Strengths in Motion

A Strengths-Based Approach to Enhance Positive School Climate and Address Issues of Bullying and School Violence

December 2009

Dr. Edward Rawana   Dr. Keith Brownlee

Dr. Jessica Whitley   Dr. Jennine Rawana

Jessica Franks   Dr. Diana Walker

Acknowledgements

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present study explored the efficacy of a strengths-based approach in terms of improvements in school climate and reductions in student bullying and victimization. The program, titled *Strengths in Motion*, was implemented at McKellar Park Central Public School in Thunder Bay, Ontario beginning in February 2008, and ending in December, 2009. A school with similar demographic characteristics (Ecole Gron Morgan Public School), was also included in the study and served as a control school.

Following the guidelines of effective school-based interventions (Finger et al., 2005), *Strengths in Motion* was theoretically grounded, was implemented school-wide, contributed to the development of a safe and supportive environment, and involved multiple stakeholders including parents, educators, and students. The approach was developed by a team of educators, school administrators, educational researchers, and mental health professionals. Components of the approach included targeted resources for students with particular needs (those new to the school or experiencing behavioural difficulties) as well as strategies and skill development initiatives infused throughout the curriculum. All aspects of the approach have at their core a focus on student strengths; finding ways to identify and capitalize on these in order to improve school climate and ultimately student success.

While *Strengths in Motion* was implemented school-wide, students in the present study include those who were in grades 4 to 6 when the approach began - in February, 2008. The evaluation portion of the study includes the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the approach and of the strengths-based approach broadly. Other indicators of success include student self-reports of strengths, self-concept and school climate as well as bullying; in addition, students academic grades were assessed. School staff and parents also reported on their perceptions of student bullying and victimization as it was felt that a school that was successful in creating a positive, strengths-based environment would also be effective in improving positive interactions between students.

A total of 64 students (35 at McKellar Park and 29 at Gron Morgan) completed a number of surveys selected to assess the indicators of success listed above. These were administered at four time points: a) February, 2008 (Pre-test), b) June, 2008 (Post-test), c) March, 2009 (Post-test) and d) November, 2009 (Post-test). In addition, 3 students from McKellar Park also participated in interviews in November, 2009 focused on the perceived efficacy of *Strengths in Motion*.

A small sample of primary caregivers at McKellar Park ($n = 11$) and Gron Morgan ($n = 4$) as well as school staff (McKellar Park: $n = 14$, Gron Morgan: $n = 8$) also completed surveys at the first and final time points. Interviews were conducted at the final time point with 4 parents and 5 school staff from McKellar Park.

Findings regarding the efficacy of *Strengths in Motion*, as evidenced by both qualitative and quantitative findings were generally positive. All stakeholders reported significant improvements in terms of school climate. In particular:

- Students
    - Reported a greater focus on helping others
    - Reported increased school engagement
    - Reported becoming more involved in extracurricular activities
    - Continued to experience higher self-concept and perceived their classroom climate more positively
    - Had significantly higher average academic grades across all time points
- Parents
    - Felt that their children had developed greater confidence and self-esteem
    - Observed increased academic achievement for their children
    - Expressed fewer concerns regarding bullying
- School Staff
    - Perceived the school environment as welcoming and supportive of students
    - Felt that students self-confidence improved
    - Felt that students had a greater awareness of their own strengths and those of their peers
    - Reported that bullying was much less of a problem

- o Reported that students were much more comfortable talking about bullying and knew what steps to take to deal with it

Feedback from staff and parents provide several suggestions for further improvements for the approach. Parents suggested that workshops be offered at more convenient times and that the approach needed to include more options for participation for students who are doing well, rather than focusing solely on students actively involved in bullying. School staff felt that greater communication and training regarding the various elements of the approach were required and that their strengths, rather than just student strengths, should be drawn upon within the approach. By addressing these suggested areas of improvement and valuing the feedback of students, staff and parents, stakeholders will likely continue to endorse a strengths-based approach in their school and further perpetuate it's development and refinement. The cultural shift will thus continue and sustainability of the approach will be increased regardless of staff and student turnover.

The issue of sustainability is an important one. Too often, school-based interventions are not fully embraced by school staff and students due to inconsistent implementation, a lack of common focus and understanding about goals and philosophies, and transient funding. Stakeholders at McKellar Park clearly believe that *Strengths in Motion* has contributed to a significant shift in school culture; one that draws on student strength and perpetuates positive change in behaviour and learning. It is important that educational leaders and those supporting initiatives such as *Strengths in Motion* capitalize on the momentum that exists at McKellar Park and promote continued development and refinement of the approach.

Based on the findings, it may also be of value to engage students further in terms of finding ways for them to draw on their strengths to negotiate situations where bullying may be taking place. Although most students at the two schools involved in the present intervention do not report involvement in bullying, there are most likely small groups of students for whom this continues to be an issue. Targeted interventions such as those included in *Strengths in Motion* are one way to deliver more directed skill development and changes in self-perception for those most at-risk; these should continue to be developed and examined over time.

Many key elements of *Strengths in Motion* contributed to its success. As recommended by Finger et al. (2005) the approach was theoretically grounded, was implemented school-wide, contributed to the development of a safe and supportive environment, and involved multiple stakeholders including parents, educators, and students. Other schools and organizations that are attempting to build positive school climate and reduce negative student experiences such as bullying should consider these characteristics of effective programs.

Certainly *Strengths in Motion* shows promise as an approach that has a positive impact on multiple stakeholders supporting students; it's continued development and implementation is certainly warranted given the present findings.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Developing school-based interventions that promote positive change in school climate is not a simple task. Educators throughout North America and beyond have struggled to develop and/or implement programs that are aligned with their philosophies and goals for their school community and that also effect sustainable, significant improvements in student outcomes. As an example, many schools have put in place programs that attempt to reduce bullying and victimization among students. Despite years of research and extensive funding, the majority of these programs have been found to be largely ineffective in terms of impacting student and teacher reports of bullying (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross & Isava, 2008).

Given the wealth of research that exists documenting school-based interventions and the characteristics of those found to be more or less effective in terms of effecting change in school climate and student outcomes, a group of researchers recently released a number of recommendations for program developers to consider (Finger, Craven, Marsh & Parada, 2005). Specifically, interventions should:

   (a) Be theoretically grounded

   (b) Gain genuine commitment from the school and research team

   (c) Adopt a whole-school approach

   (d) Use empirically robust measures and methods of analysis

   (e) Create safe and supportive school environments

   (f) Provide specialised formal teacher training in classroom management, behaviour management, and adopting age-appropriate material during curriculum implementation;

   (g) Educate peers and individual students according to roles within the dynamic of bullying; and

   (h) Educate, enlist the support from and have parents actively involved in the program and actively involved with the child's progression through the program

The present study includes the evaluation of a school-wide approach that was developed with the goal of creating a school environment and climate that better promotes positive student experiences in terms of social, emotional and academic outcomes. The program, entitled *Strengths in Motion*, was created with the recommendations of Finger and colleagues in mind and includes a solid theoretical framework, a vision shared by all school stakeholders, and a school-wide, multi-faceted approach. This program and the literature supporting it's development is described in more detail below. Following this, the evaluative portion of the study is outlined along with recommendations for future research and practice.

