EXAMINING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO PROMOTING STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL: A PILOT STUDY

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STEPHANIE COLEMAN

Dr. Cheryl Offutt, Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled
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Presented by Stephanie Coleman
A candidate for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

_________________________________________________________________________
Professor Cheryl Offutt

_________________________________________________________________________
Professor David Bergin

_________________________________________________________________________
Professor Melissa Maras

_________________________________________________________________________
Professor Joe Johnston

_________________________________________________________________________
Professor Erica Lembke
I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my friends and family who have been a huge source of support to me. To my family, I am absolutely here because of you. Thank you for believing in me, for supporting me, and always encouraging me. For my parents, Bob and Tina Coleman, thank you for instilling in me a love of learning. Thank you for listening to me through the roller coaster ride of graduate school and for your unyielding support through my 20 years of education. For my grandmother, Roberta Coleman, thank you for your empathic ear, encouraging notes, and love and prayers. And for my brothers, Brian and Kevin Coleman, thank you for listening patiently to me, for letting me know you are proud of me, for the gift of laughter in difficult times, and for your encouragement and advice. Thank you to Mark Harris, who provided much encouragement, support, and guidance and helped me become part of the Tiger faithful. To my family (Lee Harris, Ann Harris, Ed Harris, and Lyman Coleman) who provided much love, support, and encouragement to me in my formative years and with whom I wish could share this moment. I love you all very much.

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Abstract

Students’ engagement with school is a critical facet of students’ successful school completion and involves student attitudes and behaviors that can facilitate academic success. Students’ engagement with school incorporates theory and scholarship related to motivation theories, school connectedness, and positive psychology. Although there are interventions to promote student engagement with school, they are typically targeted at students identified as at-risk for school dropout. The following study is an investigation on the efficacy of a novel strengths-based universal intervention for middle school students. Utilizing a randomized control trial procedure, no significant intervention effects were observed related to students’ psychological, cognitive, behavioral or academic engagement. Additionally, no significant treatment effects were observed for students’ self-reported hope. Results are discussed within the context of implementation research.
Introduction

School dropout comes at a significant cost for both the individuals dropping out of school as well as society at large. Individuals lacking high school diplomas make $16,000 less yearly on average than their diploma or credentialed counterparts (Cataldi, Laird, & Kewel Ramani, 2007). In addition, school dropouts incur large costs to society, including lost tax revenue, unemployment, and a disproportionate participation in welfare and the justice system (Reimer & Smink, 2005). Although graduation rates have improved considerably, decreasing school dropout is a point of emphasis for school districts in the “age of accountability.” Finding a practical, evidence-based prevention and intervention continuum of support for all students is an important and worthwhile activity for school psychologists.

While the rate and consequences of dropping out of school are alarming, malleable factors have been identified to prevent dropping out and to promote more positive school outcomes. Specifically, individuals interested in countering the negative effects of dropping out of school have found school engagement, a multidimensional construct measuring students’ active involvement with school, to be a significant malleable risk factor for dropping out of school. Although there is a confluence of individual status variables (e.g. race, socioeconomic status (SES)) that predict dropping out behavior, researchers specifically focus on school engagement as a means of prevention and early intervention for students at-risk for dropping out. A focus on school engagement has also illuminated a host of factors impacting school engagement (such as quality teacher-student relationships, effective instructional and classroom management practices, and systemic practices) and a variety of
factors impacted by school engagement (such as academic achievement and school completion).

School engagement is considered to be a primary vehicle for increasing positive outcomes for students, including successful school completion. Studies have shown that students’ engagement with school is malleable and can be improved through targeted and universal intervention (e.g., Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr & Anderson, 2003). Further, students’ engagement with school is considered to be an academic enabler, which facilitates academic achievement (DiPerna, 2006).

While many interventions and system reform efforts focus on promoting engagement with students at risk for dropping out, there is a dearth of information concerning practical strategies to promote school engagement as a universal prevention technique. This type of perspective is informed by positive psychology, which examines strengths in addition to weaknesses and promotes the study of protective factors and human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This approach is also based on motivation theory and current scholarship that aims to promote students’ motivation and engagement with school.

The current study seeks to integrate current knowledge and scholarship on school engagement with a positive psychological perspective and an emphasis on primary prevention. Specifically, the aims of this study were to implement and evaluate a strengths-based curriculum for sixth through eighth grade students geared toward increasing school engagement. The strengths-based curriculum involves students identifying their top strengths, describing how these strengths impact them, using these strengths to set goals, and monitoring and evaluating goal progress. This curriculum was implemented by middle school teachers in a rural Midwestern school district and was evaluated using a diverse set of
indicators of school engagement, including grades, attendance, discipline referrals, and self-report indicators of cognitive and psychological engagement.
Literature Review

Students’ engagement with school is considered to be a multidimensional construct that utilizes ecological theory, incorporates motivation theories, and prioritizes students’ affective reactions to school and schooling. The discussion below reviews literature related to students’ engagement with school. First, an overall orientation to students’ engagement with school is given. Next, specific components of students’ engagement with school are identified and described. Important outcomes associated with school engagement are discussed next. Following this, facilitators and influences on students’ engagement with school are identified and discussed. Interventions that have been shown to facilitate students’ engagement with school are then discussed. Finally, a rationale, given the literature on student engagement and positive psychology in schools, is given for the following study.

Overview of Student Engagement with School

“Student engagement has practical implications. It has been considered to be (a) the primary theoretical model for understanding and intervening with potential dropouts to promote school completion; (b) the cornerstone of recent high school reform initiatives that explicitly focus on fostering high schoolers’ perceptions of competence and control, personal values and goals, and social connectedness to peers and teachers; (c) interrelated with the construct motivation to learn, and (d) relevant for all students who “cross our school doors.” (Furlong & Christenson, 2008, p. 366)

Although there are many ‘status variables’, such as race and SES, associated with school dropout (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Godber, 2001), school engagement is “considered to be the primary theoretical model for understanding and intervening with potential dropouts to promote school completion” (Furlong & Christenson, 2008, p. 366). Because school dropout is conceptualized as a process rather than a discrete event (Lehr,
Hansen, Sinclair & Christenson, 2003), student engagement represents an alterable variable to change the developmental trajectory of students at-risk for dropping out, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Finn’s (1989) seminal treatment of school engagement reconceptualized school dropout as a process (rather than a discrete event) that is associated with decreasing psychological engagement with school. Finn situates school dropout in a participation-identification model, in which students’ active participation in school and feeling of identification with school are associated with academic achievement. This model is based on research findings indicating that students’ social bonds with schools promote academic success and decrease the likelihood of a number of negative outcomes, such as delinquency. The model describes the reciprocal influences of participation and identification with school on eventual school outcomes. According to this model, behavioral engagement (such as involvement in extracurricular activities and initiative in class) leads to academic success which leads to feelings of identification with school (e.g., feelings of belonging in school, valuing of school). These feelings of identification with school serve to further increase students’ behavioral engagement with school.

Since Finn’s (1989) work, the literature on school engagement has greatly expanded. School engagement is a multidimensional construct, now studied across realms of education, psychology, and sociology (Griffiths, Sharkey, & Furlong, 2009) and has also been studied as school bonding, school connectedness, and student engagement. Engagement is typified as “encompassing a student’s feelings, beliefs, thoughts and behaviors related to the school context” (Griffiths et al., 2009). Engagement with school is a concept that has been gaining momentum as educators, policy-makers, and parents decry students’ lack of motivation for
their schoolwork and the alienation many students feel in school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Parks, 2004).

School engagement is considered to be a meta-construct that encompasses several different components of students’ attitudes, behaviors, and feelings which are organically inter-related within individual students (Fredricks et al., 2004). Engagement with school is typified as one’s active interest with school activities and varies among dimensions, such as psychological engagement (a feeling of belonging with the school, connection to teachers), cognitive engagement (self-regulation, value of learning), behavioral engagement (attendance, participation), and academic engagement (grades, credits earned) (Appleton, Christenson, Kim & Reschly, 2006). Students’ engagement with school involves a continuum of the type and degree of commitment or investment in each domain (e.g., cognitive, behavioral) which can vary in intensity and duration (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The notion of school engagement is closely connected with motivation theories. Self-determination theory contends that optimal human functioning is based, in part, on the extent to which foundational psychological needs are met through the environment – the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (the need to feel belongingness and connectedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, the notion of psychological engagement and school bonding or connectedness is derived, in part, from these theories that indicate students need close connections with peers, teachers, and family to function optimally.

However, engagement with school is differentiated from motivation in that engagement is considered “motivation in action.” That is, students’ engagement reflects active involvement in tasks or activities with purposeful devotion of cognitive resources to accomplish a task (Appleton, Christenson & Furlong, 2008). Thus, motivation is necessary but not sufficient for a student to be actively engaged in a task.
Components of School Engagement

School engagement encompasses a wealth of research from a diverse set of theoretical backgrounds and disciplines. Although the lack of clarity of the term ‘school engagement’ has been noted (e.g., Appleton et al., 2006), it is generally accepted to be a multidimensional construct encompassing both internal/high inference (thoughts and feelings towards school) and external/low inference (academic behaviors, such as attendance and persistence) dimensions (Sharkey, You & Schnoebelen, 2008; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton & Antaramian, 2008).

Components of students’ engagement with school can be considered indicators of engagement. Observations of these characteristics, for instance by monitoring students’ grades, attendance, discipline referrals, and accrued credits can assist educators in selecting students needing further intervention and determining intervention impact (Furlong & Christenson, 2008).

In general, students’ engagement with school is conceptualized as existing on a continuum. At low levels of engagement, students have irregular attendance and no active involvement in their learning. At high levels of engagement, students have good attendance, participate actively in school, have positive relationships with peers and staff, and have a sense of belongingness to school. In between low and high levels, students may have good attendance but have a poor sense of belongingness to school and are inconsistently engaged with completing school tasks (Christenson et al., 2001). Additionally, within each dimension, students can exhibit qualitative differences in intensity and duration of engagement. A student who is cognitively engaged, for example, can exhibit a range of cognitive strategies, from rote memorization to meaningful and self-regulated learning strategies (Fredricks et al., 2004).
The components or indicators of students’ engagement with school also interact with each other and can serve as self-reinforcing, leading to a greater degree of engagement. For instance, Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model specifically advances the notion that participation in the school environment (e.g., behavioral and academic engagement) serves to reinforce and strengthen students’ feelings of school connectedness (e.g., psychological engagement).

Traditionally, students’ engagement with school has been conceptualized as a three-component model, encompassing behavioral, cognitive and psychological engagement. These factors encompass a wealth of student attitudes and behaviors. However, Furlong and Christenson (2008) note that academic engagement, conceptualized as time on task or time spent on academically meaningful tasks are also relevant to conceptualizing students’ overall engagement with school.

Although there is debate as to the number and type of dimensions of student engagement, the following study utilizes the four-factor model of student engagement advanced by Appleton et al. (2006); the dimensions of academic engagement, behavioral engagement, psychological engagement, and cognitive engagement will be outcome variables in this study. The following sections provide additional detail about each specific area of engagement.

**Academic engagement.** Academic engagement is reflected through indicators such as time on task, credits earned toward graduation, and homework completion (Appleton et al., 2006). Although academic engagement is conceptually distinct, in much of the research, it is subsumed under behavioral engagement. Moreover, in many studies, engagement is reported as a cumulative sum of a number of indicators, further making connections between academic engagement in particular and both facilitators and outcomes of academic
engagement difficult to determine (Fredricks et al., 2004). Appleton et al. (2008) argue that including academic engagement as a facet of engagement in itself is consistent with other literature suggesting time spent in academic activities has a strong connection to student achievement. Finn’s (1989) model of participation-identification used the notion of academic engagement, defined as completed work and time on task, to conceptualize the processes by which students complete school and achieve school success.

Academic engagement encompasses a variety of positive behaviors that facilitate academic success. Academic effort, defined as students’ time and energy on academic activities, has been used as an indicator of academic engagement (Stanard, Belgrave, Corneille, Wilson & Owens, 2010). Academic time engaged, or time on task, has also been frequently studied in terms of teacher and classroom practices facilitating academic engagement and in terms of interventions promoting academic engagement (e.g., Greenwood, Horton & Utley, 2002; Skinner, Pappas & Davis, 2005). For instance, Greenwood et al. (2002) notes that pedagogical strategies such as including more discussions and interactive lessons, providing more opportunities for all students to respond, and attending to individual and small groups of students can increase time that students are actively engaged in lessons. Codding & Smyth (2008) studied the efficacy of a consultative intervention with teachers, incorporating performance feedback, on decreasing transition time which in turn increased students’ academic engaged time.

**Behavioral engagement.** Behavioral engagement is a directly observable component of school engagement. Researchers have typically examined behavioral engagement along several dimensions: adherence to rules and school routines, attendance, and active involvement in school curriculum (e.g., persistence, asking questions, contributions to class discussions), and participation in extra-curricular activities (Fredricks
Behavioral engagement is typically the facet most salient to schools – because it is directly observable and connected to important academic outcomes, many schools focus their attention exclusively on behavioral engagement for intervention. In this study, behavioral engagement is defined as displaying prosocial and appropriate behaviors and the absence of disruptive and inappropriate behaviors (e.g., absences, discipline referrals).

Behavioral engagement, as other types of engagement, varies along a continuum. Finn (1989) postulated that qualitative differences in engagement exist between different “levels” of behavioral engagement with school, such as between compliance with adult directives (low level) and voluntary involvement in extracurricular activities (high level). Further, his work (Finn, 1993) demonstrated that behavioral engagement (defined as attendance, classroom behavior, and participation in extracurricular activities) was strongly associated with academic achievement with more positive impacts for student classified in groups typifying higher levels of engagement.

There are a variety of ways to measure behavioral engagement. Rating scales, including parent, student and teacher-reports have been used while others use observational techniques. Measuring behavioral engagement involves examining patterns of absences, tardies, and conduct problems. Observational strategies to measure behavioral engagement primarily assess whether a student is on-task and non-disruptive during a given time period (Fredricks et al., 2004).

**Cognitive engagement.** Cognitive engagement encompasses two separate but interrelated components: (1) an investment in learning and valuing of its important future outcomes (e.g., viewing schoolwork as important to future endeavors); and (2) use of specific cognitive strategies, such as self-regulation and goal-setting (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement encompasses internal indicators such as self-regulation, value of
learning, perception of relevance of schoolwork, personal goals, and autonomy (Appleton et al., 2006). Cognitive engagement is perhaps the dimension of engagement most related to other motivational concepts, including motivation to learn, learning goals, and intrinsic motivation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement also varies along a continuum with qualitative differences between different degrees of cognitive engagement. A student can, for instance, be cognitively engaged by simply completing tasks or by focusing on learning and mastering material.

Related to the psychological components of cognitive engagement, such as valuing learning, cognitive engagement has also been measured by determining students’ interest in school (e.g., enjoyment of academic activities) and utility value (e.g., belief that education is meaningful and will lead to better personal outcomes) (Stanard et al., 2010).

In terms of the motivational and strategic components of cognitive engagement, it is said that students who reflect a high degree of cognitive engagement likely reflect learning as opposed to performance goals, exhibit intrinsic motivation, use metacognitive and learning strategies to facilitate task completion, and self-regulate to sustain attention to task (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Cognitive engagement has historically been a more difficult engagement dimension to measure. Some studies, drawing from concepts of self-regulation, have defined and measured cognitive engagement as metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting, planning, organizing, concentration, and managing effort. Some studies have also drawn from strategy use to define and measure concrete indicators of strategy use by observation (e.g., evidence of volitional control strategies and evidence of persistence). However, Appleton et al. (2006) constructed a self-report measure (SEI) of cognitive and psychological engagement to address this gap in the engagement literature. This measure proved to be useful in predicting
a variety of student outcomes, including grades, and is conceptually congruent with research on psychological and cognitive engagement.

**Psychological engagement.** Psychological or emotional engagement addresses students’ feelings toward academic tasks and includes diverse feelings, such as boredom, interest and anxiety. Finn’s (1989) model of school withdrawal specifically includes psychological engagement as “identification” with school (e.g., valuing of school, feelings of belonging in school) which can protect students against negative outcomes, such as school dropout. Emotions, such as interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment are frequently used to refer to students’ emotional engagement with academic tasks and vary in activation (e.g., the degree to which emotions are energizing) which can be functionally applied to match task demands (e.g., using high-activation emotions for tasks that require rote repetition) (Bergin, Jamroz, Murphy & Bryant, 2010).

Psychological engagement varies along a continuum and can include positive feelings about school and learning but also include feelings of intense interest, involvement and investment in an activity that is characterized as a *flow* experience (Fredricks et al., 2004, Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Emotions such as interest can vary between situational (temporary and specific) and personal (enduring interest in a topic area).

Emotions linked to the school environment are included in definitions of psychological engagement and include feelings about academic tasks, the valuing of school overall, and feelings of connectedness to teachers, peers, and school staff. Disengagement, connected to school dropout, is associated with feelings of alienation, poor sense of belongingness to school, and a dislike of school (Lehr, Sinclair & Christenson, 2004).

Psychological engagement is connected to growing interest in studying emotions in the context of school and academic tasks (Linnenbrink-Garcia & Pekrun, 2011). Models
such as Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory suggest that positive emotions experienced in learning environments serves to build resources and build the thought-action repertoire, serving to facilitate effort and persistence. Recent studies clearly demonstrate the links between emotions, behavior, and students’ engagement with school. For instance, Linnenbrink-Garcia, Rogat, and Koskey (2011) found that affect and peer relationships affected behavioral engagement during small group tasks and Ainley and Ainley (2011) found that students’ perceptions of science as being personally meaningful and relevant was associated with their enjoyment of science and their intention to further engage with science content.

Psychological engagement is also closely connected with feelings of belonging associated with positive peer and teacher relationships. Teacher-student relationships are considered an important component of schooling and impact students’ social and cognitive development, including teachers’ provision of structure, support, and facilitation of students’ feelings of academic success (Davis, 2003).

Drawing from social cognitive theories of motivation and attachment theories, it is frequently stated that the need for belonging and relationships with others is a foundational human need (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for these relationships extends to significant adults in a student’s life, including parents and teachers. Strong relationships with significant adults have been shown to have a strong positive association with school engagement. For instance, Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that students’ sense of relatedness to others was predictive of their academic performance, with behavioral and emotional engagement as a mediator. Furthermore, this study concluded that a sense of relatedness contributed to engagement beyond students’ control beliefs.
Overall feelings of belonging with and valuing of the school overall and with significant adults in the school is associated with psychological engagement. This component of engagement is amplified by connected literature on ‘school bonding’, defined as attachment to school, attachment to personnel, school commitment, and school involvement (Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Psychological engagement is also related to social control theory, which indicates that individuals who identify and connect with conventional social institutions (e.g., schools) will inhibit socially deviant behaviors (Finn, 1989). School bonding, similar to school engagement overall, is linked to a diverse set of educational and life consequences, such as substance use, risky behaviors, academic performance, and self-esteem (Maddox & Prinz, 2003).

Psychological engagement is primarily measured by a student’s self-report. These items assess a student’s affective reactions to school, schoolwork, and individuals in their school. Some scales measure identification with school, or the degree to which a student has positive relationships with teachers and values schoolwork. The Student Engagement Instrument (SEI; Appleton et al., 2006) was specifically constructed to measure cognitive and psychological engagement based on research on these factors. Psychological engagement is specifically measured by assessing students’ feelings of connectedness to peers and adults in their school.

### Outcomes of School Engagement

The effects of engagement with school are diffuse and far reaching, including impacting academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for students. One consistent finding in the literature is that academic engagement influences grades. In particular, a number of studies indicate that indicators of behavioral engagement, such as inattention and conduct problems are strongly associated with scores on achievement measures (Finn & Rock, 1997).
Perhaps the most well studied school engagement outcome is school completion. A number of aspects of school engagement have been shown to be associated with school dropout or successful school completion. Summarizing the vast literature, Fredricks et al. (2004), found that multiple authors reported a significant correlation between behavioral engagement (e.g., attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, behavioral conduct) and eventual dropout, which is consistent with Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model of school completion. There is also some evidence that emotional engagement is a factor in students’ decision to drop out. For instance, feelings of school connectedness can act as a protective factor in school completion.

Two seminal studies demonstrate long-term outcomes associated with school engagement predictors. Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997) examined a variety of risk factors, including background characteristics, family context, personal resources, and school experiences at first grade and their cumulative, combined, and individual impact on eventual school dropout. They found that indicators of students’ behavioral engagement, such as lateness, absences, and classroom behavior at first grade were strong predictors of later high school dropout. Additionally, children’s attitudes (e.g., psychological engagement) were found to be weak predictors of later school dropout, which is significant given the difficulties in obtaining accurate self-report measures from young (first grade) students. These measures retained their significant predictive value even when controlling for sociodemographic risk factors, such as SES and family structure, suggesting the crucial role of student attitudes and behaviors in school completion.

Finn and Rock (1997) found that several measures of engagement, assessed by self- and teacher-report at tenth grade predicted membership in either resilient (still in school, standardized test scores at least at the fortieth percentile and grades of B’s and C’s),
nonresilient completers (still in school but did not meet academic criteria for resilience), and nonresilient noncompleters (dropped out of school) for students placed at-risk due to minority status and low SES. Specifically, teacher-reported attendance, hard work in class, and engagement in learning activities as well as student-reported attendance and behavior problems significantly predicted student outcomes even while controlling for demographic characteristics (SES and family composition), self esteem, and locus of control. The authors conclude that the study “has underscored the potential of academic engagement for protecting individual students from the adversities that may accompany status risk factors. Unlike status characteristics, engagement behaviors may be manipulable; that is, school personnel may be able to reinforce these behaviors when they occur and promote them when they do not” (p. 231).

**Influences on School Engagement**

Because students’ engagement with school is a large meta-construct, encompassing many different dimensions of students’ attitudes, behavior, and emotions, a large number of factors also influence the degree to which it is manifested. Engagement is frequently conceptualized within a systems-ecological model which posits that contextual factors, such as school characteristics, policy decisions, peer attitudes and behavior, and family academic and motivational support impact students’ engagement with school individually and in concert with each other (e.g., Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003; Janosz, Archambault, Morizot & Pagani, 2008). Researchers often note that engagement research examines the person x environment interaction to specify the degree to which there exists “fit” and to determine strategies to provide better “fit” between students and their environments (e.g., Appleton et al., 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Reschly et al., 2008; Eccles et al., 1993). Social cognitive theory also provides some insight as to how these
factors influence each other – specifically, this theory indicates that there is a reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. As such, students with good attendance and on-task behavior (behavioral factor) may create more positive opportunities for interacting with teachers (environmental factor) which may in-turn increase the students’ feelings of competence in the school realm (personal factor) (Holt, Bry & Johnson, 2008).

