THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Applications from the 681 elementary schools applying for the California Distinguished Schools Award in 2000 were randomly selected, evaluated, and scored for character education implementation. Results were correlated with both the SAT9 and API rankings over a four-year period from 1999-2002. Schools with higher total character education implementation tended to have higher academic scores on academic measures for the year prior to their application, the year of their application and the subsequent two years. Small but positive correlations were found between three specific character education indicators and the total character education score and higher scores on California's API and the percentage of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile on the SAT9.

The belief that character education implementation in schools is related to academic achievement of students in those schools has great intrinsic appeal. From biblical times, the purpose of childhood education has been to cultivate both the moral character and the intellect of youth. In the United States these dual purposes have permeated schooling since

colonial times (McClellan, 1999) and were of significant interest to the founding fathers of this nation. Over the past century, progressive educators in the mid-20th century and more traditionalist character educators 50 years later have shared the same optimism. For example, John Childs noted in 1950 that

> The child who is learning through empirical procedures to discriminate the better from the worse in the different mundane spheres of human activity is, at the same time, growing in capacity for moral judgment. It is in and through these varied and interrelated life activities that the real occasions for moral decision arise, and the child grows in his capacity to function as a responsible moral agent as he grows in his ability to make judgments of the good and the bad in terms of concrete consequences. Moral behavior is thus a function of the entire experience of the child, and all education is inescapably a form of character education. (p. 167)

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) agree. They write,

> Where does character education fit into the curriculum? The simple answer is this: everywhere. Since education seeks to help students develop as persons, character development is part and parcel of the whole enterprise. Teaching, as Alan Tom reminds us, is a moral act. We believe that learning is a moral act as well . . . . Character education, then, with its twin goals of intellectual and moral development, should be implicit in all of the school's undertakings. (pp. 93-94)

Logically, experts agree that character education is the responsibility of adults (see for example Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, 2003; Damon, 2002, p. ix; Wynne & Ryan, 1997, p. 1). But there is no full consensus on how it is to be defined, practiced or evaluated. Berkowitz (1998) has documented this lack of consensus. While the term historically has referred to the duty of the older generation to form the character of the young through experiences affecting their attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, more recent definitions include developmental outcomes such as a positive perception of

school, emotional literacy, and social justice activism. There are sweeping definitions of character education (e. g., Character Counts' six pillars, Community of Caring's five values or the Character Education Partnership's 11 principles) and more narrow ones such as those used by the specific programs described in the following paragraphs. Character education can be defined via relationship virtues (e.g., respect, fairness, civility, tolerance) or performance virtues (e.g., diligence, self-discipline, effort, perseverance) or a combination of the two (anonymous reviewer comment). The State of California has included some character education criteria into the application process for its statewide school recognition program and in the process has created its own character education definition. Other states and districts have undoubtedly done the same. Each definition directs the practice of character education. To complicate the picture even more, most character education initiatives either are not yet objectively evaluated, or those evaluations tend to focus only on their own specific program's character-related outcomes. It is unusual to find evaluations relating character education programs to academic outcomes. But over the past five years some evidence of the relationship between character education and academic learning has begun to emerge.

Several programs seeking primarily to improve students' social attitudes and behaviors have reported positive impacts on academic performance at the elementary school level. For example, the Peaceful Schools Project (PSP) of the Menninger Clinic has as its purpose to reduce disruptive behaviors. An evaluation of the PSP (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, Evans, & Ewbank, 2001) revealed significant gains for the implementing elementary school on the Metropolitan Achievement Test compared with a non-implementing elementary school. Research on the Responsive Classroom (RC), an approach to integrate social and academic learning, found in a series of studies (Elliot, 1998) that students in implementing schools

had significantly greater gains in standardized academic test scores than did students in comparison schools.

