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An Evaluation of the Youth/Law Enforcement DMC Forum – October 2017

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Introduction

In October 2017, the Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Task Force asked the Center for Public Scholarship and Social Change (CPSSC) to collect data at the Youth/Law Enforcement DMC Forum (Forum) scheduled to take place at Millersville University. The Forum, held on October 6th, 2017, was an event at which middle and high school students participated in a number of activities with police officers and other individuals working in the juvenile justice system. These activities, including a panel discussion, role plays, and small group discussions, are designed to improve relationships between youth and police officers. The CPSSC was asked to collect data on the youth's attitudes toward law enforcement before and after attending the Forum. In addition, we were asked to determine whether students in attendance had improved attitudes toward the police after attending the Forum.

Methodology

The CPSSC administered two surveys created by the PA Disproportionate Minority Contact Youth/Law Enforcement Corporation. The Young People Pre-Survey (Pre-Survey), administered in the morning, before the Forum started, asked a series of questions regarding the participating students' attitudes towards law enforcement. The students also completed the Young People Post-Survey (Post-Survey) at the end of the Forum. In addition, the Post-Survey asked students about their attitudes toward police officers, how they would apply what they used at the Forum and how helpful they found various parts of the event. Each student received a unique identifier that allowed us to pair Pre-Surveys and Post-surveys. In addition, students were informed that their responses were anonymous. Copies of both surveys and complete results are included in the appendices.

Student Characteristics

109 students from several Lancaster County school districts attended the Forum at Millersville University on October 6, 2017. As depicted in Figure 1, of these students, 69 (65.09%) were male, and 37 (34.91%) were female. Three students declined to provide this information. The average age of the students who attended the forum was 13.68, with a range from 11-18 years old. The age distribution is shown in Figure 2.