Furlong & Christenson (2008) recommend a specific focus on facilitators of engagement. Facilitators of engagement are malleable contextual factors that contribute to the strength of students’ engagement with school (e.g., school discipline practices). A focus on facilitators of engagement provides suggestions for intervention with students having poor engagement with school and also preventive strategies that promote resilience. Specific influences or facilitators of engagement based on prior research are discussed below. First, peer and family-related influences on engagement are discussed; next, school-related factors are discussed; finally, individual influences are identified and discussed.

**Peer and family-related factors.** Given that families have a large influence on children’s behaviors overall, family-related factors, such as effective parenting behavior, parental involvement in education, and parental monitoring affect students’ engagement with school. Family influences, including effective parenting behavior, are often targeted for intervention. One such empirically-supported intervention, the Family Check Up model, has been shown to increase students’ self-regulation which was associated with a gain in students’ behavioral and academic engagement during students’ transition to high school (Stormshak, Fosco, & Dishion, 2010). This study reinforces the notion of the multiple reciprocal influences impacting students’ engagement with school and the role of intervention in multiple contexts to improve student outcomes.
Perceived social support via positive teacher-student, peer, and parent relationships are believed to be a source of social capital, particularly for students who are at-risk for negative educational outcomes due to ethnic background and socioeconomic status. A series of studies has found positive benefits associated with perceived social support from parents (e.g., parent behaviors appreciating their children, parent encouragement behaviors), peers (e.g., level of perceived trust with friends) and teachers (e.g., perceptions of support, care, and encouragement from teachers) on psychological engagement (e.g., perceptions of school meaningfulness) for Latino/a youth (Brewster & Bowen, 2004) and Hispanic females (Garcia-Reid, 2007). While this research is cross-sectional and does not take into account the reciprocal influences of students and their environments, it nonetheless implies that the contextual variables of family, peer, and teacher support contribute to notions of engagement with school.

Stanard et al. (2010) found that peer risky behaviors (e.g., sexual behaviors, truancy, and substance use) and family cohesion (e.g., positive family relationships and communication) predicted cognitive and academic engagement in a sample of African-American adolescents. Further, family cohesion proved to be a significant predictor of students’ engagement with school over and above peer influences. Similar results were found by Bowen, Rose, Powers, and Glennie (2008), who found that students’ perception of family togetherness predicted later engagement with school.

Further highlighting the role of contextual influences on students’ engagement with school, Daly, Shin, Thakral, Selders and Vera (2009) found that perceived neighborhood incivilities (e.g., lack of access to recreational activities, lack of supervised neighborhood activities) negatively predicted racial and ethnic minority students’ psychological engagement.
with school. This study also demonstrated that perceived social support (e.g., from parents, peers, and teachers) was more impactful at younger than older ages.

Peers provide another influence for student engagement. Characteristics of peer relationships have been shown to affect students’ engagement with school in some studies. For instance, Perdue, Manzeske, and Estell (2009) found that characteristics of peer relationships at third grade, such as friendship quality and social support, predicted students’ engagement with school at grade five when controlling for demographic (e.g., gender, SES) factors, social skills, academic achievement, and parent-child relationship quality.

It has been noted (Kindermann, 1993) that peers often self-select into groups of similar engagement levels. Moreover, peer acceptance and rejection impact overall levels of engagement such that students who are rejected are more likely to also be disengaged (Buhs & Ladd, 2001). However, Bowen et al. (2008) report findings that peer group acceptance was negatively associated with later school engagement. They discuss that the notion that peer group acceptance does not necessarily mean acceptance into prosocial groups and that having poor peer acceptance may assist students in resolving competing demands between their schoolwork and peer groups. The complex association between peer influence and students’ engagement with school is predicated on the quality and characteristics of friends, peer group norms, and behaviors associated with peer rejection and bullying (Juvonen, 2007). One possible school-based solution to increase affiliation with prosocial peers and, in turn, increase students’ engagement with school, is to offer opportunities to engage with school-based, structured extracurricular activities.

School-related factors. School structures, policies, and practices have been shown to affect students’ engagement with school. Schools whose policies and practices specifically incorporate children’s participation and rights influence students’ academic and
psychological engagement with school (Covell, 2010). Increasing systemic support for students’ engagement with school includes such suggestions as creating smaller schools with more opportunities for extracurricular activities and service learning activities (Johnson-Reid, 2010).

Research shows that school organizational variables influence academic engagement. It has been found that diverse structural characteristics, such as class size, transitions, and student-teacher ratio impact students’ engagement with school. Summarizing the literature related to the organizational impact of schools on student engagement, Baker et al. (2001) note the significant interaction between the child and his or her environment (the school) that impacts school achievement and completion. Previous studies reviewed indicated that student engagement and achievement improve when schools reduce class sizes (to approximately 15 to 20 students per class), promote block scheduling or project-based learning, and have adequate physical resources. Fredricks et al. (2004) review literature indicating that fair and flexible discipline within the classroom and school structure impacts behavioral engagement and dropout. It is clear that the school plays a role in student engagement via structuring of physical and organizational resources.

Waters, Cross and Shaw (2010) discuss school-related ecological factors impacting students’ psychological engagement, or school connectedness. They specifically relate the school environment to structural characteristics (e.g., school size, number of grade levels) and functional characteristics (e.g., fair and consistent discipline practices, high expectations for learning and student involvement in decision-making). These authors specifically found that students’ psychological engagement was associated with school factors, such as school size (number of students), presence/absence of graffiti, and average academic scores for reading, writing, and numeracy.
In terms of determining malleable classroom-related factors for increasing students’ engagement with school, Doll, Spies, LeClair, Kurien, and Foley (2010) identified classroom relatedness (e.g., a supportive classroom community), perceived competence (e.g., students’ perceptions of their likelihood of being successful), and classroom supports for autonomy (e.g., opportunities for self-directed learning) as contributing to academic and behavioral engagement.

Studies have found that teacher support and positive teacher-student relationships impact engagement and dropout. There may be a reciprocal link between teacher support and behavioral engagement, such that teachers view students who conform to school rules are more likely to elicit positive relationships from teachers (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students’ overall prosocial behaviors, peer affiliation, and teacher relationships form their sense of connectedness to school which can reciprocally influence their future behaviors and feelings of connectedness by soliciting a “fitting” response from the environment (e.g., teachers’ differential response to prosocial and disruptive behaviors) (Juvonen, 2007).

Teachers also impact student engagement via the classroom structure. Studies indicate that teachers who are clear in their expectations and provide consistency and consequences for misbehavior promote behavioral engagement (Connell, 1990). Teachers with classrooms that are well-managed behaviorally promote more on-task behavior and fewer incidences of conduct problems (Doyle, 1986). Additionally, teachers impact cognitive engagement through task selection. Students are provided opportunities to be cognitively engaged (e.g., use metacognitive strategies) when tasks are challenging. Thus, cognitive engagement is impaired by tasks such as rote memorization or repetition of procedures.

School assets and individual assets both contribute to school engagement. Using a model including individual factors, such as self-efficacy and goal orientation as well as school
assets, including connections to teachers, Sharkey et al. (2008) found that there is a dynamic interplay of these factors for students; individual factors mediate the relationship between school factors and school engagement, with differential impact for students of varying levels of risk.

**Student-related factors.** School engagement is associated with individual assets as well. Cognitive and psychological engagement have been shown to be related to positive affect and coping strategies, although it is unclear whether these constructs are causally connected (Reschly et al., 2008). Indicators of cognitive and psychological engagement are associated with positive academic outcomes and increase in response to learning strategies, representing the interaction between individual and systemic factors (Furlong & Christenson, 2008).

School engagement is also associated with career development and self-efficacy. In a study examining the longitudinal impact of career development and school engagement, Kenny, Bluestein, Haase, Jackson & Perry (2006) found that higher levels of career planfulness (defined as positive outcome expectations, knowledge of career options, and interest and activities in career planning) predicted later school engagement (defined as school belonging and valuing education). This study suggests that career development may represent a route for increasing school engagement, which would be consistent with an overall approach to increasing self-efficacy and autonomy for future options, appealing to the cognitive and psychological aspects of school engagement.

**Interventions to Promote School Engagement**

Authors frequently cite descriptive studies describing the dropout phenomenon, correlates of school dropout and factors associated with engagement while proliferation of interventions has been mostly limited (Lehr et al., 2003). Christenson et al. (2001) specifically
differentiate conceptually between interventions to decrease school dropout which specifically focus on preventing and decreasing risky behaviors (e.g., truancy) while interventions to promote school completion focus in decreasing school dropout while simultaneously focusing on skill building and promoting engagement with school (e.g., via positive teacher-student relationships and active participation in the school environment). As such, the authors characterize interventions to promote school completion as being strengths-based, seeking to improve contextual fit between students and environments, focusing on implementation over time, and utilizing a comprehensive interface of systems.

In recommending a general route to promoting students’ engagement with school, McPartland (1994) suggested conceptualizing a framework in which both academic and social concerns are addressed in both in school and out-of-school contexts. So, for instance, schools should focus on promoting academic success and demonstrating the importance of schoolwork on future endeavors. In social domains, schools should strive to create caring environments while also helping students with personal concerns.

Interventions to promote school completion vary in terms of their target audience. Some strategies target students displaying a host of risk factors and who are currently displaying problematic engagement with school (Tier 3), others seek to intervene early with individuals who are at-risk based on academic or behavioral factors (Tier 2), while others seek to create a supportive environment in which students’ engagement with school can flourish (Tier 1). Overall intervention strategies as well as specific intervention techniques are reviewed at each tier below.

**Tier 3 interventions.** Tier 3 interventions target a small group of students who are at-risk for school dropout and are displaying characteristics of poor school engagement (e.g., truancy, poor grades). The following general Tier 3 interventions are suggested by Balfanz,
Herzog & Mac Iver (2007): create sustained individualized attention and problem solving for attendance, use referrals to community agencies; for behavior, use an in-depth functional behavioral assessment, create behavior contracts with family involvement, and for course failures, use on-on-one tutoring.

For students deemed at-risk due to poor attendance, an approach involving daily phone calls to parents regarding academic and behavioral strengths and areas of difficulty, participation in afterschool athletic activities, and participation in a social skills/moral education program significantly improved several indicators of engagement with school, including absences, attitudes toward education, and educational expectations (Marvul, 2012).

A large amount of research supports the Check & Connect intervention to impact students’ engagement with school. Check & Connect is a targeted intervention for students ‘placed at risk’ for school dropout. Students are identified through the systematic use of multiple referral criteria, including behavioral indicators of engagement with school (e.g., attendance, grades). In studies with elementary students, its efficacy has been established in increasing school attendance (an indicator of engagement with school), and in increasing student attention to school and participation with academic activities (e.g., homework) (Lehr et al., 2004).

The Check & Connect intervention involves students being paired with an adult mentor whose goal is to create an individualized set of interventions aimed at facilitating a connection with school and learning, and by extension, increase students’ engagement with school. Interventions commonly used by monitors include monitoring student attendance and grades, providing feedback about student progress, frequent communication with families, demonstrating problem-solving strategies, and listening to personal concerns raised by students (Sinclair et al., 2003).
Core components of the Check & Connect model include relationship building, persistence plus, routine monitoring of alterable indicators, individualized and timely intervention, following students and families, problem-solving, and affiliation with school. Relationship-building, both within the student-mentor dyad and within the larger school community is a key component of the intervention. Monitors also keep a routine (e.g., daily) eye on key behavioral indicators of engagement (e.g., absences, tardies, grades). All students receive basic and intensive interventions which are specifically targeted to their level of risk and current functioning. Monitors follow students and families across their participation in the program even if the family moves. They partner with families through consistent communication, including home visits. Monitors also teach and model a cognitive-behavioral problem-solving model to facilitate conflict resolution skills and to build student capacity for independently resolving barriers to academic success. Monitors encourage and facilitate students’ involvement in extra-curricular activities. The notion of persistence is strongly emphasized in the Check & Connect program through the persistence of the monitor in the students’ lives, the emphasis on student persistence toward educational goals, and a persistent message about the positive impact of school completion.

Monitors are a key facilitator of positive student outcomes in the Check & Connect intervention. The role of a monitor reflects the positive gains associated with youth having a trusted adult within the school setting. Anderson et al. (2004) found that for students participating in the Check & Connect intervention, the quality of the monitor-student relationship predicted success in the intervention in the form of increased school engagement (e.g., attendance, work completion, class preparation, persistence). These results indicate that student relationships with adults can be a powerful impact on student engagement and academic outcomes.
**Tier 2 interventions.** Tier 2 interventions are for students who are at elevated or moderate risk and who may be displaying increasing signs of disengagement (e.g., poor classroom behavior, decreasing grades). Balfanz et al. (2007) suggest the following indicated (Tier 2) interventions: use daily check ins for students with more frequent attendance problems and solicit information about functions and contributors to poor attendance behavior from an attendance team; for behavior, provide behavior checklists, provide a mentor, and involve the behavior team; for course failures, provide extra help courses to replace electives, and provide reduced class sizes.

Tier 2 or selected levels of intervention includes programs such as the Check in/Check Out (CICO) model or behavior education program, in which students receive positive noncontingent adult attention at the beginning of the day, meet with a teacher to receive feedback and points related to behavior several times a day, receive reinforcers selected from a token economy system, and receive a second check-out meeting with school staff. In addition, feedback is provided to parents on students’ behaviors using a daily report card. This intervention has shown improvements with students’ academic and behavioral engagement in school by showing an increase in time on task and a decrease in disruptive behaviors (Campbell & Anderson, 2011).

Targeted interventions at Tier 2 can specifically use positive adult-child relationships to build skills and self confidence which can in turn increase students’ engagement with school. For instance, Holt et al. (2008) found that a systematic mentoring intervention, including frequent consultation with teachers, skill building in deficient areas, and frequent monitoring of school performance impacted psychological engagement (perceptions of teacher support).
Self-monitoring interventions, in which students are taught to systematically self-assess their academic and behavioral progress and adjust accordingly, have also been shown to impact students’ academic engagement (e.g., time on task) (Rock & Thead, 2007).

**Tier 1 interventions.** Tier 1, or universal, interventions, seek to intervene at the systemic level by reaching all students. Janosz et al. (2008) specifically call for increased attention to universal prevention mechanisms, such as universal policies and supportive practices that combat poor school engagement displayed by some students upon entry into high school. Balfanz et al. (2007) suggest the following universal interventions: for attendance, create accountability for each absence, create a culture that indicates attendance is important, provide social incentives for good attendance, and use data tracking; for behavior, teach, model and expect good behavior, provide reinforcement for good behavior, and provide advisory classes; for course failures, use research-based instructional programs and create active and engaging pedagogies.

In terms of whole-school or universal prevention/promotion interventions, there are many school-wide initiatives which can impact academic engagement (e.g., shifting to effective and scientifically-validated pedagogy, implementing systemic behavioral supports) but few interventions are specifically targeted toward increasing all students’ engagement with school. One school-wide model that is commonly implemented in schools is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS includes explicit teaching and rewarding positive behaviors, using data collection to determine additional individualized interventions and to monitor intervention fidelity, and using positive, preventive strategies to reducing problem behaviors in schools (Horner & Sugai, 2000). In a quasi-experimental design reported by Luiselli, Putnam, Handler & Feinberg (2005), an elementary school adopted a PBIS approach, including forming a behavior support team, building a system for data
management, developing a policy handbook with positive behavior expectations for students, and utilizing a token reinforcement system for positive behaviors. Outcomes of this school-wide change included an increase in behavioral engagement in school as measured by decreased office discipline referrals and out of school suspensions. Using a single subject design, Clarke, Worcester, Dunlap, Murray & Bradley-Klug (2002) found that individualized supports offered through PBIS increased a student’s academic engagement (e.g., time on task).

An example of a universal intervention specifically focused on decreasing school dropout and increasing behavioral engagement (e.g., attendance) is exemplified in the program reported by Graeff-Martins et al. (2006). This intervention program, implemented in Brazil, incorporated extensive psychoeducation to parents and students on risk factors for dropping out of school, negative impacts for dropping out, strategies to achieve school success, and consultation with school professionals around issues related to the emotional and behavioral problems of youth. An additional targeted assessment and intervention program (e.g., connection to outside resources) was provided to students behaviorally at risk for dropping out of school due to frequent absences. This intervention proved successful at decreasing school dropout and decreasing the number of days a student was absent.

Effective instructional and classroom management procedures can assist in facilitating academic (e.g., time on task, work completion) and behavioral (e.g., compliance) engagement. Skinner et al. (2005) review types of class-wide and individualized strategies to increase academic and behavioral engagement in the classroom, including ensuring students have materials, utilizing praise and differential reinforcement for on-task behavior, providing students with choices, and providing frequent assessment and skill remediation. In addition, group contingencies (e.g., applying reinforcement and consequences to target
behaviors designated for the entire group) have been shown to impact academic (e.g., time on task) and behavioral (e.g., fewer disruptive behaviors) engagement (McKissik, Hawkins, Lentz, Hailley & McGuire, 2010).

School structural changes can also contribute to increased engagement. A variety of school-wide intervention strategies at the middle school level, including grouping students into smaller grade-level “teams,” facilitating “advisory” periods with a small groups of students, and facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration between teachers have been implemented while more contemporary solutions involve actively incorporating students’ need for teacher and peer affiliation, such as the cooperative learning model, extracurricular activities, and community volunteer programs; creating environments supportive of emotional security, such as incorporating antibullying programs; and enhancing continuity, such as by “looping” (grouping students for multiple years) (Juvonen, 2007).

Based on findings connecting family cohesion to students’ engagement with school, Stanard et al. (2010) suggest strong school-family linkages and partnerships as a route for promoting positive school engagement. For instance, they suggest that offering parental support groups, utilizing referrals to social services agencies, including families in achievement ceremonies, and offering family homework assignments may foster a strong connection between schools and families and help parents convey a strong valuing of academic success.

Many universal prevention programs seek to affect students’ engagement with school indirectly. For instance, PBIS affects engagement via increasing prosocial behaviors and classroom management and instructional techniques seek to affect engagement through increasing positive academic behaviors (e.g., on-task behaviors). However, a universal prevention program may be helpful, particularly at a middle school level where students’
engagement with school begins to decline (Eccles et al., 1993).

Current Study

**Intervention rationale.** In reviewing the literature on cognitive and psychological engagement and demonstrating the utility of a self-report measure to assess these constructs, Appleton et al. (2006) further state the need for interventions addressing these components, stating “given that school personnel cannot alter family circumstances, we must focus on alterable variables, including those related to the development of students’ perceived competence, personal goal setting, and interpersonal relationships to offer students optimism for a positive outcome” (p. 431).

The purpose of this research is to evaluate a pilot study of a novel strengths-based intervention that builds on prior research on students’ engagement with school. Specifically, the intervention will build positive engagement with school through the content of the intervention (e.g., major goals and topics covered including strengths exploration and goal-setting) and through the process of delivering the intervention (e.g., targeted conversations with peers and teachers regarding school performance and student strengths). The rationale for the intervention is provided below, including a grounding in positive psychology theory and research, a rationale for intervening at the middle school level using a universal approach, and a description of the intervention content with connections to the scientific literature supporting its use.

**Theoretical framework.** Student engagement with school is considered a protective factor that can promote successful school completion as well as prevent a range of negative outcomes. Interest in engagement comes from several fronts, including motivation research, school policy research, and dropout prevention research. Recently, authors (Reschly et al., 2008, Griffiths et al., 2009) have noted the similarities between an emphasis on engagement
and the shift towards positive psychology. This intervention is theoretically grounded, in part, in positive psychology. Specifically, the psychoeducational goal of elucidating student strengths and the overall goal of promoting a positive environment for students are closely connected to positive psychology. A summary of positive psychology follows.

Interest in the burgeoning field of positive psychology continues to grow, especially in relation to its potential practical applications (Terjesen et al., 2004; Chafouleas & Bray, 2004). With a focus on “health” rather than “illness” and strengths in addition to weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), a paradigm shift within the larger field of psychology has been observed. For instance, a focus on well-being and the promotion of mental health is touted as a critical component in mental health prevention and intervention (National Research Council and Institutes of Medicine, 2009).

Within school-based settings, there has been an increased interest in the basic assertion of a strengths-based approach. The development of “positive psychology” as reacting against a disease/pathology-focused model is mirrored within the schools by an increased focus on preventive/consultative-focused practice for school psychologists, as opposed to the traditional refer-test-place model of special education (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004). School psychologists are not only interested in treating pathology but also fostering strengths and resiliencies amongst students to buffer the effects of stress and counter risk factors.

A strengths-focused intervention to increase academic engagement fits with evidence-based dropout prevention priorities such as strengthening problem-solving and decision-making skills, aiding in appropriate goal setting, and recognition of student achievements (Dynarski et al., 2008).
This intervention also provides a route for students’ basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness) to be met within the school setting (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students will actively monitor their academic goals with their teachers, providing more opportunities to build positive relationships. Students are also given opportunities to begin to develop a degree of autonomy by “taking charge” of their education and setting their own unique goals based on their strengths. Students are provided the opportunity to develop a degree of competence by monitoring their goals, receiving feedback on their performance, and suggestions to further develop an active plan for achieving their goals.

*Universal prevention.* Effective social programs encompass a wide variety of intervention strategies. The public health model, for instance, characterize intervention strategies as being universal, targeted or selective, or indicated based on an individual’s current level of symptoms and risk factors (Gordon, 1983). There are intervention strategies (e.g., Check & Connect; Sinclair et al., 2003) that provide intensive, individualized services to students most at-risk for dropping out of school based on poor engagement. Some universal prevention strategies (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support; Horner & Sugai, 2000) have also demonstrated impact on students’ engagement with school. However, due to the large numbers of students who display poor levels of engagement, a universal prevention/intervention strategy may be helpful in promoting students’ engagement with school on a systemic level.

