

THE IMPACT OF STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT ON STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT

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*All difference calculations are taken from raw values. All other scores have been rounded to the nearest 100th.

Introduction

As a culminating project, this dissertation represents my journey through understanding engagement both conceptually and pragmatically within schools. It begins with a look at when I was a high school math teacher and first began to understand that engagement mattered, and continues with my struggles as an administrator encouraging teachers to care about engagement. The definition of engagement for the purposes of this dissertation will be on a continuum. It will be defined at the broadest level as someone's involvement or even enjoyment with some aspect of life and defined much more narrowly as someone's behavioral, motivational, and cognitive connection to an activity or task, whether that be school or work related (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). My interest in engagement is what led to a project in partnership with The Gallup Organization as part of my doctoral work and eventually what my full-time employment focused on within the company.

The first chapter of this dissertation reviews the background of my own experiences with engagement and the events that led to my connection to Gallup. The second chapter explores the background knowledge that was necessary for me to investigate as I prepared a study that would help Gallup justify a program aimed at measuring and increasing engagement within schools. The third chapter tells the story from beginning to end about the *actual* study that took place, the process from a project standpoint, and shares the deliverables that were provided to Gallup's Education Division. The fourth and final chapter is a reflection of the Gallup project, my learning about leadership and management as part of the MBA/Ed.D. program, and my thoughts about how these experiences have helped clarify my future goals.

CHAPTER 1

The Back Story

The first time I realized that student engagement was something that I, as a teacher, could influence was in 1999. After five years of private school teaching, my husband and I moved to Texas and I started teaching Algebra I at a 5A high school. I was excited and confident, for I had just come from a prestigious, highly academic high school in South Florida. For the first five years of my teaching career I had the best mentors, was able to develop my methods, stretched myself in instructional design, and felt like I had a good handle on the art of teaching. I had every reason to believe that I would be revered as a masterful teacher at my new school.

Teacher 101

I started during the third week of school. We had moved to Texas in late July and this district started the first week of August, so by the time I was offered a position, school was well under way. The students had been through three substitute teachers already and were locked and loaded for the new “real” teacher they had been told about. I started my first day as I always had, with dialogue about who I was and who they were and how important it was to me that we know each other. Let’s just say there was a ton of eye rolling and sleeping that day. I was aware enough to know they could care less about who I was and that they did not trust me at all. I was perplexed. Did they not know and believe that I liked them and cared about them as people first? Did they not sense my commitment to their growth as individuals? I knew it would take some time to get to know them, but at the very least I expected some eagerness on their part about our future time together.

Across the next few weeks I tried hard to design lessons that would involve them, where they could discover things – my wonderful teaching strategies that had wowed everyone in South Florida, students included. I was getting nowhere. Students slept, cussed, walked out of class, and absolutely never had their homework. The first time I assigned homework I had four students all day that actually did it. I remember the look on one student’s face when I was expressing my disappointment about the lack of effort on homework; it was a smirk, as if to say “Lady, you have no idea who you are dealing with – you really expected us to do our homework, you’ll learn.” I also started to ask questions and listened carefully to their responses. I was genuinely trying to get to know them by listening and observing what excited them, what motivated them, and what their hopes were about the future.

I had one class that had only about 20 students, which was a small class by comparison. They were all struggling with the most basic content of Algebra I. It was nine weeks into the semester before the school administration informed me that most of the students, 16 of the 20, were special education or on a special learning plan. No wonder we could not figure each other out. All of the frustration I was feeling left me lost, confused, and defeated. I remember those first nine weeks or so like it was yesterday. There were nights that I would come home crying, telling my husband that I was going to quit at the semester break. I would wake up in the morning trying to figure out if I could use a sick day, because I just could not face another day.

I was not only humbled by this feeling of defeat, but also humiliated. Things had come easily for me in teaching. What I did not realize was that teaching was easy mainly because the students I worked with in South Florida were easy. They were invested in

their classes either because they were naturally motivated to do well or because the pressure to do well kept them committed to their work. Either way, they strived for good grades and success, motivation my new students at first glance seemed to be lacking.

I had standards, beliefs, and high expectations. My whole reason for being a teacher stemmed from a desire to help students discover their greatness and to help them understand the vast opportunities that were in front of them. How could I reach this group? I could not give in and expect less from these students just because they seemed disinterested in learning and in the future. I was not going to compromise what I so strongly believed just because these young people seemed to lack motivation, dedication, and did not want to work for their own futures. So, I kept trying. If I could just help motivate them, get them thinking about their future, get them to trust me, things could be different; but they were not interested in those conversations, it seemed. I kept feeling that maybe that type of environment, public school, was not the place for me. I missed my highly motivated, high achieving teenagers from South Florida, students that were striving for Harvard and Yale. I missed my teaching colleagues, too; we brainstormed and worked together on instruction. We pushed each other to be better teachers. In this high school I felt isolated. I barely knew the names of the teachers on my hall. Everyone kept to themselves and most seemed so unhappy. When that afternoon bell rang, I am not sure who was out the door faster, the students or the teachers. I thought maybe I just did not fit. But how could that be? I was a product of public schooling.

The Revelation

One night I had a conversation with my husband that changed everything. I made a comment about my standards and expectations and how I could not believe these young

people did not care about the future. All I wanted was for them to see the opportunities that were in front of them. He said something like, “Jessica, you love this age group. These are the students that need you the most. The private school students succeed despite the teachers they have. You need to figure out how to have your standards, high expectations, and hope for the future with these students in a way that works for them.” I do not know what it was, but that comment changed me overnight, literally. I thought I had been trying hard to do just that all those weeks. But I realized that I had been trying to fit these students into my world instead of trying to fit myself into theirs. I could not sleep that night because my husband struck a chord in me; it was *my* responsibility to figure out how to get them involved and engaged, not theirs. They were doing their part. As Schlechty pointed out in *Inventing Better Schools* (1997), students are more like volunteers and “thus, they are more like customers in our adult world than like neophytes being inducted into the ways of a tribe. The idea of the student as a customer acknowledges the voluntary nature of the relationships between the student and the school” (p. 48). Most of them showed up every day just waiting for me to figure them out, waiting for me to connect with them and get them plugged in. So I dreamed, brainstormed, and thought a lot about how to structure our time together in a way that fit their lives.

I decided that one battle I could immediately let them win was the battle over homework. Regardless of how well I connected with them, or how much I encouraged them to do homework, or punished them for not doing it, it was clear that most would never complete the homework assignments. I knew because I had been fighting this battle and losing for weeks. Within hours of the revelatory conversation with my

husband, my feelings changed about the homework issue. I understood the power they held on this front and knew that I could not win. I wondered if I could accomplish all the learning that was necessary without nightly assignments. I could not imagine how it would have worked in my previous school, but here I began to see that it just might be possible. I had 90 minutes per day with these students because of our block schedule and that seemed like plenty of time to learn. If we could be efficient with our time, it could work. My new philosophy emerged: I had 90 minutes a day with these students and in that 90 minutes I was going to push them, expect the most out of them, challenge them, and love them. And when they walked out the door, they would have produced more and learned more in those 90-minute segments of our time together than ever before.

I had a few people that did not quite agree with me along the way, namely the department chair – who I later found out as a consultant, usually had a failure rate near 40%. He said forcing students to do homework was teaching them responsibility. To give up on that was to let them win and perpetuated the lower standard. In my mind I had not given up on anything; I had merely changed the way in which I helped students meet my (and the district's) standards. The standards were not changed. I still expected them to learn the content of Algebra I, and I still expected them to demonstrate that learning in many ways, but through daily work and tests, not nightly assignments. I could teach them about responsibility; I could teach them about integrity; and most importantly, I could teach them that they were able to produce, succeed, and exceed expectations. This could be done within the 90 minutes of face time that I was privileged to have with them each day.

The classes I had were full of repeat offenders and students that did nothing and expected to pass, because they had done so in many other classes. They knew that teachers were under pressure to have low failure rates and so some worked the system. When I announced that there would never be homework again, I got a round of applause. I am sure they were thinking that I was starting to figure them out and starting to give in. What they didn't realize at first, but slowly began to understand, was that I was having them do more in our time together than ever before. I did not announce my new approach, but instead just designed different lessons that had them working together to create products and through that creation, I could see their learning. The work they created ranged from working together to demonstrate and communicate the understanding of very traditional practice problems to projects that allowed them to further explore the relevance of a particular topic to their own world. They began getting involved and working hard for me. Some even said things like "Wow, we got a lot done today." And some of my more savvy students began to realize what I was up to and secretly appreciated it, I think.

From day one I had been working really hard to build relationships and through those relationships I was hoping to build an implicit trust. That was beginning to pay off about the same time my new philosophy was being put into play. By the end of the semester we were having fun learning, and they were actually surprised at themselves. One student who literally only showed up a few days a month actually did work for me when he was present. He, of course, was one student that I still could not fully reach, and he failed my class. I later found out from one of his friends that my class was often the only one he showed up for, and I truly believed it was because I expected something –

anything – from him, while nobody else did. Other teachers were probably glad he was not there and dreaded dealing with him when he did show up. I know that is how I felt early on in the semester. These relationships were based solely on caring about their lives, work, athletics, friends, family, and other happenings outside of math. Because they could see that I cared about them as people, I was able to build the trust I needed to help them grow. Once I understood who they were, I could connect the importance of learning to them in an individualized way: The connections were different for every student and I could only build those connections after I learned more about their lives.

One student warned me very early on that she “stunk” at math and by the end of the semester she was a class leader, often helping other students learn. A note from her is still in my wallet to this day in which she describes her own transformation from loathing and struggling with math to loving it and that through this learning she felt her future had really opened up. She could learn; she could overcome her fear; and she could win. Having her overcome her fear was the connection that I made with her that allowed me to help her learn. It was not about the math itself. It was about her *ability* to learn.

Some of my students had never earned an A or B on a math test; some had never had a positive comment shared with their parents in their 10 or 11 years of schooling. Some parents on parent night could not believe the work that their children were producing and that they were talking about their math class at home. Some parents challenged my no-homework policy, but I was armed with evidence to support my case. Every paper, every assignment, and every project was kept within the walls of my classroom. They were building portfolios and did not even know it. When the parents saw these portfolios, most of them were stunned. The students and I revisited those files

every week and looked at the work that we created together. They enjoyed it, and they were proud. This filing system was one way that I taught them about responsibility, but it was also my way of reminding them of their greatness and successes. Those relationships are still important to me, and that experience changed me and my view of teaching and learning forever.

My first powerful lesson was understanding for the first time that I truly had the power within me to influence how each and every child experienced school. So, as a sixth year teacher I had a teacher 101 moment. I cried, I struggled, I witnessed, I manufactured, I experimented, and I succeeded with those students. The students were engaged, they learned, they had fun, and they grew as human beings as well as learned the math. I will never know whether it was the relationships or the choices I made about the learning that enhanced our experiences that year, but I do know that the outcomes were more favorable than if I had just given up or had continued down the path of frustration. I will also never know if I could have reproduced this result in other environments; my guess is that I could have, but the variables with which I would tinker would be different. I learned how to influence the engagement of my students that year and in that classroom. My next challenge, unbeknownst to me at this time, was going to be to learn how to help other teachers influence the level of engagement in their classroom, that is, if they were willing to experiment.

Administrator 101

The next year, 2000, I became the assistant principal at a middle school in the same school district. When we originally moved to Texas, I was seeking an administrative position because I was ready to have a broader impact on education. I had

just completed my Masters in Educational Leadership at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida that same summer. I wanted to help make an entire school a better place for young people and I wanted to have an impact on more students than just those in my own classroom. Because our move was a very last minute decision, I pursued teaching for one more year before I could begin the search for a principal position.

My experience as a school administrator would serve as another major impetus for the growth of my own philosophies and understanding of the profession that was so dear to my heart. All along in my teaching career, I just assumed that everyone else worked as hard, took things as seriously, and dedicated their hearts, souls, and minds to getting teaching right for students. I thought that everyone worked at building close relationships with students and that every teacher understood that sincere relationships were the avenue to student growth. During my first few days on the job as an assistant principal, I began to see evidence that challenged my perspectives.

I saw laziness, rudeness, boredom, disrespect, total lack of interest in learning, and lack of energy and enthusiasm, and that was within the teaching staff, not the students. At first I blamed it on the chaos that surrounds the beginning of school and my unfamiliarity with the middle school environment. But soon it became apparent that this attitude was permanent in certain teachers. I really could not believe what I was seeing. I was in disbelief. Was this real? Was this what teaching looked like? In my first five years of teaching I was surrounded by amazing teachers who had amazing students. In my sixth year I was in my own world trying to figure things out for the students I worked with every day, so much so that I never knew what really went on outside my classroom. It was not until I was an administrator that I saw for the first time what teaching looked

like at a more macro level. I was naïve, discouraged, and disappointed. I began to wonder if what I was seeing was a more realistic view of teaching than what I had known thus far in my career.

I sensed that the behavior I was seeing was the result of power battles being fought every day, in which the win did not always go to the worthy party. For example, a teacher had the exact same routine every day and approached it with the same lack of energy every day. She put her warm-up activity on the screen without saying a word. She gave no greeting or smile and her students responded in the same manner. Then students got their homework out, and she flipped the overhead to the answers; again without a word. Next she asked if there were any questions. Surprise, there weren't any. Then she went right into giving the notes for the day in lecture style; she could have just recorded herself, it would have been the same amount of interaction. After the notes, students started on the homework listed on the board, again without a word spoken. There literally was no human interaction; a machine could have flipped the pages on the overhead.

The students were like machines too. Some students figured out her system. They knew how to jump through the hoops. They learned to go to other teachers for help if they had questions. By doing their homework and following the routine, they could get by. Students that did not appreciate the routine and did not know how to reach out for help would fail. She had about a 40% failure rate, and she put all the blame on the students. She rationalized each and every name on the list as to why they failed. He or she did not try hard enough, or did not pay attention in class, or was a very low reader and could not be expected to succeed. The blame was always going in one direction and

there was a sense of power in her words. This teacher would not meet them half-way, for that would be failure on her part and that would be letting them win.

Such power battles, however subtle or obvious, occurred every day and usually in the classrooms that had higher failure rates and higher rates of behavior problems. As a result of these power battles, a sense of survival set in for both teacher and student, and those students that figured out each teacher's system could manipulate it and survive. Those who could not failed. Survival for the teacher was different. Teachers shut down and did whatever was necessary to get through the day. For some, the easiest way to survive was to blame someone else. For these teachers there were plenty of targets for the finger pointing, namely students, administrators, and the district as a whole. They displayed no ownership and no sense of responsibility. These teachers believed that the problems existed outside of themselves. They were not responsible for being part of the solution. The problems were someone else's fault and issue to solve, and in the meantime, they would just bide their time and focus on getting through each day.

Of course, some of those same negative behaviors occurred among students. One of these behaviors that I especially noticed early on in my administrative role was boredom. I remember being so saddened by the boredom that I saw every day. The same students that were loud, energetic, happy, and busy at lunch and between periods were struggling to keep their eyes open and had the most sullen looks on their faces in class. As soon as the bell rang, boom they were up and out and living life. I decided to do an experiment. I followed an eighth grade student around one day and sat in all of his classes. I could barely stand it. I was bored out of my mind and not because the material was "below" me, but because the teachers failed to engage their students. There was no

energy in the room. I really just sat in a desk, faced the front of the room, and listened to an adult for close to seven hours. I wanted to jump out of my seat – get students talking, doing, sharing, producing, and thinking. Even in the classes that had group work or activities, I felt like the students were going through the motions and teachers were too. I do not want it to sound like this school was horrible. The school, by all district and state measures, was a top-performing school. We had a great staff. It was simply the first time that I had seen such a range in teacher effectiveness and the first time I cared because of my new role. As an administrator, I had to care about the performance of every teacher and student. This experience helped me see that even at good schools, as defined by external measures, the differences in approaches and outcomes in teaching were vast. That day made me realize more than ever that if we do not engage our students, learning and growth are a much bigger challenge.

Can learning occur without engagement? Yes, because students who are naturally driven to achieve or who have other factors encouraging achievement can *do* school. Their success does not necessarily mean that great learning and growth are occurring. I think of students that I have had in the past that could *do* school and do it really well. They were wired to achieve, to be the best, and always figured out the rules to do just that; however, if you ask them some very basic questions that any “well-schooled” individual should know, they will not necessarily know the answers. They learned what they needed for the test and shortly afterwards, would forget the content and move on to the next test. Our schools are full of these students. They are the ones who can figure out the rules of the game and who can play it well enough to get by and even excel, but not necessarily know as much as they should to be the best they can be outside

of school. Unfortunately, our schools are also full of students that either do not know it is a game or do not care to play.

In my experience, valuable learning and growth seemed to happen when students were truly engaged. I was beginning to think that as the precursor to learning, engaging students should be our primary goal as professional educators. I believed that teachers should commit to figuring out the magic necessary to do just that. I believed that this magic would be different for every class of students, but that there were common aspects to the equation that were essential. To me, relationships and the right activities would be those essential pieces; the other variables would be different from class to class and would be more local. I had experienced the impact that a teacher could have on the students in her classroom, but now my challenge was to see if I could help others think about engagement in their own classrooms.

At that time, I truly believed if a teacher could just get those two things right, relationships and the right kind of learning activities, students would be more involved in learning. What I would come to learn is that those two aspects of educating students are difficult to teach and are more a result of who teachers are than certain strategies they invest in upfront. I do believe that simply having conversations about controllable and uncontrollable aspects of engagement and spending time brainstorming can help teachers who may be trapped in that power battle mode with students to think more openly about their students and their standards. These conversations should occur within the context of specific goals for student outcomes. A focus on student outcomes with openness about how to be successful could be a useful exercise for teachers. Not all teachers are naturally good at relationships and creating the right kind of work for students. Although

all teachers can work at both, they may not ever be great. So dialogue and brainstorming where the outcomes have already been agreed upon would allow teachers to think about how to take different paths and use different strengths to achieve those goals. Doing so would provide much needed time to share and collaborate on the tough issues of school, where teachers could utilize each other as professionals.

Also during this administrative experience, I would come to realize the importance of partnerships among the adults in the building. The principal and I were both new to our positions, although the principal had been the assistant principal at the school the year before, under a very unpopular administrator. The previous principal did not appreciate the power of putting relationships first. She was degrading, seen by staff as an uncaring taskmaster and micromanager. Before they knew she was leaving, several members of the staff quit or put in for transfers. The new principal was seen as part of the former administrator's regime. He had his own battles to fight and had to prove that he truly cared about teachers as people first. He was one of the greatest mentors I have ever had. He worked hard, cared a lot, instinctively knew what was right for students, and ensured that it happened. We worked together for two years, and in that time we created change together through extreme commitment to the teachers and students of that school.

One of the most important decisions we made was to create discussions and exchanges in our monthly faculty meetings. We made a vow to the faculty that these meetings would be an exchange of ideas versus a transfer of information. We shared our notion that information could be disseminated in other formats, e.g., an email or bulletin, and that our time together in the same room should be spent talking about the issues that mattered to helping our students grow. Having meaningful dialogue where everyone

contributed was probably the most powerful change that we implemented, because it allowed for conversations about everything from structuring tutorials to teaching philosophies. People became more connected and felt they had a safe place to discuss shared issues and felt they had partners who could help solve problems. By safe I mean a shared feeling that it was okay to struggle with the art of teaching, because it is not easy, and it is challenging year after year, class after class, no matter how good you are.

We also held students accountable for learning and supported it in ways that made sense. We did not interrupt learning time; we protected it. No announcements were made during learning time, unless it was an emergency. Students went directly to class if they were tardy and the issue of tardiness was dealt with later so that instructional time would not be shortened further by a wait in the office. We tried our best to protect the time that teachers had with students by guarding it very carefully. We held students accountable by helping to solve any issues that got in the way of their learning. When a student would tell us that s/he could not attend tutorials because s/he had to take the bus and the parent told us the same, we talked with the parent to find a solution that worked. Sometimes it just meant brainstorming with the parent on how to work out transportation issues, and other times it meant we had to figure out a way to help the student during the school day. Either way, we were persistent in solving some of the roadblocks that normally would have prevented our efforts. The typical excuses were put to rest by partnering with parents and teachers to ensure that we did whatever we could to remove those roadblocks to growth.

During all this push for change and growth among our staff, I often reflected on the amazing amount of energy and work that it required to take a pretty good school and

make it even better. Although empowering and invigorating, the work was also exhausting for us all. To consistently get better, we had to commit to doing whatever it took, and most of the time, that meant a huge investment in both energy and time. The only reason that we were able to create change those two years was the true commitment of the teachers. Although some of the negative behaviors that I mentioned did continue to exist, the majority of the staff was striving for excellence not only in students, but within themselves. I often thought about the fact that I was in a white, middle-class suburb at one of the best schools in the area. If it took this much time and energy to just improve from good to great, what would it take to go from bad to average to good to great? If this is what it was like in the suburbs at a good school, I was afraid to think about what it would be like in inner-city schools.

My experience at this top-performing campus caused me to wonder what teaching and learning looked like in other environments, inner-city, rural, poor areas, and rich areas. Were teaching and learning in general going to have the challenges of student engagement and the immense need for teachers' commitment and hard-work? Were the good, the mediocre, and the ugly aspects of education going to appear in any school, anywhere? I imagined that the answer was probably yes, but believed that good leaders could work at getting a building to have more of the good and less of the ugly if they worked at it every day. So for the first time in my life, I began to define what I thought good teaching was really about.

I had always known that relationships and knowledge were important, that a certain skill in creating engaging lessons was vital, and that enthusiasm and passion were foundational to successful teaching. I had known this to be true in my teaching, but what

I realized during this experience was that an awareness of engagement and the ability to influence it depended on these aspects coming together in a person who was highly self-aware and perceptive about young people, and who first and foremost cared. So now, not only did the teacher have to brainstorm and discuss strategies for engagement, but they first had to have the right relationships, had to care, had to be self-aware and had to be perceptive. My list was becoming a pretty tall order. I wondered what part of this list could be taught. Could teachers learn how to build relationships? I believed the answer was closer to no than yes, but I did believe that most teachers could get better at building relationships. I was fairly certain that relationships were the foundation, but I was also beginning to see evidence that revealed relationships alone were not the answer. Focusing on helping teachers with some of the other pieces could be worthwhile, especially if the relationship part was already in place.

I began to wonder how I as an administrator could work on engaging teachers in their work so that they in turn could engage students in learning. This question haunted me during my two years at the middle school in Texas. I was not knowledgeable about literature on engagement, yet I worked hard during those years to develop relationships with teachers, to help them rediscover their purpose and their love of teaching and to have stimulating conversations with them about what happens in the classroom. What I loved most about being an assistant principal was working with teachers to help them think of teaching not as something we are able to perfect, but instead as a process of discovery and recovery every day, month, and year. Working with new teachers provided a fascinating challenge. I enjoyed working with their raw talent, energy, and beginner's enthusiasm to help them find ways to connect with young people in a way that

engaged both parties in learning. Sometimes the classrooms of new teachers looked too much like mine did those first nine weeks in my Texas math class. Only, some new teachers might not discover the secrets of teaching and mentally check out or worse, quit. The new teachers' classrooms demonstrated the most growth during those two years, partly because their learning curve was steepest and partly because they were eager for guidance and partnerships. I would soon begin to realize that the adult partnerships were a crucial part of the process of personal growth for all adults in the school building.

During this time, I worked closely with a teacher that had all the right relationships with students, but learning was not happening as much as we all thought it should be. Students would do anything for her; they participated, turned in work, made good grades, but they performed poorly on state assessments and at local competitions. She had to figure out how to leverage those valuable relationships to help her students learn. She had to design the right experiences for students that would ensure learning was taking place. That teacher, who was a 15-year teaching veteran, saw huge gains in her students during that second year that we worked together. I did not provide the answers; she did. She just needed someone to care, to help her think, to help her brainstorm, and to help her understand what levers to pull. She needed a partner. We planned together, and I watched her teach, and then we would debrief and start the cycle again. This process was powerful. It taught me about the importance of relationships, both with students and other adults, and how partnership can create powerful outcomes that are harder to attain alone. Her growth involved providing students with the right kind of learning activities, holding them accountable, and putting mechanisms in place to make sure that learning was happening. Relationships with students formed the

foundation of success in her classroom, while engaging learning activities, student accountability and appropriate assessments produced excellence.

This experience also taught me that there are different ways of getting through school. Her students were highly engaged by all standards. Anyone who walked by would hold her up as the epitome of good teaching; however, sufficient learning was not taking place because although students might have looked engaged, their minds were not necessarily being challenged. They were not being asked to think, to ponder, or to wonder. They did know how to go through the motions and get good grades in her class. In her classroom, I had my first glimpse of different kinds of student engagement that will be examined later in this paper.

So these were the next powerful discoveries for me: (1) relationships with students were not enough on their own, but they were the foundation for great student growth, (2) that engagement was a multi-faceted phenomenon, and (3) that partnerships among the adults in a school could often produce better student outcomes. These professional partnerships were essential to the growth and development of the adults in the building. Without these adult relationships, status quo and isolation were common among teachers.

The principal and I both ended up leaving the same year. He left to take a principal position at a 5A high school in the same district and I left to pursue further education. For the next two years I was a full-time student and part-time consultant for a few school districts and small businesses. I didn't sell any product; I simply sold my ability to create, plan, and strategize regarding school improvement and learning in general.

The Desire to Study Engagement

My return to graduate school led to employment at The Gallup Organization as the Practice Manager of Employee Engagement. It is not really a coincidence that I am managing our consulting practice that works with companies that are interested in engaging their employees in hopes of seeing better business outcomes. I do, however, need to go back to explain how I ended up with Gallup. When I applied for a teaching position in the Texas school district, I went through an interview called the Teacher Perceiver. It had some weird questions and was tape-recorded. I must have performed well enough because I was hired (either that or at three weeks into school they were desperate). Later, as an administrator, I was trained on the interview and used it to help make hiring decisions for the middle school in Texas. My second year as an administrator we had a new online tool that was used to help sort applicants called TeacherInsight™.

These Gallup instruments were helpful and most of the time seemed to predict pretty well who should be interviewed. The interviews, I learned in my training, were based on questions that listened for talent, not just knowledge, skills, years of experience, and certification. It had questions about motivation, relationship building, and instructional approaches. For example, a motivation question might have been, “When did you first realize you wanted to be a teacher?” An example of a relationship question would have been something like, “You come across a student whom you know and he is crying, what would you do?” An instructional approach question might have been, “A student who has already read a book that the class is getting ready to start reading has

suggested she read another book, what would you do?” People might think that anyone would be able to answer these questions the “right” way.

Surprisingly, the applicants’ answers to these questions varied from hateful to perceptive. It really did reveal a lot about the person. For instance, on the crying question I would get answers ranging from, “With all that we have to do as teachers, I do not really have time to meddle in a student’s life” to “I’d ask him what he screwed up on” (this interviewee laughed really awkwardly after that) to “I’d stop and listen.” All of these questions allowed an interviewer to hear about the person that might be working with young people all day. I liked those interviews because I loved hearing about the person, the whole person, not just whether they had the right degree, certification and qualifications. These interviews were based on Gallup selection research that helped organizations select more employees like their best.

Gallup developed the interview by studying the best teachers based on student and principal ratings across the country and across all demographic dimensions. Gallup asked hundreds of questions of the best and the average/below average and then figured out what questions sorted. By sorted, Gallup meant, separating those questions that the best teachers consistently answer differently than average or below average teachers from those questions that did not differentiate between the two groups. Questions meeting this criterion would make up the applicant interview. Every year, Gallup tested the interview for reliability to ensure that it actually did strongly predict those individuals having potential in the field of teaching, again based on student and principal ratings. The key word here is potential. Gallup interview instruments helped predict strong potential for teaching. Once a person was hired, that potential needed to be fostered. The interviews

were a start at focusing on the things that mattered in a teacher versus whether or not they fit the position because of the right certification. I personally never felt that certification was a solid predictor of good teaching; quite frankly just about anyone with an undergraduate degree can get certified. The interviews supported the theory that I was constructing about good teaching, that relationship building mattered and that an interest in instructional methods was important. Our philosophies were somewhat in synch; I would later learn just how much.

In 2003 when I entered the MBA/Ed.D. program full-time at Texas Christian University, I was working toward becoming a high school principal, a director of curriculum and instruction, and later a superintendent. However, I was also secretly wondering what else was out there for me. Was there another avenue for me to have even a broader impact on education? Throughout my doctoral program I continued to shape my learning around teacher and student engagement. I realized that I wanted to do my dissertation project about both. In the fall of 2003, a recruiter from Gallup did an information session with our MBA class. She was there to talk about management consulting, which I found interesting since I had recently begun consulting myself. I was excited that I knew something about their business, and so I introduced myself to the recruiter to talk about my experiences with the Teacher Perceiver and TeacherInsight™ instruments. She also spent a considerable amount of time sharing information with me about Gallup's Employee Engagement Practice. She and I communicated for over 18 months and in that time, I interviewed with Gallup on several occasions. We had trouble developing a clear vision of my place within the company because I was still a full-time student. During these conversations, we discussed the possibility of a dissertation project

that aligned with both of our respective interests in engagement. I finally accepted a position as a consultant and seminar leader in the Education Division.

Once I was officially hired, but long before my official start date, I connected with two leaders of the Education Division. The Partner was responsible for sales and the Practice Leader was responsible for thinking about research and future offerings. Together, we came up with a plan to create a study of student and teacher engagement. The original plan was brilliant, I thought. We would work with school districts and schools through a brainstorming process using validated engagement questions asked of students and teachers that would then be analyzed and discussed in the hopes of creating a plan for action. The goal would be to influence the engagement of everyone in the building. The process would be localized, not prescriptive. The plan prompted great dialogue about the immediate environment that students and teachers had to live in every day. I was excited about being involved because I felt this project had the potential to show that engagement was something on which teachers and principals could have an impact.

Gallup's interest and need for such a study came out of a desire to introduce an employee engagement process to K-12 schools. Gallup had published research demonstrating that employee engagement linked powerfully to business outcomes such as retention, productivity, profitability, customer engagement, and safety. Gallup's management consultants worked with organizations to implement measurement and planning solutions for improving the performance of workgroups and ultimately, the organization to which those workgroups belong. This process represented a substantial part of Gallup's management consulting business, but it had never really taken off in

school districts for three reasons according to one of the leaders of the division. One, the Education Division never really tried very hard to sell it; two, Gallup had a tremendous amount of data about how the process worked in business, private, public, and non-profit, including governmental agencies, but only a few studies that suggested it worked in an educational setting; and three, nobody had ever taken the time to think about schools and how the process might have to be different.

In my opinion, engagement was the heart of what made schools work and Gallup had really never focused on helping schools measure and influence engagement at the teacher or student levels. As a result, the two leaders in the Education Division wanted a study to investigate whether or not the process could help school districts.

Next, we started to develop the details of our plan. The survey tool that would be used to gather engagement data was a validated, heavily researched tool called Q^{12®}. When I first saw the twelve items, I recognized them. The district in Texas had used these questions with employees, and as principals we received a report with the data. But, that is where the process ended. There was no dialogue or effort to leverage the data to make an impact. The report was just filed away after the initial discussion, which usually only involved the administrators. I was curious about this process since I could see its potential and had read about how this process worked within the companies with which Gallup partnered.

As I began the journey of this partnership within Gallup, both from a dissertation project standpoint and as a new employee, I began to put my own theories to the test. Were relationships and instructional design the keys to engaging students? In my experiences, I had seen what the two components brought to the classroom, both my own

and others, but would brainstorming and key partnerships within schools be just as or more important to the outcomes schools value? Would all of these aspects together create a great process for impacting engagement? Would I be able to help design a process that worked for schools? Would I be able to finally have a broader impact on education in my new role in this interesting project? Where would it lead?

When I arrived at Gallup and reality set in, things changed. That story will be revealed later in Chapter Three. Chapter Two will describe what I had to do next, which was to investigate engagement literature and other related topics in the hopes of demonstrating the need for the process I described above within schools.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

For the first four million years of human evolution, which includes probably about 200,000 generations, children learned by observing and participating one-on-one with adults who taught them how to become members of that society. For the last four or five generations, we have changed that around so that now kids sit for 13 years behind desks being exposed to a kind of abstract stream of information that comes from an adult in front of them. It is not a viable way to teach everyone. A small percentage of kids may be capable of learning that way. But, for the most part, that's not very much in sync with the way most children learn. Evolution has prepared us for a much more active, much more interactive, much more responsibility-involving way of learning. (Csikszentmihalyi in Whalen, 1999, p. 163)

This chapter represents what I learned as I prepared to conduct a study on student and teacher engagement. The majority of my review of the literature focused on finding support for why a process for thinking about and influencing engagement was necessary for schools to consider. I reviewed engagement and related concepts like motivation, self-efficacy, flow, and authentic work. I searched for related studies and dug deeply into the Gallup archives to understand where we were in understanding engagement. My discoveries make up the content of Chapter Two.

The Impetus for Change

Our understanding of engagement and what drives it has changed dramatically over the last few decades; yet, we are still *doing* school the same as we always have. I heard once that if a time traveler had visited schools in the early 1900s and then again in the early 2000s, the only noticeable changes would be physical – what the buildings look like, that children are no longer in one room, but many rooms, that the clothes are different, that there are computers, but that a closer look at what students were doing would reveal that it is essentially the same. They are sitting, listening, and practicing the

basics. As our understanding of learning and engagement has improved, so too should our efforts to change the way we *do* school. A look at reform movements over the years shows that we have tried many different models and programs, but in my opinion, the problem with many of these efforts is that they are based on the same faulty premise. We want young people to know the basics and be well-rounded. The objectives of the learning have never changed and no matter what school looks like, if the learning objectives are the same as they were in the 1850s, our country is in trouble. Maybe if the objectives changed, engagement issues would take care of themselves.

I had the chance to hear Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2004) and *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* (2005), address a group at the Young Professionals Summit on February 3, 2006 in Omaha, Nebraska. His premise was about our country's need to attract and retain talented, creative people, arguing that if we do not, we will lose in the global economy. In this talk he addressed the way that we educate our children, pointing out that creativity and talent are two concepts that are completely ignored in the current system. He mentioned that the way in which we approach education is to say we know what students need no matter who they are. We ask all students to go through the same process, and we expect them to do it in the same way. We send signals, strong ones he says, that seem to tell young people, "We don't really care who you are, we just need you to comply and get through this." Florida suggests schooling is more for educators than for students, and is more a rite of passage than a true journey of self-discovery. I am paraphrasing from his speech of course, but these thoughts are what left a profound impression on this educator.

It seems to me that in order to focus on talent and creativity, we must know students at their core – what makes them tick, what gets them going, what their true feelings are, and what their dreams are. We should ask them to dream, and figure out how we can help them discover more about who they are and where their biggest potential lies. Most of this would probably happen through dialogue, by asking good questions, listening, and taking the time to engage students in ways that let them apply who *they are* to learning. Thus, who they are matters and defines the journey, the direct opposite of what Florida describes as our current approach.

I knew I had heard these ideas before. Let students apply themselves to the learning. This concept felt foundational and fundamental to me, and then I remembered my very first education class, a freshman seminar at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. We read John Dewey's *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*. I remembered as a naïve idealist that everything I read sounded exactly like the way that I had dreamed my class, my school, and my students would be. I concluded my philosophies were in line with Dewey's. I recently revisited that text and was reminded of why I connected to it so long ago. In the latter of the two monographs, he tries the case of Child versus Curriculum, and in the end gives his verdict. He decides that the case goes to the Child and states that it is the student's "present powers which are to assert themselves; his present capacities which are to be exercised; his present attitudes which are to be realized" (Dewey, 1990, p. 209). Dewey describes traditional learning in school as a process that happens outside the child because it is not shaped by the child. If we want the child to shape the learning, then we must know what engages each child in

the broadest sense of the word. A look back at past definitions of engagement can help give perspective on the relationship each has with understanding student learning.

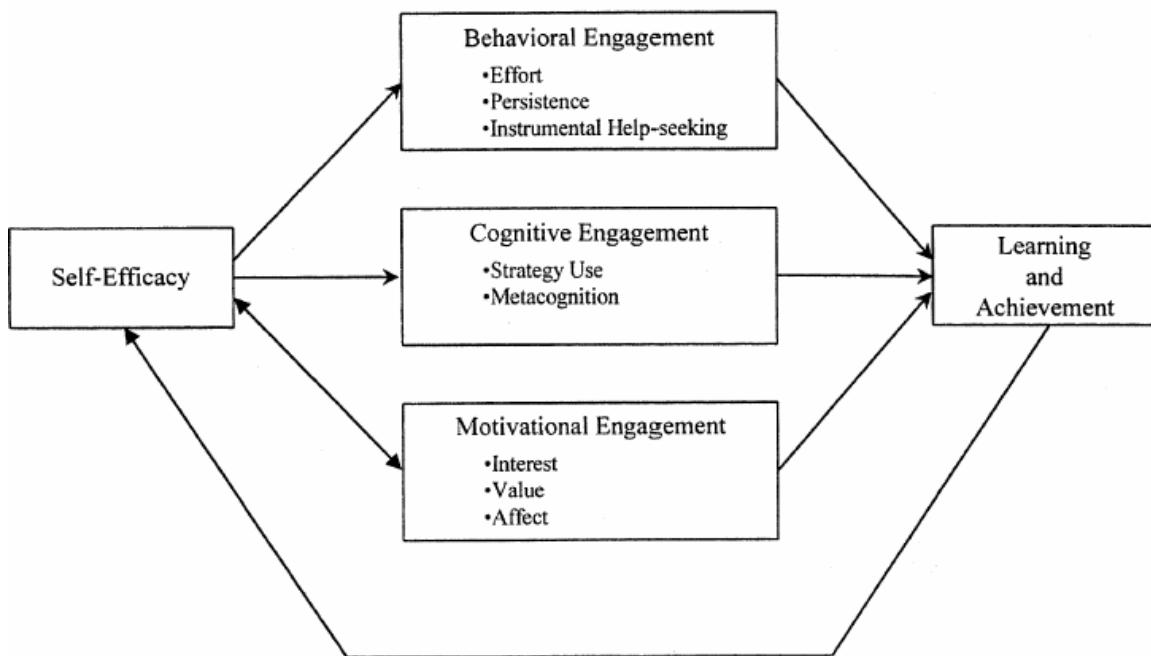
Engagement Definitions: An Evolving Concept

Natriello describes student engagement as “participating in the activities offered as part of the school program” (Chapman, 2003, p. 2). It was once believed that merely showing up and participating in the activities associated with school was a true indication of student and teacher engagement. If you “punched in” on any given day, it was believed you were involved, you belonged, and you cared.

Skinner and Belmont defined engagement as “behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by positive emotional tone” (Chapman, 2003, p. 2). Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn (1992) describe engagement as “The student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (p. 11). Both of these definitions illustrate that in the 1990s researchers began to see a gap between merely being present and actually being psychologically and behaviorally involved in the activities of school. We began to understand that there was a link between behavior and positive emotions when looking at the engagement of any individual with an activity or task.

Linnenbrink & Pintrich (2003) describe three types of engagement that must be present for full engagement to occur: behavioral, cognitive and motivational engagement. To date, the most comprehensive analysis of engagement focuses on the link between the intellect, outward behavior, and the intrinsic motivational aspects of a person and a task or activity. The model is also connected to the concept of self-efficacy, which Bandura

defines as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003, p. 120). These authors offer the model in Figure 1 as a visual for defining not only the individual concepts, but also their interrelatedness.



| *Figure 1: General framework for self-efficacy, engagement, and learning (p. 122).*

Engagement, as I was beginning to discover during my administrative days, is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional phenomenon. Figure 1 helps us understand engagement from three distinct perspectives. The first is behavioral engagement or the actions that the teacher can see in each child. Is the student making an effort; are they persisting with the learning; do they seek help in understanding more? Second is cognitive engagement or whether or not the student’s mind is fully involved. Are students thinking critically about the material or activity; what strategies are they using to understand; are their

“minds-on” the activity? Most of the time, this engagement is judged by products or responses to questions or the language students use to describe their understanding. Finally, motivational engagement is the third dimension. Does the student find the activity or material interesting; do they value it as a worthwhile endeavor personally; is it connected to personal goals; are they proud of their learning or work; do they experience happiness as opposed to anxiety (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003)?

These dimensions allow us to look at engagement with more depth, by looking at the interconnectedness of the three types of engagement and their ties to self-efficacy and learning and achievement. In teaching, we often think if students look engaged (behavioral) and seem interested in the activity (motivational), we have hit a home run. Considering only those two dimensions of engagement has been the flaw in understanding engagement for years. We never went beyond these two aspects of engagement to really engage students cognitively. To consider the third dimension, we must figure out ways to know if we are cognitively engaging students, the one aspect that is so hard to measure or see.

Teachers that cognitively engage students want them “to think deeply about the content to be learned, to think about what they know and do not know, to use different strategies for learning that increase their understanding of the material, and to think critically and creatively about the material to be learned” (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003, p. 124). Teachers who know how to truly engage students describe being able to measure cognitive engagement by the strategies that students apply, by the language that they use to describe their processes, and the products that they create. Teachers also describe having conversations with students regarding the metacognitive aspects of their

learning. These conversations allow students to “reflect on their own thinking, actions, and behaviors and monitor and regulate their own learning” (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003, p. 125). Teachers would have to provide a platform for these types of discussions so that students become more independent and able to better understand their ability to shape their own learning experiences by reflecting on their own thought processes. One common initiative aimed at getting students to be more cognitively engaged, is having teachers apply Bloom’s Taxonomy as they plan and create student learning experiences. The highest levels of Bloom’s, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, are ways that teachers try to get students more cognitively involved in the concepts they are learning. Although, the Linnenbrink and Pintrich model does a much better job at looking at the multi-dimensional aspects of engagement, I still believe that an important piece is missing.

To borrow a concept from one of the twelve items Gallup uses to measure engagement discussed later in this chapter, if I get to do what I do best every day, I tend to be more engaged. I do not see a connection to that sentiment in the above model. Interest and value might be close, but these are simply judgments I pass on activities or learning that still might be disconnected from who I am and how I might apply what I naturally do well to the activities at hand. I am not referring to subject matter or even skills here. This approach does not mean that I should only do what I do well and not ever stretch myself in new ways. This concept is more about hooking students into the learning through avenues that fit their natural tendencies. For example, I am a very strategic thinker and I really like organizing things, so in school I usually was “in charge” when it came to working with a partner or team. These are natural behaviors for me, and when I am not able to think strategically or plan and organize a task or activity, I do not

enjoy it as much. Others might feel the same as I, or they might be very happy that I am playing that role so they can play a different role that naturally fits them. That person then is free to be an idea generator or a follow-through/timeline person, whatever fits. My point is that students would enjoy learning more if they were able to apply themselves in ways that best fit who they are as an individual. Although I think there is more to engagement, Linnenbrink and Pintrich's model is by far the closest to a multi-dimensional definition.

As we continue searching for a more developed definition, we must also get better at measuring engagement. Although we have evolved tremendously in our understanding of what truly drives engagement, we still struggle with how to measure it. If we cannot measure it, it is difficult to know what actions to take to have a positive impact on the environment. I think we have even further to go in formally defining engagement, but the above definitions and models provide insight into our current understanding.

Engagement: Connections to Related Concepts

Motivation Is Not Enough

Educators often think if they can use the right hook or the right motivational strategy, students will naturally want to participate and their participation alone should lead to learning. Motivation theory says that motivation is much more than simple participation. Motivation must include “constructs related to students’ own beliefs about their capabilities to do a school task” (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003, p. 120). We must consider that what motivates students is not some external, interesting fact, but is more of

an internal connection to a task because it matches their abilities (or at least their sense of self-efficacy).

The most recent definitions of engagement include motivation as one of three elements necessary for true engagement. Because motivation can also be looked at as a particular disposition, it is important to distinguish between a teacher's effort to motivate and a student's motivation to succeed. Newman, et al (1992) state, "Conceivably students can be motivated to perform well in a general sense without being engaged in the specific tasks of school" (p. 13). In other words, highly motivated students can achieve according to our traditional standards of measurement, but may never really be cognitively or motivationally engaged in the learning process or even the content. They simply, through their internal motivation, jump through the hoops of the educational process, without having been truly engaged. I have to assume that this type of "learning" does not lead to real growth and development, and so as a result motivation alone is not enough to ensure true engagement.

Self-Efficacy as a Foundation

Almost every child, and adult for that matter, wants to be seen as competent. They do not want to be embarrassed into being competent; they actually want to acquire the skills to be considered competent by others. Covington and Dray (2002) believe that "many students equate their worth with a reputation for being able and, as a consequence, strive to secure such a reputation" (p. 44). This kind of thinking allows administrators and teachers to begin building self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is also a cycle. It cannot improve without having had success, and it is difficult to have success when a person's belief about his/her own ability is not a match for a task. The research reveals a distinct

difference between self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-esteem refers more to a general self-concept, one that projects a belief about an entire category; for example, “I am a good athlete” or “I am a good student.” Self-efficacy, on the other hand, refers more to “specific and situational judgments of capabilities” (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003, p. 121). In the Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) model in Figure 1, self-efficacy is an input for engagement. They believe self-efficacy is a better predictor of engagement and learning than self-esteem or general self-concepts. Newmann (1991) discusses how the need for competence is the driving force of student engagement. Figure 2 describes the “factors that influence student engagement in academic work” (Newmann, 1991, p.64).

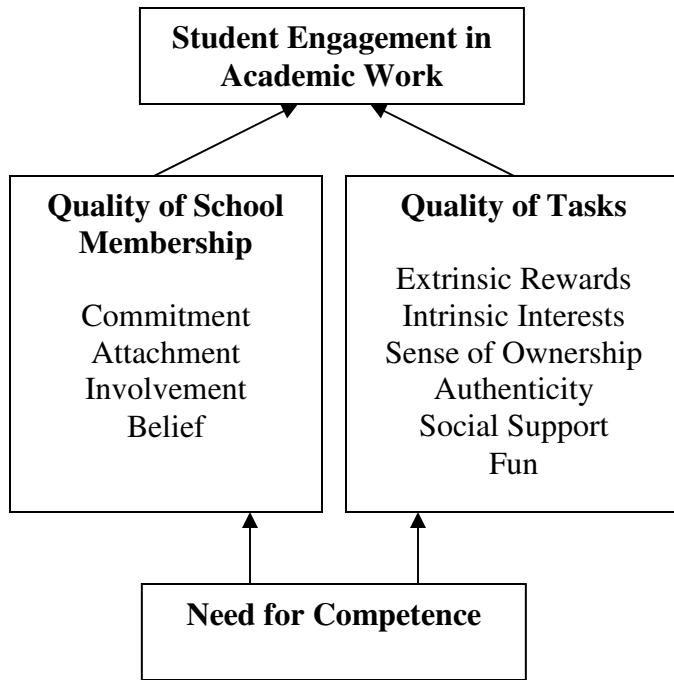


Figure 2: The factors that influence student engagement (p. 64).

If we can design experiences through which self-efficacy can be built, we are on the road to helping students become engaged and ultimately successful in their learning. Educators must “foster the belief that competence or ability is a changeable, controllable

aspect of development" (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003. p.134), not stagnant or innate. We must help students understand that these things evolve, that we are not born able or unable to be or do and that developing skill and competence on top of what makes us unique (our natural tendencies) is truly the essence of learning and growing.

Authentic Work is a Necessity

There cannot be a discussion about engagement without including what researchers have to say about the kind of work we ask students to do in school. Schlechty (2002) suggests that student engagement is higher if "the task, activity, or work the student is assigned or encouraged to undertake is associated with a result or outcome that has clear meaning and relatively immediate value to the student" (p. 48). Schlechty argues that the key to student engagement is spending the time and effort to create authentic work. In the introduction of *Working on the Work* (2002), Schlechty states that the "level and type of engagement will vary depending on the qualities teachers build into the work they provide students" (p. xvii). Authentic work is absolutely critical to student engagement and must be present in classrooms for more students to have a chance at success. When Newmann (1991) describes authenticity, he uses the word relevancy and similarly believes tasks must have "value and meaning beyond the instructional context" (p. 68).

Although authentic work is central to student engagement, it seems to me that there are two fundamental oversights in this area of literature. First, in my review there was rarely mention of the importance of having foundational relationships with students. The other oversight in my opinion is that the activities and tasks are designed and developed by teachers with the hope that the teachers know each student well enough to

create authentic work for each child. In my opinion, we need to allow students to apply themselves to the learning so that they make it their own and get out of it what is necessary for their individual growth. While good teaching is simply seen as the ability to create the right kinds of activities or tasks, I argue that teachers can create and provide students with what they might consider authentic work all year long and still not reach the levels of engagement necessary for students to truly grow. Maybe the authentic work is how a teacher builds those meaningful relationships, I do not know, but there is very little acknowledgement of the need for such relationships throughout the literature.

