

Twin Rivers Unified School District

Student Leadership Camp

Survey & Video Testimonial Results

Submitted to:

Youth Development Network
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Submitted by:

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Introduction

Youth Development Network (YDN) and Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD) are collaborating to provide a leadership program for TRUSD students. Through the program youth, school administrators and staff will:

- Build and develop stronger partnerships;
- Learn the meaning of authentic youth engagement;
- Explore youth leadership roles;
- Define school climate and the various factors that impact it;
- Create a future vision for their schools; and
- Address campus issues and create a safe and supportive school climate.

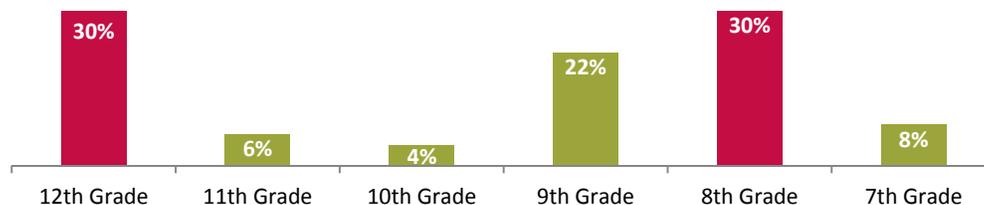
A four-day strengths-based leadership camp launched the TRUSD program for the 2014-2015 academic year, where youth from 20 different TRUSD schools participated in workshops and teambuilding exercises. Prior to camp the youth completed the *Gallup, Inc. StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment* to uncover their top five talent themes. The assessment was the foundation of the camp curriculum where youth explored how to turn their top five talents into strengths; how to use their strengths to navigate weakness, or areas of struggle; and how to combine their strengths with those of their peers to create powerful teams. Students also learned the tenants of Youth Participatory Action Research, how to develop a research question, select appropriate research tools, and conduct research. Ultimately, the expectation is that youth will use their strengths and leadership skills to form school teams that tackle and solve issues negatively impacting school climate.

YDN partnered with LPC Consulting Associates to evaluate the 2014-2015 TRUSD Student Leadership Program. The project budget supported the administration of a camp survey, and focus groups with TRUSD youth and adults at the conclusion of the 2014-2015 academic year. The following is a summary of the TRUSD Student Leadership Camp video testimonial and survey findings.

Youth Demographics

YDN collected 50 completed youth surveys¹. In the upcoming academic year, the survey respondents will enter school as 7th through 12th grade students, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Grade Levels of Camp Attendees for 2014-15 Academic Year



¹ Approximately 50 youth attended the camp. The evaluator will introduce a systematic approach for tracking attendance for future camps.

Slightly more than half (52%) of the survey respondents identified their gender as female, and slightly less than half (48%) identified as male. The largest percentage of survey respondents identified as multiracial (30%), but the race/ethnicity of survey respondents was diverse, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Race/ethnicity of Sacramento State Camp Attendees.

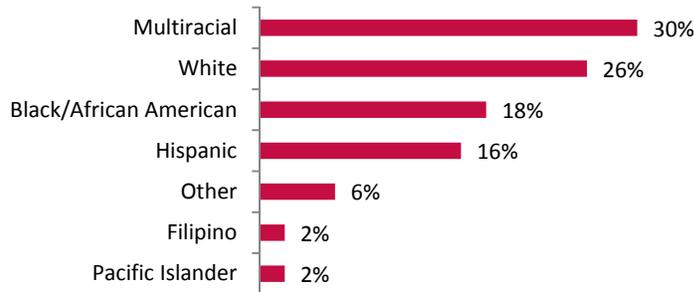


Table 1 details the 22 different schools represented at camp and the number of youth from each school in attendance.

