

CHARACTER CONNECTION

BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 2020

For the past three years, each month you have been provided with strategies to integrate CHARACTER COUNTS! into your class, department and school. The Spotlight on Character section has featured events and activities in our 22 project schools. This issue shares reflections from the first three years of our initiative and its impact on the educational program.

Gary Smit, CHARACTER COUNTS! Master Trainer Suzanne Bracci, Regional Director Western New York
Melissa Frawley and Patrick Heraty, Mentor/Coach of Western New York

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Like you, I live in a wintry climate, though I have little interest in outdoor activity during this time of the year. Ice skating and sledding are not on my list of things to do in January. However, I do enjoy watching others who relish with gusto the bitter cold, blustery, and snow-packed conditions.

One of those winter sports is downhill skiing. Racers careen down a mountainous course at breakneck speeds with the wind freezing their face and the powder spraying beneath their feet. If you note, the downhill skiing race courses are often marked by swaths of blue paint sprayed across the white, snowy surface. Two vertical blue lines are intended to give skiers a clear path down the mountain, vital to both the success and safety of the competitors. The paint serves as a guide for the racers to visualize the fastest line to the bottom of the hill and the contrast of the paint against the snow offers racers depth perception.



I would contend that CHARACTER COUNTS! has served as the “blue lines” providing guidance and direction for educators and students. Together, we endeavor to create a positive learning environment that ensures students are physically and emotionally safe. Success and safety are the result of the intentional and direct instruction in core values and desired behaviors. Let’s face it, there are days when you may feel that because of the ever-increasing

workload and the challenge of potentially changing a child’s life, that you feel you’re careening down a hill with minimal direction. While you are given the freedom to “ski” wherever you like, think of character as the tool to provide you and your students with a moral compass to safely reach the chosen destination.

Your school has helped children and young people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values. We know that creating and maintaining a school climate where students feel safe, inspired and supported must be the focus of schools at all grade levels. The guiding principles of CHARACTER COUNTS! provides a roadmap for developing and supporting this type of learning environment.

Putting CHARACTER COUNTS! into practice means that teachers develop caring, supportive relationships with and among students. Throughout our project schools, there is evidence of intentionally teaching character that is designed to encourage student engagement with academic tasks. As a school, you have much to be proud of with all that has been accomplished in creating a positive school climate where students can learn and teachers can teach.

Gary Smit



CHARACTER COUNTS! ALL THE TIME ALL THE TIME CHARACTER COUNTS!

The CITRS/CHARACTER COUNTS! project has been more than words or established PBIS expectations for desired student behavior. Marvin Berkowitz, Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, “knows of no research that suggests that posters, signs, and trinkets foster human development” but rather, he believes that “character develops from the quality of human relationships that one experiences. Above all, educators should aim for developing a caring culture in their classrooms and schools.”

By implementing CC!, a meaningful and measurable initiative has been developed by dedicated Buffalo Public School educators. As a staff, you have been supported, guided, and directed by our excellent Mentor/Coaches these past three years. But now, you must sustain the effort, so that what has been accomplished is embedded in the DNA of your school. As a school, you are encouraged to:

- Retain your committee or team
- As a goal, make CC! an integral part of the School Improvement Plan
- Continue to intentionally and directly teach the desired beliefs with stand-alone lessons, curriculum integration and regular assemblies
- Utilize the *CharacterDaily* app
- Make your school and classroom visual laboratories of character
- Ensure that new staff are trained on CC!
- Prepare for meetings with Mentor/Coaches twice a year
- Promote the use of the PD video lessons on a regular and consistent basis
- Continue to braid what CC! can do with other initiatives of the Buffalo Education Bargain
- Communicate with parents and the community your continued emphasis on developing the academic and character skills of students.

Finally, I hope you will continue to meet for Pod gatherings to share best practices and successes for improving the climate of your schools.

**PD
VIDEO
LESSON**



**CHARACTER COUNTS! Is
So Much More**

Access the video at:
<http://bit.ly/2SIEatQ>



The video discusses that CC! is more than Six Pillars. You could say it's about teachers developing caring and supportive relationships with and among students. They craft stand-alone lessons or integrate values and character traits with their ethically rich curriculum by encouraging student engagement with academic tasks.

The complete PD Video Library can be found on the Buffalo Public Schools website:

<https://www.buffaloschools.org/Page/86213>



RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING EFFORT IN PROMOTING CHARACTER COUNTS!

Each month, there is a section of the Newsletter that highlights the work of a school team, teacher and administrator. For this month, recognition is being given to CITRS.