Theoretical Framework

One of the hallmarks of many school-based interventions is that they are based in deficit thinking. That is, they highlight the difficulties experienced by students and seek to lessen these negative behaviours. In light of the many programs that have failed to demonstrate efficacy, the research team piloting the current project have chosen to adopt a novel perspective that focuses on facilitating positive change for students who are struggling. This approach capitalizes on the areas where students are doing well, rather than focusing on areas of weakness; this is known as a strengths-based approach.

Strengths-based approaches are an increasingly supported and accepted perspective for working with students who experience behavioural and academic difficulties (Jimerson, Sharkey, Nyborg, & Furlong, 2004). Originally proposed by Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, and Kisthardt (1989) as an alternative to deficit oriented models of intervention; strengths-based approaches are founded upon the assumption that all individuals, including children, have strengths. Consistent with this assumption is the view that working with a child's strengths is a preferable way to address behavioural and academic difficulties (Epstein, 2000), that focusing solely on a child's difficulties is counter productive (Wieck et al., 1989) and that interventions that begin with a focus on strengths are more likely to actively involve families and children in treatment or remedial processes (Epstein & Sharma, 1998).

Strengths have been defined as, "a set of personal competencies and characteristics of the child or adolescent that were developed and embedded in culture and valued both by the individual

and by society" (Rawana and Brownlee, 2009, p. 256). Strengths-based assessment and intervention techniques have been used primarily among clinical populations, such as in young offender and psychiatric facilities (Anderson, Lyons, Giles, Price & Estle, 2003; Duncan et al., 2007) and with adolescents with emotional and behavioural disorders (Epstein, 2000). Research that has examined the association between strengths and behavioural and emotional functioning have largely reported a positive link; students with greater strengths had fewer difficulties (Lyons, Uziel-Miller, Reyes, & Sokol, 2000; Walrath, Mandell, Holden, & Santiago, 2004).

In an educational context, a strengths-based approach focuses on promoting development and well-being through the identification and support of competencies, characteristics and resources both within and surrounding the student (Jennings, 2003; Winter-Messiers et al., 2007). Assumed outcomes of a strengths-based approach are improvements in school engagement, achievement, pro-social classroom behaviour and reductions in bullying and victimization (Anderson, Rawana, Brownlee & Whitley, 2009; Donnon, Hammond, & Charles, 2003; Katz & McCluskey, 2003). Recent research has supported the relationships between these constructs (Albrecht & Braaten, 2008; Anderson et al., 2009; Donnon & Hammond, 2007; Farmer et al., 2005).

One of the unique elements of strengths-based approaches is that they draw on resources that already exist. All students come to school with strengths, although many may not exhibit those most often valued in school, such as strong work habits, positive behaviours and interpersonal skills. Employing a strengths-based approach challenges students, school staff and parents to identify and find ways to leverage the competencies, abilities and resources that students possess. Rather than importing an existing program that may not align with school goals, fit with school populations, or that may be costly or potentially ineffective, adopting a strengths-based approach requires a focus inward – to the potential that presently exists.

Making a shift to a strengths-based approach is not a simple task, and requires dedication and persistence over time by educators, administrators, parents and students. It also requires strategy and skill development that allow participants to better incorporate a strength focus in their teaching, learning, interacting and parenting. The *Strengths in Motion* program includes many

components that seek to accomplish just this. The following section describes the program in more detail.

Program Description

The *Strengths in Motion* program was developed by a team of educators, school administrators, educational researchers, and mental health professionals. This program used a strengths-based approach to improve students' school experiences. There were several important components that comprised the *Strengths in Motion* program, each having a focus on strengths.

One component of the program was the "Good Start Centre", which was designed to support new students joining the school from smaller communities. This program involves orientation sessions at the school and includes a strengths assessment that is used to help guide the student's integration into their new school community.

Another important component was the use of "cool down and prevention time", in which students having difficulty that day spend time at school with a caring adult engaging in discussion related to their strengths and behavioural choices and encouraging them to use their strengths.

A third important component of the *Strengths in Motion* program was the use of alternatives to suspension practices that replace short suspensions with work on social skills, restorative justice, and participation in talking or healing circles.

A fourth component of the program was the "Ambassador's Club", which involves students who are at high risk for bullying and victimization. These students meet biweekly over lunch with administrators to build social and problem solving skills, organize activities for the school, and discuss how to improve school situations to make the school more positive and inviting.

Another vital component of the *Strengths in Motion* program was the weekly student and parent workshops provided by the New Experiences Program from Children's Centre Thunder Bay.

These workshops focused on a wide range of topics, including grief, trauma, bullying, First Nations teachings, role models, development of goals and dreams, and appropriate coping skills.

In addition, the strengths approach has been integrated in to the general curriculum at McKellar Park. Teachers employ strategies such as Strength Walls (Rawana, Latimer, Whitley & Probizanski, 2009), where achievements and positive aspects of students are displayed in an effort to promote pride and self-concept. Teachers are also encouraged to draw on student strengths in their interactions with students both in class and during unstructured times.

The combination of these components serves the intent of the *Strengths in Motion* program to build sustainability, promote a cultural shift within the school, and perpetuate established traditions. While it was hoped that students with particular difficulties would benefit from the program, the goals were much more wide-ranging and holistic in nature: the development of a positive, strengths-based climate and culture.

Present Study

The goal of the present study was to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of a school-wide program titled *Strengths In Motion* that has a strengths-based approach as it's theoretical framework. As will be described in the following section, students, parents, educators and administrators participated in the program. Given the many areas of student experience that were anticipated to be impacted by the program, it was necessary to choose those that were felt to be most salient and of interest to the school community.

Accordingly, the evaluation portion of the study includes the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the program and of the strengths-based approach broadly. Other indicators of success include student self-reports of strengths, self-concept and school climate as well as bullying; in addition, students academic grades were assessed. School staff and parents also reported on their perceptions of student bullying and victimization as it was felt that a school that was successful in creating a positive, strengths-based environment would also be effective in improving positive interactions between students.

The main research question guiding the evaluation was: How effective was a strengths-based program in improving the school experiences of a sample of elementary-aged students?

The following sections outline the methodology, results, discussion of the findings and finally recommendations for practice and future research.

METHOD

Local Context

The participating schools are located in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This city has a population of approximately 110,000 people and is the most populous region in Northwestern Ontario. The city is culturally diverse, with a large Aboriginal population, as well as many other ethnic backgrounds including Finnish, Italian, Scottish, Ukrainian and French.

