

A Virtuous Agenda for Education Reform

By SANFORD N. McDONNELL
"Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom."

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Throughout most of our history, certain core ethical values were considered fundamental to the character of the nation and to the character of the people who made up the nation. These values were passed on from generation to generation in the home, the school and the church.

Today in America, far too many homes, schools and churches are no longer fulfilling their traditional roles as protectors and promoters of ethical values. Too many young people are growing up with almost no exposure to the values upon which our freedom is based. To paraphrase Newt Gingrich, today we have 12-year-olds selling drugs, 14-year-olds having babies, 16-year-olds killing each other, and kids of all ages admitting to lying, cheating and stealing at record numbers. The answer is a return to the core values of our American heritage in our homes, schools, businesses, government, and indeed in each of our daily lives. But it is the schools that have the greatest potential for overcoming this national crisis of character.

During most of our history, character education was considered just as important as intellectual knowledge. During the past 30 years or more, for various reasons, formal character education was largely removed from the public schools; but in response to our national crisis of character, many school communities across the country have been reinstating character education. They are realizing that while they can't teach religion in the

public schools anymore, they can teach the core values common to all the great religions.

Over the past decade, character education has been successfully implemented in public schools, kindergarten through high school, in many parts of the nation. And where it has been implemented properly, it has produced positive and often dramatic results not only in student behavior but also in academic performance.

The Allen Elementary School, an inner-city school in Dayton, Ohio, with 60% of its students coming from single-parent homes and 70% from families on welfare, was a near disaster in 1989. Allen was ranked 28th out of Dayton's 33 elementary schools in test scores, and teachers couldn't teach because of the constant discipline problems. Principal Rudy Bernardo implemented a comprehensive character education program; five years later Allen was No. 1 in test scores and its behavior problems had improved dramatically.

Jefferson Junior High School, an inner-city school in Washington, D.C., with approximately 800 African-American students, was having serious problems with drugs, student pregnancies and discipline. With a comprehensive character education program, Principal Vera White completely turned the school around over a five-year period. There have been almost no student pregnancies in the past few years, and Jefferson has been recognized for having the highest academic achievement in the city. The school now has a waiting list of more than 400 students.

The nonprofit Character Education

Partnership, a growing national coalition of organizations and individuals, was founded in February 1993 to help communities across the nation implement character education in their public schools. CEP defines "good character" as understanding, caring about and acting on core ethical values. CEP believes that character education is most effectively accomplished using the following 10 basic principles:

First and foremost, the entire school faculty and staff must be ethical role models.

Second, core values such as honesty, responsibility, respect and hard work must be promoted in all phases of school life.

Third, the school must become a caring community, progressing toward becoming a microcosm of the civil, caring and just society we seek to be as a nation.

Fourth, students must have many and varied opportunities to apply values such as responsibility and fairness in everyday interactions in and out of the classroom.

Fifth, effective character education includes high academic standards that challenge all students to set high goals, work hard to achieve them and persevere in the face of difficulty.

Sixth, teachers should teach core values through subjects such as language arts, science and social studies; and engage students in moral reflection through reading, writing and discussion.

Seventh, teachers should practice moral discipline using the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning and respect for others.

Eighth, character education as well as academic progress must be evaluated in

every school. As the old Navy saying goes, "You can expect what you inspect." The character of the school, each aspect of its character education, and the extent to which students manifest good character should all be assessed.

Ninth, the principal and his or her entire staff should use the total school environment to support and amplify the values taught in the classroom. For example, service opportunities in the school and in the community help students learn to care by giving care.

Tenth, parents, churches, businesses, and indeed the total adult community should be recruited as full partners in character building.

Character education is one of the most, if not *the* most, important answer to our national crisis of character. We need to implement character education as fast as possible in every school in America as part of any truly effective education reform movement.

Character without knowledge is weak and feeble, but knowledge without character is dangerous and a potential menace to society. America will not be strong if we graduate young people from our schools who are brilliant but dishonest, who have great intellectual knowledge but don't care about others, who are highly creative thinkers but are irresponsible. Martin Luther King Jr. stated it well: "Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."

Mr. McDonnell, chairman emeritus of McDonnell Douglas Corp., is chairman of the Character Education Partnership. This article was also signed by more than two dozen members of the partnership's advisory board, including Barbara Bush, Jesse Jackson, Peter Lynch and John Pepper.

