

Tulare County Office of Education
Partnership in Character Education Program Study
Sample School Highlights

School Highlight

In March, 2010, Pacific Research & Evaluation staff conducted site visits at Four CC! program schools. These schools were two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Highlights from the visit to one of the elementary schools are provided next. Statistically significant improvements over the course of the grant were detected on eight of the nine Student Report Card subscales (all but Religious Values) for this school.

The site visit consisted of a half day of focus groups and interviews conducted with staff, parents, and students at each school, including a:

- 45 minute focus group with three teachers
- 30 minute focus group with two classified staff members
- 15 minute focus group with two parents
- 30 minute focus group with five students, and
- 15 minute interview with the school principal.

Focus group and survey questions revolved around the extent to which CC! has been implemented at the school and the impact that implementation has had on the school community. The site visit quickly revealed that the school was a high implementing school where the entire school community had bought into the importance of CC! The school principal declared that the program “is a must in all schools,” and attributed much of the success of their program to the buy-in and “passion” of the school’s site coordinator and staff. Staff report that CC! implementation has coincided with the number of student behavioral referrals decreasing. Parent focus group participants described CC! as the most visible initiative at the school. Students provided enthusiastic feedback about CC! activities.

Before the grant, focus group participants reported that everyone in the school was familiar with the four pillars of CC! but that the program was not infused into the school culture in the same way that it is now. As a result of grant funding, members of the school community including teachers, coaches, and parents have been able to attend CC trainings. In addition, the school has been supplied with materials such as banners and books to increase the visibility of the CC! program and teachers have been given additional time to plan how to integrate CC content into their classroom curricula.

Examples of Character Counts Implementation at the school include:

- Displays about CC are present in every classroom (e.g., pictures, quotes, posters) as well as in the school cafeteria.
- On the morning announcements the principal will read a short saying about character and relate it to one of the pillars.
- Teachers nominate students who display character and later recognizing them at an award ceremony luncheon attended by the entire school and parents of the honored students.
- The 6 pillars are used on office discipline referrals. Office staff have discussion with students about why they were disciplined and how their behavior relates to CC!
- Teachers include comments about character on report cards (e.g., “This student is respectful.”).
- Even on morning announcements, principal will read a short saying about character.

At the classroom level, teachers have taken ownership of CC! implementation (e.g., choosing how to decorate their classroom to address the CC! pillars, and creatively integrating the CC! message into their curriculum). Focus group members explained how, as a result of grant funding, a teacher planning committee has been put together to support staff in developing ways to integrate CC! into their existing curriculum.

Focus group participants described how this high degree of consistent implementation across grades K-8 has led to an increased student awareness of CC! One thread that ran through the focus groups was that the CC! grant has led the school community to adopt a common vocabulary and to employ the CC! language when evaluating and describing behavior both within and outside of the classroom. Students report that they “hear something about character every day” in school. Examples of how discourse surrounding character is imbedded within the school culture include:

- A teacher talking to a little boy who became upset with himself about his behavior towards a fellow classmate. The boy stated, “I wasn’t respectful and I didn’t show that I cared.”
- Classified staff report hearing conversations in the staff room where teachers discuss examples of what constitutes “responsible” behavior.
- The school identified words that do not display character and labeled them as “red words.” One teacher explained how she had overheard students talking with each other on the basketball court over the weekend. One said to the other, “you don’t need to use that ‘red word’ out here,” then proceeded to tell them what they could have said instead.
- Teachers described how students are taking ownership for their behavior. For example, one teacher described how her 7th grade students made a game out of displaying good character; if someone says the word “stupid” or “dumb” other students yell, “red flag!”

Student focus group participants reported that having good character is seen as “cool” by the students at their school. Student athletes in the student focus group explained how they were proud of the recognition that they had received from the coach of a rival school who told the school’s coach that their school’s team had “great character.” A parent from the opposing team echoed this sentiment, saying that school’s players were “the nicest.” The students explained that when you hear something like that it “makes you want to keep it going.” All student focus group participants reported that they were very proud to attend their school.

