



Detroit PAL Presents

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Program Impact Summary Report

Spring 2025

Helping Youth Find Their Greatness Since 1969

Overview

Since 2020, the Critical Conversations program has been giving voice to youth to promote positive police-community relations and strengthen communities. It brings law enforcement officers into classrooms for facilitated discussions with youth on topics such as the role of police, police misconduct, and media influence. Detroit PAL has implemented this program in area schools to create a path toward community healing in response to violent encounters with law enforcement.

Participation

In Spring 2025, Detroit PAL implemented the Critical Conversations program in two Detroit-area schools:

- **Brenda Scott Academy**
- **Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences (DAAS)**

A total of 38 middle school students, ages 13 to 15 years old, participated in the Critical Conversations program in these schools from April to May 2025. Attendance at each session ranged from 13 to 21 students.



Program Structure

Once per week, over six weeks, program sessions were delivered in person during the regular school day by 5 program staff, 2 school staff, and 5 volunteers. Each session was 60–90 minutes in duration. Sessions included information sharing, small-group discussions, and role-playing scenarios. The program concluded with a celebration in week 7. Each week focused on a different topic, as follows:

- **Week 1:** Program Introduction
- **Week 2:** Roles of Law Enforcement
- **Week 3:** The Influence of Social Media on Law Enforcement
- **Week 4:** Police Misconduct & Harassment
- **Week 5:** Positive Interactions with Law Enforcement
- **Week 6:** State Your Case
- **Week 7:** Program Celebration



Key Findings

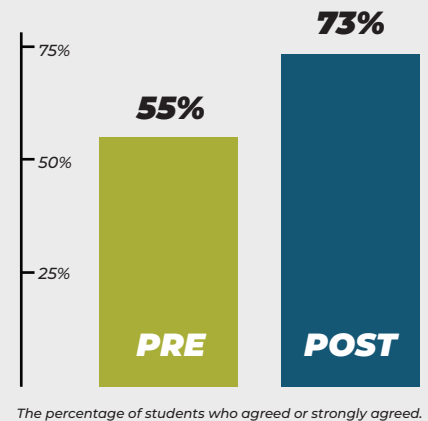
To assess the impact of this program, students took pre and post surveys. The data contained in this report reflects only those students who submitted both pre and post surveys, totaling 22 students. The program data collected demonstrated changes that occurred in students' attitudes and opinions as a result of their participation. Additionally, a post survey was completed by Detroit PAL staff (3), law enforcement officers (4), and school staff (2) for a total of 9 completed surveys. The purpose of the survey was to collect their thoughts on program outcomes and implementation. These findings are described in the following section.



RESPECT

I HAVE RESPECT FOR POLICE OFFICERS

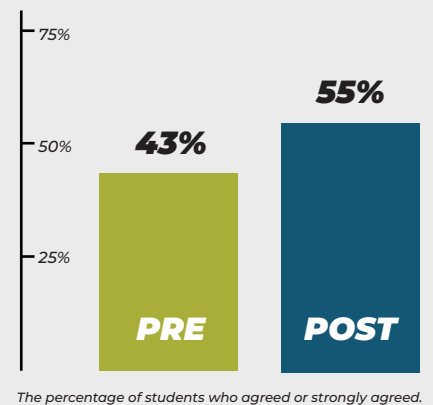
Facilitated discussions are a key component of the program and are designed to encourage open and honest conversations and promote mutual respect. Student survey results showed an 18% increase in the number of students who respect police officers. Comments suggest that this opinion shift arose from the development of mutual respect among participants as well as students' recognition of police officers' professionalism and dedication to their jobs. As one student explained, **"Because most of them is respectful, so I respect them back."** Another student observed, **"They are hardworking people."**



SAFETY

I FEEL SAFE WITH POLICE OFFICERS AROUND

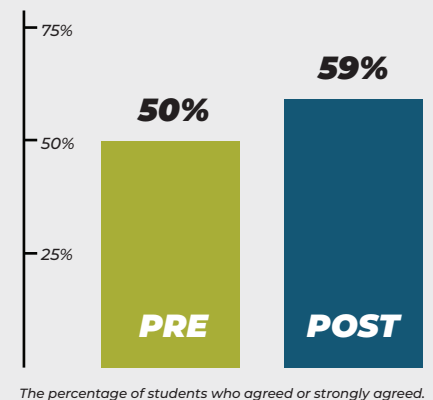
The theme of safety was woven throughout the program sessions, including safety for youth, their families, community members, and law enforcement. One student described law enforcement in terms of safety, explaining, **"They are a sign of peace."** Over the course of the program, the number of students who felt safe around police officers increased 12%. **"Because I know they can protect me,"** shared a student describing why they felt safe with police officers around.

