

The Formation Gap

Evidence Doesn't Transfer With the Name

Character education works. The meta-analytic record is large and positive, and the claim that it fails is simply wrong. What does not work is the assumption underneath most program purchasing: that a program inherits a trial's results by sharing its name. It does not. Evidence belongs to a tested intervention under particular conditions, and the distance between that version and the one a child receives runs through six links — design, delivery, practice, internalization, transfer, durability. Implementation science instruments the first two. The last four decide whether a capacity was built, and they are the ones nobody prices. This paper defines that gap, applies it to youth programming, and states what would refute it.

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Contents

What This Paper Is For, and What It Refuses

I. Character Education Works. The Rhetoric Is Wrong.

II. And One of the Most Rigorous Federal Tests Found Nothing

III. Plausible Explanations for the Divergence

IV. The Program Is Not the Variable

V. The Formation Gap, Defined

VI. From Implementation Fidelity to Durable Formation

VII. What Leaving the School Day Buys, and What It Costs

VIII. Construct Lineage and Differentiation

IX. Observable Indicators and Youth Co-Design

X. What Would Have to Be True

XI. The Strongest Counterarguments

XII. Safeguarding and Governance for Minors

XIII. Epistemic Firewall

XIV. What This Paper Does Not Claim

XV. Research Protocol

XVI. Responsible Program Action

References

The Central Proposition

A program does not inherit a trial's evidence by sharing its name. Evidence belongs to a tested intervention under particular conditions — and the distance between that version and the one a child actually receives runs through six links. A capacity claim lives in the last four, and almost nothing prices them.

Executive Brief

- Character education works, and the claim that it fails is wrong. A meta-analysis of 213 universal programs involving 270,034 students found significantly improved skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance, reflecting an eleven-percentile-point gain in achievement.
- The most recent evidence is larger and points the same way: 424 studies from 53 countries, 252 discrete interventions, 575,361 students, with improvements across skills, attitudes, behaviors, school climate and safety, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement.

- And yet one of the most rigorous federal tests of it found nothing. The Institute of Education Sciences and the Centers for Disease Control evaluated seven schoolwide social and character development programs across 84 schools, following 6,660 students from third through fifth grade, and reported no differences in social and emotional competence, behavior, academic performance, or perceptions of school climate between treatment and control schools.
- Both findings stand, and the reports themselves identify plausible sources of the divergence. Both meta-analyses report that implementation quality and implementation problems moderate outcomes, and the federal evaluation reported that control schools were already using social and character development activities as standard practice, though at lower levels than treatment schools.
- The meta-analytic average is positive while effects vary substantially across programs and settings, and implementation differences are one plausible contributor to that variation rather than the only explanation. What follows from this is narrower than a diagnosis: a program's first obligation is to say which version of itself it is delivering, and to measure the chain from design through durability rather than stopping at attendance.
- Grit to Genius™ has no outcome evidence. Nothing here claims otherwise. Section XV states what the founding cohort commits to producing.

A Note on Method

This paper follows the EQGenix evidentiary standard. Every citation was verified against its primary source before publication. Limitations are disclosed inline at the point of claim. Correlational findings are never described in causal language. The strongest available evidence against the thesis is engaged by name.

Claims are labeled by evidence class throughout:

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE for peer-reviewed, meta-analytic, or federally evaluated findings; EQGENIX ARGUMENT for the firm's own reasoning, which is argument rather than evidence.

What This Paper Is For, and What It Refuses

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

This paper argues for measuring what a program leaves in a child. Four things it does not argue, stated first because the subject invites misreading.

- The target is program architecture, never the people delivering it. The evidence in Section IV points at dose, sequence, and support conditions — which are structural — not at effort or belief. A teacher asked to deliver a twelve-week sequenced curriculum in four compressed sessions alongside everything else they carry has not failed; they have been handed an impossible instruction.
- Nothing here supports removing social and emotional programming from schools. Sections I and II establish that the evidence base for it is substantial and that the alternative — control schools with no such activity — largely does not

exist.

- Grit to Genius™ is a community-delivered program, not a school program. It runs outside the school day, in a community venue, with voluntary enrollment. That is a materially different delivery position, and Section VII states both what it gains and what it gives up.
- This is formation, not therapy. EQGenix does not provide clinical services, does not diagnose, and does not treat. No claim is made that the program addresses any mental health condition. Where a young person needs clinical care, facilitators refer under the protocol in Section XII.

