

Character Education Common Practices of the 2012 and 2013 National Schools of Character

By

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Abstract:

Character Education is a part of many schools that is rising in prominence in America. Character Education has grown and changed over time, but the basic tenant that follows is the same; children must be taught core values to become productive citizens. This tenant is at the heart of all effective character education practices. There is much evidence to support the teaching of character education and there have been many programs and frameworks presented for this purpose. One such program is the Character Education Partnership (CEP) which deems schools and school districts that prove use of effective character education programs National Schools of Character. This organization names schools to be National Schools of Character following the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education. These principles are presented later in this report. This study included a survey submitted to the 2012 and 2013 National Schools of Character which asked them to rate practices used in their schools from 1 – 5. This study is aimed at producing a set of common practices used by effective schools so practices with high rates of commonality are considered to be effective by the respondents from the National Schools of Character. The results of this study included a basic finding that the most effective practices to teach character education are real-life based. Practices must be relevant to students so that students will be engaged and find meaning in their lessons. This study confirmed this belief by respondents rating these practices as highly effective and rating responses with less student engagement and relevance as less effective.

Introduction:

The National Character Education Partnership was formed to guide character education in America, and started the National Schools of Character program that identifies the best character education programs in schools each year. The CEP's foundation of effectiveness is based on 11 principles of effective character education. The principles are:

1. The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character.
2. The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.
3. The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.
4. The school creates a caring community.
5. The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.
6. The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.
7. The school fosters students' self-motivation.
8. The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.
9. The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.
10. The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.
11. The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.

All schools and school districts have to prove effective practices in all 11 principles of character education listed above and if they do so, will become a National School of Character. The purpose of this project is to identify the common practices among the 2012 and 2013 National Schools of Character. For the purposes of this study, practices of National Schools of Character are considered to be effective based on the evidence of effectiveness proven by the schools for the Character Education Partnership in regards to the 11 principles, but is not included in this study.

In “An Historical Analysis of Character Education” by Michael Watz, a thorough and specific history of character education is explained using references from theorists such as Kant, Comte, Renouvier, Jefferson, Mann, and McGuffey. The article also discusses how character education came to America and how it has changed and grown in the past two centuries with the influences of educators and society as a whole. The article purports that the roots of character education in America were started in France, with the influences of the aforementioned French theorists, and eventually brought to America during the Enlightenment era when Thomas Jefferson and later Horace Mann and William McGuffey began to claim its importance and tried to integrate it into the school systems. During this period, the focus shifted from God to man, which was evident in character education as it was no longer based on religious foundations, but those of the individual and society.

All three men strongly believed a need existed for the implementation of character education in the American school systems and helped to develop programs through institutions of higher education and legislation (Watz, 2010). For Mann, who held parallel convictions to those of Franklin and Ferry [French Minister of Education], students would benefit greatly from an education of character in all facets of the school environment that focused upon “the

principles of piety, justice and a sacred regard to truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation and temperance, and those other virtues, which are the ornament of human society” (Watz, 2010). The need for character education is not just evident in our schools today but rather has been prevalent in our entire educational system’s history. Mann noted that in the absence of morality, the character of students would not fully develop and, presumably, negative effects such as undesirable behavior and decreasing academics would occur. Presumably, many of these undesirable behaviors, including talking back to the teacher, verbal bullying of other students, and acts of physical aggression, would be the same types of incidents that occur in classrooms today and that drive the need for character education in modern American classrooms (Watz, 2010). McGuffey, just like Franklin and Mann, felt that morality was crucial to education. And, in similar fashion to Mann, he believed that values and education were inseparable and that the growth and development of character in students would be reflected in the health and happiness of American society in general (Watz, 2010).

Since the influence of these educators on our educational system, the American society has called for national programs to instill within the youth of the day good morals and values such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). These programs worked to provide an alternate way of teaching the youth morals and values in an ecclesiastical manner that parents could not find in the schools. Even though these programs were heavily focused on the training of young, middle-class white males, they were able to withstand the struggles of the past century because they targeted children of the middle class. The parents in the middle class supported their cause financially, socially, and politically as their children could no longer receive this same instruction in schools after the separation of church

and state (Watz, 2010). Along with the founding of these programs, there was a burst of Christian schools opening after the civil rights movement which again, separated religion from school which led to thousands of Christian schools opening in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The article goes on to describe how the state of New York in 1937 examined its Social Studies curriculum and redesigned it to better fit the needs of character education in its state and placing more emphasis on citizenship and the duties and responsibilities of Americans. This examination opened the door for a national examination of character education and led to many of the findings we hold true today (Watz, 2010). The article also touches on four controversial issues that affect character education in schools today that are actually negative, and caused by the schools themselves. These factors - educational consumerism, a lack of conflict negotiation, harmful education policies, and a lack of positive models - have coalesced to formulate an environment that requires character in schools (Watz, 2010).

The last point in Watz's article leads to the current programs and trends and the basis for those in character education today. In the article, "Character Education in America's Schools", Dorothy L. Prestwich gives a brief overview of where character education in America has been, and where it is now. She starts the history in the 1930s and 1940s, when character education was starting to wane in prevalence and favor throughout society. This was still the time where character education was being taught somewhat according to religious foundations and ideals. She cites a book written in 1931, *Fifty Hints and Helps in Character Education*, that was still being taught in the 1930s and 1940s, that tells children character is, "what God and the angels know you are" (Prestwich, 2004). She goes through the events depicting the changes in character education that take place in the next decades already presented in this review, and moves up to the present and describes how character education is handled in schools today. The article moves

on to modern approaches to teaching character education, the first being a literature-based approach which the following article review over Harry Potter and juvenile delinquents will discuss in depth. This approach simply consists of teaching students values and morals from lessons presented in books and trying to relate those lessons to the students' own lives. The article goes on to describe other approaches; the next was developed and used by many schools in St. Louis, Missouri. This program, Charaterplus, is integrated into many schools in Missouri, and forms the basis of their character education programs. Also presented were the Character Counts! Program, and a holistic, entire school district approach that seems to be very effective in creating a community of positive choice-makers (Prestwich, 2004).

Later discussed, but relevant and essential to all character education, is the idea that traits of good moral judgment should not be taught, but rather the *behaviors* associated with them. This teaches students how to implement character in their lives in a more real sense, rather than just knowing the definitions of the traits. The article finishes by discussing the obstacles and implications of character education in today's schools. The two biggest obstacles faced were students' negative attitudes towards character education and the lack of effectiveness of teacher implementation. Results from studies found that both of these issues have negative impacts on character education, as some students do not wish to have the beliefs of others imposed upon them, and that many teachers do not model morally good behavior or simply refuse to teach character education in their classrooms. Therefore, the author makes the basic following recommendations for the success of character education: creating an entire school district wide character education program and training pre-service teachers in teaching and the importance of character education (Prestwich, 2004).

Following up with the claim that character education can be taught through literature, I found a study that suggests that modern literature can be used to guide juvenile delinquents into making better choices. A study published in 2011 by Seroczynski, A D; Johnson, Scott P; Lamb, Kristen; Gustman, Brian investigated the effects on character education by reading the first book of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, with a group of juvenile delinquents at a state school in the Midwestern United States. The study was entitled "The Hidden Virtues of Harry Potter: Using J. K. Rowling's Novels to Facilitate Character Education with Juvenile Delinquents." The study was conducted by having three test groups engage in written and oral discussions and explanations about the morals and ethics depicted in the book, and how those same morals related to the delinquents' lives. Ratings were collected from a pretest and posttest of seven virtues on the Youth Virtues Scale. Most students in the test groups were engaged in the readings and activities and were expected to have higher test scores on the posttest and later in life than those who were not apt to participate during the study. Engaged students were significantly more likely to report improvements in charity and fidelity than students who did not invest in the program; fortitude and prudence approached significance. Engaged students also showed more teacher-rated changes in virtuous behavior (Seroczynski, et al., 2011).

The researchers visited the students twice weekly and discussed the moral and ethical dilemmas presented in the book and engaged in discussions about these dilemmas then had the students write journal articles reflecting over the discussions. The researchers were also able to have brief, one-on-one meetings with the students where they were able to make the messages from the book most relevant to the students' own lives. The results from this study show us the importance of character education and how it can be used in today's modern world. Character

education can be more than having a virtue of the month throughout the district. “We have found that novels are rarely used to promote character development. Instead, students share a litany of deconstructive worksheets, quizzes, and lectures that seem to undermine the significant and serious messages of prejudice and justice, love and mercy, courage and compassion that are replete in many novels” (Seroczynski, et al., 2011). The researchers in this study were able to make the character lessons in a widely popular book relevant to some of the most troubled students in our school system and increase their understanding of and feelings towards good character.

In addition to increasing moral judgment, character education has been shown to increase academic achievement in elementary students. In a study, “The Relationship of Character Education Implementation and Academic Achievement in Elementary Schools” conducted by Jacques, S. B., Marvin, W. B., Kuehn, P., & Smith, K. in 2003, researchers found that schools with higher total character education implementation also had higher academic achievement test scores. The study gathered a random sample of the 681 schools applying for the California Distinguished Schools Award in 2000, and evaluated and scored them for character education implementation. These results were then correlated with the SAT9 and API rankings – two of California’s standardized tests- over a four-year period from 1999-2002 (Jacques, 2003). This study also reported on other programs making similar gains. For example, the Peaceful Schools Project (PSP) of the Menninger Clinic has as its purpose to reduce disruptive behaviors. An evaluation of the PSP (Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies, Evans, & Ewbank, 2001) revealed significant gains for the implementing elementary school on the Metropolitan Achievement Test compared with a non-implementing elementary school. Research on the Responsive Classroom (RC), an approach to integrate social and academic learning, found in a series of studies (Elliot,

1998) that students in implementing schools had significantly greater gains in standardized academic test scores than did students in comparison schools.

An article by Marvin Berkowitz (2007) reviews the study that he and colleagues conducted to identify and quantify the common effects of character education programs and their shared practices. The researchers conducted empirical studies, meta-analysis, and literature reviews to examine already published studies on character education to determine their validity and effectiveness. Their research found that “effective character education tends to include: professional development; student interactive pedagogical strategies; an explicit focus on character/ethics; direct training of social and emotional competencies; modeling of character; aligned classroom/behavior management strategies; and community service and/or service learning” (Berkowitz, 2007). While these findings are helpful to school administrators and/or teachers when trying to build a character education curricula, the article does not give specific examples of activities or practices that the school uses to achieve or maintain these objectives.

After finding a study that is vague in its direction for implementing good character education, I found a study that lists and describes concrete practices that schools can use to implement a character education curricula. In the study, “Comprehensive Character Education in the Elementary School: Strategies for Administrators, Teachers, and Counselors” by Quinn Pearson and colleagues, the researchers outline activities and practices that administrators, teachers, and counselors can utilize to produce good character in their schools. The article lists many different activities but I will only list a sample. The article suggests that administrators should organize and promote school assemblies, morning messages, newsletters, and school and community projects. Teachers are provided with many examples as well, including developing classroom rules, positive language, phrasing options, direct instruction, learning partners,

mentoring, journal writing, cooperative activities, and appreciation time. Counselors are encouraged to aid the teachers and administrators by helping to produce behavior plans, classroom guidance activities, conflict resolution, and individual and small group counseling (Pearson, 2000). These practices have been shown to support and promote good character education in the school and can be adapted to fit the needs of virtually any school. Because of publications like the previous and of the work of character education programs in recent years, some schools have already begun to implement successful character education programs.

