

Transforming Learning: Strengths-Based Schools Bolster Teacher Efficacy and Engage Students



Thrivning Learning Communities (TLC) is a national initiative of Mayerson Academy designed to activate the science of character strengths to build social emotional learning (SEL) competencies and increase performance, learning, and engagement.

TLC DELIVERS PERFORMANCE, ENGAGEMENT, AND LEARNING

In 2011, Durlak, et.al, published a groundbreaking meta-analysis of school-based, K-12 social and emotional learning programs which found these efforts delivered an 11-percentage point gain in academic performance on average for participating students. Mayerson Academy leveraged this research and that of other national leaders to deliver large-scale change in an urban, Midwest school district with the Thriving Learning Communities (TLC) initiative. External research on the program validated the TLC theory of change, indicating that when the program was implemented with fidelity, not only did students experience higher levels of academic performance but they also realized improvements in engagement, attendance, and discipline. (McGrath, 2019)



THE LINK BETWEEN TEACHER EFFICACY AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The reach of TLC has grown considerably in recent years. Studying implementation of the program in the very challenging 2020-21 school year suggests that there is an additional and essential level of impact that TLC is delivering. Research indicates that the program is working to protect against teacher burnout and to inspire students to believe in themselves.

Teacher efficacy is the critical link to buffering against both teachers' and students' adverse experiences. Research indicates that teacher efficacy:

- protects against burnout
- can predict students' sense of self-efficacy and motivation (Midgley et al., 1989)
- can predict achievement outcomes (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Corkett, Hatt, Benevides, 2011)



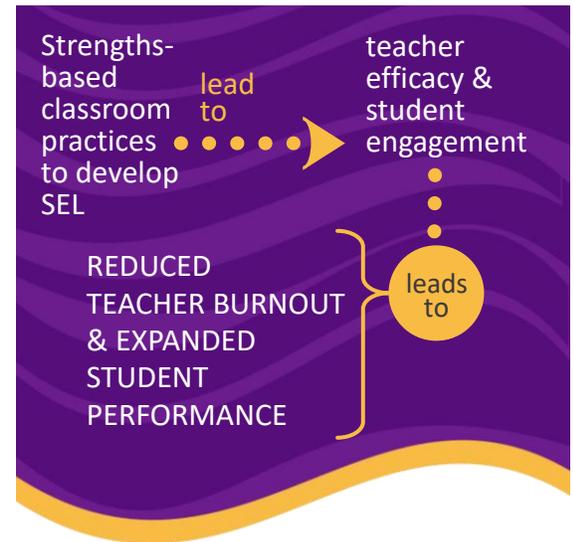
STRENGTHS INCREASE TEACHER EFFICACY

Research on the TLC program indicates that with our unique, strength-based approach to SEL, teachers experience positive shifts in self-efficacy. In a study conducted in Youngstown City Schools, educators in treatment and control schools were administered the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) developed by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001. Four items from the TSES that reflected areas specifically targeted by the TLC program were analyzed individually. These items focused on the teacher's perceived capacity to motivate and calm students, to help students believe they could do well, and to assist families in supporting student's success in school.

TLC teachers saw a significant increase in their belief in their ability to motivate students. Along with the control group teachers, TLC teachers increased in their belief in their ability to calm students. Importantly, while control group teachers' confidence in their capacity to help students believe they could do well in school (student efficacy) and their ability to assist families diminished over the year, the TLC teachers improved in both of these areas.

STRENGTHS INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Along with shifts in teacher efficacy, this same study documented positive shifts in student engagement. Student engagement is linked to a multitude of positive outcome variables including grades, standardized test scores, attendance, post-secondary enrollment, and well-being. Each TLC instructor was asked to complete a Student Engagement Survey (SES) to rate students' engagement during TLC instructional time relative to their other core content classes. Statistical analyses were run to examine changes in the distribution of the teachers' evaluation of students on the four areas of engagement (attention, positive emotion, participation, and use of strengths language) across the four quarters. Overall, student engagement improved across all areas. These improvements were reported for both the TLC and core curriculum time.



WHAT WE KNOW



Earlier research confirms that the combined elements of TLC, including a comprehensive curriculum, Champions Institute and ongoing coaching, have a positive impact on student engagement and performance. Our most recent research, once again, underscores the power of TLC to positively impact student engagement but also includes teacher outcomes, indicating a strong effect on teacher efficacy. What is most remarkable about the study summarized here is the fact it was conducted at a time when all students were learning remotely in both treatment and control schools, returning for the final two months of the school year. It is a strong demonstration that teacher efficacy and student engagement can be positively impacted by the implementation of a strengths-based SEL program despite the extreme challenges brought with the COVID pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year.

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Mayerson Academy is a non-profit consultancy serving schools, non-profits, & for-profit businesses by activating strengths to transform cultures.

