

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTERPLUS IN THE  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF A MIDWESTERN URBAN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

By  
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and student discipline in twelve elementary schools of a large Midwestern urban school district. The goal of this study was to identify if there was relationship between the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and the rate of office discipline referrals resulting out-of-school suspension. A second goal was to identify if there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions.

This descriptive study involved an examination of the discipline data from all twelve schools for the fall semester two years prior to implementation creating a baseline (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester for two consecutive years following implementation of CHARACTERplus. The discipline data was analyzed by the total number of office discipline referrals per 100 students as well as by the type of infractions to include attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, and a category referred to as the 3Ds inclusive of disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior. Additionally, a survey was sent electronically via Survey Monkey to the 350 teachers who worked in the twelve elementary schools at the time of the study with 230 responding. The survey was designed to elicit responses from teachers who had worked in the building for the four years reviewed in this study. Of the 230 teachers who responded, 60% of them had worked in the school prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus.

Findings indicated that for the schools combined, the total number of office discipline referrals increased from the baseline to year one and to year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus per 100 students. One could speculate that the rise in office discipline

referrals could be a result of a heightened awareness around the character traits being taught that teachers may have developed a zero tolerance level. While some schools individually experienced decreases in specific infraction types, other schools experienced substantial increases that raised the total number. The number of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension decreased from the baseline year and each year following implementation of CHARACTERplus. It is possible that the reduction in out-of-school suspensions could be due to administrators applying leniency in consequences or perhaps while the frequency of office discipline referrals increased, the severity of the behaviors was lessened. Lastly, only one school had a majority of teachers that perceived that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. These findings are counter to the expectation that the number of discipline office referrals would decrease and this is further supported by the majority of teachers' perceptions are that referrals were not reduced with the implementation of CHARACTERplus. This study concluded with implications for action for the school district and recommendations for further research involving the implementation of character education programs and CHARACTERplus in relation to student behavior and other components of education such as achievement.

## Acknowledgements

A colleague once shared that the completion of a dissertation is much like that of preparing and running a marathon. It is not a sprint but rather an act of training and conditioning with the determination, perseverance, and endurance to get to the finish line. It involves developing and sustaining the will to complete a complex, long term project.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The lack of discipline in school has ranked at or near the top in national surveys of the American public on the problems faced by American public schools (DiGiulo, 2001). Loeber and Southamer-Loeber reported in 1998, that most types of anti-social behavior are already evident by third grade and problem behaviors in childhood are predictive of violence and other antisocial behavior later in adolescences and adulthood. Research has shown that schools must work to create an overall positive school climate, so students have a good learning environment to improve the academic performance (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). “Helping students behave in a way that supports learning outcomes and a safe environment continues to be one of the most critical issues facing schools” (Ludlow, 2011, p.6).

A substantial body of literature has shown that disruptive classroom behavior, conduct problems, aggression, delinquency and substance abuse are associated with poor academic achievement and with a lack of student feeling of school connectedness and school involvement. In a study of 600 schools conducted by Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Hybl (1993), they found that the following school characteristics were associated with discipline problems: rules were unclear or perceived as unfairly or inconsistently enforced; students did not believe in the rules; teachers and administrators did not know what the rules were or disagreed on the proper responses to student misconduct; teacher and administration cooperation was poor or the administration inactive; teachers tended to have punitive attitudes; misconduct was ignored, and schools were large or lacked adequate resources for teaching. Kendziora and Osher (2009) reported that the behavior of students interferes with learning, diverts teacher and administrative time, and contributes to teacher burnout.

Schools face challenges related to disruptive and antisocial student behavior. Many discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions imposed upon students impact the amount of instructional time and overall student achievement. Out-of-school suspension is regularly used in schools. National data estimates that approximately 7% of the school population missed at minimum one day of school as a result of being suspended or expelled double the number since the 1970's (Wald & Losen, 2003). Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997), reported, that up to 33% of all disciplinary referrals in a middle school in an urban district resulted in out-of-school suspension. Office discipline referrals signal the point at which teachers formally and most often publicly acknowledge that behavior is beyond their capacity to manage. In effect, teachers have reached the limits of professional and personal capacity to control a student's behavior and at this point the resources of the school are expected to be utilized (Fields, 2004).

While exclusionary discipline is considered necessary for school safety, Noguera (2003) reported that one of the key rationales for excluding offending students is to ensure that others can learn without disruption. Some have argued that suspensions remove disorderly students and deter others from misbehaving, thereby improving the school environment so well-behaving students can learn without distractions (Ewing, 2000). A competing hypothesis is that recurrent student removal may have a negative impact on student learning, by reducing the opportunity to learn for the removed student (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000). In a study of middle school suspension within six middle schools, Gottfredson, Karweit, and Gottfredson (1989) found that 2,042 suspensions resulted in a loss of 3,850 student instructional days in one school year. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* 2015, reported that "during the 2011-12 school year, nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended out-of-school at least once. Of the 3.5 million students that were out-of-school

suspended, 1.55 million were suspended at least twice." "Given that the average suspension lasts 3.5 days, it is estimated that children lost nearly 18 million days of instruction in just one year because of exclusionary discipline" (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015, pg. 1).

As stated by Lickona (1991), public school systems have faced violence, vandalism, cheating, stealing, disrespect for authority, peer cruelty, profanity, sexual precociousness and abuse, increasing self-centeredness and declining responsibility, and self-destructive behavior. Many stakeholders called for the need of character education and moral education in the academic system and advocate for mandated programs to be in place (Hayes & Hagedorn, 2000). According to the 2013 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, "nine percent of public schools reported that student acts of disrespect toward teachers other than verbal abuse occurred at least once a week in 2009-10". Ten percent of elementary teachers and nine percent of secondary teachers reported being threatened by a student at a school in 2011-12. Eight percent of elementary teachers reported being physically attacked compared to three percent of secondary teachers in 2011-12" (p. 5). Concern by parents, caregivers, and educators led to an intense interest in the field of character education, an aspect of education defined as "the deliberate effort to teach virtues...objectively good human qualities" (Lickona, 1997, p. 63).

Society has looked to public schools to assume large responsibility in addressing and assisting in the deterrence of violent crimes, rampant abuse of drugs, open displays of cruelty, and a generalized display of disrespect (Hunt & Mullins, 2005). The 42nd annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools included data that shows student discipline and the importance of programs that address problem behavior have been priority concerns for the public for the last four decades. In response to the public perception of the moral decline of youth, presidents, federal government, state governments, educational

organizations, and family organizations have called on schools to focus on moral and ethical development. On January 23, 1997, President Bill Clinton used a State of the Union Address to “challenge all of our schools to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship” (Davis, 2003, p. 43).

### **Statement of Problem**

Schools are the "obvious site for addressing positive youth development and prevention efforts because of universal access to children over time that, in turn, allow for efficient distribution of these efforts to a comprehensive population of youth" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010, p.3). Elementary school is thought to be a critical time for prevention. School-wide approaches are promoted for educators to achieve consistency in positively recognizing appropriate behaviors and acting upon inappropriate behavior. School-wide discipline approaches allow teachers to respond to behavior more positively and with more forethought (Lewis, 1999; Algozzine, Ellis, Marr, & White, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2001). A consistent approach helps educators to articulate to families the behavior expected in schools, the rationales for those behaviors and the methods used for dealing with those behaviors.

Character education programs became increasingly popular in K-12 education, partially in response to apparently high levels of student misbehavior and concerns about low levels of endorsement of values consistent with good character (Williams, 2000). Between 1993 and 2009, thirty-six states passed laws mandating or recommending some aspect of character education in schools, and character education programs have had high levels of support from parents, teachers, and school administrators (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 enacted the Partnerships in Character Education Program to support the design and implementation of instruction aimed at promoting positive character development and

improving the school environment. From 2001-2006, Congress appropriated approximately \$25 million a year in grants to states and school districts to design and implement character education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although U.S. Department of Education appropriation levels for the program have since declined, interest in character education among K-12 educators is high, a wide variety of character education curricula and professional development resources are available, and implementation of character education programs in schools is widespread (Berkowitz and Bier, 2007). Currently, thirty-six states continue to have laws or strongly encourage implementation of character education programs and seven states support character education without legislation (n.d., <http://www.character.org/wp-content/uploads/What-States-Are-Doing.pdf>).

Character education is defined as those educational practices that foster the development of student character. Character has been defined as the set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable the individual to function as a competent and moral agent that is to do ‘good’ in the world (Berkowitz, 2011). Glanzer and Milson (2006), best describe character education as teaching youth about the reasons for knowing, caring, and acting in the good. It is more specifically defined as “knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good”. Character education has also been referred to as social education and moral education. The definition of moral is “being able to distinguish between right and wrong” (Demmon, Rice, & Warble, 1996).

The primary foundation for character education is to promote the ethical, social and personal integrity of students. Proponents of character education argue that the nation benefits when its citizens subscribe to the ideas of respect for others, fairness, justice, honesty, responsibility, and civic participation (Ryan, 2004). Character education programs have been



promoted as a partial solution to student misbehavior at school and the effect of such misbehavior on student learning (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003).

CHARACTERplus is a proactive school-wide character education process that engages staff in developing an environment where students are valued, and the teaching of character traits is embedded in the curriculum. School staffs identify positive character traits to instill in students, such as responsibility and respect, and processes to support the traits as a school community. The traits are then integrated into the curriculum and taught, modeled, and encouraged throughout the school. School staffs utilize positive strategies to respond to students who exhibit disruptive behavior by providing what the student needs in regards to character development rather than what the teacher may think he or she deserves. CHARACTERplus is an approach to support an instructional focus and reduce the amount of time lost to addressing student discipline.

For almost two decades, the national attention has been placed on schools to teach character education. Character education programs are widespread in their use and implementation within schools. The question is do schools experience a decrease in student office discipline referrals after the implementation of character education programs? An examination of character education programs, specifically CHARACTERplus, and the perceived effects the implementation has on student discipline as measured by the number of office referrals and suspensions will provide policymakers, educators, and community partners with information and an increase in understanding for continued support of such programs.

### **Purpose of Study**

In the large Midwestern urban school district of focus for this study, the review of discipline data and student perceptions of relationships and safety at school are a common

practice conducted throughout each school year. School officials and administrators review student discipline data and report findings and observations to the Board of Education on a regular basis. Three data sets brought concerns to the district in the 2012-2013 school term. The analysis of the district's discipline data, specifically the high number of suspensions and incidences of bullying was disconcerting. At that time, the data showed that 34.9 office discipline referrals were written per 100 students, and 12.3 suspensions were imposed per 100 students in the fall of the 2012-2013 school year. The Caring Communities survey that students at certain grade levels completed around relationships with staff and students and the feeling of safety at school, and input gathered from the district's principal advisory committee also presented a level of uneasiness. The district decided that a proactive schoolwide approach to student behavior was needed to address the student behavior.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the district's Student Services Department and a study team of principals and district officials was formed to review various programs available that could be implemented with a level of consistency across all school levels. A visit was made to a district similar in demographics that had implemented CHARACTERplus and had experienced significant turn-around in student behavior. The Student Services Principal Advisory committee received a presentation of the data from the other district and they supported the recommendation of CHARACTERplus. CHARACTERplus allowed for building autonomy and had direct links to the district code of conduct and other district initiatives, specifically the district goal of students being college and career ready. The school district identified three goals for the implementation for CHARACTERplus: improve academic achievement; reduce incidents of office discipline referrals; develop a strong sense of belonging in students.

The district decided to pilot CHARACTERplus and invited all schools to an informational meeting with an invitation to be part of the pilot implementation. Twelve of the district's elementary schools volunteered to pilot CHARACTERplus. The Student Services Principal Advisory Committee, decided to focus on a character trait of the month approach. A CHARACTERplus committee was formed with representatives from the piloting schools and district officials. The committee met monthly with a CHARACTERplus trainer to build consensus with staff, students, parents and community members on the implementation, identification of character traits, how to embed the traits into the curriculum, and purposeful braiding of CHARACTERplus with other district initiatives. The CHARACTERplus volunteer schools received training from a CHARACTERplus consultant at the start of the 2014-2015 school year and began implementation in the fall of 2014. The pilot year was used to determine if CHARACTERplus supported the needs identified by the district and if full implementation would occur in all schools the following year. Pilot school representatives met consistently throughout the first year and with input from district officials, they decided to move to full implementation in all schools in the fall of 2015. CHARACTERplus was implemented in all schools within the district in the fall of 2015.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to describe the relationship of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and student discipline in twelve elementary schools of a large Midwestern urban school district. The goal of this study was to identify (a) if there is a relationship between the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension, and (b) if there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. Both building level and district level

administration will benefit from this study as it was to identify if the implementation of character education programs has implications on the number of office referrals and out-of-school suspensions. This study can be utilized to inform administration of the commitment and investment of resources for implementation of programs in schools.

Discipline data to include the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions from the schools two years before implementation of CHARACTERplus and for two consecutive years following implementation was collected and analyzed for the twelve elementary schools. Office discipline referrals occur when a student behaves in such a way that the district code of conduct calls for disciplinary action.

The district's board approved student code of conduct is designed to promote understanding of the policies and expectations for the conduct of all students, parents, staff and the community to provide high quality educational experiences. The code of conduct defines the types of behavior infractions, the interventions and consequences to student behavior. The district in this study requires administrator's to enter all discipline data in a district designed software program as each incident occurs. District data are pulled each semester by school, level (elementary, middle, high) and the district as a whole. The data include the number of student office discipline referrals, types of student code of conduct violations, and the consequences or penalty action in response to the office disciplinary referral that results in in-school or out-of-school suspension. In the elementary schools included in this study, the office discipline referrals most commonly included; defiance of authority, disrespect, disruptive behavior. Bullying, attendance, weapons and drugs to include tobacco and alcohol are other less common behaviors for which discipline referrals may have been made.

It is a district requirement that the code of conduct is read and reviewed with students every year. Each student and parent signs a verification form to affirm that the student has read the code of conduct. The code of conduct behavioral expectations for the 2014-2015 school year included empathy, emotion management and self-awareness, respectful behavior and communication, decision making and problem solving, perseverance, and responsibility. In the 2015-2016, the behavioral expectations in the code of conduct were modified to match the expected character traits of the month: empathy, cooperation, respect, patience, perseverance, compassion, courage, integrity, gratitude, ambition, and citizenship.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the research questions listed below. The school district categorizes office discipline referrals into different types of infractions or reasons for the referral. Therefore, additional sub-questions were addressed to look specifically at discipline office referrals and out-of-schools suspensions related to attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, and the 3D's (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior).

1. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, and each fall semester after implementation, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - a. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to attendance reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?

- b. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to bullying reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - c. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to drugs/alcohol/tobacco reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - d. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to the 3D's (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior) reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
2. Is there a change in the rate of discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension reported between the two fall semester prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
3. Is there a greater change in the number of office discipline referrals in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals?

4. Is there a greater change in the number of out-of-school suspensions in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals?

### **Organization of Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents an introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the organization of the study. Presented in Chapter Two is a review of literature relevant to study to include historical background, perspective, and research. Chapter Three contains the methodology and procedures beginning with the introduction, research questions, research design as well as the description of the proposed data analysis. Chapter Four includes the analysis of the data. The final chapter includes an overall summary with conclusions, implications for the field of education and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### School Reform

Americans have repeatedly followed a typical pattern of devising education solutions for specific social or economic dilemmas. Historically, when a problem is discovered, it is labeled and a strategy developed on the topic. For example, sex education was developed in response to an increase of venereal diseases and home economic courses were designed to address the divorce rate (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Addressing societal needs through education has often diverted attention from more costly, politically controversial and difficult societal reforms. It is easier to provide vocational training than to resolve inequities in employment and gaps in wealth and income. Educational reforms have helped to influence citizens to construct the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Tyack & Cuban (1995) define reform as “planned efforts to change schools to correct perceived social and education problems” (p. 4). They further state that whatever the reform, it usually “entails a long and complex set of steps: discovering problems, devising remedies, adopting new policies and bringing institutional change (p.4)”. Reforms are typically gradual and incremental and with the revision of practices over time, can considerably improve schools.

The past century marks several events that have influenced educational reform. The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 paved the way for racial desegregation in schools and ultimately influenced the inclusion of students with disabilities to be integrated into the public school system. The Soviets Launch of Sputnik in 1957 drew attention to more focus on science, math, foreign languages and increased rigor in the classroom. “The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 reformers targeted funds to students



from low-income families to prevent poverty from restricting school opportunities and academic achievement”(Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 27). “A Nation at Risk was only one of many elite policy commissions of the 1980s that declared that faulty schooling was eroding the economy and that the remedy for both education and economic decline was improving academic achievement” (p.34). The important problem is to devise reasonable policies for the improvement of schooling that can command the support of a concerned public and the commitment of the educators upon whom reform must rely (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Elam, 1989).

Several phases of reform efforts are suggested by Tyack and Cuban (1995). “The first phase is “policy talk,” where a problem is diagnosed and solutions are advocated for. The next phase is sometimes referred to as policy action or the adoption of reforms through state legislation, school board regulations, or decisions by authorities. The actual implementation of planned change in schools, putting reforms into practice is the next stage that is often much slower and more complex than the first two stages” (p. 40).