One such example is the Thomas Edison Community School in Port Chester, New York, which has made significant gains in overall school performance after making conscious efforts to initiate a character education plan over 10 years ago. It is a Title I school with a population that is predominantly Hispanic (88%), largely minority (94%) and overwhelmingly poor with 80% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch (Ferrara, 2007). The school was experiencing low parental involvement and very low test scores. In 1997, the school began to reflect and review what it was doing to facilitate good learning and growth of its students. They decided to revamp their school atmosphere, standards, and goals to help students achieve by instituting higher learning standards and rigorous testing requirements. Thomas Edison School followed the Character Education Partnership's 11 Principles of Effective Character Education that provided a guide for implementing character education programs in their school. After implementation and taking deliberate steps, the Thomas Edison School has woven character education into the school's programs and partnerships. The teachers are now enabled to be educators of the whole child because they, the administrators, and the students are invested in creating a better school for the students. The school also made extreme efforts to involve parents in their students' education and teach parents about the importance of education and childrearing. After ten years

of implementation of and dedication to a character education program, Thomas Edison School has become a model of a great school and of immense improvement. The school improved test scores from a mere 19% proficient in language arts and math to 90% in the fourth grade (Ferrara, 2007).

Arguably the most important aspect of a child's growth and development is the influence of the child's home life and his or her relationship with parents. We cannot leave all the responsibility to schools to teach children about character and moral development. Some of this instruction must come from home, unfortunately some children don't get that needed instruction and bring difficulties to school. In "The Family as the Moral Center: An Evolutionary Hermeneutic of Virtue in Family Studies" by J. P. Jr. James, the four cardinal virtues (justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude) are examined and an explanation is given as to why these virtues need to be taught at home before they are reinforced at school. The article suggests that character education should be taught at school, but that it is not enough if the students do not have good moral support from home in our society or topsy-turvy social ethical standards (James, 2005). Our children need all the support they can get as they grow up if they have any hope of becoming well-adjusted, wise, and moral people who make good decisions and care for others. These four cardinal virtues are the building blocks for good moral development and cannot be attained independently of each other. Because these virtues are so essential to child and eventually student success, the article argues that we must focus on these virtues being taught at home first because if children come into not having a start at possessing them, they will be behind in development. This article is pertinent to my proposal because I predict that the schools I survey will have strong ties to student and parent relationships and will have at least

some focus on the home. Schools can usually do little good for students if they have no support at home from parents, which is why we must focus on the family first, then schooling.

Methods:

The methods of this study consisted of submitting a survey to one contact at each 2012 and 2013 National School of Character which was based on a 1 – 5 rating Likert scale. I got the contact information from the Character Education Partnership website and used the contact listed for each school or school district to email the survey. I developed the survey by including the practices I came across in my literature review, had seen used in classrooms through practicum experiences in Teacher Education classes at MSSU, or aligned with the principles of the Character Education Partnership. The survey created consisted of 19 items that asked respondents to rate the level of effectiveness of each item. Once returned, the results of the data were averaged and a range of commonality was produced.

Results Analysis:

The data of this study were recorded using the following Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly agree, NA – Not applicable.

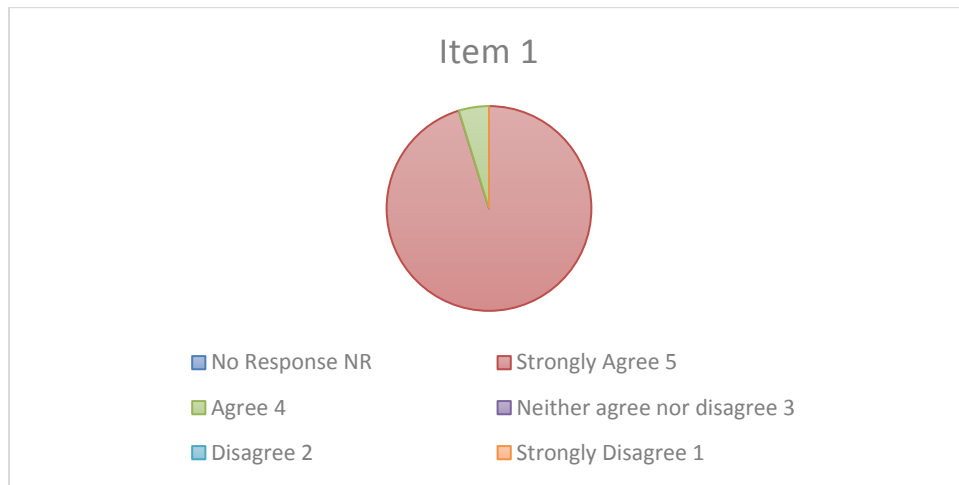
Respondents were asked to rate the following 19 statements regarding character education using the above scale. Following are the results of the data with the items. Under each item is listed the possible answer options, followed by the number of responses for that item with the percentage of responses that option had. Results will be considered strong if the mean response is between four and five. Item one, for example had zero responses of one, two, three, and no responses, one response of four, and 20 responses of five, so it is marked as:

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 1/5% 5: 20/95% NR: 0.

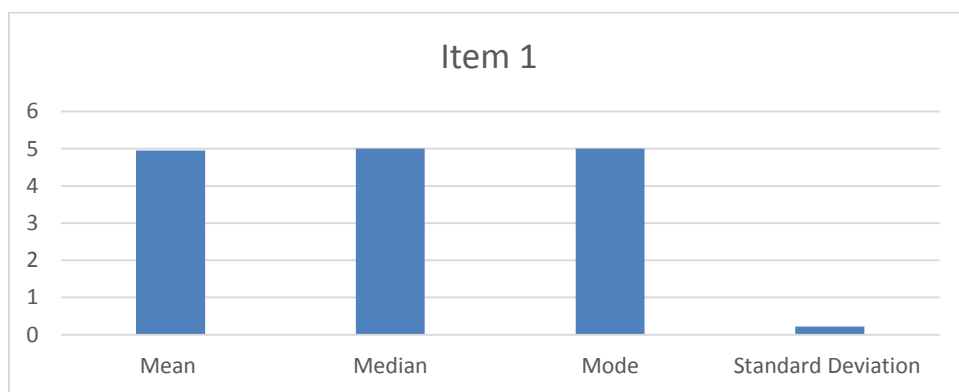
The data of the survey with items is as follows:

1. *My school's character education program is effective for the majority of students.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 1/5% 5: 20/95% NR: 0

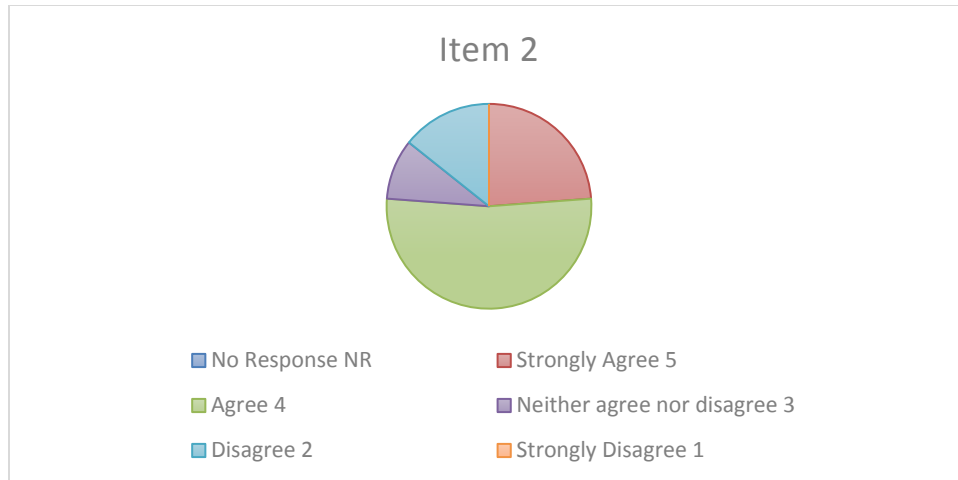


The mean of item one was 4.9545 and the median and mode are five. The standard deviation was low at .218. This item had little variance because out of the 21 responses, 20 were 5 and one was 4. This item wasn't a specific practice used by schools, but rather an overall view of the character education in the whole school. Since the numbers were so high on this item, it shows that the respondents were confident that their character education program is effective for the majority of students.

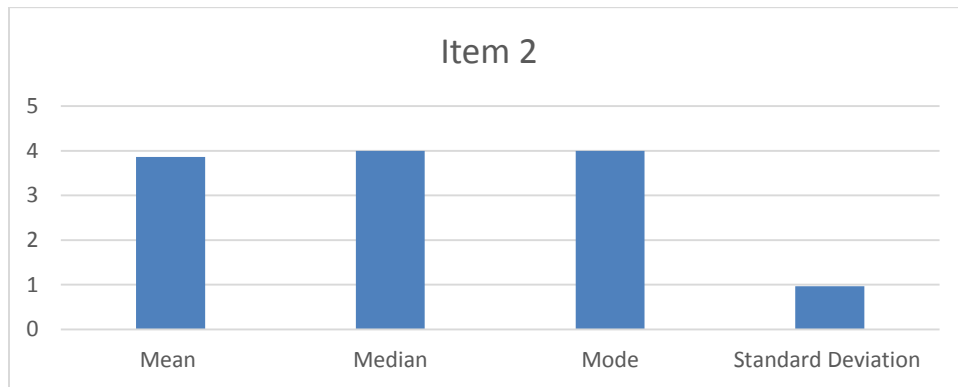


2. *Most of the character education practices at my school occur within the classroom.*

1: 0/0% 2-3/14% 3: 2/10% 4: 11/52% 5: 5/24% NR: 0

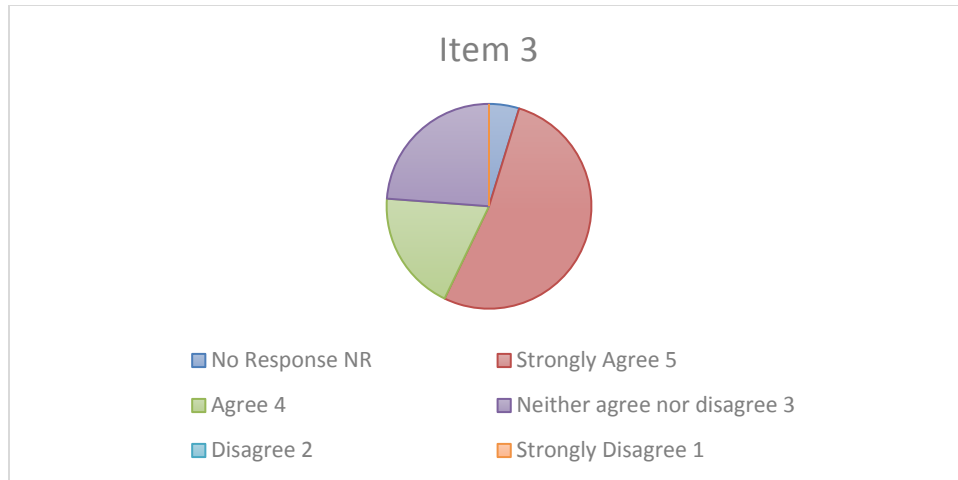


The mean of item two was 3.90 and the mode and median are four. The standard deviation was high at .963 because the responses were more varied including responses of 2, 3, 4, and 5. However, the median and mode are both four, the mean is 3.9, and there were 11 responses of four which is six more than the next highest number of responses which was five fives.