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Charity Begins in the Mailbox

By ARDIAN GILL

Like many Americans, I contribute to a number of charities, museums, environmental groups and educational institutions. As a result, I am plagued daily by solicitations in numbers that numb the soul—they even exceed the Chinese restaurant menus under my door.

Last year I decided to count them.

I started on July 1, figuring the count for the balance of the year could be doubled for approximating an annual "mail-fall." By year's end I had filled two shopping bags with 429 pieces of mail weighing 22 pounds; making my estimate for the year nearly 900 pieces at almost 45 pounds.

I then sorted by sender. Heavy hitters were the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club (hey, these guys are supposed to *preserve* trees) with 11 each, matched by Planned Parenthood and CARE. There is an irony here: All four have received contributions from me for many years, so they don't need to solicit from me at all. There is also an unhappy equation: If a mailing's total costs are a dollar per piece, then the first 20 bucks or so of my contribution was eaten up by expenses.

The mail itself demonstrates considerable ingenuity in inducements for opening the envelope. Some are stamped "Second Notice" in red, as if they were overdue bills, putting me in mind of the old gag, "Merry Christmas from your mailman, Second Notice." Other envelopes have messages such as "Documents Enclosed," "Urgent News," "Free Gift Enclosed" (what kind of gift isn't free?), "Mailgram," "Hand Deliver" or my favorite, "Last Chance." There are also "Have you overlooked?"; "We are disappointed, etc." and "Your membership is about to expire"—six months ahead of time.

Some send Christmas cards I don't want, note cards I wouldn't send to my dog, decals and return address labels, most often with my first name misspelled. Others are heavily underlined to emphasize certain passages, rather like those unsettling italics in the King James Bible. Some include photographs: vivisected dogs, dead elephants, beaches with bloated fish bodies, everything but the Harvard Lampoon's "If you don't buy this magazine, we'll shoot this dog" cover.

Once you become a contributor, you become a target of techniques designed to increase your contribution. The Sierra Club, the National Organization for Women and the NAACP, as examples, split themselves in twain, forming "legal defense funds" or "education funds," seeking thereby to double up your contributions, a trick I've fallen for more than once. The museums favor membership categories, inspiring a cartoon by Roy Delgado, which appeared in this newspaper, showing a panhandler with a hand-lettered sign reading, "Benefactor \$5, Patron \$2, Friend \$1."

Give money to one charity and you soon will receive mail from other, similar charities, since they trade or rent their lists. The most prolific are the Indians: Give to the Native American Rights Fund or the American Indian College Fund and you will receive requests from the Red Cloud Indian School, the Little Sioux Indian Mission, the Sinte Gleska' University, the American Indian Relief Council, the Native American College Fund and the Navajo Health Foundation; the list goes on.

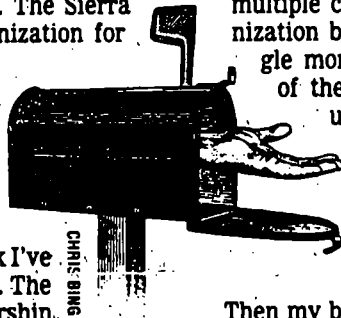
(I received 21 such requests in six months). A donation to Friends of the River will produce mail from American Rivers, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Save-the-Redwoods-League, Scenic Hudson, Grand Canyon Trust, Rainforest Action Network, Defenders of Wildlife, the Trust for Public Land and Mohonk Preserve. This swapping of lists leads to multiple solicitations (three in one day from Unicef) because no attempt is made to eliminate duplication.

It's impossible to stop this sorrowful waste, but there are defenses. I now avoid multiple contributions to the same organization by lumping my giving in a single month, December, near the close of the tax year (October for museums, because membership renewal is likely to be assigned to the annual appeal, and you will be hit again). While this helped, my conscience wouldn't let me overlook the mail that continued to pour in.

Then my bank came up with a bill-paying service that liberated me. Now I make up my list of donees, select the amounts and dates for the contributions and set up recurring annual payments, which I'll review and edit each year.

A postscript: In a moment of weak resolve, I went outside my system and sent some money to the Asia Society to support a particular event. I wasn't able to attend the event, but it happened to include a raffle, and I won a 14-day cruise. There's a moral here, but it eludes me. Perhaps it lies in the cruise being a circumnavigation of Greenland.

Mr. Gill is a photographer, writer and erstwhile actuary.



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