

# LEARNING AND EVALUATION

2024 Year-In-Review



**OUTWARD  
BOUND USA**

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## **Questions?**

*For more information about the Outward Bound Learning and Evaluation team and this report, please contact Katie Dalbey, Director of Learning and Evaluation, at: [kdalbey@outwardbound.org](mailto:kdalbey@outwardbound.org).*

# INTRODUCTION

The "Outward Bound Learning and Evaluation 2024 Year-In-Review" report showcases key evaluation and research initiatives aimed at assessing and improving the Outward Bound student experience and learning outcomes. It highlights the ongoing use of the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey, the expansion of participant feedback programs, and the development of a Theory of Change to shape future programs. Additionally, the report examines global partnerships, student engagement trends, course length impacts, and the effectiveness of specialized programs. It also provides insight into ongoing efforts and future directions, including educator programs, middle-to-high school transitions, and the Listen4Good initiative.

The overall findings reinforce that young people are leaving Outward Bound having developed key skills for thriving supporting Outward Bound's commitment to evidence-based, equitable, and impactful outdoor education.

## Stronger Together

*While our students know Outward Bound through programs at a specific regional School, their experience is supported by a network-wide commitment to providing the best experience for every student every time. The Outward Bound Professional Learning Lab, a collaboration between Outward Bound USA and the regional Schools, supports this commitment by providing evidence-informed resources and staff trainings and tools to measure impact and support continuous improvement.*



Fall Convening, October 2024

## 2024 Highlights

*In 2024, 30,620 students embarked on the journey of a lifetime with Outward Bound*

 **2/3** OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN ONE-DAY PROGRAMS

 **1/3** OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN OVERNIGHT PROGRAMS

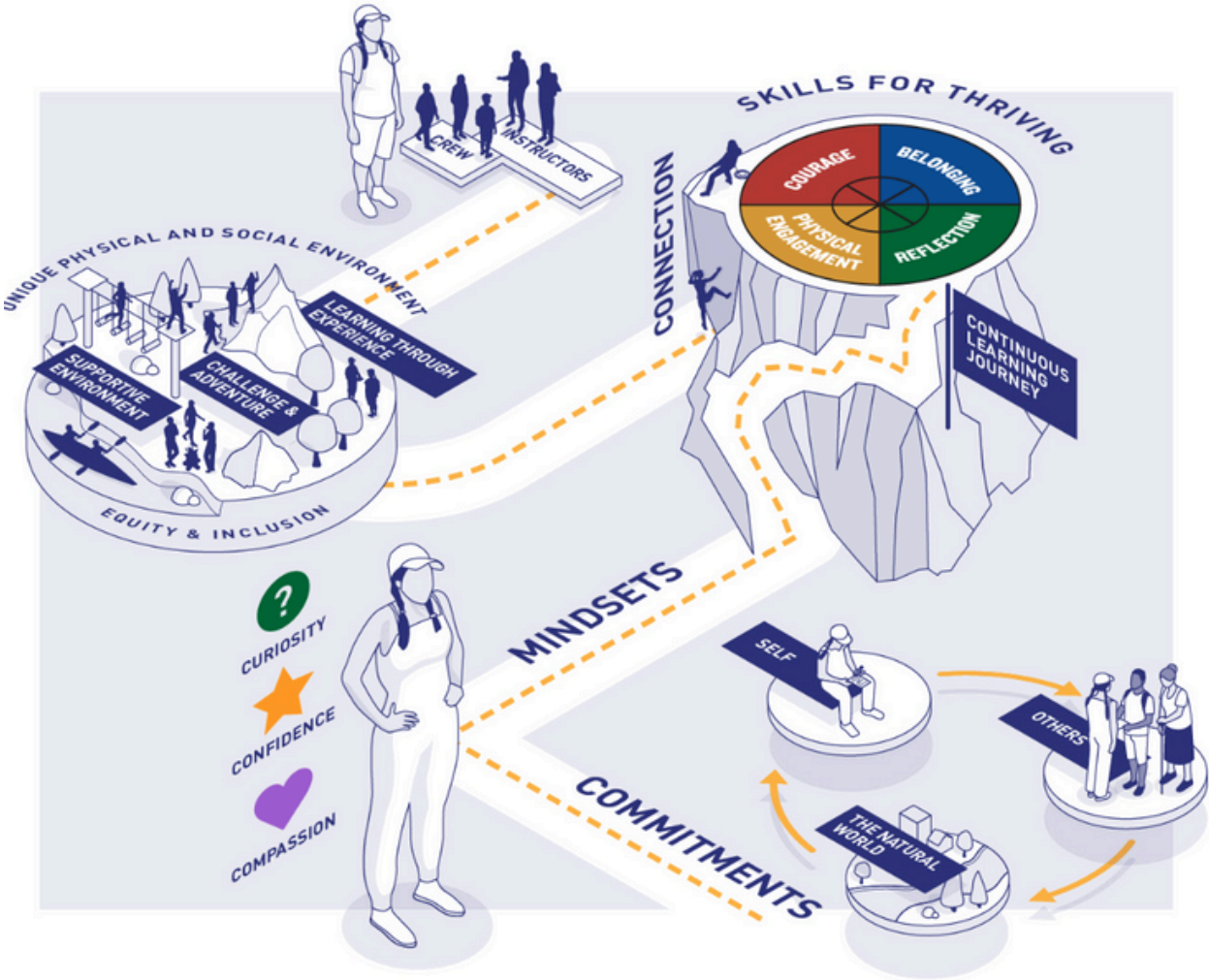
**3,300+** WE WORKED WITH MORE THAN 3,300 EDUCATORS AND/OR YOUTH SERVING PROFESSIONALS

