

# The Fourth and Fifth Rs

## Respect and Responsibility

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### Character Education: Teaching Values, Valuing Teachers

Angela Perez Baraquio, Teacher and Miss America 2001

Incidents like the Columbine school massacre and other acts of youth violence have led to increased discussion about the role teachers play in developing their students' core ethics and values. Teachers, more than any other adults besides parents, directly influence the character attributes youngsters develop. Through formal instruction, coaching, and their everyday behavior, teachers communicate and pass on their own character traits and ethics to children.

There is growing agreement that a renewed emphasis on character education is needed to support the ethical and academic development of our youth. *But in addition to providing students with character education, we must also increase the value we place on teachers.*

We must place greater emphasis on the workplace conditions teachers face. Many of our schools are in need of basic building repairs or renovating. At the same time, 22 percent of all new teachers leave the pro-

fession within three years not only because they can't *afford* to teach anymore, but because the rewards don't outweigh the challenges they face. Many times teachers are forced to reach into their own pockets for much-needed supplies and teaching tools. If America's teachers are to be responsible for teaching our children to become honorable people, then America's teachers need to be *treated* like honorable people.




#### Three Core Principles

Despite the severity of these problems, they can be overcome. As Miss America 2001 and a teacher myself, I will champion three core principles:

*First*, I will urge every educational institution to adopt or create a formal, high-quality initiative that infuses character development into its daily school culture and curriculum.

*Second*, I will encourage schools to investigate the various character education options that exist and then choose or develop one that meets the unique needs of its students.

*Third*, I will serve as a strong voice for all teachers in their fight to achieve quality compensation for quality education, appropriate resources for their classrooms, professional development opportunities, and respect. 

*Miss America 2001 Angela Perez Baraquio taught at Holy Family Catholic Academy, Hawaii. For information on booking her, contact: The Miss America Organization; Tel. (609) 345-7571, ext. 20; or E-mail: events@missamerica.org.*

#### Miss America's Mission

- ★ *to promote the character development movement in America while calling attention to the critical role teachers play in the lives of our nation's youth.*
- ★ *to encourage students to open their minds and hearts to the messages of good character.*
- ★ *to encourage parents to value their children by valuing their children's teachers.*
- ★ *to challenge educational administrators, government officials, civic leaders, business people, and others to join in supporting character education within their schools and communities.*



# *Morgan Road Elementary School: A National School of Character*

**Richard Parisi, Principal**

*In a national competition sponsored by the Character Education Partnership, Morgan Road Elementary School was one of 10 schools selected as a 2000 National School of Character.*

**W**hen I'm invited to share the "Morgan Road Story" with school staffs or university classes, I always begin by calling to mind the two great goals of education: growing academically and becoming the best people we can be.

Morgan Road, a K-6 school in Liverpool, New York, serves a mixture of blue-collar and white-collar families. Five years ago, we sent a team of teachers to attend the Summer Institute in Character Education run by the Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs. With that background, a core group of faculty and administration helped our school community embrace a common vision—helping our students become both smart and good.

We then joined the Character Counts Coalition and adopted their six core virtues as the pillars of our character education program: *respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship* and *trustworthiness*. We made the Golden Rule the foundation of these pillars.

## *Our Leadership Team*

We called our character education leadership team the Character and Reading Enrichment Committee (CARE). We thought, why not have the character education team focus on enriching the reading program as well? We didn't want people to get the wrong idea that character education was a stand-alone.

Our committee has about 10 members who meet monthly and for three half-days in the summer to plan the upcoming year. The committee has planned schoolwide activities, developed reading guides for specific stories, and proposed general questions that can be used with any piece of literature to help teachers mine the meaning of a text. The committee has looked at questions such as, "How might character journals be a part of the writing process?"

## *Curricular Integration*

One intermediate teacher taught a literature unit with her students using books that highlight the character pillars. Students worked in cooperative groups and made computer slide presentations showing how the books they were assigned connected with the pillars. In another class, after studying the structure of fables, students created their own fables and shared them, discussing the moral they chose to highlight in their story.

The school library staff creates a monthly display of books for each pillar and sends out a monthly list of books to the staff related to the character pillar in focus.

*The two great goals of education:  
growing academically and becoming  
the best people we can be.*

In 1996, seven staff attended a two-day Kagan Institute of Cooperative Learning. A staff member then attended a weeklong training and, for the last two summers, has offered training to her colleagues.

## *Building Community Through Buddy Classes*

Every class in the building has a buddy class. We felt it was important for students to have mentoring opportunities. Each month, the classes meet and reflect on the core virtue being focused on that month. During the course of the year, all six virtues are covered through writing activities, art activities, and other creative endeavors. This pairing of older and younger students has inspired older students to do other volunteer service in the building. For example, about 15 sixth-grade students serve as kindergarten helpers.

