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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.

The Over-Time Panel Report

The “Over-Time Panel Report” is based on the data from ten communities in DuPage County participating in both years of the two-year *Global Portraits* study (2003 and 2004) and provides an over-time look at the social and moral health of DuPage County. Unlike the “Cross-Sectional Report” which represents all communities participating in the 2004 data collection compared primarily by stakeholder groups (e.g., youth as compared to teachers, etc.), the tables and graphs in the Over-Time report focus on comparing 2003 data with 2004 data. Over-Time reporting is included only at the County level, since the sample and resulting data trends are most reliable at the aggregate level. Over-Time reports are not provided for local communities, since unequal sampling in small groups (e.g., larger sample from a particular stakeholder group in one year compared to the other or absence of data from

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one of the groups in one of the years) can potentially skew the data. Pooling many groups together, as is done in the Over-Time Report for the County, tends to stabilize the results. Individual participating communities still may choose to compare their 2003 and 2004 tables, but should do so with caution. In fact, given the limited data for high schools, caution should be used in interpreting high school numbers, even for the county aggregate.

It is important to remember that because of the sampling design utilized, the 2003 data and 2004 data represent different cohorts of the same grade; that is, the study is not longitudinal in terms of individual participants (in other words, it is not following the same individuals over-time). Instead, the study follows the same communities over time.

Note that an asterisk (*) in the tables to the right of the 2004 data indicates that the difference observed between 2003 and 2004 is statistically significant at .05 level. In layman's terms this means we are 95% confident that the differences observed exist and are NOT attributable to random error.

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 sub-sample 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 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

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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.

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 were used as a foil for generating the following general findings.

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General Findings

Comparing 2003 and 2004 results reveals two patterns of consistent differences:

- (1) Responses for middle school youth are significantly higher in 2004 on almost all the scales.
- (2) Parents' responses in 2004 are significantly higher on the school social health and safety scale and on both school and home town caring community scales. (In addition, parents in 2004 report significantly higher home town involvement and professional development and resources available to them.)

There are several other statistically significant differences that do not, however, establish a consistent pattern. Interpretation of these differences at this point is uncertain: while they can be pointing to a time trend, they can also be attributed to cohort differences, in other words, to naturally occurring variation in people's perceptions and experiences.

The general conclusion from these results, on the other hand, is certain. Data from 2003 and 2004 indicate quite similar responses for youth, teachers, community

members, and to some extent, parents. This seems to support the view that decline in some middle youth's and some of the parents' responses is more likely to be due to cohort differences, but not indicative of an overall negative trend. As such, this difference is not necessarily cause for concern. Moreover, the lack of differences for the other groups of respondents indicates that our findings are consistent; it suggests that we now know with reasonable confidence the general state of social and moral health in DuPage County—as measured by the *Global Portraits*. This general conclusion by itself is quite significant: with only a single year's data we don't know how much confidence to ascribe to the findings, since the single-year findings may be vulnerable in numerous ways. However, with two cohorts at these key grade levels giving similar responses, our confidence in our findings increases greatly. Although we still don't know what things were like 5 or 10 or 15 years before, nor can we predict changes 5, 10, or 15 years into the future, now we have the benchmark of social and moral health in DuPage County from which to begin monitoring—and responding to—trends over time.

It is important to note that the Global Portraits is meant to provide broad diagnostic and benchmarking indicators. Once a "hotspot" is identified, it should be investigated in greater depth and monitored over time. The Global Portraits process is akin to a long-term investment strategy: we want to make

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knowledgeable decisions based on good information. We want to be able to respond to change—positive or negative—and yet, we don't want to act rashly. We'll take a short-term return on investment; however, we're keeping our eyes on the future.

Given the similarity between the 2003 and 2004 data, the story lines for the 2004 data follow closely the patterns observed in 2003.

☒ Youth, and especially adults, tend to rate themselves quite high on the values, motivation, and pro-social competencies scale.

✓ For example: adults in DuPage County indicate the following personal character descriptions as “**somewhat to exactly**” accurate:

- >believe it's important that everyone has a fair chance (justice/fairness)—98%
- >feel badly when others are in pain (empathy)—99%
- >resist the temptation to cheat to win or get ahead (honesty)—97%

✓ Similarly, youth in DuPage County indicate the following personal character descriptions as “**somewhat to exactly**” accurate:

- >feel badly when others are in pain (empathy)—91%
- >work to achieve difficult goals they care about (perseverance)—93%
- >can be counted on to do their part for any group they are members of (responsibility)—94%

These numbers should be interpreted with some caution due to high social desirability of these types of questions for youth and adults. (Compare, for example, these items with the scale-items for community caring and connectedness).

☒ However, even with the influence of social desirability, some items call for further attention and consideration.

