

Exposing Youth and Adults to Character Messages Is Always a Good Thing

Mt. Pleasant and other communities across the nation just finished celebrating National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week, and I know it made a difference. How do I know? Numerous studies have shown that people who hear information 6 times will have a greater than 90% chance of retaining it after 90 days. Therefore, celebrating CC! Week and making intentional references about positive character attributes and ethical decision-making can pay great dividends.

As all of us know, the most important place for character education is in the home. It's where kids spend the bulk of their time. Through books that are read, what's talked about over dinner, what's viewed on tv, how conflict is dealt with, how chores are assigned, the consequences for making mistakes, and so on, there is a smorgasbord of opportunities for lessons in character.

Schools offer a wide range of character building opportunities as well. Whether the messages are incorporated into lesson plans, posted on bulletin boards or shared over the PA system, students are watching, listening and learning. Teacher workloads and efforts are at a maximum, yet they still find ways to incorporate character in meaningful ways - reading assignments, reflecting on inequities in our country's history, spelling and vocabulary, math lessons dealing with money, or even writing about ethical concepts in Isabella County's annual CHARACTER COUNTS! Essay Contest are just a few examples. We also see efforts for enhanced sportsmanship by players and fans.

Some schools are able to go a little further by sponsoring school assemblies, like Beal City did in September. Their elementary and junior high as well as St. Joseph the Worker had a group (Primary Focus) perform three musical assemblies for their students. Elementary principal Diane Salterelli said that the group "was able to deliver their message about character counts to all ages of students...They kept all students engaged in their performance." Members of the cast even made classroom visits to promote character and ethical decision-making. I can only image how powerful it was for these students to view the performance and have personal interaction with the performers. This kind of reinforcement by the group as well as teachers and other school staff when the day was over really sets a positive tone.

The broader community also plays an integral part in supporting character education efforts. Local restaurants display table tents about CHARACTER COUNTS!, banks and businesses place messages about character on their signs and marques, public officials and other community leaders demonstrate respect by how they interact with others, and community members who display responsibility in carrying out personal and civic duties. Isabella County is fortunate to have so many valuable non-profit organizations that work to meet community needs. Thankfully, many people donate time and money to these organizations because without this kind of support, thousands of people in our county would go without basic needs being met.

All community members benefit when those around us demonstrate trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. Whether we realize it or not, we also set the character climate for all of the interrelated parts of our community. We are constantly role modeling the way through being responsible employees, active and engaged community members, expecting honesty and fairness by those around us and acting accordingly ourselves. Edward Allen Hale once said "It is true that I am only one. But I am one. And the fact that I cannot do everything will not prevent me from doing what I can." Whether our energies are directed toward our family, place of employment, our schools, city, county or state, what we do makes a difference in our own development and the development of those around us.