

excellence & ethics



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The Education Letter of the Smart & Good Schools Initiative

Best Work, Best Self: The Pursuit of Excellence & Ethics at The Shipley School

by Usha Balamore and Margaret Granados

How can we help students discover the inner joy and self-assurance that come from doing their best work? How can we help them fall in love with goodness—so that they desire to develop qualities such as respect, compassion, and courage?

“Doing our best work” and “Being our best selves”—these are the twin goals, for adults as well as students, that define our mission at The Shipley School. We are a pre-K-12 independent school in Bryn Mawr, Pennsyl-

How can we help students discover the joy that comes from doing their best work and doing the right thing?

vania, serving a population of 840 students. Most of the challenges we face—motivating students to do their best work, teaching them to respect others, building a strong collaborative relationship between administration and staff, and partnering effectively with parents—are similar to those faced by public schools. In our continuing effort to meet these challenges, we have for the past three years integrated the Smart & Good Schools vision of excellence and ethics into our Lower School (pre-K-6) and are now expanding it into the Middle School. We think that the strategies described in this article and in the two that follow can be adapted to other developmental levels and used effectively in public as well as private schools.

At all developmental levels, our application of the Smart & Good Schools vision has been guided by what the Smart & Good framework calls the 4 KEYS:



Photo by Melissa Cardona

Usha Balamore with Shipley students.

Smart & Good High Schools (2005), our report on award-winning high schools, defined character education as the process of developing performance character (needed to do our best work) and moral character (needed to be our best selves) within an ethical learning community. Since our report, elementary, middle, and high schools have made use of the Smart & Good Schools framework. Among the schools implementing the Smart & Good vision, The Shipley School has taken exemplary steps to design developmentally appropriate activities for helping students do their best work and do the right thing.

We are grateful to Shipley for sharing its innovative practices with our readers through this issue of *excellence & ethics*. Visit www.cortland.edu/character to view Dr. Balamore's general session at our 2009 Smart & Good Schools Summer Institute.

—The Editors

1. Support and Challenge: Building relationships and group norms that hold everyone accountable for doing their best work and being their best selves.

2. Self-Study: Assessing one's strengths and areas for improvement, then setting goals and monitoring progress.

3. Other-Study: Learning from the positive and negative examples of others.

4. Public Performance/Presentation: Sharing one's goals and work with others in the classroom, school, and community.

KEY 1: SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

In order to create an ethical learning community in which goodness and excellence are equally valued, a school must establish strong norms—clear expectations that all of us will do our best and be our best. During the past three years, Shipley has devised three strategies to develop such norms: (1) a year-long character theme, (2) Compacts for Excellence, and (3) vivid displays of values.

A Year-Long Character Theme

Year-long themes have been developed by Usha Balamore, director of character education, as a way to create a unifying focus within classrooms and throughout the school. A year-long theme provides an overarching canopy broad enough to absorb and enhance the academic and social curriculum at every grade level.

In the Lower School, we began with the year-long theme of "Respect and Responsibility." The second year's theme was "Best Work, Best Self." Last year, the theme was our school motto, "Courage for the Deed, Grace for the Doing." Instead of a scattered assortment of virtues, a single,

ADMINISTRATOR/COLLEAGUE COMPACT

To help all feel welcomed, respected, valued, and cared about,

Administrators will:

- Look for options, be open to questions, and seek consensus
- Enforce policy in a consistent way
- Support staff in being able to lead a balanced life.

Colleagues will:

- Graciously accept change
- Be gentle with each other
- Be open and humble.

To help everyone do their best work,

Administrators will:

- Follow through on initiatives and discussions
- Provide authentic feedback
- Keep extra meetings to a minimum.

Colleagues will:

- Have a strong work ethic
- Collaborate and share ideas
- Take care of their whole selves and help others do the same.

unifying theme throughout the year provides time to:

- define and redefine the focus virtues
- discuss feelings and experiences related to those virtues
- examine the portrayal of the focus virtues in fiction and nonfiction texts and integrate the virtues into every part of the curriculum
- ponder the prevalence or non-prevalence of the virtues in the community, neighborhood, and current news events
- practice the virtues—and evaluate our progress in showing them by our actions.

