LEADERSHIP, SELF-EFFICACY AND GRIT IN HIGH-POVERTY MINORITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Youth in high poverty areas are often at risk for poor mental health and academic outcomes, and have been identified with deficiencies in perceived self-efficacy, grit, and sense of purpose. Youth leadership has been mentioned in the literature as a strategy for building needed skills and attitudes but has not been the focus of much research in the field of school psychology. The present study examined the extent to which participation in a youth leadership program in a school within a high poverty context promoted student competence in self-efficacy, grit and the development of positive purpose. Moderating variables, such as gender, ethnicity, grade level and school performance, also were examined. Results indicated that there were no significant overall differences between student Ambassadors and non-Ambassadors when comparing baseline and post-intervention scores. However, male Ambassadors showed significant gains in purpose and Ambassadors with higher initial efficacy had higher degrees of engagement. Additionally, clear impacts were demonstrated in final interviews with students. This study demonstrates the potential for the impact of youth leadership programming and points to the need for more research in this area.

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Abraham Lincoln once said, “I’m a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn’t have the heart to let him down.” All of my accomplishments in life have been attributable to hard work and the greatest support network. I would not be where I am today without the support of my family, friends, colleagues and mentors.

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Introduction

Students in high poverty contexts are often at risk due to exposure to more physical and emotional stress than those living in more advantaged contexts (Silverman, et.al, 2008). Further, research has demonstrated that youth living in high poverty areas are more likely to have lower self-efficacy, a weaker drive to persist and a greater likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Boser & Brown, 2016; Evans, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Gentile, & Salpekar, 2005; Whitebeck et al., 1997; Zimmerman & Messner, 2011). Youth who have low self-efficacy, or believe they are not able to influence the events in their lives, are less likely to persevere, and perseverance is comparable to Duckworth's conceptualization of grit (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007).

It is clear that students need more than just academic skills to succeed in school and beyond. Educators and policy makers are increasingly interested in "non-cognitive skills" or social-emotional learning in schools (West, Kraft, Finn, Martin, Duckworth, Gabrieli, & Gabrieli, 2015; Yeager, Paunesku, Walton, & Dweck, 2013). Social-emotional learning has become an important focus of research in the field of school psychology, so much that the National Association of School Psychology oriented their 2016 conference around this topic (NASP conference, 2016). Considering social-emotional learning, it is understood that if youth feel connected to their school environment, their well-being is higher leading to positive affect, greater life satisfaction and confidence (Jose, Ryan & Prior, 2012). One way to target social-emotional development is engaging youth in leadership experiences.

The term "youth leadership" is not easily defined (Conner & Strobel, 2007). In reviewing literature, the assortment of replacement terms, including "youth engagement," "youth participatory action research," "service leadership," and "youth voice," renders research difficult

to review definitively (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2006). Although there may be many ways of targeting youth leadership, there has been consensus on the core nature of the youth leadership experience. One of the most cited definitions of youth leadership is "leaders…think for themselves, communicate their thoughts and feelings to others and help others understand and act on their own beliefs" (VanLinden & Fertman, 1998, p. 11). In other words, youth leadership opportunities foster one's ability to think independently, communicate, and take action. Successful youth leadership programs include skill-building in emotional, intellectual, psychological, and social health in a context involving peers and adults (Cohen & McDonough, 2012). More specifically, youth benefit from being engaged in leadership opportunities that give them opportunities to engage in positive, prosocial behavior in groups and participate in forums for youth empowerment (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; VanLinden & Fertman, 1998).

Although there has been continued national attention for the importance for engaging youth in social change efforts, in the last three years, the topic of youth leadership has been neglected by the field of school psychology. In reviewing the *School Psychology Review*, *School Psychology Quarterly,* and the *Journal of School Psychology*, the word "leadership" was used in five articles. When it was present, the research rarely focused on the details of elements of youth leadership programs or program outcomes, and instead mentioned leadership as a strategy for decreasing the racial discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016), embedding leadership in a positive psychology curriculum (Ng, Huebner & Hills, 2015), and recognizing leaders as more likely to be active bystanders of LGBT bullying (Poteat & Vecho, 2016). Two studies noted the importance, predictors, and consequences of student engagement and participation (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014; Lawson & Masyn, 2015).

Lansdown, Jimerson and Shahroozi (2014) explored children's right to participation in schools by summarizing the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and published information in the *Journal of School Psychology*. These researchers reviewed the concept of participation, citing page 9 of Article 19:"The participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counseling, and the involvement of children in school disciplinary proceedings should be promoted as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of rights" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001, p. 9). According to Lansdown, Jimerson, and Shahroozi (2014), youth "acquire skills, build competencies, extend aspirations, and gain confidence" through participation (p. 6). The article lists many different ways of helping youth participate in a meaningful system. More specifically, it explains that students can be involved in decision-making processes when they participate in student council or serve as a student representative on a committee, helping them to express their views about schools.

Also in the *Journal of School Psychology*, Lawson and Masyn (2015) studied a model of data-driven, person-centered conceptualization of student engagement amongst a nationally representative sample of students attending public schools in the United States. In this study, the Educational Longitudinal measures were used to examine factors such as initiative, investment and ambivalence over time among sophomores continuing six years past graduation. The results of this study indicated that students can be categorized into six subgroups which distinguish different types of youth performance, youth perception of the future and youth investment in academic success. It was believed if there were clear profiles for youth, it would be easier to address specific student needs; but, it was found that all six profiles can benefit from "engagement-focused, targeted learning supports" (Lawson and Mason, 2015, p. 21).

In addition to minimal research in the field of school psychology, research looking at the correlates of self-efficacy, or one's belief in his/her abilities, and engagement with leadership have shown inconsistent results (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004; Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013). Similarly, researchers are only beginning to look at grit or perseverance and passion for long-term goals and these have not yet been linked to youth leadership (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). In addition to self-efficacy and grit, Damon (2003) explains that context matters for youth development. When youth feel embedded in their context, it is easier to develop a sense of purpose, or motivation that leads you to a satisfying future. School psychologists know that youth who feel connected to a larger purpose demonstrate more positive behaviors and feelings (Larson, 2005), yet little research has studied youth purpose in relationship to leadership.

In summary, it is clear that students in high poverty areas are often at risk for poor mental health and academic outcomes, and have been identified with deficiencies in perceived self-efficacy, grit, and sense of purpose. Youth leadership has been mentioned in the literature as a strategy for building needed skills and attitudes but has not been the focus of much research in the field of school psychology. The present study examined the extent to which participation in a youth leadership program in school within a high poverty context promoted student competence in self-efficacy, grit and the development of positive purpose. Moderating variables, such as gender, ethnicity, grade level and school performance, also were examined.

Review of Literature

Parameters of Youth Leadership

As mentioned, additional research is needed to better understand the mechanisms involved in youth leadership; the resulting knowledge will help to more effectively guide school

psychologists and others with planning interventions for increasing skills in youth. While youth leadership research has focused on improving self-efficacy, there also has been exploration of additional mechanisms by which youth leadership operates.

Among these mechanisms are skill building, relationship building, opportunities to practice, and recognition of a larger purpose. More specifically, the structure of youth leadership training often includes skill building, positive, prosocial service opportunities and youth empowerment (Linnebrink & Pintrich, 2002; VanLinden & Fertman, 1998). The focus on these variables in training assumes that youth need knowledge and internal self-worth to succeed as a leader. The Rutgers Cooperative Extension (2003) posit that youth leadership involves the ability of youth to work together toward a vision. It is important to consider collaboration opportunities when forming a leadership program.

More recently, in research in Toronto focusing on youth leadership development, Cohen and McDonough (2012) studied four pillars that enhance youth leadership development: strong relationships between youth and adults, youth engagement in decision-making and program planning to impact their communities, intentional skill building, and high expectations. More specifically, skill building involves aspects needed to develop physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological and social health. In developing a youth leadership program, one should provide opportunities to learn cognitive, affective and behavioral skills from peers and research demonstrates that well-designed programs promote relationships with both peers and adults because the consistent presence of a single caring adult can lead to more positive youth development (Garmezy, 1993).

Some studies also have used relational theory to help conceptualize or frame youth leadership. Considering the capacity for leadership, researchers have distinguished between

internal, or the ability to analyze your goals and have self-esteem to carry them out, versus external, or the ability to guide and direct others (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). In other words, leaders have internal characteristics that support leadership building and external capacities that help to pay the leadership forward into the community. Other leadership programs have used empowerment theory to support the development of positive cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Zimmerman, 2000).

In conclusion, by being engaged in a youth leadership program, youth have an opportunity to create a purposeful experience to stimulate creativity and a wider sense of their possible futures. Considering youth development, participation in a well-designed program has the potential to build virtues like service and diligence that solidify a sense of constructive purpose which are likely to enable youth to thrive.

