

A Systems Approach to the Implementation of Character Education

Jon C. Marshall
Marshall Consulting
joncmarshall@aol.com

Sarah D. Caldwell
International Learning
Services, Inc.
SDCaldwell@aol.com

Robert M. Moody
4bobmoody@sbcglobal.net

Judy Owens
Cooperating School Districts
owensjudy@aol.com

Jeanne Foster
Cooperating School Districts
jefoster6240@gmail.com

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Abstract

Presented in this paper is a whole-district systems model for educational improvement. This model incorporates several postulates for organizational health.

- A school district is a system of central and sub-entities, which functions much like a family as described in Family Systems Theory.
- A strong district (and school) culture with clear core values and character traits is fundamental to a healthy learning climate.
- Character education can provide the basis for developing a healthy district (and school) culture.
- Planning based on appropriate school climate and cognitive information provides the foundation for building a strong educational culture.

The model, called ShowMe Character™, has evolved from the character education school-change process called CHARACTERplus®, which has been implemented in hundreds of schools since its inception in 1988. The ‘PIR’ planning model (Plan – Implement – Refine) has been integrated into the CHARACTERplus® process to provide a method for systematic data-based planning. In addition, effective implementation strategies have been drawn from the Caring School Community® model.

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The whole-district character education based reform model presented here, evocative of *Family Systems Theory* in counseling psychology, suggests that the district central office is pivotal to developing and sustaining high achieving, healthy schools (Marshall & Pritchard, 2001). This is consistent with what Caldwell and Marshall have found in multiple years of school-based program evaluation. While the culture of individual schools can be changed (Marshall & Caldwell, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, and 2004b), for lasting, systemic change to occur, support must be provided at the district level – **healthy districts have healthy schools.**

As a systems model, whole district change is predicated on systemic change from the school classroom to the district boardroom. To impact lasting organizational improvement, all interactive elements of the school system must be impacted. Some of the requisites for successful, long-term system change are as follows:

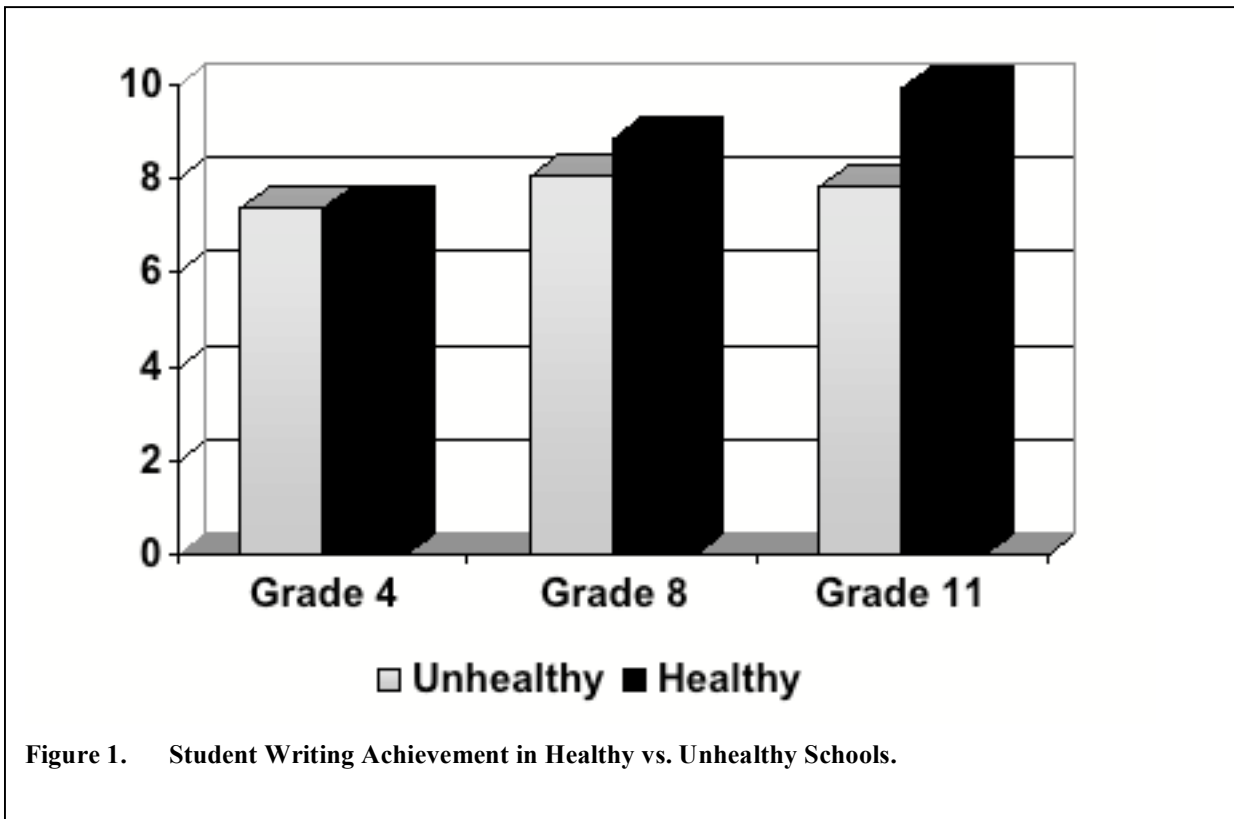
- School board members must become knowledgeable and skilled in leadership to include understanding: the linkages between organizational culture/climate, organizational health and student achievement; cooperative leadership; the importance of identifying district core values and associated policy supported at all levels; and the value of data-based decision making.
- District and school administrators must become transformational and moral leaders with knowledge and skills to include: understanding concepts of organizational health and the interrelation of organizational health, culture, climate, and student achievement; individual and group cooperative moral leadership incorporating organizational quality concepts, change theory, cultural norming philosophy, distributive leadership and contingent leadership styles; importance of core traits in establishing healthy districts and schools; and techniques for data-based decision making.
- District and School Leadership Teams must be established. Teachers and administrators must have leadership knowledge and skills to include: understanding the interrelations among organizational health, culture, climate and student achievement; skills in motivating and developing staff in the cultural concepts and core traits to be implemented; data-based decision making processes; and skills in setting district and school goals with connected implementation and monitoring strategies.