I. Character Education Works. The Rhetoric Is Wrong.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

It is common in this field, including in commercial materials, to assert that character education does not work. That assertion is not supported. One definition first, because it governs everything that follows: in this paper, “character education” refers to the structured, universal social-emotional and character-development interventions represented in the cited evidence. It is not a claim about every program marketed under that label, and producing one weak program does not refute what follows.

Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger meta-analyzed 213 school-based universal social and emotional learning programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high

school students. Compared with controls, participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance, reflecting an eleven-percentile-point gain in achievement. School teaching staff conducted the programs successfully.

Cipriano and colleagues, with Durlak among the authors, updated that base a decade later. Their systematic review and meta-analysis covered universal school-based interventions available from 2008 through 2020: 424 studies from 53 countries, reflecting 252 discrete interventions and involving 575,361 students. Students who participated experienced significantly improved skills, attitudes, behaviors, school climate and safety, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement.

Limitation disclosed at point of claim: meta-analyses aggregate heterogeneous studies of varying quality, and both papers report substantial heterogeneity rather than a uniform effect. Publication bias is a standing concern in any intervention literature. Effect sizes in this field are modest in absolute terms. Neither analysis establishes that any particular program will work in any particular setting, and the second explicitly notes disparities in the evidence available for students who have been historically marginalized in education, which is a real limit on how broadly these findings can be applied.

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

A firm selling youth formation has an obvious commercial incentive to leave the "character education fails" narrative standing. This paper refuses it, for the same reason White Paper 004 refused the dependency narrative: it is not supported, and an argument that leans on it will give way in front of the first reader who knows the literature. If the case for a new program requires believing the existing evidence base is empty, there is

no case.

II. And One of the Most Rigorous Federal Tests Found Nothing

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

Against that record sits one of the most rigorous evaluations ever conducted in this field, and it found nothing.

The Institute of Education Sciences and the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention collaborated on an impact evaluation of seven schoolwide social and character development programs. All seven were coherent, school-based, and universal. The evaluation followed one cohort of third-grade students at 84 schools for three years, through fifth grade, from fall 2004 through spring 2007, with a sample of 6,660 students together with their caregivers, teachers, and principals.

The report states three findings. The programs did increase the reported implementation of classroom activities intended to promote social and character development. The control schools also reported using a variety of such activities as standard practice, though not at the same levels as treatment schools. And there were no differences between treatment and control students in social and emotional competence, behavior, academic performance, or perceptions of school climate. Year-by-year and growth-curve analyses found no improvement when the programs were considered together, individually, or for specific subgroups, with the number of significant impacts at or below what would be expected by chance.

Limitation disclosed at point of claim: this is one evaluation of seven specific programs in one cohort over three years, and it does not generalize to every program in the field. The report itself discusses several explanations for the absence of impact rather than concluding that the programs are inert. It is cited here because it is unusually rigorous and because its findings are genuinely in tension with the meta-analytic record – a tension this paper is obliged to resolve honestly rather than to select around.

III. Plausible Explanations for the Divergence

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

A large positive meta-analytic record sits in tension with a particularly rigorous federal multi-program evaluation that found no detectable impact. That is an asymmetry rather than two equal bodies of evidence, and the temptation is to pick one. The more useful move is to ask what differs between them.

Three differences are visible in the reports themselves, and none requires believing that either finding is wrong. They are offered as plausible explanations. The available evidence does not permit this paper to identify how much each contributed, or to rule out weaker program theory as a contributor.

The counterfactual differs. In the federal evaluation, control schools were already running social and character development activities as standard practice. The comparison was therefore not program against nothing; it was program against a school already doing some version of the same thing. A trial with a weaker counterfactual will show a larger effect than a trial with a strong one, and that is a fact about the comparison rather than about the intervention.

The delivery conditions differ. Efficacy trials typically run with developer involvement, trained staff, monitored fidelity, and measurement built in. A schoolwide rollout across 84 schools runs under the conditions schools actually have.

And the unit differs. Much of the meta-analytic base tests a defined curriculum with a specified sequence. A schoolwide program aims to shift climate and practice across an entire building, which is a harder target and a slower one.

The likeliest reading is not that character programs fail. It is that the tested version and the delivered version are frequently not the same program — and that the difference is measured inconsistently and rarely linked to outcomes.

IV. The Program Is Not the Variable

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

The meta-analyses do not merely report an average effect. Both report what moves it.

