

Fostering Positive Youth Development Through Culturally Responsive Programming:

Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE) Spring 2026 Post-Program Evaluation Topline Results

Study Overview and Methodology

Ipsos is working with YAAACE and the Department of Justice on a broader research project to understand the impact of YAAACE programs on socio-economic risk factors associated with criminal justice system involvement.

This represents the second wave of the project, following a 2025 pilot study of the Summer Institute that was conducted to refine the initial survey instrument. The second wave was conducted with participants taking one or more of eleven programs offered by YAAACE. Respondents enrolled in more than one program were asked to choose a single program to answer survey questions. The survey was conducted online, using an open link and was distributed to ____ participants by YAAACE staff.

A total of 157 YAAACE participants responded to the survey between March 17 and April 28, 2026. The table below shows a detailed breakdown of the sample characteristics. Please note, totals may not add to 100% where respondents were permitted to select more than one response.

	Percentage of the Sample
Gender	
Boy/Man	73%
Girl/Woman	25%
Other/Prefer not to answer	3%
Age	
8-12 years old	55%
13-15 years old	18%
16-18 years old	18%
19+ years old	8%
Population Group(s) – self described	
Black	69%
Southeast Asian	12%
White/European	9%
East Asian	5%
Latin American/Hispanic	4%
Mixed Heritage	4%
Indigenous	3%
South Asian	2%
Middle Eastern	1%
Prefer to self-describe	1%
Prefer not to answer	3%

	Percentage of the Sample (continued)
Identify With – self described	
Afro-Caribbean	58%
African	26%
African-Caribbean	21%
Afro-Latin American	3%
Afro-Indigenous	<1%
Prefer to self-describe	2%
Prefer not to answer	<1%
Program	
March Break Camp	40%
Inclusive Health and Athletics Initiative	22%
Numeracy and Literacy Enrichment	20%
Small Ball	14%
Spirit of Math	12%
New Narrative	11%
Robotics	6%
Peer-to-Peer Youth Committee	2%
Transitional School	1%
TO Wards Peace	1%
City Serve TO	1%

Survey Results

Overall Program Experience and Participation

YAAACE programs were viewed strongly, with 92% of participants rating their overall experience in the program they rated as either very good or good. There were no notable differences by age or gender, while just 4% reported a negative experience, indicating widespread success.

Eight in ten (79%) participants indicate attending the program session all or most of the time, with younger participants more likely to indicate frequent attendance (86% vs. 71% of older participants).

Inclusion

Almost all program attendees felt the program was inclusive: 96% felt supported by staff, and 95% felt welcomed by staff, while 93% felt welcomed by other participants. A lower, but still high proportion (87%) felt supported by other participants. There were some age-related differences: younger participants were more likely to feel not being welcomed (7% vs. 0% of older participants) or supported (6% vs. 0%) by staff and were also more likely to indicate not feeling welcomed by other participants (9% vs. 3%). Females were more likely to indicate they did not feel welcomed (6% vs. 3% of males) or supported (9% vs. 2%) by staff.

Program Impact on Academic Success, School Habits and Social Skills

The program also had an excellent impact on feelings toward academic success, school habits and social skills, though there were limitations in improvements in their reading skills.

On most metrics relating to academic success, eight in ten or more program participants believe they have improved skills, especially on self-confidence regarding ability where almost all (96%) indicate that after participating in the program they believe they can succeed in school. Most also feel that their grades have gotten better (82%), feel more confident in asking questions in the program than in regular classes and understand lessons given in the program better than at their day school (both 81%), while seven in ten (72%) indicate they are more prepared for tests and assignments at school. With respect to school related habits, over eight in ten indicate that after participating they will try their best to finish their schoolwork, take part in fun things at school (both 85%), while nine in ten (90%) indicate they will follow school rules. In all instances levels of agreement are higher among those over 12 years of age.

Close to six in ten (57%) feel their reading skills have improved, while three in four (75%) feel their math skills have improved.