There are some who are unaware as to why we have referred these past three years to the CITRS/CHARACTER COUNTS project. CITRS is a Pennsylvania non-profit with a mission of “empowering people to achieve success by building a strong foundation of character.” For Buffalo, CITRS has been the coordinator of the project, the employer of the Mentor/Coaches, and the organization that has secured the necessary funding from philanthropic foundations to fully fund the project these past three years.

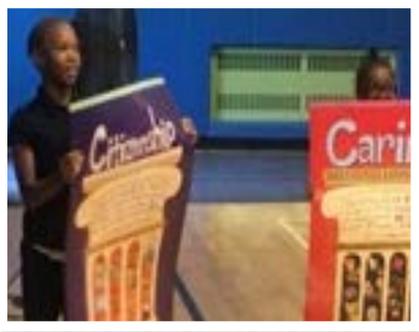
Needless to say, there would be no CHARACTER COUNTS! initiative for Buffalo without CITRS. Your Mentor/Coaches, along with the staff of CC! has relied heavily on the dedicated efforts of Melissa Nunez and Clay Hamlin from CITRS. Additional support has been received from Brendan Petersen and Jeanne Craft. These individuals have been deeply invested in developing, supporting, and maintaining a quality character education initiative for Buffalo.

For all that they have done, there is a heartfelt appreciation for their dedication and commitment to promote and advocate CHARACTER COUNTS! The result of the efforts of CITRS has been for every student to develop essential character, social, ethical, and personal traits that lead to success in academics, relationships, careers, and life, resulting in happier, more fulfilled individuals.

Truly, the support for Buffalo embodies the vision of CITRS, “for everyone, good character.”

THREE - YEAR REFLECTIONS: WHAT DOES CITRS/CHARACTER COUNTS! INITIATIVE LOOK LIKE AT YOUR SCHOOL?

Early Childhood Center School #17



We at School #17 are proud to celebrate the positive impact that CHARACTER COUNTS! has had on strengthening our school community. Our success began with just a handful of passionate educators committed to helping students do their best. Now we have the strength of the entire school as we embed the Six Pillars into our daily routines. From the morning pledge, to restorative circles, to rewarding student behavior with "Loyal Lion Loot," our school is determined to promote positive values!

Maria Carrow (Champion)

Native American Magnet School #19

Our school has been able to blend CHARACTER COUNTS! in with PBIS. We have created a universal behavior matrix that incorporates the Six Pillars, a reward system using Eagle Bucks, a restorative reflection room, and we have even opened a school store. Our Eagle Bucks incorporates the Six Pillars to recognize students using good behavior throughout the school day. We have incorporated the CC! language into our school. Our students are becoming incredible citizens inside and outside of our school!

Marielle Zych (Champion)

Hillery Park School #27

School #27 has successfully braided its MTSS and CC! teams, creating a streamlined system and structure for the development of the whole child in students. School #27 has built consistency to character lessons by establishing "C" day as "CHARACTER COUNTS! day" when lessons occur school wide. Through the dedicated efforts of Champions, administration, and all the caring adults in the school, Hillery Park's CC! initiative has contributed to building a common language and a positive school culture and climate.

Mentor/Coach (Melissa Frawley)

Frank A. Sedita School #30

School #30 has found innovative ways to promote character development. In addition to its considerable CC! signage throughout the building, the school has worked with different groups to develop the common language of the Six Pillars. The three Mentor/Coaches worked with the Champions team to facilitate leadership training to middle school students. Mentor/Coaches also presented an overview of CC! and the *CharacterDaily* app to teaching assistants so that they could apply CC! language in their important role. CC! is having a positive impact in every corner of School #30!

Mentor/Coach (Patrick Heraty)

Lovejoy Discovery School #43

School #43 has done a great job of weaving their PBIS PRIDE behavior expectations with the Six Pillars of Character, creating a 10-month schedule for the school year, and a combined focus with their Tier 1 *Positive*

Behavior Counts (PBC) Team. Various accomplishments over the three years have included weaving the language and teaching of the Six Pillars with mindfulness time, restorative practices and integrated within classroom instruction. Morning announcements, student of the month, student leadership, and Community Schools and after-school programming are just some of the ways School #43 has integrated the Six Pillars for a positive impact on their school environment.

Mentor/Coach (Suzanne Bracci)



International School #45

The enthusiasm of School #45's Champions team is contagious! Character development is promoted in a variety of enjoyable and interesting ways. Six Pillar poster contests take place in the fall, with the posters adorning the halls. The CC! assembly features competition between grade levels to determine the most creative means of presenting the Six Pillars. The Champions team and the staff are fully involved, even wearing costumes to match the colors of the Six Pillars. CC! is integrated into PBIS, further strengthening its common language.

Mentor/Coach (Patrick Heraty)

North Park Community School #50



We have seen a positive impact with our students through the implementation of CC! We use the character posters to discuss the traits with our Pre-K and 1st grade students. Parents were introduced to the Pillar characters and the CC! program during a PTO meeting and via our family handbook. Each homeroom has been assigned a color and pillar. Students wear their pillar color

during our quarterly Panther Celebrations which parents also attend. The character traits are discussed during the celebration and students are awarded certificates for demonstrating the trait.

Jennifer Bennett (Champion)

Dr. George Blackman School of Excellence #54

Dr. George Blackman School has incorporated CC! into our school's routines, beginning with morning meetings. At morning meeting, we discuss the Pillar of the month and utilize CHARACTER COUNTS! materials for conversation prompts. Each month we identify a student who embodies the Pillar of the month and we hold a schoolwide celebration for identified students to celebrate their hard work modeling the identified trait. These students are also displayed on our Student of the Month bulletin board in the main hallway. CC! has made a difference in our school by providing a framework and universal language to structure our practices around improving behaviors.

Meghann Loncar (Behavior Specialist)

Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet School #59 (Museum)

Our school has had success blending their PBIS strategies of being Respectful, Responsible and Safe with the Six Pillars of CHARACTER COUNTS! It has been refreshing to focus on the students who continue to make good choices and exhibit exemplary character traits. Each month, each homeroom of School #59 nominates a student of the month who has exemplified that month's character trait. Students' pictures are taken and displayed outside the main office. We love to celebrate their smiling faces!

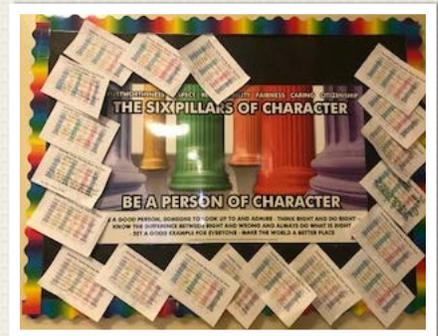
Erin Brown (Champion)



Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet School #59 (Annex)

CHARACTER COUNTS! has made a powerful and positive impact in #59 Annex. CC! has become a seamless and integral part of our daily routines. It has rejuvenated instruction and motivation in students and staff alike. Visitors have made numerous comments on the atmosphere and positive feeling they get when they enter our building. It has allowed teachers to renew their passion for teaching, becoming more intentional when interacting with students to develop strong character. The language is utilized in all areas of instruction. Our assemblies kick-start our traits of the month and school-wide incentives are tailored to each trait. It has helped our students in crisis by giving them tools to use in all aspects of life. CC! has changed the culture of our building by providing appropriate ways to interact with others and create meaningful relationships. We are forever grateful for CC! and the new approach it has provided our staff and students to interact and learn in a positive school climate.

Jackie Floriano (Champion)



Arthur O. Eve School of Distinction #61

This year we have implemented a student recognition program. Each month we have a CC! assembly for our students who show good character. Students who show the trait of the month are recognized and brought on stage. Then before the end of the assembly we talk about the next month's character trait!

Autumn Zasowski (Champion)

Roosevelt Early Childhood Center School #65



Helen Keller cited, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." This quote captures our

past three years at Roosevelt ECC. We have moved through this with trial and error, but fast forward and you will see sustainable activities ranging from morning circles to students earning Teddy Tickets.

Martin Luther King once said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." At Roosevelt ECC #65 our dream is for all children to be judged by the content of their character.

Amy Chavez (AP)

North Park Academy Middle School #66

John Hayes Hammond once said, "Character is the real foundation of all worthwhile success." The one thing that has been consistent during a period of change at our school is our implementation and follow through of the CHARACTER COUNTS! program. The culture of our school has changed considerably over the past 3 years. Conversations among the students and staff reflect a more respectful and caring tone. The vocabulary of the Six Pillars is used throughout the day and throughout the building. Students are more successful in their academics as they utilize the Six Pillars and become more responsible young adults. CC! has helped us as a community to lay a solid foundation for success in all areas of our students' lives!

Christine Martin (Champion)

Discovery School #67

Discovery School #67 started off the 2019-2020 school year with an assembly that focused on behavioral expectations and the CC! pillars. CC! enabled us to bring about school-wide systems that center around the pillars and foster more positive student behavior. Daily announcements

incorporate words of the week which are synonymous with the Pillars. The CC! agendas enhance communication between the school and home. Our greatest accomplishment is the Golden Tray Award for demonstrating good character, which is awarded to students during lunch on Fridays.

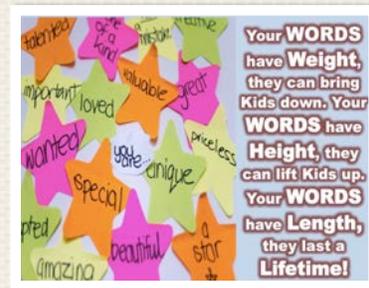
Karen Murray (Principal)

Houghton Academy School #69

The focus of the CHARACTER COUNTS! initiative is in full force this school year with an emphasis on the Pillar of *Responsibility*. With a higher degree of accountability for schools in good standing under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Houghton Academy has increased awareness among all students of the importance of daily school attendance. Under the supervision of the Attendance Improvement Team, average daily attendance has increased from 88% to over 92% this year. Students have been provided with helpful tips, guidance and support to promote the increase in overall school attendance and students are celebrated for their accomplishments and their *Responsible* behavior.

Kevin Garcia (AP)

Lorraine Academy School #72



The CHARACTER COUNTS! initiative has created a very positive environment at School #72. We are pleased with many aspects of

the initiative. Our disciplinary referrals have decreased. Our students are happy. We have a common vocabulary that allows us, the staff, to have more productive conversations with our students. We are building stronger relationships with our students every day.

Sarah Vittoria (AP)

Hamlin Park School #74

The school climate at Hamlin Park has been transformed because of the BPSD/CITRS/CC! initiative. We grew from a school on the verge of being shut down to a school in good standing; a school operating in fear to a school operating on positivity and hope; and a climate of compassion, caring, respect, and responsibility that is embraced school-wide by teachers, staff, students, and all who enter. Hamlin Park is now a school to be proud of, a school that is helping to

embrace students of character! None of this would have been possible without the CC! program - thank you CITRS/ CHARACTER COUNTS

Lauren Golpl (Champion)

Dr. Lydia T. Wright School of Excellence #89

Besides colorful signs and displays throughout the school building, CC! is also integrated into the PBIS matrix. Teachers and students participate in morning character-building circles daily where prompts are used from the CC! Flip Charts and Way to Go Journals around the monthly character trait. Staff and students engage in conversations that discuss ways they have or can display good character. Students are also recognized for their display of good character through character shout-outs during morning announcements and award ceremonies. Students can give examples of how each character trait can be displayed. Our school community looks forward to continuing development of good character throughout the school and the community.

Nicole Smith (AP)

West Hertel Academy School #94



Our school has done an incredible job weaving the Six Pillars of Character into all aspects of the school's culture, routine, and academics. Teachers use the Six Pillar traits, lessons, and *CharacterDaily* app to create a common understanding and language to positively influence the climate of the building. The students at West Hertel Academy proudly recite and pledge to be Kids of Character daily and, over the past three years, have

internalized those words and now feel a sense of responsibility and commitment to demonstrating the Six Pillars of Character through their words and actions.

The impact of CITRS/CC has allowed us to achieve our West Hertel Academy Mission to work together in partnership with students, families, and the community to reach their social-emotional and academic potential through innovation and change. We have even weaved the Six Pillars with our Trauma-Informed Educational Practices. We are "Going Deeper, Getting Better, Breaking Through!"

LaFraya Wilson (Program Coordinator)

Harvey Austin School #97

I have noticed a remarkable difference in the culture of our building since implementing CHARACTER COUNTS! at Harvey Austin 3 years ago. Character development and the Six Pillars of Character really have begun to shape everything we do. Not only is specific time built into our schedule every day to focus on

character development, but it is integrated into every classroom and every hallway, all day, with the way we talk to each other, the way we treat each other, and the relationships we build.

Cassandra Gasbarrini (AP)



South Park High School #206

CHARACTER COUNTS! has been an integral part of our school since its inception in the 2016-17

school year. We have incorporated it into our Tier 1 programming seamlessly and worked the ideals and topics of the program into our activities and events. The greatest impact that CC! has had on our students and staff has been giving them inclusive language and the vocabulary to describe their actions and accountability not only in our school, but also in their outside lives. Thank you CITRS and CHARACTER COUNTS!

Amber Nigro (Champion)

New Buffalo School of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management #355

We at School #355 have noticed a significant difference in the culture of our school building. Our students and staff now look to "catch someone doing something good." Students have begun to think about their actions, as well as the actions of others. We are still in the process of growing and learning how to make the right choices. CC! has helped us create an atmosphere that makes students feel safe and teaches them how to make good life choices. School is not just about academics; it's about preparing students for life, and CC! and the Six Pillars have become an essential part of our school culture.

Michelle Cimato (Champion)