High Poverty Context

In considering the effectiveness of any program, it is imperative to consider the context in which it will be implemented. While schools are often the environment for youth interventions, those in high poverty areas have a unique set of challenges. Some common barriers in high poverty contexts include a history of failure, limited time to support student needs and fulfill academic requirements, power imbalance between administration, teachers and students, turnover of staff, and centralized control over policies affecting the school that can be demoralizing for students and staff (Kirshner, 2007; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Langhout et al., 2002; Ozer et al., 2010). Considering these barriers, it is not surprising that when assessing youth empowerment programs, research has demonstrated that students' sense of power to make a change in the schools was often thwarted (Ozer, 2013). Additionally, youth in high poverty are less likely to perceive their relationships with teachers and connections to school as positive

when compared with their middle-class peers (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004). Due to their history in many dysfunctional social systems, youth are less likely to persevere or make commitments to their well-being. According to a recent study on urban youth, leadership programs should "support collaborative agency and participatory action that are directed toward changing the broader social issues affecting the youth's lives" (Houwer, 2013, p. 57).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is an important factor in youth development. Research indicates that having higher self-efficacy is related to more positive outcomes such as mental health and physical health (White, 2013), while low self-efficacy is related to more negative outcomes such as delinquency, oppositional behavior, and substance abuse (e.g., Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2011; Fergusson & Horwood, 2002; Greenberg, 2008). According to White (2013), perceived self-efficacy is the most crucial and pervasive mechanism of human agency. If one believes that action can positively impact his/her outcomes, he/she would be more likely to persevere in the face of adversity. It is clear that youth require high self-efficacy to persevere, and leadership has the potential to increase self-efficacy. While leadership and self-efficacy independently have been paired with positive outcomes, there has been mixed results in research to demonstrate this connection empirically.

Leadership interventions with positive outcomes are often linked with self-efficacy (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson & Hare, 2004). Gullan, Power and Leff (2013) explored the role of program empowerment in positive identity development amongst high poverty youth. Researchers studied the Kids for Action program, which is a classroom-wide intervention in which students identify a problem and carry out a service project. The program consists of

twenty 45-minute sessions over the course of one semester, with sessions 1-10 for skill building and 11-20 for a service project.

Many measures (e.g., self- efficacy, sense of responsibility and ethnic identity) were collected pre- and post- intervention. Self-efficacy was measured using Cowen et al.'s (1991) scale. Sense of civic responsibility was measured using a 10-item measure with limited psychometric strength. Ethnicity was measured with the Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999). Program empowerment, or the extent to which youth felt the program was empowering, was measured using a three-item measure created by the researchers. Results demonstrated that youth who experienced empowerment had increased self-efficacy, sense of civic responsibility and ethnic identity (Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013). It is important to note that this result was only found when data were controlled for how the program was experienced. In other words, it is not the program alone that produces positive effects, but also how the youth experience the process of participation.

In considering the limitations of the study, it is important to consider measures and program implementation. Some measures used had marginal psychometric properties, which limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study lacked a control group to ensure the results were strictly due to participation in the Kids for Action program. While it is clear that some students were more influenced by the program than others, there is little information about the predictive factors of which students experienced the program as empowering and why they felt empowered.

Wong, Lau, and Lee (2012) reviewed the effects of a youth leadership program in a public school. This study occurred in an underprivileged district and included approximately 50

students ranging from age 15 to 16. The leadership program included training in problem solving and team building, "friendship building" (or psychoeducation about the needs of the individuals the youth would be serving; p. 3), and volunteer services. The program was approximately twenty hours total, with four hours of activity participation over a 5-month period and youth were engaged with disabled youth through the Red Cross. All student leaders attended the same leadership training meetings, which ensures that all leaders were trained in the same way, using the same intervention. Self-efficacy is often studied using the general self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 2010), and this was the measure used for assessing self-efficacy growth in this study. While only small changes in overall pre-post general self-efficacy were noted, female students demonstrated statistically significant changes in both self-esteem and self-efficacy after participating in this program.

Ozer (2012) engaged youth in a youth-led participatory action research (yPAR) program. This study occurred within a high-poverty high school. The leaders were recruited from an elective course and were enrolled in a six-week program that included team building, communication skills, and principles of social justice. The experimental group was trained in conducting research of their own and the control group completed a peer mentoring program. Results of this study indicated no differences in perceived control at school or self-esteem pre- or post-intervention for the experimental group.

One tentative conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that short-term interventions without ongoing supportive instruction seem less likely to provide the skill learning and positive experiences needed for genuine improvement in self-efficacy. These considerations were part of the design of the present study.

Grit

The concept of grit is related to self-efficacy, as they both involve perseverance, but they are studied as separate constructs. According to Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007), grit is perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit is often studied using the Short-Grit Scale. Two subscales within grit are consistency of interest, or setting goals and pursuing them, and perseverance of effort, or the ability to push through adversity and work toward something.

Grit is still in the early stages of research, but has the potential to be a relevant concept to youth leadership. One recent study found a correlation of grit and growth mindset (West, Kraft, Finn, Martin, Duckworth, Gabrieli & Gabrieli, 2015). Growth mindset measures student's belief that their academic ability can improve with effort and that it is not fixed (Dweck, 2006). Youth with a growth mindset do not believe failure is a permanent condition. Many forms of leadership training are focused on guiding students in the area of problem solving, setting goals, building cooperation and confidence in their strengths, rather than remaining stagnant in a fixed mindset about their skills and abilities. Duckworth believes that grit can be built in children by promoting growth mindset, which may happen through engagement in leadership. Additionally, it is possible that youth who have higher levels of grit are more likely to join in leadership programs, but little research has been found in this area.

Considering the disempowerment common in failing urban schools, it cannot be expected that leadership opportunities, even when provided and supported, will go smoothly. While developing a capacity for diligence and constructive response to obstacles should be part of youth leadership programs, it is likely the case that higher levels of grit on the part of students

when they enter leadership programs will predict higher levels of participation and a lower likelihood of leaving the program or having a partial commitment.

Sense of Purpose

According to research (Edelman, Gill, Comerford, Larson, & Hare, 2004), one outcome of leadership is a sense of purpose in goals and activities. Damon (2003) states, "Purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self (p. 121)." Damon contends that for youth to develop and maintain a true sense of leadership, they must recognize the larger purpose or the service potential for completing activities in which they are engaged. Youth benefit from being in contexts that allow them to make decisions and feel like they are making changes in their communities. Experiential learning leads to being engaged in something beyond themselves, which can have a transformative effect on the behaviors and feelings of youth (Larson, 2005). Youth who engage in leadership may be more in tune with their sense of purpose and being engaged in leadership may help to identify their sense of purpose. However, to this point, there has been relatively little research explicitly looking at the connections between purpose and youth leadership.

Additionally, Oyserman, Smith, and Elmore (2014) created a theory of identity motivation which states that students are highly influenced by attainable short- and long-term futures. If youth are in high poverty systems, additional support may be needed to help these students recognize their self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose. The literature suggests that having a sense of purpose helps youth in prosocial development but provides less guidance with regard to specific ways to facilitate this growth. As adolescence is a crucial developmental stage for developing a sense of self, this may be a perfect time to intervene and support the

development of positive purpose. The present study draws on the possibility that helping youth to identify a problem in their school, planning a project to address the problem and carrying out the project can tangibly reinforce students' sense of making a positive difference and hence facilitate the growth of purpose.

Additional Variables

According to the *APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct,* Principle E states:

> Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination. Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status and consider these factors when working with members of such groups. Psychologists try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon such prejudices.

For this reason, it is important to explore additional variables that might mediate or moderate those students who engage in leadership, and consider the impact these variables may have on the effectiveness of engagement in a leadership program. Very little research addresses such variables as gender, grade level, school performance or ethnicity and youth leadership.

Gender.

More research is needed in the area of gender and youth leadership. Considering literature on gender norms, men are taught at an early age to be strong, aggressive and competitive but girls acting as leaders may go against their norms of being followers and more

self-conscious (p.33-34, VanLinden & Fertman, 1998). According to Shernoff (2013), girls have engagement dispositions characterized by an intrinsic enjoyment of academic work. In other words, girls are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to succeed in school. Two studies found that self-efficacy was higher for girls than boys after participation in an empowerment program (Gullan, Power, & Leff, 2013; Wong, Lau, & Lee, 2012).

Grade level/ School performance.

Grade level and school performance are also lacking research in the area of youth leadership. Students with better grades have engagement dispositions characterized by strong academic and school attachments (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). According to Eklund, Tanner, Stoll, and Anway (2015), cognitive abilities may be one of several protective factors to mitigate social, emotional or behavioral concerns. Considering efficacy, students have higher self-efficacy when they perform well; therefore, it is possible that having higher grades might impact an individual's perception of leadership capability. Grade level may also be an important variable to consider in youth leadership. While this is not often studied, youth in sixth grade may be at the earlier stages of identity development, which may leave them less likely to seek opportunity, due to self-consciousness, but more malleable in outcome results.

