



# 2025 Summer Discovery Program Summary

December 2025

# 2025 Evaluation Summary

This report summarizes key insights from the evaluation of **Summer Discovery**, a program that provides free, engaging summer learning experiences designed to prevent learning loss and promote growth.

At a high level, many of the positive results observed in 2024 were **replicated in 2025**, an encouraging sign given the program's substantial increase in size from the previous year.

Although results are not causal, this consistency suggests that **Summer Discovery was able to successfully maintain program quality while scaling**, and it offers promising implications for future growth.

In summary that follows, we highlight the **new learnings** from the 2025 evaluation as well as **key trends** that emerge across the first two years of Summer Discovery programming.

*See insights from 2024 [here](#).*



# National data shows learning gaps persist post-pandemic, especially for students with the greatest need

Students of color and those from low-income communities continue to be most affected by nationwide learning gaps—underscoring the urgency of targeted support.

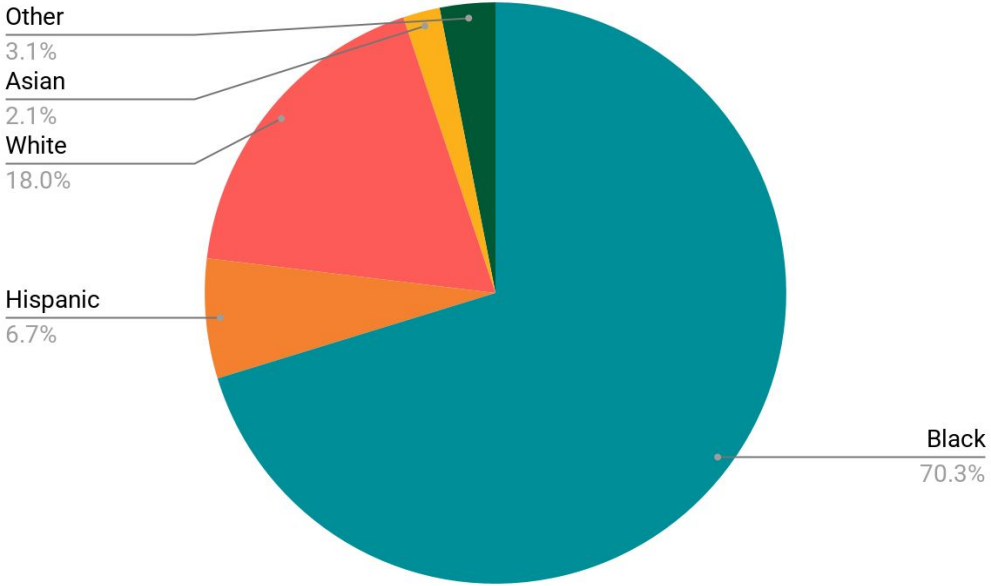
- Nationwide, the **gap in average scores between districts with the highest and lowest proportions of Black students widened** by 0.28 grade levels from 2019 to 2024—a 17% increase, **indicating that districts with higher Black student populations fell further behind** during this period.\*
- **Achievement gaps between high- and low-poverty districts also widened** from 2019 to 2024.
- **Gaps for free/reduced-price lunch eligible students, Black, and Hispanic students all grew substantially** over the same period.

With ongoing summer learning loss and lingering pandemic impacts, investing in summer learning is essential—not just as a one-time fix, but as a recurring strategy to sustain academic progress year after year.

- National data shows that, as of 2024, **Math and ELA scores remain below pre-pandemic levels.**
- Reading NAEP scores in 2024 were **approximately half a grade level lower than in 2019.**
- Math NAEP scores have rebounded modestly since 2022, but progress remains slow, with **levels still about half a grade below 2019.**
- **High-poverty districts are recovering more slowly** than low-poverty peers.
- **Chronic absenteeism has worsened** across the board, especially in districts with previously low rates.\*\*

# Summer Discovery continues to serve the students who need it most

Summer Discovery served 82% students of color in 2025.



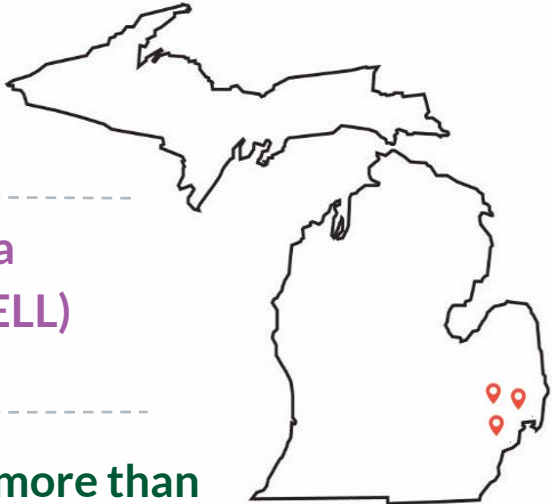
Demographic Breakdown of Students Participating in Summer Discovery\*

Summer Discovery sites served a majority of students eligible for Free Lunch.

19% of Summer Discovery sites served a majority of English Language Learner (ELL) students.

54% of Summer Discovery sites served more than 10% Special Education students.

60% of Summer Discovery families reported their child would have stayed at home or with another caretaker if Summer Discovery had not been an option.



*“It was a life-changing summer. One kid literally said the words, ‘[This site] saved my life.’ It made me feel like I have a purpose, a calling.”*

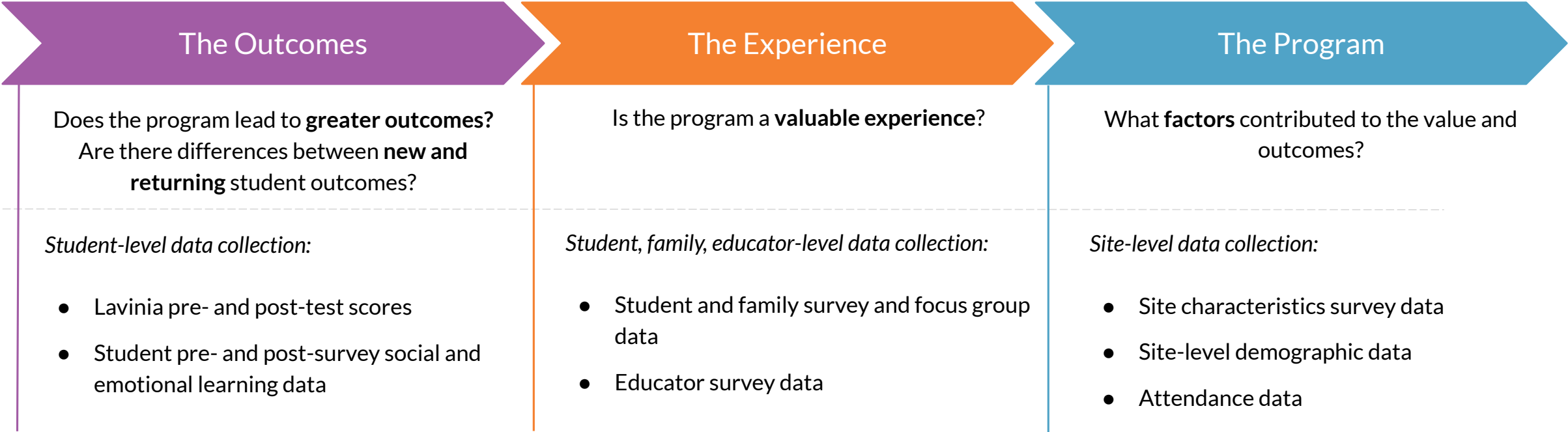
- Educator from a CBO site in Wayne County

