REACHing New Heights in Youth Development and Postsecondary Achievement: Final Evaluation Report

(Resilience, Adventure, Education, Community, Health)

September 2017

SPR SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

REACH
Resilience ♦ Education ♦ Adventure ♦ Community ♦ Health

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NOTE: All photos provided by REACH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REACH (Resilience, Education, Adventure, Community and Health) was a four-year experiential education and youth development program for motivated low- to middle-income students from California's Santa Barbara County that operated from 2012 to 2017. The program, launched by the Orfalea Foundation, worked to establish a foundation for thriving adulthood by supporting youth in their development as "whole people" and aiding them to lead "lives of purposeful action, continuous learning and courageous pursuit of opportunity."

This evaluation report on the REACH program model and outcomes yields important insights that can inform others interested in supporting youth in meeting their education, career, and life goals. The evaluation focused particularly on academic/postsecondary outcomes and personal/youth development outcomes—as well as on the critical role of mentoring in the REACH program.

R esilience

E ducation

A dventure

C ommunity

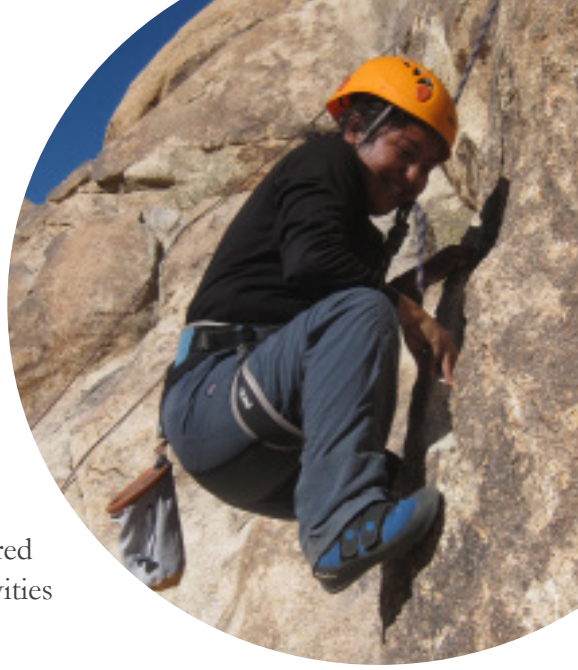
H ealth

Key Lessons

Evaluation findings show that REACH's multi-pronged approach improved participants' knowledge of postsecondary education options, skills to navigate the college application process, and resiliency to transition from high school. GPA data also indicated that REACH participants are on track to graduate from college.

REACH's contributions to positive youth development outcomes are clear. A high percentage of young people reported that they consistently received the types of supports and opportunities they needed for healthy development, including high-quality relationships with adults and peers.

REACH aimed to support youth in their development as "whole people."



The REACH model provided key lessons on program practice:

- **REACH provided comprehensive, research-based, long-term programming to achieve impacts.** REACH's four-year program model is consistent with research findings suggesting that programs with the greatest impact on postsecondary success tend to be those offering intensive services requiring a high level of involvement over an extended period of time.[1] By offering services typically through the second year of postsecondary education, REACH was able to support participants through their college transition. The Orfalea Foundation's sizable investment ensured that REACH participants received adequate support for various activities over a multi-year program life cycle.
- **Developing relationships well before college was critical.** By targeting rising high school juniors, the program was able to help participants envision postsecondary and career goals in advance of the college application process. By the senior year of high school, participants and co-workers had cultivated trusting relationships so that participants were able to accept and even seek out guidance in support of their college and career goals and college application process.
- **A diverse range of program activities promoted consistent participant engagement.** REACH offered a mix of interesting experiences such as outdoor experiences and life skills training in diverse formats—workshops, one-on-one meetings, Web Labs. This formula contributed to the achievement of a high retention rate across the cohorts.
- **Outdoor experiences provided a critical venue for personal and relationship development.** REACH's outdoor experiences curriculum provided regular opportunities for participants to cultivate self-awareness, experience measured risk-taking, and practice new skills for navigating life's challenges. The multi-day outdoor expeditions provided invaluable opportunities for participants to connect with one another and co-workers and to reflect on their own abilities.
- **REACH was instrumental in helping participants navigate the college application process.** Research shows that this type of support is an important predictor of college enrollment.[2] The REACH program played an important role in helping students with the college admissions process by helping them complete college applications and preparing for the SATs. This support, along with other factors, enabled nearly all participants to enroll in postsecondary education.

1 Cabrera, A.F., & S.M. La Nasa. (2001). On the path to college: Three critical tasks facing America's disadvantaged. Research in Higher Education, 42, 2, 199-249.

2 Horn, L.J., & Chen, X. (1998). Toward resiliency: At-risk students who make it to college. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Retrieved July 24, 2006, from http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/resiliency.pdf.

6 Core Program Areas


Outdoor Experiences


Postsecondary Education


Health and Wellness


Financial Literacy


Community Involvement


Personal Development

The REACH program was structured to **integrate fundamental aspects of youth development** programming into its service delivery.

- **REACH's financial assistance allowed participants to enroll in and succeed in postsecondary education.** The REACH program was generous with the range of financial supports provided to participants. This included scholarships, laptops, sending students on college visits, and—as needed—covering the fees for college entrance exams and applications. In addition, the program provided students with information and assistance in applying for financial aid. This support made the idea of attending college a reality for many students.
- **REACH integrated virtual, ongoing mentoring to extend support for the successful transition to postsecondary education.** REACH offered virtual mentoring as a strategy to provide ongoing support once youth were enrolled in postsecondary education. Virtual mentoring allowed the program co-workers to work with participants from a distance, primarily communicating online or via telephone or email. This strategy was essential as it continued to engage participants when they were attending different colleges.

REACH Target Population and Program Model

REACH targeted and selected students from nearly every public high school in Santa Barbara County (14 out of 18 total), with the majority coming from schools in the north county area. The program specifically sought motivated students performing at a "middle-of-the-road" level academically. Ultimately REACH served 80 participants in two cohorts, with a total of 68 completing the program.

The main aim of REACH was to support participants through their transition to postsecondary education, beginning in the summer after sophomore year of high school and typically lasting through the second year of postsecondary education.

REACH delivered a range of activities in six core program areas: outdoor experiences, postsecondary education, health and wellness, financial literacy, community involvement, and personal development. REACH offered its activities in a staged fashion, timed to maximize value for participants at their given stage of development in the high school to postsecondary education transition. Program offerings were adapted to allow for virtual participation once students were in college.

The REACH program was structured to integrate fundamental aspects of youth development programming into its service delivery.

In particular, the program provided opportunities for youth to develop ongoing relationships with caring adults and peers, build relevant skills, and cultivate a sense of usefulness and competence.

The REACH program also emphasized mentoring—primarily through assigned advisors and mentoring sessions—as an essential program component and ongoing source of support for participants. Participants valued the mentorship they received, particularly during the transition to postsecondary education in years three and four of the REACH program. This was especially true for participants whose parents had not attended college.

The REACH program model required maintaining a core set of co-workers but also contracting much of its service delivery to outside providers. Staffing needs were more intensive during the first two years of the cohort experience, when participants were still in high school and all activities occurred in person. REACH experienced challenges in sustaining continuity among program co-workers.

The cost of the REACH program model per participant was high compared to other comparable youth-serving and college access programs. A number of factors contributed to this, including relatively high facility costs. In total, the Orfalea Foundation invested close to $6 million in the REACH program over five years. The average cost per program completer was between $69,335 and $78,984, depending on whether or not scholarship expenditures were included.

Participant Characteristics

Overall REACH served more females than males, and an ethnically diverse group, with Latinos being the primary group—making up a greater share of the program population than the county population (63% and 43%, respectively). Over half of REACH participants spoke a language other than English, with Spanish being the predominant additional language.

Approximately one-third of participants' parents had not finished high school. While parent annual income levels varied considerably, very few participants came from high-income families and the median annual parent income ($40,798) was lower than the median for Santa Barbara County ($61,294).

2012 Cohort		2013 Cohort
20% had between 2.5 to 2.99 GPA at enrollment	A B+	**12%** had between 2.5 to 2.99 GPA at enrollment
47% of worked while in college		**17%** of worked while in college
47% attended community college		**12%** attended community college
35% attended UC system		**67%** attended UC system

The median GPA at participant enrollment in REACH was 3.01. REACH enrolled a large percentage of high-achieving students, as 78% had earned a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher at the time of enrollment. However, there were clear differences in academic preparedness between the two cohorts, with a greater percentage of the 2012 cohort having lower GPAs than the 2013 cohort at time of enrollment. As a result, the 2012 cohort required more individualized academic support.

Most participants resided in North Santa Barbara County at the time of enrollment. Once participants were attending college, their living situation differed depending on what type of postsecondary institution they attended. The vast majority (80%) of participants attending community colleges were living with immediate family, while the majority (53%) of those attending four-year institutions were living alone or with roommates off campus.

While attending college, 68% of REACH participants worked. About one-third (38%)worked between 15-25 hours per week. The remaining worked between 25 to 35 hours per week (24%), and a smaller percentage worked more than 40 hours per week (18 %). Most studies conclude that jobs are harmful to students' GPAs only when the number of hours worked per week exceeds 20. Participants from the 2012 cohort worked more hours while in college than those from the 2013 cohort. A side-by-side comparison of the two cohorts is presented below.

Participation and Retention

The REACH program's duration required addressing the challenge of sustaining participant involvement over a four-year period.

Ultimately program retention was high, with 85% of all original participants completing REACH. Participation was highest in program years one and four. The total service hours received (as a percentage of total possible hours) was higher for health and wellness activities and for outdoor experiences, than it was for financial literacy or postsecondary activities.

Ultimately program retention was high, with 85% of all original participants completing REACH.

Multiple factors contributed to high retention. The program's selection process assessed students based on their likelihood of retention. The program's implementation also encouraged retention through diverse and relevant programming, and by allowing for flexible scheduling and formatting of activities (e.g., virtual participation). Also critical were the connections formed among REACH participants and between participants and co-workers. These relationships kept participants engaged throughout the entirety of the REACH program. Offering incentives—such as financial support for a laptop—also encouraged consistent attendance and participation.

Postsecondary Outcomes

More than half (53%) of the participants enrolled in four-year institutions and nearly half (44%) enrolled in community colleges.

REACH worked to boost participants' postsecondary enrollment and success. As a precursor to this, REACH increased participants' understanding of: postsecondary options (e.g., the difference between community colleges and universities), financial aid, and how to achieve their career goals. Program co-workers provided various forms of support, including connecting participants with resources, escorting them on campus tours, and assisting them with college and financial aid applications and enrollment decisions.

Ultimately more than half of all participants (53%) enrolled in four-year institutions, with those in the 2012 cohort more likely to attend community colleges. Most participants enrolled in postsecondary education as full-time students. Notably the majority of students from the lowest family income bracket attended a University of California (UC) institution, while those from families in the highest income bracket were more often attending community colleges than UC schools. A large majority of participants (91%) attended college in the state of California. Less than one-quarter of participants (18%) enrolled as part-time students.

REACH participants identified ambitious education goals, with over half (53%) saying they would pursue a graduate degree. However, fewer than half (40%) had GPAs of 3.0 or higher during their sophomore year of college.

Youth Development and Other Outcomes

A strong youth development philosophy lay at the heart of the REACH program model and activities. This was reflected in the vast majority of program participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with survey statements about how REACH helped them in key youth development outcome areas. Ratings were especially strong in the areas of self-confidence and desire to learn/intrinsic motivation.

For each youth development survey item, **98% or more of respondents agreed or strongly agreed** with the statement presented.

100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all statements pertaining to the self confidence, desire to learn, ability to plan and set goals, and ability to problem solve dimensions.

While academic and youth development outcomes are at the crux of the REACH evaluation, participants realized other important short-term outcomes reflective of their development as "whole people." For example, participants rated their sense of environmental connection strongly as a result of REACH. REACH participants also developed an increased understanding of money management principles as a result of participation in the program. In fact, results from the annual REACH survey administered to the 2013 cohort showed some of the greatest gains of any outcome dimension.

Recommendations

Recommendations for program leaders looking to implement youth programs similar to REACH are as follows:

- Increase breadth of impact by collaborating with school partners.
- Ensure a deep enough mentor/co-worker bench.
- Help students matriculate into "right fit" institutions.
- Consider offering counseling support for emotional health and well-being.
- Involve and encourage parents and families in the program.

REACH's comprehensive model has shown that ongoing, intensive, and multi-dimensional support over a four-year period has made a significant difference in participants' lives. This program's implementation and outcomes have yielded numerous promising practices and insights that can be leveraged by others interested in supporting youth development and postsecondary success.

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I. Introduction

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REACH (Resilience, Education, Adventure, Community and Health) was a four-year experiential education and youth development program for motivated low- to middle-income students from California's Santa Barbara County that operated from 2012 to 2017. The program served two cohorts and sought to set a foundation for thriving adulthood by supporting youth in their development as "whole people" and aiding them to lead "lives of purposeful action, continuous learning and courageous pursuit of opportunity."

Launched by the Orfalea Foundation, REACH engaged participants in a diverse range of program activities aimed at supporting their personal growth and the cultivation of life skills. REACH emphasized six core program areas: outdoor experiences (which serviced as a vehicle to engage youth overall), postsecondary education, health and wellness, financial literacy, community involvement, and personal development.

This evaluation report on the REACH program model and outcomes yields important insights that can inform educators, policymakers, and funders as they support youth in meeting their education and career goals.

R esilience

E ducation

A dventure

C ommunity

H ealth

Context for REACH Program

Experiential education programs—that is, programs that promote learning through experience outside of a traditional classroom—can play a pivotal role in supporting positive youth development and promoting engagement in school settings. Research has shown that participating in these programs over an extended period of time can lead to social, psychological, and intellectual growth. In particular, youth who participate in experiential education programs show increased gains in self-esteem and moral reasoning, and a greater sense of social and personal responsibility.[3] At the same time, studies on adventure outdoor education—a particular form of experiential education—show that these experiences can promote self-directed learning and help youth better understand their own agency in school environments and beyond.[4]

Experiential education programs—that is, programs that promote learning through experience outside of a traditional classroom—**can play a pivotal role in supporting positive youth development and promoting engagement in school settings.**

At the heart of many experiential education programs is mentoring, which has received substantial attention over the past decade as an important community and program strategy for promoting positive, healthy youth development. Funders and policymakers have stressed the importance of mentors, who are described as adults that "augment parents and expose young people to new opportunities and horizons."[5] A number of studies have shown that mentors play an indispensable role because they build critical relationships and fill important gaps in children's lives.[6] Furthermore, there is evidence that mentoring can result in positive behavioral changes among youth in interpersonal skills and relationships, self-control, and academic achievement as well as in reduced negative behaviors such as drug use, aggression, and truancy. There are limitations in these supports, however. One mentoring relationship is not likely to mitigate all negative influences a youth may confront, including but not limited to poverty, stressed families, poor schools, and high-crime neighborhoods. However, when combined with other experiences and interventions, mentoring can lead to positive outcomes for youth.[7]

The REACH program combined outdoor experiences, mentoring, life skills training, and other services to offer participants the comprehensive experiences and supports they needed in order to explore their full potential. REACH targeted motivated low-income students with high school grade point averages (GPAs) above 2.0. The program supported youth in Santa Barbara County who faced many different

3 Conrad, D., & Hedin, D. (1982). *The impact of experiential education on adolescent development*. Omaha, NE: University of Nebraska.

4 Sibthorp, J. (2015). Fostering experiential self-regulation through outdoor adventure education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 38(1), 26–40.

5 Grossman, J. B. (2009). *Evaluating mentoring programs*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from http://nationalassembly.org/uploads/publications/documents/ppv.org/303_publication.pdf

6 Grossman, J. B., Resch, N., & Tierney, J. B. (1995). *Making a difference: An impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters New York*, NY: Commonwealth Fund.

7 Foster, L. (2001). *Effectiveness of mentor programs: Review of the literature from 1995 to 2000*. Sacramento, CA: California Research Bureau. Retrieved from https://www.library.ca.gov/crb/01/04/01-004.pdf

challenges including unstable family environments, first-generation college goers, and limited English proficiency.

In the spring of 2016, the REACH program, under the leadership of Wilderness Youth project, contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) and Lisa Bass to conduct an 18-month evaluation of the program. The goal was to document the participant-level outcomes of the two cohorts of program participants, assess the key factors that influenced participants' engagement in school and in the program, and document lessons learned and implications for the field of education and youth development.

Evaluation of REACH

The evaluation was designed to assess how well the REACH program achieved its goals of supporting youth in transitioning from high school to postsecondary education while providing critical supports and life skills. This evaluation also sought to understand the key program features that influenced outcomes and the lessons that program leaders learned from designing and implementing REACH. To accomplish these goals, the evaluation identified three core research questions.

Core Research Questions

1. **What short-term, participant-level outcomes have resulted from participating in the REACH program?**
2. **What program-level factors influence participants' level of engagement in school and in the program?**
3. **What are key lessons learned and implications for youth development?**

Appendix A includes a detailed list of questions that we explored for the evaluation. Our evaluation questions were informed by the program's logic model—described in more detail in Chapter II—which identified six core dimensions that REACH sought to influence: (1) postsecondary education, (2) outdoor experiences, (3) health and wellness, (4) community involvement, (5) financial literacy, and (6) personal development. Based on feedback from the REACH Advisory Committee, the evaluation explored two outcome areas:

- Academic and postsecondary outcomes including enrollment in postsecondary education institutions (two-year and four-year) and GPA as an indicator of whether students are on track to graduation.
- Personal/youth development outcomes including increased self-confidence and self-awareness, desire to learn, and ability to plan, set goals, and problem solve.

In addition to these outcomes, the evaluation explored the role of mentoring in participants' experiences in the program and in their transition to, and persistence in, postsecondary education.

Data Sources and Methods

To address the evaluation questions above, this report relies on a number of data sources, described in Exhibit I-1.

Exhibit I-1: Data Sources[8]

Data Sources	Description
Co-worker and Advisory Member Interviews	SPR conducted interviews with 23 individuals involved with the REACH program. Interviews focused on program design, implementation, and successes and challenges in running the REACH program, as well as potential for replication. The first group of interviewees included program staff and members: • Current and former program co-workers (n = 3) • Advisory board members (n = 2) • Funder, Natalie Orfalea (n = 1)
Youth Case Study Interviews	We conducted 16 telephone interviews with youth participants—eight from the 2012 cohort and eight from the 2013 cohort—as they were completing the REACH program. We asked about their engagement in program activities, experiences in college, and reflections on the role of REACH in helping them adjust to life after high school and in meeting other intended outcomes of the program. In order to represent the diversity of students served by REACH and to understand the breadth of participant experiences, we worked with REACH co-workers to select participants who reflected a range of backgrounds and experiences. Specifically, we sought a balance along the following characteristics: gender, race/ethnicity, academic achievement, North County versus South County , level of participation, and type of postsecondary education in which they were enrolled (e.g., two-year vs. four-year). See Appendix G for the youth interview protocol.
Parent Interviews	We interviewed five parents of case study participants. Using questions that aligned with the participant interviews, we asked about parents' perceptions of their students' experiences in the REACH program and the program's contribution to students' transition to and experiences in postsecondary education. (Three of these interviews were conducted in Spanish.)

8 REACH refers to program staff as co-workers.

Data Sources	Description
Youth Survey	We designed and administered a youth survey to the 2012 and 2013 cohorts in the early summer of each cohort's final year in the program. The survey was intended to assess participant outcomes and investigate factors that are important to understanding those outcomes. Specifically, we asked youth to identify the extent to which REACH contributed to their development along several intended outcomes identified in the logic model such as self-awareness, strong relationships with peers and adults, teamwork, ability to plan for the future, and educational outcomes. We piloted the survey with four participants and incorporated their feedback before administering the final survey to the rest of the 2012 cohort. See Appendix B for the youth survey questions. Out of 68 program completers, all but seven completed the youth survey.
Virtual Mentoring	To understand the nature of the mentoring support, we observed two virtual meetings (through video) facilitated by the REACH program co-workers—one in fall 2016 and another in spring 2017. During this observation, we made note of the nature of the interactions and topics discussed between youth and program co-workers.
Administrative Program Data	We analyzed administrative program data, including: (1) the number of hours of service received in hours of outdoor expeditions, hours of in-person workshops, and hours of ZOOM meetings; (2) data from surveys that were designed and administered by program co-workers prior to engaging SPR; (3) parent education and income levels; (4) participant GPAs in high school, GPAS during sophomore year in college, and GPAS for 2012 cohort during junior year in college.

Remainder of the Report

The remainder of this report presents key findings from the evaluation:

- Chapter II presents an overview of the REACH program design and delivery including the program context, program structure, and program costs. Chapter II also describes mentoring support.
- Chapter III describes REACH program participants including their demographics and academic profile.
- Chapter IV summarizes program participation and retention, including hours of participation by program activity.
- Chapter V summarizes postsecondary outcomes.
- Chapter VI summarizes youth development outcomes.
- Chapter VII summarizes other outcomes.
- Chapter VIII summarizes core findings from the evaluation and reflects on lessons for the program and the field of education and youth development.

II. REACH Program Overview

II. REACH Program Overview

> [REACH wants to support] students to achieve the visions they see for themselves.
>
> Natalie Orfalea

Drawing upon lessons learned from operating Montana Youth Expeditions,[9] an outdoor education program, the Orfalea Foundation developed and, in 2012, launched the REACH program. Though the Orfalea Foundation closed its doors in 2015, it continued its commitment to REACH participants and provided funding for the program to continue operation under the leadership of the Wilderness Youth Project. The program served 80 participants in two cohorts—the 2012 cohort and the 2013 cohort. Overall, 68 participants—34 from each cohort—completed the program. The REACH program sunset in August of 2017.

Drawing from an analysis of program documents and interviews with program co-workers and participants, this chapter provides an overview of the program. In the sections that follow, we describe the program model, analyze the mentoring support component, provide an overview of program administration, and reflect on successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Program Model

In this section we examine the elements of the REACH program model. The logic model, presented in Exhibit II-1, can be summarized as follows:

- The REACH model fostered a **comprehensive set of youth outcomes** that support the development of the "whole person."
- REACH targeted, recruited, and selected **cohorts of motivated, "middle of the road," typically low-income high school youth.**
- REACH supported participants **through their transition to postsecondary education** by offering a four-year program that began the summer after sophomore year of high school and lasted, typically, through the second year of postsecondary education.
- REACH provided exposure to **six core content areas** (postsecondary education, outdoor experiences, health and wellness, community involvement, financial literacy, and personal development) by delivering a structured series of diverse program activities.

9 Montana Youth Expeditions is a three-week outdoor adventure education and personal development program.

- REACH services were structured and delivered to provide **opportunities for youth** to develop ongoing relationships with caring adults, cultivate a sense of belonging by developing a strong peer community, build skills, participate in decision-making processes, and cultivate a sense of usefulness and competence.

Target Population, Recruitment & Selection

REACH targeted students from every public high school in Santa Barbara County. The program sought out rising juniors, and aimed to serve motivated low-income students who were performing academically at a "middle of the road" level.

Specifically, the program prioritized students who:

- had average academic performance and maintained a GPA of between 2.8 and 3.2, as co-workers felt that these students would be motivated to pursue higher education and would benefit from the additional support that REACH would provide;
- displayed motivation, self-awareness, and resilience;
- were categorized as low-income based on Santa Barbara County Housing Authority guidelines[10]; and
- were involved in extracurricular activities but not to the extent that they would be unable to fully participate in the program.

In order to connect with their intended target group, the REACH co-workers engaged in a number of different types of outreach activities including:

- working closely with high school counselors and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teachers to identify applicants;[11]
- clearly identifying and communicating selection criteria with students, counselors, and teachers; and
- making multiple presentations at each school so that students had multiple opportunities to learn about the program and interact with REACH co-workers.

While parents' education level and race were not stated as selection criteria, outreach strategies emphasized reaching Latino students and those whose parents had not attended college.

Potential participants went through a structured application process that included group interviews, written applications, and letters of recommendation.

The program aimed to serve motivated low-income students who were performing academically at a "middle-of-the road" level.

10 See http://cosb.countyofsb.org/housing/default.aspx?id=4576

11 AVID is a national college readiness and success program that is integrated into the schools and is designed primarily for Latino students.

Exhibit II-1: REACH Logic Model

Activities	Outcomes	
	Short-Term	Long-Term
Diverse activities, as detailed below, including: • Experiential education opportunities such as outdoor expeditions, service learning, and cultural exchange • Workshops • College access services • Mentoring • Youth internships	Participants leave the program with… • A sense of belonging • Ongoing relationships with caring adults • Self-confidence • A desire to learn/intrinsic motivation • An ability to plan and set goals • An ability to problem solve	Alumni will… • Be engaged members of society • Pursue their interests • Be lifelong learners • Have the skills to manage the situations that life brings
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION		
• College access services including college tours, SAT/ACT prep, college application support, stipends for visiting colleges or attending educational conferences • Workshops on college access (career exploration, financial aid) and college transition (finding resources on campus, selecting classes and majors) • Mentoring in support of educational goals	Following the program, participants… • Understand the college track and have identified institutions • Have discovered fields of interest • Have matriculated in a postsecondary institution • Are on track to graduate or transfer to a four–year college	Alumni graduate from a postsecondary institution
OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES		
• Outdoor expeditions (Wilderness First Aid certification, backpacking, rock climbing, kayaking, canyoneering)	Following the program, participants have… • A sense of environmental connectedness • An ability to manage risk • An ability to be an effective team member	Alumni exemplify environmentally sensitive practices
HEALTH AND WELLNESS		
• Workshops on cooking • Service learning at an organic farm coupled with planning and preparing a meal for families • Nutrition planning and cooking during outdoor expeditions • Orthodontics available to all participants • Mentoring in support of health and wellness goals	Following the program, participants… • Have an ability to cook for themselves • Have learned about local food • Have had exposure to prioritizing oral and physical health	Alumni make healthy lifestyle choices
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT		
• Service learning projects (e.g., painting a school, reforestation project), typically integrated into outdoor expeditions • Mentoring in support of community involvement goals	Following the program, participants… • Have created positive change • Feel invested in the community	Alumni are engaged in the community
FINANCIAL LITERACY		
• Educational workshops on money management • Mentoring in support of financial goals	Following the program, participants have… • A plan to fund college • An understanding of basic money management principles	Alumni know how to live within their financial means and save money
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT		
• Educational workshops about stress management, healthy relationships • Personal development activities integrated into program offerings • Mentoring in support of personal development	Following the program, participants have… • Self-awareness • Self-management • Self-direction	Alumni have intrinsic motivation and increased empathy, apply consequential thinking, and have the ability to navigate emotions and live with purpose

Program Components: Diverse Activities Focused on Six Core Content Areas

REACH program activities provided exposure to six core content areas: postsecondary education, outdoor experiences, health and wellness, community involvement, financial literacy, and personal development. These are detailed below, and presented in a timeline format in Exhibit II-2 below. REACH offered its activities in a staged fashion, timed to maximize value for participants at their given stage of development and focused on supporting participants' transition to college and independence.