The Lakehead District School Board, which includes the two participating schools, is an English-language public board with an enrolment of approximately 13,000 students and more than 840 teaching staff. The board includes 25 elementary and 4 secondary schools.

McKellar Park School served as the intervention school. This school enrols approximately 265 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. McKellar Park is considered an 'inner-city' school and serves a community where many struggle with substance abuse, crime, and poverty. Approximately 50% of the students at McKellar are of Aboriginal ancestry. The school supports the needs of students in a number of ways, including breakfast, snack and lunch programs, after-school programs, tutoring, and drumming groups.

Ecole Gron Morgan Public School is the control school that did not receive the intervention. The school is much larger than McKellar, with approximately 685 students in Kindergarten through Grade 8. However, the school has an English as well as a French Immersion stream; only students enrolled in the English stream were included in the study. The area served by Gron Morgan includes communities with similar difficulties to those experienced in the McKellar Park area.

Procedure

Parents and guardians of students at McKellar Park school, where the *Strengths in Motion* program was implemented, were invited to have their children in grades 4 to 8 participate in the current study evaluating this program. In order to provide a comparison, students were also recruited from Gron Morgan, where no formalized intervention program was occurring and which was determined to have a similar demographic makeup to the population at McKellar Park.

Participating students completed three surveys (described below) at four different points in time. All surveys were completed during the regular school day. The first data collection occurred prior to the start of the *Strengths in Motion* program at McKellar Park School, in February 2008. A second data collection occurred in June 2009 to determine the initial effects of the program and inform the intervention itself, so as to best meet the needs of the students. The third round of data collection took place in March 2009. The final data collection was completed as the formal *Strengths in Motion* intervention was drawing to a close, in November 2009. Students who had transitioned to high school by the third and fourth data collection were located, when possible, and provided with an opportunity to complete the surveys.

In addition, researchers were provided with report card information for each participating student from their Ontario School Record, reflecting grades given throughout the duration of the *Strengths in Motion* program.

Surveys were also provided to parents of students participating in the study to be completed prior to the start of the *Strengths in Motion* program and at the completion of the intervention. Staff at both schools were also provided with opportunities to complete surveys at the start and end of the *Strengths in Motion* program.

Measures

Student Self-Concept and School Climate

The first survey completed by the students was the Student Experiences Survey, which was compiled for the purposes of this study. One component included the General and Peer

Relations self-concept scales from the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ-I; Marsh, 1988). Students' perceptions of classroom climate was also assessed using a subscale from the Diversity, Individual Development and Differentiation (DIDDs) survey (Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw & McDonald, 2008).

Student Strengths

The second survey completed by the students was the Strength Assessment Inventory (Rawana, Brownlee, & Hewitt, 2006). This survey measures the student's strength characteristics in 11 domains, including: Home, school, work, friendships, dating, leisure time, community involvement, keeping clean and healthy, goals and dreams, faith and culture, and knowing oneself. Student reported strengths in work and dating were not reported on as too few students were able to provide information in these sections.

Student, School Staff and Parent Reports of Bullying & Victimization

Participants completed the Safe School Survey (Totten, Quigley, & Morgan, 2004), which measures perceptions of bullying, victimization, and attitudes towards bullying.

Academic Achievement

Finally, an academic average was calculated for each participant using grades assigned in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Other academic subjects were not included as not all students were enrolled in, for example, History or French in all semesters. As grades were drawn from report cards, rather than collected by the research team directly, there are six time points in total for the academic average, rather than the four time points provided for the remainder of the measures.

Participants

At the pre-intervention data collection in February 2008, the sample consisted of 50 students at the target school (McKellar Park) and 53 students at the control school (Ecole Gron Morgan). This comprised approximately 37% of students at McKellar Park and 22% at Gron Morgan. Of the students at McKellar Park, there were 21 males and 29 females and 22 students self-identified as Aboriginal. At Gron Morgan, there were 29 males and 24 females and 14 students

self-identified as Aboriginal. Students involved were in grades 4 to 8 (McKellar Park $M = 5.8$; Gron Morgan $M = 6.3$), and were aged between 9 and 14 years old (McKellar Park $M = 11.0$; Gron Morgan $M = 11.5$).

However, the longitudinal sample of students who would be followed throughout the intervention was limited to those who were in Grades 4 to 6 when the study began. This sample consisted of 64 students in total, 35 at McKellar Park and 29 at Gron Morgan. The demographic characteristics of this sample are described in the figures below.

Figures 1 and 2: Sex and Grade of Longitudinal Participants
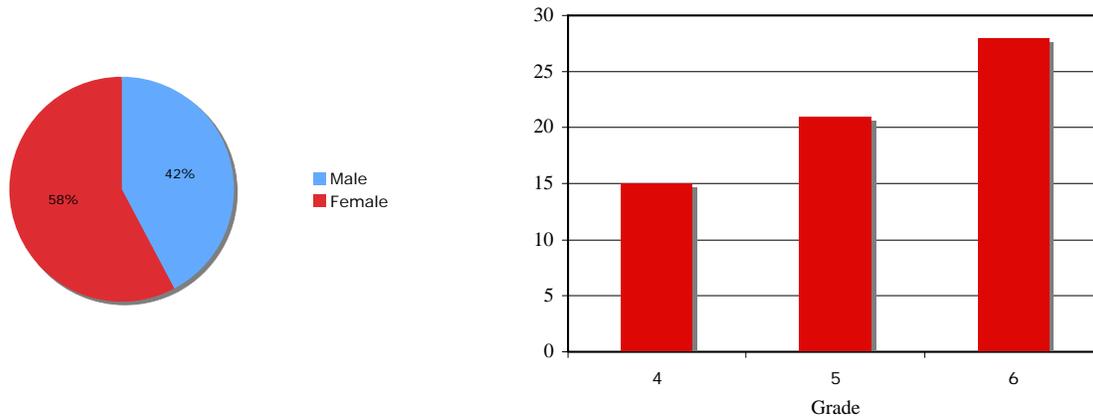
A high degree of attrition in was noted between the March and November 2009 student data collection, with 23 fewer students available at the final data collection point. Researchers followed up with school administrators to determine reasons for this decrease. It was determined that 20 students had transferred to other elementary schools either in Thunder Bay or other jurisdictions. In addition, 1 child was now being home-schooled, and 2 were chronically absent from school. Given the large number of students who did not complete surveys in the final data point, results for students focus largely on data from the first three time periods: February and June 2008, and March 2009. As well, interviews were conducted with 3 students at McKellar Park in order to assess their perceptions of the efficacy of the *Strengths in Motion* program.

