

The Fourth and Fifth Rs

Respect and Responsibility

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The Character of Education: Promises to Keep

Chip Wood, co-creator of the *Responsive Classroom*, gave the June 25, 1996 keynote at the Center's Second Annual Summer Institute in Character Education at SUNY Cortland. In his concluding remarks, he outlined seven promises he believes we must make to our children, schools, and each other if we are to move our beliefs about character education into sound daily practice.

1. Let us promise not to ignore the behavior of boys when it is deliberately mean and cruel and physically or verbally abusive to girls. In order to stem the tide of abusive treatment of women in our society, we must promise not to look the other way in the halls of our elementary, middle and high schools. We must teach young boys to express empathy and make it normative to be respectful and caring in our schools. **This is the promise of respect—to the boy on the bicycle and the girl in the schoolyard.** (Wood had recounted a disturbing newspaper report of a 10-year-old boy's assault on an 8-year-old girl with broken glass in a schoolyard after school.)

2. Let us promise to ask parents what they want their children to learn in school this year. At the very least, send a letter home before school starts that asks this question. If possible, move the first parent conference to the beginning of the school year and make it a goal-setting conference. **This is the promise of parental involvement for all moms and dads.**

3. Promise your students real responsibility in the classroom and school by generating classroom rules that begin with their hopes and dreams, aspirations and goals. Then give them real jobs to do. **This is the promise of responsibility in action.**

4. Promise yourself, your administration, parents and students, a clear set of school-wide rules and procedures that let everyone know that *the vast majority of students—the ones who follow the rules—will, from this point forward, be the ones who get most of the teacher's attention*, rather than the other way around. Make sure the school board approves this policy. **This is the promise to recognize responsibility.**

5. Promise yourselves that you will work together to create classroom and school ceremonies, rituals, structures and routines that provide for teaching and practicing the *internalization* of rules and for the building of greater trust among all members of the school community. To accomplish this, *find as many ways as possible to increase meaningful, prosocial contact between younger and older students in the school*, such as cross-age tutoring and "buddies" programs. **This is the promise of apprenticeship.**

6. **Promise to teach recess and lunch with the same intentionality as reading and math.** Share the lunchroom and playground with your students as often as possible. **This is the promise of safety and civility.**

7. **Promise to use every available avenue to strengthen and support your adult community in its work together and with children**, especially through the provision of time to meet, dialogue and create stronger bonds among adults. I recommend the notion that every teacher needs a "buddy teacher." In order to model good character for children, they must see us interact with *each other*, not just with them. We must be in each other's rooms, on the playground together—modeling for children. **This is the promise to "raise the village"—the community of adults.** ☞

To receive *The Responsive Classroom* newsletter (free), call 1-800-360-6332 or e-mail: nefc@crocker.com.

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Homer School-Business Partnership Promotes Character

“We know that responsible and respectful students do not just happen. It takes work by parents, educators, church leaders, community and business leaders, and community agencies.”


So spoke Dr. Jerry Rice, Curriculum Director, Homer (NY) Central School District, in announcing a September 17 school-community forum on character education. Character education has been named by Homer's Board of Education as a high priority.

Homer's decision to make character education a district priority is in part an outgrowth of its participation in the 1995 and 1996 weeklong Summer Institutes and one-day Conferences in Character Education sponsored by the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs.

Albany International, a Homer business, has provided scholarships both years to encourage the participation of

Homer teachers in the summer programs.

In spring of 1995, Gary Seales, Operations Manager of Albany International, wrote Hal Ferguson, Homer School Superintendent, to offer the scholarships. Mr. Seales said, "From a business perspective, I feel that character-building is one of the most important things a school can do for its students. At Albany International, we look for employees who have the character qualities of honesty, responsibility, diligence, perseverance, and the ability to work with others."

Participants in Homer's September 17 forum included the mayor, police chief, school superintendent, school staff, students, parents, and other members of the community. Homer teachers described what they learned at the summer programs, how they had used the learnings, and why they believe character education is essential in any classroom or school. 

1997 Summer Institute in Character Education

Dates: Mon., June 30 - Thurs., July 3.

Place: SUNY Cortland campus.

Participants: Most slots reserved for school or district teams; some spaces for individual educators.

