



Milwaukee Biz Blog: You are a model, for good or ill

How Wisconsin schools are the best examples

by [Richard Pieper](#) | June 21, 2016, 10:35 AM

We all agree modeling bad behavior is, unfortunately, effective. Parents and grandparents worry constantly about what their children see and experience. Fortunately the converse is true: modeling good behavior is also effective and everyone in our society stands to benefit.

Because the drumbeat of troubled kids and broken schools gets monotonous, here are three schools in Wisconsin recognized nationally for modeling good behavior. The result is a school environment where everyone cares for each other, teachers teach, students learn, and relieved parents/grandparents pitch in. They are insuring a world we want to live in.

Through the efforts of Wisconsin Character Education Partnerships (WCEP) and the national organization **Character.org** (<http://character.org/>), our state has emerged as a model of character development. State and national recognition has followed.

Each spring schools assess what they have accomplished for the year. Across the country, schools committed to developing academics and character submit plans and self-assessments to WCEP. WCEP is an all-volunteer organization in Wisconsin encouraging character development in elementary to secondary schools. It adheres to the national Character.org's Eleven Principles, broad tenets for creating a caring society, respecting others, and leading a virtuous life. Without these, growing into a productive, balanced, successful life is difficult.

Schools involved with character education create their own tailored plans. These are not one day affairs or a single assembly discussing character. These schools embed the concept throughout. They want the entire community involved in behaving well and fashioning a healthy lifestyle. Not to sound too lofty here (although, we ask why not), but we want nothing less than to make the world a better, kinder place.

A school submits its plans and results first to a state panel; if the effort is excellent quality, the school is designated a State School of Character (SSOC). Next, the school seeks to be evaluated at the national level. If successful there, it is designated a National School of Character (NSOC). For the academic year 2015-16, three Wisconsin schools achieved this lofty level. They are: Brown Deer Middle High School in Brown Deer, Meyer Middle School in River Falls, and Pleasant Prairie Elementary School in Pleasant Prairie.

This year, a total of 68 schools and 4 districts from 15 states spanning CA to NJ, were selected to receive the NSOC designation. A complete list can be seen on the national website www.character.org (<http://character.org/>).

Awards were announced by national President/CEO Becky Sipos on May 10, 2016, after the SSOC designations were announced. "These character initiatives create conditions for learning where students are thriving and growing into ethical members of our society. They are developing lifelong skillsets they will leverage well into their adult lives."

The entire state should laud local efforts. The SSOC awards ceremony and celebration will be held on June 15 at Alverno College. The NSOC awards will be October 15 in Washington D.C.

Achieving national recognition is difficult, but schools in the initial stages of striving to attain that goal are acknowledged. This year Greenwood Elementary in River Falls will receive an Honorable Mention SSOC; Westlawn Elementary School in Cedarburg is an Emerging SSOC. Additional information can be read at the Wisconsin website [www.wcharacter.org](http://wcharacter.org) (<http://wcharacter.org/>).

Once a Wisconsin school opts to incorporate character development throughout the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, teachers, administrators or both attend classes one day a month for the academic year in the Leadership Advancing Character & Culture in Schools (LACCS) program housed at Alverno College. Educators share best practices, complete exercises and hear guest lecturers provide insights

about incorporating character education.

My conclusion: our children will follow good behavior more closely than bad. I am always encouraged by the annual awards. Our state and country are not going to the dogs, quite the contrary. The challenge for every adult is to accept the responsibility of being a shining example to all children. Someday those children will be adults.

Richard R. Pieper Sr. is the non-executive chairman of Milwaukee-based PPC Partners, Inc.

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