Tyack & Cuban (1995), identified “three features of reform that complicate tracking how policy talk became translated into institutional trends: the time lag between advocacy and implementation; the uneven penetration of reforms in the different sectors of public education; and the different impact of reforms on various social groups” (p55). The time lag frustrates elected officials that desire to see a quick change in educational practices as the results might help sway the next vote. By the time reforms are implemented, the people may have changed its original purpose and goals. The time taken for implementation impacts the attainment of desired goals and thus goal displacement can occur.

In regards to the kinds of reforms that were implemented smoothly and lasted long enough to become an institutional trend Tyack and Cuban (1995) stated:

Reforms that were structural add-ons generally did not disturb the standard operating procedures of schools, and this noninterference enhanced their chances of lasting... and tended to be non-controversial to the lay people on the school board or legislatures.

Programs were likely to persist if they produced influential constituencies interested in seeing them continue.... Reforms also tended to persist if they were required by law and easily monitored.... Reforms proposed and implemented by school administrators and teachers themselves to make their work easier or more efficient or to improve their professional status were likely to stick better than innovations pushed by outsiders. (p 57)

There are three recommended criteria for which to identify success or failure of reform: fidelity to the original design; effectiveness in meeting preset outcomes or goals; and longevity (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Quite often, the three criteria are influenced in the way that schools change reform. By the time the reform policies are delivered from higher level officials to the teachers, the original design has often changed which then impacts the effectiveness in meeting the preset outcomes and the ability to identify longevity of the original plan. When teachers work collaboratively with policy makers to develop goals and strategies for an identified need and support each other in assessing the progress and challenges to implementation, then reform efforts that lead to school improvement are likely to survive, and the three criteria to success can be easily determined. This collaboration may be “seen as positive tinkering, adapting knowledgeably to local needs and circumstances, preserving what is valuable and correcting what is not” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.10).

## Character Education

Character education is one of the nation's oldest education initiatives that experienced a rebirth in public interest over the past few decades. Character education has been in existence since the days of ancient philosophers such as Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle, who wrote about man's intrinsic worth. It has existed in public school systems since colonial times (Greenawalt, 1996), and is as old as education itself from Plato to America through the 20th century (Lickona, 1991). Through discipline, teacher's example, and the curriculum, virtues were historically taught.

Character education programs are designed to prevent, address, and reduce inappropriate behaviors, and teach skills that will lead to academic and social success through increased time for teaching and learning. Character education programs are intended to foster the development of student character by instilling core values or morals that help students to distinguish between right and wrong. According to Lickona (1988, p.420), character education programs are devised to accomplish three goals:

- “To promote development away from egocentrism an excessive individualism and toward cooperative relationships and mutual respect.
- To foster the growth of moral agency – the capacity to think, feel and act morally; and
- To develop in the classroom and in the school a moral community based on fairness, caring, and participation such a community being a moral end in itself as well as a support system for the character development of each individual student” (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p.158).

Character education programs have been distinguished as the objective of schooling and the ensuing answer to social problems (Sanchez, 2005). The resurgence of character education emerged based on a consensus concerning core values transcending cultural and religious boundaries. By the 1990s, character education involved the act of intentionally teaching virtues such as honesty, integrity, respect, and responsibility. The revitalized movement was in response to the belief that the absence of good character results in the dishonest, destructive, violent, and irresponsible behavior of today's youth. Character education programs promote respect, responsibility, and compassion for all which helps children to feel safe at school and so students can be academically productive during the school day. Throughout history, students have learned positive behaviors, morals, values, and character from family, church, and community. Teaching students in school about these concepts through character education programs will have far-reaching benefits for students.

### **Early Years to Mid-18th Century**

Character education has a long history that dates back to over 2000 years ago. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle influenced what is now known as character education. Plato believed “but if you ask what is the good of education in general, the answer is easy: that education makes good men and that good men behave nobly” (n.d.).

The history of character education in American schools dates back to colonial times. In the 17th century, the Puritans of New England left the most enriching history and documentation about the purpose and practices of moral education as they wanted to set the precedence for future generations and settlers. Puritans who first settled the colonies in 1620 “saw in moral education as a way to keep religious orthodoxy alive, promote social harmony, encourage hard work, and spread the Christian faith to the heathen” (McClellan, 1999, p.2).

Schools were not readily available in the 1600s. Therefore, families were given the responsibility of education of which most teaching came from bible scripture. Puritans did not differentiate between the values to be taught to boys and girls as they believed that a single morality applied to both, although prepared them for diverse adult roles. While most education occurred in the home, it was not uncommon for families to apprentice their children to other families. Both parents and masters of the apprenticeships in this era were to “ensure the moral and religious education of the child as well as to provide occupational training and some cases, to teach the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic” (McClellan, 1999, p. 5). Churches and schools played a significant role in the course of moral education. The schools reinforced the moral lessons first offered in the home although their primary purpose was to teach the skills of literacy with some writing and calculation using materials immersed in religious and moral imagery.

Education laws composed by the first Puritans recognized that academics were meant to assist students in improving their ability to reach and better understand the values of religion and laws of the country (Johnson, 2002). Specific qualities taught in character education were not specified within legislation; yet, the intent and other components were discussed in the curriculum (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). As early as 1642, the Massachusetts General Court required select men of every town to oversee that "all parents and school masters of indentured servants ensure that all children in the household acquire the ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of their country " (Fraser, 1999, p.9). In 1647, a Massachusetts law was passed requiring the function of schools in every town to provide formal education (Fraser, 1999.) One section of the law read:

It is therefore ordered, that every township in this jurisdiction after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty households, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read. (Fraser, 1999, p 10-11)

The school laws of Connecticut in 1650, New Haven in 1655, Plymouth in 1677, and New Hampshire in 1680 all emphasized moral, civic, and religious focus (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). In 1683, Pennsylvania adopted an ordinance that all parents and guardians of children “shall cause such to be instructed in reading and writing, so that they may be able to read the Scriptures and to write by the time they attain twelve years of age...” (Fraser, 1999, p. 12). Enforcement of the laws fluctuated among the colonies between practical and scriptural. Scriptural enforcement was “emphasized to prove the correctness of their particular interpretation of Christianity” (Fraser, p. 12).

In the years between 1607 and 1750, not only did the settlers across colonies share many assumptions about moral education, but they also demonstrated a common anxiety about the task and developed many similar approaches. Settlers everywhere expected the “family to be the primary purveyor of moral values, with the apprenticeship, schooling and the church serving as important supplementary institutions” (McClellan, 1999, pg. 9). There was a defined inheritance of belief throughout this period that it was the responsibility of those in the colonies to raise children in the correct and true faith to guard them against the errors being taught in the other colonies (Fraser, 1999).

### **Mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century through 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Americans retained many of the forms of moral education that had developed in the earlier years. Some subtle changes were made as

societies became more stable and affluent and where life had evolved to a more comfortable and casual quality, moral education began to lose some of the tight strictness. As settlers gained confidence, religious beliefs began to relax. In most cases “this did not indicate an abandonment of traditional values nor imply a rejection of religion but rather a less theologically rigorous approach to it” (McClellan, 1999, p.10).

As the confidence and moderate approach grew, the family structure began to change where the roles of mothers and fathers began very gradually to diverge. Instead of viewing parents as exchangeable teachers in the process of moral education, responsibilities began to be assigned to the mother as there was growth in vocations and more work occurred away from the home. Americans began to attribute to women special moral qualities and to give them primary responsibility within the family for the moral development of the child. As a redefinition of education began to develop, that “promoted an equally subtle gendering of moral education, with girls increasingly being prepared for a special maternal role while boys were schooled for work outside of the home” (McClellan, 1999, p. 12). Mothers were no longer alone in efforts to provide moral education to children. Americans showed a growing movement to allow churches and teachers to support the moral and academic development of their children.

While the U. S. Constitution was written in 1787, it was at the 1789 Constitutional Convention where it became apparent that no colony had ever separated religion from the state’s responsibilities, and the First Amendment was enacted two years later (Fraser, 1999). It drew a hard line on the church-state issue with the sentence: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the exercise thereof” (Fraser, 1999, p.13). There was little objection to the new clause.

The religious clauses of the First Amendment (in 1791) helped reinforce one of two significant changes that would eventually “transform how various states approached character education legislation” (Glanzer & Milson, 2006, p. 527). This first change was the escalation of religious freedom and the gradual end of state-sponsored churches. The result is that states no longer directly supported one particular Christian denomination. In 1818, states began to pass laws prohibiting public funds for church schools and later after 1844, states wrote in laws to ban the use of state funds for any denominational purpose (Glanzer & Milson, 2006)

The second development that began to change laws related to moral education was the development of the nonsectarian public school system supported by Horace Mann. According to Horace Mann, he believed the goal of the early moral training was to make the child like “those oaks” that “preserve their foliage fresh and green, through seasons of fiery drought, when all surrounding vegetation is scorched to a cinder” (McClellan, 1999, p.18). He advocated laws that removed sectarian teaching in public school textbooks and statutes that prohibited sectarian teaching by public school teachers. By the time of the civil war, tax-supported nonsectarian public education existed in all Northern and most Southern states. The casual era of the mid-eighteenth century in regards to moral education had weakened.

The nineteenth century Americans made moral education the individual responsibility of the family and the schools which are especially adaptable to the task of offering intensive training to the very young. One educator declared:

The home-life and the school-life of the child should prepare him for the transition to freedom by effective training in self-control and self-guidance, and, to this end, the will must be disciplined by an increasing use of motives that quicken the sense of right and make the conscience regal. (McClellan, 1999, p. 19; White, 1887)



Despite Mann's belief in nonsectarian schools, he supported Bible reading in classrooms as a way to promote and teach moral character, provided that the readings were left without comment and free of interpretation so that all religions could be observed (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). This ideology became one of the common means of moral education throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A survey from 1896-1903 given to major cities by the U.S. Commissioner found that 75% of school districts indicated that the Bible was regularly read (Glanzer & Milson, 2006; Michaelsen, 1970). This practice of Bible reading in the classroom was permitted or required in 37 states until the 1963 Supreme Court decision prohibiting Bible reading in the classroom (Glanzer & Milson, 2006; Boles, 1964).

### **Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, two approaches to moral education began to dominate American public schools: (a) a form of traditional character education that sought to teach traditional virtues and (b) progressive approaches to character education that focused on "the ability to act efficiently and thoughtfully in the cause of social improvement (McClellan, 1999, pg. 58; Glanzer & Milson, 2006, pg. 529). American educational institutions began to set goals and acknowledged the importance of developing character (Leming, 1993) as demonstrated by the state of Arkansas in 1923 when a law was passed approving long-established approaches to character education. The law read "a course in morals, manners, patriotism, and business and professional integrity shall be included in the course of study for the state public schools" (Glanzer & Milson, 2006, p.529).

Supporters of character education gradually developed a the new approach to character education that emphasized the use of elaborate codes of conduct and the careful cultivation of group processes designed to encourage good behavior and moral growth (McClellan, 1999).

The renewed interest in character education brought about the publishing of William Hutchins *Children's Morality Code*. The publications outlined “ten laws of right living”: self-control, good health, kindness, truth, sportsmanship, teamwork, self-reliance, duty, reliability, and good workmanship (Mulkey, 1997; McClellan, 1999). Good character clubs began to form in elementary and secondary schools with the hopes that peer pressure would be strong to ensure the practice of these character traits (Fields, 1996). Many schools began to adopt the Hutchings code as their focus on character education with some schools making small adjustments.

Educators expected moral codes to incite teachers to attend to the development of character and to provide themes for instructions. In Boston, the School Committee published elaborate guides for teachers and encouraged the school to emphasize one “law of obedience” each month. In Birmingham, Alabama, schools stressed one virtue each year, covering its particular code in the twelve years of schooling (McClellan, 1999). The codes provided a focus for more than formal instruction, extending beyond reading a novel of a character that represents the code or virtue.

The codes were found on posters in hallways and classrooms, and they were emphasized in extra-curricular activities. The aim was to use the codes as a way of permeating every aspect of school life with moral education (Birmingham Board of Education, 1936; McClellan, 1999). By the mid-1920s, the use of codes was common in schools everywhere, and clubs designed in part to build character were virtually universal.

It was in the late 1920's that the use of codes began to decline. Progressive educators and other critics called for a more critical approach to moral education. The 1928 study by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May elicited serious concern about the effectiveness of moral education of giving the critics powerful information and placing the champions of traditional moral education in a defensive position for which they struggled to break away (McClellan, 1999).

A profoundly different approach to moral education emerged from the energy of a small but influential group of activists associated with the progressive education movement. Theorist, John Dewey, articulated in *Moral Principles in Education* (1909), the movement requesting to abandon tradition and strive for a just, productive, and democratic society through the application of science and reason to the complex problems of the day (McClellan, 1999, p.56). Dewey was a strong advocate for educating children for democratic citizenship and believed that children needed to experience social situations to understand how to react to the situation (Howard et al., 2004). The progressive educators mounted an attack on character education programs that stressed the use of morality codes or the teaching of specific virtues. Dewey declared “we need to see that moral principles are not arbitrary, that they are not ‘transcendental’; that the term ‘moral’ does not designate a special religion or portion of life” (McClellan, 1999, p.56). In 1932, the Character Education Committee of the National Education Association’s Department of Superintendence published a report calling for a moral education to teach students to apply values as determined in particular situations. The report further stressed that systems have to change and grow as no system is permanent (McClellan, 1999).

The Progressives turned to methods of scientific inquiry and democratic decision-making to provide students with the intellectual abilities that would allow them to deal constructively with the social problems of the day. Hartshorne wrote, in the progressive classroom “life situations taken from the experience of the children of the group... are discussed not in terms of some pre-formulated code but in terms of the problems confronted, or the efforts made to solve these problems, or the success or failure met with, and of the principle of conduct suggested by the total experiences” (McClellan, 1999, p.59). Character had evolved into a way of thinking rather than knowledge of particular virtues.

Teachers found that it was difficult to provide a moral education that had no place for particular virtues. To teach a process of thinking without a specific content was a challenge without concrete guidance. Many schools attached the new moral education to social studies content while others gradually abandoned their virtue-centered approaches and made the social curriculum the core of their character education. Progressive moral education rarely replaced the virtue-centered programs, and rather it served as a continuing alternative, one of two widely accepted responses to the problem of moral education in early twentieth century (McClellan, 1999).

Before World War II, character education had focused on values and patriotism. During the war, character education was reanalyzed, and the necessity for it was debated among educators. Although most educators insisted it should be taught and at the time teachers focused on practical values, the character education program was renamed to social education, education for social adjustment, and building social foundations (Field, 1996). Postwar Americans began to demand that schools emphasize high-level academic and cognitive skills, often at the expense of the various forms of moral, civic, and social education that had been emphasized by earlier generations (McClellan, 1999). Throughout the 1950's formal character education gradually tapered and eventually all but vanished (Field, 1996). With the focus on academics and intellectual skills in addition to the many issues surrounding World War II, such as racial division, teachers and administrators were only too happy to escape from the task of moral education and give the responsibility back to family and church.

Two Supreme Court cases were also influential in the decline of moral education. In *Engel v Vitale* (1962), the court ruled that a New York program that began classes with a nondenominational prayer was unconstitutional (McClellan, 1999). One year later, in 1963, the

Supreme Court prohibited the enforcement of bible readings in *Abington School District v. Schempp* (Glanzer & Milson, 2006).

Moral education did not disappear completely in schools. Teachers continued to put a moral point on their lessons and new textbooks offered significant examples of the old principles. However, fearful of charges of impositions, teacher backed away from anything that might be labeled “indoctrination” (p.78). “Wary and anxious, the expectations for student behavior lowered and schools sought to find harmony in a curriculum that met the interests of every known constituency” (McClellan, 1999, p.78; Sedlak, 1986).

### **Mid to Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century – Three New Approaches**

Between the mid-1960s to late 1990 values clarification, cognitive developmentalism, and feminist approaches to moral education surfaced (McClellan, 1999). Of the three new approaches, values clarification had the earliest influence on education. Values clarification was first developed by Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmon, and Sydney B. Simon, who published *Values in Teaching* in 1966 and was later modified by Howard Kirschenbaum and others (McClellan, 1999, p.79). “Values clarification presented a clear, comprehensible, and immediately attractive program, especially to those who had tired of traditional approaches because its developers provided a wealth of instructional materials and pedagogical guidance (p.79). The values clarification approach was easy to implement and it quickly spread across school in the 1960s and 1970s. The advocates were impressed by the situational character of moral decision-making where children learned not a predetermined set of values but rather a practice of valuing. Raths, Harmin, and Simon who published their first volume of *Values in Teaching* in 1966 asked rhetorically, “could it be we wonder, that the pace and complexity of modern life has so exacerbated the problem of deciding what is good and what is right and what is worthy and what

is desirable that large numbers of children are finding it increasingly bewildering, even overwhelming, to decide what is worth valuing, what is worth one's time and energy?" (McClellan, 1999, p.80).