Durlak and colleagues found that the use of four recommended practices for developing skills, and the presence of implementation problems, moderated program outcomes. Cipriano and colleagues report that significant heterogeneity in content, intervention features, context, and implementation quality moderated student experiences and outcomes.

Limitation disclosed at point of claim: moderator findings in meta-analysis are observational. Programs with better

implementation may differ systematically from programs with worse implementation in ways that also affect outcomes – better resourcing, more capable settings, more motivated staff. The moderator result is consistent with implementation mattering causally, and it does not establish that improving implementation in a given program would produce the difference observed.

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

With that caution held, the moderator findings are among the most practically important results in this literature, and they are too often missing from routine purchasing, reporting, and replication decisions. They show that implementation characteristics are associated with different outcomes across studies; whether changing those characteristics causes the difference requires stronger designs than a meta-analysis can supply. Even on the weaker reading, describing a program by its name and its curriculum is describing an incomplete variable. Two schools running the identical branded program are not running the identical intervention if one delivers the full sequence with trained staff and the other delivers a compressed version in whatever time remains.

This is why a program's reporting layer matters more than its content claims. A program that reports what it delivered, at what dose, with what fidelity, to whom, can be evaluated. A program that reports only its name and its attendance cannot be — and neither can its results be believed. Buying by name is buying a label.

V. The Formation Gap, Defined

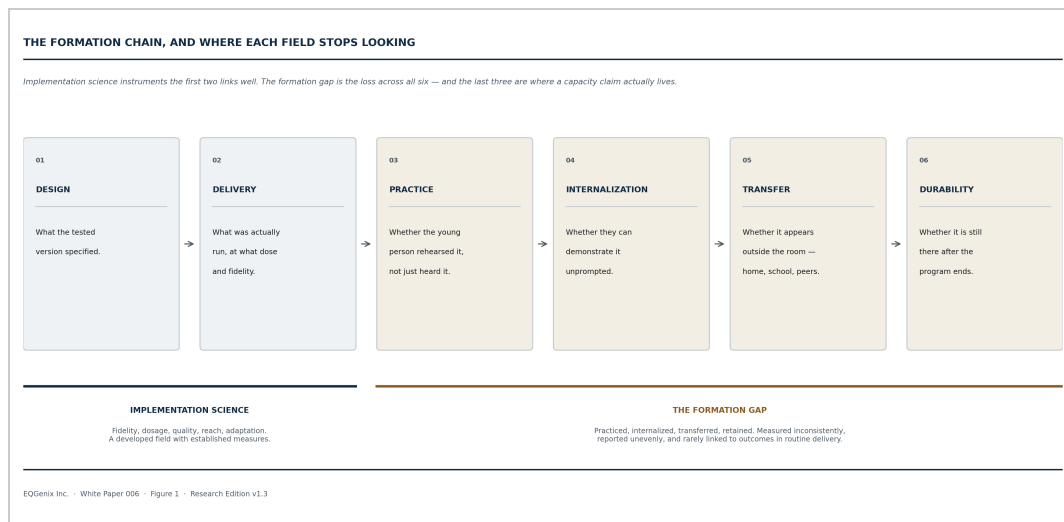


Figure 1. The six-link formation chain. Each link is a point where capacity-building potential can be lost, and routine reporting typically becomes thinnest from participant practice forward.

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

The formation gap is the loss of capacity-building potential across the full chain between an intended design and durable capability in a participant. That chain has six links, and the distinguishing point of this framework is that a capacity claim lives in the last four rather than the first two.

- Design. What the tested version specified — sequence, dose, and the practices the evidence identifies as mattering.
- Delivery. What was actually run, at what dose, with what fidelity and quality, and reaching whom.
- Practice. Whether the participant rehearsed the capacity rather than hearing about it. Exposure and practice are not the same event and are not measured by the same instrument.
- Internalization. Whether the participant can demonstrate the capacity unprompted, without the facilitator, the worksheet, or the cue.

- Transfer. Whether it appears outside the instructional setting — at home, at school, with peers, under pressure that the program did not stage.
- Durability. Whether it is still there after the program ends, at an interval long enough that novelty and expectancy have decayed.

Stated that way, the gap is a program-design and measurement problem rather than a claim about children, teachers, or the value of the field. Each link is measurable, and a program that reports only attendance has instrumented none of them.

