

Executive Summary

The Instrument

The *Global Portrait of Social and Moral Health* is a survey tool and evaluation process designed to provide a detailed audit of the broad socio-moral influences impacting youth development and to assess the effectiveness of character development efforts in schools and communities. The results can be used for evaluation, benchmarking, strategic and tactical planning, and grant writing.

The *Global Portrait* is comprised of the following dimensions: (1) a values rating scale, indicating the degree to which respondents believe that they live out particular values, (2) a community climate scale (broken into 4 subscales: health & safety, collective responsibility, social capital, attachment & acceptance), assessing the degree to which respondents believe that they are part of a safe and caring community - both in and out of school, and (3) character education experiences and practices scales, measuring the degree to which character education practices are utilized by adults and experienced by youth.

The *Global Portraits* utilizes 5-point Likert-type scales, where in general, 5 is positive and 1 is negative. Although the Likert scales change depending on the question from various scales of agreement (i.e., like me-not like me; agree-disagree) to scales of frequency (i.e., practically

every day-a few times a year), a score of 5 in these results is always indicating a positive response (i.e., a positive value, perception, or experience), whereas a score of 1 is indicating a negative response. Reverse items (negatively worded items) have been accommodated statistically for consistency and clarity; thus, reverse items in graphs and tables should also be read as 5=positive and 1=negative.

Sample Design & Statistical Analysis Background Information

The study utilized a *two-stage stratified cluster sample design*. The first stage consisted of selecting a sample of schools in each participating community. Schools were stratified by grade level, meaning that typically schools were chosen to represent all three age-levels -- elementary, middle, and high schools. The second stage refers to building the subsample of children, and consisted of randomly choosing sample classrooms (sections) from each targeted grade level (5th grade youth representing elementary schools, 8th grade youth representing middle school youth, and 11th grade representing high school youth). Selecting whole groups of participants is known as clustering which serves to increase the statistical efficiency of the sample. Stratification ensures adequate representativeness of the sample. Combining stratification and clustering approaches allowed the study to minimize the overall

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sample size without compromising its quality. Random selection of classrooms (sections) within schools and random selection of schools within strata minimizes selection bias.

The complex composition of the sample allows for multiple comparisons across the targeted subpopulations within communities: elementary, middle, and high school age youth; teachers/staff in elementary, middle, and high schools; parents of elementary, middle, and high school age youth; and community activists. Breaking down the results by the age level of youth and associated adults (i.e., teachers and parents) reveals the natural variation in the responses of these groups due to the developmental differences in youth's beliefs, motivation, and behavior and in the corresponding school community characteristics. The multi-level reporting creates a more detailed picture of reality than would otherwise be available to the stakeholders in the communities.

Taking into account the age-level is also essential because communities sampled the three levels at different rates (e.g., some communities selected more elementary classrooms than others). To compensate for varying selection rates by level, the overall scores for youth, teachers, and parents were computed applying the statistical technique of "senate" weighting. This procedure

gives equal weight to each age level in the overall youth, teacher, or parent score. In other words, overall mean scores are calculated as if the communities sampled equal numbers of elementary, middle, and high school youth and associated adults, whereas actual samples of, for example, elementary youth ranged from about 40 to over 300. Weighted overall scores permit more adequate comparisons both between and within communities. Finally, since some communities did not sample all the three levels, their reports show comparison results only for the appropriate levels. For example, if the community did not sample high schools, the comparison numbers in its report would exclude high school participants that were surveyed in the other communities. This is reflected in the breakdowns, but also in the fact that the overall comparison scores for other communities in this case are calculated from elementary and middle school reports only.

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The Cross-Sectional Summary Report

The “Cross-Sectional Summary Report” represents all DuPage County communities participating in the 2004 *Global Portraits*. The Cross-Sectional Report compares stakeholder groups within the county-level dataset. The “other” category of comparison is supposed to show where DuPage stands relative to other communities around the country, which at this time we are unable to provide. We hope that in the future we will be able to remedy this situation by having other communities join in this project.

The community level reports, on the other hand, use information from all other participants in DuPage in 2004 as comparison, labeled as “Other” or “Other Communities.” They allow us to see where a particular community stands relative to everyone else in DuPage County. Note that only appropriate stakeholder groups and levels are used for comparison in the individual community reports.

The cross-sectional report provides a comparison of perceptions between and among developmental levels (elementary, middle, and high school), and stakeholder groups (youth, parents, teachers, community activists). The report attempts to provide pictures displaying

different glimpses of the entire community. Like an onion, the graphical pictures attempt to peel back the layers of complexity and make them available for examination. In the Cross-Sectional Report we are looking for the relative consonance or dissonance between (and within) stakeholder groups. What follows are several sample graphics, which are used to illustrate the data presentation and analysis nuances of the Cross Sectional Report. Figure 1 displays a glimpse of the entire community. In this figure there is relatively little disparity between stakeholder perceptions.