The intervention will be focused on prevention/promotion at the *universal level.* Students’ engagement with school has been said to vary along a continuum and is frequently separated into subtypes or groups based on the degree to which a student is engaged with school. However, studies demonstrate that up to one quarter of high school students are disengaged to some extent (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Moreover, many more students are at-risk
to become disengaged due to negative peer influences, status risk factors, and the developmental course of decreasing engagement (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

This intervention is differentiated from other interventions aimed at increasing school engagement and school completion, particularly Check and Connect, in that it is implemented at the universal level, is delivered in a group setting, and has a specified set of activities that are implemented for all students participating. In addition, its goal is explicitly focused on increasing school engagement and is differentiated from other initiatives that affect engagement indirectly and variously seek to increase positive behaviors (e.g., PBIS, CICO), increase quality instruction (e.g., systemic pedagogical interventions), and decrease school dropout (e.g., Check and Connect).

**Targeting middle school.** Students’ engagement with school has been found to follow a typical developmental course. Janosz et al. (2008) established a normative trajectory of students’ behavioral, cognitive, and psychological engagement with school, which classified the majority (53%) of their sample as having somewhat high levels of engagement at ages 12 through 16 with a decrease over time. Students with unstable trajectories (e.g., with vacillations in indicators of engagement) and trajectories associated with decreasing engagement with school also show an increased risk for dropping out of school.

Middle schools have specifically been identified as a potentially powerful context to mitigate risk factors. Eccles et al. (1993) specifically discuss early adolescence (e.g., middle school) as a time in which students are susceptible to a mismatch between their needs and the opportunities available through their social environment. Thus, changes in middle school students’ motivation and engagement with school can be explained, in part, due to structural changes in schools which are a ‘mismatch’ to adolescents’ social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. For instance, although middle school students have a strong need for
autonomy, middle school classrooms tend to be characterized by discipline, teacher control, and few opportunities for student decision-making.

Middle school students have been found to have a decrease in engagement which persists through high school (e.g., Eccles et al., 1993; Balfanz et al., 2007). American middle school students also have, on average, a poorer sense of belongingness to school and a more negative perception of peer relationships than other same-aged students in other countries (Juvonen, 2007). School engagement, even amongst middle school students, is closely connected to school completion. For middle school students, particularly students who are sociodemographically at risk for school dropout (e.g., due to attending a high-poverty school), variables such as poor attendance (e.g. 80% or less), course failure (e.g., in core math and English courses), receiving a poor final behavior grade, and out of school suspensions during sixth grade predict eventual school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2007). This study further found that students who exhibit good behavior and academic performance (e.g., the reverse of the former) are much more likely to graduate than district norms. These studies, combined with studies showing the developmental decline of motivation and engagement, point to middle school as being a critical time for predicting future success and a key time period for intervention to facilitate future success. This study specifically focuses on middle school (grades 6-8) students. Beyond structural and systems changes to middle schools (e.g., decreasing class size, using effective behavior management), there are currently no universal strategies specifically aimed at promoting school engagement at the middle school level.

**Description of intervention content.** The current study examines a novel strengths-based curriculum aimed at improving students’ engagement with school. First, students discuss the notion of strengths and determine their personal strengths by taking a strength survey. Next, students explore how their strengths can contribute to academic and
personal success. Next, students discuss goal-setting and how to write effective goals using specific criteria, such as measurable and specific. Finally, students set academic and personal goals and monitor their progress by meeting with their teacher. It is hypothesized that psychological engagement will be impacted by students’ strengths exploration and positive goal-directed talk with their teachers; their cognitive engagement will be affected by goal setting and monitoring procedures. It is further hypothesized that academic and behavioral engagement will be affected via students’ more positive feelings and expectancies related to school.

A very similar study was conducted by Madden, Green, and Grant (2011) with elementary students. In this study, a trained teacher-coach facilitated sessions with small groups of elementary students using a solution-focused cognitive-behavioral framework that included three parts (1) exploration of one’s “signature strengths;” (2) psychoeducation on effective goals using the SMART framework (e.g., specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely); and (3) self-regulation of goal attainment, such as specific coaching around planning, persistence, and goal monitoring. These authors found participants had significant gains in terms of their level of hope and in terms of their engagement. However, no control group was used for comparison of outcomes and only self-report measures were utilized as outcome measures.

The intervention is strengths based. As an intervention strategy, it focuses on student strengths and resiliencies. As an intervention overall, it seeks to build resiliencies to buffer against stress and risk factors and promote students’ engagement with school. This is similar to Lehr et al.’s (2003) call to focus on promoting school completion (as opposed to preventing school dropout) and building skills related to academic, behavioral and future life success.
Strengths-based coaching is a positive psychology oriented intervention that has gained momentum within positive psychology. In coaching sessions, participants identify strengths and competencies, set goals, identify barriers and facilitators to their goals, and monitor their progress with the assistance of a “coach” (Biswas-Diener, 2009). Strengths exploration facilitates self-exploration and can orient an individual to appropriately direct their motivations and behaviors towards a given goal (e.g. Madden, 2011). Research has supported the link between strength use and goal progress which is in turn associated with increased subjective well-being (Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010).

Strength exploration is also a psychoeducational intervention in which students learn more about themselves and can further develop self-awareness. Psychoeducational interventions, such as the intervention reported by Martin (2007), including education and self-exploration around motivational realms, such as self-efficacy, valuing school, and planning impacts students’ engagement with school (e.g., feelings of connectedness to school).

Moreover, self-assessment of strengths and interests is consistent with career development theories, which posit that school professionals can facilitate the process by assisting students in developing a sense of identity and understanding of him or herself (e.g., Kosine, Steger & Duncan, 2008). Career development, including career planfulness and positive expectations is also associated with students’ psychological engagement with school (Kenny et al., 2006). It is also hypothesized to relate to cognitive engagement, as when students have goals and can directly connect their academic performance to their future goals, they see school as being relevant.

The intervention focuses on developing student goals. Summarizing motivational research including self-determination theory, Appleton et al. (2008) explicate that the social
context, such as schools and classrooms, can focus on autonomy support (e.g., connecting actions and goals), which will contribute to students’ competence and autonomy (e.g., beliefs such as “I know how to do well in school,” “I can do it,” “It is important for me to do well in school”) which can prove beneficial in increasing students’ engagement with school and as a result, promote positive academic, social and emotional outcomes.

Students’ goals are also very important to the notion of cognitive and psychological engagement. Specifically these facets of students’ engagement with school specify that students believe school is necessary and a priority in order to accomplish future endeavors. For students to have these beliefs and to prioritize school, they also need to have academic and career goals. In a large-scale survey of high school students, 73% of students reported they go to school because they want to get a degree and go to college; however, 58% also reported they go because it is the law. Moreover, 60% of students who considered dropping out of school reasoned that they didn’t see the value in schoolwork (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Students’ goal-setting overall is related to the motivational constructs of self-determination theory. According to this theory, students’ motivation includes intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations, such as engaging in an activity for the inherent value in the activity, and engaging in activity to accomplish a student-set goal, have been linked to school completion (e.g., Eisenman, 2007).

The process of goal-setting and connecting goals to plans and future educational aspirations is related to Martin’s (2008) conceptualization of the Motivation and Engagement wheel which draws from motivation theory and research. In this model, student behaviors, such as persistence, planning, and task management and attitudes, such as self-efficacy and valuing are associated with increased engagement. This model has also been used to guide
intervention efforts, such as incorporating explicit activities around planning and goal setting, which resulted in gains in students’ engagement with school (Martin, 2008).

Further, goal-setting and active monitoring of goals is linked to self-regulation (e.g., control, monitoring, and evaluation of learning and behavior), which is linked to school persistence. Eisenman (2007) specifically discusses that interventions to promote self-regulation via setting and monitoring goals can be delivered to all students inasmuch as such interventions can be beneficial to all students and students at-risk are not “singled out.” These interventions can involve explicit teaching of goal-setting and goal attainment strategies as well as teacher facilitation of goal monitoring.

Students’ goals are also closely connected to the notion of hope, which is defined as one’s ability to: (1) clearly conceptualize goals; (2) develop strategies to reach their goals (pathways thinking); and (3) initiate and sustain motivation and behavior to reach goals (agency thinking) (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand & Feldman, 2003). Both agency and pathways thinking are necessary to sustain goal-attainment behavior. Hope, including positive future expectations, has been shown to be a protective factor for school completion (Worrell & Hale, 2001) and further shown to be associated with perceived competence and academic achievement (Snyder et al., 2003).

Snyder et al. (2003) specifically suggest the following universal and targeted interventions to promote student hope: facilitate students setting a variety of goals (e.g., academic, personal), establish measurable benchmarks and indicators of goal progress, break large goals into smaller steps, and establish positive self-talk to assist in reaching goals. This study incorporates many of these suggestions: students are asked to brainstorm a variety of goals, use their strengths to accomplish their goals, and track their goal progress with assistance from a teacher.
This intervention seeks to build positive teacher-student relationships. Studies have consistently found that positive teacher-student relationships as well as peer support for learning are associated with students’ engagement with school (e.g., Stanard et al., 2010; Daly et al., 2009). Using motivational theories as a framework, Davis (2003) specifically explicates the notion of positive teacher-student relationships as including autonomy support (e.g., listening to and questioning children’s wants). Bergin and Bergin (2009) discuss literature related to school bonding, attachment in classrooms, and teacher relationships and report findings supporting the notion that when students feel supported and securely attached to teachers, there is likely to be greater interest and engagement in school. It is expected that activities such as discussions around goals and discussions with peers regarding goals and goal progress will reinforce the notion to students that teachers believe school is important, that teachers are willing and able to assist them in completing school and accomplishing their goals, and discussions with peers will reinforce positive views toward schooling and its application to students’ future plans.

It is specifically hypothesized that the intervention will improve students’ hope and their cognitive and psychological engagement and will have a significant, but smaller, impact on behavioral and academic engagement. To measure these hypotheses, separate ANOVAs will be conducted on each outcome variable: hope (self-report) cognitive engagement (self-report), psychological engagement (self-report), academic engagement (teacher report), rate of disruptive behaviors (self-report), discipline referrals (school records), and attendance (school records). Interaction effects indicating the efficacy of the intervention as compared to the control group as well as main effects for time and treatment status will be examined.
Methods

Setting

The intervention took place within a middle school (grades 6-8) located in a small Midwestern city (population of approximately 12,000). This community faces concerns related to poverty, child abuse and neglect, and access to few health and mental health resources (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). The district has placed increased emphasis specifically on dropout prevention through leadership initiatives and programming decisions. The middle school in this district (intervention school) has also adopted a homeroom period called “Summit” that is designed to allow students increased access to teachers, tutoring, academic assistance, and to make up class work and exams; to build connections between teachers and students; and to teach Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and character building lessons. Students meet for this class period daily for 30 minutes.

Group Assignment

At the intervention school, each grade level contains two “teams” of teachers within which students are placed. Within each team, all core academic areas are taught. Most students are placed in a Summit classroom within their grade-level team, although some students are placed in a Summit class taught by a “specials” teacher (e.g., art teacher, P.E. coach, home economics teacher). Each grade has two additional Summit classes taught by these teachers (e.g., one for each team). The students in these Summit classes are in class with other students from their grade-level team. Grade-level teams were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control condition before the intervention training and consent
form distribution began. In addition, the “specials” teachers assigned to also teach Summit classes were assigned to the same condition as the team to which the students in the class were assigned (i.e., if a “specials” teacher has students from Team A in his/her class, then that class (students and teacher) were assigned to the same condition as other students/teachers in Team A).

A total of three teams were in the intervention condition (one each of sixth, seventh and eighth grade teams) and a total of three teams were in the control condition (one each of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade). Fifteen teachers were assigned to the intervention condition; five teachers implemented the intervention at each grade level (sixth, seventh, and eighth). Each grade-level team had two male teachers and three female teachers.

**Procedure**

Consent forms were distributed to all teachers in the target school to send home with their students three weeks into the fall semester. Email reminders were sent to all teachers and administrators. Students were given approximately two weeks to return their consent forms. Parental consent to collect student data included permission to gather the following (see Appendix A): student self-report data (e.g., SEI, PALS-DB, CHS), for teachers to complete measures related to their students’ performance (e.g., TRIAA), and for access to additional school records (e.g., demographic information, attendance records, discipline records). Additional teacher consent forms were collected for teachers to implement the lessons, to complete TRIAA forms on their students, and to complete the end of intervention questionnaire and focus group (see Appendix B). Students whose parents consented for their participation in the study were given a packet to complete including all self-report measures and an assent form. All data were collected prior to the
start of the intervention and at the end of the semester after the intervention had concluded (approximately 12 weeks after the beginning of the intervention).

Participants

Participants included 148 students in sixth through eighth grade. Participating students in the control group contained 54 students while participating students in the intervention group contained 94 students. Overall across intervention and control groups, there were 56 sixth grade students, 49 seventh grade students, and 43 eighth grade students. A comparison of the response rates between grades and intervention condition is provided in Table 1. Ages of participants ranged from 11.18 years to 14.79 years with a mean age of 12.8 years (SD=0.94). There were more females (61%) in the sample than males. With regard to race, 85% of the sample was White, 11.5% was African-American, 2% were Hispanic, and 1% were Native American. With regard to Free and Reduced Lunch status, 47% of the sample were eligible to receive free lunches and 14% eligible to receive reduced price lunches. A comparison of the demographics within the study and the overall school demographics are provided in Table 2. The design of the study included a randomization procedure (of grade-level teams) to ensure the equivalency of the intervention and control groups. A comparison of demographics between intervention and control groups is shown in Table 3. Several tests were conducted between groups to test the assumptions that the groups were equivalent at the pre-test time point. First, a series of t-tests established that there were no significant differences between the two groups prior to the start of the intervention with regard to age \( t(145) = .52, p > .05 \), number of hours absent \( t(146) = .69, p > .05 \), number of office discipline referrals \( t(146) = 1.51, p > .05 \), TRIAA scores \( t(146) = -1.03, p > .05 \), SEI-PE scores \( t(141) = .41, p > .05 \), SEI-CE scores \( t(141) = .60, p > .05 \), CHS scores \( t(137) = .65, p > .05 \), and PALS-DB scores \( t(140) = 1.2, p > .05 \). In addition,
a series of chi-square tests indicated that the groups did not differ based on gender composition $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 2.57, p >.05$, special education status $\chi^2(1, N = 147) = 1.96, p >.05$, or free and reduced lunch status $\chi^2(2, N = 147) = 0.35, p >.05$. However, the groups did differ with regard to grade composition $\chi^2(2, N = 148) = 8.19, p <.05$, with the intervention group having more seventh grade students. In addition, the difference between the groups with regard to racial composition was approaching significance $\chi^2(3, N = 147) = 7.69, p =.053$. The distribution of African-American (7.4% in intervention group and 18.9% in control group) and White (89.4% in intervention group and 79.2% in control group) students across intervention and control groups differed from expected counts.

**Measures**

Student engagement with school is characterized as being multi-dimensional (Appleton et al., 2008). Following the typology of engagement with school suggested by Appleton et al. (2006), the study employed multiple measurements of student engagement with school. The study’s measures included a variety of methods (e.g., surveys, archival data), reporters (e.g., students and teachers), and content (e.g., cognitive and psychological engagement, behavioral engagement, academic engagement, hope). The following measures were used for subsequent analyses for the study. Means and standard deviations of study measures are located in Table 3. Alpha coefficient reliabilities for this study at pre- and post-test are located below in the discussion of each measure.

**Student Engagement Instrument (SEI).** To measure cognitive and psychological engagement, the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI; Appleton et al., 2006) was utilized. The SEI is a six-factor 35 item self-report instrument. Responses are on a Likert scale from 1 “Strongly Agree” to 4 “Strongly Disagree;” items are scored such that higher scores indicate higher levels of engagement. The instrument has been found to have significant correlations
with student outcome measures such as GPA and suspensions and is theoretically grounded in scholarship on cognitive and psychological engagement. The measure contains three factors of cognitive engagement (control and relevance of school work, future aspirations and goals, extrinsic motivation) and three factors of psychological engagement (teacher-student relationships, peer support for learning, family support for learning). Sample items include: “I feel safe at school,” and “Other students at my school care about me” (psychological engagement) and “I plan to continue my education following high school,” and “Most of what is important to know you learn in school” (cognitive engagement). The alpha coefficient reliability of the obtained six factors ranged from .72 to .88 for a large sample of ninth graders (Appleton et al., 2006). For analyses in this study, the two broad measures of cognitive (SEI-CE; 16 items) and psychological (SEI-PE) engagement (19 items) are utilized. For SEI-CE, the alpha coefficient reliability in this study was .83 at pre-test and .83 at post-test. For SEI-PE, the alpha coefficient reliability in this study was .87 at pre-test and .86 at post-test.

**PALS-Disruptive Behavior (PALS-DB).** The Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS, Midgley et al., 2000) are a series of student and teacher report surveys grounded in goal orientation theory that aim to measure important dimensions of student characteristics and characteristics of the learning environment. For the purposes of this study, the Disruptive Behavior survey (student self-report) of the PALS was used to measure behaviors interfering with learning and disrupting the classroom (behavioral engagement) (e.g., “I sometimes annoy my teacher during class;” “I sometimes disturb the lesson that is going on in class”). The scale contains 5 questions on a 5 point Likert scale from “Not at all true” to “Very true”. Alpha coefficient reliability of this scale is reported as .89 in the manual when
given to elementary and sixth grade students (Midgley et al., 2000). Alpha coefficient reliability in this study was .86 at pre-test and .90 at post-test.

**Children’s Hope Scale (CHS).** Hope is conceptualized as the belief that goals can be met, including the interrelated beliefs of capability to make plans to achieve goals (pathways) and beliefs about one’s ability to achieve these means (agency). Hope is related to children’s feelings of competence and control. The Children’s Hope Scale (CHS; Snyder, Hoza, Pelham & Rapoff, 1997) is a six item questionnaire measured on a 6-point Likert scale from “None of the time” to “All of the time” designed to measure the construct of Hope in this model. The questionnaire contains three items related to agency (e.g., “I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future”) and three items related to pathways (e.g., “I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me”). Alpha coefficient reliability of the scale ranges from .72 (sample with 8 to 16 year olds in cancer treatment program) to .86 (sample with 9 to 13 year olds from a school district); the scale has demonstrated good convergent, discriminant, incremental and predictive validity (Snyder et al., 1997). Alpha coefficient reliability in this study was .80 at pre-test and .86 at post-test.

**Teacher report of intensive academic engagement (TRIAA).** This study utilized a brief teacher-report survey designed to measure students’ effort and persistence in their studies (intensive academic engagement; Assor, Kaplan, Kanat-Maymon & Roth, 2005). The scale contains four items on a 5-point Likert scale from “Never” to “Most of the time”. Items include “this student shows persistence as she/he works on assignments” and “this student puts effort in studying”. Internal consistency reliability of this measure is reported at .95 for teachers rating their fourth and fifth grade students (Assor et al., 2005). For this study, two teachers in core academic areas (e.g., reading, math, social studies) were selected.
to rate each students’ performance in his or her classroom. However, two teacher forms were not received for all students – at pre-test, 18% of students only had one report form and 32% of participants had only one report form at post-test. The mean of the two teacher report forms was used for students for whom both teacher report forms were available; otherwise, the mean of one teacher report form was used. The two teacher report forms were correlated 0.56 (p<.01) at pre-test and .52 (p<.01) at post-test. Alpha coefficient reliability for the pre-test was .97 and post-test was .98.

**Absences.** Attendance has been noted as an important component of students’ engagement with school, especially as it relates to students’ risk for dropping out of school. In this study, attendance was obtained from school records with prior consent of participants’ parents. Attendance was measured as the number of hours absent. Data were collected prior to the start of the intervention and during the period of the intervention (from start of the intervention to the end of the fall semester). Attendance for the post-assessment was not cumulative: only absences recorded since the start of the intervention period were counted in the post-assessment.

**Office discipline referrals.** To measure behavioral engagement, student office discipline referrals were also collected from school records with prior consent obtained from participants’ parents. Data were collected prior to the start of the intervention and during the period of the intervention (from start of the intervention to the end of the fall semester). Discipline referrals involving excessive absences/tardies and possession of cell phone were excluded from the total count. As with absences, office discipline referrals for the post-assessment were non-cumulative: only discipline referrals accrued after the start of the intervention period were counted in the post-assessment.
**Intervention Description**

The intervention was a novel, strengths-based exploration curriculum administered in a group format. The overall goals of the curriculum were to build self-awareness of personal strengths, use these strengths to set academic and personal goals, understand the relationship of their strengths to their academic performance, and build relationships with teachers and staff (see Appendix C). The intervention was informed by research on strengths coaching (e.g., Madden et al., 2011; Biswas-Diener, 2009), a positive psychology perspective on school completion (e.g., Lehr et al., 2003; Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000) and research indicating positive benefits gained from goal setting and monitoring (e.g., Snyder et al., 2003; Eisenman, 2007; Martin, 2008).

This intervention consisted of 7 lessons across 7 weeks, delivered weekly (one and a half class periods a week) to establish a foundation of defining strengths and goals and allowing students to make this information meaningful by defining their own strengths and goals. Following this foundation, the rest of the sessions (approximately 4 sessions in 4 weeks) involved individual student-teacher meetings during which students reported their progress on their academic goals and the teachers provided feedback regarding the strength of their goal plan and suggestions for achieving their goals. Each week included approximately 45 minutes (one and one half class period weekly) of instruction, discussion, and activities. A number of learning modalities were utilized, including didactic instruction, group-work, interactive and exploratory methods, homework assignments, and the utilization of various media (e.g. movies, books, music). The intervention was administered by trained teachers in the intervention school district. A summary of lessons is provided below as well as in Appendix C. Full lessons are provided in Appendix C.
**Student strengths (Sessions 1-4).** The purpose of these sessions were to establish the importance of knowing one’s strengths (session 1), and to facilitate strengths exploration through taking a strengths survey (Fox, 2008) (session 2) and through discussion with peers and teachers (session 3-4). The strengths survey includes 72 questions that assess six strength areas (Fox, 2008). Sample strengths include: explorer, creator, and verbalizer. Summaries and definitions of personal strengths were given to students. Students were directed to focus on their top three strength areas. During sessions 3 and 4, students worked in groups to find examples of their personal strengths in media (e.g., a famous person, a movie or book character) (session 3) and had a discussion with their teacher about his or her strengths and how he or she uses those strengths in various settings (session 4). Teachers were also asked to give feedback to students about how they can display their strengths at school (session 4).

