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**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION ON STUDENT  
BEHAVIOR**

by

Katie M. Ferrara

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Special Education  
at  
Rowan University  
May 8, 2019

Thesis Chair: Margaret Shuff, Ed.D.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Michael. You have made many sacrifices to allow me to chase my professional dreams. Thank you for supporting me throughout my Master's journey. All of this would be near impossible without your love and encouragement.

## **Abstract**

Katie Ferrara

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR  
2018-2019

Margaret Shuff, Ed.D.

Masters of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this study was to determine if character education in schools is effective enough to positively increase students' moral and ethical behaviors and values. Students' behaviors in grades Kindergarten through fifth across three different elementary schools were examined. Measurements were taken prior to the implementation of a character education program and were reexamined after the first year. The results of the study revealed all three schools decreased in filed discipline reports and increased in positive behaviors from the execution of character education programs.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

Character education is a learning process that influences all people within a community to exhibit moral and ethical values such as respect, responsibility, and citizenship towards self and others. Since students spend much of their time in classrooms, schools across the country have enforced character education programs beginning before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The schools have seen this time spent in classrooms as an opportunity to teach these core values to promote strong character and citizens among the youth. The word “character” originates from the Greek meaning “to make a mark on,” such as to have made an impression or to be remembered for. Having good character refers to behaving in a positive manner and developing positive virtues and habits. In 2008, the Character Education Partnership (CEP), defined character as “human excellence” and focusing on “being our best and doing our best.”

### **Statement of the Problem**

Street crime, violence, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, teen pregnancy, and a decline in civility are just some examples of the unfortunate events that have taken place within schools and school communities in the United States. To address these concerns, President Clinton addressed the nation on January 23, 1997. He called for schools to teach students about the importance of values and good citizenship through character education (Character Education Manifesto, 2002). After President Clinton’s address, character education programs became state-mandated in an effort to instill moral, positive and ethical values to support social, behavioral and emotional development in students. However, it comes into question whether the character

education programs implemented in schools, in fact, replace negative behaviors. It becomes a challenge for schools to assume the responsibility of encouraging students to develop and maintain good character if families, neighborhoods and religious communities are not in on the task together.

In a study completed by the National Center for Educational Statistics, more than one out of every five students reported being bullied in 2016 (Lessne & Yanez, 2016). Even more so, “students with specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavior disorders, other health impairments, and speech or language impairments report greater rates of victimization than their peers without disabilities longitudinally and their victimization remains consistent over time,” (Gage & Rose, 2016). The purpose of President Clinton’s character education program initiative was to decrease or eliminate the number of negative behavior cases. However, studies, research, statistics, and social media have shown a continuation of these negative behaviors.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the early 1990s, the idea of a traditional family unit was beginning to change in American society. Divorces, single parenting, same-sex orientation preferences, and adoptions are just some of the examples of the changing family dynamics that were on the rise throughout the nation. Furthermore, special education was becoming more predominant. Students started to become diagnosed with conditions including hyperactivity disorders, behavior and emotional disorders, autism, cognitive impairments, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ironically enough, there was a nearly 300% increase in social problems faced by public education at this time such as violence, racism, teen pregnancy, low self-esteem, and drug and alcohol abuse (Sojourner, 2012).

Additionally, in 1992 the National Research Council named the United States as the most violent nation in the world. A commonality appeared in that the young people involved in violent acts throughout the nation seemed to be alienated, did not have strong and meaningful relationships with their parents or other adults, violent video games, had unlimited access to the Internet, had negative influences and they were bullied in school.

Due to these rising issues and President Clinton's demand for character reform, schools around the nation began implementing structured character education curriculum and programs to promote fairness, equality, integrity, honesty, respect, responsibility, and compassion. The intention of implementing character education programs is to disintegrate problematic behaviors such as violence, bullying, dishonesty, and irresponsibility. However, not all of society is convinced with the character education programs. Some believe character education is not enough to change the youth's negative conducts because it becomes rare that children follow the practices of what their schools and educators preach (Snyder, Vuchinich, Eashburn, & Flay, 2012). Similarly, according to Black (1996), "there is little positive correlation between what students learn about good character in school and the extent to which they demonstrate good character both in and out of school," (p. 29).

