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Partnerships in Character

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Abstract: A Dynamic, District-wide Buffalo Public Schools Character Education Partnership

The second largest public school system in New York State, a nationally recognized organization focusing on character education and parenting, and one of the top character education research institutions in the nation, propose a dynamic partnership which connects the home and school in a powerful and effective model for the changing of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors related to promoting positive social and character development, reducing negative behaviors as well as increasing academic achievement. Through this grant, the collaborators will be able to create and implement a seamless and comprehensive character education program and explore new methods for capturing the processes and outcomes of the complex interactions between schools, families, and communities.

The project goals are to reduce negative behavior and increase positive behavior in students by enlisting teachers, schools, parents, business leaders, and community members in this extensive initiative. Student outcome variables will include *academic achievement* and *disciplinary actions* (which will be gathered from school records); as well as *school climate*, *student engagement in and attachment to school* (“bonding”), *task orientation toward learning*, *academic honesty*, and *participation in extracurricular activities* (all assessed via survey). In addition to these school-related outcomes, the evaluation will assess students on acceptance of each of the nine character traits targeted by the EPIC program—*caring*, *citizenship*, *fairness*, *honesty*, *open-mindedness*, *respect*, *responsibility*, *self-reliance*, and *trustworthiness*. Implementation processes and parent/teacher outcomes will also be measured.

Research suggests that a strong character education program must be comprehensive; be implemented consistently over a period of time; provide opportunities to partner with the home and community; be supported by teachers, administrators, and school staff; have measurable objectives; and be curriculum infused (Berkowitz and Grych, 1998; Berkowitz, 2002; Ryan, 1993; Zarra, 2000; Collins, D. and Henjum, R., 1999; Lickona, 1991; Battistich et al., 2003; Battistich, 2003). This proposal is designed to meet each of these criteria, utilizing a comprehensive, highly effective, research-based character education program.

1. Quality of the Project Services

A. Quality and sufficiency of strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented.

"We must teach our children more than reading and math; we must also teach them the values upon which this nation was built." "Character education cannot be covered in ten minutes a day, it must be at the heart of the entire education program." (Former U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, October 2003 10th National Forum on Character Education Partnerships).

To make Secretary Rod Paige's vision a reality, the Buffalo Public School District (BPS), Every Person Influences Children, Inc. (EPIC), and the Center for Character and Citizenship (CCC) at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, have joined together to plan for the development and implementation of a high quality, comprehensive, character education program based on the EPIC Pathways to Character program.

The proposed project, located in a very high need, urban, community in Western New York, will be implemented in 24 elementary schools in the Buffalo Public Schools, impacting approximately 393 teachers and 6500 students by the end of the four-year grant period. In addition, approximately 4360 parents will be involved in the project through parenting workshops, home-based activities, and special events as well as parent representatives participating and providing critical input at every level of planning and implementation. These schools comprise the entire list of targeted schools in BPS Superintendent James Williams' 2005 to 2008, Three-year Academic Achievement Plan, an educational reform initiative to raise the academic achievement of BPS students. This project complements Dr. Williams's plan and supports his goal for character education in all schools, with the Pathways to Character curriculum providing English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Math/Science lesson plans for each of the nine character traits.

Buffalo is currently the second largest city in New York State with a population of approximately 292,600. Fifty-two percent of Buffalo residents identify themselves as White-Non-Hispanic, 36.5% African American, 7.5% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, and 2.7% as some other race. According to the 2000 U.S. Census,

the average household income in Buffalo, is \$18,482, as compared to a statewide average of \$32,965. According to a recent analysis of census data, Buffalo has the sixth-highest rate of child poverty in the nation, with nearly 40% of the city's children considered poor.

A recent report by the Ann E. Casey Foundation, *"The Growing Number of Kids in Severely Distressed Neighborhoods"* September 2003, listed the Buffalo area as one of the ten worst metropolitan areas in the US with the greatest numbers of children living in severely distressed neighborhoods (15.3%). Children residing in these neighborhoods are at increased risk for teen pregnancy, school failure, unemployment or underemployment, violence, and poverty. In addition, these communities generally lack strong community institutions and/or positive role models. Erie County, which includes Buffalo, consistently registers a higher crime rate than NYS excluding the NYC region as a whole. In 2000, Erie County's violent crime rate was 47.4 per 10,000 compared to 28.4 per 10,000 for similar regions nationally with the majority of these incidences occurring in Buffalo. Erie County has higher than state rates for adolescent arrests (ages 16-19) for property crimes (25.3 compared to a state rate of 19.4 per 1,000 youth); driving while intoxicated (44.8 per 1,000 youth ages 16-20 compared to state rate of 28.6) and the rate of persons in need of supervision ages 10-15 (18 compared to 13.2) (NYS Touchstones/Kids Count 2002 Data Book).

