

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Applications for Student Workshop .....	2
Character in Print .....	3
Character Educators Suggest .....	3
Character Spotlight .....	4
Free Subscription .....	4

## Implementing Successful Character Education

By David B. Wangaard

The new millennium has provided U.S. citizens with a variety of opportunities not available to many generations. Peace and economic growth have opened a window of opportunity to reflect on our moral condition. The general public has reflected its concern for declining ethics and morality as the single most important issue facing our country in a recent Gallup Poll<sup>1</sup>. Educators and business leaders have also acknowledged their dissatisfaction with the behaviors of high school graduates related to taking responsibility and working cooperatively<sup>2</sup>. Is there a window of opportunity to advance character and ethics education in our schools?

The public's documented concern for society's declining ethics and character is not sufficient to guarantee successful implementation of character education. Implementing character education will require the active support of school leadership. School leaders are understood to have their own concerns regarding character education which include—the residual 1960s-70s fear of teaching values in schools, and pressure related to focusing everyone's time on academic content to improve standardized test scores. Anecdotal evidence notes well implemented character education programs have unified diverse communities around shared values and also improved school environments for the mastery of academic material<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>.

Successful implementation, however, requires more than just the efforts of school administrators. Support committees are recognized as invaluable in the start-up and maintenance of character education initiatives. A committee or team can take many forms, and be under the umbrella of a school site-management team or school improvement team, however, it must be self-sustaining to maintain meaningful progress. Successful committees leverage their outreach into the school by including school staff members from a variety of positions, age-appropriate youth, parents, and members of the community.

See **Implementing** on pg.2

## Mountain View Elementary Marches into the Millenium

By Ellen Almeida

The character education program at **Mountain View Elementary School** in Bristol, Connecticut is flourishing during its third year of implementation. Character traits such as respect, responsibility, leadership and citizenship are integrated into every facet of school life. In addition, this integration of character into the school culture has been accomplished without changing the general curriculum or creating an "add on" program. The staff at Mountain View is committed to finding ways to promote character through the existing curriculum and programs. The clear and simple goal of including character as a focus during the school day has had a positive impact on teachers' willingness to implement a school-wide character education initiative. To strategically advance character education at Mountain View, teachers have volunteered to form **The Character Ed. Team**. This team oversees the implementation of several specific programs which have been prioritized to advance positive character at school.

The *Character Ed. Team* initiated a review of the school's disciplinary process as one of its first tasks. The team's goal was to establish a proactive and prescriptive disciplinary process with a focus on positive character expectations. Focusing on positive character has encouraged students to become actively involved in helping the school establish excellent behavior standards. Fourth and fifth grade students regularly meet with the school staff to make plans for school improvement and upcoming events and projects. A first grader recently summarized her learning experience in character education by noting, "Our words help us do the right thing."

Mountain View has also recognized the benefit of developing a strong sense of community among the student body, staff, and parents. The *Character Ed. Team* has helped identify an annual character education theme which becomes a framework for building col-

See **Mountain** on pg.2

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## Implementing continued from pg.1

Wise strategic planning will help focus a character education team on a few critical activities. A clearly written vision statement which highlights shared community values and encourages regular professional development can guide committee activities. A well-written vision statement will also help team members select character education program options for implementation. Classroom meeting strategies, moral discipline policies and procedures, democratic governance, cooperative learning, service learning and integrating values into the curriculum are examples of program concepts which advance comprehensive character education. Finally, the committee should be responsible for the ongoing assessment of all programs through a practical action-research design or with a traditional control and experimental treatment study.

While the process of implementing character education is not a mystery, one must recognize the need to attend to the strategic details with the support of a team approach to ensure success. Schools are busy places where new initiatives easily succumb to the demands of the urgent. Poorly defined character initiatives or poorly implemented programs will easily lead to a loss of teacher and public confidence in the school's mission to educate for character. Visionary leaders are needed with the courage and energy to move comprehensive character education forward with the support of a school-based team. A window of opportunity is open now. The School for Ethical Education encourages those committed to excellence in character education to create a team and work together in their local schools to put Ethics in Action!

