

**YOU+LEAD**STUDENTS AND LEADERS
IMPROVING SCHOOLS
TOGETHERLearn more at: impactfl.org/you-lead-cadre

YOU+LEAD CADRE

Unlocking Potential: Building Youth
Participatory Evaluation Teams in Schools

**PROVING
GROUND**Evaluation Report in conjunction with
Harvard Proving Ground

ABOUT THE YOU+LEAD CADRE

FOSTERING RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS WITH STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT THE CENTER

In the summer of 2022, Impact Florida formed the You+Lead Cadre to pilot Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) programs in four high schools. The cadre enacted the Five Conditions that Support Great Teaching – shared vision, high-quality instructional materials, effective professional learning, empowered leaders, and effective use of data – by focusing on the student's perspective of each condition.

Youth Participatory Evaluation



A Youth Advisor at each school facilitated the program for students. Youth Advisors received a monetary stipend and successfully led students through a year-long, 7-step, process. The process required students to build a team, identify a research question, make a plan, collect data, analyze data, communicate their findings, and take action.

A school support team connected each school with their respective district office, enabling learning and program adaptation in real-time. The support team included the school's principal, district-level data coaches, members of other departments (that are interested in advancing youth-voice in school improvement) and a high-level district sponsor.

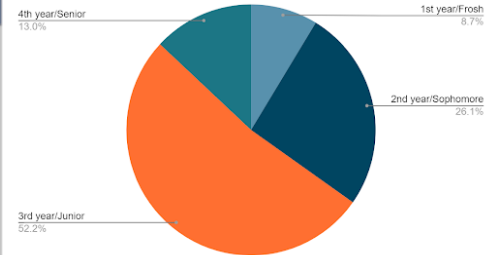
Impact Florida provided design and implementation expertise through two experienced leaders who, previously, facilitated a district-wide Youth Participatory Evaluation program in Minneapolis Public Schools. Adults participated in virtual and in-person training sessions, along with bimonthly coaching calls. Students and adults also learned and worked alongside each other during district-level, in-person, training and two, day-long, learning sessions.

Each student team shared their research, findings, and recommendations with their principal, school leadership team and educators. In one district, some students shared their experience with an audience of principals and district leaders during an end-of-year, district-wide, principals meeting.

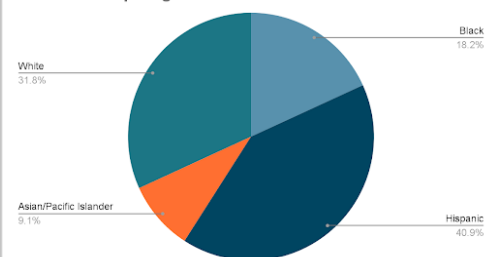
IMPACT FLORIDA'S FIRST YOUTH-ADULT CADRE

John I. Leonard HS YPE Team Members: 6 Meeting Time: <u>School Demographics</u> Students: 3,546 Hispanic: 71.3% Black: 17.8% White: 7.1% Asian: 1.7% Two or more races: 1.5% Male: 52% Female: 48% FRL: 88% 	Wiregrass Ranch HS YPE Team Members: 6 Meeting Time: <u>School Demographics</u> Students: 2,066 Hispanic: 28.5% Black: 10.8% White: 50% Asian: 6.4% Two or more races: 4.2% Male: 51% Female: 49% FRL: 22% 
Palm Beach Lakes Community HS YPE Team Members: 14 Meeting Time: <u>School Demographics</u> Students: 2,638 Hispanic: 25.3% Black: 67.2% White: 4.2% Asian: .8% Two or more races: 1.6% Male: 51% Female: 49% FRL: 89% 	Zephyrhills HS YPE Team Members: 13 Meeting Time: <u>School Demographics</u> Students: 1,443 Hispanic: 25.4% Black: 12.0% White: 56.5% Asian: 1.0% Two or more races: 5.1% Male: 52% Female: 48% FRL: 61% 

Participating Student School Year Identification



Participating Student Racial Self-Identification



ABOUT IMPACT FLORIDA



Impact Florida is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that believes excellent classroom instruction can move the needle for all students. The organization focuses on supporting education leaders and teachers with the knowledge and resources they need to ensure that great teaching and learning is consistently realized in all Florida schools. Impact Florida Learning Cadres bring educators and education leaders together across districts to pilot innovative instructional practices and to learn from each other. The You+Lead Learning Cadre is Impact Florida's first youth-adult cadre.

