



## Evidence Supporting *CharacterStrong* Curricula

### Three Levels of Evidence

There are three levels of evidence supporting CharacterStrong's social-emotional learning and character education curricula: (1) Randomized controlled studies, (2) Practice-based evidence, and (3) Common elements of evidence-based practice.

#### *Randomized Controlled Studies*

The first level of evidence comes from two randomized controlled studies. The first RCT study was conducted with 14 secondary schools in the Pacific Northwest ([link to full study](#) - Zhang, Cook, & Smith, 2021) that were assigned to an intervention (CharacterStrong MS and HS SEL curricula) or business-as-usual control condition. This study revealed several findings supporting the effects of the CharacterStrong Middle School and High School SEL curricula on student outcomes, including a) significantly higher student reports of academic engagement and perceived school safety, b) teachers reporting higher levels of safe behaviors, and c) school administrative data indicating fewer incidents of unexcused absences or trancies in the intervention schools compared to control schools. All data analyses were performed by a third-party member who is a professor at University of Iowa and not an employee on payroll with CharacterStrong.

As of March 2022, we have a completed randomized controlled study examining the effects of PurposeFull People when implemented in combination with PBIS. This study involved 24 classrooms and 236 students across four elementary schools. Teachers and classrooms were randomly assigned to a PurposeFull People+PBIS condition or a PBIS only condition. The initial findings from this study are very promising and suggest that students in PurposeFull People+PBIS condition demonstrated greater improvement in student-reported belonging, positive interactions with peers, and behaviors consistent with expectations than students in the PBIS alone condition. These positive effects are more pronounced in classrooms where teachers implemented PurposeFull People with greater fidelity and higher dosage, resulting in students receiving more exposure to SEL and character learning opportunities.



We are in the process of preparing the findings from these studies for submission to CASEL, which does not happen on an annual basis. We anticipate our curricula will be approved the next time CASEL opens up the window for submission.

### ***Practice-Based Evidence***

The second level of evidence comes from survey data we routinely gather from partnering school systems across the country to generate practice-based evidence. This evidence demonstrates that when implemented with fidelity, CharacterStrong SEL curricula is evidencing a positive impact on school-wide culture and climate among staff alongside improvements in teacher-student relationships and student behavior, including increased prosocial behaviors and improvements in attendance and grades. Also, teacher usability surveys indicate that educators find the curricula relevant, easy to use, developmentally and culturally appropriate, and beneficial for the students they serve. Also, findings from student-level surveys demonstrate equitable outcomes across White, Hispanic/Latino, and Black students regarding their perceptions of the relevance, benefits, and importance of the curriculum.

### ***Common Elements of Evidence-Based Practice***

The last level of evidence supporting CharacterStrong curricula and implementation supports comes from the common elements definition of evidence-based practice. This definition defines programs as evidence-based when they are intentionally designed to integrate common elements of effective practice that research has causally linked to improved outcomes of interest (see Sutherland et al., 2018). CharacterStrong also meets this definition of evidence-based, as the practices and content infused throughout it were carefully selected as common elements of effective practice that research has causally linked to improved social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes at schoolwide and individual student levels. CharacterStrong curricula are also built upon the assumption that to realize the benefits of evidence-based practices requires evidence-based implementation. Considering this, CharacterStrong possesses two levels of evidentiary support: (1) Inclusion of evidence-based implementation strategies and (2) Inclusion of evidence-based practices ([click here for an overview of our evidence-based approach](#))

### ***Summary of Evidence***

Overall, while our curricula is not yet listed in the CASEL Program Guide, when considering the above information in totality, there is defensible evidence suggesting that CharacterStrong curricula is feasible for teachers to implement, developmentally and culturally appropriate, and grounded in research around effective SEL content and practices that are likely to lead to important student outcomes of interest when delivered with fidelity. We have every intention of applying to be listed in the CASEL Program Guide when the next window for submission opens.