

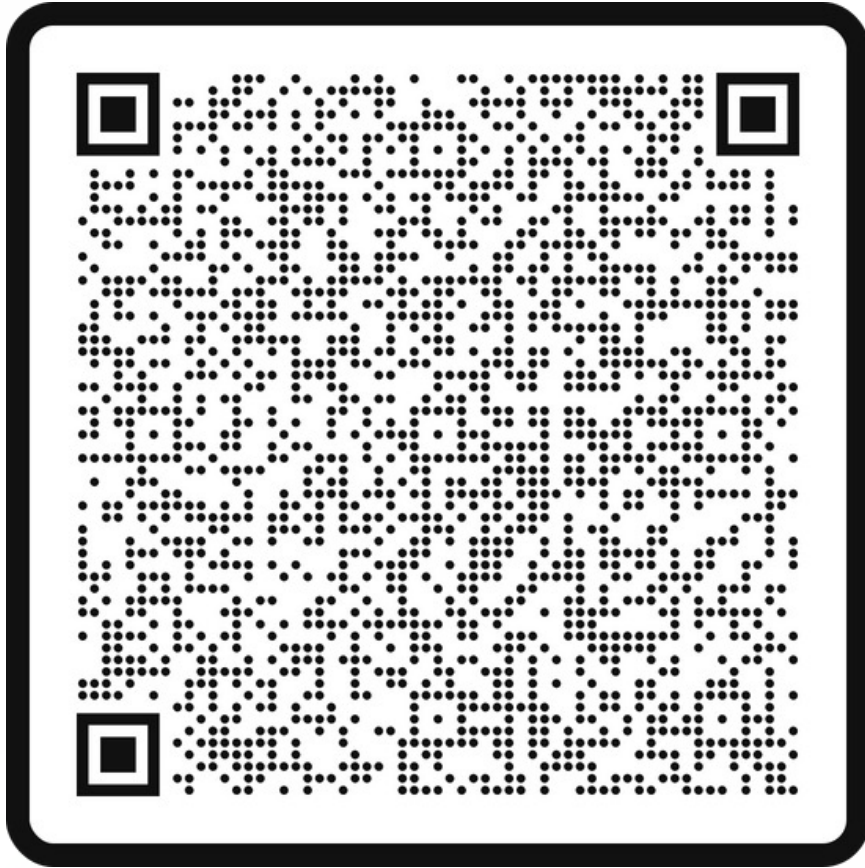


MOVING TO WHAT'S STRONG

Harnessing Strength-based
Practices for a Positive School
Climate

Presented by Dr. Byron McClure, NCSP
Founder

 @bmccclure6



LEARNER OBJECTIVES

We will begin to shift from what's wrong to what's strong.

01 Learn about the impact of deficit thinking in education spaces

02 Discuss ways to begin reframing deficit thinking

03 Review strength-based practices

04 Select one strategy to implement tomorrow

Student Profile

SAT Score	980
High School (HS) GPA	2.66
Math Proficiency	Below Basic
Great School Score of HS	3/10
Percentage of Students in AP	7%
School Graduation Rate	77%



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Do you think this student
is college ready?





Student Profile

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High School (HS) GPA	2.66
Math Proficiency	Below Basic
Great School Score of HS	3/10
Percentage of Students in AP	7%
School Graduation Rate	77%
Demographics	97% Students of Color

That kid was me!



My Strengths

Top Strengths	Maximizer
	Achiever
	Woo
	Relator
	Competition
CONNECTIONS – Clubs & Sports	Football, Wrestling, Baseball SGA, Peer Mediator
CONNECTIONS – Social Capital	Family, Friends, Church,

No BS -- Bad Stats





3 LESSONS MS. MOORE TAUGHT ME ABOUT LIFE

- Get at the root cause of the problem because what you see at the surface is just the beginning.



3 LESSONS MS. MOORE TAUGHT ME ABOUT LIFE

- Get at the root cause of the problem because what you see at the surface is just the beginning.
- Always look for what's strong and cultivate potential.



3 LESSONS MS. MOORE TAUGHT ME ABOUT LIFE

- Get at the root cause of the problem because what you see at the surface is just the beginning.
- Always look for what's strong and cultivate potential.
- One caring adult can make all the difference.



BEING STRENGTH-BASED PRODUCES LONG-TERM OUTCOMES



Dr. Byron McClure
@SchoolPsychLife

...

3/7

Every time I speak, I make sure to tell the story of Ms. Moore. She was more than an educator, she was an inspiration. Her spirit played a huge role in my decision to become an Alpha, as she was a proud AKA.



Dr. Byron McClure @SchoolPsychLife · Jun 9

...

4/7

Following my keynote, two gentlemen approached me. They told me they knew Ms. Moore and were close to her family in Virginia. It was a magical moment.



1

↻

2

170

↑

WHY A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH?

“We must be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst.”

–Dr. Christopher Peterson



STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

"A strength-based approach values the skills, knowledge, connections, and potential of individuals or communities. It does not mean ignoring challenges or spinning struggles into strengths. The emphasis is on a positive outlook and goals."

WE CAN SHIFT FROM WHAT'S WRONG TO WHAT'S STRONG!