Values clarificationists did not recommend the values to be taught but provided children with a process of choosing values that would give them a sense of purpose in a world of options. Teachers had a range of teaching materials with which to choose from to include use of dialogue that clarified values and written dilemmas or situations from a variety of sources to discuss in groups or answer questions individually. In all of the activities, teachers were expected to avoid imposing their own values on students. Teachers were to facilitate a seven-step valuing process, but could not give personal opinion or influence on the students so they could form their own opinion about values; hence the term values clarification (Leming, 2001).

Critics such as philosopher Kenneth A. Strike declared, "values clarification makes all moral principles into values, values into matters of personal preference...its having done so, the enforcement of any value can only be an act of arbitrary will" (McClellan, 1999, p.81). Critics alleged that values clarification clouded the difference between moral principles and personal preferences and incited students to think that all moral positions were equally effective.

While the values clarification theorists were at work, another approach developed by Lawrence Kohlberg emerged having more influence among researchers. Kohlberg's secular approach was in competition with the values clarificationists as he created a far more tightly constructed system focused more narrowly on the cognitive aspects of moral growth.

Kohlberg's early beliefs stem from work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget and he was enticed by the idea that moral reasoning advanced through identifiable stages. He hypothesized the existence of six stages of cognitive moral development and later concluded that classroom

activities could move children quickly to higher stages of reasoning (McClellan, 1999; Muson, 1979). Through cognitive conflict and argument with students at the next higher stage of development, Kohlberg believed that students advanced. He alleged that conflict develops a “sense of disequilibrium about one’s own position” will guide students to see the benefits of higher-level approaches (McClellan, 1999, p.84). The role of the teacher was to prompt a debate through presentation of difficult ethical dilemmas and offer probing questions of his or her own. Students were expected to resolve the dilemmas and defend their positions. Teachers measured student progress not by their final stance but by the quality of moral reasoning they used in reaching their final stance on the dilemma.

Kohlberg’s narrow focus on cognitive development produced stark criticism of his early theories of presenting students with tough dilemmas. Doubters claimed that students need to learn more tangible principles and to gain good moral habits. They cautioned that the tight focus on moral discussion gave students the right to justify their actions rather than influencing the students to behave in principled ways (McClellan, 1999). The critics for the moral dilemmas approach believed that it promoted ethical relativism because it encouraged students to reason through situations that present artificial moral choices and dilemmas (Lockwood, 1997).

Kohlberg took heed to the criticism and proposed a dramatic reform to his earlier theory and created the Just Communities approach. Just Community Schools operate as democratic communities with students sharing in the design and enforcement of codes of conduct (Glanzer & Milson, 2006; McClellan, 1999). The Just Community School sought to use the culture and climate of the school to encourage moral growth by wrestling with immediate problems within the school community itself. The Just Communities model focused on the real life of the school

and engaging students making decisions that would have an impact (Oser, Althof, Higgins D'Alessandro, 2008).

Following the values clarification approach and Kohlberg's reformed approach, feminist theorists critical of Kohlberg produced a gendered approach of moral education that stressed care ethics (Glanzer & Milson, 2006; Noddings, 1984; Gilligan, 1982). The feminist raised concern that Kohlberg's emphasis had a masculine bias. They argued that Kohlberg's system failed to take into account the fact that women went about the process of moral reasoning in a substantially different way (McClellan, 1999). The feminists invited an entirely new approach to include the emotional component in moral education. The feminists proposed a thorough reorganization of curriculum around caring. Noddings argued that "such a program would balance the voice of the father, who speaks language of rights, with the voice of the mother, who uses the language of caring and compassion, and provide a program that would promote the moral growth of men and women alike" (McClellan, 1999, p.88; Noddings, 1984). While rigidities remained between the feminists and the progressives, like Kohlberg, feminists played a primary role in defining an approach to moral education in the 1990s that remain in progressive tradition (McClellan, 1999). Since the mid-1960s, values clarification, cognitive developmentalism, and feminist approaches each elicited innovation in moral education, however, the efforts from groups to rejuvenate moral education with a traditional, virtue centered approach, now labelled as "character education" creates a distinction from the contemporary competitors (McClellan, 1999).

Character education has become a means for assisting students to control their anger, feel cared about, and become responsible students (Lickona, 1993). Lickona reports that character education is essential to the task of building a moral society. The adverse effects of family



breakdown, physical and sexual abuse, mounting violence, teen pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, materialism portrayed in the mass media and the pressures of peer groups are just a few of the impacts made on societies that suffer severe social and moral problems (Lickona, 1996).

A new character education movement was revitalized in the early 1990s as a result of deliberate efforts (Lickona, 1993). In 1992, a group comprised of teacher, youth leaders, politicians, and ethicists, was established by the Josephson Institute of Ethics to dialogue and research character education components and programs (Damon, 2002). The declaration that resulted from the meeting, known as the “Aspen Declaration on Character Education” included eight principles of character education. They are:

1. The next generation will be the stewards of our communities, nation and planet in extraordinarily critical times.
2. In such times, the well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character.
3. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct.
4. Effective character education is based on core ethical values rooted in democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, caring, and civic virtue and citizenship.
5. These core ethical values transcend cultural, religious and socioeconomic differences.
6. Character education is, first and foremost, an obligation of families and faith communities, but schools and youth-service organizations also have a responsibility to help develop the character of young people.

7. These responsibilities are best achieved when these groups work in concert.
8. The character and conduct of our youth reflect the character and conduct of society; therefore, every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the core ethical values, and every social institution has the responsibility to promote the development of good character. (<http://whatwillmatter.com/2013/10/eight-sentences-that-changed-the-world-the-aspen-declaration/>)

The conference additionally endorsed a program centered around “six pillars of character”; trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, justice, caring, and civic virtue. By teaching our young the values of respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic virtue, we affirm our human dignity and promote the common good of the individual and protect our human rights (Lickona, 1993). The six pillars soon after developed into a national character education movement called Character Counts where school and communities embrace and promote the six pillars.

The Character Education Partnership (C.E.P.) was began in March 1993, as a national coalition committed to raising character development to the top of the nation’s educational agenda. Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (2003) prescribed eleven principles, to serve as criteria to use when planning to implement a character education program. Each principle frames vital aspects of character education. They wrote the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education in 1995, and they became the philosophy of the Character Education Partnership. These principles are also suggested as a means for evaluating character education programs, books, and curriculum resources. CEP developed Character Education Quality Standards to serve as an assessment tool of the eleven principles, where each principle has some standards attached and a scoring rubric. The standards were later revised in 2003 and 2006 and 2009. CEP

decided to combine the Eleven Principles with the Quality Standards into a single document. The combined document was revised again in 2010 with the input of experts in the field of education. In 2014, CEP officially changed its name to Character.org. The eleven principles include and currently read as (as found on character.org and in Lickona, 1996 (p.1-9):

- The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character;
- The school defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling and doing;
- The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development
- The school creates a caring community;
- To school provides students with opportunities for moral action;
- The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character and helps them succeed;
- The school fosters students’ self-motivation;
- The school is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.
- The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.
- The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.
- 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.

## **Federal Influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

History portrays federal influence on character education. Schools are looked upon not only to make children smart but to make them smart and good (Lickona, 1993). Theodore Roosevelt said, “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to create a menace to society” (Vincent, 1999). President Bill Clinton on January 23, 1997, used a State of the Union Address to “challenge all of our schools to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship” (Davis, 2003, p. 43).

During President Clinton’s administration, the U.S. Department of Education started funding character education programs with competitive grants. The grants had a catalytic effect in the states to implement character education programs (Howard, et al, 2004). The amount of funding grew over the years. In the presidential election year of 2000, character education was an issue supported by candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was established and clearly written setting high standards not only for developing students academically but also for enriching values. In 2003, the total expenditure from the Department of Education to support character education in 2003 was \$24 million (Howard et al, 2004). Rod Paige (2004), former U.S. Secretary of Education said,

President Bush has invested \$42 million in programs in 2004, underscoring the importance of character education in our nation. Students must learn to respect others as well as themselves, and understand the importance of democracy in this country. Sadly, we live in a culture without role models, where millions of students are taught the wrong values – or no values at all. ...We have to remind our students of a lesson taught in ancient Greece: the character of the person is the primary product of education. Good character is the product of good judgments made every day. (p.1)

## **State Level Influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The fifty States in America have one of four stances on character education within the school setting. The four stances vary in support of character education: (a) a state mandates character education, (b) a state that encourages character education, (c) a state supports character education without legislation, (d) a state does not have character education legislation. The table below is created using information from [character.org/wp-content/uploads/What-States-Are-Doing.pdf](http://character.org/wp-content/uploads/What-States-Are-Doing.pdf).

Table 1

*State Level of Support of Character Education*

<b>Mandates</b> character education (18)	<b>Encourages</b> character education (18)	<b>Supports</b> character education without legislation (7)	<b>Does not have</b> character education legislation (8)
Alabama Alaska Arkansas California Florida Georgia Illinois Indiana Kentucky Nebraska New York North Carolina South Carolina South Dakota Tennessee Utah Virginia West Virginia	Arizona Colorado Delaware Iowa Kansas Louisiana Maine Maryland Michigan Minnesota Mississippi Ohio Oklahoma Oregon Pennsylvania Rhode Island Texas Washington	Connecticut Hawaii Missouri Montana New Jersey North Dakota Vermont	District of Columbia Idaho Massachusetts Nevada New Hampshire New Mexico Wisconsin Wyoming

States hold the responsibility to support and fund education from local and state resources. According to current Character.org data, eighteen states have specific mandates for character education, eighteen states encourage character education, seven states support character education without legislation, and seven states have no legislation, specifically addressing character education. The states that encourage character education do so without passing laws and might attach character education language to other bills already passed. Iowa is an example where they added to a law that authorizes schools to require service learning as a requirement and encourages schools to “consider recommendations from the school improvement advisory committee to infuse character education into the educational program” (Howard et al., 2004, p

192). The encouragement does not include funding. The state of Washington had an old act that called schools to teach “honesty, integrity, trust, respect for self, and others, responsibility for personal actions and commitments, self-discipline and moderation, diligence and positive work ethic, respect for law and authority, healthy and positive behavior, and family as a basis of society” (p.208). Washington later reformed the act that states the purpose “to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible citizens, to contribute to their own economic well-being and that of their families and communities, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives” (Howard, et al., 2004, p.208). The reformed act was proposed to be funded but was later defeated.

### **Research on Character Education**

In the mid-1920’s, the Committee on Character Education of the National Education Association sent an inquiry to 300 cities to solicit ideas as to how character education could be improved. The researchers concluded:

... that efforts at Character Education across the country were “seemingly feverish, anxious, and even frantic in character. It was impossible to discover anybody of settled convictions as to experiences needed or subject matter preferred. There was little evidence of carefully thought-out, well-tested techniques of procedure which could be employed in securing character results. Thus, while the schools of the country were giving universal and definite attention to the development of good character, there was some confusion and lack of clear knowledge as to how best to go about the problem of character education. (Yulich, 1980)

One of the earliest most comprehensive studies related to character education was conducted by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May. It began in 1924 with Columbia University’s “Studies into the

Nature of Character” where Hartshorne and May assessed the character-related behavior of some 10,000 students primarily in grades 5 through 8 located in 23 communities across the United States. They found that they could not assign “good character” and “bad character” categories based on behavior, specifically as it related to honesty and helping others (Leming, 1993). Children and adolescents who reported that they valued honesty could not be distinguished, in their behavior, from those who did not (Hartshorne and May, 1928).

From 1928-1930, the Institute of Social and Religious Research performed the most comprehensive and detailed investigation of the nature of character and the school’s role in its development (Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2005). The research was intended to locate children and adolescents who could do more than read and write. The study was designed to see if students understood what it meant to be honest, practice self-control and participate in community service. After this study, little research was completed on character education until the 1960s and 1970s.

The Character Development Project (CDP) is an intervention project derived from research and theory on classroom environment and child socialization. It was designed to create caring communities in schools and to promote student development in the social, ethical, and intellectual realms, including increasing understanding of, and commitment to, core values underlying each realm (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schnaps, & Lewis, 2000). CDP teachers are encouraged to organize and conduct their classrooms in ways that maximize students’ feelings of autonomy and influence, competence, and social connectedness, and that help them understand the importance and relevance of the academic and other tasks they do in school.

In 1993, the Character Development Project (CDP) conducted a longitudinal study following a kindergarten cohort of 217 students through elementary school where they



participated in character education activities. The focus of the activities involved supporting skill development in conflict resolution, moral reasoning (specifically helping and transgressions), self-esteem and democratic values. The study showed positive effects as the students progressed through elementary. As these students entered middle school, only 27% of the students remained from the original cohort. The findings indicate that the program sustained effects on children's social development for two years and four years for some after the conclusion of the program (Solomon, Battistich, & Watson, 1993). Conflict resolution showed the strongest effects in the earlier years and was maintained in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The moral reasoning skills of helping and transgression showed a small effect across years, although the differences were not significant within years. Self-esteem was quite low as the students left elementary school but had quite a strong effect for the students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Lastly, democratic values showed a significant program effect in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but it had almost disappeared by 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Solomon, et al. 1993).

Berkowitz (2002) noted findings from a study that have strong supporting research data:

The Just Community Schools approach has demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting moral reasoning and stimulating the development of positive school culture and prosocial norms.... The most extensive body of scientifically sound research about a comprehensive character education approach concerns the Child Development Project (a program of the Developmental Studies Center). The elementary school reform program has been shown to promote prosocial behavior, reduce risky behaviors, stimulate academic motivation, create a positive school community, result in higher grades, and foster democratic values. Furthermore, it has identified the development of a caring school community as the critical mediating factor in the effectiveness of character

education. . . . Numerous other character education initiatives and programs report single studies of effectiveness, but are not often reviewed and published. (p. 56-57)

Battistich, Schnaps, & Wilson, (2004) elaborated on the impact of the findings from the Child Development Project that in elementary schools character education has an impact on academic performance in students' middle school years. They reported:

Middle school students who participated in the Child Development Project as elementary students had both statistically higher grade point averages and academic achievement scores than their peers who had not participated. Furthermore, it was reported that the students like school, had greater respect for their teachers, and had high educational aspirations than their peers. (Battistich, et al., 2004, p.251)

Battistich et al. (2004) conducted a study that measured behavior records as well as perception outcomes on the character education program called Child Development Program (CDP), which is a whole-school approach designed to foster elementary students' social, ethical, and academic development by helping schools become communities of caring learners. He compared 12 CDP schools to 12 comparable schools from six school districts across the U.S. in a four-year study. The results indicated that when CDP was implemented throughout the schools, there was a significant change in social attitudes, values, and skills. Battistich et al. (2004) found that students reported a significant reduction in alcohol and marijuana use, and school records indicated a decrease in violent behaviors, including gang fighting, and misconduct in school. In a follow-up study of 334 CDP students and 191 comparison students found that in middle school the CDP students were significantly less likely to engage in misconduct and delinquency. Was et al., (2006) stated that the Battistich et al., 2004 study provided evidence of behavioral change directly measured from behavior records and that this type of data are what is needed to make a

solid argument that character education programs have a significant impact on the type of behaviors that character education programs target.

Was, Woltz, and Drew (2006) conducted a review of research to determine if specific character education programs were obtaining the stated goals. Was et al., (2006) found that of the studies they reviewed, evidence was provided that teachers and administrators involved in the programs believed the program made a difference. Other programs showed that students enjoyed the character education program, feel their attitudes changed, and even stated that they are more likely to be cooperative and incorporate teamwork. Furthermore, they found that overall; the studies on character education were missing the direct measurement of the stated outcome of the character education programs. Discipline records, “if kept in a consistent manner would be a more direct measure of the target outcome” (Was et al., 2006, p. 153).

Muscott and Talis-O-Brien (1999) were specifically interested in the effects of character education on students with behavioral and learning disabilities. The character education program in their study, SO (Service-Learning Opportunities) Prepared for Citizenship, is an after-school program designed to increase character development in students by teaching specified character traits. The authors used an interview format with 19 students with behavioral disorders and learning or language disabilities. Results indicated that these students felt they learned from the character education program and found that the students believed they were taking responsibility for their actions, responded to the ideas of teamwork and cooperation, learned to make new friends, and found learning about character education fun and rewarding.

In 2003, Wilson and Lipsey published a meta-analysis on the effects of school-based psychosocial interventions for reducing aggressive and disruptive behavior aimed at identifying the characteristics of the most effective programs. The meta-analysis included 172 experimental

and quasi-experimental studies of intervention programs, which showed marked potential for reducing aggressive and disruptive behavior, especially for students whose baseline levels were already high. Different intervention approaches appeared equally effective, but significantly larger reductions in aggressive and disruptive behavior were produced by those programs with better implementation to the intended recipients.

Education policies soon after called for evidence-based programs. Wilson and Lipsey, (2007), conducted an update to their previous meta-analysis by adding recent research and further investigate which programs and student characteristics are associated with the most effective treatments. The additional meta-analysis might illuminate the features that characterize the most effective programs and the kinds of students that benefit most. They identified 249 studies categorized into four intervention types: 1) universal programs delivered to all students in a classroom setting, 2) selected/indicated programs delivered to specific students selected to receive treatment, 3) special schools or classes that serve children placed in these settings, and 4) comprehensive/multimodal programs that involve multi-intervention elements and/or a mix of intervention formats (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). The main findings from the meta-analysis are that the most common and most effective approaches are the universal programs delivered to all students in a classroom or school and targeted programs for selected students who participate in programs outside of the regular classroom. The findings showed statistical significance for universal and selected/indicated programs that respectively represent a decrease in aggressive and disruptive behavior.