<sup>1</sup> Gallup Organization (September, 1999). Gallup social and economic indicators. Princeton: Author.

<sup>2</sup>Public agenda: Reality check 2000. (2000, February 16). Education Week, pp.S1-S8.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent, P. F. (Ed.). (1996). Promising practices in character education. Chapel Hill, NC: Character Development Group.

<sup>4</sup>DeRoche, E. F. , & Williams, M. M. (1998). Educating hearts and minds: A comprehensive character education framework. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

<sup>5</sup>Lickona, T., (1991). Educating for character. New York: Bantam Books.

<sup>6</sup>Ryan, K. & Bohlin, K. E., (1999). Building character in schools: Practical ways to bring moral instruction to life. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>7</sup>Vincent, P. F., (1995). Developing character in students. Chapel Hill, NC: New View Publications.

## Mountain continued from pg.1

laborative projects throughout the year. The shared focus on a unifying annual theme has encouraged great working connections within the school and between the staff, students, and parents. This year's theme is "Hand in Hand, Marching into the Millennium" and it has led to an emphasis of service in the school. Students have taken ownership of projects such as **Habitat for Humanity** and **UNICEF**. Fifth graders are given meaningful responsibilities to assist in the school office. An active student council helps with many existing community service projects and the development of new project ideas.

Another initiative supported by the *Character Ed. Team* encourages the staff to integrate character lessons and moral reasoning into daily lessons and discussions. To support this goal, teachers receive monthly informational packets which focus on the "Word of the Month". A new character trait is identified monthly and reinforced through suggested lesson plans and activities. **Ann Kenyon**, Mountain View's principal, visits each classroom and introduces the monthly character theme. The information packets also provide age-appropriate definitions for the monthly character trait, booklists to share with students and parents, and a classroom poster detailing examples of the character trait. These resources have helped teachers effectively integrate character traits into their daily lesson activities.

Stimulating students to engage in the use of character traits has had a major impact on students' vocabulary. Students now share a common, positive vocabulary for action and discussion. Writing experiences serve as opportunities for students to incorporate character traits within their assignments. Selected literature provide opportunities for ethical reflection as students share ideas, express feelings, and engage in moral reasoning about the behaviors of characters in the stories. Such opportunities encourage students to think about moral action as part of their daily experiences.

Finally, the skills of respectful conflict resolution have been taught and practiced at Mt. View. Respectful conflict resolution has provided wonderful opportunities for real-life ethical solutions. Such opportunities foster ethical growth by engaging students in discussion and reflection about moral action.

The Mountain View staff believes the best way to develop moral action is by learning through experience. They believe good character is developed by practicing behaviors which help support clearly established character goals. At Mountain View, everyone is working to develop good character as they enthusiastically march into the millennium hand in hand. **SEE** celebrates the vision and accomplishments of staff, students, and parents of Mt. View Elementary!

## Connecticut Applications now Being Accepted



**SEE** in collaboration with the Albert Schweitzer Institute is currently taking applications for a student leadership program we call **Building Ethical Communities through Service-Learning**. This program involves a free, one-day workshop in October where Connecticut school or youth organization teams learn about shared values, practice ethical leadership skills, draft a service-learning plan, and learn how to use ethical reflection to improve their project and community. If you are interested in enrolling a student team (grade 5-12) in this program, please contact **SEE** at **(800) 232-0013** or email us at **Ethics@wisi.com** for more information and an application.

*Planning Professional Development or Youth Leadership Seminars . . . contact The School for Ethical Education  
for services associated with Comprehensive Character Education*

**TWO TO TWELVE-HOUR WORKSHOPS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE FOLLOWING TOPICS**

- ✓ Identifying shared values and character goals to unify a school, district, club or community
- ✓ Teaching character development principles for the head, heart, hands and feet
- ✓ Creating classroom or club meeting strategies for a caring learning environment
- ✓ Developing moral discipline by using character goals to set positive expectations
- ✓ Integrating character goals throughout the academic or activity curriculum
- ✓ Using cooperative learning to promote positive character
- ✓ Developing a service-learning program that highlights ethical reflection
- ✓ Modeling ethical decision making with character goals
- ✓ Connecting conflict resolution to character outcomes
- ✓ Strategic planning and program implementation for comprehensive character education
- ✓ Program evaluation

**For further information about SEE visit our website at [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org).**

From our website you may also subscribe to this newsletter, learn more about the comprehensive approach to character education, identify character education publishers and consultants and stay informed about upcoming events.