Interviews were conducted following the intervention (November 2009) to evaluate the *Strengths in Motion* program with 4 parents of students at McKellar Park school. Quantitative data was also collected from primary caregivers at both schools prior to the intervention in February 2008, as well as at the completion of the intervention in November 2009. At the pre-intervention assessment, 49 caregivers of students at McKellar Park and 51 caregivers of students at Ecole Gron Morgan returned the survey. This comprised approximately 35% of caregivers at McKellar Park and 42% at Gron Morgan. Of these caregivers, 77 were mothers, 12 were fathers, 2 were grandmothers, and 7 were other relatives or guardians. In addition, in 2 cases both parents completed the survey together. At the post-intervention assessment, caregivers of children still attending each of the elementary schools were again contacted. Of these caregivers, 11 from McKellar Park and 4 from Ecole Gron Morgan completed the surveys. Of these caregivers, 13 were mothers and 2 were grandmothers.

Staff at McKellar Park also provided with the opportunity to discuss the *Strengths in Motion* program with research staff following the intervention. Five staff members chose to participate in this portion of the study. Staff at both schools also completed a survey prior to the intervention in February 2008, as well as at the completion of the intervention in November 2009. At the pre-intervention assessment, 26 staff from McKellar Park and 3 staff from Ecole Gron Morgan returned surveys. This comprised approximately 93% of staff at McKellar and 11% at Gron Morgan. This sample included 14 teachers, 5 educational assistants, 1 other intervention worker, and 9 other staff. In addition, 7 staff reported having been at their school for less than a year, 8 had been there for 1 to 2 years, and 14 had been there for 3 years or more. At the post-intervention assessment, 14 staff at McKellar Park and 8 staff at Ecole Gron Morgan completed the surveys. This sample included 19 teachers and 3 other intervention workers. Of these staff, 8 had also completed the pre-intervention survey. Of these staff, 5 reported having worked at their current school for less than 1 year, 2 had been there for 1-2 years, and 15 had been there for 3 or more years.

Analyses

Given the plethora of data collected over the course of the study, select analyses will be presented for the purposes of this report. These include those most directly aligned with the

research question: How effective was a strengths-based program in improving the school experiences of a sample of elementary-aged students?

In order to answer the research question, interviews with students, parents, and school staff were conducted. Participants were asked to provide insight into the effectiveness of the *Strengths in Motion* program, and of the strengths-based approach in general. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

As well, repeated measures analyses of variance were conducted using time and school (control vs. intervention) as independent variables and student self-concept, classroom climate, academic achievement, student strengths, as well as bullying and victimization items as dependent variables.

RESULTS

Program Efficacy: Qualitative Findings

Follow-up interviews were conducted in November 2009 to evaluate the McKellar Park School's *Strengths in Motion* approach. The following provides an overall summary of the general themes that emerged from the interviews completed with school staff and administrators ($n = 5$), parents ($n = 4$), and students ($n = 3$).

Overall, according to the interviewees, the *Strengths in Motion* approach had a positive impact on school climate and bullying prevention at McKellar Park school. The various stakeholders reported that the Strengths approach contributed to increases in students' awareness of their strengths as well as the strengths of their peers, and in doing so increased their self-confidence and their respect for others. Findings also indicated that this approach has made the school a safer place by contributing to students being more knowledgeable about bullying and how to deal with it. Despite many reporting that student strengths have been emphasized by staff prior to program implementation, the Strengths Approach provided a "common language" to formalize the use of this approach in the school. The strengths approach also contributed to increased participation in Aboriginal cultural activities within the school.

In terms of areas of improvements to the *Strengths in Motion* approach, it was suggested that emphasizing strengths may contribute to the perception by students, staff, and parents that appropriate consequences for bullying behaviour may not be regularly used. In other words, emphasizing strengths when dealing with bullying behaviours may decrease the likelihood that a student will take responsibility for inappropriate behaviours. Furthermore, overly emphasizing strengths and not acknowledging problematic behaviours exhibited by some students may not adequately prepare students for the rigors and "realities" of high school. Lastly, the methods that are used to emphasize strengths (e.g., strengths display boards) may need to be more developmental appropriate to engage older students, particularly older males students (grade 7-8). Additional themes and participant comments are summarized below.

Student Results

1. Overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the program

- General positive themes
    - o The students reported an impact on engagement in school activities, in particular the ambassadors club: *"Ambassadors club is fun they help people."*
    - o Students reported that the program had encouraged them to become more involved in class: *"I wasn't paying attention in class before and now I changed that by helping other kids do things."*

- General areas of improvements
    - o In order to help further decrease bullying during school hours, the students' suggested more supervision. *"Put more teachers out so they can stop bullying"*
    - o In terms of getting more people involved, the student's suggested more advertising, *"Posters and in announcements is a good way to get students involved"*

2. Evaluation of the strengths based perspective
    - o In general, the students reported that they liked identifying their strengths: *"Helped me figure out strengths and that's how I learned I was a fast learner"*
    - o Additionally, the strengths based perspective has resulted in the students engaging in their strengths through programs and other activities in school (e.g., sport teams and reading clubs): *"Sometimes I go to the after school program...do some native stuff there, and they drum"*

Parent Results

1. Overall evaluation of the program/effectiveness of the program

- General positive themes observed
    - o The approach has taught students to identify different kinds of bullying such as physical and verbal bullying. As a result, students feel more comfortable talking about bullying in their classrooms. One parent mentioned, *"younger kids seem to have more of an understanding of how to talk about their feelings."* Students are able to articulate their feelings about bullying more readily *"[My child] has been improving and now understands not to bully because it hurts people."*

- Overall, the parents believed that the school staff has handled bullying proactively and that the Strengths Approach has prevented bullying from escalating: *"[My child] is more outspoken now and is the first one to intervene and calm it all down."* Additionally, one parent stated that the *"parent seminars teach me about parenting and are a great program."*

- Parents reported that there have been improvements in the educational outcomes of students since the implementation of the strengths approach. Parent's reported *that "identifying students' strengths has given children more confidence".* As a result, *"students' grades have been improving and students have become more involved in the programs that the Strength in Motion approach has offered such as the ambassadors club."*

- Parents also added that the approach has resulted in their child becoming *"more confident"* and *"more involved with extra activities such as gyms. Got into a boxing after school program that teaches the kids how to box... proud of [my child] by being part of the gym and participating in extra curricular activities. Makes me look at [my child] positively."*

- General areas of improvements
  - Parent's reported that the strengths approach may overly emphasize positive aspects of children and negate important consequences and accountability for negative behaviours, such as suspensions. It was stated that without having suspensions or other appropriate consequences for behaviours, school may be viewed as an *"easy place to be and [students] can do whatever [they] want."*
  - Additionally, it was reported that the environment of the school may be *"too relaxed"* in terms of appropriate consequences for negative behaviours.
  - While parents found the Parent Information Sessions on Strengths very helpful, it was noted that in order to engage more parents, seminars could be offered on weekend or evenings with child care provided.

