



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
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# HELPING YOUTH THRIVE

A Profile of Santa Clara County  
Middle School Students

Executive Summary



**PROJECT  
CORNERSTONE**

A YMCA of Silicon Valley Initiative

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## The Developmental Assets Survey: Young People Talk About Growing Up in Silicon Valley

In Fall 2010, Project Cornerstone administered a survey to 38,000 students in more than 200 schools and 25 districts throughout Santa Clara County. The survey measures developmental assets—the positive values, relationships, and experiences that youth need to thrive. Research proves that the more assets youth possess, the more likely they are to choose healthy activities, succeed in school, and avoid risk behaviors. Conversely, youth with fewer assets are more likely to engage in risk behaviors and fail to achieve at school. The survey also measures risk behaviors and thriving indicators, and correlates them with the presence or absence of developmental assets.

Project Cornerstone previously administered the developmental assets survey in 1999 and 2004. The 1999 survey, administered to 6,800 youth, generated community interest to begin our countywide efforts to increase developmental asset levels and resulted in the creation of our School Partnerships Program, which now serves nearly 150 schools, 1,500 adult volunteers, and more than 30,000 students. The 2004 survey, administered to 13,700 youth, resulted in additional community partnerships and increased school participation in asset-building programs.

We are pleased to release the results of our recent countywide survey to the community. The survey results provide current data about the developmental asset levels, risk behaviors, and thriving indicators of Silicon Valley youth. These help the community understand the ways that we are successful at raising healthy, responsible young people and where we must improve. Because developmental asset levels are directly correlated with academic achievement, school districts and schools are especially interested in better understanding their students' strengths and weaknesses so they can develop strategies to help all of their students succeed.

This document contains executive summaries of the survey results for elementary school students, middle school students, and high school students. To view the full reports, please visit [www.projectcornerstone.org](http://www.projectcornerstone.org).

By providing current data about our youth throughout the community, we hope to renew and revitalize Silicon Valley's commitment to developing healthy, caring, and responsible children and youth.

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Results from the Search Institute Survey  
*Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*

Santa Clara County Middle Schools  
Santa Clara County, CA  
Revised May 2011

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Search Institute will treat this report as **Confidential**. Because the data upon which this report is based can be used to advance the understanding of adolescent development, Search Institute reserves the right to add the data to its larger Developmental Assets database. This report is based on data from the survey **Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors**, copyright © 2011 by Search Institute. For additional information, contact Search Institute's Survey Services Department at 1-800-888-7828 or [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

# Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth

## Santa Clara County Middle Schools

Over the past 20 years, Search Institute has surveyed nearly three million youth about how they experience the 40 Developmental Assets—a research-based framework that identifies basic building blocks of human development. We've found clear relationships between youth outcomes and asset levels in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

The results are compelling: The more assets kids have, the better. Youth with high asset levels are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors (such as violence, sexual activity, drug use, and suicide), and more likely to engage in thriving behaviors (such as helping others, doing well in school, and taking on leadership roles).

Assets are crucial for the healthy development of all youth, regardless of their community size, geographic region, gender, economic status, race, or ethnicity. This report summarizes the extent to which *your* youth experience the Developmental Assets and how the assets relate to their behavior and overall health.

The Developmental Assets were assessed in your school community in Fall 2010, using the Search Institute survey *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*. Below you'll find a brief summary of demographic data that describes the young people who participated in your study.

<b>Table 1. Youth Who Were Surveyed</b>			
		<b>Number of Youth</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
<b>Total Sample<sup>1</sup></b>		8559	100
<b>Gender<sup>2</sup></b>	Male	4081	48
	Female	4348	52
<b>Grade<sup>2</sup></b>	6	0	0
	7	6753	79
	8	1806	21
	9	0	0
	10	0	0
	11	0	0
	12	0	0
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b>	American Indian	59	1
	Asian	2103	25
	Black or African American	192	2
	Hispanic or Latino/Latina	2300	27
	Pacific Islander	189	2
	White	1880	22
	Other	608	7
	More than one of the above	1208	14

<sup>1</sup> Four criteria were used to determine whether individual responses were valid. Survey forms that did not meet one or more of the criteria were discarded. Reasons for survey disqualification include inconsistent responses, missing data on 40 or more items, reports of unrealistically high levels of alcohol or other drug use, and surveys from students in grades other than those intended. See full report for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers may not add up to the "Total Sample" figure due to missing information on individual surveys.