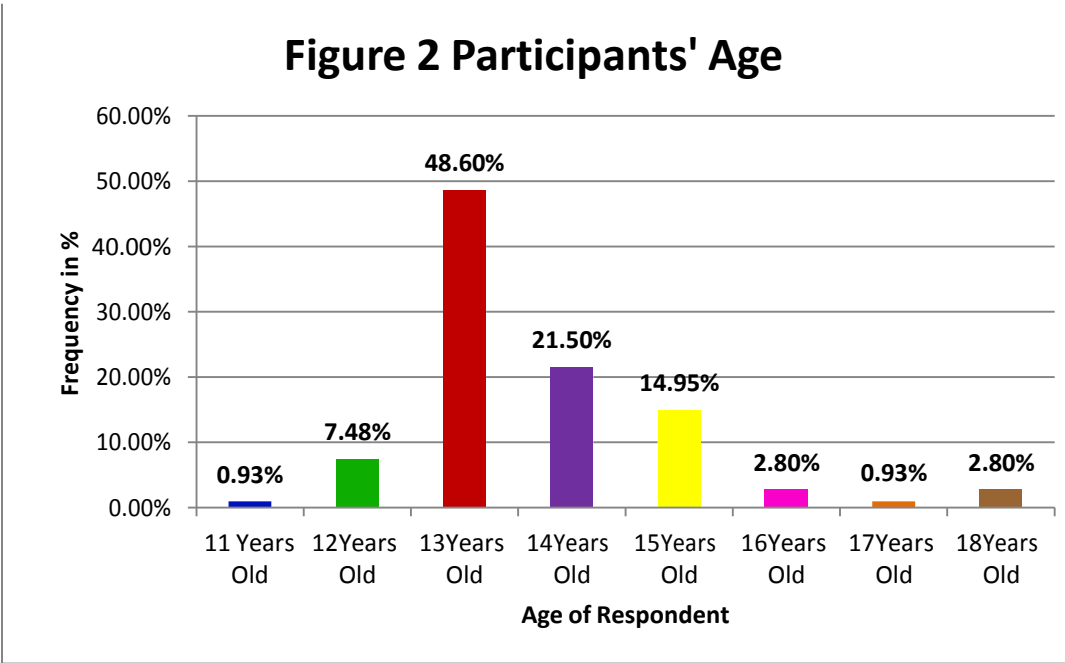
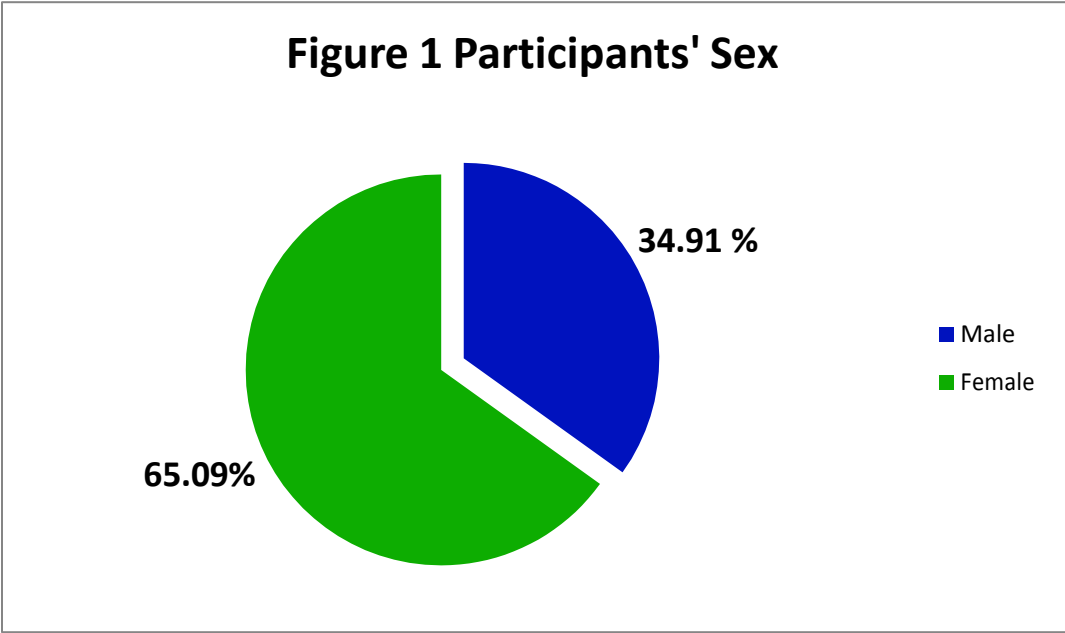
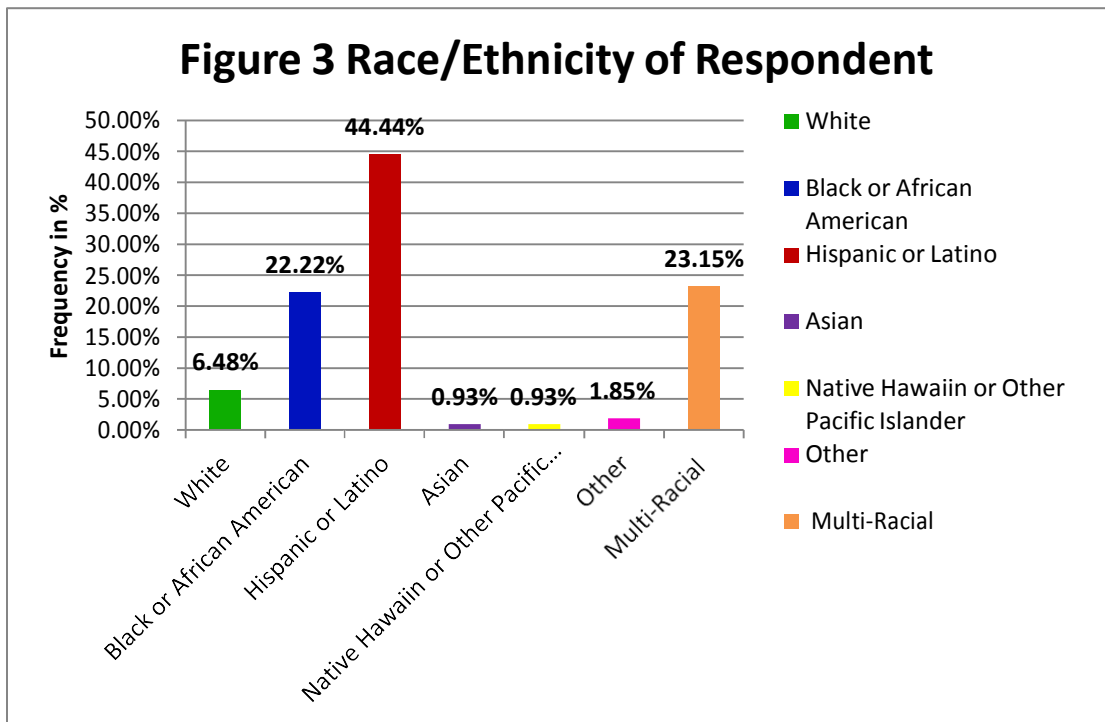