Other elementary school programs that focus on student social attitudes and behaviors have academic effects that surface only in middle and/or high school. The Child Development Project, one of the most widely studied character education programs, found little evidence of academic gain during its elementary school initiative (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). However, in follow-up studies of middle school students (through 8 th grade) who earlier had attended CDP elementary schools, those students who attended CDP program schools in elementary school had higher course grades and higher academic achievement test scores than comparison elementary school students (Battistich & Hong, 2003). Similar effects were reported for longitudinal follow-ups of middle and high school students participating as elementary school students in the Seattle Social Development Project, a longitudinal study to test strategies for reducing childhood risk factors for school failure, drug abuse, and delinquency (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999; Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001). No such positive academic effects were found at the elementary level during implementation of the Seattle project (Hawkins, Catalano, Morrison, O'Donnell, Abbott, & Day, 1992). Evaluations of Positive Action (PA), a comprehensive school reform program, resulted in a similar pattern of delayed academic gains (Flay & Allred, in press), although an evaluation in 13 of its participating elementary schools in two states did reveal significant gains for PA schools on the Terranova and Stanford Achievement tests (Flay, Allred, & Ordway, 2001).

There is evidence as well of the impact of character education on secondary school students' academic gains. The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) seeks to prevent problem behaviors by providing supports for adolescents. From a national sample of 25 high schools, an evaluation of TOP (Allen, Philber,

Herring, & Kupermine, 1997) has revealed a significant decrease in course failure for students randomly assigned to its program as compared to control students. Also, an unpublished study of the Community of Caring (COC) in six high schools (Balicki, 1991) reported that COC 9 th grade students showed significantly higher gains in school grades as compared to non-COC students. A second unpublished study on the COC reported similar effects (Scriba Educational Services, 1998-1999).

Finally, case studies of successful individual school character education initiatives have been reported. For example, many National Schools of Character, such as Columbine Elementary School (Character Education Partnership, 2000) report significant academic gains during the implementation of character education.

The argument that quality character education is good academic education is bolstered by findings that educational interventions with character-related themes produce a range of effects that are linked to effective schooling. Although these findings generally are from programs that do not claim to be character education programs, for the most part their focus is on enhancing interpersonal understanding and prosocial behavior. For example,

- Across Ages, an intergenerational mentoring program, has been shown to positively impact high school attendance (Taylor, LoSciuoto, Fox, Hilbert, & Sonkowsky, 1999),
- the Child Development Project, a total school program focusing on prosocial development, has produced gains in academic motivation, bonding to school, task orientation, and frequency of self-chosen reading in elementary school (Solomon, et al., 2000),
- a Character Counts! survey of over 8,400 students receiving that program found that students reported they "Get homework done more often" (28% of the sample agreeing in 2000 vs. 15%

agreeing in 1998); and they "Cheat less" (35% agreeing in 2000 vs. 26% in 1998) (South Dakota Survey Results, 2000),

- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), a program promoting emotional and social competencies, has increased blind observers' reports of positive classroom behavior such as following rules, showing interest and enthusiasm, and staying on task (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1999),

- Project Essential, a program to help children develop integrity and self-respect, has been found to improve overall classroom behavior in elementary school (Teel Institute, 1998),

- Reach Out to Schools, another social competency program, has reported long-term gains in middle school boys' self-control (Hennessey & Seigle, 1998), and

- the Teen Outreach Program has reduced school suspensions in high school (Allen, et al., 1997).

While educational theorists may support an inherent link between character education and academic achievement, and while recent research has begun to demonstrate such a link in the implementation of specific programs, no evidence exists for a broader relationship that spans a range of character education approaches in a large sample of schools.

The Research

This study sought to take advantage of an opportunity to access two large sets of data allowing a direct, objective comparison of the relation between character education and academic achievement in California elementary schools. In 2000, the California Department of Education (CDE) implemented a revised rubric for the California School Recognition Program (CSRP). The CSRP is a competitive selection process conducted by the CDE to reward schools that successfully implement

state priorities (California Department of Education, 2001a). Schools seeking that recognition submitted a comprehensive application, including a complete demographic description and a 12-page, single spaced narrative addressing nine standards incorporating major themes of state and national policies and research related to effective schools. In that process, applications were evaluated and scores derived and assigned. The schools were then ranked in numerical order from highest to lowest, with the highest scoring schools selected as statewide nominees, eligible to receive a site validation visit and subsequent award (California Department of Education, 2001b).

