Rochester Rotary Super Star Scholars

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Abstract

This paper describes the development and implementation of a positive psychology curriculum for high performing 5th-12th grade students. These students attend Roberto Clemente School No. 8, an inner-city school in the Rochester City School District, in Rochester New York and are supported by the local Rotary Club scholarship program. Our project aimed to enhance the overall well-being among these students by integrating evidence-based principles of positive psychology into their educational experience. We conducted a situational analysis of the school district and the role of the Rochester Rotary Club in supporting district students through their scholarship program. A comprehensive literature review was carried out to inform the design of age-appropriate materials and modules. Our collaboration with the Rochester Rotary Club facilitated the integration of the positive psychology curriculum into the school's monthly meetings between the students (scholars) and their Rotarian mentors. The curriculum consists of 10 distinct modules on a two-year rotating cycle, addressing topics such as goal setting, resilience, and character strengths. The aim is to empower students with the tools and knowledge necessary to foster their personal development and well-being, alongside academic achievement.

The paper offers insights into the process of designing, implementing, and sustaining the positive psychology curriculum, highlighting the vital role of community partnerships in supporting such initiatives. The findings from this project have the potential to inform future educational practices, as well as contribute to the growing body of research on the benefits of positive psychology in educational settings.

Keywords: well-being, education, positive psychology, intervention, educational practices, positive education, youth development, curriculum design, character strengths, Rochester Rotary
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Situational Analysis

Positive psychology, with its emphasis on human flourishing and well-being, has emerged as a transformative approach to understanding and nurturing the human experience (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the realm of education, positive psychology's potential to enrich students' lives by fostering their strengths, resilience, and sense of purpose is increasingly recognized as a vital aspect of holistic learning (Seligman et al., 2009). As academic institutions continue to explore innovative ways to cultivate not only intellectual growth but also emotional and psychological well-being, the integration of positive psychology principles into educational curricula offers promising avenues for nurturing well-rounded, resilient, and flourishing individuals. This paper delves into the development and implementation of a positive psychology curriculum tailored for high-performing 5th-12th grade students in an inner-city school setting, demonstrating the value of such an approach in fostering well-being and personal growth alongside academic achievement. In this section of the paper, the current situation regarding the city of Rochester, the Rochester Rotary organization, and Roberto Clemente School No. 8 is described in detail.

Rochester’s per-capita homicide rates are the highest in New York State (Schermerhorn, 2022). The Rochester City School District’s performance ranks among the worst in the nation (Review, 2023). Students attending district schools struggle to succeed within daily circumstances shaped by the nation’s second highest childhood poverty level (Townsend, 2022). Childhood poverty is associated with several lifelong problems including poorer health and educational outcomes as well as involvement in the criminal justice system (Townsend, 2022). While the charge to change lives exists against the backdrop of disheartening circumstances,
Rochester Rotary is a service organization (501(c)(3) not-for-profit) made up of over 350 business and civic leaders who unite in fellowship to serve others and promote values like integrity, understanding, goodwill, and peace (Rotary International, 2023). The Rochester branch is a part of a larger network, Rotary International. Members, known as Rotarians, combine passion, purpose, and service to help close the opportunity gaps for academic and professional advancement. The Rochester Rotary has many key initiatives designed to serve its city, all of which are overseen by committees that fall into the categories of Friendship, Fundraising, or Service (Key Initiatives, 2023). The School No. 8 Scholarship Committee falls within the public service and education sectors of Rotary’s categorical approach to realizing its mission to enrich the lives of global neighbors, those with disabilities, and the youth. Board member and Vice President of Engagement, Andrew Brady, is partnering with the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program team of the University of Pennsylvania to integrate positive psychology principles into the Scholarship program to help its students flourish.

**Rochester Rotary’s School No. 8 Scholarship Program**

Since its inception in 2003, the Scholarship Committee has been dedicated to managing the student selection process, providing mentorship, ongoing support and offering enriching educational and social activities designed to enhance the wellbeing of Rochester youth. At some point between third and fifth grade, students demonstrating high performance are recommended for participation in the School No. 8 Rotary Scholarship program by their teachers to receive extra support toward achieving academic and holistic success. The first scholar of the program graduated from high school and went on to college in 2013. At present, the scholarship program
Rochester Rotary Super Star Scholars is working with eight students. Six students are currently attending School No. 8, and two students are thriving at local high schools. Once program requirements are completed, these students will be awarded scholarships that cover 75% tuition at a State University of New York college. Paving the pathway to success, mentors meet on the third Wednesday of each month with students in addition to offering occasional social and cultural excursions and activities. This ongoing mentorship, enrichment, and support is extended to scholars from their sixth-grade year through high-school graduation. Positive psychology concepts have and will continue to support Rotarian mentors in maximizing the impact of their work in service of students.