Compacts for Excellence

The Compact for Excellence (see *Smart & Good High Schools*, pp. 150-51; www.cortland.edu/character) is an agreed-upon set of guidelines developed by a group (a classroom, school, or family) for the purpose of holding all members accountable for doing their best work and treating others with respect and care. At Shipley, we took this idea a step further by developing compacts at *two levels*: (1) a compact between administrators and colleagues (all other staff); and (2) classroom compacts between teachers and their students.

Administrator/Colleague Compact. The prospect of creating a classroom compact is initially daunting for some teachers, especially when they discover that expectations for the teacher will also be listed on the compact, evaluated, and displayed throughout the school year. Willingness on the part of administrators to face their own vulnerability and model this procedure for teachers is therefore crucial. And so, at our first faculty meeting of the new school year, we wrote the two sentence starters below on a large whiteboard and invited staff to help create an Administrator/ Colleague Compact for Excellence:

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- To help everyone *feel welcomed, respected, valued, and cared about . . .*

Administrators will . . .

Others in the adult professional community will . . .

- To help everyone *do their best work . . .*

Administrators will . . .

Others in the adult professional community will . . .

An hour of brainstorming and discussion resulted in the creation of our

Welcome to the fourth issue of ***Excellence & Ethics: The Education Letter of the Smart & Good Schools Initiative***. The Smart & Good Schools Initiative is a joint project of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs and the Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE), with major grant funding from the **John Templeton Foundation** and the **Sanford N. McDonnell Foundation**.

Excellence & Ethics features K-12 practices that help all educational stakeholders do their best work (performance character) and do the right thing (moral character). **To subscribe, go to www.cortland.edu/character**. *Excellence & Ethics* is free, but your donations will help ensure its continuing publication. To make a contribution, please go to IEE's web site or mail to the Center. To submit an article for consideration, email the Center.

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Administrator/Colleague Compact (see box, p. 2). The Compact was then circulated via e-mail, refined further, and displayed prominently in our faculty lounge all year long. At faculty meetings, we considered whether we needed to work harder on any item in the Compact or add any new items.

Classroom Compacts. Teachers were given a timeline of three weeks to create Classroom Compacts with their students. Creating a compact at the beginning of the year serves several purposes. It clearly communicates what our school values: *doing our best* and *being our best*. It sends the message to students that while teachers have high expectations for students, they also have high expectations for

at our front entrance, weave their way through the hallways, and continue in our classrooms, science labs, cafeteria, library, and gyms. To convey our school's mission and theme for the year, we adorned a large green iron circle at the school entrance with the words **Excellence, Ethics, Courage, and Grace**. In the center of the circle, we hung a banner with the words "Doing our best work" and "Being our best selves" (see cover photo).

Lobby Display. In our front lobby, we divided the wall space into sections to display what we value:

- best academic work
- best caring and sharing (photos and self-reflections from service projects)

age quotes from students, teachers, and famous people were mounted on the inner and outer walls; and pictures of people who had displayed courage and grace in science, music, art, and sports were visible everywhere. A special Compact for Excellence, created and displayed in the cafeteria, reminds students to value and honor our cafeteria staff.

KEY 2: SELF-STUDY

Self-Study involves personal reflection—looking within. Having a different character theme every year not only propels grade-level curricula in new and exciting directions, but also provides a plethora of Self-Study opportunities. Here are three of the Self-Study activities that grew out of our year-long theme, "Courage for the Deed, Grace for the Doing."

Courage Quotes

Virtues such as courage and grace are rich, complex, and multi-dimensional and should not be reduced to any single, simplistic definition. To hand children a definition of a virtue is to put it in a box. We began the year, therefore, by asking students in every grade for their own definitions of courage.

Students in our youngest grades were given magazines and asked to first choose a picture that depicted courage and then

The Compact creates accountability—helping students go from knowing what's right to doing it.

themselves. We are all aspiring to do our best, we are all in this together, and we will accomplish our goals by creating strategies and evaluating our progress along the way. (See the box below for a compact created by a Shipley 4th-grade class.)

Most important, the Compact for Excellence provides a pathway from *knowing* what is right to *doing* what is right. Teachers use various ways to hold class members accountable to their compact. Some teachers assess regularly, asking students to rate on a scale of 0-5, how well the class is doing on a particular item (e.g., "How well are we doing with not pushing to get to the front of the line?") Students each put a post-it note with their rating next to that item.

Sometimes teachers pick a single item—one that is continually receiving the lowest score—to focus on for the entire week, and this item is assessed at the end of every day.