2. Evaluation of the strengths based perspective
- General positive themes

- o Students were aware of the different types of bullying such as verbal or physical. Also, identifying student strengths contributed to children become more confident.
  - o *"The programs are helping [my child] do better in school because [my child's] marks are really improving"*
  - o *"School always talks to [my child] about [my child's] strengths"*
  - o Since the start of the *Strengths in Motion* Approach there have been positive improvements in students. More specifically, in highlighting and reinforcing their strengths they have enabled them to develop a more positive self-esteem.

- General areas of improvements
  - o Parents reported that there must be firm rules.
  - o Some parents did not support continued involvement in the Strength in Motion programs or components. *"There is no motivation [for the parents child] to jump on board because [my child] is a good kid…the programs need to be based on kids who do well and [not only those who] bully."*

School Staff Results

1. Overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the program

- General positive themes
  - o One general theme that arose from the interviews was that school staff and administrators reported a reduction in bullying.
  - o It was reported that students were more comfortable talking about bullying with the staff. Students were also more knowledgeable about bullying and what it entails. It *"makes them [students] feel safer, more secure"*
  - o *"Students are more aware of what is right or wrong. They're more aware of what's going on, what's acceptable and what isn't"*
  - o *"Students are more aware about bullying and know how to address it and that it is ok to talk about"*
  - o *"This has, overall, been a really successful project that has helped our school and our community"* and there has been a *"Cultural shift and a mindset and expectation. The*

program has been well documented so that hopefully the program will have a better chance of surviving even when there are changes in staff."

- General areas of improvements
  - o Participants reported that it would be beneficial to have more school-wide communication among administrators and school staff about negative events (e.g., bullying incidents, family crises) that may impact a student's behaviour at school. For example, it was reported that it would be helpful for administrators to *"Let us [school staff] know what's going on. What you don't know you're more afraid of"*
  - o Additionally, it was reported that more ongoing communication and training regarding the different components of the program was needed, especially with regards to what is available and where it is available (e.g., some participants were unsure if the Cool Down room was operational and, if so, when it could be accessed).

2. Evaluation of the strengths based perspective

- General positive themes
  - o The staff and administrator reported that emphasizing student strengths had been used prior to the program being implemented; however *"this program has given staff the vocabulary"* to openly discuss strengths and how the strengths of students are more identified.
  - o It was reported that the students were definitely more aware of their strengths, *"…seeing their pictures and their strengths displayed on the walls has helped with that. Being more aware of one's strengths and the strengths of others is definitely a positive thing."*
  - o *"Students are more aware of their more personal strengths and students get a chance to reflect on who they are"*
  - o *"Everyone has strengths, and we should be working from those strengths in order to bring out the best in the individual"*
  - o Although not all parents may have increased awareness about their children's strengths, participants reported that many parents had the opportunities to learn about

strengths *"from the materials that have been sent home with their children as well as the invitations to participate in the school."*

o The administrator and staff all reported that the students had benefited from the strengths program, and the most important component was *"that these kids learn that they are good and they are valuable and they are worth something. Maybe they don't get that out outside of school, but when they're here they sure know that they're important"*

o The administrator and staff reported that the students' level of Aboriginal traditional knowledge had increased as a result of this approach: *"Students are now taking part in pow wows and there is a drumming group of children who participate in community events"* and it has *"definitely made them more active in the community"*

o The staff and administrator reported that the approach had made the school a safer place to be.

o Participants also reported that focusing on strengths may increase a student's level of attention and focus in the classrooms; therefore, there was an indirect link to possible improved educational outcomes: *"If you're not constantly worrying about being bullied or being harassed then you would be less stressed and able to focus more on your learning"* and *"it has helped as people who feel better about themselves are more likely to do better at school."*

- General areas of improvements

Participants suggested that the *"strengths of the staff need to be highlighted as well"* in order to celebrate their own strengths and make the students more aware.

Program Efficacy: Quantitative Findings

Student Results

Student Self-Concept & Perception of Class Climate

Mean scores for student self-concept as well as their perception of class climate, are presented in Table 1. A significant interaction between time and school was found for general self-concept, $F(2, 100)=2.98$, $p< .05$, $\eta2=.05$, and classroom climate, $F(2, 100)=3.53$, $p<.03$, $\eta2=.07$, with an interaction approaching significance for peer self-concept, $F(2, 100)=2.75$, $p<.07$, $\eta2=.05$. As

can be seen in Table 1, scores in all three areas were higher at McKellar Park prior to the intervention. These scores dipped at the second time point and then returned to previous levels by the third time point. Conversely, scores at Gron Morgan increased at the second time point and decreased at the third time point. Clearly then, students at McKellar Park continue to report more positive perceptions of self and of their classrooms across the year in question.

Table 1: Student self-concept and perception of class climate over time, by school

Item	Time Point		
	1 (Pre)	2 (Post)	3 (Post)
Peer Self-Concept			
McKellar Park	3.86 (.74)	3.71 (.81)	3.79 (.58)
Gron Morgan	3.54 (.93)	3.82 (.85)	3.63 (.74)
General Self-Concept			
McKellar Park	4.26 (.61)	4.10 (.66)	4.26 (.75)
Gron Morgan	4.24 (.69)	3.91 (.74)	4.08 (.76)
Classroom Climate			
McKellar Park	4.76 (.27)	4.46 (.63)	4.71 (.38)
Gron Morgan	4.48 (.67)	4.56 (.56)	4.48 (.47)

Academic Achievement

The final repeated measures analysis was conducted using the average academic grades for students across six time points (Figure 3). Average grades were higher for McKellar Park prior to the intervention and continued to increase across the time points. The interaction between time and school was significant, $F(3.23, 138.92) = 4.04$, $p<.01$, $\eta2=.09$, indicating that the gains in achievement were higher for students at McKellar Park that Gron Morgan.

Figure 3: Student academic achievement over time, by school
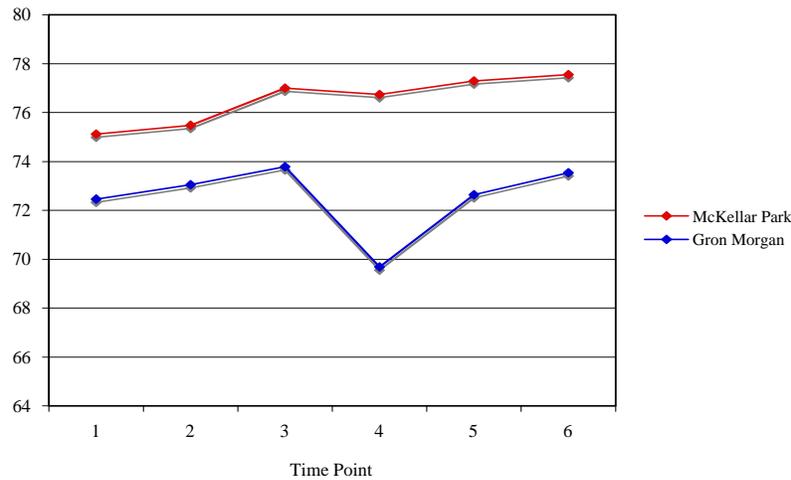
Student Strengths

With respect to student perception of strengths, mean scores across time, by school, are presented in Table 2. Most strengths remained relatively stable across time and were similar across schools.

