Since GripTape’s launch in 2015, we’ve built an organization and program model around a simple yet radical idea: to put young people in the driver’s seat of their own learning.

The GripTape Learning Challenge gives youth the opportunity—many for the first time in their lives—to have complete decision-making control over what and how they learn. They pursue topics that fire up their interests and passions, and are supported with small grants, a peer network, and a “Champion” who offers belief and encouragement without advice or direction.
Along the way, we’ve sought to better understand how to help youth drive their learning passions forward. Our early research focused on defining the conditions needed to develop young people’s agency and self-direction over their learning. We next turned to investigating the impact GripTape was having on young people. Immediately following their Learning Challenge, youth consistently report that the experience had a significant positive effect on their confidence and views of their competence, as well as how they approach their learning and understand what they need to do to be successful.

Most importantly, we’ve found that these changes endure well after the GripTape experience. Our more recent research has focused on further defining and investigating these and other outcomes over time. In June 2018, we released our first report on the persistent impact of the Learning Challenge on youth, based on findings from the youth themselves as well as perspectives from key adults in their lives. This present report extends those findings with further learnings and nuance about these lasting outcomes and how youth practice agency in the months and years following the journey.

The results so far have been extraordinary. Youth experience a powerful and sustained transformation in their mindsets, skills, and behaviors. As many as 18–24 months after the Challenge, youth are demonstrating dynamic changes in behavior in and out school—from demanding and seizing new learning experiences, to creating opportunities that didn’t previously exist, to sharing what they’ve learned with peers, adults, and community members. A full 98% of young people indicated that GripTape had a positive impact on how they now approach learning. These profound shifts in young people’s behavior are supported by improved skills to regulate their own learning as well as new mindsets about learning, with increased confidence, determination, and self-awareness.

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99% Indicated Griptape had a significant or meaningful to them on their journey and that will be valuable to their future success.

98% Gained knowledge or skills that were meaningful to them on their journey and that will be valuable to their future success.

98% Know more about their own areas of strength and where they need to keep learning or improving.

97% Were more confident they could get better at challenging things if they work hard.

91% Indicated the experience changed the way they will approach learning in the future.
Our upcoming research will continue to help us develop a deeper understanding of these outcomes, how they endure, strengthen, and evolve over time, and how they vary based on youth circumstances and environment. We’re encouraged by the results that we’re already seeing, and the ways in which GripTape youth push the boundaries of what’s perceived as possible when young people learn on their own terms.

IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT...

youth experience a powerful and sustained transformation in their mindsets, skills, and behaviors.
Youth who have participated in GripTape are engaging in new thinking and new agency around the types of learning experiences that they want and work to create in their lives.

Nearly all youth (98%) indicated GripTape had a significant or moderate impact on how they now approach learning experiences. Overall, 6–24 months after their journey young people feel empowered to seek out different learning opportunities or make adjustments to the learning they are already engaged in to suit their interests, needs, and passions. They also express a fresh approach to how they view school (both high school and college) and the extent to which they can have an impact on how meaningful their school experiences are.

Based on our research, we’ve defined four related types of behaviors that youth employ when they practice agency and self-direction over their learning:
Depending on the situation, young people might take action to drive their learning using one of these behaviors or through multiple activities across different behaviors. However, the outcome is clear—GripTape youth are taking a more active role in shaping and driving their own learning.

**SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES**
Young people are significantly more aware of available learning opportunities they find meaningful and relevant and are more likely to seize these opportunities.
98% feel more aware of opportunities and are more likely to take advantage of such learning opportunities.

Since their journey, 98% feel more aware of opportunities that are available to them where they can pursue their interest areas, and are more likely to take advantage of such learning opportunities. 88% have taken steps to actively look for existing opportunities where they get to pursue topics they are interested in, and 84% have decided to participate in learning opportunities that they would have previously passed on.

Youth described feeling full of energy for learning and eager to find ways to pursue it. They often discussed getting internships and/or identifying experts or mentors with expertise in a field they want to know more about (e.g., fashion design, computer programming, movie editing, mentoring children, law enforcement). One young person said that 18 months after GripTape, he is still determined to find ways to pursue a career in photography and film. He has developed relationships with new mentors in the fashion industry and has been able to take advantage of the events that they and other photographers invite him to, including as a highlight, attending New York Fashion Week.

Creating Opportunities

Young people described feeling empowered to go after what they want to learn and are willing to create avenues to pursue these areas if opportunities don’t already exist.

