

SUMMARY OF PARTNERSHIPS IN CHARACTER EDUCATION GRANT 2002-2007

Introduction

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) began its formal support for character education in 1988 with an effort to encourage local boards of education to establish core ethical values to serve as fundamental guidance for their mission of student development. An initial federal grant in 1996 and a state-aid initiative begun in 2000 solidified the state's commitment to assisting teachers to become educators of character as well as intellect. In 2002 the NJDOE received a four-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education, under the NCLB Partnerships in Character Education Grant Program to expand the reach and quality of character education in the state and undertake an ambitious research project in ten school districts

Scope of the Project

As the cornerstone of the grant project initiated in 2002, the NJDOE established the New Jersey Center for Character Education (NJCCE) at Rutgers, The State University, in 2003. NJCCE was located in the Center for Applied Psychology of the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology to serve as the management hub for implementing the objectives of the PCE grant. To provide input from the field, an advisory board was formed of state association, practitioner and parent representatives to help guide the project and an Evaluation Expert Panel of experienced research and evaluation professionals was convened to advise the NJDOE and assist the NJCCE in its evaluation of the project.

As an SEA grantee, the NJDOE had two distinct responsibilities under the provisions of the authorizing legislation: 1) to assist interested Local Education Agencies (LEAs) throughout the state in designing and establishing character education programs, and 2) to form a partnership with ten selected LEAs to evaluate their implementation of science-based character education programs.

State-wide Services and LEA Program Development Support

The program support plan implemented by the NJCCE was designed to provide technical assistance to educators throughout New Jersey who were responsible for services under the NJDOE's Character Education Partnership state aid initiative (NJCEP), which provided \$4.75 million in formula driven resources for all of New Jersey's 671 school districts and charter schools, as well as state managed special schools from 2000 to 2006, an unprecedented state-level commitment to character education.

NJCCE significantly expanded the support available for the NJCEP initiative through a combination of state-wide and regional conferences, technical assistance and consultation, and resource development and dissemination. The following summarizes the services provided over the course of the four years of the project:

- Eleven Principles Sourcebook Institutes. As the only state-level organization licensed to provide this training program developed by the national Character Education Partnership NJCCE provided this training, which was required by the NJDOE to form a common definition and understanding of comprehensive character education, to 695 school district representatives from 2005-2007.
- State-Wide Conferences and Regional Workshops. The NJDOE and NJCCE sponsored 17 other events that included 149 workshops, most of which featured New Jersey practitioners and students; attended by 2,132 educators.

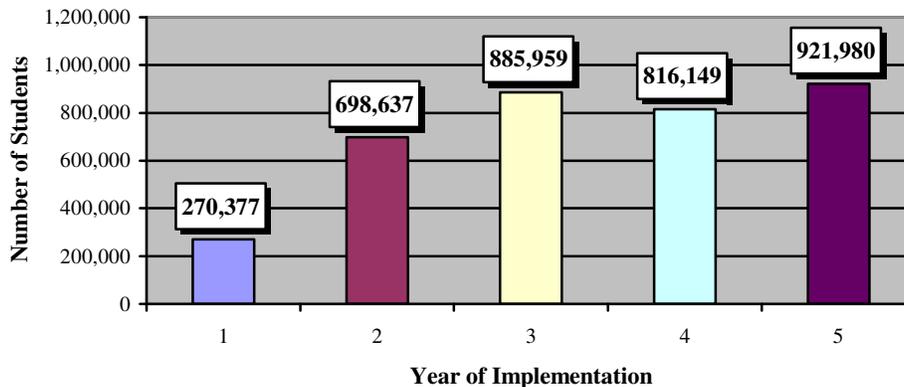
Many other additional events were held in co-sponsorship with the following NJCCE collaborating partners:

- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning,
 - Princeton Center for Leadership and Training,
 - New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association,
 - New Jersey Parents and Teachers Association,
 - New Jersey Education Association,
 - New Jersey Association of School Administrators,
 - The New Jersey State Bar Foundation,
 - Fairleigh Dickinson University, and
 - The College of New Jersey.
- New Jersey On-line Character Education Profile Directory. The NJCCE developed a searchable data base of 67 national programs and 80 program resources (consultants, presenters, publishers) that provided a source of uniform information for schools to access in making informed decisions regarding program development and expansion.
 - National On-Line Conference. NJCCE co-sponsored the first national on-line conference, *Character Education In a World of Budget Cuts and Standardized Testing*, in 2006, with iCohere, Inc., which featured a presentation on the NJCEP.
 - The Sakai Pilot Project. NJCCE was selected by Rutgers University to participate in a pilot test of Sakai, a higher education community project to develop and support a new web-based collaboration and learning environment. NJCCE utilized the new system to support a service-learning mentoring network of eighteen schools in the Promoting the Advancement of Character Education through Service-Learning (PACES) project funded by the New Jersey Department of State's Learn and Serve America program.
 - Consultations. Approximately 45 school districts received intensive individual consultations through site visits, meetings and a combination of email and telephone support.

The NJCEP Network began in 2003 with 324 educators who signed-up to be part of a listserv and receive monthly e-newsletters offering current information on resources, research and funding opportunities. The Network grew to 2557 educators over the life of the grant. Forty-five issues of the *Network* newsletter have been disseminated during the grant period.

The most recent NJCEP Initiative Report on Year Five Outcomes demonstrates the impact of these combined efforts on the level of activity and numbers of students, parents and educators reached by the combined state and federally supported initiatives. The number of students receiving services grew from 270,377 in the 2000-01 school year to more than 900,000 students in the 2004-05 school year.

