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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the pros and cons educators may encounter if they are involved in a character education program. Those supporting a character education program offer the following reasons: (1) decline of a traditional family structure; (2) erosion of the values system of key institutions; (3) the position of schools as the second most important contributor to a child's value system, with family being first; and (4) prevalent troubling trends in young people, such as declining work ethics, declining civil responsibility, disrespect for authority, dishonesty, violence and ethical illiteracy. Those opposing a character education program cite the following reasons: (1) lack of research showing a direct connection between values and behavior; (2) an erroneous assumption that teaching moral values will reduce irresponsible behavior; (3) the idea that moral values provide limited guidance for moral decisions, known as value conflict; and (4) young people do not perceive the same social problems as adults and would not likely turn to teachers for advice. The results come from a review of the literature and from a survey of 271 educators, students, and employees of mainstream work environments outside of education, all in the Michigan-Indiana area. The research indicated strong support from parents, school employees, and the community for the development and implementation of moral and character development in public education. Contains 22 references and the survey instrument. (EH)

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Moral and Character Development

In Public Education

by

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Moral and Character Development in Public Education

- **Pros and Cons of Teaching Positive Character Traits**
- **Successful Programs and Tips for Teaching Activities**
- **Results of Michiana Area Survey**

by

Terri Demmon
Jennifer Rice
Donna Warble

MORAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

If you were to ask a hundred people on the street whether we should teach our students the rules of society; how to distinguish between right and wrong, most would answer affirmatively. Why then, are there so many people upset about the resurgence of character education in public schools? One would think that it is 'right' to train our children about what is right, and what is wrong, how to treat others, and how to get along. This philosophy addresses only the surface of deeper feeling and ideas. These emotional ideas are what makes moral and character development an issue for public education. Questions such as; "Who decides what is right or wrong, good or bad?"; "Who is to decide how I should treat others?" - "What if they have belief systems that differ from mine?"; all are common concerns voiced by community members when the idea of character education is discussed. The Civil Liberties Union cry out that this type of teaching will open the door to intrusion of religious values in the public school system. Moral and character education is not a new idea brought about by the 'Moral Right' as the politicians would like us to believe. From its earliest history, American educational institutions have been infused with the teaching of 'common sense' values such as honesty, compassion, respect and responsibility. Parents and teachers alike used the Declaration of Independence as a foundation for teaching the values on which the success of our nation were founded. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."(Maginnis, p. 2)

Today, as educators, we need to evaluate the merits or truths held in Roosevelt's statement as it applies to our school cultures. We need to question the inherent value or lack thereof in developing the moral and character traits in students. The decisions made regarding

the teaching of moral values can not be left to the school administration, or the classroom teacher, alone. The decision making process must include the community as well as the school personnel. Yet, the very requirement of involving such a large body of ideas impels the dynamics for developing character education for the public school.

One of the primary and most difficult components of the process is identifying clarifying the terms used to describe moral and character education. Second, the community needs to assess the pros and cons of teaching values. Finally, the community needs to come to some agreement on which traits to teach, and how to promote moral, character, and value development through activities.

According to the New American Webster Dictionary, the definition of moral is being able to distinguish between right and wrong. (Webster, p. 300) Character is defined as the combination of qualities that distinguish one person or thing from another. (Webster, p. 83) Values is defined as something that is useful or desirable or worthy of having. (Webster, p. 496) Character involves the activation of knowledge and values, so from this viewpoint, values would become one of the foundations for character. (Huitt, p. 1) The belief of Thomas Lickona is that education's two great goals are to help people become smart and to help them become good, therefore, the central desirable outcome of the school's moral enterprise would be to restore good character. (Noll, p. 50)

The resurgence of this issue stem from the growing concerns over the quality of public school cultures and America's youth in general. Though the public in general believe the primary responsibility of raising children belongs to the parents, schools can amplify the lessons. School board members across the country are under fire from both sides of the issue.

