

Annual Letter

August 30, 2019

At Character Lab, we envision a world in which kids thrive socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. In our third annual letter, I'm thrilled to report on progress over the past year and plans for the future.

2019 Milestones

In just one year, the Character Lab Research Network nearly doubled in size. A total of 63,360 students in 81 public, charter, and independent schools across the country participated in research activities designed by world-class scientists and educators. For comparison, consider that a [2016 meta-analysis](#) of all motivation-intervention studies conducted in K–16 education over the last 50 years identified a total 38,377 student participants.

In tandem, scientists in the Research Network continued to publish their discoveries in top-tier academic journals. Here are a few highlights:

“A National Study Reveals Where a Growth Mindset Improves Adolescent Achievement” was published in [Nature](#). Led by David Yeager and colleagues, this longitudinal study found that a brief, online intervention, which taught high school students that intellectual abilities can be developed, raised report card grades among lower-achieving students and advanced math course enrollment among students overall.

In “A Values-Alignment Intervention Protects Adolescents From the Effects of Food Marketing,” published in [Nature Human Behaviour](#), Chris Bryan and colleagues showed that reframing unhealthy food choices as incompatible with core values such as social justice and autonomy changed attitudes about junk food and, for boys, choices in the school cafeteria.

Lauren Eskreis-Winkler and her collaborators published “A Large-Scale Field Experiment Shows Giving Advice Improves Academic Outcomes for the Advisor” in [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#). In this randomized controlled trial, high school students in the Character Lab Research Network who were asked to give advice to other students about how to succeed academically later improved their own report card grades.

And, in an essay entitled “Using Psychological Science to Help Children Thrive” published in [Perspectives on Psychological Science](#), I shared the origins and ambitions of Character Lab with the broader community of psychological scientists.

Last month, we hosted more than 200 teachers, school leaders, and student ambassadors in our Research Network for an all-day professional development

workshop. One of my highlights was watching our student ambassadors lead a workshop for educators. The Character Lab Internship Program (CLIP) has been integral to our efforts at promoting student voices in research activities.

Like our Research Network, our annual [Educator Summit](#) nearly doubled in size. With our partner organization, the Relay Graduate School of Education, we welcomed 800 participants to this two-day event. This year's theme: creating conditions that cultivate character. Scientific keynote speakers included Sonja Lyubomirsky, co-author of our *Kindness Playbook*; David Yeager, who presented the latest findings on growth mindset; and neuroscientist Allyson Mackey, who related new findings on brain plasticity to practical suggestions for inspiring curiosity in the classroom. Plenary speakers included Susan Cain, author of the best seller *Quiet*, whose message underscored that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all environment for teaching kids. Professors Howard Fuller and Jeff Duncan-Andrade challenged the audience to consider the socioeconomic, cultural, and political implications of our work: In word and deed, are we, as educators and researchers, doing what is needed to enable all kids to thrive?

We launched nine new [Playbooks](#), each written specifically for educators and parents by leading scientists. Playbooks for strengths of heart—which reinforce connections with other people—highlighted *kindness, gratitude, social intelligence, and purpose*. Playbooks for strengths of mind—which help us think and ideate—promoted *curiosity and intellectual humility*. And Playbooks for strengths of will—which enable us to accomplish our goals—included *proactivity, grit, and self-control*.

This year, we experimented with new ways of turning scientific insights into actionable advice. I debuted [Thought of the Week](#)—60 seconds of psychological wisdom in the form of a personal essay written by me and fact-checked by the scientists whose work I highlight. Each week, my goal was to explain one key discovery and suggest how parents and educators might apply it when modeling, celebrating, and otherwise enabling character in the young people in their lives. Our partnership with Arianna Huffington's *Thrive Global* extends our reach well beyond the 18,000 subscribers who receive Thought of the Week in their email inbox every Sunday morning.

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead to the coming year, we are excited to develop the Character Lab Research Network. We recently invited 250 leading scientists to our network of over 80 schools and 100,000 students, and they have been responding with proposals on a wide range of topics, including students' attitudes and beliefs about mindfulness, motivation for pursuing careers in STEM, the relationship between confidence and problem-solving, and students' sense of meaning and purpose. Just as important, we aim to improve the quality of our services to all our stakeholders. If we are successful, each year will bring a new crop of insights into the conditions that help children thrive.

We will work just as hard to translate these scientific insights into actionable advice for parents and teachers. We aim to complete Playbooks for the most essential strengths of character, and to enhance our existing Playbooks with curated resources. And, as the new school year begins, so will I resume my ritual of writing a Thought of the Week for you and others eager to put psychological wisdom into everyday practice.

We are already planning the 2020 Educator Summit and, fingers crossed, looking forward to seeing you there.

From all of us at Character Lab, thank you for your continued support.

With grit and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Angela Duckworth', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Angela Duckworth

Founder & CEO, Character Lab