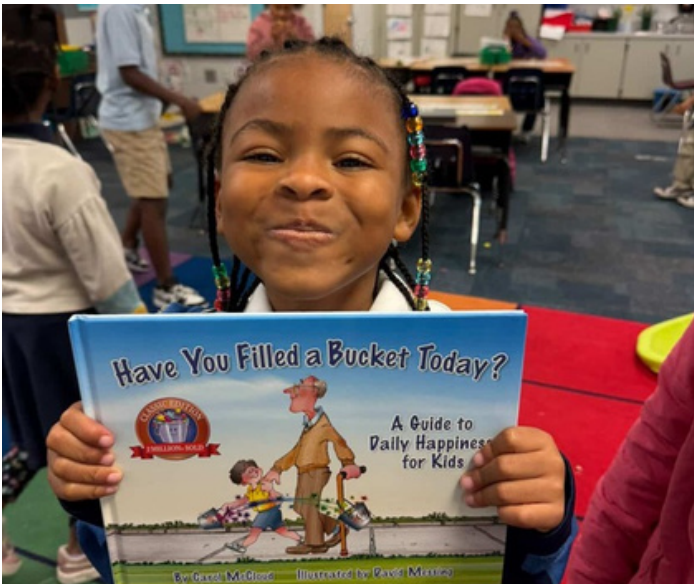


EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT SURVEY REPORT



2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR

As Vice President of Learning & Engagement, I am proud to share the inspiring stories, lasting partnerships, and bold impact made possible through our work in classrooms, community spaces, and creative hubs across the region. **At the heart of our mission is a simple but powerful idea: that education, rooted in empathy and inclusion, has the power to change lives.**

Over the past year, we have deepened our connections with educators, students, and community partners—strengthening initiatives, expanding access to our resources, and reimagining how the arts can support character development and cultural understanding. Whether through field trips to our annual outdoor exhibition, interactive reading days, professional development for educators, or our ever-growing Coexistence Clubs, our programs continue to foster curiosity, critical thinking, and compassion.

This report is both a reflection and a celebration of the thousands of learners who have engaged with us, the educators who champion our work, and the partners who help us dream bigger.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are creating spaces where every student is seen, every voice is heard, and every difference is embraced.

Patrick Arthur Jackson

VP, Learning & Engagement





Interactive participation is one of the most effective delivery methods for teaching students the abstract concepts of kindness and inclusion.

Our year-round education initiatives represent the most important aspect of our efforts – reaching and impacting the lives of tens of thousands of students, educators, and adults around the world annually.

Included in this report are the results from the educator surveys distributed throughout the **2025-2026 school year** for the following programs and initiatives:

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During the 2025-2026 school year,



participated in Embracing Our Differences’ programming across all initiatives.

Bucket Fillers Reading Day



Using the concept of an invisible bucket to encourage positive behavior, the Bucket Fillers book series teaches children how to “fill buckets” through acts of kindness, love, and appreciation for others. Embracing Our Differences provides books to each participating student and classroom. Pre-K through third grade educators have the option of selecting an in-person volunteer reader or a pre-recorded webisode, featuring local arts organizations and author Carol McCloud, for their classroom.

Sponsors:



Bucket Fillers

LYRIC & STONE
PUBLISHING



Kiwanis
CLUB OF SARASOTA



This year's Bucket Fillers Reading Day occurred in Manatee, Pinellas, and Sarasota counties!



11,365

Students

612

Classrooms

76

Schools



11,977

Books Donated



132

Educator Survey
Responses

612 educators solicited



How would you rate your
overall reading day
experience?



4.9/ 5 Stars

based on average rating

What do you like about this program?



Selected Comments:

- I love that each student has the book in their hands. I love the "pre-guided" activities you send. AMAZING PROGRAM!
- Our guest reader, Tom Edwards, was a very engaging reader who asked the students lots of questions while he read. There were some great discussions. I also liked the fact that students were given a copy of the book, which they wanted to read right away!
- This program puts a book into the hands of the child that shows how a child can make someone's day. Each child gets to take this book home and share with family and friends.
- Students having books of their very own is SO important to help them build a love of reading. The presentation was the perfect mix of reading and discussion without being overwhelming to the students or too long for them to pay attention to. The book was fabulous about teaching how important it is to help others WITHOUT needing recognition (which is a skill we are still working on in our room). I didn't know that was what the book I selected was (I'm a multi-grade level self-contained classroom) but I couldn't have picked a more perfect book!
- I liked how it promoted kindness and the students were engaged. I liked the follow up discussions about how the students can be bucket fillers. I love that each student received a hard copy of the book! I look forward to next year's kindness day to do it again!