The Buffalo Public School District is responsible for the education of approximately 41,625 students who are housed in 76 sites. The racial composition of Buffalo's students is diverse with approximately 58% African American, 26% white or Caucasian, and 13% Hispanic. Students with special needs also comprise a significant percentage (27.3%) of Buffalo's student population.

The severe poverty of Buffalo's population is revealed in the schools, where 73.8% of students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. This is compared to 38% of students in the rest of NYS State's school districts. The City of Buffalo is designated as a Federal Enterprise Community by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A disproportionate number of students in Buffalo schools, 38.4%, are considered educationally disadvantaged. According to 2003 State Assessments for Grade 4 Language Arts Literacy, 65% of students are only partially proficient or do not meet State Standards. For mathematics, 43% of students are only partially proficient or do not meet State Standards. Eighth grade assessments reveal that 22% of students have serious academic deficiencies in Language Arts Literacy and 58% need extra help to meet State Standards. In 2004, over 8% of Buffalo students dropped out of school.

The project collaborators propose to develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive character education program to be piloted in Buffalo Public Schools utilizing the EPIC Pathways to Character program. It is expected that with its academic lessons infused with character education and strong parent component, Pathways to Character will effect positive change among students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. During the planning period, the collaborators will design an initiative which will be aligned with state and national education standards as well as local and state education reform efforts such as the BPS Three-year Academic Achievement Plan and New York State Safe Schools Against Violence in Education Act (SAVE). Following an initial year of planning, design, and outreach, all teachers in selected schools in Grades K – 8 will be trained in the EPIC Pathways to Character program. As indicated below, this program, with a strong emphasis on classroom implementation, has been proven effective in working with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, students with special needs, and students residing in urban, economically disadvantaged areas. Moreover, the proposed project will engage students and parents who, because of student disabilities, are not historically engaged in special programming and activities.

B. Extent to which the training/professional development services are of sufficient quality, intensity and duration to lead to improvements in practice among the recipients.

The proposed project will utilize the EPIC Pathways to Character, Parenting Workshops, and Creating Home School Partnerships programs with added support provided by The Parent Network of Western New York, an agency committed to helping parents enable children with disabilities to reach their own potential.

Responding to the challenge to provide effective school- and home-based programs that make a measurable and lasting difference in a child's moral thinking, attitudes, and behavior, in 1998, EPIC, in partnership with a team of master teachers and educational experts from Columbia University's Teachers College and funded by the United States Department of Education (USDE), developed a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to character education that is infused into the academic curriculum for kindergarten through grade 6, and that includes parents as an integral part of the education team (grades 7 and 8 will be developed in the first year of this project). Combining Pathways to Character teacher training for grades K - 8, a comprehensive parent involvement/education component, as well as annual character education follow-up trainings, the overall goal of this initiative is to help students develop core ethical values as the basis of good character while promoting parent engagement and academic achievement. The EPIC *Pathways to Character* program works with parents and schools to reduce school failure and increase state assessment scores by providing a meaningful and challenging curriculum with academic lessons infused with character education that respects all learners, including special needs students and limited English proficient students. EPIC's *Pathways to Character*, Young Children Workshops and Creating Home School Partnerships programs are all aligned with national Learning Standards and the Search Institute's recommendations for building resiliency through asset development.

Through the *Pathways to Character* program, EPIC trains classroom teachers (K-8) to incorporate the activities in the curriculum into their regular classroom instruction. The five-hour training uses an active-training, discussion-based model and provides opportunities for teachers and other school personnel to explore their role in character development. The training instructs teachers and school personnel in how the curriculum is easily infused with core content subjects such as social studies, math, science, and

English Language Arts and allows them to practice the activities. The training also addresses how school personnel and parents can work together to embrace character education as a total school and community effort incorporating the nine character traits into every aspect of a student's life. Each year after a school receives the Pathways to Character Training, it will receive a three-hour Follow-up Training that will examine current implementation, discuss and problem solve barriers, explore innovative implementation activities, allow for networking opportunities, and continue to support the overarching goals of the Pathways to Character curriculum and the proposed project. To date, EPIC has trained over 700 teachers in the Pathways to Character program from 47 schools/25 school districts in NY State.