Dewey (1990) talks about the right kind of work for students, but goes even further than Schlechty and Newmann. He writes that even if we, as teachers, make the work interesting and relevant, there are still three issues even if we capture their interest. He states that, “(1) the attention thus gained is never more than partial, or divided; and (2) it always remains dependent upon something external; and (3) such attention is always for the sake of ‘learning,’ i.e., memorizing ready-made answers to possible questions to be put by another” (p. 148). I interpret his writing to mean that if we change the locus of control from external to internal and allow students the power to create their own problems, engagement or interest or motivation, whatever you want to call it, will take care of itself. He says if the problem is “one’s own; hence also the impetus, the stimulus to attention, is one’s own; hence also the training secured is one’s own – it is discipline, or gain of power of control; that is, a habit of considering problems” (p. 149).

If we know that authentic work is important, why don’t we see more of it in classrooms? Farrell, et al (1988) found that “students distinguish ‘interesting’ from ‘boring’ classes on the basis of the process rather than the content of teaching” (p. 499).

This statement is important to share with teachers because it seems some teachers hold the view that some subjects are just inherently boring and there is not much a teacher can do about it. However, when students are asked about good teachers and good classes, the literature suggests they rarely mention content as the enticer.

Teachers know how important authentic work is to engagement and achievement, but say lack of time and resources are the primary reasons for not being able to create such work for every child (McLaughlin, et al, 1986). Efforts involving Bloom's Taxonomy, individualization, and differentiation have been around for years and are aimed at helping teachers be more deliberate and more individualized about the work we ask students to do. These concepts are nice in theory and most teachers understand the need for such approaches, but I have seen how these efforts fail because when it comes to the day to day teaching, the requirements seem overwhelming. Furthermore, to do what Dewey suggests also sounds great in theory, but how do teachers start and how do they manage it with a classroom full of students? Teachers are usually open to new ideas, but want them to be practical and easy to implement. I am beginning to believe that working on engagement and changing the way we *do* school are fundamental shifts in philosophy, not a simple program to put in place. Authentic work can be somewhat nebulous because it can take on different meaning depending on who is judging the work. With the right relationships, though, attempting to create authentic work is a critical component for increasing engagement in classrooms.

Flow

The struggle to formally define engagement might be helped by the ideas associated with Flow Theory. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the man who developed the

Theory of Flow, in an interview with Scherer (2002) describes flow as “the spontaneous, effortless experience you achieve when you have a close match between a high level of challenge and the skills [and I would add talent] you need to meet the challenge” (p. 14).

He believes that the best experience that humans can have is when work and play coincide in our lives. In early childhood, learning takes place when the child makes choices to investigate, discover, and experiment with what *they* find interesting, which echoes Dewey’s philosophy. Young people, if given the right environment, can play for hours and will definitely let everyone know when they are no longer in a state of flow.

When what we are doing allows us to apply our talents and skills in a way that is both challenging and rewarding, we will find ourselves in this satisfying state.

Csikszentmihalyi, in the same interview, notes that “flow is easiest to experience when you are challenged, have clear goals, and get clear feedback” (p. 14).

Flow in a classroom means that students are working together, being challenged at appropriate levels, and are responsible for most of the talking and doing.

Csikszentmihalyi believes that teachers should develop learning experiences around the idea of matching skill with challenge. Teachers are primarily in the learning experience to provide support and feedback. Without support and feedback, students can lose sight of goals and struggle to develop. Flow sounds a little like self-efficacy, a match between the task and the skills of the person, but the two are very different. Flow is more about the satisfaction that I get out of something, that I am tuned in and tuned out at the same time. I am so focused because I am applying myself, my most natural self, to an activity. Self-efficacy is more about growth, in my opinion. I think of self-efficacy as a process chart. For example, I ask myself: Do I have the skills to attempt the task before me? If

yes, I proceed. If no, I go back and learn more. It's like a loop strictly based on being able to do or not do something and the result is that I either proceed and grow or go back and learn and try again. Some students get stuck in the loop and never feel they can proceed. But those same students that are stuck in the loop with respect to school activities might go home and play the piano for hours or shoot hoops until after dark. That is flow.

To understand further the relationship between flow and school, Csikszentmihalyi performed a landmark student engagement study using what has become known as the “beeper” method. One thousand students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 were part of a longitudinal study that used pagers to beep them at certain times of the day. Students were then to write in a journal what they were doing at that time, what they were thinking about, what their level of concentration was, how happy they were, how creative they felt in doing whatever it was they were involved in at the time, in addition to several other questions. These journals helped Csikszentmihalyi discover the relationship between flow and school (Hektner and Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). He points out that young children are continuously in a state of flow as they apply their developing skills to new challenges each and every day. In the Scherer (2002) interview, he also notes that once children hit school they begin to lose the feeling of flow “because they cannot choose their goals and they cannot choose the level at which they operate. They become increasingly passive” (p. 14). This passivity is another way of describing the disengagement among students that is so prevalent in today’s schools. The theory of flow provides us much needed insight into how to think about student growth and development.

Strengths-Based Development: Students and Teachers

The concept of flow is closely related to what the Gallup Organization and others call strengths-based development. Wigfield suggests that as people get older, they tend to “like the activities at which they excel and excel at the activities they like” (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003, p. 132). This statement exemplifies the cyclical relationship between self-efficacy and engagement, but also demonstrates an important strengths-based connection. When we apply ourselves to situations or activities that fit our talents, we excel. This application builds self-efficacy, which leads to engagement, which leads to more learning and growth. Gallup’s strengths-based philosophy rests on the fact that “our talents – defined as our naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied – are our greatest opportunities for success” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 111). When we focus on what we are naturally good at and really refine those areas of talent, we maximize our chance of being great at what we do, whatever that is. In Figure 3, a PowerPoint slide that appears in Gallup presentations, the results of a study that involves two readers, one average reader and one above-average reader are illustrated.

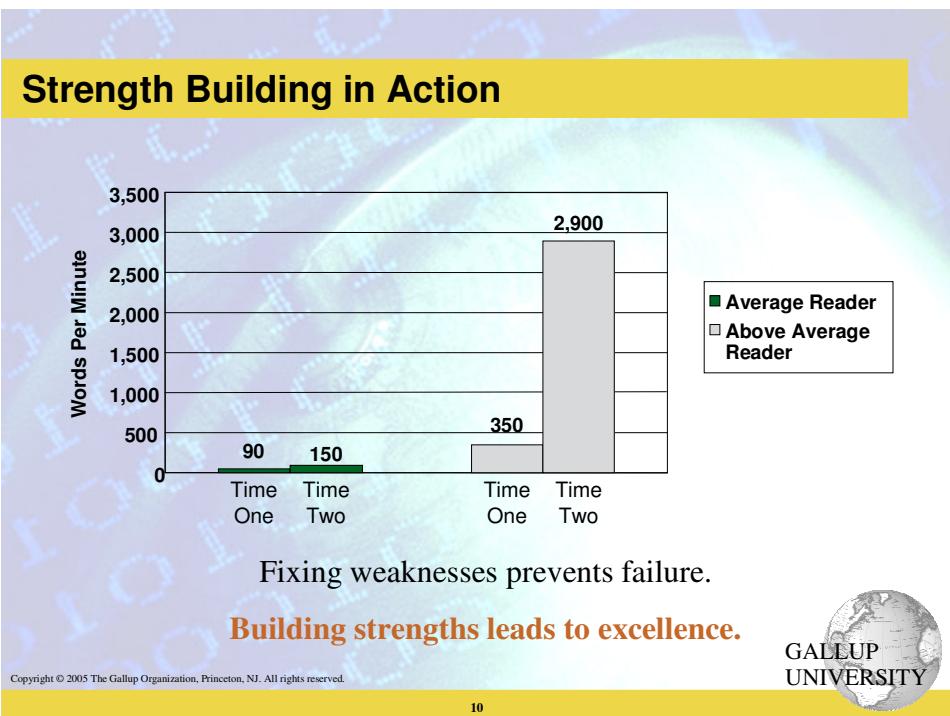


Figure 3: Speed reading study with average and above average reader.

The average reader could read 90 words per minute, and the above average reader could read 350 words per minute. Both readers were led through a speed-reading course, and both improved. The interesting observation was that the average reader went from 90 to 150 wpm and the above average reader went from 350 to 2,900 wpm after the intervention (Gallup, SPC PowerPoint Education, 2005). The 67% increase versus a 728% increase shows that if we focus on what we are good at and gear our development toward that, we can grow exponentially.

Figure 3, taken from a Gallup presentation deck on Strengths-Based Development, also points out another important concept, one that is part of the strengths-based philosophy. Developing strengths is the path to success, while weakness-fixing merely prevents failure. The first time I heard this statement, it resonated strongly with the teacher and administrator in me. Coming from Texas with its state standardized

testing initiatives, I reflected back on the activities and work that we had students do to improve scores. We were absolutely focused on preventing failure, not producing excellence or potential success in students. Within our current system, I wonder how our approach could have been different. I still think we would have to focus on getting that student to perform at the minimum level, but maybe in a strengths-based school, we could approach those weaker subject areas through our strengths and everyone could just accept the fact that not everyone is good at everything, including the most basic levels of knowledge. This area should be studied further by Gallup. Do students who know, understand, and utilize their strengths have better standardized test scores? Does knowing who I am and what my natural tendencies are help me overcome even my weakest areas in academics? In strengths-based organizations, it is okay to be average in some areas as long as you are refining and growing in your areas of strength. If people are rewarded in real life for their talents, why couldn't a school mirror that? Does it matter so much that a student gets C's in some areas, but A's in others if in the A areas, s/he has really pushed the limits in terms of offerings and application?

To understand further the strengths-based philosophy, I looked into Gallup's background and history. Don Clifton, a professor of psychology at the University of Nebraska and the founder of Selection Research, Inc., the company that would later purchase Gallup, has been recognized as the Father of Strengths Psychology by the American Psychological Association (Rath and Clifton, 2004). Clifton built his business around listening to what was right about people and studying success. He was really frustrated with the fact that psychology only focused on the negative and treated the negative in the hopes of making people "better." His philosophy, and what would

eventually play a part in the development of Positive Psychology as a field, was that “to produce excellence, you must study excellence” (Clifton and Anderson, 2002, p. xii).

Interviewers asked millions of successful individuals across industries and roles open-ended questions that were recorded for later research. From that research, two important discoveries were made. Clifton and his colleagues at SRI found that successful people did not necessarily have a set of common traits, like so much leadership literature suggests. What they found was that successful people (1) knew what they were good at, and (2) had built their lives around that (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001). Successful people focused their energy on getting better at what they were already good at and then made choices along the way that utilized those strengths. When addressing a group of students at the University of Nebraska, Warren Buffet said, “I am really no different from any of you. I may have more money than you do, but money doesn’t make the difference. Sure, I can buy the most luxurious handmade suit, but I put it on and it just looks cheap. I would rather have a cheeseburger from Dairy Queen than a hundred-dollar meal.” The students were skeptical, and so Buffett continued, “If there is any difference between you and me, it may simply be that I get up every day and have a chance to do what I love to do, every day. If you want to learn anything from me, this is the best advice I can give you” (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001, p. 19).

Inside and outside of Gallup, strengths-based development is simply focusing on what people are good at and planning development efforts and opportunities based on those areas of talent. Gallup has a validated construct for identifying strengths in people called the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ (CSF™). The CSF™ is a web-based assessment with 180 paired items that forces people to rate which of the two items is most like

themselves on a scale with five points. Each individual item is linked to one or more of 34 themes of talent. Those 34 themes were developed out of those millions of interviews mentioned above. Each theme is a collection of similar talents (behaviors, thoughts, and feelings) that were seen in the individuals interviewed. Successful people did not necessarily have traits in common, rather they were quite different. These people had unique combinations of talents that propelled them to success. There are over 278,000 different combinations of a person's top five areas of talent on the CSF™, and the chance that someone has the same top 5 in the same order of intensity is one in over thirty-three million. These are not competencies that can be obtained through training. These are behaviors or ways of thinking and feeling that are the natural ways we live our lives.

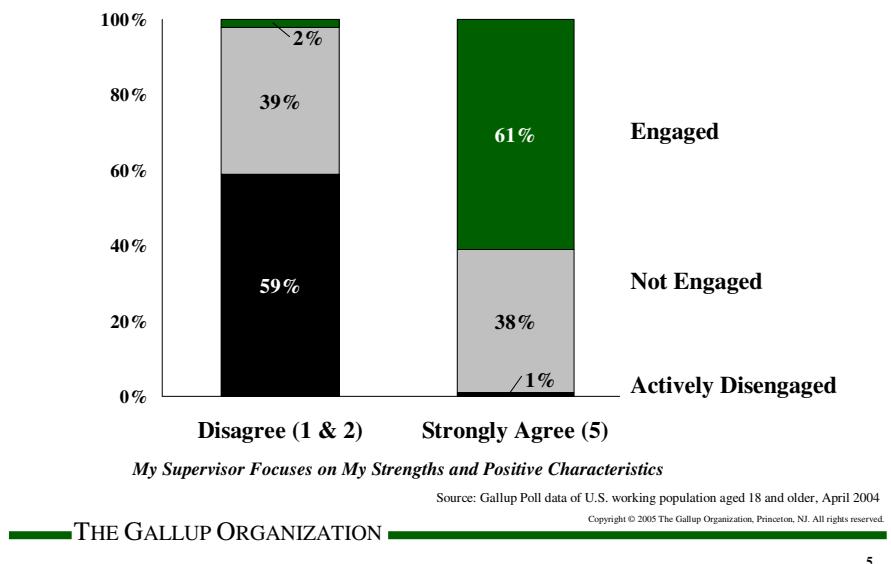
Once a person takes the assessment, s/he receives a Signature Themes report listing the top five areas of talent with long definitions and action items for developing in each area. Those action items are to prompt thought about stretching in those areas of talent. For example, I have a theme called Strategic™ as number one and one of the action items is to "lend" my strategic talent to organizations for which I volunteer. This idea of sharing my strengths is something that I had never thought of in all my years of volunteering. Naturally, some of what I do when I volunteer, like planning and taking a group on a Habitat for Humanity trip, involved strategic thinking, but I truly had never thought of it as lending my strategic talent to an organization that might need it. This action item helped me think about ways to utilize some of my talents in my volunteer efforts. With more education, a person can receive all 34 themes in rank order, so that s/he can also understand what is at the bottom of the list. If the whole list were provided first, the bottom would likely grab most of the attention because of how we are wired to

think. What is at the bottom of a Theme Report (all 34) is important. One major misunderstanding about strengths-based development is that people think weaknesses do not matter, but strengths-based development does not mean ignore the weaknesses. Actually, the over two million successful people that Gallup interviewed were very aware of what they were not good at and made sure that they managed those areas of weakness, either by being deliberate about acquiring the skills or knowledge to at least be competent in those areas or by finding partners that excelled in those talents.

When a person gets to focus on what s/he does best and has the opportunity to understand, apply, and develop natural talents every day, what implications does that have on engagement? Hodges and Clifton (2002) discuss studies related to strengths-based development in “Strength-Based Development in Practice.” They connect strengths-based development to employee engagement. The studies they conducted included virtually every type of industry, including schools. They provided overwhelming evidence that focusing on the development of a person’s strengths, while teaching them to manage their weaknesses, is the key to having an organization thrive. Strengths-based development has been quantifiably linked to employee engagement, as measured by the Q^{12®} instrument (developed by Gallup) that is described later in this chapter.

Figure 4 shows data from a 2004 Gallup Poll in which people were asked their level of agreement with the statement, “My supervisor focuses on my strengths and positive characteristics.” Then the same group was asked the twelve items of the Q^{12®} engagement survey (Gallup, Strengths Slides PowerPoint, 2006).

Engagement Effect of Focusing on Strengths



5

Figure 4: Engagement effect of focusing on strengths.

An engagement index was developed to identify each person as engaged, not engaged or actively disengaged. “Engaged” workers are those that are truly committed to the mission of the company. They work hard to move the company forward. Gallup calls this group the “builders.” The individuals that are “not engaged” are the ones that are doing their jobs, but really just punching in each day. The “actively disengaged” are the “organizational terrorists,” employees that are actually counterproductive and that can truly tear down an organization. The links between strengths and engagement are astounding. For those that rated the statement about their supervisor a one or two, strongly disagree or disagree, 59% were actively disengaged and only 2% were engaged. However, among those who rated the supervisor statement a five, strongly agree, only 1% was actively disengaged, while 61% were engaged. Later I will discuss the links between engagement and business outcomes, but imagine what engaged employees do for an

organization versus their actively disengaged counterparts in terms of productivity and profitability.

Further evidence that strengths-based development matters was found in Clifton and Harter (2003). When discussing the results of years of data collected by The Gallup Organization, these authors state that in a strengths-based organization, “top-performing managers were more likely to indicate that they spend time with high producers, match talents to tasks, and emphasize individual strengths versus seniority in making personnel decisions … managers with a strengths-based approach nearly double their likelihood of success” (p. 115). They also found that in education, the evidence suggests that strengths-based development relates positively to “gains in GPA, state hope [a child’s “state of hope” for the future], and self-confidence, and declines in absenteeism and tardiness” (p. 118). In strengths-based development, there is a strong belief in focusing on aspects that we can change when trying to better ourselves and not focusing development around deficiencies. “People can change on the ‘changeables’ (satisfaction, subjective well-being, engagement, performance, etc.), but most efficiently through who they are to begin with - their inherent talents” (Clifton and Harter, 2003, p. 116). It seems then, that if someone wants to be a good manager of people, focus should be given to guiding individuals in the direction of their strengths if engagement is to increase and hence important measurable outcomes. This summary sounds logical, but may be philosophically problematic in the education arena.

When looking at schools, we seem to have a history of focusing on deficiencies and, although it is important to identify weaknesses and learn to overcome or manage them, it is more important to identify strengths and work to develop and grow in those

particular directions. In schools, it seems we often focus entirely on weaknesses and try to only grow students in relation to those lacking skills. Flow and strengths-based development both argue that the best way to develop and find true happiness and success in life is to focus on your strengths and to design the tasks of your life to match and challenge those strengths in new ways.

The strengths philosophy suggests that we learn how to manage our weaknesses through a better understanding of our strengths. A student that is failing math and understands that the way in which he naturally behaves, thinks, and feels is through natural tendencies to build lasting relationships, think strategically, and focus for long periods of time on the road to accomplishing goals, can begin to build a plan for success in math through those behaviors. Better yet, when his teacher and fellow classmates know and understand his talents, learning methods can be expanded to include opportunities for him to utilize his strengths to reach his goals. If he is a goal setter and in his math class never knows or understands the goals, he might be frustrated and lost. Setting smaller, incremental goals for this student could help. Finding just the right study partner based on a strong relationship could also help this student. Because he thinks strategically, he may benefit more from connections made to other math topics, other real-life topics, and his life in general so that he can see how it all fits together and where it all leads strategically. If everyone involved with his education understands him at this deep of a level, they may provide a less frustrating avenue to the learning at hand. This person may or may not ever be a world-class mathematician, but might have a better chance at accomplishing what is necessary to be considered competent through his self-

awareness and within an environment where everyone utilizes each other's strengths to reach individual and common goals.

How many times have we heard, "You can do anything you put your mind to?" This is a nice, encouraging phrase, but it has limits. Yes, most of us can probably do anything we put our minds to and be average or good at it. But to be truly successful, we should put our minds on the strengths we possess in order to build and develop those areas of greatest potential. An internal quote around Gallup is "let the work group be well-rounded and the individuals be sharp." In other words, maximizing each individual's strengths and building a group that is diverse and rich in different kinds of talent lead to organizational or team success.

The strengths philosophy is a framework for having more awareness in our lives as individuals and in our relationships with those in our community. It is a foundation for strong relationships focused on success. A few weeks ago in our Monday Morning Learning Session, we watched a video of Donald O. Clifton addressing a group of central administrators back in 1980. He was talking about strengths and how it is our job as educators to help students discover what they do best and help them develop in those areas. He went on to say that if we cannot help a student know what they do best by the time they leave high school, we have not done our jobs (Clifton, 1980). I really agree. A student should know what they are good at, not just by subjects, but by the natural tendencies they have that they can build upon to find success in life. If every student left high school with more self-awareness about their own strengths, that knowledge would provide them with hope and direction for their future.

Hodges and Clifton (2002) connect a person's level of engagement to "state hope" which is described as "an individual's present goal-directed thinking" (p. 263), and is an important concept when discussing persistence among students. In other words, students with goals and direction tend to stay in school. Snyder, et al (1997) further describe goal-directed thinking as being "made up of two necessary components. First, there is pathways thinking, which reflects the person's capacity to conceptualize one or more avenues by which to arrive at the desired goal. Second, there is agentic thinking, which taps thoughts aimed at initiating and sustaining movement along one's chosen pathways toward a desired goal" (p. 1257). Educators need to help students dream and then help them discover avenues or paths to making those dreams a reality. Strengths-based development could help students realize that those pathways necessary to achieving success are already a part of who they are. We should commit to helping students understand themselves better in order to help them build a vision for their future.

The Engagement Conundrum: The Chicken and the Egg

This is the conundrum as I see it: As *administrators* our role is to foster teacher engagement. If we can get teachers to remain truly engaged in their roles, we have a better chance of their having a positive influence on students; however, we have to run a school. There are emergencies, students misbehaving, family issues, textbooks to recover, lunch duty to oversee, and paperwork. How can we possibly have time to manage the adults in the building? Shouldn't they be responsible for their own job and doing it effectively?

As *teachers* our goal is to foster student engagement. If we can get students to be intellectually, motivationally, and behaviorally involved in the learning that we have

arranged for them, they will surely have a better chance of success; however, we have 30 students in a class; some have taken this class before; some are at the top of their class, and some barely speak English. How can we be expected to arrange profound learning experiences when we have 30 distinct humans with 30 distinct sets of needs, interests, motivations, and personalities in each class? How do we have time to worry about engaging them? Why should that be our responsibility? Shouldn't students take ownership of their own learning and, hence, their own future?

As *students* our goal is to learn and grow. We are to show up ready to soak up every bit of information presented. If we do, we are surely going to be brilliant, college-bound scholars; however, we have all of these other things that get in the way of making it possible to achieve that goal. Our teachers do not care, so why should we? We work jobs after school or do not plan on going to college, so what is the point? Really, the information we learn is so useless. We just do not get how it relates to us and our future.

Whose job is it anyway? Whose job is it to worry about engagement? It can become a vicious merry-go-round of blame when nobody is willing to take ownership. The answer, of course, is that it is the responsibility of all three parties in the relationship. Without the commitment of all three, lack of engagement and hence lower achievement will surely result, but, it is also important to note that it is a cycle with no beginning and no end. Someone has to make the first move. My contention is that the paid professionals must. It is our duty to initiate the shift and once in motion, the natural *positive* consequences will occur.

The impact that the “paid professionals” have on an organization are all a leader can count on to move an organization forward. Harter and Schmidt (2002) state that,

“After employees have been selected, they make decisions and take actions every day that can impact the success of their organizations. Many of these decisions and actions are influenced by their own motivation and drives. One can also hypothesize that the way employees are treated and the way they treat one another can positively affect their actions – or can place their organization at risk” (p. 1). Teachers and students both act out of their own motivation and drives, but both also respond to the way in which they are treated. The important insight from these authors is that the two things that most influence our interaction and response to our world are who we are and how we are treated.

Both of these factors are hard to measure. How do you really measure what motivates and drives people? How someone is treated is complex as well. It is not always obvious; often the subtleties involved with relationships are what lead to how we feel we have been treated. These two concepts, who a person is and how they are treated, are the real secrets to helping others grow and are the crux of the business we are in as educators. In schools, teachers and students respond to the climate, and the climate is created by the people, namely teachers and principals who set the tone. The leadership on campus, both formal and informal (principals on a campus level and teachers on a classroom level), contributes to the expectations and atmosphere of the learning environment. Often talked about in terms of rapport, the *relationships* between principals and teachers and teachers and students are how we have an impact on both of these concepts. For growth and development to occur, we must help students to understand themselves better within an environment of care and challenge.

James K. Harter conducted a study that attempted to help students understand themselves better at Gage Park High School in Chicago, Illinois from 1994 to 1996 (Harter, 1997). Teachers were trained to administer an instrument called the Gallup Youth Perceiver, which included 80 questions designed to help measure areas of talents. Teachers then gave feedback to students about their talents and areas of potential. For some students, the intervention was just the one feedback session, and for some, the feedback continued throughout the first year. The students were tracked over the course of three years. In all, 1,441 students were involved in the study, with 699 participating by being interviewed and getting feedback and the remaining students serving as the control group. Harter (1997) writes, “The overall effect of the interviewing process was positive in that students who were interviewed for 1994, 1995, and 1996 received higher GPAs, were tardy less often, and were absent fewer days from school” (p. 5). Student engagement was also measured between the two groups and the interviewed students were more engaged. The implications of this study are that when students even have simple conversations and feedback about their areas of talent, GPAs, tardiness, absences, and even engagement can be positively influenced.

Another study designed to help us better understand not only different levels of engagement, but also the characteristics of engagement in classrooms was performed by Dolezal, Welsh, Pressley, and Vincent (2003). They observed nine third-grade teachers to get a better understanding of how student academic engagement was encouraged (or not). They were able to categorize three levels of teachers: teachers who taught in ways known to increase engagement, moderately engaging teachers, and teachers with the lowest levels of engagement. What they found related strongly to the Linnenbrink and

Pintrich (2003) model: the teachers with the highest levels of engagement had all three types of engagement, behavioral, motivational, and cognitive. The moderately engaging teachers had behavioral and motivational engagement, but lacked true intellectual challenge, and the lowest levels of engagement occurred in classrooms that had very little if any of the three different dimensions of engagement. Out of the nine classroom teachers studied, only two fell into the top category, teachers who could engage students.

Student Disengagement

If we generalize from the Dolezal, et al (2003) study, we would predict that seven out of nine public school classrooms are not fully engaged, and that the teachers in those classrooms were only moderately engaging or not engaging at all. As a contrast to what drives engagement, it is worth taking a look at reasons for disengagement. As Cothran and Ennis (2000) state, “Student engagement is a prerequisite for student learning and retention. Unfortunately, the number of disengaged students may exceed two-thirds of the high school population” (p. 106). One theory of student disengagement is something Kuh (2003) calls the “disengagement compact” (p. 28). He describes the relationship as follows: “I’ll leave you alone if you leave me alone. That is, I won’t make you work too hard (read a lot, write a lot) so that I won’t have to grade as many papers or explain why you are not performing well” (p. 28). This breakdown is related strongly to the responsibility issue discussed earlier. Whose responsibility is it anyway to get students and teachers engaged? The disengagement compact is entirely too prevalent in today’s schools. It goes against everything we know about learning. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that “challenge gives children vision and direction, focus and perseverance. Support gives the serenity that allows them freedom from worry and fear” (Scherer, 2002, p. 16).

As teachers and administrators it is our responsibility to ensure that all students have challenge and support as part of their learning environment.

There is also a version of the “disengagement compact” on the administrator-teacher level as well. I describe it as “stay off my radar and everything will be fine.” In other words, administrators will not bother teachers or intrude in their classrooms as long as teachers do whatever it takes to avoid any issues that bother the administrators or intrude on their day. Administrators who want teachers to fly below the radar are not the exception; rather, in my experience they seem to be the rule.

A study that made an effort to understand issues related to student disengagement was performed by Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) who gathered information from high school students regarding the issues of school boredom. They found that there was a moral component to disengagement. The students they talked with were classified as gifted and talented and were open about the fact that they often *chose* to disengage out of a feeling of moral obligation to do so. Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) write, “Their disengagement was an honorable resolution to the dilemma of whether or not to engage in inappropriate curricula as they confronted it each day in school” (p. 20). From their conversations Kanevsky and Keighley summarized three things that educators need to do: “1) Ask students about *their* boredom, 2) *listen* and *probe* until their understanding is deep and accurate, and then 3) *act* on what they hear” (p. 27).

Cothran and Ennis (2000) also describe several strategies to re-engage students (and I argue teachers) in their article “Building Bridges to Student Engagement: Communicating Respect and Care for Students in Urban High Schools.” In this article they describe the barriers to engagement as:

- Nobody taking responsibility for engagement – teachers expect students to naturally be engaged and take ownership, and students expect teachers to actively engage them in the material
- Student attitude – why should I care?
- Outside lives – the different priorities students have for school, work, and play
- Lack of trusting relationships – students are apprehensive to trust adults to guide them and teachers are apprehensive to lead (pgs. 110-111)

The authors also suggest that the key factor to student engagement is the teacher, and that it is the teacher's responsibility to build the following bridges to encourage more engagement:

- Communicate – bond, get to know students' real lives, and most importantly, listen
- Inclusive environment – invite students to be part of the process of decision making during learning by giving them choices
- Care – provide a safe, supportive environment and one in which students can be successful, because when students feel cared about, they care back
- Enthusiastic, active learning – if the teacher is excited and active, the students will be too, and if the teacher is bored, so too will be the students (pgs. 111-114)

These bridges to engagement are not new ideas; we have known the importance of these factors for a very long time. I suggest that their positive effects can be applied to the relationship between administrator and teacher. Teachers also need communication and a caring environment in which to work. As discussed earlier, people respond to the way they are treated. If they exist in an environment that is supportive and full of caring people, there is a better chance that they will respond positively.

Relationships, the Heart of Engagement

In “Let Sleeping Students Lie,” Merwin (2002) discusses how interpersonal relationships can make a positive impact on student engagement. When students were asked what they needed most from their teachers, overwhelmingly their responses contained relational sentiments. Students wanted to be heard and treated as individuals and they wanted teachers to show interest in them as whole persons and to communicate in encouraging ways (Merwin, 2002). Student responses rarely contained comments about content or methods. Students simply wanted to know that their teachers cared. Kanevsky and Keighley’s (2003) investigation into boredom in school, mentioned previously, revealed that when five key components were present, students were more apt to be engaged in learning. They called these components the five Cs: control, choice, challenge, complexity, and caring teachers. What they discovered, however, was that if a classroom was led by a truly caring teacher, some of the other Cs did not necessarily have to be present for engagement to be taking place. In other words, a caring teacher “could enhance or overcome the other four Cs” (Kanevsky and Keighley, 2003, p. 25).

They also concluded that students could easily identify teachers that cared and were personally committed. Students are perceptive enough to distinguish between teachers who are there to collect a paycheck and the ones who are there because of a passion for developing students. One student described her frustration to Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) in the following way:

It is almost like they think it is a one-way deal because we’re supposed to do everything that they say and be wonderful for them. But when they’re not going to give as well ... so a good teacher is one who is not afraid to get in there and help out ... doesn’t sit behind a desk all the time like a barrier between him and the kids. Yeah, someone who gets right in the dirt and helps you dig out the little pieces of clay pots or whatever [referring to a social studies field trip] ... really

wanting to be with the kids, not just getting paid; goes past what the job requires ... if I could give one message to teachers I'd say do not take the job unless you're really going to go out of your way to do it (p. 25).

This student wants the teacher to be part of the journey, part of a *two-way* relationship, and really wants teachers who are willing to work with her side-by-side. The heart of what all students ask for and want is relationships with the people who they spend so much time with every day. Another teenager relates caring to learning by saying that when teachers are nurturing, "it shows you that the teacher really cares, and just seeing that makes you want to learn" (Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack, 1986, p. 418). This connection does not exist only on the teacher to student level, but also on the principal to teacher level and even the superintendent to principal level. We have a tendency to be more engaged in an activity, process, or task when we know that we are cared about as individuals.

Caring teachers seem to have an overwhelming impact on student engagement, but is it measurable? In *Teach With Your Strengths*, Liesveld, et al (2005) note that according to Dr. Dan Goldhaber of the Urban Institute, "[o]nly 3% of 'the contribution teachers made to student learning could be connected to experience and education'" (p. 22). This statement shows that there are other contributing factors to success, namely, I suggest, the effort or ability that teachers make with students to build and foster relationships. For years educational achievement problems have been blamed, in part, on poorly prepared teachers, and we have made substantial changes in certification and educational expectations, but without widespread improvement in student success. Corcoran, et al believe that the "evidence suggests that an equally if not more serious problem is an increasing level of teacher detachment and alienation from their work and

students” (Louis and Smith, 1992, p. 119). Therefore, quality relationships or the lack thereof, seem to be at the heart of the engagement conundrum. How do we combat this problem? How do we teach people how to build and foster relationships? Is it possible?

Asking Students and Teachers Questions That Matter

The first steps in understanding how to impact engagement, similar to what Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) suggested, are to ask students the right questions and then listen and act. The engagement literature suggests that the way students are treated and their positive self-awareness both matter. In order to understand how students feel they are treated, what they think of the environment that they learn in, and whether they feel that they get to utilize the best of who they are, we must give them the opportunity to share their opinions. Just as Don Clifton asked millions of successful people thousands of questions to understand how to produce excellence, The Gallup Organization asked millions of employees hundreds of questions on every aspect of the workplace to create the Q^{12®} employee engagement survey. Those hundreds of questions were then culled through to find the ones that best linked to business outcomes that most companies care about, like productivity and profitability. Finally, after “focus groups, factor analysis, regression analysis, concurrent validity studies, and follow-up interviews” (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999, p. 27) the list was narrowed to the twelve statements that linked most strongly to business measures that mattered. The questions, listed in Figure 5, use extreme language because that language showed a more powerful sorting effect. That is, people in the highest performing workgroups answered those questions differently than average or below average workgroups. In addition to the twelve items, Gallup also asks an overall satisfaction question.

Q00 On a five-point scale, where “5” is extremely satisfied and “1” is extremely dissatisfied, how satisfied are you with (Name of Company) as a place to work?

Individuals are asked to rate the next twelve statements, on a scale of 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

Q01 I know what is expected of me at work.

Q02 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

Q03 At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

Q04 In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

Q05 My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.

Q06 There is someone at work who encourages my development.

Q07 At work, my opinions seem to count.

Q08 The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.

Q09 My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing quality work.

Q10 I have a best friend at work.

Q11 In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.

Q12 This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

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Figure 5. Q¹²® Items.

These items are not only linked to business outcomes, but are considered actionable, meaning a workgroup can discuss how to address each question in ways that will influence their daily work environment (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

In First Break All the Rules, the authors outline the following important statistics about the twelve items:

- Every item linked to at least one of the four business outcomes – productivity, profitability, retention, and customer satisfaction.
- Ten of the 12 items linked to productivity.
- Eight of the 12 linked to profitability.
- Five of the 12 linked to retention.
- Statements one through six have the strongest links to the most business outcomes. (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999, pgs. 258-259)

In the latest meta-analysis performed by Gallup, scientists studied differences in performance between engaged and actively disengaged work units and individuals. The study included 681,799 employees, 23,910 business units, 125 organizations, and 37 industries, nine times the amount of data than was used by Buckingham and Coffman (1999) to write *First Break All the Rules* (Gallup, Meta-Analysis 2006 PowerPoint, 2006). Figure 6, taken from the Meta-Analysis PowerPoint (2006) deck, shows the differences in several business outcomes.

Q¹²® Meta-Analysis: Outcomes

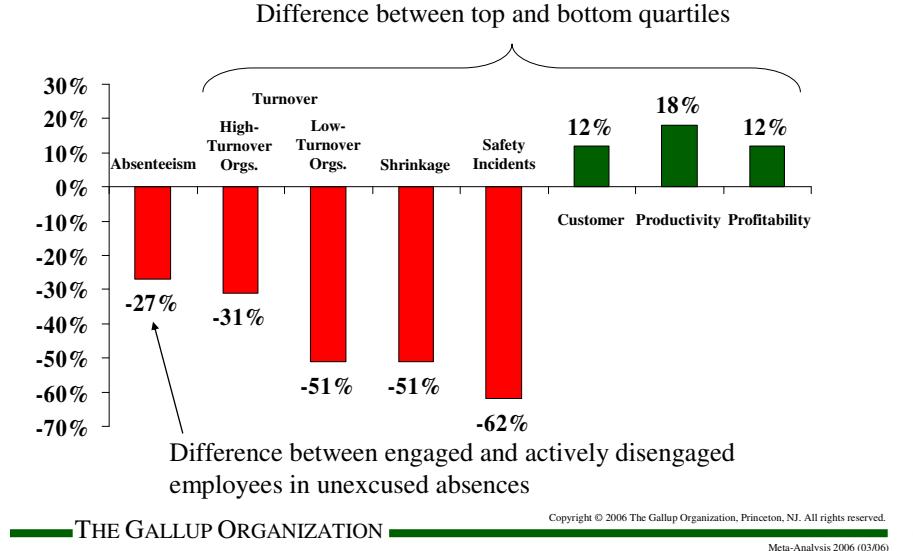


Figure 6. Differences between engaged and actively disengaged workers.

The difference in the number of unscheduled absences for engaged employees and actively disengaged employees was the only comparison made at the individual level. Engaged employees have 27% less absenteeism, on average, in comparison to actively disengaged employees. “The remaining analyses pertain to business or work units. Gallup scientists conducted utility analysis and compared the outcomes of top and bottom employee engagement quartiles. Top-quartile employee-engagement business or work units achieve substantially lower turnover, lower merchandise shrinkage, lower safety incidents, higher customer engagement, higher productivity, and higher profitability” (Gallup Meta-Analysis 2006 PowerPoint, 2006). The 2006 meta-analysis paper is included as Appendix A.

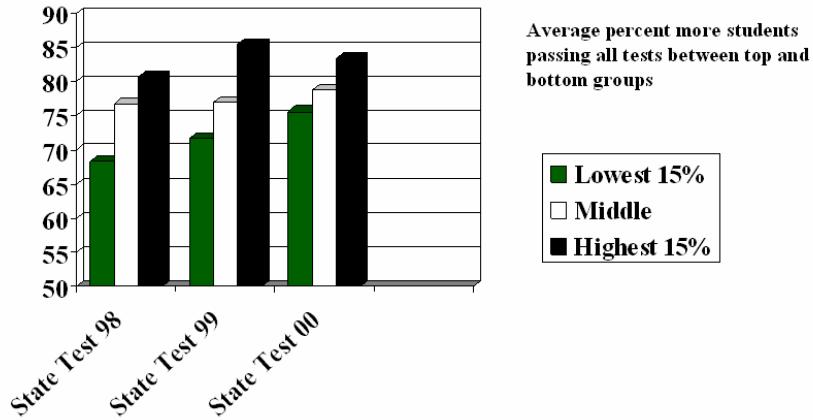
In addition to the business sector analysis, Gallup has conducted studies linking teacher engagement to student achievement in three school districts. In all three cases,

schools with the highest levels of engagement also had the highest scores on student achievement tests. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the first two studies that demonstrate the powerful links between engaged employees and student achievement. In these two districts, school level engagement was divided into three categories, the top 15% of schools, the middle, and the bottom 15% of schools as ranked by the overall GrandMean (average of the 12 engagement items on Q^{12®}) from the employee engagement survey (Gallup, Q^{12®} and TAAS PowerPoint, 2000).

School District Case Study #1

Q¹² Grand Mean and % of Students Passing All Tests by Building

11.3%



Average percent more students
passing all tests between top and
bottom groups

- Lowest 15%
- Middle
- Highest 15%

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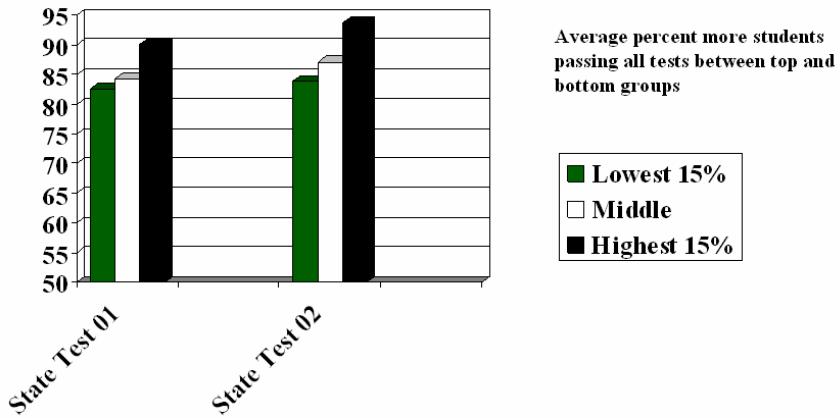
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Figure 7. Case Study 1 linking employee engagement to student achievement.

School District Case Study #2

Q¹² Grand Mean and % of Students Passing All Tests by Building

8.62%



Average percent more students
passing all tests between top and
bottom groups

- Lowest 15%
- Middle
- Highest 15%

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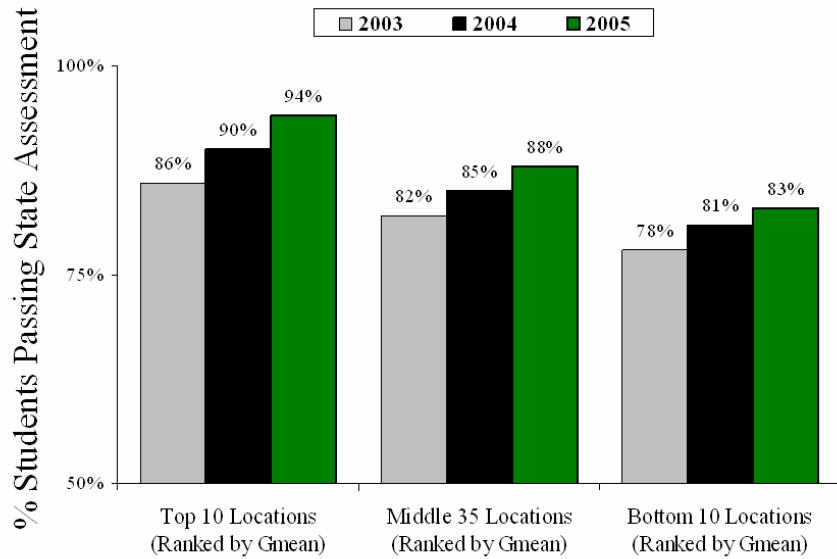
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Figure 8. Case Study 2 linking employee engagement to student achievement.

In these two studies, the buildings with higher engagement had higher percentages of students passing all state assessments. For the first school district, an average of 11.3% more students passed in the top groups than in the bottom groups over the three years. For the second school district, an average of 8.62% more students passed all tests in the schools with higher engagement than in schools with the lowest levels of engagement over the two years. When those percentages are turned into approximate student numbers, it means that for an elementary with 700 students, 79 more students at that school could have passed all tests. In the second district, 60 more students could have passed all tests. In a high school of 1500 students, 170 and 129 more students could have passed all tests, respectively.

In the third case study, the district's schools were split into three groups as well, the top ten buildings, the middle buildings, and the bottom ten buildings also ranked by GrandMean. Instead of looking at the percent of students that passed all tests, Figure 9 and Figure 10 show the percent of students passing the language arts test and the percent of students passing the math test for each of the three groupings (Gallup, RISD Exec Presentation PowerPoint, 2006).

Reading/English/L.A. by GrandMean



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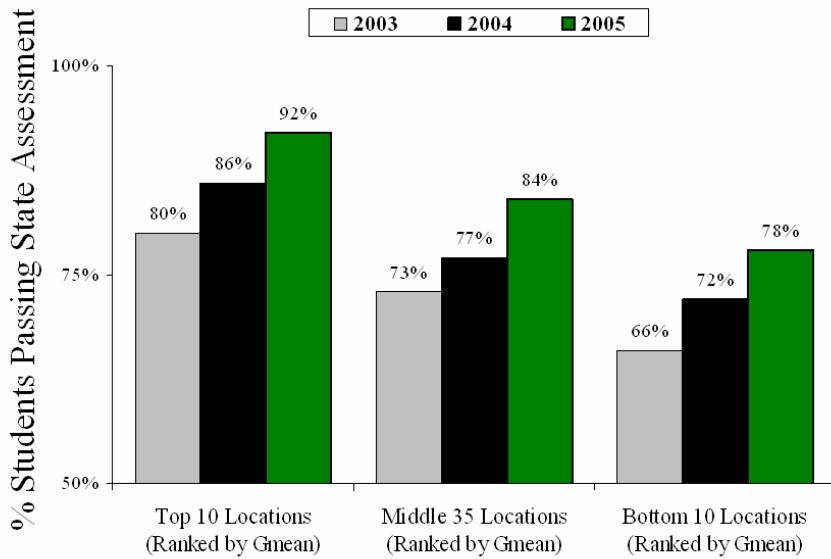
School District 3

5

Figure 9. Case Study 3 linking employee engagement to student achievement in Reading/English/L.A.

If the same comparison is done here, in 2005, the top ten locations had an average of 94% of students pass the Reading/English/L.A. state test. In the bottom ten locations the average was only 83% of students passing the same tests. If this district of 34,000 students could increase engagement at those bottom schools, it could mean over 3,700 more students in the district could pass this test. The numbers are even more disparate when looking at the math state test. Just examining 2005 again, the top buildings averaged 92% passing the math state test, while only an average of 78% passed the math test in the least engaged schools. That 14% difference equals over 4,700 students.

Math by GrandMean



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School District 3

6

Figure 10. Case Study 3 linking employee engagement to student achievement in math.

The three case studies are based on school districts that had between 32,000 and 55,000 students and were all in Texas where state testing requirements and expectations for proficiency are standard across the state. The links are strong and even linear in these case studies: the more engaged a school is, the higher the student outcomes. Engaged teachers lead to engaged students. These case studies build the case that the thirteen items asked in the Q^{12®} survey are linked to important outcomes in education, as well.

The strong linkages between the items and measurable outcomes are one thing that differentiates Gallup's survey from other employee surveys, but there are other differences as well. First, the number of questions in the Gallup survey is substantially fewer than most other employee and student surveys that often times have more than 100 questions. Second, other surveys typically aggregate the data at the company level. The

data from Q^{12®} are reported at the workgroup level, meaning every manager receives a report that includes the data of their direct reports and then the data are “rolled-up” through the organizational structure. The research behind the development of this survey also showed that people’s immediate workgroup environment is what influenced their engagement the most. Thus, I might work for a large school district and my principal and school are both amazing, so my experience is amazing. My experience might be very different from someone in another school who works for the same district but has a horrible principal and a horrible work environment. Our perspectives about our work will vary greatly and are influenced mostly by the local environment, not the district overall. This is why Gallup works with organizations to design the data collection in a way that allows data to be reported at the most local level possible. A third difference is that Gallup’s approach to improving organizational performance through employee engagement is not only about the data, but also the process of impacting the items through conversations and actions that come from the data. Gallup’s approach is focused on what happens after data is collected and analyzed. The lens is on how workgroups can improve in the twelve areas so that engagement increases and as a result, the business outcomes that are so important to organizational success also improve.

In terms of employee and student engagement packages and helping schools to measure and influence engagement, there is very little available to schools. One engagement survey that is well known is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This engagement survey is given to college-age students all over the country. It simply is used to assess how colleges are doing at engaging their students. Schools subscribe to the NSSE to get data from colleges and universities all over the country.

Schools get the data and belong to a network of participants that provides general education and tools, mostly online. In the last two years, the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) started, with just over 100 schools participating. The 2004 data include the results of more than 90,000 students at 103 high schools. The full HSSSE 2004 Overview can be found in Appendix B. The following are some of the findings of the 2004 survey:

- Sixty-six percent of students said that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well.
- Those who strongly agreed (23%) that they were supported and respected by teachers differed drastically from students who strongly disagreed (5%). The ones who strongly agreed were more likely to agree that (1) they fit in at their school (78% compared to 37%), (2) what they learn at school is useful (77% to 22%), and (3) they worked harder than they expected to work in school (61% to 25%).
- Forty-seven percent cared about their current school.
- Forty-eight percent agreed that if given the choice they would select the same school.
- Fifty-five percent said their school provided the support students need to succeed in school.
- Fifty-three percent said their school contributes to developing clear career goals.
- Forty-eight percent said their school contributes to helping them understand themselves (HSSSE Overview, 2004, pgs. 6-10).

Both the college-level and high school-level survey contain more than 100 questions, and I could not find any evidence that discussed why all those questions mattered. While the questions do provide great country-wide or school level statistics on students' opinions, the data are still not about a student's immediate environment, the classroom, they are not linked to student outcomes, and many do not seem actionable. No effort to collect teacher level engagement data is involved in the NSSE or HSSSE process, so the engagement levels of teachers cannot be linked to engagement levels of students. By identifying teacher engagement levels and tying those to student level data, a school can begin to study which teachers make engagement work and how they do it within their specific school environment. From a quick review of the market place, it seems that Gallup has a chance to position an employee and student engagement program with little to no competition.

Implications From the Literature: Can We Do Anything About It?

The literature and research reveal a strong relationship between engagement and achievement. Although this link is very well established and important for educational leaders to understand, the next challenge is to study what types of efforts can be made to increase engagement. Researchers have been able to show that teachers and schools can and do affect the levels of student engagement by focusing on the critical aspects described in this chapter. The studies done at Gallup are some of the first to use validated questions that have been linked to important school outcomes. The three school district case studies included in this chapter show strong links between engagement levels and student achievement as measured by state standardized tests. Gallup's business cases are also strong: measure employees on the twelve items, report the results at the lowest

level possible, discuss the results, and decide what actions to take to improve the workplace. Case after case shows that as companies improve engagement, the important business outcomes improve as well. Most recently, Gallup did a study to analyze the causal direction of employee engagement and performance, another type of chicken – egg conundrum. Does engagement or performance come first? The results of their study, which included 2,178 business units, indicated “a stronger relationship from employee engagement to business outcomes than from business outcomes to employee engagement” (Harter et al, 2005, p. 1). Thus, if engagement is something we can improve in the business world and see positive results, is engagement something we can improve for students and teachers with the hope that we can improve student achievement and other valued outcomes?

