

***Resiliency In Action Training & Publications***

*Nan Henderson, M.S.W.*

800-440-5171/ [www.resiliency.com](http://www.resiliency.com)

# ***Unlocking the Power of RESILIENCY...***

**in youth, schools, adults, families, & communities**

**“...can be defined as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social and academic competence despite exposure to severe stress... Or simply the stress of today’s world.”**

From Resiliency In Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators  
by Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein

**“...is about bouncing back from problems and stuff with more power and more smarts.”**

--“Sean” (15-year old high school student)

**“...is an innate self-righting and transcending ability within all children, youth, adults, organizations, and communities.”**

From “The Philosophy of Resiliency In Action, Inc.

--Nan Henderson, Bonnie Benard, Nancy Sharp-Light

## ***What are "protective factors" ?***

**"Many adolescents [people] who seem to be at high risk nevertheless do not succumb to risk behavior, or get less involved in it than their peers or seem to abandon it more rapidly than others do.**

**"A likely answer [as to why this is true] is that there was indeed exposure to and experience of risk, *but that it was countered by exposure to and experience of protection.*"**

**"Protective factors...moderate, buffer, insulate against and thereby do mitigate the impact of risk on adolescent [child, and overall human] behavior development."**

**--RICHARD JESSOR, PH.D., INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE,  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO**

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## ***The Resiliency Chart***

Name of someone (aged 5 – 30) that you are concerned about \_\_\_\_\_

# **PERSONAL RESILIENCY BUILDERS**

## **Individual Protective Factors that Facilitate Resiliency**

**Relationships -- Sociability/ability to be a friend/ability to form positive relationships**

**Service -- Gives of self in service to others or a cause**

**Life Skills -- Uses life skills, including good decision-making, assertiveness, and impulse control**

**Humor -- Has a good sense of humor**

**Inner Direction -- Bases choices/decisions on internal evaluation (internal locus of control)**

**Perceptiveness -- Insightful understanding of people and situations**

**Independence -- "Adaptive" distancing from unhealthy people and situations/autonomy**

**Positive View of Personal Future -- Expects a positive future (Optimism)**

**Flexibility -- Can adjust to change; can bend as necessary to positively cope with situations**

**Love of Learning -- Capacity for & connection to learning**

**Self-motivation -- Internal initiative, inner motivation**

**Competence -- Is "good at something"/personal competence**

**Self-Worth -- Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence**

**Spirituality -- Personal faith in something greater**

**Perseverance -- Keeps on despite difficulty; doesn't give up**

**Creativity -- Expresses self through artistic endeavor, or in other creative ways**

## **THE RESEARCH OF EMMY WERNER AND RUTH SMITH**

1. They began studying all the children born on Kauai in 1955--700 babies.
2. 1/3 of these children were considered "high risk" due to multiple risk factors at birth.
3. Of these "high risk" children, 70 seemed "invulnerable" to the risk--developed no problems.

### **Two main reasons for this "invulnerability" were identified:**

They were born with outgoing, social dispositions.  
They therefore were able to recruit several sources of support for themselves.

4. The other 2/3 of the "high risk" group did develop problems, but the majority were doing well by their mid-30s by their own and others' reports, psychological tests, and community records (5/6 of the original "high risk" group, 166 of 200, had therefore "bounced back").

### **How did this process of "bouncing back" happen?**

They told researchers that someone along the way reached out with the messages: "You matter" and "It doesn't matter what you have done in the past". Sources of this support, other than family members, were most often neighbors, teachers, and informal youth workers.

The person was more important than the program.

The programs that assisted most provided support similar to an extended family.

The group that bounced back from having problems also developed some kind of competence

**"Our findings and those by other American and European investigators with a life-span perspective suggest that these buffers [protective factors] make a more profound impact on the life course of children who grow up under adverse conditions than do specific risk factors or stressful life events. They appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical, and historical boundaries. Most of all, they offer us a more optimistic outlook than the perspective that can be gleaned from the literature on the negative consequences of perinatal trauma, caregiving deficits, and chronic poverty. They provide us with a corrective lens--an awareness of the self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult development under all but the most persistent adverse circumstances."**

**--Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith, *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, 1992**