**367** WE PARTNERED WITH 367 SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

# DEFINING OUR JOURNEY

## OUTWARD BOUND'S THEORY OF CHANGE

Outward Bound has been delivering programs in the United States for over 60 years, demonstrating the enduring value of our educational model. While we trust in this history, we also know how important it is to meet the moment – to be relevant to what youth and our communities need now. In that spirit, the Outward Bound network embarked on their own journey in 2023-2024 to define the theory of change for Outward Bound programs in the United States. This collaborative project, which engaged hundreds of staff across the network, seats Outward Bound's transformative learning process within the context of today's needs.



[CLICK HERE TO EXPLORE ONLINE](https://www.outwardbound.org/theory-of-change)  
[www.outwardbound.org/theory-of-change](https://www.outwardbound.org/theory-of-change)

# MEASURING OUR IMPACT

## OUR SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Outward Bound’s impact extends far beyond individual experiences, creating lasting change in communities and the world. While we currently measure only short-term student outcomes, our Theory of Change lays the foundation for assessing long-term growth in curiosity, confidence, and compassion, ultimately fostering a commitment to self, others, and the natural world. In 2024, Outward Bound USA, Outward Bound International, and global partners collaborated with Accenture to evaluate the organization’s Social Return on Investment. The study found that for every unit of currency invested, Outward Bound generates at least nine times the value in economic, social, and environmental benefits, reinforcing the organization’s far-reaching influence.

**Outward Bound USA is proud to contribute to this global initiative and is excited by the findings, which highlight the profound and lasting impact of our programs on individuals, communities, and the world.**

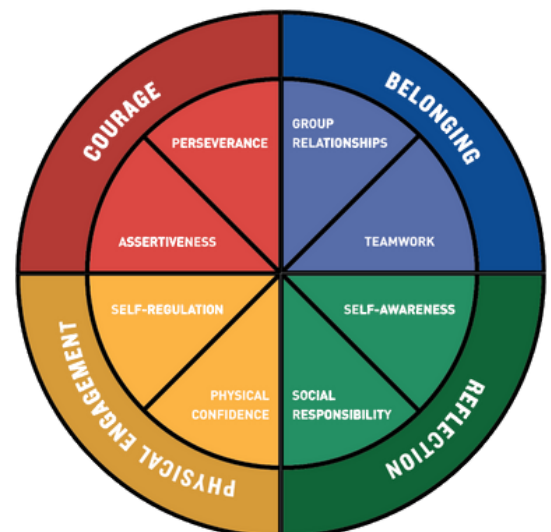
[Click here to read more about this study and its findings.](#)

## DEFINING OUR OUTCOMES

We use the Domains of Thriving framework to define our short-term outcomes—the skills students develop at Outward Bound that empower them to thrive at home, in school, and within their communities.

There are four Domains of Thriving that highlight the four key areas of development experienced on an Outward Bound course: Courage, Belonging, Reflection, and Physical Engagement.

These skills are measured through the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey, a valid and reliable retrospective pre-post survey. Students take the survey at the end of their Outward Bound experience, answering questions about how they felt at the beginning of the program and how they feel now.



# A LOOK AT THE DATA

## 1-DAY COURSES

Outward Bound’s one-day programs, which may range from a few hours to a full day, provide access to the same time-tested learning process as our longer programs, with a format that allows for greater accessibility. We used a shorter version of the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey that highlights the skills for thriving that are most often the focus of these programs.

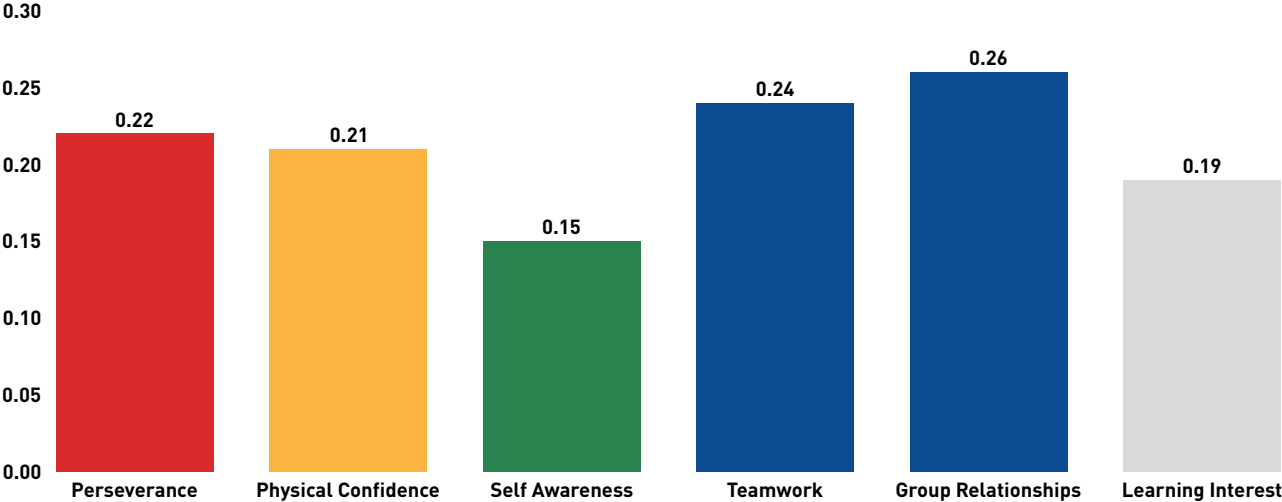


**In 2024, 854 young people on one-day programs took the OBOS.**

Analysis from our evaluation partner, PEAR, showed that even on these brief programs, **we see statistically significant positive change on all 6 outcomes** when comparing average starting scores to average ending scores!

### AVERAGE DIFFERENCE SCORES

*All scales showed statistically significant positive change*



#### What are Average Difference Scores?

*Difference Score = Student’s post-course rating - Student’s pre-course rating.  
Average difference score is the average of all students and represents the average degree of change.*

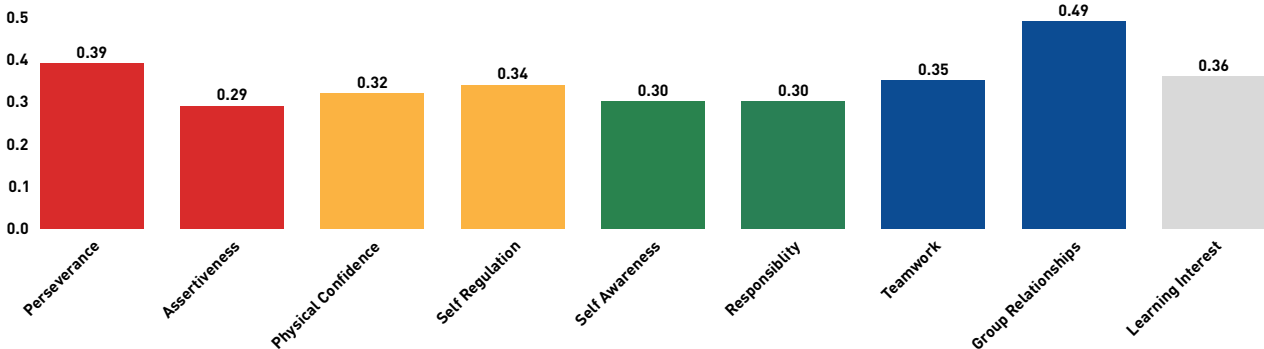
# A LOOK AT THE DATA

## 3+ DAY COURSES

On our multi-day Outward Bound programs, which are most often delivered in an expedition format, we use a longer version of the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey. Analysis from our evaluation partner, PEAR, showed that we see statistically significant positive change on all 9 outcomes shown here.

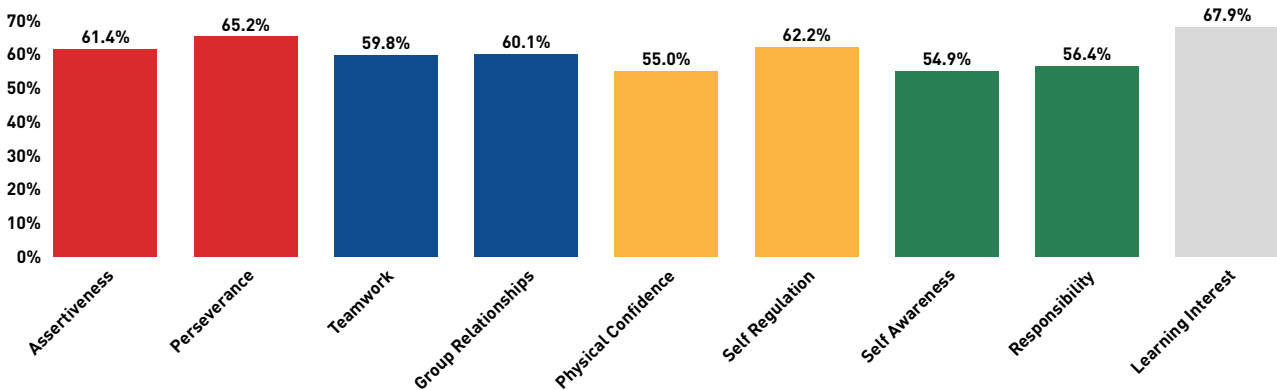
### DIFFERENCE SCORES

All scales showed statistically significant positive change



Another way that we can look at our outcomes data is by the percent of students that report a positive change. Looking at the data in this way can provide a more tangible way for folks to understand our impact. The chart below represents the percent of students on 3+ day courses that reported a positive change on each outcome.

### PERCENT POSITIVE CHANGE



A common question we receive is: “Why aren’t the percentages higher?” The reality is that the Outward Bound experience affects each student uniquely. With a program designed to foster holistic growth, different students develop in different ways. Our data reflects this individualized impact: 92% of students on these courses reported positive change in at least one skill and 77% reported change in 4 or more skills. These findings reinforce the transformative potential of Outward Bound programs, meeting students where they are and helping them grow in meaningful ways.

# NCOBS UNITY PROJECT

## SCHOOL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

For more than 25 years, the North Carolina Outward Bound School's UNITY Project has offered young people in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District the opportunity to participate in an Outward Bound expedition. What's unique about the Unity Project is that the wilderness expedition is followed by year-long participation in a Unity Club. Each club designs two annual projects that address social issues in their school. The Outward Bound wilderness expedition provides an opportunity to participants to strengthen their connections and build skills that will help them be change makers in their schools and communities.



*"What makes the Unity Project so special is that it combines the power of the Outward Bound expedition with a structured way for students to apply what they learned back in their community. As Unity Project participants work together throughout the school year to plan and implement service projects, we see them using and strengthening the skills they gained on the expedition."*

Sarah Goldman, NCOBS Community Programs Director

**NCOBS started using the OBOS with UNITY expeditions in 2022. Among 122 UNITY students between 2022-2024, here's what they learned...**



**91% OF STUDENTS**

*say that because of their Outward Bound experience, they can work more effectively in group.*



**86% OF STUDENTS**

*say that they are committed to making a difference in their world.*



**96% OF STUDENTS**

*say that because of their Outward Bound experience, they have gained courage to face challenges.*

**"In our hyper-connected world, where technology often propels us to be perpetually ahead of the curve, I discovered the beauty of slowing down and truly being present. Outward Bound's mission—to change lives through challenge and discovery—has not only redefined who I am but also ignited a passion within me to lead with heart and purpose."**

- Yasmin, Charlotte Unity Project Alum

# THE CONTINUOUS LEARNING JOURNEY

## EMPOWERING GROWTH BEYOND THE ADVENTURE

At the end of an Outward Bound expedition, it’s common to hear an instructor tell the students, “Your Outward Bound experience starts now.” This concept is captured in our Theory of Change as the Continuous Learning Journey. Outward Bound has become the “safe harbor” and they are heading back out into the unknown, with new skills and perspectives to apply to the challenges and opportunities that come their way. As they navigate those experiences, they build on the skills they gained at Outward Bound.

The OBOS Learning Interest scale captures an individual’s desire to learn and acquire new knowledge. This scale acknowledges that while students are experiencing learning and growth in many areas at Outward Bound, they are also increasing their desire to continue learning when they leave!

**In 2024, on multi-day programs, 68% (or over 2/3) of young people reported an increase in Learning Interest. (n=2802)**

Students also tell us through the OBOS that Outward Bound has prepared them for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

## WHAT WE LEARNED...



**77% OF STUDENTS**  
on Day Programs agreed  
with the statement:

*“I am more aware of how to support those around me”*



**77% OF STUDENTS**  
on Day Programs agreed  
with the statement:

*“I have gained confidence to try new things”*



**86% OF STUDENTS**  
on 3+ Day Programs  
agreed with the statement:

*“I gained courage to face challenges”*

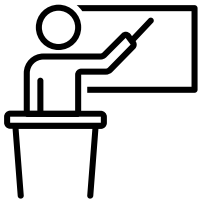
# IN PROGRESS INITIATIVES

## WHERE WE STAND AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

### NATIONALLY-ALIGNED PROGRAM MODELS

In an effort to support the clarity and consistency of the Outward Bound experience across the network, OBUSA is collaborating with the regional Schools on the development of nationally aligned program models. Our initial focus is on models that are delivered at all or many regional Schools. The process integrates best practices from existing programs, aligns on core student outcomes, and provides a standardized, yet adaptable, framework for diverse sites and student needs.

#### EDUCATOR PROGRAM MODELS



With funding from RK Mellon and support from a workgroup representing four regional Schools, we developed and piloted two programs for educators. Philadelphia Outward Bound School, which has a deep history of working with educators, piloted the educator expedition model. Colorado Outward Bound School, which is looking to grow their work with school partners and educators, piloted the educator day program model. Both pilots utilized a newly developed survey for Outward Bound educator programs. These program models are being updated in 2025 and are available for use across the network.



Click the links to learn more:

**Key Insights: Outward Bound's Educators Programs: [Day](#) | [Expedition](#)**

#### MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION



In 2024, Outward Bound, with support from the New York Life Foundation, developed a nationally aligned 5-day group expedition program model for the middle-to-high school transition. The 5-day group expedition model is commonly used across the network, most often with 7th -10th graders. In April, OBUSA convened representatives from all 10 Regional Schools to shape the model, and a workgroup from four schools met through the summer to refine it. In the fall, Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School and Philadelphia Outward Bound School piloted the program. [This report](#) outlines the model's development, evaluation findings, and next steps for research. The model is now available for all Regional Schools to use on group expeditions with middle and early high school students.

# IN PROGRESS INITIATIVES

## WHERE WE STAND AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

### SURVEY UPDATES

There is great value in an organization using the same outcomes tool consistently over time. It strengthens the power of the tool for both program improvement and communicating impact. However, it is also important to evaluate the usefulness of measurement tools and adapt to meet evolving needs. From 2019-2024, the Outward Bound network has significantly grown its capacity to measure, share, and learn from student outcomes data. In 2024, Outward Bound collaborated with PEAR to make changes to the OBOS. We also added a new survey for Accompanying Adults on group programs.

#### AN IMPROVED OUTWARD BOUND OUTCOMES SURVEY

The new survey launched in January 2025, with changes informed by our historical data, input from program, development, and marketing, and youth focus groups at Cathleen Stone Island Outward Bound School and Outward Bound California. Key changes include:



- An updated, more engaging design for the electronic survey
- Live entry of electronic survey data into the dashboard, increasing the utility of the data for Regional Schools
- Uniform course experience questions on the one-day and multi-day versions of the survey so that data can easily be reported together
- Addition of questions about outdoor access and technology use on the multi-day survey
- A change in how we measure the instructor-student relationship from a change scale to a one-time measure, allowing Schools to get more information about the quality of the student experience.

#### ACCOMPANYING ADULT SURVEY

In 2024 alone, more than 2,000 educators joined their students as accompanying adults on group programs. Yet, the impact of Outward Bound on and through educators has been a largely untold story. Outward Bound collaborated with PEAR to develop two surveys to help us better understand and celebrate the impact that Outward Bound has on educators. With versions for one-day programs and multi-day programs, this survey measures the impact of the experience on the educators and their relationships with their students, as well as their perspective on student growth and program quality. This survey is currently available for all regional Schools to use.



# IN PROGRESS INITIATIVES

## WHERE WE STAND AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED

### LISTEN4GOOD

With support from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, we participated in Listen4Good's signature feedback program, which prioritizes understanding students' experiences through an equity-focused lens.

In a survey of 517 young people across 7 Schools on summer open enrollment courses, we asked: In what ways did instructors interact with you?

**9/10 chose...**

- **"created a supportive environment"**
- **"provided opportunities to challenge myself"**
- **"showed concern for my well-being"**

While the feedback students shared through the Listen4Good survey highlighted our design principles in action, it also shone a light on some areas of concern. In both the survey of open enrollment students and a survey of group program participants, the Net Promoter Score, a satisfaction measure that captures participants' likelihood to recommend Outward Bound, was lower than industry benchmarks. OBUSA and regional Schools will continue to explore this in 2025, with a close look at differences by demographic groups that might identify differences in the ways students are experiencing Outward Bound.

## CONCLUSION

As we reflect on a transformative year for the Learning and Evaluation department and our Schools, we are proud of the strides we've made—from impactful professional development programs to innovative curriculum design and national collaboration, our momentum is strong. Looking ahead, we remain committed to growing this movement—supporting educators, elevating student experiences, and ensuring every young person has the opportunity to realize their potential through the power of Outward Bound.

### Questions?

For more information about the Outward Bound Learning and Evaluation team and this report, please contact Katie Dalbey, Director of Learning and Evaluation, at: [kdalbey@outwardbound.org](mailto:kdalbey@outwardbound.org).