



Inspiring youth to lead.



2025 EVALUATION REPORT

provided by 21st Century Leaders



"21st Century Leaders gave me both a community and exposure to careers that I had never dreamt upon. Connecting with truly bright and intelligent individuals who are passionate and eager to learn more about their potential careers; plus, the networking opportunities that were available to us at some of the most valued companies in the United States. It is truly what separates 21st Century Leaders program from any other business program."

-David Alford, Riverwood International Charter School, Class of 2026

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Founded in 1989, 21st Century Leaders (21CL) is a non-profit organization that connects, transforms, and inspires high school students in Georgia to leverage diversity, explore career opportunities, and become leaders in their school, community and ultimately the workforce. 21CL's *Summer Youth Leadership Institute (SYLI)*, celebrating its 16th summer, is a week-long, residential business and entrepreneurship-oriented summer leadership institute hosted on Emory University's campus in partnership with Emory's Goizueta Business School. This year's institute was held from June 1 - June 6, 2025.

Students at SYLI explored the different aspects of the business world through hands on workshops with passionate professionals, networking opportunities and corporate insights. Business professionals from **The Coca-Cola Company, Goizueta Business School's Start:ME NextGen program, Invesco, Cox Enterprises & Cox Automotive, and Insight Global** helped the students develop personal and professional leadership , skills and explore career possibilities throughout the week. Students who attended the summer institute also received free enrollment in Leadership Connect, our online leadership development platform, for the 2025-26 school year.

STATEWIDE STUDENT DIVERSITY



38% *Black/African American*
18% *Indian/South Asian*
16% *Asian*
11% *Caucasian*
9% *Hispanic*
5% *Middle Eastern/North African*

76

60

25

STUDENTS HIGH SCHOOLS COUNTIES

51% *Female identifying*

49% *Male identifying*

Thank you to the following individuals, corporate and community partners for supporting: **Emory University's Goizueta Business School, The Coca-Cola Company, Cox Enterprises, Invesco, Insight Global, Cousins Foundation John & Mary Franklin Foundation, Kiwanis Foundation of Atlanta, DeKalb County Human Services Department, Fulton County Community Services and Youth Services Dept., Inspire Brands Foundation, Board of Directors and Individual Donors.**

42%

of students reported that an experience at the institute was their ***first time seeing someone successful who looks like them*** in a career or position they are interested in

STUDENT IMPACT

21st Century Leaders' programs are focused on developing skills in seven core leadership competencies. Students reported understanding the following competencies and knowing how to use them or expand them as a result of the program

87%

PROBLEM
SOLVING

84%

CAREER
AMBITION

83%

COMMUNICATING
EFFECTIVELY;
INTEGRITY &
TRUST

78%

SELF-
DEVELOPMENT;
ACTION
ORIENTED

77%

BUILDING
EFFECTIVE
TEAMS



"I have and will continue to recommend this program and 21CL as a whole to others because of the impact it's had on my life. *I've become more confident, learned how to public speak, network with my peers and professionals, and learn so much about the world as a whole.*"

-Carissa Hagood, Richmond Hill HS,
Class of 2027

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

100% of students reported that their **confidence as a leader increased** because of the program.

97% of students agreed that they **now see themselves as leaders after attending** the program and that their **communication and networking skills improved**.

96% of the students reported that because of their experience they are **more likely to seek out or continue seeking out leadership roles**.

81% of students reported that their **critical thinking skills improved** since attending the program.

STUDENT IMPRESSIONS & IMPACT

“I would 100% recommend this program because of how *incredibly transformative and inspiring* it has been. I will for sure be recommending people to this program.”

-Dominic Mimbang, Coffee HS, Class of 2026



91% of students reported that after attending the institute, **they are clear in knowing their career path** after high school

52% of students reported their experience at the institute was their **first time visiting a corporate campus**



CAREER READINESS

67% of students reported that they **discovered a new career field** that they are now interested in that they didn't realize prior to attending the program

64% of students reported that their **career interest was reaffirmed** by an experience at the institute

“I would recommend this program because it’s fun, engaging, and you’re able to network with people. You get to meet the amazing staff, you learn more about different professions, and you get to visit many companies to get more of an insight of the company and also more insight of [possible] careers.”