## **ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY BUILDERS**

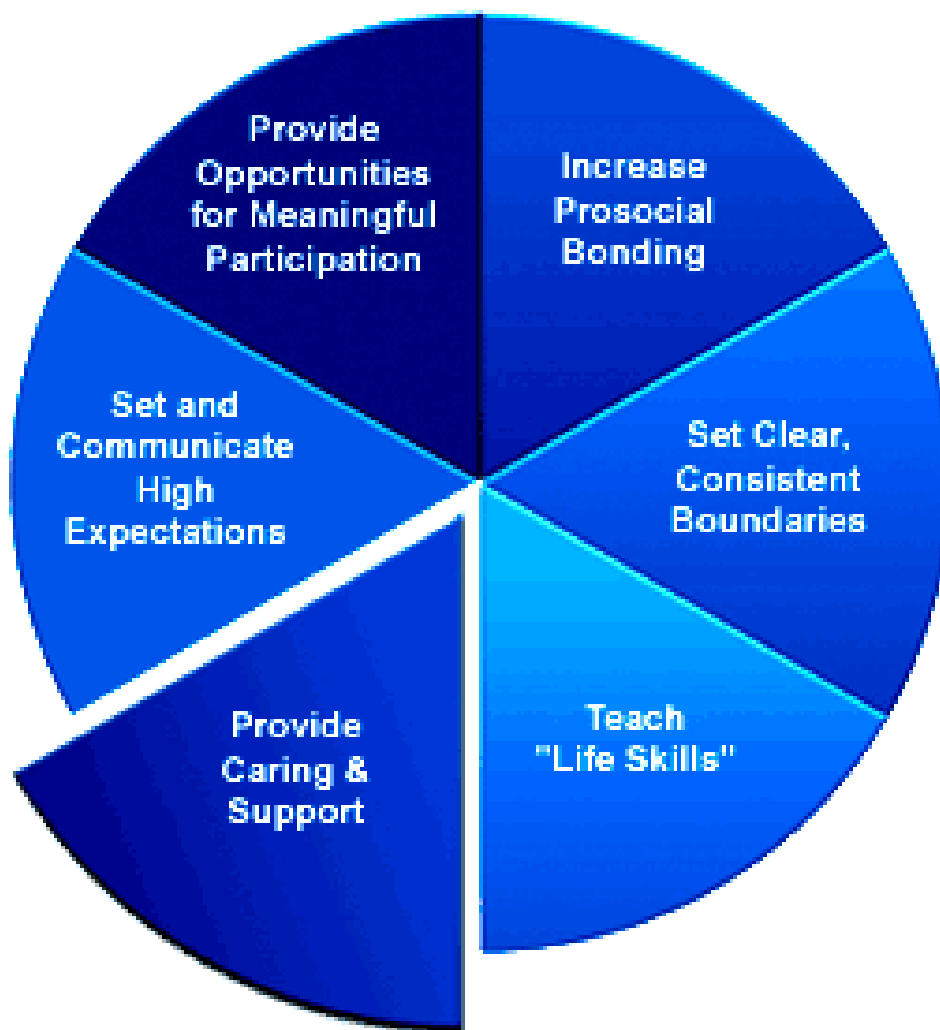
**Protective Factors in Families, Schools, Communities, and Peer Groups  
that Foster Resiliency**

- \* Promotes close bonds**
- \* Values and encourages education**
- \* Uses high warmth/low criticism style of interaction**
- \* Sets and enforces clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws)**
- \* Encourages supportive relationships with many caring others**
- \* Promotes sharing of responsibilities, service to others, "required helpfulness"**
- \* Provides access to resources for meeting basic needs of housing, employment, health care, etc.**
- \* Expresses high, and realistic, expectations for success**
- \* Encourages goal-setting and mastery**
- \* Encourages pro-social development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation)**
- \* Provides leadership, decision-making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation**
- \* Appreciates, develops, and offers opportunity to share the unique talents/gifts of each individual**

(Richardson et al.,1990, Benard, 1991, Werner & Smith, 1992, Hawkins et al.,1992, Wolin & Wolin, 1993)

Adapted from the book, *Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators* by Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein, published by Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA (2003, revised ed.).

