Non-Cognitive Skills

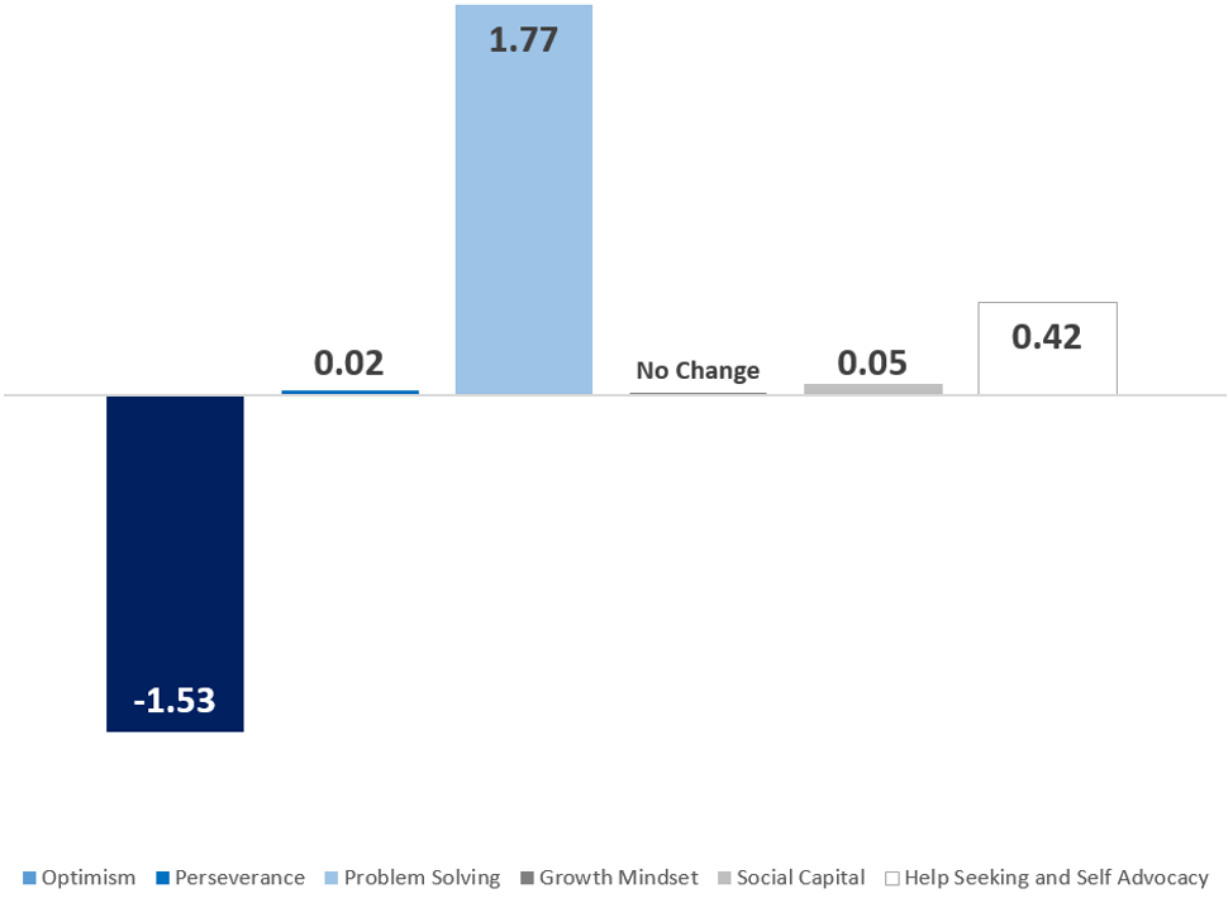
Research consistently indicates that the development of non-cognitive skills is a leading indicator of success both academically and in the labor market. In addition, employers consistently report that possessing non-cognitive skills is among the most salient indicator used in searching for high-quality employees. iMentor has identified six non-cognitive skills (described in detail here (partners.imentor.org/help/what-non-cognitive-skills-does-the-imentor-program-develop)) we believe are essential for college success including:

- having a growth mindset
- being persistent
- thinking critically
- being able to seek help and self-advocate
- having social capital skills
- being optimistic and excited about the future.

Pairs have consistent opportunities to practice and develop these skills in their weekly communication and monthly in-person events. Mentee progress in non-cognitive skill areas have been measured rigorously since the 2013-14 program year. This article will briefly explore the findings of that measurement to date. It may be helpful to review how iMentor measures non-cognitive skills (https://learn.imentor.org/help/article/link/research-around-non-cognitive-skills-our-curriculum-and-college-success#non-cog-exp) to gain a better understanding of the following data.

