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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my husband, thank you for your love and support and endless words of encouragement. We started this journey over four years ago, and I could not have finished without you. To my daughter, son, and grandchildren, I love you more than anything. If I can give you any advice, it would be to follow your heart and work hard to attain your goals. You can achieve anything you want with the willingness to persevere. I love you all!

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## Abstract

Character education is not a new concept and has been part of American education since colonial times; however, character education has had a resurgence in the early 1990's primarily because of concerns about growing teenage violence, at risk behaviors, and a perceived decline in morality. Numerous character education initiatives and programs have sprung from the growing concerns of youth moral decline. Character education programs have demonstrated improvement in school climate, student and staff relationships, and have had a positive influence on student achievement. Research on the relationship of character education programs on school climate is vast; however, there is little research on the influence of character education programs on student character growth. The purpose of this study is to shed new light on the effectiveness of a character education program on student character development.

## Chapter 1

*“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”*

*Aristotle*

### Introduction

Character education is not new and dates back to the beginning of American education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Was, Woltz, & Drew, 2006). Character education has a long history from the philosophers of Kant and Buber to Dewey’s publication of *Moral Principles of Education* in 1909 (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Moral education has been a part of education in America since colonial times with the teachings of morality and citizenship as cornerstones in education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Arthur, 2008). Moral education and discourse goes back to early philosophers from the teachings of Plato and Aristotle in the west and Buddha in the east. The education of moral virtues has a long history across cultures, and despite differences in philosophies and theories, the significance of teaching moral virtues has been viewed as significant to the full development of human happiness. Often, character education worked to develop students as good citizens in a democratic society, and the Bible was often used to teach morality. Moral education was taught at the university level. The National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) emphasized the need for moral school leaders and for ethics/character education to be taught at schools as they were more than one hundred years ago at the university level. NISL quoted from Thomas Sobol’s “The Principal as Moral Leader” to illustrate a focus not only on education but also on morality. Sobol noted, “The very purpose of the university was not only to create and disseminate knowledge but also to make students wise and good” (p.

92). Since a perceived decline in the moral principles of our society and among youth, character education programs have found renewed interest (Berkowitz & Bier 2004; Stiff-Williams, 2010; White & Warfa, 2011). Theoretically, character education programs help develop social and emotional skills while fostering democratic ideals often found in citizenship courses (Althof & Berkowitz 2006). In addition, character education programs' goals are to develop good people and citizens. Character education promotes moral values that could be applied universally and represent ideal traits, such as integrity, honesty, respect, empathy, etc. Although character education, social/emotional learning, and citizenship are sometimes used interchangeably, there are clear differences in their definitions and in their focus for pedagogy.

### **Defining Character Education**

Character education has been defined as developing virtues in students, which will help them improve in moral reasoning and in citizenship. Thomas Lickona (1999) based his theory of character education on Aristotle's virtues which when practiced and developed become one's habits. Thomas Lickona proposed 11 principles of effective character education which when implemented with fidelity create a positive school climate, help develop virtues in students, and increase student achievement (Lickona 1999). Although character education has been overlapped with other terms, such as, moral education, social-emotional learning, non-cognitive skills, citizenship, soft skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, etc., there are clear differences among these terms and in their instructional practice. Moral education focuses on developing core ethical values, while social-emotional learning focuses on the skills and attitudes necessary to function in a community and in society (Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg, & Utne-O'Brien, 2007). Character education programs often utilize various aspects of all affective domains, thus character education could be viewed as an overarching umbrella that incorporates moral education, social-

emotional skills, and citizenship. Character education's primary goal is to develop good or moral people. Lawrence Kohlberg believed that through moral discourse and analysis of moral dilemmas schools could foster moral development (Harding & Snyder, 1991).

Character education also promotes the development of social skills and effective collaboration with others for the good of the community, which are essential skills needed and taught in social-emotional learning pedagogy. Character education promotes good citizenship and helps to instill democratic values. Although these terms differ in meaning and in application, there are aspects of all affective domains within character education. One character education program, Character.org espouses 11 principles that include aspects of moral education, social-emotional learning, and citizenship. Character education programs often interweave the affective domains to include development of moral values, social skills, and citizenship.

Berkowitz and Bier (2005) recognize the similarities among the affective domains and the different labels educators place on character education initiatives. Their conceptual model of character education comprise the following assumptions:

1. Character is a psychological construct. That is, the outcome of effective character education is the psychological development of students.
2. Character education targets a particular subset of child development, which we call character. Character is the composite of those psychological characteristics that impact the child's capacity and tendency to be an effective moral agent, i.e. to be socially and personally responsible, ethical, and self-managed.
3. Character education then ought to be most effective if it relies predominately on

those social, education, and contextual processes that are known to significantly impact the psychological development of such characteristics. (p. 2-3).

Character education promotes the moral development and social-emotional development of the student, so he or she can succeed not only in school but also in the workforce and in life.

For students to be successful in school and in life, they should be equipped with more than just academic knowledge and skills. Intelligence alone cannot predict success and well-being. Despite the plethora of names for character education, the bottom line is people need more than intelligence and academic learning to be successful in life. Affective traits, such as, grit, resilience, self-control, etc. play significant roles on one's success and well-being in life (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) also address the numerous terms that have been used interchangeably with character education: "Whatever term one chooses for this field (e.g., social-emotional learning, character education, citizenship education, moral education, etc.), it is fundamentally about fostering the optimal positive development of students" (p. 8).

### **Convergence of Affective Domains**

As previously noted, there are distinct differences among the definitions of moral education, social-emotional learning, and citizenship; however, effective character education should incorporate all aspects of the affective domains to develop the values and skills necessary for student success in school and in life. Although moral education and its values may vary according to culture and customs, scholars note that moral education can be approached neutrally. "From the perspective of America's public, secular education system in a nation committed to democratic principles, there are sets of values and moral principles that can be seen



as consensual” (Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg, & Utne-O’Brien, p.249). Moral education seeks to develop good values. Social-emotional learning seeks to develop skills and attitudes that will help students work within a community and for the good of the community. Character education incorporates both aspects of these affective domains to develop a moral person committed to helping oneself and one’s community. Effective character education programs should help develop moral reasoning, social-emotional competencies, and good citizenship. Elias, Parker, Kash, Weissberg, and Utne-O’Brien (2007) note, “John Dewey (1933) was among the first to propose that empathy and effective interpersonal management are important skills to be conveyed and practiced in the educational environment” (p. 252). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded in the early 1990’s to emphasize the importance of connecting academic achievement with the skills needed to work and succeed in school, in the community, and in life (Elias, et. al, 2007, p. 252). Emotions do affect how students think and how they learn; caring relationships provide for deep learning in school and in the home. Elias et al. (2007) note CASEL’s research concludes that the following five elements are found in schools of social, emotional, and academic excellence:

1. A school climate that articulates specific themes, character elements, or values, such as respect, responsibility, fairness, and honesty, and conveys an overall sense of purpose for attending school;
2. Explicit instruction and practice in skills for participatory competence;
3. Developmentally appropriate instruction in ways to promote health and prevent problems;
4. Services and systems that enhance students’ coping skills and provide social support for handling transitions, crises, and conflicts; and

5. Widespread, systemic opportunities for positive, contributory service. (p. 253).

According to Character.org, formerly known as the Character Education Partnership (CEP), “character education includes and complements a broad range of educational approaches such as whole child education, service learning, social-emotional learning, and civic education. All share a commitment to helping young people become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens” (Character.org). Character.org later expanded the definition to include the tenets of the 11 principles for effective implementation: “Character education is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. To be effective, character education should include all stakeholders in a school community and must permeate school climate, culture, teaching, and learning” (Character.org, p. 1). This expanded definition emphasizes core values and performance values. Thus, character education seeks to develop core ethical values, such as, respect, care, fairness, etc., while performance values encourage students to act upon their ethical values to improve their lives and make a difference in their communities (Character.org; Sokol, Hammond, & Berkowitz, 2010). Character education has also been defined in broad terms, which incorporate elements of the affective domains. Battistich (2008) defined character education as “the deliberate use of all dimensions of school life to foster optimal character development” (p. 3). For successful student outcomes, character education programs should utilize research-based instructional practices and systemic school-wide implementation and evaluation (Greenberg, Weissberg, Utne O’Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, 2003; Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000; Battistich, 2001; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

### **Positive Youth Development and Character Education**

Positive youth development focuses on promoting positive traits in youth while also preventing at risk behaviors. Proponents of positive youth development programs focus on promoting support to adolescents so they develop “a sense of competence, self-efficacy, belonging and empowerment, thus promoting positive behavior and reducing the likelihood of risk behavior” (Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017, p. 484). Adolescence is a critical time of growing physically, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. All of these developments take place in diverse contextual structures to include community, home, and school, so adolescents experience a diverse array of relationships among their peers and the adults in their lives. It is during adolescence that many at-risk behaviors begin to emerge, thus focusing on reducing these risks and promoting positive behaviors is critical. Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004) define positive youth development programs seeking to develop one or more of the following objectives:

1. Promotes bonding
2. Fosters resilience
3. Promotes social competence
4. Promotes emotional competence
5. Promotes cognitive competence
6. Promotes behavioral competence
7. Promotes moral competence
8. Fosters self-determination
9. Fosters spirituality

10. Fosters self-efficacy
11. Fosters clear and positive identity
12. Fosters belief in future
13. Provides recognition for positive behavior
14. Provides opportunities for prosocial involvement
15. Fosters prosocial norms p. 101-102.

One key component of positive youth development is that it does not solely focus on at-risk behaviors, but it also recognizes the strengths and the development of adolescents (Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, Gillings, 2017; Greenberg, Weissberg, Utne O'Brien, Zins, Resnik, & Elias, 2003). Similar to positive youth development are the tenets of character education programs. Character.org incorporates many of the principles of positive youth development; both attempt to address at-risk behaviors while providing opportunities for moral, emotional, social, and cognitive development. In a study by Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004), the researchers evaluated 25 effective positive youth programs that promoted positive behaviors while reducing at-risk behaviors. These programs shared the following themes: all programs helped to develop social-emotional competencies, cognitive thinking, self-efficacy, and commitment to schooling and academic achievement (p. 117). These themes also form the basis of the 11 principles of character education as espoused by Character.org.

Despite the numerous terms associated with character development, and whether one refers to them as skills, competencies, virtues, values, or traits, the development of character is important for student success and well-being, and character development can be improved

through educational experiences. Character traits are not immutable and are influenced by experience, thus character development can be improved (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Lickona, 1996; Battistich, 2008; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Duckworth and Scott-Yeager (2015) argue the multitude of definitions really refer to the same concept of character development; however, they note the more significant focus should not be placed on what to call these attributes but rather on how to measure these personality traits (p. 239). Personality changes through experience; one develops character traits over time and maturation. Character traits, such as grit, determination, self-control, etc. can be developed in educational settings. It is important that schools help develop character so students have the dispositions to succeed in life.

There are many character traits that help foster success and well-being. The Big Five Model is a descriptive framework for traits that predict success: Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, and Agreeableness (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). This model has often been used in research to determine which personality traits seem to be more significant in predicting achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). It is significant for educators to research character traits that are more predictable of success than others; for instance, helping develop the traits of grit and self-control may have more influence on student success than other personality traits (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Hofmann, Luhmann, Fisher, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2013; Wagner & Ruch, 2015). Numerous studies on grit and self-control have concluded these traits play a seminal role in the educational attainment and professional success of individuals, thus by focusing on specific traits that truly predict well-being and success, educators can help develop more successful students (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Ivcevic & Brackett,

2014; Hofmann, et al., 2013). Although grit has been criticized recently for romanticizing hardship and for distracting what systemically disadvantaged students need to succeed, the characteristic of grit and perseverance or the ability to continue trying to learn difficult concepts is a significant ability for student achievement (Gorman, 2017). Ivcevic and Brackett (2014) noted conscientiousness, which describes impulse control and self-regulation, plays a key factor in student academic achievement; therefore, educators who pursue character education programs should be cognizant of the character traits that truly impact student success in school and in life. Finally, despite the differences or preferences in terminology for character education, there is “scientific consensus in the behavioral sciences that success in school and beyond depends critically on many attributes other than cognitive ability” (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

### **The Need for Character Education**

The value of character education begins with the need for character education stemming from growing student at-risk behaviors, not only detrimental to health but also harmful to social-emotional well-being. At-risk behaviors include a range of behaviors negatively effecting student health and wellness and also education. At-risk behaviors can include substance abuse, domestic violence, numerous forms of trauma, which can adversely affect student behavior and educational outcomes. The perceived decline of American youth brought a renewed interest in teaching character education in schools and education has had significant influence from federal, state, and local governments to support character education initiatives (Vessels & Boyd, 1996). Durlak, Dyminicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger (2011) noted, “Many students lack social-emotional competencies” and “approximately 30% of high school students engage in multiple high-risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, sex, violence, depression, attempted suicide” (p. 405). According to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) for 2015:

During the 30 days before the survey, 41.5% of high school students nationwide among the 61.3% who drove a car or other vehicle during the 30 days before the survey had texted or e-mailed while driving, 32.8% drank alcohol, and 21.7% had used marijuana. During the 12 months before the survey, 15.5% had been electronically bullied, 20.2% had been bullied on school property, and 8.6% had attempted suicide.

Growing violence in schools has sparked renewed interest and urgency in character education (Was, Woltz, & Drew, 2006). According to Bucher and Manning (2005), “20 percent of all public schools experienced one or more serious violent crimes” (p. 56). In addition to violent crimes, bullying and cyberbullying have significant negative impact on students. Bullying and cyberbullying have demonstrated several negative effects not only on school but also on health (Sojourner, 2012). Students who are bullied often show signs of depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Beran & Li, 2007, p. 19). Also, students who are cyberbullied often cyber bully other students and do poorly in school (Beran & Li, 2007). According to Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2013), bullying on-line has grown significantly and “as many as 160,000 students may stay home from school on any given day” (p. 361). Goss and Holt (2014) note, “violence being displayed in schools has been linked to bullying and social ostracism” (p. 50). In a study conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2007), cyberbullying and traditional bullying had a significant increase in suicide ideation among adolescents (p. 212). According to the YRBSS for 2017, “17.2% of high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, and the percentage of students who had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year increased significantly from 2007 through 2017.” These alarming trends have also increased the awareness of violence in schools and the need to address these issues in schools and among adolescents. These risky behaviors, among many others, demonstrate a lack of social-emotional

competencies among some teenage youth, and these at-risk behaviors can have dire consequences not only on student health and safety but also on student achievement and success in school (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000).

Increasing students' social-emotional competencies has demonstrated improved student achievement and student well-being (Durlak, et al., 2011; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Berkowitz, & Bier, 2004; Cheung & Lee, 2010; Cohen, 2006). Schools who foster social-emotional competencies in students have demonstrated positive effects on student self-perceptions, on student relationships with others, and on student achievement in school (Durlak, et al., 2011). Comprehensive character education programs focus on the development of social-emotional competencies. Lickona (1996) defines character education as "the deliberate effort by schools, families, and communities to help young people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values" (p. 93). Acting by core ethical values increases students' social and emotional competencies by encouraging self-regulation, critical analysis of behavior, and thoughtful reflection of moral dilemmas. Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) acknowledge the multitude of terms describing the affective domains: "Whatever term one chooses for this field (e.g., social emotional learning, character education, citizenship education, moral education, etc.), it is fundamentally about fostering the optimal positive development of students" (p. 8).

Because of the rise in at-risk behaviors among youth and rising incidents of bullying, suspensions, and other negative school-related behaviors, effective implementation of character education initiatives hopes to increase positive relationships among staff and students, create a positive school climate, and help students develop in character.

### **The Purpose of Character Education**



The purpose of character education is to help develop character traits in students which will help them thrive in school, work, and in life. Success in life requires more than just cognitive knowledge; it also requires social-emotional competencies, citizenship skills, and moral development. Schools are social places where students interact with peers and adults. They are places of learning, not just in academics but also in social skills. Thus, character education is education in academics, in social-emotional competencies, and in moral values. One can be intelligent, yet intelligence alone does not make someone nice or a good person. History documents this. Berkowitz and Bustamante (2013) describe the purpose of character education as the following:

All societies should desire citizens who are able and willing to participate in the political process toward societal improvement, are able and willing to understand and manage their own emotions and relationships and to understand others, and are motivated and equipped to follow a moral compass. (p. 8).

The goals of character education programs are to develop character strengths that will help students be successful academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. In addition, character education programs often uphold the ideals of democracy. The purposes of character education incorporate many facets of the school environment that educators wish to improve: school climate, student behavior, school safety, academic growth, etc., but the foremost goal of character education is to develop positive character traits and moral values so students are successful in school and in their lives.

### **The Case Under Evaluation**

This study investigated the influence of a character education program on school climate, relationships, and student character growth. The goal of the program was to influence student character development through service-learning opportunities and other initiatives which may influence character growth. The program of Monroe High School was based on 11 principles of character education by Character.org, which provided a theoretical framework and evaluation process (Character.org). Each of the 11 principles contains indicators that demonstrate implementation of the program. As a framework, the principles include multiple school stakeholders' input in the character education initiative. Comprehensively, the framework provided for implementation and evaluation of the program.

The researcher examined the extent, quality and influence of character education at one urban high school in southwestern Oklahoma—Monroe High School, a pseudonym. MHS serves a diverse student body in a city of approximately 100, 000 people. The community is also home to a large army base, and the school is partnered with a military liaison. The school district is the ninth largest district in the state of Oklahoma. The high school consists of grades nine through twelve. Monroe High School's enrollment is 1028 students with a special education population of 25.7%, which is 10% higher than the state average. Approximately 44% of students are on free or reduced lunch. The students' ethnicity is as follows: 25.1% black, 14% Hispanic, 6.8% Native American, 46.7% Caucasian, 3.1% Asian, and 4.2% identifying with 2 or more races. The diversity of the student body presented opportunities for cultural awareness and for inclusiveness of students in all areas of education. Character education initiatives included pedagogy that emphasized inclusiveness, cultural awareness, fairness, equity, respect, etc. The school began its character education initiatives in the fall of 2015, but full implementation did not begin until SY

2016-2017. The expected outcomes of the study can be used by educators to support program planning, improve implementation procedures, and support program evaluation.

The first year of character education implementation involved an administrator who had led character education initiatives at another high school, which was designated as a National School of Character by Character.org in 2017. The administrator began by creating the character education committee which included the school's planning team, comprised of lead teachers, department chairs, support staff, administration, and parents. The CE administrator and department chairs led character education initiatives through professional development of the 11 Principles of Character Education by Character.org. The CE committee analyzed school data records, developed school climate surveys for all stakeholders, conducted appreciative inquiries, and developed key structures to begin full implementation of the 11 principles. Based on school data analysis, the committee developed a new vision and mission statement and school goals and objectives to meet the needs of the school. This process involved all faculty, parents, students, and community. The student body developed the core values and touchstone of the school, and by student majority vote, the touchstone and core values were created.

During the second year of character education implementation, the committee invited a lead member of Character.org to conduct training on the 11 principles for the staff. The character education committee analyzed school data records to determine goals for the school and designed a logic model framework for the second year of character education initiatives. The following logic model framework was utilized to assess student perceptions of school climate, assess their character development, assess effective implementation of the 11 principles of character education, and other character education goals for the school (Gardner & Brindis, 2017).

Required Resources	Outcomes	Assessment of Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Development of 11 Principles</li> <li>• Student School Climate Survey</li> <li>• Staff/Parent/Community Survey</li> <li>• 11 Principles of CE rubric</li> <li>• Character Growth Index (CGI) - to measure student character growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and students knowledgeable of the 11 principles framework on CE</li> <li>• Access to service learning opportunities</li> <li>• Positive school climate</li> <li>• Improved relationships among school stakeholders</li> <li>• Increased social and emotional competencies of students.</li> <li>• Student character growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School climate survey data: students, staff, parents, and community.</li> <li>• 11 Principles Rubric to measure implementation of CE.</li> <li>• Character Growth Index to measure student character growth.</li> <li>• School data- attendance, discipline, and academic achievement.</li> </ul>

Figure 1 Logic model framework.

One significant evaluation approach used to begin policy implementation was appreciative inquiry (Gardner & Brindis, 2017). This evaluation approach was best for the initial implementation process since stakeholders could identify indicators of the 11 principles that the school was already implementing and could further analyze areas that needed focus. Through appreciative inquiry, school stakeholders could envision the future state of the school (Gardner & Brindis, 2017). In addition, performance monitoring as another evaluation approach was utilized to track indicators of progress of the 11 principles through surveys, academic outcomes, and school data records before, during, and after implementation of character education policy.

At the end of the second year of implementation, Monroe High School was designated by Character.org as a 2018 National School of Character. Implementation of the character education initiatives was extensive and the desired outcome of being designated as a NSOC was attained; however, the need to measure the intended outcome of student character growth remained.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this program evaluation was to discover how implementation of a character education program influenced student character growth, school climate, and relationships. The researcher examined the extent and quality of character education implementation, the extent and quality of data analysis, and school evaluation processes of character education. One purpose of this study was to analyze the descriptives of school climate, program implementation and student character growth. In addition, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among the variables of the domains of relationship, responsibility, respect, and motivation. The researcher expects to find differences across time in the four domains from the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys and the pre and post Character Growth Index surveys. Finally, this study expects to find variables from the school climate

surveys, the character education implementation survey and the pre Character Growth Index survey that predict outcomes of the post CGI domains of respect, responsibility and relationship. The expected outcomes from this study can be used by educational leaders for program planning and design, implementation, and evaluation.

