



EVALUATIONS OVERVIEW

Founded in 1987, Youth Frontiers (YF) is a nonprofit organization that provides schools with experiences that inspire character, civility and community. Our vision is our next generation of leaders is grounded in character.

Our character development retreats produce measurable, long-term results. Our ongoing evaluation efforts, both internally and with independent institutions, confidently report that we deliver a high-quality retreat experience every day. In the 2018-19 school year, 83 percent of schools reported their retreats as “excellent.” This accounts for Youth Frontiers’ high rate of returning schools: **Nearly nine out of 10 schools bring us back each year** because they believe strongly in the value and impact of our programs.

Our programs are supported by sound educational and learning theories, such as character education, social-emotional learning and the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets®. 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.

This report features details of key findings from our evaluation projects to date. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

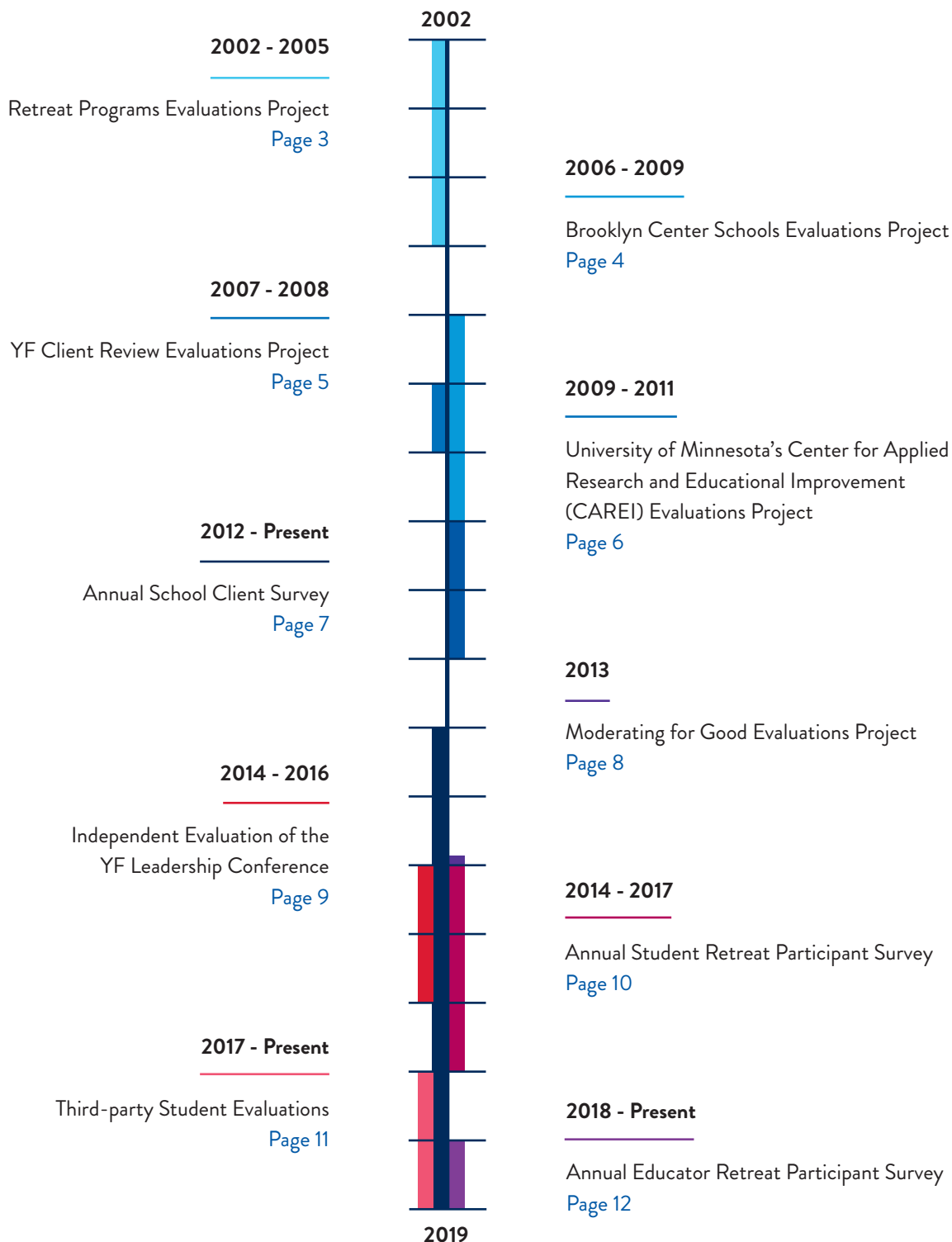
Joe Cavanaugh
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Evaluations Evolution