# Research Questions & Data Collected

In 2025, Summer Discovery served **26,778 students**, across **169 sites** and **101 networks** in the Tri-County Detroit area. This represents 10,315 more students and 47 more grantees than in 2024, with **~33% (~5,500) of 2024 students returning for programming in 2025.**

Ballmer Group partnered with [MGT](#) to evaluate the program and understand its impact on students and families.

*Below are the research questions we aimed to answer and the data we collected.*



*Note: Findings are based on 1 - 2 years of data and should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, due to the nature of the correlational, non-experimental methods employed, results should be viewed as trends rather than causal relationships.*

# Key Findings for Summer Discovery 2025 (1 of 2)

## The Outcomes

Students grew in Math, ELA, and Social and Emotional Learning

**[NEW]** Both new and returning students grew



Students with the highest need, those who started the furthest behind, and those at sites with larger ELL populations, saw the most growth in academic outcomes.



New and returning students made similar progress in Math and ELA. Returning students began the summer slightly ahead and maintained that advantage, suggesting the program effectively supports growth for all participants.

## The Experience

Students enjoyed the program

Educators were satisfied

The program created increased opportunity for families



Students continue to be highly satisfied and reported feeling safe and cared for.



Educators also continue to be highly satisfied with the program and believe students were more prepared for the next school year after participating.



Families felt that their children had new opportunities, and the program allowed their household to save on costs. They would like to see more communication.



# Key Findings for Summer Discovery 2025 (2 of 2)

## The Program

Program flexibility did not detract from outcomes



Programs with varied formats consistently delivered positive results.

[NEW] Attendance was associated with academic gains



Attendance was a strong predictor of Math growth, aligning with other research.

Positive student experience was associated with academic growth



Students who enjoyed the program, [NEW] enjoyed enrichment activities, and felt cared for by adults in the program saw higher academic growth.

# Does the program lead to greater outcomes?



Student outcomes remained strong, and even improved in some areas, despite significant program growth in 2025. As in 2024, students saw growth in Math, ELA, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills.

## Academic Growth



Students showed growth in Math and ELA. Math growth was greater than last year, while ELA growth was comparable.\*

**[NEW]** New and returning students made similar progress in Math and ELA.

## Largest Growth for Students who Needed it Most



As in 2024, students who showed the greatest academic growth were those who:

- Started the program the furthest behind
- Attended sites with larger English Language Learner (ELL) populations\*\*

## Social and Emotional Growth



As in 2024, students self-reported growth across a range of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) outcomes.

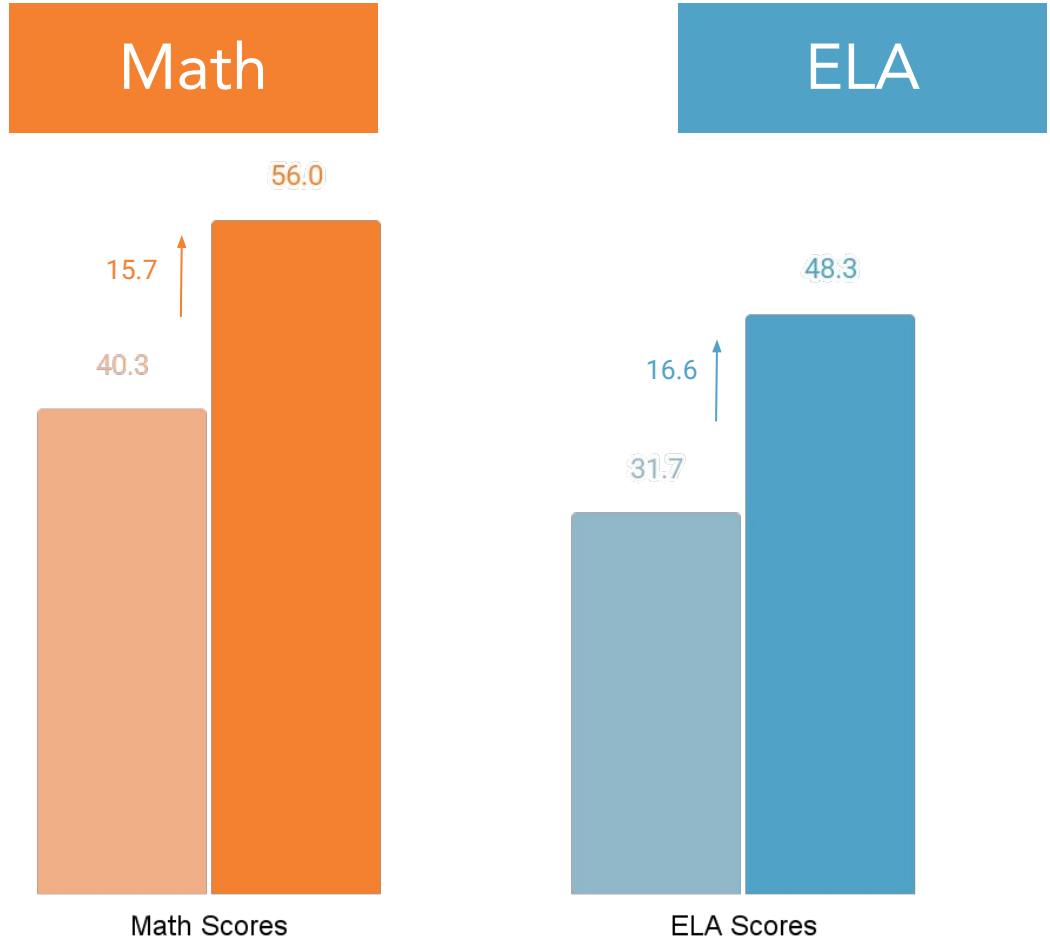
Educators and families also perceived SEL and personal growth in students.

\*Score growth: The percentage point change between the average score on the pre-assessment and the average score on the post-assessment.

\*\*Sites with larger ELL populations saw higher growth in Math only.



# For the second year, Summer Discovery students grew in both Math and ELA



**According to Lavinia Group's analysis\*, over the course of Summer Discovery in 2025...**

- Students' average Math test scores increased by 15.7\*\* points from pre- to post-assessments. Math growth in 2025 exceeded 2024 gains by 1.6 points.
- Students' average ELA test scores increased by 16.6 points\*\* from pre- to post-assessments.

