

# ***MEETING COMMON CORE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS WITH CHARACTER EDUCATION LESSON PLANS IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION GRADES 9 THROUGH 12***

**Joseph M. Hoedel and Robert E. Lee**

*Character Development and Leadership Program*

This is a case study in which the Character Development and Leadership Program replaced an alternative high school's traditional English language offerings. A triangulated case study used student records, field notes, and interviews of stakeholders to compare the academic year prior to this substitution and the 2 academic years following it. All 3 sources of data agreed that using the character education curriculum to meet English language arts and English language development standards was associated with increased attendance, percentage of passed coursework each semester, and higher grade point averages. There also may have been greater student body cohesion, a more positive group process, and heightened employability values, habits, and skills.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The administrators of a stand-alone alternative high school replaced their conventional English language arts (ELA) and English language development (ELD) program (see <http://www.corestandards.org>) with a carefully conceived curriculum of character education and leadership, that is, the Character Develop-

ment and Leadership (CD&L) Program, described at <http://www.characterandleadership.com>. These educators *wanted* to do this because their primary foci were remedial education resulting in employability and positive citizenship. They could do this because the CD&L developers had aligned their curriculum with the ELA and ELD standards (see Study 1).

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• Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Joseph M. Hoedel, [jhoedel@characterandleadership.com](mailto:jhoedel@characterandleadership.com)

The opportunity to use a character education curriculum in place of more traditional English language offerings is present because the Common Core Standards are outcomes directed and cross disciplinary. The means to the required outcomes is left up to the educators “in the trenches.” However, those who aspire to meet ELA and ELD standards have two practical process obligations: The character education curriculum must be explicitly set out in a user’s manual consisting of lesson plans designed to produce ELA and ELD outcomes. Moreover, the user of this character education program must appreciate and strictly follow the lesson plans set out in that user’s manual (Lee & Nelson, 2013, manualized programs). Study 1 demonstrates how correspondence was established between the character and leadership lesson plans and the required processes and outcomes of ELA and ELD

Study 2 is a case study of a high school alternative-education program that subsequently substituted the CD&L lesson plans for its traditional English language Common Core procedures. This alternative education institution is one of several dozen currently structured in this way and employing the CD&L curriculum. It was selected for our illustration because its locale was near at hand, its faculty, school district administrators, and school board were open to impartial and unrestricted review, and the student body was of a manageable size while being diverse socioculturally (Black, Hispanic, and White males and females, some homeless, and most at poverty level) and educationally (some entered from other alternative education programs, and others had interacted dysfunctionally with conventional middle and high schools).

### ***Study 1. Documenting the Alignment of the Character Development and Leadership Curriculum With the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Development***

The original venue of the CD&L had been a high school class focusing on 16 character and

leadership traits a semester, each unit taking a week to thoroughly explore a specific trait. The final 2 weeks (17 and 18) were reserved for review and consolidation (see Table 1).

In the past 2 years, some school districts began to use the CD&L content and lesson plans to meet the ELA and ELD standards. This application was based on the extent to which special education teachers who were attending national workshops personally discovered what they believed was compatibility of the CD&L program with ELA and ELD demands and informed their school districts. This perceived alignment needed formal support.

### *Methods*

The CD&L developers had educational experts decide the extent to which each of the Common Core ELA and ELD standards were met by the procedures specified in the CD&L lesson plans (Character Development and Leadership, 2016).

### *Participants*

A high school special education English teacher with 15 years’ experience was a CD&L advisor. She was commissioned to form a panel with herself as head to explore the apparent CD&L and ELA and ELD overlap. She selected seven California (her home state) special education English teachers based on their interest and their experience (ranging from 5 to 15 years).

