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2007 Blue Ribbon Panel

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2007 National Schools of Character:
Award-Winning Practices

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Mission Statement

Character Education Partnership is dedicated to developing young people of good character who become responsible and caring citizens.
Character Education Partnership (CEP) is the nation’s leading advocate for quality character education initiatives. CEP is a national, nonpartisan coalition of educational organizations and individuals, led by key business and education leaders, dedicated to the advancement of quality character education as a key component in school reform, academic achievement, and preparation for responsible citizenship.

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2007 marks the tenth year of the National Schools of Character (NSOC) awards program. With the 2007 winners, CEP will have named 100 schools and districts as National Schools (or Districts) of Character. One hundred communities of character educators have been recognized as models and exemplars of effective character education and charged with being ambassadors.

The seeds of what would ultimately become a prestigious national awards program were planted in 1998, when Business Week, the McGraw–Hill Companies, and CEP announced that 10 "Schools of Character" would be named as the winners of the Ninth Annual Business Week Awards for Instructional Innovation. With support from the John Templeton Foundation, CEP invited 100 individuals and organizations to nominate schools. Boston University’s Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character (CAEC), founded and directed by Dr. Kevin Ryan, helped CEP study the nominees and select 10 winners for recognition and a $2,000 grant. CAEC continued to provide vital strategic support during the next two years of the program, and Templeton has supported the program financially throughout its ten years and continues to enable its expansion.

In the following year, under the direction of executive director Esther Schaeffer and program director Kathy Beland, CEP gave the program its current structure. CEP and CAEC selected and visited 26 Finalists from a pool of 108 applicants. CEP Board member Diane Berreth took on the enormous challenge of chairing the first Blue Ribbon Panel, which selected the 1999 Winners.

During each year that has followed, more and more talented individuals with a passion for character education, as well as schools and organizations with a concern for civic virtue, have become involved in the NSOC process, enriching it with their experience and helping it to grow. In 2000, UAW–GM became a supporter of the program, and in that same year, current program director Janice Stoodley came on board as senior program coordinator. Having been with CEP longer than any other staff member, she has managed the program’s tremendous growth and witnessed the ever-increasing level of competition. “In 2007, the Blue Ribbon Panel made its toughest choices ever,” says Stoodley. Promising Practices, added to the program in 2000, provide another example of the program’s growth. CEP made 37 Promising Practices awards that year, while 130 are being conferred in 2007. Once people become involved with NSOC, they frequently stay involved, revealing their love of the program and their belief in its impact. After leaving the CEP staff, for example, Beland continued to be a site visitor and currently chairs the Blue Ribbon Panel. Each year, the site visitors—many of them from winning schools and districts—describe their visits to the Finalists as a highlight of their year. “Finalists almost universally celebrate the process of strategically working to improve their character education initiative,” states Dr. David Wangaard, a site visitor each year since 1998.

Over the span of a single decade, the NSOC awards program has touched the lives of many individuals and institutions beyond those most closely associated with it. As it has grown, countless school communities have been challenged by the application process itself to undertake high-quality character education initiatives that work. Former CEP Board member Dr. Eileen Santiago, principal of Thomas A. Edison School in Port Chester, New York, a 2003 Winner, notes that the Eleven Principles “formed the basis of Edison’s school renewal and improvement efforts 10 years ago and continues to guide our work. The awards program, including its rigorous requirement of critical self-examination, served as an important source of validation and recognition for us.”

“NSOC has changed the character education landscape nationally over the last 10 years. Now we can all see what works,” reflects Berreth. The NSOC program continues to expand: through a tiered approach—with states giving State Schools of Character awards—and through an increased grant award to NSOC Winners to expand their outreach efforts. After looking back at the impact of the last decade, one can only be enthusiastic about what the next 10 years will bring.

The Numbers

NUMBER OF STATES WITH NATIONAL SCHOOLS OF CHARACTER: 30
STATE WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF NSOC: California (12 NSOC)
The 2007 National Schools of Character Awards

“We all need models of what works. NSOC schools provide a vision of the possible in developing young people of character.”

—Diane Berreth, CEP Board Member

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) administers the prestigious National Schools of Character (NSOC) awards program to provide educators and school communities throughout the nation with a variety of models of effective character education. Character education is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important, agreed-upon core ethical values. To be effective, character education must include the entire school community and must permeate the entire school curriculum and culture. The 10 public and private schools and school districts (K–12) named by CEP each year as National Schools (or Districts) of Character are models of this comprehensive, proactive approach. NSOC serve as exemplars and mentors to other schools and districts. To help them serve in this ambassadorial role, each winning school or district receives a grant. Thanks to the generous support of the flagship donor, the John Templeton Foundation, as well as the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources, the Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation, and Lockheed Martin Corporation, the 2007 grants are, for the first time ever, in the amount of $20,000. Half of the grant is to be used by the winners to enhance their own programs, and half for mentoring and outreach to other educators. This larger grant will enable the NSOC to provide targeted staff development training and follow-up mentoring to a greater degree than in the past.

The program’s outstanding donors’ support has also enabled CEP to create a tiered approach to the NSOC awards, with participating states offering State Schools of Character (SSOC) awards as a preliminary step to the national competition (see related article on pages 71–73). Expanding the scope of the program in this way increased the number of schools and districts applying for the award and made 2007 the most competitive year for the NSOC program thus far. The SSOC competitions created the added benefit of strengthening the local networks of character educators in the participating states.

Application Process

Schools that apply for the NSOC award repeatedly attest that while the rigorous application process can be quite daunting, it is also incredibly beneficial. By design, the NSOC application process affords all applicants an opportunity to conduct a thorough self-assessment of their character education programs and receive constructive feedback. The goal of the NSOC application process is not only to identify exemplary schools and districts, but also to help strengthen the character education programs of all that apply.

The document that guides both an applicant’s self-assessment and CEP’s evaluation of all NSOC applications is CEP’s Character Education Quality Standards. The Quality Standards are derived from CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, the premier document that characterizes excellence in character education. Both documents are available free of charge on CEP’s Web site. A school that is new to character education can use the Quality Standards to design a comprehensive and effective program that will address each of the Eleven Principles. CEP encourages schools with character education initiatives already in place to use the Quality Standards to assess the effectiveness of their current efforts and devise ways of improving their programs.

Before completing an NSOC application, schools and districts are asked to use the Quality Standards document to pre-assess their character education initiatives. For many prospective applicants, this assessment confirms their confidence in their program and forms the foundation and structure of their application. For others, examining their efforts in light of the Quality Standards is the

Is your school or district ready to serve as a model for others? Consider applying for the NSOC award. Visit www.character.org for details and a variety of resources for applicants.
beginning of a planning process designed to strengthen their program. Once a school or district that has been engaged in character education for at least three years (four years for districts) decides they are ready to apply for the NSOC award and serve as a model for others, they complete and submit the application in early December to either their state sponsor (if their state is an SSOC participant) or CEP. (The NSOC and SSOC applications are identical.) The application includes a 7-page narrative that explains how the applicant’s character education program exemplifies the Eleven Principles. In addition, applicants submit a 25-page portfolio of materials that support the narrative and provide specific evidence of their program’s success.

**Selection Process**

Using the *Quality Standards* document, participating states and CEP evaluators screen the applications. States send their strongest applicants on to the national competition. CEP then narrows the pool of state and national applicants to approximately 25 national Finalists. In evaluating districts, reviewers also use CEP’s *Guidelines for School Districts in Fostering Character Education*. CEP then selects and trains a team of site visitors—experts in the field of character education—to visit the Finalists. In two-person teams, they visit each school for one day (two days for districts), during which they conduct in-depth interviews with administrators; meet with parents, staff, and students; and spend several hours observing classroom practices and general school operations.

CEP’s *Blue Ribbon Panel* is then responsible for making the final selection of the National Schools of Character award winners. The panel makes its decisions during a deliberative process after studying the applications and site-visit reports. The 2007 panel was composed of seven noted professionals, all of whom are experts in the field of character education (see Acknowledgments on inside front cover).

This year’s Winners, while diverse, share a common commitment to forming young people of good character through an emphasis on shared ethical values. They offer their students many opportunities to serve others, enriching their own lives in the process. Never giving up on their students, caring teachers at these winning schools challenge their students to excel both academically and morally, and they succeed. These schools intentionally develop both the moral and performance character of their students, using positive discipline techniques and without resorting to extrinsic rewards. By working together, these schools have, without exception, shaped caring communities where students thrive. To see how they have accomplished this, read their stories—as well as those of the other 15 Finalists—on the pages that follow.

**REFERENCES**


What Is a National School of Character?

Every year for ten years now (including 2007), CEP has selected approximately ten schools and districts as National Schools of Character that serve as models of excellence for other schools across the United States. The three elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, three mixed-level schools, and one school district that have been designated as the 2007 National Schools of Character exemplify CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, but each one is unique in that it has tailored its plan to the population it serves. By actualizing the Eleven Principles in remarkable ways, the 2007 National Schools of Character stand out as beacons of excellence.

The 2007 National Schools of Character: Actualizing the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education

**PRINCIPLE 1: Promotes core ethical values.** Every 2007 National School of Character clearly defines and promotes its core ethical values. However, three schools that were founded in the past dozen years intentionally constructed their educational foundation on ethical values even before the schools opened.

Birmingham Covington School used the Three E’s (Valuing Education, Each Other, and the Environment) as the school’s moral compass and touchstone. Newport Mill Middle School created the slogan Tiger Pride to give expression to its ethical values: respect, responsibility, caring, sportsmanship, and effort.

Skyview Elementary School, realizing that it needed a powerful bonding element in establishing a new school that was replacing an older, revered school, followed Boyer’s Basic School philosophy to achieve academic and behavioral success by accenting four “connections”: community, climate, curriculum, and character.

**PRINCIPLE 2: Defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.** From its humble beginnings as a class unit in 1997 to inculcate compassion, the character education initiative of Memorial Middle School has grown phenomenally by adopting a multi-dimensional approach to character building. The school’s Character Cavalcade assembly kicks off its Celebrate Character program, which finds curricular life in three interconnected language arts units. Two private schools, Pine Point School and Sacred Hearts Academy, use service learning as a key strategy in their rigorous academic programs that weave character education into the curricula on a daily basis.

**PRINCIPLE 3: Uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach.** In each National School of Character, character building is intrinsic to the mission of the school or district. Pinellas County Schools, home to 155,000 students, has been in the business of character education since 1995. Its Commitment to Character (C2C) program serves as the framework of a comprehensive character education initiative, replete with rich professional development, that gives each of its 145 schools autonomy in deciding implementation.

Radix Elementary School has assessed and revised its character education program many times. Among the many innovations made by its teachers are grade-specific manuals that contain engaging lessons on character and a rubric for evaluating student understanding of character through writing prompts.

**PRINCIPLE 4: Creates a caring school community.** Winning schools promote a culture of caring in many innovative ways. Newport Mill really lives up to the motivational messages posted in the school: *This is important, You can do it, and I won’t give up on you.* Staff members are so committed to the philosophy of “not giving up” on their students that they call many students in the morning before school to encourage them to attend, and accommodate the needs of students who arrive at the building at 6:15 a.m. because of their parents’ schedules. At Boys Town High School, school personnel—administrators, therapeutic and clinical directors, support services staff, teachers, and family-teachers—work together as one unit to help the students, most of whom have already failed at three placements. Not surprisingly, graduates of this school attribute the beginning of their “turn-around” to their stay at Boys Town.

**PRINCIPLE 5: Provides opportunities for moral action.** Service learning is an effective instructional method that fosters student awareness of their responsibility to society. A National Service-Learning Leader School since 2001, Sacred Hearts considers community service to be a vital part of quality education. Students in the lower school do service projects as a class; every student in grades 7–12 fulfills a minimum of 25 hours of community service each year. Last year, Academy students gave over 60,000 hours of service. Educating students so they can change the world...
also characterizes the mission of Pine Point. Follow-up studies of Pine Point alumni show that a high percentage of them pursue interests that are service oriented, such as working in speech pathology in Central America, developing village infrastructure in rural China, and teaching young children in the favelas of Brazil.

**PRINCIPLE 6: Includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum.** All National Schools of Character have high expectations for their students, and each school uses strategies to include all learners. Birmingham Covington uses its emphasis on science and technology as a basis for exploration of ethical dilemmas. All students must write public policy papers in which they take moral stands and defend their views, based on core democratic values.

Fairbrook Elementary School promotes a “full inclusion” policy for its special needs population, which constitutes 16.4 percent of the student body; the school has no self-contained classrooms, and students with special needs are fully integrated into all aspects of the school curriculum, daily activities, and extracurricular life. Sacred Hearts provides opportunities for its all-female student body to excel in the traditionally male bastions of math, science, and technology.

**PRINCIPLE 7: Develops students’ self-motivation.** Many National Schools of Character work to eliminate extrinsic rewards by accenting intrinsic motivation. Radix intentionally addressed this concern last year by systematically eliminating extrinsic rewards. Students at Pine Point have taken the lead and formed GIVE, a service organization so effective that it received a state award for philanthropy. Graduates of Boys Town embrace the philosophy of service to others long after graduating. Follow-up studies find them returning to the organization to help other boys and girls, and also exceeding the national profile in terms of charity work.

**PRINCIPLE 8: Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community.** Effective professional development is a hallmark of all winning schools. Every summer, more than 300 teachers in Pinellas County flock to Character Camp, an innovative two-day immersion in the best practices in character education which is open to administrators, teachers, support staff, and community members. In addition to being active learners of character-building strategies, Birmingham Covington teachers also model the qualities they are trying to instill. When BCS families are in crisis, they often turn to school staff, who are known to have cleaned houses, prepared meals, purchased groceries, donated food and clothing, and even painted rooms to help those in need.

**PRINCIPLE 9: Fosters shared leadership and long-range support.** All winning schools involve everyone—administration, staff, students, and the community. Memorial has sustained ten years of effective character-building—despite the turnover of principals—because of an industrious core team, led by teachers and representing all members of the community. Pinellas County, realizing that student behavior on the 713 buses that are used daily could constitute a major problem, provided training in character education for all bus drivers. This practice has resulted in “a remarkable decrease in bus behavior referrals, by 64 percent.”

**PRINCIPLE 10: Engages families and community members as partners.** All successful character education programs have formed powerful partnerships with parents and community organizations. Even before Skyview opened, teachers visited the homes of prospective students to allay the fears of students and parents. Four for Fairbrook is the PTO slogan at Fairbrook, which challenges each parent to volunteer four hours of service to the school, through work done either on site or from their home. In the 2006–07 school year, parents volunteered over 4,500 hours.

Pinellas County has actively courted organizations to help in the character education of its students. The district reports that 6,352 school-based partnerships and nearly 30,000 volunteers enriched the efforts of the district’s schools in 2006–07.

**PRINCIPLE 11: Assesses the character education initiative.** All winning schools have systematically assessed their efforts through surveys, disciplinary and attendance statistics, and examination of academic performance. An interesting feature this year is the emergence of longitudinal studies that compare significant data over a period of several years. A sixteen-year follow-up study (2006) of Boys Town graduates points to positive outcomes—in adulthood—of students who stayed at the facility for 18 months or longer. Radix, in a five-year longitudinal study by Rowan University, has found significant positive changes in school culture and an increase in student and family involvement in educational decision-making. At Memorial, a six-year longitudinal study reveals a steadily decreasing rate of student absenteeism, tardiness, and suspensions. The Proof Is in the Data sidebars in the articles on the individual NSOC winners provide cogent evidence that the character education revolution has indeed reaped remarkable results.
Positively Influencing Our Ever-Changing World

From its beginning, Birmingham Covington School set out with an ambitious mission in mind for its graduates: to positively influence our ever-changing world. Now, twelve years later, this science and technology magnet school, through its successful blending of academics with character, has teachers, parents, and community agreeing that it is achieving that goal.

Those brilliant science and technology whizzes that inhabit the world of television forensics always solve complex crimes but consistently lack one element: a human touch. The students at Birmingham Covington School (BCS), a magnet school for science and technology located in picturesque Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, clearly disprove that stereotype. In fact, they have demonstrated extraordinary caring and compassion as they follow their school’s moral compass and touchstone, the Three E’s: Valuing Education, Each Other, and the Environment.

Principal Dale Truding, who has been at the school’s helm since the beginning, is a visionary who wisely convened a committee of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, even before the school opened, to define its mission. From the ensuing educational research, focus groups, and surveys, there emerged two core goals: to treat each child with dignity and respect and to challenge all students. These goals have shaped the education of BCS students for a dozen fruitful years, and the Three E’s reinforce the Birmingham district’s core values: positive attitude, honesty and integrity, respect and kindness, and responsibility and accountability.

“Peeling the Onion” of Character Education

Character education is not a program at Birmingham Covington; it is an integral part of the school’s structure, culture, curriculum, and activities. Counselor Tamra Nast, who has worked at the school from its first days, compares character education to peeling an onion: “You have to peel the onion to see all the layers; it’s not a separate curriculum—it’s infused into all we do.”

A democratic and innovative spirit prevails in this open and inviting school in which students are selected by straight lottery from a long waiting list. Unlike traditional schools, BCS organizes its classes into two-year cycles: grades three and four, five and six, and seven and eight. Students remain with the same teachers for two years, allowing for personalized attention, consistency, and the opportunity to develop close relationships. This flexible academic cycle develops both empathy and leadership in students, two qualities that demonstrate what community organizer Sue Reempeyer calls “the special ability of BCS to bring out the best in people.”
As a school that draws students from all over the district, BCS has created structures that foster team building and caring. For example, fourth graders serve as mentors to the third graders, answering the newcomers’ questions and easing their transition to a new school. “Bus families” also promote harmony and friendships. At first, parents were concerned that younger children would be riding the bus with middle school students, but the bus family concept has been successful, with the older students assuming responsibility for the little ones.

According to Robert Glass, director of instruction for Birmingham Public Schools, “BCS uses the Three E’s as a basis for all of its initiatives. Its norms and core beliefs carry them through everything they do.” In the main lobby and in every classroom, the touchstone appears as a tangible reminder of the school’s goal for students and staff. Students can readily explain the significance of the design. Kendall, a fifth grader, is quick to point out that “the symbol for the Three E’s shows a right angle that represents doing the right thing and a compass pointing north to signify going in the right direction.” Agreeing that “doing the right thing” should extend to all aspects of life, fellow fifth grader Matthew adds that “the Three E’s are good to use in and outside school.”

Faculty as Learners, Facilitators, and Role Models

“It is more challenging to teach at BCS than in most other schools,” states Truding. “Teachers work in teams, and they must compromise and collaborate. They must also believe in the concept of ‘customer service,’ which is a paradigm shift in education.” The warm and supportive culture at BCS more than balances the hard work involved for the teachers, who consistently acknowledge that their voices mean something here. Counselor Brian Flatter says, “When you make suggestions in other schools, the response is often, ‘You can’t.’ The response here is, ‘You can.’”

To help students value their education, the faculty sets high academic standards. Staff members are also learners in professional learning communities; they discuss ways to interact with students, model appropriate behaviors, and create a climate of respect and trust. Through numerous methods of differentiating instruction (grouping, using different rubrics, employing challenge pacing, and facilitating individual goal-setting), staff members foster academic success. The school also uses its emphasis on science and technology as a basis for exploration of ethical dilemmas. All students must write public policy papers in which they take moral stands and defend their views, based on core democratic values. Assignments are never hum-drum, according to Emily, a seventh grader. “Students have a chance to lead the lesson, and every day is different.” Emily continues, “In math, for example, instead of a boring lesson on measurements and motion, we had a chance to build a miniature plane.”

In addition to gaining a reputation for promoting academic excellence, Birmingham Covington teachers also model the character qualities they are trying to instill in their students. When BCS families

The Proof Is in the Data

How we know character education is working at Birmingham Covington School:

- The 2006 Annual Student Character Education Survey gives ratings of 91 to 95 percent on school safety, faculty caring and modeling of good character, and treating one another with respect.
- The 2006 Parent Exit Survey at the end of eighth grade gives education at BCS a rating of 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.
- 98 percent of our students return each year, indicating the positive effect of individualized attention.
- Consistently, our seventh- and eighth-grade Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores are the highest in the district.
- The number of students on the waiting list to attend BCS increases each year, usually in the 150–250 range.
- The number of students requiring peer help to solve problems decreased by 60 percent over the last five years, because of students’ abilities to utilize multiple strategies to solve problems.
- Attendance rates are excellent, and disciplinary referrals are declining.
are in crisis, they often turn to staff members for assistance. Among the many acts performed by the staff are cleaning houses, preparing meals, purchasing groceries, donating food and clothing, and even painting a room. It is not surprising, then, that the students are also enthusiastic about helping others. Each summer the seventh and eighth graders research and design their own community-service projects, and every other year all BCS students vote on one of these projects to be adopted school wide.

Student Voice
Nast says, “The sky’s the limit at BCS. Kids are an important part of this wide-open process that encourages individual thinking and willingness to take risks.”

Many students interviewed indicate that the feeling of safety allows them to express opinions openly and to offer suggestions. For example, when Emily and some friends observed that teasing was occurring among sixth-grade girls, their proposal for a workshop to address the issue soon became a reality.

John Hoeffler, the retiring superintendent of Birmingham Public Schools, points out that Birmingham Covington is a school that has a “different climate, one that has been thought out very carefully.” Hoeffler continues, “Kids know what they’re doing and why they are doing it, and can articulate what they are experiencing in the learning process.” By encouraging critical thinking, problem solving, and open dialogue in the classroom, the teachers promote higher-order learning. Class meetings serve as an important vehicle for students to express views and settle differences. Student Ambassadors play welcoming roles in the annual Open House for prospective students, where they serve as guides for the potential students and their families and also answer questions.

The close bond that connects students with BCS is evident at the annual Senior Breakfast to which graduating high school seniors are invited. Reepmeyer says that “a special camaraderie exists among those who attended BCS, a close family connection.”

Meeting the Needs of All Students
The faculty works actively and collectively to address the needs of all students, paying close attention to those who are struggling. Nast and Flatter conduct Support Team meetings to consider the needs of all students, because “kids are at the center of everything we do.”

Birmingham Covington uses assessment effectively in determining new directions. It evaluates its programs through surveys, focus groups, and report-card/progress-report data; it also uses the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education to determine areas where improvement is needed. For example, five years ago the school added a course—Organizational Strategies—in response to faculty input that some students needed additional coaching in responsibility and accountability. The course, which is still being offered, has proved to be quite successful, according to report-card data. Also, in the 2006–07 school year, when data collected from the progress reports and report cards of seventh and eighth graders revealed that a disproportionate number of them had not handed in assignments, the school set up the Success Center, a place where students are sent during lunch to work quietly and catch up. Assistant principal Hal Heard praises this
“non-negotiable lunch,” which is staffed by a teacher who provides academic help and encouragement. Last year, the number of students in the targeted grades who received help in the Success Center dwindled to fewer than 10 out of the original 45 who had a comment of “missing assignments” on their report cards.

Again and again, parents who are interviewed say that the individual attention given to each student and the policy of individual goal setting has fostered success. One mother of a sixth grader and two fourth graders says that her son was able to achieve success because of the positive and caring way in which the school handled his learning and behavioral issues. Also, having just completed chemotherapy for breast cancer, the mother gained spiritual strength from the outpouring of compassion shown by the school and the kindness extended by the staff to her children.

Empowering Parents
Parents feel greatly empowered by their relationships with the school. The principal meets with parents at monthly lunches to listen to their concerns and to engage in honest and open dialogue. Parent Rich Tropea, an original board member of the Proud Dads (a 2005 Promising Practice), an organization at the school that gets fathers involved in sports, academics, and music activities, observes that he is “deeply touched by the growth of his children” at the school. Lori Soifer, a parent who is currently an elected School Board member and a participant in the district’s Character Education Steering Committee, credits BCS with helping her develop the confidence to run for office. She remembers that when her children first enrolled in the school, she was very quiet; the school’s caring environment empowered her to speak out and to work to make a difference in the lives of children across the district.

“All eleven standing committees of the PTSA are filled, a testament to the close commitment the parents have to the school,” states PTSA president Susan Gwizdz, the mother of four children, all of whom attended BCS. Gwizdz also believes that the school has contributed greatly to her own children’s “development into people with strong moral character with an internal compass that has kept them on a healthy and positive track.”

New Directions
Since assessments always provide the impetus for making changes, Truding says the school will look at results of parent/student/staff climate surveys as well as report cards and progress reports to determine its next steps. Also, the administrators will take into account issues or suggestions from the Faculty Advisory Committee, the PTSA Management Team, and the Lunch with the Principal. The school does have plans for expanding service learning to the younger grades and for pursuing environmental causes in designing such projects. Since student voice is so important at BCS, the students naturally will have active roles in proposing, designing, and implementing the projects.

When asked to summarize character education at Birmingham Covington, Truding responds, “Character education does not happen on a bookmark, on a poster, or on letterhead. Character education is an integral part of the tapestry of BCS. It is interwoven into each and every encounter between students, staff, and parents, as well as in each decision they make.”