-Deborah Bosombo, DeKalb Early College Academy, Class of 2027



INSPIRING YOUTH TO LEAD

151 VOLUNTEERS / 250 HOURS

“This program is truly special. For people like me, it offers a way forward. Coming from a place where many give up on their dreams, I knew I wanted more for myself. *This program helped shape me into the leader and person I need to be. No matter how far I go in life, I’ll always owe a part of that journey to this program.*”

-Nathan Thomas, Jefferson County HS, Class of 2028

LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND NETWORKING

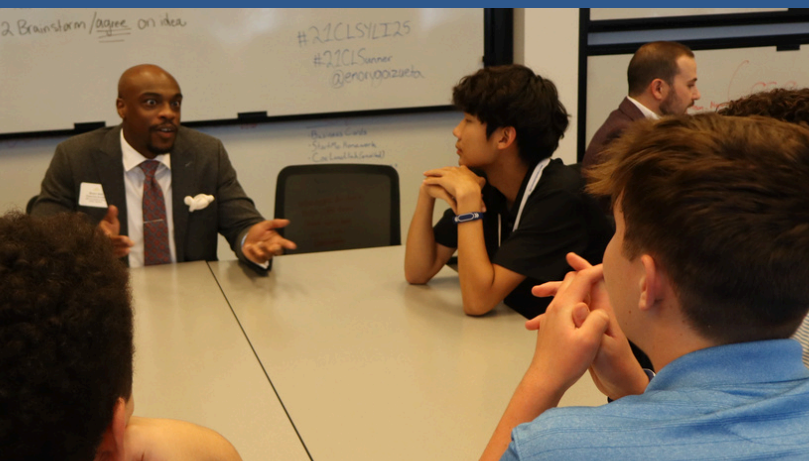
Students had the chance to dine with industry professionals and community leaders during the Leadership Dinner + Panel...



“The dinner provided me with the opportunity to leverage my communication skills, providing practice time to network, and overall give us a wonderful and open professional experience.” -Carson Rivera, GSMST, Class of 2027

64% *of students reported that this was their first time formally dining with business professionals*

...and students also had a chance to network with 21CL Alumni in a speed networking session.



“They (Alumni) all seemed like this program truly touched their life and changed it for the better. All the connections they made truly lasted and benefited them in the future.” -Luna Fernandez, Decatur HS, Class of 2027



SOCIAL ENTERPRISE & ENTREPRENEURSHIP DAY



EMORY

GOIZUETA
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Through our nearly 20-year partnership, Emory University's Goizueta Business School and Start:ME NextGen program provided real-world business prompts to showcase entrepreneurship in action. With entrepreneurs and GBS faculty, students walked away with a better understanding of social enterprise and business.

84% of students reported an **increase in their business knowledge**

61% expressed **interest in becoming an entrepreneur.**

“My favorite part about the Start:ME Program with the Goizueta Business School group and mentors was the experiences and interacting activities, being able to collaborate with creative a pitch to introduce our own business idea was one of the highlights of that day.”

-Carson Rivera, GSMST, Class of 2027

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Volunteers

I really enjoyed hearing advice from different business leaders, and I had fun working with my group to come up with a business idea.” -Blake Davis, The Galloway School, Class of 2026



“What I liked most about Monday's Start:ME NextGen Program with Goizueta Business School group and mentors is that we were able to get a feel of how it is to present an idea to investors and have the judges share the glows and grows of our presentation.” - Adonis McCormick, Arabia Mountain HS, Class of 2026

THE *Coca-Cola* COMPANY **Branded Day**

The Coca-Cola Company sponsored its 10th year at SYLI with its branded day. The students enjoyed a career-driven day at the Coca-Cola Headquarters with Coca-Cola's Legal and Marketing departments, featuring an overview of Coca-Cola's history, brand marketing with Sprite, insight into community engagement, and legal breakout sessions with a simulation of talent contract negotiations.



