



Top 10 Questions

About the Developmental
Assets & Student Success Pilot
Program in El Salvador

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

FHI 360 facilitated the Developmental Assets & Student Success Pilot Program as part of the [Education for Children and Youth Program \(ECYP\)](#) to improve outcomes for lower secondary students. ECYP was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by FHI 360 along with local partners. This document provides answers to the top 10 most commonly asked questions about the implementation and impact of the Pilot Program.

1. WHEN AND WHERE WAS THE PILOT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTED?

The Developmental Assets and Student Success Pilot Program was implemented from January to November 2015 in eight lower secondary schools serving more than 1,000 students in grades 7-9 in Sonsonate, El Salvador. All eight schools were part of the same school network in Sonsonate.

2. WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM?

The purpose of the Pilot Program was to transform mindsets about youth and strengthen practices of lower secondary educators in schools with high dropout rates, to keep more students on track for success. To fulfill this purpose, the Pilot Program focused on two main objectives: (1) develop a local approach for integrating a positive youth development¹ (PYD) framework into lower secondary grades so that students are better prepared for high school and post-secondary success, and (2) introduce systems and structures to help schools lay the groundwork for increasing high school graduation rates through FHI 360's dropout-prevention model, *Indicators for Success*, by reinterpreting the existing research on early warning systems through a strength-based lens. To meet these objectives, FHI 360 introduced evidence-based dropout prevention strategies to educators and Ministry of Education (MINED) staff by adapting methods that FHI 360 has successfully implemented in middle schools located in high-risk communities in the United States.

Since the Pilot Program was implemented over the course of one academic year, its purpose was not to immediately lower school dropout rates, but instead, to lay the necessary groundwork for preventing school dropout in the long-run by building the capacity of educators to continue dropout prevention strategies in the future.

To promote sustainability of Pilot Program methods and activities, the FHI 360 team built the capacity of over 25 local implementing partner representatives through three training workshops in 2015, sharing concepts, tools, and methodologies and identifying connections between the Pilot Program and other ECYP activities.

3. WHAT ARE THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM?

A PYD approach to building students' developmental assets. By integrating a PYD approach into the formal school setting, the Pilot Program empowered schools to support students' non-cognitive development as well as their academic growth. The Pilot Program incorporated the [Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents](#) framework to make the PYD work in schools more tangible and concrete, and to help Salvadoran educators better nurture the building blocks of healthy development. The Search Institute® has been a leader in PYD for more than 50 years, and FHI 360's domestic education work has incorporated their research into a wide range of school-improvement and youth development initiatives to help strengthen youth's developmental assets—the external supports and the internal characteristics that young people need to succeed in school and life.

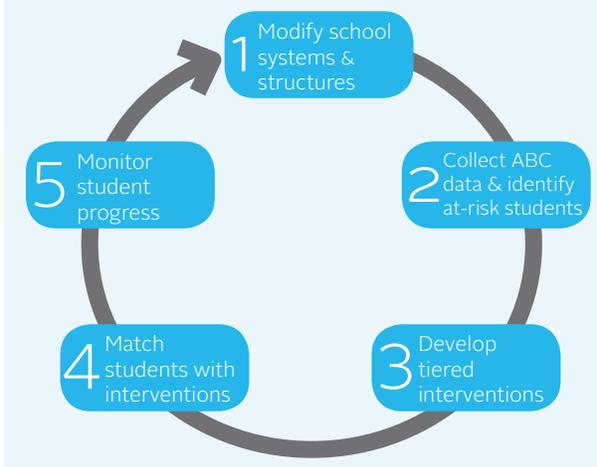
Research shows that the more of these developmental assets students have, the more likely they are to stay in school and thrive.

¹ The USAID Youth Power program uses the following definition for PYD, which is both a philosophy and an approach to adolescent development: "Positive youth development engages youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems."

Developmental asset-building is integral in transforming adults' mindsets to see youth as resources to be developed, and in helping them understand the urgency of ensuring that students stay in school. This is especially critical in the Salvadoran context, where youth are often viewed as a problem to be solved rather than a resource to be nurtured.

