



EVALUATIONS OVERVIEW

Founded in 1987, Youth Frontiers (YF) is a nonprofit organization that provides 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 internal and with independent institutions, confidently report that we deliver a high-quality retreat experience every day. In the 2021-22 school year, 97 percent of schools said they would recommend their retreat to another school. Our clients 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joe Cavanaugh'.

Joe Cavanaugh
Founder & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kenneth A. Dragseth'.

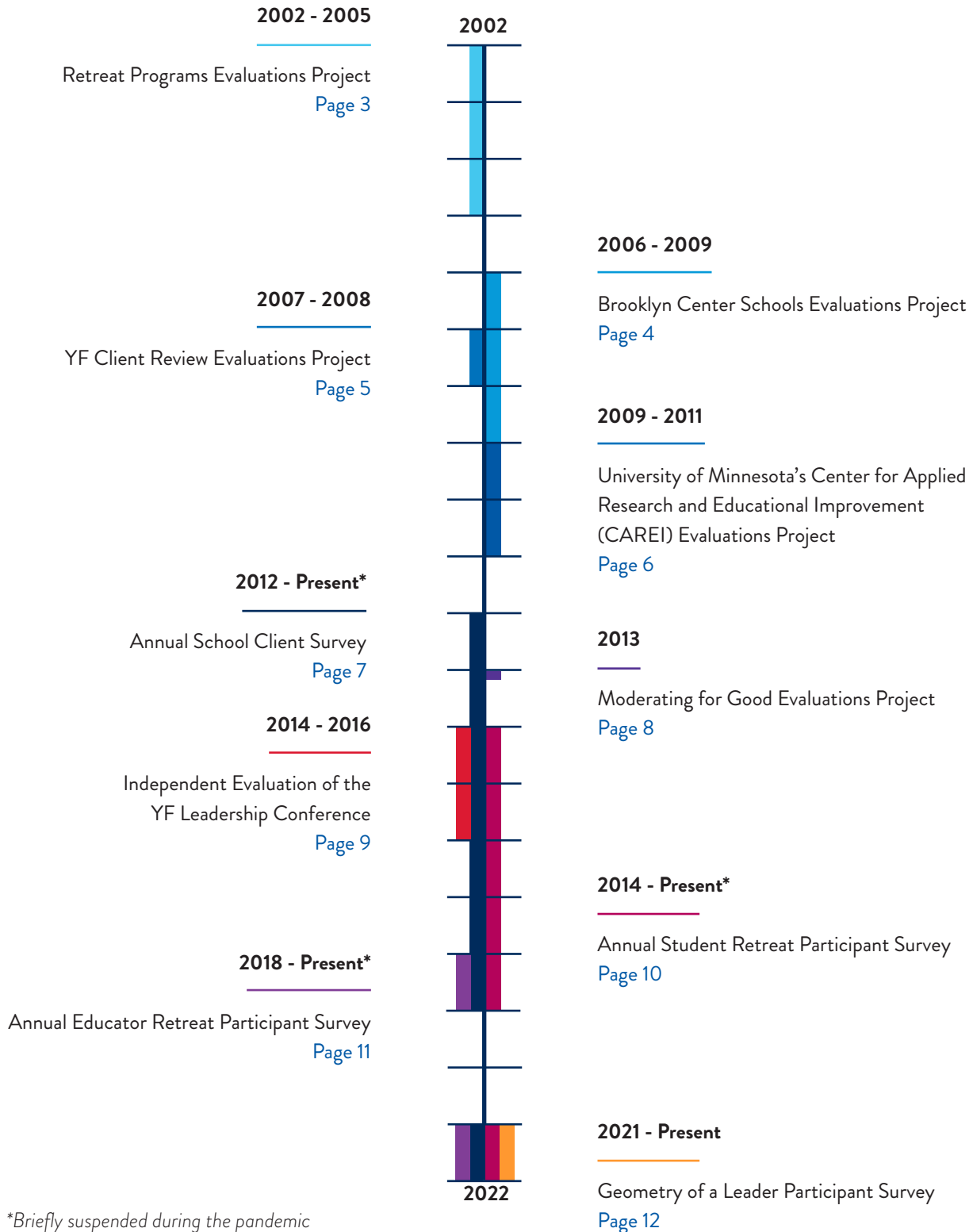
Kenneth A. Dragseth, Ph.D.
Director of Administrative Licensure
University of Minnesota
Former YF Board Member

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'R. Craig Vana'.

R. Craig Vana
Retired Administrator
Minneapolis Public Schools
Former YF Board Member

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.



*Briefly suspended during the pandemic

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).





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

Words from 2021-22 Clients

“The kids loved [the Youth Frontiers staff] and really made a connection with them. I saw several of our more challenging kids hanging on their every word! SO impressed with the Youth Frontiers Kindness Retreats!”