**NJCEP Initiative Year Five Report:
Number of Participating Students**



Reporting LEAs also indicated in the Year Five Report that 80,570 parents and community members participated in NJCEP initiative programs and services and 38,789 school staff participated in professional development services as a part of the initiative. (See <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/chared/> for a full description of the NJCEP and annual reports.)

National awards and recognition received by New Jersey schools based on a competitive process and expert reviews is another measure of the general impact of the NJCEP on New Jersey schools' comparative program quality. The national Character Education Partnership in Washington, D.C., originally established by the Association for Supervision, Curriculum and Development is the national standard setter for the field. CEP's annual award process is the highest level of recognition in the field. For three consecutive years (2004, 2005, 2006), which coincided with the last three grant project years, more New Jersey schools received promising practice awards than any state in the nation (a total of 49 schools received 54 awards -- see Appendix H). In addition, two schools (Cranford High School and Zane North Elementary School in Collingswood) received the prestigious National School of Character award.

LEA Partners Evidence-Based Program Implementation and Evaluation Studies

Purpose and Organization of the Evaluation

During the first project year, each of the ten selected LEA Partners conducted a needs assessment focusing on the status of its existing program and was required to select a nationally recognized and evidenced-based character education program. To advise the LEAs and approve their program selections, the NJCCE used standards set by CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, and published in CASEL's source book *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*. Teachers from each LEA were trained, along with other school staff members, in each specific program's methods of teaching character education to students. Seven LEA partners decided to expand programs with which they had a number of years of experience, and three decided to implement new programs.

The purpose of this research part of the project was to understand the effectiveness of the impact of these character education programs on the populations they were intended to serve and also to study the process of implementing and supporting these programs. While there were barriers to conducting student assessments for some of the LEA partners, seven agreed to utilize the student report form of the Social And Character Development survey tool (SACD) developed by the U.S. Department of Education for use in another research project which also featured multiple school districts using different character education programs at the elementary level. The SACD was designed to measure connectedness and quality of school relationships; school engagement and effort; teasing; ability to handle conflict; acceptance and frequency of aggression; empathetic responses and pro-social behaviors.

The following table represents the LEA partner program selections and the general extent of the student assessment efforts:

LEA PARTNER PROGRAM SELECTIONS AND STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

LEA Partner School Districts	Evidence-Based Program Implemented	Schools / Students (N) Assessed Annually	Research Design / Instrument
Cape May County Special Services	Social Decision-Making / Problem Solving	2004: Special E.S. / N = 11 2005: Special E.S. / N = 6 2006: Special E.S. / N = 8	Pre & Post Assessment / SACD
Cherry Hill	Lion's Quest Skills for Adolescence	2005: E.S. / N = 53 2006: E.S. / N = 55	Pre & Post Assessment / SACD
Highland Park	Social Decision-Making / Problem Solving	No NJCCE assessment conducted.	No NJCCE evaluation plan.
Hunterdon Central Reg. High School	Lion's Quest Skills for Adolescence	2005: H.S. / N = 241 2006: H.S. / N = 415	Pre & Post Assessment / Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ)
Jersey City	Social Decision-	2004: 6 E.S. / N = 281	Quasi-Experimental /

	Making / Problem Solving	2005: 6 E.S. / N = 462 2006: 6 E.S. / N = 546	SACD
Monroe Township (Gloucester Co.)	Community of Caring	2004: 2 E.S. / N = 212 2005: 4 E.S. / N = 360 2006: 4 E.S. / N = 388	Pre & Post Assessment / SACD
Paterson	Responsive Classroom	2004: 6 E.S. / N = 353 2005: 6 E.S. / N = 382 2006: 6 E.S. / N = 351	Quasi-Experimental / SACD
Plainfield	Overcoming Obstacles	2005: H.S. / N = 886 2006: H.S. / N = 364	Pre & Post Assessment / "About Me" Composite Survey
Westwood	Social Decision-Making / Problem Solving	2004: 5 E.S. / N = 626 2005: 5 E.S. / N = 594 2006: 5 E.S. / N = 617	Pre & Post Assessment / SACD
Woodbridge	Community of Caring	2005: 3 E.S. / N = 185 2006: 3 E.S. / N = 188	Pre & Post Assessment / SACD

Staff training by the selected program providers, planning and program support from the NJCCE and data collection conducted by the NJCCE with school support occurred during the school 2003/04, 2004/05 and 2005/06 school years.

Findings: Student Assessment Outcomes

The study found significant increases in students' perceptions of engagement and effort in their schoolwork at some of the schools within the 10 selected LEAs. In addition to students' improved prosocial behaviors, assessment data also revealed increases in students' empathetic responses, a sense of connection to school and perceptions of improved quality in school relationships across schools. When comparing successive grades, significant increases in engagement and effort in school, and decreased acceptance of verbal aggression also were found in some schools. While two of the 10 districts used quasi-experimental designs to demonstrate some statistically significant findings in areas such as increased levels of engagement and effort in school, and increased ease in handling conflict and non-conflict situations, the findings were mixed and inconclusive about the overall impact of the program implementation in the participating schools in the two districts.

The Westwood Regional School District mounted an ambitious program plan in five elementary schools and demonstrated substantive and significant positive findings. Using the Social Decision-Making/Problem Solving program as the intervention, the implementation plan allowed for outcome comparisons across same grade and by successive grades (3rd-, 4th- and 5th- grade cohorts; approximately 600 students per grade) over three years. When comparing the same grade level pre and post implementation, significant decreases were found at all schools in perceptions of being teased by other students, the acceptance of verbal and physical aggression, and/or the frequency of aggressive and delinquent behaviors.

Despite mixed findings from student data, the degree of success in program development and expansion throughout New Jersey was far beyond what was initially proposed and anticipated.