VI. From Implementation Fidelity to Durable Formation

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

The first two links of that chain are not new ground, and a paper implying otherwise would be renaming an established field. Durlak and DuPre reviewed over 500 quantitative studies and reported strong empirical support for the conclusion that the level of implementation affects the outcomes obtained in promotion and prevention programs, together with at least 23 contextual factors influencing implementation across communities, providers, innovations, delivery systems, and support systems. The field distinguishes fidelity, dosage, quality, reach, participant responsiveness, and adaptation, and it has established measures for them.

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

So the honest position is priority and integration, not territory.

Implementation science provides essential tools for understanding design, delivery, fidelity, dosage, quality, reach, participant responsiveness, adaptation, and sustainability, and some of that work extends well past delivery. Nothing in this paper improves on any of it.

What the formation framework proposes is to build on that foundation by making durable participant possession the governing endpoint rather than one outcome among several: practice, unprompted demonstration, transfer across settings, and retention after delivery ends. The dependent variable shifts from fidelity in the delivery to capacity in the person. A program can be delivered faithfully and still leave nothing behind, and routine reporting would not distinguish that case from success.

Whether links three through six add explanatory or predictive value beyond established implementation measures is not established, and it is the central open question of this framework. Section X states what would show that they do not.

VII. What Leaving the School Day Buys, and What It Costs

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

Grit to Genius™ is delivered outside the school day, in a community venue, in age-banded cohorts, with voluntary enrollment. That position carries advantages and costs, and both should be stated plainly rather than only the first.

What it gains. The provider has greater control over the

scheduled dose and sequence, because the program is not competing with instructional minutes. Facilitators deliver one thing rather than that thing plus everything else. Cohort size is a design choice. And measurement can be built in from the start rather than retrofitted, which is the difference between a program that can learn from itself and one that cannot.

What it gives up, and this is the part a community program is tempted to omit. Control over the scheduled dose is not control over actual exposure, which remains vulnerable to transportation, caregiver schedules, sport and activity conflicts, employment, sibling care, housing instability, and simple voluntary non-attendance. Community delivery may raise fidelity to the plan while lowering the dose a young person actually receives, and a program that counts the first as a win without measuring the second has fooled itself. Voluntary enrollment selects. The young people whose families find, choose, and transport them to an out-of-school program differ systematically from those who do not, and that difference will flatter any result the program produces. A universal school program reaches everyone; a community cohort reaches whoever arrives. Reach is narrower, and the young people who might benefit most are the least likely to be in the room.

Two consequences follow. Any outcome comparison must address selection explicitly rather than treating an enrolled cohort as though it were a random sample of young people. And the program has an obligation to work on reach — to go where young people already are rather than waiting for families to bring them — which is the reason the founding cohort is sited in a public library rather than a private facility.

There is direct evidence for the out-of-school position, and it should be cited rather than borrowed from the school literature. Durlak, Weissberg and Pachan meta-analyzed after-school programs seeking to promote personal and social skills and found that, compared with controls, participants showed significant increases in self-perceptions and bonding to school, positive social behaviors, school grades and academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors. The presence of four recommended practices — sequenced, active, focused, and explicit — moderated several program outcomes.

Limitation disclosed at point of claim: this establishes that structured out-of-school skill programming can produce average benefits under some conditions. It does not establish that a voluntary community model will reproduce those benefits, that the Grit to Genius™ construct set is the right content, or that this program will replicate anything. The school-based meta-analyses in Section I provide context for the field; they are not evidence for this program, which is community-based, voluntary, selectively enrolled, differently staffed, and built on an unvalidated construct set.

VIII. Construct Lineage and Differentiation

Four established construct families sit adjacent to the Emotional Portfolio™ and any serious reader will raise them: psychological hardiness, introduced by Kobasa as commitment, control, and challenge; psychological flexibility, synthesized by Kashdan and Rottenberg; psychological capital, with meta-analytic support across 51 samples and 12,567 employees; and grit, defined by Duckworth and colleagues as perseverance and

passion for long-term goals, which showed incremental predictive validity over IQ and conscientiousness while correlating highly with conscientiousness.

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

The redundancy tests carried in White Paper 003 apply here without modification, with one addition specific to this population. In youth samples, the constructs must also be shown to be distinguishable from developmental stage — that is, that a measured difference reflects capacity rather than the ordinary trajectory of adolescence. A framework that mistakes a fourteen-year-old becoming fifteen for an intervention effect has measured nothing, and that is the single most likely way a youth formation program deceives itself. Age-banded cohorts make this risk higher, not lower, and the research protocol in Section XV addresses it directly.

Disclosure at point of claim: every distinction offered is a proposal, not a finding. No discriminant-validity study has been run for any of the five capacities in any population, and none in a youth population.

