

# DCPS Goes Global:

Research on the District of Columbia  
Public Schools Study Abroad Program,  
2017 Cohort

LAURA C. ENGEL

HEIDI GIBSON

CLARK BOOTHBY

JESSICA FUNDALINSKI

Graduate School  
of Education  
& Human Development

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WORKING PAPER

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## AUTHORS

**Laura C. Engel**, *Associate Professor of International Education and International Affairs, The George Washington University*

**Heidi Gibson**, *Master's Student, GW International Education Program*

**Clark Boothby**, *Master's Alumnus, GW International Education Program*

**Jessica Fundalinski**, *Master's Student, GW International Education Program*

## AUTHORS' NOTE

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Questions and comments should be addressed to [Lce@gwu.edu](mailto:Lce@gwu.edu).

## KEY FINDINGS

This paper details findings from an analysis of the second year of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Study Abroad Program, which took place during the summer of 2017. The DCPS Study Abroad Program supports short-term global trips during the summer for selected eligible DCPS students in grades 8 and 11. The program, which began in the summer of 2016, covers the full costs of travel for students regardless of family income or GPA, and aims to help prepare students for success in an increasingly diverse global community. This analysis was conducted by a research team at the George Washington University (GW). The team collected data through three surveys of participating students — one survey before their travel experience and two after travel — and through interviews with participating students and educators (referred to as Travel Ambassadors, or TAs).

Evidence from the surveys and interviews revealed several positive impacts related to study abroad, from enhanced global competencies to increased social and emotional aptitude and engagement in learning. The key findings are listed below, and additional findings from the analysis are explained in more detail in the main sections of this paper.

- **Students gained an interest in and respect for other cultures.** Immediately after returning from study abroad, 55% of students reported that they learned to be more open-minded, while 38% listed respect for other cultures as the most important thing they learned from their study abroad experience. Five to six months after study abroad, more than 60% of respondents said that they learned to be more open-minded and respectful of other people and cultures.
- **Students were more likely to consider themselves “world citizens” after studying abroad, and many reported a greater interest in community service.** In a survey administered immediately after travel, 87% of respondents reported seeing themselves as world citizens, up from 78% before travel. At the same time, DCPS Study Abroad participants displayed a strong desire to participate in local community service activities after returning. Interviewed students also spoke about their inspiration to get more involved in overseas service projects.
- **Students reported making new friends during study abroad and valued the peer-to-peer relationships built during the program.** Prior to travel the students surveyed ranked the experience of making friends from other DC schools the least important part of the trip for them (sixth out of six options), but after travel abroad they ranked this third among the factors they enjoyed the most. The vast majority (93%) of surveyed students said they “got to know new friends” while studying abroad.

Interviewed students reported building new relationships with peers in DC, often from different schools, neighborhoods, and socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds. After approximately six months, these relationships persisted with about half of surveyed students keeping in touch with others on their trips “often” or “all of the time.”

- **Students found speaking a language other than English to be challenging, enjoyable, and rewarding. Students often expressed an increased desire to learn a world language.** In an open-ended survey question, 44 out of 122 students (36%) identified language or communication barriers as their biggest challenge during travel. Interestingly, data from the post-travel interviews and survey also suggest that many students ultimately found the experience of cross-cultural communication to be rewarding. Between the pre-travel and post-travel surveys, the percentage of students who expressed a desire to speak a language other than English increased from 88% to 94%. In addition, bilingual students who were interviewed noted the positive impacts of being able to use their second language during their study abroad, a point mentioned by TAs as well. The TAs also observed that students, regardless of their ability level, were willing and eager to try to communicate across language barriers in a variety of situations.
- **Many students reported increased feelings of gratitude and greater motivation to learn after study abroad.** After travel, many students said they had learned to be more “humble” and “grateful” for resources such as free and accessible education, clean water, food security, and a clean environment. Further, 20% of surveyed students identified gratitude as the most important thing they learned while studying abroad, and 60% of interviewed students spontaneously discussed gratitude when describing their travel. Many students connected this sense of gratitude with increased motivation to work harder in school and suggested they felt more academically engaged.
- **Student engagement appeared to improve after travel abroad in certain areas, but their adaptability and intercultural sensitivity did not appear to be strongly affected.** Student scores on measures of engagement showed significant improvements between pre- and post-travel surveys, especially in terms of classroom motivation and the desire to do well in school. However, scores on measures of adaptability and intercultural sensitivity did not seem to change much between pre- and post-travel surveys, and on some measures showed decreases after students returned from study abroad.

- **Many interviewed students expressed interest in studying, traveling, or working abroad in the future.** In addition, after studying abroad, 69% of surveyed students indicated a desire to study and work in another country in the future, an increase from 64% in the pre-travel survey.

## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Students eligible for the DCPS Study Abroad Program include those in grades 8 and 11 who are studying a world language and special education students who are pursuing an alternative certificate. Between 2016 and 2017, the number of student participants increased from 380 to 422, and student applications rose from 933 to 1,251. The number of Travel Ambassadors also increased from 44 in 2016 to 69 in 2017. In 2017, 22 study abroad groups of 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders went to 15 countries on five continents. Destinations included Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Perú, Argentina, Uruguay, Senegal, Morocco, Spain, France, Italy, China, and New York City in the US. The purposes of the trips varied: there were six language immersion trips, eleven service-learning, one combination service/language immersion, two global leadership, and two domestic tours. Funding for the Study Abroad Program came from the DC Public Education Fund, and no additional funding was required from student participants.

Approximately two-thirds of Study Abroad Program participants were female and one-third were male. Of the 45 DCPS secondary schools, 38 supported student applicants. Student travelers came from all eight Washington, DC wards, and included students with disabilities; 6.2% of travelers required accommodations. Sixty-two percent of participants were first-time international travelers, and 18% of all participants had never before left the Washington, DC metropolitan area. DCPS provided 252 students with new passports.

DC Study Abroad participants differed in background from the typical white, affluent participant in postsecondary study abroad. In 2017, 91% of participants in the DC Study Abroad Program were students of color (slightly higher than the DCPS average of 82%), and 85% were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (compared with 76% of DCPS students overall).

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

The central purpose of this research is to understand students' experiences in study abroad and to explore the potential relationships between study abroad and participating students' global competency, academic engagement, and social and emotional learning. The study used a mixed methods research design, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods.

## ***Survey Methodology***

The GW research team administered three surveys to students in the 2017 cohort: one pre-travel survey administered in April through May 2017, a post-travel survey administered immediately upon students' return in July through August 2017 (their travel dates varied), and a later post-travel survey administered five to six months after their return, in November through December 2017. Surveys were designed to measure changes in student attitudes and behaviors in relation to engagement in school and the community, intercultural awareness and communication, and college and career aspirations, in addition to other dimensions. The surveys, completed online using SurveyGizmo, consisted of several different question types, including multiple-choice questions, ranking scales, open-ended questions, and situational judgment items. Some open-ended questions were similar in both the pre-travel and immediate post-travel surveys to see how well students' actual experience and lessons learned aligned with their original expectations and concerns. Responses to open-ended questions in the post-travel surveys were coded into themes and accompanied by frequency counts to gauge the most common student perspectives.

Overall, 276 program participant responses were collected from the pre-travel survey (for a 65% response rate), 138 from the immediate post-travel survey (33% response rate), and 40 for the later post-travel survey (10% response rate). Results from the pre-travel survey and the immediate post-travel survey are compared at length in this report; the 40 responses from the later survey are detailed only in the aggregate.

## ***Interview Methodology***

Individual interviews were conducted with 35 students by one of two members of the GW research team; interviewees were identified using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Of the 35 students interviewed, 13 were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 22 were in 11<sup>th</sup> grade; 22 were female and 13 were male; and 27 were African American, 3 white, 2 Hispanic, 2 of mixed heritage, and 1 Asian. In addition, 19 were first-time travelers. All DC wards and 20 schools (10 middle, 10 high) were represented among the interviewees, as were all types of trips to 13 countries. Interviews took place at schools during September and October 2017 and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Guardians and participating students each provided consent to the interviews, which were audio recorded, transcribed, de-identified, and coded independently by two members of the research team. To guide the analysis of interview data, the team developed a codebook with 16 categories adapted from dimensions of student global competence (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011) and adapted indicators of engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2018), and cultural and social capital resources. Data analysis also included an open category to capture emergent themes. After the researchers coded the interviews, they organized the text into thematic categories, later collapsing codes under larger grouped categories.

GW team members also interviewed eight TAs in June and July 2017. TAs play a key role in the recruitment, preparation, and actual travel experience of students. TAs are DCPS employees based in secondary schools, mostly teachers, librarians, social workers, counselors, or school administrators. Interviewees were identified through convenience and purposive sampling. Of the eight TAs, six were female and two were male; four were African American and four were white. The interviews took place at the DCPS central office or in a school, between one and three weeks after TAs returned from their trip abroad with DCPS students. TAs consented to audio recorded interviews, which lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. Interview questions focused on TA observations of student learning, as well as their understandings of students' global competence. These data were transcribed, de-identified, and coded independently by two research team members using a developed codebook. Analysis focused on triangulation of TA reported data with data generated from student interviews.