Table 2: Student reports of strengths over time, by school

Strength Domain	Time Point		
	1 (Pre)	2 (Post)	3 (Post)
Strengths at Home			
McKellar Park	31.65 (3.22)	30.77 (3.31)	30.55 (4.16)
Gron Morgan	30.40 (4.02)	30.65 (3.67)	30.82 (3.96)
Strengths at School			
McKellar Park	36.10 (4.13)	34.41 (4.11)	35.34 (5.73)
Gron Morgan	35.38 (4.52)	34.92 (3.81)	34.78 (5.09)
Strengths with Friends			
McKellar Park	27.10 (2.17)	25.67 (2.85)	26.72 (2.94)
Gron Morgan	26.27 (3.89)	25.77 (3.82)	26.54 (3.33)
Strengths with Leisure Time			
McKellar Park	44.26 (5.80)	43.66 (6.64)	44.00 (7.80)
Gron Morgan	44.02 (6.88)	44.21 (6.53)	46.25 (6.10)
Strengths from Community Involvement			
McKellar Park	14.44 (2.30)	14.96 (2.16)	14.63 (2.96)
Gron Morgan	14.23 (2.39)	14.65 (2.09)	15.00 (3.06)
Strengths with Goals and Dreams			
McKellar Park	18.23 (2.61)	18.17 (2.59)	19.00 (2.80)
Gron Morgan	19.11 (2.17)	18.69 (2.67)	19.78 (1.85)
Strengths from Keeping Clean and Healthy			

| Strength Domain | Time Point | | |
	1 (Pre)	2 (Post)	3 (Post)
McKellar Park	19.87 (2.88)	19.45 (2.88)	20.41 (2.64)
Gron Morgan	19.87 (3.21)	19.86 (3.00)	21.18 (2.04)
Strengths with Knowing Myself			
McKellar Park	47.25 (5.23)	45.69 (5.97)	48.55 (6.24)
Gron Morgan	46.01 (6.91)	46.57 (5.58)	46.78 (5.56)
Strengths with Faith and Culture			
McKellar Park	25.60 (2.73)	24.44 (3.43)	24.79 (3.90)
Gron Morgan	23.97 (3.87)	23.54 (4.66)	23.81 (4.38)

Significant main effects for time were observed for:

a) Keeping Clean and Healthy, $F(2, 110)=5.62$, $p<.005$, $\eta2=.09$. Contrasts revealed a significant difference between the first and third as well as the second and third time points where both schools reported significant increases in strengths with keeping clean.

b) Goals and Dreams, $F(2, 108)=4.25$, $p<.02$, $\eta2=.07$. Contrasts revealed a significant difference between the first and third as well as the second and third time points where both schools reported significant increases in strengths with goals and dreams.

While many differences approached significance, no interactions between time and school met an alpha level of at least .05. Thus, changes in student reports of strength cannot be clearly linked to the intervention.

Bullying and Victimization

Student reports of bullying and being victimized, over the 3 time periods, are described in Table 3. The first describes to what degree students agree with the statements listed, including "I am bullied at school". Responses ranged from "1 = NO" to "5 = YES" with more moderate responses in between.

As can be seen in Table 3, most students reported low levels of bullying at all time points. At Time 1, prior to the intervention, students at McKellar Park assessed their rates of victimization as lower at school and higher on their way to and from school than students at Gron Morgan.

However, students at McKellar Park reported higher rates of bullying others at school than those at Gron Morgan.

Students at both schools reported lower rates of victimization and bullying both at school and on their way to and from school at Time 3 compared to Time 1. Thus while bullying rates declined, changes were similar at both schools.

Table 3: Student reports of bullying and victimization over time, by school

Bullying Item	Time Point		
	1 (Pre)	2 (Post)	3 (Post)
I am bullied at school			
McKellar Park	2.10 (1.21)	2.05 (1.40)	1.75 (1.33)
Gron Morgan	2.24 (1.22)	2.00 (1.34)	1.62 (1.07)
I am bullied on my way to and from school			
McKellar Park	1.40 (.82)	1.20 (.41)	1.00 (.00)
Gron Morgan	1.35 (.75)	1.50 (.89)	1.05 (.22)
I bully others at school			
McKellar Park	1.40 (.75)	1.35 (.49)	1.35 (.75)
Gron Morgan	1.19 (.40)	1.24 (.44)	1.33 (.91)
I bully others on the way to and from school			
McKellar Park	1.15 (.49)	1.30 (.73)	1.05 (.22)
Gron Morgan	1.14 (.36)	1.10 (.30)	1.05 (.22)

Parent Results

Parents completed surveys regarding their perception of bullying and victimization related to their child both prior to and following the intervention. Multivariate analysis indicate that there was a trend toward a significant interaction between parent's reports of concerns prior to and following the intervention, between schools, $F(21,47)=1.44$, $p=.15$. Significant items included concerns or fears that their child might be physically attacked ($p=.01$), sexually coerced ($p=.02$), or verbally harassed ($p=.04$). Specifically, parents of students at McKellar Park felt that these forms of bullying were less of a concern for their child over time and parents of students at Gron Morgan felt that they were more of a concern.

No other differences were found in the interaction between time (pre vs. post) and school. However, it is important to point out that the number of staff participants who completed both the pre and the post intervention survey numbered only 15, only 12 of whom provided complete

data (8 at McKellar Park and 4 at Gron Morgan). Given these very small numbers, any quantitative analyses should be interpreted with caution.

School Staff Results

As only 3 school staff at Gron Morgan completed surveys prior to the intervention, and even fewer post-intervention, analyses by school were not possible. Findings for school staff at McKellar Park are presented with respect to their perceptions of bullying pre- and post-intervention.

A number of significant differences were found between the two time periods and are presented in Table 4. Clearly, staff at McKellar Park school perceived various types of bullying to be less of a problem following the intervention and also felt that their school was taking sufficient action to deal with bullying.

Table 4: McKellar Park staff perceptions of bullying before and after the intervention

Bullying Item	Time Point		F value	η2
	Pre	Post		
Bullying is a serious problem among students at our school	3.15 (.54)	2.75 (.62)	4.14*	.10
Racial discrimination is a serious problem among students at our school	2.45 (.60)	2.23 (.93)	0.76	.02
Sexual harassment is a serious problem among students at our school	2.13 (.50)	1.58 (.52)	7.85**	.23
The degree of bullying/harassment at our school is greater than the average level in Canadian schools	2.54 (.52)	2.00 (.45)	7.27**	.25
The amount of time and resources we commit to anti-bullying/harassment initiatives is sufficient to effectively deal with these problems at our school	2.41 (.67)	3.25 (.75)	11.29**	.26

DISCUSSION

Many interesting and informative findings arose from the qualitative and quantitative analyses. Overall, participants perceived positive changes in terms of school climate and student outcomes as a result of the strengths-based program. Findings will be discussed in three sections: Students, Parents, and School Staff.