Pathways to Character teaches children appropriate pro-social behaviors embodied in nine universal character traits: Honesty, Fairness, Trustworthiness, Open-mindedness, Citizenship, Caring, Self-reliance, Respect, and Responsibility. There are four classroom-based lessons per trait per grade level and one bulletin board idea per trait. The lessons are designed to actively engage children in becoming aware of their decisions, of what factors go into their decision-making, and how their decisions affect themselves, their future, and other people.

Pathways to Character also includes a strong family component including letters sent home introducing and explaining each trait and corresponding activities to reinforce the traits and academic lessons being taught at school. In addition, EPIC trains parents at each school to facilitate two EPIC Parenting Young Children Workshop Series annually that involve the family in preventing violence and developing healthy pro-social behaviors. Parents/Adult Caregivers are recruited to attend the 2-hour sessions on such topics as: Structure and Limits: Managing Problem Behavior; Promoting Non-Violence; Resolving Conflicts; Character, Conscience and Values; Substance Abuse Prevention: Developing Resiliency; Developing Respect and Caring in Young Children; Guiding Your Child's Behavior: Positive Discipline; and Helping Your Child Succeed in School. The Workshops use a strengths-based model to promote skill development for parents/families of all backgrounds. Discussion Groups are led, not by professionals, but by EPIC-

trained facilitators who must complete a 2 and one half-day training course. Facilitators, usually parents themselves, are drawn from the neighborhood where a series will be offered. Using trained facilitators from the neighborhood where the workshop is held assures cultural flexibility and creates a non-threatening environment that draws parents who may not otherwise attend a school-based function. Materials are available in English and Spanish. Lastly, EPIC will train each school in the spring prior to receiving the Pathways to Character training in its Creating Home School Partnerships (CHSP) training. CHSP is a five hour training that brings parents, teachers, and school administrators together to develop a comprehensive parent involvement plan built on mutual input and diverse perspectives. This plan will be implemented simultaneously to the Pathways to Character program in the beginning of the following academic year.

Pathways to Character has been evaluated by MAGI Educational Services, an independent, national research firm based in New York State. Results have found positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills in the three audiences in which EPIC sought changes: students, parents, and teachers. Moreover, most of the schools involved in the study continued to implement the Pathways to Character program even after the funding was over. Some of the findings from the four-year pilot study of the program in four school districts including a representation of urban, suburban, and rural communities, include: 1) Students and teachers reported that student behavior changed as a result of participation in *Pathways*, specifically in areas that are associated with bullying; 2) Parents observed greatly improved behavior in their children as a result of participation in *Pathways* and the Parenting Workshop/Discussion Groups 3) Teacher commitment for the model was strong; by the end of the project period, 99% of teachers reported implementing the lessons; 4) Matched pre-post test student surveys revealed positive trends in 8 of the 9 character traits addressed through the curriculum and these changes were statistically significant for 3 traits - trustworthiness, responsibility, and citizenship; 5) in three of the five pilot schools, scores on the 4th grade NYS English Language Arts Assessment increased after one year of implementing the program. In a NYC school, ELA scores improved an average of 35 points. The percentage gains for

students participating in *Pathways* were *double* that of students who were not part of the *Pathways* initiative; and 6) the parenting workshops positively impacted parenting skills and parental confidence for 90% of workshop respondents.

It is the belief of the collaborators that the EPIC *Pathways to Character* program is a powerful and effective model for effecting change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to promoting positive social and character development; reducing negative behaviors; and increasing academic achievement. Through this grant, the Buffalo Public Schools, EPIC, and the CCC will be able to create a seamless and comprehensive character education program and explore new methods for capturing the processes and outcomes of the complex interactions between schools, families, and communities.

C. Extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project involve the collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing the effectiveness of project services.

In order to design, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive and effective approach to infusing character education programming into the elementary school curriculum to promote strong character and citizenship among youth, a number of highly qualified partners have agreed to collaborate on this project. Each of the partners has had extensive experience in the area of character education. In order to facilitate coordination and diverse perspectives, BPS and partner representatives, teachers, parents, faith-based/community leaders, and business leaders will convene the Buffalo Character Education Advisory Board (BCEAB) that will meet quarterly, assess implementation, and provide guidance when necessary.

Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) will be the lead agency for this grant application. In addition, BPS will participate in the planning and design process and will provide 24 schools for a targeted, district-wide implementation of the program. The Buffalo Public School District offers a wide range of programs and a high quality education to Pre-K-12 students attending theme schools, vocational and technical schools, Early Childhood Centers, academic high schools, academies, neighborhood and community schools, magnet schools and adult academic and vocational education programs. BPS has partnered with EPIC on

numerous projects including a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) grant and has served as the lead agency for numerous federal and state grants.

