



# CATCH

Them Doing Something Right

*Jostens*<sup>®</sup>

Recognizing and emphasizing strengths in students isn't a naïve way to ignore problems, challenges and risks. Rather, it taps students' motivations and capacities to learn, grow and improve.

When educators view young people based primarily on their limitations, we treat them differently. That reinforces our preconceptions (sometimes stereotypes) about who they are and what they can do. Even when they have the best of intentions, research shows that when teachers hold deficit-focused views of students, they

- lower their expectations for these students;
- give fewer options for learning;
- spend less time with these students; and
- talk less with them.

Is it any wonder that students disengage or hold back, particularly when they really are struggling?

In contrast, noticing and tapping students' strengths and aspirations can bring out the best in students. One way it does this is by helping students themselves recognize and use those strengths for their own learning, growth and resilience. It also creates a positive connection between the teacher and student that encourages positive interaction and motivates the student to work harder for the teacher.

**In the end, recognizing and building on young people's strengths is more motivating and empowering than focusing on their challenges and deficits. While negative emotions can shut us down, positive emotions open us up, helping us see more options, solve problems and expand our worlds.**

Yes, many students do face real challenges and limitations. It's just as true, however, that these same students have real strengths. Our challenge and opportunity as educators is to notice and accentuate those strengths as resources, even when they're overshadowed by the challenges we first notice.

This month's Renaissance Kit gives you tools and ideas to **Catch Students Doing Something Right** as a powerful focus for helping students overcome the challenges they face. As its focus, we're offering Search Institute's widely recognized framework of Developmental Assets® as a tool for reflection, conversation, and learning about the strengths and resources in young people's lives.

—Kent Pekel, Ed.D.  
President and CEO, Search Institute

## The Importance of Positive Emotions

There is more to a focus on strengths than "feeling good." But feeling good (or, more technically, positive emotions) can make a real contribution to learning, growth and resilience. (The opposite is also true, of course: feeling bad, threatened or belittled makes it harder to learn.)

How does this work? A growing body of experimental research suggests that small but regular experiences of positive emotions enhance our personal resources, including:

- A sense of personal competence
- Self-acceptance
- A sense of optimism and purpose in life
- Positive relationships

These personal strengths are what our students can draw upon to navigate successfully through life.

## Strengths Students Need

Thousands of schools and other organizations have used Search Institute's framework of Developmental Assets to help them focus on identifying and building strengths in children and youth. The framework articulates specific strengths that matter for kids' development and thriving. The assets are organized into two broad categories:

- **External Assets** focus on positive relationships and opportunities young people need in their families, schools and communities.
- **Internal Assets** focus on the character strengths (beliefs, attitudes and skills) that young people need to develop within themselves to guide their choices.

External Assets	Internal Assets
Support	Commitment to Learning
Empowerment	Positive Values
Boundaries and Expectations	Social Competencies
Constructive Use of Time	Positive Identity

The framework captures a wide range of what kids need across all areas of their lives. No single organization or person builds all the assets. But knowing about these different potential strengths in many parts of students' lives helps educators notice and tap the strengths students experience in their families and communities, as well as the strengths they are developing within themselves.

## The Power of Developmental Assets

Based on Search Institute's surveys of almost 90,000 students in grades 6 to 12 in 2010, this chart shows that the more assets young people experience, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of risky behaviors and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors.

The numbers represent the percentage of students in each asset group who report this behavior:

	0-10 Assets	11-20 Assets	21-30 Assets	31-40 Assets
<p><b>Violence</b> Has engaged in three or more acts of fighting, hitting, injuring a person, carrying or using a weapon, or threatening physical harm in the past year.</p>	60%	34%	15%	4%
<p><b>School Problems</b> Has skipped school two or more days in the past month and/or has below a C average.</p>	41%	19%	7%	3%
<p><b>Good Health</b> Reports paying attention to healthy nutrition and exercise.</p>	29%	51%	73%	91%
<p><b>Leadership</b> Percentage of youth reporting they have been a leader of a group or organization in the past 12 months.</p>	45%	63%	77%	86%

**Assets have power for all young people, regardless of their gender, economic status, family or race/ethnicity. Levels of assets are better predictors of high-risk involvement and thriving than poverty or being from a single-parent family.**

## Developmental Assets and School Success

Experiences of Developmental Assets aren't just good for life in general. They also provide a foundation for school success.