## **The Resiliency Wheel**





# **THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT STEPS TO FOSTERING RESILIENCY: APPT**

## **1. ATTITUDE -- The Resiliency Attitude**

**“You matter to me...”**

**“I am not going to judge you based on your past...”**

**“I believe in your capacity to overcome...”**

**“What is right with you is more powerful than anything  
that is wrong with you....”**

## **2. PERSPECTIVE OF STRENGTHS -- Work from a Strengths Perspective**

**Use “The Resiliency Chart” T-chart, formally and  
informally**

**Ask: What is on the strengths side of the chart that can  
be used to intervene with problems**

**Teach people about their strengths: name them, share  
how they are being used, suggest how they can be  
used in the future**

## **3. Create a PROTECTIVE WEB -- Use the Resiliency Wheel**

**(as a web around each person, family, organization,  
community—or yourself)**

## **4. TAKE TIME -- Persist: Don’t Give Up!**

**“Mind these three: TTT; hear their chime: Things Take Time!”**

**—Emmy Werner, Ph.D.**

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### **ACTIVITIES FOR "DISCOVERING AND CELEBRATING YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCY"**

*The following activities can be worked into presentations to any audience, including students.*

*[Note: Individuals need at least a basic understanding of the definition of resiliency and protective factors to do the following activities. Use handout of "Personal Resiliency Builders" for activities.]*

#### **1. WHAT'S IN MY WALLET**

Have participants pair up with one person they do not know, and sit knee to knee. Instruct them to show their partner one thing they have in their purse or wallet that is connected in some way to their personal resiliency, and explain how it connects.

#### **2. NAMING OTHERS' RESILIENCY**

Have participants move to groups of four (pairs connect with other pairs who have done "What's In My Wallet" or this activity can stand alone with groups where everyone knows each other, such as a staff or class). Each person must introduce his/her partner by identifying at least one personal resiliency builder he or she has identified in his/her partner (from the list on the HANDOUT on Personal Resiliency Builders) and share how they have observed this resiliency builder in the partner.

#### **3. WHO AND WHAT MADE ME RESILIENT?**

In groups of four, have participants share answers to these questions:  
Who and What made me Resilient? How did they do it?  
Who and What keeps me Resilient now? How?

#### **4. TOP RESILIENCY BUILDERS**

Ask each participant to look down the list of personal resiliency builders, identifying the top three they use when they are facing stress or crisis. (Make the point that all of us lean towards a few of these based on our personality type and life experiences.) Tell the participants to raise their hands as you call out each of the resiliency builders. Using an Overhead of the list of Personal Resiliency Builders, note the number for each.

#### **5. USING RESILIENCY BUILDERS**

Have participants move to groups of eight, and take turns introducing themselves to one another by sharing their top three resiliency builders and a time they used one of them.

#### **6. ADDING TO OUR RESILIENCY BUILDERS**

Have participants, in groups of eight, share one personal resiliency builder referring to the Handout on Personal Resiliency Builders) that they are working on, or think they should work on, and ideas about how to go about it.

#### **7. RESILIENCY BLIZZARD**

Have participants work as a large group, or stay in groups of eight: Instruct each person in the group to write down on a scrap of paper a sentence conveys a message they would like to receive more often that would help them feel more resilient. When they are finished, have participants throw their papers in the middle of the group. Each person should then pick a paper not their own and read it aloud to their group (without comment). Groups should then discuss any common theme they heard.

#### **8. REFLECTING UPON RESILIENCY**

At the conclusion of the activities (or the end of a resiliency presentation) ask::

1. Do you feel more resilient than you did at the beginning of these activities?
2. If so, how does this resiliency feel inside of you?
3. How did it happen?
4. Do you feel more able to successfully cope with a problem or make a change?
5. What does this mean for the work you do? For your life?

#### **9. DRAWING RESILIENCY**

Have participants use crayons and paper that you provide to draw their representation of what resiliency looks like/feels like inside of them. Have them share these drawings in their groups of eight. Display these drawings in a location where all training participants can view them.

# The Resiliency Quiz

by Nan Henderson, M.S.W. (reprinted from [www.resiliency.com](http://www.resiliency.com))  
©, 2004, 2007 Resiliency In Action, Inc. (Copies can be made for educational purposes only)

*I developed this quiz for anyone—teens, adults, elders—to assess and strengthen the resiliency building conditions in their lives. Use it for yourself or use it as a tool to help others you care about build their resiliency.*

## PART ONE:

Do you have the conditions in your life that research shows help people to be resilient?

People bounce back from tragedy, trauma, risks, and stress by having the following “protective” conditions in their lives. The more times you answer yes (below), the greater the chances you can bounce back from your life’s problems “with more power and more smarts.” And doing that is a sure way to increase self-esteem.