EPIC is a national not-for-profit organization developed in 1980 with a mission to help adults raise children to become responsible adults. EPIC seeks to build assets and protective factors in parents and their children, to increase academic achievement, parent involvement, positive behaviors and relationships, and to reduce the likelihood of risky and unhealthy behaviors such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug use as well as violent behaviors. EPIC's award winning programs help parents and school personnel intervene in antisocial behaviors by providing opportunities to recognize early problem behavior and develop skills to address these behaviors.

With its roots in Buffalo, NY, EPIC expanded to a national program in the late 1980's. EPIC programs have been replicated in a variety of settings throughout NY, and in 16 other states. The national and Western New York Office is located in Buffalo with regional offices in Niagara Falls, Westchester, Rockland, Central New York, and New York City and eight USDE funded Parent Information Resource Centers located across the state. With the capability to provide programs statewide, EPIC has successfully implemented state and federal projects including two major projects funded by the US Department of Education and one funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Over the years EPIC programs have been part of several rigorous evaluation studies. EPIC has successfully partnered with both Buffalo schools and NYC schools on numerous projects including the Pathways to Character Program. EPIC currently employs 44 full-time staff and 23 part-time staff. EPIC's role will be to participate in the planning process and provide training and assistance to program sites on Pathways to Character.

The Parent Network of Western New York provides current, relevant, and comprehensive information to parents and caregivers who have children with special needs. Parent Network offers seminars and training sessions for parents on topics like negotiating the special education system, their child's disability, and services outside of the school. For the purpose of this proposed initiative, Parent Network will provide

training annually at each school implementing the Pathways to Character curriculum that will assist parents with maximizing the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the school's and society's mainstream.

The final partner in this project is the Center for Character and Citizenship (CCC) at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Co-directed by Marvin W. Berkowitz, the Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education, and Wolfgang Althof, the Teresa M. Fischer Endowed Professor of Citizenship Education, CCC is the largest concentration of scholars, researchers, and practitioners focused on character development and democratic citizenship in the United States. Its professional staff of over 20 includes nationally and internationally recognized experts in character and moral development, citizenship education, prevention, school reform, and research design, methods, and statistical analysis. CCC is a unit of the College of Education at UMSL—the largest provider of teachers to Missouri K-12 schools—conducting research and providing consultation on implementation and evaluation of character education programs throughout the nation. CCC will be responsible for the design and implementation of the project's evaluation component. CCC is the home of The Journal of Research in Character Education.

2. Quality of Key Personnel

To effectively implement this project, a team of expert character education researchers; program directors; trainers; and compliance specialists have been assembled. When recruiting for new positions in this project, the Buffalo Public Schools and its partners will take every step necessary to ensure that all paid and volunteer positions provide for the diversity enjoyed by the district and the communities it serves.

BPS Project Coordinator, Tonja M. Williams is the Director of Youth Services for the Buffalo Public School District (BPS). This position is under the division of Student Support Services. In her role, she is responsible for all aspects of guidance and counseling, crisis prevention and intervention services, safe and drug free schooling, home instruction and alternative education. There are 62 Certified School Counselors in BPS including: Title 1 counselors who work primarily with elementary students to help them in the areas of pro-social skill development, High School Ahead Counselors who focus on students in middle school;

assisting them with the process of high school program selection and the application process, Special Education Counselors who work with students with disabilities in grades K-12, and traditional high school counselors. Ms. Williams has worked with the school district for 15 years; nine of which were as a school counselor.

EPIC Project Coordinator will be hired and trained in the Pathways to Character curriculum and provided direct supervision by the Project Director. The Project Coordinator will be hired from the communities that are served by the grant, ensuring diversity of project personnel; providing an immediate connection between grant personnel and the school and community; building acceptance, trust, and commitment; and facilitating implementation. The qualified candidate will have experience implementing Pathways to Character, coordinating multiple sites, managing projects through Microsoft Project, familiarity with the NYS educational system, preferably teaching experience, and a commitment to character development.

