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# The Blind Spots: The importance of measuring non-academic indicators that are critical to producing positive outcomes specifically for youth who are living in adverse conditions

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Public Administration
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Public Administration

By
Orrin White
May 2020

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# Dedication

The dissertation is dedicated to my father, Orrin White Sr.  Thank you for everything.

# Acknowledgements

> I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.
> – Rosa Parks

This manuscript is dedicated to the strong women in my life who helped pave the way to this most prestigious achievement. My wife Natasha, your unwavering loyalty and commitment to our marriage and family serves as a constant reminder of my "Why". To my mother Iesha, who at an early age, taught me the importance and necessity of pursuing and achieving one's education. To my current CEO Michelle, who has served as a mentor and a trusted guide throughout my professional career. To Dr. Angela Clarke, whose study entitled "RISE" allowed me to discover and walk in my purpose. And to my daughter Athena, my first born, who teaches me the true meaning of giving and receiving unconditional love. I pray that in all I do, I continue to make you all proud.

# Abstract

The study explores the impact of measuring non-academic indicators to establish and promote positive secondary and post-secondary outcomes, specifically for youth living in adverse conditions. In pursuit of this objective, the sixth grade population attending a traditional public middle school in Wilmington, Delaware completed the Search Institute's Developmental Asset Profile (DAP), a self-report survey designed to understand the strengths and supports young people have in their lives. The assessment of the secondary data was the result of already existing programming and evaluation initiatives by the United Way of Delaware. The analyses show that participants perceptions of self, family, and community indirectly influence future decision making, academic and personal development while advocating for intentional alignment across their core contexts for the continued promotion of positive outcomes. Implications for relevant community stakeholders including recommendations for future research and practice are discussed.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

All children, regardless of race, color, address, gender, or economic background are born with the ability to develop skills and competencies based on their passions and interests. The ability to pursue these passions and interests can lead to pathways of limitless potential and future success. For some, youth trajectory or development has been defined by the hurdles or challenges one must overcome during their adolescence. These challenges can include, but are not limited to, lack of motivation or ability to achieve; lack of parent/guardian to build social or emotional skills; peer pressure to use drugs, consume alcohol, or engage in sexual activity; learning disabilities; asset deficient school/community environments; and paternal/maternal education level.

Positive youth development is an emerging field of research that contrasts with deficit-based thinking, instead, electing to focus on the talents and strengths children possess and how this can positively influence future potential (Damon, 2004). Early researchers have identified the concept of positive youth development in three exclusive yet interrelated ways: as a developmental approach, as a philosophy for youth programming, or as an intentional alignment of youth programming and community-based organizations focused on creating healthy environments in which youth can successfully thrive (Hamilton, 1999). Positive Youth Development is an approach that acknowledges the presence of social and financial barriers as well as developmental adversities that can also impact young people but “resists conceiving of the developmental process mainly as an effort to overcome deficits and risks” (Damon, 2004, pg. 15).

The positive youth development perspective recognizes and harnesses the innate abilities youth possess rather than focusing on the supposed inabilities that can limit growth opportunities regardless of social, economic, socio-economic, or more common social determinant factors (Damon, 2004). The call for youth action is increasing and growing louder as the necessity for high quality and consistent engagement of youth is not only vital to ensure positive youth development but also to promote community development and to embrace future civic responsibility. This call for action is coupled with an emerging paradigm shift in response to ever changing barriers that threaten youth progress. The employment of strategies and systems in concert with schools, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders that strive to view youth as resources will take aim at reimagining the decision-making process for youth at all levels.

Current researchers and scholars theorize positive youth development has shifted conversation and thought pieces "from problem prevention to preparation; from preparation to participation and from participation to power sharing" (Irby, M., Ferber, T., Pittman, K., J. Tolman, & N. Yohalem, 2001, pg. 4). The positive youth development approach recognizes young people as resources rather than problems and sees true potential unconstrained by troubled or challenged backgrounds. The approach advocates to harvest this potential through exploration, skill competency, and increased capacity through community support (Damon, 2004).

> Multiple dimensions of profound changes are prototypic of the adolescent period, involving levels of organization from the physical and physiological, through the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, and to the social relational and institutional. If adaptive developmental regulations emerge or can be fostered between the plastic,

> developing young person and features of his or her context (e.g., the structure and function of his/her family, school, peer group, and community), then the likelihood will increase that youth may thrive (that is, manifest healthy, positive developmental changes) across the adolescent decade (Lerner et. al., 2011).

Practitioners and scholars have explored the nature of the relationships children experience within a respective context (e.g., school or a community-based program) and have found evidence that suggests intentional alterations to these relationships, promoting positive youth development both as an approach and a philosophy, have shown the propensity to diminish the impact of the problems and challenges youth and their families face, especially those living in adverse conditions. The relational developmental systems theoretical models shed light on the scholarship of exploring the critical relationships involving adolescents and their engagement across their core context in the promotion and acceptance of the contemporary, theoretical frames that are more relevant to current times (Overton, 2010).

A focus for this research was to inform practitioners and professionals, working in any capacity with youth who have been deemed low-income or who come from challenged communities, of the value of implementing a theoretical model or youth development framework. These frameworks shed light on the factors that contribute to a disproportionate number of adolescents disconnecting from the traditional education offerings within their respective community (e.g. local education agency, community based organization, etc.), and the long-term impact on youth’s post-secondary and adulthood success. As a theoretical model, the Search Institute’s *40 Developmental Assets* can be viewed as a set of standards that provides the foundation to support a collaborative community system that fosters and nurtures positive youth development.

The positive youth development framework is comprised of core tenets described as internal and external factors that are critical to ensuring youth transition successfully throughout adolescence and into their adult lives (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). The theoretical framework for this dissertation leverages several key assumptions for successful implementation of Small and Menmo’s (2004) positive youth development framework:

1. Youth who achieve their full potential are less likely to experience problems.
2. Supports and opportunities are important to success for young people.
3. Communities are critical shapers of youth development and can improve their capacity to build successful young people.
4. Youth need to be viewed as resources and in a positive light.

The models clearly suggest that the core tenets of human development involve the shared relational influence within the adolescent throughout various stages of their development and the multi-faceted changes to his or her context. These mutual relationships play a pivotal role in measuring and evaluating the pace at which youth development can take place when considering trajectory, direction, and intended goal attainment through post-secondary education and into adulthood.

Within a model of youth development or socialization, this research explores established outcomes in seeking to identify the method and frequency students currently living in challenged or low-income communities are leveraging their school-site to inform and prepare them for impending education transitions through middle and high school. The research also clearly acknowledges the influence of the social and emotional factors, impacted by trauma indigenous to their respective communities, that can either hinder or renew faith in personal trajectory due to the awareness of and access to the proper supports and resources within the community.

In this dissertation, I shed light on the necessity and benefit of promoting and implementing positive youth development to endorse and harness sustainable change for youth and families in pursuit of long-term systematic community enhancement. When considering the multitude of changes for youth and their contexts during adolescence, coupled with the ability to develop skills, positive behaviors, and assets to be an active influencer in his or her own development, adolescence presents itself as the most important time to explore a collaborative system that promotes the positive youth development approach.

This research illuminates the various roles of community stakeholders, who influence positive youth development and provide support for a more integrated and aligned system centered around the implementation and continued assessment of the Search Institute's *40 Developmental Assets* such as support services, community-based organizations, employers, and governmental entities. The ability for community stakeholders to successfully partner in the promotion and sustainability of positive youth development for children living in communities with little to no choice, enduring poverty, economic and professional prejudice, and high rates of trauma, is often a challenging if not a perceivably impossible task.

The establishment of a new approach to prepare youth for their future looks to leverage the strengths youth currently possess to serve as a foundation to promote future positive development and build new skills during their all-important adolescent years. Positive youth development provides a perspective different from conventional approaches. A perspective that views youth as community advocates with strengths that require amplification, nurturing, and continued development, as opposed to deficit-based approaches in which youth are viewed as in constant need of repair, or worse, completely broken (Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000). All youth are born with the capacity to engage across a variety of contexts, which promotes a focus on developmental characteristics and endorses positive behavior development leading to more informed students in preparation for future educational and professional transitions and civic-minded actions.

“For example, one instance of the evolving strengths of adolescents is their ability to intentionally contribute to the adaptive developmental regulations with their context” (Gestsdóttir & Lerner, 2008, pg. 203). The positive youth development approach suggests that all youth are born with the capacity to be an active participant in their own self-regulation through the intentional development and ownership of personal goal setting, while acquiring and leveraging core assets and skills to increase the likelihood of short- and long-term goal attainment. Through the positive youth development approach, when youth are met with resistance or the need to course correct throughout their adolescent journey and through adulthood, they will have an internalized skillset and developed the capacity to consistently overcome adverse reoccurring experiences. (Freund & Baltes, 2002). Future local/state strategy and policy development should make a concerted effort to develop systems that promote positive youth development as the collective responsibility of all relative stakeholders within a respective community.

This chapter provides a bridge to the existing knowledge and provides a frame for the desired study that addresses the importance of measuring non-academic indicators to promote positive outcomes, specifically for youth living in adverse conditions, through the collective guidance of identifying strengths and support within their surrounding community.

This qualitative research study includes the completion of the Search Institute's Developmental Asset Profile survey by the 6th grade population currently enrolled at a public middle school located within a Promise community zone, a local education agency with a history of poor academic performance in a high need area of Delaware. The expansion and regular assessment of the developmental assets serve as a proxy for the social and emotional supports that are essential for successful and personal growth across the adolescent continuum. This chapter explores the collective mindset shift and the necessary contributions to that aptitude, coupled with understanding how to better align in-school and community services to enhance youth development experiences.

## Background and Context

Educational attainment and the measuring stick by which youth progress have long been marred by educators and policymakers alike, due to an inequitable focus on purely academic achievement. The development of a conceivable relationship between the youth and their respective local education agency will require a commitment to a collective goal and a reimagining of current practices, one that "focuses on holistic adolescent outcomes and school outcomes that increase both adolescent psychosocial well-being and societal well-being" (Gomez and Ang, 2007, pg. 97). The introduction of positive youth development, as both an approach and a philosophy in a school-based setting, involves identifying, aligning, and mobilizing all existing and potential stakeholders and resources to bolster the overall adolescent development continuum.

The work of Lerner et al. (2005) and Pittman et al. (2003) profoundly illuminate the outcomes and development that occur as a result of positive youth development being implemented within a school setting. Both groups of scholars found that promoting positive youth development assisted youth in areas such as building self-worth, expansion of social network, academic efficacy, character, and civic-mindedness. They both further assert that a focus and subsequent enhancement in these areas will lead to an increase in adolescent development and show significant improvement to psychosocial and societal well-being. Schools offer unique and favorable conditions that enable them to serve as ideal foundations for the successful implementation of positive youth development. School-based environments, both academic and non-academic, have the potential to influence youth development in core areas such as identity development and peer to peer engagement. School functions as the place where adolescents spend most of their working day, and most schools have the infrastructure and resources to support a transitional system change in promotion of the positive youth development framework (Gomez and Ang, 2007).

The belief that positive school experiences and opportunities contribute to youth development and an attitude of resilience is drawn from the work of Olsson et al. (2003). Schools have the ability to introduce competencies, programs, and people that not only work collaboratively to promote positive youth development but also serve as protective factors to provide clarity for future peer and community engagement and preparation for transitions that will occur throughout the course of the young person’s life. Positive people are defined by their willingness and preparedness to aid and support youth during their all-important developmental phases and the ability to develop an aligned network to provide access to other like-minded individuals and entities (Roth & Brook-Gunn, 2002).

An important aspect of the school model is the steady increase in workload for faculty and staff and the need for additional stakeholders to have dedicated roles in providing youth with various types of support ranging from the consistent availability and accessibility; reaffirming positive actions that lead to milestone achievement; and setting firm and clear boundaries and expectations that encourage skillset, asset, and behavior development (Scales & Leffert, 1999). As the understanding of youth and community development has evolved, there continues to be a growing need at the national and international level for more intentional research, applied programming, and developmental theory to continue the advancement of these efforts (Brennan, 2008; McGrath, Brennan, Dolan, & Barnett, 2009).

These collaborative efforts can only be proven to have long-term impact on social and economic determinants if students have been equipped with the skillset to identify and harness these resources both in school and within their surrounding community (Rosenfeld et al., 2000). Equipped with the realization that community support contributes to both improved academic efficacy and positive youth development, attainment of youth outcomes increases exponentially when schools are adequately supported by other stakeholders such as parents, community members, local employers, and community-based organizations (Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 2000). For example, local education agencies play pivotal roles in the promotion of positive youth development by providing access to high quality people/mentors, safe and caring environments, and activities/programming that provide opportunities for social and technical skill development, while also embracing the concept of a ‘community-school’ to leverage surrounding resources to further accelerate competency development for youth.

The interrelation of youth and community development are influencing contemporary public practices related to current youth program and policy. This work has pointed to the need to further and systematically explore the process by which both concepts emerge

(Brennan & Barnett, 2009). The exploration of this process begins with the understanding that the concept of community can be seen from multiple perspectives.

Observing the concept of community with the intent to understand its societal connectedness may yield an emphasis on individual acquaintances, organizational and governmental components, and pride of one's respective neighborhood. However, the concept of community is much deeper when considering its integration from a systems perspective. Luloff & Bridger (2003) write "community is a social and psychological entity that represents a place, its people, and the relationships that exist within it." Considering the concept of community from that vantage point, the community represents systematic aligned action through which relative stakeholders work collectively to advance the common good or in response to pressing shared needs.

Youth Development persists as a shared community need that forecasts a higher probability of long-term positive and sustainable change when conceptually approached by that of a collective as opposed to an individual or respective entity. Establishing and maintaining a system of communication or a common vision for youth development is a vital component in the process of collective impact. Kania and Kramer (2011) unpack the core activities that drive collective impact: a common agenda, shared data and measurements, continuous flow of communication, mutually reinforcing activities and a strong backbone organization. The goal for implementation of this process is aimed at successfully integrating several community stakeholders whom are already beholden to their own mission and goals.

As the understanding of the youth development process has evolved, so too has the intentionality of developing relationships among key community stakeholders, yielding mutual understanding of how to accelerate the positive change relative to community needs, and a sense of collective ownership. “Where these relationships can be established and maintained, increases in various adaptive capacities materialize and community can emerge” (Brennan & Barnett, 2009, pg. 59). The idea of increasing the propensity of the community to view growth from a collaborative systems approach will increase the integration of current and future stakeholders to share in the successful implementation of positive youth development, by way of aligning and compounding positive youth experiences.

This emerging concept of positive youth development by way of collective impact is driven by the mutually reinforcing activites of community stakeholders. These coordinated efforts allow individuals, parents, employers, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to be participants in the design, implementation, and sustainability of the advancement of positive youth development through collective impact. The agency of community functions to develop and maintain systems bringing together singular entities to work in concert to respond to community needs, or in this case, promote positive youth development to bring about real social change. Positive youth development is no longer a concept only to be adapted and carried out by parents and local education agencies. For long-term sustainable success of positive youth development to be achieved, the entire community, comprised of all its diverse sectors, must buy-in and commit. Youth Development persists as a vital component in the fabric of overall community development due to its intentional alignment of key stakeholders to create and sustain the activities, programs, and opportunities that young people need to thrive, grow, and become contributing members to society (Perkins, Borden, Keith, Hoppe-Rooney, & Villarruel, 2003).

## Public Administration Context

The past 30 years have been wrought with pressure from both the social and political sphere to properly address the persistent problems that impede the personal, academic, and professional success of youth. From the vantage point of politicians, scholars, and practitioners there exists the confirmation that too many youths are "at-risk" with limited access to systems, supports, or a comprehensive collective vision for youth development to successfully enter adult life. Simply put, "too many young people lack the requisite skills and competencies needed for adult success. Whether because of changing demographics, changing times, or changing labor force requirements, young people are not entering adulthood ready for adult life" (Pittman, 1991, pg. 1).