*Answer yes or no to the following. Celebrate your “yes” answers and decide how you can change your “no” answers to “yes.” (You can also answer “sometimes” if that is more accurate than just “yes” or “no”.)*

### 1. Caring and Support

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have several people in my life who give me unconditional love, nonjudgmental listening, and who I know are “there for me.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am involved in a school, work, faith, or other group where I feel cared for and valued.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I treat myself with kindness and compassion, and take time to nurture myself (including eating right and getting enough sleep and exercise).

### 2. High Expectations for Success

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have several people in my life who let me know they believe in my ability to succeed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get the message “You can succeed,” at my work or school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I believe in myself most of the time, and generally give myself positive messages about my ability to accomplish my goals—even when I encounter difficulties.

### 3. Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

- \_\_\_\_\_ My voice (opinion) and choice (what I want) is heard and valued in my close personal relationships.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My opinions and ideas are listened to and respected at my work or school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I volunteer to help others or a cause in my community, faith organization, or school.

### 4. Positive Bonds

- \_\_\_\_\_ I am involved in one or more positive after-work or after-school hobbies or activities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I participate in one or more groups (such as a club, faith community, or sports team) outside of work or school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel “close to” most people at my work or school.

### 5. Clear and Consistent Boundaries

- \_\_\_\_\_ Most of my relationships with friends and family members have clear, healthy boundaries (which include mutual respect, personal autonomy, and each person in the relationship both giving and receiving).
- \_\_\_\_\_ I experience clear, consistent expectations and rules at my work or in my school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I set and maintain healthy boundaries for myself by standing up for myself, not letting others take advantage of me, and saying “no” when I need to.

### 6. Life Skills

- \_\_\_\_\_ I have (and use) good listening, honest communication, and healthy conflict resolution skills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have the training and skills I need to do my job well, or all the skills I need to do well in school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I know how to set a goal and take the steps to achieve it.

## **PART TWO:**

People also successfully overcome life difficulties by drawing upon internal qualities that research has shown are particularly helpful when encountering a crisis, major stressor, or trauma.

The following list can be thought of as a “personal resiliency builder” menu. *No one has everything on this list.* When “the going gets tough” you probably have three or four of these qualities that you use most naturally and most often.

It is helpful to know which are your primary resiliency builders; how have you used them in the past; and how can you use them to overcome the present challenges in your life.

You can also decide to add one or two of these to your “resiliency-builder” menu, if you think they would be useful for you.

### **PERSONAL RESILIENCY BUILDERS** **Individual Qualities that Facilitate Resiliency**

*Put a + by the top three or four resiliency builders you use most often. Ask yourself how you have used these in the past or currently use them. Think of how you can best apply these resiliency builders to current life problems, crises, or stressors.*

*(Optional) You can then put a \* by one or two resiliency builders you think you should add to your personal repertoire.*

- \* Relationships -- Sociability/ability to be a friend/ability to form positive relationships
- \* Service -- Giving of yourself to help other people; animals; organizations; and/or social causes
- \* Humor -- Having and using a good sense of humor
- \* Inner Direction -- Basing choices/decisions on internal evaluation (internal locus of control)
- \* Perceptiveness -- Insightful understanding of people and situations
- \* Independence -- "Adaptive" distancing from unhealthy people and situations/autonomy
- \* Positive View of Personal Future -- Optimism; expecting a positive future
- \* Flexibility -- Can adjust to change; can bend as necessary to positively cope with situations
- \* Love of Learning -- Capacity for and connection to learning
- \* Self-motivation -- Internal initiative and positive motivation from within
- \* Competence -- Being "good at something"/personal competence
- \* Self-Worth -- Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence
- \* Spirituality -- Personal faith in something greater
- \* Perseverance -- Keeping on despite difficulty; doesn't give up
- \* Creativity -- Expressing yourself through artistic endeavor, or through other means of creativity

### **You Can Best Help Yourself or Someone Else Be More Resilient by...**

1. Communicating the Resiliency Attitude: “What is right with you is more powerful than anything wrong...”
2. Focusing on the person’s strengths more than problems and weaknesses, and asking “How can these strengths be used to overcome problems?” One way to do this is to help yourself or another identify and best utilize top personal resiliency builders listed in The Resiliency Quiz Part Two.
3. Providing for yourself or another the conditions listed in The Resiliency Quiz Part One.
4. Having patience...successfully bouncing back from a significant trauma or crisis takes time.