Youth Frontiers' core values are quality, caring and growth. We are continually looking for ways to improve our work, as well as the ways we measure its results. Throughout the years, we've refined our methods and engaged outside sources to help evaluate our programming.



Retreat Programs Evaluations Project, 2002-2005

During a YF retreat, students are given relationship-building and decision-making tools as well as opportunities to practice using them. The key findings of this evaluation project show that **YF retreat programs enhance students' social and emotional competencies.**

Kindness Retreat Key Findings

- 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

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

Respect Retreat Key Findings

- 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



Brooklyn Center Schools Evaluations Project, 2006-2009

The Brooklyn Center School District, located in a first-ring suburb of Minneapolis, values strong instructional programming and social-emotional learning. Its efforts are evidenced by the accreditation of its elementary school as an International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program school. Through a three-year partnership funded by the Charlson Foundation, YF facilitated student and educator retreats for the district to reinforce the IB philosophy

of educating the whole child — nurturing the students' social-emotional development while also challenging them intellectually. The goal of this evaluation project was to determine the district-wide impact of YF programs on school climate, student character and staff morale. Ultimately, **YF worked with a diverse population of students to shift students' perspectives and help improve school climate.**

About Brooklyn Center

- Between 65 percent and 75 percent of students qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch (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 as Hispanic and two percent as American Indian.

Key Findings

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

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

YF Client Review Evaluations Project, 2007-2008

Administrators value the partnership that exists between YF and their school community. They actively seek opportunities to integrate YF messages into their curricula. It is this collective effort that sustains the impact of the retreat lessons throughout the school year. Therefore, many schools believe that **YF retreats are more than just a one-day program.**

Led by an independent evaluator, YF interviewed primary school contacts (typically the principal, assistant principal, dean, classroom teacher, counselor or social worker) who had

partnered with YF for two or more years. 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.

The goals of the project were to understand how schools were utilizing YF retreats and resources, what sustained impact schools were observing and how YF could improve our programs.

Key Findings

- YF retreats provide a common language for educators to reference within their curricula and school activities.
- 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 gain 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 receive wide-spread praise.
- YF staff members are 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.

Project Evaluator: Bill Johnston, Independent Research Consultant

Results from Youth Frontiers' 2018-19 Client Survey*

92%

of clients rated YF's retreat logistics coordination and administration as "excellent."

89%

of clients rated YF's retreat staff as "excellent."

83%

of clients rated the effectiveness of YF's retreat as "excellent."

*Data from 865 client respondents

CAREI Evaluations Project, 2009-2011

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 behaviors at school?

CAREI researchers found that the retreat approach is a viable strategy for reaching students and teaching social-emotional skills. Furthermore, CAREI also found that students, teachers and administrators value the programs. CAREI hypothesized that participation in our retreats helps students realistically assess their own attitudes and behaviors and those of their peers.

I need to respect others more. I think I take jokes too far and I realized today that the things I think are funny might offend other people.

— Respect Retreat Student Participant, Minn.

Year One: Literature Review Key Findings

- **YF retreats employ best practices** such as using older students as role models, using relational and youth-centered formats 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 Retreats 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.

To enhance learning retention and skill application after a retreat, Youth Frontiers has implemented several recommendations from CAREI's 2009 and 2010 reports, including creating pre- and post-retreat activities for the classroom and making our activities and language more

concrete and developmentally appropriate for each age group. Based on the data from the 2011 report, we examined how our language and activities could better engage boys and nonwhite students. We have also bolstered our follow-up materials that use technology.