Those promoting character education claim that by not teaching common values in the schools, we are implicitly teaching the opposite. Those against teaching character education fear an infiltration of religious values will be dictated to the students. It is important to consider both the pros and cons of incorporating character education into the curriculum.

Presented here, through research, are some of the pros and cons educators may encounter if they should become involved in, or are currently involved in a character education program. These viewpoints do not necessarily represent the opinions of our group, but are outlined, with supporting documentation, as to the positives and negatives of such a program.

The Pros Of A Character Education Program

Some of the reasons for teaching character education in public schools would be:

- The decline of the family due to parents having less time to spend with their families, more working mothers, more families headed by a single mother, high divorce rate, and the traumas of abuse frequently associated with divorce. (Maginnis, p. 2)
- Erosion of the values system of key institutions, including family, church, media, government, and the public school. (Maginnis, p. 1)
- School is the second most important contributor to a child's value system, with family being first. According to a study by Campbell and Bond, some of the influences on the moral behavior and development of children were their heredity, early childhood experiences, modeling by important adults and older children, peers, the general physical and social environment, communications media, schools and other institutions, finally, specific situations and the type of corresponding behavior that was elicited from those involved. (Huitt, p. 2-3)

- Prevalent troubling trends in young people, some of which include declining work ethics, declining civil responsibility, disrespect for authority, increasing dishonesty, rising violence, and ethical illiteracy. (Noll, p. 53)

The Cons Of A Character Education Program

Arguments against having a character education program in public schools include:

- No research showing a direct connection between values and behavior.
  Example: If you were in the actual situation of knowing you had an upcoming difficult test, would you study for it on your own, or would you pay someone to give you the answers? (Noll, p. 58)
- There is an erroneous assumption that teaching moral values will reduce irresponsible behavior. (Noll, p. 59)
- Moral values provide limited guidance for making moral decisions, otherwise known as value conflict.
  Example: your friend is wearing a new outfit and asks for your opinion. In reality, you do not like it, so do you go ahead and say that you like it, (dishonesty), or that you dislike it, (discourtesy)? (Noll, p. 59)
- Young people do not perceive the same social problems as do adults, and even if they did, would not likely turn to teachers for advise. (Noll, p. 61)

On the pro side of values education, Edward Short points out in his book, Education In A Changing World: "Society has traditionally looked to its educators and the educational institutions it has provided to conserve, enrich, and transmit to each generation the accumulated knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and graces, on which its cohesion and permanence depend." (Konstant, p. 1)

On the con side of values education, according to John Covaleskie, the shortcomings in any type of "ethical discipline" program is that it is aimed at controlling behavior rather than shaping character. Children need to be taught why to obey the rules, not just to obey the

rules. They must develop a sense of choosing to do the right thing, especially when there is the possibility of doing the wrong thing, will be to their own advantage. (Noll, p. 288) As children grow, they will discard some rules and affirm others. What they will carry with them is how they make their choices, whether it is by rules, or by careful and caring moral judgment. (Noll, p. 291-292)

Character Education Programs

There are many successful character education programs currently at work. From the outside looking in, these programs appear to be easy to develop and easy to incorporate into the classroom. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many individuals have spent long hours researching ideas, attending workshops, creating programs, and then promoting them within their own schools and districts. Even though the content of each is different in nature, their success is the result of some common qualities such as displayed respect for others, self control, decline in discipline problems, and improved classroom work.

One of the most important qualities to consider when developing a successful character education program is to make it user-friendly. Keeping the curriculum materials simple and straightforward greatly increases the chance that the lessons will be taught consistently and effectively. (Brooks and Kann, p.20)

Another quality of a successful program is to include the entire school community in the process. Lessons should not be restricted to classrooms but should be dispersed into the playground, the office, the cafeteria, the bus, and then into the home and neighborhood. (Brooks and Kann, p. 27) This approach encourages students to be cognizant of proper behavior beyond the classroom setting.

