



Questions & Answers KIPP NYC's Approach to Character / KIPP Character Growth Card

1. How does research by Seligman, Peterson, and Duckworth serve as the basis for the KIPP NYC approach to character?

The KIPP NYC approach to character combines our own experiences as teachers with the research of several leading psychologists – including Dr. Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania), Dr. Christopher Peterson (University of Michigan in Ann Arbor), and Dr. Angela Duckworth (University of Pennsylvania).

Seligman and Peterson's research identified twenty-four character strengths that lead to engaged, meaningful, and purposeful lives. Duckworth's research focuses primarily on the particular power of two of the twenty-four strengths – self-control and grit. These twenty-four strengths have become the backbone of KIPP's work on character.

2. Is this focus on character development a new phenomenon at KIPP?

No. Since our inception in 1995, KIPP has had a dual focus on academic preparation and character development. KIPP emphasis on character development has been exemplified in our long-standing slogan: "Work hard. Be nice."

3. What is the KIPP character growth card? How does it measure character strengths?

The KIPP character growth card provides an opportunity for teachers, parents, and students to have meaningful conversations around the development of character. Its purpose is less to quantify what "character" means and more to provide a vehicle for people to talk about character in a rigorous and nuanced manner. The KIPP character growth card consists of twenty-four behaviors spread across seven "highly-predictive" character strengths– zest, grit, self-control, hope/optimism, curiosity, gratitude, and social intelligence.

For example, we measure grit by such behaviors as "works independently with focus" and "tries very hard even after experiencing failure." The behaviors provide a meaningful window into an individual's character and a roadmap for character growth – both for students as well as their teachers.



4. Why is KIPP focusing on character strengths vs. character traits? And why is the distinction important?

A character trait is often seen as genetically determined or “fixed.” Character strengths, on the other hand, can be nurtured and developed. At KIPP, we believe character strengths can be developed over time through practice and positive feedback.

5. The KIPP character growth card focuses on seven character strengths? How did KIPP NYC settle on these particular strengths for the growth card?

Among the twenty-four strengths, Dr. Christopher Peterson identified seven as most predictive of positive life outcomes – zest, grit, self-control, hope/optimism, love, gratitude, and social intelligence. In the end, KIPP elected to substitute curiosity for love as we felt that love would be particularly challenging for the format of a growth card. The resulting list of seven traits formed the foundation of our KIPP character growth card.

6. How many KIPP schools are using character education based on research by Professors Peterson, Seligman, and Duckworth?

While all KIPP schools focus on character education, only the four KIPP middle schools in New York are currently piloting the KIPP character growth card. KIPP schools in several regions use the twenty-four character strengths as an explicit part of their school culture, including KIPP New Orleans Schools and KIPP LA Schools. In addition, KIPP Philadelphia middle schools are participating in a study by University of Pennsylvania professor Angela Duckworth on how students develop “self-control.”

7. Can students be held back a grade for their marks on the KIPP character growth card?

No. Students cannot be held back for their marks on the KIPP character growth card. It is meant to generate a meaningful discussion about character among students, parents, and teachers.

8. Do you plan on expanding the KIPP character growth card to all KIPP schools?

The KIPP character growth card is currently in the pilot stage, and is only being used at the four KIPP middle schools in New York City. We have received some promising early indicators of the success of the program through parent and student surveys. We will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and determine the best way to maximize its impact and value to the KIPP network. Even more important than getting every KIPP school to use the character growth card is for all schools to find ways to infuse the character strengths and the specific behaviors that have been developed into the life of their classes and schools.