

# Minnesota Youth Day Trip Evaluation Summary

## Prepared for Wilderness Inquiry

### Introduction

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Wilderness Inquiry's mission is to connect people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities through shared outdoor adventures so that all people can equitably experience the benefits of time spent in nature. Their outdoor adventures range from single-day introductory activities to multi-day wilderness adventures that offer deepening levels of engagement and experience, with the ultimate goal that everyone feels like they belong in the outdoors. To achieve this, they offer outdoor adventures across the country that are available for families, school and community partners, and individuals. In 2025, Wilderness Inquiry provided a total of 558 trips, serving over 38,000 individuals. Of those, 286 events were single-day experiences in Minnesota serving 16,264 Minnesotans.

### Youth day trip evaluation

In 2025, Wilder Research (Wilder) and Wilderness Inquiry partnered to evaluate Wilderness Inquiry's youth day trips. These day trips are outdoor field trip opportunities for schools and other youth-serving organizations across the country. During a day trip, students typically have an opportunity to paddle in a 10-person North canoe, learn outdoor skills such as building a fire, measure water quality, go on nature hikes, and learn about the cultural or geological history of an area. The specific program, called Canoemobile, is tailored to the location and group interest or age. For example, at Fort Snelling in the Twin Cities, a typical program day includes a canoe trip on Lake Snelling, an interactive game on the fur trade in Minnesota, and a brief nature hike.

The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the impact of day trips on youth across the country. Wilder and Wilderness Inquiry designed a post-trip youth survey focused on:

**Broadening outdoor perspectives:** outdoor exposure, future outdoor exploration, belonging in nature, program satisfaction



**Environmental engagement:** environmental stewardship, exposure to environmental or outdoor careers



**Building relationships:** connections to peers, sense of community



**Building resilience**

Wilderness Inquiry serves thousands of Minnesota youth participants each season. Surveying all youth who participated in day trips would not be feasible; therefore, Wilderness Inquiry and Wilder created a set of criteria to select groups that could be included in the sample. Criteria included:

- Groups had to be associated with a school
- Youth needed to be in grades 4-12
- The day trips had to be canoeing-centered
- Students had to be able to read and speak English, as the survey was not translated into other languages
- Trips took place May–November 2025[

After schools had been screened for the above characteristics, Wilder randomly selected 21 schools from Minnesota. In total, 783 youth completed the survey. Figure 1 shows demographics of student respondents.

### 1. Student respondent demographics

|  | %   |
|--|-----|
| <b>Geography (N=783)</b>                         |     |
| Greater Minnesota                                | 49% |
| Twin Cities metro                                | 51% |
| <b>Student grade (N=755)</b>                     |     |
| Elementary (4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> )   | 55% |
| Junior high (6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> )  | 26% |
| Senior high (9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> ) | 18% |
| Other  | <1% |
| <b>Student race or ethnicity (N=584)</b>         |     |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native                | 8%  |
| Asian  | 26% |
| Black or African American                        | 20% |
| Hispanic or Latino/a/e                           | 14% |
| Middle eastern/Arab American                     | <1% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander              | 3%  |
| White  | 49% |
| Other/prefer to self-describe                    | 2%  |

## Findings

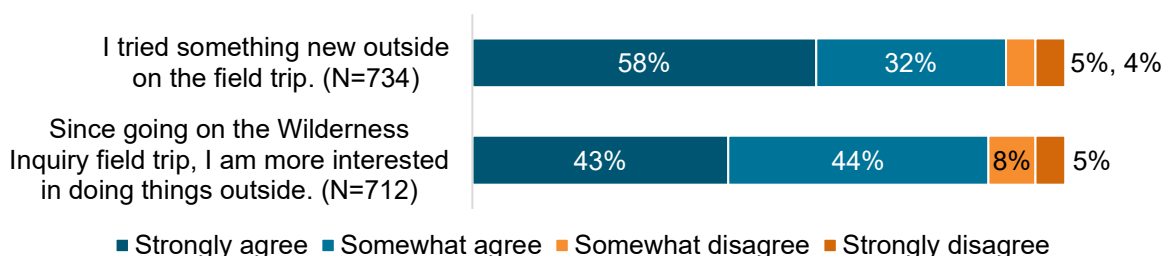
The following section summarizes the survey findings, organized by the outcomes of interest outlined on page 1. Differences by geography (greater Minnesota vs Twin Cities metro), student race or ethnicity (White vs BIPOC, or specific categories) and grade groups (elementary, junior high, or high school) are explored where relevant. Quotes included in the report may have been edited for anonymity, clarity, or spelling.

