

*Developmental Assets:  
A Profile of Your 6th Grade Students*

# *Me and My World*

## Survey Report

Putnam County Middle Schools  
Cookeville, TN

**Prepared for:**  
Putnam County Anti-Drug and Violence Coalition  
Cookeville, TN  
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## I. Introduction

Since 1958, Search Institute has been proactive in working to create a world where all young people are valued and thrive. To accomplish this mission, Search Institute generates, synthesizes, and communicates new knowledge, convenes organizational and community leaders, and works with state and national organizations. The bedrock of the institute's work is the framework of 40 Developmental Assets—positive experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Created in 1990, the framework is grounded in research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention, and resilience. The assets represent a common core of developmental building blocks crucial for all children, regardless of community size, region of the country, race/ethnicity, gender, family economics, sexual orientation, or ability status. Using data from a child self-report measure, *Me and My World* (MMW)—a Search Institute survey of Developmental Assets for grades 4 through 6, this report summarizes the extent to which children in your community experience these assets and how the assets relate to their behavior.

### **Overview of Search Institute's Developmental Assets Framework**

Search Institute has found that focusing on the strengths and resources of all children and youth is a powerful approach that engages communities to mobilize and act in the service of their children. The Developmental Assets model recognizes that promoting healthy child and youth development requires the participation of all members of a community, because many of the core processes of positive development are increasingly absent in most towns and cities. These include adult support, positive intergenerational relationships, safe places, clear and consistent boundaries, participation in constructive activities, commitment to learning, consistent attention to values, and practice in serving others.

The fragility of this developmental infrastructure explains many of the behavioral choices children make that concern us.

Strengthening, and in some cases rebuilding, this developmental infrastructure is essential for the positive development of all young people in all communities. And, everyone has a role to play. Though support from professionals and the public sector is needed, much of the responsibility and capacity for the healthy development of children and youth is in the hands of the people who interact with young people every day—families, friends, neighbors, seniors, law enforcement, businesses, religious institutions, and other citizens.

### **Developmental Assets in Middle Childhood: A Paradigm of Positive Human Development**

Children entering the middle childhood years as we define it (grades 4-6, or roughly 8-12 years of age) are rapidly “coming into their own,” beginning to seek the kind of autonomy and independence that typify the majority of young people during adolescence in the United States (Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004). Additionally, in a prelude to adolescence, emotional, interpersonal, and academic demands increase for children in middle childhood. Thus, it is vital to know whether our children are well-prepared to enter into this stage of greater maturity and how parents, teachers, neighbors, and community resources can help prepare children for this developmental transition.

Search Institute's framework for positive development during the middle childhood years provides a means not only for assessing your children but also for mobilizing community-wide attention to and action on promoting the healthy development of young people.

The 40 assets for middle childhood and their definitions are listed in Figure 1. The assets are grouped into two major types:

1. **External assets** are positive developmental experiences that surround children with support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and opportunities for constructive use of time. When provided by many different formal and informal systems in a community, they stimulate and nurture positive development in children.

2. **Internal assets** are a young person's own commitments, values, and competencies. They are grouped into categories of educational and learning commitment, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. As with the external assets, community is important for the development of these internal assets.

**Figure 1: Developmental Assets with Definitions**

<b>External Assets</b>		
<b>Asset Category</b>	<b>Asset Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Support</b>	1. Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
	2. Positive family communication	Parent(s) and child communicate positively. Child feels comfortable seeking advice and counsel from parent(s).
	3. Other adult relationships	Child receives support from adults other than her or his parent(s).
	4. Caring neighborhood	Child experiences caring neighbors.
	5. Caring school climate	Relationships with teachers and peers provide a caring, encouraging school environment.
	6. Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping the child succeed in school.
<b>Empowerment</b>	7. Community values youth	Child feels valued and appreciated by adults in the community.
	8. Children as resources	Child is included in decisions at home and in the community.
	9. Service to others	Child has opportunities to help others in the community.
	10. Safety	Child feels safe at home, at school, and in her or his neighborhood.
<b>Boundaries and Expectations</b>	11. Family boundaries	Family has clear and consistent rules and consequences and monitors the child's whereabouts.
	12. School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring the child's behavior.
	14. Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults in the child's family, as well as nonfamily adults, model positive, responsible behavior.
	15. Positive peer influence	Child's closest friends model positive, responsible behavior.
	16. High expectations	Parent(s) and teachers expect the child to do her or his best at school and in other activities.
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	17. Creative activities	Child participates in music, art, drama, or creative writing two or more times per week.
	18. Child programs	Child participates two or more times per week in cocurricular school activities or structured community programs for children.
	19. Religious community	Child attends religious programs or services one or more times per week.
	20. Time at home	Child spends some time most days both in high-quality interaction with parents and doing things at home other than watching TV or playing video games.

**Figure 1: Developmental Assets with Definitions (Cont'd)**

<b>Internal Assets</b>		
<b>Asset Category</b>	<b>Asset Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Commitment To Learning</b>	21. Achievement motivation	Child is motivated and strives to do well in school.
	22. Learning engagement	Child is responsive, attentive, and actively engaged in learning at school and enjoys participating in learning activities outside of school.
	23. Homework	Child usually hands in homework on time.
	24. Bonding to adults at school	Child cares about teachers and other adults at school.
	25. Reading for pleasure	Child enjoys and engages in reading for fun most days of the week.
<b>Positive Values</b>	26. Caring	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to help other people.
	27. Equality and social justice	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to speak up for equal rights for all people.
	28. Integrity	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to stand up for one's beliefs.
	29. Honesty	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to tell the truth.
	30. Responsibility	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to accept personal responsibility for behavior.
	31. Healthy lifestyle	Parent(s) tell the child it is important to have good health habits and an understanding of healthy sexuality.
<b>Social Competencies</b>	32. Planning and decision making	Child thinks about decisions and is usually happy with results of her or his decisions.
	33. Interpersonal competence	Child cares about and is affected by other people's feelings, enjoys making friends, and, when frustrated or angry, tries to calm her- or himself.
	34. Cultural competence	Child knows and is comfortable with people of different racial, ethnic, & cultural backgrounds and with her or his own cultural identity.
	35. Resistance skills	Child can stay away from people who are likely to get her or him in trouble and is able to say no to doing wrong or dangerous things.
	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Child attempts to resolve conflict nonviolently.
<b>Positive Identity</b>	37. Personal power	Child feels he or she has some influence over things that happen in her or his life.
	38. Self-esteem	Child likes and is proud to be the person he/she is.
	39. Sense of purpose	Child sometimes thinks about what life means and whether there is a purpose for her or his life.
	40. Positive view of personal future	Child is optimistic about her or his personal future.

## How to Use This Report

This report contains important insights about the young people in your community. It includes information about the challenges they face and the internal strengths and external supports they have to meet those challenges.

In reading a report such as this, people may question the accuracy of individual numbers or their meanings. Some general guidelines for interpretation may be helpful:

- First, differences of 5% or more between grade levels or between males and females are worthy of thought and consideration. Please note that differences of 5% are not always statistically significant, but in the context of the overall pattern of results, community residents may find them meaningful in considering courses of action.
- Second, it is often helpful to look for patterns of findings rather than to focus on one specific asset or finding. For example, does one grade or set of grades consistently report fewer assets?
- Third, do not overwhelm others with numbers at the risk of losing their understanding of key messages. Rather, make more use of the numbers and figures that give the overall messages, such as the average number of assets your children report.

Many people in your community will benefit from the information in this report. These include educators, parents, young people, youth workers, community leaders, policy makers, media, religious leaders, employers, coaches, health care providers, and so on. Use local resources or those from Search Institute to help you communicate these findings to others. (See Appendix E for suggested asset-promoting print and video resources.)

Once you have shared information with key people and groups, your community can begin to focus on the important work of

asset building. This, of course, requires a long-term, community-wide effort. While this report gives a snapshot of children at a particular point in time, asset building begins at birth and continues through childhood, adolescence, and beyond. Section V of this report highlights some ideas for getting started as an asset-building community. Once you do, you will find that there are many individuals and groups in your own community that already are involved in asset building. You also will find that many people and organizations have creative new ways to build assets. Asset building is not a program—it is a catalyst for connecting and empowering all sectors of your community in a long-term effort. Your data—and this report—should be seen as a tool to engage and mobilize all stakeholders, which includes both adults and children, to help create a social climate that supports their engagement with young people.

## How Your Study Was Done

The survey *Me and My World* (MMW) was used to measure these assets among children in your community. The MMW was administered in May, 2006 to students in grade 6 at Algood School, Burke Middle School, Cornerstone Middle School, and Prescott Middle School. Standardized administration procedures were provided to school staff by Search Institute to enhance the quality of the data. To ensure complete student anonymity, no names or identification numbers were used.