What Works Clearinghouse (2007) looked at 93 research studies of 41 character education programs, concluding that character education works and impacts a wide range of outcomes including academic achievement. The U.S. Department of Education's What Works

Clearinghouse identified thirteen programs with evidence of effectiveness. Of these 13 programs, 18 studies met the What Works Clearinghouse standards. There were three outcome domains for the 13 programs; behavior; knowledge, attitudes, values; and academic achievement. The Positive Action program showed positive effects on behavior and academic achievement. The program titled, Too Good for Drugs and Violence, had positive effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values. The Too Good for Violence program had potentially positive effects on behavior, knowledge, attitudes, and values. Six other programs had potentially positive effects in one domain with no overriding contrary evidence.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's Safe and Sound reported that nearly half (34) of the 80 programs they reviewed had either strong or promising evidence of effectiveness, and their more recent meta-analysis of 213 programs further supports these conditions. Durlak, Dymnicki, Schellinger, Taylor, and Weissberg (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs involving over 270,000 kindergarten through high school students. More than half of the studies involved programs delivered to elementary school students. Just under half of the studies were conducted in urban schools. The results indicated that compared to controls students demonstrated enhanced social and emotional learning skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors following intervention, and also demonstrated fewer conduct problems, and had lower levels of emotional distress. The findings documented enhanced student' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems and improved academic performance on tests (Durlak et al., 2011, p 317). For the small percentage of studies that conducted follow-up assessments, statistical significance remained for a minimum of 6 months after interventions. Collectively, these results build on positive results reported by

other research teams that have conducted detailed reviews examining the promotion of youth development or the prevention of negative behaviors (Durlak et al., 2011, p.338). (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Greenberg, Weissberg, Utne O'Brian, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, 2001; Hahn et al., 2007; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007; Wilson et al., 2001). This meta-analysis differs from other previous research as it focused exclusively on school-based social-emotional development programs and evaluating their impact on positive social behavior, problem behaviors, and academic performance. Not surprisingly the largest effective size occurred for social-emotional skill performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

Snyder, Vuchinich, Acock, and Washburn reported in 2012 on a study conducted in Hawaii on a character education program titled Positive Action. The Positive Action program posits a theoretical link between positive and negative behaviors, whereby a focus on positive actions leads to a cycle of positive outcomes and, therefore, a reduction in negative behaviors (Flay, B. & Allred, C., 2003). It consists of K-12 classroom curricula designed into six units that focus on topics related to self-concept, physical and intellectual actions, social/emotional actions for managing oneself responsibly, getting along with others, being honest with yourself and others, and continuous self-improvement. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of the program on teacher, parent, and student perceptions of school safety and quality on student learning and success. Two previous studies of Positive Action (PA) had been completed by one of the researchers. In the previous studies, archival School Report Card data was examined which included data on achievement and disciplinary outcomes. Overall the studies reported beneficial effects on student achievement (math, reading, and science) problem behaviors (suspensions, violence rates) and provided preliminary evidence regarding the effects on PA on school level outcomes. At a one-year post-trial, the intervention schools scored better on

standardized scores and state test scores for reading and math and reported lower absenteeism and fewer suspensions and retentions (Snyder et al, 2012; Snyder, Flay, Vuchinich, Acock, Washburn, Beets, & Kin-Kit, 2010). Overall, the research showed that PA can concurrently and positively affect school level outcomes of achievement and negative behaviors.

Building on their previous work of using archival school level data and randomized design, Snyder et al. (2012), engaged in additional research to be the first study to investigate the impact of PA on school-level indicators of school quality, thereby examining if social-emotional and character development programs create contextual whole-school change. Multiple measures in the PA Hawai'i trial suggested that there was some variability in the school-level implementation. Typical training for the first year included a 3 to 4 hour session and then a 1-2 hour booster training session each year thereafter. As part of the state's accountability system, the researchers accessed the school quality surveys collected every two years beginning with 2000-2001 to 2005-2006. The researchers compared the results of the intervention schools with control schools and the overall averages for the state. The results showed no significant difference between the intervention and control schools on the survey scores at the baseline. In the first year post-trial, the PA schools exceeded control schools and state averages for each participant group; teachers, parents, and students on the school quality survey with nearly all effect sizes being moderate to large (Snyder et al. 2012). The overall study illuminates that comprehensive school-wide social-emotional character development programs, enhance school safety and quality as reported by teachers, parents, and students, as further supported by previous studies documenting reduced negative behavior and improved student achievement.

Howard et al. (2004) concluded:

As noted by many educators, character education comes with the territory of teaching and schooling. It is not a question of whether to do character education but rather questions of how consciously and by what methods. . . .character education will continue and character educators will continue to grapple with questions of how to be our best ethical selves and how best to help students to know, care about, and do the right thing. (p.210)

A variety of universal school-based programs created to help elementary school develop positive student behaviors, reduce negative behaviors, and, ultimately, improve academic performance are available; however, “more evidence from rigorous evaluations is needed to better understand their effects. Such information is important because the development of social competencies during middle childhood has been linked to adjustment to schooling and academic success while the failure to develop such competencies can lead to problem behavior that interferes with success in school” (USDE, 2010, p. xxv).

### **CHARACTERplus**

CHARACTERplus is a proactive school-wide character education process that engages staff in developing an environment where students are valued, and the teaching of character traits are embedded in the curriculum. School staff utilizes strategies to respond to students who exhibit disruptive behavior by providing what the student needs rather than what the teacher may think he or she deserves. CHARACTERplus is an approach to support an instructional focus and reduce the amount of time lost to addressing student discipline.

CHARACTERplus was created 1988 by a group of school district and corporate sponsors to help educators to instill positive character traits in students and transform climate and culture. It is not intended to be a separate curriculum or program but rather a process in which teaching



of character is built into the curriculum. CHARACTERplus is built on ten essential components to a process, called the CHARACTERplus process that

- Build on consensus around core values
- Transforms the climate of a school with integrated curriculum, experiential learning, adult role models, staff development, and student leadership
- Involves parents and community
- Engages and empowers students
- Decreases discipline referrals
- Increases academic scores

CHARACTERplus seeks to instill the Eleven Principles in Character Education previously mentioned in this chapter as its framework. With the framework, schools and districts identify through the process of gaining consensus on the activities they will implement. Some districts and school may choose to do a character trait of the month, establish professional learning communities (PLCs) that focus specifically on culture and climate, establish student PLCs focused on climate, and identify and study strategies for various topics such as: collaboration and cooperation; engagement and relevance. Additionally, a district may look to design and create rigorous instructional units and assessments that embed character development and assessment.

CHARACTERplus reports in their research studies that 64 schools in a randomized study showed a 41% average decrease in discipline referrals and a 93% increase in the percentage of students scoring sufficiency in communication arts within one year of implementation. They report that research conducted has shown enough statistical sophistication and significance to earn approval and listing in the National Registry for Evidence-based programs and practices.

Additionally, CHARACTERplus has been named on the list of Promising Programs by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning.

Theodore Roosevelt said, “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to create a menace to society” (Vincent, 199). Education is faced with increased accountability. Administrators are responsible, among many other things, to maximize instructional time and promote social justice (CCSSO, 2008, 19). Today’s standards insist that administrators “take a stronger role in helping young people to discover the good and learn to become individuals of character” (Ryan, 1993, p.16). According to Hoy and Tarter (2004), today’s leader “leads by example, and there may be no more important role than...to be a moral leader” (p.257). Donna Anderson (2004) wrote “schools must abashedly teach students about such key virtues as honesty, dependability, trust, responsibility, tolerance, respect and other commonly-held values important to Americans” (p.139).

Character education researchers and proponents state that students exposed to character education had higher academic achievement and fewer behavioral and interpersonal problems in school. Brooks and Kann (2003) stated that character education has reportedly reduced absenteeism, discipline referrals, school failure, suspensions, school anxiety, pregnancy, and substance use. Was et al., (2006) conducted a review of research to determine if specific character education programs were obtaining the stated goals and found that of the studies they reviewed, evidence was provided that teachers and administrators involved in the programs believed the program made a difference. Other programs showed that students enjoyed the character education program, feel their attitudes changed, and even stated that they are more likely to be cooperative and incorporate teamwork. Furthermore, they found that overall:

The studies on character education were missing the direct measurement of the stated outcome of the character education programs. If the intended outcomes of the character education include reduced absenteeism, discipline referrals, pregnancy, school failure, suspensions, and substance abuse, then why does the majority of the research regarding character education programs focus on teacher, staff, administrator, and student perceptions of the programs and not the behavioral outcomes? ...discipline records, if kept in a consistent manner would be a more direct measure of the target outcome (Was et al., 2006).

### **School Discipline**

Safe, effective and controlled schools are not a coincidence. These are environments that have been built and maintained with considerable effort and evaluation (Horner, Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 2000). Horner et al. (2000) believed school administrators should assess safety in schools and implement proactive steps to build a safe school environment. One approach to assist in this challenge requires ongoing evaluation of office discipline referrals which may be used as an index to assess school discipline needs and to monitor the effects of reform efforts. "School staff can use information about office discipline referral patterns to assess the status of school safety and the behavioral climate to build a schoolwide behavior program based on the data" (Horner et al, 2000, p. 99).

Horner et al. (2000), defines an office discipline referral as; a student who engaged in behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school; the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff; and the event resulted in a consequence delivered by administrative staff who produce a permanently written document defining the event. Office discipline referrals signal the point at which teachers formally and most often publicly

acknowledge that behavior is beyond their capacity to manage. In effect, teachers have reached the limits of professional and personal capacity to control a student's behavior and at this point the resources of the school are expected to be utilized (Fields, 2004). Schools face a number of challenges related to disruptive and antisocial students. The behavior of these students interferes with learning, diverts administrative time, and contributes to teacher burnout (Kendziora & Osher, 2009).

Historically, school responses to student behavior have been focused on punishing or excluding the individuals who engage in the misbehavior (Flannery, Fenning, McGrath Kato, & Bohanon, 2013). Although exclusionary responses remain common to address behavioral issues, they are associated with a number of undesirable outcomes, such as diminished instructional minutes, which, in turn, are the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Algozzine et al., 2011). Recent attention to addressing student behavior has additionally focused on ways to address the broader school culture and to design systems for behavioral supports for students on a prevention-oriented basis (McIntosh, Campbell, Russell Carter, & Zumbo, 2009).

Programs that address social development and behavior are also attractive to school administrators because of the prevalence of problem behaviors that teachers perceive as interfering with their ability to teach and students' ability to learn (Mansfield, Alexander, & Farris, 1991). For example, in the 2005-06 school year, 21 percent of primary schools reported occurrences of student bullying at least once per week, 12 percent of schools reported student acts of disrespect for teachers once per week, and 28 percent of 12-18 year-old students reported that they had been bullied at school during the six months prior to the survey (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007). A substantial body of literature has shown that disruptive classroom behavior,

conduct problems, aggression, delinquency, and substance use are associated with poor academic achievement and with a lack of student feeling of school connectedness and involvement (Najaka, Gottfredson, & Wilson, 2001). On the positive side, social competencies have been linked with higher levels of achievement and school adjustment. Researchers have theorized that the development of a warm, caring community with a school might reduce problem student behaviors, such as aggression and bullying (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schnaps, 1997), however, research directly testing this hypothesis is limited.

A universal approach has been shown to influence the attitudes and behaviors of all children in the general student population. Universal approaches focus on preventing problems before they occur by addressing factors that place youth at risk for problem behavior and promoting factors that foster positive youth development (Walker & Shinn, 2002). Universal school-based prevention programs have followed different theoretical traditions. Character education programs teach moral values through the curriculum and attempt to create a climate of caring and moral discipline (Lickona, 1993). Social and emotional learning programs stress goal-setting, emotion identification, responsible decision making, perspective-taking, and effective interpersonal skills, within a caring and engaging school climate (Greenberg, et al., 2003). Behavior management approaches utilize theory to apply strategies such as positive reinforcement, consistent schoolwide discipline, and antecedent control to minimize disruptive and aggressive behaviors and promote prosocial behaviors in all settings in the school. Primary youth violence prevention approaches identify the individual, relationship, and environmental factors that place youth at risk for engaging in violence related behaviors. They implement strategies that modify those risk factors, such as by changing attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and environments, to disrupt developmental pathways to violence (Dahlberg, Toal, & Behrens,

1998). Each of these approaches has the common goal of promoting students' social and character development and reducing engagement in problem behavior.

### **Office discipline referrals**

Office discipline referrals (ODRs) are used throughout the nation as a means for managing and monitoring problem student behaviors. The types of problem behaviors most likely to result in an office discipline referral include tardiness (Morgan-D'Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Serpa, 1996), disobedience and general disruption (Skiba et al., 1997), defiance (Menaker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988), and physical contact/fighting (McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang, 1992). According to Skiba (2002), an office discipline referral represents an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in a consequence delivered by administrative staff.

Several studies have been conducted using ODR to identify common behaviors. Two large studies found the most frequent behaviors resulting in ODRs to be specific to developmental stages of behavior. Spaulding et al. (2010) analyzed 1510 ODRs across the United States, and Kaufman, Jaser, Vaughan, Reynold, Di Donato, Bernard, and Hernandez-Brereton (2010) analyzed ODRs for 1668 students in a large urban city. Across both studies, the most frequent behaviors resulting in ODRs were aggression (e.g., fighting and defiance) in elementary school, disrespect (e.g., defiance and disruption) in middle schools, and attendance issues (e.g., tardies, skipping, leaving the building) in high schools (Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012). Putnam, Luiselli, Handler, & Jefferson (2003) analyzed 747 ODRs for 188 students in one public elementary school in Massachusetts and found the most frequent behaviors resulting in ODR were disruption, harassment, defiance, inappropriate language, and

fighting. Tidwell, Flannery, and Lewis-Palmer (2003) evaluated ODRs for 16 elementary schools from Oregon and Hawaii and found the most common reasons were defiance, disrespect, and fighting. In a study done by Flannery et al. (2013), on office discipline referrals at 112 high schools, they found that the overall rate of ODRs varied by school size. Smaller schools have the highest rate of ODR and larger schools, the lowest. Additionally, they found that more than 70% of the total ODRs occurred in the areas of disrespect, disruption, and attendance.

Office discipline referrals do not simply occur as a result of student problem behavior but rather at the end of a chain of behaviors (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). When a student engages in behavior that warrants an ODR, an adult must observe the behavior, then determine if an ODR should be written, and file the ODR for analysis by administrative decision-makers. It is important to consider that office discipline referrals are always filtered through the referring teacher, with no independent measure of student behavior (Wright & Dusek, 1998).

One of the best naturally available sources of data is office discipline referrals, which can be used to determine when and where problem behaviors occur on school property to develop appropriate interventions, as well as determine where desired outcomes (e.g., decrease in disruptive behaviors, decrease in suspension) are being achieved (Sugai & Horner, 2002). ODR data are collected and stored routinely by schools along with attendance records, grades, and academic test scores. Office discipline referrals (ODRs) are widely used by school personnel to evaluate student behavior and the behavioral climate of schools (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004). ODRs provide an index of student behavior and the discipline procedures and practices of the schools. At the schoolwide level, ODR data are used to indicate the behavioral climate of schools, identify and track school-wide patterns of problem behavior, help target and

evaluate reform efforts, and monitor compliance with school mission and safety goals (Irvin et al, 2004).

The use of ODRs has several advantages. ODRs have been recommended for use largely due to availability. Additional advantages of using ODRs for monitoring purposes are that they offer a standard format for data collection, are generally completed within temporal proximity of the infraction, and contain teacher-generated information on student behavior that can be useful for preventative consultative purposes (Wright & Dusek, 1998). Clonan, McDougal, Cark, and Davidson (2007) reported that ODRs patterns have been proposed to be useful in several ways including (a) as a guide to the selection or design of universal, selected/targeted and indicated intervention programs; (b) as a monitoring techniques to gauge the effectiveness of those programs; and (c) as a screening procedure to identify students in need of more intensive levels of intervention.