PROVING GROUND

The You+Lead Cadre in conjunction with Harvard Proving Ground emphasized student experiences collected through participatory evaluation methods led by youth. Proving Ground surveyed youth both before beginning and after concluding the work. Participatory methods were also used to gather student perceptions at three in-person learning sessions. Adult mindsets are also important in youth voice work, so adult team members and youth advisors were also surveyed at the beginning and end of the year. Adults also participated in several interviews and focus groups throughout the process.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

KEY FINDINGS

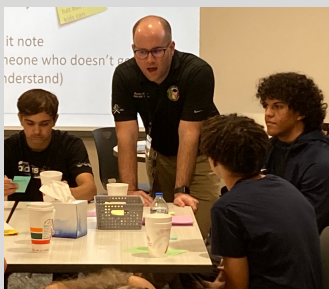
Critical mindset shifts by both the students and adults in You+Lead were important both as inputs and outcomes of the process. The culture shifts required to foster true youth-adult partnership in schools were attended to on both sides of the relationship. Students learn that their individual experiences do not define everyone's, while adults learn that students can be reasonable and insightful when they identify needs, share expertise, and help shape solutions.

Participating Students



- Grew in leadership skills, resilience, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and elevating of unheard voices
- Developed stronger relationships and collaboration - BOTH student-to-student and student-to-adult
- Expressed excitement about feeling heard, gaining insight from other students and participating in school improvement
- Leaned on adult responsiveness to take the risks required for growth and were wary of adult resistance

Participating Adults and Youth Advisors



- Reported an 11% increase in adult confidence in student leadership and a 75% increase in adult realization of student knowledge and skills
- Experienced an increased recognition of the value of listening closely to student voices
- Expressed a strong willingness to share decision-making with students and became more aware of colleagues who were less willing
- Reported an increase in their desire for students to have opportunities to share ideas at school.

District and School Administrators



- Documented deeper engagement between adults and students; witnessed positive shifts in adult perceptions of student knowledge and ability
- Appreciated growth in student confidence, collaboration, research, and presentation skills
- Saw greater rigor and structure in the students' approach to activism, which improves their effectiveness in promoting change both inside and outside of school

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Idealism and Pragmatism

As students learned the process and began to gather opinions from their peers, their perspectives on the work grew deeper. At the start of the year, students were excited to learn that adults would listen to their ideas. The opportunity to make change and deepen relationships in their schools also excited them about the work. Their initial worries included the possibility that adults would not truly listen and that they'd experience pushback and resistance from their peers. Overall, their greatest worry was the fear of not having the skills necessary for the work and believing they'd fall short on creating the changes they wished to see.

After participating in You+Lead, students were excited to witness their ability to effect change. They reported enthusiasm in collaborating as a team to problem-solve issues they face at school. The lingering fear, however, that the changes they hoped for wouldn't materialize remained. They were also concerned that their peers might lose interest, over time, and that they would lack adult buy-in to their proposals.

MEETING CHALLENGES

Learning to Lead Change

Interestingly, pre/post survey data showed that participating students became slightly more confident in their ability to make positive changes at their school over the course of the year (Fig. 1.) While their assessment of their “skills” needed to make change also increased slightly, the strength of their agreement was tempered a bit (Fig. 2.)

The sense that the process empowered students to share ideas and make positive changes at their school remained strong, but showed some reduction that strength. While follow-up interviews to determine reasons for this shift were not possible, and disaggregation by school results in too few respondents to be reliable, interviews and focus groups with Youth Advisors, principals, and district administrators offered some insight. It is possible that early enthusiasm from students met the practical realities of change to slightly temper their confidence. It is also likely that, being a first-year pilot program, the full potential of Youth Participatory Evaluation teams wasn't recognized, due to incomplete information and experience. Lessons learned and improvement ideas were collected from participating adults. These crucial pieces of insight were included in the development of the model, training and support resources and focus areas to assess. Of course, student experiences may differ, and understanding them lies at the core of this work. Therefore, subsequent research and tests of change should include follow-up interviews with participating students as well.