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Transforming Workplaces: Catalyzing Strengths to Fuel Engagement, Performance, and Well-being



Strong Cincinnati, a regional initiative of Mayerson Academy, is committed to helping organizations become great places to work. Learning institutes, customized consulting, and a vibrant network are expertly designed and grounded in the science of character strengths to deliver increased work engagement, job performance, and personal well-being. After two years of working with nearly fifty organizations, external research findings have confirmed the transformative impact of Strong Cincinnati on individuals, teams, and organizations.

INCREASED PERFORMANCE BY KNOWING STRENGTHS

More than 90% of Strong Cincinnati participants now use and apply their character strengths and achieve the results they want on a weekly basis. This is a key finding in that less than half of the general population is reported to know their strengths (McQuaid, 2019) and that individuals who activate their strengths regularly at work are 18 times more likely to be flourishing (Hone, 2015).

“ *Understanding and using my character strengths has empowered me to lead more courageously, and to speak honestly and contribute more effectively to my team. I feel better about my place in the organization.* ”

BETTER TEAMS BY SEEING STRENGTHS

More than 70% of participants have:

- acknowledged strengths in their colleagues
- been recognized by colleagues for their strengths on a weekly basis
- indicated that focusing on character strengths has had a positive impact on their team’s ability to get along, work together, and feel connected

In fact, as strengths-use went up, work relationship scores were more than twice as likely to increase as well - a critical factor in fostering a sense of belonging, which fuels inclusive and equitable cultures.

“ *Better understanding the strengths of the members of our team has made projects more fun to do together and helps us achieve results we might otherwise not have been able to achieve.* ”

POSITIVE CULTURES WITH STRENGTH-BASED FEEDBACK

The majority of Strong Cincinnati participants experienced strengths recognition from their managers. While research suggests that most of today’s workforce rarely, if ever, receive positive feedback from their leaders, the research is also clear that positive manager feedback plays a powerful role in creating trust, loyalty, and increased performance. In addition to direct-report feedback, 80% of the participants indicated character strengths are highlighted across their organization on a weekly basis.

Strategic interventions and intentional culture development are key to growing and sustaining these practices and creating positive impact. Encouragingly, most participants indicate that this is exactly what’s happening in their organizations.

“ *It has opened up opportunities for recognizing and celebrating our successes rather than focusing on only the negative things that didn't go as planned. I feel like we congratulate each other more, which helps overall with office morale and sense of meaning/fulfillment.* ”

INDIVIDUALS: KNOWING STRENGTHS

90%
Know their strengths

which leads to

achievement & flourishing

TEAMS: SEEING STRENGTHS

70%
Receive and give strengths recognition

which leads to

better relationships & inclusive culture

LEADERS: SEEING STRENGTHS

50+%
Receive positive manager feedback

which leads to

trust, loyalty, & increased performance

ENGAGED, HIGH-PERFORMING WORKPLACES BY APPLYING STRENGTHS

As individuals and teams know, see, and apply their strengths, organizations are changing. Increased communications, better relationships and positive feedback have all likely contributed to participants indicating an increased enjoyment coming to work, which is true for about half of all participants. This may also stem from the fact that the vast majority of respondents indicated they experienced a greater sense of purpose in their work, are more motivated to do well, and have been more successful in achieving objectives, as a result of participating in Strong Cincinnati. In fact, as strengths-use rose, work engagement and work performance scores were at least two times more likely to rise as well.

ORGANIZATIONS: APPLYING STRENGTHS

Enjoyment,
purpose, and
motivation
increase

2x
more
likely to
experience

engagement, performance
& well-being

“ This has made a huge impact on our organization. We were in a very difficult place with the agency, and this allowed us to start to shift our team by focusing on the positive strengths that we each bring to the agency. This made everyone feel like they were making a difference.

Finally, as we think about the potential for business and work to play a positive role in shaping peoples' lives, it is very encouraging to know that the majority of participants indicated that their lives felt fuller and that using their character strengths has helped them thrive in all areas of their lives. More specifically, for every single unit increase in frequency of strengths-use, a respondent was 2.5 times more likely to show an increase in their well-being score. Like many of the above results, this held true regardless of several demographic factors, especially, age, gender, race/ethnicity, job function, length of employment, and organization size.



WHAT WE KNOW

Research has confirmed the combined elements of Strong Cincinnati, including cohort-based learning through the Strong Cincinnati Institute, customized organizational consulting, and the Strong Cincinnati Network deliver powerful results. The link between strengths-use and increased performance, engagement, and overall well-being has been shown to be statistically significant, with moderately large effects for individuals, teams, and organizations. Given a successful pilot, early growth, and a proven theory of change, Strong Cincinnati is well-positioned to scale strengths-based change to a wide audience.

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