## **Research Questions**

For the purpose of this study, the following four research questions were asked:

1. Research Question #1 (RQ1): What are the characteristics of the Character Growth Index (CGI), school climate, and character education program implementation?
2. Research Question #2 (RQ2): What are the relationships among characteristics across the CGI, school climate, and character education program implementation?
3. Research Question #3 (RQ3): What are the differences across time for CGI and school climate?
4. Research Question #4 (RQ4): To what extent does character education program implementation, school climate, and past CGI predict character growth?

## **Significance of the Study**

Based on the logic model, assessment of school climate through surveys of student, parents, faculty, and community was important in measuring outcome effectiveness. Positive relationships among students and staff and peer relationships are significant factors in creating a positive school climate and advancing character education initiatives. Student

perceptions of character education implementation emphasized the importance of student input and voice into character education. Effective implementation of character education required significant input from all stakeholders and focus on building positive relationships with students. Assessment of the character education initiatives was measured by the 11 principles rubric and was significant to determine the extent and quality of character education implementation. Assessment of student character development via the character growth index by Dr. Mark Liston was significant in determining student character growth and overall character development of the school site (Liston & Berkowitz, 2014). As indicated in the logic model framework, assessment of school data records, the 11 principles rubric, and the character growth index were key elements in determining program effectiveness and achievement of intended student and school outcomes.

This study can contribute to the benefits of teaching core values and performance values in schools. By focusing on student perceptions of character education implementation, this study can demonstrate the significance of student input and can demonstrate how character education influences student character development. Creating schools of character can help alleviate at risk behaviors, increase student safety in school, and create schools that not only increase students' academic attainment but also increase their character development, their moral values, and their community service.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The following limitations are acknowledged in this study. First, this study was conducted at a single high school that implemented one character education program; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other schools. Second, this study utilized the Character Growth Index over two periods of time. Not all students took the surveys completely, thus limiting the

number of student responses. Third, this study used the elements of the 11 principles rubric at a school that was previously designated as a National School of Character, which may influence some students' answers. Fourth, the researcher is an administrator at the school, which may influence student responses to the implementation survey.

### **Definition of Terms**

For this study the following terms are operationally defined:

Character Education:	Is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. To be effective, character education must include all stakeholders in a school community and must permeate school climate, teaching, and learning (2018).
Character Growth Index	The CGI (2014) is designed to be simple to take and its data easy to use. The only brief (80 questions), valid measure of multidimensional student character development. CGI assesses large groups' character development in 16 strengths (Characterchallenge.org).
11 Principles Rubric	A scoring guide that measures the implementation of each indicator of the 11 principles.
Intrinsic Value	Performance or actions based on intrinsic value rather than extrinsic rewards or recognition; finding personal satisfaction from one's actions.
Moral Values	Moral values describe the values in support of our best



social interactions such as integrity, justice, fairness, compassion, caring, empathy, humility, respect for others, trustworthiness, and generosity. (Character.org).

#### Performance Values

Performance values define the qualities that lead to our best work such as diligence, perseverance, initiative, self-discipline, goal setting, determination, creativity, and curiosity. (Character.org).

#### Service Learning

Service learning is an experiential teaching strategy that intentionally integrates academic learning and relevant community service.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was a program evaluation to discover the influence of a character education program on student character growth. This study evaluated one high school's implementation of character education and its measures of school and student outcomes.

Although this study focused on one program at one high school, it demonstrated the implementation processes, assessments and evaluation of program effectiveness, thus providing other educators and administrators information and measures that could be replicated.

Character education is an intentional process of incorporating moral values into every aspect of school processes, functions, and curriculum. It is the intentional practice of recognizing the significance of character on one's success in school and in life. Schools have the opportunity to help develop morals and values in youth. This study hopes to add to the research on character education and its influence on student character development.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews key aspects of character education and provides a conceptual and theoretical framework for character education implementation and educational leadership as it is presented in current educational practice. This program evaluation analyzes leadership, implementation of a character education program, and evaluation of its intended outcomes. The history of character education is presented to understand the root of the initiatives and to understand the comprehensiveness of character education in America. The resurgence of character education is also explored to highlight the reasons for its renewed focus in American education. Common themes and characteristics from dozens of character education programs are explicated for further understanding of the elements of implementation and instructional practices that have demonstrated successful outcomes. Also presented in this chapter are aspects of character education that may be controversial and should be explored for comprehensive review prior to program implementation. A review of evaluation processes of character education concludes the chapter.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on elements of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, Thomas Lickona's 11 principles of character education, and Jacqueline Stefkovich's best interests of students' framework (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Lickona, 1996; Stefkovich, 2013). This theoretical framework provides a boundary for definition and explanation about why character education is important for students in schools.

Moral development can evolve like one's cognitive development and physical development, and schools can provide students opportunities for moral development; however, educators should note that morals and values differ across cultures, religions, and individuals. Critics of Kohlberg's theory noted that these theories were based predominately on adolescent males and focused on the justice perspective to the neglect of the care perspective, but Kohlberg's theory does provide value to educators who can provide opportunities for moral development through moral dilemmas and discourse. Kohlberg's theory emphasized that social interactions and cultural norms play significant roles in the development of one's moral development. This study also utilized Stefkovich's best interests of students' framework to ensure students had voice in school decision-making, and students would consider for themselves the core values of the school and their own individual values. The 11 principles of character education was utilized for program implementation and provided the framework for character education initiatives.

For this study, Thomas Lickona's 11 principles of character education was utilized to expound the framework of moral development into integration of character education into the school setting, thus promoting moral development of the student. Character.org, formerly known as the Character Education Partnership, defined character education as "the deliberate effort by schools, families, and communities to help young people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values" (Lickona, T., 1996, p. 1). This framework provided a pragmatic approach to character education implementation and evaluation of outcomes, while also providing for a systematic process for schools to consider for further program utilization.

### **Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development**

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development has often been used as a theoretical framework for moral development in children through adolescence (Harding & Snyder, 1991).

Much like Piaget’s theory of cognitive and moral development, Kohlberg’s theory of moral development processes through stages of increasing degrees of sophistication and complexity in cognition. Kohlberg’s theory is a developmental process of six stages with each stage representing more sophistication in moral development. The following figure represents the six stages of development:

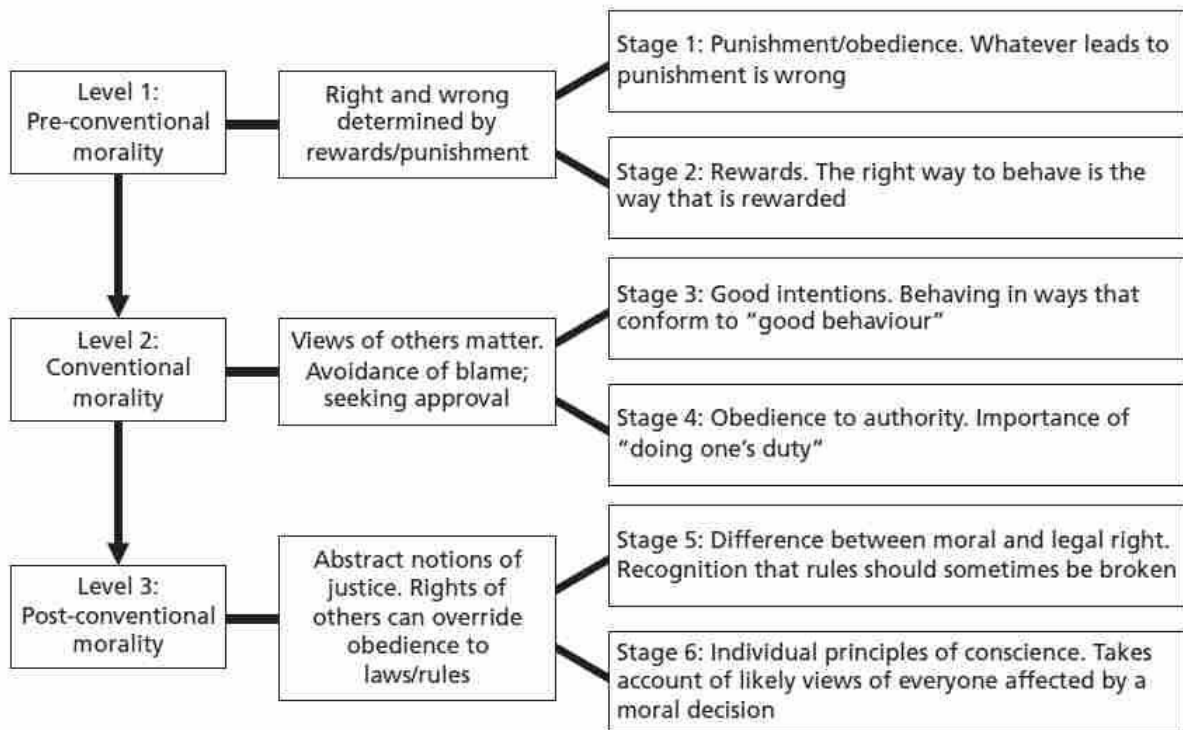


Figure 2 Kohlberg’s theory of moral development.

Level one of Kohlberg’s model depicts the early formation of moral development beginning in infancy and early childhood, where behavior is based on extrinsic factors of rewards and punishments. The second level develops through more sophisticated interactions with others and with community; developing complexity of individual in relation to others and what is good for the community. The final stage is the most sophisticated level where an individual can

distinguish morality across many cultures, ideologies, and individual beliefs and evaluate those differing moral sentiments as significant to others. In addition, individual rights of others may warrant civil disobedience or breaking of laws, etc. According to Kohlberg, the utilization of moral dilemmas and discourse in education can promote moral development in youth (Harding & Snyder, 1991; Gimmarco, 2016). Kohlberg and Hersh (1977 ) note the significance of moral education in school processes where students learn and develop in a community of their peers and the adults around them and where they develop moral “autonomy and a more adequate conception of justice” (p. 54). Kohlberg added significantly to the field of moral education as an educator and practitioner himself. In addition to the moral framework, Kohlberg developed three processes to teach moral education: moral exemplars, moral discourse, and Just Community schools (Snarey & Samuelson, 2008). The framework of Kohlberg’s theory provides a rationale for the teaching of moral values through discourse in education. Many programs that emphasize social-emotional learning, such as found in character education programs, utilize Kohlberg’s model as a framework and basis for pedagogy.

### **Critics of Kohlberg’s Theory**

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development has been criticized for focusing too much on the focus of justice without consideration for the female perspective or the consideration of care when facing moral dilemmas. Gilligan (1977) asserted that Kohlberg’s stages of moral development were biased against women; his subjects of study were predominately male adolescents (Stefkovich, 2013). Kohlberg’s highest stage of morality focuses on the justice orientation and how one protects the rights of others. Not included in Kohlberg’s model is the ethic of care. Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) noted there are tensions between the moral orientations of justice and care:

The tension between these perspectives is suggested by the fact that detachment, which is the mark of mature moral judgment in the justice perspective, becomes the moral problem in the care perspective, that is, the failure to attend to need. Conversely, attention to the particular needs and circumstances of individuals, the mark of mature moral judgment in the care perspective, becomes the moral problem in the justice perspective, that is, failure to treat others fairly, as equals. (p. 232-233)

Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) also note both moral orientations are used by people, and not one orientation is a best fit in all circumstances nor with any one gender. Sernak (1988) combined both justice and care for educational leaders, and emphasized the need to utilize both moral perspectives when making ethical decisions. For educational leaders, moral dilemmas should be considered from multiple lenses to ensure equity and fairness. For this program evaluation of character education implementation, the best interests of the student model is explained to conceptualize leadership and implementation of a character education program. Traditionally, school leadership's focus was value-free and focused on what leadership is and how it is important in education; however, more contemporary leadership focuses on the moral purposes of education (Furman, 2004).

### **Best Interests of the Students Model for Educators**

Administration and faculty utilized the best interests of the student as an ethical model for character education implementation. This model for leadership is progressive and considers multiple lenses when making ethical and moral decisions and places the students at the center of decision-making. This model incorporates not only the ethics of justice and care, but also the ethics of critique and professionalism which are significant to the success of all students in an ever changing pluralistic society. The best interests of students framework is a model which

works conjointly with the 11 principles of character education framework because both models share the importance of rights, responsibility, and respect in educational decision-making. Stefkovich's (2013) best interests' model incorporates the ethics of justice, care, and critique within the ethic of the educational profession. Also, included within this model are rights, responsibilities, and respect, which provide educators with differing lenses to utilize when making school decisions. Additionally, Furman (2004) adds a fifth dimension to the best interest of the student model—the ethic of community.

Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) provide an overview of the five paradigms for educators to consider when making ethical decisions. The ethic of justice focuses on the “abstract concepts of fairness, equity and justice” (p. 199). The ethic of justice is often used when considering the legality or equity of a situation or principle. Within this paradigm is also the question of in whose best interest when weighing decisions of individual rights versus for the good of the majority. The second paradigm is the ethic of care, which goes beyond rules and laws and considers individual needs. Within this paradigm is compassion and empathy for individuals. The ethic of care emphasizes the significance of relationships and belongingness of students. Shapiro and Stefkovich (1997) note the ethic of care is significant in education because of the nature of schooling itself which is to focus on the needs of students and help students in every way possible. The idea of nurturing students and taking care of their interests and rights is significant and according to Noddings, “caring is the very bedrock of all successful education” (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2013, p. 10). The ethic of caring provides educators another view when considering decisions that affect students. The third ethic is the ethic of critique which is based on critical theory. The ethic of critique challenges the status quo and analyzes inequities that may exist in society; it calls for the evaluation of decisions based on human rights and considers the

inequities that may exist within society. This ethic calls into question issues of equality and equity and carefully considers minority voices. The fourth paradigm is the ethic of the profession, which provides a moral aspect unique to the educational profession. This ethic calls for educators to consider their own personal and professional codes in relation to what truly is best for all students. Viewing decisions through this ethic calls for leaders to be aware of their own biases and personal interests and to be able to put those aside to make ethical decisions in students' best interests. The fifth paradigm to consider is the ethic of community. Furman (2004) defines the ethic of community as "centering on the communal over the individual as moral agent" (p. 222). Furman further explained the ethic of community as based on distributed moral leadership and based on the following skills: "listening with respect; striving for knowing and understanding others; communicating effectively; working in teams; engaging in ongoing dialogue; and creating forums that allow all voices to be heard" (p. 222). A school community includes all faculty and staff, students, parents, and community members. These stakeholders, if viewed through the lens of community, should be an integral voice in school decision-making. According to Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004), "by considering the paradigms as complementary parts of a whole, the school leader has access to a more advanced set of tools for decision making" (p. 200).

The best interests of the students' model works conjointly with the 11 principles of character education framework because both models incorporate community involvement in decision-making, promote student voice and student rights, promote a positive and nurturing school environment, promote inclusiveness for all students and school stakeholders, and promote a commitment to community values and academic success.

## **11 Principles of Character Education- A Conceptual Framework**



For this program study, Thomas Lickona's 11 principles of character education provided a conceptual framework for effective implementation and for the best interests of students. Teaching social emotional competencies and performance values is at the heart of the 11 principles framework developed by Character.org. Although not stated directly as "social-emotional" learning, Character.org addresses social-emotional competencies of students (Character.org). Five of the 11 principles framework specifically develop students' social-emotional competencies. Principle one establishes the core values of the school as developed by all school stakeholders: "The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character" (Character.org). This principle establishes the core values of the school community to include all school stakeholders: students, parents, faculty, support staff, parents, and community. All school stakeholders develop and encourage the focus of the school's core values in all facets of school instruction. Principle two focuses on the fidelity of implementation of opportunities for the social-emotional development of students: "The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing" (Character.org). This principle fosters development of nonacademic factors that students need to be successful in school and in their futures. This principle outlines how schools can promote opportunities for students to learn the traits of empathy, caring, and collaboration with others. Principle five focuses on developing opportunities for students to learn the value of service learning: "The school provides students with opportunities for moral action" (Character.org). Character education programs help to develop pedagogical practices that emphasize moral action on the part of students and provide students opportunities to discuss and analyze moral issues among one another (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Battistich, 2008). Service-learning offers students the ability to not only improve their communities, but also learn to appreciate the value service

learning has on them as individuals. In addition, effective service-learning enhances students' "sensitivity to culture and social justice issues, as well as awareness of the value of collaboration" (Cohen, 2006, p. 213). Schools emphasizing service learning for students allows for greater opportunity for the development of empathy. Principle six provides for rigorous academics and character development: "The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed" (Character.org). Academics and character development help to foster all competencies students need to be successful in school and life. Finally, principle seven focuses on developing intrinsic motivation in students to become good people: "the school fosters students' self-motivation" (Character.org). This principle encourages schools to provide students opportunities to intrinsically value good citizenship and commitment to others. The focus of this principle is for students to want to do the right thing for oneself and others because it is "good" to do so (Battistich, 2008). As a comprehensive character education program, Character.org's framework emphasizes key principles for schools to develop the social-emotional competencies of students.

### **Comprehensive Implementation of Character Education**

Successful implementation of a comprehensive character education program is key to the effectiveness of its influence on student outcomes (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Principle three from the 11 Principles Framework focuses on the intentionality of character education implementation: "The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development" (Character.org) Berkowitz and Bier (2004) emphasize the importance of fidelity of implementation and evaluation of implementation if the program is to be successful. In order for any character education initiative to be successful, schools must evaluate the implementation and its influence on student outcomes. Not only does CE implementation need to

be comprehensive and continually evaluated, but it also must have effective leadership. Principle nine emphasizes the importance of leadership for successful implementation: “The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative” (Character.org). Shared-leadership and stakeholder support of character education is critical for its success (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 75; Lickona, 1996; Durlak, et al., 2011). School leaders need to develop shared-leadership opportunities for all school stakeholders, including students, if the CE program is to be successful. Finally, principle eleven of the 11 Principles framework emphasizes the significance of continual assessment of the school climate and comprehensive implementation of character education: “The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character. (Character.org). It is significant for educational leaders to evaluate the success of implementation on student outcomes if there is to be a continual process for improvement. Because it is difficult to measure social-emotional learning or “good character,” Duckworth and Yeager (2015) recommend using multiple forms of measurement, which can greatly enhance validity and reliability (p. 245). A majority of measurements on social-emotional competencies relies on student self-report surveys (Bradshaw, et al., 2014). Diverse methods of assessment and validity and reliability measures are important for improvements in assessment of character education initiatives.

### **Character Education Promotes Community**

The significance of community in character education programs is vital. Character.org emphasizes three principles in their framework that are devoted to building community within the school. Principle four emphasizes the significance of developing a caring community: “the school creates a caring community” (Character.org). Though simply stated, this principle

requires significant work on the part of administrators and teachers. Building a caring community begins with the significance of creating caring, positive relationships among teachers and students (Zullig, et al., 2010; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011). Several studies have indicated that a caring community and students' connectedness with school are significant predictors of grade point averages and state assessments (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010; Hanson, Muller, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004; Seider, Novick, & Gomez, 2013).

Building a caring community also requires developing caring relationships among students. Bullying prevention programs help foster more positive relationships among peers and can help develop empathy for others. A significant goal of character education is to improve student relationships among peers and faculty (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). As previously stated, students must feel safe at school if they are going to learn (Bucher & Manning, 2005).

Character.org emphasizes the significance of faculty and school staff promoting the core values and being role models for students. Principle eight of the 11 Principles Framework emphasizes good role modeling: "The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students" (Character.org). Teachers and staff must model the core values and demonstrate important traits of success, such as, respect, collaboration, perseverance, grit, and integrity (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Rizzo and Bajovic (2016) discuss how teacher preparation programs should emphasize how to teach character education and how to be good role-models. The authors emphasize the need for teachers to model caring based on Noddings (2013) "caring perspective: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation" (as cited in Rizzo & Bajovic, 2016, p. 136). Caring teachers model the behaviors they wish students to internalize and demonstrate among one another. Bajovic, Rizzo, and Engemann (2009) note the importance of teachers being

good role models and using moral discussions to influence the development of moral action among students (p. 18). Students watch and listen to the actions and words of the adults around them. Good role-modeling is significant for students because they must trust the adults around them to be examples of what they preach.

Comprehensive and effective character education programs seek the support and involvement of parents and community. Character.org promotes community and parent support in principle eleven: “The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort” (Character.org). The significance of positive, active relationships between school and community cannot be overemphasized when discussing school climate. Cohen, et al., (2009) discuss four significant domains of school climate: safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environment (p. 184). In the domain of relationships, community and parental support are poignant to building a positive school climate. Character education emphasizes the importance of building relationships with community and parents (Lickona, 1996). Parental involvement in school decisions helps to build ownership and commitment to school and school-based programs (Cohen, 2006, p. 214). Building positive and active relationships with parents develops several positive outcomes for students and faculty. Henderson and Berla (1994) point out that schools who work well with parents and community have the following positive outcomes: “improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families, higher student achievement, and better reputations in the community” (p. 15; Cohen, et al., 2009). Character education programs like Character.org recognize the importance of family and community within the school and for student achievement. Henderson and Mapp (2002) discuss the importance of parental involvement even at the high school level and how the school can actively help parents become more involved:

Involvement at home is positively and significantly influenced by school practices that assist parenting and facilitate interactions with teens on learning at home. Involvement at school is most strongly influenced by school practices that encourage volunteering and participation in school decision making (p. 53).