Specific wording related to character education was included in the CSRP for the first time in 2000. Thus, schools applying for the award that year were instructed to describe their programs in character education. Presumably, schools not addressing character education would have difficulty attaining statewide nominee status. Of the nine standards in the CSRP application, the one which most clearly called for a character education description, Standard 1 (Vision and Standards), was weighted double in point value compared to other standards. To receive maximum points on this standard, schools were informed to include "specific examples and other evidence" that they addressed in their program vision and standards "expectations that promote positive character traits in students" (California Department of Education, 2001c). One other standard (#7, Support for Student Learning) was directly related to character education as well. It required schools to document activities and programs that ensured opportunities for students to contribute to the school, to others and to the community. Other standards in the CSRP application were found to have relevance to character education. Those included #3 (Curriculum Content and Instructional Practices), #4 (Teacher Professionalism), #8 (Family Involvement) and #9 (Community Connections). Six hundred and eighty-one elementary schools (out of 5368 elementary schools in California) applied for the 2000

CSRP award. Of that group, 230 schools received the award. The 681 CSRP elementary school app lications submitted for the 20 00 award competitio n comprised the population sampled for this study.

Measures of Academic Achievement Used in the Study

The standardized test administered by th e state of California between 1999 and 2002 was the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT9). Scores from SAT9 includ ed in our study w ere th e percentag e o f students w ho scored at o r above the 5 0th percentile on th e reading, lang uage, an d mathematics sections of the test for the years 1999 through 2002. In addition, data for each schoo l inclu ded th e Academic Perfor mance Index (API) f or the years 1999 to 2002, a scale develo ped by the California Department of Educatio n to rank schools o n achiev ement and to m easure their gain from year to year. The API score is derived through a complex fo rmula using a weighted composite of SAT9 scores, including the spelling subscore, a formula-driven reflection of sub-scores of minority groups, and items developed by the State each year in other subject areas. Thoug h additional factors w ere added to the academic p erformance index in subsequent years, for the first years of its cal-culation and reporting (199 9 and 2000), th e results of the SAT9 con stituted the API. In subsequent years, test results based on the Cal-ifornia content standards were added with the SAT9 scores to fo rm the overall API. There-fore, after 2001 (but not before) the API increasingly reflected assessment of the State content stand ards, while th e SAT9 scores remained a reflection of the same content dur-ing the fiv e-year period it was adm inistered. The API scores a vailable fro m the State are comparable from year to year, but not over periods of two or more years. These data allowed us a unique opportunity to investigate the relationship between the measures of char-acter education implementation and measures of academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

Defining Character Education

Considerable time was spent by the first two authors in developing an operational defi-nition of character education for this project. In the end, criteria were selected using a com bi-nation of the Character Educatio n Quality Standards develo ped by the Character Educa-tion Partnersh ip (2001) and criteria used by California in its CSRP application. Six criteria were identified, all but one with two indica-tors. Each of the six criteria addressed one important co mponent of character edu cation: the school promoted core ethical values as the basis of good character; it involved parents and other community members in its character education initiative; it infused character educa-tion in all aspects of school life; the school staff were involved and modeled good charac-ter; the sch ool fostered a sense of caring; and, it provided opportunities for stu dents to prac-tice moral action. A rubric encompassing these six criteria was created and a scoring scale was designed.

The scoring sc ale wa s developed by fo ur raters—two professors with extensiv e experi-ence in character education and two doctoral students with years of educational and adm in-istrative e xperience—after differences were noted in interpretation of the criteria/indicators in early scoring trials conducted to establish reliability. A scal e (1 - 5) and a defin ition for each of its five leve ls were created for each of the eleven indicators. A low score (1) indicated no evidence in the school's application for that indicator, and a high score (5) indicated co m-prehensive attention by the school to that indi-cator. In combination, the criteria and their corresponding ind icators in Table 1 became our working definition of character education.

Selecting the Sample

A to tal of 68 1 elem entary scho ols made application to the State for the CSRP for the academic year 1999 -2000. Of those, 653 had

TABLE 1
Criteria and Indicators Defining Character Education

1) This school promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.	1.1) School agreed on core values.
	1.2) Programs are in place to support school values.
2) In this school, parents and other community members are active participants in the CE initiative.	2.1) Parents have participated in the design and application of the CE initiative.
3) In this school, CE entails an intentional, proactive and comprehensive approach that promotes core values in all phases of school life (i.e., cafeteria, transportation, playground, classrooms, etc.).	3.1) The school is intentional and proactive with regard to CE.
	3.2) The school ensures a clean and secure physical environment.
4) Staff share responsibility for CE and attempt to model good character.	4.1) The staff promotes and models fairness, equity, caring and respect and infuses CE.
	4.2) Selection criteria and staff development reflect CE.
5) This school fosters an overall caring community as well as in each classroom.	5.1) Policies and practices promote a caring community and positive social relationships.
	5.2) The school promotes democratic processes of governance and decision-making.
6) This school provides opportunities for most students to practice moral action.	6.1) Students contribute in meaningful ways.
	6.2) Curriculum includes collaborative/group activities and service learning.

available both complete applications and achievement scores. Two schools were deleted from the data set due to their very extreme gains or losses on the State's Academic Performance Index (API) between 1999 and 2000. These two schools were considered outliers for the purposes of these analyses.

