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November 10, 1995

Ms. R. Gaynor McCown
Special Project Analyst
Domestic Policy Council
The White House
Old Executive Office Building, Room 217
Washington DC 20500

Dear Ms. McCown:

We are working on the 1996 conference on Character Building, co-hosted by the White House, to take place on May 31 and June 1, 1996 in Washington, DC.

The conference is benefiting greatly from the verbal support of President Clinton. In addressing the 1995 meeting, the President stated that he would like to see the conference "institutionalized as an annual event that goes way beyond my administration; that encompasses Republicans and Democrats and that has nothing to do with politics."

The 1996 meeting will be different from the previous two in that the first day of the meeting will be held on the Hill, as they say in Washington, that is in Congress. This will allow participants to reach a large number of members of Congress as well as their gate keepers, the staff.

Senators Bill Bradley and Nancy Kassebaum will serve as bi-partisan congressional co-hosts.

The heart of the conference lies with the task forces. We plan to have reports from all of them well before the 1996 conference and hope to work with you on specific action conclusions. We shall circulate reports as they are realized by the task forces.

Building Character Through Sports
Chair: Jeff Blatnik, President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports
"Sports" which has essentially finished its report (we

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have only editing changes before it is published) is focusing on issues such as emphasizing sports activities that involve all students, viewing sports as an important part of the curriculum, and working with various bodies to initiate a national character building through sports campaign.

Community Schools

Chair: Gaynor McCown, Domestic Policy Council, The White House
"Community Schools" is regrouping and reworking its extensive and thoughtful draft. It is examining the issues of keeping school open well into the evening, seven days a week, year round.

Education for Human Relations, Family Life, and Intimacy

Chair: Amitai Etzioni, The Communitarian Network

"Intimacy" is reworking its draft and looking for ways to find common ground with a hot-button topic. It is focused on revamping sex-education to make it more compatible with character education and personal and social responsibilities.

Methods for Building Empathy

Chair: Diane Berreth, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

"Empathy " is reworking its draft. It is examining ways to foster the creation of caring moral communities in schools, a venture which would involve modeling caring relationships among students and teachers, teachers and teachers, and the school and home.

Methods for Building Self-Discipline

Chair: Sheldon Berman, Hudson Public Schools

"Self-Discipline" was recently re-energized and is now charging forward on its draft. It will be looking at factors both supporting and inhibiting self-discipline, as opposed to discipline, and examining several successful programs.

New Americans: The Road to Citizenship

Chair: Jennifer Howse, March of Dimes

"New Americans" presented a very thorough draft and will continue to look at programs and policies that assist immigrants as they join the community of the United States. Because Jennifer Howse has numerous new commitments, we regret to say that this task force will require a change of leadership. Ms. Howse did an outstanding job.

The Role of Civic Education

Chair: Charles Quigley, Center for Civic Education

"Civics" has completed its draft and we are beginning to discuss further steps. The paper develops the concept that "the dispositions that inform the democratic ethos are not inherited" and examines ways to revitalize civic education such as strengthening both the formal and informal curriculum.

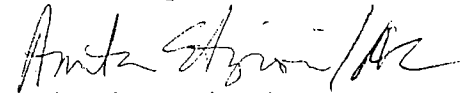
The Role of Family Involvement

Chair: Roberta Doering, National School Boards Association

"Family Involvement" is determining how to incorporate the many comments it received. The paper builds off of the foundation that "parents are a child's first teachers" and looks at family involvement at home, with the school, and the community.

We would be grateful for any suggestions on ways to improve the Character Building conference, the work of the task forces, and any other suggestions. Let's stay in touch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amitai Etzioni".

Amitai Etzioni

encl.

"It will take every parent, teacher, friend and loved one we can find to teach children... the differences between right and wrong, and to give them the kind of self-esteem they need to do well in a troubled world."

President Clinton

Character Education Conference

May 20, 1995

At the Second White House Character Education Conference, on May 19, 1995, Gaynor McCown, senior policy analyst for domestic policy at the White House, facilitated a discussion on the role of community schools in character education. This piece provides a summary of that discussion, as well as some examples of successful initiatives at community schools around the country.

Gaynor posed three questions to participants:

- What do you know to be true about community schools?
- What is necessary to create successful community schools? What can be done to improve community schools?(is this what you were trying to get at???)
- What is the role of community schools in character education?

What do you know to be true about community schools?

Because there is no one definition of community schools, participants focused on different aspects of the community schools with which they were familiar. Participants thought that community schools were founded on the premise of mutual responsibility and mutual benefit. Our children will be

Perhaps most significant was a theme that ran through the entire discussion which was

responsible for making important decisions for our country and for the world in the future. It is therefore the responsibility of today's parents, teachers, businesses and community residents to teach children how to weigh those difficult choices. At the same time, the school can also serve important functions for the community.