**The Rochester City School District**

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) opened its first doors in 1813, with the vision that free “common schools” would create “hope of a better tomorrow” (*A History of the Public Schools of Rochester, 1813-1935*). Despite this idealism, the district’s current reality is that it “tops all the lists you don’t want to be on” (A. Brady, personal communication, January 26, 2023). Based on an index of socioeconomic and academic measures that can shape a child’s future, the district currently ranks as the worst in the state and is listed as one of the top fifty worst districts in America (Stebbins & Sauter, 2020). Although per-student spending in Rochester nearly doubles the national average, the fiscal investment is not shifting the statistics. Graduation rates are under 60% (Murphy, 2019). The district has had eleven superintendents over the last two decades, and three in the last three years (Battaglia & Gross, 2022). NYSED has appointed an independent monitor to the school, to support district turnaround and leadership and address fiscal and academic issues. These are the kinds of circumstances that inspire Rotarians to serve students through the lens of positive psychology.
Roberto Clemente School No. 8

Rochester Rotary’s Scholarship Program focuses on the RCSD students who face the greatest challenges. At a glance, the Roberto Clemente School No. 8’s performance measures rank its students as struggling the most to achieve success within the contextual challenges plaguing the district, community, and youth (rcsdk12.org/8, 2023). Only five percent of School No. 8 students demonstrate proficiency on math or reading assessments. That level of academic proficiency is well below the district-wide average of approximately 20% proficiency (compared with the state-wide average of approximately 50%). 94% of students are categorized within historically underrepresented groups. 97% of students are economically disadvantaged. Although the Rochester Rotary scholarship program is designed to work with selected students, Rotarian clearly see the need to scale up efforts. Offering basic support for the larger School No. 8 community, through winter coat drives and canned food drives, has increasingly been part of Rochester Rotary’s recent efforts to help Rochester’s youth flourish by starting with their basic needs.

Cultural Considerations

A substantial body of research and theory exists for trauma-informed instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and practices for supporting students experiencing poverty. As a field, however, positive psychology has not delved specifically into work with populations of people who share characteristics with Rochester youth. Adolescents between the ages of 10-18 are a unique population that are often not the primary research subjects for the science behind the applications developed in this project. In addition to age, there are many socioeconomic factors that shape the lives of Rochester youth that have not been specifically explored within the body of positive psychology research. Contextual and cultural factors crucially impact the
effectiveness of interventions (Schueller, 2014). What constitutes a “positive” intervention, or a “negative” construct is not equivalent across individuals and groups (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2017). While this project attempts to consider the unique realities of the students it seeks to serve, cultural humility and competence about the socioeconomic and demographic diversity within the Rochester Rotary scholarship program participants is crucial as the project is developed, applied, and refined.

**School No. 8 Scholarship Program Strengths and Challenges**

The dedication and generosity of Rotarian mentors is one of the greatest strengths of the Rochester Rotary scholarship program. The Rotarian mentors use active listening to deepen their understanding of others (Rotary DEI Code of Conduct, 2023), an openness that guides them in creating new interventions (like this year’s winter coat drive) to respond directly to the needs, they observe. Rotarians’ receptive approach provides a basis for trust; listening can encourage high quality connections and positive relationships (Hinz et al., 2022). In terms of the program itself, monthly meetings with the scholars at School No. 8 are well-attended. The regularity of these monthly interactions between mentors and mentees provides the foundation for strong relationships. Partnerships between youth and adults serve protective and developmental functions that can help promote knowledge, competency, and initiative (Zeldin et al., 2005). Additionally, the mentors take scholars on monthly excursions that incorporate fun, learning, and service. These outings provide the students with increased exposure to play and culture that goes beyond academics. Rochester Rotary’s work with students is already designed around tenets of positive psychology such as high-quality connections (Dutton, 2003), mattering (Prilleltensky, 2021), and fostering hope (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Additionally, many Rotarians exhibit a desire to increase knowledge and increase the relevance of practices by participating in the
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organization’s quarterly trainings on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in addition to relevant local issues. These strengths are central to Rochester Rotary’s efficacy in using positive psychology to address students’ challenges and the program’s limitations.

Even if the majority of individuals’ happiness is accounted for by factors like genetics and life circumstances (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014), a third is malleable. Although Rotarian mentors meet individually with students once per month, lasting improvements and habits might be achieved through more regular interactions. Setting goals and receiving regular feedback and positive guidance builds not only self-efficacy but also improved achievement (Locke, 1996).

Another challenge of the program is that some scholars are in high school while most others are in elementary or middle school. Rochester Rotary might leverage the different ages and stages of students in order to support a leadership-development program in which students grow into mentoring positions. A structure that enables students to contribute and give to their community through leadership opportunities might offer Rochester youth a chance to feel how much they matter (Prilleltensky, 2021) in a way that encourages them to believe they have value to add to the broader community. Regarding the lived experiences of the students served by Rochester Rotary, sociographic training is not prerequisite to working with School No. 8 students. Equipping Rotarian mentors with research updates regarding effective mentorship regarding goal-setting, community building, mattering, and feedback might benefit the efficacy of the relationship between Rochester Rotary, students, families, and the community.

**Application of Positive Psychology**

To maximize the efficacy of this mentorship program, Andrew Brady and the MAPP team see the potential for infusion of positive psychology concepts, principles, and practices through multiple pathways: mentees, mentors, and educators. Because the scope of this endeavor
is quite broad, we chose to address the well-being of the student scholars themselves by providing assistance to the mentors through the provision of a research-informed application plan and sample materials. A Mentor Training Program would provide mentors with a foundational understanding of optimal human flourishing through a framework for wellbeing built upon Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment (PERMA) (Seligman, 2011). Additionally, the mentors would learn about character strengths and positive interventions. A sample set of learning materials to support mentors in learning about character strengths to facilitate wellbeing through growth-mindset and goal-achievement will be provided as the basis for the curriculum built with consideration of a methodology that deploys strategies applicable to students coming from underserved communities (Jensen, 2013).