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- All staff must integrate the core character traits and experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum. They become optimum role models for students. They display leadership skills such as transformational and contingent leadership, cooperative group processes and facilitation in working within the organization and with students.
- Students must develop leadership skills both directly in the classroom and through special school-wide opportunities. These skills focus on the moral context of decision-making, altruism, democratic values and cooperative processes.

System Orientation and Focus

Educational organizations, including both districts and schools, can be classified along two dimensions – Orientation to Learning and Focus for Decision Making (Marshall & Pritchard, 2001). Schools with a primary focus on “best practices” for teaching and learning with a strong, supportive central office are the healthiest educational systems (Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004). These organizations demonstrate the highest achievement levels (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002) as illustrated in **Figure 1**. The link between healthy school culture (as defined



by a caring and safe school community) and achievement has been reinforced by a longitudinal study reported by Wested (2004), a not-for-profit research organization. Healthy education organizations share three essential characteristics:

1. Constancy of purpose to improve teaching and learning via staff development.

Effective organizations display strong constancy of purpose focused on high-quality teaching and student learning. The overall focus continues over long periods of time and does not change from year-to-year. While a specific focus among districts may be different, each focus is distinctive and embraced by all staff in an organization. There is a recognized set of core values. Teachers in high level districts focus on “best practices” such as the writing process, Inquiry Learning, Cognitive Coaching, Problem-based Learning, Reading Recovery, cooperative problem solving, experiential learning, and the development of a culture of caring and respect supported by extensive staff development and ongoing teacher and administrator study groups. The establishment of the constancy of purpose and the ensuing staff development are advanced and supported by the school and district leadership.

2. Effective leadership with a philosophy of continuous improvement.

Highly effective, healthy organizations have administrators with collaborative leadership skills; less effective, unhealthy organizations support managers who often display mistrust, intimidation, control and manipulation, described by Argyis (1971) as Pattern A, Hard or Soft leadership. Administrators in effective organizations are team leaders, empowering others to become involved in planning and implementing educational processes (Fullan, 2002a, 2002b). They are moral (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999; Wong, 1998), transformational (Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Murphy & Louis, 1999), distributive (Lambert, 2003a, 2003b; Neuman & Simmons, 2000), contingent (Hall & Hord, 2003; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Sebring & Bryk, 2000) leaders. Their focus is to transform the organization into a healthy culture, understanding the need to broaden leadership to include the whole organizational community and to moderate their leadership style to the maturity of the individual, group or organization.

Healthy districts implement and support continuous improvement strategies through staff and curriculum development that is ongoing, and often for more than 20 years. It has been demonstrated, for example, using pretest-posttest and posttest comparison group designs (Marshall and Caldwell, 2003c and d), that there is a strong relation between schools

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implementing the Caring School Community[®] processes and healthy school environments.

Schools with high levels of implementation are significantly higher on every parent, staff and student variable assessed than are schools with moderate levels of implementation.

Schools with moderate levels of implementation are significantly higher than schools with low levels of implementation. Pritchard and Marshall (2002) found that healthy, high achieving districts had a defined focus (usually in writing and/or reading) for student learning. These districts required *all* teachers and administrators to champion and become competent (through district-lead staff development) in the skills required to support the district focus. And, for these healthy, high achieving districts, the focus had been in place 10, 15, or more years.

3. Elimination of barriers to teaching and learning.

New employees enter an organization energetic, high in commitment but relatively low in competence (Blanchard, 1990; Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004). As they learn the organizational expectations, they grow in competence and typically regress in commitment as the realities of the job and disillusionment set in. Healthy districts and schools minimize this disillusionment through leadership, direction for teacher integration into the school culture, and support for developing high quality teaching practices. Teachers in healthy organizations feel that they are not burdened by administrative tasks so that they can focus on teaching and learning. In healthy organizations implementing the principles listed above, new employees are able to pass through the “storming” stage (Johnson & Johnson, 1998) rather rapidly, resolving their concerns by developing a constructive “norming” pattern and becoming high performers. In unhealthy organizations not implementing these principles (Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004), “storming” at all levels of the system causes a continuation of the disillusionment stage of the growth process. Employees in these school districts either leave the districts or develop unhealthy behaviors, performing well below their potential competence level and never regaining their commitment to the organization. These administrators and teachers either cocoon by withdrawing into a very narrow sphere of influence or became disrupters displaying frequent aggressive behaviors.

