

**KEWASKUM
CHARACTER EDUCATION REPORT**

FOR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

**Prepared by:
Character Education Task Force
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CHARACTER EDUCATION TASK FORCE 2006-2008

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CHARACTER EDUCATION REPORT

STUDY CLARIFICATION

What is to be studied?

Character education brings two related ideas together: the development of character and learning. Character education is the process of developing qualities, such as responsibility, respect, and self-discipline. Character education is something that occurs not just at home or in school but throughout the entire social environment. The task force is charged with studying what is meant by character education, how is it developed, what are the core virtues, and how can these virtues be integrated into our daily lives.

Why is the study needed?

Negative youth trends, such as drug abuse, rising youth violence, increasing dishonesty, and premature sexual activity, are supported by a great deal of evidence.

Character education is not just for youth in at-risk or non-traditional families; all youth need the support of character education because family structure does not determine the parenting style nor do families constitute the total environment of youth.

Increasing amounts of permissive parents do not provide appropriate boundaries and restrictions for their children, and they tend to bail their children out of their problems so that their children do not experience the consequences of their actions.

Children are often with the media more than they are with their parents or school; the media often fills this moral vacuum with suggestive and exciting portrayals that have a strong emotional appeal.

Relativism is creating a culture where people are uncertain of what is right or wrong.

Character education was once an implicit purpose of schools; now it is a neglected mission; schools must help students to be good as well as smart.

Character education is positive; it emphasizes what to do rather than what not to do.

Without character education, negative peer pressure can have an undue influence while positive experiences are left to chance.

Character education provides a common language for the many different youth development entities.

Character education sends a consistent message throughout the community enabling home, school, church, and community organizations to coordinate their youth development efforts.

Character education provides a common language for all of the different social entities throughout the community.

Empirical evidence from positive psychology indicates that being good is good for you.

What are the limits of the study?

According to the Character Education Partnership, character education includes the following topics:

Moral reasoning/cognitive development

Social and emotional learning

Moral education/virtue

Life skills education

Service learning

Citizenship training/civics education

Civic engagement

Caring community

Social responsibility

Health education; drug, pregnancy, and violence prevention

Conflict resolution/peer mediation

Ethics/moral philosophy

RESPONSES TO CONCERNS ABOUT CHARACTER EDUCATION

Isn't the teaching of values a job for parents not schools?

Parents do play the primary role in the development of a child's character. However, character is imparted through the total environment, which includes school, the workplace, church, the media, peer gatherings, community organizations as well as home. Parents need support from all of the places where value formation occurs.

Society consists of many groups with differing customs and values, how can we impose our values on someone else?

By taking the time to identify the virtues that the community aspires to, all voices can be honored, and diversity becomes a strength.

What about the separation of church and state?

The separation of church and state protects freedom of religion by keeping the state from favoring a particular form of religion or interfering in the practice of religion. Virtues are not the exclusive property of religion. Core virtues are a natural part of education and community life. Religion can play an important role in presenting, explaining, and reinforcing these core virtues.

Isn't character education simply a cover to forward special interests?

Character education is about a consensus within the community on a core set of virtues. For dialogue to take place on character education, people must put aside their issues and focus on the fundamental virtues that they share in common.

Isn't character pretty much determined during early childhood?

Character develops over a lifetime. Psychological research does not support the idea that character is somehow determined in early childhood. At no stage of development should people be treated as lost causes. Schools, churches, and other community organizations are charged with never giving up on anyone and doing the best that they can for their people.

Can character education really be done effectively?

Character education is capable of significant impact. Evidence suggests that character education can improve performance in school and strengthen relationships between home, school, church, and community. Doing nothing leaves the development of character to chance and misses a profound opportunity for youth development.

Will character education eventually fade away like other programs?

Character education is not a program; it is a movement that can generate ownership on the part of everyone. It is sustained by strong relationships rather than adherence to a plan. Character education has a better chance of being supported over time when it involves the school and community.

How can character education be added to an already overcrowded schedule?