Goal: To teach the comprehensive approach to character education and help teams prepare an action plan for promoting character education upon return to their home school.

Requirements: Teams must include a building administrator (the principal or vice-principal) and several faculty. Sponsoring schools must commit to providing follow-up support for planning and implementing a character education initiative.

Institute Cost: Early bird: \$200 per person (includes lunch and 4 books). After May 1: \$225.

To Apply: To request an Institute application and further information, write or call the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs. (We recommend early application, since we had to turn people away last year.)

One-Day K-8 Conference:

Wed., July 2: Early bird cost: \$70.

Two-Day High School Conference:

Wed.-Thurs. July 2-3: Early bird cost: \$140.

Every man must decide if he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

The possibility that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just.

—Abraham Lincoln

SECOND ANNUAL SUMMER INSTITUTE IN CHARACTER EDUCATION drew 165 educators from 20 states. Approximately 400 persons attended the June 25 One-Day K-8 and High School Conferences. Sample comments from the week-long participants:

“This has been the single most influential workshop I have attended. I have wanted to teach ‘values’ in depth for a long time but didn't think I could. You have given me permission to do it.”

“The Institute explained what character education is (not an add-on), the research as to its effectiveness, and the nuts and bolts of how to implement a program in our school. The speakers were informative and inspirational.”

“Our school district is just starting character education. The Institute has given us the information we very much need to develop a district-wide program.”

K-12 CHARACTER EDUCATION IN LOCUST VALLEY

by Dr. Eric Berger, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Berger speaks frequently on character education to schools and communities. He can be reached at (516) 674-6315.

“Character education is having an effective influence on our school. Fewer students are being brought to the office for disciplinary reasons. I also see the growth of empathy. When I announce award winners in the assembly, I see many more children clapping and smiling at the winners and shaking their hands.” — Locust Valley Elementary School Principal

Districtwide, K-12 character education is now in its fourth year in Locust Valley Central School District (LVCSD), Long Island, New York, and we are seeing the fruits of our efforts.

For us, the journey began in September of 1992. We had long talked about educating the whole child, but that notion had not been clarified. For some, education’s purpose resided solely in the development of intellect with its attendant skills; for others, intellect and character encompassed the school’s calling.

I proposed to our superintendent in October 1992 that a task force be formed to determine if character education should become a focus of our district. The board of education supported the superintendent’s recommendation to form such a task force to answer the following questions:

- ◆ *Should LVCSD educate for character by reinforcing certain fundamental ethical values learned at home?*
- ◆ *If the district should educate for character, what ethical values should we teach to students? How?*

I assumed the responsibility for the task force and met with each employee group and parents council or PTA to establish the following guidelines for task force membership:

- ◆ *Each school building could send one teacher and one administrative representative.*
- ◆ *Each K-12 employee group (bus drivers, cafeteria personnel, custodians, school-related personnel) could send one representative.*
- ◆ *Each parent council or PTA could send up to two representatives.*

The task force began meeting in March 1993 and decided that LVCSD should educate for character by reinforcing certain core ethical values. The task force decided on nine, defined them, and then sought feedback from parents and employees of the school district. (See page 4 for the nine core values and their definitions.)

How Children Learn Values

We also adopted a comprehensive approach to character education that makes use of all aspects of school life. This comprehensive approach, we believe, is consistent with what research shows about children’s moral development.

10 CLUES FROM THE RESEARCH

Children develop a commitment to ethical values from:

- 1. Identifying with significant others who live by these values**
- 2. Internalizing these values from others**
- 3. Falling in love with the good**
- 4. Experiencing reinforcement of behaviors demonstrating these values**
- 5. Experiencing logical consequences from adults for behaviors opposing these values**
- 6. Seeing models who exemplify these values**
- 7. Developing perspective-taking**
- 8. Acquiring higher levels of moral reasoning**
- 9. Experiencing these values in relationships and interactions**
- 10. Practicing behaviors exemplifying these values.**

The change process in Locust Valley Central School District has proceeded on two fronts. On one front, a formal process has been mounted, illustrated by the continuing work of the goal-oriented Character Education Task Force and its subcommittees. On the second, an informal growth process has been nurtured by creating an improvement-oriented, intelligent risk-taking organizational environment. Staff are encouraged to share ideas conceived, tried, modified, discarded, and adopted. Failures are celebrated along with successes; each attempt is valued as an effort to improve.

