

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THE ELEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

Based in Washington, DC, the Character Education Partnership (CEP) is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to fostering effective character education in our nation's schools. As a member of CEP, the Boomerang Project is committed to ensuring quality character education which is in alignment with CEP's eleven character principles, equipping "school teachers and leaders with the knowledge and skills to create safe, healthy, high-performing schools, while inspiring their students to reach their full potential as learners and as people."

WEB and Link Crew are examples of character education at its best.

In 2009, **Susquehanna High School** in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania was awarded a National School of Character Award for Link Crew, demonstrating an exemplary level of implementation of Character Education Partnership's

- 1. The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character.**
- 2. The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.**
- 3. The school uses a comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach to character development.**

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THESE PRINCIPLES

WEB is intentional in its approach to improve overall school culture. Hundreds of schools have watched as their student bodies have become more connected, more spirited and kinder to each other.

An intentional and proactive approach to the selection of WEB leaders ensures that students who would otherwise not socialize with each other a common purpose and a common goal, thus diminishing antagonism that might exist between these groups. WEB Leaders are positive, natural leaders from a broad social cross-section so student leadership is shared by a variety of groups at your school and the climate reflects the diversity of the school population.

The more connected students are to their new school, the better they will do in all the measures that are important in tracking their success: grades, test scores, attendance and discipline. All these measures are positively affected when students are connected.

Ethical behavior is promoted and reinforced by trusted messengers: 8th grade peers starting with orientation and continuing throughout the school year with Academic Follow Ups, Social Follow Ups and Leader Initiated Contacts.

Academic Follow Ups occur in a classroom setting; WEB Leaders visit 6th grade classes to teach lessons on topics such as time management, goal setting and peer pressure.

Social Follow Ups are events organized by the WEB Coordinator team in which the 6th graders and Leaders attend fun school sponsored social events together.

Leader Initiated Contacts are proactive methods of fostering positive connections and ensuring that transitioning students stay on track.

4. The school creates a caring community.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

WEB gives students permission to care about each other and the structure in which to do it. By connecting 8th graders and 6th graders with the structure and training to make the relationship meaningful, students have the opportunity to focus on the important aspects of their lives.

WEB creates a structure that connects every incoming 6th grade with a caring upperclassman, a trusted source of safety, a well-trained 8th grader from their first moments at their school throughout the entire year.

5. The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

WEB trains 8th grade leaders in personal responsibility, integrity and ethical behavior. Leaders are trained to take responsibility for and demonstrate positive action on behalf of individual students and the school as a whole.

WEB Leaders are asked to care for all incoming sixth graders for the entire year, supporting their academic, personal and social needs.

Leaders are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs in creating a community of care within the school. Each WEB Leader is responsible for the support of a group of sixth graders and their academic, personal and social success at school.

6. The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them succeed.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

Schools that have implemented the WEB transition program indicate that when 6th graders connect with 8th graders in positive ways, schools can dramatically reduce trancies, dropouts, failing grades, bullying, harassment, disciplinary referrals and detentions. These initial indicators show that 6th graders experience feelings of connection to school, develop trusted relationships with adults and feel part of the community as a whole because they have connected with 8th graders as mentors.

The WEB program works because the Leaders not only help organize and guide the 6th graders through orientation day, but they also help to facilitate a smooth transition both socially and academically throughout the year. Using a series of social, academic and leader initiated

interactions, the WEB Leaders maintain contact with their 6th-grade groups and mentor them throughout the year.

Academic Follow Ups occur in a classroom setting; WEB Leaders visit 6th grade classes to teach lessons on topics such as time management, goal setting, and peer pressure.

7. The school fosters students' self-motivation.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

WEB is a student-run, student-lead program. The goal is for the adult coordinators to simply provide the structure and the training for the WEB Leaders to positively influence both sixth graders as well as the rest of the school population. Adults recognize the value in their leaders because it would be literally impossible to run WEB without student leaders.

WEB enhances student responsibility and improves performance of both transitioning students and leaders. Academic Follow Ups provide tools for academic success and support to low-achieving, underrepresented students ensuring that each incoming 6th grader is immediately connected with a trained 8th grade mentor interested in his/her success in middle school. The peer mentorship model creates a connection that facilitates self-motivation for both the transitioning students and the leaders.

8. The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.

9. The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THESE PRINCIPLES:

WEB Coordinators provide positive, responsible behavior modeling for both the WEB Leaders as well as the entire 6th grade class by investing their time and energy for the success of all students.

Because the WEB Leaders are selected from a cross section of 8th grade students, the positive experience trickles out to the many social groups around the school.

From the moment a student walks into 6th grade orientation, he/she is expected not only by the adults, but also by older peers to do well and contribute to the overall success of the school, as well as take responsibility for his/her own development.

10. The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE:

WEB schools across the United States and Canada, are connected to a community of engaged and dedicated educators through the Boomerang Project and the Boomerang Foundation. The foundation houses a unique, web-based community service program that engages school communities in service learning and volunteerism beyond the school walls.

The Boomerang Foundation community service tools are available to all WEB schools free of charge. This program enables students to search for volunteer opportunities, create individual project plans and professionally designed resumés. This program builds skills in community service, community engagement and fund raising allowing schools to connect with community partners and supporters.

Some of the outcomes experienced by WEB schools relative to community engagement, fundraising and marketing include:

- contribution to future community strengthened
- funding opportunities increased,
- Service Learning principles integrated into school community,
- restored confidence in school as a positive participant in the community at large, and
- improved sustainability of key school programs.

11. The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.

HOW WEB ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

WEB sets up a structure within a school for disseminating information and ensuring that the entire school community has the opportunity to engage in and support the school's defined mission and strategic goals.

With WEB, trained student leaders (8th graders) are able to communicate and demonstrate the school's purpose and direction with and among those within the school population who might otherwise be disengaged: 6th graders. WEB focuses the information dissemination process through the student-to-student connection both one on one and in small groups. This makes it far more likely that critical information is received and remembered by the entire school community: parents, students, and staff.

Additionally, the WEB Leaders and Coordinators themselves become more committed to the beliefs, philosophy and learning results of the school via their roles as messengers.