Indicators for Success. The second half of the Pilot Program focused on introducing the *Indicators for Success*², FHI 360's secondary school readiness and dropout prevention framework, which organizes resources and interventions to help students succeed in four critical areas—Attendance, Behavior, and Course grades in mathematics and language (ABC Indicators). U.S.-based research shows that middle school students who perform poorly in any of these four indicators are likely to drop out before graduating from high school.³ Thus, these four areas have become known as early warning indicators.⁴

FIGURE 1. INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS FRAMEWORK



Collecting and analyzing ABC indicator data allows school staff to track student progress, identify students who are at risk of dropping out, and provide supports and interventions to help students stay on track to high school graduation. *Indicators for Success* organizes supports and interventions into three tiers: Tier 1 encompasses universal, proactive supports for all students, Tier 2 is composed of targeted interventions for 10-20% of students who are struggling, and Tier 3 is focused

on intensive interventions for 5-10% of students who need individualized support. *Indicators for Success* is organized into five phases; the sequence of implementation can be customized to meet the needs of individual schools. Figure 1 illustrates the order in which the Pilot Program implemented the framework.

Connecting PYD and Indicators for Success.

PYD is an example of an *Indicators for Success* Tier 1, universal support that works to modify school systems and structures. PYD helps to establish expectations for positive behavior and allows schools to recognize and address the human element and relationship-building that must accompany dropout prevention work. Dropout prevention is not simply about analyzing and improving students' academic performance; it must be complemented with changes in student attitudes and skills through effective support systems. By combining the 40 Developmental Assets and *Indicators for Success* frameworks, the Pilot Program allowed schools to holistically address the needs of adolescent students more effectively than either intervention could accomplish on its own.

4. WHAT HAPPENED IN EACH PHASE OF THE PILOT PROGRAM?

PYD: Developmental Asset-Building. Pilot schools developed Asset-building Action Plans to strengthen assets in lower secondary students by making changes to existing school activities in order to address a school challenge. Schools then measured lower secondary students' developmental assets at the end of the Pilot Program by administering a developmental assets survey.

Indicators for Success. Pilot schools implemented components one through three of the *Indicators for Success* framework and learned about components four and five.

Table 1 summarizes the four phases of the Pilot Program, including each phase's objective, key activities, data collected, and timeline. As previously noted, certain activities from phases two through four were implemented contemporaneously. The timing of phase implementation can be customized to meet the needs of individual schools.

TABLE 1. PILOT PROGRAM PHASES

PHASE	OVERVIEW	TIMELINE
<p>PHASE 1: Building a Common Language</p>	<p>Goal: Build a common language among local stakeholders related to positive youth development and the <i>Indicators for Success</i>. Key Activities: School teams (principal, teacher, parent leader) and MINED staff attended an initial workshop to build participants' understanding of and capacity to implement PYD and the <i>Indicators for Success</i>. An emphasis was placed on developmental asset-building, social emotional learning and reinventing and reimagining universal, proactive school-level supports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools began defining SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) goals and drafting Asset-building Action Plans to address school challenges through building developmental assets. Initial school visits and coaching and technical assistance provided to school teams related to Asset-building Action Plans. 	<p>January 2015</p>
<p>PHASE 2: Positive Youth Development and Asset Building</p>	<p>Goal: Finalize and implement action plans that not only promote developmental asset-building but also reinvent existing school-level supports. Key Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School principals participated in a workshop that connected developmental asset-building to the <i>Indicators for Success</i> framework. Schools revised, finalized and began implementing Asset-building Action Plans. School leaders received continued coaching to support revision and implementation of Asset-building Action Plans. FHI 360 team gathered data on how ABC indicator data was being collected in pilot schools. 	<p>Feb–Nov 2015 February–May: Asset-building Action Plans revised March–November: Plans implemented</p>
<p>PHASE 3: The <i>Indicators for Success</i> (ABC)</p>	<p>Goal: Lay the groundwork for an <i>Indicators for Success</i> system in the eight schools. Key Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School principals participated in three workshops to learn about the five components of the <i>Indicators for Success</i> framework. Schools implemented the first three components of the framework and learned how to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather, organize, and analyze ABC data and identify students who are <i>off-track</i> to high school graduation. Create tiered intervention maps for each ABC indicator. Match <i>off-track</i> students with interventions. FHI 360 provided coaching and technical assistance in the collection and analysis of ABC indicators and introduced the <i>Indicators for Success</i> to lower secondary teachers at each school. 	<p>June–Nov 2015 July, September, October: Workshops conducted with principals</p>
<p>PHASE 4: Learning from One Another</p>	<p>Goal: Collect and analyze data on asset-building and <i>Indicators for Success</i>, and share lessons learned from the Pilot Program with stakeholders in El Salvador. Key Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students, principals, and teachers completed a developmental assets survey to measure the assets that lower secondary students had developed. Principals completed a self-evaluation on their progress with the <i>Indicators for Success</i> framework. Schools celebrated and shared lessons learned in a regional Results Conference in Sonsonate. 	<p>Oct–Nov 2015 October: Surveys administered November: Results Conference held</p>