Exhibit II-2. Timeline of REACH Program Activities

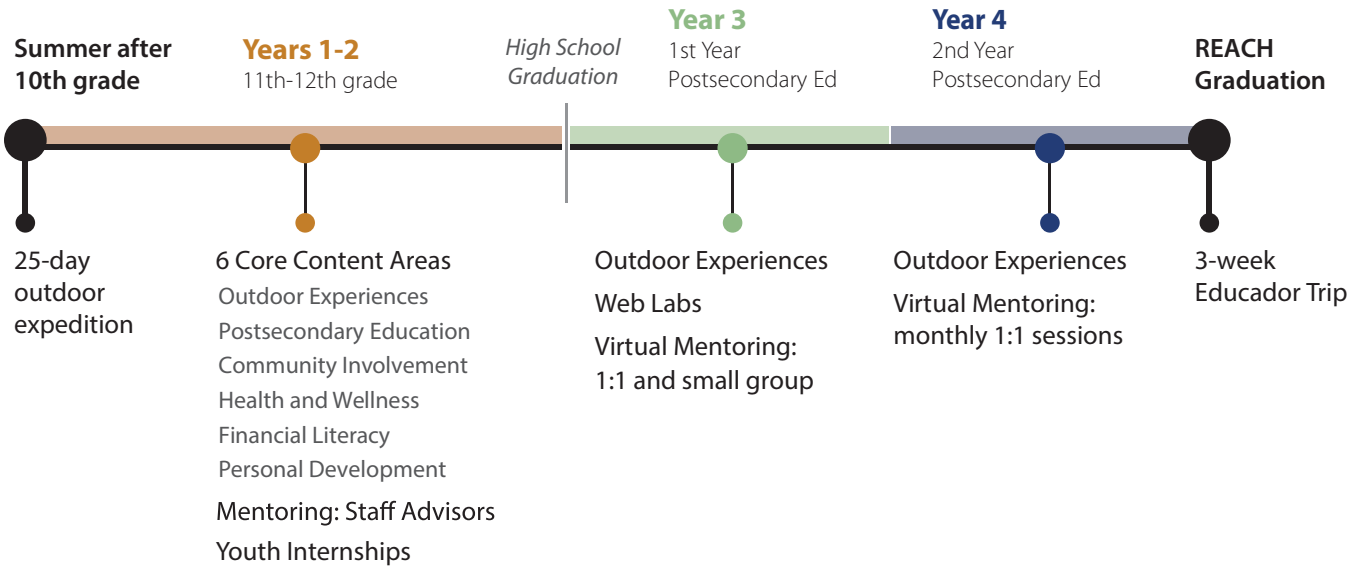


Exhibit II-2 depicts the progression of activities that were offered throughout the four program years. Each cohort began with a 25–day outdoor expedition the summer before junior year of high school. Then, during their first two years in the program, participants engaged in a range of activities focused on the six core content areas. These activities were aimed at building community among participants and with co-workers and were designed to prepare students for the transition to postsecondary education.

During the second two years of the program, after high school graduation, program structure and content turned toward the transition to postsecondary education. While outdoor expeditions continued during summer and winter breaks, program offerings during the school year became virtual so that students could access them from their college campuses. Co-workers provided small group web labs in Year 3 and one-on-one mentoring sessions in Year 4 focused on navigating the transition to postsecondary education. The program culminated with a three-week service learning and intercultural exchange trip to Ecuador.

Throughout the program, mentoring interactions with program co-workers provided fundamental support to participants. (Mentoring is explored in detail in the following section of this report.) Additionally, seven REACH participants from the 2012 cohort served as youth interns during Year 2 of the program. They worked in administrative roles and helped program co-workers plan, prepare, and lead activities during outdoor expeditions.

Participants were expected to attend program activities on a monthly basis. REACH offered a given activity multiple times each month so that participants could choose a time that aligned with their schedules. Participants were offered incentives to encourage participation in program activities. During Years 1 and 2, they could earn up to $550 in credit toward the purchase of a laptop computer by missing no more than one event; those with additional absences could earn prorated amounts. During Years 3 and 4, participants could earn gifts for perfect attendance during a given time period. Examples included a jacket, messenger bag, or laptop case silkscreened with the REACH logo.

Throughout the program, mentoring interactions with program staff **provided fundamental support to participants.**

Reach Delivers Six Core Content Areas Through A Range Of Diverse Activities

Postsecondary Education. Postsecondary education efforts focused on enabling participants to discover fields of interest, identify right-fit institutions, and navigate the college application process. During Year 3 and Year 4, efforts focused on supporting participants through their transition to postsecondary education. Activities and services included:

- college access services such as college tours, SAT/ACT prep, college application support, stipends for visiting colleges or attending educational conferences;
- workshops on college access (career exploration, college application process) and college transition (finding resources on campus, selecting classes and majors);
- mentoring in support of educational goals; and
- priority scholarship consideration.

Outdoor Experiences. Participants engaged in extended outdoor experiences, ranging from a multi-day trip to prepare for Wilderness First Aid certification to multi-week backpacking trips. These experiences allowed students to spend extended quality time in nature and learn skills associated with the outdoors. They were purposefully designed to allow participants to develop strong relationships with one another and with staff and to engage in personal and leadership development experiences.

Health and Wellness. Participants engaged in workshops and experiences designed to support them in developing healthy practices, particularly in terms of choosing and cooking healthy meals. Activities included experiential cooking workshops, service learning on an organic farm, and webinars on topics such as strategies for creating appropriate balance between sleep, work, studying, and socializing. During their one-on-one mentoring sessions, participants often chose and worked towards goals about fitness and wellness with their staff mentors. Throughout the outdoor experiences, they learned to tend to their nutritional and energy needs, including planning and cooking meals. In terms of dental health, REACH fully funded braces for any participant who wished to receive this care.

Financial Management. Participants benefited from interactive workshops about budgeting, financial goal setting, use of credit, and money management. REACH also provided training and guidance about navigating financial aid and scholarship processes for postsecondary education. During one-on-one mentoring sessions, participants often chose and worked towards financial goals with their staff mentors.

Community Involvement. To cultivate a sense of connectedness to their community and provide the experience of making a positive change, REACH engaged participants in a variety of service days including painting a school and participating in a reforestation project. Service learning opportunities were typically integrated with outdoor expeditions and college tour trips. During webinar workshops and one-on-one mentoring sessions, staff encouraged and guided youth to seek campus resources and pursue opportunities for connecting with the community at their postsecondary institutions.

Personal Development. Activities designed to support personal development were integrated into most of REACH's programing. During trips and events, participants engaged in guided reflection, journaling, and small group activities designed to cultivate self-awareness as well as capacity for self-management and direction. Additionally, participants received educational workshops targeted specifically toward personal development including about stress management and healthy relationships.

Youth Development Structures and Practices

The REACH program was structured to integrate fundamental aspects of youth development programming[12] into service delivery. In particular, the program provided opportunities for youth to develop ongoing relationships with caring adults, cultivate a strong peer community, build relevant skills, and cultivate a sense of usefulness and competence.

- **Program structures and practices facilitated the development of adult–youth relationships.** Cognizant that an ongoing relationship with caring adults is a predictor of positive youth development,[13] and seeking to support youth engagement with the program, designers structured REACH to facilitate strong adult–youth relationships. The program model intended that co-workers would begin with participants the summer after their sophomore year of high school and stay with them through all four years of the program. Participants and co-workers had the opportunity to develop trusting relationships during the extended time they spent working and living together during outdoor expeditions and to continue these relationships during monthly meetings. Co-workers were expected to consistently implement practices that conveyed care and accountability including checking in with youth during monthly interactions, making and following through on commitments, and responding when participants reached out for support and guidance.

- **The program intentionally cultivated peer community.** REACH was designed to support participants in achieving a sense of belonging and to build a strong cohort of peers who could provide one another with mutual support and encouragement as they transitioned to postsecondary education. Participants moved through the four-year curriculum as a cohort. They had intensive, regular time together during outdoor experiences and monthly opportunities for interaction, including web-based interaction while in college. Participants had additional opportunities to build community by working together to achieve shared goals including opportunities to achieve Wilderness First Aid certification, cook and serve dinner to their families, and execute group community service projects.

- **REACH provided opportunities for participants to build relevant skills.** The REACH curriculum was based on supporting participants to develop the skills they would need in college and life including hard skills such as money management and cooking as well as youth development skills for planning, decision making, and navigating complex situations. REACH timed skill-building opportunities to be immediately relevant. For example, participants were trained about how to read maps in advance of leading a group on a hike during an outdoor expedition; webinars about accessing college campus resources occurred during the first few months of postsecondary education; one-on-one mentoring sessions supported participants to set and meet goals relevant to their particular situations.

- **REACH provided opportunities for participants to develop a sense of competence and usefulness.** REACH engaged participants in activities structured to rely on their contributions for their success. Examples included planning, cooking, setting up camp, and mapping routes during outdoor experiences; working together to plan and cook meals for families; and service learning opportunities that required coordinated efforts such as painting a school.

12 Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

13Scales, P. C., & Leffert, N. (1999). *Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development*. Minneapolis. MN: Search Institute.

Mentoring Support

The REACH program emphasized mentoring as an essential program component. Mentoring is a valuable strategy for supporting the social and emotional development of youth[14] as well as for providing information, guidance, and encouragement to students who aim to transition to and persist in postsecondary education.[15] Further, studies suggest that mentor relationships, even with adults who are not part of the campus community, can support students in their postsecondary education persistence and success[16]. In this section we explore the way that REACH reflected mentoring best practices and supported participants in their transition to postsecondary education.

REACH Mentoring Structure and Best Practices

The mentoring model summarized above was integrated into the fabric of REACH's comprehensive youth development and experiential education program. Its structures and practices largely aligned with the following research-based best practices for maximizing the impact of mentoring relationships:

- **Flexibility.** Mentoring is particularly effective when mentors are able to respond to the context and situation of youth[17]. REACH co-workers responded to and, where appropriate, used discretionary funds of typically up to $300 to support youth in navigating their life circumstances. Examples of ways that REACH mentors supported participants included talking through death or illness in the family, providing

14 DuBois, D. L., Hollaway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). *Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytical review. American Journal of Community Psychology,* 30, 157–197.

15 Levine, A., & Nidiffer, J. (1996). *Beating the odds: How the poor get to college.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

16 Jossey-Bass. Johnson, A.W. (1999) *An Evaluation of the Long – Term Impact of the Sponsor – a Scholar (SAS) Program on Student Performance.* Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

17 Rhodes, J.E, Spencer, R., Keller, T.E., Liang, B., Noam, G. (2006). A model for the influence of mentoring relationships on youth development. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34, 691–707.

REACH Mentoring Structure

Participants were randomly assigned staff advisors at the beginning of the program, though they also naturally developed mentor relationships with other REACH staff.

Assigned advisors were responsible for checking in with participants, keeping track of participant well-being, noting and following up on any issues the participants might be facing, and connecting participants to appropriate resources.

Participants were invited to reach out to assigned staff advisors or any REACH staff member at any time for support or guidance. Staff consistently responded.

Staff and participants regularly engaged with one another during in-person scheduled group activities. These included extended outdoor expeditions that occurred throughout all four years of the program and monthly activities during Years 1 and 2 while participants were in high school.

During Years 3 and 4, once participants had graduated from high school, they engaged with staff mentors virtually during monthly web-based program activities. One staff member served as the key mentor for all participants.

- Monthly web labs during Year 3 provided content and allowed time for group discussion about topics related to the transition to college and independence. Participants were purposefully placed in affinity groups of about seven to eight individuals so that they attended monthly web labs with other REACH students in similar life situations (e.g., four-year vs. two-year colleges, Northern vs. Southern California, etc.).
- During Year 4, participants received focused support during monthly web-based, one-on-one mentoring sessions. These sessions included open discussions about whatever might be going on in participants' lives as well as check-ins about progress toward academic, career, and personal goals.

Mentors worked with participants to set career, education, and personal goals. They checked in with students on their progress toward these goals during monthly meetings, sending texts or e-mails as reminders and encouragement. Mentors connected participants with partners from the same cohort; the encouraged to hold one another accountable for progressing toward goals.

On a discretionary basis, REACH provided funding, usually up to $300, to "remove an obstacle" to a participant pursuing a personal, career, or life goal. Over the course of the program, staff estimated that a total of $3,000 was allocated in this way. For example, these allocations covered application fees for summer enrichment programs and provided financial support as students applied for citizenship or met with a study skills advisor.

financial support in applying for citizenship, connecting participants to domestic violence resources, connecting participants to internships and volunteer opportunities, and supporting participants in choosing colleges to attend.

- **Longevity of Relationships.** Mentoring relationships that last 12 months or longer are thought to be most effective.[18] Since participants began the REACH program the summer after their sophomore year of high school, they had two years to cultivate relationships with their adult mentors before transitioning to postsecondary education. Ken Gates, the key mentor for all REACH youth during Years 3 and 4, had been with the program since its initiation and, significantly, developed strong relationships with most students prior to the summer after their senior year of high school.

- **Frequency of contact.** Frequency of contact between mentor and mentee facilitates increased positive mentoring outcomes.[19] Co-workers maintained a minimum of monthly contact with youth, plus additional contacts between monthly meetings as needed. During trips and outdoor expeditions, contact was more intensive.

- **Structured interactions.** Structured activities during mentoring relationships can support the development of mentor–mentee relationships.[20] Participants could expect structured interactions with co-worker mentors during workshops and outdoor experiences as well as during monthly one-on-ones.

- **Emotional closeness.** Practices that cultivate trust and respect support emotional closeness between mentor and mentee.[21] Throughout all aspects of the REACH program, co-workers implemented practices to support the development of strong relationships with participants including checking in with youth during monthly interactions, making and following through on commitments, responding when youth reached out for guidance and support, and following up with youth participants on specific items. Extended co-worker and youth experiences during outdoor expeditions also provided opportunities for developing trusting relationships.

Research also suggests that mechanisms for support and involvement of parents yield increased benefits in mentoring programs.[22] REACH co-workers were conscientious about updating parents on program activities and were consistently available when parents reached out to talk about the program or participants, but practices for engaging parents were not emphasized in the REACH program.

The REACH mentoring model largely aligned with research based best practices for maximizing the impact of mentoring relationships.

18 Lawner E., Beltz, M., & Moore, K. A. (2013). *What works for youth mentoring programs: Lessons from experimental evaluation of programs and interventions* (Publication No. 2013-14). Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

19 DuBois, D. L., Hollaway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytical Review. *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 30, 157–197.

20 DuBois, D. L., Hollaway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytical Review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 157–197.

21 Rhodes, J. E., Bogat, A., Roffman, J., Edelman, P., & Galasso, L. (2002). Youth mentoring in perspective: Introduction. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2), 149–155.

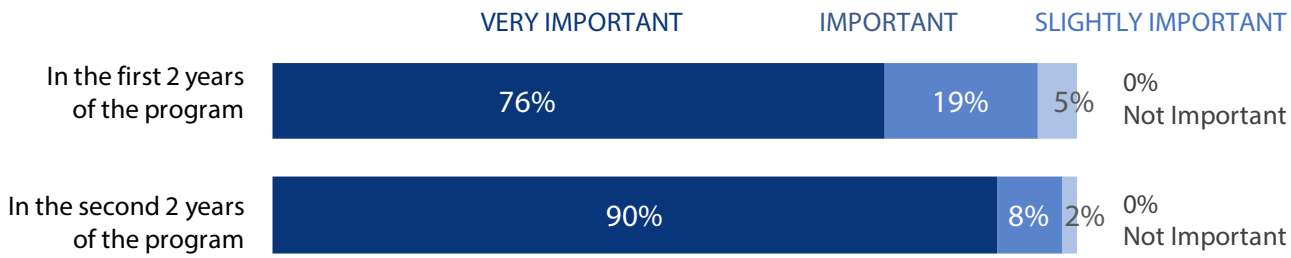
22 DuBois, D. L., Hollaway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., & Cooper, H. (2002). Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytical Review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 157–197.

REACH Mentoring and the Transition to Postsecondary Education

We analyzed interview and survey data to identify co-worker and participant perspectives on the value of REACH's mentoring practices. Data revealed that participants valued the mentorship they received throughout the program, and that they particularly turned to their mentors to support them during their transition to postsecondary education. Participants whose parents had not attended college found the mentorship they received from REACH to be particularly important. Key findings of our analysis are summarized below.

- **Participants valued the mentorship they received during the REACH program.** Exhibit II-3 shows that participants particularly valued the mentorship they received in Year 3 and Year 4, when they were in their first two years of postsecondary education. Ninety percent of respondents reported that the mentorship they received during this time period was very important, compared to 76% of respondents reporting that the mentorship they received in Year 1 and Year 2 was very important.

Exhibit II-3. Importance of Mentorship to Participants by Program Phase

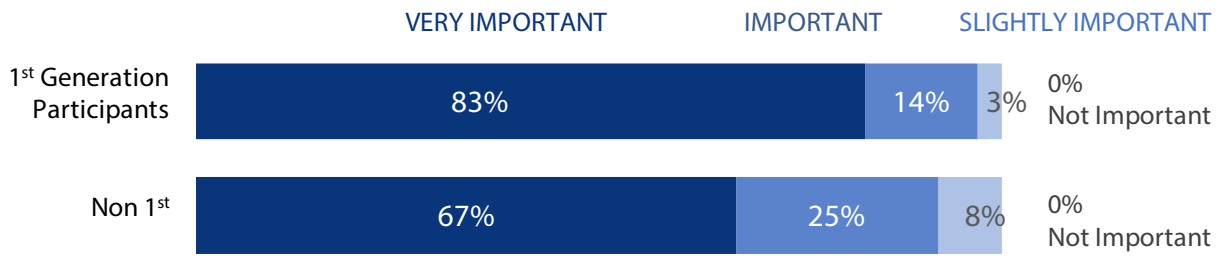


Source: Youth survey

Participants whose parents had not attended postsecondary education found the mentorship they received from REACH to be particularly important. Exhibit II-4 shows that 83% of participants from this group said the mentoring they received during Year 1 and Year 2 was very important, compared to 67% of students whose parents had attended postsecondary education. During Year 3 and Year 4, all participants increased the extent to which they found mentorship important (Exhibit II-5). However, a greater portion of first-generation participants continued to find mentorship very important (94%, compared to 83% of participants whose parents had attended college). These findings align with research that shows that relationships with mentors can support college transitions, particularly for first-generation, low-income students.[23]

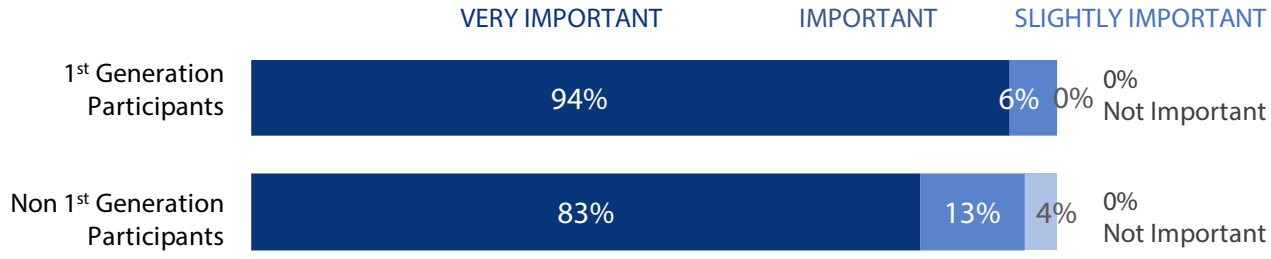
23 Hurd, N. M., Tan, J. S., & Loeb, E. L. (2016). Natural mentoring relationships and the adjustment to college among underrepresented students. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 57, 330–341. doi: 10.1002/ajcp.12059

Exhibit II-4. Importance of Mentorship in Year 1 and Year 2 to Participants by First-Generation Status



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit II-5. Importance of Mentorship to Participants in Year 3 and Year 4 by First-Generation Status



Source: Youth survey

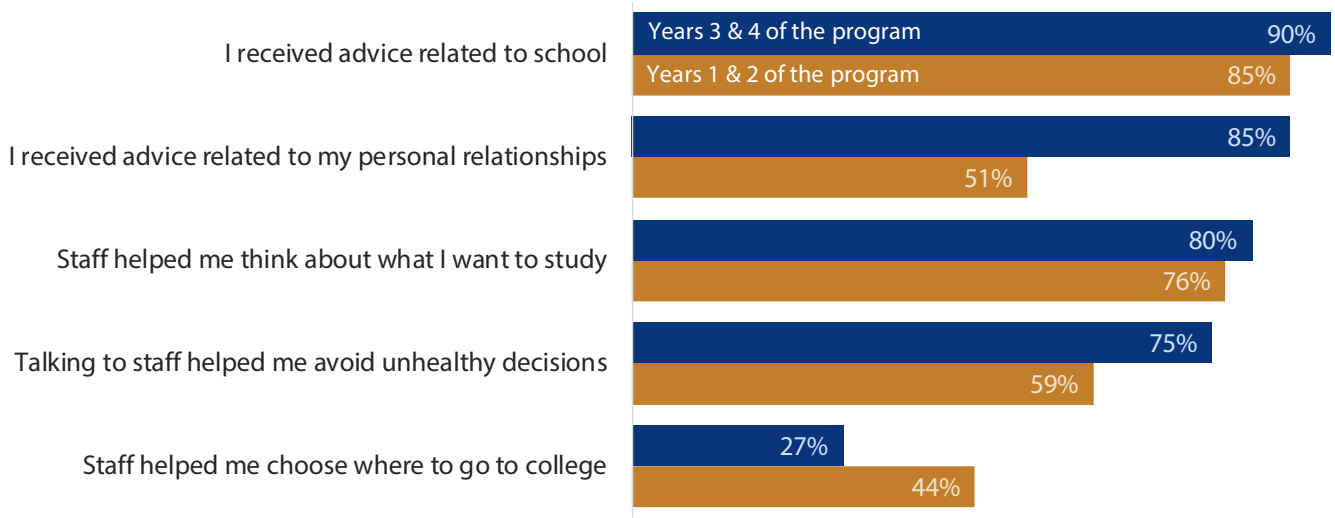
- **Participants particularly relied on co-worker mentors for support during their transition to postsecondary education.** The survey data described above aligns with co-worker observations that participants turned to REACH co-worker mentors with more intensity after they graduated from high school. Staff had anticipated that it would be difficult to maintain connections with participants once they moved on to postsecondary education, but instead they described that participants "latched on to the meetings as a place to open up about stress and things that are going on in their lives." Participants and staff reported that participants frequently reached out for support and guidance between monthly meetings. Eight of the 16 participant interview respondents reported that they texted or emailed their staff mentors between virtual meetings; two reported reaching out at the rate of once or twice a month. One participant articulated that when he began college he felt untethered from his social network, and turned to a trusted mentor to support him through his transition:

> **When I was home, I had my family there, but then you get to college and it's like, "Okay, who do I really have that's around me?" But, being in the program for four years, you definitely develop this positive relationship with Ken [Gates] where you can really trust him and he's always been open to discussing anything with us that we had questions about. And so I just knew that if I had an issue, I would just call him and, or shoot him an email, and he would find time to talk to us and try to help us in any what that he could.**

- **During Year 3 and Year 4, in addition to school and career support, participants increasingly received mentoring support for personal issues.** Exhibit II-6 summarizes survey data about the types of mentoring support that participants received. It shows that during Years 1 and 2, while respondents were in high school, the mentoring support they received focused on a variety of issues, but primarily school and preparing for postsecondary education. Eighty-five percent of respondents reported that they received advice related to school, and 76% reported that staff helped them choose what they wanted to study.

  During Years 3 and 4, after high school graduation, participants continued to receive support with school (90%) and choosing what to study (80%). An increased number of participants also received advice related to personal relationships (85% in Years 3 and 4, compared to 51% in Years 1 and 2) and help with avoiding unhealthy decisions (75% in Years 3 and 4, compared to 59% in Years 1 and 2).

Exhibit II-6. Types of Mentoring Support Received by Participants by Program Phase



Source: Youth survey

Another window into the types of supports that participants received is the individualized goals that participants set and worked toward with the support of their staff mentors. Guided support for reaching these goals was the focus of the Year 4 monthly one-on-one mentoring meetings. Exhibit II-7 provides examples of these goals, illustrating a range of topics including academic goals that supported participants in navigating their college experience, career goals that encouraged concrete exploration of potential careers, and choice goals that supported participants in pursuing community, health and wellness, financial, and social aims.

Exhibit II-7: Examples of Goals Set During Year 4

Type of Goal	Examples of Goals Set During Year 4 One-on-One Mentoring Sessions
Academic	• Accessing campus resources • Making connections with professors • Learning new study habits • Registering for classes
Career	• Shadowing professionals who are in a career that a person is exploring • Researching information about potential careers such as salaries or degree requirements
Choice	• Connecting with Community: Joining and attending campus clubs • Health and Wellness: Attending a fitness club • Financial: Setting a balanced goal for work hours; saving money but also maintaining grades • Social: Interacting with new people

REACH Program Administration

Staffing

As shown in Exhibit II-8, REACH employed different types of staff to operate its program. This table details program staffing by year of operation.

Exhibit II-8. REACH Staffing Structure by Year

Staff Position	Role	Number of Staff by Year					
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Director	Maintained program oversight and development, managed partnerships, developed and implemented web-based curricula, served in a mentor role.	1	1	1	1	1	1
Program Manager	Responsible for direct interaction with participants including recruitment, mentoring, and planning and staffing program activities.	1	2	1	1*	1*	0
Temporary Trip Staff	Supported permanent staff with preparing for and staffing trips during summer and winter months.				.5	.3	
Coordinator	Assisted with administrative duties.						.25

**While an FTE program manager was employed in 2015 and 2016, the individual was out on medical leave for a period of months each year.*

Staffing needs were more intensive during the first two years of the cohort experience, when participants were still in high school and all activities occurred in person. Staff estimates suggest that in addition to the program director, 1.25 program managers per cohort was the ideal ratio to support the REACH model while participants were in high school. Staffing needs decreased during Year 3 and Year 4 when most participants were in college and the program relied on virtual meetings to engage participants. Staff estimated that the REACH program model required one full-time director along with one program manager per cohort while students were in Years 3 and 4.