## *The Spirit of Service*

We think the spirit of service has taken hold. When the school underwent a construction project leading to a large enclosed courtyard, a parent who was a landscape architect volunteered to run a before-school class for fifth- and sixth-graders to help them decide how to beautify the space. This initial group continued as an after-school club self-named the Gardenateers. The students

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meet once a week after school to work on planting and landscaping. The space now includes a bird sanctuary, a wildflower area, and a set of raised planters for students with physical disabilities.

Another popular after-school club focuses on serving others with understanding and compassion. Kids Care was formed after a staff member heard character educator Deb Austin Brown speak about “the power of one.” Fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade students meet to design and make cards for hospital patients, armed service members, and anyone who they’ve been told may need a pick-me-up. They write notes of appreciation to slip in staff members’ mailboxes and think of creative ways to thank bus drivers.

### A Yearly Project

Each year, in addition to the everyday integration of character education, Morgan Road chooses a special project to unify and focus the school. In 2000, the Random Acts of Kindness program gave students, staff, and parents an incentive not only to perform acts of kindness but also to notice the kind acts of others. When someone observed an action that demonstrated true kindness, they could go to the office and ask for a “key,” made of colorful paper, where they could describe what they had witnessed. These keys decorated doors and enriched open houses.

### The Parent Connection

Students have played an important role in keeping parents informed and involved. One year we gave “blocks” to adults in the community and asked them to write about a time they saw a student “doing the right thing.” These blocks were half sheets of paper that could be used to build a “wall.” As a surprise for open house, students wrote a block about their parents and what they do to show good character.

Our monthly calendar and newsletter remind parents of upcoming events and of the character education trait that is being emphasized at school.

### Student-Led Conferences

Some teachers use student-led conferences in lieu

of the traditional parent-teacher conferences. Students put together a portfolio of their work to share with their parents. The teacher schedules three to five parent-student teams at a time, rotating them from station to station, allowing the parents to hear about the inner workings of the classroom from the mouths of their own children.

### Character on the Bus

At the start of each school year, I meet with all of the bus drivers at a breakfast. One year I asked if anyone wanted to try extending character education to the bus route. A driver who had the “tough” bus route volunteered. After arriving at school, the students who don’t eat breakfast have to wait on the bus for a few minutes. He decided to have students come to the front of the bus

and share something about themselves. He said, “I saw more respect for one another as kids got to know one another.” This driver also greets every child by name as they get on the bus each morning and afternoon—and they greet him back!

### Discipline Problems Down, Scores Up

Our kids are far from perfect, of course. But when they do something wrong, our character pillars guide the discipline process. When a student is sent to me, one of the first questions I

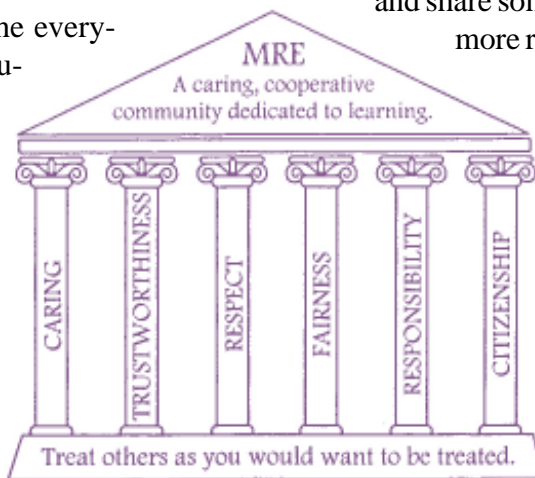
always ask is, “Tommy, can you tell me which of the pillars you had trouble following in this situation?”

Student referrals from the classroom, cafeteria, and buses are all at their lowest level. Student test scores are on the increase. On a standardized writing exam, 100 percent of students have scored above the state benchmarks. In math and reading, over 98 percent of students were above state standards.

We credit much of this success to a classroom environment created by a focus on character that has allowed more uninterrupted instruction time. ■

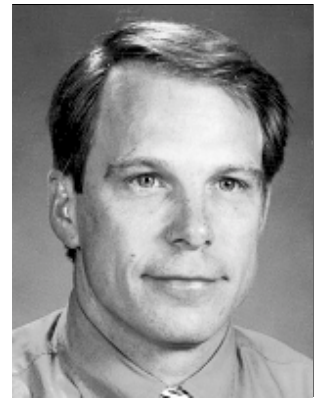
*Adapted from the book, 2000 National Schools of Character with profiles of the 10 award winners; available from CEP; Tel: 800-988-8081; [www.character.org](http://www.character.org).*

*Morgan Road Elementary, 7795 Morgan Rd., Liverpool, NY 13090; Tel: (315) 453-1268; E-mail: [rparisi@liverpool.k12.ny.us](mailto:rparisi@liverpool.k12.ny.us).*



## *r<sup>2</sup>: Respect and Responsibility at West Genesee High*

**Dr. Barry Copeland, Assistant Principal**



Implementing an effective respect and responsibility program at the high school level can be more complicated and overwhelming than any other building initiative. One has to overcome such obstacles as student resistance ("This is nerdy," "It won't work"), and a "fix the kids" mentality on the part of some adults. But done right, a character education initiative can also be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding school experiences for students and staff alike.