Student Comments and Reactions:

- "I can keep this book & take it home?" "I love this story and I can fill buckets too!"
- The children now speak about their buckets numerous times per day! They say when things happen that fill their buckets and one girl noted that her bucket was empty when she felt sad.
- We had a lovely discussion on what types of things fill buckets v. spill buckets and my students have been verbal about whether or not actions of others are filling or spilling their own bucket! It's allowed for some really good child friendly communication about feelings!
- I had a mom write me to share that her son was so excited to come home with new book and has asked her to read it every night to him.
- "Oh, I like this (Bucket Fillers) pledge. I can be nice to people."
- My students had a great time and are so excited to have these books to add into their own libraries at home
- I had a student feel emotions during the video/book reading. Another student noticed and wanted to comfort them. We took the opportunity to discuss why our actions and the actions of other people can make us feel this way.

EOD Reading Day



In partnership with Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and Pinellas Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Embracing Our Differences Reading Day celebrates literacy through a wide variety of books for pre-K through third grade students. These age appropriate stories focus on themes of inclusion, kindness, and respect, stimulating conversations about what we share and what makes us unique.

Program Sponsors



This year's Embracing Our Differences Reading Day occurred in Manatee, Pinellas, and Sarasota counties!



9,016

Students

523

Classrooms

84

Schools



9,539

Books Donated



100

Educator Survey Responses

523 educators solicited



How would you rate your overall reading day experience?



4.74/ 5 Stars

based on average rating

Examples of student comments & reactions:

Selected Comments:

- We also had an amazing discussion about how different cultures are to be celebrated and to be curious about – not to put down differences.
- Students were excited to try the yoga at the end. I could hear them actually participating in the deep breathing exercises.
- My students loved seeing the artist use a blank sheet of paper and draw shapes all over the page. Then using her imagination to create pictures. They were calling out to the active board, as if she could hear them, suggestions for some of the shapes!
- My students laughed a lot at the bear who wanted to be a rabbit in Bunnybear!
- "It was fun to hear the Spanish words because I speak Spanish at home."
- After reading "Maybe Something Beautiful", one of my students said "I think we have a vibrant classroom".
- "Oh wow, the story was so dark and then it became beautiful with just a little paint and imagination!"

What did you like about this program?

Selected Comments:

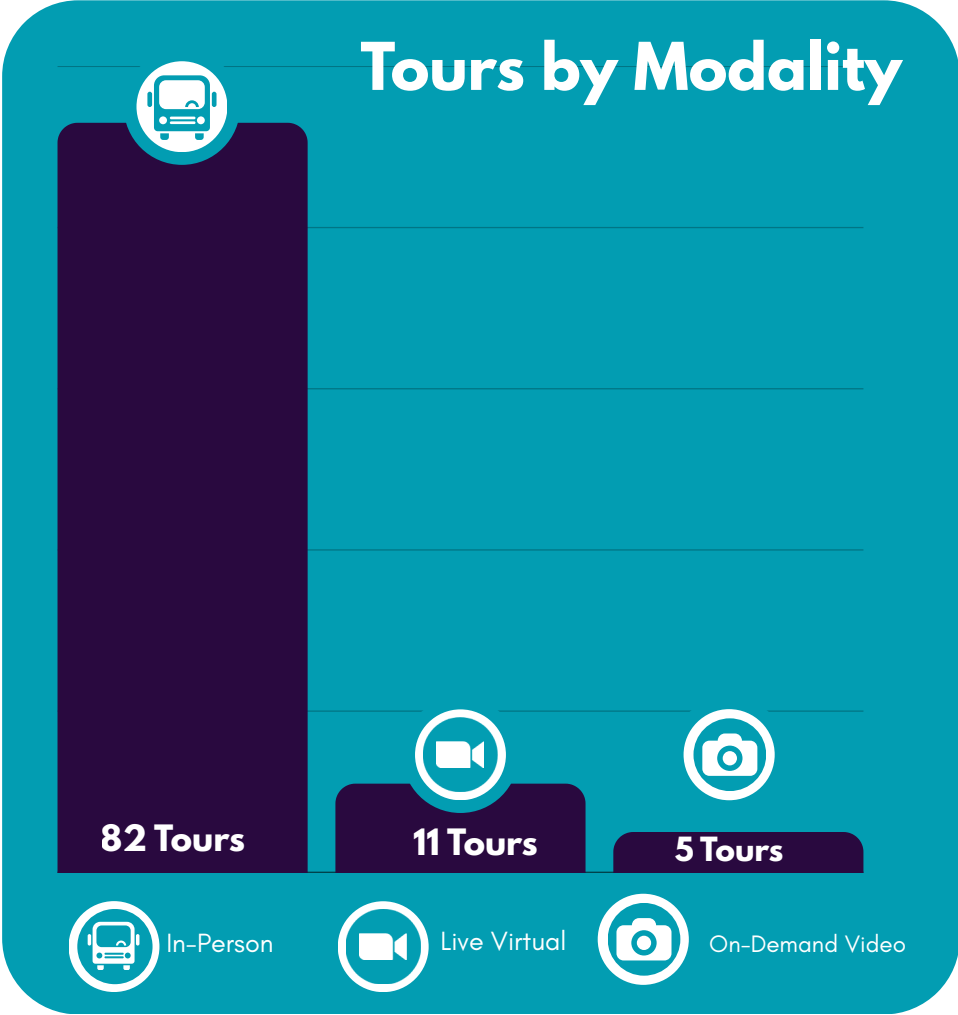
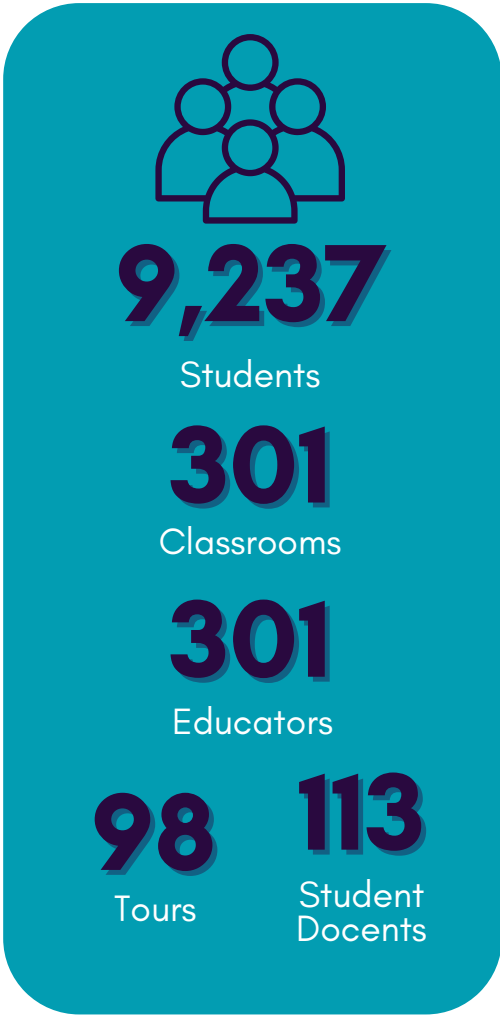
- I love how our guest reader engaged my students by asking them questions and making them feel like experts reading the Spanish words.
- The program is amazing. The fact that each child gets a book is so special and they love it!
- This was amazing! The students LOVED the book and the guided video activity that followed! It was a fantastically wonderful day for us!!!
- This was a great book! It had my ELLs who are not very outspoken during whole group reading more involved and made them feel so important and valued. Great choice of a book.
- I often do not have full participation in brain breaks/movement breaks. My WHOLE CLASS participated in the chair yoga and seemed to really enjoy it!



Exhibition School Tours



Tours of our annual exhibition have become a signature of our education efforts with thousands of students worldwide benefiting from in-person, live virtual, and on-demand video tours each school year. Through peer-guided conversations with high school aged docents utilizing Visual Thinking Strategies pedagogy, exhibition tours embrace kindness and inclusion while providing connections to art education and curriculum engagement through student-driven exploration.