Ethnicity.

In assessing a leadership program, it is also helpful to think about the differences in ethnicity amongst the participants in a program. Generally, research has studied the impact of race/ethnicity on youth engagement, but results have been inconsistent (Lawson & Masyn, 2015). Some research has found that race/ethnicity is not a predictor of engagement (Shernoff, 2013). Other research has demonstrated that ethnicity has impacted adolescent's understanding of leadership. More specifically, core traits differed across ethnic group, such that white youth

linked leadership with ethical behavior, minority youth saw leadership as focused on communication and self-drive, and Asian youth emphasized overall confidence (Jackson, Sakuma, & DeVol, 2015). Due to the inconsistent results across studies of ethnicity as it relates to youth leadership, more research is needed in this area.

The Present Study

The lack of recent literature on the topic of youth leadership points to the need to better understand the predictors of student engagement in leadership, the parameters of youth leadership and the possible outcomes after participation. As noted earlier, self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose are theoretically important parameters of youth leadership. To date, there have not been studies examining how those who have higher levels of self-efficacy, grit and purpose engage in leadership, in comparison to those who have lower levels, nor the extent to which changes in self-efficacy, grit and purpose take place after youth are engaged in a year-long leadership program directed toward improvements in those areas. Further, while there have been some studies within a middle-school context, there is little research about leadership programs in high poverty schools. As students from low-income backgrounds face a variety of challenges that make it harder to reach their potential, school psychologists are in a great position to support these youth (Boser & Brown, 2016). In addition, there is little information about how gender, grade level, school performance and race/ethnicity might impact those students who seek out leadership opportunities or if these variables impact the effectiveness of a leadership program. This study attempted to explore these gaps in current literature.

Considering the importance of an ecological, developmental lens within psychology, leadership programs can be most effective when they are embedded within a strong school climate. Community psychologists take a perspective that reflects consideration of ecological,

developmental and contextual variables (Kloos et al., 2012). With integration into the current school structure, the program can be more sustainable and youth can experience positive development. Considering the community psychology framework when creating a youth leadership program gives theoretical richness and justifies the intervention context as potentially sustainable within an education and school psychology practice framework. In the present study, all students were engaged in a school-wide social-emotional curriculum and some students were given the opportunity to also engage in a leadership program, as "Ambassadors". An overview of the key components of the program are provided below (see Table 1).

Table 1
Key Components of Ambassador Program

MOSAIC Advisory Curriculum	Students received explicit instruction in the constellation of virtues as well as skill building lessons to practice the competencies needed to act on these virtues.
Election	Students volunteered for the Ambassador position, made a speech to pitch why they are fit for the role and participated in an election within their class
SCA	Students facilitated school community-action (SCA) lessons within their MOSAIC class
Training	Students were trained by school MOSAIC coordinator and/or graduate students on effective leadership skills like communication, problem solving and time management.
Team Meetings	Students worked with other Ambassadors within their school (Ambassador Teams) to complete a positive purpose project. Students created an idea, pitched it to administration, and planned for execution of the project.
Positive Purpose Projects	Students carried out the appropriate action steps to complete their positive purpose projects within the school.
Ambassador Showcase	Students attended a showcase at the end of the school year to present their projects to Ambassadors from other schools.

The present study sought to build on prior research about the impact of youth leadership programs on middle school students within a high poverty context. This study explored whether levels of self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose predicted those who chose to engage in a

school-embedded leadership program and explored whether these variables were impacted by engagement in leadership. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. *Before entering a leadership program, were there baseline differences between the Ambassador group and their non-Ambassador matched control group?*
    a. *Were those individuals in the Ambassador leader group higher in scores of self-efficacy, grit, or sense of purpose than those that were in the control group?*
    b. *Are there differences in self-efficacy, grit and purpose amongst the leadership group when considering gender and grade level?* In considering these variables and prior research, the following predictions were made:
        i. Males in the leadership group will have higher scores on self-efficacy, grit and purpose than females in the leadership group at baseline.
        ii. Within the leadership group, students in eighth grade will have higher scores on self-efficacy, grit and purpose than those in sixth grade.
    c. *Are students within the leadership group different than their control peers in self-efficacy, grit or sense of purpose when considering ethnicity and academic performance?*
        i. It was predicted that African-American youth in the leadership group would have higher scores on self-efficacy, grit and purpose than those in the control group.
        ii. It was predicted that students with higher academic grades in the leadership group would have higher levels of self-efficacy and grit at baseline compared to their control peers.

2. Pre – post: Does Ambassadors' self-reported self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose increase more from baseline to post-intervention than non-Ambassadors?

a. *Did self-efficacy improve more with participation in the program than for those who were in control group?* It was expected that self-efficacy would improve more for those who participate in the leadership program when compared to their control group peers.

b. *Can grit be increased with participation in a leadership program?* Although there is not much literature in this area yet, it was expected that grit would increase more for those involved in the leadership program when compared to the control group.

c. *Does participating in a leadership program help youth to gain a positive sense of purpose?* It was hypothesized that youth who participate in the leadership program will develop a stronger sense of purpose than those who were in the control group.

3. Does gender, ethnicity, grade or school performance moderate the student's amount of change from pre-post when assessing the impacts of the leadership program? In considering these variables and prior research, the following predictions were made:

a. Female Ambassadors were expected to show stronger improvement in self-efficacy, grit and positive purpose from leadership participation than males who participated.

b. Higher achieving students were expected to show a stronger impact in self-efficacy, grit and positive purpose when engaged in the leadership program than lower-achieving students who were also engaged in the program.

c. Younger student (6th grade) Ambassadors were expected to demonstrate stronger improvements in self-efficacy, grit and positive purpose than older student (8th grade) Ambassadors.

d. African American youth leaders were expected to be less likely to show stronger improvement in self-efficacy, grit and positive purpose from participation than white peers engaged in the leadership program.

4. *What is the impact of effectiveness of participation on the results of the intervention?*

Dosage includes such measures as meeting and Ambassador Showcase attendance.

a. It was predicted that individuals who attended a larger percentage of meetings would demonstrate stronger improvement in self-efficacy, grit and positive purpose.

Methods

Participants and Setting

The current study used data from the Ambassador Program within the Mastering Our Skills and Inspiring Character (MOSAIC) Project of the Rutgers Social-Emotional Learning Lab and the Jersey City Public Schools, funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Through this grant, the Rutgers SECD Lab was able to consult with the school about program implementation. The MOSAIC project is intended to improve social-emotional skills amongst middle school students, through daily lessons focusing on a specific set of skills and virtues (i.e., forgiveness, creativity, diligence, generosity, and future mindedness). In the present study, all students participated in a classroom-wide curriculum, MOSAIC (Master Our Skills and Inspiring Character), during their usually-scheduled Advisory time. MOSAIC taught students a

combination of evidence-based social-emotional skills and character competencies in support of positive purpose.

Jersey City has approximately 27,000 students enrolled and most of these students are from racial/ethnic minority groups (New Jersey Department of Education, 2013). More specifically, students are 11% White, 32% Black, 38% Hispanic and 17% Asian across the district. Approximately 75% of students receive free lunch. At start-up, in 2015, six intervention schools were selected to represent the variety of school sizes, grade configurations and percentages of minority students.

For the purposes of this study, the three schools that had begun the Ambassador program and collected data were selected for study based on having the most complete implementation data. Two schools were middle schools serving grades 6-8, and one school was a primary school serving grades PreK-8. School A had 843 students enrolled in the school, which includes grades 6-8. The ethnic breakdown includes 34.5% Hispanic, 33.2% Black, 20.6% Asian, 10.1% White, .8% Two Races, .4% American Indian and .4% Pacific Islander. Among those students, thirty-six students were Ambassadors. In the year 2014-2015, approximately 78% of students received free or reduced lunch at School A. School B had 244 students enrolled. The ethnic breakdown includes 62.3% Black, 23.4% Hispanic, 8.2% Asian, 3.7% White, 1.2% Two Races and 0.8% Pacific Islander. In the year 2014-2015, approximately 91% of students received free or reduced lunch at School B. Among those students, nineteen students were Ambassadors. School C had 276 students enrolled from grades 6-8. The ethnic breakdown of the entire school (grades K-8) includes 34.6% Hispanic, 27.5% Black, 25.5% White, 11.4% Asian, 0.5% Two Races, 0.3% Pacific Islander. In the year 2014-2015, approximately 85.5% of students received free or reduced lunch at School C. Among those students, thirty-one students were

Ambassadors. Note that there was a significant Arabic-speaking population in School C who were counted as White, demographically.

There was a total of 86 Ambassadors from three schools. Each student was matched with two control students who were receiving the identical MOSAIC curriculum, but were not student Ambassadors. Control peers were matched on five primary characteristics: gender, ethnicity, grade level, school performance, and special education status. These criteria represent variables believed to potentially moderate the outcome of leadership engagement, and therefore need to be controlled to ensure that differences in results are due to the Ambassador program and no other variables. Some Ambassadors were only matched with one control due to limited student matches. Students who dropped out of school or entered during the period of data collection were excluded from the sample. Additionally, if a student did not have Fall or Spring self-report data, they were removed from the dataset.