Figure 3 depicts the racial and ethnic distribution of the students attending the forum. 48 (44.44%) of the students described themselves as Hispanic or Latino, 25 (23.15%) students said they were mixed race, and 24 (22.22%) said that they were African American. Seven (6.48%) students said

that they were white, and two (1.85%) self-identified as other. One (0.93%) student self-identified as Asian, and one (0.93%) as Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.



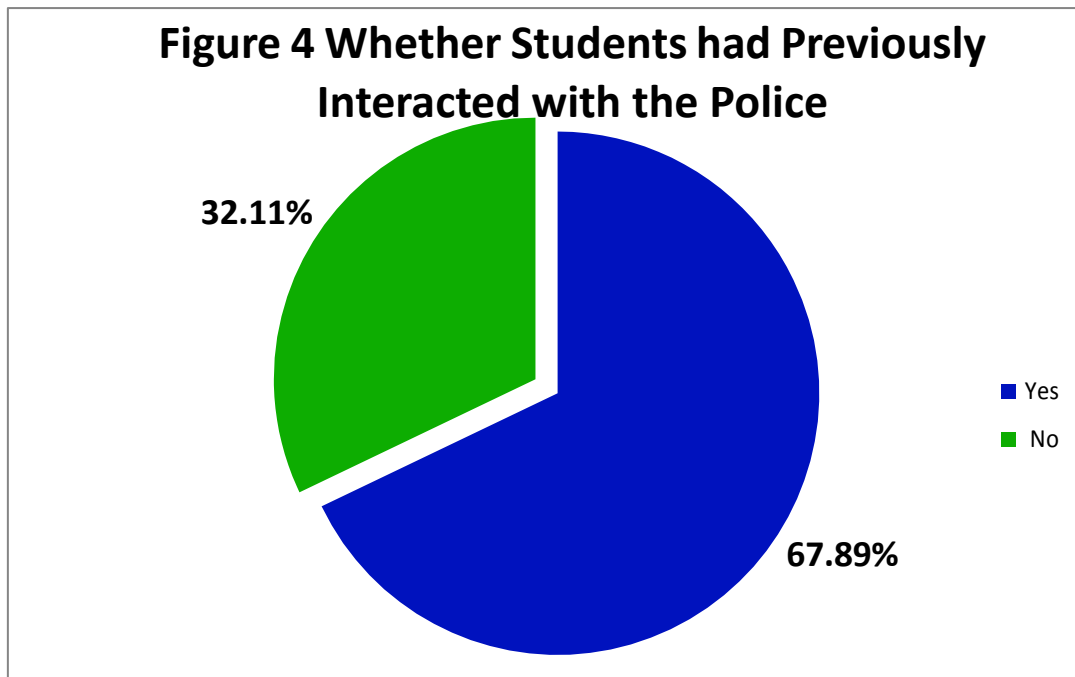
Previous Experiences with DMC Forums

The Pre-Survey asked the students if they had previously attended a Forum. Of the 104 students who answered that question, 18 (17.31%) responded that they had previously attended a Forum. Eight (7.69%) had previously attended twice. The fact that one-fourth (25%) of the attendees had previously attended a Forum may affect how accurately the pre-forum and post-forum surveys measure the impact of the Forum program on students' attitudes. Specifically, these students have already been exposed to programming designed to improve their attitudes toward law enforcement, and to encourage them to think constructively about how to respond in the event of a negative encounter with police officers. If the previous Forum was effective, the repeating students' attitudes on the pre-forum survey will already reflect more positive attitudes engendered by their previous experience. The attitudinal change occurring as a result of attending a second or third Forum may be smaller than that experienced by a first-time attendee.

