearly explain the answer

1 = They answered partially

0 = The answer was incorrect or left blank

Once the two tests had been scored for each student, the change between the tests was quantified as follows:

2 = Significant correct change in post-test answer

1 = Partial correct change in post-test answer

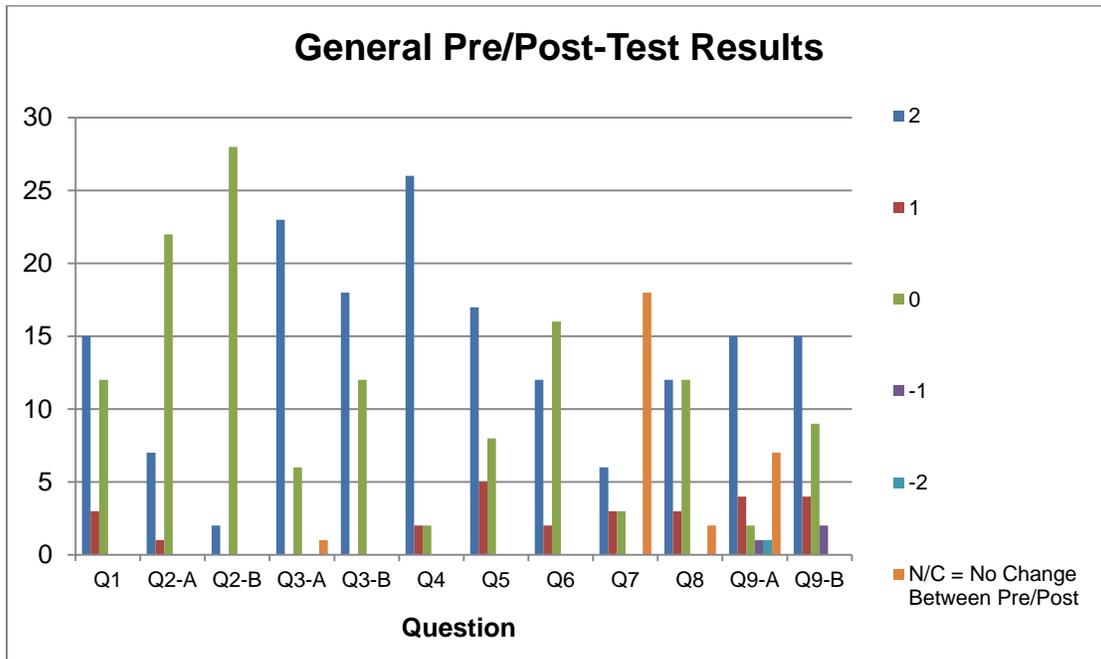
0 = The answer was incorrect or left blank on both tests

-1 = They answered partially correctly on the pre-test and not the post-test

-2 = They answered correctly on the pre-test and completely incorrectly on the post-test

N/C = Answered correctly on the pre-test AND post-test (showing no change in knowledge)

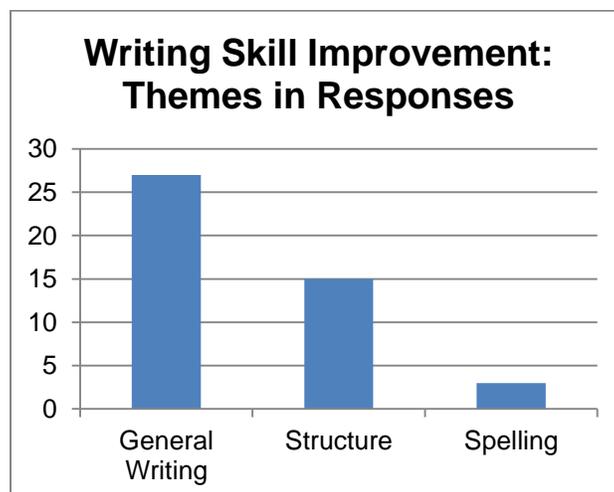
From this pre/post-test, we found that student responses improved or remained consistent in identifying the need for sources, proper pronoun use in a news story, identifying a direct quote, what it means to paraphrase, and interview etiquette.