REACH staffing shifted over the course of its five-year life span to adjust to program requirements and accommodate staff turnover (which was typically due to illness and family needs). The original program director and program developer, Laurel Andersen, was replaced in 2014 by Ken Gates, who had been serving as program manager since the program's inception. Staff turnover and medical leave caused program manager staffing to drop to one full-time equivalent (FTE) in 2014 and functionally (due to medical leave) less than one FTE in

2015. This coincided with a slow-down in program staffing requirements. Both cohorts had moved on to postsecondary education at this time and the program was planning to close in 2017. Instead of hiring additional program manager-level staff, temporary trip staff were hired to support program operations.

Outside Contractors

While maintaining a core staff, REACH contracted much of its service delivery throughout the program to outside providers. The program director worked closely with consultants and vendors to ensure that programming was aligned to the intended outcomes of the REACH program. Examples of contractors involved in different aspects of the program include the following:

- REACH contracted with outside providers to run many of the *experiential education o*fferings including Deer Hill (an outdoor expedition program), Fairview Gardens (an organic farm providing service learning opportunities), and Tandana (a travel agency that organized the trip to Ecuador).
- REACH worked with outside vendors to provide *educational workshops* such as The Money Game (on financial literacy) and Cultural Detective (on intercultural competence). REACH staff often conducted webinars focused on the college transition, but outside experts were brought in to discuss such topics as study skills.
- REACH contracted with consultants and vendors to provide *college access services,* including Princeton Review, who provided SAT preparatory courses, and individual consultants who offered study skill workshops.

Between 2012 and 2017, the Orfalea Foundation **invested a total of $5,814,010 in the REACH program.**

Program Costs

Between 2012 and 2017, the Orfalea Foundation invested a total of $5,814,010 in the REACH program. Up to 80 participants were being served in any given year; a total of 68 participants completed the program. REACH spent an average of $69,335 per program completer, or about $17,339 per year when not including scholarship expenditures. When scholarship expenditures directly to REACH participants and alumni are included, the expense was $78,984 per program completer, or about $19,746 per year.[24] When we analyzed costs based on number of participants in any given year, including participants who did not complete the REACH program, we found that REACH spent an average of $14,520 annually per participant. This amount reached $16,288 when including scholarships that were granted to REACH participants and alumni.

24 We calculated the cost per participant using total program expenditures divided by total number of participants who completed the program (N = 68).

A detailed cost analysis can be found in Appendix C. Highlights from the cost analysis include:

- REACH costs per participant were significantly higher than other youth-serving and college access programs such as College Track (estimated $7,172 per year per participant) and Summer Search (estimated $6,120 per year per participant).
- A number of aspects of the program structure may have inflated the costs of providing REACH services, including:
  - REACH leased a premium facility at the price of almost $80,000 per year (7% of the total program budget). The facility supported the Orfalea Foundation's community efforts but may not have been necessary for REACH program operations.
  - The grants line item (8% of the total budget) included community-based strategic grants that the Orfalea Foundation, through REACH, made to organizations in Santa Barbara County. Some of these had the potential to directly impact the operation of the REACH program while others were strategically aligned with REACH's mission but did not directly impact the program.
  - Disproportionately high annual costs per participant in 2012 ($22,282 per participant for 39 participants) and 2017 ($25,115 per participant for 34 participants) reflect costs associated with program start-up and close-down.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons

REACH was able to develop and implement a multi-year, multi-prong model for supporting youth development. Staff and participants reflected on a number of successes and challenges to delivering services over the course of the program. Additionally, an ongoing orientation toward program improvement often allowed staff to respond to challenges with mid-course corrections. In these cases, lessons learned during service delivery with the 2012 cohort caused staff to adjust practices before delivering services to the 2013 cohort. Successes, challenges, and lessons as they relate to recruitment, program components, and youth development practices are explored below.

Recruitment

- **Staff fine-tuned recruitment strategies after serving the first cohort in 2012.** Two students from the 2012 cohort dropped out of the REACH program after completing the initial outdoor expedition and two additional students did not complete the first program year. For the 2013 cohort, staff became more purposeful about clearly communicating expectations of REACH participants beyond participation in the initial backpacking trip. They worked closely with counselors to identify and recruit suitable students (i.e., "middle of the road," low-income students with the character and motivation to take advantage of the REACH program).

Program Components

- **REACH facilitated participant access to program activities.** As detailed in Chapter IV , REACH sustained high participation rates throughout the program. Participants noted that the program structure allowed for easy access to monthly required events. For the most part, activities were offered multiple times each month and scheduled well in advance, allowing participants to plan their attendance. During Years 1 and 2, transportation was made available for those traveling from various parts of the county to attend in-person workshops. During Years 3 and 4, workshops and mentoring sessions were conducted through a web-based platform that allowed students to participate remotely in program activities.

- **REACH provided increased support to the 2013 cohort when they were transitioning to postsecondary education.** When the 2012 cohort graduated from high school and moved on to postsecondary education, staff noted that almost a third considered either not matriculating in out-of-town colleges to which they had been accepted or considered returning home during their first semester of college.

  – Staff adjusted by setting up multiple contacts with students during the weeks before the 2013 cohort was scheduled to go to college.

  – Staff worked to purposefully tease out and talk through insecurities that participants were experiencing.

  – REACH incorporated programming targeted toward the emotional transition to postsecondary education by including by introducing themes about preparing for this transition to independence during the eight- to 10-day Sierra trip that occurred the summer after high school and by providing a workshop that supported participants in navigating the differences in school and home cultures.

Youth Development Structures & Practices

- **REACH initiated an additional outdoor experience in order to support the development of peer community.** REACH intentionally structured the program to cultivate a strong peer community among participants. During their first summer in REACH, the 2012 cohort broke up into three small groups to participate in a 25-day outdoor expedition that offered a significant bonding experience. However, it then took nearly a year to ensure that the whole first cohort knew each other's names and had gone on a trip with everyone in the cohort at least once. It was a significant challenge to build connections and relationships as a whole cohort. For the 2013 cohort, almost immediately upon return from their summer expeditions, all students attended a four-day Wilderness Advanced First Aid training session. Staff reported that this intensive amount of time together—along with the opportunity to work toward a shared, meaningful goal quickly and successfully—created a strong feeling of connection among the entire cohort.

- **REACH implemented strategies to support the development of adult–youth relationships.** This was instrumental to the REACH program model. Staff were successful at implementing practices that conveyed caring and accountability to youth. Participants reported that staff checked in with them during monthly interactions, followed through on commitments, and consistently responded when participants reached out for guidance. Lessons learned during the 2012 cohort's first year of outdoor experiences caused staff to adjust their staffing practices for outdoor experiences during the 2013 cohort. For the 2012 cohort, program staff did not participate in the backpacking trip; they contracted with Deer Hill Colorado, an outdoor expedition program, to lead the trip. By the second cohort, staff realized that they were missing the opportunity to develop rapport with students and therefore decided to lead the backpacking trips moving forward.

- **REACH experienced challenges in sustaining continuity and diversity among program staff.** Due to staff turnover and a decrease in staffing due to the closing of the program, participants went from interacting with three dedicated REACH staff between 2012 and 2014 to just one full-time REACH staff member in 2017. The three program managers who had primarily served youth during the first two years of the program brought a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives: two were female, one was male; two were white and one was Latina. They brought a range of areas of expertise and interest including scuba diving, music, outdoor education, and women's health. Only a small percentage (6%) of survey respondents reported that they felt less connected to the program because of the decrease in the number of staff mentors.[25] Nevertheless, participants noted that "As time went on, we started having less mentors," and "it would have been good to have some variety." In the end, Ken Gates, the program director for the final three years of REACH programming and an original REACH staffer, maintained continuity by serving as the primary adult contact throughout the culminating years of programming.

25 This survey question was only administered to the 2013 cohort.

III. REACH Participants

III. REACH Participants

REACH participants brought a diverse range of personal and life challenges—many came from home environments with limited family support and struggled to balance home and school responsibilities. Participants also brought high academic potential but required focused support to help them thrive in school. As noted in the previous chapter, the program targeted students who were middle-achieving (earning B's and C's), who demonstrated motivation through consistent attendance and high involvement, and who received strong recommendations from teachers and counselors. As one program leader said, "We seek students who need help to achieve. REACH is specifically focused on recruiting not the A students, but the students who were on the edge—those who could either do well or go to a gang."

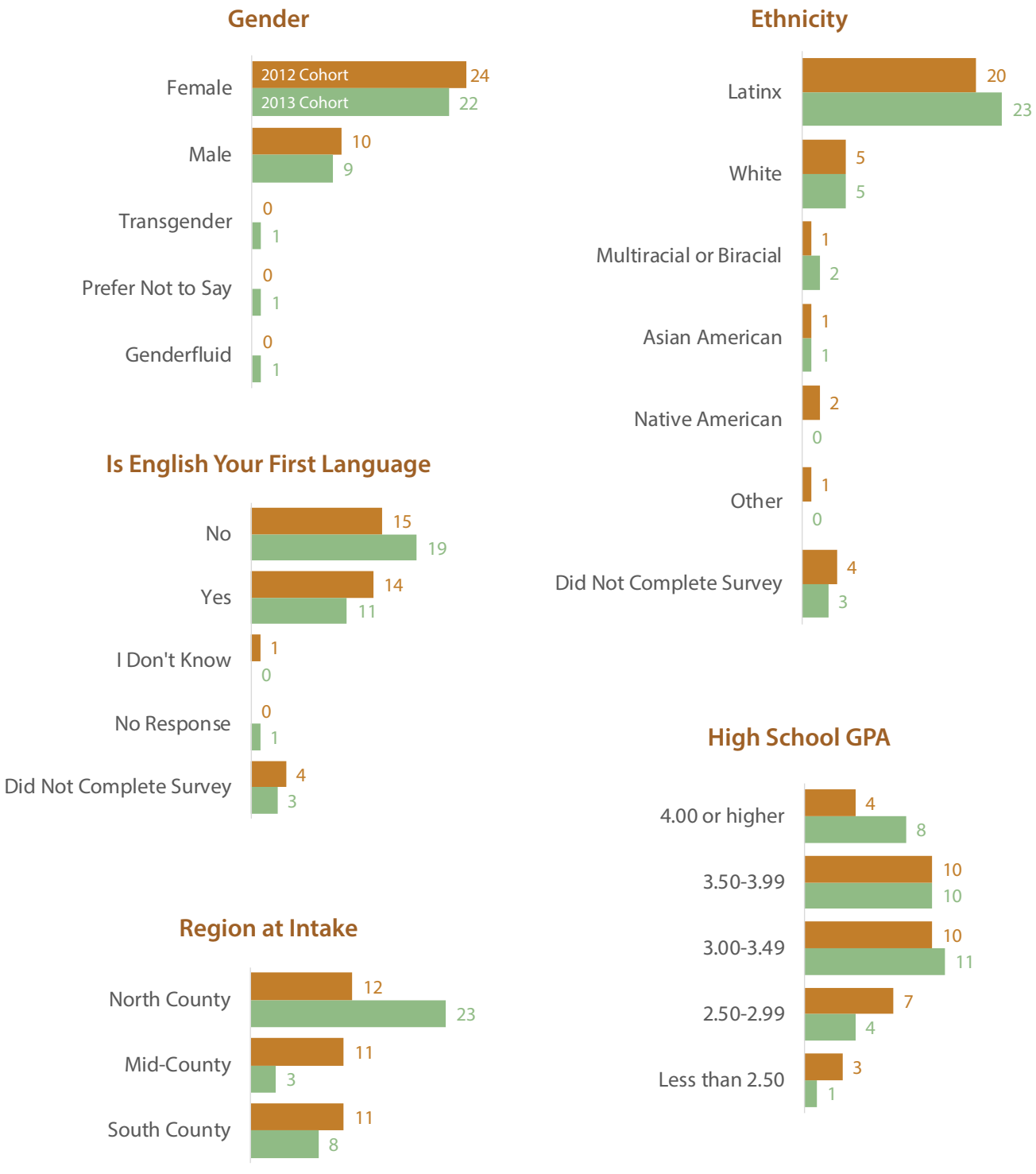
This chapter provides details about the youth who participated in the REACH program. We begin with a description of participant demographics, followed by a summary of the participants' education experience, academic profile, and employment status.

Participant Characteristics

The REACH program served 80 participants; 68 completed the program—34 in each cohort. Exhibit III-1 provides an overview of these participants. The exhibit summarizes demographic information on all participants by cohort. It also includes area of residence and GPA at enrollment.

The REACH program served 80 participants with **68 completing the program**

Exhibit III-1. Participant Demographics *(N = 34 for each cohort)*



Source: Youth survey, baseline administrative data

Following are core findings related to participant characteristics, drawn from Exhibit III-1.

- **The program served more females than males.** This gender pattern is in keeping with research findings showing that females are more likely than males to engage in non-recreational after-school activities.[26]

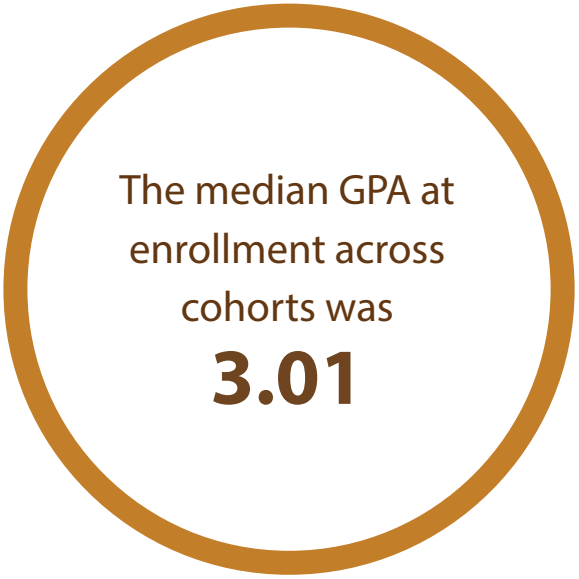
- **The REACH program served ethnically diverse youth.** The program served predominantly one racial group: Latinos made up a greater share of the program population (63%) than the county population (43%).[27] There was a small difference in the racial/ethnic composition by cohort. Specifically, the 2012 cohort enrolled fewer Latino students (59%) than the 2013 cohort (68%). The racial/ethnic composition of other groups was similar across the two cohorts.

- **Over half of the students spoke a language other than English (56%).** Spanish was the dominant language other than English spoken at home. When compared to the general population in Santa Barbara County, the REACH program served a higher percentage of youth who were Spanish speakers. In Santa Barbara County, 33% of the population speaks Spanish.[28]

- **Participants differed in their region of residence at the time of enrollment.** In general, more participants were drawn from North County (52%) than other areas (20% in Mid County, and 28% in South County). However, students from the 2012 cohort were more evenly distributed across the county while most of the 2013 cohort was concentrated in North County.

- **The program enrolled a large percentage of high-achieving students.** More than three-quarters of participants (78%) had earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher at the time of enrollment. The program did enroll students with lower GPAs, but they made up a smaller percentage of total students (22% of both cohorts had GPAs lower than 3.0). The median GPA for both cohorts was 3.01.

- **There was a clear difference in academic preparedness between the 2012 and 2013 cohorts,** as a greater percentage of students from 2012 than from 2013 had lower GPAs at enrollment. These findings are consistent with co-workers' assessments of the distinct differences between the first and second cohorts. As one interviewee said, "The first cohort wasn't as strong academically. We had to give them a lot more individualized care and there was a lot more energy that went to their academics."



26 Hofferth, S. L., & Jankuniene, Z. (2001). Life after school. *Educational Leadership*, 58(7), 19–23.

27 Stanford Center on Longevity. (2011). *Santa Barbara County: Demographic profile*. Stanford, CA: Author. Retrieved from https://www.library.ca.gov/lds/demographicprofiles/docs-reference/Santa%20Barbara%20County%20DP2010.pdf

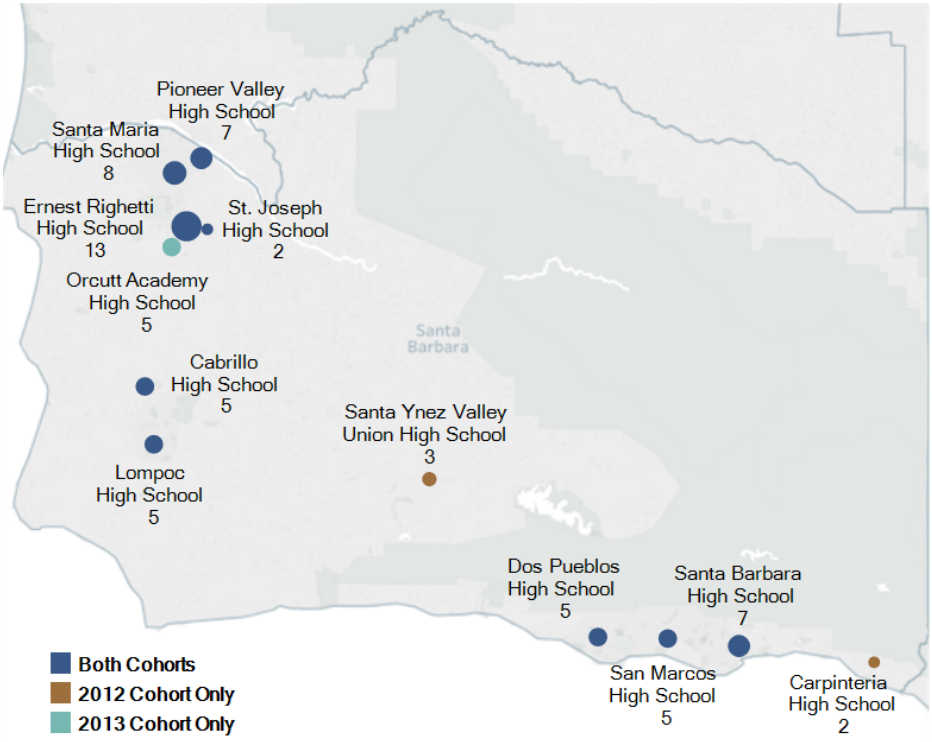
28 Languages in Santa Barbara County. (n.d.). In *Statistical Atlas*. Retrieved August 28, 2017, from https://statisticalatlas.com/county/California/Santa-Barbara-County/Languages

High Schools Attended

Program co-workers sought to enroll students representing every public school in the county. As a result of this effort, the program reached a broad section of youth throughout Santa Barbara County, although most were drawn from North County area high schools. Exhibit III-2 shows a map of participants' high schools and colleges.

- **Participants were drawn from 14 out of 18 high schools in Santa Barbara County.**[29] The majority of participants attended Ernest Righetti HS (13 or 19% of participants). Students also attended Dos Pueblos HS (6), followed by Santa Barbara HS (7), Pioneer Valley HS (7), Lompoc HS (5), and Orcutt Academy HS (5).
- **Each cohort represented a wide variety of high schools to ensure a diverse mix of students.** The 2012 cohort drew from 11 high schools; the 2013 drew from 9 nine. The distribution of high schools by cohort is as follows:
  - **In the 2012 cohort**, the majority of participants attended Ernest Righetti High School (n = 6), followed by Lompoc (n = 4) and Santa Barbara High Schools (n = 4).
  - **In the 2013 cohort**, the majority of participants attended Ernest Righetti (n = 6) and Santa Maria High Schools (n = 6). The high schools with the smallest number of participants included Cabrillo (n = 1) and St. Joseph High Schools (n = 1).

Exhibit III-2. Number of Participants per High School by Cohort



Source: Youth survey, administrative data

29 Data downloaded on 8/16/17 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:High_schools_in_Santa_Barbara_County,_California

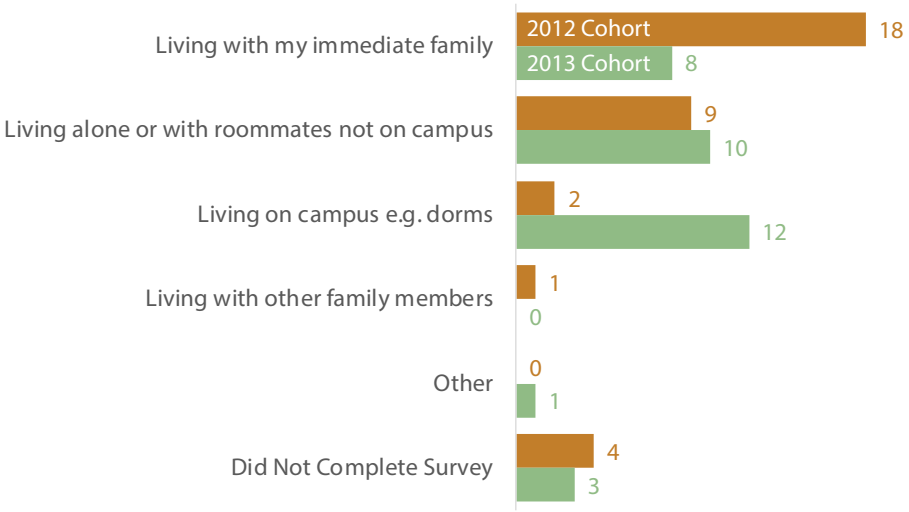
Postsecondary Living Situation

REACH participants chose different living situations while in college (Exhibit III-3). Key findings are as follows:

- **Most participants in the 2012 cohort chose to live with family members (53%).** This is not surprising as many are attending community college. (See Chapter VI).
- **More participants from the 2013 cohort than from the 2012 cohort lived on campus** (35% and 6%, respectively) because more were attending four-year institutions.
- **About one-third of participants reported living alone or with roommates** (27% from the 2012 cohort and 29% from the 2013 cohort).

Exhibit III-3. Postsecondary Living Situations of Participants by Cohort

(N = 34 for each cohort)



Source: Youth survey

Participants attending community colleges are more likely to live with their immediate family (80%). In contrast, participants attending four-year institutions are more likely to live alone or with roommates (53 %).

We analyzed data on living situation based on the type of institution that participants were attending. The vast majority of participants at community colleges were living with immediate family (80%). In contrast, participants attending four-year institutions were more likely to live alone or with roommates off campus (53%); a smaller number at four-year institutions were living on campus (39%). This finding is significant, as research shows that students' college living situations can influence their academic outcomes. Minority students—African Americans and Latinos—"have higher GPAs when they live on campus than when they live off campus with their families. This suggests that programs like REACH should reflect on their efforts to ensure that working students have the support they need to persist in college.[30]

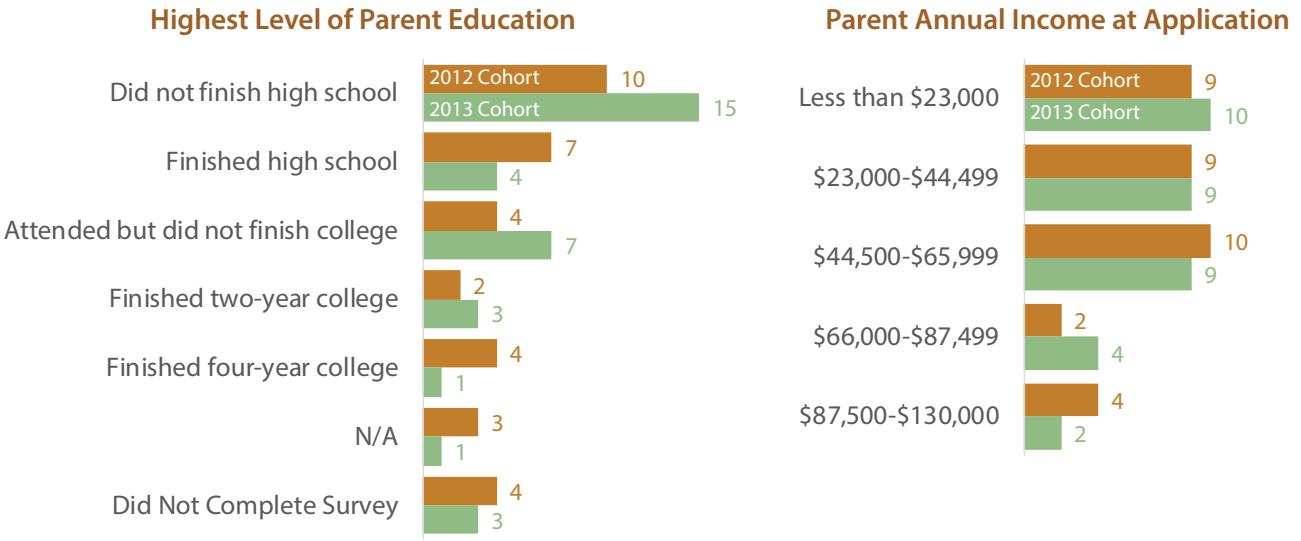
30 López Turley, R., & Wodtje, J. (2010). College residence and academic performance: Who benefits from living on campus? *Urban Education*, 45(4), 506–532.

Parents' Education and Income

To gain a deeper understanding of participants' backgrounds, we collected information on their parents' education and income levels. Parent education was self-reported in the youth survey; income level was drawn from the program application. This information is useful because of the distinct relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic outcomes (see Exhibit III-4).

Exhibit III-4. Parent Education and Income by Cohort[31]

(N = 34 for each cohort)



Source: Youth survey, baseline administrative data

- **About one-third of REACH parents had not finished high school** (37%). More parents from the 2013 cohort had not finished high school (44%) than from the 2012 cohort (29%).
- **Few parents had completed college**, with 16% attending but not finishing college.
- **Parents' annual income levels varied at the time of enrollment.** Approximately 83% of parents reported earning $66,000 or lower per year, with just over one-quarter earning less than $23,000 per year.[32]
- **The median parent annual income for both cohorts ($40,798) was lower than Santa Barbara County's median of $61,294.[33]**
- **Very few participants came from high-income families.** Only about 9% came from families whose family annual income was between $87,500 and $130,000 per year.

31 The 2016 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s median income in Santa Barbara County was $77,100, which is well above the median family median for REACH participants ($40,798).