Reference
Boys Town High School

Bringing Help, Healing, and Hope

Every old-time-film buff knows the story of Boys Town, the famed classic starring Spencer Tracy as the spirited Father Flanagan, who believed “there is no such thing as a bad boy.” Now, 90 years after the priest founded Boys Town, a home for troubled boys in rural Nebraska, his dream lives on at Girls and Boys Town, where at-risk students are becoming productive citizens, transforming their own lives, and extending help to others.

Thoughtful reflection is a constant at Girls and Boys Town. And in no tradition is it more prominent than at the high school baccalaureate ceremony. Granted, all the conventional trappings of graduation are there—the formal procession, the stirring strains of Pomp and Circumstance, the stately magnificence of Dowd Chapel—but missing are the usual platitudes about commencement as the “beginning of a new life.” In their stead are the graduates’ personal reflections. Always honest and often wrenching, these reflections attribute the “beginning” of their new lives to their stay at Girls and Boys Town.

Brad, who admits he was “tricked into coming here,” thanks Girls and Boys Town for teaching him “how to be a real man” and for taking care of his sister “when she was sick with cancer.” Anca, who was abandoned by her parents, is grateful to her family-teachers, Mac and Kerry Stewart, who showed her “what love is all about.” Tiffany, who recalls that she “would turn to drugs and alcohol” to ease her emotional pain, explains how the school helped her deal with the deaths of her mother and father.

Loneliness, fear of reaching out, and disappointment with themselves and others are negative feelings that marked the students’ days before they came here. Brian, who says “I had no direction to go but down,” now has “the motivation and the means to strive to go further … beyond all expectations.” Amanda, who survived the hardship of her mother being in a coma, reflects, “What Girls and Boys Town has done for me is to help me learn to trust again. It has helped me dream a dream and be able to live that dream.” These reflections, representing just a small part of the graduates’ testimonials, illustrate the bonding that occurs here, a bonding so powerful that it has changed lives.

Those in Need of Healing

When Father Edward Flanagan set out in 1917 to establish a home for troubled boys, first in a rented Omaha house and later in the larger Overlook Farm, he clearly was a man with an extraordinary vision. Nine decades later, his vision—to bring help, healing, and hope—is still influencing others; the organization, now called Girls and Boys Town (girls were admitted in 1979), is America’s largest privately funded organization serving severely at-risk, abused, abandoned, and neglected children. Although it has been co-ed for more than a quarter of a century, the high school itself is still called Boys Town High School, because it is located in the village of Boys Town. It is virtually impossible to consider the high school as distinct from the Residential Therapeutic Center which surrounds it—physically and philosophically—since school administrators, therapeutic and clinical directors, support services staff, teachers, and family-teachers work together as one unit to help the students. Girls and Boys Town (GBT) is the name of the entire complex.

Father Flanagan may have believed that “there is
no such thing as a bad boy,” but many of the agencies that refer students to Boys Town seem to think otherwise. According to Bob Gehringer, the superintendent of schools and high school principal, students who arrive at GBT generally have already failed in three placements. Statistically, 51 percent of them have aggression problems; 27 percent experience depression; 42 percent have been physically and/or sexually abused, or suffer from neglect or abandonment; 64 percent have had problems in school; 47 percent have a history of substance abuse; 36 percent are out of parental control; and 51 percent have prior arrests.

A visitor, aware of the students’ histories, might expect to find them heavily tattooed, sporting spiked purple hair and multiple body piercings. However, just the opposite is true. Students, dressed appropriately, are friendly, happy, outgoing, and quite articulate about themselves and about the positive impact that GBT has had on their lives. It is not unusual for students to come up to visitors, introduce themselves, welcome them, and shake hands. All students live in the picturesque village of Boys Town, in Tudor-style homes run by family-teachers who act as counselors and surrogate parents. Rob Wright and his wife find their role as family-teachers challenging but rewarding: “Running a home with eight boys is not easy, but in many ways it is an ideal set-up. Just think … the home and the school being absolutely supportive of each other.” Although the family-teachers serve as parents for the children during their stay, GBT includes biological parents in their efforts and works on plans for eventual reunification whenever feasible. Parents and relatives complete Common Sense Parenting classes and study with the family-teachers and clinical consultants to learn skills they need in order to help their children become successful upon returning home.

Planting the Seeds of Recovery
The transformation from rebellious youth to productive citizens is not an easy journey; it requires great effort on the part of everyone. “When the kids come here, most of them are angry,” says orientation director Maciej Novak. Athletic director Brent Robinson joins in, “They enter without socially acceptable values, attitudes, and behaviors, because they have not learned them.” The first step is a two-day training in basic social skills that breaks down expectations behaviorally and teaches the students the requisite skills—such as accepting criticism, following instructions, greeting others, accepting compliments, having a conversation, asking for help, and listening. Students are not permitted to advance to the next level unless they show understanding of appropriate behavior.

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“From the very nature of our mission,” Gehringer says, “our school is steeped in character education.” The GBT Education Model, rooted in the principles of applied behavioral analysis and social learning, is integrated into the entire school day.

The Proof Is in the Data
How we know character education is working at Boys Town High School:

- A 16-year longitudinal follow-up study (2006) indicates that the percentage of GBT youth who have positive outcomes in adulthood is consistent with the percentage for the U.S. population at large.
- The study showed that the longer a student stayed in the program (18 months or more), the more positive the long-term results.
- The group that received care for 18 months or longer was similar to the national norm in terms of completing high school or pursuing higher education, not being involved in domestic abuse, and being currently married; they exceeded the national norm in terms of involvement with their children.
- The group that received care for 18 months or longer exceeded or was similar to the national norm in terms of well-being, indicated by emotional support, positive mental health, and life satisfaction.
- Over 90 percent of students who spend at least 18 months at Boys Town graduate from high school, compared to rates of 25–50 percent among students who qualified for admission here but did not come.
- The school met Adequate Yearly Progress goals.
- The GBT National Data Base records positive growth in areas such as welfare, safety, and consumer (youth and family) satisfaction.
- Student grades, discipline, and attendance have improved.
Basically, it involves four main tenets: to monitor one’s feelings, to control impulses, to empathize with others, and to delay gratification. Interviews with graduating seniors show how the model has helped them. Erin comments that she learned to make wiser choices: “Before Boys Town, I always hung around with a bad crowd. Boys Town has taught me to choose my friends wisely.” Connor adds how he has gained empathy for those less fortunate, saying, “I have gained respect for all of the kids who are here. We all are getting better together.”

Don Bader, religion department and community services chair, says, “Character education has always been implicit at Boys Town. Adding Character Counts eight years ago made it explicit. It dovetails with the Education Model.” Each of the six pillars—respect, trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, caring, and citizenship—is broken down into behavioral terms so students can understand concretely “what it looks like and what it sounds like.” Athletic coach Kevin Kush adds, “Many of these kids just don’t know the basic rules of life. We make it simple for them.”

Learning to Improve Oneself and Help Others

All community members are trained and retrained in techniques for implementation of the Education Model in conjunction with Character Counts. This includes all stakeholders, all of whom have equal value: family-teachers, administration, faculty, plumbers, cafeteria workers, biological parents, and students. Additionally, all 76 high school staff members receive training in The Well-Managed Classroom, a program that provides a sound theoretical foundation for classroom management as well as techniques for addressing diverse student needs.

Along with the expected academic and elective courses, the high school offers many hands-on courses that often fuse vocational training with service. For example, the Girls and Boys Town Print Shop published the Youth Information Book for members of the community. Other courses, such as Living without Chemicals, Journey of Love 1, and Journey of Love 2, address the students’ emotional needs and dependency issues. A junior class, Employability Skills, provides opportunities for students to develop life plans through aptitude and skill assessment, personal research, and individual counseling. Among the more popular offerings, such as computer labs and ROTC training, is one in vocal music—which, in part, explains the excellence of the Boys Town Choir.

Giving service joyfully to others is also an integral part of the learning process. “A large component of our kids’ emotional and social healing process is to serve others in need,” says Bader, who organizes many service opportunities. The Girls and Boys Town motto, He ain’t heavy, Father...he’s m’ brother, comes from the famed Two Brothers statue that depicts a boy carrying his younger brother on his back. Standing between the campus Catholic and Protestant chapels, the statue symbolizes the three-fold emphasis on inclusion of all, compassion for everyone, and support by one’s peers. Special Olympics communications director Steve Neesman points out that the Boys Town girls and boys always make sure that the disabled students feel good about themselves: “For these four hours, our athletes feel normal. They don’t stand out in a crowd. You don’t know how much that means to our athletes and their parents.”

Athletics and Self-Government: Pathways to Recovery

Kush firmly believes that “athletics give you a chance to be proud of what you’re doing.” He admits that “teaching these kids social skills and the rules of good sportsmanship isn’t easy,” but once his players have internalized the rules, they play by them consistently. For example, when the football team trounced West Point–Beemer in a crushing 45–0 victory, Kush hardly expected to hear from the opponents. Yet, shortly after the game, their coach e-mailed him, complimenting the Boys Town team for its good manners and impeccable deportment. “These things just don’t happen in other schools,” remarks the coach. Robinson points out that Boys Town has won the Nebraska state Basketball Sportsmanship Award for the last two years, and the students seem prouder of this than of winning the Nebraska state basketball championship last year.

Equally enthusiastic about the way athletics have been a pathway to recovery is Mary Anderson, the high school’s assistant principal and athletic coach. “Most of these girls have not been athletes, and it’s a new experience for them.” One of the most poignant stories that Anderson tells is of Kari, a student who managed to make States in her first year of track participation and suddenly found herself in the limelight.

2007 WINNERS

GBT students help rangers clear out invasive plant species at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge.
“Coach, all my life I never thought I could do anything right. I lived in darkness,” says Kari. “Thank you for giving me fifteen minutes of light.”

The self-government tradition also serves as an important tool for developing character. Ask viewers to name an unforgettable scene in the Boys Town film, and an obvious choice is the turn-around of the incorrigible Whitey Marsh, who becomes the mayor of Boys Town. Jordan, the present mayor, says that, like Whitey, he too has changed since his arrival in his sophomore year. Having run away from home several times, he describes himself as “distrustful” and “coming to GBT with his guard up.” Once he began to let others in, he started to change, he listened to authority and peers, and his grades improved. As mayor, Jordan serves as the Student Ambassador, Student Council president, and the chief spokesperson for the students. But it is not just the mayor who has a leadership role. From the Citizenship Ceremony at which every new child is “sworn in” as a citizen, the students are aware they can contribute to “their” town. Many students also demonstrate leadership skills by serving on the Student Council, assuming duties in their homes, assisting in service projects, and participating in caucus discussions. Jacqueline, who arrived as “a stubborn fourteen-year-old who didn’t like help from anyone,” shares that her peers and her GBT family helped her to discover that she “can be a strong leader and accomplish much.”

Continuing to Flourish through Community Outreach

Father Flanagan’s mission, to change the way America cares for her children and families, flourishes today far beyond his dreams. Girls and Boys Town programs now extend to 19 sites in 15 states and the District of Columbia, each of which participates in the Outreach program and implements the Education Model. A training division exists, and staff travel nationally to provide workshops on a host of topics, from classroom management to developing parenting skills. Girls and Boys Town stands out as the most successful rehabilitation center for severely troubled youth in the nation; a sixteen-year longitudinal follow-up study indicates that significant numbers of GBT youth have positive outcomes in adulthood.

In an interview with faculty members to pinpoint the magic ingredient for that success, an interesting phenomenon took place: one by one, the speakers unwittingly started to talk about the way that GBT had positively affected their own lives. Apparently, its transformational powers are contagious. Gehringer recalls an incident at his own high school reunion, where he met a man whose son had been successfully rehabilitated at GBT. The man thanked Gehringer, not only for saving his boy but also for teaching him how to be a better parent.

REFERENCES


FOR MORE INFORMATION

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PRINCIPAL’S BEST PICKS:
Robert Gehringer

TWO WORDS TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL: safe and supportive

CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM/PROJECT OF WHICH YOU ARE MOST PROUD: our students sharing their stories with others, to show that there is hope for even the most severely troubled

BEST PROOF THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION CHANGES SCHOOL CLIMATE: success stories of “throwaway kids” who return to us and tell us about their changed lives

EVIDENCE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION HAS ENHANCED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: the fact that over 90 percent of students who spend at least 18 months at Boys Town graduate from high school, compared to rates of 25–50 percent among students who qualified for admission here but did not come; improved grades for kids who have never been successful in school

WORDS OF WISDOM TO A NEWCOMER IN CHARACTER EDUCATION: Keep it simple, and model what you teach.
A Great Place to Live and Learn

Some schools can boast that the quality of their educational program has merited them a state-wide or national reputation for excellence, but Fairbrook Elementary School can claim international distinction. When a Beavercreek realtor asked a young couple purchasing a home why they had selected that neighborhood, the response was immediate: “Oh, we wanted our children to go to Fairbrook School. We heard all about it in Germany.”

No one can dispute that a high rate of student mobility tends to lower a school’s academic performance, and yet the inventive Fairbrook School, located close to Wright–Patterson Air Force Base, regards its changing student population as an asset. With an annual mobility rate of 10–15 percent, the school takes deliberate steps to be a safe, caring, and welcoming home to newcomers and permanent residents. As a result, Air Force personnel stationed throughout the world often tell those going back home, “Just make sure your kids attend Fairbrook.”

Fairbrook has a knack for transforming what other schools deem as obstacles into pathways to success. For example, it promotes a “full inclusion” policy for its special needs population, which constitutes 16.4 percent of the student body. Highly regarded in the Beavercreek district for its inclusive model, the school has no self-contained classrooms, and students with special needs are fully integrated into all aspects of the school curriculum, daily activities, and extra-curricular life. Rated “excellent” for seven years in a row by the Ohio Department of Education for consistently high student performance on state standardized tests, Fairbrook fulfills its motto: A Great Place to Live and Learn.

First Steps

Fourth-grade teacher Barbara Rhea, a leader in the school’s character education program, traces its roots to 1992, when growing disciplinary incidents prompted the school to explore new ways of improving school culture. With Linda Beaver as its new motivating principal, Fairbrook adopted a conflict resolution and peer mediation program. The core team attended in-state conferences on character education as well as CEP’s annual National Forums on Character Education. The result: a home-grown program that focuses on six life skills (adapted from the six pillars of Character Counts): respect, citizenship, caring, fairness, trustworthiness, and responsibility. Principal Deron Schwieterman, who has headed the school for the last three years, points out that “the school takes deliberate and effective steps to help students acquire and develop these core values through the processes of class meetings, curricular connections, and Dens.”

Fairbrook’s character education program has evolved during its 15 years, affecting the way that students behave, learn, and perceive their roles in life. Fifth-grade teacher Ann Unverferth says, “In my 27 years of teaching at Fairbrook, I have witnessed an amazing transformation in the climate of the building.” Schwieterman adds, “Transforming
the climate of a school does not happen overnight. . . . An effective character education initiative is demonstrated through the little things we do in our school each day. It is the way we treat each other, the language we use to solve conflict, and the vision we share of working in a caring learning community.” Rhea sums up the spirit of Fairbrook: “I should have retired two years ago, but I’m still here because it’s such a pleasure to teach in this school.”

The faculty is not unaware of certain ironies that accompany the success of their program. The need for peer mediation, the original basis for character education, is practically non-existent these days, because the students have internalized and utilized the life skills. Also, the character education team that at one time blanketed conferences in its search for effective strategies now finds itself the recipient of requests to train staff in the nearby towns of Kettering, Dayton, and Trotwood.

The Character Education Program in Action

The school grounds, hallways, ceiling tiles, hall signs, and classroom bulletin boards—every available location serves as a place for publicizing the life skills. Where those skills are most apparent, however, is in the behavior of the students and staff, whose courteous and caring manner toward one another provides the real evidence of character. Parent Holly Farrell states, “From day one, kids check one another on the life skills. Kids coach each other on respect and responsible behaviors.”

Fairbrook has memorialized every student who has attended the school, from the past to the present, through Everlasting Peace projects that feature student artwork. Current and former students often guide parents through the school, pointing out their names on permanent Everlasting Peace displays. Kim Rosenbaum, parent of a former student and a current student, describes why these displays are special: “The Peace Quilt was created by my older son’s class. It means so much to me, to see my son’s name and work even though he is no longer here.” The courtyard, a peaceful place and learning space that features a fountain and pond designed by fifth graders, completes the peace motif.

The school’s character education program, while enhanced by these outward trappings, finds its center in the Dens (a 2004 Promising Practice). These cross-grade-level communities discuss the life skills, address current concerns, and work together to find solutions. Every two weeks, small groups of students in grades one through four, guided by fifth-grade leaders who are in turn supervised by adults, gather together as a Den. Students remain in the same Den for four years, so these groups are like little families within the larger Fairbrook family. The student leaders undergo a full-day training, and the teachers work with them before each presentation. Fourth graders Chase and Jack look forward to assuming leadership roles in fifth grade and are already thinking of creative skits and games to enliven their meetings.

Teachers throughout the building actively use class meetings to develop class rules that embody the Fairbrook life skills. These rules, written on poster paper and displayed in the respective classrooms, bear the signatures of all students. Novel ideas for implementing the life skills often arise in these meetings. For example, during a fourth-grade class meeting, a student proposed sending funds to UNICEF by collecting money instead of candy on

The Proof Is in the Data

How we know character education is working at Fairbrook Elementary School:

- Fairbrook was rated “excellent” for seven years in a row by the Ohio Department of Education.
- In a 2006 Parent Survey, 92 percent of respondents rated Fairbrook “excellent” or “good” as a caring community.
- In a 2006 Student Survey of Character Skills, 96 percent of respondents said adults care about them.
- The Beavercreek City School District received a Buckeye Association of School Administrators Award for its inclusion program, which Fairbrook helped design and implement.
- Student performance on the Ohio Achievement Tests has been consistently high.
- Attendance has improved, and disciplinary referrals have declined.
Halloween. The suggestion received immediate peer support, and other class meetings soon joined the bandwagon. The school contributed $1,500 because of that one suggestion, proof that student voice is a mighty power for good at Fairbrook.

**Character Connections in the Classroom and Beyond**

Fairbrook teachers, who receive extensive professional training in the practices of Harry and Rosemary Wong as well as those of Richard Villa and Jacqueline Thousand, infuse the life skills into both the content and the form of their lessons. A library of character education lessons, bibliographies, and activities is available to them in the media center. Accenting the life skills takes many forms at Fairbrook: from discussing traits such as fairness and caring in literature to exploring citizenship and responsibility in social studies or creating works of art and music that exemplify the life skills. To lessen the competitive edge in sports, the school offers many non-competitive games as part of physical education classes.

Teachers work hard to ensure that all children are included and valued for their special gifts. Classroom lessons are interactive, with teachers using responsive questioning techniques to engage students in perspective taking. Students work in cooperative learning groups, and buddy partnerships have been formed between fourth and fifth graders. Special needs students take part in all activities and may also serve as Den leaders; intervention specialist Amber Mayne often facilitates a discussion with them in preparation for their sessions.

Many community-service projects foster the development of caring, citizenship, and respect. For example, in an intergenerational program with Trinity, a local nursing home, 12 classes rotate visits throughout the week. Students learn about problems that tend to be associated with aging, such as impaired vision, hearing disabilities, and bodily dysfunctions. Kayla, a fourth-grade student, describes her experience at Trinity: “For the visit, I make stuff and play games with the elderly. The visit really makes me happy.”

**Parents as Partners: Four for Fairbrook**

Fairbrook Elementary School places a high priority on developing positive relationships on all levels and provides many opportunities for parents, staff, community members, and students to interact and develop a caring culture. Tina Snider, a former teacher and current Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president, spent time searching for an ideal school before making her choice: “Fairbrook fits every category. It is safe, nurturing, and academically rigorous. It not only develops my children in terms of learning but also shows them how to become good citizens.”

The school practices its spirit of inclusion in making certain that all family members become part of the larger Fairbrook family; among the many events that the PTO sponsors are Family Fun Day, Field Day, Donuts with Dad, and Muffins with Mom. Parent and former student Steve Deaton fondly recalls the scene of 800 people—fathers, children, staff—gathered together in the cafeteria at 6:45 a.m. for the annual donut event. Deaton enjoys the camaraderie and the bonding experience: “It is neat to get a peek inside my child’s world.”

“If you don’t get the volunteer sign-up list early, there just might not be anything left,” continues Deaton as he explains the school’s active parent involvement. *Four for Fairbrook* is the PTO slogan, which challenges each parent to volunteer four
hours of service to the school, through work done either at school or from their home. In the 2006–07 school year, parents volunteered over 4,500 hours. Another novel venture sponsored by the PTO is the Masterworks Art Appreciation project, which comprises instruction about artists as well as training in a variety of art design techniques. Solely supported and delivered in the classroom by parent volunteers, Masterworks provides students with extraordinary enrichment opportunities.

Planning Ahead
Fairbrook’s decisions are data driven. Schwieterman points out that the surveys given to staff, parents, and students each fall and spring indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the school climate. However, the school uses these surveys not just as evaluative tools but also as guides to mapping future moves. For example, when last fall’s parental survey indicated a need to include parents in more activities, the school gave them a role in the Dens. Tracking of disciplinary referrals has also provided a guide to improvement. Realizing there was a disconnect between the school’s handling of disciplinary referrals and its character education program, staff members redesigned disciplinary procedures so that they are consistent throughout the building and reflect the life skills.

Fairbrook effectively engages students in both evaluation and school improvement. Students complete reflection pieces in the Dens, take surveys, and evaluate their own data by recording their responses on bar graphs. When a survey indicated that the playground was the place in which most conflicts took place, the Dens brainstormed ways to improve it. Through an online poll, students voted for making additional playground equipment and active games available as a way to ease tensions. Always ready to help, the Fairbrook PTO provided equipment such as balls, soccer nets, and markings for blacktop games.

The teachers, parents, and students will continue to work together to make Fairbrook a full-inclusion school in every way. Second-grade teacher Pat Martin says, “Students have models and examples for positive ways to interact with one another, their teachers, and other adults. These traits are in contrast to the many examples they see on television, in movies, in video games, and in society. Our students know that what they do, think, and say defines the kind of character or person they are choosing to become.”

Perhaps one of the most touching examples of the deeply held feelings toward Fairbrook was given expression at graduation last year. In the midst of the festivities and laughter, one mother was crying, not smiling. Although she was happy about her child’s success, Diane Sefton, whose third and youngest child was now graduating from Fairbrook, declared, “I feel as if I’ve lost my best friend.”

REFERENCES

2007 NATIONAL SCHOOLS OF CHARACTER: FAIRBROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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2007 WINNERS

PRINCIPAL’S BEST PICKS:
Deron Schwieterman

TWO WORDS TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL: caring and safe
CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM/PROJECT OF WHICH YOU ARE MOST PROUD: the Den program in which fifth graders become the leaders of the other grades
BEST PROOF THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION CHANGES SCHOOL CLIMATE: Our children come to school happy each day.
EVIDENCE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION HAS ENHANCED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: Our school was rated “excellent” for seven years in a row by the Ohio Department of Education.
WORDS OF WISDOM TO A NEWCOMER IN CHARACTER EDUCATION: Start now. Don’t wait for a magical program to come. Character education is what you do in your daily interactions with students, not some shot-in-the-dark program.
“Always make certain that I listen to my people. After all, look what happened here,” says John Immerman, the affable principal of Memorial Middle School in Fair Lawn, a middle-class suburb located in the northeast corner of New Jersey. Immerman, who took over the reins of the school in 2006, is referring to Memorial’s school-wide character program—Celebrate Character—which has revolutionized school culture, curricula, and community relationships.

The “new teacher” who touched off the revolution at Memorial—though quite by accident—is the effervescent Laurianne Brunetti, language arts teacher and the current character educator coordinator. As a brand-new teacher in 1997, Brunetti was faced with a highly diverse class of students who ranged from “significantly gifted to considerably challenged.” In search of personal survival and a way to help her students develop much-needed compassion, she created an instructional unit—Walk in My Shoes (a 2006 Promising Practice)—in which students experienced various disabilities (blindness, multiple handicaps, deafness/muteness, visual impairment, fine-motor handicaps, and gross-motor handicaps) through simulated situations at six disability stations set up in the classroom. Each “challenged student,” feigning some physical limitation, was accompanied by a guide student while attempting a timed task; students recorded their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and questions in a response journal at each station. In a reflective discussion at the end of the unit, the students showed they were actually becoming sensitive to the plight of others.

When the superintendent and the administrator who had observed her teach the lesson summoned her for a meeting, Brunetti thought she was in trouble. The very opposite was true: Fair Lawn was interested in launching a character education program and requested the help of the novice teacher who had managed to change class climate by transforming unfeeling students into sympathetic souls. Along with the request came a strong suggestion to write up the lesson as an entry in the New Jersey Department of Education’s Best Practice competition.

**The Celebrate Character Team**

Brunetti won a prestigious 1998–99 Best Practice Award, the first of many awards that Memorial has earned for its innovative strategies in character education. Twice named a New Jersey School of Character, the middle school has also won six CEP Promising Practices awards. She reflects, “What is exciting to me is that Promising Practice recognitions have not been one-hit wonders for us, that it just hasn’t stopped there.” An examination of...
Memorial’s rich character education program shows it is anything but a “one-hit wonder.”