■ Pre-Assessment ■ Post-Assessment ■ Pre-Assessment ■ Post-Assessment



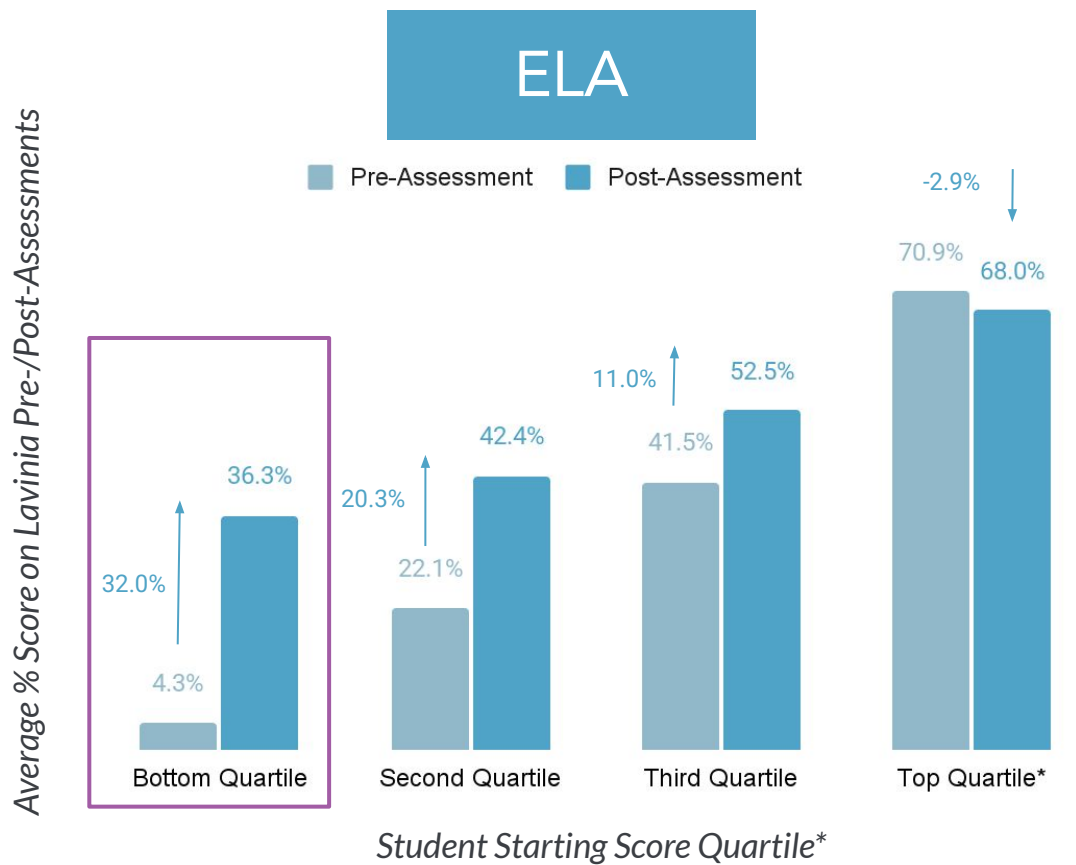
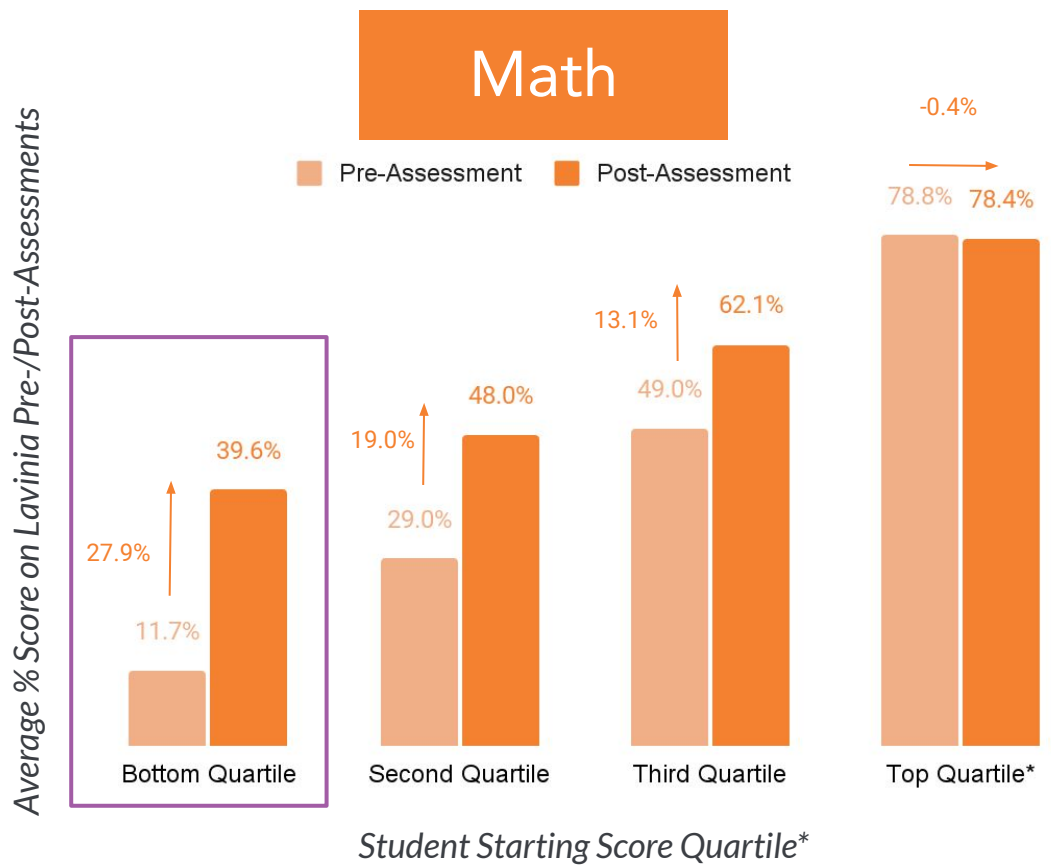
\*Analysis completed by Lavinia Group with assessment data from pre- and post-assessment from 15,978 students who completed the Math assessment and 15,597 students who completed the ELA assessment.

\*\*Score growth: The percentage point change between the average score on the pre-assessment and the average score on the post-assessment.

# Students who started the furthest behind saw the most academic growth



Similar to last year, **students who started the furthest behind grew the most** in both subjects, indicating that **Summer Discovery is successfully serving students who need it the most.**



\*The above quartiles were created by ranking Summer Discovery students and placing them in evenly distributed groups (n=15,597 for ELA, n=15,978 for Math). Negative impact on higher achieving students may be due to potential "ceiling effects" where students' pre-test scores are high, and they are unable to show much growth on the post-test.