A key factor in developing healthy educational organizations is trust. Trust is based on whether or not staff members believe that the decision-makers base decisions on what is best for children (and, therefore, what is best for the system), rather than on what is politically or

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financially expedient. Trust within the system is a direct result of the competence of the district and school administration. Leadership skills of principals are the influencing factor in driving out fear and breaking down barriers in schools. Teachers who have principals whom they perceived as collaborative and supportive have high levels of trust and commitment to the school. The cultural norms in these schools are usually collegial. Students are observed to be involved in meaningful learning activities. In contrast, teachers who have principals whom they view as managers who police school operations often regard the principals as manipulative and self-serving. The cultural norms in these schools are abrasive, with teachers displaying passive-aggressive and overtly aggressive behaviors.

Importance of Cultural Norming

Blanchard (1990) provides a framework for understanding cultural norming in healthy organizations. Less understood are the norming processes that teachers and others undergo in unhealthy systems [for example, the culture of individualism and Balkanized culture as described by Hargreaves (1995)] characterized by low levels of system intercommunications, poor relationships, distrust and low levels of student achievement. Over the past 20 years, several books (e.g., Goodlad, 1984; Sarason, 1990; Schlechty, 1997) and articles (e.g., Elmore, 1992 and 1996; Peterson & Deal, 1998) have been devoted to the stagnation of teacher culture and how it influences learning environments for students. Parish & Aquila (1996) comment that especially in urban schools, the problem-solving process is an adversarial one in which participants must create issues, take sides, develop support for their side, determine winners and losers, and either celebrate victory or plan a new attack. Such jockeying for power is what Covey (1990) describes as a "win/lose," in contrast to a "win/win" philosophy that he believes supports success. It also exemplifies the *Dissatisfaction* stage of Blanchard's (1990) Situational Leadership II.

It is common for teachers to adopt a protective, survival attitude toward their responsibilities, what McNeil (1986) called "defensive teaching" and, ten years later, what Parish and Aquila (1996) called "teacher work." Such work is laid out factory style: 1) organize the stuff, 2) learn techniques and methods that work for me, 3) control and manage students, and 4) sort students (p.301). This ensures survival for the teacher at a low to moderate level of competence, but not commitment to or growth for the organization. Such teachers are "stuck" at stage two, the *Dissatisfaction* or "storming" stage, in their maturational development. They often *cocoon* (Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004) by isolating themselves and having

minimal interactions with colleagues. Other teachers in such cultures become *disrupters* (Marshall, Pritchard & Gunderson, 2004), the naysayers or “mailbox saboteurs.”

Collaboration and Organizational Health

Several authors (Elmore, 1992, 1996; Saphier & King, 1985) have advanced the idea that the key to substantial improvement in education is changing school culture so that collaboration, risk-taking, and shared decision-making can become the established norms. Saphier and King outline a comprehensive list of 12 cultural norms that they feel are essential to support growth and change, including: collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust, confidence, tangible support, reaching out to the knowledge bases, appreciation and recognition, celebration, humor, honest and open communication, and involvement in decision-making. Similar norms were found to be positive influences in an alternative school that was the focus of research by Raywid (1995). When these norms are present in an organization, it is deemed to be healthy.

School change efforts place emphasis on giving teachers and principals an opportunity to systematically think about their school culture as it relates to practice so as to improve the teaching/learning environment. Through such collaborative efforts, often called "learning communities" or "networks" (DeMulder & Eby, 1999; Hargreaves, 1995; Lieberman, 1996; Shapiro, 1995; Sparks, 1999), teacher leaders, rather than being limited by the definition of teacher work described above, explore ways to strengthen their knowledge base, and address challenges and ways to change their practice for the benefit of students. Veteran staff members in these schools exemplify the maturity levels described by Blanchard (1990) in the higher *Resolution* and *Production* stages of development with high levels of competence and commitment. In the U. S., the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has established such participation in a learning community as a measure of excellence for the profession (Shapiro, 1995).

Culture, Organizational Health and Student Outcomes

Administrators, teachers and students feel effects of cultural norms. For example, studies in administration underscore the important role of principals as culture-builders (Deal, 1990; Deal & Peterson, 1994; Levine, 1989; Parish & Aquila, 1996). Madsen and Maboketa, (2000) describe the role of school culture in providing cues for how African-American teachers behave in relationship to the expectations of the organization. Focusing on student perspectives, Osterman (2000) provides a thorough review of the research on students' need for belonging.

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The effects of organizational health at the district level have been studied, especially in relation to how district health influences educational effectiveness (for example, see Elmore, 1992, 1996; Fullan, 2002; Kelly, 1999; Meyer & Rowan, 1991; Peterson et al., 1996; Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Sarason, 1990; Wohlstetter & Smith, 2000). A whole district focus is evident in suggestions for organizational reform through system-wide learning communities and collaborative networks across levels in a school system (for example, see Alter & Hage, 1993; Arganoff & McGuire, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1994; Lieberman, 1996; Mandell, 1999). Research by Pritchard, Marshall and Morrow (2003) indicates that district health has a measurable effect on school culture and student achievement.

