

PARKWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT CHARACTER EDUCATION GUIDE





What is character education?

“Character education is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures.” Character Education Partnership, 2010

Character education includes an expansive range of concepts such as positive school climate, social emotional learning, positive youth development, and service learning. These approaches promote the social, emotional, academic and ethical development of students and help them become responsible, caring and contributing members of our communities.

Why character education?

Character education helps our students to develop important human qualities such as justice, diligence, respect, courage and most importantly why it is important to live by such qualities.

The Parkway School District has an obligation to help students develop their character because, “Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning and practice. It is developed through good character education.” Character Education Partnership

Character education practices have been used across the globe to transform schools, improve school climate, increase student achievement, develop global learners, prevent anti-social and at risk behaviors, and improve job satisfaction among employees.

Schools with high quality character education are places where students, parents, and staff want to be. School communities working to establish exemplary practices provide an environment where students do their best work because they feel safe, appreciated, supported and challenged by their peers and adults around them.

Character education provides students opportunities to develop lasting skills that will enhance their opportunities during their formative years and beyond.

PARKWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT CHARACTER EDUCATION

No single script for effective character education exists, but there are some important commitments. Based on the practices of effective schools, the *Nine Parkway Character Education Commitments* were adapted from the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*. Parkway's commitments were created from a researched-based philosophy, on how best to develop and implement high-quality character education initiatives. Parkway's character education commitments serve as vehicles for schools and the District as they develop and evaluate character education initiatives.

This document explains each of the nine commitments. It defines each commitment more specifically, describing what the principle should "look like" when implemented. Most of the key indicators were developed by the Character Education Partnership in consultation with experienced National School of Character (NSOC) site visitors and evaluators. These key indicators describe how effective schools most commonly implement the commitments and offer benchmarks of successful practice. This document can help examine current character education practices, identify short- and long-term objectives, and develop or strengthen a strategic plan for continuous improvement.

The character education commitments are listed below.

Character Education Commitments

1. The school community promotes core ethical and performance values.
2. The school community uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character education and development.
3. The school community provides students with opportunities to transfer the core ethical and performance values into real-world settings.
4. The development of student character will be embedded within a meaningful and challenging academic and character curriculum that respects all learners.
5. The school community fosters students' intrinsic motivation to exemplify the core ethical and performance values.
6. The school community creates a positive school climate.
7. The school and district staff contributes to an ethical learning community that shares responsibility and leadership for ongoing character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.
8. The school community effectively engages students, families and community members as partners in the character-building effort and includes them in the leadership process.
9. The school community regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students exhibit good character.

COMMITMENT 1 The school community promotes core ethical and performance values.

Schools that effectively promote good character come to agreement on the core ethical and performance values they most wish to instill in their students. Some schools use other terms such as virtues, traits, pillars, or expectations to refer to the desirable character qualities they wish to foster. Whatever the terminology, the core values promoted by quality character education are ones which affirm human dignity, promote the development and welfare of the individual, serve the common good, define our rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, and meet the classical tests of *universality* (i.e., Would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?) and *reversibility* (i.e., Would you want to be treated this way?).

The school makes clear that these basic human values transcend religious and cultural differences and express our common humanity. Examples of core ethical values are caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. Examples of performance values include diligence, best effort, perseverance, critical thinking, and positive attitude. The school community selects and commits to its core values as the foundation for how people interact and do their best work in the school. A school committed to its students' character development treats its core values as essential to its mission and often refers to them in its code of conduct or "touchstone."

1.1 Stakeholders in the school community select or assent to a set of core values.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- A highly inclusive, representative group of stakeholders (professional and other staff, parents, students, and community members) has had input into, or at least assented to, the school's core ethical and performance values. If the District selected the values or if the values have been in place for a long time, current stakeholders have been involved in ongoing reflection on the values in order to ensure their continuing relevance to the present school community.
- Staff members understand how and why the school selected its core values and affirm the importance of core values in guiding the behavior of all those in the school community.

1.2 Core ethical and performance values actively guide every aspect of life in the school.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Students, staff, and parents use common language reflecting the school's core values (e.g., students, teachers, or parents might use the word "perseverance" when discussing homework or the word "respect" when discussing relationships).
- There is staff ownership for teaching, modeling, and integrating the core values into all aspects of school life (e.g., discussions in grade-level, subject-area, and full staff meetings).
- Core values guide hiring practices and the orientation of new teaching and non-teaching staff.