Researchers and policy makers assert that youth from challenged backgrounds develop character traits and endure experiences that put them at risk of developing long-term behaviors that could have adverse effects on themselves and the communities that they belong to. While the risk factors may vary across a diverse sector of youth, the outcomes that spell a difficult transition into adulthood are shared by all (Fernandes-Alcantra, 2018). Fernandes-Alcantara (2018) details the negative outcomes experienced by some youth due to the presence of these factors and the long-term implications to the broader public. He states that at the individual level "youth who are at risk are faced with the day to day reality that is chronic poverty and the public health concerns include chronic health conditions, low education attainment impacting local workforce and increase in delinquent behaviors." Youth who are considered at risk also contend with schools who may be devoid of resources equipped to adequately serve their specific needs leading to poorer academic outcomes, or youth may be at the point of “disinterest” heading towards total disconnection, creating school environments that encourage problematic challenges for all students such as high rates of negative student interactions and behavioral problems. “Researchers, policymakers, and youth advocates, however, might agree to this definition: vulnerable youth have characteristics and experiences that put them at risk of developing problem behaviors and outcomes that have the potential to hurt their community, themselves, or both” (Fernandes-Alcantea, 2018, pg. 4).

It is difficult to determine what or who is responsible for some youth failing to be prepared to transition through middle and high school, into the post-secondary phase of their life, and subsequently the workforce, but the facts remain clear that far too many youth have a diminished or weakened academic skillset and have limited to no experience engaging in authentic workplace environments to further develop career awareness, immersion, or exploration. These social deficiencies can be linked to a lack of asset or skill development across various contexts in which they engage during adolescence or the inability to properly translate core developmental learnings such as teamwork, high quality decision making, communication, and critical thinking (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009).

Dryfoos (1990) expounds on this phenomenon, arguing that the lack of proper youth development and skill deficiency presents greater societal challenges when youth are engaging in negative behaviors and compounding poor decision making that leads to adverse effects on their ability to be successful in the future or maintain a healthy lifestyle. Dryfoos’ also indicated that “25 percent of 10- to 17-year old’s are engaged in problem behaviors such as drug use, poor academic performance, or limited to non-school attendance and thus have been identified as "high-risk" youth, and that an additional 25 percent are at moderate risk" (Dryfoos, 2009, pg 404).

Contemporary interpretations of childhood socialization in the form of positive youth development has merged as a means to combat growing concerns and calls for reimagination regarding the existing system's ability to provide the proper supports and services to youth. Many scholars and journalists believed the development of a strong base of supports and services could have a greater and more sustainable impact with a commitment to collaborative alignment, less fragmentation, and a strength-based perspective for approaching youth development, while also abandoning the ideology of a problem-first focus, and being more deliberate in their approach, consistency, and commitment to those who have the highest needs. These truths, while accurate, have persisted as an incomplete picture and have been unsuccessful in grappling with the deep-rooted problems to effectively move the needle forward.

The work of Karen Johnson Pittman (1991) profoundly articulated that the issues were not simply access to a strong base of youth services, but that the practitioners delivering these services were devoid of a common vision of what youth truly needed to be successful and the potential they already possessed to achieve that success regardless of their social or economic background. Historically, formal youth programming was developed to combat youth adversity, providing opportunities as positive alternatives; therefore, limiting youth from engaging in negative instances, positive youth development would naturally occur. Pittman's emphasis on the promotion of youth development strategies, with the same intentionality used to deter high-risk behaviors, is steeped in the desire to ensure youth are adequately prepared to enter adulthood armed with the skillset to face challenges in both the present and the future. Johnson Pittman stated, “there is increasing evidence that the high-risk behaviors that have garnered so much public and political concern cannot be reduced without attention to meeting youth needs and developing their competencies—without addressing the broader and more positive issue of youth development.” The concept that promotes youth skill development is drawn from the work of Berlin and Sum (1988), Benson (1990), and Bogenschneider, Small, and Riley (1991), which expanded the core tenets of youth development from skill and goal development to include family, peer, and community support as pivotal contributions to a sustainable approach to decreasing youth exhibiting high-risk behaviors.

This paradigm shift in thinking fueled the emergence of the need for a systematic developmental approach to childhood socialization and post-secondary preparation. At the turn of the 21st century, evidence suggests that the potential for increased concern from both public and political spheres will continue to persist regarding high-risk behaviors from youth and the adverse effects that subsequently arise without a clear definition of youth development and engagement, and utilizing youth serving organizations as the main vehicle to develop core skills and promote positive competency internalization.

## Problem Statement

Middle School students, specifically a majority of students who are low-income, English Language Learners (ELL), or whom call a community of high need home, have an unusually low perception or expectation of their current traditional public education experience and its ability to adequately prepare them for their future (Durlak, Taylor, & Kawashima, et al., 2007). This startling reality for these students contributes to a disconnection and eventual disengagement from their school or community-based educational offering, creates potential long-term public health and community development concerns, and impairs future personal and professional success for youth, which can be measured at the middle school level by tracking key leading and lagging in-school indicators such as attendance, behaviors, course development, developmental asset inventory, and potential ACES (adverse childhood experiences).

Too often, low-income communities, which are comprised of local education agencies, community-based organizations, employers, local government, state education departments, and other relevant stakeholders have research and databases on these students, which are limited to only academic or health related indicators. While these indicators play a role in telling the story of these youth, it is a limited perspective that doesn't account for the daily experiences, engagements, and community indigenous trauma that these youth are, in most cases, forced to contend with, which have a definitive impact on their personal and academic trajectory.

This dissertation will shed light on the factors that contribute to students, specifically low-income and ELL students, disconnecting from traditional forms of education and development, with a pointed focus towards middle school and how these perceived factors contribute to sustained disengagement and eventual disconnection from educational attainment. This research also looks to identify how to better align services in support of the whole child to address the academic and non-academic needs of low-income students by way of connecting home, school, and community in ways that improve student success.

Leveraging and administering Search Institute's *Development Asset Profile* survey to the current 6th grade population at Bayard Middle School, located in Wilmington, DE in the

19805 zip code—identified as an area of high need in the state of Delaware—to establish a baseline for current social and emotional strengths and challenges from the perspective of each youth to serve as quality meaningful baseline data for future planning with both in- and out-of-school program providers, progress monitoring, and documentation of positive post-secondary results with young people.

## Purpose of the Studies

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of measuring non-academic indicators, utilizing the 40 Developmental Asset Model—a youth development framework established by the *Search Institute*—amongst the current 6th grade population at Bayard Middle School. The research will look to assess the results of a study utilizing the survey with the desire to establish and promote positive secondary and post-secondary outcomes, specifically for youth who are living in adverse conditions. The research will explore the factors that negatively impact their quality of life and education, without access to proper strengths and supports within their surrounding community, and the role community partnerships aligned around a common vision play in enhancing the promotion of healthy thriving youth and communities.

## Significance of the Studies

By supporting middle school youth services and programs, we are investing in supportive and enriching educational environments at a formative and often challenging development period, so youth from challenging socio-economic and high-need areas in Delaware begin high school with the proper academic and social foundation necessary to graduate and thrive in the post-secondary. This research will aid in helping schools and partners gain a deeper understanding of trauma, its effect on positive youth development, and leveraging “developmental assets” to serve as a common language for both internal and external partners to articulate how their programming supports students’ social and emotional development, and academic and personal success. The belief exists that by supporting students in mastering the skills and behaviors that help them develop lifelong positive habits, and by connecting home, school, and communities in a more collaborative fashion, consistent student success can become both a sustainable and attainable reality.

# Chapter 2
# Theory and Literature Review

## Introduction

This literature review will synthesize prevalent literature on strength-based youth development models, including the ideas and interpretations of positive youth development and the observable impacts on theory, research, and practice across a variety of contexts. The study will further advance the focus on a specific youth development model to inform future researchers and practitioners on the importance of observing the synthesis of youth across their core context with the propensity to enhance the myriad of experiences and stakeholder impact throughout the adolescent journey. In an ever-changing public landscape where the role of skill development and developmental asset acquisition has been connected to tangible improvement of youth trajectory, it is crucial to conduct studies that help further the knowledge on successful preparation for pending transitions.

Historically, practitioners working with youth have continued to recognize and advocate for the short-and long-term benefits of applying and implementing strength-based models. The last decade or so has seen more social scientists and academics embracing the strength-based perspective as a successful collaborative model for positive youth development. This represents a paradigm shift in establishment thinking and theorizing, which saw the application of socialization coupled with further exploration concerning the psychology of youth development, grossly dominated by a focus on negative factors that included challenged social and economic backgrounds, poverty rates, and maternal/paternal quality of education attainment.

The argument exists that the true shift from understanding youth development as abnormal and acknowledging the presence of gross inequity or relentless grappling with challenges or trauma began with better understanding the display of motivation or resilience exhibited by youth who endured these adversities. How has that resilience been nurtured and subsequently enhanced their ability to be successful? Thus allowing those youth to seemingly consistently overcome their adversity in the long-term, in pursuit of their goals, when so many of their peers could not. The ideas of Positive Youth Development (PYD), as opposed to a focus on purely negative behaviors or competencies, was born out of a growing desire for an abandonment of deficit-based thinking or systems design.

The work of William Damon (1997) made important contributions to the interpretation of PYD, its impact on the theory and research around the mental and emotional states of youth development, and the observable impacts across a variety of contexts including the development of social policy and within the educational realm. PYD is focused on helping youth build the necessary assets, skills, and competencies aimed at exploring the possibilities and potentialities of future success, regardless of various current determining factors. Damon posited that community functioned as the central point at which PYD could live, sustain, and reinforce positive behaviors, as well as a setting that offers multiple contextual engagements to allow youth opportunities to employ and sharpen their skill set with diverse, individual entities and organizations triggering policy changes consistent with the rate of development. This research explores the strength-based approach of model development and further explores the ways in which youth are engaging with contexts within their community and how they are influenced by these contexts, respectively, throughout the adolescent journey.

Research on the desired evolution of PYD (Benson et al., 2006) shows a concerted effort to identify the behaviors and skill sets that are associated with improving personal, academic, and professional trajectory. Scholars and professionals may have varying degrees and definitions of PYD (Lerner & Benson, 2003; Damon, 2004), yet the credibility of the field is increasing within respected spaces of academia, further necessitating the deepening of studies into the practice and research of the field in pursuit of crystalizing the common ground upon which both components can feasibly coexist to establish a direction for future innovation in practice and legislation.

PYD has existed as a relatively new field of study, which has also contributed to the inability to agree to a common language regarding key words, definitions, etc. Various scholars and researchers have created a breadth of terms to provide further context to this field of study, such as marketable skills, strengths, or developmental nutrients/assets. The research conducted on the varying definitions of PYD (Scales & Leffert, 2004; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001) revealed a focus on several key core constructs. These constructs included mutually reinforcing theories of developmental success, specifically reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting positive competencies, community contexts that promote positive development by way of places and people, or community-based organizations that present opportunities for skill/resource enhancement or general support. Finally shedding light on the nature or state of the young person and their current ability to grow and have positive engagements with these support driven contexts is key. The strengths or attributes a youth may possess, which if proven to be mastered across multiple contexts and subsequently a transferable skillset, can prove to have a definitive impact as they engage at the community or even at the global level.

This dissertation will explore a specific PYD model that has evolved from the study of these key core constructs, further shedding light on the research to date and highlighting the key empirical data supporting this position and establishing the legitimacy for future practice and policy influence. Benson et al. (2006) incorporated the impact of intentionally increasing asset development opportunities across the core contexts that matter most in a young person's life, understanding and stating that the alignment of multiple contexts across the adolescent continuum will yield far greater outcomes than the highest performing single setting or engagement.

An early practice was to inform researchers and practitioners on the importance of observing the synthesis of youth and their contexts and the myriad of experiences and individuals that are present throughout their journey. The acknowledgement of the sheer number of community stakeholders and experiences presented an obstacle when considering the vast number of assets or competencies that exist, coupled with being clear on what are of most importance to each respective youth. The research was quite clear on the necessity for future practice to increase the propensity and ability of youth to develop assets or skills across multiple contexts during their childhood, rather than limiting their scope to a few (Benson et al., 2006). Scholars asserted that this would prove to have a better overall impact on youth development and trajectory. Historically, youth have been characterized as having a minimal role in their development contrasting with more current methods, which embrace true positive youth development. This dissertation is designed to address the role developmental assets—known as internal strengths or guidance from community stakeholders in the areas of support, positive identity, and commitment to learning, to name a few—or non-academic indicator measurement and collaborative implementation play in the process of improving youth outcomes specifically for youth with more challenged backgrounds.

The role of skill development or developmental asset acquisition in local education agency’s or other community based settings in correlation with marked improvement of youth trajectory, specifically focusing on students from economically and socially challenged neighborhoods, is the subject of study that sheds light on its importance at the middle school level, in preparation for the pending transition to the high school and into post-secondary education or adulthood (Gutman & Midgley, 2000: Scales, Benson, Leffert & Blyth, 2000; Rhodes, Grossman & Resch, 2000). The research highlights the impact of asset attainment across a sixth-grade population citing benefits accrued by students that received several supports, including heightened support from their school staff or teachers, identification of a familial connection to their current educational institution, or substantial support from a parent or guardian both in and out of school. These students showed increased academic aptitude in comparison to their fellow classmates who did not benefit or have access to these assets. A closer look at these outcomes saw an even greater increase in academic prowess and achievement by sixth grade students who exhibited a benefit from multiple assets, as opposed to those only experiencing one asset.

A major threat to adolescent health and attainment of academic and personal goals is the protection from the factors that encourage high risk behaviors and the awareness and access to key core contexts, such as their school and community settings, that can provide tangible value in that pursuit. The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (2000) compiled original contributions from several prominent researchers and authors who studied how a young person’s engagement across their social contexts, and the current thinking on the connectedness, and how these experiences shape positive or negative behaviors youth exhibit; these experiences required additional insight and understanding to shape future practice. The results of the study concluded that youth who have strong connections with their parent, guardian, or families and strong connectedness with the local education agency saw sustainable resistance to negative behaviors at a much higher rate than their adolescent counterparts who demonstrated limited to non-existent connections.

The study also assessed the impact of family and school contexts as independent variables across several high-risk behavior areas and found that these contexts were protective in aiding youth in the long-term from being susceptible to engaging in high risk behaviors including emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, use of controlled substances etc. sans the outlier, history of pregnancy. The potential success and influence of these results in studying the impact of these contexts (i.e. family, school) were subsequently enhanced with the intentional entrenched presence of the developmental assets.

The overlapping influence from key contexts that demonstrate definitive impact across child and adolescent socialization and achievement continues to be an integral focus of youth development study. The young person's perception of support from family, school, and community play a major role in their ability to develop a positive reflection of self and influences their ability to learn and implement positive behaviors in school and school-like settings—directly influencing short-term and long-term success probability, while associating with more contemporary approaches to positive youth development (Sanders, 1998). This theoretical framework, founded almost 30 years ago by Epstein (1987), incorporating educational, psychological, and sociological perspectives on community entities and integrating the influence of school and family, was the focus of Sanders' study, which compiled data from over 800 African-American middle school students on the effects of these supports across core contexts in their respective journey of personal and academic success (Sanders, 1998).

The results of the studies contributed greatly to the belief that asset, strength, or nutrient development across the range of environmental spheres amplify the sustainability or impact of those effects in each individual context (Epstein, 1987). The study also shed light on the necessity for further exploration of youth attitude, behavior competency development, and the process by which those skillsets or assets are enhanced across those core contexts (i.e. home, school, etc.). Of note, the data showed a visible increase in impact across these ecological domains with the presence of intentional alignment and coordination around the vision for youth development and subsequent goal setting for academic improvement and achievement (Sanders, 1998). The question practitioners and policy makers continued to grapple with lies with understanding how we can better influence community resources and the willingness of relative stakeholders and organizations to efficiently and effectively work in alignment to improve the personal and academic success for all students regardless of social or economic background.