### *Procedures*

The CD&L uses 10 lesson plans (see Table 2) to structure the educational processes within each of its units. Those lesson plans are fixed; only the character trait changes with each unit. The lesson plans are intended to address the diverse ways of learning of students (e.g., Moussa, 2014). The panel members communicated individually and in groups, in person and

TABLE 1  
The Empirically Determined Content Requirements  
for the Character Development and Leadership Program

<i>18 Unit Topics</i>	<i>Traits</i>
Orientation and expectations	Attitude
Developing goals and priorities	Preparation
The importance of education	Perseverance
Showing respect to others	Respect
Building a positive reputation	Honesty
Developing personal values	Integrity
Handling peer pressure	Courage
The importance of role models	Appreciation
Managing anger and aggression	Composure
Positive communication skills	Empathy
Expressing gratitude to parents	Gratitude
Cultural competence	Tolerance
Citizenship in the community	Service
Sustaining long-term relationships	Loyalty
Employability and workplace skills	Responsibility
Addressing bullying in your school	Compassion
Becoming a strong leader	Leadership
Being a strong role model	Character

*Note:* Each unit is expected to last a week, and each explores a specific individual character and/or leadership trait.

electronically, about where the CD&L lesson plans and the ELA and ELD requirements were the same.

### *Results*

There was little disagreement and no unresolvable conflict. At the conclusion of their process, the panel agreed that the CD&L Program supported:

- 80% of the ELA College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards;
- 75% of the Grades 8, 9, and 10 ELA Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing Standards; and
- 60% of the Grades 11 and 12 ELA Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing Standards.

An illustration of the alignment of these repetitive CD&L lesson plans with ELA standards is provided in Figure 1.

### *Discussion*

The identical structure of the ten CD&L lesson plans applied in each unit clearly match the requirements of ELA and ELD. One English Language Development (ELD) administrator/teacher summed it up:

It follows the same curricular standards as any ELD class at any high school. You start with students being interested and therefore listening. You then move them to speaking and thence to reading and writing. By comparing their own and their peers' opinions with what they have read and viewed, you have collaborative work groups accomplish ends that promote cross-curricular development and expository reading and reasoning. In so doing you culminate the course of study with students able to meet state high school exit demands by successful completion of a formal academic writing project.

TABLE 2  
The 10 Lesson Plans the Character Development and Leadership Program  
Repeats in the Exploration of Each Character and Leadership Trait

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**Lesson Plan 1: Quotation Exercise.** This is an informal, low-stress way to introduce the trait and topic. Traits are defined and quotations from both historical and anonymous individuals are provided. Students provide short-answer responses about the context and meaning of the quotations, followed by classroom discussion.

**Lesson Plan 2: Ethical Dilemma.** Real-life scenarios are used to challenge students to contemplate choices, options, consequences, and different points of view, to help them with critical thinking skills and judgment. Students provide written short-answers and then participate in debate/discussion.

**Lesson Plan 3: Lecture.** Students receive weekly direct instruction and collaborative question prompts from research-based lectures supported with curriculum-provided slides and handouts.

**Lesson Plan 4: Character Movies.** Students view, discuss and debate selected scenes from appropriate popular movies that embody the featured character trait. Verbal and/or written responses to follow up questions challenge students to critically analyze these video segments from multiple points of reference.

**Lesson Plan 5: Role Model Readings.** A textbook has been written which provides the biographies of 17 role models who exemplify each of the 17 traits covered in the curriculum. Each week students read a 10-page biographical narrative about a historical or contemporary person. Chapter quizzes and discussion questions spur in-depth analysis of each featured role model.

**Lesson Plan 6: Community Role Model.** Understanding that “true” role models reside in the students’ community (i.e., live in the same neighborhoods, graduated from the same schools, and look like the students), community leaders are brought into the classroom each week to reinforce the importance of the character traits covered in the class. The speakers tell personal stories, provide life lessons, and encourage students to reach their full potential.

**Lesson Plan 7: Basic Skills.** Practical and essential skills are provided for each module to help students become successful in school and beyond. Almost all of these skills are behavioral in nature, so that differences can be observed immediately.

**Lesson Plan 8: Blog.** An on-line blog provides a positive, negative, or controversial current event related to character and leadership. An overview and a link to a short news video is provided along with the blogger’s (CD&L developer Joe Hoedel) perspective. Follow up discussion questions seek to inspire students to contemplate the importance of character and leadership in today’s society.

**Lesson Plan 9: Leadership Principles.** Virtual lectures on 17 leadership principles are provided on the website by various leaders. Students learn the key components of timeless leadership, which will help them become successful in school, career and their personal lives. Discussion and social media questions accompany each principle.

**Lesson Plan 10: Expository Writing Assignment.** Students write expository or persuasive essays about core beliefs and character related issues. This serves as a final academic written assignment that students will present in a formal oral presentation to classmates.