Office discipline referral measures have often been used as outcome measures in both formative and summative evaluations of interventions, as well as in research to determine the effectiveness of interventions intended to improve the behavioral climate of a school environment. In a literature review and comprehensive analysis of 110 studies of school-based interventions for preventing delinquency, which was limited to group designs, D. C. Gottfredson (2001) reported a similar finding. In studies where ODR measures were included with other indicators of conduct problems at school, (e.g., survey data where students self-reported misbehavior and teacher rating), Gottfredson found that ODRs were the most commonly used outcome measure (79% of the group-design intervention studies) (2001). A study by Dwyer and Osher, 2000, who conducted a formal evaluation of the impact of Project ACHIEVE, a school reformation process that emphasizes school-wide, systematic instruction in social skills for



students with challenging behaviors, the evaluation indicated that the number of disciplinary referrals to the principal's office and out-of-school suspensions decreased. McIntosh and colleagues (2009) conducted a study to assess validity of ODRs with normed standardized behavior rating scales for forty students referred by teachers and believed to need additional behavioral supports. The study provided that when ODRs are defined and used systematically, they can be valid measures of the level of support needed for students in the area of externalizing behaviors. Irvin et al. (2004), reviewed examples of empirical and ethical justifications for interpreting and using ODR measures as school-wide indices of various features of schools' behavioral climates. Irvin et al. (2004) found that the higher levels of school-wide ODRs were associated with higher levels of problematic behavioral climates in schools. When a school experiences increases in ODRs, these increases probably occurred in the form of one or more student misbehavior. Without school-wide behavior support interventions, high ODR levels and problematic school behavioral climate are likely to persist. The evidence supports the interpretation of ODRs as school-wide behavioral climate indicators.

Irvin et al. (2004) also examined reports of program evaluations in which ODR measures were used as a dependent or outcome variable. They found evidence regarding the usefulness of ODR measures as indicators of intervention effectiveness in schools. Additionally, Irvin et al. (2004) found benefits to using school-wide ODR measures. Individual student histories of behavioral and disciplinary problems may be useful in planning behavioral supports for children in schools. The ODR data can be used by school teams of teachers administrators and other interested staff members to work together to use the measures to make data-based decisions on additional areas of the effectiveness of school-wide interventions and where

additional efforts may be needed. Another consequence of the use of school-wide ODRs relates to satisfying school accountability needs to local, state, and federal agencies.

Although ODRs are susceptible to incongruities in collection (e.g., ambiguously defined behavior codes, inconsistency in when and under what conditions data are collected, lack of staff training in their use), a number of procedures have been documented that increase their utility as a credible indicator of school-wide behavioral performance (Flannery, et al., 2013). Irvin and colleagues (Irvin et al., 2004, 2006), have documented that ODRs can function as credible schoolwide metrics of school behavior when school staff systematically use standard procedures aligned with databases. In a study conducted by Irvin et al. (2004), they found that office referral data measures meet the criteria for a valid construct as indicators of schoolwide behavioral climate, including general misbehavior at school, student perceptions, teacher perceptions, and classroom orderliness (Irvin et al., 2004). The validity of using office referral data to make decisions about student behavior in schools was established by a study conducted by Irvin, Horner, Ingram, Todd, Sugai, Sampson, and Boland (2006), where they found that office referrals are regularly used to make decisions, such as identifying specific behavior problems, and that ODRs are an efficient and effective way to do so.

Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000), defined an ODR as “an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated the a rule/social norm in the school, (b) a problem behavior was observed by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in a consequence delivered by administrative staff who produced a permanent product defining the whole event” (p. 96). According to Guskey (2000), school records concerning being sent to the office for disciplinary action, student behavior problems, vandalism, and suspensions are valuable for assessing staff development efforts, making comparisons between classrooms and

schools, and making comparisons from one time to another. Guskey noted that they are “vitaly important to stakeholders” (p. 234).

In their conclusion, Irvin et al. (2006) reported that their data demonstrated that school personnel do in fact access and report ODR information to make active decisions about implementing interventions that are aimed at decreasing problem student behaviors. They further stated that future evaluation efforts should focus on ODR data use in schools to include whether the data-based decisions by school personnel result in the actual implementation of planned actions and interventions and such interventions ultimately result in desired outcomes schoolwide and with individual students, as reflected in continuous ODR data.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study is to identify if the implementation of a character education program in a large Midwestern urban school district has a relationship on student behavior as measured through office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. This chapter presented the needed components of effective reform efforts that provide the foundational elements for implementation of new initiatives to take hold in meeting the ultimate desired effects. Character education was defined and the historical evolution to include federal and state influences on moral education to what is now referred to as character education in current day was portrayed. School discipline and office discipline referrals were described. Several studies were reviewed regarding a variety of character education programs of which some involved the use of office discipline referrals as a measure of effectiveness.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The Midwestern urban school district serves approximately 11,000 students in kindergarten through fifth grade in thirty elementary schools. The results of discipline data analysis conducted by the district revealed high numbers of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions, growing concerns of students' feelings of safety and relationship, and an increase in bullying. Reducing discipline incidences and developing in students a sense of became a priority for the district. A strategic decision was made to pilot the adoption of CHARACTERplus, a character education program in schools that volunteered. Twelve elementary schools piloted CHARACTERplus in the fall of the 2014-2105 school year.

#### **Research Design**

Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984).

This quantitative case study used descriptive research measures to identify in the implementation of CHARACTERplus changed the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. The independent variable was the implementation of CHARACTERplus. The dependent variable was the number of office discipline referrals and the number of out-of-school suspensions.

#### **Research Questions**

The goal of this study was to identify if there is a relationship between the implementation of CHARACTERplus and change in office discipline referrals and out-of-school

suspension. This study also involves gathering teacher perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the relationship on office discipline referrals.

The goal of the study was to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, and each fall semester after implementation, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - e. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to attendance reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - f. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to bullying reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
  - g. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to drugs/alcohol/tobacco reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?

- h. Is there a change in the number of discipline referrals due to the 3D's (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior) reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
2. Is there a change in the rate of discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension reported between the two fall semester prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?
3. Is there a greater change in the number of office discipline referrals in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office referrals?
4. Is there a greater change in the number of out-of-school suspensions in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals?

## **Participants**

The study included the twelve elementary schools that volunteered to pilot CHARACTERplus. Discipline data from the fall semesters of 2012-2013, 2013- 2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years was collected and analyzed. The fall semester data of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 were averaged to serve as baseline data prior to the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Additionally, teachers at each school were asked to voluntarily complete a survey that obtained their perception of the relationship of CHARACTERplus on office discipline referrals after implementation of CHARACTERplus over two fall semesters.

Approximately 350 teachers were asked to participate in the survey. Two hundred and thirty certified teachers completed the survey.

The researcher submitted the appropriate forms to the University's Institutional Review Board and filed a description of the proposed research, a copy of the survey, and a copy of the cover letter including informed consent that was emailed to teachers. The Institutional Review Board determined that this study was not human research.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Process**

Office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension data for the twelve elementary schools were obtained through the District's Department of Research and Assessment. The data was pulled from the student discipline referral software program developed by district technology staff. The discipline data included both the raw numbers and numbers per 100 students for the four fall semesters for each school, for each of the four school years. The school data included the student population, the total number of office discipline referrals and a breakdown of the number of office discipline referrals by infraction type to include those represented in the four sub-questions of research question one: bullying, attendance, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, and disrespect/defiance of authority/disruptive behavior (3Ds). The number of infractions that resulted in out-of-school suspension was also collected.

An electronic survey was developed by the researcher using Survey Monkey. The survey was comprised of questions regarding teachers' perceptions of student behavior and the relationship of office discipline referrals and out-of-schools suspensions to the implementation of CHARACTERplus. The survey required an answer to each question before moving on so that the respondents would respond to each question. The survey included three sections; demographic information; teachers' perceptions of the extent to which specific behaviors are a

problem in the school both currently and in the baseline years, and teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the relationship to problem behaviors. The last section of the survey was designed to specifically address research questions number three and four on teachers' perception of the implementation of CHARACTERplus.

Two Likert scales were designed using a seven point scale. The questions related to current behaviors and those during the baseline years used a scale where the rating of seven represents the behaviors are "major problem" and a rating of one represents "no problem". The second scale applied to the questions of teachers' perception of the implementation of CHARACTERplus on the various infraction types where the rating of seven represents "strongly disagree" and a rating of one represents "strongly agree".

The online survey was sent as a link in an email to the 350 certified teachers assigned to the twelve elementary schools in late in the spring semester of 2015-2016 school year. The email informed participants that the researcher is a doctoral student at the University of Kansas, the purpose of the survey, that the survey is anonymous and responses confidential, and that by clicking on the link to the survey attached in the email represented their consent. The final screen thanked the respondent for their time. A follow up email was sent a week later with gratitude for those that had participated and as a reminder of the first email to consider participating if they had not already done so. A final email was sent a week later requesting participation of those that had not already completed the survey and thanking those that had completed the survey.

### **Analysis of Data**

The District's Department of Research and Assessment provided the discipline data. The principal investigator compiled the data for the twelve schools to include combined data from



two years prior to intervention of CHARACTERplus as a baseline and each year of CHARACTERplus implementation. This allowed for three time frames (the baseline and fall semester of each school year (2014-2015- 2015-2016), to represent multiple observations of the dependent variable. The twelve elementary schools vary in total number of students therefore, it was critical to not look just at the raw data but to analyze the number of incidences per 100 students for consistent comparisons across schools and as a whole. Discipline data from two years prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus was averaged for the twelve schools to obtain a baseline measurement.

The overall change in numbers from the baseline (average of fall of 2012- 2013 and fall of 2013-2014) to the fall of 2014-2015 and the fall of 2015-2016 were compiled into an Excel spreadsheet with rate of change noted and reported both in raw numbers and per 100 students. The observed change in the rate of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions across the twelve schools and as a whole group was analyzed without a statistical application applied. The results of the survey questions regarding teachers' perceptions were downloaded from Survey Monkey with data reported numerically in frequency counts and/or in percentages without a statistical application applied. The researcher used both the data provided from the Department of Research and Assessment and Survey Monkey to answer the research questions. The data was analyzed and described to make conclusions, infer results, and identify implications for future study as found in chapters four and five.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to describe the relationship of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and student discipline in twelve elementary schools of a large Midwestern urban school district. The goal of this study was to identify (a) if there was relationship between the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and the rate of office discipline referrals resulting out-of-school suspensions, and (b) if there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions.

The study evaluated the discipline data of twelve elementary schools two years before implementation of CHARACTERplus and for two consecutive years following implementation. Data collected was based on the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions as reported in the fall semester of 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. Data on teachers' perceptions was collected through an online survey.

This chapter presents the findings to the four research questions presented in Chapter One.

#### **Office Discipline Referrals Descriptive Data**

Research Question 1 involved reporting the change in the average of the number of office discipline referrals reported in the fall semester of school years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 to the number of office referrals in each fall semester after implementation of CHARACTERplus, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, in twelve elementary schools. The two fall semesters of 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 were averaged together to obtain a baseline. Table 2 below shows the number of

office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions per 100 students for the fall semester of the 2012-2013 and the 2013-2014 school years prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus.

Table 2

*Number of Office Referrals and Out-of-Schools Suspensions per 100 Students for 12-13 and 13-14 School Years Prior to Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School	Fall Semester	# of Students Enrolled	# of Office Referrals per 100 Students					Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior	# of Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students
			Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/Alcohol/Tobacco			
A	2013	235	11.5	0.0	0.9	0.0	6.8	6.4	
	2014	234	8.5	0.4	1.3	0.0	2.6	6.0	
B	2013	422	18.7	1.4	0.9	0.0	20.4	4.0	
	2014	385	42.6	1.6	2.1	0.0	29.1	10.6	
C	2013	479	7.5	0.0	0.2	0.0	4.2	7.5	
	2014	471	6.6	0.0	0.2	0.0	3.0	6.4	
D	2013	409	38.9	0.0	6.4	0.0	21.8	4.2	
	2014	446	37.4	0.2	5.4	0.0	19.7	7.6	
E	2013	190	1.6	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	
	2014	172	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	
F	2013	478	2.3	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	
	2014	489	2.2	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	
G	2013	617	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	5.8	
	2014	590	11.2	0.2	0.7	0.0	3.9	9.0	
H	2013	233	20.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	8.2	15.4	
	2014	218	14.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.0	9.6	
I	2013	323	22.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	11.1	19.2	
	2014	366	23.8	0.0	0.3	0.3	18.3	14.2	
J	2013	277	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	3.2	
	2014	298	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	1.0	
K	2013	252	9.9	0.0	1.6	0.0	4.0	3.2	
	2014	251	11.6	0.0	2.0	0.0	8.0	0.8	
L	2013	596	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	
	2014	574	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	

Table 3 below displays the combined average number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions per 100 students for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years to obtain the baseline.

Table 3

*Average of 12-13 and 13-14 School Years (baseline) Prior to Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School	# of Office Referrals per 100 Students					# of Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students
	Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/ Alcohol/ Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior	
A	10.00	0.20	1.10	0.00	4.70	62.00
B	30.65	1.50	1.50	0.00	24.75	7.30
C	7.05	0.00	0.20	0.00	3.60	6.95
D	38.15	0.10	5.90	0.00	20.75	5.90
E	1.65	0.00	0.55	0.00	0.60	0.00
F	2.25	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.50
G	12.75	0.10	0.35	0.00	5.50	7.40
H	17.20	0.00	0.20	0.00	9.60	12.50
I	22.90	0.15	0.15	0.15	14.70	16.70
J	5.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.15	2.10
K	10.75	0.00	1.80	0.00	6.00	2.00
L	0.50	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.10

CHARACTERplus was implemented in the fall of the 2014-2015 school year. The 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 fall semester number of office discipline referrals were each compared to the baseline to find the change in office discipline referrals each year following implementation

Research Questions 1, sub-questions 1a through 1d involved the same process for Research Question 1 but each question is specific to the code of conduct violation infraction types. Sub-questions a-d compare the changes in office discipline referrals specific to infraction types between the average of the baseline and each of the two years following implementation of CHARACTERplus for each of the twelve schools. The following infraction types are specific to

the sub-questions; 1a is specific to infractions involving attendance, 1b is specific to bullying infractions, 1c is specific to drugs/alcohol/tobacco infractions, and 1d is specific to disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior (referred to as the 3Ds) infractions. Any code of conduct violation that does not meet the definition of those listed in sub-questions a through d are not reported by the researcher.

Table 4 presents the number of office discipline referrals by school, by fall semester of each school year included in this study, and by the type of infraction. The data for the types of infraction may not equate to the total number of office discipline referrals as a referral could include more than one infraction.

Table 4

*Number of Office Referrals by School, Year, and Infraction Type (Raw Data)*

School	Fall Semester	# of Students Enrolled	# of Office Referrals				
			Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/ Alcohol/ Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
A	2013	235	27	0	2	0	16
	2014	234	20	1	3	0	6
	2015	248	8	0	2	0	2
	2016	244	24	0	2	0	18
B	2013	422	79	6	4	0	86
	2014	385	164	6	8	0	112
	2015	349	131	0	3	0	128
	2016	260	66	0	0	0	51
C	2013	479	36	0	1	0	20
	2014	471	31	0	1	0	14
	2015	439	77	0	3	0	34
	2016	436	155	1	13	0	105
D	2013	409	159	0	26	0	89
	2014	446	167	1	24	0	88
	2015	402	108	1	20	0	33
	2016	392	220	3	20	0	145
E	2013	190	3	0	2	0	0
	2014	172	3	0	0	0	2
	2015	231	4	0	0	0	1
	2016	244	1	0	0	0	0
F	2013	478	11	0	5	0	0
	2014	489	11	0	5	0	0
	2015	405	14	0	3	0	2
	2016	493	1	0	0	0	1
G	2013	617	88	0	0	0	44
	2014	590	66	1	4	0	23
	2015	562	65	2	1	0	27
	2016	562	40	0	4	9	12
H	2013	233	47	0	1	0	19
	2014	218	31	0	0	0	24
	2015	205	27	2	2	0	7
	2016	206	30	0	0	0	10
I	2013	323	71	1	0	0	36
	2014	366	87	0	1	1	67
	2015	367	194	5	12	0	143
	2016	326	189	3	7	0	148
J	2013	277	19	0	0	0	11
	2014	298	10	0	0	0	7
	2015	279	8	1	1	0	1
	2016	253	22	0	0	0	6
K	2013	252	25	0	4	0	10
	2014	251	29	0	5	0	20
	2015	238	18	0	2	0	5
	2016	205	9	0	2	0	5
L	2013	596	4	0	2	0	0
	2014	574	2	0	1	0	0
	2015	538	2	0	0	0	0
	2016	559	7	0	0	0	3

Table 5 presents the combined number of office discipline referrals for all twelve schools by fall semester of each school year included in this study, and by the type of infraction.

Table 5

*Combined Number of Office Referrals for all Schools by Year and Infraction Type*

School	Fall Semester	# of Students Enrolled	# of Office Referrals				
			Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/Alcohol/Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
All Schools	2013	4511	569	7	47	0	331
	2014	4494	621	9	52	1	363
	2015	4263	656	11	49	0	383
	2016	4180	764	7	48	9	504

Tables 4 and 5 show that the student population and the number of office discipline referrals fluctuated at buildings. When combined, the number of office discipline referrals increased each year in total and specifically the infraction type of disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior (3Ds). There is a noted increase in drugs/alcohol/tobacco infractions.

As the elementary schools differ in the size of population, the data was converted to the number of office discipline referrals per 100 students to allow for comparisons across schools. Table 6 presents the number of office referrals per 100 students by school, by fall semester of each school year included in this study, and by the type of infraction.