*Nan Henderson, M.S.W. is an international speaker, writer, and president of Resiliency In Action, a publishing and training company in Southern CA., which she cofounded in 1996 to “redirect the national obsession with risks and weakness to embracing the reality and power of human resiliency.” She has authored/edited several articles/books on fostering resiliency, including Resiliency In Action: Practical Ideas for Overcoming Risks and Building Strengths in Youth, Families, and Communities and Resiliency In Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators. ([nhenderson@resiliency.com](mailto:nhenderson@resiliency.com); 800-440-5171)*

## **Questions for Teaching Youth about their Resiliency (also for use with adults and families!)**

by Nan Henderson, M.S.W.

*These questions can be used in a large group discussion. However, depending on the characteristics of the group, often it is more effective for students to pair up or work in groups to answer each question and then come back for a larger group discussion.*

1. If resiliency is defined as “the ability to bounce back from, and successfully overcome risks and adversity,” why are you a “resilient” person?
2. What are some of the struggles, challenges, difficulties you have faced in the past (or currently face). Go into as much detail as you feel like sharing.
3. Share how you overcame these difficulties...
  - A. What did you DO?
  - B. What BELIEFS about yourself and others guided you?
  - C. WHO helped you?
  - D. HOW did they help?
  - E. WHAT else helped you?
4. How can you use these same things now or in the future in dealing with problems (or the current problem)? What can you do that worked in a similar situation in the past? Who can you go to for support or more information? Is there a way to maintain a greater access to these individuals?

Is there a place or another kind of resource that would help? How can you access it?

5. Can you connect the personal ways you have overcome problems to the list of resiliency builders that research studies have shown help people overcome problems? (Share both individual and environmental lists of resiliency builders.)

Can you think of other times/ways you have used your resiliency builders?

6. What would you tell another kid (person) who was going through your situation?}or  
What advice do you have for other kids going through some of the problems and difficulties you have gone through?
7. What advice do you have for adults trying to help kids to be “resilient”?
8. How well are adults (or your organization) providing the six environmental resiliency builders (refer to  
part one of The Resiliency Quiz) or to The Resiliency Wheel? What is provided well?  
What needs to be better?
9. What barriers do you think stand in the way of kids being more resilient (in your school, or family, or church, or community)? What ideas do you have about how to change these barriers?

# Gallup Research Shows the (Underestimated) Power of Strengths

by Nan Henderson, M.S.W.

*This article is reprinted from the on-line newsletter, Resiliency In Action News To Use, and is available to download at no charge at [www.resiliency.com](http://www.resiliency.com).*

Gallup has been researching what leads to human success for the past 30 years, surveying almost 200,000 people working in thousands of "business units" around the world. The research has also involved conducting more than two million interviews with "the best" of the world's professions—including teachers, doctors, lawyers, salespeople, soldiers, nurses, housekeepers, pastors, and executives.

Gallup's results challenge common assumptions about what contributes to life success.

## Key findings are:

- Success occurs in individuals' lives because they grow in the areas of their strengths, rather than obsessing about and trying to repair their weaknesses. While it may be necessary at times to "manage" a weakness, most of our attention should be focused on growing strengths.
- People develop their strengths by first identifying their natural "talents", then learning information and building skills to maximize them.
- In all countries where individuals were surveyed, strengths were overlooked, taken for granted, and underestimated.
- The most productive, satisfied employees are those who report they have "an opportunity to do what I do best" every day. But only 20 percent of those surveyed said they have this opportunity.

These findings are reported in the book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* by Gallup Executives Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton. What relevance does this research have for educators, parents, and social service providers? The authors state that strengths are more powerful than weaknesses—a finding very connected to the research on human resiliency.

School, they suggest, should be "a focused hunt for a child's areas of greatest potential" (p.31). "The keystone of high achievement and happiness is exercising your strengths" rather than obsessing on weaknesses, notes resiliency researcher Martin Seligmann, Ph.D., past president of the American Psychological Association, (on the back cover of the book). While this "building on strengths" approach is too seldom prevalent in schools, Buckingham and Clifton note this "building-on-strengths" focus is also not the norm in most corporations. They report that it is, however, something "the most successful managers" do.

Though the book was written primarily for a business audience, most teachers, parents, and counselors can also benefit from the suggestions on how to use a strengths approach to maximize life success. These are summarized below.