# The Developmental Assets in Your Community

The Developmental Asset framework covers extensive territory, including the experiences of young people and their commitments, values, skills, and identity. Your youth were asked questions about their experience of each of the 40 assets. Their answers form the basis for this report. To grasp the range and depth of concepts measured by the asset framework, we can divide assets into two key areas: external assets and internal assets.

*External assets* are the positive developmental experiences that families, schools, neighborhoods, community groups, and other youth and family-serving organizations provide young people. These positive experiences are reinforced and supported by the broader efforts of society through government policy, health care providers, law enforcement agencies, civic foundations, and other community institutions.

<b>Table 2. Percent of Your Youth Reporting External Assets</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Asset Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Support</b>	1. Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.	77
	2. Positive family communication	Young person and his or her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel.	39
	3. Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.	46
	4. Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.	43
	5. Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.	42
	6. Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.	44
<b>Empowerment</b>	7. Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.	29
	8. Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.	38
	9. Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.	46
	10. Safety	Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.	39
<b>Boundaries and Expectations</b>	11. Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts.	47
	12. School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.	73
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.	54
	14. Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	35
	15. Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.	85
	16. High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.	66
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	17. Creative activities	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.	23
	18. Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.	55
	19. Religious community	Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.	51
	20. Time at home	Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.	74

Internal assets are the positive commitments, skills, and values that form a young person’s inner guidance system. Youth make personal choices and actions based upon the degree to which their internal assets are developed.

<b>Table 3. Percent of Your Youth Reporting Internal Assets</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Asset Name</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	21. Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.	77
	22. School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.	71
	23. Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.	69
	24. Bonding to school	Young person cares about his or her school.	74
	25. Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.	29
<b>Positive Values</b>	26. Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.	61
	27. Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.	66
	28. Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.	67
	29. Honesty	Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.	72
	30. Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.	69
	31. Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	70
<b>Social Competencies</b>	32. Planning and decision-making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.	35
	33. Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.	52
	34. Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.	50
	35. Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.	54
	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.	58
<b>Positive Identity</b>	37. Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."	37
	38. Self-esteem	Young person reports having a high self-esteem.	48
	39. Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."	60
	40. Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about his or her personal future.	76

## The External Developmental Assets (Assets 1–20)

Think of *external assets* as positive developmental experiences provided for youth by networks of supportive people and social systems in the community. They offer youth a consistent source of love and respect, opportunities for empowerment, leadership, service, and creativity, safe interpersonal and physical boundaries, and high expectations for personal achievement.

The table below summarizes the extent to which young people in your community experience each of the 20 external Developmental Assets.

Table 4. Percent of Youth Reporting External Assets by Gender and Grade										
External Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade						
		M	F	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Support</b>										
1. Family support	77	78	76	78	72					
2. Positive family communication	39	37	41	40	36					
3. Other adult relationships	46	42	50	46	45					
4. Caring neighborhood	43	41	45	44	39					
5. Caring school climate	42	38	45	41	44					
6. Parent involvement in schooling	44	45	44	46	37					
<b>Empowerment</b>										
7. Community values youth	29	26	32	30	27					
8. Youth as resources	38	36	40	38	37					
9. Service to others	46	42	50	45	51					
10. Safety	39	42	36	38	42					
<b>Boundaries and Expectations</b>										
11. Family boundaries	47	44	49	46	48					
12. School boundaries	73	72	74	73	71					
13. Neighborhood boundaries	54	52	56	55	51					
14. Adult role models	35	33	37	35	32					
15. Positive peer influence	85	84	85	86	79					
16. High expectations	66	65	67	66	68					
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>										
17. Creative activities	23	18	27	23	22					
18. Youth programs	55	56	55	54	59					
19. Religious community	51	49	53	51	50					
20. Time at home	74	72	76	74	72					

## The Internal Developmental Assets (Assets 21–40)

The *internal assets* can be thought of as inner characteristics: a young person's motivation and commitment to academic achievement and lifelong learning; his or her positive personal values; social competencies (including relationship and communication skills); and characteristics of personal identity, including an optimistic future outlook and sense of purpose.