Table 6

*Number of Office Referrals per 100 Students by School, Year, and Infraction Type*

School	Fall Semester	# of Students Enrolled	# of Office Referrals per 100 Students				
			Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/ Alcohol/ Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
A	2013	235	11.5	0.0	0.9	0.0	6.8
	2014	234	8.5	0.4	1.3	0.0	2.6
	2015	248	3.2	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.8
	2016	244	9.8	0.0	0.8	0.0	7.4
B	2013	422	18.7	1.4	0.9	0.0	20.4
	2014	385	42.6	1.6	2.1	0.0	29.1
	2015	349	37.5	0.0	0.9	0.0	36.7
	2016	260	25.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.6
C	2013	479	7.5	0.0	0.2	0.0	4.2
	2014	471	6.6	0.0	0.2	0.0	3.0
	2015	439	17.5	0.0	0.7	0.0	7.7
	2016	436	35.6	0.2	3.0	0.0	24.1
D	2013	409	38.9	0.0	6.4	0.0	21.8
	2014	446	37.4	0.2	5.4	0.0	19.7
	2015	402	26.9	0.2	5.0	0.0	8.2
	2016	392	56.1	0.8	5.1	0.0	37.0
E	2013	190	1.6	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
	2014	172	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
	2015	231	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
	2016	244	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
F	2013	478	2.3	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
	2014	489	2.2	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
	2015	405	3.5	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.5
	2016	493	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
G	2013	617	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1
	2014	590	11.2	0.2	0.7	0.0	3.9
	2015	562	11.6	0.4	0.2	0.0	4.8
	2016	562	7.1	0.0	0.7	1.6	2.1
H	2013	233	20.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	8.2
	2014	218	14.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.0
	2015	205	13.2	1.0	1.0	0.0	3.4
	2016	206	14.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.9
I	2013	323	22.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	11.1
	2014	366	23.8	0.0	0.3	0.3	18.3
	2015	367	52.9	1.4	3.3	0.0	39.0
	2016	326	58.0	0.9	2.1	0.0	45.4
J	2013	277	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0
	2014	298	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
	2015	279	2.9	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4
	2016	253	8.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4
K	2013	252	9.9	0.0	1.6	0.0	4.0
	2014	251	11.6	0.0	2.0	0.0	8.0
	2015	238	7.6	0.0	0.8	0.0	2.1
	2016	205	4.4	0.0	1.0	0.0	2.4
L	2013	596	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
	2014	574	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0
	2015	538	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	2016	559	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5



Table 6 presents two of the twelve elementary schools have experienced infractions related to drugs/alcohol/tobacco. Nine of the twelve schools have had infractions for attendance. For each of the twelve schools, disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior (3Ds) have the largest number of infractions across the four years except for School F. The highest numbers of discipline infractions for School F are related to bullying for three of the four fall semesters. While School E has more infractions for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior, the 2013 fall semester shows bullying with the highest number of infractions.

Table 7 presents the combined number of office referrals per 100 students for all twelve schools by fall semester of each school year included in this study, and by the type of infraction.

Table 7

*Combined Number of Office Referrals per 100 Students for all Schools by Year and Infraction Type*

School	Fall Semester	# of Students Enrolled	# of Office Referrals per 100 Students				
			Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/Alcohol/Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
All	2013	4511	154.5	1.7	12.8	0.0	87.6
	2014	4494	163.5	2.4	13.2	0.3	99.1
	2015	4263	178.9	3.4	13.8	0.0	104.0
	2016	4180	221.6	1.9	12.7	1.6	146.0

The data in Table 7 reports that overall infractions related to attendance and bullying steadily increased for three years and then dropped in the fall of the 2015-2016 school year. Infractions for drugs/alcohol/tobacco were zero in fall semesters of 2012-2013 and 2014-2015. The number of infractions for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior increased significantly each year over the four fall semesters.

The data to respond to Research Question 1 and the four sub-questions is conveyed in Table 8. Table 8 displays the average of office discipline referrals per 100 students in total and

per each infraction type for the baseline years per school. The first row for each school reports the average of the two fall semesters of the baseline years (2012-2013) and (2013-2014) before implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second row reflects the change in the number of office discipline referrals per 100 students from the baseline to year 1 of implementation (2014-2015) for the total number of discipline office referrals and referrals for each infraction type. The third row reflects the change in number of office discipline referrals per 100 students from the baseline and year 2 of implementation. A negative number demonstrates a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals from the baseline and the year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. A positive number demonstrates an increase in the number of office discipline referrals from the baseline each year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. Table 9 shows the resulting data for all twelve schools combined.

Table 8

*Change in Number of Office Referrals per 100 Students from Baseline Year and Each Year of Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School		# of Office Referrals per 100 Students				
		Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/ Alcohol/ Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
A	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	10.00	0.20	1.10	0.00	4.70
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-6.80	-0.20	-0.30	0.00	-3.90
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-0.20	-0.20	-0.30	0.00	2.70
B	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	30.65	1.50	1.50	0.00	24.75
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	6.85	-1.50	-0.60	0.00	11.95
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-5.25	-1.50	-1.50	0.00	-5.15
C	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	7.05	0.00	0.20	0.00	3.60
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	10.45	0.00	0.50	0.00	4.10
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	28.55	0.20	2.80	0.00	20.50
D	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	38.15	0.10	5.90	0.00	20.75
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-11.25	0.10	-0.90	0.00	-12.55
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	17.95	0.70	-0.80	0.00	16.25
E	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	1.65	0.00	0.55	0.00	0.60
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	0.05	0.00	-0.55	0.00	-0.20
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-1.25	0.00	-0.55	0.00	-0.60
F	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	2.25	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	1.25	0.00	-0.03	0.00	0.50
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-2.05	0.00	-1.00	0.00	0.20
G	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	12.75	0.10	0.35	0.00	5.50
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-1.15	0.30	-0.15	0.00	-0.70
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-5.65	-0.10	0.35	1.60	-3.40
H	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	17.20	0.00	0.20	0.00	9.60
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-4.00	1.00	0.80	0.00	-6.20
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-2.60	0.00	-0.20	0.00	-4.70
I	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	22.90	0.15	0.15	0.15	14.70
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	30.00	1.25	3.15	-0.15	24.30
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	35.10	0.75	1.95	-0.15	30.70
J	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	5.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.15
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-2.25	0.40	0.40	0.00	-2.75
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	3.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.75
K	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	10.75	0.00	1.80	0.00	6.00
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-3.15	0.00	-1.00	0.00	-3.90
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	-6.35	0.00	-0.80	0.00	-3.60
L	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	0.50	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	-0.10	0.00	-0.25	0.00	0.00
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	0.80	0.00	-0.25	0.00	0.50

Table 9

*Combined Change in Number of Office Referrals per 100 Students from Baseline and Each Year of Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School		# of Office Referrals per 100 Students				
		Total	Attendance	Bullying	Drugs/ Alcohol/ Tobacco	Disrespect, Defiance of Authority, and Disruptive Behavior
All	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	159.00	2.05	13.00	0.15	93.35
	Change in referrals between baseline and 14-15	19.90	1.35	1.07	-0.15	10.65
	Change in referrals between baseline and 15-16	62.60	-0.15	0.00	1.45	52.65

Research Question 1 investigated whether there was a change in the number of office discipline referrals reported two years prior to the implementation of CHARACTERplus compared to each year following implementation. When looking at the columns for each school in Table 8, if the change remains the same for each consecutive year, then there were no office discipline referrals for that infraction type for each year of implementation from the baseline. If the change between the baseline year and year one of implementation is a negative number, then the number of office discipline referrals decreased. If the change reflects a negative number from year one to year two, there was an additional reduction in the number of office discipline referrals for that infraction type. If the change reflects a positive number from baseline to year one or a positive change from year one to year two of implementation, this reflects an increase in the number of discipline referrals.

In reviewing the data for the infraction type specific to attendance, Research Question 1a, School A, School B, School E, School F, School K, and School L had no change in office discipline referrals from the baseline to year one and year two. This reflects that there were no office discipline referrals for attendance after the baseline year and it was sustained for each of the two years of implementation. School C reflects that office discipline referrals for attendance from baseline to year one was sustained at zero with an increase in office discipline referrals for

year two. School D reflects an increase in discipline referrals from the baseline year to year one and another increase in year two. School G, School H, School I, and School J convey an increase in office discipline referrals for attendance from the baseline to year one and then a decrease from year one to year two.

In reviewing the data for the infraction type specific to bullying, Research Question 1b, School E and School L had no change in office discipline referrals from the baseline to year one and year two. This reflects that there were no office discipline referrals for bullying after the baseline year and it was sustained for each of the two years of implementation. School A presents a decrease in office discipline referrals from the baseline to year one and it was sustained in year two. School B and School F convey a decrease in office discipline referrals for bullying from baseline to year one and a continued decrease from year one to year two resulting in zero referrals. School C reflects an increase in discipline referrals for bullying from the baseline year to year one and another increase in year two. School D, School G, and School K show a decrease in office discipline referrals for bullying from the baseline to year one and then an increase in referrals for bullying from year one to year two. School H, School I, and School J reveal an increase in office discipline referrals for bullying from the baseline year to year one and then a decrease from year one to year two.

Research question 1c, is specific to the change in office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco. Ten of the twelve schools had zero office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco in the baseline and sustained zero referrals for each year of implementation. School I conveys a reduction to zero office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco from the baseline to year one of implementation. School I further sustained zero referrals from year one to year two. School G presented zero office discipline

referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco for the baseline and year one of implementation and then shows and increase in referrals for year two of implementation.

The data for Research Questions 1d, specific to office discipline referrals for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior (3Ds) represents change for each of the twelve schools from the baseline year to the two years of implementation. School L maintained zero office discipline referrals for the 3Ds from baseline to year one. In year two, School L experienced an increase in office discipline referrals for the 3Ds. School E reveals a decrease in referrals from baseline to year one followed by a decrease to zero in year two. School G also shows a decrease from baseline to year one with a larger decrease in referrals from year one to year two of implementation. School A, School D, School H, School J, School K all experienced a decrease in office discipline referrals for the 3Ds from baseline to year one and then demonstrated an increase in referrals from year one to year two. School B and School F showed an increase in office discipline referrals for the 3Ds from baseline to year one and then decrease office discipline referrals from year one to year two of implementation.

In review of the total change in office discipline referrals for the twelve schools from baseline to year one and year two of implementation, School G and School K presented a decrease from the baseline to year one and additional decrease from the year one to year two of implementation. Five schools, School A, School D, School H, School J, and School L each showed a decrease in total office referrals from baseline to year one and then an increase from year one to year two. The increase from year one to year two rose higher than the baseline for three of the five schools; School D, School J, and School L. School B, School E, and School F presented an increase in office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and then showed a decrease from year one to year two for a positive change from the baseline. School C and

School I conveyed an increase in total office discipline referrals from both the baseline to year one and to year two of implementation. The data for all twelve elementary schools combined in Table 9 shows an increased in total office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and an additional increase from year one to year two.

### **Out-of- School Suspensions Descriptive Data**

Research Question 2 examines the change in the rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension between the two fall semesters (baseline) prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus and each fall semester after implementation. Table 10 presents the number of office referrals and out-of-school suspensions per 100 students for the fall semester of the baseline year and each fall semester of the two years of implementation. Additionally, Table 10 reflects the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to office discipline referrals. Table 11 demonstrates the data combined for all twelve elementary schools.

Table 10

*Rate of Out-of-School Suspensions to Office Referrals per 100 Students from Baseline Year and Each Year of Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School		# of Office Referrals per 100 Students	# of Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students	Suspension to Referral Ratio
A	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	10.00	6.20	0.62
	Fall 2015	3.20	2.40	0.75
	Fall 2016	9.80	8.20	0.84
B	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	30.65	7.30	0.24
	Fall 2015	37.50	9.20	0.25
	Fall 2016	25.40	3.80	0.15
C	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	7.05	6.95	0.99
	Fall 2015	17.50	14.80	0.85
	Fall 2016	35.60	8.90	0.25
D	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	38.15	5.90	0.15
	Fall 2015	26.90	8.20	0.30
	Fall 2016	56.10	11.20	0.20
E	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	1.65	0.00	0.00
	Fall 2015	1.70	1.70	1.00
	Fall 2016	0.40	0.40	1.00
F	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	2.30	0.50	0.22
	Fall 2015	3.50	1.70	0.49
	Fall 2016	0.20	0.20	1.00
G	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	12.75	7.40	0.58
	Fall 2015	11.60	5.70	0.49
	Fall 2016	7.10	6.80	0.96
H	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	17.20	12.50	0.73
	Fall 2015	13.20	10.70	0.81
	Fall 2016	14.60	7.30	0.50
I	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	22.90	16.70	0.73
	Fall 2015	52.90	10.90	0.21
	Fall 2016	58.00	7.30	0.13
J	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	5.15	2.10	0.41
	Fall 2015	2.90	0.00	0.00
	Fall 2016	8.90	3.20	0.36
K	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	10.75	2.00	0.19
	Fall 2015	7.60	0.40	0.05
	Fall 2016	4.40	1.00	0.23
L	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	0.50	0.10	0.20
	Fall 2015	0.40	0.00	0.00
	Fall 2016	1.30	0.50	0.38

A review of Table 10 demonstrates various ratios in response to office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension. Although the number of office discipline referrals show



and increase each year, School C and School I shows continual decrease in the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus.

Schools G and School K reflect decreases in the number of discipline referrals from the baseline to each consecutive year, however the ratio for out-of-school suspension decreased from baseline year to year one and increased from year one to year two to a ratio higher than the baseline. School J and L conveys a decrease in office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and an increase in referrals to year two. The ratio of out-of-school suspensions reduced from baseline to year one and then increase in year two to a ratio higher than the baseline year for School L. School J also conveys a decrease in ratio of out-of-school suspension to referrals from baseline to year 1 but a slight increase in ratio of out-of-school suspension in year two, not exceeding the baseline year.

School D demonstrates a decrease in office discipline referrals and an increase in the ratio of out-of-school suspension to referrals from the baseline to year one. In year two, School D reflects an increase in office discipline referrals to a level higher than the baseline and a decrease from year one to year two in the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to office discipline referrals.

School B and School H both demonstrate an increase from baseline to year one and then a decrease from year one to year two in the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to office discipline referrals being lower than the baseline year. School B's office discipline referrals follow the same trend with an increase and then a decrease lower than baseline. School H's office discipline referrals decrease and then increase to a number lower than the baseline.

School E demonstrates an increase from baseline to year one for both the number office discipline referrals and the ratio of out-of-school suspension to referrals. From year one to year

two, School E shows that the number of office discipline referrals decrease and the ratio of out-of-school suspensions remained the same. School E demonstrates in year two that the number of office discipline referrals matches the number of out-of-school suspensions.

School A and School F present an increasing ratio of out-of-school suspensions from baseline to year one and year two of implementation. School A had a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and an increase in year two, where School F had an increase in office discipline referrals from baseline to year one and a decrease from year one to year two.

Table 11

*Combined Rate of Out-of-School Suspension to Office Referrals per 100 Students from Baseline Year and Each Year of Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School		# of Office Referrals per 100 Students	# of Out-of-School Suspensions per 100 Students	Suspension to Referral Ratio
All	Average of 12-13 and 13-14 school years (baseline)	159.05	67.65	0.43
	Fall 2015	178.9	65.70	0.37
	Fall 2016	221.6	58.80	0.27

Table 11 conveys the office discipline referrals increased with each year after the baseline however the out-of-school suspensions decrease each year. The suspension to referral ratio, which represents the rate in which referrals resulted in suspension, also decreased each year.

**Teachers’ Perceptions Survey Descriptive Data**

This study also included a sample size of 230 teachers out of a total of 350 teachers who received the survey in the large school district for a 65.7% return rate. The study was designed to elicit responses from teachers who had worked at their school two years prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus in 2014-2015 school year. Of the 230 teachers, 92 had

not been working in the school since the 2012-2013 school year leaving 138 teachers to complete the survey. The return rate for the number of teachers that participated in the survey and who had worked in their school for four school years reviewed in this study is 60%. Of the 138 teachers that completed the survey, 31.9% had been in their current school for four to five years, 35.5% had been in their current building six to ten years, 13.0% had been in their current building for eleven to fifteen years, 14.5% had been in their building for sixteen to twenty years, 2.2% had been in their current building for twenty-one to twenty-five years, and 2.9% had been in their current building for more than twenty-six years.

The teacher respondents varied in their number of years in teaching and their current positions. The teachers reported that 14.5% were in their first five years of teaching, 24.6% having taught six to ten years, 23.2% having taught eleven to fifteen years, 17.4% having taught sixteen to twenty years, 8.7% having taught twenty-one to twenty-five years, and 11.6% having taught more than 26 years. Of the teacher respondents, currently, 12.3% teach kindergarten, 14.5% teach first grade, 12.3% teach second grade, 10.9% teach third grade, 13.8% teach fourth grade, 12.3% teach fifth grade, 13.8% are special education teachers, and 10.1% teach other subjects to include art, music, physical education, English as a Second Language, and pre-school. When the teachers were asked if they had adequate training to handle student behaviors in the classroom, they responded with a weighted average of 3.64 using a seven point Likert scale with a one rating representing strongly agree and a seven rating representing strongly disagree.

