



Youth Engagement Impact Report

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UNITED STATES

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The 2025 GCE-US Youth Engagement Program equipped young people with the knowledge, communication tools, and leadership skills to advance whole child wellbeing in their communities. The program trained students in communication, civic engagement, and leadership skills with a focus on whole child policy and practical tools for engaging decision-makers and community stakeholders. After intensive training, youth leaders meet with congressional offices during an Advocacy Day to share their perspectives on child-focused issues and learn how federal decision-making shapes local outcomes. The participants aimed to understand how policies affect access to mental health services, nutrition programs, inclusive education, and safe learning environments.

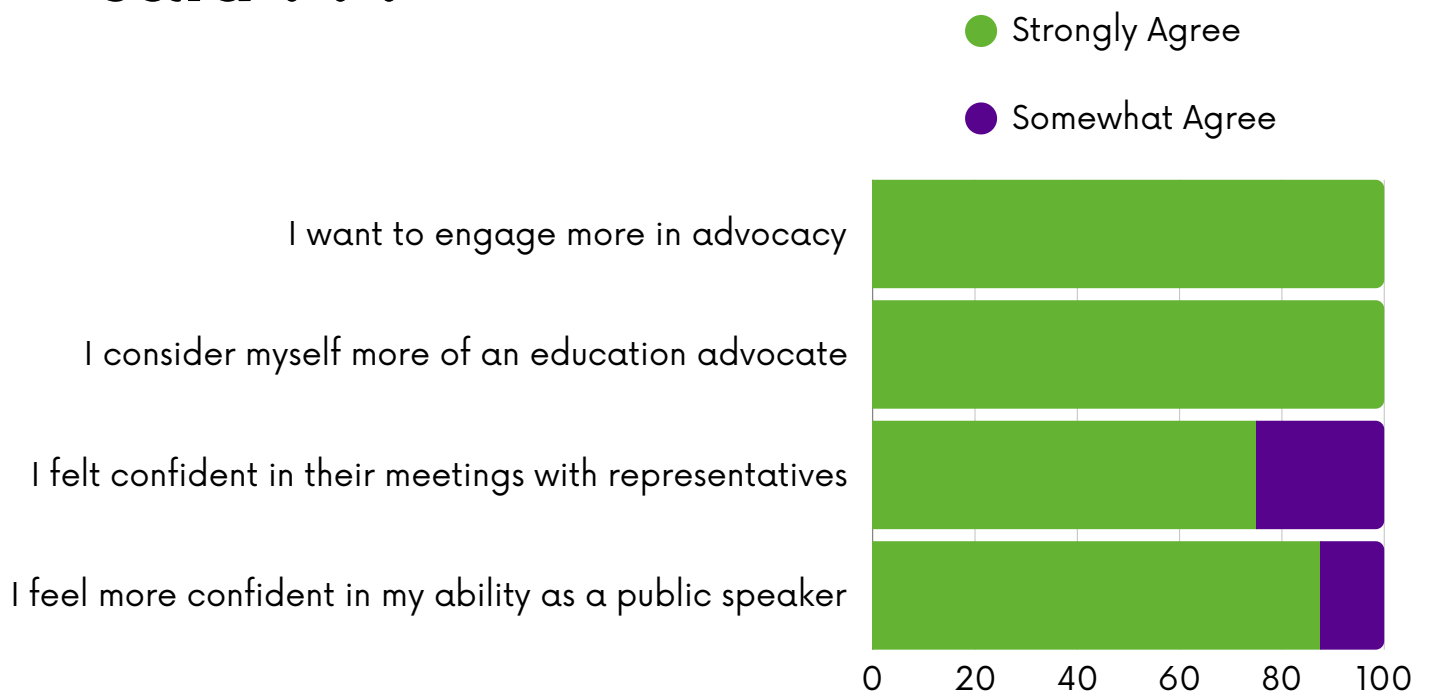
Following Advocacy Day, the program participants identified an issue in their community and designed a project to address it. Among the diverse projects, 50% of youth leaders from the 2025 cohort led their own empowerment training for a group of students in their communities.

Through the participants' local community projects, they reached over 350 people across their communities from California to the Gambia by designing and leading projects on issues from special education equity to school board engagement and refugee access to higher education.

To better understand the impact of the program, this report draws on baseline and endline survey data, reflective qualitative responses, and project outputs. Findings suggest meaningful progress across all three intended outcomes, particularly in skill acquisition and network-building. While some quantitative self-efficacy indicators declined slightly at endline, qualitative data indicates this reflects increased realism and sophistication following direct exposure to policymaking spaces rather than diminished confidence.

50% of youth leaders from the 2025 cohort led their own empowerment training for a group of students in their communities.

As a result of participating in Advocacy Day, participants said . . .



OUTCOME 1: Youth develop leadership and civic communication skills

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Outcome 1: Youth develop leadership and civic communication skills



Theme 1: Increased ability to communicate complex child-focused issues clearly and persuasively

Quantitative findings show gains in participants' ability to explain complex child-focused policy issues, including education, in accessible language. At baseline, most participants somewhat agreed they could do so; by endline, all participants strongly agreed, representing one of the largest gains across outcomes.

Qualitative responses reinforce this shift from abstract understanding to applied communication. Several participants described learning how to translate lived experience, data, and policy into compelling narratives for decision-makers.