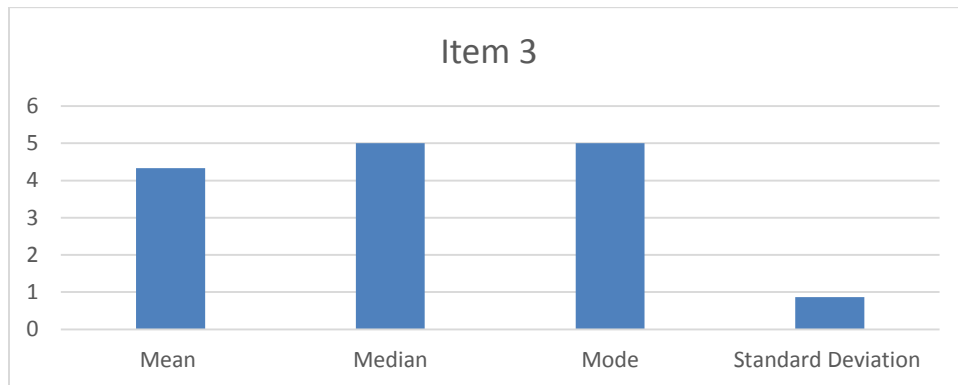


3. *I consider parental involvement integral to having a successful character education program.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 5/25% 4: 4/20% 5: 11/55% NR: 1



The mean of item three was 4.33 but the median and mode are both five. The standard deviation was about average at .86 on this item as the responses were spread somewhat evenly across three choices. This item having 11 responses of five and only five of three and four of four made the median and mode higher than the mean.



4. At least half of my school's character education practices are student-led or become student self-sufficient after instruction.

1: 0/0%

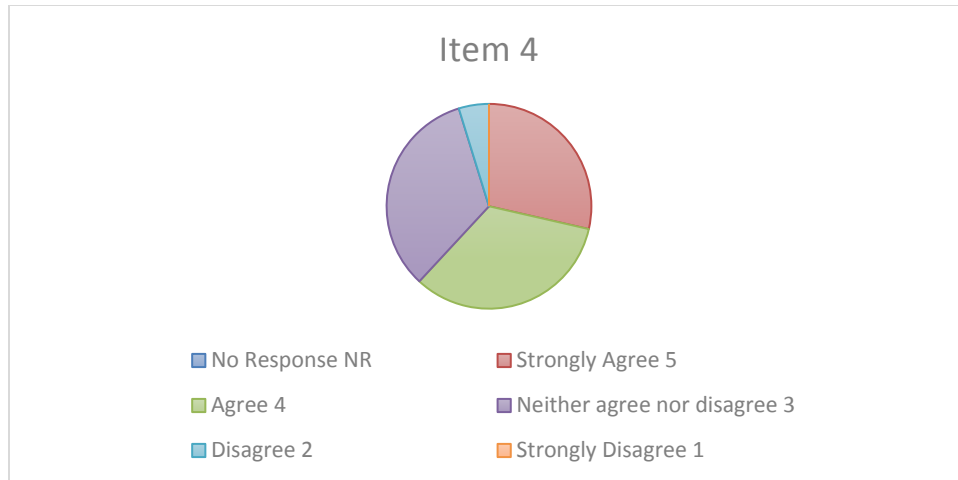
2: 1/5%

3: 7/33%

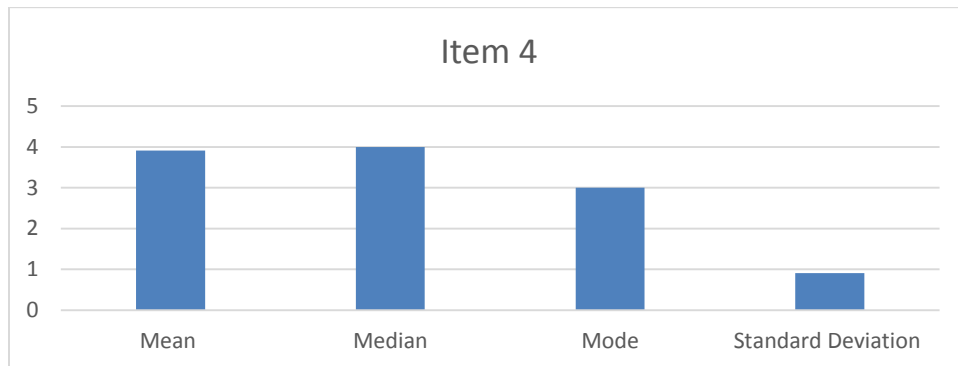
4: 7/33%

5: 6/29%

NR: 0

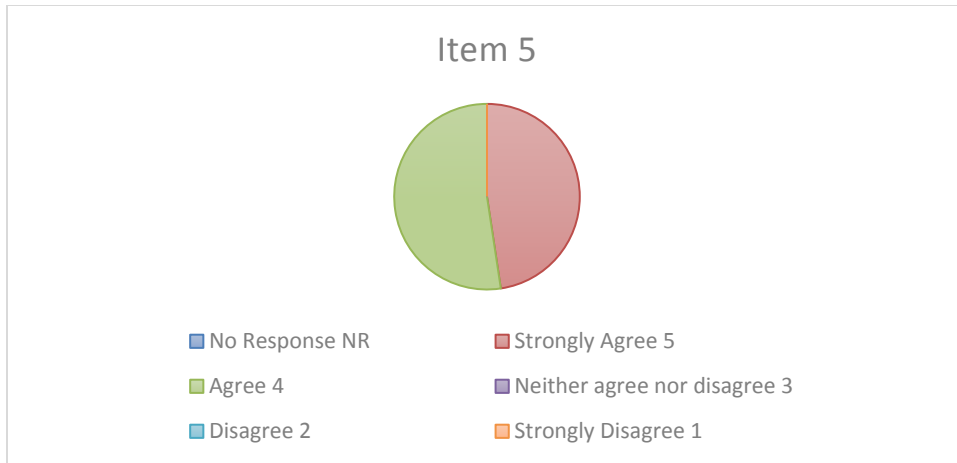


The mean of item four was 3.9 and the median and mode are four. The standard deviation of this item is fairly high at .91, but the responses were spread almost evenly among responses three, four, and five with seven, seven, and six responses respectively, and with only one response of two, making four an accurate average.

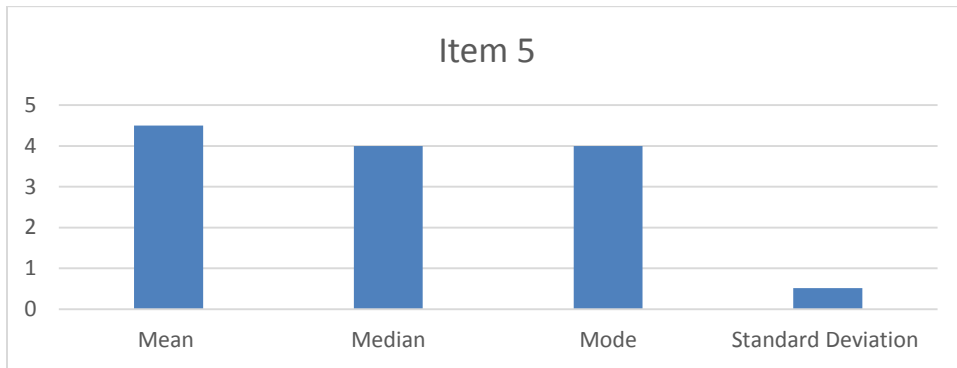


5. *Teachers at my school integrate character education into many content areas.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 11/55% 5: 10/45% NR: 0

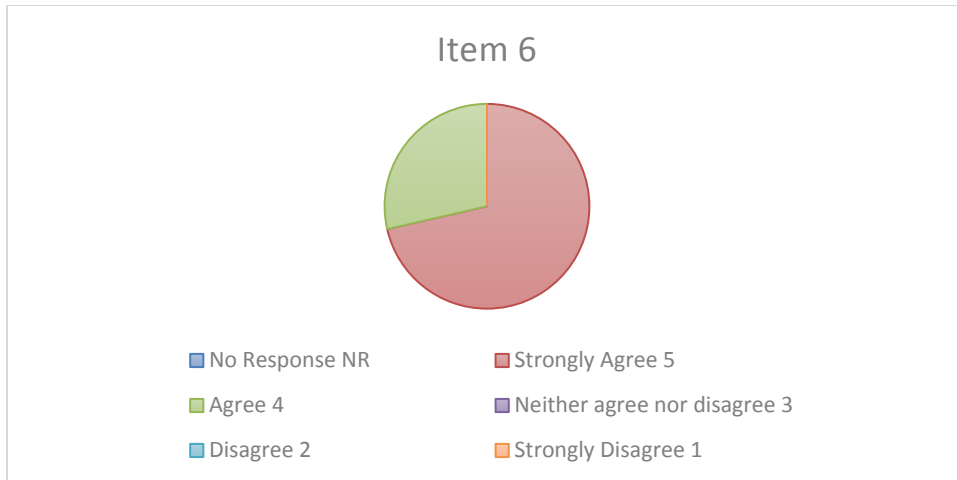


The mean of item five was 4.45 and the median and mode are both 4. The standard deviation of this item is .51 which is low because all the responses were four and five. This was one of the least varied items because all the responses were within one response with 11 responses of four and 10 responses of five and none of one, two, or three.

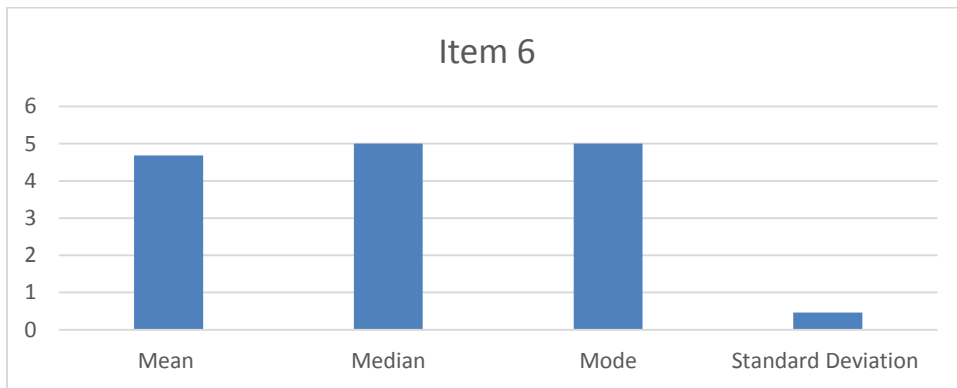


6. *Students at my school are engaged in character education practices on a daily basis.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 6/29% 5: 15/71% NR: 0

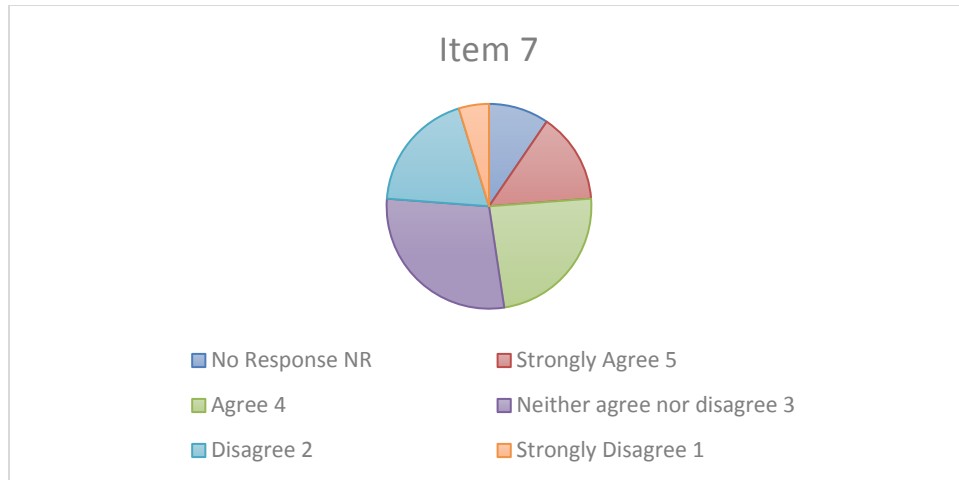


The mean of item six was 4.72 repeating and the median and mode are 5. The standard deviation of item six was low at .46 because all the responses were within one response. This item was more one-sided with 15 responses of five, six responses of four, and none of one, two, or three.