The answer lies in the development of sustainable partnerships to include schools, families, community-based organizations, employers, and government, with a commitment to re-assessment and upkeep aimed at coordinating these major institutions around a PYD model that creates opportunities to respond to the individual real-time needs of youth, while providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive and achieve post-secondary success (Connell & Gambone, 2000). The theory of positive youth development and the measurement of the number of developmental assets or strengths across contexts is significant as is the individual's specific competencies expressed through self-assessment. The work of the *Search Institute*, a national nonprofit whose mission is to leverage resources for the continued promotion of healthy children and communities, has historically shown the propensity to emerge as the logical blueprint to achieve the goal of effective community mobilization and PYD aimed at achieving post-secondary and workforce readiness. The *Search Institute* has found that the effects of positive experiences across multiple contexts for youth and the enhancement of thriving indicators had a direct impact on youth, magnifying the number of developmental assets gained through intentional exposure.

Previous studies show youth can access skills and internalize skillsets that encourage developmental asset growth to protect them against current negative influences; that breakthrough presents opportunities to scaffold their learning with new skills and assets throughout their adolescent journey (Benson, 2006). Increasing developmental strengths for young people have also yielded long-term results such as increased contributions to their academics and community as well as lessening the chance of being involved in potentially harmful or negative behaviors (Benson, 2006).

My study will advocate for the acceptance of a valid and proven instrument by community stakeholders with the capability of providing reliable and statistically significant data on youth perspective related to outcomes of in- and out-of school programming that subscribes to the implementation of positive youth development framework. The tool would be rooted in the contemporary views of positive youth development, which work to ensure youth perspective and feedback are part of the very fabric of the process.

## Guiding Framework and Principles

### *Positive Youth Development Movement*

The Positive Youth Development movement was born from scholars and practitioners who exhibited a heightened interest in the strengths youth possessed, understanding the pliability of human growth, and the basis upon which youth understood and employed resilience throughout their adolescent journey. The idea of developmental science sought to understand, inform, and improve the multi-faceted complexity of human change and the various respective differences of change that are reflected throughout a full life cycle (Baltes, Reese, & Nesselroade, 1977). The work of Katherine E. Heck and Aarti Subramaniam (2009) shed light on the emphasis of positive youth development and the broader theory of youth development as a field of research garnering considerable interest, on the edge of full-blown arrival. The positive youth development field, like most major fields of knowledge whom fall victim during their inception to an outbreak of data and multiple curated understandings, has been viewed through a myriad of interpretations. The widely accepted positive youth development definition (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004; Small & Memmo, 2004) is a reference to a deliberate focus on introducing and building developmental skillsets, which encourages positive behavior competencies, discovery, and internalization during the period of adolescence.

The movement towards embracing positive youth development frameworks ensured a commitment to increasing the visibility and understanding of internal and external factors, which persist as the core indicators that influence future post-secondary and adulthood success among youth. Towards this end, the positive youth development methodology prescribed to several key expectations of successful implementation including the necessity for youth to be viewed as community assets as opposed to deficits, the ability to develop a knowledge base adept at contributing to solving challenges and improving the future landscape, access to key supports, and opportunities for exploration and upward mobility are vital for young people to be successful. Youth who have consistent sources of encouragement and who build the capacity to pursue and achieve their full potential will, on average, experience fewer problems, and the stakeholders who form our concept of community play vital roles in shaping and improving the trajectory of youth development and the sustainability to improve that capacity over time (Small and Memmo, 2004).

The research behind effective implementation of positive youth development saw the creation and promotion of scholarly frameworks in pursuit of providing guidance for coordinated systems alignment and providing a NorthStar for relative stakeholder engagement. These frameworks are still relatively new, with limited data available from testing and practitioner implementation and engagement (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009). The frameworks provide a common vision upon which existing and potential new partners can actively pursue positive youth development while providing direction to the collaborative or a renewed sense of purpose to in-school and out-of-school programming. The youth development framework offers clarity in forming and understanding the stated goals for youth in a respective locale including workforce readiness, academic improvement, motivation/ambition reset, or pending middle to high-school transition or high school to post-secondary etc. (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009).

The presence of an established and accepted framework also works to secure the legitimacy of an effective program evaluation, leveraging a keen focus on core items or competencies on which the evaluation will measure impact, growth across youth participants, effective awareness, and implementation across the contexts in which they engage (Damon, 1997). The provision, consistent development, and assessment of these core components that promote positive youth development among policymakers, officials, employers, organizational leaders, and their staff will encourage programming development that supports outcome attainment. “If the field of youth development is to mature into a unified discipline, more consistent use of terminology is needed, as is work toward developing a more integrated conceptual framework and creating opportunities for dialogue among both practitioners and researchers” (Small & Memmo, 2004, pg. 10). Finally, a framework that has been tested to ensure its ability to contribute to outcome attainment and has been validated to show consistent impact in the short term across a number of measures can create new and powerful evidence that shapes the practice of future youth development programs and partnerships and the long-term outcomes that one could reasonably expect.

The implementation of effective positive youth development is viewed as both a process and an approach to youth programming, as it promotes effective strategies that deliver consistent high-quality programming, while also addressing the professional, academic, and economic barriers that exist and prevent current and future practitioners from continuing to help young people thrive without sound integration (Lerner, 2011).

### *Positive Youth Development Movement and The Developmental Asset Survey*

The Positive Youth Development movement has gained widespread momentum and support from practitioners and academics alike and continues to emerge as a primary approach for community-based organizations and youth serving organizations throughout the country. The research has examined several frameworks that have generated high rates of implementation and practice, to verify their claims as an effective youth development framework, to grow new information and guidance for future practitioners, and for valid program evaluation. Effectiveness and impact were measured across several key standards, which included the frameworks ability to be universal: its approach or its success in serving several diverse populations as the value of the framework is significantly decreased if its effectiveness is tied to one subgroup; valid: ensuring the superiority of the discipline that supports and affords a foundation to the framework provides references to scholarly literature, which endorses the core characteristics of the youth development framework as indicators that contribute to long-term sustainable positive outcomes, while also providing a decrease in negative factors that affect that trajectory; and a utility: sheds light on the framework's history in adding credible qualitative and quantitative analysis to existing youth development research and valid contributions to current or future program evaluations, leveraging authenticated survey instruments and tools (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009).

Over the past 40 years, positive youth development frameworks have formed a considerable field of study with a myriad of scholarly contributions further diluting the number of proven or valid frameworks and making the task of identifying the model showing outcome attainment and adolescent growth across the long-term a difficult task. Heck (2009) and other researchers at the 4-H Center for Youth Development at the University of California developed a monograph aimed at reviewing the positives, limitations, and overall practicability of the more commonly known models and frameworks to identify the superior models that have emerged. The five most commonly used frameworks throughout the early history of youth development: Targeting Life Skills (Hendricks, 1998), Search Institute's *40 Developmental Asset Profile* (Theokas et al., 2005), The Four Essential Elements (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), The Five C's (competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring) of Positive Youth Development (Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000), and the Community Action Framework for Youth Development (Connell & Gambone, 2000) all show commonality in their respective ability to coalesce and offer character traits that young people need to develop. The scholars and authors deduced that the frequency of the youth development frameworks, in their collective usage as research in the youth development space and for program evaluative purposes, found the Five C's of Positive Youth Development and the *Search Institute*'s Asset Development framework emerged with the richest history of scientific data with the applicability of the youth development framework and existing knowledge (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009).

The Search Institute of Minnesota's Asset Model first entered the youth development space during the early part of the 1990's, introducing a contrasting focus on youth resiliency as a new theory of development and assessment. Subsequently, the intent of this paradigm shift was to identify the supports or resources that encouraged youth to thrive throughout the period of adolescence across core central contexts, opting for a shift in identifying and amplifying the success or strengths youth currently enjoyed rather than judging present or future youth growth from a lens of insurmountable deficiency. The *Search Institute* identified a list of 40 developmental nutrients, which research has supported as primary indicators youth need to successfully transition into adulthood and becoming contributing members to their respective community's advancement (Theokas et al., 2005).

### *The Search Institutes Developmental Asset Survey and Practice*

The Search Institute's *40 Developmental Asset framework* has served as a positive youth development vehicle in a variety of childcare, educational, and youth agency settings (Dukes & Stein, 2001; Klein et al., 2006 & Evans et al., 2004). The examples that exist of the Search Institute's Asset framework being implemented in community organizations and school-based settings shows a focus on the foundational indicators in the Asset model, emphasizing the critical shared contributions between genes, experiences, and environment, thus demonstrating a keen awareness of the importance of internal and external factors in achieving sustainable long-term outcomes that promote positive youth development.

The developmental asset checklist is a collective interpretation of both internal and external factors; internal factors represent the assets that focus on youth identity, social awareness and connectivity to education, while external factors comprise the assets that focus on familial and community support, constructive use of time, and boundaries/expectations. A youth's asset inventory is typically measured by way of using the valid survey assessments developed by Search Institute known as the Development Asset Profile or DAP and Youth Asset Profile or YAP. Of the research that exists from the application of the developmental asset framework, considering a high number of samples from adolescents across the country, very few studies currently exist that leverage this model for program evaluation or shed light on the predictive nature of short and long-term positive outcomes utilizing the survey measurement instrument (Scales, 1999; Murphey et al., 2004).

Therefore, the implementation of the Search Institute's developmental asset framework, definitively solidified in the realm of youth development and socialization, while leveraging the progress and implementation of the frameworks valid assessment tool, will prove to be beneficial in future policy and practice and contribute to future expansion of the positive youth development paradigm (Oman et al., 2002).

The Youth Developmental Asset Profile Survey was designed as a tool to aid youth community/in-school programming in helping adolescents build a positive asset inventory and move practitioners away from a deficit-based approach. Authors and researchers at the University of Oklahoma and Texas A&M (Oman et al., 2002) used data to describe the development of the asset survey tool and to vet the youth developmental tool as a psychometrically sound measure of developmental assets and a youth development approach that helps youth build assets towards workforce readiness, social competency, and post-secondary success and reduces short and long-term negative behaviors.

From the research, three studies were conducted utilizing a sample size of over 1,300 randomly selected youth (mean age = 15.4 years; 52% female; 47% White, 22% Black, 19% Hispanic, 10% Native American). The creation of 8 asset constructs were born out of the study including a focus on non-parental mentors/role models and family communication, which were very reliable measurements for detecting an increase in developmental assets with variation identified amongst the following subgroups: gender, age, and race. The study concluded the Youth Developmental Asset Survey was a reliable and acceptable measurements of assets for youth development, with a relational connection to decreasing a high amount of potential negative behaviors for youth (Oman et al., 2002).

The work of Riser, Mesler, Tallon, & Birkhead (2006) provided feedback and illumination on the implementation of an asset development project across a number of zip code(s) or an entire city, leveraging the presence and idiosyncratic trust of community-based organizations through aligned and coordinated partnerships. The lessons gleaned from this study included the importance of a local leader/support organization to enable present and future stability; involving relative stakeholders across all sectors in the community is vital to sustainable success; all youth, regardless of their background or zip code, should have access to adequate supports/programming; and youth voices must be equivalent to that of the input of adults during critical points of design and decision making. In short, the authors identified sustained youth participation as the core lever pull for potential policy change and reiterate the arduous process that involves making lasting impact or change to youth and community trajectory (Birkhead, Riser, Mesler et al., 2006).

Encompassing the priorities of positive youth development and considering the reliability the Search Institute's Asset Profile survey to effectively measure the assets a youth currently has can assist in compounding and guiding future asset development across the core contexts throughout the adolescent continuum. The integration of both the internal and external settings, while directly influencing the condition of these settings, promotes the alignment of in-school programming and community stakeholders implementing and utilizing the 40 Developmental Asset Framework.

Fourteen conceptually expressive scales that represented social connections present in both the actions of the core context and within youth support the hypothesis that the process of youth development is significantly impacted by community programming that includes a focus on key assets such as belonging, mastery, skill attainment, and generosity. The assets coupled with increasing the amount of time spent in community programing aligned around a common vision are foundational for a community based positive youth development experience to enhance the promotion of healthy, thriving youth and communities. In addition, they influence the lens through which the data was collected for the research study presented in this dissertation.

# Chapter 3
# Methodology

## Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion to investigate the importance of measuring non-academic indicators with the desire to establish and promote positive outcomes for youth along the adolescent continuum. This research will focus specifically on youth living in adverse conditions where risk factors negatively impact their quality of life, and where they receive education without access to proper strengths and supports within their surrounding community. The study will provide individual profile data and feedback of the strengths, supports, and social and emotional factors of current middle-school youth that are essential for both their successful academic and personal growth. The research will be conducted leveraging secondary data collected utilizing the Search Institute's Developmental Asset Profile Survey. The description and origin of the 64 students who participated in the initial study are provided in this chapter.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the data will identify patterns, commonalities in responses, reoccurring themes, as well as unplanned themes to offer unique information on the youth, which will highlight both strengths and challenges that impact academic and personal progression across the main Developmental Asset categories. The collected data will help to highlight the perspectives of the participants that will aid in understanding their personal assessment of self and subsequent surroundings, which are pivotal for navigating future decision making and making clear where they will seek help. This broader understanding will set the stage for future collaboration and impact efforts aimed at improving the whole child including both academic and social/emotional indicators, in low-income communities throughout the state of Delaware.

United Way Worldwide (formerly known as United Way of America) is a global nonprofit organization that leverages the local presence of over 1,800 chapters domestically and internationally, working towards improving the overall quality of life for individuals everywhere. For over 100 years, United Way, a 501(c) (3) certified human service organization, has worked to identify and address key social and economic issues to drive community partnerships with relative stakeholders such as local government, the private sector, and employers. United Way drives collective support and alignment around measurable outcomes that lead to long-term sustainable impact in communities around the world (http://uwde.org/).

United Way's philosophy for improving the overall quality of life and human condition is rooted in four common areas that represent core themes for the local chapters: commitment to improving the overall trajectory for adolescents regardless of their race, color, creed or zip code; assisting more individuals and families to become independent and achieve a level of economic stability; ensuring adequate access to health care services; and promoting the core tenets of fiscal responsibility and savings. Each year, United Way trains and works with over 2.6 million volunteers in pursuit of improving lives and creating opportunities for growth while raising over $5 billion dollars annually in support of those efforts (http://uwde.org/).

While there is some alignment amongst the 1,800 local chapters via the commitment to the collective mission and vision, the unique and specific conditions respective to each community determine largely the respective issues that are addressed by that chapter. The United Way of Delaware (UWDE), founded in 1946, has worked to advance the common good amongst all Delawareans with a commitment to maximizing the community resources, to improve the overall quality of life from the cradle to career and well throughout adulthood.

For over 70 years, UWDE has worked collectively to build community partnerships across all three counties (New Castle, Kent, and Sussex), starting with focused development in the early education space from birth to age 10 to ensure all children are meeting their developmental milestones to begin the third grade with the all-important skill of reading. UWDE is also engaged in long-term program design to equip Delawareans with the resources and access to free financial coaches to combat the root causes of poverty and promote principles of financial stability. In addition, UWDE is committed to the successful development and transition of adolescents from secondary into postsecondary education and adulthood and focused on providing the necessary supports and services that incite both college and career success for all youth throughout the state (http://uwde.org/).

Since 2006, UWDE has worked alongside leaders in education, business, government, and legislation throughout the state to ensure that all public-school students, regardless of their race or zip code, have access to a world-class education that informs and prepares them for life and success after high school. Collectively, these multi-sector coalitions have worked to establish positive long-lasting solutions that have emerged in the form of notable successes, such as the statewide “Summer Youth Employment Program,” developed to provide participants access to workplace experiences, enhance job opportunities and readiness, and provide critical career competency development. Also of note, the “Delaware Pathways” initiative, which is a statewide collaboration aimed at reimagining how we better prepare students for the workforce leveraging labor workforce data and future forecasting and creating opportunities to engage youth in workplace experiences that encourage skill development and introduction to low, middle, and high skill careers while in high school. While the old adage persists, “a rising tide lifts all boats,” UWDE has identified that not all individuals have access to or have been equipped with the skill set to take advantage of these opportunities, nor have they been equitably distributed across the state (http://uwde.org/).