The remaining 651 elementary schools in the sample were ranked on their 1999 API scores and divided into three groups of 217, a high-scoring group, a middle group, and a low-scoring group. In turn, each of these groups was ranked according to their gain scores from their 1999 to their 2000 SAT9 scores. From each of these six resulting subgroups, 20 schools were randomly selected for the scoring and analyses, for a total of 120 elementary schools. This method of selection ensured that the sample was representative of high, middle, and low achieving schools from the applicant pool, and that the schools analyzed also represented high and low academic achievement gain during the 1999-2000 school

year, the year in which they applied for the CSRP award.

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of 120 schools had the following mean percent of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile on the SAT9 subscores for 1999 and 2000:

	1999	*2000*
SAT9 Reading	62.5%	65.5%
SAT9 Language	66.0%	69.8%
SAT9 Math	66.2%	72.3%

These 120 schools were not significantly different from the rest of the schools that submitted applications (but were not selected for the study) on the following academic indicators: the API 1999 score (t = -.487, p = .626), the API 2000 score (t = -.436, p = .663), and the API growth from 1999 to 2000 (t = .360, p =

.719). The sample schools were also not significantly different from the remaining applicant schools on the following demographic variables: percent of English language learners (t = 1.72, p = .086), average parent education level (t = -1.32, p = .187), or on the percent of credentialed teachers at the school (t = 1.56, p = .122). Of the 120 schools randomly selected to be part of our study, 40 (33.3%) won distinguished school status in 2000 and 80 (66.7%) did not. These proportions were not significantly different (chi square = .022, p = .881) from those of the total school applicant pool (34.0% and 66.0% respectively). We can conclude from these results that the sample of 120 stratified-randomly selected schools is a representative sample of all the schools that submitted distinguished school applications in fall 1999 for the 2000 award.

Interrater Reliability Estimates

An extensive time period was devoted to creating the rubric and its scoring scale and to establishing reliability in scoring the CSRP applications. In all, before the scoring was initiated on the final sample, 22 randomly selected school applications were scored, analyzed and discussed by the raters over a 17 month period in order to refine the rubric and establish interrater reliability.

The four raters evaluated the 120 randomly selected applications on the character education elements in sub-groups of seven applications. All four raters rated the first 2 applications of each sub-group and the results were compared and discussed. Score differ-

ences of more than one score point on the five-point scale were resolved through discussion and where necessary, those items were rescored. The overall score for each of the commonly scored applications (the means of the 11 scores for each rater) was also tested for significance using oneway ANOVA to determine whether there were overall mean differences in scoring for the four raters, and no significant differences were found. These procedures were repeated for two commonly scored applications before each rater scored five applications independently until all 120 applications were scored. The applications scored in common by all four raters were compared and checked for reliability through correlations and ANOVA, and discrepant scores were discussed and resolved. In this way, the raters were checked for drift from the scale through discussion of the commonly-scored applications. Where disagreements were found, discussions about the ratings occurred and adjustments were made to ensure that scorers were all using the rubric with similar understanding of the descriptions for each of the five rating levels. In all, 20 of the 120 applications were scored by all four raters.

As shown in Table 2, interrater reliabilities in the form of Pearson correlations ranged from .55 to .66 for the 20 commonly-scored applications.

Results for the oneway ANOVA on all twenty commonly scored applications showed no significant differences in the overall mean scores (2.33, 2.37, 2.43, and 2.57) for the four raters (F = .35, p = .79). Raters' scores were converted to z scores to help account for any

TABLE 2
Intercorrelations of Ratings by Rater.

Rater	1	2	3	4
1	-	.55*	.58*	.56*
2	.55*	-	.64*	.60*
3	.58*	.64*	-	.66*
4	.56*	.60*	.66*	-

* p<.01

scale differences raters may have had and the z scores were used in subsequent analyses.