The table below summarizes the extent to which young people in your community experience each of the 20 internal Developmental Assets.

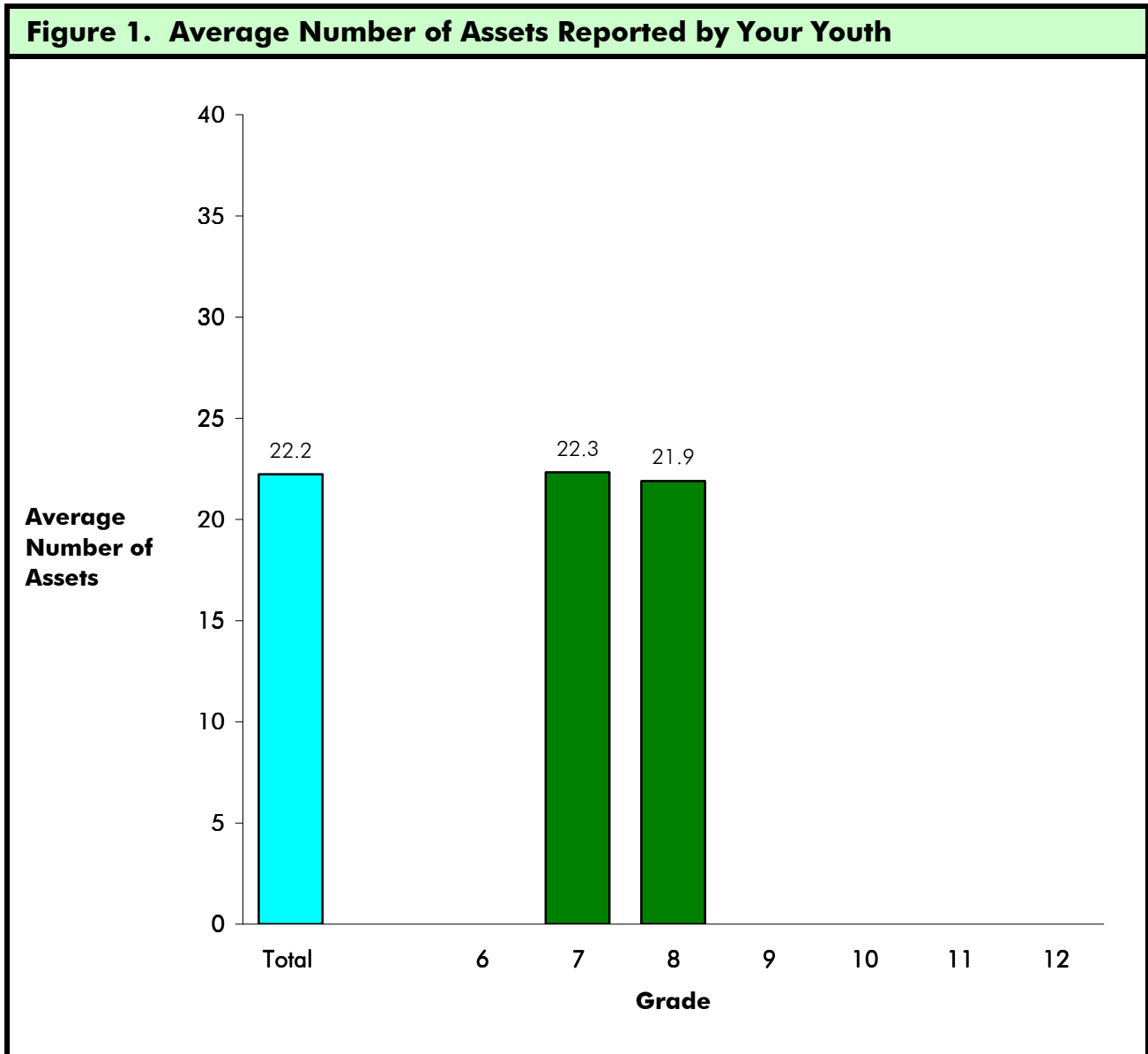
<b>Table 5. Percent of Youth Reporting Internal Assets by Gender and Grade</b>										
Internal Asset	Total Sample	Gender		Grade						
		M	F	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Commitment to Learning</b>										
21. Achievement motivation	77	73	80	77	77					
22. School engagement	71	67	76	72	71					
23. Homework	69	64	73	67	75					
24. Bonding to school	74	71	76	75	68					
25. Reading for pleasure	29	25	33	29	28					
<b>Positive Values</b>										
26. Caring	61	55	67	61	61					
27. Equality and social justice	66	59	72	65	67					
28. Integrity	67	61	73	67	70					
29. Honesty	72	67	77	72	71					
30. Responsibility	69	65	73	69	71					
31. Restraint	70	64	76	71	64					
<b>Social Competencies</b>										
32. Planning and decision-making	35	30	39	35	34					
33. Interpersonal competence	52	38	65	52	51					
34. Cultural competence	50	45	56	50	53					
35. Resistance skills	54	48	60	55	52					
36. Peaceful conflict resolution	58	51	65	59	53					
<b>Positive Identity</b>										
37. Personal power	37	37	38	37	40					
38. Self-esteem	48	50	47	49	48					
39. Sense of purpose	60	62	59	61	58					
40. Positive view of personal future	76	77	76	77	75					