Findings

Previous Interactions with Police Officers

One of the aims of the Forum is to address negative attitudes that students have towards law enforcement. A particular concern is helping students understand the perspective of police officers in their interactions with young people, especially young people of color. To assess the impact of the Forum, it is important to ascertain whether the students attending have had personal interactions with police and, if they have, whether those interactions were positive or negative. When students were asked if they had ever interacted with the police previously, 74 (67.9%) said yes and 35 (32.1%) reported that they had not. The students who reported having had contact with police reported an average of 3.66 lifetime interactions, with responses ranging from one to 15 times. When students were asked, “how would you describe these experiences in general,” their average response was neutral ($M = 2.94$), rather than negative or positive on a scale from 1-5 (1-Very Negative, 2-Negative, 3-Neutral, 4-Positive, and 5-Very Positive).



Another question on the Pre-Survey asked students, “Do you think police treated you unfairly in the past?” In response to that question, 35 (33.7%) students reported they had been treated unfairly and 69 (66.3%) students said they had not. Of the 35 (33.7%) students who reported

that they had been treated unfairly by the police in the past, only 6 (17.1%) students said that they reported it.

Comparisons of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Responses

Attitudes toward Law Enforcement

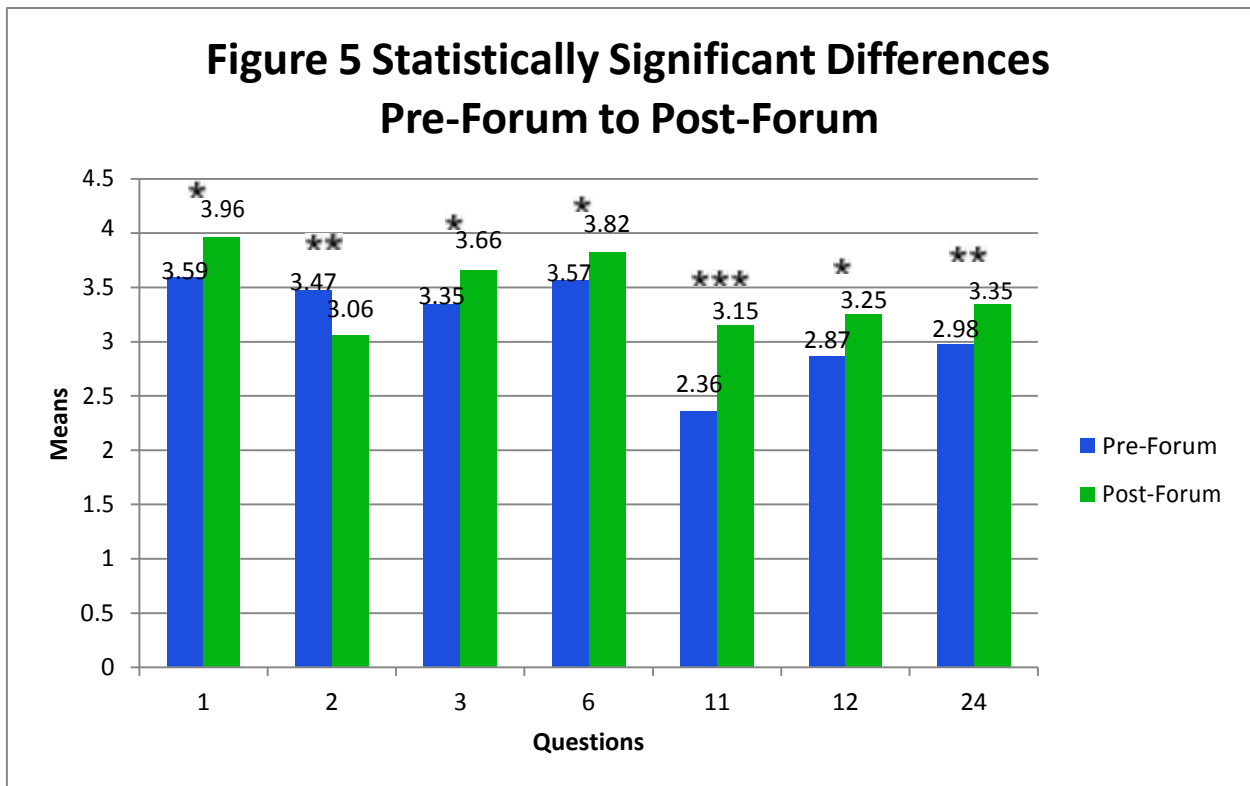
Both the Pre-Survey and the Post-Survey asked the students questions regarding their attitudes toward the police. Questions one through 17 asked respondents to use a 1-5 scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree) to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with such statements as “Police often overreact when dealing with young people,” “I trust many of the police in my district,” and “Police are concerned about their safety when they approach a group of young people.” All 17 questions and the average scores on the Pre-Survey and Post-Survey are found in Appendix A. For item number 2, “Police often overreact when dealing with young people,” a lower score reflects a more positive attitude toward the police. For all the other items, a higher score indicates a more favorable attitude toward the police.