● Students are more **CONFIDENT**

● Students learn how to
ADVOCATE for their needs

● Adults are more **EMPATHETIC**

● Schools demonstrate more
EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

**WHAT HAPPENS
WHEN WE'RE
STRENGTH-BASED?**

***SHIFTING
FROM WHAT'S
WRONG...***



WHAT IS DEFICIT THINKING?



DEFICIT THINKING:

"a *distorted* lens, focused on student *weaknesses*, that *blames* students and their families for student *difficulties* rather than acknowledging the impact of *our* practices and broader structural inequities."

NOW MORE THAN EVER, WE NEED A NEW APPROACH






What does *deficit thinking* sound like?

*Those students
don't belong here*

*Her parents
don't care about
education*

*It's because he
has a disability*

*They can't even
speak English*

Four purple thought bubbles of varying sizes are arranged on the left side of the slide. Each bubble contains a sentence in white, italicized font. Small purple circles of varying sizes trail from the bottom of each bubble, suggesting movement or thought. The bubbles are: 1. Top left: "I don't feel like I belong here". 2. Top right: "I don't feel connected to staff or peers". 3. Bottom left: "I feel like no one cares about me". 4. Bottom right: "I feel like there is no point to even try".

*I don't feel like
I belong here*

*I don't feel
connected to
staff or peers*

*I feel like no
one cares
about me*

*I feel like there
is no point to
even try*

**What does
*deficit
thinking*
feel like for
students?**

The Hidden Harm of Students Internalizing Deficit Thinking

Poor self-worth

Low self-esteem

Imposter syndrome

Overall performance

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE NOT BEING MET

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary &
Trends Report: 2011-2021



YOUTH UNMET NEEDS



MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDALITY

60%

Female Students

Experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness

42%

HS Students

Felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for at least two weeks in a row that they stopped doing their usual activities



70%

LGBTQ+ Students

Experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness

20%

LGBTQ+ Students

Attempted Suicide

SEVERITY OF FINDINGS

22%

HS Students

Seriously considered
attempting suicide
during the past year



45%

LGBTQ+ Students

Seriously considered
suicide in the past year

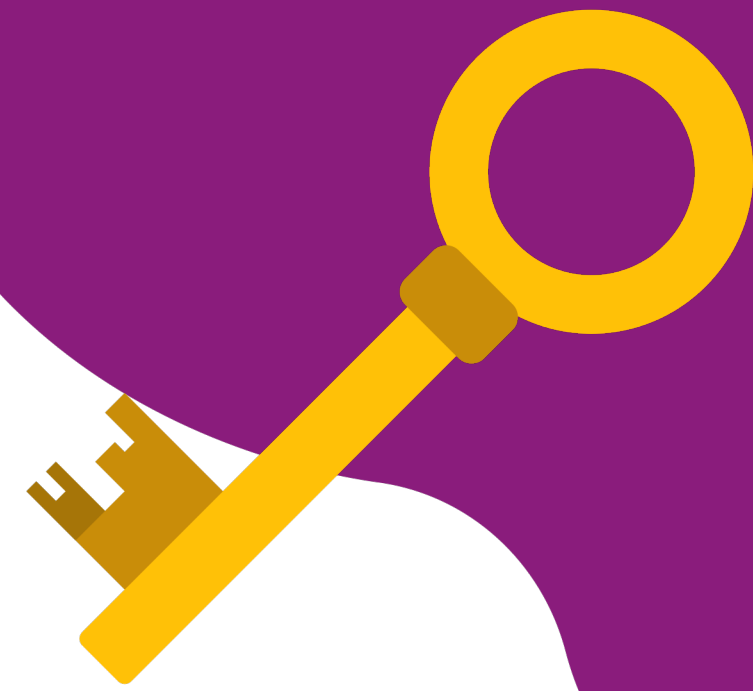
BLACK STUDENTS

- More likely than Asian, Hispanic, and White students to attempt suicide.
- Black students who attempted suicide had the highest increase from 2011 to 2021 (8% to 14%)
 - Followed by white students which increased from 6% to 9%.
- Asian students who attempted suicide decreased from 11% in 2011 to 6% in 2021

KEY FINDINGS

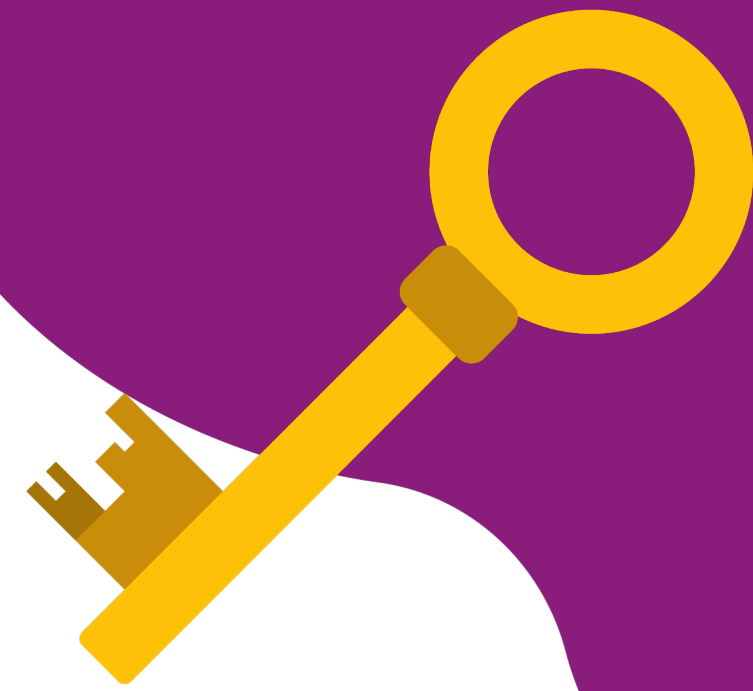
- Poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors are increasing for nearly all groups of youth.