## Average Number of Developmental Assets in Your Youth

Search Institute's research on adolescents consistently shows a small but meaningful difference in assets between older youth (grades nine through 12) and younger youth (grades six through eight), with younger youth reporting more assets than older youth. This result has been found in both "snapshot" and longitudinal studies. Regardless of age, gender, economic status, or geographic region, most young people in the United States experience far too few of the 40 Developmental Assets.

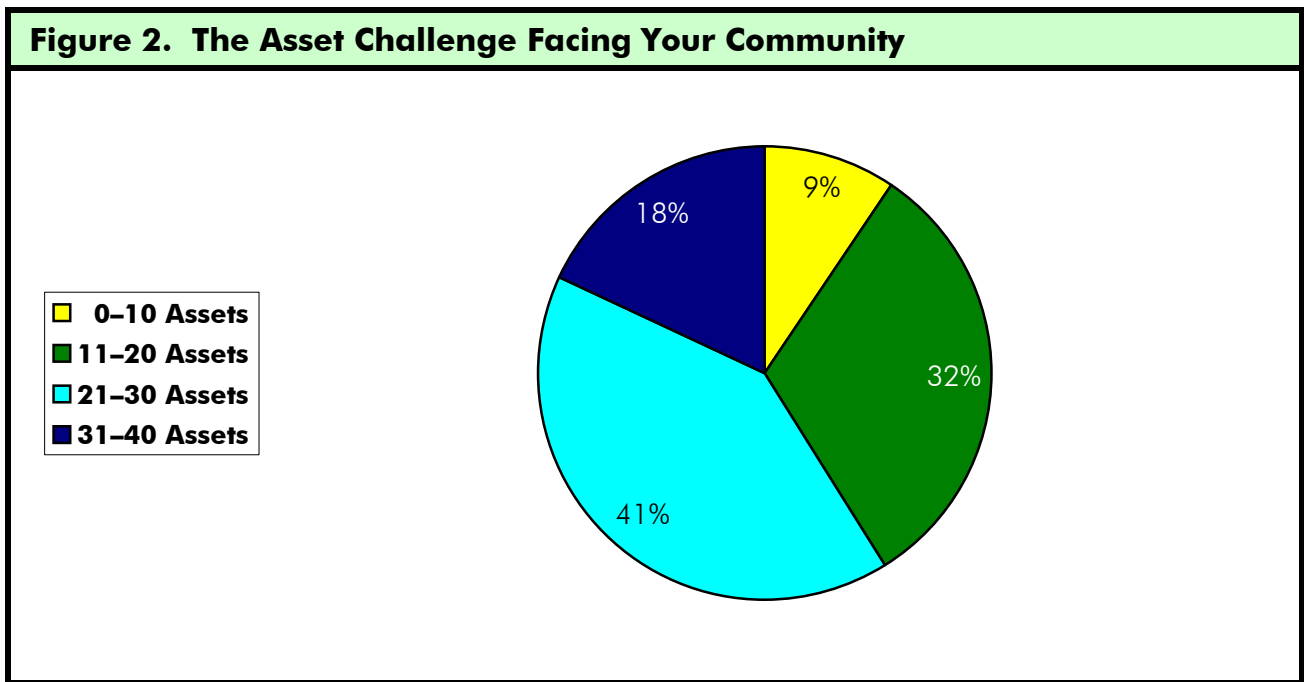
If one or more grade levels in your survey sample report particularly low average numbers of assets compared to other grades in your study, you may need to closely examine community conditions that affect asset development at those particular grade levels.

The following figure reflects the average number of Developmental Assets reported at each grade level by youth in your community.



## Your Community's Challenge

For optimal youth outcomes, the more assets youth have, the better. Having 31–40 assets is better than 21–30, which is better than having 11–20, and so on. In an ideal world, communities would strive to ensure that all youth eventually experience between 31 and 40 of the Developmental Assets. In your community, 18 percent of surveyed students report 31 or more of the 40 assets. Below in Figure 2 you'll find the percent of your young people who currently experience Developmental Assets (in asset groups of 10).



## The Asset Challenge for All Communities

The state of Developmental Assets in your community is likely to be similar to the challenging asset pattern found throughout the country. The particular strengths and weaknesses highlighted in this report are a unique reflection of your community, but general patterns (of average numbers of assets, general decreases in asset levels, and relationships between assets and risk behaviors and between assets and thriving behaviors) are typical of other communities that have administered this survey to youth. Search Institute studies have found regardless of town size or geography that youth typically lack support. Communities can draw upon the inherent strengths of youth and adults to increase assets in young people and do the following:

- Give adequate adult support through long-term, positive intergenerational relationships;
- Provide meaningful leadership and community involvement opportunities;
- Engage young people in youth-serving programs;
- Provide consistent and well-defined behavioral boundaries;
- Help youth connect to their community; and
- Create critical opportunities to develop social competencies and form positive values.

Young people may face complex social forces, including:

- High levels of parental absence;
- Adult silence on positive values and healthy boundaries;
- Fragmented family and community social systems;
- Neighbors who are isolated from one another and separated by age barriers;
- Adult fear of becoming involved and the sense that young people are someone else's responsibility;
- Public disengagement from the important work of building meaningful connections with youth;
- Youth overexposure to media saturated with violence and sexual situations;
- Poverty and lack of access to supportive programs and services;
- Inadequate education and poor economic opportunities that cause families to be unable to provide for their children's needs;
- Schools, religious institutions, and other youth-serving organizations that are not adequately equipped to be supportive, caring, and challenging in a positive way.

By working to eliminate these barriers and conditions, communities can fortify young people against the allure of risk-taking behaviors, negative pressures, and undesirable sources of belonging in order to prepare them to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders, and citizens. While this combination of social factors suggests that we have much work to do, a concerted effort by all members of the community to build assets in youth can strengthen our capacity to be caring, connected and committed to the common good.