In 2016, UWDE committed to amplifying these disparities by refocusing their why; it believed in creating social change through a community continuum and subsequently reframed their work around eight high-need communities, representing 17 zip codes throughout the state, known as the Eight Promise Communities (EPC). The EPC’s are comprised of children and families with high-needs where the delivery of supports and programs are relatively scarce and the presence of barriers such as inadequate transportation, inter-generational poverty, lack of affordable housing, and varying qualities of educational offerings impair the personal and professional trajectory for youth who call these areas home. UWDE works to collectively catalyze and align partners in the EPC’s to support its three strategic focus areas: third grade level reading, economic and financial empowerment, and college and career success. As of 2018, the EPC’s had a total population of over 318,000 with 44.9% of residents being considered low-income and only 18.2% of the total population over age 25 in possession of a high school diploma or equivalent. There are over 200,000 children ages birth to 17 who call one the EPC’s home, with 28% of youth growing up or experiencing some form of poverty and less than 38% of children reading at or above third grade reading level (http://uwde.org/).

UWDE believes that by supporting students within the EPC's through their all-important middle school years, with greater access to integrated career awareness and immersion activities, while being equitably positioned to take advantage of programs, will aid in the mastery of skills that provide that bridge to high school in pursuit of a positive post-secondary credential. This research collects data via the Search Institutes' *Developmental Asset Profile* survey assessment, which serves as a proxy for student's social and emotional development, featuring learners from Bayard Middle School (now known as The Bayard School).

The Bayard School is situated in Wilmington, DE in the 19805 zip code (Wilmington-Westside; Eight Promise Community), which has been identified as an area of high need. Bayard Middle School currently serves grades six through eight and a total of 298 students. Enrollment by ethnicity at Bayard Middle reflects an African American population of over 61% and a Hispanic/Latino population of 32%, with a low-income population of over 74%. Over the past several years, Bayard has experienced steady enrollment declines, as well as large declines in school-wide academic proficiency in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, with proficiency rates for the school in the 2017-2018 academic year at 9% and 3%, respectively. Student Attendance has also been a major issue as only 84% of the student population at Bayard in 2017-2018 has met the state requirements for completion, while the state average for attendance for comparative public middle schools in the state is at 94% (https://www.doe.k12.de.us/reportcard).

This dissertation was approved by the West Chester University Institutional Review Board to ensure safe practices and protect the rights of the adolescent participants.

## Participants

The study sample includes 90 youth participants who completed the *Search Institute's* Developmental Asset Profile Survey consisting of 35 females and 28 males enrolled at Bayard Middle School during the 2018-2019 academic year. With the desire to ensure the validity of survey participant responses for the purposes of this study, 26 records were eliminated due to missing responses on more than six questions, inconsistencies in individual responses, and similar related reasoning. The participants represented the sixth-grade population at Bayard Middle School with ages ranging from 11 to 12. 64 youth participants are inhabitants of the City of Wilmington, predominately hailing from the 19801, 19082, and 19805 zip codes, known as promise communities, referenced in the introduction (Search Institute, 2018 ).

Representing 52% of the survey sample, and the highest number of youths, were 33 African American students, followed by Hispanic or Latina/Latino students representing 23% of the sample at 15 students. Almost 16% of the survey sample, 10 students, identified as multiracial, with the four remaining student participants identifying as other. Bayard Middle School reported to the Delaware Department of Education a total of 98 students enrolled in the sixth grade during the 2018-2019 academic year, which further supports the quality of the data collected as the sample size of 90 students appropriately represents the total sixth grade population during the time of the study (Search Institute, 2018).

## Measures

The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Asset Profile survey instrument (see Appendix D) was developed and accredited leveraging over 20 years of empirical research and spanning direct engagement with over 5 million fourth through twelfth grade youth in the United States and around the world. Experts on youth development at the Search Institute in Minneapolis collaborated with the intent to develop a theory that would help youth to identify nutrients that would promote growth throughout the adolescent continuum. What the experts discovered were Developmental Assets that played a critical role in achieving positive outcomes for young people regardless of their background or current economic or geographic conditions. The studies concluded from the engagement of over five million youth that a higher asset inventory was indicative of increased mental and physical health, correlated with better academic performances, and lead to increased preparedness in students to successfully pursue personal and professional success after high school as opposed to youth who had lower asset counts (Search Institute, 2018).

The Developmental Asset Profile survey instrument is comprised of 58 Likert Scale items that assess young people on the frequency and opportunities that exist across their engagement introspectively, with their school, local community centers, and mentors to develop a variety of assets or strengths. Responses to the survey range from strongly agree to strongly disagree indicating a low connection or an endorsement of the asset in question. The Developmental Asset model emphasizes the necessity for a focus on both the internal and external factors that can influence youth trajectory. The internal factors represent a young person’s commitment to learning, their perception of positive values, adaptation of social competencies, and overall identity of self (see Appendix F) (Search Institute, 2018).

The external factors represent how they interpret support across the core context they engage daily, if they feel empowerment or have an idea of where they can potentially seek it, the defined boundaries and ambitious expectations that can peak and sustain interest in pursuit of desired success, and their use of time in relation to defined academic, personal goals, and network expansion. The Developmental Asset Profile survey has been proven to be a reliable and valid instrument across diverse audiences and landscapes with the model lending itself to cities or regions that support system wide youth development (Search Institute, 2018).

## Research Procedures

Eligible sixth grade students participating in the study were escorted by building staff to the multiple computer labs at Bayard Middle School to complete the pre-survey assessment via the use of an encrypted key provided by the Search Institute that granted them temporary access to the Development Asset Survey Assessment. The pre-survey assessment consisted of 58 Likert Scale Question items and students needed approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the assessment. Upon completion, students were escorted back to their respective classrooms to complete the school day.

The survey responses served as secondary data for this study and the primary method of initial data collection. The pre-specified sample included 98 participants and is consistent with the number of sixth graders enrolled at Bayard Middle School during the 2018-2019 academic year. Due to the challenges with students missing school time due to behaviors and inconsistent overall attendance, coupled with staff and leadership tending more to the daily issues that arise, the completion rate was just above 92% with 90 sixth grade students completing the survey assessment.

# Chapter 4

# Analysis

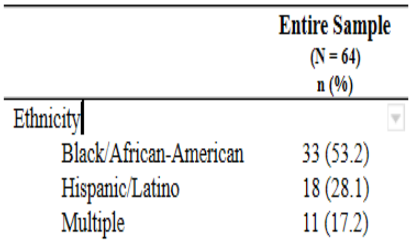
## Results

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the importance of measuring non-academic indicators, with the desire to improve outcomes for youth specifically living in adverse conditions. The study was also designed to shed light on youth experiences across the developmental asset categories to provide insight for improvement of youth trajectory when asset development is possible across all educational settings.

Participants' survey responses and feedback provided insight and legitimacy to the foundational research questions that guided the development of this study. By analyzing the secondary data obtained from the administration of the developmental asset profile, valuable evidence was uncovered regarding the need for awareness and implementation of the developmental asset framework across relevant stakeholders, programs, and local education agencies to guide better short and long-term outcomes for the participants. This chapter engages the main research inquiries and is addressed with support gleaned from participant survey responses and relevant theoretical inferences.

The initial steps undertaken in the data analysis process involved the examination of the study sample size that completed the Search Institute's *Developmental Asset Profile Survey* using SPPS for Windows. Frequency, percentages, valid percentages, and cumulative percentages observing how student participants identified racially were computed and examined. The sample constraints associated with the research limited the representation of non-minority students. Race of the student responses included 51.6% of respondents identified as Black/African American, 28.1% of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino, and 17.2% identified as multi-racial/other. Table 1 presents the data and descriptive analysis on the race of the student respondents.

**Table 1: Race of the Student**



| | Entire Sample<br>(N = 64)<br>n (%) |
|---|---|
| Ethnicity | |
| Black/African-American | 33 (53.2) |
| Hispanic/Latino | 18 (28.1) |
| Multiple | 11 (17.2) |

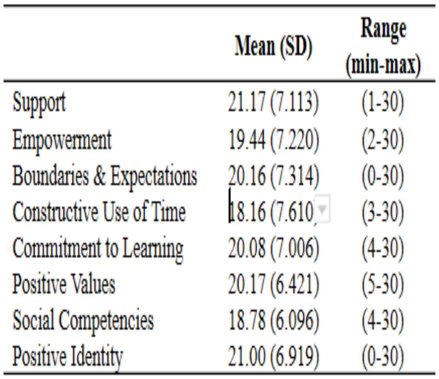
During the initial analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated and involved the examination of the Developmental Asset Profile (DAP) survey subscales/categories of developmental assets including the frequencies for each response. Scale item means and standard deviations were computed and examined. Subscale Categories include “Support,” “EMPOW” or EMPOWERMENT, “BOUNDE” or Boundaries and Expectations, “TIMEU” or Constructive Use of Time, “CLEARN” or Commitment to Learning, “POSVAL” or Positive Values, “SCOMP” or Social Competencies, and “POSID” or Positive Identity.

The subscales, which represent the developmental asset framework, are entrenched in a myriad of scientific works on youth and adolescent development, with a specific analysis of the relevant literature in the areas of prevention, resilience, youth program analysis, and community collaboration during the early 1990’s (Benson, 1990). The research informed the rationale for the selection of the developmental nutrients or assets that demonstrated prevention for youth participation in risky behaviors, identified evidence of generalizability across diverse contextual locations, enhanced the propensity for resiliency development amongst youth, and can be adapted by all community and education stakeholders impacting rate of acquisition, while also being accessible to youth for ease of awareness and procurement (Benson,1998). The developmental asset framework was established not only to advance youth development theory and study but to also demonstrate reliability as an instrument for which to mobilize communities promoting positive youth development (Benson, 1990).

The 40 developmental assets distributed across the eight subscales have been refined through practical use, research study, community development endeavors, and explicit practitioner feedback that demonstrate higher asset exposure across the adolescent continuum for youth, yields tangible improvement in positive outcomes such as academic success, social and emotional health, and highlights a decline in poorer health challenges (Benson, 1998).

The subscale entitled “SUPPORT” has the highest mean score of 21.17, and the subscale with the lowest mean score was “TIMEU” or Constructive Use of Time at 18.16. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all DAP subscale results. The rationale for this analysis is to also establish the significance regarding the other 6 DAP subscales considered during the test not being normally distributed. Those subscales were Support,” “EMPOW” or EMPOWERMENT, “BOUNDE” or Boundaries and Expectations, “TIMEU” or Constructive Use of Time, “CLEARN” or Commitment to Learning, and “POSID” or Positive Identity. From this research, we can indicate the reasoning behind why student responses across those 6 subcategories deviated from a normal distribution and further explain this phenomenon through “experience, environment, social strains, and knowledge” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991, pg. 194).

**Table 2: Developmental Asset Profile Subscale Results**



| | Mean (SD) | Range (min-max) |
|---|---|---|
| Support | 21.17 (7.113) | (1-30) |
| Empowerment | 19.44 (7.220) | (2-30) |
| Boundaries & Expectations | 20.16 (7.314) | (0-30) |
| Constructive Use of Time | 18.16 (7.610) | (3-30) |
| Commitment to Learning | 20.08 (7.006) | (4-30) |
| Positive Values | 20.17 (6.421) | (5-30) |
| Social Competencies | 18.78 (6.096) | (4-30) |
| Positive Identity | 21.00 (6.919) | (0-30) |

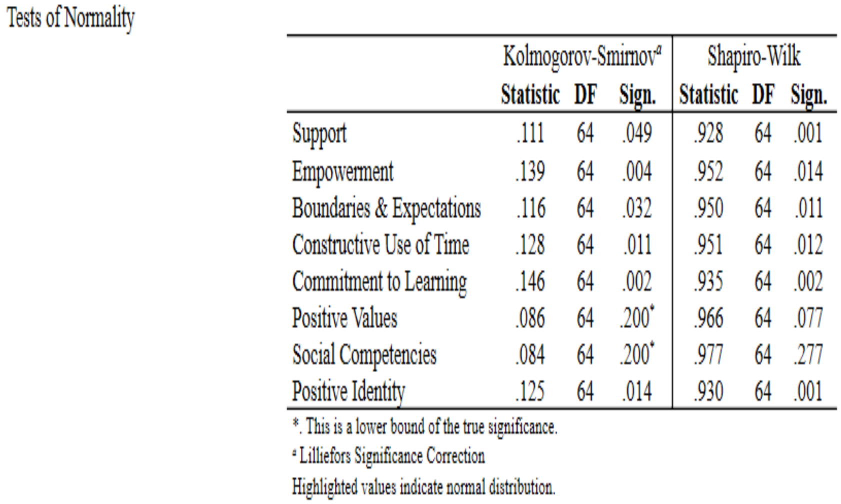
## Analysis

### *Tests of Normality*

The literature addressing the successful coordination of collaborative community resources, in pursuit of implementing a common vision for positive youth development, sheds light on the immersion of a valid instrument capable of providing statistically significant data on youth perspective to improve community collaborative efforts in pursuit of future professional and personal outcomes for the participants. The need for an empirically driven instrument rooted in the contemporary views of positive development warranted exploratory research of participant survey feedback to understand inferences from student responses that inform their relevant experiences across the developmental asset categories. By analyzing these experiences across the developmental asset categories, the researcher can provide insight for improvement of youth trajectory when asset development is possible across all educational settings.

An assessment of the normality of the data set across the DAP's eight subscale items served as a prerequisite before running any statistical analysis to determine, based on students responses across the subscale items, what response patterns did and did not return normal distributions and to hypothesize what can be drawn from the outputs that would stand to support or illuminate assumptions presented in the manuscript. Table 3 presents the results from two well-known tests of normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and the Shapiro-Wilk Test.

**Table 3: Tests of Normality (DAP Subscale Categories)**



Tests of Normality

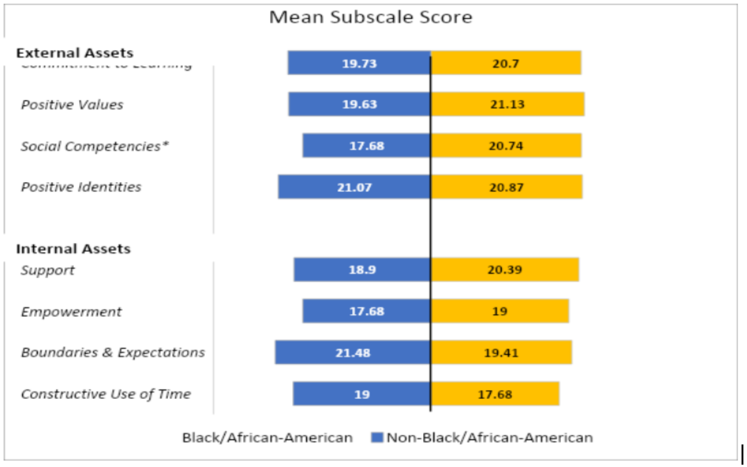
| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov$^a$ | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Statistic** | **DF** | **Sign.** | **Statistic** | **DF** | **Sign.** |
| Support | .111 | 64 | .049 | .928 | 64 | .001 |
| Empowerment | .139 | 64 | .004 | .952 | 64 | .014 |
| Boundaries & Expectations | .116 | 64 | .032 | .950 | 64 | .011 |
| Constructive Use of Time | .128 | 64 | .011 | .951 | 64 | .012 |
| Commitment to Learning | .146 | 64 | .002 | .935 | 64 | .002 |
| Positive Values | .086 | 64 | .200* | .966 | 64 | .077 |
| Social Competencies | .084 | 64 | .200* | .977 | 64 | .277 |
| Positive Identity | .125 | 64 | .014 | .930 | 64 | .001 |

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
$^a$ Lilliefors Significance Correction
Highlighted values indicate normal distribution.