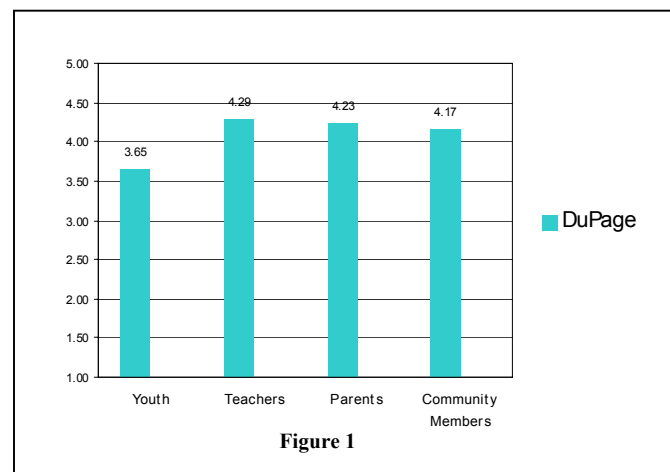


Figure 2 breaks down the reported experiences of one particular stakeholder group—youth. The graph clearly

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shows considerable difference within the experience of youth. If there were consonance (everybody is reporting the same experience), then the bars would be straight across. However, the graph clearly shows that elementary, middle, and high School students are communicating different experiences.

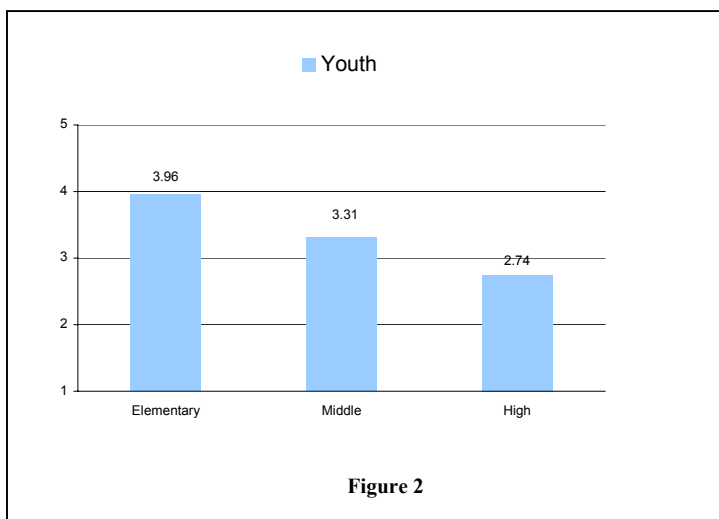


Figure 2

Figure 3 demonstrates a comparison within and between stakeholder groups. We are able to look at the youth data by developmental level, or within the group (we see a considerable decline from elementary to high youth in this example). We also have a comparison of the youth

experience to the experiences of teachers and parents, or comparison between groups (in this example, youth experience is slightly lower than teachers' and significantly lower than parent reports).

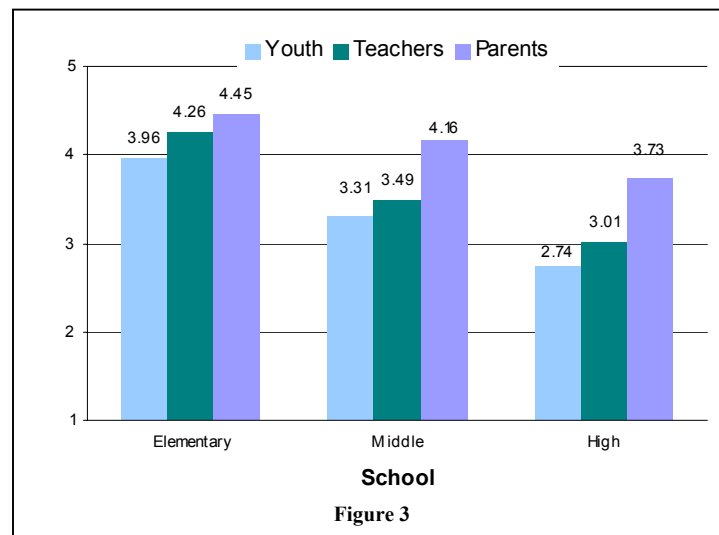
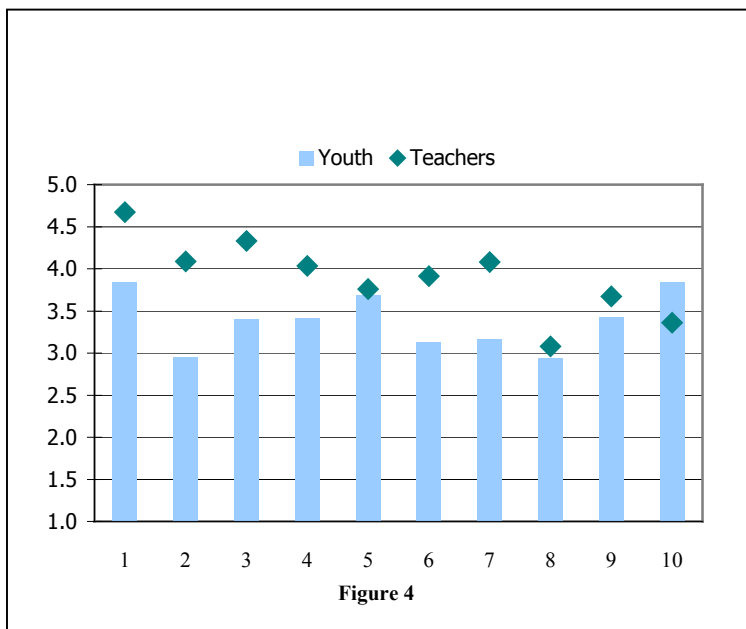