## The Power of Developmental Assets to Promote Thriving in Youth

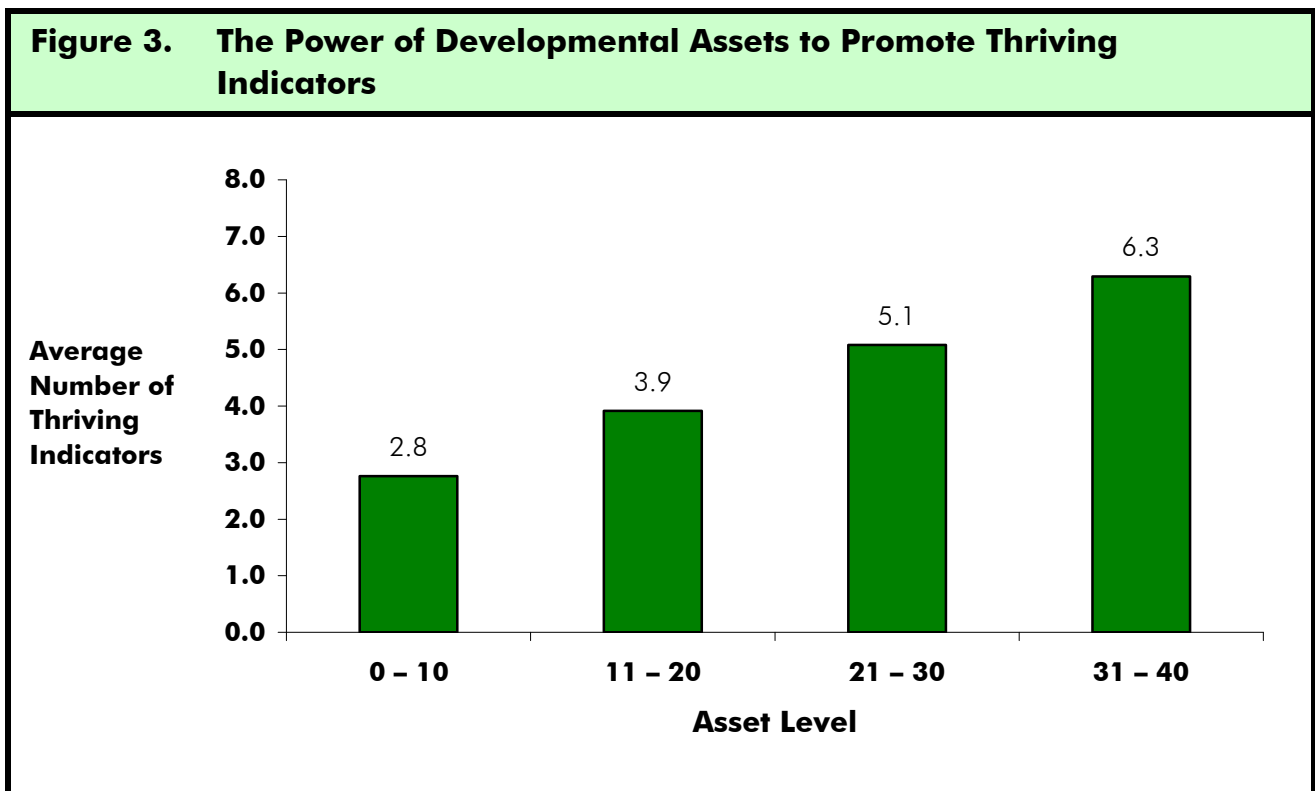
Youth who report higher levels of assets are not only less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors, but they are also more likely to consistently report higher numbers of eight thriving indicators, according to Search Institute's research. These indicators offer a brief look at thriving, which is a much more comprehensive concept.<sup>3</sup> Figure 3 reflects the power of assets to promote the eight specific thriving indicators among young people.

