Effective Character Education:

9. (continued)

11. Assess the characters of the school, the school staff’s functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

11. There is no single script for effective character education, but there are some important basic principles. The following eleven principles can be used to plan a character education effort and to evaluate available character education programs, books, and curriculum resources.

- Effective character education must include an effort to assess progress using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Three broad kinds of outcomes merit attention:
  1. The character of the school: To what extent is the school becoming a more caring community? This can be assessed, for example, with surveys that ask students to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements such as, “Students in this school (classroom) respect and care about each other,” and “This school (classroom) is like a family.”
  2. The school staff’s growth as character educators: To what extent have adult staff—teaching faculty, administrators, and support personnel—developed understandings of what it means to be a future character developer? Personal commitment to doing so: “Skills to carry it out? Consistent habits of acting upon their developing capacities as character educators!”
  3. Student character: To what extent do students manifest understanding of, commitment to, and action upon the core ethical values? Schools can, for example, gather data on various character-related behaviors: How many students are on time for class? Do they use cellular phones during class? Do they cheat on tests? Do they respect teachers and other students? Schools can also assess the three domains of character: knowing, doing, and being—through online questionnaires that measure student moral judgment (for example, “If it were your choice, would you cheat on a test?”); moral commitment (e.g., “Would you cheat if you were sure you wouldn’t get caught?”); and self-reported moral behavior (“How many times have you cheated on a test or major assignment in the past year?”). Such questionnaires can be administered at the beginning of a school’s character initiative to get a baseline and again at later points to assess progress.

Effective Character Education includes a tiered approach that allows schools to begin or move to a tiered approach. Schools and district administrators from across the country in learning about the latest strategies, research, and inspirational ideas on character education. Visit www.character.org/forum for details.

More Resources...

Eleven Principles Sourcebook

- The Eleven Principles Sourcebook Seminars bring CEP to your school or district to provide customized professional development based on CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education and the Eleven Principles Sourcebook. CEP offers a dynamic, hands-on approach that allows schools to begin or move to a tiered approach. Professional development experiences can be one-day or multi-day, with a focus on putting the principles of effective character education into action.

Eleven Principles Sourcebook

- The purpose of the program is to disseminate model character education practices to schools and districts across the nation. The CEP select recipient award submitted by CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education Sourcebook: A $25,000 monetary award; $10,000 to enhance the program and $10,000 to provide outreach to other educators. A full listing of the CEP National Forum on Character Education for Educators is available on the CEP’s Web site. For more information, visit www.character.org/ssoc for details.

State Schools of Character

- The National Schools of Character award program moves to a tiered approach. Schools and districts in participating states are eligible to receive a State Schools of Character award in addition to being eligible for the National Schools of Character award. By expanding the scope of the program in this way, CEP intends to increase the number of outstanding schools and districts sharing best practices, to facilitate the matching network among educators, and to identify exemplary sites within participating states to serve as models. Schools and district administrators from across the country in learning about the latest strategies, research, and inspirational ideas on character education. Visit www.character.org/ssoc for details.

Promising Practices Awards

- In addition to the National Schools of Character award, CEP gives over 100 Promising Practices awards each year to specific schools and districts practicing best practices in character education. These practices are included in the annual NOSC publication and on CEP’s Web site. CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education Sourcebook: A $25,000 monetary award; $10,000 to enhance the program and $10,000 to provide outreach to other educators. A full listing of the CEP National Forum on Character Education for Educators is available on the CEP’s Web site. For more information, visit www.character.org/ssoc for details.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL CEP OR VISIT US ONLINE.
Effective Character Education:

1. Promotes core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character.

2. Defines “character” as simultaneously including thinking, feeling, and behaving.

3. Uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.

Character education holds that widely shared, practically important, core ethical values—such as kindness, respect, responsibility, and truthfulness—can be taught, learned, and practiced. These values support positive performance values such as diligence, a strong work ethic, and perseverance. A program that develops character education encourages students to develop performance values, such as achievement and success, by creating supportive environments that promote students’ behavior and are consistent with the performance values. Character education helps students better understand the hidden curriculum—those messages communicated by their schools that reinforce performance values, such as the hidden curriculum's support of the academic curriculum and the school environment. The hidden curriculum, for example, may reinforce the importance of academic achievement and the need for students to work hard.

In a school committed to developing character, core values are modeled as a matter of obligation, along with a show of respect, responsibility, and fairness. A comprehensive approach to character education, in which all school activities and interactions model the core values, supports students in applying these values. In a world where there are no guarantees of positive outcomes, students need to develop their own means of making their lives successful. A caring school community, the daily life of classrooms and all other parts of the school environment (e.g., the hallways, cafeteria, playground, school bus, front office, and teachers’ lounge) is imbued with a climate of concern and respect for others. These approaches increase student autonomy by appealing to students’ interests, cooperative learning, problem-solving approaches, and experience-based projects.

A school committed to character development looks at character through a moral lens to assess how virtuously everything that goes on in a school affects the character of students. A comprehensive approach to character education examines all aspects of student development. This includes what is sometimes called the hidden curriculum (e.g., school routines and procedures), the connections between core values and other school tasks, and other such. In this manner, character education broadens the assessment of learning: the teaching, learning, and experience that go beyond the academic curriculum (e.g., core values, including the health curriculum); and course curriculum (e.g., sports teams, clubs, and art programs). Character education programs can be such first steps or helpful elements of an ongoing effort but fall short of an adequate strategy for a holistic approach to the development of character in every aspect of school life. Finally, rather than simply setting out for opportunities to act and an intentional, proactive approach, the school staff also describes steps for character development, designing whatever possible on practice observed by the employees.

For more information on character education, please visit CharacterEducationPartnership.org.