1.3 The school community articulates its character-related goals and expectations through visible statements of its core ethical and performance values.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Core values appear in the school building, in the school mission statement, on the school website, in the student handbook, in the discipline code, in newsletters sent home, and at school events.
- The school has defined what the core values “look like” and “sound like” in terms of observable behaviors.
- Staff, students, and parents can identify the core values and recognize their importance as a distinctive feature of the school.

(District)

- The District incorporates core values in its community and public relations efforts.
- The District establishes core values as part of its vision, mission, goals, objectives, regulations, and policies, and seeks to promote a community of adults and students based on a commitment to excellence and ethics.

COMMITMENT 2 The school community uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character education and development.

Schools committed to character development look at themselves through a character lens to assess how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the character of students. A comprehensive approach uses all aspects of schooling as opportunities for character development. This includes the formal academic curriculum and extracurricular activities, as well as what is sometimes called the hidden or informal curriculum (e.g., how school procedures reflect core values, how adults model good character, how the instructional process respects students, how student diversity is addressed, and how the discipline policy encourages student reflection and growth).

“Stand-alone” character education programs can be useful first steps or helpful elements of a comprehensive effort but are not an adequate substitute for a holistic approach that integrates character development into every aspect of school life. With an intentional and proactive approach, school staff do more than react to “teachable moments” to integrate character lessons. They take deliberate steps to create opportunities for character development.

2.1 The school is intentional and proactive in addressing character at all grade levels.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Individual teachers, grade-level teams, and the staff as a whole participate in planning for character education.
- The school has created and can document a plan for character education, or the school follows the district's plan.
- (District) The district defines character education clearly and comprehensively, emphasizing that it is a process that demands integration into all aspects of school life.

2.2 Character education is integrated into academic content and instruction.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Teachers teach core ethical and performance values through their academic subjects. The school is able to point to examples of lessons from teachers in diverse subject areas that explicitly include the integration of character into academic content and the consideration of academic integrity issues (e.g., use of sources, moral implications of academic dishonesty).
- Teachers provide opportunities for students to develop their moral reasoning through discussions of ethical issues in their content areas (e.g., how lessons of history guide moral choices, how scientific discoveries have ethical implications).
- (Districts) The District includes character education in its academic curriculum frameworks and seeks to apply the vocabulary of character to develop higher level student thinking (e.g., evaluation of lessons in history, literature, or school life where character traits provide a guide to behavior.)

2.3 Character education is a priority in how teachers conduct their classes.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Classroom routines and procedures address students' need for belonging, autonomy, and competence.
- Classroom routines and procedures are respectful of students and engage them in ways that develop core values such as responsibility, fairness, caring, diligence, and perseverance. Teachers explain to students how the core values underlie classroom routines and procedures.
- Teachers and students can point to and explain the policies and procedures that support academic integrity (e.g., lessons on proper citation of sources and plagiarism, testing strategies to resist cheating, honor pledges or honor codes, and honor committees or courts).

2.4 Character education is infused throughout the school day in classes, sports, meetings, and co-curricular activities.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school communicates clear and consistent expectations of good character throughout the total school program (e.g., sports, clubs) and in all areas of the school (e.g., cafeteria, halls, playground, sports fields, library, buses).
- Both students and staff are able to point to artifacts reflecting the core values that guide class, team, or club goals and procedures (e.g., sportsmanship codes, publication codes of ethics, club bylaws).

COMMITMENT 3 The school community provides students with opportunities to transfer the core ethical and performance values into real-world settings.

Good character involves understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical and performance values. A holistic approach to character development therefore seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions required to do the right thing and do one's best work. Students grow to understand core values by studying and discussing them, observing behavioral models, and resolving problems involving the values. Students learn to care about core values by developing empathy skills, forming caring relationships, developing good work habits, taking on meaningful responsibilities, helping to create community, hearing inspirational stories, and reflecting on life experiences. And they learn to act upon core values by striving to do their best and be their best in all areas of school life. As children grow in character, they develop an increasingly refined understanding of the core ethical and performance values, a deeper commitment to living according to those values, and a stronger capacity and tendency to behave in accordance with them.

In the ethical as in the intellectual domain, students are constructive learners—they learn best by doing. To develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of their character, students need many and varied opportunities to grapple with real-life challenges (e.g., how to plan and carry out an important responsibility, work as part of a team, negotiate for peaceable solutions, recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas, and identify and meet school and community needs). Through repeated experiences and reflection, students develop appreciation for and commitment to acting on their ethical and performance values. When providing service to others, the school follows guidelines for effective service learning to include student voice and choice, integration of service into the curriculum, and reflection. In addition to service learning, moral action can include conflict resolution, bully resistance, academic integrity, and sportsmanship.

