

Committed to Evaluation

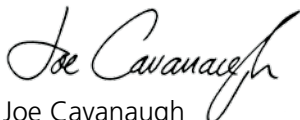
In over 20 years working to build positive school communities, Youth Frontiers has never wavered in our commitment to ensure that students and educators participate in the best possible retreats and most effective programs every day. **To this end, we invest in ongoing evaluation efforts to prove the impact our programs are having on building cultures of respect where students thrive socially, emotionally and academically.**

We are confident that we deliver a high quality retreat experience every day. Ten years of significant data collection shows 79 percent of schools report their retreats as “excellent” or “very good.” This accounts for Youth Frontiers’ high rate of returning schools: More than eight out of 10 schools bring us back year after year because they believe strongly in the value and impact of our programs.

We know that our programs are supported by sound educational and learning theories, such as Character Education, Social and Emotional Learning and the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets®. We believe that supporting the social and emotional growth of students is essential not only to their character development but also to their academic outcomes. Schools recognize the ways that we complement and enhance their curricular programs, such as with the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Responsive Classroom models. Through a shared responsibility with schools, we can ensure that the lessons and skills that students learn on the day of their retreat will permeate throughout their school community.

We are changing kids’ attitudes about how they treat themselves and others, for the better. This report features the details of the key findings from our evaluation projects to date, including the final report from our three-year collaboration with the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota.

Please let us know if you have any questions or would like additional information.



Joe Cavanaugh
Founder & CEO



Kenneth A. Dragseth, Ph.D.
Director of Administrative Licensure
University of Minnesota
YF Board Member



R. Craig Vana
Administrator
Minneapolis Public Schools
YF Board Member

Youth Frontiers is a nonprofit organization that partners with schools to build cultures of respect where students thrive socially, emotionally and academically.

Through programs that help young people realize the importance of living a life of character, Youth Frontiers is transforming the day-to-day experience in schools across America so that today’s young people can make tomorrow’s world better.



The YF Logic Model

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

A culture of disrespect and lack of character development in schools creates a negative school community and an unhealthy learning environment.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Immediate Outcomes (Day of Program)	Mid-term Outcomes (0-30 days after the program)	Long-term Outcomes (30+ days after the program)	Impact
<p>FOR STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 full-time program staff 3 program volunteers 1 contract program staff Program supplies 	<p>FOR STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kindness, Courage, Respect, Responsibility and Wisdom Retreats Advisory Curriculum YF Weekly Emails Retreat volunteering Internships 	<p>FOR STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retreats: 90,000 students impacted Follow-up: 10,000 students Emails: 2200 students 10,000 upper class student volunteers Program volunteers: 200 hours of service 	<p>FOR STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience respect Learn a common language Understand and empathize with others Engage respectfully with peers and adults Inspired to change 	<p>FOR STUDENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students use common language and Social Emotional Learning skills to stand up for respect in schools Bullies choosing more respectful behaviors Students being more respectful in class Enhanced school connectedness: students are not afraid of coming to school and have healthy relationships with peers and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School community more connected and respectful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generation of young people with stronger character who stand up for respect in their community and their world
<p>FOR EDUCATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 contract program staff 3 full-time program staff 	<p>FOR EDUCATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection Retreat Mind Retreat Purpose Retreat E-newsletter Workshops 	<p>FOR EDUCATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retreats: 10,000 educators impacted E-newsletter: 8500 recipients Workshops: 1000 attendees 	<p>FOR EDUCATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience connection and respect Create community among staff Give needed time to honor colleagues 	<p>FOR EDUCATORS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced school connectedness: relationships among colleagues are healthy and supportive; educators are committed to the school community 		
<p>FOR ORGANIZATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 full-time and part-time support staff including operations, development and school outreach Office supplies 25 members of the Board of Directors 550 donors Outreach events 	<p>FOR THE COMMUNITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> YouthFront newsletter Keynotes for parents Social media/ website Volunteer opportunities 	<p>FOR THE COMMUNITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newsletter: 10,000 recipients Keynotes: 1000 attendees 60,000 website visits annually 5500 Facebook/ Twitter connections Adult volunteers: 300 hours Outreach events: 600 attendees 	<p>FOR THE COMMUNITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given resources to help build the character of young people and create a culture of respect 			