- Higher levels of Developmental Assets are linked to better school grades, achievement motivation and academic self-confidence.
- Increases in assets over time have been linked to significantly better school grades.
- Students with low levels of assets in middle school earn, on average, a GPA of "C" three years later in high school. Students with high levels of assets in middle school earn an average GPA of "B+" three years later in high school (Scales et al., 2006).
- Students who have adequate levels of assets in middle school are two to three times more likely than other students to have "B+" or higher GPAs three years later in high school (Scales et al., 2006).

Consider surveying your student body to discover their experiences of Developmental Assets. For information on available survey options, visit [search-institute.org/surveys](http://search-institute.org/surveys).

## External Assets



### Support

Young people need to feel surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate and accept them.

- Family support
- Positive family communication
- Other adult relationships
- Caring neighborhood
- Caring school climate
- Parent involvement in schooling



### Empowerment

Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.

- Community values youth
- Youth as resources
- Service to others
- Safety



### Boundaries and Expectations

Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules and encouragement to do their best.

- Family boundaries
- School boundaries
- Neighborhood boundaries
- Adult role models
- Positive peer influence
- High expectations



### Constructive Use of Time

Young people need opportunities—outside of school—to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.

- Creative activities
- Youth programs
- Religious community
- Time



### Commitment to Learning

Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.

- Achievement motivation
- School engagement
- Homework
- Bonding to school
- Reading for pleasure



### Positive Values

Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help them make healthy life choices.

- Caring
- Equality and social justice
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Responsibility
- Restraint



### Social Competencies

Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions and to cope with new situations.

- Planning and decision-making
- Interpersonal competence
- Cultural competence
- Resistance skills
- Peaceful conflict resolution



### Positive Identity

Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.

- Personal power
- Self-esteem
- Sense of purpose
- Positive view of personal future

## SCHOOL-WIDE ACTIVITY: TOKENS OF APPRECIATION

Inspired by the Developmental Assets framework, Ward Clapham, a now-retired officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), decided to try an experiment. What if police “caught” youth doing good things, not just negative ones? So he and his fellow officers began giving “positive tickets” to youth they saw doing the right things. The tickets were coupons, vouchers, tokens or notes that recognized and reinforced positive behaviors—and helped build positive relationships between cops and kids. Build on his idea by using Tokens of Appreciation in your school. Included in this box are tokens that can be given out and redeemed for whatever prizes or rewards you collectively define (at the discretion of teachers and staff).

### Ideas for Rewards:

Free treat or prize from the school store  
Admission to a special event or rally  
Bring to office to be entered in a drawing for a prize or special honor  
Early dismissal for lunch or end of class  
Extra credit  
Turn in an assignment late  
Quiz/test retake  
Drop lowest quiz/test score  
“Oops” forgiveness (i.e., tardies, missing homework, minor infractions)

### Tips for Implementation:

- Come up with a fun name for tokens that will be well received in your school community. Some possibilities are: positivity currency, “Caught you!” tokens, goodness chips, right-on disks, or woodies.
- Create an announcement or social media message describing the types of actions that can earn tokens and the reward options.
- Remind faculty and staff that the value is in individual positive recognition from the teacher; so be sure to make eye contact, address the student by name and specify what action inspired you to give a token.
- Have a process in place for re-distributing the tokens as soon as they are redeemed, so that each teacher and administrator can always have a few on hand.

## Suggested Recognition Categories

Use the below list for ideas of actions that might warrant a token, based on the eight categories of Developmental Assets.

### Support

Thanks for listening and being there for other students.

### Empowerment

Thanks for serving others and giving students a voice in the school.