IX. Observable Indicators and Youth Co-Design

EQGenix publishes behavioral indicators and retains scoring models and item banks as proprietary. These are stated so that a parent, facilitator, or partner can test the construct against young people they know.

Cognitive Sovereignty™. The young person can state a position and a reason as two separate things, can say what would change

their mind, and can distinguish a view they reasoned to from one they absorbed from a group chat, a feed, or a friend.

Emotional Regulation™. There is an observable interval between provocation and response, and it does not collapse to zero in front of peers. The young person can be corrected without the correction becoming a crisis.

Resilience Architecture™. After a failure, a rejection, or a public embarrassment, their account of who they are does not reorganize around the event. Recovery time shortens across repeated setbacks.

Relational Intelligence™. The young person can repair with a friend, a sibling, or an adult without requiring the other to move first, and can distinguish being disliked from being wrong.

Effort Tolerance™. They sustain effort on something that will not pay off this week, and can tell the difference between a plan that is failing and one that is merely slow.

Limitation disclosed at point of claim: these are face-valid behavioral descriptions, not validated scale items, and they have not been examined for developmental appropriateness across the age bands the program serves. They are not diagnostic criteria, not readiness determinations, and must never be used to sort, place, or exclude a young person – see Section XII.

The questions these indicators have not yet answered

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

Transporting adult-derived capacities into youth contexts raises problems that developmental confounding does not exhaust. They are listed because they are unresolved, not because they have been handled.

- Whether the same behavior indicates capacity at eleven and at seventeen, or whether each construct requires age-specific indicators.
- Whether "accept correction without crisis" pathologizes reactions that are developmentally ordinary, culturally normative, or a proportionate response to unfair correction.
- Whether "initiates repair" places the burden on the harmed child. Where a young person has been bullied or excluded, an indicator rewarding repair-initiation is not merely inaccurate; it is harmful, and it must be scoped so that it never applies in that situation.
- Whether "distinguishes being disliked from being wrong" oversimplifies peer exclusion, which is frequently about power rather than correctness.
- Whether sustained effort is always adaptive, or whether an indicator rewarding persistence can reinforce staying in a harmful situation. Knowing when to stop is a capacity too, and the present indicator does not capture it.
- Who defines successful regulation, and whether the definition encodes a cultural expectation rather than a developmental one.

These are not resolvable by the people who wrote the indicators. Before the founding cohort, the indicator set goes to structured review by developmental psychologists, educators, youth-development practitioners, disability and cultural reviewers, parents, and — not as a courtesy — young people themselves. Adults should not finalize a child-facing emotional

framework without structured youth input, and any indicator surviving that review unchanged should be treated with suspicion rather than satisfaction.

X. What Would Have to Be True

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

Six conditions apply here, one more than in the adult papers, and none is discharged.

Structural validity. Factor analysis on adequately powered youth samples must recover five distinguishable factors. If they collapse, the architecture is wrong for this population and should be revised rather than defended.

Discriminant validity. The constructs must measure something not already captured by general mental ability, personality, psychological capital, and grit.

Discriminability from development. Measured change must be distinguishable from ordinary maturation across the age bands served. This requires a comparison condition; a pre-post design in a growing adolescent cannot separate the two and should never be reported as though it could.

Predictive validity. Scores must predict outcomes that matter — school engagement, disciplinary contact, program completion, relational stability — beyond what existing instruments predict, in prospective designs.

Sensitivity to intervention. Formation must move the score and the movement must persist past the program window.

No harm. Participation must not reduce help-seeking, increase self-criticism, or produce a vocabulary young people use to label themselves or each other. This is monitored as a safety outcome, not assumed.

XI. The Strongest Counterarguments

One: the evidence gap cuts against you

The objection: this paper establishes that the field has meta-analytic support and that a rigorous federal evaluation found nothing, then proposes a program with neither. Conceded without qualification. Grit to Genius™ has no outcome evidence and this paper does not claim any. What it claims is that the full chain is measurable, that routine reporting rarely follows it through transfer and durability, and that a program should arrive with instrumentation rather than assertion.

Two: you are describing the implementation science literature

The objection: dose, fidelity, sequence, and support conditions are the subject of an established implementation science field, and repackaging its conclusions with proprietary vocabulary adds nothing.

Largely correct on the diagnosis, and this paper does not claim to have discovered implementation science — the moderator findings in Section IV are the field's own. Its proposed contribution is to organize implementation and participant outcomes into one six-link chain and to make durable possession, rather than delivery fidelity, the final criterion.

