

December 11, 2006

Ms. Delores Bolton
Assistant Superintendent for Magnet Schools
960 Main Street, 5th Floor
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Ms. Bolton,

We are psychology majors at Trinity College, and have recently completed a public policy project for our Child Development class. Our area of concern for our project was school integration in Hartford and how certain magnet schools have been able to facilitate achievement of the goals set out in the Sheff vs. O'Neill case while others have not. More specifically, we examined what programs or educational initiatives certain successful magnets schools have utilized in order to create diverse classrooms, both economically and racially. Our goal in this project is suggest a program that newly established magnet schools in Hartford can employ to help with the process of integration.

We realize that successful integration and the construction of a well-run and designed school requires time, yet we have come to understand that by implementing certain ideas right off the bat this process can be sped up. These include, but are not limited to: After-school and out-of-school programs for students, so that they have opportunities to bond, especially since so many of the students live far from each other; parent involvement in the school; accommodation of bi-lingual families; widespread and targeted advertising, both in Hartford and surrounding districts; a lottery system designed to bring in an equal number of students from inside Hartford and outside; a distinctive, unconventional curriculum that implements meaningful initiatives.

After talking with a number of community members in Hartford, including longtime Hartford educators, it became clear that in addition to allowing a school time to fine-tune its programs, a distinctive magnet school could become appealing to families both inside and outside Hartford by working on all of those facets of school design. Indeed, a school within city limits needs to attract and convince suburban parents to send their children there – that is how a diverse community is created. Of course, this is where the trouble in integrating the schools originates: How does one convince parents to send their children to schools inside Hartford? Since much of Hartford is racially and economically homogenized, solving this problem is crucial.

Our conclusions, presented in the attached report, focus on what we see are the important and meaningful tenets of a successful character education based curriculum. We believe that by utilizing aspects of a quality character education program, magnet schools can create an attractive, thoughtful, and worthwhile educational theme. We expect that families will notice and want to enroll their children, effectively integrating the schools. Moreover, by integrating the school through an application of character education principles, classrooms will subsequently be integrated. Indeed, oftentimes, while a school may possess a certain level of diversity, the classrooms do not reflect this make-up, leaving them to be segregated at some measure. This educational theme of character education has the ability to overcome these hurdles. What we

have recommended is culled from the schools we visited and the people with whom we talked. We hope that when designing new magnet schools, some of these ideas can be taken into account. If you would like to speak further about the ideas expressed here or about any aspect of the magnet school design mentioned above, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

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Facilitation of School Integration Through a Character Education Program

The importance of creating a curriculum that enhances the child's conception of a global community and a diverse setting cannot be understated. It is thus crucial to offer numerous opportunities for students to experience new activities and subjects, creating a breadth of knowledge and vocabulary that enhances their character education. Examples of this include programs during school focusing on the fact that while people may celebrate different holidays or have different ethnic backgrounds, they are still very much alike. Such a program could be run and designed by students with supervision from teachers. Another example is after-school programs – music and art classes, chess clubs or outdoor activities. These are important venues for children to learn about and experience a wide variety of stimuli. Indeed, it all fits into the idea of a global education, creating students with positive character and personality, curious minds that enjoy thinking abstractly about the world and the people around them.

Goals of Character Education in a Magnet School:

- Incorporate the development of a complete child, focusing on all aspects of what constitutes a well-educated person, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally
- Develop an appropriate ability to work together in an integrated setting, garnering a mutual respect between persons of every race, sex, and socioeconomic status.
- Ideally every child will benefit from this environment and the community that is built between the faculty, students, and families.
- Ability to learn through consistent, direct lessons and activities, preaching and imbedding, early in a child's development, quality character.
- Embodying a curious, abstract, and well-informed mind.
- Creating an open forum for all children to feel comfortable to be themselves in their own personalities, interests, learning styles etc.
- The desire for students to continue this behavior beyond the classroom and hallways, and into their home and social environments.
- To create an effective morally and globally aligned community.

Learning Objectives

A complete character education will reach students certain core values, including individual responsibility, honesty, what is fair, and social respect. These are all basic tenets of good, quality character – involving moral choice and ethical decisions. This type of education can begin at a very early age.