The Pre-Survey and Post-Survey answers were compared using Paired Sample T-tests. For six of the 17 items measuring students’ attitudes toward law enforcement, responses post-forum were more positive than those given pre-forum, and the difference in responses was statistically significant.¹ These items were:

- Relationships between police and young people can be improved. (Item 1)
- Police often overreact when dealing with young people. (Item 2)
- I have some control over whether police show me respect. (Item 3)
- Young people should show respect when interacting with police. (Item 6)
- Police are often afraid when approaching young people. (Item 11)
- I trust many of the police in my district. (item 12)

¹When a test has a p value that is less than .05, we can conclude that there is a statistical difference between the two means that did not occur by chance. Significance values represented as * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, and *** = $p < .001$.

**Figure 5 Statistically Significant Differences
Pre-Forum to Post-Forum**



Positive and statistically significant differences seem to pertain primarily to one-on-one interactions between young people and the police. For example, positive change occurs with regard to a belief that police overreact when dealing with young people, that young people should show respect when interacting with the police, and trusting police in their district. The items that focus on more general statements such as “race/ethnicity affects interactions between police and young people locally,” “young people have a role to play in keeping their communities safe,” and “police are important members of our community” do not show statistically significant changes between the Pre-Survey and the Post-Survey. To the extent that the curriculum of the Forum focuses on primarily on youth–police interactions, this is to be expected. It is also important to note that even for the statistically significant items, the changes in attitudes, as evidenced by comparing the means, are modest.

Students also responded on the Pre-Survey to a series of 7 questions regarding how likely they are to do certain things when interacting with police, using a five point scale (1-Definitely Not, 2-Probably Not, 3-Possibly, 4-Probably, and 5-Definitely). On the Post-Survey, they were asked,

“(w)hen you interact with police in the future, how likely will you be to” do a list of behaviors. The seven behaviors about which they were questioned were:

- Follow directions from the police
- Argue and raise your voice
- Politely stand up for your rights
- Keep your hands in your pockets
- Run away
- Listen to what the police have to say before responding
- Say hi to the police in your community

The only item on which there was statistically significant, positive change was with regard to the final item, “say hi to the police in your community.” The mean score on the Pre-Survey was 2.98 and on the Post-Survey, it was 3.35 ($p=.005$). The mean scores for all the items are found in Appendix A.

The lack of statistically significant positive changes with regard to the majority of these items suggests that more specific instruction is required to entice these students to predict that they will behave differently in the future. The Forum may be moderately successful in encouraging students to question some of their attitudes about police and their interactions with them. Teaching students how to act differently may require different modes of instruction and additional opportunities for students to practice improved behaviors when interacting with police.

