100 Ways to Promote Character Education in Schools

(This list of successful strategies was collected from numerous teachers and administrators, compiled by the staff of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, and adapted for NVUSD.)

1. Hang character education posters in halls and classrooms. Refer to traits throughout the day in different subjects as appropriate.

2. Promote a project for each class that contributes positively to the school or neighborhood/community environment.

3. Be vigilant to prevent and stop scapegoating of one student by others.

4. Modify current recognition programs to include academic, artistic, athletic and character achievement.

5. Encourage students to identify a charity, collect donations and help administer the distribution of goods or funds.

6. Consistently prohibit gossip and, when appropriate, address/discuss its damaging consequences.

7. Enforce a zero-tolerance policy on swearing. Prohibit vulgar and obscene language in the classroom, on school grounds, and at school-sponsored activities.

8. Don’t allow unkindness of any kind in your classroom; no “put-downs.”

9. Help students to see that the “good” in others is more than academic success.

10. Use morning announcements, school/classroom bulletin boards, and/or the school newsletter to highlight various accomplishments - particularly character oriented ones - of students and faculty members.

11. When conflicts arise, teach about self-discipline, respect, integrity and the responsibility to discreetly inform appropriate adults.

12. Have students take turns caring for class pets during the week, on weekends, over holidays and vacations. Discuss and demonstrate the responsibility to care for living creatures.

13. Invite student volunteers to clean up the neighborhood or community.

14. Create a code of behavior for your classroom/school to which students and teachers agree.

15. Add character traits to your parent/student/school compact.
16. Share a personal hero and tell the students why he/she is your hero.

17. Regularly weave character into your discussion of literature, history and other subjects, asking “What’s the right thing to do?” and follow up with a discussion.

18. Lead by example. Address students respectfully; clean the chalkboard for the next teacher; pick up litter on the playground or in hallways; admit when you have made a mistake.

19. Treat ethical issues like other intellectual issues – get the facts, gather evidence, weigh consequences and options, make a decision and follow through.

20. Write, call or visit parents to praise their child.

21. Include the study of “local heroes” or “heroes in the news” in your classes.

22. Institute an honor system for test-taking and homework assignments.

23. Use the language of character traits: “I have a responsibility to…” “It demonstrates integrity when…” “Picking up litter shows responsibility and respect for our school…”

24. Reinforce the moral authority of parents, urging students to take their problems to their parents. Discuss why this is sometimes difficult.

25. Create a character education bulletin board or section in your classroom; post sayings on the wall that encourage good character.

26. Have students write their own sayings of significance or create a personal motto; display on walls.

27. Share stories of ethical conflict from literature, current subjects, in the news or movies/TV shows.

28. Encourage students to bring in articles about moral issues.

29. Discuss campus “issues of character” on a regular basis (vandalism, good deeds, etc.).

30. Make classroom expectations clear and hold students accountable for them.

31. Strive to be consistent in dealings with students; avoid allowing personal feelings to interfere with fairness.
32. Require students to behave responsibly and respectfully when watching athletic competitions. Model and have students identify what such behavior “looks like” and “sounds like.”

33. In physical education and sports programs, place a premium on good sportsmanship. Again, what does good sportsmanship “look like” and “sound like.”

34. Teach students about competition, helping them to see when it is valuable and when it is not.

35. Read aloud a “Two-Minute Story” every day to begin or end the school day. Choose stories that are brief, yet value-centered. (The *Chicken Soup for the Young/Teenage Soul* series is a good resource.)

36. Explain the reasons for a particular school or classroom policy, action or decision. Help students understand the “why” not just “what.”

37. Have students discuss the ethical and character-developing elements of being a good student.

38. Talk with your students about why you’re a teacher. Explain how you understand the responsibility and integrity of your profession.

39. Let students know about your community service. Tell them about volunteering in a food bank, coaching Little League or teaching at your temple or church.

40. Teach students to analyze the media critically. To what extent do their messages encourage living a life of character?

41. Bring recent high school graduates back to talk about their successful transition to college, work or the military. Ask them how good moral habits have helped in their adjustment.

42. Invite local adults to talk about how they have integrated character traits into their lives.

43. Help reinforce students’ empathy. Ask questions like, “How would you feel if no one would play with you?” or “How would you feel if someone made fun of your name because they thought it was different?” Follow up with “What choice can you make to show integrity (self-discipline, respect, responsibility, etc.)?”

44. Overtly teach respect and courtesy. Model and ask students to identify what respect “looks like” and “sounds like.”
45. Teach students how to listen attentively to other students and adults and to avoid interrupting people. Again, what does it “look like” when you are listening respectfully to someone.

46. Read and discuss biographies of accomplished individuals. In upper grades, encourage students to be discerning, seeing that an individual may have flaws but still be capable of much admirable action.

47. Assign older students to assist younger ones to show them the school.

48. Emphasize from the first day of class the importance of working hard and striving for certain standards of achievement.

49. Encourage high school students to become more active in their community by performing service or attending city council or school board meetings.