7. *Students at my school have character education-based homework at least once a month.*

1: 1/5% 2: 4/21% 3: 6/32% 4: 5/26% 5: 3/16% NR: 2

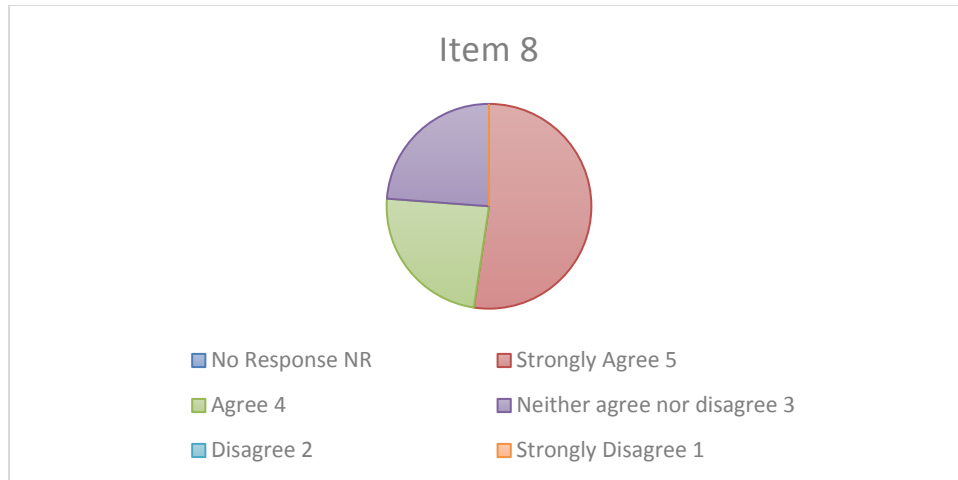


The mean of item seven is 3.3 and the median and mode are 3. This item seems to be an accurate representation of answers but has a high standard deviation of 1.15 because responses were marked for all five answer choices. This item is more varied which makes it less reliable because respondents marked it as low as one and as high as five.

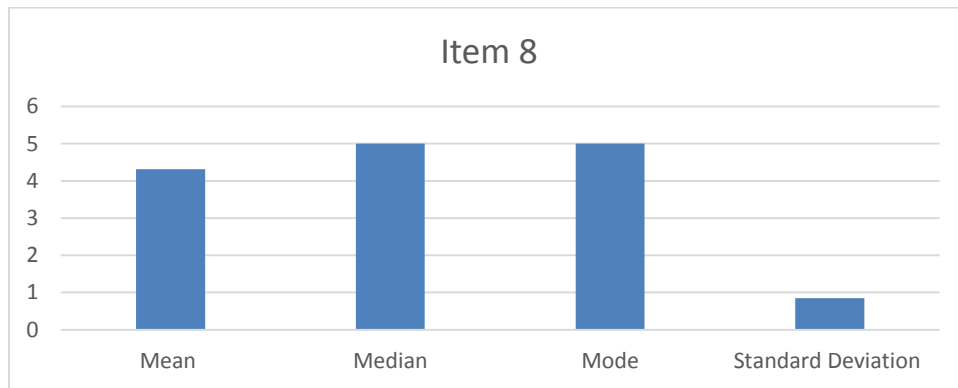


8. *The character education program at my school has strengthened teacher's relationships with parents.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 5/24% 4: 5/24% 5: 11/52% NR: 0

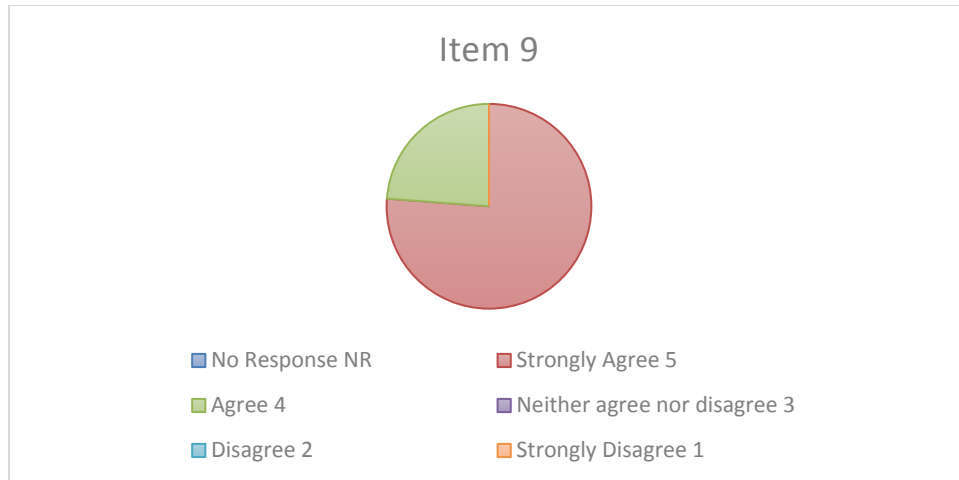


The mean of item eight is 4.23 and the median and mode are both five. The standard deviation was .85 which is about average because the responses were spread among options three, four, and five but option five had over twice the number of responses as three or four.

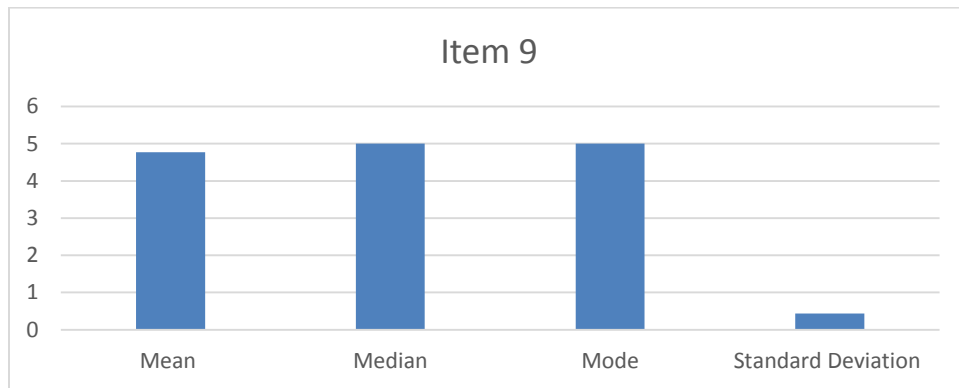


9. *Students at my school participate in service-learning opportunities in or out of school.*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 5/24% 5: 16/76% NR: 0



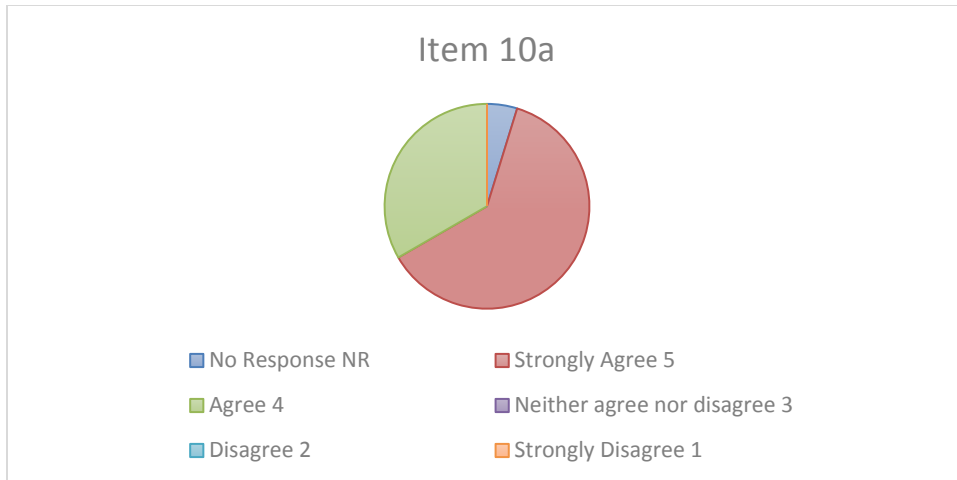
Item nine had a mean of 4.77 and a median and mode of five. The standard deviation of item nine was low at .44 because there were five responses in option four, 16 responses in item five, and none in options one, two, or three.



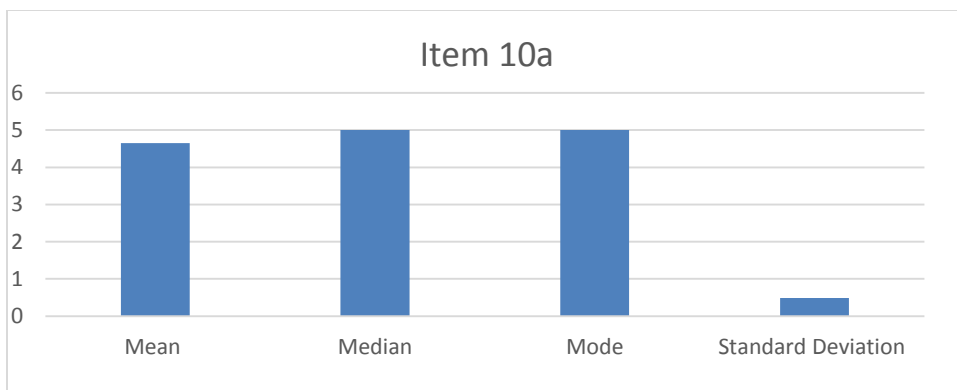
10. *Our school finds the following practices effective:*

a. *Stories of good examples of character*

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 7/35% 5: 13/65% NR: 1

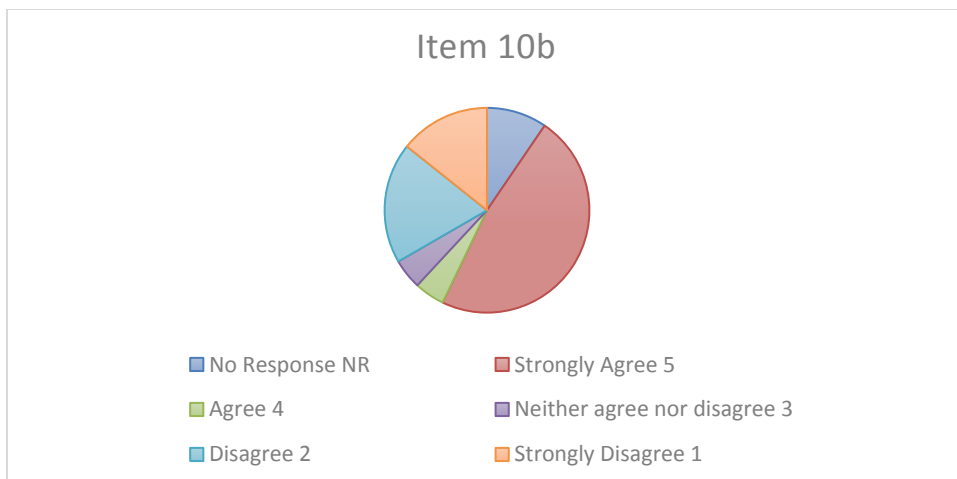


The mean of item 10a is 4.66 and the median and mode are five with a low standard deviation of .49 which makes this data very reliable.

