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Service Learning Projects

By Kinsey Wangaard

In the fall of 1998, the **School for Ethical Education** and the **Albert Schweitzer Institute** co-hosted two youth seminars focused on service learning. The seminars promoted ethical, civic, and academic growth through service learning projects. Seventy-nine students, teachers, and parent volunteers attended the seminars. Student teams from Bridgeport and Norwalk to New Britain discovered core values they have in common, and they learned teamwork, decision-making skills, and strategies for implementing effective service learning projects.

Service learning, although similar to community service, has several unique traits that distinguish this strategy from other volunteer activities. Service learning includes students during project planning, integrates academic objectives within the project goals, allows participants to reflect during and after the project, and should result in meaningful contributions to the community.

After the seminar, each team worked with classmates, advisors, and the community to develop a service learning project. Through the efforts of these teams, six schools completed service learning projects.

The "Guardian Angels" project was sponsored by sixteen eighth grade students and four staff members at **Dag Hammarskjold Middle School** in Wallingford. During the year, eighth graders paired with sixth graders to create a mentoring relationship. The eighth graders became friends and positive role models for their sixth grade "angels." The eighth graders quickly saw positive results. One eighth grader described the improvement he saw in his sixth grader's schoolwork; "One day we had a breakthrough. My angel told me that he got one of the highest grades in the class on a test, and I told him how proud I was of him. He gave me this enormous smile."

Five other schools completed notable projects. Each month students from

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Schools of Character

The **John Templeton Foundation** is funding several initiatives to promote and document effective strategies in modern character education. One initiative involves the **Character Education Partnership (CEP)** in Washington D.C. and the **Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character (CAEC)** at Boston University. The project, entitled **The National Schools of Character Awards Program**, identifies and rewards schools demonstrating comprehensive character education. Participating schools are required to perform a self-assessment based upon CEP's **11 Principles of Effective Character Education**. Each school must evaluate whether their character education program is comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior. The schools must also determine whether their initiative involves a proactive approach to promoting core values in all phases of the school life. The CAEC led team reviewed the applicants and conducted site visits to validate the self-reported school applications. Dr.



Students at Washington Elementary in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, one of the Schools of Character Awards Program semifinalists, are proud of their "justice" character poster.

Wangaard, Director of **SEE** was privileged to participate as a member of the site visitation team.

**Kennedy Middle School** in Eugene, Oregon, one of the semifinalist schools, is an excellent example of vision and leadership in character education. Four years ago, the principal, faculty, students,

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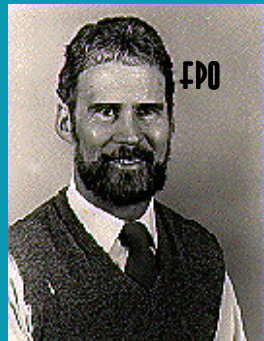
1999 CALENDAR

- Sept 2 Professional In-Service, Ellington, CT
- Sept 10 Department of Education, Principal Seminar
- Sept 24, 25 Character Education Course, University of Bridgeport
- Oct 8, 9 Service Learning Course, University of Bridgeport
- Oct 14 High School Service Learning Seminar with the Albert Schweitzer Institute, Wallingford, CT
- Oct 22, 23 Character Education Partnership National Forum, Charlotte, NC
- Oct 26 Middle School Service Learning Seminar with the Albert Schweitzer Institute, Wallingford, CT

## Character Education after Columbine

by  
David B. Wangaard, Ed.D.

DIRECTOR'S



DIALOGUE

Many people have asked me if the tragedy in Colorado has led to an increased public interest in character education. My response has been one of guarded optimism. The loss of student life in Colorado and elsewhere has focused the public on youth issues and prevention programs. However, advocates of modern character education are still working for full inclusion within the existing prevention/health community and for school resources in light of the push for higher academic standards. While the misled educator's advocacy for "values free" education is in decline, recognition and application of comprehensive character education remains modest in American schools.