In addition to sending select parents to a character counts training, the school has actively sought to include parents in implementing the CC program in a variety of ways. For example, parents who volunteer in classrooms give out character awards to students along with teachers. Parents are then invited to the luncheon where students are recognized as displaying one of the six pillars of character. Students described how the PTA is actively involved in their school, explaining how “they do everything for us,” and noting how they appreciated having a visible parent presence in the school. One such example is that one of the most popular character counts initiatives at the school is run by a dads group at school. In this program, teachers nominate students who have displayed character to be “captured” at recess by a parent volunteer dressed up as a count (the “Character Count”). The student and the count later have their picture taken together, and then the picture is laminated and sent home to parents to see as evidence of their child displaying good character.

The school visit revealed that key components in this success included: engaging parents in the initiative, creating CC activities that complement the existing school culture, and allow staff with freedom to integrate CC in their classroom support them in work but don’t mandate methods.



Three Year Data for High School Behavior

School Year	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	% Change from Baseline to Year 2
Total # Students	1831	1813	1792	39 fewer students than baseline year
Total # of Suspension Infractions	2587	2243	1828	29%
Total # of Recommended Expulsions	35	29	8	77%



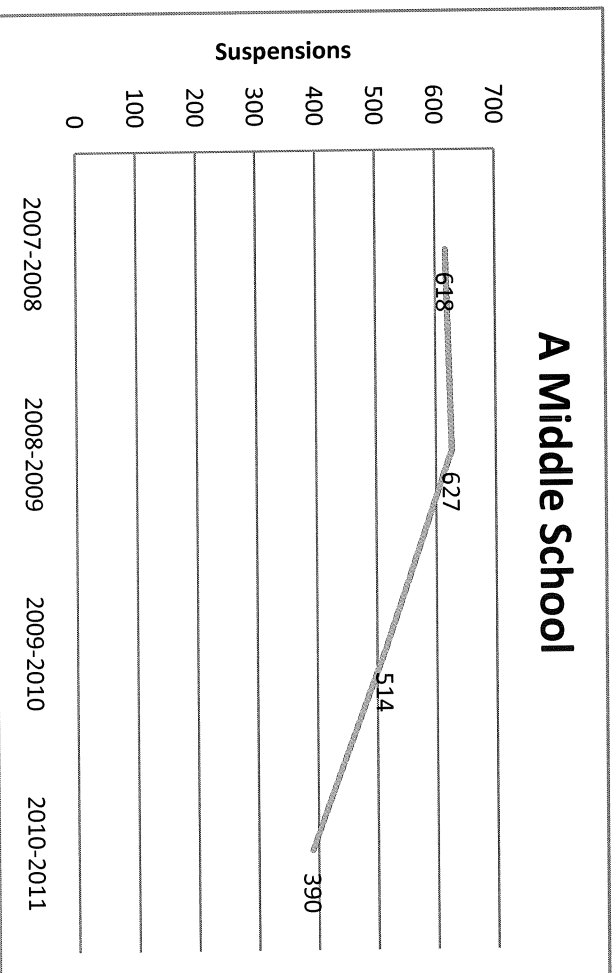
An Elementary School's Self Reported Behaviors

<i>The following occurred at least once in the past year:</i>	Monte Vista 2007-08	Monte Vista 2009-10	% Change Behavior
Hit a person because I was angry.	54%	38%	30%
Bullied, teased, or taunted someone.	44%	30%	32%
Mistreated someone because he or she belonged to a different group.	15%	5%	33%
Used racial slurs or insults.	28%	20%	29%

A Suspension Report for a Middle School

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Month Totals
August	6	14	21	12	27	7	13	1	5	106
September	56	31	67	50	110	60	57	36	41	508
October	90	88	82	109	95	74	74	41	33	686
November	69	55	61	90	80	57	51	39	50	552
December	26	54	40	47	42	36	23	35	33	336
January	52	20	30	93	31	31	52	15	36	360
February	71	39	65	124	82	48	51	46	48	574
March	108	54	143	99	34	122	72	77		709
April	47	81	53	71	55	69	53	42		471
May	93	74	108	89	59	122	67	53		665
June	0	0	0	12	3	1	1	5		22
Totals	618	510	670	796	618	627	514	390	246	

2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
618	627	514	390



36.9% decrease in suspensions
from 07-08 to 10-11