



# Parent Beliefs and Engagement In Summer Camp Experiences

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*Results of the Pre and Post Test of  
Phase 2 of Growing Faith Together*





# Introduction

The Growing Faith Together Project seeks to empower parents and caregivers in family faith formation by leveraging the power of camp experiences. The project is a 5-year, nationwide, cross-denominational initiative coordinated by Wheaton College's Center for Leadership Development (HoneyRock) and generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

The project seeks faith formation through partnership: partnership among parents/caregivers; partnership among camps, congregations, and the home; partnership among practitioners and the academy; partnership among different Christian traditions. We bring together scholars and practitioners from Lutheran, United Methodist, and Evangelical traditions, drawing experience from camp, clergy, and academia.

Phase 2 seeks to collect longitudinal data over 4 time points. This report includes data primarily from the second time point (post camp). This report seeks to address the following questions:

- 1) To what extent did parents engage with their campers' experience?
- 2) In general, what impact did the camp experience have on the camper and what changes have parents seen in campers?
- 3) What are parents' impressions of camp and its programs?
- 4) What differences exist in campers' experience, perceived growth, or parents' impressions, across a variety of variables?

## In This Report

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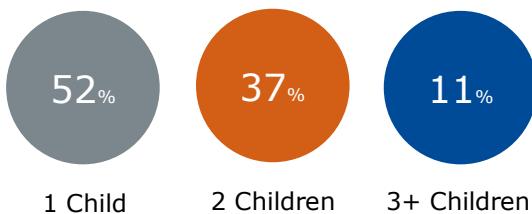
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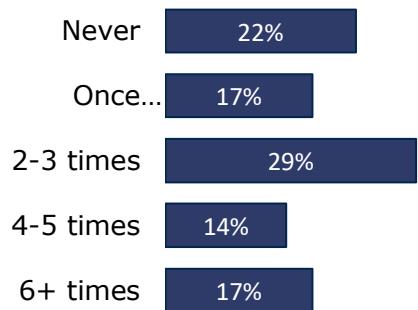
# Parent & Family Insights

Total T2 Responses: 770

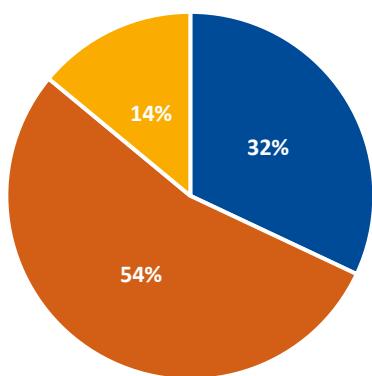
## # of Family Children Attending This Camp



## # Years a Child from Household Attended



## Camper Age



■ 10 and under ■ 11 to 14 ■ 14 and up

## Affiliations

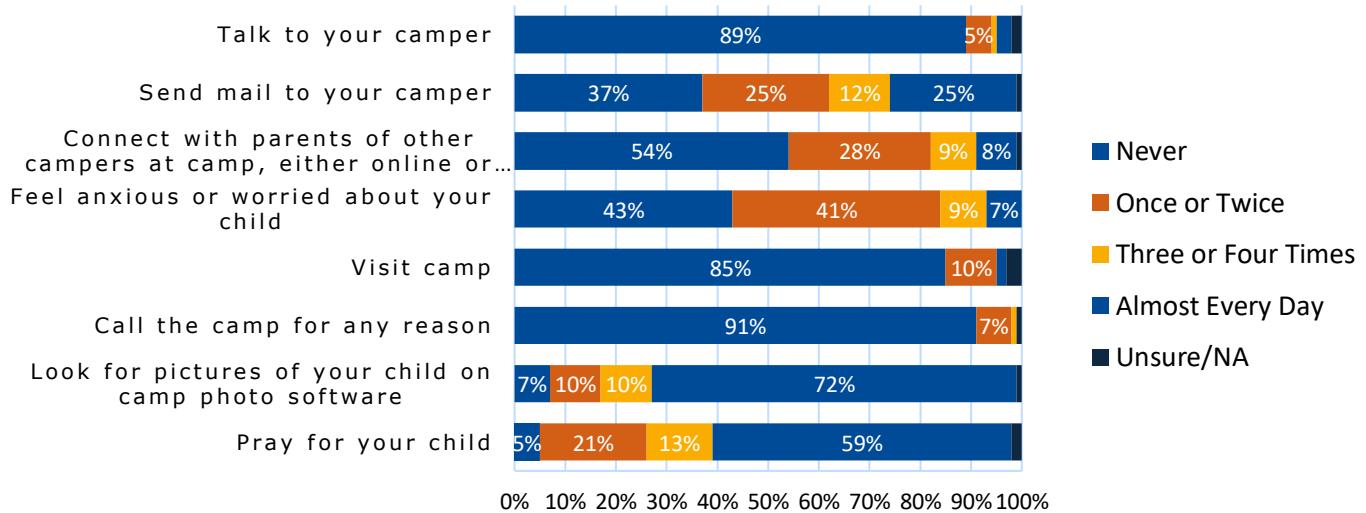
	# Respondents	%
Partner Church Families	236	31%
Non Partner Church Families (Other church or no church affiliation)	519	67%