Vivid Displays of Values

Since the late 1960's, amid theories of relativism and outcries of "Whose values should we teach?", many parents and teachers have lost faith in their moral authority—their confidence in voicing and teaching basic values such as honesty, hard work, respect, and courage. It is time once again, in our homes and schools, to make evident the virtues we value, the qualities we are aspiring to, the principles we are willing to defend.

The Iron Circle. Our efforts to create a visual display of our core values begin

- students at our sister school in Uganda
- profiles of people who exhibit courage and grace from around the world
- our "Acts of Courage and Grace" challenge to families (see p. 5).

Other Displays. In classrooms, Compacts for Excellence were displayed prominently on bright green paper; cour-

4TH-GRADE COMPACT FOR EXCELLENCE

To help everyone feel welcome, respected, and cared about:

STUDENTS will . . .

- treat people the way *they* want to be treated
- be kind, respectful, and responsible toward everyone
- think before they act
- respect teachers and school property
- be cooperative and honest
- apologize (then everyone will forgive and forget).

The TEACHER will . . .

- greet every student
- understand that each student is different
- treat everyone kindly.

To help everyone do their best work:

STUDENTS will . . .

- never settle for less than their best
- be inspired to learn
- listen carefully and raise their hands if they want to speak
- be quiet while others are working
- ask for help when they need it
- have a positive attitude and try to bounce back after disappointments.

The TEACHER will . . .

- prepare lessons well and do her best teaching
- give interesting homework
- call upon all students in class
- provide individual help.

4th-Grade Courage Writing Frameworks

Framework 1—"Courage in 4th-Grade"

"You need a lot of courage to even start 4th-grade. Just raising your hand and asking for help is an act of courage. It takes courage to sit at the girls' table. It takes courage to make a speech in front of your class and courage to stick up for your friends. It takes courage to take a hard math test. It can be hard to be honest with your teacher if you did something that you weren't supposed to. I hope to be more courageous by the end of 4th-grade."

Framework 2 – "A Courage Experience from Your Life"

"It takes a lot of courage for me to fly on an airplane! Whenever I fly on an airplane, I get very scared, especially when it is a long flight. First of all, you are always afraid that some technical problems like losing gas or crashing will happen. Then, you also feel kind of weird eating food that you don't usually eat. I get a little bit worried when I have to go to sleep. That is because it isn't like your cozy bed at home. But when you get to your final destination, you feel proud of yourself for beating your fear. Sometimes your courage hides away in a little corner of your body and you are scared, but courage is stronger than fear."

explain their choice in a dictated sentence. Students in 2nd and 3rd grade wrote their quotes on a 5" x 5" paper square, drew a corresponding picture, and then combined all the squares to make Courage Quilts. Below are sample quotes our 5th-graders wrote (akin to courage quotes from famous writers and philosophers), demonstrating the depth of understanding of which students are capable when given enough time for discussion and personal reflection.

Courage is having the ability to stand up to your fears and overcome them. (5th-grader)

Courage is mastery of fear, not absence of fear. (Mark Twain)

Courage is having the mental strength to do what you want to do. (5th-grader)

Courage is grace under pressure. (Ernest Hemingway.)

Personal Reflection in Writing

Throughout the year, students pondered the role of courage in their lives and expressed their thoughts in writing. They came to the important insight that courage is often needed to put a virtue into action. See the box above for 4th-grade student writing samples in response to different "courage frameworks" provided by two teachers.

Self-Study as Self-Improvement

We encouraged self-reflection by students of all grades at the beginning of the new year. In January, we asked students to think about one skill or activ-

ity that they would like to improve in—a skill that might require a dash of courage. Each student had to: (1) write down the skill; (2) set a target date for improving the skill; and (3) list three strategies that would lead to improvement in the skill.

Students discussed additional character traits, besides courage, that they might need to develop their desired skills, e.g., "I will need courage *and* determination because I am afraid to fall off my bike."

These New Year Resolution sheets were posted all around the building, and students were reminded of their resolutions each week. When students reported mastery of their goal, a smiley-face sticker was placed on their resolution sheet.

identified other character qualities that helped to strengthen that person's display of courage.