Character education cannot simply be fulfilled in schools through reading books, hanging up posters and banners, and using catchy slogans. Students' behaviors will not indefinitely change through these experimental practices. Schools need to do more than concentrate on the cognitive side of character (Lickona, 1991). Lickona (1991) goes on to state that students need to be committed to positive behavior and values and they need to practice the moral actions in order to build character. Elias (2009) argued that it is

imperative for not only teachers, but the entire school community to carry out the practices and framework of building character within our youth. However, character must also be built within ourselves in order for character education to be effective and lasting.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine if character education in schools is effective enough to positively increase students' moral and ethical behaviors and values. In this study, I will examine the effectiveness of character education in three suburban elementary schools in Cherry Hill, New Jersey one with a population of 304 students (School A), the second with a population of 499 students (School B), and the last elementary school with a population of 417 students (School C). The schools include grades kindergarten through fifth grade classes.

School A has 19% of the student population participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and 15% receiving special education services. The average absentee rate since enrolling in kindergarten is 28%. The Great Dream program developed by Richard Layard, Geoff Mulgan and Anthony Seldon in 2010 was adopted by the school in the fall of 2017 and is in its second year of implementation. The purpose was to establish a happier and more caring community and society.

School B has 31% of the student population participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and 16% receiving special education services. The average absentee rate since enrolling in kindergarten is 7%. The Responsive Classroom Initiative was adopted by the school in the fall of 2015. The purpose of this program is to integrate academic

success and social-emotional skills (SEL) to create an environment where students do their best learning.

School C has 33% of the student population participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program and 21% receiving special education services. The average absentee rate since enrolling in kindergarten is 13%. Lions Quest Skills for Growing is a K-5 program that integrates social and emotional learning, character development, drug and bullying prevention, and service-learning. The program promotes positive student behaviors that lead to academic success.

The objective of implementing character education within schools is to improve students' academic achievement, behavior, school culture, peer interaction, and parental involvement. I believe that students who receive a character education program such as The Great Dream will increase in pro-social behaviors such as cooperation, respect, and compassion and will replace negative behaviors such as violence, disrespect, apathy, and underachievement.

The research question examined in this study is:

- Does character education improve student behavior?

**Key Terms.** For the purpose of this study, the term “character” will be used here as having positive morals, values, and habits (Character Education Manifesto, 2002)

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

It is intended for character education to be taught in schools in order to decrease undesirable behaviors. The purpose of such programs is to instill moral and ethical standards to prepare students for becoming valuable members of society. The effectiveness of character education on student behavior and the review of literature can be presented from both positive and negative perspectives. Examining each viewpoint will help to determine if character education can improve student behavior.

#### Positive Implications of Character Education

With the expectation that schools will develop, deliver and implement character education programs, there are no set guidelines as to the exact content that is to be taught. However, the importance of character education is highlighted as “promoting prosocial attitudes and behavior that support the development of social competence and a cooperative disposition,” (White & Warfa, 2011). One program that has shown positive results is The Building Schools of Character program. This platform uses an “ecological framework to develop an understanding of social constructs associated with a person’s schemas of behavior and is rooted in the empirical evidence gained from developmental research” (White & Warfa, 2011). Such programs use Vygotsky’s *zone of proximal development* (SPD) to develop a child’s schemas of behaviors. The results indicated that prosocial character education programs positively affect students’ abilities to meet the social, emotional, and cognitive needs. Students’ on-task behaviors nearly increased 49%, while their off-task behaviors decreased 51%.

Social-emotional and character development programs, such as Positive Action (PA), have also shown success in improving school quality. “The PA program is a comprehensive, school-wide social-emotional and character development program designed to improve academics, student behavior and character,” (Snyder, Vuchinich, Eashburn, & Flay, 2012). The program is curriculum that consists of 140, 15-20-minute lessons taught over the course of 35 weeks by the classroom teacher. Lessons cover a total of 6 major concepts that include self-concept, physical and intellectual actions, social/emotional actions for managing oneself responsibly, getting along with others, being honest with yourself and others, and continuous self-improvement (Snyder et al., 2012). Two studies were completed to examine the PA program utilizing quasi-experimental designs and matched-control comparisons. Snyder and colleagues reported that both studies showed positive effects on student achievement in academics and a decrease in problem behaviors (e.g., suspensions, violence rates, bullying). When the schools were examined 1-year after the implementation of the PA program, the schools’ report cards stated an improvement on standardized tests for reading and math and lower absenteeism, suspension, and retention rates.