The power behind the dynamic character education program is the hardworking and inventive Celebrating Character Core Team (CCCT). Led by Brunetti and guidance counselor Greg Pepe, the core team began as a small group of committed teachers from a variety of disciplines: math teacher Leslie Scheinzeit, science teacher Andrew Miller, social studies teacher Peter Arts, and physical education teacher Tom Hochkeppel. The team now represents the entire school community (students, teachers, parents) as well as the wider community (government agencies and businesses). With the adoption of the six Character Counts pillars—respect, trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, caring, and citizenship—the school developed a stronger foundation. The turnover of four principals in the last five years has not deterred the CCCT; each new administrator has enthusiastically joined the bandwagon.

Eighth-grade student Brianna captures the essence of Memorial’s spirit: “No matter how different you might be, there is always a place for you here.” The school, once characterized as isolated and uncaring, has become friendly and compassionate; in fact, the Bridges program, in which two cognitively impaired classes of students are mainstreamed into the fabric of the school, has met with such student acceptance that the district has decided to move an autism program into Memorial next year. Given the school’s diversity—30.7 percent of Memorial students come from non-English-speaking homes, and 19.7 percent of the student body is classified as having special needs—the high level of tolerance at the school is the glue that holds it together. Veteran teacher Judi Boyce observes a correlation between character education and the positive development of the special needs students: “As a special education teacher with over thirty years of classroom experience, this is the most authentic form of inclusion that I have ever seen. It allows my students to actually measure up in ways that are not often possible for them. Character education allows the students to participate in a competition of character rather than a competition of the mind—this approach to teaching middle school students really levels the playing field and reminds them that there really is a place for everyone.”

Opportunities Galore

“I remember seeing a poster that read, ‘Caring is thinking with your heart.’ I never really understood how that worked until I became a part of this school. Now I can’t imagine not understanding that,” says Ryan, a seventh-grade student. The CCCT seems to have thought of everything that would make character building a school priority and “thinking with your heart” its daily focus.

Externally, all the reminders are there: the welcoming Character Lives Here sign; student artwork and posters in every classroom; windows decorated by the parents with character virtue words; and a Hope and Healing Garden for reflection, created jointly by the Guidance Department, parent and technical adviser Emil De Luccia, and students from the Environmental Club. However, what strikes the visitor is the degree to which the staff and students have internalized the pillars and put them into action through service.

Emily, an eighth-grade student says, “Everywhere you look, character is happening,” and the Core Team makes certain that students have an opportunity for their character to shine from

The Proof Is in the Data

How we know character education is working at Memorial Middle School:

- Steadily decreasing rate of student absenteeism, with a 10 percent decrease from 1999–2000 (the base year) to 2005–06, as indicated by a 7-year longitudinal study
- 50 percent decrease in tardiness, and 62 percent decrease in suspensions, during the same period, as revealed by the same study
- Recognition as a New Jersey School of Character (2006, 2007) for the school’s comprehensive, intentional, and proactive character education program
- Adequate Yearly Progress goals met in all categories
September through June. Even before they begin at Memorial, fifth graders from the feeder schools embark on their “journey of character” through the structured Common Ground program (a 2007 Promising Practice), which provides an initiation into many school programs by Memorial’s student leaders, including collaboration in a service project.

A rollicking team-building activity for the entire school, Character Cavalcade (a 2005 Promising Practice) kicks off Memorial’s celebration of National Character Education Week every October. Bringing the six pillars to life, the day-long Olympics of Character delivers a cogent message: Work together, help one another, and experience the joy when cooperation, not competition, is the prevailing spirit. If the Cavalcade serves as the traditional rite that begins the year, the Points of Light—Stars of Character assemblies (a 2004 Promising Practice) are the formal quarterly recognition ceremonies that celebrate student achievement. The students recognized at these events—called Points of Light and Stars of Character, because they have demonstrated service, citizenship, and character—function as role models for others, conduct the Common Ground initiation, and take on independent service initiatives. Memorial’s programs not only build character; they are also fun. Clarissa, a seventh-grade student, observes, “These programs are examples of how our school is just the friendliest and safest place to be. Friends on opposite teams (in Character Cavalcade) were giving high fives, children were smiling from ear to ear, the atmosphere was so wonderful. These are the ways that we learn that character really counts.”

**Curriculum, Service, and Student Leadership**

The grass-roots nature of Memorial’s character education efforts is responsible for the creative infusion of character into the curriculum; as Pepe points out, the literacy/humanities course offerings come “from the teachers ‘up,’ not [from the] administration ‘down.’”

Under the umbrella theme of *Finding the Write Way*, three interrelated courses emphasize character development: Lifetime Readers, Curriculum Connections, and Fair Lawn Researcher. The courses build literacy and critical thinking skills for grades six, seven, and eight, respectively. In the Fair Lawn Researcher course, for example, students develop a “community connections” outreach service-learning project as part of the Hometown Heroes unit. Students complete an action plan proposal, compose a persuasive letter to the mayor and borough manager, and design some form of visual aid, such as a brochure, a flyer, or a graphic blueprint. Eighth grader Betsy says, “The Fair Lawn Researcher course has helped me to develop my voice and my ability to speak up and speak out about something I believe is important.”

Since the roots of Memorial’s character education program lie in the need to develop empathy, the school’s continuing emphasis on service is understandable. The Starfish project, begun in 1997 by teaching duo Brunetti and Scheinzeit and based on the concept of helping one another one small act at a time, has become an integral part of school life. The school’s Helping Hands organization, for example, records astounding statistics for 2006: more than 30 students donated hair to Locks of Love; 50 students participated in some form of tutoring; more than 70 students participated in community or school clean-up projects; 40 volunteered at senior citizen centers; 150 volunteered in after-school programs; and 80 students participated in various local and national charitable endeavors.
Students feel the responsibility of becoming “servant leaders,” a commitment that the school has stressed following the 9/11 tragedy by establishing a Celebrate America—Celebrate Character program. Eighth-grade student Eric states, “Leadership is about service. It’s about finding ways to help others and figuring out how to make things better.” Peer mentors in the P.A.L.S. (Peer Assistance Leader Service) program take the group’s motto (Kids Helping Kids) seriously by pledging in a signed contract to mentor a peer through modeling of positive behaviors and character traits. Parent and PTO president Lisa Carlone has high praise for the program: “It takes away the boundary between sixth and eighth graders. Being introduced to someone who is not like them is very helpful. The kids will come home and talk about their experiences.”

Reinforcing Family and Community Values

A common thread in interviews with Memorial parents and Fair Lawn community groups is satisfaction with the school’s “reinforcing the values that they themselves believe in.” Mary Beth Milas, PTO liaison, says, “What they are doing with character education is really incorporating our family values. It has positively impacted the lives of my three daughters in sixth, eighth, and now eleventh grades.” Milas’s oldest child, Kira, holds the distinction of being the student artist who designed and created the Memorial school seal. Collectively, parents remark that the wider community is grateful to the school for “teaching compassion, tolerance, and the six pillars of character.”

District superintendent Bruce Watson comments that Memorial’s character education initiatives have created a “partnership with the municipality and surrounding towns.” With Memorial leading the way for the district, Watson adds that “the Board of Education now gives the teaching of character education its full support.” Fair Lawn mayor Marty Etler, who has witnessed the ways in which Memorial students have enhanced community projects, presented the school with a 2006 borough proclamation that read in part: “We recognize and celebrate with Memorial Middle School its efforts to reinforce the notion that the development of strong character is recognized, appreciated, valued and necessary, not only within the school community but also within the Borough of Fair Lawn.” “Good citizenship is spreading,” says the mayor. “If children learn about citizenship now, it is something that will last a lifetime.”

A Time for Celebration and Collaboration

Memorial had better order a huge cake for its triple celebration this year: the fiftieth anniversary of the school, the tenth anniversary of its character education program, and its formal recognition as a National School of Character. The festivities for the school’s golden anniversary began in March, with an original musical and dramatic extravaganza, “Follow That Star,” written by Brunetti and directed by Brunetti, Scheinzeit, and Pepe, that used a character theme as its message: a call to students to reflect, realize, and recognize the power and potential they have in this world to make a difference. Clearly, the story of the school is inextricably linked to its character journey.

Immerman stresses that the faithful Celebrating Character Core Team will continue to forge ahead, this time with an eye on improving the environment in its service-learning projects. Seasoned performers, having presented at the CEP Forum and the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the team members will throw themselves into the role of becoming missionaries of character to other districts. In the meantime, Immerman relishes his role of guiding Memorial: “Imagine being in charge of a school where everybody regards one another as family and celebrates character every day.”

REFERENCE


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A Cinderella Story: The Spirit of Excellence

Everyone loves a Cinderella story. When Newport Mill Middle School opened its doors in 2002, folks wondered how students would fare in a school located in the section of Montgomery County, Maryland, that is most affected by poverty, mobility, and language diversity. The verdict is in: One of the highest-performing middle schools in the county, Newport Mill has demonstrated the remarkable power of the Spirit of Excellence.

Nelson McLeod likes a challenge. When he heard that his first principalship would be of a soon-to-be-opened middle school with students of below-grade achievement, he concentrated not on potential problems but on ways to achieve excellence. McLeod says, “Character education is a wonderful opportunity to support student achievement and to develop a positive and rewarding school culture. One of our school goals from the beginning was to connect with the community.”

And Newport Mill did indeed connect. Conversations with teachers, students, and parents consistently attribute the school’s reputation for excellence to being “connected” and “feeling like a family.” Administrative school assistant Dave Dove says, “It’s about making connections with the kids, and that’s what we do at Newport Mill.” Seventh grader Michelle agrees: “Our school is like a big community, and all of us try to help each other.” Media specialist and parent Kathy Stouffer observes, “The teachers really care about the students and the success of each individual student.” Guidance counselor Ellen Turvey, a coordinator of the Character Education Committee, sums up the special quality of Newport Mill: “It’s a peaceful, safe, and fun place to be, where there is a lot of love for learning and for one another.”

McLeod, a charismatic and imaginative leader, has been the recipient of three prestigious awards for his work in creating an excellent educational program and environment: The Washington Post Distinguished Educational Leadership Award for Montgomery County (2006), the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals’ Middle School Principal of the Year Award (2007), and the Maryland State Department of Education’s Educator Excellence Award for minority student achievement (2007). Despite all these accolades, McLeod shrugs off his awards and gives high marks to his committed faculty and supportive parents for making his vision of excellence a reality.

Tiger Pride: Fueling the Character Education Initiative

From the school’s beginning, Tiger Pride—with its emphasis on the five traits of respect, responsibility, caring, sportsmanship, and effort—has been the slogan that fuels the character education program. Since low test scores, concerns about student behavior, and lack of connection among stakeholders seemed to beset middle schools in the area, the new school intentionally set out to develop a comprehensive program that would address these issues. Counselor Tim Rossini, another coordinator of the Character Education Committee, observes how the school’s emphasis on respect and accountability has aided instruction: “The culture of the school is structured in a way that helps to eliminate barriers to learning, so that teachers can teach.” Three motivational messages, which are prominently displayed in the school, epitomize its positive philosophy: This is important, You can do it, and I won’t give up on you.

Staff members are so committed to the philosophy of “not giving up” on their students that they call many students in the morning before school to encourage them to attend. To accommodate the schedules of parents with early-shift work, a school
employee supervises at least 10 students who arrive at the building at 6:15 a.m. Eighth grader Jocelyn echoes the views of both students and parents when she says, “It’s a nice environment, and the teachers are always willing to help you. You can go to them about things outside of school as well as things about school.”

Building on the Baldrige Framework
If Newport Mill wanted its students to be active learners, it reasoned that its faculty must also assume that role. In 2003 the school implemented the Baldrige School Improvement process and strove to abide by its emphasis on student-centered education, listening to all voices, and using performance data to guide improvement. When a student survey indicated that teasing was an issue, the school instituted its first Peer Leadership program for 45 members. However, when an end-of-the-year survey indicated a need for all students to be sensitized, the school went into action. The counselors devised a creative How to Be an Ally program of structured lessons on bullying and teasing. All teachers receive full-day training on these lessons, which they in turn teach to the entire student body in small classes. Listening to the student voice has worked, and current surveys indicate that bullying and teasing have greatly decreased. Parent and PTA treasurer Emily Ellenbogen says, “The focus on bullying and teasing is really important to me as a parent, and the fact that the school feels this is as important as academics is very reassuring, because it reinforces the idea of caring about each other, which is definitely needed in today’s world.”

A centerpiece of the Newport Mill character education program is the Character in Action lessons that reach the entire school once a week through the closed-circuit television system. Staff members, under the direction of the school’s guidance team, perform open-ended skits that deal with a monthly value that is being highlighted. Although the entire student body views the same presentation, individual teachers are responsible for guiding the follow-up discussion and linking the topic to their own curriculum.

As part of the staff development program, teachers are reading Teaching with Love and Logic to examine successful strategies for engaging students in a caring way. Teachers have very high expectations of their students, and these expectations are consistently expressed through the use of respectful and encouraging language. In fact, at the beginning of summer vacation, seventh grader Mayra revealed how sad she was not to still be in school: “I love learning at Newport Mill. The teachers help you a lot.”

McLeod, who has had experience in human resources, makes certain that all new hires are both caring and knowledgeable. Using hypothetical scenarios, he manages to get a good read on the way potential staff members will treat students. McLeod readily shares his own personal story, which has shaped his philosophy: As a child, he was overweight and
stuttered. Once when asked to read aloud in middle school, he froze, and the teacher responded by calling him “stupid.” Vowing that such an experience would never happen to any Newport Mill student, he works with his staff to make the school an inviting place where children with problems “will always have someone to go to.” Conversations with the student body indicate that this goal has been fulfilled. Eighth grader Dominic comments on the school’s democratic spirit: “Newport Mill helps everyone. It doesn’t matter what is your race.”

**A Challenging Academic Curriculum**

Although Newport Mill accents caring, it does not in any way compromise the student’s responsibility to excel academically. A class at Newport Mill is a stimulating adventure in learning. Worksheets and busy work do not find their way into these energetic classrooms; in their stead are thought-provoking lessons in which students accept exciting challenges and explore new ideas. For example, a social studies class might consider explorers from the perspective of both the conqueror and the conquered, or an English class might conjecture what a poem would say if it were written from a different viewpoint.

To meet the diverse learning styles of their students, teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies, such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, small-group activities, individual and group projects, literary circles, and individual reading and response. The school has adopted the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (MYP) approach that organizes lessons around essential questions and focuses on international understanding and critical thinking. English teacher Susan Reff finds “a significant link between the goals of MYP and those of character education.”

Newport Mill has done remarkable work in narrowing the “achievement gap.” Since earlier test performance indicated a weakness in mathematics, all students receive a 90-minute period in that subject daily. Almost 68 percent of all current eighth graders are taking either Algebra 1 or an even higher-level math course. What is noteworthy is that the minority enrollment mirrors this trend: 68 percent of African-Americans and 60 percent of Hispanics take algebra or higher math. (In the Montgomery County Public Schools district as a whole, the corresponding figures for these two groups are 44 percent and 45 percent, respectively.) Not only do the students at Newport Mill tend to take more difficult courses, but there have been amazing improvements in scores on the Maryland School Assessment: Only 34.1 percent of African-American students were proficient in math in 2004, but that figure rose to 67.3 percent in 2006; among Hispanic students, the level of proficiency increased from 38.2 percent to 60.3 percent in the same period.

**Connecting School to Families in Novel Ways**

The intentional goal of connecting the school to families is evident in the high level of communication with parents, illustrated by daily e-mail messages that contain the school’s morning announcements and Sunday night phone calls outlining the activities of the week to come. Catherine Huntress-Reeve, the parent of an eighth grader, feels that Newport Mill is different from other schools, because it has made a conscious effort to be “family friendly and
welcoming.” All communications are issued in English and Spanish, with the capacity for translation into other languages when necessary.

McLeod says that Newport Mill listens to the needs of its parents and often takes a non-traditional approach to addressing their concerns. For example, when the parents indicated that they needed babysitting services in order to get to meetings, the school provided such a service; when the parents said they needed dinner, it furnished food. Sarah Patterson, Guidance Department chair and still another coordinator of the Character Education Committee, asserts, “We have built and will continue to build our program around the ever-changing strengths and needs of our students and community.”

Staff and parents listen to each other, and the administration regards feedback as a positive guide, not as criticism. “The level of communication flows easily,” states Kitty Hollister, PTA president. “The school is responsive to parent concerns in many ways.” Another parent, Susan Anderson, agrees: “We are seen as partners, and we feel respected, because concerns and questions are responded to quickly.” For example, when feedback indicated the need for parenting workshops, the Parent Empowerment program with its monthly parent workshops came into existence. Topics run the gamut, from techniques for responsible parenting to handling peer pressure and transitioning to high school. One mother of a seventh grader reveals how this program taught her new skills for dealing with her son, who had been experiencing difficulties. Through the parenting resources and the support of numerous adults at the school, the relationship of mother and son improved, and so did the son’s academic performance.

Next Steps for Character Education
Since Newport Mill has consistently used data and feedback to devise plans and revise its programs, it will use the Character Education Partnership site-visit report to determine its next steps. With an eye on developing service learning as the moral-action component of character education, the school intends to emphasize projects that help the oppressed, including those in other countries. Last year, a student-directed project in which Newport Mill sent 25 boxes of goods to the needy in Swaziland received strong support. Teachers are already talking about projects that promote social justice and train students to be activists while reinforcing the curriculum.

Newport Mill has taken giant strides in meeting the academic, emotional, social, and personal needs of its diverse student body. By expanding its Character Education Committee to include more students, parents, and community members, the school hopes to widen its support base. When asked what he wants his school to be like, McLeod, who never thinks small, says, “I would like it to be considered a character education academy, a model school that others can visit and see what can be done by believing in students and teaching them to believe in themselves.” In its sixth year of existence, Newport Middle School already appears to be fulfilling the American Dream.

REFERENCES


Strong Minds and Caring Hearts

When five stalwart visionaries decided to found a new private school in 1948, they sought to provide a quality education in which hands-on learning would build a firm foundation for core academic skills. Now, almost six decades later, Pine Point School in Stonington, Connecticut, thrives, using service learning as the key strategy of its rigorous academic curriculum that exemplifies the school’s motto, *Strong Minds and Caring Hearts.*

“I am always inspired when I hear the kids say that they feel they get more out of their service than they give. This is education at its finest,” says Paul Geise, the genial and farsighted headmaster of Pine Point School. Nestled in a rural area of southeastern Connecticut close to the Rhode Island border, Pine Point makes certain that all its students use their talents to help others. A structured service-learning initiative that reinforces the curriculum spans all grade levels. Little ones begin by providing companionship to senior citizens at the Westerly Adult Day Service Center, and each successive grade engages in a collective community project that runs the gamut from beach clean-up and recycling to interviewing of veterans and tutoring of young children. A highlight of the experience is the eighth-grade performance-based assessment project in which the students demonstrate critical thinking, analytical reading, expository writing, and presentation skills through a service project that correlates with a literary work.

Many schools may wonder if what they do in the way of character building has any long-term effect on their students’ lives. Pine Point knows for sure that it has made a difference. David Cruthers, assistant director of development, points out that the school follows its graduates closely and notes that a high percentage of them pursue interests that are service oriented. Recent graduates have helped porters in Nepal, worked in speech pathology in Central America, developed village infrastructure in rural China, and taught young children in the favelas of Brazil. Parent Alice Groton observes how the school “reaches out and gets involved in our greater community.” She adds, “We are a small school with a big mission of caring for others.”

**Ethical Basis of Pine Point**

From its very roots and philosophy, Pine Point has been in the business of ethical education for close to six decades. However, in 2004, under the transformational leadership of Geise, the whole school as well as members of the surrounding communities set out to reaffirm precisely what Pine Point’s core values were. Respect, integrity, moral courage, and excellence emerged as these essential values; once recognized and understood by faculty, students and parents, they became known to all, through the school newsletters, the school’s Web site, the student handbook, and the service-learning documents. Students learn and practice the core values in a variety of strategically planned initiatives that include developmentally appropriate service learning, class and school meetings, cooperative group activities, cross-age activities, and collaborative academic projects.
Susan Kozel, assistant head of school, states that the administration makes a special effort to emphasize the core values in the training of new staff at the faculty retreat that precedes the opening of school. Music teacher Linda Lozis, who was new last year, quickly got a sense that these core virtues were something very important at Pine Point. She looks back fondly on a memorable activity in which all new staff members collaborated in creating a skit that included the core values. Putting these core values into practice takes place daily in the class lessons, service projects, and extra-curricular activities, while weekly faculty meetings allow the staff to reflect on the larger purposes of education. Parent Holly Carbonneau comments on the result: “I believe Pine Point School is a small slice of heaven. There we have found caring, dedicated teachers who not only teach but challenge our children to be good, caring members of society.”

An Expectation of Kindness
Another parent, Janet Hinkle, points out, “One of the best characteristics of Pine Point is its universal expectation that all students will be kind to each other at all times.” Though Hinkle maintains that this is not forced upon students and that the students are not punished for not following it to the letter, she is quick to add that “it is an expectation that everyone seems to share.” That honored New England tradition, the town meeting, surfaces in many forms at Pine Point and serves as a bonding element. The whole school gathers every Monday morning for a weekly greeting exercise that unites the upper and lower schools. During the spring semester, presentations by ninth-grade students on their service projects are much-awaited components of these gatherings. All grades have class meetings at least once a week, and the middle school students participate twice a week in advisory periods. Cross-age tutoring is another strategy that engenders caring. It is not unusual to observe a fifth-grade student and a first grader walking hand in hand down the hall or exchanging high fives after completing a project together.

The middle school’s Pine Point poetry competition, affectionately called Poetry Madness since it is structured like the collegiate March Madness basketball tournament, serves as a tangible example of the way in which the school develops strong minds and caring hearts. Last May, all students and faculty gathered together in Mitchell gym as Hamilton Salsich, a 2006 Connecticut Teacher of the Year, read the favorite poems selected by students and faculty. As engrossed as if observing a tie-breaking moment in a championship game, the audience, tense and silent, listened to Salsich’s sonorous voice read the final choices. The overwhelming favorite, Dudley Randall’s “Ballad of Birmingham,” which described the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, received thunderous applause. It is not surprising that the selection correlated with the school’s emphasis on addressing social injustice.

Developing such caring students is no accident at Pine Point, for the school provides many channels for solving conflicts amicably. The Responsive Classroom model serves as the framework for creating routines in grades K–3. Talking Couches, found

The Proof Is in the Data
How we know character education is working at Pine Point School:

- Evaluative data derived from feedback from teachers, students, and community partners in every service-learning project reveal a high degree of satisfaction.
- Follow-up studies of alumni reveal that a significant percentage of them are pursuing interests that are service oriented.
- The number of community partnerships (currently 32) continues to grow annually.
- The number of student-initiated service projects has increased. G.I.V.E., a service organization started by students, received the Association for Fundraising Professionals’ Youth in Philanthropy state award.
- The strategic study of school climate undertaken last year reveals that parents gave Pine Point excellent ratings (from 90 percent to 96 percent) in all the following areas: safe learning environment, quality of teaching, opportunities for parent involvement, fostering creativity, empowering students, valuing family, cultivating leadership, living out its mission, serving community, being a place of excellence.
- Performance on standardized tests has been consistently strong.
- Scores on eighth-grade performance/service assessment have improved.
in all homerooms, are comfortable spots to resolve disagreements and misunderstandings. In the lower-school classes, students and teachers work together to develop classroom jobs, civility charts, and social ground rules, while middle school students find that conflict resolution strategies taught as part of a social-skill unit called Work It Out help to eliminate bullying and cruel teasing.

Service Learning: The Core of Strong Minds and Caring Hearts

“Pine Point has an admirable service-learning program, called a ‘learning’ program because we firmly believe that the habit of serving others is fundamental to being fully human,” writes Geise in his September 2005 ViewPoints address. Service learning director and seventh-grade teacher Dave Smith believes that the school’s exemplary service-learning program, with its thoughtful integration of academics, service, and moral development, has been successful for the last 15 years because it is “an integral part of Pine Point, not an add-on.”

Collective cross-grade projects help all students realize the benefits of being of service to others, and original projects, initiated by students, show another level of advancement. A close connection with the curriculum makes the projects all the more meaningful. For example, a beach clean-up project in which fourth graders collect, sort, and analyze sources of litter along local beaches dovetails with math and environmental science skills; and a language arts project in which seventh graders interview veterans about wartime experiences, organize their responses, and write biographies reinforces proficiency in interviewing, research, and writing. Anna, an eighth grader, says that her work last year in interviewing senior citizens at the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center changed her perspective of history and of older people. In reference to service learning in general, Anna adds, “Education is more than ABC’s—it’s about making a difference.”