## Partner Organizations

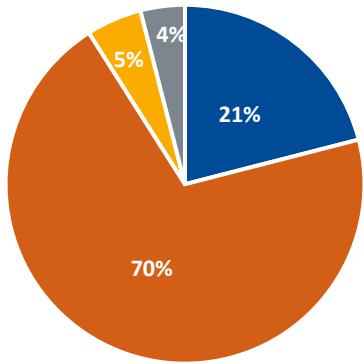
Partner Organization	#
Bayshore	105
Covenant Point	119
Cross Trails	77
Camp Hebron	23
Camp Horizon	73
Lutherhaven	51
New Life	113
Shetek	117
Wanake	92

# Parent Engagement

While your camper was at camp, how often did you...

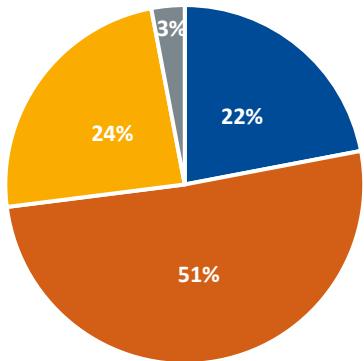


## Time Spent At Drop Off



- None - Someone Else Dropped Off
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- More than 2 hours

## Time Spent At Pick Up



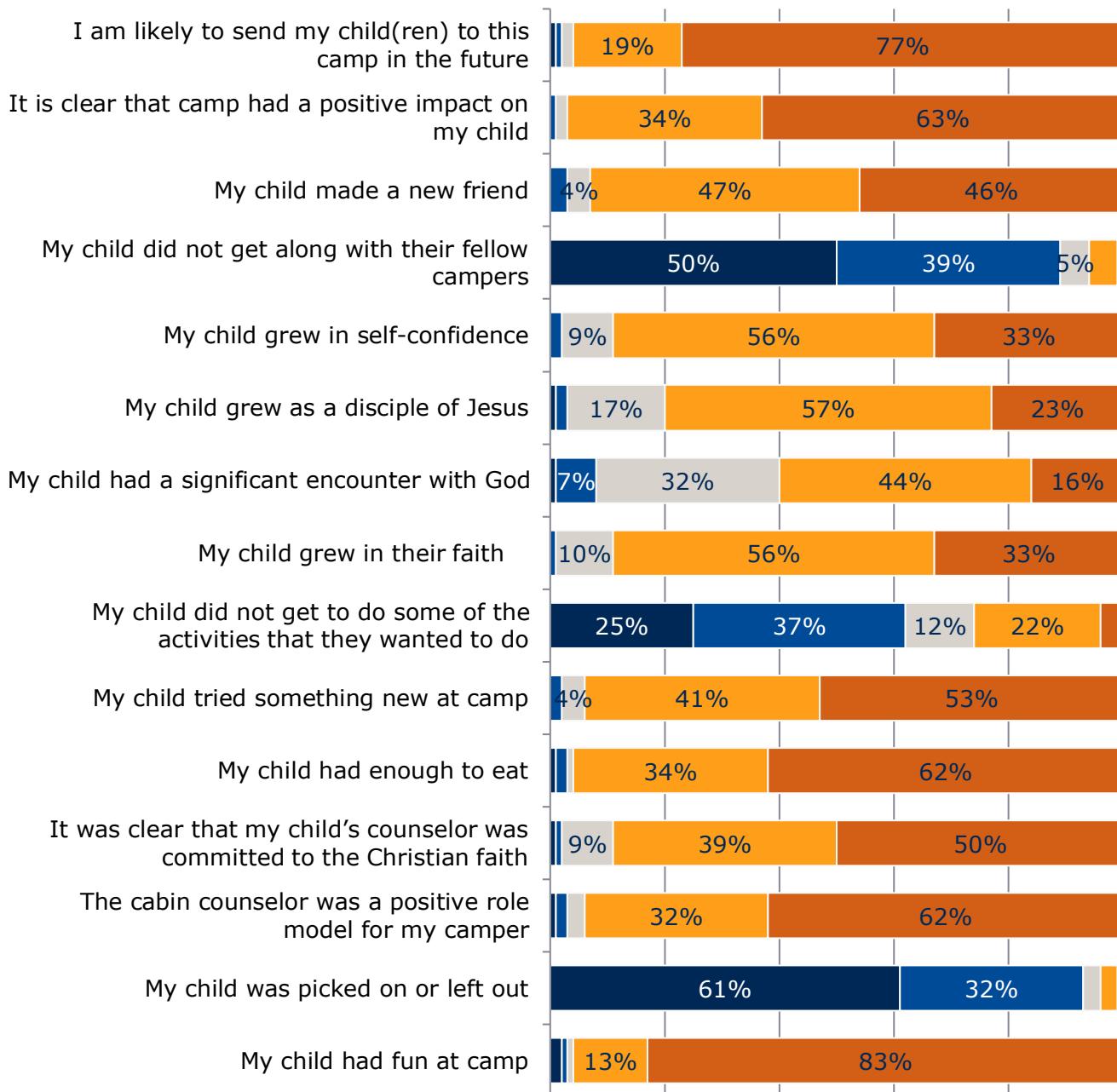
- None - Someone Else Picked Up
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- More than 2 hours