Marvin W. Berkowitz, Ph.D., Co-Principal Investigator, is a Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education, UMSL. Before arriving at UMSL, Dr. Berkowitz was the inaugural Ambassador Holland H. Coors Professor of Character Development at the United States Air Force Academy. Previously he served as Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Ethics Studies at Marquette University. His research interests are character education, moral development, adolescent development and risk-taking. He is a former board member of the Character Education Partnership, the Association for Moral Education, and a consultant to Mathematica Policy Research on the Institute for Educational Science's Social and Character Development Research Program cross-site evaluation. He is editor of *Moral Education: Theory and Application* (1985) and *Peer Conflict and Psychological Growth* (1985) and author of more than 60 chapters, monographs and articles. He recently completed a review of the scientific literature around, "What Works in Character Education: A Literature Review," for CEP.

Victor Battistich, Ph.D., Co-Principal Investigator, has been a leading researcher and program developer in the areas of character education, moral education, and prevention for over 20 years. Most

notably, he and his colleagues' work on the *Child Development Project* has been widely recognized as exemplary, including awards and/or recognitions by the American Association of School Administrators, the Character Education Partnership, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National School Boards Association, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Education, among others. He has authored numerous journal articles and book chapters on children's character and moral development, and the influence of schooling and school-based practices on positive developmental outcomes.

Melinda C. Bier, Ph.D. is Project Director of "What Works in Character Education: A Literature Review," and the National Character Education Clearinghouse. She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Research in Character Education and is a consultant to Mathematica Policy Research on the Institute for Educational Science's Social and Character Development Research Program cross-site evaluation and to Caliber Associates on the Character Education Technical Assistance Center. She has published on the topics of character education, research ethics, and instructional technology.

Mary Beth Debus (Project Director) is the Director of Training and Program Development for EPIC-Every Person Influences Children. Mary Beth oversees the curriculum development and training design for EPIC's programs and services. She has worked in both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations in positions overseeing training and development, change management, and facilitation. Mary Beth has a Masters of Arts in Communication and additional graduate studies. She is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Communication at the University at Buffalo, and has also taught at The Ohio State University and Canisius College. She is also a consultant to not-for-profits in areas of strategic planning and staff development. She has presented research at national conferences, including an award winning research paper and is published in peer-review journals and textbooks.

School-based Contacts will be identified, with a strong emphasis on ensuring cultural diversity, by the principals from each of the schools and trained in the Pathways to Character curriculum. These contacts

will play a critical role in implementing the Pathways to Character curriculum and maintaining strong communication between their assigned school, the Project Coordinator, and initiative personnel. Each School-based contact will chair a school committee that will oversee the Pathways to Character program.

3. Quality of the Project Evaluation

The proposed evaluation of a research-based character education utilizes a rigorous experimental design and reliable and valid outcome measures, and thus addresses the GPRA measure established for the Partnership in Character Education Program grants. The project goals and outcomes examined include each of the following factors listed in the Program RFA:

- *discipline issues*
- *student academic achievement*
- *participation in extracurricular activities*
- *parental and community involvement*
- *faculty and administration involvement*
- *student and staff morale*
- *school climate*

The proposed analyses of student outcomes will explicitly examine the extent to which program effects are observed for all subgroups of participating students, including those with disabilities.

Design: The effectiveness of the EPIC *Pathways to Character* intervention program will be evaluated using a randomized, wait-list control group design involving 24 elementary schools in the Buffalo Public School District. The 24 schools, all of which have volunteered to implement the program, will be stratified on the basis of size and student demographic characteristics, and then randomly assigned within strata to form three equivalent groups of 8 schools each. Baseline assessments of all outcome variables will be conducted at all 24 schools during the first grant year, prior to the beginning of intervention. In each of the subsequent three years, one group of 8 schools will be randomly selected to receive the intervention, so that all of the participating schools will be implementing the program during the final year of the grant. This randomized design will allow both between-school (within-year) and within-school (across year)

assessments of program effects, relative to no treatment, as well as estimation of the cumulative impact of one, two, and three years of program implementation.

Outcome Assessments: Student outcomes will be assessed primarily through group-administered questionnaires. All students in grades 3-5 who have parental consent to participate in the research will be assessed in the spring of each school year, beginning with the baseline assessments in Year 1. The estimated annual sample size for the 24 participating schools is approximately 4,000 students, for a total student sample size from baseline through the final assessment in Year 4 of approximately 8,000 individual students with one or more years of outcome data.

Two types of outcomes will be assessed through the student surveys: character-related and school-related. Assessment of student character will focus on measures of the nine character traits targeted by the EPIC program—*caring, citizenship, fairness, honesty, open-mindedness, respect, responsibility, self-reliance, and trustworthiness*. The school-related outcomes assessed in the surveys will be *student engagement in and attachment to school* (“bonding”), *task orientation toward learning, academic honesty, and participation in extracurricular activities*, and perceptions of *school climate*. Additional measures of students' character (in terms of the nine traits specified above) and school climate will come from parent and teacher surveys (see below). Finally, data on students' *academic achievement* and *disciplinary actions* will be obtained from school records.