Three years ago, at West Genesee High School, a handful of students, teachers, and administrators started a program designed to promote mutual respect and personal responsibility among members of our school. The program, now with a Task Force of over 120 people, has come to be known as *r<sup>2</sup>* (r-squared). Here are our steps and strategies:

**Task Force.** Staff, student, and parent volunteers planned the program. We adopted three basic premises: *We should promote the good that exists in our building; we are more alike than unlike; and respect is mutual.* Next, we created a three-fold framework for carrying out our program: (1) *Service* (creating partnerships in and outside of school); (2) *Knowledge and Skills* (promoting a safe learning environment); and (3) *Public Relations* (promoting the program). Each *r<sup>2</sup>* activity is connected to our framework.

**Training.** Teachers, students, administrators, a school counselor, and a parent rep attended training workshops at the Center for the Fourth and Fifth Rs.

**School Survey.** A brief survey asked school members to identify existing school activities that already promote respect and responsibility. This information was then published throughout the building.

**Visual Displays.** Two art students and their teacher designed an *r<sup>2</sup>* logo (shown above). The logo was used to create *r<sup>2</sup>* buttons and banners and was painted on a wall in the student cafeteria as a daily reminder. The *RAK (Random Acts of Kindness) Tree* was painted in the main hallway, using symbolic "kindness leaves" to promote acts of caring. Finally, an *r<sup>2</sup>* video highlighted all of the year's efforts and events.

**Student Kickoff.** A student-run assembly used a "variety show" format to promote a mutual respect and personal responsibility theme. Skits, a student rock band,

a large-screen video of teacher and student testimonials, chorus and dance line performances, and cheerleaders doing the R-E-S-P-E-C-T cheer made this a huge success.

**Faculty Kickoff.** A faculty assembly brought in a speaker on strategies for the high school classroom.

**Race for Respect.** Over 800 people participated in a school and community walk or run while enjoying refreshments and live music by our students.

**24-Hour Challenges.** All school members were challenged for 24 hours to "Resist the Urge to Criticize," "Make No Complaints," etc.

**Building Focus.** Periodic building-wide themes included "Keep-it-Clean" (self-policing to keep hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, and cafeterias clean) and "Appreciation" (sending thanks to others in recognition of their efforts).

**Resources.** Character education books and videos were collected for teachers' use.

**Newsletter.** An *r<sup>2</sup>* Newsletter highlighting these events was mailed to every student's home.

**Service Corps.** Service opportunities included serving food at a local homeless shelter, reading to elementary students, and meeting over lunch with eighth-grade students to help them transition to the high school.

**Parent Education.** Dr. Tom Lickona spoke to over 300 parents on "Raising Children of Character."

**Leadership Training.** Twenty students and staff attended an all-day leadership training workshop.

**Green-it-Up, Clean-it-Up.** 200 students, staff, and parents have taken part in our annual finale of cleaning and planting flowers around school and community grounds.

Our program has evolved from being just a "good idea" to an integral part of our school's culture. It has received local media attention and helped other districts develop similar efforts. ■

*West Genesee High School, 5201 W. Genesee St., Camillus, NY 13031; Tel. (315) 487-4601. After Feb. 23, Barry Copeland will be the high school principal at: Weedsport Central School, 2821 E. Brutus St., Weedsport, NY 13166; Tel. (315) 834-6652.*



## ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, & HIGH SCHOOL CHARACTER ED. CONFERENCES

JUNE 25-28, 2001. *Early Bird Deadline: April 12; Registration Deadline: June 11.*

*See accompanying flyer for details and registration, or contact Center.*

1. **PRE-INSTITUTE K-12 WORKSHOP**, Monday, June 25: *Using the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education to Begin or Strengthen Your Program*—Dr. Tom Lickona  
Early bird: \$75, then \$100.\*
2. **3-Day SUMMER INSTITUTE IN CHARACTER EDUCATION (ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TRACKS)**, Tues., June 26-Thurs., June 28 (ends at 3:45 pm). Early bird: \$350, then \$375.\*
3. **1-Day HIGH SCHOOL WORKSHOP**, Tuesday, June 26, *Building Character in Your Classroom*—Dr. Hal Urban, and *Schoolwide Strategies for the High School*—Sr. Kate Arseneau  
Early bird: \$125, then \$150.\* (Note: *If you are a high school educator registering for the 3-day Institute, you may attend this High School workshop instead of the regular Tuesday Institute program.*)
4. **1-Day K-8 CONFERENCE (ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TRACKS) (Day 2 of the Institute)** Wed., June 27. Early bird: \$125, then \$150.\*

