

The Gallup Student Success Model

Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D., Senior Scientist in Residence

In the last decade, more than 1 million students have used a Gallup tool to identify their strengths or to measure hope, engagement, or wellbeing. The challenge for this decade is to encourage students and educators to use positive student data to develop success plans and practices that result in desirable academic outcomes (i.e., attendance, comprehension, credits earned, GPA, graduation, job placement, and wellbeing).

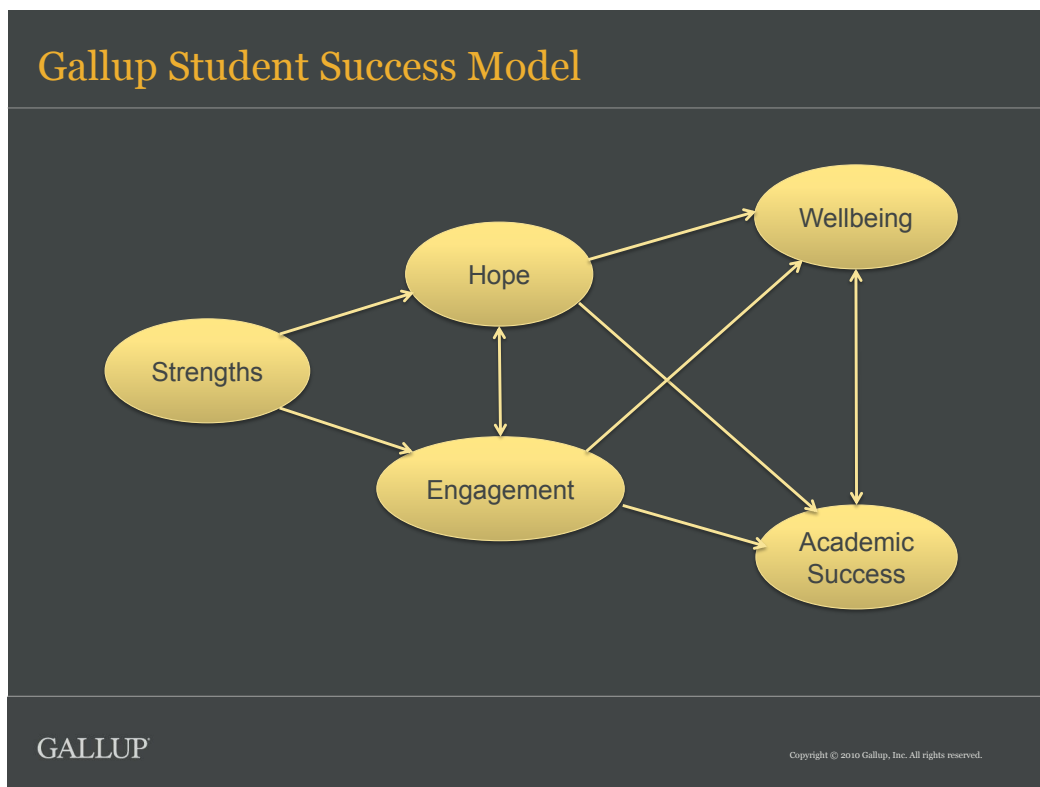
Gallup's efforts to promote student success in preschool, K-12, colleges, and universities have long been guided by a core assumption about people — focusing on what is right with a person will result in more growth than trying

to fix what is wrong. This assumption has been tested and supported and it has yielded additional assumptions about student development that have been empirically examined. The resulting Gallup Student Success Model explains how investing in students' strengths, hope for the future, engagement with school, and wellbeing will lead to outcomes that matter to the students and the institutions.

Student Success Is Determined by Many Factors

Like most life outcomes, student success is a product of many factors. Recognizing that it does not account for all elements that determine academic progress, The Gallup Student Success Model does account for four of the factors that influence student success.

Strengths identification remains as simple as completing an inventory whereas strengths development requires considerable time and effort. Gallup's work with students often begins with measurement of positive personal characteristics. While this measurement can kick start a change or growth process, completion of the measure itself does not constitute a change process. Accordingly, Louis (2008) found that strengths identification created a shift to a fixed mind-set (a belief that



GALLUP

Copyright © 2010 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.

personal abilities are not malleable; Dweck, 1999) whereas strengths development, which takes time and effort (Rath, 2007), did not negatively affect a person's implicit theory about self or change. Other intervention studies point to the link between strengths development and increases in hope and engagement.