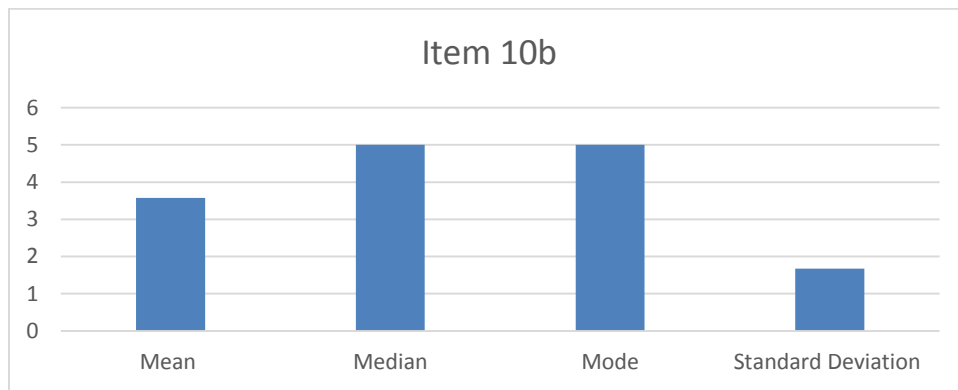


b. Character trait of the month

1: 3/16% 2: 4/21% 3: 1/5% 4: 1/5% 5: 10/53% NR: 2

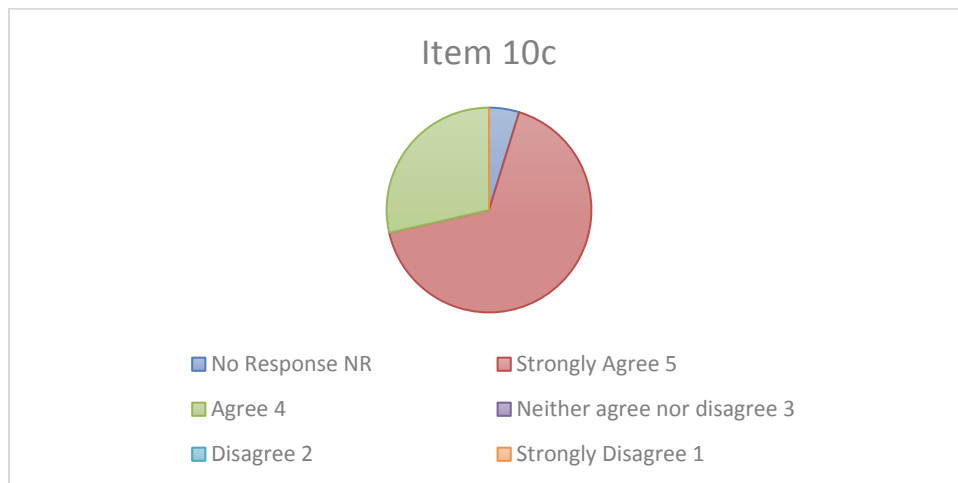


The mean of item 10b is 3.5 and the median and mode are five. The standard deviation is the highest in the data at 1.67. The responses for this item also range from one to five which makes this data less reliable than any other item. This item's responses are interesting in that 10 respondents marked option five, only one marked options three and four, four marked option two, and three marked option one.

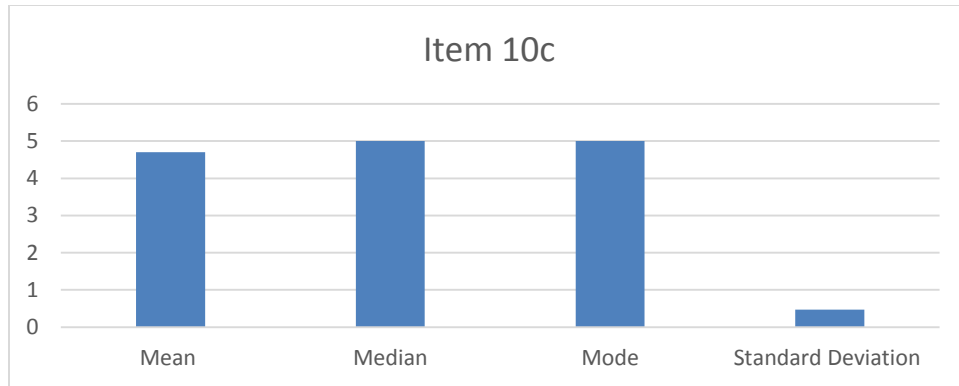


c. Service-learning opportunities

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 6/30% 5: 14/70% NR: 1



The mean of item 10c is 4.67 and the median and mode are five with a low standard deviation of .47 which makes this data very reliable.



d. Classroom responsibilities

1: 0/0%

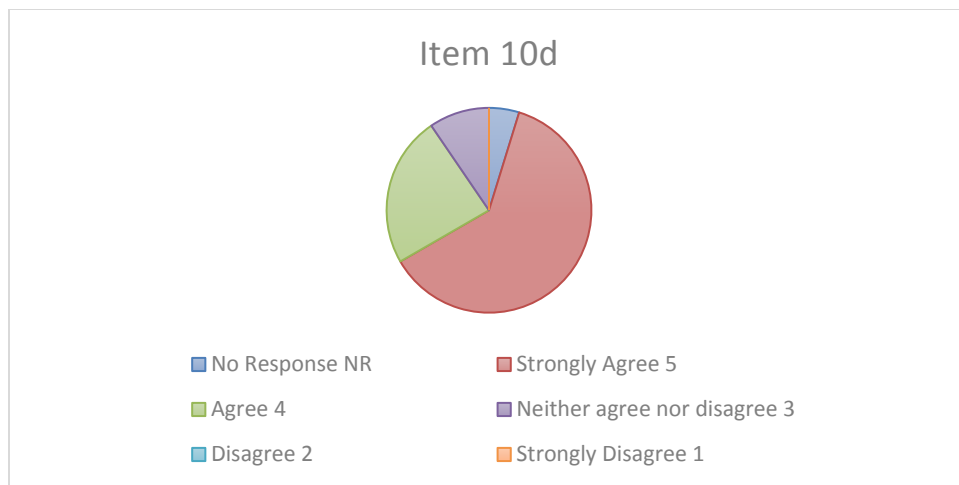
2: 0/0%

3: 2/10%

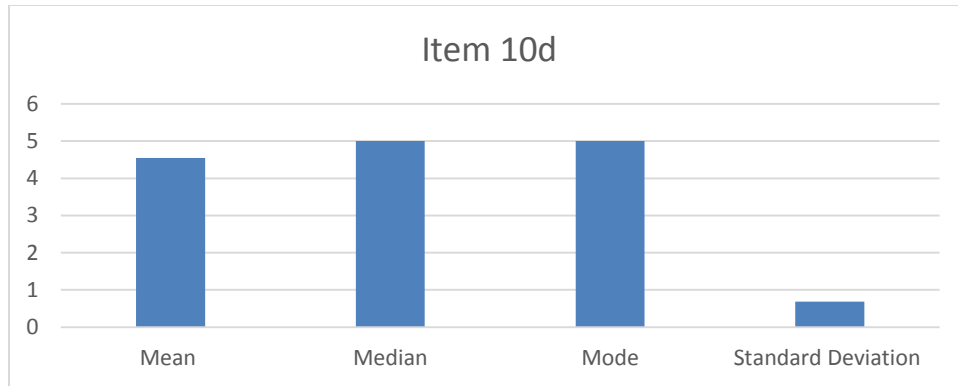
4: 5/25%

5: 13/65%

NR: 1

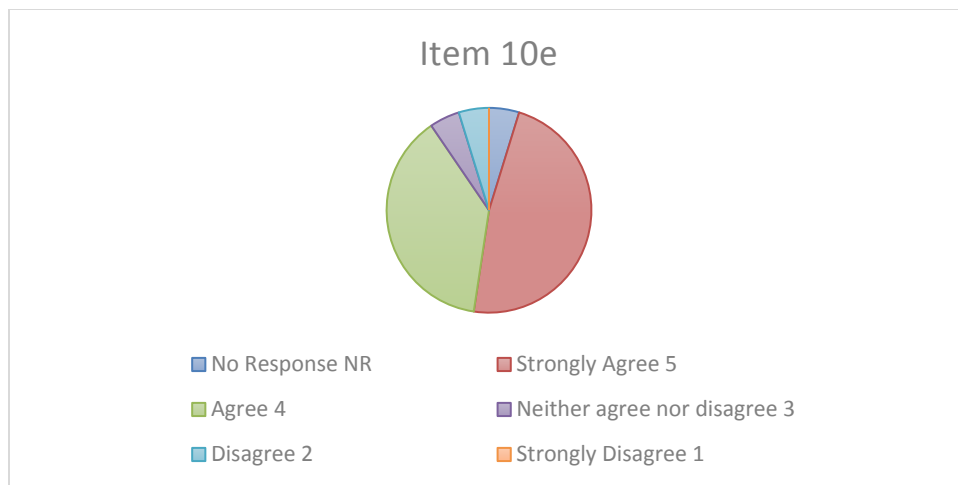


The mean of item 10d is 4.57 and the median and mode are both five. The standard deviation is about average at .69 because there are two responses in option three in this set of data. However, because there are 13 responses in option five and five in option four, the two responses in option three have fairly little significance to the data.

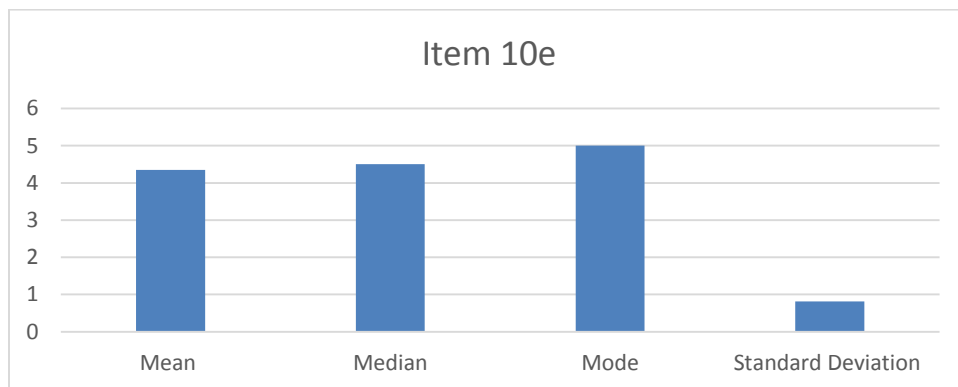


e. Student peer-teaching

1: 0/0% 2: 1/5% 3: 1/5% 4: 8/40% 5: 10/50% NR: 1

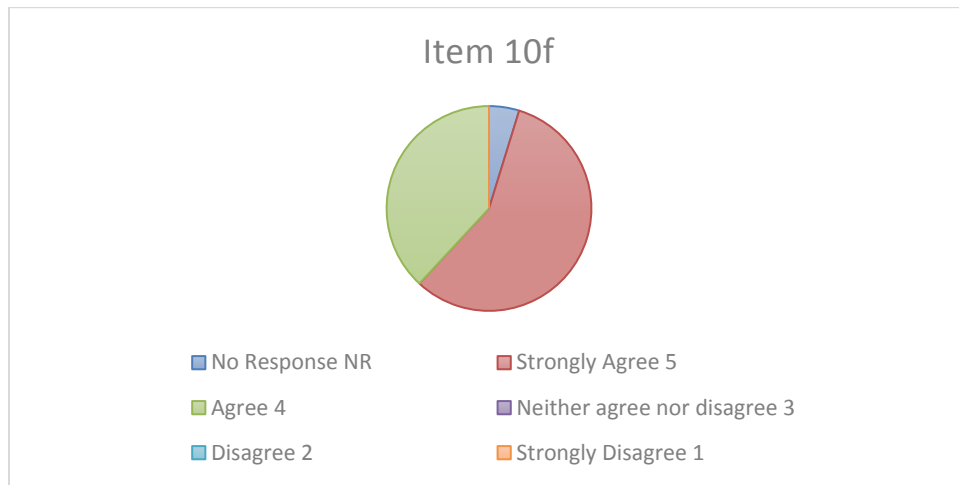


The mean of item 10e is 4.33, the median is 4.5, and the mode is five. The standard deviation is about average at .81 because there is one response in options one and two, but options four and five are almost even making them an accurate average.