Program effects on teachers (all grade levels) and parents (workshop participants and parents of sampled students) also will be assessed through annual surveys (including baseline) administered to all teachers and parents at the participating schools who consent to being assessed. The expected annual sample sizes are approximately 400 teachers and 2,000 parents. Teacher outcomes measured in these surveys will be *commitment to character education, staff morale*, and perceived *school climate*, as well as *involvement and commitment of both faculty and administration in the intervention and involvement of parents and the community in the school*. The survey measures of parent outcomes will be *knowledge*

about character education, attitude, knowledge, and confidence in their parenting skills, and involvement in their student's school, as well as perceptions of school climate.

Implementation Assessments: Program implementation will be assessed through items on the student, teacher and parent surveys, as well as on a survey of school principals. These questions will examine each group's perception of both the frequency and quality of implementation of program activities.

Quality of Outcome and Implementation Measures: All of the outcome and implementation measures either have been used in previous evaluations of the *Pathways to Character* program (MAGI, 2003) or in evaluations of related character education programs (Solomon et al., 2000). Copies of proposed measures are included in the Appendix.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the baseline data from all 24 schools will be used to refine measurement quality for the battery of measures included in each of the surveys. These analyses will be used to minimize redundancy and maximize internal consistency of the measures so that analyses program effects will be based on the most reliable measures of empirically distinct outcome variables. For variables measured by more than one informant (character traits, school climate), latent variable confirmatory factor analysis will be used to assess the degree of construct validity represented in the data (i.e., by estimating the extent to which observed item responses can be reproduced as functions of separate "trait" and "informant" latent variables).

Analysis: Analyses of program outcomes will be based primarily on hierarchical linear regression, with level 1 representing time, level 2 representing participants (students, teachers, parents) within school, and level 3 representing school in these analyses. The randomized, longitudinal design provides sufficient statistical power ($\beta \geq .75$) to detect small-to-moderate school-level program effects ($ES = .2 - .4$) at conventional levels of statistical significance ($\alpha < .05$). Intervention effects will be estimated by including a dichotomous indicator of program status as a time-varying, school-level covariate. Relevant demographic

characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability status) will be included as control variables to increase the precision of program effect estimates. Preliminary analyses will be conducted to determine whether program effects vary reliably by participant subgroups and, if so, appropriate interaction terms to represent these effects will be included in the final models of program impact.

The primary hierarchical regression outcome analyses, which are consistent with the level of assignment to treatment and accurately take into account the nesting of participants within schools, will be supplemented by individual-level growth modeling analyses to assess program impacts on longitudinal changes in measured outcomes for students, teachers, and parents.

Additional follow-up analyses will be conducted separately for any participant subgroup (e.g., students with disabilities) identified as differing reliably in response-to-treatment in overall impact analyses (see above) to further investigate the nature of these subgroup-specific outcomes.

Process Evaluation: In addition to the quantitative assessments of program implementation described above, qualitative assessments of program progress will be made at each school by the EPIC Project Coordinator, as the schools enter the intervention group and continuing throughout their period of implementation. Data relevant to program monitoring and improvement will be gathered by the Project Coordinator through periodic observations at the school sites, at program trainings, and at meetings of the school character education committees and the project advisory board. Depending on the activity, these observations will occur two to six times annually during each intervention year, and will be supplemented by analyses of relevant documents (e.g., minutes of project staff and school committee meetings; monthly reports on technical assistance provided by BPS coordinators) and, as needed, individual or focus group interviews with key project participants. These qualitative data will be supplemented by the quantitative data on workshop attendance, participant responses to the training and curriculum provided by the workshop evaluations, and the implementation measures included in the teacher and parent surveys.