Moral education has become a common practice in schools across the country. The purpose of moral education is to teach students to be honest, smart and good (Lickona, 1991). “Through discipline, the teacher’s good example, and the curriculum, schools have sought to instruct children in the virtues of patriotism, hard work, honesty, thriftiness, altruism, and courage” (Lickona, 1991, p. 59). In other words, teachers demonstrate moral education through the use of preexisting school and classroom curriculum and instruction. For example, children can practice their reading while



learning about heroism and virtue. Teachers choose reading assignments that captivate young readers and include characters who display ideal character traits. According to Pritchard (1998), students who have moral education built into their curriculum are self-disciplined and tend to score higher on achievement tests than students who do not identify with positive behavior characteristics. Studies have also shown that moral education makes it possible for all students to achieve and show greater success. “Moral education is a recognized educational standard that introduces a noncompetitive goal for students to aim at, a goal that is within the reach of many more students than is academic excellence” (Pritchard, 1988).

### **Negative Implications of Character Education**

Even if teachers do teach children to value positive characteristics, it hardly becomes an easy task to initiate. When character education is implemented into the school curriculum, it is expected that students will continue with what they learned and apply it within society and social situations outside of school. Teachers cannot supervise the students beyond the classroom. Therefore, it comes into question the significance and the effectiveness of teaching character education if children will not oblige, or follow through, with the values that were taught through a specified character education program (Pritchard, 1988).

In order for a character education program to be effective, it must involve the entire faculty, staff, parents, and community. “Cooks, custodians, and bus drivers, as well as teachers, parents, and community must be involved if student behaviors are to be positively affected.” However, having various individuals designating character traits, such as “respect,” can become confusing for a child because the word has a different

meaning for each person. “The student receives mixed messages about the trait;” therefore, could become lost on how to express and show respect towards themselves, others, and property (Bulach, 2002).

Another conflict with teaching character education in schools is there could be very little change in student behaviors because the repetition of teaching the same character traits. “If a system has twenty-five traits to cover and they are repeated each year, students will say, ‘We did that last year.’ They become bored with it and do not take it seriously” (Bulach, 2002, p. 274). Although schools may be meeting the state mandates, the character education programs can be ineffective due to the lack of student interest and it could take time away from the regular instructional programs.

## **Conclusion**

The hope of promoting and delivering character education within schools is to develop “children’s rational and ethical decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills,” (White & Warfa, 2011). For some, character education programs can be deemed ineffective, time consuming, and inconsistent. However, many believe such programs can meet students’ social, emotional, and cognitive needs. Further research on schools’ character education programs is being conducted in order to investigate the effectiveness on student behaviors.

The goal of this study is to determine if character education in schools is effective enough to positively increase students’ behaviors. To conduct this research, three schools’ character education programs within the Cherry Hill Public School District will be examined. Data of the schools’ behavior and discipline reports will be collected from the beginning of the implementation school year to the end of the school year. Results will

be analyzed to determine if character education has no, some, or significant efficacy on student behavior.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### Setting

**Schools.** The study was conducted across three elementary schools located in a suburban town in New Jersey. The school district consists of one preschool, twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. During the 2017-2018 school year, there were approximately 10,996 students enrolled in the district. Three elementary schools were examined during this study. The length of the elementary school day is approximately 6 hours and 30 minutes with 5 hours and 30 minutes of instructional periods. School A served 304 students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. Out of the 304 students enrolled, 67 students were identified as receiving special education services. There were 47 students classified as economically disadvantaged. School B served 417 students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. Out of the 417 students enrolled, 88 students were identified as receiving special education services. There were 121 students classified as economically disadvantaged. School C had 499 students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. Out of the 499 students that attended, 80 students received special education services. There were 155 students classified as economically disadvantaged.