Underpinning this whole district model for organizational improvement through effective leadership in character education is Kanter's research on organizational development in healthy corporations (1983). Her definition of a Culture of Pride with a Climate of Success says "...there is emotional and value commitment between person and organization: people feel that they 'belong' to a meaningful entity and can realize cherished values by their contributions." (p. 149). She explains that this positive culture is manifested by activities and endeavors that are integrative, focusing on the wholeness of the enterprise. By translating Kanter's descriptions into the educational arena, and taking into account the research that has emerged since her model was introduced (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1997; Elmore, 1992; Fieman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Johnson, et al., 1996; Kelly, 1999; Leithwood, et al., 1991; Little, 1993; Mortimore, 1991; Osterman, 2000; Roeser, et al., 2000; Rosenholtz, 1989; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993), we arrive at the features of a *district* Culture of Pride that are included in the ShowMe Character School District Improvement Model. In research reported by Marshall and Caldwell (2003 and 2004), these characteristics are imbedded in the Ten Essentials of the CHARACTER*plus*[®] process.

The Model

ShowMe Character (see **Figure 2**) is a comprehensive, research-based model that integrates CHARACTER*plus*[®], the Plan-Implement-Refine (PIR) planning cycle (see Hales & Marshall, 2004; Marshall, et al., 2003), and the Caring School Community[®] program strategies. Successful implementation involves the integration of the developmental framework of CHARACTER*plus*[®] with data-based planning using the PIR cycle, which incorporates training School Leadership Teams in the Ten Essentials and the highly interactive pedagogical strategies

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of Caring School Community[®]. Each of these models has been shown to provide value-added processes that improve school culture when properly implemented. The integration of these three processes provides a particularly powerful program for implementing school-based change, based on character education principles, that leads to healthy schools where positive social and character development and student achievement are optimized.

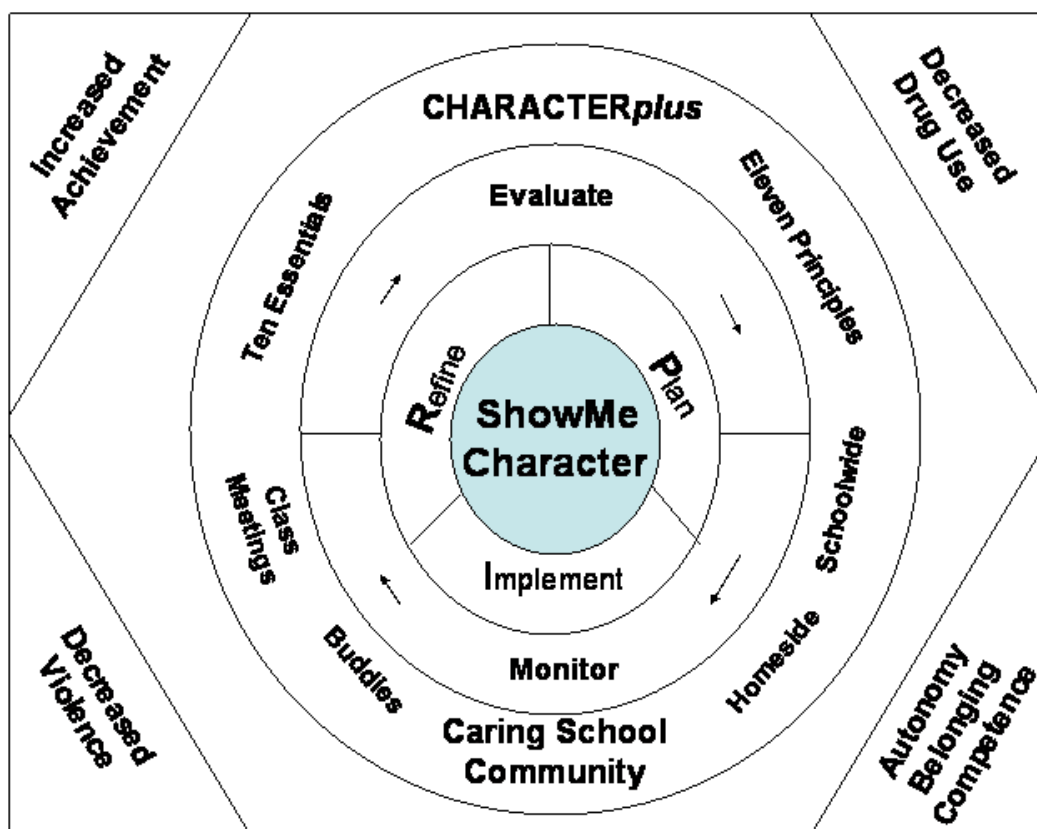


Figure 2. ShowMe Character Model.

The CHARACTER^{plus}[®] process forms the foundation for the ShowMe Character program. It is a process for optimizing community involvement and buy-in at the school and district levels. The program is based on the following Ten Essentials:

1. *Community Participation*

Educators, parents, students and members of the community invest themselves in a consensus-building process to discover common ground that is essential for long-term success. Together, they develop a plan for implementation of a character education process in their community.