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## Conclusion

The CD&L curriculum aligns with the national Common Core Standards. The course transitions seamlessly from a low-stress, casual student engagement environment to activities that supplement specific ELA and ELD curriculum goals. The structured set of 10 lesson plans per unit addresses all learning styles. Each unit starts with informal, social language inquiry survey questions and naturally progresses to the more formal academic speaking and writing assessments at which language students must succeed. Weekly writing assignments provide expository and persuasive writing practice that exceeds national

formal writing rubrics. Finally, the course textbook (Hoedel, 2015) meets the ELA and ELD requirement of 70% expository text use.

## ***Study 2: Exploring the Impact of Using the CD&L Curriculum to meet ELA and ELD Common Core Standards in an Alternative High School***

### *Introduction*

The above discussion of Study 1 not only addresses the adequacy of using the CD&L curriculum to accomplish ELA and ELD learning requirements. It also contains the

<p>1) Word &amp; Quote of the Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reading:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Language:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>3) Points of Emphasis Lectures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reading:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Language:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>7) Current Events Blog</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>2) Ethical Dilemmas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reading:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Language:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.5 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>4) Role Model Textbook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reading:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>8) Virtual Leadership Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p>5) Character Movies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>9) Community Role Models Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reading:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Language:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.5 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p>6) Basic Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking &amp; Listening:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>10) Expository Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 »</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Language:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.1 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.2 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.3 »</li> <li>• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRAL.4 »</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Note: These standards can be found at <http://www.core.standards.org>.

FIGURE 1

Alignment of The Character Development and Leadership Program's Weekly Lesson Plans With the Common Core Anchor College and Career Readiness ELA Standards Grades 8–12

implicit expectation that alternative education students will benefit psychosocially by using the character education curriculum instead of traditional ELA and ELD programming.

### Research Questions

Compared to traditional ELA and ELD programming:

- Does substituting the CD&L curriculum duplicate the former program's previous success of teaching English language proficiency and does it exceed it?
- Does substituting the CD&L curriculum promote prosocial changes in attitudes and behavior?

### Method

A “group” case study approach (Yin, 2014) was employed. This approach, using both qualitative and statistical methods, is typically used in field studies to create a “thick” impression of a single entity. The population of the school being studied was small and its identity and mission were somewhat unique as such programs tend to be (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). It also existed in a unique ecosystemic context (see below). Therefore, our research mission was to accurately describe this one institutional unit rather than comparing it and its students with other alternative education schools and their students. Basically, this school program provided an opportunity to see a program in action and to gain

hypotheses for future, more sophisticated, investigations.

### *Site*

The specific school program to be explored was chosen because it was only a 2 1/2-hour drive for the second author, it had a 2-year history of using the CD&L program for its English language offerings, and its teachers were enthusiastic about their experiences and willing to oblige. The school is a free-standing alternative education facility serving Grades 9–12 in a Midwestern town. It is situated among a group of small shops distant from the district high school campus. The alternative education program is team taught by two experienced special education teachers (14 years and 12 years of experience respectively). It is a “one room schoolhouse” in that Grades 9 through 12 are taught together. There is a didactic classroom, with audiovisual equipment, an independent study room with computers and conference tables, a well-equipped vocational workshop, and a kitchen. The student to teacher ratio of 27:2 is enriched by several paraprofessionals who contribute as needed. The overall pedagogy employs both whole-group and individual instruction and makes liberal use of the Internet and word processing software.

### *Participants*

The teaching staff and the entire student body participated. There were 27 students, 14–19 years of age, male and female, somewhat evenly distributed between Grades 9 through 12. They had enrolled in the alternative school in one of the 3 previous academic years. Seven of them (11th and 12th graders) had enrolled in academic year 2013–2014, one year prior to when the character education program first was offered to meet ELA and ELD standards. The remaining 20 had enrolled 2014–2015 ( $n = 6$ ) and 2015–2016 ( $n = 14$ ). Minority enrollment was 19%; the majority of which was Hispanic. The students were referred by their high

school principals or school counselors because they had been “unique personalities ... active nonlearners” (personal communication by the central high school counseling staff). These students had a history of poor school attendance and were considered to be at high risk for permanently dropping out of school. For example, several male and female students appeared to be alienated by the central high school, had few social connections, had few current interests beyond computer gaming, and were living semistructured lives in their parents’ homes. One female was a homeless, unemployed, single mother who spoke little English, and whose child had recently been removed to foster care. One student was the son of undocumented, non-English-speaking migrant workers. About half of the students formerly had entry-level unskilled service jobs (e.g., landscaping, dishwashing, and fast food labor). The others were unemployed.