Parents were notified of survey administration and given the option of withdrawing their student(s).

## Notes about Interpreting Your Findings

In developing the MMW, great care was taken to create an instrument that addresses two key factors—reading level of respondents and creating survey questions that are suitable for the cognitive abilities of children in middle childhood (such as asking

students to think about concrete examples rather than asking them to think of hypothetical or abstract concepts). Each of these factors plays an important role in the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. For the majority of the Developmental Assets scales, the MMW has acceptable to good reliabilities and good evidence of validity.

Described below are additional factors that influence your survey findings:

**Data cleaning.** To create the final set of data on which these findings are based, steps were taken to ensure the data are as high quality as possible. To do so, surveys were eliminated from the dataset if students marked a grade level other than the grade level(s) being surveyed. In addition, surveys were eliminated when there was missing data on 41 or more (25%) of the 165 items in the survey. Typically, between 1 to 5 percent of surveys are discarded for these reasons. If the percentage of discarded surveys is greater than 10 percent, caution should be used in interpreting the results, as some bias may be present. For this report, 0 surveys (0%) were eliminated from the dataset.

**Sample characteristics.** When reviewing your data, it is important to look at the characteristics of the children represented in the dataset (see Figure 2). The quality of the data is affected by the degree to which the surveyed children represent the students in the participating school(s). If a random sample was used, the sample needs to be large enough to appropriately represent the student population. Studies intended to assess all children should ideally obtain data from at least 80% of the students. Neither method produces perfect results, but both can provide quality information about your children.

**Response option formats.** Unlike surveys of older youth, research has shown that some younger children may have a tendency to respond using the extremes in the types of response formats used for

many of the *Me and My World* survey items (e.g., a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)<sup>1</sup>. It is possible that, while the survey items were understood in terms of reading level comprehension for these elementary students, the items may have been difficult for some children to answer realistically due to their stage of developmental maturity and the subsequent limitations in cognitive ability at these ages.

**Ambiguous responses.** Any item with greater than 20% of the responses either “Not Sure” or missing (the student did not answer the question) should be interpreted cautiously. On one hand, this may mean that many students were confused by the question and found it difficult to answer. On the other hand, it may instead mean that a relatively large percentage of students truly are not yet sure about their attitudes and the experiences in their lives. The assets pertaining to these items may provide potential points of influence for your community, as students haven’t yet “made up their minds” regarding how they feel. As community residents seek the meaning in these data, you will need to decide whether it is important to find out more about why a large proportion of your children either were unsure about, or chose not to respond to, these specific items. (See Appendix B for a list of all survey items with response option percentages.)

**Maintaining anonymity.** In this report, percentages are generally reported by total group, by gender, and by grade. To protect anonymity, if data are available from fewer than 30 students in any grade, percentages are reported for combinations of grades, for example combining data for your 4th and 5th grade students. Also, gender data will not be reported if there are fewer than 30 students in either gender category. When the sample sizes at the individual grade levels are 50 students or fewer, caution

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<sup>1</sup> Chambers, C. T., & Johnston, C. (2001). Developmental differences in children’s use of rating scales. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 27, 27-36.

should be used in making comparisons among grades, unless the sample sizes represent the total number of students in those grades.

Characteristics of the students participating in your study are given in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Demographics of Students Surveyed**

		<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
<b>Total Sample</b>		374	100
<b>Gender*</b>	Male	176	47
	Female	198	53
<b>Grade*</b>	4	0	0
	5	0	0
	6	373	100
<b>Race / Ethnicity*</b>	American Indian or Alaska Native	4	1
	Asian	4	1
	Black or African American	3	1
	Hispanic or Latino/Latina	15	4
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	1
	White	328	88
	Other	5	1
	Multi-racial	10	3
	*Numbers may not sum to "Total Sample" due to missing information. Less than 0.5% rounded to zero.		

## II. Portrait of Developmental Assets

In this section, information about your young people's assets is presented in various forms. Both the average number of assets your children report plus the percentage of children who report each asset are noted. Whether a child is said to have an asset is based on how he or she answered the questions that measure the asset. In order to simplify reporting and focus attention on overall trends, all assets are assessed as either present or absent in a child's life. In reality, of course, children experience assets in degrees, not as either all or nothing.

Figure 3 shows the average number of assets for all students combined, as well as by grade. Communities typically find motivation for individual and community asset-building actions by creating a shared vision for the average number of assets you want your children to experience. This approach reminds citizens that, while the total number of assets is important, there are many different asset combinations that contribute to the healthy development of children. For example, a group of children each with 26 assets is likely to have a different set of 26 in their asset profile. Thus, efforts to build all 40 assets are critical.

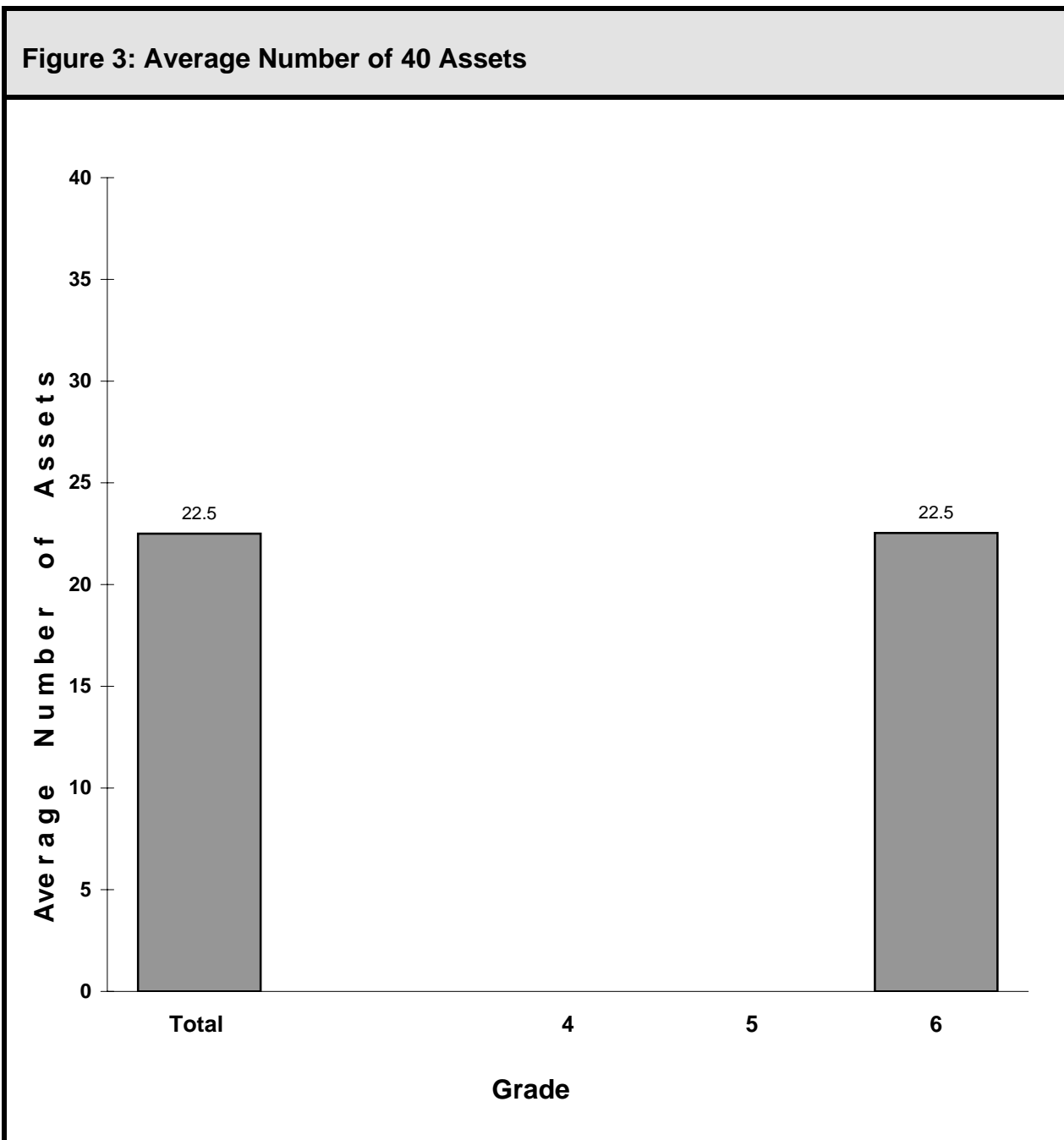
## A Note on the Differences in Reported Assets between Children and Adolescents

Results from initial studies using the MMW indicate that the number of assets reported by children in middle childhood tends to be greater than the number of assets reported by adolescents. For example, 36% of the 4th – 6th graders (1,294 students) in our field tests had 31 to 37 assets (Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004), compared to 9% of 6th – 12th graders (217,277 students) who were in the highest asset quartile (31-40 assets) (*Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth*, 2001, unpublished report). It is possible that some of these striking differences are due to wording differences between the elementary and adolescent surveys that make it easier for elementary students to be scored as having some of the assets. For example, for the Constructive-Use-of-Time assets, adolescents need to report the number of hours per average week they do the activity, but elementary students are asked to report the less precise number of times per week they do the activity. Elementary students also may have a more positive bias in their reporting. But these findings also are consistent with previous research and supportive of Developmental Assets theory, in that studies consistently find preadolescents more likely than adolescents to have the relationships and opportunities needed for positive development (see Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004, for more discussion on this topic).

