


reading, writing, & **respect**

Dismayed that kids are rude, irresponsible, and intolerant, teachers are weaving moral lessons into the curriculum—and seeing dramatic results.



Seven years ago, teachers at Hilltop Elementary School, in Lynnwood, Washington, were frustrated and discouraged by the students' behavior. Children used bad language, fought on the playground, and talked back in class. "A kid would get in trouble, the teacher would tell him to leave the room, and the student would retort, 'No, you can't make me,'" recalls former school principal Geri Branch. The "cool" attitude, as Branch puts it, was "I don't want to work—I'm just here because I have to be." At a time when Hilltop, like most schools across the country, was trying to help its students meet increasingly stringent academic standards, this anti-school culture was not only demoralizing teachers but interfering with learning.

Today Hilltop is a different place. If a student mouths off to a teacher, classmates are shocked, Branch says. "Before, they would have laughed." Respectful behavior is now a matter of course: "If you approach a door and there's a student anywhere nearby, that door will automatically be held open for you," she says. Standardized test scores have also increased steadily over the past several years.

What prompted the changes at Hilltop Elementary is reflective of a rapidly

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Photographs by Jim Franco