



*Helping
Students
Make
Wiser
Choices*

*Within the character
of the citizen
lies the welfare
of the nation.*

Cicero

Wise Choices for a Character Education Initiative

Our daily messages provide an effective springboard for comprehensive character education. By following these recommendations, you can create a pool of support and resources that will greatly improve results.

CHOICE 1 Examine the concept and rationale of character education.

There is a growing body of evidence that illustrates that character education improves academic performance, school climate, and student discipline. These sites provide information, plus links to other sources:

- Character Education Partnership — www.character.org
- Center for the Fourth and Fifth Rs — www.cortland.edu/character
- CharacterPlus — www.characterplus.org

CHOICE 2 Form a character education team.

Form a team to take responsibility for the implementation of the Project Wisdom program. Enroll the support of teachers, students, administrators, office staff, cafeteria workers, parents, and neighborhood businesspeople. When only one person carries all the enthusiasm and responsibility for a character education initiative, the initiative may eventually suffer.

Delegate individual responsibilities for: (1) narration of the Project Wisdom messages; (2) implementation of the weekly lesson plans or journals; (3) informing staff about Project Wisdom and your character education initiative; (4) assessing effectiveness; (5) serving as a liaison between your character education team, staff, parents, and the greater community.

CHOICE 3 Create a vision statement.

Determine the outcomes you are seeking. Create a vision statement which clearly states your expectations for improved school climate, student behavior, and student learning.

CHOICE 4 Examine and discuss the values presented in Project Wisdom.

Review the "Summation of Values Presented" (see front of your Reproducibles binder, or download from your Educator Resource Site: www.projectwisdom.com/ers). Decide if these values (1) correspond to the values your community has agreed to foster or (2) represent values your community can agree to foster. Keep in mind that there are some options with the messages. You may choose not to broadcast some of the messages, while emphasizing or repeating others.

CHOICE 5 Discuss the importance of role modeling and caring, ethical leadership.

Examine the need for moral leadership—a must for the success of any character education initiative. The principal's role as a character educator is pivotal. Consider that more harm than good can occur if students are encouraged to embrace values not actively modeled by leaders on campus.

CHOICE 6 Create a caring school environment.

Examine the school's ethos, its hidden curriculum, its rituals and celebrations, its rules and procedures, its buildings and grounds. What values are being fostered by the school environment? Consider that "actions speak louder than words."



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*Sow a thought;
reap an action.
Sow an action;
reap a habit.
Sow a habit;
reap a character.
Sow a character;
reap a destiny.*

William M. Thackeray

Establish ways of creating caring relationships on campus. Consider mentoring programs, advisory groups, peer mediation, cooperative learning, class meetings, and interdisciplinary teaching teams. Ask parents and community members to come to campus and share their personal interests, skills, and life stories as they relate to the values being fostered or to the themes.

CHOICE 7 Involve the community.

Invite parents and community members to come to campus to act as guest narrators. Send students out into the community to prerecord (audiotape or videotape) community members narrating the Project Wisdom messages. Consider local celebrities, police officers, legislators, business owners, faith leaders, etc. Communicate upcoming themes to parents through your school newsletter or homework hotline so these themes can be reinforced at home. Display the themes on the marquee outside the school or in the cafeteria.

CHOICE 8 Integrate values into the classroom.

Use our Weekly Journals and lesson plans to encourage students to reflect on (1) the meaning of the values being fostered and (2) the everyday application of the values. Encourage teachers to create "teachable moments" by recording the quote of the day or the theme on chalkboards or bulletin boards. Encourage teachers to use the "virtue vocabulary" established by these themes and quotes. Examine ways to integrate the values into the academic curricula. Promote cooperative learning, conflict resolution, peer or cross-age tutoring, and class meetings.

CHOICE 9 Create service-learning projects.

Provide students with the opportunity to "put wisdom into action." Organize service-learning projects both on campus and in the community. Make these projects meaningful to students. Before their service work, have students research the particular social issue being addressed. Provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the experience and to share their reflections with others.

CHOICE 10 Establish a baseline of social behaviors and academic performance, then create a plan for assessing results.

Use the six practical assessment tools we provide to:

- Evaluate the perceptions of school personnel
- Create a "School Problem Inventory"
- Assess the effectiveness of your character education team
- Survey your students using our "Student Survey"
- Take a community-involvement inventory
- Poll parents about their opinions

CHOICE 11 Recognize and reward honorable behavior.

Establish a plan to recognize and reward students who are demonstrating the values being fostered. Use the Project Wisdom Golden Rule awards, or create your own award.