

The Sweet Home Story

A Districtwide Approach. In 1988 Dr. James Finch, then superintendent of Sweet Home Schools in Amherst, New York, wrote a letter to all district staff asking three questions: "Are you concerned about the values and attitudes of our students? Should the school be doing something about this? If so, would you like to be involved?"

Seventy-five persons wrote replies. Dr. Finch set up a 19-member District Values Education Council, chaired by Middle School teacher Sharon Banas and representing teachers, parents, administrators, paraprofessionals, classified personnel, students, and the School Board. The District Council then charged each building with the task of identifying its top values concerns and coming up with strategies for addressing them.

The building character education committees have continued the approach of getting everyone involved. Building committees have included administrators, teachers, librarians, nurses, secretaries, custodians, guidance counselors, parents, and students. Once a month, representatives from each building meet to report activities they have successfully implemented in their schools. A monthly Values Education Newsletter describing these activities goes to all staff and parents.

At Sweet Home Middle School, students have made large vinyl banners that read **I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY DAY** and **I WANT RESPECT AND I SHOW IT** and hung them in school corridors. Daily messages on the themes of respect and responsibility are included in the morning announcements and repeated on the electronic message board in the cafeteria.

The Middle School **S.M.I.L.E.** Club ("Students Motivated In Leading Each other"), whose only qualification is that "you be a person who cares about others," raises funds for school projects, sends a card to all students and staff members on their birthday, provides a buddy for new students to ease their school transition, and prepares and distributes to all students a monthly **Caring Calendar** with daily suggestions for how to show caring (e.g., "Compliment another student today," "Be kind to the office and cafeteria staff," "Compliment a teacher," "Don't spread rumors").

A **Positive Bus Program**, led by bus driver Mary Zimmerman, promotes respect and responsibility on all the school buses.

"There hasn't been a single parent complaint about the school teaching values," says Dee Serrio, President of Sweet Home's PTA Council. "Parents had input, and this whole program contains nothing more than the values parents said they wanted for their children."

Sweet Home's districtwide values program has been written up in the New York Times, featured at the Annual Values Education Conference sponsored by the New York State Education Department, and presented at national conferences.

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