■ A 0-5 point courage scale was used to evaluate a character in a book or a person portrayed in a news story. This led to thoughtful debates among students. After discussing the following excerpt, for example, a group of 5th-graders decided to give Dr. Herbert Needleman a 5-point courage rating:

Dr. Herbert Needleman is receiving Health Care Without Harm's first *Courage in Science Award* for his instrumental work in advancing the science regarding the health impacts of lead and the imperative to eliminate lead exposures. His work led to one of the greatest public health victories of the 20th century. Dr. Needleman's tenacity in pursuing preventive actions on the basis of science—in the face of fierce industry and governmental opposition to his findings—was pivotal in removing lead from gasoline, reducing high lead exposures in children, and bringing about a five-fold reduction in the prevalence of lead poisoning of children in this country.

Dr. Needleman's deep understanding of the effects of lead poisoning, his passion for the cause, his determination, and his perseverance were all seen as character qualities that empowered his courage.

■ During the current school year, our year-long theme is "Heroes," which is expanding the opportunities for Other-Studies (and also Public Presentation). Every Friday, we have a Hero Assembly, where a parent, teacher, or grade presents the life

Courage and Grace

In speaking to parents and students about our school motto, "**Courage for the Deed, Grace for the Doing**," we made the following points:

A character trait has a continuum from positive to negative. Courage can move into recklessness, bravado, bragging, etc., unless tempered by grace. Grace means acting in ways that are gracious, dignified, courteous, and considerate of others.

On the courage slips that parents filled out (see p. 5), the criteria were that the action involve both courage and grace. If a 5-year-old who was always fussy about food had the courage to try a new dish, the parent could fill out a slip—but only if the child had not whined or complained during the entire process. Standing up for a friend on the playground takes courage, but it has to be done *graciously*—with no rancor, loud accusations, pushing, or shoving.

KEY 3: OTHER-STUDY

Other-Study involves analyzing the lives and work of other people and then applying lessons learned to our own efforts to do our best and be our best.

■ To engage students in Other-Study, we asked all of our teachers to identify people in their field who had shown courage and grace in their lives. Teachers rapidly found scientists, artists, musicians, doctors, sportsmen, politicians, chefs, gymnasts, and scholars who could be presented as role models. When considering each role model, students

story and character traits of their hero.

KEY 4: PUBLIC PERFORMANCE/PRESENTATION

Sharing our goals, our progress toward achieving them, and the products of our work with the wider audience of parents

Could we perform 2,008 acts of courage in one school year?

and the community plays a crucial role in creating a culture of excellence and inspiring students to do their best. In Shipley's individual classrooms, public performance during the past year took the form of courage plays, debates, poetry presentations, and student work displayed on bulletin boards for special parent visits. Below we focus on two forms of public performance that involved the whole Lower School:

Physical Education

To kick off the Physical Education portion of the courage theme, students from each grade level came together in the gym to watch a short video clip of a baby elephant, just hours old, trying to learn to walk. Teachers and students discussed how the baby elephant showed courage and how it "handled its fears with strength, determination, and grace."

Then, for the next several weeks, students discussed examples of courage we might see in our own P.E. program. The list included behaviors such as being willing to take risks by trying new skills in front of classmates, continuing to try no matter how many times it takes, sportsmanship, and controlling our feelings.

To keep students focused on the courage theme, each P.E. class began with a quick discussion of opportunities for best work, best self, and courage within the day's lesson. When the instructor saw a student displaying courage during class, he described it on an Act of Courage form. At the end of the period, he shared what he had written and explained why he considered it an act of courage.

The completed form was then placed on Courage Mountain (a large visual). As the year progressed, more and more Acts of Courage were added onto the mountain slopes.

Our Challenge: 2,008 Acts of Courage and Grace in One School Year

Students arrived at school in September 2008 filled with images of the accomplishments of athletes in the 2008 Summer excellence & ethics

Olympics. We decided to seize the moment to create our own Olympic challenge: Could 326 students (the number of students in our Lower School) perform 2,008 acts of courage and grace in one school year? We created a large display board, explained the process to teachers and students, and sent a letter

(below) with 10 "courage and grace slips" to every parent.

Our bulletin board was soon covered with these slips, often documenting a new accomplishment—a first attempt at swimming; taking a flu shot without grimacing in order to be a role model for a younger sibling; and traveling unaccompanied by parents for the first time. A sample anecdote:

Nick (a 5th-grader) decided to be a referee for youth soccer. It takes a lot of courage to make difficult calls and uphold the rules. He must especially have courage and grace to manage very passionate parents.