**Classrooms.** The study was conducted in Kindergarten through fifth grade general education and special education classrooms in all three schools. Schools A, B, and C have access to SMART boards within the classrooms and libraries. The classrooms all have Chromebooks assigned to each student. Each classroom teacher participates in their school's character education program and implements character

education lessons. The participants in the study attended the schools during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years.

### **Participants**

**Students.** A total of 1,223 students, from 3 different elementary schools within the same school district, participated in this study. The participants ranged in age from 5 to 11 years old in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. All students are identified as being in general or special education, with 235 students receiving special education services. Of the 1,223 participants, 615 are females and 608 are males. Table 1 shows general participant information.

Table 1

*General Participant Information*

<b>School A</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Age</b>
Kindergarten	40	5-6
First	31	6-7
Second	49	7-8
Third	59	8-9
Fourth	52	9-10
Fifth	42	10-11
Special Education/Ungraded	31	5-11
<b>School B</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Age</b>
Kindergarten	55	5-6
First	64	6-7
Second	67	7-8
Third	81	8-9
Fourth	64	9-10
Fifth	63	10-11
Special Education/Ungraded	23	5-11
<b>School C</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Age</b>
Kindergarten	70	5-6
First	83	6-7
Second	79	7-8
Third	86	8-9
Fourth	85	9-10
Fifth	85	10-11
Special Education/Ungraded	11	5-11

**Teachers.** A total number of 84 teachers instructed the classes for the duration of this study. The average years of experience in School A was 9 years with 8 staff members holding a Bachelor's degree and 14 holding a Master's degree. School B's staff members have an average of 12 years of experience with 14 teachers having a Bachelor's degree and 18 teachers having a Master's degree. The average years of experience in School C was 12 years of experience with 11 teachers holding a Bachelor's degree and 19 teachers holding a Master's degree.

### **Materials**

The materials used in this study include a laptop with internet access, electronic chart to document and compare discipline reports according to grade level from 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 from the 3 elementary schools, electronic access to The Great Dream Character Education Program, electronic access to The Responsive Classroom Initiative, and electronic access to Lions Quest Skills for Growing.

**Measurement materials.** A discipline report chart, shown in Figure 1, was created to document the number of reports that were filed prior to the implementation of a character education program within the schools. In the same chart, reports were documented a year after the implementation of the schools' character education programs. The discipline reports were collected from the schools' principals and guidance counselors.

Table 2

*Data Collection Table*

<b>School A</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten		
First		
Second		
Third		
Fourth		
Fifth		
Special Education/Ungraded		
<b>School B</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten		
First		
Second		
Third		
Fourth		
Fifth		
Special Education/Ungraded		
<b>School C</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten		
First		
Second		
Third		
Fourth		
Fifth		
Special Education/Ungraded		

**Research Design**

The research was conducted using single subject design methodology and a one-shot experimental case study. The experimental treatment, being the character education programs in each school, was introduced and then observed over the course of a school year. The baseline data was collected through the collaboration of the schools’ principals



and guidance counselors. The principals and guidance counselors provided information regarding their discipline reports prior to the implementation of a character education program during the 2016-2017 school year. The data collected displayed the number of discipline reports that were filed before a character education program was put into effect. Once a character education program was put in place at each school during the 2017-2018 academic school year, data was collected on the amount of discipline reports that were filed. At the end of the study, data from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic school years were compared to determine if the amount of discipline reports filed had decreased.

### **Procedures**

The research was observed over the course of an entire academic school year, September 2017-June 2018. Prior to the observations, each classroom teacher introduced their school's new character education program to their students through mini-lessons, social activities, and presentations. To further the students' understanding of their school's character education program and to motivate them to participate, principals and guidance counselors presented whole school assemblies. The assemblies described the school's character education program, discussed examples of positive behaviors, and offered incentives for displaying good character. Some of the incentives included earning extra recess time, excused homework for a day, spend the day with the principal, have lunch with the principal or a teacher of their choosing, sitting in the principal's chair for the day, etc. Follow-up lessons and discussions designed and provided by the teachers were executed 2-3 times per week to reinforce the character education programs.