KEY FINDINGS



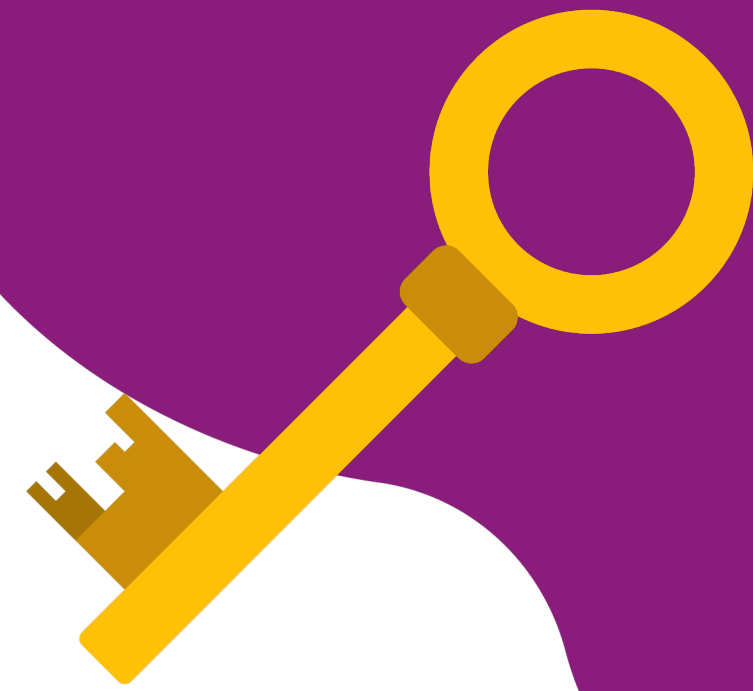
- Poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors are increasing for nearly all youth groups.
- Female students and LGBTQ+ students are experiencing alarming rates of violence, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS



- Poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors are increasing for nearly all youth groups.
- Female students and LGBTQ+ students are experiencing alarming rates of violence, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- The rates of experiencing bullying, sexual violence, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors indicate a need for urgent intervention.

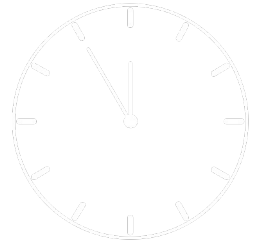
KEY FINDINGS



- Poor mental health and suicidal thoughts and behaviors are increasing for nearly all youth groups.
- Female students and LGBTQ+ students are experiencing alarming rates of violence, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- The rates of experiencing bullying, sexual violence, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors indicate a need for urgent intervention.
- Overall, young people are experiencing a level of trauma and distress that requires action!

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH STRENGTH- BASED PRACTICES





REFLECTION QUESTION




**Can you name your top 5
strengths?**

MY TOP 5 STRENGTHS (UPDATED)

- **FUTURISTIC**
- **ACHIEVER**
- **COMPETITION**
- **STRATEGIC**
- **ACTIVATOR**





**“ACROSS THE BOARD,
HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY
TO **DEVELOP** OUR STRENGTHS
IS MORE IMPORTANT TO OUR
SUCCESS THAN OUR ROLE,
OUR TITLE, OR EVEN OUR
PAY.”**

~ TOM RATH



**YOU MUST MAKE IT A
PRACTICE TO NAME,
KNOW, AND USE
YOUR STRENGTHS**

IDENTIFY DEFICIT THINKING IN ACTION

BY CHANGING
YOUR LENS



PICK A SCENARIO

Elementary



Middle



High



At your seat, identify the instance of deficit thinking. Then, discuss how these instances of deficit thinking could impact the student's self-esteem, motivation, and performance. Finally, determine what kind of support or resources could be provided to the student.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIO SHARE

Maya's Story

In a second-grade classroom, a teacher frequently becomes frustrated with Maya, who struggles with reading. The teacher often comments, "Maya, we've gone over this many times. Why can't you get it?" Over time, Maya becomes reluctant to participate in reading activities, fearing being called out or embarrassed. She begins to believe that she's not good at reading and starts to avoid books, even outside of school.



@bmccclure6

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCENARIO SHARE

Luke's Story

Luke is a seventh-grader who is passionate about art but struggles with math. He often hears comments from his math teacher like, "If you spent as much time on math as you do on your doodles, maybe you'd pass my class." Luke starts to believe he just isn't a "math person" and even begins to question his art skills, thinking they're not valuable because they aren't academic.



@bmccclure6

HIGH SCHOOL SCENARIO SHARE

Maria's Story

Maria is a high school junior from a low-income immigrant family. She's hardworking and ambitious, but she struggles with English literature due to English being her second language. Despite her efforts, her teacher often tells her, "Maybe you should focus on something less challenging." This causes Maria to question her potential and future college prospects, making her feel like she doesn't belong in an academic setting.