CAREI Evaluation Project



What we learned: In this three-year intensive study of YF's core student programs, the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) studied three research questions:

1. Does participation in YF retreats help students attain social-emotional learning competencies?
2. Do youth feel more connected to peers and school staff after a retreat?
3. Is there a relationship between participation in YF retreats and students' prosocial, positive behaviors at school?

CAREI researchers found that the retreat approach is a viable strategy for reaching students and teaching skills. Furthermore, students, teachers and administrators value the programs. To enhance learning retention and skill application after a retreat, Youth Frontiers has implemented several recommendations from CAREI's 2009 and 2010 reports, including:

1. Implementing a menu of pre- and post-retreat activities for the classroom.
2. Making our activities and language more concrete and developmentally appropriate for each age group.

CAREI has hypothesized from the data that participation in our retreats helps students realistically assess their own attitudes and behaviors and those of their peers. Students report higher levels of disrespectful behaviors after the retreat because they have great awareness of what it means to be respectful and act with moral courage. Based on the data from the 2011 report, Youth Frontiers will examine how our language and activities can better engage boys and nonwhite students. We will also look into extending the impact after the retreat even further through bundled services that utilize technology.

Year One Literature Review Key Findings:

- **Youth Frontiers has incorporated many best practices into its retreat format** including using upper-class students as role models, using a variety of formats that are relational and youth-centered and providing opportunities for personal reflection.
- Research indicates the power of emotional intensity and small life events, known as **quantum change**. In other words, for some students, the retreat will transform their lives in a profound way.

Year Two Kindness Retreat Case Study Key Findings:

- **Students retain key retreat concepts.** More than eight of 10 students correctly identified the three types of bullying on the day of the retreat. Thirty days later, seven of 10 retained this learning.

Year Three Courage and Respect Retreat Study Key Findings:

- **Students perceive less bullying after the retreats.** Fewer students reported that bullying was a problem at their school after the Courage Retreat.
- **Students learn to resolve conflict respectfully.** After the Respect Retreat more students reported that students at their school mostly resolve conflicts without fighting, insults or threats.

CAREI Background: CAREI is an internationally recognized leader in the field of educational research and evaluation. CAREI's mission is to improve the quality of education for all learners through neutral, rigorous research and evaluation of educational contexts and initiatives. Some of CAREI's research and evaluation projects in progress are being conducted for St. Paul Public Schools, Minnesota Department of Education, The Children's Theatre Company and the Wallace Foundation.

Key Dates: 2009-2011.

Project Evaluator: Dr. Kyla Wahlstrom, Director of CAREI, wrote the evaluation plan for YF. Dr. Tim Sheldon led the research project with support from Dr. Molly Gordon and Sue Rickers.

YF Client Review Evaluation Project

What we learned: Schools recognize YF as an integral part of their school system. Administrators and teachers intentionally seek appropriate curricular opportunities within their school calendars to weave YF lessons into the fabric of the school. Schools value the shared partnership that exists between YF and their school community. It is this collective effort that sustains the impact of the lessons learned during a YF retreat throughout the school year. **Therefore, many schools believe that YF programs are *more than just a one-day program*.**

- **83 percent** of the schools interviewed rated YF's coordination and administration of retreat logistics as Excellent. This included YF's responsiveness to calls and/or emails, ease of implementing a retreat and YF's professionalism.
- **93 percent** of schools interviewed rated YF's retreat experience and the achievement of retreat's short-term outcomes as Excellent. This included the retreat content, activities and the skills and lessons learned by the students during the retreat.
- **100 percent** of the schools interviewed rated YF's retreat staff as Excellent. This included the retreat staff's professionalism, their gender diversity, the diversity of their backgrounds, their ability to form authentic relationships with students, their understanding of education and the quality of their presentations.