## **Measurement Procedures**

**Observations.** Observations of student behaviors were made during school visitations. The researcher would walk throughout the schools and randomly visit classrooms to observe students' behaviors towards one another. The researcher would look for opportunities in which students were communicating politely, helping each other without prompts, and treating each other with respect.

**Reports.** Each month, the researcher discussed any discipline reports that were filed with the schools' principals and guidance counselors. The researcher would ask for the number of discipline reports that were filed to determine if the reports were increasing or decreasing.

## **Data Analysis**

Graphs were created to compare the effectiveness of each school's character education program. The graphs were measured and broken down according to grade level. Comparisons were made based upon the pre-implementation and post-implementation of a character education program. The graphs were analyzed to determine if character education improves student behavior.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

This study utilized a single subject design and a one-shot experimental case to evaluate the effectiveness of character education programs in grades kindergarten through fifth across three different schools. During the baseline phase, discipline reports from each school were examined. These reports were examined prior to the implementation of a character education program in each school. During the intervention phase, every classroom teacher in each of the three schools introduced the new character education program to their students. The programs were implemented through mini-lessons, social activities, and presentations.

Data was collected through observations of students' behaviors. The researcher walked throughout the schools and visited the classrooms to observe students' behaviors towards one another. Opportunities in which students were communicating politely, helping each other without prompts, and treating each other with respect were traits that were looked for. Each month, the researcher discussed any discipline reports that were filed with the schools' principals and guidance counselors. Discipline reports were examined to determine if the reports were increasing or decreasing.

### Results

**Pre-implementation behaviors.** Pre-implementation behaviors were assessed using discipline reports provided by the schools' principals and guidance counselors. The scores were calculated per grade level and categorized according to consequence. For each incident, the corresponding grade level received 1 point to indicate an incident had

occurred or had been reported. Table 2 provides student group data at School A for the 2016-2017 academic school year. Information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed prior to the implementation of a character education program.

Table 3

*Pre-Implementation Behaviors School A (2016-2017)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	7	0	0	5
First	4	0	0	6
Second	4	0	0	9
Third	6	0	0	7
Fourth	3	0	0	6
Fifth	4	0	0	7
Special Ed	4	0	0	2

Table 3 provides student group data at School B for the 2016-2017 academic school year. Information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed prior to the implementation of a character education program.

Table 4

*Pre-Implementation Behaviors School B (2016-2017)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	1	0	0	3
First	0	0	0	3
Second	4	0	0	5
Third	2	0	0	4
Fourth	2	0	0	6
Fifth	4	0	0	5
Special Ed	3	0	0	0

Table 4 provides student group data at School C for the 2016-2017 academic school year. Similar to Tables 2 and 3, the information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed prior to the implementation of a character education program in School C.

Table 5

*Pre-Implementation Behaviors School C (2016-2017)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	4	0	0	4
First	2	0	0	5
Second	1	0	0	3
Third	0	0	0	4
Fourth	3	0	0	2
Fifth	2	0	0	6
Special Ed	3	0	0	1

**Intervention year 1.** Post-implementation behaviors were assessed using discipline reports provided by the schools' principals and guidance counselors. The character education programs were introduced, taught, and implemented for an entire academic school year before the results were analyzed to determine their effectiveness. Similar to the pre-implementation tables, the scores were calculated per grade level and categorized according to consequence. For each incident, the corresponding grade level received 1 point to indicate an incident had occurred or had been reported. Table 5 provides student group data at School A for the 2017-2018 academic school year. Information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed after the implementation of a character education program.

Table 6

*Post-Implementation Behaviors School A (2017-2018)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	2	0	0	3
First	2	0	0	2
Second	3	0	0	4
Third	0	0	0	2
Fourth	0	0	0	2
Fifth	1	0	0	3
Special Ed	2	0	0	2

Table 6 provides student group data at School B for the 2017-2018 academic school year. Information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed after the implementation of a character education program.

Table 7

*Post-Implementation Behaviors School B (2017-2018)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	1	0	0	3
First	0	0	0	1
Second	0	0	0	3
Third	1	0	0	2
Fourth	2	0	0	4
Fifth	3	0	0	2
Special Ed	1	0	0	0

Table 7 provides student group data at School C for the 2017-2018 academic school year. The information has been documented according to grade level and incidents that were reported. The reports were filed after the implementation of a character education program in School C.

