

RESEARCH BEHIND CHARACTERSTRONG

CharacterStrong's goal is to teach students the importance of strengthening one's own character in order to improve relationships, increase academic achievement and overall improve the climate and culture of their schools. Research has shown over and over again that by teaching character, not only will students improve academically, but they will also possess traits that will help them succeed post-high school in the workplace, and more importantly, in relationships that are important to them.

We understand, that today's students are juggling pressures from school, relationships and the enormous world on social media. Some would argue, that intentionally teaching strong character traits is needed now more than ever before due to the increase peer pressures students face while in school and now at home thanks to new technology and social media pressures. In a study done by Armitage and Rowe, they found that adolescent girls reported heightened feelings of interpersonal positive feelings through exercises affirming personal character strengths like kindness.¹ A study done by Proctor showed that adolescents who were included in a character strengths based intervention showed increased life satisfaction, compared to those who did not.² CharacterStrong focuses on intentionally teaching eight character traits and goes in-depth into what these traits look like and then follows up with practical ways to improve them in their own lives and with those around them.

The research analysis from 78 studies conducted from 2000-2015 with a focus on relationship between school or classroom climate, academic achievement and socioeconomic status found that creating a more positive school climate levels the playing field for students of lower socioeconomic status.³ When your students begin to intentionally think about how they treat others and how their choices impact their own character, you begin to see students who are more empathetic and understanding of those around them and in turn see an improvement in the climate of your building.

CharacterStrong gives practical tools on how to build that positive climate that both students and staff desire to be a part of. One of the most impactful processes the students go through is the CharacterDare Challenge. Some challenges hit on kindness or respect like the day one challenge "Be an encourager. Carefully observe those with whom you interact, and identify something positive you can acknowledge. Give at least 5 genuine compliments." This process can be done in the classroom through the CharacterStrong Leadership Curriculum or through the CharacterStrong supplement which provides 180 character dares! If a school desires to take a school-wide approach, CharacterStrong has built an advisory program that provides character lessons each week so each and every student in your building is going through and hearing how students are building their character muscle. Even if students don't do every challenge it begins to ask them the question that they aren't getting asked "What did you do for others today?" If you have students hearing challenges like this each day, they will see an improvement in their own personal relationships, but your school will experience a radical shift as well.

When this character-development program was first implemented in Sumner High School in Sumner, WA, the school quickly grew from two leadership classes a day each semester to five years having seven classes each semester. The positive results that came from having 200+ kids a day receiving an hours worth of character education each day transformed the school. In a school of 1,800 they get 1,300 kids attending their Homecoming dance. Each day students greet other students at the front, side and back doors of their school. At passing period you have students greeting other students as they walk into class and at the end of class students thank their teachers.

1. Armitage, C.J. and Rowe, R. (2011). Testing multiple means of self-affirmation. *British Journal of Psychology*, 102, 535-545.

2. Proctor, C., Tsukayama, E., Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Eades, J., & Linley, P. (2011). Strengths Gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and well-being of adolescents. *The Journal Of Positive Psychology*, 6(5), 377-388.

3. Berkowitz, R., Moore, H., Astor, R.A., & Benbenishty, R. (2016). A Research Synthesis of the Associations Between Socioeconomic Background, Inequality, School Climate, and Academic Achievement. *Review of Educational Research*.

The small acts of compassion and kindness permeate the school each day because students understand the value of relationships and developing their character.

Lastly, CharacterStrong's goal is to not only impact the students in your building, but the educators as well. Leading educational researcher John Hattie identified the number one indicator of student's success in the classroom is the teacher. The teacher to student relationship cannot be ignored. That is why CharacterStrong places a strong emphasis on building CharacterStrong teachers and schools. One of the simple tasks CharacterStrong challenges the teacher to do is to greet at the door. We know from research that a positive greeting at the door will lead to positive outcomes on student behavior and engagement that day.⁴ Although it may seem simple, if not explicitly taught, we know teachers may miss this opportunity.

Every student at your school could define character or kindness for you - but just because they can define something, doesn't mean that they understand it or know how to practice it.

That's why we built CharacterStrong. We believe that every student in your school wants to BE good, they just don't always know how to PRACTICE good in their lives. They aren't given the tools or the accountability or the opportunity to be compassionate, selfless people. So we built a curriculum that allows educators to get back to the core of teaching - teaching young people and not just young test takers. We built a curriculum that fosters meaningful relationships and deeper connections throughout your community. We built a curriculum that gives everyone opportunities to serve and feel powerful and meaningful through their capacity to give. A curriculum that teaches people the skill of empathy and kindness. A curriculum that helps young people realize that life is not about them - that true joy and meaning comes from serving others.

4. Cook, C.R., Prentiss, K., Daikos, C., Decano, P., and Grady, E.A. (under review). Positive Greetings at the Door as a Standalone Proactive Classroom Management Strategy for Middle School Students.