### *Procedures*

Three methods of inquiry were used:

1. Field notes by the junior author while visiting the program
2. Interviews of senior, middle, and entry-level students, selected by opportunity sampling; Interviews of the teachers, paraprofessionals, and school counselors
3. Compilation of academic and disciplinary data, using inferential statistics where possible.

### *Field Notes*

The junior author’s initial visit to the program was in the Spring semester, 2016, at which he and the site visit were introduced: “We have a good record and he wants to see how we do things.” All parties agreed that his observations and any student data would be confidential. He subsequently attended unannounced on six random days dictated by the facts of his daily life and ending with the last day of school. Each time he stayed the entire

day. At the end of each day, he entered his observations and verbatim quotations from his interviews into an electronic journal. At the end of the data gathering, he sent the teachers a transcript of his journal, with its identifying data removed, for an assessment of its accuracy.

### *Interviews of Participants and Stakeholders*

The junior author took advantage of the students' individual work periods to interview visiting high school administrators, the teachers, volunteers, and diverse students who indicated their availability. These were open-ended interviews beginning with "So! What do you think about this program?" The students also were prompted: "What do you think of the afternoon character education part?" After each interview, verbatim quotations were entered into his notes.

### *Statistical Analyses*

If the data were numerical (e.g., grade point averages), *t* tests between means for matched samples were used. If the data had been categorized, for example, frequencies of respective disciplinary matters, chi-squared tests were employed to ascertain the extent to which the findings were predicted by chance.

Given the two research questions relative to the student data that could be released legally (Family Policy Compliance Office, 2016), the high school central office provided the following information:

- attendance;
- the number of disciplinary violations (warnings, in-school suspensions, suspensions, expulsions);
- number of academic units successfully completed;
- grade point average (GPA), in addition, the senior students had taken the Aca-

ademic Achievement Test (ACT; act.org); and

- the graduation rate was computed, and some contemporary employment data were reviewed.

No data allowing student identification were requested or recorded. All data were compiled by a clerical third party at the district school headquarters, and all analyses were aggregate. The contemporary employment rate was of a descriptive nature (that is, no inferential statistics could be used).

### *Faithfulness*

"Faithfulness" is the term used in case studies to designate the extent to which one should feel confident with study results. Increased faithfulness through "triangulation" is a best practice (Cohen & Manion, 2000). That is, three different perspectives must clearly converge into a common finding. In this case the three perspectives were the researcher's observations, the statements of diverse stakeholders (administrators, counselors, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students), and statistical data.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Research Question # 1***

Does substituting the CD&L curriculum duplicate the former program's previous success of teaching English language proficiency and does it exceed it?

### *Field Observations*

The teachers requested no additions or corrections to the journal entries. Because the research question was the extent to which Common Core ELA and ELD Standards were being met, it was imperative to see if the CD&L lesson plans were closely followed.

### *Teachers and Classroom Structure*

When the second author viewed the afternoon (CD&L-integrated) sessions, he observed that the teachers closely followed the lesson plans contained in the CD&L User's Manual. Classroom structure was explicit, predictable, audited, and enforced. Students had to write, then read and discuss diverse questions, emotional reactions, probable outcomes, and so on. The teachers modeled and demanded prosocial behavior: Active participation, self-control (e.g., some students were inclined to verbally dominate discussions), fairness, patience, focused attention, and constructive critical thinking.

Attendance was documented with a time card. Students were required to punch in and punch out. School days were 6 hours long (8:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M.). There were 30 hours of school each week. Students had to be clocked in for 27 of them or the missed hours had to be made up. (See attendance figures below.) If a student missed a class, no attendance credit was received until it was made up. Moreover, no academic credit was given until designated school work was successfully completed and the relevant test of competency passed.