Whether links three through six add explanatory or predictive value beyond established implementation measures is the test stated in Section X.

Three: out-of-school programs reach the wrong children

The objection: a voluntary community cohort systematically excludes the young people with the least stable households, the least available transportation, and the greatest need — which means any result is selection, and the program may widen a gap while appearing to close one.

This lands and is conceded in Section VII. It is a real limitation of the delivery model, not a solved problem. The mitigations are partial: public siting, no fee barrier for the founding cohort, and explicit reporting of who enrolled against the community's demographics so that the selection is visible rather than hidden. Whether the program reaches beyond the families who would have found something anyway is a question the first cohort will answer, and the answer will be published either way.

Four: measuring children's interior lives is not benign

The objection: administering capacity instruments to minors creates records about their emotional functioning that can follow them, be misread by adults with authority over them, or teach them to see themselves as a set of deficits.

This is the most serious objection in the paper and it is answered with constraints rather than reassurance. Section XII states them. The short form: results belong to the young person and their parent or guardian, no score reaches a school, a court, or a diversion decision, no young person is told they scored low

on anything, and the harm condition in Section X is monitored as an outcome rather than assumed away.

XII. Safeguarding and Governance for Minors

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

A framework applied to adults becomes a different instrument when applied to children, and the constraints have to be stricter rather than merely adapted. These are published so they can be enforced against EQGenix.

- Informed parental or guardian consent is required, and the young person's own assent is required separately and in age-appropriate language. A young person may decline or withdraw at any point without consequence and without needing to give a reason.
- Results belong to the young person and their parent or guardian, and are returned to them. EQGenix makes no voluntary disclosure of an individual profile to a school, a district, an employer, a court, a probation department, or any diversion decision-maker for disciplinary, placement, legal, probation, or diversion purposes. Where disclosure is legally compelled — by subpoena, court order, or statute — EQGenix limits it to the minimum required, notifies the family where legally permitted, and obtains legal review first. An absolute promise would be one the firm cannot keep, and stating it would be worse than useless.
- Capacity measures may never inform a legal or disciplinary disposition. Where a young person participates in

connection with a diversion pathway, participation and completion may be reported; scores may not. A framework that helps an adult decide what happens to a child has been converted into the opposite of its purpose.

- No young person is told they scored low, is ranked against peers, or is placed in a group on the basis of a score. Individual outputs in the founding cohorts are developmental profiles, not validated determinations, because the instruments lack the reliability data that any such statement would require.
- Facilitators do not screen, assess, or characterize any young person clinically, and are trained explicitly that they are not qualified to do so. They document observable facts, never diagnoses.
- Child-abuse reporting obligations exist independently of this program. Whether a given facilitator is a mandated reporter under California law depends on role, employment relationship, licensure, and duties, and the exact statutory category is being verified with California counsel rather than asserted here. Regardless of statutory status, EQGenix contractually requires every facilitator to follow the organization's child-safety reporting policy. The policy is disclosed to families and to young people at intake in plain language, before any assessment is administered, and no confidentiality commitment in this program overrides it.
- Outside reporting obligations and imminent danger, a concern is handled under a youth-safety and consent protocol that weighs the young person's age, wishes, legal

rights, and the risk that disclosure itself creates. Parent notification is not automatic. Where a disclosure concerns a caregiver, a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity, pregnancy, or any matter where telling a parent could place them in danger, the protocol governs and the default is not disclosure. Referral information is offered rather than a characterization of the young person.

- Operational child protection is a condition of delivery, not an appendix to it: background screening for every adult with participant contact; child-safety and reporting training before first contact; a two-adult or observable-interaction rule with no adult alone with a participant out of sight; a prohibition on private off-platform contact between staff and participants; published staff-to-youth ratios; pickup authorization and emergency contacts held for every participant; documented incident, injury, and allegation procedures including procedures for allegations against staff; a bullying and peer-harm response protocol; separate media and photography consent that is never bundled with program consent; and disability and accessibility accommodation as a standing requirement rather than a request-based exception.
- Identifiable data on minors is retained for a stated period disclosed at intake, after which it is deleted. A parent or guardian, or the young person on reaching majority, may require deletion of identifiable records at any time, subject to any active legal hold, incident investigation, or ethics-board retention requirement, which are disclosed at the time of the request. Deidentified data already incorporated into

an analysis cannot be withdrawn, and that limit is stated at consent rather than discovered later.