**Figure 3:** The average number of 40 assets your children report, for the total sample and by grade level. Each student's responses are analyzed to determine whether s/he has each asset. The number of assets are then averaged across groups (total sample and grade level). Attention should be focused on increasing the

number of assets your children report having.

**Questions to consider:** What is the average number of assets reported by your children? How do the number of assets compare across grades? Are there any grades reporting low numbers of assets?



## External Assets

Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the overall percentages of students who report each *external* asset as well as the percentages by grade and gender. The external assets are the positive experiences and supports a young person receives from formal and informal connections to others in the community. There are 20 external assets, divided into four categories: **Support, Empowerment, Boundaries & Expectations, and Constructive Use of Time.**

The **SUPPORT** assets refer to the way young people experience love, affirmation, and acceptance. Ideally, young people experience an abundance of support not only in their families but also from many other people in their schools and communities.

The **EMPOWERMENT** assets relate to the key developmental need for students to feel valued, valuable, and safe. The empowerment assets highlight this need,

focusing on students' perceptions of their families, schools, and communities, and opportunities for students to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

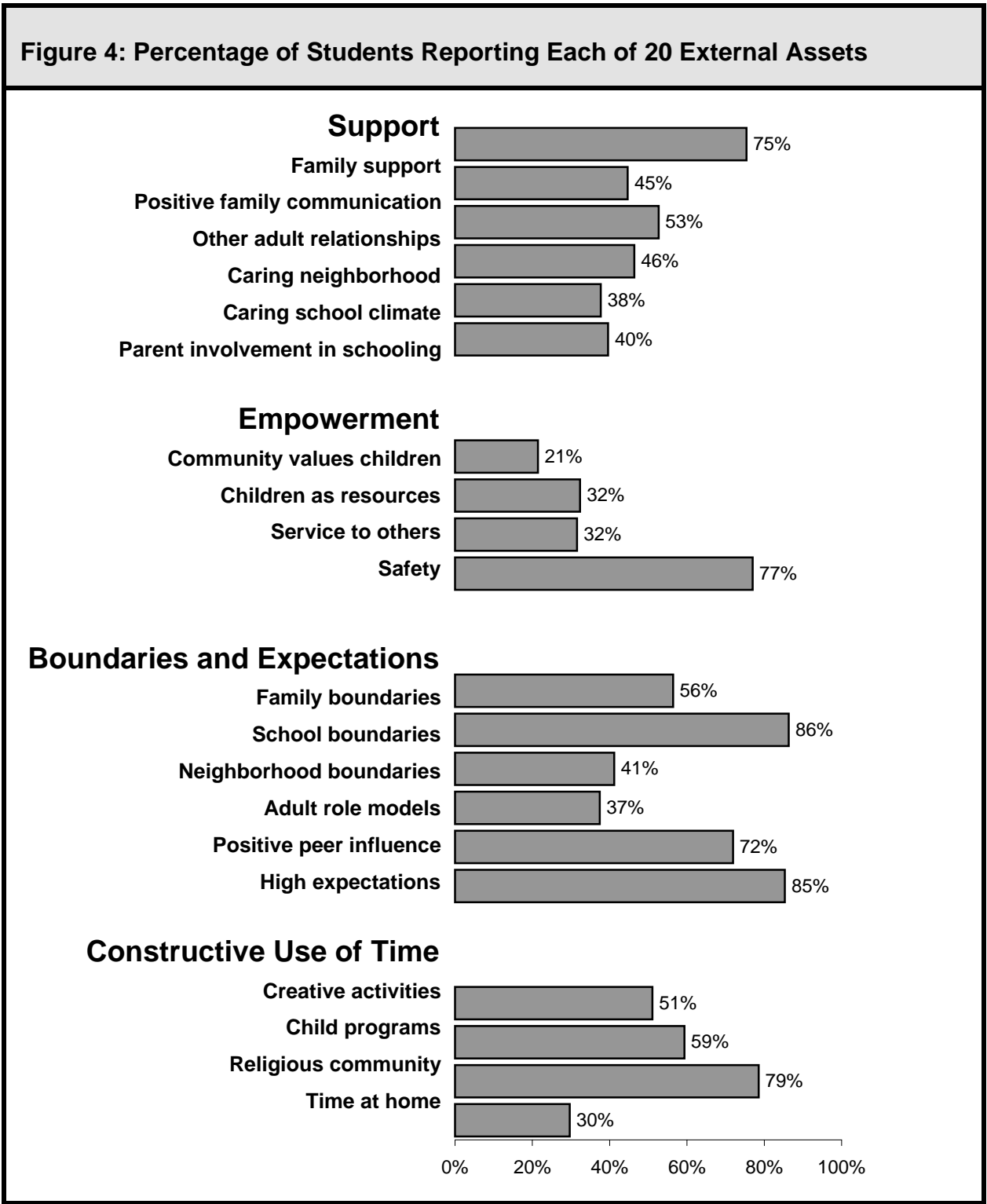
## **BOUNDARIES and EXPECTATIONS**

assets refer to the need for children to have clear and enforced boundaries, exposure to positive role models, and consistently high expectations for behavior. Ideally, boundary assets are experienced in the settings of family, school, and neighborhood, providing a set of consistent messages about appropriate and acceptable behavior across socializing systems.

The final category of external assets is **CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME.** One of the prime characteristics of a healthy community for children is a rich array of structured opportunities for children and adolescents. Whether through schools, community organizations, or religious institutions, these structured activities contribute to the development of many of the internal and external assets.

**Figure 4:** The percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of the external assets, listed under four general external asset categories. This bar graph gives a visual presentation of the differences in percentages in the external assets.

**Questions to consider:** Where are the strengths and needs of your children with respect to external assets? That is, which assets do more of your children report, and which do fewer report? Are there some *categories* of assets that are particularly high or low in general?



**Figure 5:** The percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of 20 external assets, for the total sample, by gender, and by grade. The 20 external assets are listed under the four general external asset categories. You will notice that the percentages for the total sample correspond to those presented graphically in Figure 4.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of

60% is under the 4th grade category for family support, that means that 60% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* “have” the family support asset; conversely, 40% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* do not “have” the family support asset.

**Questions to consider:** Are there differences between males and females? Do females report certain external assets more than males, and vice versa? Are there certain grades reporting consistently higher or lower levels of external assets?

<b>Figure 5: Percent of Students Reporting Each External Asset, by Gender &amp; Grade</b>						
External Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade		
		M	F	4	5	6
<b>Support</b>						
1. Family support	75	75	76			75
2. Positive family communication	45	43	46			45
3. Other adult relationships	53	49	56			53
4. Caring neighborhood	46	38	54			47
5. Caring school climate	38	27	47			38
6. Parent involvement in schooling	40	39	40			40
<b>Empowerment</b>						
7. Community values children	21	14	28			22
8. Children as resources	32	27	37			32
9. Service to others	32	27	36			32
10. Safety	77	76	78			77
<b>Boundaries and Expectations</b>						
11. Family boundaries	56	48	64			57
12. School boundaries	86	85	88			86
13. Neighborhood boundaries	41	33	48			41
14. Adult role models	37	31	43			38
15. Positive peer influence	72	66	77			72
16. High expectations	85	82	88			85
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>						
17. Creative activities	51	41	60			51
18. Child programs	59	57	62			60
19. Religious community	79	74	83			78
20. Time at home	30	22	37			30

## Internal Assets

Figure 6 and Figure 7 show the overall percentage of children with each *internal* asset and the percentage by grade and gender. The internal assets are those things a community and family nurture within children so they can contribute to their own development. There are 20 internal assets divided into four categories: **Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity.**

**COMMITMENT TO LEARNING** is essential to young people in today's information-loaded society. Developing an internal intellectual curiosity and the skills to gain new knowledge and learn from experience are important characteristics for a future workforce that must adapt to rapid change.