The final sample included 165 students: 56 Ambassadors and 109 Non-Ambassador matches; overall, the 56 Ambassadors were demographically matched with the 30 excluded Ambassadors. The final sample consisted of 86 males and 79 females, with a mean age of 12.79 (*SD*= .934). Approximately 41% of the students were Hispanic (*n*= 68), 34% were African American (*n*= 55), 14% were Asian (*n*= 23), 9% were White (*n*= 15) and the remaining students (*n*= 2) identified as Pacific Islander. The majority of students (*n*=129) received free or reduced lunch (78%).

Intervention

To elaborate on the points outlined in Table 2, the goals of the MOSAIC project were generally to increase social-emotional skills, improve character, and develop students' sense of purpose via action-focused pedagogy. The Ambassador program is considered an additional

opportunity for some students in each school to serve as leaders, and further develop their skills and virtues. The Ambassador Program was developed by the Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab ("RU SECD LAB," 2015) to engage students in a positive way and create contributory roles for students. Classes were randomly assigned to the Ambassador condition (i.e., two student ambassadors per class) or the teacher condition (i.e., no student ambassadors), in order to compare differences in effectiveness of youth leadership while controlling for school characteristics.

For the Ambassador condition, two students were elected in advisory classrooms to serve as classroom and school leaders. More specifically, these students were told about the Ambassador program, the teacher assessed interest, each interested student gave a speech to the class, and students voted for their classroom Ambassadors. Teachers were encouraged to use student votes as a guide to select one female and one male student Ambassador within their classroom. In some cases, teachers encouraged reluctant students to put themselves up to be Ambassadors. The instructions guided teachers to have one ambassador with the most votes and use judgment in selecting a second ambassador, preferably a student of the opposite sex. In other words, the ambassadors were not always the students with the most votes to increase potential diversity.

The Ambassadors who engaged in the program had the opportunity to serve as leaders within their classroom and school environments. Students helped lead community action lessons four times per month during their MOSAIC lessons, participated in team meetings and worked on school-wide team projects (Positive Purpose Projects) with other Ambassadors within their schools.

Within each classroom, from November through May, Ambassadors led a monthly series of 4 lessons, labeled as School Community Action (SCA), each taking 15 instructional minutes (plus prior preparation with their teacher), during which students had the opportunity to become engaged, involved stakeholders on issues within the school. Ambassadors solicited suggestions and feedback, facilitated discussions to brainstorm effective change and brought that information to school personnel. Some Ambassadors had additional opportunities to serve as leaders within the classroom, such as leading other lessons with the teacher or taking notes on the board. Ambassadors were trained for this by attending three SCA bimonthly training meetings (see Appendix A for SCA training timeline) led by Ambassador Training Leaders, who was a teacher in the school and/or a trained graduate student from the Rutgers SECD Lab MOSAIC team. The Ambassador Training Leaders were oriented to the meeting agendas and were given scripts to use for the bimonthly meetings to ensure that all Ambassador were trained in a similar way. A sample meeting agenda has been provided to depict the level of detail within the script (see Appendix B).

Meetings lasted approximately 15-30 minutes and involved orientation to new responsibilities and training in specific skills. At the first meeting, students were oriented to the Ambassador program and the SCA classroom lessons. At the second meeting, students were asked to read and sign an Ambassador contract, which specifically outlined the responsibilities of the Ambassador title (see Appendix B). While completing this contract, students were given the option to speak with the Ambassador Training Leader privately about his/her reservations about the program. When students indicated that they were not interested or willing to take on the responsibilities of the program, they were given the option of withdrawing from the program. In other words, all student Ambassadors who signed contracts were willing to serve as

Ambassadors. During the third meeting, the students were given the opportunity to reflect on the experience of leading a classroom SCA. Throughout these three meetings, the students were trained in topics such as effective communication, presentation skills, and social problem solving.

The other key aspect of the Ambassador program was participation in a school-wide Positive Purpose Project. After being trained in leading classroom SCA discussions, Ambassadors were assigned to teams within their schools to complete projects designed to improve some aspect of their school or community. Approximately nine meetings were held to train students in additional skills needed and allow teams the time for taking action (see Appendix C for Positive Purpose Project meeting breakdown). Modeled on the PARD/C framework (a pedagogical sequence involving Preparation, Action, Reflection, Demonstration and Celebration, Kaye, 1997), the Positive Purpose Project included brainstorming, proposing the idea, planning and carrying out a project at their school.

Ambassador Teams began in the "Preparation" domain where they were asked to select an issue in their school that they wish to address, breaking into committees and creating an action plan. Teams moved into "Action" by working within committees to carry out the action plan. Depending on the idea, this phase involved actions like making posters about anti-bullying, preparing a script for a video performance or gathering the materials needed to host an event. During the "Reflection" phase, Ambassadors were encouraged to think about their challenges and successes throughout the Positive Purpose Project. Ambassador Teams were asked to document the project and "Demonstrated" a review of what impact they made. The Ambassador Teams gathered at The State University of New Jersey in order to present their projects to other Ambassador teams and "Celebrate" their accomplishments. Project ideas

ranged from anti-bullying to cultural acceptance. In addition to PARD/C, skill-building lessons were provided in topics like teamwork, ethical decision making and creative thinking during completion of the Positive Purpose Projects.

Theory of Change

The Ambassador program was established on a theory of change that indicates the purpose of the program, inputs, outputs and expected outcomes of the project. Students established the foundation of their social-emotional skills and character competencies during their MOSAIC lessons. In addition, the Ambassadors received specific leadership training and had opportunities to engage in improving their school community. Through these opportunities, youth used the skills and virtues they developed through the MOSAIC curriculum (e.g., creativity, diligence and empathy). Participation in this Ambassador Program was expected to enhance students' purpose by giving them meaningful direction and increase their engagement in their school community. A logic model is depicted in Appendix E.

Procedures

Students were asked to complete a series of self-report measures at pre-test and post-test. In the beginning of the school year (i.e., before November), students completed measures during their standard advisory class. The survey took approximately 1 hour to complete. After some students were engaged in the Ambassador program, post-test surveys were administered at the end of the school year (i.e., after March). Again, students completed the 1-hour survey during their advisory class.

Measures

Demographics: Parents gave permission for access to school records of demographic characteristics and school performance data of students. Gender, ethnicity, grade-level and

academic grades were all collected from school records for each Ambassador and his/her matched control peer. Students' subject area grades (i.e., Social Studies, Math, Science and Language Arts) were collected for each marking period. The final grades for each class were totaled and averaged, in order to collect a "school performance" construct. If a grade was missing for a certain class, it was not counted in the average.

Perceived self-efficacy: Self-efficacy was measured using the General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE: Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The GSE includes 10 items and is often used to assess self-efficacy. A typical item is, ""Thanks to my resourcefulness, I can handle unforeseen situations." Response options are: not at all true (1), hardly true (2), moderately true (3), and exactly true (4), yielding a total score between 10 and 40. High scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy. This scale has been adapted to 28 languages and has excellent psychometrics. It has demonstrated high retest-reliability of r= .67, stability of r= .75 after one year and internal consistencies are typically between alpha= .75 and .91. In this study, this measure demonstrated high reliability for baseline (alpha=.83) and post-intervention (alpha=.91). The measure has also demonstrated high construct validity and convergent and discriminant validity across studies and cultures (Scholz, Gutierrez Doña, Sud & Schwarzer 2002; Schwarzer, 1999). See Appendix F.

Grit: Grit was measured using the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S, Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The Grit-S is an 8-item measure designed to assess trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Subscales include perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, but for the purposes of this study, only perseverance of effort was studied (items 5, 7 and 8). The selection of grit items was selected based on a recent study of the grit construct in this population and the poor reliability of the passion aspect of grit (Hatchimonji, 2016). Items are rated using a 5-point

scale ranging from "very much like me" to "not like me at all." The Grit-S has good reliability (alpha = .73 to .83). In the present study, the measure had high reliability at baseline (alpha=.73) and post-intervention (alpha=.80). See Appendix G for measure.

Sense of purpose: Purpose was measured using a combination of items from two different purpose scales. Based on pilot data with this population, two items were used from the Purpose Scale for Adolescents (Lippman et al., 2014) and three items were taken from Bundick et. al (2008)'s Revised Youth Purpose Survey. These items were representative of the full scores of their scales and also related as strongly to one-another as their items related to each other internally. The Bundick et al. scale has shown reliability and predictive validity among adolescent samples (Blattner, Liang, Lund & Spencer, 2013; Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). In the present study, the measure demonstrated good reliability at baseline (alpha=.82) and post-intervention (alpha=.87). See Appendix H.