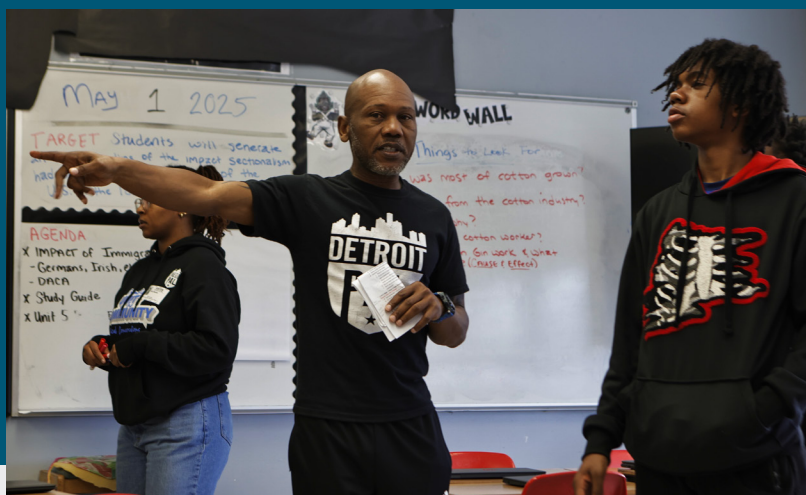


TRUST

I TRUST MY LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENT

One of the key goals of the Critical Conversations program is creating trust between youth and law enforcement. Small-group discussions during the classroom sessions provided an avenue for officers and students to get to know each other in a safe environment and to begin to build trust. At the beginning of the program, pre surveys showed that 50% of students trusted their local police department. At the program's conclusion, that number increased to 59% of students. Students commented: **"They do a good job,"** and **"They will protect me if needed."** Another specified, **"Because soon as you call, they there in seconds."**

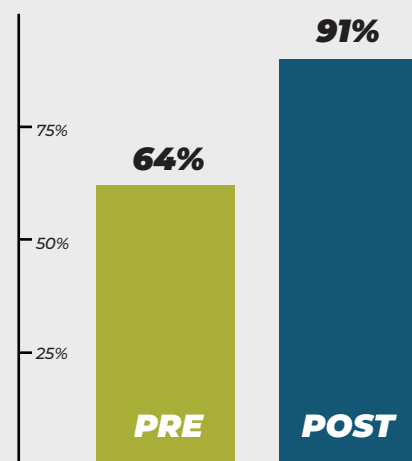




POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

I HAVE HAD A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH A POLICE OFFICER

Many students who participate in the Critical Conversations program have never previously interacted directly with a police officer and may only have familiarity with law enforcement through media portrayals or community perceptions. This program allows them to get to know officers personally and to learn from them about their roles and responsibilities. From program beginning to end, there was a substantial increase (27%) in the number of students who reported having a positive experience with a police officer. One student simply stated, **“I met them, and they were kind.”** Others offered more detailed explanations about why these experiences were positive for them: **“Because they never made feel unsafe,”** and **“They were all nice and respectful and actually want to help me.”**



The percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

BECAUSE OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROGRAM, 91% OF STUDENTS REPORTED THEIR VIEW OF POLICE OFFICERS IS BETTER OR MUCH BETTER.

In the post survey, students were asked to reflect on their perspective of police officers at the end of the Critical Conversations program. Most (91%) students reported that their view was better or much better. Students noted that their increased understanding of law enforcement's role in the community combined with the development of personal relationships with officers over the course of the program changed their opinions in a positive direction. **"I used to think they were bad because I had only knew about George Floyd and the brutal acts they do. This program has made me change my view,"** shared one of the students. Another explained, **"I know more about them and what they do."**

Additionally, the number of students who would consider a career in law enforcement increased by 9% (from 27% to 36%), suggesting a more positive opinion of law enforcement at the conclusion of the program.

PROGRAM STAFF REFLECTIONS

All (100%) program staff rated the program's progress toward fulfilling the goal of improving relationships between youth and law enforcement as successful or very successful. They observed that the students' comfort level in the presence of law enforcement increased as students got to know officers on a personal basis. **"I believe the program helped my students get comfortable with being around law enforcement. I believe that it helped them realize that police officers are still real people just like they are,"** explained one of the school staff. Others appreciated the openness and honesty of the conversations and the relationships that unfolded between students and officers as a result. A staff member observed, **"I felt that a very strong connection developed from the conversations with the officers and students and bridging the gap definitely was successful."**

STAFF SURVEY RESULTS



88%

Students' feelings of safety around law enforcement have improved or improved a lot.



100%

Students' trust in law enforcement has improved or improved a lot.



100%

Students' respect for law enforcement has improved or improved a lot.

Conclusion



“I enjoyed seeing the excitement and connection from the students and how they looked forward to the weekly visits.”