**POSITIVE VALUES** involve the child's family laying the groundwork for the eventual personal ownership of a value

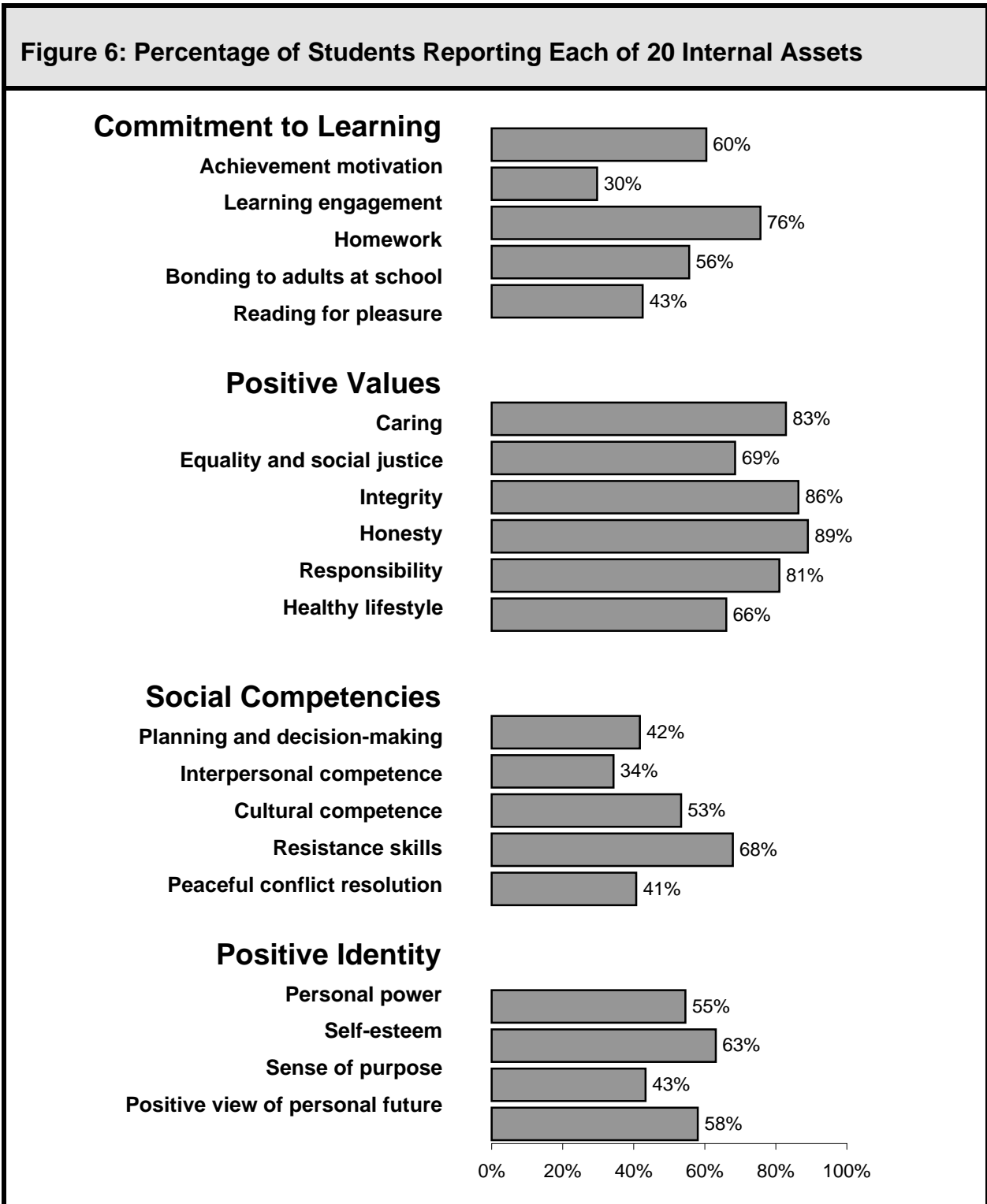
system by actively teaching her or him the importance of personal values. Though there are many values that parents or caregivers seek to nurture and instill in their children, the asset framework focuses on six values known to both help prevent high-risk behaviors *and* promote caring for others

**SOCIAL COMPETENCIES** reflect the important personal skills children need to navigate through the maze of increased choices and options they face in middle childhood. These skills also lay a foundation for the development of independence and competence in adolescence.

**POSITIVE IDENTITY** assets focus on children's view of themselves—their own sense of power, purpose, worth, and promise. Without these assets, young people risk feeling ineffective and without a sense of initiative and meaning.

**Figure 6:** The percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of the internal assets, listed under the four general internal asset categories. This bar graph gives a visual presentation of the differences in percentages in the internal assets.

**Questions to consider:** Where are the strengths and needs of your children with respect to internal assets? That is, which assets do more of your children report, and which do fewer report? Are there some *categories* of assets that are particularly high or low in general?



**Figure 7:** The percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of 20 internal assets, for the total sample, by gender, and by grade. The 20 internal assets are listed under the four general internal asset categories. You will notice that the percentages for the total sample correspond to those presented graphically in Figure 6.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 60% is under the 4th grade category for

achievement motivation, that means that 60% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* “have” the achievement motivation asset; conversely, 40% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* do not “have” the achievement motivation asset.

**Questions to consider:** Are there differences between males and females? Do females report certain internal assets more than males, and vice versa? Are there certain grades reporting consistently higher or lower levels of internal assets?

<b>Figure 7: Percent of Students Reporting Each Internal Asset, by Gender &amp; Grade</b>						
Internal Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade		
		M	F	4	5	6
<b>Commitment to Learning</b>						
21. Achievement motivation	60	49	70			61
22. Learning engagement	30	21	37			30
23. Homework	76	66	84			76
24. Bonding to adults at school	56	42	68			56
25. Reading for pleasure	43	38	47			43
<b>Positive Values</b>						
26. Caring	83	78	87			83
27. Equality and social justice	69	62	74			69
28. Integrity	86	85	88			87
29. Honesty	89	86	92			89
30. Responsibility	81	80	82			81
31. Healthy lifestyle	66	57	74			66
<b>Social Competencies</b>						
32. Planning and decision-making	42	32	50			42
33. Interpersonal competence	34	19	48			34
34. Cultural competence	53	41	64			53
35. Resistance skills	68	65	71			68
36. Peaceful conflict resolution	41	30	51			41
<b>Positive Identity</b>						
37. Personal power	55	54	55			55
38. Self-esteem	63	65	62			63
39. Sense of purpose	43	42	44			43
40. Positive view of personal future	58	53	63			58

## Deficits

Assets form part of the developmental infrastructure on which healthy lives are built. Deficits are countervailing influences that can interfere with a child’s healthy development by limiting access to external assets, blocking development of internal assets, or easing the way into risky behavioral choices. Deficits are negative influences, none of which necessarily does permanent harm, but each of which makes harm more possible.

**Figure 8:** The percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of 3 developmental deficits, for the total sample, by gender, and by grade. Each of these deficits can interfere with the development of assets. Each also is correlated with poor developmental outcomes. Although this report advocates community-based efforts to promote Developmental Assets, communities must also focus attention

on preventing these deficits and lessening broader related deficits that make it harder for all children to thrive (e.g., poverty, racism).

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 60% is under the 4th grade category for alone at home, that means that 60% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* “have” the alone at home deficit; conversely, 40% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* do not “have” the alone at home deficit.

**Questions to consider:** What percentage of your children are reporting these deficits? Are there differences between males and females, or across grade levels? How do these differences in deficits relate to the differences in the assets you have already detected?

Figure 8: Percent of Students Reporting Deficits, by Gender & Grade							
Deficit	Definition	Total Sample	Gender		Grade		
			M	F	4	5	6
<b>Alone at Home</b>	Less than 1 hour per day of adult supervision after school	26	32	21			26
<b>TV Overexposure</b>	Watches TV or videos two or more hours per school day	63	66	60			63
<b>Victim of Violence</b>	Reports yes to “In the last year, has anyone hurt you by punching, hitting, slapping or scratching you?”	48	51	46			48

### III. Portrait of Risk Behavior Patterns and Thriving Indicators

This section presents information about your children's involvement in both risky behaviors as well as positive health-promoting behaviors that suggest they are *thriving* and not merely developing adequately. While some of these indicators parallel typical behaviors measured in surveys of adolescents (e.g., helping others, valuing diversity, alcohol use), we also included other developmentally appropriate markers of thriving and risk. For example, the inclusion of "coregulation" as a thriving indicator reflects the growing importance of children helping to make decisions about matters of interest to them.