A high proportion (85%) feel their social skills have improved since participating in the program, while close to nine in ten (88%) feel it helped them to get along well with caring adults in their life. Older participants (93% vs. 79%) and males (88% vs. 77%) are more likely to indicate that their social skills have improved.

Coping Skills, Decision Making, Anger Management, Self-Esteem and Empathy

More than 9 in 10 participants felt the program had helped them feel good about their future (93%), feel just as important as other people (93%), think before they act (91%), stay calm when things are hard and make good choices (both 89%), solve problems with others (87%), believe most people are kind (85%) and feel happy with their life (84%).

Most participants indicated that after the program they were less likely to take part in anti-social behaviour as virtually all (96%) indicated they will stay away from doing things that are wrong, such as breaking things or stealing and over eight in ten (85%) indicated that after participating they can stay out of fights.

Participants above 12 years of age are more likely to indicate feeling just as important as other people (100% vs. 87% of those 8-12 years of age).

Social Development, Physical Safety and Feelings on Violence

Nine in ten participants indicate agreement on the following pro-social measures: 91% indicate feeling important and confident in their beliefs and 93% indicate after participating they want to help others when they can.

Roughly three in four indicate that since taking part in the program their feelings of safety have increased: 77% feel safer from bullying at school, 76% feel safer from bullying in the neighbourhood, feel safer from being hit or hurt at school, or being hit or hurt in the neighbourhood.

Four in five (81%) feel that after taking part in the program they have adults to talk to when they don't feel safe, while just over three in four (78%) feel they now have a safe space away from violence in their neighbourhood. This proportion is higher among older participants (88% vs. 68% of those 8-12).

Africentric Family, Community and Cultural Elements

The survey data suggest that results from the benchmark wave indicating that the YAAACE program was incredibly successful in helping participants feel pride and improve their knowledge of their cultural background continues. Across the board participants feel importance regarding pride in their heritage, understanding their cultural background and standing up for themselves and their community.

Pride/knowledge in heritage: 90% agree they know about their family's background and culture, 93% feel proud of the background and culture, 90% think it is important to understand and celebrate their Caribbean or African roots and 94% think it important to show positive pride in being Black.

Community: Nine in ten or more feel it is important to: support the good things their community believes in (92%), positively support your community and the different groups you belong to (93%), build your own powerful and positive identity as a Black youth in Toronto (93%), speak up for the good things my community believes in (94%) and build and use strong leadership skills to help and guide other Black youth (97%).

Directional Program-Level Observations

A limited review of the three largest program streams suggests some variation in participant experiences. Participants in the Inclusive Health and Athletics Initiative reported the strongest overall experience (94% positive) and were the most likely to report improvements in social skills (100%). Participants in the March Break Camp reported the highest levels of attendance (87% attending all or most of the time).

Relative to the overall sample, March Break participants were somewhat less likely to report improvements related to safety and well-being, including feeling safer from bullying (61% vs. 77% overall) and having a safe space away from violence (63% vs. 78% overall).

However, these program-level findings should be interpreted as directional observations only due to the relatively small subgroup sample sizes.

Conclusion

Overall ratings indicate considerable YAAACE program success, as most attendees believe the program has helped them in several ways, including feeling more confident and prepared academically, more comfortable regarding physical safety, better equipped to manage challenges they may face, and prouder of their cultural, neighbourhood, and family background. With very few exceptions, most positive ratings exceeded eight in ten, with several exceeding nine in ten.

While findings were positive across all demographic groups, some differences emerged by age and gender. Older participants generally reported stronger outcomes across a number of academic, social, and self-confidence measures, while males were somewhat more likely than females to report improvements in social skills. Younger participants were also slightly less likely to report feeling welcomed and supported. However, given the relatively small subgroup sample sizes available in the Spring survey results, these demographic differences should be interpreted with caution. A more detailed exploration of age- and gender-based differences will be included in the full report this fall, incorporating additional data collected through the Summer Institute pre- and post-program surveys