



## The DuPage Regional Office of Education Partnerships in Character Education Middle School Study Project – 2004

**Introduction** – As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, the DuPage Regional Office of Education has been awarded a character education research grant from the U. S. Department of Education. This three-year study is intended to research the effectiveness of certain aspects of character education in schools in DuPage County. The grant required partnerships with community organizations, so the ROE has partnered with the Healthy DuPage Abraham Lincoln Center for Character Development to administer this project.

**Background Information** – For the past three years, Healthy DuPage has sponsored the DuPage Character Development Coalition which has brought together representatives from the many communities that have an organized approach to character development in their schools and communities. One of the Coalition's initiatives has been to develop a process and tools for measuring the impact and progress of each community's character development activities. This has involved the development and use of *The Global Portraits of Social and Moral Health* survey. During 2003, over 7,600 students, teachers, parents and community members in 14 DuPage County communities were surveyed using the *Global Portraits*. The results of the survey indicate several areas where character development efforts are making a positive impact, as well as some areas identified for continued improvement. Each community is working with their specific data to plan and implement character development initiatives that will meet their specific needs. However, there are several common themes throughout the county. (See <http://www.healthydupage.org/cdc/measurement.html> for more details.) The 2003 findings indicate a need for youth in schools to focus on self-discipline, respect and collective responsibility. The findings also indicate an overall degree of effectiveness of character education at the elementary school level, but a considerable drop-off at the middle and high school levels.

**Project Overview** – This research project is primarily based on the *Global Portraits* research and will focus on developing the specific "outcomes" of self-discipline and collective responsibility in middle schools. The findings are aligned with national theoretical and empirical trends in the field of character education. Recent research (e.g., Davidson et al., 2003 & Lickona and Davidson, in press) has attempted to expand the notion of "character" to include what they define as "performance character" (those strengths of character – such as hard work, diligence, self-discipline, perseverance, and commitment to excellence – needed to develop one's talents, do one's best, and achieve one's goals in school and beyond) and "moral character" (those strengths of character – such as empathy, honesty, respect, justice, and service – needed to develop positive interpersonal relationships, contribute to community, and assume the responsibilities of democratic citizenship). This project is designed to tie together aspects of both performance and moral character and to focus on the identified DuPage county needs. Rather than providing general character training, the theme of "**Responsibility for Self and Others – the Pathway to Excellence and Ethics**" will be used as a means to address the specific areas of self-awareness, self-discipline, and positive goal orientation (focusing on aspects of achievement motivation) along with creating a climate of respect, caring, and service (focusing on aspects of collective responsibility such as connectedness, agency and courage). The goals of the interventions will be to utilize strategies that help kids take responsibility for themselves and one another and to cultivate a middle school environment where students feel a strong sense of being their "brother's/sister's keeper."

**Research Design** – The *Global Portraits* survey was administered again in the spring of 2004 to 8,250 youth and adults. Based on these data, specific training and follow-up activities will be used during the 2005 school year with certain middle schools to intentionally work on the identified needs and desired outcomes. Specifically, six schools have been identified to participate in the research (along with six "comparison" schools). Teachers of certain grade levels within each school will participate in a series of in-depth content immersion workshops led by national experts on the subject to learn about how to accomplish the desired outcomes with students and to devise specific plans for how to implement this learning in their specific school. Follow-up activities and support will be provided throughout the year. A quasi-experimental design using the CREE pre-test/post-test will be conducted in both the project and comparison schools to determine the effectiveness of this approach. A passive consent process will allow parents to review the questionnaire and decide whether their student may participate.

Project Director: Ken Fisher M.Ed., Director, The Abraham Lincoln Center for Character Development  
Project Coordinator: Evie Caprel, Program Manager, The Abraham Lincoln Center for Character Development  
Research Investigator: Matthew Davidson, Ph.D. Cornerstone Consulting and The Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> R's

