

# Character Education Strategies From America's Blue Ribbon Schools

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For more than a decade, my research has focused on character education practices used in U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon Schools. Here is a sampling of practices from recent award winners:

## *Life-Skills Approach to Character Education*

Both the Belmont School, a K-5 school in Belmont, Michigan, and the Patterson School, a K-5 school in Santa Maria, California, call their character qualities "Life Skills" (after Susan Kovalik's *Life Skills*). Life Skills include: caring, common sense, cooperation, courage, curiosity, effort, flexibility, friendship, initiative, integrity, problem-solving, patience, perseverance, responsibility, and sense of humor. Patterson School teacher Annette Taul co-authored *Developing Character: A Classroom Approach*, a curriculum guide for teaching the Life Skills at each grade level within science, language arts, and social studies. At Belmont, Life Skills have been integrated into the state learning standards, especially social studies.

## *Character Traits in a Scope and Sequence*

West View, a K-5 school located in Spartanburg, South Carolina, began with a list of monthly character traits but soon found that teaching the same traits each year led students to lose interest. They therefore adopted the *Core Essentials Curriculum* ([www.coreessentials.org](http://www.coreessentials.org)), a three-year program based on teaching 27 different character traits, 9 each year. The traits are integrated into lessons and stories. Teachers use the traits as they work with students to develop classroom rules and connect the traits to real life through daily classroom activities.

## *Character Education at the Movies*

The Belmont School has "film nights" in which children and parents watch and discuss a character-building film. The school uses quality films with messages of family, friendship, truth, trust, or responsibility and the idea that character, rather than money or fame, is the most important thing in life. Films include:

*Willy the Sparrow* (Pre-K and Kindergarten), *On Our Own* (1st-grade), *Secret of Treasure Mountain* (2nd-grade), *The Buttercream Gang* (3rd-grade), *The Rogue Stallion* (4th-grade), and *Split Infinity* (5th-grade).

## *Creating a School Song [www.songs4teachers.com](http://www.songs4teachers.com)*

The McCoy School (K-5) in Carrollton, Texas, has written its own school song to include the character traits for which the school stands. The song is sung at the start of each day after the Pledge of Allegiance and at every assembly and school game. Kathy Struck, a 5th-grade teacher, wrote the song... ("Oh, give me a school, where integrity is cool, where respect is the name of the game . . .")

## *Parents as First Moral Teachers*

West View Elementary believes that parents are the most important character educators. The school has parenting workshops at least once a month throughout the school year. Parent updates on the program are given in the school newsletter every six weeks and in weekly classroom newsletters. A Parent Resource Room provides books and other character education material.

## *Do Dads Club*

The dads at Walnut Hill Elementary in Dallas, Texas, have a "Do Dads Club" that meets regularly to find ways to make a difference in the school. Every other month they hold a workday to hang curtains, build shelves, repair furniture, plant trees, lay walkways, and offer a strong back or a helping hand. All of the things they do model responsibility and caring. Each Wednesday the school enjoys inspirational messages from one of the "Do Dads," reinforcing the curriculum's character qualities. ■

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