

A guide to Character Development in Ontario Schools, K–12

October 2008



reach every student



What is Character Development?

Definition

There are universal attributes that schools and communities value. Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture these attributes and use them as a standard against which we hold ourselves accountable.

They are key aspects of school life. They bind us together and form the basis of responsible citizenship.

They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education and for school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive.

What Character Development Is – and What It Is Not

IT IS...

✓ the community building consensus on the attributes it values and sharing responsibility for developing them in students

✓ developing standards of behaviour

✓ developing self-discipline and interpersonal skills

✓ doing what's right because it's the right thing to do

✓ actively involving and engaging all students and the wider community

✓ embedded in all aspects of school life

✓ about inclusiveness, equity and respect for diversity

IT IS NOT...

✗ schools taking over from parents or the government imposing a set of morals

✗ compliance or indoctrination

✗ behaviour based on fear of punishment

✗ behaviour motivated by rewards and recognition

✗ something that can be done to students

✗ a new curriculum or an add-on

✗ about the “few” or the exclusion of any

Goals

Character development aims to develop school environments where everyone – students and adults alike – treats each other with care and respect.

Results will include:

- Improved academic achievement
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Schools that are respectful, caring, safe and inclusive
- Reduced behavioural problems.

Key Principles

Shared Responsibility

Although parents have the primary role in character development, we all share in the responsibility for and the benefits of young people becoming empathetic and involved citizens. All members of school communities must model, teach and expect demonstrations of the agreed upon attributes.

Educational Excellence

Although academic learning is the primary mission of our schools, they are also about the development of the whole person. A quality education sets high expectations for all students in learning, academic achievement, citizenship and character development.

Community Building and Equity

As Ontario's population becomes more diverse, it creates an opportunity for communities to find the beliefs and principles they hold in common. Respect for diversity must be at the heart of board and school policies and programs.

The Essential Elements of Character Development

The following four elements link together, enhancing each other, to form the foundation of successful character development:

1. Learning and academic achievement
2. Respect for diversity
3. Citizenship development
4. Parent and community partnerships.

1. Learning and Academic Achievement

A growing body of research illustrates that character development and student engagement are linked closely to improvements in academic achievement.

Many boards and schools have implemented character development. Character development is evident in areas such as respectful and accessible workplace practices, environmental awareness and protection programs, local and global health initiatives, athletic codes of conduct, student-led conferences and student leadership development.

2. Respect for Diversity

Character development upholds human rights and builds respect for the dignity of all people as the foundation for positive relationships. For example, community consultations must encourage and include diverse perspectives. This ensures that groups will find consensus on the selected attributes and provide input into their board's initiative.

3. Citizenship Development

Character development creates opportunities for students to develop the skills required for positive and effective participation as citizens in their schools and communities.

It challenges students to:

- Make principled decisions and contribute to solutions
- Think critically about their world
- Become engaged in their communities
- Develop higher levels of personal and social responsibility.

4. Parent and community partnerships

The success of the character development initiative depends on the meaningful engagement of parents and community partners.

Parents can support character development at all stages of their children's development. They can serve as positive role models, nurture character attributes and talk with their children about how they apply to situations at home and in the community.

Character development is an integral part of many youth, sports and community-based programs and is nurtured by the business community in co-operative and other work experience programs. Schools must seek out alliances among parents and community partners to support learning in all forms and settings.

In summary

A quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the mind. It means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect for others and who will think critically, feel deeply and act wisely. Character development enhances employability skills, encourages civic engagement and prepares students to be contributing citizens in our increasingly global society.

Character development is education at its best.

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www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/character.html

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