The test generated the issue of non-normality present throughout the data set. While there are eight subscales, only two response patterns: POSVAL and SCOMP yielded normal distribution. Both POSVAL and SCOMP are representative of key internal assets, commitments, and skills that have been proven as essential to the positive development of youth (Benson, 1998). “POSVAL,” the Positive Value category, is described as a self-perception or skill that young people develop within that leads to harnessing motivation and developing strong character (Strengths and Supports in the Lives of Bayard Middle School Youth, 2018). “SCOMP,” Social Competencies, indicates young people are aware of the need to build skillsets that translate to effective interaction with adults and peers, embrace new situations, and have the wherewithal to successfully make difficult decisions with regularity.

The data gleaned from the initial study sample presented racial dynamics as the dimension with most significance. With that in mind, for additional testing, my study will consider race as a core element that may influence participant responses and provide feedback on the initial research questions. The mean subscale scores for the Developmental Asset subscales for Black/African American respondents is presented in Table 4:

**Table 4: Mean Subscale Scores (Black/African American Students)**



** Relationship significant at $p < 0.1$*

Regarding Black/African-American student respondents, based on a review of youth development/socialization theories and relevant research, we notice the relationship that was found to be significant on some level can be seen in the noticeably greater difference in mean subscale scores between Black/African American and Non-Black students. Scores on the Social Competencies subscale, which were found to differ significantly between Black/African American and non-Black identifying respondents (a difference of 3.06 points).

When you compare the differences in mean subscale scores across the different DAP subscale groups, we identified the average difference between the groups is approximately 1.49 points. The subscale scores are indicative of the *Composite Assets Score*, which combines the internal and external asset scores, each 30 points, to reveal across the data sample how students scored on the spectrum representing the following themes: challenged (0-29), vulnerable (30-41), adequate (42-51), and thriving (52-60).

Participant responses found more than 50% of the initial survey sample score in the lower categories, vulnerable and challenged, further illuminating participants perception of strength and support development, or the lack thereof, in their families, schools, and communities. The need for awareness and implementation of the developmental asset framework across relevant stakeholders, programs, and local education agencies to guide better decision making across the participant group can be expressed and attained through the utilization of the Developmental Asset Profile as a highly reliable and valid instrument.

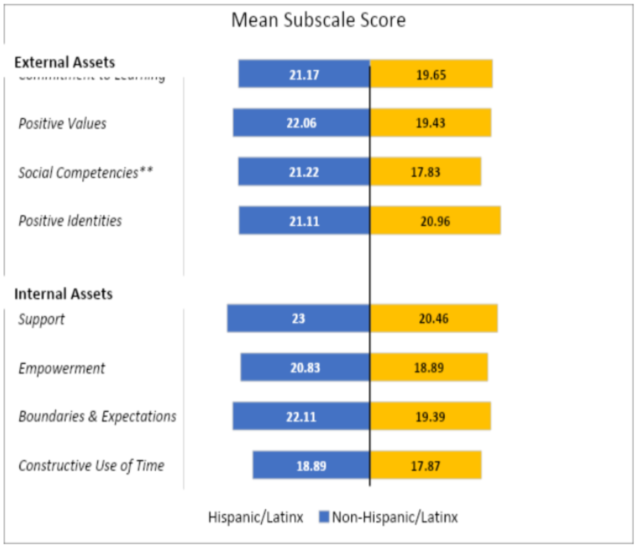
The specific assets represented on the subscale reflect the importance of strength and support development across the adolescent continuum and guides how participants frame choice development in their school, with their health, and also how they contribute to shaping their respective community (Oman et. al., 2002). Black/African American-identifying students, on average, scored lower on all subscales but three: Positive Identities, Constructive Use of Time (1.32 points), and Boundaries & Expectations (2.07 points). The difference in mean subscale scores between Black/African American and non-Black students was miniscule (0.2 points). To further explain the phenomenon of what may be at the heart of these patterns, we consider environment, social strains, and a lack of "broad-based, cross-sector coalitions" (Allen, 2015).

Dr. Tony Allen, former chair of the Wilmington Education Advisory committee, continues to underscore these educational inequities associated with the host city, and their contribution to participants derailment from accessing a high quality of education and personal trajectory due to "teacher roles that extend far beyond education due to quality of life issues such as cleaning student clothes, providing meals, educating parents on ways to collaborate in their child's journey, and connecting parents and students with services that provide response due to the daily trauma that awaits in their homes and surrounding neighborhoods" (Allen, 2015, pg. xiv). He describes trauma through several lenses including, homelessness, presence of violence in the community, lack of access to health care, and the entrenched reality of racism, while simultaneously underscoring a lock of focus on the developmental needs of youth and the lack of learning skills and assets that translate in and out of the classroom (Allen, 2015).

Previous research studies implementing this instrument have confirmed students with access to higher asset implementation across all relevant stakeholders are generally more productive and contribute more to society than youth with lower levels of assets (Strengths and Supports in the Lives of Bayard Middle School Youth, 2018). The perception participants offered through their responses are often influenced by social precursors such as family, economic disadvantage, and community settings. The data points that further tell the story of these precursors and the impact on the participants, shed light on a 65 year history of education in the host city which has been described as, "a vigorous disagreement over how to best to serve children who – because of where they come from, what they look like, and/or the financial and social circumstances of their families – need more support in the way of resources to learn effectively in school, and by extension, to succeed in life" (Allen, 2015).

The six subscales each have unique distinctions that reflect student experiences based on the responses and shed light on the three research questions that were hypothesized previously. The research addresses the collective necessity of measuring non-academic indicators (developmental assets) in the promotion of positive outcomes, leveraging community stakeholders to ensure youth awareness of strengths, and supporting development to enhance experiences that contribute to an elevated aptitude and the regular assessment of the developmental assets that are proven to be essential for successful individual growth. The mean subscale scores for the Developmental Asset subscales for Hispanic/Latino participants is presented in Table 5:

**Table 5: Mean Subscale Scores (Hispanic/Latino Students)**



** *Relationship significant at $p < 0.05$*

Based on a review of youth development/socialization theories and relevant research, we notice the relationship between Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American student respondents was found to be significant on some level, and there is a  noticeably greater difference in mean subscale scores between Latino and Non-Latino students. Scores on the Social Competencies subscale, were found to differ significantly between Latino and non-Latino-identifying respondents (a difference of 3.39 points). When comparing the differences in mean subscale scores across the different DAP subscale groups, what you find is that the average difference between the groups is approximately 1.99 points. Also, comparatively, the Hispanic/Latino-identifying students on average, scored higher on all subscales.

These participants voices continue to support and legitimize the need for student empowerment and development by way of measuring non-academic indicators utilizing a proven and reliable instrument such as the Search Institute’s *Developmental Asset Model*. The instrument, through regular assessment, will aid in understanding individual viewpoints of self and their community surroundings which are pivotal for navigating future decision making and areas for development across their core contexts. This research study provided valuable insight into 6th grade students’ perception of self, family, and community which are indicative of future perceptions of their supports and the world where they will seek advisement or improvement for the personal and professional choices they will make. Participant responses across the data set support these beliefs and growth opportunities.

# Chapter 5

## Summary

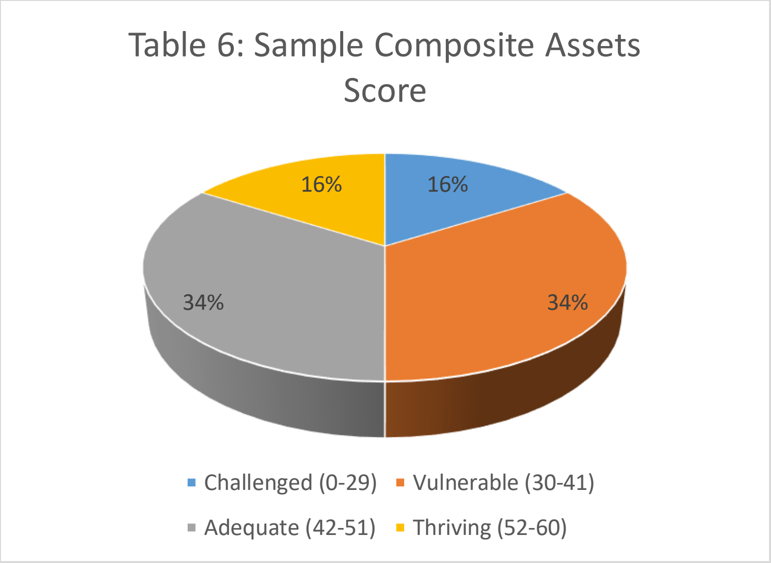
Concluded from a comprehensive review of positive youth development theories, practice and relevant research, my study examined the need for the implementation of a youth development framework to shed light on the importance of measuring non-academic factors with the desire to establish and promote positive outcomes, specifically for youth living in adverse conditions, along the adolescent continuum. In Chapter 4, I shared the results of my data analysis and study. This chapter will provide commentary on my overall findings, limitations to the study related to the sample, while considering the implications for relevant community stakeholders including recommendations for future research, study and practitioner engagement.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discussed the prevalent literature on strength-based youth development models and its significant impact on the development of a young person when successfully implemented across the adolescent continuum. Damon (1997) redefined contemporary interpretations of positive youth development highlighting significant gains for mental and emotional development amongst youth when community functions as the central hub by which these learnings are sustained and opportunities for improvement abound. This concept of community and how it frames the contexts across the continuum by which youth engage is discussed by Connell and Gambone (2000). The scholars discuss the importance of alignment on vision across key youth stakeholders which include schools, parents, community based organizations and local government to develop partnerships aimed at implementing a positive youth developmental model which both assessed the real-time individual needs of students while also clarifying access to relevant resources and supports to improve personal and professional outcomes.

I discussed the importance for the implementation of a proven instrument that can provide meaningful and quality data to serve as the foundation for planning and strategy development across a community collaborative in pursuit of improved short and long-term youth outcomes. The next section of this chapter will shed light on participants feedback related to the completion of the *Search Institute's* DAP Survey offering unique information on the participant group, with an emphasis on the assets and supports they believe are present in their lives' and subsequently guides future decision making across their core contexts.

### *Composite Asset Score*

Benson (2006) understood the importance of intentionally increasing asset awareness and development across a young person's core communal contexts, advocating for the alignment of multiple community stakeholders across a young person's life will yield greater personal and community outcomes for youth in the long-term than that of a single source engagement. Feedback from participants in this study begins with unpacking the aggregate asset score of the total sample which provides an overall picture of the foundation of developmental assets for these youth. The data set revealed that while 50 percent of the sample showed scoring that suggested they perceived a mid to high level of asset awareness and development in their respective lives, on the other end of spectrum, the scores suggested a substantial amount of participants, on the whole, struggled more; with considerable room to improve participants awareness and experience with developmental assets when focusing our collective attention on broader asset development strategies. The utility and implications drawn from the developmental asset dataset provided by the participants illuminates the work completed by Leffert et. al (1998) who completed an extensive study on the major risks to adolescent health and the impact on the ability to achieve positive outcomes based on asset scoring. The research operationalized risk behaviors such as: alcohol and tobacco abuse, illicit drug usage, and school problems associated with chronic delinquency and low levels of academic achievement, in terms of recent patterns of engagement with asset scoring, or the lack thereof, as a tool for communities to develop a foundation to promote positive development for all children. Based on their aggregate sample of over 250 thousand participants, they identified the higher number of assets present in a participant's life, the smaller number of participants were identified engaging in the risky behaviors with general applicability across grade, race, and gender. The composite asset score for the sample is presented in Table 6:

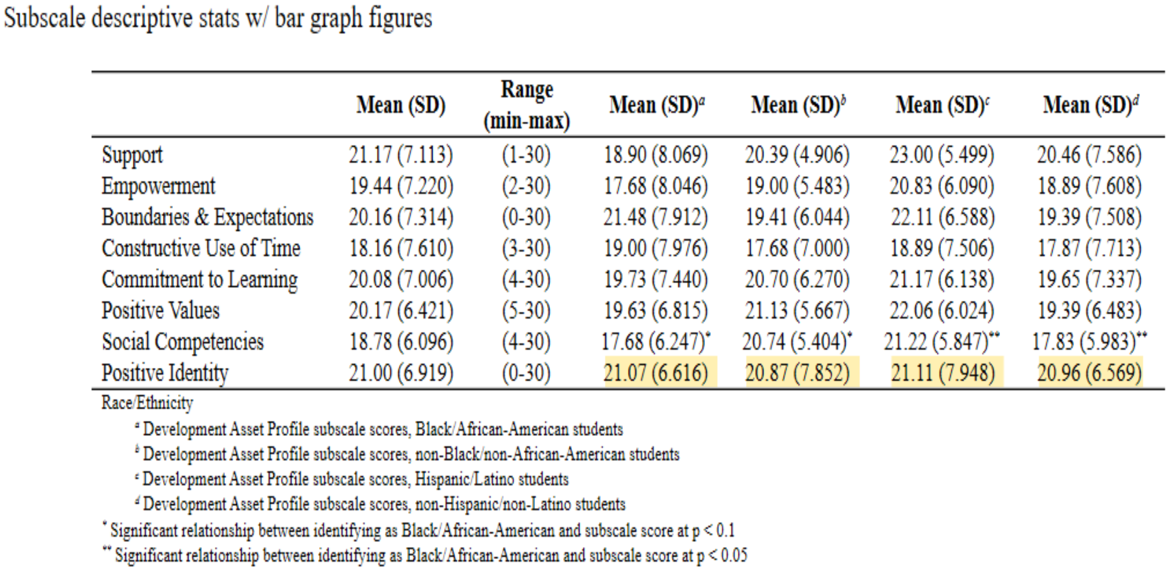


### *Asset Levels by Selected Demographics*

Racial dynamics further exacerbated the unique experiences of the participants in this study and the responses across the eight categories of developmental assets on the survey instrument: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, commitment to learning, positive values, constructive use of time, social competencies, and positive identity. Leffert et. al (1998) synthesized the relevant literature related to the development of the asset categories which provide a foundation to the application of the framework. They identified numerous previous bodies of literature which support the conceptualization of the support, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, social competencies, positive identity, and commitment to learning categories with fewer bodies of work supporting the positive value and empowerment categories. Moreover, the categories are comprised of items that the relevant literature has proven to have a positive impact on youth development and support that these categories capture the salient elements for which to inform future strategy development for participants.

Based on the survey results, I identified some subgroups of the sample struggled more than others. For example, African American respondents scored lower than non-African American participants across all subcategories but three: positive identity, constructive use of time and boundaries and expectations. Participant responses across these subcategories help to highlight, on average, which categories of developmental assets are experienced most strongly and conversely the remaining categories that are not as strong that require and would benefit from the development of an integrated community-wide system capable of responding to these realities young people are facing daily and provide opportunities for engagement and development.

