

“Throughout history, and in cultures all over the world, education rightly conceived has had two great goals: to help students become smart and to help them become good” (Likona & Davidson in Character Education Partnership, 2016, p.i). Even young people acknowledge value in upholding character. The 2012 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth reported that 99% of high school students said it was important to be a person of good character and 93% were satisfied with their own ethics and character. However, 52% of the same students reported cheating on school exams, 32% copied an Internet document for a classroom assignment, 20% stole from a store within the past 12 months, and 57% believed that in the real world, successful people do what they have to in order to win, even if others consider it cheating (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2012). This disparity intensifies the need for parents, schools, policy makers, and non-profit agencies to carefully develop effective character education programs.

DEFINING CHARACTER AND CHARACTER EDUCATION

“Character education is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures” (Character Education Partnership, 2016, p.i). To maximize impact on the development of youth’s character traits, those creating character development programs typically implement one of two contrasting approaches:

(1) The deficit approach concentrates on addressing risk factors that detract from the ability to acquire character, such as teen

pregnancy and criminal activities. The successful implementation of a program using this approach occurs with the reduction of those risky behaviors, such as fewer children dropping out of school, becoming pregnant, or abusing substances. Some national and local statistics for commonly used indicators of character deficits in young people are provided in Tables 1 & 2. These data further demonstrate the need for character education. While this approach focuses on correcting symptoms, it potentially neglects the underlying causes of the issues (Community Network for Youth Development, 2001).

(2) The positive youth development approach focuses on contributors to healthy youth development. It emphasizes a holistic approach which includes a safe physical environment, collaboration and contribution by youth, supportive relationships, high expectations, activities that keep youth engaged and learning, and mechanisms which will help youth become young adults (Youth.gov, n.d.).

Instead of deficits, positive actions such as volunteering are often used as indicators to demonstrate effectiveness of this development approach. For example, the Corporation for National and Community Service (n.d.) reported that 24.9% of Americans volunteered at least to some extent in 2015. The national volunteer rate for persons aged 16-19 was 26.4%. The majority of teenagers, 77%, volunteered with one or more of three types of organizations: educational; religious; or social services.

TABLE 1. RISKY BEHAVIOR INDICATORS	U.S.	TX	BEXAR	BANDERA	COMAL	KENDALL
<i>Status Dropout Rates</i> (16-19 year olds not in school and no high school diploma or equivalency; percent in 2014)	4%	5%	8.7%	2.6%	4.2%	1.1%
<i>Persons age 18 to 24 not attending school, not working, and no degree beyond high school</i> (Percent in 2015)	14%	16%	14%	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Teen Births</i> (Number of live births for females 15-19 years of age and rate per 1,000 females in 2015)	229,715	32,687	2,010	n/a	n/a	n/a
	22	35	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Juvenile Violent Crime Arrests</i> (number and rate per 100,000 children aged 10-17 in 2014)	n/a	3,572	95	2	5	3
	n/a	110.9	43.2	104.3	35.4	63.5
<i>Teen Deaths Deaths</i> (Number of deaths by homicide, suicide, and accident ages 15-19; rate per 100,000 in 2015)	7,567	689	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	36	36	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017)						

TABLE 2. JUVENILE DELINQUENCY	TX	BEXAR	BANDERA	COMAL	KENDALL
Total number of juvenile referrals in 2014	64,057	5,154	41	221	51
Number of referrals in secure detention in 2014	3,876	44	0	17	0
Youth residing in juvenile detention, correctional and/or residential facilities (2014)	41,934	2,463	11	84	19
(Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2016)					

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

“The last decade has seen a shift in awareness of the importance of leisure time activities in the development of a young person. There is growing recognition of the vital contribution that discretionary time can make for young people in terms of promoting social inclusion, access to opportunities and overall development... Given such interconnections, it is critical that leisure-time activities be viewed within the overall context of youth development and the participation of young people in their communities and society” (United Nations, 2005, p.70).

As a response, after school programs, arts programs, and summer recreational activities programs have been developed to fill youth’s discretionary time with “character” centered curricula.