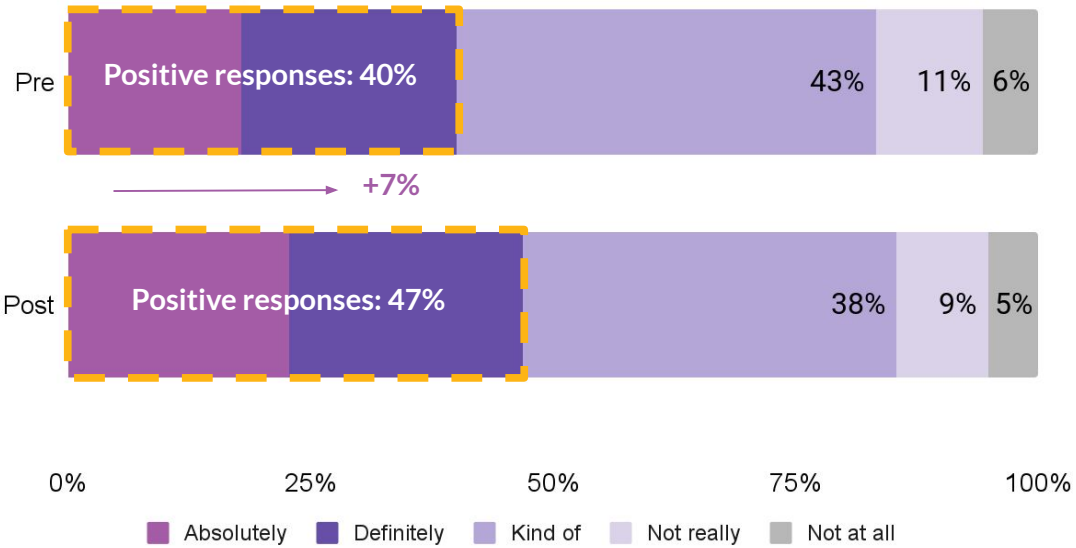
# Students reported increases across key Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) outcomes



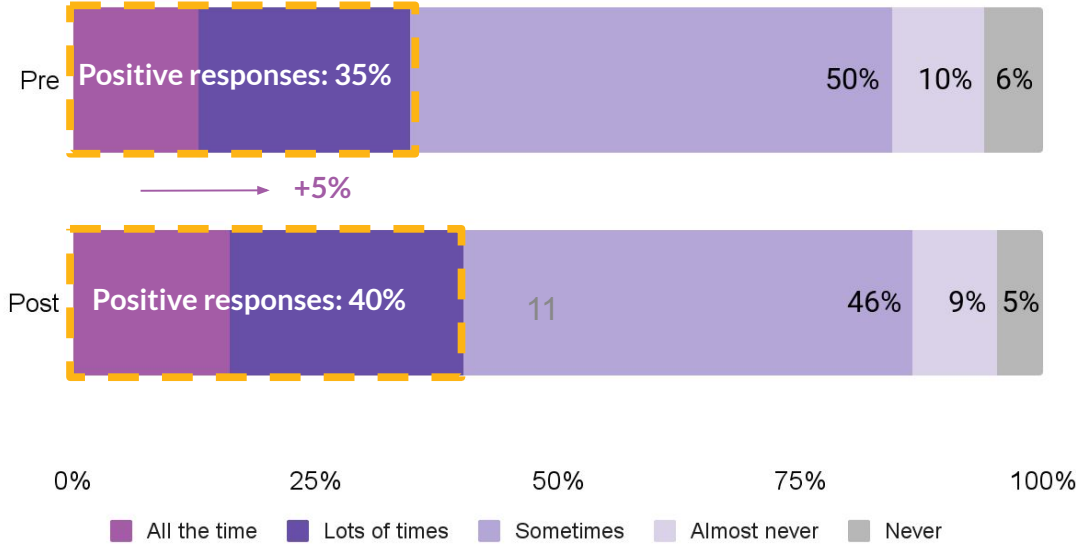
Student pre- and post-surveys measured students' self perceptions on a range of SEL items such as **growth mindset, self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and resilience.**\*

Students showed the greatest growth in two growth mindset domains, with a **7% point rise in enjoying learning new things** and a **5% point rise in seeking feedback** from pre- to post-survey (compared with 16% and 9% points in 2024, respectively). These gains may reflect enhanced enrichment opportunities and the additional support and feedback provided by educators.

"I enjoy learning new things even if they are difficult at first."\*\*



"I ask for feedback or suggestions to help me get better at things."\*\*



\*According to the Student Pre-/Post-Survey from 11,209 complete responses across Summer Discovery sites.

\*\*Positive responses include "Absolutely", "Definitely", "All the time" and "Lots of times."

Note: Due to rounding differences, numbers in charts may not add up to 100%.

# Is the program a valuable experience?



*Students, families, and educators continued to report high levels of program satisfaction. Families appreciated meaningful opportunities and cost savings. Educators, and especially families, felt the program prepared students for the upcoming school year.*

## Student Satisfaction



For the second year, students indicated that they **saw great value in the program**.

Notably, they **reported feeling safe and cared for**, and expressed particular **satisfaction with enrichment activities**.

## Educator Satisfaction



Educators **reported greater satisfaction this year** and noted a significant **increase in feeling supported by the program**.

They also continued to perceive an **increase in students' overall readiness** for the next school year.

## Family Satisfaction



As in 2024, families felt that **Summer Discovery provided valuable opportunities** and offered a productive alternative to staying at home.

The program also continued to **enable families to fulfill their commitments** more easily while **saving on costs**.

**Communication remained families' top priority** for program improvement.

# Stakeholders' Perception of Summer Discovery



2024*	2025**	
68%	70%	Students reported they <b>had fun</b> during Summer Discovery programming.
71%	71%	Students reported they <b>felt safe</b> during Summer Discovery programming.
63%	67%	Students reported <b>learning new things</b> during the Summer Discovery program.
81%	87%	Families said the program made it <b>easier for them to fulfill work and educational commitments</b> .
88%	93%	Families felt that Summer Discovery <b>prepared their child for the upcoming school year</b> .***
84%	90%	Families reported they <b>would return to Summer Discovery</b> , if given the opportunity.
86%	87%	Educators reported they were <b>overall satisfied with their job</b> at Summer Discovery.

\*According to survey responses from 4,403 students, 1,808 families, and 1,202 educators across 2024 Summer Discovery sites.

\*\*According to survey responses from 11,209 students, families of 5,645 students, and 2,455 educators across 2025 Summer Discovery sites.