**Goal setting and monitoring (Sessions 5-8).** The purpose of these sessions was to give students instruction on effective goal setting (e.g., creating specific and reasonable goals) (session 5), allow students to create personal and academic goals (session 6) and create a plan to reach their goals (session 7). The final weeks (sessions 8) were intended to be spent with individual students meeting with the Summit teacher to discuss goals and goal progress and for teachers to provide feedback and encouragement to students. Students were also instructed to incorporate their strengths into their goals, either by the specific goal they chose or by the method by which they proposed to achieve their goals.

**Treatment as Usual (Control) Condition**

Teams in the control condition continued Summit classes as was mandated by the building administrator. In this condition, the Summit class period was spent teaching positive behavior support lessons, conducting team-building activities, providing
opportunities to make up academic work, and preparing students for state testing. Different
days in the week were dedicated to different content areas as described above.

**Intervention Pilot Feedback**

During the development of the specific lesson plans, formative feedback was sought
from teachers outside the intervention district who also taught sixth through eighth grades.
Each lesson plan was read by at least two different teachers. Specific feedback requested
included the extent to which the given lesson was clear and understandable, feasible to
implement, and appropriate and interesting for sixth through eighth grade students. Lesson
reviewers also provided narrative comments about the lesson and specific suggestions for
changing wording and organization of the lesson plans. After receiving this feedback, lessons
were revised accordingly.

**Intervention Training**

Teachers assigned to the intervention group (n=15) received training and
consultation on the intervention and research process. Training specifically occurred during
two sessions. The first session was conducted in small groups during teachers’ team planning
period (approximately 45 minutes). There were a total of four separate team trainings (one
for each group of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade intervention teams and elective teachers
who taught Summit classes). During the first session, the author asked teachers to provide
written feedback on the current structure and use of Summit time and facilitated a discussion
on the strengths and weaknesses of how the Summit hour had been used. Next, she led a
discussion on the two basic content areas of the program (e.g., strengths exploration and
goal setting), including: prompting teachers to complete the strengths inventory and
discussing results, discussing a framework for creating good goals (e.g., specific and
measurable), discussing the importance of strengths exploration and goal-setting and
discussing the long and short-term aims of the intervention. During the second training session, all intervention teachers met during collaborative learning time (CLT), a weekly hour-long teacher and staff training time, to discuss standard administration of the program (e.g., use of scripts), administering the research portion of the study (e.g., student and teacher measures), and accessing and completing the online intervention fidelity measure (see below). Training materials and handouts are located in Appendix D. Follow-up training and consultation was also provided to teams after observations of the first two lessons. The author also sent regular email updates and was available for phone or email consultation throughout the intervention period. The author received approximately 20 emails related to logistical issues (e.g., distributing consent forms, assistance with accessing the online fidelity checklist, questions about data transfer) and 2 emails related to intervention questions and concerns (e.g., questions about how lessons should be delivered, concerns about students’ understanding of lessons). Additionally, the author discussed a potential ethical violation regarding recruitment with one teacher in detail via phone conversations and email.

**Intervention Fidelity**

Intervention fidelity was assessed and monitored through two means. First, a fidelity checklist was developed for each lesson delivered, using a Likert scale of 1 (low fidelity) to 7 (high fidelity) to measure the extent to which each key lesson component was delivered according to the intervention manual. Each key lesson component had its own question, typically yielding approximately 5 questions per lesson. Lesson checklists are included with the intervention materials provided in Appendix C. Teachers were instructed to complete the fidelity checklists online following the lesson administration for the week. To incentivize completion of the fidelity checklists, Teachers were also given one entry in a random drawing for two $25 checks at the end of the semester for each lesson checklist completed.
Intervention fidelity was also assessed and monitored using observations of lesson administration. Trained research assistants (primarily graduate students in counseling and school psychology) observed each teacher for one lesson during the first two lesson administrations. Each observer was asked to complete the lesson checklist in addition to a short rating scale on other dimensions of lesson delivery (e.g., fluency with scripts, enthusiasm about lessons, responsiveness to individual student needs/questions, and behavior management). In addition, observers provided overall comments around administration strengths and areas for improvement. Data provided on rating scales were averaged across teams and narrative feedback was summarized to capture common themes across teams (see sample feedback form in Appendix E). Feedback was delivered by the author to the teams during a “booster session” of training and consultation occurring during team planning time. Teachers were provided with a copy of the observation feedback for their team, and the author facilitated a discussion of the content of the feedback form as well as any questions or concerns about administering the lessons.

Evaluation of Intervention

In addition to the quantitative measures of student outcomes, additional sources of feedback were solicited and gathered. One student from each intervention classroom (n=15) was randomly selected to participate in a short interview and complete a brief survey soliciting their perspective on participating in the intervention. The survey included seven questions on a five point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” and included questions assessing the extent to which students learned about their strengths, felt that their teacher helped them in the intervention, and would continue setting and monitoring goals. The interview was semi-structured and included questions pertaining to knowledge gained through the intervention, assistance received from teachers, and
commitment to continue setting and monitoring goals (both the survey and semi-structured interview format are located in Appendix A). Trained research assistants administered both the survey and interview to the selected students. Interviews were tape-recorded for accurate transcription. Due to scheduling conflicts, only fourteen interviews were completed. Means of survey items were calculated and interviews were transcribed and analyzed to determine broad themes emerging from student interviews.

Teachers also completed a similar procedure. Short surveys were given to all intervention teachers during the final data collection period. These surveys contained seven questions on a Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” related to their perceptions of the curriculum and the benefit to themselves and students. Spaces for comment followed each question; in addition, the form asked teachers to describe strengths of the curriculum and areas for improvement (see Appendix B). The author also facilitated a discussion with teams of teachers around strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for the intervention. This discussion closely followed the survey items. All grade-level teams participated in these brief focus groups; however, the elective teachers (n=3) were unable to participate. Notes from these focus groups were analyzed to determine common themes across teams and to determine next steps regarding intervention development. The results of both the student and teacher surveys and interviews are described in the Results section.
Results

Tests of Assumptions

A series of assumption-testing procedures were conducted related to the data and statistical procedures to be completed. First, all variables were subjected to tests determining the normality of distribution. Using the acceptability criteria of -2 to +2 for skewness and kurtosis, all self-report and teacher-report measures were considered normally distributed. However, attendance and office discipline referrals (both pre and post measurements) were significantly positively skewed. Because these variables were skewed, subsequent analyses used conceptually derived categories of these variables as the dependent variable, as described below. All self-report and teacher-report measures also met the assumption of homogeneity of variances, using Box’s M Test and Levine’s Test.

ANOVA on Dependent Variables

Each dependent variable was entered into individual repeated measures ANOVA models to evaluate the effect of the intervention on cognitive engagement (SEI-CE), psychological engagement (SEI-PE), behavioral engagement (PALS-DB), hope (CHS), and academic engagement (TRIAA) with time (pre-assessment and post-assessment) as the within-subject factor and treatment status (intervention and control) as the between-subjects factor.

SEI-Cognitive Engagement (SEI-CE). Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 3. Please also see a graphical representation of the data in Figure 1. There was a significant main effect for time, \( F(1, 130) = 9.84, p=.002 \), indicating that the mean self-reported cognitive engagement score across the two groups decreased.
between the pre- (M=3.49, SD=0.34) and post-test (M=3.39, SD=.38). However, there was not a significant main effect for treatment status $F(1, 130) = .59, p>.05$, indicating no significant mean differences between the treatment and control groups across the two time points. There was also a nonsignificant time x treatment interaction, $F(1, 130) = .92, p>.05$.

**SEI-Psychological Engagement (SEI-PE).** Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 3. Please also see a graphical representation of the data in Figure 2. There was a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 130) = 9.40, p=.003$, indicating that the mean self-reported SEI-PE score across the two groups decreased between the pre- (M=3.39, SD=0.35) and post-test (M=3.30, SD=.37). However, there was not a significant main effect for treatment status $F(1, 130) = .005, p>.05$, indicating no mean differences between the treatment and control groups across the two time points. In addition, there was also a nonsignificant time x treatment interaction, $F(1, 130) = .05, p>.05$.

**PALS-Disruptive Behavior (PALS-DB).** Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 3. Please also see a graphical representation of the data in Figure 3. There was a nonsignificant main effect for time, $F(1, 124) = 2.25, p>.05$, indicating that the mean self-reported PALS-DB scores did not differ between the pre- and post-tests. There was also not a significant main effect for treatment status $F(1, 124) = 2.9, p>.05$, indicating no mean differences between the treatment and control groups across the two time points. Finally, there was also a nonsignificant time x treatment interaction, $F(1, 124) = .10, p>.05$.

**Children’s Hope Scale.** Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 3. Please also see a graphical representation of the data in Figure 4. There was a nonsignificant main effect for time, $F(1, 121) = 2.1, p>.05$, indicating that the mean
self-reported CHS scores did not differ between the pre- and post-tests. There was also not a significant main effect for treatment status \( F(1, 121) = 1.2, p > .05 \), indicating no mean differences between the treatment and control groups across the two time points. Finally, there was a nonsignificant time x treatment interaction, \( F(1, 121) = .86, p > .05 \).

**Teacher ratings of intensive academic engagement (TRIAA).** Means and standard deviations of these measures are presented in Table 3. Please also see a graphical representation of the data in Figure 5. There was a nonsignificant main effect for time, \( F(1, 140) = 1.45, p > .05 \), indicating that the mean self-reported TRIAA scores did not differ between the pre- and post-tests. There was also not a significant main effect for treatment status \( F(1, 140) = 1.15, p > .05 \), indicating no mean differences between the treatment and control groups across the two time points. There was also a nonsignificant time x treatment interaction, \( F(1, 140) = .40, p > .05 \).

**Ordinal Regression**

Due to the positive skew in the ODR and attendance data, performing ANOVAs on these data would violate assumptions of these procedures. Therefore, both of these variables were split into conceptually-driven categories for further analysis. For office discipline referrals, groups consisted of low (0 referrals), medium (1 referral), and high (more than 1 referral). For hours absent, the following categories were used: low (below 1 standard deviation of the mean), medium (within 1 and 1.5 standard deviations from the mean), and high (above 1.5 standard deviations from the mean). Specific ranges included in each category as well as sample counts are located in Table 4. Two ordinal regression analyses were performed to determine if treatment status (e.g., intervention or control group) predicted membership in one of the outcome variable categories (low, medium, high). Ordinal regression analyses were performed for each outcome variable (e.g., office discipline
referrals, hours absent) with treatment status as the factor and the pre-intervention category as covariate variable.

For the model predicting office discipline referrals, treatment status was not significant (Wald=.006, df=1, p>.05), and there was a weak effect size observed for this model (Nagelkerke's R-square=.16). Similarly, for the model predicting attendance, treatment status was not significant in changing the odds of belonging to categories of attendance at post-test (Wald=1.8, df=1, p>.05). There was also a weak effect size observed for this model (Nagelkerke's R-square=.09).

**Correlations**

Bivariate correlations were computed for all continuous study variables (e.g., PALS-DB, CHS, SEI-CE, SEI-PE, TRIAA, absences, discipline referrals, age). These correlations are located in Table 5.

Correlations largely supported hypothesized associations between study measures. For instance, statistically significant positive correlations were observed between all three measures of engagement with school (e.g., SEI-CE, SEI-PE, and TRIAA). Consistent with prior research (see Eccles et al., 1993) there was also a negative association between age and psychological engagement (SEI-PE) which was statistically significant at the .05 level. Scores on the CHS were also positively associated with all three measures of engagement with school. Scores on the PALS-DB measure were negatively associated with all three measures of engagement with school and with scores on the CHS, indicating that endorsement of disruptive behaviors is associated with lower scores related to engagement with school and CHS scores. The number of hours a student was absent did not prove to be strongly associated with other study measures; however, there was a negative correlation with CHS scores and TRIAA scores at the .05 significance level. Office discipline referrals were
negatively associated with CHS and TRIAA scores and positively associated with the PALSDB scores.

**Intervention Fidelity**

**Observations.** All intervention teachers were observed by trained research assistants at least once during the first two weeks of the intervention period. Observers used the lesson checklists to rate each teacher on fidelity to the lesson as given to the teachers on a Likert scale from 1 (low fidelity) to 7 (high fidelity). All grade-level teams received at least a 6 point fidelity average; the sixth grade team received an average fidelity score of 6; the seventh grade team received an average fidelity score of 7; the eighth grade team received an average fidelity score of 6.4. The specials teachers who also taught Summit classes received an average fidelity score of 5.8. Across all teachers, the average fidelity score was 6.3.

Intervention teachers were also observed on other important dimensions of intervention implementation. Observers rated these behaviors on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Observers rated the intervention teachers with a mean score of 3.9 related to being positive and enthusiastic about the lesson, 3.9 related to having a “natural” implementation (e.g., was not reading verbatim), 4.5 related to responding to student questions, 4.1 related to students observed interest in the material, and 3.9 related to positive student behaviors during the lessons (e.g., listening to the teacher, following directions). During the “booster session” of training and consultation, teachers received feedback around fidelity of implementation and suggestions for improving fidelity. Questions about the upcoming curriculum that were raised by teachers were also discussed and answered to support the implementation of the intervention with fidelity.

**Lesson checklists.** Teachers were asked to complete online fidelity checklists following lesson administration. Of the 105 checklists that could have been completed
(seven checklists by fifteen intervention teachers), a total of 53 lesson checklists were completed by 11 teachers, yielding a total completion percentage of 50.5% across all teachers and the entire intervention period. Four of the fifteen teachers implementing the intervention did not fill out any checklists. As seen in Figure 6 the number of participating teachers declined across the intervention period.

The mean self-reported fidelity score across the intervention was 6.4 (SD=0.7). Lesson checklists averaged across teachers for individual lessons ranged between 6.0 and 6.7. Self-reported fidelity averaged across the intervention period for individual teachers ranged from 5.7 to 7.0. Average lesson checklist scores across each lesson are shown in Figure 7.

Overall, teachers reported implementing the lessons with moderately high fidelity. However, due to the limited numbers of lesson checklists completed as well as the absence of completed lesson checklists for four of the fifteen intervention teachers, few conclusions can be drawn from these data.

**Program Evaluation Results**

**Student surveys.** A total of fourteen students were given a survey and interview to assess their perceptions of participating in the intervention. Overall, the students who took the survey reported having a generally positive experience. The average response for each question was above the middle point of 3.0 (see Table 7 for means and standard deviations for this questionnaire). The two questions with the highest average score were “knowing my strengths will help me at school in the future,” and “I can accomplish the goals I set this semester.” The two questions with the lowest average responses were: “my teacher helped me know my strengths,” and “my teacher helped me figure out my goals.”

**Student interviews.** A total of fourteen students (the same group of students participating in the student survey) were interviewed using the protocol in Appendix
A. This interview queried students regarding their opinions and significant learning from participating in the intervention and also suggestions regarding future implementation.

Although the interview protocol included both open- and closed-ended questions that attempted to gain a broad understanding of how students perceived their participation in the intervention, three students who were interviewed gave vague or limited answers without elaboration such as “I don’t know.” Thus, quotes of given thematic areas are provided when appropriate; however, the generalizability of these quotes to other students in the interview and other students in the intervention is limited.

Overall, students reported several significant and positive effects of participating in the interventions. When asked to name their top strengths, the majority (nine of fourteen) were able to name their top strengths when prompted with a list of possible strengths. Six students reported enjoying taking the strengths survey and learning more about their strengths. Students also reported positive gains from setting and monitoring goals. One student stated, “I learned that I can accomplish a lot if I actually sit down and set a goal,” and after discussing accomplishing her goal, stated “I feel like I can do a lot more in life than I really realized.”

Students were varied in their opinions regarding their teachers’ role in helping them understand their strengths. While some students expressed a lack of involvement from their teachers, others expressed a positive role which contributed to their learning. For instance, one student reported “he (the teacher) compliments you on grades or on things that you do good so you know that’s a strength.” An eighth grade student communicated “my teacher had us pick three strengths and like it didn’t have to be school-related, it could be anything we think we’re good at, and we all got to share it with the class and they all said ‘yeah those are your strengths’ – like the strengths we picked, everyone agrees so it makes you think those are really good strengths you have…like it’s not just school-related stuff, some people
are good with school stuff, but [teacher] she showed us deeper what we’re better at.”

With regard to goal-setting, most (n=12) students reported that they set goals related to improving their grades in school. Many (n=10) students reported that they had met their goals and felt proud to have done so. For instance, one student reported, “I said my goal is to do better in my grades (...) I actually did cause I was doing bad in math (...) I feel great about it because now I know that I can raise my other grades up too.”

Students reported learning something from the process of goal setting, regardless of meeting their goals. A sixth grade girl shared not meeting her goal “all the way,” but planned to “listen and not talk and stay after school” to keep working on her goal. Another student reported, “I think I will (continue to make goals) because now that we’ve actually set goals and we’ve learned how easy it is to actually make the goals that you want to do, then you can go out there and make more goals as you go on.”

Thirteen students interviewed expressed a commitment to continual goal-setting. Many (n=13) students mentioned specific strategies for setting and monitoring goals, such as checking their grades on the “parent portal” (a website where parents and students can access grades; n=4) and asking their teacher about their performance (n=2). Other students (n=3) mentioned creating a calendar or list of tasks and due dates and regularly checking to see their progress and next steps. One student mentioned regular self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses to determine goals: “set a time down and sit down and write what I’m good at what I ain’t and what I could do better.”

Students also explored the connection between learning about their strengths, setting goals, and future thinking. Many (n=5) students mentioned the prospects of college and career planning. For instance, an eighth grade student reported, “well I learned that my
strengths are actually connected with what I want to do when I’m older and go to college and stuff.” When asked about the implications of knowing their strengths for the future, a student reported, “I think it’ll help me choose what I should be…like if the job I get is gonna be right for me like if I’ll like it and fit what I can do.”

With regard to suggestions for future implementation, some (n=3) students mentioned the lack of involvement from their teachers. The following suggestions were also given by individual students participating in the interview (each suggestion was given by a different student): (1) including partners as accountability for goal progress and rewarding goal progress, (2) having fewer worksheets, and (3) having teachers giving more feedback on grades and progress.

**Teacher Surveys.** All intervention teachers were asked to complete the teacher survey and turn the form in anonymously with other data. The teacher survey is located in Appendix B and contains 7 questions on a Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). This survey contains questions regarding ease of implementation and usefulness of the intervention. In addition, qualitative feedback in the form of written comments was solicited through these surveys. A total of fourteen teachers completed the survey. Means and standard deviations of each question are reported in Table 8.

Overall, teachers reported negative perceptions of participating in the study, conducting the lessons, and the intervention’s impact on students. All questions except one (“the lessons were easy to implement”) had mean responses below the middle point (e.g., a “3” on the Likert scale). The second highest item based on mean response was “the students found the lessons useful.” The lowest two items based on mean responses were, “the lessons are a good use of Summit time” and “the students found the lessons interesting.”
Themes emerging from qualitative comments on the survey are discussed below in the context of the teacher focus groups, as the content of these sessions closely mirrored the teacher survey format. When available, numbers of individuals expressing certain viewpoints is included; however, since the focus groups were conducted with teams of teachers, often the views were expressed by most or the entire team.

**Teacher focus groups.** Teachers implementing the intervention were asked to participate in a focus group with other members of their grade-level team to solicit feedback about the intervention. All grade-level (sixth, seventh, eighth) grade teams participated; however, the elective teachers did not participate in a focus group. Consents were obtained from teachers to participate in these groups; the focus group sessions were largely based on the structure of the survey (see Appendix B). Comments derived from these focus groups are integrated with qualitative written feedback provided on the teacher survey forms.

In terms of strengths, teachers reported that the students enjoyed learning about their strengths and taking the strengths survey. A seventh grade teacher explained, “any time of self-evaluation is going to be a benefit.” Teachers also appreciated the intent of the intervention and felt that the goals of the intervention are beneficial to students. A seventh grade teacher said,

> “they need to know about it and the value of setting goals and planning to achieve that goal…in reality there’s not a real high percentage of people who do this on a consistent basis but probably there’s a real high percentage of people who do it intermittently whenever something comes up and to have those skills, to think ‘oh I really want that’ and ‘oh I remember how they said to do it’ I think would be valuable.”

A sixth grade teacher indicated he felt it opened doors for students thinking about their futures,

> “there were some sidebar conversations that came out of it regarding careers and career choices and areas of interest…I did have some kids put some
thought and conversation into it that I would perceive as valuable – a kid that has three or four core F’s talking about what he wants to do for a living…you have very real-world conversations about how to change your academic approach to meet goals.”

Several teachers had feedback for improving the content of the lessons. Many teachers mentioned that they felt reviewing and re-teaching concepts was repetitive and did not hold the students’ interest (n=10). Seventh grade teachers mentioned they felt the intervention period could be condensed to hold students’ interest better and to go “deeper” into concepts. Sixth and seventh grade teachers mentioned that students would benefit from an increased focus on activities in the intervention as well as using more contemporary examples in the curriculum. The sixth grade team felt limited by the lack of an extrinsic incentive, such as a grade, to motivate students to actively participate in the curriculum. One teacher explained, “Summit time is viewed as a blowoff kind of stuff… the stuff we do in here it’s not taken as seriously as the core classes.”

In addition, many teachers mentioned time as a prohibitive factor. Teachers (n=5) indicated that they felt the intervention could be condensed to cover the same material without taking away from the overall intent of the program. In addition, one teacher indicated that they believed the Summit class period could be better used for other tasks, such as time to prepare for high-stakes state testing, to provide a time to make up academic assignments, and to offer tutoring and extra academic assistance to students.

Some teachers discussed issues related to the target population as a whole. Teachers discussed the appropriate developmental level for such an intervention. Interestingly, a sixth grade teacher felt that the intervention would best be suited for a fifth grade audience while an eighth grade teacher felt the intervention would be a better fit for ninth grade students. The sixth grade team also discussed the idea that the students who benefitted the most from
the intervention were most likely not the students who were “at risk” or disengaged from school in the first place. A sixth grade teacher said,

“I think the goal of what you’re trying to do works very well for the kids who don’t need it… the kids who are the on-task, goal oriented are going to get a lot out of this… most of the time we’re trying to find ways to reach the kids who aren’t being reached and they’re not interested.”