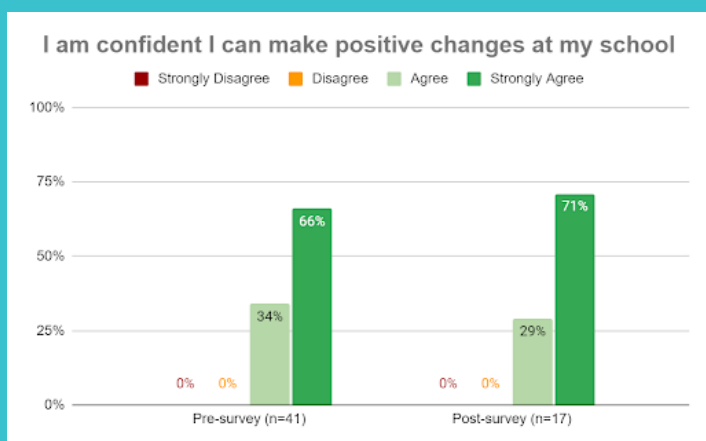


Figure 1

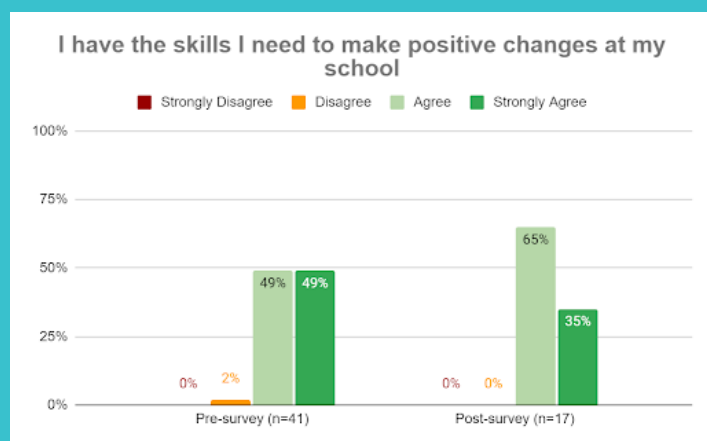


Figure 2

ADULT RESPONSIVENESS

Beyond Tokenism

Students were asked to envision potential barriers to their change efforts. They were then asked to create ideas for how adults could demonstrate responsiveness and help them address these barriers. This observation carries particular significance in light of a 2022 study which links school responsiveness with academic improvements - suggesting that responsiveness may exert positive effects, at the school-level, in the development of student agency, belonging, and competence, and even at the classroom level ([Kahne et al., 2022](#)).



Students identified 5 specific actions that demonstrate adult responsiveness and support for their youth participatory evaluation work:

- Provide support, help, encouragement, and reassurance
- Serve as a guide and thought-partner, offering clarification, direction, and feedback
- Gather and offer information and resources to support their change work
- Listen actively and authentically to their voice and perspective
- Become an ally in their work



YOUTH ADVISOR EXPERIENCE

School-Level Outcomes

Youth Advisors highlighted positive school-level outcomes for:

- **Youth Development:** Leadership skills, resilience, practical research experience and elevating the voices of quieter students - empowering them to lead change.
- **Youth-Adult Relationships:** Collaboration with adults, deepens their connection with students, enhances professional relationships, and serves as a platform for mutual learning and growth.
- **Sense of Belonging & Positive School Climate:** A more responsive school culture, enhancing students' sense of belonging and identity and leading to improvements in the school climate.

Professional Growth

You+Lead Youth Advisors (YA's) reported an improved sense of their own self-efficacy and professional growth. Confidence in their ability to lead YPE showed a 33% increase, while 100% agreed, or strongly agreed, that they had the requisite knowledge and skills after their participation in You+Lead.

Youth Advisors also reported a greater recognition of the value of student voice, potential and capabilities. Some YA's stated that hearing students' voices and seeing students' data validated their own professional observations and experiences in their schools. Their confidence to support other adults to be more responsive to student experiences increased. They also noticed other adults listening to the students more. Nevertheless, they realized that work still remains to align adult mindsets with student leadership for change.