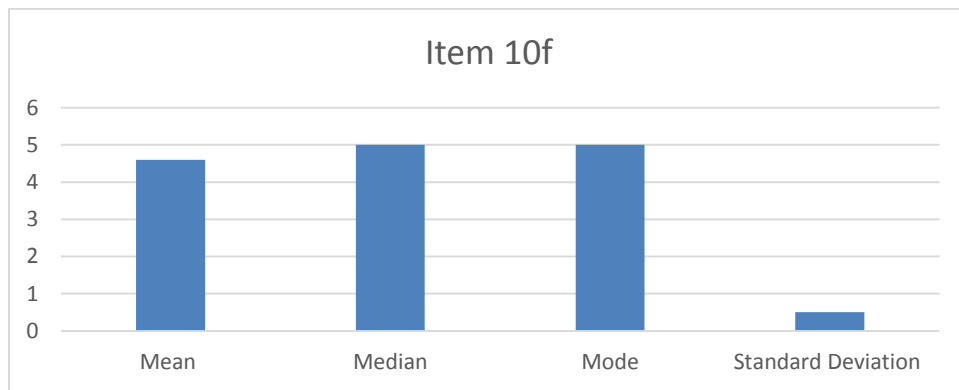


f. Integrating character education into content areas

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 8/40% 5: 12/60% NR: 1

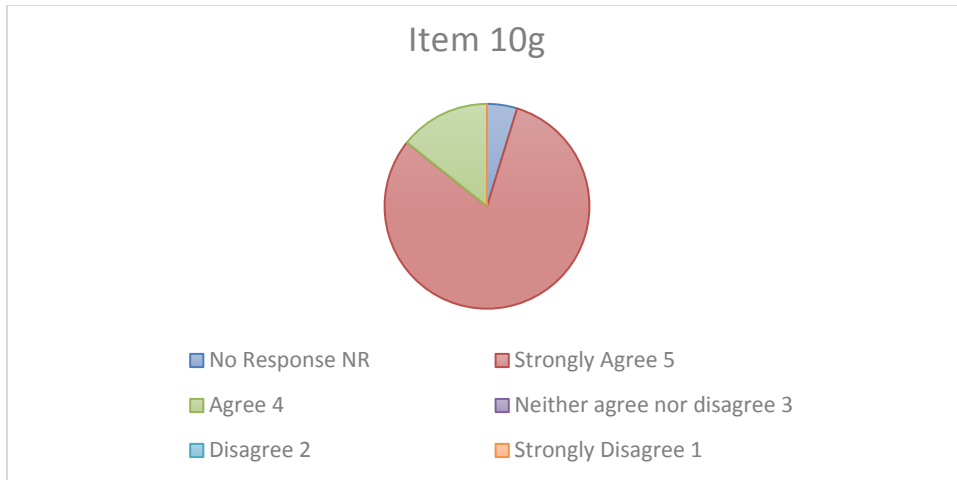


The mean of item 10f is 4.61 and the median and mode are five. The standard deviation is lower than average at .5 because the responses are all option four and five which makes this data more consistent.

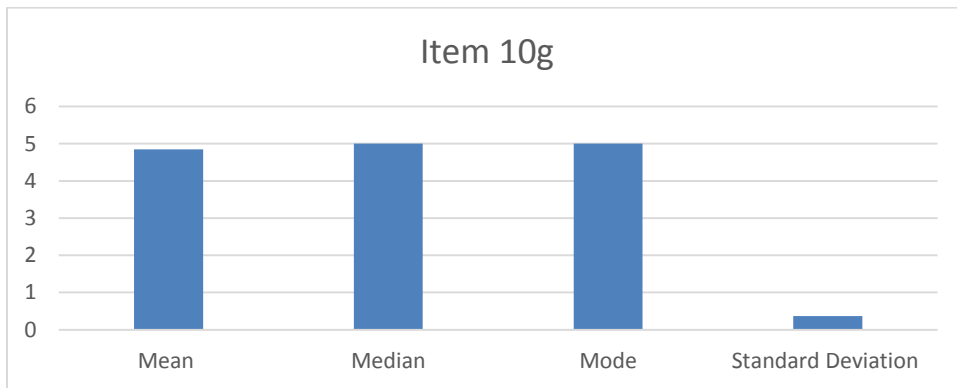


g. Real-life applications of character explained in classroom

1: 0/0% 2: 0/0% 3: 0/0% 4: 3/15% 5: 17/85% NR: 1

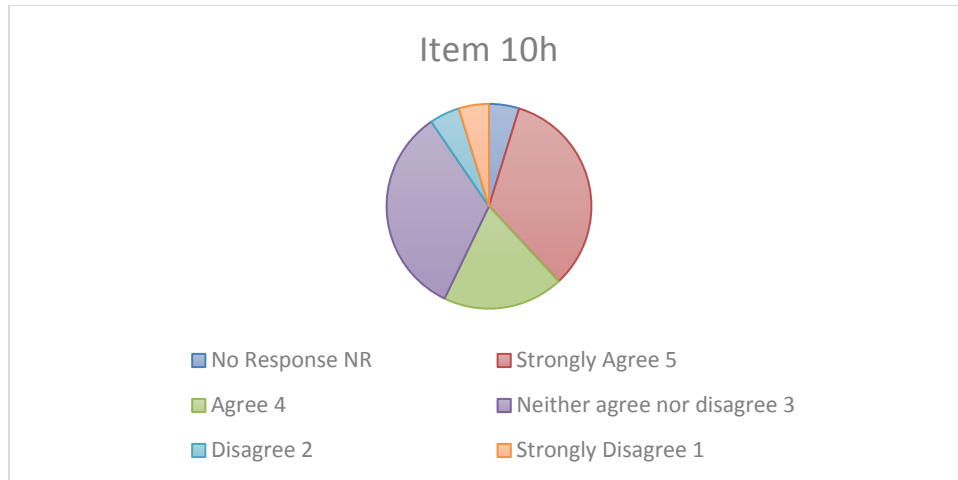


The mean of item 10g is 5 and the median and mode are both five. The standard deviation is very low at .37 because all of the responses are in options four and five, but with most in option five. The results of this item are very consistent and show an accurate average.

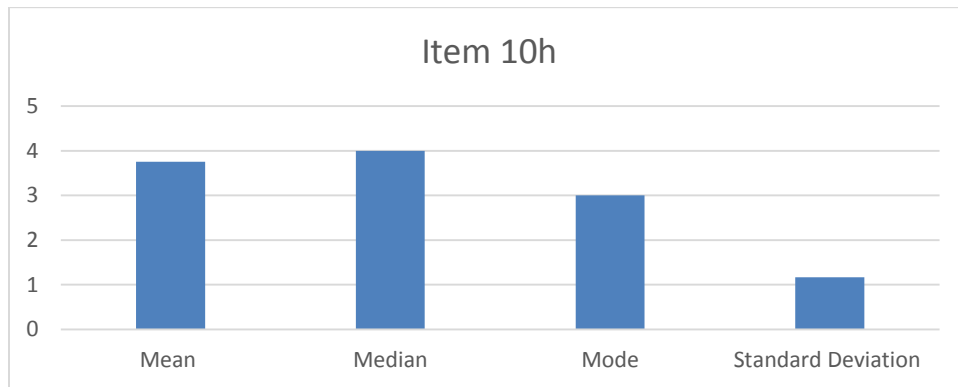


h. Physical labor to improve or serve the school

1: 1/5% 2: 1/5% 3: 7/35% 4: 4/20% 5: 7/35% NR: 1

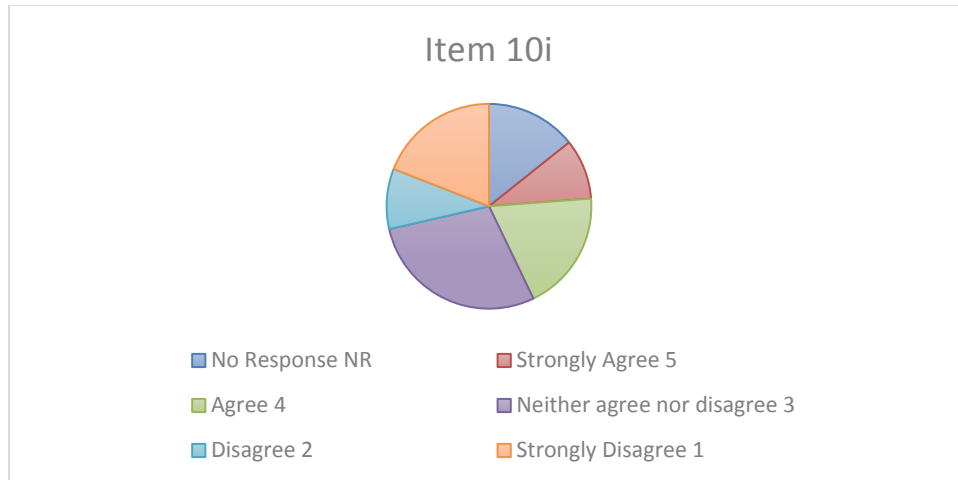


The mean of item 10h is 3.67, the median is four and the mode is three. The standard deviation is very high at 1.16 which because there are responses in all five answer options. There are only one in option one and two but the responses are spread more evenly in options three, four, and five which makes it difficult to determine an accurate average.

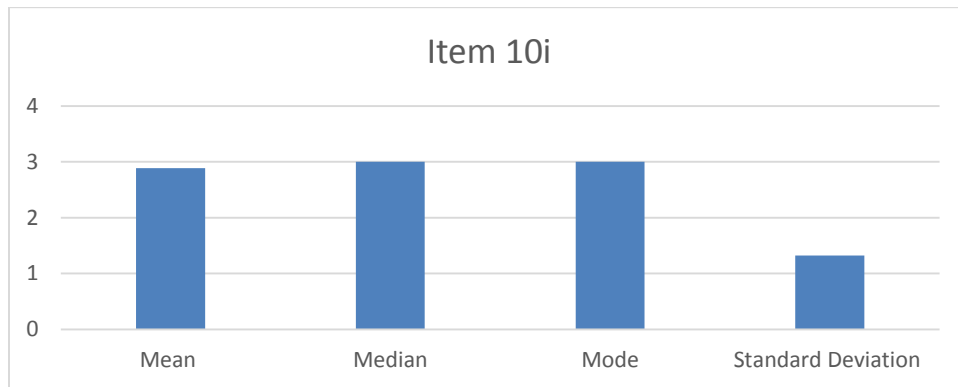


i. *Student of the month*99%*

1: 4/22% 2: 2/11% 3: 6/33% 4: 4/22% 5: 2/11% NR: 3

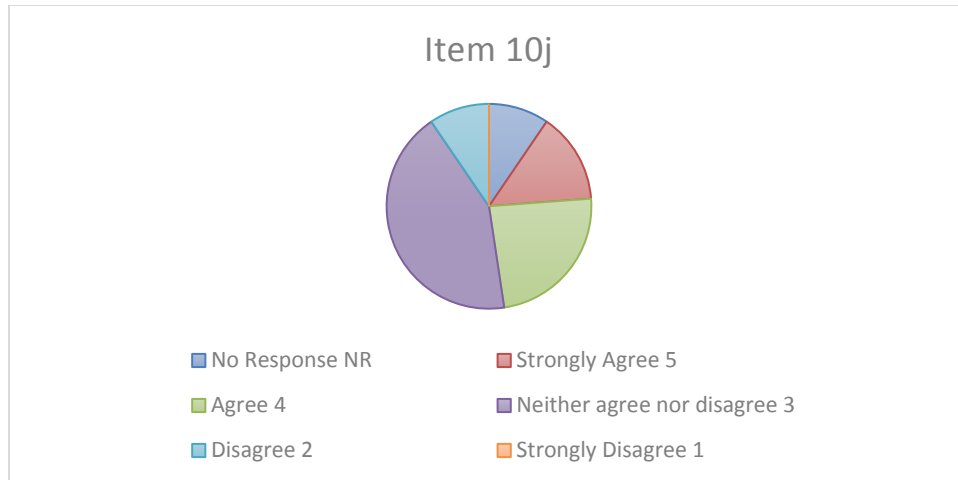


The mean of item 10i is 2.79 and the median and mode are three. The standard deviation is very high at 1.32 because the responses are spread evenly among all five answer options. This answer is very inconsistent and did not provide good data because of the wide variance of answers given.