The team teaching was individualized and outcomes based. The teachers employed successive approximations in order to inculcate realistic optimism and to sustain effort. They focused on small steps. For example, one student made many errors and the teacher responded, "Well, you did the assignment! That's progress for you!" Another student slouched in a corner and, upon questioning, reported having "a bad day." The teacher's response was, "But you showed up! Did you used to do that?" Sometimes extrinsic rewards (e.g., gift cards for fast food) were given for accomplishments.

Students were required to assign themselves daily goals in daily subjects. They were allowed to work at their own rates, and the teachers reviewed each student's individual progress at the end of the day using

problem-oriented record keeping, that is, setting goals for a session, stating what actions were taken, describing how things turned out, and planning the next logical step.

### *Interviews of Teachers*

The teachers individually spoke of the 14-year history of the alternative education program, the challenging nature of their work, and how they had together evolved, first, a curriculum specifically oriented toward the future employability of challenging high school-age teenagers; next, combined the Common Core language outcomes with the CD&L curriculum.

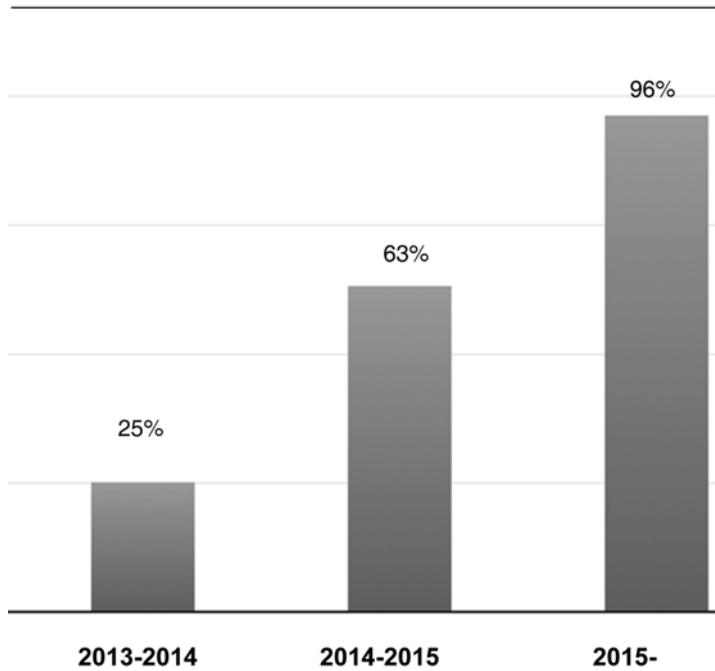
We tell ourselves and the students every day that everything we and they do is involved in them getting and keeping a job.... They need to problem-solve, set goals and strategize, show up on time every day, and reliably do what is expected of them.

The teachers described in detail the structure of their program and emphasized the importance of daily auditing and immediate follow up. They laid out their educational philosophies (clearly seen in the foregoing data) and procedures.

Overall, the teachers' interview behavior demonstrated passionate personal and conjoint commitment and optimism toward their vocation, toward the individual students, and the student body.

### *Interviews of Students*

Several students observed that they were attending school more often, doing better work more and consequently passing more educational units. One student said that the CD&L had no effect on him. He then qualified that. He said that he now was attending school "almost all the time" and was "getting good grades.... So I suppose it has." The data in Figure 2 and Table 3 support his observation.



Note: The average number of minimum school weeks (26 documented hours actively working in the school setting) satisfactorily attended each academic year: 2013–2014, before the introduction of the Character Development and Leadership Program; 2014–2016, the two academic years following its introduction

FIGURE 2  
School Attendance

TABLE 3  
The Average Number of Educational Units Passed by Each Student in the Academic Year Preceding the Integration of the CD&L (2013–2014) and the Subsequent 2 Academic Years

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Average Number of Academic Units Passed by each Student</i>
2013–2014	5	17 (SD = 9.4)
2014–2015	12	20 (SD = 5.7)
2015–2016	22	22 (SD = 6.2)
<i>Difference Between Means</i>	<i>t Value</i>	<i>Statistical Significance</i>
Academic Years		
2013–2014 versus 2014–2015	12.27	Corrected for multiple tests > .001
2013–2014 versus 2015–2016	16.57	> .001
2014–2015 versus 2015–2016	16.60	> .001