Project Evaluators: 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.



Annual School Client Survey, 2012-Present

Each year, Youth Frontiers sends a customer satisfaction survey to educators whose students participated in retreats. The survey assesses the quality of YF’s customer service and Retreat Staff as well as the effectiveness of our programs from the educators’ perspectives. During the 2018-19 school year, 99 percent of respondents said they’d recommend YF retreats.

Percentage of Educators Who Rated the Following Categories of YF Retreats as “Excellent”

| School Year | Customer Service | Retreat Staff | Retreat Content |
|-------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 2013-14 | 89% | 95% | 88% |
| 2014-15 | 85% | 92% | 82% |
| 2015-16 | 85% | 95% | 85% |
| 2016-17 | 86% | 94% | 86% |
| 2017-18 | 87% | 89% | 82% |
| 2018-19 | 92% | 89% | 83% |

Moderating for Good Evaluation Project, Nov.-Dec. 2013

Youth Frontiers has a solid reputation for its professionalism, for building trust and for being a catalyst for change in school communities. For schools who have experienced the benefits of YF, often the largest barrier to rebooking their retreats is cost. Because school program funding continues to tighten, YF needed to better understand the following:

- How YF compares to other programs
- How counselors are making the case for rebooking retreats

- How schools are securing funding
- Benefits of YF programming
- How YF can better facilitate the rebooking process
- What role YF and our follow-up materials play beyond the retreat experience

An independent focus-group facilitator conducted a two-hour focus group with school counselors, some of whom use our programs and some who do not.



Key Findings

- YF has a strong positive perception as a well-run, professional program that speaks “kid” and can be trusted to deliver consistently high quality and unique experiences.
- The benefits of YF to counselors are mostly emotional. They report feeling: 1) relief that they are delivering key programming for their students 2) trust that the programming will be expertly delivered and 3) gratitude for a common language that will aid in continuing conversations about lessons learned beyond the retreat day.
- The YF experience met or exceeded counselors’ expectations of their first YF retreat.
- The role of outside programs is to “set the stage” for conversation about issues like student behavior, personal development and learning.

“As an administrator, I have seen the positive impact of a Youth Frontiers retreat. The retreat leaders were able to break down our students’ barriers through a variety of fun, highly energetic and engaging activities and take them on an emotional, soul-searching journey. By the time our retreat concluded, our students were electrified with excitement over how to improve themselves and act with courage. Both their teachers and I have seen a significant improvement in their interpersonal skills and are confident that this has impacted their lives outside of school as well.

— Mark Peperkorn, Principal, Pilgrim Park Middle School, Elm Grove, Wis.

Project Evaluator: Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA), Minnesota Chapter, December 12, 2013.

Independent Evaluation of the YF Leadership Conference, 2014-2016

The Youth Frontiers Leadership Conference (YFLC) inspires 11th-grade student leaders to set the tone for improving their school environment. Students identify personal strengths to utilize as a leader and create an action plan to improve their school. Pre- to post- student surveys showed statistically significant improvements across multiple items with sizable

effects. Furthermore, students reported taking concrete action steps toward improving their school in the area they identified. Clearly, participation in this conference empowers students to think of themselves as leaders and then to take on the responsibility of making their schools better.



Key Findings

100 percent of participants recommended the YFLC

- Overwhelmingly, students reported that the YFLC exceeded their expectations.
- Students also reported that networking with other students from other high schools was helpful: hearing other students' stories inspired them to make changes at their own schools.

Five out of nine students' belief statements saw statistically significant positive change from before to after the YFLC. These statements include:

- I feel responsible for standing up for what is right at my school.
- I feel empowered to stand up for what I know is right in my school.
- I feel like I am a leader in my school.
- I set goals that will improve my school.
- I can achieve anything I set my mind to.