### Boundaries and Expectations

Thanks for expecting a lot of your fellow students and challenging them to be their best.

### Constructive Use of Time

Thanks for encouraging other students to get involved in activities at school and in the community.

### Commitment to Learning

Thanks for motivating fellow students to be committed to school and learning.

### Positive Values

Thanks for showing honesty, integrity and care to others in our school.

### Social Competencies

Thanks for showing others how to be a good friend and get along with people who are different from you.

### Positive Identity

Thanks for modeling a positive attitude about who you are and what the future holds.

## Additional Opportunities

In your faculty room or lounge (a place not accessible by students), post a list of all students in the school in alphabetical order and/or by grade. Ask staff and faculty to place a dot by each student’s name when a positivity coin is given. After a few days, check the list and look for students who don’t have any dots by their name. Ask everyone to pay particular attention to those students and make an effort to “catch” them, even if it is for something small and “expected” like turning in work on time or being courteous to someone. Try to make sure all students have at least one dot by the end of the activity.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Students create public service announcements that encourage their peers to build developmental assets (character strengths). This can be in the form of a video message, a presentation, social media campaign, or radio or television commercial — whatever sparks the students' imagination.

### Step 1

Separate students into small groups as you deem appropriate, but try to make the groups as diverse as possible. As we've discussed, allowing students to bring their unique strengths to a project can often make the results stronger.

### Step 2

Give each group a copy of the 40 Developmental Assets and discuss what these mean and why you believe they are important. Make an effort to have all eight sub-categories covered. If you would like to provide detailed descriptions of the assets, visit [search-institute.org](http://search-institute.org).

### Step 3

Have each group create a 30-second public service announcement (PSA) with the goal of inspiring their peers to build and develop these assets. For example, a group might create an announcement based on a single asset, such as how doing homework every day leads to academic success. Or a group might use the entire asset framework: "If you want support, give support. If you want to be empowered, empower a friend."

Remind them that PSAs are brief, so every word counts; the writing should have "hooks" to grab attention and get people to listen; and they should suggest a specific action, such as "talk to a friend today about a book you're reading for fun."

### Step 4

Give them a few days to develop this project, then allow time for each group to share their announcement with the whole class or group. Grade their work based on how well they conveyed the asset, how inspiring their message was, and any other criteria you want to add. Consider having them evaluate each other's PSAs and vote for the most effective one(s).

### Step 5

Finally, have them discuss:

- What were some themes that came up across several different categories of assets?
- What was it like for you to try to come up with positive messages for your peers?
- What are effective ways to motivate your peers to do something you think is important?
- How do we know which messages motivate students?
- What might we do with the messages you developed to make our school a better place?
- Can you think of any other character strengths that you think are important enough to include on this list?

### Additional Opportunities

- Share these with the school community. Show videos on school channels or website, or include written announcements in the newsletter. Read the announcements over the PA system or at sporting events.
- Have a school social media contest. Give everyone a hashtag to use and ask them to share photos or videos, and offer prizes for best video and drawings for prizes just for participating.

## SCHOOL-WIDE ACTIVITY: POSITIVE OFFICE REFERRAL

Teachers and staff refer students to the office for positive behavior. Give students positive one-on-one time with administrators and reward them for good behavior. Administrators get a chance to have positive individual conversations with more students.

### Supplies:

Use your standard office passes and the enclosed "Positive Office Referral" forms (also available at [jostensrenaissance.com/renkit](http://jostensrenaissance.com/renkit)).

### Step 1

**Teacher observes student doing something right.** This can be significant academic progress or excellence, or a good deed in the classroom or hallway.

### Step 2

**Teacher completes and turns in the form.** Have them fill out the Positive Office Referral form and turn it in to the office without the student's knowledge.

