

# Character Education: The Impact of a Positive Behavioral Support Program

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## **Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:**

In today's current educational climate, it is not uncommon to find schools devoting much of their time and attention to curriculum development, formative assessment, and the ongoing progress monitoring of students. There is no argument that all schools have an obligation to provide each and every student with a sound, rigorous, and well-rounded course of study. There are however growing concerns among many in the field of education that with the intense focus on the ongoing development and revision of school curriculum, many of the soft skills students often learn in schools are being overlooked or sacrificed. Many professionals outside of the world of education perceive a continuous drop in the development of many of the soft skills needed to be successful in the world today.

North Knox Jr/Sr High School services students from a variety of different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. Currently, over fifty percent of our student population receives free and/or reduced meal and textbook assistance. Additionally many of our students do not live within the traditional nuclear family dynamic. The students of North Knox Jr/Sr High School display a wide variety of attitudes and perceptions with respect to the importance and value of obtaining their education. In connection, North Knox Jr/Sr High School has also observed an increase need to further develop the soft skills of our students. Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to determine whether the implementation of a unified school-wide character education program will change student perception and impact a positive change on the climate of the North Knox Jr/Sr High School student body.

## **Statement of Your Team's Wondering:**

With this purpose, we wondered whether the implementation of a unified school-wide character education program will change student perception and impact a positive change on the climate of the North Knox Jr/Sr High School student body.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into our wondering, we began the process of developing and implementing a unified character education program for North Knox Jr/Sr High School. The first step in the development of the NKJSHS character education program began with our faculty advisory committee reviewing current information regarding the components of successful character education programs. On October 10, 2016, the NKJSHS Faculty Advisory Committee met and identified the key components necessary for a successful character education program at North Knox. Through multiple discussions, the concepts of respect, responsibility, and readiness were identified as the focal points for our upcoming program. With this charge in mind, the NKJSHS Faculty Advisory Committee set forth in developing a series of individualized lessons teaching and reinforcing the concepts of respect, responsibility, and readiness.

On October 24, 2016, the NKJSHS Faculty Advisory Committee reviewed the individualized lessons that had been developed. During this meeting, some modifications were made to the lessons. Upon conclusion of this meeting, the faculty advisory committee deemed the content appropriate and moved for the presentation of the character education lessons to the entire faculty. On November 2, 2016, the entire faculty of NKJSHS participated in a peer review of the upcoming NKJSHS character education program. Feedback from the peer review process was positive. During this peer review two additional determinations were made. First, it was decided the completed character education program would be implemented at the beginning of the second semester. Second, it was determined that a pilot lesson covering digital citizenship would be taught in November to assist in the planning and rollout of the entire character education program scheduled for the start of the second semester. On November 7, 2016, the digital citizenship lesson was taught during our school-wide enrichment period. Subsequently on November 15, 2016, the NKJSHS Faculty Advisory Committee met to debrief on how our students responded to the lesson. Feedback obtained from teachers was positive. The faculty advisory team moved to go forth with the implementation of our character education program at the start of second semester. From January 9, 2017 through March 27, 2017, the students of North Knox Jr/Sr High School participated in "Character Education Mondays." The scope and sequence of this program consisted of ten lessons covering respect and responsibility taught each Monday of the school week.

To assist in reinforcing the concepts of respect and responsibility being taught within our character education program, the faculty advisory committee developed the "Warrior Buck." The "Warrior Buck" was created as an incentive to reward those students that put the topics covered within the character education lessons into practice. Using earned "Warrior Bucks," students were allowed to purchase various items and privileges. Examples of items and/or privileges included: gym time during lunch, hat day, tardy buy back, temporary student ID rental, and late homework passes.

Upon the conclusion of our ten week character education program, NKJSHS conducted both faculty and student surveys to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, anecdotal observations were made from the variety of personal conversations the researchers had with both teachers and students participating in the program. Overall, the researchers determined both the survey results and anecdotal observations appeared to support one another.