The MMW survey includes six questions about the extent to which students are involved in risk-taking behaviors. Although a single instance of a risky behavior may indicate very poor judgment, it does not necessarily indicate a serious, ongoing problem. Thus, we do not define a single occurrence of a risk behavior in the last year as a behavior problem. Two or more such instances, however, begin to reflect a **pattern** of problem behavior that, for children in middle childhood, is cause for concern. (For further discussion on the

difference between risk behaviors and risk behavior patterns, see the FAQ in Appendix A.) The risk behavior patterns studied in the survey are; use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, antisocial behavior, physical aggression/violence and sadness.

Note that while risk behavior patterns are measured in this survey, detailed results on how your children responded should be considered with caution. Field test results of this survey, as well as national studies of risk-taking behavior, indicate that the rate of some risk behaviors (e.g., drug use) for this age group is quite low. In cases where less than 5% of your children report engaging in any risk behavior patterns, extreme caution is advised as the number of children may be too small to enable a reliable and valid interpretation. Regardless of total sample size, these behaviors are exhibited by only a small fraction of children in grades 4-6. With the exception of violence and sadness, the risk behavior patterns we measure are rare occurrences; their explanation could have considerably more to do both with factors not measured in the MMW and by idiosyncratic experiences by individual children, rather than the overall number of assets or the effect of an intentional asset-building effort.

**Figure 9:** The percentage of your surveyed students reporting each of the six risk behavior patterns by gender and by grade.

conversely, 90% of the *4th grade children you surveyed did not* use alcohol more than once during the last year.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 10% is under the 4th grade category for Alcohol, that means that 10% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* have used alcohol during the last year;

**Questions to consider:** What percentage of your students report engaging in risk behavior patterns? Are there differences between males and females, or across grade levels? How do these differences relate to the differences in the assets or the deficits that you have already detected?

**Figure 9: Percent of Youth Reporting Risk Behavior Patterns, by Gender & Grade**

Risk Behavior Pattern	Definition	Total Sample	Gender		Grade		
			M	F	4	5	6
<b>Alcohol</b>	Has used alcohol more than once during the last year	8	10	7			8
<b>Tobacco</b>	Has smoked cigarettes more than once during the last year	5	6	5			5
<b>Marijuana</b>	Has used marijuana more than once during the last year	4	6	2			4
<b>Anti-social Behavior</b>	Has damaged property just for fun more than once during the last year	10	13	7			10
<b>Physical Agression/ Violence</b>	Has hit or beat someone up more than once during the last year	29	38	21			29
<b>Sadness</b>	Has felt sad or depressed a few or more times during the last month	37	28	45			37

*Note:* Less than 0.5% rounded to zero.

**Figure 10:** The percentage of your surveyed students reporting each of the seven thriving indicators by gender and by grade.

conversely, 30% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* do not "have" the school success thriving indicator.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 70% is under the 4th grade category for school success, that means that 70% of the *4th grade children you surveyed* "have" the school success thriving indicator;

**Questions to consider:** What percentage of your students report engaging in thriving behaviors? Are there differences between males and females, or across grade levels? How do these differences relate to the differences in the assets, deficits, or risk behavior patterns that you have already detected?

<b>Figure 10: Percent of Students Reporting Thriving Indicators, by Gender &amp; Grade</b>							
Thriving Indicator	Definition	Total Sample	Gender		Grade		
			M	F	4	5	6
<b>School Success</b>	Child gets mostly "A's, or Outstanding/ Excellent marks" or mostly "B's, or Good/ Above Average marks."	65	56	73			65
<b>Helps Others</b>	Child helps friends, neighbors, or others on one or more days per week.	75	68	81			75
<b>Values Diversity</b>	Child values having diverse friends and gets along well with people who are of a different race or culture than the child.	81	72	89			81
<b>Delays Gratification</b>	Child can wait for a larger reward later, rather than needing to obtain a smaller reward immediately.	40	38	41			40
<b>Coregulation</b>	Child often helps parents make decisions about things the child cares about.	89	87	91			89
<b>Coping</b>	Child regularly uses active coping skills to deal with problems.	42	37	46			42
<b>Life Satisfaction</b>	Child is satisfied with her or his life.	77	79	75			77

## **IV. The Power of Developmental Assets in Middle Childhood**

Fortunately, the choices young people make about how to act, what to do, and who to be are not made simply by chance. Their decisions are made on the basis of a web of external and internal influences, including the Developmental Assets. The figures in this section reflect how the assets your children experience influence the choices they make regarding risk behavior patterns and thriving indicators.

Search Institute's studies with adolescents have consistently shown that young people who experience more of the Developmental Assets are less likely to report engaging in patterns of risky behavior and more likely to report indicators of thriving. In other words, the more assets a young person experiences, the more likely he or she will

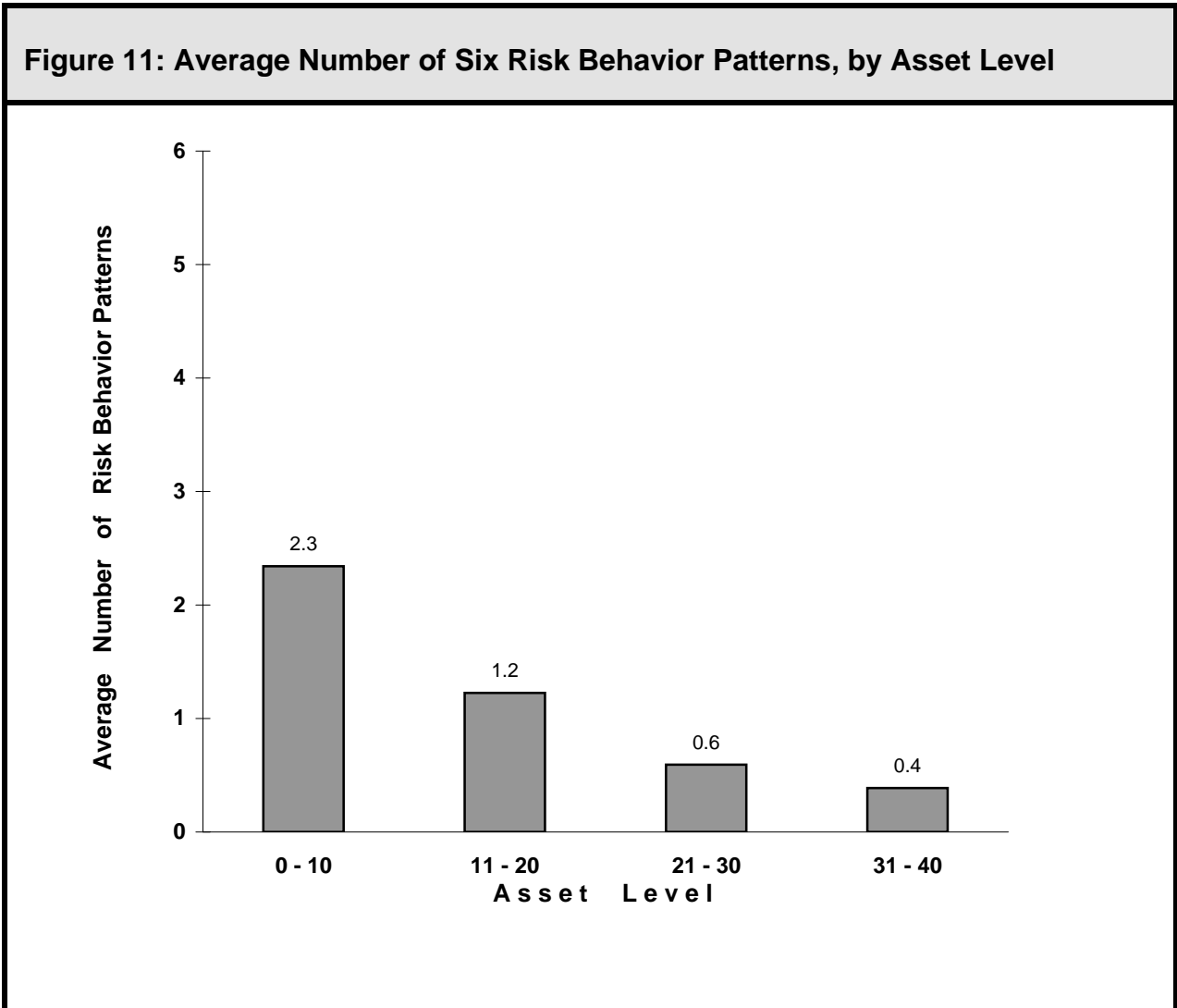
choose a healthy lifestyle. This has been consistent regardless of age, race, gender, family economics, or region of the country.