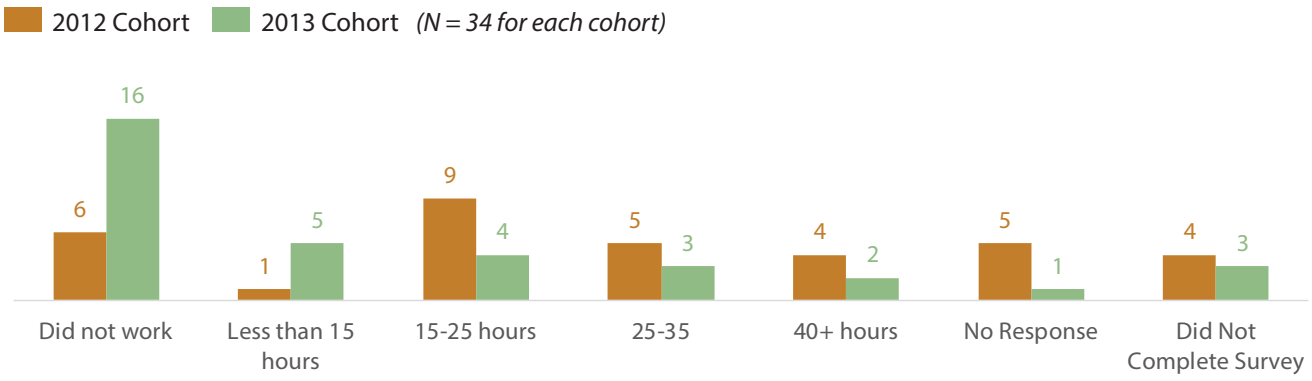
32 While we do not have data on family size, data from the 2017 federal poverty guidelines suggest that REACH parents' earnings fell within these guidelines.

33 Santa Barbara County. (n.d.). *Point 2 Homes*. Retrieved August 28, 2017, from https://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/CA/Santa-Barbara-County-Demographics.html

Employment Status

To further contextualize participants' experiences in the REACH program and their realized outcomes, we examined their employment status. This context can provide clues about their degree of academic success in college, because work can interfere with studies. Survey data show that about two-thirds (68%) of REACH participants across cohorts worked while in college; about one-third (38%) were working between 15 and 25 hours per week. As shown in Exhibit III-5, more participants from the 2012 cohort than from the 2013 cohort were working, and they were working more hours. This is consistent with the finding that the majority of participants in the 2012 cohort were attending community college and lived at home, and they worked in order to support themselves through college.

Exhibit III-5. Hours Worked Per Week While in College by Cohort[34]



Source: Youth survey

This finding is similar to national statistics. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 71% of all college students were employed while completing their undergraduate education.[35] The effects of employment on student academic success in college may provide insight about REACH participants' academic outcomes. Most studies conclude that jobs are only harmful to students' GPAs when the number of hours worked per week exceeds 20.[36] Other studies show that working off campus more than 20 hours per week contributes to a higher likelihood that students will drop out before receiving a degree.[37] However, working 20 hours or less per week on campus does not seem to have an effect on dropout rates compared to students who do not work. In fact, working in moderation can benefit students, as it may increase efficiency and organization and teach important skills that augment post-college marketability.[38]

34 The information in this Exhibit was drawn from an open-text question from the SPR-implemented survey asking respondents to estimate the number of hours worked per week in the spring prior to completing the survey. Some respondents entered number ranges, and were in turn placed into the category in which the majority of their response range fit. For this reason there was some overlap in the hours worked categories. Additionally, note that no participants reported working 35-39 hours per week.

35 National Center for Education Statistics. (2015).

36 The Effects of Employment on Student Academic Success. https://www.byu.edu/hr/sites/default/files/effects_of_student_employment.pdf

37 Orszag, J.M, Orszag, P.R. and Whitmore D. M. (2001). Learning and Earning: Working in College.

38 Dundes, L. and Marx, J. (2006). Balancing Work and Academics in College: Why do Students Working 10-19 Hours Per Week Excel? Journal of College Student Retention, 8(1) 107-120.

As previously discussed, the 2012 cohort had clear challenges compared to the 2013 cohort. In comparison to the 2013 cohort, the 2012 cohort had lower academic achievement (as shown in their GPAs), came from families with lower income levels, and worked more hours while in school. In fact, nine out of the 34 students (27%) in the 2012 cohort worked more than 25 hours per week, and, in most cases, in more than one off-campus job. The youth survey data reveal that working while in college was a necessary responsibility—for instance, one participant held three part-time jobs, and another had two jobs to help pay for rent and utilities.

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IV. Participation and Retention

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REACH's four-year structure required addressing the challenge of sustaining participant involvement over a long period of time. The program was intentionally designed to accommodate flexible scheduling and to include programming aimed at promoting retention through transitional periods. Furthermore, the participant selection process assessed students based on their likelihood of remaining involved for the entirety of the program.

This chapter explores participation in program activities, considering variations by program year and program component, as well as the factors that influenced participant retention and departure. REACH co-workers tracked participants' attendance throughout the program and kept a record of hours completed for each activity. However, these data are only available for program completers, so participation results refer only to this set of participants. These records, along with completers' self-reported participation from SPR-implemented surveys responses, informed the findings for this chapter.

Key Findings

- **Program retention was relatively high across both cohorts**, with 85% of all original participants completing the program. Completers had high program dosage, with the 2013 cohort receiving on average a slightly higher proportion of possible service hours (92%) than the 2012 cohort (90%).
- **Participation was highest in Years 1 and 4 for both cohorts.** The percentage of service hours received was higher for health and wellness activities (92%) and outdoor experiences (91%) than for financial literacy (80%) or postsecondary education activities (88%).
- **Connections with other REACH participants and program staff were widely cited as key to keeping participants present at and engaged in activities throughout the entirety of the program.** The quantity and variety of activities contributed to high attendance in Years 1 and 2, while the web labs and one-on-one mentoring helped keep participants invested in the program during Years 3 and 4.

Participation in Program Activities

To analyze cohort-level and overall participation, we aggregated individual and activity-level participation records by year, activity type, and program component. These values were then compared to estimates of the number of hours of each activity, which were provided by REACH co-workers.[39] Though each activity was typically offered more than once, REACH co-workers assumed just one instance of participation when calculating the number of hours associated with each activity.[40]

Overall Program Participation

Overall, REACH participants completed a very high percentage of program service hours, with average program participation (dosage) at about 91% across both cohorts. The median participation hours were even higher than the average, at about 96% of possible program hours completed for both cohorts. The proportionately higher median value compared to the average dosage indicates that the majority of participants participated in a greater than average percentage of available program hours.

- **The vast majority of participants who completed the program participated in almost all program hours.** Nearly three-quarters of participants in both cohorts had dosages of 90% or more of possible program hour participation. Additionally, only one participant from each cohort engaged in less than 50% of possible program hours.

- **The 2013 cohort had higher overall participation than the 2012 cohort by both program hour participation and activities attended.** Though average program dosage for the 2012 cohort was high (90%), the average dosage for the 2013 cohort was even higher (92%). Similarly, while participants in the 2012 cohort on average attended about 86% of the program activities offered, those in the 2013 cohort had average attendance rates of 92%. These results align with co-workers' expectations based on the composition of each cohort, as the 2013 cohort was reported to have a higher level of maturity than their 2012 counterparts. In addition, there was a more targeted recruitment process for the 2013 cohort, which aimed to better communicate the degree of commitment required for participation in REACH.

39 Because the number of service hours offered differed across cohorts, we defined and reported dosage as the percentage of program intervention hours received. We calculated attendance rates by determining the total number of participants with participation hours greater than zero for a given activity. Activity-level attendance was then averaged across program component or year to compare attendance rates in different scenarios. The total possible attendance was 34 participants per cohort (equal to the number of completers per cohort).

40 Though REACH typically offered each program activity up to three times to facilitate maximum possible participation, it was expected that participants would only attend a single iteration of the event. This trend is largely reflected in the participation hours recorded in the program tracking sheet, with the exception of the Sierra backpacking trip at the close of Year 2, which two participants attended twice.

Program Participation by Year

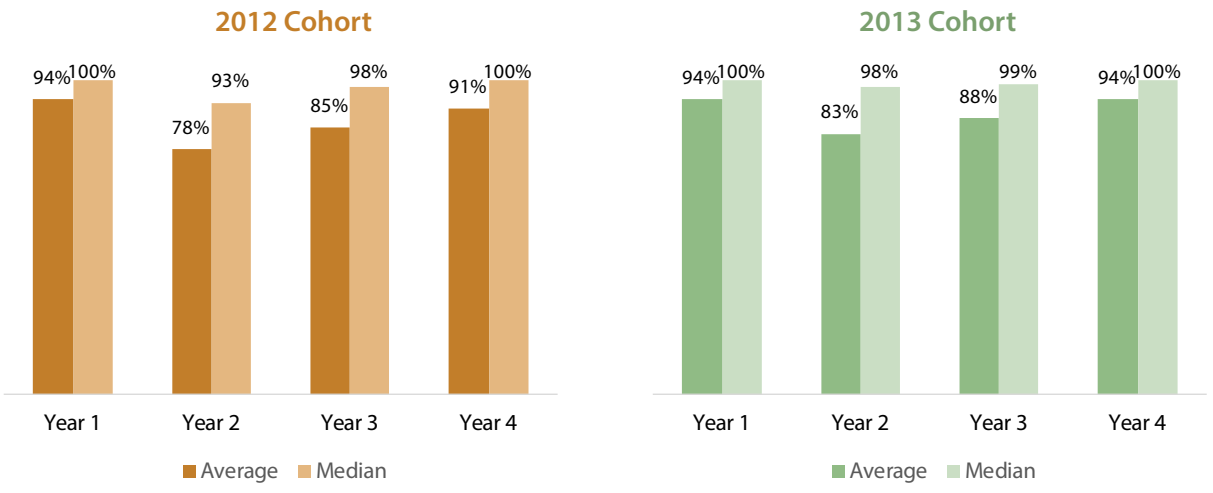
As discussed in Chapter II, program activities were sequenced in a particular order to maximize their value and use for participants as they moved through various phases of their secondary and postsecondary experiences. The types and concentration of activities therefore differed substantially between the first two years—while youth were in high school—and the last two years, when the majority of participants began their postsecondary education (see Appendix D for details). Exhibit IV-1 shows the total number of activity hours and the number of activities offered in each year of the program. Exhibit IV-2 depicts total participation by year and by cohort. As can be seen from this exhibit, program dosage overall was highest during Year 1, then dipped during Years 2 and 3, increasing again during the final year. To best understand the nuances of participation and the effects of the program design, we considered participation distinctly during these two periods.

Exhibit IV-1. Hours and Number of Activities Offered by Cohort and Program Year

	2012 Cohort		2013 Cohort	
Program Year	Hours	Activities Offered	Hours	Activities Offered
Year 1	1,129	13	1,101	14
Year 2	269	10	340	11
Year 3	242	9	242	9
Year 4	558	9	560	10

Source: Administrative participation data

Exhibit IV-2. Percentage of Program Participation by Cohort and Program Year



Source: Administrative participation data

Participation in Years 1 and 2

In Years 1 and 2, the REACH program included frequent activities ranging from the initial three-week backpacking expedition to SAT preparation and cooking classes. The Deer Hill expedition, along with the wilderness skills training and shorter hiking and backpacking trips that followed, were concentrated in Year 1. Year 2 saw a shift in focus towards postsecondary education workshops, college tours, and other skills. Participation data for these years yielded the following results:

- **Dosage was higher for both cohorts in Year 1 than in Year 2. This is not surprising, as the Year 1 activities were often more fun and engaging than the workshops of Year 2.** This structure was intentional, as the emphasis on outdoor experiences during Year 1 aimed to foster a connection to the program, while the focus on skills development and postsecondary education during Year 2 was intended to prepare participants for their coming postsecondary transition.
- **The least attended of all of the seasonal trips for both cohorts was the Sierra backpacking trip (with 25 attendees from the 2012 cohort and 26 attendees from the 2013 cohort).** This trip took place the summer following participants' senior year in high school, a time likely to be busy with college preparation or work. This is in contrast to the first Deer Hill expedition, which had nearly full participation for both cohorts (one 2013 cohort participant did not attend) and made up more than half of the total program hours in Year 1.
- **While program dosage was nearly identical for the two cohorts in Year 1, in Year 2 participation trends began to diverge, with the 2012 cohort facing a greater decline in dosage.** In Year 1, both cohorts had average program dosage of 94% and average attendance per activity of about 32 participants. Though both cohorts saw a decrease in program hours completed in Year 2, average dosage for the 2012 cohort dropped to 78% (median 93%), while the 2013 cohort saw a less substantial decrease, to about 83% (median 98%). In turn, while average attendance per activity dropped only marginally to about 30 participants for the 2013 cohort, it fell to about 26 participants per activity for the 2012 cohort.

The Role of Incentives in Participation in Years 1 and 2

One strategy the program employed to encourage consistent participation in Years 1 and 2 was to offer incentives for high attendance. Each semester during the first two program years, attendance at REACH events was recorded. Participants with fewer than three absences by the summer of Year 2 were awarded either a laptop or money they could put towards a laptop they already owned or school supplies. Those with three or more absences were offered smaller sums of money to go towards school books, with the amount offered decreasing with more absences.

- In total, 81% of all REACH completers earned a fully funded laptop.
- Of those awarded free laptops, slightly more than half chose to accept the computer, while the remainder selected money towards a laptop upgrade or an academic voucher.

> **"They gave us…laptops and that was a huge incentive… it really was something that helped…I was very skeptical of being involved in a program like this and I think knowing that something was going to come out of it, even if I had no idea that it would have been as amazing as it did in a learning environment. Having the material incentive…really did help."**

Participation in Years 3 and 4

Program co-workers understood that students' availability to participate extensively in program activities would decrease and vary more as they entered different types of postsecondary institutions in dispersed locations. To accommodate this transition, they chose to decrease total program activities in Years 3 and 4, limiting academic year activities to monthly check-ins, and convening in person for seasonal trips during academic breaks. Participation during this period can be summarized as follows:

- **Though co-workers expressed concern that commitment to REACH would weaken as participants transitioned to postsecondary institutions, overall program dosage increased slightly from Year 2 to Year 3 (average 87%), and continued to rise in Year 4 (average 92%).** As discussed to a greater extent in the following chapter, participants tended to increasingly depend upon support from REACH programming to assist with the transition to postsecondary education. However, the first year of postsecondary schooling did occasionally pose challenges to continued program participation, which may in part explain the lower participation rates in Year 3 relative to Year 4. At least one interview respondent reported facing difficulties staying as connected during this time due to physical distance from fellow REACH participants and the demanding nature of the academic schedule.

- **As was the case in Year 2, in Year 3 the average attendance rate of the 2013 cohort was much higher than that of the 2012 cohort, though this gap began to close in Year 4 when attendance rose for both cohorts.** As can be seen in Exhibit IV-3, Year 3 average attendance at REACH activities was about 27 participants for the 2012 cohort and 31 participants for the 2013 cohort (of a possible 34 for each); in Year 4, 2012 cohort attendance jumped to about 31 participants on average, and to about 33 participants for the 2013 cohort.

- **While web lab dosage in Year 3 was around 81% on average across both cohorts (77% and 86% for the 2012 and 2013 cohorts, respectively), it rose in Year 4 to about 90% across both cohorts.** In Year 4 the web-based meetings transitioned from being primarily group workshops and seminars with specific topical focuses to one-on-one meetings between REACH co-workers and youth that catered more specifically to individual needs and mentorship. As discussed further below, many participants greatly valued the opportunity to check in one-on-one, thereby increasing the likelihood of more consistent participation.

2012 cohort dropped to 78% (median 93%), while the 2013 cohort saw a less substantial decrease, to about 83% (median 98%). In turn, while average attendance per activity dropped only marginally to about 30 participants for the 2013 cohort, it fell to about 26 participants per activity for the 2012 cohort.

Exhibit IV-3. Average Number of Participants Attending Activities by Cohort, Program Year, and Program Component

	2012 Cohort (N = 34)	2013 Cohort (N = 34)
Program Year		
Year 1	32	32
Year 2	26	30
Year 3	27	31
Year 4	31	33
Program Component		
Outdoor Experiences	29	31
Postsecondary Education	29	30
Financial Literacy	26	31
Health and Wellness	31	31

Source: Administrative participation data

Participation by Program Component

Though the REACH program consisted of six core components, specific activities were typically oriented around one of the following four: outdoor experiences, postsecondary education, financial literacy, and health and wellness. The other two program components, personal development and community involvement, were typically incorporated into the other activities.[41] This section therefore focuses primarily on these first four components.

We used survey and participation data mapped to the program calendar to consider the degree of variation in participation across program components. It is important to note that while a fairly clear map existed between activities and program components for Years 1 and 2, there was slightly less precise information available for Years 3 and 4. This discrepancy is in part because a number of the activities in the latter years were web labs, which tended to be more flexible and variable in content than activities in the first two years. With the understanding that the disaggregation of program hours by component includes some estimation, on the following page we present component-level participation in Exhibits IV-4 and IV-5 and we summarize our analysis of these findings.

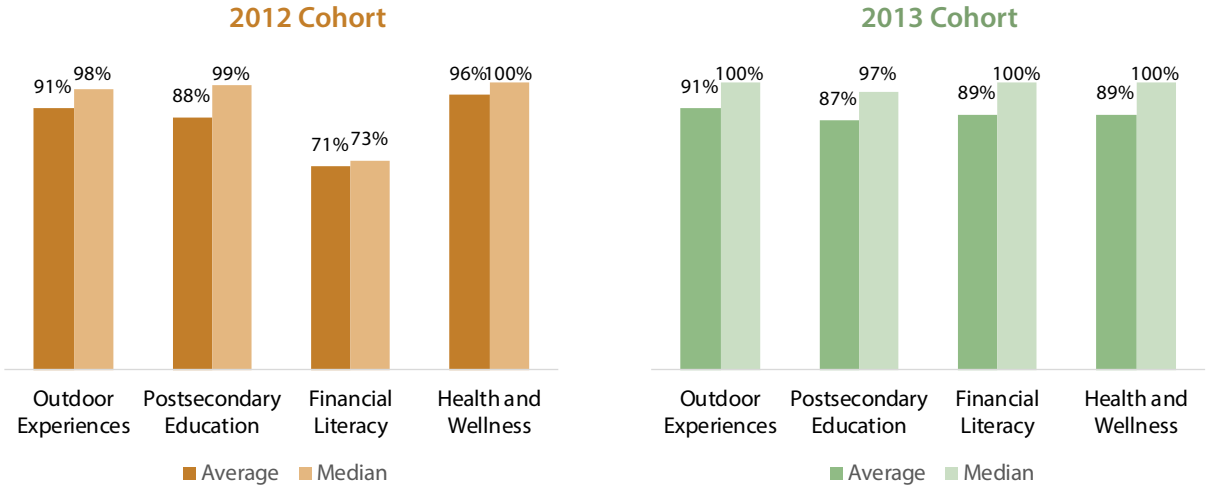
41 While it is generally the case that personal development and community involvement components were integrated into other activities, the main exceptions to this were the San Diego trip during Year 3 and some web labs that were explicitly concerned with personal development. However, data are limited for web lab schedules, and the San Diego trip makes up only a single trip, so considering personal development separately would not have been analytically rigorous.

Exhibit IV-4. Hours and Activities Offered by Cohort and Program Component

	2012 Cohort		2013 Cohort	
Program Component	Hours	Activities	Hours	Activities
Outdoor Experiences	1,180	10	1,180	10
Postsecondary Education	239	13	226	12
Financial Literacy	22	5	20	5
Health and Wellness	114	6	112	5

Source: Administrative participation data

Exhibit IV-5. Percentage of Program Participation by Cohort and Program Component



Source: Administrative participation data

- **Overall, dosage was higher for health and wellness activities (average of 92% for both cohorts) and outdoor experiences (average of 91%) than postsecondary education (average of 88%) or financial literacy activities (average of 80%).** This finding is consistent with the findings discussed above, where Year 2—when a larger portion of activities focused on financial literacy and postsecondary education—tended to see the lowest participation of all program years. Additionally, health and wellness activities had the highest proportion of participants completing 90% or more of possible service hours of any program component.
- **The 2013 cohort showed higher average attendance at REACH activities across nearly all program components (with the exception of health and wellness activities) than did the 2012 cohort.** Additionally, the 2013 cohort tended to show more consistency in attendance rates across program components, with average attendance at activities ranging from about 30 participants (postsecondary education) to about 31 participants per activity for the other components.

Comparatively, attendance for the 2012 cohort ranged from about 26 participants (financial literacy) to around 31 students (health and wellness).

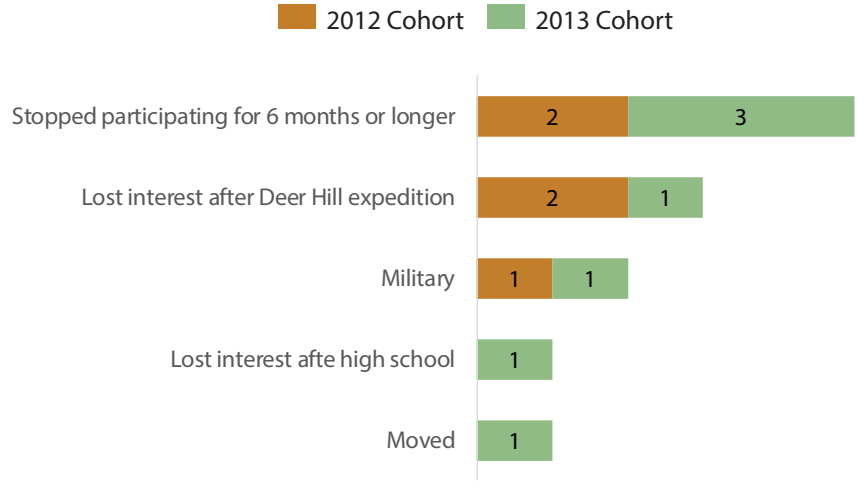
- **One of the few changes in the program calendar between the 2012 and 2013 cohort affected participation rates in each of these activities.** Though the schedule of most program activities remained constant across the two cohorts, the timing of the southern CA college tours was switched with that of the SAT preparation course for the 2013 cohort. First, the SAT preparation course moved from fall of senior year to spring of junior year in order to align services with participant needs as they were preparing for college. In turn, there was an increase in participation in the course from the 2012 cohort to the 2013 cohort. There was also, however, a corresponding decrease in participation in the southern California college tour trip. This change seems to reflect differences in overall participation between program Year 1 and Year 2 more than it does the specific nature of these activities.

- **The relatively weaker emphasis on community involvement compared to the other program components is reflected in the survey data.** A relatively lower proportion of participants reported having participated in service learning activities through REACH. This was particularly true for the 2012 cohort, as only 59% reported participating in these activities, compared to closer to 80% of the 2013 cohort.

Program Non-Completers

Overall retention was relatively high across both cohorts, with 85% of all original participants completing the program. Still, some participants did leave or get dropped from REACH: Five youth from the 2012 cohort and seven from the 2013 cohort were unable to complete the program. Though data about non-completers are limited, Exhibit IV-6 depicts the reasons listed for REACH non-completers leaving the program.

Exhibit IV-6. Reasons for Program Exit by Cohort



Source: Administrative participation data

- **About three-quarters of non-completers were dropped from the program either because they stopped participating in activities for six months or longer or they lost interest in REACH.** The remainder left either because they moved (8%) or joined the military (17%). REACH policy was such that anyone who failed to participate for six months or longer would be dropped from the program, accounting for nearly half of dropped participants. The majority of non-completers left the program before Year 3.

- **When reflecting upon non-completers, program co-workers commented that these participants tended not to be as good a fit for the program as others.** They noted that these students were often higher achievers in school and therefore less in need of program services, or they were already overcommitted and unable to commit fully to the program. However, due to the unavailability of participation data for non-completers, we cannot provide a more detailed assessment of their attributes.

Factors Influencing Program Retention

REACH co-workers aimed to establish commitment to the program early on and maintain engagement throughout its duration. The high participation rate across both groups points to their efforts being largely successful. When asked which elements most contributed to their engagement with and sustained participation in REACH, interview respondents pointed primarily to several key factors.

Retention in Years 1 and 2

In addition to the incentives described in the textbox presented previously, the following elements played an important role in retention in Years 1 and 2:

- **The frequency and varied content of program activities was effective in maintaining youth engagement during the first two years of the program.** Nearly half of the youth interviewed from both cohorts reported that the high volume of program activities kept them interested in REACH early on. The degree of variation in the types of activities further contributed to engagement and continued attendance, as did the opportunity to gain exposure to experiences to which participants may not otherwise have had access.

- **The bonds formed in the early stages of REACH kept youth engaged as the program continued into the next two years.** Though a very small portion of participants were unable to attend the Deer Hill expedition in its entirety, nearly all participated in some, if not all, of the trip. As was the hope with the program design, this allowed them to develop trust and form bonds with each other as they spent several weeks together in the wilderness—a first-time backpacking experience for many. Seven of the 16 interviewees reported that these connections were key to keeping them engaged in REACH throughout the

> **"[For the] first few years, I think it was really cool how we were just trying to build something, how we would go to trips and build our bonds with one another. That was something that motivated me. As high school students, we wanted to see different places and we got opportunities. Because some of us, like me, I never had the opportunity to go hiking until I met REACH, and that really opened up my eyes to a whole new world, basically. And I feel like that was really cool, something that kept us engaged."**

school year. As one participant said, "You made these really important friendships, especially the ones that you go on your first trip with. It was three weeks long and so you really get to know them."

- **The differing baseline academic standing between the two cohorts in part explains the variation in workshop attendance and engagement in Years 1 and 2.** One co-worker reflected that the program model was more successful with the 2013 cohort than with the 2012 cohort, as the "idea is that they take classes and apply that information together. That worked better for the [2013] youth…because they had [the] fundamental skills that they needed to apply.…The [2012] cohort… were struggling with basic things like academics. If you are getting D's in school, the issue is more about getting their grades up." This difference in characteristics between cohorts affected participants' ability to engage with program elements with a big-picture focus. Activities such as financial literacy workshops or postsecondary education workshops that focused on long-term planning may have been less appealing for those struggling academically, leading to lower participation in these activities for the 2012 cohort.

Internship and Commitment to REACH

The internships offered with REACH during Year 2 provided opportunities forthree participants per semester from the 2012 cohort to take on additional responsibility and contribute more time to the program. Interns took on heightened leadership roles among their peers, deepening their commitment to the program and their relationships with other participants.

> **"I think what really helped me a lot, because I'm a very quiet person sometimes until I get comfortable with someone, I'm able to continue to open up and continue to build up. But at the beginning, it's a lot for me to push myself out of my comfort zone. So I think being selected to be one of the interns helped me step out of my comfort zone and become more involved with everything in REACH."**

Retention in Years 3 and 4

- **Relationships with other participants and program co-workers continued to be a primary factor in maintaining engagement throughout the last two years of the program.** Nearly three-quarters of interview respondents cited the community they had built as being instrumental to their continued connection with the program in Years 3 and 4. Many referred to fellow participants and co-workers as their "REACH family," with one participant saying "I'm never gonna find that anywhere else.…This is my REACH family."