**Eight Indicators of Thriving Youth**

Youth:

- Experience school success
- Help others informally
- Value diversity
- Maintain good personal health
- Exhibit leadership
- Resist danger
- Control impulsive behavior
- Overcome adversity

In the figure below, each bar represents a relationship between the average number of thriving indicators reported by your youth and the total number of assets (in asset groups of 10) reported by the same youth.



<sup>3</sup> For more details regarding the definition and measurement of thriving, see *Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* by Peter L. Benson, Ph.D. (Jossey-Bass, 2008). See also Benson, P. L., & Scales, P. C. (2009). The definition and preliminary measurement of thriving in adolescence. *Journal of Positive Psychology* 4(1), 85-104.

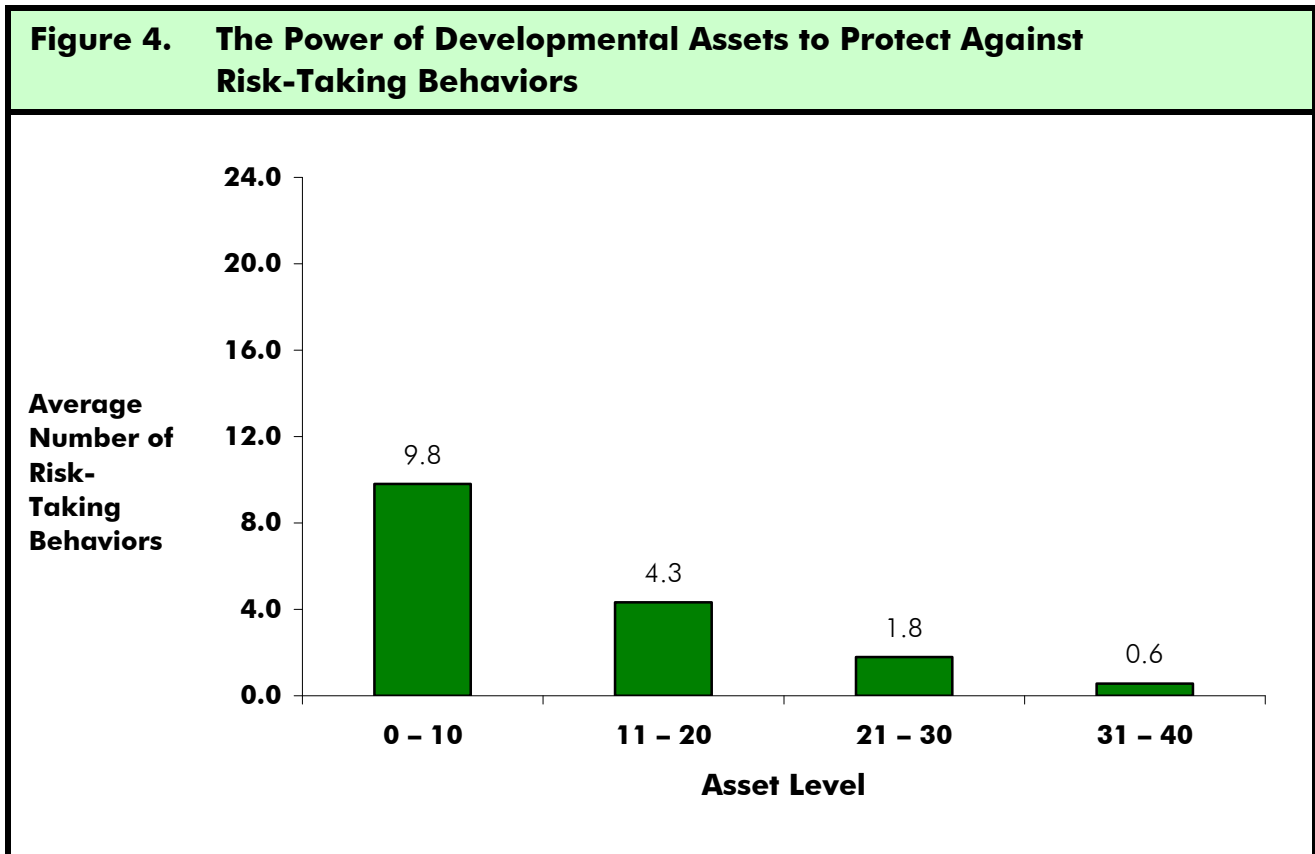
## The Protective Power of Developmental Assets