Early research looking at the relation between assets and risk behavior patterns among students in 4th – 6th grades indicates that the differences across asset groups may be small and not as striking as it is for adolescents (6th – 12th graders). If your data show small changes in risk behaviors across asset groups, it is most likely due to two patterns seen in our middle childhood data to date: a) children in middle childhood tend to report experiencing more assets than do adolescents (see page 9 for further discussion of this issue); and b) far fewer children in middle childhood report engaging in risk behaviors than do adolescents. Each of these factors, singly or together, contributes to more modest changes across asset groups.

**Figure 11:** Average number of risk behavior patterns by asset levels. This bar graph illustrates the effect of assets on risk behavior patterns among your students. Your children were first grouped by the total number of assets each reported (0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40), and then the average number of the 6 risk behavior

patterns was calculated for each group.

**Questions to consider:** What is the general pattern of risk-taking as you move across asset levels? (Does the number of risk behavior patterns decrease as the number of assets increases? If not, what are possible explanations?)



**Figure 12:** The protective implications of Developmental Assets—the percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of six risk behavior patterns. These findings are reported for the total sample and by asset level. This table presents the risk behavior patterns and their definitions within the survey, together with the percentage of the total sample reporting each. In addition, percentages are reported by asset level (0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40). As noted on page 18, caution is advised when interpreting instances where fewer than 5% of the sample report engaging in a particular risk behavior pattern.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 10% is under the 0 to 10 category for Alcohol, that means that 10% of your children *who report 0 to 10 assets* used alcohol more than once during the last year; conversely, 90% of your children *who report 0 to 10 assets* did not use alcohol more than once during the last year.

**Questions to consider:** What is the pattern of risk behaviors as you move across asset levels? Is the pattern consistent with what you would expect?

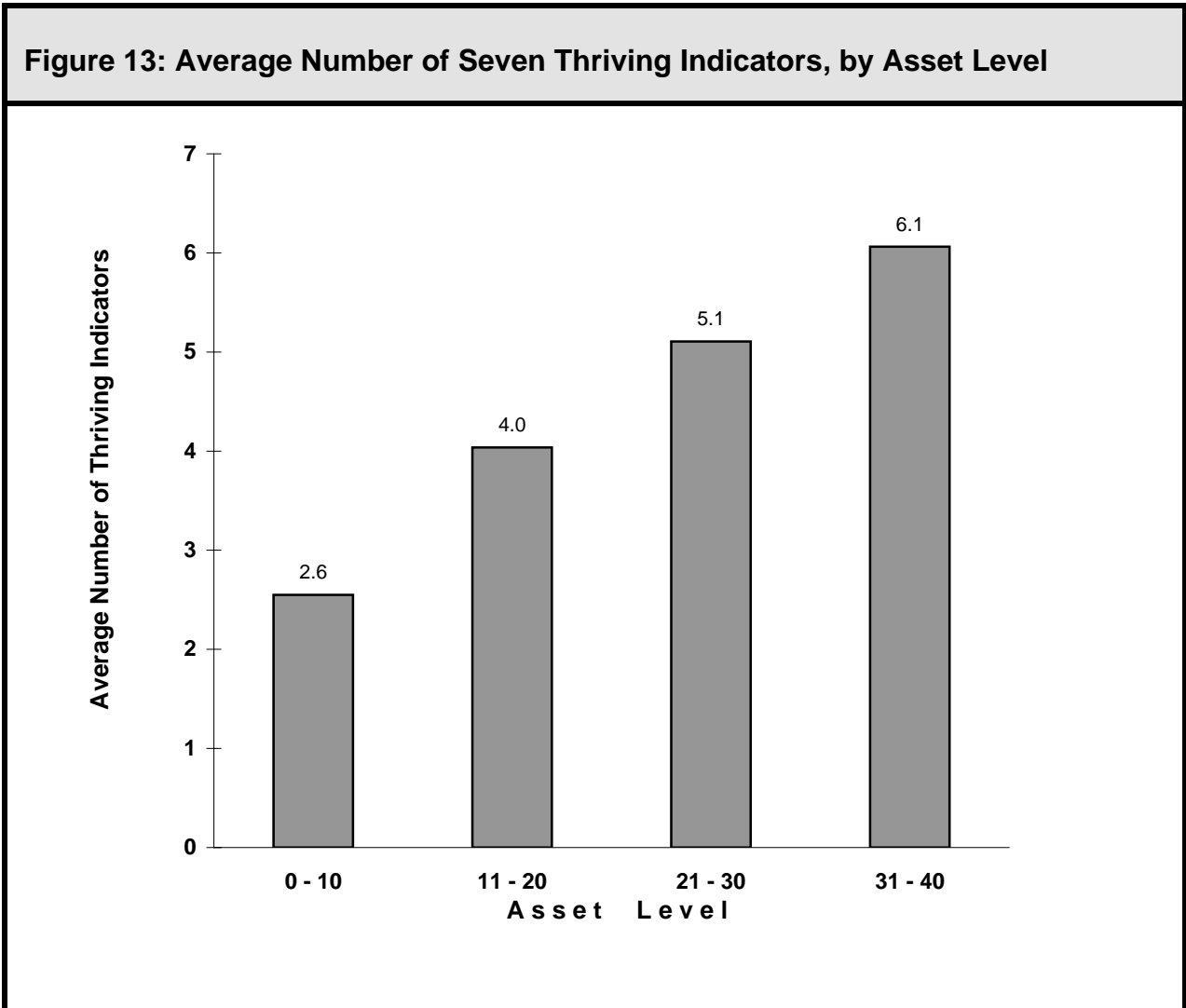
<b>Figure 12: Percent of Students Reporting Risk Behavior Patterns, by Asset Level</b>						
<b>Risk Behavior Pattern</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Number of Assets</b>			
			<b>0 - 10</b>	<b>11 - 20</b>	<b>21 - 30</b>	<b>31 - 40</b>
<b>Alcohol</b>	Has used alcohol more than once during the last year	8	33	11	2	1
<b>Tobacco</b>	Has smoked cigarettes more than once during the last year	5	20	8	2	0
<b>Marijuana</b>	Has used marijuana more than once during the last year	4	23	5	0	0
<b>Anti-social Behavior</b>	Has damaged property just for fun more than once during the last year	10	43	13	3	1
<b>Physical Agression/ Violence</b>	Has hit or beat someone up more than once during the last year	29	65	41	21	8
<b>Sadness</b>	Has felt sad or depressed a few or more times during the last month	37	53	46	33	29

Note: Less than 0.5% rounded to zero.

**Figure 13:** Average number of 7 thriving indicators by asset level. Just as assets protect children against engaging in risky behaviors, they also promote engaging in positive, developmentally appropriate behaviors. As this bar graph shows, children with more assets generally report

higher levels on the seven thriving indicators.

**Questions to consider:** Do assets make a difference for your children? Do your children follow the typical pattern of increasing levels of thriving indicators paired with higher levels of assets?



**Figure 14:** The positive implications of Developmental Assets—the percentage of your surveyed children reporting each of seven thriving indicators. These findings are reported for the total sample and by asset level. This table presents the thriving indicators and their definitions within the survey, together with the percentage of the total sample reporting each. In addition, percentages are reported by asset level (0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40).

**PLEASE NOTE:** Percentages across rows do not add up to 100% because

percentages are based on the column group membership. For example, if a value of 70% is under the 0 to 10 category for school success, that means that 70% of your children *who report 0 to 10 assets* “have” the school success thriving indicator; conversely, 30% of your children *who report 0 to 10 assets* do not “have” the school success thriving indicator.

**Questions to consider:** What is the pattern of thriving indicators as you move across asset levels? Is the pattern consistent with what you would expect?

<b>Figure 14: Percent of Students Reporting Thriving Indicators, by Asset Level</b>						
Thriving Indicator	Definition	Total Sample	Number of Assets			
			0 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	31 - 40
<b>School Success</b>	Child gets mostly "A's, or Outstanding/ Excellent marks" or mostly "B's, or Good/ Above Average marks."	65	40	48	76	86
<b>Helps Others</b>	Child helps friends, neighbors, or others on one or more days per week.	75	33	69	81	94
<b>Values Diversity</b>	Child values having diverse friends and gets along well with people who are of a different race or culture than the child.	81	58	81	82	94
<b>Delays Gratification</b>	Child can wait for a larger reward later, rather than needing to obtain a smaller reward immediately.	40	10	24	41	74
<b>Coregulation</b>	Child often helps parents make decisions about things the child cares about.	89	73	88	94	95
<b>Coping</b>	Child regularly uses active coping skills to deal with problems.	42	8	23	50	66
<b>Life Satisfaction</b>	Child is satisfied with her or his life.	77	35	68	86	98

Note: Less than 0.5% rounded to zero.