Reporting Unfair Treatment by Police

Another item on which there was a change from Pre-forum to Post-forum answers pertained to whether students know how to report unfair treatment by the police. On the Pre-Survey, only 16 (16% of the total responding) students answered that they knew how to report unfair treatment by the police. On the Post-Survey, 43 (46.2%) students of the attendees answered “yes.” Both surveys asked a follow-up question regarding how students would report unfair behavior by the police. On the Pre-forum survey, all students responded either that they would tell their parents or go to the police department. After the forum, respondents also provided additional responses, such as reporting the behavior to another police officer that they trust, getting the badge

number of the police officer, or writing a report. Finally, the Post-forum survey asked students how likely it was that they would file a report if a police officer treated them unfairly. The average response was 3.43 (1-Definitely Not, 2-Probably Not, 3-Possibly, 4-Probably, 5-Definitely). As with the previous questions with regard to interactions with the police, following the Forum, the students are moderately likely to do the things the program advises.

Student Evaluation of the Forum

The Post-forum survey asked the students a number of questions pertaining to their experiences at the Forum. Nine of these questions pertained to whether and how students will use the information they obtained at the Forum. Students were asked to indicate agreement with these statements using a five-point scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree). As shown in Table 1, students’ responses fell, on average, between “neutral” and “agree,” indicating a slightly positive response to the Forum.

Table 1 Application of Knowledge Learned at the Forum

Question	Mean
30. I will use the information I learned today	M = 3.49
31. I will share information I learned today with my friends	M = 3.50
32. Today’s program should be shared with all police officers	M = 3.56
33. Today’s program should be shared with all young people	M = 3.67
34. Today, I learned new ways to interact with police	M = 3.61
35. Today’s workshop helped me understand police officers’ point of view	M = 3.62
36. I feel more prepared to deal with police if they stop me	M = 3.55
37. I was able to share my thoughts and feelings about how police deal with young people	M = 3.36
38. I would like to participate in more positive activities with police in the community	M = 3.31

The Post-Survey also asked students to rate on a five-point scale (1-Not at All, 2-Slightly, 3-Moderately, 4-Very, 5-Extremely) how helpful they found specific Forum activities, and how helpful they found the Forum overall. The average scores for all five items fall between “moderately” and “very helpful.” The students rated small group discussions highest (3.48) and the panel discussion lowest (3.2).

Table 2 Students' Responses on Helpfulness of the Program

Question – How helpful was each of the following?	Means
25. Panel Discussion	M = 3.20
26. Role Plays	M = 3.40
27. Small Group Discussions	M = 3.48
28. Handouts	M = 3.26
29. Overall Workshop	M = 3.43

Overall, the students' responses are moderately positive regarding the value of various activities at the forum, its power to change their views with regard to law enforcement, and how they will use what they learned. The students' answers in response to the final questions, "what did you like or find helpful about today's workshop?" provide a little more insight into what they regard as positive aspects of the program. One common theme in the responses pertained to increased knowledge about police. Examples of these comments include, "I learned how police feel on certain situations," "I learned some cops don't like others," "I learned that police are different than others," and "I find that it helped me understand more about the police."

Another type of comment pertained to the activities, particularly the fact that attendees got to share their ideas. Some examples of these comments include, "I liked hearing other students' opinions," "I like how we had the freedom to say what we want and share our thoughts," "I liked that everyone got to share their opinion on each topic," and "I liked that not only the kids were involved but the adults and police." One student commented, "I liked that we got to speak to the police." Affording the youth an opportunity to participate in an exchange of ideas and experiences is a very positive aspect of the Forum experience.

When the students were asked what suggestions they would make in order to improve the workshop, many students did not provide an answer, or said that they had no suggestions. The most common suggestions indicated a desire for more role plays, simulations, and activities. One student suggested that students should interact one on one with police officers.

Conclusions

This review of the results of the Pre-survey and Post-survey indicate that there are positive aspects to the program in terms of its effectiveness in influencing students' attitudes with regard to law enforcement. The students' answers show a number of positive changes, especially with regard to individual interactions between the youth and police officers. Also, after the Forum, an increased number of the students said that they would report unfair treatment by the police. Their responses reveal that they have learned several new ways to report unfair treatment. It is not clear that students have learned to behave differently when interacting with the police. Ensuring that attitudinal change leads to changed behaviors may require reinforcement of the message of the Forum, and opportunities to practice the desired behavioral changes.