@bmccclun

CHALLENGE DEFICIT- THINKING IN ACTION



WHAT IF...

My coworker says something deficit-based about a student?

What makes you think that?

That is out of our control.
What is in our control?

Have you asked the student about this?

What changes can we make at the school level?

Have you asked the parents about this?

Blaming the student isn't going to solve the problem.

I've found that when I seek out reasons beyond blame for student challenges, I feel better about my work.

Start here

STRENGTH- BASED INTERVIEWS

ALWAYS BEGIN BY
ESTABLISHING
RAPPORT



STRENGTH-BASED INTERVIEW

PROTOCOL

What is working well for you in school?

What could be going better?

*Who is important in your life? Why?

What is one thing you need help with?

What does a good day look like for you?

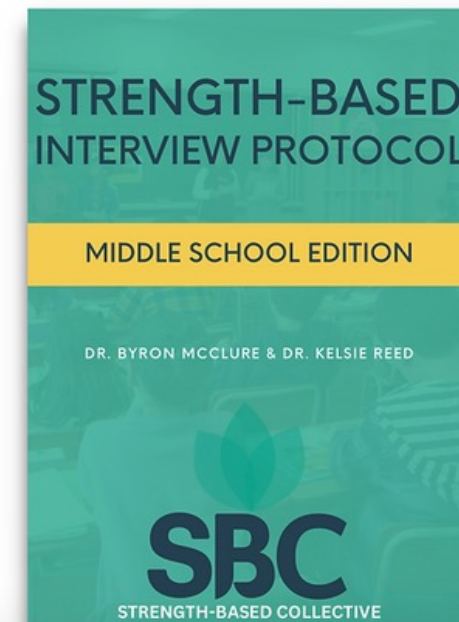
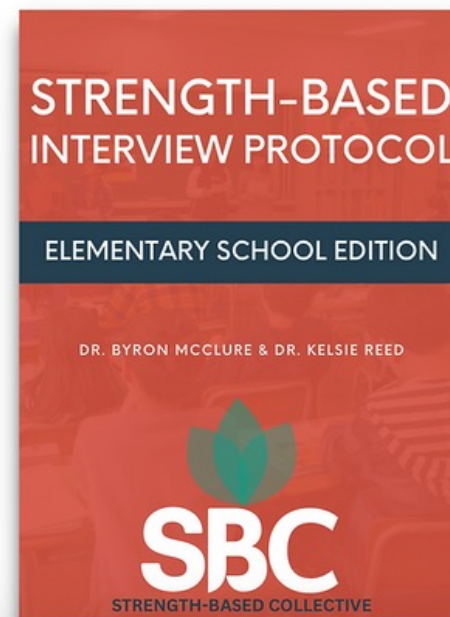
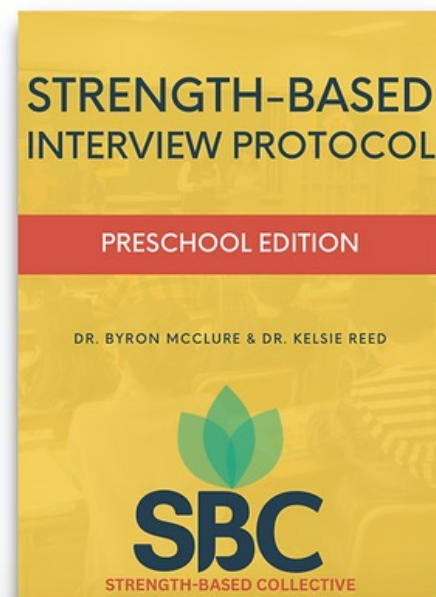
What makes it a good day?

What small things could you do to help things go better?

What do like to do and why?

What comes easily to you?

STRENGTH-BASED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS



SCAN ME

STRENGTH- BASED ASSESSMENT



STRENGTH-BASED ASSESSMENT

● IDENTIFY student strengths

- ASK THEM!
- Offer your perception: "I noticed you were really good at _____!"
- Administer a formal assessment: VIA, CliftonStrengths Finder

● TALK about strengths in the classroom

● HELP students name, know, and use their strengths

- "I'm good at _____"
- "I learn best when _____"
- "When something is hard for me, I can _____"

LET'S TALK ABOUT NONTRADITIONAL STRENGTHS!



- Personal strengths
- Communication strengths
- Social strengths
- Emotional strengths
- Cognitive strengths
- Physical strengths
- Musical strengths
- Logical strengths
- Cultural strengths
- Spiritual strengths
- Creative strengths
- High-tech strengths

4 WAYS YOU CAN USE SB ASSESSMENTS

DIRECT SERVICE
(I.E., INDIVIDUAL
COUNSELING OR
WEEKLY CHECK-IN)

SMALL GROUPS
(SOCIAL SKILLS,
SEL GROUPS,
ETC.)