The development of character is a lifelong pursuit. As educators, we may never really know when or where the seeds we have planted will germinate. It is,

in the words of historian and peace educator Irwin Harris, an unseen harvest.

What we do know at the end of this past school year is that we raised students' awareness of the importance of courage and grace, fostered their self-reflection, and encouraged and supported courageous action in classrooms and on the playing fields. We hope our school motto—"Courage for the deed, grace for the doing"—will stay in our students' hearts, inspiring them for a lifetime. ■



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2,008 Acts of Courage and Grace



Dear Families,

It is with great excitement that we launch our Lower School Olympic Challenge. The challenge is simply this: Can 326 lower school students perform a total of 2,008 acts of courage and grace in the 2008-2009 school year?

We are sending home 10 "Acts of Courage and Grace" slips to document your child's acts of courage and grace. When your child does something courageous—with grace—please fill out one slip with your child's name, grade, date of action, and a brief description of the act. Also attach a picture of your child and send it to school in the Friday folder.

Guidelines:

- Have high expectations for your child. Document only something new and different. Remember, the act has to be done with courage AND grace.
- This is a good time to talk to your child about the relationship between fear and courage, between courage and recklessness, and the meaning of grace or graciousness.
- You can create your own challenge at home and have every member of the family talk about his/her acts of courage and grace at weekly family meetings.

If each Lower School Student performs 10 acts of courage and grace, we will have a total of 3,260. How impressive!

Love, Dr. Balamore

Johnny Appleseed: A Tale of Character

by Constance Morin



I have been a teacher of young children for more than 30 years. One of the wonderful things about teaching for so long is seeing that what was important in a child's development three decades ago remains so today. Children have always naturally gravitated toward what is morally just. Given appropriate freedom, structure, and nurturing, children will also strive for excellence. So it was with great joy that I welcomed our Lower School's year-long theme of Courage and Grace.

Studying Johnny Appleseed

My 1st-grade class began the year learning about Johnny Appleseed. My goals for the children in studying this kind and generous man were three:

1. Plant the seeds of philanthropy in the hearts of 1st-graders.
2. Appreciate how Johnny Appleseed exemplified giving to others as well as other valuable character traits.
3. Understand what it means to be a giver and a receiver.

We started with Stephen Kellogg's *Johnny Appleseed: A Tall Tale*, an endearing, often humorous, and beautifully illustrated version of this legendary figure's life. The children were hooked!

Since 1st-graders tend to be concrete thinkers, we began with the facts of Johnny Appleseed's life, from his humble beginnings to his frontier travels. We progressed to the relationship Johnny Appleseed had with the pioneers, the American Indians, and the woodland animals.

Then, moving to more conceptual thinking, we explored his character traits of kindness, generosity, courage, grace, and compassion in several ways:

Acrostic Poems describing our hero.

- As a class, we developed a Johnny Appleseed Good Qualities Alphabet, including words such as Attentive, Caring, Generous, Inspiring, and Zexcellent!

The excitement in the classroom showed itself in enthusiastic teamwork and animated discussions.

"What Would Johnny Do?"

The next major step in our project was creating a life-sized plywood Johnny Appleseed figure who would watch over our classroom throughout the year.

I gave small groups of students everyday problems to solve, using their knowledge of Johnny Appleseed's character and actions. They asked themselves, "What would Johnny Appleseed do?"



The children's active focus, seriousness of purpose, and collaboration were electric. The small groups came together as a class and shared their thoughtful solutions. From that day, our classroom strove to embrace Johnny's best traits,

to enlarge our circle of kindness, we chose to make felt pillowcases for hospitalized, chronically ill children. My 1st-graders made 20 beautiful pillowcases and donated them to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

As a class, we also wrote a skit that connected Johnny Appleseed's characteristics to the characteristics we exhibited by engaging in our service learning pillowcase project. We performed this skit in front of the whole school (840 students!) while proudly holding our pillowcases. The last two lines of our skit were:

"With great care and love, we made pillowcases for sick children. WE KNOW THAT WE CAN MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE!"

In this way, we not only worked as a group to spread the seeds of kindness, but we also related Johnny Appleseed's characteristics to the good that is achieved through service learning.

