

Missouri Show Me CHARACTER^{plus}® Implementation Study



The ABCs of Student Success

- **Autonomy:** need for personal freedom and power
- **Belonging:** need for connection
- **Competence:** need for efficacy

CHARACTER^{plus} is a ten-step approach that integrates character education into the school district's mission, policies, professional development, and academic curricula. Consequently, it becomes a critical component in student learning.

Character content, dialogue, and reflection are integrated into academic studies. As students are given opportunities to participate in class discussions and moral conversations, they provide leadership in ethical decision-making.

School goals are set for implementation of the CHARACTER^{plus} process, and progress toward those goals is monitored on a regular basis.

Integral components of the process call for extensive staff development, adult role modeling, high-level commitment from the top to establish and sustain the initiative, and provision of a support system for teachers. CP

Ten Essentials

1. Community Participation
2. Character Education Policy
3. Identified and Defined Character Traits
4. Integrated Curriculum
5. Experiential Learning
6. Evaluation
7. Adult Role Models
8. Staff Development
9. Student Leadership
10. Sustaining the Program

Results

(research based evidence)

- Greater student feelings of belonging at school
- Greater staff and parent expectations for student behavior
- Higher achievement scores at elementary, middle, and high school
- More positive school health as perceived by students, staff, and parents

Building 'sense of community' in school for parents, teachers, and especially students ought to be one of the principal's top priorities for school improvement.

— Vincent Ferrandino
Executive Director,
National Association of
Elementary Principals

Professional Development



Implementation Training (3 days)

School leadership teams (SLTs) participate in intensive training sessions held during the summer. Schools at similar levels of implementation convene at a single location where they spend three days learning about the character education process, the PIR (Plan, Implement, Refine with emphasis on planning and implementation) process for databased planning, and using individual school data to set goals and plan for the upcoming school year. SLTs build action plans for implementation and staff development while they interact with other school teams and the CHARACTERplus facilitation team. CP

Advanced Training (2 days)

SLTs revisit the character education process with a focus on academic connections, review and expand knowledge of the PIR (emphasis on refining) process using new individual school data to set goals for the upcoming year, and build an action plan for continued implementation and expanded staff development. CP

Networking

Three networking sessions (either face to face or by video-conferencing) are scheduled during the year. The purpose for networking is to provide SLTs with additional opportunities during the year to share their progress, successes, and experiences with others at similar levels of implementation. As questions are raised, they are addressed by the facilitation team and other participants and may become agenda items for follow-up sessions. The coach (or facilitator) for the school utilizes information gleaned from these meetings to more effectively work with school leadership teams during the year. CP

Site-Based Staff Development

Based on the National Staff Development Council's standards for effective staff development, SLTs are presented with a model for working with other teachers to plan, implement and reflect on lesson/unit plans and the resulting student work. Teachers form study groups. They observe and are observed by other teachers while implementing the character education process. These activities are built into the school workday. CP



Principals' Roundtables

Principals' roundtables are scheduled on the same day as the team networking sessions. As a support group for principals, the roundtable is designed for them to address issues that are of particular concern to school leaders. In this informal setting, principals share their successes and offer helpful suggestions to their peers. **CP**

Coaching

The school coach supports the team through the implementation process, providing nurturing for the SLT. Coaching is a critical staff development process for implementation success.

Coaches:

- Are advocates for the character education process,
- Assist the SLT in planning for implementation,
- Help plan for staff development,
- Attend character education staff development session activities at the school,
- Collect data from staff and students,
- Arrange site visits for planning,
- Visit classrooms,
- Review survey data with the team, and
- Are available by telephone and e-mail for consultation.



School Leadership Teams

It is essential to the success of the program to have a strong character education leadership team led by a school principal who fully embraces the model and is committed to its success.

Team membership includes:

- Principal
- Counselor
- Classroom teacher
- Teacher (classroom or special subject area)
- Parent/community member

Desirable characteristics for members are:

- Strong leadership skills
- Respect from peers
- Commitment to staff development
- Enthusiasm for the program

Responsibilities of team members

- Attend summer training
- Collaborate with school coach or facilitator
- Implement the program and strategies
- Meet on a regular basis
- Lead staff development
- Participate in networking sessions

Evaluation, Monitoring and Research

The CHARACTER_{plus} process is rooted in data based planning and implementation. This requires data collection from students, staff, and parents each February or March. School-level data reports are provided to plan for the next year. The foundation for planning is baseline data provided during the first year of training. Comparison data is provided in subsequent years for SLTs to analyze the effectiveness of their implementation. Student behavior is tracked using a record form to document office referrals.

The CHARACTER_{plus} program embraces scientific research exemplified in No Child Left Behind legislation. Treatment and comparison group studies are currently being conducted to present strong evidence of the effectiveness of the CHARACTER_{plus} process in schools. **CP**

Resources

Available resources supporting this process include: CHARACTER_{plus} replication, implementation and evaluation guides published by Cooperating School Districts; varied materials supporting the Ten Essentials published by commercial publishers; and an assessment book, *Developing Effective Assessment for Improved Teaching and Learning*, published by Christopher-Gordon. School level required resources include SLT time for planning and implementation activities, staff time for high quality staff development, and the principal's support of the program. **CP**

CHARACTER^{plus} Ten Essentials

- 1. *Community Participation***
Educators, parents, students, and members of the community invest themselves in a consensus-building process to discover common ground that is essential for long-term success.
- 2. *Character Education Policy***
Character education is a part of the district's philosophy, goals, or mission statement, including a formal, written policy adopted by the school board.
- 3. *Identified and Defined Character Traits***
Parents, teachers, and community representatives agree on which character traits to emphasize and what definitions to use. Developing consensus on the definitions is key, and the early involvement of students enriches the process.
- 4. *Integrated Curriculum***
Character education is an integral part of the curriculum at all grade levels. Character traits are connected to classroom lessons so that students see how a trait might figure into a story, be part of a science experiment, or how it might affect them.
- 5. *Experiential Learning***
Students are given many opportunities to experience character traits, see them in action, and feel them rather than just talk about them. Community-based, real-world experiences that illustrate character traits are included in the curriculum.
- 6. *Evaluation***
The character education initiative – including the implementation process, program activities, and impact on students – is evaluated on a regular basis to determine if it is achieving the anticipated results and to validate that the processes and structures being implemented are working.
- 7. *Adult Role Models***
Children “learn what they live,” so it is important that all adults in the school community who interact with children on a daily basis demonstrate positive character traits at home, school, and in the community.
- 8. *Staff Development***
Significant time and resources are allocated for staff development activities so that staff can create and implement character education on an ongoing basis.
- 9. *Student Leadership***
Students are involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all aspects of the program.
- 10. *Sustaining the Program***
The character education program is sustained and renewed through implementation of the first nine essential elements, with particular attention to a high level of commitment from the top; adequate funding; support for district coordination staff; high-quality and ongoing professional development; and a networking and support system for teachers who are implementing the program.



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