94% feel confident enough to try to take an active role in creating new learning opportunities.

94% reported that since completing their Learning Challenge they feel confident enough to try to take an active role in creating new learning opportunities that match their interests. And three-fourths report that since completing their Challenge they have proactively worked with adults in or outside of school, or with other youth, to create new opportunities that better match what or how they want to learn.
Young people and parents across cohorts gave examples of how youth have created new learning opportunities since completing their GripTape journey. One youth described how he has been working to create a non-profit that works with citizens in his community. His project has carried over to new and different types of work for the community, most recently working in collaboration with neighborhoods to address youth violence in his city.

DEMANDING OPPORTUNITIES

Since the Challenge, youth feel empowered to use their voice and actively shape their learning activities.

98% of youth are more interested in learning where they get to choose what and how they learn. 100% stated they feel it is up to them to take an active role to shape their learning experience, and they feel confident enough to do so—and the vast majority have taken action on these beliefs with great success. 92% of youth reported that since completing their Learning Challenge they have been successful making learning experiences better match their interests.

Young people described several ways they took a more active role in shaping their learning experiences through supplementing existing activities and exploring new and different ways to learn content they needed or were passionate about. Most commonly, youth extended their existing activities by finding ways to access additional material and pursue angles they find more interesting after school and on the weekends. For many young people, these additional courses, content areas, or learning opportunities were a result of not receiving what they need and are most interested in from traditional or current learning arrangements. One young person expressed, “Before GripTape, I thought I needed a teacher to teach me stuff. Now I know I can...learn by failing and trying again.”
**ACTIVATING LEARNING**

Youth report taking action to inspire others at school, in their family, or in the community to demand and pursue more authentic learning experiences.

72% have taken an active role helping other youth find opportunities to lead their own learning.

Within the 6–12 months following their journey, 72% noted they have taken an active role in helping other youth find opportunities to lead their own learning in or outside of school, and 81% feel they have been successful at inspiring other young people to try to lead their own learning.

Youth and adults alike described ways that young people had worked to inspire and prompt others around authentic and meaningful learning, primarily through engaging peers and family members in their work. Two parents discussed how GripTape led their daughters to “step up” in the family and how they have worked closely with siblings and cousins to inspire them and encourage them to seize opportunities. Several youth talked about continuing their GripTape journey’s project after the official completion date, expanding upon it to bring others on board so they too can see and understand the importance of changing one’s mindset about learning. Another student in an almost all-white high school started “asking herself why there were no opportunities for students of color on campus,” and as a result, formed a Black Student Union in her school. She thinks it is “essential for girls in 8th grade through high school to know who they are and that they deserve to be there [at a predominately white school].”

Youth are eager to share the experiences from their Learning Challenge. One young person shared how he visits his local elementary school to talk about GripTape and the importance of engaging in opportunities that arise. Another young person noted, “I just realized that what I was doing with GripTape wasn’t only going to be a big step in my life and be good for me, but would be good for others too...I want to inspire others to follow a similar path...I used that mindset as my motivation and even when I felt as if I was falling down, I still used that motivation to slowly bring myself back up and be stronger each time.”

**REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS**

One father shared that his daughter has become the role model for the younger children in the family, in particular to his niece in middle school, who always wants to talk to her. He said his niece is eager to take all of his daughter’s advice because she wants “some of what she has,” referencing her fervor for learning and success in life.
MINDSETS

One of the most profound impacts youth described is a marked increase in their self-confidence, particularly regarding how they approach learning in and out of school.

After GripTape, youth believe they can learn anything they put their minds to. 100% indicated that participating in GripTape strengthened their belief that they can successfully drive their own learning. 98% reported an increase in their self-confidence and belief they can accomplish something if they work hard. 100% said they feel confident enough to try to take an active role in shaping existing learning opportunities to better match their interests after participating in GripTape.

One mother shared of her daughter, “She is fearless. She is adamant about her vision, and adamant about bringing it to fruition.” A young person explained that since her journey, she is much more confident speaking in front of others and no longer needs to seek someone else’s approval all the time. Another said, “I took great self-confidence away from GripTape...I understood my capabilities...this has boosted me to do what I want to do and shown me my true potential of what I can live up to.”
Adults expressed that young people were embracing greater independence and responsibility for their learning. One of the most common sentiments shared by parents was a change in their child’s focus, self-reliance, and renewed sense of responsibility. One father says, “The fact that [my son] independently executed the Challenge, and I had no role is amazing...he found out about GripTape on his own, did it, worked on it, managed the timeline...it didn’t feel like homework to him...”