Several teachers also expressed a lack of commitment to implementing the intervention. One sixth grade teacher said, “this is the absolute lowest thing on the priority list of seventy four things each day,” and another sixth grade teacher said, “it was the last thing on my mind.” One sixth grade teacher suggested increasing the frequency of observations, saying, “I would have liked to see more observers… it would motivate me to know that I was being held accountable… to make it more of a priority.”
Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine a pilot study of a universal preventive intervention aimed at promoting students’ engagement with school and decreasing the probability of negative outcomes associated with poor school engagement (e.g., school dropout and its associated personal, social, and economic consequences). Although interventions to impact students’ engagement with school exist, they typically target students who are identified as being at-risk for dropping out of school due to poor attendance in school (e.g., Check & Connect; Sinclair et al., 2003) or who belong to a racial or socioeconomic group with higher odds of dropping out (e.g., Holt et al., 2008). A universal intervention that promotes school engagement could be a valuable addition to the variety of strategies available to school professionals to promote healthy academic and social-emotional outcomes for youth. In addition, an intervention specifically targeting middle school students could be particularly valuable as a kind of inoculation against the trend of decreasing engagement with school as students progress in school (Eccles et al., 1993).

The intervention reported in this study specifically expands on other initiatives and interventions that affect school engagement by utilizing a universal intervention framework and delivery in a group setting. While other interventions affect engagement indirectly through creating effective behavior management contexts (e.g., PBIS) and preventing school dropout (e.g., Check and Connect), the aim of this intervention was to directly impact students’ engagement with school through identifying and exploring strengths and creating and monitoring goals.
As Fixsen, Naom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace (2005) discuss, the results of an intervention should be discussed within two domains: the intervention and its implementation. Each component (first, the intervention; then, its implementation) will be discussed below with specific strengths and weaknesses of each area as well as recommendations for future development and implementation of the intervention.

**Intervention Factors**

The broad purpose of the intervention were to promote students’ engagement with school via developing positive teacher-student relationships (which was hypothesized to impact psychological engagement with school), developing and monitoring academic goals (which was hypothesized to impact cognitive and academic engagement with school), and to develop students’ self-exploration via a study of their strengths (which was hypothesized to impact psychological engagement). Furthermore, these positive outcomes were hypothesized to extend to other student outcomes, such as behavioral engagement in school (e.g., increased attendance, decreased discipline referrals, more positive behavior in the classroom). Additionally, it was expected that the discrete process of setting and monitoring goals would increase students’ sense of hope, as students specifically develop pathways to reach goals and develop agentic thinking to help facilitate goal accomplishment.

To examine the effect of the intervention, a randomized control trial design was utilized. Specifically, teams of teachers were randomized to implement the study in a middle school (grades 6-8). Following two sessions of training, teachers implemented the intervention lessons weekly during a “homeroom”-type class period called “Summit.” The author provided the following related to training and consultation: (1) two sessions of training before the intervention started; (2) a formal session of consultation and performance feedback (see Appendix E); and (3) informal consultation throughout the intervention.
period. Observations and fidelity checklists were completed as indicators of intervention adherence and quality. Student outcomes were evaluated through three methods: review of student records (for office discipline referrals, and number of hours absent), teacher-report data (for indicators of academic engagement), and student-reported data (for indicators of cognitive and psychological engagement, hope, and behavioral engagement). In addition, this study utilized program evaluation components to determine student and teacher perspectives on implementing and participating in the intervention and to determine important strengths and weaknesses of the intervention and research to determine future directions for improving the intervention.

The analyses revealed no statistically significant treatment effects on any student outcomes (e.g., cognitive engagement, psychological engagement, academic engagement, disruptive behaviors, hope, discipline referrals, or number of hours absent). However, a small sample size likely decreased the power of these statistical tests; given that we are unaware of the population effect size, conclusions about the probabilities of Types I and II errors in this study are limited.

A number of explanations can be advanced for the lack of significant findings. For one, the intervention may not be effective in changing participant outcomes. Hypothesized relationships between intervention characteristics and concomitant changes in outcomes related to student engagement may not exist. Significant intervention effects were found using a very similar curriculum (Madden et al., 2011) albeit without a rigorous methodology (e.g., control group, measurement on multiple dimensions using multiple raters). This study improved upon the methodology reported in the Madden et al. (2011) by utilizing a randomized control trial design, using an intervention manual and precise protocol administered to students, and measuring a variety of outcomes, including both student
attitudes and behaviors, and using a variety of data sources (e.g., self-report, teacher report, school records).

However, implementation factors, such as intervention adherence and quality were likely very important in this study given that the implementers were novice and organizational factors and other job responsibilities were noted as undermining full participation in the study. Implementation factors are discussed in more detail below. In addition, measurement issues with implementation factors and intervention outcomes may have obscured significant changes in participant outcomes. Sampling issues, such as a non-representative sample and poor response rates may also have contributed to the lack of significant findings. Each potential explanation is explored in more detail below.

Intervention issues, such as participant responsiveness, may have contributed to the nil findings in the study. While the teachers, the implementers of the intervention, indicated they believed the students perceived the intervention as boring and repetitive, the students interviewed had mostly positive things to say about the intervention and rated almost all facets of the intervention highly (e.g., above the midpoint on the Likert scale). Of course, there is the possibility that the students who were randomly selected to participate in the intervention evaluation portion of the research study (brief feedback survey and interviews) differed in meaningful ways from the students who did not participate in the research study. However, an examination of demographic variables did not appear to reveal significant differences between the evaluation sample and the student population in the school as a whole.

**Intervention Implementation Factors**

As Durlak and DuPre (2008) state concisely, implementation matters. Their summary and analysis of the literature found that effect sizes for interventions are two to
three times higher when interventions are carefully implemented. *Implementation* refers to “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions” (Fixsen et al., 2005). When using an implementation framework to analyze interventions, a number of factors emerge as important considerations. Many authors (e.g., Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fixsen et al., 2005) advocate conceptualizing implementation within a multilevel ecological perspective. At minimum, this analysis entails an examination of innovation characteristics, provider characteristics, and community or organizational factors. The specific components within each of these spheres varies, although Durlak & DuPre (2008) indicate eleven common factors between implementation models, such as funding, a positive work climate, shared decision-making, coordination with other agencies, formulation of tasks, leadership, program champions, administrative support, providers’ skill proficiency, training, and technical assistance. A combination of the approaches advocated by Durlak & DuPre (2008) and Fixsen et al. (2005) are used to analyze the implementation factors present in the study.

It should be noted that a limitation of using an implementation framework to analyze the intervention and research study is that this research is a pilot study of an intervention. Typically, implementation research focuses on characteristics leading to successful implementation of an identified and established evidence-based program. Thus, discussion of facets regarding effective implementation is limited to the few “knowns” and many “unknowns” about the intervention. Nonetheless, implementation factors are relevant given the intervention context (school), implementers (teachers), and systems and organizational factors that influence these variables. Although the research is still in a pilot stage, implementation research provides a useful framework for examining these issues.
**Fidelity.** One of the key characteristics in implementation involves the extent to which an intervention is delivered as planned. The terms treatment integrity, fidelity, or adherence capture a set of interrelated implementation behaviors that are hypothesized to lead to better outcomes to participants when delivering an evidence-based intervention. These components include adherence (e.g., degree to which treatment elements are delivered as intended), exposure (e.g., length and frequency of sessions), quality (e.g., level of skill involved in implementation), and program differentiation (e.g., extent to which only planned treatment components were delivered) (Fixsen et al., 2005; Schulte, Easton, & Parker, 2009). Moreover, treatment integrity can also refer to characteristics of treatment receipt, such as participant dose (e.g., amount of treatment received by participants), participant comprehension (e.g., extent to which participants comprehend treatment content), and participant responsiveness (e.g., extent to which participants are engaged with the intervention) (Schulte et al., 2009).

In this study, intervention adherence and quality were two key aspects of implementation. Specifically, treatment adherence was measured to determine the extent to which participant outcomes were related to delivery of the intervention as planned and implementer competence was salient due to the novice nature of the implementers and because specific components of quality (e.g., teacher-student rapport) was hypothesized to be a key driver of student-level outcomes.

Treatment *compliance* or *adherence* encompasses the extent to which core implementation components are implemented as planned; treatment *competence* or *quality* involves the level of skill used by a practitioner to implement an intervention (Fixsen et al., 2005). Measuring treatment adherence and competence includes both direct and indirect methods. Direct methods include observations and video or audiotaping sessions. Indirect
methods involve completion of checklists related to adherence to treatment protocol (Perepletchikova, 2011). Treatment compliance is typically conceptualized as a quantitative dimension whereas competence or quality is conceptualized as a qualitative dimension (Gresham, 2009).

For fidelity measures to be helpful, the treatment model must be conceptually well-defined and contain operationally defined core implementation components (McGrew et al., 1994). The level of rigor with which intervention fidelity or adherence is measured depends on the type of study being conducted. For new interventions or interventions implemented by individuals who are prone to “drift” (e.g., teachers, parents), it is recommended that the study use a specific treatment manual, utilize direct and indirect training of implementers, and include ongoing supervision and monitoring of treatment delivery (Perepletchikova, 2011). Each of these conditions were met with this intervention study (though the latter to a lesser extent) and intervention fidelity was specifically measured in two ways (i.e., through direct observation and feedback for the first two sessions and teacher self-assessment on a Likert scale).

The initial observations revealed that teachers administered the intervention with a reasonable degree of fidelity. The average score across all teachers was a 6.3 of a possible 7 points; the scale and questions on this fidelity assessment were the same as the measure on which teachers self-reported their fidelity to the intervention. It should be noted, however, that these observations were not continued throughout the intervention. After the feedback session provided as part of ongoing training, teachers were not observed in their implementation of the intervention.

The second method, teacher self-assessment, utilized a checklist derived from key components of each intervention lesson. Teachers rated the degree to which they
implemented components with fidelity through an online checklist measured on a 7 point Likert scale. Across the entire intervention, teachers self-reported a mean fidelity score of 6.4, indicating a high degree of adherence.

A full discussion of the fidelity checklist is limited due to the small response rate. Across all teachers and the entire intervention period, only 50.5% of all potential lesson checklists were completed. In addition, four implementers (out of fifteen) did not complete a single lesson checklist. Response rates declined through the entire intervention period (see Figure 6), precluding analysis of the middle and end phases of the intervention. In addition, a limitation of this method of collecting treatment adherence is that practitioners tend to overestimate their level of treatment integrity (Schulte, Easton, & Parker, 2009).

Although no quantitative or objective data exists on how well the intervention was implemented during the middle and end phases (a limitation discussed below), some clues can be found in the qualitative data from focus groups. Several teachers indicated a lack of preparation for the interventions, specifically noting that it was a low priority and that they believed the time could have been better used for other purposes (e.g., to make up academic work or prepare students for standardized testing). Overall perspectives of the intervention and research study, as indicated on the post-implementation teacher survey, were negative, which suggests poor intervention quality and fidelity were likely.

**Quality.** Another important component of implementation is the quality of implementation, which refers to how well program components are implemented. Many factors are included in the discussion on implementation quality, including implementer enthusiasm and preparedness (Schulte, Easton, & Parker, 2009). Implementation quality is said to be a more qualitative dimension of implementation and can be measured through direct observations or indirect methods, such as self-assessments.
A few indications of implementation quality can be found in the data from the study. First, the direct observations of teachers implementing the first few lessons yielded ratings ranging from 3.9 (enthusiasm, natural implementation) to 4.5 (responding to student questions) on a 5 point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating higher quality. Implementation quality, as measured by these observations, was moderate. Second, during teacher focus groups and the teacher survey following the end of the intervention, teachers expressed negative opinions regarding the intervention, including their own lack of preparedness for delivering the intervention. As a whole, teachers did not appear enthusiastic about the intervention and their disengagement from the intervention likely affected the quality of implementation. However, a lack of formal, objective data (e.g., observations) ultimately prohibits an authoritative stance on the extent to which the intervention was implemented with quality.

Students’ perspectives on implementation quality are critical because they are the direct recipients of the intervention. Student evaluation surveys indicated mostly positive impressions regarding the intervention. However, though all mean responses on this survey were above the mid-point on the five point Likert scale, the questions with the two lowest mean responses directly related to quality of teacher interactions (e.g., “my teacher helped me know my strengths,” (M=3.86, SD=0.36) and “my teacher helped me figure out my goals” (M=3.79, SD=0.70)), indicating perhaps that the teachers were the least effective component of the intervention.

During student interviews, students expressed diverse opinions regarding the role of their teachers in facilitating self-exploration, guiding goal-setting and monitoring, and providing high-quality interactions with students. While some students expressed a lack of teacher involvement, other students specifically cited their teacher as a catalyst for helping
them better understand their strengths. Students expressed a desire to have their teachers be more involved in the process through helping them set goals and helping them monitor goals by providing performance feedback on academic tasks. In future research this specific relationship should be explored in more detail; specifically, does greater teacher involvement in goal-setting and monitoring lead to measurable changes in participant outcomes?

**Organizational Factors**

Interventions are not delivered to consumers in a vacuum. Rather, they operate within an organizational context which includes policies and other external influences. Organizational factors include administrative involvement and support; structural and organizational characteristics; attitudes, skills, and capacity of staff; organizational climate; level of stakeholder support; consistency of intervention with existing mandates; and access to resources (e.g., time, funding, facilities) (Fixsen et al., 2005; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2009).

There were several positive organizational characteristics in the study. One was supportive school and district administrators. District administrators supported the study by providing support and guidance in developing the procedural and content components of the intervention as well as providing support to receive approval from the ethical review board at the host university. The principal at the intervention site allowed for intervention training to occur during existing staff development times, allowed access to school data, provided meeting spaces for training, and provided encouragement and oversight of the intervention. In addition, several key staff members at the district and school level who were not directly involved with implementing the intervention offered to observe teachers and give feedback to the author.
One organizational factor that likely impacted the intervention was the competing initiatives allocated to Summit time. As the teachers indicated in both the training phases and the post-implementation focus group, Summit time had been variously reserved for positive behavior support lessons, preparation for statewide high-stakes testing, academic tutoring, and mentoring students. Teachers felt that this time was disorganized; the lack of an overall goal for the Summit time likely contributed to their ambivalence about implementing the intervention.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Limitations and future directions regarding the study’s methodology (e.g., sampling, research design) and implementation factors (e.g., fidelity measurement, staff training, staff buy-in) are discussed as follows. In addition, future directions that account for the study’s limitations are incorporated throughout.

One key issue that may have affected results is sampling. Tests of assumptions revealed no statistically significant differences between the intervention and control groups related to age, gender, or any of the dependent variables at the pre-intervention timepoint. Poor response rates may have limited the study. In the intervention group, the overall response rate was around 35%. The seventh grade team had the highest response rate, at 43.2% while the eighth grade team had the lowest response rate, at 24.7%. The control group had a much lower response rate, at approximately 20% overall. The seventh grade control group had a very low response rate, at only 11.6%. These low response rates may have contributed to a lack of variability in student data. In addition, poor response rates contributed to a small sample size and overall lack of power in the analyses. Response rates from the control group may have been limited due to lack of contact with the teachers.
Information regarding the study was disseminated to control teachers via email and written notes.

Although this was a pilot study of the intervention, it also used a randomized control design which is typically reserved for interventions with a significant number of promising pilot studies. Being that this was an initial test of an intervention, this study may have prematurely utilized more rigorous research methodology without first establishing its status as a promising practice with some initial studies showing significant impact on participant-level outcomes. Generally, it is expected that sufficient amount of pilot studies will be conducted and the intervention will be in place from one to three years before being evaluated (Fixsen et al., 2005; Felner et al., 2001). Fixsen et al. (2005) state, “evaluations of newly implemented programs may result in poor results, not because the program at an implementation site is ineffective, but because the results at the implementation site were assessed before the program was completely implemented and operational.” The typical course for intervention development involves a significant amount of pilot trials to reform the intervention and demonstrate effects on participant outcomes that merit further research. Then, research proceeds to a highly controlled efficacy study. Finally, an effectiveness study is conducted that involves implementing the intervention in a context that is closest to its intended destination (e.g., in a “real world,” less controlled environment).

This study included elements of all three types of intervention studies. For one, it was a pilot test of an intervention with no prior research on implementation. Secondly, it was intended to be a strictly controlled randomized control trial design, although it used natural implementers, which is more characteristic of an effectiveness trial. The lack of pilot studies prohibited an understanding of core intervention components, which must be
implemented with fidelity to achieve positive participant outcomes. Future development of the intervention should determine which components of the intervention are essential (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005). Specifically, more frequent assessments of intervention outcomes as well as assessments of outcomes using various core intervention components in isolation and in combination would assist in determining essential intervention components.

An important limitation to the study was intervention acceptability or interventionist and stakeholder buy-in to the intervention. Literature suggests that successful interventions often have an in-house program champion as a resource (Durlak & DuPre, 2008) which can also lead to a greater degree of buy-in amongst implementers (Fixsen et al., 2005). Teachers’ buy-in to the intervention may have been hampered by several factors. First, in terms of institutional culture, the author was an “outsider” who was not employed by the district. In addition, because of the distance to the implementation site, the author was unable to be present on a weekly basis, which may have contributed to the perception of her as an “outsider” to the district. However, the author attempted to change this perception by sharing her experience in working in schools in general as well as her experiences in working with the district in the past.

Second, teachers’ buy-in may have also been limited by the fact that the intervention and research study were top-down initiatives that were ultimately determined by administrators and then passed along as unilateral decisions without teacher feedback. The author and her adviser met with building and district administrators to plan the intervention and research study during the summer preceding the study; however, teachers were only made aware of their participation during the fall semester when they returned to work and most of the key decisions about the intervention were already made.
Research overwhelmingly supports local input as a key factor in innovation adoption, implementation, and sustainability (e.g., Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). The maxim “nothing about us without us” certainly applies to innovation adoption and the stakeholders affected by it. Shared decision making between a variety of stakeholders (e.g., researchers, implementers, administration and leadership), utilizing nonhierarchical relationships is viewed as key to developing intervention acceptability (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

In the future, specific goals of gaining intervention acceptability should be incorporated into future studies. Implementers and other stakeholders should be involved in the decision-making process to implement the intervention, to determine how and when to implement the intervention, and to assist in developing measures related to intervention effectiveness. In addition, it would be helpful to identify a local champion who can advocate for the potential effectiveness of the intervention and encourage implementers to continue to implement the intervention with competence and adherence.

Enhancing intervention fidelity and quality is also a key goal for future research. The relationship between intervention quality and student-level outcomes is unclear at this point. However, developing operational definitions of key implementer behaviors (e.g., developing positive relationships with students), developing behavioral measures to document the core components of the study, and determining the relationship between these measures and student outcomes will provide important advances in terms of selecting appropriate implementers, training implementers on providing key quality components, and coaching implementers during their administration of the intervention.

A route to promoting high quality implementation is through training and coaching. Coaching, behavior rehearsal, skill training, modeling, and role playing of strategies and techniques are supported by research (Fixsen et al., 2005; Greenwood et al., 2003) as
significantly impacting implementation fidelity and quality. Specifically, during initial training sessions, modeling and behavior rehearsal should be utilized. Case scenarios could be developed that assist teachers in conceptualizing how strengths can be incorporated into school, how goals should be written, how teachers can facilitate goal monitoring, and overall provision of support and encouragement to students.

To promote quality and fidelity, monitoring of implementation via observations should be incorporated as well as providing in-vivo coaching during the intervention. For instance, teachers could be assigned to a “mentor/coach” who specifically works with a small group of teachers to promote fidelity and quality, answer questions, and provide periodic performance feedback, particularly using graphed treatment fidelity data and verbal and written feedback (Sanetti & Kratochwill, 2009). Additional evidence of training effectiveness could be incorporated into future studies. For instance, pre-post assessments on knowledge of core implementation component expectations, ratings of coaching effectiveness, and observations of behavior change as a result of in-classroom coaching could be utilized to determine effective training and coaching techniques.

Implementation quality is also directly related to staff selection, which may have affected this study and the quality of implementation. In this study, teachers were randomly assigned to implement the intervention corresponding with the random group (team) assignment. Thus, there was no strategy of staff selection; only random assignment was used. This study used a universal intervention/prevention framework to implement the intervention; however, in future iterations, it may be better fitted for a small group setting. In this case, staff selection would be important. Staff characteristics, such as enthusiasm about the intervention, investment in its implementation, capability and willingness to implement the intervention with fidelity, and possession of other characteristics amenable to affecting
change with youth (e.g., developing rapport with students, offering supportive guidance and feedback) should be used to select implementers. An interview or survey assessing such characteristics or sociometric methods, such as principals nominating well-fitting staff, would be helpful in this regard.

An important limitation to the discussion of fidelity in this study was the lack of objective, observation data at the middle and end stages of the intervention. Because of the low response rate on the fidelity measure, it is unclear how well the intervention was implemented during these times, which may be particularly vulnerable to “drift.”

In further developing the intervention and with implementation factors in mind, more rigorous and methodologically sound fidelity and quality measures should be developed. The intervention and associated research would benefit from greater reliance on more objective measures of implementation (e.g., observations). In further developing the implementation components of the study, it would be useful to identify and operationally define key aspects of implementer behavior which would be hypothesized to contribute to student outcomes. In addition, discrete behavioral ratings could have been used to contribute to reliable ratings of intervention quality. Interrater reliability regarding observation data should also be collected as part of this extension of the study. In addition, future studies should determine psychometric qualities of fidelity self-report measures, such as reliability across respondents, convergent validity, and predictive validity (Mowbray et al., 2003). Better measurement of fidelity will promote accurate measurement, training and technical assistance, and analysis.

In developing future iterations of this study, it is recommended that the intervention first be scaled back to more intensive pilot studies specifically examining key intervention components in a small group setting. Using pre-post assessments of knowledge gain and
participant engagement in the intervention itself would be a good first step. Participants and implementers should be involved in steps to provide feedback on the intervention and these sources of information should be used to refine the intervention. Should the intervention prove to have some merits worth further study, it is recommended that the same methodology of this study (e.g., a randomized control trial design) be used to examine its effect on participant outcomes, but only using experienced implementers who have been extensively trained on the intervention and have significant experience in delivering the intervention and are invested in its success. Once efficacy of the intervention is established at this level, its effects can be tested with novice and natural implementers in the school setting.