As Rotarian mentors meet with their mentees, a positive psychology and well-being program designed for student scholars will be implemented. With their own goals in mind, students will leverage their strengths and growth-mindset as the basis for building knowledge of positive psychology concepts that support goal achievement. From our first conversation, Rotarian Andrew Brady was explicit in his request for information about best practices regarding habit formation and goal achievement to support student success. It’s not only physical habits like studying and sleep that scholars need to develop, however. Social, mental, and emotional realms involving the development of resilience, grit, optimism, meaning, purpose, high-quality connections and mattering into the scholars will also add to positive psychology resources that scholars can rely on to support their success through the Rochester Rotary program. Our project proposes the application of engaging concepts and ideas predicated on positive psychology principles, and validated research.
PERMA and PERMA-H

While not neglecting the adversities of the human experience, the field of positive psychology compliments the overall field of psychology by offering insight into the multifaceted complexities of what it is to thrive. Predicated on science, the PERMA model serves as a useful framework to guide individuals towards a flourishing life (Seligman, 2011). The acronym’s constitutive elements in PERMA, Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, are empirically validated constructs that are recognized as essential building blocks that, when operationalized, contribute to a life well-lived. Each individual component of PERMA contributes to well-being and may be operationalized singularly or in combination with each other. Additionally, one may benefit from the application of the PERMA-H which incorporates a dimension of one’s physical health into its well-being model (Kern, 2020). The PERMA-H model utilizes a broader perspective when operationalizing wellness practices and interventions (Kern, 2020). Based on our conversations with our service-learning partner as well as our situational analysis, our team has decided to focus on relationships, engagement and accomplishment. Having a solid understanding of the PERMA framework and PERMA-H models of well-being will afford the adults and students involved in the Rochester Rotary scholarship program a solid foundation in which its constitutive elements may be put into practice.

Habit Formation & Goal Achievement

One of our top priorities and most researched topics in psychology is habit formation and goal achievement, which fall under the achievement category in PERMA. Research in this area tends to focus on how habits are formed, what makes them difficult to change, and how they can be modified to support positive behavior change (Wood et al., 2005). Charles Duhigg published
The Power of Habit (2012) to explore some of these topics and explains how habits are developed through the process of a cue, routine, and reward. The cue acts as a trigger for the routine, which leads to the reward. Continued use of this pathway reinforces it resulting in habituation (Duhigg, 2012). Cues can be present in one’s environment or through social norms and play a crucial role in habit formation solidifying both positive and negative behaviors (Gardner et al., 2012). Mentors could work with the students to teach and model healthy habits that the scholars may apply in their personal and academic lives.

Additionally, habits can be modified through intentional effort and practice and disruption of the cue, routine, and reward pathway (Wood & Neal, 2007). This can be accomplished through altering cues, replacing the routine, and finding meaningful new rewards. Changing one’s habits can be an intense process that requires self-awareness, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation (Wood & Neal, 2007). However, it is possible to break old habits and form new ones that support one’s overall goals through understanding the principles of habit formation. As an example, research on habit formation has been used to design interventions for positive behaviors such as promoting physical fitness and eating nutritionally as well as for ceasing negative behaviors such as smoking cessation. Habit formation and disruption is a dynamic process that can be utilized and prove beneficial for the student scholars.

Goal achievement is an area of interest across many fields and is an important component of human behavior. Research has shown that achievement of goals is a complex process that takes into account interactions between the individual, their environment, and their own cognitive abilities. One’s personality traits plays a role in successful goal achievement. Having a growth mindset, or the belief that skills and abilities can be developed through perseverance and hard work, can increase motivation and goal achievement (Dweck, 2007). An individual’s
emotions also play a role through either progressing or regressing progress towards a goal (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Goals that are intrinsically motivating and linked to an individual’s values are very effective.

Locke & Latham’s theory of goal setting and task motivation is one of the most influential theories on this topic (2002). According to their theory, goals can effectively motivate when they are specific, challenging, and based on an individual’s personality and predilections. They also propose that feedback mechanisms are a critical part of successful goal attainment. Feedback sheds light on one’s progress towards a goal which helps to identify the problem areas – an activity essential for adjusting behavior and tactics during the journey (Locke & Latham, 2002). Understanding factors impacting habit formation and goal achievement will assist Rotarian mentors and scholars develop effective strategies for setting and achieving goals.

