

# EDUCATION MATTERS

A publication of the Association of American Educators Foundation

RESPONSIBILITY HONESTY FAIRNESS  
RESPECT KINDNESS DISCERNMENT



## Character Education

Caralee J. Adams

Many school administrators are realizing character education, once thought of as an intrusion on the school day, can actually help students perform better.

A growing body of research supports its effectiveness, and educators say they've seen a difference in students when positive value lessons become part of the school's culture.

"Good character education is good education," said Marvin Berkowitz, a professor of character education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

"If kids come to schools where they feel valued, safe, and feel teachers have their best interests at heart, . . . they commit themselves," continued Marvin Berkowitz. "They

work harder, there are fewer distractions, and kids are more motivated. Of course they learn more."

Character education often entails a school embracing a set of values that are taught in regular advisory sessions or integrated into classroom lessons or both. Supporters say character education is simply about how people treat each other, and the ideas are fairly universal. The primary traits that schools promote, according to Mr. Berkowitz, are respect, responsibility, caring, fairness, and honesty. It is seen more in elementary schools, sometimes getting squeezed out at the secondary level to make room for more intense academics. But experts say resistance is lessening in some places.

Yet some challenge the notion of the public schools, rather than families, being charged with teaching values. They are concerned about whose values will be taught. Others, however, maintain that schools and families should share the job of nurturing character.



## Signs of a Renaissance

While many think of character education as a curriculum, the values permeate all interactions in schools where it is effective.

“It’s hard to call it a program because it’s really embedded in everything we do,” Julie Williams, the principal of Russell Middle School in Colorado Springs, Colorado, says of her school’s emphasis on what it calls the “rocks” values—respect, ownership, choices, knowledge, and safety. “We don’t stop the day to talk about character education. We do it every day, in every class. It’s how our family works.”



Since implementing character education at Russell eight years ago, discipline referrals have fallen, test scores have increased, and the school has been recognized nationally.

The popularity of character education ebbs and flows in reaction to issues of accountability, bullying, and school violence. Some say it is gaining momentum as part of the comprehensive whole-school reform movement.

Concern over sexting, bullying, and the need to get students college ready are also factors for the increased interest, according to Scott Seider, an assistant professor of education at Boston University and the author of last year’s *Character Compass: How Powerful School Culture Can Point Students Toward Success*.

Russ Sojourner, the director of leadership development for the Character Education Partnership, a Washington-based advocacy organization, and a former principal, senses the pendulum is swinging back in favor of character education, fueled in part by the recent killings of twenty-six students and adults in Newtown, Connecticut.

In the wake of that massacre, the U.S. Department of Education is considering ways to improve school culture and invest more in character education, according to Mark Hyatt, the president and chief executive officer of the Partnership.

“I do believe there is a renaissance of late,” Mr. Sojourner said. “School life can be so much better than it is. Teachers and kids can be happier,” he said. “Disrespectful behavior can be reduced, and all the disastrous things from chronic bullying can be so reduced.”

Some advocates also point to the Common Core State Standards as a selling point for character education because the standards will require students to be more diligent in their studies.

“We do have data that show attendance goes up, discipline problems go down, achievement rises,” said Mr. Hyatt.

Research on the topic is mounting. Mr. Berkowitz and Melinda Bier, also a University of Missouri research scientist, identified sixty-nine studies of thirty-three different character education programs that had scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness in enhancing the academic goals of schools. A 2011 meta-analysis of school-based social and emotional learning programs published in *Child Development* found significant improvements in academic achievement, behavior, and attitudes compared with control groups.

Results of a 2010 study commis-

sioned by the U.S. Department of Education, however, did not find that social- and character-development programs improved student outcomes or teachers’ perceptions of school climate. Mr. Berkowitz, among others, cites weaknesses in that research.

## Building on Values

Independent and charter schools tended to be the early adopters of character education, largely because they have a nimbleness to experiment with new initiatives that regular public schools often lack.

The Democracy Prep public schools in New York City are among them. Lessons in character begin in kindergarten and evolve through 12th grade.

“Before you get to academics, college-going, and rigorous courses, you have to build a school culture,” said Seth Andrew, the network’s founder and school superintendent. Children start with learning to dream (discipline, responsibility, enthusiasm, accountability, and maturity.)

By high school, it becomes dream added.

The first two weeks of school every fall are dedicated entirely to values and development. Then small, weekly homeroom sessions help build long-term relationships between teachers and students around school values.

For each value, students learn concrete skills with the hope that, over time, they will develop the disposition to demonstrate them when no one is looking or rewarding them. The emphasis switches from extrinsic rewards to more intrinsic ones as the students mature, Mr. Andrew said.