Table 8

*Post-Implementation Behaviors School C (2017-2018)*

	Physical fights or attacks	Distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs	Use or possession of firearm or explosive device	Harassment, intimidation, or bullying reports or investigations
Kindergarten	0	0	0	0
First	1	0	0	2
Second	0	0	0	3
Third	0	0	0	2
Fourth	2	0	0	2
Fifth	2	0	0	2
Special Ed	1	0	0	1

Table 8 displays a concise view of the number of discipline reports that were filed. It compares the number of reports that were filed prior to the implementation of a character education program to the first year a character education program was executed within each school.

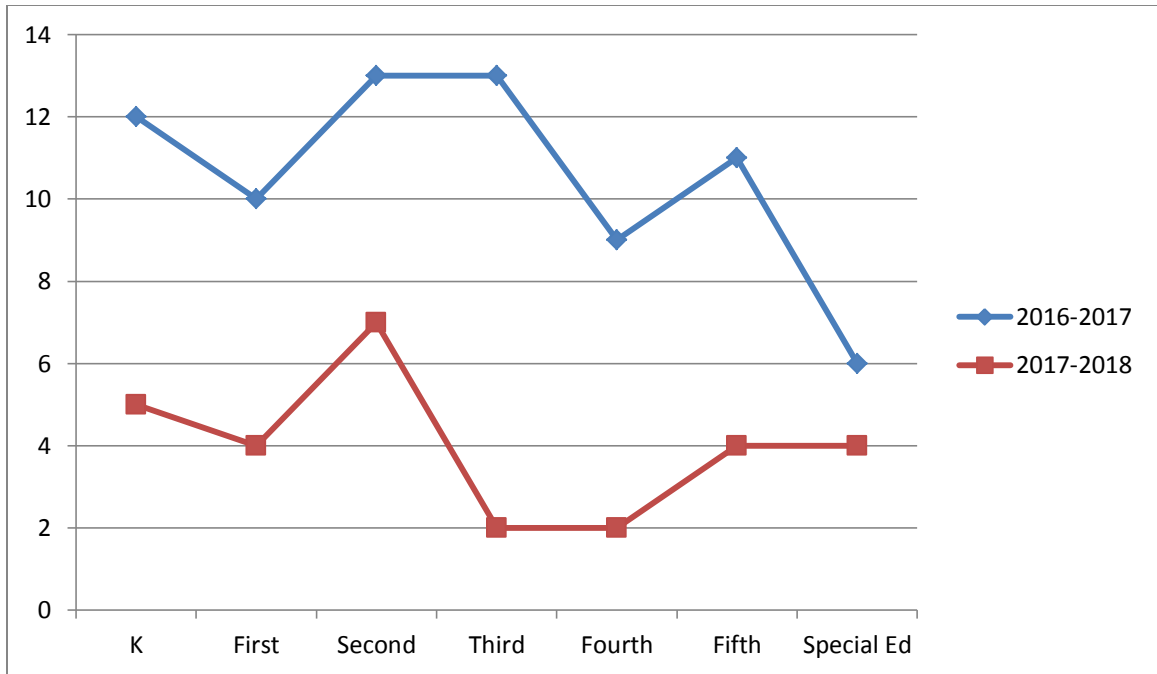


Table 9

*Pre- and Post-Implementation*

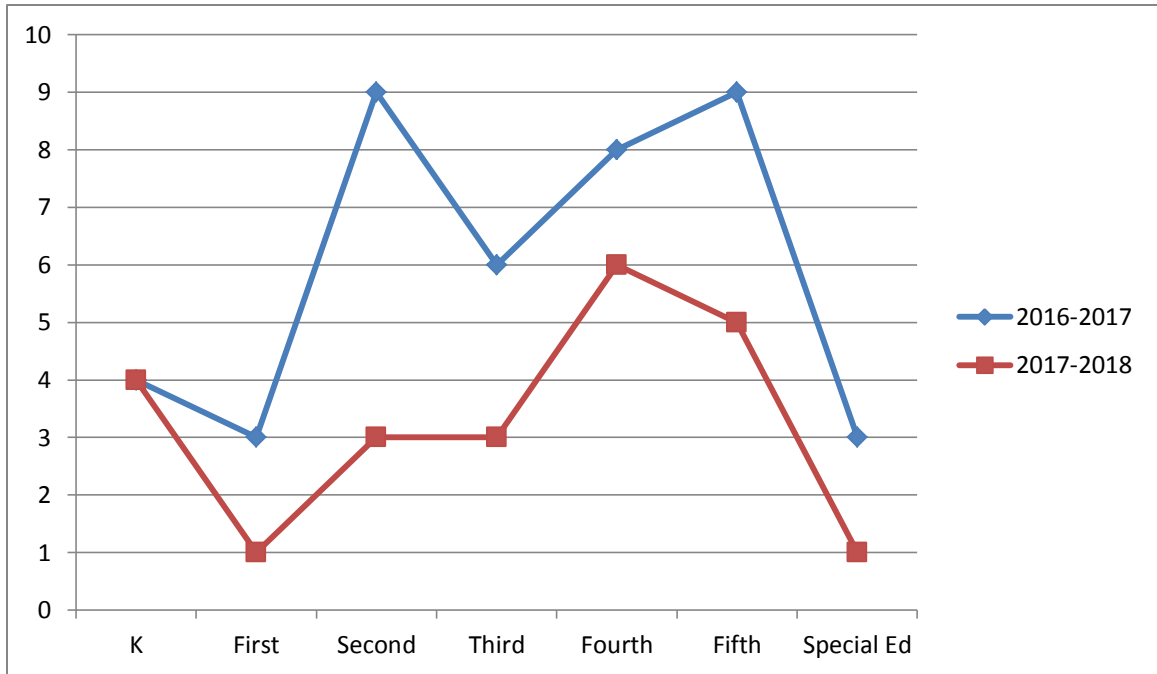
<b>School A</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten	12	5