3.1 The school helps students acquire a developmentally appropriate understanding of what the core values mean in everyday behavior and grasp the reasons why some behaviors (e.g., doing your best and respecting others) represent good character and their opposites do not.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Staff consistently explain to students how the core values can help them make choices that demonstrate good character.
- Staff can explain how they help students understand the core values (e.g., teachers can point to lessons they have taught).
- Students can explain why the core ethical and performance values are important, how various behaviors exemplify those values, and why some behaviors (e.g., treating others as you wish to be treated giving your best effort) are right and others are wrong.

3.2 The school helps students reflect upon the core values, appreciate them, desire to demonstrate them, and become committed to them.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Staff help students to develop an appreciation for and a commitment to the core values (e.g., by developing empathy and a sense of responsibility for others, by supporting and challenging students to do their best work, and through character exemplars in literature, history, sports, the media, and everyday life).
- Staff provide opportunities for students to reflect on the core values through discussions of real-life problems and situations relevant to ethical and performance character.
- Staff meet students' needs for safety, belonging, competence, and autonomy, since these form a foundation for developing a commitment to the core values.

3.3 The school helps students practice the core values so that they become habitual patterns of behavior.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Staff encourage students to examine their own behavior in light of the core values and challenge them to make their behavior consistent with the core values (e.g., through journal writing, discussion of events in the classroom, one-on-one adult-student conversations about past or present behavior).

- Students receive practice in and feedback on academic and behavioral skills (e.g., setting goals, monitoring their progress, listening attentively, using “I” messages, apologizing) through the ordinary conduct of the classroom (e.g., the normal flow of teaching and learning, procedures, role plays, class meetings, cooperative learning groups).
- Students have the opportunity to practice the core values in the context of relationships (e.g., through cross-age tutoring, mediating conflicts, and helping others) and in the context of classroom work (e.g., students demonstrate that they care about the quality of their work and incorporate feedback in order to improve their performance).

3.4 The school sets clear expectations for students to engage in actions that develop and demonstrate good character.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school can point to artifacts that demonstrate how the school’s expectations for peaceful conflict resolution, academic integrity, good sportsmanship, and service to others are taught; students can describe how these things have been taught by their teachers and what they have learned.
- The school establishes and communicates clear expectations regarding service learning. The school can point to school-wide expectations of personal and social responsibility. Relevant stakeholders (students, teachers, and parents) know the school’s expectations regarding action that develops and demonstrates good character. Students and staff readily acknowledge their responsibility for these expectations.
- (District) The District encourages and sets clear guidelines and expectations for service to others, academic integrity, and good sportsmanship and makes explicit that service learning includes student voice and choice, integration into the curriculum, and a reflection component.

3.5 The school provides all students with varied opportunities for engaging in positive, responsible action within the school, and students engage in these opportunities and reflect on them.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for service within the school (e.g., peer or cross-age tutoring, classroom or student body governance, and service projects related to the care of the school or school grounds), and students take advantage of these opportunities and benefit from them.
- Teachers connect service within the school with the curriculum and core ethical and performance values (service learning).
- Teachers provide instruction and students engage in projects to practice and/or advance conflict resolution, ethical decision-making, and academic integrity.

3.6 The school provides all students with repeated and varied opportunities for making contributions to the larger community, and students engage in these opportunities and reflect on them.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school effectively provides all students with opportunities for participation in service learning (e.g., working with the elderly; helping the homeless, those in need, or animals; or caring for the environment) and students take advantage of these opportunities and benefit from them.
- Teachers connect community service with the curriculum and core values, creating service learning experiences.
- The school sets aside time for students to assess community needs, create ideas for meeting those needs, plan and coordinate service learning projects, and reflect on the positive consequences of community service.

3.7 The school provides an environment which reinforces positive peer interactions among students.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Students report:
 - they feel connected to school as a result of other students caring about them as individuals and learners,
 - they work with each other to achieve common goals,
 - that they and their peers feel a strong sense of personal, social and civic responsibility which influences their actions with one another,
 - that they and their peers respond to one another with appropriate help and support, including involving school personnel as needed,
 - positive and supportive relationships with peers, including socializing, problem solving, academic help, and students new to the school.
- (District) The district can demonstrate through data that students feel and receive support from peers.

COMMITMENT 4 The development of student character will be embedded within a meaningful and challenging academic and character curriculum that respects all learners.