"YF gives young people an understanding of how they can live a good life by making choices that benefit their own lives, the lives of those around them, their communities and their world."

– Anne Larson,
Moorhead High School

Key Findings/Measures of Impact:

- YF retreats provide a **common language** for teachers to reference within their curricula, school activities and citizenship expectations.
- YF retreats provide a foundational experience for students to think about how their individual decisions impact the greater community. Through the direct instruction on the retreat, students have an increased awareness of their choices and use this experience as a **catalyst to change their behavior**.
- YF delivers a **consistently high-quality program**. Retreat content, activities and student engagement received high praise across the board.
- Schools consider YF staff to be **professional partners**. Schools value the professionalism, expertise and competence of the YF retreat staff. Their ability to connect with the students, model appropriate risk-taking and identify with the issues of adolescents today is highly regarded by school staff.

Scope of project: Led by an independent evaluator, YF conducted a series of structured interviews with key clients (schools) who had partnered with YF for two or more years. The goals of the project were to better ascertain (1) how schools are utilizing the YF retreats and resources, (2) what sustained impact schools were able to observe or document and (3) how YF could improve their programs.

Key Dates: September 2007 – December 2008.

Data Collection Strategies: Client interviews were conducted with the primary contact at a school – typically the principal, assistant principal, dean, classroom teacher, counselor or social worker. The lead evaluator conducted 25 percent of the total interviews independently, and a team of YF personnel (who were trained by the independent evaluator) conducted the remaining interviews.

Project Evaluator: Bill Johnston, independent research consultant

Brooklyn Center Schools Evaluation Project

What we learned: Youth Frontiers was an integral part of the Brooklyn Center Schools' district-wide initiative to improve its school climate. Through this partnership, **YF was able to show our ability and success in working with a diverse population of students, and show some significant perception changes within the school community.** Discipline incidents dropped by a quarter after the first year that our programs were delivered; although we are not able to correlate this data to our specific programs, we were a part of the network of support that facilitated this important shift. Part of our learning is for Youth Frontiers to narrow our research aims in order to correlate our specific impact.

Brooklyn Center School District Background

The Brooklyn Center School District, located in a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis, serves a diverse community.

- Between 65 percent and 75 percent of students qualified for Free or Reduced Meals (FRPL).
- Nearly 30 percent of the elementary and junior high students were considered Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.
- The student body is racially diverse, with 40 percent of students identifying as black, 28 percent as white, 16 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander, 14 percent Hispanic and two percent American Indian.

Key Findings/Measures of Impact:

● **Increased school connectedness.**

One-third of ninth graders on the Respect Retreat reported feeling more of a connection to classmates since the retreat.

Nearly half of fifth graders on the Kindness Retreat believed their peers were including others more.

● **Commitment to positive decision-making.**

Two-thirds of Wisdom Retreat participants believed that they would make better decisions during their last month of high school because of the retreat.

The Brooklyn Center School District has strong instructional programming and values social and emotional learning as an integral part of its full curricular offerings. The district's elementary school has been accredited as an International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program school. **YF programs directly complement and enhance the IB philosophy of educating the whole child – nurturing the students' social and emotional development** (teaching values such as caring, cooperation and respect) while challenging their intellectual properties.

Scope of Project: A three-year partnership funded by the Carlson Foundation provided the delivery of all YF retreats to both students and educators in the Brooklyn Center School District. The goal of this evaluation project was to determine the district-wide impact of YF programs on school climate, student character and staff morale.

Key Dates: 2006 – 2009.

Project Evaluator: Edmund Sass, Ed.D., Professor of Education, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

Retreat Programs Evaluation Project, 2002-2005

What we learned: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with the core areas of social and emotional competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision Making (www.casel.org). During a YF retreat, students are not only provided with instruction on how to build relationships and make more responsible decisions about how they treat themselves and their peers, but they also get an opportunity to practice these skills. **The key findings of this evaluation project show that YF retreat programs enhance students' social and emotional competencies.**

"[The Kindness Retreat] solidifies the big picture we are trying to instill in our school around empathy and responsibility."

