

The Character Curriculum Design (Summit Country Day School)

Character Education at The Summit

"The mission of The Summit Country Day School is to challenge every student, faculty, and staff member;

to share fully the gifts that have been given to them by God; to grow in grace and wisdom;

to develop spiritually, academically, physically, socially, and artistically;

and to become people of character who value and improve the world they inherit."

A school is far more than a building to which students come to learn necessary information. We believe it is important that a Summit graduate leaves this campus with an intrinsic set of values and knowledge that gives one an ethical framework for life. For over a century, The Summit has stood for academic excellence and achievement as our students have gone on to many of the finest colleges and universities in America. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded this school in 1890, not only to provide an excellent academic education for students, but also to foster the development of character within each student. The quality of a Summit education is measured not only on what one accomplishes but on the character of life to which one aspires. The Summit carries on this mission today through its Educating For Character Program, which formalizes our commitment to character formation and provides a complement to a long-standing academic tradition.

An Overview:

Our Educating For Character Program is comprehensive and is integrated into everything we do from Preschool through Grade Twelve.

In the 1991-92 school year we spent the entire year developing a Strategic Plan, which would guide the school into the 21st. century. One of the many implementation strategies of the Strategic Plan is to "define and develop a developmentally sound and sequentially ordered curriculum that teaches social responsibility." At that time we did not know what that "curriculum" would look like, but we realized that it must be a program that would evolve from the philosophy and mission of the school.

During the next two years, 1992-94, we researched character education programs in the country. Using many of the ideas gleaned from these programs, most especially Tom Lickona's work in the field, our administrative team spent the 1994-95 school year developing The Summit's Educating for Character Program:

- During that year The Summit Ethos was defined in the above mission statement.
- After working with the school community for several months, the values of respect, responsibility, and honesty were identified to be the core qualities, which define good character.
- The Summit's Educating For Character Position Statement was then developed incorporating these values: "We, at The Summit, are members of a Catholic, independent school community in which gospel values are fostered. We believe a person of character embraces the core values of respect, responsibility, and honesty and consistently decides to act based on these values."
- We worked throughout the rest of the 1994-95 school year to define the strategies we believed were important to help our students to become people of good character through a comprehensive program. These fourteen strategies are:

Spiritual Development

The Teacher As A Role Model

Student Work Ethic: Achieving One's Personal Best

Teaching Values Through the Academic Curriculum

Code of Conduct

Student Leadership

Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage

Christian Service

Cooperative Learning

Computer Ethics

Sportsmanship

Drug and Alcohol Prevention

Human Sexuality

Parent/School Alliance

- With these strategies identified, position statements were developed on each of them describing why they are important and what implications they have for our students. These position statements guide our implementation as we build meaningful opportunities for our students to experience and practice values in their daily lives.
- Being a Catholic school we continually emphasize the Spiritual Development of our students. Each year we focus on one or more of our Educating For Character strategies to implement.

Implementations:

The First Year of Implementation, 1995-96, we focused on the strategy, The Teacher As A Role Model. We felt that it was important to start with ourselves and we defined "teacher" as "everyone at school" "who supports our students throughout their education. We identified practices of good role models and, indeed, did practice them! Within months you could witness the students modeling us!

The Second Year of Implementation, 1996-97, we concentrated on Student Work Ethic: Doing One's Personal Best. Allowing students more time for in-depth study and to provide more opportunities for students to reflect on their own work were common action plans for the four divisions of the school. Also, during this year we focused on Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage. One of the many implementations we pursued was to survey how we integrated cultural studies across all curricular areas and what we could do to enhance diversity within the curriculum.

The Third Year of Implementation, 1997-98, we began work on our Drug and Alcohol Prevention Program. We provided for all students, parents, faculty, and staff a series of workshops and specialized in-service in this area. We are in the process of initiating a peer counseling education program for prevention. We also reviewed how best to implement the Cooperative Learning strategy and we brought in a national expert in the field to begin work with the faculty.

The Fourth Year of Implementation, 1998-99, we decided to continue emphasis on the implementations of Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage, Drug and Alcohol Prevention, and Cooperative Learning. As a new strategy is emphasized each year, we continue to build on what we were working on the previous year and to provide professional development for the school community.

The Fifth Year of Implementation, 1999-00, we continued our emphasis on the strategies of Diversity: Our Unifying Heritage, Drug and Alcohol Prevention, and Cooperative Learning. An appreciation of diversity is an important component of a Summit education and during this school year there were an increased number of cultural presentations by students, parents, and outside presenters. The PRIDE Parent-to-Parent Drug Prevention Workshops continued to be successful. Ninety Summit parents have participated and received training in these video-based workshops. Upper School faculty continued work with Dr. Deborah Hobbs

on cooperative learning and student assessment. Middle School faculty attended a three day workshop with Dr. Hobbs on Talents Unlimited. Implementation of these techniques was ongoing throughout the year. This school year we began to focus on Student Leadership and chose "Educating Leaders of Character" as the school theme. We wrote a Leadership Vision Statement, "Leadership education at The Summit Country Day School will challenge every student, faculty and staff member to become people of character who recognize their personal gifts and use them collaboratively in service with others." The Upper School Leadership Team completed the development of an integrated leadership program. Leadership skills and attributes, which are ethically based, collaborative in nature, and focus primarily on service to others will be integrated into all the course work and co-curricular activities and program which are offered. Three Peer Education programs were implemented between Upper and Middle School students. The program topics were Confirmation, Honor Council, and National Honor Society.

During this school year we undertook an assessment of this program and it consisted of a faculty and staff perspective survey, a faculty questionnaire, a grades 7-12 student questionnaire, a grades 4-6 student questionnaire, and a review of data on Upper School attendance and discipline. To analyze the results of the questionnaires we identified the questions with responses, which had high correlations and those which had low correlations between program and practice. It was gratifying to read the responses from the faculty and staff surveys which stated that the program was well received, well known, has become an integrated part of every day life at the school, and should be continued. The results of the student questionnaire will be used to plan implementation of the program for the school year 2000-01 emphasizing positive peer relationships and kindness.

This is a school where the total community shares in the responsibility for character education. We have an Educating For Character Committee which promotes the implementation of the program within each division of the school, evaluates the program, and provides information for the Monthly Character Education Reports to the school community.

Are we successful? We believe so. Testimonials to the program are important to us. Here's one: "The value and effectiveness of our Summit Character Education is evident through the actions and responses of our students. It is heartwarming to have students become aware and incorporate the program into their discussions. Students focus on the way that character influences their actions and they make decisions in light of good character. As a teacher at The Summit, my heart and soul is in teaching this program." -Mrs. Diane Uckotter, Summit Primary Faculty

We believe The Summit's Educating For Character Program guides the school to become a better place for teaching and learning.

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