

Millard schools use the DAP district wide

The Millard school district in Omaha, NE was first introduced to the Developmental Assets Profile in the school year of 2005. They began by administering it to at risk students and students that had been placed on long-term suspension for drug or alcohol use, figuring that a strength-based approach had the potential to show positive results with this group. It was not long, however, before parents and teachers of other students began asking about the DAP. Since then the DAP has become the snowball gathering strength and speed among schools in Omaha.

“I know my student hasn’t been suspended or anything, but I’d really like to see how my kid matched up with this category or this one...” This was the response of concerned and involved adults to the use of the DAP in schools, says Scott Butler, committee member of the district asset team and assistant principal of Beadle Elementary. Having parents and teachers so interested “made it a lot easier to sell” in terms of pitching the DAP to all schools.

And so this last fall, Millard school district became one of the first in the nation to begin regularly administering the DAP to all 7th, 9th and 11th graders district wide.

Millard uses an online version of the DAP to better be able to alter it slightly to fit the needs and concerns of the students in the district.

“Our kids were asking, ‘who’s going to see these results?’” said Butler. Some of the kids didn’t want teachers or parents to know how they scored on individual questions. What kid wants adults to know if they don’t avoid alcohol or if they don’t resist bad influences? Using their own online version of the DAP allows Millard to block out the answers to individual questions and instead concentrate on the scores in the eight asset categories.

And when they get the results back, schools and students know where their strengths lie and what areas they would like to improve upon. Beadle Elementary scored lower than they wanted in the ‘positive values’ category. The students and teachers decided to develop a service project in response. They also created something called the Top Dog awards, based on the asset category that the school has been promoting that month. Students nominate peers that they think have been good asset builders for the category of the month. Each student writes something positive about the student they nominated on a notecard. The teacher ultimately decides who gets the award for the month. Not only does one student end up getting recognized, but all students get the notecards back that are written about them, giving everyone positive reinforcement for their positive actions. “The kids are getting really excited about giving that feedback to each other,” says Butler.

Asset building activities and programs that spring up out of the DAP vary by school. This last summer each building sent a number of students, teachers, administrators and staff to an asset training offered by Vision Training Associates. These groups formed the core of what would become asset teams in the district, one team per school. Each asset

committee meets once per month and talks about the activities that they would like to plan. All asset decisions get run through the entire asset committee. “When it comes to planning,” says Butler, “we always sit down with the students and look at the DAP results and say, ‘what should we do? Who should we involve in this?’” In the month of November the students planned everything in Beadle elementary around ‘constructive use of time,’ the asset category of the month.

The DAP has given Millard a starting point from which they can begin to engage with assets. “Our kids are pretty familiar with the Developmental Asset framework by now,” says Butler. “They do asset activities everyday in their home rooms.” And all students are affected by the DAP and assets in their school. Perhaps one of the biggest take-aways from the DAP results is this: kids get their results back and then reflect on them, asking, “What are the assets that I’d like to build? How can I go about building those assets?” Each kid makes three big goals a year, and these they share with their parents at student-led conferences.

“What it has done for us,” reports Butler of the DAP,” is that it has started us talking about the whole kid rather than just the academic kid. We used to just talk about academics in schools, but now we’re trying to pay attention to other aspects of a child’s education.” This, for a program that began working with assets only two years ago, is a pretty good start.

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