First	10	4
Second	13	7
Third	13	2
Fourth	9	2
Fifth	11	4
Special Education/Ungraded	6	4
<b>School B</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten	4	4
First	3	1
Second	9	3
Third	6	3
Fourth	8	6
Fifth	9	5
Special Education/Ungraded	3	1
<b>School C</b>		
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pre-Implementation</b>	<b>Year 1</b>
Kindergarten	8	0
First	9	3
Second	4	3
Third	4	2
Fourth	5	4
Fifth	8	4
Special Education/Ungraded	4	2

Figure 1 shows the trend of the pre-implementation and the completion of the first year of a character education program within School A during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic school years.



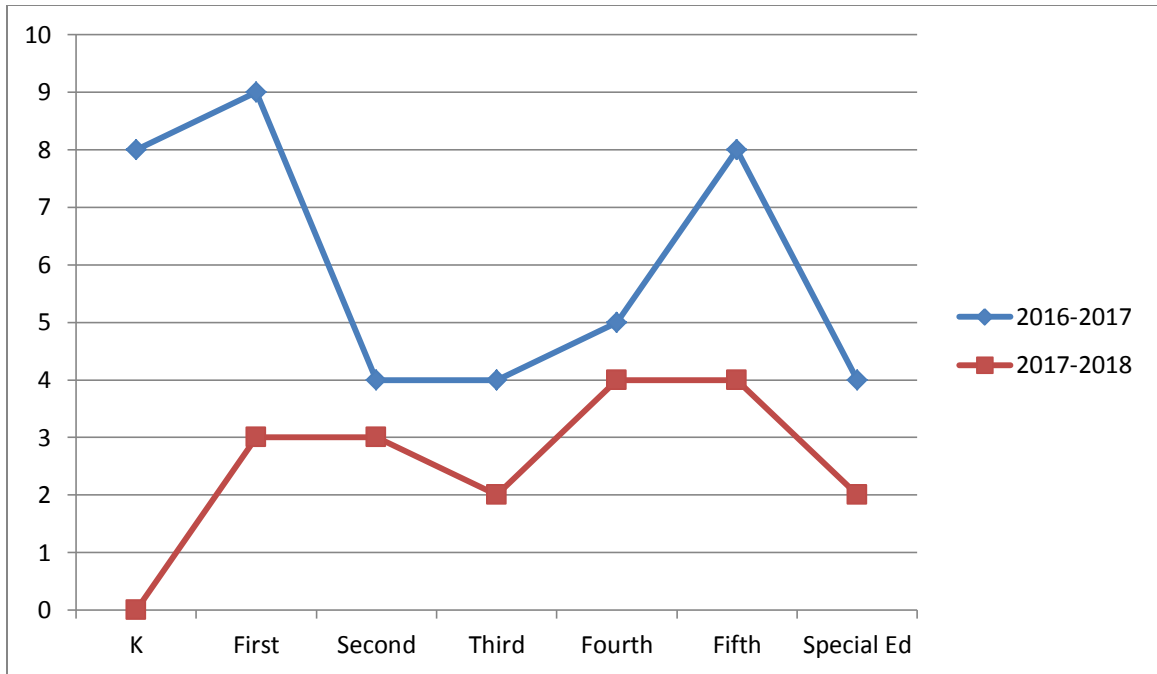
*Figure 1. Pre-Implementation of Character Education Program for School A.*

