



School Values Statements

Notes

See related fact sheets on:
Character Education
Character Counts
Developmental Assets

Resources

The Cobb County School District in Marietta, GA (770-426-3300; www.cobbk12.org) has identified four district-wide values:

- Safety
- Civility
- Maximum learning for all
- Effective and efficient use of resources.

These are in the context of its vision and mission statements, and lead to its strategic goal statements:

1. Increase student achievement
2. Increase effective and efficient use of resources
3. Increase stakeholder satisfaction.

The Altoona Public Schools, IA (http://qsite.aasdcad.com/vision_values_statements.htm) provides “Vision statements” and “Values Statements” for each of its schools. Excerpts of the High School values statements include:

- Create life-long learners.
- Develop independent learning skills.
- Foster pride and school spirit.
- Encourage the use of communication skills that promote understanding.
- Advocate positive and meaningful educational experiences for all students.
- Promote excellence in academics, the arts, athletics and life skills.

Keith Junior High School includes:

- Provide a clean, safe and orderly environment.
- Foster an environment that promotes mutual respect.
- Promote pride, heritage and tradition of our past and present.
- Promotes responsibility, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, caring and citizenship.

Many schools particularly elementary schools have chosen to identify a set of school wide values statements which are intended to provide a school-wide base of expectations for student behavior. In some cases these values statements are a part of a larger character education program that includes citizenship education, social skills instruction, and service learning (for example, the Character Counts program), but in other cases the set of values may not be part of such a program, and may be self standing.

What are School Values Statements?

The values statements tend to be a list of positive characteristics that all faculty and students can accept as desirable goals for student behavior. The values are usually prominently displayed in key locations in the school, and sometimes are included on school stationary, in newsletters to parents, at assembly programs and the like. In some schools these values statements become almost part of the school logo and identity, and are referred to and used in a variety of situations.

These values statements are distinguished from school or classroom rules in that they identify positive traits and goals, rather than specific appropriate or inappropriate behaviors. For example, these three simple values or goals: “Be safe; Be respectful; and Be responsible” can be distinguished from the following three rules: “Be in position; Keep hands and feet to self; and Start work on time” which are much more specific and focus on specific behaviors regardless of their motivation. As a result, schools often use the values statements as the foundation for the creation and implementation of more specific rules for various situations or locations in school. The values may also serve as a basis for school’s efforts to respect cultural and ethnic diversity.

What Do We Know About School Values Statements?

While these types of values statements are widely advocated, there is virtually no empirical evidence about the measurable outcomes of having these values statements. No evaluative studies of these types of values statements have been identified. As with many practices in schools, these types of values statements have logical and common sense value, particularly if one hypothesizes that one potential cause of violence and inappropriate behavior in school arises from deteriorating home and community values. It is not clear that these school value statements can compensate for these larger community value deficits, but such efforts by schools are viewed with a “can’t hurt” attitude and the belief that this is the right thing for schools to do.

Making it Work

In order to implement these values statements, many schools have established a “values committee” of students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, community members, and possibly clergy from various faiths to devise a list of values. Sometimes these are then discussed in school assemblies, homerooms, and in public hearings for input and to develop a sense of community and school consensus around the values, and to permit parents to be informed and to support these values in their children. In an era when the responsibilities for instilling values are controversial and are shared among parents, schools, and religious organizations, most schools have attempted to develop and

include only those values which all faiths and families are likely to be able to fully endorse. In addition to simply being posted or distributed, most schools which implement these values statements also encourage all teachers to employ these values in working with students in their classes, and many suggest that class instruction be devoted to insuring that students understand the values and related rules, and to also build consensus on the importance of the values, as well as illustrate their application in school. Most schools also attempt to recognize students whose behavior exemplifies one or more of these values. This is often done by posting names prominently in the school hall near the office, recognizing these student in honors or awards ceremonies or assemblies, providing recognition certificates, and also by providing special privileges (such as lunch with the Principal, special parking spot, etc.), or tangible awards (such as small prizes, certificates for free or discounted food items, etc., donated by the local community).

An example of one such values statement might be the CAREskills developed at the Clear Creek Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana:

1. Caring- feeling and showing concern for others
2. Cooperation- working well with others toward a common goal
3. Common Sense- using good judgment
4. Effort- trying to do your personal best
5. Flexibility- willing to change when necessary
6. Initiative- moving into action
7. Integrity- being honest and sincere
8. Organization- planning and implementing in an orderly way
9. Patience- waiting calmly
10. Perseverance- working until finished despite difficulties
11. Problem solving- seeking solutions
12. Responsibility- being accountable for my choices
13. Respect- treating yourself, your world, and others as you want to be treated.

Seven virtues identified by Earnest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1995) might serve as another example:

1. Honesty
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Compassion
5. Self-discipline
6. Perseverance
7. Giving

The “Six Pillars of Character” which form the core of the “Character Counts!” program are used in a wide variety of environments, and are part of a much larger effort at character development. However, they too are used as school values:

1. Trustworthiness. Be honest, don’t deceive, cheat or steal. Be reliable- do what you say you’ll do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal- stand by your family, friends and country.
2. Respect. Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the feelings of others. Don’t threaten, hit or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements.
3. Responsibility. Do what you are supposed to do. Persevere: Keep on trying! Always do your best. Use self-control. Be self disciplined. Think before you act. Consider the consequences. Be accountable for your choices.
4. Fairness. Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Don’t take advantage of others. Don’t blame others carelessly.
5. Caring. Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.
6. Citizenship. Do your share to make your school and community better. Cooperate. Stay informed. Vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

As can be seen in these three examples, there tends to be considerable overlap in the values identified by various schools, agencies, or individuals. If the values identified truly represent a core set of values to which the larger community ascribes these similarities might be anticipated.

Conclusion

While these school wide values statements in themselves may not change the behavior of chronically disruptive students, they may have a positive impact on the behavior of many other students. Moreover they serve as a foundation for rules, and many other behavior prevention and intervention programs.

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Reference

Boyer, W. (September, 1995). Character in the Basic School -Making a Commitment to Character. Article from *Principal Magazine* reprinted on website: <http://www.naesp.org/char.html>

About the Safe and Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing prevention-based approaches to school safety, discipline reform and behavior improvement in schools.

Websites: <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> or <http://www.unl.edu/srs/> Or Contact:

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