In an article published in the Middle School Journal, Smith points out that implementing a rigorous eighth-grade performance assessment that focuses on literary analysis, community service, and research would “not only test our students’ knowledge of basic skills and concepts through authentic applications, but also would require them to demonstrate a social conscience.” Amanda and Victoria, current ninth graders who finished their projects last year, agree with Smith’s estimate of the project’s outcomes. After reading the novel Flowers for Algernon, Amanda served at a learning center for students with autism for approximately ten hours and then wrote and presented a synthesis of her reading and experience to a panel of teachers and community members. Although she said public speaking was not her forte, she deemed the experience “incredible” because it developed her own courage and her insight into the world of the autistic child. Victoria, after analyzing themes in Walkabout, a novel about two children stranded in the Australian Outback, applied the theme of responding to different cultures to her work with the homeless and to needy children.

Geise points out that one way of assessing the strength of a character education program is to ask the question Do students take the initiative in the advance of character? Pine Point students deserve an A+ in this category. Individually, students have volunteered to leave school and help in New Orleans, asked fellow students to assist them in financing surgery for children with cleft palates, and directed their birthday gifts to support the less fortunate. Cassie, a fifth grader, shares that the Shoe Train campaign she initiated last year came from a talk she had with her mom at home. Students had fun creating miniature shoes to adorn a bulletin board that spurred other students to donate new and “gently used” shoes to a local center. In another vein, the students have collaborated to form a youth group for philanthropy—called G.I.V.E. (an acronym for generosity, involvement, volunteering, and education)—that works with many service organizations. This year, the organization, which has at times partnered with Beacon Hospice in the nearby town of Mystic, won the Association for Fundraising Professionals’ Youth in Philanthropy state award.

Parents and School Values

Ask parents about their views of Pine Point, and you will be bound to hear many anecdotes about teachers who have generously given of their time and care to help students, and even some tearful testimonials of
the personal benefits that parents have experienced. Parent Karen Stone calls the relationship “a dynamic partnership between students, school, and family—dedicated to the education of the whole child.”

Another parent, Mary Minn Kong, gives praise to the way the school implements its mission: “Pine Point does an excellent job fostering strong minds through activities such as the school debates, ninth-grade speeches, the Math Counts club, poetry nights, and book club meetings. . . . Caring hearts are apparent when the school facilitates children from the lower school to the middle school getting increasingly more involved in a variety of activities to help members of the community.”

Many parents testify that they believe their children’s perspective on life and willingness to accept others is an outgrowth of participation in service at school. Elena Marquardt relates that her daughter Emily still remembers visiting the senior citizens at Westerly two years ago and has asked if her family can go back to visit the friends she made there. Parent Suzanne Purnell observes that the school inspires “internal motivation for success in all areas of life” and praises “the willingness of the school community to help others without thought for personal gain.” Art teacher Maria Iacoi, whose two children also attend Pine Point, provides another insight: “My son is the kind of child who could slip through the cracks anywhere else, but that will never happen at Pine Point.” Iacoi adds, “They really know my son. The staff will just dig deeper and deeper until they find the strengths of a child. We care about how kids come out of here. We want them to be successful when they move on to their next school.”

**Future Steps: Innovation and Improvement**

When asked to describe the animus of Pine Point, Geise replies, “A healthy spirit of innovation and a thirst for continual improvement.” The school’s record shows that it has never been a slacker in taking first steps. It is already doing its part to reduce its own contribution to the generation of greenhouse gases, by having 330 solar panels installed on the school roof; Pine Point expects that they will generate about 50 percent of the electricity that the school uses annually.

Also, since other environmental issues loom over our nation, Pine Point will take the initiative in developing service projects that support issues such as energy conservation, recycling, preservation of biodiversity, countering of global warming, and pollution control. As for additional projects, Geise says the school community is interested in pursuing a more global perspective, possibly through exploring additional possibilities for international studies and partnerships.

It is easy to see that Pine Point is living up to what Geise believes is the “greater responsibility” placed on independent schools today: “to restore faith and confidence that goodness and honor and integrity are still nourished in society.”

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Commitment to Character

Beginning a character education program in one school can be a formidable task; initiating and sustaining one in a district with 145 schools seems unattainable. Long before the state of Florida mandated character education, Pinellas County Schools had made a strong commitment to developing character, a commitment that can serve as a model for other large districts hesitant about taking the first step.

Summer is traditionally the time when boys and girls bid farewell to school responsibilities and jaunt merrily to camp. In an unusual role reversal, more than 300 teachers in Pinellas County find themselves flocking to summer camp each year. Character Camp, which the venture is called, is an innovative professional development activity that provides an opportunity for administrators, teachers, support staff, and community members to learn about the best practices in character education.

This two-day immersion in character education is a highly popular draw, one of the many innovative practices of Pinellas County Schools. This sprawling urban district, situated in the middle of Florida’s west coast between Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, has been at the forefront of character education in the Sunshine State since 1995. Home to more than 150,000 students, the district has earned kudos for implementing and sustaining Commitment to Character (C2C), the framework of its comprehensive character education program for a dozen years now.

When not attending talks by current researchers and practitioners of character education, such as Marvin Berkowitz, Hal Urban, Phil Vincent, and Adolph Brown, who are popular speakers at Character Camp, participants have the chance to take part in workshops where they can exchange ideas and develop skills. Instituted in 2001, Character Camp continues to be a popular attraction that consistently elicits responses such as “motivational,” “awesome,” and “not to be missed.”

Starting Small

“Great movements start small,” says Dr. Clayton Wilcox, superintendent of Pinellas County Schools. The district has always prided itself on addressing student problems, no matter how small. In 1995 Pinellas faced a delicate situation: how to handle cases of dishonesty when fifth graders involved in the Enterprise Village economic education project were caught stealing. Other districts might have zeroed in on assigning the appropriate punishment, such as detention or suspension, but not Pinellas County Schools. A group of educators and community leaders, led by Dr. Gus Stavros, a local citizen involved in school affairs, got together to brainstorm a proactive approach and wound up designing a system for the teaching of character qualities. From this meeting was born the C2C program.

Pinellas County Schools has always known the importance of listening to many voices when making a decision. Before identifying the qualities of respect, responsibility, honesty, and self-motivation as the district’s key traits, the committee surveyed over a thousand stakeholders. The effort to include people from all interested groups has paid dividends: Twelve years later, the four qualities still frame the district’s character education logo and continue to shape the focus of its 145 schools. When the Florida State Legislature first mandated in the late ’90s that character development be taught at the elementary level, Pinellas County Schools was in the vanguard. It incorporated the state qualities of patriotism, responsibility, citizenship, kindness, respect, honesty, self-control, tolerance, and cooperation into its list, and chose to focus on a specific trait each month.
Accent on Autonomy
School Board member Carol Cook attributes the “credibility” of the district’s character education program to its accent on autonomy. The C2C model does set forth a common goal for all schools: to create a school culture that is saturated with such character qualities as respect, responsibility, honesty, and self-motivation to promote higher student achievement in a safe environment. However, the district does not dictate the specifics of how each school is to achieve that goal. Instead, the Safe and Drug Free Schools office, which coordinates character education, offers “a menu of strategies” that schools may embrace according to their needs and provides ample professional development opportunities to schools so that they can attain success. Cook adds that this freedom has enriched the quality of the different programs and the extent of teacher buy-in: “Character education wasn’t crammed down the throat of the teachers and principals. Rather, they saw the value in it, and it grew from there.”

Apparently, autonomy has fostered invention and success, demonstrated by the many awards that the district has garnered in developing character. In 2006, Cross Bayou Elementary School in Pinellas Park was named a National School of Character. In previous years, Pinellas County Schools won three Promising Practices awards from CEP for innovative programs: Moving with Character (2003), Peer Connections (2004), and Bobcat Buddies (2005). In this ethnically diverse district, all schools are required to have a multicultural committee that acts as an advisory group to the principal. In recognition of its commitment to diversity, the district received the 2006 Rose Duhon-Sells Multicultural Program Award from the National Association for Multicultural Education.

Pinellas County Schools realizes that “one size does not fit all.” Commitment to Character utilizes a common language, teachable moments, service learning, and modeling to infuse character education into all areas of the curriculum. However, depending on the grade level and local needs, different schools gravitate to different approaches. For example, many elementary schools rely more heavily on monthly themes, assemblies, literature lessons, posters, and school-wide initiatives; middle schools find success with programs such as Life Skills and Love and Logic; all high schools use peer programs, and more than two-thirds are engaged in service learning. School Board chair Mary L. Tyus Brown is proud that the district “embraces character education wholeheartedly,” and points out that Board members consciously try to model the character traits in their interactions with one another.

The Proof Is in the Data
How we know character education is working at Pinellas County Schools:

- Disciplinary referrals and suspensions have decreased each year.
- Volunteerism has increased: Nearly 30,000 volunteers donated more than 1.1 million hours to Pinellas County Schools in 2006–07.
- Community involvement has increased: There were 6,352 school-based partnerships with businesses in 2006–07.
- Responses on the My Voice Aspirations Survey of high school students (2006) indicate that 77.4 percent feel accepted at school.
- Students outperform the state and most other large districts on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).
- Tarpon Springs Elementary School was named a 2006 Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, the only school in the Tampa Bay area so recognized.
- Two of the district’s high schools made the Newsweek list of the top 100 high schools in the United States.
- The Principal’s Multicultural Advisory Committee program won the 2006 Rose Duhon-Sells Multicultural Program Award.
Providing Professional Development

Professional development does not end in the summer, with Character Camp. Throughout the year, opportunities abound for teachers and support staff to attend workshops organized by the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. Topics run the gamut from training in the Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education to more specialized offerings focusing on substance abuse prevention, gang awareness, conflict resolution, and cyber bullying. Prevention specialists and instructional staff developers follow up by assisting school communities in applying the wide variety of strategies learned in these workshops.

Pinellas County Schools contends with problems not usually encountered by smaller districts. Realizing that student behavior on the 713 buses that are used daily could easily constitute a major problem, the district wisely included training in character education for all bus drivers. Brenda Lewis, the director of transportation, is happy to report that this practice has resulted in “a remarkable decrease in bus behavior referrals, by 64 percent.”

School Board member Janet Clark points out that Pinellas County’s character education program has a “good backbone, [a] foundation” that enables it to thrive in different settings. In fact, a visitor to just a handful of its many schools would find character education manifested in different ways, but would observe that each school is a caring community that treats students as “persons, not pupils.”

Different Programs, Different Settings

Most elementary schools teach character directly; to assist them, the district provides a host of structured literature and character lessons. For example, at elementary schools such as Mount Vernon, Pasadena, Seminole, and Walsingham, an observer might see students actively engaged in describing what responsibility looks like in action or how a character in a story might have made a wiser choice. Teachers comment favorably on the carryover from the classroom to other aspects of life. Carol Dinsdale, a second/third-grade teacher at Mount Vernon, says, “If a student lives his or her life by the Commitment to Character theme, a better and well-rounded individual will be presented to society.”

Service learning, one of the components of the C2C protocol, has added zest to character training by introducing students to new worlds. For example, fifth graders at Pasadena Fundamental Elementary School delight in their “hands-on” training in the care of a guide dog that their teacher Kim Thomson trains to help the blind. Equally enthusiastic about giving service to others are the students in the school’s gifted program, who design their own projects to help the community. Service learning at the middle school level reinvigorates the curriculum and enhances learning. Beth Anderson, eighth-grade teacher at Lealman Intermediate School, instituted a cross-grade tutoring program that pairs her students with sixth graders. Holly Atkins, a teacher at Southside Fundamental, has created a class in which students, taking themes of local interest, write scripts for plays to be hosted and performed by the American Stage Theatre Company. Last year, this collaboration entailed having students interview members of the local African-American community to capture stories of their personal lives and gain a sense of their history as a people. The reflections that take place after completion of the projects indicate
a high level of student interest and a desire to continue being of service to others.

Val Gallina, a long-time member of the C2C Resource Team and current character education grant specialist, observes that character education has gone from “door decorating” to “moral dilemma” discussions. This growth is evident at Dixie Hollins High School, where students are afforded the opportunity to have their voices heard on a variety of issues. Principal Michael Bohnet, who meets monthly with leaders of the Student Government Association and the School Advisory Council (SAC), often “steps back” and lets the students figure out solutions to a problem. “The results are quite amazing,” states Bohnet.

**Community Connections in Astounding Numbers**

From the outset of its character education program, Pinellas County Schools has recognized the necessity of bonding with parents and the community. The intervening years have solidified that relationship: last year, nearly 30,000 volunteers donated more than 1.1 million hours in schools and offices, and businesses and organizations were involved in over 6,000 school-based partnerships. These organizations range from the district’s PTA to colleges and large corporations. As a result of strong support from these organizations, the Pinellas Education Foundation was able to establish the Gus A. Stavros Institute, which provides an elementary and secondary school facility where students can experience the operations of local businesses. The Institute, a fitting tribute to a committed citizen who was at the helm of Pinellas’s character education movement, hosts the quarterly character education professional development workshops.

Kim Richardson, the varying exceptionalities liaison of Tyrone Middle School, observes that character education helps to “bridge the gaps in society,” particularly for kids who “aren’t getting these messages at home.” The district works intentionally to help parents “get that message” by providing them with strategies for success. Monthly Dinner Dilemmas; workshops on Internet safety, bullying, and parenting; guidelines for good behavior on the bus; and tips on dealing with substance abuse—these are among the many offerings that the district extends to parents to include them in the character education journey. Wilcox, who believes that the Pinellas community really understands the need to develop students of character, stresses that the future of character education “needs to rest with the people” rather than “to be tied to a superintendent.”

**Taking Character Education to Another Level**

Character education at Pinellas County Schools will be taking new and exciting steps with the help of a four-year, $1.9 million federal Partnerships in Character Education grant from the United States Department of Education. With Cross Bayou (a 2006 National School of Character) as the standard, all elementary schools will develop character education programs that aim to replicate its level of excellence. Writing cadres in secondary schools will infuse character education into the existing curriculum. Students will demonstrate problem-solving and critical-thinking skills in ethical debates that show a deep understanding of moral dilemmas. Parents and the community also are important links in the far-sighted plan, with the addition of more parenting workshops and community conferences on ethical matters.

The “small step” that Pinellas County Schools took 12 years ago to shape students of character has already brought about unimaginable results. As it moves forward, the district envisions that the commitment to character will extend beyond its walls and become the animating spirit of the government, the organizations, and the businesses of Pinellas County. Ask Wilcox, the recipient of a 2007 Florida Department of Education Superintendent’s Award for Volunteer/Community Involvement, to describe the district’s ultimate vision, and his response is to create a “county of character.” The track record shows that visions have a way of becoming reality in Pinellas.

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A Big Vision and a Big Heart

Although its oldest students are just in fourth grade, Radix Elementary School in Williamstown, New Jersey, has gained a reputation for a big vision and a big heart. Not only has Radix spurred other schools to get on board for character education, but its focus on intrinsic motivation has inspired its young crusaders to embrace many humanitarian projects.

Chat with any student, staff member, or parent about the special quality that defines Radix Elementary School, and the word family invariably comes up. Considering that the enrollment (725) is large for an elementary school and that 16 buses are needed to transport its students from the many sections of Monroe Township which it serves, it is amazing that Radix can engender such close bonds.

But then again, Radix does amazing things as a family. Never afraid to try the unorthodox, particularly if it means fun, students, teachers, and parents joined together to create a giant aquarium float to showcase the school’s successful character education program. Designed by the PTA, the surrealistic-looking float, amusingly entitled “A Fin-tastic School of Character,” won honors at Williamstown’s annual Halloween Parade and enjoyed rave reviews in Philadelphia’s 2007 Mummers Day Parade. Arrayed as jellyfish, big bass, dolphins, and mermaids, the Radix team merrily strutted with style. Nestled inside the huge aquarium was the Hidden Treasure: the children, who are indeed regarded as the treasure of Radix. The Mummers Day announcer’s comments on the production, “Great school, great kids, great teachers, and a great performance,” may well serve as an apt description of this lively school that seems to have found a magic formula for blending school and community into one happy family.

A Character Education Journey with Twists and Turns

If the Mummers Day float served as external proof of Radix’s commitment to character, the daily caring behavior of staff and students shows how the values have been internalized. Principal Ray Dinovi and lead teacher Christine Gehringer, who have guided the program since its inception in 2001, are both inspirational and indefatigable. “We can’t sit stagnant,” says Dinovi, and the twists and turns that have occurred during Radix’s journey prove that this school grows by making needed changes along the way. Gehringer, who serves as coordinator of character education, adds, “What we are doing is promoting a way of life. That’s why we listen to our focus groups of teachers and parents to add new ideas to enrich that life.” Parent Judi Kibelstis, who has a son and a daughter attending the school, observes, “It’s not a program. It’s what they do on a daily basis.”

Radix already had a character education program intact when, as the recipient of a federally sponsored grant in conjunction with the New Jersey Department of Education, the school was required to select a character education program approved by the No Child Left Behind legislation. Instead of regarding this as a chore, parents, teachers, and administrators enthusiastically explored different programs until they found the one that was a perfect fit. The ideology of Community

Radix students beautify their community by planting trees.
of Caring, with its emphasis on respect, responsibility, caring, trust, and family, reflected the very values that Radix deemed essential for child development. In October 2004 the official Community of Caring training of staff began, and Radix readied itself for a boost to its focus on character.

Two other major “twists” have enriched the program in novel ways. When the teachers met to assess progress, they agreed that character education must be closely tied to the curriculum as well as to social and emotional processes. As a result, teachers representing each grade level created a grade-specific character manual that contains engaging lessons that integrate character into all curricular areas, replete with cross-referencing to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Media specialist Marianne Gibson states, “There is a wealth of great resources in our media center in the area of character education. The handbook with lessons is wonderful, a real bonus for a new teacher or one who is moving to another grade level.” Teachers have gone far beyond the original lessons, creating new ones as they have progressed.

In another twist, Radix has worked consciously to replace extrinsic incentives with intrinsic motivation. Schools serving a student body in the lower grades frequently rely on material rewards, such as stars, coupons, pencils, or candies, to spur the children to practice the values. A teacher focus group agreed that “extrinsic rewards just don’t work”; the new philosophy stresses the positive feeling, the intrinsic reward that comes from exhibiting good character. The principal's Character Chats with the students as well as the teachers’ emphasis on “doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do” have specifically addressed intrinsic motivation. Kelly Dillich, a new third-grade teacher, observes, “The students have a sense of pride to do their best. I think they have a sense of doing it intrinsically.”

A Caring School Community
Proof that the students at this school are doing things intrinsically is plentiful: from their courteous and respectful behavior in daily interactions to their demonstrations of empathy in service projects. The school proves that it is indeed a “community of caring” in many ways. From making pillows to comfort patients undergoing chemotherapy to collecting new Halloween costumes, decorations, and treats for the children of families displaced by Hurricane Katrina, Radix students participate actively in a host of service projects. Student Council member Max, a fourth grader, after observing that many children at Radix lacked the funds to buy presents for their families, is hard at work in increasing the stock of the school’s Holiday Shop to enable the less fortunate students to procure gifts free or at a nominal cost. Parent Judi Viviani, whose four children have attended Radix, observes their growth over the years: “I could see a difference in how respectful they were becoming of one another and more mannerly. All these qualities they carried home.”

Parent Kristin McCoy, who has both a son and a daughter attending Radix, says that the core values are “instilled not just taught,” resulting in an atmosphere in which students genuinely care for one another. A staple of the program is the daily class meetings (a 2005 Promising Practice) in which children engage in meaningful conversations about the core values. Topics for the class meetings range from

The Proof Is in the Data
How we know character education is working at Radix Elementary School:
- Decreases of 56 percent in disciplinary referrals and 70 percent in suspensions over the past three years
- Adequate Yearly Progress goals met for the past three years, with scores of 91 percent or better on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (ASK) test
- Change in school culture, marked by a 40 percent increase in student and family involvement in educational decision-making, as indicated by a 5-year longitudinal study by Rowan University
- Recognition by other schools, as evidenced by Radix presentations at 12 state and national character education conferences in the last three years
- Selection by Raritan College and New Jersey Center for Character Education as a Best Practice Model School (2005) to mentor three other schools
- Recognition as a New Jersey School of Character in 2006 and 2007
the character education quote of the day to issues arising from concerns in the children's own lives. Last year, the school's site-based management team collaborated on adding topics that would also demand critical thinking, Dinovi says, “They are taking class meetings to a new level by developing scenarios and questions to prompt discussion.” A buddy system in which older classes are paired with younger classes helps students at both levels to develop confidence, improve reading and writing skills, and work on service projects together.

Newcomers quickly become part of the Radix family. Ambassadors from the Welcome Committee greet them and their parents, letting them know that this school is a family. Not only do ambassadors take the newcomers on a tour of the building, but they also “adopt” the new students as friends. Fourth-grade welcome ambassador John likes the arrangement, because it provides him with a great opportunity “to meet new friends.” On the receiving side, Erin, a new student last year, enjoyed her celebrity status as a newcomer, proud of her picture and article on the school’s welcome board located in front of the main office.

Caring in the Curriculum
Just as reading stories and studying history provide inspirational ways to integrate character into the classroom, writing also serves as a vehicle to foster the core values. Teachers assert that student behavior on the playground, in the cafeteria, and on the buses has improved since the school initiated writing assignments in which students are asked to describe respect, responsibility, and caring in various settings. Thoughtful reflections conclude each service project. Parent Cathy Coffman observes, “Character is a natural way of life here. It is part of the teaching, and it is totally integrated.”

In response to a suggestion by a focus group, a committee of teachers created a four-point rubric for evaluating student understanding of character through writing prompts. The committee defined observable, measurable behaviors for each character trait. By their responses to carefully structured writing prompts, students are now assessed on their understanding of the character trait, the relationship of the character trait to oneself, the association of one character trait to another, and the evaluation of the character trait. Gehringer, who points out that “Radix's program is unique because it combines a school-developed ideology with the tenets of Community of Caring,” says that this rubric is “another example of the use of focus groups to improve the program.”

Another crucial factor in Radix’s success is its espousal of professional training in character education for all of its staff, an approach that Dinovi recommends to schools attempting to create and sustain effective programs. In addition to the Community of Caring training, the faculty has studied Michael Fullan’s strategies and explored the ideas of motivational speaker Dr. Philip Vincent. The school has also enriched its own program as well as the educational training of Rowan University by establishing a partnership with that institution. Student teachers from Rowan play important roles in Radix’s character education program, serving in the classroom and assisting in the planning and implementation of service projects. “If we can get teacher candidates to see the importance of character education,” states Dinovi, “we ensure that it will continue to flourish in the next generation.” Not surprisingly, other educators often refer to Radix as a “school with a big vision.”

A Vision That Spurs Others
A committed missionary for the character education cause, Dinovi believes “a school has a duty to tell its story and to help other schools change school culture through character education.” His first step in the mission was to garner district support; he helped create a District Character Education Advisory
Committee (DCEAC) for Monroe Township that has made character education a priority for the entire district. But the district is not the only one to profit from the expertise of Dinovi and his staff. In a presentation at the CEP 2005 Forum, Radix staff members joined Dr. Philip Brown, director of the New Jersey Center for Character Education (NJCCE), in sharing strategies for “taking your character education district-wide.”

Dinovi and his dedicated staff are familiar figures on the presentation circuit, having made 12 presentations at state-wide and national conferences during the past three years. Locally, in a 2005 joint venture of the NJCCE and Rowan University called Building Teams to Sustain Best Practice, Radix served as a mentor to three New Jersey schools with diverse demographics.

Parents as Staunch Supporters

“The parents deserve kudos for all they do,” states Gehringer. From the outset, parents have been active participants in the character education program, sitting on the site-based management team, serving in focus groups, sponsoring a host of activities, and organizing a strong volunteer program. Currently, Deborah Hamilton and Tina Doran coordinate the volunteer group of over 80 parents who help the teachers on a daily basis in response to their requests. Parents often assume teacher roles themselves, training other parents on confidentiality, the use of equipment, and school procedures. In the classroom, parents (and grandparents too!) help students with reading and the learning of math facts. To attract participation, volunteers are allowed to bring their preschool-age children to school with them. Doran feels that “this helps our preschool-age children begin to build relationships with staff even before they begin school.”

Attendance at PTA meetings is a high priority with the administration, so Radix is quick to resolve problems that interfere with attendance. For example, high school students provide baby-sitting services for parents with little ones. The activities sponsored by the PTA—such as Family Fun Night; Math, Science, and Reading Nights; Halloween Night; the Ice Cream Social; and Candy Bar Bingo—have served as wonderful catalysts to unite the school. Upon request, parents and grandparents may even have lunch with a student and two friends. Parent Jen Carlson sums up the Radix attitude toward parents: “This is your school as well as the school of your child. The school deserves a lot of credit for this. They keep parents coming in, and you never feel like an outsider.”

It is hard to imagine that Radix will ever be at a standstill in its character education journey, for its history in the field indicates it is always ready and eager to embrace change. In spite of the changes that may occur, one goal that will persist is the fulfillment of the school’s far-sighted mission: to develop productive, moral citizens. As a National School of Character, the Radix team will continue to do what it has done best: caring for its children as the finest treasure, listening to many voices to find out what works, and taking its show on the road to inspire others.