Dosage of ambassador program. When considering the effectiveness of youth engagement, it is also helpful to consider how much is needed in order for a program to be effective. For the purposes of this study, dosage will be examined by considering the total number of Ambassador SCA trainings and Positive Purpose Projects team meetings were attended throughout the school year. An attendance percentage was calculated using the total number of meetings held and the total meetings attended.

Table 2 summarizes all of the items used and their measurement metrics.

Measures Used

Table 2 *Items and Measurement Metrics*	
Instrument Name: **General Perceived Self-Efficacy** *Construct Assessed*: Self-Efficacy	
Item 1	I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
Item 2	If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want
Item 3	It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
Item 4	I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
Item 5	Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations
Item 6	I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
Item 7	I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
Item 8	When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
Item 9	If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution
Item 10	I can usually handle whatever comes my way
Response format: A- Not at all true, B- Hardly true, C- Moderately true, D- Exactly true	
Instrument Name: **Short Grit Scale** *Construct Assessed*: Grit *Subscale:* Perseverance of Effort	
Item 1	I finish whatever I begin.
Item 2	I am a hard worker.
Item 3	I am diligent. "Diligent" means I am careful and responsible in the things I do
Response format: A- Not at all like me, B- A little like me, C- Half the time like me, D- Usually like me, E- Always like me	
Instrument Name: **Purpose Scale for Adolescents** *Construct Assessed*: Sense of Purpose	
Item 1	My life will make a difference in the world.
Item 2	I am doing things that will help me to achieve my purpose in life.
Response format: A- Strongly agree, B- Somewhat agree, C- Neither agree nor disagree, D- Somewhat disagree, E- Strongly disagree	
Instrument Name: **Revised Youth Purpose Survey** *Construct Assessed*: Sense of Purpose	
Item 1	My life has a clear sense of purpose.
Item 2	I am always working toward accomplishing my most important goals in life.
Item 3	I have a purpose in my life that says a lot about who I am.
Response format: A- Strongly disagree, B- Disagree, C- Somewhat disagree, D- Neither agree nor disagree, E- Somewhat agree, F- Agree, G- Strongly agree	

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A correlation matrix was completed to assess differences across demographic variables. Few correlations emerged, which demonstrates that the variables are distinct. One important finding was that there was no direct correlation between the Ambassador group and any demographic variables (e.g., race, gender, grade level, final grades, etc.). This supports prior research which indicated that all students have the potential for leadership. Mean scores were calculated and are depicted below for Ambassador and Non-Ambassador groups (see Table 3). These data support the assumption that the matching process was sound and groups were comparable to each other.

Table 3
Descriptive analysis of student characteristics by Ambassador/Non-Ambassador group

Demographic Variable	Ambassador		Non-Ambassador	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Gender				
Female	27	48.2	52	48.1
Male	29	51.8	56	51.9
Grade Level				
6th	21	37.5	40	37.0
7th	21	37.5	41	38.0
8th	14	25.0	27	25.0
Ethnicity				
African American	18	32.1	37	34.3
Hispanic	21	37.5	47	43.5
White	5	8.9	10	9.3
Asian	21	17.9	13	12.0
Other	2	3.6	1	.9

Table 3- Continued
Descriptive analysis of student characteristics by Ambassador/Non-Ambassador group

Socio-Economic Status				
Free/Reduced Lunch	44	78.6	85	77.9
No Benefits	12	21.4	24	22.0
Limited English Proficiency				
Yes	5	8.9	14	12.9
No	51	91.1	94	87.0
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	12.79	.967	12.79	.918
Final Grade (all subjects)	85.21	6.13	84.28	6.19

Baseline Differences

In order to answer the first research question about differences among groups, pre-intervention data was used to assess key variables across the Ambassador and the non-Ambassador condition (see Table 4). At baseline, the Ambassador group did not differ on self-efficacy, grit or sense of purpose. A series of t-tests demonstrated that there was no difference between Ambassadors and Non-Ambassadors in self-reported self-efficacy: $t(159) = -.471$, $p = 0.638$, grit: $t(158) = .117$, $p = 0.907$ or sense of purpose: $t(160) = -.654$, $p = 0.514$. In other words, students who sought out leadership opportunities or were nominated by their teacher to be part of the leadership program did not have higher levels of self-efficacy, grit or sense of purpose than their control group peers.

In considering demographic differences, a series of t-tests were used to compare baseline differences as a function of gender, race, grade level and academic performance. Within the Ambassador group, males and females did not differ in self-efficacy, purpose or grit scores at

baseline. No significant results were found when testing for differences in self-reported sense of purpose, self-efficacy and grit for 8th graders and 6th graders.

Table 4
Descriptive differences in self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose by group

Pre-intervention data	Ambassador			Non-Ambassador		
	n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Self-efficacy	54	3.13	.53	107	3.09	.49
Grit	54	4.12	.78	106	4.14	.75
Sense of purpose	55	4.25	.68	107	4.18	.71

Post-intervention data	Ambassador			Non-Ambassador		
	n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Self-efficacy	52	3.11	.54	104	3.01	.58
Grit	52	4.15	.84	104	4.06	.80
Sense of purpose	54	4.30	.76	105	4.11	.81

In addition to differences within the Ambassadors, some analyses focused on differences between the Ambassador and Non-Ambassador groups. A series of t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences in self-efficacy, grit or purpose for African American Ambassadors and African American non-Ambassadors at baseline**.** In order to test the difference between academic grades and leadership, a regression was used. The independent variables for the regression were the average of all academic grades and Ambassador status (i.e., Ambassador and non-Ambassador). Three separate regressions were run using self-efficacy, sense of purpose and grit as the dependent variable, respectively. There were no differences between Ambassadors with higher academic grades and Non-Ambassadors with higher academic grades when considering levels of self-efficacy and grit.

Pre-Post Differences

The second research question posed in this study targeted whether there was a larger increase in self-efficacy, purpose and grit for those involved in the Ambassador program. To assess the differences in the Ambassador and Non-Ambassador scores, a series of ANCOVAs were performed. Participation in the Ambassador program did not predict change in self-efficacy, grit, or sense of purpose scores from baseline to post-intervention. Results for the ANCOVAs are depicted in Table 5. There were no significant data to support that students who were Ambassadors reported higher levels of growth than those who were not Ambassadors.

Table 5
ANCOVA differences in Ambassador versus Non-Ambassador group

Source	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Baseline Self-Efficacy	1	5.12	23.48	.00
Between Groups	156	.30	1.38	.24
Baseline Grit	1	24.73	45.09	.00
Between Groups	156	.34	.63	.43
Baseline Sense of Purpose	1	20.01	37.69	.00
Between Groups	159	.75	1.41	.24

In order to assess the potential moderating impact of demographic variables, a series of regressions was run to test gender, grade level, ethnicity and school performance. Within the leadership group, a regression analysis demonstrated that there was no significant difference in growth between those who had higher grade point averages than those with lower academic achievement. Additionally, when comparing 8th grade Ambassadors to 6th grade Ambassadors, there was no statistical difference in the amount of growth from baseline to post-intervention. Additional regression analyses demonstrated no significant difference between those students who were African American and their white peers with regard to growth.

However, analyses by gender yielded significant findings (see Table 6). Male Ambassadors demonstrated a significant increase in purpose from baseline (M=4.31, SD=.56) to post-intervention (M=4.43, SD=.71). Male Non-Ambassadors decreased in purpose scores from baseline (M=4.19, SD=.61) to post-intervention (M=4.00, SD=.91).