Character education programs focus on building parent and school partnerships, not only to improve student achievement but to also create a positive school climate. Parental and community support of the character education program and moral development of youth help to build a collaborative school community with a vision for student well-being.

### **Character Education Promotes a Positive School Climate**

Character education programs address school climate as an integral component of character education implementation (Lickona, 1999). A large body of research has shown that a positive school climate promotes student achievement and lowers at-risk behaviors (Loukas & Murphy, 2007; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, Johnson, 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Cohen, 2006; Battistich, 2008). Various definitions of school climate have made research on its impact on schools more challenging (Cohen, et al., 2009; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010; Wang & Degol, 2016). Cornell and Huang (2016) posit authoritative school climate theory with two specific dimensions: disciplinary structure and student support (p. 2247). Disciplinary structure is characterized by firm but fair application of school policies, while student support emphasizes positive, caring relationships between students and teachers (Cornell & Huang, 2016, p. 2247; Zullig, et al., 2010). The specific definition of school climate through the authoritative model recognizes the importance of order, discipline, and fairness in application, i.e., all students

are treated fairly and consistently, and the support students feel from their teachers (Cornell & Huang, 2016). This model of school climate attempts to measure a strong authoritative model to lower at risk behaviors.

There are numerous definitions of and theoretical models of school climate; however, most espouse the importance of safety and discipline. Wang and Degol (2016) studied over 327 reviewed literature sources to determine the specific domains of school climate: academic climate, community, safety, and institutional environment (p. 322). These four domains demonstrated the focus of school climate and reviewed the influence each domain had on student outcomes. According to Wang and Degol (2016), “approximately 48% of studies used a correlational design to relate school climate to other variables” (p. 333). These studies reflected the association of school climate to a multiple of variables, yet most studies focused on student perceptions through student surveys. As the authors note, a missing piece in school climate studies is a focus on multiple perspectives from various stakeholder groups to include teachers, administrators, parents and community (Wang & Degol, 2016; Reynolds, Lee, Turner, Bromhead, & Subasic, 2017). In addition, most schools who measure school climate do so without “strong psychometric properties” (Zullig et al. 2010). The literature pertaining to school climate demonstrates its importance to student outcomes with a special emphasis being placed on safety and student perceived support from teachers and administration (Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al. 2010).

Promoting a positive school climate is a primary focus of character education programs. Positive school climates have a significant impact on student connectedness to school and have shown to improve student outcomes (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013; Berkowitz, & Bier, 2004; Elias, White, Stepney, 2014; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee,

2011). Positive school climates that foster student/teacher relationships and student voice have also helped mitigate the effects of systemically disadvantaged students and academic scores. According to Hopson and Lee (2011), schools can develop data-driven strategies to mitigate negative student outcomes associated with high poverty (p. 2222). These strategies should promote relationships among students and staff, promote student voice in decision-making, and promote student safety. In fact, Hopson and Lee (2011) note that school climate has a significant effect on students in poverty. For educators this is noteworthy. There is significant research on the negative outcomes of students who are in poverty compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged, and there is a disproportionate number of minoritized students who are impoverished (Elias et al., 2011; Hopson & Lee 2011). However, focusing on character education can improve school climate and help systemically disadvantaged students.

One first step in creating a positive school environment is to first evaluate the climate. Climate evaluation can be measured through a variety of measures to include the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, Monitoring the Future survey, the National School Crime Victimization Survey, and the National School Crime and Safety Survey (Bradshaw, et al., 2014). There has been a growing body of research on school climate and its association on student behaviors, at-risk behaviors, and student motivation. Measuring school climate is a first step for educators to begin analyzing their student body (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Through measurements such as the surveys mentioned previously, educational administrators can begin to analyze areas of strengths and weaknesses as perceived by their students, parents, and faculty. Measuring students' perceptions of school safety and belongingness can give school officials poignant information on where to begin to improve. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) highlight the need that school climate either helps or hinders students' academically and



behaviorally and that students need to “feel safe, cared for, appropriately supported, and lovingly ‘pushed’ to learn” (p. 186; Wang & Degol, 2016; Johnson, 2009). By measuring school climate first, educators can begin the steps in implementing a more positive school climate where students feel safe, cared for, and more motivated to learn.

A second step in fostering a positive school climate is to form at-risk prevention programs and/or health-promotion programs (Cohen, 2006). Programs designed to lower bullying and violence in schools, lower alcohol and drug abuse, decrease anti-social behaviors, while increasing students’ self-concept and academic motivation play a significant role in positive school climate. Durlak et al (2011) analyzed 213 school-based social and emotional programs and found that “extensive developmental research indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competencies is associated with greater well-being and better school performance” (p. 406). Including at-risk programs and health-related programs can help to foster students’ self-concepts and motivation to learn. According to Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2013), a positive school climate is associated with lower student at-risk behaviors, improved student self-concept, and even lower absenteeism for middle and high school students (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Most character education programs address school climate through surveys given to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. In the 11 Principles Framework authored by Character.org, the 11<sup>th</sup> principle addresses assessment of school climate and staff as leaders in character education initiatives: “The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character” (Character.org). This principle focuses on school climate and how staff and students feel about one another. By implementing at-risk prevention measures, such as anti-bullying efforts, schools help to build

and develop more positive relationships among students and staff. Building a sense of community within the school helps to reduce antisocial behaviors. Bucher and Manning (2005) note that a sense of community plays a significant role in school safety (p. 57). Through school climate assessments and at-risk prevention programs, schools can create a school community that will foster student connectedness to school.

Another significant component to creating a more positive school climate is to provide students with opportunities for service learning (Cohen, 2006). Character education programs, such as, Character.org place special significance on providing students service learning opportunities that also emphasize a reflective piece on the part of the students. According to Character.org's 11 Principles Framework, principle five focuses on service learning. This type of learning seeks to provide students engagement with their communities in an effort to make their communities better. It also helps foster empathy and sensitivity to others; developing empathy has also shown to increase pro-social behaviors, which is at the core of character education programs (Cohen, 2006; Sokol, Hammond, Berkowitz, 2010). Service learning has demonstrated improved student interpersonal and personal relationships and civic engagement (Simons & Cleary, 2006). Service learning provides benefits to both the student and the community. Morgan and Steb (2001) noted that when students lead and implement service-learning projects in their communities, they have higher self-concepts and more positive views of their influence in their communities and their acceptance of people who are different from them. Character.org emphasizes service learning opportunities as key to developing students' character. Principle five of the 11 principles directly addresses service learning and how service learning should provide for student reflection on their learning (Character.org).

### **Character Education Promotes Positive Relationships**

Fostering positive relationships among teachers and students also has a significant impact on school climate and student belongingness to school (Barile, Donohue, Anthony, Baker, Weaver, & Henrich, 2012; Battistich, 2008). According to Johnson (2009), teacher support has a significant influence on student achievement (p. 101; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Klem and Connell (2004) note that “students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with school,” and also noted is that student engagement improves student/teacher relationships (p. 262). In addition, schools that encourage positive relationships between teacher and student demonstrate higher academic achievement and higher graduation rates (Barile, et al., 2012). Teacher behaviors and interactions with students impact student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Muller, Katz, & Dance (1999) studied the influence of teacher and student relationships, and they noted that teacher expectations of their students is critical in determining whether they have a positive or a negative relationship. The importance of teacher support, and its influence on student outcomes cannot be overemphasized.

Character education programs not only foster positive school climates, but they also emphasize positive teacher/student relationships; for example, Character.org emphasizes a caring culture with teachers and staff working to build positive relationships with students (Character.org). In addition character education programs work to develop an overall positive culture that stems from the relationships among all school stakeholders (Battistich, 2008).

There are numerous programs or frameworks of character education. Character.org espouses an 11 principles framework that when implemented with fidelity would create a positive school climate and culture (Character.org). For example, principle four focuses on the

school as a caring, moral community—one that fosters nurturing relationships among school stakeholders and staff (Lickona, 1996, p. 95). The rising interest in character education initiatives has often come from the perceived decline in morality among adolescent students (Stiff-Williams, 2010). There is also renewed interest because of the concern for student safety. Bucher and Manning (2005) noted that safe schools are not necessarily created by metal detectors, cameras, etc. but by schools that emphasize a positive school climate. Implementing character education initiatives, such as Character.org’s 11 principles framework places central focus on creating such a climate for students. Character education programs that include community support, service learning, moral action, and a positive school climate have been effective in reducing student problem behaviors and increasing student achievement (Parker, Nelson, & Burns, 2010; Wang & Degol, 2016; Davidson, Khmelkov, Baker, & Lickona, 2011). Creating positive school climates and teaching social-emotional competencies helps develop democratic citizens (Cohen, 2006). Also, effective school climates address multiple facets of student life in school. Cohen (2006) posits that schools should first conduct school climate surveys, which would give administration and staff the data to know where to begin in helping develop, foster, and evaluate school climate. Comprehensive character education programs, such as the 11 principles of character education focus on the following facets of school life to foster a positive school climate: risk-preventions, health promotion efforts, service learning, community involvement, and cultural and social justice (Cohen, 2006).

One aspect of character education programs that increase a positive school climate is for the CE program to have risk-prevention efforts. As stated previously, poor school climates are often associated with higher at-risk behaviors to include bullying and aggression (Bradshaw et al, 2014). Stiff-Williams (2010) notes that the United States “has the highest youth homicide and

suicide rates of the twenty-six wealthiest nations in the world” (p. 115). Growing concern for the nation’s youth has given rise to several federal and state initiatives to incorporate character education in schools across the United States (Bradshaw, et al 2014). Oklahoma is one such state that has embraced character education initiatives to improve school climates and reduce student at-risk behaviors. House bill 1704 in 2005 authorized school districts to incorporate character education in their districts (sde.ok.gov). Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, (2004) studied 161 programs that addressed youth development and social-emotional competencies. The authors found that youth development programs that focused on several at-risk prevention measures demonstrated “significant improvements in problem behaviors, including drug and alcohol abuse, school misbehavior, aggressive behavior, violence, truancy, high-risk sexual behavior, and smoking” (p. 117). As research has indicated, a positive school climate has demonstrated a decrease in student behavior problems, lowered risk of at-risk behaviors, and an increase in student motivation to learn (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

### **Character Education Promotes Social-Emotional Development**

Comprehensive character education programs also focus on the development of social-emotional competencies of students. Character.org promotes social-emotional competencies in principle five which states: “The school provides students opportunities for moral action.” Although schooling has historically focused on developing a democratic citizenry promoting the development of American ideals, such as, protection of the rights of others, and the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, teaching social-emotional competencies has generally been left out of schooling in favor of academic subjects (Cohen, 2006). The growing at-risk behaviors of America’s youth has brought renewed interest in teaching social-emotional competencies

(Payton, et al., 2000 & Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, 2003).

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development posits there are six stages of moral development and that the final stage is one in which the individual uses moral reasoning to affirm the "universal principles of justice, the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons" (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55). Teaching goes well beyond just academic core subjects, and character education initiatives have focused on also developing moral competencies of students. To be successful in life, students must also be able to work well with others, appreciate differences, and have social competence (Cheung & Lee, 2010; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Cohen, 2006). Social-emotional competencies have demonstrated positive developmental outcomes (Cohen, 2006; Cheung & Lee, 2010).

The newly enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), opens the door for teaching social-emotional competencies (Ferguson, 2016). Although the law does not specifically use the terms social-emotional competencies or character education, it does state that "nonacademic" factors can also be used for accountability purposes, which include school climate and safety (Ferguson, 2016, p. 74). As more and more attention is being paid to increasing students' self-regulation, self-concept, and socialization, providing opportunities for student moral development is being evaluated. Teaching opportunities to improve student moral development is at the heart of character education programs. Pala (2011) posits that character education: "helps students to develop important human qualities such as justice, diligence, compassion, respect, and courage, and to understand why it is important to live by them" (p. 26). These qualities of moral development are significant factors in determining student outcomes not only in school but also in life. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that "Intelligence plus character- that is the goal of true

education.” Today, schools across the nation and the world are focusing on more than just academics and are looking for ways to improve students’ social and emotional well-being.

Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) discussed how moral development should be taught in a “cognitive-developmental sense” (p. 54). Developing student moral values requires reflection and moral deliberation on the part of students. To be successful in life, students need more than just academics. Students also need competencies, such as, empathy for others, respect for oneself and others, effective communication with others, and a litany of character traits that will help them make sound decisions regarding safety and health (Lickona, 1996; Cheung & Lee, 2010). There are dozens of social-emotional learning programs available for schools; however, many programs seem to lack sustainability and fidelity of implementation (Payton, et al., 2000). Payton, et al., 2000 highlight the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, which is designed to guide schools in effective social-emotional learning programs that will provide sustainability. The CASEL framework has four broad dimensions with several indicators under each domain: 1) Awareness of self and others, 2) Positive attitudes and values, 3) Responsible decision making, 4) Social interaction skills (p. 180). These domains focus on the nonacademic factors as mentioned in ESSA, but each domain is essential for the well-being of the student and the success of the student in his or her future. For schools to effectively address the social-emotional competencies of students, they must incorporate social emotional learning in every facet of the school to include school climate, relationships among stakeholders, and community and parent support (Greenburg, et al., 2003).

### **Character Education Challenges**

One challenge that faces character education and social-emotional learning programs is with measurement. How does one measure the effectiveness of character education programs on

the character development and/or social-emotional development of students? Character education programs need to have a focus on what variables should be measured and for what purpose(s). If the purpose of character education is to influence a positive school climate, then a research-based climate survey could be beneficial; however, most character education programs do not utilize sound psychometric measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of the CE programs on student moral development (Zullig, et al., 2010). Again, most character education programs utilize some form of school climate survey and/or school data on student information, such as, discipline records, absenteeism, truancy, etc., but there is little evidence of the measurement of character development and its influence on student achievement (Leming, 1993). Cohen, et al., (2009) discuss the problematic measurement of school climate, which is a significant focus of character education programs and has demonstrated influence on student behavior (Zullig et al., 2010). Cohen, et al., (2009) note that in a survey conducted by 40 school leaders from across the nation many of the principals developed their own climate surveys. Bradshaw, et al., (2014) state there are numerous school climate surveys, but most do not account for the “multidimensional nature” of school climate, and most of the school climate surveys are in questionnaire forms where only certain aspects of school climate are measured, such as student engagement or connectedness to school (p. 594). In addition, many school climate surveys have not been researched as valid and reliable measurements (Cohen, et al., 2009). Although school climate is significant to creating a positive culture and positive relationships, it alone cannot be measured singularly to demonstrate the effectiveness of character education programs on student outcomes. Unfortunately, there is still little research on the effectiveness of character education programs (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).



Another problematic aspect of measurement of character education programs is the lack of clear objectives or goals for character education. As pointed out by Berkowitz and Bier (2004), “it is difficult to discuss the effectiveness of character education programs without first considering its goals” (p. 73). The authors note that the goal of character education is to develop good character in students; however, what exactly constitutes “good” character is also difficult to define in a universal and comprehensive way. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) define character as a “complex set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent” (p. 73). Duckworth and Scott-Yeager (2015) use the term “personal qualities” to refer to positive character traits that help students become successful (p. 239). Other terms used in a similar vein are social-emotional competencies, virtues, values, and morals; however, the key connotation of all these terms relates to the positive character traits students’ need to possess to succeed in school and in life, such as, grit, determination, courage, empathy, respect, etc. (Duckworth & Scott-Yeager (2015). Similarly, Lickona (1991) describes good character “as involving the facility to consistently apply principles such as respect for others, truthfulness, fairness, and responsibility when facing behavioral and ethical choices (as cited in Skaggs & Bodenhorn, 2006, p. 84). One definition of character education comes from the Institute for Educational Services which defines CE as “school-based programs that are designed to positively influence behaviors associated with qualities such as respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship” (as cited in Sojourner, 2012, p. 7). The multi-dimensional descriptors of character and character education make it challenging to define and thus challenging to measure the effectiveness of character education programs.

In addition to the multiple definitions of what “good” character is and what is meant by character education, the goals and objectives of character education are not always clearly

articulated. Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) studied five school districts and their implementation of character education and its influence on student behaviors and achievement. Of special note is that the authors suggested that if the goals of the character education program were “to improve student behavior and the overall climate of the school” then the goals were warranted and capable of being measured (p. 113). Skaggs and Bodenhorn (2006) did not determine an influence of character education on student achievement, but their findings do show promise of the influence of character education on school climate and more positive social behaviors of students.

### **Components of Effective Character Education Programs**

Although character education initiatives are not new, their effectiveness on student character development and sustainability rely on effective implementation. Effective implementation begins with leadership. To implement a comprehensive character education program, educational leaders need to recruit the help of parents and community and encourage active community partnerships in the character education initiative (Lickona, 1999). Berkowitz and Bier (2004) emphasize the importance of schools leaders in character education implementation, and they note that implementation must be done so with fidelity if the program is to be successful (p. 75). Berkowitz and Bier go further in emphasizing the principal’s role in leading a school of character:

Leading a school of character requires that the principal first fully understands what quality character education entails (most do not). Then the principal must really commit to this vision and truly want to make it happen under his or her watch. Finally, the principal must have the requisite skills to enact quality character education and then to live it out both personally and programmatically (p. 77).

The vision and drive of the principal and the commitment to implementation play a significant role on the effectiveness of the character education program. One note for school leaders is that the role of the principal is crucial to effective implementation because only the principal can ensure faculty participation (Bulach, 2002).

A second critical component of effective implementation of character education is stakeholder buy-in and involvement in the program. This includes all school stakeholders: parents, community, students, faculty, and support staff (Bulach, 2002; Bajovic, Rizzon, & Engemann, 2009; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). For any initiative to last, the majority of school stakeholders must see character education as needed and vital for the education of students. Berkowitz (2002) noted that “if you work with or around children, you *cannot* not be a *character educator*” (p. 59). For character education to last, teachers and school staff must buy-in to the character education program. Character.org utilizes a rubric to assess the effectiveness and fidelity of character education implementation (Character.org; Bulach, 2002). This assessment includes all school stakeholders in the evaluation process, and it ensures that character education initiatives are supported by a majority of stakeholders and there is a clear vision of the goals of character education. This assessment is vital for effective implementation.

Also important for effective implementation is to have a clear understanding of what character education is and what are the program’s goals and objectives. One criticism of character education programs is that they have not always had a clear definition of character or character education and that the goals of the program have not been clearly defined (Was, Woltz, & Drew, 2006). Thus, leaders of schools of character must set clear definitions of character education and set clear goals for the character education program. According to Bajovic, Rizzo, and Engemann (2009), there must be a clear definition of character and character education

before there can be buy-in among stakeholders. What is character?—has been the focus of many studies (Berkowitz 2002; Chen, 2013; Williams, 2000; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Bulach, 2002). Berkowitz (2002; 2004) defines character as a “set of psychological characteristics that affect that person’s ability and inclination to function morally” (p. 48) In other words, the character traits of the individual will determine if that person chooses to do the right or the wrong thing given a circumstance. Berkowitz (2013) notes that when defining character, one should note the complexity of the characteristics of moral functioning. The ability to reason based on morality—what is right versus what is wrong—is a complex cognitive enterprise (p. 48). Character traits such as guilt, compassion, and empathy allow for an individual to utilize moral reasoning to determine moral action or immoral action. Comprehensive character education programs include moral reasoning, moral behaviors, and moral functioning (Berkowitz, 2013; Lickona, 1996; Shields, 2011). Though character education and moral learning have often be in different theoretical camps, the current trend is to bridge the two theoretical thoughts into a blended, comprehensive and universal concept of character education (Berkowitz, 2013). Berkowitz and Bier (2004) define character education programs in a broader sense and encompass a multi-faceted definition of character education which includes service-learning initiatives, social-emotional learning, and prevention programs. If a school is intentional in its character education initiative and has clear objectives, goals, and outcomes for the school and students, then the school is implementing a comprehensive character education program (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). In addition, character education has also been defined as encompassing the “cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains and includes strategies ranging from moral reasoning and ethical dilemmas to values clarification and even community service learning” (Williams, 2000, p. 32). Character education programs, such as Character.org, posit intentional practices that include

moral dilemma reasoning, moral reflection, community values and service learning opportunities (Character.org). Character education should not be prescriptive with simple character traits of the week, posters, or assemblies. Effective character education implementation involves creating a clearly defined and articulated definition of character based on moral principles that a community beholds as virtuous. The evaluation of the school climate and culture is a starting point for articulating what the school community values as character.

