

Ministry of Education

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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of
School Authorities
Director of the Provincial Schools Branch
Supervisory Officer of Centre Jules-Leger

FROM: Avis E. Glaze
Ontario's Education Commissioner &
Senior Advisor to the Minister of Education

DATE: April 11, 2008

SUBJECT: **Update: The Character Development Initiative,
K-12**

The Character Development Initiative continues to be a key priority of the Ontario government. Over the past few years, the Ministry of Education has introduced a series of initiatives designed to enhance education for Ontario students by setting high levels for student achievement, closing the achievement gap and building increased confidence in publicly funded education. All of these initiatives are designed to help provide the best possible education for our students – one that is characterized by both excellence and equity.

We believe that a quality education is holistic in nature. Our approach combines a strong academic program with a focus on character, equity, citizenship development and respect for diversity. Through character development, schools address another important aspect of education – one that contributes significantly to student success. To this end, all publicly-funded school boards in Ontario are expected to implement a character development program during the 2007-08 school year, or build upon their current character development initiatives.

The Character Development Initiative was launched by the Premier of Ontario, The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, at a Provincial Symposium in October 2006. A draft framework document entitled *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K – 12*, was released in November 2006. This document stated the expectation that, “All publicly funded boards in Ontario will implement the character development initiative during the 2007-08 school year”.

It also established the following expectations for school boards to guide their implementation plans and processes, stating that:

School boards will:

- collaborate with their Provincial Character Development Resource Team to develop the processes and practices necessary for successful implementation
- establish a collaborative board-based process for engaging students, staff, parents and school councils, as well as a diverse cross-section of business and community representatives, in the development, implementation and review of their initiative, with local trustees playing a key role
- ensure that students play a key role at all stages of the development of this initiative
- provide the knowledge, skills and leadership development required for students to take on their expanded roles effectively
- promote the character attributes agreed upon by the community in their workplace practices and interactions
- establish a culture of respect for diversity through policies, processes, practices, and interactions
- ensure that their character development initiative is aligned with and becomes an Integral part of Board and School Improvement Plans
- provide a key role for school councils to play in reaching out to and engaging community members in this initiative
- expand access to, and opportunities for, student engagement in their learning environments
- expand access to, and opportunities for, civic engagement and citizenship development of all students
- partner with local organizations to provide programs which further engage students in the community.

The document also provided the framework for the twenty-four sessions held across the province between February and June of 2007. These sessions were designed to:

- engage parents, community and business organizations and the education sector in sharing responsibility for the initiative
- support board teams with the implementation and expansion of their character development plans and processes.

To further assist with implementation, eight Character Development Resource Teams were established in December 2006 to support all English, French and Catholic publicly-funded school boards. Team leaders are educators with experience in the implementation and extension of character development initiatives.

In January 2007 and again in January 2008, all school boards received funding to support character development implementation or build upon existing character development initiatives. This funding was allocated to support:

- Community consultation and engagement processes
- Professional development
- Student engagement

- Data collection
- Analysis of current practices

In the spring of 2007 all school boards were invited to submit successful practices in character development for publication in a Ministry document to be entitled *Character Development in Action: Successful Practices, K – 12*. This compendium of practices will be released in the near future and will provide a vision of the potential for character development in Ontario’s schools, boards and communities.

In February 2008, a monograph entitled *Understanding Effective Character Education*, prepared by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz, an internationally renowned character education researcher, was published under the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat’s *Expert Perspectives Capacity Building Series* to support reflection, dialogue and investigation into the character development initiative.

In the future, additional documents and resources, such as webcasts, may be produced to further support implementation. We encourage school boards that currently have character development programs in place to share the resource documents that they have developed.

The majority of boards have met or exceeded the 2007-08 character development implementation expectations. The following is a summary of the status of provincial implementation:

- Eleven boards have exceeded the 2007-08 expectations. These boards have implemented their character development initiatives and are providing leadership and support to other boards.
- Twenty boards have completed their community consultations and are in the process of implementing additional expectations.
- Twenty-seven boards are in the process of consulting with their communities and are in the early stages of extending their plans to meet the expectations.
- Fourteen boards are developing plans for the initial stages of the implementation. These boards are working with their Provincial Character Development Resource Teams and Ministry staff to develop their plans.

The approach we have taken in implementing this provincial initiative does not require a new curriculum. The key beliefs, principles and attributes of character development can be infused into all classrooms, curriculum areas, and extra-curricular activities. Character development will permeate the culture of a school when it is embedded into its policies, programs, practices and interactions. It will then become a way of life for all members of the school community.

In my new role as Ontario’s Education Commissioner one of my key responsibilities over the next three months is the development of an equity strategy and implementation plan for the Ministry. As we develop this plan we will be identifying the strong links between character development and the equity initiative.

We recognize that educators across the province have always been committed to the development of the character of their students. We are convinced that the character development initiative will assist us in finding common ground within our increasingly diverse school communities. We look forward to working with you in implementing this important initiative.

By June 30, 2008, boards are asked to submit the attached single page feedback form reporting on the actions that they have taken to support their 2007-08 character development initiatives. This information will be used in future planning, resource allocation and decision making.

Thank you for the pivotal role you are playing in making character development an integral part of Ontario education. If you have further questions or information to share please contact Lorraine Gruzuk at lorraine.gruzuk@ontario.ca or Jan Kielven at jan.kielven@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Avis E. Glaze

cc: EDU Deputy Minister
EDU Assistant Deputy Ministers
EDU Regional Managers
Frank Kelly, CODE
ADFO Director General
AEFO Director General
CPCO Executive Director
ETFO General Secretary
OECTA General Secretary
OPC Executive Director
OTF Secretary General
OSSTF General Secretary
Deans, Faculties of Education

Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K – 12

2007-08 Action Report

Name of School Board/School Authority:

Director of Education:

Supervisory Officer of the School Authority:

Telephone:

Email Address:

Name of Board Character Contact:

Title:

Telephone:

Email Address:

1. How have you engaged students, educators and community members in establishing or expanding your character development initiative?

2. What are your next steps in further developing or expanding your character development initiative?

Person Completing Form:

Date:

Director's Signature:

Please return to Lorraine Gruzuk, lorraine.gruzuk@ontario.ca at The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat by June 30, 2008.