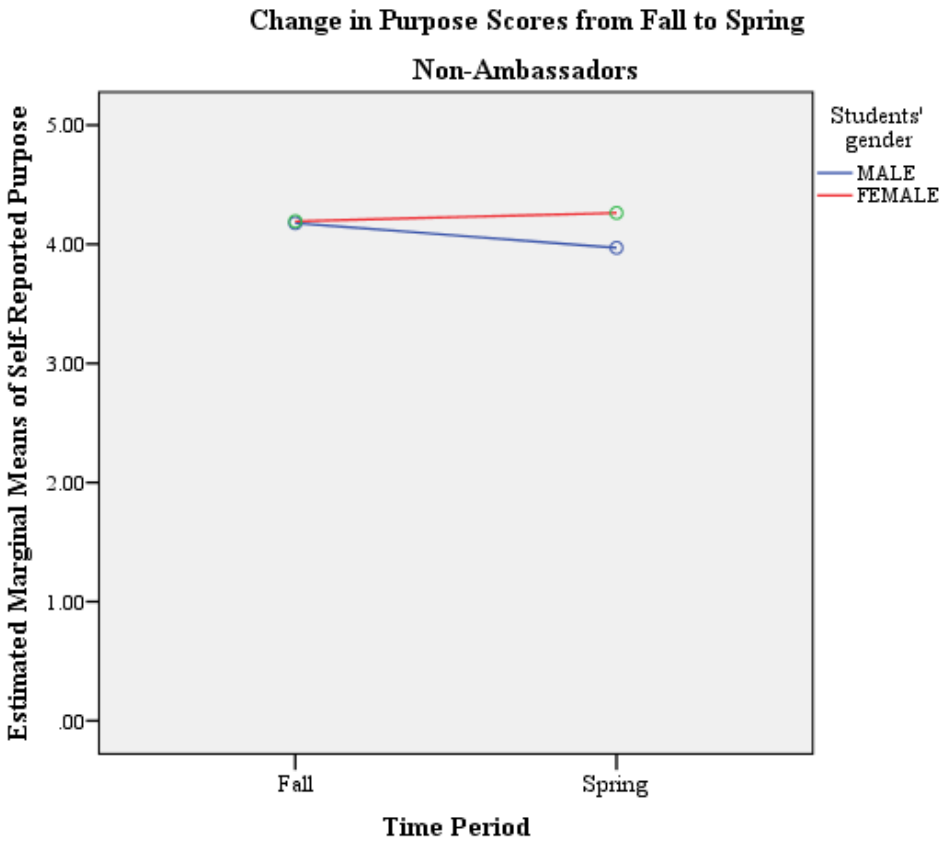

Figure 1: Change in Purpose Scores- Non-Ambassadors

Students who were not engaged in the leadership program demonstrated little difference between Fall and Spring self-reports of purpose. Males and females had similar scores in the Fall and male scores slightly decreased by Spring.

Table 6
Gender differences in purpose scores

Pre-intervention data	Pre-Test Purpose			Post-Test Purpose		
	n	M	SD	*n*	M	SD
Ambassador Males	28	4.31	.56	28	4.43	.71
Non-Ambassador Males	54	4.19	.61	54	4.00	.91
Ambassador Females	27	4.19	.79	27	4.13	.80
Non-Ambassador Females	52	4.17	.81	51	4.26	.69

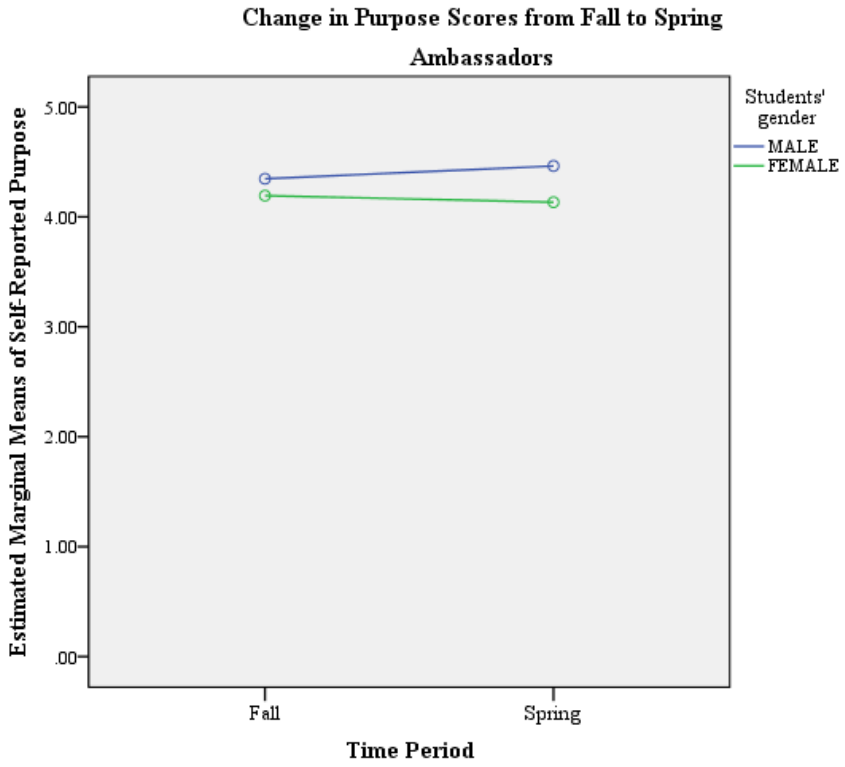

Figure 2: Change in Purpose Scores- Ambassadors

Students who were engaged in the leadership program are depicted above. Females demonstrated little change in feelings of purpose from Fall to Spring. Males demonstrated a slight increase in self-reported purpose, which may demonstrate the program's effectiveness for boys. It is possible that the program was more impactful for men than women, but it is important to note that female students started with lower purpose scores.

Multiple regression analyses were used to test if the gender of students significantly predicted participants' ratings of self-efficacy, grit, and purpose. The results indicated that self-efficacy and grit were not predicted by gender. The regression indicated that adding the interaction of gender and ambassador status created significant results for the following variables: ambassador versus non-ambassadors (p=.017) and student gender (p=.044). The interaction between ambassador status and student gender explained an additional 2.6% of the variance in purpose scores. Results for the regression analyses are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7
Regression of Ambassador gender and purpose scores

	Standardized coefficients	Significance		Model F/ Sig	
Model	Beta	*t*	Sig.	Change	*R* (R^2)
1 (Constant)		5.89	.000	34.26	.423 (.179)
Pre-Intervention Purpose	.423	5.85	.000*		
2. (Constant)		5.81	.001	17.877	.432 (.186)
Pre-intervention Purpose	.418	5.78	.000*		
Ambassador/Non-Ambassador	.086	1.19	.237		
3. (Constant)		5.55	.001	12.157	.436 (.190)
Pre-intervention Purpose	.420	5.80	.000*		
Ambassador/Non-Ambassador	.085	1.17	.243		
Student Gender	.063	.877	.382		
3. (Constant)		5.49	.000	10.611	.465 (.216)
Pre-intervention Purpose	.411	5.74	.000*		
Ambassador/Non-Ambassador	.244	2.42	.017*		
Student Gender	.178	2.03	.044*		
Ambass/NonXStudent Gender	-.254	-2.24	.026*		

a. Dependent Variable: Post-intervention Purpose
b. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-Intervention Purpose
c. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-Intervention Purpose, Ambassador/Non-Ambassador
d. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-Intervention Purpose, Ambassador/Non-Ambassador, Student Gender
e. Predictors: (Constant), Pre-Intervention Purpose, Ambassador/Non-Ambassador, Student Gender, Interaction between Ambassador/Non-Ambassador and Student Gender

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Engagement/Dosage Effects

It was predicted that students receiving higher dosages of the Ambassador intervention would show a larger incline across dependent variables than their peers having lower dosages. Dosage was determined using attendance at Ambassador training and Positive Purpose Project meetings. Students were grouped into low (0-6 meetings) and high (6+) using the quartiles of attendance. These ranges were determined using means of the student attendance. It was determined that there were some baseline differences between those who attended few meetings when comparing these students to those who attended almost all meetings.

Chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between baseline scores and ambassador attendance. Baseline scores for self-efficacy were significantly related to attendance X^2 (2, N = 54) = 6.541, p = .038. The Ambassadors who reported higher self-efficacy at baseline attended more meetings than those who reported lower self-efficacy. Baseline scores for grit and sense of purpose were not significantly related to attendance. In sum, those who had higher self-efficacy at baseline were more likely to attend more Ambassador meetings than those with lower baseline scores.

Similarly, chi-square analyses were used to assess relationships between post-intervention scores and ambassador attendance. Post-intervention scores for self-efficacy were not significantly related to attendance, grit, or sense of purpose, X^2 (2, N = 52) = 2.040, p = .361; X^2 (2, N = 54) = .059, p = .971; X^2 (2, N = 55) = .565, p = .754.

Discussion

As indicated in the literature review, leadership programs have the potential to make an impact on youth development. This study assessed differences in those students who participated in a leadership program, as Ambassadors. It was determined that Ambassadors

equaled their matched, non-Ambassador peers in levels of self-efficacy, grit, and sense of purpose at baseline. In other words, all students have the potential for leadership programs (VanLinden & Fertman, 1998). The present study also assessed the differences in self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose after at least six months of engagement in the leadership program. Although it was predicted that youth leaders would increase more than those not involved in leadership, this study demonstrated that overall self-reported levels change minimally over time. As such, more research is needed to examine the effect of youth leadership programming on youth development.

When reviewing previous literature, little research was published regarding the impact of youth leadership programming. For instance, studies found that students did not demonstrate increases in self-efficacy after engagement in a leadership program (Ozer, 2012; Wong, Lau, & Lee, 2012). Programs have the potential to make an impact on youth development, but there have been few studies that can demonstrate such a difference. Gullan, Power, and Leff (2013) found significant increases in self-efficacy, sense of civic responsibility and ethnic identity but this result was only present when controlling for the "experiencing" variable. In other words, the program needed to be experienced as empowering in order for these results to be present. Although it is clear why the change in self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose could occur, the present study aligns with past research in the struggle to demonstrate this change.