Winkelman Elementary School, north of Chicago, felt they needed to improve student attitudes and behavior within the school community. They sensed students had a lack of respect for each other and for other adults in the building. As a response to this growing problem, they created a program called "Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring." (Lickona and Skillen, p. 48) It emphasized the values of courtesy and caring at every opportunity through:

◊ photo displays in the corridors
◊ discussions in the classrooms
◊ one-on-one conversations between teachers and children
◊ at school assemblies
◊ giving citizenship awards
◊ in parent-teacher conferences
◊ service projects in the community. (Lickona and Skillen, p. 48)

The efforts of both teachers and administrators have paid off. The school environment is more friendly, caring, and respectful and parental involvement has increased.

When determining what specific values to emphasize, successful programs incorporate values that have been identified and agreed upon by both the school and the community. Since it is impossible to list every value schools should promote or model, it is more realistic to identify only a handful of values everyone can remember and readily identify. (Thomas and Roberts, p. 34)

Wedgewood School in Missouri has found an increase in personal responsibility and mutual respect displayed in their students using a program called PREP - the Personal Responsibility Education Process. (Moody and McKay, p. 28) It began as a privately funded program in 1988 that helped individual schools build a consensus about which character traits to reinforce. The formula for the implementation of those values was left up to the individual

schools. In five years, the program expanded from 7 school districts to 22 school districts including 275 schools. (Moody and McKay, p. 28)

Successful character education programs also help students define specific values and describe how they connect to the student's own behavior. (Brooks and Kann, p. 20) Students need to be taught that they are responsible for their actions and to realize there are consequences for their actions.

The Jefferson Center for Character Education developed an operative process students could use to make ethical decisions. It encouraged students to evaluate a situation before acting on it. The process is called STAR - for Stop, Think, Act and Review:

- ***Stop*** before you act.
- ***Think*** about the ABC's of behavior (*alternatives*, both good and bad; which *behavior* to choose, and what the *consequences* of the choice will be.)
- ***Act*** on your decision.
- ***Review*** the impact of your act on your goals and on other people.

(Brooks and Kann, p. 24)

Even though research indicates that a successful character education program includes a planned, schoolwide approach, we must not forget the difference a teacher can make without that support. There are many strategies individual teachers can use to incorporate values into their own classrooms.

One of the most important strategies teachers can use that does not require a specific program is modeling. If teachers cannot follow the values themselves, it is not realistic to expect the students to. In a study done by Mary M. Williams, students concluded that actions speak louder then words. As a result, students listed several characteristics a model teacher

possesses. Students say that they:

- present clear, consistent, and sincere messages
- do not pull rank--are never authoritarian
- communicate high expectations
- really listen
- communicate their commitment through actions
- are hard-working and really care about student learning
- deserve respect

(Williams, p.22)

In addition to modeling, teachers are also encouraged to use cooperative learning strategies. Not only is it a sound educational practice, it also helps foster cooperation, consideration, courtesy, and mutual respect. In order to realize success and benefit from the strategy, it is very important that teachers understand how to implement it.

Teachers can start off the school year by allowing students to help develop a set of classroom rules. This process can be presented as a lesson that sets the tone for appropriate classroom behavior. If students have a sense of ownership, they will view rules as a positive rather than negative component of their classroom. The rules will be more meaningful and students will receive a clear message on the difference between right and wrong.

Another means of teaching values is to get students involved in community service. This is a perfect opportunity for students to play an active role in helping others. These activities can take place either within the school or out in the community. Students can tutor, collect donations for specific charities, adopt a needy family in the community, or volunteer their time in a homeless shelter. Students can even get involved in environmental activities such as picking up trash along the roadways or developing a recycling program. These activities promote kindness, helpfulness, citizenship, and generosity along with many other values.

A word of caution. Even though there are many effective strategies teachers use to promote character education, studies also found there are ineffective strategies as well. For example, didactic methods alone--codes, pledges, teacher exhortation are not likely to have any significant or lasting effect on character. (Leming, p. 69) Teachers cannot simply preach about values or have students recite pledges without explaining their significance first.