Because students come to school with diverse skills, interests, backgrounds, and learning needs, an academic program that helps all students succeed will be one in which the content and pedagogy engage all learners and meet their individual needs. This means providing a curriculum that is inherently interesting and meaningful to students and teaching in a manner that respects and cares for students as individuals. Effective character educators model persistence, responsibility, and caring as they differentiate instruction, employ a variety of active teaching and learning strategies, and look for ways that character is potentially developed *in and through* everyday teaching and learning. When teachers bring the character dimension of their classes to the front, they enhance the relevance of subject matter and content area skills to students' natural interests and questions, and in the process, increase student engagement and achievement. When teachers highlight models of excellence and ethics and promote social-emotional skills, such as self-awareness and self-management, and ethical decision-making, students are able to access the curriculum with greater focus. When teachers promote moral and performance values such as academic integrity, intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and diligence, students are better able to do their best work and gain greater autonomy, competence, and self-confidence.

4.1 The academic curriculum provides meaningful and appropriate challenges to all students.

Key indicators of exemplary practice:

- Teachers provide all students with opportunities to interact with academic content in engaging, hands-on, appropriate ways (e.g., cooperative learning, problem solving, and experience-based projects). Students report feeling challenged by and excited about what they are learning in school. Parents report that their children are appropriately challenged and that teachers have high expectations.
- The school community encourages students to seek mastery of content and skills.
- Instruction increases students' sense of competence and emphasizes student autonomy (e.g., by providing them with opportunities to think creatively and test their ideas, by giving them a voice in classroom decisions and plans that affect them).

4.2 The school staff identifies, understands, and accommodates the diverse interests and learning needs of all students.

Key indicators of exemplary practice:

- Staff members engage in ongoing identification of students' learning needs. Differentiated instruction appears organic—a natural part of the school day for all students (e.g., students move easily into reading or math groups that provide activities that have been differentiated by content, process, or product yet are designed to meet the same objectives).
- Staff members challenge and help all students do high-quality work and strive for continuous improvement.
- Parents and students report that teachers know their students well and understand and respond to their learning needs and cultural differences.

4.3 Teachers promote the development of performance character traits that support students' intellectual growth, academic performance, and capacity for both self-direction and teamwork.**Key indicators of exemplary practice:**

- Teachers promote thinking habits (e.g., curiosity, truth-seeking, critical thinking, and open-mindedness) that lead to intellectual growth in students. Students set goals and are aware of their growth as learners.
- Teachers promote work-related habits (e.g., perseverance, responsible decision-making, self-management, self-awareness, and challenge-seeking) that help students do their best work.
- Teachers promote social habits (e.g., honesty, responsibility, collaboration, relationship, skill, social awareness) that help students work together harmoniously (e.g., through cooperative learning).
- Teachers promote, and students report, the importance of academic integrity in the completion of work.

4.4 The school community demonstrates respect for diversity and social justice.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Student, staff and families report:
 - student to student, adult to student, adult to adult interactions demonstrate and promote mutual understanding, acceptance, and respect for individual and family differences (e.g., including but not limited to, gender, race, culture, disabilities, sexual orientation, social economic, values, appearance, religion) at all levels of the school, district, and community.
 - staff, students and families promote an understanding of self as an individual and as a member of a diverse local and global community,
 - they interact with each other in ways that respect individual and group differences.
- (District) Staff at the district level ensure processes, procedures, and materials/forms are responsive to the needs of families from different cultures and/or who speak languages other than English.
- Schools recognize existing achievement gaps between diverse student subgroups and take active steps to eliminate such gaps.

4.5 Social/emotional learning competencies are a part of the curriculum.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Teachers teach the district character standards through their academic subjects (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, self-advocacy, relationship skills, responsible and ethical decision making) into all instruction and learning.
- (District)The district’s guaranteed curriculum integrates developmentally appropriate social emotional learning core competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, self-advocacy, relationship skills, responsible and ethical decision making) into all instruction and learning.

COMMITMENT 5 The school community fosters students’ intrinsic motivation to exemplify the core ethical and performance values.

Character means doing the right thing and doing our best work “even when no one is looking.” The best underlying ethical reason for following rules, for example, is respect for the rights and needs of others—not fear of punishment nor desire for reward. We want students to be kind to others because of an inner belief that kindness is good and an inner desire to be a kind person. We want them to do a good job—work that applies and further develops their best abilities—because they take pride in quality work, not just because they want a good grade. Becoming more self-motivated is a developmental process that schools of character are careful not to undermine by an emphasis on extrinsic incentives. Intensive focus on rewards and behavior modification is consciously limited.