In the present study, meeting attendance was examined in order to look at baseline and post-intervention differences. It was hypothesized that youth who reported higher levels of self-efficacy, grit and sense of purpose were more likely to attend more Ambassador meetings than those with lower baseline scores, but only self-efficacy was a significant predictor. No post-intervention differences were found. In other words, there was no difference in post-intervention

scores for those who attended more meetings when compared to those who attended fewer meetings. It is possible that those who had the best attendance already had higher scores at baseline, and there was not much room for them to show improvement.

When demographic variables were analyzed, one significant result was found. Males had significantly higher levels of purpose than females. In other words, males were better able to recognize their potential to accomplish something that is meaningful than were their female peers. When comparing pre- and post-intervention data, males significantly increased more than females when pre-test differences were controlled. Male Ambassadors reported the most significant gains in sense of purpose.

Some differences were found between males and females in leadership groups in past studies. Wong, Lau, and Lee (2012) found that female students significantly increased in self-esteem and self-efficacy after participating in a leadership program, but males did not. A similar result was found in the present study, regarding gender. When the whole group was assessed for changes in sense of purpose from baseline to post-intervention, there were no significant differences. Once gender was separated out, there was a clear difference between males and females. Additionally, there was a significant difference between males in the control group and males in the Ambassador group. In other words, it is possible that participation in the Ambassador program had a differential effect on sense of purpose in males and females in middle school, with males being most strongly affected.

Alternative Explanations and Limitations of Findings

The results of this study were meant to inform research about the impact of youth leadership programming. The lack of prior published research was surprising, given the frequent emphasis on leadership within diverse organizational systems, especially youth leadership in

schools. In considering the contribution of this study, it is important to consider possible limitations in procedures and findings. For example, some students dropped out of the Ambassador program and there are a few speculated reasons why this may have happened. Sometimes, teacher guidance for selection led to the election of students who were not fully committed to the role. Some classrooms did not fully undergo an election process, which resulted in Ambassadors who were unclear of the responsibilities of the role. It is possible that students did not see their potential as a leader within their school, even when they had the role and participated. This could be due to factors like a lack of prior experience in leadership roles, self-doubt, or social pressures.

There were some methodological issues, as well. All measures in this study were self-report, with the exception of student engagement, via attendance at Ambassador meetings and trainings. This creates problems with social desirability (i.e., all inflated results) and may not be an accurate measure of the students' growth. For instance, if a student does not feel confident about his/her potential, it is possible that data will not change using their report of grit or purpose over time. On the other hand, if we asked another person who interacts with the student, such as the teacher, it is possible that he/she will recognize an increased level of diligence or a more positive intention to make change within the classroom. Future studies should use multiple sources and types of data to assess a broader picture of the potential changes over time.

Another limitation to this study is the reality of school systems. Due to the busy nature of the school building, it was inevitable for researchers to have missing data. In this study, missing data decreased the sample size and impacted the possibility of finding significant results. For instance, no significant results were found when testing for differences in self-reported sense of purpose, self-efficacy and grit for 6th and 8th graders, but there was about a half of a standard

deviation difference between the grade levels. A difference of this magnitude would usually be significant, but the small sample size may have caused a Type II error. With that being said, these results, if found, would not be large in magnitude.

Additionally, this was the first year of the Ambassador program within this school. There are predictable barriers (e.g., buy-in to the program and logistical details in scheduling) that may have decreased the overall potency of the intervention and therefore the potential for success in the present study. This study should be replicated after two years of the program to allow necessary time for adjustment.

Also, this change was measured over a short period of time. It is possible that the Ambassadors will demonstrate changes in self-efficacy, sense of purpose and grit over a longer time period. In other words, it would be interesting to replicate this study when these middle school students have had two or three years of experience as Ambassadors to see if there are any changes noted. As these students may have felt the same sense of purpose, self-efficacy and grit since entering school, this change may take time. Further, as these students live in high poverty neighborhoods, it is possible that they are exposed to more adversity than others their age. This may negatively impact their ability to recognize their potential. A corrected logic model is provided to demonstrate the possibility for long-term change (see Figure 4).

In considering the variable of effectiveness of student engagement, the only measure used in the present study was dosage. It may be helpful for future research to consider variables beyond attendance and compare those who were mildly involved to those who were highly effective ambassadors. For instance, highly effective ambassadors may be considered those who took additional steps for their purpose project and demonstrated leadership among their peers. These distinctions may be found by interviewing the Ambassador Training Leaders in each

school. This comparison will help to assess how different levels of engagement impact outcomes of the program.

Implications for Practice

In considering implications for practice, there are specific suggestions that may be helpful for working with students, teachers and schools to best support our youth. First, it is important to recognize the gender differences amongst our youth. If females have a more difficult time recognizing their sense of purpose than males, we should particularly focus on young women to support them. There may be some societal barriers to changing this phenomenon, so it is important to be aware of gender stereotyping and cultural norms in our society. With that being said, it may be effective to run counseling groups for at-risk girls, bring in female speakers for inspiration, or use empowerment programs like Girls Leading Outward (GLO; Hamed et al., 2011).

Although there were no differences found in pre- to post-intervention data for those engaged in the leadership program, it is important to recognize that there were anecdotal examples of Ambassadors reporting empowerment and attributing it to the program. For instance, a video was created at the end of the program where a youth leader said, "The most important thing I learned [as an Ambassador] was teamwork…and I think I will use this in the future." Another student said, "What I liked about this program was that it wasn't like all your other classes, like math, language arts and history. It just taught you skills about life that could help you in the future." This demonstrates acquired skills and optimistic future-mindedness to accomplish success in the future. Other students spoke about making new connections with peers and staff. One student explained her journey from being a "shy person" to learning to speak in front of a crowd. The Ambassador program taught her communication and how to

express herself. Along with students, teachers reported positive changes amongst their Ambassadors and administration believed in the potential of the program.

Success is relative among our youth, so even if the data do not demonstrate a large change, quotes like these demonstrate that an impact was made. Therefore, school psychologists are in a position to educate administration about the possible impacts of youth leadership programs and help support the empowerment of youth during this crucial time of development.

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Appendix A- SCA Training Model

Table 8: *School Community Action (SCA) Meeting Breakdown*

Meeting	ACTIVITIES
Meeting 1 (Orientation)	• Express Enthusiasm for being an Ambassador • Introduction to School Community Action (SCA) Series • Skill building: Presentation skills and respect - Interview/summarizing practice - Public speaking skills - Active listening
Lead Classroom SCA	• Students serve as student leaders within classroom by leading a School Community Action discussion • Ambassadors facilitate choosing a topic, brainstorming options to fix the problem and creating a proposal for administration about taking action
Meeting 2 (Training)	• Sharing success about first SCA • Ambassador Contract • Skill Building: Communicating SCA Idea - Empower youth to advocate for positive change - Public speaking refresher - Practice presenting SCA idea - Provide feedback from presentation
Administrative Feedback	• Each classroom receives feedback about their proposed idea for taking action • Students facilitate reflection within the classroom about feedback
Meeting 3 (Training)	• Lessons learned from SCA cycle one • Introduce Ambassador Teams • Skill building: Teamwork - Small group brainstorming - Problem solving - Creative thinking

Appendix B- Sample Training document

Ambassador January Training Agenda
Meeting #2
Run Time: approximately 15 minutes

I. Lessons Learned from SCA Feedback Loop (4 minutes)
- **"During the last training, we discussed some of our successes, difficulties, and lessons learned from SCA. We also offered each other suggestions to improve on our presenting skills. Now let's spend some time discussing how useful this feedback has been."**
- Ask these discussion questions to the whole group.
  i. **"Have you been able to test out different suggestions you received since we discussed last? How was this helpful to you?"** (this doesn't have to be during SCA, can be in general)
  ii. **"Can you think of an instance in which you might use suggestions from our discussion? Which suggestions and when would you use them?"**
  iii. **"How is receiving feedback useful?"**
  iv. **"Are there any other parts of SCA for which you would like feedback or suggestions?"**
- Provide feedback & troubleshooting as necessary

II. Introduce Ambassador Teams (1 minute)
- **"As I mentioned briefly during our last training, there is a second big role of Ambassadors outside of the SCA/MOSAIC class leader role. This second big role is being part of an Ambassador Team. Ambassadors will be split up into smaller teams to work on creating positive change in your school. In your Ambassador Team, you will be working on a service project to better your school. Ambassador Teams will start next month and continue meeting regularly and working together for the rest of the school year."**
- Anticipate questions on how teams are chosen, how often/when teams will meet, when teams will begin, and other logistics…plan to incorporate this into the introduction if information is known.