Democracy Prep also requires that students demonstrate mastery of thirteen civic values, including

publishing a piece of work, fund-raising for a cause, and canvassing the neighborhood before an election.

Great Hearts Academies, made up of fifteen nonprofit charter schools in Arizona, is all about a classical liberal arts education where virtue is the aim, said Daniel Scroggin, the founder and chief executive officer. Character education is woven into all aspects of the schools, from hiring teachers who embrace its

charter network's values, to asking students to set their own consequences for discipline.

Honesty, kindness, friendship, perseverance, justice, and citizenship are pillars in the K-5 schools, while truth, beauty, and goodness are the focus at the 6-12 level.

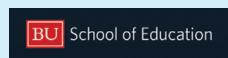
Mr. Scroggin said the pillars lay a solid moral foundation. "If just grit and perseverance are key moral attributes that you see, the question

is grit and perseverance for what—to make money, to rule the world?" he said. "Ultimately, it's about seeking how we can be truthful and good. . . . We want students to have a deep and enduring sense of care for others." ■

This article originally appeared in a February edition of *Education Week*.

**Caralee J. Adams** is a contributing writer for *Education Week* specializing in higher education. She is also author of the blog *College Bound*.

Have you pondered incorporating character education into your curriculum? To start your own character education research, check out these resources on the AAE website:



**Boston University**

**School of Education, Center for Character and Social Responsibility**

is a resource for administrators, teachers, and parents seeking to fulfill their responsibilities as moral educators. The Center publishes books on character education topics and a quarterly newsletter, *Character*.

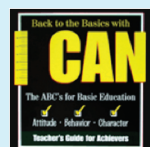
▶▶▶ [www.bu.edu/ccsr](http://www.bu.edu/ccsr)



**"Values In Action"**

is a national award-winning school-

wide comprehensive character education program with eighteen years of research and successful implementation (K-12). ▶▶▶ [www.ethicsusa.com](http://www.ethicsusa.com)



**Jefferson Center for Character Education**

has two programs: S.T.A.R. (Success Through Accepting Responsibility) (K-6) and How To Be Successful (7-9). Both use the STAR process (Stop, Think, Act, Review) as a conflict resolution and decision-making process.

▶▶▶ [www.jeffersoncenter.org](http://www.jeffersoncenter.org)



**WiseSkills K-12 Character Education Program** is a

teacher-friendly and interdisciplinary

way to build the character of young people. Innovative and exciting activities are conveniently organized around monthly Character Themes, and include: Character Education, Conflict Resolution, Curriculum Integration, Career Awareness, Service-Learning, and Parent/Community Involvement.

▶▶▶ [www.wiseskills.com](http://www.wiseskills.com)



**I CAN Character Curriculum:** Thousands of educators, students, and parents across America

are excited about Zig Ziglar's I CAN Character Curriculum. Through I CAN, they are learning not only the ABCs of education but also, more importantly, the ABCs of life: Attitude, Behavior, and Character. Available in two complete curriculums: one for kindergarten through 5th grade, and a second for 6th grade and up. ▶▶▶ [www.yesican.net](http://www.yesican.net)



**Lessons in Character**

includes a wonderful multicultural literature collection (ten lap books) and

audio cassettes, a thorough teacher's management guide, student activity books, and a poster set. Step-by-step guidelines for using the components are given for the twenty-four lessons at each grade level. Reading, reflecting, writing, and developing life skills are all prominently featured, following a thematic approach of promoting the character traits of Trustworthiness, Respect for Others, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship.

▶▶▶ [www.youngpeoplespress.com](http://www.youngpeoplespress.com)



**STARS (Students Taking a Right Stand)** helps stu-

dents in grades 6-12 refrain from the use of alcohol and other drugs, and

learn positive living skills through programs of positive peer pressure and caring confrontation. The Victor Team program is designed to reach children early in their development (K-6), and to teach them important skills to prevent drug abuse and other unhealthy behaviors.

▶▶▶ [www.cyi-stars.org](http://www.cyi-stars.org)

# Top Ten Teacher Discounts

## 1. The Container Store

The organizational aficionados at The Container Store provide a 15 percent discount on all items through the Organized Teacher Program. Register online for a free discount card to use for in-store and online purchases. If you visit a store, be sure to have your school ID.

## 2. Michael's

Receive 15 percent off your entire purchase every day. See a store associate for details as some exclusions may apply.

## 3. Apple Store

The House of Jobs is surprisingly generous to teachers, offering 5 percent off all in-store purchases with proof of employment as an educator. This includes librarians, home schoolers, and university profs.

## 4. Cell Phone Companies (Verizon, AT&T, Sprint)

This discount is a tad tricky to redeem but can save loads on a personal cell phone bill, sometimes up to 20 percent a month. Visit your provider's business or discount portal and input your .edu e-mail address to check if your institution is registered. Example: Search "Verizon business discount" in a search engine and click on the first result to register or check an existing discount.