Figure 3

Figure 4 demonstrates responses on particular items for youth and teachers. In this figure we see many good examples of particular things to look for from the data. For example, item 5 displays an item where teachers and youth are in agreement (bar and dot together), which is also mostly true for items 8 & 9. Whereas, item 2

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demonstrates a clear disparity between the perceptions of youth and teachers—as do items 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7. Item 10 is an item for which teachers are clearly lower than students—the only one in this set, and as such, worthy of further reflection.



In all of the examples, comparing the reported experience with a view to the relative consistency or inconsistency of stakeholder responses—within and between stakeholder groups—adds important layers of complexity to our

understanding the data. We still need to “make the data talk” so that we can understand what the findings mean and what to do about them. However, the pictures of the Cross-Sectional Report help to reveal the emerging story lines by examining the data from various vantage points.

Making The Data Talk

When looking at the data, there are at least 5 critical questions you might consider asking yourself: (1) What do these data tell us (i.e., what are the general trends, what are the high items, the low items, etc.)? (2) What accomplishments or positive aspects of the data can we celebrate? (3) What improvement needs emerge from the data? (4) What do these data not tell us? (5) What other information is needed? (Getting Excited About Data, 1999). These five questions provide the framework for “making the data talk.” We make data talk when we ask it questions: What are the patterns? Are they true for everyone? Why is there a difference between youth and adults? Is there anything in our experience to support or refute the finding? If we don’t make the data talk, it simply sits there, stagnant. If we do make the data talk, it becomes dynamic, revealing a clear sense of where we are and where we go from here.

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General Findings

☒ Youth, and especially adults, tend to rate themselves quite high on the values, motivation, and pro-social competencies scale. While youth ratings are high (mean = 3.65), adult ratings are even higher (mean = 4.25). Within stakeholder groups the responses are fairly consistent, with the differences among youth developmental levels (Elem-3.81; Mid-3.53; High-3.62) slightly more pronounced than the differences for adult stakeholders (teachers-4.29; parents-4.23; community members-4.17).

✓ Youth and adults in DuPage County are fairly aligned in their positive perception of certain value-ratings items. For example, youth and adults indicate the following personal character descriptions as **“mostly to exactly”** accurate:

>can be counted on to do their part for any group they are members of (responsibility)— 78% Youth; 92% Adults

>continue working to achieve difficult goals they care about (perseverance)—75% Youth; 89% Adults

✓ Youth and adults in DuPage County are also aligned in a somewhat negative perception of certain value-ratings items. Consider, for example, the percentage of youth and adults indicating the following personal character descriptions as **“mostly to exactly”** accurate:

>can forgive those who hurt them (forgiveness)— 54% Youth; 52% Adults

✓ There are also certain value-ratings items where a fairly significant disparity exists between youth self-perception and adult self-perception, in particular self-discipline and respect. For example, 34% of youth indicate the following personal character description for self-discipline as **“mostly to exactly”** accurate:

>would give up watching their favorite TV show to study for a test (self-discipline)— 34% Youth

Conversely, 88% of adults indicate the following personal character description for self-discipline as **“mostly to exactly”** accurate:

>would give up personal leisure time for personal, professional, or family goals –88% Adult

✓ Relatively low youth responses on items measuring respect, self-discipline, caring, and tolerance continue to indicate important areas for further consideration and exploration. Low adult ratings for items measuring forgiveness, caring, and respect are character outcomes worthy of further investigation.

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☒ Similar to the Values, Motivation, and Pro-Social Competencies Scale, there are many positive experiences reported by all stakeholders for the Caring Community Scale.

✓73% of youth in DuPage County agree that there are adults at school to talk with about problems that are bothering them (fully 82% of elementary students agree with this statement).