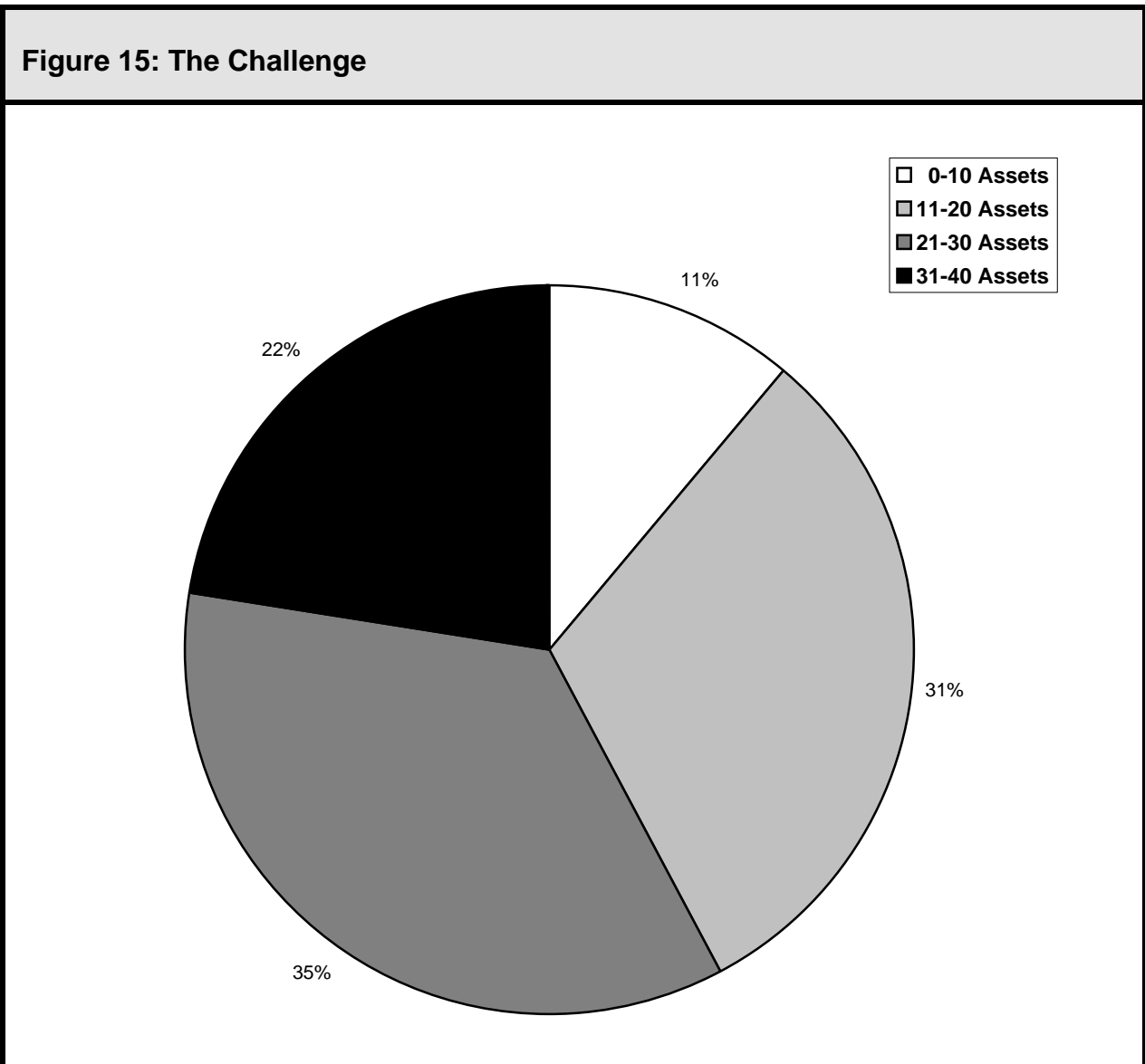
## V. From Awareness to Action

### The Challenge

In all communities across the country, Developmental Assets are too fragile. Ideally, a community should strive to ensure that all children and youth experience the highest level of Developmental Assets (i.e., 31-40 assets). Though our field tests as well as past research suggest that 4th – 6th graders have more assets than do adolescents, there are still too many of these 4th – 6th graders who do not have enough assets. Since studies of children across time indicate that the most typical path for students in middle and high school

is for assets to decrease overall, anything we can do to build assets during the upper-elementary years will aid in keeping young people on developmentally healthy trajectories.

**Figure 15.** Proportion of your children reporting 0-10, 11-20, 21-30, and 31-40 assets. A majority of your children may have more than half the assets, but examine the proportion that experience half or fewer of the assets. Which actions can your community take to ensure that these children do not continue experiencing half or fewer of these 40 assets as they move across adolescence?



Unless we are aware of the importance of Developmental Assets in the lives of children and are intentional in our actions and behaviors to promote healthy development, we will see too many young people who are susceptible to risky behaviors and negative pressure, drawn to less desirable sources of belonging, and ill-equipped to become healthy adolescents and eventually the next generation of parents, workers, leaders, and citizens. Why are we in this situation? A number of social forces likely are at work, including:

- high levels of parental absence in the lives of children;
- adult silence about boundaries and values;
- the fragmentation of many socializing systems;
- age segregation and the general disengagement of the public from building meaningful connections with children;
- the isolation of people of all ages within neighborhoods;
- over-exposure to the mass media;
- barriers to healthy development such as poverty, lack of access to programs and services, and families ill-equipped to care for their children;
- fear of involvement by adults and a sense that children and youth are the responsibility of "someone else"; and
- the too-common occurrence of schools, religious institutions, and other youth-serving organizations not being adequately equipped to be places of support, caring, and positive challenge.

This combination of factors suggests, among other things, that we are losing our capacity to be communities in which caring, connectedness, and a shared sense of purpose are common place and a commitment to children dominates public and private life.

## Promoting Developmental Assets

Developmental Assets are cumulative or additive—the more, the better. Search

Institute's research has consistently shown that the more assets young people have, the less likely they are to be involved in risky behavior patterns. And, multiple forms of thriving, such as school success and helping others, increase as assets increase. Given the power of the Developmental Assets and the current too-low levels of assets among our society's children, a commitment to asset building should become a top priority. While many well-intentioned child and youth development efforts focus on the consequences of asset depletion, unless we place major energy into strengthening the asset foundation for children and youth, the problems we now see will persist—and likely increase.

How do we begin the work of strengthening the Developmental Assets for all young people? Through its work with communities across the country, Search Institute has identified six principles to help guide the process.<sup>2</sup>

- **All young people need Developmental Assets:** While it is crucial to pay special attention to those who have the least (economically, educationally, emotionally), **all** children and adolescents will benefit from having more assets than they now have.
- **Everyone can build assets:** Asset development requires positive messages across a community. All adults, youth, and children play a role.
- **It's an ongoing process:** Asset development starts when a child is born and continues through high school and beyond.
- **Relationships are key:** A central key to asset development is strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children.

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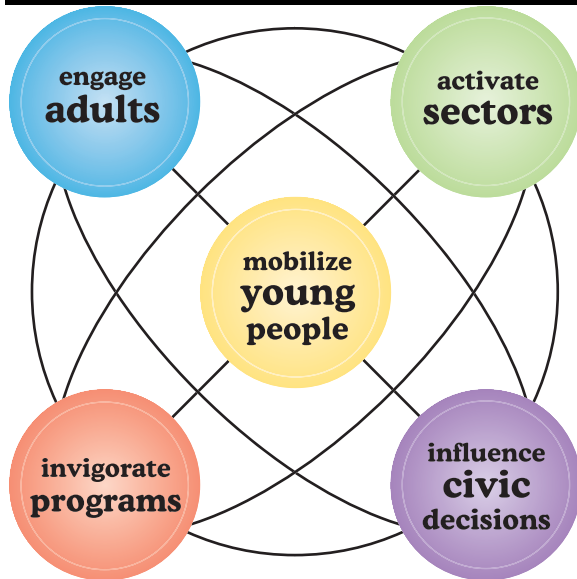
<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Uniting Communities for Youth: Mobilizing All Sectors to Create a Positive Future* by Dr. Peter L. Benson, Search Institute, 1995.

- **Consistent messages:** Asset building requires consistent, positive messages about what is important.
- **Redundancy:** Young people need to hear the same positive messages and feel support over and over again, from many different people.

## Taking Action: Search Institute’s Five Action Strategies

At Search Institute, we have studied many community change models and have observed hundreds of community initiatives that are using the framework of Developmental Assets to guide their work. We have identified five action strategies (as depicted in Figure 16) that can transform communities into more developmentally attentive places; places that are more intentional in their efforts to foster the healthy development of their children and adolescents.