Student Findings

Students at McKellar Park reported many positive outcomes of the *Strengths in Motion* approach. They described the climate in the school as more positive and focused on student strength. As indicators of this cultural shift, students were more focused on helping others, which also increased their own level of school engagement and involvement. Students continued to feel better about themselves and their competencies as well as their classroom environments compared to students at the control school. Students reported making better choices in all aspects of their school life, and recognized the benefits of these.

One of the most striking findings arising from the study was the increasing achievement of students at McKellar Park. The strengths-based approach embraced by both students and school staff may have resulted in changing perceptions regarding academic potential and a greater emphasis on effective strategies for student learning that draws on their areas of competence, rather than weakness. This interpretation is supported by teacher interviews, where the value of student strengths was highlighted: *"Everyone has strengths, and we should be working from those strengths in order to bring out the best in the individual"*.

Results from the student survey indicated that most students report low levels of bullying and victimization, regardless of the school or time point. Bullying and victimization rates decreased over time at both schools. That rates of bullying and victimization decreased across the span of a year is a positive finding, particularly given the lack of positive change observed in most anti-bullying programs (Merrell et al., 2008). However, these changes cannot be attributed to the intervention, given similar changes observed in the control school. Differences may instead be

due to other initiatives occurring across the school board, or simply changes in teaching staff and school climate over time.

Several interpretations of these findings are possible. The first is that the program did not have an impact on bullying and victimization. However, given the significant number of participants in the program who did not complete surveys or interviews, this conclusion cannot be fully supported. The majority of the analyses presented in this report include the perceptions of a small percentage of the school population. There were many reasons for the low response and high attrition rate, including the many students who moved to other schools, both in and out of the city. Frequent moves are not uncommon for many students attending the two schools included in the study, however high student turnover makes longitudinal evaluation of a particular approach difficult.

As with many other programs, it is likely that particular components were effective for various students, rather than the school as a whole. Most students did not report high rates of bullying and victimization. For those who are involved in regular episodes of bullying others or being victimized themselves, it is unclear whether or not they were involved in the research portion of the intervention. It may be the case that *Strengths in Motion* did have a positive impact on those students who participated in, for example, the Ambassador's Club, which focused specifically on high-risk students, or the Cool Down room, for students experiencing significant difficulties in their classroom. Unfortunately, the views of many of these students may not have been captured in the data presented here.

Parent Findings

Although not all parents were involved in the daily school life of students at McKellar, it was important to recognize the important role they played in promoting and supporting a strengths-based approach for their children. Parents reported that their children benefited from the *Strengths in Motion* approach in a number of ways. They felt that the climate was such that students were better able to identify and describe bullying and to talk about their feelings in relation to these incidents. With respect to strengths, parents described how their children had developed greater confidence and self-esteem and had improved academically since the advent

of the approach. Parents saw benefits to students extending beyond the classroom, as children began to engage in extra curricular activities.

A small number of parents completed surveys describing their perceptions of bullying and victimization related to their child. However, parents of students at McKellar Park expressed fewer concerns regarding the victimization of their child over time, where parents at Gron Morgan expressed greater concerns in areas including physical attacks, sexual coercion and verbal harassment. While these findings represent a very small number of parents at both schools, they are an indication of the positive impact of the *Strengths in Motion* intervention, of which parents are aware of and may have actively participated in through parent workshops. Gaining an understanding of various types of bullying, and possibly engaging in related discussions with their children and schools staff may alleviate concerns on the part of parents and serve as a protective factor for students. Parents' views may also reflect the improvements that they are seeing in the experiences of their child with respect to bullying and victimization. These explanations are supported by the findings from parent interviews where participants stated "*My child has been improving and now understands not to bully because it hurts people*", and *"My child is more outspoken now and is the first one to intervene and calm it all down"*. Clearly, the shift in school climate at McKellar Park to a more strengths-based approach was perceived by parents as having a significant, positive effect on their children's social and academic functioning.

School Staff Findings

The staff at McKellar Park school reported a number of ways in which the climate was improved following the implementation of a strengths-based approach. They felt that support was provided for students in terms of social and emotional, as well as academic needs and that students perceived the school environment as safe and welcoming. Teachers also felt that the strengths-based focus of the program was particularly beneficial in terms of increasing students' sense of confidence and competence which may in turn decrease bullying and increase achievement. One staff member stated, ""*…seeing their pictures and their strengths displayed on the walls has helped with that. Being more aware of one's strengths and the strengths of others is definitely a positive thing.*"

Staff also felt that bullying was seen as much less of a problem and that sufficient time and resources were being dedicated to the issue. Clearly then, teachers and administrators perceive that the situation in the school in terms of bullying is more positive with the addition of *Strengths in Motion*. More specifically, staff who participated in the interviews felt that students were more comfortable talking about bullying and what steps to take to deal with it. According to one staff member, "*Students are more aware about bullying and know how to address it and that it is ok to talk about it*". Overall, school staff endorsed and supported the strengths-based approach and were able to identify specific changes in climate that positively impacted students.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Findings regarding the efficacy of *Strengths in Motion* were generally positive. All stakeholders reported significant improvements in terms of school climate. In particular:

- Students
    - Reported a greater focus on helping others
    - Reported increased school engagement
    - Reported becoming more involved in extracurricular activities
    - Continued to experience higher self-concept and perceived their classroom climate more positively
    - Had significantly higher average academic grades across all time points
- Parents
    - Felt that their children had developed greater confidence and self-esteem
    - Observed increased academic achievement for their children
    - Expressed fewer concerns regarding bullying
- School Staff
    - Perceived the school environment as welcoming and supportive of students
    - Felt that students self-confidence improved
    - Felt that students had a greater awareness of their own strengths and those of their peers
    - Reported that bullying was much less of a problem
    - Reported that students were much more comfortable talking about bullying and knew what steps to take to deal with it

The findings highlight the potential of strengths-based approaches in developing a school culture and climate that encourages students to make better choices in terms of their schoolwork and interpersonal relationships. Over time, parents and school staff also develop a common philosophy that permeates all areas of school life, from classroom instruction and behaviour management, to helping with homework and engaging students through their interests.

Given the high turn over rates of both students and staff in some schools in Thunder Bay, as well as many other communities, it is extremely difficult to conduct longitudinal research and to evaluate conclusively the impact of an approach such as *Strengths in Motion*. The addition of more frequent and in-depth qualitative methods such as focus groups, as well as observational data, may allow for schools to better assess programs such as the one described presently.