Source: FHI 360

5. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF THE ASSET-BUILDING ACTION PLANS?

The eight pilot schools included close to 100 activities in their Asset-building Action Plans to support the social emotional, and developmental needs of lower secondary students. The Action Plans helped educators develop a common language around developmental asset-building by making explicit connections between existing school

programs and activities and the developmental assets. These connections played a key role in transforming educators' mindsets towards youth. Four main themes emerged from the Asset-building Action Plans. Table 2 illustrates the links between these four themes, developmental asset categories, and dropout root causes. The table also provides specific examples of developmental asset-building activities that were implemented in the pilot schools.

TABLE 2. ACTION PLAN MAIN THEMES

Principal theme (dropout prevention strategy)	Developmental asset category(s) strengthened	Root cause of dropout addressed	Specific pilot school activities
1. Increase the involvement of parents and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Boundaries and expectations 	Lack of support from parents and families	Reinvent <i>parent school</i> by using active learning strategies and involving students in the design and planning of parent workshops
2. Promote and strengthen positive values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive values Social competencies 	Violence and harassment/ bullying	Explicitly identify and promote assets being built during daily structured
3. Increase students' commitment to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to learning 	Low academic achievement	Incorporate asset building into academic projects in classrooms
4. Prepare students for life through future-oriented, extra-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowerment Positive identity Constructive use of time 	Lack of motivation and lack of interest in school	Focus on building assets through vocational education activities and after school programs such as arts and athletics

Source: FHI 360

6. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS SURVEY?

To complement the Asset-building Action Plans, FHI 360 worked with pilot schools to administer a survey to 941 lower secondary students, 42 teachers, and 9 administrators to measure perceptions of adolescents' strengths, supports and opportunities (developmental assets). The 40-question survey asked participants to consider

each developmental asset and rate the extent to which it was present in or available to lower secondary students, using the following scale: (1) rarely, (2) sometimes, (3) quite often, (4) almost always. The survey exposed nearly 1,000 people to the developmental assets, and thus, helped to build a common language and vision around asset building, which is an important step in transforming adults' mindsets towards youth.

Table 3 compares students', teachers' and administrators' perceptions of adolescents' developmental assets. The eight developmental asset categories are ranked from strongest to weakest, as reported by each of the three groups. Of the eight developmental assets, four are internal assets (personal and social characteristics) and four are external (community and family supports). This is denoted by blue (internal) and orange (external) shading. To complement Table 3, Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of students that reported having an asset *quite often* or *almost always*.

The results illustrated in Table 3 and Figures 1 and 2 reveal three key findings:

- **Internal assets are perceived as more developed than external assets by all three groups.** This is illustrated by dominance of blue, internal assets at the top of the table. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate consistent results, since a greater percentage of students report having internal assets fairly often or almost always, as compared to external assets. It is interesting to note that all three groups perceive that adolescents have a fairly strong positive identity but lack empowerment from within the community.