– Ginny Clark, retired principal,
Greenwood Elementary

"[The Respect Retreat] builds class unity."

– Neil Schendel,
Willmar High School

Kindness Retreat Key Findings/Measures of Impact:

- **77 percent** of students reported that their classroom has been a kinder place since the retreat (60 days post-retreat).
- **More than half** of teachers reported that their students had stood up for each other more since the retreat and felt that, overall, their class had been kinder since the retreat (60 days post-retreat).

Courage Retreat Key Findings/Measures of Impact:

- **More than 70 percent** of students reported following through with their act of courage (60 days post-retreat).
- **More than half** of teachers felt there had been a "noticeable change in the way students treated each other since the retreat" (60 days post-retreat).

Respect Retreat Key Findings/Measures of Impact:

- **74 percent** of students reported that they had been more respectful of others since the retreat (60 days post-retreat).
- **95 percent** of teachers reported that the retreat experience was of a very high quality (seven days post-retreat).

Project Evaluator: Edmund Sass, Ed.D., Professor of Education, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

2011 School Client Survey and Retreat Participant Survey Results

2011 School Client Survey: Each year Youth Frontiers sends a customer satisfaction survey to educators whose students participated in retreats. The survey assesses the quality of our customer service and the retreat staff as well as the effectiveness of our programs from the educators' perspectives.

"Every year we seem to get 'the best' facilitators...so that leads me to believe that YF only hires the best!"

– Cayla Rother,
Jordan Middle School

Key findings from the 2010 – 2011 School Client Survey:

- **86 percent** of respondents rated our customer service as excellent.
- **94 percent** of respondents rated our retreat staff as excellent.
- **86 percent** of respondents rated the content of the retreats as excellent.

2011 Student Retreat Participant Survey: Youth Frontiers provides schools with student surveys for each retreat. As a service to schools, they can send in the completed surveys for YF to tabulate and return the results. YF hired Ed Sass, Ed.D., to independently analyze the results of this survey to determine how well Youth Frontiers is meeting our learning objectives for each retreat.

Key Findings from the 2010 – 2011 Student Retreat Participant Survey

- **83 percent** of students believe the Kindness Retreat made their school a kinder place.
- **95 percent** of students would recommend the Courage Retreat for others students.
- **87 percent** of students agreed that the Respect Retreat gave them more self-confidence.

Complementary Programs and References

Many schools use complementary programs in conjunction with their Youth Frontiers retreat. Some of these programs include:

- Advisory Periods/Homeroom
- Boys Town Social Skills
- Building Assets – Reducing Risks (BARR)
- Character Counts
- Ethics Curriculum
- Film Clips Online
- LINK Crew
- Lions Quest
- International Baccalaureate
- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program
- PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports)
- Responsive Classroom
- Restitution
- Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets®
- Second Step

YF and Test Scores

Although there may not be a clear way to demonstrate a causal or correlative relationship between YF and test scores or improved academics, schools who use YF programs have, on average, a higher level of proficiency on statewide tests.

Based on the 2008 – 2009 School Report Cards, submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education, schools who use YF programs had an average MCA-II Reading Proficiency of 74 percent compared to the state average of 71 percent. Furthermore, YF's partnering schools had an average MCA-II Math Proficiency of 70 percent compared to the state average of 60 percent.*

There is also a great amount of evidence connecting social emotional learning programs to higher achievement and academic improvement (casel.org).

**Reading score range for schools who use YF programs: 15 – 96 percent proficiency.
Math score range for schools who use YF programs: 28 – 93 percent proficiency.*

Youth Frontiers
6009 Excelsior Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minn. 55416
952.922.0222
888.992.0222



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www.youthfrontiers.org