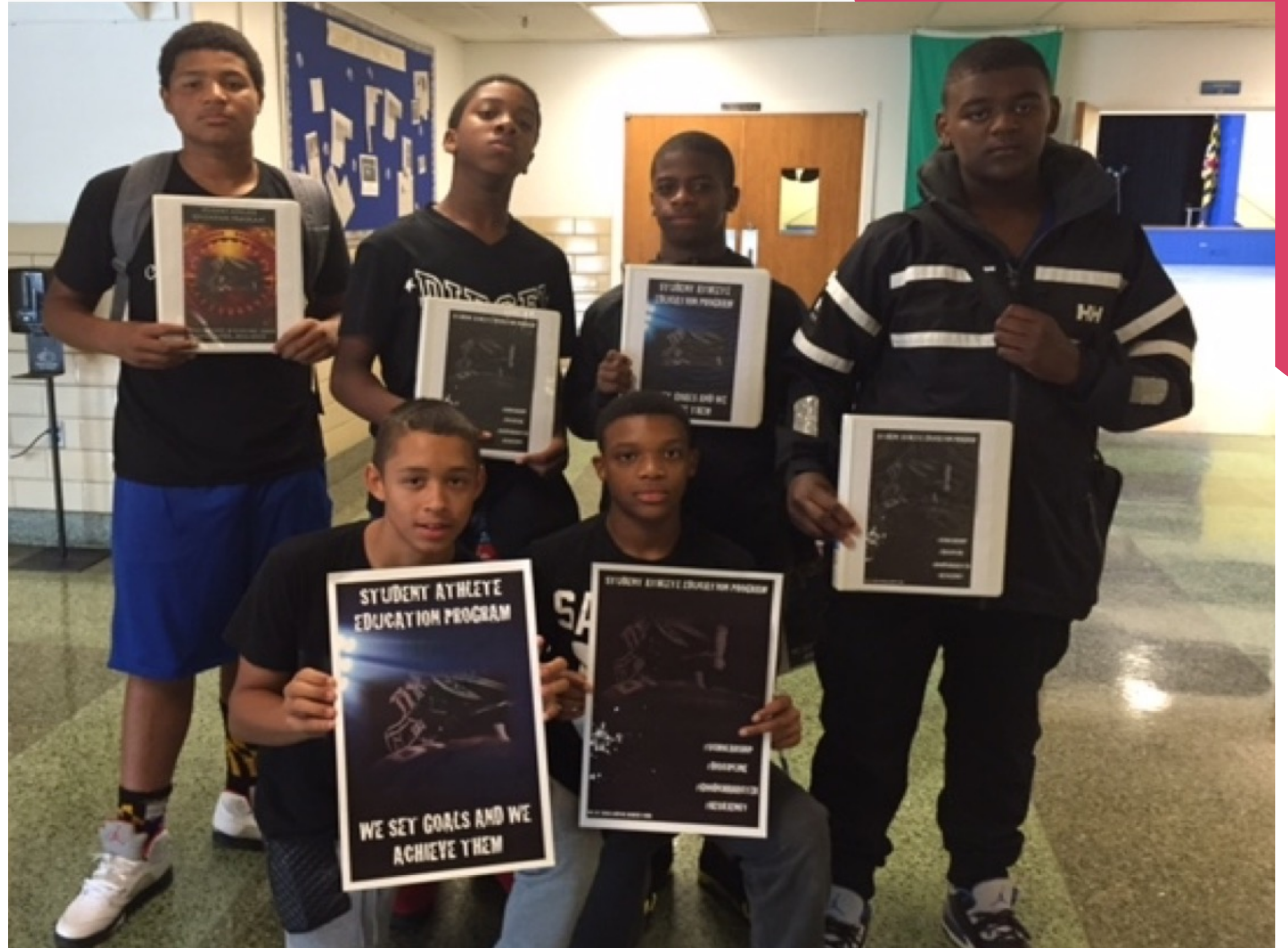
EVALUATION
PROCESS -
ACROSS TIERS

CAREER
EXPLORATION

*BONUS - MENTORING PROGRAMS

...

IN ACTION
IN ACTION
IN ACTION
IN ACTION
IN ACTION



VALUES IN ACTION SURVEY (VIA) OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS (FREE!!)



MEASURES 24 CHARACTER STRENGTHS

When children know their personal strengths, they are more confident, resilient, and better prepared to handle life challenges.

WELL RESEARCHED AND VALIDATED

Internal consistency reliability is .82 on average, and its mean correlation with life satisfaction across two samples is .35.


RECENT UPDATES

- [Ages 8-12 - 98 items](#)
- [Ages 13-17 - 98 items](#)
- [Via Youth \(8-17\) - 198](#)

REGISTER
STUDENT

uestionnaires/strength-survey-children

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Authentic Happiness

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Home / Questionnaires / VIA Strength Survey for Children

VIA Strength Survey for Children

Select your Child

- Select - ▾

SUBMIT

OR

Register a Child

Screen Name *

»

Date of Birth: *

-Day ▾-Month ▾-Year ▾

Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female


SUBMIT

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ALLOW
TIME TO
COMPLETE
(10 MIN)

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Home / Questionnaires / VIA Strength Survey for Children

VIA Strength Survey for Children



Below is a list of statements describing people who are 8 to 17 years old. Please read each one, and then decide **how much it is like you** and mark the correct radio button. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as you possibly can.

We will rank your strengths and compare them to others' strengths when you have answered all of the 198 questions.

All questions must be completed for this questionnaire to be scored.

