

# SDFS NOTES

MARCH 1998

VOLUME 2, ISSUE #2

---

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
DIVISION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION  
BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES  
SAFE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTION

---

## Character Education

The goal of this issue of *SDFS Notes* is to provide an overview of character education. Several districts in Florida have implemented character education programs: Escambia, Clay, Lee, Seminole, and Martin are among these. At least one district, Escambia, has held a conference on the topic this year, and it was well received.

This 'Notes issue will also provide information concerning an upcoming Character Education Conference in Seminole County on April 24, 1998. If you would like more information on the conference or on the topic of character education, please call John Masterson or Melissa Hatch at (850) 414-9976 or SunCom: 994-9976 or visit the FIE/SDFS Project Website at: <http://www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs>.

*"Society as a whole must come together to help young people develop the good character that is essential to their own well being and to that of our local, national, and global communities."<sup>1</sup>*



### **What is Character Education?**

Character education is the process of helping young people develop good character. Specifically, character education is helping young people know, care about, and act on core values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and self-respect.

It is commonly felt today that young people get less moral instruction from parents and religious institutions and, at an increasingly early age, are exposed to mixed messages on the media about sex, drugs, and violence. The rate of school violence and classroom disruption indicates that young people are having difficulty making sound moral decisions. In our state and nation children are hurting themselves, their peers, and others, and many are too distressed to demonstrate concern about the welfare of those about them.

Our society is split over specific moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. However, despite the differences, we are able to identify common core values across cultures and belief systems. It is these core values that are identified, agreed upon, promoted, practiced, and internalized in a character education program.<sup>2</sup>

**Character education is based on the premise that good character is not formed automatically; it is developed through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning, and practice. Although developing good character in children is primarily the responsibility of families, it is also the shared responsibility of communities, schools, and religious institutions.<sup>3</sup>**



### ***What are some basic premises of Character Education?***

- In a democratic society, every citizen has responsibilities and rights
- Only people of good character can sustain responsible government
- Creating caring schools is indispensable to teaching and learning
- In order to attract and keep quality teachers, we must cultivate a positive school climate and address the moral development of our youth

**“Everything a school does, teaches values, either implicitly or explicitly. We shouldn't be asking, "Should schools teach values?" but rather, "Which values will they teach?" and "How well will they teach them?"<sup>4</sup>**

### ***What does effective Character Education offer?***

- It makes schools caring communities
- It reduces violence, pregnancy, substance abuse, and negative attitudes
- It improves academic performance
- It prepares young people to be productive citizens



## ***When did Character Education begin?***

*"Character education is as old as education itself. Down through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good."<sup>6</sup>*

Developing good character in young people has always been an essential part of the educational mission. In the mid-fifties, the effort dwindled due to a recognition of the complexity of moral education. By the 1980's, reports indicated that the moral climate in many U.S. schools reflected growing social uncertainties. Family breakdown, poverty, loss of community, negative peer pressure, and glorification of sex, violence, and materialism in the media contributed to an increasingly challenging school climate. A number of communities, businesses, and schools came together to address these issues and to develop what is now called *character education*.<sup>6</sup>



## ***How does a school provide Character Education?***

**Before initiating any character education program, a thorough needs assessment must be conducted, including a data analysis and literature review. Only after thorough analysis can appropriate strategies and program evaluation methods be selected and implemented.**

There is no one set method for implementing a character education program in a school. Some schools provide it through civics and social studies courses that emphasize citizenry. Others identify a set of basic character traits such as justice, fairness, and honesty, and promote these. Some infuse character education into all aspects of curricular and extracurricular activities. Some schools develop their own materials; others obtain them from other districts or curriculum companies. Most successful character education efforts are schoolwide and employ a combination of many strategies, including the provision of community service opportunities (service learning) in addition to classroom activities.

