

# The "So What" Learning Series: Lessons on Leadership Pilot

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## ABSTRACT

Community involvement and leadership skills aimed at our youth are paramount in our local communities. The purpose of this project was to create a pilot summer leadership series aimed at teenagers (12-18 years old) within the cities of Aurora and Denver, Colorado. Our main aim as a pilot series was to determine our youth's needs and find ways to implement a curriculum that was easy to understand, age-appropriate, creates a sense of purpose and self-efficacy, and is overall beneficial for the individuals who took the course. The initial program was a once-a-week course that lasted for four weeks. Pre- & post surveys were given at each session to gauge the student's perspectives on the leadership lessons and see the areas we need to improve on as we work towards a complete curriculum. An analysis of the program's impact was measured by the feedback provided by the students and evaluated in three categories (1) Feasibility and Program Satisfaction, (2) Program Effectiveness in meeting Learning Objectives and (3) Implementation Barriers. Overall, the feedback that we have received indicates that community involvement and leadership skills aimed at our youth is a gap that needs to be bridged in their curriculums and a necessity in our local communities.

COMIRB did not need to be obtained for this study.

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## INTRODUCTION

- There is a role for local communities to play in investing in their youth and instilling lessons on leadership and professionalism at an early age [6].
  - Support is especially necessary amongst **marginalized youth** [8]. Especially in high poverty systems, the youth experience lower self-efficacy, lower drives to persist, and are more likely to engage in risky behaviors [1].
  - Engaging with the youth and creating an environment of youth leadership where participants can envision their goals, take the initiative or action to achieve those goals, and assume responsibility for outcomes, they will then form **resilience** –the ability to have positive results in the face of adversity [2,3].
  - Early intervention could help improve our graduation success rates and higher education readiness.
  - Youth programs that focus on leadership are especially crucial in assisting adolescents in developing self-efficacy and professional skills and can support students as they set the foundation needed to help them achieve their lifetime goals including higher education [5,7].

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

### Methods

- 4- week program involving a mixture of didactic and interactive learning with each week focused on a different aspect of leadership
- Program had 36 participants (Fig. 1, Fig. 2) that were English speaking adolescent males and females ranging from ages 12-18 who were either a member of Moorhead Recreation Center in Aurora, CO or Vicker's Boys & Girls Club in Denver, Colorado.

### Materials

- PowerPoint Presentation containing learning material tailored to the goal set for each week.
- Students were asked at each session to complete self-report pre-session and post-session surveys and a quiz over the taught material.
- At the end of each session, snacks and drinks were provided to each participant.

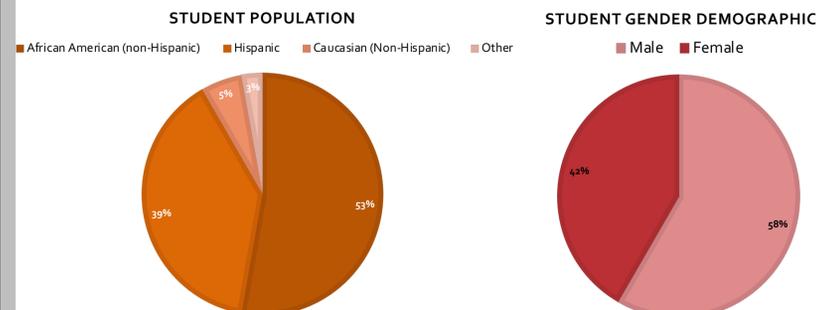


Fig 1. Student Population stratified by race.

Fig 2. Student Population broken down by gender.

### 4 Week Program with Concentrated Lessons:

Week 1 – Why Is Leadership Important

Week 2 – Did I Just Tweet That?: Lessons of Cyber Etiquette

Week 3 – Better Late Than Never, Never Later is Better (Time Management + Professionalism)

Week 4 – So Show Me What They Look Like (Career Day + Health Education)

## RESULTS

**Study Goal:** "Is there a need for leadership programming for youth in the community and if there is, does this program meet those needs?" The findings of this pilot study will be reported in 3 sections: (1) **feasibility and program satisfaction** (2) **the effectiveness of the program in meeting the learning objectives** (3) **implementation barriers**.

### 1. Feasibility and Participant Satisfaction (Fig.4)

- Feasibility was dependent on the cooperation of those running the facilities where the program would take place.
- Satisfaction was measured on whether or not given the opportunity, would the student recommend the program to a friend. Satisfaction was based on a 5-point scale. Some feedback we received were "This program helps you learn a lot", "It does not last long enough", "I like the hands-on experience," and, "wow, I did not know anything about time management before, and now I know a lot!".

### 2. Effectiveness of program in meeting learning objectives (Fig 3.)

- Embedded in the post-survey each week were questions that addressed how well the learning objectives for the lesson were met.
- 5-point scale ranging from 1 = Not Satisfied to 5 = Well Satisfied to determine the effectiveness of the lessons.

### 3. Implementation Barriers

Implementation barriers included, standardization in student selection, survey completion cooperation, and participation availability/ nonattendance. It was important to identify these barriers in order to make improvements in subsequent years.

- Participation availability/ nonattendance was our biggest barrier in the project. Summer played a large role in this issue.

## DISCUSSION

- The results of this pilot program show that community involvement and investment in the youth is important for their growth and the building of leadership skills and point to the possible impact this program may directly have on these goals.
- Youth empowerment is a vital aspect of the program, and students were encouraged to take ownership of their thoughts and ideas and create a safe space for them to express themselves productively.
- Improvements in each participants' understanding of how leadership is defined, why it is important, and how it can be applied in their daily lives were evident through the analysis of the pre- & post-surveys and questionnaires that were taken throughout the program.

### Potential changes

- Standardizing the application process and enrolling all students before the program starts.
- Changing the program to a week-long program where students come four days a week for one week may also help with attendance and retention.

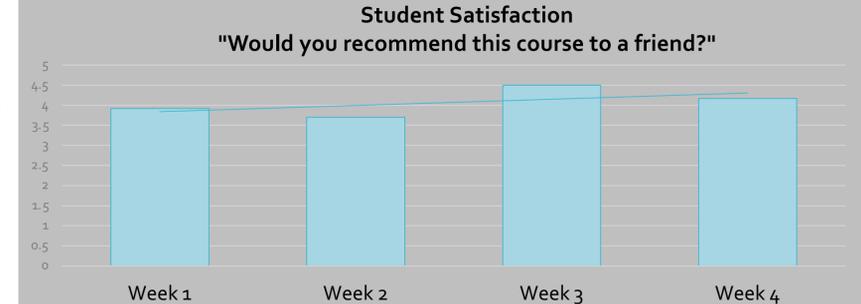


Fig 4. Vicker's B&G Club Student Satisfaction & Course Recommendation Rating

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### Vicker's B&G Club Week 3 Post-Survey



Fig 3. Sample of Learning Objective Effectiveness Week 3 @ Vicker's B&G Club