### *Student Academic Records*

- **Attendance.** Attendance was assessed each semester according to the extent to which the students successfully completed—not only were they physically present but accomplished the requisite daily work—a required 26 minimum hours of weekly instruction. In the academic year 2013–2014—before the CD&L curriculum was made part of their program—only 25% of the entering students consistently satisfied the weekly requirement. The next academic year, the CD&L curriculum was integrated and the percentage was 63%. In academic year (2015–2016) it was 96% (see Figure 2).
- **Passing Rates.** Academic education was administered by means of direct instruction, on-line courses, and individual tutoring centered on instruction packets. Students only received a grade and credit when they successfully completed a designated unit of education (e.g. coursework or a given number of packets) and a final test of competence. The average number of educational units passed by each student in the academic year preceding the integration of the CD&L (2013–2014) and the subsequent 2 academic years (2014–2015, 2015–2016) are in Table 3. The reader will notice the large standard deviations within these cohorts.

Moreover, the students' GPA over these same years have the same statistically significant pattern. See Table 4: In academic year 2013–2014, the year before the introduction of the CD&L program, their average GPA was 1.1 ( $SD = 0.65$ ). This denotes “barely passing.” Then, over the next 2 academic years, after the CD&L program began, the GPA rose steadily and finished at 3.2 ( $SD = 0.62$ ). The  $t$  test of the difference between means, comparing the academic year before the introduction of the CD&L Program and the 2 years thereafter,

one-tailed, is highly significant statistically ( $< .001$  level).

### *Other Statistical Data*

- **Graduation Rates.** Five of seven students in the 2013–14 cohort graduated June 2016.
- **National Standardized Tests.** In a final assessment of ELA and ELD progress, the graduating seniors took the ACT Test. This is considered to assess high school students' readiness for college as a function of what they learned in high school. The Composite Scores (average of English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science) of the graduating seniors ranged from 11 to 22, with a mean of 14.4. Their scores are at the 30th and 50th percentiles nationally and regionally. There are no test results for students prior to this graduating cohort.

## ***DISCUSSION***

School administrators have stated that before and during the integration of the CD&L curriculum their alternative education program met ELA and ELD standards. This determination had been a matter of district- and state-level audit. The student body of alternative education students—nonachieving and underachieving high schoolers with unique personalities, most of whom were expected to drop out of school—had already been acquiring academic skills and graduating on a par with regional alternative education programs considered effective. The cohort who enrolled in academic year 2013–2014 provided the educational benchmarks for the present site before the CD&L Program was installed as a substitute for previous ELA and ELD programming. The two cohorts who enrolled after that date (2014–2015 and 2015–2016) clearly met and went beyond these benchmarks in all instances: Attendance, passage of academic

TABLE 4  
Alternative Education Students' GPAs for the Academic Year Before  
the Introduction of the Character Development and Leadership Program and for the 2 Years Thereafter

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Number of Students</i>	<i>Average Grade Point for Each Student</i>
2013–2014	5	1.1 ( <i>SD</i> = 0.65)
2014–2015	12	2.8 ( <i>SD</i> = .71)
2015–2016	22	3.2 ( <i>SD</i> = .62)
<i>Difference Between Means</i>	<i>t Value</i>	<i>Statistical Significance</i>
2013–2014 versus 2014–2015	12.27	> .001
2013–2014 versus 2015–2016	16.57	> .001
2014–2015 versus 2015–2016	14.55	> .05

*Note:* GPAs can range between 0.0 (total failure) to 4.0.

units, grade point averages, and graduation rate.

### **Research Question # 2**

*Does substituting the CD&L curriculum promote prosocial changes in attitudes and behavior?*

#### *Field Observations of the Student Body*

The overall ambiance of the student body appeared to range from neutral to positive: Low arousal level, no tension, some students looking modestly motivated by an activity or conversation, some looking bored during a classroom presentation while others were gradually becoming enthused, and so on. The students often appreciated each other's outcome goals (see below) and intervened when someone was going astray by confronting that student or repeating a teacher's advice.

