

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behavior survey (PSLAB) was administered to ACPS students in grades 7-12 in December 2006. An initial report and presentations were made to the School Board, City Council and interested community and youth groups during the Spring and Summer of 2007. This report complements and expands upon the previous report and information shared. It includes a detailed profile of the strengths and risk behaviors engaged in by various student subgroups. In addition, it examines which assets are likely to lead to an increase in thriving behaviors as well as a decrease in risk taking behaviors.

Key highlights from the results are:

- Of the 14 assets studied, Alexandria youth had strengths in Positive Identity, Connection to Family and Personal and Social Values. Weaknesses were noted in Connection to School and Community.
- Although the profile of strengths and weaknesses was similar for all student subgroups examined; there were significant differences in how strongly the assets were experienced.
 - Economic disadvantage had a negative linear relationship with experience of assets. This was not the case for personal and social values and connection to school.
 - Gender differences were noted primarily on individual assets, typically favoring girls. The only asset that did not follow this trend was positive identity, which was stronger for boys.
 - Ethnic differences were noted on 12 of the 14 assets.
- Engagement in individual risk behaviors was highest for alcohol use, fighting, depression and television overexposure. Girls were more likely to experience depression, boys were more likely to act out; there were no gender differences for alcohol use and television overexposure.
- Forty percent of youth exhibit no high risk behavior. Violence was the most common high risk behavior; it was disproportionately associated with Black youth. Many high risk behaviors were likely to co-occur with violence and anti-social acts being the most common.
- The asset of Risk Avoidance, which includes values and skills related to good decision making predicted a decrease in all four risk behaviors examined, as well as better grades in school. Positive Identity, Social Competence, School Engagement and Activity Engagement predicted increased in three of four thriving behaviors.

The data suggest an integrated approach to asset development and risk reduction, as well as differentiation of approach based on gender, age, socioeconomic and culture differences. Implementation of this survey provides a baseline for understanding perceived strengths and risks experienced by youth and allows for setting targets and goals for the future. Collaboration among community members and service providers to create a community vision to target those goals will help produce the greatest amount of change. Eight recommendations are offered at the conclusion of this report.