III. Skill Building: Teamwork (7 minutes)
- (Activity modified from Building Everyday Leadership, Session 18)
- **"As a member of an Ambassador Team, you will likely spend a lot of time brainstorming as a group, making decisions as a group, and working together towards common goals. Last time we met, we learned about the different ways that teams can make decisions together. Today we are going to focus on team brainstorming. Specifically, we are going to be working on thinking creatively. Thinking creatively is being able to come up with new ideas or deal with problems in fresh ways. Today you are going to test your creative thinking skills and see how thinking creatively can help when working as a team."**
- Small Group Brainstorming: Break Ambassadors into small groups, and read the Scenario below aloud. Groups have 2 minutes to brainstorm a creative solution to this problem. Remind Ambassadors that this solution should be a unique, fresh

way to solve the problem. Also remind them that they should be trying to incorporate the ideas of everyone in the group, not just one person.

i. Brainstorming Scenario: Your Ambassador team has planned an outdoor walk-a-thon to raise money for your school to get new computers. Your team scheduled the event to happen the first week of March, but this year the weather is supposed to be bitterly cold. You are finding it hard to motivate people to participate because of the expected weather. Without the money from the walk-a-thon, you will not be able to raise enough money for the new computers. As an Ambassador Team, what can you do to attract more participants?

- Whole Group Share: After time is up, each group should briefly share their idea. After sharing, launch into the discussion questions below as a group:
  - **i. "How did your group work together when thinking creatively? Was it easy or hard to get everyone thinking creatively?"**
  - **ii. "Why do you think creative thinking is important for problem solving?"**
  - **iii. "How could creative thinking be useful when you start working in your Ambassador Teams?"**

IV. Ambassador Homework (2 minutes)

- **"A big part of being on an Ambassador Team is developing a service project to better your school, so we want you to start thinking about project ideas. First, it is important to start thinking about needs and issues in your school that you think are important. Once you identify some of the needs of your school, you should start thinking creatively about projects that could solve these problems. Between now and our next training in February, we would like for you to start brainstorming some ideas for service projects. You should come prepared to our next meeting with one or two ideas."**
- Provide resources and examples of school needs/issues and possible projects so that Ambassadors have some direction.

V. Q & A (1 minute)

- Ambassadors can take this opportunity to ask any questions they may have. If time runs out, Ambassadors may write their questions down for you or talk to you after training.

Appendix C- Ambassador Contract

MOSAIC AMBASSADOR CONTRACT 2015-2016

Why Should You Be a MOSAIC Ambassador: MOSAIC Ambassador Mission Statement:
*Being a MOSAIC Ambassador offers students the opportunity for leadership within their MOSAIC Advisory and the chance to make important, positive changes within their school for a term of **one year**. The program is comprised of a team of student leaders and school and MOSAIC Staff who provide guidance and support.*

MOSAIC Ambassador Code of Ethics

- ✓ I will appropriately follow the rules and requirements of the Ambassador Program and address disagreements constructively and respectfully.
- ✓ I, as an Ambassador, recognize the importance of my position and its effect on my school.
- ✓ I will make decisions and take actions that will positively affect **all students.**
- ✓ I understand that all my actions have consequences for myself and for others.
- ✓ I agree that I will follow all school rules.
- ✓ I will maintain a respectful manner at all times, both in and out of school.
- ✓ I will act as a role model to my peers.
- ✓ I understand that I represent my classroom and my school, here and in the community.
- ✓ I will listen to the concerns of my MOSAIC classmates.

Program Expectations for MOSAIC Ambassadors

- ✓ I will maintain academic standing holding a C average or above.
- ✓ I will maintain a high standard of behavior in and out of school.
- ✓ I will be in uniform every day.
- ✓ I understand and will uphold the Ambassador roles and responsibilities.

Roles and Responsibilities of the MOSAIC Ambassadors

- ✓ I will act as a Student Ambassador representative by making the needs and concerns of my MOSAIC Advisory heard.
- ✓ I will work together with my MOSAIC teacher and my co-Ambassador to fulfill my responsibilities to lead MOSAIC discussions of important school issues (the School-Community Action Series).
- ✓ I will attend and participate in all Ambassador meetings and trainings, including any that may take place at Rutgers University.
- ✓ I will join and contribute to an Ambassador Team to make positive change in our school.
- ✓ I will work closely with my fellow Ambassador to create a positive atmosphere in my MOSAIC class.

I, _____, do hereby agree to all responsibilities and expectations of being an Ambassador in this 2015-2016 school year. If I do not follow these guidelines, I could be asked to step down from being an Ambassador.

Student Signature _____
Date_____

Appendix D- Positive Purpose Project

Table 9: *Positive Purpose Project meeting breakdown*

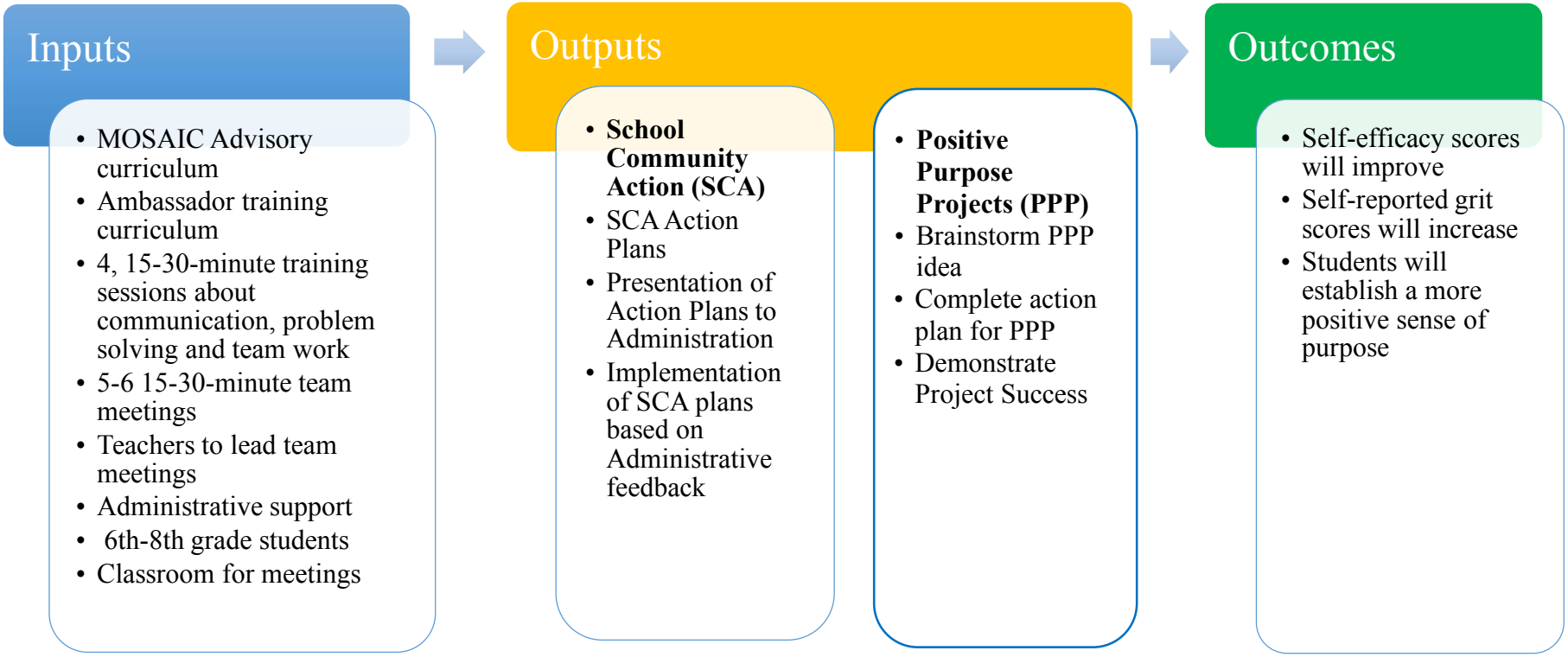
Meeting	ACTIVITIES
Meeting 4** (Team Training)	• Introduce Positive Purpose Projects • Skill Building: Teamwork - Decision making • Choose service learning project idea
Meeting 5 (Multiple teams)	• Positive Purpose Project Logistics - Finalize idea - Plan for Preparation phase of their project - Creative thinking • Ice breakers to get to know other Ambassadors
Meeting 6 (Team Meeting)	Preparation • Get to know team members • Finalize project committees • Complete action plan
Meeting 7, 8 & 9 (Team Meetings)	Action • Empowerment activity/ team building • Work on project idea • Assign task for each person to complete before next meeting
Meeting 10 & 11 (Team Meetings)	Reflection • Finish carrying out action plan • Reflect on successes of project and Ambassador experience • Brainstorm how to present it to other Ambassadors
Team Meeting 12	Demonstration • Prepare for presenting Positive Purpose Project successes • Assign tasks for individual members to finalize presentation • Practice presentation
Ambassador Showcase (Multiple Teams)	Demonstrate and celebrate success!

** Note: This starts at Meeting 4 because SCA training meetings 1-3 occur first, and the Positive Purpose Project meetings follow.

Appendix E- Theory of change

Ambassador Program

Figure 3: *Logic Model*



Appendix F- Edited Theory of change

Ambassador Program

Figure 4: *Edited Logic Model*