A COMPARISON OF CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND
THEIR EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT,
BEHAVIOR, AND ATTENDANCE

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether significant relationships existed between character education and the number of incidents of crimes and violence, attendance rates, and academic achievement in Florida public schools. Proponents of character education such as Lickona (1991) and Murphy (1998) posited that there was a positive correlation between teaching and practicing the six pillars of character education, and student achievement, and increased attendance. They also posited that there was a negative correlation between character education and incidents of crime and violence. The researcher acquired data in an attempt to determine whether or not the views of Lickona (1991), Murphy (1998) and others holding this view would yield similar results in the Florida public schools. The theoretical framework for the study was Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning.

The study was compiled between 2003 and 2004 based on data for the 1998-1999 school year and the 2002-2003 school year. These dates were chosen because they were the pre-

implementation year (1998-1999) and four years after the
character education mandate went into effect.

Data from 67 Florida counties were solicited and 10
counties selected as samples of effective character
education implementers and non-effective character
education implementers in their elementary schools.
Utilizing Statistical Package for Social Science (2004),
data were analyzed for statistically significant
relationships in order to confirm or negate the null
hypotheses. The tests utilized were repeated measures
ANOVAs.

The study found a statistically significant
relationship between those counties that effectively
implemented a character education program in their
elementary schools and student attendance, as compared to
counties that did not effectively implement a character
education program in their elementary schools. The study
did not find a statistically significant relationship
between those counties that effectively implemented a
successful character education program in their elementary
schools and student achievement, as compared to counties
that did not effectively implement a character education
program in their elementary schools. The study did not find

a statistically significant relationship between those counties that effectively implemented a successful character education program in their elementary schools and lowered incidents of crime and violence, as compared to counties that did not effectively implement a character education program in their elementary schools.

In all school districts studied, however, over the four-year period incidents of crime and violence were reduced, the absenteeism rate was reduced, and achievement had increased. This could have been due to the implementation of any type of character education program or it may have been due to other programs implemented in the Florida schools.

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the right paths and gave me the inspiration to try to
influence others.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Trends reflect that public schools are taking on the task of educating the whole child, in addition to teaching reading, writing, math, science, social studies, physical and vocational education. Character education has emerged as a focal point. Ten states, Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Nebraska, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia, introduced legislation requiring character education to be included in the curriculum (McElmeel, 2002). The 1999 Florida Legislator required each school district to provide a character education program, secular in nature, and similar to *Character First* or *Character Counts!* be introduced in elementary schools (Florida State Statute 233.061 (q)).

Character education encompasses a broad spectrum of moral development, which includes beliefs of the home and beliefs of the school curricula developers. Educators were reminded to be cognizant of student rights and personnel responsibilities regarding the teaching of character education. Published programs were established to meet the requirements set forth by legislators. Examples include

Character First (Character Training Institute, 1999) and

Character Counts! School districts, however, were given

autonomy toward creating their own character education

curriculum.

Significance of the Study

This study was initiated to assist public school

administrators with the development of character education

curriculum within their schools. In a memorandum from David

Mosrie to District School Superintendents dated July 30,

1999, Mr. Mosrie stated:

> The 1999 Legislation passed HB 365, amending Section
> 233.061, Florida Statutes, addressing required
> instruction, to require that a character development
> program be provided in the elementary schools, similar
> to *Character First* or *Character Counts!* Such programs
> must be secular in nature and must stress such
> character qualities as attentiveness, patience, and
> initiative. This legislation also amended Section
> 233.0612, F.S., addressing authorized instruction, to
> add ethics to the list of subjects a school district
> may teach (Florida Department of Education, 1999, ¶2)

Because of the Florida legislation and because of

society's escalating problems, especially incidents of

crimes and violence, it is important that schools teach

values and character in a meaningful way (Traiger, 1995).

Since it is difficult to shape moral conduct because the

process of moral shaping is enormously incremental,

cumulative, and complex (Wynne, 1989), the character

education programs chosen by school districts should be

carefully developed and implemented based on proven

techniques. According to Lickona (1993), the teaching of

human values and shaping of good character needs to be

restored to its historical place as the central desirable

outcome of the school's moral enterprise. Since A Nation at

Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), several

reports were written on what constitutes excellence in

education; included in these reports are many discussions

of the need to return to the moral purpose of teaching

(Fenstermacher, 1990).

As there is much agreement among legislators,

researchers, and educators of the need for character

education programs in schools, it is important that school

districts choose effective programs, programs that affect

issues such as crime and violence, attendance and academic

achievement. Schools only get one chance to accomplish this

task and they have limited resources with which to do it.

The researcher attempted to show the significance of not

only implementing character education programs, but

implementing these programs in a meaningful manner.

Statement of the Problem

Section 233.061 of the Florida Statutes deals with
required instruction in the Florida public schools. House
Bill 365, amending Section 233.061 of the Florida Statutes
has potentially far reaching effects, both inside and
outside of the classroom. To date, there is limited
information concerning the manner in which school districts
have implemented this bill, especially concerning changes
or additions to curriculum. In addition, the impact
character education in the Florida school districts has on
student achievement, attendance and discipline has not been
explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether
significant relationships existed between character
education and the number of incidents of crimes and
violence, attendance rates, and academic achievement in
Florida public schools. Proponents of character education
such as Lickona (1991) and Murphy (1998) posited that there
was a positive correlation between teaching and practicing
the six pillars of character education, and student
achievement, and increased attendance. They also posited

that there was a negative correlation between character
education and incidents of crime and violence. The
researcher acquired data in an attempt to determine whether
or not the views of Lickona (1991), Murphy (1998) and
others holding this view would yield similar results in the
Florida public schools.

<u>Research Questions</u>

This study was guided by the following five research
questions:

1. To what extent are the six elements of *Character
   Counts!* present in the identified school district
   character education plans?

2. Does the inclusion of character education in the
   curriculum affect the number of incidents of crime
   and violence in public elementary schools?

3. Does the inclusion of character education in the
   curriculum affect attendance in public elementary
   schools?

4. Does the inclusion of character education in the
   curriculum affect achievement in public elementary
   schools?

5. What quality control measures are in place to

ensure that the respective schools are following the district plan?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. There is no relationship between the number of incidents of crime and violence in the Florida elementary schools and the implementation of a comprehensive character education program adopted by the representative school districts.

2. There is no relationship between student achievement (as measured by increased standardized test scores) in the elementary schools and the implementation of a comprehensive character education program in the school districts selected for this study.

3. There is no relationship between student attendance in the elementary schools and the implementation of a comprehensive character education program in the school districts selected for this study.

Methodology

An introductory e-mail was sent to each district superintendent within the 67 school districts in the state of Florida. A request was made for a copy of their elementary school district character education plan. Also included were the following questions:

1. What is the name of the character education program your school district is following?

2. What materials are you utilizing?

3. To what extent are the six pillars of character education found in *Character Counts!* present in your program?

4. How closely are elementary schools in your district following the district character education program?

5. Have you encountered any parental resistance toward the design and implementation of the school district's character education plan?

6. If you have encountered parental resistance toward the character education plan, how does the school district or the individual school administrators deal with the types of parental concerns or refusal to cooperate in the program?

After receiving responses from participating school districts, it was determined which school districts developed a comprehensive program and/or used the already available curriculum in a comprehensive manner. The researcher separated responses according to where the school districts were located: the panhandle, northeast, central, southeast, and southwest. The purpose of such a division was to get an accurate geographical representation of how character education was being implemented throughout Florida. Districts that had the most comprehensive character education programs in the state and those school districts that did not have comprehensive district based plans were selected.

In order to determine which districts had comprehensive character education programs, the researcher analyzed each district character education plan. Several plans were quite extensive and included many facets. Other districts offered little more than one page of paper issued from the district office that contained nothing more than a list of suggested topics to be discussed that month.

Questionnaires were sent to all Title I elementary schools within each school district to determine the type

of character education program. Data were gathered on the following:

1. The number of disciplinary referrals since before the inception of the character education program through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

2. Attendance rates prior to the inception of the character education program and through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

3. FCAT scores prior to the inception of the character education program and through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

Utilizing SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences, 2000), data were analyzed to determine significant relationships to accept or reject the null hypotheses. The tests utilized were repeated measures ANOVAs. In addition, data were also analyzed for significant relationships between the implementation of each of the six pillars of *Character Counts!* within the curriculum and the variables of student attendance, achievement and disciplinary referrals.

Definition of the Terms

To clarify certain references throughout the study, the following terms are defined as follows:

G-d--The researcher's method of writing the name of the Supreme Being, due to the fact that these papers may be discarded in an unholy manner. According to Jewish tradition, one does not spell out the name of the Supreme Being in order not to transgress the commandment about not using His name in vain. Jewish tradition dictates that books and papers that contain the holy name, when no longer usable are buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Character Education--The Character Education Partnership (2003) defined character education as

> a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share. It is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts and states to instill in their students important core, ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. (¶1)

Six Pillars of Character Education--Primary character attributes of the *Character Counts!* curriculum: The lessons

teach and reinforce: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship.(Josephson Institute, 2004).

Moral Education--Incorporates how the individual, as well as society, develop standards of right and wrong.

Civic Education--How individuals and groups can become involved in the democratic processes of the school and community. Students are taught the principles and values of democracy. They are given the opportunity to learn about their civil rights and responsibilities and participate in the community in a manner that is consistent with the public good.

Service Learning--A form of character education that teaches students by actively involving them in addressing real community needs and tying these experiences to the classroom. In the 2002-2003 school year, many states made service learning an integral part of high school requirements. According to the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2004):

1. Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin permitted community service or service-learning activities to be applied toward high school graduation requirements.

2. Maryland required service-learning for high school graduation.

3. California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, Utah, and the District of Columbia encouraged the use of service-learning as a mechanism for increasing student achievement (Education Commission of the States).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 67 school districts throughout Florida that had implemented character education programs in their elementary schools. Fifty seven districts were not part of the study due to either geographic proximity or non-response to the researcher's inquiries.

Limitations

The limitation of the study was that respondents answered questions accurately and honestly. The survey did not take into account other programs (such as, but not limited to behavior modification and drug abuse programs) implemented concurrently with the character education programs. In no way should it be construed that all changes in school districts' data on discipline, attendance, and achievement were solely due to the various school districts' implementation of a character education program.

Other factors must also be considered, such as history,

socioeconomic changes, addition, and changes to

extracurricular programs, as well as other changes in

curriculum and changes in the demographics of the school

districts.

Theoretical Framework

Character education as it is known today is largely

based on Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory

of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg (1981), there are

six stages of moral judgment:

Level A. The Preconventional Level

Stage 1. The Stage of Punishment and Obedience:

In this stage the young child considers right to

be literal obedience to rules and authority,

avoiding punishment, and not doing physical harm.

a. The child will strive to avoid breaking

rules, for the sake of obedience and will

try not to do physical damage to people

and property.

b. The reasons the child will try to do right

are to avoid punishment and the superior

power of the authorities. From a social

perspective, the child has an egocentric point of view. The child does not consider the interests of others, recognize they differ from actors, and does not relate two points of view. Judgment is in terms of physical consequences instead of the well being of others. The authority figure's perspective is confused with the child's own perspective (Kohlberg, 1981).

Stage 2. The Stage of Individual Instrumental Purpose and Exchange: In this stage, right is considered to be serving one's own or other's needs and making fair deals. The right thing to do is to follow rules when it is to someone's immediate interest. It is acting to meet one's own interests and needs and letting others do the same. It is what is fair, an equal exchange, a deal or an agreement. The reason one is to do right is to serve one's own interests, but also to realize that others also have interests. Socially, a person at this stage can separate his or her own interests from those of authorities and others. He or she is aware that often

interests between self and others conflict, so
that right is relative. Rights are negotiated by
instrumental exchange of services, through
instrumental need for the other and the other's
goodwill, or through fairness (Kohlberg, 1981).

Level B. The Conventional Level

Stage 3. The Stage of Mutual Interpersonal
Expectations, Relationships and Conformity: In
this stage, right is playing a nice role. The
individual is now concerned about other people
and their feelings. He/she is loyal and
trustworthy, and motivated to follow rules and
expectations.

   a. The individual lives up to what is
      expected of him/her in one's role as son,
      sister, friend, etc. It is important to be
      "good" and have good motives. There are
      mutual relationships, the maintenance of
      trust, loyalty, respect and gratitude.

   b. The reason to do right is the need to be
      "good" in one's own eyes, as well as the
      eyes of others. At this stage, it is
      important to follow the Golden Rule.

Socially, a person at this stage is in relationships with other people. He or she is aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations. The person puts themselves in the other person's shoes.

Stage 4. The State of Social System and Conscience Maintenance: In this stage, right is considered doing one's duty in society, keeping the social order and maintaining the group or society's welfare.

a. Right is considered to be the fulfillment of the duties to which one has agreed. Unless laws conflict with other fixed social duties and rights laws are to be kept. It is important to be a contributing member of the group.

b. The reason the individual will do the right thing is to keep the institution going, or meet his or her obligations. From a social perspective a person at this stage is able to differentiate the societal point of view from interpersonal agreement or motives. This person takes

the viewpoint of the system that defines

roles and rules. Individual relations are

considered in terms of place in the system

(Kohlberg, 1981).

Level B/C. The Transitional Level (postconventional

but not yet principled): Shortly before reaching

Stage 5, choice is seen as personal and subjective.

Choice is based on emotions. Conscience is arbitrary

and relative. The perspective at this stage is of an

individual who can stand outside of the group. He or

she makes decisions without a generalized commitment

to the group.

Level C. The Postconventional and Principled Level:

Rights, values or principles that are agreeable to all

individuals composing the group are the foundation

upon which moral decisions are made.