✓75% of youth in DuPage County agree that their parents know their friends.

✓75% of youth in DuPage County agree that kids would help someone who is new feel accepted (83% for elementary).

✓69% of youth in DuPage County agree that if they knew something dangerous was going to happen they would go to an adult for help.

☒ Whereas overall results are positive, responses on some items were lower indicating critical areas for further improvement. Responses tend to decline by developmental level—that is, less positive perceptions by increasing grade level. Take, for example, the item just discussed, “69% of youth in DuPage County agree that if

they knew something dangerous was going to happen they would go to an adult for help.” By developmental level the breakdowns actually look like this:

✓83% of 5th grade youth in DuPage County agree that if they knew something dangerous was going to happen they would go to an adult for help.

✓62% of 8th grade youth in DuPage County agree that if they knew something dangerous was going to happen they would go to an adult for help.

✓62% of 11th grade youth in DuPage County agree that if they knew something dangerous was going to happen they would go to an adult for help.

In addition, there is a demonstrable consonance in the perceptions of elementary youth and adults indicating that elementary school students report an experience that is similar to what adults report. On the other hand, there is a widening gap between the perceptions of middle school and high school youth and adults, with adults generally conveying a more positive view. This is an important overarching cross-sectional finding: disaggregating the data provides a much more accurate perception of reality. Lumping the developmental levels together buffers the portrayal of reality—both good and bad.

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☒ Despite the developmental decline, there is consonance between the low items for each developmental level; that is, the same items represent the lowest items for elementary, middle, and high school youth. In addition, these items are generally aligned with the perceptions of adults (see tables g2&3.es, g2&3.ms, g2&3.hs). Consider for example, the percentage of youth who “**somewhat or completely agree**” with the following statements about their schools:

✓ kids who are not part of the popular group get picked on... *ES—51%; MS—63%; HS—55%* (a perception that is also shared by 66% of parents and 67% of teachers)

✓ when kids here see someone being picked on, they try to stop it... *ES—57%; MS—32%; HS—28%* (55%—parents; 64%—teachers)

✓ kids would stop their friends from spreading rumors or gossip about others... *ES—46%; MS—26%; HS—23%* (32%—parents; 36%—teachers)

☒ Overall, youth in DuPage report infrequent or sporadic character development experiences (generally, between a "few times a year" and "a few times a month"), with middle and high school students indicating significantly fewer

experiences than elementary school students. Consider, for example, the percentage of youth who indicate experiencing the following practices “a few times a week to practically every day”

✓ an adult talking about the importance of character in their life... *ES—32%, MS—24%, HS—19%*

✓ talking about moral values (such as respect, or responsibility) with a teacher... *ES—30%, MS—18%, HS—20%*

✓ thinking about how parent, teacher, or coach would act before making an important decision... *ES—47%, MS—28%, HS—26%*

Adult high self-perceptions regarding their use of character practices stand in contrast to the reported low frequency of youth character development experiences. We cannot compare the numbers directly, however, since adults were asked about the extent of their engagement in various kinds of character development activities and their overall self-efficacy in promoting youth’s character growth, but not how frequently they actually do the practices. Nevertheless, when examining graphs g4&5.t, g4&5.p, and g4&5.cm, we see that the most dissonance between youth and adults lies in the areas of experiences

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and practices of direct instruction, modeling, reflective dialogue, and discipline. On the other hand, youth and adult reports of such approaches, as problem-solving, experiential and service-learning, or leadership, appear to be more closely aligned.

Graphs showing individual item responses about engagement in practices reveal remarkable consonance among adults in their reports (see g5.a, g5.t, g5.p, g5.cm). For example, all adult stakeholders report relatively low engagement with the following practices (mostly or exactly like me):

- ✓ having children practice different leadership roles... teachers – 58%, parents – 42%, community members – 33%
- ✓ involving children in the creation of the rules... teachers – 56%, parents – 52%, community members – 46%
- ✓ utilizing examples from current events to emphasize the importance of moral values... teachers – 48%, parents – 59%, community members – 46%
- ✓ looking for ways to involve children in service to others: teachers – 59%, parents – 58%, community members – 48%

✓ seeking help from youth in solving real-life challenges: teachers – 65%, parents – 59%, community members – 41%.

With only about half of the adults reporting engagement with these types of activities, they obviously warrant further study and programmatic support.

Conclusion

Hopefully this Executive Summary has begun to make the DuPage County Cross-Sectional data talk. There is a great deal that these data tell us: There are plenty of accomplishments or positive aspects of the data that we can celebrate; there are clear areas for improvement; and, there are plenty of areas that require further consideration and additional research.

As we have so often argued, character education is a process not a product. It is a never-ending process of defining our outcomes and then engaging in continuous cycles of action and reflection toward the realization of those outcomes.

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