Part A of this paper summarizes the survey results, and Part B describes the interview results for students and Travel Ambassadors.

## **PART A: STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS**

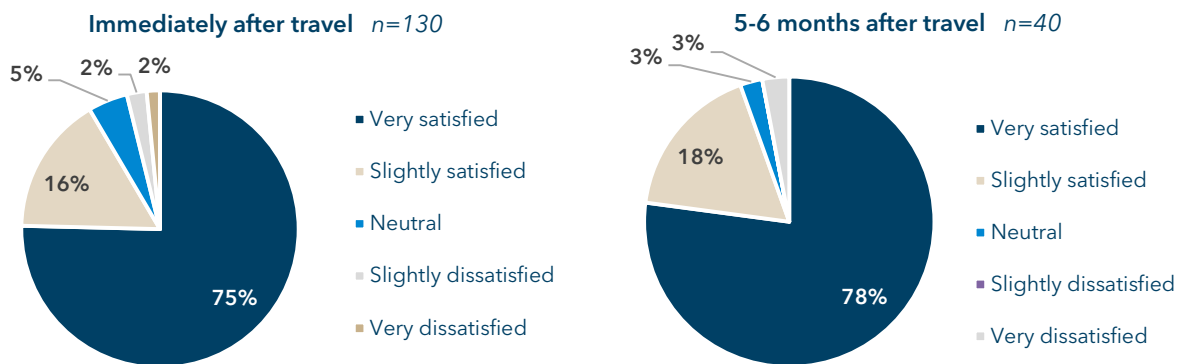
Findings from the surveys are described below, along with tables and figures illustrating the survey data. Results from both closed-ended and open-ended questions are discussed, and pre- and post-travel survey results are compared where appropriate to gain a better understanding of student experiences in global travel, as well as possible links between study abroad and learning outcomes.

### ***Overall Satisfaction and Program Experiences***

Closed-ended survey questions dealt with students' overall satisfaction and their pre-travel expectations and post-travel perceptions of their most important and enjoyable study abroad experiences. Several open-ended questions focused on students' expectations, concerns, challenges, lessons learned, factual knowledge gained from their study abroad experience, and how students applied what they learned. Some similar questions were asked in the pre- and post-travel surveys to see if takeaways and challenges matched pre-travel expectations and concerns.

**A large majority of participants were satisfied with their study abroad experience.** In the immediate post-travel survey, 91% of respondents said they were satisfied with their experiences (including 75% very satisfied plus 16% slightly satisfied, as shown in Figure 1). Five to six months after travel, 96% indicated they were satisfied (78% very satisfied plus 18% slightly satisfied).

**Figure 1. Students' Satisfaction with Study Abroad Experience**



**Students most enjoyed learning about the culture and history of their study abroad country.**

In a closed-ended survey question, students were asked to rank their experiences before and after their study abroad (Table 1). The majority of respondents ranked “learning about their country’s culture and visiting historical sites” as the experience they most looked forward to (pre-travel) and enjoyed the most (post-travel). “Meeting new people who live in another country” also ranked highly in both the pre-travel and immediate post-travel surveys. The biggest shift in expectations pertained to “making new friends from DC,” which ranked last in the pre-travel survey but turned out to be the third most enjoyable experience after students traveled abroad. The majority of students indicated a range of new experiences gained through global travel, including trying new food, speaking in a language other than English, and meeting local people (Figure 2).

**Table 1. Students' Most Important and Enjoyable Study Abroad Experiences**

*Pre-travel prompt:* Rank the following experiences that are most important to you while in your study abroad country.

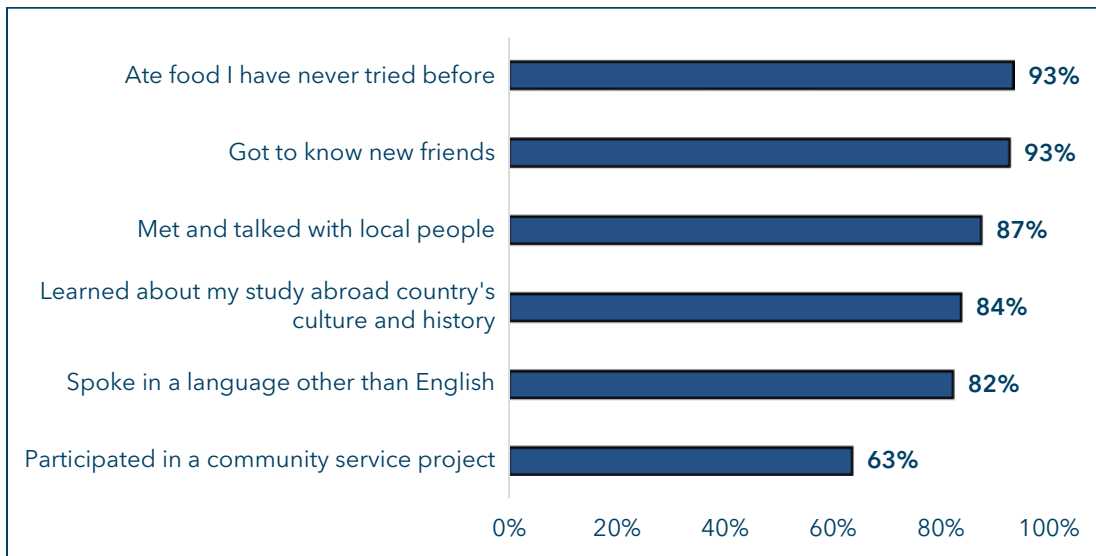
*Immediate post-travel prompt:* Rank the following experiences that you enjoyed the most while you were in your study abroad country.

| Response   | Pre-Travel Rank (Most Important) |       | Post-Travel Rank (Most Enjoyable) |       |
|--|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|
|  | Average Rank (n=266)             | Order | Average Rank (n=130)              | Order |
| Learning about the country's culture and visiting historical sites | 2.16                             | 1     | 2.78                              | 1     |
| Meeting new people who live in another country                     | 3.17                             | 2     | 3.28                              | 2     |
| Making new friends from DC   | 4.70                             | 6     | 3.48                              | 3     |
| Trying new food  | 3.40                             | 3     | 3.59                              | 4     |
| Working in the local community                                     | 3.82                             | 5     | 3.78                              | 5     |
| Practicing your foreign language                                   | 3.48                             | 4     | 4.10                              | 6     |



**Figure 2. Which Actions Did You Take Part in While in Your Study Abroad Country?**

*(Immediately after travel) n=138*



**Students experienced challenges during their travel.** In response to an open-ended survey question, students cited their greatest challenge to be “communication/language barrier” issues, alongside other challenges of trying new food and adjusting to climate (Table 2).

**Table 2. What was the most challenging experience for you while studying abroad this summer?**

*(Immediately after travel)*

| Response Theme                     | Mentions (n=122) | % Total | Example of Response  |
|------------------------------------|------------------|---------|--|
| Communication/<br>language barrier | 44               | 36%     | Trying to communicate with the locals. My Spanish skills are not the best so it was a little difficult trying to talk to them.                           |
| Food                               | 16               | 13%     | Eating the food that they eat because I am a very picky person.  |
| Weather/climate                    | 11               | 9%      | Adjusting to Peru's high altitude, it made me feel a little sick on the first few days.  |
| Other students                     | 10               | 8%      | The most challenging experience was making friends with the people during the trip in Ecuador, but I overcame my challenge and made a couple of friends. |
| Homesick                           | 10               | 8%      | At times, I felt homesick during the trip but I always reminded myself that it was only temporary and that I should make the most of it.                 |

**Many students mentioned “respect for other cultures and ways of life” as the greatest lesson learned from their trip.** In an open-ended question in the immediate post-travel survey, more than half of the responses indicated that their most powerful takeaway was being open-minded and understanding many ways of life (Table 3), which was also the case for students’ responses to a similar question in the later survey five to six months after travel (Table 4). In both post-travel surveys, students mentioned enhanced gratitude, confidence in cross-cultural interactions, enhanced foreign language skills, and new friendships formed in DC as lessons learned.