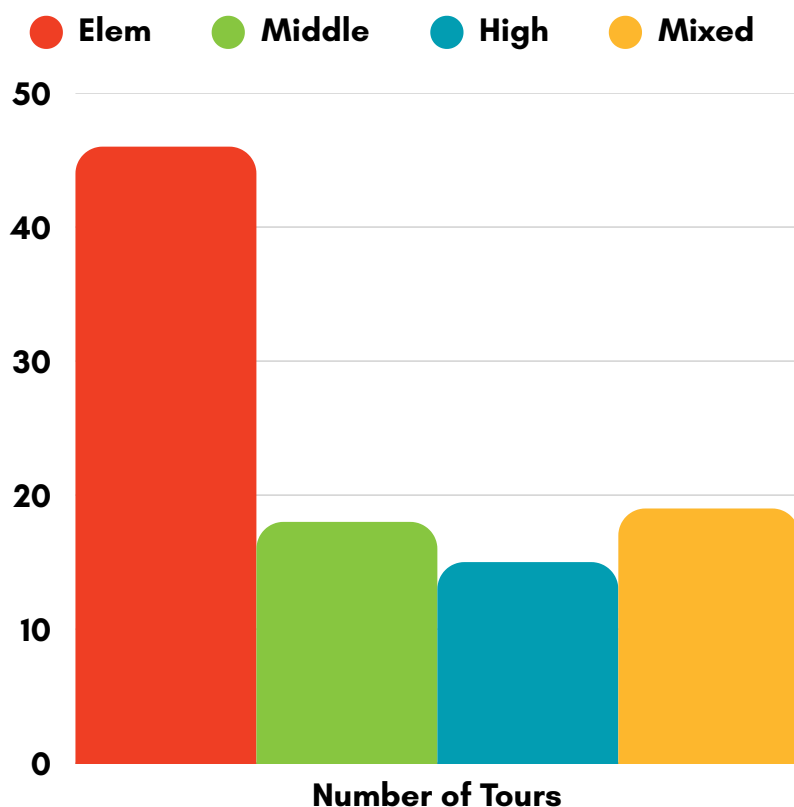


Tours by Location

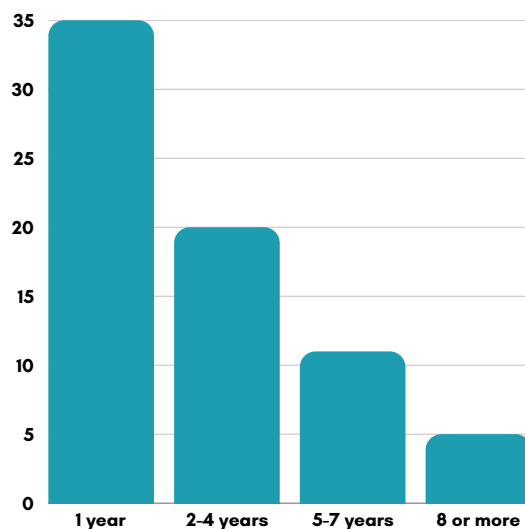




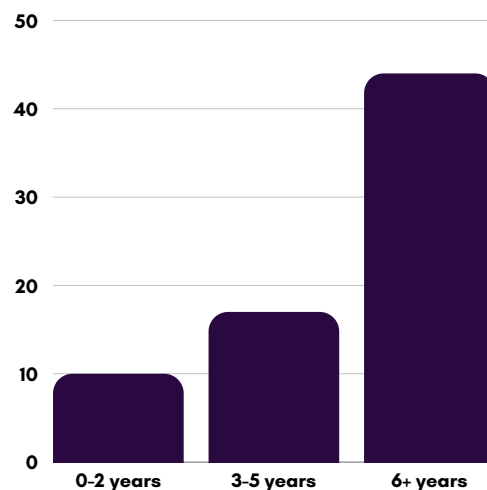
School Tours By Grade Level



Number of Years Visiting EOD for Participating Educators



Number of Years Teaching for Participating Educators



71 Educator Survey Responses

237 educators solicited

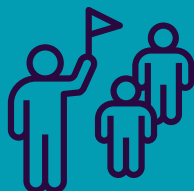


How would you rate your overall EOD educational experience?



4.41 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



The student docents enhanced our educational experience.



4.3 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



The online lesson plans provided were meaningful and beneficial tools.