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A visitor to halcyon Sacred Hearts Academy, situated on the Kaimuki hillside, just a short trip from Waikiki Beach, first experiences a sense of being in an older, gentler age. Perhaps it is the architecture, with its cream-colored stucco walls and red tile roof, reminiscent of a Spanish mission; perhaps it is the friendly student body, ranging from tykes to teens, all neatly dressed in crisp, spanking uniforms; perhaps it is the unhurrying attitude of its faculty and staff, each one taking the time to nod and welcome a stranger with a warm “Aloha.” Gradually, as the visitor moves through the campus, passing through the newly opened McKeough Art Center, a modern visual arts facility donated by a benefactor in memory of his wife, a somewhat different sense of this school begins to develop. Guided by a nurturing faculty, the students are engaged in exceptionally rigorous academic studies that prompt them to question and think for themselves so they can take their place as leaders in an ever-changing world.

At the commencement exercise, head of school Betty White stated that “a beautiful world” is at the fingertips of the graduates. But she also pointed out that “with a push on the remote channel changer,” they will be “transported to war, hunger, poverty, despair, and anguish.” White’s assertion, “We know that a child born in the United States has a life expectancy of 78.6 years, and a child born in Sierra Leone has a life expectancy of 38 years,” was a call to action to help others less fortunate. Clearly, this school is not training its students to be passive and compliant observers in life; Sacred Hearts Academy seriously expects its graduates to undertake a formidable challenge: to be the builders of a better tomorrow.

A Mission of Commitment and Compassion

Sister Katherine Miller, the campus minister who has worked at the school for thirty-five years, explains that the name of the school, Sacred Hearts, refers to Jesus and Mary, who serve as role models to the students. Sister Katherine points out that the virtues demonstrated by these two exemplars—“respect for human dignity, unconditional love and forgiveness, and service as an expression of nobility”—are “ethical values that are very much needed today.” Therefore, commitment to this compassionate love of God serves as the first value that the Academy aims to instill in its students. The other three principles the school wants its students to embrace are to take responsibility for their own lives, to contribute positively to the world around them, and to value life-long learning.
A member of the school’s Board of Directors and a parent of three daughters at the Academy, Randy Perreira says, “This school is hard to duplicate; the bond is different, there is a strong sense of community in the school, community service and values, and tremendous interaction with staff and faculty.” Many students are second- and even third-generation Sacred Hearts Academy (SHA) students, because the family feels such a strong attachment to the school. Jaclyn Park, whose mother and grandmother both attended here, is currently a student at the University of Hawaii but often returns, saying, “Since kindergarten, this has been my second home.”

There is no doubt that students care for one another; the close bond between students is palpable in both the lower school (primary) and upper school (intermediate and high school) students. As a family, the entire school community, some 1,200 strong, gathers together each morning for the flag salute and a student-composed prayer. Inclusion is more than a concept; it is an integral part of school culture. For example, every student in Barbara Carnate’s and Michelle Tuzon’s second-grade classes proudly signed the banners that declare “We want our class to be a friendly, safe, and caring place and Be friends and work hard.” Students at all levels intentionally include newcomers in their activities. Victoria, a senior student, shares that when a new student enrolls in the school, others are quick to say, “Come sit with us.” Cross-age tutoring also helps to engender a spirit of caring among different grade levels. Tiffany, who volunteers as a teacher’s assistant in the junior kindergarten class, says that initially she did this for a work–study program, but now she volunteers on her own time because she enjoys “the special feeling of helping others.”

The Academy has worked hard to build a caring community, one in which, as White says, “each student feels a sense of belonging, a feeling that ‘I matter.’” Through Project Connect, children in the lower school develop skills and ease in speaking to one another in guided group meetings called Ohana Circles. Advisory groups in the upper school provide time for sharing of accomplishments, fears, and concerns. When asked what was special about her school, graduating senior Alyssa says, “The best thing is the close relationships students have with teachers and classmates. We are able to talk not only about school but about problems we may be having outside of school.”

**Character in the Curriculum**

Lest anyone think that teaching ethical values is synonymous with teaching religion, Sister Katherine points out that character building takes place in every class. For example, in Cindie Ogata’s English class, students examine the serious issue of racism in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and the injustice revealed in Spike Lee’s 1997 documentary *4 Little Girls*. Analyzing an individual’s reaction to adversity also engages students in absorbing discussions on ways to develop inner strength. Cydrienne, a senior, found that the discussion accompanying the study of *The Color of Water* made her proud to be in the sisterhood of women who fought against the odds. Curricular connections to character development

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**The Proof Is in the Data**

How we know character education is working at Sacred Hearts Academy:

- Sacred Hearts Academy students contributed over 60,000 hours of service to their community last year.
- The Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE), given to students in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 in 2002 and 2007, reveals positive student attitudes toward morality, practice of ethical behavior, and relationships with peers.
- Accreditation reports (2003) by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), and the Hawaiian Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) gave high praise to SHA in areas such as philosophical foundation, curriculum and instruction, and student personal and academic growth.
- Parent, teacher, and student self-evaluation surveys for accreditation processes reveal a high degree of satisfaction with the implementation of values, cooperative learning, and teacher satisfaction.
- Alumnae follow-up studies and testimonials from graduates disclose satisfaction with being of service to others and continued volunteerism through college and beyond.
- Each year, the rate of bullying, stealing, and disciplinary infractions is low.
occur in other disciplines as well. Dawn Shinoki-Ho’s sixth-grade math students practice team building and cooperation through solving problems collaboratively. Rosemary Summers, a performing arts teacher, emphasizes that the way students behave with one another, their interactions in groups, and their appreciation of one another are also ways of illustrating character.

White, who also serves as a trustee on the board of the National Coalition of Girls’ Schools, believes that it is important “to instill in girls a confidence that they can do anything and be anything.” As a result, SHA has been in the vanguard in initiating programs that foster female achievement in traditionally male bastions. Two forums that the Academy has hosted, a Girls’ Financial Literacy Conference and a Science Symposium for Girls, have drawn female students from all over Hawaii. SHA girls have countered gender stereotyping by designing and building an underwater robot for a pre-engineering class and constructing and testing an electric vehicle for a Hawaiian Electric Company competition. Imbued with a mission to contribute positively to the world around them, Academy students stretch beyond their comfort zone to achieve this goal.

### Spiritual Growth through Service

“The Academy encourages us to reach out to the community through service projects and extra-curricular activities, which gives us a perspective about the world at large,” says graduating senior Caroline. A National Service-Learning Leader School since 2001, the school considers community service to be a vital part of quality education. Students in the lower school generally do service projects as a class; every student in grades 7–12 is asked to fulfill a minimum of 25 hours of community service each year. Many accumulate well over that number. Last year, in fact, Academy students gave over 60,000 hours of service, with many spending their summer vacation doing volunteer work. Students may design their own service project, but partnerships with organizations exist in seven main areas: hospitals and clinics, nursing care homes, health organizations, children and youth programs, social service programs, nature and environmental programs, and educational agencies. Reflection is an intrinsic part of the experience; each student constructs a portfolio of her responses each quarter.

When Eleni, a student who transferred to SHA, first experienced the extent of student engagement in community service, she was amazed. She was amazed, too, that no one bullied her for being Tongan, and figured there must be some real connection between helping others and being nice. Eleni says that her involvement in the Lancer Christian Community at SHA has impelled her to become even more involved in her own non-Catholic church, where she raises money for schools in Tonga. Valerie, a senior who serves as Student Council president this year, says her experiences as a teacher’s assistant provided her with “a way to see the world with the eye of a child and to understand how kids learn differently.” The many clubs at SHA—such as Zonta and Soroptimist, which are affiliated with parent organizations in Hawaii—support a multitude of community-service projects.

But students are not the only ones who practice the philosophy of giving back to the community. The Academy’s faculty dedicates both time and effort to help the less fortunate. Ten-year veteran Leo Delgado, who teaches theology and social justice, has traveled to the Philippines to help on the Aloha Medical Mission. Delgado, the force behind many impressive social work projects, says, “The school is supportive of causes I get involved in. They back me up, and,
because of that, I inspire the girls and they inspire me back.” Another tireless worker is Dr. Mimi Dang, an advanced physics instructor who visited Vietnam with her husband. Upon her return, she became “determined that SHA students could contribute and make a difference.” She is organizing her own “relief fund” to help impoverished Vietnamese and is currently working with her students on devising ways that they can help. Dang shared that one of the best things about SHA is “administrative support, cooperation, and the ability to nurture students toward high dreams.” Other staff members echoed Dang’s praise, saying administrative support has helped to make service a life-long habit. Parent and SHA alumna Sheryl Chun reveals that she continued her volunteer work in college and that it helped her build and strengthen relationships.

**Leading by Example: Teachers, Students, Parents**

“Leading by example” serves as an apt description of the way in which respect, service, and compassion are woven into the fabric of school life. Science department chair Nancy Rocheleau states that staff members view themselves as “tremendous role models” and that a visitor to the school sees only “the tip of the iceberg, a dusting of what we do.” The faculty, too, demonstrates the special bond that unites the SHA students. Physical education instructor Sandy Richardson describes the staff’s synergy: “We gather to enjoy each other’s company and are seated purposely in collaborative groups.” Parent Sandee Higuchi adds, “This is an encouraging atmosphere, seeds are planted, and students are taught by the staff to be accountable for their actions.” Graduating senior Shaina says, “My teachers here have a passion for learning. They do more than just teach; they encourage us to reach for our dreams and nurture us into becoming adults.” One of the ways the school nurtures its students is by training them to lead, through work in peer groups, the Student Council, and the annual retreats. For example, peer leaders conduct highly successful life skills sessions for students in grades 7–12, and facilitate workshops that run the gamut from developing time management techniques to coping with stress, peer pressure, and personal conflicts.

Just as teachers and students are encouraged to be role models, so too are parents. In the school’s continuing focus on becoming “people of peace,” Sister Katherine points out that parents’ own behavior is crucial in their capacity as “models of peace” for their children. The Parent Organization promotes the school’s values by sponsoring programs to help parents deal with issues that affect the character development of their daughters, such as Internet safety, effective communication, and the dangers of drugs. Parents take pride in working with their daughters on school service projects, particularly on the Super Fair, a carnival that celebrates diverse cultures. Many of the mothers are alumnae themselves and participate in both parent and alumnae get-togethers. This teamwork and intentional modeling of good character by staff, students, and parents serve as powerful forces that enhance SHA education. When Mike Browning, a member of the Board of Directors, asked his daughter why the Academy was so much more effective than other schools, she replied, “If kids were exposed to what we are exposed to, they’d all succeed.”

As Sacred Hearts Academy moves closer to its hundredth birthday, it will continue to expand its service program and to refine its outreach programs that support gender equity. Hawaii can boast of a fine tradition of strong women who have equated leadership with service to their community. Hawaiian congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first Asian-American woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives, believed “the highest achievement is to find a place in life that permits one to be of service to people.” The young women of Sacred Hearts Academy are trying their hardest to follow the noble tradition of serving others as a way of building a better tomorrow.

**REFERENCES**


Dynamic former principal Gail Gilbert has a knack for raising the test scores of students. She also has a gift for connecting with each one of them and a refreshing ability to “think out of the box” on ways to inspire them. All three talents come to the fore on Student Success Day, a highlight of Student Pride Week in October.

The festivities that mark the official opening of School Pride Week begin with a parade. First come the colorful floats designed by the class buddies; next is the Teacher of the Year, who serves as the Grand Marshal; then come the community partners, who lead the students in the parade.

All agree that the highlight of Student Pride Week is Student Success Day. Once the initial excitement dies down, there is silence as each grade anxiously awaits the principal’s signal to hold up its banner. A thunderous cheer follows the hoisting of each banner. The observer, of course, wonders what those banners could possibly say to elicit such joy. Unbelievably, what each grade is publicizing is the percentage of students who have passed the state performance test, the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Gilbert explains: “I think students should experience proper delight in their school’s achievement and status, and this is a great way to show it.” Creative perfectionist that she is, Gilbert set the stage long before the testing day, with her animated reading of Dr. Seuss’s *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day* to the children. In this hilarious tale, students in a zany school that prizes individuality are threatened with removal to antiseptic Flobbertown if they fail the required test. Although such dire consequences are never in store for the Skyview children, their “Hooray for Skyview” on Student Success Day carries the same exuberance as that which is expressed by the merry Diffendoofers in the book. The ceremony ends with jubilation as balloons in the school colors of red, white, and blue float up into the sky, informing the community of the school’s success.

Connecting to the Community

Parent Tammy Minton, who now works as the school secretary, chose to live in this area because of the warm experience she had in visiting the school. In fact, she was so impressed by the universal friendliness and courtesy of students and staff that she quietly asked a friend, “Where do they keep the bad kids?” Parent after parent interviewed said their children were so happy at school that they objected to staying home even when sick. Parent Barry Merritt, whose fifth-grade son fits into this category, says that “the boy has never been absent or tardy.” The irony is that Merritt initially was reluctant to have his son attend Skyview, “because it was three times as big as the previous school.” Merritt was just one of many parents who responded apprehensively to the opening of this school five years ago. In a major redistricting plan, the Bibb County School District had decided to close the revered Redding Elementary School and reassign its students to Skyview. Community members, many with parents and grandparents who had attended the older school, were not happy; some even filed a lawsuit to keep Redding open.
Luckily, Gilbert had learned much from her previous principalships. As the head of Minnie Burghard Elementary School, she experienced first-hand how an effective character education program could transform a low-performing school to one so effective that it became a 2001 National School of Character. A short one-year assignment at Morgan Magnet School had provided her and her staff with an opportunity to try out the Basic School philosophy. Basing his concept of a school of excellence on 20 years of research on educational practice, Dr. Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, advocated a comprehensive approach to education, marked by four “connections”: community, climate, curriculum, and character. Fortified with Boyer’s philosophy and a passion for character education, Gilbert and her hand-picked staff at Skyview began their journey.

In order to woo the community to accept the new school, Gilbert set out immediately to make the first “connection.” To give the new students a sense of ownership, she visited the classes at Redding School in May and let them select the school colors (red, white, and blue) and the school mascot (SkyHawk). After a gathering with the community “to address rumors and misconceptions,” the staff’s next move was to conduct home visits or make phone contact with every child and parent over the summer. A picnic on school grounds served as the official open house for parents, children, and staff. The Skyview staff, aware of the anxiety engendered by a move to a strange, new school, manned information booths, where they answered transportation questions, gave out carpool numbers, supplied schedules for after-school programs, and distributed school supplies. Skyview also planned occasions for staff bonding: a “get acquainted” staff meeting and visit to the new school while it was still under construction, a pool party that included spouses and children, workshops presented by the Basic School mentor, and pre-planning days. Skyview is an apt name for this school, which charged onward and upward with a mission “to create a culture of excellence.”

Connecting Character to the Curriculum
Gilbert’s comment, “We had a lot of relationship building in the first year,” underplays the gargantuan effort required in the early days. The community connection is strong today because of a carefully planned structure. First of all, the student body is divided into a “family within a family” arrangement: Three PreK–5 families exist, each with classes of all grade levels, and every class is paired with a buddy class of a different grade within its family. In addition, the Character Design Team is kept busy in guiding the character development effort and in connecting the values to the curriculum. Music teacher Susan Mincey points out one of the strengths of Gilbert’s leadership: “Her philosophy is to give the teachers what they need and then get out of the way.”

A character education curriculum, written by the staff, provides a host of engaging character lessons as well as suggestions for journal topics, home activities, Web-site content, and service-learning projects. Each month the school is abuzz with talk of the Book of the Month, which serves as a common reading experience for students, staff, and parents. Lively discussions,

The Proof Is in the Data
How we know character education is working at Skyview Elementary School:

- Skyview exceeded the state performance on the 2006 Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in every grade and every subject (reading, math, science, social studies), with the exception of grade 3 reading, where it equaled the state performance.
- The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the state standards on the CRCT increased by at least two percent each year (2003–05) over the baseline (2002) score of 89 percent.
- The implementation of the character education program merited a perfect score (5) in the 2006 assessment by the University of Georgia.
- The character education program, evaluated according to an eight-criterion rubric, received a “strong implementation” rating.
- The rate of disciplinary incidents has remained below the 2002 baseline, despite an increase in enrollment of 259 students and an increase of 14 percent in the number of free/reduced lunch recipients.
- Staff/parent/student survey data indicate that parents think students get an excellent education at Skyview, and that students are aware that adults care for them and speak to them politely.
written reflections, and artistic renditions show the impact of the selection on school life. For example, after the students completed Mr. Lincoln's Way, a story about a bully overcoming his prejudice when an African-American principal invited him to help attract birds to the school atrium, the students created their own aviary in the hallway, replete with trees and a variety of student-made birds.

Although Skyview does encourage its students to be proud of their performance on the state tests (results show a continuing increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state requirements), the emphasis is on developing self-motivated individuals who are “knowledgeable, responsible, and caring.” Clearly, a cornerstone of that goal is the Pride Folder maintained by every student in grades 2–5. The folder contains the student’s goals, reflections, and important achievements as well as the teacher’s Professional Education Dedication Statement. Skyview is both caring and creative in its efforts to address the needs of at-risk students, providing a STARS (Special Touches for At-Risk Students) mentoring program and Test Talk Time, one-on-one chats with the principal and assistant principal to encourage success.

Developing Student Leaders and Improving School Culture

Parent Lester Miller says, “It’s not enough to just get all As here. You have to be good, too.” It is obvious that the school agrees, for the Skyview Superior Award is given to students who combine all As with good citizenship. The school believes strongly in fostering student leadership, even training kindergarteners to assume roles of responsibility. Every class elects a representative to the Student Council, and students vote on both grade-level and school-wide service-learning projects. Student reflections on a service-learning project last year, the Race to the Lake, revealed how the project to clean up the play space at a local lake area affected them. Annie wrote that the project helped her develop “kindness, respect, and perseverance”; Taylor “felt good” by “helping the earth,” and Ariele “felt proud when the project was finished, ready for the next one to start.”

Life is never dull at Skyview, and it is never without the student voice. First-grade teacher Lisa Daniely emphasizes that the students, like the staff, feel a strong connection to the school: “The children have ownership. The staff takes ownership. This is our school.” In the student-run television broadcast, WSKY, announcers read the school announcements, lead the school in a character pledge, display the student character-related art of the day, and introduce birthday celebrants. Moreover, students may take on many interesting roles in other aspects of school life. They can voice an opinion at a class meeting, conduct an actual transaction at the Skyview Community Bank (sponsored by Bank of America), or function as a host or hostess in the cafeteria. A pilot project in which two students from each class set the table, welcome students, and keep a watchful eye on clean-up has proved to be highly successful, pleasing both teachers and students.

Connecting to Parents

From the first “hello” at the welcoming social, parents feel they are vital partners in their children’s education. The SkyHawk Talk Newsletter apprises parents of the latest events; a special Parent Character Corner provides ideas for parents to promote character at home. In addition, workshops help parents hone skills in raising children and

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**PRINCIPAL’S BEST PICKS:**

Gail M. Gilbert

**TWO WORDS TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL:** family and nurturing

**CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM/PROJECT OF WHICH YOU ARE MOST PROUD:** Student Success Day, which shows student pride (an appropriate way to delight in a school’s achievement)

**BEST PROOF THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION CHANGES SCHOOL CLIMATE:** students consistently doing the right thing for its own sake (for example: a student returned a $100 bill that she had found)

**EVIDENCE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION HAS ENHANCED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:** consistently high scores on the state CRCT

**WORDS OF WISDOM TO A NEWCOMER IN CHARACTER EDUCATION:** Whatever you do, do it consistently and make it a school-wide effort. Look for opportunities to immerse and embed character in all key activities.
dealing with problems, and the Character Design Team elicits suggestions from parents on ways to improve character initiatives. Parent Tracy Taylor observes, “Everyone’s on a level playing field at parent meetings.” Taylor, who is delighted that her daughter applies “the manners she learned at Skyview” to other situations, continues, “They even help you to teach your child to be better in math.” Another parent, Mott Smith, observes that becoming part of the Skyview family also means learning to abide by the school rules. As a result of their relationship with the new school, Smith says, “Parents grew, children grew, and, as a community, we grew. This is still a community school.”

Parents have a high regard for the principal and the caring staff, who often attend the students’ activities outside of school to strengthen their bond with the children. Susan Middleton, a School Board member, states, “Gail Gilbert combines character education with a strong academic model. This is a model school.” Representatives from Mercer University and Macon State College agree, adding that they “love to place their student teachers at Skyview” because it provides them with an actual example of an ideal school. Student teacher Carolyn Garvin of Mercer University, who has never had “a negative assessment” while being observed here, is enthusiastic about her experience: “The principal sets the positive tone for the school.”

The school also teams with local community and civic organizations on projects and solicits local leaders to share their careers and life experiences with the children. A meeting with faith-based community leaders generated the plan for a community park/playground that is now being developed.

Soaring into the Future

Gilbert, as the principal of two schools that have achieved National School of Character status, has much to offer schools desirous of implementing or improving a character education program. A seasoned presenter who served as a content faculty member at several character education institutes sponsored by the Idaho State Department of Education and also facilitated character education sessions in Missouri and Virginia, she looks forward to the new outreach role that Skyview will play in bringing the message to others.

Skyview has already made a name for itself on both the state and national levels. Georgia Family magazine chose the school for its Spotlight on Education feature in 2004, since it was already shaping up to be “one of the highest-performing schools in Bibb County” because of the high percentage of students meeting or exceeding reading and math standards on the CRCT. A 2006 study by Patricia Davenport and Terri Smith, *Are We There Yet? Continuing to Close the Achievement Gap*, also accentuated the school’s continued strong performance on standardized tests.

Ask the staff and students at Skyview about the school’s accolades, however, and you will find them to be characteristically modest. Skyview considers itself, first and foremost, to be a school of character. It should come as no surprise that its students perform well academically, because that is what students strive to do in a culture of excellence. After all, students who choose powerful, legendary birds as their mascot have high expectations.

REFERENCES


Goal Setting

Name:

1. **My Academic Goal:**

Steps I am going to take to accomplish my academic goal:

2. **My Character Goal:**

Steps I am going to take to accomplish my character goal:

3. **What I am going to do to celebrate my goals when I accomplish them:**

I will focus my energy on making progress toward achieving my goals during the _______ – _______ school year.
If I achieve my goals, I will create new goals.

_________________________________________________ ________________________
Student Signature Date

_________________________________________________ ________________________
Parent Signature Teacher Signature

For additional instructions and handouts related to this activity, visit www.character.org.

SOURCE: Birmingham Covington School
Competing with Character

Skills for Players

LISTEN TO YOUR COACHES
Stop what you are doing.
Look at the coach.
Make an effort to concentrate.

GET ALONG WITH YOUR TEAMMATES
Make positive comments to teammates; avoid negative comments.
Ignore any irritating behavior; don’t escalate a situation.
Remember that you are all here for a common goal.

FOLLOW YOUR COACHES’ INSTRUCTIONS
Listen the entire time your coach is giving instructions.
Do what your coach says, immediately and with energy.
If you don’t understand, raise your hand and ask.

EXHIBIT HIGH ENERGY
Do everything to the best of your ability.
Hustle, don’t walk.
Stay on task, and avoid horseplay with teammates.

BE PREPARED FOR PRACTICE AND GAMES
Be on time.
Pack equipment ahead of time.
Double check before leaving.

RESPECT YOUR OPPONENT
Don’t use any trash talk or gestures.
Play within the rules.
Ignore any unsportsmanlike behavior from your opponent.

WIN WITH CLASS AND LOSE WITH DIGNITY
Congratulate your opponent, whether you win or lose.
Don’t brag or boast when winning; don’t criticize or make excuses when losing.
Take a lesson from both winning and losing.

RESPECT FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT
Use facilities and equipment in the way they were intended.
Pick up after yourself and teammates.
Report any damage to the coach.

HANDLE DISAPPOINTMENT AND ADVERSITY
Avoid negative outward displays, both physical and verbal.
Learn from the situation.
Work harder.

ACCEPT COACHING
Understand that coaching makes you better.
Follow the coaches’ instructions without hesitation or talking back.
If you feel frustrated, express your concerns to the coach at an appropriate time.

Skills for Parents

HAVE YOUR CHILD ARRIVE ON TIME AND WITH PROPER EQUIPMENT
Make a list of dates, times, and equipment.
Help your child share the responsibility.
Notify coaches if there is a problem.

SUPPORT THE COACHES
Avoid negative talk.
Ask if there is anything you can do.
Tell them thanks.

VOICE CONCERNS APPROPRIATELY
Avoid voicing concerns after a game or contest.
Remain calm, and use an appropriate tone of voice.
State your concerns, listen, and have an open mind.

PRAISE YOUR CHILD AND OFFER COMPLIMENTS
Look for the positive.
Aim for a 3-to-1 ratio of positives (praise and compliments) to negatives (criticism).
Make connections between appropriate behavior and desired outcomes.