**A school-wide comprehensive effort, employing a combination of many strategies, ensures a successful character education program.<sup>7</sup>**



## ***Strategies for Effective Character Education***

### **Any school-wide effort requires that schools and teachers:**

- Promote core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect for self, compassion, and equality of opportunity
- Act as caregivers, models, and mentors
- Help students know each other, care about each other, feel valued in the group
- Create a democratic classroom
- Involve students in decision-making and give students responsibilities
- Promote study and discussion of core values
- Teach thinking, feeling, and acting on core values

**Values are learned through thinking, feeling, and acting. This is a long-term process requiring continual opportunities for practice and continual reinforcement.<sup>8</sup>**

### **Any school-wide effort requires that schools and teachers:**

- **Implement character education intentionally and comprehensively**
  - ◇ Construct deliberate ways to develop character rather than waiting for opportunities to occur
  - ◇ Integrate character education into discipline policy, academia, instructional methods, learning processes, management of school environment, and relationships with parents
- **Create a caring school community**
  - ◇ Foster caring attachments between students and adults, and students and each other
  - ◇ Teach values in the classroom as well as in corridors, cafeterias, playgrounds, and school buses

**Schools must become caring communities. They must be microcosms of the society we want to have. When children feel valued and empowered, they internalize the values of the group that meet these needs. Good character, modeled by school personnel, is fundamental to this effort.<sup>9</sup>**



## **Any school-wide effort requires that schools and teachers:**

- **Provide opportunities for moral action**
  - ◇ Provide opportunities to apply values in everyday interactions and discussions.
  - ◇ Involve students in:
    - Cooperative learning
    - Service learning
    - Decision-making
    - Problem-solving
  
- **Provide curricula that help students succeed**
  - ◇ Provide meaningful and interesting curricula
  - ◇ Use literature, writing, decision-making, and debate to promote moral reflection

**“Learning academically and building character are interdependent. One of the most authentic ways to respect children is to respect the way they learn.”<sup>10</sup>**



## **Any school-wide effort requires that schools and teachers:**

- **Develop students' intrinsic motivation**
  - ◇ Minimize reliance on extrinsic rewards and punishments
  - ◇ Use rule-breaking incidents as opportunities to teach character development
  
- **Create a school staff that is a learning and moral community**
  - ◇ Involve all school staff in the character education effort, including teachers, administrators, coaches, office staff, custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, aides, and school volunteers.
  - ◇ Make sure all school personnel
    - Adhere to the same core values
    - Model good moral character
    - Seek opportunities to build children's character
    - Are governed by the same values that govern students
    - Are treated as constructive learners
    - Are given opportunities to reflect on moral matters

**“Ask: ‘What positive character-building experiences is the school already providing for its students? What negative moral experiences (peer cruelty, adult disrespect of students...) is the school failing to address? What important moral experiences (cooperative learning, school and community service, opportunities to learn about and interact with people from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds) is the school now omitting? Including?’”<sup>11</sup>**



**Any school-wide effort requires that schools and teachers:**

- **Recruit parents and community members as full partners**
  - ◇ Involve a broad and representative range of parents and community members on the character education committee, in the selection of core values, and in the development and implementation of strategies
  - ◇ Keep parents informed on character education efforts; explain how families can help, and provide family outreach activities
  - ◇ Reach out to minorities
  - ◇ Recruit businesses, religious institutions, youth organizations, the government, and the media

*“Parents are the first and most important moral educators of their children.”<sup>12</sup>*



## ***Evaluating Character Education***

There are a number of character education programs that have been evaluated independently. Outcome data for many of these indicate effectiveness in reducing violence and substance use, increasing test scores and attendance, and improving attitude. **To date, however, character education as a whole does not yet have a substantial body of evidence indicating effectiveness.**

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) is currently funding twelve states for pilot character education projects. An important component to the pilot project is the evaluation of the project. Results from these evaluations will be used to help identify key components that ensure success in any character education program.



## **Things to look for in an evaluation:**

- The culture and climate of the school:
  - ◊ The extent to which the school is becoming a more caring community
  
- The staff's growth as character educators:
  - ◊ The extent to which adult staff understand how to foster character
  - ◊ The level of personal commitment to do so
  - ◊ The level of skill to carry it out
  - ◊ The consistency of carrying it out
  
- Student growth in character:
  - ◊ The extent to which student are committed to and acting upon core values
  - ◊ The changes in school attendance, fights, suspensions, vandalism, drug incidents, and academic achievement



## **Showcase: Seminole County's Character Education Program**

Several districts in Florida have outstanding character education programs. Seminole County's program has been popular, and districts in the state consult with Seminole County, Character Education Liason, Judy Wiant for help in starting a program. Seminole County is hosting a conference and training session on character education. Any Safe and Drug-Free School (SDFS) coordinator or other interested party is invited to attend.