Another key aspect of successful character education implementation is for staff to build positive relationships and model the behaviors that they want students to develop. For instance, staff should treat colleagues, students, and parents with respect. Students are attentive to teacher and staff behaviors, and their perceptions of school leaders should embody the values of the school community (Battistich, 2008; Rizzo & Bajovic, 2016). Educators and educational leaders should model the behaviors and values they wish for students to embody. Students who perceive their teachers as caring and supportive of them demonstrate more self-regulatory skills and have more positive relationships with their teachers and peers (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

As noted previously, effective character education programs cannot be didactic or prescriptive in nature. Simply memorizing words of the week or character posters is not effective in developing moral principles in students (Leming, 1993). Comprehensive character education programs, such as Character.org, emphasize the importance of service-learning in developing positive character traits in youth (Character.org). When students lead and actively participate in service-learning projects they develop collaboration skills, communication skills, and social skills. Students learn to work with people different from themselves. In a longitudinal study of undergraduate college students by Astin, Vogelgesang, Iked, and Yee (2000), the authors noted that service learning had significant, positive outcomes for students' perceptions of their

influence on their communities and that students' involvement in service-oriented professions increased (p. 3). In a meta-analysis study, Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki (2011) also noted the significance service-learning projects had on student self-concepts and perceptions of community. Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki (2011) noted the following service learning strategies as effective in student outcomes: 1) service learning should be aligned with curricular goals, 2) student-voice should lead development, implementation, and evaluation of service learning, 3) community partnerships should be created, 4) there should also be a reflective piece to the service learning so students can internalize the learning process (p. 166-167). By providing students with opportunities to lead and implement service-learning projects, educators help students increase their self-concepts and increase their perceived impact on their communities. Students also have an increase in their perceptions of their schools (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Astin, et al., 2000; Billig, 2000). Billig (2000) highlights another positive student outcome—students who are involved in service-learning projects are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors. Service learning provides students opportunities to build communication skills, social skills, and self-efficacy skills.

Another key strategy when implementing character education in the curriculum is to provide numerous opportunities for moral discourse and moral dilemmas. Berkowitz and Bier (2004) state that “a substantial body of literature has demonstrated that programmatic peer moral discourse is an effective means of promoting the development of moral-reasoning capacities (p. 81; Battistich, 2008). Developing students' moral reasoning is significant in character development and aligns with Kohlberg's theory of moral development. There are several methods teachers can utilize to provide for moral discourse. Current issues and social issues can highlight significant core values. Allowing students to analyze social and moral issues through

literature, history, and media can provide opportunities for moral discussion (Battistich, 2008, p. 8; Pala, 2011; Molchanov, 2016). Power (2002) posits that Kohlberg's application of moral psychology is best demonstrated through a dilemma-discussion approach: "leaders encourage students through Socratic questioning to resolve moral dilemmas. Research shows that when used appropriately over an extended period, the dilemma-discussion approach is an effective and reliable way of promoting moral stage development" (p. 131; Berkowitz, 2002). Teachers have numerous teachable moments where moral discourse can help hone student moral development.

Another key strategy for effective instruction on character development is training and staff development of teachers. The training of teachers how to teach character education or moral development lessons is lacking (Revell & Arthur, 2007). Significant professional development and teacher preparation to implement character education is vital if there is going to be significant outcomes on student development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Battistich, 2008). Berkowitz and Bier (2004) highlight several effective character-education models that emphasize and require significant staff development of teachers. These programs focus on staff development to effectively train staff on the how and why of character education implementation. Cohen et. al (2009) note the lack of teacher preparation when it comes to the social and emotional learning of students (p. 206). Most teachers have only been prepared to teach subjects and not how to influence students' social and emotional development. To teach character education, teachers must be educated to teach social and emotional competencies.

Another strategy to effectively implement character education in the curriculum and throughout the school is to provide for as many opportunities as possible for student-voice to lead. One example of student voice is for students to develop classroom rules or even school policies. Aligned with Kohlberg's theory of moral development, allowing students to interpret

and develop principles that will be followed in the class or in the school helps to hone their moral reasoning skills (Leming, 1993). According to Mitra (2003) “increasing student voice in schools also has been shown to help to re-engage alienated students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools. Psychological research has demonstrated the connection between autonomy and motivation” (p. 290) Helping students gain autonomy builds confidence in their ability to make a difference and feel a belongingness to school. This also builds on students’ self-concept and self-efficacy. Providing students with significant opportunity to actively participate in the social aspects of school builds ownership and respect for the school community. Advocates of student voice point to the importance of a change in how educators perceive students—one where students become active participants in their own education (Cook-Sather, 2006). By changing how we perceive students, educators have the opportunity to truly enhance the affective cognition of students.

## **Conclusion**

Teaching students to be successful, productive citizens in an ever changing and diverse world requires educators to teach more than just subject matter. Growing concerns for at-risk behaviors among today’s youth has led to the revitalization of character education. Although there are many character education programs, educators should evaluate these programs based on individual school and district goals. For any character education program to be effective, clear goals and objectives must be established and fidelity of implementation must be considered. Of course, community and parental support play a significant role in character education programs and in developing a positive school climate. Also, educators should continually evaluate the effectiveness of the program through a variety of measurements. Assessments should be chosen carefully and should be sound psychometric measures. Finally, character education initiatives



must have full support of the entire school community and include student voice. Student voice increases student engagement and self-efficacy. If schools want to teach students to be productive democratic citizens, then they must be afforded opportunities in school to practice such. The core of character education is to develop the social and emotional competencies of students and these affective traits are significant to the full educational development of students.

To further the research on the effectiveness of character education on student development requires a measurement of student social-emotional development. Measuring student character development requires a valid and reliable instrument which can provide much needed data for educators. Most character education research has measured school climate or student perception surveys to assess the program's effectiveness; however, there is little research on the measurement of character development of students. Evaluating character education implementation and assessment of student character development could add new light on the influence of character education on students.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study is a program evaluation that takes a pragmatic approach, which can include a range of purposes (Creswell, 2014, p. 11). The purpose of this study was selected based on a framework of program initiatives. This program evaluation evaluated the effectiveness of a legislative policy enacted in Oklahoma to encourage and promote character education programs in all school districts. The overall goal of the policy was to promote and encourage character education programs in the state of Oklahoma. The bill provided incentives for school districts who developed and implemented character education programs. Furthermore, this program evaluation reviewed one high school from southwestern Oklahoma, and its development, implementation, and evaluation of its character education program. The goal of the program initiative was to influence student character development through service-learning opportunities and other initiatives which may influence character growth. The character program at Monroe High School, a pseudonym, was based on 11 principles, which provided a theoretical framework and evaluation process (Character.org). Each of the 11 principles contains indicators that demonstrate implementation of the program. As a framework, the principles included multiple school stakeholders' input in the character education initiative. Comprehensively, the framework provided for implementation and program evaluation.

#### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among character education implementation on school climate and student character development. The 11 principles

framework provided indicators for implementation of a comprehensive program with multiple stakeholder input. Effective implementation of character education programs has demonstrated positive outcomes on school climate, teacher/student relationships, student behaviors, etc., but little research has examined the influence of character education on student character development; thus this study hopes to expand the research on character education and its influence on student character growth (Pala, 2011). This study will address the following questions:

1. Research Question #1 (RQ1): What are the characteristics of the Character Growth Index (CGI), school climate, and character education program implementation?
2. Research Question #2 (RQ2): What are the relationships among characteristics across the CGI, school climate, and character education program implementation?
3. Research Question #3 (RQ3): What are the differences across time for CGI and school climate?
4. Research Question #4 (RQ4): To what extent does character education program implementation, school climate, and past CGI predict character growth?

## **Research Design**

This study is a program evaluation and uses a logic model framework to examine the processes and activities around a character education program and to evaluate its intended outcomes. The logic model framework was chosen because the research questions call for the examination of processes and activities that led to effective implementation of a character

education program and to the evaluation of the program’s outcomes (Gardner & Brindis, 2017; Anderson, Petticrew, Rehfuss, Armstrong, Ueffing, Baker, Francis, & Tugwell, 2011). “Logic models attempt to identify multiple variables, thus acknowledging the potentially complex interactions among program activities and outcomes” (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013, p. 89). Multiple activities occurred throughout two years of character education implementation and many occurred simultaneously; therefore, a logic model conceptually helps to link multiple activities and processes to intended outcomes. Figure 3 outlines the logic model framework. The logic model represents an on-going and fluid process of program implementation. Activities are recurring and evaluation of all processes and outcomes is continuous.

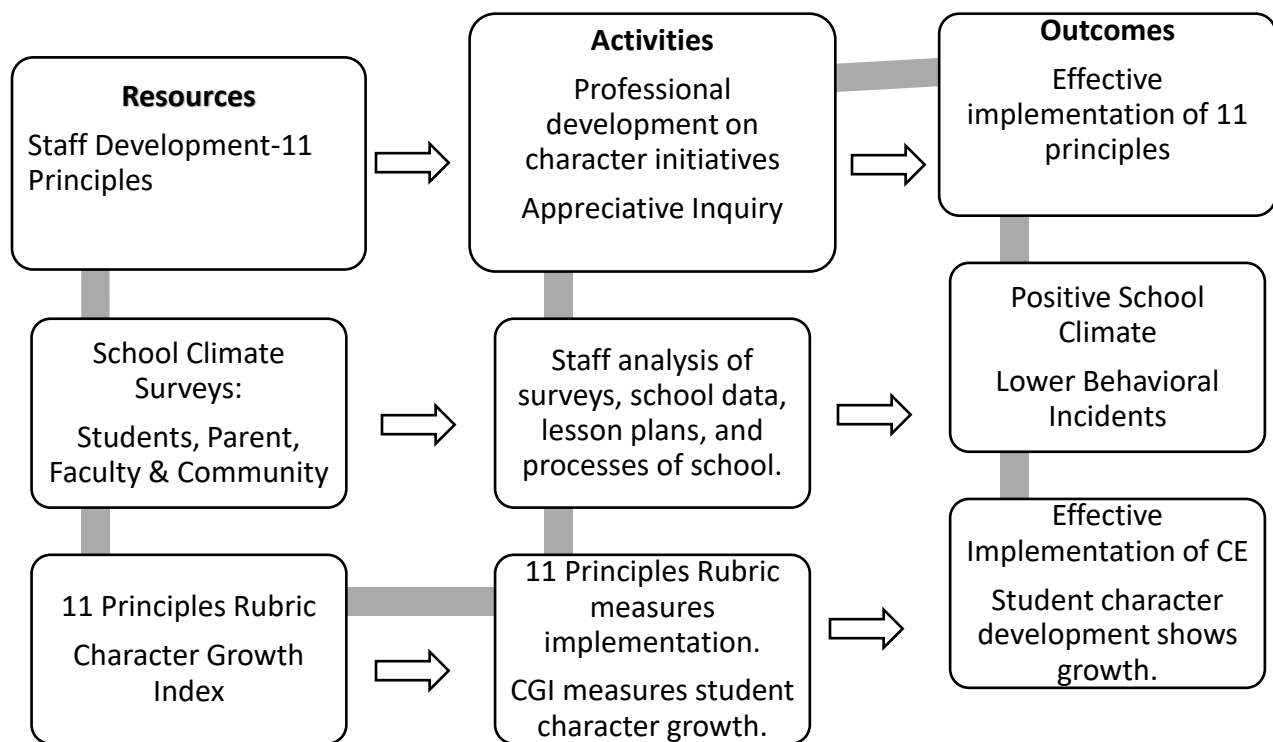


Figure 3. Logic model framework.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of a character education program and its influence on student character growth. The researcher examined the

extent of implementation as measured by school stakeholders' responses to the 11 principles' implementation rubric by Character.org and analysis of students' perceptions of their character growth. Descriptives, non-experimental correlational research, and multiple regression were conducted to measure the extent of the relationship between character education program, school climate and student character growth.

One significant evaluation approach used to begin program implementation was appreciative inquiry (Gardner & Brindis, 2017). This evaluation approach was best for the initial implementation process since school stakeholders could identify indicators of the 11 principles the school was already implementing and could further analyze areas that needed focus. Through appreciate inquiry, school stakeholders could envision the future state of the school (Gardner & Brindis, 2017). In addition, performance monitoring as another evaluation approach was utilized to track indicators of progress of the 11 principles.

### **Study Context**

This study was conducted at one urban southwestern high school. Population of the city was approximately 100,000, and the district was the ninth largest in Oklahoma. Monroe High School's enrollment was 1,028 students with the following specific demographics: 25.1% black, 14% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian, 6.8% Native American, 46.7% white, and 4.2% two or more races. Students eligible for free and reduced lunches was 42.9%. Special education population was 25.7%. MHS has a diverse student body that provides opportunities for inclusiveness and respect of differences. The school's diversity creates a natural setting for learning appreciation for differences and for respect of one another. For the 2018-2019 school year, MHS was entering its third year of character education implementation and had been designated as a State and National School of Character by Character.org the previous spring. To continue character education

initiatives, quantitative data was collected on school climate, character education implementation in all school processes, and student character growth.

### **Program Implementation Year One**

Implementation of the character education program was based on legislation encouragement of character education for the collective good of the school and its stakeholders. Utilizing the 11 principles of character education as espoused by Character.org, program implementation began at Monroe High School with professional development of staff, school climate surveys, core value surveys of staff and students, and evaluation of implementation from the 11 principles rubric. Policy implementation began in the first year of implementation with staff development on the 11 principles and reevaluation and revision of the school's vision and mission statements. In addition, staff and student development of core values which represent the principles of the school stakeholders was developed.

All staff development days were devoted to implementation of character education initiatives. One of the MHS administrators attended several Character.org workshops, including the National Forum on Character Education. The administrator was also an evaluator for OKCharacter.org, an affiliate of Character.org. The administrator evaluated other school sites who had applied for national and state school of character designation, thus providing numerous resources on the 11 principles framework for MHS staff. One lead teacher provided much of the information and training on the 11 principles. Department chairs also shared in the implementation process. Each department focused on one or two specific principles and then shared their information in faculty meetings. Thus, all professional development days and faculty meetings were devoted to the implementation of the 11 principles. Each faculty and staff member had copies of the 11 principles handbook to reference during professional development.

## **Policy Implementation Year Two**

The second year of implementation at MHS involved discussion and training on the 11 principles framework from the school leadership team, which then moved forward to the school planning team, consisting of administration, counselors, department chairs, activities director, library media specialist, and parents. The school planning team divided the 11 principles among various departments within the school so each of the departments could focus on one or two principles. The departments then researched application of the principle(s) within the school, and provided ideas and processes that could be incorporated into the school curriculum to further advance each principle within the structures of the school. After initial introduction and training on the principles, school faculty, support staff, students, and parents developed the core values and the school's touchstone. The school's touchstone and core values were developed through teacher participation and student selection; the school chose the core values of responsibility, motivation, attitude, and character.

Throughout the second year of implementation, the school promoted the core values through all school processes. Laminated signs of the core values were placed in each classroom, and the new mission and vision statements with the core values embedded in them were also posted in the classes. In addition, banners were made of the mission statement, core values, and touchstone, which were then hung in strategic places throughout the school. All media was utilized to further advance the core values of the school. Classroom procedures emphasized the mission and core values of the school, and all faculty meetings and staff development further advanced the integration of core values and curriculum. Monthly faculty meetings were devoted to teachers' lesson plans and strategies to include moral discourse and emphasis of the core

values. In the fall of the first year, five faculty members attended the National Forum on Character Education, and then these faculty members provided additional training for staff.

During the first year and second year of implementation, school climate survey data was collected from students, faculty, and parents/community. The data were collected to ensure that indicators of the 11 principles were present in the school as perceived by all school stakeholders. The 2017 student school climate survey consisted of 25 questions related to school climate, teacher/student relationships, safety, and social learning. The student survey data comprised of 744 respondents in grades 9-12. Statistical analysis of the data were run by the researcher and results were shared at faculty meetings to further advance the support and implementation of character education initiatives. During the second year of implementation, both internal and external evaluations were conducted. Internal examinations included school staff, parents, and students. Internal examinations consisted mainly of perception data collected in surveys, while external examinations consisted of evaluations from Character.org personnel who examined the school's application and visited the school for further evaluation.

In the spring of the second year of implementation, MHS was designated by examiners from Character.org as a State School of Character and as a National School of Character. To become a State School of Character, the school's application was examined by a minimum of three evaluators. The application required evidence of the school's implementation of all 11 principles. Each principle contained 3 to 4 indicators of character education implementation. For each principle, the school provided evidence and/or photos of the indicator in action. In addition, various school stakeholders scored the school's implementation of the 11 principles on a rubric provided by Character.org. Appendix B depicts the 11 principles rubric. Testimonials from school stakeholders to include students, parents, and community members were also uploaded as



part of the application. After becoming a State School of Character, MHS was then examined for national designation. In April of 2018, a national evaluator from Character.org visited MHS and interviewed various school stakeholders and visited classrooms. The evaluator interviewed the administrative team, department chairs, and parents and students. This process allowed for the evaluator to ask more detailed questions which could not be supplied in an application process only.

## **Participants**

For this program evaluation, the majority of students were asked to participate in all surveys. Students took all survey instruments in their English classes so the majority of students could participate. Students from all grade levels participated from a total student population of approximately 1000. The character education program required student survey data; student voice in school processes was a major initiative in improving school climate and student character development. One instrument to measure student character growth was given to the majority of the student body in the fall of 2018 and again in late spring of 2019. The Character Growth Index (CGI) by Dr. Mark Liston is a validated measurement of student character development (Liston & Berkowitz, 2014). The majority of students were given the CGI to further advance the character education program. MHS faculty used the instrument so students could reflect on their character strengths and could then provide goal-setting opportunities to further develop other character strengths. Student ID numbers were used for both instruments to protect the anonymity of the students. Students who did not complete both the fall and spring CGI were removed from the data. For the fall CGI, 405 students participated and 673 students participated in the spring CGI; however, some students either did not complete one or both surveys, which resulted in their data being removed before analysis. Some students did not report

their student ID numbers, so a match could not be determined. Only students who could be matched by student ID numbers and who completed both the pre and post CGI were included in the data analysis. To measure the dependent variable student character growth with the independent variables across the four domains, students who took both CGI surveys were analyzed which resulted in 218 students for data analysis.

Students also took the school climate survey and the character education implementation survey. The school climate survey was conducted in the fall of 2017 and the fall of 2018. In fall of 2017, 745 students took the school climate survey, and in the fall of 2018, 628 students completed the survey. The school climate survey was developed by Madison Tomlinson, Director of OKCharacter.org. The survey measured similar dimensions between school climate and character education implementation; for example, both instruments measured the domains of relationship, responsibility, and respect. To conduct a paired sample t-test only students who took both school climate surveys were included in data analysis resulting in a sample size of 271. The 11 Principles of character education implementation was taken by 660 students in March of 2019. Students who did not take both CGI surveys for pre/post measurement were not utilized in data analysis.

## **Data Sources**

Five data sources were analyzed for this program evaluation. Two of the data sources were given pre/post full program implementation. Two school climate surveys were conducted in the fall of 2017 and fall of 2018 to measure student perceptions of respect, responsibility, and relationships. Two character development surveys were given, one in the fall of 2018 and one in spring of 2019 to measure student character growth. A fifth survey was given to measure student perception of effectiveness of the character program's implementation. Together, the five data

sources were used to answer the four research questions presented in this study. All data was secondary data the school used to evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation.

## **Surveys**

**Character growth index.** To further examine the outcomes of the character education program, students were given the Character Growth Index developed by Liston and Berkowitz, (2014). The character growth index is a valid measure of multidimensional student character development (listongroup.org, 2014). The validation of the character growth index was addressed in the executive summary of the CGI. The executive summary addressed the reliability and validity of the CGI. To test for internal consistency reliability, the CGI was field tested with over 1000 middle school students. The validation study consisted of 784 Midwest US middle school students. Cronbach's alpha for the CGI items was .944 and the test/retest was correlated at .720 (listongroup.org, 2014). The results indicated the CGI was a reliable measurement of student character growth. Appendix E is the executive summary of CGI and demonstrates the validity and reliability of the instrument. The Character Growth Index was chosen because the instrument measures student character growth which is an intended outcome of the character education program, and the researcher attended professional development on how to conduct the survey and how to utilize the results for optimal student development. The survey provided students with information on their character strengths. The CGI (2014) assessed 16 character traits in the dimensions of respect, responsibility, relationship and motivation. The survey consisted of 88 questions that pertain to the 16 traits. A Likert scale was utilized to measure the strength of each trait; each trait consisted of a 7 scaled answer response from "nothing like me" to "more like me than anyone I know." Results of the CGI were given to the students in their English classes because English is a four year requirement thus resulting in more students taking

the CGI. Results of the CGI were meant for student reflection and goal-setting. The overall results of the school were provided to the researcher for further analysis of MHS compared to the national average, and thus provided further discussion at faculty meetings and in staff development. Areas of strengths and areas of growth were identified and became a focus for the school and future character education initiatives. Utilization of the CGI provided needed assessment, reflection and goal-setting for students and staff and provided sustainability efforts of program implementation. Appendix A is the complete Character Growth Index.