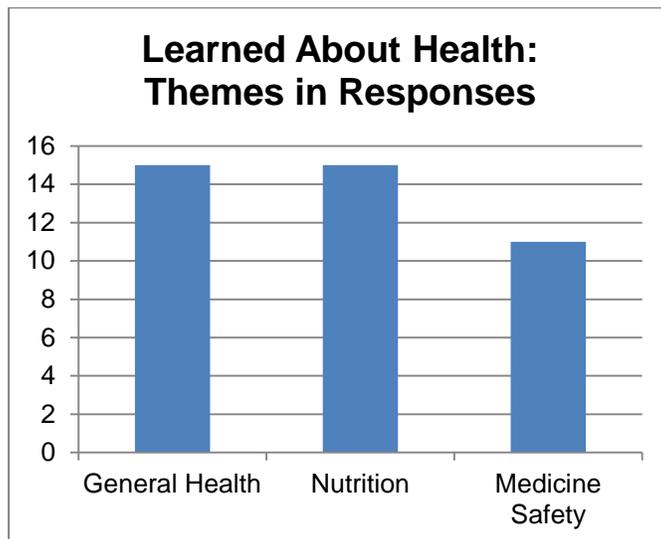
## Student Survey

During the 2012-2013 school year, an eight-question survey was developed by the Research & Evaluation Consultant for student reporters participating in the Healthy NewsWorks program at four schools, ranging from third through sixth grades. Survey questions were open-ended, giving students an opportunity to provide qualitative responses. Fifty-four student reporters completed the surveys in spring 2013. Once collected, responses were coded by themes, specifically in regard to writing improvement and health knowledge.

Of the 54 students surveyed, 45 (83%) expressed an improvement in their writing. Response categories include "General Writing," which ranged from categorical statements, such as, "made me a better writer," to specific topics, like improved vocabulary, handwriting, and the importance of revising; and "Structure," which captured themes of breaking into paragraphs and stating the point clearly, for example.



In addition, 41 responses to what the students learned about health described general healthy practices (such as, “you need to take care of your body”, as well as stress reduction, safety and exercise) and nutrition and medicine safety practices (*Note: Four responses included nutrition AND medicine safety*):



Examples of responses by health category include:

- **General Health:** *“I learned that there [are] a lot of ways to keep people and yourself healthy and safe.”* – Sixth grade student reporter  
*“That you need to take care of yourself and be positive in what you are doing to yourself.”* – Fourth grade student reporter
- **Nutrition.** *“I learned that eating vegetables, fruits, protein, and dairy helps our body.”* – Third grade student reporter.
- **Medicine Safety.** *“To never share medicine and to make sure your name is on your medicine.”* – Third grade student reporter

### Reflection Essays

A sample of student reporters wrote reflections of their experience on the healthy newspaper. Some of the most common themes in the reflection essays included improved writing skills, pride in their work and recognition of a hard work ethic, and learning and teaching others about health.

The following are some excerpts:

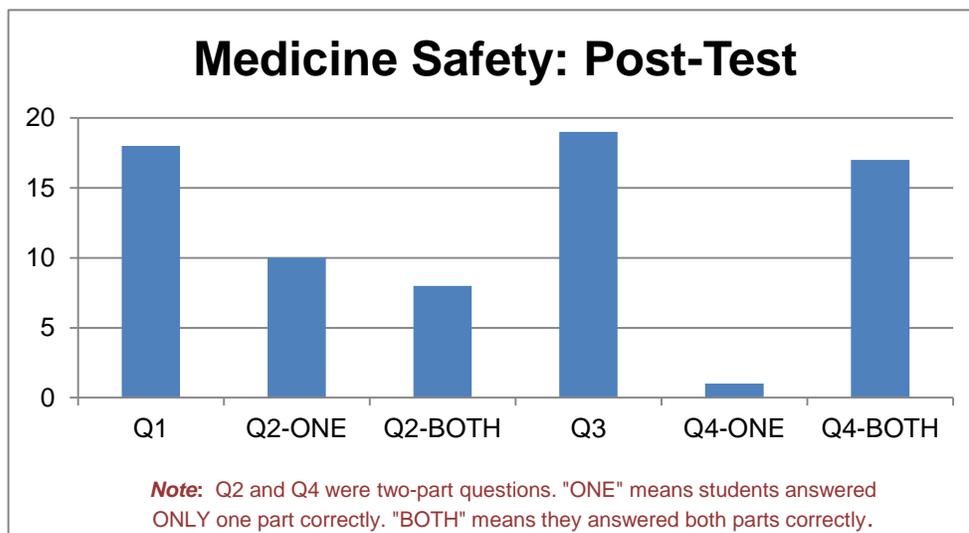
- *“I have been a reporter since fifth grade...Every time I have done a story, I always have received a lot of suggestions. It is heavily revised. But recently, there were just three suggestions. Three! That made me so proud.”* – *Seventh Grade Student*
- *“I am a reporter and book author. Wow. Joining the newspaper opened many doors for me and gave me a confidence boost. Being on the newspaper also helped me improve my writing.”* – *Ninth Grade Student*
- *“When our readers read good articles, they also learn to become better writers. Also, for one moment in their lives, our readers might be inspired to do better in school, help others with health issues, and learn what it means to be healthy for themselves and everyone around them.”* – *Sixth Grade Student*

## Medicine Safety Post-Tests

Pre-tests were administered to students prior to participation in prescription medicine safety program. Post-tests were distributed to students in late spring after attending medicine safety program classes and completing their writing assignments.

The students who participated in the medicine safety lessons were given a four-question post-test to capture knowledge. Questions two and four requested two answers, for example, asking two ways medicines can help people.

Of the 20 students tested, 18 (90%) were able to correctly define a medicine, able to explain at least one way medicines can help people, and provide at least one safety rule to follow when taking a medicine. Additionally, 19 (95%) students were able to identify who can give medicine safely.



## Teacher Surveys

Two surveys were created using "Poll Daddy", an online survey platform. One 5-question survey was targeted to "participating teachers," which is defined as teachers directly working with the student reporters to write the newspapers. These questions were designed to inform the program administration and reach. Fourteen participating teachers responded to the online survey. Ten teachers expressed that students bring the newspaper home to their families often (71%). Teachers also described strategies for promoting the newspaper at school and how to engage other teachers to use the newspaper in the classroom, which will inform the upcoming school year.

A second survey (also 5 questions) targeted "general teachers," which is defined as teachers in a school where the newspaper is written and distributed. When the "general teachers" were asked if they used the newspaper in their classroom lessons, 11 of 17 responded "yes". Thirteen (76%) expressed interest in having their students participate in the newspaper in the future. In addition, teachers provided concrete suggestions for using the newspaper in the classroom.

## Conclusion & Discussion

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Healthy NewsWorks has received positive feedback from participating students and teachers from a programmatic standpoint. The program continues to consider new and innovative ways to capture the scope and effectiveness throughout each school year, as well as challenges to address.

For the first time, Healthy NewsWorks highlighted a specific, timely health topic – Medicine Safety – to deepen the newspaper content around an important issue. This was a change because Healthy NewsWorks generally encourages students, teachers, and school staff to generate their own topics. Healthy NewsWorks adopted its special topic in the same spirit that a professional news organization identifies an important issue to cover more intensely. The special topic becomes part of the coverage, but still allows plenty of room for the community to identify additional subjects and issues.

The 2012-13 results suggest that student journalists learned important concepts about medicine safety through their reporting and writing on the topic. The results also suggest that student journalists are gaining similar knowledge when they report on other topics. To evaluate such impact has been difficult because of challenges in designing a pre/post-test on topics that arise organically during the year.

In general, a considerable evaluation challenge for Healthy NewsWorks has been data gathering. Time must be allotted for pre and post-tests, often reducing the amount of time for actual instruction. In addition, evaluations are expensive. The program has been fortunate to have valuable volunteer expertise on its advisory board to develop, guide, and assess the evaluations.