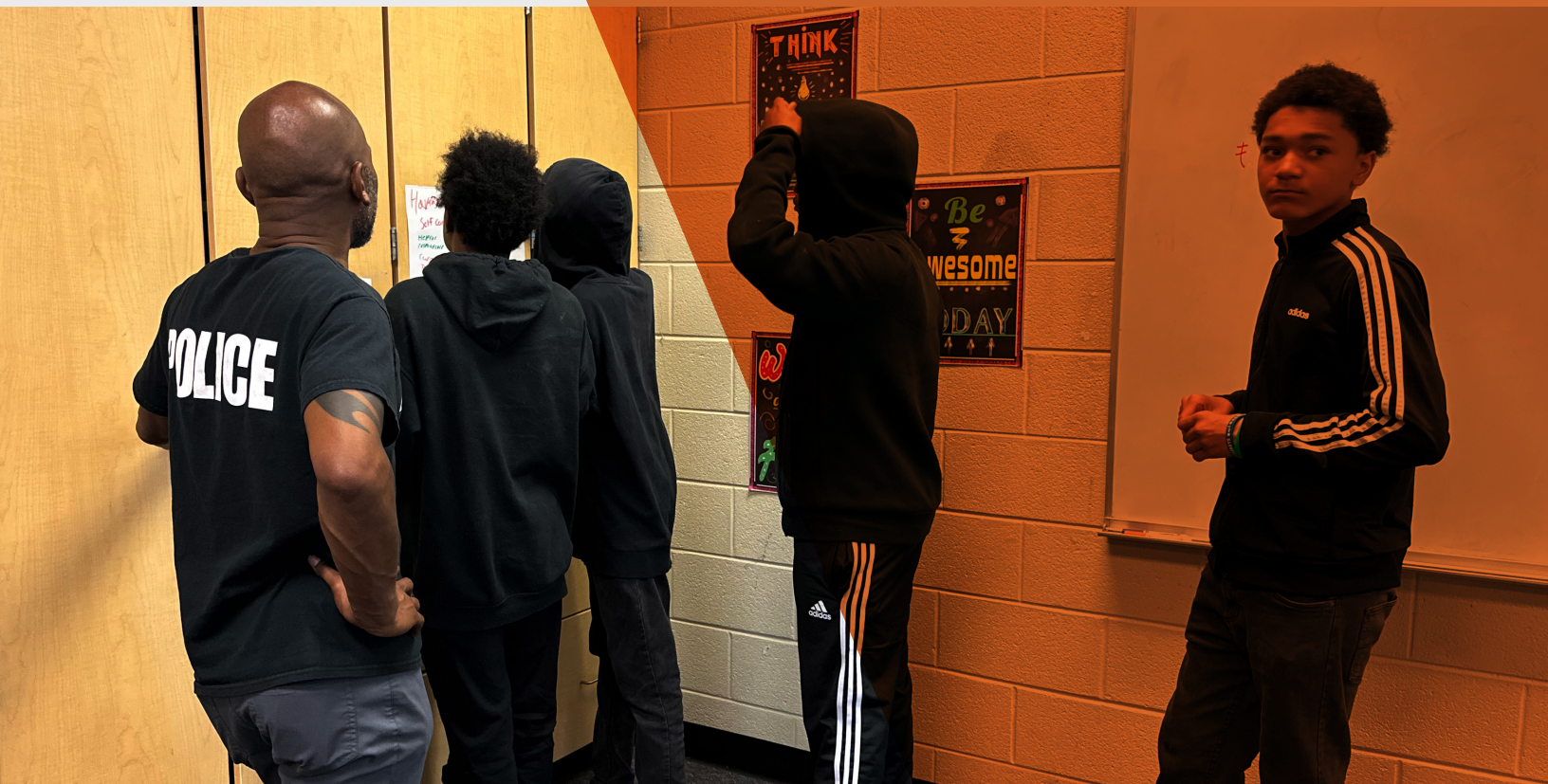
– Program Staff Member



Very positive outcomes resulted from Detroit PAL's Spring 2025 Critical Conversations program. Evaluation results demonstrated significant increases in the number of students who respected law enforcement, felt safe around them, and trusted officers, all of which are key program elements. Direct interactions with honest conversations and the development of personal relationships fostered these outcomes and helped bridge the gap between youth and law enforcement.

The results of Critical Conversations are essential for program planning and preparation. Staff and youth surveys are thoroughly reviewed by the program staff to identify areas of strength in the program and areas for improvement. By understanding participant outcomes, Critical Conversations can be tailored to the students, ensuring that the information distributed is relevant and educational. Evaluation of these data allows Detroit PAL staff to make informed, strategic decisions that align with our mission of helping youth find their GREATness.

Questions? Contact Joseph Smith at
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This report was prepared in partnership with Evaluation into Action, LLC

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