4.0 / 5 Stars

based on average rating

What was the most significant learning outcome for your students?

Selected Comments:

- My students learned how art can tell powerful stories about acceptance and embracing our differences was really great!
- This was beneficial for the Title I students at my school to have the opportunity to leave campus and be immersed in this learning experience. Thank you making it happen and offering this unique exploration.
- I think it was powerful for them to see themselves represented in one way or another in the artwork.
- Many of my students see a physical connection between the work that they do in the classroom and the practical application of that art in a public space. They also enjoy having discussions about the ideas, concepts, and messages of the works on display and engaging in their own talks about utilizing these ideas in their own work.

We are always excited to hear student reactions to the exhibition. Please share one or more moments.

Selected Comments:

- The new students who hadn't been before were awed by the exhibit and the fact that they themselves could participate and potentially be on one of the banners.
- They were amazed that the artwork was created by students just like themselves.
- Our students responded very well to the docents. The lesson plans on the website prepared the teachers and students well. Thank you!
- Students immediately began talking about ideas for artwork they could submit
- They left feeling like their voices and experiences mattered.
- "We're famous!" - students apart of this year's featured artwork *All*.
- Several students continued talking about the artwork long after we returned to school.
- Students were thoughtful in discussing how people experience the world differently.



Comments on the overall educational experience:

Selected Comments:

- The students were helpful, engaging and seemed to enjoy showing us around and asked our students thought-provoking questions about the displays.
- Docents were engaging my students with open-ended questions which was very helpful for them to explore the art.
- Each year, I get see kids grow in terms of thoughtfulness, perspective and empathy in such a short amount of time. Very powerful experience for kids.
- My students and the staff/chaperones had a wonderful time! We brought 3rd and 8th graders from our K-8 school and they all loved it. I was excited to see it was guided and it really kept the students interested in the artwork and the guides asked them some great questions. I loved that one group was asked to reenact the painting, and the students loved it!

Is there any additional information you would like to share with us about your experience?

Selected Comments:

- Keep spreading kindness! Thank you for being a spark of light in our dark days.
- Thank you for your dedication to showcasing artwork that can build our community with empathy and kindness.
- We absolutely loved it and it is so important for our Title I students to be able to experience something like this that they would probably never go do outside of school. Thank you so much for making this free for our school and students!
- Honestly, my kids were not interested in visiting the exhibition when we shared our itinerary for the day. By the time we went home, many of them said it was their favorite part.
- We are so grateful to you for your time and the experience we had touring the art virtually. We would have loved to make it in-person, but it just wasn't possible this year. Virtual was a fantastic alternative!



Education Ambassadors



At the heart of Embracing Our Differences is a belief that inclusive learning environments create stronger, kinder, and more connected communities. The Education Ambassador Program is a year-long, district-supported leadership initiative designed to equip and empower Manatee and Sarasota County educators, administrators, and school-based professionals to become catalysts for inclusion, kindness, and respect in their schools.



24

Educator Participants

22

Schools Represented



7,497

Students impacted
through program
projects and educator
engagement



How would you rate your
overall ed. ambassador
experience?



4.9 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



23

Educator Survey
Responses
24 educators solicited

What did you find most valuable about the program?

Selected Comments:

- I loved the connections, the community partners and the opportunity to think more deeply about the values that EOD has!
- I was able to think outside the box working with my students to create a wonderful kindness piece that will be seen by future students going to our school as well as parents.
- The presenters were all amazing. EOD was intentional in choosing who would come to our meetings to educate and help us based off our needs, backgrounds, and issues we were dealing with and experiencing in and out of the classroom.
- I value collaborating with other peers with a passion for bettering our community. The insight and ideas that the fellow teachers have that I then am able to implement in my classroom is a valuable resource. I loved listening to everyone's project and being inspired to make our community a safe place for all to be in.
- I think what I find the most valuable about the ambassador program is the connections you make with people you may not have met otherwise. It is wonderful for me to meet others in my field that have similar interests, values, and morals.

What part of the program did you find least effective in helping you grow as an educator this school year?



