The Relationship Between Persistence and Student Engagement in Youth
Laura R. Rapp, M.S.Ed., Jocelyn H. Newton, Ph.D., NCSP
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Abstract
Persistence has been identified as a positive intellectual trait that helps people succeed during difficult situations. Research has demonstrated the importance of persistence in tasks spanning long periods of time, especially in academic endeavors. Therefore, this study will examine how six factors of student engagement predict the positive trait of persistence. The implications of this study will suggest potential points of invention to bolster persistence in school-aged youth.

Introduction
The field of school psychology has become increasingly influenced by positive psychology which focuses on human virtues and strengths that enhance psychological functioning and prevent psychopathology (Huebner & Gilman 2003; McGiboney & Carter, 1993).

Within the framework of positive psychology, one strength based construct that is extremely applicable to school-aged youth is persistence (Luft & Cohen, 1987).

Several definitions of persistence have been presented in the literature, however, for the purpose of this study, academic persistence will be defined as “the effort to hold firm and steadfastly to some purpose or task” (McGiboney & Carter, 1993, p. 128).

Persistence is related to factors such as locus of control, emotional stability and self-reliability. Furthermore, persistence is associated with goal directed and purposeful behavior, characteristics of great importance in academic tasks (McGiboney & Carter).

According to Luft & Cohen (1987), persistence is an important intellectual trait when it comes to tasks that span a long period of time, such as academic endeavors.

Research in the area of persistence is limited and has been conducted on specific populations such as Israeli boys with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and male gymnasts (Luft & Parish-Plass, 1994; Luft & Tenenbaum, 1991). One study found that persistence correlates with degree completion and graduation rates in college (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011).

Although past research provides a strong foundation into the concept of persistence, more information is needed about the concept of persistence, more information is needed about how to potentially bolster this positive trait in youth in school settings.

The aim of the current study was to examine the construct of persistence in school-aged youth and how it relates to academic outcomes. Specifically, it explored the predictive relationship between student engagement and persistence.

Method
Participants: 213 students, grades 7-12, from regular education study hall classrooms participated in this study. The students were from a small, rural, Midwestern school district.

Instruments:
The following surveys were administered:
1. Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006)

Results: Descriptive Statistics
207 participants completed all of the questionnaires.
Participants ranged from 12-18 years of age.

- Gender: Male: 50%
- Female: 47%
- Other: 1%
- Ethnicity: Caucasian: 96%
- Receiving Special Education Services: 12 total students
- Retention: 7 total students

Results: Analysis
- Internal reliability checks using Cronbach’s Alpha were performed to ensure the reliability of both instruments.

- The internal reliability of the Persistence Scale for Children for the current study was .67, and for the subscales of the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI), Cronbach’s Alpha values ranged from .50-.89.

- A multiple regression was conducted to determine the predictive relationship between the six subscales of the SEI and the Persistence Scale for Children.

- The independent variables for the analysis were the six SEI subscales (teacher-student relationships, control and relevance of school work, peer support for learning, future aspirations and goals, extrinsic motivation & family support for learning).

- The dependent variable was student’s overall score on the Persistence Scale for Children.

- The six SEI scales significantly predicted persistence scores, F (6, 154) = 11.91, p < .001. All six variables significantly contributed to the prediction.

- The adjusted R Square value was .290, indicating that 29% of the variance in persistence scores were explained by the combination of independent variables. According to Cohen (1992), this is a large effect.

- **SEI** **29%**

- Extratonic motivation (β = .35)
- Control and relevance of learning (β = -.34)

Discussion
- Persistence has been identified as an intellectual trait that contributes to positive outcomes in tasks spanning long periods of time, such as academic endeavors (Luft & Cohen, 1987).
- Little research has been conducted on methods to bolster the positive trait of persistence in youth.
- Past literature suggests a strong connection between student engagement and a student’s investment and connection to learning (Appleton et al., 2006).
- The results of the current study indicate that student engagement is in fact correlated with persistence.
- Furthermore, students are more likely to persist at academic tasks when they are intrinsically motivated, as well as when they believe their schoolwork has relevance to their future endeavors.
- As such, classroom teachers may be able to impact student levels of persistence on academic tasks by selecting coursework that is relevant to their future goals. In turn, this may allow students to exhibit control over aspects of their own learning, as well as help students develop and enhance intrinsic motivation.
- Future research may be conducted to identify the developmental period in which intrinsic motivation becomes a key component of persistence.

References