– *Elementary School Counselor, Neb.*

“[The Respect Retreat] helps us welcome our newest students, and it allows us to connect positive upper-class leaders with ninth-grade students. We take what we learn at the retreat and use the follow-up resources ... So much good comes from this retreat!”

– *High School Counselor, Wis.*

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 2021-22 school year, 97 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
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%
2021-22	—	90%	—

*We briefly suspended the Annual School Client Survey during FY20 & FY21 due to no/low student retreat volume during the pandemic. When we resumed the survey in FY22, we updated it to focus on staff performance and solicit more qualitative, open-ended feedback.

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.



“Retreat days are seriously the best days of the year! Through energy and fun, students talk about big topics, build their character and set goals to implement their learning ... it doesn’t get better than this!”

— Instructional Coach, Iowa

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:

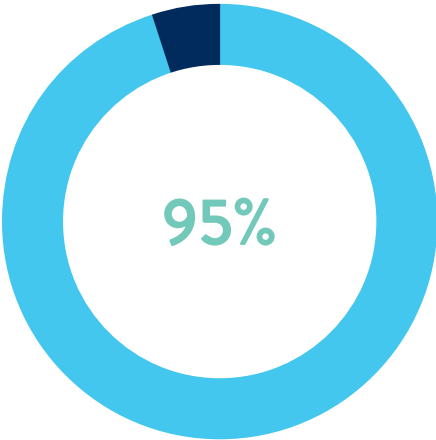
- Students said that the conference taught them to be more tolerant and to speak up for others.
- Students said that the conference gave them confidence to take on leadership roles and get to know new people.

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



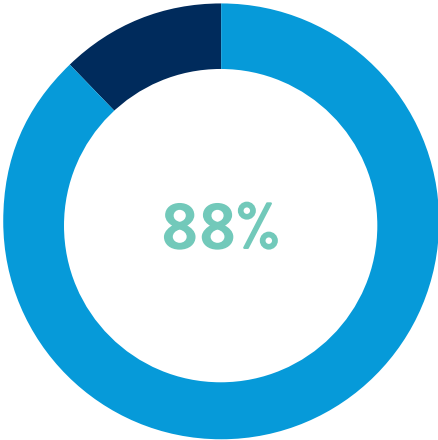
Annual Student Retreat Participant Survey, 2014-Present

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. (From 2017 to 2019 this survey was conducted by a third-party evaluator.) Below is the aggregate data from the 2021-22 school year for each retreat type that highlights attainment of key learnings, attitudinal shifts or behavioral change.



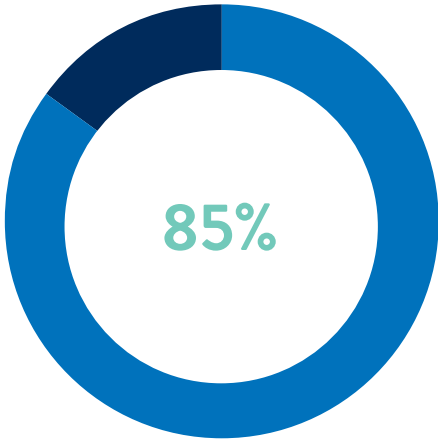
After the **Kindness Retreat**, 95 percent of 2,910 student evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

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



After the **Courage Retreat**, 88 percent of 2,885 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.



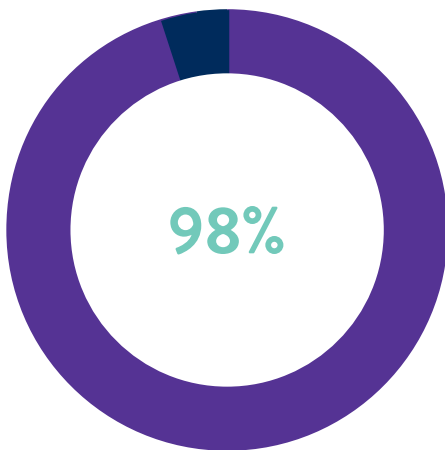
After the **Respect Retreat**, 85 percent of 2,136 student evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

Since the Respect Retreat, I show more respect for others who may not share my view.



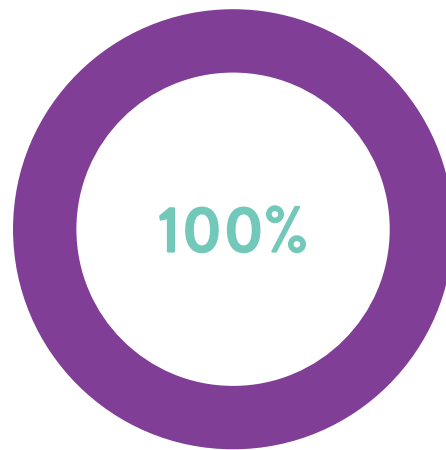
Educator Evaluations, 2018-Present

After each program, YF asks educators to fill out a survey about the impact of their retreat. From 2018 to 2019, this survey was conducted by a third-party evaluator. Below is the aggregate data from the 2021-22 school year for each of our programs.