Whether directly or indirectly, schools should teach students the values necessary to make the right decisions in their lives. Even though the process may not be easy, teachers must be committed to the process and to each individual student. Students, teachers, parents, and the entire community must all be strong links that hold the character education process together. If any one of them becomes a weak link, a permanent gap might be left in a child's moral development.

THE SURVEY

As a group, we began the project with a belief that there is a need for moral and character development in the public schools. Our review of written materials confirmed that most writers in the field proactively promote character education in public schools. Surprisingly, the frustrations were greatest in the development and implementation processes were directly connected to the inability to recognize commonalties of traits, and how the public understood, or interpreted "a need for Character Education." The successful programs stressed the importance of community involvement in the identification and implementation process. The traits used for development were regional values determined through the involvement of parents, area residents, and the school community.

We selected the need to identify some common values held by citizens in the Michiana area as one of our objectives for this project. The tool we developed was a survey. Initially, we hoped to collect 100 completed surveys from 3 distinct pools: Teachers/educators/future educators; students from 7th grade to college; employees of mainstream work environments outside the field of education. The response was overwhelming. Approximately 300 surveys were distributed and 271 surveys were returned. Of the 271, 71 surveys were eliminated due to: incompleteness of information (more then 3 questions were unanswered) (19 surveys); items were checked instead of ranking (not allowing us to interpret which would have been 1st, 2nd, 3rd...) (34 surveys); and survey returned after deadline (18 surveys).

Some trends in demographic responses (which may be considered a weakness of the survey) were: the largest concentration of returns were from households earning $46,000-$70,000 (25% of total returns); and from individuals falling in the age ranges of 25 - 55 which covered two age categories out of 7, but accounted for 80% of the returns. Another concentration of returns revealed over 50% (115 surveys) were completed by individuals with a bachelor degree or higher. When the total number of individuals that have had some college plus was included in the figure, the percentage increased to 84%. These considerations are acknowledged because we believe individuals who further their own education beyond high school will hold the value of their children's education at a higher level. These perceived weaknesses, though they may affect the high rate of returned surveys, do not take away from the collective results tallied as we sought to identify commonalties in the Michiana area. The patterns that emerged through the responses clearly identified the need to develop character education activities within the public schools and which traits should be stressed.

For statistical purposes, other demographics identified in our survey pool include:

Percent	Descriptive	Actual Number
71%	have children	143
83%	have\had children in public schools	121
27%	have\had children in private schools	39
65%	married	131
24%	single	47
9%	divorced/other	22

In response to question 9. "The school's moral culture is important in building and contributing to a child's value system."

93.5% Agreed (187) 1.5% Disagreed (3) 5% did not respond (10).

In response to question 10. "Rank the elements important to a positive moral culture at school:" There were clear breaking point between the ranking as follows:

Mutual respect and cooperation (Ranked as number 1.)
Moral leadership (Ranked as number 2.)
Consistent schoolwide discipline (Ranked as number 3.)
Time spent reflecting on the quality of life (Ranked as number 4.)

In response to question 11. "There is a correlation between Moral/Character Education and Academic Achievement."

79.5% Agree (159) 7% Disagree (14) 12.5% Did Not Know (25)

In response to question 12. "Moral and Character Development should be:"

11.5% taught by parents (23) .5% taught by schools

84% taught by both (168) 3% not taught at all (6)

In response to question 13. "If taught in school, these traits should be taught by:"