- **Male and female students tend to rate their developmental assets very similarly.** This was true for both external and internal assets.
- **Internal assets appear to strengthen as students progress through lower secondary.** An analysis of the student survey disaggregated by grade level showed that average ratings for internal asset categories increased from one grade level to the next. Within the survey sample, it appears that on average, eighth graders have stronger internal assets than seventh graders, and ninth graders have stronger internal assets than eighth graders.

TABLE 3. STUDENT, TEACHER, AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF ASSET DEVELOPMENT

STUDENTS	TEACHERS	PRINCIPALS
1. Positive identity	1. Commitment to learning	1. Constructive use of time
2. Positive values	2. Positive identity	2. Commitment to learning
3. Commitment to learning	3. Boundaries and expectations	3. Positive identity
4. Social competencies	4. Positive values	4. Positive values
5. Boundaries and expectations	5. Social competencies	5. Social competencies
6. Support	6. Constructive use of time	6. Support
7. Constructive use of time	7. Support	7. Boundaries and expectations
8. Empowerment	8. Empowerment	8. Empowerment

Source: FHI 360, based on The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents framework

FIGURE 1. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EXTERNAL ASSETS.

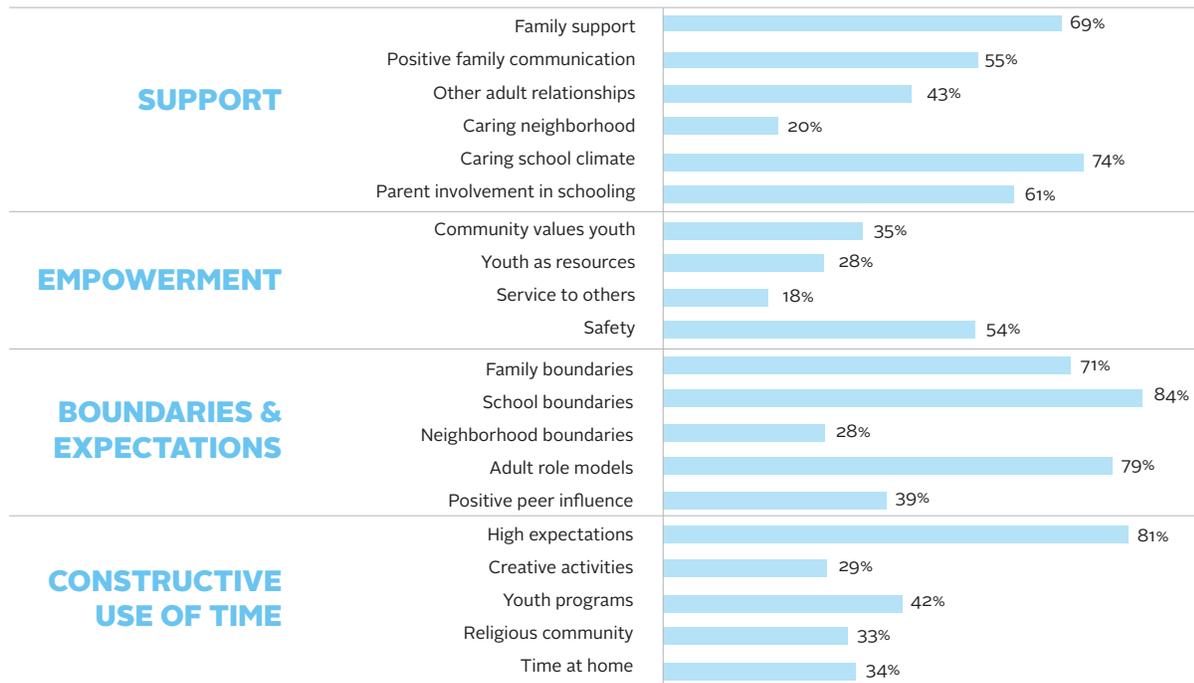
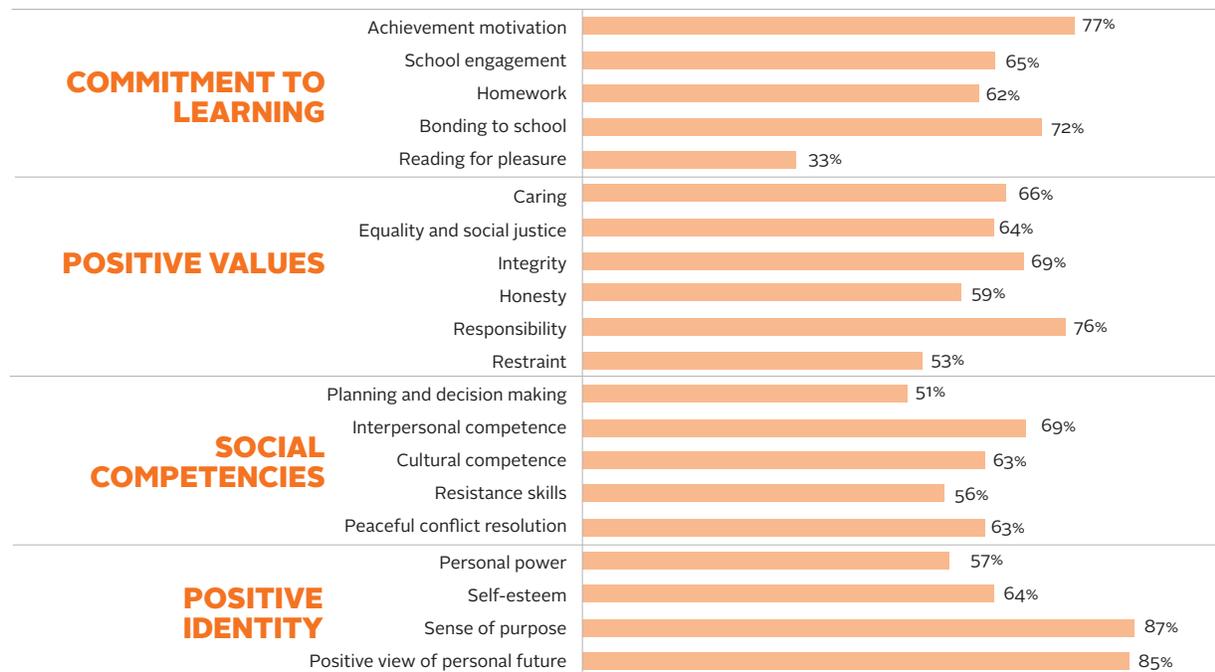