- **Web labs and one-on-one mentoring were commonly noted as key to engagement in the latter two program years, with a particular emphasis on opportunities to check in with someone trusted through the one-on-one meetings.** Six of the interviewed youth mentioned these activities as contributing strongly to continued engagement, highlighting both the importance of having regular check-ins with someone outside of their family through one-on-ones, and being able to stay connected to the rest of their cohort in the group meetings. The importance of the one-on-one meetings in particular is reflected in the increased participation rates across both cohorts in the final year of the program.

Reflections on Program Engagement

Despite the REACH program seeing high attendance at activities and participant-level completion of program hours, many participants said they wished they had engaged more deeply. Though they attended REACH trips and workshops, several interview respondents still felt that they did not emotionally commit to the program as early as they should have, and in turn they did not allow themselves to gain as much from the program as they believed possible. Participants said this was particularly true during the earlier phases of the program.

When asked if they would engage in the program differently if they could go back, a majority of youth who were interviewed said they would; only three said they would not do anything differently. This points to a trend of delayed value and gratitude for program services among participants. This phenomenon is exemplified in the disparity between the value many interview respondents noted they received from activities such as the financial literacy workshops offered during their senior of high school and actual attendance in these activities, which tended to be lower on average than other activities and program years. Their reflections further highlight the deep value that many participants found in REACH and emphasize the program's success in forming meaningful connections with participants.

> **"[If I could change how I would have engaged with REACH,] I think I would have been more engaged in the beginning. I wish I would have learned to appreciate everything that [REACH has] done for me and everything that it is for me earlier on instead of, I think, being so set in my own ways about it."**

V. Postsecondary Outcomes

V. Postsecondary Outcomes

> "REACH [was] always there for me. I feel like they never doubted our ability to be better than what we were. They always encouraged us to strive.…Where we come from, not a lot of people believe in us, and for somebody to come in here and to say, 'I believe in you, and I'm going to show you I believe in you,' was something I really do feel like REACH has done for us."

The goal of the REACH program was to help enable the youth in Santa Barbara County to reach their educational, career, and personal life goals. This chapter addresses postsecondary outcomes, an important outcome for the REACH program. We present outcomes focused on postsecondary enrollment and postsecondary success. To better understand how REACH participation benefited different groups of youth (e.g., by cohort), we disaggregated the data by high school GPA, type of postsecondary institution, parent income, and hours of service in each program activity.

Research Questions Focused on Postsecondary Outcomes

1. **To what extent do REACH participants achieve youth development and student achievement outcomes? How do outcomes differ by subgroups of students?** Key outcomes include postsecondary enrollment and postsecondary success:
   - Postsecondary enrollment:
     (A) Students have an understanding of the college track
     (B) Students have discovered fields of interest
     (C) Students have enrolled in postsecondary education
   - Postsecondary success:
     (D) Students have successfully transitioned to college
     (E) Students have achieved good academic standing/GPA
2. **To what degree do outcomes vary by participant characteristics, the frequency and type of program support they receive, and the type of academic institution they attend? What factors influence participants' satisfaction with the REACH program? What program aspects create the highest levels of satisfaction?**

Summary of Key Findings

- **Survey data show that from baseline to Year 3,** participants increased their understanding of college options and how to pay for college, as well as their likelihood of having career plans.
- **More than half (53%) of the participants enrolled in four-year institutions and nearly half (44%) enrolled in community colleges.** Participants from the 2013 cohort were more likely to be enrolled in four-year institutions, while those in the 2012 cohort more often attended community colleges.
- **Of the 19 participants from the 2012 cohort who were enrolled in two-year colleges when they completed the REACH program,** six later transferred to four-year colleges.
- **Fewer than half of the participants (40%) had GPAs of 3.0 or higher during their sophomore year in college.** Data on 20 REACH participants in the following year showed that 65% had either raised their GPAs or kept them constant.

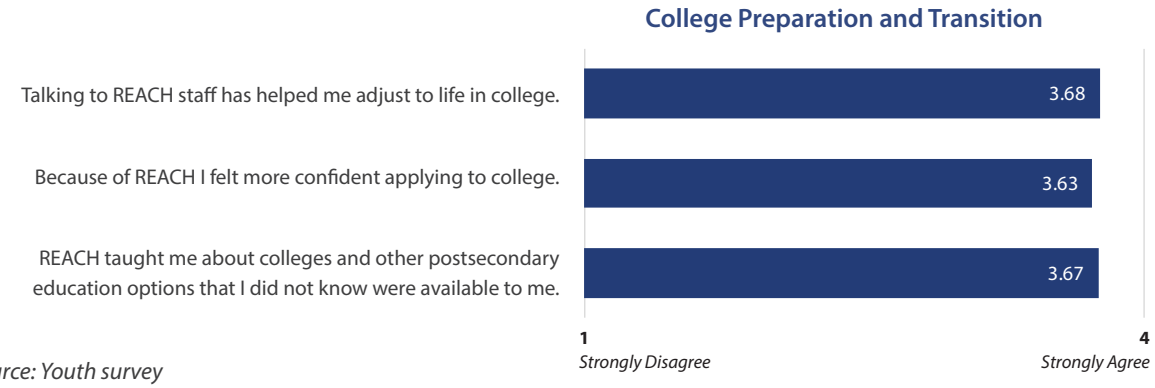
Postsecondary Outcomes

The REACH program emphasized postsecondary education as a critical pathway to future success and aimed to equip participants with information about college options and careers. In this section we highlight the strategies and approaches that participants identified as important to helping them reach their postsecondary goals. We have organized the findings according to the logic model outcomes of postsecondary **enrollment** (i.e., understanding the college track, discovering fields of interest, and postsecondary enrollment) and postsecondary **success** (i.e., transition to college and academic standing/GPA).

Postsecondary Enrollment Understanding of the College Track

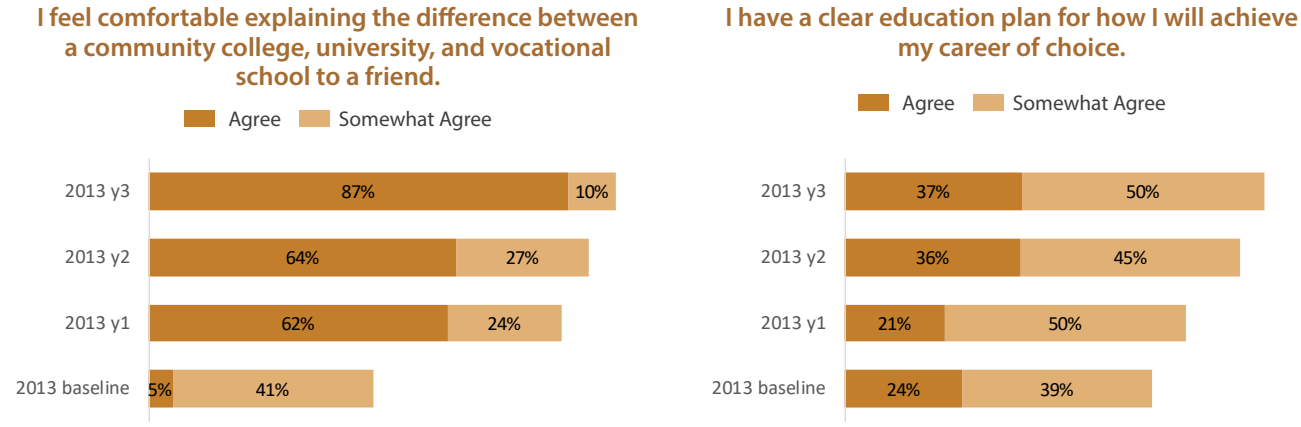
To assess the first outcome area—understanding of the college track—we looked at whether participants (a) increased their understanding of postsecondary options and resources; (b) felt more confident applying to college; (c) adjusted to life in college; and (d) understood which field of study to pursue in college. The vast majority of participants indicated that participation in REACH had a positive impact on these areas. To explore changes in their perceptions over time, we reviewed the data from the REACH program survey that was administered to the 2013 cohort (see Exhibit V-1 which shows survey results on a 4-point scale).

Exhibit V-1. Participants' Self-Reports of Program Effects on College Preparation and Transition



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit V-2. Participants' Self-Reports of College Preparation Over Time



Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

Key findings in this outcome area are as follows:

- **Participants reported gaining skills and knowledge from baseline to Year 3 on the differences between community colleges, universities, and vocational schools, as well as on how to achieve their career goals.**
- **The program supported participants in reaching their postsecondary goals in a variety of ways.** Program co-workers helped them see college as a postsecondary option by connecting them with resources, supporting them in making decisions about college, assisting them with college planning (i.e., helping them to pick the right classes), and demystifying the path to college by emphasizing its accessibility.

> "I didn't know anything about Cal State University and the difference between UCs and private college. But REACH was the one that actually provided… information."

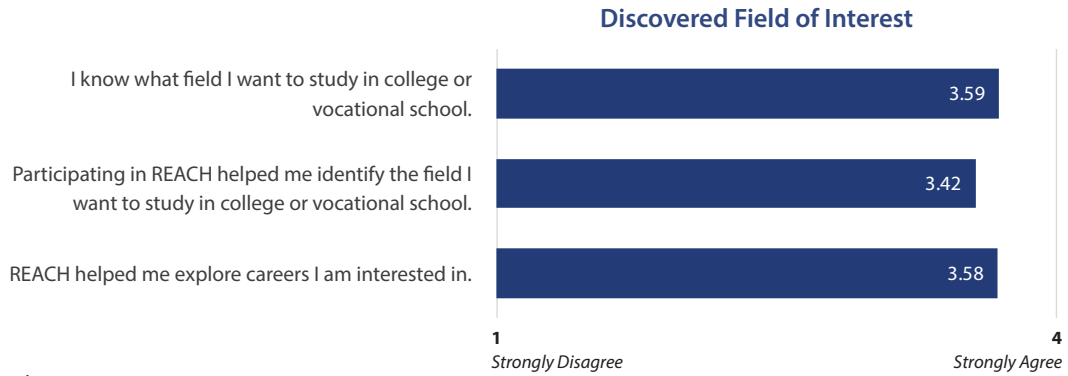
- **Program co-workers helped participants make informed decisions about college.** While participants said that they also received information about college from school counselors and other adults in their lives, they all mentioned that the REACH program played an important role in helping them gain essential information about college. Interviewees noted that, through REACH, they were introduced to college options that they had not considered and they gained significantly more knowledge about the types of colleges available. As described in earlier chapters, REACH accomplished this through workshops and targeted discussions about topics such as college requirements, paths to college, and financial aid, as well as by bringing participants on college tours.

- **Program co-workers assisted participants in the college application process.** REACH offered supports to educate participants about college applications, financial aid applications, SAT prep classes, personal statements, fee waivers, and so on. In interviews, two participants in particular mentioned that applying to college was one of the hardest things they had done, and that without the help from the co-workers—financially to apply for college and emotionally to navigate the process—they would not have even considered it.

Discovered Fields of Interest

The second outcome area—discovered field of interest—is concerned with understanding career options and how to achieve career goals. As shown in Exhibit V-3, survey data show that the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them identify career fields to study (3.59 on a 4-point scale), explore potential careers of interest (3.58), and know what fields they want to study (3.42).

Exhibit V-3. Survey Means for Discovering and Pursuing Fields of Interest Dimension



Source: Youth survey

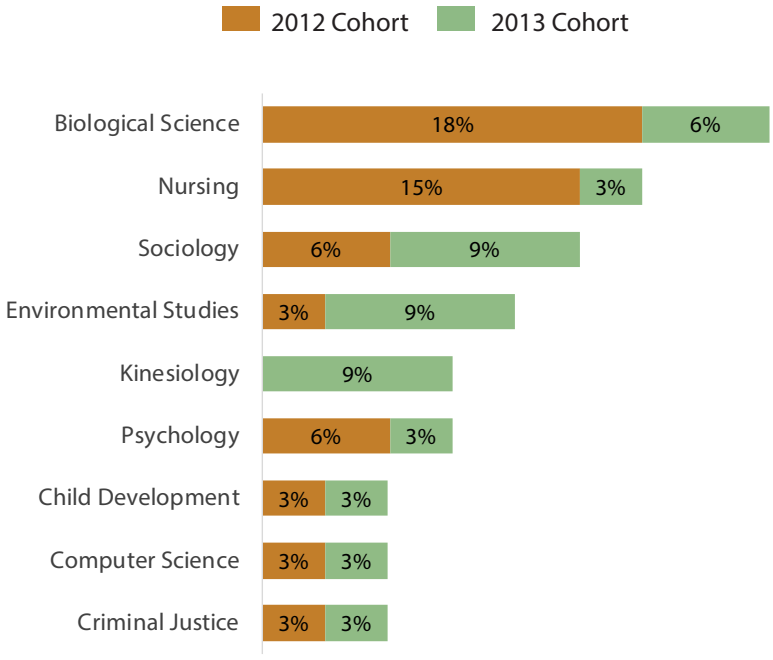
For six of the 16 interview respondents, exposure to outdoor experiences through the REACH program contributed to an interest in pursuing fields related to outdoor education and environmental science. One participant reflected,

> **"I'm going to pursue a career in outdoor education, and I'm not entirely sure what that looks like yet, but I'm double majoring in natural resources and education.…Before REACH, I kind of thought that I hated the outdoors.…What I learned from that first expedition with REACH with Deer Hill was how to appreciate those experiences and grow from them."**

Beyond identifying fields of interest, REACH also helped participants understand the pathways to particular careers. Specifically, they were informed about academic requirements that would allow them to achieve their career goals, and, in some cases, were advised to adjust their pathways appropriately. For example, one participant articulated how REACH helped him take the proper classes and move forward on a path to a nursing career:

> **"Without REACH, I wouldn't be able to make the right decisions, and maybe would just end up going to community college and taking, like, random classes. But they helped me to set up, like, goals, and to focus on what I want to do and to take the classes I [need]."**

Exhibit V-4. Most Common Majors Selected by Participants in Year 4



Source: Administrative scholarship data (N=54)

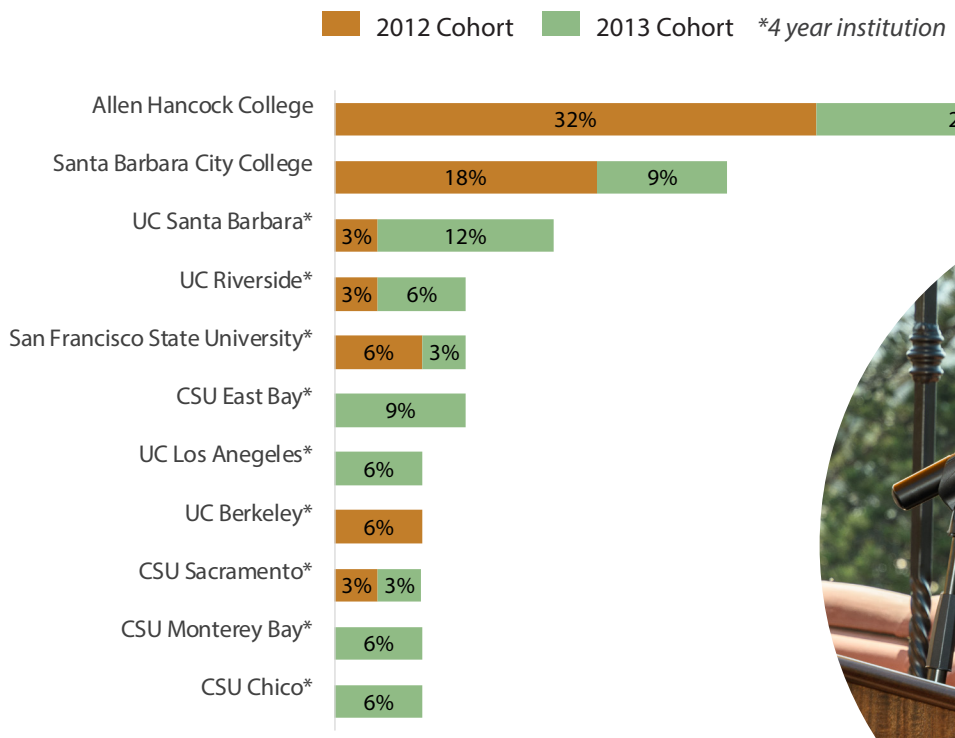
Enrollment in Postsecondary Education

The program was very successful in helping participants enroll in postsecondary education, as nearly all attended college after high school. More than half (53%) of the participants enrolled in four-year institutions and somewhat fewer (44%) enrolled in community colleges. Exhibit V-5 summarizes the most common institutions that participants were attending during their sophomore year.

Key findings are as follows:

- **The vast majority of participants (91%) attended college within the state of California.** Most commonly, they attended Allan Hancock College, a community college in Santa Maria, which is in northern Santa Barbara County. Among those attending the University of California (UC) system, the majority were at UC Santa Barbara.
- **There were distinct differences in types of colleges that students in each cohort attended.** More students from the 2013 cohort attended four-year institutions (67%) while a greater percentage of the 2012 cohort attended community colleges (56%).
- **The majority of participants from the lowest family income bracket attended a UC institution.** Specifically, more than two-thirds of students (68%, or 13 students) whose annual family income was less than $23,500 were attending a UC institution. Interestingly, students from families in the highest income bracket ($87,500 to $130,000) were more often attending community colleges (67%) than UC schools (33%).
- **Most participants enrolled in postsecondary education as full-time students.** Less than one-fourth (18%) enrolled as part-time students. More participants in the 2012 cohort than in the 2013 cohort reported part-time status (21% and 15%, respectively). This is at least partly explained by the fact that more students from the 2012 cohort were attending community colleges.
- **Participants had ambitious goals for their education.** More than half (53%) said they planned to pursue graduate degrees; about one-fourth (24%) planned to pursue bachelor's degrees; a smaller percentage (4%) were seeking associate's degrees. Those who attended four-year institutions wanted to pursue graduate degrees more often than those attending community colleges (69% and 37%, respectively).

Exhibit V-5. Most Commonly Attended Postsecondary Institutions in Year 4



Source: Administrative data (N=65)

In addition to the critical role that the REACH program played, several other factors helped participants decide on what colleges to apply to and where ultimately to enroll. These factors included location, cost, and college-specific program strengths.

- **Location:** Participants described location as a key factor in shaping their decisions about where to attend college. For some, being close to their families and communities was important; for others, living in a new place far from home was something they felt was an important part of the college experience.
- **Cost:** Participants cited cost as a key factor that influenced their choice of where to attend college. In some cases, this meant choosing not to attend a four-year university to which they had been accepted, and choosing instead to attend a two-year college.

> **"I knew financially that it [community college] was the best option for myself. I'm the type of person that I kind of want to do everything on my own, and kind of don't want to have to rely on a lot of support. And so that's how I knew that Santa Barbara City College was for me. I am determined that I will be able to transfer."**

"I'd have to say, it was mostly an economic choice [to attend community college]. It was the cheapest option for me."

- **Program strengths:** Several participants made their decisions based on the program strengths and offerings of specific colleges. Those who had a clear vision for what they wanted to study used this as a factor in weighing where to enroll.

"I wanted to find a school with an adventure education program, which a few have. But when I learned about Oregon State and the Adventure Leadership Institute here, I kind of felt like it was going to be the right place for me. And it definitely has."

Postsecondary Success Transition to Postsecondary Education

Research on college success indicates that students' experiences during their first year of college—inside and outside the classroom—are crucial to their academic achievement, personal development, and persistence. Thus, the transition to college marks a critical passage. If students do not thrive during this transition, their chances for success are greatly diminished.[42] Additional research shows that the need for college transition support is great for students whose characteristics are similar to those in the REACH program (i.e., those who are racial/ethnic minorities, are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and have parents who did not go to college).[43]

Overall, 87% agreed or strongly agreed that talking to REACH staff helped them adjust to life in college.

During interviews, REACH participants discussed their college transitions. For many—especially those who were first-generation college students—the adjustment was difficult. They described multiple transitions including academic, social, and cultural. One participant, for example, needed counseling to help with the transition:

"I think maybe what I needed at the end of high school and the beginning of college was some sort of counseling service, and I had a lot of issues on my own and trying to deal with that."

42 Terenzini, P. T., Rendon, L. I., Millar, S. B., Upcraft, M. L., Gregg, P. T., Jalomo, R., Jr., & Allison, K. W. (1996). Making the transition to college. In M. Weimer (Ed.), *Teaching on solid ground: Scholarship to improve practice* (pp. 43–74). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

43 National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *The condition of education* 2003 (NCES 2003-067). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Participants also described challenges adjusting to the academic requirements in college. Eleven out 16 interviewees reported that they were not where they wanted to be academically; only three said they were happy with where they were.[44] Others reported challenges that included being homesick and not feeling connected to the college community. In addition, five out of the 16 interviewees expressed serious concerns about their financial stability and how that might affect their ability to stay in school. They expressed concerns that working off campus was taking time away from school and that they might not graduate. Others felt that changes in their living situations and the high cost of rent might impact their ability to reach their goals.

> **"I worry a lot about financial stability in the transition period between when I graduate and when I try to find a job. I worry about the financial stability then because I need money to get a house, get a place to live, while I get the job. But I'm also worried about, how do I save up for that? How do I save up for a car if all of my income right now is going towards food and living expenses for myself? I earn $400 per month but most of it is gone by the end of the month."**

By Year 4, when participants were in their sophomore year of college, most (10 out 16) said that they had survived the transition process, college was going well, and things were significantly better than in their first year. Many of the issues raised during their transitions were largely addressed by this second year, including developing a social network and gaining time management and study skills. Notably, several participants said it took several months to a year for them to find their place within the school community. After doing so, they felt they "fit in" with larger school.

REACH recognized the importance of supporting students as they transition to college, and structured the program to ensure ongoing engagement in program activities during the first two years. The supports REACH provided ranged from an academic counselor, support and community in the face of homesickness, help finding solutions for problems, and assistance with learning how to live independently. Furthermore, participants had access to mentors who met with them regularly through virtual, online trainings and regularly scheduled one-on-one check-ins. Because of REACH, participants believed they had a strong support system in place to help them transition to college. As one participant said,

> **"If I run into a problem, I just talk to Ken [Gates]."**

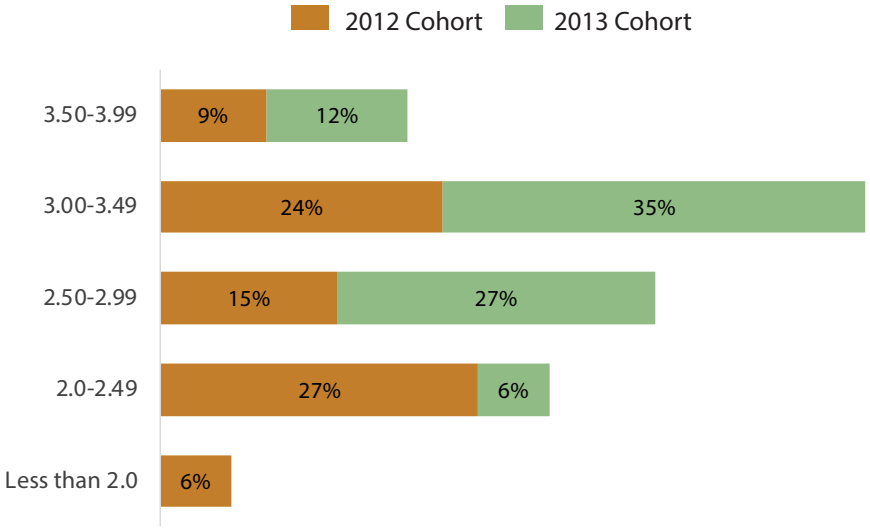
44 Note that standards for "acceptable GPA" varied widely as some youth with high GPAs (e.g., 3.8) reported that they were not were not happy with where they were academically; others with a 2.0 GPA admitted that they could do better.

Academic Success and Grade Point Average

Research shows that indicators of postsecondary success include GPA, adequate credit load, and passing general education courses without the need for remediation within the first two years of college.[45] Indicators of being on track to graduate from a four-year college include maintaining a 3.0 GPA or higher and attending college full time as indicated by earning 30 credits within the first year. Working 20 hours or less is also an indicator of postsecondary success.

Our analysis does not allow us to make definitive assessments about the extent to which students were on track to graduate from four-year colleges by the end of the REACH program. However, to gain insight into the potential for postsecondary success, we relied on participants' GPAs during their sophomore year, their full-time versus part-time enrollment in college, their work hours, and their self-perceptions of college success.[46] We describe findings on these measures here.

Exhibit V-6: Participants' GPAs in Sophomore Year in College



Source: Administrative scholarship data, youth survey (N=60)

We examined participants' GPAs at the culmination of the REACH program, at the end of their second year of postsecondary education. Key findings, as shown in Exhibit V-6, are as follows:

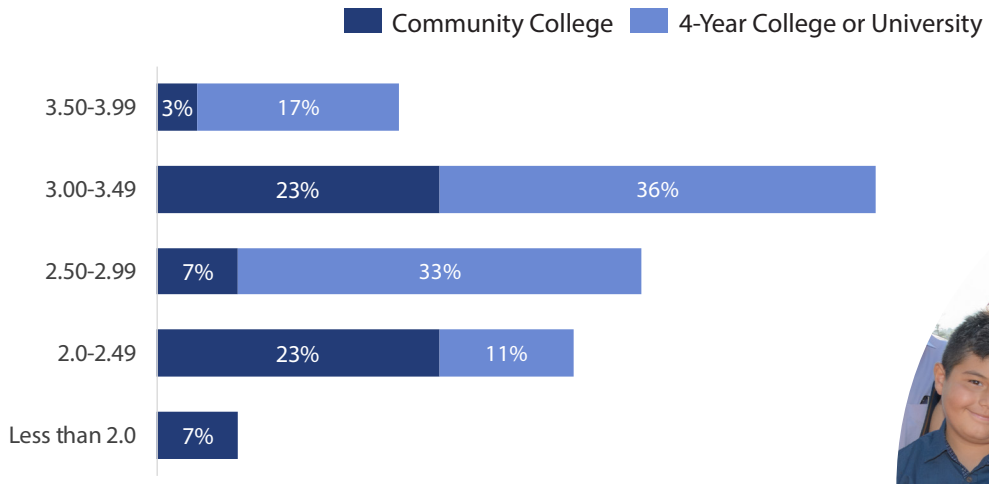
- **Fewer than half of the participants (47%) had GPAs of 3.0 or higher.** When examined by cohort, a slightly higher percentage of the 2013 cohort achieved a 3.0 GPA or higher (39%) than the 2012 cohort (33%).