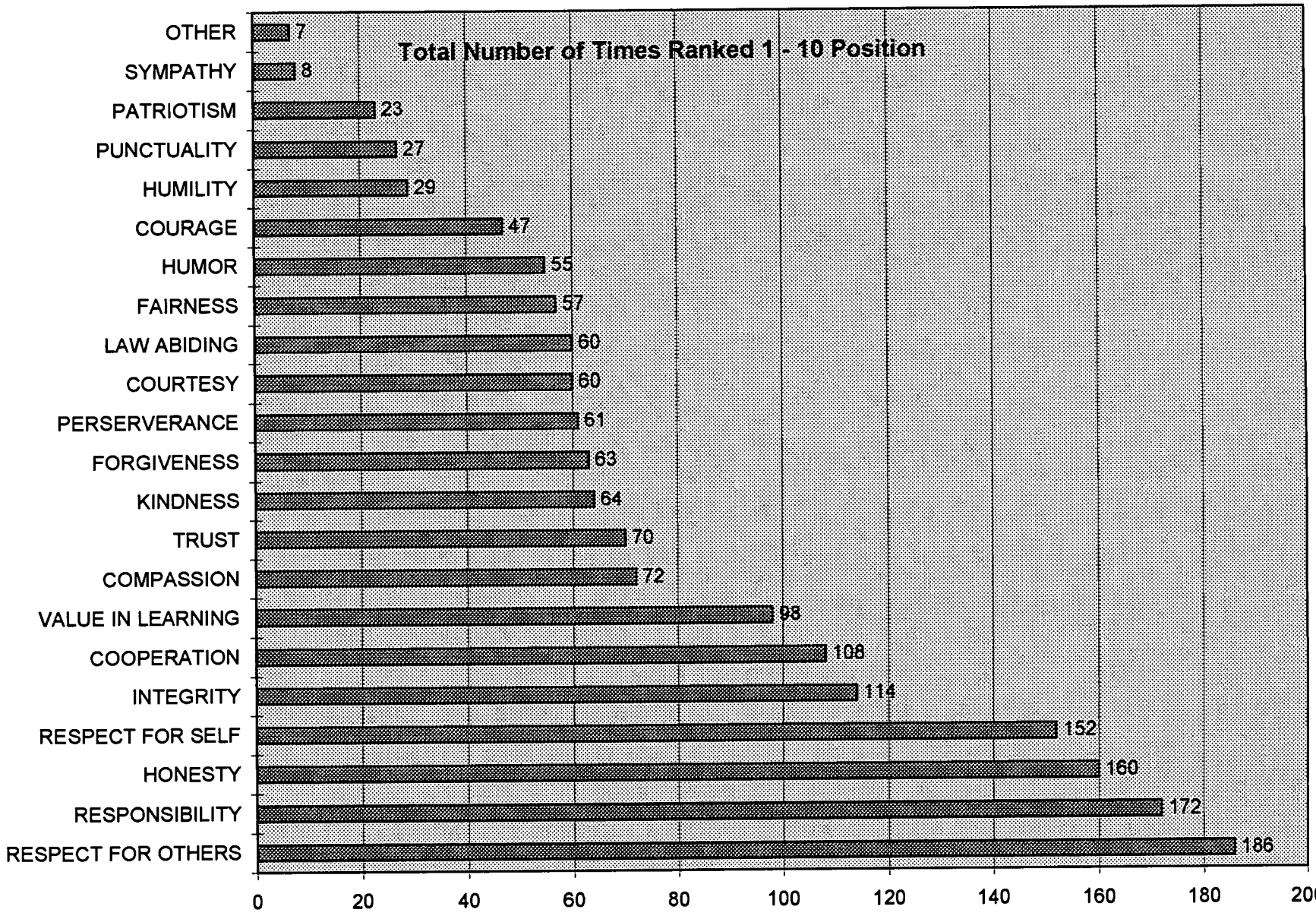
22.5% modeling (45) 5.5% as part of the curriculum (11)

64.5% both through modeling and curriculum (129)

7.5% did not respond (15)

The final section of the survey dealt more directly with specific Moral/Character traits and how individuals would rank them in order of importance. This section was designed to identify some common traits to target in Character Education issues.

Initially, we ranked the traits by total responses (being selected 1 - 10). The top 6 received more then 50% of the responses. The next 11 traits followed a slow decline in response with the last 5 dropping at or below the 10% point.