Conversely, Hispanic/Latino student respondents scored higher than non-Hispanic/Latino participants across all subcategories. When considering the data collected and comparing the differences in mean subscale scores across the different DAP subscale groups, I found that the average difference between the groups is approximately 1.99 points. The implications drawn from these findings show relevant comparisons to the research conducted by the *Search Institute (2018)* and the feedback gleaned from the over 121,000 students in grades 6-12 in the United States, who self-reported race identify, that have completed a DAP between 2012 and 2015. The Search Institutes' previous research also supports this growth opportunity, in that while all racial subgroups will show differences, all youth regardless of racial background will show similar strengths and gaps in asset and skill development. The subscale descriptive statistics is presented in Table 7:



Subscale descriptive stats w/ bar graph figures

| | Mean (SD) | Range (min-max) | Mean (SD)[a] | Mean (SD)[b] | Mean (SD)[c] | Mean (SD)[d] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support | 21.17 (7.113) | (1-30) | 18.90 (8.069) | 20.39 (4.906) | 23.00 (5.499) | 20.46 (7.586) |
| Empowerment | 19.44 (7.220) | (2-30) | 17.68 (8.046) | 19.00 (5.483) | 20.83 (6.090) | 18.89 (7.608) |
| Boundaries & Expectations | 20.16 (7.314) | (0-30) | 21.48 (7.912) | 19.41 (6.044) | 22.11 (6.588) | 19.39 (7.508) |
| Constructive Use of Time | 18.16 (7.610) | (3-30) | 19.00 (7.976) | 17.68 (7.000) | 18.89 (7.506) | 17.87 (7.713) |
| Commitment to Learning | 20.08 (7.006) | (4-30) | 19.73 (7.440) | 20.70 (6.270) | 21.17 (6.138) | 19.65 (7.337) |
| Positive Values | 20.17 (6.421) | (5-30) | 19.63 (6.815) | 21.13 (5.667) | 22.06 (6.024) | 19.39 (6.483) |
| Social Competencies | 18.78 (6.096) | (4-30) | 17.68 (6.247)* | 20.74 (5.404)* | 21.22 (5.847)** | 17.83 (5.983)** |
| Positive Identity | 21.00 (6.919) | (0-30) | 21.07 (6.616) | 20.87 (7.852) | 21.11 (7.948) | 20.96 (6.569) |

Race/Ethnicity

[a] Development Asset Profile subscale scores, Black/African-American students

[b] Development Asset Profile subscale scores, non-Black/non-African-American students

[c] Development Asset Profile subscale scores, Hispanic/Latino students

[d] Development Asset Profile subscale scores, non-Hispanic/non-Latino students

* Significant relationship between identifying as Black/African-American and subscale score at $p < 0.1$

** Significant relationship between identifying as Black/African-American and subscale score at $p < 0.05$

As described in Chapter 4, participants' responses and feedback to the survey supported the notion that the integration of the DAP survey instrument can reasonably support youth development and empowerment across their core contexts by way of leveraging the data and perspective gleaned from the regular use and assessment of the instrument. Benson et. al. (1998) shed light on the practical use of the responses gleaned from the DAP instrument citing its two major functions served to provide a playbook for which community serving organizations and relevant systems could partner to purse long-term system wide efforts aimed at promoting the core concepts and characteristics of positive youth development. The examination of respondent's feedback utilizing the composite asset score demonstrated 50 percent of the sample scored in the lower categories, vulnerable and challenged. The research conducted by Leffert et.al (1998) indicated that asset levels can serve as importance predictive information for future engagement in risky behaviors. The data gleaned from the respondents indicate viable opportunities for community stakeholders to leverage in the promotion of the development and growth for these students.

The research provides salient data points for which community-wide efforts can identify specific, repeatable actions to implement and/or increase the frequency based on the findings gleaned from the DAP survey. For example, youth stakeholders can convene with adults and youth from their programming or organization regarding the respondents feedback to compare against their real-time experiences in the effort to distill and capture relevant patterns and themes that has the ability to inform future planning and collaborative efforts. Benson (1998) describes this process as the goal of implementing the development assets, to develop a shared vision of positive youth development and to provide a broader picture of how the relevant stakeholders who comprise the community are doing in providing tangible opportunities for youth to meet this vision.

### *Limitations*

In the completion of this study, a few limitations related to the sample were identified and will be discussed. Primarily, the number of participants (64) that participated in the study was relatively small. We can attribute these shortcomings to overall resource constraints and the bureaucratic challenges that exist when conducting research with minors in local education agencies. A larger study sample, that includes a broader participant pool, will benefit future research efforts. Second, the data was gleaned from students attending middle school within a Promise Community which significantly impacted the presence of non-minority students. Future studies can benefit from the presence of a comparison group, one that includes more affluent students living and attending school outside of the Promise Community. Finally, for the purposes of understanding how racial and socioeconomic dynamics play a role in determining how participants respond to the DAP inventory questions, a larger sample that includes a comparison group would also make future findings both more robust and generalizable to contexts outside of Wilmington and the schools, students, and grade level (all respondents were in sixth grade) that participated.

### *Implications for Community Stakeholders*

The results of this research have implications for practitioners, school leaders, educators, funders, employers, youth serving organizations and parents. Positive Youth Development has emerged as viable approach amongst community and education stakeholders in the youth space based on the research and prior successful implementations of using strength-based models to improve youth outcomes overall (Benson, 2006).

The study investigated the strengths and supports that young people have or do not have in their lives. This meaningful feedback should provide community stakeholders with the broader picture that sets the stage for future collaboration and coordinated efforts to ensure asset awareness and development is possible across all core contexts present within a young person's life consistent with improved youth and community outcomes. The use of the survey instrument assists in highlighting the perspective the young person is willing to provide via a common language that has the propensity to develop a road map to guide collaborative focused planning and improvement for all students across the adolescent continuum regardless of social or economic backgrounds. Prior research implementing the DAP tool have confirmed that young people who possess a high number of assets show high signs of mental and physical health, contribute more to the sustainability of their community, perform better in school and possess a higher number of options after high school.

The research concluded that there is considerable opportunity to improve access to and experience with the developmental assets for the survey participants, at least from the perspective gleaned from the survey data. The 6th grade participants in this study were able to articulate via the instrument the strengths and supports they both possessed and lacked that lead them to positive or negative paths to and through adulthood. The data reported overall that communities, schools, other relevant stakeholders can improve the fidelity of their youth development work by way of access to the quality and meaningful data produced by the *Search Institute's* Developmental Asset Profile to inform future strategy and planning development.

This dissertation helps to address the challenge in promoting positive youth development and empowerment by way of collective impact driven by the mutually reinforcing activities of community stakeholders. This research is the start to continuing study that will work to evaluate the relationship of youth asset development as the foundation for community collaboration to promote the achievement and sustaining of positive youth outcomes in the long-term regardless of race, color, creed, or economic background. By helping schools and community partners to work together in determining and aligning supports needed by students, we are effectively leveraging a powerful strength-based model to inform future practice, theory, and policy development.

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# APPENDIX A: EIGHT CATEGORIES OF ASSET DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">THE EIGHT CATEGORIES OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS</th></tr>
<tr><th>External Assets</th><th>Internal Assets</th></tr>
<tr><td><b>SUPPORT</b><br>Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.</td><td><b>COMMITMENT TO LEARNING</b><br>Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.</td></tr>
<tr><td><b>EMPOWERMENT</b><br>Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.</td><td><b>POSITIVE VALUES</b><br>Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy life choices.</td></tr>
<tr><td><b>BOUDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS</b><br>Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.</td><td><b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b><br>Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.</td></tr>
<tr><td><b>CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME</b><br>Young people need opportunities—outside of school—to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.</td><td><b>POSITIVE IDENTITY</b><br>Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.</td></tr>
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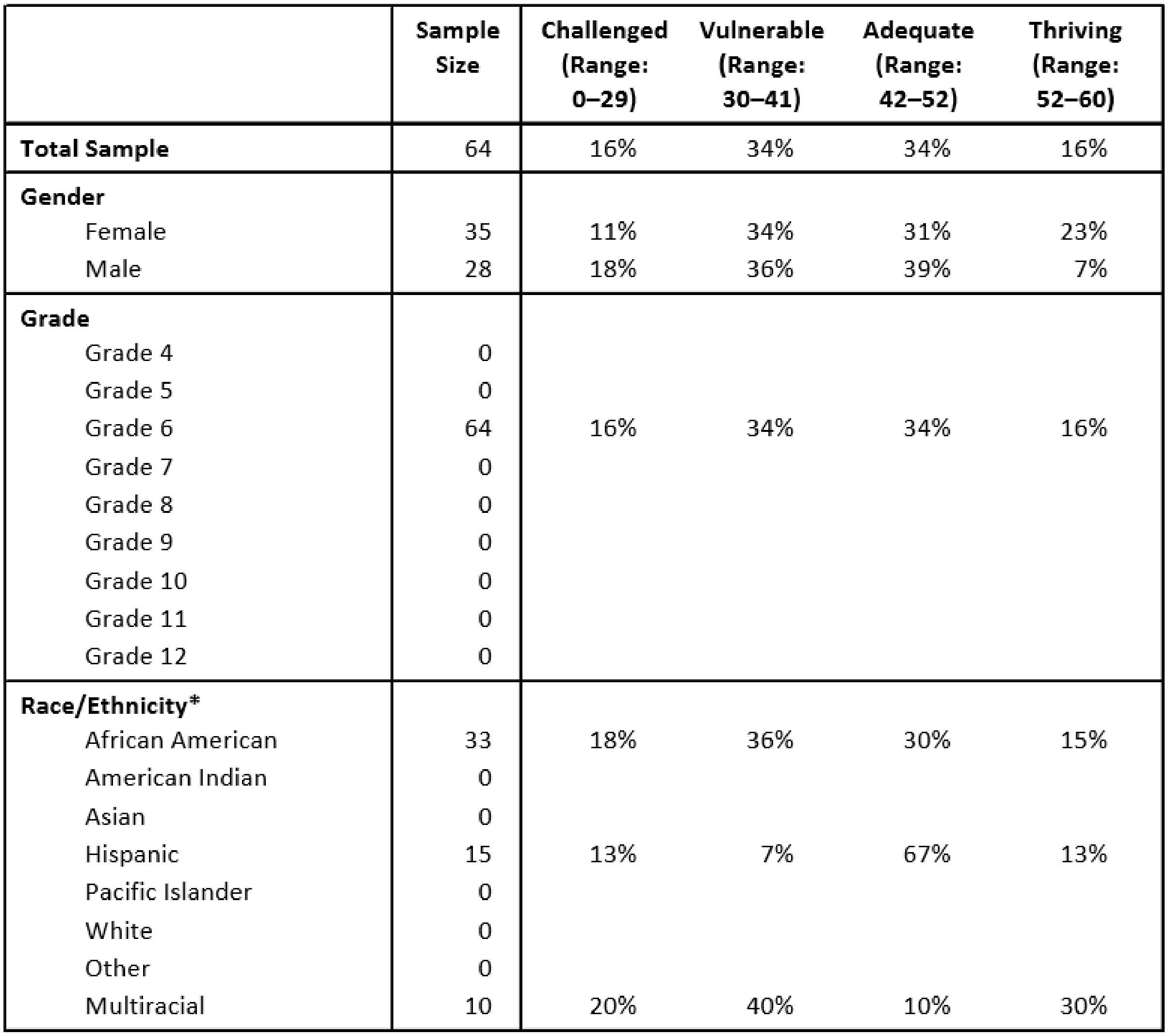
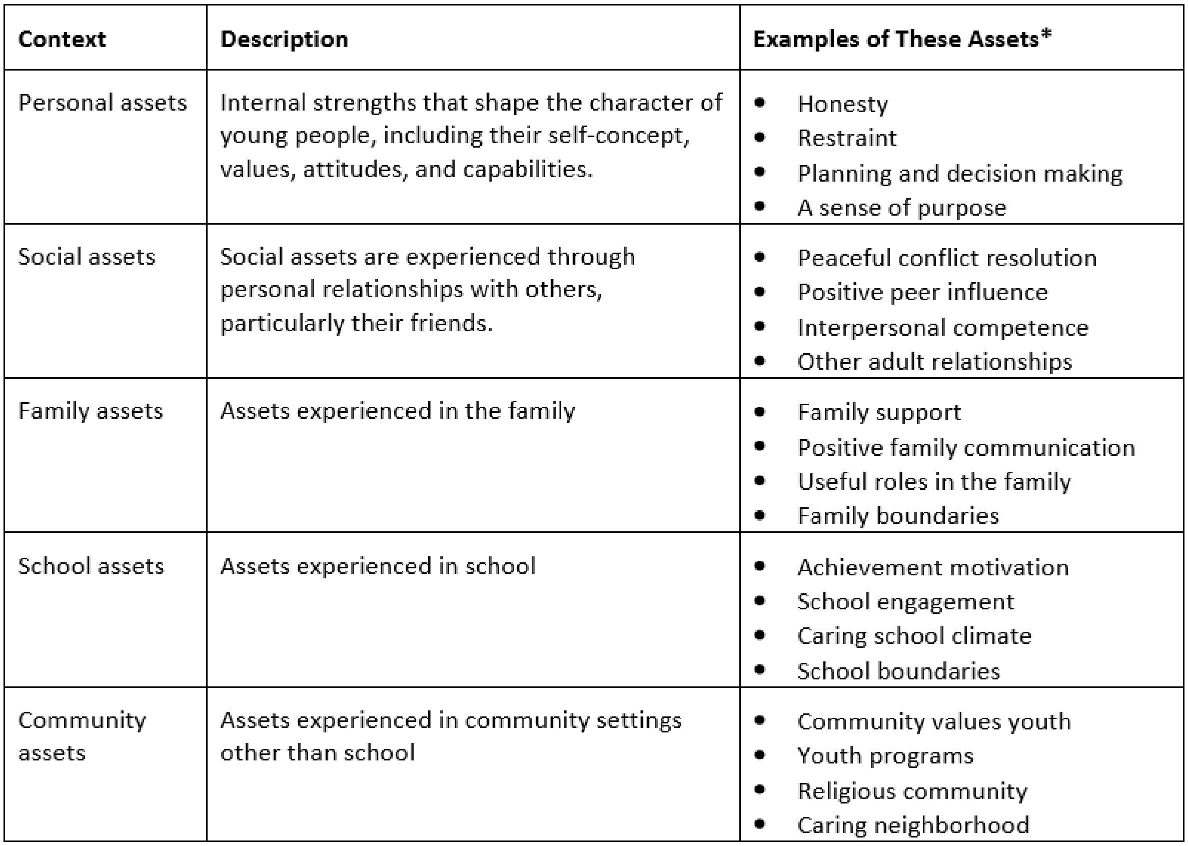
# APPENDIX B: ASSET LEVELS BY CATEGORIES