1. I love art, music, dance, or theater.

☐ Very Much Like Me

☐ Mostly Like Me

☐ Somewhat Like Me

☐ A Little Like Me

☐ Not Like Me At All

2. I stick up for other kids who are being treated unfairly.

☐ Very Much Like Me

☐ Mostly Like Me

☐ Somewhat Like Me


☐ A Little Like Me

☐ Not Like Me At All

REVIEW TOP 5 STRENGTHS

[Home](#) / [Questionnaire Scores](#)

VIA Strength Survey for Children

Here are your scores on the Children's Strengths Questionnaire. For how to interpret your scores, see the [book Authentic Happiness](#) .

Your Top Strength

Hope and Optimism

You expect the best in the future, and you work to achieve it. You believe that the future is something that you can control.

Your Second Strength

Love of Learning

You love learning new things, whether in a class or on your own. You have always loved school, or reading, or museums-
-anywhere there is an opportunity to learn.

Strength #3

Humor and Playfulness

You like to laugh and tease. You enjoy bringing smiles to other people no matter what the situation. You are able to see the light side of it. You are good at making jokes.

Strength #4

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

You notice and appreciate beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

Strength #5

Fairness and Justice

You treat all people fairly and equally and do not let personal feelings bias your decisions about others. You give everyone a chance.

[Show More](#) Thank you for your kind contribution to this research.



Enrollment is now open for the online specialization certificate taught by Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania.



STRENGTH SUMMARY

Sean's top strength is "hope and optimism."

A high score in strength and optimism means Sean expects the best in his future and will work to achieve it. Sean might also believe that his future is something that he can control. Sean showed a strong love of learning, both inside and outside of class. Sean likes to laugh and bring smiles to other people no matter the situation. He is great and making jokes and able to see the lighter side of things. He is skilled in appreciating excellence. Finally, Sean scored highly in the area of fairness and justice. High scores in the area of fairness and justice suggests Sean cares deeply about people being treated fairly and he might believe everyone deserves a chance.

STRENGTH-BASED REPORT WRITING: A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE

Informal Strength-Based Assessment

The Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths Profile was completed with [REDACTED] to aid in the identification of her top five strengths. Character strengths are the core personality traits that define one's unique identity. Research shows that learning about your strengths and how to express them can make you happier, less stressed, more productive, and better connected to others. The results of [REDACTED]'s assessment revealed that her top five character strengths are:

1. Kindness: doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
2. Gratitude: being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
3. Hope: expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
4. Love of learning: mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
5. Teamwork: working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group

STRENGTH-BASED REPORT WRITING

■■■■ is a very bright and capable student with a plethora of strengths that will allow her to be **successful at school**. Her character strength profile indicates significant strengths in the areas of kindness, gratitude, and hope. In order to foster these strengths, ■■■■ may enjoy serving as a classroom helper or peer mentor. In addition, her gratitude and positive outlook on life may serve as excellent internal motivators for future academic success.

STRENGTH-BASED REPORT WRITING

██████ is a kind and helpful child who benefits from one-on-one academic support, positive connections with adults, and consistent structure and expectations. She is highly capable of demonstrating success at school when these supports are in place. ██████ has demonstrated a history of learning challenges in the general education environment paired with attendance difficulties and behavioral challenges that also lead to missed instruction. ██████'s behavior challenges appear to be triggered by her gaps in academic knowledge and are most profound when she is expected to complete academic work that is beyond her current level of skill acquisition. Her behavior is also likely triggered by inconsistent expectations and lack of structure.

**WHAT BARRIERS ARE
STOPPING YOU FROM
BEING STRENGTH-BASED?**



A SYSTEMIC LOOK AT SHIFTING TO STRENGTH- BASED PRACTICES

WHY REDESIGN?

ANACOSTIA High School

Principal: William Haith

Grade Levels Served: 9-12

Students Served: 296

Special Education Population: 35%

* **At Risk:** 83%

Economically Disadvantaged: 100%

In Boundary: 71%



ENROLLMENT
BY RACE/ETHNICITY

American Indian/Alaskan	0%
Asian	0%
Black/African- American	98%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic/Latino, any race	1%
Two or more races	0%
White	0%

BALLOU High School

Principal: Willie Jackson

Grade Levels Served: 9-12

Students Served: 650

Special Education Population: 26%

* **At Risk:** 81%

Economically Disadvantaged: 100%

In Boundary: 73%



ENROLLMENT
BY RACE/ETHNICITY

American Indian/Alaskan	0%
Asian	0%
Black/African- American	98%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic/Latino, any race	2%
Two or more races	0%
White	0%

* Non-adult students who receive free and reduced lunch, are homeless or in the foster system, or are more than a year or more behind in high school.



Number of STUDENTS ENROLLED



SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

% of students scoring proficient or advanced on PARCC



ANACOSTIA

DCPS AVERAGE

What is Redesign?

REDESIGN IS A
SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION
STRATEGY THAT:



Imagines new school models
worthy of all students' potential
and ambition



Is responsive to our
changing world



Is grounded in equity and centers
unique school communities' needs,
interests, and assets



Provides a strategic runway for
engagement, design, and planning

WHAT IS REDESIGN

EMPATHY INTERVIEWS



WHAT WE HEARD

Analyze - trends and data

1

**Students didn't
feel wanted or
cared for**

2

**Poor sense of
belonging**

3

**Our students
wanted to feel
more connected at
school**



“**How might we create an environment where students feel loved, cared for, and connected to the school community?**”

How might we question



RESPOND

Failing to be strength-based is no longer an option!