Schools of character work with students to develop their understanding of rules, their awareness of how their behavior affects others, and the character strengths—such as self-control, perspective taking, and conflict resolution skills—needed to act responsibly in the future. Rather than settle for mere compliance, these schools seek to help students benefit from their mistakes by providing meaningful opportunities for reflection, problem solving, and restitution.

Consequences are *relevant* (logically related to the rule or offense), *respectful* (not embarrassing or demeaning), *reasonable* (not harsh or excessive), *restorative* (restoring or repair the relationship by making restitution), and *resource-building* (helping students develop the character qualities—such as empathy, social skills, and the motivation to do the right thing—that were not put into practice when the behavior problem occurred). Staff routinely deal with behavior issues in positive ways that encourage reflection according to the core values, offer students opportunities for reparation and moral growth, and respect students as individuals.

5.1 Staff and students recognize and celebrate the natural, beneficial consequences of acts of character rather than rewarding students with material recognition or rewards.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Students are able to articulate on a personal level what it means to be self-motivated and why it is important (e.g., students can cite personal goals, achievements, and challenges).
- Staff can explain how they have specifically addressed the question of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. They reflect on whether their practices develop self-motivation and seek agreement on a shared philosophy and associated practices (e.g., how all members of the school community will articulate and act upon the concepts of praise, rewards, and punishment).
- Recognition is inclusive of members of the school community (e.g., recognizing the character strengths and unique qualities of each student in a classroom rather than having students earn the title “student of the month”). The school may recognize students or classrooms for outstanding behavior or service but refrains from excessive singling out of students or competition among classrooms.

5.2 The school’s approach to student conduct uses all aspects of behavior management—including rule-setting and rule-enforcement—as opportunities to foster students’ character development, especially their understanding of and commitment to core values.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school provides staff training in developmentally appropriate forms of classroom management, which includes a focus on developing clear character-based expectations for behavior throughout the school and is supported by the publication, instruction, and practice of procedures to support school expectations.
- The school’s discipline code uses explanation, discussion, and natural and logical consequences in ways that help students learn from their mistakes, repair relationships, and implement a plan for behavior improvement.
- Students have a developmentally appropriate role in classroom management and school governance (e.g., participating in the creation of behavioral norms and rules, class meetings, conflict resolution programs, and student governance bodies such as student court).
- Teachers discuss academic integrity with students in terms of fairness and personal honor, establishing clear guidelines about what constitutes doing one’s own work and acceptable collaboration compared to what constitutes plagiarism and cheating.

COMMITMENT 6 The school community creates a positive school climate.

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's collective experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, organizational structures, and the school environment. A school committed to character strives to become a microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society. It does this by creating a community that helps all its members form respectful relationships that lead to caring attachments to and responsibility for one another. This involves developing caring relationships between students and staff, among students (within and across grade levels), among staff, and between staff and families. These caring relationships foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person. All children and adolescents have needs for safety, belonging, and the experience of contributing, and they are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups that meet these needs. Likewise, if staff members and parents experience mutual respect, fairness, and cooperation in their relationships with each other, they are more likely to develop the capacity to promote those values in students. In a caring school community, the daily life of classrooms and all other parts of the school environment (e.g., hallways, cafeteria, playground, sports fields, buses, front office, and teacher's lounge) are imbued with a climate of concern and respect for others.

6.1 The school ensures a sense of physical security in all school related settings.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- All members of the school community feel safe from physical harm.
- All members of the school community are aware of how to report safety concerns.
- All members of the school community report safety concerns.
- All members of the school community believe their health, wellness and physical safety are valued and supported.
- (District) District data indicate students and staff feel and are physically safe in all school settings.

6.2 The school ensures a sense of social-emotional security in all school related settings.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- All members of the school community feel safe from abuse, teasing, intimidation, bullying, harassment, and exclusion.
- All members of the school community are aware of how to report concerns about their social-emotional security.
- All members of the school community report concerns about their social-emotional security.
- All members of the school community believe their social-emotional security is both valued and supported.
- Students and staff demonstrate and report feeling safe to express curiosity and creativity and a willingness to take risks.
- (District) District data indicate students and staff feel and are emotionally secure in all school settings.

6.3 The school fosters a feeling of connectedness and engagement for all community members.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Students:
 - report the school is a welcoming place and feel positively about being a member of the school community,
 - actively participate in all aspects of school life, including after school activities and events.
- Parents/families:
 - report the school is a welcoming place and feel positively about being a member of the school community,
 - actively participate in all aspects of school life, including after school activities and events.
- School district personnel:
 - report the school/district is a welcoming place and feel positively about being a member of the school/district community,
 - actively participate in all aspects of school/district life, including after school activities and events.
- School and district personnel actively encourage and promote participation in school life for students, staff and families.