**Table 3: What did you learn most from your study abroad experience?**

*(Immediately after travel)*

| Response Theme   | Mentions (n=121) | % Total | Examples of Responses   |
|--|------------------|---------|---|
| Open-mindedness and respect for/understanding of many ways of life | 66               | 55%     | Different countries will have different kind of culture and we should respect it and enjoy it. On my study abroad trip I learned not to have tunnel vision. What I mean by this is that I learned how to open up to try and see new things. |
| Cultural norms, historical facts, or political issues              | 31               | 26%     | I learned a lot about the culture and where the historical landmarks and locations originated from and why they were built.   |
| Gratitude  | 24               | 20%     | Be grateful for what you have, whether it is food or air conditioning or people.  |
| Confidence and enjoyment of cross-cultural social interactions     | 21               | 17%     | I learned that I really like to travel abroad and speak another language with confidence.   |
| Friendships formed in DC   | 9                | 7%      | It can be easy to connect with people with little relation to me, either from across the city or across the world.  |
| Foreign language speaking skills                                   | 9                | 7%      | I increased my Spanish vocabulary a lot and I became more aware of my surroundings.   |

**Table 4: What did you learn most from your study abroad experience?**

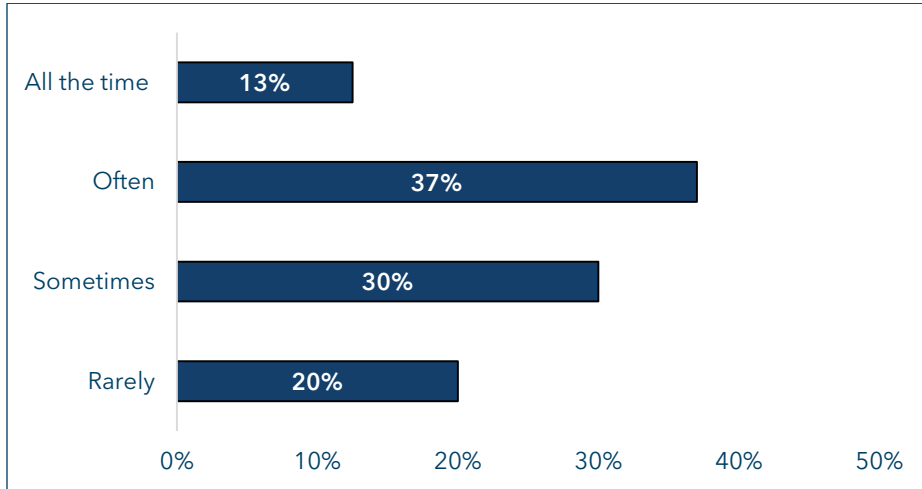
*(Five-six months after travel)*

| Response Theme   | Mentions (n=39) | % Total | Examples of Responses   |
|--|-----------------|---------|---|
| Open-mindedness and respect for/understanding of many ways of life | 25              | 64%     | I learned to appreciate and accept all cultures no matter how different they may be from yours.<br>I've learned how to engage in a community with individuals from different cultures and background experiences. It's important to take notes and be open-minded when talking to people from a different culture. You may learn something new from them. |
| Confidence and enjoyment of cross-cultural social interactions     | 23              | 59%     | I learned that interacting with people of different culture is actually fun and that it is easy to make friends. I was not sociable until I went to this trip where I learned to be sociable and learn new things. I learned Spanish (the language) which is kind of helping me in school today.  |
| Gratitude  | 7               | 18%     | I learned to not take anything for granted and be grateful for the things I have.   |
| Cultural norms, historical facts, or political issues              | 6               | 15%     | I learned how they make a lot of stuff by hand.<br>Being from DC, I'm so used to city life, but when I came to Costa Rica I had to get used to the lifestyle and living near wildlife, jungles, and the countryside. I ended up loving Costa Rica due to the beautiful scenery and its culture.   |
| Friendships made in DC   | 5               | 13%     | The most powerful thing I learned on my trip was how much all the students on the trip had in common despite coming from very different parts of the city and backgrounds. We got along instantly. It changed my perception of some of the other DC high schools and neighborhoods.   |
| Foreign language speaking skills                                   | 4               | 10%     | I improved my Spanish skills.   |

**Friendships forged during travel appear to be sustained.** Five to six months after travel, the majority of students still communicate with peers in other parts of DC sometimes (30%), often (37%), or all of the time (13%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: How often do you communicate with students who were on your Study Abroad trip?**

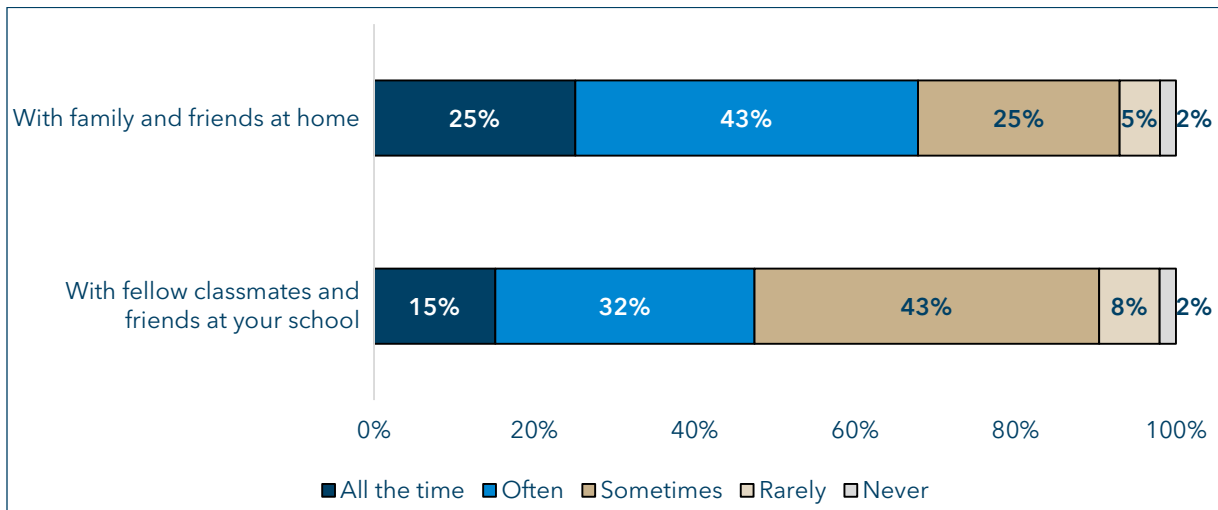
(Five-six months after travel) *n*=40



**After returning, most respondents said they talked with family, friends, and other classmates about their global travel experiences.** The vast majority said they talked at least sometimes about their study abroad experiences with friends and family members, and nearly all respondents reported talking about their experiences with classmates who did not travel abroad (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: How often do you talk about your study abroad experience?**

(Five-six months after travel) *n*=40



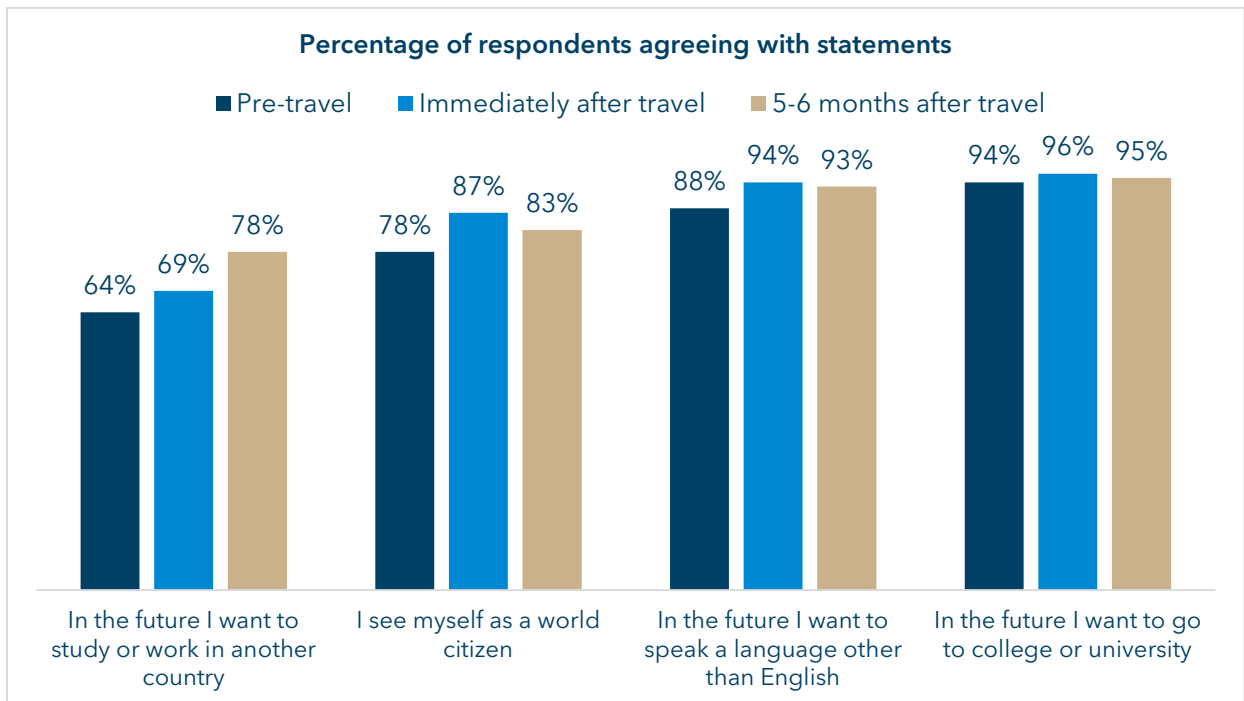
## Students' Aspirations and Perspectives

The pre- and post-travel surveys included questions about students' interest in future study or work abroad, interest in world language learning, and perspectives on global citizenship.