FIGURE 2. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNAL ASSETS.



Source: FHI 360, based on The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents framework

7. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF THE INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS AND ABC DATA?

With support from the pilot schools, FHI 360 collected over 9,500 data points from students in grades 7-9. The data were compiled into Trend Analysis Reports for each school, which showed aggregate, school-level trimester results for lower secondary students. For each ABC indicator, the analysis used locally-defined thresholds to determine whether students were *exemplary*, *on-track* to high school graduation, *at-risk* of falling off-track, or *off-track* to high school graduation (see Table 4).

The eight pilot school principals and MINED representatives from Sonsonate developed these thresholds through a participatory process in which they debated, analyzed, and agreed upon thresholds based on MINED's existing evaluation standards and benchmarks for attendance, behavior grades (excellent, very good, good), and course grades (10-point grading system). The pink *off-track* threshold indicates that a student has a high risk of dropping out before graduating from high school.

TABLE 4. ABC INDICATOR THRESHOLDS

	Attendance	Language	Math	Behavior
Off Track	< 80%	Grade < 5	Grade < 5	N/A
At Risk	81-84%	5-6	5-6	Good
On Track	85-95%	7-8	7-8	Very Good
Exemplary	96-100%	9-10	9-10	Excellent

Source: FHI 360

At the end of the Pilot Program, FHI 360 aggregated the ABC data from the eight schools to create one Trend Analysis Report for all 1,206 lower secondary students served by the Pilot Program. The pie charts

in Table 5 are from the aggregate trend analysis report for trimester 2 (May-July 2016), which was the final reporting period for the Pilot Program. The data indicate that 25% of students were *off-track* in at least one ABC indicator area.