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2. *Character Education Policy*

Character education is a part of the district's philosophy, goals, or mission statement, including a formal, written policy adopted by the school board. In this way it becomes a part of the leadership of the school and community. The district policy also should be affirmed and supported at the building and classroom levels.

3. *Identified and Defined Character Traits*

Parents, teachers and community representatives agree on which character traits to emphasize and which definitions to use. Developing consensus on the definitions is key, and the early involvement of students enriches the process. Once the traits are defined, they should be highly visible throughout the school and community.

4. *Integrated Curriculum*

Character education is an integral part of the curriculum at all grade levels. Character traits are connected to classroom lessons so that students see how a trait might figure into a story, be part of a science experiment, or how it might affect them. These traits are a part of the instruction of the day – in every class and every subject.

5. *Experiential Learning*

Students are given many opportunities to experience character traits, see them in action, and feel them rather than just talk about them. Community-based, real-world experiences that illustrate character traits are included in the curriculum. Service learning, cooperative learning and peer mentoring can be an important part of this approach. Ample time is also allowed for discussion and reflection.

6. *Evaluation*

The character education initiative – including the implementation process, program activities and impact on students – is evaluated on a regular basis to determine if it is achieving the anticipated results and to validate that the processes and structures being implemented are working. Evaluation data are used to improve the program.

Ten Essentials

1. Community Participation
2. Character Education Policy
3. Identified and Defined Character Traits
4. Integrated Curriculum
5. Experiential Learning
6. Evaluation
7. Adult Role Models
8. Staff Development
9. Student Leadership
10. Sustaining the Program

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7. *Adult Role Models*

Children “learn what they live,” so it is important that all adults in the school community who interact with children on a daily basis demonstrate positive character traits at home, at school and in the community. Adults need to reflect and focus on important character traits and how to model them systematically and intentionally. If adults do not model the behavior they teach, the entire program will fail.

8. *Staff Development*

Significant time and resources are allocated for staff development activities so that staff can create and implement character education on an ongoing basis. Time for discussion and understanding of both the implementation process and the resources, as well as for creation of curriculum and lesson plans, is an important part of training activities.

9. *Student Leadership*

Students are involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all aspects of the program. They are involved in age-appropriate activities and encouraged to connect character education to their learning, decision-making and personal goals as the process is integrated across the school curriculum.

10. *Sustaining the Program*

The character education program is sustained and renewed through implementation of the first nine essential elements with particular attention to: a high level of commitment from the top, adequate funding, support for district coordinator staff, high-quality and ongoing professional development, and a networking and support system for teachers who are implementing the program.

Change in climate is a continuous process. It starts with the district/school and community determining the core value character traits they embrace. These traits become foundational to policy development, curriculum integration, experiential learning opportunities, staff and student role modeling and leadership. Implementation of these processes has been positively linked to improvements in school culture using large-scale pretest-posttest designs (Marshall & Caldwell, 2003a and b).

Coupled with the processes for developing a strong, caring culture for staff and students are specific classroom and school strategies for optimizing learning. These support the highly

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researched **ABCs** of healthy schools.

- **A** stands for **Autonomy** or providing student voice in the educational process. Students must be taught appropriate decision-making leadership processes if they are to become responsible for their learning. This must be taught directly and experienced in the safety of a caring school community. Besides optimizing learning, this results in improved personal behavior and school safety. **A** also stands for **Achievement** – the learning outcomes supported by local, state, and national standards.
- **B** stands for **Belonging**. Students must feel that they are members of a caring community, that they fit in at school and in the classroom. Isolation and fear are eliminated.
- **C** stands for **Competence** – a student’s belief that she can meet the established standards; each student must believe that he can do the work that is being requested for him to do.

Strategies for optimizing the **ABCs** are drawn from the Caring School Community[®] program. These include:

1. *Class Meetings*. Class meetings provide a forum for students and their teachers to reflect, discuss issues, plan and make decisions that affect the classroom. The teacher’s role in these meetings is to create an environment in which students’ opinions and concerns are taken seriously. The students’ role is to contribute to the classroom community. Class meetings are used for everything from setting class goals, to solving common social problems, to preparing for a substitute, all contributing to a cohesive classroom community.
2. *Cross-Grade Buddies Program*. Whole classes of younger and older students are paired so that each older child is assigned a younger “buddy” for the year. These cross-age pairs then come together to work on academic and recreational tasks of various kinds. Buddy partnerships allow older students to experience themselves as caring, competent, and valued, while younger students see themselves as worthy of special attention and kindness. The activities are designed to support academic goals for students, rather than taking time away from them, and to build a schoolwide atmosphere of trust.
3. *Inclusive Schoolwide Activities*. These innovative events and activities for students, parents, and faculty are designed to promote a climate of helpfulness, inclusiveness, responsibility and service throughout the school. Activities such as “Grandparents

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Gathering,” “Family Read-Alouds,” and “Working for a Cause” link home, school and the community at large while building new school traditions.