**Students' interest in studying or working abroad and in learning a world language was slightly higher after their global experiences.** The percentage of respondents who agreed they would like to study or work abroad in the future increased from 64% in the pre-travel survey to 69% in the immediate post-travel survey (Figure 5), while the percentage that was "unsure" decreased from 24% to 18%. The percentage that indicated an interest in learning a world language in the future also increased slightly between the pre-travel and post-travel surveys.

**Students were more likely to view themselves as world citizens after participating in study abroad.** The percentage of respondents who reported seeing themselves as world citizens increased from 78% in the pre-travel survey to 87% in the immediate post-travel survey (Figure 5). In the later survey 5-6 months after travel, 83% of respondents reported seeing themselves as world citizens.

Figure 5. Student Aspirations and Perceptions



N for pre-travel survey = 276, immediate post-travel survey = 134, later post-study survey = 40

Note: Figure shows percentage of survey respondents who agreed with these statements; the remainder gave responses of "disagree" or "unsure."

The responses to these perception questions differed somewhat by race and grade level (not shown in the figure). For example, in the pre-travel survey, 71% of white students viewed themselves as world citizens compared with 53% of African-American students and 45% of Asian students. On the whole, more 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported seeing themselves as world citizens than did 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

### **Student Engagement**

The 2017 surveys included three different validated measures of student engagement (Table 5). First, students responded to a series of questions about their ongoing engagement in school; for example, how well they pay attention in class. These items derive from the Research Assessment Package for Schools (RAPS) student survey of Ongoing Engagement and Identification with School, which was designed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (1998). Questions from the Appleton Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) were also used in the pre- and post-travel surveys to understand how connected students feel to peers and teachers at their school (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). Lastly, students responded to three questions about their feelings of “belongingness” at school, using items from Voelkl’s Identification with School Questionnaire (ISQ) (Voelkl, 1996; 1997). Together these measures give a more complete picture of student engagement among study abroad participants.

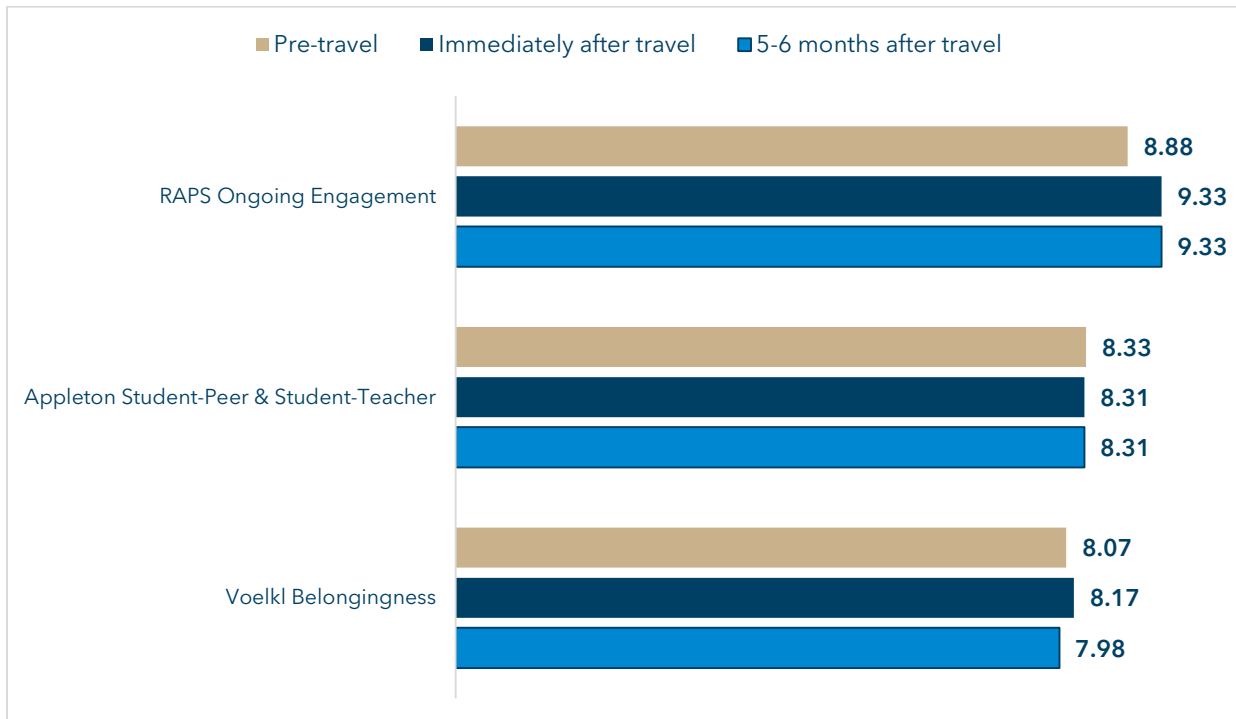
**Table 5. Overview of Student Engagement Measures**

| <b>Instrument</b>   | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Scale Reliability</b>  |
|---|---|---|
| Research Assessment Package for Schools Student Self Report | The ongoing engagement subscale examines the extent to which the student exerts effort on schoolwork, pays attention in class, prepares for class, and believes that doing well in school is personally important | $\alpha = .605$   |
| Appleton Student Engagement Instrument                      | The peer support for learning and teacher-student relationships subscales focus on students’ feelings as they relate to the support of other peers and teachers/staff   | $\alpha = .788$<br>(Student-Peer subscale)<br>$\alpha = .855$<br>(Student-Teacher subscale) |
| Voelkl Identification with School Questionnaire             | The belongingness with school subscale looks at students’ feeling of connection with their school   | $\alpha = .598$   |

**A student's knowledge of a second language seems to be a significant predictor of engagement.** Pre-travel scores on all three instruments measuring engagement were higher for students who spoke a second language than for students who did not. On the RAPS subscale, second language speakers had a pre-travel score of 9.04 (out of 10) compared with 8.82 for students who did not speak a second language; differences were also evident on the Appleton (8.39 vs. 8.30) and Voelkl (8.32 vs. 7.97) instruments. There were other differences in pre-travel engagement scores by gender and race, but patterns were not consistent across the three instruments. Differences between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders were small and not consistent across the three measures.

**Immediately after returning from abroad, student engagement scores increased on some but not all of the validated measures used.** The RAPS ongoing or classroom engagement subscale score improved from 8.88 in the pre-travel survey to 9.33 in the immediate post-travel survey on a scale of 10 (Figure 6). The Appleton SEI score remained roughly the same between the pre-travel and two post-travel surveys. Scores on the Voelkl belongingness items showed small improvements immediately after students returned from abroad but slight declines five to six months after travel.

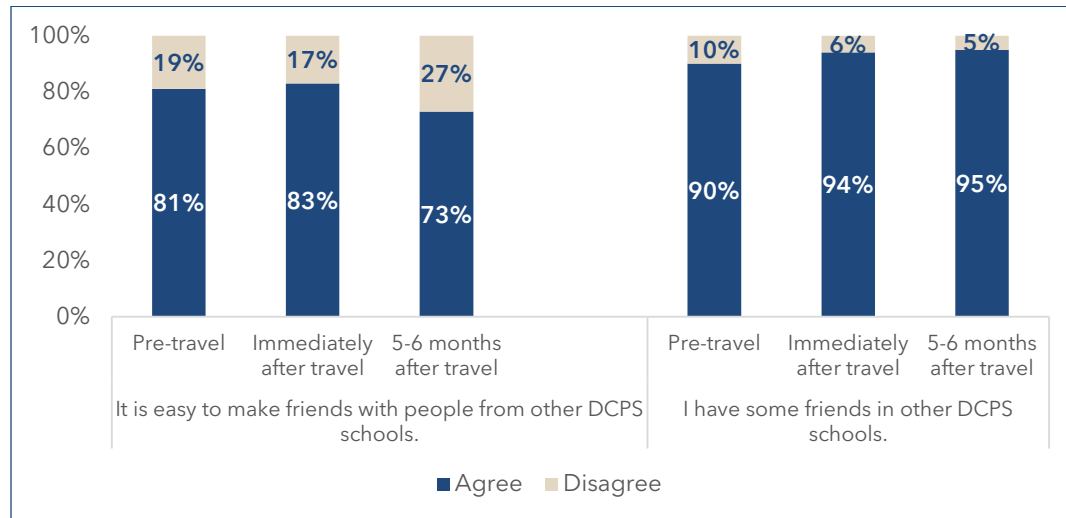
**Figure 6. Student Engagement Scores**



*N for pre-travel survey = 276, immediate post-travel survey = 134, later post-study survey = 40*

**Study abroad participants reported some improvements in peer-to-peer engagement after their global experiences.** The percentage of students who reported having friends at other DCPS schools increased slightly between the pre-travel and both post-travel surveys (Figure 7). The percentage who said they found it easy to make friends with students at other DCPS schools increased in the immediate post-travel survey from 81% to 83%, but decreased to 73% in the survey five to six months after travel.