**Character Education Conference  
Friday, April 24, 1998  
Maitland, Florida  
For registration information, contact:  
Judy Wyant - (407) 320-0370  
E-mail : judy\_wiant@scps.k12.fl.us**

## Some Steps in the Development of a Character Education Program

- Conduct a thorough needs assessment by collecting and analyzing a variety of data (SESIR data, school discipline data, surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews, etc.)
- Form a character education committee composed of representatives from school administration, teachers, parents, students, the clergy and other community stakeholders
- Review the literature on character education, including program content and evaluation data
- Determine whether a values curriculum is needed and the specific issues that are appropriate to address – such as, alcohol, tobacco, other drug use, and violence
- Actively promote a buy-in from district schools, parents, community, and various media
- Identify a set of common core values, e.g., caring, courage, fairness, honesty, patriotism, knowledge, respect, and responsibility
- Develop age-specific classroom and schoolwide activities supporting values
- Provide opportunities for feedback and suggestions from teachers and other stakeholders
- Conduct an on-going, outcome and process evaluation of all programs.

*"...The present and future well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct...Effective character is based on core ethical values which form the foundation for a democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, justice, fairness, and civic virtue."<sup>13</sup>*

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Character Education Partnerships. *Character Education Questions and Answers*. Website: <http://www.character.org>.
- <sup>2</sup> Character Education Partnerships. *Character Education Questions and Answers*.
- <sup>3</sup> Character Education Partnerships. (1996) *A Brief History of Character Education in America*. Website: <http://www.character.org>.
- <sup>4</sup> Lickona, Thomas; Schaps, Eric; Lewis, Catherine. "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> R's. Website: [http://www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/home .htm](http://www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/home.htm).
- <sup>5</sup> Lickona, Thomas (1993). "The Return of Character Education." *Educational Leadership*. ASCD, 11:6-11.
- <sup>6</sup> Character Education Partnerships. (1996) *A Brief History of Character Education in America*. Website: <http://www.character.org>.
- <sup>7</sup> Character Education Partnerships. *Character Education Questions and Answers*.
- <sup>8</sup> Lickona, Thomas; Schaps, Eric; Lewis, Catherine. "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." *Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> R's*.
- <sup>9</sup> Lickona, Thomas; Schaps, Eric; Lewis, Catherine. "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." *Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> R's*.
- <sup>10</sup> Lickona, Thomas; Schaps, Eric; Lewis, Catherine. "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." *Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> R's*.
- <sup>11</sup> Lickona, Thomas; Schaps, Eric; Lewis, Catherine. "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education." *Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> R's*.
- <sup>12</sup> Character Education Partnerships. *Strategies for Teaching Respect and Responsibility*. Website: <http://character.org>. Phone 1-800-988-8081.
- <sup>13</sup> The Josephson Institute of Ethics. (1993) *Declaration on character Education*. Website: <http://www.CharacterCounts.org/>.

---

**Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project  
Florida Institute of Education / University of North Florida  
320 Blounts Street, Suite 410  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301**

**Phone: (904) 414-9976  
SunCom: 944-9976  
FAX: (904) 414-9979  
FAX SunCom: 944-9979  
e-mail: boyer\_j@popmail.firn.edu**

**FIE Staff**

<i>John Masterson</i>	<i>Project Director</i>
<i>Leonard Everett</i>	<i>Senior Program Manager</i>
<i>Cathy Hammond</i>	<i>Program Manager</i>
<i>Maureen Rogers</i>	<i>Project Coordinator</i>
<i>Melissa Hatch</i>	<i>Resource Librarian</i>
<i>Judy Boyer</i>	<i>Executive Secretary</i>

*This publication was produced through Federal Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities funding.*