Making Personal "Character Apples"

Johnny stayed with us and nurtured our development all year long. In May, the children made large paper mache apples and painted them a bright and glorious

red. I used Mod Podge to decorate each apple with Courage and Grace labels, along with two additional characteristics from the Johnny Appleseed Alphabet that each child felt he or she had embodied through the year.

On the last day of school, we had a Courage and Grace Apples Ceremony. All of the children were individually presented with their apple and publicly praised for the Johnny Appleseed virtues they had shown throughout the year. ■

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We asked ourselves, "What would Johnny Appleseed do?"

- The children drew pictures of Johnny Appleseed and wrote accompanying descriptions of his characteristics and deeds.
- They worked together in groups of two or three to create Johnny Appleseed

and a classroom culture of kindness and generosity steadily blossomed.

We Can Make the World a Better Place

We decided to do as Johnny would and spread our own seeds of kindness. In order

Packing our Backpacks for the 5th-Grade Journey

by Wendy Eiteljorg



For the past few years I have begun the school year with a discussion of character—my imperfect character in particular. I describe my walking trip in Spain and how I handled a difficult situation.

Why talk about me? Well, why not? It's the person I know best. And if I want my students to believe me when I say over and over that I not only accept but expect mistakes and imperfections, I better start by sharing some of my own.

So I tell the story, complete with pictures, of the trip I took with another teacher. It's a good story. There's suspense, lost luggage, hard times, good food, nice people, a happy ending, and a lesson learned. The kids eat it up. The key part is the lost luggage. I celebrate my determination, positive attitude, and the mental preparedness I always have with me. I

moment, and keep character front and center with the visual aid of the backpacks.

Analyzing Book Characters

As we read novels, we talk about the character traits of the people we meet. We imagine what it might be like to have those people in class with us, what qualities are helping them, and which ones are getting in their way. We have “pretend dialogues” between characters from different books. We try to write as various characters.

A lot of this work is done on our class blog. I post an assignment that follows from our discussion, and students have a few days to comment. Since comments on the blog are visible to class members all the time, it's a great way to share ideas, many of which are about character. Students become more comfortable with reading the thinking of their peers, commenting on it, and letting it push their own thinking forward.

to pretend to be the protagonist's fairy godmother or godfather, give the protagonist some additional character traits, and defend their choices. Their answers were well-reasoned. One student said, “I would give her wisdom to know what she was getting into.” Another said, “Tolerance, so she can have a better relationship with her family.” A third said, “I would give her more hope, because she worried about many things.”

I asked them to choose a protagonist from one of the books we had read and consider, “What was the protagonist's *most* important trait that led to success (or problems)?” One student argued, “Even though Ulysses has trillions of character traits, I picked *courageous* because Ulysses said that without courage there would be no point in living. Ulysses's whole life was courage.”

We then returned to our character backpacks and reflected on what personal traits had been most important for our success in 5th-grade. What did we use the most? Which ones got in our way? We had come full circle. ■

“What character traits do you need for the journey of 5th-grade?”

also fess up to being nervous, uncertain, stubborn, weepy, too competitive, and shy—and that's just for starters.

Making Character Backpacks

The story of my Spain trip leads us to a discussion of the mental preparation needed for the journey of 5th-grade. What character traits do we each already possess that will help us meet that challenge?

Each student then makes a paper “backpack” packed with his or her own character traits. We focus on the good ones, but throw in one not-so-good trait just to be fair. We talk about how those not-so-good traits are sometimes just good qualities taken to the extreme. As an example, I share the fact that my determination turned to complete stubbornness on my trip.

These backpacks hang on the doors to the students' cubbies all year. We can review the backpacks' contents, think about what traits we need to use at any given

“What Are the 3 Most Important Traits?”

In one activity, students had to choose the 3 most important traits of the main character. They first worked in pairs, then combined to 4s, then 8s, then the whole class. In each group, they repeated the process of discerning the key character traits.

Students debated the relative merit of nominated traits and had to back up their ideas with examples from the text. The final class conversation got stuck after agreeing on the first two traits. Students were at an impasse about a particular word/trait that had connotations some did not like. They went back and forth politely, stridently, convincingly. Ultimately, they searched for a word that had some of the meaning they wanted and none that they didn't. It was a lesson in vocabulary, close reading of the text, debate, and character.

Back to the Backpacks

As we finished reading one of our last books of the year, I asked students

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New Smart & Good Programs

POWER2LEARN™ is a high school curriculum designed to boost academic achievement, reduce dropouts, improve workforce preparation, and prepare youth to become productive citizens and lead fulfilling lives.

