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Cathy Webb suggested a coordinated effort — for the school board and both city councils to recite the same portion of the list during cable televised meetings.

"That would help deliver a consistent message," Webb said. "Kids would see the same list of assets on bulletin boards in area businesses, to include that part of the community in the overall effort; bringing up the subject of asset-building at the Feb. 27 State of the Cities Breakfast; finding ways to honor students for unpublished accomplishments, anything from an award to being publicly recognized."

"There are some kids (who need) to be recognized for the small things," said Farmington city councilwoman JoAnne McShane. "We could send a strong message."

But, noted Farmington Hills city councilman Chris McRae, efforts must be made when giving recognition to avoid insulting today's increasingly sophisticated youth.

"Kids will look at other kids and say, 'Why is he getting special recognition? I do that every day,'" McRae said. "Kids keep track. We have to treat these kids with some measure of respect; we don't want to belittle them."

Making it relevant

In looking at the 40 developmental assets and percentages of surveyed youngsters who feel that item pertains to them, Cotter cited three areas where assets appear to be lacking: Schools provide a caring, encouraging environment (24 percent); young people perceive adults in

their community value youth (20 percent); young people are given useful roles in the community (24 percent).

"The power that we have, as leaders of our cities and of our schools, is to make a change in those areas," said Cotter, suggesting adults can do something as simple as acknowledge a youngster."

Seventy percent of the young people surveyed by the Search Institute are optimistic about their future, noted Farmington Mayor Pro-Tem James Mitchell, "although there may be other negatives in their lives."

The challenge for community leaders, Mitchell said, is to work together so those findings are applicable to Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Farmington Mayor Bill Hartsock asked Cotter whether the Search Institute could compare how local teens match up with those who participated in the national survey. A follow-up survey would help determine just how meaningful the research really is, Hartsock said.

"I don't think we should work from this (list) as a reflection of our community," Hartsock said. "One of the first steps is to see how our community rates against the national norm and then develop a plan, and focus on that."

Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield admitted that "We're sort of preaching to the choir here. ... But the point of it all is that it is communitywide. You hope a church group grabs five

(of the assets) as being relevant to them or a police group zeroing in on three or four. That's when the dialogue becomes really productive and becomes part of the vocabulary."

Following is a partial list of the 40 Developmental Assets, identified by the Minnesota-based Search Institute as "building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible."

External assets

■ Support: Family support; positive family communication; caring neighborhood; caring school climate.

■ Empowerment: Community values young people and gives them important roles; young people feel safe at home, school and in the neighborhood.

■ Boundaries and expectations: Schools provide clear rules and consequences; parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior; neighbors monitor young people's behavior.

■ Constructive use of time: Spend three hours or more each week in various sports, clubs and activities, and at least one hour per week in activities at religious institutions; more time is spent at home, limiting nights out with friends "with nothing special to do" to two or fewer nights per week.

Internal assets

■ Commitment to learning: Motivated to do well at school, actively engaged in learning and does at least one hour of homework every day.

■ Positive values: Places high value on helping others; acts on convictions and stands up for beliefs; "tells the truth even when it is not easy"; believes it is important to not be sexually active, or to use alcohol or other drugs.

■ Social competencies: Has empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills; is comfortable with people of all cultural backgrounds; can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations; seeks to resolve conflict in a non-violent way.

■ Positive identity: Has high self-esteem; optimistic about the future.

Six keys to asset building

■ Everyone can build assets; young people need assets; relationships are key; asset building is an ongoing process; consistent messages are important; intentional redundancy is important.




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