\* *Registration fees for high school students are half of the normal fees for all events.*

### **Sample comments from participants in last year's Summer Institute:**

*This has been one of the best conferences I have attended. I gained both professionally and personally. I have learned practical strategies for discipline (I am a new administrator) and with my own three boys. I've discovered many ideas to add to my mission to create a positive climate in my school. What I learned here about character education has pulled everything together for me.*

*Tremendously useful; incredible amount of resources and knowledge gained from experts in the field. A life-changing experience!*

*This was a conference packed full of information and inspiration. I gained a tremendous amount, and we have begun generating ideas of our own almost immediately. The speakers were brilliant! A powerful and uplifting experience.*

*My one wish is that everyone could experience this conference! It has been a great week: Outstanding speakers, concrete ways to implement a successful character education program in our schools, meeting other teachers and sharing best ideas, and the time to develop an action plan.*

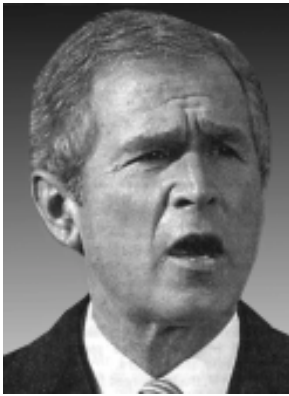
### **Sample comments from participants in Hal Urban's previous H. S. Workshops:**

*Excellent demonstration of how you can make a difference in your classroom even if staffmates are not on board.*

*Hal's positive attitude and gift for story-telling made this one of the best conferences I have attended in my 26 years of teaching. His suggestions are very valuable, realistic, and "do-able" in a high school setting.*

*This is the second time I have heard Hal Urban speak. Throughout the past school year, I found myself thinking, "How would Hal Urban handle this?" By the end of the school year, I saw why his philosophy and materials work. He gets students to look at things in a different way.*

**The New York State S.A.V.E. law requires character education K-12.**



# *"Building a Nation of Character"*

President George W. Bush

*In the recent presidential campaign, candidates Gore and Bush both strongly endorsed character education. In his inaugural address on January 20, 2001, President Bush issued*

*a call to character to all schools and citizens. An abridged version follows.*

**W**e have a place, all of us, in a long story, a story we continue but whose end we will not see. It is the American story, a story of flawed and fallible people, united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise: that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born. Americans are called to enact this promise in our lives and in our laws.

*If we do not turn the hearts of children toward knowledge and character, we will lose their gifts and undermine their idealism.*

Even after nearly 225 years, we have a long way yet to travel. While many of our citizens prosper, others doubt the promise—even the justice—of our own country. The ambitions of some Americans are limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice and the circumstances of their birth.

## *A Nation of Justice and Opportunity*

We do not accept this. Our unity, our union, is the serious work of leaders and citizens in every generation. This is my solemn pledge: to work to build a single nation of justice and opportunity. I know this is in our reach, because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves, who creates us equal in his image.

America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests, and teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these principles. Every citizen must uphold them. If we do not turn the hearts of children toward knowledge and character, we will lose their gifts and undermine their idealism.

## *Civility Is a Choice*

Today we affirm a new commitment to live out our nation's promise through civility, courage, compassion, and character. Civility is not a tactic or a sentiment. It is the determined choice of trust over cynicism, of community over chaos.

**A**merica at its best is compassionate. In the quiet of American conscience, we know that deep, persistent poverty is unworthy of our nation's promise. All of us are diminished when any are hopeless. Many in our country do not know the pain of poverty. But we can listen to those who do. And I can pledge our nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side.

## *Compassion: The Work of a Nation*

Government has great responsibilities, for public safety and public health, for civil rights and common schools. Yet compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government.

America at its best is a place where personal responsibility is valued and expected. Encouraging responsibility is not a search for scapegoats; it is a call to conscience. Our public interest depends on private character, on civic duty and family bonds and basic fairness.

Sometimes in life we are called to do great things. But as a saint of our times has said, every day we are called to do small things with great love. The most important tasks of a democracy are done by everyone.

*The most important tasks of a democracy are done by everyone.*

**W**hat you do is as important as anything government does. I ask you to seek a common good beyond your comfort, to serve your nation, beginning with your neighbor. I ask you to be citizens. Citizens, not spectators. Citizens, not subjects. Responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character. When this spirit of citizenship is missing, no government program can replace it. When this spirit is present, no wrong can stand against it. ■