RESULTS

Relationships between Character Education (CE) Scores and Academic Achievement Indicators

In order to look for linear relatio   nships between the CE ratings and academic achievement levels of the 120 sample schools, Pearson correlations were comp uted between total CE score and each CE indicator and the API scores and   SAT9 su bscores for the 120 sample schools. Significant correlations are reported in Tables 3 (API) an d 4 (SAT9). Correlations approaching signi ficance (rang ing from p = .053 to p = .09) are also noted. As shown, the small positive co rrelations found between CE indicators 3.2 (clean and secure physical environment), 4.1 (staff promotes and models CE), and 6.1 (students contribute in meaningful ways) and the total CE score for all of the academic ac hievement indic ators were for the most part sign ificant. For all SAT9 scores except the SAT9 reading scores for 2000 and 2002 the total CE scores showed small but significant positive correlations. For these two

reading scores, the correlation approached significance (p = .070 and .076 respectively). In addition, small   but significant correlations were found for sev eral of the SAT9 subscores and CE indicator   5.1 (policies and practices promote caring and po sitive so cial relationships). Thus, schools with hig her evidence of character education implem entation in these areas and with more total character education overall tended to have higher academic scores on all the measures used for the year prior to their application, the year of their application, and the subsequent   two years, although   the relationships were not strong.

Relationships between CE Scores and Academic Achievement Gain

In order to determine whether CE scores are related to gains on the API or on the percent of students at or above the 50th percentile on the SAT9 subscores, Pearson   correlations w ere calculated for the API 1999 to 2000 gain, and for the SAT9 subscore gains for 1999 to 2000, 1999 to 2001, and 1999   to 2002 . Only two small bu t significant correlations w ere found between CE indicators and gain scores on the academic indic ators. A co rrelation of r = .19 (p<.05) was found between the gain on SAT9

TABLE 3
Pearson Correlations Between CE Indicators and API

CE Indicator	API 1999	API 2000	API 2001	API 2002
1.1 Agreed on values				
1.2 Programs in place				
2.1 Parents participate				
3.1 School proactive				
3.2 Clean/Secure	.23*	.19*	.19*	.18*
4.1 Staff promotes	.25*	.20*	.24**	.25**
4.2 Staff development				
5.1 Caring community	(.18)	(.17)	.18*	.21*
5.2 Democratic process				
6.1 Students contribute	.26*	.21*	.23*	.23*
6.2 Group and SL				
Total CE	.22*	.18*	.20*	.20*

*p<.05, **p<.01   (p values in parentheses are .053 and .068)

TABLE 4
Pearson Correlations Between CE Indicators and SAT9 Subscores

CE Indicator	Read 1999	Read 2000	Read 2001	Read 2002	Lang. 1999	Lang. 2000	Lang. 2001	Lang. 2002	Math 1999	Math 2000	Math 2001	Math 2002
1.1 Agreed on values												
1.2 Programs in place												
2.1 Parents participate												
3.1 School Proactive												
3.2 Clean/Secure	.18*	(.17)	.19*	(.15)	.25**	.22*	.20*	(.17)	.21*	.19*	.22*	.19*
4.1 Staff promotes	.20*	(.17)	.23*	.20*	.25**	.21*	.21*	.24*	.26*	.21*	.27**	.24*
4.2 Staff development												
5.1 Caring community	(.17)	(.16)	.20*	(.17)	.19*	(.17)	(.17)	.19*	(.16)	(.16)	.18*	(.17)
5.2 Democratic processes												
6.1 Students contribute	.28**	.22*	.22*	.20*	.27**	.23*	(.18)	.20*	.25**	.23*	.23*	.20*
6.2 Group and SL												
Total CE	.18*	(.17)	.20*	(.16)	.22*	.20*	.19*	.20*	.20*	.19*	.22*	.20*