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The top 17 ranked traits by total response are as follows:

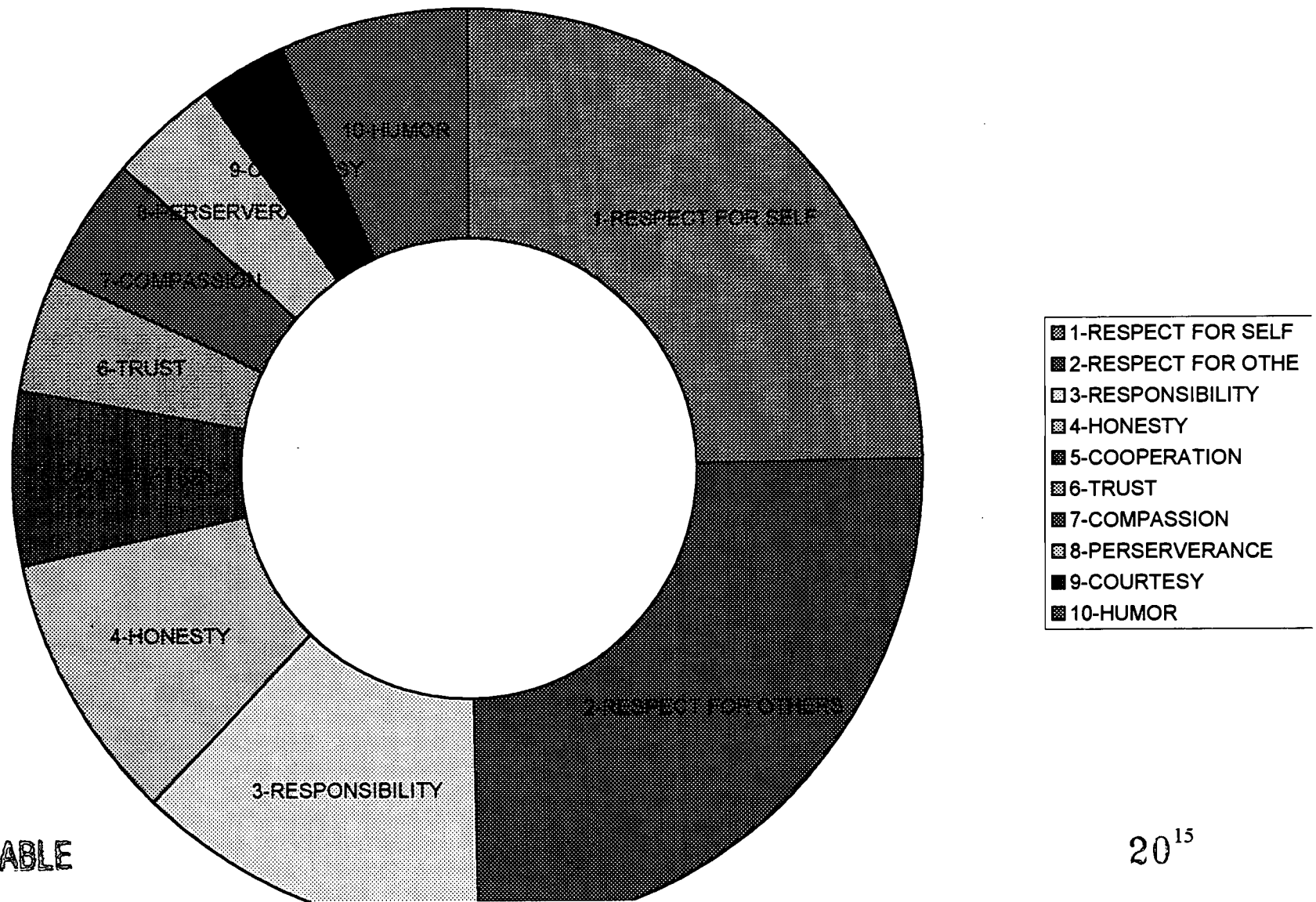
93% Respect for Others
86% Responsibility
80% Honesty
76% Respect for self
57% Integrity
54% Cooperation
49% Value in Learning
36% Compassion
35% Trust
32% Kindness
31.5% Forgiveness
30.5% Perseverance
30% Courtesy
30% Law Abiding
28.5% Fairness
27.5% Humor
23.5% Courage