# Camper Experience

FIGURE 5; n = 830

- Strongly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly Agree

- Disagree or Somewhat Disagree
- Agree or Somewhat Agree

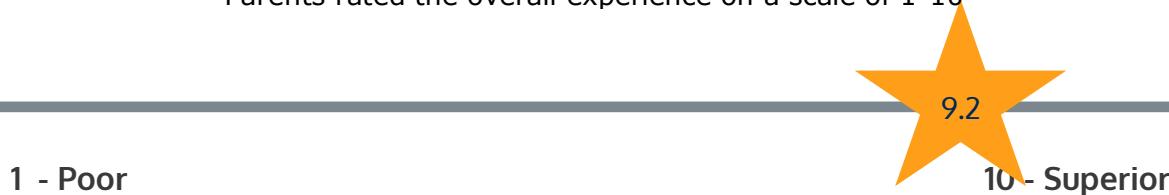


# Camper Experience (cont.)

	Yes	No	Unsure
I have noticed significant positive changes in my child	56%	21%	23%
My child has been singing Christian songs	70%	26%	4%
My child has been more helpful around the house	48%	35%	17%
My child has been nicer or more pleasant to me and other family members	50%	29%	21%
My child has asked (or been willing) to lead the family in prayers during meal times more frequently	27%	59%	13%
My child has asked (or been willing) to lead the family in prayers at other times (e.g. bedtime) more frequently	25%	62%	14%
My child is more committed to his/her relationship with Jesus	52%	15%	33%
My child has engaged me in conversations about God and faith more frequently	49%	36%	15%
My child has shown greater interest in attending church	43%	39%	19%
My child reads his/her Bible more frequently on their own	31%	47%	22%
My child has been spending less time on electronic devices	28%	60%	12%
My child is more adventurous, willing to step outside their comfort zone and take risks	56%	24%	20%
My child has been more social, wanting to spend more time with others than before camp	41%	38%	20%
My child has been spending more time outside or expressed increased interest in nature	41%	43%	16%
My child has expressed a new or greater interest in serving others in our community	39%	38%	23%
Any positive impacts wear off within a few days and are NOT long-lasting	11%	49%	40%