Research Question 3 investigated if there was a change in the number of office discipline referrals in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions were that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. The survey that 138 teachers completed was

comprised of four questions specific to the implementation on CHARACTERplus. Table 12 provides a frequency count and percentage of responses to each question.

Table 12

*Teachers' Perceptions of CHARACTERplus on Number of Office Referrals*

Item	Frequency Count and Percentage of Responses to Each Question						
	1 Strongly Agree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly Disagree
If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for tardiness and skipping class.	0 0.00%	10 7.25%	17 12.32%	20 14.49%	18 13.04%	34 24.64%	39 28.26%
If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for bullying.	1 0.72%	14 10.14%	24 17.39%	27 19.57%	19 13.77%	21 15.22%	32 23.19%
If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.	12 8.70%	6 4.35%	7 5.07%	12 8.70%	9 6.52%	14 10.14%	78 56.52%
If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior.	1 0.72%	17 12.32%	19 13.77%	27 19.57%	16 11.59%	21 15.22%	37 26.81%

Table 13 provides the data in order to identify which schools had a majority of teachers' perceptions purporting that CHARACTERplus has reduced office discipline referrals. To identify majority through the use of a seven point Likert scale, the researcher calculated the number of response ratings of 1-3 on the Likert scale to show agreement that CHARACTERplus has an impact. A Likert rating of four shows neutrality in the seven point scale. Likert ratings of 5-7 show disagreement that CHARACTERplus has an impact on the number of discipline referrals.

Table 13

*Frequency Count and Finding Majority of Teacher Responses to Four Survey Questions Regarding Implementation of CHARACTERplus*

School	Number of Respondents	Frequency Count of Responses to Four Questions							% of Responses to find Majority		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
		Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree	% of ratings of 1-3	% of ratings of 4	% of ratings of 5-7
A	9	1	0	4	3	4	4	20	13.89%	8.33%	77.78%
B	6	0	1	3	3	2	4	11	16.67%	12.50%	70.83%
C	15	1	7	14	15	3	3	17	36.67%	25.00%	38.33%
D	15	2	1	7	4	8	8	30	16.67%	6.67%	76.66%
E	4	0	4	2	5	1	3	1	37.50%	31.25%	31.25%
F	20	4	14	11	13	7	10	21	36.25%	16.25%	47.50%
G	13	0	5	9	8	4	4	22	26.92%	15.38%	57.69%
H	8	1	1	5	7	3	7	8	21.87%	21.87%	56.25%
I	10	3	1	1	5	8	12	10	12.50%	12.50%	75.00%
J	11	0	0	0	8	9	15	12	0.00%	18.18%	81.81%
K	8	0	2	3	0	0	10	17	15.62%	0.00%	84.38%
L	19	2	11	8	15	13	10	17	27.63%	19.74%	52.63%

School E is the only school with the greatest number of responses to the four questions with Likert scale ratings of 1-3 to show the majority of teachers' perceptions' believe that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. School E had four teachers respond to the questions presenting a low number and little variation in responses. The low response rate is likely due to a new building being opened in 2014-2015 school year, the first year of CHARACTERplus implementation, and the student population grew by approximately sixty students as depicted in Table 4. This also describes the low number of teacher respondents as the survey required that individuals have worked in the school since 2012-2013, two years prior to implementation. In referring back to Table 5, School E experienced an increase in total office discipline referrals from the baseline year to year 1 and then a decrease from year 1 to year 2 of implementation with the number of referrals remaining lower than the baseline year. School E had zero office discipline referrals for both attendance and bullying starting in the fall semester of the baseline and through both fall semesters of implementation. Bullying was decreased from

the baseline year to zero in both fall semesters of implementation. Disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior saw a decrease from the baseline year to year one and was reported as zero in the fall of year two.

Research Question 4 investigated if there was a change in the number of out-of-school suspensions in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions were that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. Again, School E was the only school where a majority of teachers' perceptions were CHARACTERplus reduced office discipline referrals. Table 10 conveys that School E had zero out-of-school suspensions in the fall semesters of the baseline and in year one they experienced an increase in out-of-school suspension with a ratio 1.00 for out-of-suspensions to office discipline referrals. Moving from year 1 to year 2 School E saw a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals however the ratio of out-of-school suspensions to office discipline referrals remained the same.

### **Key Findings**

The data presents key findings regarding the implementation of CHARACTERplus in the twelve elementary schools.

**Research Question 1. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals reported between the fall semesters prior to implementation, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, and each fall semester after implementation 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?**

The change in the number of office discipline referrals revealed an increase from the baseline to year one and year two following the implementation of CHARACTERplus for the twelve elementary schools combined. There was an increase of 19.90 office discipline referrals per 100 students from the baseline year to year one of implementation of CHARACTERplus.

The infraction type involving disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior represents 10.65 of the increase in year one. Year 2 revealed an increase of 62.60 office discipline referrals per 100 students from the baseline year to year two of CHARACTERplus implementation. Again, the infraction type of disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior represents 52.65 of the increase in year two.

In looking at individual schools, the total number of office discipline referrals per 100 students decreased for seven of the twelve schools from the baseline year to year one of implementation. The decrease ranged from .10 to 11.25 office discipline referrals per 100 students. Five schools experienced an increase in office discipline referrals ranging from .05 to 30 referrals per 100 students.

In year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, eight of the twelve schools experienced a decrease in the total number of office discipline referrals from the baseline year. The decrease ranged from .20 to 6.35 discipline office referrals per 100 students. Four schools had an increase ranging from .80 to 35.10 office discipline referrals per 100 students.

While seven of the twelve schools experienced a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals from the baseline in year one of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and eight of the twelve schools experienced a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals from the baseline in year two of the implementation of CHARACTERplus, the remaining schools experienced an increase that raised the overall the number of office discipline referrals as a whole.

**Research Question 1a. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals due to attendance reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-**

**2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary school implementing CHARACTERplus?**

The number of office discipline referrals related to attendance for all twelve schools combined, increased by 1.35 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students during the first year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second year of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed a decrease of .15 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students for all twelve schools combined.

In looking at individual school data, the number of office discipline referrals due to attendance from the baseline year to year one of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed that five schools maintained a rate of zero office discipline referrals for attendance. Two schools demonstrated a decrease in attendance referrals ranging from .20 to 1.50 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students. Five schools experienced an increase in attendance referrals ranging in from .10 to 1.25 discipline office referrals for attendance per 100 students.

Year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, reveals that six schools experienced no change with zero office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students. Three schools experienced a decrease ranging from .10 to 1.50 office discipline referrals per 100 students. Three schools had an increase ranging from .20 to .75 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 which consequently raised the number of office discipline referrals per 100 students for all schools combined in year two.

**Research Question 1b. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals due to bullying reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary school implementing CHARACTERplus?**



The number of office discipline referrals related to bullying for all twelve schools combined, increased by 1.07 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students during the first year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second year of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed no change from the baseline in the number of office discipline referrals for bullying per 100 students for all twelve schools combined. The findings from the data demonstrated that the number of office discipline referrals due to bullying increased from the baseline to year one and then reflects no change from the baseline to year two, therefore a decrease from year one to year two.

For individual schools, the number of office discipline referrals due to bullying from the baseline year to year one of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed that eight schools had a decrease in office discipline referrals for bullying ranging from .03 to 1.00 office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students. The four remaining schools experienced an increase in office discipline referrals for bullying ranging from .40 to 3.15 per 100 students which outweighed the decrease from the other schools resulting in a combined increase per 100 students for all schools.

Year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, revealed that two schools experienced no change from the baseline with zero office discipline referrals for bullying per 100 students. Seven schools experienced a decrease ranging from .20 to 1.50 office discipline referrals per 100 students for bullying. Three schools had an increase ranging from .35 to 2.80 office discipline referrals per 100 students for bullying. While there were changes among the schools, the total number of office discipline referrals in year 21 for bullying matched the baseline.

**Research Question 1c. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals due to drugs/alcohol/tobacco reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary school implementing CHARACTERplus?**

The change in the number of office discipline referrals due to drugs/alcohol/tobacco demonstrated that from the baseline to year one there was a decrease in referrals, however in year, there was a noted increase. The number of office discipline referrals for all twelve schools combined decreased to zero office discipline referrals for attendance per 100 students during the first year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second year of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed an increase of 1.45 office discipline referrals for per 100 students for drugs/alcohol/tobacco for all twelve schools combined.

For individual schools, the number of office discipline referrals due to drugs/alcohol/tobacco from the baseline year to year one of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed that eleven schools had a no change with zero office discipline referrals. One school experienced a .15 decrease in discipline office referrals per 100 students for drugs/alcohol/tobacco. Zero schools experienced an increase from the baseline year to year one of implementation

Year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, revealed that ten schools had no change with zero office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco. One school experienced a .15 decrease in discipline office referrals per 100 students for drugs/alcohol/tobacco. One school showed a 1.60 increase in office discipline referrals per 100 students for drugs/alcohol/tobacco.

**Research Question 1d. Is there a change in the number of office discipline referrals due to the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior) reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary school implementing CHARACTERplus?**

The number of discipline office referrals due to the 3Ds increased substantially from both the baseline to year one and to year two. The number of office discipline referrals related to disrespect/defiance of authority/disruptive behavior (3Ds) for all twelve schools combined increased by 10.65 office discipline referrals per 100 students for the 3Ds during the first year of implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second year of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed an increase of 52.65 office discipline referrals per 100 students for the 3Ds for all twelve schools combined.

For individual schools, the number of office discipline referrals due to disrespect/defiance of authority/disruptive behavior (3Ds) from the baseline year to year one of implementation of CHARACTERplus revealed that one school had a no change with zero office discipline referrals. Seven schools had a decrease in office discipline referrals for the 3Ds ranging from .20 to 12.55 office discipline referrals for the 3Ds per 100 students. Four schools experienced an increase in office discipline referrals for bullying ranging from .50 to 24.30 per 100 students.

Year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, revealed that six schools experienced a decrease ranging from .0 to 5.15 office discipline referrals per 100 students for bullying. Six schools had an increase ranging from .50 to 30.70 office discipline referrals per 100 students for the 3Ds.

**Research Question 2. Is there a change in the rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension reported between the two fall semesters prior to implementation (2012-2013 and 2013-2014) and each fall semester after implementation (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) for the twelve elementary schools implementing CHARACTERplus?**

While the number of office discipline referrals per 100 students increased from the baseline to year one and to year two, the number of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students decreased from the baseline to year one and year two. The rate of suspension subsequently decreased as well. This data reflects that the implementation of CHARACTERplus could have an impact on the number of out-of-school suspensions.

For individual schools, the data on the rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension from the baseline to year one of implementation identifies that six schools showed an increase in suspensions and six schools showed a decrease. In year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, the rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspensions from the baseline increased in seven schools and decreased in five schools.

This identifies that the schools that showed a decrease in the rate of suspensions due to office discipline referrals was significant such that the rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension decreased for all schools combined.

**Research Question 3. Is there a greater change in the number of office referrals in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals?**

The survey data revealed that only one of the twelve schools presented with a majority of the teachers' perceptions that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline

referrals. School E had four teachers respond to the survey. The change in the total number of office discipline referrals from baseline to year one of CHARACTERplus implementation reflects an increase in referrals. The change from the baseline to year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus reveals a decrease in the total number of office discipline referrals.

As a result, the survey data reflects that the majority of the teachers' perceptions at eleven schools are that CHARACTERplus does not reduce the number of office discipline referrals. The teachers' perceptions are further supported by the observed increase in office discipline referrals from the baseline to year one and year two.

**Research Question 4. Is there a greater change in the number of out-of-school suspensions in the schools where the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals?**

Again, one school of the twelve schools, School E, presented with a majority of teachers' perceptions that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. The rate of office discipline referrals that resulted in out-of-school suspension for the school increased from the baseline to year one and decreased from the baseline to year two.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This chapter presented the changes in the number of office discipline referrals from the two fall semesters (baseline) prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus to each fall semester for two consecutive years after implementation of CHARACTERplus in twelve elementary schools for research question one and each sub-question. For all schools combined, the data revealed that there was a substantial increase in the number of office discipline referrals related to the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior) per 100 students. There were minor changes involving both minute increases and decreases to the number of office

discipline referrals for attendance, bullying, and drugs/alcohol/tobacco per 100 students from the baseline to year one and to year two. The rate of office discipline referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension per 100 students from the baseline to each year of implementation revealed a decrease for all schools combined. The survey data showed that only one of the twelve schools, School E, had a majority of teachers who perceived that CHARACTERplus has reduced the number of office discipline referrals and those resulting in out-of-school suspension. The teachers' perceptions at School E are corroborated by the office discipline referral for the 3Ds and out-of-school suspension data as the school saw an increase in both from the baseline to year one, yet they experienced a decrease in both moving to year two.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine how the piloted implementation of CHARACTERplus in a Midwestern urban school district related to student discipline. Specifically the study was to determine (a) if there was relationship between the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and the rate of office discipline referrals resulting out-of-school suspensions, and (b) if there was a relationship between teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CHARACTERplus and the number of office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions. CHARACTERplus is a character education program. Prior to implementation, the school district identified several data sets that brought them to implement CHARACTERplus in the fall semester of the 2014-15 school year. The discipline data at that time revealed that with a student population of 20,431 students 34.6 office discipline referrals were written per 100 students, and 12.4 out-of-school suspensions were imposed per 100 students in the fall of the 2012-2013 school year. The district piloted implementation of CHARACTERplus in 12 elementary schools to address the concerning data. For this study, discipline data was analyzed from the twelve elementary schools that implemented CHARACTERplus. Discipline data included office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension data obtained through the school district for two years prior to the implementation of CHARACTERplus and for each year of implementation. The change in discipline referrals specific to infractions of attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, and the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance or authority, and disruptive behavior) were analyzed specifically for this study. Teachers in the pilot schools also completed an online survey designed to obtain

teachers' perceptions of the impact of CHARACTERplus in relation to student discipline that result in office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspension. This chapter provides conclusions and discussion, limitations of the study, implications for action and recommendations for future research.

### **Conclusions**

Research questions 1 and sub question 1a through 1d were specific to the change in the number of office discipline referrals as a whole and by infraction type from the baseline to year one and year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus. From the analysis of the data, it can be concluded that the implementation of CHARACTERplus did not result with a decrease in the number of office discipline referrals; if anything, the opposite occurred as the total number increased from the baseline to year one and year two of implementation. The predominant increase in office discipline referrals involved infractions for the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior). With the implementation of CHARACTERplus, decreases in office discipline referrals were noted at several individual buildings for infractions related to attendance, bullying, and the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance or authority, and disruptive behavior) however other buildings experienced substantial increases that nullify the noted decreases at individual sites. The researcher further concludes that discipline office referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco was not an area of great concern as evidenced by the high majority of schools having zero infractions in the initial baseline and each consecutive year. Although one school showed growth in referrals from the baseline to year two, it can be concluded that the implementation of CHARACTERplus alone does not influence a reduction in office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco. Furthermore, in order to bring consistency across all schools for analysis, the data was presented per 100 students. Therefore, the researcher



concluded that change in office discipline referrals for attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco elicited negligible differences for the twelve schools as evidenced by small change from year to year per 100 students. Given these facts, with the implementation of CHARACTERplus there was an increased in the number office discipline referrals for all school combined.

Research question two evaluated the rate of out-of-schools suspensions resulting from office discipline referrals per 100 students. The data revealed a decrease for all buildings combined with the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Hence this data provides evidence to report that implementation of CHARACTERplus has a positive influence on rate of discipline referrals resulting in a decrease of out-of-school suspensions per 100 students.

Lastly, research questions three and four assessed if there was a greater change in the number of office discipline referrals where teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals and those resulting in out-of-school suspension. Survey data revealed that one of the twelve buildings demonstrated that teachers' perceptions were that CHARACTERplus reduced the number of office discipline referrals. The study concludes that the majority of teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus does not reduce office discipline referrals.

## **Discussion**

It is reasonable to generalize that the increase in office discipline referrals as demonstrated in research questions 1 through 1d may be indicative of teachers and administrators developing a lower tolerance for student behaviors and higher expectations for appropriate behaviors to be exhibited, especially those directly related to the traits that have been taught in previous months. Teacher and administrator retention and attrition play a role as well

in the fidelity and integrity to the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Of the seventeen administrators assigned to the twelve elementary schools, only eight had been at their school prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus. Office discipline referrals for 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior) saw a large increase and can be directly linked to several character traits to include respect, citizenship, responsibility, compassion, and integrity. One might question if the severity of behaviors changed over time that could have elicited more office discipline referrals for the 3Ds. Additionally, as students are educated on the different traits, they may likely begin to call others out when demonstrating undesired behavior eliciting the need for a teacher response. Some students may also be inclined to push the limits in testing the definition of the traits as well as teacher and administrator tolerance. Lastly, societal issues in the urban school district could have heightened awareness of student behavior by teachers and influenced the number of office discipline referrals. CHARACTERplus purports through their internal research that schools experience a decrease in discipline referrals. This descriptive study does not support their findings.