This intervention was originally intended to be a universal preventive intervention to promote students’ engagement with school, which is believed to have an ultimate positive effect on school completion (prevent school dropout). Future research regarding this intervention should determine the appropriate audience for the intervention. Teachers noted that they believed that the intervention was most helpful for the students who were least at-risk for dropping out. It is possible that this intervention is best-suited not as a universal intervention, but as a Tier 2 or 3 intervention that can give students who are at-risk for dropping out more individualized attention from teachers. Instead of being held in a classroom and integrated into general curriculum, perhaps it is better suited for a small group of students who exhibit some at-risk characteristics and can benefit from more intensive intervention in this regard.
References


83


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Demographics of Sample as Compared to School Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percent in School</th>
<th>Percent in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Percent in School</th>
<th>Percent in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50.85%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49.15%</td>
<td>61.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free and Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Percent in School</th>
<th>Percent in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunch</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Comparison of Demographics between Intervention and Control Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intervention Group</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free and Reduced Lunch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Lunch</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations of Study Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre M (SD)</th>
<th>Post M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEI-Psychological Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>3.35 (0.38)</td>
<td>3.30 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.38 (0.35)</td>
<td>3.30 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEI-Cognitive Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>3.46 (0.33)</td>
<td>3.37 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.49 (0.36)</td>
<td>3.44 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PALS-Disruptive Behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>1.89 (0.89)</td>
<td>1.92 (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.08 (0.87)</td>
<td>2.13 (0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hope</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>4.51 (0.89)</td>
<td>4.59 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.61 (0.88)</td>
<td>4.77 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Ratings of Intensive Academic Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>3.80 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.90 (0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.63 (1.01)</td>
<td>3.72 (1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office Discipline Referrals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>0.10 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.26 (0.94)</td>
<td>0.33 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hours Absent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>4.47 (9.00)</td>
<td>17.06 (20.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>5.55 (9.50)</td>
<td>12.16 (13.90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Data Ranges and Sample Counts for Office Discipline Referral and Absences Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office Discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals (ODR)</td>
<td>Pre Post</td>
<td>Pre Post</td>
<td>Pre Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 ODR n=134</td>
<td>0 ODR n=125</td>
<td>1 ODR n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 ODR n=12</td>
<td>1 ODR n=12</td>
<td>&gt;1 ODR n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;1 ODR n=11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours Absent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre Post</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-9.2 n=123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-18.4 n=102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.2-13.8 n=12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.4-27.6 n=22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.8-60 n=13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.6-124 n=24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

*Correlations between Study Measures at Pre-Intervention for All Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ODRs</th>
<th>PALS</th>
<th>Hope</th>
<th>SEI_CE</th>
<th>SEI_PE</th>
<th>TRIAA</th>
<th>Age in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODRs</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALS</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEI_CE</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEI_PE</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRIAA</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ 0.05
** p ≤ 0.01

Where absences are measured by number of hours absent; ODRs indicate number of office discipline referrals; PALS indicates scores on self-reported disruptive behaviors; Hope indicates scores on Children’s Hope Scale; SEI_CE indicates cognitive engagement as measured by the Student Engagement Inventory; SEI_PE indicates psychological engagement as measured by the Student Engagement Inventory; and TRIAA is teacher reports of intensive academic engagement.
Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Student Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned a lot about my strengths</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing my strengths will help me in school in the future</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher helped me know my strengths</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can accomplish the goals I set this semester</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will keep setting goals for myself</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will keep monitoring my goals</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher helped me figure out my goals</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The lessons were easy to implement</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students found the lessons useful</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students found the lessons interesting</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lessons benefitted the students</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lessons are a good use of Summit time</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this study/giving the lessons has been a positive experience for me</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in this study/giving the lessons has been a positive experience for my students</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. ANOVA chart for SEI-Cognitive Engagement Measure
Figure 2. ANOVA chart for SEI-Psychological Engagement Measure
**Figure 3.** ANOVA chart for PALS-Disruptive Behavior Measure
Figure 4. ANOVA chart for Children’s Hope Scale
Figure 5. ANOVA chart for Teacher Ratings of Intensive Academic Engagement
Figure 6. Number of participants completing fidelity checklists for each lesson administered
Figure 7. Average self-reported fidelity score for each lesson administered.
Appendix A: Student consent, questionnaire, and interview protocol

CONSENT FORM
Study on Student Engagement

We invite your child to be in a research study on the effects of a strengths-based curriculum. Your child will receive the curriculum this school year in their Summit or Connections Class period. Please read this form and contact the researchers if you have questions before you agree for your child to participate in the study. Students who agree to participate in this study will be entered into a random drawing for either an iPod shuffle player (2 GB) or an iTunes gift card of equal value. Two prizes will be awarded in total.

You may keep the white copy of this form for your records; please return the blue copy to school with your child.

This study is being conducted by: Stephanie Coleman and Dr. Cheryl Offutt of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Background Information:
The goal of this study is to see how a new program on strengths and goals affects students’ feelings about school and learning. We will collect data about student and teacher opinions to see if using a new curriculum is helpful for students. This information can help students work better in school. It can also help the district make decisions on programs.

Procedures:
All students will participate in the new program on strengths and goals in either Fall 2010 or Spring 2011. We need your consent to collect the following data:

1. Your child’s scores on a 46-item survey on attitudes about school and learning. This will take about 20 minutes of Connections/Summit time to complete. Students who do not wish to fill out the survey may work on homework during the time other students are filling out the surveys.
2. Your child’s demographics, attendance, and discipline referrals.
3. Evaluations of your child’s behavior and attitude by two of his or her teachers.
4. Some students will be randomly selected for a short interview about the curriculum. This will take place during Connections/Summit time. The interview will be audio taped and stored until the tapes are transcribed. Then, the data will be coded and the original tapes will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Your child may experience some mild discomfort while completing the survey. We do not believe it will be greater than discomfort with any other school activities. There is some risk your child’s data will be exposed on accident. However, we are trying to keep the data safe. We are assigning codes for students in the study and using passwords for all data files. Students who participate in this study will be entered into a drawing for either an iPod shuffle player (2 GB) or an iTunes gift card of equal value. There are other benefits to this study. First, we will be able to understand the effect of the curriculum. This curriculum may help important academic outcomes, such as grades and attendance. Also, this study will allow [REDACTED] to evaluate this program for future use.
Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any report, we will not include any
information that will identify the children in the study. All records will be kept in a locked
file and only the researchers will have access to those records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your decision for your child to participate will not change your relations with
[REDACTED] or the University of Missouri. Your decision for your child to participate
will not change your child's grades. If you decide to have your child participate, you can stop
at any time and not change those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The people in charge of this study are Stephanie Coleman and Dr. Cheryl Offutt. You may
contact us at any time with questions. You may reach the researchers at the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Coleman</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Slccm7@mail.missouri.edu">Slccm7@mail.missouri.edu</a></td>
<td>573-300-7615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Cheryl Offutt</td>
<td><a href="mailto:offuttc@missouri.edu">offuttc@missouri.edu</a></td>
<td>573-882-2592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have other questions or concerns and you would like to talk to someone other than
the researchers, please contact the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Institutional Research Board</td>
<td>483 McReynolds, Columbia, MO, 65201</td>
<td>(573) 882-9585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you want to see the results of this study, please reach either Ms. Coleman or Dr. Offutt to
receive a summary of general results.

Statement of Consent (please circle yes or no for your child):

YES

I give permission for my child, ____________________________ to
(participate in the University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

______________________________  ____________________________
Parent or Guardian (signature)  Date

NO

I do not want my child ____________________________ to participate in the
University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

______________________________  ____________________________
Parent or Guardian (signature)  Date
Youth Assent Form

“Your parent knows we are going to ask you to participate in this project. We want to know about students’ attitudes and experiences with their school work. If you agree to participate, we will use the information you give in the survey in our research project. We also may ask you some extra questions in a short interview with a researcher. This will happen during Connections/Summit time.

If you don’t want to participate, you can stop at any time. There will be no bad feelings if you don’t want to do this. If you don’t want to take the survey, you can turn the survey over and work on homework. You can ask questions if you do not understand any part of the study.

Do you understand? Is this OK?”

Name (Please Print): ________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________
**Student Survey and Interview**

**Student Survey**

*We want to know your thoughts about the lessons you had this semester in your Summit class. This is to help us decide whether these lessons are helpful to students and whether we should keep doing similar things. Please read each question carefully and circle the answer you most agree with.*

1. I learned a lot about my strengths
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

2. Knowing my strengths will help me in school in the future
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

3. My teacher helped me know my strengths
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

4. I can accomplish the goals I set this semester
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

5. I will keep setting goals for myself
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

6. I will keep monitoring my goals
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

7. My teacher helped me figure out my goals
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
Student Interview

Intro: We want to know your thoughts about the lessons you had this semester in your Summit class. This is to help us decide whether these lessons are helpful for students and whether we should keep doing similar things. We are going to tape-record you so we make sure we get all of your ideas down. Once we type what you say, we will get rid of the tape. Your teachers will not know what you said. Please be honest in your answers because that will help us the most.

1. What did you learn about your strengths?
   a. FU: What are your top strengths?
   b. FU: How do you show them in school?
   c. FU: How do you use your strengths to set goals?

2. How will this (knowing your strengths) benefit you in the future?
   a. FU: How can knowing your strengths help you at school?...at home?...what your friends?

3. How did your teacher help you in learning your strengths?
   a. FU: How did they help you see how your strengths help you in school?
   b. FU: What would have been helpful for your teacher to do?

4. Do you feel that you have a good plan to meet your goals?
   a. FU: Did you meet them this semester?
   b. FU: If yes, how do you feel about meeting your goals?
   c. FU: If no, do you plan to keep working on it?
      i. FU: How do you plan to keep working on it?

5. Will you keep making goals?
   a. FU: Why yes/no?
   b. If yes, will you regularly check to see if you have met your goals?
      i. How will you check to see if you met your goals?

6. How did your teacher help you with your goals?
   a. FU: how did they help you decide if you met your goal?
   b. What would have been helpful for your teacher to do?
Appendix B: Teacher consents, questionnaire, and focus group protocol

CONSENT FORM – Lesson Implementation
Study on Student Engagement

You are being invited to be in a research study examining the impact of a strengths-based curriculum on student engagement. This study will investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum your students will be receiving this school year in their Summit or Connections Class period. We ask that you read this form and call or e-mail the researchers if you have any questions before agreeing to participate in the study.

You may keep the white copy of this form for your records; please return the blue copy to Stephanie Coleman. This study is being conducted by: Stephanie Coleman and Dr. Cheryl Offutt of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a strengths-based curriculum on students’ engagement with school and learning. As part of this study, researchers will be collecting data about student engagement and academic outcomes to determine if using a strengths-based curriculum during Summit and Connections Time is advantageous for creating more positive academic and social outcomes. Knowledge of these factors can increase student achievement as well as inform district decisions on curriculum.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate you will complete the following:
1. Implement a total of 8 lessons related to strengths development and exploration and goal-setting.
2. Complete a brief lesson survey following each lesson online to determine how closely the lesson followed the plan provided. As appreciation for your efforts in filling out these surveys, you will be entered into a drawing for each fidelity checklist you complete. All data will be coded such that you cannot be identified.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are no anticipated risks to implementing the curriculum or completing the lesson surveys.
As appreciation for your efforts in filling out these surveys, you will be entered into a drawing for two $25 checks for each fidelity checklist you complete. Other benefits to participation are that the university researchers collecting the data will be able to determine the effectiveness of the strengths-based curriculum. This curriculum has the potential to increase important academic outcomes, such as grades and attendance. In addition, this study will allow [REDACTED] to evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum for future use.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify the teachers or students who participate. All records will be kept in a locked file and only the researchers will have access to those records.
Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with [REDACTED] or the University of Missouri. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:
The researchers conducting this study are Stephanie Coleman and Dr. Cheryl Offutt. If you have questions, you may contact us at any time. You may reach Ms. Coleman at the following phone number: 573-300-7615 or the following email address: slccm7@mail.missouri.edu. You may reach Dr. Offutt at the following phone number: 573-882-2592 or the following email address: OffuttC@missouri.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact the Campus Institutional Research Board, 483 McReynolds, Columbia, MO, 65201; telephone (573) 882-9585.

If you are interested in the results of this study, please contact either Ms. Coleman or Dr. Offutt to receive a summary of the general results of the study.

Statement of Consent (please circle yes or no):

YES
I give permission to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

___________________________________
Printed Name

___________________________________
Signature       Date

NO
I do not want to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

___________________________________
Printed Name

___________________________________
Signature       Date
CONSENT FORM – Teacher Data Collection
Study on Student Engagement

You are being invited to participate in a research study examining the impact of a strengths-based curriculum on student engagement. This study will investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum your students will be receiving this school year in their Summit or Connections Class period. We ask that you read this form and call or e-mail the researchers if you have any questions before agreeing to participate in the study.

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Procedures:
You are being asked to complete the following:
1. You will be asked to complete a series of short (4 question) surveys about some of your students who are participating in the research study. We estimate that it will take you approximately one minute to fill out each form. These data will then be coded to protect your identity as well as the student’s identity.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are no known risks to filling out this brief survey.
Benefits to participation include that the university researchers collecting the data will be able to determine factors the effectiveness of the strengths-based curriculum. This curriculum has the potential to increase important academic outcomes, such as grades and attendance. In addition, this study will allow [REDACTED] to evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum for future use.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any reports we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify the children or teachers who participate. All records will be kept in a locked file and only the researchers will have access to those records.
Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations
with [REDACTED] or the University of Missouri. If you decide to participate, you are free
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Contacts and Questions:
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slecm7@mail.missouri.edu. You may reach Dr. Offutt at the following phone number: 573-
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Offutt to receive a summary of the general results of the study.

Statement of Consent (please circle yes or no):

YES

I give permission to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student
engagement.

________________________
Printed Name

________________________    ______________________
Signature                   Date

NO

I do not want to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student
engagement.

________________________
Printed Name

________________________    ______________________
Signature                   Date
CONSENT FORM – Teacher Questionnaire and Focus Groups
Study on Student Engagement

We invite you to participate in a research study on the impact of a strengths-based curriculum on student engagement. This study will investigate the effectiveness of the curriculum your students received this school year in their Summit Class period. We ask that you read this form and call or e-mail the researchers if you have any questions before agreeing to participate in the study.

You may keep the white copy of this form for your records; please return the blue copy to Stephanie Coleman.

This study is being conducted by: Stephanie Coleman and Dr. Cheryl Offutt of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a strengths-based curriculum on students’ engagement with school and learning. As part of this study, researchers will be collecting data about student engagement and academic outcomes to determine if using a strengths-based curriculum creates more positive academic and social outcomes. Knowledge of these factors can increase student achievement as well as inform district decisions on curriculum.

Procedures:
You are being asked to complete the following:
1. You will be asked to complete a short written survey and participate in a small focus group with Stephanie Coleman. This group will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and how it has been implemented this semester.

Duration of the Project:
The entire data collection will be conducted during the Fall semester of 2010. The focus groups you are consenting to participate in will be conducted in December 2010. The focus group will last approximately 45 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are no known risks to filling out this brief survey or participating in the focus group. Benefits to participation include that your perspectives as a teacher will be heard regarding the usefulness of the curriculum. The study will allow [REDACTED] to evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum for future use.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. Your survey data will remain confidential. The focus group will be recorded to ensure accuracy in note-taking and transcription. The recording will be password-protected and kept electronically on Ms. Coleman’s computer. Following the final transcription of the interview, the recording will be destroyed. In any reports we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to
identify the teachers who participate. All records will be kept in a locked file and only the researchers will have access to those records.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with [REDACTED] or the University of Missouri. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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If you are interested in the results of this study, please contact either Ms. Coleman or Dr. Offutt to receive a summary of the general results of the study.

**Statement of Consent (please circle yes or no):**

**YES**

I give permission to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

___________________________________
Printed Name

___________________________________
Signature Date

**NO**

I do not want to participate in the University of Missouri research project on student engagement.

___________________________________
Printed Name

___________________________________
Signature Date
**Teacher survey**

1. The lessons were easy to implement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Comments/Feedback:*

2. The students found the lessons useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Comments/Feedback:*

3. The students found the lessons interesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Comments/Feedback:*

4. The lessons benefitted the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Comments/Feedback:*

5. The lessons are a good use of Summit time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Comments/Feedback:*

118
6. Participating in this study/giving the lessons has been a positive experience for me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments/Feedback:

7. Participating in this study/giving the lessons has been a positive experience for my students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments/Feedback:

8. What are the strengths of this curriculum?

9. What are the weaknesses of this curriculum? What can be improved?
### Appendix C: Intervention Materials

**Overview of Intervention Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Goal:</strong> Students will identify their top strengths.</th>
<th><strong>Goal:</strong> Students will learn to apply their strengths to various situations.</th>
<th><strong>Goal:</strong> Students will use their strengths to build relationships with school staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will complete the strengths questionnaire</td>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will find examples of their strength(s) in other contexts – music/tv/movies, stories/literature, other individuals, etc</td>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will interview teachers regarding their own strengths as well as how they apply them to their job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will name their top 3 strengths.</td>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will create 3 academic goals and brainstorm ways to meet these goals using their strengths. Students will also be challenged to brainstorm personal and other future goals using their strengths.</td>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will collaboratively brainstorm their goal plan with a teacher. Teachers will provide feedback regarding how well students are meeting their goals and using their strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective:</strong> Students will provide their personal definitions of these strengths.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Learning Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. What is a strength?                       | Students will be introduced to the curriculum overall as well as to the concept of describing and identifying personal strengths. | 1. Lecture  
2. Discussion |
| 2. What are my top strengths?                | Students will take a survey to determine their top 3 strengths. They will provide personal definitions of these 3 strengths. | 1. Activity  
2. Discussion |
| 3. What do these strengths mean to me?       | Students will find examples of their strength(s) in other contexts – music/tv/movies, stories/literature, other individuals, etc | 1. Activity  
2. Discussion |
| 4. What do these strengths mean to me, cont. | Students will interview teachers regarding their own strengths as well as how they apply them to their job. In addition, teachers will provide feedback to students regarding the student’s strengths. | 1. Activity |
| 5. What is a goal?                           | Students will learn how to write a measurable, objective goal and will be provided examples of personal and academic goals. | 1. Lecture  
2. Discussion  
3. Homework |
| 6. Writing my academic goals                 | Students will create 3 academic goals and brainstorm ways to meet these goals using their strengths. Students will also be challenged to brainstorm personal and other future goals using their strengths. | 1. Lecture  
2. Activity |
| 7. Writing my academic goals, cont.          | Students will collaboratively brainstorm their goal plan with a teacher. Students will be given feedback about their goal plan and students will make necessary revisions. | 1. Activity |
| 8. Monitoring goals                          | Teachers will provide feedback regarding how well students are meeting their goals and using their strengths. | 1. Activity |
### Overview & Purpose

Students will be introduced to the curriculum overall as well as to the concept of describing and identifying personal strengths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Students will be introduced to the concept of strengths and the importance of identifying strengths  
• Students will brainstorm some strengths | • Lesson plan  
• Lesson checklist |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2 Activity</th>
<th>Next Week…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students will be asked to brainstorm (e.g., without taking the survey) their top strengths in school, at home, and with their friends.</td>
<td>• Students will take strengths quiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Materials collected for research purposes | |
|------------------------------------------|
Lesson

Day 1
1. Discuss Strengths

**Intro:** What are strengths? Strengths are the things we are good at. Strengths are something about us that make us do well at certain activities or in a certain place, like at school or with friends. Our strengths allow us to do lots of things, like be creative on a school project or have good relationships with our friends. Everyone has strengths, and they make us unique individuals capable of achieving lots of cool things! We can have strengths in many areas of our lives.

**Discussion:** Pose the question “What are some strengths you have in school or with your schoolwork? Or what are strengths you have seen your friends (you don’t have to say their names) display in school or with schoolwork?” Wait to receive at least 2 responses and praise the students responding. Examples could include subject-area strengths (e.g., good at math or reading) or could encompass broader strengths, such as being a good listener, being a good organizer, having a good memory, etc. If students do not give an example of the second type of strength, say “Those are great examples of strengths! We can also have strengths that may be with us for all our school work – for instance some of us are good at staying organized, while others are good listeners – these strengths will help us through all our classes!”

**Discussion:** “What are some strengths you have when you’re with your friends or family?” Wait to receive at least 2 responses and praise the students responding. Examples could include being kind, being a good listener, having a good sense of humor, and being a leader. Provide at least one of these strengths in addition to the ones discussed by students “Those are great examples! We all have strengths in the way we interact with other people – some people are (good listeners, good leaders).”

2. Discuss the importance of strengths

**Discussion:** Why is it important to know about our strengths? Pose this question to the class, wait to receive at least 2 answers, and praise the students responding. Discuss with the class that knowing our strengths allow us to live up to our potential – they are those parts of us which encourage us to be successful. Focusing on our strengths allows us to do our best in all of life’s activities and it also allows us to challenge ourselves to keep growing.

Day 2 (Half Day)
1. Think-pair-share on personal strengths

“Yesterday we discussed the idea of strengths and some areas we all have strengths in. Today, I want you to think about what some of your strengths may be. We will do an activity next week to help us think about this, but for now, I want you to brainstorm at least one strength in school and one strength with your friend.” Wait 5 minutes, or until most students have written at least one strength. Ask students to pair up to discuss their strengths. Wait 5 minutes. Ask class to share their ideas of what some of their strengths may be. Wait to hear from at least 2 groups.
## Lesson Checklist

### 1. What are strengths?

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>•</strong></td>
<td>Script was not delivered. Students did not hear the instructor speak about what strengths are.</td>
<td><strong>•</strong></td>
<td>Instructor discussed strengths, but did not follow the point of the script</td>
<td><strong>•</strong></td>
<td>The instructor discussed strengths according to the guidelines in the lesson plan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. What are strengths at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **•** | Instructor did not pose initial question  
• There were no student responses  
• Instructor did not deliver final script | **•** | Instructor posed initial question, but did not follow main point of script  
• There was only one student response  
• Instructor did not praise response  
• Final script was delivered, but with changes | **•** | Instructor posed initial question according to script  
• Two student responses were received  
• Instructor praised responses  
• Final script was delivered |   |   |   |   |
### 3. What are strengths with friends?