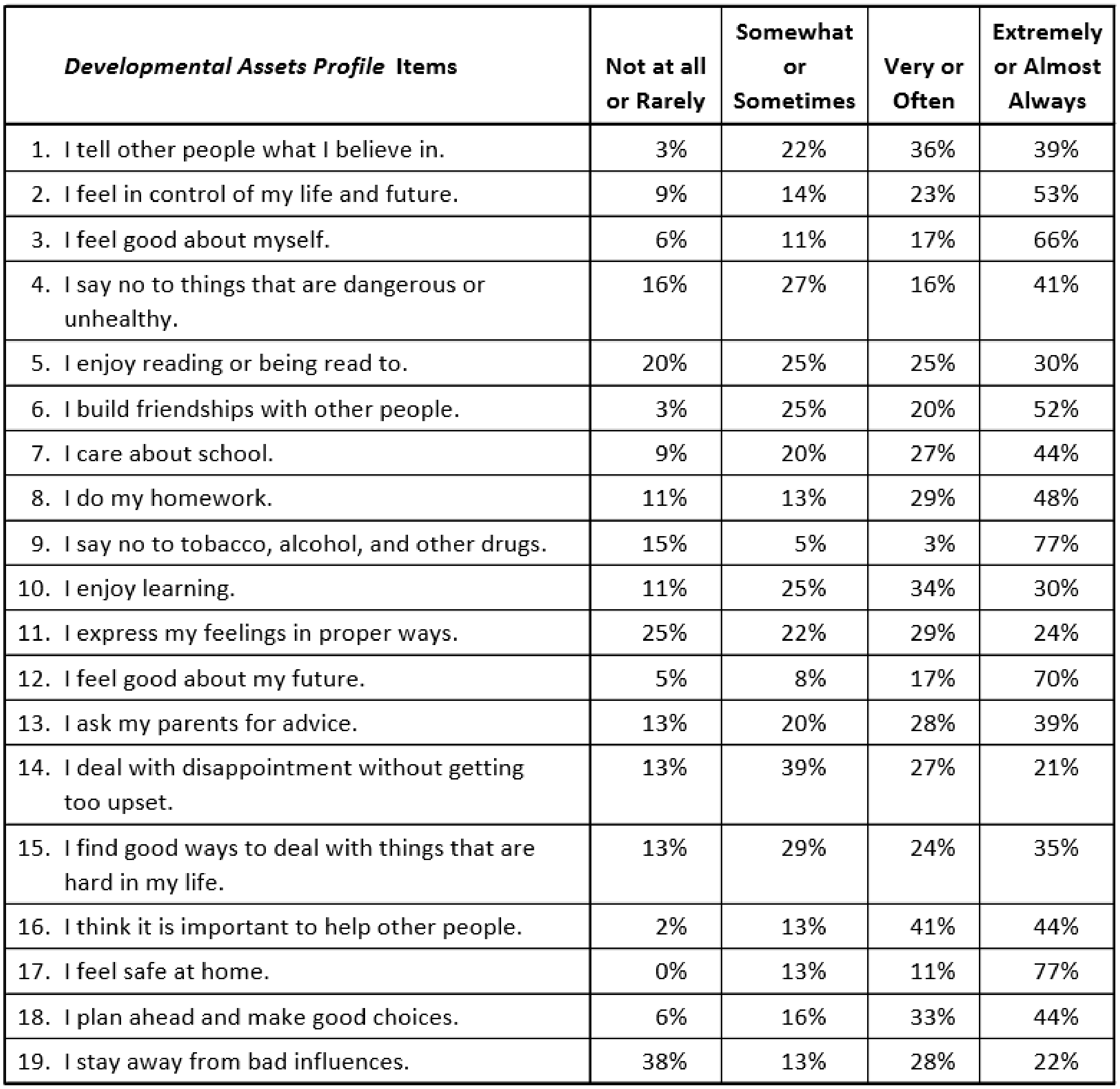
| | Sample Size | Challenged (Range: 0–29) | Vulnerable (Range: 30–41) | Adequate (Range: 42–52) | Thriving (Range: 52–60) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Sample** | 64 | 16% | 34% | 34% | 16% |
| **Gender** | | | | | |
| Female | 35 | 11% | 34% | 31% | 23% |
| Male | 28 | 18% | 36% | 39% | 7% |
| **Grade** | | | | | |
| Grade 4 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 5 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 6 | 64 | 16% | 34% | 34% | 16% |
| Grade 7 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 8 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 9 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 10 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 11 | 0 | | | | |
| Grade 12 | 0 | | | | |
| **Race/Ethnicity*** | | | | | |
| African American | 33 | 18% | 36% | 30% | 15% |
| American Indian | 0 | | | | |
| Asian | 0 | | | | |
| Hispanic | 15 | 13% | 7% | 67% | 13% |
| Pacific Islander | 0 | | | | |
| White | 0 | | | | |
| Other | 0 | | | | |
| Multiracial | 10 | 20% | 40% | 10% | 30% |

# APPENDIX C: FIVE CONTEXTS FOR BUILDING DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS



| **Context** | **Description** | **Examples of These Assets*** |
|---|---|---|
| Personal assets | Internal strengths that shape the character of young people, including their self-concept, values, attitudes, and capabilities. | • Honesty<br>• Restraint<br>• Planning and decision making<br>• A sense of purpose |
| Social assets | Social assets are experienced through personal relationships with others, particularly their friends. | • Peaceful conflict resolution<br>• Positive peer influence<br>• Interpersonal competence<br>• Other adult relationships |
| Family assets | Assets experienced in the family | • Family support<br>• Positive family communication<br>• Useful roles in the family<br>• Family boundaries |
| School assets | Assets experienced in school | • Achievement motivation<br>• School engagement<br>• Caring school climate<br>• School boundaries |
| Community assets | Assets experienced in community settings other than school | • Community values youth<br>• Youth programs<br>• Religious community<br>• Caring neighborhood |

# APPENDIX D: DEVELOPMENTAL ASSET PROFILE SURVEY RESPONSES

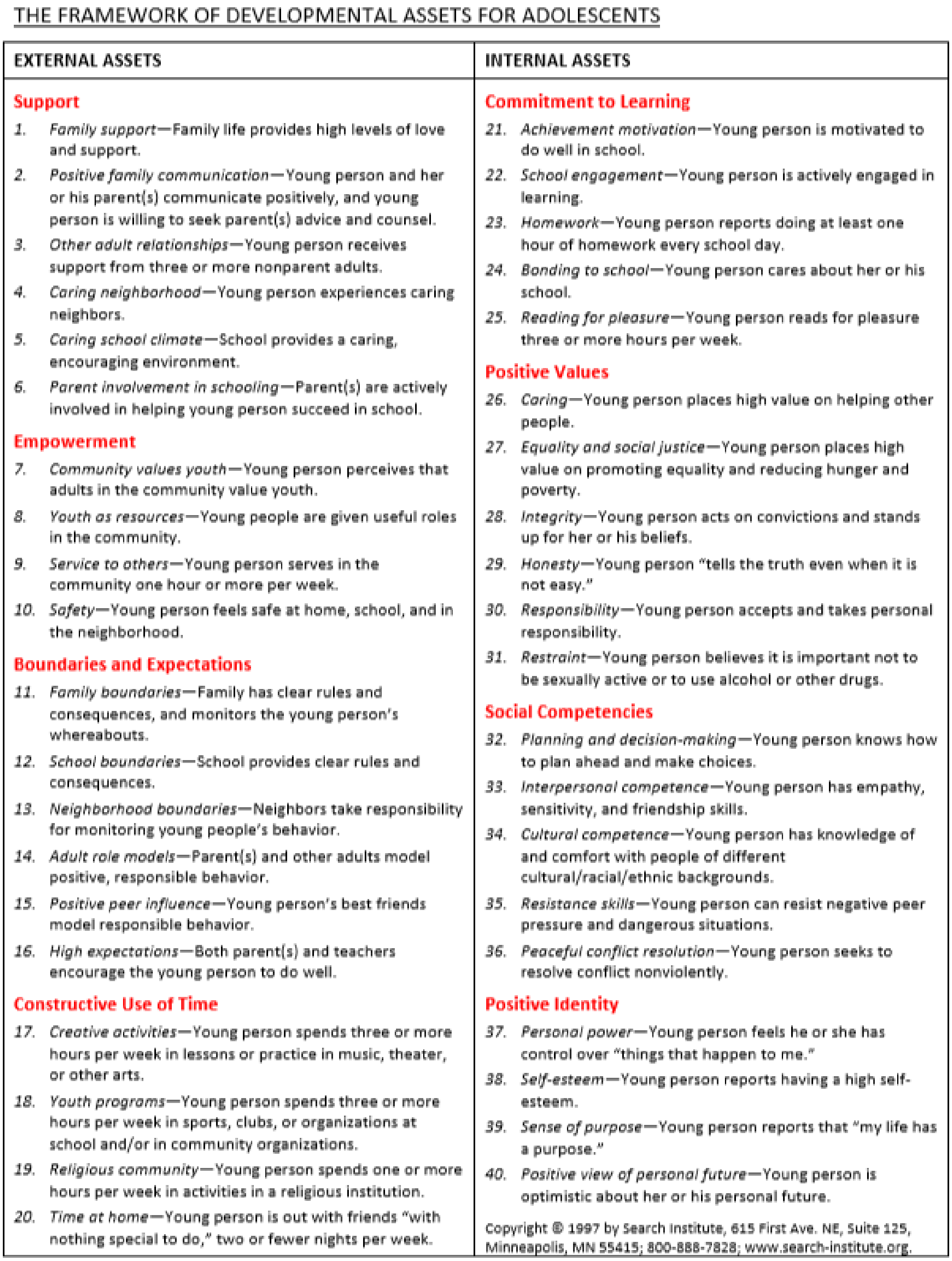


| ***Developmental Assets Profile*** **Items** | **Not at all or Rarely** | **Somewhat or Sometimes** | **Very or Often** | **Extremely or Almost Always** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I tell other people what I believe in. | 3% | 22% | 36% | 39% |
| 2. I feel in control of my life and future. | 9% | 14% | 23% | 53% |
| 3. I feel good about myself. | 6% | 11% | 17% | 66% |
| 4. I say no to things that are dangerous or unhealthy. | 16% | 27% | 16% | 41% |
| 5. I enjoy reading or being read to. | 20% | 25% | 25% | 30% |
| 6. I build friendships with other people. | 3% | 25% | 20% | 52% |
| 7. I care about school. | 9% | 20% | 27% | 44% |
| 8. I do my homework. | 11% | 13% | 29% | 48% |
| 9. I say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. | 15% | 5% | 3% | 77% |
| 10. I enjoy learning. | 11% | 25% | 34% | 30% |
| 11. I express my feelings in proper ways. | 25% | 22% | 29% | 24% |
| 12. I feel good about my future. | 5% | 8% | 17% | 70% |
| 13. I ask my parents for advice. | 13% | 20% | 28% | 39% |
| 14. I deal with disappointment without getting too upset. | 13% | 39% | 27% | 21% |
| 15. I find good ways to deal with things that are hard in my life. | 13% | 29% | 24% | 35% |
| 16. I think it is important to help other people. | 2% | 13% | 41% | 44% |
| 17. I feel safe at home. | 0% | 13% | 11% | 77% |
| 18. I plan ahead and make good choices. | 6% | 16% | 33% | 44% |
| 19. I stay away from bad influences. | 38% | 13% | 28% | 22% |

| *Developmental Assets Profile* Items | Not at all or Rarely | Somewhat or Sometimes | Very or Often | Extremely or Almost Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20. I resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt. | 10% | 33% | 24% | 33% |
| 21. I feel valued and appreciated by others. | 11% | 21% | 30% | 38% |
| 22. I take responsibility for what I do. | 10% | 13% | 32% | 45% |
| 23. I tell the truth even when it is not easy. | 13% | 32% | 21% | 35% |
| 24. I accept people who are different from me. | 6% | 8% | 25% | 60% |
| 25. I feel safe at school. | 19% | 27% | 15% | 39% |
| 26. I am trying to learn new things. | 8% | 23% | 23% | 45% |
| 27. I am thinking about what my purpose is in life. | 5% | 23% | 33% | 39% |
| 28. I am encouraged to try things that might be good for me. | 11% | 11% | 27% | 52% |
| 29. I am included in familiy tasks and decisions. | 9% | 20% | 27% | 44% |
| 30. I am helping to make my school, neighborhood, or city a better place. | 9% | 28% | 22% | 41% |
| 31. I am involved in a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious group. | 32% | 18% | 23% | 27% |
| 32. I am developing good health habits. | 6% | 22% | 27% | 45% |
| 33. I am encouraged to help others. | 6% | 19% | 25% | 50% |
| 34. I am involved in a sport, club, or other group. | 14% | 19% | 17% | 49% |
| 35. I am trying to help solve world problems like hunger or disease. | 13% | 34% | 27% | 27% |
| 36. I am given useful roles and responsibilities. | 3% | 38% | 29% | 30% |
| 37. I am developing respect for other people. | 5% | 24% | 29% | 43% |
| 38. I am eager to do well in school and other activities. | 5% | 22% | 27% | 47% |
| 39. I am sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. | 13% | 34% | 23% | 30% |
| 40. I am involved in creative things such as music, theater, or art. | 21% | 30% | 22% | 27% |

| *Developmental Assets Profile* Items | Not at all or Rarely | Somewhat or Sometimes | Very or Often | Extremely or Almost Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 41. I am serving others in my community. | 16% | 36% | 23% | 25% |
| 42. I am spending quality time at home with my parent(s) when we do things together. | 9% | 20% | 17% | 53% |
| 43. I have friends who set good examples for me. | 17% | 20% | 38% | 25% |
| 44. I have a school that gives students clear rules. | 19% | 23% | 19% | 39% |
| 45. I have adults who are good role models for me. | 13% | 25% | 20% | 42% |
| 46. I have a safe neighborhood. | 29% | 24% | 21% | 27% |
| 47. I have parent(s) who try to help me succeed. | 3% | 13% | 11% | 73% |
| 48. I have good neighbors who care about me. | 22% | 22% | 25% | 31% |
| 49. I have a school that cares about kids and encourages them. | 9% | 30% | 25% | 36% |
| 50. I have teachers who urge me to develop and achieve. | 15% | 15% | 19% | 52% |
| 51. I have support from adults other than my parent(s). | 8% | 23% | 25% | 44% |
| 52. I have a family that provides me with clear rules. | 3% | 19% | 21% | 56% |
| 53. I have parent(s) who urge me to do well in school. | 3% | 19% | 21% | 57% |
| 54. I have a family that gives me love and support. | 3% | 11% | 11% | 75% |
| 55. I have neighbors who help watch out for me. | 16% | 25% | 21% | 38% |
| 56. I have parent(s) who are good at talking with me about things. | 8% | 13% | 22% | 57% |
| 57. I have a school that enforces rules fairly. | 13% | 22% | 33% | 32% |
| 58. I have a family that knows where I am and what I am doing. | 5% | 16% | 14% | 66% |

# APPENDIX E: DEVELOPMENTAL ASSET FRAMEWORK



THE FRAMEWORK OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS FOR ADOLESCENTS

**EXTERNAL ASSETS**

**Support**

1. *Family support*—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. *Positive family communication*—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel.
3. *Other adult relationships*—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. *Caring neighborhood*—Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. *Caring school climate*—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. *Parent involvement in schooling*—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

**Empowerment**

7. *Community values youth*—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. *Youth as resources*—Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. *Service to others*—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. *Safety*—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

**Boundaries and Expectations**

11. *Family boundaries*—Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. *School boundaries*—School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. *Neighborhood boundaries*—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. *Adult role models*—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. *Positive peer influence*—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. *High expectations*—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

**Constructive Use of Time**

17. *Creative activities*—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. *Youth programs*—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
19. *Religious community*—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. *Time at home*—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do," two or fewer nights per week.