As illustrated in Table 5, the strongest area was attendance, while the weakest were academic course grades in language and math. However, due to data limitations it is possible that, in reality, student results in attendance and behavior are poorer than they appear.

8. BASED ON THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOT PROGRAM, WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINED?

Update systems, policies and practices for accessing and recording data.

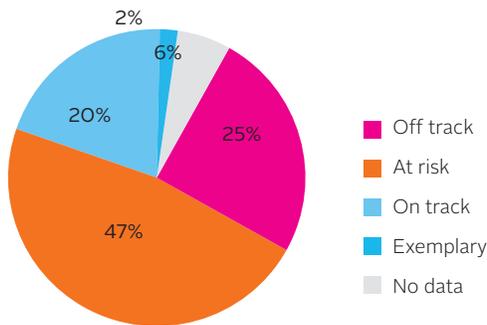
With 25% of students *off-track* in at least one ABC indicator, schools must develop systems to identify, support, and track students so they do not drop out of school. This includes exploring updates to policies and practices for recording attendance, behavior, and course grades. Schools should establish solutions for consolidating and accessing real-time ABC data and quickly generating accurate, up-to-date reports. Teachers and school staff must have easy access to student data, and data reports should organize data according to pre-defined thresholds, such as those presented in Table 4.

Improve schools' ability to identify students who are off-track in behavior.

Within MINED's current grading system, teachers cannot accurately identify students with problematic behavior. Education ministries should keep in mind that an ideal system would include marks to correspond with *excellent*, *on-track*, *at-risk*, and *off-track* behavior thresholds. A simple solution would involve reinstating the *NM* (needs improvement) grade, even if only in an unofficial capacity at the school-level. Teachers and schools can continue to follow established marking standards, but should consider developing creative internal solutions for identifying those students who truly need additional behavior supports and interventions.

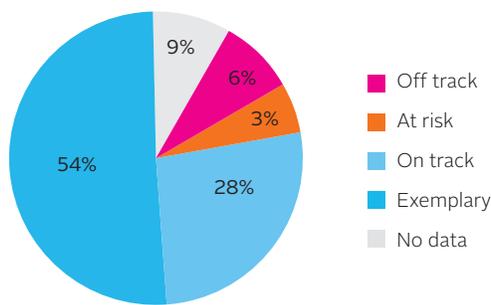
TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF ABC INDICATORS FOR 1,206 STUDENTS IN ALL PILOT SCHOOLS AT THE END OF TRIMESTER TWO

ABC OVERVIEW



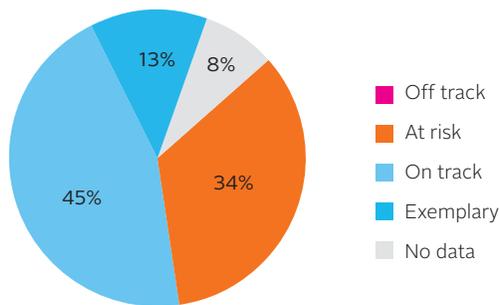
25% of students are off-track in at least one ABC indicator. Across all ABC indicators, 25% of all students (294 students) were *off-track* in at least one indicator at the end of the second trimester. This suggests that ¼ of current students will likely drop out before completing high school if they do not receive appropriate interventions and support.

ATTENDANCE



Schools reported high attendance. Of the four ABC indicators, attendance had the strongest results, as indicated by the high percentage of students who were *exemplary* and *on-track* (82%, or 985 students) and the low percentage of *off-track* students (6%, or 74 students). Although attendance results were strong, the FHI 360 team found that not all schools had consistent practices for recording attendance on a daily, weekly, monthly, or trimester basis. This brings into question the accuracy of attendance data. The same issues exist for course grades and behavior grades.