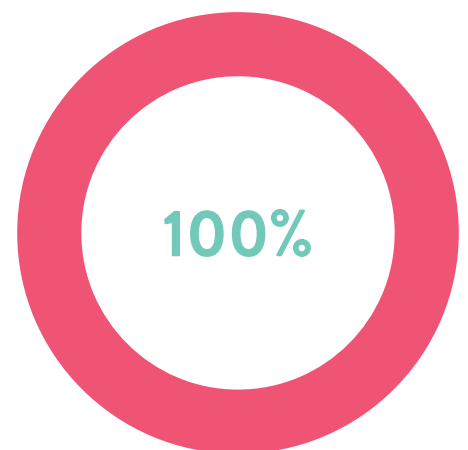
After the **Honor Retreat**, 98 percent of educator evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

After the Honor Retreat, I feel a stronger sense of community with my colleagues.



After the **Purpose Retreat**, 100 percent of educator evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

The Purpose Retreat reminded me of why I continue in the noble profession of education.



After the **Elements Conference**, 100 percent of educator evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

Because of this conference, I feel more inspired to continue in my important work as an educator.



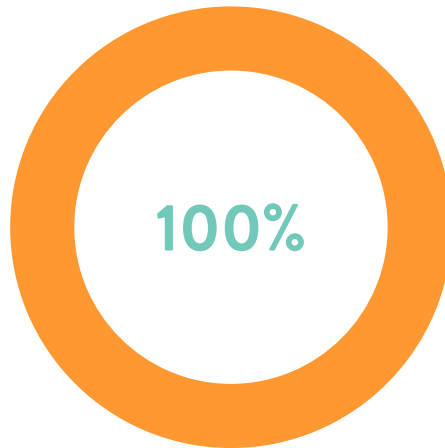
Leader Evaluations, 2021-Present

After each Geometry of a Leader (GOAL) series, YF asks leaders to fill out a survey about the impact of their experience. Below is the data from our 2022 virtual GOAL Conference for cross-sector leaders.



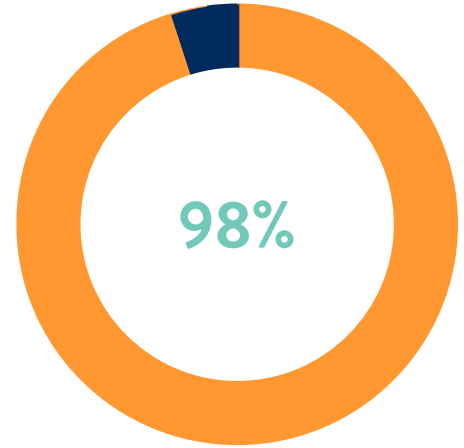
100 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

The Geometry of a Leader has increased my confidence in my ability to lead with character.



100 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

The Geometry of a Leader has equipped me with tools I need to face today's leadership challenges.



98 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

The Geometry of a Leader has deepened my commitment to making my workplace and my community better for all.



98 percent of survey respondents said that they would recommend the Geometry of a Leader to other leaders.

Logic Model

	<i>Students</i>	<i>Educators</i>	<i>Community</i>
<i>Input</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 Programs Staff • 17 Office Staff • 3 Board Members • 31 Mission Advisory Council Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Programs Staff • 17 Office Staff • 3 Board Members • 31 Mission Advisory Council Members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Programs Staff • 17 Office Staff • 3 Board Members • 31 Mission Advisory Council Members
<i>Activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindness, Courage, Respect and Wisdom Retreats • Character Academy; YFLCs • Retreat Volunteering • Follow-up Materials, Videos, Emails and Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor and Purpose Retreats • Elements of an Engaged Educator • Follow-up Materials, Videos, Emails and Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geometry of a Leader (GOAL); Parent Academy • Week of Character; 35th Anniversary Event; Volunteering • Follow-up Materials, Emails and Social Media
<i>Outputs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 415 Student Retreats • 75 Character Academy sessions • 2 YFLCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 Educator Retreats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 GOAL Conference; 1 GOAL Retreat; 7 private GOAL Series • 3 Parent Academy sessions • 35th Anniversary event
<i>Immediate Outcomes</i>	<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"> • Gain a common language around character-driven leadership • Connect with community leaders • Receive resources to help build the character of young people
<i>Long-term Outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students use social-emotional learning skills to stand up for kindness and respect in schools. • Enhanced school connectedness: students have healthy relationships with peers and teachers. • Our young people have the tools they need to navigate life's challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our educators will have an enhanced sense of wellbeing and feel a deeper connection to their vocation so that they continue in their noble work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our parents are equipped with a framework to help their children grow into productive and responsible adults. • Our leaders have a common language and commit to re-weaving our community with character.

Ultimate Impact – The realization of our vision:

Our next generation of leaders is grounded in character.