The image shows a "Positive Office Referral" form. At the top, it says "Positive Office Referral" in a banner. Below that, there are fields for "Student Name", "Class", and "Grade". A section titled "Please check all of the categories which best apply to the deed or accomplishment" includes a list of categories with checkboxes:  Academic Achievement,  Citizenship,  Character,  Creativity,  Leadership,  Service,  Sports/Physical Education,  Art,  Music,  Language,  Other. To the right of this list are sections for "Teacher's Comments", "Handwritten Signature", "Administrative Comments", and "Administrative Signature". At the bottom, there is a small note: "Thank you for making us a better school!" and a logo for Jostens Renaissance.

### Step 3

**Administrator reviews form and selects the student.** The Dean, Assistant Principal or other administrator reviews all the forms received, writes additional personal comments, and selects a student to be called to the office at a convenient time.

### Step 4

**Student is called to the office immediately.** The office sends a standard office pass to the student's class, which may cause apprehension and teasing as the student thinks he or she may be in trouble.

### Step 5

**Student meets with administrator.** The student arrives at the administrator's office and is given the form, with a handshake and personal thanks from the administrator for the action, as well as a tangible reward.

Visit [jostensrenaissance.com/referral](http://jostensrenaissance.com/referral) to see the contest-winning video from LaSalle-Peru High School describing one student's experience with a Positive Office Referral.

### Additional Opportunities

- Remind teachers and staff to include students who aren't often recognized, or are showing great improvement.
- To incent teachers to submit the forms, have office staff enter a ticket with the teacher's name into a drawing for prizes each time a form is submitted.
- Suggestions for tangible rewards the students receive:
  - Have your school's Renaissance club prepare goodie bags.
  - Ask local businesses to contribute coupons for a free meal or item of value to students.
  - Create a coupon for an item in the school store or a free privilege, such as a tardy pass or early dismissal.
- At a pep rally or assembly, ask the students who have received these to stand up and be recognized, and/or select one example to share with the school community.
- While many students share the forms with parents on their own, consider having the administrator write a quick email to the student's parent or guardian as well.
- If the administrator is unable to meet with all the students who have forms submitted on their behalf, consider some other way of recognizing them, such as a call or quick email to the student or the parent/guardian.

## The Legend of Two Wolves

A man sat on a boat with his grandson, fishing poles in the water. The young boy was restless—twisting his reel back and forth, tugging on the line and digging his toes into the sides of the boat.

“You all right, kid?” he asked.

“I just feel, I don’t know, just, all over the place.”

The old man simply nodded and smiled. “I know that feeling, boy. It’s the fight that goes on in all of us.”

The boy sits up a bit. “What fight?” he asked.

“The fight about what kind of person you want to be,” he said, as a fish begins to nibble at his bait. “Think of it like a fight between wolves. One is negative—anger, greed, guilt, lies and so forth. The other is positive—like love, hope, kindness and generosity.”

The boy seemed slightly confused, just as the old man was when his grandfather told the same story.

The fish took the bait and swam away and while the old man reeled in his line, he saw the boy struggle and his fidgeting get worse. Finally the boy seemed ready to speak.

“How do I know which wolf will win?” he asked sheepishly.

A grin crept across the man’s face. “Who will win?” he asked, as a fish began to nibble the boy’s bait.

“The wolf you feed, of course.”

### SOURCES:

#### FROM KENT’S DESK

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Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Updated thinking on positivity ratios. *American Psychologist*, 68(9), 814–22. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0033584>.

#### INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

Importance of Positive Emotions

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The Power of Developmental Assets

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Developmental Assets and School Success

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How Much Do Young People Experience These Assets?

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#### CLASSROOM OR GROUP ACTIVITY: PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Adapted from *The Best of Building Assets Together: Favorite Group Activities That Help Youth Succeed*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Available from: [www.searchinstitute.org/Best\\_of\\_Building\\_Assets\\_Together\\_p/0323-w.htm](http://www.searchinstitute.org/Best_of_Building_Assets_Together_p/0323-w.htm).

#### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: POSITIVE OFFICE REFERRAL

Adapted from Positive Office Referral forms and details provided by Melanie Lindsey, Foothill Technology High School, Ventura, CA and Jean Ganze, LaSalle-Peru High School, LaSalle, IL.