If you compare the above list with actual responses for the top traits by individual trait responses and specific rankings (1st, 2nd, 3rd, ...), you will see that the list is reordered: *

Ranked as:	Overall Percent	Trait	Number of responses
1	41%	Respect for self	79
2	41%	Respect for others	79
3	21%	Responsibility	40
4	16%	Honesty	30
5	10%	Cooperation	19
6	7.5%	Trust	14
7	7.5%	Compassion	14
8	6%	Perseverance	12
9	5%	Courtesy	10
10	11%	Humor	21

* See chart on next page.

Top Ten Ranked by Number in Position Ranked



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This reordering according to specific rank position gives a different perspective on the importance of particular traits such as humor. It is important to consider not only how many times it was ranked, but times by position as well as there is a different list that emerged from these statistics. The lower numbers on ranked positions 6-10 should be noted as a portion of the surveys only listed their top 5 selections. A breakdown of each trait and the corresponding responses by ranked position are included in Appendix A.

Our research indicated strong support from parents, school employees, and the community for the development and implementation of moral and character development in public education. Most felt, at the very least, that strong positive character traits should be modeled and encouraged in the school. This was the most common response in the comment section was that the "Do as I say, not as I do," mentality of conveying the importance of these traits has not and will not be successful. The second most frequent concern voiced was for students who did not receive any type of positive character or moral development in his or her family environment. The concern expressed was that if the school did not incorporate moral and character development into the curriculum, the student might not have a chance to develop many of the traits necessary to be successful in life. Even those who stated that character education should be a responsibility of the parent alone, usually marked question 13 (If it is to be taught in schools...) as through modeling or both through modeling and through curriculum inferring character education should be part of a structured format in the classroom.

One area of most interest to our group was the responses of the teenagers. The most significant finding was the fact that only one student marked self respect as one of the top ten traits, and it was listed as eighth. Yet this was ranked highest in responses by the adults.

The final analysis of our project offers answers to many questions. As with any issue, where there are both pros and cons on the implementation of character education programs in the public schools; the decision is often left to the community. The survey responses statistically verified the communities' desire to include moral and character development in public education. We were able to identify a strong set of traits teachers may use as a basis to develop programs in the Michiana area, and also confirmed the necessity of positive role models in the school environment. Through research on the internet and in written work, we offer sound recommendations on components of structured programs, and also give teachers guidance on making an impact in their classrooms without the support of structured programs.

Teachers are accountable to the community, for the growth and development of students through public education. Teachers should consider how our influence will change the future of public education, and how programs that help to develop moral and character traits in students can impact our children and the community. As we reflect on Theodore Roosevelt's statement he made nearly one hundred years ago, we realize there is very strong evidence to support his prediction. As teachers, we must do everything in our power to reverse the negative trends in our society and help create a generation of respectful and responsible individuals.

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Graduate Studies Survey

This survey is part of research being conducted on the issue of Moral and Character Development in Public Education. We would appreciate your responses to the following questions. Please be sure to complete both sides of the sheet. Thank you. Donna Warble, Jennifer Rice, & Terri Demmon

1. Household Income : $0-8,000 $9,000-14,000 $15,000-25,000 $26,000-45,000
$46,000-70,000 $71,000-100,000 $101,000-130,000 $131,000-170,000 $171,000 +

2. Age level: 12-15 16-18 19-24 25-39 40-55 56-65 66-70 71+

3. Your level of education: ____ no diploma ____ HS diploma/GED ____ Some college

____ Associate Level Degree ____ Bachelor ____ Masters ____ Doctorate

4. Marital Status: ___ Single ____ Married ____ Divorced ____ Other

5. Do you have children? ____ Yes _____ No
(if no, skip to question 9.)

6. If so, what are their ages? _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

7. Do / did your children attend/graduate from public schools? ____ Yes ____ No

8. Do /did your children attend private schools? ____ Yes ____ No

9. The school's moral culture is important in building and contributing to a child's value system. _____ Agree _____ Disagree

10. Rank the elements important to a positive moral culture at school:

_____ Moral leadership
_____ Mutual respect and cooperation
_____ Consistent schoolwide discipline
_____ Time spent reflecting on the quality of moral life.