I think that we must endeavor to do so. It is after all, what we get paid to do – to help students grow and develop. And if our systems say that the measure for that growth is in standardized tests and achievement tests, then those should be the outcomes that we strive to improve for each and every child, for now. With an improved understanding of what influences engagement, we can better attempt to create environments in which students and teachers can feel successful and achieve. The reciprocal relationship between teacher and student engagement and even principal and teacher engagement is a serious issue, one that must be carefully considered. The responsibility must lie with the paid professionals, for students are only volunteers, as Schlechty (2002) says. We must continue to strive for understanding by looking at the fundamental factors that encourage engagement. Whether teacher to student or principal to teacher or even superintendent to principal, we can only realize our potential through matching our unique qualities with

the tasks and activities we participate in each day, whether that is a student and his school work or an adult and the work s/he does each day. The core of what we need to do is understand how to utilize ourselves by understanding who we are and develop meaningful relationships and interactions with those that we work and learn with in our daily lives.

This chapter provided a general overview of literature and research related to student and teacher engagement. The next chapter will describe and analyze the research project I conducted at Gallup from first concept to final deliverables. I will explore from beginning to end all facets of struggle and success involved with the study.

CHAPTER 3

The Project Journey

In the previous chapter, I reviewed topics related to student and teacher engagement that would be relevant to executing the Gallup study. Much of the reading and review of the literature occurred throughout 2004 and 2005, since I knew that my main research interest centered on engagement and because by the end of January 2005, it was clear that I would be accepting a position at Gallup. Soon after, I began to have conversations with the Education Division to begin defining my project. Chapter three will include: a description of how the final study came about in concept and how it was executed, a review of the findings, and an overview of the deliverables that were produced for the Education Division. Throughout this chapter I will explore the challenges that were encountered and what my thoughts and feelings were along the way.

In the first conversations with Gallup about doing a dissertation project, there was immediate interest and enthusiasm about our partnership. The company had never hired someone and allowed him or her to do a research project like this one because Gallup had an entire staff of chief scientists and researchers. There were some initial issues with how the project would proceed: Would the project be my full-time job or would it only be part of my job? The Education Division had to get approval from the Human Resources Department, and we had many conversations about pay and time commitment. Finally, we were able to come to a decision. I would take a full-time position in the Education Division, but 20% of my time would be allotted for working on this study for the first year of my employment. Once the logistics were worked out, I signed on and we

had our first official conversation about possible areas of research for which we would both be interested.

The Evolution of the Study

Version 1

From the very beginning, my interests were student and teacher engagement, areas Gallup wanted to study more, too. I remember in the spring of 2005 reconnecting with the two leaders of Gallup's Education division. We met through the interview process and had multiple conversations about a dissertation project. The Education Division partnered with school districts on selection, those interviews that I discussed earlier, and staff development, which involves the strengths work that was described in the last chapter. The Partner, Practice Leader, and I had several telephone discussions that spring that were interesting and thought provoking. The Partner was focused on sales and marketing, whereas the Practice Leader was more focused on helping clients learn and get better through Gallup's consulting. At this point, the Practice Leader was very interested in student and teacher engagement and was interested in long term research. The Partner, however, was focused on the short term and wanted something new, sound, and quick. We went back and forth, and I took the liberty of drafting some options and issues for an in-person meeting that was coming up.

I flew to Nebraska for a day so that we could meet in person and hopefully iron out a plan for a research study that I could conduct. I met with the researchers and the education team members to further explore my options. When I left at the end of the day, I thought we had a plan that was a perfect match for their interests and mine. The Practice Leader was in the beginning stages of setting up a longitudinal study on student and

teacher engagement. This study was a four to five year project that would attempt to measure student and teacher engagement, help schools increase engagement, and then track various outcomes along the way. We designed a plan that included my participation throughout the first year of the project. I would design the intervention and the support and communication mechanisms for participants. I would actually do a mini-study within the five year study. I would analyze the data collected from the first year and use that as my dissertation. This meeting occurred in February 2005, six months before my official hire date. The five year study was to launch in May 2005 after securing schools that would participate across the country.

I was expected to design the intervention by June 2005, so I began to work with various people within Gallup to learn about their engagement offerings in terms of training. I read two Gallup books: *First, Break All The Rules* (1999) by Buckingham and Coffman on engagement and an advanced copy of *Teach With Your Strengths* by Liesveld, Miller, and Robison that was due to be published in the fall of 2005. In the conversations that I had with the Partner and Practice Leader about engagement, one of the ideas was to include some of Gallup's strengths work in the intervention sometime over the course of the five years. I gathered the current training programs, called Impact I and Impact II, two modules used with the businesses that Gallup consulted with on engagement. I also received something called an Accelerator Report, which tied the themes of talent from the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ together with the items of the Q^{12®} for managers in the business world to know how to leverage their own strengths to increase the engagement of the work groups they managed. The teacher in me was excited about all the resources. It was evident that much thinking and research had gone

into the development of the survey and the training programs used with business clients, so I felt that I had quality materials to utilize. My job, before June, was to create a program for schools to measure, understand, and impact engagement. I began working on that in my *spare* time while I took three graduate courses, taught two undergraduate sections of a math methods class, and was very close to having my first child, due in May of 2005.

I began putting together a program for schools that involved both administrators and teachers. The program for the first year included measuring teacher and student engagement four times, which seemed a bit excessive to me. I was not sure that doing the survey that often would tell us much more than just doing it twice and actually thought it might make participants respond more haphazardly. But the Practice Leader of the Education Division wanted to survey on that schedule, thus we followed that plan. Before the first administration and then throughout the year, participating teachers and administrators would work together to create a plan for impacting engagement in their buildings by utilizing their individual strengths and paying attention to the engagement data. The intervention was not a prescriptive program, but was about learning how to work together to (1) listen to both students and teachers about how they feel about the school environment, (2) brainstorm and communicate openly about the data from teachers and students, (3) develop a plan for action that would hopefully create a better place for everyone to spend their days learning and growing, and (4) continue this process indefinitely. The materials I had adapted were in draft form by May when I got a call from the Practice Leader.

He called to let me know that he was having trouble finding schools to participate in our study. This difficulty did not surprise me because there was not an organized effort to market or position this initiative as a profound study on engagement where schools also received, at no cost to them, proven Gallup resources and consulting. I had a feeling that districts felt like it was just one more program that teachers and principals would have to add to their overflowing plates. I also knew that the Practice Leader was in the midst of writing a book about engagement in schools and this was taking most of his focus and time. That phone call was to break the news to me that the five-year study would have to be postponed. This call came on May 4th, just 7 days before I would give birth to my son and right in the middle of my own exams and the exam I was giving my math students. I did not have time to think in detail about what this new information meant to my dissertation. I just knew that I was on my own with respect to creating a study. The planning up to this point would be utilized some time in the future, but not necessarily for what I would decide to do for my dissertation. I finished my own exams, finished grading the exams of my undergraduate students the morning of May 10th, and went into labor at midnight that night. It was quite a semester.

Version 2

I resurfaced in June. I called the Partner of the Education Division to check-in, and we had a conversation about my dissertation. The *Teach With Your Strengths* (2005) book was to be released in August or September, a main concern for her not only from a sales perspective, but she also was thinking of a new staff-development offering to go with the book. The Education Division's revenue for the past 30 years had primarily depended on the personnel selection tools, the interviews mentioned in the previous

chapters. There were separate interviews for teachers, principals, central administrators and support staff. These “Perceiver” interviews were in-person and tape-recorded, and would later become “Insight” tools that were administered via the web. Beginning around 2000, the Education Division started to sell more staff development programs focused on strengths to school districts. The Education Division’s strengths seminars up to this point utilized the standard curriculum used with any client, but were taught by educational consultants. With the new book coming out that focused on teachers and how they could specifically leverage their talents in their work, the Partner wanted a strengths program that went with the book. As we talked more about this need, it occurred to her that if we could study the effects that teachers who focus on their own strengths had on student engagement and student performance measures, we would have great data to use in marketing strengths staff development and the book.

At this point, I wrote up a brief plan on how I thought the study could be designed. First, teachers would receive a copy of the *Teach With Your Strengths* (2005) book, which includes an access code to take the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ online. Teachers could read the book and use the code to get their top five themes of talent. Then they would attend a full-day seminar adapted from the standard strengths seminar to include many of the ideas found in the *Teach With Your Strengths* (2005) book. We would do pre and post engagement surveys on both students and teachers in the intervention group and the control group as well as gather grades, attendance, and other measures pre and post. She liked the idea and suggested that I talk to the Education Division consultant assigned to Nebraska schools. That consultant suggested two districts as viable candidates (District 1, a suburban setting and District 2, an urban

setting). In late August both districts were scheduled to attend a TeacherInsight™ seminar. She invited me to meet the personnel directors, hiring managers, and principals that would be in the sessions. These seminars would be my first opportunity to make connections within these two districts about doing a research study. Contacts from both districts showed immense interest in the study I described and requested proposals.

Immediately, I was put in touch with the Executive Director of Planning and Evaluation in District 1 and the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel in District 2. I learned what process each district used for submitting research proposals and began to work on meeting the requirements. In District 1 the first requirement was that proposals for an academic year were to be submitted in the spring of the prior academic year; thus, I had already missed the very first deadline. However, district officials were willing to make an exception in order for Gallup to do a research study in their district. Gallup has a very prestigious reputation locally and works closely with many school districts in Nebraska. District 2 had guidelines too, but my contact suggested that I simply write something up and submit it to her and then she would get it to the right person for approval. I submitted both proposals and waited. Both districts were non-responsive at first. I talked more with the Associate Superintendent of District 1, who asked that I make a few changes to my original proposal. Afterwards, she would hand deliver it to the Executive Director of Planning and Evaluation, who would get a committee together to review and approve or disapprove the study. As a result, version three was born for District 1 and District 2 faded out completely even after several attempts to prompt dialogue.

Version 3

The third version of my study would still not be my final version. I worked with the Associate Superintendent of District 1 to devise a study that would measure the impact of a strengths intervention, primarily a student intervention, on student engagement, teacher engagement, grade point average, attendance, tardiness, and discipline. A group of 47 teachers were already scheduled to attend a Strengths Spotlight™ Seminar in October where they would get to learn about their top five themes of talent, but the seminar's primary focus would be how to help high school and middle school students learn about and develop their own top five themes. The students and teachers would take a pre and post engagement survey, and Gallup would provide support for the intervention group of teachers throughout the school year. I adapted the original proposal, for which I still had no response, to reflect our new plan. She walked it over to the Executive Director and asked that he assemble a committee quickly to review the proposal. Exactly three days later I received a letter from the Executive Director that contained exactly two sentences. The first stated that the committee met to review the proposal and the second stated that after review the committee rejected the proposal.

Immediately, I thought something odd must be going on. Was there tension within the district or a power battle going on? I called the Associate Superintendent, and she had not been informed that the study had been rejected, even though it directly related to her work. She was looking forward to having data to support a certain initiative that her office was funding. I also made a call to the Executive Director to see if I could learn more about what the committee specifically did not like about the proposal. In that conversation, I got the sense from some of the words the Executive Director used, that I

in fact had been thrust into the middle of a minor power battle between the Executive Director and the Associate Superintendent. In the proposal, I had requested teacher and student identifiers in order that pre and post data could be matched; this was the first thing the committee disliked.

Second, I was asking for student data, and too much of it, in his opinion. There were over 1600 students participating, and he was not going to agree to release data on that many students, no matter what integrity standards Gallup had in place. He was well aware that Gallup was one of the largest data collection firms in the world, and that its reputation rested on data integrity and respondent anonymity, but that did not seem to impress him at all. I thanked him for his time and within a few minutes received an email from the Associate Superintendent specifying that I was to resubmit the proposal with some minor changes, and she would go directly to the Superintendent. Thus, version four was developed.

Version 4

This version would be the closest in writing to the study that actually was executed, but the process would still require much compromise and adjustment. In the fourth version, I reduced the request for student data from 1600 secondary students in the study, to 200 students chosen at random from each of the groups, the control group and the strengths intervention group. I also agreed that the only matching I would do with the pre and post data was to track whether the teacher was trained or untrained, the school location of the teacher and student, and the grade level of the student. The Executive Director of Planning and Evaluation thought that tracking individual students and teachers was not appropriate. He would not even let me double blind the data. He

insisted that the district did not want any record of how teachers performed on an individual level. Nor did the district want student data matched on an individual level. This limitation meant that there would be no way to track the impact of the individual teachers on classroom level student engagement growth. Also, I would not be able to tie an individual student's engagement to his or her direct outcomes, i.e. grades. I would only be able to analyze (1) whether students overall who worked on strengths with a trained teacher had improved engagement over students overall who did not have the opportunity to work on strengths, (2) whether students within certain school settings showed any improvement on engagement after working on strengths, (3) whether the grade level had some impact on engagement in general, and (4) whether teachers in the intervention group had higher engagement than teachers in the control group.

After personal reflection, I realize that I should have abandoned this district. I remember thinking “if the Executive Director of Planning and Evaluation does not want me to be able to drill down to the teacher and student level within the data, that is just not a good sign,” but I reminded myself that districts often shy away from teacher accountability issues and figured I would run into that road block no matter where I went. I already felt committed because of the time and effort put in up to this point and wanted to get the research underway. So I submitted this final proposal and it was accepted. However, this proposal would not accurately reflect the actual study.

The Actual Study

In concept, the actual study did not veer too much from the proposal, but the deviations came in the details and these details would make a difference. I began to realize that some of these details might influence the data later, but was nonetheless

excited to get the project underway. This new version of the project would involve comparing the level of student and teacher engagement among groups of students from three traditional high schools, two alternative high school settings, and one middle school from District 1 in Nebraska. District 1 has roughly 20,000 students and is considered a suburban district. Roughly 1600 high school and middle school students and roughly 90 teachers were invited to take the pre and post surveys. Half of the students would work with teachers that participated in a strengths-based intervention and half would work with teachers that did not participate. The teachers in the intervention group would attend a Gallup strengths-based development seminar called Strengths Spotlight™, to not only learn about their own personal talents, but also to learn how to help students identify, understand, and grow in their own areas of talent.

In the intervention group, teachers and students learned about their own Signature Themes (a person's top five areas of talent) as determined by the Clifton StrengthsFinder™, a Gallup tool based on over 30 years of research. The Clifton StrengthsFinder™ is designed to identify a person's dominant talents defined as, "naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied" (Liesveld et al, 2005, p. 49). During the staff development day, teachers learned how to help students understand, apply, and grow in their areas of greatest strength. Teachers received a teacher guidebook and student guidebook full of activities and interactive lessons to be used throughout the intervention period. Over the course of roughly five months, teachers and students in the intervention group (strengths group) would work together on strengths.

The hope for this investigation was to show a relationship between focusing on strengths during the school day and student and teacher engagement, which could then be linked to student outcomes such as grades, attendance, and tardiness. I was also curious about levels of teacher engagement and the impact that had on student outcomes, but because I would not be able to tell which teachers had which students, I would be unable to tie teacher engagement to student engagement. This version of the study was also sold in-district as supporting one of its strategic goals. The strengths work that students and teachers would be involved with would align with its new Personal Learning Plan (PLP) initiative to be launched in 2005-2006. The Associate Superintendent, leading the PLP initiative, was able to move the study forward because of this alignment; however, at this point I did not understand how the study actually would fit.

Moving forward, I put together the surveys that included well-researched questions from the Q^{12®} tool used to measure engagement and questions that Gallup had used in previous studies. The student pre-survey and post survey used for this project, found in Appendix C, had 20 total questions in common, including the 13 items from the Q^{12®}, worded slightly differently, three items about the PLP that the district included, and a few other items that Gallup had asked students in the past. The student post survey contained the 20 items from the pre-survey, in addition to four items about strengths. The teacher survey, found in Appendix D, was the same from pre to post and was the exact 13 items from the Q^{12®}, but with the word “school” used instead of company or organization. Figure 11 shows the 24 items of the student post survey (the first 20 items made up the pre survey). The Practice Leader and the Researcher provided the items that

were to be used for this study. The additional items about the PLPs were created to meet the district's needs.

Q00 On a five-point scale, where “5” is extremely satisfied and “1” is extremely dissatisfied, how satisfied are you with this as a place to go to school?

Individuals are asked to rate the following statements, on a scale of 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

Q01 I know what is expected of me at this school.

Q02 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my school work right.

Q03 At school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

Q04 In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

Q05 A teacher, or someone at school, seems to care about me as a person.

Q06 There is someone at school who encourages my development.

Q07 At school, my opinions seem to count.

Q08 My teachers make me feel my school work is important.

Q09 My fellow students are committed to doing quality work.

Q10 I have a best friend at school.

Q11 In the last six months, someone at school has talked to me about my progress.

Q12 This last year, I have had opportunities at school to learn and grow.

Q13 I understand how to use my personal learning plan.

Q14 I will benefit from developing and using my personal learning plan.

Q15 I feel my personal learning plan is an important part of planning for my future.

Q16 I feel safe in this school.

Q17 I am always treated with respect at this school.

Q18 I know I will graduate from this school.

Q19 Which of the following grades are you currently in? 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th check boxes

Additional strengths items on the post survey:

Q20 My school is committed to building the strengths of each student.

Q21 My teachers emphasize my strengths rather than my weaknesses.

Q22 I know and understand what my greatest strengths are.

Q23 I understand how to apply my strengths to improve my performance in school and other areas of my life.

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Figure 11. The 24 items of the student post survey, the pre survey included the first 20 items.

The surveys were coded, printed, delivered, and administered in October, and the teachers in the intervention group attended the one-day Strengths Spotlight™ seminar. This seminar was a well-designed, pre-existing seminar for educators, not one that I created or adapted. The pre-surveys and the seminar went according to plan. Teachers spent the entire day focusing on strengths. First, they learned about their own top five strengths. Then, teachers spent time understanding the framework and language of strengths-based development so that they could spend most of the day learning about activities that would help students understand, apply, and grow their own strengths.

Example materials from the Strengths Spotlight™ seminar are included in Appendix E.

Once the teachers attended the seminar, they needed specific codes so that their students could take the Clifton StrengthsFinder™. On November 9th, Gallup provided the codes to the Associate Superintendent who then distributed them to administrators at each participating school. About a week later, an e-mail was sent to the intervention group to provide further ideas and support for working with students on their strengths. Occasional emails were sent throughout the intervention period, much like a consultant would typically do with a client. Two voluntary sessions were held, one in January and one in February, for teachers in the intervention group to share their struggles and triumphs and learn from one another. This session was attended by five teachers in January and fifteen in February out of a total of 47 teachers who had attended the seminar. These sessions were led by the Education Division Consultant that worked with District 1 and who originally taught the Strengths Spotlight™ Seminar.

As the Associate Superintendent and I continued to communicate by phone and email to help make this initiative work, I would face more changes regarding the study. I

was very disappointed about the compromises that I had to make on the data collection issues, and my disappointment would continue to spiral. First, I found out that the teachers within the traditional settings that were focusing on strengths with students would be doing so during advisor time and not during normal classroom time. I thought this approach could be interesting until I found out how much time advisors really spent with students each week. It varied from school to school, ranging from 10 minutes a couple of times per week to 20 minutes once per week. I also discovered that the advisor time was very structured and planned. Advisors had very specific tasks to accomplish during advisor time each week. The strengths work could be perceived as an add-on, one more activity teachers had to try to squeeze in each week. The Education Division Consultant and the Associate Superintendent were the ones planning the use of strengths within the district. It seemed to me that the lack of focus on strategic issues related to the implementation of a strengths program was starting to get in the way of this study. I was not a part of those up-front conversations because I was simply seen as the person collecting data regarding the district's use of strengths. All of the revamping that the district had me do to my proposal was so that I could study something they were already planning to do. It was no longer a study that I was conducting; it was more than I was helping them by providing the surveys and analysis. In the beginning, helping them study something they were already doing sounded like a good plan for both of us, but it was starting to mean that I had no control in most of the decisions made because the district was in charge.

The next factor that contributed to my draining enthusiasm was that all students would be working with their advisors on Personal Learning Plans. This was the new

initiative I mentioned previously that the Associate Superintendent was leading. We had talked about it in passing as I revamped my final proposal and prepared the survey, but my understanding at that point was that strengths aligned and helped support one of the district's strategic goals. After the strengths work was underway, the Associate Superintendent and I discussed the PLPs in more detail. All students would be working with their advisors to fill out a plan, and each plan differed depending on the student's grade level. What I would not find out until we were in the field was that as a part of the plan, students would be discussing and writing about their strengths, but general strengths instead of Gallup's themes. This detail meant that students in the control group would also be having conversations with their advisors about their strengths and how to utilize those strengths to reach their academic goals. These discussions would definitely impact the data, but we had already done the pre survey, and the teachers had already been through the seminar. At this point, I could have walked away, but I felt a sense of responsibility to carry out the plan not only for the district, but also for myself. I did have a conversation at this point with the Practice Leader who suggested I move forward because Gallup had committed to helping this current client with studying this intervention. He and I agreed that there would probably be pockets of interesting data.

As fall semester turned to spring semester, I started to work with the Associate Superintendent on a detailed plan to collect the student data that I would need, including grade point average, attendance, and tardiness. We must have gone back and forth on logistics related to this issue for two months. Who was going to be able to get that data for me? When would he or she do it? Gallup had already agreed in the proposal to pay for someone in the district to gather the required data. I was beginning to see that this

need was going to be another road block and yet a third major disappointment. First, she told me that the tardy data would be impossible to collect because of the district's tracking systems. At this point, I offered to retrieve the data myself, if the district would just let me have access to the system. That offer was not accepted. I even said that I would sign a confidentiality waiver and explained that having been an administrator, I could probably navigate within the computer system, and nobody would have to be bothered. If the task took hours, they would be my hours and I was willing to do it because after all, it was my project. Still, there was no way they were going to let me have access, waiver or not. Now, I was just left with grade point average and attendance on a subgroup of 200 students from each of the two groups. After further discussion, the 400 students dwindled down to 200 students, 100 from each group. I was becoming more frustrated. It was clear in my proposal that I wanted data for 200 students from each group for a total of 400 students. Now, 400 was too large a number for the district, so I was left with 200 students.

I had an in-person meeting with the Associate Superintendent to discuss the data collection for those 200 students and walked away disappointed yet again. The school district had a new student data tracking system, and nobody knew how to use it. Past attendance data were not carried over from previous years because of costs. Now, we were just discussing gathering grade point average from 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. The post survey was originally planned for the middle of February, but the Associate Superintendent pushed for it to be given later. We compromised and scheduled it for the first two weeks of March. As it worked out, that meant that the post survey would coincide with the end of the third quarter. This change meant that the intervention

period, which was roughly three quarters long, and the student data that we would collect would span the same amount of time, perhaps resulting in a positive change. As we discussed this in relation to grade point average, she discovered that the new tracking system only reported grade point averages at semester intervals. As a result, I could either get grade point average information through first semester, which would only reflect half of the intervention, or I could get year-end data that would include time well past the intervention period.

By that time, I found out that some teachers did not even start using strengths with their students until January. This news was another surprise to me and meant that the student data, if only taken through the end of the first semester, would not be reflective of the intervention period. We discussed this at length and then came to the conclusion that if we were going to collect any data, it should be year-end. She shared that finding a person to help collect this information was still a major challenge. They would have to be trained on the new system and it would have to be done after hours. It was finally decided that we would abandon the effort to collect data until the summer. This development meant for the purposes of my dissertation that I would not compare engagement data to grades or any other student outcome for that matter. She was beginning to sound defeated and started expressing her concerns that we weren't going to find anything useful in the data and I silently agreed.

In this frank discussion, she shared that she had received reports from teachers that they weren't able to spend any time on the strengths activities and that they were just barely able to get all the students to take the Clifton StrengthsFinder™. Teachers were obviously dedicated to this effort at varying levels. I had expected some differences, but I

was getting the impression that reality was much worse than I had imagined. The typical arguments against a new initiative began to surface. Teachers expressed their concern about time and priorities with respect to other initiatives in school. All of these teachers had volunteered for this strengths seminar, which meant at one point they were enthusiastic at the chance to work with students and their strengths. Early on, I thought this was going to impact the data in the opposite way. I thought that because they volunteered, they naturally would have more engagement and would really make this intervention work. While not a negative issue, I would have to mention it in my analysis. The fact that teachers were trying to accomplish all of the strengths work in just a few minutes during advisor time was the heart of the problem.

She also shared that she had offered financial support for principals who wanted more teachers and students to have the opportunity to work with strengths. Very few administrators showed interest. She said that the student data tracking system had been such a nightmare for everyone, including teachers who had to be trained on it for several hours, and that it just was not living up to the district's expectations. She shared that the Personal Learning Plan, as a new initiative, was overwhelming for advisors as well. This study was beginning to sound like a failure and not because the strengths-development program itself was bad, but because it never got the chance to succeed. It lacked the necessary support to make it work and it was competing with other initiatives for time. The reality of school set in, and those involved could not manage the implementation issues. The problems overshadowed the goal to help students learn more about what made them unique and how they could use their strengths to find more success in school. I was seeing first hand what must happen so often with new initiatives in schools. If the

support and appropriate planning is not sufficient from the start, there is little hope for successful implementation and hence even less hope for positive outcomes.

So, the final design of the study can be described as a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest, nonequivalent control group design. Teachers in the intervention group volunteered to participate in the Strengths Spotlight™ seminar. To obtain a control group, characteristics of the teachers who volunteered were matched based on advisor class size, school, and grade level. Performing this matching allowed for the same number of teachers and roughly the same number of students within five of the six settings. In the school within a school, all teachers were essentially trained and all students participated in strengths development meaning that only pre and post analysis could be performed. The independent variable was the strengths-based development program used with teachers. The dependent variables were student engagement and teacher engagement. In the end, it became a much simpler study than I had imagined I would do, but was still aimed at answering the question: Will the knowledge, understanding, and implementation of a teacher led, student strengths-based development program, positively influence engagement levels for students and teachers?

A Review of the Data

Now the real task started. Did the data hold anything interesting or important? That would be the deciding factor in whether this effort was valuable for all involved. The data came back and went through the internal Gallup process. The surveys were scanned and the responses loaded into a data system and sent to a data analyst who put the data files together, aggregated the data into groups that we discussed, and then gave it to me. As normal protocol for any Gallup research project, a “real” researcher (the

Researcher) was assigned to my study for analysis. Gallup has an entire team of researchers that work with the various internal divisions to study the impact of Gallup's work with clients as well as on new R & D projects. I use the term "real" researchers, because that is what they get paid to do, they do research full-time.

The Researcher and I sat down to discuss what we should analyze and quickly started running the data. We would analyze the data in several groupings: (1) Students Overall - overall students taught by trained teachers versus overall students taught by untrained teachers, (2) Traditional High Schools - the three high schools' students compared by whether they had a trained or untrained teacher, (3) Traditional Middle School - the middle school students taught by a trained teacher versus those taught by an untrained teacher, (4) Learning Center – students taught by a trained teacher versus those taught by untrained teacher, (5) School within a School – all students pre survey versus post survey results (no control group), and (6) Teachers – trained teachers versus untrained teachers. If we could find something in the first two groupings, the n sizes were large enough to make some generalizations.

We started with these two groupings, and time and time again, nothing interesting was coming up. Either there was very little difference from time one to time two, or the control group was the one with the meaningful growth. The Gallup researcher shared with me that "meaningful change" is a five percentage point or more gain in "percent fives" or percent "strongly agree" responses, a .10 change or more in the mean score for an individual item, and a .20 or more change in the GrandMean, which is the average of the item means of the 12 specific engagement items from the Q^{12®} survey. These principles, based on standard deviations, were the "rules" that Gallup used in analyzing

results for their business clients and would be the standards used for this data as well. For hours, we crunched the numbers and still, nothing interesting emerged. We tried the sixth grouping, the teacher group, to see if there was anything meaningful from pre to post between those that participated in the strengths-based development and those that did not. There was no indication that the teachers involved in leading the student strengths-based intervention had higher levels of engagement. Teachers in this study had so much going on that intervention or not, engagement was being impacted by all of the expectations and change going on in within the district. The GrandMeans of these groupings showed no meaningful growth. Even when we analyzed differences in item means and differences in “percent fives” per item pre and post, still nothing showed as meaningful change for these three groupings.

Toward the end of our time that day, we quickly glanced at the middle school and the two alternative settings and it seemed there might be something to look further into. I asked her to print out several reports and send me the data files so that I could continue digging. I went on my way and used the Gallup guidelines to continue searching for pockets of impact. I looked for meaningful changes in “percent fives”, the GrandMeans, and individual mean scores from pre to post. After drilling down to the individual item level within these three settings, the middle school and the two alternative settings, I found what I was looking for, two groups where strengths seemed to make a big difference in the way students responded from pre to post survey.

Case Study 1 – School Within a School

The school within a school program is a 9th and 10th grade program housed within one of the traditional high schools in District 1. It is a program for students that have

been identified as high risk for dropout during middle school or the early years of high school. The program's purpose is to help students prepare for their 11th and 12th grades of high school and beyond. There were four teachers and 44 students in this group. Two of the four teachers attended the Strengths Spotlight™ seminar and later shared their learning with the other two teachers, so all teachers were essentially trained. All 44 students took the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ and participated in strengths' activities and discussions. No control group existed within this setting, but comparisons could be made from the pre and post surveys.

Meaningful differences in means (increase of .10 or more) and “percent fives” or “strongly agree” (increase of five percentage points or more) would be analyzed per item from pre survey to post survey. On Q01-Q08 and Q11, meaningful change was observed in means and “percent fives”. On Q00 and Q12 meaningful change was observed in the mean differences. On Q10, Q14, Q17 and Q18, meaningful change in “percent fives” was observed.

There were seven items that had double digit increases in the percentage of students that could rate the item a five from pre to post survey. Table 1 summarizes those findings.

Table 1

Survey Items with Double Digit Increases in “Percent Fives” from Pre to Post for School Within a School

| School within a school | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Q02 | Materials & equipment | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 29.27% | 51.52% | 22.25% |
| Q03 | Do what I do best | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 17.50% | 31.25% | 13.75% |
| Q05 | Cares about me | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 32.50% | 45.45% | 12.95% |
| Q06 | Encourages development | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 17.50% | 43.75% | 26.25% |
| Q08 | School work important | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 14.63% | 37.50% | 22.87% |
| Q11 | Talked about progress | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 31.58% | 48.48% | 16.90% |
| Q18 | Know I will graduate | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 40.54% | 53.33% | 12.79% |

The items in Table 1 that gained more than 20 percentage points from time one to time two had strong implications. Students felt that they had the materials they needed (Q02), had someone who encouraged their development (Q06), and had teachers who made them feel that their school work was important (Q08). To have students strongly agree with “there is someone at school who encourages my development” should be a given at school, but as we see here, only 17.5% of students strongly agreed with that item on the pre survey. By time two, almost 44% of those same students could strongly agree.

In addition to these tremendous results on “percent fives,” meaningful differences in means from time one to time two were observed. On eleven items, the mean difference from pre to post survey was greater than .10 and in 10 of those 11 cases the

change was .20 or greater. Table 2 summarizes the mean differences for the eleven items mentioned.

Table 2

Survey Items with Meaningful Increases in Means from Pre to Post for School Within a School.

| School within a school | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|------|
| Q00 | Overall Satisfaction | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 2.86 | 3.11 | 0.25 |
| Q01 Know what's expected | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.95 | 4.15 | 0.20 |
| Q02 Materials & equipment | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 4.00 | 4.27 | 0.27 |
| Q03 Do what I do best | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.30 | 3.97 | 0.67 |
| Q04 Recognition | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.02 | 3.27 | 0.25 |
| Q05 Cares about me | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.83 | 4.06 | 0.24 |
| Q06 Encourages development | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.45 | 4.09 | 0.64 |
| Q07 Opinion counts | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 2.80 | 3.15 | 0.35 |
| Q08 School work is important | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.59 | 3.94 | 0.35 |
| Q11 Talked about progress | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.66 | 4.06 | 0.40 |
| Q12 Opportunity to learn & grow | | | |
| strengths | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| | 3.77 | 3.94 | 0.17 |

The largest mean increases were on Q03 “opportunity to do what I do best every day,” Q06 “someone at school encourages my development,” and Q11 “past six months, someone at school has talked to me about my progress.” These differences are powerful.

The average score on these three items changed by .67, .64, and .40, respectively. Since students reported that they were able to do what they do best every day at school, felt like someone was encouraging their development, and that someone talked with them about their progress, I wondered if their overall engagement increased. To analyze the overall engagement, I pulled the GrandMean from the pre survey and the post survey to see if there was at least a .20 gain. There was a .29 gain in the GrandMean from pre to post survey. This increase suggests that the overall engagement of this group had very meaningful growth over time.

Six additional items had increases in “percent fives” from the pre survey to the post survey of five percentage points or more. Table 3 summarizes the meaningful changes for these items.

Table 3

Survey Items with Meaningful Increases in “Percent Fives” from Pre to Post for School Within a School.

| School within a School | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Q01 | Know what's expected | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 39.02% | 45.45% | 6.43% |
| Q04 | Recognition | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 21.95% | 27.27% | 5.32% |
| Q07 | Opinion counts | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 9.76% | 15.15% | 5.40% |
| Q10 | Best friend at school | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 64.10% | 72.73% | 8.62% |
| Q14 | Benefit from PLP | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 8.82% | 13.79% | 4.97% |
| Q17 | Treated with respect | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 7.50% | 15.63% | 8.13% |

The “I have a best friend at school” and “I’m always treated with respect” items could most significantly affect a child’s connection to and engagement in school. As discussed in the literature review, how students feel about their treatment matters to their engagement levels. The responses of the students in the school within a school setting showed that their perceptions about their environment changed for the better because they had the opportunity to work on strengths.

Case Study 2- The Learning Center

The learning center was for behaviorally challenged students, most of whom had been identified as needing behavior modification and were part of the district’s Special Education program. Some non-special education students also were placed at the learning center based on a recommendation from their home school. Most of these students had not demonstrated the skills necessary for appropriate behavior in their home school, and the learning center was seen as a school that could help these students succeed. Students attended the learning center because either their Individual Education Plan called for it or they could not quite handle the behavior expectations of the more traditional setting.

There were 90 students at the learning center that were involved in the study, 53 in the intervention group and 37 in the control group. The students in the intervention group took CSF™ and were taught by four trained teachers, and the students in the control group had no exposure to strengths and were taught by four untrained teachers. There were four items where strong positive results for the strengths group contrasted with declines in the control group. On Q00, the overall satisfaction question, the group receiving the strengths intervention had over an 18 percentage point gain in the percent of

students that could strongly agree with the statement. In the pre survey, 35.29% rated the item a five and on the post survey 53.57% rated the item a five. This result was in stark contrast to the 19 percentage point decline in the percent of students that could strongly agree with the statement in the control group. On the pre survey, 42.11% of the control group strongly agreed with the statement, and only 23.08% strongly agreed on the post survey. The mean difference on Q00 was also meaningful. The strengths group mean on Q00 went from 3.97 to 4.11, a .14 increase in the item mean versus the control group's mean that stayed exactly the same. The control group over time became less satisfied with the learning center as a place to go to school, while the strengths group became more satisfied. All of the students in this environment were at the learning center because a more traditional setting did not fit their needs. It seems strengths might help students feel more satisfied with the learning center environment as a whole, which is a great first step on the path to increasing engagement.

On Q14, the item about benefiting from their Personal Learning Plan, the strengths group increased the “percent fives” by almost six percentage points, while the control group decreased the “percent fives” by nearly 20 percentage points. Those students who were able to focus on their strengths seemed to find more value in the Personal Learning Plan. For the control group, the perceived benefit of the PLP declined over time instead of increasing. On Q16, the item about feeling safe in school, the strengths group increased the “percent fives” by almost five percentage points, while the control group decreased by 24 percentage points. Possibly during the process of learning about one’s own strengths and hearing about the strengths of others, mutual understanding was fostered. As a result, these students seemed to feel safer over time

than the control group, who felt less safe as the year progressed. On Q17, the item about being treated with respect, similar results occurred. From pre to post survey, the strengths group increased the percent of students rating the item a five by 20 percentage points, from 31.91% to 52.38%. In the control group, there was a five percentage point decline from pre to post on this item, from 43.33% to 37.93%. These results are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Survey Items with Meaningful Increases in “Percent Fives” from Pre to Post for Learning Center

| Learning center | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Q00 | Overall Satisfaction | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 35.29% | 53.57% | 18.28% |
| control | 42.11% | 23.08% | -19.03% |
| Q16 | Feel Safe | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 50.00% | 54.76% | 4.76% |
| control | 66.67% | 42.42% | -24.24% |
| Q17 | Treated with respect | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 31.91% | 52.38% | 20.47% |
| control | 43.33% | 37.93% | -5.40% |

Sharing strengths among classmates may contribute to the overall feeling of being respected. Someone was paying attention to who they were and what made them unique besides the behavioral issues. A focus on the positive aspects of these students was being celebrated, and it most likely contributed to their feeling respected at school. The control group on all three items actually started out higher than the intervention group, so it is safe to say that the strengths group did not have a happier outlook to begin with than the control group.

Although both groups declined on several of the items, it is important to point out that the strengths group declined by much less than the control group. That might not be the most positive news, but it might give us further insight into these students and how strengths affected their perceptions. If focusing on strengths can lessen the negative views a student has about being in an alternative school over time, it might help students persist. If we can help students complete high school, we know they have a much better future (NCES, 2006). Table 5 summarizes these particular items:

Table 5

Survey Items with Larger Declines in Control Group for Learning Center

| Learning center | | | |
|------------------------|--|---------|---------|
| Q01 | Know what's expected | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 68.75% | 62.50% | -6.25% |
| control | 73.33% | 60.61% | -12.73% |
| Q05 | Cares about me | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 56.25% | 47.50% | -8.75% |
| control | 65.52% | 48.48% | -17.03% |
| Q12 | Opportunities to learn & grow | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 39.13% | 33.33% | -5.80% |
| control | 58.62% | 41.94% | -16.69% |
| Q13 | Understand PLP | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 40.00% | 35.90% | -4.10% |
| control | 53.33% | 31.25% | -22.08% |
| Q15 | PLP important to future | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 39.58% | 41.03% | 1.44% |
| control | 50.00% | 25.81% | -24.19% |
| Q18 | Know I will graduate | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 77.78% | 75.00% | -2.78% |
| control | 92.86% | 78.57% | -14.29% |

The decreases in “percent fives” are consistently less for the strengths group than the control group on these items. So, although the strengths group’s outlook changed slightly toward the negative, the control group’s outlook declined by much more. In half

of the items listed in Figure 14 (Q13, Q15, and Q18), the drop in “percent fives” for the strengths group would not be considered meaningful, so at least their ratings stayed relatively the same from time one to time two, unlike the control group’s ratings that became much worse over time. Even though the overall GrandMean of the strengths group did not increase by a meaningful .2, it did go up by .1, while the control group’s GrandMean decreased by .18. The GrandMean might reveal that overall engagement is at least on the rise for those students that participated in strengths-development.

The Traditional School Environments

When the Researcher and I first analyzed the data of the two groupings, students overall and then students within traditional high school settings, we struggled to find anything meaningful. However, when the data were analyzed school by school and then item by item, a number of gains were observed within each of the traditional settings.

In the first traditional high school, there was only one item with a meaningful change, but it happened to be the overall satisfaction question, and it contrasted with a decline in the control group. From pre to post, the strengths group gained 9.44 percentage points in those strongly agreeing with the item, while the control group lost 10.16 percentage points, a meaningful change, from pre to post on the same item. Table 6 displays the evidence that in this traditional high school, students that were exposed to strengths-based development were more satisfied with their school over time than the control group that became less satisfied.

Table 6

Survey Item with Meaningful Increase in ‘Percent Fives’ for First Traditional High School

| Traditional High School #1 | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---------|---------|
| Q00 | Overall Satisfaction | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 19.53% | 28.97% | 9.44% |
| control | 27.27% | 17.12% | -10.16% |

In the second traditional high school there were two items with positive results for the strengths intervention group. Table 7 displays the gain that was observed in what just might be the most important question asked of students. For Q05 “someone cares about me,” there was a meaningful increase in “percent fives” and in the mean difference from pre to post survey. The intervention group gained 7.57 percentage points on “percent fives” and .21 in the mean from time one to time two.

Table 7

Survey Items with Meaningful Growth from Pre to Post for Second Traditional High School

| Traditional High School #2 | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------|
| Q05 | Someone Cares | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 24.84% | 32.41% | 7.57% |
| control | 27.72% | 25.75% | -2.00% |
| Q05 | Someone Cares | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 3.53 | 3.74 | 0.21 |
| control | 3.57 | 3.69 | 0.12 |
| Q06 | Encourages Development | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 3.37 | 3.61 | 0.24 |
| control | 3.45 | 3.62 | 0.17 |

For Q06 “someone encourages my development,” as shown in Table 7, the mean grew by .24 from time one to time two for the group receiving the strengths intervention, a more meaningful gain than the control group.

Table 8 displays the changes observed within the third traditional high school. Q04 “received recognition” had meaningful changes in “percent fives”, growing from 12.99% who strongly agreed to 19.46% on the post survey. This 6.47 percentage point gain was in contrast to a 5.75 percentage point decline in the control group. For Q18 “know I will graduate,” the intervention group increased the “percent fives” by 6.84 percentage points, while the control group lost more than three percentage points.

Table 8

Survey Items with Meaningful Increase in “Percent Fives” from Pre to Post for Third Traditional High School

| Traditional High School #3 | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| Q04 Recognition | | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 12.99% | 19.46% | 6.47% |
| control | 21.70% | 15.95% | -5.75% |
| Q18 Know I will graduate | | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 79.22% | 86.06% | 6.84% |
| control | 81.86% | 78.54% | -3.32% |

In the traditional middle school setting there were several interesting observations as well. On Q09, Q11, Q14, Q16, and Q18 there was either a meaningful change in the mean or “percent fives” and on Q11, both. Tables 9 and 10 summarize the middle school findings.

Table 9

Survey Items with Meaningful Change in Means Pre to Post for Traditional Middle School

| Traditional Middle School | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Q09 | Quality work | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 3.04 | 3.15 | 0.10 |
| control | 3.18 | 3.22 | 0.04 |
| Q11 | Talked about progress | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 3.68 | 3.78 | 0.10 |
| control | 3.87 | 3.87 | 0 |
| Q18 | Know I will graduate | | |
| | Pre mean | Post mean | Diff |
| strengths | 4.61 | 4.80 | 0.19 |
| control | 4.62 | 4.59 | -0.03 |

Table 10

Survey Items With Meaningful Change In “Percent Fives” Pre To Post For Traditional Middle School

| Traditional Middle School | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Q11 | Talked about progress | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 36.36% | 45.74% | 9.38% |
| control | 45.19% | 41.74% | -3.44% |
| Q14 | Benefit from PLP | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 25.00% | 26.88% | 1.88% |
| control | 37.11% | 28.87% | -8.25% |
| Q16 | Feel Safe | | |
| | Pre %5 | Post %5 | Diff |
| strengths | 32.32% | 41.24% | 8.91% |
| control | 52.38% | 53.85% | 1.47% |

On the “talked about progress” and “feel safe” items, middle school students had percent five gains of 9.38 and 8.91 percentage points respectively, both items contributing to a more positive perception of the environment. I included Q14, because while the strengths group did not have meaningful positive change, the control group had meaningful negative change on the perceived benefit of the Personal Learning Plan.

Overall Student Data from Post Survey

I was interested in the overall data, not related to the strengths intervention as well. What would the data show about how students feel about school? How many were engaged, not engaged, or even actively disengaged? When I asked the Researcher to apply her proprietary formula to the data, only one group fit the criteria necessary for calculation. The overall student group comprised of 1,385 respondents on the post survey met the criteria for calculating the three engagement categories. Out of those students, 29% were engaged, 50% were not engaged, and 21% were actively disengaged. That comes out to only about 401 students who were engaged and roughly 984 that were either not engaged or actively disengaged. In Chapter Two I referred to Cothran and Ennis' (2000) estimation that nearly two-thirds of the high school population was disengaged. If only 29% of students in the study were engaged, over 70% were not engaged or actively disengaged. Gallup suggests that a ratio of 4 engaged to 1 actively disengaged has shown to be associated with productive and profitable work groups among adults. With the numbers that the Researcher provided, there are about two actively disengaged students for every three engaged students, far from the healthiest workgroups in Gallup's experience. I do, however, wonder if a 4:1 ratio among students is ever possible. I wonder how the best schools in the country would weigh in on engaged versus disengaged students. This is another area for further study.

What else would the data reveal about students' opinions regarding the environment in which they spend more than half of their day? Figure 22 provides a summary of the post survey results for all 24 items and lists the percent agreement for

each item as well as the mean score. I created three categories for which to separate the data:

- (1) Green Flags – items where 80% or more students rated the item a 4 or a 5;
- (2) Yellow Flags – items where 60 – 79% of students rated the item a 4 or a 5;
- (3) Red Flags – items where less than 60% of students rated the item a 4 or a 5.

The Good – The Green Flags

Of the 24 items, only three ranked in the first category; these are marked green in Figure 21. On Q01 “know what’s expected,” 81.5% of students gave a four or five rating; on Q02 “materials and equipment to do my school work right,” 80.7% of students gave a four or five rating; and on Q18 “know I will graduate,” 88.9% of students gave a four or five rating. Q01 and Q02 are what Gallup labels “basic needs” of any person. In order to be engaged, people need to know what is expected of them and need the materials and equipment to do their jobs right. In *First Break All the Rules*, Buckingham & Coffman (1999) suggest that the first six items of the Q^{12®} are considered “the core of a strong and vibrant workplace” (p. 48) and I would say school, as well. The first six items include the do what I do best, recognition, someone encourages my development, and someone cares about me items. Student perceptions on these items, in my opinion, are very important because they reveal much about the relationship between adults and students and we know from the literature how important those relationships are to engagement. These authors also share that great managers focus on Q01-Q06 first, and then begin to build up through the other items. Therefore, the data would support that these schools at least provided clear expectations and the “stuff” that students needed to do their school work right.

Table 11

Summary of Student Post Survey Percent Agreement and Mean for Each Item

| Student Post Survey Item (n=1385) | %5 | %4 | %3 | %2 | %1 | Mean |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Q00 Overall Satisfaction | 20.6 | 48.5 | 22.9 | 6.1 | 2.0 | 3.80 |
| Q01 Know what's expected | 42.0 | 39.5 | 13.8 | 3.2 | 1.5 | 4.17 |
| Q02 Materials and equipment | 46.6 | 34.1 | 14.1 | 3.8 | 1.4 | 4.21 |
| Q03 Do what I do best | 26.5 | 39.9 | 24.3 | 5.9 | 3.5 | 3.80 |
| Q04 Recognition | 18.1 | 22.0 | 24.5 | 19.2 | 16.2 | 3.07 |
| Q05 Cares about me | 36.9 | 30.2 | 21.3 | 7.1 | 4.4 | 3.88 |
| Q06 Encourages my development | 29.6 | 33.9 | 22.9 | 9.1 | 4.4 | 3.75 |
| Q07 Opinions count | 14.1 | 26.9 | 29.6 | 15.8 | 13.6 | 3.12 |
| Q08 School work is important | 28.7 | 32.0 | 27.4 | 8.3 | 3.7 | 3.74 |
| Q09 Committed to quality work | 10.2 | 25.5 | 39.2 | 18.4 | 6.6 | 3.14 |
| Q10 Best friend | 63.1 | 16.1 | 10.5 | 3.8 | 6.5 | 4.26 |
| Q11 Talked about progress | 37.6 | 29.1 | 19.3 | 7.6 | 6.4 | 3.84 |
| Q12 Opportunities to learn and grow | 34.0 | 37.8 | 18.7 | 6.0 | 3.4 | 3.93 |
| Q13 Understand PLP | 27.4 | 27.8 | 22.2 | 9.9 | 12.7 | 3.47 |
| Q14 Benefit from PLP | 19 | 26.2 | 21.4 | 11.7 | 21.7 | 3.09 |
| Q15 PLP important to future | 21.5 | 19.4 | 21.5 | 12.6 | 24.9 | 3.00 |
| Q16 Feel safe | 40.2 | 31.2 | 19.7 | 4.9 | 4.0 | 3.99 |
| Q17 Treated with respect | 24.4 | 30.1 | 25.3 | 12.0 | 8.1 | 3.51 |
| Q18 Know I will graduate | 78.5 | 10.4 | 5.9 | 2.4 | 2.9 | 4.59 |
| Q20 School committed to building strengths of each student | 23.5 | 37.5 | 26.7 | 8.2 | 4.1 | 3.68 |
| Q21 Teachers emphasize my strengths | 19.6 | 35.2 | 28.7 | 11.9 | 4.7 | 3.53 |
| Q22 Understand my strengths | 38.1 | 34.4 | 19.6 | 5.0 | 2.9 | 4.0 |
| Q23 Apply my strengths to improve performance | 36.1 | 34.6 | 21.2 | 5.1 | 3.0 | 3.96 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| More than 80% 4s & 5s | 60-80% 4s & 5s | Less than 60% 4s & 5s |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

The Average – The Yellow Flags

Between 60-80% of students gave a four or five rating to Q00, Q03, Q05, Q06, Q08, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q16, Q20, Q22, and Q23. Of these, seven were actually in the lower of the two deciles, the 60-70% range. Only 69.1% of students could give a four or five rating to the overall satisfaction rating. That means that 30% of students are not satisfied with their environment as a place to go to school. If schools took Schlechty's approach and viewed students as customers, they would be in trouble. If 30% of a company's customers were not satisfied, business would quickly die. Only 66.4% of students rated the “do what I do best every day” item a four or a five. Roughly one-third of students don't feel that they get to do what they do best every day. It seems then, that these students don't apply themselves in ways that are appropriate to their strengths during the school day. The ones that were able to agree to this statement probably thought about non-academic activities; e.g., they get to play soccer every day. I imagine they do not experience “flow” very often within the academic day. Only 67.1% of students rated the “someone at school cares about me” item with a four or five. Again, one-third of students rated this item a three or less. The Researcher that I worked with shared that Gallup's official point of view about a rating of three is that it is a “soft no.” So, 534 students out of the 1,357 students that responded to this item could not think of someone at school that cared about them as a person.

