



WASDA NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2011

Welcome to WASDA's September edition of our online Newsletter! Here we go! It is Fall—a time of the year that has the WASDA staff hopping from one event to the next starting with the new Fall Superintendents Conference WASDA will be presenting with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Madison, September 14-16, at the Madison Concourse Hotel. We are looking forward to seeing many of you at this event. A special thank you to WASDA Business Partner, *Robert W. Baird Co., Inc.*, for sponsoring the Wednesday evening reception.

WASDA would also like to remind our members that we will once again be offering graduate credit through Viterbo University at the Fall Superintendents Conference and for many of our upcoming events.

One credit will be awarded for attendance at the following WASDA events:

- Fall Superintendents Conference
- Jt. WASB/WASDA/WASBO Convention
- WASDA Annual Educational Conference
- WASDA Summer Legal Seminar

We are pleased to be able to offer our members this convenient service to comply with PI 34.

We are looking forward to welcoming many of you to an Open House in the WASDA offices to celebrate the new state-of-the-art Wisconsin School Leadership Center on Thursday evening, September 15.

It's going to be another busy year! We look forward to seeing you at many of our upcoming events.

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WISCONSIN CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

A rural school district in southeastern Wisconsin— a high performing elementary school in a wealthy suburb – and a charter school located in one of Milwaukee’s most disadvantage neighborhoods. The question is, what do these schools have in common that gave them state and national recognition for what they are doing? The answer: they have all spent considerable effort promoting and developing character education as core to their mission in educating students. Jefferson School District, Stormonth Elementary School in Fox Point-Bayside, and Milwaukee College Preparatory School all received the State Schools of Character Awards. Jefferson and Milwaukee College Prep School also received the National Schools of Character Award in 2010 and 2009, respectively. These schools are exemplars in the importance of educating the child beyond the 3 R’s. They are educating children well in both academics and ethics.

All schools in Wisconsin face considerable challenges. At this juncture in education in the state, with shrinking dollars, increasing class sizes and a changes in long-standing policies, everything that is done must be integral to improving learning outcomes for students. This is not new; over the past decade schools have spent considerable time and incorporated many strategies to improve test scores albeit to questionable gain. Leading educators are now realizing that academic achievement must be balanced with the acquisition of social emotional skills for students to be engaged and productive. Character education provides a foundation of performance and ethical values for the individual and the entire organization. This impacts on behavior and social/emotional skills. If implemented in a holistic way, character education results in a school climate that fosters learning.

A statewide coalition of education, business and community leaders are working to support the teaching of character education in our schools. The Wisconsin Character Education Partnership (WCEP) was formed by current and former district administrators, principals, school board members, community and business leaders in the state. This non-partisan grassroots effort exists to advocate for and support the intentional teaching of character in all Wisconsin K-12 schools. The vision of WCEP is for all Wisconsin students to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and dispositions of core universal values through a self-sustaining culture. Our emphasis for the past five years has been to do this by: infusing character education with resources already in place, promoting and increasing training opportunities for teachers and principals in character education and leadership, and providing resources to address these goals. In addition, WCEP is establishing a platform to further communication and collaboration among educators, parents, community leaders and other interested parties/organizations.

WCEP has focused on three strategic areas: recognizing schools as models for best practices, training/staff development in effective character education, and the development of principals in their capacity as school leaders to create positive school cultures.

WCEP sponsors the State Schools of Character Award program in partnership with the Character Education Partnership (CEP). CEP is a national non-partisan advocacy group that is grounded in research based character education principals. The State School of Character Award program recognizes schools that integrate character education systemically in their schools. In addition, WCEP sponsors a Promising Practice Award program, which recognizes schools for an initiative/program that exemplifies a best practice in character education. Over the past five years, over 30 schools in the state have received awards. They have received scholarships to attend the statewide character education conference hosted by Jefferson School District, along with additional staff development for school teams (teachers and leaders) in effective character education. Our effort has been to find out what schools are doing, recognize them for doing it well, and providing additional staff development to enhance their efforts.

WCEP provides support and training, in partnership with CEP, on effective character education. This training, focused on the empirical based Eleven Principles developed by CEP, provides a framework for developing an effective character education program. This framework includes building a caring school community, giving students the competencies in core values/social emotional skills and the opportunity for moral action, a strong and engaging academic curriculum, promoting shared leadership among staff, and involving families and community members as partners. WCEP has provided this training to educators throughout the state over the past several years.

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WISCONSIN CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP CONTINUED:

School leadership is essential in working toward a school of character as the school leader is key in setting school priorities and culture/climate. Given that, WCEP sought and partnered with Alverno College in setting up the Leadership Academy in Character Education (LACE). This academy provides school leaders with the knowledge, resources and skills to implement comprehensive character education in their schools. Modeled after the University of Missouri- St. Louis program developed by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz (former professor at Marquette University), the academy meets monthly and brings in nationally recognized educators in the field, such as Dr. Thomas Lickona. WCEP has been able to provide scholarships for the first cohort that graduated in December 2010. LACE is offered through the Alverno College Institute for Educational Outreach under the direction of Mary Diez, Ph.D.

As administrators, it is understandable that your initial response to this effort to spend time on character education might be that there is no time and there certainly are not enough resources now nor in the foreseeable future to start another initiative that does not improve district test scores, assist schools in the movement toward common standards or enhance the acquisition of and integration of technology. However, as you establish priorities and look for ways to do more with less, to respond to education trends and mandates, such as Response to Intervention, focusing on building capacity is of critical importance. One of the goals of system reform is improving organizational capacity- building a comprehensive system of support for academic achievement and behavioral expectations- character education fits in as a key lever. Character education is important from a civics/citizen point of view, but it is also valuable as a support for students to develop into healthy, engaged young people.

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