The students' evaluation of the Forum is moderately positive. A number of students suggested more role plays and activities as ways to improve the Forum. Increasing the numbers of opportunities for students to interact with the presenters and other participants might boost the ratings the respondents give to the Forum. Many students also mentioned that they liked having an opportunity to speak their minds and share their experiences. In many settings, youth are talked to and talked at. Offering students a chance to speak about their experiences and to voice their concerns is an important feature of this Forum.

Appendix A – Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Comparisons

Question—Please circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each sentence	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	P-Value
1. Relationships between police and young people can be improved	M = 3.59	M = 3.96	p = .012*
2. Police often overreact when dealing with young people	M = 3.47	M = 3.06	p = .009**
3. I have some control over whether police show me respect	M = 3.35	M = 3.66	p = .023*
4. Having positive interactions with police in the community is important	M = 3.68	M = 3.71	p = 1.00
5. Young people are more likely to take risks with a group of friends than when alone	M = 3.76	M = 3.77	p = .365
6. Young people should show respect when interacting with police	M = 3.57	M = 3.82	p = .046*
7. Race/ethnicity affects interactions between police and young people locally	M = 3.30	M = 3.22	p = .511
8. Young people have a role to play in keeping their communities safe	M = 3.58	M = 3.54	p = .404
9. Young people often overreact when dealing with police	M = 3.22	M = 3.41	p = .360
10. There are things I can do to keep myself safe if stopped by police	M = 3.58	M = 3.68	p = .099
11. Police are often afraid when approaching young people	M = 2.36	M = 3.15	p = .001***
12. I trust many of the police in my district	M = 2.87	M = 3.25	p = .015*
13. Young people are often afraid when they interact with police	M = 3.34	M = 3.40	p = .829
14. All police are bad	M = 2.41	M = 2.57	p = .229
15. Police are important members of my community	M = 3.49	M = 3.61	p = .444
16. Most police treat young people fairly	M = 2.99	M = 3.29	p = .177
17. Police are concerned about their safety when they approach a group of young people	M = 3.05	M = 3.36	p = .354

Question - When you interact with the police how likely are you to:			
18. Follow directions from the police	M = 3.74	M = 3.91	p = .489
19. Argue and raise your voice	M = 2.46	M = 2.34	p = .397
20. Politely stand up for your rights	M = 3.74	M = 3.76	p = .139
21. Keep your hands in your pockets	M = 2.58	M = 2.53	p = .120
22. Run away	M = 2.11	M = 2.24	p = .831
23. Listen to what the police have to say before responding	M = 3.58	M = 3.91	p = .175
24. Say hi to the police in your community	M = 2.98	M = 3.35	p = .005**

Appendix B – Young People – Pre-Survey

Pennsylvania DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Curriculum

Age: _____ **Gender:** _____

Race/Ethnicity: (Please circle all that apply)

American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American
 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander White Hispanic or Latino Other:

Have you ever interacted with the police? (Please circle) Yes / No

If so, about how many times? (Please write number) _____

How would you describe these experiences in general? (Please circle one)

Very Negative Negative Neutral Positive Very Positive

Have you ever been to one of these DMC trainings before? (Please circle) Yes / No

If you have been before, how many times? (Please write number) _____

III. Please circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each sentence.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Relationships between police and young people can be improved	1	2	3	4	5
2. Police often overreact when dealing with young people	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have some control over whether police show me respect	1	2	3	4	5
4. Having positive interactions with police in the community is important	1	2	3	4	5
5. Young people are more likely to take risks with a group of friends than when alone	1	2	3	4	5
6. Young people should show respect when interacting with police	1	2	3	4	5
7. Race/ethnicity affects interactions between police and young people locally	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. Young people have a role to play in keeping their communities safe	1	2	3	4	5
9. Young people often overreact when dealing with police	1	2	3	4	5
10. There are things I can do to keep myself safe if stopped by police	1	2	3	4	5
11. Police are often afraid when approaching young people	1	2	3	4	5
12. I trust many of the police in my district	1	2	3	4	5
13. Young people are often afraid when they interact with police	1	2	3	4	5
14. All police are bad	1	2	3	4	5
15. Police are important members of my community	1	2	3	4	5
16. Most police treat young people fairly	1	2	3	4	5
17. Police are concerned about their safety when they approach a group of young people	1	2	3	4	5