For example, in a response to the Columbine shootings a state-level education leader noted the need for increased effort dedicated to school prevention programs. He highlighted the useful application of mentoring, community service, peer tutoring and teaching social and emotional competencies. In vain, I searched for character education within this checklist of priority interventions.

Those of us advocating for modern character education embrace all of the previously mentioned student interventions. We purposefully add a focus on character development during all of our program implementation. Character education themes can often provide a foundation or unifying thread for multiple prevention programs. This foundation includes the explicit recognition, discussion and application of core values. Thus, respect, caring, responsibility and honesty become a shared vocabulary and set of positive expectations for schools and communities. This shared vocabulary guides students and adults as they work together to create safe places to learn and grow.

Character education is not a panacea that will prevent all future incidence of school violence. Nevertheless, comprehensive character education does provide schools and communities an excellent research-supported methodology to improve student behavior, sense of belonging and academic progress in schools.

If you would like more information about modern character education and/or strategies for implementing character education in schools, please visit our web site at [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org).

*Service continued from pg.1*

**Roosevelt Middle School** in New Britain visited residents at a senior residential care facility. **East Lyme Middle School** students tutored elementary school students in reading every week throughout the school year. **East Lyme High School** students initiated a recycling effort and a fundraiser for the refugees in Kosovo. The **Sheehan High School** team



raised money for a homeless shelter. At

**Dag Hammarskjöld Middle School "Guardian Angels" celebrate the success of their 1998-1999 service learning project.**

**Wolcott High School**, each grade initiated a service learning project, and their efforts benefited a homeless shelter, a convalescent home, and a shelter for teenage mothers.

After the success of 1998-1999 service learning projects, SEE and the Albert Schweitzer Institute are planning to repeat the process with student team planning seminars scheduled for October 1999. For information or an application contact SEE: 1000 Lafayette Blvd., Bridgeport, CT 06604.

*Schools continued from pg.1*

parents, and community members wrote three school improvements goals. One of the goals targeted an improvement of the school environment and student behavior. In order to achieve this goal, the school adopted a prosocial skills program called **Second Step** (see Committee for Children in highlighted resources for more information). They also implemented a number of strategies to improve the sense of community at the school. Some of the changes included lowering class sizes, instituting regular class meetings for discussion and problem solving, and setting school-wide expectations focused on respect.

With the mature implementation of their Second Step program, Kennedy Middle School demonstrates several aspects of a healthy and positive school environment. Teachers and students are involved in a variety of service activities in and out of the school, and they recognize clear steps in problem solving and conflict resolution. The school staff is unified and empowered in the planning and administration of professional development. Parent volunteers are key partners in many of the service and extra-curricular activities.

Teachers and administrators at Kennedy Middle School have seen several positive results since the beginning of their character education initiative. Test scores are increasing while office referrals and fighting have decreased. These standards are encouraging, but one great benefit has been the students' descriptions of their school, "Awesome, fantastic, challenging, and exciting." With such enthusiastic praise, you almost forget that American middle school students are describing school.

If you would like to nominate your school for the Schools of Character Awards Program, or you would like more information, contact the CEP office at (800) 988-8081.

For a FREE subscription to *See Me* or further information on how you can assist students in these changing times, please complete the following information, tear off and mail/fax to:

**SEE, 1000 Lafayette Blvd., Bridgeport, CT 06604-4725, or fax to 203-330-5036**

(Please Print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

School or organization name or affiliate: \_\_\_\_\_

School District, City or Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: (circle one) Administrator, Teacher, Principal, Social Worker, Psychologist, Community Member, Parent, Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Day telephone number ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Ext. \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in attending a workshop in your area? (circle one) Yes No

Special interests: \_\_\_\_\_



## CHARACTER IN PRINT

Titles referenced by *Books that Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories* by William Kipatrick and Gregory and Suzanne M. Wolfe, Simon & Schuster, New York (1994).

### Grades 1-3

#### **The Runaway Bunny**

**Margaret Wise Brown, (Harper Collins, 1977)**

Margaret Brown creates an atmosphere of loving security as she captures each young person's desire for independence and the need to be cherished and safe.

