

Character Education at Work

*Ballentine Elementary School
Irmo, South Carolina*

Every month brings a new character trait and corresponding community service project to Ballentine Elementary.

- In October, the theme was “cooperation,” and the school collected more than 1,780 pounds of food for the Harvest Hope Food Bank, which helps local families with food and shelter.
- In November, the students concentrated on “effort,” and the third-grade sponsored Operation Foot Locker, a toiletry drive to support American soldiers.
- In February, the second-graders sponsored “Project Pet,” collecting pet food and supplies for a local animal shelter. The character word for that month was “initiative.”

The service projects and the emphasis on various character traits are all part of Ballentine’s Character Education at Work program, which attempts to foster an awareness of the local community’s needs and a genuine spirit of giving in each student. To drive home the importance of these service projects, Ballentine prominently displays them in Beacon’s Point, the center entrance of the school and home to its mascot, a bear named BES.

“I think it is important to model caring—especially to children,” said one parent, who is also a teacher. “I think the projects teach the children compassion and make them realize how fortunate they are!” said another teacher.

Ballentine’s school district originally adopted a list of Character Words/Life Skills, with one character trait highlighted each month—Cooperation, Initiative, Patience, Friendship, and Self-Esteem, among them—to show the impor-

tance of working hard and caring for others. Ballentine initiated the Character Education at Work program to bring these concepts to life through the month-long community service activities. A different grade sponsors each initiative to increase students’ feelings of responsibility for the program. The sponsoring grade publicizes the month’s activity in Ballentine’s weekly school and classroom newsletters.

The project for January, Ballentine’s Friendship month, was extra-special. Students donated books and stuffed bears to a local children’s hospital. This Books & Bears program was inspired by a Ballentine student who had been a patient in the hospital and had received a book and a bear from a friend.

The guidance committee of Ballentine’s Action Team for Partnership (ATP) chooses the themes and monthly service activities for the year. The team meets throughout the year to monitor the program and make changes to fit the needs of the school and community.

Ballentine is driving home to its students the importance of caring about others. The Character Education at Work program gives students, teachers, parents, and other members of the community common interests and goals.

*Susan Weaver, Guidance Counselor
(803) 732-8251
sweaver@lex5.k12.sc.us*