

Throughout time, societies have recognized the need to **educate** the coming generation of adults to pass on **knowledge** and skills.

Recorded history from long before the present era emphasizes that **education** must also **develop character**.

One of the great education reformers, Horace Mann, in the 1840s, helped to improve instruction in classrooms nationwide, advocating that character development was as important as academics in American schools. The United States Congress, recognizing the importance of this concept, authorized the Partnerships in Character Education Program in 1994. The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 renews and re-emphasizes this tradition—and substantially expands support for it. Indeed, one of the six goals of the Department of Education is to “promote strong character and citizenship among our nation’s youth” (*Strategic Plan 2002-2007*). To reach this goal, the Department of Education joins with state education agencies and school districts across our country to provide vital leadership and support to implement character education.

Within the **character** of the **citizen** lies the **welfare** of the **nation**.

—Cicero

What is character education?

Throughout history, character education has been the shared responsibility of parents, teachers and members of the community, who come together to support positive character development.



... nothing is of more **importance** for the public weal, than to **form** and **train** up youth in **wisdom** and **virtue**.

—Benjamin Franklin

Character education teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations.

Character education is a learning process that enables students and adults in a school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others. Upon such core values, we form the attitudes and actions that are the hallmark of safe, healthy and informed communities that serve as the foundation of our society.

What is the school’s role in character education?

Students spend much of their young lives in classrooms. This time in school is an opportunity to explain and reinforce the core values upon which character is formed.

In school, character education must be approached comprehensively to include the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of a person or group. It must offer multiple opportunities for students to learn about, discuss and enact positive social behaviors. Student leadership and involvement are essential for character education to become a part of a student’s beliefs and actions.

To successfully implement character education, schools are encouraged to:

- ★ Take a leadership role to bring the staff, parents and students together to identify and define the elements of character they want to emphasize;
- ★ Provide training for staff on how to integrate character education into the life and culture of the school;
- ★ Form a vital partnership with parents and the community so that students hear a consistent message about character traits essential for success in school and life; and

- ★ Provide opportunities for school leaders, teachers, parents and community partners to model exemplary character traits and social behaviors.

State education agencies, through a collaborative community process, have chosen to incorporate character education into their school improvement plans and state standards. Some states have chosen to implement character education through official state policies such as the Michigan State Board of Education Policy on Quality Character Education. Many schools have chosen to incorporate character education into their plans for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

From state to state, the following are common threads in character education agendas:

- ★ Involvement of the whole community in designing and implementing character education for its schools; and
- ★ Commitment to making character education an integral part of the education process.

Federal resources and support for character education

The United States Congress and the Department of Education have expanded support for character education for more than a decade, enabling schools across our nation to implement character education in a variety of ways. The Department of Education provides grants to state and local education agencies to support the development of character education. Since 1995, through the Partnerships in Character Education Program ([www.ed.gov/programs/charactered/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/charactered/index.html)), the Department has awarded 97 grants to assist in designing, implementing and

Education at its best should **expand** the mind and **build** character.

—Secretary Margaret Spellings

sustaining high-quality opportunities for students to learn and understand the importance of strong character in their lives.

Resources for parents and teachers in character education

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools  
[www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs/index.html)

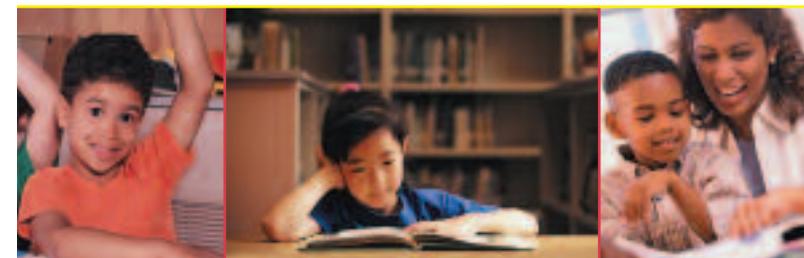
Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center  
[www.cetac.org](http://www.cetac.org)

What Works Clearinghouse—Character Education  
[www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov)

*Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen*  
View the booklet online at: [www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/index.html)  
Order by calling (877) 4ED-PUBS.

*Character Education-Our Shared Responsibility*  
View the brochure online at: [www.ed.gov/admins/lead/character/brochure.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/character/brochure.html)  
Order by calling (877) 4ED-PUBS.

Character education teaches the habits of thought and deed that help people live and **work together** as families, **friends**, neighbors, **communities** and nations.



U. S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools  
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20202-6450  
1-800-872-5327  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)



**CHARACTER** education ...  
our shared responsibility