The following figure illustrates the four categories/domains of the 16 character traits:

Categories	Strengths
Respect	Honesty    Humility Cooperation    Courage
Responsibility	Wisdom    Perseverance Peace    Self-Control
Relationship	Love    Kindness Forgiveness    Gratitude
Motivation	Creativity    Curiosity Spirituality    Optimism

*Figure 4:* Character growth index categories and traits

**Program implementation survey.** The second instrument was a survey that measured the effectiveness of character education implementation. The survey consisted of 35 questions taken from the 11 principles’ rubric survey created by Character.org and used for implementation evaluation. Each question contained 4 Likert choice items with the following ranges: 1- Lacking

Evidence, 2- Developing Implementation, 3- Good Implementation, and 4-Exemplary Implementation. Each of the 4 Likert items were explained by the instructors prior to students taking the survey. Permission was granted by Doug Karr, President and CEO of Character.org to utilize the 11 principles rubric. Two questions were created by the researcher to link the implementation of character education to student character growth. Questions 36 and 37 asked students to rate the level of character education and its influence on their character development and on school climate. Question 36 asked: Character education efforts at school have helped me develop in character, and Question 37 asked: Through character education initiatives at school, the school climate is positive and inclusive of all students. Answers to these two questions were also based on a Likert scale: 1- Strongly Agree, 2- Agree, 3- Somewhat Agree, 4- Neutral, 5- Disagree, and 6- Strongly Disagree. Appendix B is the survey instrument measuring implementation of the character education program and student character development.

For the 11 principles of character education implementation survey, construct validity was analyzed using factor analysis to determine if the questions correlate in each of the four domains of relationship, responsibility, respect, and motivation. Based on factor analysis, the implementation rubric is a valid construct for all four domains. The highest correlational factors were found in the domains respect and motivation. Appendix D contains the component matrices for the 11 principles of CE implementation and the 2017 and 2018 school climates. Cronbach's Alpha for each of the four domains for the 11 principles of CE implementation are as follows: Relationship  $\alpha = .779$ , Responsibility  $\alpha = .919$ , Respect  $\alpha = .843$ , and Motivation  $\alpha = .832$ . The high values of Cronbach's alpha demonstrates the implementation survey has high internal consistency as the items are related to each domain.

**School climate.** The school climate survey was designed by Madison Tomlinson, Oklahoma Director of Character Education (OKCharacter.org). Tomlinson designed the school climate from Character.org's 11 principles implementation rubric. The school climate survey was a simplified version of the implementation rubric. For instance, question #15 of the 11 Principles implementation rubric stated: "Students perceive staff as caring and report that they can go to an adult in the school with a problem." The school climate survey divided question #15 into two separate statements: 3. "Staff at your school are caring," and 4. "You can go to an adult in the school with a problem." Appendix C is the school climate survey. Both the 11 Principles of Character.org implementation rubric and the school climate survey share commonalities in the dimensions of relationship, responsibility, and respect. In addition, the Character Growth Index also shares the dimensions of relationship, responsibility, and respect. The 11 principles of implementation rubric and the school climate survey both measured the effectiveness of the implementation of the character education program. The Character Growth Index measured the development of student character growth, which was one of the intended outcomes of the program.

For school climate surveys 2017 and 2018 and the 11 principles of character education implementation survey, construct validity was analyzed using factor analysis to determine if the questions correlate in each of the four domains. For the school climate survey 2017, questions 10 and 11 were excluded from the domains of relationship and responsibility based on factor analysis. Questions 10 and 11 were added to the domain of respect. Appendix D indicates the component matrices of all four domains. The 2017 school climate survey indicated a reliable measure for three of the four domains. Coefficient alpha measures how well similar traits correlate with one another (Ravid, 2011). Cronbach's Alpha for each of the four domains for

2017 school climate is as follows: Relationship  $\alpha = .824$ , Responsibility  $\alpha = .849$ , Respect  $\alpha = .670$ , and Motivation  $\alpha = .491$ . Questions 10 and 11 were also excluded from the domains of relationship and responsibility and added to the domain of respect for the 2018 school climate survey. The 2018 school climate survey indicated a reliable measure for three of the four domains. Cronbach's alpha for each of the four domains for 2018 school climate is as follows: Relationship  $\alpha = .806$ , Responsibility  $\alpha = .849$ , Respect  $\alpha = .670$ , and Motivation  $\alpha = .426$ . For both climate surveys, the domain of motivation did not demonstrate internal consistency; however, this may be because of the limited number of questions in the school climate surveys for this domain.

## **Variables**

For this study, independent variables were included from the four domains of respect, responsibility, relationship, and motivation for the CGI. Three of the four domains of the CGI are components of the school climate survey and all four domains of the CGI are components of the character education implementation survey. Independent variables in the domains of respect, responsibility, relationship, and motivation were used to measure the extent of the character education program's implementation, school climate, and the CGI taken in the fall of 2018. The dependent variable of students' character growth was taken from the post CGI survey in the spring of 2019. The following figure illustrates the questions pertaining to each domain across all surveys:

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Character Growth Index</b>	<b>11 Principles of CE Rubric (Implementation)</b>	<b>School Climate Survey</b>
Relationships	Q2, Q4, Q7, Q11, Q13, Q26, Q29, Q36, Q39, Q43, Q45, Q53, Q54, Q57, Q61, Q67, Q71, Q74, Q75, Q77	Q6, Q11, Q15, Q16, Q27, Q35	Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, *Q10, *Q11, Q18, Q19, Q20
Responsibility	Q6, Q10, Q12, Q17, Q19, Q20, Q22, Q28, Q37, Q38, Q40, Q44, Q55, Q58, Q59, Q60, Q65, Q66, Q68, Q76	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q13, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, & Q26	Q9, *Q10, *Q11, Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q23, Q24, & Q25
Respect	Q3, Q5, Q9, Q16, Q18, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q27, Q32, Q33, Q35, Q41, Q48, Q49, Q51, Q64, Q69, Q73, Q80	Q14, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q32, & Q33	Q10, Q11, Q12, Q22, & Q27
Motivation	Q1, Q8, Q14, Q15, Q21, Q30, Q31, Q34, Q42, Q46, Q47, Q50, Q52, Q56, Q62, Q63, Q70, Q72, Q78, Q79	Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, & Q34	Q21 & Q26

Figure 5: Survey questions pertaining to each domain.

\*Excluded from the domain

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is an internal evaluator and administrator which provided helpful insight into the culture and climate of the school being examined; however, the limitations of insider bias must be considered (Gardner & Brindis, 2014, p. 97). To lessen the bias of the researcher's internal commitment to the school program, quantitative analysis was conducted on student



responses to school climate, character education implementation and their character growth. Again, the focus of this study was on student perceptions of the implementation of character education and of student perceptions of their own character development. To lessen bias, the researcher did not participate in the survey's implementation to students; teachers were asked to conduct the surveys using computers housed in their individual classrooms. The researcher is an advocate of the character education program, so careful examination of the strengths and limitations of this study must be considered.

Despite potential limitations, the role of the researcher added a clear perspective of the nuances and the needs of the students and faculty. Based on the school climate surveys and student perceptions of program implementation, the researcher was able to include student voice in school processes and programs. Significant research has been conducted on school climate and prosocial behaviors and belongingness to school; engagement in school is an important criteria for student academic and social success (Konold, Cornell, Shukla, & Huang, 2017; Thapa et al., 2013; Cornell and Huang, 2016). As an administrator at the school, the researcher was able to utilize student-voice to make change initiatives promoting a positive school climate and student engagement.

### **Research Approval and Confidentiality**

Prior to conducting this study, the Internal Review Board was consulted. The researcher completed the Human Research Determination worksheet for this study because all data analyzed was secondary data and was reviewed by school officials for program evaluation of intended outcomes. All data sets were de-identified and existing, thus IRB determined that approval was not necessary and the researcher could proceed with the study. This program evaluation utilized the data sets collected by the school.

## **Data Analyses**

The Character Growth Index was given to students in the fall of 2018 and again in the spring of 2019. The CGI was utilized so students could identify their own character strengths, and students could create goals based on their results. CGI results were given to students through their student ID numbers, and their individual results were deleted by the administrator. Only overall school data was kept so student anonymity was protected. CGI results were used by the school planning team to focus on areas that may be lower than the national average.

Research question one asked, “What are the characteristics of the Character Growth Index, school climate, and character education program implementation?” Research question two asked, “What are the relationships among characteristics across the CGI, school climate, and character education implementation?” and research question three asked, “What are the differences across time for CGI and school climate?” Descriptive statistics were run for all surveys to determine levels of agreement among the four domains of respect, responsibility, relationship, and motivation. Correlational statistics were run utilizing SPSS software to measure relationships among the variables of all surveys in the domains of respect, responsibility, relationship, and motivation. Levels of difference were also measured using paired sample t-tests for school climate and the character growth index.

All questions pertaining to each of the four domains were transformed to mean composites for comparison. For the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys, the domain of motivation was eliminated because only two questions pertained to the domain and Cronbach’s alpha was .491 and .426 respectively. The 11 principles of character education implementation rubric and the pre/post Character Growth Index measured all four domains.

Research question four asked, “To what extent does character education program implementation, school climate, and past CGI predict character growth?” Multiple regression analysis was used to answer level of prediction of independent variables related to respect, responsibility, and relationship on the outcome of student character growth. Multiple regression was used because of the many variables of the four domains of respect, responsibility, and relationship on a single variable of student character growth. The independent variables used were the following: 11 principles of implementation rubric, mean composites of responsibility, respect, and relationship from the 2018 school climate survey, and mean composites for the pre CGI domains of responsibility, respect, and relationship. Multiple regression was conducted for three dependent variables of post CGI responsibility, respect, and relationship.

## **Descriptives**

The first component of this program evaluation study describes the degree of character education program implementation, school climate and student character growth. This study used survey research to measure student perceptions of school climate, character education implementation, and student character development. Five survey instruments were used to gather students’ perceptions on the program’s implementation, school climate, and student character growth. All five survey instruments were taken online by students. School climate survey data was collected in the fall of 2017 and the fall of 2018. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data across time between the first year of character education implementation and the second year of implementation of the program. Descriptive statistics were also analyzed across time on the character development of students from fall of 2018 to spring of 2019. Finally, descriptive statistics were analyzed on the implementation of the program itself using Character.org’s 11 principles of implementation survey.

## **Relationships**

The second component of this study was to measure the relationships or correlations among characteristics across the survey instruments: the CGI, school climate, and character education implementation. Correlational research does not imply causation, but correlation of variables can demonstrate a relationship between numerical variables, which can provide valuable information to educators (Ravid, 2011). A high correlation between variables can be informative and pertinent to educators evaluating the effectiveness of program initiatives and outcomes. Non-experimental correlational research was utilized in this study to analyze associations of variables in the four domains of respect, responsibility, relationship, and motivation. These four domains are categories of the 16 traits the character growth index measures. In addition, both the school climate survey and character education implementation survey measure three of the four domains. Utilizing correlational research can help inform effectiveness of program implementation. In this study, one significant component of the character education program was relationships among school stakeholders, thus analyzing variables regarding relationships can be informative. For example, if students perceive staff are caring and they perceive the character education program has helped improve student/staff relationships, then significant resources and professional development could be targeted to building positive, caring relationships.

A third component of this study measured differences between the 2017 school climate survey and the 2018 school climate survey and the differences between the CGI taken in the fall of 2018 and the spring of 2019. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the pre/post surveys. Analysis of the pre/post surveys

through t-tests can inform educators of the influence of a character education program on school climate and student character development.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted among the fall CGI, the 2018 school climate, and the character education implementation survey to analyze the level of prediction the variables have on student character growth (spring). The stronger coefficients between variables, the more likely that one variable may predict the outcome of the second variable. Thus, utilizing multiple regression can help inform educators as to the prediction of certain variables on the outcome of student character growth. This information can inform educators as to areas of focus when considering implementation of a character education program. The desired outcomes of the character education program are essential when planning program implementation. As depicted in the logic model framework, the desired outcomes of the character education program were effective implementation, positive school climate, and student character growth.

Before analysis was conducted, survey items were averaged and assumptions tested. Assumptions for multicollinearity, linearity, and normality were checked. Multicollinearity was checked by running Pearson correlations (1-tailed) among the independent variables: 11 principles rubric, 2018 school climate relationship, responsibility, respect, and pre CGI relationship, responsibility, respect. The three dependent variables were the post CGI domains of respect, responsibility, and relationship. For post CGI respect, there were no significant relationships with any of the independent variables. Linearity was checked by running scatterplots of each continuous variable (11 principles, 2018SC relationship, responsibility, respect, pre CGI relationship, responsibility, respect) with the dependent variable (post CGI respect). Normality was checked by running histograms of the independent variables. Finally, a multiple regression was run to determine if any of the variables predicted student growth on the

post CGI domain of respect. The process of checking for multicollinearity, linearity, and normality was repeated with the same independent variables and the domains post CGI responsibility and post CGI relationship. Appendix F depicts the histograms of the post CGI domains respect, responsibility and relationship.

### **Data Analysis Programs**

This study utilized three surveys: school climate, 11 principles of character education rubric, and the Character Growth Index. The researcher inputted survey results and student score data into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 25.0 for Microsoft Windows in order to conduct data analysis. Additionally, excel was used for data collection and creating charts. Excel was also used to clean data and export data into SPSS. For the school climate survey and Character Growth Index, excel was utilized to match student ID numbers for the pre and post surveys so the same sample of students would be retained for analysis.

### **Conclusion**

The Character Growth Index survey was conducted to measure student character development and to provide students data on their character strengths. In addition, student reflection and goal-setting were utilized to further develop character education initiatives. The implementation of the 11 principles survey and its influence on student character growth was chosen to measure the correlation between the character education program and its intended outcome on student character development. Most quantitative studies on character education programs have consisted of the programs impact on school climate, school safety, and student achievement; however, little research has been conducted on the efforts of effective implementation of a character education program on student character growth.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

Schools are charged with more than just teaching academics. Schools are also expected to help develop social and emotional needs of students, produce good citizens, and develop essential life skills. Today's educators face numerous challenges, not only in preparing students for a global job market, but also preparing students for an ever diverse and pluralistic society. Students have greater opportunities than before, but they also have challenges as well. Providing character education initiatives can help build students with essential values and skills needed to be successful in their careers and in their lives. The purpose of this study was to evaluate one school's character education program and its influence on school climate and student character development. Specifically, this study is a program evaluation and examines the relationships among character education, school climate and the development of student character. To measure these components, five student surveys were conducted over two years of program implementation. First, survey results were analyzed to show students perceptions of school climate, program implementation and character development. Data were analyzed for descriptives, correlations, and differences across time. Then, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship existed between character education implementation, school climate and student character development. Below, the results directly respond to each of the four research questions, and where relevant, are organized within by domain (relationship, responsibility, respect, and motivation).

#### **Character Education Program Characteristics**

Research question one asks: What are the characteristics of the Character Growth Index, school climate, and character education program implementation? This research question analyzed the domains of relationship, responsibility, respect, and motivation across the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys, the 11 principles of character education implementation rubric, and the pre/post Character Growth Index. Table one shows descriptive statistics for all four domains for the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys, the 11 principles of character education implementation and pre/post Character Growth Index.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Mean Composites for Domains: Relationship, Responsibility, Respect, and Motivation*

<b>Domains</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
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<b>Relationship</b>					
2017 School Climate	271	1.13	4.63	3.4228	.62154
2018 School Climate	271	1.13	4.63	3.4470	.59978
11 Principles CE Rubric	659	1.00	4.00	2.7656	.62749
Pre Char Growth Index	218	2.50	7.00	5.4236	.73040
Post Char Growth Index	218	1.00	7.00	5.5126	.81014
<b>Responsibility</b>					
2017 School Climate	271	1.0	4.70	3.2825	.64617
2018 School Climate	271	1.0	4.70	3.2852	.66176
11 Principles CE Rubric	659	1.0	4.0	2.7552	.59300
Pre Char Growth Index	218	1.90	7.05	4.8794	.83156
Post Char Growth Index	218	1.0	7.05	5.1062	.86851
<b>Respect</b>					
2017 School Climate	271	1.0	4.80	3.5264	.67299
2018 School Climate	271	1.0	4.80	3.6841	.68443
11 Principles CE Rubric	659	1.0	4.0	2.7608	.68752
Pre Char Growth Index	218	2.5	7.00	5.0530	.75239
Post Char Growth Index	218	1.00	7.00	5.2472	.74682
<b>Motivation</b>					
2017 School Climate					
2018 School Climate					
11 Principles CE Rubric	659	1.00	4.00	2.7608	.68752
Pre Char Growth Index	218	1.95	7.00	5.0170	.82341
Post Char Growth Index	218	1.00	7.00	5.1989	.81513

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**Domain one: relationship.**

Across the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys, the domain of relationship stayed consistent. Choices for student answers for eight of the twenty-seven questions had a maximum response of 4, on a scale which asked about the degree of caring. Average composite scores for relationships indicated a positive school climate among staff and student relationships. The average means for 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys was 3.4. The average mean for the 11 principles of character education rubric was 2.76. The means for all domains for the 11

principles survey were lower. The character education implementation survey's questions contained some educational jargon and questions were longer than the school climate survey and the character growth index. For example, Q27 of the 11 principles rubric asks: "Parents and students report that teachers know their students well and understand and respond to their learning needs and cultural differences." Question 28 asks: "Teachers promote thinking habits (e.g., honesty, responsibility, collaboration) that help students work together harmoniously." The Character Growth Index's answers ranged from 1-7: 1- nothing like me, 2- not like me, 3- not much like me, 4- a little like me, 5- like me, 6- a lot like me, and 7- more like me than anyone I know. The composite mean for pre CGI for relationship was 5.42 and for the post CGI the mean was 5.51.

**Domain two: responsibility.**

For the domain of responsibility in the school climate surveys, choices for student answers ranged from 1-5: 1- never, 2- rarely, 3- sometimes, 4- often, and 5- always. Composite means for both school climate surveys was 3.28. Q14-Q17 and Q23 specifically asked students questions pertaining to knowing or modeling the school's core values. The core values were the values chosen by school stakeholders and voted on by students. The mean composites for these surveys indicate the core values are known by students and throughout school processes. The same composite means for 2017 to 2018 indicate a need to continue teaching and modeling the core values throughout all school processes. The 11 principles of implementation rubric was lower in composite means than the school climate surveys. The 11 principles of character education rubric offers 4 responses: 1-Lacking Evidence, 2- Developing Implementation, 3- Good Implementation, and 4- Exemplary Implementation. The mean composite score for the 11

principles rubric for the domain of responsibility was 2.75. The composite mean for pre CGI for responsibility was 4.87 and the post CGI mean was 5.10.

### **Domain three: respect.**

Of all four domains, the domain of respect scored highest in composite means across the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys. Mean composite scores for 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys were 3.52 and 3.68. Higher scores in this domain indicate respect among students and staff is important to students and to school climate. The mean composite of the 11 principles rubric was 2.76. The composite mean for pre CGI for respect was 5.05 and the post CGI mean was 5.24. The composite means increased across time for both the school climate surveys and the CGIs.

### **Domain four: motivation**

For the domain of motivation, only two questions from the school climate surveys related. Q21 asked: “Students understand what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important,” and Q26 asked: “How do you rate the importance of character in your life.” Five questions related to the domain of motivation from the 11 principles rubric, and the mean composite score was 2.76. The composite mean for pre CGI for motivation was 5.01 and the post CGI mean was 5.19. For all four domains, there was an increase in composite means across time for the school climate survey and the character growth index.

In summary, both the school climate surveys and CGIs average means increased across time. Relationship remained consistent throughout two years of character education implementation. Building positive relationships among students and staff was a primary focus for the school. Continuing efforts to build positive relationships is critical for school climate and

positive student growth. Responsibility domain remained consistent throughout the two years of implementation. The core values of the school were developed by students and staff, and promotion of the values permeated school processes and curriculum. The domain respect had the highest average means across the domains, and there was a slight increase across time for both school climate surveys and CGIs. Respect among students and staff is critical for positive relationships and a positive school climate. Motivation domain increased across time for the pre/post CGI.

### **Relationships Across CGI, School Climate, and Implementation**

Research question two asks: What are the relationships among characteristics across the CGI, school climate, and character education program implementation? The results from the 2017 and 2018 school climates, program implementation, and CGI were analyzed for the four domains. Specially, correlations were run to determine relationships among questions for each domain.

#### **Domain one: relationship**

For the 2017 school climate survey, Q7 of the relationship domain had the highest correlations among the questions. The following table illustrates the correlations in the relationship domain.

*Table 2*

*Correlations of 2017 School Climate- Relationship Domain*

Measure	Q3SC	Q4SC	Q6SC	Q7SC	Q18SC	Q19SC
Q3SC	—					
Q4SC	.389	—				
Q6SC	.417	.281	—			
Q7SC	.452	.528	.430	—		
Q18SC	.263	.320	.312	.408	—	

Q19SC	.419	.328	.415	.386	.353	—
Q20SC	.384	.282	.431	.350	.438	.565

The correlations in table 2 were all statistically significant with p-values < .001. Q7 and Q4 had the second highest correlation ( $r = .528, n = 269, p < .001$ ). Q7 of the survey asks, “Teachers provide counseling or mentoring to students when needed” and Q4 asks, “You can go to an adult in the school with a problem.” Q7 and Q3 had a positive correlation ( $r = .452, n = 269, p < .001$ ). Question 3 asks, “Staff at your school are caring.” Q7 is crucial in the domain of relationship. Also significant in this domain was Q20, which asks, “Our teachers know their students’ learning needs and cultural differences.” Q20 and Q19 had the highest correlation in this domain: ( $r = .565, n = 268, p < .001$ ). Q19 asks, “Our teachers know their students well.” Q20 and Q18 had a positive, moderate correlation ( $r = .438, n = 267, p < .001$ ). Q18 asks, “Teachers connect community service with curriculum (the things you study in class).” In the relationship domain, highest correlations were among questions pertaining to teacher/student relationship and teachers’ abilities to individualize academics and community service.

