

Title: A Cross Case Study of Implementation of a Character Education Program: A Comparative Analysis Between Two High Schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania

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Initially implemented at the elementary school grades, *character education* initiatives are slowly being infused into high school programming. This study examined the influences of a high school character education program on student decision-making as it relates to school behavior and the relationship to school climate, student dropout numbers, daily average attendance rate, and the social capital/positive peer relationships that may exist in the school community. The study was a cross case study, a comparative analysis between two high schools in southwestern Pennsylvania. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used, including focus groups, survey, and existing data analysis.

In analysis of the school climate survey response, the study found that there was not a significant difference between the high school student populations and the perception of mutual respect. Responses for questions related to peer relationships reflect a significant difference between the high schools' student populations. This study found that there was not a relationship between a character education program and the students' perception of a safe school environment or having a sense of belonging. Focus group commentary did not support this finding.

Archival school data suggest that character education programming did not have an impact in reducing the number of violent student incidents reported to PDE. This study found that the daily average attendance rate was similar for both high schools. The school disciplinary referrals reflect a higher incidence of in-house disciplinary referrals for the Comparison School and a decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals in the Character Education School. This study found that there was a decrease in the number of students who dropped out between the 2001-2003 school years in the Character School. The Comparison School data revealed an increase in dropouts.

This study reinforces the need for schools assess school climate, to review discipline and student dropout data, and to determine whether or not there is a sense of school community within the student population. The examination of school data may lead educators to determine whether a character education program or a character education focus should be incorporated into the framework of the school community.