## 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 3-8

#### **Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World** **Mildred Walter (Econo-Clad Books)**

Justin wants to be respected by doing his share of the household chores but feels chores are for women. After spending a week on his grandfather's ranch, Justin learns there is more to being a man than doing outdoor work. Justin learns the value of doing household chores as well as the history of the black cowboy.

**Traits: confidence, helpfulness, dependability**

#### **When the Monkeys Came Back** **Kristine L. Franklin (Atheneum Books, 1994)**

The hoots and barks of howler monkeys whose calls signified the break of day and change to dusk greeted Dona Marta each day. The monkeys moved away when trees that served as their home were cut down. Dona's determination to bring the monkeys back is a story about making a dream become a reality.

**Traits: perseverance, diligence, responsibility**

#### **The Hundred Dresses** **Eleanor Estes (Harcourt Brace, 1988)**

Wanda wears the same faded blue dress to school everyday and faces Peggy's relentless taunting. Maddie is afraid to do anything to help Wanda. Eventually Wanda and her family move away. Through her absence, Wanda teaches her classmates a lesson.

**Traits: compassion, kindness, integrity**

## Character Educators Suggest . . .

Over two hundred character educators have been asked to respond to the question **"What student activities and behaviors will I see which are supported by or compliment the Character Education mission?"** Here are some of their responses:

- ⇒ Students are involved in and leading service-learning projects.
- ⇒ Students manage peer mediation efforts resulting in a decrease in teacher/administrative intervention.
- ⇒ Students have high competency in social and emotional skills and use active listening to make others feel understood. Students engage in interpretive discussions.
- ⇒ Students actively seek commonalities by using cooperative practices in recognizing and honoring the differences, diversities, strengths and weaknesses of others.
- ⇒ Students speak out in support of positive character by using character education vocabulary and serving as role models.
- ⇒ Student attendance is high accompanied by high academic achievement. Students come to class prepared and with a strong sense of pride, spirit and enthusiasm.

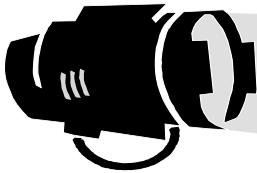
**Please share with**

Principal

Character Ed. Comm.

Health Teacher

Counselor/Social Worker



*Character Spotlight*  
**Roslyn Dobey**



**Roslyn Dobey** is a fifth grade teacher at **Naramake Elementary School**, Norwalk Connecticut. Mrs. Dobey is eager to help students develop good character. She seizes opportunities to make daily instruction about good character engaging for students. Mrs. Dobey also understands the importance of involving students in cooperative learning.

Mrs. Dobey collaborated with **Deb Line** and **John Moses** from **Saxe Middle School**, New Canaan, to form a partnership through the **LINKS** program sponsored by the Nature Center in New Canaan. Under the LINKS program, students from urban and suburban communities work together in group settings. Mrs. Dobey's fifth grade class and a fifth grade class from Saxe Middle School collaborated in a **Character Counts 2000** workshop. During the four workshop series, students worked in teams to examine traditional fables focusing on virtues, diversity, and morality. Student teams selected a virtue to highlight and then wrote skits or created original fables. They shared ideas, brainstormed, compromised, used their creativity, and developed writing skills. Students presented their skits and fables during an on-stage presentation. This activity was an effective strategy to help students learn to work cooperatively as well as share concepts of good character. We commend Mrs. Dobey and her colleagues for their efforts to keep "Ethics in Action!"

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

**SEE, 440 Wheelers Farms Rd., Milford, CT 06460**

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

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

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

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