The 2018 school climate survey demonstrated similar results in the relationship domain.

Table 3 illustrates the correlations for the 2018 school climate survey.

*Table 3*

*Correlations of 2018 School Climate - Relationship Domain*

Measure	Q3SC	Q4SC	Q6SC	Q7SC	Q18SC	Q19SC
Q3SC	—					
Q4SC	.357	—				
Q6SC	.240	.388	—			
Q7SC	.436	.460	.389	—		
Q18SC	.271	.351	.329	.430	—	
Q19SC	.344	.288	.265	.423	.362	—
Q20SC	.347	.333	.328	.441	.506	.482

The correlations in table 3 were all statistically significant with p-values < .001. Similar to the 2017 school climate results for relationship, Q7 had the highest correlations as compared to the other questions. Students who perceive they can go to a teacher for counseling or mentoring is significant in the relationship domain. The highest correlation was between Q18 and Q20 ( $r = .506, n = 271, p < .001$ ). For 2018, teachers focused on developing service-learning projects in the community based on individual student input. Q20 and Q19 had a positive, moderate correlation ( $r = .482, n = 271, p < .001$ ). Q20 was significant in the relationship domain for 2018. Both school climate surveys demonstrated highest correlations among questions pertaining to teachers knowing their students' individual needs and teachers providing counseling and mentoring to students. Additional analysis was conducted on the composite means of the relationship domain between the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys. The composite means had a positive, moderate correlation ( $r = .433, n = 271, p < .001$ ).

For the 11 principles of character education rubric, all questions pertaining to the relationship domain had positive, significant correlations with p values < .001. The following table illustrates the correlations for relationship domain.

*Table 4*

*Correlations of 11 Principles Rubric - Relationship Domain*

Measure	Q6	Q11	Q15	Q16	Q27
Q6	—				
Q11	.467	—			
Q15	.454	.394	—		
Q16	.288	.254	.278	—	
Q27	.454	.435	.446	.307	—
Q35	.357	.344	.383	.263	.417

In this domain, Q6 and Q11 had the highest correlation among the six questions ( $r = .467, n = 659$ ). Q6 asks, “Staff help students to develop an appreciation for and a commitment to the core

values,” and Q11 asks, “Students have the opportunity to practice the core values in the context of relationships.” Q6 and Q15 had a positive and moderate correlation ( $r = .454$ ,  $n = 659$ ), and Q6 and Q27 had a positive and moderate correlation ( $r = .454$ ,  $n = 659$ ). Q27 also had significant correlations among the questions. Q27 asks, “Parents and students report that teachers know their students well and understand and respond to their learning needs and cultural differences.” Overall, the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys and the 11 principles of character education rubric demonstrate the significance of positive relationships among faculty and students. The 11 principles implementation rubric demonstrates implementation of core values throughout school processes. These results show teachers who are seen as mentors and/or counselors have good relationships with their students. Students see this relationship as positive and caring.

The domain of relationship had high correlations for three character strengths across the pre and post Character Growth Index surveys. Love, kindness, and gratitude had positive and moderate to high correlations in pre and post CGI results. All pre-test strengths had significant correlations with  $p$ -values  $< .001$ . Likewise, all post-test strengths had significant correlations with  $p$ -values  $< .001$ . Table 5 illustrates the correlations for the pre Character Growth Index.

*Table 5*

*Correlations Pre Character Growth Index - Relationship Domain*

Measure	Love	Kindness	Forgiveness
Love	—		
Kindness	.517	—	
Forgiveness	.289	.464	—
Gratitude	.585	.617	.325

Gratitude and kindness had the highest correlation ( $r = .617$ ,  $n = 218$ ), and gratitude and love had a significant, positive correlation ( $r = .585$ ,  $n = 218$ ). For the domain of relationship, gratitude in the pre CGI had the highest correlations.

Post Character Growth Index had similar results with the pre CGI results with gratitude having high correlations; however, love had the highest correlations among the four traits. Table 6 illustrates the post CGI correlation results.

*Table 6*

*Correlations Post Character Growth Index - Relationship Domain*

Measure	Love	Kindness	Forgiveness
Love	—		
Kindness	.678	—	
Forgiveness	.420	.480	—
Gratitude	.706	.664	.412

Love and gratitude had a significant and high correlation in the post CGI results ( $r = .706$ ,  $n = 218$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Love and kindness also had a significant and high correlation. For all traits, the correlations increased in the post CGI results demonstrating increases in strength of relationships across the domain.

### **Domain two: responsibility**

For both the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys, questions pertaining to the school's core values and stakeholders knowing those values had moderate to high correlations. Table 7 depicts the correlations for the 2017 school climate survey.

*Table 7*

*Correlations of 2017 School Climate- Responsibility Domain*

Measure	Q9	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q23	Q24
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Q9	—								
Q13	.392	—							
Q14	.336	.536	—						
Q15	.352	.362	.450	—					
Q16	.315	.390	.505	.349	—				
Q17	.136	.302	.373	.481	.293	—			
Q18	.166	.335	.407	.425	.495	.370	—		
Q23	.101	.264	.374	.431	.258	.359	.303	—	
Q24	.192	.396	.517	.458	.328	.365	.418	.473	—
Q25	.190	.327	.414	.467	.287	.471	.377	.437	.488

For the 2017 school climate survey, Q13 and Q14 had the strongest correlation ( $r = .536$ ,  $n = 268$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Overall, Q14 had the highest correlations among the questions. Q14 asks, “Students at your school live by or model the core values,” and Q13 asks, “Students know your school’s core values.” Q14 and Q16 had a positive, high correlation ( $r = .505$ ,  $n = 268$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Q16 asks, “Parents know what the core values are.” The questions in the responsibility domain relate to the school’s core values and whether or not school stakeholders know and model those values. The 2018 school climate survey produced some similar results to the 2017 school climate survey; however, there were differences. Table 8 depicts the correlations for the 2018 school climate survey.

*Table 8*

*Correlations of 2018 School Climate- Responsibility Domain*

Measure	Q9	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q23	Q24
Q9	—								
Q13	.283	—							
Q14	.336	.501	—						
Q15	.292	.413	.504	—					
Q16	.259	.468	.487	.378	—				
Q17	.362	.318	.418	.521	.329	—			
Q18	.393	.408	.535	.413	.450	.486	—		
Q23	.214	.338	.360	.417	.319	.422	.277	—	
Q24	.304	.428	.558	.402	.452	.467	.439	.402	—

Q25	.275	.290	.359	.411	.249	.475	.412	.437	.495
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Q14 remained strong in its correlations with the other questions. The strongest correlation was between Q14 and Q24 ( $r = .558, n = 268, p = < .001$ ). Q24 asks, “Students help create and maintain standards of behavior (like classroom rules or class contracts).” Part of the character education initiatives were to employ student voice in classroom expectations and processes. Q14 was critical in the domain of responsibility. One difference noted between the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys was the correlations in Q9. Question 9 asks, “You feel safe at your school.” Correlations between Q9 and Q17, Q18, Q23, Q24, and Q25 increased from 2017 to 2018. One dramatic increase in strength was between Q9 and Q18. Q18 asks, “Teachers connect community service with the curriculum (the things you study in class).” In year two of character education implementation, service-learning projects became part of the curriculum.

The 11 principles of character education implementation survey had 16 questions related to the domain of responsibility. Correlations for the 16 questions were moderate to high and statistically significant with all correlation  $p$ -values  $< .001$ . Question 7 was crucial to this domain; Q7 asks, “Staff provide opportunities for students to reflect on the core values through the discussion of real life problems and situations relevant to ethical and performance character.” Q7 and Q9 had one of the highest correlations, ( $r = .517, n = 659, p < .001$ ). Q9 asks, “Staff encourage students to examine their own behavior in light of the core values and challenge them to make their behavior consistent to the core values.” Additionally, Q7, Q9, Q10, and Q12 had higher correlations among all questions. Q10 asks, “Students receive practice in and feedback on academic and behavior skills.” Q12 asks, “Teachers teach core values through academic subjects.” Table 9 shows the results of the correlations.

Table 9

*Correlations of 11 Principles Rubric – Responsibility Domain*

Measure	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q12	Q13	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25
Q1	—														
Q2	.458	—													
Q3	.450	.437	—												
Q4	.316	.417	.425	—											
Q5	.306	.329	.467	.372	—										
Q7	.346	.405	.436	.502	.377	—									
Q8	.399	.399	.421	.412	.349	.408	—								
Q9	.333	.431	.437	.484	.358	.517	.488	—							
Q10	.354	.388	.406	.401	.351	.399	.418	.416	—						
Q12	.266	.407	.391	.450	.374	.504	.414	.456	.396	—					
Q13	.336	.418	.397	.439	.340	.445	.427	.466	.448	.544	—				
Q22	.389	.417	.391	.377	.338	.420	.435	.447	.449	.343	.401	—			
Q23	.366	.376	.399	.399	.312	.404	.400	.511	.377	.373	.394	.583	—		
Q24	.313	.361	.390	.395	.361	.420	.350	.453	.398	.414	.488	.477	.526	—	
Q25	.326	.366	.401	.392	.358	.416	.395	.474	.425	.407	.445	.466	.507	.489	—
Q26	.385	.405	.391	.457	.350	.406	.453	.450	.472	.434	.456	.482	.498	.534	.525

For responsibility domain, questions related to teaching the core values in the curriculum and with reflective practices and class discussions had higher correlations. Questions 22 – 26 also had significant correlations with p values < .001. Question 22 asks, “The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for service within the school.” Questions 22- 24 relate to how the school offers student opportunities for service learning in the community and how the school offers students’ voice in their community projects. Questions 25 and 26 relate to how school staff challenges students in content learning and high-quality work. The moderate to high correlations for responsibility domain for the 11 principles of character education implementation demonstrate the staff and students have taken on responsibility of implementation of the 11 principles of character education.

Tables 10 and 11 represent the correlations for pre/post CGI for domain responsibility. The four character strengths wisdom, perseverance, peace, and self-control in the responsibility

domain also had positive, significant correlations. Post CGI results demonstrated increases in all four strengths. The highest correlation was post CGI perseverance and insight ( $r = .752$ ,  $n = 218$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post CGI self-control and insight had a positive, high correlation ( $r = .748$ ,  $n = 218$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post CGI peace and insight had a positive, high correlation ( $r = .683$ ,  $n = 218$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post CGI peace and self-control had a positive, high correlation ( $r = .681$ ,  $n = 218$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The post CGI results increased in all four character strengths. Highest correlations were from the post CGI.

*Table 10*

*Correlations Pre Character Growth Index – Responsibility Domain*

Measure	Wisdom	Perseverance	Peace
Wisdom	—		
Perseverance	.654	—	
Peace	.618	.475	—
Self-Control	.673	.532	.608

*Table 11*

*Correlations Post Character Growth Index – Responsibility Domain*

Measure	Wisdom	Perseverance	Peace
Wisdom	—		
Perseverance	.752	—	
Peace	.683	.578	—
Self-Control	.748	.647	.681

### **Domain three: respect**

The 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys measured the domain of respect with questions 10, 11, 12, 22, and 27. Table 12 illustrates the correlations for the 2017 school climate survey.

Table 12

*Correlations of 2017 School Climate- Respect Domain*

Measure	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q22
Q10	—			
Q11	.337	—		
Q12	.256	.281	—	
Q22	.182	.432	.232	—
Q27	.180	.432	.396	.420

Question 11 had the highest correlations. Q11 asks, “Bullying (including cyber-bullying), teasing, and acts of cruelty or intolerance are not tolerated by staff.” Q11 and Q27 had a moderate, positive correlation ( $r = .432$ ,  $n = 266$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Q27 asks, “Your school promotes the core values and the importance of good character.” For 2017 school climate, Q27 and Q22 had a positive, moderate correlation ( $r = .420$ ,  $n = 267$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Question 22 asks, “Teachers discuss academic integrity with students in terms of fairness and personal honor, and there are clear guidelines about doing your own work compared to plagiarism (copying someone else’s work) and cheating.” Questions related to respect emphasized respect for oneself and for others and included promotion of core values. Table 13 illustrates the correlations for the 2018 school climate survey.

Table 13

*Correlations for 2018 School Climate- Respect Domain*

Measure	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q22
Q10	—			
Q11	.382	—		
Q12	.274	.398	—	
Q22	.244	.254	.202	—
Q27	.193	.400	.160	.125

Correlations for Q11 remained the highest for the variables; however, Q11 and Q27 had the highest correlation ( $r = .400, n = 267, p < .001$ ). Core values such as integrity and respect were emphasized throughout the school with an emphasis placed on respect for oneself and for others.

The 11 principles of character education implementation survey also measured respect. Questions 14 and 19 had the highest correlations among the questions related to respect. Question 14 asks, “Classroom routines and procedures are respectful of students and engage them in ways that develop core values.” Question 19 asks, “The school uses educational strategies to encourage mutual respect and a feeling of responsibility for one another.” The highest correlation was between Q14 and Q19. Table 14 shows the results of the correlations.

*Table 14*

*Correlations of 11 Principles Rubric – Respect Domain*

Measure	Q14	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q32	Q33
Q14	—						
Q18	.420	—					
Q19	.571	.467	—				
Q20	.373	.382	.377	—			
Q21	.405	.440	.461	.409	—		
Q32	.482	.453	.484	.385	.400	—	
Q33	.451	.436	.468	.378	.427	.502	—

Q19 and Q32 had the second strongest correlation ( $r = .484, n = 659$ ). All variables for the domain of respect had  $p$ - values  $< .001$ . All correlations were positive and significant across all questions. The emphasis on respect for individuals and for responsibility for one another was promoted throughout the school’s character education program. Questions 32 and 33 relate the

staff and whether the staff is courteous and respectful to students and parents and whether staff model the core values of the school.

For the domain of respect, the CGI character strengths are honesty, humility, cooperation, and courage. Increases in strength of correlation from pre to post CGI was evident across all traits; however, the strongest correlation in this domain was for pre and post humility and cooperation. Pre CGI humility and cooperation had a significant correlation ( $r = .636, p < .001$ ).

Table 15 illustrates the correlations in the pre CGI.

*Table 15*

*Correlations Pre Character Growth Index – Respect Domain*

Measure	Honesty	Humility	Cooperation
Honesty	—		
Humility	.503	—	
Cooperation	.450	.636	—
Courage	.389	.485	.373

All pre CGI strengths were significant with p-values  $< .001$ . In addition, all post CGI strengths were significant with p-values  $< .001$ . Post CGI humility and cooperation had a significant correlation ( $r = .711, p < .001$ ). The second highest correlation was the post CGI honesty and humility ( $r = .531, p < .001$ ). Table 15 illustrates the correlations in the post CGI.

*Table 16*

*Correlations Post Character Growth Index – Respect Domain*

Measure	Honesty	Humility	Cooperation
Honesty	—		
Humility	.531	—	
Cooperation	.483	.711	—
Courage	.442	.515	.466

#### Domain four: motivation

The 11 principles of character education implementation rubric and the character growth index both measured the domain of motivation. Motivation includes the traits of creativity, spirituality, curiosity, and optimism. For the 11 principles rubric, questions 28-31, and 34 pertain to motivation. For instance, Q31 asks: “Students are able to articulate on a personal level what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important.” Q28 had the highest correlations among the questions; Q28 and Q29 had a positive, significant correlation ( $r = .530, n = 659, p < .001$ ). Question 28 asks, “Teachers promote thinking habits (e.g., curiosity, truth-seeking, critical thinking, and Q29 asks, “Teachers promote social habits (e.g., honesty, responsibility, collaboration) that help students work together harmoniously.” Teachers promote motivation among students through meaningful lessons, relevant to student interests and promote collaboration and group activities. Table 16 shows the results of the correlations for the 11 principles rubric in the domain of motivation.

Table 17

*Correlations of 11 Principles Rubric – Motivation Domain*

Measure	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31
Q28	—			
Q29	.530	—		
Q30	.528	.497	—	
Q31	.463	.476	.470	—
Q34	.487	.508	.491	.523

The questions in motivation relate to students self-motivation, creativity, and identity of themselves in a wider community.

All pre and post CGI character strengths had positive, significant correlations; however, the degree of relationship was lower across all traits than the other domains. The highest



correlation was pre CGI for creativity and curiosity ( $r = .562, p < .001$ ). Post CGI for creativity and curiosity was ( $r = .535, p < .001$ ). The third strongest correlation for motivation was post CGI spirituality and optimism ( $r = .522, p < .001$ ). Table 18 illustrates correlations for pre CGI and Table 19 illustrates correlations for post CGI.

*Table 18*

*Correlations Pre Character Growth Index –Motivation Domain*

Measure	Creativity	Curiosity	Spirituality
Creativity	—		
Curiosity	.562	—	
Spirituality	.305	.283	—
Optimism	.319	.371	.479

*Table 19*

*Correlations Post Character Growth Index –Motivation Domain*

Measure	Creativity	Curiosity	Spirituality
Creativity	—		
Curiosity	.535	—	
Spirituality	.244	.230	—
Optimism	.333	.414	.522

In summary, the domain relationship remained consistently strong throughout the school climate and implementation surveys. One significance noted was the importance of teachers knowing their students cultural differences and individual learning needs. Students also noted the importance of teacher approachability—being able to go to a teacher for mentoring or counseling. The pre/post CGIs had high correlations for love, kindness, and gratitude. Love had the highest correlations among the traits in the post CGI. Positive and caring relationships among students and teachers is critical for school climate, program implementation and student character growth.

Responsibility domain had strong correlations among questions pertaining to students knowing the school's core values and students acting upon those values. In addition, staff providing students with opportunities to reflect on the core values through classroom discussion of real life problems involving ethical and moral dilemmas were significant in responsibility. Service-learning opportunities were also important in this domain, thus allowing for real-world application of core values. Post CGI results demonstrated increases in all four traits with the strongest correlation between perseverance and wisdom. Focusing on core values and providing opportunities for discussion and reflection of moral and ethical dilemmas were significant components in this domain.

Respect domain demonstrated strong correlations among questions pertaining to the school promoting the core values and the importance of good character and bullying and intolerance of any kind not being tolerated by staff. Respecting the rights of others and inclusivity became a focus for the school in its character education program. The school climate surveys and implementation survey demonstrated significant relationships among the school helping to develop core values and respect among students and staff and the development of mutual respect and responsibility for one another. For pre/post CGI, all traits increased in strength of relationship; the strongest correlation was post CGI humility and cooperation. Cooperation is significant in this domain and demonstrates a willingness to work with others for common goals.

Motivation domain had high correlation in the implementation survey with questions pertaining to student self-motivation and teachers promotion of thinking habits and social habits. Through the character education program, teachers highlighted the importance of curiosity and critical thinking and collaboration in classroom and academic goals. For pre/post CGI, creativity

and curiosity had the strongest relationships in motivation. Providing classroom opportunities for students to develop these traits is significant.

### **Differences Across Time for CGI and Climate**

Research question three asks: What are the differences across time for CGI and school climate? Results from the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys and the pre/post CGI surveys were analyzed across time across the four domains. Paired sample t-tests were conducted using SPSS to compare means from the pre/post surveys.

#### **Domain one: relationship**

A paired sample t-test was conducted on the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys to compare mean composites for domain relationship across time. There was not a significant difference between the 2017 school climate relationship ( $M = 3.4228$ ,  $SD = .62154$ ) and 2018 school climate relationship ( $M = 3.4470$ ,  $SD = .59978$ );  $t(270) = .612$ ,  $p = .541$ . Building positive relationships among all school stakeholders was important for both school years and was emphasized throughout program implementation of character education.

A paired sample t-test was conducted on the character growth index fall of 2018 (pre CGI) and spring of 2019 (post CGI). In the relationship domain, all four traits increased slightly across time: Post love ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = .886$ ), pre love ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = .865$ ), post kindness ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.013$ ), pre kindness ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = .937$ ), post forgiveness ( $M = 4.92$ ,  $SD = 1.221$ ), pre forgiveness ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.223$ ), post gratitude ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = .868$ ), pre gratitude ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = .776$ ). The paired t-test showed there was not a significant difference between the four traits in this domain across time.

### **Domain two: responsibility**

A paired sample t-test was conducted on the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys to compare mean composites for domain responsibility. There was not a significant difference in the scores for composite means for 2017 school climate responsibility ( $M = 3.2825$ ,  $SD = .64617$ ) and 2018 school climate responsibility ( $M = 3.2852$ ,  $SD = .66176$ );  $t(270) = -.067$ ,  $p = .947$ . The results suggest responsibility for developing and promoting school core values did not significantly change through two years of character education implementation.

For the pre/post CGI in the domain responsibility, all four traits increased from pre to post. The following four traits indicate increases across time: Post insight (wisdom) ( $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = .936$ ), pre insight (wisdom) ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = .911$ ), post perseverance ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = .968$ ), pre perseverance ( $M = 5.09$ ,  $SD = 1.003$ ), post peace ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.073$ ), pre peace ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.122$ ), post self-control ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.009$ ), pre self-control ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = .961$ ). A paired sample t-test indicated a significance in difference across time for insight (wisdom):  $t(217) = -2.41$ ,  $p = 0.017$ . There was also a significant difference across time for peace:  $t(217) = -3.999$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . There was not a significant difference for perseverance or self-control. All traits increased in post survey, and insight and peace demonstrated significant increase across time.