45 Moore, C., & Shulock, N. (2009). *Student progress toward degree completion: Lessons from the research literature*. Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy; Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., & Coca, V. (2009). College readiness for all: The challenge for urban high schools. The Future of Children, 19(1), 185–201.

46 GPA data were the most accessible measure of academic proficiency while the participants were in college. We utilized self-report data about work hours and full-time versus part-time enrollment. Reliable data about passing general education courses without the need for remediation within the first two years of college were not available for this analysis.

- **The 2012 cohort appeared to struggle in college relative to the 2013 cohort.** The largest segment (27%) of the 2012 cohort had a GPA between 2.0 and 2.49 during their sophomore year. In contrast, the largest segment of the 2013 cohort (35%) earned between a 3.0 and 3.49 GPA.
- **When we examined GPA by type of institution, we found that a greater percentage of participants in four-year institutions had GPAs of 3.0 or higher.** As shown in Exhibit V-7, participants in community colleges had a wider distribution of GPA ranges, with more participants in the lower range (2.0 to 2.49).

Exhibit V-7. Postsecondary GPA by Institution Type



Source: Administrative scholarship data, youth survey (N=60)

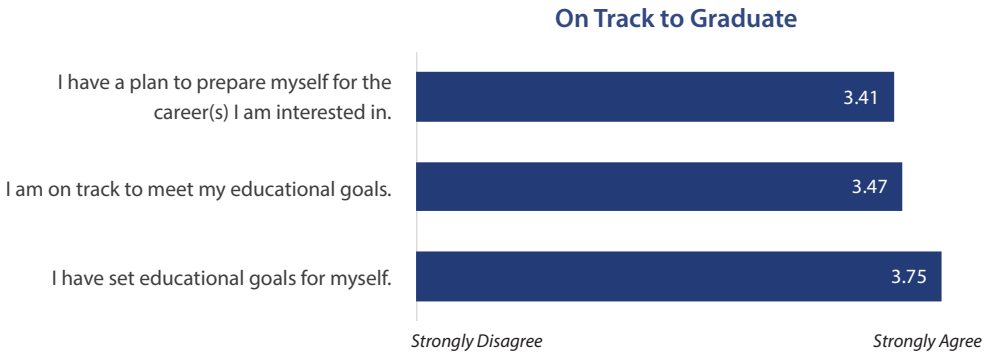
Recognizing it as a predictor of postsecondary success, we assessed the extent to which participants maintained full-time enrollment during college. More than two-thirds (68%) of REACH participants enrolled in college full time, while 18% enrolled part time.

We also analyzed work status. As mentioned in Chapter III, 7% of participants worked 40+ hours a week during their first two years of college. These students were all enrolled at community colleges and maintained GPAs between 1.87 to 3.40. An additional 22% of students worked 20 to 39 hours per week. These students maintained higher GPAs.

At program completion, 35% of participants had maintained GPAs of 3.0 or higher, enrolled full time in college, and maintained a full-time course load. The profile of these participants indicates that they were on track to graduate. In contrast, 3% of students were enrolled part time, maintained a GPA of 2.0 or less, and worked more than 20 hours per week. The profile of these participants indicates that they were at risk of not graduating from a four-year college. Additionally, 16% were missing at least one piece of GPA, work or enrollment data. The remaining 46% appear to be on a path toward graduating though vulnerable to veering off track. Their GPAs range from 2.18-3.26, their hours per week worked range from 0-40, and

they primarily attend school full time (72%).[47] These individuals are difficult to definitively categorize: their indicators reflect a mixed profile (for example, a high GPA but part time enrollment with a high workload).

Exhibit V-8. Survey Means for On Track to Graduation Dimension



Source: Youth survey

To better understand participant perspectives about whether they were on track to graduate from college, we examined their self-perceptions of success in college through survey and interview data. More than 80% of survey completers agreed or strongly agreed that they were on track to graduate and were clear about their goals for the future. This yielded mean agreement ratings of 3.47 and 3.75 on a 4-point scale, respectively (Exhibit V-8).

Because of the intensity of support provided by REACH, we examined the relationship, if any, between dosage (hours of participation) and feelings about being on track to graduate. We expected that the greater the dosage, the more participants would agree or strongly agree with the survey questions related to college success. This was true for some survey questions but not for others.

The data make clear that even a little exposure to the program made a difference to indicators of being on track to graduate, such as understanding how to pay for college and identifying education and career goals. For questions about setting educational goals, we saw a positive relationship between dosage and self-perceptions of success. However, for questions related to paying for college, this was one area where increased dosage did not appear to make a difference.

> **"Being able to set up goals has definitely been something that they've really helped with—like short-term goals and long-term goals."**

47 GPAs above 3.0 are for those enrolled in school part time (3 participants), and those working 20 or more hours per week have GPAs above 2.0 (18 participants).

Post-Program Academic Progress for the 2012 Cohort

We obtained and analyzed GPA data for 20 out of 34 members of the 2012 cohort during their junior year in college, one year after they completed the REACH program. (Data were not available for the remaining 14 completers.)

- Thirteen (65%) showed an increase in their GPAs or their GPAs remained constant.
- Six (30%) transferred from community colleges to four-year universities. All but one of these participants had an increase in GPA after transfer.
- Only one participant had a GPA below a 2.0.
- In all, 60% of these 20 participants will enter their senior year of college in the fall of 2017.

VI. Youth Development Outcomes

VI. Youth Development Outcomes

Youth development theory provided a core, underlying philosophy that drove many REACH activities. At its heart is the use of a holistic approach to support growth through a diverse mix of supports and opportunities. In this chapter, we summarize youth development outcomes.[48]

Research Questions on Youth Development Dimensions

1. **To what extent do REACH participants achieve youth development and student achievement outcomes? How do outcomes differ by subgroups of students?**

   Community and Peer Assets
   - Sense of belonging
   - Ongoing relationships with caring adults

   Personal Development
   - Self-confidence
   - Desire to learn/intrinsic motivation
   - Ability to plan and set goals
   - Ability to problem solve
   - Self-awareness

Youth development theory provided a core, underlying philosophy that drove many REACH activities.

48 We defer discussion of additional outcomes of interest (outdoor experiences, financial literacy, health and wellness, community involvement) to Chapter VII.

In this section we provide a detailed overview of the survey findings organized by each youth development dimension.[49]

Community and Peer Assets

Experiencing emotional as well as practical support from peers and adults in one's environment is widely and consistently understood to impact the healthy development of youth.[50] As detailed in Chapter II, REACH purposefully implemented practices that would create opportunities for youth to experience both a sense of belonging and ongoing relationships with caring adults. In this section we examine how the participants experienced these intended outcomes.

Sense of Belonging

Cultivating a sense of belonging among participants in youth development programs has been shown to be critical for supporting their engagement and helping them become receptive to support and guidance. A sense of belonging is also an important protective factor for facilitating the positive development of youth. In particular, youth who feel a sense of belonging are less likely to seek negative opportunities for belonging.[51]

> **"When I felt like I didn't really have a support system, there [were] people from REACH that I could talk to…"**

49 The SPR youth survey included a series of questions intended to assess each dimension of youth development outcomes. We used questions drawn from previously developed, as well as questions designed in collaboration with the REACH Advisory Committee, to construct scales measuring outcomes in each of these areas. These sources, scales, and validation measures are described at length in Appendix F.

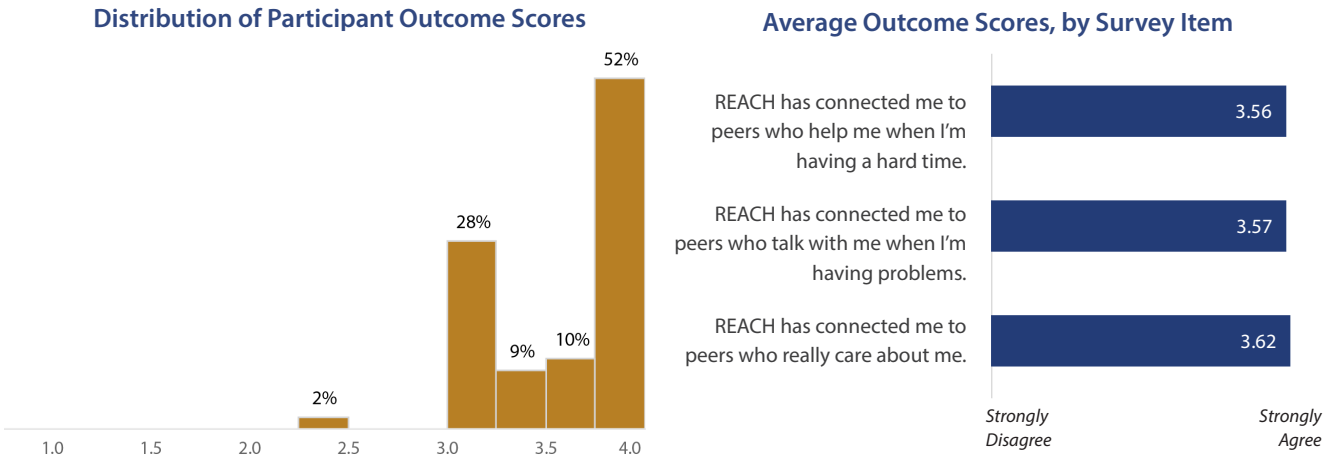
50 Gambone, M. A., Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2002). *Finding out what matters for youth: Testing key links in a community action framework for youth development.* Philadelphia, PA: Youth Development Strategies.

51 Newman, B. M., Lohman, B. J., & Newman, P. R. (2007). Peer group membership and a sense of belonging: Their relationship to adolescent behaviour problems. *Adolescence,* 42(166), 241–263; Drolet, M., & Arcand, I. (2013). Positive development, sense of belonging, and support of peers among early adolescents: Perspectives of different actors. *International Education Studies,* 6, 29–38. doi: 10.5539/ies.v6n4p29.

Summary of Key Findings

- **Participants had a positive view of the REACH program across all dimensions of youth development.** The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed with statements about how the program helped them in each of the youth development outcome areas.
- **The dimensions with the highest survey ratings were self-confidence and the desire to learn/intrinsic motivation.** For both of these dimensions, a high proportion of participants believed REACH had improved not only how they perceived themselves but also their ability to do things that they did not previously feel they were capable of.
- **There was greater variation in survey responses along three dimensions: sense of belonging, ability to plan and set goals, and ability to problem solve.** While the majority of participants reported high scores on each of these dimensions, a few did not. These participants may have had a difficult time transitioning to postsecondary education, were unclear about their long-term goals, and/or were not entirely confident about how to address some of the enormous challenges they identified, such as financial stability.
- **Results for "caring relationships with adults" also showed positive outcomes, but there was variation in the number who agreed and strongly agreed with the related statements.** This was surprising, given that the qualitative data showed that participants overwhelmingly appreciated how their mentors and program staff helped them navigate college and life circumstances.

Exhibit VI-1. Sense of Belonging Outcome Scores[52]



Source: Youth survey

As depicted in Exhibit VI-1, the majority of participants who responded to the survey reported feeling a strong sense of belonging in the REACH program. The mean scores for this dimension showed moderate to high agreement (3.56 to 3.62 on a 4-point scale) on associated survey questions. For example, most agreed that the program connected them to peers who really cared about them, yielding a mean score of 3.62.

Key REACH practices to promote a sense of belonging included using a cohort model to create a network of REACH participants who supported each other through their college experiences, sharing life experiences through group activities, and team-building activities that helped youth develop communication skills. Furthermore, program co-workers were described as attentive and supportive, which youth said promoted their sense of belonging.

Ongoing Relationships with Caring Adults

Positive youth development is dependent upon the quality of the relationships that youth are able to form with adults; these relationships create a space for trusting communication and an openness to adult guidance. Research has found that youth define their attachment to programs in relationship to the presence of caring adults.[53]

Survey responses on this dimension leaned favorably towards the program, as nearly all youth strongly agreed there was "at least one person on REACH staff who really cares about me" (Exhibit VI-2).

52 For example, 52 percent of participants gave an average score between 3.75 and 4.0 for questions related to Sense of Belonging.

53 Pittman, K., & Cahill, M. (1992). *Pushing the boundaries of education: The implications of a youth development approach to education policies, structures and collaborations.* Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcek12/51/

One participant described his relationship with Ken Gates, program director and mentor as follows:

> **"[He is] a mentor I can talk to, a friend who I can trust, a person who can listen to what I have to say and either just listen—'cause that really helps a lot—or also give me some advice of what I can do. Or someone who just says, "Hey, have a good day." I can see Ken [Gates] isn't just doing this for the REACH program. He actually cares about me, and that's pretty cool."**

Additionally, data suggest that participation in REACH contributed to participants' ability to cultivate supportive relationships with other adults in their lives. Seven of the 16 interview respondents reported that having a strong relationship with their REACH mentors helped them feel more confident approaching people in positions of authority. One student reflected that his experience in REACH helped him realize that the adults in his life "aren't burdened by him," which made him feel more confident in reaching out for help. Related to this, participants reported that REACH helped them develop the confidence and skills to develop mentor relationships with other adults in their lives. A full 100% of 2013 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case.

The REACH program viewed relationship- and trust-building between co-workers and youth as an essential first step to creating trusting relationships. For example, co-workers modeled program activities, including life-sharing exercises. Likewise, formal and informal one-on-ones with youth were used as an opportunity to address personal issues in their lives, and outdoor expeditions and group projects in Ecuador provided the time and space to build relationships further. By creating an atmosphere of trust, program co-workers were able to honestly, respectfully, and calmly address challenges that participants faced throughout the program. This trust also enabled youth to feel they could ask for help in handling challenging situations.

Exhibit VI-2. Ongoing Relationships with Caring Adults Outcome Scores[54]

Source: Youth survey

54 As explained in Appendix F, the survey items for the ongoing relationships with caring adults dimension were sourced from multiple survey areas in order to most specifically address outcome areas of interest using the fewest possible questions, and are therefore considered individually rather than as a scale.

Personal Development

Providing opportunities for participants to cultivate assets such as the youth and personal development outcomes emphasized by REACH is critical to supporting their psychological and emotional development and preparing them to navigate the challenges that life brings.[55] Here, we integrate our reporting of the youth development outcomes and the personal development outcomes that REACH intends for its participants.[56]

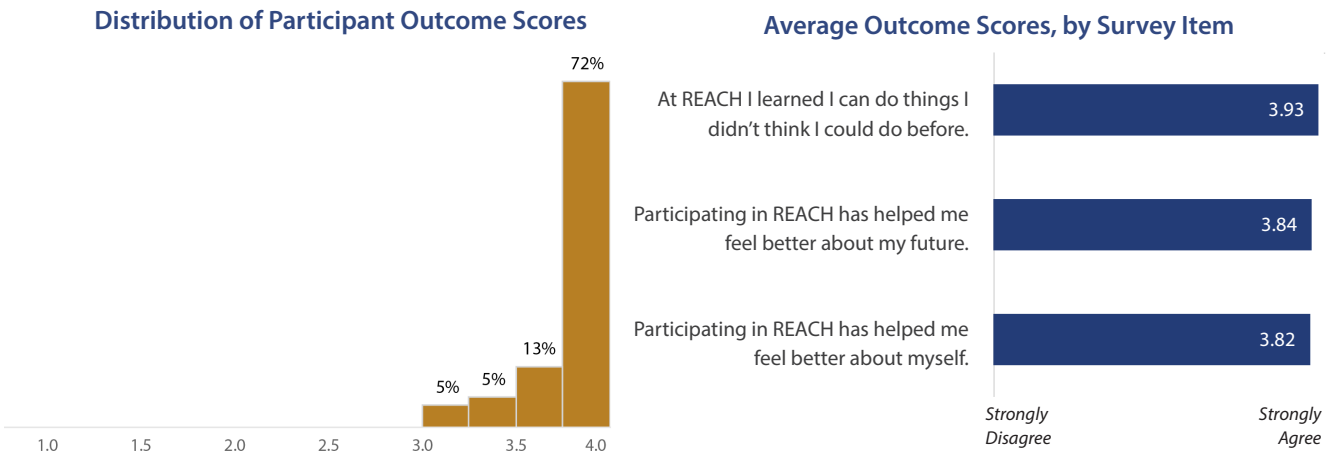
Self-Confidence

The vast majority of participants felt that the program helped them feel more confident about themselves, recognize their own potential, and feel motivated to strive for more. One participant articulated this shift as follows:

> **"[REACH] has helped me notice the potential I have and the influence that I am capable of transmitting. That I do have the capabilities, that I do have the skills—the skills and techniques to be able to execute anything that I put my mind to."**

Among youth who responded to the survey, nearly 90% agreed or strongly agreed that participating in REACH had helped them feel better about themselves and their future (3.82 and 3.84 on a 4-point scale, respectively; see Exhibit VI-3). As often, participants said they learned they could do things they had not thought they could do before (3.93). The program achieved this by providing ongoing mentoring support and coaching as well as clear opportunities for participants to succeed and recognize their own successes through experiences like executing community projects and applying to college. Outdoor expeditions and the Ecuador trip also supported this outcome by creating opportunities for youth to challenge themselves in new environments and by working on projects that they could see through to completion.

Exhibit VI-3. Self-Confidence Outcome Scores



Source: Youth survey

55 Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. A. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

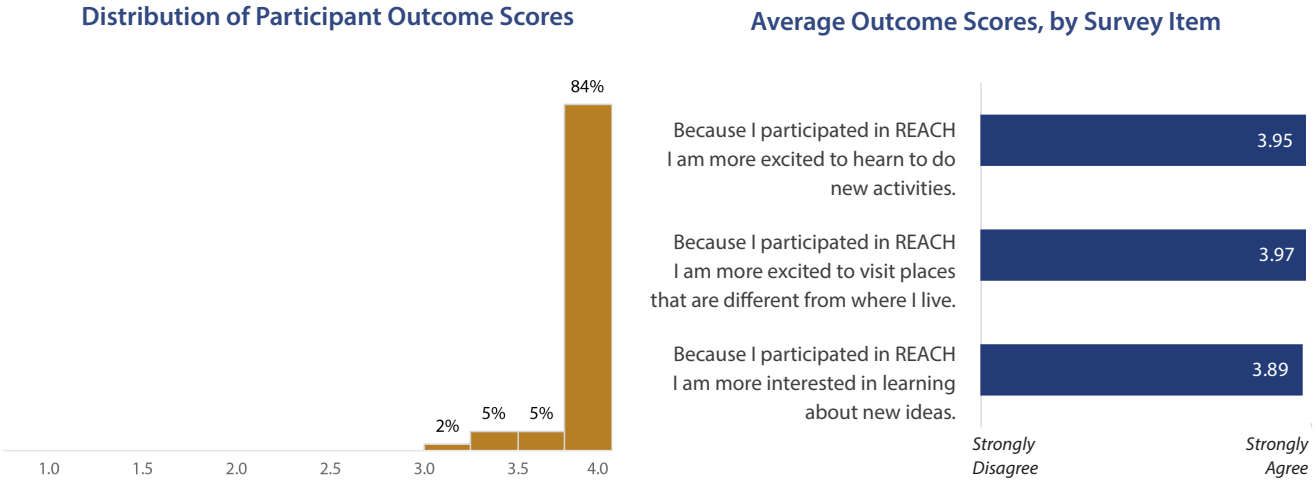
56 The REACH logic model identifies self-awareness, self-direction, and self-management as the short-term outcomes associated with personal development. We report directly on self-awareness in this chapter. We also report on dimensions associated with self-direction (desire to learn/intrinsic motivation, ability to problem solve) and self-management (ability to plan and set goals).

Desire to Learn/Intrinsic Motivation

Fostering motivation to learn among young people supports positive development and establishes a foundation for improved performance and persistence as well as increased engagement in learning.[57] The REACH program aimed to foster an enthusiasm for learning and provide a safe environment for trying new things. REACH participants reported that the program had a positive impact on their desire to learn (3.95 on a 4-point scale). Overall, this dimension received the highest score on the survey, as nearly all youth agreed or strongly agreed with the statements on this topic. As shown in Exhibit VI-4, participants indicated that the program provided them with rich opportunities to learn new skills and be exposed to new places. In his interview, one participant articulated that the program supported him to develop an orientation toward learning and exploration.

> **"I feel like that's something I've learned through REACH. Always asking and always learning. You can never learn too much. It's always about learning and exploring new things."**

Exhibit VI-4. Desire to Learn/Intrinsic Motivation Outcome Scores



Source: Youth survey

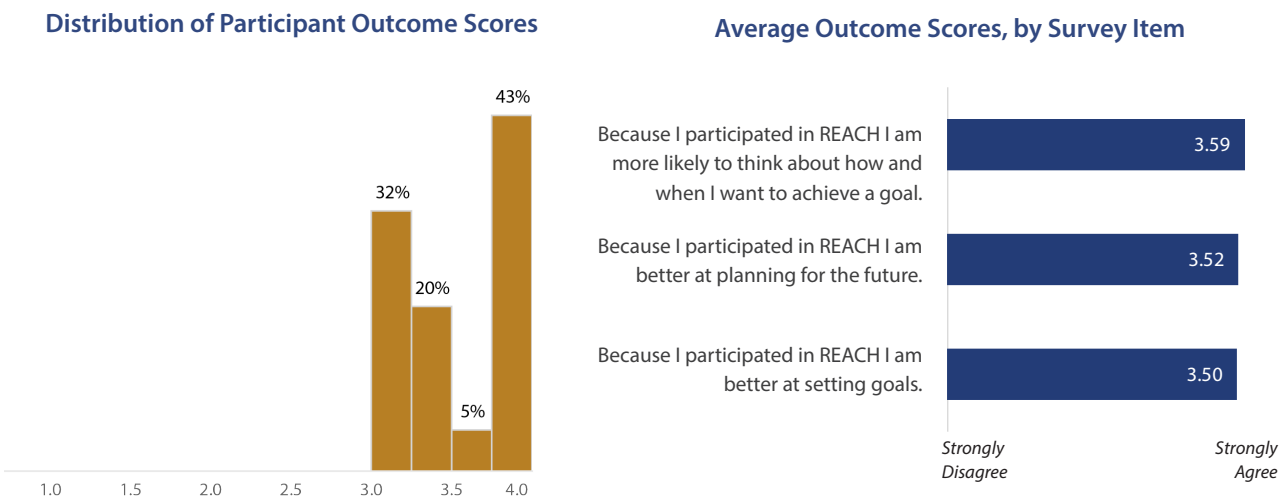
57 Larson, R. W., & Rusk, N. (2011). Intrinsic motivation and positive development. In R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner, & J. B. Benson (Eds.), *Advances in child development and behavior* (Vol. 41, pp. 89–130). Burlington, MA: Academic Press.

Ability to Plan and Set Goals

REACH participants were taught how to set goals and why goal setting is important for life planning. The program designers believed that setting goals could facilitate motivation and promote achievement in postsecondary education and careers. Survey questions associated with this dimension received mixed responses compared to other outcomes, however (Exhibit VI-5). About half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements on whether they were setting goals and were good at planning for their future (3.5 and 3.52, respectively, on a 4-point scale). This finding was somewhat inconsistent with interview data, which showed that participants felt that REACH played a significant, influential role in helping them set short- and long-term goals for postsecondary education.

While participants articulated a variety of influences on their goals in college, such as family, peers, and early experiences, 14 out of the 16 youth we interviewed felt that REACH had been the most influential factor. Participants also reported that program co-workers helped them aim higher when setting goals, including by encouraging them to apply to four-year institutions.

Exhibit VI-5. Ability to Plan and Set Goals Outcome Scores



Source: Youth survey

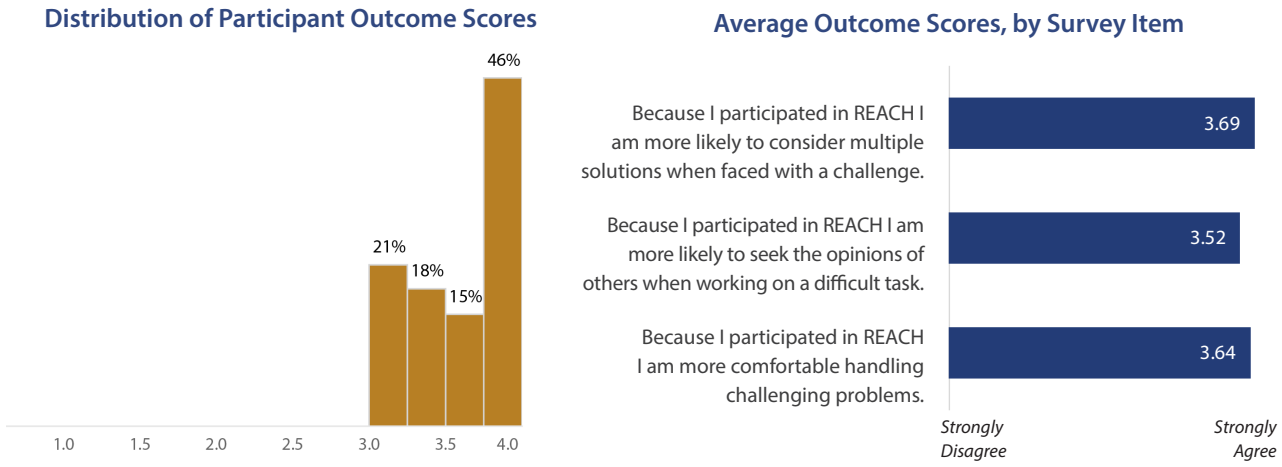
Ability to Problem Solve

The REACH program sought to help participants acquire problem-solving skills that would promote postsecondary and future success. Survey questions associated with this dimension received high scores, ranging from 3.52 to 3.69 on a 4-point scale (Exhibit VI-6). The most common indicators of increased problem-solving skills were:

> **I don't know if there's a day that goes by that I don't use a skill or some sort of knowledge that I've learned through the REACH [program].**

- **Becoming self-advocates.** Three interviewed youth described developing the capacity to advocate for themselves, including seeking resources and asking questions.
- **Learning how to ask for help** was an important skill for many REACH participants. One participant summarized their understanding of this outcome by saying, "Use your resources, never be afraid to ask, because what is the worst thing that's going to happen?"
- **Learning how to be resourceful.** An essential skill identified by REACH participants, especially during the transition to postsecondary education, was learning how to be resourceful. One said, "I think really what REACH did to sort of help me with that transition was to teach us how to find the resources that we needed—to not be afraid to ask for help, but also just make sure to sort of find a good fit and not settle for something that wasn't going to be ideal.