Although not conflict-free, these students appeared to generally feel positive toward one another, and even to share a feeling of being in a positive and cohesive group. They worked, talked, played, and ate in diverse small groups. Most of the time they were civil and accepting of each other's quirks and, during a group vocational activity or a class discussion, their

behavior ranged from neutral to positive. Although the observer was once told by a teacher he was about to "see what happens when the group gets out of balance," he actually was not aware of any disturbance. Overall, the daily picture of the students was one of sustained positive activity. They were working agreeably in small groups, with the exception of a student who one day was very negative about a community service activity. She complained, "Why should I do it? It's not for me, it's for people I don't even know." After coaxing her to join them, the students left her alone.

On one occasion a student was dealing with grief, and another student went over to provide comfort. On another occasion, one student was complaining that he had been turned down for a job and a fellow classmate had been accepted. A few classmates joked with him about it, heard him out, and then provided various (nonhurtful) rationales for what may have happened. The complainant seemed to feel better after that and got on with his school work.

None of the students appeared to be isolates. Before and after school hours small groups interacted on the school grounds, perhaps shooting baskets, or involved in quiet conversations. Two students had formed a romantic relationship but, overall, the males

and females interacted separately. Still, everyone appeared to be comfortable with each other. There were no loud arguments and no physical altercations. There also was a pronounced lack of teasing and profanity. They did not seek the observer's attention, but always acknowledged his presence and usually with an appropriate greeting.

Students who graduated prior to 2016 did not consider themselves to be members of a cohort. They "graduated" individually at the time each completed the academic requirements. But those who graduated in 2016 identified themselves as the "Class of 2016," graduated as a group, and enjoyed the school's first "sit-down dinner prom." Several students brought their parents as prom dates, and many students left the festivities early to go to work.

### *Interviews of Students*

More than one student said that, "We are family!" Asked what that meant, one student said "We have each other's back." One student spoke of "total help". That person, a single parent with a toddler, having just extricated herself from of an abusive relationship, needed food and shelter, day-care for the toddler, language tutoring, and formal education. She needed life coaching and personal counseling. She said she received all of that through the teachers and their connections and would soon graduate high school and start community college on a scholarship. Later another student would say much the same thing: She reported that the teachers asked about her life outside the classroom and her feelings and "*listened ...* These two women gave me more than a teacher does. They helped all the time, with everything."

Because the observer wanted to know what adding the CD&L program uniquely brought to the alternative education experience, he spoke individually with four students who had been in the program for a minimum of 3 years, that is, before and after the introduction of the CD&L program. One individual spoke of the CD&L curriculum with enthusiasm. "Every

day is great! I never thought of initiative, caring, leadership—just about getting by." This student said the CD&L program helped in managing stress, becoming less of a social isolate ("I am dealing with lots of different people"), and getting a job ("and promoted"). "It helps me *help me*." In contrast, another of these veteran students just shrugged. Although he had been at the alternative education site for the past 2 1/2 years, he said that he had had no experience with the CD&L curriculum because he only came to school in the mornings and stayed home in the afternoons when CD&L offerings usually took place. Yet another long-term student was of two minds about the CD&L. He said that he already knew about good character traits and he didn't like its role models text book ("very boring"). But he did like the weekly blog exercises which often included videotape vignettes of well-known people confronting life events. "I get to see many interesting role models and not just one ... I like to talk about the videos." Another student said that the CD&L program "didn't just tell me things but makes me think about it" and that, plus hearing about the thoughts and experiences of others, "helps me work things out."

Almost all of the students interviewed were optimistic and future oriented. They spoke of going to school while employed at service jobs (often at minimum wage) for the first time or for lengthier periods of time. Some spoke of going on to a local community college. Often students talked about their "dream jobs." Some wanted skilled trades such as welder, tattoo artist, and photographer. Others saw their future selves in ancillary medical positions (e.g., massage therapist, nurse). Some talked about professions that would require substantial advanced education, such as oceanographer, graphic designer, computer games designer, child protection worker, architect, and physician. The observer heard no negative retorts to these expressed dreams and, instead, he observed the class strategizing about realistic ways those goals could be reached.