- Group reporting is subject to a minimum cell size, and in small cohorts this constraint will frequently mean no group figure is published at all.

XIII. Epistemic Firewall

EQGenix is a Christ-centered firm and does not disguise it. The firm's governing canon holds Scripture as its source of authority and treats empirical science as a corroborating witness rather than a competing one. That is a worldview commitment, declared rather than embedded, and it is not offered as evidence.

The separation carries additional weight where minors are concerned. Programming delivered in a public venue, in a publicly funded setting, or under any civic partnership contains no religious content, and no young person is asked about belief or is exposed to religious instruction as a condition of participation. Faith-anchored content, where it exists, is held to a separate and clearly labeled track that families elect deliberately. Nothing in Sections I through XII depends on the reader sharing the firm's theology.

XIV. What This Paper Does Not Claim

- It does not claim that character education or social and emotional learning fails. The meta-analytic evidence is positive and this paper is built on that finding.

- It does not claim that the seven programs in the federal evaluation are ineffective. That evaluation reported no differences under the conditions tested and discussed several explanations.
- It does not claim that improving implementation causes better outcomes. The moderator findings are observational.
- It does not claim that Grit to Genius™ works, or that community delivery is superior to school delivery. Neither has been tested.
- It does not claim that the Emotional Portfolio™ has established validity in any population, or that its constructs are distinguishable from ordinary adolescent development.
- It does not claim that a voluntary community cohort is representative of the young people who most need support. Section VII says the opposite.
- It does not claim to have discovered that implementation matters. That is an established finding in an established field, cited in Section VI, and the contribution proposed here concerns links three through six rather than one and two.
- It does not claim that measuring practice, internalization, transfer, and durability adds anything over measuring implementation fidelity. That is the central open question and Section X states what would settle it against the framework.
- It does not claim that the school-based meta-analyses are

evidence for Grit to Genius™. They are context for the field.

XV. Research Protocol

EQGENIX ARGUMENT

Ethics and consent. The protocol is reviewed by an institutional review board or equivalent independent body before the first administration, with particular attention to research involving minors. Research participation is consented separately from program participation, requires guardian consent and youth assent, is revocable, and never affects a young person's place in the cohort.

Independence and interest. Outcome analysis is conducted by an external partner rather than by the parties who built and deliver the curriculum. EQGenix's commercial interest is disclosed in every publication and to every participating family.

Pre-registration. Hypotheses, outcomes, and the analysis plan are filed publicly before the founding cohort is administered.

Wave one is feasibility and measurement development, not effectiveness: enrollment against community demographics, completion, attrition with reasons, assessment burden and age-appropriateness, comprehension established through cognitive interviewing with young people, item distribution and missingness, floor and ceiling effects, acceptability to young people and families, felt pressure to participate, and the harm signals named in Section X. A founding cohort is far too small to estimate factor structure or age-band-specific reliability, and no psychometric validation will be implied from it. Capacity

change is exploratory and reported as exploratory.

Wave two introduces a comparison condition, and in this population that is not optional: without one, maturation cannot be separated from intervention. A waitlist design across cohorts is the most feasible ethical option, since it delays rather than denies access, and it is what the pre-registration will specify. Two limits are stated alongside it. Randomization addresses causal inference within the enrolled sample; it does not eliminate selection into the program or establish population-level reach. And waitlisted families know they are waiting, which can affect behavior, reporting, dropout, and outside-service use — so alternative program participation, expectancy, differential attrition, contamination, changes in school services, and major household events are tracked as part of the design rather than treated as noise.

Analysis specifications fixed in advance: sample size and number of cohorts, allocation, missing-data handling, clustering by cohort, and covariates including age band, prior programming exposure, and household characteristics collected at the minimum level necessary. Selection is addressed concretely rather than by assertion: recruitment channels and eligibility rules are documented, the enrollment denominator and reasons for non-participation are recorded, enrolled demographics are compared against the service area, and transportation access and prior program participation are collected. Where weighting or propensity methods are appropriate they are pre-specified — and the limits that remain after adjustment are reported, because statistical modeling cannot remove selection that was never measured.

Fidelity and dose. Facilitator fidelity, session attendance, and exposure are recorded for every cohort, so that a null result can distinguish theory failure from delivery failure — which is the entire subject of this paper and would be an unforgivable thing for this program to be unable to answer about itself.