Many youth now view themselves as leaders in their learning experiences and actively take on leadership roles. Six to 12 months after their journey, 89% reported that since completing their Learning Challenge they have taken on more such roles than they would have previously.

Youth described a new awareness of one’s leadership potential—“If I want to be great, I have to push myself into it and be the leader”—as well as using their leadership skills in and out of school. One young person took the lead on forming a step team at his school, working with teachers and administrators to get it approved. Others decided to work with GripTape after their journey as an ambassador, mentor, or on the Youth Board. One of these young people noted, “GripTape has been an opportunity and space for me to lead and I will be thankful for the rest of my life.”

REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS

“[GripTape] gives her a new way of thinking of herself. Shows her it can be done, and you can do it. GripTape solidified that ‘the world is her oyster and she just needs to go and get it.’”

REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS

“GripTape was an empowering program...there was not a lot of hand holding, and I think is very unique because it is process oriented and not end-product orientated. Kids feel a sense of ownership. He had a lot of freedom in the project and was not boxed in.”

Young people also credit their GripTape experience with increasing their self-awareness about their learning, including their passions, preferences, and capacity.

96% indicated that the experience helped them understand their own areas of strength and growth.

90% agreed that GripTape helped them clarify what they are most interested in learning.
Youth shared how greater self-awareness, coupled with increased self-confidence, was a powerful change-agent in their lives following GripTape. 96% reported that participating in the Learning Challenge helped them understand their own areas of strength and growth, such as what they are good at and where they need help or to learn more. 90% agreed that GripTape helped them clarify what they are most interested in learning.

When youth described this new awareness, two key themes emerged. First, they reported greater awareness of their actions, especially when faced with a challenge or mistake, and are better-equipped to make mid-course corrections when needed. One young person 18–24 months after the journey stated, “The most important thing I have learned from GripTape is self-awareness and being able to catch myself when doing stupid things...and having an understanding of knowing why you are failing on something...and the ability to audit myself deeply so I can succeed.”

Second, youth and parents expressed that young people were making more informed decisions to shape their future learning and career direction, and being able to fine-tune (and in some cases rule out) possible paths. Almost all of the parents interviewed explained that GripTape provided an avenue for their child to develop skills and interests in a focused area (digital music, broadcasting, sewing) and allowed time, space, and energy for figuring out how these newfound interests/talents could possibly play a role in their future. One mother talked about how proud she was that her son took time during his gap year to look into broadcasting classes at the community college because now he is always trying to figure out how to improve his craft.

REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH

One young person shared how her journey informed her long-standing desire to enter a career in animal therapy. Through her Challenge, she gained a better understanding of what this career path entails. As a result, she has enrolled in a college program that addresses the full range of knowledge and skills she will need to be successful on this path.
SKILLS

Young people note significant increases in their competence and use of specific skills needed to successfully practice agency, especially around self-regulation of their learning experiences.

Six to 12 months after their journey, 91% of young people reported they always or frequently assess the quality of their work and make improvements if needed. 89% reported they always or frequently adjust their plans or goals based on their learnings or experiences as they occur.

91% ALWAYS OR FREQUENTLY ASSESS THE QUALITY OF THEIR WORK AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS IF NEEDED
89% ALWAYS OR FREQUENTLY ADJUST THEIR PLANS OR GOALS BASED ON THEIR LEARNINGS OR EXPERIENCES AS THEY OCCUR

While youth described multiple ways the experience of leading their learning journey taught them about the importance of managing their work, and their responsibility to do so, youth and adults alike described three types of self-regulative behaviors that were particularly prominent as a result of their GripTape experience.

Time management

Most youth and adults interviewed noted youth became better managers of their time and had an increased awareness about the importance that time management plays in their success. Young people noted a wide variety of time-management techniques they use in their daily lives, such as making to-do lists, using phone apps, or utilizing various approaches to help them stay focused such as working for 25 minutes then breaking for five.

REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS

“This whole thing of focusing, setting a timeline, and completing something from start to finish…. GripTape helped her understand the importance of thinking through what you need and how you plan to go about it.”
Being prepared & staying organized

The majority of young people indicate that the GripTape journey was invaluable in teaching them the importance of staying organized during a project, and most indicate they continue to practice the strategies they learned during their journey. One young person noted that “I think as a result of GripTape I understand now that one of the most important things to do when you are trying to learn something is having a laid-out plan—organizing what important events and dates are coming up.”

Communication

Many youth note improvements in their communication skills and habits as a result of participating in GripTape, and how their improved communications skills have become a key part of successfully implementing their learning plans. One young person shared that he has learned in order to keep his project on track he cannot avoid communicating with other people, despite it not being his natural instinct. Another youth explained, “Before GripTape, I was really a shy girl and didn’t want to communicate with people. Now I am more outgoing and more talkative than I was before. I feel like I have matured, and realized if I am not communicating with others I won’t go anywhere.” She described how she understands that her ability to connect with others is essential to her being successful in life and going to college.

REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS

A mother shared that her son used to “ball up his emotions and not talk about them,” but after GripTape he is more open and willing to share with her.
Learning and research are at the core of our approach at GripTape.

We use rapid, iterative learning cycles based on the Learning Challenges to test different supports, conditions, and variables that enable young people to drive their own learning. Based on the resulting data, we then evolve our organizational models and programming—with young people playing lead roles in concept, design, and execution. For example, based on recruitment data we are now testing out an entirely new methodology for application submissions that incorporates youth-to-youth interviews. Through this new model, we aim to address the risk that more traditional formats may hinder many youth from fully expressing their interests and passions during the application process.

Our research questions and approaches are also driven by our findings.

Over our last two research cycles, we’ve built our knowledge base on the kinds of outcomes that GripTape youth experience over time—and the results are undeniably powerful. We know that youth are invested in their future and overwhelmingly want opportunities to design and direct their own learning. When they have these experiences, they develop enduring new mindsets about learning and the skills to practice agency. These shifts lead to dynamic, sustained changes in how they demand, consume, shape, and respond to new learning opportunities to better meet their interests and needs.

Implications for GripTape and for the Field—A Call to Action

WHAT COMES NEXT?

ARE YOU CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE READ? DO YOU HAVE NEW IDEAS FOR US?

Don’t hesitate — reach out and tell us what you think. Better yet, jump in and help!

We need volunteers.
We need research partners.
Think of what can be ... hundreds of thousands of young people with these mindsets, skills, and behaviors. In the meantime, young people at GripTape continue to lead the way by driving their own learning and spreading the word. And we will continue to research these outcomes, as well as others that present themselves.

**WILL YOU HELP US?**

www.griptape.org

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**REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH**

“**Learning is entirely experiential.** It is not just about the way you comprehend material taught in the classroom, but rather a culmination of lessons that stem from challenges and barriers. When the world becomes my classroom, I find I am more engaged. **I can dictate my own learning path, and that’s both daunting and empowering.**”

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“**The experience teaches me more about real-world projects versus school ones and in so doing, sets me up to become a better adult.**” – COLE

“**Being set on a pathway I actually enjoy, I’m becoming more productive, developing grit, and through my actions hope to motivate others.**” – JAMAR
DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

Various types of data collection were utilized for this report to understand youth and adults’ perspectives on the young people’s Learning Challenge as well as the knowledge and skills gained as a result of participating in the Challenge and how these outcomes sustained over time.

To provide deeper insight into the enduring impact of GripTape on youth, 360 degree interviews were conducted with a subset of youth having completed the Challenge 6–24 months prior as well as adults whom they identified. Youth who agreed to participate in interviews were asked to identify an adult in their lives who knows them well and could offer perspective on how their GripTape experience influenced them. A subset of adults named by youth interviewees was selected for interviews to provide their perspective on whether lessons gleaned from the learning journey were sustained and observable in youth lives.

An end-of-journey survey was administered upon completion of the journey to all youth who completed their Learning Challenge. A post-journey survey was conducted of all youth who had completed their Learning Challenge 6–12 months prior. The surveys aimed to capture how their experience with GripTape may have influenced them in terms of knowledge, skills, behaviors/actions, and beliefs in and out of school in the time period 6–12 months after completing the Challenge.

Surveys were conducted in September and October 2018. A total of 23 youth interviews and 9 adult interviews across four cohorts (Learning Cycles 2-5) were completed in October 2018.

“Each individual is allowed to delve into what they want and may not take a conventional finished product out of the learning process.” –DELANEY