**Figure 7. Peer-to-Peer Engagement within DCPS**



*N for pre-travel survey = 276, immediate post-travel survey = 134, later post-study survey = 40*

## Global Competence

There are many definitions and measures associated with global competence. In the survey instrument used in this research, a student's level of global competence is explained by 1) the ability to adapt to novel situations and circumstances, and 2) the ability to appreciate cultural differences and interactions (Table 6). On their own, neither of these measures act as proxies for global competence. However, together they embody key skills and attitudes important for individuals to embody in an increasingly global and intercultural world. The first, Martin's Adaptability Scale (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2012), explores individuals' adjustments of psycho-behavioral functions in response to novel and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions, and situations; the scale includes a cognitive-behavioral factor (six items) and an affective factor (three items). Second, we used a revised version of Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Wu, 2015) to measure students' confidence and enjoyment in cross-cultural interactions. Intercultural sensitivity is defined as "an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communications" (Chen, 1997, p. 5). The intercultural sensitivity scale (Wu, 2015) includes four factors: intercultural engagement and attentiveness, respect for cultural



differences, interaction confidence, and interaction enjoyment. Scale reliability estimates for both instruments show moderate to high internal consistency ( $\alpha=.860$  &  $\alpha=.787$ ).

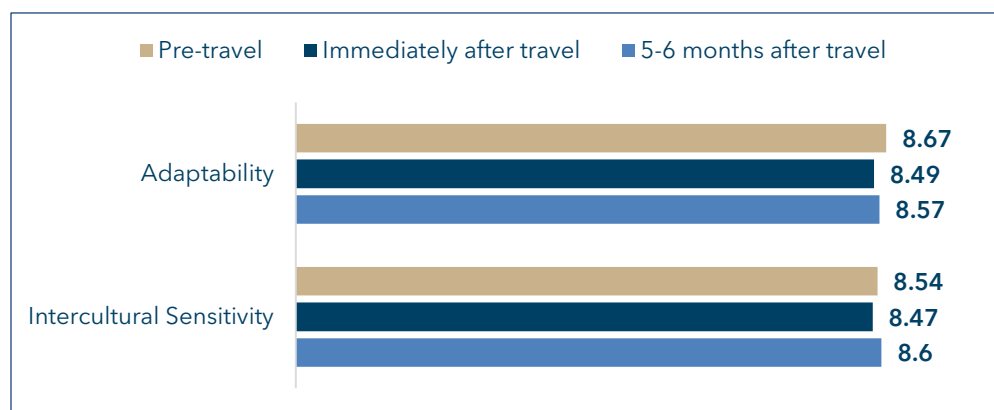
**Table 6. Adaptability and Intercultural Sensitivity Scales**

| Source  | Description   | Scale Reliability |
|---|---|-------------------|
| Martin Adaptability Scale                                     | This scale explores individuals' adjustments of psycho-behavioral functions in response to novel and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions, and situations       | $\alpha = .860$   |
| Chen & Starosta Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Wu revision) | This scale includes four factors: intercultural engagement and attentiveness, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, and interaction enjoyment | $\alpha = .787$   |

**Knowledge of a second language seems to be a significant predictor of both adaptability and intercultural sensitivity.** Before their global travel experiences, students who reported speaking a second language scored 8.78 (out of 10) on the Martin's adaptability scale and 8.83 on the intercultural sensitivity scale — among the highest of all the demographic groups we analyzed.

**We found no significant gains after study abroad in students' scores on the adaptability or intercultural sensitivity measures, and by some measures noted declines.** The average adaptability scores were lower on both post-travel surveys than they were before travel, while the average intercultural sensitivity score declined on the immediate post-travel survey but increased on the later post-travel survey (Figure 8). We have two possible explanations for these score decreases. First, some students may better understand their level of intercultural competence after travel and may hold themselves to a higher standard. Second, some students may have had a negative experience abroad, which may make them less understanding and accepting of cultural differences.

**Figure 8. Changes in Global Competence Scores**



## PART B: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW RESULTS FOR STUDENTS AND TRAVEL AMBASSADORS

Findings from the research team's post-travel interviews are described below. Thirty-five students and eight travel ambassadors were interviewed. Select quotations have been included to give a flavor of the observations made by interviewees.

### **Global Competence**

*When you're studying abroad, you're learning about different people. You're learning about the environment. You're understanding how different it is from your home, or even how similar it is. And so I feel like I can take more in and experience more through a situation like that. (Student 34)*

Students' reports about their study abroad experience demonstrated all four components of global competency described by Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2011). Every interviewed student made statements that indicated competencies in "investigating the world" and "recognizing perspectives." All but one student expressed evidence of competency in "communicating ideas," and 66% offered evidence of "taking action." Students exhibited these competencies in a variety of ways. The TA interviews provided further evidence that students participating in study abroad were developing the four components of global competency.

### **Investigating the World**

Students investigated the world by learning about different aspects of the cultures they visited. As Student 13 explained, "I learned a lot about their culture just by the way they cook . . . I was just aware of what they eat, with what. I feel like that tells a lot about your culture." Another student reported paying more attention to the daily life of the people in the country visited than someone would if they were on a vacation.

As students investigated the world, they were able to identify issues and generate questions about what they were seeing abroad. "Managua, it was beautiful, but it was bad, too, at the same time," said student 16. "When I Googled it and did research, it made it seem like it was a vacation spot, but they didn't really let me see the bad side of it, and I want to know why." This student went beyond simply noticing poverty; he was able to reflect and generate questions related to the larger global context.

After experiencing other cultures, some students could identify areas for improvement in their own culture, as this quotation suggests:

*When you go abroad, it's not just what you see on TV; you actually get the personal experience of what things are like over there, and you can come back and really teach*

*others what's really happening. And you can piggyback off of the things that they do over there that we should do over here and implement them within our own community. (Student 22)*

Student 35 observed that “everything is more global,” and asserted that “America should step out there and learn about everyone else, all their cultures.”

An integral element of global competency is the ability to take a step past observation and analyze evidence to construct a coherent response. A comment from Student 23 illustrated this competency:

*Over there in Peru, it's like it was kind of hard to breathe . . . especially as you go higher up in the mountains . . . A big impact that I experienced was the cars that people drive. It gives off a larger amount of CO<sub>2</sub> . . . And then, there's a lot of trash over there, too . . . the trash pollution and air pollution. So I thought, why not try and find ways to fix that.*

The student looked past the basic difference of altitude and hypothesized about other possible contributions to the poor air quality.

The TAs interviewed similarly reported that students investigated the world in a number of different ways. On most trips, TAs said that students would compare their home and global environments. In some cases, students noted differences in cuisine or experiences like shopping, but often students’ comparisons were more nuanced. TAs noted that on a trip to China, students questioned the historical and cultural significance of pandas and their role in the larger ecosystem. In Nicaragua, students discussed the condition of schools and the transportation infrastructure and how fashion and economics interplay to impact the local job market. TAs also reported that students raised questions about issues local to DC, such as neighborhood rivalries and conflict, and began to generate ideas for dealing with such issues.

### **Recognizing Perspectives**

In describing their study abroad experiences, students made multiple connections between the global experience and their home environment, suggesting both a widened perspective and the ability to compare local and global contexts. Students often described how the everyday life they experienced in a foreign context differed from media portrayals, as this student comment shows:

*I think that the news and social media likes to focus on the big, bad things that happen. While there are places and people who are really peaceful . . . People are always talking about Middle Eastern people; they're like, "So this terrorist just blew up this*

*house or this place," but they don't ever talk about the normal people . . . they normally don't mention the good things that happen. (Student 20)*

Other students reported more general lessons about the need to consider different perspectives. "[My travel] definitely made me think about stuff," said Student 2. "It's always two, three, four, five, sides to every story. It's always a different way to think about it. It's always another angle." Other interviewees said they learned that they "shouldn't judge . . . but try it first" (Student 5) and that "different people [are] good people, too" (Student 17).

Some students demonstrated empathy by considering what life would be like for people they met abroad if their roles were reversed. "What if those kids came to my school?" asked Student 18. Student 1 thought about this change in perspective as a call to action, noting that while "these problems may not be my own, they could someday be my own, and I have to fight those problems now." Student 26 posed this scenario:

*If I could bring somebody back to America with me just to experience it for even a day or even an hour, I wonder how big of an impact it would have on them, comparing it to their home and how they live on a daily basis compared to an average student here in America?*

The TAs interviewed also noted that students were able to recognize how their own and others' perspectives shaped ways of experiencing the world. In particular, students began to realize that there is not a normative way of being, and that the American way is "not the only way," as TA 2 explained:

*You know how minds are, they start to try to put things in boxes, like, "They do this, we do this." [The students] realize that there are complications within that. Not everybody is doing that. It sort of complicates your own definitions of culture, which is good. I don't want them to think from this one trip that they'll know.*

TAs postulated that for some students, recognizing the perspectives of others meant adjusting to cultural and behavioral differences, such as different expressions of politeness. For other students, this meant understanding how people's lives are influenced by differential access to resources, education, and other forms of capital. Students who went to the Dominican Republic were "shocked at conditions" (TA 6), but these students later learned how integrated the community was, both at growing their own produce and livestock and sharing these with other community members. This new perspective — that "everything that [the Dominicans] did was for the community" — led students to question the meaning of community at home (TA 6).