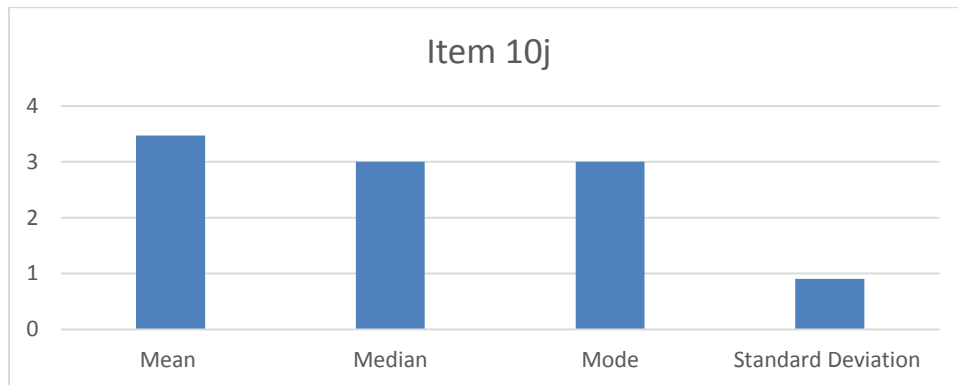


j. Life-skills or character-based activities for parents

1: 0/0% 2: 2/11% 3: 9/47% 4: 5/26% 5: 3/16% NR: 2



The mean for item 10j is 3.47 and the median and mode are both 3. The standard deviation is a little above average because there are responses in four answer options but the responses are mostly option three and four. This data isn't as consistent as hoped, but isn't too inconsistent to not be recognized.

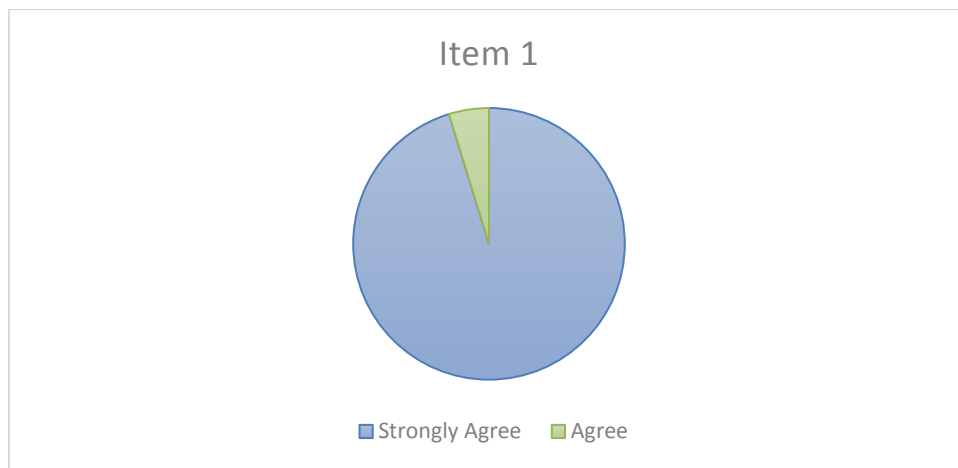


Discussion of Results:

The results of my data show that items 1, 5, 6, 9, 10a, 10c, 10d, 10f, and 10g have the highest rate of commonality and the lowest standard deviation. All of these items have a response mean, median, and mode of between four and five and have a standard deviation of less than .69 which is below the average standard deviation of this study. These items include the following statements:

Item 1. My school's character education program is effective for the majority of students.

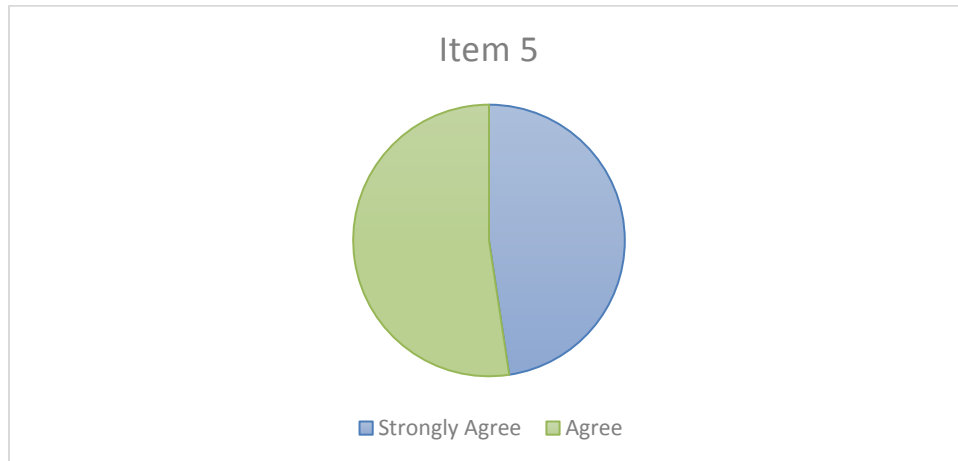
Item one is not a statement of a certain practice but rather a “big-picture” analysis of character education among the whole school. This item shows that 20 out of 21 or over 95% of respondents strongly agree that their character education program is effective for the majority of students. This item was included to see if the schools themselves felt that their programs were effective, because if they didn’t, the rest of their results wouldn’t have been as valid. It is important to see if schools believe in their own programs before further analysis of their methods can be done.



Item 5. Teachers at my school integrate character education into many content areas.

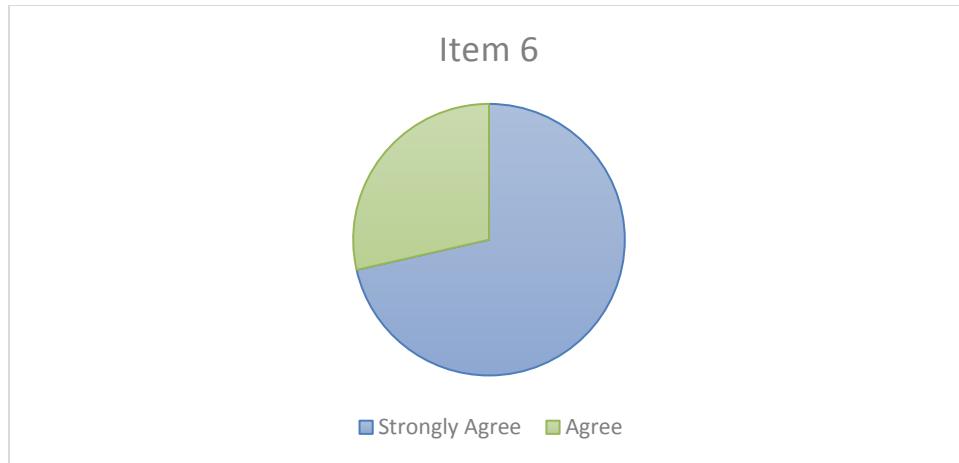
Item five is not a specific practice but more a method of implementation of practices as integration is a way of teaching. This means that when teachers teach character education, it is taught through a core or elective subject. This allows for multi-tasking for teachers and for deeper enrichment in those content areas. For example, instead of teaching a math lesson on fractions then moving on to a lesson about character education, a teacher can teach a lesson on fractions and include a lesson on sharing pieces of a cookie in fraction pieces and cover math and character education. This also allows for teaching real-life applications of character education and teachers may not hear, “Why do I need to learn this?” so often. In this study, 10 respondents

marked that they strongly agree with this statement and 11 marked that they agree. There are not as many strongly agree responses on this item as others, but all the respondents still at least agree with the statement.



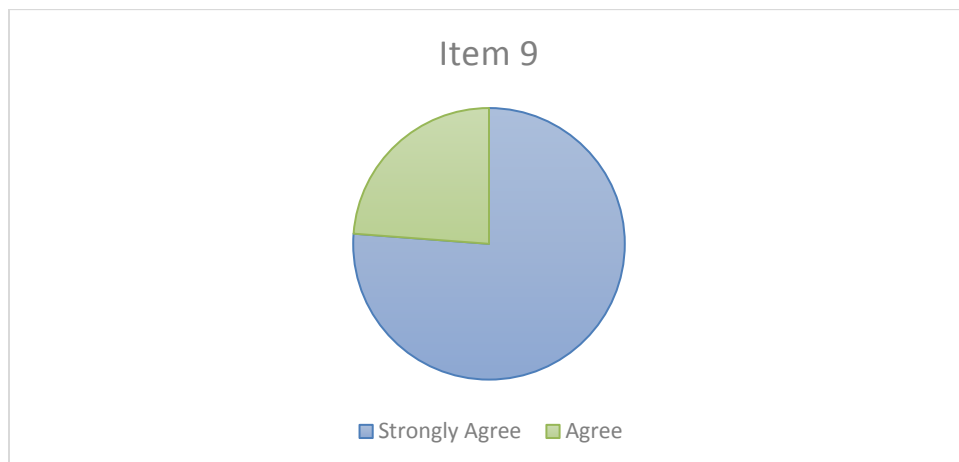
Item 6. Students at my school are engaged in character education practices on a daily basis.

Item six is also an implementation strategy of practices because it asks respondents to respond with how often character education is taught. A school that teaches character education once a week for 30 minutes has a very different approach than a school that teaches character education every day for 15 minutes. In this study, 15 out of 21 respondents strongly agreed that character education was taught every day and the remaining six agreed that it was taught every day. This tells us that all of them at least agree that character education is taught every day which is a large piece of the overall teaching character education practice.



Item 9. Students at my school participate in service-learning opportunities in or out of school.

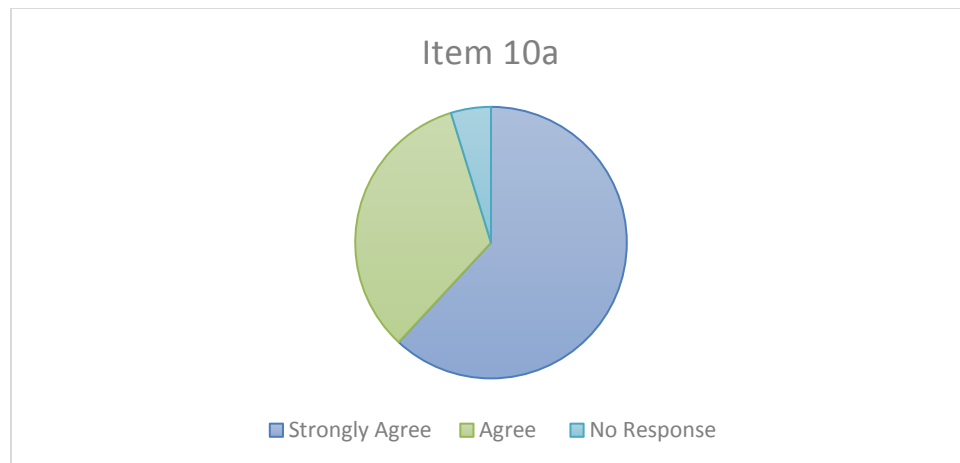
Item nine is a specific practice that is part of the schools' character education programs. Service learning is a method of teaching that includes classroom instruction and meaningful community service. This could include any type of community service that involves students and that is part of their classroom learning. Like item six, item nine had 15 respondents say that they strongly agree that students at their school participate in service-learning opportunities either in or out of school. The other six responded that they agree with this statement, which again tells us that all of the respondents at least agree that their students participate in service-learning.