MODEL APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AT ATHLETIC CONTESTS
Cheer for your team, not against your opponent.
Don’t approach game officials; they’re off limits to you.
Don’t criticize the referees’ decisions.

EMPHASIZE EFFORT AND ENJOYMENT OVER WINNING AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Avoid conversations concerning “how many” or “how much.”
Try not to draw comparisons between your child and another.
Be empathetic immediately after contests.

USE APPROPRIATE MEANS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS YOUR CHILD HAS WITH COACHES
Stay neutral, and avoid making negative comments about the coach.
Practice with your child how to advocate for him/herself with the coach.
Support the coaches’ right to make decisions.

For additional instructions and handouts related to this activity, visit www.character.org.

SOURCE: Boys Town High School
Dear Parent:

This report is being sent to inform you of your child’s inappropriate behavior at school. Please guide your child through this important reflection activity. Life Skills are an essential aspect of our school’s mission to educate the whole child. Your support of this process is appreciated.

**Directions to Student:** Based on this report, circle the Life Skills that need improvement. Then, in the space below, describe what you did and how you will improve your Life Skills in the future (use the back of this paper if you need more room), or use the back of this paper to draw a picture of what you will do in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respect: for myself, others, and my school</th>
<th>Responsibility: accountable for my actions</th>
<th>Trustworthiness: honest and truthful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fairness: treating everyone equally</td>
<td>Caring: compassion and kindness</td>
<td>Citizenship: teamwork and cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How I will improve my Life Skills:**

**Student Signature:**

**Parent Signature:**

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM ON THE NEXT SCHOOL DAY. Thank you!

*Respect • Responsibility • Trustworthiness • Fairness • Caring • Citizenship*

SOURCE: Fairbrook Elementary School
Circles of Strength
What Do You Stand For?
A Reflection of Us

Each year we celebrate a new beginning in our school!
In honor of this new beginning, we would like to create a school mural that will be displayed throughout the year. Our School is a place that is filled with tradition, strength, and creativity. It is filled with character. It is filled with your strengths, your dreams, and your visions. We ask you to reflect upon your character and your strengths right now as you design a “circle of strength” for this special “What Do We Stand For?” mural.

Please clearly write your name and grade on your circle (front or back). Remember that your circle should represent your personal thoughts and ideas and vision of the character trait, quality, or pillar that you stand for, admire, or believe in. You might choose to contribute a written reflection, a visual image, or a combination of the two. We would like the finished mural (which will be displayed within our school) to be a “wall of strength” filled with color, personal thoughts, and reflections. As you decide how you will design your original circle, the following prompts might be helpful in developing your ideas:

• What do you stand for (as an individual)? or What do we stand for (as a school)?
• Which is the one character trait/quality that you admire most in yourself? Explain.
• Which is the one character trait/quality that you admire most in others? Explain.
• Choose one of the six pillars of character (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship) to define, explain, or represent in words or symbols.
• Which of the six pillars of character do you most often demonstrate in your life?
• Which is the most important quality you look for in a friend? Why?
• Which is the most important quality/ability/strength you bring to your friendships?
• Brainstorm other ideas, concepts, qualities, and character traits that are important to you. (For example, do you stand for honesty, loyalty, reliability, kindness, courage, bravery, modesty, sensitivity, punctuality, etc.)
• Consider how these qualities and characteristics help to make our community a better place.
• Consider sharing your thoughts about why it is important to “stand for something” and why you have chosen this particular quality/characteristic/concept.

Please feel free to use your own sense of creativity, color, and form. Drawings, quotations, imagery, descriptions, definitions, poems, etc. are welcome and anticipated!

Thank you for your contribution to our “What Do We Stand For?” mural.

After you complete your circle, please return it to your teacher. We ask that all teachers please collect all circles and send one student to return the circles to our guidance counselors as soon as all are completed. We also invite all faculty and staff to contribute a circle to this mural. We will be constructing the mural as soon as your contributions are completed. Thank you, and please come visit your circle and others on our wall of strength as we share and reflect upon “What We Stand For.”
**METAMORPHOSIS**  
From BYSTANDER to ALLY

We are going to look at sample phrases that might make it easier for us to get the words out when we want to be an ally of someone whose feelings have been hurt because of the words of another person. As we read these phrases, think about which ones you would use. Also, there is a place on the sheet to write some of the things you might prefer to say instead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAMPLE PHRASES YOU CAN SAY</th>
<th>THINGS YOU MIGHT PREFER TO SAY INSTEAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CALM PHRASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know a lot of people say that, but …</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know some people think that’s funny, but …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You might feel angry, but …</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CALL-IT-OUT PHRASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s messed up!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re bullying that person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re spreading a mean rumor, and it’s not true.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop showing off!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SAY-HOW-YOU-FEEL PHRASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It offends me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not OK with me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you feel if someone did that to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s not funny.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SAY-WHAT-YOU-WANT PHRASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just please stop saying that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think we should talk behind people’s backs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please don’t joke like that anymore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER PHRASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those words hurt feelings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the big deal? Is it really that important?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s better not to judge others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of families have a disabled person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think (name) really means to act that way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re my friend, but that’s not right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think I know (name) well enough to say that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For additional information and handouts related to this activity, visit [www.character.org](http://www.character.org).

SOURCE: Newport Mill Middle School
Dinner Dilemmas

Purpose: To encourage family discussions that promote character education in our community.

To Parents: Dinner Dilemmas will be sent home once a month with your child. Please have your family discuss one dilemma each week. Try to decide how the character quality of the month relates to each situation presented—and to each member of your family. Thank you for participating!

Month: ______________________________               Character Quality of the Month:            Respect

Definition: Treating others and yourself with courtesy and consideration

Week 1

Situation: Sam feels his aunt is always mean and rude to him. He wants to talk back, but his parents say he needs to show respect.

Dilemma: On one hand, Sam does not believe he should show respect to someone who is not nice to him. On the other hand, Sam is expected to show respect to his family members.

Discussion: What advice do you have for Sam?

Week 2

Situation: Sue and her friends are standing in the hallway when another student—obviously upset—goes by in a wheelchair. Sue’s friends roll their eyes and laugh.

Dilemma: On one hand, Sue thinks it’s okay to laugh with her friends. On the other hand, Sue knows she should show respect for other people, even if they are different.

Discussion: What advice do you have for Sue?

Week 3

Situation: Sam gets home from school, and there is a sick stray dog in his front yard.

Dilemma: On one hand, it is right to show respect for all living creatures by taking care of them. On the other hand, Sam may endanger the other pets in his house if he brings the dog inside.

Discussion: What advice do you have for Sam?

Week 4

Situation: Sue and her family go to the beach. There is a big pile of trash, and the trash container is far away.

Dilemma: On one hand, Sue and her family know they should show respect for nature and help keep the beach clean. On the other hand, they did not make the mess, and there are workers who get paid to pick up trash.

Discussion: What advice do you have for Sue?

For a Spanish version of this activity, visit www.character.org.

SOURCE: Pinellas County Schools
Character Education Assessment Rubric

To the Teacher: You may use this rubric to evaluate your students’ understanding of character traits. Provide your students with writing prompts focused on character traits taught in your school and classroom. You may wish to use your state’s testing format as a model for the prompts. Each writing assessment will enable you to measure your students’ proficiency in language arts as well as their comprehension of character traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score and Content</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of character trait</td>
<td>Identifies character trait but gives no description of trait</td>
<td>Identifies character trait and makes an attempt to describe trait</td>
<td>Identifies character trait and gives basic description of trait</td>
<td>Identifies character trait and gives detailed description of trait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation of character trait to self</td>
<td>Makes little or no connection of trait to a personal experience or action</td>
<td>Makes limited connection of trait to a personal experience or action</td>
<td>Makes more substantial connection of trait to a personal experience or action</td>
<td>Shows strong connection of trait to a personal experience or action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of character trait to actions of other people</td>
<td>Shows no relationship between trait and actions of others</td>
<td>Shows limited evidence of relationship between trait and actions of others</td>
<td>Shows more substantial evidence of relationship between trait and actions of others</td>
<td>Shows strong evidence of relationship between trait and actions of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of identified character trait to other traits</td>
<td>Shows little or no attempt to relate identified trait to other character traits</td>
<td>Shows limited attempt to relate identified trait to other character traits</td>
<td>Shows more substantial attempt to relate identified trait to other character traits</td>
<td>Shows clear relationship between identified trait and other character traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of character trait</td>
<td>Shows no judgment of character trait, or with no support</td>
<td>Shows appropriate/inappropriate judgment of character trait, with limited support</td>
<td>Shows appropriate judgment of character trait, with more substantial support</td>
<td>Shows appropriate judgment of character trait, with strong support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 0 Non-scorable responses</td>
<td>FR (Fragment) Student wrote too little to judge comprehension accurately.</td>
<td>OT (Off Topic) Student did not write on assigned topic or task.</td>
<td>NE (Not English) Student wrote in a language other than English.</td>
<td>NR (No Response) Student refused to write on the topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Circle Activities

Thoughts become our words; words become our actions; actions become our habits; habits become our character; and character becomes our destiny. (Anonymous)

Formal circle time held weekly can reinforce values such as respect, active listening, sharing with one another, and leadership. Simple circle rubrics include the following:

- Sitting in a circle—which has no beginning and no end—to express that we are all equal and united with one another
- Lighting a candle and ringing a bell to signal the beginning of circle time
- Passing a “talking” symbol to the person whose turn it is to share while everyone else listens

Circle topics and activities can cover a whole range of themes that impact character development. Some of these themes are self-esteem, qualities of a friend, courage, service, respect, making a positive difference in the world, responsibility, caring for people, and taking care of the environment.

Sample Circle Activity to Build Self-Esteem

Objectives:
- To encourage students to reflect on their strengths
- To help them become aware of people who love and care about them
- To encourage interaction among students, and of students with teacher

Procedure:
Have each person in the circle (no more than 15) draw an outline of his or her hand on a piece of paper. Then the leader gives the following instructions (pausing after each, to allow sufficient time for participants to respond):

1. In the palm of your hand, write about a time when you were really generous.
2. On your thumb, write words or a phrase that makes you feel encouraged.
3. On your index (pointing) finger, write something about yourself that you wish more people knew about you.
4. On your middle finger, write about a time when you felt really strong.
5. On your ring finger, write about something or someone you love.
6. On your pinkie (little finger), write about someone who loves you.

When all have finished the “hand,” each person shares something about an item on his or her “hand.” This continues for as long as time permits. When sharing time is over, the group joins hands and closes with an appropriate word or song.

SOURCE: Sacred Hearts Academy
Character Education Integration Template

Basic Steps to Embed Character into Reading:

1. Identify the character qualities demonstrated by the character.
2. Give specific examples where the qualities were demonstrated.
3. Define each character quality in your own words.
4. Tell how the character’s display of each character quality led to the successful outcome of the story.
5. Think about times when you demonstrated the same character qualities in your own life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character in Story</th>
<th>Action in Story Which Shows Character Quality</th>
<th>Character Quality Displayed</th>
<th>Discussion Questions and Activities</th>
<th>Related Books and Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| EXAMPLE: Akiak in Akiak: A Tale from the Iditarod by Robert J. Blake | Akiak's paw is injured, but, instead of taking the plane home, Akiak runs away to follow her team. | **Perseverance**—working hard without giving up | How did Akiak’s display of perseverance lead to the successful outcome of the story? Have you ever persevered in your life when you felt like giving up? How would things have changed if you had given up? | *The Hare and the Tortoise*  
*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* |

For additional instructions and handouts related to this activity, visit [www.character.org](http://www.character.org).

SOURCE: Skyview Elementary School
The National Schools of Character awards program is made possible through a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation. Established in 1987 by renowned global investor Sir John Templeton, the Foundation works closely with educators, scientists, theologians, medical professionals, and other scholars throughout the world to support more than 300 programs and projects that encourage character development in schools and colleges, promote an appreciation for the benefits of freedom and free enterprise, and stimulate serious scientific research on the relationship between spirituality and health. The foundation’s mission is to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life’s biggest questions in science and philosophy.

The Laws of Life Essay Contest is the foundation’s oldest character development program. In 1987, John Templeton created the contest as a gift for the young people of his hometown of Winchester, Tennessee. His vision was to encourage young people to reflect and write about their own laws of life and then to publicly recognize them for thinking about the values and principles that will guide them, wherever they go or whatever they do in life. In the words of former first lady Barbara Bush, “The Laws of Life Essay Contest gives students the opportunity to look within themselves and decide which ideals are important to them.”

Laws of Life Essay Contests are now held in communities and schools throughout the United States and around the world. In 2007, more than 350,000 young people in more than 50 countries participated in an area essay contest. Individuals, businesses, foundations, civic groups, community organizations, youth groups, and colleges and universities sponsor contests locally. This program is endorsed by the National School Boards Association and is on the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ National Advisory List of Student Contests and Activities. In 2003, Health Communications, Inc., the publisher of Chicken Soup for the Soul, published 112 of the best essays from all the local contests in a special book called Teen Ink: What Matters.

The Character Education Partnership shares the foundation’s belief that thoughtful reflection and writing are essential to character development and lauds the Laws of Life Essay Contest as a valuable tool for schools everywhere. CEP encourages educators and interested citizens to contact the John Templeton Foundation or visit www.lawsoflife.org to learn more about this important program. Please feel free to request a complimentary Contest Information Kit and Video or DVD.

REFERENCE

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Web site: www.lawsoflife.org
Folks in the Alhambra Elementary School District feel a personal bond with school superintendent Dr. Jim Rice. A highly visible figure in each of the district’s 15 schools, he knows most teachers by name and visits each of Alhambra’s 800 classrooms at least once a year. What is even more amazing is that the other administrators in this sprawling urban district that is home to more than 15,000 students seem to mirror Rice’s personalized style. In fact, modeling good character is a clear expectation for all personnel. Sevilla School assistant principal Celia Waite sees it as the key to building relationships: “We walk the walk. It’s the modeling of adults on campus that makes the difference. Many students don’t have people in their lives to model good behavior.” Jackie Doerr, the principal of Andalucia Primary, points to the strong power of example: “They see me do it. They see the assistant principal do it. That’s the way it works. Example, example, example.”

If modeling of good character provides the strategy that has transformed the Alhambra district, the slogan, Every child has a star within, provides the philosophical base. The district’s efforts to polish the star in every child have brought amazing results. Since the introduction of character education, four schools in the district have received Arizona’s A+ School Award, two schools received Arizona’s A+ Exemplary Program Award, and one school was honored as one of ten elementary schools in the nation to receive the Intel and Scholastic National School of Distinction Award. The usual obstacles, such as poverty, a high-crime location, and homelessness, have not stopped Alhambra’s march to higher achievement.

When Alhambra received a $25,000 grant seven years ago through the University of Arizona, it adopted the Character Counts framework to embed character development in the daily lives of its students and to make the six pillars of character (trustworthiness, fairness, caring, citizenship, respect, and responsibility) the foundation of learning. Over the last three years, the staff has received training in the Kagan Cooperative Learning Model that stresses interdependence, individual accountability, and equal participation. “It was easy to implement Kagan, because we already had character education in place,” says Sevilla West principal Kathy Davis.

The district has been recognized as a model district for educating Latino students. Among its many successful practices are the Culture Club that explores different world cultures, the Men of Honor Club that supports service learning, and the CHA CHA program (Choosing High Achievement) that celebrates good citizenship by rewarding students who have done all their homework and have demonstrated good attendance.

Rice, who received Arizona’s Superintendent of the Year Award in 2006, is quick to give credit to the district’s teachers, who often come in early and stay late to tutor students. As one sixth-grade student put it, “Teachers help us learn, and they won’t quit.” As a result, Alhambra students won’t quit either as they discover their inner stars.

REFERENCES

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Web site: www.alhambra.k12.az.us
We believe that great schools don’t happen by chance; they happen by design,” states Holly Hawthorne, the energetic principal of Arlington Traditional School, an elementary school of choice located in the inner suburbs of Washington, D.C. About a dozen years ago, the school adopted ABC’s of Success (in reference to academics, behavior, and character) as its mantra. Today, the ABC’s of Success underpin everything that happens at the school. They shape instruction, curriculum, student behavior, school climate, and community outreach. By espousing the six pillars of Character Counts (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship) and highlighting these values, the school helps students strengthen the bond between ethical behavior and academic success.

Arlington Traditional, which draws students from each of the diverse neighborhoods in Arlington County, is highly desirable because it emphasizes character development and academic achievement. Families apply for admission to the kindergarten program, and each kindergarten class is chosen through a formal lottery process. When there are openings in other grades, students are placed from a waiting list. Parents often say that gaining admission to this prestigious school is tantamount to “winning the lottery.”

Students meet the challenge of high academic expectations, and they experience success in a caring environment that is free from distractions. A visitor can easily find tangible proof of the students’ strong sense of responsibility and the school-wide emphasis on making personal connections. Fourth graders, for example, work diligently with at-risk kindergarteners; and fifth graders, who serve as the school Safety Patrol, walk the younger children to the bus at the end of every day. The librarian sponsors Literary Lunches in which students bring their lunches to the library and read books together. When Peter, a fifth grader, was asked what he had learned about character at Arlington Traditional School, he immediately responded, “Taking care of one person, and that person is you.” In essence, the school aims to develop the students’ intrinsic motivation so they will follow the ABC’s of Success when no one is watching.

Friday afternoon school assemblies reflect the ways in which ABC’s of Success has been embedded into school life. Every week, the student body gathers as a family, wearing blue and gold colors, for a one-hour program to recognize the good deeds of students; to celebrate birthdays and team or individual achievements; and to enjoy class plays that demonstrate academic or character lessons.

Opportunities for helping others extend far beyond the school boundaries. When parent John Wanda founded the Arlington Academy for Hope in his native Uganda, school staff and families provided resources and support. The school’s principal and teachers traveled to Africa during their summer breaks to teach at the school. Arlington Traditional students write to pen pals abroad, share experiences at Friday assemblies, and learn about one another’s culture.

Arlington Traditional School, which has earned recognition for its rigorous academic curriculum and high scholastic achievement, remains focused on helping individual children reach their potential to become competent persons of character. Fourth grader Sophie sums up the care and concern of adults here: “There are lots of people you can go to if you have a problem.”

REFERENCE
CHARACTER COUNTS! Los Angeles, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics. Website: www.charactercounts.org.

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How can a 50-minute bus ride to school improve reading? Just ask 40 enthusiastic youngsters at Chesterfield Elementary School who have shown a dramatic increase in reading power. When students from inner city St. Louis opted to attend suburban Chesterfield through a voluntary inter-district choice program, assistant principal Sharon O’Day used her ingenuity to transform their traveling time into instructional time. Now, thanks to a grant, the Riding-to-Read program is in full swing, and riders enjoy interesting books and cassette tapes during the trip.

“I’ve been here since second grade,” says fourth grader Keith, “and I’ve learned a lot.” A bonus: bus discipline problems are greatly reduced.

Chesterfield Elementary School prides itself on the many novel approaches it has used to promote character education. Part of the Rockwood School District, which was a 2006 National District of Character, Chesterfield shares the district’s nine ethical values and also embraces the tenets of the Caring School Community. However, it is the school’s emphasis on “voice and choice” that has served as its distinctive focus. School superintendent Craig Larson says, “The whole theme of student voice is ingrained at Chesterfield. This is the biggest change in an elementary school I’ve ever seen.” The passion for student autonomy comes from the school’s vibrant principal, Jill Ramsey. She has made a concerted effort to help staff, parents, and community members understand the correlation between student autonomy and personal and academic achievement. Wisely, she has provided adequate professional training for her teachers so that they can implement the concepts successfully.

A visit to this sunny school shows democracy in action as the students thoughtfully become the architects of their own education. Class meetings serve as a common ground where they decide norms for student behavior and consequences for breaching those norms. Also, these meetings provide forums to discuss character traits, resolve conflicts, and make decisions regarding curriculum. Disciplinary incidents become learning opportunities, because students must reflect on poor choices made and then discuss possible alternatives via a Think Sheet.

The school’s many opportunities for cross-age tutoring and cooperative learning enhance the students’ ability to work together. Each class is paired with a buddy class of a different grade for specific activities. For example, first and fourth graders teamed up last year to design a T-shirt for a young cancer victim who is the brother of a fourth grader. “Walking in the shoes of another person” forms the basis for exploration of many challenging social issues, such as the early settlers’ treatment of the Native Americans. In another vein, races in physical education lose their competitive nature as students, working in pairs, try the indoor mile. When one teammate tires, he (she) comes to the center, and the buddy runs.

Students collaborate in math classes on a Math Treasure Hunt, and students and staff work together to create an outdoor Hope Garden as a means of showing support and encouragement to staff members who are battling cancer. Just as the school song states, Chesterfield is a great place to grow, and the diversity of activities in the classes enables students to learn from one another.

Voice and choice has had a positive impact on Chesterfield’s nine core values: respect, responsibility, caring, integrity, patience, cooperation, courage, self-control, and perseverance. Fourth grader Kylie sums up the spirit of the school: “We have a choice, and it kind of feels like a family because we take care of each other and help each other.”

REFERENCE

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Keeping the Peace through the Solution Wheel

A school visitor asks the group gathered around him, “What would you do if you were bullied at school?” One by one, the students thoughtfully posit a series of responses, such as ignoring the bully, walking away, telling the bully to stop, or telling an adult immediately. The maturity of the responses seems incredible, considering that the oldest speaker is just a second grader.

Without a doubt, Peace-It-Together (PIT), a social competency/character education program at Colonel John Robinson, is a winner, as the little ones demonstrate grown-up problem-solving skills by using the Solution Wheel.

The Solution Wheel, which provides students with nine options to draw on when facing a difficult social situation, is just one strategy that the youngsters master in the social-emotional learning program of this innovative K–2 school, located just northwest of Boston. Unlike traditional primary schools with classes isolated from one another, a sense of community seems to validate the staff’s theory.

The school’s home-grown program has had an unusual genesis, beginning about ten years ago on a teacher’s back porch as her colleagues shared their frustrations about losing academic time to disciplinary issues. The plan they drafted together, Peace-It-Together, provides the framework for the current program, which has been enhanced by research and additions from several packaged programs. To help in inculcating social skills, the staff has developed a formal and expanding collection of social competency units, and the library provides additional sources, such as literature for students as well as staff resource books.

The school’s motto, At Robinson School We All CARE!, emphasizes four core values: community, acceptance, responsibility, and excellence. In keeping with the tenets of the I-Care philosophy, stories that accent the importance of striving for excellence and fostering acceptance have enriched the curriculum. The teachers assert that the accent on caring has improved behavior during recess time and fostered empathy through service projects, such as working with senior citizens. Parents are regularly informed about the various programs via newsletters, parent workshops, and individual class notices.

Believing that “caring relationships are the cornerstone of our education system,” Arvidson and her staff have forged a connection, both literal and figurative, between Robinson and its counterpart at the next level (Crisafulli Elementary School, grades 3–5). As a result of an Eagle Scout project, a trail through the woods links Robinson with Crisafulli School; future plans call for joint nature programs and snowshoe lessons as part of the physical education program.

Robinson students have accepted problem solving as a necessary tool for life. When one student learned that he had to leave Robinson School because of a family move to California, his first question revealed his priorities: “Will my new school have a Solution Wheel, or should I bring one with me?”

REFERENCE


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"We all feel safer here than we did in our elementary school."

"The No Bullying program is really good. I don’t feel I have to worry about bullies when I’m at school." "The Peer-to-Peer program makes you feel like you’re going to someone’s big house, not a school."

The fifth graders at Gillette Road Middle School in Cicero, New York, do not suffer from the traditional pre-adolescent anxiety associated with entering middle school. Despite its burgeoning population of over 1,300 students and its gigantic building that boasts of a new gym, new media center, and multiple cafeterias, Gillette Road Middle School retains a friendly, caring atmosphere, thanks to its highly successful Peer-to-Peer and No Bullying programs.

This caring middle school provides an innovative way to help its fifth graders feel at home even before they start their three-year cycle at the school. Each fourth grader from the four elementary feeder schools is matched up with a fifth-grade helper. During February and March, the fourth graders write letters to their peer helpers, who send a response by late April. When students meet with their peer helpers in late May, fears of being bullied or getting lost seem to recede, and new friendships begin to blossom. The House Plan Model, in which Gillette is broken down into three houses, with each student remaining in the same house for three years, also creates a small-school atmosphere.

Gillette Road believes strongly in students assuming leadership roles in its character education initiative. Begun in 2000 and greatly enhanced by staff members attending the Summer Institute on Character Education in Cortland, the program has moved from being administration driven to one which is propelled by staff and students. Currently, the I Make a Difference Committee (IMAD), consisting of 72 students, serves as a creative and energetic force that drives many of the character-related programs. Not only do committee members plan and implement school events, such as Spirit Week, Diversity Day, and the Student of the Month program, but they also conduct many community-service initiatives, such as a walk for Alzheimer’s or diabetes, a project for Make-a-Wish, and a fund drive for Children’s Hospital. Jackie, a student in IMAD, points to the significant role of the student body: “Our school is a good influence. We are a big school that cares; there are lots of activities, and everyone has a say in what the school can be.” Clearly, students are seeing school as the place to begin building a better world.