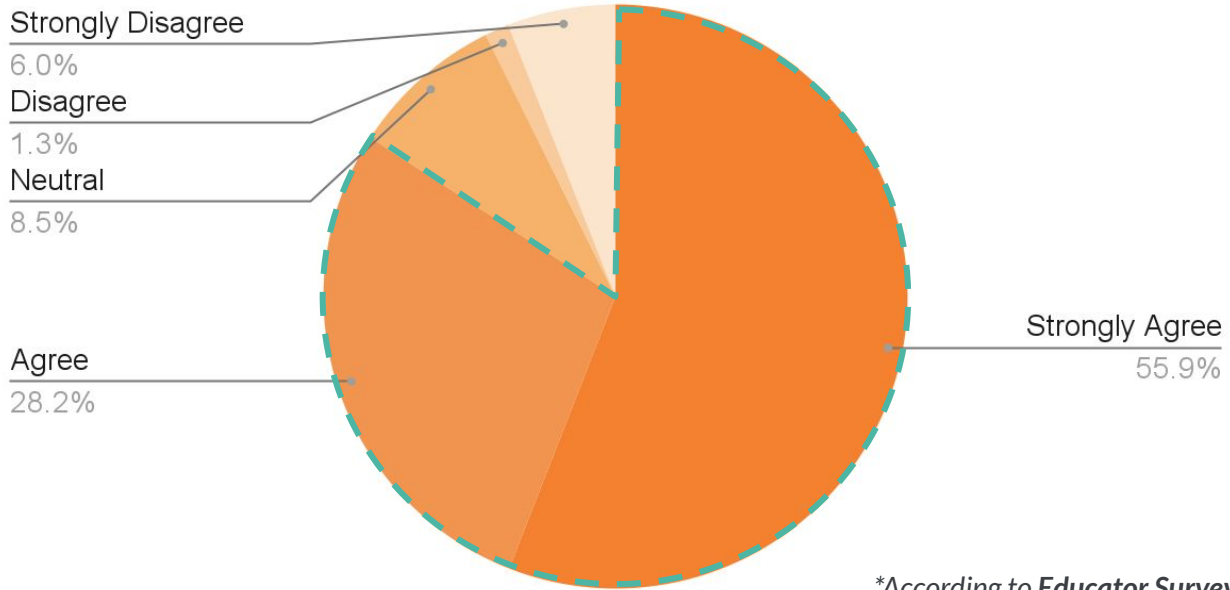
\*\*\*Includes respondents who indicated that Summer Discovery prepared their child "Extremely," "Quite," or "Somewhat" well for the upcoming school year.

# Educators reported increased job satisfaction, and many noted that they would participate in Summer Discovery next year

87% of educators\* were satisfied with their job at Summer Discovery (an increase of 1% point from 2024), with 84% of educators agreeing that they would participate in Summer Discovery another year if it was offered (up 2% points from 2024).\*\*

70%+ of lead educators\*\*\* felt that Summer Discovery improved their ability to deliver high-quality instruction, create a supportive learning environment, and incorporate enrichment opportunities during the school year.

“Overall, I would participate in Summer Discovery again if it were offered another year.”



“It was a life-changing summer. One kid literally said the words, ‘[This site] saved my life’. It made me feel like I have a purpose, a calling.”  
- Educator from a CBO site in Wayne County\*

\*According to Educator Survey responses from 2,455 educators.

\*\*Positive responses include “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.”

\*\*\*According to Educator Survey responses from 1,522 lead educators who responded to this question in the survey. Lead educators self-selected that designation.

Note: Due to rounding differences, numbers in charts may not add up to 100%.

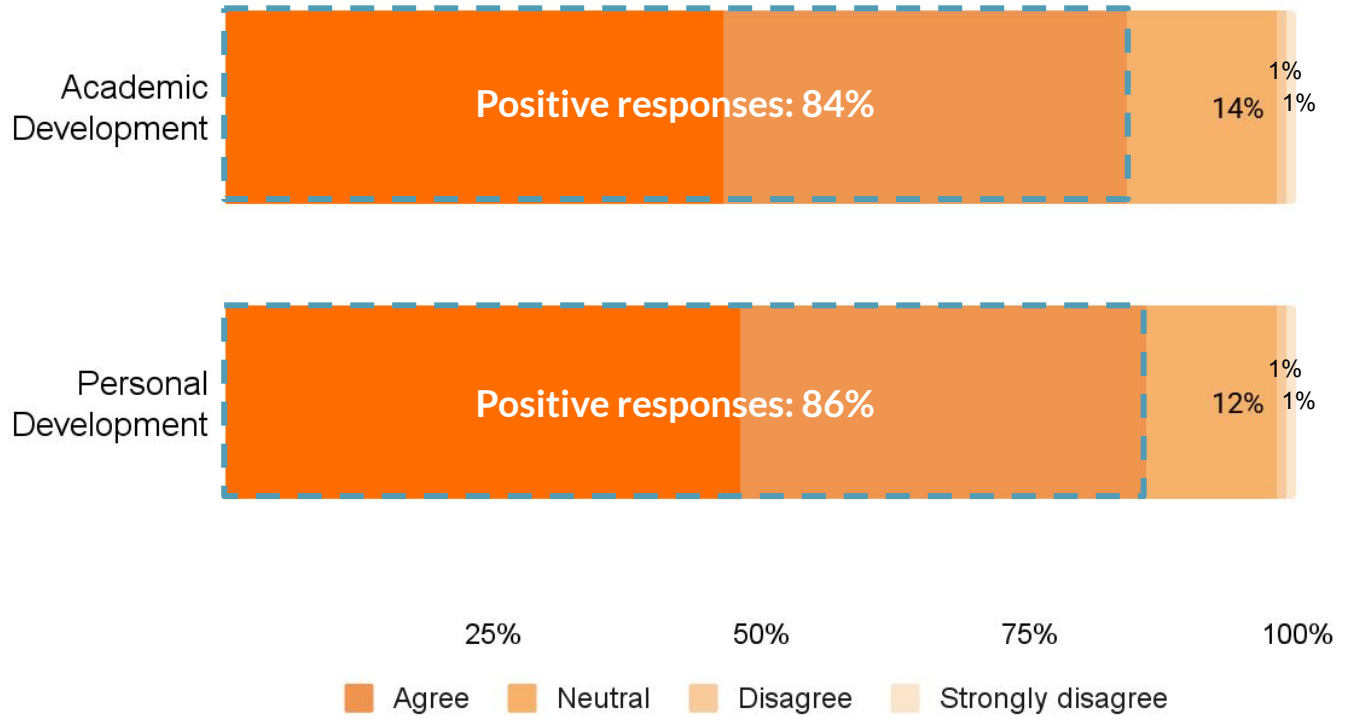


# Families reported seeing positive academic and personal development for their students over the summer



84% families felt the program enhanced\* their student’s academic development (up from 80% in 2024), while 86% saw improvements in personal development (up from 83% in 2024).\*\* In focus groups and surveys, families shared stories of students’ enthusiasm for learning, increased confidence to try new things, and feeling better prepared to make friends and navigate the next grade.