Stage 5. What is considered to be right is to

uphold the basic rights, values and legal

contracts of a society, even when they conflict

with the concrete rules and laws of the group.

a. It is important to be aware of the fact

that people hold many different values and

opinions, and that most of these values,

opinions and rules are relative to one's
group.

b. The reasons that the individual does right
are generally based on feelings of
obligation to obey the law as one has made
a social contract to abide by the laws for
the good of all. The relationships of
family and friends and trust and work
obligations are contracts that were freely
entered into. The concern is that laws and
duties be based on rational calculation of
overall utility: the optimization of
goodness for the most people. Socially,
this perspective is that of a rational
individual who is aware of values and
rights before social attachments and
contracts. The individual considers the
moral and legal points of view, recognizes
that there is a conflict and finds
integration of the two difficult
(Kohlberg, 1981).

Stage 6. The Stage of Universal Ethical

Principles: At this stage, guidance is by

universal ethical principles that should be
followed by all humanity.

    a. Right consists of universal, ethical
       principles. Laws and social agreements are
       generally valid because they are based on
       those principles. If a law violates these
       principles, one should act in accordance
       with the principle. Principles of those of
       justice, which are not merely recognized
       values, but principles used to generate
       particular decisions.

    b. One does right because as a rational human
       being, one has seen the validity of
       principles and has become committed to
       them. Socially, the individual at this
       stage takes the perspective of amoral
       point of view from which social
       arrangements are grounded. It is the
       ability to recognize the nature of
       morality or respect for other persons as
       ends, not means (Kohlberg, 1981).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

<u>Introduction</u>

Students in the public schools of the United States of America come from many diverse backgrounds and religions. Since the earliest days of public education in this country there has been much confusion and conflict about the role of religious and moral education in the public schools. Throughout our history many groups have shaped moral, ethical and religious educational policy.

According to Dr. Thomas Lickona (1993), the concept of moral education is almost as old as the field of education itself. Agreeing with this sentiment was Ryan (1996) of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University. Ryan made the assertion that character education is not the school's latest fad, but rather it is the school's oldest mission. The inherent intent of the educational system was that character education be an integral part of a child's academic experience (Schaeffer, 1999).

Throughout history, most countries have had two great goals for education: to help young people become smart and to help them become good citizens (Lickona, 1993). Groups who advocated the promotion of moral and religious education in public schools have been quite vocal in their concerns. Equally vocal are those who view public schools as religion-free zones (The First Amendment Center, 1999).

In 1999, The Florida Legislature passed HB 365, which amended Section 233.061 of the Florida Statutes, to require that a character development program similar to *Character First* or *Character Counts!* be implemented at the elementary level. This legislation also required that character education be secular in nature and stress character qualities as attentiveness, patience and initiative. In 2002, Section 1003.42(2)(q) was expanded to include grades K-12 and stress the values of patriotism, responsibility, citizenship, kindness, respect, honesty, self-control, tolerance and cooperation.

The lines between the separation of character education and religious education, however, are not clearly drawn. Although divided into six main categories of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship, when subdivided into the lessons of

Character Counts! (a text commonly used in the public

schools) these pillars of character become further

subdivided into the following lessons:

Trustworthiness:
Be honest
Don't deceive, cheat or steal
Be reliable – do what you say you will do
Have the courage to do the right thing
Build a good reputation
Be loyal – stand by your family, friends and country

Respect:
Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule
Be tolerant of differences
Use good manners, not bad language
Be considerate of the feelings of others
Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

Responsibility:
Do what you are supposed to do
Persevere: keep on trying!
Always do your best
Use self-control
Be self-disciplined
Think before you act – consider the consequences
Be accountable for your choices

Fairness:
Play by the rules
Take turns and share
Be open-minded; listen to others
Don't take advantage of others
Don't blame others carelessly

Caring:
Be kind
Be compassionate and show you care
Express gratitude
Forgive others
Help people in need

Citizenship:
Do your share to make your school and community better
Cooperate
Stay informed; vote
Be a good neighbor Obey laws and rules
Respect authority
Protect the environment (Josephson Institute, 2004, ¶1-7)

Although not exactly spelled out, the above behaviors

are inherently religious values, many of which are

specifically mentioned in the world's major religions.

For example:

    Christianity: All things whatsoever ye would that men
    should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the
    law and the prophets (Matthew 7:1).

    Confucianism: Do not do to others what you would not
    like yourself. Then there will be no resentment
    against you, either in the family or in the state
    (Analects 12:2).

    Buddhism: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
    would find hurtful (Udana-Varga 5,1).

    Hinduism: This is the sum of duty; do naught unto
    others what you would have them to unto you
    (Mahabhrata 5,1517).

    Islam: No one of you is a believer until he desires
    for his brother that which he desires for himself
    (Sunnah).

    Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not do to your
    fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is
    commentary (Talmud, Shabbat 31d).

    Taoism: Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and
    your neighbor's loss as your own loss (TaiShang Kan
    Yin P'ien).

Zoroastrianism: That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself (Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5). (Teaching Values, 2004)

To call these values secular is to be less than totally honest since they are all based on religious standards. According to McClellan (1992), the foundation for the restoration of moral and ethical values to the schools was provided by ancient philosophies as well as religion. In addition, moral education examines how standards of right and wrong are developed. Furthermore, Haynes (1994) felt that it is up to the school community to identify the core values of the school. After consensus is reached, the school then decides which character traits should be fostered).

Lickona (1999) offered an additional attribute of cultivating virtue to character education. He contended that while virtue is good for the individual in that they are required to lead a fulfilling life, they are also good for the human community since they allow us to live together harmoniously. It is reasonable to expect that people of every religious faith, as well as people who have no religious faith all believe that virtues are an important foundation of our society as well as the basis of good character.

One of the reasons character education has been so embraced by communities of many different faiths and cultures is that it is built on our common moral ground. It stresses what unites us rather than what divides us. However, according to Lickona (1999), excluding religion from the public school curriculum is neither intellectually honest nor in the best interest of the public.

Since many values are shared cross-culturally, the character education movement has met with very little parent resistance. However, when character education programs are implemented it is important to bear in mind that different religions and cultural groups have varying beliefs and customs. Therefore, when working with public school children of diverse backgrounds the attitude adopted should be one of exploration and inquiry, rather than moralistic (McElmeel, 2002).

Moral and Religious Influences in Public Education

The history of public education in the United States began with The Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647. Thus, the concept of compulsory public education was conceived due to the religious influences of the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay. Because of a fear of children falling

into the hands of Satan if they did not learn how to read from Scripture for themselves, it was ordered that every township with 50 households hire a teacher to instruct the children in reading and writing. The Old Deluder Satan Act further stated that when a town reached a population of 100 hundred families, it was required to set up a grammar school where youth were to be given instruction that would prepare them for entrance to Harvard College. The Old Deluder Satan Act further provided that if any town did not comply with the provisions of this act for more than 1 year, the town would be required to pay the nearest school until such time as they complied with this order (Massachusetts, 1853).

Not only did The Old Deluder Satan Act require the establishment of schools, it also set the precedent for religious and moral education. The first Latin Grammar schools of Boston were established for the sons of certain social classes, in order to prepare them for leadership positions in church, state or courts. Latin and Greek languages and literature, as well as reading, writing, arithmetic, and the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation were studied (Miller, 1999).

The New England Town School in Boston used the Hornbook and The New England Primer to teach the close relationship between reading, religion and character education. The curriculum for these students included "An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth", "The Dutiful Child's Promises," and "The Duty of Children Toward Their Parents", which included lines about fearing G-d, honoring the King, honoring their father and mother, and keeping all of G-d's Holy Commandments.

Following the establishment of the Latin Grammar schools of New England, the middle colonies established schools that were sponsored by various religious denominations. In addition to reading, writing, arithmetic and practical education, religious education was also a fundamental part of the curriculum. In the South, however, the religious emphasis was Anglican (Church of England) and the religious supported the slave owners by providing only oral religious training to the slaves. Ministers spread the fear that literate slaves would soon be reading documents from the North, which encouraged rebellion and would pose a threat to the Southern family (Cheek, 1999).

In 1749, Benjamin Franklin established a plan for an English Grammar School in Philadelphia. Rather than Latin

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and religious studies, Franklin's schools taught English as well as scientific and practical skills. The schools were to be equipped with laboratories and workshops that contained maps, books, and globes. Emphasis was placed on practical and ethical elements of the skills and subjects that were taught. Although Franklin's ideas furthered the trends of the revolutionary and early national period, as well as being a precursor to America's future trends in education, the English grammar schools did not flourish. America was still too caught up in the classical religious traditions to be ready for this new policy (Meiss, 1999).

Between the years of 1830 and 1850, over a million Catholic immigrants arrived in the United States. During this period, the Protestants controlled the religious education offered by the public schools. The Catholics objected to the use of the King James translation of the Bible, which was being used in the public schools. When their request to use Catholic bibles and prayers for Catholic children was denied, the Baltimore Council prohibited Catholics from attending public schools, from using the Catholic Bible, and from singing sectarian hymns. Thus, the idea of the Catholic School System emerged (Kern, 1999).

Money to fund the Catholic schools was a problem. Governor William H. Seward of New York was willing to aid the parochial schools, but the Common Council, which was supported by the Protestant churches, rejected this. In Philadelphia, Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick asked if Catholic children could be allowed to read from the Douay Bible instead of the King James Bible (Kern, 1999). Although the School Board agreed, an outpouring of protests from Protestant newspapers and speakers led to rioting, the burning of Catholic churches, several deaths, as well as the general escalation of discrimination against Catholics (Kern, 1999).

In addition to the overt religious education being offered in the public schools of the mid 1800s, in 1883 the McGuffey Readers became the basal reading system for millions of Americans (Payne, 1999). Authored by the Reverend William Holmes McGuffey, the readers were very moralistic and presented the White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant as the model American. The content included in the series were history, biology, astronomy, zoology, botany, table manners, behavior towards family, attitudes toward G-d and teachers, as well as selections from the Bible (Payne, 1999).

During the period from the turn of the twentieth century through the end of the 1920s, the character education movement utilized elaborate codes of conduct and group activities to teach character. The "Children's Morality Code" emphasized the "ten laws of right living": self-control, good health, kindness, sportsmanship, self-reliance, duty, reliability, truth, good workmanship, and teamwork (Hutchins, 1917).

The Character Education Association, a private organization that was founded in 1911 by Milton Fairchild, sponsored national contests to see who could create the best morality codes and the best character education curriculum.

It was during that period, in the year 1918, that The Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education recommended the following principles: health, worthy home membership, command of fundamental academic skills, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time, and ethical character (Krajewski & Bailey, 1999).

A five-year study called The Character Education Inquiry was undertaken by the Institute of Social and Religious Research between 1924 and 1929 (Leming, 1993). This study was funded by John D. Rockefeller and conducted

by The Teachers College at Columbia University. Character-related behaviors of 10,865 youth in grades five through eight in 23 communities throughout the United States were studied, with emphasis on deceit and service (Leming, 1993).

> In schools where character education was taking place, the researchers created classroom situations that provided students with opportunities to cheat and to voluntarily engage in helping behavior. They found that the incidence of deceit varied widely in classrooms and schools and that deceit was specific to the situation; honesty in one situation did not predict well to another. Furthermore, they found no relationship between membership in organizations that purported to teach honesty and honest behavior. (p. 2)

Dewey was also skeptical of the character education process when he wrote "moral education in school is practically hopeless when we set up the development of character as its supreme end" (Dewey, 1916).

Because of the findings of The Character Education Inquiry and Dewey there was a general decline of interest in character education over the next few years. Concerning the research of Hartshorne and May (the primary researchers of The Character Education Inquiry) and John Dewey it should be noted that more recent and sophisticated research techniques, using aggregated data have revealed a much higher correlation between participation in character education classes and the probability that the students

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would continue to practice these values in other school contexts (Rushton, et al., 1983; Wynne, 1989).

In 1935, Harry McKown wrote his classic textbook, Character Education. This book covered all of the processes of school life including classroom activities, disciplinary procedures, personal contacts, and extracurricular activities. Each one of these processes were scrutinized for character-training potential and studied by those teachers-in-training who wanted an education in the teaching of character education (Murphy, 1998).

From the 1950s through 1966 character education curricula had just about disappeared from American public schools. However, in that year Lawrence Kohlberg (1966) published an article in the School Review that linked his cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning with the practice of moral education in schools.

Also, in 1966 Values and Teaching (Raths, Harmin & Simon) was published. This was the first published guide to the study of values clarification.

Largely due to the anti-war and anti-establishment movements of the 1960s, many American values such as respect for authority and rules, hard work, sexual restraint, and patriotism became questioned. It was no

longer fashionable for education institutions to promote values. Students were taught that the process of valuing was value-free and that there were no right or wrong answers (Murphy, 1998). The goal of values clarification was to get students to clarify their own values and beliefs and then act on those beliefs (Rath et al., 1966). With values clarification every value was relative. There was no true and right behavior, only one's own beliefs. Although many teachers continued to teach in a value-free way (since that was the way they were taught to teach), many former proponents of value clarification admitted that they were wrong in their beliefs and devaluation of traditional values (Harmin, 1988; Kirschenbaum, 1995).

The Values Clarification approach to moral education quickly became one of the most popular approaches and dominated the teaching of moral education well into the 1980s (Leming, 1993).

In the 1970s, Lawrence Kohlberg's (1975) theory of Cognitive Moral Development gained popularity. His research asserted that people progress developmentally through a series of moral stages, three levels with two stages in each level. According to Kohlberg, the stages of moral development were:

The preconventional level which is comprised of:

 Punishment and obedience orientation

 Instrumental-relativist orientation

The conventional level which is comprised of:

 Interpersonal concordance or "good boy-nice girl"

 orientation

 "Law and order" orientation

The postconventional, autonomous, or principled level which is comprised of:

 Social contract, legalistic orientation

 Universal-ethical-principle orientation.