### Broadening outdoor perspectives

#### Students report exposure to new outdoor activities and increased interest

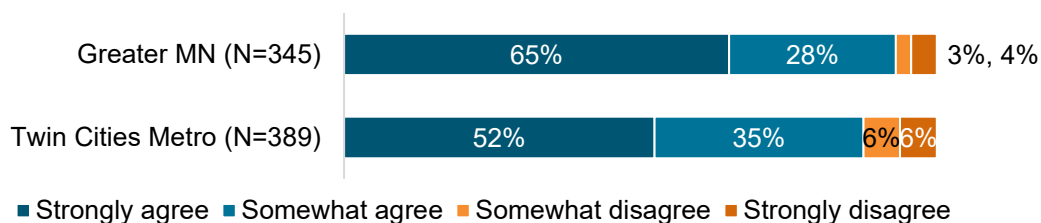
The focus of broadening perspectives is exposure to outdoor activities, leading to interest in future outdoor exploration and developing outdoor skills. Students who participated in day trips reported trying something new outside with Wilderness Inquiry and increased interest in future outdoor activities (Figure 2).

#### 2. Broadening outdoor perspectives



When looking at group differences, a higher proportion of students from greater Minnesota strongly agreed they tried something new outside with Wilderness Inquiry compared to students from the Twin Cities metro (Figure 3).

#### 3. Student exposure to new outside activities, greater Minnesota and Twin Cities metro

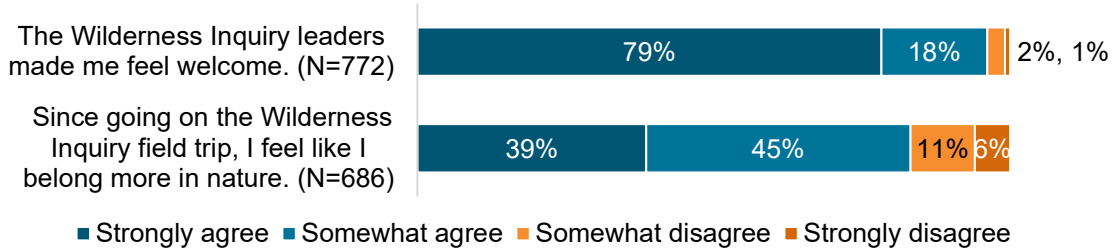


#### Students reported feeling welcome on the trip and a sense of belonging in nature

Related to outdoor exposure and interest in future outdoor activities is building a sense of belonging in nature. To help with this, Wilderness Inquiry leaders focus on building a welcoming and safe environment for students participating in day trips. Nearly all students agreed that Wilderness Inquiry leaders made them feel welcome, with 79% reporting they strongly agree (Figure 4).

A majority of students also agreed they felt they belong more in nature since their Wilderness Inquiry field trip.

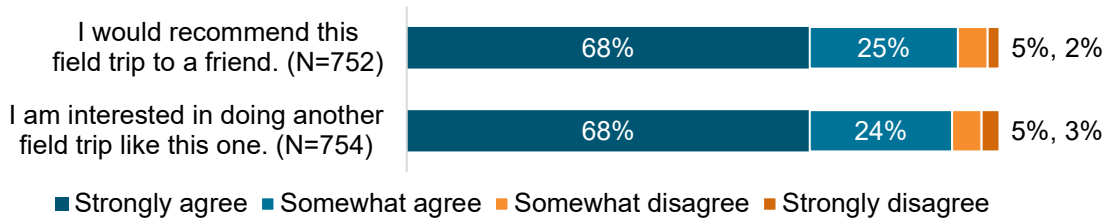
#### 4. Belonging in nature



### Students enjoyed the trip and are interested in future opportunities

While program satisfaction is important for evaluating most programs, it's particularly important for Wilderness Inquiry day trips since students who enjoy the program may be more likely to show interest in similar, future opportunities. Overall, students seem to enjoy their time with Wilderness Inquiry. Over 90% of students agreed they are interested in doing another trip like the one with Wilderness Inquiry and that they would recommend the trip to a friend (Figure 5).