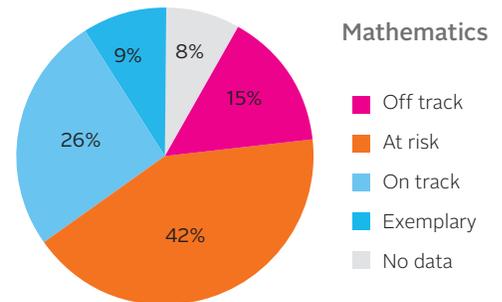
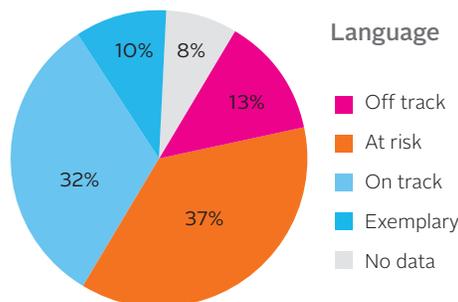
BEHAVIOR



No students are off-track in behavior. Since the MINED's marking system for behavior consists of only three levels—excellent, very good, and good—there was no clear way to indicate students who are *off-track* for behavior. In reality, there is likely a group of students who are *off-track* in behavior. 34%, or 571 students, received the lowest behavior ranking.

Course grades in language and mathematics showed the lowest performance. The MINED should prioritize keeping students *on-track* in language and mathematics. More than 50% of students were either *at-risk* of becoming off-track or were already *off-track* to graduating from high school. For language, 13% (163 students) were *off-track* while 37% (444 students) were *at-risk* of falling off-track. For mathematics, 15% (187 students) were *off-track* and 42% (509 students) were *at-risk* of falling off-track.

COURSE GRADES IN LANGUAGE & MATHEMATICS



Strengthen teachers' capacities to report and access data. Schools and the MINED must support the professional development of teachers as they continue to learn and practice strategies for analyzing and using data to inform their teaching practice. This includes building teacher capacity to determine which students need interventions and which interventions would best address individual student challenges. Pilot school teachers could begin by sharing their experiences and strategies through informal or formal teacher learning circles.

9. **BASED ON THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOT PROGRAM, WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS?**

Tailor asset-building strategies to each grade level. The developmental assets survey results suggest that schools need to tailor asset-building strategies to each grade level. Ideally, schools should collect baseline developmental asset data from all students at the start of the year to inform asset-building priorities for each grade level. At the end of the year, schools should administer the same survey to track growth and inform grade-level programming decisions for the next school year.

Integrate developmental asset-building and Indicators for Success. It is more common for schools to incorporate asset building into after school or extracurricular activities and to connect the *Indicators for Success* to school or classroom activities. However, schools and teachers should integrate developmental asset-building and *Indicators for Success* throughout all aspects of school, emphasizing the connections between the two interventions. For example, teachers must consider how to incorporate developmental asset building into classroom learning activities. Collaborative classroom work is a great way to strengthen the internal assets such as *social competencies*, and *commitment to learning*. Likewise, schools should design supports and interventions for *Indicators for Success* that apply to school activities outside of the classroom. For example, the attendance and behavior indicators are cross-cutting across all school activities. Teachers should consider how to monitor and measure performance in these indicators both inside and outside of the classroom.

Create space for regular teacher meetings.

Grade-level teams must schedule regular meetings to review, discuss, and analyze student data. Teams may begin by holding meetings every month or even every trimester, slowly working their way up to weekly meetings dedicated to analyzing student data and assigning interventions to particular students. Teams can include teachers, administrators, and other school staff, as all bring unique insights and experiences. The team must make decisions and apply interventions collaboratively, and report back on how well the interventions worked or did not work. Schools must consider when, where, and how to schedule these regularly occurring meetings and provide teams with the necessary data to support student success. During the Pilot Program, some schools began working with the MINED to convene teams, or teacher learning circles, to analyze ABC data. These existing teacher learning circles offer an established space for teams to collaborate.