## Communicating Ideas

The ability to connect and communicate with diverse people, often in a foreign language, appeared to strengthen students' interest in and bonds with foreign cultures and citizens. "It makes me feel like we have some type of connection, yearning, you want to know about each other's lives and what we do, and how we're similar in most ways because most teenagers over there are just like teenagers over here," said Student 4. The ability to interact with others in a foreign language also heightened students' interest and first-hand learning. As Student 13 explained, "I liked talking to people from the other cultures — them trying to figure me out, me trying to figure them out. So, it's really fun. And when you really can speak their language, I feel like you can know so much more because you have the ability to actually ask them about it."

TAs also said that the majority of students were willing to communicate with locals in their study abroad environment, generally in the language of the country, regardless of students' language ability. On a trip to the Mediterranean, for example, students used a mixture of Spanish and nonverbal communication to get a basketball game going for several nights in a row. Other students used technology to help communicate ideas, both with locals and other DC students on the trip. On a domestic trip to New York City, there were a few students for whom English was not their first language. Students on the trip used nonverbal behaviors or technology (such as Snapchat) to communicate with these participants, as TA 7 explained:

*[The kids used] non-language-based ways to communicate with one another . . . I'm not sure if that would have been the outcome I would have wanted, but . . . they were able to communicate and build relationships . . . I think it made them realize there are ways to communicate with people that don't speak your same language, but you can still share an experience and know what the other person is feeling, even if you don't have a common language.*

## Taking Action

While the majority of students appeared able to identify issues, communicate across cultures, and recognize different perspectives, fewer spoke about using these skills to take action once they returned to DC. Rather, students often said they felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the world and global issues. When asked to describe how they saw themselves in the world, students frequently responded with words like small, tiny, or insignificant. Student 11 captured this feeling:

*I think the trip and all this education stuff is supposed to make you think of yourself as a global citizen, but being an American citizen barely matters. An individual can't really have that much of an impact . . . I'm more focused on myself . . . changing issues with myself that directly impact me and the people that I know. I'm more interested in those than issues that impact the country or the world because some stuff's just too big.*

Several other students, however, seemed more optimistic and expressed an interest in justice and desire to take action, as in these examples:

*It made me pay attention to the news more . . . People are really struggling . . . I'm not saying that because a certain area [is] struggling that they should be on the news more than other stories, but I'm just saying, though, there are areas of world, and they're not really covering . . . (Student 2)*

*It honestly made me want to be more involved in my school and in my community . . . Where I'm from, people know each other but it's not a sense of unity, in my opinion, because honestly it's like we try to pinpoint each other for certain things, but it's like we all need to come together and rise against stereotypes. (Student 18)*

Other types of action were more service-oriented. Some students were so inspired by their participation in service learning trips that they planned to engage in other community service upon their return. Student 15, for example, said her study abroad group intends to renovate a local playground in Washington, DC.

According to the TAs interviewed, students demonstrated their ability to take action in a variety of ways. On service learning trips, students engaged in structured activities that were meant to have a “take action” piece; these included such services as digging trenches to prevent water encroachment on a school building and delivering water filters to a community in the Dominican Republic. Other actions were smaller in scope. In Nicaragua, a student who had few material resources himself gave his pair of sneakers to a local child with none. Students on a trip to Nicaragua bought jewelry from women affected by domestic violence to help support these women’s independence and well-being. Students later described the meanings of these opportunities to take action in environments far from home.

In sum, both the student and TA interviews suggest that the study abroad experience helped students develop global competencies. Although it was easiest to see competencies related to investigating the world, recognizing perspectives, and communicating ideas, the interviews, particularly with the teachers, provided some insight into how students built capacity to take action.

### ***Academic Engagement and Social Capital***

Several students described how study abroad had increased their engagement in learning and their aspirations for college, language learning, and future study abroad. One student described the energizing effect of learning in a real-world environment:

*When you're actually there, and you're hearing about this certain thing that has to do with this place . . . it makes you feel much more involved, because you feel like you're a*

*part of it. I feel like with a lot of people, because it's a physical type of thing, that it makes them much more attentive. So, I feel like [that's] an effective way of learning. (Student 13)*

Students also reported their excitement when they could connect their study abroad experiences with content in their school classes, suggesting their deeper engagement in learning. Student 33 described how, in a world history class on Spanish-speaking countries, she was able to help her peers pronounce a word in Quechua that she learned in Ecuador. "My mind keeps going back to that trip whenever something gets mentioned on it; it just makes me want to learn about it or try harder, and it's just really cool," she explained. Students also reported feeling "much more motivated in school" (Student 28), particularly after observing their peers in other countries. "I think it helped me work hard because the kids down there, they work really hard," said Student 3. "I should be doing the same thing over here and working hard as well."

Some students identified engagement with the rest of the world as a major goal for their future. "I've been fascinated with the world for a while," said Student 25, "but just going on this trip sort of made me realize, I want to go visit other countries and meet new people." Student 1 expressed a similar view:

*I really want to go to South America again. I want to go to Africa. I want to go all over the world. I want to go everywhere . . . I do know that whatever field I go into, I would love to travel. Even if it's not constantly, always urgently, I want to be able to travel and also be able to make a change for people.*

Interviewed students reflected a culture of possibility by linking their experiences overseas with what Yosso calls a "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Many students reported that their high school study abroad experience had intensified their interest in going to college. Student 2, who had been thinking about taking the step of applying to college, said that "study abroad has actually helped me put my foot down" in that direction. Several students added that not only had their interest in going to college increased, but so had their desire to study abroad again. As student 34 explained, "Every college visit or every college that visits my school, first thing I ask them, 'Do you have a study abroad program?' because I know that that's what I want to do." Student 16 mentioned that the short DCPS trip had whetted interest in a longer study abroad trip: "I heard when you do it in college, you can do it for a long time, so it's like you can really see how people really live. A week? I might feel like I know how they live, but I really don't."

TAs also frequently mentioned that students showed engagement in learning throughout the study abroad experience. Most notably, TAs observed the students eagerly questioning guides, locals, and the TAs themselves to better understand the experiences of others and make connections with their own lives. Although TAs found most students to be positively

engaged during the trip, there were some exceptions. A few TAs reported students listening to headphones while a tour guide was speaking, talking on cell phones during a language lesson, or not showing up to pre-departure meetings (without saying why). On a more positive note, TAs said that most students, regardless of their language level, tried to speak the language of the country in their interactions with local youth and tour guides or in shops and restaurants. The majority of TAs agreed that students expressed a desire to travel abroad again and to continue studying a language.

Overseas travel also tended to enrich students' linguistic capital, which Yosso described as "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language" (2005, p. 78). This was evident not only by students who expressed interest in learning additional languages, but also by students who spoke a language other than English at home and could use that language in a study abroad country. For example, Student 1 was the only native Spanish speaker on the trip to the Dominican Republic. On other trips, several students who were native Spanish speakers became informal translators for their peers, which can improve their language skills and enrich their understanding of their own linguistic capital as a biliterate citizen on a global scale. And as noted earlier, students who were connected by ethnic heritage or language to their study abroad country became particularly engaged in interacting with their environment and the locals.

For native English speakers from monolingual homes, increased motivation to study another language was a recurring theme (e.g., Students 3, 9, 11, 19), especially so they could communicate with linguistically diverse communities. Following their abroad experience, several students were motivated to pursue additional world language study:

*Whenever French gets really hard and I'm like, "Oh my god. Why did I do this to myself? I don't want to take this incredibly intense AP class my senior year and do all this work," and then I just kind of remember how Morocco was, and the fact that I'm taking this class is going to allow me to have a chance of having an experience that is just as good on my own, like going to live in a Francophone country or in France. So, it's just a little extra motivation. (Student 11)*

*And so now I am taking Spanish II. I want to learn Spanish. I want to know what they are saying. (Student 19)*

*I'm trying to learn Spanish now, because some people knew Spanish and English, so I was like, all right, I guess I'm going to focus on that, even though it's a little hard . . . I'm glad that people could go back and forth with other people in Spanish and my friends could translate, but I wanted to just talk by myself . . . to somebody else. Like not having anybody to translate for me. (Student 3)*



As previously discussed, students regularly reported increased self-confidence as they explored their identities with peers across DC and in a more global context. Student 31 described her pride in teaching others about herself as an African American woman during her trip to China:

*It was just really nice getting to know people who have never seen people like me before . . . they were touching my hair, and making faces, and taking pictures . . . I know it can be kind of a negative thing, but I wanted them to learn and know . . . Going to China and seeing how much pride they take in their culture has given me a sense of pride in my culture. I didn't [used to] say much, but now I'm saying, "I'm Afro-Caribbean, my dad's family, my mom's from here, and this makes me who I am." I take more pride in it. I think I value it more. (Student 31)*

TA interviews also provided evidence of students' growing self-confidence. TA 2 noted that during the study abroad trip to China, students felt they "have something [to offer] that the people of this province are not usually exposed to, that their culture is also embraced . . . I think they embraced it in the positive sense, as they have something to contribute that is unique."