*“Summer Discovery positively contributed to my child’s academic/personal development.”\*\*\**



*“My child is never excited about going to school. Since she has been enrolled in the Summer Discovery program she has been super excited with attending school. She comes home every day happily explaining what she has learned that day. I am so appreciative for this program.”*

- Parent from a Wayne County charter school\*

\*Positive responses include families who responded “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” to this question.

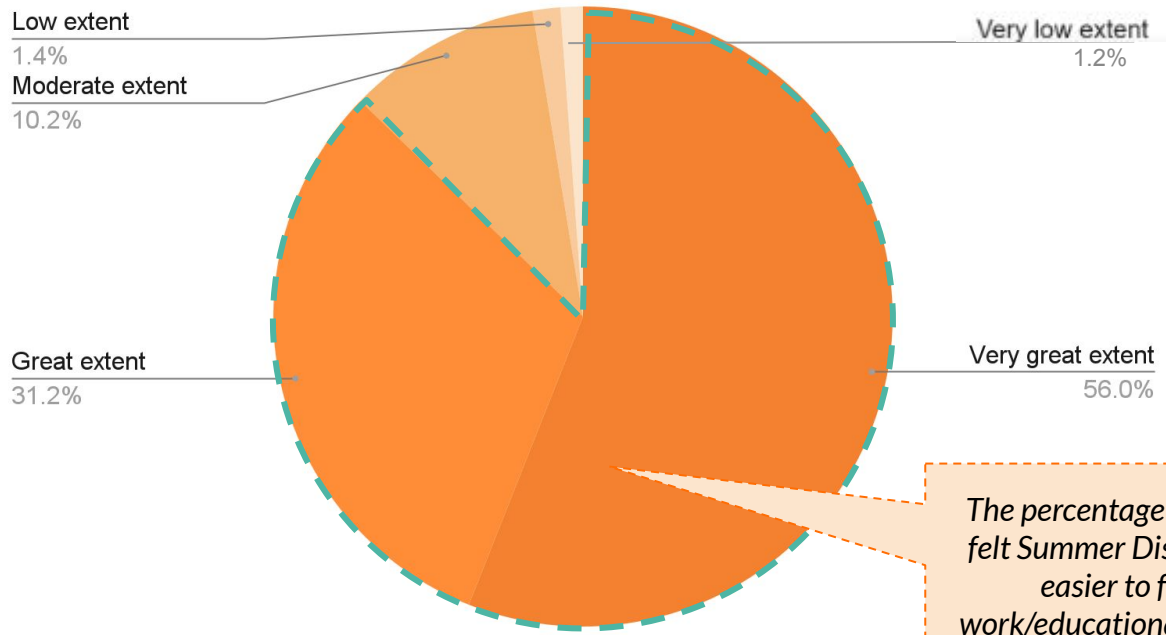
\*\*According to families of 5,645 Summer Discovery students who responded to the family survey.

\*\*\*Personal development was defined as increases in skills that allow students to handle daily challenges, cultivate positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

# Families reported that Summer Discovery allowed them to access more opportunities and helped reduce household costs

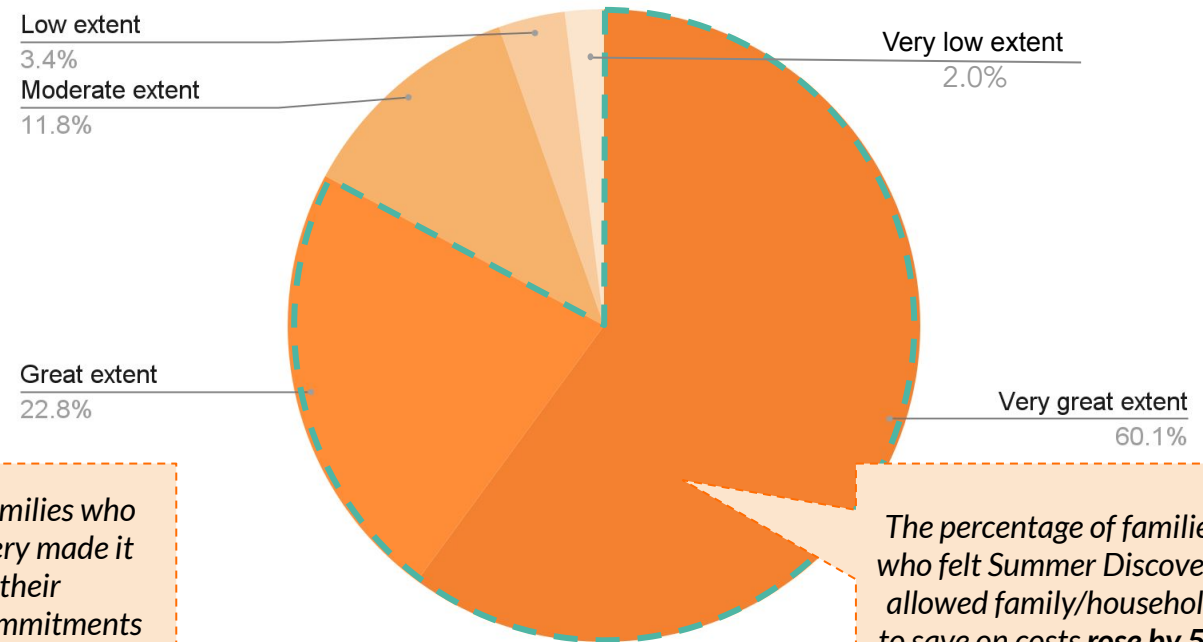
**87%** of families\* reported that **Summer Discovery made it easier\*\*** for them to fulfill work/education commitments, and **83%** of families reported that participating in Summer Discovery **allowed their family to save on costs.**

To what extent did Summer Discovery do the following over the summer? **Made it easier for my family to fulfill our work/educational commitments.**



The percentage of families who felt Summer Discovery made it easier to fulfill their work/educational commitments rose by 6% points from 2024.

To what extent did Summer Discovery do the following over the summer? **Allowed for my family/household to save on costs.**



The percentage of families who felt Summer Discovery allowed family/household to save on costs rose by 5% points from 2024.