20
Volunteers

Top Sessions: Sprite Brand Marketing, Legal Breakout Sessions, FIFA World Cup and Coca-Cola History

"I loved the whole experience because Coke being such a massive and popular company has experts in every field who are all really good at teaching their craft in ways that really informed me and made me interested in it."
-Jimmy Carrico, Midtown HS, Class of 2026

"Everyone was so personable and seeing the behind-the-scenes of how they run all of their departments was very cool because we usually only see the outside result."
-Marleigh Robinson, Westlake HS, Class of 2027

"Brand Marketing: Sprite was one of my favorites because I introduced the person who was speaking about Sprite and she was super cool and engaging." -Deborah Bosombo, DECA, Class of 2027

68%
of students
reported their
favorite session was
Brand Marketing:
Sprite

It was very knowledgeable learning about how marketing works and the legal aspect of Coke. *Networking with actual business professionals was a great experience.* The FIFA World Cup was very enlightening learning about how this world-renowned sports event will impact the U.S. and Coca-Cola revenue." -Eddie Hudson, Jefferson County HS, Class of 2026



Sponsored by Invesco, at their Atlanta headquarters, students were exposed to the asset management industry. The day included an overview of Invesco's work and impact in global finance, insights into diverse career paths, and an engaging presentation on financial literacy.

Students toured the building and trading floor and connected with professionals across departments, including early career pathways. Students gained a deeper understanding of the finance industry and empowered to explore business, investing, and beyond.



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Volunteers

"My overall takeaway was how positive a corporate environment can be. I had previously been opposed to working in a corporate office and wanted to do everything I could to work in an industry where I could be more flexible. But, at Invesco, I learned that not all companies run the same and I can still enjoy myself in the corporate world."

- Taylor Ann Freeney, Westlake HS, Class of 2026

"I learned about saving and investing and it really made me feel so professional in the environment surrounded with all the professional volunteers."

-Jaziyah Bradley, Hiram HS, Class of 2028



93% of students reported an **increase in their financial literacy** knowledge and skills after spending the day at Invesco

"My key takeaway from the Invesco site visit was that innovation and adaptability are crucial in finance. I also realized how financial literacy and asset management play a direct role in empowering individuals and communities. Along with how it's needed for a large family to contribute to the success at Invesco. "

Kunyuan Zou, Lambert HS, Class of 2026



Manheim by Cox Automotive

BRANDED DAY

Sponsored by Cox Enterprises, a legacy partner of 21CL since 1989, students got hands-on experience learning about the automotive industry through their Cox Automotive division at Manheim, located in Atlanta. From building robots to inspecting and valuing cars up for auction, students walked away with new skills and inspiration.

"I took inspiration from the way that the people at Manheim/Cox take their jobs so seriously, despite also having so much fun in their job." -Rayan Pirani, Lambert HS, Class of 2028



"I was able to meet a member of the Environmental branch at Cox, and had great conversations with her. I learned the diversity in operations behind Cox and their importance. I took inspiration from people who changed their career paths because that assured me that it is okay to not know everything right now." -Aanya Jagavkar, Northview HS, Class of

80% of students reported the **Robot Build** rotation was their favorite session!

"I learned I can be an engineer!!"
-Sarahi Flores, Pickens High School, Class of 2027



I learned more about automotives and about bidding. I realized that the automotive world is really large and can range from marketing to being a driver every day to being inside the building as a corporate worker." -Sydney Howard, West Laurens HS, Class of 2028



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VOLUNTEERS



"I learned that there are several industries in the world that I know very little about. I also realized those jobs can be a lot of fun, like looking at really cool cars all day and getting to sell them sounds like a really neat job. I think this inspired me to focus on pursuing what I love." - Jimmy Carrico, Midtown HS, Class of 2026

Insight Global sponsored the program's capstone challenge to this year's institute. During the week, students worked in teams to address a "challenge" and pitch their solution to a panel of judges. The challenge this year involved identifying a real-world workplace challenge at IG and designing an innovative solution.

8 VOLUNTEERS

“This program created opportunities I never knew existed. This week enables young leaders to collaborate with people and create lasting, valuable connections. This program is definitely something I strongly recommend.”

-Aanya Jagavkar, Northview High School, Class of 2027



94%

of students agree that their **interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, and business knowledge** improved since attending this program.

“I learned to network with people state-wide, meet new professionals, and gain new interest in some career paths I never thought about before. But, to top all of that, I learned the power of community. The community here was the best thing I have ever experienced, and I would encourage people to join this institute for the experience of your life.” -Rayan Parani, Lambert High School, Class of 2028



AGENDA SNAPSHOT

Sun., June 1 - Fri., June 6, 2025



SUNDAY: Welcome to SYLI

Program welcome and leadership workshops led by 21CL staff and alumni

MONDAY: Entrepreneurship with Goizueta Business School

Welcome to Start:ME NextGen - **Fran Carroll**, Southside Coordinator, Start:ME; **Will Wesley**, Community Development Representative, Delta Community Credit Union

Entrepreneurship 101: Idea Generation Session

Business Plan Labs: From Ideation to Generation - **Start:ME NextGen Mentors**



Networking Lunch, *sponsored by Inspire Brands Foundation*



DolphinTank Pitches!

The SYLI Challenge, sponsored by *Insight Global* - **Hannah Jenkins**, Philanthropy Program Manager;

Andrea Wilson, ESG Program Coordinator

All Camp Fun!



EMORY

GOIZUETA
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

TUESDAY: The Coca-Cola Company Day

Coca-Cola Day Welcome + History - **James Gibson**, Senior Director, Legal Counsel
International Operations



Coca-Cola Connections - **Joe Lovas**, Senior Director, Investor Relations

Brand Marketing: Sprite - **Monica Douglas**, Executive Vice President, Global General Counsel;

Ashley Lee, Vice President, Executive Counsel and Assistant & Head of Legal Operations

Brand Marketing: Sprite - **A.P. Chaney**, Creative Director, Sparkling Flavors

Simply Pop Break - **Paxton Shamlu**, Manager, Brand Management

Legal Matters! + Breakouts & Presentations - **Andy Weeks**, **Josh Podolnick**, **Tony Fan**

Breakout Session Debrief - **Tony Fan & Andy Weeks**

Influencer Marketing + Social Media - **Marshall Roach**, Senior Director, Social Center

FIFA World Cup 2026 - **Paula Weeks**, Senior Director, Hospitality

All Camp Fun!

WEDNESDAY: Invesco Day

Invesco Welcome- **Jeff Kupor**, Senior Managing Director, and General Counsel,
Invesco, 21CL Board of Directors



Invesco & Asset Management Industry Overview- **Matt Koch**, Early Careers Program Manager, Invesco

Career Paths Overview - **Amy Scott**, Early Career Development Manager, Invesco

Madison Ford, Manager, Tech Strategy & Execution, Invesco

Building and Training Floor Tour- **Colin Cook**, **Robert Reed**, **Chris Higgins**

How Not To Suck At Money Presentation (HNTSAM)- **Bobby Kannady**, Regional Advisor Consultant, Invesco

Lunch and Learn- **Alan Smith**, Senior Managing Director and Chief Human Resources Officer, Invesco

Early Career Employee Panel!

Final Thoughts- **Gwendolyn Smith**, Executive Leader and Global Financial Services & Investments, Invesco

Leadership Dinner-Convocation Hall, Emory University

Welcome Speaker: **Jon Neff**, CEO/Co-Founder, SKL'D, 21CL Board of Directors

Panelists: **Pranav Dhingra**, Chief Financial Officer- Mortgage & Consumer Business, Equifax ; **Jim Hanna**, Owner/Operator,

Hanna Brothers Catering, **Ashley Lee**, Vice President, Executive Counsel & Head of Legal Operations, The Coca-Cola

Company; **Martha Revelo**, Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs for DeKalb County

Talent Show!

THURSDAY: COX Enterprises & COX Automotive Day

Welcome and Overview of Manheim -**Butch Herdegen**, General Manager, Manheim Atlanta

Eddie Rawlings, Assistant General Manager, Manheim Atlanta

Rotations: Career Panel, Robot Building, and Tour, Condition Report, and Market Valuation Activity-

Manheim Volunteers

Auction Simulation and Debrief!

Closing Remarks- **Eddie Rawlings**, Assistant General Manager, Manheim Atlanta

Finalize Projects!



Manheim
by Cox Automotive

FRIDAY: SYLI Challenge Presentations, sponsored by Insight Global



Intro to Judges + Presentation- **Insight Global Leaders**

Nell Goza, Communications Business Partner; **Rahil Pirani**, Director of Business Intelligence; **Donald Pham**, Verification

Specialist; **Brian Lee**, Business Intelligence Developer; **Cassidy Starling**, Senior Account Manager

Leadership Closing Celebration - 21CL students, staff and parents/family