### **Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing our data two important things we learned include:

The students of North Knox Jr/Sr High School have a desire to act respectfully and responsibly.

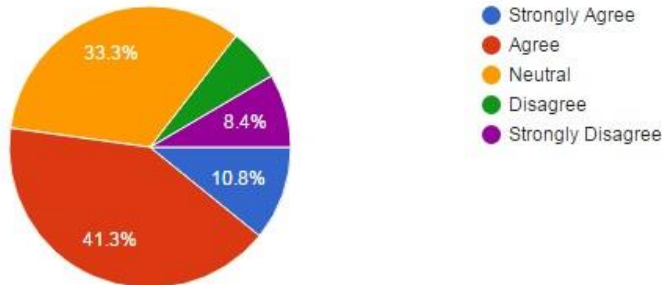
The North Knox Jr/Sr High School character education and incentives program should be further refined to maximize its benefits.

The data collected from our action research project indicated that our students responded positively to the implemented character education program. Of the 462 respondents to the student survey, a majority of the students indicated the lessons were relevant to their age group. Additionally, over fifty percent of the student respondents felt the lessons were either "good" or "very good." In support of the finding of a desire to act respectfully and responsibly, nearly half of the respondent population indicated they are more aware of how their actions and decisions affect others. Furthermore, as a result of the character education program, nearly half of the survey respondents indicated they now make deliberate efforts to assist others when opportunities arise.

The data collected from our action research project indicates that in order to maximize the benefits of our character education program, some additional refinement is needed. Of the 462 respondents, less than fifty percent of the students indicated they would like to have additional lessons developed and implemented next school year. Additionally, as a result of the program, less than half of the respondents perceived their peers treating each other with greater kindness and understanding. Moreover, only slightly over fifty percent of the survey respondents indicated the use of the “Warrior Buck” as a true incentive to act both respectfully and responsibly.

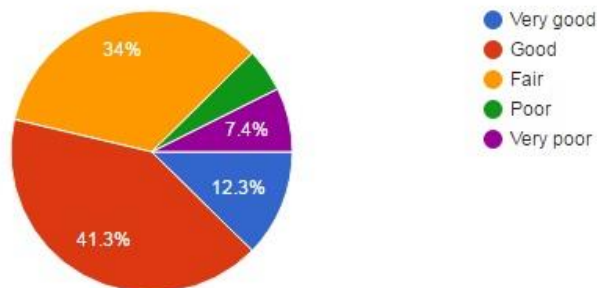
I found the character education topics relevant to my age group.

462 responses



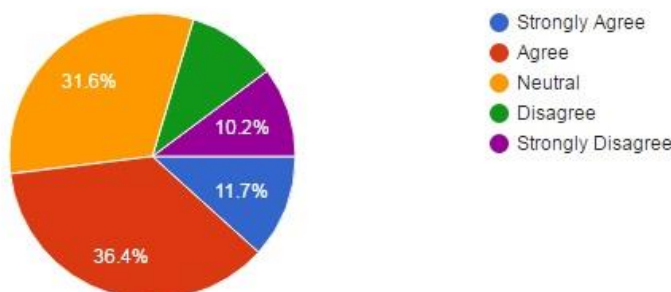
How would you rate the lessons presented within the character education program.

462 responses



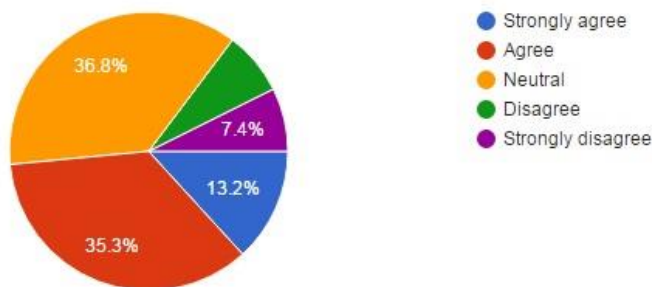
As a result of the character education lessons, I am more aware of how my decisions and actions affect others.