Over time we have sharpened our ethical delivery system by implementing classroom and schoolwork activities to develop children’s knowing, caring, and acting in accordance with the nine ethical values. Some activities have developed compassionate inter-classroom relationships. For example, a class of grade 2 students has buddied up with a class of grade 1 students to write and illustrate books. *(continued on p. 4)*

Locust Valley - Cont'd from page 3.

Prior to working together, the teacher of each class helped children learn and practice the social skills they would use with their buddies.

Other activities focus on becoming ethically aware. For example, some elementary students write about behaviors illustrative of the core values. Some activities, like Congress-in-Action for seniors, require students to become members of the House of Representatives and debate issues encompassed in legislative bills.

Values Backpacks

There are also activities that extend directly into the home. For example, a grade 1 teacher organizes a backpack of books related to a core ethical value and containing parent extension activities. Students borrowing the backpack take it home for one week.

“I am very glad our schools are addressing this issue of character,” says a parent leader. “It’s good to know the school will not turn its head when unethical behavior occurs. If all schools worked on this with their communities, we would have a better society.”

LOCUST VALLEY'S 9 ETHICAL VALUES

HONESTY/INTEGRITY: To be truthful, to distinguish between right and wrong, and to choose to do what is right.

RESPECT: To show regard for the worth of self, others, the environment, property, and laws.

COURTESY: To display appropriate behavior that shows consideration for others.

SELF-DISCIPLINE: To display appropriate control of oneself and one’s conduct and persevere in the pursuit of self-improvement.

COMPASSION: To be sympathetic and understanding towards the needs and feeling of others.

TOLERANCE: To have a fair and objective attitude toward those whose ideas, race, or creed are different from our own.

LOVE OF LEARNING: To have an intellectual curiosity.

RESPECT FOR EDUCATION: To have regard for the worth of the learning environment and the resources needed to develop each human being to his/her highest potential.

RESPONSIBILITY: To demonstrate personal accountability and work to the best of one’s ability; to respond to the needs of others.

Students must sense that their school stands for something—that the school's way of life affirms some values and not others.

—Knowledge Without Goodness is Dangerous

“Friendship” Begins Virtues Program at Wellwood Middle School

Wellwood Middle School in the Fayetteville-Manlius School District is focusing on a virtue a month, beginning with friendship. Other virtues include responsibility, honesty, compassion, perseverance, self-discipline, work, loyalty, courage, and confidence. Among Wellwood’s sources of reading material is William Bennett’s *Book of Virtues for Young People*.

Sample Friendship Lesson

1. Have the class brainstorm what they believe true friendship is and why we should have friends.
2. Read the introduction on Friendship on pages 120-121 from William Bennett’s *Book of Virtues for Young People*.
3. Have the students spend a few minutes comparing their ideas with those of Bennett’s introduction.
4. Read any one or two or three of the following readings from the book: “Damon and Pythias,” “Friendship,” or “The Bear and the Travelers.”
5. Discuss the idea of friendship:
 - Have you ever been able to trust a friend? Under what circumstances?
 - Describe the pressures that test your friendship(s) in class, halls, cafeteria, locker room, etc.
 - How far does friendship really go?
 - How do friendships change over time and in different situations?
6. Have students summarize as a group how they can be a friend to people they know and to “new friends” they are soon going to make in this new school year.

Wellwood's Ways to Focus Attention on the Theme of the Month

- ◆ Send home a Calendar of Thoughts about the theme.
- ◆ Use a Bulletin Board to display the theme. Include related newspaper articles and acts of virtue shown by school members.
- ◆ Place large poster-size signs throughout the building presenting the theme and its definition.

New Book: *The Power of Abstinence: How Parents Can Help Teens Postpone Sexual Activity and Achieve Emotional Security, Maximum Self-Esteem, & Stay Healthy* by Kristine Napier (Avon Books, \$11.00). A leading abstinence educator, Napier has written a wonderful, well-reasoned book for parents, teachers, and young people themselves.