Explore effective student supports and interventions.

Schools must become more familiar with examples of highly effective systems, structures and strategies that support adolescents, such as:

- Flexible school schedules that include time for targeted interventions
- Providing lunch for students and making extended-day activities mandatory
- Teacher teamwork
- Data-based decision making
- Social emotional learning

Monitor and adjust interventions regularly.

Schools must monitor student progress at the individual student-level, class-level, and grade-level. As previously discussed, supports and interventions should be organized into the three tiers from the *Indicators for Success* framework, to support students with varying needs.

- *Grade-level:* Administrators and teacher teams should review and analyze developmental assets and ABC data to determine areas of strength and areas for improvement. They must track and compare data from one trimester to another, to evaluate what is working and what

is not. Based on the data, administrators and teacher teams may determine new school-level, universal supports (Tier 1) and identify a sub-group of students who would benefit from a more targeted, Tier 2 intervention. Schools should discard or reinvent interventions that prove to be ineffective and should focus efforts on scaling up interventions that prove to be successful.

- *Student-level:* Each student who is assigned an intervention plan should be paired with an adult who will be responsible for monitoring his or her progress and helping that student to get *on-track* to high school graduation. The adult advocate should provide updates on the student during teacher team meetings, so that team members may share perspectives and ideas for continuing to improve supports for that student. As a result, a student's intervention plan may be adjusted or adapted over time to meet his or her changing needs.

Strengthen supports for mathematics and language. As mathematics and language are the two ABC indicators with the greatest proportion of *off-track* students, schools should identify more universal (Tier 1) supports, and also provide more targeted and intensive interventions (Tiers 2 and 3) for students in these subjects. Similarly, schools should reconsider the way that these subjects are taught. For example, the [Active Schools](#)⁵ model presents several promising innovations that teachers in these subjects can use to engage students and better support their learning.

10. WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO DEVELOP YOUTH-CENTERED ASSET-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS?

Take advantage of students' strong self-perception of internal assets and motivate them to become agents of change. Schools should capitalize on the positive perception that lower secondary students have of their internal assets in order to motivate them to take ownership of their own success. As internal assets depend largely on students' personal choices, commitment, and motivation, they are often more difficult to build than external assets. The higher ratings for internal assets should be encouraging for schools, since

schools can build upon existing internal assets and complement them with external assets (school and community supports), which are often more concrete and manageable for schools to develop.

Focus on building external assets with families and communities. The developmental assets survey made it clear that students lack external supports; given the high-risk environment of many Salvadoran communities, this result is not surprising. Schools must take the lead in building external supports for young people by frequently engaging students, families and community members in academic and non-academic school activities so that youth are able to succeed outside of the school environment. Likewise, both schools and communities must recognize the important contributions that young people can make and should provide opportunities for youth to serve and lead programs, activities, and initiatives within their school and community.

Treat genders equally when developing assets.

Since survey results showed that no significant differences exist between male and female students regarding development assets, schools should focus on supporting the development of female and male students equally. The lack of difference between genders suggests that the common perception that male youth need more support than females may not hold true. Educators must consider the individual needs of all students and should recognize that school-level, universal asset-building supports must be designed to meet the needs of all students collectively.

Educators, school and ministries from other high-risk developing contexts can adapt the lessons learned and recommendations from the Pilot Program in El Salvador to provide the support that young people need to stay in school and thrive.

² Gallup-Black, A & Sackman, R. From Data to Success: Using Early Warning Indicators to Shape Interventions for Students in the Middle Grades. FHI 360, 2015.

³Balfanz, R, Herzog, L & MacIver, D. Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions. Educational Psychologist, 2007.

⁴Mertens, SB, Caskey, MM & Flowers, N, editors. Early Indicator Systems. The Encyclopedia of Middle Grades Education. 2nd ed. IAP, 2016.

⁵Mogollon, O & Solano, M. Active Schools: Our Convictions for Improving the Quality of Education. FHI 360, 2011.