## 5. Software Express

The online outlet Software Express grants discounts of up to 75 percent on a host of programs, including Adobe, McAfee, and Symantec. Submit copies of your valid school ID and state driver's license to Customer Service before completing your order.

## 6. Marriott Hotels

Marriott grants teachers a discount at a slew of hotels across the nation. Whether you book online or in-person, show your school ID at check-in to receive the special rate. Rules on this discount are a bit vague—they mention government employees, which would imply only public school employees—but most hotel employees don't bite. Feel free to ask.

## 7. Regal Cinemas

Regal Cinemas regularly have discount tickets for teachers (and students), good for all show times. Call or visit beforehand, as not every location honors the discount or offers the same price. (Like there's time for a film with all those papers piling up, anyway. Guess that's why summer exists.)

## 8. National Park Service

Show a valid school ID at a slew of National Park Service visitor centers across the nation and receive 15 percent off any purchase. The discount doesn't apply to park entry fees, camping fees, or Smoky the Bear petting zoo fees.

## 9. Dell

Buy direct from the Dell online store and get 2 to 4 percent off the final price of any desktop or laptop, as well as software and peripherals. Call Customer Service at 1-800-999-3355 before paying to apply the discount.

## 10. Barnes & Noble

Through the B&N Educator Program, teachers can save 20 percent off the publisher's list price on purchases for classroom use. During Educator Appreciation Days, receive discounts up to 25 percent. ■





# Transforming Education in the Digital Age

**T**echnology is fundamental to our global progress. The forward charge of digital resources has forever altered how we communicate with each other and how we conduct our daily lives. Students are tethered to their iPads, smartphones, and laptops, while chalkboards, textbooks, and overhead projectors have become relics of the past. As educators, we must work to ensure that our students are prepared for our current digital world and, more importantly, the days yet to come.

## The Impact of Technology

Forward-thinking educators pride themselves on predicting the changes, challenges, and achievements possible for their students. Who in the field of education a generation ago could have predicted how integral computers would be to our students' lives? It's estimated that 90 percent of Americans have some kind of computerized

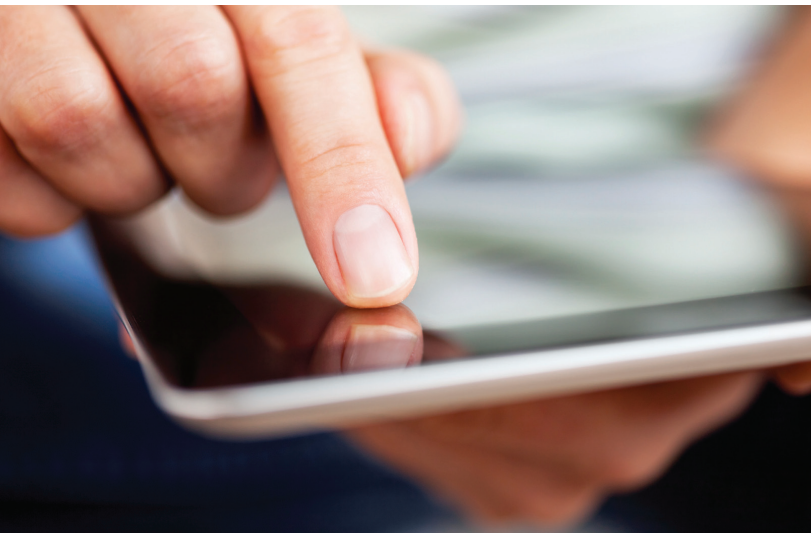
gadget, including cell phones and tablet computers. Traditional classroom resources are quickly being replaced by their digital counterparts, but our goals as educators are still based on strategies that, in many cases, do not incorporate the advantages of technology.

It might sound cliché, but if we want to solve the world's toughest challenges and build a better future, we need an incredibly effective and aware educational system. If we educate future generations to be critical thinkers, skilled craftspeople, and responsible world citizens, then we have truly succeeded as educators. The way to reach those goals in today's society is through recognizing the advantages of technology and teaching students how to use it effectively.

## Benefits for Our Students

In the digital age, our students are experiencing a revolution in how they are presented with—and study—new

“Most importantly, educators need to have an open mind about the opportunities technology has to offer.”



information. For young people, technology is only going to become more entrenched in their everyday lives.

Aside from the obvious benefit of not hauling a stack of books around, mobile- and Internet-based technology brings educational content to life. The impressive body of knowledge in every field of study can be shared between communities of individuals who continually challenge themselves to delve deeper into a subject. Educators and students can benefit from applications that individualize our schedules, give us suggestions, remind us to practice, and assess our strengths and weaknesses.