### ***Other School District and Community Leaders***

The alternative education program was described by the high school principal, the special education counselor, and the on-site program personnel as existing in a facilitative environment at the national, state, community, and school district level. They indicated that all of these entities had been positively involved in the success of the alternative high school's students' continuing academic progress, and their graduation rates, citizenship, and employability (or successful involvement in higher education). The administrators demonstrated this by being open to ideas and changes, and by providing funding. They observed that, for 2 decades, the nation, state, and community had been requesting and supporting employability initiatives. In this region, they said, "back-to-work, retraining, and school drop-out were on everyone's dashboard." The high school principal, the guidance counselor, and the leadership hierarchy of a prominent community service organization all described their investment in this alternative education program. Indeed, the second author was present when community leaders came to the school to present one of the students with a \$2,500 scholarship to the local community college.

### ***Student Academic Records***

**Disciplinary Events.** The alternative education program did not have a large number of parental warnings, in-school suspensions, and suspensions across the years being explored. They ranged from three to six events a year and the integration of the CD&L program did not affect this frequency. The chi square value was less than 1.0, indicating that any changes over time were not statistically significant. Indeed, when the observer examined school records, he discovered that *the same three male individuals* acquired one or

more sanctions each year. Everyone else had no sanctions from the beginning.

**Employment Data.** At the time of this study all of the 2014–2015 and 2016–2016 students had been successfully employed either in seasonal work (e.g., landscaping, tourist-related services) or service-level work (e.g., wait staff, dishwasher). The time of their employment ranged from 4 months to 2 years.

### ***Discussion***

Despite periodic misconduct by three students, the data suggest that substituting character education for more traditional high school language offerings may have enhanced the success of the alternative education program with regard to prosocial attitudes and behavior. Overall there was more frequent attendance than before the CD&L program was integrated. This increase in attendance was accompanied by higher completion of courses and higher GPA. Finally, although the student body varied in the extent to which they saw the character education as meaningful, their teachers and their counselors, in congruence with the second author, described greater student body cohesion (e.g., bonding, mutual support and facilitation), more interest in their immediate futures (steady employment now, and for some higher education upon graduation). Their personal and social behavior in school—restrained behavior under stress, goal-setting, problem solving, social judgment and impulse control, persistence, patience, and the capacity to recognize the need for outside help and to get it—were clearly visible in the school setting and in their recent employment statistics.

As their teachers observed early on, employability requires marketable skills and prosocial character. Clearly, in this program, combining basic academics and character education was synergistic. It created a safe environment for academic and social learning at a level meeting the needs of the community's employers.

## Limitations

This is an illustrative case study and its purpose is to serve as an example and an initiator of field studies characterized by more scientific rigor. Because there are no traditional control groups, readers must consider the influence of factors other than those considered above. For example, the data encompass 3 years, suggesting the positive contribution of biopsychosocial age maturation because of contextual influences (see Lerner, 1998). Moreover, while this study considered the influence of the curriculum, the classroom context can be considered highly influential no matter what the curriculum was: The alternative education teachers were experienced, outcomes-oriented facilitators who demonstrated and demanded continual respect, patience, optimism, impulse control, civility, humor, and common sense. They explicitly described constructive relationships and problem-solving and they modeled and demanded that. They uncovered and cultivated strengths and they worked as a team with a clear and unflagging sense of their pedagogical mission: *Students were to recognize and appreciate the connection between getting and holding a job every minute they were in class—in every activity they did, and in the group/class process.* Since prosocial attitudes were considered central to employability, the teachers modeled and demanded professionalism. Their relationships with the students were safe and supportive.

There also may have been experimenter bias in that the researchers were invested in the program's success and believed in successful character education in high schools (Hoedel & Lee, 2017). There may be other unexplored biases such as the so-called Hawthorne Effect, initiation and participation effects, and so on (Rosenbaum, 2005). Moreover, this successful program appears to have been embedded in a positive and facilitating ecosystem (see Bubolz & Sontag, 1993) throughout its existence.

## Conclusions

Hard data obtained before and after the CD&L curriculum was substituted for traditional ELA and ELD procedures appear to have resulted in substantial increases in attendance, higher grade point averages, and higher numbers of academic units completed each semester. All three sources of data—student records, field observations, and interviews of all parties involved—supported this conclusion. Therefore, one can have confidence in these findings. However, one should not ignore the ecosystemic context of this alternative school program. Community enthusiasm and support transacted with a supportive school district, and gifted and experienced teachers.

The authors hope that the results of this small study will motivate larger and more scientifically rigorous field studies.

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