4. *Family Involvement Activities.* These activities per grade level (K-6) provide opportunities for students and parents to share ideas and experiences while offering families an opportunity to see what their child is learning in school. For example, first-graders group and classify household items in “The Sorting Game” and fifth-graders do more in-depth research with parents, grandparents or other adults as part of “Family Folklore.”

Implementing the Model

The basic concept is the transformation of districts and schools by training staff to use affective and cognitive data for identifying student outcome goals (focused on school behavior and climate and integrated with student achievement) with connected organizational, student, staff and parent/community process goals and implementation and monitoring strategies. This is referred to as the PIR (Plan-Implement-Refine) planning model (see **Figure 3**).

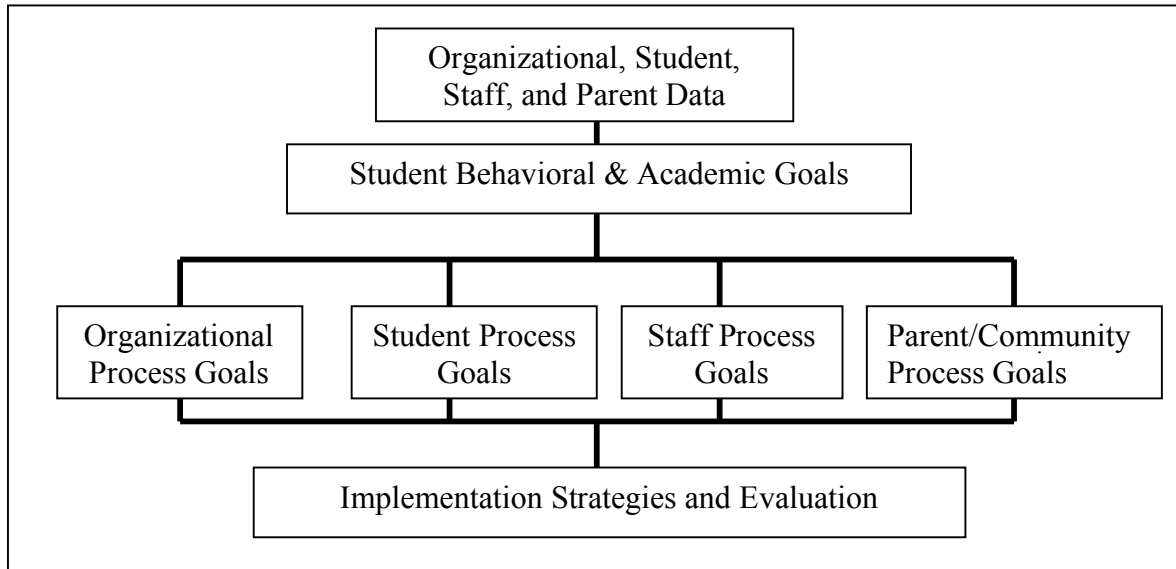


Figure 3. PIR Decision Making Process

This process is supported through systematic training, networking and coaching. The result is the development of district and school cultures, which support effective administrative leadership, constancy of purpose, a safe and caring educational community, integrated curriculum, high expectations, effective adult role models, trust, respect, and high levels of student achievement.

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Healthy cultural norms are the result of continuous effective staff development for everyone in the district – teachers, administrators and school board members alike. Deming (1991) and Kelly (1999) emphasize that continuing professional development is essential for improvement so that all members of the organization can acculturate the policies (or constancy of purpose) of the organization. Staff development in this model is fundamental to creating a healthy district as a “learning organization” (as noted by Easterby-Smith, 1990; Sege, 1990). As part of the belief system encapsulated by this model, staff development focused on the district constancy of purpose is a district improvement strategy.

Using Data for Decisions

Show Me Character is a data-based model for organizational improvement. Student, staff, and parent data are collected in February for use in program monitoring and evaluation and in district and school planning. Data are collected on the following factors:

Student Survey - Operational Definitions for Student Survey Factors [High Positive Scores]

- *Feelings of Belonging*
Students are nice to each other; they work together and get along; they take care of school property and make new students feel welcome; they respect their teachers and are responsible; they treat each other fairly, think it’s important to be good citizens, and tell the truth; they feel that they are treated fairly by the adults in the school.
- *School Expectations*
Students are expected to get along, be kind and caring, treat each other fairly, obey the rules, and tell the truth.
- *Sense of Autonomy & Influence*
Students work together in their classes, plan things together with their teachers, have a say in what goes on in their classes, decide rules together with their teachers, and help plan what they do in school.
- *Sense of Altruism*
Students report having helped someone learn something, cheering up someone who is feeling sad, getting help if they saw a person being picked on, being a friend to someone who is being teased, and getting help for someone who is hurt.
- *Feelings of Competence*
Students like themselves the way they are, are not having trouble with their schoolwork,

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do not wish they were different, see themselves as good students, see things as seldom going wrong, have no trouble figuring things out in class, like school, and feel good about their schoolwork.

- *Parent Involvement* [new factor for 2003]

Parents attend school functions, volunteer at school, set study times at home, set goals with the student, go over the student's homework, and talk with the student about what the student is doing in school.