**Psychological Mindsets: Grit, Resilience, Optimism**

Improvement in one’s psychological mindset, specifically through grit, resilience, optimism or cultivation of growth mindset, can be related to the positive emotions, engagement, and accomplishment categories of PERMA. Although intellectual talent has long been viewed as a primary predictor of success, research in recent decades has come to prioritize the role of perseverance and passion – known as grit – to support the achievement of long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Although cognitive ability predicts grades, school isn’t just about grades. Noncognitive factors like physical fitness and grit take priority status in students’ likelihood of graduating (Duckworth et al, 2019). The concept of grit is sometimes used interchangeably with resilience, the learnable skill of adapting to life’s challenges in ways that promote continued growth (Southwick & Charney, 2018).
The field of positive psychology posits that grit and resilience impact one’s future success. There is abundant reason to believe that expectations drive outcomes; positive thinking can be considered as a universally accessible superpower (Peterson, 2006). Optimism and hope, constructed by one’s expectations for future events in combination with a promising assessment of one’s ability to respond with agency and efficacy to demands, are buildable skills (Peterson, 2006). Recent research has demonstrated tools like optimistic outlook to predict, mediate, and protect mental health and promote healthy behavior specifically during adolescence (Uribe et al, 2022). Instead of viewing success as dependent on fixed traits, scientists have correlated positive future outcomes with an embrace of growth mindsets that acknowledge innate capacity to learn, grow, adapt, and define the future instead of allowing past and present circumstances to define and limit what’s possible (Dweck, 2007).

To facilitate success, Rotarian mentors may lead students and educators through activities and applications that, over time, will improve the mental superpowers that can guide future outcomes in a positive direction. For example, students might work to develop their thinking habits in ways that create mental toughness by building optimistic thought pathways (Seligman, 2006). (Seligman, 2006; Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Furthermore, intentionally applying resilient thoughts and behaviors will elevate one’s well-being by enhancing relationships, both personally and professionally (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

**Character Strengths**

Based on empirical data, the 24-character strengths are a given set of positive traits that are part of people’s personalities. The identification of the strengths, organized under the umbrella of six broader virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) provide a common language in
which the best in one’s personality and character may be described. Character strengths may be identified and used in a myriad of ways to advance individual and community well-being. The intentional application and attention to any of the 24 strengths has been positively validated to elevate the well-being in individuals and groups (Lavy et al., 2014). Character deployment could be used to uplift one’s daily mood and repair adverse moods. The study also highlighted that, in addition to an elevation in one’s personal well-being, strength usage could improve one’s relationship with other people as well. (Lavy et al., 2014). As an example, an individual with a character strength of gratitude may utilize this strength in a variety of ways to boost one’s mood and foster stronger bonds in relationships. Additionally, a study conducted by Littman-Ovadia & Streger (2010) verified that character strength usage had a positive impact on volunteers and vocational workers. When a sense of meaning was derived from their volunteer experience as well as meaning in one’s work, increases in overall flourishing and well-being were identified. Findings here have a direct connection to the mentors as they are working with the students.

Furthermore, the use of one’s top five strengths, or signature strengths, elevates well-being in a multitude of ways (Niemiec, 2017). In schools, both teacher and student engagement rise as intentional identification and utilization of strengths are operationalized and recognized in each other (VIA Institute, 2023). Specifically, research verifies that individuals were happiest when their most essential strengths were recognized by those around them in either a school or workplace setting (Blanchard et al., 2019). Additionally, the application of character strengths has been verified to assist students in higher levels of academic achievement (Mamatha & Chowhan, 2020). It is worth noting that it was not just the identification of one’s signature strength, but the recognition of, and value of the strength by another in the environment that had the most impact on one’s elevation in reported well-being (Blanchard et al., 2019).
Signature strengths are heightened when they are appreciated by others. Relationships are nurtured as individuals regularly identify and appreciate individual strengths of those around them. A solid understanding of the VIA Character Strengths will afford both Rotarian mentors and the scholar’s higher levels of success in using the strengths personally and identifying them in others.

**Application Plan**

Our situation analysis of Rochester and the Rochester Rotary School No. 8 Scholarship Program revealed several opportunities to integrate positive psychology concepts and interventions into the scholarship program. Although there are a multitude of challenges that the scholars face, we aim to provide valuable tools and strategies to help them build self-efficacy, healthy habits, and a growth mindset that will improve the trajectory of their lives. Even though half of the variance in an individuals’ happiness can be accounted for by factors like genetics and life circumstances, at least a third of each person’s happiness is malleable (Bao & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Our team aspires to aid scholars in maximizing their potential and capitalize on factors that can be influenced.

In this application plan, we outline our proposal for each session (or module) based on the fundamentals of positive psychology theory and research, in combination with guidance from our service-learning partner and the Rotarian mentors. There are nine meetings throughout the school year; however, as only two new students enter the program every year, our team proposes that the modules have a two-year cycle. Each academic year for the initial two years will begin with a goal setting and habit-formation module. After that, four additional modules will be provided each year at meetings 3, 5, 7, and 9. The third year will repeat the sequence from the beginning. The modules, as designed, will use the fundamental constructs of growth-mindset and
self-efficacy throughout the program. Other concepts important in positive psychology (such as optimism, resilience, character strengths, etc.) will be shared during the modules with a tie-in to these fundamentals. Ideally, after this two-year curriculum the scholars will be empowered to deliver the content themselves and to their peers resulting in increased sense of mattering through being of value to others (Prilleltensky, 2021) and effective dissemination of information through the scholars’ effective leadership of their peers. (Paluck et al., 2016). The schedule for the modules is attached in Appendix A. Our service-learning partner has identified a workbook as the ideal medium to use with the scholars. The workbook will primarily be for the Rotarian mentors and will comprise all nine modules, with an instruction sheet for the mentors and relevant printable hand-outs for the scholars. Our goal is to create a positive psychology curriculum that can be used by Rotarian mentors to guide the scholars to greater achievement and well-being. The following section will outline each module theme and associated exercises.

