

Summary report

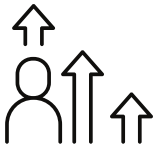
Illuminating Positive Mechanisms: An Impact Evaluation of the DREAM program



PREPARED BY
SEARCH INSTITUTE

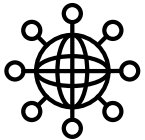
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Major findings



- **DREAM youth demonstrated statistically greater growth in social-emotional competencies over one year (June 2022 - August 2023) compared to “comparison youth” (a group of non-DREAM youth with similar demographics).**

↪ Social-emotional competencies are applying knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (see the [CASEL](#) framework for more).



- **DREAM youth also gained sense of belonging and access to resources via DREAM, which were positively associated with almost all the short-term outcomes examined.**



- **DREAM youth and comparison youth showed similar growth in academic motivation, academic aspiration, growth mindset, future orientation, self-esteem, and broader worldview over the one year.** There is opportunity to track these outcomes over longer periods of time, particularly after the organization has fully re-matched its mentees with mentors post-pandemic.



- **Youth who identified as Black/African American reported more growth in academic motivation, growth mindset, future orientation, and self-esteem compared to White youth.** Similar trends were also found among youth who identified as Hispanic or Latinx, Multiracial, and youth who identified as another race/ethnicity, compared to White youth.



- **Relationship matters! DREAM youth who reported stronger Developmental Relationships with their DREAM mentors, staff, and peers also reported greater growth in academic motivation, growth mindset, broader worldview, and social-emotional competencies.**



Developmental Relationships included five elements:

- **Express care:** show youth they matter
- **Challenging growth:** encourage youth to try their best
- **Providing support:** help youth complete tasks and work towards life goals
- **Share power:** treat youth with respect and give them a say
- **Expand possibilities:** connect youth with ideas, places, and people.

More about the evaluation

Why did we do the evaluation?

All youth deserve access to high-quality youth development programs. However, growing income inequality, racialized systems of privilege, shifts in technology, and the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the opportunity gap that holds back so many marginalized youth and communities.

Countering such inequities, DREAM provides youth living in low-income households with long-term, 1:1 relationships with college student mentors in their Village Mentoring program, and greater access to a host of resources and year-round enrichment opportunities that are designed to strengthen positive youth outcomes. *The goal of this evaluation is to rigorously assess the effectiveness of DREAM and to understand the relational mechanism behind DREAM's impacts.* For more details, see the full evaluation report submitted to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

What outcomes were assessed in the evaluation?

Search Institute conducted interviews and focus groups with 6 program staff, 4 mentors, and 7 youth to determine what short-term outcomes were most essential to include in the evaluation. We selected theoretically or empirically supported short-term outcomes that are reasonably malleable over a year. The final youth outcomes fit into three overarching categories:

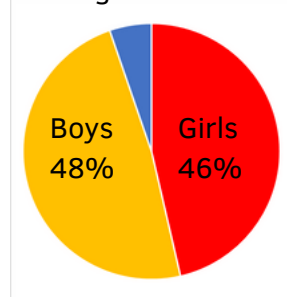
- Academic outcomes: academic motivation, academic aspiration, growth mindset
- Positive mindsets: self-esteem, future orientation, sense of purpose, broader worldview; and
- Social-emotional competencies.

For more detail, please see the full evaluation report on DREAM's website.

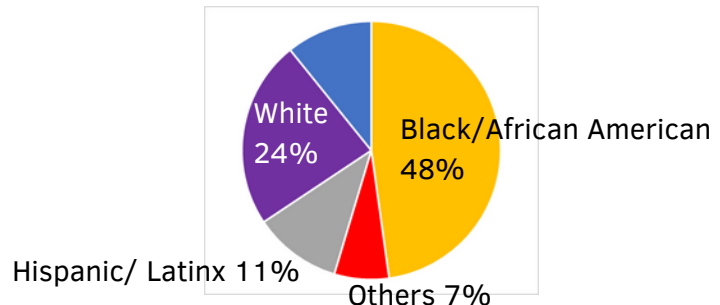
Who participated in the evaluation?

A total of 472 youth participated in this evaluation; 194 of them were DREAM youth, and 278 of them were comparison youth. Participants came from all three regions that DREAM serves (i.e., Vermont, Boston, and Philadelphia). Participants ranged from 8 to 18 years old, with the average being 12 years old.

Other gender identities 2%



Multiracial 11%



When did the evaluation happen?

Baseline (June 2022)

Midpoint (February 2023)

Endline (August 2023)

DREAM
youth



Comparison
youth



How was the evaluation done?

Search Institute trained DREAM staff on how to administer surveys with both DREAM and comparison youth, and provided all materials necessary to collect accurate and reliable data. The training included ethical considerations for conducting research in low-income communities. If staff were unable to reach a youth in-person, the survey was made available electronically. When a youth finished their survey, they received a gift card to thank them for their participation.

What's next?

The evaluation findings hold promise, and also suggest future opportunities to increase the positive impact of DREAM on the lives of the youth who participate in its programming.

- » Building off the finding that strong developmental relationships are a core mechanism through which youth experience positive growth, it will be valuable to identify and reinforce the features of DREAM that best strengthen relationships (specific relational practices, activities, and "relationship accelerators").
- » DREAM may consider investing in relationship-building support and training such as initiatives to cultivate positive peer relationships and a greater sense of belonging for *all* youth within the program. Such innovations could be tested and evaluated for their value-add impacts on youth outcomes.
- » In advance of future studies, gathering high-quality data on program engagement and dosage would allow for a better understanding for whom and under what conditions DREAM benefits youth.

Acknowledgement and Contact Us

This study was made possible through support from AmeriCorps. We also thank the "Evaluation Corps" team who helped us collect data for this study, and the DREAM staff and youth who participated in this study with us.



Search Institute is a nonprofit organization that partners with schools, youth programs, and other organizations to conduct and apply research that promotes positive youth development and equity.

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