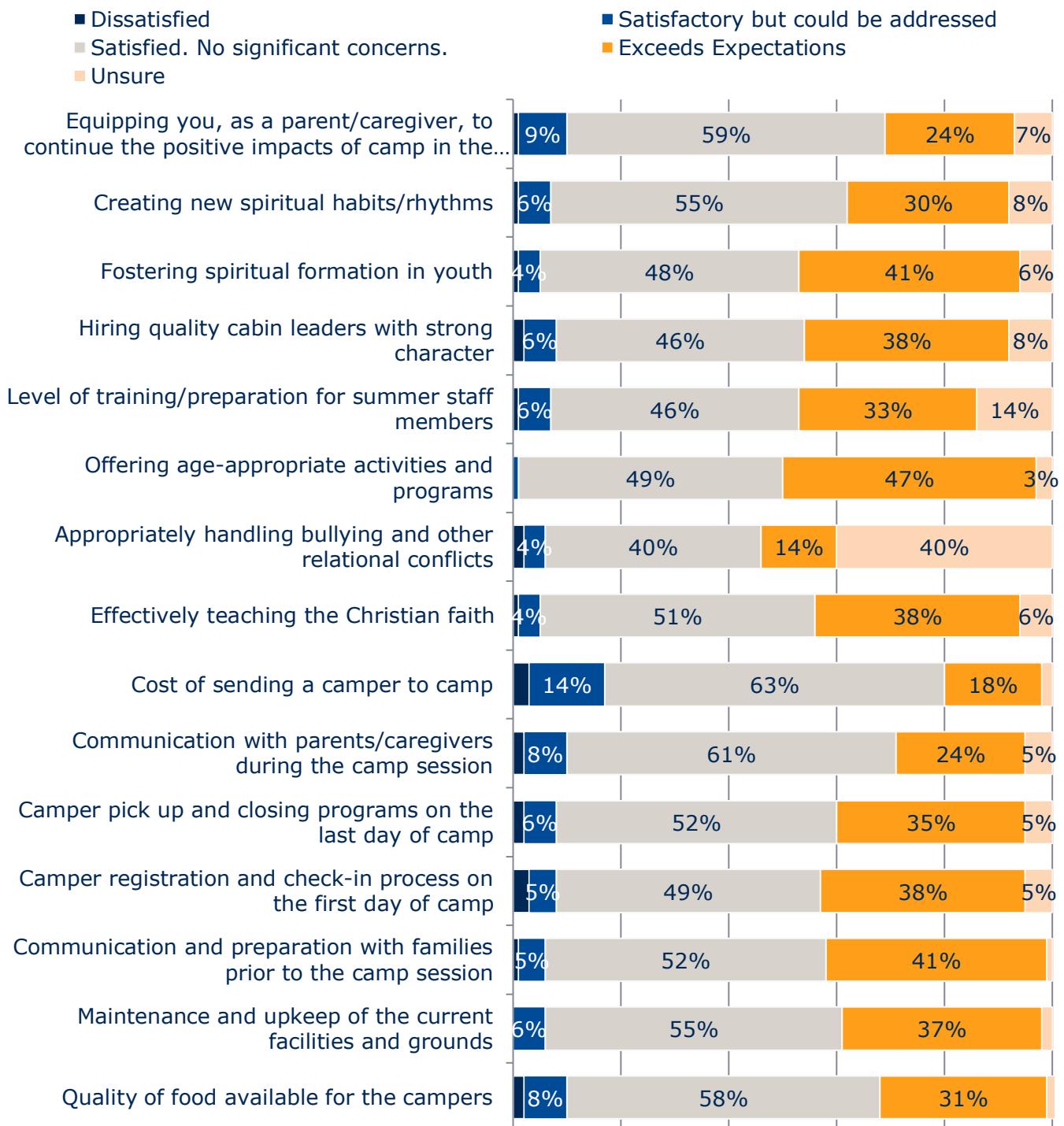
## Overall Experience Rating

Parents rated the overall experience on a scale of 1-10



# Parent Impressions

FIGURE 5; n = 690



# Parent Philosophy: Partner vs Non Partner

**FIGURE 7**  
**Participants from a Partner Church, n = 236**  
**Participants from Other Churches or Unaffiliated, n = 519**

<b>Core Beliefs about Camp</b> Mean out of 6	<b>Participants from Partner Churches</b>	<b>Participants from Other Churches or Unaffiliated with a Church</b>
I view Christian summer camp as an important tool for fostering faith in my child(ren)	5.61	5.49
Camp is a place for children and youth to unplug from technology	5.80	5.83
Faith formation and Christian practices should be integrated into all aspects of camp life	4.93	4.96
It is clear that the camp and my local church are close partners in ministry to young people and their families	5.37	4.63
I think it is important to participate in the life of a church community	5.53	5.37
I want Christian faith to be central to my child(ren)'s lives when they grow up	5.55	5.49
I oftentimes find it difficult to talk with my child(ren) about God and faith	3.35	2.97