It makes me wonder what could happen if we could reach out and help those students feel cared about. Would they be more engaged overall? Would their grades get better? Would they come to school more often? Only 63.5% of students could give a four or five rating to Q06 “someone at school encourages my development.” Shouldn't

every young person be able to agree strongly to this statement? Isn't our job as educators first and foremost to encourage the development of each student in everything from subject knowledge to personal growth? Have we lost sight of that goal? Do we forget to encourage real growth because we are so busy "fixing" what's wrong?

Only 60.7% of students gave a four or five rating to Q08 "my teachers make me feel my school work is important." Schlechty probably would not be surprised. Almost 40% of students don't feel that teachers make an effort to make school work relevant. Only 66.7% of students gave a four or five rating to Q11 "talked about progress." Roughly a third of students did not feel anyone talked to them about their growth. Only 61% of students thought their school was committed to building the strengths of each student rating it a four or five. Again, almost 40% of students do not feel that their school focuses on building their strengths. Although some people might actually be impressed with these numbers, I cannot help think what it might be like if these percentages were higher. To find out the answer to that question, more research has to be done to find the most engaged schools and study their success. Would those be magnet schools, charter schools with a specific mission, or are there traditional schools where the engaged group is 80% and the not engaged and actively disengaged combine to only around 20%? Is it possible? Is it realistic? In my opinion, schools can always improve. Even if efforts to improve the school environment increase the engagement of just a few more students, isn't it worth it?

The Bad – The Red Flags

Out of the 24 items, eight fall below 60% of students being able to give a four or five rating. Only three of those eight items fell between 50 -60%, while the rest fell below

50%. Only 40.1% of students could give a four or five rating to the statement about receiving recognition in the last seven days. Sixty percent of students could not remember getting any recognition or praise in the past seven days for doing good school work. This number supports our weakness-fixing model. Because the focus of education is to focus on the weaknesses of students and fix them, teachers may find it hard to remember to praise the work, in whole or part, when it is done well.

Only 40% of students felt that their opinions counted at school by rating the item a four or five. Reflecting on Chapter Two, the “opinions count” item probably links to the locus of control that Dewey (1990) mentioned and, choice, one of the 5 Cs that Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) discussed. If students had more choice and more control regarding their school work, they might feel their opinions count and thus might be more engaged. The lowest rated item was Q09 “my fellow students are committed to doing quality work.” Only 10.2% could strongly agree and only 25.5% could rate the item a four, so combined only 35.7% of students rated the item a four or five. Almost 65% of students did not feel that their classmates cared about or strived for quality in the work teachers asked them to do. This rating actually shocked me a little at first, until I thought more about it. I began thinking about the “going through the motions” or rite of passage type sentiments. Do teachers just simply ask students to do work for the sake of work, not for the sake of development? I remember my math class in the high school in Texas. In the beginning when I was assigning homework, some students would literally just write the problems down and turn it in and hope I would not notice, or they would write what seemed like math gibberish and cross their fingers that I was checking for quantity not quality. They were actually quite good at this response and expected to get away with it.

When I switched to producing everything in class, not once did students try this type of manipulation. I really believe that the way we *do* school contributes to this type of thinking among students. Some realize that if they just produce practically anything, quality aside, they will get credit.

The three items, Q13-Q15 which asked students about their Personal Learning Plans, were also flagged red. The percentage of students that gave a rating of four or five was 55.2%, 45.2%, and 40.9%, respectively. Since this is the first year of the initiative, the district can use this data to support further communication and development of the Personal Learning Plans. The district may want to think more about the implementation of this initiative. Maybe advisor time is not the best place to house this effort.

The last two items on the “bad” list are Q17 “always treated with respect” and Q21 “teachers emphasize my strengths versus my weaknesses.” Only 54.5% of students could give a four or five rating to the respect item. Almost half of the students in this group did not feel that they were respected at school. Only 54.8% of students could give a four or five to the item about teachers emphasizing strengths. I found it interesting that 61% of students felt that the school focused on building their strengths, but that only 54.8% felt that their teachers focused on their strengths. Again, almost half the students surveyed felt their teachers did not focus on their strengths versus their weaknesses. What would happen if teachers did? I think we saw a glimpse of what could happen in the two alternative educational settings.

Overall Teacher Data from Post Survey

I started to wonder how teachers could encourage engagement in their classrooms if they themselves were not getting what they needed from their environment and

relationships to feel engaged about their work. In Chapter One, I suggested that it was a teacher's responsibility to foster student engagement and discussed that administrators must do their part to foster teacher engagement as well. I still believe this view is correct, but seeing this data made me feel more empathetic toward teachers. The data helped me understand how teacher and student engagement are truly symbiotic.

In Table 12, the same system used with the student data was applied to identify items that would be flagged as green (good), yellow (average), or red (bad) within the teacher responses on the post survey. The figure provides a summary of the percent agreement and mean for all thirteen items and comparisons to the Educational Services sector of Gallup's Employee Engagement Database. Gallup's overall Employee Engagement Database includes over 4.51 million respondents, 423,000 workgroups, 332 clients, and represents 12 major industries, including Educational Services. Within the Educational Services sector, over 17,000 respondents, teachers primarily, are represented. The 75th percentile is a common comparison provided to Gallup clients, so that businesses can see how they compare to the world-wide database that Gallup maintains. In Figure 22, two columns represent the 75th percentile from Gallup's education sector of the database (Gallup, Q^{12®} Database Calculator, 2005). Of all the education clients Gallup has helped with employee engagement, 75 percent are at or below the number listed in these columns. Gallup suggests that "best practice" clients fall somewhere above the 75th percentile. When looking at the results for the teachers involved with the local study compared to the Educational Services sector of the database, it is obvious that the local district has many opportunities to improve on engaging teachers. Overall, only one item was flagged green, ten were flagged yellow and two were flagged red.

The Good – The Green Flag

The only item that over 80% of teachers could rate a four or a five out of the thirteen items was “I know what is expected of me at work.” It seems teachers know what they are supposed to do each day because 90.6% of them could rate this item a four or a five. I don’t think teachers ever wonder what they are supposed to be doing in terms of teaching young people; I just think they get lost in the doing.

Table 12

Summary of Teacher Post Survey Percent Agreement and Mean for Each Item and Comparison to the Gallup Database

| Teacher Post Survey Item (n=85) | %5 | 75 th Percentile Gallup's Database Education %5s | %4 | %3 | %2 | %1 | Mean | 75 th Percentile Gallup's Database Education Mean |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|------|------|------|------|------|---|
| Q00 Overall Satisfaction | 27.0 | 38 | 47.3 | 23.0 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 3.97 | 4.14 |
| Q01 Know what's expected | 48.2 | 67 | 42.4 | 5.9 | 3.5 | n/a | 4.35 | 4.58 |
| Q02 Materials and equipment | 35.3 | 50 | 42.4 | 16.5 | 5.9 | n/a | 4.07 | 4.25 |
| Q03 Do what I do best | 35.3 | 45 | 43.5 | 15.3 | 5.9 | n/a | 4.08 | 4.2 |
| Q04 Recognition | 20.2 | 40 | 16.7 | 26.2 | 11.9 | 25.0 | 2.95 | 3.73 |
| Q05 Cares about me | 38.8 | 60 | 30.6 | 17.6 | 12.9 | n/a | 3.95 | 4.4 |
| Q06 Encourages my development | 30.6 | 44 | 30.6 | 27.1 | 10.6 | 1.2 | 3.79 | 4.06 |
| Q07 Opinions count | 21.2 | 37 | 31.8 | 27.1 | 14.1 | 5.9 | 3.48 | 3.95 |
| Q08 Mission or purpose | 27.1 | 55 | 32.9 | 28.2 | 9.4 | 2.4 | 3.72 | 4.33 |
| Q09 Committed to quality work | 40.0 | 52 | 32.9 | 24.7 | 2.4 | n/a | 4.11 | 4.36 |
| Q10 Best friend | 39.3 | 39 | 31.0 | 13.1 | 11.9 | 4.8 | 3.88 | 3.73 |
| Q11 Talked about progress | 36.5 | 45 | 38.8 | 11.8 | 11.8 | 1.2 | 3.98 | 4.0 |
| Q12 Opportunities to learn and grow | 41.2 | 55 | 37.6 | 20.0 | 1.2 | n/a | 4.19 | 4.33 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| More than 80% 4s & 5s | 60-80% 4s & 5s | Less than 60% 4s & 5s |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

The Average – The Yellow Flags

Of the 10 items that fall into the average category, three fall below 70%. My mind just keeps going back to our traditional school grading system, A, B, C, D, and F. These teachers gave C's to seven of thirteen items, D's or F's to five of the thirteen, and an A to only one. Who would like to go to work every day in an average to failing environment? Over 25% of the teachers surveyed did not like their school as a place to work. About 22 teachers out of the 85 teachers that responded to the post survey, provided this response. These 22 teachers touch anywhere from 100-200 students per year. That is 2200 – 4400 students *per year* that have teachers that are not satisfied with where they work. Only 69.4% of teachers felt someone cared about them as a person, which means that 30% of teachers could not think of anyone at work that cared about them as persons first. This response reveals the need for stronger relationships among the adults in the school and provides data that support my observation that teachers often come to work, shut the door, and do not interact with the other professionals in the school unless it is necessary, just like the high school in Texas I taught at many years ago. Only 61.2% of teachers could give a rating of four or five to the item “there is someone at work who encourages my development.” Both of these items send strong signals to administrators: Start paying attention to the people who work with students all day!

The most disappointing observation to me was that only 60% of the teachers surveyed could give a rating of four or five to “the mission or purpose of my school makes me feel my job is important.” That response means that 40% of teachers could not connect to the mission or purpose of their school; they could not see how their work contributed to the big picture. These data support the need for stronger relationships

among all the adults in the building. Why do teachers and administrators come to work each day? Surely it is not for the paperwork! Teachers in this survey seemed to know what was expected of them at work, but were not connecting to the reasons *why* those expectations matter.

The Bad – The Red Flags

Only two items fell into the red flag category, but they are both crucial to teacher engagement. I remember my husband received a book entitled *If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students* by Neila Conners, as part of a principal development course he was taking a few years ago. The premise in the title caught my attention. How can teachers give recognition and praise to students if they don't ever receive it themselves? Why would teachers care about students' opinions if nobody cares about theirs? Only 36.9% of teachers could give a four or five to “In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.” Among the teachers that responded to this item, 25% “strongly disagreed” by rating the item a one. If a teacher gives that item the lowest rating, I am going to assume that not only has he or she not received recognition in the last seven days, but maybe not even in the last seven years. I point this rating out because in almost half the items, not a single teacher gave a one rating. When they do, I think we should pay attention.

Only 53% of teachers thought their opinions counted by giving a four or five rating on that item. Almost half of the teachers surveyed “softly” or strongly said they did not agree with this item. If teachers feel that their opinions do not count, they will, once again, be more inclined to show up, close the door, and mind their own business.

This response has very serious effects on the environment. How do problems get solved?

How does innovation in teaching thrive?

Public Poll Data

In September 2005, Gallup conducted a telephone survey of 600 teenagers that asked them to rate the 12 engagement items Q01-Q12 and several other items appropriate to my project. I include it in this section because the data is still in raw form, so I had to analyze it to find any pertinent observations. I also wanted to see how this public poll compared to the local study. The only data that were reported from the Youth Survey on Student Engagement was an overall engagement index, a proprietary formula, of the percent engaged, percent not engaged, and percent actively disengaged. Of the 600 students polled, 47% were engaged, 44% were not engaged, and 9% were actively disengaged (Killham, personal communication, September 29, 2005). These numbers for the local study were 29%, 50%, and 21% respectively. The Researcher that sent me the poll data file explained to me that when Gallup does a phone poll, there is always a “social desirability” effect to take into consideration. Meaning, people do not want to report that aspects of their lives might be lacking. She also said there is something about polling people on the phone at home versus in the direct environment which we are asking them to rate. Her point was that at school, students tend to be more honest, thus, the phone poll data might be slightly inflated. This is also a random sample of students across the country, so it does not reveal anything about a particular school or school district. Table 13 summarizes the findings of the Gallup Poll on the twelve engagement items (Killham, personal communication, September 29, 2005).

Table 13

Summary of 12 Items from Gallup Poll: Youth Survey on Student Engagement

| 2005 Student Poll Data (n=600) | %5 | %4 | %3 | %2 | %1 |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Q01 Know what's expected | 58.0 | 30.3 | 8.2 | 2.1 | 1.5 |
| Q02 Materials and equipment | 62.5 | 26.7 | 7.3 | 1.8 | 1.6 |
| Q03 Do what I do best | 37.6 | 34.5 | 20.0 | 5.0 | 2.9 |
| Q04 Recognition | 28.1 | 25.9 | 14.5 | 10.4 | 21.1 |
| Q05 Cares about me | 65.8 | 20.3 | 9.3 | 1.9 | 2.6 |
| Q06 Encourages my development | 51.8 | 31.0 | 12.6 | 3.2 | 1.5 |
| Q07 Opinions count | 21.7 | 29.6 | 28.3 | 11.8 | 8.6 |
| Q08 School work is important | 40.8 | 32.6 | 18.1 | 6.1 | 2.4 |
| Q09 Committed to quality work | 11.7 | 25.0 | 41.3 | 15.9 | 6.2 |
| Q10 Best friend | 79.1 | 8.7 | 5.2 | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| Q11 Talked about progress | 42.6 | 28.7 | 15.0 | 7.6 | 6.1 |
| Q12 Opportunities to learn and grow | 51.4 | 29.7 | 13.8 | 3.0 | 2.1 |

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| More than 80% 4s & 5s | 60-80% 4s & 5s | Less than 60% 4s & 5s |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|

The same green, yellow, and red flagging system was applied, and three of the items that ended up in the red category for the Gallup Poll are the same as those from the local study. The recognition, opinions count, and fellow classmates committed to quality work items, all had less than 60% of students that rating the item a four or five, 54%, 51.3%, and 36.7% respectively. The same numbers for the local survey were 40.1%, 40%, and 35.7% respectively. The similarity between student responses on these three items may provide schools a clue as to which areas to focus on first when tackling

engagement issues. Studying schools that manage to get these three concepts right for students would provide further insight into what actions could be taken to improve. If we can get the recognition piece right, help students feel their opinions count, and provide more authentic work, we would be on the road to higher engagement and hence, better student outcomes.

There were several other interesting items that Gallup asked the teenagers to rate; some of the relevant items are shown in Table 14. The table shows the responses on four items with respect to the three different engagement index categories, engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged. Student responses were put into the varying scale categories for each item. For more results from the Gallup Youth Survey on Student Engagement, see Appendix F.

On the first item in Table 14, students were asked to give their school a grade of A, B, C, D, or Fail. Of the 9% or roughly 60 students who were found to be actively disengaged, only 8% gave their school a grade of A, compared to 17% of the not engaged group and 43% of the engaged group. Roughly 85% of engaged students rated “my school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am” a four or a five. Among not engaged students 45% gave a four or five, and only 10% of the actively disengaged gave a four or five to the same item. Only 2% of students in the actively disengaged category could strongly agree with the item about school helping to discover one’s full potential. On the item about losing track of time, which is strongly related to the Theory of Flow that was mentioned in Chapter Two (i.e., getting lost in activities because they are such a match for the skills and talents of an individual), only 26%, 17%, and 2% could rate that

item with “very often” from the engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged categories respectively (Killham, personal communication, September 29, 2005).

Table 14

Four Items from the Gallup Poll: Youth Survey on Student Engagement Broken Down by Engagement Categories

| Item 1 | What grade would you give your school this past school year? | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|-----------|--------|-------|------------------------|
| Of those that were... | A | B | C | D | Fail |
| Engaged | 43% | 49% | 7% | 1% | <1/2% |
| Not Engaged | 17% | 54% | 23% | 4% | 2% |
| Actively Disengaged | 8% | 25% | 42% | 19% | 6% |
| Item 8A | My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | | | | |
| Of those that were... | 5 Strongly Agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 Strongly Disagree |
| Engaged | 47% | 38% | 10% | 5% | <1/2% |
| Not Engaged | 9% | 36% | 35% | 17% | 3% |
| Actively Disengaged | 4% | 6% | 22% | 29% | 39% |
| Item 8C | At school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. | | | | |
| Of those that were... | 5 Strongly Agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 Strongly Disagree |
| Engaged | 57% | 38% | 4% | <1/2% | 1% |
| Not Engaged | 19% | 41% | 31% | 7% | 2% |
| Actively Disengaged | 2% | 10% | 37% | 27% | 25% |
| Item 9 | When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | | | | |
| Of those that were... | Very Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | |
| Engaged | 26% | 61% | 11% | 2% | |
| Not Engaged | 17% | 54% | 25% | 5% | |
| Actively Disengaged | 2% | 53% | 37% | 8% | |

All of these items reveal how students feel about their learning environment. Are they appreciated as a unique individual? Have they had opportunities to discover their full potential? How often are they in a flow-like state while learning? Strengths-based development can make a difference in how students respond to these questions. The strengths program in this study focused on the uniqueness of an individual and helped the person understand how to apply strengths to different aspects of life in a way that better aligns with individual talents. And when individuals learn to apply themselves in these ways, they have a better chance of experiencing flow and a better chance at reaching their full potential.

Response to the Data

The entire time that the study was occurring, I was becoming less and less confident that I would find anything meaningful in the data. With all the compromises that I had to make, it was not a surprise in those first few hours with the Researcher that we could not find a single interesting discovery. I kept hoping and kept searching, and when I found that strengths really did make a difference in the lives of some students, I was excited. After thinking about why the gains occurred in the two alternative settings, it made so much sense. In these two environments, teachers spent a considerable amount of time with students on their strengths. It was not just time that made the difference either, because students in the control group in the learning center also spent a considerable amount of time with the untrained teachers and the survey responses showed very different results between the groups. In both of these alternative settings, teachers in general have a more difficult task before them each day. They have to struggle with how to help these particular students stay in school, learn, and hopefully graduate. Although

that may not seem different than the task before any teacher, the students in these schools have the cards stacked against them in terms of at-risk factors. Because the task in front of these teachers is so challenging, they were probably more open to taking the idea of strengths and figuring out how to make it work.

After reflecting on the study and having many conversations with the district and participants, it seemed there were several reasons that success was observed in the alternative settings; a few of those reasons are listed here:

- (1) In both the learning center and the school within a school, teachers were with students for large amounts of time every day, some all day.
- (2) These teachers were the students' academic teachers, not their advisors.
- (3) These teachers tried to integrate the strengths language and discussions into whatever they were doing; in other words, it was not seen as an add-on initiative.
- (4) These students, maybe more than most, needed to hear what was right about them.

It also became apparent that there were several reasons that the intervention did not show any significant impact on the two larger groupings, students overall and the three traditional high schools grouped together, a few of those reasons are listed here:

- (1) Advisors only had a few minutes per week with students.
- (2) The strengths program was seen as an add-on to all the other tasks the advisors had to fit into those minutes.
- (3) The results were blurred by the PLP initiative that also involved students talking about their strengths in general with their advisors.

- (4) There was no substantial support for the effort from building level administrators; there was only one person in the entire district who was the champion for this study, the Associate Superintendent that I worked closely with.
- (5) There was no implementation plan or expectation for those participating in the strengths intervention, so like anything else, it dropped down on the priority list as the year unfolded.

Although the teachers in the learning center and in the school within a school had to deal with some of these issues as well, they spent at least an hour, if not most of the day, with students, and had more control over how to integrate strengths and how to make it part of the students' day. These teachers shared some feedback with me after the post surveys were collected. Some of their comments reveal the power of the intervention:

- “Everyone likes to learn about themselves. Teenagers especially need to see they have strengths, not just weaknesses. The at-risk population really needs reinforcement about the strengths they have.”
- “The students learned that they all have strengths and something positive to offer the world.”
- “We made it part of everyday conversation. They began to analyze all of the strengths that we discovered among their classmates and how well some of them fit together. They also began to understand each other’s actions and why they act the way they do (both positive and not so positive behaviors) once they learned what each other’s strengths were.”
- “So many of our kids are trained to identify what is wrong with them. They are in our program because of poor choices they have made in the past whether it is academically or behaviorally so they feel that because of their weaknesses they are [here]. We tried to convey the message to them that many weaknesses can be morphed into strengths with the right amount of effort and understanding. We really wanted the kids to start thinking positively about themselves and toot their own horns. After discovering their strengths, they began to view themselves with a much more positive outlook.”

These teachers had more time and more control over the environment. They could be creative and try different approaches because they had more time with the students. This is the last stop for most of these students and thus, these teachers have a much different job than most educators. They have to be committed to trying different approaches in the hopes of saving each student. The teachers that were in the intervention group within these two settings, applied strengths in a way that reached students. When asked, both sets of teachers described in detail how they used the resources provided in the seminar as well as created their own activities to design an integrated approach. The teachers described how strengths became a part of students' vocabulary and thought process every day.

Even with the disappointment regarding the overall data, I was actually energized by what I found in the two alternative settings. Also, the data provided insight into how students and teachers feel about the school environment, unrelated to the intervention. All of this data together provided strong support for why schools and school districts should be paying attention to what both teachers and students have to say about where they work and learn.

A recent National Center for Education Statistics (2006) report studied the adult lives of students classified as at-risk in school. The study classified students into three categories: successful completers, marginal completers, and non-completers and tracked their engagement over time using four separate measures. The four measures were: attendance, classroom behavior, extracurricular participation, and the students' perception of the usefulness of school subjects (NCES, 2006, pgs. iv-viii). The following summarizes the tie between engagement and outcomes for the at-risk population studied:

Engagement was related to entering a postsecondary program, number of credits earned, and completing a program of study, above and beyond the effects of high school attainment. In all, engagement is related to high school attainments – grades, test scores, and graduation; and engagement is related to long-term educational outcomes in ways not explained by high school accomplishments alone (p. 63).

This study supports the need for efforts to engage students that struggle to stay in school. Their engagement is linked not only to immediate high school measures, but to long-term life outcomes. If schools can reach out to engage students in learning centers and other programs that attempt to help this population, they would be closer to fulfilling the broader mission of developing every child for life. In the study involved with this dissertation, strengths-based methods made a tremendous difference in the perceptions of students' in both the learning center and the school within a school on items about safety, feeling cared about, feeling like someone talked to them about their progress, feeling more confident about knowing they would graduate, and feeling that someone encouraged their development. These changes in perception meant higher levels of engagement and considering the NCES (2006) report, the teachers involved can only hope the efforts will lead to persistence and better future life outcomes. Klem, et al (2004) state that, "Regardless of the definition, research links higher levels of engagement in school with improved performance. Researchers have found student engagement a robust predictor of student achievement and behavior in school, regardless of socioeconomic status. Students engaged in school are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, and have lower drop-out rates" (p. 262). It is evident that engagement is important to student success, but engagement in a classroom can only improve with the support of the teacher that leads that classroom.

What about teacher engagement? More and more literature suggests that educational change will only occur if those that work with students most, teachers, have a shift in philosophy. Campbell & Campbell (1999) suggest that “restructuring is not necessarily achieved through external programs, resources, facilities, or district or state mandates. Indeed, meaningful restructuring first takes place within the minds of teachers and their beliefs about the nature and possibilities of their students. From there, all else follows” (p. 97). The literature is also full of research that supports the fact that the teacher, more than anything else, is the strongest link to student outcomes. Bowen and Bowen (1998) reported that “teacher rapport was found to have a greater impact than home status and home academic culture risk on educational investment and the only statistically significant effect on grades” (abstract). Darling-Hammond (1999), in reviewing data from Sanders’ work with the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System also discusses findings that differences in teacher effectiveness are strongly linked to differences in student outcomes, more so than class size or ethnic/racial mix of the classroom. It is glaringly evident that the teacher matters to student outcomes, but how can school systems hold teachers accountable without first taking into consideration their engagement.

Teacher engagement, just like student engagement is driven by relationships and a perception of the school environment. School leaders must acknowledge that teachers and students do not show up with a preset level of engagement. It is up to leaders to create an environment in which the relationships proven to be drivers of engagement can be fostered. Just as teachers are the leaders responsible for fostering student engagement, principals and other administrators are the leaders responsible for cultivating teacher

engagement. Teacher engagement is driven by the same factors as student engagement; the only difference is that the relationships necessary to create high engagement are adult to adult.

Teacher development should focus first on the teacher as a person, his or her mind and talents. Duffy (1998) in the article “Teaching and The Balancing of Round Stones,” describes great teachers as having a sense of self that gives them confidence and independence that allows them to create experiences that meet the goals for each student. He also suggests that development should be focused on helping teachers know themselves better, not necessarily helping them understand the next best educational improvement program. Teachers also need the opportunity to have strong professional partnerships, which means they should know the adults with which they work. The adult partnerships are critical to fostering teacher level engagement. Teachers need to feel cared about, need recognition, need to know that someone is thinking about their progress and development, and need to feel like their opinions count. These adult partnerships are a vital part of finding solutions to the everyday problems schools face. Strengths-based development can help teachers in the same way it helps students. We know that more engaged teachers have students with higher achievement data, but do we know if strengths-based development can increase a teacher’s engagement? Further study, specifically on teacher’s participating in strengths-based development, needs to be conducted. The equation for both students and teachers is: X → Engagement → Achievement, where X represents all the drivers of engagement. We know through the literature that the right work for students and sincere relationships matter and we know through Gallup’s research that the twelve items on the Q^{12®} are a start at measuring the

important aspects of engagement, but what actions can be taken to impact these drivers?

Having conversations where students, teachers and administrators brainstorm to answer that very question is a start. Just having those discussions is likely to have a positive impact on perceptions regarding the environment. Strengths-based development is another effort that schools can take to impact engagement directly. As a start, school districts could allow teachers and students to focus on talent as a means for development and growth, and improving engagement. And, because the link between engagement and important outcomes has been well established, districts can assume the positive results will follow.

If only 20% of students and 27% of teachers could say that they were “extremely satisfied” with their school as a place to either go to school or work, that should tell us something about how much both groups enjoy coming to school each day. If only 18% of students and 20% of teachers can “strongly agree” that they have received recognition or praise in the last seven days, that should tell us something about the weakness-fixing model that we rely on so heavily in schools. If only 14% of students and 21% of teachers can “strongly agree” that they feel their opinions count, that should tell us something about how both feel they are treated in school. If only 10% of students and 40% of teachers can “strongly agree” to the item about fellow students or employees being committed to quality work, that should tell us something about the amount of meaningful work that is going on in schools. If only about 30% of students and teachers can “strongly agree” with the statement that someone at school or work is encouraging their development, that should tell us something about how educational leaders have failed to provide that development. If only 29% of students and 27% of teachers understand that

the work they do is important (Q08), this response should tell us something about why so many students and teachers do not reach their full potential. How could they? They are simply going through the motions. If only 27% of students and 35% of teachers can “strongly agree” to the item about getting to do what you do best every day, that should tell us something about how often a student or teacher feels a mismatch between the tasks of their learning and their talents. If only 34% of students and 41% of teachers can “strongly agree” to the statement about the opportunity to learn and grow in the last year, that should tell us something about the current approach to educating the youth of our society.

Even with all the constraints that surround school systems, school leaders should be able to impact the drivers of engagement. None of the policies or bureaucracy should get in the way of a leader’s ability to impact the school environment. Leaders may not be able to change the structure, design or expected outcomes of the current model, but they sure can have a direct impact on what it *feels* like to come to school each day for teachers and students. Leaders must start listening a lot more to teachers and students. We need a level of transparency between administrators, teachers, and students that we currently do not have. High school students and even middle school students can be a part of the conversations about their own engagement. Students know what they want from teachers and could definitely take on some of the responsibility for shaping the learning environment. On one of the items on the 2005 Gallup Youth Survey, 68% of the actively disengaged students and 80% of the not engaged students responded that they “mostly enjoy learning” when they were given the choice between “mostly enjoy” and “mostly do not enjoy.” On most of the fifteen items analyzed in this manner, the actively disengaged

and not engaged groups' responses were drastically different from the responses of the engaged group, but on this item the engaged group was at 95%, which is more than 68% and 80% but not quite as dramatic a difference as seen in the other items. This response suggests that most students like to learn and that they are waiting, like my groups in Texas did, for the teacher to connect to *their* lives and *their* interests. They want so badly to figure out who they are and be able to apply the best of who they are to what they do each day.

In Gallup's work with business clients, there is substantial evidence that supports the positive impact on engagement within an organization when managers focus on strengths versus weaknesses. I thought it would be interesting to compare side by side data from a Gallup Poll and student data from this study in Figure 12 (Gallup, Strengths Slides PowerPoint, 2006).

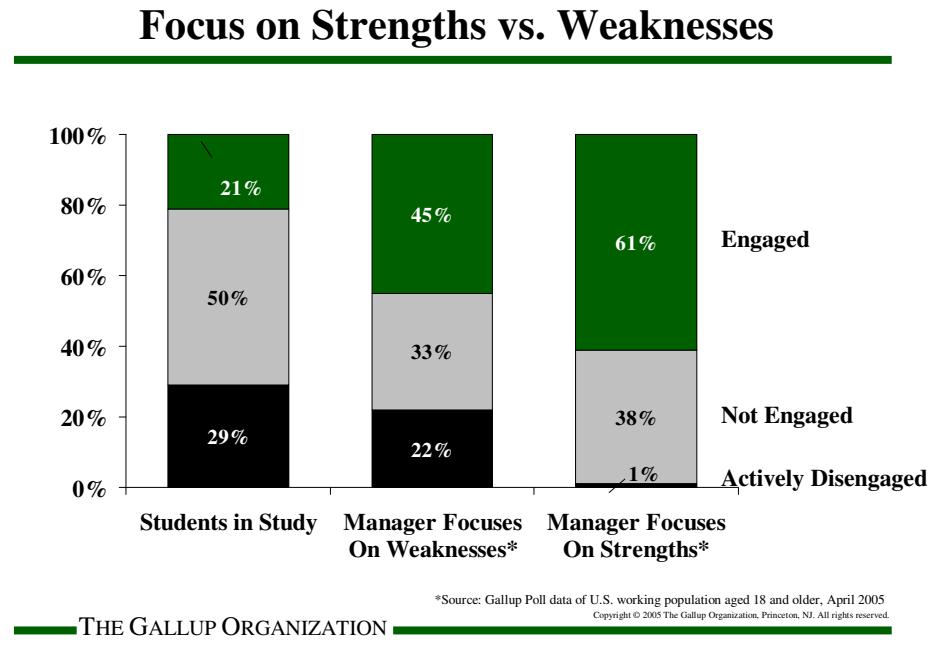


Figure 12. Student engagement levels of this study compared to Gallup Poll data.

It is interesting to note that the student data are even worse than the data for managers who focus on weaknesses. If teachers focus on students' strengths and administrators focus on teachers' strengths, remarkable gains in engagement could result, in the same way Gallup has observed with business clients.

In summary, leaders need to ask students and teachers the questions that matter most, like the ones in this study; they need to listen to what the responses say about how teachers and students feel; they need to have conversations with students and teachers about how to improve the environment; they need to act together with students and teachers to create change; and they need lead this effort on a continuing basis.

The Gallup Deliverables

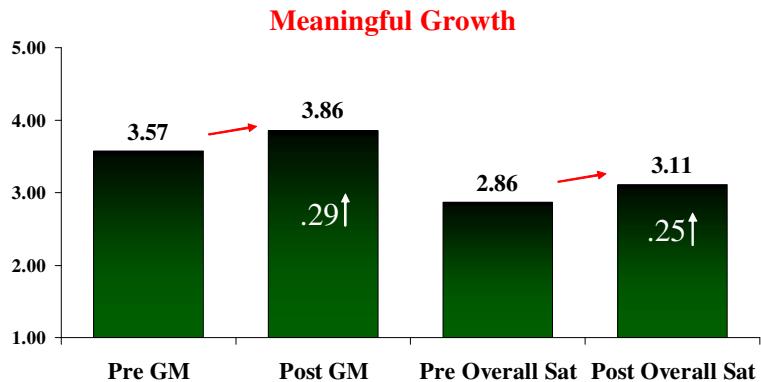
After assembling and analyzing the data and highlighting the interesting points, my last task was to produce the deliverables that the Education Division requested. They wanted a few slides that could be added to the PowerPoint sales presentations and a short description of the study and findings that would be slick and to the point so that it could be used with clients. Another deliverable that we discussed was the possibility of an article for *The Educator* or *The Gallup Management Journal*, two publications Gallup produced and shared with clients. We all agreed that an article would be great, but that it would take a longer period of time, because we needed more student outcome data from the school district and that it should be worked on with the full support of the "real" research team within Gallup.

The Slides

The purpose of the slides was for cutting and pasting them into sales presentations or seminars as further support for strengths-development and for getting school clients

interested in measuring and impacting student and teacher engagement. I pulled together the most compelling data, already described in this chapter to create slides that highlighted the positive effects that strengths-based development had on students. Also included were slides that highlighted insights about student and teacher engagement without respect to the strengths intervention. The slides and the notes that go with them are included in the next eleven pages.

**Focus on Strengths Increases
GrandMean and Overall Satisfaction of School Within School**



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1

NOTES:

School within a school

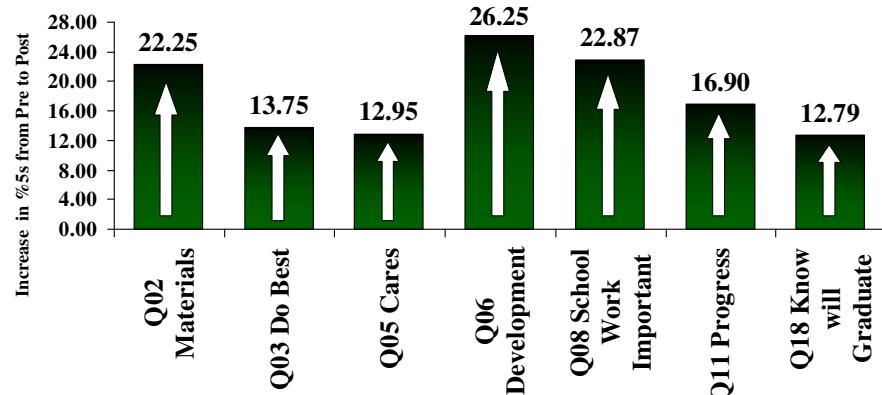
44 students

Teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

Pre survey to post survey GrandMean increase of .29 – anything over .2 is meaningful growth for the GrandMean according to Gallup researchers. The overall satisfaction item grew by .25 – meaningful growth on an individual item is .10 or more

STUDENTS WERE MORE SATISFIED AND OVERALL MORE ENGAGED (GRANDMEAN) IN THIS SCHOOL SETTING AFTER HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS.

Double Digit Percent Gains in %5s after Strengths Intervention in School Within School



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2

NOTES:

School within a school

44 students

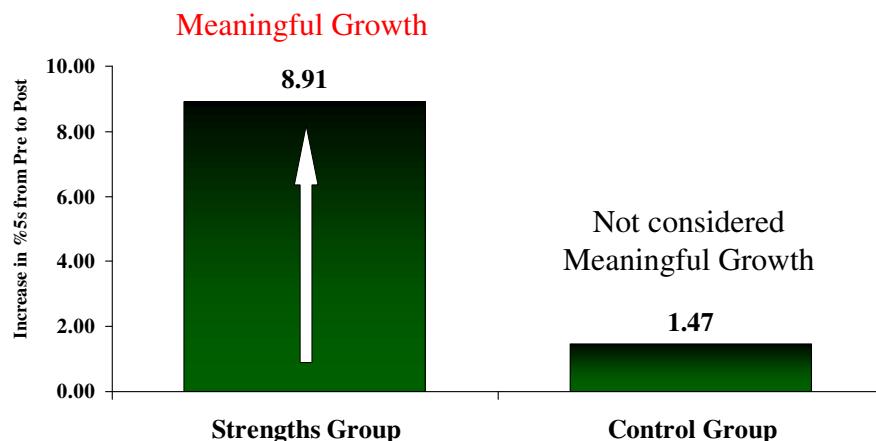
Teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

Pre survey to post survey double digit gains in the percent of students that could strongly agree with the item

AFTER HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON STRENGTHS, THE STUDENT RESPONSES TO THESE SEVEN VERY IMPORTANT ITEMS HAD DOUBLE DIGIT INCREASES IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ABLE TO STRONGLY AGREE WITH THE ITEM.

THE SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN ALL OF THESE ITEMS CONTRIBUTED TO THE OVERALL INCREASE IN ENGAGEMENT. SOMEONE CARES ABOUT ME, TALKS TO ME ABOUT MY PROGRESS, ENCOURAGES MY DEVELOPMENT, HELPS ME FEEL MY SCHOOL WORK IS IMPORTANT - THESE ARE ALL CRITICAL TO HOW A STUDENT PERCEIVES THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND HENCE CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR OVERALL FEELING OF ENGAGEMENT.

I feel safe in this school



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3

NOTES:

Middle school

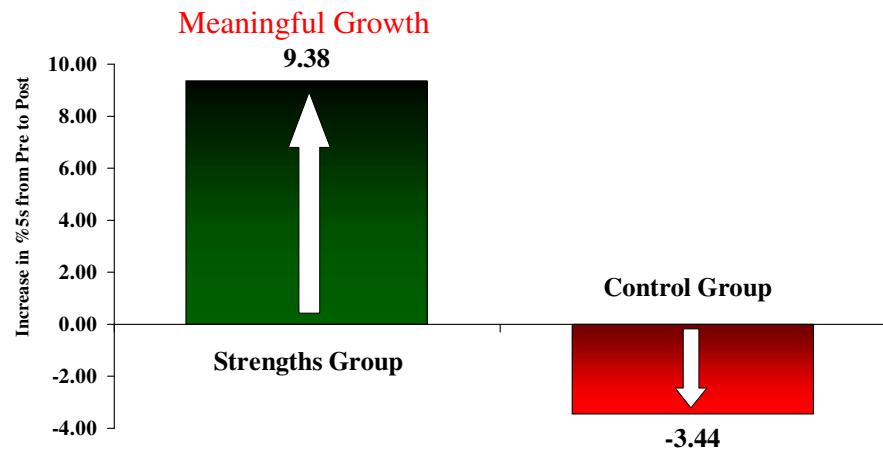
Strengths group – 110 students ---teachers trained in Spotlight

Control group – 111 students---teachers not trained – no strengths work

5 percentage point gain in %5s is considered meaningful growth according to Gallup researchers (based on standard deviations)

AFTER HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON STRENGTHS,
STUDENTS FELT SAFER IN SCHOOL OVER TIME. HAVING THE
OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERSTAND THE STRENGTHS OF OTHERS
MOST LIKELY CONTRIBUTED TO A STRONGER FEELING OF
SAFETY.

Someone has talked to me about my progress



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4

NOTES:

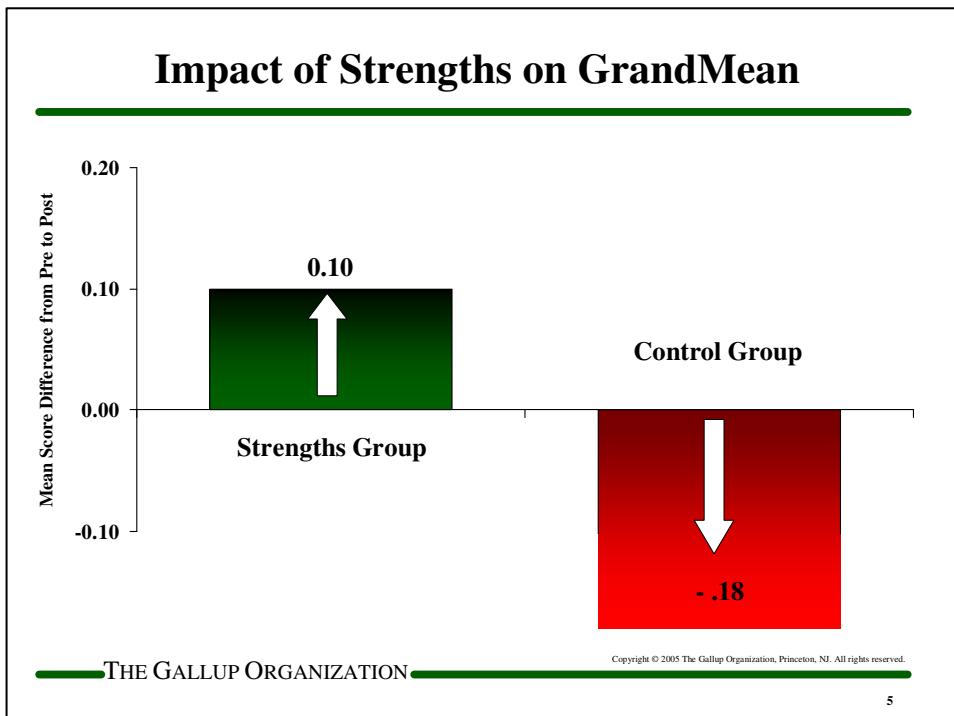
Middle school

Strengths group – 110 students ---teachers trained in Spotlight

Control group – 111 students---teachers not trained – no strengths work

5 percentage point gain in %5s is considered meaningful growth according to Gallup researchers (based on standard deviations)

STUDENTS THAT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS FELT THAT SOMEONE TALKED TO THEM ABOUT THEIR PROGRESS – MORE STUDENTS RATED THIS ITEM A 5 AFTER HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR TEACHERS ABOUT STRENGTHS. STRENGTHS IS INDIVIDUAL, POSITIVE FEEDBACK THAT STUDENTS DON'T IGNORE OR FORGET!



NOTES:

Learning Center (Discipline center)

Strengths Intervention group 53 students ---Teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

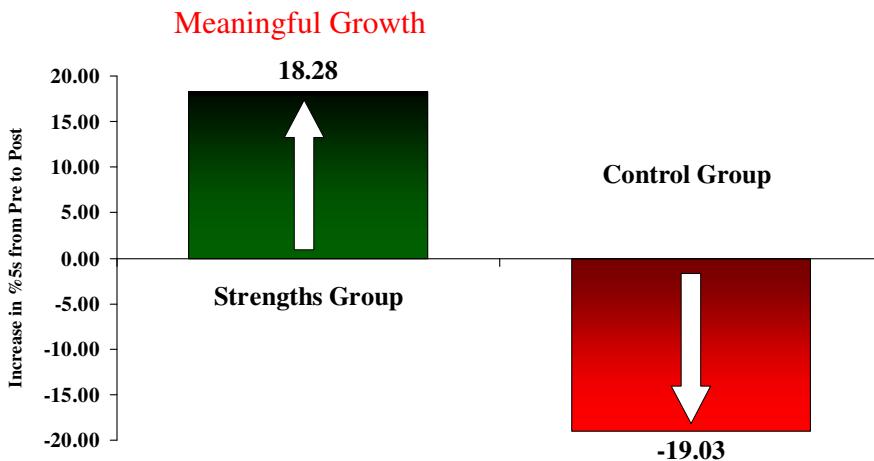
Control Group 37 students ---teachers not trained in Spotlight – no strengths work

.2 is meaningful growth for a GM

Not meaningful growth – but worth showing that strengths group increase while the control group declined.

IN THIS ALTERNATIVE SETTING, STUDENTS THAT DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS HAD A DRAMATIC DECLINE IN THEIR OVERALL ENGAGEMENT, WHILE THE STRENGTHS GROUP STAYED RELATIVELY THE SAME FROM PRE TO POST SURVEY.

Impact of Strengths on Overall Satisfaction



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6

NOTES:

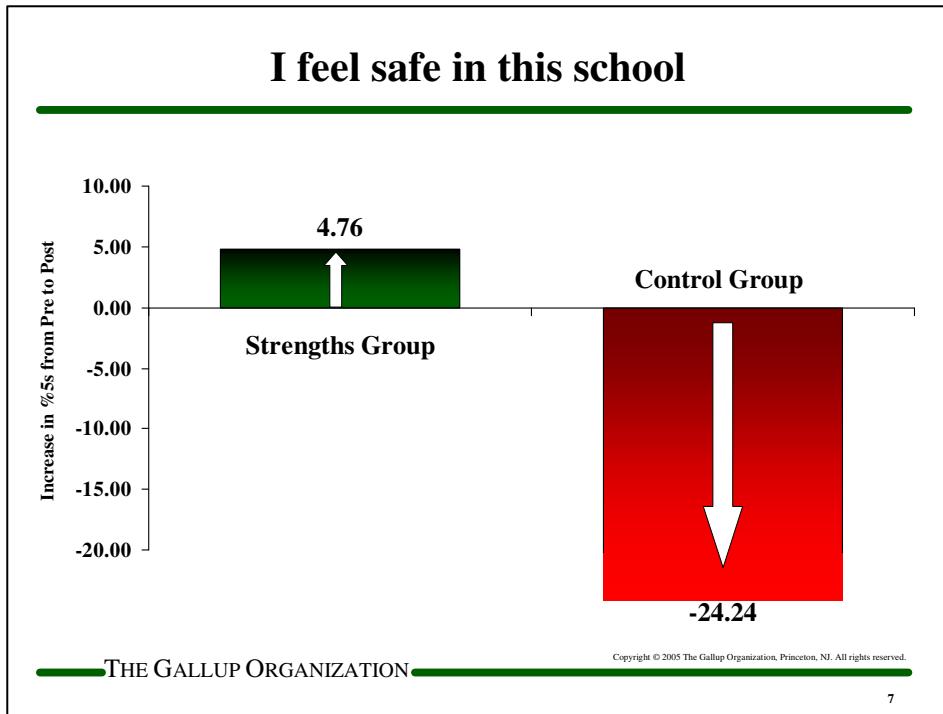
Learning Center (Discipline center)

Strengths Intervention group 53 students ---Teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

Control Group 37 students ---teachers not trained in Spotlight – no strengths work

5 percentage point gain in %5 is considered meaningful

THE STUDENTS IN THIS ALTERNATIVE SETTING THAT WERE ABLE TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS WERE MORE SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL OVER TIME, WHEREAS THE CONTROL GROUP WAS MUCH LESS SATISFIED OVER TIME WITH THE SCHOOL.



