

Word of the Week

Allen Elementary School is an inner-city school in Dayton, Ohio. More than 60% of its students live in single-parent families and more than 70% in families receiving public assistance.

When Rudy Bernardo became principal in 1989, Allen was 28th out of Dayton's 33 elementary schools in test scores. "Teachers couldn't teach," he says, "because of the constant discipline problems." Teacher absenteeism was one of the city's highest.

With the approval of the School Board, Principal Bernardo began to work with his teachers to develop a character education program, centered on "the word of the week." Each week promotes a different value; values for the first half of the year include:

respect	helpfulness	tolerance
responsibility	cleanliness	loyalty
honesty	courtesy	citizenship
punctuality	thrift	cheerfulness
self-control	self-reliance	patience
kindness	courage	sportsmanship

The **Word of the Week** is defined on Monday, and students in each classroom brainstorm examples. The next three days feature short homeroom discussions of the word. Teachers also try to connect classroom activities to the word's theme. Students are often sent to the principal's office for compliments when they behave in exemplary ways.

A **Parent's Page** is sent home with specific suggestions such as topics for discussion and bedtime stories that families can use to promote the week's value. On Friday, at the school assembly, one class presents a story or skit that shows the virtue of living by that week's word. Cafeteria placemats feature the word. And two of Dayton's TV stations run a 30-second spot each day promoting the Word of the Week.

Teachers have also improved their own relationships through staff development workshops on trust-building and working by consensus and by working in teams. Principal Bernardo also held summer orientation sessions for parents to help them understand the new attitude of discipline and mutual responsibility that would govern

the school. Parents who didn't attend the orientations were asked to meet with Mr. Bernardo one-on-one.

In the first two years of Allen's new program, student respect and other behavior improved markedly, suspensions dropped dramatically, teacher absenteeism ceased to be a problem, and PTA fundraising increased. By 1992, Allen had risen from 28th to 5th in test scores in the city of Dayton. By 1995 it was first.