Item 10. Our school finds the following practices effective:

a. Stories of good examples of character

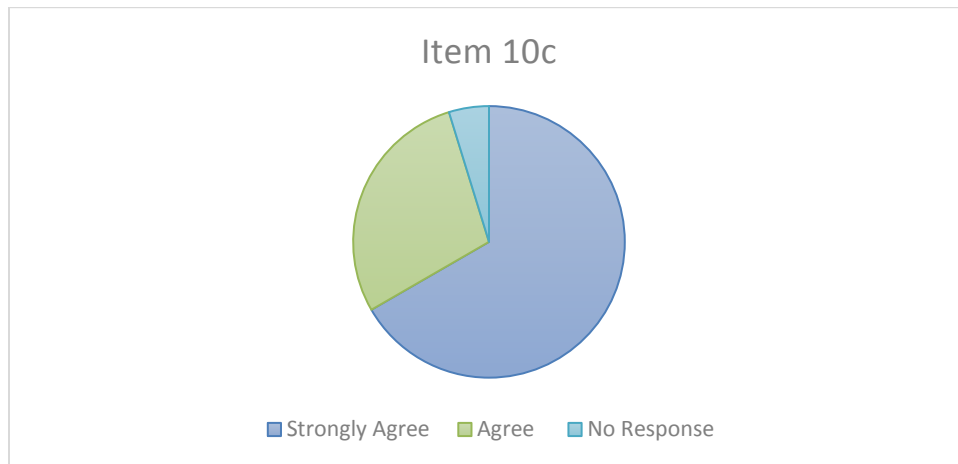
Item 10a is a specific practice used in the classroom that the respondents felt is part of their character education programs. In this study, 13 respondents marked that they strongly felt that stories of good examples of character are found to be effective in their schools. The other seven respondents marked that they agreed that their school finds this practice effective. One respondent did not accurately complete the survey from this item forward so those responses are not included but of those that are included, all at least felt that this item is effective in their schools and because of the high average response of 4.65, this is commonly thought in the schools surveyed. This item is another example of real-life character education teaching similar to integrating character education into content areas.



c. Service-learning opportunities

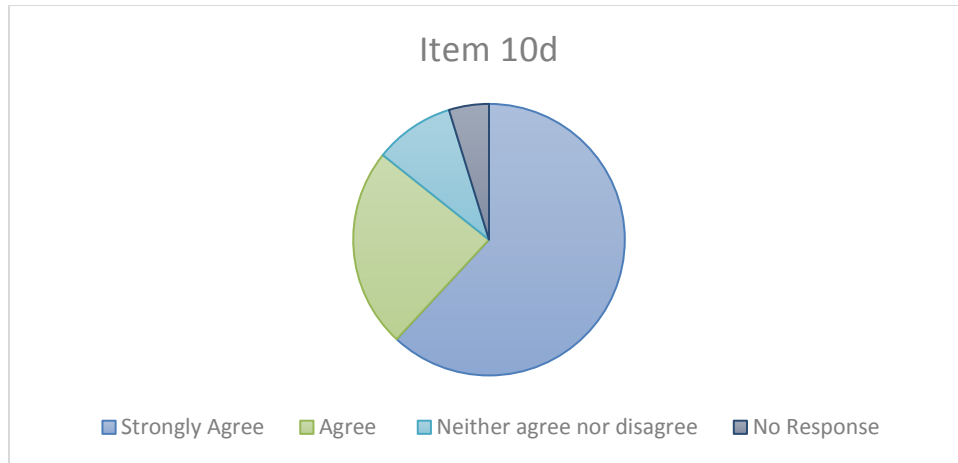
Item 10c was included in this study to see if it would match to item nine (*Item 9. Students at my school participate in service-learning opportunities in or out of school*) to show a strong commonality between the two. The mean of item nine was 4.77 and the mean of item 10c was 4.67 which has a difference of 0.1. Because the two items are not exactly worded the same, I didn't expect to get the exact same results but they are still very close. This tells us that the respondents

do feel that service-learning is an effective practice used in their schools and based on the numbers this item generated, this is commonly thought among the respondents.



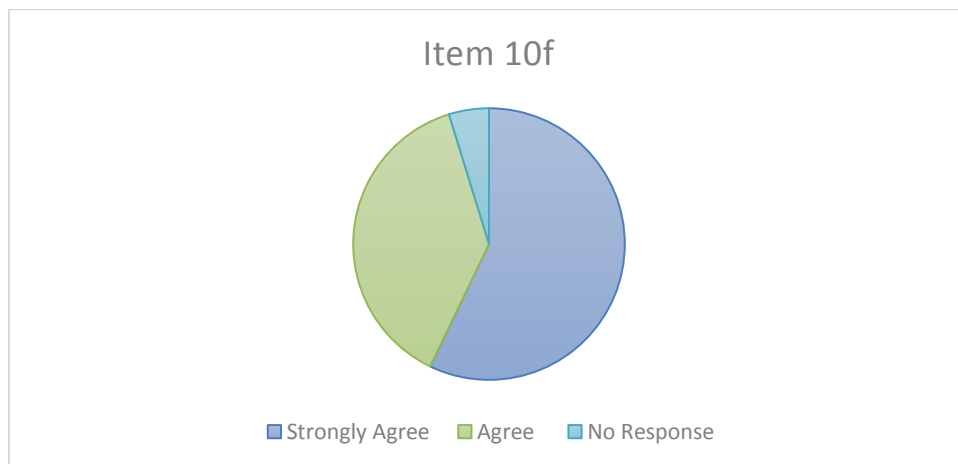
d. Classroom responsibilities

Item 10d is a specific practice used in the classroom that the respondents felt is an effective part of their character education program. For item 10d, the results were slightly more varied as it had two responses of three or neither agree or disagree, but it also had five responses of agree, and 13 responses of strongly agree. Since the mean was still between four and five at 4.55 and the standard deviation was below the average for the data set, I included it in this data set. Classroom responsibilities are also part of real-life applications as students engage in chores within the classroom, just like they may at home or in other places. Teaching classroom responsibilities teaches students traits like responsibility, respect, and diligence- all important aspects of character education.



f. Integrating character education into content areas

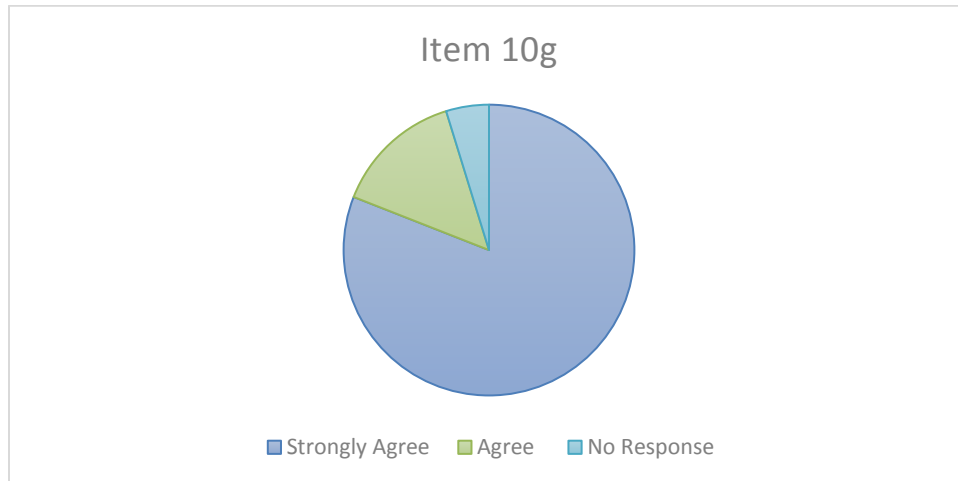
Item 10f was also included to see if it would match item five (*Item 5. Teachers at my school integrate character education into many content areas*). The mean of item five was 4.5 and the mean of item 10f was 4.6 which has a difference of 0.1. Again, these two items do not have the exact same wording but are very similar and gave a consistent answer that shows us that teachers are integrating character education into content areas in the classroom.



g. Real-life applications of character explained in classroom

Item 10g was a less specific practice but encompasses all the practices that are also in this data set. This item had the second highest mean and second lowest standard deviation which makes it very reliable. This item had 17 responses of strongly agree that this practice is effective in

classrooms and three responses of agree that it is effective. The results of this item show that all the respondents who responded agree that real-life applications of character explained in the classroom is effective for students.



Conclusion of results:

The conclusion of the results of this study showed first, that respondents feel confident that their character education programs are effective for their students and second, the types of activities used to teach character education should be based on real-world experiences to which students can relate. Included in these practices are stories about character, content integration, service-learning, and classroom responsibilities which we also learned should be taught every day. These practices were shown to have the highest measures of commonality by educators who rated them all as effective practices for teaching character education.

Limitations:

This study had many limitations as the scope was very large and could have been completed in any number of other ways. The three biggest limitations are the following: only had responses from 21 schools across America, assumed the responses from respondents were correct, and that it only included a very small number of possible practices. The first limitation is relevant because

there are thousands of schools across America that teach character education in some form and I was not able to survey more than 54 of them, of which I only got 21 responses. The second limitation is relevant because through this study I assumed the respondents to be “experts” in assessing their school’s character education program. The respondents could have been new to the school or had little to do with the character education program and not have made accurate survey responses. The last major limitation is relevant because I only included 19 items on this survey. These schools use many more and different practices and strategies to teach character education in their schools. To get a complete look at what these schools use to implement character education programs one would have to do a qualitative analysis to discover all practices used but this was not feasible for this study. Also, the schools had no chance to alter or adjust their answers to fit each item because it used a Likert scale which is purely quantitative.

Further studies:

There are many further studies that could be done with this data that would be relevant to character education. Just focusing on the positive results I found, it would be interesting to investigate how the teachers in these schools find time to teach character education every day. Even if they integrate it into core curricula, teaching it every day still takes precious time that teachers don’t have to spare. This could be a whole study or made into a year-long curricula plan on character education and how to fit it into the school day. It would also be relevant to know upon what the respondents based their answer to item 1 (*My school’s character education program is effective for the majority of students*). Is this just a general feeling? Or do the schools have some way of measuring actual effectiveness for each student in the school? One could design a study to evaluate the impact of the character education program on each students and

examine the results. If this was successful, it could be reused on any school to assess the current character education program.

One could also assess the types of service-learning opportunities in which students participate. How are those opportunities determined? Are they required and part of a grade, extra credit, or completely voluntary? How do the opportunities change by grade and age of students? Service-learning is a topic of controversy right now and would be interesting to see how effective it is for these students. If one was somehow able to prove a strong effectiveness for service-learning, it may be easier to implement into other schools that are struggling to do so now. The biggest further study from this study would be to do a qualitative study and discover and categorize all the practices used by these schools and create a plan for other schools. Similar plans like this exist but this would be one that is tested and proven to be effective by the schools who really know what they are doing. It could be made into a plan for any teacher, school, or school district that could be implemented in any way it needed to be depending on the needs of the population it would be serving.

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