Community schools serve many purposes for children, their parents, and other members of the community. For children, a community school is most importantly a place to learn. Aside from academic subjects, the school can reinforce ethical behavior, provide models for understanding cultural differences, and give children the opportunity to take on responsibilities.

A community school empowers parents to help their children learn better and to tackle difficult questions about raising children today. The school provides support for families from other parents and professionals. For instance, the TransParent School Model, first implemented in a K-8 school in Huntsville, Alabama, focuses on barriers to family and school interaction caused by limitations in parents' time, skills, and information. The program provides daily communication between teachers and parents. Parents dial a special school number to find out classroom and school activities, and information about their children's progress. They can leave messages for teachers detailing their reactions and concerns.¹

Community schools give the community an active role in establishing priorities for their children. They can be a safe haven for the entire community, and a neutral place for community

groups to meet. Participants pointed out that the school must be accessible after work hours and on weekends in order for the entire community to use the space.

Puente in New York

One model of a successful community school is El Puente.

(WHERE??), which was started by long time community residents.

The school was founded as a CBO, which helped?? During the initial planning stages, development teams of community members and families met to discuss what they thought about when they heard the word "school." The community and the school were able to integrate their needs and rely on one another for services.

El Puente is open from 7:00 am to 10:00 pm, so that it is accessible to all community members. It often uses community resources as part of their curriculum. Community members reach out to students to help with various community projects.

Before the school started, El Puente was a community center.

What is necessary to create a successful community school? What can be done to improve community schools?

Building community schools is a very difficult task. Initial challenges include finding space, identifying funding sources, and convincing the community that a community school is a good idea.

Once a decision has been made to establish a community school, the school must concentrate on building a strong relationship between teachers, students, parents, and professionals. The school must also decide how to build local collaborations, who should manage the school building and the school program, and how to evaluate its success.

The community must answer philosophical questions when creating and running one community school, or contributing to the community school movement generally. How should parents and educators spread the message about community schools? Should the goal of the movement be to develop one community school model with one curriculum for the nation?

When presenting community schools to the public, the idea must be presented in the most positive light. The type of words used in describing the school is critical. A strong political leader, who can protect and promote the community school movement, is essential to the success of the program.

What is the role of community schools in character education?

One of the most important developments in the community school movement has been the integration of character education into the curriculum. In community schools, behavior is not taught as a separate subject. Rather, it is learned through day-to-day interactions between community school members. Character education is "more caught than taught."

A good example of how character education is incorporated into the curriculum in a community school is the "five major intellectual habits" of the Central Park East Secondary School, in East Harlem, New York. Teachers and students concentrate on answering the following questions in each academic subject : *how do you know that?* (concern for evidence), *who said that and why?* (viewpoint), *what led it this, what else happened?* (cause and effect), *what if, supposing that?* (hypothesizing), and *finally*

who cares? The fifth question has ethical implications. Always asking who cares encourages students and teachers to think about how they can make a difference, and why it is important to make a difference.²

Participants discussed several aspects of the links between character education and community schools. First, they talked about how to maintain continuity between family values and school values. They asked how to evaluate progress in character education, and what is the role of higher education. In addition, the task group discussed how to carry character education from kindergarten through the high school years.

Next, the task group offered various definitions of character education. Character education encourages the development of fairness, trust, positive thinking, and respect for others. It challenges everyone to "leave the woodpile a little higher" than they found it by contributing back to the community and the nation. Character education teaches people how to discern right from wrong. It is also the expectation that people will behave ethically.

Participants talked about ways to expand the roll of character education in community schools, recognizing what a difficult task it is to build a consensus about the components of character education. One suggestion was to make facilities and programming available for the whole community. Character education in community schools must be holistic. It must address the needs of community members from pre-schoolers to business men to the elderly. It is absolutely crucial that parents be

involved in character education efforts, both as contributors and as participants. Community schools can increase communication between parents and children, and among various community members. To facilitate communication, one task group member recommended hiring a full-time social services professional to work in the school. Another member suggested that community schools implement home-based outreach programs to reach families in their houses.

Community based schools provide a better way to raise our children and promote good behavior. The earlier that children can be included in the school community, the better are their chances for understanding civic duty and ethical behavior. Each community will have a school that reflects its needs and priorities. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to provide our children with the opportunities and tools they need to explore the possibilities that the future offers.

1. Norm Fruchter, New Directions in Parent Involvement, p. 35,

2. Deborah Meier, The Power of Their Ideas, p. 41.