The factor reliabilities are estimated at grades 4, 8, and 11 using alpha-coefficient based on the combined spring 2002 and spring 2003 student data from 76 schools in Missouri. The majority of the reliabilities were in the .80s and .90s with the estimates being higher for grades 8 and 11 than for grade 4. The lowest reliability was for the factor Feeling of Competence (.64, .68, and .70 respectively). The highest reliabilities at all three grade levels were Feelings of Belonging (.85, .87, and .87), School Expectations (.84, .90, and .90), and Sense of Altruism (.82, .86, and .87). These reliabilities are displayed in Table 1 (next page).

Staff Survey - Operational Definitions for Staff Survey Factors [High Positive Scores]

- *Students' Feelings of Belonging*

Students are nice to each other; they work together and get along; they take care of school property and make new students feel welcome; they respect their teachers and are responsible; they treat each other fairly, think it's important to be good citizens and tell the truth; they feel that they are treated fairly by the adults in the school.

- *School Expectations*

Students are expected to get along, be kind and caring, treat each other fairly, obey the rules and tell the truth.

- *Parent & Staff Relations*

School staff members care about parents and their families, treat parents with respect, make parents feel welcome at school, value parents' ideas and input, encourage parents to be involved at school, communicate effectively with parents, and tell parents about the school's efforts to develop good character in students.

Table 1. CHARACTER_{plus} Student Survey Factors – Alpha Reliabilities

Grade Level	Factor	N	Reliability
4	Feelings of Belonging	3,883	.85
	School Expectations	4,066	.84
	Sense of Autonomy & Influence	4,056	.73
	Sense of Altruism	4,103	.82
	Feelings of Competence	3,828	.64
	Parent Involvement [<i>data collected 2003 only</i>]	2,064	.72
8	Feelings of Belonging	4,338	.87
	School Expectations	4,490	.90
	Sense of Autonomy & Influence	4,496	.79
	Sense of Altruism	4,543	.86
	Feelings of Competence	4,368	.68
	Parent Involvement [<i>data collected 2003 only</i>]	2,655	.80
11	Feelings of Belonging	2,390	.87
	School Expectations	2,448	.90
	Sense of Autonomy & Influence	2,454	.80
	Sense of Altruism	2,470	.87
	Feelings of Competence	2,417	.70
	Parent Involvement [<i>data collected 2003 only</i>]	1,534	.82

- *Staff Culture of Belonging*

School staff members are supportive of one another, are cooperative and help each other, and provide good counsel when there are teaching problems; share the same beliefs about the central mission of the school; do not fall into conflicting cliques.

- *School Leadership*

Both the administrators and teachers take active roles in school activities; things are well organized; the needed resources are available to get the job done; staff members are recognized for a job well done; staff members are involved in decisions which affect them; there is interest in the school for innovation and new ideas.

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The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient based on the combined spring 2002 and spring 2003 staff data from 76 schools in Missouri. The reliabilities were in the .80s and .90s. The lowest reliability was for the factor School Leadership (.85) and the highest reliability was for School Expectations (.95). All five scales reflect high levels of internal consistency among items. These reliabilities are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. CHARACTERplus Staff Survey Factors – Alpha Reliabilities

Assessment	Factor	N	Reliability
Staff	Students' Feelings of Belonging	4,164	.90
Survey	School Expectations	4,313	.95
	Parent & Staff Relations	4,268	.88
	Staff Culture of Belonging	4,217	.87
	School Leadership	4,285	.85

Parent Survey - Operational Definitions for Parent Survey Factors [High Positive Scores]

- *Students' Feelings of Belonging*
Students are nice to each other; they work together and get along; they take care of school property and make new students feel welcome; they respect their teachers and are responsible; they treat each other fairly, think it's important to be good citizens and tell the truth; they feel that they are treated fairly by the adults in the school.
- *School Expectations*
Students are expected to get along, be kind and caring, treat each other fairly, obey the rules, and tell the truth.
- *Parent & Staff Relations*
School staff members care about parents and their families, treat parents with respect, make parents feel welcome at school, value parents' ideas and input, encourage parents to be involved at school, communicate effectively with parents, and tell parents about the school's efforts to develop good character in students.
- *School Quality*
Parents believe that their children are getting an excellent education at the school.

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- *Parent Involvement*

Parents attend school functions, volunteer at school, set study times at home, set goals with the student, go over the student's homework, and talk with the student about what the student is doing in school.

The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient based on the combined spring 2002 and spring 2003 parent data from 76 schools in Missouri. No reliability estimate was made for School Quality since it is a one-item factor. The reliabilities were in the .90s with the exception of Parent Involvement. The .76 reliability reflects the heterogeneity among the possible types of parent involvement. There were high levels of internal consistency for the other three scales, Students' Feelings of Belonging, School Expectations, and Parent & Staff Relations. These reliabilities are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. CHARACTERplus Parent Survey Factor Alpha Reliabilities

Assessment	Factor	N	Reliability
Parent Survey	Students' Feelings of Belonging	3,378	.92
	School Expectations	3,461	.90
	Parent & Staff Relations	3,412	.92
	School Quality [<i>single item factor</i>]	----	N.A.
	Parent Involvement [<i>data collected 2003 only</i>]	1,938	.76

Implementation Survey

The CHARACTERplus[®] Implementation Survey is based on the Ten Essentials previously described and on the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* developed by the Character Education Partnership. The Eleven Principles are:

- P1** Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.
- P2** Character is comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
- P3** Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.
- P4** The school is a caring community.
- P5** To develop character, the school provides students opportunities for moral action.