Important to the understanding of the cognitive development theory was that cognitive development was important for moral development, and moral judgment was necessary for moral action. Neither moral judgment nor moral action was sufficient by itself. The development of moral reasoning toward increasingly complex concepts of justice was a necessary component of cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1975).

The community approach to the moral reasoning paradigm evolved out of Kohlberg's applications, first in prisons and later in schools. In this model morality is embraced by the democratic election of rules and norms and the

application of "master virtues of the community" such as caring, trust, collective responsibility, concern for fairness, and community (Power et al., 1989).

From the 1980s through the present time students were exposed to an increase in the number of sexual education and drug education movements that are concerned with social influences. Programs such as RESPECT and SADD were peer-centered and concerned with the social factors that cause pressure for students to engage in these behaviors. By teaching that abstinence is the only guaranteed way of avoiding the problems that indulgence can bring, such programs have enjoyed much success (Leming, 1993).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) provided much thought, focusing mainly on the notion that our nation was at risk due to the poor levels of attainment in academics of American students. This reform document stated, "It [our concern] also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people, which knit together the very fabric of our society" (p. 5).

In the 1990s, there was another resurgence in the development of character education programs in the public

schools. Societal pressures were taking their toll on the youth of America. Lickona (1993) presented the following statistics:

The National Center for Juvenile Justice issued a report that stated that 21 murders, 3,434 assaults, 1,735 robberies and 435 rapes were conducted by children under the age of 12.

According to the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, for the period of time between 1988 and 1989 there was a 10% increase in known cases of child abuse. By 1989, there were approximately 24 million reported cases of child abuse.

As reported by the National Coalition for the Homeless there were nearly three million homeless people living in the United States.

More than 300 United States colleges and universities reported incidents of racial violence and hostility between 1986 and 1991, as reported by the Institute Against Prejudice and hostility.

In addition to the above findings Lickona (1993), also noted that in a survey given to families of public school children in Baltimore, Maryland, parents spent an average of 2 minutes a day in "meaningful dialogue" with their

children. In the foreword to Murphy's (1998) book Character
Education in America's Blue Ribbon Schools, Lickona
presented more disturbing evidence for the need for value
education:

1. A survey by the Boston Globe in which more than one
   half of the ninth-graders in an affluent suburb
   found nothing wrong with stealing a compact disc or
   keeping money found in a lost wallet.

2. The acknowledgement by one half of United States
   teenagers that they are currently sexually active.(
   One half of these teenagers acknowledged having had
   four or more partners.)

3. In 1997, during her high school prom an 18-year old
   New Jersey girl gave birth to a baby boy in the
   school bathroom, strangled the infant and disposed
   of him in a trash can. This was only one of six such
   instances of "dumpster babies" reported that year.

4. The United States leads the industrialized nations
   in the murder rate for 15 to 24-year old males. This
   rate is seven times higher than Canada's and 40
   times higher than Japan's.

Based on studies by the Josephson Institute of Ethics
there was renewed concern about the increasing moral decay

of the American youth. Among other concerns, during the 1996-1997 school year, over 400,000 incidents of crime took place in public schools throughout the United States (Bernard, 1998). Secretary of Education William Bennett called upon school leaders to take an active part in the moral education of their students as did President Clinton, who 3 years later in his January 23, 1996 State of the Union address, challenged all schools to teach character education, good values and good citizenship (Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). President Clinton further stated that school administrators should refer to the Blue Ribbon Schools, schools that have won the National Award for Excellence. In an earlier speech in 1993, President Clinton referred to the winners of the Blue Ribbon Awards as representing what is best in American education. Clinton further stated that the winners of the Blue Ribbon Awards were producing world-class results by any rigorous measure and that the challenge was how to replicate them (Clinton, 1993).

Lest the reader think that the United States alone suffers from the lack of teaching character education, it is important to note that similar concerns exist in other democratic nations. Primarily reacting to the fatal

stabbings of a North London head-teacher, and the massacre

of 16 primary school children at Dunblane in Scotland, all

three political parties vying for a majority of the House

of Commons directed their comments about education to the

expectation that teachers should be contributing to a much

greater extent to the promotion of moral values appropriate

to the maintenance of an orderly and law-abiding society

(Haydon, 1997). Just as teachers do not operate in a

vacuum, neither does the decline of morality of the youth

of the United States.

Concerning American youth, Greenawalt (1996), in

response to a report entitled Code Blue summed up its

contents by stating, "the report stated that American

teenagers were less healthy, less cared for and less

prepared for life, than their parents were at the same age"

(p. 5).

Two national coalitions, The *Character Counts!*

Coalition and the Character Education Partnership became

thriving forces in the shaping of the character education

movement. Lickona (1996) argued that there were three

compelling reasons for schools to be engaged in character

education. They are as follows:

Good character is a necessity for individuals to become fully human. Through the building of strong hearts, minds and wills students will become more capable of work and love.

The schools themselves will become better places when they become the embodiment of caring communities which model the values on which good character is based.

Teaching character education is a necessary part of building a moral society.

In 2002, 17 states mandated that character education be included in their curriculum, with six more actively pursuing such legislation (McElmeel, 2002). In addition, seven states strongly encourage character education through legislation. Money for character education programs was provided by the United States Department of Education through its Partnership in Character Education Pilot Project. Authorized under Title X, Part A, Section 10103 of the Improving America's Schools Act (P.L. 103-382), since 1995, $27.5 million was distributed to 36 states and the District of Columbia (McElmeel, 2002).

Diversity of Character Education Perspectives

In an article entitled "Can We Be Good Without G-d?" Dennis Prager (Prager & Glover, 1993) noted over 15 years of responses from seniors in public high schools, to whom he asked the question of what they would do if their dog and a stranger were both drowning. Without hesitation, the overwhelming majority of these students responded that they would save their dog before the stranger because they love their dogs but did not even know the stranger. According to Prager, the only value these students considered was love. When the same question was asked to students at a religious school, the response was quite different. The majority of students reported that they would save the life of the stranger before they saved their dog because they believed that human beings are created in G-d's image and that dogs were not. According to Prager, (who admitted that even though he loves his dogs more than strangers, he would also save the life of the stranger before that of his dog). The reason for this choice was because religious people have a value system.

According to Glanzer (1998) students' beliefs about the world around them and the human beings who inhabit this world will strongly affect how they understand and apply

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such virtues as love. It is not a straightforward task to teach a list of virtues. Character education is influenced by many factors and a whole host of other beliefs connected to our world view (Nord, 1995).

Aristotle explained that children need to be taught and guided in order to understand virtue. He defined virtue as a state of character concerned with choice with regard to what is best and right (Murphy, 1998). Furthermore, intellectual virtue needs to be taught, whereas moral virtue is obtained as a result of habit. In order to live virtuously we must have the opportunity for action. Moral values are obtained by exercising them. "We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts" (McKeon, 1941, p. 1103b). Aristotle also stressed that it makes a tremendous difference that youth be given training in virtue from the youngest ages.

Lickona (1991) defined moral values as "values that tell us what we ought or ought not to do" p.38). He further noted that there were two categories of moral values. The first category was universal values. Universal values are concerned with fundamental human worth and dignity.

According to Lickona, we have a duty to teach, practice and enforce universal values.

The second category of moral values were non-universal. These values do not share the universality of obligation that universal values carry, however individuals or groups may feel personal obligations.

There is also a difference between moral and non-moral values in which even very young children can understand. Nucci (1989) found that in interviews with pre-kindergarten children they were able to distinguish between rules and values that were set up out of societal and classroom norms (i.e., not to talk in line), and those of a moral nature (i.e., not to hurt each other, or to tell the truth).

Murphy (1998) determined that the derivation of the word character was from the Greek word charakter, which means "enduring mark." It is the distinguishing qualities or principles that guide his or her behavior. It is character that influences how a person makes decisions and how that person will act or not act. In summary, it is the general way that a person deals with other people. Murphy (1998) made reference to Aristotle when she stated that there were three steps necessary to form one's character. They are:

1. Knowledge

2. The actual choice of the acts for their own sake

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3. The actions must be based on a firm and

   unchangeable character.

Similarly, Wynne and Walberg (1989) defined character as "engaging in morally relevant conduct or words, or refraining from certain conduct or words" (p. 38).

Since good character needs to be imparted, children must be directly instructed in virtuous behavior (Murphy, 1998).

Nord (1995) argued that we cannot separate our identities from our morality or our place within a community or tradition. It is our understanding of nature, complete with our beliefs about an afterlife, our hopes, fears, feelings of guilt, and our perceptions of how to deal with the sacred and ultimate questions of life that define our morality. However, most character education curricula avoid such topics.

If character education is to be more than externally imposed standards of conduct, educators should encourage children to develop an internal commitment to developing virtuous character habits. This should be done by teaching children to think critically, within their own frames of reference.

Effective character education programs teach values that transcend religious and cultural differences (Traiger, 1995). They should involve explicit teaching of the various virtues, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and provide examples of virtuous and morally correct behavior. This can be accomplished through real-life models or through literature (Watson, et al., 1989).

Since approximately one half of American parents do not consider it their responsibility to share their family values from one generation to another (Berreth & Scherer, 1993), children will search for values elsewhere. While in some cases the responsibility for teaching character education still is shared with religious organizations, neighborhood agencies and schools, the major responsibility of teaching character education is being transferred to teachers (Lesley & Biddle, 1996).

There is a certain expectation among the public that teachers must stand for and transmit society's values alongside their transmission of academics. They are still looked to as moral guides and models, with the expectations that their standards will perhaps be slightly above the rest of society – hence the sense of betrayal felt by society when teachers go on strike (Haydon, 1997).

Of course, if parents supported character education programs implemented in their schools, the jobs of teachers become that much easier and fulfilling. Most organizations that supported character education blatantly state that the job is not solely the school's or the organization's. In order to make a truly effective program work, the initiatives must be supported by families. Organizations such as The Community Action Network in Fort Dodge, Iowa have websites that include definitions and quotes that correspond to the six pillars of character education. They also offer suggestions for parents on how to develop these traits and lists of books that parents can procure which focus on these traits. *Character Counts!* proffers that parents are the most influential models of good character for their children, and that they must take every precaution to model the correct behavior (McElmeel, 2002).

Resistance to Character Education in Public Schools

There are some school administrators, educators and parents who believe that the development of character in children is not the job of the school. Among them is Alfie Kohn, who is the author of an article entitled "How Not To Teach Values." In this article Kohn criticized the

character education movement and stated that the values

espoused by the character education movement are based on

behaviorism, conservatism and religion (Etzioni, 1999).

Especially in the face of all the pressures put upon

schools today to conform to such mandates as the No Child

Left Behind Act, some educators, legislators and parents

are worried about the lack of academic substance in

character education curricula, and that character education

does little to raise the students' or schools' standardized

test scores. According to Wynne and Ryan (1997), these

views are completely unfounded as schools with successful

character education programs (in addition to their lowered

numbers of disciplinary referrals) have improved school

attendance, a decrease in the number of dropouts, and

increased performance scores on standardized achievement

tests.

However, it is the belief of Schaeffer (1999), Etzioni

(1998), Lickona (1999) and others that it is imperative to

focus on the roots of school violence as well as anti-

social behavior, and create school environments where these

types of behaviors cannot occur. According to Schaeffer,

school administrators who would not implement character

education programs are shirking their duty if they turn out children who are "brain smart" but not "heart smart" (p.1).

Since children are not born with the ability to make ethical decisions (Brooks & Khan, 1992), and many parents for one reason or another are not teaching their children how to make ethical decisions, it has (by default) become the responsibility of the school systems to fill this void. Our schools' deepest problems are reflections of society's social ills such as drug abuse, child abuse, poverty, unemployment and violence (Vincent, 1994).

During the course of the last 30 years, character education programs have evolved from the development of habits of character to programs that emphasize values and feelings. Since in many cases parents are not doing an adequate job of teaching such character traits as caring, respect, truthfulness and responsibility, Vincent (1994) claimed that parents wanted to leave the task of teaching these character attributes to the school, which would assist students to become responsible for not only their actions, but also to be respectful and caring toward others. Delattre and Russell (1993) had similar findings. Their research indicated that it is important to adults that children grow up to become responsible adults. In

addition Delattre and Russell came to the conclusion that

adults want children to be able to learn to feel, think and

act with respect for themselves and others.

Research by Wray (1996) showed evidence that character

education programs are successful in their efforts to bring

about positive behavior changes. Similarly, research by

Delattre and Russell (1993) indicated that when the moral

climate of the entire school changed for the better, and

when the adults in the school modeled the ideal behavior

and actions that they wanted the students to replicate,

this was by far superior to separate classes in

"character", held weekly or even daily.

Factors Surrounding the School and Community

Environment

The most successful character education programs do

not exist in a vacuum. These are the programs that not only

teach the pillars of character education but openly

practice them as well. One good example of this is

extracurricular activities such as sports. It is important

to extend the teachings of character education to practice

the old adage 'it's not whether you win or lose but how you

play the game.' If this is modeled in a meaningful way,

character will be shaped accordingly. Everything that a school does will affect character. It is the total environment of the child (whether it be on the sports field, in the cafeteria, in the classroom or after school) that determines the character formation of the child. Youngsters require self-discipline, the ability that comes from within, in order to commit to a task that they believe in and feel good about doing. In order for this to occur, however, they need the ability to incorporate into themselves the inner guiding voices that might have come from their parents, extended families, educators and others. The use of external and punitive punishments is not productive. Rather, it is the well-structured school that motivates them through educational role models, rules and tasks that provide clear guidelines. Accordingly, these guidelines must be reasonable, justified and firmly upheld (Etzioni, 1998).

Schaeffer (1999) seemed to be in total agreement with Etzioni when she stated that it is the goal of character education to provide our nation's youth with the tools they will need to mature into ethical and virtuous people. It is not in their or our best interest to frighten them into consequences they will receive, but rather because it goes

against their intrinsic nature. Especially in the wake of Columbine we need to think about the societal influences that might have been responsible for the gunmen's anti-social, murderous behavior. Among other reasons, the proliferation of mindless violence and sex in our culture, the ease with which a gun may be obtained, and the disintegration of the American family have worked together to produce the type of teenager who could and would perpetrate such a tragedy as Columbine.