A more in-depth view into one of the modules is included in Appendix B.

**Module #1: Goal Setting & Habit Formation**

Starting out each school year with a goal and habit formation workshop can be an effective way to set the tone for the academic year ahead. By taking the time to identify specific goals and developing strategies to form new habits, students can approach their studies with a sense of purpose and direction (Locke & Latham, 2002). Equally important is honing in on scholars’ personal and academic goals as well as the goals for their mentor-mentee relationship. By reflecting on their strengths and challenges, students can create a roadmap for success that will guide them throughout the school year.

The aim of this module will be to identify goals while creating supportive positive habits. The session will start with an introduction on goal setting and habit formation that explains why
it is important. There will also be an exercise to brainstorm short-term and long-term goals which can be shared with the mentors or peers. After identifying goals, the scholar will choose a short-term goal and identify habits that can support achieving the goal. For example, questions such as “What habit do you need to develop to achieve your goal?”, “When and where will you practice this habit?” and “How will you track your progress?” will be offered as prompts to facilitate the development of a habit plan. The practices instilled in this module will be regularly assessed over the course of the year and integrated into each subsequent module, with a focus on how novel insights may be employed to promote progress towards the scholar’s initial objectives.

Module #2: Character Strengths

A module on character strengths early in the curriculum can enable the scholars to identify their signature strengths and learn how to apply them. Character strengths are positive traits and attributes that are seen as core components of an individual's personality (VIA Institute). According to the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues, there are 24-character strengths that are universally valued across cultures, including qualities such as kindness, gratitude, curiosity, and creativity. Research has shown that individuals who possess and utilize their character strengths are more likely to experience positive emotions, engage in meaningful activities, and achieve their goals (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A character strengths prototype lesson was offered to the Rochester Rotary scholars to gain insights on the optimal execution of the modules.

In the module, the first task is for each scholar to take the VIA Youth Assessment (VIA Institute). Following this, scholars are given the opportunity to share (either with their mentor or peers) a story that highlights one of their signature strengths. This story may include a description of what the scholar was doing, who they were with, and what strengths they were
using. In the second part of the module, the focus is on the further development of a strength of choice (Seligman et al, 2005). The scholar chooses a strength that they want to work on and write down an activity or practice they can engage in to develop that strength. As an example, if the chosen strength is creativity, the scholar may choose to spend a certain amount of time every day working on a creative project, such as painting or writing.

**Module #3: Optimism**

Optimism is an important quality for young children to learn as it can help them develop a positive outlook on life, increase resilience, and cope better with stress and adversity (Seligman, 2006). Research has shown that optimistic children are more likely to experience better health, academic success, and social well-being (Carver et al., 2010). Optimism can be taught through various techniques, such as reframing negative thoughts, focusing on positive experiences, and practicing gratitude (Seligman, 2006). By cultivating optimism, children can learn to approach challenges with a positive attitude, develop a growth mindset, and persist amid obstacles.

This module’s goal is to cultivate optimism and encourage incorporation of an optimistic lifestyle into the scholar’s daily life. This module would start in small groups where each scholar shares a recent challenge that they have encountered. The mentor will encourage them to describe their mindset, specifically whether it was optimistic or pessimistic, based on Dr. Seligman’s definition in *Learned Optimism* (2006). The next part of the module focuses on a practicum of building optimism through strategies such as reframing negative thoughts, practicing gratitude, or visualizing success (Seligman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Carver et al., 2010; Gillham et al., 2011).
Module #4: Resilience

Resilience is a particularly powerful construct for the School No. 8 scholars due to the adversities they face in daily life. Research has shown that resilience is associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as better mental health, academic success, and social functioning (Masten, 2001). Children who learn to be resilient can develop a sense of control over their lives, learn to problem-solve, and develop coping strategies that can help them in the future. Additionally, fostering resilience can help protect children from the negative effects of stress and trauma (Masten, 2012). Parents and educators can promote resilience in children by providing a supportive and nurturing environment, modeling positive coping strategies, and encouraging children to take risks and learn from failures (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

In this module, scholars will first identify their own experiences with resilience through a reflection exercise. Scholars will start by thinking of a difficult situation they have faced and share with their mentors and/or peers about how they coped and overcame the hardship. They will then be given an overview of coping mechanisms that can help deal with stress and adversity. Two potential exercises during this module are 1) identifying and building a support network or 2) identifying and planning ways to incorporate activities that help the students feel relaxed or energized (Reivich & Shatte, 2011).

Module #5: Growth Mindset

All the modules thus far in the program have connected to an overarching goal of cultivating a growth mindset. A growth mindset is the belief that skills and abilities can be developed through hard work, dedication, and perseverance (Dweck, 2006). In adolescents, having a growth mindset is particularly crucial as it enables them to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, and learn from failure (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).
In this last module of Year 1, growth mindset will be discussed in greater detail including an exploration of its importance, an overview of the modules completed thus far, and how to continue to integrate learnings. The session will start out with a discussion of growth mindset and how the scholars believe it can be beneficial. Scholars will then participate in an exercise designed to help reframe failure as a learning opportunity (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This module will end with a reflection session, focusing on insights generated throughout the year, as well as a mini-planning session for the summer to ensure that desired habits cultivated throughout the year are continued through the summer months.