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- P6** Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them to succeed.
- P7** Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation for developing good character.
- P8** The school is a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.
- P9** Staff and students demonstrate moral leadership.
- P10** The school recruits parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort.
- P11** Evaluation of character education assesses the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

The factor reliabilities are estimated using alpha-coefficient based on the combined spring 2002 and spring 2003 implementation data from 76 schools in Missouri. The reliabilities were in the .80s for all 11 factors. The lowest reliabilities (.81) were for P8: *The school is a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students*, P9: *Staff and students demonstrate moral leadership*, and P10: *The school recruits parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort*. The highest reliabilities (.89) were for P3: *Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life* and P11: *Evaluation of character education assesses the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character*. These reliabilities are displayed in Table 4 (next page).

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Table 4. CHARACTER^{plus} Implementation Survey Factor Alpha Reliabilities

Principle	N	Reliability
P1 Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.	4,072	.88
P2 Character is comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.	4,055	.86
P3 Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.	4,054	.89
P4 The school is a caring community.	4,075	.80
P5 To develop character, the school provides students opportunities for moral action.	4,041	.83
P6 Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them to succeed.	4,071	.82
P7 Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation for developing good character.	4,078	.83
P8 The school is a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.	4,060	.81
P9 Staff and students demonstrate moral leadership.	4,032	.81
P10 The school recruits parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort.	4,071	.81
P11 Evaluation of character education assesses the character of the school, the staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.	4,051	.89

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School Reports

Reports containing the summary data compiled from the parent, staff, student, and implementation surveys administered in February are provided to each member of District and School Leadership Teams for planning. Descriptive statistics are reported in table and graphic form for initial baseline data. Pretest-posttest comparative statistics are provided for subsequent years. School/district discipline information and student achievement summary data also are provided for planning.

Leadership Teams

District Leadership Team - A District Leadership Team (DLT) consists of one school board member, the superintendent, school principals and two teachers (one elementary and one secondary). The DLT meets two hours each month: September, November, February and April.

School Leadership Team - A School Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the building principal, two teachers, support person (such as a school counselor), a parent, and where appropriate a student. The building principal serves on both the SLT and DLT. The SLT meets two hours each month, August – November and January – April. The SLT is responsible for coordinating building level staff development, monitoring implementation processes and providing information to staff.

Leadership Team Planning

District Leadership Team

During late spring, the DLT members attend a three-day planning meeting on process content and using the PIR planning process to set district goals. The DLT is provided with a district data report consisting of student achievement data and collected survey data. The outcome of this planning is a district student focus goal with enabling organizational, student, staff and parent/community goals for implementation in next school year. Implementation and monitoring strategies are identified. This meeting is lead by outside facilitators.

School Leadership Team

During the summer, the SLT members in the district attend a three-day planning meeting on process content and using the PIR planning process to set school goals. Each SLT is provided with a school data report consisting of student achievement data and collected survey data. In

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addition, the SLTs are provided with the focus and enabling goals developed at the district level. The outcome of this planning is a school student focus goal with enabling organizational, student, staff and parent/community goals for implementation in next school year. These goals are aligned with the district goals. Implementation and monitoring strategies are identified. This meeting is lead by outside facilitators.

Summary

The ShowMe Character systems model for whole district/school improvement is a professional development model. It is based on the following assumptions:

- The school board is responsible for setting policy for the school district.
- The superintendent is responsible for the organizational health of the district; this responsibility cannot be delegated.
- The principal is responsible for the organizational health of the school; this responsibility cannot be delegated.
- The teacher is responsible for the organizational health of the classroom; this responsibility cannot be delegated.
- Transformational, distributed, contingent leadership is fundamental to healthy school environments.
- Core beliefs or character traits must be explicitly defined and valued at all levels of the organization.
- Healthy districts have healthy schools.
- A healthy educational organization is a community of learners where staff, students, parents and other community members work together collaboratively to assure high levels of student learning. Included are:
 - A constancy of purpose,
 - A focus on optimizing student learning in a caring community, and
 - Purpose and focus shared by all groups.
- Systematic data-based planning focusing on student behavior results in school improvement.
- Effective data-based planning to achieve student outcome goals includes enabling process goals, implementation strategies, and monitoring for the organization, students, staff, and parents and community.

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- Effective staff development is the foundation for developing and maintaining high quality school districts.
 - Training is best implemented at the organizational level.
 - Training is needed for school boards, district and school administrators, district and school leadership teams, and all other teachers and staff.

This process requires the commitment of district resources as line items in the budget to support the assessment and reporting of perceptions of students, staff and parents; DLT and SLT training and planning time; building-level implementation and refinement of student focus goals and organizational, student, staff and community support goals; and effective school and district leadership.

The payoff: Healthy districts with healthy schools resulting in high levels of student success.

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References begin on next page.

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