Selected Comments:

- As convenient as Zoom meetings are, I do miss the aforementioned sense of connection and engagement with others.
- I will say as a busy teacher, I did not get to read the book or listen to the audiobook as much as I would've liked to.
- I loved hearing about all of the programs offered within our community! As a pre-kindergarten teacher, not all of the programs are applicable to the littles that I work with.
- I didn't really use the journal, but I found myself sharing with my colleagues instead.



What additional resources would have been beneficial?

Selected Comments:

- I would have enjoyed all the sessions in person.
- It might be fun to go to one of the locations from the community speakers and be in their space for a session.
- I don't know if time would permit, but I think it would be beneficial to maybe have a previous ambassador talk about a project that they have completed or just show a completed one each session. This may help the new ambassadors feel comfortable about coming up with and completing a project. I know they can do this on their own time on the micro site, but hearing things sometimes causes ease and makes things seem more possible. This is just a thought that I had that may help the new comers.
- I would love to learn more activities and children's read alouds related to social skills. I teach kindergarten where I believe learning how to be a good person is just as important as learning academics. I am always open to new ways on how to teach them skills like how to handle conflicts, respect others, etc.



Art Intensive Workshop



Our annual workshop for visual art educators in Manatee, Sarasota, Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Charlotte counties, seeks to answer questions, provide opportunities for collaboration, and present best practices on Embracing Our Differences student artwork creation while inspiring, reinvigorating, and exploring current challenges in the field of art education.



36

Schools Represented



50

Educator Participants



9,969

Students Impacted



42 Educator Survey Responses

50 educators solicited

Overall, the quality of the workshop was excellent.



The presenters were knowledgeable.



My knowledge of the content increased.



I plan to apply the knowledge & skills acquired in my classroom.



I feel that my time at this workshop was well spent.



I would recommend this workshop to a colleague.



What did you find most valuable about the workshop?

Selected Comments:

- The information sessions that encouraged team work and collaboration among educators. I also enjoyed the way we were able to express our perspectives without judgement.
- Always a great time talking with others in the field and sharing ideas. Workshop was very informative.
- Erica Sutherlin (our guest speaker) was a delight! She spoke with energy, warmth and full of inspiration, that I brought back to my classroom.
- The organization and energy was amazing. Love the playlist, and the atmosphere for creativity!

What part(s) of the workshop did you find least effective?

Selected Comments:

- It is all effective. Only because I have attended before the EOD submission requirements part was least effective for growth.
- Walking through an EOD lesson plan may be helpful.
- It was good to hear about the submission process, but I would like to have had the opportunity to take the break out session that had lesson plan ideas.
- All parts of the workshop were effective!



Coexistence Clubs



Coexistence Clubs are student-driven service clubs designed to build safer, more inclusive spaces in schools and communities. Partnered with Embracing Our Differences, clubs empower students to celebrate differences and take a stand against hatred and prejudice.

8



Schools Represented

11



Educator Survey Responses

12 educators solicited

258

Club Members

113

Student Docents

What school/community service projects did your club partake in?

- Co-sponsored both Black History and Hispanic Heritage Month activities.
- "Chalkbombing" leaving messages of positivity, inclusivity, and acceptance across campus
- We made cards for children in Sarasota Memorial Hospital, we made rocks with nice sayings and cute pictures and put them around campus, made cards for Valentine's Day for friends and loved ones and even random ones of kindness.
- We painted a holiday board for UTC, made placemats for a senior center, and created encouragement painted rocks to place around campus.



Unity Days



Embracing Our Differences Unity Day initiative promotes empathy, respect, and resiliency amongst students through a multi-part workshop of team-building activities that encourage cooperation and communication while providing opportunities for students to embrace their similarities and respect their differences. Over the course of the workshop, cohorts of approximately 75 students acquire the tools to be active leaders and create a welcoming culture within their respective school communities.



456

Students



7

Schools



29

Educators

Examples of student comments & reactions:

- Unity Day showed me that I am not alone in my struggles, and that people are going through very similar situations that I am. It also showed me that many of us stereotype without thinking about it.
- I could relate to people's experiences, and I felt the liberty to express things trusting the others, and also, the leaders were really engaging and that made me feel like we could share things or laugh along and actively listen to others.
- I will try to become a more emotionally available person, especially when it comes to understanding myself and others.
- I will try to form less surface-level connections and express my emotions more openly to people.
- It meant a lot getting to know everyone and learning we are all similar in ways. I hope I get to do it again.