"Through congressional lobbying and my final project involving school board advocacy, I learned to present my values persuasively and in a bipartisan manner... I was very happy with my storytelling skills, which strengthened as I practiced my pitch for the day on the hill." — Youth Participant

Others emphasized that advocacy felt more accessible and less intimidating after practicing real-world skills.

**"What helped me learn and grow the most is learning that advocacy isn't as daunting as I first imagined it might be."
— Youth Participant**

Outcome 1: Youth develop leadership and civic communication skills



Theme 2: Growth in public speaking, preparation, and strategic advocacy skills

Participants reported strong gains in public speaking confidence, research skills, and understanding how to prepare for meetings with policymakers and their staff. Quantitative results show notable increases in confidence speaking in front of groups and in preparedness for advocacy meetings.

Participants consistently cited Advocacy Day, mock preparation sessions, and iterative feedback as critical to these gains.

“This program helped me learn how to research, plan, and share ideas clearly.” — Youth Participant

At the same time, several participants identified next-step skill gaps, particularly around reading policymakers’ reactions in real time and adapting messaging accordingly. This reflects growing participants’ strategic awareness.

**“It was hard to tell if my chosen statistics were effective or not... having tips on how to tell if what you are saying is working, and if not how to change course, would be helpful.”
— Youth Participant**

Outcome 1: Youth develop leadership and civic communication skills



Theme 3: Increased issue-specific policy confidence

By endline, participants could clearly articulate specific child-focused policy issues they felt confident advocating for, often with sharper focus than at baseline. Topics included international basic education funding, refugee access to higher education, mental health in schools, disability inclusion, SNAP and CEP eligibility, Title IX protections, among other child-focused issues.

“Participating in this program sharpened my focus from a general idea of equity to a clearer understanding of education policies and funding mechanisms.” — Youth Participant

Youth build supportive intergenerational networks

Outcome 2

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Outcome 2: Youth build supportive intergenerational networks



Theme 1: Strong peer bonds and collaborative problem-solving

Participants entered the program with relatively high baseline connection to peers, which remained strong at endline. Qualitative data highlights that these connections deepened into meaningful relationships characterized by collaboration, mutual support, and ongoing communication.

"I made seven new friends, some that I talk with every day... as well as new initiatives we are working on together regarding education and human rights."
— Youth Participant

Working in small teams, preparing together, and sharing high-stakes advocacy experiences fostered trust and collective identity.

"The mere exposure to like-minded and driven individuals like myself... illuminated the truth that we can use our voices anywhere and anytime."
— Youth Participant

Outcome 2: Youth build supportive intergenerational networks



Theme 2: Increased access to adult allies and mentors

Participants reported modest quantitative increases in knowing adults who can support their advocacy efforts, supported by strong qualitative evidence of mentorship impact. Youth consistently named program staff and guest speakers as affirming, credible allies who validated their voices and modeled pathways into sustained advocacy.

“Having someone that established with experience tell you that your voice and your story is powerful enough to be within our nation’s capitol is a huge deal. Having other people believe in you makes an imprint on you as a young person that really sticks.”
— Youth Participant

Many participants expressed interest in maintaining relationships with GCE-US mentors and engaging with the organization beyond the program; 100% reported interest in future volunteering with GCE-US.

**Youth strengthen
identity as
capable
community leaders**

Outcome 3

03

Outcome 3: Youth strengthen identity as capable community leaders



Theme 1: Internalization of advocacy identity

While several self-efficacy indicators declined slightly in quantitative endline results (e.g., confidence influencing decisions or participating in meetings with elected officials), qualitative findings strongly suggest this reflects greater realism after direct exposure to complex policymaking environments. Participants described moving from idealized notions of advocacy to a more nuanced understanding of structural constraints, political timelines, and institutional responsiveness.

“Even though the budget was already being determined... I still feel like I helped push some degree of real legislation... I think that will manifest and live on in more work that they do.” — Youth Participant

This realism often coexisted with sustained motivation and long-term commitment, instead of disengagement with the newfound understanding of how advocacy functions.

Participants articulated a shift from seeing advocacy as something done by others to recognizing themselves as changemakers.

“My project reminded me that I can be the change I want to see in the world... young people’s voices truly matter.” — Youth Participant

“There isn’t anything stopping me from going out and doing something in my community... I don’t have to wait to be told by somebody to do something.” — Youth Participant

Outcome 3: Youth strengthen identity as capable community leaders



Theme 2: Sustained commitment and future orientation

Participants expressed a clear desire to continue advocacy beyond the program, while also naming the emotional and strategic support needed to do so sustainably.

“My voice and lived experience are powerful tools for advocacy. Knowing that my personal journey and the stories I carry have value in shaping education policy gives me the courage to speak up and push for meaningful change.”— Youth Participant

This suggests that future programming could focus on post-program pathways, ongoing mentorship, and opportunities for continued practice to reinforce confidence over time.

Overall Impact

Taken together, findings indicate that the Youth Engagement Program successfully strengthened participants' advocacy skills, expanded their networks, and supported the development of a durable whole child advocacy identity. Youth emerged better equipped to analyze policy, communicate persuasively with decision-makers, and situate themselves within a broader movement for equity. Importantly, exposure to real advocacy contexts fostered maturity, strategic thinking, and sustained commitment, laying the groundwork for long-term leadership on child-focused policy issues. Youth understand youth needs best.



With structured training, mentorship, and real-world practice, they can translate lived experience into informed leadership that strengthens child-centered systems.

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