NOTES:

Learning Center (Discipline center)

Strengths Intervention group 53 students -----Teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

Control Group 37 students ---teachers not trained in Spotlight – no strengths work

5 percentage point gain in %5 is considered meaningful

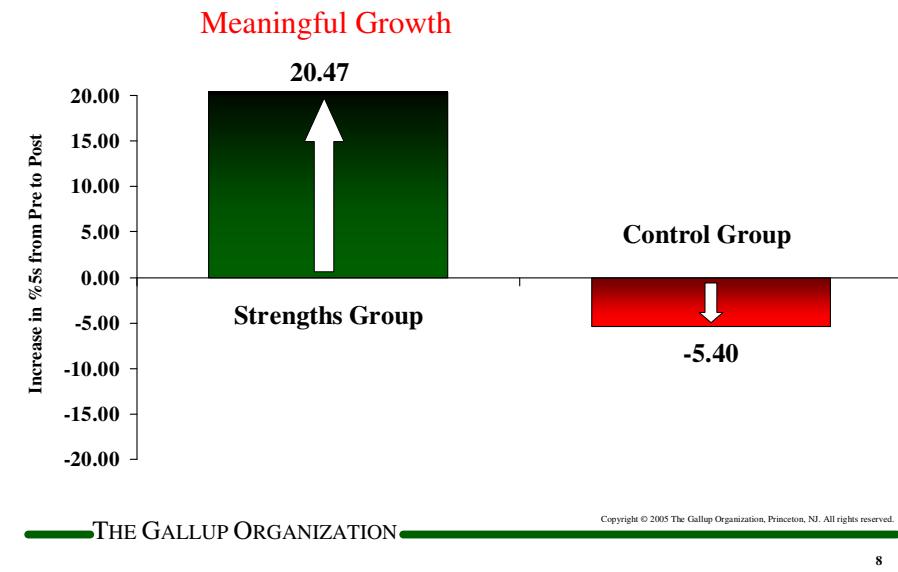
So this is almost meaningful growth in the strengths group (at least it increased or stayed basically the same)

While the control group felt less safe (meaningful drop) from pre to post survey
THE GROUP THAT DID NOT HAVE THE CHANCE TO FOCUS ON

STRENGTHS, FELT LESS SAFE OVER TIME THAN THE GROUP THAT
DID HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON STRENGTHS.

HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON YOUR OWN STRENGTHS
AND THE STRENGTHS OF OTHERS MAY CREATE A STRONGER
PERCEPTION OF SAFETY WITHIN SCHOOLS.

I am always treated with respect at this school



NOTES:

Learning Center (Discipline center)

Strengths Intervention group 53 students ---teachers trained in Strengths Spotlight

Control Group 37 students ---teachers not trained in Spotlight – no strengths work

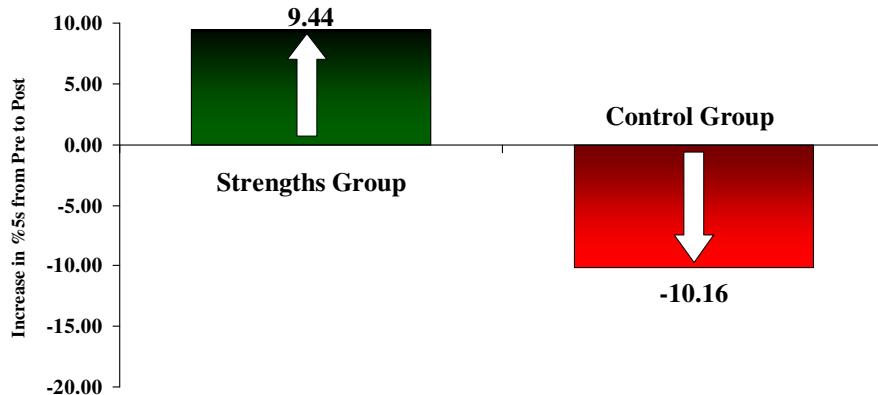
5 percentage point gain in %5 is considered meaningful

So here we see VERY meaningful growth in the strengths group in contrast to a meaningful decline in the control group

THE STUDENTS WHO WERE ABLE TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS FELT MUCH MORE RESPECTED OVER TIME THAN THE STUDENTS IN THE CONTROL GROUP THAT FELT DRAMATICALLY LESS RESPECTED FROM PRE TO POST SURVEY.

AGAIN, HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON STRENGTHS AS A CLASS – TEACHERS AND STUDENTS DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ONE ANOTHER WHICH MAY FOSTER MUTUAL RESPECT.

Q00 Overall Satisfaction THS #1



NOTES:

THS # = Traditional High School #1

Strengths group increase %5s on Overall Sat by 9.44 while the control group decreased by 10.16 from pre to post.

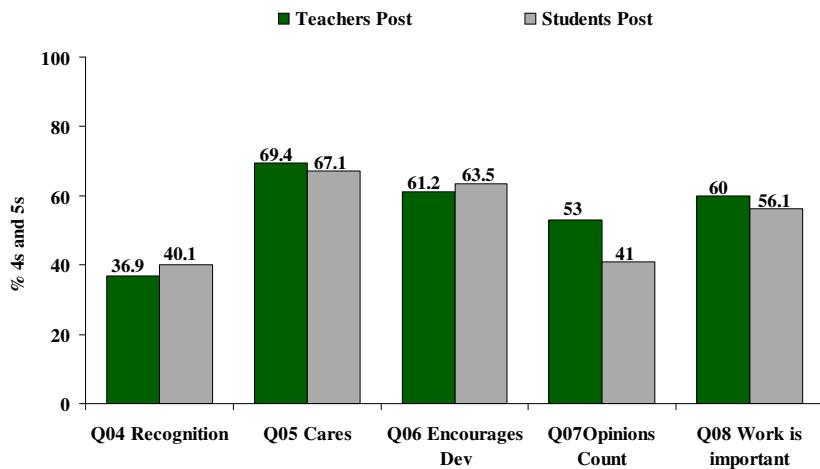
Invited to respond:

165 in strengths group

167 in control group

STUDENTS IN THIS TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL WHO HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS FELT MORE SATISFIED WITH THEIR SCHOOL, THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT WORK ON STRENGTHS – THEIR OVERALL SATISFACTION DECLINED DRAMATICALLY FROM PRE TO POST SURVEY.

Teacher / Student Responses Align on 5 Crucial Items



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10

NOTES:

1385 students took the post survey

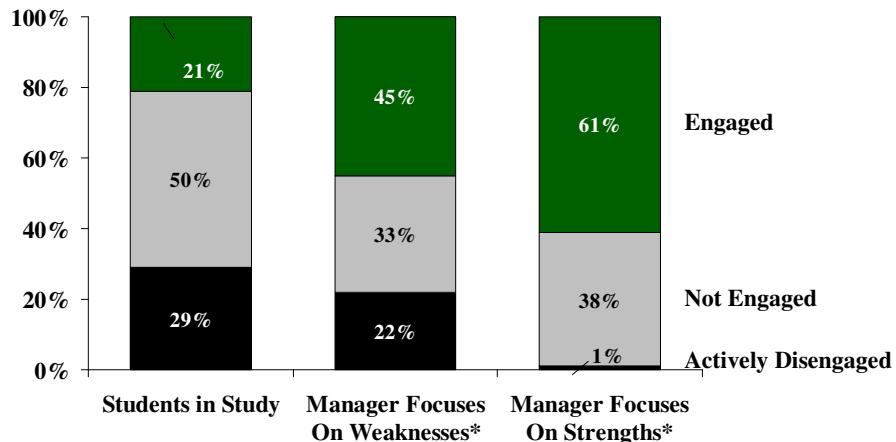
85 teachers took the post survey

This slide compares 5 crucial items on Q12 and the seemingly tight relationship between teacher and student responses.

STUDENT AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT ARE SYMBIOTIC. YOU CANNOT CONSIDER IMPACTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT BEFORE YOU CONSIDER IMPACTING THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE VALUABLE PEOPLE THAT SPEND ALL DAY WITH STUDENTS -- TEACHERS.

THE RESPONSES ON THESE 5 ITEMS SHOW THAT TEACHERS AND STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT VERY MUCH THE SAME --- NOT MUCH RECOGNITION, OPINIONS DON'T COUNT, WORK THAT WE DO ISN'T THAT IMPORTANT (MISSION FOR TEACHERS, RELEVANCY FOR STUDENTS)

Focus on Strengths vs. Weaknesses



*Source: Gallup Poll data of U.S. working population aged 18 and older, April 2005
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11

NOTES:

Student data: 1385 students responded to the post survey for this student engagement study

Those 1385 students were from 6 different schools within one district

It is interesting to compare the students of this study (a traditional weakness-fixing educational model) to Gallup Poll data that compares the engagement index for employees who have a manager that focuses on weaknesses or one that focuses on strengths.

THIS COMPARISON IS MADE TO SHOW THAT THE STUDENT DATA FROM THIS STUDY IS EVEN WORSE THAN WHAT WE FIND IN ADULTS WHO WORK UNDER A MANAGER THAT FOCUSES ON WEAKNESSES.

BUT THE THIRD BAR IS SHOWN TO PROVIDE HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE INVESTIGATION INTO HOW STRENGTHS MIGHT INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITHIN SCHOOLS IF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS BEGIN TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS.

The Marketing Piece(s)

Instead of creating a marketing piece about the study alone, I decided that I would create two marketing documents. I would develop one that highlighted the impact of a strengths-based development intervention with respect to this study and another about a student and teacher engagement program. While all of this was going on, one of the major initiatives in my new role was to oversee the development of a self-administered Q^{12®} process for smaller clients. The first two markets we were hoping to reach with this new tool were education and healthcare. These two markets had not been able to partner with Gallup on employee engagement for the most part because of price. In education, in addition to the reasons I listed in Chapter One, nobody, including Gallup, had made the case for why schools should care about engagement and nobody had made it easy for schools to measure and learn how to impact engagement. So this new product, in development as we speak, is due out later this year and will be targeted at schools and hospitals primarily. I decided that the Education Division might want an additional document about an engagement process for schools in light of both the technology tool in development and the book due out over the summer, entitled *The Engaged School* by the Practice Leader. The two documents follow on the next 18 pages.

Success Story: Strengths-Based Development Works

Student Strengths → Student Engagement

Midwestern School District

Gallup conducted a study of over 1600 students and 90 teachers from three traditional high schools, one traditional middle school and two alternative educational settings within a Midwestern school district in Nebraska with total enrollment of roughly 20,000 students. Nearly half of the teachers received a strengths-based intervention, a Gallup Seminar called Strengths Spotlight™, focused on giving teachers the resources necessary to help students understand, apply and grow in their areas of greatest potential, their strengths. Student and teacher strengths were determined by the Clifton StrengthsFinder™, an online assessment based on over 30 years of research on what makes people successful. Pre and post engagement surveys were administered to both teachers and students and data were collected to analyze the impact of the strengths-based intervention. The following is a synopsis of where the greatest impacts were observed.

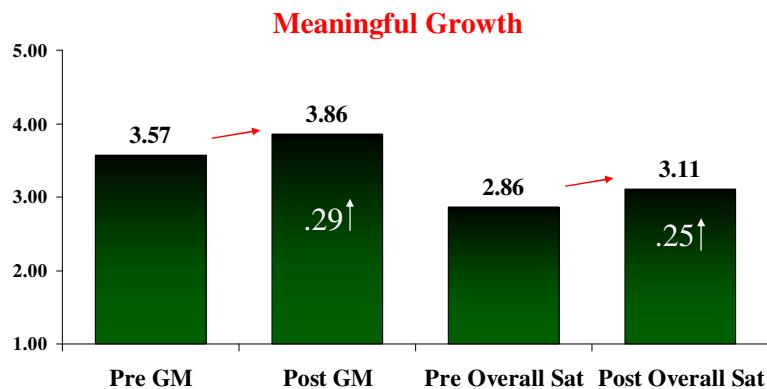
Case Study 1

Case Study 1 is a school within a school at a traditional high school in a Midwestern school district. It is a program for students that have been identified as high risk for dropout in middle school or the early years of high school. It is a 9th and 10th grade program aimed at helping students prepare for their 11th and 12th grades of high school and beyond. There were four teachers and 44 students in this group. Two of the four teachers attended the strengths training and later shared their learning with the other two teachers, so all teachers were essentially trained. All 44 students took the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ and participated in strengths activities and discussions. There was not a control group within this setting, but comparisons could be made from the pre and post engagement surveys.

Two overarching indicators of the impact of the strengths-based development intervention are (1) the GrandMean score, which is an overall engagement index that is calculated as a mean of twelve of the survey item means excluding Q00; and (2) Q00, the overall satisfaction question that asks students on a scale of “extremely satisfied” to “extremely dissatisfied”, how satisfied they are with their current school as a place to go to school. Both of these measures had meaningful¹ growth from pre to post survey. The GrandMean and the overall

satisfaction question grew by .29 and .24 respectively. Students in this group were more satisfied with this environment as a place to go to school and their overall engagement increased after having the opportunity to work on strengths.

Focus on Strengths Increases GrandMean and Overall Satisfaction of School Within School

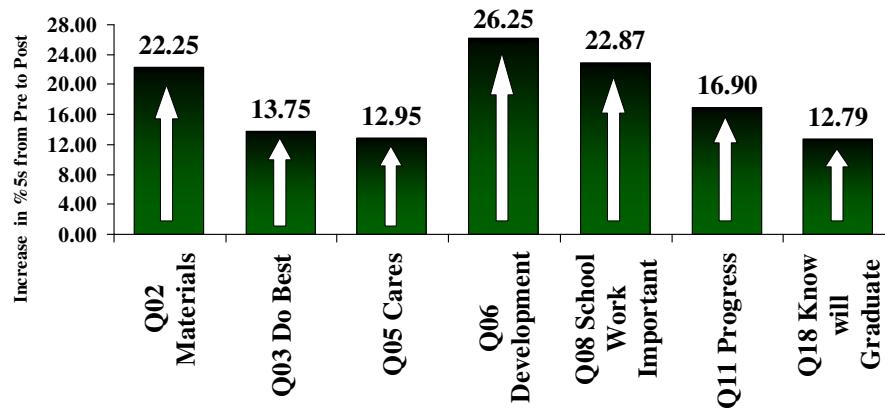


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In addition to these impressive gains, there were seven items that had double digit increases in the percentage of students that could rate the item a five, “strongly agree,” from pre to post survey.

Double Digit Percent Gains in %5s after Strengths Intervention in School Within School



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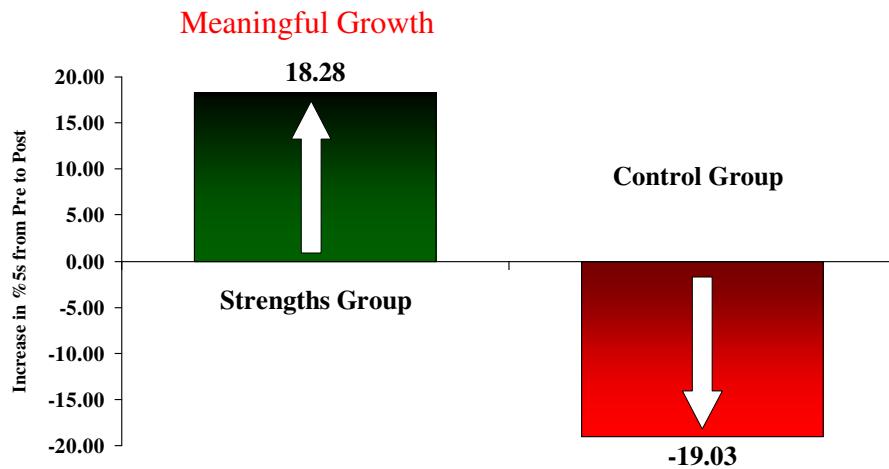
Three of the items displayed in the above graph gained more than 20 percentage points from time one to time two and have very strong implications. Students felt that they had what they needed (Q02), someone encouraged their development (Q06), and had teachers who made them feel that their school work was important (Q08). To have students strongly agree with “there is someone at school who encourages my development” should be a given at school, but as we see here, only 17% of students strongly agreed with that item on the pre survey. By time two, almost 44% of those same students could strongly agree. Strengths-based development helps students and teachers think about personal potential instead of constant focus on weaknesses. The students at this school within a school were more engaged, felt that their school work was more important, and felt someone encouraged their development more often after having the opportunity to work on strengths.

Case Study 2

Case Study 2 was a learning center for behaviorally challenged students, most who had been identified as needing behavior modification and were part of the Midwestern School District’s Special Education program. But some non-special education students also were placed at this learning center based on a recommendation from their home school. Most of these students had not demonstrated the skills necessary for appropriate behavior in their home school, and the learning center was seen as a school that could help these students succeed. Students attended the learning center because either their Individual Education Plan called for it or they could not quite handle the behavior expectations of the more traditional setting.

There were 90 students at the learning center involved in the study. Fifty-three had the opportunity to work on strengths with their teachers and 37 students served as the control group. The intervention students took the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ and were taught by four teachers that attended the Strengths Spotlight™ seminar. The control group’s students and teachers had no exposure to strengths. There were four items where strong positive results for the strengths group contrasted with declines in the control group. On Q00, the overall satisfaction question, the group receiving the strengths intervention had an 18 percentage point gain in the percent of students that could strongly agree with the statement. In the pre survey, 35.3% rated it a five and on the post survey 53.6% rated the item a five. This was in stark contrast to the 19 percentage point decline in the percent of students that could strongly agree with the statement in the control group. On the pre survey, 42.1% of the control group strongly agreed with the statement and only 23.1% strongly agreed on the post survey.

Impact of Strengths on Overall Satisfaction



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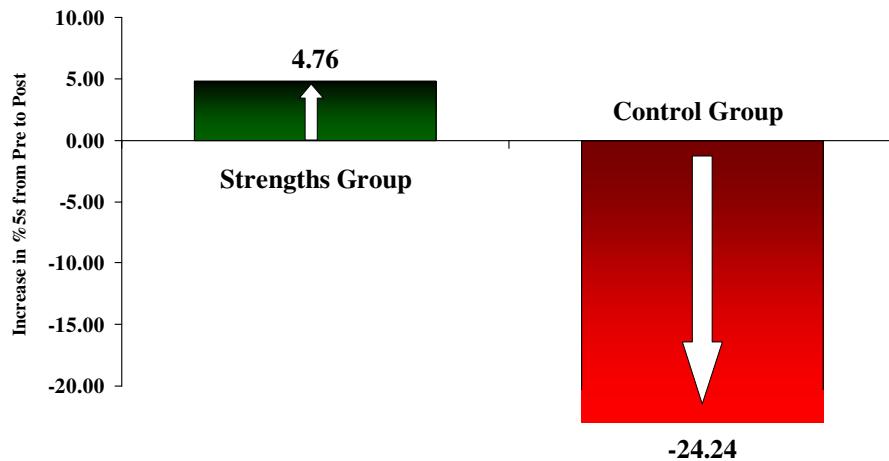
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The mean score difference on the overall satisfaction question was also meaningful. The strengths group mean on this item went from 3.97 to 4.11, a .14 increase in the item mean versus the control group's mean that stayed exactly the same. The control group over time became less satisfied with the learning center as a place to go to school while the strengths group became much more satisfied. All of the students in this environment are at the learning center because a more traditional setting does not fit their needs. It seems strengths might help these students feel more satisfied with the learning environment as a whole, which is a great first step on the path to increasing engagement.

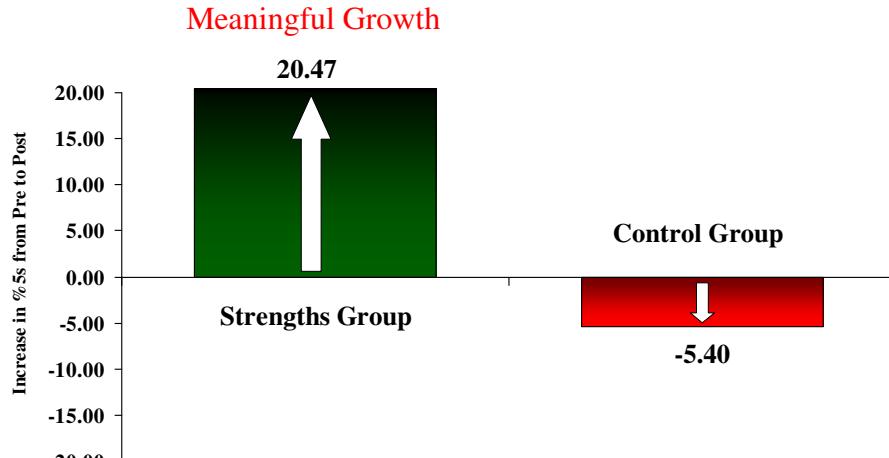
On Q16, the item about feeling safe in school, the strengths group increased the percent fives by almost five percentage points while the control group decreased by 24 percentage points. Possibly during the process of learning about one's own strengths and hearing about the strengths of others, mutual understanding was fostered. As a result, these students seemed to feel safer over time than the control group, who felt less safe as the year progressed.

I feel safe in this school



On Q17, the item about being treated with respect, similar results occurred. From pre to post survey, the strengths group increased the percent of students rating the item a five by 20 percentage points, from 31.9% to 52.4%. In the control group, there was a five percentage point decline from pre to post on this item, from 43.3% to 37.9%.

I am always treated with respect at this school



Sharing strengths among classmates may contribute to the overall feeling of being respected. The class as a whole was paying attention to the uniqueness of each person and the positive potential that was within each individual. This focus was in stark contrast to the notoriety surrounding their behavioral issues that they all had in common. A focus on the positive aspects of these students was being celebrated and it contributed to their feeling respected at school.

The study also revealed that the success of strengths-based development depends on several issues:

- (1) teachers and students should have more than a few minutes per week to work together – classroom teachers are ideal
- (2) the strengths language, activities and discussions should be woven throughout the “normal” curriculum as a foundation for approaching work and life
- (3) students should spend time learning about each other’s strengths in addition to their own

It is apparent from this study that one of the most difficult groups of students to reach, those students that are at-risk for one reason or another, benefit from learning about their own strengths and the strengths of others. Overall satisfaction, overall engagement, feeling safe, feeling respected among others, all had meaningful growth from time one to time two within the groups that received strengths-based development. One student at a time, strengths-based development can change students’ perception about the school environment in a positive direction.

1 A meaningful difference in the mean score from pre to post survey is an increase of .10 or more for individual items. A meaningful change in the GrandMean score from pre to post survey is an increase of .20 or more and a meaningful change in percent fives, “strongly agree,” is an increase of five percentage points or more.

The Gallup Engaged School Program

Building a More Engaged School

A program centered on increasing student and teacher engagement that will lead to positive student outcomes

Strategic Issues

School districts today face an array of complex issues ranging from teacher shortages to lacking student achievement scores. Many efforts are made every year to combat these challenges, but many fail to make a difference. The underlying cause of so many of the issues that school districts face is a staff and student body that lack true engagement in work and school, respectively. In order to impact the outcomes that are important to every district, a strategic approach must be taken that aims to improve the conditions that students, teachers and all staff live, learn and work in every day.

The Gallup Engaged School program is a highly effective intervention for districts seeking to improve student outcomes. The program is aimed at providing schools with the knowledge and tools they need to increase teacher and student engagement. In addition to measuring engagement at both the teacher and student level, Gallup provides proven methods for using the data to plan a course of action to increase engagement. The link between engagement and achievement is proven, but educators have consistently struggled with how to increase engagement, the first part of the equation.

Engaging Teachers

Gallup has great depth of experience in both employee attitude measurement and individualized training and development. Gallup has been the world leader in the measurement and analysis of human attitudes, opinions, and behavior since the 1930s, having designed employee attitude measurement systems for many of the world's largest companies and institutions. Gallup also has great depth of experience in human resources management consulting, particularly in the area of leadership and management development. Gallup has been studying and cataloging the characteristics of outstanding leaders and managers for nearly 40 years. Other organizations may possess expertise in either measurement or education and development, but Gallup possesses proven expertise in both areas.

For over 50 years, The Gallup Organization has studied how employee attitudes relate to job engagement and performance. Gallup has discovered that engaged employees have a direct impact on the livelihood of an organization.

Gallup has defined three levels of engagement:

ENGAGED employees have most of their performance-related workplace needs met.

- loyal and psychologically committed
- more productive, more likely to stay for at least a year
- less likely to have accidents on the job, and less likely to steal

NOT ENGAGED employees have some of their workplace needs met, but have many needs unmet.

- may be productive but are not psychologically connected
- more likely to miss workdays and more likely to leave

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED employees have most of their performance-related workplace needs unmet.

- physically present but psychologically absent
- unhappy with their work situation and likely to spread that unhappiness

Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric, once said, "Any company trying to compete ... must figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee." This is especially true in education, where nearly all of the district's value is delivered to students by individual teachers. Although districts are not really trying to compete with other districts, they are trying to deliver to the community the best citizens possible.

A "fully engaged" employee, by Gallup's definition, is one who can answer all the questions in the Gallup Q^{12®} with a strong affirmative. These items were identified through extensive research that correlates employee attitudes to five outcome measures: employee retention, productivity, customer satisfaction/engagement, safety, and profitability (or in schools, value to the community). There are often very direct links between an increase in the number of engaged employees and student achievement measures and major decreases in employee turnover.

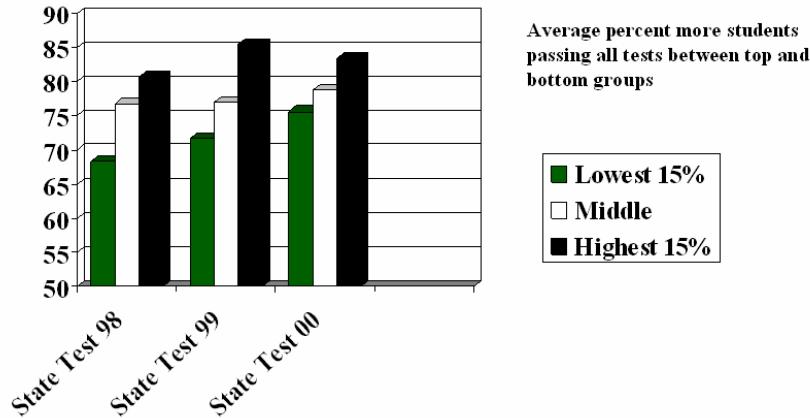
The Link Between Teacher Engagement and Student Outcomes

In several studies conducted by Gallup, schools with the highest levels of engagement scores also had the highest scores on student achievement tests. In the first two case studies that follow, school level engagement was divided into three categories, the top 15% of schools, the middle, and the bottom 15% of schools as ranked by the overall GrandMean (the mean of the twelve item means) from the employee engagement survey.

School District Case Study #1

Q¹² Grand Mean and % of Students Passing All Tests by Building

11.3%



Average percent more students
passing all tests between top and
bottom groups

- Lowest 15%
- Middle
- Highest 15%

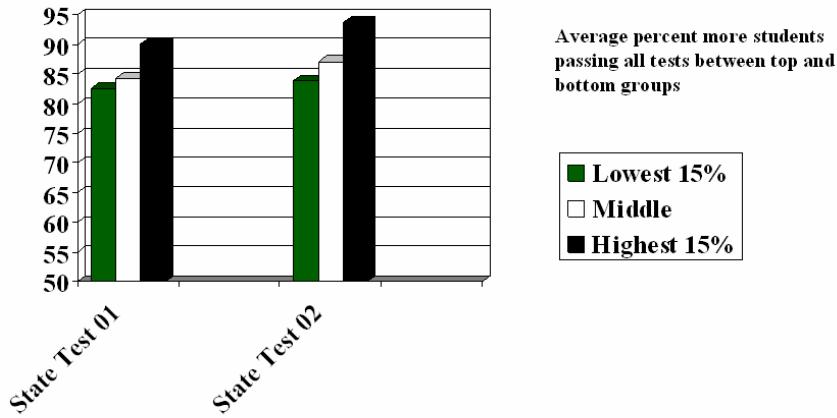
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School District Case Study #2

Q¹² Grand Mean and % of Students Passing All Tests by Building

8.62%



Average percent more students
passing all tests between top and
bottom groups

- Lowest 15%
- Middle
- Highest 15%

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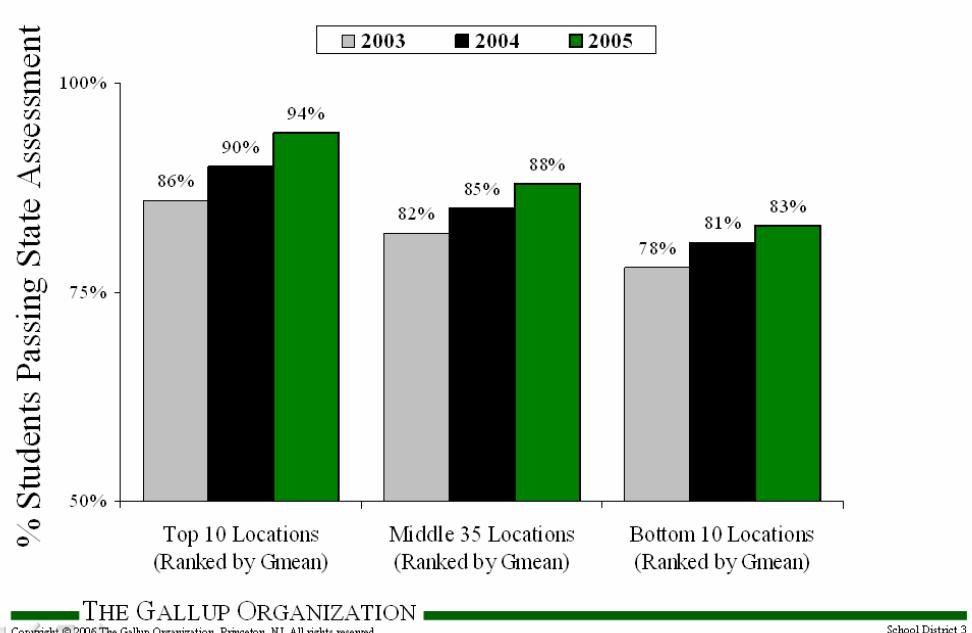
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In these two studies, the buildings with higher engagement had higher percentages of students passing all state assessments. For the first school district,

an average of 11.3% more students passed in the top groups than in the bottom groups over the three years. For the second school district, an average of 8.62% more students passed all tests in the schools with higher engagement than in schools with the lowest levels of engagement over the two years. When those percentages are turned into approximate student numbers, it means that for an elementary with 700 students, 79 more students could have passed all tests. In the second district, 60 more students in a single elementary school could have passed all tests. In a high school of 1500 students, 170 and 129 more students could have passed all tests, respectively.

In a third case study, the district's schools were split into three groups as well, the top ten buildings, the middle buildings, and the bottom ten buildings also ranked by GrandMean. Instead of looking at the percent of students that passed all tests, this case study shows the percent of students passing the language arts tests and the percent of students passing the math tests for each of the three groupings

Reading/English/L.A. by GrandMean



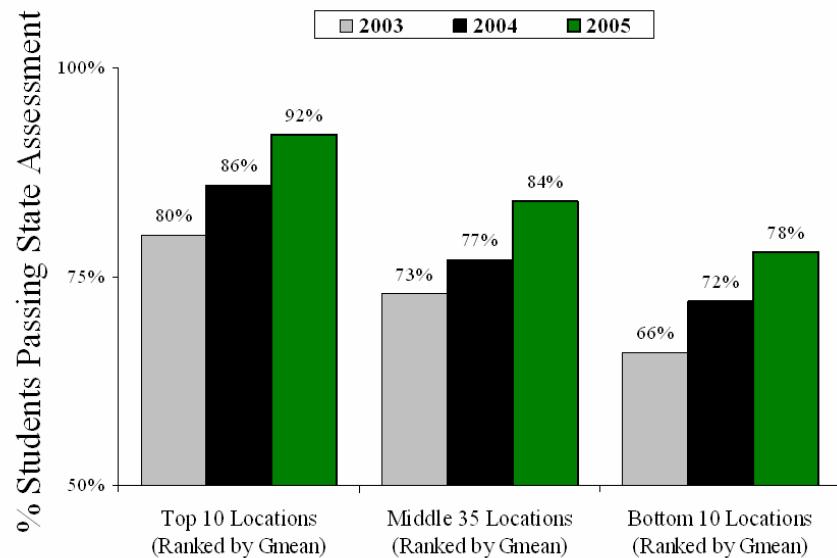
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School District 3

5

If the same comparison is done here, in 2005, the top ten locations had an average of 94% of students pass the Reading/English/L.A. state test. In the bottom ten locations the average was only 83% of students passing the same tests. If this district of 34,000 students could increase engagement at those bottom schools, it could mean over 3,700 more students passing this test. The numbers are even more disparate when looking at the math state test. Just examining 2005 again, the top buildings averaged 92% passing the math state test, while only an average of 78% passed the math test in the least engaged schools. That 14% difference equals over 4,700 students.

Math by GrandMean



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School District 3 6

The three case studies are based on school districts that had between 32,000 and 55,000 students and were all in Texas where state testing requirements and expectations for proficiency are standard across the state.

The links are strong and even linear in these case studies: the more engaged a school is, the higher the student outcomes. Engaged teachers lead to engaged students which leads directly to student outcomes.

Engaging Students

The most critical driver of positive measurable outcomes is increased levels of individually engaged students. Students can go through the routine of school never having been engaged in true learning. Engaged students must first and foremost feel that they are truly cared about. Also, they must know what is expected of them, must have what they need at the most basic level in order to perform, they must feel that they are able to apply the best of themselves, they must feel their opinions count, and must know that the work they are doing is important (to them). These are just a few of the many important drivers of engagement that Gallup has found through years of research.

Asking Teachers and Students the RIGHT Questions

Measuring Teacher Engagement with the Gallup Q^{12®}

From its initial research, Gallup identified 12 questions – *now known as the Gallup Q^{12™}* – for measuring employee engagement.

The Gallup Q^{12®}

Q01 I know what is expected of me at work.

Q02 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

Q03 At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

Q04 In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

Q05 My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.

Q06 There is someone at work who encourages my development.

Q07 At work, my opinions seem to count.

Q08 The mission or purpose of my school makes me feel my job is important.

Q09 My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.

Q10 I have a best friend at work.

Q11 In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.

Q12 This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

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The foundation for measuring the strength of a school environment can be established with 12 simple questions. They capture critical information and assess the fundamental antecedents found across workplace cultures that link to important outcomes. They avoid the mistake made by many organizations: conducting employee surveys that are far too long. Many of today's workplace surveys attempt to measure too many things and cover issues over which the organization has little or no control. They may also measure issues over which principals and their team members have no control. The result is often confusion and minimal impact. In many cases, there is little or no process for result dissemination or improvement activities. The purpose for doing the survey is unclear at many levels, and commitment to the measurement process – from both managers and employees – declines with each survey cycle. The Gallup Engaged School Program works to overcome these weaknesses.

Measuring Student Engagement with Gallup's Student Engagement Survey

These items get at the heart of what matters to student engagement: the relationships and environment that students learn in every day.

Q01 I know what is expected of me at this school.

Q02 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my school work right.

Q03 At school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.

Q04 In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.

Q05 A teacher, or someone at school, seems to care about me as a person.

Q06 There is someone at school who encourages my development.

Q07 At school, my opinions seem to count.

Q08 My teachers make me feel my school work is important.

Q09 My fellow students are committed to doing quality work.

Q10 I have a best friend at school.

Q11 In the last six months, someone at school has talked to me about my progress.

Q12 This last year, I have had opportunities at school to learn and grow.

Q13 I feel safe in this school.

Q14 I am always treated with respect at this school.

Q15 I know I will graduate from this school

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Gallup's Q^{12®} Database

Gallup maintains one of the world's most comprehensive databases linking employee engagement to relevant outcomes like retention, productivity, and safety. Gallup also collects information on key work force demographics, including length of service, function, level, status, for-profit/non-profit, exempt/non-exempt, and union/non-union.

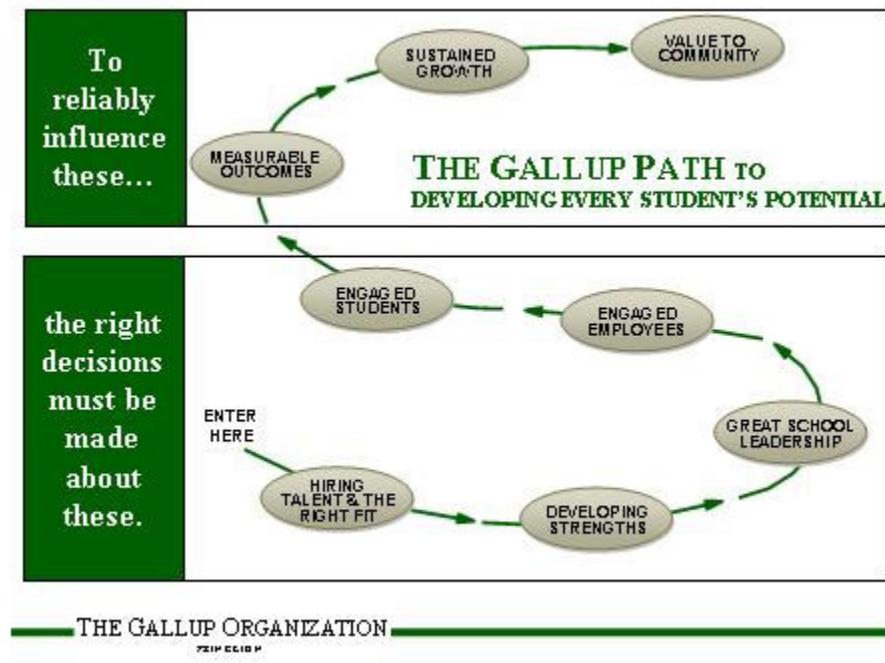
We update our database annually, which enables our clients to benchmark their organization's employee engagement levels against data collected in 37 languages from:

- 4.51 million employees
- 422,522 workgroups
- 332 organizations
- 7 major regions: Africa; Asia; Central & South America; Australia & New Zealand; Europe; Middle East; North America
- 112 countries
- 12 major industries, including Educational Services

Managers and principals within school districts will be able to compare their engagement data to the Educational Services cut of the world's largest database of its kind.

The Gallup Path to Developing Every Student's Potential

Through research examining the linkages between key elements of a healthy organization, Gallup has developed a model that describes the path between the individual contribution of every employee and the ultimate outcomes important to student success -- individual growth and development. For most districts this is measured by sustained growth in student achievement and the value the education system provides to the community.



Starting with the end in mind...

Sustainable Growth Drives Real Value to the Community

Real student achievement can only be driven by sustainable growth. Many variables influence the success of a district, including external variables beyond a district's control. But of the variables a district can control, real student growth is the most important driver of the value added to a community. A district can graduate students at an acceptable rate and still not be adding real value to a community. Real value comes from the investment in growing and developing each child's potential. Sustainable growth is not measured by a short-lived achievement score gain. Rather, sustainable growth is measured by individual year over year growth. The right metrics reveal whether or not your district is robust and whether it will continue to help contribute to the value of the community.

Gallup Tools – Customized Community Surveys and Strategic Consulting

Measurable Outcomes Drives Sustainable Growth

What we measure is as important as how we measure. Each state usually mandates the *what* and *how* related to academic achievement, but the best school districts, principals, and teachers devise their own measures to assess real growth in each school, each classroom, and each child, respectively. Whether it is the percent of students going on to higher education options or the percent of students participating in groups or organizations, learning to track specific data can help districts impact students in direct ways. Deciding what these metrics are is an important first step in measuring whether or not the human capital of your district is positively impacting student success.

Gallup Tools – Strategic Consulting

Engaged Students Drive Measurable Outcomes

The most critical driver of positive measurable outcomes is increased levels of individually engaged students. Students can go through the routine of school never having been engaged in true learning. Engaged students must first and foremost feel that they are truly cared about. Also, they must know what is expected of them, must have what they need at the most basic level in order to perform, they must feel that they are able to apply the best of themselves, they must feel their opinions count, and must know that the work they are doing is important (to them). These are just a few of the many important drivers of engagement that Gallup has found through years of research.

Gallup Tools – Student Engagement Survey, Impact Planning for Principals and Teachers and the following strengths-based development for students: StrengthsQuest (for college-bound students), Strengths Spotlight™ (for high school students), StrengthsExplorer (for 5th – 8th grade students), and How Full Is Your Bucket seminars.

Engaged Employees Drive Student Engagement

Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric, once said, "Any company trying to compete ... must figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee." This is especially true in education, where nearly all of the district's value is delivered to students by individual teachers. Although districts are not really trying to compete with other districts, they are trying to deliver to the community the best citizens possible.

A "fully engaged" employee, by our definition, is one who can answer all the questions in the Gallup Q^{12®} with a strong affirmative. These question items were identified through extensive research that correlates employee attitudes to five outcome measures: employee retention, productivity, customer satisfaction/engagement, safety, and profitability (or in schools, value to the community). The Path illustrates all of the important links between engaged employees and students, and the outcomes that schools value most.

Gallup Tools – Engaged School Program, utilizing the Gallup Q^{12®}

The right decisions about the following steps on The Path must be made to reliably influence the outcomes above...

The Right People in the Right Roles

At the entry point of The Path, the first step must be performed almost perfectly or the remaining linkages to student engagement, measurable outcomes, and sustainable growth will not occur. First, you must identify the employee's individual strengths and hire based on talent, not skills, knowledge, or certification alone. You must position that individual to perform a role that capitalizes on these strengths. Failure to meet these requirements cannot be corrected by either the employee's motivation or expert coaching. When we refer to "strengths" we are referring to a person's ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. And the key to building a strength is to identify a person's dominant themes of talent, then refine them with knowledge and skills. We believe that, when selecting employees, districts have spent far too much time and money focusing on the skills and knowledge of employees and not nearly enough on their talents, which are the basis of strength and success. Truth be told, most districts trip themselves up right at the start of this path because they have no accurate way of knowing how much talent they are bringing in, nor how well that talent is positioned.

Gallup Tools - For attracting and selecting talent: Recruiting Seminar – for HR directors, Recruiting Systems – consulting for HR directors, TeacherInsight – research based selection tool for teachers and other staff that interact regularly with students, PrincipalInsight – research based selection tool for principals, FIT – Further Insight into Talent – a school-level interview to help determine a person's fit with school culture and the position available

Developing Employees' Strengths

The development of individuals helps each employee discover, understand and apply his or her strengths. Strengths-based development focuses on individuals, as well as the group, on self-discovery, as well as learning how to use the curriculum, and on building strengths rather than remediating weaknesses. A strengths-approach emphasizes a growth culture, beginning with an individual's strengths and expands outward to teams and workgroups utilizing their strengths. Normally beginning with the leadership group of the school district, individuals become aware, own and begin to apply their strengths. Individual leaders can then work with their teams to encourage and extend the process. In this way, "strengths talk," a new language of strengths, emerges which emphasizes and names strengths for individuals and the organization. Most importantly, a new appreciation of differences emerges from an awareness of strengths. A strengths-approach allows leaders to celebrate, recognize and utilize the unique differences and contributions of team members' strengths. It is a leadership style based on expecting the best of, and providing the best for, great educators.

Positive work environments directly impact outcomes, such as retention and the variance in performance between buildings. A strengths-approach sets an expectation that the environment of every school will be supportive and encouraging and then provides a way to achieve a continuously improving culture. The expectation is realized by regularly measuring, providing feedback and actively shaping the environment by those within it so that the culture is supportive of great educators and their students.

Gallup Tools – Strengths Development Seminars and Learning:
Talent to Lead, Leading With Strengths, StrengthsCoach, Teach You're your
Strengths, Exploring My Strengths, How Full is Your Bucket, and Strengths E-Learning

Great School Leadership is the Link

Having successfully taken these first two steps, you arrive at The Path's most critical juncture. You must find a way to engage these talented employees. Again, there are many ways to do this -- pay them more, provide more generous benefits -- but these are short-lived solutions. The only way to engage talented employees successfully is to select and develop great school-level leaders. These great leaders can select the best people, set accurate expectations for them, motivate them, and develop them. School districts that are unable to create this kind of environment will be forced off The Path. They will lose more talented people than they keep. They will miscast, over promote, undervalue, and otherwise misuse those talented employees who do stay. Lacking talented people in the right roles, this district will have to revert to less robust routes that don't directly relate to student success -- a frantic push for "remediation", a warm body in every classroom, and "just getting them to pass." Great school-level leadership not only comes from talented principals and assistant principals, but also from teachers and staff members that are willing and able to lead the way to sustained student success.

Gallup Tools – Principal Leadership Development, Leading With Strengths, and StrengthsCoach

The Gallup Path to Developing Every Student's Potential requires a belief in what is right and best about people. Through this belief, human potential can be maximized and turned into real outcomes that are important to each student, teacher, administrator, and member of the community.

Program Objectives

Objectives for the Gallup Engaged School Program include

- Measure the attitudes of district employees and students on the critical engagement dimensions that correlate to important district outcomes
- Provide easy-to-understand reports to managers and principals at all levels of the district
- Provide managers and employees with education regarding what they can do to improve their school environments
- Identify internal best practices within the school district in an effort to learn from the best environments to increase engagement across the district
- Model the path that leads from employee attitudes to specific district outcomes

The Program Process

A Gallup education consultant will work closely with the district to discuss strategic goals, planning, execution, implementation, and on-going development of the engagement program within the district. The typical program involves surveying students and employees on an annual cycle. Once the data is gathered and reported, education and action planning, the heart of the program, can get underway. A Gallup consultant and the leadership of the district will discuss what specific options are relevant to the district's needs.

This chapter's purpose was to explain the process of conducting a study on the effects of a strengths-based intervention on student and teacher engagement. The final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter Four, will describe my current outlook based on the reflections on my own personal journey related to this project, the MBA/Ed.D. program and my life in general.

CHAPTER 4

Looking Back

As I began to look back at my experiences thus far, I realized that it would be necessary to organize my reflections into three main areas. The first part of this final chapter will reveal my thoughts about this particular project. The second part will attempt to share a reflection on what I learned about leadership and management throughout the MBA/Ed.D. program and the third area will be a reflection of my life in general in relation to my future hopes for myself and education.

The Project: Frustrations and Rewards

As I think about the study that I conducted with Gallup, I am reminded of the frustrating and rewarding aspects of schooling in general. Although I've been away from K-12 schools directly for almost four years now, it did not take me long to remember the emotional roller coaster ride that goes along with being part of education. The hurdles involved with the project came from two fronts: dealing with a school system as an outsider and the new corporate environment I was working within. The rewards related to this project came in the form of meaningful results in the data – that strengths-based development has the capacity to make a difference in the lives of children. And to me, that is what education is all about, making a difference one child at a time.

The frustrations I encountered with the school district will sound familiar. The program was not implemented successfully, there was really only one true supporter within the school district, and there was little support or accountability for those responsible for making the program work. In my short career span in education, one observation I have had in several settings is the attitude of “what you don’t know, won’t

kill you.” This relates back to the “stay off the radar” analogy in Chapter Two. Why wouldn’t the Executive Director of Planning and Evaluation want to know the real measurement of engagement in his district down to the teacher level? My guess is that he did not want to know because if he knew, he might have to try to do something about it. Although I was very disappointed with the lack of interest in looking at the reality of engagement, it did not really surprise me. It made sense that the district did not want me to connect the dots. This district had a reputation for being one of the best in the area. My study might have revealed something negative about the levels of engagement among teachers and students and the district surely would not want that information available to the community. The district did not want individual data matched and did not want student outcomes matched to specific student engagement levels. They made it near impossible to execute the study to its fullest potential. Not only did the data issues negatively impact the study, but the way in which the district went about integrating the strengths-based intervention was also a source of frustration. The district made the same mistake schools always make. They piled this program on top of all the other responsibilities that teachers had with no explanation, discussion, or strategic planning, and no expectations for carrying it out properly.

Prior to my involvement, I do not think that Gallup consulted enough with the district about implementation. This was a real client that had paid for this intervention prior to my joining Gallup. It seemed to me that in order to help strengths grow throughout the district, careful consulting should have occurred regarding implementation. For the purposes of the study, I wish that I had been involved much earlier in the process. I do not know that I would have had any more control over

decisions that were made, but I might have been able to discuss some of the issues upfront, like not trying to work on strengths with students during advisor time. Gallup knew and so did I that the best examples of schools that have made strengths work involve incorporating the concepts and activities into a class such as a freshman career course or a study skills class. We did not help the Associate Superintendent, who wanted to measure the impact of strengths, see that the decisions being made about how to integrate the strengths-based approach were going to impact the data regarding its effectiveness. I began to notice the impact of each issue with each bit of new information that I received. It was obvious to me in the beginning that trying to fit the strengths activities in during the few minutes per week that students worked with advisors was going to be a problem.

Because administrators are so far removed from the realities of the teaching day, it is easy to disregard, knowingly or otherwise, what teachers are tasked with each day. Central administrators and even building principals' work involves a more global focus that does not allow them to get involved with the detail of execution at the teacher level. Decisions are made and it is left to teachers most of the time to figure out how to make it work and when reality sets in, so many initiatives fail not only because of time and the pure number of priorities, but also because most of what teachers are asked to do is mandated or handed down. I remember promising myself when I became an administrator that I would try to never lose touch with the classroom environment. I remember hoping that in twenty years, I would still remember like it was yesterday the struggles and successes of my classroom. I hoped that I would never forget what it was like to go home each night worried or excited for a particular student. I hoped that I

would never forget the feeling of seeing a student really thrive. I am still hoping that the student and teacher perspectives will always be the first two lenses through which I approach educational situations, but I am sure that at times I was the “them” in the “us versus them” sentiment. I, too, had fallen prey to the lack of direct connection to the classroom. Dealing with the district involved with this study was constantly frustrating, but represented many of the issues that seem common to school districts everywhere.