Schaeffer (1999) was in further agreement about the need to make values a part of the school climate as well as being incorporated into academic subjects when she stated that,

> Service learning is a major part of most middle level and high schools that have a character education focus. It provides students with an opportunity to act on the values they are acquiring, the third key element of good character education-understanding, knowing and acting on the good. (p. 4)

A prime example of an integrated approach to character education, which involves the entire school and various facets of the community, is Community of Caring. Business leaders are also invited to participate. Founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the goals of the Community of Caring program are "to foster in staff and students: An increased sense of family and the responsibility of family

membership, an increased demonstration of respect for each other, a heightened sense of trust and moral consciousness, and an increased sense of individual responsibility." (Jones & Stoodley, 1999, p. 46)

The Community of Caring approach is one that acknowledges that there are many aspects in a person's environment that are going to affect their choices and behavior. It is only through a total approach of school and community that optimal change may occur. The values that are taught in the school are reinforced in the community and vice-versa. In addition, The Community of Caring approach tries to make every child feel personally connected to at least one adult in the school.

To achieve the four goals of Community of Caring, there are eight essential components. They are comprised of teacher and staff training, a site facilitator, a coordinating committee, a comprehensive action plan, values across the curriculum, student forums and class meetings, family and community involvement, and service learning. Because young people need strong role models, their school and community should be providing these examples in the adults the students come into contact with every day. If these adults do not provide good examples of character the

students will look elsewhere, such as their peers and the media (Krajewski & Bailey, 1999).

With everyone working together to integrate values, "the goal is for students to accept responsibility for themselves and their future. They grow toward adulthood with a clear sense of purpose, motivated by an understanding of community good, not self-centered individualism" (Jones & Stoodley, 1999, p. 50).

The holistic approach to values was also shared by Evelyn Holt Otten (2000) in a paper she simply titled "Character Education." The ideal way to teach character education is by connecting the moral dimension of education to the social and civic areas in the lives of students. Society's values and attitudes should be reinforced in the school as well as the community. Since it is society that determines what will or will not be modeled, it naturally follows that morals are "caught, not taught," and "classroom life is saturated with moral meaning that shapes students' character and moral development" (Ryan, 1996, p. 75).

The multiyear field study of moral life within schools done by Ryan (1995), in which he first concluded that morals were not taught but rather "caught" presumes the

ideal model for character education in the classroom. The successful classrooms were those classrooms that were saturated with moral meanings. These occurrences shaped the students' character and moral development.

Cole(1997) recognized the fact that schools are an excellent place to learn good moral behavior by example, since schools are generally a child's first opportunity to join a community outside his or her family. The child becomes a participating citizen while using the knowledge he or she is acquiring to assume responsibility in their everyday school lives.

Furthermore, Breiner (1993) asserted that schools and society usually have the same goals for children. Earlier findings of Ryan (1993) indicated that schools continue to provide opportunities for children to discover the important things that they will need to know, as they prepare for their futures as citizens and good workers.

Legal Issues

In 1854, in Maine, in the case of Donahoe v. Richards (1854), the State Supreme Court decided that a School Board had the right to expel a child from school for refusing to read the Bible used by the school. In turn, this led to

protests and outpouring of indignation in the New England

communities (Kern, 1999). Almost 70 years later, religious

tolerance had not improved very much. In 1922, spurred on

by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Scottish Rites

Masons, the Oregon school system decided to "Americanize"

their schools by requiring that all children between the

ages of eight and sixteen attend public schools. The only

students excused from this law were those who were limited

by their physical conditions, those who lived more than

three miles from the nearest road, and those children who

had already completed the eighth grade. Parents who did not

comply with this law faced fines of $100 dollars and up to

30 days in jail. This law was challenged in 1925 by the

Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, an

order of Catholic nuns, and a private military school. A

Supreme Court unanimously declared that Oregon could not

constitutionally compel all school children to attend

public schools. Justice McReynolds wrote that a state law

that requires all children to attend public rather than

private or parochial schools violates the Fourteenth

Amendment due process guarantee of personal liberty.

McReynolds further stated that implicit in this liberty is

the right of parents to choose the type of education that

they want for their children (Ort, 1999).

During the 1960s the Supreme Court heard two cases

involving school sponsored prayer and Bible reading. In

Abington Township v. Schempp (1963), and Engel v. Vitale

(1962), the Court found that the Establishment Clause

allowing students to be excused from school-sponsored

prayer and Bible reading was insufficient. School-sponsored

prayer and Bible reading are unconstitutional. However,

instead of answering all the questions concerning religious

activities in the public schools, this ruling stimulated

years of controversy over the separation of church and

state in the public school system. Following the Supreme

Court's 1992 decision in Lee v. Weisman (1992) that struck

down clergy-led invocations and benedictions in public

school graduations, student-initiated prayer became a

popular way of moving around the law. Because of societal

pressures, school authorities, parents and students are

finding creative ways to include prayers in graduation

ceremonies and other school related activities (McCarthy,

2001). In this vein, there are those who are concerned that

the addition of character education programs is nothing

more than a thinly veiled attempt to bring religious

education back into the public schools, as well as to coerce students into praying according to a favored religion.

Almost in direct opposition to the Lee v. Weisman (1992) ruling is the federal Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), which prohibits the use of federal funds to prevent voluntary prayer and meditation in public schools. Alabama and Mississippi's laws allowing student-initiated prayer at all public school activities were struck down, however, as sweeping too broadly; only laws allowing student-led graduation prayers were upheld (McCarthy, 2001). In Doe v. Madison School District (1999), the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a Florida school district's policy in which seniors were allowed to decide whether to have student-led messages included in the graduation ceremony. However, various federal appellate courts have reached different conclusions concerning policies allowing students to vote on whether to allow student-led prayer. Although there was much popular support of this practice, in 2000 the Supreme Court decided in Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe (2000) that a Texas school district's policy that allowed student-led prayer before football games was in violation of the

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Constitution. The Supreme Court further held that at
school-sponsored events, religious messages given by
speakers representing the student body and under the
supervision of faculty could not be construed as private
speech; such statements are not only perceived but actual
endorsements of religion, and that is a violation of the
Establishment Clause. There is still much debate over the
limits of student-initiated religious expression in public
education (McCarthy, 2001).

In 1980, in Stone v. Graham (1980), the Supreme Court
found Kentucky's law, which authorized the posting of the
Ten Commandments in public schools, to be unconstitutional.
However, in the year 2000, a few states were considering
legislation authorizing the posting of the Ten Commandments
in courts, schools and other public buildings. Some of
these states have in fact enacted these proposed
legislative acts (Walsh, 2000a).

On June 11, 2001 the United States Supreme Court ruled
that it is a violation of the rights of free speech when a
religious group is barred from using school facilities,
while other nonreligious groups are allowed access to the
same facilities for their after-school programs. In the
case of Good News Club v. Milford Central School (2001),

Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that by allowing the religious club into its "limited public forum," the district would not be in violation of the First Amendment's prohibition against government's establishment of religion (Walsh, 2001b).

This case has sparked considerable debate over tolerance of religion in the public schools. In a dissenting opinion, Justice Souter wrote that "It is beyond question that Good News intends to use the public school premises not for the mere discussion of a subject from a particular, Christian point of view, but for an evangelical service of worship calling children to commit themselves in an act of Christian conversion" (Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 2001). Because of the Supreme Court decision, the tiny Milford School District, with a total student population of only 530, is considering closing its kindergarten through twelfth grade school building to any outside group, including the local 4-H club which at the time of the ruling met right after school.

The courts have also ruled that teachers do not have the right to pray with or in the presence of students during the school day. However, if a group of teachers wishes to meet for prayer or study during their free time

during the school day (in a spot that is not accessible to students) they may do so. Also, once their school day is over, teachers may teach or otherwise participate in their religious community as long as they do not use their position in the public school to promote their outside religious activities (The First Amendment Center, 1999, p.7).

Concerning religious displays and celebrations of religious holy days, several issues surfaced in the decade between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, a New York Federal District Court prohibited the display of a religious painting in a high school auditorium (Joki v. Board of Education of Schuylerville Central School District, 1990). Similarly in 1994, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals declared it unconstitutional to display a portrait of Jesus in a public high school (Washegesic v. Bloomingdale Public Schools, 1994).

According to the First Amendment Center, it is permissible to use religious symbols only as a resource to show examples of religious or cultural heritage. They may only be displayed temporarily and as part of the academic lesson being studied. It is a student's prerogative to create artwork with religious symbols, but teachers should

take care not to even suggest the use of such symbols (The
First Amendment Center, 1999).

In 1993, the New Jersey Federal District Court
permitted the closing of schools on religious holy days,
i.e., Christmas and Hanukkah, because the court reasoned
that by doing so, it would broaden students' sensitivity
toward diversity, as well as their knowledge of the history
of religion in civilization (Clever v. Cherry Hill
Township, 1993). On the other hand, the Sycamore School
District in Ohio of February 2000 was forced to amend their
school calendar, which had for the past few years closed
their schools on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and
Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. The school
district's justification for the school closings was that
attendance was so low on those days that it was
unproductive to hold classes. However, pressure from Muslim
groups and the American Civil Liberties Union, as well as
the filing of a lawsuit by these organizations, forced the
board members to vote four to one to rescind their decision
to close the public schools on these Jewish holy days
(Sandham, 2000).

It is generally agreed upon that it is acceptable for
schools to teach about religious holidays, such as how and

when they are celebrated, but teachers may not use the occasion for the celebration of holidays within the classroom. In addition, teachers may not use the study of religion as an occasion to proselytize their own religious beliefs. In addition, teachers may wear non-obtrusive religious jewelry, such as a cross or a Star of David, but should not wear clothing with proselytizing messages (The First Amendment Center, 1999). In addition to teachers not being allowed to proselytize in the public schools, neither do students have a First Amendment right to proselytize classmates in presentations. Schools have the right to censor class projects in order to be certain that religion is not being promoted (McCarthy, 2001). However,

> Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school. (U. S. Department of Education, 1995, ¶1)

Students may gather in informal settings such as cafeterias or hallways to pray, but these gatherings are subject to the same rules of order that apply to speech in these locations. In addition, these prayer meetings do not give students the right to have a captive audience listen,

or compel other students to participate (The First

Amendment Center, 1999, ¶1).

Legislative Enactment and the Fine Line Between Character Education and Religion

In 1984, Congress passed the Equal Access Act (EAA).

Under the EAA, if a public secondary school that receives

federal funds provides "a limited open forum for non-

curricular student groups to meet during non-instructional

time, it cannot deny access to specific student groups

because of the religious, political or philosophical

content of their meetings" (McCarthy, 2001, p. 248). If the

focus of these meetings has a religious orientation, school

employees may attend only as non-participants in order to

maintain discipline. Public secondary schools may still

choose to not establish a limited open forum and therefore

only allow access to the school during non-instructional

time to curriculum-related student groups. In addition,

even if the school does allow an open forum, the

administration would have the authority to curtail meetings

that would disrupt educational activities. Under the EAA,

even if public secondary schools allow just one non-

curricular student group to meet, they must allow access to all non-disruptive student groups (McCarthy, 2001).

The philosophy of the United States Supreme Court during the 1980s was that of allowing governments to restrict religious freedom as long as the religious limitations were distributed equally among all faiths. In response to this philosophy, more than 60 religious organizations and civil liberties groups came together to form the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion. Included in this group were representatives of most of the major religions of the United States as well as formerly bitter enemies such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Concerned Women for America. Also included were the Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Traditional Values Coalition. By the year 2001, the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion has grown to include 72 organizations that have opposing views on just about every topic (Religious Tolerance, 2001).

Through lobbying and well-planned political maneuvers, the coalition promoted The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, also known as the RFRA. This Act required the government to stop limiting religious freedom unless there was a compelling societal reason, and if religious freedom

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needed to be restricted government must choose the least intrusive means of doing so. There were only a few groups who actively opposed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the primary one being the American Atheists. The Atheists were concerned that the RFRA gave special privileges to churches, mosques, synagogues, and other sectarian organizations. On October 27, 1993, the House of Representatives approved the bill unanimously, and on November 3, 1993 the Senate passed it 97 to 3 with no abstentions. On November 16, 1993, President Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law. Since 1993, many legal cases made effective use of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. However, on June 25, 1997, the United State Supreme Court declared the Act to be unconstitutional. Stating that the RFRA violated the principle of separation of church and state by preferring "religion over irreligion," Justice John Paul Stevens found himself in agreement with Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Justice Antonin Scalia and Justice Clarence Thomas. The majority opinion written by Justice Anthony Kennedy stated that the RFRA was "so out of proportion to a supposed remedial or preventative object that it cannot be understood as responsive to, or designed to prevent,

unconstitutional behavior." Rather, it was an attempt to produce a "substantive change in constitutional protections, proscribing state conduct that the Fourteenth Amendment itself does not prohibit . . . [and it is a] . . . considerable congressional intrusion into the States' traditional prerogatives and general authority to regulate for the health and welfare of their citizens" (Religious Tolerance, 2001).

Effectiveness of Character Education Programs

Some of the claims that have been made about character education programs are that they reduce disciplinary problems both inside the school as well as outside the school. Vandalism, fighting, and shoplifting are some of the deviant behaviors that have diminished in schools throughout the United States. Additionally, it is quite common for school dropout rates to substantially decrease as a result of a well implemented character education plan. School suspension rates have declined as a result of character education programs as well. Furthermore, successful character education programs often produce higher academic success stories as evidenced by an increase

in the number of honor roll students and higher reading scores (Schaeffer, 1999).