Search Institute's research consistently shows that youth with higher levels of Developmental Assets are involved in fewer risk-taking behaviors and experience higher levels of thriving indicators. Developmental Assets have the power to protect youth from engaging in the following 24 risk-taking behaviors:

**Risk-Taking Behaviors**

- Alcohol use
- Binge drinking
- Marijuana use
- Smokeless tobacco use
- Illegal drug use
- Driving while drinking
- Early sexual intercourse
- Vandalism
- Inhalant use
- Smoking
- Shoplifting
- Using a weapon
- Eating disorders
- Skipping school
- Gambling
- Depression
- Getting into trouble with police
- Hitting another person
- Hurting another person
- Fighting in groups
- Carrying a weapon for protection
- Threatening to cause physical harm
- Attempting suicide
- Riding with an impaired driver

Each vertical bar in Figure 4 represents the average number of risk-taking behaviors reported by your youth at particular asset levels (in asset groups of 10). *Note the average number of risk-taking behaviors reported by students who experience assets at both the highest and lowest levels.*



## Take Action!

This report provides educators and administrators, parents, neighbors, community members, and leaders with insight into the behaviors, opportunities, and challenges facing young people in your community. Use this information as a powerful basis for ongoing, community-wide discussions about how best to improve the well-being of your youth.

### Set a Community-Wide Asset Goal

It is important for each community to establish and work toward the goal of a higher average total number of assets that each of its young people experience. This goal-setting process can provide a critical opportunity for community members to create a shared vision for healthy youth. As you begin your goal-setting process, keep in mind the barriers and challenges noted above, as well as the protective power of Developmental Assets and their power to help youth thrive.

The good news is that everyone—parents, grandparents, educators, neighbors, children, teenagers, youth workers, employers, health care providers, business people, religious leaders, coaches, mentors, and many others—can build Developmental Assets in youth. Ideally, an entire community will become involved in ensuring that its young people receive the solid developmental foundation they need to become tomorrow’s competent, caring adults.

### Begin With First Steps

#### As a Neighbor or Caring Adult, You Can . . .

- Invite a young person you know to join you in an activity: play a game, visit a park, or go for a walk together.
- Greet the children and adolescents you see every day.
- Send birthday cards, letters, “I’m thinking of you” notes, or e-messages to a child or adolescent with whom you have a connection.

#### As a Young Person, You Can . . .

- Challenge yourself to develop a new interest on your own, or try a new activity through school, local youth programming, cocurricular activities, or faith community youth program.
- Strike up a conversation with an adult you admire, and get to know that person better. See adults as potential friends and informal mentors.
- Look for opportunities to build relationships with younger children through service projects, tutoring, or baby-sitting.

#### As a Parent or Family Member, You Can . . .

- Consistently model—and talk about—your family’s values and priorities.
- Regularly include all children in your family in projects around the house, recreational activities of all kinds, and community service projects that benefit people with needs greater than your own.
- Post a list of the Developmental Assets and talk to children about them. Ask teens for suggestions of ways to strengthen their assets as well as yours.

### **As an Organization Member and/or Businessperson, You Can . . .**

- Highlight, develop, expand, and support programs designed to build assets, such as one-on-one mentoring, peer helping, service learning, and parent education.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for young people to contribute to the lives of others, in and through your organization.
- Develop employee policies that encourage asset building in youth, including flexible work schedules for parents and other employees that allow them to volunteer in youth development programs.

For detailed information about building Developmental Assets or starting an asset-building initiative in your community, visit Search Institute at [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org) or call (800) 888-7828.



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