Feedback from staff and parents provide several suggestions for further improvements for the program. Parents suggested that workshops be offered at more convenient times and that the program needed to include more options for participation for students who are doing well, rather than focusing solely on students actively involved in bullying. School staff felt that greater communication and training regarding the various elements of the program were required and that their strengths, rather than just student strengths, should be drawn upon within the program. By addressing these suggested areas of improvement and valuing the feedback of students, staff and parents, stakeholders will likely continue to endorse a strengths-based approach in their school and further perpetuate it's development and refinement. The cultural shift will thus continue and sustainability of the approach will be increased regardless of staff and student turnover.

The issue of sustainability is an important one. Too often, school-based interventions are not fully embraced by school staff and students due to inconsistent implementation, a lack of common focus and understanding about goals and philosophies, and transient funding. Stakeholders at McKellar Park clearly believe that *Strengths in Motion* has contributed to a significant shift in school culture; one that draws on student strength and perpetuates positive change in behaviour and learning. It is important that educational leaders and those supporting

initiatives such as *Strengths in Motion* capitalize on the momentum that exists at McKellar Park and promote continued development and refinement of the approach.

Based on the findings, it may also be of value to engage students further in terms of finding ways for them to draw on their strengths to negotiate situations where bullying may be taking place. Although most students at the two schools involved in the present intervention do not report involvement in bullying, there are most likely small groups of students for whom this continues to be an issue. Targeted interventions such as those included in *Strengths in Motion* are one way to deliver more directed skill development and changes in self-perception for those most at-risk; these should continue to be developed and examined over time.

Many key elements of *Strengths in Motion* contributed to its success. As recommended by Finger et al. (2005) the program was theoretically grounded, was implemented school-wide, contributed to the development of a safe and supportive environment, and involved multiple stakeholders including parents, educators, and students. Other schools and organizations that are attempting to build positive school climate and reduce negative student experiences such as bullying should consider these characteristics of effective programs.

The expansion of *Strengths in Motion* to other schools is an important next step. The present findings support the efficacy of a strengths-based approach given adherence to the key elements listed previously. Other schools should consider how best to adapt the approach to their particular community. For example, what cultural groups are represented among students and staff? What are the needs of parents with regards to supporting student strengths? How can teachers draw on student strengths in their daily practice? Answering these types of questions with the input of all stakeholders is an important first step in fostering positive school climates through strength-based approaches. Certainly *Strengths in Motion* shows promise as a program that has a positive impact on multiple stakeholders supporting students; it's continued development and implementation is certainly warranted given the present findings.

REFERENCES

Albrecht, S. F. & Braaten, S. (2008). Strength-based assessment of behavior competencies to distinguish students referred for disciplinary intervention from nonreferred peers. *Psychology in the Schools, 45*(2), 91-103.

Anderson, R. L., Lyons, J. S., Giles, D. M., Price, J. A. & Estle, G. (2003). Reliability of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths-Mental Health (CANS-MH) Scale. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 12*(3), 279-289.

Anderson, C. G., Rawana, E. P., Brownlee, K., & Whitley, J. (in press). An investigation of the relationship between psychological strengths and the perception of bullying in early adolescents in schools. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research.*

Donnon, T. & Hammond, W. (2007). Understanding the relationship between resiliency and bullying inadolescence: An assessment of youth resiliency from five urban junior high schools. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America, 16,* 449-471.

Donnon, T., Hammond, W., & Charles, G. (2003). Youth resiliency: Assessing students' capacity for success at school. *Teaching and Learning, 1*(2), 23-28.

Duncan, P. M., Garcia, A. C., Frankowski, B. L., Carey, P. A., Kallock, E. A., Dixon, R. D., et al. (2007). Inspiring healthy adolescent choices: a rationale for and guide to strength promotion in primary care. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 41*(6), 525-535.

Epstein, M. H., & Sharma, J. (2008) *Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment.* Austin, TX: PRO-ED

Farmer, T. W., Clemmer, J. T., Leung, M.-C., Goforth, J. B., Thompson, J. H., Keadgy, K., & others. (2005). Strength-based assessment of rural African American early adolescents: Characteristics of students in high and low groups on the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 14*(1), 57-69.

Finger, L. R., Craven, R. G., Marsh, H. W., & Parada, R. H. (2005, November). *Characteristics of effective anti-bullying interventions: What research says.* Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Parramatta, Australia.

Jennings, G. (2003). An exploration of meaningful participation and caring relationships as contexts for school engagement. *The California School Psychologist, 8*, 43-52.

Jimerson, S. R., Sharkey, J. D., Nyborg, V. M., & Furlong, M. J. (2004). Strength-based assessment and school psychology: A summary and synthesis. California School Psychologist, 9, 9-20

Katz, H. & McCluskey, K. (2003). Seeking strength-based approaches in aboriginal education: the "three stars and a wish" project. *McGill Journal of Education, 38*, 116-134.

Lupart, J., Whitley, J., Odishaw, J., & McDonald, L. (2008). Whole school evaluation and inclusion: How elementary school participants perceive their learning community. *International Journal of Whole Schooling, 4*(1), 40-65.

Lyons, J. S., Uziel-Miller, N. D., Reyes, F. A. A., & Sokol, P. T. (2000). Strengths of children and adolescents in residential settings: Prevalence and associations with psychopathology and discharge placement. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 39*(2), 176-181.

Marsh, H. W. (1988). *Self-Description-Questionnaire I. SDQ-I manual and research monograph.* San Antonio: The Psychological Corporation.

Merrell, K. W., Gueldner, B. A., Ross, S. W., & Isava, D. M. (2008). How effective are anti-bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly, 23*(1), 26-42.

Rawana, E. & Brownlee, K. (2009). Making the possible probable: A strength-based assessment and intervention framework for clinical work with parents, children and adolescents. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services. 90*(3), 255-260.

Rawana, E. P., Brownlee, K., & Hewitt, J., (2006). *Strength Assessment Inventory for Children and Adolescents.* Unpublished manuscript, Lakehead University at Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Rawana, E., Latimer, K., Whitley, J., & Probizanski, M. (November, 2009). Strength-based classroom strategies for teachers. *Canadian Teacher Magazine*, 16-17.

Totten, M., Quigley, P., & Morgan, M. (2004). *CPHA safe school study* (Canadian Public Health Association). Retrieved December 8, 2008, from http://www.ysb.on.ca/english/pdf/LE/Safe%20School%20Study%202004.pdf

Walrath, C. M., Mandell, D. S., Holden, E. W., & Santiago, R. L. (2004). Assessing the strengths of children referred for community-based mental health services. *Mental Health Services Research, 6*(1), 1-8.

Weick, A., Rapp, C., Sullivan, WP, & Kisthardt, S.(1989). A strengths perspective for social work practice. *Social Work, 34*, 350-354.

Winter-Messiers, M., Herr, C. M., Wood, C. E., Brooks, A. P., Gates, M. M., Housto, T. L., et al. (2007). How far can Brian ride the daylight 4449 express? A strength-based model of Asperger Syndrome based on special interest areas. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 22*(2), 67-79.