In addition to monitoring and supporting high quality program implementation at the participating schools during the grant period, the process evaluation is intended to both: (a) provide data to support program replication and dissemination by identifying revisions to improve the use and effectiveness of curricular materials and training processes; and (b) establish a system for continuous program monitoring and improvement in the participating schools to promote capacity building and institutionalization. The primary mechanism for accomplishing the first goal is regular analysis of implementation data at quarterly meetings of the Program Coordinator with project staff (including project evaluators), and the primary mechanism for accomplishing the second goal is the character education committee at each school. This group will be composed of representatives from all constituencies (school administrators, regular classroom teachers at the primary and upper grades, special education/resource teachers, school staff, students, parents, and community members), and will be charged with overseeing the school-wide character education initiative and monitoring its implementation. These school committees will meet six times during each school year (three times in the fall and three times in the spring) to plan, assess progress, and undertake actions to improve the frequency and quality of program activities at the site. The Project Coordinator will coordinate the work of these school committees, and will institute a regular annual or bi-annual meeting where all current data on the school's implementation of the program will be presented, analyzed, discussed, and used as a basis for planning and undertaking actions to improve subsequent implementation. The Project Coordinator and other project staff will work to help assure that this committee becomes part of the formal governance structure at each school, thereby promoting "ownership" of the character education initiative and providing site-level capacity for maintaining and strengthening the program well beyond the period of the grant.

In addition to the internal progress reviews, annual reports to the BCEAB, and bi-annual federal evaluation reports; findings from this evaluation will be presented at professional conferences (CEP, NSPA, and AERA) and submitted to peer-reviewed journals (JRCE and JME) and trade publications such as

Educational Leadership. The CCC evaluation team members have presented and/or published in each of the venues mentioned above and have designed a study of sufficient scientific rigor to be accepted by these review committees. Summaries of the research will also be available on the EPIC and CCC websites.

4. Quality of the Management Plan

The need for strong character development has reached unprecedented levels as schools confront growing incidents of bullying, drug abuse, violence, and weapons possession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; Berkowitz, et al., 2001). Simultaneously, individual schools are faced with the daunting task of selecting one character education program among hundreds that offers a solution to their concerns. This has resulted in a growing emphasis on selecting research-based character education programs that serve the whole school community and not simply offer a one-dimensional approach.

Research suggests that there are four key areas that must be present in order for a character education program to be effective. First, character education cannot and should not be the sole responsibility of public schools (Berkowitz, 2002; Catalano et al., 1999). The community must be involved and there must be a strong commitment from parents to support the school's efforts in the home (Berkowitz and Grych, 1998; Ryan, 1993; Zarra, 2000; Collins, D. and Henjum, R., 1999, Lickona, 1991). Zarra (2000) explains "Effective character education must be implemented across the school culture—in the classroom and out—and be contiguous to students' lives in the home and community." (p. 3). Second, schools must have strong leadership from their administration and the commitment of their faculty and staff in order to create a school culture that not only supports strong character but promotes it (Deroche and Williams, 2001). Third, character education objectives and outcomes must be given the same academic scrutiny as traditional academic subjects such as reading and math (Battistich et al., 2003). They must have measurable objectives that are clearly defined prior to implementation and that demonstrate an impact on students and their behaviors, including higher academic achievement (Battistich, 2003; Brogan and Brogan, 1999; Leming and Silva, 2001; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999; Vessels, 1998). Finally, while most teachers agree that

character education is important, it will be difficult to prioritize it over academic objectives unless it is fused with the academic curriculum (Battistich and Watson, 2003; Edgington, W., 2002). To this end, a strong character education program must be comprehensive; be implemented consistently over a period of time; provide opportunities to partner with the home and community; be supported by teachers, administrators, and school staff; have measurable objectives; and be infused with the curriculum.

This initiative proposes to implement a research-based character education curriculum in a comprehensive, outcomes-focused, and seamless program that positively impacts the lives of students. The first objective (See Workplan Table) brings together Buffalo Public Schools, EPIC, Parent Network, nationally recognized character education experts, parents, teachers, special education representatives, administrators, business leaders like Fisher Price, Inc. and Rich Products, and faith-based/community members from agencies like the Buffalo Reads Coalition, Council of Churches, and Buffalo United Way to develop the implementation plan. A diverse array of individuals will be selected by BPS from the participating schools and school communities, including students, in order to develop The Buffalo Character Education Advisory Board (BCEAB), a diverse board that embraces and understands community culture and needs. This phase will generate diverse perspectives that will address concerns that would otherwise not be accounted for. The BCEAB will be charged with assessing the feasibility of the program, offering suggestions for improvements, and communicating any concerns from the perspective of their communities. It will continue to meet quarterly throughout the life of the project in order to maximize the overall impact on students, ensure that a diversity of perspectives is maintained throughout the project, and provide guidance throughout the management process.

In addition, because some of the schools go from K through 8th Grade, EPIC's Director of Training and educational consultants will develop Pathways to Character teacher guides for grades 7 and 8. These guides will contain the same components as the K through 6 guides and will connect with the New York

State Learning Standards. The 7th and 8th Grade guides will be completed before the implementation of the Pathways to Character trainings.