When it came to executing this project within Gallup, I did not feel frustration as much as I felt overwhelmed by the task of adjusting to a new corporate culture, one very different from education. There are three things that come to mind, among many, that separate Gallup’s culture from that of any other environment I’ve worked in: they hire based on talent first (back to the interviews that were mentioned), they strongly believe in flexible time to the fullest definition, and they pay for performance in every role. These aspects create a very trusting, performance-oriented place to work. It also creates feelings of being one’s own manager and being somewhat of a free-agent. Early on I began to realize that this environment full of self-driven achievers had a down side to it. While being surrounded by talented, hard-working people was a dream come true for me, I began to sense tension between this drive to achieve as an individual and the need to collaborate to not only get things done, but to plan and think about the future.

Everyone has very specific measures around his/her role; they know very well what they have to do to meet or exceed income expectations. There are not very many incentives that are tied to the successes of teams or group collaboration; those are thought to be measured by ultimate outcomes like revenue. For if revenue grows, people must be collaborating to serve clients’ needs. Everything is tied to revenue, gross margin or some

other measure that ranks, rates, or counts some aspect of the role. As a result, client work or work that “counts” is the number one priority, period. This often sends a message that internal projects or projects not tied to a specific client are not as important as actual client work. This can be a major issue when a company is trying to be on the forefront of their respective field. Innovation and time set aside to dream and think are greatly hurt by this type of incentive base because who wants to spend his/her time working on or helping with an internal project when those hours could be put toward something that directly increases pay. This realization was the first one that helped me plan the way that I would navigate through this project.

After getting an official project number, I started identifying the right people to help push my project through. Finding these people was not difficult; everyone was really nice and relationships were really important. Being new to Gallup, I needed to build relationships fast and work closely with those that I needed to rely on to get the work of this project done. The average length of stay at Gallup is around 9 years. It seems that everyone I met early on had been there for at least that long. There are many married couples, siblings, relatives – which sounds like Gallup might just hire based on relationships, but most of those married couples met here and got married later. There are plenty of stories from people whose sister or cousin did not make it through the interview and were turned down. The point is that everyone knows everyone, and relationships are how knowledge is shared and how work gets done.

One of the measures that most people have tied to their pay is about their internal customer service. Twice per year people will rate me on things like: Jessica always delivers on what she promises; Jessica always treats me with respect; I cannot

imagine a world without Jessica; and up to eight other questions that are about how I treat and serve people within our organization. My friends do not rate me; the list is generated by defined parameters about whom I serve and work most closely with each day. Simply having this measure and stressing its importance is an example of how valued relationships are within Gallup. This measure is also considered a metric for quality and collaboration.

The cultural belief in relationships and productivity are the foundation for the organizational structure of Gallup. You must be capable of forming the relationships that matter to your work and you must be productive. One without the other will not suffice. Gallup is a very flat, matrix-type organization. The organizational system runs on a constant flow of interlocking personal commitments. A person's direct manager may not even have much to do with the actual work that s/he does. For a newcomer, it is a bit overwhelming especially in a leadership role. "Go-tos" as they are called within Gallup are mainly to help set pay plans and partner with an associate for his/her development and career within Gallup. Individuals manage themselves for the most part and only if a situation became really challenging would a "go-to" get involved. When deadlines are missed, the relationship between the people involved is expected to manage the issue. It was very strange to experience this system especially with the 11 years of hierarchical, more bureaucratic experience that I had in education. This lack of direct or stated authority can cause issues with accountability. I often felt confusion over who was responsible for what or who ultimately had the authority to make certain decisions. Several times I have found out the hard way that I did not have the authority to make a decision. I have also had the opposite experience where I held off on making certain

decisions because I felt like it was not my responsibility only to find out later that no one else was expected to make that decision, so by default I had the authority to proceed. It feels awkward at times, but I am slowly figuring out this aspect of Gallup. Trial by fire is a common phrase within Gallup, so it is not a phenomenon of which they are unaware. It is a deliberate way of organizing people and work. These realities all played a part in how the work of my project ultimately got done and how decisions were made.

In the beginning, I lacked the relationships necessary to get the work underway, but in the end those relationships would prove valuable to getting the project finished in a timely fashion. Because the date of the post-survey was moved back, so too was the internal time line for work associated with the collection of the surveys, the scanning and the data processing. Because I had time to forge a relationship with the project manager, she pushed her relationships to the maximum to get the surveys processed quickly so that I could still get the data relatively close to our originally scheduled date. Relationships really do matter at Gallup and can still be frustrating from time to time because there are plenty of people that I do not know well that I should in order to perform in my role. I am working on this every day.

The issues I faced in dealing with the school district on this project were not new to me; however, they were no less frustrating. Within Gallup my struggle to adjust to a progressive new corporate culture was eye-opening. A culture that I had to navigate very carefully as a newcomer and as the one most invested in this project. Even with all the hurdles, I still felt very positive about the overall project. The Practice Leader and the Partner both felt the deliverables would be valuable to their work in the Education Division. They saw immediate value in the data and in the actual documents I created.

Pieces of the deliverables have already been used in presentations, in consulting with clients, both prospective and build-out, and within an article written for a Gallup publication named The Educator.

The biggest reward of leading this project was that the data showed that some students ultimately benefited from the strengths-based approach. When I dug deep into the numbers, I finally began to realize there was something worthwhile in the data that at first had seemed so disappointing. When I noticed that the two environments that seemed to have the most progress were the two alternative settings I had mixed emotions. My first reaction was, “whew, I found something good” and my second reaction was, “I wonder if Gallup will think this is good?” I wondered if Gallup would be concerned that this would brand strengths as something only for the at-risk population. After a few calls with the Practice Leader, I was reassured that the findings were good and that we should celebrate them, but that much more needed to be done. Personally, I was excited that these schools showed improvement. Among all the students educators aim to help develop, these students need to hear the most about personal strengths. The heart of this project was to help students build awareness about their own strengths. The point was to see how strengths-based development impacted student engagement and in the settings highlighted in Chapter Three, there was strong evidence that student perceptions about important aspects of school were positively impacted by having the opportunity to focus on strengths. I constantly think about bringing school to life and life to school for students and this project helped me reconnect to my passion for being part of the lives of young people.

In many conversations that I have had in the last eleven years, I have either been the voice of students or the voice of teachers. I remember being a mediator once between two grown women, both faculty members at the private school in Florida. Both women were on the Multi-Cultural Steering Committee with me and both opinionated in polar opposite directions. In committee meetings, that included student members, our discussions became debates about their divergent viewpoints, so much so that our progress was stalled. I talked to them individually about my concerns and after seeing no hope for a resolution, I went to the Headmaster and shared my thoughts. We as a committee were simply not meeting our goals because these two women could not get along. He thanked me for bringing it to his attention and the next thing I knew, the four of us were face to face in a meeting. He asked me to facilitate the discussion. I was 23 and in my second year of teaching. Both of these women were in their fifties and had been teaching for twenty- plus years. So, I did the only thing I knew how to do: ask questions, listen, and represent the student and teacher perspective. I often found myself in the middle of situations like this one; situations where I would try to raise awareness of the perspectives of others that had interest in the issues but may not have had a voice.

Flash forward about eight years and one of my very first consulting projects, as an independent consultant while going to school full-time, was to help the math department at the same high school in Texas in which I had taught. The principal of the middle school where I had been assistant principal was now the principal of that high school and had hired me to help create a plan in response to the school's state math test results. I held a session early on with four members of the department. The discussion was originally planned to be about the scores and their thoughts on what could be done. I was

really there to listen that day, but ended up in the middle of a brutal confrontation. I knew that I was now an outsider and no longer part of the teaching community, but I thought because my intentions were focused on helping students that I would connect with this group on that common goal. They started the conversation by blaming students, which I had more or less expected because I knew the vicious blame game. As the conversation progressed, it was clear that they were totally disconnected from students. There wasn't a kind word the entire hour. I had never experienced such hatred toward students or such apathy toward progress. I had glimpses of this type of behavior as a teacher and administrator, but I had never before heard some of the deplorable words coming out of this group. For the first time in my life, I was speechless. I sat and listened as my heart was shriveling up and an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach was brewing. When they were finished and realized that I hadn't said anything in a long time, they all looked at me and waited. I didn't know what to say. I felt like screaming at them, but instead I asked one question that almost got me punched. I said, "Why the hell do you come to work every day?" and that's when things got really ugly. Curse words started flying and three of the four teachers got up and walked out. The teacher that stayed apologized for her colleagues; she was only in her second year of teaching and I could tell she was scared to death by our conduct. There was nothing professional about our behavior that day. I had tears in my eyes as I talked to that young girl. I could see myself in her. Was this really what teaching was about? Was this what she had worked hard for in college? Was this what every math department was like?

That day will remain with me for the rest of my life because it was that day more than any other that I realized how important it was to support teachers. After the anger

subsided, I had an overwhelming sense of empathy. Had these teachers been left to fight their own battles? Had they been ignored, blamed, and put upon for so long without any recognition or personal support? Having a strong connection to the mission of teaching is a must. That mission might be different person by person and building by building, but as a community, we must help each other identify our own personal mission regularly to reaffirm our commitment to the development of students and ourselves. We need to help each other when we notice the well is running dry; that should be our commitment to each other as professionals. I knew how important mission and teacher support were before that day, but on that day I realized that educational leaders have an enormous responsibility to nourish and cultivate every teacher as a human being first. It also occurred to me that this responsibility to the people that work with students every day is almost never mentioned in any formal manner as part of the way we talk about educational leadership. I found this brief description of the role of a superintendent on the NCES website: “As a district superintendent, it is your responsibility to enhance the educational program of students, to improve student achievement, and to see that district policies are implemented” (NCES, 2006). There is no mention of any responsibility to the employees that help make student growth possible. This major oversight is important to include as this profession continues to discuss and explore educational leadership. What responsibilities do leaders have to the employees within a district? Personal development? Professional development? It is the responsibility of leaders to engage employees, and in order to do so, leaders must learn what matters most to each individual.

Looking back on that day, after having the experiences of the last three years, I know that I would have approached the situation differently. I was naïve that day to think that the teachers would accept me right away; that they would see me as trustworthy and well-intentioned. I was naïve to think that I could walk in off the street and “fix” a math department with a few conversations and some planning with the principal. As an assistant principal, I was accustomed to analyzing a problem and working to create a solution with the teachers in the Texas middle school. I had relationships with those teachers and those relationships, I now realize, were the basis for our growth. I now understand more than ever the importance of relationships within the context of organizational change. I believe that strengths-based development has to grow organically for that reason alone.

Through the entire project, I kept thinking about how to reconcile the desire to solve the big issues of schooling and the need to impact each and every child. The realities of schooling as we know it today are here to stay for now. So, the only hope at the local level is to focus on the things that an educator, superintendent, principal or teacher, can impact directly and immediately. And that impact starts with listening, building relationships, caring, and helping students and teachers find ways to utilize the best and most unique aspects of who they are in their quest for a good life.

The Fix for Now...

Her name was Mrs. Worst, and she was actually one of the best teachers that I had the honor of having in high school, twice even. Whenever I am asked about the best teachers I’ve ever had, Mrs. Worst is one of the first to come to mind. However, not until recently did I fully understand why. Up to this point in my life, I had always just simply

liked Mrs. Worst. She made learning interesting and fun. She had a sense of humor but also pushed me to think and wonder about the world. She was strict, but loving, like a mother almost. I remember that the first class I had with her was a combined class for gifted and talented students my sophomore year. It was English and World History in a two-hour block every day taught by Mrs. Worst and frankly, I cannot remember the English teacher's name. My freshman year a similar block was offered, but my test scores were not quite what they needed to be for me to enroll. I remember my parents meeting with the principal and the next thing I knew, I was in the class. That is what happens when you have strong advocates for you at home. I always had this feeling that I did not really belong, but knew that what I lacked in pure brain power, I made up for with a solid work ethic. I also thought that everyone else including the teachers knew that I wasn't a natural "brain." Those were the thoughts inside my 14-year-old mind at the time. My freshman year, I absolutely loved the combined class. I was looking forward to the same offering my sophomore year and that's when I met Mrs. Worst.

I remember struggling in the blocked course in the 10th grade for many reasons. First, I thought it was just harder. Secondly, I was involved with two varsity sports that year that required a lot more of my time after school and on the weekends compared to my past involvement with sports. I remember really struggling and thinking that it was my little secret. I made plenty of Bs and a few Cs on different tests and assignments. These grades were not going over very well at home, but I just worked harder and was able to keep up. The English teacher that year and I never really connected. I always got the sense that she was bothered by my presence; again these were the thoughts in my 14-year-old mind. But Mrs. Worst was different. She knew my secret and she was willing

to help me keep it a secret. The class was full of very academically competitive students, of which I was one. For the first time though, no matter how hard I worked, the grades kept landing in that average range. What I realize now that hadn't been clear to me in the past is that Mrs. Worst consistently found ways for me to *feel* successful. She found ways to assign me to roles that fit my strengths. In groups, I was the planner and the team leader. I helped set goals and made sure everyone had what they needed for their individual parts. In other activities, she let me lead as well. I remember distinctly studying Ancient Rome. We were reenacting some event and she asked me to play the role of a woman leader of the time. I wish I could say that I remember more about the actual history, but what I do remember is that *I was important that day*. She told me that the woman and I had similar personalities, and if I just always remembered that, that I would find success.

My point in all this is that now, as an adult studying engagement and thinking about strengths-based development, I realize for the first time that Mrs. Worst kept me engaged and kept me working hard by allowing me to be myself. She helped me find ways to shine in a classroom full of really, really smart students. Having this realization is like when you realize you need to thank your parents for everything they did for you growing up. I didn't realize until after college what sacrifices and commitments my parents made so that I could experience the world. Mrs. Worst kept my secret and all the while helped orchestrate my success.

I had Mrs. Worst again, my senior year, for Law Studies. I needed an elective and knew that she was teaching it, so I chose the course. In this class, the opposite challenge would face us both. I was probably one of the smarter, harder working students and she

experienced what happened when I was not challenged. When I got bored, I got sassy and instead of punishing me or getting frustrated with me, she put me to work. I had different assignments than other students. I had to do more research and make reports back to the class. I had to find a case for us to debate in class every other week. The funny thing was that I wasn't upset, I loved it and she knew that about me. She knew that I loved challenge; she knew that I thrived on hard work and so she orchestrated my growth that year, too.

In both cases, my development and growth depended on two things. First, she took the time to get to know me, and not just that I played volleyball or worked in my parent's shop on the weekend. She took the time to get to know how I approached the world. She wanted to know how I liked to think; she wanted to know what made me tick; she wanted to know what frustrated me; she wanted to know me. Secondly, she made sure that I was able to apply myself, as I was, to the learning at hand. She created avenues for me that were different than those of other students, in both cases. Call it individualization, differentiation, authentic work, or anything else you want, but I think it's something different. It wasn't just about her figuring out my learning style, or what "multiple intelligences" I had. She knew what lens I viewed and approached the world with, and that allowed her to help me chart a course to success. She didn't create the work or experiences in a vacuum, but helped me figure out how to apply myself to different situations so that I would stretch myself and grow.

I think about the teenager that I was and I wonder what would have happened had I not had the amazing support of my parents and a few great teachers and coaches along the way. I think of this because so often as an administrator I wondered about the

students that didn't seem to have an advocate at all. Would I be as confident today? Would I have accomplished as much? Would I have known myself well enough to know what my gifts were? I grew up in a home where one parent was very much a "strengths-based" developer and one was the complete opposite and had more of a "weakness-fixing" approach. I remember after soccer games, even the ones we won, that my father's first words would be about the mistakes I made. If I brought home an A-, the question was always "Why isn't it an A+?" That constant focus on never being quite good enough or perfect has contributed much to who I am and how I am wired.

In contrast, my mother focused on the positive. I was always doing such a good job at everything, never a harsh word except for when I really needed it because I was pushing the boundaries! She taught me to be strong and think carefully about the choices I made in life and to be responsible for whatever the natural consequences of those choices turned out to be. My father taught me that we are never completely done growing or learning. We are never finished; whatever we complete, it could always be better. I tell this story, because I think I turned out okay and I wonder if we could at least start with more of a balance between the two concepts in our schools.

Right now, the current model is very much a weakness-fixing approach, and I don't think this will ever completely be flipped into a strengths-based model. But for now, could we begin to integrate some strengths-based approaches into schools? Could strengths-based concepts begin to help with the engagement dilemma we are faced with at both the teacher and student level? What I personally learned from Gallup's research in this area and through this project is that measuring and having dialogue about the way teachers and students feel about their environment could be a first step to getting a handle

on the engagement issues facing a school. The second step is to figure out what else can be done to tackle the proven drivers of engagement for both teachers and students: caring relationships, connection to important work, having the opportunity to do what you do best every day, having someone else encourage your development and think about your progress, being recognized for your contributions, among others. These are at least some of the drivers for any individual, young or old.

Through all of the reading associated with both the TCU program and this project, and through the findings of this study, I feel strongly that I have expanded my understanding of engagement and have developed an even stronger connection to the work that students, teachers, and administrators do each day. I know that if I were to step into a principal or other leadership position within a school system, I would be a different leader than I was almost four years ago because of what I've learned in these past few years. This project contributed a tremendous amount to my true understanding of student and teacher engagement and has challenged me to think both broadly and specifically about leadership. However, the MBA/Ed.D. program also contributed to my learning on leadership and management over the last three years.

Leadership and Management

I've started a lot of essays over the years with "I've been a leader as long as I can remember..." and it is true. However, a better understanding of my own leadership and management has been a direct result of the experiences I have had through the last three years in the MBA/Ed.D. program.

I remember the first day of orientation like it was the first day of high school. I was a middle school assistant principal going back to school full-time to earn a MBA and

doctorate in education. The first two years were going to be very intense with full loads of business classes each semester and a few education electives along the way. I remember looking around that day at all the corporate-looking people. I was definitely one of the older full-time students at the age of 30. With the exception of a few students that came straight from undergraduate programs, I was the only one in the room that did not come from an accounting, finance, or marketing position. I was intimidated. I was nervous and immediately felt like people discounted my experience in education. I felt like I had a secret again, like I did back in high school.

What I quickly learned about myself was that my management experience exceeded virtually all of the 60 students in my class. Most had not yet had any experience managing other people and for most of them that is why they were going back for their MBAs, so that management could become a career opportunity. In classes like Managing People, Negotiations, and Strategy I had real experience that added to class discussions. We worked very closely on teams and as I look back now, I realize that we capitalized on people's strengths to get through our studies together without even being conscious about it. I was on two long-term teams in those two years and both approached work the same way: Who is good at what, who enjoys what, now lets organize the work around that and get going. This strategy worked, as both teams were very successful. So without even knowing it, I was part of a work environment that allowed people to utilize and apply strengths in different ways depending on the tasks at hand. In retrospect, I've learned that both individuals and teams can organize themselves in this way and find success. I will be more deliberate about this with teams that I work on as I continue to lead and manage.

The first year of the MBA program was the toughest academic experience that I have ever faced. I had so much ground to cover in learning subjects to which I'd had so little exposure. I learned so much, but still wondered whether I could really apply any of the knowledge as a leader. I am investigating the answer to that every day in my new role. I am responsible for managing a multi-million dollar budget and a practice that brings in over 50 million dollars in revenue each year. I feel more confident in my ability to manage these areas because of the educational experiences I had within the MBA courses. But confident or not, the true test will be whether I can manage and lead the practice to continually grow.

I also have learned a great deal about the difference between leading and managing during the past three years. In one management class, we discussed that management and leadership often reside in one position or person, but that they are very different. Top leaders for example do not usually have time to get caught up in the details of managing the work of their units because they are charged with thinking about the future and growth, and the strategy to get there. Management, on the other hand, involves making sure that the work gets done through the orchestration of every detail necessary. In my experience as an administrator, I was a leader and a manager. This is true of most managerial or leadership positions. At times I could get so caught up in the managing aspects of the role that I forgot to lead. There is leadership in managing and management in leading. To me the terms simply describe different behaviors that impact the way in which people and work are dealt with every day.

I also realized that not everyone is great at both. As an assistant principal I had the opportunity to work with a principal that was an amazing, charismatic, visionary, and

futuristic type leader. On the other hand, I was the pragmatic leader thinking about how to get things done and how to work with teachers to make sure that we had an actual strategy in place to make the vision a reality. We were a strong partnership and the school undoubtedly performed better because we figured out how to work in that manner together. I always wondered if someone deliberately put us together and now looking back on it, I'm sure they did. The district that we worked in had been partnering with Gallup for a long time. The superintendent had worked for Gallup for a short period of time during his younger years and his daughter worked there for quite some time as well. I don't have much doubt now that the Deputy Superintendent that placed me as Assistant Principal at that school did so knowing that the Principal and I would be great partners for each other. That would be the Gallup way – to fit people into a role based on the information gathered on the interviews.

I often think about those two years and the growth that the staff as a whole prompted in students and in each other. I think about the fact that the principal and I both left the same year to pursue other opportunities, and that the staff that we worked so hard with would be dealing with entirely new administrators. In a short four years, the building, not necessarily all the teachers, would have seen three different principals and four different assistant principals. How can teachers deal with that much change, that often? What happens because of that constant churn? We had two good years together. Friendships were formed. A common mission was forged and we worked really long and hard to help students and each other grow. Our strong commitment to them in those two years was still second to our commitment to our own growth and personal missions. What I know from my friends that taught in that building is that they had similar

expectations for the new administrators and were constantly disappointed. Many transferred or quickly went back to shutting their doors and teaching in isolation. Not because they didn't care, but because they would seek out a different environment or they would just go back to managing their own worlds alone. Alone, that really is the default condition in education for so many teachers.

From my very one-sided view, it seemed at the time like the environment we created would last forever because we created it together. The teachers tried to carry on after we left, but were met with resistance time and time again. Their expectations and drive were higher and more persistent than that of the new administration and sooner or later that probably frustrated them enough to shut their doors or move on. In one management course we talked about transformative leadership as the ability to create lasting change. Transformative leadership is much more than that, but creating change that lasts beyond one's own tenure is what I took away as the major difference between great leadership and transformative leadership. I would have put money on the fact that the change we were creating together those years was transformative. The teachers were empowered, creative, and truly committed, but unfortunately they went back to being all those things in isolation versus together. Going at it alone is no less powerful to the student-teacher interaction, but at the school level, going at it together can change the culture and potentially reach more students.

I point out the leadership turnover issue because I wonder if this is the root of why we seem "stuck" in the traditional approach to education. Can there be such a thing as transformative leadership in education? And if there is what does it require? A critical mass? A consistency from leader to leader in underlying beliefs? Leadership that

challenges the norms of the bigger system so much so that it becomes an outlier or extreme example can only last as long as the leadership itself. Once the leadership changes, whether in terms of people or beliefs, the bigger system will slowly recapture the outlier and bring it back in line with the standards and norms that rule the system. Teachers are actually quite adaptable now that I think about it; their coping mechanism is to just keep to themselves; why reach out beyond the walls of their classrooms, the leadership and the people are going to change so rapidly it's not worth building those relationships. Therefore, it is not out of protest, but survival, that they simply shut their door or pack their bags and head to another school if they don't like the leadership or environment of the school. I have also seen how this can result in low levels of shared leadership among teachers and administrators. Just like the people, the initiatives today will be gone tomorrow.

Looking Back to Go Forward

A few things I know about myself are that I am driven to achieve, I thrive in the face of challenge, and I love being part of the growth and development of others. Those three characteristics have been constant in my life for as long as I can remember. The achievement drive within me is the part of me that feels the need to be the best I can be at anything I am doing. I am sure it stems from my father's influences. I have always tried to attain the highest level of achievement in everything I do. That is part of the reason I'm in this doctoral program. It's why I have always strived to have the best grades, even as a graduate student. This drive might be a more overpowering piece of who I am than I want it to be and I am thinking about that much more now as a working mom. The need to achieve is something I need to spend much more time thinking about in the near future.

Part of my love of challenge comes from a great desire to learn. Challenge means that I do not necessarily have the knowledge, skills or talent to do something. The reason I thrive so much in the face of challenge, I think, is because it means I get the opportunity to learn something new and that learning means I've achieved something else. Challenge and achievement go hand and hand in my life. I am a problem-solver and an opportunity finder. In the midst of a major crisis at school one day, I was very calm and was simply dealing with the issues at hand when a frantic teacher said to me, "How in the world do you stay so calm?" and I said back to her what I still believe, "There is a way to navigate through everything." I like the challenge of both solving problems and creating opportunity where none existed before.

In high school, I was a mentor and a tutor. I worked with all kinds of younger people, because I enjoyed helping them discover their potential. I loved the feeling when someone's self-confidence increased right in front of my eyes when I helped them discover their value and self-worth. Like with the students in my math class in that Texas classroom and later my undergraduate students at TCU; I love helping students overcome their own inner hurdles to learning and opportunity. I also enjoy working with adults. The most rewarding aspect of being an assistant principal was being part of teachers' continued growth as individuals. I love helping people discover their inner strengths and then helping them figure out ways to utilize those in reaching their personal goals. This has been a part of the teacher, coach and administrator in me long before my work with Gallup.

Knowing these three aspects of who I am helps me understand why my career path thus far has had some interesting turns. I remember after teaching for about four

years saying to my then boyfriend, now-husband that I felt that parts of me weren't being utilized in the classroom. I had this urgent feeling that I could do so much more. That feeling is a familiar one to me. I get it when I am no longer intellectually challenged or when I feel that I am underutilized and could make a much bigger impact doing something else. Others might see it as unstable, but those who understand me, know that it really does come from needing continuous challenge and wanting to know that I am helping more and more individuals discover their personal power.

When I got that urge at the age of 26, I went back to school and earned a Masters in Educational Leadership and became an administrator. When I learned of the MBA/Ed.D program, I changed course because I saw an opportunity to be involved in education at a broader level. I applied, was accepted, and started the program right away. When I was presented with an opportunity to work at Gallup, I again shifted my plans, hoping that this opportunity would mean even more global involvement with education. And even after coming to Gallup, there has been another interesting turn that involved the intrigue of helping even more people.

I was hired to be a consultant and seminar leader in the Education Division. I was going to work with school districts all over the country, especially in Texas, on selection tools and staff development. I was learning and immersing myself in the Gallup culture, but it was a little slow for me at first. I wasn't getting clients as quickly as I thought I should. I voiced several times to the Partner that I was ready and was met with a bit of reluctance. I felt that I already possessed the skills necessary to consult with school districts and definitely had the skills necessary to teach. It was roughly two months into my new role and I still didn't have a client. I went to her again and for some reason she

agreed that I was ready and so I was assigned my first client. I found out later that I was hired during a very slow time and new clients were few and far between. The Partner also had to take into consideration who should be assigned to a new client. I was not given a new client just because I was the new consultant. Some clients were assigned because of prior relationships within a district or other geographic considerations. If the Partner had shared that logic with me, my frustration may have been a bit less throughout those first few months.

Around that same time I met the Workplace Consulting Practice Leader, who leads the selection, employee engagement, and strengths' practices within Gallup. We had a great conversation and soon after he called to offer me a different position. I was surprised. I was being recruited from within; but because Gallup had a free-agent approach, I guessed that type of offer was normal. After about a week of conversations and soul searching, I accepted the position. I reassigned my one client and began to learn everything there was to know about Gallup's employee engagement work, which would include all of the consulting around the Q^{12®} tool discussed in this study.

I became the Practice Manager of our Employee Engagement practice. This role means that I work closely with everyone, from operations to sales, who works with our clients on employee engagement. One reason that I accepted the position was that The Workplace Consulting Practice Leader convinced me that I would have a better chance of bringing engagement tools to education in this role than I would as a consultant and seminar leader. That made sense, and I am already seeing evidence of that after eight months in this new role.

I explain this change in my role for a couple of reasons. One, my learning curve started back at zero right in the middle of this study after three months of learning with respect to my original role; and two, I went from being underutilized, that feeling I hate, to totally overwhelmed and challenged, that feeling I love. Am I doing what I do best? I don't know yet. The achiever in me couldn't pass up the opportunity. However, it would seem to be a second move slightly away from my own personal mission of always being a part of the growth and development of students and teachers. The first move, coming to Gallup, at least fit a little more closely because I was in the Education Division and working directly with school districts. However, this second move was even further away from students, teachers and schools. I love working with students and adults to maximize their potential, I love teaching, and I love creating change that will impact students and teachers. Now, to feel as though I am creating change in our schools, I will have to make my personal mission to see the creation of a process for schools to work on engagement all the way through. This commitment is already in progress as I push the development of just such a process for education through Gallup.

There is one major goal that I am committed to achieving during my lifetime and that is to create and lead my own school. I want to put my own theories to the test and build a school based on a completely different model, one that is not tainted by the traditional constraints of our current system. Another major commitment to myself is that I will always teach. If I can't teach, I don't feel alive.

In 2004-2005, I was able to teach two sections of two different math methods courses to juniors at TCU and that opportunity was one of my favorite teaching experiences to date. I was helping teachers to learn how to be the best they could be. I

loved that mentoring, teaching, and guiding role. I worked with the same students all year and was really able to see their individual growth. Every chance I get here at Gallup to teach a seminar, I take it quickly. I talked to the Practice Leader just last week about the 3-5 year study that was postponed. Now that his book is complete, he is trying to get it started for 2006-2007 and was asking who I thought might be interested in doing the actual teaching with school administrators once we got participating schools involved. I said that I would be interested before he could finish his question.

Those are two of my *real* commitments. I say *real* because I can confidently say that they are accomplishable goals. My final goal is a bit harder to imagine, but it is still important to me. I secretly have a goal to play a part in creating an educational model that works and a plan that will allow schools to transition to that model over time so that in my lifetime our system is not based on the same premises as 100 years ago. And when I say system, I mean the United States system, not one school or one district or one state. I know this sounds a little crazy, but I actually have visions of sitting down with The President some day to discuss our educational system. Oprah Winfrey did a special recently on the crisis in our schools, and Bill Gates, her guest, talked about how our students are not prepared for the future because they lack the skills necessary to do the jobs of today and tomorrow. The whole time I watched the show, I was aggravated because no matter how many fancy computers and hands-on labs are put in schools, if every student is forced through the same hoops because it's "what's best for their future," we are back at zero. I wanted to pick up the phone or write a letter to Oprah and Bill to help them understand that the focus has to be put on developing unique, talented individuals, who know what they are good at and know what skills and knowledge they

need to add to those innate traits to excel – those are not the same for every student. As Richard Florida suggested in his address to the young professionals in Omaha, Nebraska, if we don't start focusing on talent and creativity, we will lose in the global economy. My life will always be tightly woven with the world of education no matter what I am doing or how I spend my days because that is who I am.

Appendix A: Q^{12®} Meta-Analysis 2006

THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

Q^{12®} Meta-Analysis

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Q^{12®} Meta-Analysis

Introduction

Foreword

In the 1930s, George Gallup began a worldwide study of human needs and satisfactions. He pioneered the development of scientific sampling processes to measure popular opinion. In addition to his polling work, Dr. Gallup completed landmark research on well-being, studying the factors common among people who lived to be 95 or older (Gallup & Hill, 1959). Over the next decades, Dr. Gallup and his colleagues conducted numerous polls throughout the world, covering many aspects of people's lives. His early world polls covered topics such as family, religion, politics, personal happiness, economics, health, education, safety, and attitudes toward work. In the 1970s, Dr. Gallup reported that less than half of those employed in North America were highly satisfied with their work (Gallup, 1976). Work satisfaction was even lower in Western Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Far East.

Satisfaction at work has become a widespread focus of researchers. In addition to Dr. Gallup's early work, the topic of job satisfaction has been studied and written about in more than 10,000 articles and publications. Because most people spend a high percentage of their waking hours at work, studies of the workplace are of great interest for psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and physiologists. The process of managing and improving the workplace is of great importance and presents great challenges to nearly every organization. So, it is vital that the instruments used to create change do, in fact, measure workplace dynamics that predict key outcomes — outcomes that a variety of organizational leaders would consider important. After all, organizational leaders are in the best position to create interest and momentum around job satisfaction research.

Parallel to Dr. Gallup's early polling work, Donald O. Clifton, a psychologist and professor at the University of Nebraska, began studying the causes of success in education and business. Dr. Clifton founded a company called Selection Research, Incorporated in 1969. While most psychologists were busy studying dysfunction and the cure of disease, Dr. Clifton and his colleagues focused their careers on the science of Positive Psychology, the study of what makes people flourish. Early discoveries led to hundreds of research studies focused on successful individuals and teams across a broad spectrum of industries and job types. In particular, research on successful learning and workplace environments led to numerous studies of successful teachers and managers. This work included extensive research on individual differences and the environments that best facilitate success. The group of researchers discovered early in their research that simply measuring the satisfaction of employees was insufficient to create sustainable change. Satisfaction needed to be specified, in terms of its most important elements, and

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it needed to be measured and reported in a way that could be used by the people who could take action and create change. Further research revealed that change happens most efficiently at a local level, at the level of the front-line, manager-led team. For an executive, the front-line team is his or her direct reports, and for a plant manager, the front-line team is the people he or she manages each day. Studying great managers, Gallup scientists learned that optimal decision-making happens when information regarding decisions is collected at a local level, close to the everyday action.

Dr. Clifton's work merged with Dr. Gallup's work in 1988, when the two organizations combined, enabling the blending of progressive management science with top survey and polling science. Dr. Gallup and Dr. Clifton spent much of their lives studying people. To study people, they wrote questions, recorded the responses, and studied which questions elicited responses that differentiate people and relate to meaningful outcomes. In the case of survey research, some questions are unbiased and elicit meaningful opinions, while others do not. In the case of management research, some questions elicit responses that predict future performance, while others do not. Developing the right questions is an iterative process, in which scientists write questions, and analysis is conducted; the research and questions are refined and rephrased; additional analysis is conducted; the questions are refined and rephrased again; and the process is repeated. The Gallup Organization has followed the iterative process in devising the survey tool that is the subject of this report, Gallup's Q^{12®} instrument, designed to measure employee engagement.

This section will provide an overview of the many decades of research that have gone into development and validation of Gallup's Q^{12®} employee engagement instrument. Following this overview, we present a meta-analysis of 166 research studies, exploring the relationship between employee engagement and performance across 125 organizations and 23,910 business or work units.

Development of the Q^{12®}

Beginning in the 1950s, Dr. Clifton began studying work and learning environments in order to determine the factors that contribute positively to those environments and that enable people to capitalize on their unique talents. It was through this early work that Dr. Clifton began using science and the study of strengths to study individuals' frames of reference and attitudes.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Dr. Clifton continued his research of students, counselors, managers, teachers, and employees. He used various rating scales and interview techniques to study individual differences, analyzing questions and factors that explain differences in people. Concepts studied included "focusing on strengths versus weaknesses," "relationships," "personnel support,"

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“friendships,” and “learning.” Various questions were written and tested, including many early versions of the Q^{12®} items. Ongoing Feedback Techniques were first developed, with the intent of asking questions, collecting data, and encouraging ongoing discussion of the results to provide feedback and potential improvement — a measurement-based feedback process. Exit interviews were also conducted with employees who left organizations, in order to learn causes of employee turnover. A common reason centered on the quality of the manager.

In the 1980s, Gallup scientists continued the iterative process by studying high-performing individuals and teams. Studies involved assessments of individual talents and workplace attitudes. As a starting point for questionnaire design, numerous qualitative analyses were conducted, including interviews and focus groups. Gallup researchers asked top-performing individuals or teams to describe their work environments, and thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to success. The researchers used qualitative data to generate hypotheses and insights into the distinguishing factors leading to success. From these hypotheses, they wrote and tested questions. They also conducted numerous quantitative studies throughout the 1980s, including exit interviews, to continue to learn causes of employee turnover. Qualitative analyses such as focus groups and interviews formed the basis for lengthy and comprehensive employee surveys, called “Organizational Development Audits” or “Managing Attitudes for Excellence.” Many of these surveys included 100 to 200 items. Quantitative analyses included factor analyses to assess the dimensionality of the survey data, regression analyses to identify uniqueness and redundancies in the data, and criterion-related validity analyses to identify questions that correlate with meaningful outcomes such as overall satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. The scientists developed feedback protocols to facilitate the feedback of survey results to managers and employees. Such protocols, and their use in practice, helped researchers learn which items were most useful in creating dialogue and stimulating change.

One outgrowth of a management research practice focused on both talent and environment was the theory of talent maximization within an organization:

$$\text{Per-person productivity} = \text{Talent} \times (\text{Relationship} + \text{Right Expectation} + \text{Recognition/Reward})$$

These concepts would later become imbedded in the foundational elements of Q^{12®}. Over time, SRI and Gallup researchers conducted numerous studies of manager success patterns, focused both on the talents of the manager and the environments that best facilitated success. By integrating knowledge of managerial talent with survey data on employee attitudes, scientists had a unique perspective on what it takes to build a successful workplace environment. Themes such as “individualized perception,” “performance orientation,” “mission,” “recognition,” “learning and growing,” “expectations,” and “the right fit” continued to emerge. In addition to studies of management, researchers conducted numerous studies with successful teachers, students, and learning environments.

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In the 1990s, the iterative process continued. During this time, Gallup researchers developed the first version of the Q¹² (“The Gallup Workplace Audit” or GWA), in an effort to efficiently capture the most important workplace information. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses continued. More than 1,000 focus groups were conducted in the decade, and hundreds of instruments were developed, many of them with many additional items. Scientists also continued to use exit interviews; these revealed the importance of the manager in retaining employees. Studies of Q^{12®} and other survey items were conducted in various countries throughout the world, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain, Japan, and Germany. Gallup researchers obtained international cross-cultural feedback on Gallup’s core items, which provided context on the applicability of the items across different cultures. Various scale types were also tested, including variations of 5-point and dichotomous response options.

Quantitative analyses of survey data included descriptive statistics, factor analyses, discriminant analyses, criterion-related validity analyses, reliability analyses, regression analyses, and other correlational analyses. Gallup scientists continued to study the core concepts that differentiated successful from less successful work units, and the expressions that best captured those concepts. In 1997, the criterion-related studies were combined into a meta-analysis to study the relationship of employee satisfaction and engagement (as measured by Q^{12®}) to business or work unit profitability, productivity, employee retention, and customer satisfaction/loyalty across 1,135 business units (Harter & Creglow, 1997). Meta-analysis also enabled researchers to study the generalizability of the relationship between engagement and outcomes. Results of this confirmatory analysis revealed substantial criterion-related validity for each of the Q^{12®} items. As criterion-related validity studies are ongoing, the meta-analysis was updated in 1998 (Harter & Creglow, 1998) and included 2,528 business units; in 2000 (Harter & Schmidt, 2000), when it included 7,939 business units; in 2002 (Harter & Schmidt, 2002), when it included 10,885 business units; and in 2003 (Harter, Schmidt, & Killham, 2003), when it included 13,751 business units. This report provides the sixth published iteration of Gallup’s Q^{12®} meta-analysis, focusing on the relationship between employee engagement and performance. This report expands the number of business units and outcomes studied. The previous meta-analysis examined the relationship between employee engagement and customer loyalty, profitability, productivity, employee turnover, and accidents. We now include absenteeism and merchandise shrinkage (theft and lost merchandise).

Since its final wording and order were completed in 1998, Q^{12®} has been administered to more than 7 million employees in 112 different countries.

Introduction to the Study

The quality of an organization’s human resources is perhaps the leading indicator of its growth and sustainability. The attainment of a workplace with high-caliber employees starts with the selection of the right people for the right jobs. Numerous studies have documented the utility of valid selection instruments and systems in the selection of the right people (Schmidt, Hunter, McKenzie, & Muldrow, 1979; Hunter & Schmidt, 1983; Huselid, 1995; Schmidt & Rader, 1999; Harter, Hayes, & Schmidt, 2004). After employees have been selected, they make decisions and take actions every day that can

affect the success of their organizations. Many of these decisions and actions are influenced by their own internal motivations and drives. One can also hypothesize that the way employees are treated and the way they treat one another can positively affect their actions — or can place their organizations at risk. For example, researchers have found positive relationships between general workplace attitudes and service intentions, customer perceptions (Schmit & Allscheid, 1995), and individual performance outcomes (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). An updated meta-analysis has revealed a substantial relationship between individual job satisfaction and individual performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). To date, the vast majority of job satisfaction research and subsequent meta-analyses have collected and studied data at the individual employee level.

There is also evidence at the workgroup or business-unit level that employee attitudes relate to various organizational outcomes. Organizational-level research has focused primarily upon cross-sectional studies. Independent studies found relationships between employee attitudes and performance outcomes such as safety (Zohar, 1980, 2000), customer experiences (Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980; Ulrich, Halbrook, Meder, Stuchlik, & Thorpe, 1991; Schneider & Bowen, 1993; Schneider, Ashworth, Higgs, & Carr, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Reynierse & Harker, 1992; Johnson, 1996; Wiley, 1991), financials (Denison, 1990; Schneider, 1991), and employee turnover (Ostroff, 1992). A recent study by Batt (2002) used multivariate analysis to examine the relationship between human resource practices (including employee participation in decision making) and sales growth. Gallup has conducted large-scale meta-analyses, most recently studying 13,751 business and work units regarding the concurrent and predictive relationship of employee attitudes (satisfaction and engagement) with safety, customer attitudes, financials, and employee retention (Harter et al., 2003; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter & Schmidt, 2002; Harter & Schmidt, 2000; Harter & Creglow, 1998; Harter & Creglow, 1997). The above studies have found, rather consistently, that there are positive concurrent and predictive relationships between employee attitudes and various important business outcomes.

Even though it has been much more common to study employee opinion data at the individual level, studying data at the business-unit or workgroup level is critical, because that is where the data are typically reported (due to anonymity concerns, employee surveys are reported at a broader business-unit or workgroup level). In addition, business-unit-level research usually provides opportunities to establish links to outcomes that are directly relevant to most businesses — outcomes like customer loyalty, profitability, productivity, employee turnover, and safety variables that are often aggregated and reported at the business-unit level. Another advantage to reporting and studying data at the business-unit or workgroup level is that instrument item scores are of similar reliability to dimension scores for individual-level analysis. This is because at the business-unit or workgroup level, each item score is an average of many individuals' scores. This means employee surveys reported at a business-unit or workgroup level can be more efficient, i.e., less dependent on length because item-level measurement error is less of a concern. See Harter and Schmidt (2006) for a more complete discussion of job satisfaction research and the advantages obtained by conducting unit-level analyses.

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One potential problem with such business-unit-level studies is limited data, due to a limited number of business units (the number of business units becomes the sample size), or limited access to outcome measures that one can compare across business units. For this reason, many of these studies are limited in statistical power, and as such, results from individual studies may appear to conflict with one another. Meta-analysis techniques provide the opportunity to pool such studies together to get more precise estimates of the strength of effects and their generalizability.

This paper's purpose is to present the results of an updated meta-analysis of the relationship between employee workplace perceptions and business-unit outcomes, based on currently available data collected with Gallup clients. The focus of this study is on Gallup's Q^{12®} instrument. The Q^{12®} items — which were selected because of their importance at the business-unit or workgroup level — measure employee perceptions of the quality of people-related management practices in their business units.

Description of the Q^{12®}

In short, the development of the GWA (Q^{12®}) was based on over 30 years of accumulated quantitative and qualitative research. Its reliability, convergent validity, and criterion-related validity have been extensively studied. It is an instrument validated through prior psychometric studies as well as practical considerations regarding its usefulness for managers in creating change in the workplace.

In designing the items included in the Q^{12®}, researchers took into account that, from an actionability standpoint, there are two broad categories of employee survey items: those that measure attitudinal outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty, pride, customer service intent, and intent to stay with the company) and those that measure actionable issues that drive the above outcomes. The Q^{12®} measures the actionable issues for management — those predictive of attitudinal outcomes such as satisfaction, loyalty, pride, and so on. On Gallup's standard Q^{12®} instrument, following an overall satisfaction item are 12 items measuring issues we have found to be actionable at the supervisor or manager level in the company — items measuring the extent to which employees are “engaged” in their work.

The Q^{12®} statements are as follows:

- Q00. (Overall Satisfaction) On a five-point scale, where “5” is *extremely satisfied* and “1” is *extremely dissatisfied*, how satisfied are you with (your company) as a place to work?
- Q01. I know what is expected of me at work.
- Q02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
- Q03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- Q04. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- Q05. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- Q06. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- Q07. At work, my opinions seem to count.
- Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
- Q09. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
- Q10. I have a best friend at work.
- Q11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
- Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

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The current standard is to ask each employee to rate the above statements (a census survey — median participation rate is 85%) using six response options (from 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree; the sixth response option — don't know/does not apply — is unscored). Because it is a satisfaction item, the first item is scored on a satisfaction scale rather than on an agreement scale. Regression analyses (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) indicate that employee engagement accounts for nearly all of the performance-related variance (composite performance) accounted for by the overall satisfaction measure. Therefore, the focus of this report is on employee engagement (as measured by statements Q01-Q12 below).

The reader will notice that, while these items measure issues that the manager or supervisor can influence, only one item contains the word “supervisor.” This is because it is realistic to assume that numerous people in the workplace can influence whether someone’s expectations are clear, whether he or she feels cared about, and so on. The manager’s or supervisor’s position, though, allows him or her to take the lead in establishing a culture that values behaviors that support these perceptions. The following is a brief discussion of the conceptual relevancy of each of the 13 items:

Q00. *Overall satisfaction.* The first item on the survey measures an overall attitudinal outcome: satisfaction with one’s company. One could argue that in and of itself, it is difficult to act on the results of this item. Other issues, like those measured in the following 12 items, explain why people are satisfied, and why they become engaged and affect outcomes.

Q01. *Expectations.* Defining and clarifying the outcomes that are to be achieved is perhaps the most basic of all employee needs and manager responsibilities. How these outcomes are defined

and acted upon will vary from business unit to business unit, depending on the goals of the business unit.

- Q02. *Materials and equipment.* Getting people what they need to do their work is important in maximizing efficiency, in demonstrating to employees that their work is valued, and in showing that the company is supporting them in what they are asked to do. Great managers keep this perception objective by helping employees see how their requests for materials and equipment connect to important outcomes.
- Q03. *Opportunity to do what I do best.* Helping people get into roles where they can most fully use their inherent talents is the ongoing work of great managers. Learning about individual differences through experience and assessment can help the manager position people efficiently, within and across roles.
- Q04. *Recognition for good work.* When managers ask employees who are performing at a high level whether they are suffering from too much recognition, they rarely, if ever, get an affirmative response. Another ongoing management challenge is to understand how each person prefers to be recognized, to make it objective and real by basing it on performance, and to do it frequently.
- Q05. *Someone at work cares about me.* For each person, feeling “cared about” may mean something different. The best managers listen to individuals, and respond to their unique needs. In addition, they find the connection between the needs of the individual and the needs of the organization.
- Q06. *Encourages my development.* How employees are coached can influence how they perceive their future. If the manager is helping the employee improve as an individual by providing opportunities that are in sync with the employee’s talents, both the employee and the company will profit.
- Q07. *Opinions count.* Asking for the employee’s input, and considering that input as decisions are made, can often lead to better decisions. This is because employees are often closer than the manager is to individuals and variables that affect the overall system. In addition, when employees feel they are involved in decisions, they take greater ownership of the outcomes.
- Q08. *Mission/Purpose.* Great managers often help people see not only the purpose of their work, but also how each person’s

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work influences and relates to the purpose of the organization and its outcomes. Reminding employees of the big-picture impact of what they do each day is important, whether it is how their work influences the customer, safety, or the public.

- Q09. *Associates committed to quality.* Managers can influence the extent to which employees respect one another by selecting conscientious employees, providing some common goals and metrics around quality, and increasing associates' frequency of opportunity for interaction.
- Q10. *Best friend.* Managers vary in the extent to which they create opportunities for people at work to get to know one another, and in whether they value close, trusting relationships at work. The best managers do not subscribe to the idea that there should be no close friendships at work; instead, they free people to get to know one another, which is a basic human need. This, then, can influence communication, trust, and other outcomes.
- Q11. *Progress.* Providing a structured time to discuss each employee's progress, achievements, goals, and so on, is important for both managers and employees. Great managers regularly meet with individuals, both to learn from them and to give them guidance. This give-and-take helps both managers and employees make better decisions.
- Q12. *Learn and grow.* In addition to having a need to be recognized for good work, most employees have a need to know they are improving and have chances to improve themselves. Great managers pick training that will benefit the individual and the organization.

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As a total instrument (sum or mean of items 01-12), the Q^{12®} has a Cronbach's alpha of .91 at the business-unit level. The meta-analytic convergent validity of the equally weighted mean (or sum) of items 01-12 (GrandMean) to the equally weighted mean (or sum) of additional items in longer surveys (measuring all known facets of job satisfaction and engagement) is .91. This provides evidence that the Q^{12®}, as a composite measure, captures the general factor in longer employee surveys. Individual items correlate to their broader dimension true-score values, on average, at .69.

As mentioned, this is the sixth published iteration of Q^{12®} business-unit-level meta-analysis. The current meta-analysis includes a larger number of studies, business units, and industries represented, and two additional outcomes studied (absenteeism and shrinkage). This meta-analysis includes a much larger number of studies with safety as a dependent variable, and more studies from countries outside the United States (20 studies conducted exclusively outside the U.S., including data from Asia, Canada, Central America, Europe, and South America). This meta-analysis also includes updated estimates of reliabilities across business units and includes all available Gallup studies (whether published or unpublished) and has no risk of publication bias.