There are deductions to be made from research question two and the decrease in out-of-school suspensions. Building administrators may have likely exhibited leniency in applying consequences for behaviors to support the character trait development in students as emphasized with the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Perhaps building administrators were influenced to keep their out-of-suspension data at a low since a goal of CHARACTERplus was to reduce discipline issues and higher level administration is likely to have an eye on the data. Additionally, while office discipline referrals increased with the implementation of CHARACTERplus the severity of student behaviors may have reduced such that out-of-school suspension was not elicited.

Regarding research questions three and four, it is probable that the majority of teachers' perceptions that CHARACTERplus increased office discipline referrals could be due to a more intense building focus on specific character traits and a heightened awareness when a student does not display the desired trait resulting in lower tolerance by teachers. Another feasible generalization is that student behaviors may present a number of needed character traits such that the trait of the month implementation model may not adequately address the character education needed by students. Another consideration related to teachers' perception might be related to established or lack of established monitoring of the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Lastly, it is conceivable that teachers feel that implementation of CHARACTERplus creates one more thing to do and if it is not built into the curriculum then it generates more work on their behalf to develop lessons to teach the traits which could also result in teacher resistance.

### **Findings Related to Literature**

There are several connections from the findings of this study to findings from previous research and studies. In a study conducted by Irvin et al. (2004), they found that office referral data measures meet the criteria for a valid construct as indicators of schoolwide behavioral climate, including general misbehavior at school, student perceptions, teacher perceptions, and classroom orderliness. Was et al., (2006) conducted a review of research on character education programs and found that the majority of research regarding character education focused on teacher, administrator, and student perceptions of the programs and not the behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, Was et al., (2006) reported that if the target outcomes of character education include reduced absenteeism, discipline referrals, pregnancy, school failure, suspensions, and substance abuse, then discipline records, if kept in a consistent manner, would be more of a direct measure.

The current study consisted of four research questions that connect specifically to the use of discipline data. Research question one and sub-questions 1a through 1d of the current study focused on the implementation of CHARACTERplus, a character education program and the influence on the number of office discipline referrals. The sub questions addressed specific types of office discipline referrals to include; attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, and the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behaviors). Research question two focused on the number of office discipline referrals that result in out-of-school suspension. CHARACTERplus reports in their research studies that 64 schools in a randomized study showed a 41% average decrease in the discipline referrals (CHARACTERplus, 2006). Wilson and Lipsey (2007) reported that the main findings from a meta-analysis of 249 studies showed a statistical significance for universal programs that represent a decrease in aggressive and disruptive behavior. This study is inconsistent with both the CHARACTERplus (CHARACTERplus, 2006) randomized study and the Wilson and Lipsey (2007) findings showing an increase in office discipline referrals with the implementation of a character education program, CHARACTERplus.

Battistich et al. (2004) compared twelve schools implementing a character education program called, Child Development Program to twelve comparable schools and found that students reported a significant reduction in alcohol and marijuana use, and school records indicated a reduction in violent behaviors. The results of this study are not consistent with Battistich et al. (2004). Only two schools reflected office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco, one showed a decrease to zero from .15 per 100 students from the baseline to year one and sustained it to year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus. The second school showed an increase of 1.60 office discipline referrals per 100 students from the

baseline to year two. Although the change in data was minimal the current study did not show a significant decrease in the number of office discipline referrals for drugs/alcohol/tobacco.

Snyder et al., reported in 2010, on a character education program titled Positive Action where archival School Report Card data was examined which included data on achievement and disciplinary outcomes. The studies reported beneficial effects on student achievement and problems behavior to include suspension and violence rates. In a one-year post trial, Snyder et al., (2012) found the intervention schools scored better on standardized tests and reported lower absenteeism and fewer suspensions. The current study is in agreement with the Snyder et al., 2012 studies, which showed that the number of suspensions decreased from the baseline to year one and experienced an additional reduction from year one to year two of implementation of CHARACTERplus, a character education program.

Research questions three and four of the current study focused on the perceptions of teachers' and the implementation of CHARACTERplus on office discipline referrals. Was et al., (2006) conducted a review of research to determine if specific character education programs were obtaining the stated goals and found that of the studies they reviewed, evidence was provided that teachers and administrators involved in the programs believed the program made a difference. The current study is not in agreement with Was et al., (2006) as the results of the current teacher survey revealed that teachers' perceptions are that CHARACTERplus did not reduce office discipline referrals.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

There are several factors that could place limitations on the major findings of this study. First, the study focused on the discipline data for the fall semester of each year of implementation of CHARACTERplus and the two fall semesters prior to implementation. The

school district has a discipline data base/software program where all discipline data is entered and stored. Some schools require teachers to enter the student behavioral incidences into the database at the time of the offense that elicits the office discipline referral and other schools do may send kids to the office with a hand written note or form without entering it in the database. While building administration is responsible for the overall discipline data to include the response to the offense, it is highly probable that the data is not a true representation across the twelve elementary schools due to the inconsistent expectation of who is responsible for the initial entry of the student behavior into the discipline database. Another factor involves the decision making of the building administrators to enter the office discipline referral into the system. Discipline data are not only reviewed by district administration but it is also sent to the state and impacts building level data reported state wide. Additionally, while there is a district code of conduct to guide building administrators in responding and applying consequences to student behavior, the consistency of decision making from one administrator to another and building to building impacts the overall discipline data. Lastly, attrition/change of assignment of administrators is a factor in the consistency of data. Of the seventeen administrators assigned to the twelve elementary schools, only eight have been at the school since the baseline years, prior to implementation of CHARACTERplus. This presents a concern with consistency of discipline referrals from year to year and the data that was reviewed for this study. Although some individual buildings saw a reduction in office discipline referrals, when looking at the twelve building's data together, it is clear that some buildings experienced substantial increases in office discipline referrals in specific infraction types.

In regards to the teachers perception data form the survey, a few limitations are revealed. The researcher systematically developed the questions on the survey to prompt the teachers to

think about student behavior without mentioning CHARACTERplus. The first set of questions asked teachers to reflect on behavior currently displayed in classroom and the extent to which those behaviors elicit office discipline referrals. The next set of questions were developed to have teachers reflect back to the student behavior in the 2012-2103 and 2013-2014 school years and the extent to which behavior elicited office discipline referrals. Questions regarding the implementation of CHARACTERplus were then developed as the final set of questions and those specific to the current study. The questions on the online survey specific to the teachers' perceptions to the implementation of CHARACTERplus and if it reduced office discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions were written in the negative. An example of one of the questions read: "If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behaviors." These were the last of the questions on the survey and if the teacher was in a hurry or did not read the questions carefully, it is possible that the teacher may have answered differently.

A second limitation to the survey is teacher attrition and building size specific to the number of teachers. The survey required that the teachers who completed the entire survey had to have been at the building during the baseline years, two years prior to implementation. The intent was to include teachers that were in the building both before and after implementation of CHARACTERplus such that they could respond to student behaviors both then and now. The current study revealed only one school that had a majority of teachers that felt CHARACTERplus had reduced office discipline referrals. There were four teachers who had been assigned to that building during the baseline years for that one school.

### **Implications for Action**

Schools are the “obvious site for addressing positive youth development and prevention efforts because of universal access to children over time that, in turn, allow for efficient distribution of these efforts to a comprehensive population of youth” (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010). Character education programs require focused planning and ongoing analysis during implementation in order to be successful. Through the data analysis and review of findings within this study, the researcher provides the following recommendations to the school district.

1. For consistent collection of data related to discipline, consider developing and instituting clear and explicit expectations regarding processes and procedures for entry of student discipline at the building level. Include in the expectations the role of teachers, building level administrators, and district level staff. This will provide for consistency across buildings and a clearer view of the district data as a whole.
2. When collecting and disaggregating office discipline referral data, consider creating additional categories of infractions. The district currently has five categories which infractions are sorted into to include; attendance, bullying, drugs/alcohol/tobacco, the 3Ds (disrespect, defiance of authority, disruptive behavior), and other. Breaking out the 3Ds into individual categories and further breakdown of infractions that fall into the “other” category would provide the district with more specific information regarding student behavior and the ability to connect to the character traits reinforced through the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Overall, it will assist in the analysis of the impact of CHARACTERplus on student behavior.
3. District level administration and school staff should review and analyze discipline data on a regular basis. Data should be disaggregated to the types of referrals, by grade level, school, number of referrals, time of year the referrals occur, number of referrals by



teacher. The data should be linked to CHARACTERplus. A district and building level analysis will provide data to determine if the reform initiative is meeting the preset goals and if they are on-track to meeting expected outcomes. Data analysis will reveal the needed supports to the implementation of CHARACTERplus that the district and buildings may need to provide. At the school level, reviewing discipline data with teachers frequently and making the connection to the curriculum and reinforcement of the character traits. Engaging in such a review with teachers will provide them with a stronger sense of purpose in the implementation of CHARACTERplus as well as provide them with more knowledge with which to influence their perceptions.

4. CHARACTERplus is promoted as a character education process that engages staff in developing an environment where students are valued, and the teaching of character traits are embedded into the curriculum. A review of the curriculum should be conducted to assess the degree to which each of the character traits are embedded in the curriculum. Once completed, use the discipline data along with the curriculum assessment to inform where revisions or additions may need to be made within curriculum to support the implementation of CHARACTERplus. Plan and deliver professional development for teachers specific to the curriculum revisions.

5. Develop a valid and reliable survey of district staff, students, and parents to consider the impact of the program on all constituents.

Tyack and Cuban, (1995) recommend three criteria to identify success of failure or reform which include: fidelity to the original design; effectiveness in meeting preset outcomes or goals; and longevity to the original plan. When teachers work collaboratively with policy makers to develop goals and strategies for an identified need and support each other in assessing

the progress and challenges to implementation, then reform efforts will likely survive and the three criteria for success will likely survive.

### **Recommendations for Further and Future Research**

After examining the major findings of this study and understanding the implications for action, recommendations can be made regarding furthering this research and future research in the following areas:

1. Replicate the current study using data from the other 18 elementary schools in the district who will be moving into year two of implementation in the 2016-2017 school year to determine if the findings are similar. Replication with all the elementary schools in the district will further research within the district regarding implementation of CHARACTERplus at the elementary level.
2. Replicate the study with all 30 elementary schools in the school district and modify the questions on the teacher survey regarding perceptions of CHARACTERplus reducing office discipline referrals and assess administrators' perceptions as well.
3. Replicate the current study in the middle and high school settings in the school district to determine if the findings are similar. Conducting the study in the middle and high school settings will provide additional data regarding the implementation of CHARACTERplus across the district systemically.
4. Modify this study to include students' perceptions. Student behavior is the focus of character education and soliciting their perceptions will provide further data regarding the impact of implementation and progress toward the preset goals and outcomes.
5. Conduct a longitudinal study with cohorts of students. One influence on building and district level student discipline data is the issue of mobility. The impact of reform

initiatives over time, such as CHARACTERplus, could be more solidified if the data followed the same students or monitored the length of time they have been involved in the reform initiative.

6. Modify the study to include parents' perceptions. Student behavior and learning at school will often transcend to the home environment and vice versa. Obtaining parents' perceptions about their child's character development will inform districts of additional stakeholder's views of character development and needed supports for students.

7. Conduct qualitative research of character education and how it is embedded into curriculum. Conducting a study of this nature would further research to support character education program development.

8. Conduct qualitative and quantitative research that could include interviews and observations, to identify effectively used methods of implementation of CHARACTERplus or other character education programs within the schools. This will assist district officials and principals in future leadership of character education programs.

9. Conduct research on effective evaluation tools of character education. This research could provide additional guidance for longevity of effective implementation and effectiveness of various character education programs.

10. Conduct a larger study across districts comparing the different types of character education programs and the number of office discipline referrals and those resulting in suspension.

11. Conduct a similar study with schools and include measures of academic achievement in relationship to office discipline referrals the impact of character education on both student discipline and student achievement.
12. Conduct a similar study in school districts located in rural and suburban areas to identify variables that impact successful implementation of character education programs.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools presented data that shows student discipline and the importance of programs that address problem behavior have been priority concerns for the public for the last four decades. Society has looked to public schools to assume large responsibility in addressing and assisting in the deterrence of violent crimes, rampant abuse of drugs, open displays of cruelty and a generalized display of disrespect (Hunt & Mullins, 2005). In response, the school districts have taken on the challenge by implementing character education programs.

CHARACTERplus was adopted by the school district of focus in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine if the implementation of CHARACTERplus influenced student discipline, specifically the number of office discipline referrals and the rate of suspension. The analysis of data showed that the number of office discipline referrals increased with implementation of CHARACTERplus while out-of-school suspensions decreased. The majority of teachers' perceptions of the influence of CHARACTERplus were not favorable. Overall, the findings from this study can be added to the knowledge and research base of CHARACTERplus and the implementation of character education programs in schools.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Certified Teacher Survey

Please complete each of the following questions. Your responses will be confidential. Thank you for your professional courtesy.		
1. Have you been a teacher at this building since the 2012-2013 school year?	YES or NO	If employee selects “NO” then they will be thanked for their participation. If they select “YES”, they will continue with the remaining questions.

Please click on the answers that apply to you.						
Demographics						
2. School of assignment	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
	School G	School H	School I	School J	School K	School L
3. Current grade/subject level taught (choose one)	Kindergarten	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
	PreK	Special Education	Art	Music	PE	ESL
	Counselor					
4. Number of years as a teacher	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26+
5. Number of years in this school	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26+

Using the scale, No problem (1) to Major problem (7), please click on the number that BEST answers the question.	Problem	2	3	4	5	6	7= Major Problem
6. To what extent is tardiness and skipping a problem for students in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. To what extent is bullying a problem for students in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. To what extent is drugs, alcohol, and tobacco a problem for students in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. To what extent is disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior a problem for students in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. To what extent is student behavior that results in office referrals a problem in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. To what extent is student behavior that results in suspension a problem in your classroom this year?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. To what extent was tardiness and skipping a problem for students in your classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. To what extent was bullying a problem for students in your classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. To what extent was drugs, alcohol, and tobacco a problem for students in your classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. To what extent was disrespect, defiance or authority, and disruptive behavior a problem for students in your classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. To what extent was student behavior that resulted in office referrals a problem in your classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. To what extent was student behavior that resulted in suspension a problem in your	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

classroom in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014?							
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<b>Using the scale, Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (7), please click on the number that BEST answers the statement.</b>	<b>1=Strongly Agree</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7= Strongly Disagree</b>
18. I have adequate training to handle student behaviors in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Think about the school-wide CHARACTERplus program implementation in your school as you read each statement below. Using the scale, Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (7), please click on the number that BEST answers the statement.</b>	<b>1=Strongly Agree</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7= Strongly Disagree</b>
19. CHARACTERplus has reduced problem behaviors in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for tardiness and skipping class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for bullying.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would write more student office referrals for disrespect, defiance of authority, and disruptive behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. If CHARACTERplus was not implemented, I would have more students with out-of-suspensions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Appendix B

TO: Elementary Teachers

FR: Kimberly Shaw

DATE: May 9, 2016

RE: Student Behavior Survey

Dear School A Elementary Teachers,

My name is Kimberly Shaw and I am a doctoral student at the University of Kansas in the School of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am completing a research study, as the principal investigator, to better understand the effectiveness of a proactive school-wide approach to student behavior. To gather data for my research, I am asking elementary teachers to complete a short survey.

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study that will entail your completion of a survey. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation is expected to take approximately ten minutes to complete. The content of the survey should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of the proactive school-wide approach to student behavior and rates of office referrals and suspensions. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. The online survey is anonymous; therefore your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. No identifiable information is requested therefore confidentiality of records will be maintained. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your anonymous response. To start the survey titled "Teachers' Perceptions of Behaviors" located in Survey Monkey, please click on the following link or copy and paste into an internet browser: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/tchrsurvey12345>

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone, email, or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old.

Thank you for your consideration of completing the survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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## Appendix C

TO: Elementary Teachers

FR: Kimberly Shaw

DATE: May 16, 2016

RE: Student Behavior Survey

Hello Colleague,

Last week, you received an email asking for your participation in a survey. This survey is designed to better understand the effectiveness of a proactive school-wide approach to student behavior. If you have already completed the survey, please accept this email as my sincere appreciation.

If by chance you have not completed the survey, I am asking for you to reconsider your participation. The survey should not take more than 5-7 minutes and is composed of 24 one-click response questions. It is confidential and anonymous.

Please see the original email below for more information. Once again, completing the survey indicates your willingness to participate. The link to the survey is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/tchrsurvey12345>

Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Shaw

## Appendix D

TO: Elementary Teachers

FR: Kimberly Shaw

DATE: May 20, 2016

RE: Please Participate in Student Behavior Survey

Dear School A Elementary Teachers,

Congratulations on completing another school year!

I am sending this email once more to ask those who may not have had time to complete the student behavior survey to please participate. As a reminder, the survey is anonymous, confidential, and should only take ~5-10 minutes to complete. The attached two emails provide additional information. If you have other questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Here is the link. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/tchrsurvey12345>

Again, thank you to those who have already completed the survey and for those of you who will consider participation today.

I hope you have a fantastic summer break!

Sincerely,

Kimberly Shaw