Module #6: Community & Connection

The second module in Year 2 of the curriculum focuses on building community and high-quality connections. High-quality connections are positive interactions that are defined through mutual respect, trust, and support (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Understanding how to build high-quality connections are important for adolescents as they lead to healthy relationships, increased social acumen, as well as more positive emotions (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). It is also useful for scholars to learn that high-quality connections can occur not only with friends, but also with family, teachers, mentors, and other community members.

This module starts with a demonstration of active constructive listening and its counterpart passive destructive listening. There will be a discussion around different types of listening and how they make the speaker/listener feel. Scholars will then practice active-constructive listening and active-constructive responding in small groups (Rashid & Seligman, 2018). A second exercise will be on expressing gratitude to an individual that is not present in the room (Peterson, 2006). Scholars will write a note of appreciation for their support and
connection. These exercises are geared towards building stronger relationships with those in the scholar’s lives.

**Module #7: Meaning**

Adolescents are at a critical stage of development where they are beginning to form their sense of identity, values, and goals for the future. Research has shown that developing a sense of meaning and purpose is essential for adolescent well-being and positive youth development (Damon et al., 2003). Adolescents who experience a sense of purpose have been shown to exhibit higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and motivation to succeed academically and in other areas of life (Hill et al., 2016; Yeager et al., 2014). Additionally, a strong sense of meaning and purpose has been found to act as a protective factor against the development of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues in adolescents (Malin & Liauw, 2017).

The exercise in this module focuses on identifying areas of meaning through the “Best Possible Self” intervention (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). This entails imagining a theoretical future in which the best possible outcomes have come to fruition across a range of domains including work, relationships, and health.

**Module #8: Physical Health**

Recognition of health as a cornerstone of well-being has led to the addition of the health (H) dimension to the PERMA construct of well-being. Health can include factors such as nutrition, exercise, sleep and stress management (Seligman et al., 2013). Adolescents who prioritize physical health are more likely to maintain a healthy weight, have higher energy levels, and experience less stress and anxiety (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Lubans et al., 2016).
In this module, the scholars will be guided through a physical exercise experience such as a yoga class or a fun bootcamp. This is the only module that may require an outside instructor. After this, the scholars will be led through a planning session where they will learn about and establish goals for mindful eating, establishing an exercise routine, and outlining a sleep routine. A group discussion will be held addressing any anticipated barriers to following through on the healthy goals set.

**Module #9: Self-Efficacy**

The last module of the curriculum will focus on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to accomplish specific tasks and achieve goals (Bandura, 1997). Developing self-efficacy is important for adolescents as it can improve academic performance, increase resilience, and promote positive mental health outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Adolescents with high self-efficacy are more likely to take on challenging tasks, persevere in the face of difficulty, and recover quickly from setbacks (Bandura, 1997). Increasing self-efficacy is one of the fundamental goals of this entire curriculum.

In this module, the scholars practice role-playing through scenarios that require self-efficacy, such as public speaking, interviews, or having difficult conversations. Different skills that have been taught throughout the curriculum will be stressed here such as utilizing character strengths, active listening, reframing failure, and visualizing success.

**Curriculum Limitations**

The positive psychology curriculum proposed through these nine modules are designed to promote a growth mindset, increased self-efficacy, and greater overall well-being in the Rochester Rotary scholars. By focusing on evidence-based practices such as positive habit formation, a focus on character strengths, and relationship-building, students can develop skills.
that positively affect all their PERMA dimensions (Seligman, 2011). The application materials which include the student workbook on the character strength module and accompanying mentor guidance are found in Appendix C. A measurement plan is proposed in Appendix D outlining a way in which effectiveness and impact of the program can be determined.

Potential limitations of this curriculum include the possibility of individual differences in learning and engagement styles. A lot of the exercises proposed have a sharing or reflection component which may not be comfortable for some students. It may be challenging for some adolescents to fully engage in the program or commit to making lasting changes in their habits or behaviors. The instability in many of the scholars’ personal lives can make creation of positive habits difficult. To address this, we are proposing that mentors provide a “check-in” between meetings to support students’ adherence to the positive habits they identified at the start of the school year. Additionally, there is an aspect of trust that must be established prior to being able to fully engage in the material. For example, it may be difficult for a student to share a failure in the growth mindset module if they do not feel comfortable in their group.

One particular limitation in applying the recommended interventions is that there is a limited amount of data and empirical research on diverse learners and children living in disadvantaged communities. As the field of positive psychology progresses, we hope that researchers will focus specifically on individuals with these underrepresented demographics. The research gap must be addressed, in order for applications like this one to best serve the needs of individuals and communities. Further, culturally responsive and trained mentors are critical to equitable and informed support. Another limitation to consider is the need to for culturally responsive and trained leaders, so that as students are being assisted and mentored, they are being led by members that can provide a safe and trusting environment. Another consideration is
Rochester Rotary Super Star Scholars

the acceptance and value placed on emotional and mental health learning. In many cases, offerings that address these crucial components of human development are often seen as nice to haves rather than fundamental learning assets. Given the perceived value and limited resources, the priority given to Positive Psychology infused education is jeopardized. Nonetheless, it is in bringing these considerations to light that we believe researchers, policy makers and organizations like Rochester Rotary can aid in closing this gap; In doing so build resilient, strong youth that will grow up to be strong and healthy adults.