The No Bullying program, initiated approximately five years ago, offers a violence prevention curriculum developed by Beverly Title for the Hazelden Foundation/Johnson Institute. Complementing the student and staff component is a session for bus drivers entitled “Not on Our Bus,” which has proved to be highly effective in combating a recognized problem. Moreover, since over 50 percent of the teachers of grades five and six have been trained in Responsive Classroom, with most teachers regularly holding morning meetings, opportunities abound for successful mediation of problems.

The community is justly proud of its middle school that is committed to developing responsible citizens. An Eagle newspaper editorial sums up its approval: “In a world that has been overcome with terror, hostility, and rage, Gillette is making the world better—one step at a time—by encouraging its students to live, love, and learn.”

REFERENCES


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A School with Pride and a Purpose

Hartington, Nebraska, is a storybook land, a pictorial delight set amid rolling hills and river valleys. The town’s motto, *A Community with Pride and a Purpose,* also describes its school, a beautifully manicured complex that serves grades K–6 and 7–12 in two interconnected buildings. The schools have separate principals, guided by one superintendent; all administrators work closely together and enthusiastically embrace character education. A visitor can quickly sense the pride the students have in their school and in the close connections it has with the community.

The mission statement of Hartington Public School clearly defines its purpose: *to develop students of character while empowering them to achieve personal success in an ever-changing world.* High school principal Russell Flamig points out that all school goals and activities support the view that “personal success is not possible unless our students are first students of character.” The Character Counts curriculum and tenets serve as the framework for Hartington’s systematic and developmental character education program. All elementary school students and their parents receive a homework folder printed with behavioral expectations and descriptions of the six pillars of character education, which are then reinforced in the classroom through examples. On the secondary level, students examine character from different perspectives as they assess actions portrayed in biographies, participate in literature discussions, and examine social issues.

Hartington’s demonstration of good sportsmanship is legendary in northeastern Nebraska. Before every varsity competition, a Hartington student reads the sportsmanship pledge. At the end of each home varsity game, Hartington’s team awards a medal to a member of the opposing team who best exemplifies good sportsmanship. Countless letters from the opposing teams attest to the powerful effect of this tradition, and the Nebraska Department of Education has congratulated Hartington for “living and modeling” character.

In the elementary school, a weekly student of character receives the Subway Award and a certificate for a sub sandwich. The high school, in an effort to develop students’ intrinsic motivation, has an award system that recognizes students “caught in the act” of good character. The Gotcha Good program, instituted last year, honors students behaving in ways that reflect good character.

Opportunities to serve others abound, and the school, a Nebraska pilot school for character education, encourages students to volunteer for many service projects. A recent survey indicates that 97 percent of the secondary students have participated in some type of community-service activity, and 36 percent of those students have been involved in at least six volunteer activities in the past two years. Activities run the gamut from providing help for faith, health, and civic organizations to coaching young athletes and organizing competitions for altruistic causes. Laura Wiebelhaus, a 2007 Hartington graduate and winner of Nebraska’s Female High School Heisman Award for academic performance, citizenship, and school/community involvement, states that Hartington’s character education program taught her to work her hardest “in the classroom, in athletics, and in the community.” Wiebelhaus, like many of her peers, is living proof of Hartington’s “pride and purpose.”

REFERENCE

CHARACTER COUNTS! Los Angeles, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics. Website: www.charactercounts.org.

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CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Hartington

- Increasing satisfaction with school climate, as indicated by a six-year data comparison of the Character Development Survey responses of students, parents, and staff
- Community recognition of the positive impact of character education, as recorded in focus interviews conducted by the Nebraska Character Education Partnership
- Significant increase in secondary school volunteerism

Russell Flamig, High School Principal
The welcome sign at Heron Creek Middle School in North Port, Florida, captures the democratic spirit of the school: the word welcome is written in 14 different languages. Dynamic former principal Scott Wilson, who took the reins in 2002 of a newly created middle school that was housed in the district’s high school its first year, knows that his staff still faces many instructional hurdles. More than 20 languages other than English are spoken at home, 40 percent of the student body is on free or reduced lunch, and 22.5 percent of the students receive special education services. Yet, despite these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Heron Creek has managed to earn an “A” rating from the Florida Department of Education and is recognized as a leader in achieving gains in student learning.

What is the secret of this alchemy? Wilson and his staff purposely set out “to create a school culture where diversity would be celebrated and students would be successful.” To help the faculty meet the needs of these students, everyone received training in teaching English as a Second Language, in exploring techniques from Ruby Payne’s Framework for Understanding Poverty, and in practicing the Kagan cooperative learning strategies. During the year before the new school opened, the staff researched character education initiatives and chose the Community of Caring model; professional training helped the teachers in implementing its tenets from the outset.

The vision of honoring diversity continues today and has provided the philosophical framework for many of Heron Creek’s successful initiatives. Inclusion is the key word: opportunities abound for learners of all levels within the diversified classrooms. Students wishing to participate in a more demanding academic curriculum may choose the Challenge program (a 2006 Promising Practice) with its higher expectations and more difficult assignments. Struggling students benefit from the school’s No Failure Policy in which students retake tests and redo assignments until they reach the mastery level. Teachers as well as special groups, such as the Grandmothers Club, Big Brothers/Sisters, and members of the African-American and Latino communities, voluntarily provide both tutoring and mentoring. Committed to inclusion of special education students, band director Colleen Glenney started a music integration program that has mainstream band students mentoring and tutoring special needs students on a weekly basis.

Connecting the school with its families and the greater community is central to the mission of Heron Creek. Every year the school hosts a Global Family Reunion that honors many cultures via presentations in art, dance, music, and food; the event has drawn a crowd of over 1,200. Among other programs designed to involve parents and community members are the Parent University that introduces parents to the academic demands on their children and a Diversity Forum in which community leaders address students and facilitate breakout sessions.

Wilson, as well as many parents and community members, praises the extraordinary efforts of the caring Heron Creek staff. Fire Chief William Taaffe, who has been actively involved in many of the school’s projects, sums up the town’s feeling toward its teachers: “I don’t think there’s anything they wouldn’t do for a student.”

**REFERENCES**


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Transferring from Uganda to an affluent suburban American high school is bound to be a daunting experience. Yet Killian, a current Hinsdale Central High School student who has made such a transition, declares that he suffered little apprehension in his new school, thanks to the help of his student ambassador: “Kevin introduced me to my teachers and where to sit during lunch. He introduced me to his friends, too. This school is fantastic.”

Killian’s experience is not accidental. Establishing Student Ambassadors to ease the transition for newcomers is just one aspect of Hinsdale Central’s comprehensive character education program, which grew out of a school goal to improve school culture in an atmosphere of growth and change. It was not always this way. In the spring of 2000, a post-Columbine faculty discussion about ways to detect and defuse stressful situations resulted in the decision to explore character education as a way to transform school culture. After an extensive, year-long research study, faculty, parents, and the community chose Character Counts and the six pillars (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship) as Central’s framework. Data-driven decisions guide Hinsdale’s approach to character education today, with surveys of school culture and student attitudes used as a tool to assess progress and determine new goals.

Posters, murals, and signs throughout the building serve as tangible reminders of the six pillars, but student behavior and service provide the real proof that the pillars are a way of life. In his address to the incoming students, the Student Council president pointed out, “What makes Central such a special place is the willingness of students to adhere to the six pillars of character …. If you stay true to yourself and your values and grow with pride at Central, you will travel down the right path.”

Central’s journey down the right path offers many exciting opportunities to put the pillars into action. The Character Counts Student Life Team provides a forum for students to examine current school climate and suggest ways to improve it. The Citizen Club, organized after the September 11 tragedy, concerns itself with projects that demonstrate responsible citizenship. Break Down the Walls is an innovative anti-bullying, anti-harassment program in which students perform original skits that address discrimination issues. In another humanitarian effort, more than 350 students belong to the very active Habitat for Humanity chapter that builds houses in impoverished areas.

This progressive school encourages its students to initiate programs that speak to real community needs. In one such program, Read to Lead, members read and tutor young children at a community center. Teachers In Need, another student-created club, raises money to help teachers or anyone in a teacher’s family who needs financial assistance because of an illness or accident. Let’s Help Out works jointly with the Hinsdale Community House to sign up volunteers for various community projects. A visitor can easily see that Hinsdale Central students are traveling down the right path to exemplify the words of Mahatma Gandhi that adorn a school doorway: Be the change you want to see in the world.

Reference

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A Tradition of Caring and Citizenship

Educators often characterize the teachers at Malcolm Price Laboratory School, a PreK–12 school that is the training ground for the College of Education at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), as the “movers and shakers” of the profession. Not only do many faculty members teach UNI undergraduate and graduate courses, but they have also written numerous educational articles and a character education curriculum, Be a Buddy, Not a Bully!

Ask Price Lab students to describe their teachers, and one word that is invariably used is caring. These dedicated teachers see themselves as “movers and shakers” in a different sense: they are caring parents to their 371 students, who come from Cedar Falls or neighboring Waterloo. Adjacent to UNI, the school maintains close ties with the university, and more than 800 education majors come here each year as part of their training. The tradition of caring and citizenship is deep and pervasive at Price Lab; several teachers and coaches graduated from the school and have made this town their permanent home. Many parents also attended here, and some report that, although they have looked for a school that surpasses Price Lab, they have yet to find one.

Price Lab is unusual in another respect. In 2005 it had the distinction of being named a First Amendment School (FAS), one of just 20 schools chosen nationally for this honor. The FAS guiding principles (democratic freedom, rights and responsibilities, community engagement, and active citizenship) are a perfect fit for Price Lab, which emphasizes respect, learning, responsibility, attitude, and honesty as its core values. The Elementary Citizenship program, which was initiated in 1993 in response to concerns over student behavior during non-instructional time, now serves as a model for other schools. In the advisory program for grades 6 through 12, teachers assume the role of “in-school parents” who guide the students in new directions. With such a comprehensive, integrated program, it is not surprising that Price Lab received the 2005 Iowa K–12 School of Character Award.

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REFERENCES


“Visiting Saint Anthony Foundation in San Francisco was a whirlwind experience for us. Before this day, we were scared of homeless people, because we didn’t want them to hurt us. …After talking to the homeless at lunch, we realized that many ended up at St. Anthony’s dining hall not because they made mistakes, but rather it was the result of life being mean to them.” This excerpt from a student reflection in leadership class at Orinda Intermediate School illustrates how community service changed the perspective of students living in the affluent East Bay neighborhood, just east of San Francisco.

Leadership class, moreover, is not the only place that these energetic youngsters are learning important lessons in life. The jewel in the crown of Orinda’s character initiative is the parent-run Others First community-service program. Based on the belief that a complete education includes a sense of community, this program, initiated by parents six years ago, provides numerous humanitarian activities for group or individual student participation. May, traditionally the time for students to relax, takes on a different spirit at Orinda as students work energetically on seven different opportunities to help others. Environmentally concerned students may opt to “save the Bay” at a wetland restoration project at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Shoreline, while those interested in planning volunteer events with other teens may choose to join the Youth Action Council in nearby Walnut Creek. Parents track student hours, and all student volunteers are recognized and rewarded. Rewards, however, do not seem to be the motivation, for students report that the experiences are “actually fun.” About half the students in the school have participated in at least one community-service project, and parents hope to attain 100 percent participation in the future. “I think that they’ve learned through programs like this that they can make a difference,” states one parent.

Incoming students receive an introduction to character education even before August enrollment. Orientation to the Orinda School Pledge and the school’s core values begins in the spring, when the counselors and current sixth-grade students visit the feeder elementary schools. WEB Day (Where Everybody Belongs) is a special initiation day for incoming sixth graders just before the opening of school. Eighth-grade WEB leaders serve as the personal buddies for the newcomers, and a day-long program featuring interactive exercises and team activities serves to quell fears and build relationships. A six-week character education cycle for all sixth graders emphasizes Orinda’s core values: respect, responsibility, consideration, and honesty.

Training in character education does not end at sixth grade, but undergoes refinement and development for the next two years. In addition to WEB monthly activities, students experience and practice the traits in their classrooms and on the playing fields. For example, all physical education classes reinforce life skills, and the eighth-grade social studies unit, Facing History and Ourselves, integrates the core values into the curriculum. The school’s policy of allowing all interested students to play sports, including students with special needs, illustrates its strong commitment to good sportsmanship and equality.

Principal Michael Randall, in commenting on the importance of the school’s character education initiatives, states, “Our community expects our schools to develop not only good scholars but good citizens as well.” By putting others first through volunteering, Orinda students are learning lessons in life and citizenship.

REFERENCE


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CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Orinda

- Principles of the Orinda Intermediate School Pledge—respect, responsibility, consideration, and honesty—guide all program activities.
- Parents are highly involved in service projects.
- Yearly School Climate Surveys show a continued positive trend in students’ feelings of belonging and being treated respectfully by their peers.

Michael Randall, Principal
Collaboration and Caring in Action

In 1999, when few school systems were exploring district-wide programs, Peters Township was in the vanguard, gathering over 200 community members to research character education. After much work, they arrived at a consensus and the Peters Township Character Counts (PTCC) initiative was born, with a focus on the ethical values of respect, responsibility, and honesty. A central core committee has evolved, with Dr. Robert Freado, the principal of McMurray Elementary School (a 2004 National School of Character), providing the sustaining leadership. The schools in Peters Township have won many honors for innovative programs. Last year, Pleasant Valley Elementary School was named an NSOC Finalist, and all of the district’s five schools have been winners of Promising Practices awards (2002–07), with three of them garnering two or more awards. Dr. Timm Mackley, who is beginning his second year as superintendent, says that he quickly realized that character education is “part of what defines Peters Township” and sees “a broad buy-in by a lot of people.” Parent and board member Sandy Teodori adds that “it is an integral part of the district.”

All individuals interviewed—parents, administrators, teachers, students, community members—agree that educating for character provides the philosophical basis for many programs, but it is the extraordinary level of caring in each of the schools that shows character in action. At Pleasant Valley, Kenny, the substitute custodian, captures the spirit of the school: “It’s like family. Kids feel like they belong. Every day we greet ’em with a smile.” Four miles down the main road is the sister elementary school, Bower Hill; here too, the staff and students display a cheerfulness that is contagious. With the school motto—Work hard, learn a lot, and be as busy as bees—spurring them on, the students are involved in a host of service projects to help others. Second-grade teacher Karen de Cecco explains that character education is “now part of everything we do.” Not surprisingly, the spirit of Peters Township Middle School mirrors that of Pleasant Valley and Bower Hill. Social studies teacher Matt Cheran observes, “The coolest thing is the positive relationships here,” and veteran social studies teacher Vaughn Dailey agrees: “Students connect with teachers in this school.”

If students connect with teachers and peers in these schools, it is the result of carefully planned and thoughtfully implemented practices, far too numerous to describe. A stand-out in behavior management is Tim Cirincione’s Star of the Week program at Pleasant Valley. Every student in his class has a chance to bask in the limelight, honored as both the subject of a special bulletin board and the featured speaker of the day. In many ways, the program reflects Peters Township’s usual approach to educating children: everyone is special!
Observing the Three B's has produced As in academics and character at South Newton Elementary School in Newton, North Carolina. The Three B's—Be Respectful, Be Responsible, and Be Safe and Orderly—have been the guiding spirit of the school since 2002, when teachers, administrators, and the School Leadership Team, during a retreat in the North Carolina mountains, forged a plan for student success. Since new attendance boundaries had shifted the school's demographics, the participants realized they had to address diverse student needs and possible disciplinary problems. A Title I school with 64 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch, South Newton has achieved amazing results with the introduction of the Three B's, the soul of its character education program. Not only has the school met Adequate Yearly Progress goals, but it can also boast of a dramatic decrease in disciplinary referrals.

The Secret of Getting an A: Three B's

Inextricably tied to the Three B's is the Golden Rule that is repeated daily throughout the school day. In fact, in interviews with teachers, students, and parents, the concepts of love and caring pop up frequently. Mary Watson, Title I teacher, comments that she "wouldn't want to be anywhere else. Everyone who works here truly cares." Melanie, a first grader, says, “Our teachers teach out of love,” and another student by the name of Melanie, a fifth grader, observes, “Everybody here is a friend. People treat people how they want to be treated.”

Perhaps the most poignant tale is that of a mother who had a life-threatening health condition that necessitated sudden hospitalization. The principal and her caring staff immediately went into action, not only chauffeuring the woman’s son to and from school but also taking both of her children overnight or over the weekend if necessary.

This strategy of the Three B's, reinforced by the Golden Rule, forms the foundation for South Newton's approach to character education, which relies strongly on the power of positive relationships. Vibrant former principal Sarah Ferrell Temple, a passionate leader, says, “This initiative was a grass-roots effort, not a top-down mandate, so as principal I have never had to force involvement.”

All teachers have participated in a study of Ruby Payne’s book, A Framework for Understanding Poverty, to help them nurture their learners. Among the many exciting programs the school has developed that fuse academics with character building are a second-grade community project, a third-grade space project, a fourth-grade pet project, and a fifth-grade ropes course and news team.

Just as South Newton teachers model the Golden Rule, they expect their charges to practice it in all their endeavors. Giving back to the community through service is one way of demonstrating kindness and compassion. Community projects run the gamut from creating and maintaining a nature trail to conducting many fundraisers for charitable causes. Within the school, students demonstrate good citizenship through peer tutoring, writing letters to ill children, recycling, and serving on the Safety Patrol.

When the site visitors asked Barbara McGee, a retired South Newton teacher who still volunteered while battling cancer, to describe the school, she immediately responded, “South Newton has a spirit of love for children and their needs.” This valiant woman died shortly after her school was named a National Finalist, but her “spirit of love” will continue to permeate the caring atmosphere that makes South Newton a special place.

REFERENCE

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Every teacher who has taught in a middle school can recall that twinge of anxiety before an assembly as well as that overarching fear: How will they behave today? Gone are those fears at Waterloo Middle School, located in the heart of New York's scenic Finger Lakes region. Teachers are amazed at the respect shown by the students, and speakers write letters of praise about student behavior.

To administrators, teachers, parents, and board members who remember what behavior was like six years ago, the transformation is indeed magical—and the magic ingredient is character education.

Waterloo’s odyssey began seven years ago, when foreign-language teacher Karen Moretti attended the Summer Institute at the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs in Cortland, New York. Since the new principal, Michael Ferrara, was eager to establish “some sort of advisement program” to improve school climate, he joined Moretti in using the materials from the Summer Institute to create a game plan for such a program. Twenty-five veteran teachers added their input. The advisement program was launched that fall, and the PRIDE planning committee came into being.

Today, that advisement program known as PRIDE (a 2004 Promising Practice) has become the cornerstone of the school’s character efforts. Groups of 12–15 students, under the aegis of one or two advisers, meet daily for half an hour, with a different focus every day of the week: Monday—planning; Tuesday—reading; Wednesday—improving grades; Thursday—developing character; and Friday—enjoying the day. PRIDE is more than an acronym; it is a road map for the week, with Thursday reserved for exploring character development in a variety of ways, from small-group discussion to whole-school assemblies on character-related issues.

Advisement groups also contribute to school improvement. For example, one group created the Welcome to the Middle School program (a 2005 Promising Practice) in which each new student receives a welcome bag of supplies and a personal buddy for the first two days of school.

The PRIDE committee, open to all teachers and students, plans and assesses the school’s character initiatives; a parent liaison group and building-level meetings add parental input. The school year begins with a welcoming assembly, How We Do Things Around Here, that highlights the PRIDE Guide to Procedures at Waterloo Middle School, with a focus on three major categories: assemblies, advisement time, and hallways. Many other initiatives address specific student needs. RESPECT is an anti-bullying leadership group of students dedicated to promoting “an environment free of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.” The Educational Enrichment Club (EEC) fosters high academic and character standards as well as community service. Students give back to the community in the form of drives for humanitarian causes and “hands-on” local participation.

“Six years ago it would have been hard to say what the school stood for,” Moretti comments, “and now students and staff all know what we stand for—excellence in academics and character.” Doug Barg, a technology teacher with 32 years of experience at Waterloo, agrees that the change is “truly incredible.” Consistently, the staff praises the strong leadership and example of Ferrara and assistant principal Susan Burgess, whose nurturing support has made a difference to staff and students. Through hard work and teamwork, Waterloo Middle School has transformed itself into a school that exemplifies its chosen theme for this year: Striving for Excellence.

**REFERENCE**


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Transforming School Culture

A

lthough the school day at Westminster East Middle School in Carroll County, Maryland does not officially begin until 7:40 a.m., a small group of enthusiastic boys gathers in the lobby at 7:00. Ready to greet students and teachers with a smile and to open the doors for them, these ambassadors of good will have voluntarily assumed this duty, and certainly the administration has not discouraged them. This caring behavior is not unusual in this remarkable middle school that just five years ago had “a reputation of being one of the worst” of the county’s nine middle schools, according to principal Jeffrey Alisauckas. East Middle’s story is one of the transformative power of character education.

In just five years, a dedicated group of administrators and teachers have completely changed the culture of the school. The school motto, Bulldogs Rule with Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships, has become the foundation of a home-grown character education program that reinforces Carroll County’s ethical values. Much research, committee discussions, and input from parents and community preceded the development of the school’s character initiative, which combines elements of other programs. For example, East Middle uses Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to help manage data, Project Wisdom to select quotes for each day, Mix It Up at Lunch Day to break down social barriers, and Capturing Kids’ Hearts to inspire positive teacher–student interactions. Initially encountering some staff resistance, the school has thoughtfully used data and results to make believers out of the wary. “Go slow to go fast” is how Alisauckas describes the process. He adds, “As people see the benefits, they move. Through data we move resisters. Senior faculty members say kids are different now.”

A visitor can see how “kids are different now.” Social contracts and class meetings provide students with opportunities to discuss their concerns and determine goals. An active student government makes suggestions to the administration and effects positive change.

In meeting the needs of its most vulnerable and at-risk students, East Middle has done exemplary work. The school, which houses all of Carroll County’s emotionally disturbed students in the BEST program, mainstreams 90 percent of these youngsters into regular education classes after an initial stay in a self-contained classroom. East Middle has developed an equally successful pyramid of interventions for students who are at risk of eventually dropping out of school. Mentoring, individualized student mapping with set goals, and differentiated instruction in a short-term Connections class are among the diverse strategies that have brought significant success.

Westminster’s decisions are data driven; the administration and staff excel at examining academic, behavioral, and attitudinal data to frame new programs. They also excel in demonstrating an important quality: caring. When asked to reveal the secret of East Middle’s extraordinary transformation, assistant principal and Multicultural Committee chair Philip Popielski replies, “Because people care. Kids care. Parents care.”

REFERENCES


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Parents often jest that a role reversal has taken place in Friendswood, Texas. In the car, on the soccer field, and in the grocery line, it is children, not parents, who are uttering lines such as “Did you make a wise choice?” and “Remember to be courteous.” The Character Counts framework at Westwood Elementary School has proved to be such a hit that the students are now its most vocal champions. And the parents are enjoying every moment of instruction by their enthusiastic little teachers.

Fascination with good character has not always been the case at Westwood. The years 1999 through 2003 brought many difficult adjustments: three leadership changes, shifting demographics, increasing disciplinary problems, and declining achievement. When the new leadership team assumed command in 2004, one of its first steps was to set a new direction for the school. At a summer retreat, the staff chose to strengthen the practice of Character Counts which had been introduced to the district in 2001. Principal Lynn Hobratschk points out that by revisiting the pillars of character and setting them firmly as the new foundation, “the staff was on the road to stability, healing, and success for all.”

Westwood today is a happy place, a utopia in which teachers, students, parents, and community play pivotal roles in fulfilling the school’s vision: Dynamically shaping hearts and minds for the future. From its first tangible sign—the six pillars lining the entrance walkway of the school—to the courteous and caring behavior of the students, who have truly internalized the values, character education flourishes here. Guided by counselor Barbara Gruener, who is also a certified Character Counts trainer, Westwood’s program involves creative integration into the curriculum and interactive character lessons that utilize books, puppets, music, art, writing, and role-playing. Students feel especially proud of being able to “help others” through Westwood’s myriad service projects.

In addition to a summer retreat at which the entire faculty receives character training, many have attended sessions on Capturing Kids’ Hearts and have trained the rest of the staff. Lee Whitlock, the assistant principal, states, “Our school acts like a faith-based agency. We share the leadership, and we talk openly about goals and mission. The whole school is involved, not just a few.” Thad Roher, the district director of elementary education, comments, “Whatever the district topic is, the thought process of Westwood teachers is to turn the discussion to how can we better integrate character education into the curriculum. Nothing at Westwood is isolated; everything is integrated.”

Students are not the only ones who are training parents; the school has a well-planned program to involve parents, starting with a Meet and Greet in August at which parents and children meet their teachers and initiate their relationship. Get-togethers such as Donuts with Dudes and Muffins with M’Lady add a special touch to parent/child relationships. Volunteerism is a powerful force at Westwood; the school averages 1,025 volunteer hours a month on the part of parents, grandparents, and retirees, who give assistance in everything from paper cutting and shelving of library books to tutoring of young learners. Grandparent Gene Ellen Smith adds, “The important lesson here is that when children see us volunteer, they learn to be volunteers.” Apparently, the little ones are not the only ones who want to show the world that “character counts.”