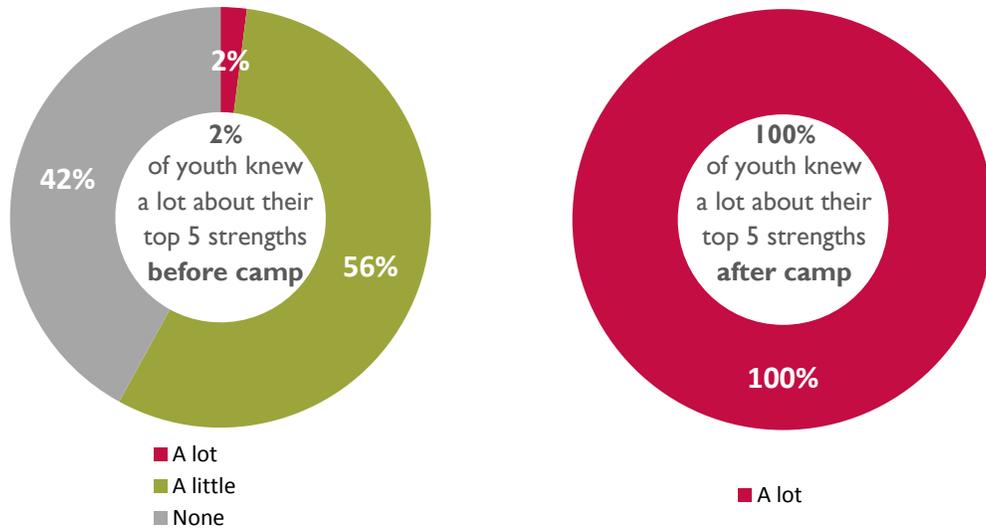
Table 1 – School Affiliation

SCHOOL NAME	# OF YOUTH
Elementary: P/K - 8	
F.C. Joyce	3
Oakdale	2
Ridgepoint	2
Pioneer	1
Village	1
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>9 (18%)</i>
Middle	
Foothill Ranch	4
Rio Tierra	3
Martin Luther King Jr. Technology Academy	2
Norwood	2
Rio Linda Preparatory Academy	1
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>12 (25%)</i>
High	
Rio Linda	5
Creative Connections Art Academy	4
Grant	3
Highlands	3
Vista Nueva	3
Pacific Career and Technology	2
Antelope	1
Foothill	1
Futures	1
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>23 (47%)</i>
Charter	
Westside Preparatory – Eastside Campus	2
Westside Preparatory – Frontier Campus	2
Westside Preparatory – Westside Campus	1
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>5 (10%)</i>

Strengths

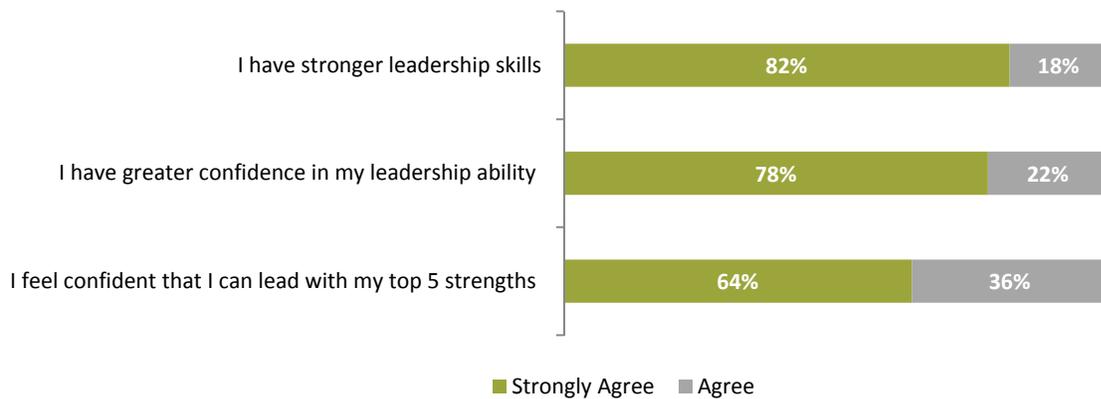
The survey included a series of questions to assess the impact of the strengths-based camp curriculum. Survey results show that students’ **knowledge of their top 5 strengths increased 98% from pre to post-camp**. Figure 3 demonstrates the marked change in students’ knowledge, or self-awareness.