**Traits: understanding, love**

#### **Through Grandpa's Eyes**

**Patricia MacLachlan, (Harper Trophy, 1983)**

John's blind grandfather helps him to see the world from a different viewpoint. Through his Grandpa's eyes, John sees more, feels more, and hears more.

**Traits: understanding, respect, humility**

#### **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughter: An African Tale**

**John Steptoe, (Lothrop, 1987)**

Based on an ancient African folktale, the story cautions against superficial appearances and illustrates the importance of true beauty, the beauty of an unselfish heart. Mufaro has two equally beautiful daughters, but when they are confronted with vulnerable members of society, only one shows compassion.

**Traits: respect, compassion, unselfishness**

## Character Educators Suggest . . .

Over two hundred character educators have been asked to respond to the question **"What staff practices will I see which compliment and promote the school's Character Education mission?"** Here are some of their responses:

- ⇒ Teachers modeling positive character traits
- ⇒ Staff appreciation of students and parents
- ⇒ Clearly articulated expectations
- ⇒ Positive staff/student dialogue
- ⇒ Behavioral assessments and feed back
- ⇒ Vocabulary supporting mission statement
- ⇒ Open door policy
- ⇒ Professionally dressed
- ⇒ Friendly greetings the norm
- ⇒ Staff mentoring new teachers
- ⇒ Staff mastering conflict resolution strategies
- ⇒ Authoritative versus authoritarian staff philosophy and action
- ⇒ Respect displayed to peers, parents, and students
- ⇒ Teachers attend student extracurricular activities
- ⇒ Rooms reflects core norms
- ⇒ Teachers facilitate student leadership of morning and class meetings
- ⇒ Shared meals with colleagues, parents, and students
- ⇒ Positive talk in classes and teacher's lounge



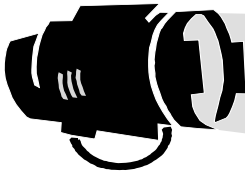
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- Character Ed. Comm.
- Health Teacher
- Counselor/Social Worker



## Character Spotlight Barbara Schwaber



Barbara Schwaber

**Barbara Schwaber** is a school psychologist for the **Bristol School System**. She models her belief in Character Education for the students and parents with whom she works. While working in two elementary schools, **Ivy Drive** and **Mountain View**, she has taken a leadership role in developing character education programs. At Ivy Drive School, she taught students conflict resolution skills, and then she initiated a conflict resolution program called "Peer Mediators." At the Mountain View School, she worked with students and faculty members to sew a character education quilt. The quilt includes the names of all the students and faculty, and it hangs by the front entrance of the school. The quilt serves as a daily reminder of the importance of good character. Beyond these two projects, Barbara is also a member of both schools' Improvement Teams. As a member of these teams, she meets monthly with parents and other faculty members to provide leadership and direction for the schools. Barbara has recently participated in the **Character Asset Resiliency Education (CARE)** Learning Community sponsored by the **Connecticut Assets Network**. She believes, "We need to look at kids' assets, their strengths, and resiliency- so they have a place where they can shine."

Barbara's pleasant personality and positive outlook make her a good role model for colleagues and parents. She emphasizes creative problem solving and conflict resolution, and she weaves the importance of good character into her counseling work with individual students. The School for Ethical Education applauds Barbara Schwaber for her efforts to put "Ethics in Action."

### CHARACTER EDUCATION RESOURCES

**All About Character, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 637  
Pleasant Garden, NC 27313  
**(888) 256-2571**

**Committee for Children**  
2203 Airport Way S., Suite 500  
Seattle, WA 98134  
**(800) 634-4449**

**Center Source Systems**  
85 Liberty Ship Way, Suite 104  
Sausalito, CA 94965  
**(415) 289-1700**

**Educational Media Corporation**  
P.O. Box 21311  
Minneapolis, MN 55421  
**(612) 781-0088**

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