SCHOOL-WIDE STRENGTH- BASED PRACTICE





VALUES

Values are fundamental beliefs that guide actions and decisions.



Examples of Common Values

- Respect
- Fairness
- Trust
- Inclusivity
- Accountability
- Active Listening
- Honesty

Think about a value that is important to you (in the context of school). Share why the value you chose is important to you.

NORMS

Norms are expected behaviors and practices within a community.

Examples of Norms

- Active listening.
- Open and honest communication.
- Taking responsibility for one's actions.
- The use of "I statements"

Think about a norm that is important to you (in the context of school). Share why the norm you chose is important to you.

Value and Norm Examples

VALUES

Our school defines respect as...

Treating others with kindness, empathy, and consideration, valuing their unique perspectives and contributions to our community.

NORMS

If the school value is respect...

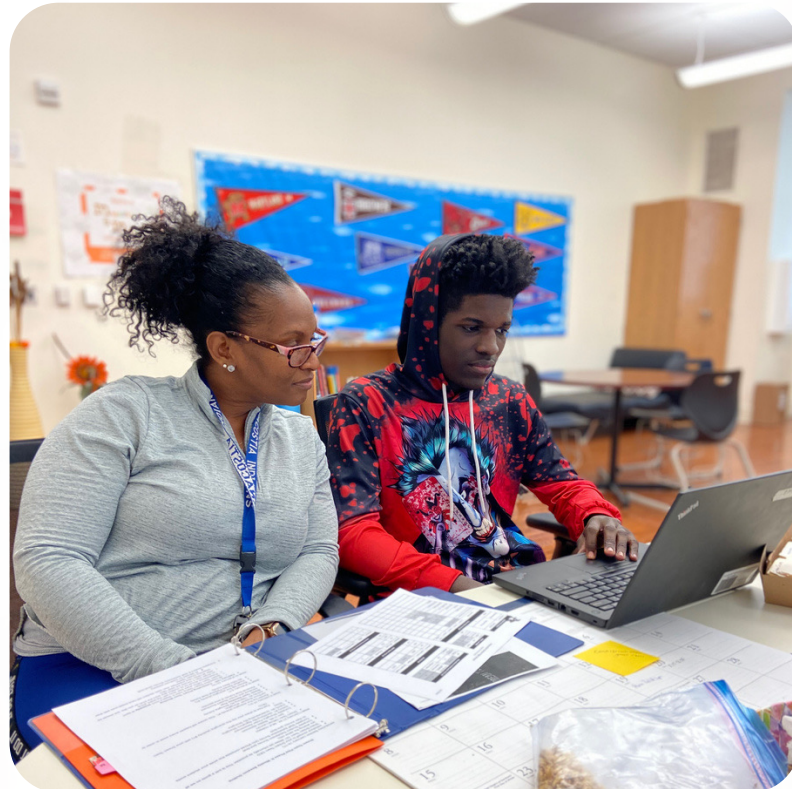
Then the norm for respect a school team might have is "during meetings we will be open and receptive to others' perspectives and ideas" or "to be punctual and prepared for meetings and other commitments."

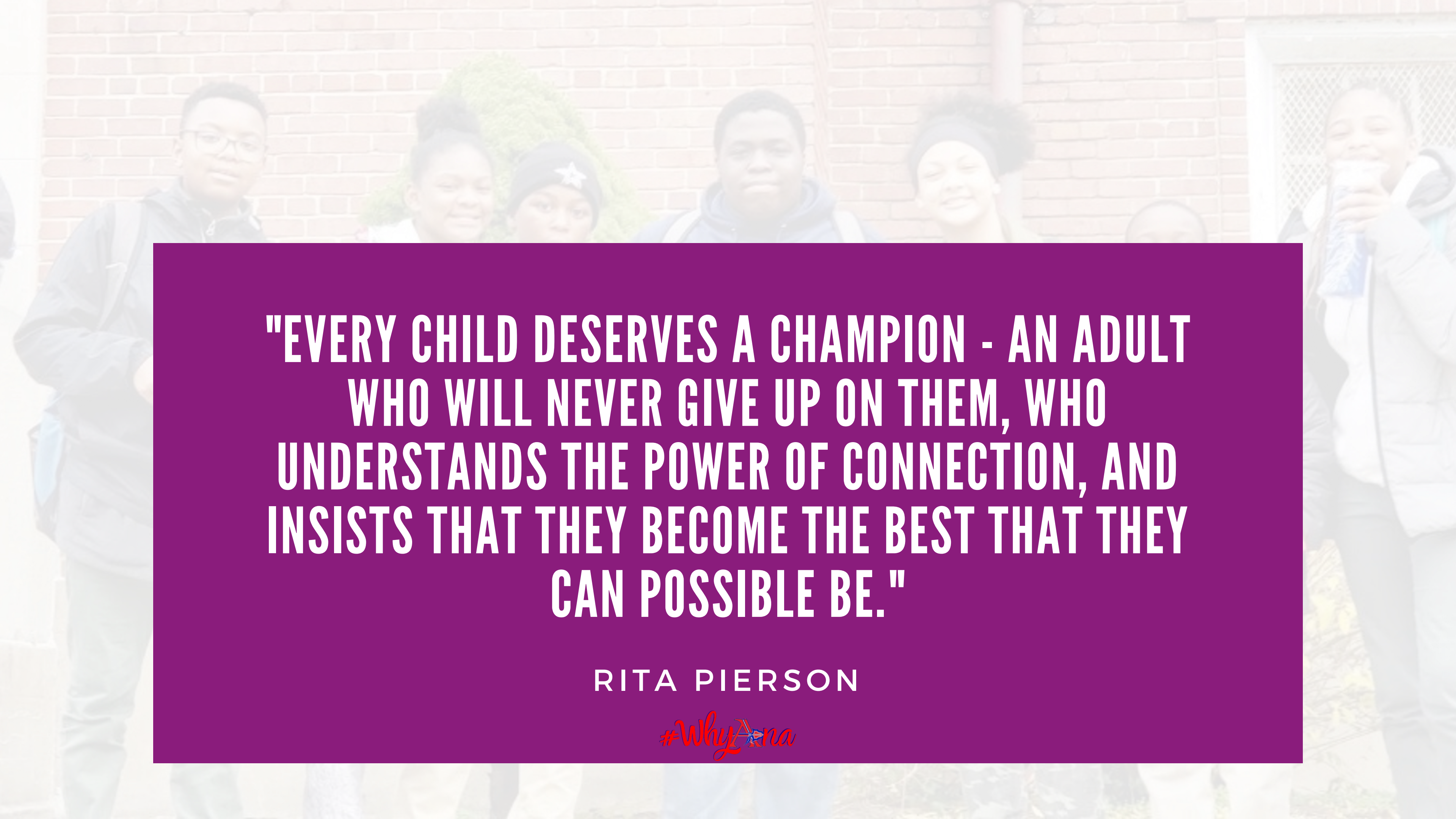
STRENGTH-BASED PRACTICES TO BUILD COMMUNITY