REFERENCES

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What Is a State School of Character?

Schools and districts in participating states can receive State Schools of Character awards for their outstanding work in character education. Sponsoring organizations give the award using the same criteria as the National Schools of Character award. In 2007, 11 states named 26 schools and 4 districts as State Schools (or Districts) of Character.

The 2007 State Schools of Character Awards

A generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation helped CEP launch the State Schools of Character project in 2006. The program has successfully increased the number of outstanding schools and districts sharing best practices, facilitated mentoring and networking among educators on the state and local levels, and identified exemplary schools and districts to serve as models in their respective states.

With this tiered approach, schools and districts in participating states are eligible to receive a State Schools of Character (SSOC) award in addition to being considered for nomination by their state as participants in the National Schools of Character (NSOC) competition. The NSOC and SSOC applications are identical, but schools and districts in participating states make application to their state sponsor, while those in non-participating states apply directly to CEP for the national award.

Sponsors in participating states receive a grant of $6,000 to set up and execute a process for soliciting applications and screening applicants for SSOC awards which is parallel to that used by CEP in selecting the NSOC. CEP trains state evaluators on the evaluation process. The funding is for the first year only, with the understanding that the sponsorship of the SSOC program will continue in future years. A variety of state entities have signed on as sponsors, such as state departments of education and organizations whose mission features character education as the central focus or a key component.

In 2006, the New Jersey Center for Character Education, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education, became the first state sponsor to confer SSOC awards as a preliminary step to the national competition. New Jersey’s pilot project was a resounding success, with the presentation of four SSOC awards, eight Honorable Mention awards, and two Participating School awards. By agreement with CEP, New Jersey officials nominated all four SSOC to the national competition. As it turned out, CEP’s Blue Ribbon Panel selected one of those four nominees as a 2006 National School of Character.

In 2007, entities from the following 12 additional states began sponsoring SSOC competitions: California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Utah. In some states the nominee for the NSOC award was their only SSOC, while other states bestowed more than one SSOC award. Most sponsors also gave other awards, such as Finalist, Honorable Mention, and Emerging School of Character. In 2007, seven of the ten NSOC Winners and seven of the fifteen NSOC Finalists are from participating SSOC states.

“The collaboration and sharing of ideas among teachers, across districts, and throughout our state has encouraged greater depth in the implementation of character education.”

~ Penny Keith, Utah SSOC Coordinator

Pinellas County Schools received its SSOC award at an annual luncheon for community leaders.
CALIFORNIA

STATE SPONSOR:
Center for Youth Citizenship

Charles Mack Elementary School
Sacramento, California
Elk Grove Unified School District

Orinda Intermediate School¹
Orinda, California
Orinda Union School District

Prairie Elementary School
Sacramento, California
Elk Grove Unified School District

FLORIDA

STATE SPONSORS:
The Golden Rule Foundation and the University of Central Florida

The Cushman School
Miami, Florida

Heron Creek Middle School¹
North Port, Florida
Sarasota County Public Schools

Pinellas County Schools²
Largo, Florida

GEORGIA

STATE SPONSOR:
Kennesaw State University

Skyview Elementary School²
Lizella, Georgia
Bibb County School District

HAWAII

STATE SPONSOR:
Angela Perez Baraquio Education Foundation

Sacred Hearts Academy²
Honolulu, Hawaii

IDAHO

STATE SPONSOR:
Center for Ethics at the University of Idaho

IOWA

STATE SPONSOR:
Institute for Character Development at Drake University

Cornell Elementary School
Des Moines, Iowa
Saydel Community School District

Malcolm Price Laboratory School¹
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Okoboji Community School District
Milford, Iowa

Urbandale High School
Urbandale, Iowa
Urbandale Community School District

MARYLAND

STATE SPONSOR:
Maryland Center for Character Education

Crofton Elementary School
Crofton, Maryland
Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Mary H. Matula Elementary School
La Plata, Maryland
Charles County Public Schools

Newport Mill Middle School²
Kensington, Maryland
Montgomery County Public Schools

MISSOURI

STATE SPONSOR: CHARACTERplus

Chesterfield Elementary School¹
Chesterfield, Missouri
Rockwood School District

Francis Howell Middle School
St. Charles, Missouri
Francis Howell School District

Lindbergh School District
St. Louis, Missouri

New Jersey Center for Character Education at Rutgers University

Carl W. Goetz Middle School
Jackson, New Jersey
Jackson School District

Hamilton Township Public Schools
Hamilton, New Jersey

Westminster East Middle School¹
Westminster, Maryland
Carroll County Public Schools

1 2007 NSOC Finalist  
2 2007 NSOC Winner

Palmyra Elementary School received its SSOC award at the CHARACTERplus Conference.
Individual states have been creative in using the project to celebrate good work in character education. They have recognized their SSOC by showcasing them on their Web sites, by inviting dignitaries to present the awards, and by soliciting media coverage. In Florida, businesses sponsored a display of the local SSOC on a community billboard; in Ohio, the State School of Character received its award at a Cincinnati Reds game.

Program managers are enthusiastic about the SSOC project. Liz Gibbons, director of Characterplus, says, “The State Schools of Character program has helped move our implementing schools to a higher level. We have more schools applying than ever.” And Dr. Phil Brown, director of the New Jersey Center for Character Education, says, “Participation in the State Schools of Character program has provided a structure to define quality character education in action and enabled us to identify school teams of educators who now serve as coaches and mentors for their peers.”

In 2008, interested entities from an additional seven states will begin sponsoring SSOC competitions:

- **Illinois**—University of Illinois Extension
- **Kansas**—Kansas State Department of Education
- **Massachusetts**—Hudson Public School District, Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, and Massachusetts Department of Education
- **Minnesota**—Minnesota Center for Academic Excellence
- **New York**—Academy for Character Education at the Sage Colleges
- **Virginia**—Greater Roanoke Valley Character Coalition
- **Wisconsin**—Wisconsin Character Education Partnership

For more information, contact Janice Stoodley, Director, National Schools of Character.
The 2007 Promising Practices Awards

CEP’s primary goal in recognizing schools and districts for their most effective practices is to spread the word about character education programs that have been demonstrated to work. Our hope is that schools and districts engaging in character education efforts will share their experiences and learn from one another. In order to help schools and districts find practices that may enhance their specific programs, CEP has once again organized these practices according to the Principle they best exemplify, and categorized them by topic within each Principle. In the pages that follow, this year’s winning practices are listed and briefly described. A more detailed description of each Promising Practice, along with school or district contact information, is posted on CEP’s Web site, where practitioners may easily search the 2006 and 2007 Promising Practices for ideas.

Promising Practices That Promote Core Ethical Values (Principles 1, 2, 3)

TEACHING/LEARNING/DEFINING/REFLECTION/PRACTICE

Bedford Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Bedford, Pennsylvania
Common Language of Character
Teachers and parents create unity by focusing on four character traits throughout the year.

Brigantine Elementary School
Grades K–4 • Brigantine, New Jersey
Kindness Is Contagious
Students record their acts of kindness in monthly logs.

Charles Mack Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Sacramento, California
“Think It Through” Sheet
Students reflect on their behavior before meeting with administrators.

Don Earl Early Childhood Learning Center
PreK • Arnold, Missouri
Life Skills
A district’s character education program is adapted for preschoolers.

Greenwood Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Toledo, Ohio
Quest for Character
Monthly activities encourage reflection on character traits and recognize good behavior.

Heritage Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Madison, Alabama
WABC TV (“We’re Always Building Character” Television)
Morning news shows provide a focus for collaborative character education efforts.

House Springs Elementary School
Grades K–4 • House Springs, Missouri
PeaceBuilder Challenge
Students respond to real-life issues during morning news shows.

Lewis and Clark Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Wood River, Illinois
Challenge Assemblies
Weekly assemblies focus on character traits and recognize students.
Peninsula Heritage School
Grades K–5 • Rolling Hills Estates, California
“Character Quality” Assembly Presentations
Students present assemblies that showcase their school’s six character qualities.

Winter Park Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Wilmington, North Carolina
The Action Zones
Students learn to be socially responsible citizens while using a common vocabulary.

VISUAL DISPLAY

Bedwell Elementary School
Grades PreK–4 • Bernardsville, New Jersey
“Be a Good Neighbor”
Caring Community House Award
Students receive awards for their good behavior that become part of a school mural.

Lyles–Crouch Traditional Academy
Grades K–5 • Alexandria, Virginia
Pillars of Good Character
Students record and post ways they exemplify character traits, thus inspiring others.

WORKSHOPS/CLASSES/DISCUSSION GROUPS

Escuela Secundaria Bilingüe Isaac Newton
Grades 7–9 • Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México
Dialogue Nights
Students and parents improve communication skills while discussing selected topics.

Fox Middle School
Grades 7–8 • Arnold, Missouri
Team-Building Fridays
Activities foster open communication between staff and students twice a month.

Lewis and Clark Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Wood River, Illinois
Character Camp
Students participate in character-related activities on the first day of school.

Lynnwood Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Lynnwood, Washington
PAWS (Peace, Affection, Wisdom, and Sharing)
Cross-grade-level student groups participate in regular meetings and activities.

Mark Twain Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Brentwood, Missouri
Families Program
Cross-grade-level student groups watch and discuss character-related film clips.

Northwest Jackson Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Jackson, Mississippi
Rosebuds Mentoring
Girls engage in character-building activities that help define and develop good character.

Viola L. Sickles School
Grades PreK–3 • Fair Haven, New Jersey
Character Café
Students meet during lunch and recess to enhance their social skills and learn virtues.

Washington Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Wauwatosa, Wisconsin
Morning Meetings Set the Tone
Students in grades 1–3 learn to care for one another through Responsive Classroom morning meetings.

Yadkin Success Academy
Grades K–12 • Yadkinville, North Carolina
Leadership with Character
A high school leadership course teaches character through positive role models.

INTEGRATION INTO CURRICULUM

Bingham Farms Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Bingham Farms, Michigan
Character Field Day
Students participate in Field Day activities aligned with the district’s character traits.

Carmel Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Woodstock, Georgia
“Unsung Community Heroes”
Writing Program
Students improve their writing skills while learning about community workers.

Hoboken Charter School
Grades K–12 • Hoboken, New Jersey
Character Building through a Social-Justice Lens
Middle school students learn about current issues and then take action themselves.

Laguna Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Scottsdale, Arizona
Operation Eagle
Students apply citizenship lessons by volunteering in their communities.

Liberty Corner School
Grades K–5 • Liberty Corner, New Jersey
“One Book” Book Club
Books selected each month provide common character education experiences for all.

Lynnwood Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Lynnwood, Washington
PAWS (Peace, Affection, Wisdom, and Sharing)
Cross-grade-level student groups participate in regular meetings and activities.

Washington Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Wauwatosa, Wisconsin
Morning Meetings Set the Tone
Students in grades 1–3 learn to care for one another through Responsive Classroom morning meetings.

Viola L. Sickles School
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Character Café
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Yadkin Success Academy
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Leadership with Character
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INTEGRATION INTO CURRICULUM

Bingham Farms Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Bingham Farms, Michigan
Character Field Day
Students participate in Field Day activities aligned with the district’s character traits.
Promising Practices That Help Create a Caring School Community ( Principle 4)

CLASS MEETINGS/COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Thomas B. Conley School
Grades K–4 • Asbury, New Jersey
Team Up for Technology
Students and teachers with more technology skills help those with fewer skills.

Ollie E. Culbreth, Jr. School (P.S. #14)
Grades PreK–8 • Jersey City, New Jersey
ACE Team Mentors
(Advisor–Confidant–Exemplar)
All sixth-grade students meet weekly with their mentors.

BULLYING/PEER CRUELTY PREVENTION

Bayless Elementary School
Grades K–2 • St. Louis, Missouri
Bully Box
Students confidentially report bullying.

Pierce Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Birmingham, Michigan
“Girls Only” Book Club
Fifth-grade girls learn to cut down on relational aggression and solve conflicts.

Ripley Central School
Grades K–12 • Ripley, New York
CASS (Creating a Safe School)
High school students teach middle school students to cut down on peer aggression.

Robert R. Lazar Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Montville, New Jersey
The Ambassadors Program
Students learn to build healthy relationships.

CONFlict RESOLUTION/PEER MEDIATION

Beverly Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Beverly Hills, Michigan
The “Beary Nice” Friendship Group
Girls learn empathy and friendship traits during sewing activities.

Beverly Elementary School
Grades 6–8 • Port Jefferson Station, New York
Project REACH OUT
Students learn character through martial arts.

Sullivan Primary School
Grades PreK–1 • Sullivan, Missouri
Peace Pals
Students learn to peacefully resolve conflicts with their peers.

Valley Park Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Valley Park, Missouri
Peer Mediation Program
Students bring their conflicts to trained peer mediators.

SOCIAL ISSUES/DIVERSITY/TOLERANCE

Berkshire Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Beverly Hills, Michigan
Game Day
Students learn appropriate social behavior while playing games during lunch.

Brigantine Elementary School
Grades K–4 • Brigantine, New Jersey
A Multicultural, Thematic Approach to Arts Education
Teachers use the arts to develop cultural respect, tolerance, and appreciation.

Chestnut Ridge Middle School
Grades 7–8 • Chestnut Ridge, New York
Multicultural/Cultural Competence Committee
Committee members seek to help students understand their role in ensuring peace.

Derby Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Birmingham, Michigan
Derby Recyclers
Autistic and general education students work together to recycle paper.

Pembroke Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Troy, Michigan
Children’s Festival
Diverse cultural traditions are celebrated in December.

Richmond Rose Public School
Grades PreK–8 • Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada
Autism Awareness: Inclusion at Richmond Rose
Students learn to respect and understand their autistic peers.
SERVICE TO COMMUNITY/ SERVICE LEARNING

Audubon Junior/Senior High School
Grades 7–12 • Audubon, New Jersey
Project Memorial
Students create and maintain a memorial to honor local veterans.

Aventura City of Excellence School (ACES)
Grades K–8 • Aventura, Florida
Community Care Outreach Program
Students impact their community through self-selected service projects.

Bayless High School
Grades 9–12 • St. Louis, Missouri
Service Learning: A Community Pledge
Students serve their community by helping the needy and the elderly.

Carl W. Goetz Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Jackson, New Jersey
Get in the Know about CO
Students raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Character Building Institute
Grades PreK–K • Singapore
Charity CARE (Care, Appreciation, Respect, Empathy) Project
Young children collect and deliver donations to the needy.

Dawnwood Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Centereach, New York
Support Your Local Animal Shelter: Save a Pet!
Students learn kindness and compassion as they work to protect local homeless and abused pets.

Emerson High School
Grades 9–12 • Union City, New Jersey
Peer Group Connection
Seniors trained as facilitators help freshmen transition through interactive activities.

Memorial Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Fair Lawn, New Jersey
Common Ground
Common experiences are celebrated as new students are welcomed.

Woodcrest Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Cherry Hill, New Jersey
First Day Celebration
First-day events center on character development and school climate.

Woodcrest Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Cherry Hill, New Jersey
Moving Day
On the last day of school, students meet their new teachers for the upcoming year.

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Old Post Elementary School  
Grades K–5 • Oswego, Illinois  
**Wildcat Paws Project**  
Students track and display their community service.

Red Mountain Elementary School  
Grades K–5 • Ivins, Utah  
**Service Learning Committee**  
A group of elementary students undertakes service projects.

Robert R. Lazar Middle School  
Grades 6–8 • Montville, New Jersey  
**8th-Grade Advisory: Making Service Learning Matter**  
Eighth graders select service projects to undertake and write about.

St. John the Baptist School  
Grades K–12 • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
**Mission Day**  
A school community raises money for a selected charity with an annual festival.

St. Patrick School  
Grades K–8 • Louisville, Kentucky  
**STEP-by-STEP Stewardship Program**  
Students focus on the needs of a particular segment of the community in each grade.

**Service to School/School Beautification**

**Engaging/Interactive Curriculum**

Christa McAuliffe School (P.S. #28)  
Grades K–8 • Jersey City, New Jersey  
**Ballroom Dancing**  
Students learn about manners and Latin American culture through ballroom dancing.

Forest Avenue School  
Grades PreK–2 • Glen Ridge, New Jersey  
**World Well-Being Week**  
Hands-on lessons enable students to learn about the needs of children around the world.

Hoboken Charter School  
Grades K–12 • Hoboken, New Jersey  
**ACE (Art and Character Education)**  
Students in grades K–8 learn to view art as a tool that may be used for grassroots advocacy.

West Maple Elementary School  
Grades K–5 • Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
**Care and Share**  
Parents and teachers help students complete grade-specific service projects.

William H. Crocker Middle School  
Grades 6–8 • Hillsborough, California  
**Community Service Handbook**  
A school handbook enables students to find meaningful service opportunities.

YES Prep Public Schools  
Grades 6–12 • Houston, Texas  
**YISS (YES International Summer Service-Learning) Project**  
Students participate in international service projects.

**Promising Practices That Challenge and Respect All Learners (Principle 6)**

Beverly Woods Elementary School  
Grades K–5 • Charlotte, North Carolina  
**The Mini-Society**  
Students apply for and do jobs around their school.

Marlboro Memorial Middle School  
Grades 6–8 • Morganville, New Jersey  
**Blogging in the Social Studies Classroom**  
Students engage in moral decision-making through online debate and analysis.

Meadowbrook Elementary School  
Grades PreK–4 • Hillsdale, New Jersey  
**Multicultural Festival**  
Students learn about other cultures during a day of interactive activities.

Comsewogue High School  
Grades 9–12 • Port Jefferson Station, New York  
**Comsewogue’s Closet**  
A school closet full of donated clothes enables needy students to be prepared for school.

**Sportsmanship**

Palmyra Elementary School  
Grades K–4 • Palmyra, Missouri  
**Sportsmanship under Construction**  
A school community puts sportsmanship at the forefront of their character efforts.
2007 National Schools of Character

2007 PROMISING PRACTICES

Promising Practices That Develop Students’ Self-Motivation (Principle 7)

TEEN PROGRAMS/ PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Joseph H. Brensinger School (P.S. #17)
Grades PreK–8 • Jersey City, New Jersey
*REBEL (Reaching Everyone by Exposing Lies)*
Students learn to resist peer pressure through a program designed to reduce tobacco use.

Lincoln High School
Grades 9–12 • Jersey City, New Jersey
*Watch Your Mouth*
Student leaders create a program that decreases use of inappropriate language.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT/ POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Alexander D. Sullivan School (P.S. #30)
Grades PreK–5 • Jersey City, New Jersey
*Relaxation Meditation Initiative*
Guided relaxation helps third graders transition after lunch and learn to handle stress.

Charles Mack Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Sacramento, California
*Student Character Education Video*
Staff and students create a video that defines character in terms of observable behaviors.

Mary H. Matula Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • La Plata, Maryland
*Positive Referrals*

Students call home after being referred for significant positive growth or achievement.

Sentinel Career Center
Grades 9–12 • Tiffin, Ohio
*Student Success and Behavior Enhancement (SSBE): Discipline with Character*
Support through character education activities replaces in-school suspension.

SOCIAL RECOGNITION

Brookpark Memorial Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Brook Park, Ohio
*Fun Fridays!*
Lunchtime celebrations recognize students for their good character.
Promising Practices That Engage the Staff as a Learning and Moral Community (Principle 8)

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Grace Hartman Elementary School
Grades PreK–6 • Rockwall, Texas
Construction Zone...Character at Work
Staff return from CEP’s National Forum and create new staff development activities.

Hamilton Township Public Schools
Grades PreK–12 • Hamilton, New Jersey
Admit One: FISH, Film, and Follow-Up
District employees tackle bias by viewing and discussing an inspirational film.

Promising Practices That Foster Shared Moral Leadership (Principle 9)

LEADERSHIP GROUPS

Henry Raab Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Belleville, Illinois
Henry Raab Leadership Team
Character education efforts are strengthened by a school team setting goals together.

Amador County Unified School District
Grades K–12 • Jackson, California
Tomorrow’s Leaders Today
Senior high students train junior high students to be positive leaders.

Ashland High School
Grades 9–12 • Ashland, Ohio
Using Student-Created Materials to Present Year-Long Focus Topics
Students create videos to address topics of interest to their peers, such as bullying.

Bayless Intermediate School
Grades 3–6 • St. Louis, Missouri
Best “Be’s” Video
Student videos explain behaviors that are expected outside the classroom.

Fox Middle School
Grades 7–8 • Arnold, Missouri
Character—Caught on Tape
Student leaders create video segments dealing with everyday character challenges.

Keswick High School
Grades 9–12 • Keswick, Ontario, Canada
Georgina Mayor’s Youth Forum
Four times per year, students gather from across the region to voice concerns.

Lynnwood Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Lynnwood, Washington
Kids Character Committee
Students teach their peers about character traits.

Maple Grove Accelerated School
Grades K–4 • Dittmer, Missouri
Ambassadors of Character
Student ambassadors learn to solve problems as they arise.

Perry County Middle School
Grades 5–8 • Perryville, Missouri
BLAST (Building Leaders and Strong Teams)
Student leaders train younger adolescents in character traits and skills.

Sonoran Sky Elementary School
Grades K–6 • Scottsdale, Arizona
PILOTS (Preparing Individuals with Leadership Opportunities to Succeed)
Sixth graders prepare to take on leadership roles in their school.
Promising Practices That Engage Families and Community Members as Partners (Principle 10)

PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

Dreamkeepers Academy
Grades PreK–5 • Norfolk, Virginia
*Family Learning Night*
Staff facilitate an evening of character education lessons for parents.

Lindbergh Early Childhood Education
PreK • St. Louis, Missouri
*Family of the Month*
Each family creates a poster to be shared with students in the preschool classroom.

Millard Hawk Primary School
Grades PreK–2 • Central Square, New York
*Book Talks*
Parents and teachers come together to read and discuss books on character education.

Radix Elementary School
Grades PreK–4 • Williamstown, New Jersey
*Family Book Club*
School staff organize monthly book-club meetings for students and parents.

Sullivan Primary School
Grades PreK–1 • Sullivan, Missouri
*Powerful Parenting*
School staff facilitate a support and discussion group for parents and child-care providers.

Uthoff Valley Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Fenton, Missouri
*Connect the DOTS (Dads of Terrific Students)*
Special events encourage the involvement of fathers.

West Junior High School
Grades 7–8 • Belleville, Illinois
*Pastries for Parents*
Students and their parents discuss questions over breakfast at school.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Azalea Gardens Middle School
Grades 6–8 • Norfolk, Virginia
*Guardian Angels: Watching, Caring, Inspiring*
Students in need of assistance are paired with caring adults.

Uthoff Valley Elementary School
Grades K–5 • Fenton, Missouri
*Explore!*
Volunteers offer character-related sessions, giving teachers much-needed planning time.

Lexington Park Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Lexington Park, Maryland
*Community Partnerships*
A partnership encourages nearby government and military personnel to tutor students.

Salt Brook Elementary School
Grades PreK–6 • New Providence, New Jersey
*Pass It On*
Local police clean up a school, starting a chain of kind acts in the school and local community.

OLDER STUDENTS

Bayless Junior High School
Grades 7–8 • St. Louis, Missouri
*Pony Pals: Cross-Age Mentoring*
Eighth-grade advisory students become leaders while mentoring second graders.

Luke Elementary School
Grades PreK–8 • Glendale, Arizona
*Seventh-Grade Pillar Presenters*
Seventh graders present pillars of character to K–5 students.

Minot Public Schools
Grades K–12 • Minot, North Dakota
*Celebrate Character Day*
Older students teach 200 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders about character.

Promising Practices That Assess the Character of the School (Principle 11)

ASSESSMENT AND ACTION

Richmond Rose Public School
Grades PreK–8 • Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada
*Critical Reflection: Becoming a Better Staff*
Teachers engage in critical reflection in order to improve their teaching.

STUDENT-LED ASSESSMENTS

Greenfield Elementary School
Grades PreK–5 • Beverly Hills, Michigan
*"For Your Information" Folders*
First graders evaluate their character, beginning a dialogue with their teacher and parents.

Does your school or district have a Promising Practice to share with others? Visit CEP’s Web site for more information and application guidelines: www.character.org. All 2008 applications are to be completed online by March 15, 2008.

For more detailed descriptions of all of the 2007 Promising Practices, visit www.character.org.
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CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education

By Tom Lickona, Eric Schaps, and Catherine Lewis

PRINCIPLE 1. Promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.

PRINCIPLE 2. Defines “character” comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.

PRINCIPLE 3. Uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.

PRINCIPLE 4. Creates a caring school community.

PRINCIPLE 5. Provides students with opportunities for moral action.

PRINCIPLE 6. Includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them succeed.

PRINCIPLE 7. Strives to develop students’ self-motivation.

PRINCIPLE 8. Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

PRINCIPLE 9. Fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

PRINCIPLE 10. Engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

PRINCIPLE 11. Assesses the character of the school, the school staff’s functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.