6.4 The school maintains a safe, clean and appealing physical environment.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Schools and facilities are perceived to be clean, safe, accessible, orderly, appealing and reflect and respond to the varied physical needs of students, families and staff.
- Classroom and building size, allocations, utilization, set-up, and supervision support student learning, safety and connectedness.
- (District) District data indicate that district personnel work to ensure that schools and facilities are clean, safe, accessible, orderly, appealing and reflect and respond to the varied physical needs of students, families and staff.

COMMITMENT 7 The school and district staff contributes to an ethical learning community that shares responsibility and leadership for ongoing character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.

All school staff—teachers, administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals, resource teachers, school psychologists and social workers, nurses, coaches, secretaries, cafeteria workers, playground and classroom aides, bus drivers—need to be involved in learning about, discussing, and taking ownership of the school’s character education effort. First and foremost, staff members assume this responsibility by modeling the core values in their own behavior and taking advantage of opportunities to positively influence the students with whom they interact. Second, the same values and norms that govern the life of students serve to govern the collective life of adult members in the school community. Like students, adults grow in character by working collaboratively, sharing best practices, and participating in decision-making that improves all areas of the school. They also benefit from meaningful staff development and opportunities to observe colleagues and then apply character development strategies in their own work with students. Third, a school devotes time to staff reflection on issues that affect their collective pursuit of excellence and ethics. Through faculty meetings and smaller support groups, a reflective staff regularly asks questions such as: What character-building experiences is the school already providing for its students? How effective and comprehensive are these? What negative moral behaviors is the school currently failing to address? What school practices are at odds with its professed core values and desire to develop a school of character? Reflection of this nature is an indispensable condition for developing an all-encompassing culture of character.

7.1 Staff model the core values in their interactions with students and each other, and students and parents perceive that they do.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Staff are courteous to students and each other and demonstrate respectful and supportive behavior toward students.
- When asked how they can best help students understand and act on the core values, staff members will specifically cite their role as a model for student work and behavior.
- Students and parents report that staff are courteous and model the core values.
- Students report:
 - relationships with adults that are positive, caring and supportive,
 - adults have high expectations for their learning and success,
 - they are willing to advocate for themselves with adults regarding social and learning needs,
 - adults are willing to listen to them,
 - they are connected to school because adults know and care about them as individuals and help them with problems,
 - they are treated with fairness and respect by adults,
 - their input is valued and they are involved with decision-making.
- Adults (staff, parents/families, patrons) report:
 - positive, supportive and caring relationships with one another,
 - others are willing to listen to one another,
 - others are willing to get to know them as individuals,
 - others express personal concern for one another,
 - others treat them with fairness and respect,
 - they receive help and support as needed,
 - their input is valued and they are involved in decision-making,
 - they feel connected to school because of how people treat them,
 - positive and supportive relationships, including socializing, mentoring, problem solving, and adults/families new to the school,
 - they work with each other to achieve common goals,
 - they feel a strong sense of personal, social and civic responsibility which influences their actions with one another.

7.2 The school includes all staff in planning, receiving staff development for, and carrying out the school-wide character education initiative.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- All professional and support staff receive training and information on their role in the character education initiative and understand the part they play in its success. Administrators, teachers, and

counselors receive ongoing staff development. There are artifacts or summaries of these professional development activities and faculty note how these activities affected teaching or classroom practices.

- The school has created a sustained “ethical learning community” through professional development and opportunities for sharing and input. Staff value the sharing of ideas and being a learning and moral community.
- All staff have opportunities to be involved in character education planning and implementation. Teachers, administrators, and counselors are substantially involved.
- (District) The district trains teachers, principals, and other school personnel in † character education and social-emotional learning on a recurring basis; trains new teachers; and provides funding for staff planning, training, and attending conferences on character education.
- School district personnel report:
 - encouragement and constructive feedback is provided,
 - support among adults contributes to a positive learning environment and encourages open dialogue, curiosity, problem solving and positive interactions,
 - resources are shared with one another as part of the learning process,
 - they are confident in their abilities to positively impact student learning and enjoy performing their duties,
 - various learning abilities, styles and needs among their colleagues are recognized, accepted and supported,
 - they are willing and able to advocate for themselves with respect to their learning needs, goals, and outcomes.