According to a three-year study on the effectiveness of Community of Caring, the Center for Health Policy Studies of Columbia, Maryland, which included over 1,700 students in school systems across the United State the following results were found:

1. Community of caring shaped students' personal values on common Community of Caring themes.

2. Schools reported an increase in the strength of values in terms of helping others.

3. Schools reported that students paid more attention to health issues.

4. The strengthening of family relationships was reported.

5. Peer relations were reported to last longer.

6. Conclusions included that Community of Caring is:

    a. An effective strategy to promote the delay of sexual activity and prevent pregnancy among students

    b. An effective strategy to delay the onset of sexual activity and other negative behaviors

of those most at risk for those types of

behaviors

c. An effective strategy to prevent alcohol and

drug use

d. Instrumental in lowering the number of school

dropouts. (Jones & Stoodley, 1999, p. 50).

A Model for Effective Character Education Programs

Just as Covey (1989) identified the Seven Habits of

Highly Effective People, Lickona (1998) identified the 11

principles that must be incorporated in order to have a

highly effective character education program. Although

there are many effective (and varied) programs operating

throughout Florida, all of them contain the following

components:

1. An effective character education program explicitly

identifies and takes a public stand on core ethical

values such as caring, honesty, fairness,

responsibility and respect for self and others. It

is made explicitly clear that these basic human

values reach across all religions, transcending

religious and cultural differences, and are

expressions of our common humanity.

2. It is important to recognize that as the students
   and community grow together in character
   development, their understanding of the core values
   will become increasingly refined. In turn, they
   will develop a deeper commitment to incorporating
   these values into their own lives, and behaving
   according to this value system.

3. Effective character education programs incorporate
   a proactive approach as well as introspective
   approach. Program developers and participating
   stakeholders are not above the program, but instead
   realize that every one of their actions will be
   noticed by others and will affect their character
   development. Furthermore, opportunities for
   character development do not occur randomly, but
   are planned for. "A comprehensive approach uses the
   teacher's example, the instructional process,
   assessment, management, relationships with parents,
   and so on, as opportunities for character
   development" (Lickona, 1993; Schaps et al., p. 53).

4. The environment of the school must be a model of
   caring.

5. Children must be given many and varied

opportunities to develop character traits such as fairness and responsibility in their everyday lives. It is through real life experiences such as working cooperatively, reaching consensus in a group, cooperatively performing service projects, and brainstorming as to how they can play together without fights, that they can internalize their understanding of how to practice the moral skills and behavioral habits that will be needed to successfully take them through life.

6. The character education curriculum should be meaningful and challenging, yet at the same time it needs to address all students' abilities and learning styles.

7. When character education programs are designed, it should be kept in mind that the ultimate goal is the strong internalization of the lessons. Although external rewards play a significant part in the beginning phases of the program, a weaning effect should take place so that the students will ultimately do what their moral judgment tells them is right, solely for the sake that it was the right thing to do, and not because they will receive some

sort of prize or reward.

8. All stakeholders in the school community must realize that they are role models and therefore must adhere to the core values of their particular school's character education program. This includes not only teachers and administrators, but secretaries, bus drivers, aides, cafeteria workers, etc. Professional development opportunities for adults as well as the opportunity to work collaboratively and participate in decision-making are critical. If the adults who come into daily contact with the students do not have the opportunity to experience mutual respect, cooperation and fairness in their working environment, they cannot be expected to effectively communicate those values to the students. Along with these opportunities, there is a need for frequent meetings to examine and revise the character education program in order to enhance what works and change what does not work. In addition, new curriculum should be designed that deals with new issues and concerns that were not previously addressed or only partially addressed.

9. A strong character education program must have a leader who will champion the initiative, as well as one or more committees to deal with long range planning and proper implementation.

10. The mission statement of the character education program must explicitly state that it is the parents who are the very first and therefore the most important teachers to impart moral development to their children. Parents need to be included on all character education planning committees and the schools must reach out to those parents who have estranged themselves from the school and community. In addition, the character education programs become infinitely more effective when the wider community, such as business partners, churches, synagogues, mosques, government and the media are given a chance to participate.

11. Continual assessment is an integral part of an effective character education program. Specifically, three specific areas need to be addressed. They are:

a. The character of the program – in other words is the community becoming more caring?

b. Has the staff shown growth in their ability and commitment to teach character education?

c. Has the character of the students changed, or are the children showing growth and acting as members of a caring community? (Lickona, 1993; Schaps & Lewis, 1998).

As evidenced by many positive changes in the South Carolina school system, when teachers, administrators and counselors implement solid character education programs tremendous improvements occur in schools (Nielson, 1997). When structured properly, started in the early grades, developed into integrated areas, and focused on values and moral growth, character education programs can make a significant impact on all those involved in the school community. Nielson concurred that schools do not exist apart from society; schools mirror society. Since there is a large segment of children who are not exposed to adults who have a positive influence on them, it becomes the task of the schools to fill that void.

As teachers and administrators are encouraged to embrace workshops featuring Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly

Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic (Fireside,

1989), the character education movement will continue to

gain momentum.

Implications for the Future

On December 3, 1999, a Louisiana law allowing daily

spoken prayer by students and teachers in public schools

was challenged by the Americans United for Separation of

Church and State and the American Civil Liberties Union of

Louisiana. A federal district court upheld the rights of

these groups to pray out loud in the school setting.

According to the Reverend Barry W. Lynn, executive director

of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the

DOE v. Ouchita Parish School Board decision "should help

put a stop to the trend of politicians meddling in the

religious lives of Americans . . . Families, not

legislators, have the right to make decisions about

children's upbringing" (Americans United, 2001). Now known

as Doe v. Foster, the case was scheduled to be heard on

October 3, 2001 in the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals

in New Orleans. According to lead counsel for Americans

United, Ayesha Khan, "This statute fans the flames of

division and intolerance by throwing a match onto the

incendiary mix of prayer, politics, and the public schools. Legislators should spend their time and energy putting fires out, not spreading them" (Americans United, 2001).

States that have made efforts to mandate a moment of silence for prayer or meditation into the public schools include Virginia, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington, and New Hampshire. Of these states, Virginia was the only one to have the bill signed into law. Bills promoting the display of The Ten Commandments in public schools were passed by South Dakota, Indiana, and Kentucky. In Oklahoma, religious advocates tried to pass a law requiring disclaimers in all science texts avowing creationism, but it never passed a conference committee (Americans United, 2001).

Although public schools initially were created as an answer to religious need, over the history of the past few hundred years they have almost become havens of separation between church and state. As political pressure from religious groups has mounted, large portions of the division have been disappearing. According to a survey released in January 2001 by Public Agenda, most Americans would like to see a moment of silence being observed in the public schools, but would rather schools stayed away from

nondenominational or overtly Christian prayers. However,

74% of Americans polled agreed that school prayer teaches

children that faith in religion is important. Supporters of

character education are in agreement. In addition, 60% of

those polled do not agree that prayer in school is a

violation of separation between church and state. However,

57% of those polled said that school prayer was unfair to

parents who believe that they should decide what their

children should learn about religion (Walsh, 2001c). This

is the same group of parents who might argue against a

character education curriculum in which they have not been

given a chance to have input.

Because of these many conflicting attitudes we are

constantly creating lawsuits and more legislative acts. The

courts are increasingly being bombarded with First

Amendment questions. Political, religious and civil

liberties groups all lobby for their own political gains.

However, in every school district throughout Florida the

response to the implementation of a character education

program has been met with no resistance from parents.

In addition to the monumental task that the Justices

of the Supreme Court have before them, it will be a

balancing act for school leaders to set policy that is

consistent with the guiding principles of the religion clauses of the First Amendment. "The law alone cannot answer every question. Teachers and administrators, working with parents and others in the community, must work to apply the First Amendment fairly and justly for all students in our public schools" (The First Amendment Center, 1999, p. 1).

Since there is an emerging consensus that the "exclusion of religion from the public school curriculum is neither intellectually honest nor in the public interest" (Lickona, 1999, p. 4), various groups including the People for the American Way and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State are urging a restoration of religion to its rightful place in the study of history and culture (Wallace & Williams, 1997). Along these lines, Lickona (1999) suggested seven methods of incorporating character education into the curriculum "in ways that would recognize religion's contribution to our culture, support the process of student character development, and honor the First Amendment" (p. 4). They are:

1. Teaching the history of the role of religion in the founding of our government as well as the moral beginnings of our nation. As an example, teachers

should mention that the Declaration of Independence (which provides the moral framework for our Constitution) asserts that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights and that it is because our human rights are G-d given, that the government cannot take them away.

2. Teaching that the major social reform movements of the United States from the abolition of slavery to the civil rights movement – have been inspired by a religious vision that life is sacred, that we are all equal in the sight of G-d, and that we are children of a common creator who calls us to live in harmony and justice" and that "the persecution of those who are different is not the practice of religion; it is the betrayal of religion." (Lickona, 1999, p.5).

3. Teaching students to understand the role of religious motivation in the lives of the important individuals who severely impacted both ancient and modern times.

4. Including the role of religious values when constructing specific curricula, such as the teaching of AIDS. For example, Henry Huffman

remembered searching for a good AIDS curriculum
when he was an assistant superintendent for a large
suburban school district. The committee examined
numerous print and video resources in which teens
gave their reasons for abstinence. In none of these
resources did a single student mention religion as
their reason from abstaining from pre-marital sex.
However, we have seen from the research that it is
often an adolescent's religion that deters them
from sexual activity. All of the major religions
say that sex is "a very big deal indeed. It can
create a new life, an immortal soul, a person with
an eternal destiny. Exposure to such visions would
contribute to the religious literacy of all
students, religious and nonreligious alike. By
exposing students to the visions of religion it
would help counter the trivialization of sex that
pervades our society. Huffman observed that "a
curriculum's total exclusion of a religious
perspective fails to meet the Supreme Court's test
of neutrality toward religion." (p. 5).

5. Encourage students to make use of their
   intellectual, cultural and religious resources when

they consider social issues and make personal moral

decisions. For example, the major world religions

"all speak for the divine imperative to care for

the less fortunate…In a unit on social justice,

students would do well to read the statements of

religious leaders on the scandal of poverty in the

midst of plenty . . ." (p. 5).

6. Encourage students to consider the question of

whether there is such a thing as moral truth. In

our present culture many students believe that

there are no moral absolutes. Today's students have

readily embraced the philosophy of moral

relativism. However, according to philosopher Peter

Kreeft, "objective truth, whether it is scientific

truth, historical truth, or moral truth, is truth

that is independent of the knower." (Kreeft, 1994,

p. 363) Lickona (1999) further stated:

> That Lincoln was President during the Civil
> War is objectively true, whether I know it
> or not. That adultery is wrong, that slavery
> is wrong, that child abuse is wrong, that
> torture is wrong, and that the unjust taking
> of innocent human life is wrong are moral
> truths – even if many people do not seem to
> know it. (p. 7)

Additionally, according to Lickona (1999), some

ways that humans behave are better than others,

such as generosity versus selfishness, faithful
versus unfaithful, and self-controlled versus
reckless. He stated that it is our life task to
develop our personal character and one of the best
places to learn how to do this is in schools where
we can:

> learn what is true and right and good, and
> then conform our conscience and character to
> that standard. It has become a cultural
> cliché that we should 'follow our
> conscience,' but there is a prior moral
> duty: to form our conscience correctly.
> (p. 7.)

7. Encourage students to think about such topics as
what is the purpose of our lives? How does that tie
in with happiness? Can we be truly happy and
fulfilled if we are not living up to that purpose?
Where do we come from and where are we going? A
surprising number of students have never even
thought about these issues, including those who
profess belief in a higher power. A good character
education program should also have students
consider the following questions:

  a. How does one achieve a fulfilling life?

  b. Is there more to human nature than merely
     being satisfied by seeking pleasure?

c. How has humanity dealt with these questions throughout history?

d. How have philosophers, religious and nonreligious throughout the ages dealt with such matters?

e. From our own experiences and that of those around us what conclusions can we draw about our interactions with other people and our need for fulfillment?

f. At people approach the end of their lives, from what experiences in their lives do people draw their sense of fulfillment? (p. 8.)

Many schools shy away from these types of questions out of fear of engaging religious responses. However, Lickona (1999) argued that this is not an educationally valid reason to avoid these most important questions in life. He furthermore stated that "In the final analysis character development needs to be grounded in a world view that gives life meaning and direction. Without such a vision, the quest for character is rudderless" (p. 8).

In addition to *Character Counts!* other quality character education initiatives are available. Some school districts have developed excellent character education

programs that suit their needs by borrowing from diverse sources or replicating other programs and tailoring it to their populations.

Grant money is available from The Partnerships in Character Education Pilot Project. The Character Education Partnership disseminates information about the National Schools of Character Awards Program. The Texas Building Character Program is another example of an organization that helps schools incorporate opportunities to utilize character education into their curriculum.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the
effectiveness of mandating character education in the
Florida public schools as it relates to attendance, school
discipline, and school achievement. Additionally, the
researcher purported to make observations as to the way
school districts around the state have complied with the
legislation. Also, it was the intent of the researcher to
provide a sound model of character education that schools
may replicate.

Procedural Methods

The first step in the study was an introductory e-mail
sent to the superintendents of all 67 school districts in
the state of Florida. The researcher requested the
superintendents to forward the research questions to the
person in their school district responsible for the
implementation of the state mandate to include character

education in each district's public elementary schools. The research questions forwarded were as follows:

1. What is the name of the character education program that your school district is using?

2. What materials are you using?

3. To what extent are the six pillars of character education found in *Character Counts!* present in your program?

4. How closely are the elementary schools in your district following the district character education program?

5. Have you encountered any parental resistance in the design and implementation of the school district's character education program?

6. If you have encountered parental resistance to the character education plan how does the school district or the individual schools' administrations deal with these types of parental concerns or refusal to cooperate in the program?