II. When you interact with police, how likely are you to:

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Possibly	Probably	Definitely
18. Follow directions from the police	1	2	3	4	5
19. Argue and raise your voice	1	2	3	4	5
20. Politely stand up for your rights	1	2	3	4	5
21. Keep your hands in your pockets	1	2	3	4	5
22. Run away	1	2	3	4	5
23. Listen to what the police have to say before responding	1	2	3	4	5
24. Say hi to the police in your community	1	2	3	4	5

III. Please circle your answer to the following questions:

25. Do you think the police treated you unfairly in the past? Yes No

26. If yes, did you report it? Yes No

27. Do you know how to report unfair treatment by the police? Yes No

28. If yes, how? _____

Appendix C – Young People – Post-Survey

Pennsylvania DMC Youth/Law Enforcement Curriculum

I. Please circle the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each sentence.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Relationships between police and young people can be improved	1	2	3	4	5
2. Police often overreact when dealing with young people	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have some control over whether police show me respect	1	2	3	4	5
4. Having positive interactions with police in the community is important	1	2	3	4	5
5. Young people are more likely to take risks with a group of friends than when alone	1	2	3	4	5
6. Young people should show respect when interacting with police	1	2	3	4	5
7. Race/ethnicity affects interactions between police and young people locally	1	2	3	4	5
8. Young people have a role to play in keeping their communities safe	1	2	3	4	5
9. Young people often overreact when dealing with police	1	2	3	4	5
10. There are things I can do to keep myself safe if stopped by police	1	2	3	4	5
11. Police are often afraid when approaching young people	1	2	3	4	5
12. I trust many of the police in my district	1	2	3	4	5
13. Young people are often afraid when they interact with police	1	2	3	4	5
14. All police are bad	1	2	3	4	5
15. Police are important members of my community	1	2	3	4	5
16. Most police treat young people fairly	1	2	3	4	5
17. Police are concerned about their safety when they approach a group of young people	1	2	3	4	5

II. When you interact with police in the future, how likely will you be to:

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Possibly	Probably	Definitely
18. Follow directions from the police	1	2	3	4	5
19. Argue and raise your voice	1	2	3	4	5
20. Politely stand up for your rights	1	2	3	4	5
21. Keep your hands in your pockets	1	2	3	4	5
22. Run away	1	2	3	4	5
23. Listen to what the police have to say before responding	1	2	3	4	5
24. Say hi to the police in your community	1	2	3	4	5

III. How helpful was each of the following:

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
25. Panel discussion	1	2	3	4	5
26. Role plays	1	2	3	4	5
27. Small group discussions	1	2	3	4	5
28. Handouts	1	2	3	4	5
29. Overall workshop	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Please circle the number that best describes your opinion:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
30. I will use the information I learned today	1	2	3	4	5
31. I will share information I learned today with my friends	1	2	3	4	5
32. Today's program should be shared with all police officers	1	2	3	4	5
33. Today's program should be shared with all young people	1	2	3	4	5
34. Today, I learned new ways to interact with police	1	2	3	4	5
35. Today's workshop helped me understand police officers' points of view	1	2	3	4	5
36. I feel more prepared to deal with police if they stop me	1	2	3	4	5
37. I was able to share my thoughts and feelings about how police deal with young people	1	2	3	4	5
38. I would like to participate in more positive activities with police in the community	1	2	3	4	5

39. In the future, if you feel that police treat you unfairly, do you know how to report it? Yes No

40. If yes, how? _____

41. In the future, if you feel that police treat you unfairly, will you report it?

Definitely not Probably not Possibly Probably Definitely

What did you like or find helpful about today's workshop?

What suggestions do you have to improve today's workshop?

Additional comments:
