

What Works Clearinghouse



Caring School Community™ (formerly, The Child Development Project)

Program description *Caring School Community™* (CSC) is a modified version of a program formerly known as the *Child Development Project*. The *Caring School Community™* program has been recently revised to eliminate some elements of the *Child Development Project* that were shown in evaluation studies to be inconsistently or poorly implemented. CSC is a multiyear school improvement program that involves all students in grades K–6. The program aims to promote core values, prosocial behavior, and a schoolwide feeling of community. The program consists of four elements originally developed for the *Child Development Project*: class meeting lessons, cross-age “buddies” programs, “homeside” activities, and schoolwide community. Class lessons provide teachers and students with a forum to get to

know one another, discuss issues, identify and solve problems collaboratively, and make a range of decisions that affect classroom life. Cross-age buddies activities pair whole classes of older and younger students for academic and recreational activities that build caring cross-age relationships and create a schoolwide climate of trust. Homeside activities, short conversational activities that are sent home with students for them to do with their parent or caregiver and then to discuss back in their classroom, incorporate the families’ perspectives, cultures, and traditions, thereby promoting interpersonal understanding. Schoolwide community-building activities bring students, parents, and school staff together to create new school traditions.

Research Two studies of the *Child Development Project* program met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The two studies together included more than 5,600 students from grades K–6 in seven school districts across the country.¹

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Caring School Community™* to be moderate to large for behavior, for knowledge, attitudes, and values, and for academic achievement.

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Effectiveness *The Child Development Project* was found to have potentially positive effects on behavior; no discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values; and no discernible effects on academic achievement.

	Behavior	Knowledge, attitudes, and values	Academic achievement
Rating of effectiveness	Potentially positive effects	No discernible effects	No discernible effects
Improvement index²	Average: +8 percentile points Range: -2 to +27 percentile points	Average: +8 percentile points Range: -2 to +18 percentile points	Average: +4 percentile points Range: -8 to +16 percentile points

Additional program information

Developer and contact

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Scope of use

In the fall of 2004, the updated intervention, *Caring School Community*TM, replaced the earlier intervention, the *Child Development Project* (CDP). The two interventions are reviewed together in this report, under the name *CSC*, because all *CSC* elements were part of *CDP*.³ The *CDP* was implemented in 321 schools across the nation. Since its release in the fall of 2004, *CSC* has been implemented in 2,756 classrooms. Information is not available on the number or demographics of students, schools, or districts using the intervention. The studies reviewed implemented the *CDP* rather than the *CSC* program. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of the *CSC* program and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

Teaching

The program was developed based on research-supported claims that students’ academic, social, and ethical development benefit from: caring school communities; having their psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence met; having a better sense of “connectedness” to schools (that is, students like school, have trust and respect for teachers, and have high educational aspirations); cooperative rather than competitive learning environments; and social support and guidance from teachers in formal and informal learning situations.

All four components of *CSC*—class meeting lessons, cross-age buddies programs, homeside activities, and schoolwide community—are designed to be introduced over the course of one year. However, according to the developer, some schools may decide to introduce the components more gradually.

Class lessons are designed to teach core values, including fairness, helpfulness, caring, respect, and personal responsibility. A typical session uses a scripted lesson and begins with a brief review of the class meeting rules (established norms to maintain a sense of community in the classroom) collaboratively established by the teacher and students. Then, the teacher

2. These numbers show the average and the range of improvement indices for all findings across the two studies.
 3. According to the developer, what was dropped from *CDP* in creating *CSC* were two other program elements (a classroom management program called “Developmental Discipline” and a literature-based reading program called “Reading, Thinking, and Caring” at grades K–3 and “Reading for Real” at grades 4–6) that evaluation studies conducted from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s found (through third-party classroom observations and teacher self-reports) to be too difficult for many teachers to implement.

Additional program information *(continued)*

introduces the topic of discussion for the lesson. During the discussion, the teacher encourages students to maintain positive interpersonal communication in which they build on each other's thinking. Sometimes the discussion is followed by activities done individually or in groups. The teacher concludes the lesson by summarizing what was done during the lesson and setting expectations regarding students' future behavior.

A schoolwide component of CSC, cross-age buddies activities, involves older students mentoring younger students for academic activities, cooperative learning skills, and relationship building. The buddies activities require one hour of class time a week or month, and an additional 15 minutes of teacher preparation time. Students participate in additional schoolwide activities such as interviewing nonteaching staff members, holding a family projects fair, and planting a school community garden. Homeside activities are included in the curriculum to build positive relationships between home and school and honor what families and communities have to offer. These activities may include show and tell from home, sharing a holiday tradition, or telling a family folklore story. Homeside activities are available in English and Spanish. CSC read-aloud libraries are an optional program enhancement. According to the developer, reading and discussing these books provide opportunities for students to make connections between the values they are learning in the CSC program and the social and ethical values in the literature.

Teachers participate in a one-day workshop in which they explore the program components, discuss ways to build caring

and supportive environments, learn how to facilitate student conversations, learn strategies to enhance cooperation among students, explore strategies to build community within and across classrooms, and view and discuss video vignettes of classroom practices. Additional coaching for teachers is available. A training of trainers approach is also available. According to this approach, a team of four to six participants from a school receives three-day institute training and then provides staff development to the remaining school staff. District-level coaches and staff developers can participate in an array of professional development offerings.

Cost

A classroom package that contains class meeting lessons, teacher's calendar, cross-age buddies activity book, homeside activities, and schoolwide community-building activities costs \$185. The principal's package (which includes all classroom materials for teachers plus a principal's leadership guide) costs \$275. The cost of workshops and follow-up visits is \$2,000 a day, plus travel expenses. Total cost for training varies depending on the number of professional development days needed and whether adoption involves a single school, multiple schools, or training-of-trainers at the district level. An optional enhancement to the program is the *Caring School Community*TM read-aloud libraries; the cost of the individual grade-level libraries ranges from \$52–\$67 a grade, and the cost for a complete K–6 library is \$408.

Research

Two studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of the *CDP*, an earlier version of *CSC*. The studies are referred to as the "San Ramon Study" and the "Six-District Study" because there are many documents for each study. The San Ramon Study

was a randomized controlled trial that met WWC standards with reservations.⁴ The Six-District Study used a quasi-experimental design that also met WWC evidence standards with reservations.

4. The San Ramon Study randomly assigned one group of three schools to intervention or comparison groups. Because the unit of assignment consisted of one set of schools, there is confounding between the unit of assignment and the unit of intervention. The study authors collected baseline measures and demonstrated that the intervention and comparison schools were matched at baseline in terms of relevant students' outcomes. Therefore, although this study did not meet WWC standards as a randomized controlled trial because of the confounding effect, it met standards with reservations as a quasi-experimental design.

Research *(continued)*

The San Ramon Study included more than 600 students a year from two cohorts⁵ of grades K–4 in 27 classrooms in six elementary schools serving a middle- to upper-class suburban community in San Ramon, California. Outcomes for students in the three schools using *CDP* were compared to those for students in three matched comparison schools. The Six-District Study assessed approximately 5,500 grades 3–6 students each year for four consecutive years in 24 elementary schools in six school districts across the United States.⁶ Outcomes for students in schools using *CDP* were compared with those for students in matched comparison schools. Both studies focused on *CDP* implemented as a schoolwide intervention.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁷

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Caring School Community*TM to be moderate to large for behavior, for knowledge, attitudes, and values, and for academic achievement.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

Behavior. The San Ramon Study examined four types of student behavior in the classroom and found statistically significant positive effects on two of them (spontaneous prosocial behavior and supportive, friendly and helpful behavior).⁸ The WWC confirmed the statistical significance of both findings.⁹ The Six-District Study examined students' altruistic behavior and 19 different indicators of problem behavior and victimization. The study reported statistically significant effects for two outcomes (use of alcohol and use of marijuana). However, none of these outcomes were statistically significant as calculated by the WWC. Additionally, the average effect size across all findings in the behavior domain was not large enough to be considered sub-

stantively important by WWC standards (that is, at least 0.25). So, the Six-District Study showed indeterminate effects on behavior.

Knowledge, attitudes, and values. The San Ramon Study examined values, attitudes, and relevant social skills and sense of school as a community of elementary school students. The study reported statistically significant positive effects on several outcomes, including social problem-solving skills and conflict resolution skills, democratic values, consideration of others' needs, and sense of community.¹⁰ However, none of these outcomes were statistically significant as calculated by the WWC. The average effect size across all findings in this domain was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The Six-District Study examined core values, attitudes, and related social-emotional skills of elementary school students and reported statistically significant positive effects

5. The first cohort was tracked for five years and the second cohort for two years.

6. This review includes only five intervention schools with meaningful progress toward program implementation and their matched comparison schools.

7. The Extent of Evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.

8. This analysis was reported by Solomon et al. (1988).

9. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *CSC/CDP*, corrections for clustering and multiple comparisons were needed.

10. These analyses were reported by Battistich et al. (1989), Benninga et al. (1991), Solomon et al. (1996), and in information provided to the WWC by the first study author.

Effectiveness *(continued)*

on several outcomes, including concern for others, democratic values, conflict resolution skills, outgroup discrepancy score (deviation from friend), liking for school, enjoyment of class, task orientation, and sense of community.¹¹ However, none of these outcomes were statistically significant as calculated by the WWC.⁹ The average effect size across all findings in this domain was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). So, both studies showed indeterminate effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values.

Academic achievement. The San Ramon Study examined elementary school students' academic performance and reported one statistically significant positive effect on a holistic measure of reading comprehension. However, this effect was not statistically significant as calculated by the WWC.⁹ In addition, the average effect size across all findings in the academic achievement domain was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). The Six District Study examined elementary school students' academic motivation

and performance. It reported statistically significant positive effects on intrinsic academic motivation and achievement in multiple state standardized tests. However, these effects were not statistically significant as calculated by the WWC.¹⁰ In addition, the average effect size across all findings in the academic achievement domain was neither statistically significant nor large enough to be considered substantively important by WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25). So, both studies showed indeterminate effects.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC⁹), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

The WWC found the *Child Development Project* to have potentially positive effects for behavior and no discernible effects for knowledge, attitudes, and values and for academic achievement

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for behavior is +8 percentile points, with

a range of -2 to +27 percentile points. The average improvement index for knowledge, attitudes, and values is +8 percentile points, with a range of -2 to +18 percentile points. The average improvement index for academic achievement is +4 percentile points, with a range of -8 to +16 percentile points.

Summary

The WWC reviewed two studies on *CDP*, a former version of the *CSC*. Both studies met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The WWC analysis found potentially positive effects in the behavior domain and no discernible effects in the knowledge, attitudes, and values and the academic achievement domains. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

11. These analyses were reported by Battistich et al. (2000), Solomon et al. (2000), and in information provided to the WWC by the first study author.

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The San Ramon study

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The Six-District Study

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For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC CSC/CDP Technical Appendices](#).