Experiences abroad also helped students to find new avenues of self-expression back home. As Student 2 explained, "everyone can say they went to Z-Burgers and Target and bought something nice out there with the Chipotle and down at PG Mall . . . But not everyone can say they went to the beaches of West Africa, or . . . saw huge fish, canoed, arrow made of seashells. Not many people can do that." For some students, the experience abroad was deeply foundational to understanding their own heritage and, in turn, navigating their social identities in the US. Student 2, an African American male who left DC for the first time to travel to Senegal, described his time in Senegal as "going home" and "empowering," during which he found new pride in his cultural roots.

For some students, acquiring a passport and traveling by airplane represent forms of social capital deemed valuable in the dominant culture in the US (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Students 2, 5, 9, 16, 19, 29, and 35 (all but one of whom were first-time travelers and passport holders) said that holding a passport gave them feelings of access and belonging. Their comments included the following:

*[With a passport you] know that you belong in the country, to know that you were there, and nobody can take that away. (Student 5)*

*I got a passport now . . . I'm important. This is real. This is good. I saw them put the stamp on there when we arrived in Senegal, and I was just like, "This is dope." (Student 2)*

*[The passport] feels like I have an extra pathway to go if I were to reach the world . . . the simile I would use is, it's like extending an arm. You have more reach to the outside than you ever did before, (Student 29)*

Many recipients of a first passport described it as a powerful tool of access and opportunity — "my passage to getting further in life," Student 27 called it — and several expressed aspirations for further travel.

All TAs mentioned how students had developed cultural capital or sophistication by successfully navigating their trip abroad or the airport, building know-how about travel, and in some cases learning what constitutes acceptable behavior when traveling. Some students recognized that their experience abroad will be an asset on college applications. As TA 1 noted, students had experiences that will enable them to connect with others and fit into new environments. For example, students who traveled to France saw the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, students who went on a domestic trip to New York saw a Broadway play, and all students experienced the local cuisine.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

*I'm really glad for [my travel experience] because that just taught me that whatever you do, you've got to do it with ethic and vigor and rigor. (Student 29)*

Evidence from student interviews suggests that study abroad may deepen core competencies associated with social and emotional learning (SEL), as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2018). CASEL breaks SEL into five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Interviewed students demonstrated learning in all five competencies.

### **Self-Awareness**

Students developed more nuanced views of themselves and increased self-esteem and self-efficacy through their reactions to a new environment. As students were put in unfamiliar places, they started to question their assumptions and, in some cases, adjust their self-perceptions. Student 34 described this thought process:

*I'm kind of thinking like, what if I wasn't born there and I was born here? And, what if I were to live this lifestyle? Would I continue to . . . seek out to see different things, or would I just stay in my home on a farm and [live] for my family? In a sense, I was just trying to put myself in the situation that they would be in, and think about how would I really do that.*

Several other students (15, 28 and 29) also mentioned the “soul-searching” and reflection opportunities presented by the study abroad experience. Student 29 described “that overall feeling of going out of your comfort zone. It’s like a rush. It’s like a feeling you can’t get rid of. You want more so you have to go out and find it yourself.”

Students appeared to build confidence during their time abroad as they navigated an unfamiliar culture. Of the students interviewed, 71% made statements indicating increased self-confidence. Student 16 summarized it in this way: “I’m more outgoing now. I’m more confident in just going up and speaking to people. I’m not scared to approach a foreigner and start a conversation. I feel like a better person, like more of an adult.” Student 17 remarked that “not a lot of kids my age can do that, you know? They can’t really go far places and really be comfortable with it and talk to different people.”

Students developed self-efficacy skills as they participated and performed well in difficult situations. Some pushed themselves physically, resulting in a new recognition of their strength and a new aspect of their identity:

*I climbed the mountain. That was a lot of work . . . I pushed myself farther than I thought I could go because I was going to stop and I thought about it . . . Something was telling me I have to go up there, and when I got up there, like you could touch the clouds and see seven mountain peaks. People have houses up there. It was crazy . . . I love hiking. I go hiking every weekend now. (Student 31)*

Several students spoke of their growth after overcoming challenges. Student 2 said that overcoming the difficulties of travel “really helped me out to learn. Being by myself wasn’t really easy . . . being on the trip made me realize a lot of stuff. It kind of just made me more of like a lone wolf in my aspirations, and [I] wanted to get out there . . . and break the bubble.” In short, the qualitative evidence suggests that successfully navigating unknown and difficult situations led students to reflect on their identities and strengths and build “can-do” attitudes. All of this evidence suggests an increase in the SEL competency of self-awareness.

Several TAs mentioned that the act of successfully traveling in another country, and even navigating airports, helped to increase students’ confidence and self-efficacy. TA 2 noted that students who traveled to China built confidence through successful attempts to speak Chinese, whether at a market or during their work at a panda conservation center. Others reported that students developed confidence and agency by acting as translators; for example, several students used their native language of Spanish to support their group in the Dominican Republic. On a domestic trip to New York City, students were confident enough to ask questions in front of a group to satisfy their curiosities, according to interview evidence. This is not to say that students did not experience frustration. Two TAs mentioned that students were upset about the lack of amenities such as Wi-Fi or having to use bottled water to brush their teeth in certain circumstances.

## Self-Management

Interview data suggest that students also gained self-management skills, particularly self-discipline and self-motivation. Several students who visited less affluent countries said that their growing awareness of inequities between countries and their gratitude for their own situations had motivated them to apply themselves academically and make the most of the opportunities they have. Student 18 described this growing motivation in this way:

*It's definitely changed motivation, because I'm a hard worker, but sometimes procrastination gets the best of me . . . When they give us textbooks, for example, normally I would just throw the textbook and be like, "Oh, yeah, I won't need it." But now I actually use the stuff they give us more because they don't have it [in the study abroad country]. And it's definitely changed my viewpoint of how I use things, how I see things, and what I have access to . . . It changed my demeanor, like I want to work harder today . . . In a sense I'm doing it for myself, but I feel like I owe it to them because if they had the opportunity I had, I feel like they'd be very appreciative; they'd do what they needed to do.*

Other students made similar comments. "It made me work harder — a lot harder," said Student 1. "I didn't realize there are people out there who don't have the opportunity that I do." Student 23 described how his exposure to individuals with limited access to education helped him develop self-discipline:

*When I'm up late at night and I have to write one more paragraph, and just like, "Ugh, I don't really feel like doing it," but I guess I think back to the trip. It's like, well, people who don't have access to school wish they had an education. So I think back to that. I'm like, "Okay, let me finish this paragraph." I think just realizing what people have to go through in that country, it always makes me realize where I'm at and what I have to do in order to make my life better.*

Some students reported that a newfound awareness of their privileges had helped them limit their impulses and ground themselves in larger goals outside of school. Student 15 said that although she used to be very focused on shopping, she now was much less inclined to do so and had learned to focus on the "bigger picture." Student 26 reported feeling a sense of responsibility "to actually earn my keep as a citizen here in America and as a student athlete" and demonstrate "that I have grown as a person."

TAs also indicated that students had gained self-management skills while on their trip abroad. On certain service-learning trips, students began to realize their situations were "not nearly as bad as it could be" (TA 4) and that living in poverty takes on a different meaning in a different context or country. In addition, TAs suggested that students realized the

opportunities offered by global travel experiences and the importance of focusing on academics to expand their opportunities.

Some TAs noted that students showed self-discipline by managing money and time appropriately while abroad. For example, students arrived promptly to activities and events and worked efficiently on scheduled activities. Several TAs said that study abroad offered students opportunities to practice self-management skills, which seemed to help them become more independent. TA 1 described how 8<sup>th</sup> grade students managed themselves on a trip:

*When they're over there, they are managing their own food, we're telling them what time to get up in the morning, we're telling them what time they've got to be at places, where they've got to be. We're putting the kids in the middle of Barcelona and saying, "Here's the fountain, take a picture of it. You've got to be back here in two hours. Go." And now they're going into a town that they've never been in in their whole lives, and they're making it back.*

### **Social Awareness**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the development of social awareness is one of the strongest SEL outcomes suggested by the interview data. Students explored and gained respect for different societal constructs and gained empathy, perspective, and appreciation for diverse peoples. Although students were in large part reacting to the unfamiliar society they visited, they also used these experiences to reflect critically on their own community.

