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Executive Summary

An essential part of the middle school development level is the opportunity to strengthen the characteristic of resilience and, hopefully, the ability to succeed and thrive in life, despite challenges, obstacles, and deficits that can lead to poor decision making during adolescence. Developmental psychology tells us “transition periods can function as turning points, providing opportunities for change from negative to more positive developmental pathways in subsequent developmental periods” (Search Institute, 2009) which is why the middle school years are such an influential period to focus on these types of developmental assets as well as academics.

This type of “education” is still fairly new and still has varying labels describing theses qualities such as developmental assets, positive youth development, character education, developmental nutrients or protective factors. They all refer to “those relationships, opportunities, values, and skills that, when present in the lives of youth, make young people less likely to become involved in risk behaviors and more likely to be successful in school, relationships, and life in general (Parkay, p. 395). For the purpose of this presentation, we decided, as a group, to teach these skills through the 40 Developmental Assets framework presented by the Search Institute.

W*hat are the Development Assets and where did they come from?*

The 40 Developmental Assets, developed by the researchers at the Search Institute in 1990, create a framework that “represents the relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to avoid risks and to thrive” (searchintsitute.org). They are divided into two categories of External, focusing on the qualities that need to be present in the environment and Internal, focusing on the personal qualities an individual should strive to obtain. For this presentation, we picked three subcategories to detail because we believe they are crucial for middle school success.

**Positive Values**

**Caring**-Young person places high value on helping other people.

**Equality and Social Justice**-Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

**Integrity**-Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

**Honesty**-Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."

**Responsibility**-Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

**Restraint**-Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

**Social Competencies**

**Planning and Decision Making**-Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

**Interpersonal Competence**-Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.

**Cultural Competence**-Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different

cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

**Resistance Skills**-Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

**Peaceful Conflict Resolution**-Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

**Positive Identity**

**Personal Power**-Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

**Self-Esteem**-Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

**Sense of Purpose**-Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

**Positive View of Personal Future**-Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

*What are the implications of the Developmental Assets in the classroom*?

In order to provide successful interactions that do impart these strengths, teachers need to:

* Transform the environments into a developmentally rich context in order to improve students’ abilities.
* Integrate service, leadership and engagement into all types of settings and engage students in all phases of planning and leadership with time for reflection on the experience.
* Provide a consistent example of good relationships and communication techniques while equipping them with the social skills needed to engage positively with others.
* Create programs that promote many of the developmental strengths and raise awareness among teachers, parents and other adults.
* Strive to achieve a balance between the short-term impact and the influence these skills will have as they grow older.
* Cross boundaries and look for multiple sources outside of the classroom that can help build these strengths.
* Develop strategies to that recognize the needs of all students in order to include as many students as possible, no single strategy will work for each student.

*What are the goals*?

The Search Institute lists these as the main objectives for building Developmental Assets:

* Promote bonding, social competence, emotional competence, cognitive competence, behavioral competence, and moral competence.
* Foster resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, prosocial norms.
* Provide recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for prosocial involvement.

For a full list of the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescence and additional research refer to search-institute.org.