Upon the completion of the design phase, the BPS and EPIC Project Coordinators will be identified and trained in the EPIC Facilitator and Pathways to Character models, both active training models that allow for practice and feedback as well as extensive review of the content. After receiving the training, the Project Coordinators will begin the process of introducing themselves to the schools and communities. They will be charged with oversight of the project, managing it through the use of Microsoft Project Software, and assessing the implementation of the project. The implementation assessments (surveys utilized in EPIC's New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services grant) will ensure quality implementation and examine teacher's responses to the training and curriculum, school and district responses to the implementation process, assess the school based character education committees three times each school year, and gather feedback from the advisory board quarterly throughout the life of the project. In addition, the BPS and EPIC Project Coordinators will work with the Principals to identify the School-based Character Education Contacts located at each school. These School-based Contacts will establish and lead the character education committees that will meet 3 times in the fall and 3 times in the spring, oversee the school-wide character education initiative, including events, manage their initiative budgets, and work to include character education in every aspect of school life. The committees will have representation from parents, teachers, students, administrators, special education teachers/aids, school staff, and business/community leaders. These committees will participate with other parents and school teaching and professional staff in the EPIC Creating Home School Partnerships (CHSP) training in order to design a comprehensive parent involvement plan that embraces diverse perspectives and promotes increased parent involvement.

The entire teaching faculty and other school personnel at each implementation school will participate in a Pathways to Character training that will educate them on the program philosophy, key elements,

implementation plan, and evaluation components. Eight schools will be trained in the second, third, and fourth years with Follow-up Trainings being provided to schools each year after they receive the initial Pathways to Character training. Teachers will be provided the teacher guides and an overview of the implementation plan that resulted from the first year of the initiative and represents the contributions of teachers, parents, community members, business leaders, and administrators from their district.

Shortly after the teacher training, parents will be invited to participate in the EPIC Facilitator Training. This training will cover the program philosophy, key elements, parents' roles, parent involvement activities, connection to the home and community, and EPIC facilitator model. Parent participants will be charged with facilitating EPIC Parenting Young Children workshop series, representing parents on the character education committees and BCEAB, connecting with the community, and raising the interest of other parents in the school community. These parents will receive a stipend and will be the core group that engages and recruits other parents in the critical roles that they will play in this initiative.

After training teachers and parents and creating a substantial awareness around the initiative, the implementation schools will host a school-wide kick-off event that will be essential in creating a culture of respect, support, compassion, and social/character development. This event sets the stage for the initiative and its emphasis on creating a school and home culture that embraces character education.

The final phase will include the implementation of the classroom curriculum and parenting components. The curriculum will utilize the standards-based Pathways to Character lessons to effect and reinforce cultural and individual change at the school level and with the students. The parent component will bridge the initiative between school and home through parent letters, home activities connected to academic/character lessons in the school, parenting workshops, implementation of the Parent Involvement Plan, and 3 annual character education family events. The events that will occur in the fall, winter and spring in each implementation school are designed for the entire family to participate, and will be connected to the character traits and offer EPIC Parenting Young Children and disability awareness workshops. In

addition, all Grade 3 – 8 classrooms will be provided with Master Guru, a computerized game that is standards-based, addresses all core subjects, and is connected with the Pathways to Character curriculum through character infused questions (development of grades 6 – 8 will occur in the first year of the grant). Finally, Parent Network will provide annual trainings to all youth and their parents on disability awareness. The trainings will be an interactive session with the goal of educating about what it feels like to be disabled in order to increase empathy and promote inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education environment of the school and broader community.

This initiative is connected to efforts to increase academic achievement in a variety of ways. First, the Pathways to Character curriculum is infused into the academic curriculum, allowing for the simultaneous presentation of character traits and academic subject matter. Second, EPIC's Parenting Young Children program, recognized by the Better Homes Fund as the premier parenting program nationally, is strength-based while developing parent's knowledge, attitude, skills, and confidence in becoming a more effective parent. These workshops and CHSP training will help families create a more supportive environment conducive to improved quality of life, acceptance of character traits, and increased academic achievement. Lastly, the Master Guru computer game quizzes students on subject matter connected to the NYS Learning Standards and infused with character development, connecting character to academic achievement.

The success of the proposed initiative will be realized because of the comprehensive scope of the program; breadth of participation in the design, development and implementation phases from parents, teachers, administrators, school personnel, special education representatives, business leaders, and faith-based/community leaders; and the commitment the Buffalo Public Schools and its partners have to this initiative and to promoting strong character development in our children.