CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND CITIZENSHIP

"Character Education is woven in....not added on." ~Michele Borba, Ed.D

Incorporating character traits into the academic curriculum promotes good citizenship in the classroom, the school, the community, and the nation. Character development has generally been centered on the personal development of an individual while citizenship has traditionally been concerned with the individual's obligations relative to the community, the nation, and the world. A "good" personal character includes a commitment and responsibility to one's community and society. The 18 Core Life principles (respect, responsibility, rules, goals, volunteering, empathy, gratitude, tolerance, healthy living, moderation, honesty, wisdom, optimism, perseverance, and courtesy) are not only good personal character traits but they are also attributes and virtues of a good citizen.

> *"Building a safe, caring and inclusive school culture means teaching it minute by minute, day by day, integrating it into discipline practices and curriculum, using instructional models that provide practice in social and relationship skills and, most importantly, modelling it."* ~ Vicki Mather, Executive Director--The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities

According to the book by Alberta Education, *The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools* (2005), "The primary responsibility for character and citizenship education development lies with parents and families, but schools play an essential supportive role. Whether they are conscious of it or not, schools are involved in teaching cultural and societal mores and values, and in shaping students' ideas about what constitutes good behaviour. Schools help students to develop civic responsibility, healthy attitudes towards themselves and others, and a commitment to lifelong learning."

Character and citizenship education is not a separate subject to be taught in isolation. Rather, the principles are interwoven into "best practices" teaching. The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities programs and resources use a framework of five topics to integrate character and citizenship education across all subject areas. An abbreviated version of those topics and sample related Core Life principles follow:

• Living respectfully and building a safe and caring classroom (respect, empathy, responsibility)
• Developing self-esteem (respect, responsibility, healthy living, honesty)
• Respecting diversity and preventing prejudice (tolerance, respect, empathy)
• Managing anger and dealing with bullying and harassment (moderation, tolerance, wisdom, courtesy)
• Resolving conflicts peacefully (courtesy, respect, moderation, wisdom).

David Brooks, noted author and journalist, agrees that character development and citizenship go hand in hand. In the Rivard Report, Robert Rivard extracts the following excerpt from a presentation made by David Brooks on November 13, 2014:

> Brooks came to talk about how "one becomes a good citizen." The country's current political polarity, he said, "is fundamentally an issue of citizenship … and the older I get, the more I think it's about character and morality and virtue."

Achieving that ideal state of citizenry and leading an exemplary individual life as part of the larger community, Brooks said, requires one to elevate their "eulogy virtues" over their "resume virtues," an elegant way of saying it matters less where you went to school than how faithfully you adhere to a value-driven life. Put another way, worry less about what the prospective employer thinks of you in a job interview and think more about what people will say about you when you are gone.

In conclusion, to become a productive member of your classroom, you must first learn to become a self- reliant and socially adept individual; to become a productive member of your community, you must first learn to become a productive member of your classroom. In other words, for the students, the classroom is the community in which they must learn to adapt and succeed; and the guidance of the teacher is paramount.

Children will inevitably develop personal traits that will impact their families, friends, and communities. They collectively determine the quality of our towns, cities, states, and ultimately out nation. Why, then, is their character development of less concern to educators than academics? Is not one ultimate test of intelligence manifested in one's care for family, friends, community, and their world?

Parents, schools, communities, or nations that disregard character development of their children does so at their own peril.

> *"Character is, in the long run, the decisive factor in the life of individuals and of nations alike."* ~Theodore Roosevelt