✓ Relatively low youth responses on items measuring respect, self-discipline, and tolerance continue to indicate important areas for further consideration and exploration. Consider, for example, the percentage of youth who indicate the following personal character descriptions as “**mostly to exactly**” accurate:

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

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>can forgive those who hurt them (forgiveness)—
54%

>resist talking disrespectfully about teachers to
their peers (respect)—40%

✓For adults too, there are indications of character
outcomes worthy of further investigation, in particular
respect and forgiveness—37% indicate that forgiving those
who hurt them is “somewhat like me to not like me at all.”

☒ As it relates to the establishment of a caring and
connected community, there is clearly much to celebrate.
For example,

✓67% of youth in DuPage County agree that there are
adults at school to talk with about problems that are
bothering them (a perception also supported by 86% of
parents).

✓75% of youth in DuPage County agree that their parents
know their friends (a perception supported by 61% of
teachers).

✓76% of youth in DuPage County agree that kids would
help someone who is new feel accepted.

✓67% of youth in DuPage County agree that if they knew
something dangerous was going to happen they would go
to an adult for help.

✓73% of teachers believe that parents are involved in the
activities of their children.

☒ 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—which is discussed in the DuPage
County Cross-Sectional Report. The observed decline and
developmental disparity is most pronounced in responses
to items about general social health and safety of schools
and home town. In addition, the collective responsibility
subscale is the lowest among the caring community scales.

If we define character as “values in action,” these
indicators are critically important. These items indicate
whether individuals are putting their values in action in
the face of outside pressure. They operationally define
character as not being part of the problem, but also as
being part of the solution.

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Consider for example, the percentage of youth who “**somewhat or completely agree**” with the following statements:

- ✓ kids try to get their friends to follow the rules—38%

- ✓ kids resolve conflicts without fighting insults or threats—25%

- ✓ when kids here see someone being picked on, they try to stop it—38%

- ✓ kids would stop their friends from spreading rumors or gossip about others—31%

Two years of data make it fairly clear that these two areas—increasing social health and safety and increasing collective responsibility—are critically important for investing in further research, program development, and monitoring over time.

☒ 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 indicating experience

with the following practices “a few times a week to practically every day”

- ✓ talking about moral values (such as respect, or responsibility with a teacher)—22%

- ✓ talking about moral values with a parent—24%

- ✓ talking with an adult about the moral issues in a recent news story—23%

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.

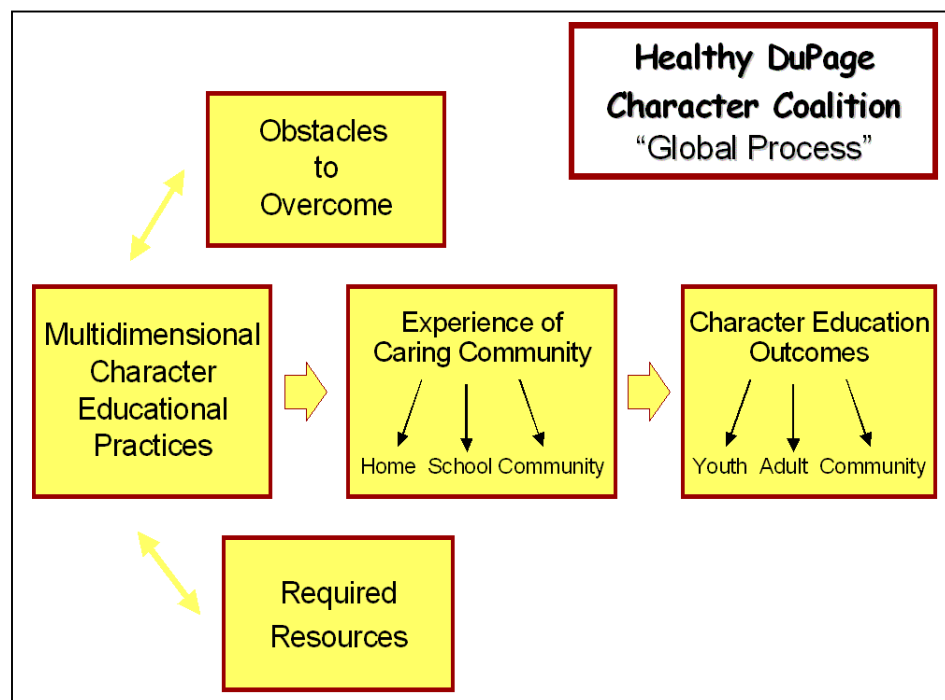
Reality is somewhere between what adults believe they are doing and youth believe they are actually experiencing. Nevertheless, it’s clear from these findings that there is still significant room for strengthening the character education experience of DuPage youth.

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Conclusion

Figure 1 represents a graphical depiction of the DuPage County character education process, which forms the basis for the *Global Portraits* research. The *Global Portraits* instrument provides DuPage County specific data for realizing the vision of this process. For each of these key components there is now concrete data identifying positive progress—as well as areas for continued growth.

Figure 1



These reports were generated by Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. & Vladimir Khmelkov, Ph.D. of Cornerstone Consulting & Evaluation, LLC (formerly Davidson Consulting & Evaluation) for the Healthy DuPage Character Coalition. They may be used without the permission of authors by the participating schools and communities.