**Figure 16. Search Institute’s Five Action Strategies**



These general strategies guide a community initiative to:

**1. Engage adults.** Engage adults from all walks of life to develop sustained, strength-building relationships with children and

adolescents, both within families and in neighborhoods.

- ❖ *Young people need the adults in their lives to acknowledge them, affirm them and connect with them. They need these things from the adults who are not paid to work with them, as well as the professionals who are.*
- ❖ *Engaging parents as asset builders—and affirming the many ways they already build assets—is particularly important, given their central role in children’s lives.*

**2. Mobilize young people.** Mobilize young people to use their power as asset builders and change agents.

- ❖ *Many youth feel devalued by adults. And most report their community does not provide useful roles for young people. It should become normative in all settings where children and youth are involved to seek their input and advice, to make decisions with them and to treat them as responsible, competent allies in all asset-building efforts.*
- ❖ *It is also important to help young people tap their own power to build assets for themselves, their peers and younger children.*

**3. Activate sectors.** Activate all sectors of the community—such as schools, congregations, children and youth, businesses, human services, and health-care organizations—to create an asset-building culture and to contribute fully to young people’s healthy development.

- ❖ *Young people are customers, employees, patients, participants—members of their community in many of the same ways adults are. All sectors have opportunities to examine the ways they come in contact with young people, and identify ways they can support their healthy development.*

**4. Invigorate programs.** Invigorate, expand, and enhance programs to become more asset rich and to be available to and accessed by all children and youth.

- ❖ *Though much asset building occurs in daily, informal interactions, programs young people take part in throughout their community must also become more intentional about asset building. Opportunities for training, technical assistance, and networking should be made available in these settings.*

**5. Influence civic decisions.** Influence decision makers and opinion leaders to leverage financial, media and policy resources in support of this positive transformation of communities and society.

- ❖ *Community-wide policies, messages and priorities not only shape people's perceptions of youth, but they also can motivate and support individuals, organizations, and sectors to make asset building an ongoing priority.*

The Developmental Assets framework for middle childhood, like the foundational framework for adolescence from which it is derived and with which it is fully aligned, is designed to provide a focus for these strategies. Collectively, efforts to build young people's Developmental Assets through these five action strategies are intended to have a powerful positive impact on young people's well-being, as well as on families, schools and other organizations, programs, policies, neighborhoods, and a community's overall quality of life.

There is no single model for how a community-wide, asset-building initiative is launched and sustained. We believe that each community brings a unique mix of strengths, history and existing efforts into the planning and implementation of their initiative. However, certain dynamics appear essential.

- **Cultivate a Shared Vision**—Invite community members to articulate and keep alive a shared vision for an asset-rich community. The information in this report can help you develop a shared community-wide vision centered on increasing the asset base for all children and adolescents. Know that reaching

this target cannot be rushed or done with a single new idea or program. Rather, it will take long-term commitment, multiple and coordinated changes, and a passion for the vision that will sustain your efforts.

- **Recruit and Network Champions**—Nurture relationships with people who have the passion to spread the word and help make the vision a reality. Create opportunities for these champions to learn from, support, and inspire each other.
- **Communicate**—Distribute information, make presentations, and tap the media to raise awareness about asset building and local efforts. Information from this survey can help you share with your community what young people experience. Emphasize the ability of all community members—including young people—to build assets.
- **Strengthen Capacity**—Provide or facilitate training, technical assistance, coaching, tools, or other resources that help individuals and organizations in their asset-building efforts.
- **Reflect, Learn, and Celebrate**—Reflect on and learn from current progress and challenges. Many people, places and programs already build assets. Highlight and honor existing and new asset-building efforts in the community.
- **Manage and Coordinate**—Manage and coordinate schedules, budgets and other administrative tasks, as needed.

Asset-building communities mobilize people, organizations, institutions, and systems to take action around a shared understanding of positive development. Figure 17 lists 36 characteristics of asset-building communities. Ultimately, rebuilding and strengthening the developmental infrastructure in a community is not a program run by professionals. It is a movement that creates a community-wide

sense of common purpose. It places residents and their leaders on the same team moving in the same direction, and creates a culture in which all residents are expected by virtue of their membership in the community, to promote the positive development of children and youth.

To learn more about asset-building communities across North America, **visit our web site at: [www.search-institute.org/communities/](http://www.search-institute.org/communities/)**

**Figure 17: Characteristics of Asset-Building Communities**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Engage Adults</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A vision rooted in Developmental Assets is communicated several times a year to all residents.</li> <li>2. All residents understand their personal capacity to promote Developmental Assets.</li> <li>3. Most residents take personal responsibility.</li> <li>4. Most residents take action.</li> <li>5. New residents are quickly socialized to the community vision.</li> <li>6. A common core of values is named.</li> <li>7. Adults model and articulate their values.</li> <li>8. A common core of boundaries is named.</li> <li>9. Adults model and articulate these boundaries.</li> <li>10. Community programs assist adults—particularly parents—to personally reclaim Developmental Assets.</li> <li>11. Most adults establish sustained relationships with children and adolescents.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mobilize Young People</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Children and teenagers know the Developmental Assets.</li> <li>13. Most youth take action to promote assets for themselves and for their peers.</li> <li>14. Youth have many opportunities to lead, make decisions, and give input; youth are provided useful roles in community life. Youth then are actors in the reclaiming of community rather than just objects of programs.</li> <li>15. All children and teenagers frequently engage in service to others. Much of this “work” is done with adults; a premium is placed on processing the experiences (i.e., service learning)</li> <li>16. Most adolescents establish sustained relationships with younger children.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activate Sectors</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Families</b> are supported, taught, and equipped to elevate asset building to top priority.</li> <li>18. <b>Neighbors</b> and community residents build caring relationships with youth and express this caring through dialogue, listening, commending positive behavior, acknowledging their presence, enjoying their company, and involving them in decision making. They know neighborhood children and adolescents by name and take time to get to know them.</li> <li>19. <b>Businesses</b> that employ teenagers address the assets of support, boundaries, values, and social competencies. Employers also develop family-friendly policies and provide mechanisms for employees to build relationships with youth ask you about homework.</li> <li>20. <b>Religious institutions</b> mobilize their capacity for intergenerational relationships, educating and supporting parents, structured time use, values development, and service to the community. They focus on both their own members and the larger community.</li> <li>21. <b>Schools</b>—both elementary and secondary—place priority on becoming caring environments for all students, providing challenging and engaging curricula for all students, providing opportunities for nurturing values deemed crucial by the community, expanding and strengthening co-curricular activities, and using their connections with parents to reinforce the importance of family attention to assets.</li> </ol>

**Figure 17: Characteristics of Asset-Building Communities (Cont'd)**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Invigorate Programs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>22. Youth organizations and other service providers train leaders and volunteers in asset-building strategies and provide meaningful opportunities for youth to serve their community and build citizenship and leadership skills.</li> <li>23. The community invests in expanding and strengthening its systems of clubs, teams, and organizations.</li> <li>24. Virtually all 7- to 18-year-olds are involved in one or more clubs, teams, or other youth-serving organizations that view building assets as central to their mission.</li> <li>25. All professionals (e.g., day care providers, teachers, social workers, youth ministers) and volunteers (e.g., coaches, mentors) who work with youth receive training in asset building.</li> <li>26. Current programs which intentionally build assets, like peer helping, mentoring, and service learning, are elevated to top priority and expanded to reach a higher number of youth.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Influence Civic Decisions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>27. Local government—through policy, influence, training, and resource allocation—moves asset development and community-wide cooperation to top priorities for planning, policies, and funding allocations within the municipality.</li> <li>28. The media (print, radio, television) repeatedly communicate the community's vision, support local mobilization efforts, and provide forums for sharing innovative actions taken by individuals and organizations.</li> <li>29. The community prizes cultural strengths and traditions. Particularly for youth of color, this heritage includes the concept of elders, the primacy of intergenerational relationships, respect for figures of authority, the value of caring for others, and a wisdom about what matters. Being in touch with and affirming these strengths represents an important dimension of cultural competence, in addition to knowledge and contact with cultures beyond one's own.</li> <li>30. Teenagers have safe places "to hang".</li> <li>31. All children receive frequent expressions of support in both informal public settings and in places where youth gather.</li> <li>32. The community celebrates the individuals and systems that take innovative action; youth professionals and volunteers have high status in the life of the community.</li> <li>33. The community-wide commitment to asset building is long-term and inclusive.</li> <li>34. The community pays particular attention to helping girls develop assertiveness skills, a sense of personal control and mastery and healthy self-concept.</li> <li>35. The community pays particular attention to helping boys develop and express compassion and caring.</li> <li>36. Local foundations and other funders invest in asset-building strategies.</li> </ul>