- A school should incorporate a character education into the development of a complete child, focusing on all aspects of what constitutes a well-educated person, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. This can be taught and learned by studying various principles and discussing their application, but then also, and this is most important, by students directly applying what they have learned, inside and outside the classroom.
 - Examples of how to apply these principles include: What types of relationships are formed, how students communicate with peers and adults, and how they approach bullies.
- Students will develop a greater understanding of their peers and be able to relate to them with sympathy and care.
 - This could happen through the students having a formal way to help their peers with problems whether it is an unhappy child on the playground, or a child who is struggling with their work.
- Every element of what occurs in a school day deserves to be a part of the core character education, such as participating in lunchtime arrangements, daily meetings, or classroom cleanup.
 - Each piece of the day can be used as a learning opportunity: Teachers can monitor whether students, for example, hold the door open for others or say thank you after being helped.

Student Responsibility and Classroom Exercises

Teachers should underline where academic work and inherent ethical values and qualities meet.

- In each subject, whether it is science, history, or literature, connections with current events and moral dilemmas can be drawn. For example, this can be done by providing older students (4th grade and up) with newspapers and allotting time to read them. In addition, through subsequent discussion of issues and how they connect with school

subjects and quality character, students will be engaged and focused on what can be meaningful.

- An exercise incorporating this would be a newspaper that is written by the students for the students. Older students can meet a few times a week to come out with a bi-weekly newspaper for their school. Based on the knowledge they gained about quality reporting from their readings of the newspaper, they will understand how to communicate stories and relevant issues with their peers.
- This type of focus on moral and character development can be expanded for students through community meetings and discussion- a focus on issues that pertain to the students and how to work through them together.
 - As a classroom exercise, students can write down issues that arise between each other in an “agenda,” both specific and more general ones. At the end of each week, the class can come together, sitting in a circle, and work out the problems through discussion, teaching them to face issues and not just ignore them.
- Not only will the students grow and succeed from a quality character education, but also a community will be built that will boost the quality of the education.
- Ideally, students are going to have an opportunity for hands-on community learning, possibly working with librarians, art teachers, and outside community members.
- Parents can be involved through organizations or events like the Parent Teacher Organization and family nights.

Consistency

Certainly, character is defined by doing what is right and fair when nobody is looking or when you have no extrinsic motivation. A strong curriculum needs to keep the focus on character education.

- Students need to be provided with consistency throughout their school day. Teachers, administrators, and staff should be educated in how they are to interact with students, whether it be talking with or disciplining the children. Such consistency should be present throughout all of elementary school.
- This consistent behavior should be stressed outside of school and in the home. A series of parent workshops could be taught at night.

- At these workshops, parents could be informed of and taught what types of behavior and language faculty and staff utilize in school, how they effectively interact with the children or discipline them, so that the same conduct could be provided at home.
- Such reliable and steady engagement of the children will teach them to take ownership of what they have learned, what types of ethical values are presented to them.
- By having these experiences in and out of school, the students will learn how to work with all different people, regardless of age, sex, race, or social status. This fosters shared leadership and the ability to come together to work through issues.

By emphasizing a meaningful character education theme, a school can create an effective morally and globally aligned community. Students, educators, and families will be able to learn through consistent, direct lessons and activities, preaching and imbedding, early in a child's development, quality character. With varied and colorful experiences, students will be able to develop an appropriate ability to work together, embodying a curious, abstract, and well-informed mind.

Resources

Websites:

(1) Character Education Partnership

www.character.org

Located in Washington, D.C., the Character Education Partnership (CEP) is a national organization geared towards the advocacy of character education in schools. The CEP also runs programs and seminars for schools, used to teach about character education and how to implement a curriculum. In addition, it has published the "Eleven Principles Sourcebook," which not only teaches about how to create a suitable curriculum but also lists numerous sources of strategies and published material concerning how to implement the curriculum.

(2) American Guidance Service

www.agsnet.com

American Guidance Service is part of the Pearson Learning Group. We heard of the AGS through the Breakthrough Magnet school. It served as a partner in designing their highly successful character education program.