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Meta-Analysis, Hypothesis, Methods, and Results

Meta-Analysis

A meta-analysis is a statistical integration of data accumulated across many different studies. As such, it provides uniquely powerful information, because it controls for measurement and sampling errors and other idiosyncrasies that distort the results of individual studies. A meta-analysis eliminates biases and provides an estimate of true validity or true relationship between two or more variables. Statistics typically calculated during meta-analyses also allow the researcher to explore the presence, or lack thereof, of moderators of relationships. More than 1,000 meta-analyses have been conducted in the psychological, educational, behavioral, medical, and personnel selection fields. The research literature in the behavioral and social sciences fields includes a multitude of individual studies with apparently conflicting conclusions. Meta-analysis, however, allows the researcher to estimate the mean relationship between variables and make corrections for artifactual sources of variation in findings across studies. It provides a method by which researchers can determine whether validities and relationships generalize across various situations (e.g., across firms or geographical locations). This paper will not provide a full review of meta-analysis. Rather, the authors encourage readers to consult the following sources for both background information and detailed descriptions of the more recent meta-analytic methods: Schmidt (1992); Hunter and Schmidt (1990, 2004); Lipsey and Wilson (1993); Bangert-Drowns (1986); and Schmidt, Hunter, Pearlman, and Rothstein-Hirsh (1985).

Hypothesis and Study Characteristics

The hypotheses examined for this meta-analysis were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Business-unit-level employee engagement will have positive average correlations with the business-unit outcomes of customer loyalty, productivity, and profitability, and negative correlations with employee turnover, employee safety incidents (accidents), absenteeism, and shrinkage (theft).

Hypothesis 2: The correlations between engagement and business-unit outcomes will generalize across organizations for all business-unit outcomes. That is, these correlations will not vary substantially across organizations, and in particular, there will be few, if any, organizations with zero or negative correlations.

A total of one hundred sixty-six (166) studies for 125 independent organizations are included in Gallup's inferential database — studies conducted as proprietary research for various organizations. In each $Q^{12^{\circledR}}$, one or more of the $Q^{12^{\circledR}}$ items were used (as a part of

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standard policy, starting in 1997, all items were included in all studies), and data were aggregated at the business-unit level and correlated with the following aggregate business-unit performance measures:

- Customer metrics (referred to as customer loyalty)
- Profitability
- Productivity
- Turnover
- Safety & Health
- Absenteeism
- Shrinkage

That is, in these analyses, the unit of analysis was the business unit, not the individual employee.

Pearson correlations were calculated, estimating the relationship of business-unit average measures of employee engagement (the mean of the Q^{12®} items) to each of these seven general business outcomes. Correlations were calculated across business units within each company, and these correlation coefficients were entered into a database. The researchers then calculated mean validities, standard deviations of validities, and validity generalization statistics for each item for each of the seven business-unit outcome measures.

As with previous meta-analyses, some of the studies were concurrent validity studies, where engagement and performance were measured within roughly the same time period, or with engagement measurement slightly trailing the performance measurement (since engagement is relatively stable and a summation of the recent past, such studies are considered “concurrent”). Predictive validity studies involve measuring engagement at time 1 and performance at time 2. “Predictive” validity estimates were obtained for approximately 43% of the companies included in this meta-analysis. This paper does not directly address issues of causality, which are best addressed with meta-analytic longitudinal data, consideration of multiple variables, and path analysis. Issues of causality are discussed and examined extensively in other sources (Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, & Killham, 2005).

Studies for the current meta-analysis were selected so that each company was represented once in each analysis. For several companies, multiple studies were conducted. In order to include the best possible information for each company represented in the study, some basic rules were used. If two concurrent studies were conducted for the same client (where Q^{12®} and outcome data were collected concurrently, i.e., in the same year), then the weighted average effect sizes across the multiple studies were entered as the value for that company. If a company had both a concurrent and a predictive study (where the Q^{12®} was collected in year 1 and outcomes were tracked in year 2), then the effect sizes from the predictive study were entered. If a company had multiple predictive studies, then the mean of the correlations in these studies was entered. If sample sizes varied substantially

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in repeated studies for an organization, the study with the larger of the sample sizes was used.

- For 54 companies, there were studies that examined the relationship between business-unit employee perceptions and customer perceptions. Customer perceptions included customer metrics, patient metrics, and student ratings of teachers. These metrics included measures of loyalty, satisfaction, and engagement. The largest representation of studies included loyalty metrics (i.e., likelihood to recommend or repeat business), so we refer to customer metrics as customer loyalty in this study. Instruments varied from study to study. The general index of customer loyalty was an average score of the items included in each measure. A growing number of studies include “customer engagement” as the metric of choice, which measures the emotional connection between the customers and the organization that serves them. For more information on the interaction of employee and customer engagement, see Fleming, Coffman, and Harter (2005), and Harter, Asplund, and Fleming (2004).
- Profitability studies were available for 63 companies. Definition of profitability typically was a percentage profit of revenue (sales). In several companies, the researchers used — as the best measure of profit — a difference score from the prior year or a difference from a budgeted amount, because it represented a more accurate measure of each unit's relative performance. As such, a control for opportunity was used when profitability figures were deemed less comparable from one unit to the next. For example, a difference variable involved dividing profit by revenue for a business unit and then subtracting a budgeted percentage from this percentage. In every case, profitability variables were measures of margin, and productivity variables (which follow) were measures of amount produced.
- Productivity studies were available for 83 companies. Measures of business-unit productivity consisted of one of the following: financials (i.e., revenue/sales dollars per person or patient), quality (i.e., managerial evaluation of all available productivity measures), quantity produced, or student achievement scores. In a few cases, this was a dichotomous variable (top-performing business units = 2; less successful units = 1). As with profitability, in many cases it was necessary for the researchers to control the financial metrics for opportunity by comparing results to a performance goal or prior year figure.
- Turnover data were available for 54 companies. The turnover measure was the annualized percentage of employee turnover for each business unit.
- Safety & Health data were available for 27 companies. Safety and health measures included lost workday/time incident rate, percentage of workdays lost due to incidents or worker's compensation claims, number of incidents, or incident rates. One large healthcare organization provided

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risk-adjusted mortality rates and risk-adjusted complication rates for each hospital.

- Absenteeism data were included for 6 companies. Absenteeism measures included the average number of days missed per person for each work unit divided by the total days available for work. Three companies provided sick days or hours and three provided total absenteeism rates.
- Measures of shrinkage were provided by 3 companies. Shrinkage is defined as the dollar amount of unaccounted-for lost merchandise, which could be due to employee theft, customer theft, or lost merchandise. Given the varying size of locations, shrinkage was calculated as a percentage of total revenue, or a difference from an expected target.
- The overall study involved 681,799 independent employee responses to surveys and 23,910 independent business units in 125 companies, an average of 29 employees per business unit and 191 business units per company. One hundred sixty-six (166) research studies were conducted across the 125 companies.
- Table 1, which follows, provides a summary of studies (per company) sorted by industry type. It is evident that there is considerable variation in the industry types represented, as companies from 37 industries provided studies. Each of the general government industry classifications (via SIC codes) is represented, with the largest number of companies represented in services, retail, and manufacturing industries. The largest number of business units is in retail, financial, and transportation/public utilities. Of the specific industry classifications, finance-depository, communications, retail-food, and services-health are most frequently represented.

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Table 1 — Summary of Studies by Industry

| Industry Type | Number of | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| | Companies | Business Units | Respondents |
| Finance | | | |
| Credit | 2 | 59 | 581 |
| Depository | 10 | 4,787 | 62,291 |
| Insurance | 2 | 174 | 7215 |
| Mortgage | 1 | 27 | 985 |
| Nondepository | 1 | 94 | 2,038 |
| Security | 3 | 86 | 2,785 |
| Manufacturing | | | |
| Building Materials | 1 | 8 | 1,335 |
| Consumer Goods | 2 | 146 | 5,797 |
| Food | 4 | 161 | 20,062 |
| Industrial Equipment | 1 | 89 | 639 |
| Instrument | 7 | 81 | 2,169 |
| Paper | 1 | 60 | 17,243 |
| Pharmaceutical | 2 | 124 | 992 |
| Printing | 2 | 35 | 716 |
| Materials and Construction | 2 | 218 | 19,926 |
| Real Estate | 2 | 185 | 3,790 |
| Retail | | | |
| Automotive | 2 | 105 | 8,313 |
| Building Materials | 2 | 793 | 43,763 |
| Clothes | 3 | 279 | 16,795 |
| Department Stores | 1 | 567 | 7,362 |
| Eating | 6 | 732 | 37,191 |
| Electronics | 4 | 960 | 96,287 |
| Entertainment | 1 | 106 | 1,051 |
| Food | 4 | 3,745 | 73,630 |
| Industrial Equipment | 1 | 11 | 484 |
| Miscellaneous | 8 | 2,599 | 76,439 |
| Pharmaceutical | 1 | 180 | 3,004 |
| — continued — | | | |

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Table 1 — Summary of Studies by Industry (cont.)

| <i>Industry Type</i> | Number of | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Companies | Business Units | Respondents |
| Services | | | |
| Business | 1 | 20 | 600 |
| Education | 7 | 310 | 10,746 |
| Government | 4 | 240 | 8,336 |
| Health | 23 | 2,218 | 80,990 |
| Hospitality | 1 | 30 | 2,612 |
| Hotels | 4 | 202 | 10,924 |
| Recreation | 1 | 14 | 288 |
| Transport/Public Utilities | | | |
| Trucking | 1 | 96 | 6,213 |
| Communications | 5 | 4,138 | 43,633 |
| Electric | 2 | 231 | 4,574 |
| Total | | | |
| Financial | 19 | 5,227 | 75,895 |
| Manufacturing | 20 | 704 | 48,953 |
| Materials & Construction | 2 | 218 | 19,926 |
| Real Estate | 2 | 185 | 3,790 |
| Retail | 33 | 10,077 | 364,299 |
| Services | 41 | 3,034 | 114,496 |
| Transportation/Public Utilities | 8 | 4,465 | 54,420 |
| Total | 125 | 23,910 | 681,799 |

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Table 2 provides a summary of studies (per company) sorted by business or operational unit type. There is also considerable variation in type of business unit, ranging from stores to plants/mills to departments to schools. Overall, 19 different types of business units are represented; the largest number of companies had studies of workgroups, stores, or bank branches. Likewise, workgroups, stores, and bank branches have the highest proportional representation of business/operating units.

Table 2 — Summary of Business/Operating Unit Types

| <i>Business/Operating Unit Type</i> | Number of | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Companies | Business Units | Respondents |
| Bank Branch | 13 | 5,038 | 65,653 |
| Call Center | 2 | 41 | 4,152 |
| Call Center Department | 4 | 120 | 2,409 |
| Cost Center | 2 | 68 | 10,597 |
| Dealership | 2 | 105 | 8,313 |
| Division | 2 | 29 | 5,090 |
| Hospital | 4 | 248 | 31,167 |
| Hotel | 3 | 101 | 10,111 |
| Location | 7 | 130 | 6,730 |
| Mall | 2 | 185 | 3,790 |
| Patient Care Unit | 2 | 177 | 4,433 |
| Plant/Mill | 4 | 131 | 38,155 |
| Region | 1 | 96 | 6,213 |
| Restaurant | 5 | 369 | 21,183 |
| Sales Division | 4 | 34 | 1,515 |
| Sales Team | 4 | 313 | 16,791 |
| School | 6 | 296 | 10,496 |
| Store | 24 | 9,097 | 327,670 |
| Workgroup | 34 | 7,332 | 107,331 |
| Total | 125 | 23,910 | 681,799 |

Meta-Analytic Methods Used

Analyses included weighted average estimates of true validity, estimates of standard deviation of validities, and corrections made for sampling error, measurement error in the dependent variables, and range variation and restriction in the independent variable (Q^{12} GrandMean) for these validities. An additional analysis was conducted, correcting for independent-variable measurement error. The most basic form of meta-analysis corrects variance estimates only for sampling error. Other corrections recommended by Hunter and Schmidt (1990, 2004) include correction for measurement and statistical artifacts, such as range restriction and measurement error in the performance variables gathered. The definitions of the above procedures are provided in the sections that follow. Gallup researchers gathered performance-variable data for multiple time periods to calculate the reliabilities of the business performance measures. Since these multiple measures were not available for each study, the researchers used artifact distributions meta-analysis methods (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990, pp. 158-197) to correct for measurement error in the performance variables. The artifact distributions developed were based on test-retest reliabilities, where they were available, from various studies. The procedure followed for calculation of business-unit outcome-measure reliabilities was consistent with Scenario 23 in Schmidt and Hunter (1996). To take into account that some change in outcomes (stability) is a function of real change, test-retest reliabilities were calculated using the following formula:

$$(r_{12} \times r_{23})/r_{13}$$

Where r_{12} is the correlation of the outcome measured at time 1 with the same outcome measured at time 2; r_{23} is the correlation of the outcome measured at time 2 with the outcome measured at time 3; and r_{13} is the correlation of the outcome measured at time 1 with the outcome measured at time 3.

The above formula factors out real change (which is more likely to occur from time period 1-3 than from time periods 1-2 or 2-3) from random changes in business-unit results caused by measurement error, data collection errors, sampling errors (primarily in customer measures), and uncontrollable fluctuations in outcome measures. Some estimates were available for quarterly data, some for semiannual data, and others for annual data. The average time period in artifact distributions used for this meta-analysis was equal to the average time period across studies for each criterion type. See Appendix A for a listing of the reliabilities used in the corrections for measurement error. Artifact distributions for reliability were collected for customer measures, profitability, productivity, turnover, and safety. But they were not collected for absenteeism and shrinkage, because they were not available at the time of this study. Therefore, the assumed reliability for absenteeism and shrinkage was 1.00, resulting in downwardly biased true validity estimates (the estimates of validity reported here are lower than reality). Artifact distributions for the last two variables will be added to upcoming reports as they become available.

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It could be argued that, because the independent variable (employee engagement as measured by $Q^{12\circledR}$) is used in practice to predict outcomes, the practitioner must live with the reliability of the instrument he or she is using. However, correcting for measurement error in the independent variable answers the theoretical question of how the actual constructs (true scores) relate to each other. Therefore, we present analyses both before and after correcting for independent variable reliability. Appendix B presents the distributions of reliabilities for the GrandMean of $Q^{12\circledR}$. These values were computed in the same manner as were those for the business-unit outcomes.

In correcting for range variation and range restriction, there are fundamental, theoretical questions that need to be considered relating to whether such correction is necessary. In personnel selection, validities are routinely corrected for range restriction because, in selecting applicants for jobs, those scoring highest on the predictor are typically selected. This results in explicit range restriction that biases observed correlations downward (i.e., attenuation). In the employee satisfaction and engagement arena, one could argue that there is no explicit range restriction because we are studying results as they exist in the workplace. Work units are not selected based on scores on the predictor ($Q^{12\circledR}$ scores). However, in studying companies, we have observed that there is variation across companies in standard deviations of indices. One hypothesis for why this variation occurs is that companies vary in how they encourage employee satisfaction and engagement initiatives and in how they have or have not developed a common set of values and a common culture. Therefore, the standard deviation of the population of business units across organizations studied will be greater than the standard deviation within the typical company. This variation in standard deviations across companies can be thought of as indirect range restriction (as opposed to direct range restriction). Improved indirect range-restriction corrections have been incorporated into this meta-analysis (Hunter, Schmidt, & Le, in press).

Since the development of the $Q^{12\circledR}$, Gallup has collected descriptive data on more than 7 million respondents, 600,000 business units or workgroups, and 500 companies. This accumulation of data indicates that the standard deviation within a given company is approximately three-fourths the standard deviation in the population of all business units. In addition, the ratio of standard deviation for a given company relative to the population value varies from company to company. Therefore, if one goal is to estimate the effect size in the population of all business units (arguably a theoretically important issue), then correction should be made based on such available data. In the observed data, correlations are attenuated for companies with less variability across business units than the population average, and vice versa. As such, variability in standard deviations across companies will create variability in observed correlations and is therefore an artifact that can be corrected for in interpreting the generalizability of validities. Appendices in Harter and Schmidt (2000) provided artifact distributions for range-restriction/variation corrections used for meta-analysis. These artifact distributions have since been updated substantially. Due to the increased size of these tables, they are not included in this report. They resemble those reported in the earlier study, but with a larger number of entries. The following excerpt provides an overview of meta-analysis conducted using artifact distributions:

In any given meta-analysis, there may be several artifacts for which artifact information is only sporadically available. For example, suppose measurement error and range restriction are the only relevant artifacts beyond sampling error. In such a case, the typical artifact distribution-based meta-analysis is conducted in three stages:

- First, information is compiled on four distributions: the distribution of the observed correlations, the distribution of the reliability of the independent variable, the distribution of the reliability of the dependent variable, and the distribution of the range departure. There are then four means and four variances compiled from the set of studies, with each study providing whatever information it contains.
- Second, the distribution of observed correlations is corrected for sampling error.
- Third, the distribution corrected for sampling error is then corrected for error of measurement and range variation (Hunter & Schmidt, 1990, pp. 158-159).

In this study, statistics are calculated and reported at each level of analysis, starting with the observed correlations and then correcting for sampling error, measurement error, and, finally, range variation. Both within-company range-variation corrections (to correct validity generalization estimates) and between-company range-restriction corrections (to correct for differences in variation across companies) were made. Between-company range-restriction corrections are relevant in understanding how engagement relates to performance across the business units of all companies. As alluded to, we have applied the indirect range-restriction correction procedure to this meta-analysis (Hunter et al., in press).

The meta-analysis includes an estimate of the mean sample-size-weighted validity and the variance across the correlations — again weighting each validity by its sample size. The amount of variance predicted for weighted correlations on the basis of sampling error was also computed. The following is the formula to calculate variance expected from sampling error in "bare bones" meta-analyses, using the Hunter et al. (in press) technique referred to on the previous page:

$$S_e^2 = (1 - \bar{r}^2)^2 / (\bar{N} - 1)$$

Residual standard deviations were calculated by subtracting the amount of variance due to sampling error, the amount of variance due to study differences in measurement error in the dependent variable, and the amount of variance due to study differences in range variation from the observed variance. To estimate the true validity standard deviations, the residual standard deviation was adjusted for bias due to mean unreliability and mean range restriction. The amount of variance due to sampling error, measurement error, and range variation was divided by the observed variance to calculate the total percentage variance accounted for. One rule of thumb adopted from the literature is that, if over 75%

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of variance in validities across studies is due to sampling error and other artifacts, the validity is assumed generalizable.

As in Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) and Harter et al. (2003), we calculated the correlation of engagement to composite performance. This calculation assumes managers are managing toward multiple outcomes simultaneously and that each outcome occupies some space in the overall evaluation of performance. To calculate the correlation to the composite index of performance, we used the Mosier (1943) formula to determine the reliability of the composite measure (as described in Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002), with updated reliability distributions and updated intercorrelations of the outcome measures. In addition, given the increase in number of outcomes studied, we included absenteeism and shrinkage as outcomes in the composite performance definition. The reliability of the composite metric is .89. Composite performance was measured as the equally weighted sum of customer loyalty, turnover (reverse scored as retention), safety (accidents reverse scored), absenteeism (reverse scored), shrinkage (reverse scored), and financials (with profitability and productivity equally weighted). We also calculated composite performance as the equally weighted sum of the most direct outcomes of engagement — customer loyalty, turnover (reverse scored as retention), and safety (accidents reverse scored), absenteeism (reverse scored), and shrinkage (reverse scored). The reliability of this composite variable is .87.

In our research, we used the Schmidt and Le (2004) meta-analysis package (the artifact distribution meta-analysis program with correction for indirect range restriction). The program package is described in Hunter and Schmidt (2004).

Results

The focus of analyses for this report is on the relationship between overall employee engagement (defined by an equally weighted GrandMean of $Q^{12\circledR}$) and a variety of outcomes. Table 3 provides meta-analytic and validity generalization statistics for the relationship between employee engagement and business performance for each of the seven outcomes studied.

Mean observed correlations and standard deviations are followed by two forms of true validity estimation. The first corrects for range variation within companies and dependent-variable measurement error. This range-restriction correction places all companies on the same basis in terms of variability of employee engagement across business units. These results can be viewed as estimating the relationships across business units within the average company. The second corrects for range restriction across the population of business units and dependent-variable measurement error. Estimates that include the latter range-restriction correction apply to interpretations of effects in business units across companies, as opposed to effects expected within a given company. Because there is more variation in business units across companies than there is within the average company, effect sizes are higher when true validity estimates are calculated for business units across companies.

For instance, observe the estimates relative to the customer loyalty criteria. Without the between-company range-restriction correction (which is relevant to the effect within the typical company), the true validity value of employee engagement is .22 with a 90% CV of .22. With the between-company range-restriction correction (which is relevant to business units across companies), the true validity value of employee engagement is .33 with a 90% CV of .32. As in prior studies, findings here show high generalizability across companies in the relationship between employee engagement and customer loyalty metrics, profitability, productivity, employee turnover, and safety outcomes. Most of the variability in correlations across companies was due to sampling error in individual studies, and for each of these five outcomes, all of the variability in correlations across companies can be attributed to artifacts (sampling error, range variation, and measurement error). In other words, the true validity is essentially the same for each company studied. For the two new outcomes (absenteeism and shrinkage), results indicate high generalizability across the three companies with shrinkage data, and substantial generalizability for absenteeism. However, not all of the variance in correlations of employee engagement and absenteeism is explained by artifacts. It is possible that this is due to a lack of reliability estimates for this outcome. Once reliability estimates become available and as more studies are added to the meta-analysis, future research may shed light on this. Regardless, 76% of the variability in the correlations across the six companies is explained by the artifacts we were able to account for — substantial evidence of generalizability (Schmidt & Hunter, 1977).

Table 3—Meta-Analysis of Relationship Between Employee Engagement and Business-Unit Performance

| | Customer | Profitability | Productivity | Turnover | Safety Incidents | Absenteeism | Shrinkage |
|--|----------|---------------|--------------|----------|------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of Bus. Units | 8,541 | 14,044 | 15,152 | 15,871 | 2,811 | 598 | 806 |
| Number of r's | 54 | 63 | 83 | 54 | 27 | 6 | 3 |
| Mean Observed r | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0.15 | -0.12 | -0.15 | -0.21 | -0.24 |
| Observed SD | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.12 | 0.15 | 0.03 |
| True Validity ¹ | 0.22 | 0.12 | 0.16 | -0.18 | -0.18 | -0.21 | -0.25 |
| True Validity SD ¹ | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.00 |
| True Validity ² | 0.33 | 0.19 | 0.24 | -0.28 | -0.28 | -0.32 | -0.37 |
| True Validity SD ² | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.00 |
| % Variance Acct'd for — sampling error | 70 | 67 | 62 | 91 | 71 | 42 | 365 |
| % Variance Acct'd for ¹ | 131 | 104 | 109 | 191 | 103 | 75 | 1402 |
| % Variance Acct'd for ² | 132 | 105 | 109 | 193 | 104 | 76 | 1426 |
| 90% CV ¹ | 0.22 | 0.12 | 0.16 | -0.18 | -0.18 | -0.12 | -0.25 |
| 90% CV ² | 0.32 | 0.19 | 0.24 | -0.28 | -0.28 | -0.19 | -0.37 |

SD = Standard Deviation

¹ Includes correction for range variation within companies and dependent-variable measurement error

² Includes correction for range restriction across population of business units and dependent-variable measurement error

In summary, for the overall measures of engagement shown in Table 3, the strongest effects were found relative to outcomes that are likely to be more direct outcomes of employee engagement (customer loyalty metrics, employee turnover, safety, absenteeism, and shrinkage). Correlations were positive and generalizable relative to profitability and productivity (often defined as sales) criteria, but of slightly lower magnitude. This may be because profitability and other financial variables are influenced indirectly by employee engagement and more directly by the customer, employee turnover, safety, absenteeism, and shrinkage. The next section will explore the practical utility of the observed relationships.

As in Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002), we calculated the correlation of employee engagement to composite performance. As defined earlier, Table 4 provides the correlations and d-values for four analyses: the observed correlations, correction for dependent-variable measurement error, correction for dependent-variable measurement error and range restriction across companies, and correction for dependent-variable measurement error, range restriction, and independent-variable measurement error (true score correlation).

As with previous meta-analyses, the effect sizes presented in Table 4 indicate substantial relationships between engagement and composite performance.

Business units in the top half on engagement within companies have .58 standard deviation units' higher composite performance in comparison to those in the bottom half on engagement.

Across companies, business units in the top half on engagement have .77 standard deviation units' higher composite performance in comparison to those in the bottom half on engagement.

After correcting for all available study artifacts (examining the true score relationship), business units in the top half on employee engagement have .85 standard deviation units' higher composite performance in comparison to those in the bottom half on engagement. This is the true score effect expected over time, across all business units.

Table 4 — Correlation of Employee Engagement to Composite Business-Unit Performance — All Outcomes

| Analysis | Correlation of Engagement to Performance |
|--|---|
| Observed r | 0.33 |
| d | 0.55 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error | 0.35 |
| d | 0.58 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error and range restriction across companies | 0.45 |
| d | 0.77 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error, range restriction across companies, and independent-variable measurement error | 0.49 |
| d | 0.85 |

As alluded to, some outcomes are the direct consequence of employee engagement (i.e., employee turnover, customer loyalty, safety, absenteeism, and shrinkage), and other outcomes are a more downstream result of intermediary outcomes (i.e., sales and profit). For this reason, we have also calculated the composite correlation to short-term outcomes. Table 5 again indicates a substantial relationship between engagement and composite performance. Observed correlations and d-values are of approximately the same magnitude as those reported in Table 4, but slightly lower (most likely because the direct outcomes do not occupy all of the performance criterion space).

Business units in the top half on engagement within companies have .55 standard deviation units' higher performance on direct outcomes in comparison to those in the bottom half. Across companies, the difference is .71 standard deviation units. After correcting for all available artifacts, the difference is .81 standard deviation units.

**Table 5 — Correlation of Employee Engagement to Composite Business-Unit Performance — Direct Outcomes
(Customer, Turnover, Safety, Absenteeism, Shrinkage)**

| Analysis | Correlation of Engagement to Performance |
|--|---|
| Observed r | 0.31 |
| d | 0.51 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error | 0.33 |
| d | 0.55 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error and range restriction across companies | 0.42 |
| d | 0.71 |
| r corrected for dependent-variable measurement error, range restriction across companies, and independent-variable measurement error | 0.47 |
| d | 0.81 |

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Utility Analysis: Practicality of the Effects

Utility Analysis

In the past, studies of job satisfaction's relationship to performance have had limited analysis of the utility of the reported relationships. Correlations have often been discounted as trivial without an effort to understand the potential utility, in practice, of the relationships. The Q^{12®} includes items Gallup researchers have found to be influenceable by the local manager. As such, understanding the practical utility of potential changes is critical.

The research literature includes a great deal of evidence that numerically small or moderate effects often translate into large practical effects (Abelson, 1985; Carver, 1975; Lipsey, 1990; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1982; Sechrest & Yeaton, 1982). As shown in Table 6, this is, in fact, the case here. Effect sizes referenced in this study are consistent with or above other practical effect sizes referenced in other reviews (Lipsey & Wilson, 1993). A more intuitive method of displaying the practical value of an effect is that of binomial effect size displays, or BESDs (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1982; Grissom, 1994). BESDs typically depict the success rate of a treatment versus a control group as a percentage above the median on the outcome variable of interest.

BESDs can be applied to results of this study. Table 6 provides the percentage of business units above the median on the outcomes of interest for high- and low-scoring business units on the employee engagement (Q^{12®}) composite measure. True validity estimates (correcting for measurement error only in the dependent variable) were used for analysis of business units **both** within companies and across companies.

One can see from Table 6 that there are meaningful differences between the top and bottom halves; again, the top half is defined as the average of business units scoring in the highest 50% on the Q^{12®}, and business units scoring in the bottom half comprise the lowest 50%. It is clear from Table 6 that management would learn a great deal more about success if it studied what was going on within top-half business units rather than bottom-half units. Within companies, business units in the top half on employee engagement had, on average, a 56% higher success rate on customer loyalty metrics [i.e., $(61\% - 39\%) \div 39\% = 56.4\%$], a 44% higher success rate on turnover (lower probability of turnover), a 38% higher success rate on productivity outcomes, and a 27% higher success rate on profitability. For the safety variable, business units in the top half on employee engagement had, on average, a 44% higher success rate (lower probability of injuries or lost workdays). For absenteeism, business units in the top half on employee engagement had, on average, a 56% higher success rate (lower probability of high absenteeism). For shrinkage, business units in the top half on employee engagement had,

on average, a 70% higher success rate (lower probability of high shrinkage). For business units across companies, those in the top half on employee engagement had, on average, a 103% higher success rate on customer metrics, a 78% higher success rate on turnover (lower probability of turnover), a 63% higher success rate on productivity outcomes, a 50% higher success rate on profitability outcomes, a 78% higher success rate on safety (lower probability of injuries or lost workdays), a 94% higher success rate on absenteeism (lower probability of high absenteeism), and a 123% higher success rate on shrinkage (lower probability of high shrinkage).

With regard to composite business-unit performance, business units in the top half on employee engagement have a 113% higher success rate within their own company, and a 170% higher success rate across business units in all companies studied. In other words, business units high in employee engagement more than double their odds of above-average composite performance within their own companies, and nearly triple their chances for above-average success across business units in all companies.

Table 6 — BESDs for Employee Engagement and Outcomes

| Employee Engagement GrandMean | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Business Units Within Companies | | Business Units Across Companies | |
| | % Above Median on Customer Metrics | | % Above Median on Customer Metrics |
| Top Half | 61 | Top Half | 67 |
| Bottom Half | 39 | Bottom Half | 33 |
| Top Half | % Above Median on Profitability Metrics | Top Half | % Above Median on Profitability Metrics |
| Bottom Half | 56 | Bottom Half | 60 |
| Top Half | 44 | Bottom Half | 40 |
| Bottom Half | | | |
| Top Half | % Above Median on Productivity Metrics | Top Half | % Above Median on Productivity Metrics |
| Bottom Half | 58 | Bottom Half | 62 |
| Top Half | 42 | Bottom Half | 38 |
| Bottom Half | | | |
| Top Half | % Below Median on Turnover Metrics | Top Half | % Below Median on Turnover Metrics |
| Bottom Half | 59 | Bottom Half | 64 |
| Top Half | 41 | Bottom Half | 36 |
| Bottom Half | | | |
| Top Half | % Below Median on Safety Incidents | Top Half | % Below Median on Safety Incidents |
| Bottom Half | 59 | Bottom Half | 64 |
| Top Half | 41 | Bottom Half | 36 |
| Bottom Half | | | |
| — continued — | | | |

Table 6 — BESDs for Employee Engagement and Outcomes (cont.)

| Employee Engagement GrandMean | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Business Units Within Companies | | Business Units Across Companies | |
| | % Below Median on Absenteeism | | % Below Median on Absenteeism |
| Top Half | 61 | Top Half | 66 |
| Bottom Half | 39 | Bottom Half | 34 |
| Top Half | % Below Median on Shrinkage | Top Half | % Below Median on Shrinkage |
| Bottom Half | 63 | Bottom Half | 69 |
| Top Half | 37 | Bottom Half | 31 |
| Bottom Half | % Above Median on Composite Performance (Total) | | % Above Median on Composite Performance (Total) |
| Top Half | 68 | Top Half | 73 |
| Bottom Half | 32 | Bottom Half | 27 |
| Top Half | % Above Median on Composite Performance (Direct Outcomes) | Top Half | % Above Median on Composite Performance (Direct Outcomes) |
| Bottom Half | 67 | Bottom Half | 71 |
| Bottom Half | 33 | | 29 |
| | | | |

To illustrate this further, Table 7 was prepared to show the probability of above-average performance for various levels of employee engagement. Business units at the highest levels of employee engagement across all business units in Gallup's database have an 83% chance of having high (above average) composite performance. This compares to a 15% chance for those with the lowest levels of employee engagement. So it is possible to achieve high performance without high employee engagement, but the odds are substantially lower (in fact, more than five times lower).

Table 7 — Percentage of Business Units Above the Median of all Business Units on Composite Performance (Customer, Profit, Productivity, Turnover, Safety, Absenteeism, and Shrinkage) for Different Employee Engagement Percentiles

| Employee Engagement Percentile | Percent Above Median of All Business Units |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 99th | 83% |
| 95th | 76% |
| 90th | 71% |
| 80th | 65% |
| 70th | 59% |
| 60th | 55% |
| 50th | 50% |
| 40th | 45% |
| 30th | 41% |
| 20th | 35% |
| 10th | 27% |
| 5th | 21% |
| 1st | 15% |

Other forms of expressing the practical meaning behind the effects from this study include utility analysis methods (Schmidt & Rauschenberger, 1986). Formulas have been derived for estimating the dollar-value increases in output as a result of improved employee selection. These formulas can be used in estimating the difference in performance outcomes at different levels in the distribution of Q^{12®} scores. Previous studies (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter & Schmidt, 2000) provided utility analysis examples, comparing differences in outcomes between the top and bottom quartiles on the Q^{12®}. For companies included in this meta-analysis, it is typical to see differences between top and bottom engagement quartiles of 2-4 points on customer loyalty, 1-4 points on profitability, hundreds of thousands of dollars on productivity figures per month, and 4-10 points in turnover for low-turnover companies and 15-50 points for high-turnover companies.

Gallup researchers recently conducted utility analysis across multiple organizations with similar outcome metric types (an update of analyses presented in Harter, Schmidt, &

Hayes, 2002, p. 275, Table 6). Comparing top- to bottom-quartile engagement business units resulted in median percentage differences of:

- 31% in turnover for high-turnover companies (those with 60% or higher annualized turnover)
- 51% in turnover for low-turnover companies (those with 40% or lower annualized turnover)
- 12% in customer loyalty/engagement
- 62% in safety incidents
- 51% in shrinkage
- 18% in productivity
- 12% in profitability

Gallup studies conducted at the individual level (rather than the business-unit level) indicate engaged employees have 27% less absenteeism in comparison to disengaged employees.

The above differences and their utility in dollar terms should be calculated for each company, given the company's unique metrics, situation, and distribution of outcomes across business units.

One can see that the above relationships are nontrivial if the business has many business units. The point of the utility analysis, consistent with the literature that has taken a serious look at utility, is that the relationship between employee engagement and business outcomes, even conservatively expressed, is meaningful from a practical perspective.

Q^{12®} Meta-Analysis

Discussion

Discussion

Findings reported in this updated meta-analysis provide cross-validation to prior meta-analyses conducted on the Q¹² instrument. The present study expands the size of the meta-analytic database by 10,159 business or work units (an increase of 74%), as well as the number of countries, industries, operating unit types, and outcomes studied. The relationship between engagement and performance at the business-unit level is substantial and highly generalizable across companies. Differences in correlations across companies can be attributed to study artifacts. These findings are important, because they mean generalizable tools can be developed and used across very different organizations, with a high level of confidence that they elicit important performance-related information. The data from the present study provide further substantiation to the theory that doing what is best for employees does not have to contradict what is best for the business.

While the present meta-analysis further substantiates the relationship between employee engagement and performance, additional studies are ongoing that look at issues of causality in more detail. As indicated earlier, Gallup's growing database provides opportunity to design studies that explore causality from many angles. While numerous qualitative analyses are conducted to understand what managers do that effects change in engagement and performance, quantitative studies are also being developed and completed. Such studies, ideally, include elements of meta-analysis (multiple studies), longitudinal analysis (to take into account the nature of time in causality), and path analysis (to take into account the influence of multiple variables). One such study was recently completed, across 2,178 business-units in 10 companies (Harter et al., 2005), testing competing causal models and finding strong evidence for engagement as a leading indicator (as opposed to a trailing result) of business outcomes. However, it is likely that there is some reciprocal relationship between business outcomes and employee engagement. We would expect that in most healthy business units, a reciprocal relationship would exist, in which engagement fuels better business and better business fuels ownership and engagement (involvement and enthusiasm).

The most convincing causal evidence comes, not from one study, but from a body of research and a multitude of types of evidence, including qualitative analysis of high-performing business units, path analysis, predictive studies, and studies of change over time. Such individual studies are a part of Gallup's past and ongoing workplace management research practice.

It is also worth noting that, as Gallup consultants have educated managers and partnered with companies on change initiatives, companies have experienced (between the first and

second year), on average, one-half standard deviation growth on employee engagement, and often a full standard deviation growth and more after three or more years. A very important element in the utility of any applied instrument and improvement process is the extent to which the variable under study can be changed. Our current evidence is that employee engagement is changeable, and varies widely by business unit or workgroup. In addition, work has been done showing that, at the individual level, employee satisfaction is at least somewhat trait related (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal, & Abraham, 1989; Bouchard, 1997). In the present analysis, for business units, we have averaged the independent variable across individuals, which makes our measure more indicative of business-unit performance-related culture than of individual employee satisfaction. In averaging across individuals, we average out trait-related variations, producing a score that reflects the culture of the business unit.

Future research should focus on how employee engagement interacts with other variables to influence outcomes of interest (such as employee talents, customer engagement, length of service, diversity of teams, training, incentive pay, and other change initiatives). The authors conclude from this study, as with prior Gallup studies, that employee engagement, as measured by the Q^{12®} items, relates to meaningful business outcomes, and that these relationships can be generalized across companies. The relationships observed are in the directions hypothesized and make psychological sense. Inferences of causality will depend on various pieces of evidence (outlined above) that are collected on an ongoing basis by scientists. In addition, future research published in academic journals may help to shed additional light on the question of causality. Clearly, there are differences across business units in the way employees perceive their work environments, and these differences relate to differences in performance. Such differences represent substantial utility to businesses and other organizations.

Q^{12®} Meta-Analysis

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Appendix A

Reliabilities of Business-Unit Outcomes (based on Schmidt & Hunter, 1996, Scenario 23, p. 219)

| Customer | | Profitability | | Productivity | | Turnover | | Safety | |
|-----------------|-------|----------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| Reliab. | Freq. | Reliab. | Freq. | Reliab. | Freq. | Reliab. | Freq. | Reliab. | Freq. |
| 0.89 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0.63 | 1 |
| 0.87 | 1 | 0.99 | 2 | 0.99 | 2 | 0.62 | 1 | 0.82 | 1 |
| 0.84 | 1 | 0.93 | 1 | 0.92 | 2 | 0.6 | 1 | 0.66 | 1 |
| 0.75 | 1 | 0.91 | 1 | 0.9 | 1 | 0.39 | 1 | 0.84 | 1 |
| 0.58 | 1 | 0.9 | 1 | 0.62 | 1 | 0.27 | 1 | | |
| 0.52 | 1 | 0.89 | 2 | 0.57 | 1 | 0.24 | 1 | | |
| 0.46 | 1 | 0.79 | 1 | | | 0.25 | 1 | | |
| 0.33 | 1 | 0.57 | 1 | | | 0.63 | 1 | | |
| 0.51 | 1 | 0.56 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 0.53 | 1 | 0.94 | 1 | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |

Appendix B

Test-Retest Reliabilities of Employee Engagement (based on Schmidt & Hunter, 1996, Scenario 23, p. 219)

| Engagement | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Reliability | Frequency |
| 0.92 | 1 |
| 0.86 | 1 |
| 0.83 | 1 |
| 0.80 | 1 |
| 0.79 | 1 |
| 0.78 | 1 |
| 0.77 | 1 |
| 0.66 | 1 |
| 0.82 | 1 |
| 0.97 | 1 |
| 0.65 | 1 |
| 0.45 | 1 |
| 0.75 | 1 |

Appendix B: HSSSE 2004 Overview

High School Survey of Student Engagement

HSSSE 2004 Overview

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Introduction

Improving teaching and learning at all levels is a national priority. Student engagement—time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities—has been linked to many positive academic, personal, and social outcomes for students.

Current federal and state policies emphasize the use of test results to evaluate students and schools. Yet, performance tests do not typically identify the specific educational processes that lead to the outcomes the tests measure. The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) is designed to address this problem by providing useful data about student behavior and attitudes and the school environment. HSSSE (pronounced hessie) results can be used almost immediately to help schools in identifying where to focus attention and resources to enhance student learning and school effectiveness.

Building on the success of the National Survey of Student Engagement for college students, HSSSE was pilot tested with more than 7,200 students from four high schools in the spring of 2003. The instrument was then revised, reviewed by practitioners and academics, administered with several student focus groups, and revised again.

In April 2004, HSSSE was completed voluntarily by 90,530 students, representing 70% of all students enrolled in the 103 participating high schools. The HSSSE respondents closely resemble the national profile of high school students based on U.S. Department of Education statistics.

This overview highlights some of the interesting findings from the 2004 administration. Subsequent reports will provide additional analyses and explore implications of the HSSSE data in more detail.

Profile of HSSSE 2004 Respondents

The students who participated in HSSSE 2004 were from 26 states. Table 1 depicts the percentage of respondents from various types of school districts, using the Census Bureau categories. HSSSE schools ranged in size from 64 to 3939 students. The average high school size was 1261 students. Selected respondent characteristics are highlighted on the following page.



| | | <u>Gender and Race</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|----|---------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|-------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|------------------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|-------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|--------------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|-------------------|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| | | <u>Grade Level</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | <u>Instructional Track</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | <p>Table 1 HSSSE 2004 Respondents¹</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Location</th> <th>Percent of Respondents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Large city (>250,000 pop.)</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mid-size city (<250,000 pop.)</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Urban fringe, large city</td> <td>38%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Urban fringe, mid-size city</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Large town (>25,000 pop.)</td> <td>1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Small town (<25,000 pop.)</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rural</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | | | | | Location | Percent of Respondents | Large city (>250,000 pop.) | 18% | Mid-size city (<250,000 pop.) | 18% | Urban fringe, large city | 38% | Urban fringe, mid-size city | 6% | Large town (>25,000 pop.) | 1% | Small town (<25,000 pop.) | 6% | Rural | 14% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Location | Percent of Respondents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Large city (>250,000 pop.) | 18% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mid-size city (<250,000 pop.) | 18% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban fringe, large city | 38% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban fringe, mid-size city | 6% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Large town (>25,000 pop.) | 1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Small town (<25,000 pop.) | 6% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rural | 14% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | <p>Figure 1: Respondents by Race/Ethnicity</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Race/Ethnicity</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>67%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>African American</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Multi-Racial</td> <td>7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>American Indian</td> <td>1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | | | | | Race/Ethnicity | Percentage | White | 67% | African American | 13% | Hispanic | 8% | Asian | 4% | Multi-Racial | 7% | American Indian | 1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Race/Ethnicity | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| White | 67% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| African American | 13% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hispanic | 8% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Asian | 4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Multi-Racial | 7% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| American Indian | 1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Females were more likely than males to indicate that their courses were primarily honors or college prep. | | <p>The HSSSE 2004 respondents reflected the expected grade distribution, given attrition between 9th and 12th grades; 29% were in the 9th grade, 28% in the 10th grade, 24% in the 11th grade, and 19% in the 12th grade.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | <p>Students were asked to identify the category or instructional track for most of their courses. Females (30%) were more likely than males (23%) to indicate that their courses were primarily honors or college prep. Table 2 depicts responses by race.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | <p>Table 2: Instructional Track of Respondents by Race/Ethnicity</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Regular/ General</th> <th>Special Education</th> <th>Courses for College Credit</th> <th>Honors/ College Prep</th> <th>Career/ Vocational</th> <th>Don't Know</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Hispanic</td> <td>63%</td> <td>4%</td> <td>4%</td> <td>15%</td> <td>2%</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>American Indian</td> <td>59%</td> <td>9%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>13%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>44%</td> <td>2%</td> <td>7%</td> <td>38%</td> <td>1%</td> <td>7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>African American</td> <td>64%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>17%</td> <td>4%</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>58%</td> <td>2%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>29%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Multi-racial</td> <td>58%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>4%</td> <td>23%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total Respondents</td> <td>58%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>4%</td> <td>26%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | | | | | | Regular/ General | Special Education | Courses for College Credit | Honors/ College Prep | Career/ Vocational | Don't Know | Hispanic | 63% | 4% | 4% | 15% | 2% | 13% | American Indian | 59% | 9% | 3% | 13% | 3% | 14% | Asian | 44% | 2% | 7% | 38% | 1% | 7% | African American | 64% | 3% | 3% | 17% | 4% | 8% | White | 58% | 2% | 3% | 29% | 3% | 6% | Multi-racial | 58% | 3% | 4% | 23% | 3% | 9% | Total Respondents | 58% | 3% | 4% | 26% | 3% | 7% |
| | Regular/ General | Special Education | Courses for College Credit | Honors/ College Prep | Career/ Vocational | Don't Know | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hispanic | 63% | 4% | 4% | 15% | 2% | 13% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| American Indian | 59% | 9% | 3% | 13% | 3% | 14% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Asian | 44% | 2% | 7% | 38% | 1% | 7% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| African American | 64% | 3% | 3% | 17% | 4% | 8% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| White | 58% | 2% | 3% | 29% | 3% | 6% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Multi-racial | 58% | 3% | 4% | 23% | 3% | 9% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total Respondents | 58% | 3% | 4% | 26% | 3% | 7% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

¹ Percentages may add to more or less than 100 because they are rounded to the nearest whole number in all figures and tables.

² Respondents who marked "Other" made up 0.2% of HSSSE respondents and are not included in Figure 1. Throughout the overview, racial/ethnic categories have been shortened to one term: Hispanic for Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; American Indian for American Indian/Native American; Asian for Asian/Pacific Islander; African American for African American/Black; White for White/Caucasian; and Multiracial for Multiracial/Multiethnic.

Course Grades

Almost three fourths of the students reported that their grades in high school thus far were primarily As (29%) or Bs (42%), while 24% reported mostly Cs. Only 4% reported that they have received mainly Ds or lower, and 3% said they did not know.

- Students reporting that most of their courses were honors or college prep (53%) were far more likely than students in the career/vocational track (17%) to say that they received primarily A grades.
- Females (32%) were more likely than males (24%) to report that they received mostly As.

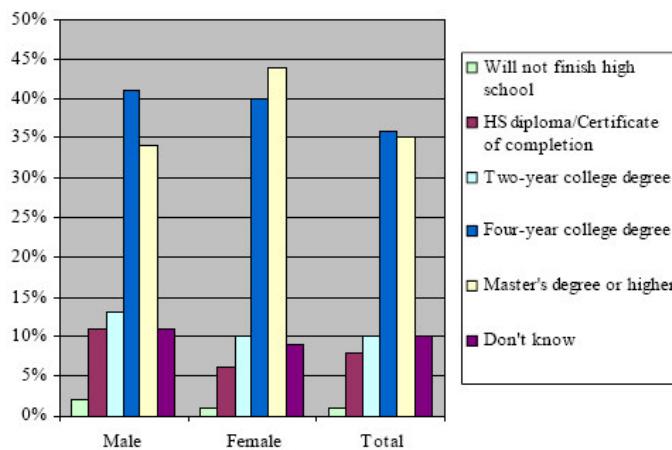
Postsecondary Aspirations

Less than 2% of the respondents said they would not complete high school, and more than four fifths of the respondents (81%) indicated that they would enroll in some form of postsecondary education after high school. One tenth said they did not know what their highest level of education would be.

- One tenth reported that their highest degree would be a two-year associate degree, 36% expected to complete four years of college, and 35% aspired to a master's degree or higher.
- Female respondents were more likely to aspire to post-graduate degrees than were males (see Figure 2).

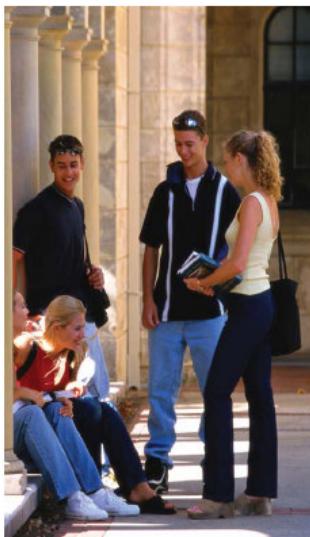


Figure 2: Educational Aspirations of Respondents by Gender



More than four fifths of the respondents reported that they would enroll in some form of postsecondary education after high school.

More than one third of the respondents were not involved in any school-sponsored activities.

