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## **CHARACTER COUNTS**

### **WEB School #71**

#### **Buffalo, New York**

As part of our Comprehensive Education Plan for the 1999-2000 school year, the Schoolwide Planning Team at WEB School implemented a character education program in grades Pre K-8. The School-Family-Community Partnership Plan is an integral part of our Comprehensive Education Plan. Our goal for the school was to create an environment that fostered respect, responsibility, and caring. We designed a program that would reach both the school and other places where family and community involvement occurs.

We began by recruiting members to design the curriculum of the character education program. During this time, we collaborated on choosing the values that we thought would be most beneficial for our program: excellence; respect; responsibility; tolerance/patience; courtesy/compassion/caring; fairness/justice; and cooperation. Topics were researched and developed into curriculum for each grade level. Each month teachers received the grade level packet, which included information regarding the value being explored, a set of instructional objectives, suggested activities, and a list of related literature that could be used in the teaching of the value. Bulletin boards in the building were dedicated to the value discussed that month. Teachers awarded certificates to students who demonstrated positive values on a daily basis.

To promote family involvement, we sent home a monthly newsletter explaining the value, the instructional objectives, and some reinforcement activities for the family to do together. The newsletter also gave "Tips for Parents" that are everyday reminders and suggestions that help strengthen family ties. For example, one tip for family members was to "Have family meals together (without the TV) as often as possible." Community members visited the school to speak with many of the students, and to reinforce the important elements of character education.

The program's financial budget was minimal. A volunteer committee developed the curriculum and materials so there were no personnel costs. Many of our ideas came from books, the Internet, and discussions with others. A small cost was incurred in paper and the duplication of materials. Trade books needed to support the curriculum might be expensive, but the cost could be reduced

through sharing materials across classrooms or utilizing the variety of books already available in the school library.

To assess the program, we developed a survey of teacher perceptions to be given before the program began and again at the end of the year. In the fall, we intend to add student and parent surveys to collect input from everyone involved.

We are still developing our character education program and plan to enhance each grade level packet as we gain more experience. We expect a decrease in discipline referrals and a general positive climate throughout the school. Our goal is to have these positive values become a natural part of the school, home, and community environment—we want our students to understand that character counts.

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