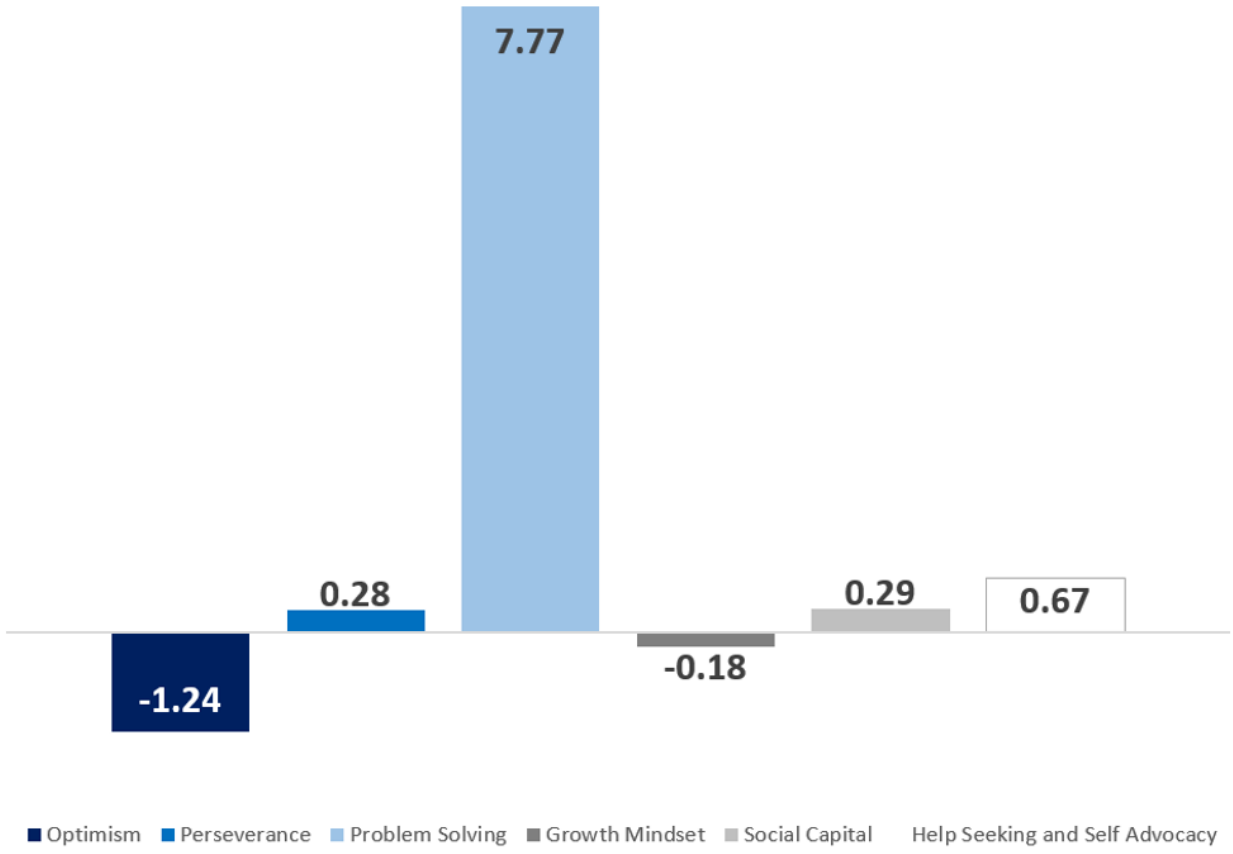
Comparing Non-Cog Scores from Fall 2014 to Spring 2015

There was significant growth in three of the six non-cognitive skill areas from the Fall 2014 survey administration compared to the following Spring across all mentees: Help seeking and self advocacy, social capital skills and problem solving. There was no significant change perseverance or growth mindset and a significant negative change for optimism.