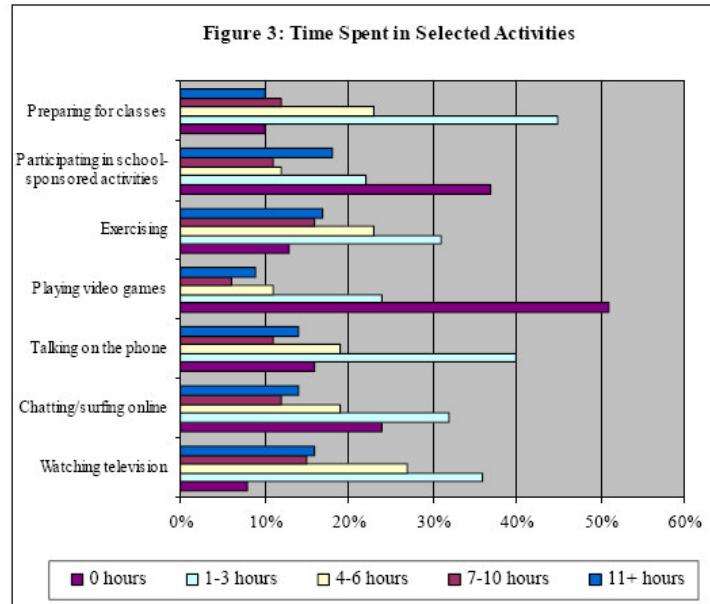


Selected Results

This section highlights selected results pertaining to the nature and frequency of student engagement in various activities and student attitudes toward their learning experiences.

Time Spent in Various Activities

Respondents were asked how much time they devoted to selected activities in a typical week. Some of these activities are depicted in Figure 3.



At least 30% of all respondents spent at least seven hours a week in the following activities: exercising, watching television, and socializing with friends.

- Females (32%) were far more likely than males (19%) to spend more than seven hours a week talking on the phone.
- Males were more likely than females to spend more than seven hours a week exercising (40% compared to 28%), playing video games (25% to 5%), and watching television (37% to 25%).

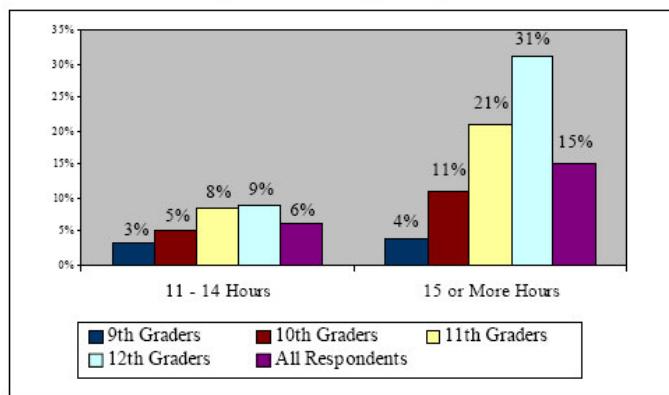
School-Sponsored Activities. More than one third (37%) of the respondents were not involved in school athletics, clubs, student government, publications, or other school-sponsored activities. However, more than one quarter (29%) devoted at least seven hours in a typical week to such activities.

Students differed in their involvement in school-related activities depending on their instructional track.

- More than two fifths (43%) of the regular education students and almost half (48%) of the special education and career/vocational education students reported that they spent no time in such activities.
- In contrast, only 21% of the students taking mostly honors courses reported no involvement in school-related activities.

Working for Pay. Work habits of the respondents varied by grade level (see Figure 4). For example, 7% of the 9th graders compared to 40% of the 12th graders spent more than 10 hours a week working for pay.

Figure 4: Working for Pay



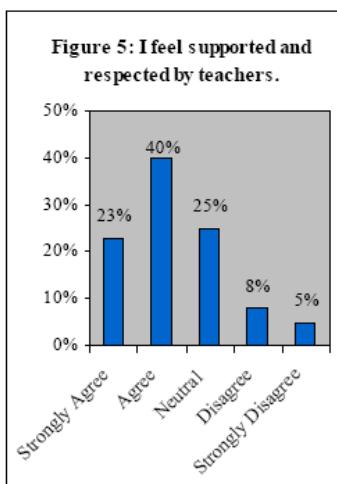
Preparing for Class. Overall, the amount of time students spent preparing for class was disappointing. The majority of the respondents (55%) devoted three hours or less per week to homework, reading, rehearsing, etc.

- Females (52%) were more likely than males (37%) to spend more than three hours per week preparing for class.
- Four fifths (80%) of the respondents indicated that they frequently (often or very often) came to class with readings or assignments completed, but less than half (46%) reported that they came prepared *very often*.
- A larger percentage of students (29%) spent four or more hours in personal reading online than devoted that much time to assigned readings for their classes (24%).



The majority of respondents spent three hours or less preparing for class each week.

Two thirds of the students said that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well.



Teacher/Student Contact

Teacher/student communication offers insights into the student experience.

- Almost half (48%) of the students had not discussed ideas from their readings or classes with a teacher outside of class during the school year.
- Three fifths (60%) had not communicated with a teacher by email.
- More than half of the respondents (56%) indicated that they never (10%) or only sometimes (46%) received prompt feedback from teachers on assignments or coursework.
- However, 52% of the respondents said they had frequently (often or very often) discussed grades or assignments with a teacher.
- Also, about 7 out of 10 respondents (71%) said they had many opportunities to ask teachers questions about their work.

Students were asked whether adults at their school supported and cared for them.

- Two thirds (66%) of the students said that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well.
- More than three fifths of the respondents (63%) said that they were supported and respected by teachers (see Figure 5).
- Respondents who *strongly agreed* (23%) that they were supported and respected by teachers differed in many respects from the students who *strongly disagreed* (5%). Those perceiving support were far more likely to agree that:

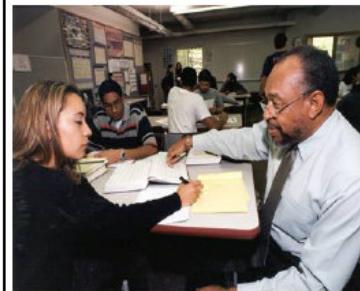
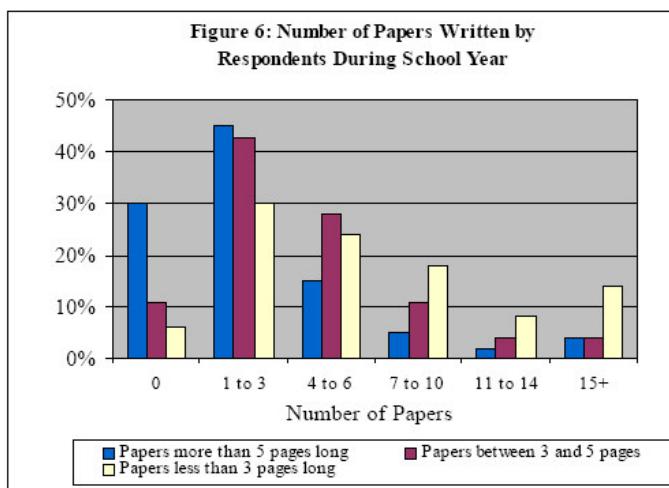
- ◆ they fit in at their school (78% compared to 37%),
- ◆ what they learn at school is useful (77% to 22%), and
- ◆ they worked harder than they expected to work in school (61% to 25%).

Class Assignments and Discussions

Students were asked about the number and nature of classroom interactions and assignments.

- Almost two thirds (63%) of the students (69% of females and 59% of males) indicated that they had frequently worked on a paper or project using information from several sources (e.g., books, interviews, Internet, etc.).
- More than two thirds (71%) of the respondents said that they frequently worked with other students on projects/assignments during class.

- About 6 out of 10 respondents (61%) indicated that they frequently asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions. About one fourth (26%) indicated that they did so *very often*.
- Three out of 10 respondents reported that they had not written any papers five pages or longer during the current school year (36% for 9th graders to 22% for 12th graders; see Figure 6).
- Respondents tended to write more short papers; about two fifths (40%) had written at least 7 papers less than three pages during the current school year.



Discussing Projects and Ideas Outside Class

Students also responded to questions about how classroom activities have nurtured conversations and collaboration with others.

- Only one fourth (25%) of the respondents frequently (often or very often) worked with other students on projects or assignments outside of class.
- A larger percentage of African American (35%), Hispanic (31%), and American Indian (31%) students reported that they *never* worked on projects with other students outside of class compared to Asian (17%) and White (24%) students.
- About two fifths (41%) of the respondents frequently discussed ideas from their classes with others, such as family members or friends (46% of females compared to 35% of males).

**About
6 out of 10
respondents
indicated
that they
frequently
asked questions
in class or
contributed to
class discussions.**

Almost one fourth of the respondents said that they never had a serious conversation with a student of a different race or ethnicity.



Experiences with Diversity

Several questions addressed students' perceptions of their involvement in personal conversations and class discussions and their school's emphasis pertaining to diversity issues.

- Almost one fourth (24%) of the respondents said that they *never* had a serious conversation with a student of a different race or ethnicity, but 44% indicated that they frequently (often or very often) had such conversations.
- Nearly half (47%) also said they frequently had serious conversations with students who differed from them in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.
- Slightly less than half (49%) of the respondents reported that views of different races, religions, genders, or political beliefs were frequently considered in class discussions or assignments.
- Only about two fifths (41%) said that their school placed substantial (quite a bit or very much) emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds and beliefs. And almost one fourth (24%) indicated that their school placed *very little* emphasis on encouraging such contact.

Perceptions of the School Environment

Students were asked a number of questions about the school environment, their sense of belonging, what their school emphasizes, and how their school experience has affected them.

- Less than half (47%) of the respondents said they cared about their current school.
- Only about one third (35%) agreed that school rules were fair, with African American students (27%) less likely than White students (37%) to voice this sentiment.
- Less than half (48%) of the students agreed that they would select the same high school again if given the opportunity.
- Nearly three fifths (59%) said that their school placed significant emphasis on treating students fairly and with respect.
- Almost two thirds (64%) of the respondents said that they fit in at their school. African American (67%) and White (66%) students were somewhat more likely than other racial groups to indicate that they fit in at their school.
- More than two thirds (68%) of the respondents said that people at their school, overall, accept them for who they are.

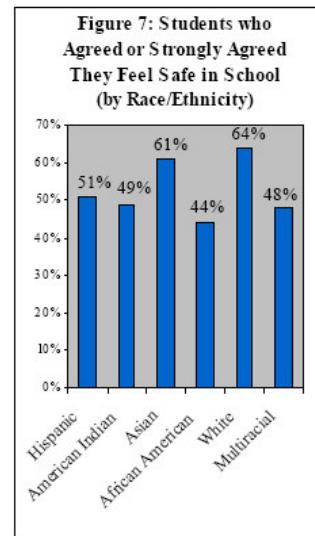
Almost three fifths (58%) of the respondents agreed that they feel safe at school. Those *strongly agreeing* that they were supported by teachers were far more likely than those *strongly disagreeing* to say that they feel safe in school (76% compared to 24%).

- Less than half (46%) of the special education students indicated that they feel safe at school.
- Ninth graders were less likely (54%) than 12th graders (67%) to feel safe.
- African American students (44%) were far less likely than White students (64%) to indicate that they feel safe at school (see Figure 7).

Table 3 depicts the students' perceptions of selected school emphases. Three fourths of the respondents said that their school places substantial (very much or quite a bit) emphasis on continuing education beyond high school.

| Table 3 Students' Perceptions of What Their School Emphasizes | |
|---|---|
| | % indicating a substantial (quite a bit or very much) school emphasis |
| Continuing your education | 75% |
| Participating in school events and activities | 62% |
| Spending significant amounts of time studying | 60% |
| Treating students fairly and with respect | 59% |
| Preparing students for standardized tests | 56% |
| Providing support needed to succeed in school | 55% |
| Using computers in class work | 52% |
| Providing helpful feedback on class work | 48% |
| Encouraging students to explore new ideas | 47% |
| Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds and beliefs | 41% |
| Involving students in school governance | 34% |

At least two thirds of the respondents thought their high school education contributed substantially (quite a bit or very much) to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in terms of writing clearly and effectively (67%) and preparing them for college (66%; see Table 4).



Three fourths of the students indicated that their school placed substantial emphasis on continuing education beyond high school.

About half of all respondents indicated they have a voice in making classroom decisions.



Table 4
Students' Perceptions of School Contributions to Their Knowledge, Skills, and Personal Development in Selected Areas

| | % indicating their school experience contributed substantially (quite a bit or very much) to personal gains |
|---|---|
| Writing clearly and effectively | 67% |
| Preparing for college | 66% |
| Learning on your own | 65% |
| Working effectively with others | 64% |
| Thinking deeply and critically | 63% |
| Speaking clearly and effectively | 62% |
| Using computing and information technology | 56% |
| Developing clear career goals | 53% |
| Learning work related skills | 50% |
| Developing personal values | 49% |
| Understanding yourself | 48% |
| Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds | 45% |
| Solving real-world problems | 43% |
| Making your community a better place | 34% |

Student Empowerment

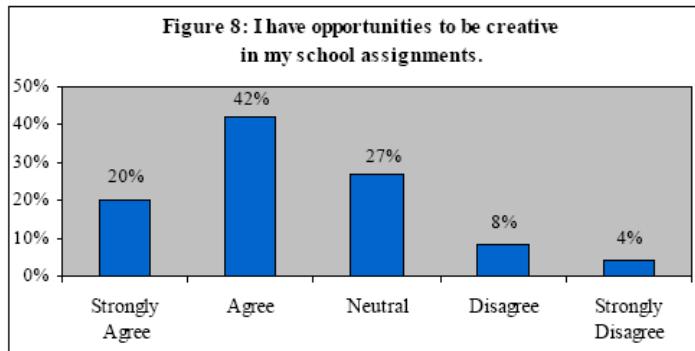
Students were asked about their involvement in deciding what they study and in determining other aspects of their classroom experience.

- About half (51%) of all respondents indicated that they have a voice in making classroom decisions. Students who *strongly agreed* (17%) reflected different attitudes toward their school experience than did students who *strongly disagreed* (5%) that they have such a voice. Those strongly agreeing were far more likely to indicate that:
 - ♦ they are supported and respected by teachers (81% compared to 24%),
 - ♦ they fit in at their school (80% to 34%),
 - ♦ what they learn at school is useful (73% to 27%),
 - ♦ they feel safe at school (71% to 29%), and
 - ♦ they worked harder than expected in school (60% to 26%).
- More than half of the respondents (56%) agreed that they get to make choices about what they study.
- Forty-four percent of the respondents indicated that they help determine how their school work is assessed.

Attitudes Toward Learning and School Work

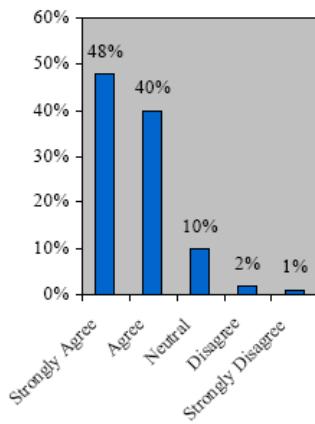
Students were asked about their level of investment in their school work and their views about grades and what they learn in school.

- Two thirds of the students (66%) indicated that they take pride in their school work, with females (73%) far more likely to do so than males (59%).
- The vast majority of the respondents (84%) felt that it is important to make good grades (89% of the females and 79% of the males).
- More than two thirds (69%) said that they place a high value on learning, yet less than three fifths (56%) indicated that they put forth a great deal of effort in their school work.
- Asian (64%), African American (66%), and Hispanic (60%) students were more likely than White students (55%) to agree that they put forth a great deal of effort when doing school work.
- More than half (56%) of all respondents agreed that what they learn at school is useful. Hispanic (68%), Asian (66%), and African American (64%) students were more likely than White students (53%) to voice this sentiment.
- Only 43% of all respondents indicated that they worked harder than they expected to work in school.
- More than three fifths (62%) said that they have opportunities to be creative in their school assignments (see Figure 8).



Almost 9 out of 10 respondents (88%) indicated that they have the skills necessary to complete their work (see Figure 9). However, only two fifths (40%) said that the support they get at school encourages them to learn more. Less than one third (29%) said that they were excited about their classes, and less than half (48%) said that their school work makes them curious to learn about other things.

Figure 9:
I have the skills and abilities to complete my work.



The vast majority of the respondents reported that it is important to make good grades.



**An essential
early step
in looking at
your results is
to assess the
representativeness
of your
respondents.**

Guidelines for Interpreting HSSSE Results

This overview features only a sample of the interesting findings from HSSSE 2004. The data on all HSSSE respondents provide a backdrop and point of comparison for interpreting and using your school's results. Before sharing your HSSSE results school wide, we suggest that you become familiar with the nature of the data and "story line" of your school's performance. Here are some things to consider.

Review the Frequency Data for Differences and Trends

You can use the frequency data to take an in-depth look at how your students and various subgroups of your students compare to all other HSSSE 2004 respondents. The frequency reports in this binder organize your data for easy reference.

An essential early step is to make sure the student demographic data in your school report are consistent with what you know about your students. In short, assess the representativeness of your respondents.

Also, review how your students' demographics differ from the aggregate for all other HSSSE 2004 respondents so you can consider these variations in comparing your students' responses to the national data. Where you note that your students deviate substantially from the frequencies for all HSSSE respondents or from means on particular items, are the differences explainable as a function of your student or school characteristics?

Of course, you should not rely exclusively on comparisons with the aggregate data. A consistent pattern of percentages for your students above the averages for all respondents may indicate that your school is doing the right things in terms of good educational practices. At the same time, some schools with very high expectations for student engagement may fall short of their own aspirations even though comparisons with students from other schools are favorable.

While this report provides frequency data by grade level, gender, instructional track, and race, you may want to do additional analyses on your students' responses. For example, you may decide that it would be instructive to conduct more in-depth analyses of the students who spend seven or more hours a week preparing for class or to compare the profiles of the subgroups of students who *very often* and *never* participate in class discussions.

Look Carefully for Large Effect Sizes

The Means Comparisons section of this report depicts survey items where the means for your students' responses differ at a statistically significant level from the means for all other HSSSE 2004 respondents. These items are marked with asterisks (*). Three common statistical thresholds are used to identify these differences ($p < .05$, $p < .01$, and $p < .001$). The more asterisks by a particular item, the higher the level of significance, and the smaller the likelihood that the difference is due to chance.

Please note that statistical significance does not guarantee that the result is substantive or important. Large samples, like that of HSSSE 2004, tend to produce more statistically significant results even though the magnitude of the mean differences may be small. It is recommended to start by interpreting only those items with three asterisks ($p < .001$) and consult the effect sizes (explained below) in making judgments about the practical meaning of the results.

The *effect size* is reported for items that have statistically significant mean comparisons. It represents the practical significance of the mean difference between two groups and standardizes the difference for comparison. The *Cohen's d* effect size has been used to depict the magnitude of how different your students are on a particular item from the mean of all other HSSSE respondents. It is calculated by dividing the mean difference by the standard deviation of the comparison group (all other HSSSE respondents compose the comparison group for your students).

Since large effect sizes are not all that common in most non-experimental educational research, when you find a large effect size or a pattern of moderate or small effect sizes, it is likely that the student experience at your school is appreciably different from the mean experience of all other HSSSE 2004 respondents. Such findings deserve attention; just remember, effects sizes can be positive or negative.

Here are some general guidelines for determining the relative importance of a *Cohen's d* effect size:

- ± .20 is a small effect
- ± .50 is a medium effect
- ± .80 is a large effect

Of course, do not rely exclusively on statistical significance tests to identify areas that warrant attention. Look for other empirical or anecdotal information to corroborate HSSSE results.

**Effect sizes
can be
positive or
negative.**



**Focus on items
with medium to
large effect sizes
and look for
patterns in
your students'
responses.**



**Your HSSSE
results can be
used alone
or with other
initiatives
to help you set
and measure
performance
standards for
your school.**

Develop a Framework to Interpret Results

HSSSE data serve a diagnostic function by identifying school strengths and weaknesses in terms of educational practices. Comparisons with other schools help reveal aspects of school and student performance not readily available from other sources.

As you look over your data, keep in mind two frequently used approaches that can help you think about how to interpret and use your results. One or both may be appropriate, depending on your school's situation.

The *normative approach* compares your students' responses to those of all other students across the nation who completed the survey. This information is readily available in the Means Comparisons section of this report. Breaking this information into subgroups or engagement topics is a particularly effective way of stimulating teacher interest in the findings.

The *criterion-referenced approach* compares your students' results to a predetermined value set by you and your colleagues, given your school's mission, size, curricular offerings, demographics, and so forth. Your HSSSE results can be used alone or with other initiatives to help you set and measure performance standards for your school.

Using Your HSSSE Results

Ideally, HSSSE results should be used in combination with other assessment tools to capture the fullest picture of the student experience at your school. But, with or without other assessments, there are several key ways you can use your HSSSE results. For example, the data can be used:

- To determine what is being done well and to identify areas where improvement is desirable. HSSSE data and results become even more valuable when they are linked to other school information and improvement initiatives.
- To document and report effective educational practices and then share this information with others to promote student learning and improve school effectiveness.
- To focus school resources on effective educational practices.

The following scenarios provide three illustrations of using HSSSE data to make changes that can be implemented fairly quickly and for minimal costs. Please share with us how you are using your HSSSE results, and we will compile the suggestions in subsequent reports.

Scenario 1: You learn from HSSSE data that your students are far below the average of other HSSSE respondents in terms of working with classmates on projects outside class. They also are below the aggregate average in having serious conversations with classmates of different backgrounds and ideologies (even though your school has a diverse student population). To address both of these findings, teachers decide to assign more collaborative projects that require students to meet outside of class in groups, and to ensure that the groups reflect diversity based on race, gender, ideology, etc. In addition, before undertaking the group projects, students will receive instruction in communication skills and strategies for effective collaborative work.

Scenario 2: The HSSSE results indicate that 90% of the students in your school have Internet access at home, and all have such access at school, but only 30% have communicated with a teacher by email during the school year. Your staff decides to implement an email system in which students can communicate with their teachers but not with classmates. Within weeks after implementing the system, 60% of your students are contacting teachers by email to discuss assignments or ideas from their classes.

Scenario 3: You find that 55% of your students are spending three hours or less per week preparing for class. Teacher and student groups have brainstormed about this and offered several strategies to increase such preparation time and make it more effective. Among strategies that will be implemented are: a peer tutoring program in the library during school hours, a homework hotline staffed by volunteer teachers and honor students two evenings each week, brief quizzes over homework at the beginning of class on a random basis, and periodic bonus questions on assigned readings.

Your school report gives you a substantial amount of useful data. How you analyze, interpret, and use HSSSE results will depend on the vision and goals for your school. There are numerous possibilities for you to make immediate changes in school practices as well as incremental changes over a longer period. We suggest you take adequate time to carefully review this report in consultation with others.

Why Schools Participate in HSSSE

- To *increase student involvement* in educationally purposeful activities
- To *participate in a national effort* to improve secondary education
- To *use a research-based tool to collect baseline data* for school improvement initiatives
- To *add a new dimension* to schools' assessment strategies
- To *link information* about student engagement to teaching and learning
- To *incorporate student engagement results* in self studies and accountability plans

Make sure teachers and other school staff members appreciate the concept of student engagement.



Sharing Your HSSSE Results

Once you understand your HSSSE data and results, it will be important to plan how to share them with teachers, staff, and other administrators and possibly with external audiences. There are as many ways to share results—small-group discussions, workshops, retreats, newspaper articles, for example—as there are stakeholders with whom to share them.

Things to Think About

As you begin to unpack your results and start to think about how you might use your HSSSE data, consider the following:

- 1. Make sure teachers and other school staff members appreciate the concept of student engagement.** Teachers who may not be familiar with assessment in general and the engagement concept in particular need to understand how HSSSE results can be used to improve teaching and learning.
- 2. Report student engagement results in a responsible way.** We encourage schools to share their results in ways that lead to a better understanding of the student experience and promote school improvement efforts.
- 3. Don't allow the numbers to speak for themselves.** Every number and comparison reported should be accompanied by an explanation and interpretation of what can and cannot be concluded from the results.
- 4. Examine the results from multiple perspectives.** Use both normative and criterion-referenced approaches to challenge assumptions about student and school performance in the context of your own school and district. It's also wise to compare the engagement levels of specific student groups, such as 9th to 12th graders, males to females, and so forth.
- 5. Link the results to other information about the student experience and complementary initiatives.** The positive impact of student engagement results will be multiplied if the data can be made relevant to groups of teachers and staff working on different reform efforts within your school and district.
- 6. Don't go it alone.** Experts argue that the chances of successful innovation improve when teams are formed and schools work together on topics of mutual interest.

Final Word

The 2004 spring administration of HSSSE provided an opportunity to gather data on high school student engagement in 103 high schools. We will continue to refine the instrument and its administration based on comments from students, teachers, administrators, and researchers.

Schools might find it useful to use the survey every two or three years. Some schools may have reasons for using HSSSE annually, especially if they are tracking longitudinal data or monitoring the impact of specific improvement initiatives.

HSSSE provides much needed information to fill a knowledge gap on the high school student experience. We are enthusiastic about the many benefits that schools, districts, and students may garner by looking at engagement information and using the data to guide school improvement efforts. HSSSE results are easy to understand and use, and they can stimulate meaningful discussions related to teaching and learning. We welcome your comments and feedback.

Selected Resources

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Fredricks, J.A., Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A.H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109.

Linnenbrink, E.A. & Pintrich, P.R. (2003). The role of self-efficacy beliefs in student engagement and learning in the classroom. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 19, 119-137.

McCombs, B.L. & Whisler, J.S. (1997). *The learner-centered classroom and school: Strategies for increasing student motivation and achievement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

National Research Council Institute of Medicine, (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Newmann, F.M. (1989). Student engagement and high school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 46(5), 34-36.

Norris, C., Pignal, J. & Lipps, G (2003). Measuring school engagement. *Education Quarterly Review*, 9(2), 25-34.

High School Survey of Student Engagement

Indiana University
1900 East 10th Street
Eigenmann 409
Bloomington, IN 47406-7512

Phone: 812.856.1429
Fax: 812.856.5150
Email: hssse@indiana.edu

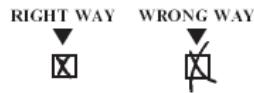
www.iub.edu/~nsse/hssse

**Appendix C: Student Engagement Survey Instruments
Pre and Post**

Student Engagement Survey

The information gathered from this questionnaire will be used by outside researchers to better understand students' views of this school and areas that you see as strengths or challenges within the school. Your responses will remain anonymous and only group data, NOT individual data, will be reported. After you complete your survey, please put your survey in the envelope at the front of the room. The envelope will then be sealed immediately and delivered to an external research firm. No one in your school will see your individual responses. Please answer the questionnaire items as honestly as possible. By completing and returning this survey, you give your permission to process and transfer this data to The Gallup Organization located in the United States.

This survey is a scannable form. Please mark your responses with an "X" using a blue or black pen as in the example.



▼ STEP 1

On a five-point scale, where 5 is extremely satisfied and 1 is extremely dissatisfied, how satisfied are you with this as a place to go to school?

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Extremely Dissatisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Extremely Satisfied | Don't Know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

▼ STEP 2

On a five-point scale, where 5 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items.

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Strongly Agree | Don't Know/ Not Applicable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

1. I know what is expected of me at this school.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my school work right....
3. At school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.....
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good school work.....
5. A teacher, or someone at school, seems to care about me as a person.....
6. There is someone at school who encourages my development.
7. At school, my opinions seem to count.
8. My teachers make me feel my school work is important.
9. My fellow students are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at school.....
11. In the past six months, someone at school has talked to me about my progress.....
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at this school to learn and grow....
13. I understand how to use my personal learning plan.....
14. I will benefit from developing and using my personal learning plan.....
15. I feel my personal learning plan is an important part of planning for my future.
16. I feel safe in this school.
17. I am always treated with respect at this school.
18. I know I will graduate from this school.
19. Which of the following grades are you currently in?

- 9th 11th
 10th 12th

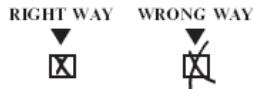
*Your answers to this questionnaire are strictly confidential.
THANK YOU for participating and providing your opinions.*

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Student Engagement Survey

The information gathered from this questionnaire will be used by outside researchers to better understand students' views of this school and areas that you see as strengths or challenges within the school. Your responses will remain anonymous and only group data, NOT individual data, will be reported. After you complete your survey, please put your survey in the envelope at the front of the room. The envelope will then be sealed immediately and delivered to an external research firm. No one in your school will see your individual responses. Please answer the questionnaire items as honestly as possible. By completing and returning this survey, you give your permission to process and transfer this data to The Gallup Organization located in the United States.

This survey is a scannable form. Please mark your responses with an "X" using a blue or black pen as in the example.



▼ STEP 1

On a five-point scale, where 5 is extremely satisfied and 1 is extremely dissatisfied, how satisfied are you with this as a place to go to school?

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Extremely Dissatisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Extremely Satisfied | Don't Know |
| ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> |

▼ STEP 2

On a five-point scale, where 5 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items.

| | Strongly Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Strongly Agree | | Don't Know/ Not Applicable |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | | ▼ |
| 1. I know what is expected of me at this school..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my school work right | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. At school, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good school work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. A teacher, or someone at school, seems to care about me as a person | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. There is someone at school who encourages my development..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. At school, my opinions seem to count | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. My teachers make me feel my school work is important..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. My fellow students are committed to doing quality work..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I have a best friend at school..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. In the past six months, someone at school has talked to me about my progress | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. This last year, I have had opportunities at this school to learn and grow.... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I understand how to use my personal learning plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. I will benefit from developing and using my personal learning plan..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. I feel my personal learning plan is an important part of planning for my future..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. I feel safe in this school..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Continued →

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17. I am always treated with respect at this school

18. I know I will graduate from this school

19. Which of the following grades are you currently in?

9th 11th
 10th 12th

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|--|
| Strongly Disagree 1 ▼ | 2 ▼ | 3 ▼ | 4 ▼ | 5 ▼ | Strongly Agree | Don't Know/ Not Applicable ▼ |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|--|

20. My school is committed to building the strengths of each student

21. My teachers emphasize my strengths rather than my weaknesses

22. I know and understand what my greatest strengths are.....

23. I understand how to apply my strengths to improve my performance
in school and other areas of my life

Your answers to this questionnaire are strictly confidential.

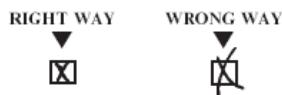
THANK YOU for participating and providing your opinions.

Appendix D: Teacher Engagement Survey Instrument

Teacher Engagement Survey

The Gallup Organization is conducting this survey to obtain your opinion on various aspects of your working environment. Your responses to this survey are completely optional and there are no consequences if you choose not to respond. The Gallup Organization will process all personal data you provide and will use such information for statistical and research purposes. Survey results will only be provided with group level data according to Gallup's policies protecting individual respondent confidentiality. By completing and returning this survey, you give your consent to process and transfer your personal data to the United States.

This survey is a scannable form. Please mark your responses with an "X" using a blue or black pen as in the example below.



▼ STEP 1

On a five-point scale, where 5 is extremely satisfied and 1 is extremely dissatisfied, how satisfied are you with your school as a place to work?

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Extremely Dissatisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Extremely Satisfied | Don't Know |
| ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

▼ STEP 2

On a five-point scale, where 5 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following items.

| | Strongly Disagree 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly Agree 5 | Don't Know/ Not Applicable |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
| 1. I know what is expected of me at work. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. There is someone at work who encourages my development..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. At work, my opinions seem to count. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. The mission or purpose of my school makes me feel my job is important..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I have a best friend at work. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Your answers to this questionnaire are strictly confidential.
THANK YOU for participating and providing your opinions.*

Appendix E: Strengths Spotlight™ Example Materials



Helping students understand, use and grow their greatest strengths.

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Exploring Your Signature Themes

On your Signature Theme report, highlight the words and/or sentences that best describe you.

| List your Signature Themes | 3 words that describe theme | Describe a recent situation in which you applied the talents of this theme |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |

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Page 6



Theme Discovery

- Find five people who have a theme that you do not have
- Have them describe the three words they picked
- Ask for their idea of a benefit of that theme

Debrief...

- Interesting discovery

- What theme would you like to borrow & why?

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Signature Themes Reflection

1. What was your first reaction to the StrengthsFinder results?
 2. Which Signature Theme(s) totally describe you? Why?
 3. What surprised you? Why?
 4. Who could you share your Signature Themes report with?
 5. What discovery have you made about yourself?
-

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What Will You Do Next?

- One Signature Theme I want to “stretch” and why
 - One of my favorite Action Items from this theme
 - Why I chose this one
 - Who will support this effort
 - When I will complete this
-

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Appendix F: Youth Survey on Student Engagement, Gallup Poll 2005

Frequencies

engage

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1.00 | 51 | 8.5 | 8.9 | 8.9 |
| | 2.00 | 254 | 42.4 | 44.1 | 53.0 |
| | 3.00 | 271 | 45.2 | 47.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 577 | 96.1 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 23 | 3.9 | | |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 | | |

Crosstabs

engage * 1. Suppose your school were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the school you attended this past school year? Crosstabulation

| | | | 1. Suppose your school were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the school you attended this past school year? | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|---|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--|
| | | | Fail | D | C | B | A | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 3 | 10 | 22 | 13 | 4 | 52 | |
| | | % within engage | 5.8% | 19.2% | 42.3% | 25.0% | 7.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 1. Suppose your school were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the school you attended this past school year? | 37.5% | 45.5% | 22.2% | 4.6% | 2.5% | 9.1% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 4 | 9 | 59 | 138 | 44 | 254 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.6% | 3.5% | 23.2% | 54.3% | 17.3% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 1. Suppose your school were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the school you attended this past school year? | 50.0% | 40.9% | 59.6% | 49.1% | 27.2% | 44.4% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 1 | 3 | 18 | 130 | 114 | 266 | |
| | | % within engage | .4% | 1.1% | 6.8% | 48.9% | 42.9% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 1. Suppose your school were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the school you attended this past school year? | 12.5% | 13.6% | 18.2% | 46.3% | 70.4% | 46.5% | |
| Total | | | 8 | 22 | 99 | 281 | 162 | 572 | |
| | | | 1.4% | 3.8% | 17.3% | 49.1% | 28.3% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 3M. I feel safe in this school. Crosstabulation

| | | | 3M. I feel safe in this school. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|--|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 9 | 11 | 14 | 13 | 4 | 51 | |
| | | % within engage | 17.6% | 21.6% | 27.5% | 25.5% | 7.8% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3M. I feel safe in this school. | 56.3% | 47.8% | 19.7% | 6.8% | 1.5% | 8.9% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 6 | 10 | 38 | 115 | 83 | 252 | |
| | | % within engage | 2.4% | 4.0% | 15.1% | 45.6% | 32.9% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3M. I feel safe in this school. | 37.5% | 43.5% | 53.5% | 60.5% | 30.3% | 43.9% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 1 | 2 | 19 | 62 | 187 | 271 | |
| | | % within engage | .4% | .7% | 7.0% | 22.9% | 69.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3M. I feel safe in this school. | 6.3% | 8.7% | 26.8% | 32.6% | 68.2% | 47.2% | |
| Total | | Count | 16 | 23 | 71 | 190 | 274 | 574 | |
| | | % within engage | 2.8% | 4.0% | 12.4% | 33.1% | 47.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3M. I feel safe in this school. | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. Crosstabulation

| | | | 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|---|--|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 15 | 14 | 15 | 3 | 4 | 51 | |
| | | % within engage | 29.4% | 27.5% | 29.4% | 5.9% | 7.8% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. | 48.4% | 28.0% | 10.3% | 1.5% | 2.7% | 8.9% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 14 | 26 | 99 | 90 | 25 | 254 | |
| | | % within engage | 5.5% | 10.2% | 39.0% | 35.4% | 9.8% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. | 45.2% | 52.0% | 68.3% | 45.0% | 16.8% | 44.2% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 2 | 10 | 31 | 107 | 120 | 270 | |
| | | % within engage | .7% | 3.7% | 11.5% | 39.6% | 44.4% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. | 6.5% | 20.0% | 21.4% | 53.5% | 80.5% | 47.0% | |
| Total | | Count | 31 | 50 | 145 | 200 | 149 | 575 | |
| | | % within engage | 5.4% | 8.7% | 25.2% | 34.8% | 25.9% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 3N. I am always treated with respect at this school. | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. Crosstabulation

| | | 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|---|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 20 | 15 | 11 | 3 | 51 | |
| | | % within engage | 39.2% | 29.4% | 21.6% | 5.9% | 3.9% | |
| | | % within 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | 69.0% | 21.1% | 8.8% | 1.6% | 1.3% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 8 | 42 | 87 | 88 | 248 | |
| | | % within engage | 3.2% | 16.9% | 35.1% | 35.5% | 9.3% | |
| | | % within 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | 27.6% | 59.2% | 69.6% | 45.8% | 15.2% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 1 | 14 | 27 | 101 | 269 | |
| | | % within engage | .4% | 5.2% | 10.0% | 37.5% | 46.8% | |
| | | % within 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | 3.4% | 19.7% | 21.6% | 52.6% | 83.4% | |
| Total | | Count | 29 | 71 | 125 | 192 | 568 | |
| | | % within engage | 5.1% | 12.5% | 22.0% | 33.8% | 26.6% | |
| | | % within 8A. My school makes me feel appreciated for who I really am. | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8B. At my school, all students receive fair treatment. Crosstabulation

| | | | 8B. At my school, all students receive fair treatment. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|---|--|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 23 | 5 | 14 | 4 | 6 | 52 | |
| | | % within engage | 44.2% | 9.6% | 26.9% | 7.7% | 11.5% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8B. At my school, all students receive fair treatment. | 38.3% | 9.6% | 10.4% | 2.9% | 3.2% | 9.1% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 33 | 37 | 81 | 62 | 38 | 251 | |
| | | % within engage | 13.1% | 14.7% | 32.3% | 24.7% | 15.1% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8B. At my school, all students receive fair treatment. | 55.0% | 71.2% | 60.4% | 44.3% | 20.3% | 43.8% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 4 | 10 | 39 | 74 | 143 | 270 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.5% | 3.7% | 14.4% | 27.4% | 53.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8B. At my school, all students receive fair treatment. | 6.7% | 19.2% | 29.1% | 52.9% | 76.5% | 47.1% | |
| Total | | | 60 | 52 | 134 | 140 | 187 | 573 | |
| | | | 10.5% | 9.1% | 23.4% | 24.4% | 32.6% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8C. At my school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. Crosstabulation

| | | | 8C. At my school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|--|---|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 13 | 14 | 19 | 5 | 1 | 52 | |
| | | % within engage | 25.0% | 26.9% | 36.5% | 9.6% | 1.9% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8C. At my school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. | 65.0% | 42.4% | 18.1% | 2.4% | .5% | 9.2% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 4 | 18 | 76 | 100 | 47 | 245 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.6% | 7.3% | 31.0% | 40.8% | 19.2% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8C. At my school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. | 20.0% | 54.5% | 72.4% | 48.5% | 23.3% | 43.3% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 3 | 1 | 10 | 101 | 154 | 269 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.1% | .4% | 3.7% | 37.5% | 57.2% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8C. At my school, I have opportunities to discover my full potential. | 15.0% | 3.0% | 9.5% | 49.0% | 76.2% | 47.5% | |
| Total | | | 20 | 33 | 105 | 206 | 202 | 566 | |
| | | | 3.5% | 5.8% | 18.6% | 36.4% | 35.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8E. My school is helping me figure out who I really am. Crosstabulation

| | | | 8E. My school is helping me figure out who I really am. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|--|---|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 18 | 22 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 51 | |
| | | % within engage | 35.3% | 43.1% | 11.8% | 7.8% | 2.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8E. My school is helping me figure out who I really am. | 33.3% | 32.8% | 4.5% | 2.2% | .8% | 9.1% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 26 | 42 | 74 | 75 | 26 | 243 | |
| | | % within engage | 10.7% | 17.3% | 30.5% | 30.9% | 10.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8E. My school is helping me figure out who I really am. | 48.1% | 62.7% | 55.6% | 41.4% | 20.3% | 43.2% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 10 | 3 | 53 | 102 | 101 | 269 | |
| | | % within engage | 3.7% | 1.1% | 19.7% | 37.9% | 37.5% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8E. My school is helping me figure out who I really am. | 18.5% | 4.5% | 39.8% | 56.4% | 78.9% | 47.8% | |
| Total | | | 54 | 67 | 133 | 181 | 128 | 563 | |
| | | | 9.6% | 11.9% | 23.6% | 32.1% | 22.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8H. My school is preparing me to lead a successful life. Crosstabulation

| | | | 8H. My school is preparing me to lead a successful life. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|---|--|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 11 | 14 | 22 | 4 | 1 | 52 | |
| | | % within engage | 21.2% | 26.9% | 42.3% | 7.7% | 1.9% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8H. My school is preparing me to lead a successful life. | 68.8% | 66.7% | 21.6% | 2.4% | .4% | 9.2% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 0 | 7 | 73 | 98 | 68 | 246 | |
| | | % within engage | .0% | 2.8% | 29.7% | 39.8% | 27.6% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8H. My school is preparing me to lead a successful life. | .0% | 33.3% | 71.6% | 58.7% | 26.0% | 43.3% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 5 | 0 | 7 | 65 | 193 | 270 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.9% | .0% | 2.6% | 24.1% | 71.5% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8H. My school is preparing me to lead a successful life. | 31.3% | .0% | 6.9% | 38.9% | 73.7% | 47.5% | |
| Total | | | 16 | 21 | 102 | 167 | 262 | 568 | |
| | | | 2.8% | 3.7% | 18.0% | 29.4% | 46.1% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 8I. My school is preparing me to lead a happy life. Crosstabulation

| | | | 8I. My school is preparing me to lead a happy life. | | | | | Total | |
|--------|------|--|---|--------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | Strongly disagree | 2 | 3 | 4 | Strongly agree | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 10 | 24 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 52 | |
| | | % within engage | 19.2% | 46.2% | 26.9% | 7.7% | .0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8I. My school is preparing me to lead a happy life. | 55.6% | 63.2% | 12.0% | 2.2% | .0% | 9.2% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 5 | 11 | 89 | 95 | 44 | 244 | |
| | | % within engage | 2.0% | 4.5% | 36.5% | 38.9% | 18.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8I. My school is preparing me to lead a happy life. | 27.8% | 28.9% | 76.1% | 52.5% | 20.9% | 43.2% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 3 | 3 | 14 | 82 | 167 | 269 | |
| | | % within engage | 1.1% | 1.1% | 5.2% | 30.5% | 62.1% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 8I. My school is preparing me to lead a happy life. | 16.7% | 7.9% | 12.0% | 45.3% | 79.1% | 47.6% | |
| Total | | | 18 | 38 | 117 | 181 | 211 | 565 | |
| | | | 3.2% | 6.7% | 20.7% | 32.0% | 37.3% | 100.0% | |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? Crosstabulation

| | | | 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | | | | Total |
|--------|------|---|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | | Never | Rarely, OR | Sometimes | Very often | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count % within engage % within 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | 4 7.8% | 19 37.3% | 27 52.9% | 1 2.0% | 51 100.0% |
| | 2.00 | Count % within engage % within 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | 12 4.8% | 62 24.6% | 135 53.6% | 43 17.1% | 252 100.0% |
| | 3.00 | Count % within engage % within 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | 5 1.8% | 30 11.1% | 166 61.3% | 70 25.8% | 271 100.0% |
| Total | | Count % within engage % within 9. When you are in the classroom, how often would you say you get so involved in what you are learning or doing that you lose track of time? | 21 3.7% | 111 19.3% | 328 57.1% | 114 19.9% | 574 100.0% |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

**engage * 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school?
Crosstabulation**

| | | 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school? | | | | Total |
|--------|------|---|--|---|--|--------|
| | | You have achieved none of your academic potential in school | You have achieved only some of your academic potential in... | You have achieved most of your academic potential in school | You have achieved your full academic potential in school | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 3 | 31 | 15 | 51 |
| | | % within engage | 5.9% | 60.8% | 29.4% | 3.9% |
| | | % within 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school? | 42.9% | 18.7% | 4.6% | 3.2% |
| | 2.00 | Count | 3 | 86 | 138 | 16 |
| | | % within engage | 1.2% | 35.4% | 56.8% | 6.6% |
| | | % within 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school? | 42.9% | 51.8% | 42.5% | 25.4% |
| | 3.00 | Count | 1 | 49 | 172 | 45 |
| | | % within engage | .4% | 18.4% | 64.4% | 16.9% |
| | | % within 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school? | 14.3% | 29.5% | 52.9% | 71.4% |
| Total | | Count | 7 | 166 | 325 | 63 |
| | | % within engage | 1.2% | 29.6% | 57.9% | 11.2% |
| | | % within 11. Which more accurately reflects your own views about your academic development at school? | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

engage * 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? Crosstabulation

| | | | 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? | | Total | |
|--------|------|--|---|--------------------------|--------|--|
| | | | Mostly do not enjoy learning | Mostly enjoy learning or | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 16 | 34 | 50 | |
| | | % within engage | 32.0% | 68.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? | 20.5% | 7.1% | 8.9% | |
| | 2.00 | Count | 48 | 195 | 243 | |
| | | % within engage | 19.8% | 80.2% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? | 61.5% | 40.5% | 43.5% | |
| | 3.00 | Count | 14 | 252 | 266 | |
| | | % within engage | 5.3% | 94.7% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? | 17.9% | 52.4% | 47.6% | |
| Total | | Count | 78 | 481 | 559 | |
| | | % within engage | 14.0% | 86.0% | 100.0% | |
| | | % within 13. Would you say overall you (read 2-1)? | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | |

engage * 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? Crosstabulation

| | | | 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? | | Total |
|--------|------|--|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | | | | | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count | 36 | 14 | 50 |
| | | % within engage | 72.0% | 28.0% | 100.0% |
| | | % within 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? | 8.9% | 9.1% | 9.0% |
| | 2.00 | Count | 184 | 60 | 244 |
| | | % within engage | 75.4% | 24.6% | 100.0% |
| | | % within 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? | 45.5% | 39.0% | 43.7% |
| | 3.00 | Count | 184 | 80 | 264 |
| | | % within engage | 69.7% | 30.3% | 100.0% |
| | | % within 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? | 45.5% | 51.9% | 47.3% |
| Total | | Count | 404 | 154 | 558 |
| | | % within engage | 72.4% | 27.6% | 100.0% |
| | | % within 14. Do you think that's (read 2-1)? | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

engage * 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? Crosstabulation

| | | | 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? | | Total |
|--------|------|---|--|--------------------|---------------|
| | | | Yes, is helping | No, is not helping | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count % within engage % within 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? | 14 27.5% | 37 72.5% | 51 100.0% |
| | 2.00 | Count % within engage % within 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? | 142 58.2% | 102 41.8% | 244 100.0% |
| | 3.00 | Count % within engage % within 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? | 215 81.7% | 48 18.3% | 263 100.0% |
| Total | | Count % within engage % within 15. Do you feel your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career, or not? | 371 66.5% | 187 33.5% | 558 100.0% |
| | | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

engage * 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? Crosstabulation

| | | | 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? | | Total |
|--------|-------|--|---|------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | Helping a little (or) | Helping a lot (or) | |
| engage | 1.00 | Count % within engage % within 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? | 7 50.0% 4.9% | 7 50.0% 3.2% | 14 100.0% 3.8% |
| | 2.00 | Count % within engage % within 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? | 74 54.0% 51.7% | 63 46.0% 28.4% | 137 100.0% 37.5% |
| | 3.00 | Count % within engage % within 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? | 62 29.0% 43.4% | 152 71.0% 68.5% | 214 100.0% 58.6% |
| | Total | Count % within engage % within 16. How much would you say your school is helping you to discover what type of work you would love to do as a career? | 143 39.2% 100.0% | 222 60.8% 100.0% | 365 100.0% 100.0% |

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VITA

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

By Jessica O'Brien Pruitt Tyler, Ed.D., 2006

School of Education

Texas Christian University

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Mike Sacken, Professor of Educational Administration

This study included over 1600 students and 90 teachers from three traditional high schools, one traditional middle school and two alternative educational settings within a Midwestern school district with a total enrollment of roughly 20,000 students. Nearly half of the teachers in the study received a strengths-based intervention, a Gallup Seminar called Strengths Spotlight™, focused on giving teachers the resources necessary to help students understand, apply and grow in their areas of greatest potential, their strengths. Student and teacher strengths were determined by the Clifton StrengthsFinder™, an online assessment based on over 30 years of research on what makes people successful. Pre and post engagement surveys were administered to both teachers and students and responses were collected to analyze the impact of the strengths-based intervention. Students in the two alternative educational settings, who had the opportunity to learn about their own strengths and the strengths of others, had more positive perceptions about the school environment. Overall satisfaction, overall engagement, feeling safe, feeling respected, feeling that someone encouraged their development, and feeling like their opinions counted are just a few of the survey items that had meaningful growth from time one to time two within the two alternative educational groups that received strengths-based development.

The engagement post survey responses of teachers in this study were compared to educational services employees within the employee engagement database of a major consulting organization. Teacher engagement is discussed as the precursor to student engagement.

This study shows that sharing strengths among classmates may contribute to the overall feeling of being engaged. The students and teachers in these groups were paying attention to the uniqueness of each person and the positive potential that was within each individual. A focus on the positive aspects of these students was being celebrated and it contributed to their feeling more engaged at school.