<b>Importance of Various Goals of Camp</b> Mean out of 5	<b>Participants from Partner Churches</b>	<b>Participants from Other Churches or Unaffiliated with a Church</b>
To have fun	4.65	4.58
Make friends and develop social skills	4.53	4.54
Grow in faith and learn more about God	4.62	4.57
Strengthen character traits like integrity and self-confidence	4.66	4.65
Have new experiences and try new things	4.47	4.45
Develop an appreciation for nature and the outdoors	4.21	4.24
Equip/influence families to continue the positive impacts of camp in the home	4.03	4.10
Deepen family engagement in their local church	3.81	3.71

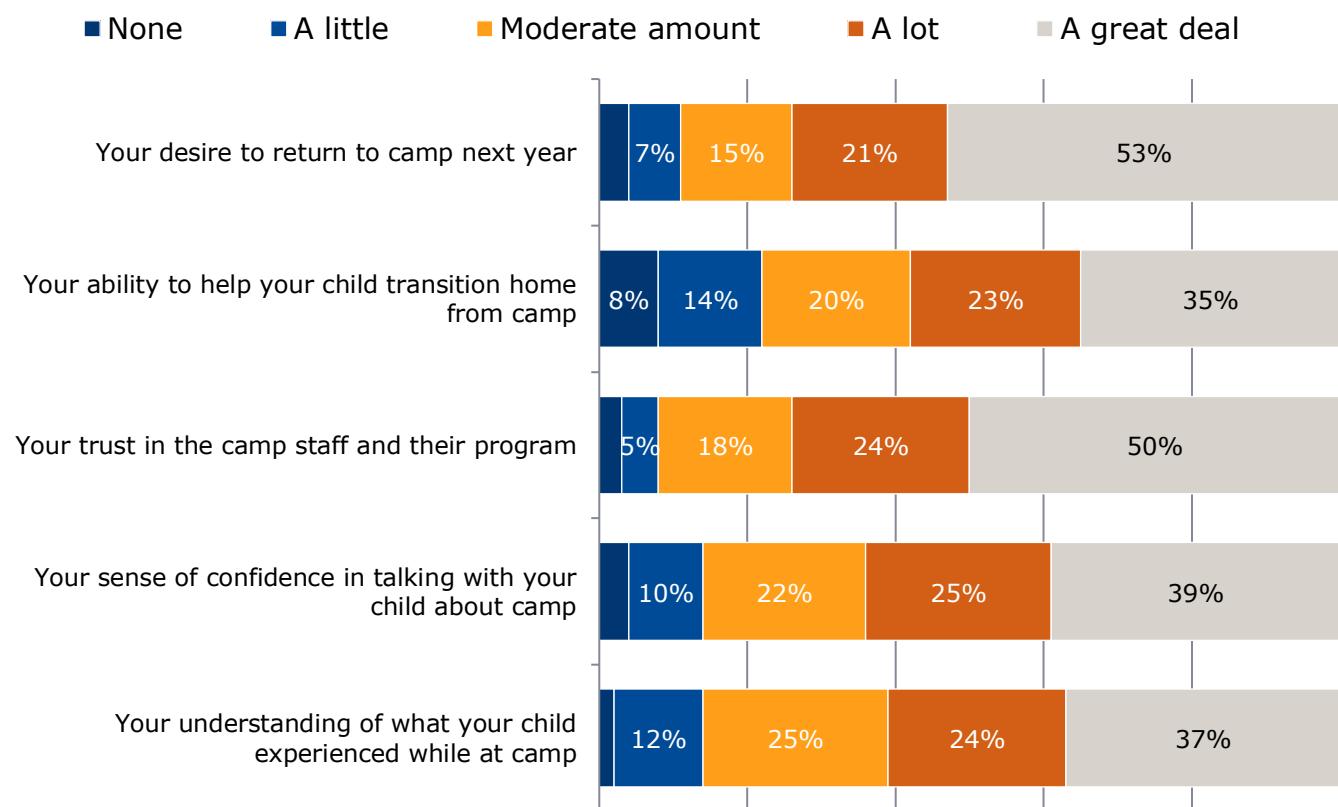
# Closing Program

FIGURE 8  
n = 711

**Did you attend  
the closing  
program?**



## Influence of Closing Program On..





# Summary Reflections

This report sought to examine the following primary questions:

- 1) To what extent did parents engage with their campers' experience?
- 2) In general, what impact did the camp experience have on the camper and what changes have parents seen in campers?
- 3) What are parents' impressions of camp and its programs?
- 4) What differences exist in campers' experience, perceived growth, or parents impressions, across a variety of variables?