Exhibit VI-6. Ability to Problem Solve Outcome Scores

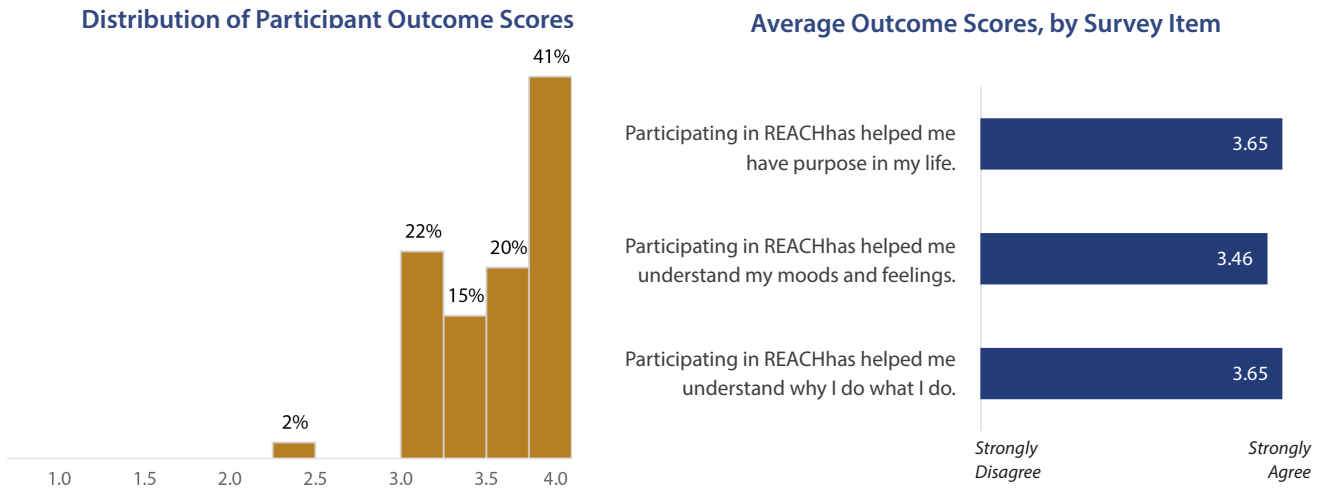


Source: Youth survey

Self-Awareness

Participants were mixed in their responses about the extent to which the REACH program increased their self–awareness. Just over half of survey respondents strongly agreed that participating in REACH had helped them "understand why I do what I do," and "have purpose in my life," while about one-third agreed. This yielded a mean score of 3.65 for each (Exhibit VI-7).

Exhibit VI-7. Self-Awareness Outcome Scores



Source: Youth survey

Interestingly, in interviews participants spontaneously talked about their own awareness of themselves in relation to leadership and the group dynamic. Five of the 16 described gaining a deeper understanding of their personal approach to leadership including how their actions impacted the group.

> **"I noted, as the years went on, and the program started to go onto its second, third, and fourth years, I noticed that I had a big leadership role in our group, that I started to back away and kind of let other people that might not be as talkative or loud of a leader as I am, and let them have their voice, and prove to themselves, I can lead too."**

VII. Other Outcomes

VII. Other Outcomes

> REACH opened doors that I didn't even know I wanted open.

While academic and youth development outcomes formed the crux of the analysis for this report, these areas alone do not fully convey the success of REACH in contributing to the development of participants as "whole people," as the program founders intended. In order to provide a more holistic consideration of how the program affected participants, we additionally assessed short-term outcomes related to REACH's other four program components: outdoor experiences, financial literacy, health and wellness, and community involvement. Success of these program components can manifest in a wide range of outcomes, from the formation of concrete skills, such as an understanding of basic money management principles, to more abstract developments including an enhanced ability to be an effective member of a team.

Similar to the analyses presented in the preceding outcomes chapters, to examine these outcomes we assessed SPR survey question responses, the results of a series of REACH-implemented surveys of the 2013 cohort (implemented once a year from baseline until the end of Year 3), and participant interview data. This allowed us to develop an understanding of outcomes in each of the above program components and to further analyze differences across various participant characteristics. Due to the limited number of survey questions for each dimension, we aggregated responses into scales for only a portion of the outcome dimensions of interest (see Appendix E for a complete list of disaggregated survey results, and Appendix F for details on scales).

Research Questions on Other Outcomes

1. **To what extent do participants achieve intended short-term outcomes, such as skills related to outdoor experiences, financial literacy, health and wellness, and community involvement?**

2. **To what degree do outcomes vary by participant characteristics? By the frequency and type of program support they receive?**

Summary of Key Findings

- **Participants reported largely positive outcomes across outdoor experiences, financial literacy, health and wellness, and community involvement program components.** For any given statement related to these program components, no more than four survey respondents reported that they disagreed, instead showing agreement or strong agreement nearly across the board.
- **The "sense of environmental connection" dimension saw the most positive survey outcomes.** These results were reflected in positive changes in 2013 cohort perspectives over time and through interview responses highlighting heightened affinity towards nature.
- **Health and wellness and financial literacy had more mixed outcomes than the other program components discussed in this chapter.** Questions pertaining to having a plan to fund college showed the weakest results of all of the dimensions assessed.
- **There was no discernible trend between changes in program component dosage and participant outcomes in the corresponding area for any of the components discussed in this chapter.**
- **There were differences in outcomes by cohort, participants' baseline GPAs, and family income level.** The 2013 cohort reported higher outcomes on every dimension compared to the 2012 cohort. Participants with GPAs below 3.0 at baseline reported more positive outcomes than those with higher baseline GPAs in nearly all areas. Participants from higher income households at baseline had more positive outcomes in all components except financial literacy.

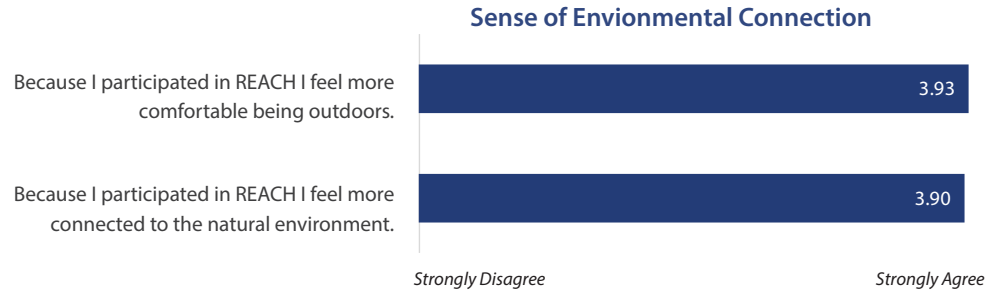
Outdoor Experiences

Outdoor experiences were a major component of REACH, making up more than half of the total program hours offered. These experiences functioned as the point of entry into the program, and they provided opportunities for participants to foster skills and leadership development and to reconnect after time had passed. The central role of outdoor experiences was reflected both in participant interviews and in survey results. Youth repeatedly mentioned the degree to which they enjoyed these experiences, and eight of the 16 said they considered them to be the most valuable activities that REACH provided.

Based on the intended outcomes that the REACH program identified as associated with outdoor experiences, we looked more closely at the role they played in shaping the following short-term outcomes of interest: building a sense of environmental connectedness, strengthening the ability to manage risks, and enhancing the ability to be an effective member of a team. We discuss each in turn.

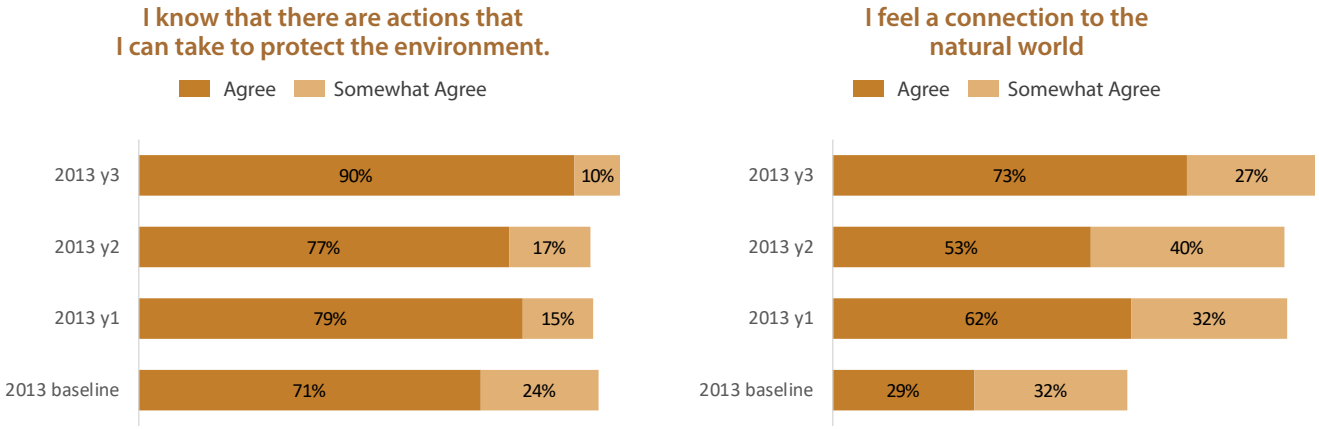
Sense of Environmental Connectedness

Exhibit VII-1. Participants' Sense of Environmental Connection



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit VII-2. Survey Results for Sense of Environmental Connection by Program Year



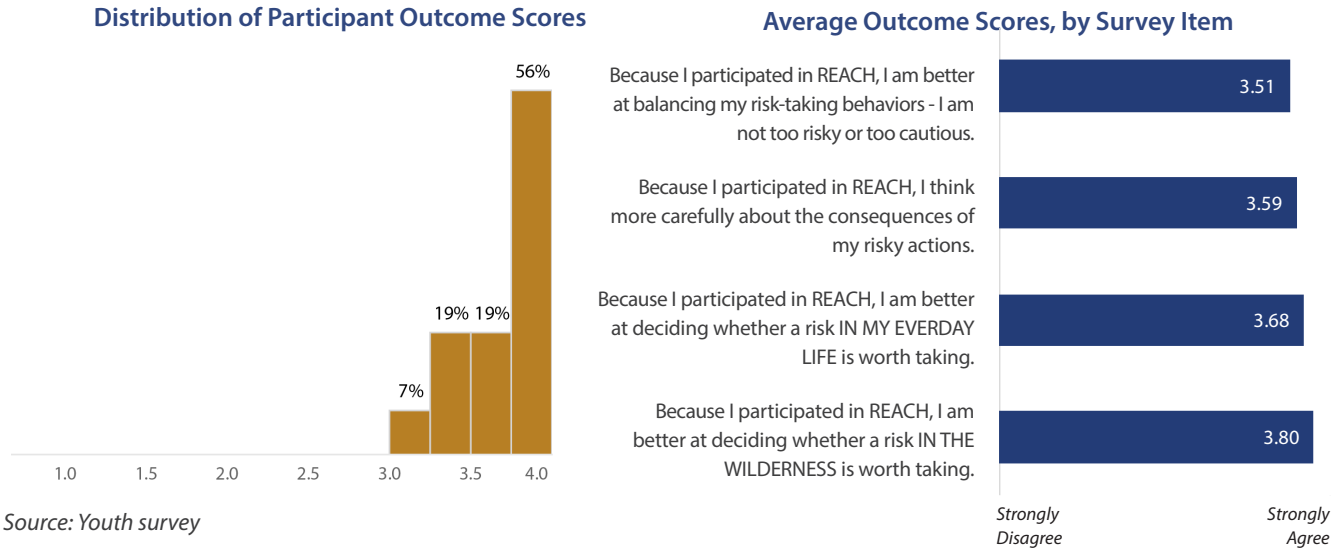
Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

- **The dimension pertaining to sense of environmental connection saw the strongest short-term outcomes of any discussed in this chapter**, with about four out of five participants strongly agreeing with the statement that REACH helped them feel more comfortable being outdoors and connected to the environment. This yielded mean ratings of 3.93 and 3.90 on a 4-point scale, respectively (Exhibit VII-1).
- **Agreement with the statement "I feel a connection to the natural world" from baseline to the end of Year 3 revealed substantial gains in environmental connectedness for the 2013 cohort.** There was a nearly 50% increase in respondents who felt connected to the natural world during this period (Exhibit VII-2).

> **"Before REACH I kind of thought that I hated the outdoors….What I learned from that first expedition with REACH with Deer Hill was how to appreciate those experiences and grow from them."**

Ability to Manage Risk

Exhibit VII-3. Ability to Manage Risk Outcome Scores



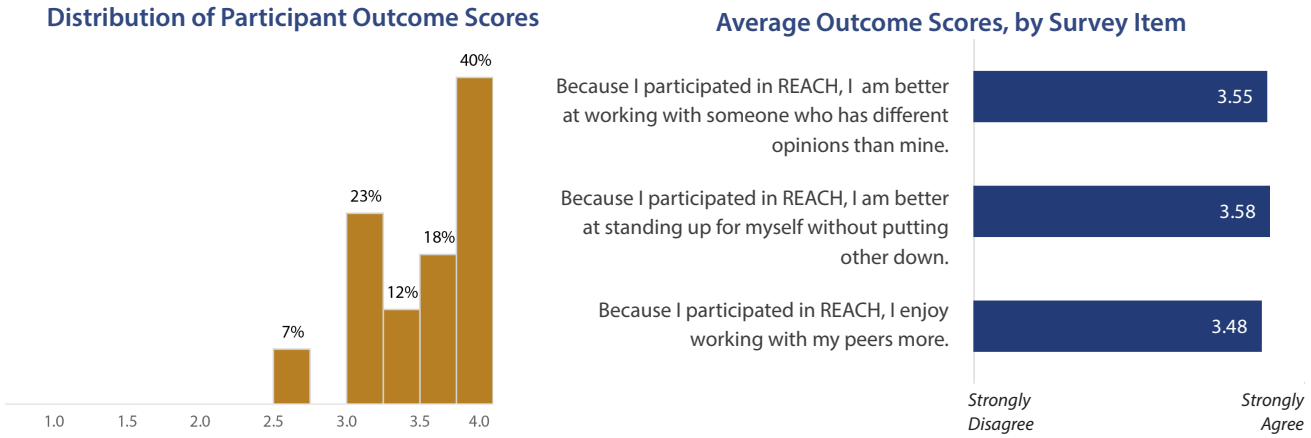
Source: Youth survey

- **As depicted in the histogram above (Exhibit VII-3), high scores on the survey scale indicate strong risk management ability among participants.** Nevertheless, outcomes for this dimension were slightly lower than for environmental connectedness.
- **Notably, participants responded most positively to the statement on risk-taking behavior in the wilderness (mean 3.8 on a 4-point scale).** This affirms the success of the outdoors skill-building activities offered through the program. Interview respondents further spoke to the role of REACH in developing these skills, emphasizing that these efforts went beyond teaching basic skills to include "real extreme kind of survival stuff."

> **"I learned almost every skill I know. I know how to use maps for navigating. I know how to use handrails in the maps. I also have the ability to use the hardware, like, WhisperLite stoves and things like that, that I probably would not [have] learned during high school."**

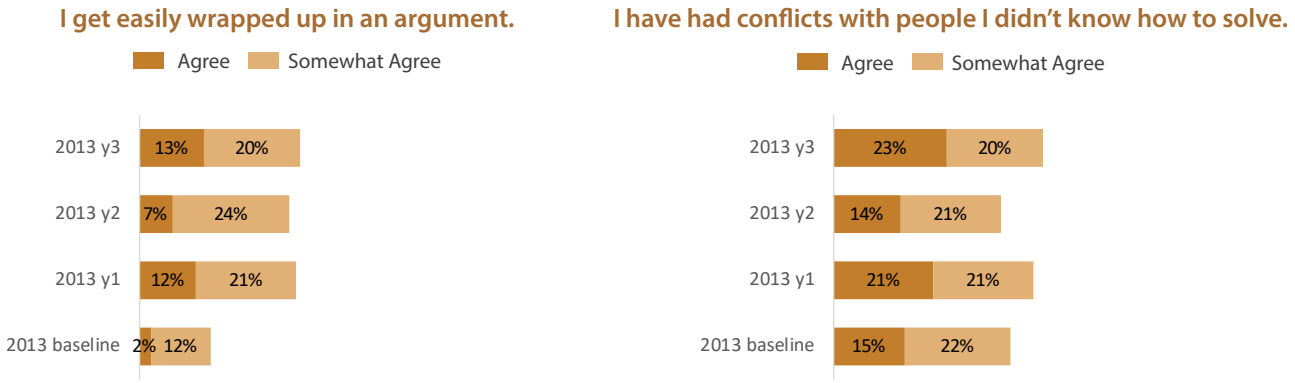
Ability to Be an Effective Member of a Team

Exhibit VII-4. Ability to Be an Effective Team Member Outcome Scores



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit VII-5. Survey Results for Ability to Be an Effective Member of a Team by Program Year



Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

- **On average, survey respondents reported slightly less positive outcomes for statements pertaining to their ability to be effective members of a team.** All but two survey respondents stated that they disagreed with statements about standing up for themselves and enjoying working with their peers, and all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were now better at working with someone with differing opinions. However, proportionately fewer respondents strongly agreed with these statements than they did with statements pertaining to environmental connectedness and ability to manage risk (Exhibit VII-4).
- **The histogram above, depicting the combined scale for this dimension, makes it evident that a high proportion of respondents scored high values on this scale.** This demonstrates possession of a strong ability to be an effective team member, but there was a wide spread of responses, which indicates more limited success in achieving positive outcomes across all participants.

- **The annual surveys of the 2013 cohort similarly did not show any trend in improving outcomes around conflict management or resolution over time.** In fact, more participants reported getting caught up in arguments at the close of Year 3 than they had at baseline (Exhibit VII-5).
- **Though survey responses indicated that not all participants achieved strong outcomes in this area, interview participants did point to the role of outdoor experiences in developing their capacity to work together as a team and to collaboratively solve problems.** One participant recalled,

> **"Basically they let us run the show. We cooked, we hiked, we looked at the map: if it wasn't the right direction, instead of Ken [Gates] saying something or one of the other instructors saying something, we would have to figure it out and we would have to depend on each other."**

Financial Literacy

Financial literacy workshops offered in high school and via webinars aimed primarily to provide REACH participants with an understanding of basic money management principles and to assist them in developing a plan to fund their college education. As discussed in Chapter IV, the financial literacy component offered the fewest hours of programming and had the lowest attendance rate of all program components. However, the survey results did not indicate any meaningful relationship between dosage of financial literacy activities and reported financial literacy outcomes. In fact, in interviews participants cited the workshops second most often when they were asked which program service they found to be most valuable. Respondents noted that they had faced financial difficulties in their family environments, and the workshops helped reduce their anxiety around money. For example, one participant reflected,

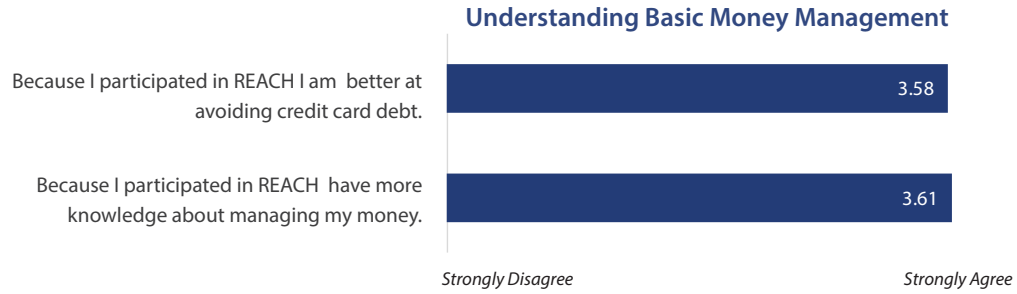
> **"The types of classes that we've taken have helped me realize that [money] doesn't have to be a scary thing, and a lot of the things that I want to do can be realistic if I just plan."**

In the remainder of this section, we consider financial literacy outcomes on each of the dimensions of interest.

There was no discernable trend between changes in program component dosage and participant outcomes in the corresponding area for any of the components discussed in this chapter.

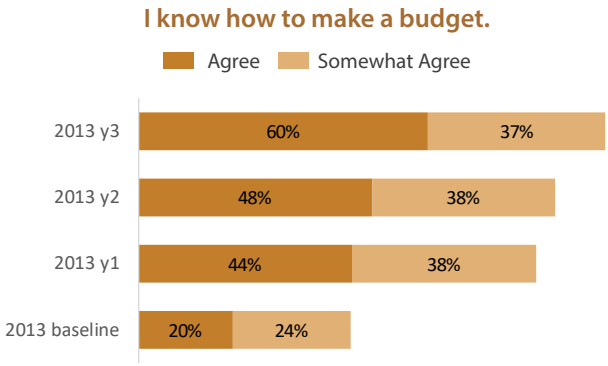
Understand Basic Money Management Principles

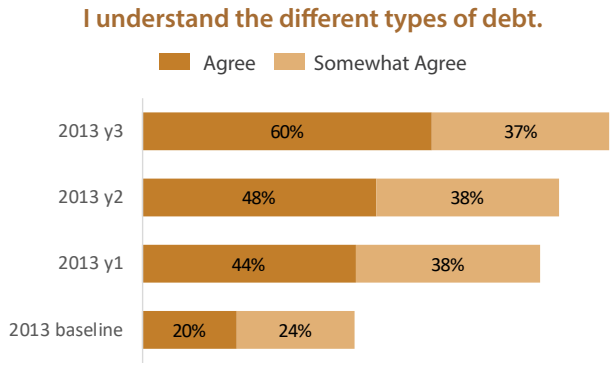
Exhibit VII-6. Participants' Understanding of Basic Money Management

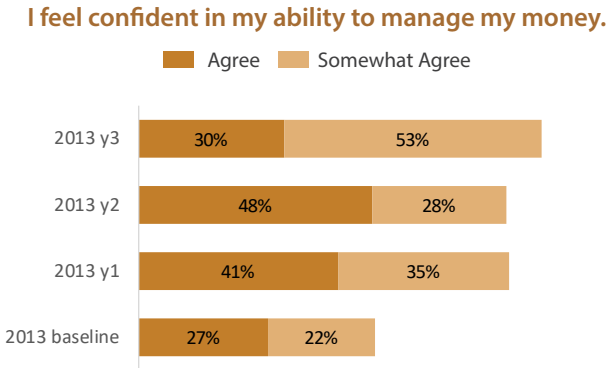


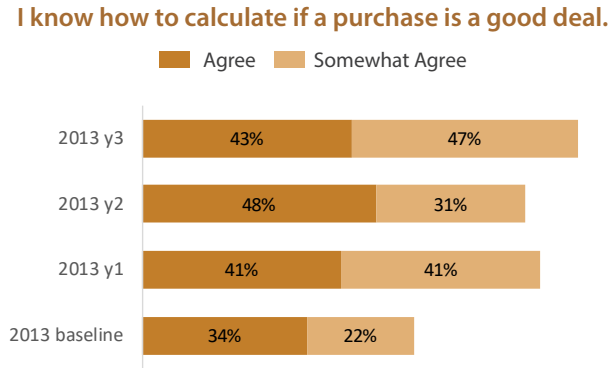
Source: Youth survey

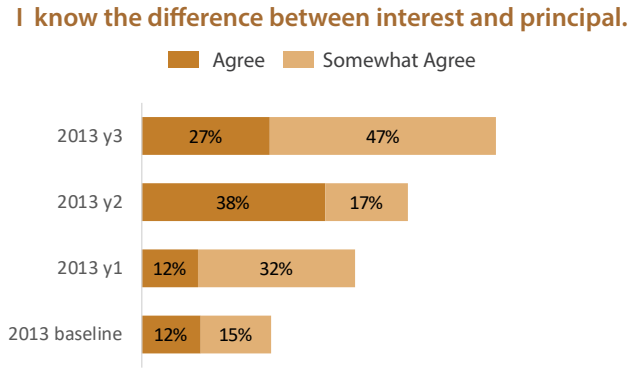
Exhibit VII-7. Survey Results for Understanding of Basic Money Management by Program Year

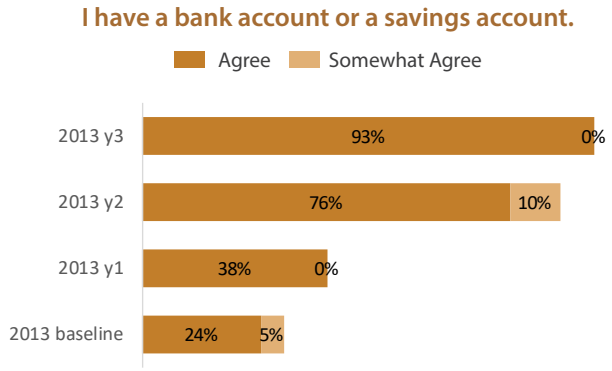


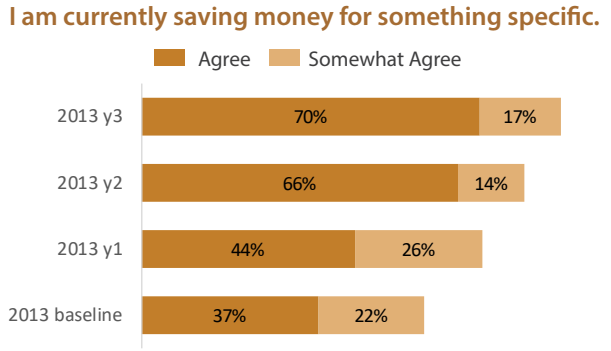












Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

> **Before I would save my money, but I wouldn't save it wisely. And I think we had two different financial aid classes. And they taught me, 'Okay, make different jars for different things. And only use that money for that specific thing. Never take money out of other jars for other activities. But always make sure to take care of yourself.' …And… money's still tight, but now I know how to manage it better than I did without those classes.**

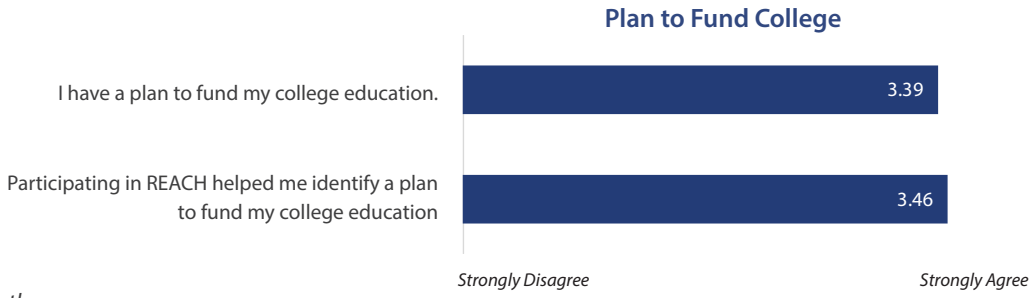
- On the whole, REACH participants developed an increased understanding of money management principles as a result of participation in the program. Nearly all survey respondents (at least 97%) either agreed or strongly agreed with statements pertaining to their ability to avoid credit card debt and their knowledge of money management. As shown in Exhibit VII-6, this yielded mean scores of 3.58 and 3.61 on a 4-point scale, respectively.