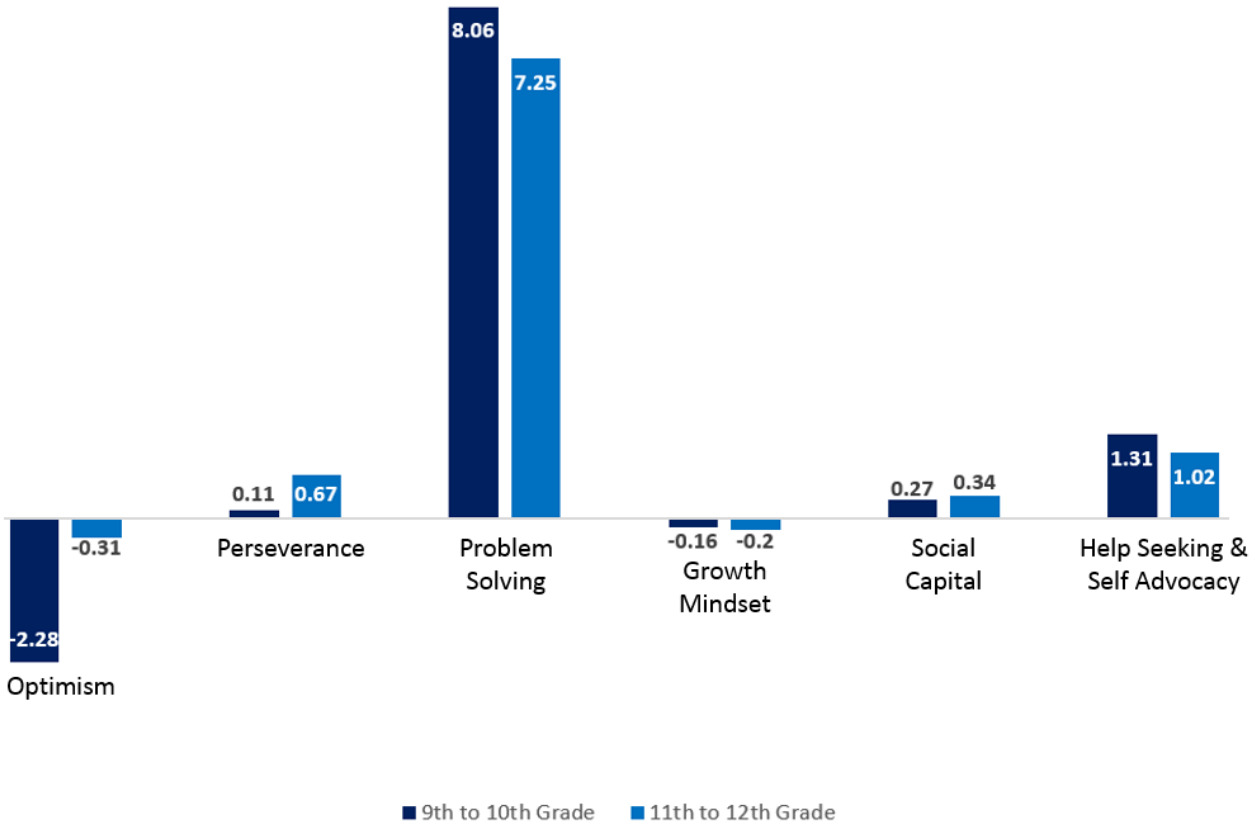


Comparing Non-Cog Scores from Fall 2013 to Spring 2015

The class of 2018 is excluded when considering change in non-cognitive skill areas from Fall 2013 survey administration to Spring 2015, as they had not yet entered the program in 2013. This means that results are for mentees that have experienced the iMentor model for a longer period of time, and as might be expected, more change occurs. From Fall 2013 to Spring 2015, there was significant growth in all non-cognitive skills except for optimism and growth mindset.



By considering the same period of change within the context of mentees' grade, interesting patterns of change can be observed between the transition from the beginning of freshman year to the end of sophomore year and the beginning of junior year to the conclusion of high school. Both see significant growth in perseverance, problem solving, social capital, and help seeking and self–advocacy. Additionally, negative growth is seen across both groups for growth mindset and there is a negative change in optimism for the younger group, but insignificant negative change in the older group.



What does it all mean?

First and foremost, it is difficult to make conclusive statements about program effectiveness with regards to developing non-cognitive skills despite rigorous data collection for 2 years. This is partially due to the fact that the iMentor model is a long-term intervention and as such, significant growth is not immediately expected across the board. This argument is supported by the change exhibited between 9th-10th and 11th-12th grade. This finding demonstrates that non-cognitive skills require not only more time, but several years of programming before they can accurately be measured.

The important takeaway is that change in non-cognitive skills seen across program participants should be brought into conversations about program design, lesson planning and pair support so that all organizational efforts are informed by what is being learned and directed toward the goal of developing these skills that research shows is critical for college success.