Eight features of successful community character development programs include:

- ✦ Physical and psychological safety
- ✦ Appropriate structure
- ✦ Supportive relationships
- ✦ Opportunities to belong
- ✦ Positive social norms
- ✦ Support for efficacy and mentoring

- ✦ Opportunities for skill building
- ✦ Integration of family, school, and community efforts

(National Academy of Sciences, 2005)

The scope of character development programs range from national initiatives to small, local community groups. Several of the more wide-reaching national programs are described below.

America’s Promise Alliance is a 501(c) (3) organization founded in 1997 following the President’s Summit for America’s Future. This initiative is the nation’s largest cross-sector alliance for young people, with over 360 national partners. Alliance partners launch new youth programs, expand existing ones, and lead community and statewide collaborations for youth. America’s Promise Alliance provides technical assistance, training, and innovative tools that accelerate the delivery of more resources to as many young people as possible at the community level. A few of the nonprofit members of the alliance include: Big Brothers Big Sisters of America; Boys & Girls Clubs of America; The National 4-H Council; Girl Scouts of the USA; The Y; City Year San Antonio; and Communities in Schools (America’s Promise Alliance, 2017a; America’s Promise Alliance, 2017c).

This organization builds the character and competence of the nation's youth by developing programs that fulfill the Five Promises:

- Caring adults – ongoing relationships with parents, mentors, tutors, or coaches
- Safe places with structured activities during non-school hours
- Healthy start– adequate nutrition, exercise, health care, and stress reduction
- Effective education and marketable skills
- Opportunities to help others through community service

(America's Promise Alliance, 2017b)

The **CHARACTER COUNTS!** coalition, developed by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, is a diverse partnership of schools, communities, education and human-service organizations committed to using the Six Pillars of Character in their individual and joint programs. As of December 2015, there were 232 coalition members, 15 of whom were based in Texas. In San Antonio, the Northside Independent School District is a member of the coalition (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2016a).

CHARACTER COUNTS! utilizes the "Six Pillars of Character" as its framework for character education programs.

- Trustworthiness (honesty, integrity, reliability, and loyalty)
 - Respect (civility, courtesy, and decency, dignity and autonomy, and tolerance and acceptance)
 - Responsibility (accountability, the pursuit of excellence, and self-restraint)
 - Fairness (fair process in solving disputes, equity, and impartiality)
 - Caring (empathy and benevolence)
 - Citizenship (community consciousness)
- (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2016b)

40 Developmental Assets is the character development framework developed by the Search Institute, an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to

promote healthy children, youth, and communities. Some organizations that have implemented the 40 developmental assets within their programs are The Y, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and the Boy Scouts of America (2017).

The 40 assets, when possessed by youth, encourage the development of strong character and decreased incidence of negative behaviors. The assets are categorized as 20 external assets and 20 internal assets. The 40 developmental assets have been tailored for four distinct age groups: early childhood (ages 3 to 5); K-3 (ages 5-9); middle childhood (8-12); and adolescents (12-18).

- External assets include support networks, a sense of empowerment, clear boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time
 - Internal assets include commitment to education, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity
- (Search Institute, 2017)

According to the Search Institute (2017), the more assets children possess, the less likely they are to engage in negative behaviors, display poor academic achievement, and use drugs. Instead, programs focused on these 40 assets lead children to display positive behavioral traits regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location.

BENEFITS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

"Character education affects various aspects of the 'head' (knowledge, thinking), 'heart' (emotions, motivation), and 'hand' (behavior, skills). Clearly there is ample evidence that character education frequently improves academic performance, reduces risk behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, pre-marital sexual behavior), increases desirable behaviors (e.g., altruism), and improves social-emotional and pro-social competencies (e.g., socio-moral reasoning, problem-solving skills, emotional competency)" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, p.6).

Lack of character development has an adverse effect not only on the youth but also on taxpayers and society. We have 6.7 million youths aged 16-24 that impose a social burden equaling \$252.6 billion a year. Helping one at-risk young person develop character can result in over \$1 million savings for taxpayers and return on the investment of the taxpayer was as much as 3.5 times the cost for each additional high school graduate (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

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