- Responses pertaining to money management from the annual REACH surveys administered to 2013 cohort participants showed some of the greatest gains of any outcome dimension. The yearly surveys asked extensive questions focused on money management skills and understanding of principles (Exhibit VII-7). At baseline, there were only two statements with which more than half of the respondents agreed: "I know how to calculate if a purchase is a good deal" (56%) and "I am currently saving money for something specific" (59%). By the end of Year 3, three-quarters or more at least somewhat agreed with all statements.

- Interview participants reported that they had gained skills and a better understanding of budgeting and money saving strategies, as well as of credit and credit cards. They further described creating systems following financial literacy workshops to put these budgeting strategies into practice.

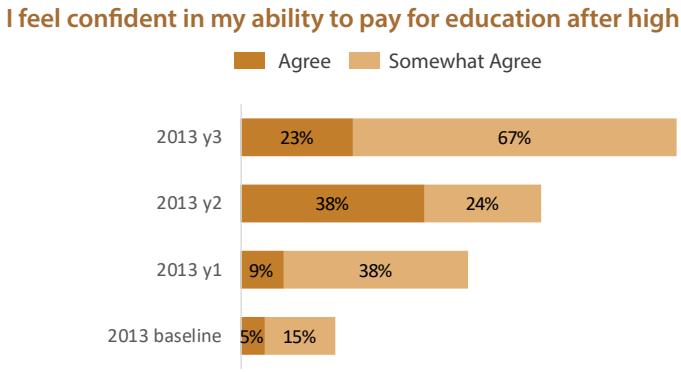
Develop a Plan to Fund College

Exhibit VII-8. Participants' Financial Planning for College



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit VII-9. Survey Results for Developing a Plan to Fund College by Program Year



Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

The results from the yearly 2013 cohort outcomes surveys showed growth in the proportion of participants feeling confident or somewhat confident in their ability to pay for education after high school.

- Outcomes related to having a plan to fund college were slightly lower on average than other financial literacy outcomes, and were generally more mixed than outcomes in other program components. While the vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding having plans to fund their college education (95%) and that participating in REACH helped them identify plans to do so (95%), relatively fewer strongly agreed than was typical of other survey questions. Additionally, "I have a plan to fund my college education" was the only statement in the "other outcomes" portion of the survey for which any respondents reported strongly disagreeing. (See Exhibit VII-8 and Appendix E.)

- The results from the yearly 2013 cohort outcomes surveys showed growth in the proportion of participants feeling confident or somewhat confident in their ability to pay for education after high school. However, despite the increase over time of the overall percentage of cohort members reporting some agreement with this statement, the percentage of respondents fully agreeing decreased between Years 2 and 3—as students graduated high school and enrolled in college—showing that they may have begun questioning their plans once they began their postsecondary schooling (Exhibit VII-9).

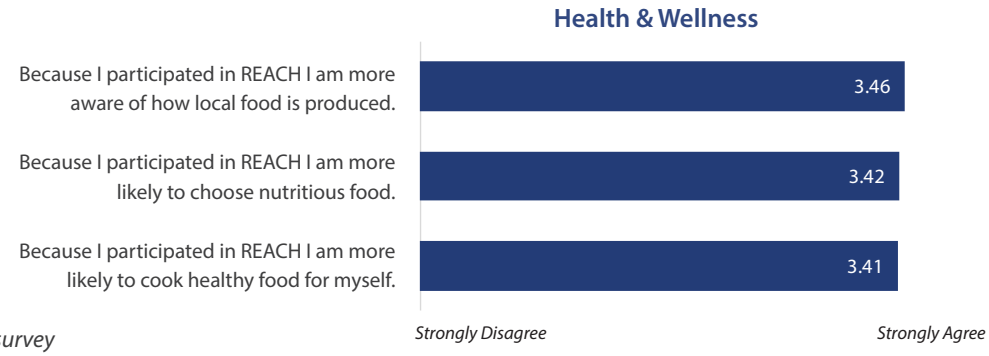
Health and Wellness

While making up fewer total service hours than outdoor experiences or postsecondary education activities, health and wellness programming was still an important component of REACH. Initially focused specifically on food literacy, this category widened as the program developed, eventually encompassing a more holistic understanding of health and wellness. As discussed in Chapter IV, activities such as cooking classes and webinars on balancing sleep and work had the highest participation rate of any program component as measured by percent of hours participated. Interestingly, although outcomes based on survey responses were still largely positive in this area, they were not stronger than other short-term program areas. This is consistent with other program components, wherein no strong trend was apparent between the program component dosage and component-level outcomes.

In this section, we consider health and wellness outcomes as they pertain to three dimensions of interest: whether participants learned about local food, the extent to which they became able to cook for themselves, and the degree of their exposure to prioritizing oral and physical health.

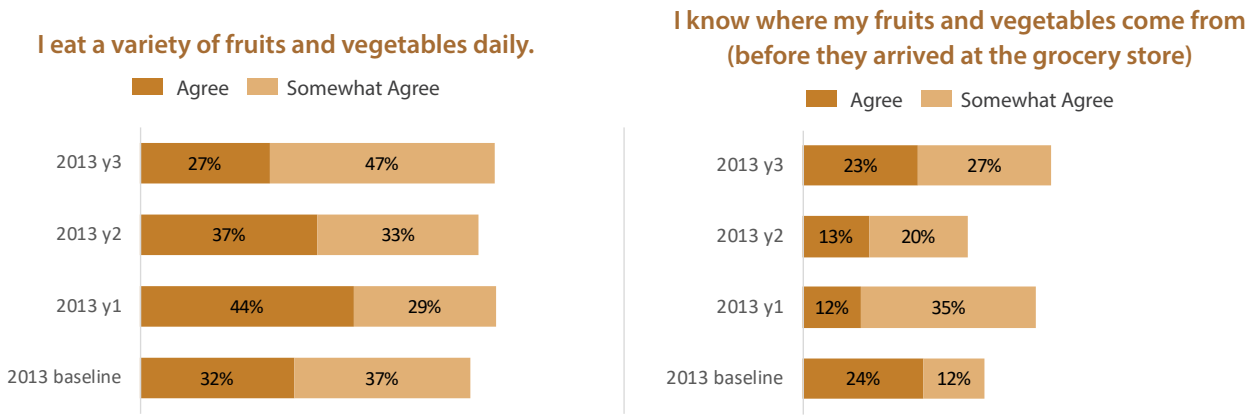
Learned about Local Food

Exhibit VII-10. Participants' Understanding of Healthy Eating



Source: Youth survey

Exhibit VII-11. Survey Results for Eating-Related Habits and Knowledge by Program Year

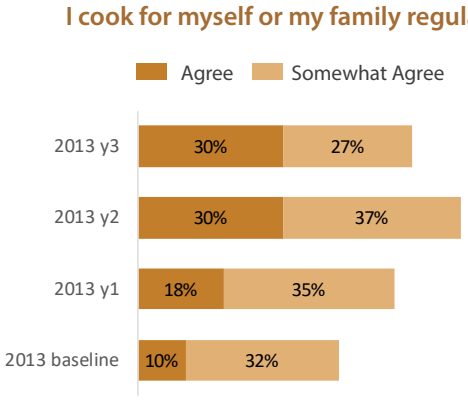


Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

- All but two respondents to the SPR-implemented survey indicated they became more aware of how local food is produced as a result of participating in REACH. Responses to this question yielded marginally more positive results on average than other questions related to health and wellness (Exhibit VII-10).
- The results of the annual 2013 cohort surveys did not show meaningful changes in questions pertaining to the variety of produce eaten or knowledge of food sourcing (Exhibit VII-11). This may be related in part to the shift in focus from food literacy to health and wellness more generally. Due to inconsistent surveying of the 2012 cohort, we were unable to compare these results to changes in outcomes for that cohort, and therefore cannot determine if they would have reflected a stronger focus on food literacy present earlier in the program.

Ability to Cook for Themselves

Exhibit VII-12. Survey Results for Participants' Cooking by Program Year



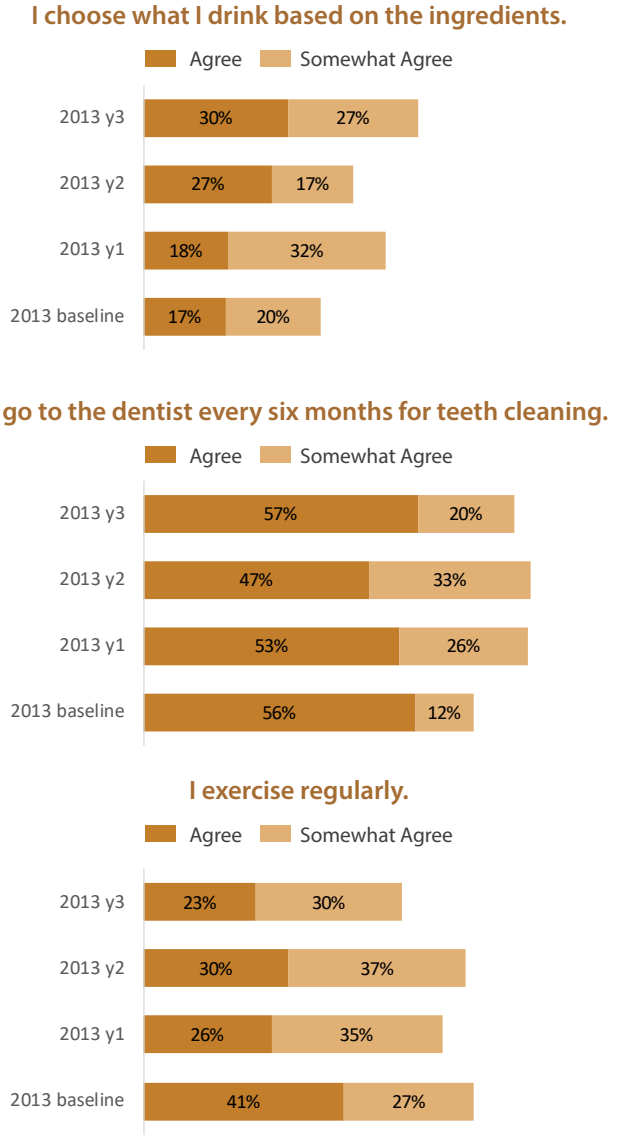
Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

> **"The most valuable skill I would say I've learned is cooking for myself. I've always seen my parents cook but I never really got the hang of it. And then REACH, all the people that Ken [Gates] and the REACH staff brought in, they just really gave me a compass. And I said, 'Hey, if I can cook a meal with these REACH people, I can definitely cook a meal for myself.'"**

- Results regarding participants' ability to cook for themselves were consistent with other health and wellness survey questions. Mean responses to this statement were marginally lower than for other health and wellness survey items, but response trends were generally similar (Exhibit VII-10). Four of the 16 interview respondents pointed to the value of the cooking classes in giving them skills to cook for themselves.
- Though the annual 2013 cohort survey results showed a steady increase in the percentage of participants regularly cooking for themselves and their families during Years 1 and 2, this trend stagnated in Year 3 (Exhibit VII-12). This pattern likely reflected participants' transition to college, in which they may have begun living in dorms and may not have been able to cook regularly.

Exposure to Prioritizing Oral and Physical Health

Exhibit VII-13. Survey Results for Oral and Physical Health by Program Year



Source: REACH-implemented participant surveys

- The results of the annual 2013 cohort survey demonstrated mixed outcomes in the area of oral and physical health. Though there was a gradual increase over time in the percentage of survey respondents who chose what to drink based on a beverage's ingredients, there appears to have been no meaningful change in the percentage of cohort participants who regularly saw a dentist, and the percentage of those reporting regular exercise decreased over time (Exhibit VII-13).

Braces and their Effect on Self-Confidence

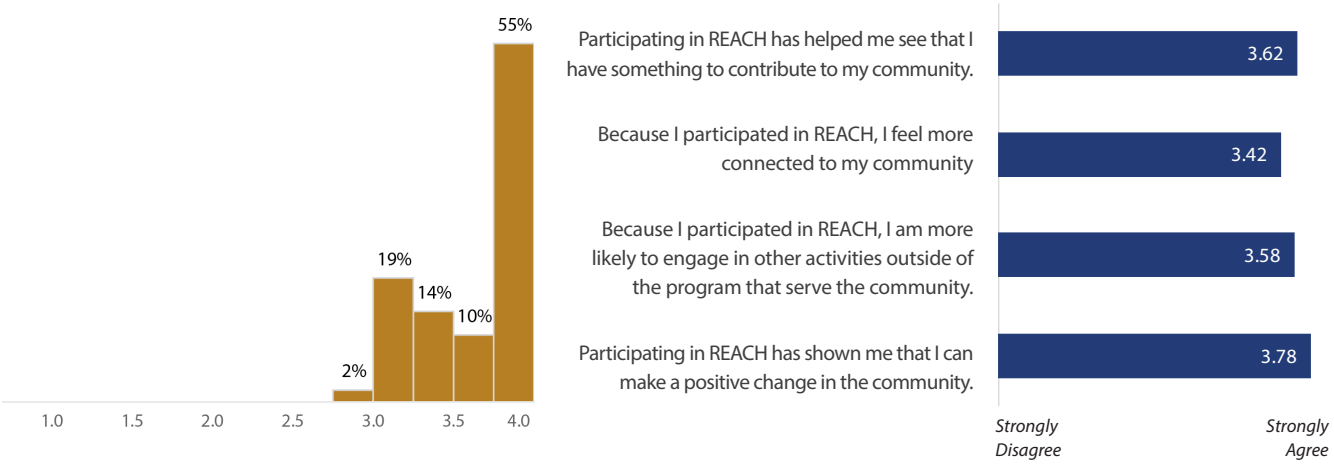
The REACH founders believed that a smile exudes confidence and that this is important for success in life. As such, REACH provided all participants with the option to get braces through the program. About 25% of survey respondents did so, with 20% of those who received braces also receiving additional dental care. The vast majority (87%) reported that receiving orthodontic care helped them feel better about themselves. Additionally, they reported slightly higher self-confidence outcomes on average than those who did not receive braces (scores of 11.7 and 11.6 out of 12, respectively).

"I feel like they noticed that we were really shy students.…We got braces, whoever needed dental care, so we applied and we had to talk to our dentists and see how much it would cost.…But I feel like when they did that…that changed everything. That was like…who does that? We've all grown up in a place that they just don't hand you something like that. Like, they just don't give you money to go get your braces done. And we were just really happy.…[S]ome of us had bad teeth and our confidence level wasn't the greatest.… When they did that, I don't know, I feel like that was something we were very shocked. We were like…who gives us money to go do this? And we were very grateful and we still are to this day, because we never forget…that's what they did for us."

Community Involvement

Though REACH ultimately focused less concertedly on community involvement than on other program components, it was still embedded in a number of program activities. Program organizers were interested in the role of REACH in contributing to participants feeling invested in their community, as well as their sense that they could create positive change. Because questions addressing these outcome dimensions have such a high degree of overlap, we consider results collectively and analyze overall community involvement outcomes.

Exhibit VII-14. Histogram and Survey Means for Community Involvement



Source: Youth survey

- **The combined community involvement scale, illustrated with the histogram in Exhibit VII-14, indicates that most survey respondents scored high on this scale.** While the height of the bars to the left—indicating lower scores—are proportionately high enough to indicate some mixed responses, "strongly agree" was still the most frequently selected response for all questions that make up the scale, demonstrating overall positive community involvement outcomes.
- **Among survey questions related to community involvement, the statement pertaining to the role of REACH in showing participants they could make positive change in their communities yielded the most positive results.** More than three-quarters of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, yielding a mean of 3.78 on a 4-point scale (Exhibit VII-14).
- **While interviews did not always include explicit discussions of community involvement, at least two participants expressed that REACH illustrated to them that they had the capacity to enact change in their community.** One respondent reflected:

> **"Being a part of REACH and learning about all these things that go on and how I can help, and then being at [UC] Berkeley and learning more about community…have been really great in how I see myself in the community and how I see myself in the future."**

Outcomes Variation by Participant Characteristics

Given the diversity in the two REACH cohorts, it was important to assess the effects that certain characteristics—including cohort, academic standing and family income level at program baseline, status as a first-generation college student, or employment status—may have had on short-term outcomes. With the understanding that the small sample size limits our ability to generalize results beyond the particular context of REACH, we observed the following:

- **The 2013 cohort reported at least marginally higher outcomes than the 2012 cohort on every item pertaining to the outdoor experience, financial literacy, health and wellness, and community involvement outcome areas.** The highest difference in outcomes was on community involvement. These results reflect expectations from program staff that, on the whole, the 2013 cohort better fit the program model and had a greater capacity to gain from the program.

- **Participants whose parents had incomes above the Santa Barbara median income level at baseline reported stronger health and wellness outcomes.** Lower income participants reported more positive responses related to having a plan to fund college. Health and wellness questions primarily assessed knowledge and consumption of local and nutritious food, which can be more costly and therefore less accessible to those with limited budgets. This could have played a part in the different outcomes across income brackets. Further, lower income participants may have felt more pressure to develop comprehensive plans to fund their postsecondary schooling.

- **Almost across the board, participants with GPAs below 3.0 at baseline reported higher outcomes than those with higher GPAs.** The differential was especially pronounced in the area of risk management. These results may reflect that participants with lower initial academic performance valued their experience in the program to a greater degree. The relatively higher results for risk management from initially under performing participants show promise for other areas, such as postsecondary outcomes, that may require students to employ measured decision making to overcome academic hurdles.

- **Participants working 20 hours per week or more had fairly even outcomes across most dimensions compared to students with lighter work schedules.** However, these participants showed much higher financial literacy outcomes than those who worked less. This could either mean that participants who were more financially savvy were inclined to work more, or it could be more strongly related to differences in parent income status that demanded these participants take on fuller work schedules.

VIII. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

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Evaluation findings show that REACH's multi-pronged approach improved participants' knowledge of postsecondary education options, skills to navigate the college application process, and resiliency to transition from high school. GPA data also indicated that REACH participants are on track to graduate from college.

REACH's contributions to positive youth development outcomes are clear. A high percentage of young people reported that they consistently received the types of supports and opportunities they needed for healthy development, including high-quality relationships with adults and youth in the program. In addition, participants reported shifts in their orientation toward ongoing learning, increased capacity for problem solving, and increased capabilities related to setting goals and navigating various contexts (including those of family, peer, school). They gained a host of knowledge about the outdoors and life skills that will prepare them for future success. Overall, then, our evaluation confirms that REACH provided youth with a well-rounded and rich developmental experience.

In this final chapter, we synthesize the lessons for the field, including key ingredients for success, lessons on organizational and co-worker capacity, and recommendations for field leaders.

Key Lessons on Program Practices

Some of the key program practices that contributed to positive outcomes include the following:

- **REACH provided comprehensive, long-term programming to achieve impacts.** REACH's four-year program model is consistent with research findings suggesting that programs with the greatest impact on postsecondary success tend to be those offering intensive services requiring a high level of involvement over an extended period of time.[58] By offering services typically through the second year of postsecondary education, REACH was able to support participants through their college transition. The Orfalea Foundation's sizable investment ensured that REACH participants received adequate support for various activities over a multi-year program life cycle.

REACH's contributions to positive youth development outcomes are clear. A high percentage of young people reported that **they consistently received the types of supports and opportunities they needed for healthy development.**

58 Cabrera, A.F., & S.M. La Nasa. (2001). On the path to college: Three critical tasks facing America's disadvantaged. *Research in Higher Education*, 42, 2, 199-249.

- **Developing relationships well before college was critical.** By targeting rising high school juniors, the program was able to help participants envision postsecondary and career goals in advance of the college application process. By the senior year of high school, participants and co-workers had cultivated trusting relationships so that participants were able to accept and even seek out guidance in support of their college and career goals and college application process.

- **A diverse range of program activities promoted consistent engagement.** REACH offered a mix of interesting experiences such as outdoor experiences and life skills training in diverse formats—workshops, one-on-one meetings, Web Labs. This formula contributed to the achievement of a high retention rate across the cohorts.

- **Outdoor experiences provided a critical venue for personal and relationship development.** REACH's outdoor experiences curriculum provided regular opportunities for participants to cultivate self-awareness, experience measured risk-taking, and practice new skills for navigating life's challenges. The multi-day outdoor expeditions provided invaluable opportunities for participants to connect with one another and co-workers and to reflect on their own abilities.

- **REACH was instrumental in helping participants navigate the college application process.** Research shows that this type of support is an important predictor of college enrollment.[59] The REACH program played an important role in helping students with the college admissions process by helping them complete college applications and preparing for the SATs. This support, along with other factors, enabled nearly all participants to enroll in postsecondary education.

- **REACH's financial assistance allowed participants to enroll in and succeed in postsecondary education.** The REACH program was generous with the range of financial supports provided to participants. This included scholarships, laptops, sending students on college visits, and—as needed—covering the fees for college entrance exams and applications. In addition, the program provided students with information and assistance in applying for financial aid. This support made the idea of attending college a reality for many students

- **REACH integrated virtual, ongoing mentoring to extend support for the successful transition to postsecondary education.** REACH offered virtual mentoring as a strategy to provide ongoing support once youth were enrolled in postsecondary education. Virtual mentoring allowed the program co-workers to work with participants from a distance, primarily communicating online or via telephone or email. This strategy was essential as it continued to engage participants when they were attending different colleges.

59 Horn, L.J., & Chen, X. (1998). *Toward resiliency: At-risk students who make it to college.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Retrieved July 24, 2006, from http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/resiliency.pdf.

Key Lessons on Organizational Capacity and Structure

In addition to program practices, our evaluation yielded lessons on organizational capacity and structure, which we describe below.

- **Co-worker transitions created opportunities to reflect on program stability.** Co-worker transitions in the REACH program—while common for most youth programs—presented some challenges, including how to maintain institutional history, co-worker capacity, and continuity of programming. Fortunately, the REACH program was able to successfully transition co-workers with each departure. These transitions helped us frame our understanding of best practices. When the first program director transitioned, she was invested in supporting a smooth transition and committed to serving as an advisory member for the program. In addition, there was an intentional effort to maintain the same co-worker—who became the program director—for the duration of the program to ensure program stability.

- **Documentation of program model and maintaining accessible program data minimized institutional memory loss and promoted best practices.** Much of the administrative data used in this report (GPA, service hours, attendance, participant demographics) was maintained by the program co-workers. The program director took great pains to record program activities, such as Zoom meetings and trainings as well as participant feedback, so that valuable information about the program was not lost when the program sunset. Should other programs be interested in replicating the REACH model, these data sources can inform their efforts.

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Recommendations for Program Leaders

We leave the following recommendations for program leaders as they seek to design and implement youth programs similar in scope to the REACH model.

- **Increase breadth of impact by collaborating with school partners.** As youth programs seek to broaden impact at multiple levels (e.g., personal development, academic success, postsecondary persistence), it is valuable to engage other partners at the high schools and postsecondary institutions to collectively promote youth success. Although the REACH program had relationships with local providers to plan and organize the outdoor expeditions and some of the life skills classes, partnerships with educational institutions were not fully developed as they could be. The program could also explore partnerships with organizations that provide academic supports to address learning needs and/or remediation. These partnerships could also inform curricular strategies and enable the program to leverage wraparound supports like counseling services.

> **"I feel like it would have been a lot more impactful for me if I had gone to community college first before going to a four-year school. This is not only REACH participants, but with tons of other people. It felt like it's a do or die, like you need to go to a four-year school. There's plenty of REACHers that went to community colleges. But I felt like for me it didn't seem like a viable option. But now when I look back, I wish I had done that."**

- **Ensure a deep enough mentor/staffing bench.** Co-worker turnover and the reduced number of co-workers was challenging for some participants. Three out of 16 youth interviewees specifically mentioned that they would have benefited from having more mentors on staff and more consistent staffing across the years, particularly in light of co-worker transitions that occurred.

- **Help students matriculate into "right fit" institutions; continue to emphasize matriculation into four-year institutions but also provide guidance for students whose best pathway is to matriculate into a two-year institution then transfer to a four-institution.** REACH excelled at introducing and facilitating participants through the pathway to four-year institutions. One interviewee suggested that the program staff could have provided a more balanced perspective on attending four-year versus community colleges, as the decision was complex, requiring REACHers to carefully examine their own life circumstances and finances. This particular participant wished there was less emphasis on attending four-year institutions rather than a community college.

- **Consider offering counseling support.** Three participants spoke about a need for an increased focus on emotional health and well-being and the option of providing counseling services while they were in the program. Considering that some REACHers were balancing multiple responsibilities, this additional support could have further enhanced their transition to postsecondary education.

- **Involve and encourage family/parents in the program.** The REACH program made an intentional effort to not involve families/parents in the program. This decision was based on the belief that youth can and should learn to take responsibility for their own success in the program. However, ample research shows that students with parents who are knowledgeable about college are more likely to attend college. Programs that focus on college success address this by providing college information to parents and teaching parents how to support their children's education. However, few college outreach and support programs like REACH include a parent component.[60]

60 Perna, L.W. (2002). Pre-college outreach programs: Characteristics of programs serving historically underrepresented groups of students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43, 1, 64-83.

Final Thoughts

As REACH comes to a close, we offer funders and field leaders some final thoughts about sustaining the program's impact and legacy. The lessons that surfaced from REACH's experience suggest that funders and field leaders consider the following:

- **Help programs address the issue of co-worker attrition.** Like many other youth programs, the REACH program experienced co-worker transitions during its lifespan. Fortunately, REACH was able to retain the program director for four years, which ensured that the program maintained its organizational processes, procedures, and practices. Funders and field leaders can address the challenges associated with co-worker turnover by ensuring that salaries are competitive, providing ongoing training/professional development, providing career advancement opportunities, and addressing excessive workload.

- **Help programs extend their impact by offering support in the virtual space through the transition to postsecondary education.** The REACH virtual mentoring model emerged as a promising practice that youth serving organizations could adopt (and adapt) to extend their impact. By implementing virtual one-on-one and small group mentoring strategies, youth development and college access programs could leverage the relationships that they develop with high – school age youth and provide critical supports as participants transition to college.

REACH's comprehensive model has shown that ongoing, intensive, and multi-dimensional support over a four-year period has made a significant difference in participants' lives. This program's implementation and outcomes have yielded numerous promising practices and insights that can be leveraged by others interested in supporting youth development and postsecondary success.

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