11. There is a correlation between Moral/Character Education and Academic Achievement.

_____ Agree _____ Disagree _____Do Not Know

12. Moral and Character Development should be :
Why or why not?
_____
_____
_____

_____ taught by Parents
_____ taught by Schools
_____ taught by both Parents and Schools
_____ not taught at all (Skip to back)

13. If taught in school, these traits should be taught by:
Why or why not?
_____

_____ modeling
_____ as part of the curriculum
_____ both

_____

PLEASE COMPLETE BACK SIDE!

14. Listed below are traits identified within the realm of moral /character development. Please identify 5 - 10 of the most important traits for children to learn. (1 = most important, 2 = second most important, ...)

____Courage

____Respect for self

____Patriotism

____Honesty

____Punctuality

____Fairness

____Integrity

____Value in Learning

____Courtesy

____Forgiveness

____Humor

____Humility

____Law abiding

____Respect for others

____Trust

____Compassion

____ Responsibility

____Kindness

____ Cooperation

____Sympathy

____Perserverance

____ Other _____

Comments:

Please return to : **Terri Demmon**

Moral and Character Development Survey Results

This survey is part of research being conducted on the issue of Moral and Character Development in Public Education. Thank you. Donna Warble, Jennifer Rice, & Terri Demmon

1. Household Income :

18 $0-8,000 11 $9,000-14,000 23 $15,000-25,000

71 $26,000-45,000 47 $46,000-70,000 19 $71,000-100,000

5 $101,000-130,000 0 $131,000-170,000 0 $171,000 +

2. Age level:

7 12-15 4 16-18 12 19-24 68 25-39

98 40-55 12 56-65 2 66-70 0 71+

3. Your level of education: 13 no diploma 19 HS diploma/GED 41 Some college

12 Associate Level Degree 47 Bachelor 67 Masters 1 Doctorate

4. Marital Status: 47 Single 131 Married 10 Divorced 8 Other

5. Do you have children? 143 Yes 57 No

6. If so, what are their ages? 2 months - 47 years old.

7. Do / did your children attend/graduate from public schools? 121 Yes 79 No

8. Do /did your children attend private schools? 39 Yes 161 No

9. The school's moral culture is important in building and contributing to a child's value system. 187 Agree 3 Disagree

10. Rank the elements important to a positive moral culture at school:

	Ranked 1	Ranked 2	Ranked 3	Ranked 4
Moral leadership	62	75	45	8
Mutual respect & cooperation	108	41	34	10
Consistent schoolwide discipline	41	49	69	34
Time spent reflecting on moral life	10	17	31	128

11. There is a correlation between Moral/Character Education and Academic Achievement.

159 Agree 14 Disagree 25 Do Not Know

12. Moral & Character Development should be : 23 taught by Parents 1 taught by Schools

168 taught by both Parents and Schools 6 not taught at all

13. If taught in school, these traits should be taught by:

45 modeling 11 as part of the curriculum 129 both

14. Listed below are traits identified within the realm of moral /character development. Please identify 5 - 10 of the most important traits for children to learn. (1 = most important, 2 = second most important, ...)

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES TO:

47 Courage	29 Humility
152 Respect for self	60 Law abiding
23 Patriotism	186 Respect for others
160 Honesty	70 Trust
27 Punctuality	72 Compassion
57 Fairness	172 Responsibility
114 Integrity	64 Kindness
98 Value in Learning	108 Cooperation
60 Courtesy	8 Sympathy
63 Forgiveness	61 Perserverance
55 Humor	7 Other

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