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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instructor did not pose initial question</td>
<td>Instructor posed initial question, but did not follow main point of the script</td>
<td>Instructor posed initial question according to script</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There were no student responses</td>
<td>There was only one student response</td>
<td>Two student responses were received</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instructor did not deliver final script</td>
<td>Instructor did not praise response</td>
<td>Instructor praised responses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Final script was delivered, but with changes</td>
<td>Final script was delivered</td>
<td>Final script was delivered</td>
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</table>

### 4. Why is it important to know strengths?

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<td>Instructor posed initial question, but did not follow main point of script</td>
<td>Instructor posed initial question according to script</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There were no student responses</td>
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<td>Two student responses were received</td>
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<td>Instructor praised responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Final script was delivered, but with changes</td>
<td>Final script was delivered</td>
<td>Final script was delivered</td>
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</table>
5. Think-pair-share on strengths

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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial script was not delivered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial script was delivered, but did not follow main point of script</td>
<td>• Students brainstormed strengths, but were rushed.</td>
<td>• Students discussed strengths, but were rushed.</td>
<td>• Initial script was delivered according to guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students did not brainstorm strengths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students brainstormed strengths, but were rushed.</td>
<td>• Students discussed strengths, but were rushed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students brainstormed strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students did not discuss strengths with a partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students discussed strengths, but were rushed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students discussed strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No student partners discussed their strengths with the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Only one pair of students discussed their strengths.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Two pairs of students discussed their strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# 2. WHAT ARE MY TOP STRENGTHS?

**Grade:** 6th-8th  
**Subject:** Strengths-based  
**Prepared By:** Stephanie Coleman

## Overview & Purpose

Students will take a survey to determine their top 3 strengths. They will provide personal definitions of these 3 strengths.

## Objectives

- Students will complete the strengths survey and the summary sheet with their top 3 strengths (10 minutes). Students will complete these surveys individually with paper and pencil and will complete a strengths summary.
- Following this, students will sit in groups of 3, discuss their top strengths, and begin to brainstorm their personal definitions of these strengths.

## Materials Needed

- Copies of Strengths survey
- Copies of Strengths Summary sheet
- Lesson plan
- Lesson checklist

## Day 2

- Students will complete the summary sheet with the results of their survey. They will provide a personal definition and example for their top strength in each area.

## Materials collected for research purposes

- Lesson Checklist

## Next Week…

- What do these strengths mean to me?
Lesson

Day 1
1. Review Strengths: Last week we discussed the idea of strengths and the importance of knowing our strengths. Can someone tell me what a strength is? (Wait for one response, correct for misconceptions if appropriate, praise student). Can someone tell me why knowing our strengths is important? (Wait for one response, correct for misconceptions if appropriate, praise student)

2. Survey administration: To help us understand our own strengths, we will be taking a survey. You will get scores for several potential strength areas and decide which ones are the highest. Pass out survey, monitor students, help when needed.

3. Discussion of strengths: Now that we have finished taking the survey, let’s talk about our results. Please get into groups of three (teacher can form these, if needed). Please talk with your group about what results surprised you, if any. Also talk about how you see yourself displaying these strengths at school.

Day 2 (Half Day)
1. Strengths summary: Let’s start to think about what our strengths mean to us. I’ll ask you to fill out a worksheet – on this sheet, you’ll write your strengths, provide your own definition of what this strength means, and provide two examples of when you showed this strength. When we know how our strengths affect us, we can have a better sense of how to increase our strengths and skills in school! Pass out sheet, help students as needed, collect at the end. You will need to pass these out to students again during Lesson 3.
Lesson checklist

1. Review Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Review of lesson is not taught.</td>
<td>• Review of lesson is taught, but does not follow script</td>
<td>• Review of lesson is taught according to script</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are not asked “what is a strength?”</td>
<td>• Only one question is posed (what is a strength/why are strengths important)</td>
<td>• Both question are asked</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are not asked “Why are strengths important?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students respond to both questions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Survey administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Survey is not given</td>
<td>• Survey is given, but students do not finish survey</td>
<td>• Survey is given</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are not monitored.</td>
<td>• Students are inconsistently monitored.</td>
<td>• Students are monitored</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Discussion of strengths:

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students are not split into groups.</td>
<td>• Students are split into groups</td>
<td>• Students are split into groups.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students do not discuss if strengths are surprising.</td>
<td>• Only one discussion prompt is given</td>
<td>• Both discussion prompts are given</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students do not discuss how strengths are displayed.</td>
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</table>
Day 2

1. Strengths summary:

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
<td>Instructions are not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary sheet is not handed out</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
<td>Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students are not monitored</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
<td>Students are consistently monitored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Instructions are given
• Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete
• Students are inconsistently monitored.
• Instructions are given
• Summary sheet is handed out, but students do not complete
• Students are inconsistently monitored.
Name:
Now that you know your top three strengths and the definitions of these strengths from the survey, let’s start to think about what these strengths mean in your own life. Do the following steps in order to complete your Strengths Summary:

1. In the first two columns, copy the name of your strength and the definition of this strength from the survey.
2. In the last two columns, write a definition of this strength that applies to your life (in your own words).
3. In the last column on the right, write one or two examples of a time you displayed this strength.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Definition from Survey</th>
<th>What it means to me</th>
<th>Examples of this strength in my life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. WHAT DO THESE STRENGTHS MEAN TO ME?

**Overview & Purpose**

Students will discuss their strengths in small groups and find examples of their strength(s) in other contexts – music/tv/movies, stories/literature, other individuals, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students will discuss their personal definitions of their strengths in small groups</td>
<td>• Lesson plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students will begin to think about other examples of individuals displaying their strengths.</td>
<td>• Lesson checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 2 Activity</strong></td>
<td>• Strengths summary worksheet from week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students will find an example of their strength. They will discuss these in their groups.</td>
<td>• Copies of Worksheet: Other strength examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials collected for research purposes**

• Lesson Checklist

**Next Week…**

• Students will continue to discuss the application of their strengths
Lesson

Day 1
1. Review from last week: Last week, we discussed what your particular strengths are. Can someone tell me what a strength is? (Wait for 1 response & praise.) Can someone tell me why we are studying strengths? (Wait for 1 response & praise.)

2. Share personal definition: Will someone share their personal definition of their strength and an example? (Wait for two responses, praise the students responding.) Excellent! We want to do this because our strengths mean different things to each of us. It is important for us to know how we display our strengths and how we can keep using our strengths to achieve our goals.

3. Group discussion of summary sheet: Now, we will talk about other examples of your strengths. Probably some of you in the same room have the same strengths and that goes for people outside the room as well. To help us understand examples of other people who use their strengths, first we’re going to share our strengths with other students in the class. We’re going to use the summary sheet we completed last week to discuss our strengths with our classmates. As you listen to the other students in your group, think about how this is similar or different than how you think about your own strengths. Split students into groups of 4 and ask them to discuss their strengths summary sheets with each other. Monitor the students as they discuss their strengths; try to get them to think about how there are similarities and differences between how strengths are displayed.

4. Group discussion of other strength examples: Our next task is to try to find someone who displays one of the same strengths as you do. Stay in your same groups of four and discuss who might display a similar strength as you do. This could be a friend, a family member, someone famous, someone on TV or someone in a song. Please use this worksheet to help you think. Pass out worksheets, monitor students and help them think of people who also may display a similar strength (Here are some hints: for investigator, think of scientists/researchers – ask students if they know of any famous scientists; for organizer, biologists see patterns in the world (e.g., Darwin); for verbalizer, politicians have to talk through key issues with other people; for creator, anyone artistic – visual arts, performing arts, etc; for collaborator – doctors, businesspeople; for explorer – inventors, archaeologists, etc). If students are having lots of difficulty with this, just ask them to come up with a profession that would use this strength.

Day 2
1. Let’s continue to discuss our strengths. Yesterday we talked about finding one or two other people who share a strength with you – this could be a friend or family member or someone famous. Please get in your groups and continue to discuss this and fill out your worksheet for the next ten minutes. Please have at least one example ready. Continue to monitor the students and give them suggestions as needed. After students have completed their discussion and have the worksheet completed, ask 2 students at random to explain their strength and the character they chose. Praise their efforts.
**Lesson Checklist**

1. Review from last week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neither question prompt was delivered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Only one question prompt was delivered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Both question prompts were delivered &amp; students responded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Share personal definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial question is not posed.</td>
<td>• Initial question is posed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Only one student response is given</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial question was posed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students do not respond with strength and example</td>
<td>• Students do not respond with strength and example</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Two students responded to the question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Group discussion of summary sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial script is not given</td>
<td>• Initial script is given</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are put into groups of 4</td>
<td>• Students are put into groups of 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not put in groups of 4</td>
<td>• Students are put into groups of 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students discuss summary sheets</td>
<td>• Students discuss summary sheets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students do not discuss summary sheets.</td>
<td>• Students do not discuss summary sheets.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are inconsistently monitored</td>
<td>• Students are inconsistently monitored</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not monitored</td>
<td>• Students are not monitored</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

• Students are closely monitored
4. Group discussion of other strength examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Initial instructions are not given.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial instructions are given, but do not follow the script.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Initial instructions are given and follow the script.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not monitored (examples are not given).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are inconsistently monitored.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are monitored closely and hints are given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students do not complete the worksheet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Some students finish the worksheet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• All students finish the worksheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not asked to report back to the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Only one student reports back to the class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Two students report back to the class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Examples of My Strengths

Think of two other people who also show the same strength as you. This can be a friend, a family member, someone famous, or someone in a book or in a song.

1. In the first two columns, write your strength and definition. You can use your strengths summary sheet.
2. After discussing it with your group, come up with someone else who also shows the same strength. Write who they are and what they do in the first box in the last column, an explanation of their strength in the second box, and how they use the strength in the third box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Strength</th>
<th>My Definition</th>
<th>Examples of other individuals who display this strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Description (who is it and what do they do?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Explanation (how do they have a similar strength?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. How does it help them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grade: 6th-8th  Subject: Strengths-based  Prepared By: Stephanie Coleman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview &amp; Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will interview teachers regarding their own strengths as well as how they apply them to their job. In addition, teachers will provide feedback to students regarding the student’s strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Teachers will provide feedback to students regarding strengths</td>
<td>● Lesson plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Students will interview teachers regarding their strengths.</td>
<td>● Lesson checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Copies of worksheets: Strengths in different settings, Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2 Activity</th>
<th>Materials collected for research purposes</th>
<th>Next Week…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Students will interview teachers regarding their strengths.</td>
<td>● Lesson Checklist</td>
<td>● Students will learn how to write a goal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson

1. Review and Intro: Last week, we discussed our personal strengths and examples of others that share our strengths. Today we will continue to explore our strengths and talk to our classmates about what these strengths mean to us.

2. Strengths in different settings: We display our strengths in different settings. We may show them similarly or differently depending on where we are. I want you to think about how you show your strengths in school, at home, and with your friends. I will give you a sheet to write down your answers. In a moment, I will split you up into groups to discuss this. Give students a few moments to complete this worksheet; monitor to be sure most students finish writing down a few notes.

3. Discussion of strengths in small group: Let's break into small groups to talk about our strengths. Each of us should talk about how we display our strength at school, at home, and with our friends. We should also talk about how we would like to use our strength at home, at school, and with our friends. Please share your thoughts with each group member about how they can display their strength at school, at home, and with their friends. On your worksheet, you'll fill in a few ideas from your group members.

   Students should be split into groups of four. You will do “discussion of strengths in small group” and “interview teacher” at the same time. You should spend enough time with each group that they know your top strength and can point to how you display it at your job. You can add additional detail as you see fit.

4. Interview teacher regarding their strengths (Day 1/Day 2) I will also be coming around to each group. I want you all to ask me a few questions about my strengths and I will ask you some questions about what your group has talked about in discussing how strengths can be displayed at school. On your worksheet, you'll see there are questions for you to ask me as well as spots for my answer. Jot down a few notes about what I talk to your group about. Also, as a group, come up with one extra question you would like to ask me about my strength and how I use it in my job. As you rotate to each group, ask them how they are thinking about showing their strengths at school. Give them suggestions about extra ways they could display their strength. For example, you could suggest using a strength as a way of completing a class project in a unique way, as a way of joining new extracurricular activities, making new friends, exploring new interests, etc.
Lesson Checklist

1. Review and Intro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No intro or review was delivered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intro and/or review was delivered, but did not follow main point of script</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intro and review were delivered according to the guidelines in the lesson plan</td>
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</table>

2. Strengths in different settings

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Initial script was not given</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Worksheets were not passed out</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students do not finish worksheets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Initial script was given, but did not follow the main point in the lesson</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Worksheets are passed out</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not all students finish worksheets</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial script was given according to guidelines in lesson plan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worksheets are passed out</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All students finish worksheets</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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139
3. Discussion of strengths in small group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intro to assignment was not given</td>
<td>Intro to assignment was given</td>
<td>Intro to assignment was given</td>
<td>Teacher did not walk around the classroom</td>
<td>Teacher walked around classroom, but did not visit all groups</td>
<td>Teacher walked around classroom and visited all groups</td>
<td>Students discussed their strengths, but did not finish worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher did not walk around the classroom</td>
<td>Teacher walked around classroom, but did not visit all groups</td>
<td>Teacher walked around classroom and visited all groups</td>
<td>Students discussed their strengths, but did not finish worksheet</td>
<td>Students discussed their strengths and finished worksheet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students did not discuss their strengths</td>
<td>Students discussed their strengths and finished worksheet</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Interview teacher regarding their strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructions were not given</td>
<td>Instructions were given</td>
<td>Instructions were given</td>
<td>Instructor did not talk to each group</td>
<td>Instructor talked to some groups and/or answered some questions</td>
<td>Instructor talked to all groups and answered all questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor did not talk to each group</td>
<td>Instructor talked to some groups and/or answered some questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

140
## Strengths in Different Settings

Instructions: How do you show your strengths in different settings? Think about yourself at school, at home, and with your friends? Do you show this strength in these different places? If so, how do you show it? Write your answers below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Strength</th>
<th>How I show my strength</th>
<th>...at home</th>
<th>...with friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|          |                        |           |                |
|          |                        |           |                |

Instructions: When you are discussing how you show your strengths with your group, write down a few ideas about how your group members show their strengths in different settings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How others show their strength</th>
<th>...at home</th>
<th>...with friends</th>
</tr>
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|                                |            |                |

141
**Interview with My Teacher**

*Instructions:* Your teacher will visit your group to talk to you about your strengths. You will also ask your teacher about his or her top strengths and how they show them in their job. Please ask your teacher the following questions and write down their answers. Your group will also fill in an additional question to ask your teacher. Write down the answer to this question as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to ask my teacher</th>
<th>My teacher’s answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  What is your top strength?</td>
<td>My teacher’s answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  How do you use your strengths in your job?</td>
<td>My teacher’s answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  Extra question:</td>
<td>My teacher’s answer:</td>
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</table>
5. WHAT IS A GOAL?

**Grade:** 6th-8th  **Subject:** Strengths-based Curriculum  **Prepared By:** Stephanie Coleman

### Overview & Purpose

Students will learn about the importance of goals and will learn the relevant criteria for creating their own goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Materials Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Students will be introduced to the combination of strengths and goals  
  • Students will be introduced to the idea of writing specific, observable, and reasonable goals | • Lesson plan  
  • Lesson checklist  
  • Copies of worksheets: “Michael Jordan on goals”, “A good goal is…” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 2 Activity</th>
<th>Next Week…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Students will start brainstorming good goals.</td>
<td>• Students will start to write their goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials collected for research purposes</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
</table>
Lesson

Day 1

1. Discuss Strengths and goals
   
   We have been discussing strengths and why they are important to know. Can someone tell me one reason we should know our strengths (pause for one response; praise responder). One reason we should know our strengths is because they can help us figure out how we can do the best job in all we do. Using our strengths allows us to tap into our potential to meet our goals.

2. Goal Story
   
   We all have goals. Some of our goals are short-term, like being able to finish our homework for tomorrow, while others may be long-term, like graduating high school. Please read this story written by Michael Jordan about having goals. Wait for students to finish reading the page. What does Michael Jordan tell us about accomplishing our goals? (Students should at least respond with a ‘step by step process’ and that you must have ‘reasonable goals’. Wait for a few student responses and if these are not given be sure you emphasize these points). Can someone give me an example of a goal they have for their life? (wait for two examples; praise responders). Excellent!

3. How to write a goal
   
   Pass out “A good goal is…” worksheet. When we come up with our goals, we want to do three things to make sure they are the best goals for us. Follow along with me on your worksheet. Please write each criterion in the first column and then the example of how to write a better goal in the second column (pause within the lecture to give students enough time to write). The first criterion: our goals need to be **reasonable**. A reasonable goal is neither too easy nor too difficult. If you are just starting to run, it would not be a reasonable goal to run a marathon next week. You want to challenge yourself a little bit, but not too much. A more reasonable goal might be to run at least 30 minutes every day. A goal should also be **observable**. You should know beforehand how you will know if you’ve met your goal. For instance, if your goal is to run 30 minutes a day, you can set a timer to know that you ran at least 30 minutes. Your goal should also be **specific**. Instead of making a goal to be healthier, you should make a more specific goal, such as eating at least one serving of vegetables each day. What is one criterion of a goal and what does it mean? (keep asking until all 3 criteria – reasonable, specific, and observable – are explained by students).

Day 2

1. Examples and critique of goals
   
   What is one criterion of a goal and what does it mean? (keep asking until all 3 are explained by students). That’s right; goals are reasonable, observable, and specific. Let’s talk about how to make some goals. I want you to write down two goals you have for yourself – one at school and one outside of school (students should write a few goals on a piece of paper). Now I need a brave volunteer that will say one of their goals and we can give them feedback…Can someone give me an example of a goal they have for themselves, a goal they wrote down on their paper? (wait for response) Targeted towards whole class: Is this goal specific? (wait for a response, have a brief discussion and correct the goal to make it specific if need be) Observable? (wait for a response, have a brief discussion and correct the goal to make it specific if need be) Reasonable? (wait for a response, have a brief discussion and correct the goal to make it specific if need be). Great! So now we know how to write good goals. Next week we’ll get more practice with writing goals for ourselves.
### Lesson Checklist

1. Discuss Strengths and goals

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question prompt is not given</td>
<td>Question prompt is given</td>
<td>Question prompt is given</td>
<td>Question prompt is given</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student does not respond</td>
<td>Student responds</td>
<td>Student responds</td>
<td>Student responds</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final script is not given</td>
<td>Final script is given, but with does not follow script</td>
<td>Final script is given</td>
<td>Final script is given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Discuss goals

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initial prompt is not given</td>
<td>Initial prompt is given</td>
<td>Initial prompt is given</td>
<td>Initial prompt is given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students do not read Michael Jordan story</td>
<td>Students read Michael Jordan story</td>
<td>Students read Michael Jordan story</td>
<td>Students read Michael Jordan story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students are not asked about story or their own goals</td>
<td>Either question about story or about students’ own goals is given</td>
<td>Both questions about story and about students’ own goals are given</td>
<td>Both questions about story and about students’ own goals are given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students do not respond</td>
<td>Only one student responds</td>
<td>Two students respond</td>
<td>Two students respond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. How to write a goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Worksheets are not passed out</td>
<td>• Worksheets are passed out, but are not completed</td>
<td>• Worksheets are passed out and are completed by all students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Criteria of specific, reasonable and observable are not explained</td>
<td>• Only some criterion of goals are explained</td>
<td>• All criteria of goals are explained</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not asked to repeat criteria</td>
<td>• Only some criterion of goals are repeated by students</td>
<td>• All criteria are repeated by students</td>
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</table>

1. Examples and critique of goals

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Question prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students are not asked to come up with goals</td>
<td>• Students are asked to come up with goals, but not all students complete</td>
<td>• Students are asked to come up with goals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No discussion about goal criteria</td>
<td>• Some goal criterion are discussed, but not all</td>
<td>• All goal criterion are discussed</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A good goal is…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Change the goal to make it better.…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ________</td>
<td>“I will run a marathon next week”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ________</td>
<td>“I will run for 30 minutes a day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How will you know if you’ve met this goal?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ________</td>
<td>“I will be healthier”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>________________________________</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## 6. WRITING MY GOALS

**Grade:** 6th-8th  
**Subject:** Strengths-based Curriculum  
**Prepared By:** Stephanie Coleman

### Overview & Purpose

Students will create 3 academic goals and brainstorm ways to meet these goals using their strengths.

### Objectives

- Students will be reminded of the goal criteria
- Students will start to write academic goals

### Materials Needed

- Lesson plan
- Lesson checklist
- Copies of worksheets “Examples of goals and plans”, “Writing my goals”

### Day 2 Activity

- Students will continue to write academic goals.

### Materials collected for research purposes

- Lesson Checklist

### Next Week…

- Students will start to write their goals
Day 1

1. Review goal criteria

   Last week we talked about the three criteria of good goals. Who can tell me one of the areas we discussed? (Students will need to respond with reasonable, observable, and specific) And another? (Students will need to respond with reasonable, observable, and specific) What's the last one? (Students will need to respond with reasonable, observable, and specific). So here's a goal: “I will make a better grade in math”. Who can tell me why this might not be the best goal and what a better goal would be? (goal is nonspecific and nonobservable; should say something like “I will raise my math grade by 2 points”). Here's another goal: “I will raise my 50% homework average to a 100% homework average by next week” Who can tell me why this might not be the best goal and what a better goal would be? (goal is not reasonable – may want to raise homework average to a 75% to begin with).

2. Discuss short and long-term goals

   Last week we also read the story written by Michael Jordan about goals. He talked about making short and long term goals…we use goals as a step by step process to get where we want to be. We're going to focus on writing goals for school. Our goals for school can be short and long-term. A short-term goal might be for a week, a month or a semester. A long term goal might be for a semester, a year, or a career goal that might be years away. Who can give me an example of a short-term academic goal? (Wait for one response; correct answer should reflect something that can be achieved in, at most, a semester; praise responder) Who can give me an example of a long-term academic goal? (Wait for one response; praise responder). We should have both short and long term goals. We can achieve what we want, step by step, when we have both short and long term goals.