In addition, copies of the elementary school districts' character education plans were requested. After receiving responses from the school districts that answered the questions, it was determined which school districts had

developed a comprehensive program and/or were using the already available curriculum in a comprehensive manner.

The second step was to separate responses according to where the school districts were located, according to the five tourist regions of Florida: southeast, panhandle, northeast, central and southwest, in order to get an accurate geographical representation of how character education was being implemented throughout the public schools of Florida.

The third step was the selection of sample school districts. School districts that had the most comprehensive character education programs in the state and school districts that did not have comprehensive district-based plans were selected. School districts selected for the study as districts that have comprehensive character education programs were:

Flagler County (Northeast)

Broward County (Southeast)

Seminole County (Central)

Bay County (Panhandle)

Sarasota County (Southwest)

In addition to selecting the above counties based on the materials sent to the researcher, the selections were

confirmed by Ralph Ricardo, Social Studies Program Specialist, at the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Standards, in a reply e-mail to the researcher.

The counties selected as not having particularly comprehensive character education programs were:

Nassau County (northeast)

Palm Beach County (southeast)

Osceola County (central)

Santa Rosa County (panhandle)

Lee County (southwest)

The fourth step involved sending e-mails to select schools within the selected school districts. In order to ascertain if individual schools were following the district plan, surveys were sent to all Title I elementary schools within the school districts. The surveys sent were to determine what type of character education program they were following. The surveys sent to individual schools basically included the same questions as were sent to the school districts, with a few additions:

1. What is the name of the character education program that your school is using?

2. What materials are you using?

3. How closely are you following your school

    district's character education curriculum?

4. Do you find your district's character education

    program effective for your school?

5. Have you encountered any staff resistance to the

    program?

6. Have you encountered any parental resistance in the

    implementation of the school district's character

    education plan?

7. If you have encountered parental resistance to the

    character education plan how does your

    administration deal with these types of parental

    concerns or refusal to cooperate in the program?

Schools were then selected for this phase of the study
as follows:

The researcher tried to target 15 elementary schools
per district. This was not always possible, since some
school districts had less than 15 elementary schools. Of
the districts that had more than 15 elementary schools, 15
schools were chosen randomly from among all elementary
schools in the district. Each elementary school in the
district was given a number and 15 numbers were randomly
selected. From the school districts with comprehensive

character education plans, the followings schools were chosen:

Flagler –(northeast)

1. Bunnell Elementary School

2. Old Kings Elementary School

3. Indian Trails Elementary School

4. Lewis E. Wadsworth Elementary School

Broward –(southeast)

1. Atlantic West Elementary School

2. Castle Hill Elementary School

3. Cooper City Elementary School

4. Dania Elementary School

5. Eagle Ridge Elementary School

6. Stephen Foster Elementary School

7. Hollywood Hills Elementary School

8. Larkdale Elementary School

9. Robert C. Markham Elementary School

10. Norcrest Elementary School

11. Oakridge Elementary School

12. Park Springs Elementary School

13. Pines Lakes Elementary School

14. Riverside Elementary School

15. Tamarac Elementary School

Seminole –(central)

1. Altamonte Elementary School

2. Bear Lake Elementary School

3. Goldsboro Elementary School

4. Carillon Elementary School

5. Casselberry Elementary School

6. English Estates Elementary School

7. Forest City Elementary School

8. Geneva Elementary School

9. Heathrow Elementary School

10. Highlands Elementary School

11. Lake Mary Elementary School

12. Lake Orienta Elementary School

13. Rainbow Elementary School

14. Sabal Point Elementary School

15. Woodlands Elementary School

Bay - (panhandle)

1. Callaway Elementary School

2. Cedar Grove Elementary School

3. Hiland Park Elementary School

4. Hutchison Beach Elementary School

5. Lucille Moore Elementary School

6. Lynn Haven Elementary School

7. Merriam Cherry Street Elementary School

8. Northside Elementary School

9. Parker Elementary School

10. Patronis Elementary School

11. Springfield Elementary School

12. Millville Elementary School

13. Tommy Smith Elementary School

14. Tyndall Elementary School

15. Waller Elementary School

Sarasota - (southwest)

1. Alta Vista Elementary School

2. Ashton Elementary School

3. Bay Haven Elementary School

4. Brentwood Elementary School

5. Emma E. Booker Elementary School

6. Englewood Elementary School

7. Fruitville Elementary School

8. Glenallen Elementary School

9. Gocio Elementary School

10. Gulf Gate Elementary School

11. Laurel Nokomis Elementary School

12. Southside Elementary School

13. Taylor Ranch Elementary School

14. Toledo Blade Elementary School

15. Wilkinson Elementary School

From the school districts with non-comprehensive character education plans the following schools were chosen:

Nassau County -(northeast)

1. Atlantic Elementary School

2. Callahan Elementary School

3. Southside Elementary School

4. Bryceville Elementary School

5. Emma Love Hardee Elementary School

6. Yulee Elementary School

7. Callahan Elementary (PreK-2)

8. Hilliard Elementary School

9. Yulee Primary School (PreK-2)

Palm Beach County -(southeast)

1. Boca Raton Elementary School

2. Coral Sunset Elementary School

3. Forest Hill Elementary School

4. Indian Pines Elementary School

5. Morikami Park Elementary School

6. North Palm Beach Elementary School

7. Orchard View Community Elementary School

8. Roosevelt Elementary School

9. Sandpiper Shores Elementary School

10. South Olive Elementary School

11. Timber Trace Elementary School

12. Washington Elementary School

13. West Gate Elementary School

14. Westward Elementary School

15. Whispering Pines Elementary School

Osceola County -(central)

1. Boggy Creek Elementary School

2. Central Avenue Elementary School

3. Cypress Elementary School

4. Deerwood Elementary School

5. Hickory Tree Elementary School

6. Highlands Elementary School

7. Lakeview Elementary School

8. Michigan Avenue Elementary School

9. Mill Creek Elementary School

10. Celebration Elementary School

11. Pleasant Hill Elementary School

12. Reedy Creek Elementary School

13. Ross E. Jeffries Elementary School

14. Thacker Avenue Elementary School

15. Ventura Elementary School

Santa Rosa County -(panhandle)

1. Bagdad Elementary School

2. Berryhill Elementary School

3. Chumuckla Elementary School

4. East Milton Elementary School

5. Gulf Breeze Elementary School

6. Holley-Navarre Intermediate School (grades 3-5)

7. Holley-Navarre Primary School (grades PK-2)

8. Jay Elementary School

9. Munson Elementary School

10. Oriole Beach Elementary School

11. Pea Ridge Elementary School

12. S.S. Dixon Intermediate School(grades 3-5)

13. S.S. Dixon Primary School (grades PK-2)

14. W.H. Rhodes Elementary School

Lee County -(southwest)

1. Alva Elementary School

2. Bayshore Elementary School

3. Caloosa Elementary School

4. Cape Elementary School

5. Colonial Elementary School

6. Diplomat Elementary School

7. Edgewood Elementary School

8. Fort Myers Beach Elementary School

9. Franklin Park Elementary School

10. Gulf Elementary School

11. J. Colin English Elementary School

12. Lehigh Elementary School

13. Mirror Lakes Elementary School

14. Orange River Elementary School

15. Pine Island Elementary School

The fifth step was gathering the following data:

1. The number of incidents of crime and violence for the academic year 1998-1999, which was before the inception of the character education program mandate.

2. The number of incidents of crime and violence for the 2002-2003 academic school year.

3. Attendance data prior to the inception of the character education program. The actual data selected were the percentage of students who were absent more than 21 days.

4. Attendance data for the 2002-2003 academic school year. The actual data selected were the percentage of students who were absent more than 21 days.

5. The percentage of fourth grade students who scored at Level 3 or above on the reading portion of the FCAT Sunshine State Standards test prior to the inception of the character education program.

6. The percentage of fifth grade students who scored at Level 3 or above on the mathematics portion of the FCAT Sunshine State Standards test prior to the inception of the character education program.

7. The percentage of fourth grade students who scored at Level 3 or above on the reading portion of the FCAT Sunshine State Standards test for the 2002-2003 academic school year.

8. The percentage of fifth grade students who scored at Level 3 or above on the mathematics portion of

the FCAT Sunshine State Standards test for the
2002-2003 academic school year.

Data for both the 1998-1999 school year, as well as
the 2002-2003 school year, were gathered from the Florida
School Indicator Report, available at the Florida
Department of Education website. Since some of the initial
schools selected were no longer in existence by the 2002-
2003 school year, the researcher randomly selected other
schools instead. Similarly, a few schools that were
selected for the study were not in existence during the
1998-1999 school year, so substitutions were made for this
utilizing the same procedure.

Utilizing SPSS Statistical Program for Social
Sciences, 2000), data were analyzed for statistically
significant relationships in order to confirm or negate the
null hypotheses. The tests utilized were repeated measures
ANOVAs.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data derived
through the methodology and statistical procedures
previously described in Chapter 1. An introductory e-mail
was sent to each district superintendent within the 67
school districts in the state of Florida. A request was
made for a copy of their elementary school district
character education plan. Also included were the following
questions:

1. What is the name of the character education program
   your school district is following?

2. What materials are you utilizing?

3. To what extent are the six pillars of character
   education found in *Character Counts!* present in
   your program?

4. How closely are elementary schools in your district
   following the district character education program?

5. Have you encountered any parental resistance toward
   the design and implementation of the school

district's character education plan?

6. If you have encountered parental resistance toward the character education plan, how does the school district or the individual school administrators deal with the types of parental concerns or refusal to cooperate in the program?

After receiving responses from participating school districts, it was determined which school districts developed a comprehensive program and/or used the already available curriculum in a comprehensive manner. The researcher separated responses according to where the school districts were located: the panhandle, northeast, central, southeast, and southwest. The purpose of such a division was to get an accurate geographical representation of how character education was being implemented throughout Florida. Districts that had the most comprehensive character education programs in the state and those school districts that did not have comprehensive district based plans were selected.

In order to determine which districts had comprehensive character education programs, the researcher analyzed each district character education plan. Several plans were quite extensive and included many facets. Other

districts offered little more than one page of paper issued from the district office that contained nothing more than a list of suggested topics to be discussed that month.

Questionnaires were sent to all Title I elementary schools within each school district to determine the type of character education program. Data were gathered on the following:

1. The number of disciplinary referrals since before the inception of the character education program through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

2. Attendance rates prior to the inception of the character education program and through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

3. FCAT scores prior to the inception of the character education program and through the end of the academic year 2002-2003.

Utilizing SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences, 2000), data were analyzed to determine significant relationships to accept or reject the null hypotheses. The tests utilized were repeated measures ANOVAs. In addition, data were also analyzed for significant relationships between the implementation of each of the six pillars of *Character Counts!* within the

curriculum and the variables of student attendance, achievement and disciplinary referrals.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is relationship between character education and the number of incidents of crime and violence, the attendance rates, and academic achievement in the Florida public schools.

Results of the Research Questions

Research Question 1

To what extent are the six elements of *Character Counts!* present in the school district character education plan?

In the five school districts that were coded as having comprehensive character education plans (Flager, Broward, Seminole, Bay and Sarasota) all of the six elements of *Character Counts!* were present. The six elements are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

In Flagler County, as self-reported on their district website, a great deal of money and time has been spent on teacher inservice training to implement programs such as

Positive Action, Personal and Social Responsibility, and Peace Education Foundation.

The Broward County School District put together a program created by diverse groups. The school district did not feel that any prepackaged program met their needs so they implemented their own program. Called, *Good Character: It's Not Just For School*, Broward County emphasizes eight character traits that are infused throughout their curriculum and student activities. These traits are responsibility, citizenship, kindness, respect, honesty, self-control, tolerance and cooperation. *Good Character* includes everyone who comes into contact with the children including bus drivers, teachers, janitors and cafeteria workers. Additionally, there is a local partnership with the local newspaper in the form of the *Sun-Sentinel Kids of Character Program.*

The Seminole County School District also created their own program called *Keys to Your Character.* Seminole stresses eleven character traits including the six character traits in *Character Counts!* These traits are: respect, honesty, courage, gratitude, generosity, responsibility, caring, knowledge, fairness, patriotism, and service.

The Bay County School District plan incorporates the six pillars of *Character Counts!* (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship) and also includes student and staff training in peer mediation, decision making skills, and a parent program.

The Sarasota School District also incorporates the six pillars in their *Building a Community of Character* curriculum.

Research Question 2

How does the inclusion of character education in the curriculum affect incidents of crime and violence in the public elementary schools?

Results of the data indicated that the inclusion of character education in the curriculum only slightly affected the number of incidents of crime and violence in the public elementary schools.

Research Question 3

How does the inclusion of character education in the curriculum affect attendance in the public elementary schools?

The data indicated that the five school districts that had instituted a comprehensive character education program

(Flagler, Broward, Seminole, Bay and Sarasota) showed

improvement in their attendance.

Research Question 4

How does the inclusion of character education in the
curriculum affect achievement in the public elementary
schools?

The data did not show that the school districts that

had a comprehensive character education program (Flagler,

Broward, Seminole, Bay and Sarasota) achieved a greater

degree of academic achievement than those school districts

that did not have a comprehensive program, although

academic achievement increased for all the school

districts. On both the reading and math achievement tests

the percent of improvement between the pre-implementation

period and after four years of character education in both

school districts having a comprehensive character education

program and those that did not have a comprehensive

character education program was almost identical, (6.58%

improvement for the comprehensive districts versus 6.28%

improvement for the non-comprehensive districts). A close

inspection of Figures 2 and 3 will show almost parallel

lines between the two sets of districts.

What quality control measures are in place to ensure that the respective schools are following the district plan?

Quality control measures included close collaboration between the district personnel in charge of coordinating the character education mandate and the principal's designee in each school. In Flagler County, Bay County, Seminole County, Broward County and Sarasota County this collaboration took place in the form of workshops, distribution of character education materials, meetings and plans submitted by each school to the school district.