In addition, intuitive technologies can help facilitate connections between subject areas that we might not have identified on our own. Students can have a truly interactive experience with today's digital learning resources. Textbooks don't talk back. As students, we didn't receive feedback from these books, and, as teachers, we see how difficult it is to spark interest and inspiration with such limited tools. In contrast, the promise of digital content is that it evolves right alongside its users. Students now have the ability to view videos of historical events or listen to the audio of landmark speeches if they are embedded into digital texts. The topic of study comes to life through multiple dimensions.

### Embracing Tomorrow

Many educators already incorporate revolutionary modes of teaching on a daily basis. Innovations like Jog

the Web, Skype in the Classroom, Promethean Planet, and the Learning Network provide quick and reliable means to connect with students and other professionals.

Key learning experiences can be supplemented and enriched by sharing ideas, assessment tools, and primary resources with a community of learners. By incorporating tools of technology into the classroom, educators can integrate the information they present with the way students interact with information outside the classroom. We should not be afraid to try different approaches to find the optimum student response to new material. As students, didn't we search for those genuinely exciting and insightful moments that transported us into our studies?

Experimentation can help educators determine which lesson plans, lectures, or even assessments could benefit from digital resources. Most importantly, educators need to have an open mind about the opportunities technology has to offer. By embracing this progression in education and its ability to bring a more enriching and individualized experience to our students, we are paving the path for their future success in the Digital Age. ■



**Ujjwal Gupta** is the cofounder of BenchPrep, a cross-device learning platform that allows students to buy educational and test prep content from leading publishers and study across all devices. It allows students to practice tests, get real-time scores, compete, and chat with experts.

# AAE Member Ignites a Love for Science

California member Mike Cerrillo answers questions about his unique methods of teaching science.

## What lesson were you teaching in the picture?

The lesson in the picture was about chemical reactions. The picture is a demonstration activity that I did for my chemistry students. Every Friday I do fun demos that pertain to the chemistry topic we will learn about.

## How does this fit into your lesson plan?

This demo fits nicely when we are studying elements, compounds, mixtures, chemical change, word equations, and chemical quantities.

I use this demo when I teach a lesson on “Chemical Reactions.” This combustion reaction between propane ( $C_3H_8$ ) and oxygen ( $O_2$ ) produces new chemicals, carbon dioxide ( $CO_2$ ) and water ( $H_2O$ ). The students will recall this type of reaction as a chemical change (as opposed to a physical change). The students then must interpret the reaction in terms of words, molecular models, and perform an atom inventory. The students will then apply the principle of conservation of mass by balancing the equation. This reaction also produces thermal energy.

As the semester continues, I refer back to this demo when teaching chemical quantities. The students use the chemical equation to describe the amount of moles of reactants needed to produce a specific amount of product.

## How did students react?

The students love this activity. It is a way to teach rigorous material while keeping them engaged. The students also find the material relevant since most know that propane is used for barbecuing and helps fuel some vehicles. This activity also helps build teacher/student relationships by allowing some students to light my hands on fire. I first demo this activity by taking a handful of gas-filled bubbles and tossing it into the air. As soon as the bubbles begin to float upward, I have a student light the bubbles in the air with a match. This produces a nice floating fireball. The students look up toward the ceiling in awe. Then, I grab a handful of bubbles and allow a student to light the bubbles in my hands on fire, which I



usually get many who want to volunteer.

Doing this activity allows for a visual demonstration, one that is uniquely engaging, to show students an example of chemical reactions. Since this isn't your typical lesson, it helps engage the students in learning and the excitement helps to keep students focused.

## Do you often incorporate this type of lesson into your classroom?

Yes! Every Friday I incorporate a fun and engaging chemical reaction to show the students that chemistry is fun, interesting, and relevant. ■

## AAE Wants to Recognize YOU!

Have you reached a milestone in your teaching career, recently implemented a new program, or received your Doctorate degree? AAE wants to know!

Please email [awards@aaeteachers.org](mailto:awards@aaeteachers.org) to be recognized in upcoming editions of *Education Matters*.



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# Professional Development Matters

## PDMATTERS

**Members:** Don't forget to check your inbox for AAE's new publication, *PD Matters*! This professional development-focused publication features both original AAE content and a compilation of the latest news and resources from handpicked outlets.

### NEW RESOURCE: AAE Professional Development Calendar

Don't miss out on a great webinar or upcoming conference! AAE Members can now view our new professional development calendar online. If you know of something that we should add to our calendar, please email us ([Melissa@aaeteachers.org](mailto:Melissa@aaeteachers.org)) so that we can share with the rest of our members. Visit [aaeteachers.org/PDcalendar](http://aaeteachers.org/PDcalendar)