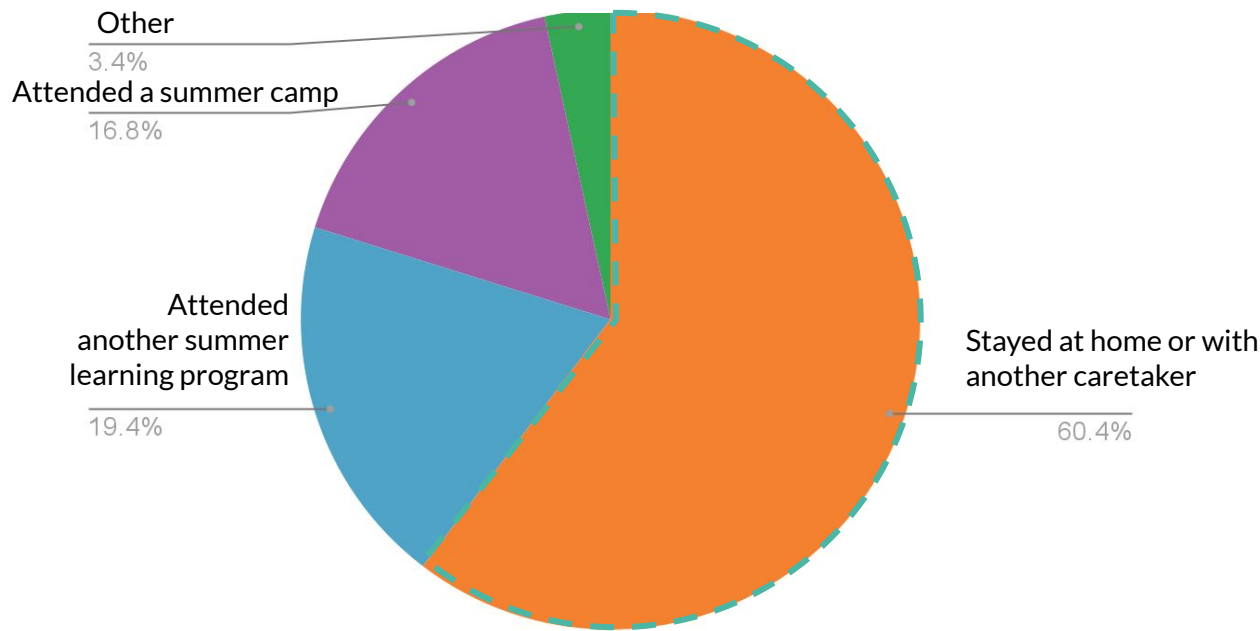
\*According to families of 5,645 Summer Discovery students who responded to the family survey.  
 \*\*Positive response include "Very Great Extent" and "Great Extent."  
 Note: Due to rounding differences, numbers in charts may not add up to 100%.

# Families largely reported their children would have stayed at home if Summer Discovery had not been an option



Consistent with last year, a **majority of families (60%)** reported that their children would have stayed at home or with another caretaker had Summer Discovery not been an option this summer.\*

*“If Summer Discovery had not been an option this summer, my child would have...”*



*“[Been] at work with me, and it's not great for him as an ADHD child. We cannot afford other summer camp so this program really helped us. Thank you.”*

*“Stayed up all night and slept until 2:00 PM.”*

*“Stay[ed] on the iPad, and that’s not healthy.”*

*“Stay[ed] home without learning anything new or doing new projects.”*

*- Responses from family members on the Family Survey\**

\*According to families of 5,645 Summer Discovery students who responded to the family survey.

# In focus groups and surveys, students and families shared that program strengths included a strong community and hands-on learning activities

➤ **Students enjoyed the program's hands-on experiences**, which differed from those offered during the regular school year, deepened their engagement with learning, and strengthened their outlook on school.\*



## Attitude Towards Learning

"I feel more confident. Instead of being at home, this summer school lets me learn - I don't forget everything I learned last year." - *Student from an Oakland County charter site*



## Real-World Connections

"We got to build the garden with LEGO pieces, which was fun, and the teachers told us about how community gardens work, the love and care it needs, what it needs to survive." - *Student from a Wayne County CBO*

➤ **Families highlighted cost, proximity, and community** as key areas that contributed to their program satisfaction.\*



## Cost and Access

"They would just stay home alternatively. There aren't many community programs in most places. Some we cannot qualify for. It is first-come, first-served, so by the time you hear about it, it's already full. It is great that they have this opportunity." - *Parent from a virtual focus group*



## Trust and Community

"[We] chose to re-enroll because I trust the staff and my daughter trusts the staff as well." - *Parent from a Wayne County district school*

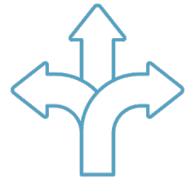
\*Quotes were collected from 39 students and 59 families who participated across 5 focus groups.



# What factors contributed to Summer Discovery's outcomes?

*Students across program structures showed positive growth. Higher outcomes were associated with strong attendance, and some enrichment and SEL components. Additionally, students who reported the greatest enjoyment of the program saw higher growth.*

## Program Flexibility



Across both 2024 and 2025, programs with various formats consistently achieved positive academic results—reinforcing that program flexibility and local design are key strengths.

## Attendance



**[NEW]** Average site attendance was a predictor of Math growth.

## Bilingual Staff



For the second year, employing bilingual staff was associated with student growth in Math.

## Program Enjoyment & Enrichment



Students who **enjoyed the program in general** and **[NEW]** enrichment activities specifically saw higher academic growth in 2025.

## SEL and Feeling Cared For



**[NEW]** SEL skill building activities were associated with Math growth.

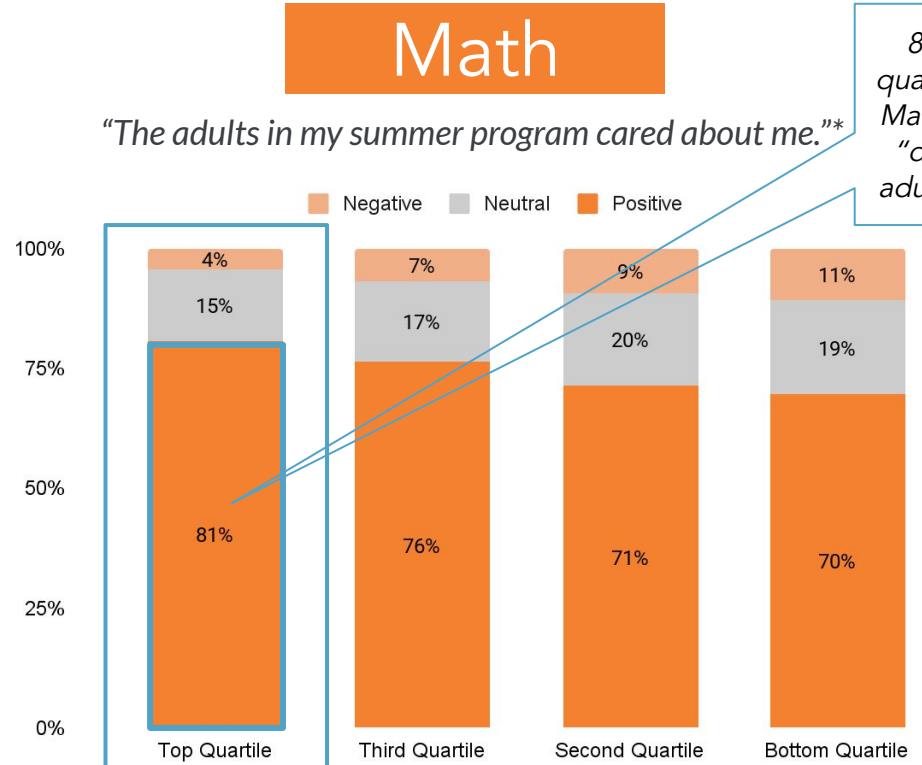
Consistent with last year, students who **felt cared for by adults in the program** saw higher academic growth.

