

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT **IN ACTION**

FINDING COMMON GROUND: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K–12 (Summary)

KEY BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Character development is:
 - Primary responsibility of parents and families
 - Cornerstone of a civil, just and democratic society
 - Foundation of our publicly funded education system.
- ✓ Character development supports academic achievement:
 - At its best it develops the whole student – the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains, and as an individual, learner and engaged citizen
 - It contributes to safe, healthy, and orderly school environments that are pre-requisites for learning
 - It creates learning environments that are collaborative in which teachers spend less time disciplining and more time doing what they do best, namely, teaching
 - High expectations for learning and behaviour contribute to academic success by engaging students in their own learning
- ✓ Character development is not a new curriculum. Neither is it an add-on. It is embedded in all that we do in schools. It is intentionally infused in our policies, practices, programs and interactions.
- ✓ Education at its best is essentially education for character.
- ✓ The principles and attributes of character development are universal and transcend racial, ethno cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, physical and intellectual ability, and other demographic factors.
- ✓ Ontario's population is becoming increasingly diverse. There is a growing need to find common ground on the values we hold in common.
- ✓ Character development is not a new curriculum. Neither is it an add on. It is embedded on all that we do in schools. It is intentionally infused in our policies, practices, programs, and interactions.
- ✓ Student engagement is essential in the character development process. The initiative will not be successful without the meaningful participation and involvement of students.
- ✓ Character development is about community development. Engaging the community in sharing the responsibility for character development is an essential component.
- ✓ Character development respects Constitutional Rights, federal and provincial legislation, curriculum guidelines, and, in particular, the grounds outlined in Ontario Human Rights Code.
- ✓ Character Development strives for an ever growing depth of self-awareness, self-discipline and understanding; it is not about indoctrination or punishment.
- ✓ Because we care about our youth and the future well-being of our communities, we all share the responsibility to model the universal attributes upon which we find common ground.

***STUDENT SUCCESS** is the fundamental measure of any education system and the ultimate expression of respect for the students in its care. Student success, however, is multi-dimensional. In addition to academic success, Ontarians collectively share a belief in the need to develop character and prepare students for their role in society as engaged, productive and responsible participants.*

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CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: A CALL TO ACTION

Developing character is a shared responsibility. There is a need for families and schools to engage cooperatively to encourage students' learning and maturing as social beings. Students are at the centre of all that we do. Family and school alliances are necessary to create a web of support for the continuous improvement of our schools. Character development, at its best, permeates the entire life of the school as it is woven into policies, programs, practices, procedures, and interactions. It is a way of life. It recognizes that a respectful, safe and orderly school climate enhances learning.

We believe in the potential of our students to be responsible members of our communities who will sustain the universal values that we espouse as a society. We want students to develop self discipline and the personal management skills that will make their communities, workplaces and lives the best that they can. Together we can make this happen.

"Education worthy of its name is essentially education for character."

Martin Buber

The Promise of the Character Development Initiative

The Character Development Initiative recognizes that academic achievement, character development and civic engagement are inextricably linked and must be interwoven into student's educational experience. It provides students with tools for increasing academic achievement, a solid foundation for ethical decision-making, and more opportunities to use their voices to influence outcomes.

Studies in character education demonstrated that when implemented on a school-wide basis, positive results are realised in the areas of:

- Student engagement, motivation and achievement
- Self-discipline, behaviour and interpersonal relationships
- Preparation for the workplace
- School culture, civility and feelings of safety
- School-community partnerships
- Volunteerism and civic engagement

Character attributes will provide students with high standards for behaviour, for making decisions that are personally empowering and for creating quality relationships. This translates ethical knowledge, skills and attitudes into action.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement within a culture of high expectations for **all** students, regardless of circumstances, remains the primary responsibility of schools. A number of researchers report that character development and the creation of caring learning cultures increase student achievement.

"We must remember that intelligence alone is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of a true education."

Martin Luther King Jr.

Character Development

Exemplary teachers have always fostered universal attributes, explicitly and implicitly, in their classrooms. Likewise, schools have long recognized the need to nurture democratic principles in order to prepare students for their future role as citizens. The Character Development Initiative challenges students to think critically about their world, anticipate problems, contribute to solutions, and develop higher levels of social responsibility, along with the skills to mediate and resolve conflict and become civic minded and engaged. Civic engagement implies active participation, a strong student voice in decision making, and moving from talking and learning to engaging in activities that reinforce the need to care about others and our world.

Students will learn to demonstrate self-discipline, take responsibility for their own behaviour, acquire the knowledge and skills required for getting along with others both within and beyond school, and choose ways of interacting positively with others in a variety of situations. They will also learn about thoughtful and non-violent problem-resolution, social responsibility, working cooperatively with others and caring about others.