

“But the biggest day-to-day repository of constructive power to improve schools is in the hearts, minds, and hands of the people who work in them.”

– Sirotnik 1987, p. 43

This resource was intended to provide a basic starting point for schools and jurisdictions as they build effective character and citizenship education. Most valuable in any character and citizenship initiative are the human resources present in that school and community. Every day, teachers and other school staff help students to develop into conscientious individuals and citizens. To maximize success of any initiative, this existing strength is enhanced by actively involving teachers, administrators and school staff from the beginning of the development and assessment process, and through the different stages of its implementation. As schools and jurisdictions develop more deliberate and structured character and citizenship education, they continue to build commitment and capacity through meaningful professional development and ongoing support.

Effective Professional Development

Sustainable and effective professional development efforts are linked directly to school needs. Professional development includes workshops and inservices that offer opportunities to reflect on and apply what has been learned, as well as independent and online professional development. These options are considered with a specific goal in mind and thoughtfully selected. Effective professional development for character and citizenship education initiatives recognizes the involvement of the broader community, and considers participation of parents and other community members, in addition to jurisdiction and school staff.

The Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia have developed understandings and essential questions about professional development that focus on sustainability and lead to a change in practice that is directly linked to the enhancement of student learning. Effective professional development is:

- a shared responsibility of all stakeholders
- developmental and contextual
- systemic, systematically planned and sustained



- based on collaboration, leading to deeper understanding and shared commitment
- interactive, continuous and reflective
- meaningful, purposeful and provided through a variety of learning opportunities for all stakeholders.



The following essential questions can be used to guide and support professional development plans for character and citizenship education initiatives.

- What strategies lead to change in professional practice for enhanced student learning?
- What are measures of effective implementation?
- What does shared responsibility of all stakeholders look like?
- What does meaningful and purposeful stakeholder collaboration look like?
- How are developmental and contextual variables of communities addressed in achieving effective implementation?

Building Commitment

All people don't necessarily have the same perspective on character and citizenship education. Some may feel that teaching values is not the role of the school; others may feel they already promote good character and citizenship, without an organized initiative. Building commitment means developing a shared vision and plan that school staff and key stakeholders including school councils, can develop together, believe in and support. It means giving the school community opportunity to reflect on how they embody core values, so that modelling becomes authentic for educators, students and parents.

Building Staff Capacity

Even more so than in many other types of educational initiatives, building staff capacity is an important part of character and citizenship education. One of the lessons learned from a recent Alberta Initiative for School Improvement report was that one-day workshops alone are not enough: "The general consensus was that for school improvement to succeed, the quality and nature of PD needs to change" (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement 2003, p. 10).

The following key principles assist staff in aligning professional development activities with the purpose and goals of a character and citizenship education initiative.

- A clear focus on learning and learners—Effective professional development emphasizes attainment of high learning standards by all students as a paramount goal. At the same time, teachers and other staff are also viewed as learners, and activities are targeted at improving teacher expertise.¹

- Small changes guided by a larger vision—Change begins with small, incremental steps guided by a clearly articulated statement of a preferred future that looks beyond the walls of the classroom and school.¹
- Professional development embeds teacher capacity and learning in the daily work.¹
- Individualized approaches—Professional development is timely, innovative, based in the classroom/school setting and initiated by a need established by the learning community.
- A long-term outlook—Professional development is ongoing and sustainable.
- Broad staff involvement—Learning opportunities are spread around and there is distributed teacher leadership at the grass-roots level. Involvement of principals is also key to successful implementation of projects.
- Research alignment—Activities are based on research and incorporate classroom visits to support/collect data.

Professional Learning Communities

As schools develop character and citizenship education initiatives, staff support each other in a professional learning community. Professional learning communities are created when teachers and administrators in a school or jurisdiction purposefully share learnings and then act on what they learn. This process of sharing, reflection and improvement helps staff enhance effectiveness as professionals, to benefit students. Professional learning communities may be established at many levels—the school, the jurisdiction or a consortium of jurisdictions.

See Appendix A-13 for more information on professional learning communities.

Action Research

Another way to implement professional development and support change is through the action research process. Action research provides a tool that encourages staff to continually assess the effectiveness of an initiative. As a form of professional development, action research allows staff to continuously reflect on and improve their own practice.

See Appendix D for more information on action research.

Chapter 13

The Heart of the Matter

Over the years, attitudes towards character and citizenship education have changed, but most people agree with the basic notion that children become good people and good citizens by learning from the adults and the environment around them. The most effective educators have always taken into account that the school is an important place where this learning occurs. They have made conscious efforts to give students the knowledge, skills and support they need to develop personally as well as academically. As schools and jurisdictions develop more explicit character and citizenship education, this common-sense approach remains at the heart of any initiative. By continuing to focus on student learning and growth, schools and jurisdictions create character and citizenship education that builds on existing strengths to produce an even better future for students, schools and communities.

Endnotes

1. Guskey 2000.