**p<.05, **p<.01 (p values in parentheses range from .060 to .096 and are mainly in the .060-.076 range)

reading from 199 9 to 2001 and   CE indicator 3.1 (school is proactive in CE). A negative correlation of r = -.20 (p<.05) was found between gain   on the SAT9 language   score change between 1999 and 200 1 and CE indicator 6.1 (students contribute in meaningful ways). Though it seems curious to find a positive correlation between gain in reading   scores and one CE criterion and a negative correlation between gain in langu age score and   another closely related CE criterion over the same time period, we have no explanation for this anomaly in the data. Suffice to state that there appear to be almost n o linear relatio nships between CE sc ores and changes in the acad emic gain indicators for these   time period s. Perhaps so much emphasis was put on schools at that time to produce new programs d esigned to bo ost achievement (a s measured by   SAT9 scores) that it wou ld have been difficult to   attribute achievement gain to CE programs at those schools even had we fou nd positive relation - ships between the two.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research indicate that a composite summary sc ore of ch aracter educ ation criteria is positively c orrelated with academic indicators a   cross yea rs. The elem   entary schools in our sample with solid character education programs defined by our six criteria and their eleven indicators not only show positive relationships with academ ic indi cators that same year, but also evidence positive co rrelations across the next two academic years.

The results also indicate that certain criteria identified as characteristic of quality character education programs in elementary schools are correlated with higher scores on California's academic performance index (API) and on the percent of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile on the SAT9.   Over a four-year period from 1999-2002, higher rankings on the API and higher scores on the SAT9 w ere sig- nificantly positively correlated with a sum   - mary score of character education and three of

our character education in dicators (see Tables 3 and 4):

- a school's ability to en sure a clean and safe p hysical environment (criterion 3.2),
- evidence that its parent s and teachers modeled and pro moted good character education (criterion 4.1), and
- quality opportunities at the school for students to contribut e in mean ingful ways to th e school and its commu nity (criterion 6.1).

In addition, higher ratings on the summary score and these same three character education indicators generally w ere significan tly corre- lated ov er the four-year period with h igher achievement scores (as measured by SAT9) in mathematics and language (except for student opportunities to contribute to school and com- munity in 2001 and a school's ability to ensure a safe   and clean   physical environment in 2002). Higher character   education scores on the summary score an d th e th ree in dicators also corre lated significantly with hig her re ad- ing achievement scores in 19 99 and 2001, but not in 2000 and 2002. It should be remembered that the data on character education were avail- able only from the 2000 CSRP applications but that achievement data were available for other years as w ell. Thus the CE scores remaine   d unchanged while achievement scores changed. Overall these are   promising results, particu- larly because the total   character education score for 2000 is sig nificantly correlated with every lan guage achievement SAT9 score a nd every mathematicsachievemen t SAT9 score from 1 999-2002 and readin g achi evement scores in two of tho se four years. To a lesser degree, over   this four-year period , indicator 5.1 (fostering an overall carin g community in the school and its classrooms) correlated w ith two years of API scores (2001, 2002) and four of twelve SAT9 su bscores across the assessed content areas, but not co nsistently within th e assessed content areas.

Indicator 3.2: Ensuring a Clean and Secure Physical Environment

Although all schools in our sample addressed this criterion, the higher scoring character education schools described great pride in keeping their buildings and grounds in good shape. This is consistent with what is reported about the virtues of clean and safe learning environments. For example, the Center for Prevention of School Violence (2003) notes that, "the physical appearance of a school and its campus communicates a lot about the school and its people. Paying attention to appearance so that the facilities are inviting can create a sense of security."

One school in our sample reported that its buildings "are maintained well above district standards . . . . The custodial crew prides themselves in achieving a monthly cleaning score that has exceeded standards in 9 out of 12 months." And another noted that "a daily grounds check is performed to ensure continual safety and cleanliness." Each of the higher scoring schools in our sample explicitly noted its success in keeping its campus in top shape and that its parents were satisfied that their children were attending school in a physically and psychologically safe environment.

All schools in California are required to have a written Safe School Plan on file, but emphases vary. While some schools limit their safety plans to regulations controlling access to the physical plant and define procedures for violations and intrusions, the better character education schools define this criterion more broadly and more deeply. For example, one high scoring school in our sample explained that the mission of its Safe School Plan was, "to provide all students with educational and personal opportunities in a positive and nurturing environment which will enable them to achieve current and future goals, and for all students to be accepted at their own social, emotional, and academic level of development." Another high-scoring school defined its Safe School Plan to include three areas of focus: identification of visitors on campus,

cultural/ethnic harmony, and safe ingress and egress from school. To support these areas of focus this school's teachers all were trained in conducting classroom meetings, in implementing the Community of Caring core values, and in issues related to cultural diversity and communication.