7.3 The school makes time available for staff planning and reflection in regard to character education.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Aspects of the character education initiative appear regularly on the agendas of faculty meetings and in-service days.
- The administration provides staff release time for development of promising ideas, planning of events, and reflection.
- Teachers use core values to reflect on their own behaviors and procedures.
- (District) The district encourages sharing information by providing venues for collaboration among schools; establishing a centralized source of materials, curricula, and other tools; and sponsoring regular conferences or meetings on character education.
- (District) District data indicate school district personnel learning is supported.

COMMITMENT 8 The school community effectively engages students, families and community members as partners in the character-building effort and includes them in the leadership process.

Schools that are engaged in effective character education have leaders who visibly champion the effort and share leadership with all stakeholders. Many schools and districts establish a character education committee—often composed of staff, students, parents, and community members—that takes responsibility for planning, implementation, and support. Over time, the regular governing bodies of the school or district may take on the functions of this committee—or, as character education goals become well-known and fully shared, formal organizational structures may no longer be necessary. The leadership also takes steps to provide for the long-range support (e.g., adequate staff development, time to plan) of the character education initiative, including, ideally, support at the district and state levels. In addition, within the school, students assume developmentally appropriate roles in leading the character education effort through, for example, class meetings, student government, peer mediation, cross-age tutoring, service clubs, task forces, and student-led initiatives.

Schools that reach out to families and include them in character-building efforts greatly enhance their chances for success with students. They communicate with families—via newsletters, e-mails, family nights, the school website, and parent conferences—about goals and activities regarding character education. To build greater trust between home and school, parents are represented on the character education committee or through whatever decision-making structures exist. These schools also make a special effort to reach out to subgroups of parents who may not feel part of the school community. Finally, schools and families enhance the effectiveness of their partnership by recruiting the help of the wider community (i.e., businesses, youth organizations, religious institutions, the government, and the media) in promoting character development.

8.1 The school engages families in the character education initiative.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Parents serve in character education leadership roles and are actively involved in carrying the character initiative to the parent-teacher organization and parent community.
- Families report being aware and supportive of the initiative.
- The school offers workshops and resources on character education and general parenting skills.
- Parents are recruited, trained and frequently volunteer and are active contributors to and participants in school and classroom events that go beyond fundraising
- The school office is welcoming to parents, and staff prioritize inclusive outreach to parents.

8.2 The administration and faculty regularly communicate with parents and guardians, providing suggestions and activities that help them reinforce the core values, and they survey parents, both formally and informally, on the effectiveness of the school’s character education efforts.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school communicates with families about its character education efforts using a variety of techniques (e.g., report cards, notes, e-mails, phone calls, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, group meetings, workshops, websites).
- The school can provide evidence of strong two-way communication regarding the character education initiative. Parents do not just receive information from the school, they also provide input, guidance, and evaluation data to the school regarding the effectiveness of the initiative and how it might be improved.
- Strategies are in place to welcome new families to school and orient them to the school’s character education mission.

8.3 The school recruits the help of the wider community.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Community members (e.g., representatives of local government agencies, business partners, religious organizations, youth organizations, other schools) serve in character education leadership roles and are actively involved in carrying the character initiative into the larger community.
- Members of the larger community report being aware and supportive of the initiative, and elements of the initiative may be integrated into community activities (e.g., youth sports programs, after-school activities, youth-serving organizations such as 4-H or scouts, businesses or other organizations that promote core values or help with service projects).
- Community members volunteer in the school and are active contributors to and participants in school and classroom events (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, support of learning experiences).
- (District) The district engages a broad spectrum of the community in its character education initiative with particular focus on involvement of appropriate local government agencies, youth-serving organizations, and the business community.
- District and school activities are attended and supported by parents and patrons/community members
- Parents/community members are willing to come to the district and/or schools to address student, school/district, and community issues and needs.

8.4 The school’s character education initiative has leaders, including the school principal, who champion character education efforts, share leadership, and provide long-range support.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Stakeholders (i.e., faculty, parents, students, community members) report that the principal is a visible and supportive champion of the effort, who values and trusts their input, but that if the principal left the school, character education efforts would continue at full strength as a result of shared leadership and school culture.
- Actions and statements of the principal and other key leaders (e.g., articulation of goals and principles; modeling and personal example; and decisions regarding policies, personnel, staff development, and allocation of time and other resources) are clearly supportive of character education and the long-range survival and growth of the initiative.

(District)

- Character education is a shared priority of the district board and district superintendent.
- The District hires school principals and central office personnel who are committed to character education and encourages them to incorporate character education into their work and evaluation of staff.
- The District requires central office personnel (e.g., superintendents, athletic directors, directors of guidance and other student and administrative services) to incorporate character education into their work.