For example, Seminole County has a website for parents called *Parent Tips for Character Education.* Lesson ideas are distributed throughout the schools, and activities are listed for all support personnel including the school board and administration, guidance, cafeteria, custodial, transportation and media center.

In the school districts that did not have comprehensive plans, some or all of these components may have been missing. For example, in Osceola County, the extent of the character education program in many schools was that teachers come up with lessons based upon the character trait of the month. In Denn-John Middle School

this takes the form of a monthly writing prompt in which

the students write an FCAT style essay during one class

period.

Results of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no statistically significant relationship
between the reported incidences of crime and violence,
and the implementation of a comprehensive character
education program adopted by the representative school
districts.

A review of Box's test for the equality of covariances

revealed that the covariance of the matrices of the two

groups were not different to a statistically significant

degree, so that sphericity may be assumed.

To determine whether there was a statistically

significant relationship between the number of incidents of

crimes and violence in the Florida elementary schools and

the implementation of a comprehensive character education

program, the researcher conducted a repeated measures

ANOVA. A review of this result revealed that there was no

statistically significant interaction between the

implementation of a strong character education program in

the school districts and the reduction in the number of

reported incidents of crimes and violence in the selected

Florida counties, $F(1,130)=2.484$, p=>.05 (Table 1).

Table 1

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts of Incidents of Crime
and Violence

Source	Time	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	ETA Squared
		Measure: Measure 1					
Time	Linear	1870.334	1	1870.334	3.896	.051	.029
*Time Impleme	Linear	1192.319	1	1192.319	2.484	.117	.019
Error (Time)	Linear	62404.121	130	480.032			

*computed using alpha=.05

However, the intensive character education

intervention was able to account for 19.0% of the reduction

in the number of reported incidents of crime and violence.

To ensure that the change was in the predicted direction,

it is important to inspect the means in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Crime and Violence

_____

Incidents	Character Ed	Mean	SD	N
Crimes and violence in 98-99 per school	Weak implementation	12.29	25.31	68
	Strong implementation	25.78	30.43	64
	Total	18.83	28.61	132
Crimes and violence in 02-03 per school	Weak implementation	11.22	25.95	68
	Strong implementation	16.20	26.40	64
	Total	13.64	26.19	132

A review of these means indicated that in school

districts with a weak character education implementation

program, the mean number of incidents of crimes and

violence decreased from 12.29 during the 1998-1999 school

year, to 11.22 during the 2002-2003 school year. Weak

implementation was the researcher's way of coding the

school districts with the non-comprehensive character

education programs (Nassau, Palm Beach, Osceola, Santa

Rosa, Lee). In school districts with a strong character

education implementation program, the mean number of

incidents of crimes and violence per school decreased from

25.78 during the 1998-1999 school year to 16.20 during the

2002-2003 school year. Strong implementation was the

researcher's way of coding school districts with

comprehensive character education programs (Flagler, Bay,

Sarasota, Seminole and Broward). The plotted means visually

demonstrates what is seen numerically above (see Appendix

A, Figure 1).

<u>Hypothesis 2</u>

There is no statistically significant relationship
between student achievement (as measured by increased
standardized test scores) in the elementary schools
and the implementation of a comprehensive character
education program in the school districts selected for
this study.

A review of Box's test for the equality of covariances

revealed that the covariance of the matrices of the two

groups was not different to a statistically significant

degree, so that sphericity may be assumed.

To determine whether there was a statistically

significant relationship between the achievement levels in

the Florida elementary schools and the implementation of a

comprehensive character education program, the researcher

conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. Acceptable

achievement was defined as scoring at Level 3 or above on

the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Separate

tests were used for Reading Achievement and Math

Achievement.

A review of the reading results revealed that no

statistically significant interaction between a strong

character education program over time and successful

student achievement in reading existed, F(1,123)=.035,

p=>.05 (Table 3).

Table 3

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for Reading Achievement

_____

Source	Time	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	ETA[2]
		Measure:	Measure 1				
Time	Linear	2581.288	1	2581.288	63.935	.000	.342
*Time Impleme	Linear	1192.319	1	1.400	.035	. 853	.000
Error (Time)	Linear	4965.936	123	40.373			

*computed using alpha=.05

Moreover, strong character education can account for

0.0% of the change that occurred in student reading

achievement. To ensure that the change was in the

predicted direction, it is important to inspect the means

in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Reading Achievement

_____

Percentage	Character Ed	Mean	SD	N
Students reading at Level 3 or higher in 98-99	Weak Implementation	56.36	16.07	61
	Strong Implementation	60.42	17.21	64
	Total	58.44	16.72	125
Students reading at Level 3 or higher in 02-03	Weak Implementation	62.64	14.97	61
	Strong Implementation	67.00	13.36	64
	Total	64.87	14.28	125

Review of the means indicated that 60.42% of students in the strong character education implementation group were reading at Level 3 or higher in the school year 1998-1999 and increased to 67% in the school year 2002-2003, an increase of 6.58%.

Review of the means indicated that 56.36% of students in the weak character education implementation group were reading at Level 3 or higher in the school year 1998-1999 and increased to 62.64% in the school year 2002-2003, an increase of 6.28%. The plotted means demonstrates visually what is seen numerically above (see Appendix A, Figure 2).

A review of Box's test for the equality of covariances revealed that the covariance of the matrices of the two groups was not different to a statistically significant degree, so that sphericity may be assumed.

A review of math results revealed that no statistically significant interaction between a strong character education program over time and successful student achievement in math existed, $F(1,123)=.911$, $p=.342$ (Table 5).

Table 5

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for Math Achievement

_____

Source	Time	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	ETA^2
		Measure:	Measure 1				
Time	Linear	4601.170	1	4601.170	59.977	.000	.328
*Time Impleme	Linear	69.922	1	69.922	.911	.342	.007
Error (Time)	Linear	9435.974	123	76.715			

*computed using alpha=.05

Moreover, the strong character education can account for 0.7% of the change that occurred in student math achievement. To ensure that the change was in the

predicted direction, it is important to inspect the means

in Table 6.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Math Achievement

_____

Percentage	Character Ed	Mean	SD	N
Students at Level 3 math or higher in 98-99	Weak Implementation	41.30	14.52	61
	Strong Implementation	47.48	17.09	64
	Total	44.46	16.13	125
Students at Level 3 math or higher in 02-03	Weak Implementation	48.82	15.57	61
	Strong Implementation	57.12	15.46	64
	Total	53.07	16.00	125

Review of the means indicated that 47.48% of students

in the strong character education implementation group were

performing at math Level 3 or higher in the school year

1998-1999 and increased to 57.12% in the school year 2002-

2003, an increase of 9.64%.

Review of the means indicated that 41.30% of the

students in the weak character education implementation

group were performing at Math Level 3 or higher in the

school year 1998-1999 and increased to 48.82% in the school

year 2002-2003, an increase of 7.52%. The plotted means

demonstrated visually what is shown numerically (see

Appendix A, Figure 2).

In the case of reading achievement and in the case of

math achievement, neither was found to have a statistically

significant increase based on a strong implementation of

the school district's character education program.

<center>Hypothesis 3</center>

There is no relationship between student attendance in
the elementary schools and the implementation of a
comprehensive character education program in the
school districts selected for this study.

A review of Box's test for the equality of covariances

revealed that the covariance of the matrices of the two

groups was not different to a statistically significant

degree, so that sphericity may be assumed.

To determine whether there was a statistically

significant relationship between attendance in the Florida

elementary schools and the implementation of a

comprehensive character education program, the researcher

conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. The standard used was

the percentage of students who were absent 21 or more days

during the school year. A review of this result revealed

that there was a statistically significant interaction

<center>114</center>

between the implementation of a strong character education

program in the school districts and the reduction in the

percentage of students who were absent 21 or more days

during the school year 2002-2003, $F(1,130)=5.572$, p=<.05

(Table 7).

Table 7

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for Students Absent over
20 Days

Source	Time	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	ETA[2]
		Measure:	Measure 1				
Time	Linear	103.949	1	103.949	21.885	.000	.144
*Time Impleme	Linear	26.463	1	26.463	5.572	.020	.041
Error (Time)	Linear	617.460	130	4.750			

*computed using alpha=.05

Moreover, the intensive character education

intervention was able to account for 4.1% of the decrease

in the percentage of students who were absent for 21 or

more days during the 2002-2003 school year. To ensure that

the change was in the predicted direction, it is important

to inspect the means in Table 8.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Percentage of Students Absent 20 or More Days

Percentage	Character Ed	Mean	SD	N
Students with at least 21 daily absences in 98-99	Weak Implementation	6.75	2.76	68
	Strong Implementation	7.73	4.31	64
	Total	7.23	3.62	132
Students with at least 21 daily absences in 02-03	Weak Implementation	6.13	2.49	68
	Strong Implementation	5.84	2.54	64
	Total	5.99	2.51	132

A review of these means indicated that in school

districts with a weak character education implementation

program, the mean percentage of student absences in excess

of 20 days per school year decreased from a mean of 6.75%

during the 1998-1999 school year to 6.13% in the 2002-2003

school year, a decrease of .62%. In school districts with

a strong character education implementation program, the

mean percentage of student absences in excess of 20 days

per school year decreased from 7.73% during the 1998-1999

school year, to 5.84% during the 2002-2003 school year, a

decrease of 1.89%. Figure 3 visually demonstrates what is

seen numerically above (see Appendix A).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was designed to analyze the relationship character education has on school achievement, absenteeism, and incidents of crime and violence in the public elementary schools of Florida. The study sought to confirm that strong character education programs that are well implemented, are worth pursuing because of the many benefits to students and the communities in which they live.

It was anticipated by the researcher that the compiled data would provide information about the relationship between school districts that implement strong character education programs, student achievement, attendance and acts of crime and violence. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine if the relationship is stronger in school districts that have a strong character education program than it is in school districts that do not have a strong program.

Strong working models were found to have the following shared characteristics:

1. A monthly character trait is chosen for the entire school district. The character trait of the month varies from one school district to another, but they all utilize the traits emphasized by the Florida Department of Education.

2. Everyone in the school district is expected to model this trait, including administrators, teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, office staff classroom aides and parents. The general community is also asked to model these traits. In Broward County the businesses are asked:

   a. To display the character education posters where employees and the public will see them

   b. To incorporate the character education logo in their printed materials such as brochures and stationery.

   c. That when they participate in career days or other school functions to let the students know that character traits are important in life beyond school.

d. That if they sponsor events such as shows,
   health fairs or picnics, they should use the
   character logo in their promotional materials.

e. To provide recognition for employees' children
   who exhibit one of the traits in an exemplary
   manner.

f. To recognize employees who demonstrate the
   character traits.

g. To ask other businesses with whom they are
   involved to display the posters or logo.

h. To provide funding for pencils or stickers
   with the logo.

i. That if they employ students or use them as
   volunteers that they ask them to give examples
   of how they have demonstrated the character
   traits as part of the interview process or
   when they receive feedback on their
   performance.

j. That if they have a marquis to publicize the
   trait of the month.

3. Parents are informed of the monthly character trait
   and given tips on how they can foster character
   education in the home. Flagler County provides

direct links to the National Character Education Center.

4. Parenting tips are provided by the school district.

5. Newsletters are sent out to the general community, keeping everyone informed of what is happening in the school community. In Seminole County parents and the community are encouraged to display the *Keys to Your Character* each month, and encourage students to live by those values.

6. Teachers are provided with activities to reinforce each value of the month.

7. Posters are made available and businesses and organizations are encouraged to display these posters.

8. Links to character education websites are provided to the home and community on the districts' websites.

9. Businesses and other county agencies within these school districts take an active part in promoting character education. In Broward County the Department of Planning and Environmental Protection Air Quality Division linked the core values to environmental protection. Students can learn about

environmental activities as they relate to the various character traits by clicking on various links on their website.

10. Various departments within the school district align their goals with the district's character education curriculum. This is especially true for Student Services, Multicultural Education, Curriculum and Instruction, and Athletics.

11. Mentoring, volunteerism and business partnerships have major roles in the school community.

Discussion

The response rate to the e-mails sent to the 67 districts was small (only 13 school districts answered the researcher's original e-mail). There were, however, sufficient responses for the researcher to choose 1 school district within each tourist area of Florida, able to be placed into either the strong implementation or weak implementation category. Also helpful to the researcher was correspondence with the Florida Department of Education, which guided the researcher in the direction of school districts with especially strong programs.

It was interesting to note that in school districts whose superintendent responded to the researcher's e-mail, the response from the person responsible for the district's character education program was swift and comprehensive. It was also interesting to note that these are the school districts that not only the Department of Education had noted as having comprehensive plans, but sent the researcher copies of their district plans wherever it was feasible.

The majority of the school districts did not bother to answer the researcher's e-mail nor send copies of their character education program, so research was gathered through district websites and the Florida Department of Education.

Conclusions

The findings of this study showed whether or not the implementation of a comprehensive character education program would have a greater positive impact on reported school statistics, than would a weak program. The four areas this study covered were the number of reported incidents of crime and violence, percentage of students absent in excess of 20 days per school year, percentage of

students achieving a Level 3 or higher on the FCAT Reading Achievement Test, and percentage of students achieving a Level 3 or higher on the FCAT Mathematics Achievement Test. Based on reported data for the 1998-1999 and 2002-2003 school years, the researcher reached the following conclusions.

1. There was a statistically significant relationship between school districts with comprehensive character education programs and a reduction in the percentage of students absent over 20 days per school year.

2. There was no statistically significant relationship between comprehensive character education programs and the reported number of incidents of crimes incidents of crime and violence. However, the study did show that since the implementation of character education curricula throughout Florida elementary schools during the 1998-1999 school year, there was an overall decrease in the number of reported incidents of crime and violence for the 2002-2003 school year, both in schools with weak, as well as, comprehensive programs. The percentage decrease in reported incidents, although greater in

the schools with comprehensive programs, did not

meet the standard for statistical significance. It

may be important to note that while attendance and

student achievement were expressed in percentages

that adjusted for the increase or decrease in

populations of the various schools, the incidents

of reports of crimes and violence were absolute

numbers. These numbers could tend to skew results

if the schools' populations substantially grew or

shrank between the 1998-1999 school year and the

2002-2003 school year.