Figure 2 shows the trend of the pre-implementation and the completion of the first year of a character education program within School B during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic school years.



*Figure 2. Pre-Implementation of Character Education Program for School B.*

Figure 3 shows the trend of the pre-implementation and the completion of the first year of a character education program within School C during the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic school years.



*Figure 3. Pre-Implementation of Character Education Program for School C.*

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to determine if character education in school is effective enough to positively increase students' moral and ethical behaviors and values. The study examined the effectiveness of character education programs in three suburban elementary schools.

#### Findings

The results of the study revealed all three schools decreased in filed discipline reports and increased in positive behaviors from the Pre-Implementation year to Year 1 of a character education program. For example, School A decreased the number of discipline reports filed from the Pre-Implementation year to Year 1 by nearly 38%. Kindergarten went from filing 12 discipline reports to 5; First grade's initial amount of reports were 10 and decreased to 4; Second went from 13 down to 7; discipline reports for Third grade began at 13 and plummeted to 2; Fourth grade had 9 and improved to 2; Fifth grade had 11 discipline reports filed in the Pre-Implementation year and went down to 4 filed reports in Year 1; Special Education had 6 and reduced to 4.

The results of this study corroborate with prior research that has been conducted on the effectiveness of character education. Bulach (2018), for example, suggested schools and school communities should be involved in a character education program, and determined character education programs decrease bullying and incidents of violence because students will be more sympathetic, tolerant, kind, compassionate, and forgiving individuals. Snyder et al. (2012) reported their findings on character education. Results determined character education showed positive effects on student achievement in

academics and a decrease in problem behaviors. Snyder's findings validate the results that were determined through this case study. Students showed a decrease in suspensions, violence rates and bullying.

### **Limitations**

This study had several possible limitations. One limitation may have been the varying instruction when it came time for intervention of the character education programs. During the intervention period, all educators were given the names of the programs that were being used and the website or book in which they can find additional information. However, the educators were required to find or create their own materials. Additionally, they were to create lesson plans on how they were going to implement the character education programs within their classrooms. These factors could have hindered the results of the study because each educator's instruction differed from classroom to classroom. Furthermore, varied materials were used, making the programs' implementation inconsistent.

The final limitation was the timeline in which the study was completed. This study was conducted during the Fall and Spring semesters. This does not provide enough time to truly detect the effectiveness of the character education programs. To determine if these programs make a significant difference in student behaviors, further research should be conducted.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

An implication for practice includes having the teachers well trained to initiate and follow through with the intervention of the character education programs. Teachers should have an understanding of the programs that were being implemented within their

schools and know the materials and resources they have available to them. Offering professional development opportunities for their programs would be the most effective way to ensure teachers are properly trained and consistent in their practice.

### **Conclusion**

The study was successful in that it revealed an increase in positive behaviors within the elementary schools. Further research should be conducted to completely determine the effectiveness of character education programs. Results could have been stronger if teachers were offered additional training on how implement the character education programs. Moreover, giving the teachers the proper materials to instruct the students on these programs could have promoted student engagement to increase their positive behaviors.

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