#### 5. Program satisfaction, all students



### Water-based recreation is a highlight of the trip.

When asked in an open-ended question, "What did you like best about the field trip?" all of the students (N=188) indicated an activity that they participated in during the trip. Of those students, 81% specifically indicated they liked water-based recreation, such as canoeing, the best. While the trips surveyed were canoe-based, they also included many other activities, including land-based activities like hiking/walking and food related elements like making s'mores. Students mentioned these activities as highlights as well.

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**Paddling down the river was the best part of this field trip.**

**I like that I got to eat lunch and to make s'mores and eat them, also when I learned to make a fire.**

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## Environmental engagement

### Students learned aspects of camping and surviving outdoors on the trip

When asked through an open-ended question, "What did you learn during the field trip?" almost half (48%) of the students (N=324) noted **camping or outdoor survival** like learning how to make fires or build a shelter.

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[I learned] how to survive in the wild.

I learned how to make fire with cotton balls, Vaseline, and flint & steel.

What I learned during the field trip was [how] to build a tent with ropes stakes and tarps to make an A shape tent.

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Over a quarter (28%) of the students noted water-related activities like learning how to use a watercraft like a canoe, kayak, or boat, as well as learning how to fish.

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[I learned] how to canoe because I didn't know how to do it before.

I learned how to canoe properly (I'm way better at it after being taught appropriately).

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### Students reported they are more interested in helping the environment

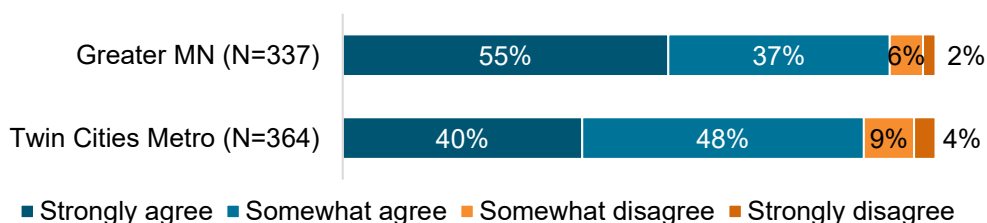
Nearly all students (90%) agreed that they are more interested in helping the environment since going on the Wilderness Inquiry field trip (Figure 6), demonstrating environmental stewardship.

#### 6. Environmental stewardship (N=701)



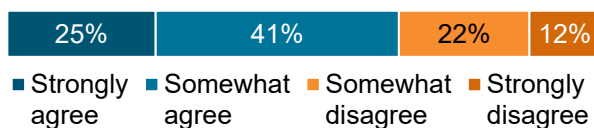
When looking at differences by groups, a higher proportion of students in greater Minnesota compared to students from the Twin Cities metro strongly agreed that they were more interested in helping the environment since their trip (Figure 7). Over half of greater Minnesota students strongly agreed, compared to just 40% of Twin Cities metro students, though overall levels of agreement are similar for the two groups.

## 7. Environmental stewardship, greater Minnesota and Twin Cities metro



Beyond environmental learning and stewardship, Wilderness Inquiry is also interested in how exposure to outdoor careers may impact students' career interests. During day trip programming, students are often exposed to multiple outdoor careers. The Wilderness Inquiry trip leaders talk about their jobs as outdoor leaders and often mention other types of outdoor career options. For some events, partner organizations present or lead activities to share more about their organizations (e.g., DNR, environmental organizations). While increasing interest in outdoor careers may be a lofty goal for a day program, there is value in exploring this as a potential impact since it is part of Wilderness Inquiry's overall priorities. Students were asked their level of agreement with the statement "Since going on the Wilderness Inquiry field trip, I am more interested in jobs where I would work outside," with results shown in Figure 8. Approximately two-thirds of students agreed and one-third disagreed.

## 8. Interest in outdoor jobs



Results for this question were reviewed by grade level, since it's reasonable to suspect students in older grades may answer this question differently than students in younger grades. However, results were stable across all grade groups.