### **Domain three: respect**

A paired sample t-test was conducted on the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys to compare mean composites for domain respect. There was a significant difference in the scores for composite means for 2017 school climate respect ( $M = 3.5264$ ,  $SD = .67299$ ) and 2018 school climate respect ( $M = 3.6841$ ,  $SD = .68443$ );  $t(271) = -3.442$ ,  $p = .001$ . The results suggest the focus of the school's goals to increase respect among faculty and students was successful. An

addition of a club to promote prosocial behaviors and promote inclusiveness was instituted during the 2017-2018 school year.

For the pre/post CGI in the domain respect, all four traits increased from pre to post. The following four traits indicate increases across time: Post honesty (M = 5.19, SD = .960), pre honesty (M = 5.00, SD = 1.019), post humility (M = 5.40, SD = .866), pre humility (M = 5.18, SD = .884), post cooperation (M = 5.36, SD = .833), pre cooperation (M = 5.30, SD = .886), post courage (M = 5.05, SD = 1.078), pre courage (M = 4.72, SD = 1.098). For pre/post humility, a paired sample t-test showed significance in increase of humility across time:  $t(217) = -2.58$ ,  $p = .011$ . For pre/post courage, a paired sample t-test showed significance in increase of courage across time:  $t(217) = -3.23$ ,  $p = .001$ . Honesty and cooperation slightly increased but did not demonstrate statistical significance in differences.

#### **Domain four: motivation**

For the domain motivation, the pre/post character growth index measured the following traits: creativity, curiosity, spirituality, and optimism. The following three traits increased across time: Post creativity (M = 5.46, SD = 1.013), pre creativity (M = 5.21, SD = 1.077), post curiosity (M = 5.52, SD = .953), pre curiosity (M = 5.26, SD = .990), and post optimism (M = 5.13, SD = 1.172), pre optimism (M = 4.87, SD = 1.149). Spirituality decreased from pre to post survey: Post spirituality (M = 4.69, SD = 1.317) and pre spirituality (M = 4.73, SD = 1.269). For pre/post creativity, a paired sample t-test demonstrated statistical significance in difference of composite means across time:  $t(217) = -2.385$ ,  $p = .018$ . For pre/post curiosity, a paired sample t-test demonstrated statistical significance in difference of composite means across time:  $t(217) = -2.798$ ,  $p = .006$ . For pre/post optimism, a paired sample t-test demonstrated statistical

significance in difference of composite means across time:  $t(217) = -2.375$ ,  $p = .018$ . For spirituality, there was no statistical significance in difference of composite means across time.

### **Predictors of Character Growth**

Research question four asks: “To what extent does character education program implementation, school climate, and past CGI predict character growth? The results were obtained from multiple regression analysis from three of the four domains: relationship, responsibility and respect. The domain motivation was left out of analysis because it was not represented in the school climate surveys. The first dependent variable was post CGI respect with the independent variables: mean composite of 11 principles implementation, mean composites for 2018 school climate relationship, responsibility, respect, and pre CGI respect, relationship and responsibility. The second dependent variable was post CGI responsibility with the independent variables: mean composite of 11 principles of implementation, mean composites for 2018 school climate relationship, responsibility, respect, and pre CGI respect, relationship and responsibility. The third dependent variable was post CGI relationship with the independent variables: mean composite of 11 principles of implementation, mean composites for 2018 school climate relationship, responsibility, respect, and pre CGI respect, relationship and responsibility.

The student responses were averaged for the three domains represented in all surveys. Table 20 shows the descriptive statistics. The 11 principles of implementation rubric had the lowest minimum and maximum and the lowest mean of 2.75. The average means from the CGI increased from the pre to the post in all three domains. The highest mean was for post CGI relationship at 5.51.

*Table 20*

*Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
<u>11 Principles</u>	659	1.00	4.00	2.7489	.58216
<u>Climate 2018</u>					
Relationship	271	1.13	4.63	3.4470	.59978
Responsibility	271	1.00	4.70	3.2852	.66176
Respect	271	1.00	4.80	3.6841	.68443
<u>Pre CGI</u>					
Relationship	218	2.50	7.00	5.4236	.73040
Responsibility	218	1.90	7.05	4.8794	.83156
Respect	218	2.50	7.00	5.0530	.75239
<u>Post CGI</u>					
Relationship	218	1.00	7.00	5.5126	.81014
Responsibility	218	1.00	7.05	5.1062	.86851
Respect	218	1.00	7.00	5.2472	.74682

**Results of the multiple linear regression post CGI domain respect**

Table 21 depicts the results of the multiple regression for the post CGI domain respect. Pre CGI relationship is shown to be a significant predictor on student character growth in the domain of respect at  $p < .05$  ( $B = -.230$ ,  $t = -2.357$ ,  $p = .019$ ). Table 22 depicts the results of the multiple regression for the post CGI domain responsibility. Table 23 depicts the results of the multiple regression for the post CGI domain relationship. There were no significant predictors on student character growth in the domains of responsibility and relationship.

*Table 21*

*Results for Regression for Post CGI Domain Respect*

Source	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Intercept	5.063	.545		9.284	.000
<u>11 Principles</u>	.097	.090	.075	1.079	.282
<u>Climate 2018</u>					

Relationship	.073	.137	.058	.531	.596
Responsibility	-.110	.139	-.098	-.792	.429
Respect	.115	.108	.107	1.068	.287
<u>Pre CGI</u>					
Relationship	-.230	.098	-.227	-2.357	.019
Responsibility	.011	.096	.012	.114	.910
Respect	.159	.128	.161	1.242	.216

Table 22

**Results for regression for post CGI domain responsibility**

Source	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Intercept	4.841	.638		7.583	.000
<u>11 Principles</u>					
<u>Climate 2018</u>					
Relationship	.133	.161	.091	.826	.410
Responsibility	-.194	.163	-.147	-1.187	.236
Respect	.125	.099	.099	.991	.323
<u>Pre CGI</u>					
Relationship	-.224	.114	-.189	-1.956	.052
Responsibility	.070	.112	.067	.621	.536
Respect	.104	.150	.090	.693	.489

Table 23

**Results for regression for post CGI domain relationship**

Source	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Intercept	4.834	.597		8.093	.000
<u>11 Principles</u>					
<u>Climate 2018</u>					
Relationship	.055	.151	.040	.365	.716
Responsibility	-.096	.153	-.078	-.627	.531
Respect	.124	.118	.106	1.046	.297



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<u>Pre CGI</u>					
Relationship	-.102	.107	-.093	-.957	.340
Responsibility	.098	.105	.101	.928	.354
Respect	.032	.140	.030	.225	.822

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## **Conclusion**

The survey data provided significant information for the school to evaluate the effectiveness of its character education program. The survey data demonstrated increases across time in the school climate surveys and the character growth index surveys. Results on school climate can help school administration determine how to improve overall culture of the building. In addition, results from the pre/post Character Growth Indexes indicated development across time. Character education's primary goal is to help develop positive character traits in students. The utilization of the Character Growth Index helped school officials determine the overall strengths of their students and helped determine character strengths for future focus. Overall, the school improved in 15 of the 16 character strengths across time with the exception of spirituality. The surveys indicated the significance of the domains relationship and respect on school climate and character development. This information can help school stakeholders continue to foster respect and relationship as key elements in promoting a positive school climate and development of student character strengths.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

This study examined one school's initiatives to implement a character education program to improve school culture, improve faculty/student relationships and develop student character. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of character education implementation, school climate, and student character growth. This chapter begins with an overview of methodology, discussion of the study's findings, and recommendations for further study.

Five survey instruments were analyzed by the researcher to answer the research questions. The five surveys were given to the majority of students at Monroe High School, pseudonym. The researcher wanted as large a sample size as possible to ensure student input into character implementation, school climate, and student character development. Two school climate surveys were conducted in the fall of 2018 and 2019. The school climate survey consisted of 27 questions related to school safety, student and staff relationships, and character education initiatives. A character education implementation survey was conducted in the fall of 2018 to evaluate the effectiveness of CE implementation and 659 students completed the survey. To measure student character growth, the researcher employed the Character Growth Index. The CGI survey was conducted twice, once in the fall of 2018 and again in the spring of 2019. To answer the research questions, only students who took both school climate surveys and both CGIs were kept for data analysis. Sample size for the school climate surveys was 271 and sample size for the pre/post CGI was 218. Excel software was utilized to match student IDs for the

school climate surveys and the pre/post CGI. The five surveys were merged in SPSS for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were analyzed and compared across time. Correlations were run to measure relationships among variables in the four domains of relationship, responsibility, respect, and motivation. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to analyze differences across time for the school climate surveys and the Character Growth Index, and finally, multiple regressions were conducted among the mean composites of the surveys in the domains of relationship, respect, and responsibility and the post Character Growth Index to determine if any relationships existed among the variables.

Character education has gained publicity in education for a number of factors. The most alarming factor is the growing at-risk behaviors among adolescents and the lack of social-emotional competencies of youth (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011; Hinguja & Patchin, 2007). To combat at-risk behaviors while increasing social-emotional competencies, many schools have adopted character education programs or initiatives to help develop essential personal skills which will help students in all facets of life. Character education programs emphasize developing good character values of students, promoting positive school climates, and student involvement in community. Positive school cultures help increase student achievement in school and lower at-risk behaviors (Loukas & Murphy, 2007; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, Johnson, 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Cohen, 2006; Battistich, 2008).

Monroe High School administration and faculty chose to implement the 11 principles of character education by Character.org. The overall goals of the school for program implementation was to promote a positive school climate, to decrease disciplinary incidents, to foster positive relationships among faculty, students, parents, and community, and to develop

character strengths in students which would help them succeed in business and life. This study examined the relationships among school stakeholders and overall school climate, the implementation of the 11 principles of character education, and the development of student character growth.

One goal of MHS in implementing character education was to foster a positive school climate. Vast research has been conducted on school climate and its influence on student outcomes and achievement. Positive school climates influence student connectedness to school and improvement of student outcomes (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2013; Berkowitz, & Bier, 2004; Elias, White, Stepney, 2014; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004). Positive school climates have also demonstrated lower at-risk behaviors and improved self-concepts of students (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Teacher and student relationship is significant in creating a positive school climate and student connectedness to school (Barile, Donohue, Anthony, Baker, Weaver, & Henrich, 2012; Battistich, 2008; Johnson, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2013; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). Teachers' interactions with students influence student motivation, engagement, and achievement; the relationship between teacher and student significantly impacts student outcomes (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999; Klem, & Connell, 2004). A study by Zullig, Koopman, Patton, and Ubbes (2010) found that teacher/student relationship and student connectedness to school had a high, significant correlation. According to Klem and Connell (2004), "students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (p. 270). In turn, student engagement is associated with better attendance and test scores (Klem & Connell, 2004). For MHS, fostering

positive and significant relationships among faculty and students was a primary goal for developing a good school climate and improving student outcomes.

Results from the school climate surveys indicated the relationships among students and faculty were positive. One of the highest correlations was related to students being able to go to teachers for counseling or mentorship and for students being able to go to a teacher with a problem. In addition, there was a strong, positive correlation between teachers knowing their students' individual and cultural needs and teachers knowing their students well. Program implementation also indicated the significance of relationship among staff and students. Positive, significant correlations existed among questions pertaining to student commitment to the school's core values and opportunity to practice the core values in context of relationships. For the CGI results, all four traits in relationship domain increased in composite means from pre to post test. Overall, student and teacher relationship is a significant factor in developing and fostering a positive school climate. The primary influence on student achievement and success is the classroom teacher. The correlations in relationship domain were significant in all surveys, and the highest mean was in post CGI relationship. Continual efforts by school stakeholders to increase positive relationships increased over time through program implementation. In addition, pre CGI relationship was a significant predictor of student character growth in respect. Cultivating relationships among teachers and staff is critical to developing positive school climates and development of student growth in respect. Through character education implementation, the goal of developing positive student/teacher relationships was established.

Implementation of character education also involved development and adherence of the school's core values. Integrating the school's core values throughout school processes and curriculum involved all school stakeholders, but notably, students were the driving force behind

the selection and commitment to the core values. Responsibility for emphasizing these values throughout the curriculum belonged to all stakeholders. The core values chosen emphasized responsibility for one's actions and for the welfare of others. The implementation survey indicated a high, significant correlation between staff providing student opportunities to reflect on the school's core values through discussion of real life problems and situations and staff encourage students to examine their own behavior in light of the core values. High correlations existed among questions pertaining to reflective activities and moral discourse and adherence to the school's core values. In addition, for both school climate surveys, questions pertaining to students modeling the core values and knowing the core values had high, significant correlations. Effective implementation of the character education program relied on all school stakeholders. Student promotion and adherence to the core values and opportunities to reflect on the values as they related to real situations and ethical dilemmas promulgated the CE program. Building relationships among staff and students and promoting shared core values impacted the overall school climate.

Another focus of the character education program was to increase respect among students and staff, which also impact school climate. For the school climate surveys, questions related to bullying or other acts of cruelty not being tolerated by staff and teachers, and promoting core values and good character had moderate, significant correlations. The implementation survey also indicated strong to moderate relationships among questions pertaining to mutual respect, classroom procedures, and encouragement of building community and responsibility for one another. A paired sample t-test demonstrated a significant difference in the composite means of respect across the 2017 and 2018 school climate surveys. During the second year of CE implementation, the school developed a pro-social club to promote inclusivity and respect among

all students. Students researched and developed anti-bullying presentations to present to classmates. Throughout the year events were held to promote positive social interactions among students. In addition, MHS emphasized its Partner's club, an organization that connects regular education students with special education students. Several events throughout the year bring students together to develop respectful, positive relationships. In the second year of implementation, the focus for the school was on principle four of the 11 principles of character education. Principle four focuses on the school developing a caring community. Under principle four there are four indicators of effectiveness for developing a caring community:

- The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments between students and staff.
- The school makes it a high priority to help students form caring attachments to each other.
- The school makes it a high priority to foster caring attachments among adults within the school community.
- The school takes steps to prevent peer cruelty and violence and deals with it effectively when it occurs.

Several clubs and organizations of the school focused on developing respect for others and inclusiveness of all people. The development of the school's touchstone by students and staff emphasized taking responsibility for one's actions.

Results of the multiple regression indicated that pre CGI relationship was a significant predictor of student character growth in the domain respect. This result is important for the school's program evaluation. The efforts to build positive relationships among all school

stakeholders is important in student development of respect. The significance of relationships and respect is critical in creating a positive school climate conducive to student learning. School administration should continue to emphasize creating a caring community to foster development of respect.

Another goal of the school's CE program was to increase service-learning opportunities for students and increase students' development in character strengths. Principle 5 of the program focuses on providing students opportunities for service-learning. There are multiple benefits to students who participate in service-learning projects, especially when students drive the community projects from start to finish. Service-learning provides students opportunities to improve their interpersonal skills and engagement in their communities (Simons & Cleary, 2006; Astin, Vogelgesang, Iked, & Yee, 2000; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). Students who lead and implement service-learning projects have higher self-concepts and more positive views about their communities (Morgan, & Steb, 2001). Several clubs and organizations of the school provided opportunities for service-learning throughout program implementation. In addition, in the second year of CE implementation, the school required all incoming freshmen to take the elective course Character Education/Service Learning. The course utilized an internet based curriculum along with other outside resources. Throughout the year, the students developed, implemented, and evaluated a service-learning project. Students wrote reflections on the project and its influence on their growth in values. For the responsibility domain, there were significant, high correlations among questions related to service learning opportunities within the school and the promotion of core values. Service-learning opportunities helped develop students' core values and effective implementation of the character education program.



The implementation of Character.org's 11 principles of character education began at MHS in order to develop a positive school climate conducive to student learning and to help development of student character. MHS faculty and school stakeholders changed their mission statement to incorporate the new values of the school. "We support the academic, social and character growth of all stakeholders." Education involves more than teaching academics alone; students also need social-emotional competencies and moral values in order to be successful in their careers and in their lives. The stakeholders of MHS were determined to provide students with opportunities to develop academically, socially, and morally. Promotion of the school's core values permeated every facet of school processes. The challenge faced by the faculty was how to measure the effectiveness of the program on student character development. The Character Growth Index was chosen as an evaluative tool to measure student character growth. The CGI measured 16 character strengths in the four domains of respect, responsibility, relationship and motivation. Students were given the CGI in the fall of 2018 and spring of 2019 to evaluate character growth. Students were given their pre CGI results to evaluate their character strengths and develop individual goals based on those strengths. Students also received their post CGI results for self-reflection.

From pre to post CGI, composite means increased across time in 15 of the 16 traits with the exception of spirituality. The paired sample t-tests indicated statistically significant increases in seven of the sixteen traits from pre to post: wisdom, peace, humility, courage, creativity, curiosity and optimism. Only one trait, spirituality, slightly decreased across time. Results indicated the character education program influenced student character growth. In addition, the multiple regression indicated that pre CGI relationship was a predictor of post CGI respect. The school's continued efforts to promote respect among stakeholders and to promote positive

relationships among staff and students was impacting the school culture and student character growth.

### **Implications for Practice**

School leaders should understand the significance of a positive school climate on student connectedness to school and student academic achievement (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Berkowitz, & Bier, 2004; Elias, White, Stepney, 2014; Wang & Degol, 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011). School climate can affect students' learning and behavior (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). In order to improve school climate and promote moral and ethical development of students, MHS administration implemented the 11 principles of character education authored by Character.org. School personnel's awareness of the importance of school climate and relationships helped promote the implementation of the character education program. The commitment of staff to character education was vital for success of the program.

Student data demonstrated the significance of teacher/student relationship and respect among school stakeholders on school climate and character growth. Educators are tasked with more than teaching academics. They also teach social-emotional competencies, citizenship and moral values. The 11 principles of character education encompasses these skills and values. Schools are social places and have organizational processes to ensure students can learn and develop in a safe environment; therefore, educators should offer in curriculum and school processes development of good character.

This study demonstrated the significance of relationship on student growth in respect. Positive relationships are built on trust and respect, thus educational leaders should be mindful of the best interests of students' framework when implementing character education. The best

interests of students' framework provided differing lenses to consider when making decisions. Often leaders are tasked to consider the interests of the individual or the interests of the whole community; sometimes the two paradigms conflict. However, through multiple lenses, educational leaders can make more informed decisions for the good of the entire school community. Stefkovich (1997) discussed the frequent conflict of moral dilemmas as they become more complex with the diversity of student populations and community thus making educational leaders' decision-making even more intricate. Prior to implementation of character education, the faculty of MHS considered Stefkovich's summation of "students' best interests."

Stefkovich conceptualizes decisions related to a student's best interests as those incorporating individual rights, accepting and teaching students to accept responsibility for their actions, and respecting students. These three Rs—rights, responsibility, and respect—are key to making ethical decisions that are in a student's best interests, and in turn, to fulfilling one's professional obligations as educational leaders (p. 19).

Student-voice was a driving force in character education implementation. Students were given opportunities to create the school's touchstone and core values, and the student body was given final decision-making of the school's core values. Providing students opportunities to lead in school processes and in curriculum helped build respect among students and staff and helped develop students' self-efficacy. Through the theoretical framework of the students' best interests and the conceptual framework of the 11 principles of character education, educational leaders developed communications and systems to expound student voice and participation in school processes and curriculum.

The central figure in student achievement in academics and other outcomes is the teacher. The school climate surveys demonstrated the significance of teachers knowing the individual

learning and cultural needs of their students, and students being able to go to a teacher for mentoring or counseling. This significance of teachers knowing the individuality of students further promulgates Stefkovich's best interests of students' framework. The complexity of the school community and individual student needs is a critical consideration for educational leaders; effective character education implementation considers the interests of individual students, student-efficacy and the broader community.

Motivation is a challenging construct to measure as demonstrated in the school climate survey. Motivation itself is a broad term, which can encompass several characteristics, such as, creativity, curiosity, optimism, etc. Motivation for learning or attaining future goals can differ at any point in time based on life experiences and contextual circumstances. Several factors can influence a student's motivation to learn or to achieve positive school outcomes, so the difficulty of measuring one's academic motivation remains a challenge. Consideration of how to measure student motivation on academic and social outcomes should be explored further. A study by Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish, and Russell (2016) noted that "motivational beliefs concerning academic self-efficacy and internalized values were significant, positive predictors of academic effort and goal orientations for academic tasks" (p. 41). Thus, educational leaders should consider ways to develop students' self-efficacy. Creating learning environments where peers help and encourage one another demonstrated positive effects on student motivation (Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish, & Russell, 2016). Teachers can influence through careful classroom structures and supports development of peer influence on student motivation; however, there is still much to learn about what motivates students to learn and to achieve in school.

The Character Growth Index indicated significant growth from pre to post survey in the motivation domain for three traits: optimism, creativity, and curiosity. Implementation of the

character education program emphasized student engagement and student voice in school processes, classroom procedures, and school projects. Student led service learning projects and clubs and organizations helped increase student engagement and interactions with peers. Educational leaders should develop student-voice in school processes and should develop student led initiatives to increase motivation and student self-efficacy.