In terms of the camper experience and its impact, the overall camper experience at these camps was positive. 96% were reported to have had fun, 94% tried something new, and 93% made a new friend. In terms of impact, 97% reported some level of agreement with the statement "Camp had a clear positive impact on my child". However, when asked a similar question in a yes/no fashion, it is interesting that only 56% responded "Yes" when asked if they have noticed positive changes in their child. This could be because parents have a sense that camp is a positive experience but could not name exactly what the impacts were at the time the survey was given.

When asked about areas of impact, the highest percentage of parents responding "Yes" was seen in response to the prompt about whether or not their child has been singing Christian songs (70% of parents said "Yes" to this statement). It is interesting that of all the items, this one had the highest "Yes" response by far. While singing Christian songs might seem like a small thing, it may provide evidence that camps are offering meaningful worship experiences that campers are continuing as they transition back home. Integrating the Christian songs from camp into the church worship set may be an easy way to link camp and church. The lowest areas of impact appeared to be in campers' willingness and desire to lead in family prayers (only 25-27% responded yes). This could indicate an area of continued growth for camps as they plan for next summer. Finding ways to more intentionally train campers and equip parents to foster meaningful times of prayer could be an indicator of success in future years.

The primary goal of this project is to leverage the power of camp experiences to foster faith formation in the home through intentional partnerships between camps, churches, and families. In addition to measuring the impact of camp and overall perceptions of parents, the project is tracking parent beliefs about camp as it relates to family faith formation. In the aggregate, there was no significant change evident in the aggregate sample in terms of mean scores from before to after camp in parent beliefs about camp and the level of importance parents place on different goals of the camp experience. The majority of families provided the same responses on both surveys. However, it was still possible to gather insightful information from the data by comparing scores across different variables. We dove into three specific variables that are central to the project: Camp Organization, Partner Church status, and Closing Ceremony Involvement.

## Camp Organization



When breaking out change in response to parent belief and goal questions, the greatest level of change was seen in the level of importance that families placed on “deepening engagement with local churches” as a goal of camp, with 33% of families reporting positive change. However, some individual camps appear to have higher proportions of people showing positive change. In other words, some camps appear to have been more effective at helping parents begin to see the value of camp as a faith formation tool and the importance of intentional connections between camps and churches. For example, three camps (Bayshore, NewLife and Shetek) had 40-45% of their respondents demonstrate an increase in the level of importance they placed on “deepening engagement with local churches” as a goal of camp, while the others hovered around or below 30%. Camp Hebron, however, had the highest percentage (40%) of people increase their agreement with the statement “I believe Christian summer camps are an important tool for faith formation”, compared with the aggregate rate of 23%.

### **Partner Church Status**

Partner church status is also an important variable in this project, as we are attempting to understand how being involved in a church that intentionally partners with a camp may impact the experience. This survey provided evidence that church partner families are significantly more likely to:

- View summer camp as an important tool for fostering faith in children
- See their camp and their church as intentional partners in ministry to young people and families
- Believe it is important to be part of a church

### **Closing Ceremony**

Finally, one of the factors that quickly emerged in the data as a possible mediating factor for outcomes was attendance of the closing ceremony. The majority of people that chose NOT to attend a closing ceremony did so because someone else was picking up their camper. However, responses to questions about the influence of the closing ceremony offer strong evidence for the value of closing ceremonies that involve parents. Among those that attended the ceremony, 73% reported that it had a great deal or a lot of impact on their desire to return next year. Similarly, 74% reported that it had a great deal or a lot of impact on their trust in the camps leaders.

Those that attended the closing ceremony were significantly more likely to:

- View summer camp as an important tool for fostering faith in children
- Believe that faith formation should be integrated into every aspect of the camp experience
- Believe that is important to participate in the life of the church
- Desire Christian faith to be central to their children’s lives

Those that attended the closing ceremony viewed the following goals of camp as significantly more important than those who did not:

- Have fun
- Develop social skills
- Grow in faith and learn more about God

### **Summary and Next Steps**

The findings described here represent data from the first two of four total time points. Collecting the additional longitudinal data over the next few months will enhance our understanding of the meaning of these findings, while integrating additional measurements such as frequency of family faith

practices. To stay up to date with the emerging findings or to interact with additional resources, visit [wheaton.edu/growingfaithtogether](http://wheaton.edu/growingfaithtogether).



**GROWING FAITH**  
Growing Faith *Together* offers free resources,  
tools, and opportunities to participate in  
action-oriented research so that camps,  
parents, and churches are equipped to foster  
lasting faith formation in the home.