Educators are going to deal with issues related to character education in some fashion, such as student discipline, relationships, and performance. Character education provides a means for addressing these issues in positive and productive ways. At first character education takes more time and effort, but this initial investment has the potential for significant returns in terms of fewer disruptions, improved relationships, and increased student achievement. Over time character education becomes integrated naturally throughout the school and community.

DESIGN OF STUDY

- (1) What is character education?
- (2) What are the attitudes and beliefs of Kewaskum Youth?
- (3) What are the virtues?
- (4) How is character education developed and delivered?

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

(1) What is character education?

Character is knowing, desiring, and doing the good. Goodness is society's ideal standard of moral rules and virtues that shape conduct.

Character development is a gradual shifting from following the commands from authority to choosing to do the right thing. It is acquiring the capacity to control one's impulses for acts other than the satisfaction of immediate desires. Moral rules and virtues are transmitted through the total environment, which includes the family, schools, places of worship, peer groups, the media, and the community at large.

Character education holds that core ethical virtues, such as responsibility, caring, fairness, respect, and honesty are the basis of good character. A school and community committed to character education explicitly names and publicly stands for these virtues. Core virtues are the basis for the social, emotional, and behavioral learning in the school. Because of the core virtues, all school and community members, adults as well as students, can hold one another accountable to the standards of conduct consistent with these ideals.

(2) What are the attitudes and beliefs of Kewaskum youth?

Currently the Kewaskum School District has limited data on the social/emotional status of its youth. To date, the source of the most descriptive data on Kewaskum youth is derived from two Search Institute Surveys conducted in 2004 and 2006 on grades 9 and 11. This data was obtained largely through the efforts of Kewaskum Cares About Kids. This organization was founded on the notion that youth are not the problem, but are part of the solution. Kewaskum Cares About Kids has hosted information sessions on the survey data as well as activities for parents and youth.

The information from the two surveys indicated that progress had occurred between 2004 and 2006. Percentages from many of the positive indicators had increased while percentages from some of the at-risk indicators had decreased.

The following are some of the positive findings from the surveys:

- Most youth feel the presence of strong family support.
- Many youth indicate a positive impact from their peers.

- A large percentage of youth participate in the religious community.
- In general, youth feel engaged in the school.
- From the perspective of positive values, youth indicate a strong foundation from which to build a character education initiative.
- Three out of four students have a positive view of their personal future.

The following are some areas of concern:

- Three out of four students do not view the school climate as caring.
- A similar amount of youth feels that the community does not value them or see their potential as resources.
- Youth also feel that there is a lack of positive adult role models.
- Youth indicate that there is a lack of creative activities available to them.
- In terms of a commitment to learning, one statistic stands out, a lack of reading for pleasure, which is a foundational piece for life-long learning.
- A lack of planning and decision-making skills was of concern with regards to the social competencies of youth, particularly, the ability of youth to realistically assess future options.
- Almost half of the students lack a sense of personal power, which is an important determiner of student achievement.
- At-risk behaviors like bullying/intimidation, depression/suicide, and underage use of alcohol are of particular concern although the percentages are consistent with other schools in the area.

It is obvious that more information is needed to make more definitive statements as to the status of Kewaskum youth. A more definitive picture could be obtained if all secondary grades (6-12) took the survey once every three years.

(3) What are the virtues?

September:	Respect	Treat others the way you want to be treated.
October:	Responsibility	Do what needs to be done.
November:	Self-discipline	Make yourself do what's right.
December:	Caring	Be kind and helpful to others.
January:	Integrity	Be truthful in your actions.
February:	Leadership	Set a good example.
March:	Cooperation	Work together in a positive way.
April:	Citizenship	Serve for the good of all.

May: Reflection Better yourself by learning from experience.

(4) How is character education developed and delivered?

ROLES FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION

- Be a positive role model by actively living the virtues.
- Build community by creating an environment where virtues can thrive.
- Advise others about the relationships between the virtues and their lives.
- Mentor an individual about the impact of the virtues on their life.