# Students who grew the most academically were also those who felt cared for during the program

As in 2024, students who grew the most academically during Summer Discovery were **more likely to feel cared for by adults in the program**. This relationship was statistically significant for both math and ELA. Students who feel cared for may be more motivated to put in effort or may receive more support to succeed academically.

## Math

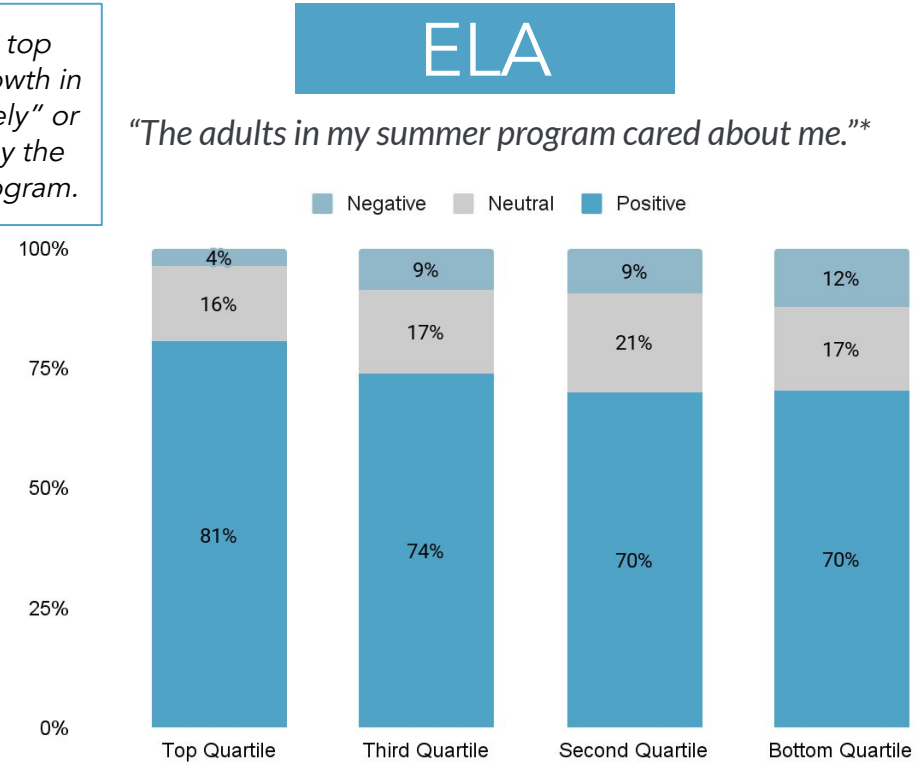
% of Students Rating Program Experience\*\*



81% of students in the top quartile for academic growth in Math said they "absolutely" or "definitely" felt cared by the adults in the summer program.

## ELA

% of Students Rating Program Experience\*\*



"The adults in my summer program cared about me."\*

Student Academic Growth Quartile

Student Academic Growth Quartile

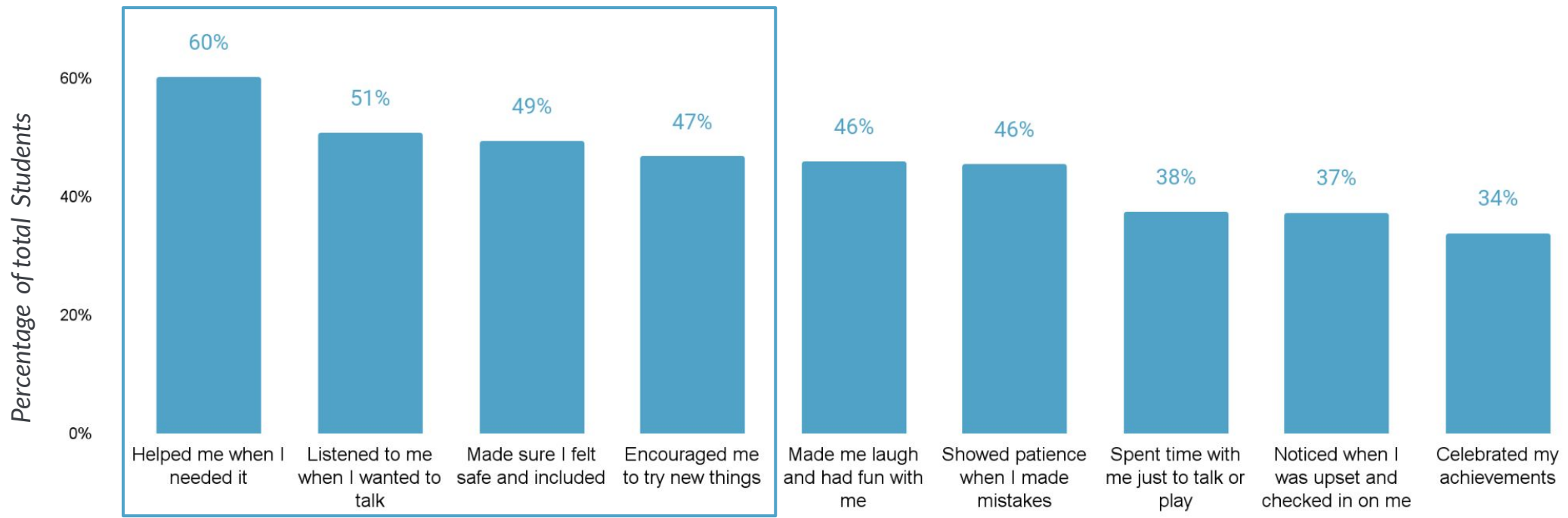
\*Positive responses include "Definitely" or "Absolutely", Neutral responses include "Kind of", and Negative responses include "Not at all" or "Not really."  
 \*\*According to the Student Post-Survey from 6,430 students who completed both the Math assessment and student surveys and 6,198 students who completed both the ELA assessment and student surveys across Summer Discovery sites.  
 Note: Due to rounding differences, numbers in charts may not add up to 100%.



# Students said they felt cared for through staff's everyday gestures of listening, offering support, and encouragement

- Consistent with results in 2024, 74% of students reported that the adults in their summer program cared about them in 2025.
- In post surveys, students most frequently reported that staff made them feel cared about during Summer Discovery programming by helping, listening, making sure they felt more included, and encouraging them to try new things.

"What did the adults at your summer program do that made you feel cared about?"\*



Strategies Students Reported Adults at Their Program Used

\*According to Student Pre-/Post-Surveys from 11,209 complete responses across Summer Discovery sites.