The You+Lead experience pushed the thinking of the Youth Advisors over time. At the start, YA's were excited about the opportunity to increase student voice and agency and their own personal learning. However, they were worried about other adults buying into the process and their own availability to support the work. At the conclusion, YA's were still excited about increasing student voice and technical skills, as well as being elated by the participating students' engagement and enthusiasm. Still, though, they were anxious about the sustainability of You+Lead, due to the time requirement and the implications for maintaining student buy-in.

Youth Advisors identified specific ways to make the program better. Their recommendations helped shape the online course, *Unlocking Potential: Building Youth-Led Evaluation Teams in Schools*, as well as aiding in the planning and design to support the next generation of You+Lead teams.

"The students figured out that they have a voice. They realized that if they understand the process, they can truly get things done. The students at [our school] are excited about next year. They're excited about the fact that somebody just wants to listen."

-Youth Advisor

Youth Development Outcomes

Youth Advisor confidence in the self-efficacy of participating students grew through participation in You+Lead. Youth advisors identified five positive youth development outcomes among participating students, including:

- **Increased Confidence in Their Own (Students') Abilities:** Participation in You+Lead led to an increase in students' self-confidence, particularly among those who were previously disengaged or had lower GPAs. Students took on leadership roles and excelled in them, demonstrating a greater belief in their own abilities.
- **Discovery & Development of Student Leadership Potential:** YPE provided students with the opportunity to discover and develop their leadership potential. Students who may not have had previous opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills were able to lead discussions, facilitate focus groups and drive the direction of the project.
- **Student Recognition of Personal Influence & Power:** Students participating in YPE recognized their individual power and influence. They realized that their opinions and actions can drive change and make a significant difference in their educational environment.
- **Student Empowerment & Increased Initiative:** Participation in YPE empowered students, making them feel heard and valued. This inspired them to take more initiative and become more invested in their school community, leading to a greater sense of ownership and engagement.
- **Peer-to-Peer Relationships, Collaboration & Teamwork:** Students learned to participate and work together as a team, even when that required forming new relationships with peers.

"I found it very validating for me. I'd noticed my students trying to get [adult] investment and stuff that they've said about generally the school climate. I felt like before [You+Lead] that this was just me having high expectations, but I'm a pessimist by nature and I felt like it was just that. But the fact that the students found that there was a lack of community, a lack of connection with the staff felt very validating that I did see this. And with the connection problem, it does nothing if a teacher points it out. It does everything when it's a student."

-Youth Advisor

ADMINISTRATOR EXPERIENCE

Youth Leadership and School Improvement

School and district administrators identified benefits from the program supporting stronger school-level experiences, including: greater student engagement, a positive shift in adult perceptions, new ideas for improvement and growth of student confidence and efficacy.

Administrators also highlighted how the structure and discipline, that data collection and analysis brings to the process, improved the students' ability to effect change and helped shape their skills for collaborative activism more broadly.

Likewise, administrators highlighted the power of student opportunities to build collaborative relationships with their peers, both within and outside their specific schools. The connections across the You+Lead student groups brought real energy to You+Lead and the student experience.

"In [prior student activism], I do not think that they did the research element, and I don't think they really thought through [questions like]: How do I know what I'm listening to or where I get my information from? Is it more than one person? Is it things like, I just talked to my friend down the street. They said it, so everybody must think it. So I do think it helped to provide structure to that process." -Administrator



"It's harder and harder for people to see things from another lens, and they did it by looking at data themselves. They also did it as they were listening to their colleagues presenting. They were out looking at other experiences." -Administrator

Unlocking Student Potential: Improving and Replicating You+Lead

Why Build Youth-Led Evaluation Teams in Schools?

You+Lead identified **five key objectives** that Youth Participatory Evaluation efforts in schools seek to advance:

- 1. Cultivating Youth Voice & Leadership:** You+Lead empowers young people to lead by actively involving them in evaluation. Engaging youth in the evaluation process allows them to express their perspectives, ideas and opinions and become active participants in decision-making that affects their lives.
- 2. Student-Centered Design; School Improvement/ Improve Student Perceptions of School Climate & Culture:** You+Lead integrates student perspectives and insights and gathers valuable feedback and data directly from those who are experiencing, or benefiting, from school programs, policies, and procedures.
- 3. Deeper Learning - Evaluation & Critical Thinking Skills:** You+Lead equips young people with evaluation and critical-thinking skills. Through active participation in evaluation, youth engage in activities that develop their ability to analyze, interpret and make evidence-based decisions- becoming more effective advocates for change.
- 4. Adult Responsiveness & Youth-Adult Collaboration:** You+Lead fosters meaningful collaboration and partnerships between youth and adults. By involving young people in the evaluation process, the program creates opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, mutual respect and shared decision-making. This objective promotes the idea that youth and adults can work together as equal partners to create positive change, breaking down traditional power dynamics and enhancing the overall quality of the evaluation process.
- 5. Elevating Unheard Voices:** You+Lead emphasizes the importance of inclusivity to address disparities and inequities that affect young people. You+Lead, in particular, seeks to create an evaluation process that is accessible and representative of diverse youth populations, including those from marginalized communities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION IN FUTURE YOU+LEAD SCHOOLS

Aggregated experience and advice from initial You+Lead cadre participants highlight the following recommendations:

- Consider and design for adult and student time constraints and actively address adult mindsets and willingness to change.
- Consider and design for district and school data collection requirements and securing consent at the onset.
- Value Youth Advisors who form strong, responsive relationships with students and principals who are willing and able to listen and adapt to student feedback.
- Look for opportunities to foster connections and collaboration with other schools, when possible.

Designing for Local Context

You+Lead tools and resources support strong local resources, including those at the district level, to make sure You+Lead teams are designed for your school context. A free, online course and planning guide for Youth Advisors, *Unlocking Potential: Building Youth Evaluation Teams in Schools*, was created from work of the initial cadre. Attention to local context, including student research requirements, forms of consent and available data collection, visualization, and analysis tools should remain design priorities. Connecting students with district and school personnel (Research and Assessment Office, Statistics teachers, etc.) also adds richness to the research effort.



Peer-to-Peer Collaboration

Participants in the initial You+Lead cadre found that student events that fostered connections among You+Lead teams from different schools were helpful in generating and maintaining student enthusiasm/commitment, as well as offering useful outside perspectives and feedback that improved their projects. These connections can be approximated within a single school, perhaps by sharing early work and/or initial findings and recommendations with other student groups (the student council, school newspaper, etc.) However, connections across schools and the resources required to make them happen in person will benefit greatly from central district resources. A point-person, trained in Youth Participatory Evaluation, who's able to support professional learning among Youth Advisors, as well as opportunities for student connections across schools, would be beneficial.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION IN FUTURE YOU+LEAD SCHOOLS

Adapting You+Lead for Your School

Protecting Time & Effort Costs

We investigated the costs of You+Lead teams. Most of the costs of You+Lead are generated in the time and effort of the Youth Advisor, with supportive time and effort from the principal, district office supporters and other educators enlisted for support. It is important to consider and account for the time and effort required to facilitate an effective You+Lead team at the beginning. Dedicated meeting time (2-4 meetings per month) and as-needed support from others in the school, as well as the district office, are important resources that beginning Youth Advisors need. Youth Advisors in the first You+Lead cadre experienced time pressures. They acknowledged that those pressures would be lessened by having a better understanding of all steps in the year-long process from the onset, as well as more examples of prior work and tools to support planning. It's important not to underestimate the time required to get You+Lead teams going in schools during the start-up year. As much Youth Advisor time that can be protected as possible, the more effective the program can be.



Building Virtual Communities

Virtual connections, training and coaching support can also be very helpful for Youth Advisors and students. The tools developed as a result of the lessons learned from the initial cadre will expand Impact Florida's ability to support schools starting You+Lead teams. As more schools across Florida get involved, Youth Advisors will be able to share their experiences in a virtual community of practice that will help to spread and sustain You+Lead work more broadly.

Access Our Free Online Youth Advisor Course

This pioneering You+Lead learning cadre has transformed the way we understand youth involvement in shaping their educational experience. Thanks to the work of the initial You+Lead learning cadre, Impact Florida has launched a free, online resource that school leaders and youth advisors can use to plan and lead youth evaluation teams in schools!

Introducing [Unlocking Potential: Building Youth Participatory Evaluation Teams in Schools](#).

Drawing upon firsthand experiences and insights from the pilot year, the course provides you with the tools, knowledge, and strategies to make a tangible difference. The self-paced course and accompanying planning guide include stories and examples as well as adaptable tools that can help you get started right away.