Reporting. Results are made public regardless of direction, and null or disconfirming findings are reported and submitted on the same footing and timeline as supportive ones. EQGenix can commit to reporting and submission; it cannot commit to acceptance by any particular journal, and does not.

XVI. Responsible Program Action

A school leader, funder, or parent should be able to act on this paper without adopting anything from EQGenix.

- Do not conclude that character or social-emotional programming does not work. The evidence says otherwise and cutting it on that basis is not supported.
- Ask any program what dose and sequence were tested, and what dose and sequence you are actually receiving. If those two answers differ, you are not buying the program that produced the evidence.
- Ask what is measured other than attendance and satisfaction, and whether anything is measured after the program ends.
- Ask what the comparison is. A program with no comparison condition, delivered to growing children, cannot separate its

effect from a year of ordinary development.

- Never permit a capacity or character score to enter a disciplinary, placement, or legal decision about a child, from any vendor including this one.
- Treat any founding cohort — including this one — as research-informed programming rather than proven intervention, and say so to families in those words.

A program earns its evidence. It does not inherit it. Ask what was built, not what was branded.

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EQGenix Inc. (2026). Trained for the call, unbuilt for the career: The evidence gap in first responder wellness. Institutional White Paper 003, Research Edition v1.1.

EQGenix Inc. (2026). What help leaves behind: Relief, service, and the case for capacity formation. Institutional White Paper 004, Research Edition v1.1.

Revision History

v1.0 (August 2026) — Initial Research Edition. The working subtitle held that K–12 character education fails; the meta-analytic evidence does not support that claim, so the claim was retired rather than defended. v1.1 — Substantive revision: the formation gap redefined from an implementation-fidelity gap to loss across a six-link chain; a new section establishing what implementation science already covers; Figure 1 rebuilt around the chain; causal overclaims about moderators removed; direct out-of-school evidence added; community delivery reframed from fidelity control to a tradeoff; six unresolved questions about the youth indicators added with a youth co-design requirement; safeguarding rebuilt, including qualification of the absolute no-disclosure promise for legally compelled disclosure, non-automatic parent notification under a youth-safety protocol, mandated-reporter status referred to counsel, and operational child protection; research protocol tightened; Taylor et al. removed as record-confirmed but not read. v1.2 — Positional revision, voice and structure only: the deck now states the paper’s position — evidence does not transfer with the name — and section headings and openers were rewritten to take positions rather than describe topics. v1.3 (this edition) — Nine corrections following further review, one of them a genuine overclaim. The implementation-science boundary was

drawn too narrowly and too territorially: that field also addresses reach, participant responsiveness, adaptation, and sustainability, and some of its work extends past delivery. Section VI is retitled From Implementation Fidelity to Durable Formation and now claims priority and integration rather than territory, proposing durable participant possession as the governing endpoint rather than asserting that the established field stops at link two. The assertion that nobody acts on the moderator findings is withdrawn in favour of their being too often missing from routine purchasing, reporting, and replication. The residual "almost nobody measures" language is removed from the first counterargument and from the Figure 1 caption. The second counterargument is rewritten, correcting two stale section references and a description of community delivery that the v1.1 revision had already superseded. A definition of "character education" is added at the point of first claim, limiting the term to the structured universal interventions represented in the cited evidence so that one weak program cannot be produced as a refutation. The superlative claim that the federal evaluation was the most rigorous is softened to one of the most rigorous. One executive-brief line is aligned with Section III's treatment of the divergence as plausible rather than established. One cross-reference to the referral protocol is corrected. Figure 1 is enlarged in the document layout. No caveat, safeguarding constraint, or concession was removed in this or any preceding edition.

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- 01 **Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B**

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

- 02 **Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., Ha, C., Kirk, M., Wood, M., Sehgal, K., Zieher, A. K., Eveleigh, A., McCarthy, M., Funaro, M., Ponnock, A., Chow, J. C., & Durlak, J**

<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13968>

- 03 **Social and Character Development Research Consortium**

ies.ed.gov – SACD multi-program evaluation

- 04 **Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M**

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-010-9300-6>

- 05 **Durlak, J. A., & DuPre, E. P**

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0>

- 06 **Kobasa, S. C**

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.1.1>

- 07 **Kashdan, T. B., & Rottenberg, J**

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.j.cpr.2010.03.001>

- 08 **Avey, J. B., Reichard, R. J., Luthans, F., & Mhatre, K. H**

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20070>

- 09 **Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R**

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087>

The two internal EQGenix white papers referenced in this edition are excluded from this index, which lists external sources only.