**INTERNAL ASSETS**

**Commitment to Learning**

21. *Achievement motivation*—Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. *School engagement*—Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. *Homework*—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. *Bonding to school*—Young person cares about her or his school.
25. *Reading for pleasure*—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

**Positive Values**

26. *Caring*—Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. *Equality and social justice*—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. *Integrity*—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. *Honesty*—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. *Responsibility*—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. *Restraint*—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

**Social Competencies**

32. *Planning and decision-making*—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. *Interpersonal competence*—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. *Cultural competence*—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
35. *Resistance skills*—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. *Peaceful conflict resolution*—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

**Positive Identity**

37. *Personal power*—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
38. *Self-esteem*—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
39. *Sense of purpose*—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
40. *Positive view of personal future*—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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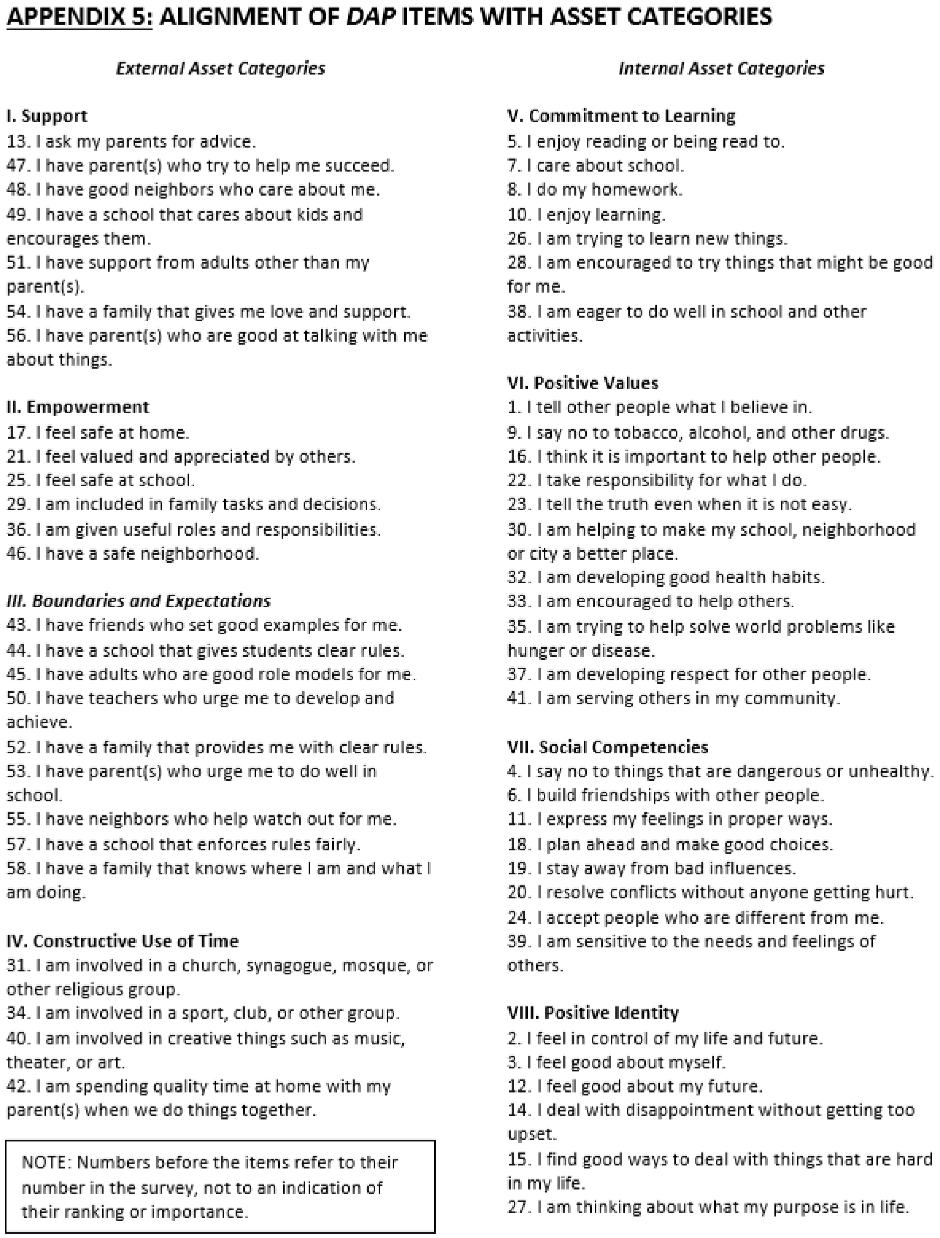
# APPENDIX F: ALIGNMENT OF DAP ITEMS WITH ASSET CATEGORIES



## APPENDIX 5: ALIGNMENT OF *DAP* ITEMS WITH ASSET CATEGORIES

*External Asset Categories*

**I. Support**
13. I ask my parents for advice.
47. I have parent(s) who try to help me succeed.
48. I have good neighbors who care about me.
49. I have a school that cares about kids and encourages them.
51. I have support from adults other than my parent(s).
54. I have a family that gives me love and support.
56. I have parent(s) who are good at talking with me about things.

**II. Empowerment**
17. I feel safe at home.
21. I feel valued and appreciated by others.
25. I feel safe at school.
29. I am included in family tasks and decisions.
36. I am given useful roles and responsibilities.
46. I have a safe neighborhood.

***III. Boundaries and Expectations***
43. I have friends who set good examples for me.
44. I have a school that gives students clear rules.
45. I have adults who are good role models for me.
50. I have teachers who urge me to develop and achieve.
52. I have a family that provides me with clear rules.
53. I have parent(s) who urge me to do well in school.
55. I have neighbors who help watch out for me.
57. I have a school that enforces rules fairly.
58. I have a family that knows where I am and what I am doing.

**IV. Constructive Use of Time**
31. I am involved in a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious group.
34. I am involved in a sport, club, or other group.
40. I am involved in creative things such as music, theater, or art.
42. I am spending quality time at home with my parent(s) when we do things together.

NOTE: Numbers before the items refer to their number in the survey, not to an indication of their ranking or importance.

*Internal Asset Categories*

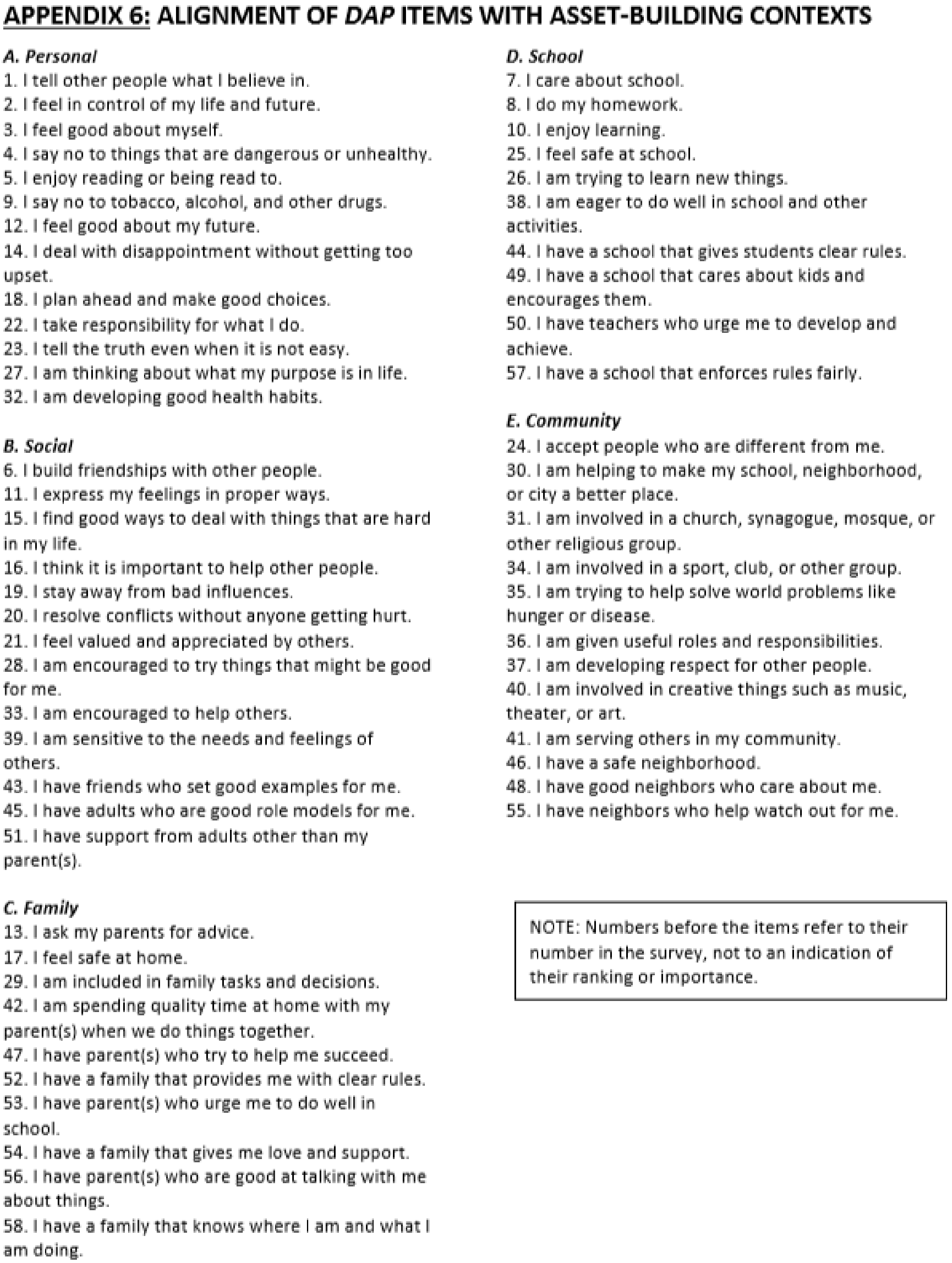
**V. Commitment to Learning**
5. I enjoy reading or being read to.
7. I care about school.
8. I do my homework.
10. I enjoy learning.
26. I am trying to learn new things.
28. I am encouraged to try things that might be good for me.
38. I am eager to do well in school and other activities.

**VI. Positive Values**
1. I tell other people what I believe in.
9. I say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
16. I think it is important to help other people.
22. I take responsibility for what I do.
23. I tell the truth even when it is not easy.
30. I am helping to make my school, neighborhood or city a better place.
32. I am developing good health habits.
33. I am encouraged to help others.
35. I am trying to help solve world problems like hunger or disease.
37. I am developing respect for other people.
41. I am serving others in my community.

**VII. Social Competencies**
4. I say no to things that are dangerous or unhealthy.
6. I build friendships with other people.
11. I express my feelings in proper ways.
18. I plan ahead and make good choices.
19. I stay away from bad influences.
20. I resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt.
24. I accept people who are different from me.
39. I am sensitive to the needs and feelings of others.

**VIII. Positive Identity**
2. I feel in control of my life and future.
3. I feel good about myself.
12. I feel good about my future.
14. I deal with disappointment without getting too upset.
15. I find good ways to deal with things that are hard in my life.
27. I am thinking about what my purpose is in life.

# APPENDIX G: ALIGNMENT OF DAP ITEMS WITH ASSET BUILDING CONTEXT



## APPENDIX 6: ALIGNMENT OF *DAP* ITEMS WITH ASSET-BUILDING CONTEXTS

***A. Personal***

1. I tell other people what I believe in.
2. I feel in control of my life and future.
3. I feel good about myself.
4. I say no to things that are dangerous or unhealthy.
5. I enjoy reading or being read to.
9. I say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
12. I feel good about my future.
14. I deal with disappointment without getting too upset.
18. I plan ahead and make good choices.
22. I take responsibility for what I do.
23. I tell the truth even when it is not easy.
27. I am thinking about what my purpose is in life.
32. I am developing good health habits.

***B. Social***

6. I build friendships with other people.
11. I express my feelings in proper ways.
15. I find good ways to deal with things that are hard in my life.
16. I think it is important to help other people.
19. I stay away from bad influences.
20. I resolve conflicts without anyone getting hurt.
21. I feel valued and appreciated by others.
28. I am encouraged to try things that might be good for me.
33. I am encouraged to help others.
39. I am sensitive to the needs and feelings of others.
43. I have friends who set good examples for me.
45. I have adults who are good role models for me.
51. I have support from adults other than my parent(s).

***C. Family***

13. I ask my parents for advice.
17. I feel safe at home.
29. I am included in family tasks and decisions.
42. I am spending quality time at home with my parent(s) when we do things together.
47. I have parent(s) who try to help me succeed.
52. I have a family that provides me with clear rules.
53. I have parent(s) who urge me to do well in school.
54. I have a family that gives me love and support.
56. I have parent(s) who are good at talking with me about things.
58. I have a family that knows where I am and what I am doing.

***D. School***

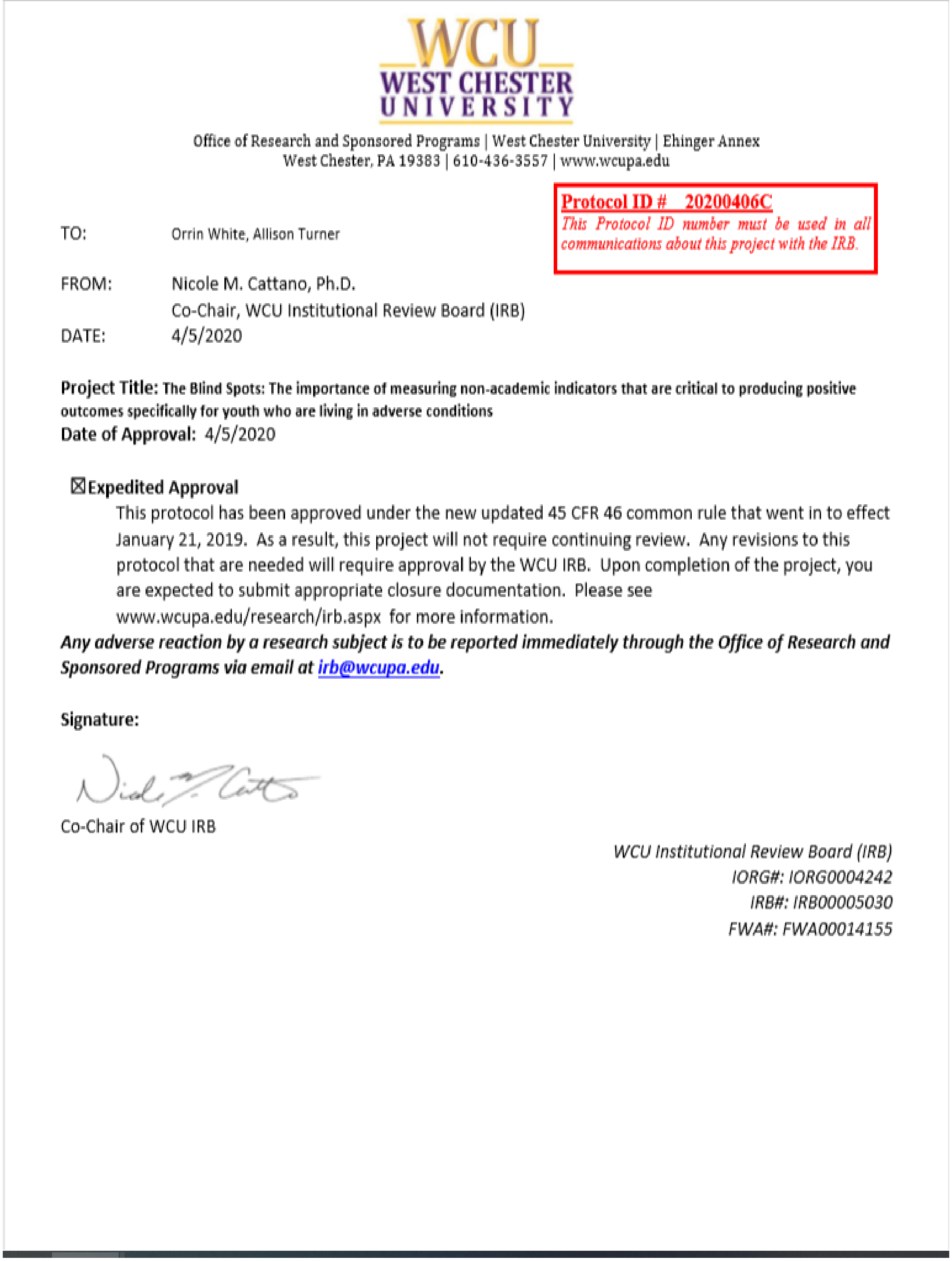
7. I care about school.
8. I do my homework.
10. I enjoy learning.
25. I feel safe at school.
26. I am trying to learn new things.
38. I am eager to do well in school and other activities.
44. I have a school that gives students clear rules.
49. I have a school that cares about kids and encourages them.
50. I have teachers who urge me to develop and achieve.
57. I have a school that enforces rules fairly.

***E. Community***

24. I accept people who are different from me.
30. I am helping to make my school, neighborhood, or city a better place.
31. I am involved in a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious group.
34. I am involved in a sport, club, or other group.
35. I am trying to help solve world problems like hunger or disease.
36. I am given useful roles and responsibilities.
37. I am developing respect for other people.
40. I am involved in creative things such as music, theater, or art.
41. I am serving others in my community.
46. I have a safe neighborhood.
48. I have good neighbors who care about me.
55. I have neighbors who help watch out for me.

NOTE: Numbers before the items refer to their number in the survey, not to an indication of their ranking or importance.

## APPENDIX H: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



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**Protocol ID # 20200406C**
*This Protocol ID number must be used in all communications about this project with the IRB.*

TO: Orrin White, Allison Turner

FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
DATE: 4/5/2020

**Project Title:** **The Blind Spots: The importance of measuring non-academic indicators that are critical to producing positive outcomes specifically for youth who are living in adverse conditions**
**Date of Approval:** 4/5/2020

☒ **Expedited Approval**

This protocol has been approved under the new updated 45 CFR 46 common rule that went in to effect January 21, 2019. As a result, this project will not require continuing review. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

***Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.***

**Signature:**

Co-Chair of WCU IRB

*WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)*
*IORG#: IORG0004242*
*IRB#: IRB00005030*
*FWA#: FWA00014155*