We also surveyed 12th-grade students who attended the YFLC as 11th graders. The following themes emerged from our survey:

- Students said that the conference taught them to be more tolerant and to speak up for others.
- Students said that the conference gave them confidence to take on leadership roles and get to know new people.

Project Evaluator: Lisa St. Clair, Ed.D. Partner/Senior Evaluator, Omaha Program Evaluation Services, Omaha, Nebraska; Jolene Johnson, Ed.D. Assistant Professor, Munroe-Meyer Institute, Omaha, Nebraska

Annual Student Retreat Participant Survey, 2014-2017

Youth Frontiers provides schools with 30-day post-retreat student surveys designed by the University of Minnesota for the CAREI Evaluation Project. YF tabulates the results for each individual school and collectively for each retreat. Below is the aggregate data from the 2016-17 school year for each retreat type that highlights attainment of key learnings, attitudinal shifts or behavioral change.

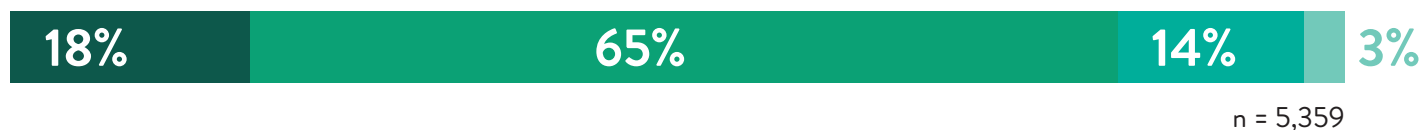
Bar Graph Key

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Since the Kindness Retreat, I feel more confident to help someone who is being picked on.



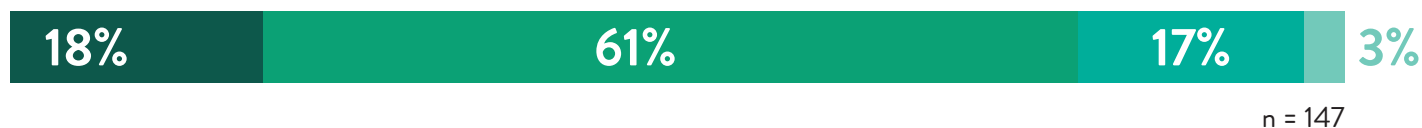
Since the Courage Retreat, I stand up to negative peer pressure.



Since the Respect Retreat, I have more respect for myself.



The Wisdom Retreat inspired me to finish school in a respectful manner.



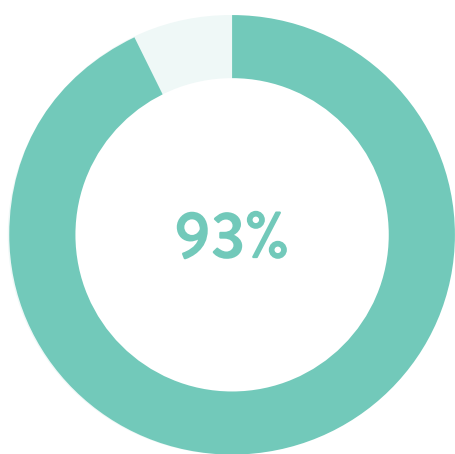
“ Thank you for this opportunity to really learn and grow as a seventh grader and as a whole class. You have helped give a lot of students hope, and for that, I am grateful. What I learned today will help me and so many others to be courageous. Today, I got to really learn about how to help others — about how to be me. And that will stick with me forever.

— Student, South Jr. High, St. Cloud, Minn.



