



# Research Brief

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN UNIVERSAL PRE-K

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*In light of the current UPK NYC movement, current research on UPK is essential to support its growth and effectiveness. The present study introduces the concept of character education in UPK, but most especially highlights parents' views about character education and UPK; including parent voice in the UPK conversation is critical in understanding the value of UPK.*

## Key Research Findings

### 1. Lack of familiarity with

**Character Education:** Parents of children in universal pre-k are not generally familiar with the term and concept of character education and therefore define the phenomenon based on their personal views and experiences.

**2. Character education inherent in UPK curriculum:** Parents of children in universal pre-k do not perceive character education as a deliberate school curriculum but rather an inherent part of the social learning that takes place in the universal pre-k classroom.

**3. Parental responsibility:** Parents of children in universal pre-k perceive themselves as ultimately responsible for their child's character education and essentially their character development.

**4. Collaborating with UPK teacher:** Parents of children in universal pre-k perceive collaborating with the teacher as a valuable means of supporting their child's character development.

**5. Importance of prosocial behaviors:** Parents of children in universal pre-k perceive the development of prosocial behaviors as essential to their child's development for success in school and life.

**6. School readiness:** Parents of children in universal pre-k perceive the universal pre-k program as valuable for school readiness because of both its academic learning and social learning components.

# UPK



*"... I think it's important for my child to develop integrity, honesty, empathy, the ability to share with others, compassion, and obedience, and also just a tolerance of others, knowing that everyone is different in many different ways... I think one of the easiest ones (character traits) to address in pre-k is obviously sharing... and working together with their classmates ..."* – parent of UPK student



# Research Abstract

*"...Why is it good to bring them to pre-k... well it's not only about education, which is really important, but they also explain to them and teach them how to get along with other kids, how to work well with others, and how to understand and take orders and how to follow directions..." - parent of UPK student.*

Research has shown the importance of parental involvement in the implementation of effective character education programs. Yet little is known about parental involvement in and experiences with early childhood character education programs. The purposes of this phenomenological study were to discover the perceptions of parents with children in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program concerning character education and to describe their lived experiences with character education. Theories of parental involvement, parenting practices, moral development, and social learning provided a lens through which the phenomenon of character education in early childhood was discussed and analyzed. Participants included six adults who were parents of students attending UPK. Qualitative data were gathered using interviews and journals. A combination of a priori and open

coding was used to help analyze the data and to determine themes and patterns. The findings regarding the UPK parents showed that they were not familiar with the term character education although the character-fostering aspects inherent in the UPK program were one of the main reasons they selected that preschool program. Further, parents expressed a strong sense of responsibility for their children's development of character and behavior, although they were not always sure how to best foster that development. This study helps foster social change by providing preschool program designers and administrators with insight into the importance of including solid character education and parental support for character development in their children in preschool programs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Adopt** character education as part of UPK programs.
- **Train** UPK teachers to effectively collaborate with parents in matters of character development.
- **Increase** UPK programs throughout New York City.

*"He's like more geared to learning, he understands things, he can play with other children now. He's looking forward to going to Kindergarten in September, he keeps talking about it... So I actually think that it's quite amazing that in two and a half hours you can actually get your child to improve that much, to learn, to talk to other children, to be more comfortable with himself" - parent of UPK student*