### **Limitations of Research**

There were some limitations of this study. First, the research was conducted on student survey data. Self-reporting data may not be completely accurate, and students may not answer fully and with complete honesty. Sometimes students may rush through items just to finish, or they may not feel self-reporting information is necessary or important. In addition, students may not understand the need for the school to evaluate school climate, program implementation or their character development. The second limitation is the challenge of connecting the three separate surveys to measure effectiveness of program implementation on school climate and student character growth. Utilization of student survey data may miss some nuances of character education implementation and actual student perceptions of its influence on their character growth. Parent input on the character education program and its influence on their student's character development could provide more insight on effectiveness of program. The final limitation is the researcher is an administrator at the school and is an advocate of character education; however, the researcher did not participate in survey collection. The researcher took steps to reduce any bias through careful data collection. The researcher was not present for survey collection and took steps to maintain confidentiality of all students.

## **Recommendations for Further Study**

Several recommendations for further study exist. This program evaluation consisted of only one high school. The researcher would recommend duplication of this study in the other schools throughout the district and throughout school districts across the nation. Measuring student character growth throughout the district would help school leaders analyze areas of strength and need for further development. Additionally, the researcher recommends more input from parents and community on the character education program and its influence on student character growth. Parental input of the importance of character education and the role of the school in character development would provide a deeper and more robust evaluation.

Although this program evaluation analyzed one school's character education program, the study could be duplicated at other schools. Each school's student population and community should guide program implementation. Student, parent and community support for the character education program is critical for successful implementation and student outcomes. Each school's needs differ based on their student body and their community, thus consideration must be given for the students' best interests.

The measurement of school climate and effective program implementation on student character growth was challenging. This study utilized three separate surveys to evaluate the program and its influence on student character development. Future exploration may employ a mixed-method approach connecting school climate and program implementation to student character growth. In addition, parent and community input on the school's character education program and its influence on student character could also enhance program evaluation.

Student character growth increased in 15 of the 16 traits measured by the Character Growth Index; only spirituality slightly decreased across time. Motivating students is difficult, but utilizing multiple lenses when making educational decisions is a critical step for outcome success. Dantley (2010) provided another lens for school administrators—critical spirituality. Critical spirituality calls for leaders to search for meaning and transcend to the highest human potential. How do educators help students transcend to discover their highest human potentiality and connection with community and the world? Dantley (2010) described transformative leaders as those who reject the status quo and who “allow their spiritual selves to assist them in the execution of their leadership responsibilities” (p. 215). Leadership should help students recognize and reject the status quo through critical dialogue and study of moral issues. Encouraging students to think critically for themselves and for their futures as community leaders may help students develop in spirituality—a transcendence to a higher human connection.

## **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of one high school’s character education program. The school’s goals for its character education program were to improve school climate and to develop character strengths in students to help them succeed in academics and in their personal lives. Specifically, this study was a program evaluation of the implementation of character education and school climate on student character growth. The findings indicated the significance of teacher/student relationships on school climate and program implementation. Positive relationships among staff and students help create a positive school climate conducive to student learning. In addition, this evaluation indicated a significant relationship exists between relationship among students and staff on student development in

respect. Fostering a caring relationship among school staff and students is important in development of respect. These results can help school leaders allocate resources to further advance their character education initiatives.



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## APPENDIX A

### CHARACTER GROWTH INDEX

*Answer sets: CGI asks students to answer each question at two points in their life: 6 months ago and today. Both points use the same scale:*

More like me than anyone I know

A lot like me

Like me

A little like me

Not much like me

Not like me

Nothing like me

*Reliability items begin and end the CGI items:*

Reliability 1: I intend to answer all of these questions honestly, even if I'm not proud of my answer.

Reliability 2: I have answered all of these questions honestly, even if it made me look bad.

*CGI Factors with Items:*

1. Honesty
  - a. Q3: I am honest and keep my promises.
  - b. Q23: I am honest even when no one is watching.



- c. Q33: I'm honest and have not lied in the last month.
  - d. Q49: I have not cheated on homework or a test in the last month.
  - e. Q69: I have not stolen anything in the last month.
2. Humility
- a. Q18: My humility makes me happy when a good person succeeds.
  - b. Q24: I'm humble enough to admit when I am wrong.
  - c. Q27: I'm modest and not cocky when I succeed.
  - d. Q35: I am modest enough to enjoy a good person's success.
  - e. Q41: I am humble enough to admit when I make a mistake.
3. Perseverance
- a. Q6: Even when it gets hard, I stick with an important task and get it done.
  - b. Q10: Even when it's hard, I keep going until I finish the task.
  - c. Q22: When I have a task to do, I stay with it and finish it.
  - d. Q55: I am responsible to finish a task I begin.
  - e. Q59: I keep trying until I finish, even after a delay or roadblock.
4. Optimism
- a. Q21: I am optimistic and hopeful.
  - b. Q34: I am passionate about life despite hard times.
  - c. Q50: I enjoy my life and my smile is genuine.
  - d. Q56: I look on the bright side.
  - e. Q72: I am enthusiastic and motivated.
5. Kindness
- a. Q26: When I see someone who is really hurting, I help them.
  - b. Q39: I try to help people who are hurting to feel better.
  - c. Q54: When I can help someone who is really in need, I do.
  - d. Q57: When someone is in danger, I do something to help them.
  - e. Q71: I help those in need, even if they can't help me in return.
6. Love

- a. Q2: Despite their faults, I love my friends and close family members.
  - b. Q11: I care for and trust my friends and close family.
  - c. Q43: My close friends know me well and trust me.
  - d. Q67: I get close to the friends and family whom I trust.
  - e. Q75: I love my family and friends, even though they can be annoying.
7. Peace
- a. Q19: When something bad happens, I can calm myself down.
  - b. Q38: I can deal with negative, angry people.
  - c. Q40: In stressful times, I stay calm and at peace.
  - d. Q65: I can calm myself, even when the situation is upsetting.
  - e. Q68: I am patient and remain calm, even when others are trying to make me mad.
8. Courage
- a. Q5: When facing danger, I act with courage despite my fear.
  - b. Q9: I have courage when I face danger.
  - c. Q25: When in a crisis, fear doesn't stop me from taking action.
  - d. Q51: I have courage and take action in a crisis.
  - e. Q73: When in danger, my courage overcomes my fear.
9. Insight/Wisdom
- a. Q17: I make good decisions and solve my problems.
  - b. QQ20: When I make a decision, I can clearly see its positive and negative consequences.
  - c. Q37: When I have a problem, I make a good decision and solve it.
  - d. Q58: I find ways to solve my problems with good decision-making.
  - e. Q66: I make good choices that have good consequences.
10. Spirituality
- a. Q1: My spirituality is strong and influences my values.
  - b. Q8: I am a spiritual person or a person of faith.
  - c. Q42: I am a spiritual person with strongly-held beliefs.
  - d. Q52: I feel or sense things on a spiritual level.

e. Q70: Prayer, meditation, or reflection is important to me.

#### 11. Forgiveness

a. Q4: I am a forgiving person.

b. Q7: When someone is sorry for hurting me, I forgive them.

c. Q36: In time, I choose to forgive those who do me harm.

d. Q53: When someone hurts me, I don't want to get bitter so I forgive them.

e. Q74: When someone hurts me, I can work through it and forgive them in time.

#### 12. Self-Control

a. Q12: I have self-control over my emotions.

b. Q28: I have self-control; I resist when tempted to do something wrong.

c. Q44: Even when I really want something, I can control my desires.

d. Q60: In the past month, I've been self-controlled.

e. Q76: I am self-disciplined and can wait to get what I want.

#### 13. Gratitude

a. Q13: I am exceedingly thankful for good things in my life.

b. Q29: I am so grateful when someone helps me that I want to say, "Thank you."

c. Q45: I tremendously appreciate the good things I receive.

d. Q61: I like to show my gratitude when given a gift.

e. Q77: I believe in expressing appreciation when I'm helped.

#### 14. Creativity

a. Q14: I am imaginative and creative.

b. Q30: In my hobbies and interests, I am creative.

c. Q46: I am creative when I want to be.

d. Q62: In the past month, I've expressed my creativity.

e. Q78: When I want to create something, my creativity comes out.

#### 15. Curiosity

a. Q15: I am curious and like to ask questions.

b. Q31: I like to find answers to questions that interest me.

- c. Q47: I get curious about things that interest me.
- d. Q63: My curiosity makes me think deeply or ask questions.
- e. Q79: My curiosity moves me to find answers to my questions.

16. Cooperation

- a. Q16: I am fair and cooperate with others.
- b. Q32: When in a group, I am fair and cooperate with the others.
- c. Q48: On a team, I do my part and am fair to others.
- d. Q64: I am fair and work well with others.
- e. Q80: I cooperate and am fair with others.

*Youth Flourishing Scale* (to correct for student level of subjective well-being).

- 81. My life has purpose and meaning.
- 82. My friends and family are encouraging and helpful.
- 83. I lead an active and interesting life.
- 84. I help others in ways that make their lives better and happier.
- 85. When involved in something important to me, I'm motivated and do well.
- 86. People who know me best would say I'm a good person and have a good life.
- 87. I think my future looks great.
- 88. People respect me.

*Demographic items are at the end of the test:*

DQ1: What is your student ID?

DQ2: What is your grade?

DQ3: What is your gender?

DQ4: What is your race? African-American, Asian, Hispanic, More than One Race, White, Another Race, Rather Not Say

## APPENDIX B

### 11 PRINCIPLES RUBRIC

- 1- Lacking Evidence
- 2- Developing Implementation
- 3- Good Implementation
- 4- Exemplary Implementation

1. Core values appear in the school building, mission statement, website, handbook, discipline code, newsletters home, and at school events.
2. The school has defined what core values “look like” and “sound like” in terms of observable behaviors.
3. Staff, students, and parents can identify the core values and recognize their importance as a distinctive feature of the school.
4. Staff consistently explain to students how the core values can help them make choices that demonstrate good character.
5. Students can explain why the core values are important, how behaviors exemplify those values, and why some behaviors are right and other are wrong.
6. Staff help students to develop an appreciation for and a commitment to the core values.
7. Staff provide opportunities for students to reflect on the core values through the discussion of real life problems and situations relevant to ethical and performance character.
8. Staff meet students’ needs for safety, belonging, competence, and autonomy.
9. Staff encourage students to examine their own behavior in light of the core values and challenge them to make their behavior consistent to the core values.
10. Students receive practice in and feedback on academic and behavior skills.
11. Students have the opportunity to practice the core values in the context of relationships.
12. Teachers teach core values through academic subjects.
13. Teachers provide opportunities for students to develop moral reasoning through discussion of ethical issues in content areas.
14. Classroom routines and procedures are respectful of students and engage them in ways that develop core values.
15. Students perceive staff as caring and report that they can go to an adult in the school with a problem.
16. Staff frequently attend school events.
17. Staff provide extra help in academic work and counsel or mentor students when needed.
18. Students perceive the student body as friendly and inclusive.
19. The school uses educational strategies to encourage mutual respect and a feeling of responsibility for one another.

20. Students report that bullying (including cyberbullying), teasing, and acts of cruelty or intolerance are infrequent and not tolerated by staff.
21. All students participate in activities, programs, and processes that promote tolerance, understanding, respect and peace among students.
22. The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for service within the school.
23. The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for participation in community service learning.
24. The school sets aside time for students to assess community needs, create ideas for meeting those needs, plan and coordinate service learning projects, and reflect on the positive consequences of community service.
25. The school community encourages students to seek mastery of content and skills.
26. Staff members challenge and help all students do high-quality work and strive for continuous improvement.
27. Parents and students report that teachers know their students well and understand and respond to their learning needs and cultural differences.
28. Teachers promote thinking habits (e.g., curiosity truth-seeking, critical thinking, and open-mindedness) that lead to intellectual growth in students.
29. Teachers promote social habits (e.g., honesty, responsibility, collaboration) that help students work together harmoniously.
30. Teachers promote, and students report, the importance of academic integrity in the completion of work.
31. Students are able to articulate on a personal level what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important.
32. Staff is courteous to students and each other and demonstrate respectful and supportive behavior.
33. Students and parents report that staff is courteous and model the core values.
34. Students value the leadership roles available to them and identify themselves as members of wider communities.
35. The school office is welcoming to parents, and staff prioritizes inclusive outreach to parents.

*Student Character Growth Items:*

36. Character education efforts at school have helped me develop in character.
37. Through character education initiatives at school, the school climate is positive and inclusive of all students.
  - 1- Strongly Agree
  - 2- Agree
  - 3- Somewhat Agree
  - 4- Neutral
  - 5- Disagree
  - 6- Strongly Disagree

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT CLIMATE SURVEY

Thank you for taking this survey seriously. We appreciate and value your input. Last year, students chose our school's touchstone: "ON ME! Myself. Everything I do." This year we are asking you to choose our vision statement. A vision statement is how we want to see our community in the future. Thank you for being a part of our community.

\*Required

*Mark only one oval.*

1. Email address \*

2. Current grade level \*

3. Staff at your school are caring.

Extremely caring

Somewhat caring

Not very caring

Not caring at all

4. You can go to an adult in the school with a problem.

Extremely caring

Somewhat caring

Not very caring

Not caring at all

5. Staff frequently attend school events.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

6. Teachers provide extra help in academic work to students when needed.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

7. Teachers provide counseling or mentoring to students when needed.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

8. You perceive the majority of the student body to be friendly and inclusive of everyone.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

9. You feel safe at your school.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

10. Bullying (including cyber-bullying), teasing, and acts of cruelty or intolerance are infrequent.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

11. Bullying (including cyber-bullying), teasing, and acts of cruelty or intolerance are not tolerated by staff.

Always



Often  
Sometimes  
Rarely  
Never

12. All students have an opportunity to participate in activities and programs that promote tolerance, understanding, respect, and peace among students.

Always  
Often  
Sometimes  
Rarely  
Never

13. Students know your school's Core Values.

Always  
Often  
Sometimes  
Rarely  
Never

14. Students at your school live by or model the Core Values.

Always  
Often  
Sometimes  
Rarely  
Never

15. Teachers at your school model the Core Values.

Always  
Often  
Sometimes  
Rarely  
Never

16. Parents know what the Core Values are.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

17. Your school effectively provides students with opportunities for service within the school.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

18. Teachers connect community service with the curriculum (the things you study in class).

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

19. Our teachers know their students well.

Extremely well

Somewhat well

Not very well

Not at all

20. Our teachers know their students' learning needs and cultural differences.

Extremely well

Somewhat well

Not very well

Not at all

21. Students understand what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important.

Extremely well

Somewhat well

Not very well

Not at all

22. Teachers discuss academic integrity with students in terms of fairness and personal honor, and there are clear guidelines about doing your own work compared to plagiarism (copying someone else's work) and cheating.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

23. The principal in your school often promotes the Core Values and good character.

Extremely well

Somewhat well

Not very well

Not at all

24. Students help create and maintain standards of behavior (like classroom rules or class contracts).

All students do

Most students do

Some students do

Only a few students do

No students do

25. Students have a responsible roles and opportunities for leadership at various levels.

All students do

Most students do

Some students do

Only a few students do

No students do

26. How do you rate the importance of character in your life?

Extremely important

Somewhat important

Not very important

Not at all important

27. Your school promotes the Core Values and the importance of good character?

Extremely well

Somewhat well

Not very well

Not at all

APPENDIX D

FACTOR ANALYSIS: COMPONENT MATRIX

2017 School Climate: Relationship

Component Matrix

	1	2
2017Q7	.751	
2017Q20	.703	
2017Q19	.701	
2017Q3	.690	
2017Q6	.681	
2017Q4	.668	
2017Q18	.635	
2017Q5	.514	
2017Q10		.732
2017Q11	.531	.594

2017 School Climate: Responsibility

Component Matrix

	1	2
2017Q14	.735	
2017Q15	.727	
2017Q13	.712	
2017Q25	.702	
2017Q24	.687	
2017Q17	.686	
2017Q23	.636	
2017Q16	.594	-.469
2017Q9	.561	
2017Q11	.534	.587
2017Q10	.418	.505

2017 School Climate: Respect

Component Matrix

	1
2017Q27	.735
2017Q11	.707
2017Q22	.689
2017Q12	.654
2017Q10	.537

2017 School Climate: Motivation

Component Matrix

	1
2017Q21	.814
2017Q26	.814

2018 School Climate: Relationship

Component Matrix

	1
2018Q7	.750
2018Q4	.694
2018Q20	.689
2018Q3	.641
2018Q19	.628
2018Q18	.624
2018Q6	.623
2018Q11	.561
2018Q5	.518
2018Q10	.466

2018 School Climate: Responsibility

Component Matrix

	1
2018Q14	.752
2018Q25	.735
2018Q24	.729
2018Q15	.702
2018Q17	.688
2018Q23	.659
2018Q13	.639
2018Q16	.614
2018Q11	.583
2018Q9	.581
2018Q10	.464

2018 School Climate: Respect

Component Matrix

	1
2018Q11	.735
2018Q27	.731
2018Q12	.725
2018Q22	.679
2018Q10	.534

2018 School Climate: Motivation

Component Matrix

	1
2018Q26	.797
2018Q21	.797

11 Principles: Relationship

Component Matrix

	1
Q27	.738
Q6	.732
Q15	.706
Q11	.696
Q35	.656
Q1	.624
Q16	.539

11 Principles: Responsibility

Component Matrix

	1
Q9	.723
Q26	.721
Q13	.695
Q23	.695
Q22	.692
Q25	.691
Q7	.691
Q24	.689
Q4	.674
Q3	.670
Q12	.668
Q8	.665
Q10	.659
Q2	.648
Q5	.581
Q1	.581

11 Principles: Respect

Component Matrix

	1
Q19	.768
Q14	.741
Q32	.740
Q33	.729
Q18	.714
Q21	.699
Q20	.641

11 Principles: Motivation

Component Matrix

	1
Q29	.780
Q28	.779
Q34	.779
Q30	.772
Q31	.755

## APPENDIX E

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CGI

For you who want to go deeper in evaluating CGI's content validity and construct validity, the following is the executive Summary of Mark Liston's dissertation study that validated CGI. If you are a real data geek (or if you want some lullaby reading), **click here** to see the pre-publication article by Mark Liston and Marvin Berkowitz, "Is Character Development Quantifiable? Creation and Validation of the Character Growth Index."

**Executive Summary:  
Conceptualizing and Validating the Character Growth Index (CGI)**

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This study's research question is: *Can a valid, reliable measure of multi-dimensional adolescent character be developed?* Its goals were:

1. To construct a grid of trait lists by experts in Positive Psychology (PP; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), Character Education (CE; Bulach, 1996; Davidson & Lickona, 2005; Josephson, 2011), and Positive Youth Development (PYD; Lerner et al., 2005) to create the *Character Taxonomy* as a conceptual basis;
2. To construct the *Character Growth Index* (CGI) as a brief measure of the *Character Taxonomy's* traits; and
3. To validate CGI.

The *Character Taxonomy* produced 18 traits that were hypothesized to cover the various dimensions of character. Two CGI field tests involving over 1000 middle school students produced a reliable measure with 11 factors for a validation study.

The validation study involved 784 Midwest US middle school students. Average administration time was 17 minutes. Cronbach's alpha for the 55 CGI items was .944 and test/retest was correlated at .720 indicating CGI is a reliable measure (Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2012; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Exploratory factor analysis produced all 11 hypothesized factors with Eigenvalues >1.0 and explained 58.5% of the total variance. Coefficient alphas for ten of the eleven were >.7. Traits defined as Courage, Kindness, and Peace showed unique conceptualization and differentiating elements that could inform and contribute to character research.

The measure by which CGI was compared for validation was a collection of 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* that were conceptually closest to CGI's 11 factors. Spearman's Rho set the overall CGI correlation with the *VIA Youth Survey* at .851. Paired



sample correlations of CGI's hypothesized 11 character traits and the corresponding subscales of the *VIA Youth Survey* produced significant correlations ranging from .405-.806.

The 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* had not been subjected to reliability and validity measurement. A post-hoc EFA of its data showed strong reliability, produced 11 factors (ten that were identical to CGI factors), and had acceptable structural coefficients.

When independent EFAs of CGI and the 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* produced 11 factors each, the questions arose: Can a multidimensional character measure contain even more than 11 distinct, interpretable factors? Could items intending to measure traits defined by differing fields (PP, CE, and PYD) support the same factor?

To answer these questions, a third post-hoc study combined all CGI and VIA-YS items for a conjoint EFA. Data from the 107 items revealed 19 factors with Eigenvalues  $> 1.0$  accounting for 63.4% of variance. Eighteen factors were easily interpretable and sixteen had items that created  $>.7$  coefficient alphas. 80% of items factored. CGI items factored together with and independent from VIA items. Future studies could add traits deemed essential to make CGI a comprehensive measure of character.

Limitations involve the need for future studies (1) to improve factoring, discriminant, convergent, and predictive validity, (2) to conduct confirmatory factor analysis for improved conceptualization, and (3) to be experimentally designed to indicate longitudinal outcomes that determine CGI's ability to measure character growth.

# APPENDIX F

## HISTOGRAMS RQ4