3. Write goals

   Now, we're going to practice writing goals. We will begin today and continue tomorrow. We will keep track of these goals until the end of the semester. This is our first draft of goals – next week we will talk about how to make a plan to meet your goals. I will give you some ideas about how to write your goals and how to achieve your goals. We will also talk about how well you have been able to meet your goals. Your strengths that you learned about earlier will help you meet your goals. Your goals can have to do with your strength or you can talk about how you will use your strength to meet your goal. Either way, you must include your strengths (from the survey) in your goals. Please look at the worksheet I'm passing out. You will write your strengths in the first column. In the second column, you will write your goal using our goal criteria and keeping your strength in mind. In the third column, you will write your plan for meeting your goal. This may also include your strength(s). In the last column you will judge your goal to see if it meets the three criteria we discussed before – specific, observable, reasonable. You can write “yes” or “no”. If it is “no”, you will want to rewrite it or ask for help. I am also passing out an extra sheet that will help you come up with some ideas for school goals and help you write some steps to accomplish your goals. You can use the attached example to help students understand what they are to do.

   1. Writing goals, cont.

      Let's continue to write our goals. What are the three goal criteria? (look for specific, observable, reasonable) Who can tell me what else should be included in our goal statements? (make sure students know they need to be using their strengths either to set or to achieve the goal). Allow students time to complete their worksheet on goals. Collect these worksheets for students to work on next week.
### Lesson Checklist

#### 1. Review goal criteria

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Question prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Students do not respond with all criteria</td>
<td>• Goal examples are given</td>
<td>• Students do not give correction for both goal examples</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Students respond with all criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students do not respond with three criteria</td>
<td>• Students respond with some, but not all of criteria</td>
<td>• Goal examples are given</td>
<td>• Students do not give correction for both goal examples</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Students respond with all criteria</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Goal examples are not given</td>
<td>• Goal examples are given</td>
<td>• Students do not give correction for both goal examples</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Students respond with all criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students do not correct goal examples</td>
<td>• Goal examples are given</td>
<td>• Students do not give correction for both goal examples</td>
<td>• Question prompt is given</td>
<td>• Students respond with all criteria</td>
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#### 2. Discuss short and long-term goals

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is not given</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given, but does not follow point of the script</td>
<td>• Only one prompt (short-term, long-term goal) is given</td>
<td>• Students only respond to one prompt</td>
<td>• Final prompt is given, but does not follow the point of the script.</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given and follows the point of the script</td>
<td>• Both short-term and long-term prompts are given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Short-term goal prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given, but does not follow point of the script</td>
<td>• Only one prompt (short-term, long-term goal) is given</td>
<td>• Students only respond to one prompt</td>
<td>• Final prompt is given, but does not follow the point of the script.</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given and follows the point of the script</td>
<td>• Both short-term and long-term prompts are given</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Long-term goal prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given, but does not follow point of the script</td>
<td>• Only one prompt (short-term, long-term goal) is given</td>
<td>• Students only respond to one prompt</td>
<td>• Final prompt is given, but does not follow the point of the script.</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given and follows the point of the script</td>
<td>• Both short-term and long-term prompts are given</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Final prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given, but does not follow point of the script</td>
<td>• Only one prompt (short-term, long-term goal) is given</td>
<td>• Students only respond to one prompt</td>
<td>• Final prompt is given, but does not follow the point of the script.</td>
<td>• Michael Jordan reference is given and follows the point of the script</td>
<td>• Both short-term and long-term prompts are given</td>
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</table>
3. Write goals

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Instructions are not given&lt;br&gt;• Worksheets are not passed out</td>
<td>• Instructions are given, but do not follow the point of the script&lt;br&gt;• Worksheets are passed out&lt;br&gt;• Some students do not fill out the worksheet</td>
<td>• Instructions are given and follow the point of the script&lt;br&gt;• Worksheets are passed out and completed</td>
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1. Writing goals, cont.

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<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Question prompts are not given&lt;br&gt;• Students are not given time to work on goal worksheet</td>
<td>• One question prompt is given&lt;br&gt;• Students respond to one question&lt;br&gt;• Students are given time to work on goal worksheet</td>
<td>• Question prompts are given&lt;br&gt;• Students respond to both questions&lt;br&gt;• Students are given time to work on goal worksheet</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Examples of goals and plans

Instructions: You may want to fill in these blanks to give you some ideas about how to write a school goal.

Finish the sentences below.

On this project, I will _____________________________________________

In ________ (class), I will __________________________________________

In my homework assignments, I will ______________________________________

For my tests, I will _____________________________________________________

Thinking about what I want to do next year, I will ______________________________

Instructions: When you start to think of a plan to accomplish your goal, you want to have each step written down. You will want to be able to know when you have finished each step so you can cross it off your list.

□ Step 1:

□ Step 2:

□ Step 3:

□ Step 4:

□ Step 5
Writing my goals

Instructions: On this sheet, you will write your strength from the survey in the first column. Then, think of how you can use this strength to accomplish a school goal. Write the goal in the next column. Start to think about how you will accomplish this goal. Think about each step you need to do to make the goal happen. Then, ask yourself if the goal meets each goal criterion. If it does not, rewrite the goal or ask for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Strength</th>
<th>My Goal</th>
<th>My plan</th>
<th>Does my goal meet the criteria?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Specific</td>
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<td>Measurable</td>
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<td>Reasonable</td>
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<td>Specific</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Measurable</td>
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<td>Reasonable</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Specific</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Measurable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
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</table>
## Writing my goals (example)

**Instructions:** On this sheet, you will write your strength from the survey in the first column. Then, think of how you can use this strength to accomplish a school goal. Write the goal in the next column. Start to think about how you will accomplish this goal. Think about each step you need to do to make the goal happen. Then, ask yourself if the goal meets each goal criterion. If it does not, rewrite the goal or ask for help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Strength</th>
<th>My Goal</th>
<th>My plan</th>
<th>Does my goal meet the criteria?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Creator** | For my class assignment, I will write a poem. For my creative writing assignment in English, I will write and turn in a poem about nature. | 1. Ask my teacher if I can do this project  
2. Write an outline of the poem  
3. Write a first draft of the poem  
4. Ask my friends to read the poem  
5. Make changes; turn it in | Specific  
No Yes  
Measurable  
No Yes  
Reasonable Yes |
|             |         |         | Specific  
Measurable  
Reasonable |
### 7. WRITING MY GOALS

**Grade:** 6th-8th  
**Subject:** Strengths-based Curriculum  
**Prepared By:** Stephanie Coleman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Overview &amp; Purpose</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will collaboratively brainstorm their goal plan with a teacher. Students will be given feedback about their goal plan and students will make necessary revisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Materials Needed</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Students will be given feedback on their goal plans  
- Students will be introduced to the goal monitoring sheet | - Lesson plan  
- Lesson checklist  
- Worksheet from last week “Writing my goals”  
- Copies of progress monitoring worksheet, example progress monitoring worksheet |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Day 2 Activity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Materials collected for research purposes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Students will continue to be given feedback on their goals</td>
<td>- Lesson Checklist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Next Week…</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Students will monitor their goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson

Day 1
1. Review goal sheets

Last week, we discussed setting goals by using our strengths. On our worksheets, we listed our strengths, listed our goals, listed how we would meet our goals, and judged whether our goals were specific, observable, and reasonable. This week we will talk about our goal plans with each other and I will show you how to judge your progress towards your goal.

2. Discuss goal monitoring

We’re going to monitor our goals each week. At least once a week in here, we will fill in how well we are meeting our goals and what else we need to do to make sure we stay on the right track to meet our goals. You should look at your plan each week to see if you can cross something off your plan or you can use the sheet to plan how you will cross something off your list. On this goal monitoring sheet, you’ll fill in your goal in the first column and then use the rest of the columns to keep track of your progress each week. They are split up into weeks; you may not need all the columns. I will also help you figure out if you are doing a good job using your strengths and making progress towards your goals. Use example to help students understand. So, for example, if my goal was to use my strength as a creator in my English class to write a poem for an assignment, I would keep track of my progress using my plan. Each week, I would write if I did something to accomplish my goal and what my next step would be. Please look at this example and give me some ideas about what the next steps should be. Give students a moment to look at the worksheet. Answers should relate to writing a first draft of the poem. Discuss this answer with students as well as any questions they may have.

3. Provide feedback

We’re going to split into groups to talk about our goal plans and how to monitor them. One of the things we talked about is making sure our goals are observable, meaning you will know when you reach your goal. I want you all to split into groups, tell each other your goals and your plans and give each other ideas about how to make your goals specific, observable, and reasonable. Also, tell the group your ideas about your goal plan. Your other group members should nicely give you feedback about your goal plan. It takes a lot of work to write good goals and we can all help each other! I will walk around the room and also visit with groups to talk about how to make sure we know we’re reaching our goals. We will continue doing this until tomorrow. Visit with each group and ask a few group members about their goals and goal plans. Be sure to give them feedback around the three criteria as well as how reasonable the goal plan looks. Continue doing this for the rest of the allotted time.

1. Writing goals, cont.

Let’s continue to talk about our goals. Let’s get in the same groups as yesterday and talk about our goals and our goal plans. Again, I will walk around to discuss your goals with each group. Visit with each group and ask a few group members about their goals and goal plans. Be sure to give them feedback around the three criteria as well as how reasonable the goal plan looks. Continue doing this for the rest of the allotted time.
## Lesson Checklist

### 1. Review goal sheets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Review is not given</td>
<td>• Review is given, but does not follow point of the script</td>
<td>• Review is given and follows the point of the script</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### 2. Discuss goal monitoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Initial script is not given  
• Goal monitoring sheet is not given or explained  
• Example is not referenced  
• Students do not answer question about example goal monitoring sheet | • Initial script is given, but does not follow point of the script  
• Goal monitoring sheet is given but not explained  
• Example is referenced, but students do not answer question about it. | • Prompt is given and follows main point of script  
• Goal monitoring sheet is both given and explained  
• Example is referenced and students answer question about it. |
3. Provide feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Prompt is not given</td>
<td>• Prompt is given, but does not follow main point of script</td>
<td>• Prompt is given and is consistent with script</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students do not discuss goals/plan with each other</td>
<td>• Some students discuss goals/plan with each other</td>
<td>• All students discuss goals/plan with each other</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Instructor does not visit groups</td>
<td>• Instructor visits some, but not all, groups</td>
<td>• Instructor visits all groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Instructor does not give feedback about goals and plan</td>
<td>• Instructor gives feedback about either goals or plans</td>
<td>• Instructor gives feedback about both goals and plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Goal Monitoring Sheet - Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. For my creative writing assignment in English, I will write and turn in a poem about nature.</td>
<td>Progress: Asked my teacher if I could do this project – she said yes.</td>
<td>Progress: Finished my outline</td>
<td>Progress: My teacher read my outline and said it was good</td>
<td>Progress:</td>
<td>Progress:</td>
<td>Progress:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next Steps: By next week, I will have an outline ready</td>
<td>Next Steps: Ask my teacher if she will read my outline</td>
<td>Next Steps:</td>
<td>Next Steps:</td>
<td>Next Steps:</td>
<td>Next Steps:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. MONITORING GOALS

**Grade:** 6th-8th  **Subject:** Strengths-based  **Prepared By:** Stephanie Coleman

**Curriculum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Overview &amp; Purpose</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will provide feedback regarding how well students are meeting their goals and using their strengths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Materials Needed</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Students and teachers will meet in short, individual meetings (approximately 7 minutes) to discuss the status of their goal plans and appropriate next steps.</td>
<td>● Goal Monitoring Sheets (students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Students will summarize their goals and their progress toward these goals.</td>
<td>● Discussion Framework (teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Teachers will ask guiding questions to students to determine the progress toward goals as well as brainstorming next steps.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Homework</strong></th>
<th><strong>Next Week…</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Students will complete the goal monitoring sheets each week during connections time they are not meeting with the teacher.</td>
<td>● Continue individual meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Materials collected for research purposes</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Completed discussion framework sheets for each student</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Instructions:
For the remained of the semester, you will meet with students individually for approximately 7 minutes. During this time, you will discuss with them their goals and their progress towards their goals. This is a key time for students to get feedback from teachers about improvements they can make on their goals and goal plan. Please print out paper copies of the following questions to discuss with your students. You will keep them and turn them in to Stephanie.

Discussion Framework
Student:_______________
Code: _______________

☐ 1. What are your goals?
Comments:

☐ 2. How are you doing in reaching these goals?
Comments:

☐ 3. How are you using your strengths to accomplish your goals?
Comments:

☐ 4. What are your next steps?
Comments:

Guidelines for suggestions:
• Students should be creating reasonable goals.
• Students should be creating academic goals that can be accomplished this semester in school.
• Students should be using their strengths in these goals.
• Students should be actively measuring their progress toward these goals.
Appendix D: Training Materials

Training – Day 1:

1. Feedback form for Summit time (10-12 mins)
   a. Purpose is to help structure time while also promoting positive engagement with school

2. What are strengths and why are they important? (30 mins)
   a. Ask for definition and examples
   b. Examples and definitions of known personal strengths
      i. How have those helped you
   c. Examples of student strengths?
      i. How have those helped students?
   d. Complete strengths inventory
      i. What surprised you?
      ii. What did you already know?
      iii. How can you further use these strengths on the job?

3. Importance of goal-setting (15 mins)
   a. How have you used goals in the past?
   b. What is the easiest/most difficult aspect of creating and monitoring goals?
   c. Criteria of ‘good goals’
      i. Specific
      ii. Observable
      iii. Reasonable

Training – Day 2

1. Lesson plan structure (pass out General Introduction Sheet and discuss each point; use examples from first two lessons)
   a. Full session/half session
      i. Division is included in lesson plan
   b. Assigned days
   c. Scripts
      i. Follow gist, but can make it your own
      ii. Ensure consistency across teachers
   d. Question prompts
      i. Generate discussion
   e. Worksheets
      i. Used to supplement curriculum
      ii. Included in lesson plans
   f. Lesson checklist
      i. Ensure consistency
      ii. Can complete online, but use paper copy as reference

2. What to do if you have questions?
   a. Call or email Stephanie
Handouts

**General Introduction**
The purpose of this curriculum is to promote student engagement with school by increasing self-awareness and by creating structure for students to invest in their personal educational goals. An overall orientation to the curriculum with the primary objectives for each week is listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is a strength?</td>
<td>Students will be introduced to the curriculum overall as well as to the concept of describing and identifying personal strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are my top strengths?</td>
<td>Students will take a survey to determine their top 3 strengths. They will provide personal definitions of these 3 strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What do these strengths mean to me?</td>
<td>Students will find examples of their strength(s) in other contexts – music/tv/movies, stories/literature, other individuals, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do these strengths mean to me, cont.</td>
<td>Students will interview teachers regarding their own strengths as well as how they apply them to their job. In addition, teachers will provide feedback to students regarding the student’s strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is a goal?</td>
<td>Students will learn how to write a measurable, objective goal and will be provided examples of personal and academic goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Writing my academic goals</td>
<td>Students will create 3 academic goals and brainstorm ways to meet these goals using their strengths. Students will also be challenged to brainstorm personal and other future goals using their strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Writing my academic goals, cont.</td>
<td>Students will collaboratively brainstorm their goal plan with a teacher. Students will be given feedback about their goal plan and students will make necessary revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Monitoring goals</td>
<td>Teachers will provide feedback regarding how well students are meeting their goals and using their strengths.</td>
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</table>
Lesson Plan Structure

Each lesson plan has an outline for Day 1 (full session) and Day 2 (half session). There are suggested “scripts” for each section. To ensure consistency across teachers, we ask that you follow these scripts as closely as you can. Feel free to paraphrase and/or add examples – you are encouraged not to read the scripts and “make them your own”, but to maintain the original meaning and purpose as listed in the lesson plan.

There are also question prompts for many lessons. These prompts are meant to generate whole-class or small group discussion. Again, you may paraphrase these questions but be sure each question prompt is given and that the general meaning of the question is maintained.

Several lessons include worksheets and other supplemental materials. Original copies are provided in the lesson; you will need to make copies for the class. These materials are introduced within the lesson and include surveys, discussion points, and template frameworks for in-class activities.

At the end of each lesson is the Lesson Checklist. To insure teachers are implementing lessons consistently, we are asking each teacher to rate the degree to which the lesson they implemented matched the lesson plan. We divided each lesson according to the outline and specified the necessary components to successfully implement the lesson. Each component is rated on scale from 1 to 7. You may want to reference the paper copies of the lesson checklists as you prepare to give each lesson. However, you will complete the lesson checklists online.
Survey on Summit Time

Please mark all that apply.

1. An advantage of Summit time is…
   a. I can get to know the students better.
   b. Students have an opportunity to ask questions/get feedback on academic issues.
   c. Students have an opportunity to get to know me better.
   d. Students have an opportunity to get to know each other better.
   e. Other: ________________________________

2. Summit time is difficult because…
   a. There is no curriculum.
   b. There is no structure to help me get to know my students.
   c. There is no opportunity to give students feedback on academic progress.
   d. There is no structure to allow students to meaningfully interact with each other.
   e. Other: ________________________________
Purpose of Project

- Add structure to Summit time
- Promote students’ engagement with school
  - Key aspect of dropout prevention
  - Want to provide universal support for all students
- Research project will examine if this curriculum is successful
Lessons

- See overall lesson plan on handout
- Full session/half session
- Assigned days
- Scripts
- Question prompts
- Worksheets
- Lesson checklist

Lessons: General

- All are structured and give specific instructions
  - E.g., put students in groups of 3
  - Wait 5 minutes
  - Wait to receive 3 responses
  - Praise student responses
- Goal: create consistency between teachers
Full Session/Half Session

- One day will be full Summit class period; second will be half; lesson plans are structured as such
- Example:
  - Lesson 1
    - Day 1 – Discussion about what strengths are and why they are important
    - Day 2 – Think-pair-share on personal strengths

Scripts

- Should be given as closely to lesson plan as possible
- Represented with *italics* in lesson plans
- **Intro: What are strengths?** Strengths are the things we are good at. Strengths are something about us that make us do well at certain activities or in a certain place, like at school or with friends. Our strengths allow us to do lots of things, like be creative on a school project or have good relationships with our friends. Everyone has strengths, and they make us unique individuals capable of achieving lots of cool things! We can have strengths in many areas of our lives.
Question Prompts

- Goal is to create discussion amongst students
- Should be considered akin to *scripts*. Should be given as closely to original as possible.
- Example from Lesson 2: *Review Strengths*: Last week we discussed the idea of strengths and the importance of knowing our strengths. *Can someone tell me what a strength is?* (Wait for one response, correct for misconceptions if appropriate, praise student). *Can someone tell me why knowing our strengths is important?* (Wait for one response, correct for misconceptions if appropriate, praise student)

Worksheets

- Goal is to supplement curriculum
- Included in lesson plans; you will need to make copies for your students
- Example from Lesson 2:
Now that you know your top three strengths and the definitions of these strengths from the survey, let’s start to think about what these strengths mean in your own life. Do the following steps in order to complete your Strengths Summary:

1. In the first two columns, copy the name of your strength and the definition of this strength from the survey.
2. In the last two columns, write a definition of this strength that applies to your life (in your own words).
3. In the last column on the left, write one or two examples of a time you displayed this strength.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Definition from Survey</th>
<th>What it means to me</th>
<th>Examples of this strength in my life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</table>
Teacher:

For each lesson date, please place a 'check' if the student was present for the lesson day. Note that there are two columns for each lesson – you will record attendance both for the full day of the lesson and the half day of the lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Lesson 1 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 2 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 3 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 4 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 5 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 6 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 7 Dates given</th>
<th>Lesson 8 Date (specify date each student had session)</th>
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Lesson Checklist

- Completed online
- Drawing for each entry
- Paper copies will be included in lesson plan for your reference
Enter Name

To help us match your responses with your future responses, please provide your name below. This will also allow us to enter you into a drawing for one of two $25.00 checks. You will receive one entry for each checklist you complete.

Enter Grade you teach

I teach:

- Kindergarten Class
- 1st grade Inclusive Class
- 1st grade Extended Class
- 2nd grade Inclusive Class
- 2nd grade Extended Class
- 3rd grade Inclusive Class
- 3rd grade Extended Class

Please note that you can complete these surveys at any time during the day.
Enter Lesson Number

Survey will redirect you to correct questions

Lesson 1:
The following questions correspond to the lesson plan you were provided. We want to make sure that all teachers are giving the lesson plans in the same way. We’d like you rate yourself on how well you followed the lesson plan. These are guidelines for each category listed on each screen.

Survey Formed By: Quirkos

Survey Formed By: Quirkos
Survey questions are the same as in lesson plan

Questions/Concerns
- Call or email Stephanie Coleman
- slccm7@mail.missouri.edu
- [phone number redacted]
Appendix E: Sample Observation Feedback Form

**Fidelity Score (Same as Lesson Checklist)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Team Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was positive and enthusiastic about the lesson.</td>
<td>4 (out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor seemed “natural” (e.g., was not just reading from the</td>
<td>4 (out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesson plan)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor responded to student questions.</td>
<td>4.2 (out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students seemed interested in the material (e.g., paid attention,</td>
<td>4.2 (out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asked questions).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students were well-behaved (e.g., in seats, eyes on teacher, not</td>
<td>3.6 (out of 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strengths:**

- Providing reviews of previous days
- Using own experiences (e.g., with survey) to discuss activity/lesson
- Setting expectations/structure for activities (e.g., giving visual cues for scoring survey, writing instructions on the board)
- Facilitating conversation between students
- Being flexible with the game plan for the day/timing of the lesson

**Areas for growth:**

- Using opportunities to give whole-class feedback to correct misconceptions
- Offering praise for students’ compliance with directions/involvement in activities (“I like how everyone is staying on topic with their conversations” “Thank you for working quietly on your worksheets”)
- Offering feedback/affirmation to students as they share strengths (“I see that strength as well when you…”)
- Expressing enthusiasm and interest in the lesson and relating to own experiences
- Being sure to emphasize strengths as in survey – something that is across all subjects
VITA

Stephanie Lynn Coleman was born in St. Louis, Missouri to Bob and Tina Coleman. She lived with her family in Conway, Arkansas and Katy, Texas while growing up. After graduating from Cinco Ranch High School in Katy, Texas in 2003, Stephanie studied at the University of Texas at Austin, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology (May 2006). In August 2006, Stephanie entered the doctoral program in school psychology at the University of Missouri. She received her Masters of Arts degree in December 2009. Stephanie is currently completing her predoctoral psychology internship at Cypress-Fairbanks ISD in Houston, Texas.