Indicator 4.1: Promoting and Modeling Fairness, Equity, Caring and Respect

In high character education/high academic schools staff model and promote fairness, equity, caring, and respect, and infuse character education into the school and classroom curriculum. A recent essay drove home this point—it's title was "Moral Teachers, Moral Students" (Weissbourd, 2003). The author noted, "The moral development of students does not depend primarily on explicit character education efforts but on the maturity and ethical capacities of the adults with whom they interact . . . . Educators influence students' moral development not simply by being good role models—important as that is—but also by what they bring to their relationships with students day to day . . ." (pp. 6/7). The staff of excellent character education schools in our sample are treated as professionals and see themselves as involved, concerned professional educators. They are professional role models.

Thus, one school described its teachers as "pivotal in the [curriculum] development process; there is a high level of [teacher] ownership in the curriculum . . . . Fifty percent of our staff currently serve on district curriculum committees." Another school stated that it "fosters the belief that it takes an entire community pulling together to provide the best education for every child; that is best accomplished through communication, trust, and collaboration of ideas that reflect the needs of our school and the community . . . . Teachers are continually empowered and given opportunities to voice their convictions and shape the outcome of what the school represents." A third school described its teachers as "continu-

ally en couraged" to grow profession ally and use best practices b ased on research. In the best cha racter educ ation schools, te achers are recognized by their peers, district perso nnel and professio nal o rganizations for their instructional pro wess an d their professionalism. They mode l the academic and pro-social characteristics tha t represent a deep c oncern for the well being of children.

Indicator 6.1: Students Contribute in Meaningful Ways

Finally, we found that acad emically excel lent character education schoo ls provide opportunities for students to contribute in meaningful ways to the school and its commu nity. In o ur study, opportunities to contribute (i.e., volu nteering) were distingu ished from service learning opportunities. Surprisingly, in our rubric the criterion related to service learn ing, though assessed (e.g., indicator 6.2), was not a significant component of high character education/high ach ievement sch ools. Those high scoring schools did provide opportunities and encouraged students to participate in vol unteer activ ities such as cross-age tutoring, recycling, fund raising for charities, commu nity clean-up programs, food drives, v isita tions to local senior centers, etc. One school required 20 hours of community service, a pro gram coordinated entir ely by parent volun teers. Students in that schoo l volu nteered in community gardens, at convalescent ho spitals and fo r commun ity clean-up days. A nother school wrote an d received a gran t to hire a school-community coordinator. That person spent part of her work schedule finding oppor tunities for students to contribute. On the whole, while these activities are not directly connected to students' academic program s, they seem to be consistent with activities that promote a healthy moral character. According to William Damo n, a crucial co mponent of moral education is eng aging ch ildren in posi tive activities, be they comm unity serv ice, sports, music, theater or an ything else that

inspires them and gives them a sense of pur pose (as cited in Gilbert, 2003).

Indicator 5.1: Promoting a Caring Community and Positive Social Relationships

It should not be overloo ked th at indicator 5.1, sch ools' policies or practices promoting caring communities, was positively correlated with some of the SAT9 sub scores and API scores in 1999, 2001, and 2002. These correla tions ranged the SAT9 sub scores, but with out regularity. There may be several explan ations for these data. First, our scoring scale for item 5.1 focused primarily on the positive social relations an d carin g com munity that existed between the sch ool and p arents, e.g ., parent involvement, social functions to bond the fam ily to the school, etc. Second, it may be thatthe effects of positive social relations and caring communities may not show immediately. Such was the case with dat a reported by the Child Development Pro ject (Battistich & Hon g, 2003) and the Seattle Social Dev elopment Project (Hawkins et all, 1999, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The results presented here, though modest, are very hop eful. Most California elementary schools in our sam ple did not implement research-based ch aracter e ducation programs. Others were affiliated with established concep tualizations (e.g., Character Coun ts! or Com munity of Caring) that allow considerab le flexibility in implementation. Many schools created their own programs of character educa tion, relying on rather superficial expectations tied to their classroom management/discipline procedures. In this study we found that, though character education criteria w ere stated in th e CSRP application, schoo ls responded to those indicators in quite varied ways. Some ign ored character education completely in their written applications an d oth ers had fully developed, well con ceptualized program descriptions. It

appears from this diverse sam ple of schools, that those scho ols addressing th e character education of their students in a serious, well-planned mann er tended also to hav e higher academic achievement scores.

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