Summary

The application of positive psychology principles helps individuals and communities thrive. Based upon our situational analysis, input from Rochester Rotarians, and applicable research, we created a curriculum that assists the student scholars in elevating their academic achievement and overall personal well-being. Despite the challenges that the scholars may face, we are hopeful that Rochester Rotary’s commitment to the School No. 8 Scholarship Program will help the students move forward to attain forthcoming goals. It has been an honor to serve the Rochester Rotary School No. 8 Scholarship Program in our effort to bolster student achievement and uplift well-being of mentors and mentees alike.
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## Appendix A. Proposed Curriculum for Rochester Rotary Scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Module</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Goal &amp; Habit Formation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Growth Mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Goal &amp; Habit Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Community &amp; Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Alternate months may be spent going on field trips with mentors. Positive interventions will be discussed and shared during months when new concepts are not presented.
Appendix B. Detailed Character Strengths Module

A. Introduction

Use a high-interest, multi-media way to introduce the concept of Character Strengths. Consider a video like this one, that provides auditory as well as visual input for students to build a basic understanding of the concept of Character Strengths.

B. Input

Provide students with a tangible visual to dig deeper into the concept, perhaps a handout (there is a “youth” version) like this one. Guide students in a conversational focus on the general concept of Character Strengths:

1. Address the “virtues”
2. Briefly consider each of the “strengths”

C. Application

Have students apply the concept to themselves. Consider a “think, pair, share” approach:

1. Ask students to circle the strengths they perceive within themselves.
2. Rotarian mentors and students can share in pairs their strengths.
3. Students might stand up and circulate amongst each other, sharing their strengths. An alternative or additional way of sharing would be to set up stations, each with devices that are primed to play one-minute clips from popular tv shows or movies. Students can watch the clips in small groups and “strength spot” together.

D. Evaluation

Each student can complete the VIA’s survey and discuss results with mentors. Each
Rotarian mentor can use a handout to guide a conversation with each student about what they think their strengths are, and you can find correlates on the handout. Make space for students’ original self-assessments compared/contrasted with the survey findings.

**E. Review**

Ask students to remember the goals they set in Module #1. Discuss how they might leverage one of their “signature strengths” toward making progress on that goal. Emphasize that everyone has each strength. It’s a question of our strength signature, which we can embrace as well as develop.

**F. Next Steps**

Each Rotarian mentor creates a plan for follow-up with their mentee, according to their sense of what will fit best with the student’s goals, strengths, and areas for growth. One idea might be to create “character strength” slide introductions (like these MAPP students’ slide introductions) to introduce themselves at next month’s meeting.
Appendix C. Application Materials: Character Strength Module

Facilitator Materials

Character Strengths

KNOW YOUR SUPERPOWERS!

This book of power and strength belongs to...

What's best about you?! In the early 2000s, scientists discovered a common set of 24 superpowers that everyone possesses. Even though we all share the same character strengths, each of us is unique in the degree to which we choose to use our special powers.*

*VIA Institute on Character, viacharacter.org/character-strengths
It takes just one person to be present, fair, and supportive. Every child needs one. Rochester Rotary Mentors provide that presence for School No. B Scholarship Students. This MODULE ONE: CHARACTER STRENGTHS booklet is designed to help mentors do what they already do: help kids to be strong and to know their strength. Like mentors, the students have superpowers! Half of this booklet provides pages for students to learn, work, and develop their power! On pages like the ones below, students will interact with concepts during monthly meetings. At the end of each module, students will keep their work!

Lifelong learning is part of a life that is pleasurable, meaningful, and full of psychological richness! Pages like the ones above are resources for mentors’ own learning and application. The lesson plan pages provide quick overviews of each lesson in MODULE ONE: CHARACTER STRENGTHS. There is a link for more resources, lesson plan detail and suggestions, and pages that recommend ways to integrate lessons into monthly field trips with students.

**w i t h  l o v e,**

[Signature]

---

Penn University of Pennsylvania

Rotary Club of Rochester
DATE:
Wednesday, March 15
Monthly Meeting @ School No. 8

MODULE:
CHARACTER STRENGTHS

TOPIC:
Get To Know Your Superpowers!

COMMUNITY CONNECTION:
During opening snacks and circle, tell stories about people in your life who are strong!

MATERIALS:
1) Mentor Positive Intro Slides
2) Crayons, Sharpies, Stickers

ACTIVITIES AND LEARNING:
After opening circle, mentors will share their Positive Introduction Slides. Kids will use writing to savor and immerse in details about the strength of someone they know. Then students will personalize their cover and “Hello, My Name Is” pages. Finally, mentors will work with students to discuss the VIA strength icons and circle some of their own strengths.

EXTENSION AND ENRICHMENT:
Select stationary to bring home, and write gratitude letters detailing the strengths you appreciate in your family, friends, and other VIPs! OPTION: Create your own Positive Intro Slides or Object Share for next meeting!

Click here for lesson details and additional resources!
SUPER POWERS IN ACTION!