INSTRUCTION IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

- Help others form virtuous habits; people are what they repeatedly do.
- Present the virtues to others by defining them, providing examples, and describing their applications in life.
- Use all curriculums to teach right and wrong as well as the virtues.
- Look for teachable moments during the day to reinforce the virtues.
- Assist others in the development of moral strength so that they can actually do the right thing when the need arises.
- Encourage dialogue about ethical issues and dilemmas to stimulate moral growth.
- Examine the rationalizations that people use to justify their actions.
- Employ ethical tests, such as the golden rule and the fairness test, in deciding ethical issues.
- Identify ethical moments and reflect on what is the right thing to do.
- Be mindful that teaching moral reason without virtue may result in relativism and teaching virtue without reason may result in indoctrination.
- Help students to know each other; as a result, they tend to treat each other better.
- Help students to know themselves better so that they can maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses.
- Help students take ownership of their learning process through self-evaluation.

CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- An emphasis on **interpersonal, small group, and non-verbal communication** can provide insights into a person's character.
- **Critical and creative thinking skills** can aid in moral reasoning.
- **Controversial issues** can stimulate moral reasoning, but the virtues should never be presented as controversial.
- **Conflict resolution** teaches ways of resolving disputes in nonviolent ways and is effective when the parties are of relatively equal status.
- **Bullying** is about contempt not conflict; conflict resolution should not be used for bullying, especially when the parties are of unequal status.
- **Social skills** enhance the possibility of virtuous behavior.
- **Cooperative learning** improves academics and character education.
- **Service learning** fosters caring attitudes and active citizenship.

- **Employers** are looking for the same virtues that are espoused by the community and schools.
- **Elementary classroom meetings** and **secondary advisor groups** provide students with an opportunity to explore ethical issues and virtues.
- **Student government** can provide opportunities for moral dialogue and action.
- **Extracurricular activities** hold great promise for character development because of student interest.

DEVELOPING CHARACTER THROUGH THE WORK OF LEARNING

- A teacher with high expectations believes that the student can accomplish the task and demonstrates this belief by doing everything possible to help the student. Without high expectations, high standards are counterproductive.
- Unsuccessful students tend to attribute poor performance to unfair teachers, bad luck, or low ability—factors beyond their personal control—while successful students believe that motivation and effort determines their performance. Talent is not a substitute for hard work; it only gives a student a head start.
- Students who spend more time doing their homework, reading, and engaging in other academic pursuits do better in school than those who are disengaged or are there primarily for social purposes.
- Homework can develop self-discipline and good work habits; it can have positive effects on character development, student achievement, and communication between home and school.
- Extrinsic rewards can corrupt the motivation of students to learn; learning should be made more interesting for its own sake.

DISCIPLINE BEYOND CROWD CONTROL

- Discipline is an opportunity to teach right and wrong.
- Students subjected to discipline based solely on control and punishments develop low internal commitment to good behavior.
- For virtues to become habits, extensive coaching, practice, feedback, and consequences are required.
- Rules with procedures operationalize the virtues.
- Without consequences actions can be misleading. Certainty of consequences is more powerful than the severity of punishment.
- Restorative approaches help students learn from the situation, repair the harm, and strengthen relationships.
- Good values are grown from the inside out.

MORAL LEADERSHIP

- One of the historic purposes of public schooling is character education; schools should help students be good as well as smart.
- Character education is not an at-risk program; all youth and families are in need of support.

- Academic and ethical student development is enhanced in an authoritative learning environment where students experience a balance of unconditional acceptance, reasonable structure, and support in becoming their own person.
- Teachers, coaches, and sponsors are particularly influential in the development of character because they lead student peer groups; students look to their peers for cues as to what it takes to be successful in their environment.
- Moral strength is gained incrementally; the tougher the ethical stand today, the more capable one becomes of standing on convictions in the future.
- A person can lead with moral authority by becoming the change that he or she wants to bring about; students learn by example.