Figure 3 – Increase in Students’ Knowledge of Top 5 Strengths



The overarching goal of teaching youth about their top 5 strengths is for youth to become leaders and apply their strengths – both individually and collectively - to addressing an issue impacting school climate. To discern students comfort with leading from a strengths-based perspective, the survey included a series of statements preceded by “*after attending TRUSD Leadership Camp*” and students indicated the level to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement; **100 percent of students expressed confidence in their ability to lead by either “strongly agreeing” or “agreeing”** with each statement, see Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Leadership Skills and Confidence



Students’ also reflected on the use of their strengths in the school environment. Once again, students indicated the level to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements, and:

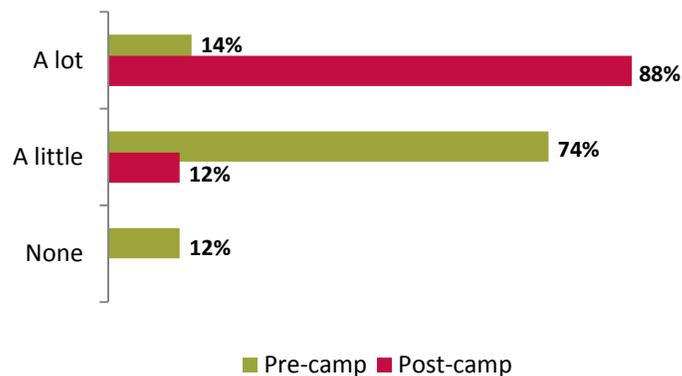
98% of students believe:

- *I can work with my school team to accomplish our goals using our individual strengths.*
- *I will use my strengths to make my school a better place.*

Research

The camp curriculum included a youth participatory action research component. The expectation is that youth will use their research skills to identify a campus issue and appropriate mitigation(s). To discern the impact of the research curriculum, youth identified what they knew about conducting research prior to attending camp, and how their level of knowledge changed after camp. The survey results demonstrate that students’ knowledge of how to conduct research increased through exposure to the camp curriculum. Specifically, **the percentage of students that reported knowing ‘a lot’ about research increased 74 percent from pre to post-camp**. Figure 5 depicts students’ self-report knowledge of their research skills pre and post-camp.

Figure 5 – Students’ Research Knowledge Pre and Post-Camp



One would expect the students’ grade levels (7th through 12th grade) to correlate with how much they know about conducting research; the higher a student’s grade level, the more she/he knows about conducting research. While survey analysis reveals there is a relationship between student grade level and their research knowledge prior to attending camp, analysis also reveals that students’ level of knowledge increased from pre to post-camp when controlling for grade level, see table 2.

Table 2 – Students Research Knowledge by Grade and Pre and Post-Camp

How much do you know about conducting research		7 th – 8 th Grade		9 th – 12 th Grade	
		Pre-Camp Scores	Post-Camp Scores	Pre-Camp Scores	Post-Camp Scores
How much do you know about conducting research	A lot	0%	84%	22%	90%
	A little	84%	16%	68%	10%
	None	16%	0%	10%	0%

The table illustrates that grade level does impact research knowledge, in that about one quarter (22%) of ninth through twelfth grade students reported knowing “a lot” about research prior to attending camp in comparison to none of the sixth through eighth grade students. For both grade groups a percentage of students reported knowing nothing about how to conduct research. However, post-camp 100 percent of students from both grade groups reported knowing “a lot” or “a little” about research which demonstrates the impact of the camp curriculum.

The survey included an open-ended question for students to convey why they participated in the TRUSD Student Leadership Camp. Not surprisingly, developing leadership skills was the number one reason students elected to attend leadership camp. Comments illustrating this are as follows:

“I wanted to strengthen my leadership skills before my upcoming school year so that I am prepared.”

“To learn how to become a leader and not a follower.”

“To better my leadership skills, gain a relationship with them, and also gain strategies on how to make the year great.”

Students wanted to develop leadership skills in order to: improve their school, better their communities, and build a foundation for future opportunities. A large number of students noted their desire to learn about their individual strengths, and the application of those strengths, for example,

“I felt it was a good opportunity to learn about my strengths and make them stronger so I can be a leader in my community and in my life.”