Strengths development leads to hope and engagement. Strengths development, often facilitated via small group discussions or brief individual coaching or mentoring sessions, has produced significant increases in hope in high school freshmen (Gallup, 2009) and college students (Gomez, 2008; Lopez, 2009). These findings parallel discoveries that link strengths development to engagement (e.g., see Asplund & Blacksmith, in press). In business units whose managers received some strengths development (typically a one-hour coaching conversation focused on understanding one's strengths) showed significantly more improvement in engagement relative to those units where the manager received no strengths development. Among those employees (non-managers) receiving a strengths development session, engagement also improved significantly relative to employees without a strengths session.

Hope and engagement work independently and interdependently to produce the positive outcomes of wellbeing and academic success. Hopeful students see the future as better than the present, and believe they have the power to make it so. Engaged students are actively involved in and enthusiastic about school. Based on a longitudinal study of hope and engagement in college students (Lopez, Gallagher, & Krieshok, 2011), it appears that a person's thoughts about the future and the conditions in a climate work by themselves and together to foster academic success. Specifically, hope and engagement, account for unique variance in student grades. Together the variables discriminate among groups of students that return to college after the first winter break and those that don't. Hope (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009) and engagement (Harter & Agrawal, 2011) also appear to be necessary but not sufficient for wellbeing.

People with high wellbeing have more success than people with low wellbeing. Wellbeing drives success. Wellbeing, how we think about and experience our lives, tells us how our students are doing today and predicts their success in the future. In an examination of evaluative wellbeing, high school freshmen with high wellbeing earned more credits with a higher GPA than their peers with low wellbeing. Specifically, the typical student with high wellbeing at the beginning of a term earns 10% more credits and a 2.9 GPA (out of 4.0), whereas a typical student with low wellbeing, completing fewer credits, earns a 2.4 (Gallup, 2009).

Regarding experienced wellbeing, most directly measured as positive affect, Lyubomirsky (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) reviewed cross-sectional, experimental, and longitudinal evidence and found that reports of feeling joyful, excited, or pleasant among other positive emotions are predictors of success and numerous behaviors associated with success. In an exploratory study of the experienced wellbeing of high school freshmen, those students who reported they experienced joy and interest yesterday (versus those who had not) had better academic records (Gallup, 2009).

The typical student with high wellbeing at the beginning of a term earns 10% more credits and a 2.9 GPA (out of 4.0), whereas a typical student with low wellbeing, completing fewer credits, earns a 2.4

The Gallup Student Success Model

Strengths development leads to hope and engagement that, in turn, lead to wellbeing and academic success. The model purposefully positions academic success and wellbeing as equally important outcomes. This is consistent with a belief that both are products of sound student development. The

model also suggests that strengths development is the only way to achieve student success, which is not the case. Though strengths measures are accessible to students, ages 10 years old and older, most student success efforts are not currently strengths-based. Note that the findings linking hope, engagement, wellbeing, and academic success hold up in and out of the context of strengths programming.

The Gallup Student Success Model suggests that positive student outcomes are multiply determined and attainable by focusing on what is right with students. The assumptions inherent to the model must be put to the test and the model should be revised based on new data.

Reference

- Asplund, J., & Blacksmith, N. (in press). Productivity through strengths. In K. Cameron & G. Spreitzer (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford.
- Boehm, J. K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Does happiness promote career success? *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16, 101-116.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Gallagher, M. W., & Lopez, S. J. (2009). Positive expectancies and mental health: Identifying the unique contributions of hope and optimism. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4, 548-556.
- Gallup. (2009). *Hope, engagement, and wellbeing as predictors of attendance, credits earned, and GPA in high school freshmen*. Unpublished raw data.
- Gomez, M. (2009). Effects of integrating a strengths-based curriculum into a freshman seminar for at-risk college freshmen. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 70. (UMI No. 3366113).
- Harter, J., & Agrawal, S. (2011, March 30). *Workers in bad jobs have worse wellbeing than jobless*. Retrieved June 6, 2011 from <http://www.gallup.com>.
- Lopez, S. J. (2009). *Strengths development results in hope*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Lopez, S. J., Gallagher, M. W., & Krieshok, T. S. (2011). *The longitudinal study of academic success of college students*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Louis, M. C. (2008). A comparative analysis of the effectiveness of strengths-based curricula in promoting first-year college student success. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 69(06A). (UMI No. 3321378).
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855.
- Rath, T. (2008). *Strengthsfinder 2.0*. New York: Gallup Press.

GALLUP

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.202.715.3045

www.gallup.com