8.5 A leadership group or structure (several linked groups) inclusive of staff, students, and parents guides the ongoing planning and implementation of the character education initiative and encourages the involvement of the whole school in character-related activities.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- An inclusive leadership group or structure (e.g., character education committee or task force, standing school committee(s), committee of the whole) guides character education strategic planning and implementation. Artifacts such as minutes, strategic plans, and/or project portfolios describe this group’s activities. Stakeholders can identify the groups or structures that guide character education planning and ways they can have input into decisions that affect them. They report shared ownership of the decision-making process.

8.6 Students are explicitly involved in creating and maintaining a sense of community and in other leadership roles that contribute to the character education effort.**Key indicators of exemplary implementation:**

- Students create and maintain standards of behavior (e.g., classroom rules, honor code) and have responsible roles within the classroom and school community (e.g., character ambassadors, safety patrols, student government, honor councils, peer mediators, school newspaper editors) and opportunities for leadership at various levels (e.g., learning groups, classrooms, the school, extracurricular activities).
- Students value the leadership roles available to them and identify themselves as members of wider communities (e.g., state, nation, world) in which they can play positive and contributory roles.
- Multiple artifacts recognize the recruitment, training, and activities involved in student-led projects.

COMMITMENT 9 The school community regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students exhibit good character.

Effective character education includes ongoing assessment of progress and outcomes using both qualitative and quantitative measures. The school uses a variety of assessment data (e.g., academic test scores, focus groups, survey results) that include the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents. Schools report on this data and use it to determine next steps. Schools administer questionnaires to stakeholders early in their character education initiative and again later to assess progress.

Three outcomes merit attention. First, schools assess the culture and climate of the school in light of the core values by asking stakeholders questions about the extent to which members of the school community demonstrate the core values and thereby function as an ethical learning community. For example, schools might administer climate surveys in which they ask students whether they agree with statements such as, “Students in this school (classroom) respect and care about each other.” Second, the school assesses the staff’s growth as character educators by examining the extent to which they model the core values and integrate these values into their teaching and other interactions with students. Schools ask teachers to reflect upon their character education practices, survey students about their perceptions of their teachers as role models, and have administrative procedures in place to monitor desired teacher behaviors. Third, the school assesses student character by examining the degree to which students manifest understanding of, commitment to, and action upon the core ethical values. Schools can, for example, gather data on various character-related behaviors (e.g., attendance, suspensions, vandalism, service hours, drug incidents, and cheating). Effective schools collect data on desired outcomes in student attitudes and behaviors and report to parents on students’ growth in character just as they report academic progress (e.g., on report cards, during parent/teacher conferences).

9.1 The school sets goals and regularly assesses (both quantitatively and qualitatively) its culture, climate, and functioning as an ethical learning community.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school can provide artifacts demonstrating character education assessment results and conclusions drawn from these results (e.g., data on school climate and academic integrity gathered from students, staff, and parents).
- The school uses qualitative and quantitative data in an ongoing manner to make changes and improvements to the character education initiative (e.g., data on academic achievement shows positive results since the implementation and growth of the character education initiative).
- (For districts): The district arranges for and finances assessment of the district's character education initiative.

9.2 Staff members reflect upon and report on their efforts to implement character education, as well as on their growth as character educators.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- Teachers periodically gather feedback from their students on their perceptions of character-related activities and the extent to which teachers are modeling the core values.
- The school requires all staff to report on their efforts to meet character education goals (e.g., through staff surveys).
- Staff examine and reflect on data through structured and informal opportunities (e.g., focus groups, faculty discussions, and committee meetings).
- The school staff reports to stakeholders on efforts to implement character education.
- (For districts): The District builds implementation of character education into the assessment of school principals and in turn asks principals to evaluate integration of character education into their assessments of school staff.

9.3 The school assesses student progress in developing an understanding of and a commitment to good character and the degree to which students act upon the core values.

Key indicators of exemplary implementation:

- The school uses a variety of approaches (e.g., report cards, student-led parent/teacher conferences, goal-setting rubrics) to assess student progress in the area of character development.

- In questionnaires and reflections on character-related behaviors and core values, students rate the importance of core values in their lives as high (e.g., on a survey question such as “Students in the school (classroom) respect and care about each other,” more than 80 percent of students would agree or highly agree).
- Data collected on student behavior (e.g., attendance, suspensions, vandalism, service hours, drug incidents, and cheating) demonstrate growth in the understanding of and commitment to good character.
- Program development and modifications can be attributed to evaluation.