3. There was no statistically significant relationship

between comprehensive character education programs

and student achievement of scoring at least a Level

3 on the FCAT Reading Achievement Test, when

compared to students in schools with weak character

education programs. There was a difference in the

mean percentage of students of achieving at least a

Level 3 on the FCAT Reading Achievement Test

between schools with comprehensive character

education programs, and those with weak programs

for the 1998-1999 school year, with the higher mean

score reported in the schools with comprehensive

programs. Data reported for the 2002-2003 school
year indicated that the difference in means stayed
at about the same level.

4. There was no statistically significant relationship
between comprehensive character education programs
and the student achievement of scoring at least a
Level 3 on the FCAT Mathematics Achievement Test,
when compared to students in schools with weak
character education programs. There was a
difference in the mean percentage of students of
achieving at least a Level 3 on the FCAT Reading
Achievement Test between schools with comprehensive
character education programs, and those with weak
programs for the 1998-1999 school year, with the
higher mean score reported in the schools with
comprehensive programs. The data reported for the
2002-2003 school year indicated that the difference
in means stayed at about the same level, with the
gap only slightly widening.

Recommendations

Recommendations in the study were based upon the major
findings of the researcher:

1. Since there was a statistically significant relationship between school districts that had a comprehensive character education program and a reduction in the percentage of students who were absent in excess of 20 days, it would be prudent to keep those programs in place in those school districts.

2. It would be prudent to restructure the character education programs in those school districts that did not have a comprehensive character education programs to replicate the comprehensive programs.

3. When implementing character education programs, it is important to keep in mind that comprehensive character education programs should be integrated into the curriculum by the entire school community, as opposed to having character education taught as a stand-alone subject (Schaeffer 1999).

Recommendations for Further Study

It is recommended that a similar study be conducted to analyze data to determine if statistically significant relationships between the implementation of each of the six pillars of *Character Counts!* exists in the curriculum and

the variables of student attendance, achievement and the number of incidents of crime and violence. Specifically:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between teaching the pillar of citizenship and attendance in those schools that self-indicated that this pillar was an integral part of the character education curriculum?

2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between teaching the pillar of responsibility and student achievement?

3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between teaching the pillar of respect and the reported incidents of crime and violence occurring in these schools?

4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between teaching the pillar of trustworthiness and the reported incidents of crime and violence occurring in these schools?

5. Is there a statistically significant relationship between teaching the pillar of fairness and the reported incidents of crime and violence occurring in these schools?

6. Is there a statistically significant relationship

between teaching the pillar of caring and the

reported incidents of crime and violence occurring

in these schools?

The researcher feels that by disaggregating the data

further, the effectiveness of character education in the

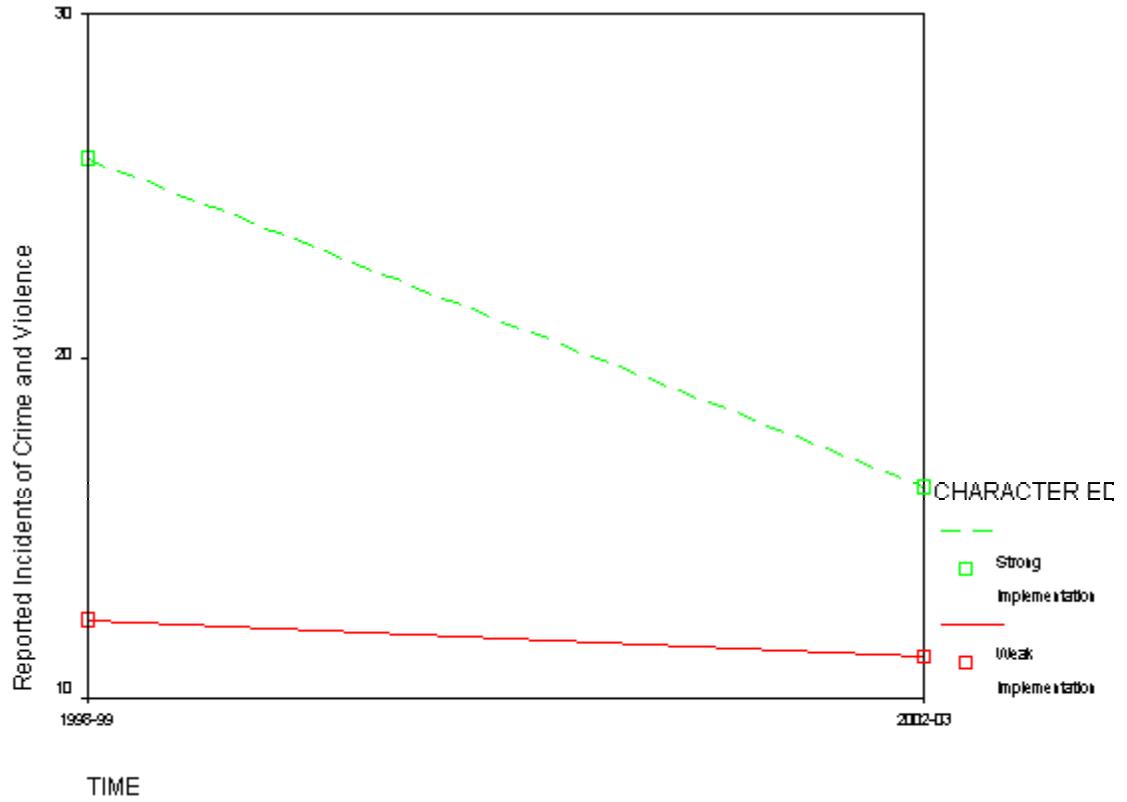Florida public schools can be more closely monitored.

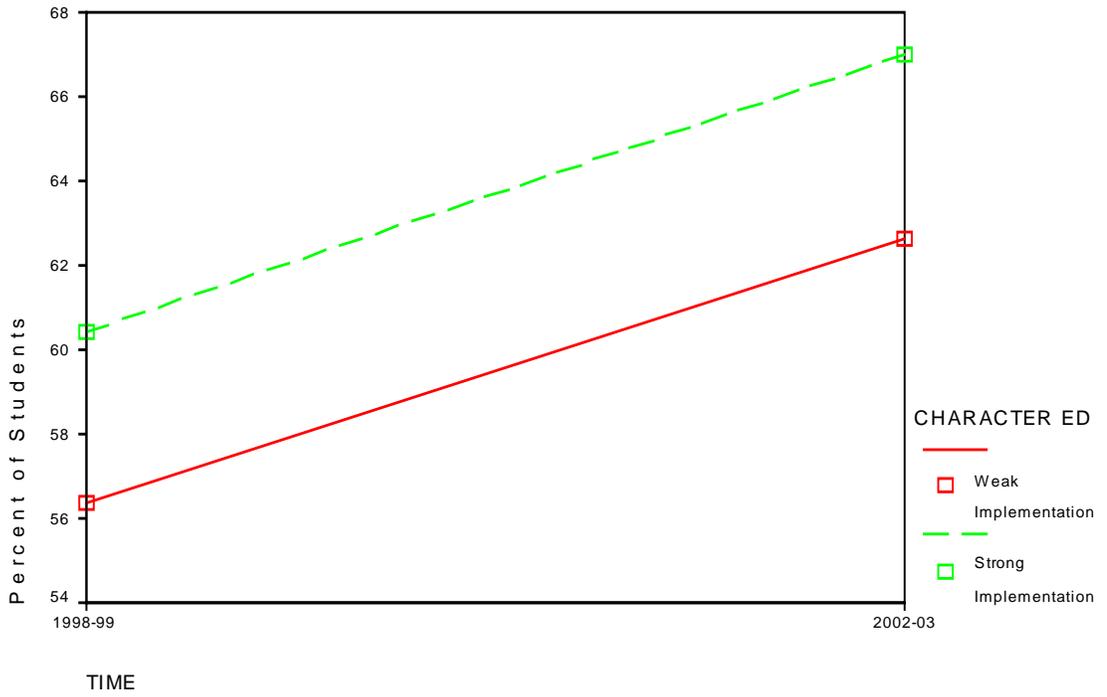Figure 1

Reported Incidents of Crimes and Violence Per School

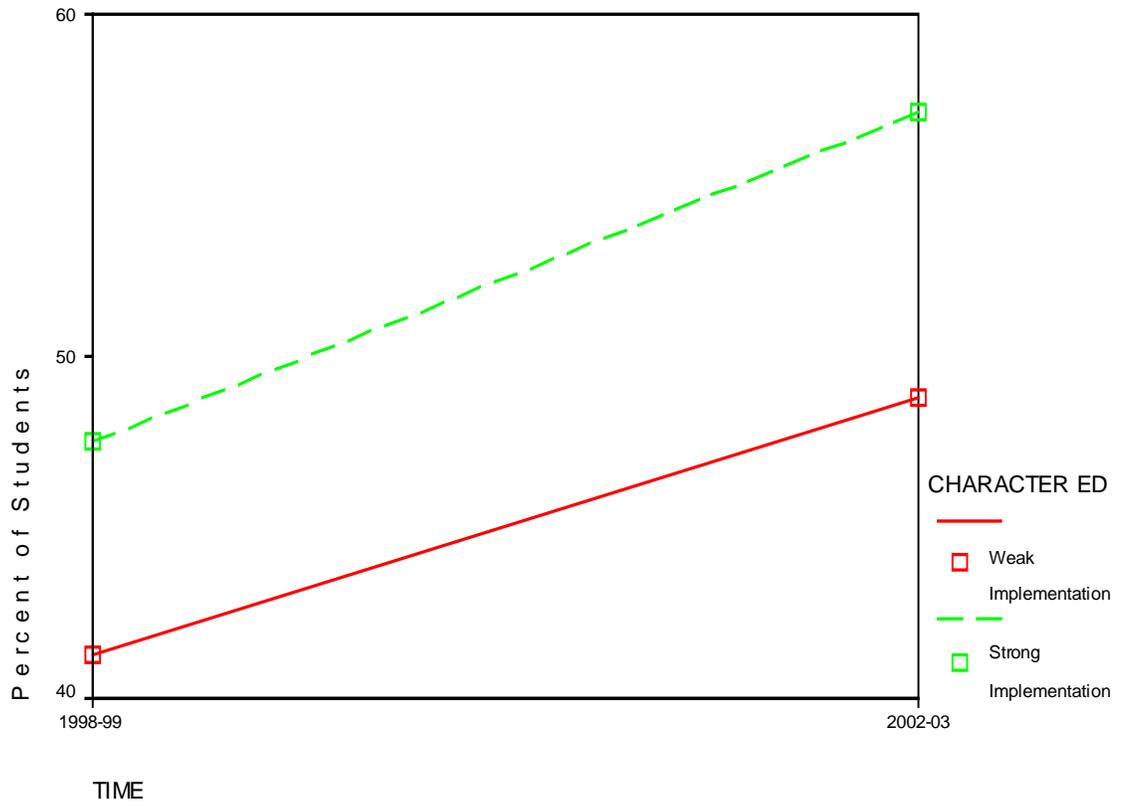Figure 2

Percentage of Students Reading at Level 3 or Higher

Figure 3

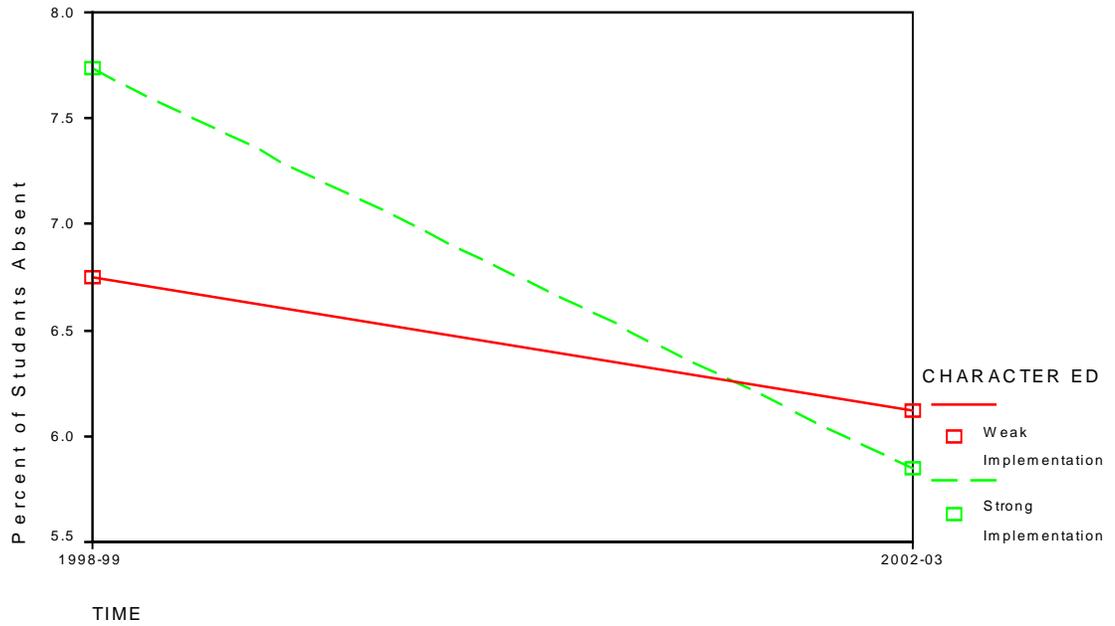Percent of Students Achieving at Level 3 or Higher in Mathematics

Figure 4

Mean Percent of Students Absent at Least 21 Days of School
Per Year

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