POWER2TEACH™ is a staff development program that builds trust and collegiality among teachers and gives them tools to improve the culture and competencies needed for learning.

See page 8 for more details on these programs. To learn how to bring them to your school, go to www.excellenceandethics.com, or call (315) 677-8114.

National Field-Testing Underway

by Matt Davidson



Twenty-five high schools in four states—Iowa, Kansas, New Jersey, and New York—have begun initial field-test implementation of the first two programs in our series of *Power2Programming* (www.excellenceandethics.com). Built on the theory, research, and practices of the *Smart & Good High Schools* report (www.cortland.edu/character), *Power2Learn* and *Power2Teach* provide teachers with a curriculum of lessons and practical tools to develop the essential culture and competencies needed for teaching and learning.

These are our first practical steps to distill the Smart & Good vision into user-friendly, replicable, data-driven, and researchable programs. During the spring-summer of 2009, leadership teams from participating schools were trained by *Power2* National Trainers Phil Catania and Ken Fisher.

Power2Learn™

Power2Learn is the student program. Our experience with schools convinces us that sequenced curricula with learning objectives and lesson plans targeting character competencies are an essential part of a school's ability to develop excellence and ethics. *Power2Learn* therefore teaches character competencies—such as taking initiative, setting goals, and “working smarter”—that students need to succeed in school.

Power2Learn field-site schools have committed to the following:

- ✓ A two-three day training, preparing the school's implementation team to train colleagues in *Power2Learn*.
- ✓ 28 weeks of student programming designed around the following features:
 - 50-60 minutes per week of student curriculum with flexible implementation options.
 - Integration of this curriculum into preferred time of day, such as content area class, homeroom, advisory, etc.
 - Lesson activities and reflections with engaging and student-friendly materials, including movies, music, experiential activities, as well as practices from *Smart & Good High Schools*.
 - Video learning resources, voice-over

PowerPoints, and a facilitator's guide.

- A mid-year assembly designed to help students reflect on their school experience thus far, refocus on their goals, and recommit to daily growth.
- An end-of-year celebration and rite of passage ceremony.

Academic achievement will improve when schools develop the culture and competencies of excellence and ethics.

- Continuous reflection, including formative and summative evaluation (pretest and posttest student surveys).

Power2Teach™

Power2Teach prepares all faculty and staff to align with and enhance the *Power2Learn* student experiences. It also develops the Professional Ethical Learning Community needed for high-quality teaching and learning. *Power2Teach* field sites have committed to the following:

- ✓ A two-day introductory training for the School Leadership Team (3-5 people) designed to train them to deliver *Power2Teach*.
- ✓ 75 to 90-minute monthly learning modules, called Essential Conversations, that focus on key issues that contribute to (or detract from) the character and culture needed for effective teaching and learning. These monthly conversations, typically conducted in groups of 7, center on questions such as, “Is this a community dedicated to continuous improvement?” and are facilitated for the entire staff by the *Power2Teach* leadership team.

Each Essential Conversation uses curricular materials, prepared for the school, that include a:

- *Community-Builder* to help the group reconnect, recommit, and refocus
- *Collegiality Compact* to reestablish respectful and efficient working norms
- *Knowledge Burst* to introduce important theory and research
- *Data Reflection* from the school assessment used to examine culture and character competencies
- *Action Planning* to adapt or adopt specific tools to address areas of need
- *Closure and Commitment* to summarize discussion and send the group forward.

Ripple Effects

We believe that such programming for students, coupled with concurrent professional development for faculty, has the potential to help subject-area teachers build on the character competencies their students are developing in the “character class.” For example, once subject-area teachers see what students have learned about goal-setting, they can help them

apply those goal-setting strategies in math, science, history, and so on.

Power2 field sites are receiving ongoing coaching and support from IEE and the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, as well as from regional support centers, including Iowa's Institute for Character Development at Drake University and the Kansas Character Education Initiative at the Kansas State Department of Education.

Our hope is that as these programs become an integral part of the teaching and learning experience, schools will see significant improvement in the culture and competencies of excellence and ethics. That, in turn, should begin to make a demonstrable difference in boosting academic achievement, reducing disciplinary problems and dropouts, and preparing students for success in school, work, and beyond. ■

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