SETTINGS FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT BEYOND SCHOOL

Parents are the first and primary teachers of character. Parents can have a positive influence on the development of character by consistently:

- Being an authoritative parent.
- Teaching by example.
- Managing the moral environment.
- Coaching to form a conscience and habits.
- Teaching good judgment.
- Using restorative discipline.
- Providing opportunities to express virtue.

The faith community can be particularly influential in the development of character:

- A faith tradition is virtue-based.
- The activities of the faith community are primarily family-centered.
- The faith community is a significant player in youth development.
- The faith tradition provides a compelling rationale for the core virtues.

Youth not only have a stake but they also influence the development of character:

- When youth are viewed as a part of the solution and not the problem, they can become a positive influence in the development of character.
- Youth can influence the development of character through positive peer pressure.
- Through acts of service and volunteerism, youth can outwardly express virtue.
- When given the opportunity to participate in decision-making, youth can acquire ownership of their virtues.

The community at large can influence the development of character in a positive direction:

- By advocating for a consistent set of core virtues, the community can establish a positive moral climate.
- Community organizations can forward the character education initiative by issuing a statement of support and determining actions that would enhance the core virtues.
- Organizations that primarily serve youth can facilitate character development by making the core virtues a natural part of their activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUTH

- Live your life by the core virtues.
- Encourage your peers to live by the core virtues.
- Express the core virtues through service and volunteerism.

PARENTS

- Teach the core virtues by your example.
- Manage the moral environment of your children.
- Encourage your family to live by the core virtues.

SCHOOL

- Teach, model, and reinforce the core virtues.
- Integrate the core virtues into the curriculum.
- Create a supportive environment for the core virtues.

FAITH COMMUNITY

- Provide a theological grounding for the core virtues.
- Integrate the core virtues into the life of the faith community.
- Encourage the faithful to be an example to the greater community.

COMMUNITY

- Make the core virtues a natural part of community activities.
- Work to establish a positive moral climate for all members of the community.
- View youth as part of the solution not the problem.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Build campaign around the Hal Urban presentations on November 6-7.

- Hal Urban will make a community presentation at 7:00 PM on November 6 in the Kewaskum Theatre. (Have books available for selling to the public.)
- Hal Urban will meet with the entire staff from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM on November 7 in the Kewaskum Theatre.
- Hal Urban will meet with the faculty from 9:00 AM to 11:45 AM on November 7 in the Kewaskum Theatre.
- Faculty, paraprofessionals, secretaries and other interested staff members are to receive *Life's Greatest Lessons* on or prior to June 14.
- Faculty, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and other interested staff members are to receive *Positive Words, Powerful Results* at pre-service workshops in August of 2008.

- Place promotional materials for Hal Urban's presentation in businesses and other public locations.
- Use open house, parent teacher conferences, and registration as opportunities to promote character education and Hal Urban's presentation.

Include Holy Trinity School, St. Lucas School, and local clergy in all aspects of the campaign.

Use results from Asset Survey of high school students in spring of 2008 to elaborate on the status of youth development and character education in the Kewaskum community.

Develop posters and brochures of the character education report to be distributed at informational meetings.

Place complete character education report on the District Web Site.

Hold a retreat on initiating the character education campaign on Monday, August 4, 2008, at 6:30 PM in the Kewaskum District Offices. (Invite anyone who has an interest in being a champion of this cause.) Champions are to present information on character education and promote Hal Urban's presentation during September and October of 2008.

- Clergy along with champions in their churches are to engage their congregations on character education.
- Community champions are to present information on character education to community organizations, governmental units, student organizations, and school-affiliated organizations.
- Activities Director is to present the concept of character education to coaches and sponsors of extracurricular activities including youth sports coaches on a seasonal basis.
- Principals are to work with youth organizations related to their buildings, such as scouts, Boys and Girls Club, day cares, and preschools.

Enlist the support of the arts community in helping to elaborate and develop the character virtues. Examples of arts groups would be visual artists, vocal music, drama club, and local writers.

Use District newsletters, Statesman, community channel, radio, and any other means available to forward the cause of character education on a monthly basis.

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