Many students cited social cohesion as a strength of the communities they visited. Students described these communities as "united" (Student 13), "like a family" (Student 3), "tightly-knit" (Student 30), "looking out for one another" (Student 1), and "peaceful" (Student 4). They had positive views of this strong social connection and in many cases expressed a longing for such a sense of social belonging. For example, said Student 13, "they know how to live, and we don't know how to live." Student 30 envisioned how this value might benefit the United States:

*I definitely think our communities aren't as close as they were in Costa Rica and as they could be. I think if we were a little bit closer with the people around us, I think that it's something very positive. Even just for your mental health, normal people that you can say hi to. More friendly, positive interactions and being able to rely on someone not particularly for work, but just if you need a favor. I think we can all do a little bit more of that.*

Many students positively responded to the lack of materialism they witnessed in the cultures they visited. "Attitude-wise, they are so positive about everything that they do," said Student

16. "In Guatemala they don't really care about those things — they just do what they need to survive and they are happy with the stuff that they have, even if it's not much to them." Some contrasted this attitude with the lack of gratitude they saw in their own culture. For instance, said Student 19, "Down there, they are so appreciative of what they have. Up here, some people are not grateful of the little things, and they want the big things but they are not doing anything to work for it." Students often reported feeling "humble" when they realized their prior lack of awareness of some of the opportunities they enjoyed.

Interviewed students gave considerable thought to the lack of resources in some of the places they visited, and many shared fairly nuanced responses. Altogether, 60% of interviewed students spontaneously expressed feelings of humility, privilege, gratitude, or appreciation when reporting their experiences. Many students reported increased gratitude for their education in light of the limited educational opportunities in places they visited, and many connected this to an ethical responsibility to work harder in school. Students also gained appreciation for resources like clean water, electricity, cell phones and wireless coverage, food security, flushing toilets, roads, and a clean environment.

Appreciation of diversity also increased; 83% of interviewed students made statements that demonstrated openness and open-mindedness. Some students reported that after studying abroad they felt "more accepting and understanding about other cultures" (Student 29) and "like I understand people more" (Student 21). Student 28 noted that "all people are connected in some way. Even though we didn't speak the same language, I knew [what] they were saying."

TAs also frequently said they observed students demonstrating openness and open-mindedness in a variety of contexts. For instance, several TAs gave examples of students' willingness to speak in the language of the country, eat the way the locals eat, and respond to cultural differences, such as strangers in China asking to take their pictures. TA 7 described the effect of study abroad on students' social awareness:

*It has ignited this desire to travel and experience other things and it has ignited more curiosity about the world around them and gives them the confidence to ask questions of adults. (TA 7)*

Students often interacted with locals through games, sport, and local dances. However, this openness was not limited to interactions with people in the host country. According to TAs, students were also open to new friendships and relationships with others in the DCPS program.

Each of the TAs observed students reflecting on their own social and cultural heritage and identity in the context of the places they visited during their study abroad. Notably, students who already had connections to the study country, such as those who came from or spoke

the language of that country, became an asset or better connected to their environment and the locals. Moreover, half of the TAs mentioned that African American students questioned what it meant to be black in another country. On a Mediterranean trip, several students were relieved to see other black US citizens abroad, while they also discussed the local perception of black students. In the Dominican Republic, African American students were told “you are our people” by a local tour guide and noted the interconnectedness of people across the globe.

Students also explored social awareness by learning about different norms and expectations in other contexts. Students navigated their multiple identities and showed social awareness by behaving differently or responding differently to people depending on the context. Students often engaged in “code-switching,” said TA 4. “We did have conversations about, listen, we do stick out because there’s not a lot of people that look like us in this country? . . . So we have to make sure that we handle ourselves in a particular manner. We also want to make sure that we are respectful to other cultures. I think those were some of the best conversations we had.”

According to TAs, students also began to reflect on their own community and its identity and cohesion. Often through TA-led discussions, students considered how the ward or neighborhood in which they were born might offer or deter certain opportunities. Students were able to break through stereotypes about different DC communities through relationships formed during the study abroad experience. Students also discussed how their own social cohesion in DC might be strengthened and questioned their understanding of poverty after seeing poverty in developing countries.

### **Relationship Skills**

Interviews with students showed that this sense of connection carried over into the relationship skills competency of SEL. Students built this competency by both engaging with host country nationals and getting to know other members of their study abroad group. Many students were worried about interacting across cultures to begin with, describing themselves as “not confident” (Student 12), “terrified” (Student 14), or “uncomfortable” (Student 21). Students were especially concerned about foreign language communication, which Student 35 called “very, very difficult . . . sometimes frustrating.” However, many students reported that they eventually grew “more comfortable” (Student 12) and were “really happy” (Student 25) they could communicate. Student 34 summed up the continuing impacts of study abroad conversations: “When I meet new people and they're not from DC, or they're just from different places, I still ask them those kind of detailed questions that I asked the teenagers in Morocco. I feel like I didn't do that before. I feel like I wasn't as interested to do that.”

The nature of the program meant that many students knew only a few, if any, of the other students they were traveling with. Students described this as “intimidating” (Student 25) and “not easy” (Student 2), but in the end felt more positive. The experience “forced me to be friends with people I did not know at all,” said Student 33, while Student 30 said it felt like “this was the first time, genuinely in my life, that I’ve made friends from scratch.” Students not only valued the relationships they built with their fellow students — and often continued to communicate with them via group chats or texts — but they also reported a newfound appreciation for students around the city. Student 11 said the experience “helped me realize what a strong culture DC has, especially with the youth.” Student 16 made this observation:

*It made me feel like DC can create some good people. People look at DC and feel like the people are bad . . . but I actually was with people of all different backgrounds. Not to talk down on people, but I was with some people that are living in the streets, I was with some people that go to Banneker and are smart. I was with a lot of different people and we all connected.*

Student 13 specifically praised this aspect of the program design:

*That's why it made it more interesting, because it wasn't only schools that were close to mine, it was schools that were far from mine, so it was kids that I really never see, even just walking around. So, I found that is actually a plus for the trip, because even though we were all in the same grade, we all came from different schools.*

After meeting the twin challenges of unfamiliar peers and cross-cultural communication, many students felt they came away with more robust relationships and communication skills. Student 18 said that before the trip, “I wouldn’t feel comfortable in my speaking abilities. But now it’s like, ‘Yeah, I can do it, I’m not really intimidated anymore.’” Students reported other types of improved relationship skills: “I’ve got to come out of my shell a little bit more” (Student 27); “I am capable of talking to people I don’t know” (Student 28); and “I can be . . . more open and stop being so shy all the time” (Student 19). Student 23 said he had become “more polite” in his everyday interactions. Several students reported they found it easier to make new friends.

TAs unanimously mentioned positive impacts of the relationships students forged with TAs and peers during study abroad. Several TAs expressed surprise at the friendships, closeness, and solidarity that emerged between students in such a short time. Students mixed well with peers from different schools and DC wards, and formed positive relationships with the local guides, especially when students shared the same language or culture as the guides.



## Responsible Decision-making

Finally, there is evidence of students making progress toward responsible decision-making. The ethical component of responsible decision-making was exemplified by students' appreciation for the resources they had and moral responsibility to take full advantage of their opportunities, as noted above. Other examples of constructive choices are the academic goals set by some students. For instance, Student 15 reported using the study abroad experience to motivate herself to take a college course:

*I wanted to do more for myself because I knew I deserved more. And especially if I wanted to get into the school, I've got to start to get my life together, do what's best for me, start focusing on sports that really matter and do more community hours, just to be a better person because I know I'm worthy enough.*

Other students used the study abroad experience as a catalyst for positive personal actions. Student 33, for example, decided to "stop using all this electricity" and "stop complaining about everything so much." The students' abilities to make good decisions were enhanced by their increased global competencies, particularly those related to investigating the world and exploring perspectives.

## LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study had several identified limitations, which are important to recognize when considering the findings. First, although we included a wide sample of students in our qualitative interviews, it is important not to overgeneralize from the experiences reported by the selected students. Second, the identity of the researchers (Caucasian, middle-aged women) and the place where interviews took place (e.g., in schools) may have had an effect on the students' self-reporting of their experiences and perceptions, as well as the inferences researchers drew from these qualitative data. Although interviewers explicitly stated at the beginning of the interview that they were not affiliated with the school system, some students may have felt some constraints in sharing less positive experiences. Third, the five-six month post-travel survey had far fewer responses than the pre-travel and immediate post-travel surveys; therefore, the results may not be as representative as the prior two surveys.

Overall, findings drawn from this research are limited by a reliance on self-reports of experiences and reflections, rather than first-hand observation or quantitative measures of longitudinal growth. While this is somewhat mitigated by the triangulation of multiple forms of data, including student and TA observations, as well as survey results, there remains a need to incorporate additional perspectives, including those of parents and guardians. Researching student projects and linking them to the "take action" component of global competence, as well as building in data from official student records, would be another method to provide more robust results. For example, connecting student record data (GPA,

attendance, etc.) to self-reported attitudes and behaviors is crucial to substantiating claims made about increases (or decreases) in engagement or learning. A comparison to a representative control group sample would also provide additional insights. Further, the sample size of TA interviews (n=8) was rather small and did not reflect the range of travel experiences of the students (i.e., two sets of TAs went on the same trips).

Despite these notable limitations, our research provides critical opportunities to examine the experiences of young people in global travel and the effects of this early exposure to global education on young people. These studies have already gleaned important knowledge and understanding about what “going global” means to young people of various ages and genders and from different socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and schooling backgrounds. They have opened up new avenues for continued research into short and long-term connections between global travel and social and emotional learning, academic engagement, college access/retention, career readiness, and global competence.

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