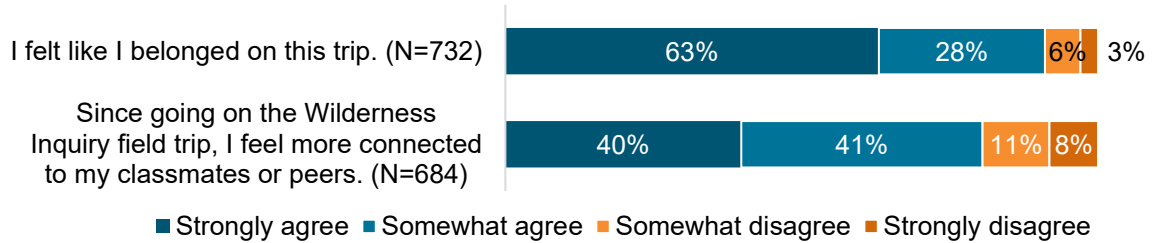
## Building relationships

### Students reported feeling that they belong on the trip and more connected to their classmates or peers

Building relationships focuses on creating and strengthening connections among students to build a sense of community. This has been a particular focus of Wilderness Inquiry program staff and leadership in recent years.

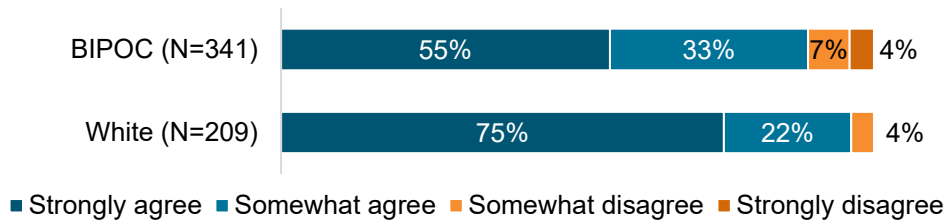
Nearly all students said they felt like they belonged on this trip, with about two-thirds strongly agreeing (Figure 9). Similarly, a majority of students said they feel more connected to their classmates or peers since going on the Wilderness Inquiry trip.

## 9. Building relationships, all students



While nearly all students reported feelings of belonging on the trip, BIPOC students agreed less than White students (Figure 10). Three-quarters of White students strongly agreed, compared to about half of BIPOC students (55%).

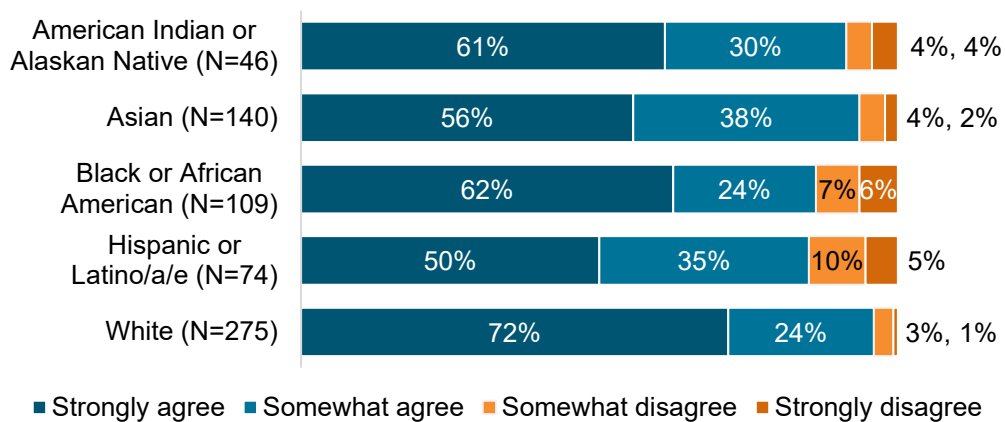
## 10. Trip belonging, BIPOC and White students



Note. Students could choose more than one response option to indicate their race or ethnicity. If a student chose “White” and another response option, they are included in the BIPOC category.

To explore this further, Figure 11 shows the same survey question data with individual race or ethnicity categories. Students that identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/e, or as Black or African American show the highest level of overall disagreement (15% and 13%, respectively) compared to 4%-8% of students of other races. Half of Minnesota Hispanic or Latino/a/e students strongly agree they felt that they belonged, compared to almost three-quarters of White students.

## 11. Trip belonging, by student race or ethnicity



Note. Students could choose more than one response option to indicate their race or ethnicity. For this analysis, any student who chose a category is included. Therefore, if a student indicated “White” and another response option, they are counted in both. Additionally, “Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander” was a response option but not included here due to fewer than 20 respondents.

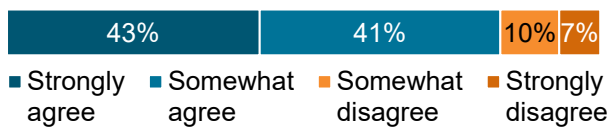


## Building resilience

### Students said they pushed themselves to try on the trip, even when something was hard

Building resilience and persistence is an important part of Wilderness Inquiry’s programming overall. During the day trip, nearly all students reported they pushed themselves to try even when something was hard (Figure 12), which can be an important first step towards building resilience.

#### 12. Building resilience (N=730)



## Conclusion

Overall, survey data suggest youth day trips are an integral component of Wilderness Inquiry’s programming to achieve their outdoor engagement goals. Ninety percent of students surveyed reported they tried something new outside on their trip with Wilderness Inquiry, which is a critical first step to outdoor exposure and engagement. Similarly, a majority of students reported increased interest in future outdoor opportunities. Student open-end responses to “What did you learn on the field trip?” demonstrate the environmental engagement and learning that happens on the Wilderness Inquiry day trips.

In addition, a majority of students reported they felt they belonged on the trip and feel more connected to their peers or classmates, which aligns with Wilderness Inquiry’s goals of building relationships. However, a greater proportion of White students strongly agree that they belonged on the trip compared to BIPOC students. One way to support BIPOC students in feeling more welcome on trips could be to further increase recruitment and retention of trip leaders of color. Wilderness Inquiry has been making efforts and progress in this area over recent years. Additional efforts could include:

- Partner with additional community groups or clubs with an outdoor focus for recruitment of day trip leaders
- Invite potential applicants or hires to an optional mock day trip or info session to understand what the position entails
- Strengthen recruitment of diverse candidates by increasing Wilderness Inquiry’s visibility through participation in community events, cultural festivals, career fairs, and local celebrations.
- Partner with organizations or individuals who are deeply connected to various cultural communities to co-design recruitment materials, identify potential candidates, and help promote the positions through their communities. Offering stipends or other forms of

payment to partner organizations for this work will likely increase willingness to help and appropriately compensate partners for their time and expertise.

For future evaluations of research questions, Wilder suggests two possible areas of exploration based on these results to support Wilderness Inquiry's programming:

1. What helps students feel like they belong, or makes students feel like they don't belong, on outdoor trips? Since this question is essential to ongoing outdoor engagement, it is worth more exploration. This may be best explored qualitatively and/or through a review of existing literature.
2. How do different program dosages impact outcomes? Wilderness Inquiry provides multiple programming levels, ranging from the day trips evaluated here to multi-day trips to long-term partnered programming. Comparing similar evaluation results across programming could shed some light on what program components influence outcomes or the depth of those outcomes. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods could further explore this.

## Limitations

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While this evaluation provides valuable insight into Wilderness Inquiry programming, there are a few limitations that should be considered when reflecting on key findings.

Data collection occurred from May through October; however, most completed surveys were filled out while school was in session, with fewer responses during the peak summer months. This pattern is not surprising, as most schools are not in session during summer. Trips in the summer are more likely to be through out-of-school-time summer programs or community partners that tend to operate on different schedules and make it more difficult to remind students to complete surveys or to allocate time for survey completion. In contrast, during the regular school year, students are in classrooms on a more consistent basis, providing more opportunities for survey administration.

The trips were limited in duration, with students typically participating for one day, often comprising approximately 3-4 hours of activities. Students who experience multi-day or longer-duration trips may have deeper, more varied experiences and, consequently, be able to provide more nuanced insights about their learning and engagement.

Surveys, no matter the topic, distribution, etc. have some self-selection bias, meaning youth who had high levels of positive or negative responses/feelings about the trip may be more likely to fill out the survey.

Wilderness Inquiry operates in a unique way, and what works well for canoe programs may not translate to other day trip programs. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to generalize these findings to other Wilderness Inquiry programming.

# Wilderness Inquiry Day Trip Survey



Wilderness Inquiry Leaders!

## Hi there!



Do you remember that outdoor adventure where you went canoeing?



We want to know what you thought about this outdoor adventure so we can make things even better.



**Questions?** Ask your teacher or the adult who gave you this survey.



This is NOT a test—there are no right or wrong answers!



Just be honest and tell us what you think.



You don't have to answer every question if you don't want to.



Your answers are private—no one from your school or Wilderness Inquiry will know what you wrote.



**Please don't write your name on this paper**

What state is your school in?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the name of your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each sentence about your experience with the Wilderness Inquiry field trip.

|  | Strongly agree           | Somewhat agree           | Somewhat disagree        | Strongly disagree        | I don't know             |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I tried something new outside on the trip.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. On the field trip, I pushed myself to try even when something was hard. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I felt like I belonged on this trip.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The Wilderness Inquiry leaders made me feel welcome.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I am interested in doing another field trip like this one.              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I would recommend this field trip to a friend.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each sentence about your experience on the Wilderness Inquiry field trip.

| Since going on the Wilderness Inquiry field trip...                | Strongly agree           | Somewhat agree           | Somewhat disagree        | Strongly disagree        | I don't know             |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. I am <b>more</b> interested in doing things outside.            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I am <b>more</b> interested in helping the environment.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. I am <b>more</b> interested in jobs where I would work outside. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I feel like I belong <b>more</b> in nature.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I feel <b>more</b> connected to my classmates or peers.        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. What did you **like best** about the field trip?

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13. What did you **learn** during the field trip?

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14. Which of these best describes you?  
You can choose more than one.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/e
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe:

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I don't want to answer

15. What **grade** are you in?

- 4th
- 5th
- 6th
- 7th
- 8th
- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th
- Other
- I don't want to answer

Thank you for helping us make outdoor adventures more awesome!

## Methodology

As mentioned previously, Wilderness Inquiry serves thousands of youth participants each season. Surveying all youth who participated in day trips would not be feasible; therefore, Wilderness Inquiry and Wilder created a set of criteria to select groups that could be included in the sample. Criteria included:

- Groups had to be associated with a school
- Youth needed to be in grades 4-12
- The day trips had to be canoeing-centered
- Students had to be able to read and speak English, as the survey was not translated into other languages
- Trips took place May–November 2025

After schools had been screened for the above characteristics, Wilder randomly selected 21 schools from Minnesota to be surveyed. Each school was sent a pre-trip survey notification email from Wilderness Inquiry letting them know they would receive a post-trip survey. The email provided information about the survey, including how to complete it online via a QR code (given to them after their trip) or via a packet of paper surveys if students did not have the ability to access the survey online. In addition, schools had the choice to opt out of the survey. None of the schools chose the paper option, nor did they opt out.

After the trip, trip guides gave the teachers/chaperones from the selected schools a postcard with a QR code and a bag of small incentives (stickers) for the youth as a thank you for completing the survey. Three days after their trip, Wilderness Inquiry sent a follow-up thank you email to selected schools, which included a reminder to complete the survey.

## CROSS TABULATIONS

To better understand potential differences in youth served during these trips, we examined differences in responses between geographic location, race, and grade (i.e., cross-tabulations). As a rule, we used a 10-percentage point difference to indicate meaningful differences, though we highlight some differences that do not quite meet this threshold if the item is of interest. We do not highlight all data points that had a 10-percentage point difference, only the differences that are most relevant to Wilderness Inquiry’s mission and programming.

**Geographic location.** Geographic location was determined by where the school was located, comparing responses between youth from those from organizations in the seven-county Twin Cities metro region (“metro”) vs. those from outside this region (“greater Minnesota”).

**Race/ethnicity.** Youth were categorized as either “White” or “BIPOC” based on their self-identified race/ethnicity. If a student indicated “White” and another response option, that student was categorized as BIPOC. In some cases, cross tabs were calculated based on specific race/ethnicity category (e.g., Asian or Black or African American). Figure B1 shows the breakdown of students by race/ethnicity.

**Grade.** Youth selected their grade level (4th-12th grade). Wilder then grouped youth into elementary (K-5), middle/junior (6-8), and high school (9-12) based on standard grade-level groupings. Cross-tabs for grades are reported using these three categories. Figure B2 shows the breakdown of students by grade.

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For more information about this report, contact Julia Miller at Wilder Research, 651-280-2744 or [julia.miller@wilder.org](mailto:julia.miller@wilder.org).

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