## **How to Put the Strengths Approach Into Practice: Suggestions from *Now, Discover Your Strengths***

1. Ask yourself or those you are trying to help, "What are your strengths?" "What one, two, or three things do you (or could you) do better than most people?" "Where can your strengths take you?" "What do you need to maximize them?"
2. Any or all of the following clues can be used to help yourself or others identify innate talents that can be developed into strengths:
  - Yearnings that "exert a consistent pull" (a desire to write, paint, or play a sport, for example);
  - Experiencing "rapid learning" in the context of a new job, challenge, or environment—immediately your brain seems to light up as if a whole bank of switches were suddenly flicked to 'on' (p. 72);
  - Identifying positive activities that bring you psychological strength and satisfaction.

Though some weaknesses need "managing", most of your personal and professional development (or the development of others) should focus on acquiring knowledge or skills that will build strengths. This is the place of "each person's greatest room for growth (p.8)."

## **“Amazing” Classroom Results from Using “the Strengths Approach”**

I received the following letter from a sixth grade teacher in Riverside, CA, who decided (after attending a resiliency training) to put the “building on strengths” approach into practice with her “very difficult group of students”.

January 21, 2002

Dear Nan:

I was teaching a very difficult group of sixth graders last year and was running out of energy and hope. [I attended your resiliency] training, which gave me some new inspiration, and I took the tools from that day and trained my whole class. I had them go through the list of personal resiliency factors from the training [see list below] looking for their top three. We discussed them beforehand, and talked about how each might play a factor in helping them to bounce back from difficulties in their lives.

I teach in a low-income neighborhood with many gang involvement opportunities. I was unsure of the impact this little exercise would have. I had several students whose initial response was, "Ya, right. I don't have any of these!" However, after a few days of class discussion, assignments to share with parents, and one-on-one time, every student had chosen at least two that they already had. We then discussed how to make them stronger, and [how to] choose one or two more to work on in the coming year.

My classroom became a much different place. I firmly believe that looking at resiliency had a huge part in that. Before the training, I was focusing on what was wrong with my class. After our work together, each student had at least two "strengths" or as one student put it, "I have two things I do right!"

This same student was a huge behavioral challenge for me. I was so fearful of her entering Middle School. As of the last time we spoke, she was each of her teachers' favorite student! She sits right in front, and is getting high marks. Her SAT9 scores (that ever important academic component) went up 259 points overall! Another student who was always getting in fights is the student who is welcoming new students to school, and is taking all her friends to church!

The trick, I believe, was in focusing on what the individual students already had going for them. Now I am about ready to work with this year's class. I waited till I felt like I would be able to pick out strengths for each one. I can't wait to see the results! By the way, the rest of my class from last year is doing great as well. They were an academically low-functioning group, and many of them are on the honor roll this year! The next step I would like to take is to meet with many of them, to see if their resiliency traits have grown, and if they have added more to their list.

I am very grateful for the training, and the talks we had that day. I am hoping to attend a Training of Trainers soon. I feel that Resiliency is the missing piece in the Asset puzzle, and I will begin sharing about resiliency in staff meetings once a month this February. My colleagues [have] actually asked me to tell them more! It seems most teachers are tired of the negative messages we are always hearing.

This is a long thanks to let you know that your message made a difference in my teaching and in the lives of my students.

Sincerely,

Keira Flionis  
6th Grade Teacher,  
Rosemary Kennedy Elementary  
Alvord Unified School District,  
Riverside, CA

P.S. Thanks, too, for making The Resiliency Quiz available or go to [www.resiliency.com](http://www.resiliency.com) for a copy]. With a few changes, I will be using it with my students this year, as well as with the staff.



## References

Buckingham, M. & Clifton, D. (2001). *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. New York: The Free Press.

Henderson, N. (2002). *The Resiliency Quiz*. Ojai, CA: Resiliency In Action.

### **Take the Gallup StrengthsFinder Survey On-Line and Access Additional Resources**

Since the publication of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Gallup has also developed websites devoted to helping young people and adults identify their strengths, and to help schools become strengths-based organizations.

The strengths survey is available (for a fee) at [www.StrengthsQuest.com](http://www.StrengthsQuest.com). Gallup states that more than 2 million people worldwide have taken this scientifically developed and tested instrument. A personalized profile is immediately generated after taking the assessment on-line that identifies five top strengths of the person who takes the survey. This website also has numerous free resources, including articles, curriculum, research studies, and activities.

Gallup's website for educators can be accessed by going to [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com), and clicking on "Education Division." There, educators can access Gallup's program for students, ages 10 – 14 called StrengthsExplorer, and a program for older high school students called StrengthsSpotlight. Numerous resources for educators are available at this website as well.