ROCHESTER
ROTARY
ACTIVITY
ADVENTURE

COOKING CLASS
Local Authentic Italian Food
HEALTHY HABITS

CHARACTER STRENGTHS
How can you use your superpowers to help you through the challenge of learning to cook?!

Remember to spot strengths in others, while you slurp spaghetti with the Rochester Rotary!
**LESSON PLAN**

**DATE:**
Wednesday, April 13
Monthly Meeting @ School No. 8

**MODULE:**
CHARACTER STRENGTHS

**TOPIC:**
Super Strength Breadth and Depth

**COMMUNITY CONNECTION:**
During opening snacks and circle, reminisce about cooking class! What strengths do our stories showcase about others and also ourselves?

**MATERIALS:**
1) Crayons, Sharpies, Stickers
2) Poster Boards
3) OPTIONAL: Devices, Bling Box

**ACTIVITIES AND LEARNING:**
After opening circle, mentors and students will work on their “STRENGTHS” page. Students will complete the VIA Youth Survey and then use star stickers to identify their Top Five Signature Strengths in workbook. Then students will circulate around to the “Virtues” poster stations, wearing empowering bling, giving hearts, and getting hearts. Finally students will be invited to share Positive Intros/objects/strengths before goal reflection.

**EXTENSION AND ENRICHMENT:**
Set a communication plan with your mentor to use your strengths to make progress on your goals this month! You can also learn more about strengths, collisions, and synergies. Spot them in your life!

**Click here**
for lesson details and additional resources!
Character Strengths
KNOW YOUR SUPERPOWERS!

This book of power and strength belongs to...

What's best about you?! In the early 2000s, scientists discovered a common set of 24 superpowers that everyone possesses. Even though we all share the same character strengths, each of us is unique in the degree to which we choose to use our special powers.*

*VIA Institute on Character, viacharacter.org/character-strengths
SUPER STRENGTH

A person I know with superpowers is ____________

I can see their strength when they ________________

THERE STRENGTHS MATTER TO ME BECAUSE...

Sign Your Name HERE: ______________
What are you doing, when you feel your best? Who are you with, and what are they saying? Sometimes we feel our strongest when we are with other people, and sometimes we are at our best when we are alone. Sometimes we are making things happen when we know our superpowers, and other times the best of who we are is most apparent when we are not doing anything at all. What do you like most about who you are when you feel your best?

Some of my super strengths are...

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

What makes you feel on point? Design and accessorize to show what makes you feel like you shine and sparkle!
Circle your strengths

24 Character Strengths

Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence
Bravery
Creativity
Curiosity
Fairness
Forgiveness
Gratitude
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Judgment
Kindness
Leadership
Love
Love of Learning
Perseverance
Perspective
Prudence
Self-Control
Sense of Meaning
Social Intelligence
Teamwork
Zest

Star Heart
your survey strengths
the strengths your friends and family see in you
We all have character strengths and super powers! Here is WHAT I learned about myself, HOW I will use my new knowledge, and WHY it matters to me and my VIPs!

"Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is Youer than You." --Dr. Seuss
## Rochester Rotary Super Star Scholars

### Goal Update

**Character Strengths**

<table>
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<th>NAME:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Five Superpowers:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Goal</th>
<th>Personal Goal</th>
<th>Relational Goal</th>
<th>Healthy Habit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Think back to your **ANNUAL GOALS**. Write each goal here!

**Strength 1:**

Which strength can you use to make progress on this academic goal? Explain!

**Strength 2:**

Which strength can you use to make progress on this personal goal? Explain!

**Strength 3:**

Which strength can you use to make progress on this relational goal? Explain!

**Strength 4:**

Which strength can you use to make progress on a healthy habit? Explain!

**Strength 5:**

Which strength can you use to make progress on a healthy habit? Explain!
Appendix D. Proposed Measurement Plan

Background

In order to measure the effectiveness of the proposed positive psychology curriculum on the Rochester Rotary scholars, it is important to use a combination of subjective and objective measures so that both student perceptions and objective data can be considered. Self-report measures can be used to measure subjective experiences and the impact of the curriculum on the students. Perspectives of students’ families, teachers, and mentors will be valuable as well. Objective measures may include academic performance, attendance rates or health outcomes. It will be important to establish a baseline measurement prior to the program commencement.

Data Collection

A variety of measures will be used to assess the effectiveness of the proposed positive psychology curriculum. These measures will include:

1. Subjective well-being: This will be assessed using the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being (Kern et al., 2016). Participants will complete these questionnaires before the program begins and at the end of each subsequent academic year.

2. Academic performance: This will be assessed using academic records, including grade point average (GPA), attendance rates, and disciplinary records. Data will be collected from school records before the program begins and at the end of each subsequent academic year.

3. Program feedback: The scholars will fill out a feedback form on the program at the end of each academic year including their perceived benefits and ideas for improvement. As a part of this feedback, students will reflect on the goals they identified at the start of the
year and their progress towards those goals. Graduates of the program will also be asked for feedback to determine curriculum utility and effectiveness.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the data collected, identifying any differences in subjective well-being (through the EPOCH measure) or academic performance. Program feedback will be used qualitatively to modify the curriculum as needed.
Appendix References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pas0000201