Our Dream

- EVERY STUDENT WOULD HAVE A DREAM TEAM OF CARING ADULTS
- EVERY CHILD WOULD FEEL CONNECTED AND LOVED
- WILL KNOW THEY BELONG AND HAVE JOY
- WILL KNOW THEIR STRENGTHS
- WILL SET GOALS AND ACHIEVE THEM
 - INCREASE PROMOTION RATE



A group of diverse young people, including Black and Hispanic youth, are standing in front of a brick wall. Some are smiling, while others have neutral expressions. A purple rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text. The background is slightly faded to make the text stand out.

**"EVERY CHILD DESERVES A CHAMPION - AN ADULT
WHO WILL NEVER GIVE UP ON THEM, WHO
UNDERSTANDS THE POWER OF CONNECTION, AND
INSISTS THAT THEY BECOME THE BEST THAT THEY
CAN POSSIBLE BE."**

RITA PIERSON

#WhyAma

DREAM TEAM 3 KEY ELEMENTS

1

STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

Shifting from what's wrong to what's strong

The Dream Team Model consists of 3 Key Elements to help students flourish.

2

GOAL-SETTING

Setting goals and achieving them

3

ONGOING COACHING, SUPPORT, AND MENTORSHIP VIA STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Belief that one caring adult makes all the difference



SUCCESS STORIES

The Dream Team Program That Increased the Promotion Rate to 10th Grade at D.C.’s Anacostia High



Dr. William Blake



Anacostia High School celebrates development of new greenhouse on campus

by 7News Staff
Monday, March 6th 2023



1. Increased sense of belonging

Our surveys showed that between Spring 2021 and Fall 2021, **student sense of belonging increased by 11%.**

When we disaggregated the data, we saw that—overwhelmingly—students who’d been in the initial ninth grade pilot program accounted for the change. So we attribute the increase in feeling loved and connected to the redesign program.

2. Increased rate of promotion to the next grade

Improved sense of belonging translated to academic improvements. **87% of students in the ninth grade were promoted to the 10th grade** – our highest promotion rate yet.

3. High rate of feeling loved

55% of our students feel loved, and 50% feel loved, challenged, and prepared. That 55% is the highest number for a comprehensive high school across the whole district, so we believe that we are doing the right work.

4. Doubled rate of survey completion

Over 80% of our student population filled out the survey—an increase over the 40 to 50% we’ve had in the past. We are thankful that they completed the survey, and even more thankful

***HIGHEST PROMOTION
RATE EVER!!***

FULL YEAR 2

87%

**OF 9TH GRADERS
PROMOTED TO 10TH
GRADE... OUR HIGHEST
PROMOTION RATE**

#WhyAna

THREE FINAL PRACTICES



1

**NAME YOUR STRENGTHS
AND WRITE THEM DOWN**



2

**KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS
AND INVEST IN THEM**



3

USE YOUR STRENGTHS





**INVEST IN YOURSELF, AND SEE
THE RETURNS COME POURING
IN. INVESTING IN YOURSELF IS
THE MOST IMPORTANT
INVESTMENT YOU WILL EVER
MAKE. IT'S THE SUREST PATH
TO LIVING A MEANINGFUL
LIFE.**

~ DR. BYRON MCCLURE



THANK YOU!



DR. BYRON MCCLURE