CHARACTER EDUCATION SNAPSHOTS

It is the month of June, the month of leaves and roses, when pleasant sights salute the eyes, and pleasant scents the noses. — Nathaniel Parker Willis

With my camera in hand, I visited the character education gardens where "everything was coming up roses" and took these snapshots for my scrapbook.

Snapshot 1: TEACHING CHARACTER AND CIVILTY

"Civility goes beyond being polite and courteous; it involves listening to others with an open mind, disagreeing respectfully and seeking common ground to start a conversation about differences. Acting with civility requires children to be respectful, reflective and self-aware. Learning the skills of perspective taking, empathy and problem-solving helps children understand that their actions and words affect individuals as well as their entire community, encouraging them to rise up and act with civility in tough situations....By teaching skills like empathy, problem-solving and perspective taking, we can help nurture civility in our children."
Melissa Benaroya, *How to Teach Civility During Divisive Times*, *Committee for Children*, February 24, 2017

Snapshot 2: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE REPORT CARD

The "citizenship" side of the report card should not take second place in the "race to the top." Why? The Josephsen's Institute's annual poll of teens reveals a rather high percentage of teens who cheat, steal, lie, and exhibit a "propensity toward violence" including bullying. Teacher polls show that teachers find students to be less respectful, more aggressive, more impulsive and impatient, and display more inappropriate language. One observer of the youth culture noted that the mantra of the "ME" generations appears to be: "I Know My Rights – I Want It Now – Someone Else Is To Blame – I'm A Victim." Let us join the many schools and communities in this county who are attending to the "citizenship" side of the report card by implementing programs designed to teach students democratic values, prosocial skills, emotional control and anger management, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and what it means to be a good citizen.

Snapshot 3: MORAL AND CHARACTER EDUCATION: THE CONNECTION

*"Character education has reintroduced one important aspect of moral development…namely, socialization—helping the young learn how to live cooperatively, caringly, and civilly." (*Paraphrasing our colleague, Professor Kevin Ryan)

Lickona and Davidson have made the case that there are two types of character—*"moral character"* and *"performance character."* They write:

"Moral character [values/virtues and ethics] is necessary for successful interpersonal relationships and ethical behavior." The characteristics of moral character encompass such virtues as integrity, caring, respect, generosity, responsibility, cooperation, and the like. The companion to moral character is *"performance character – a needed characteristic for reaching one's potential in school, the workplace, or any area of endeavor."* Performance virtues include diligence, perseverance, ingenuity, self - discipline, grit, optimism, and more.

Snapshot 4: CHARACTER EDUCATION: THE TRUE COMMON CORE

Attending to the character development of students in our schools supports academic achievement and social-emotional skill development.

"Character and citizenship are the critical elements of a positive school culture and climate."   -M. Elias, (2008)

"Character education positively influences academic achievement; and has a broad impact on a wide variety of psycho-social outcomes, including sexual behavior, problem-solving skills, relationships, and attachment to school."

-Berkowitz and Bier (2005)

"Integrated character education resulted in an improved school environment, increased student pro-social and moral behavior, and increased reading and math test scores. In addition, schools became more caring communities, discipline referrals dropped significantly—particularly in areas related to bullying behavior—and test scores in moderately achieving schools increased nearly 50%."

-Marshall, Caldwell, and Foster (2011)

Snapshot 5: CHARACTER EDUCATION: SIX STANDARDS

Standard One: Mission-Core Values-Goals
- Exemplary character education programs have a clear set of core values/virtues, including a mission statement and specific goals.

Standard Two: School Culture
- Exemplary character education programs address a school's culture and its effectiveness to provide a safe environment, character development, community involvement, and student achievement.

Standard Three: Value Formation-Moral Action
- Exemplary character education programs nurture and foster students' interpersonal values, intrapersonal values, and civic virtues.

Standard Four: Staff Development
- Exemplary character education initiatives include professional development training, workshops, seminar, etc.

Standard Five: Curriculum-Programs-Partnerships
- Exemplary character education efforts focus on integrating character education into the full spectrum of school activities and school life.

Standard Six: Assessment/Evaluation
- ▪ Effective character education programs are assessed on a regular basis, and school personnel and others use data-driven information to make informed changes and decisions.

Snapshot 6: CHARACTER EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

Research has shown that children who receive regular exposure to the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic excellence, to participate in a math and science fair, or to win an award for writing a poem or essay.

Recent research also shows that participation in the arts improves children's abilities to concentrate and focus in on other aspects of their lives. The ability to focus requires a balance between listening and contributing, concentration and focus, thinking about one's role, and how that role contributes to the big picture of what is being created. Several experts make the case for adding the "A" to STEM and for promoting programs that develop children and youth's artistic/performance skills and talents.

Snapshot 7: CHARACTER EDUCATION AND SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Jacob Francom researched the roles high school principals assume when developing, implementing, and sustaining character education efforts in their schools. He found six main roles, three of which deal directly with leader skills and abilities: **reflective** leaders, **collaborative** leaders, and **moral** leaders. These principals were also **plate peddlers** (get buy-in from constituents), **cultural engineers** (character education becomes the foundation of the school's environment), and **champions** (obstacles overcome, successes celebrated.)

"Roles High School Principals Play in Establishing A Successful Character Education Initiative," *Journal of Character Education,* Vol 12(1), 2016, pp. 17-34)

A 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found that three out of four K-12 public school principals believe the job has become "too complex," with the majority contending that school leadership responsibilities have changed significantly over the last five years. Nearly half of the principals surveyed indicated that they "feel under great stress several days a week."

In a teacher survey, 21% of teachers polled completely agree that their school's principal possesses the subject-matter/content knowledge necessary to help them improve their instruction. Forty-one percent of the principals believe that they did.

(*Education Week Research Center*, 2019)

Snapshot 8: CHARACTER EDUCATION AND TEACHING SKILLS

You may have seen the Business World's Scorecard where people are talking and writing about "soft skills."

"Like it or not, emotions are an intrinsic part of our biological makeup, and every morning they march into the office [and our schools and classrooms] with us and influence our behavior. Executives are starting to talk about the importance of such things as trust, confidence, empathy, adaptability and self-control."

-Shari Caudron, "The Hard Case for Soft Skills"

Currently we have the 21st Century Skills Scorecard that includes:
- Ways of Thinking (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and learning);
- Ways of Working (communication and collaboration);
- Tools for Working (communications technology and information literacy); and,
- Skills for Living (citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility).

Two skills that cut across all four categories are "collaborative problem solving" and "learning in digital networks."

The Fortune 500 Companies Scorecard identifies five top qualities these companies seek in employees:
1. Teamwork.
2. Problem solving.
3. Interpersonal skills.
4. Oral communication.
5. Listening.

And so, what is in your character education garden?

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