50. During elections, encourage students to research candidates’ positions.

51. Have older students sponsor a potluck supper for their parents. Have students cook, decorate, serve and clean up.

52. Work together as a class or school to clean up classrooms or school grounds on a regular basis.

53. Have the entire school identify campus beautification as an annual theme. Have each club contribute to the project.

54. Encourage high school students to volunteer for voter registration drives, and, if eligible, to vote.

55. Teach students how to write thank-you notes. As a class, write thank-you notes to people who have done thoughtful things.

56. Insist that quality matters. Homework that stimulates and challenges students should be handed in on time, neat and complete. Details do count.

57. Help students form friendships. When forming cooperative learning groups, keep in mind both the academic and emotional needs of the students. Use this as an opportunity to group students who might not otherwise interact.

58. Teach responsibility by instituting a student tutoring program.
59. Have students memorize poetry and important prose selections such as the Preamble or parts of the Gettysburg Address. In the process, make sure they understand the ideas that make these works worthy of committing to memory.

60. In science, address when appropriate the ethical considerations of that field of study.

61. In math classes, specifically address traits such as perseverance, hard work, self-discipline and responsibility required to be successful math students.

62. In social studies, continuously examine the responsibilities of the citizen. Help students identify what they can do right now to build the habits of responsible citizenship.

63. Follow through. Do what you say you will do. For example, administer tests when they are scheduled with thorough preparation and adequate notice; don’t cancel at the last minute after students have prepared.

64. Model integrity; let students observe that you live the expectations of hard work, responsibility, gratitude and perseverance that you place upon them.

65. Teach justice and compassion by helping students separate the doer from the deed.

66. Ensure students have a firm understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and of the school’s policy against it. More importantly, help them to understand why it is wrong and teach them how to use an author’s work as a reference, a direct quote or paraphrase.

67. As a staff, agree schoolwide on format and criteria for research papers, footnotes and bibliography. Teach students how to use footnotes and bibliography as a regular part of any research assignment in any subject area.

68. Never underestimate the power of stories to build a child’s moral imagination. Read aloud daily.

69. Stand up for the “underdog” when he or she is being treated unfairly. Use this as a teaching moment.

70. Start or expand a class or school recycling program. Talk about the general principles of carefully using what you have and not wasting as part of our obligation as citizens of the world and caretakers of the environment.

71. Use programs already in place such as HLAY2000, DARE, Impact or the National Honor Society, to reinforce character traits.

72. Have students create songs, acrostic poems or skits illustrating character traits. Let them perform at monthly assemblies.
73. Emphasize the significance of school traditions and rituals. Discuss the importance of recognizing certain customs as a community.

74. Start a pen pal exchange between your students and students from another school in Napa. Share ideas about what your class is doing to develop character.

75. When making school policy, allow student participation and responsibility in some decisions.

76. Collect interesting thought-provoking quotes worthy of reflection, discussion and writing such as, “You cannot embrace victory unless you have tasted defeat” (Michael Jordan) or “The truth never becomes clear as long as we assume that each one of us, individually, is the center of the universe,” (Thomas Merton). Ask students to do the same.

77. Identify excellent literature selections for your grade level that address specific character traits; share ideas regularly at staff/grade level meetings.

78. Develop a school motto.

79. Institute a “Character Honor Roll.”

80. Include discussions of the school’s “moral climate” and the desired goals for the moral life of the school at staff meetings.

81. Create a bulletin board where teachers and administrators can share their own “100 Ways to Promote Character Education.”

82. Include references to the character traits in school newsletters.

83. Create/revise school brochure to include a reference to “Building Good Citizenship through Character Education.”

84. Include anecdotes of commendable student behavior in the school newsletter.

85. Develop with students a “School Code of Ethics” that reflects the character traits. Distribute copies to all school members for display.

86. Publicly recognize the work and achievements of the school’s “unsung heroes” - custodians, maintenance workers, secretaries, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and volunteers - and connect to character traits.

87. Seek ways to involve local businesses in the life of the school, perhaps through mentoring opportunities or partnerships with student groups.
88. Establish a Newcomers’ Club for newly hired personnel and entering students.

89. Have athletes and coaches collaborate to develop a code of ethics for athletics.

90. Communicate with parents appropriate ways they can help their children develop responsibility with their schoolwork.

91. Encourage teachers to send out monthly newsletters to parents that include references to ongoing character development in the classroom.

92. Have students write in their journals about character traits.

93. Designate a section in the school library that contains books with stories depicting respect, responsibility, honesty, integrity, self-worth and self-discipline and other moral lessons.

94. Add books on character and moral development to your parent resource center.

95. Make the discussion of moral development and current school projects a regular part of parent meetings.

96. Label the behavior of students using the vocabulary of character development: “You demonstrated integrity when you turned in the money you found on the playground.” Teach students to use this language.

97. Include character traits on spelling lists.

98. Involve the entire school community (advisors, counselors, yard duty, bus drivers, volunteers, custodians) in reinforcing character traits and using the vocabulary.

99. Use Newspapers in Education as a resource to discuss issues of character.

100. Remind students – and yourself – that building good citizenship through character education is not an easy or one-time project. Fashioning our character is the work of a lifetime.

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