462 responses



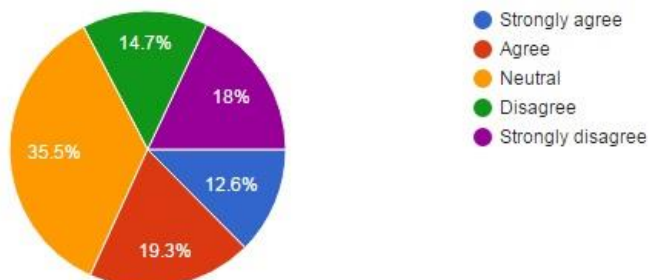
As a result of my participation in the character education lessons, I make a deliberate effort to try to assist others (Pay It Forward) when an opportunity arises.

462 responses



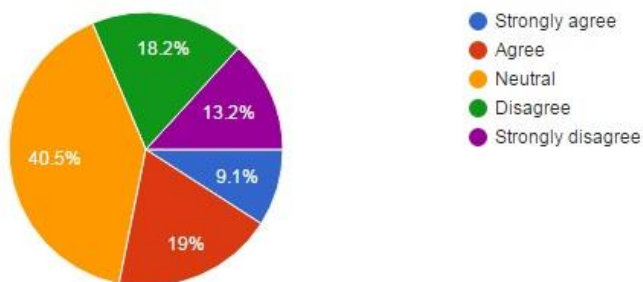
I would like to see additional character education lessons developed and taught next school year.

462 responses



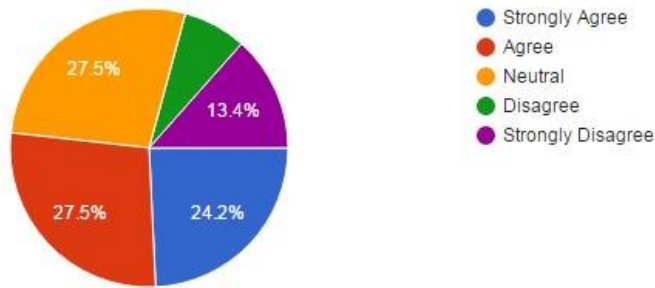
As a result of my participation in the character education lessons, I believe my peers treat each other with greater kindness and understanding.

462 responses



Warrior Bucks are a good motivation for me to act responsibly and respectfully.

462 responses



### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

The team at North Knox Jr/Sr High School has found participating in the process of action research to be quite rewarding. The process of action research has reaffirmed our high beliefs of what a great and uniquely talented faculty we have at North Knox. In the beginning, the notion of developing a character education program to address our identified needs seemed daunting. However, through the power of a shared goal, collaborative spirit, and guided action research, the task became not only manageable but enjoyable for the entire team. We truly feel we are on the right path at North Knox Jr/Sr High School. Our hope is that the work done through this action research project will be a springboard to further our capabilities to develop our students into the leaders of tomorrow.

We believe our action research project has positively impacted how our school and school corporation moves forward. Here at NKJSHS, we plan on the continued implementation of character education for the 2017-18 school year. Our focus for the fall is "readiness." We anticipate teaching a series of lessons on what it means to be prepared for learning. Our goal is to create a culture where every student enters our doors with a thirst for learning and the proper readiness skills to quench this thirst! Additionally, as a result of our character education program, the North Knox School Corporation is looking at an implementation program for character education throughout our entire K-12 system. North Knox is also looking at ways to provide further guidance services at the lower elementary grades to help foster traits such as respect, responsibility, and kindness at earlier ages. We believe these intervention strategies will further cultivate a spirit of caring and compassion throughout our entire community.

Overall, North Knox Jr/Sr High School has been blessed by being a part of IPLI and the action research process. The knowledge we have gained and lessons we have learned about ourselves are immeasurable. North Knox Jr/Sr High School was a great place before IPLI and action research. However, IPLI and the action research process have made this great place even greater! Thank you to all of team at ISU and IPLI for the wonderful journey!

### **References:**