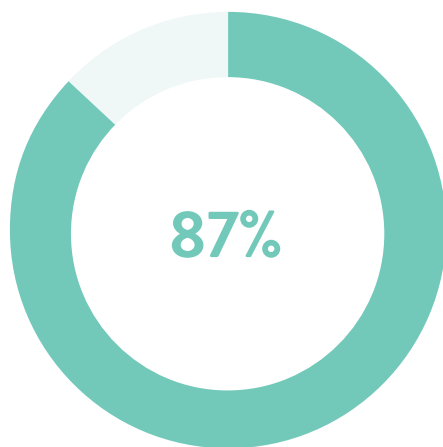
Third-party Student Evaluations, 2017-Present

In an effort to increase participation and accuracy in the data Youth Frontiers collects from its student participants, in 2017 we hired a third-party evaluator to conduct our evaluations for us. Four weeks after a retreat, the evaluator sends YF a link for each school to use to fill out the student evaluations. The students' electronic responses go directly to the evaluator, who then compiles the data and sends it to us and to the schools. We have already increased our evaluation return rate from 8.5 percent to 25.5 percent and received cleaner data. We implemented a similar process for our educator evaluations in the 2018-19 school year.



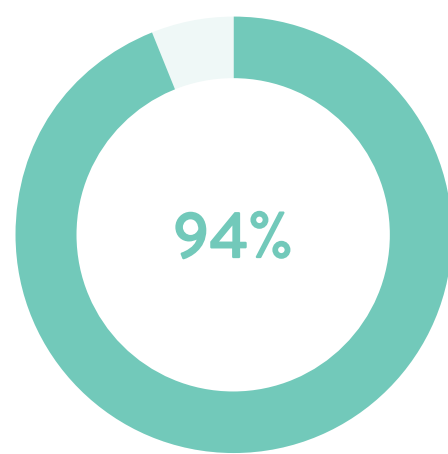
After the **Kindness Retreat**, 93 percent of 6,887 student evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

When I see another person who is hurt or upset, I know how they feel.



After the **Courage Retreat**, 87 percent of 8,766 student evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

The Courage Retreat helped me understand how acting with courage can make a difference for me and my school.



After the **Respect Retreat**, 94 percent of 5,646 student evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

I treat teachers with respect even if I disagree with them.



Third-party Educator Evaluations, 2018-Present

Bar Graph Key

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly Disagree

I feel committed to continuing my important work educating young people. (Purpose Retreat)



Today I reaffirmed my purpose as an educator. (Purpose Retreat)



Today I got to know one or more of my colleagues better. (Honor Retreat)



I feel more committed to continuing my important work of educating young people. (Honor Retreat)



Logic Model

| | Students | Educators | Community |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| Input | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30+ Programs Staff 4 YCorps Members 30+ Office Staff 17 Board Members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30+ Programs Staff 4 YCorps Members 30+ Office Staff 17 Board Members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30+ Programs Staff 4 YCorps Members 30+ Office Staff 17 Board Members |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kindness, Courage, Respect and Wisdom Retreats; YFLC Retreat Volunteering Follow-up Materials, Videos, Emails, Newsletters, Social Media and Blog | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honor, Purpose and Mind Retreats Onboarding, Engagement and Leadership Series Follow-up Materials, Videos, Emails, Newsletters, Social Media and Blog | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethical Leadership Luncheon in Minn. and Wis. Annual Event in Minn. and Neb. Emails and Newsletters Videos, Social Media and Blog |
| Outputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 824 Student Retreats 134,508 Unique Page Views 16,602 Social Media Followers 34,940 Video Views | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 39 Educator Retreats 9 Cohort Series 134,508 Unique Page Views 16,602 Social Media Followers 34,940 Video Views | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,473 Fundraising Event Attendees 134,508 Unique Page Views 16,602 Social Media Followers 34,940 Video Views |
| Immediate Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience respect, connection and belonging Learn a common language Understand, empathize with others Engage with peers and adults Be inspired to build positive change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with and honor each other Reflect on purpose as educators Welcome and retain educators Develop school leadership Receive resources to help build the character of young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with community leaders Be inspired by student stories Receive resources to help build the character of young people |
| Long-term Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students use social-emotional learning skills to stand up for respect in schools. Enhanced school connectedness: students are not afraid to come to school and have healthy relationships with peers and teachers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators feel more connected to their students, their school and their profession. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community leaders are committed to helping raise the next generation of ethical leaders. |

Ultimate Impact – The realization of our vision

Our next generation of leaders is grounded in character.