“I wanted to learn more about my strengths and become a better leader.”

Other reasons for attending the TRUSD Student Leadership Camp included: (1) to have fun; (2) learn something new; and (3) a trusted teacher encouraging attendance.

Through the survey youth identified their favorite camp activity. Most of the students favored the ropes course for a variety of reasons. Students believed the ropes course allowed them to overcome fears, exhibit new leadership skills, and work together with their peers. Networking with peers was the second most favored aspect of camp, with the talent show, dance, and camp fire gathering helping to create a sense of unity and trust.

Video Testimonial

During one of the team building activities, youth had an opportunity to provide a video testimonial. The YDN team set up a laptop with question prompts and instructions on how to record a video. While the youth facilitators encouraged students to record a testimonial, participating in the activity was voluntary.

Through the video testimonials, students expressed that the camp learning opportunities far exceeded those in the traditional classroom setting. Students believe the camp learning environment was less constrained and that they could extract what resonated with them individually from each lesson, making the camp experience meaningful. The students enjoyed the interactive and hands-on approach to learning, and that the facilitators emphasized the main learning objective of each activity. Students remarked that the facilitators physically showed, or dynamically explained, each camp activity/lesson instead of lecturing from a text book.

Video testimony also touched upon the teamwork approach to learning utilized at camp. Opportunities to work with peers and facilitators on various activities delighted students,

“You’re not just sitting there and they [teachers] are not telling you this and then making you do work on your own; at camp you’re doing it together.”

At times the teamwork approach forced students outside of their comfort zones, which facilitated the development of skills taught at camp. Students reflected on how to apply to their strengths to various experiences (e.g., school and community leadership) and how to manage their strengths in those situations. Students favored the aspect of camp that focused on learning about individual strengths. The ability to develop those strengths with hands-on and interactive teamwork activities is what set camp apart from learning about their strengths in the classroom environment.

A few students relayed that unlike school, they felt an acceptance from others for being themselves. Students also felt they could express feelings and emotions and really explore who they are, which is different from school because there is a stigma associated with expressing emotion. Video testimony supports that the students flourished being around like-minded peers in an environment where they could be themselves without fear or judgment. Through the video testimonial, youth identified the following approaches to learning that positively impacted the camp experience,

- Learning objectives by activity;
- Interactive and hands-on;
- Teamwork;
- Dynamic and experiential;
- Reinforced strengths;
- Personal relevance;
- Self-expression;
- Social-emotional learning; and
- Peer Support.

The success of the approaches to learning identified by students has implications for traditional teaching, especially in so far as it might improve school climate through social-emotional learning.

Summary

Thus far the techniques employed by YDN and TRUSD staff are propelling students through the public health behavior change models. The three steps outlined in the models include: (1) increased knowledge or self-awareness; (2) changes in attitudes, beliefs, or self-confidence; and (3) behavior change.

The TRUSD Student Leadership Camp sought to instill in the participants an understanding of their top five strengths and a confidence in applying those strengths as school and community leaders. Through camp youths' knowledge of their strengths increased, as well as their assurance in their ability to lead. Students believe they can use their individual and collective strengths to make their schools a better place. In addition, students' understanding of how to conduct research expanded at camp.

Students enjoyed the hands-on, interactive learning environment at camp. Students extracted individual meaning from the lessons, but also enjoyed working as teams because it forced them outside of their comfort zones. Camp provided a venue for students to express their feelings, emotions and explore who they are. Students also felt accepted for being who they are. The learning modalities served to reinforce the students' change in knowledge or self-awareness, and their confidence and belief in their ability to lead. The applied learning in the school environment is the testing ground for whether students will experience a change in behavior, and become active change agents.

The TRUSD Student Leadership Camp laid a great foundation for the upcoming academic year (i.e., 2014-2015). Students are poised for great success as they take on leadership roles to define school climate and the various factors that impact it, create a future vision for their schools, and address campus issues to create a safe and supportive school climate.