

## Chapter 6

# Actions to Promote Educational Success

Having grown up in the '30s and early '40s in New York City, I never saw a prostitute or witnessed drug activity. My wife and sister as teenagers could ride the subways late at night and walk home in safety.

From the United States Information Agency comes this report about effects of the Great Depression. "In October 1929 the stock market crashed, wiping out 40 percent of the paper values of common stock. Even after the stock market collapse, however, politicians and industry leaders continued to issue optimistic predictions for the nation's economy. But the Depression deepened, confidence evaporated and many lost their life savings. By 1933 the value of stock on the New York Stock Exchange was less than a fifth of what it had been at its peak in 1929. Business houses closed their doors, factories shut down and banks failed. Farm income fell some 50 percent. By 1932 approximately one out of every four Americans was unemployed."<sup>1</sup>

Some like to blame poverty as a cause of our social problems. In the midst of the great poverty of the Great Depression, the public school teachers

rated the top seven disciplinary problems in 1940 as: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the hall, cutting in line, dress code violations, and littering. Fifty years later when our country was much more prosperous, these were the top public school disciplinary problems: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault. What happened?

The permissive, “do-what-you-want” philosophy of moral relativism permeated our educational system. As a substitute teacher in 27 different public schools, I witnessed firsthand the fear of children sitting in these permissive, undisciplined jungles. From the 1940s to now, everything has changed. Now in the smallest towns doors must be locked, and it’s unsafe for women to be out alone at night.

Those believing in moral relativism refuse to provide positive training for children. They have their buzzwords: they’re for children’s rights and tolerance. They teach children there are no moral absolutes and they should choose their own way. Then we wonder why so many choose destructive paths for themselves and for society.

What is the key to turning America around and bringing back civility and common sense standards of morality? One of the major keys is to insist that our children attend schools that implement programs promoting character which leads to educational success.

## Four Keys for Successful Schools

The educational crisis facing America today is a philosophical crisis: should the inherent values of our educational system be based on moral relativism that there are no absolutes, or should our educational system be based on America's historical value system? There are four main crisis areas facing schools: educational, disciplinary, racial, and moral. The key to success in each of these areas has to do with which value system is chosen.

What would happen if educational leaders would declare from America's heritage this value from the Declaration of Independence?

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

As a consequence of our Constitution that all men are created equal, regardless of your color or background, *all* students must behave and respect every teacher and student in their desire of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Could you envision the transformation of our schools if there would be a sign over every school entrance: "Once you enter these doors, we will *not*

tolerate misbehavior!" Everything would be done to help misbehaving students, but those refusing to change—reform school.

I'm not endorsing carrying a bat and clobbering any kid who disobeys. That's how opponents would like to paint those believing in discipline. But proper discipline creates a loving atmosphere that refuses to tolerate misbehavior so that all students can receive the best education. Fair, firm, and loving discipline works wherever it's applied: classrooms, schools, families, or businesses. Effective discipline needs all three. Eliminate any one of these three principles of fair, firm, or loving, and discipline will be ineffective.

Some may ask, "Why are you so strong on discipline?" I'm strong on discipline because I've witnessed firsthand as a substitute teacher the frustration of teachers and the fear of children sitting in undisciplined classrooms. I've documented in my book, *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?* the ruinous effect that undisciplined schools have on children's educational experience. In undisciplined schools might makes right, and bullies becomes the leaders.

It's the same in the home. With 14 grandchildren I get many opportunities to watch them. Children demand justice. If Zachary acts as a bully and grabs a toy from his brother Nathan, Nathan will yell, "That's my toy!"

Nathan is right to object. If I act as a loving grandpa, I'll demand justice that each child must respect the rights of others. I'll tell Zachary, "No, you can't take a toy from Nathan." And if Zachary does this again, I will punish him and put him in timeout. Zachary will learn that in grandpa's house bullying will not be tolerated. If I don't intervene and demand justice, then the rule of the jungle will prevail—the weak will be exploited by the strong. This will cause constant friction.

It's the same with schools. All the lofty goals of leaving no child behind can never be achieved unless schools are disciplined. Effective education is only possible in a disciplined atmosphere. Others may contend, "You're much too hard. What about children's rights?" That's exactly the problem. What about the rights of the innocent children being deprived of a proper education? What about the right of not being abused by bullies? Put yourself into the shoes of those who are bullied.

Listen to how it affected Erika Harold, who was chosen Miss America. Harold has been so affected by bullying that she goes on speaking tours telling about her experience of being bullied in ninth grade. "It started out with people calling me names, and then it got worse," Harold said. "They threw things at me, they vandalized my house, and they sang nasty songs about me in school hallways and classrooms. It got so bad that I felt like I was in danger physically."<sup>2</sup>

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What about Miss America's rights when she was bullied in ninth grade? Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national advocacy group that consists of over 2,000 law enforcement officers and victims of violence, reports that each year for children in grades six through ten nearly one in six, or 3.2 million, were victims of bullying and 3.7 million were bullies. Of those labeled as bullies in grades six through nine, nearly 60 percent of the boys were convicted of one crime by the time they reached 24. Those bullied, the report stated, citing U.S. and European studies, are five times more prone to be depressed and more likely to be suicidal.<sup>3</sup> A study by Vanderbilt University estimates that each high-risk juvenile that is saved from a life of crime would save the country from \$1.7 to \$2.3 million.<sup>4</sup> What would happen if *all* schools would implement a fair, firm, and loving discipline policy?

Governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee, points out in his book, *Character Is the Issue*, the consequences of lack of values:

If Arkansas is going to be the great state that it can be and must be, we must put Arkansas first in underscoring responsibility. I believe we focus so many times only on revenues. Today I'll offer a new paradigm of government, suggesting that maybe we've misplaced priorities, believing that what we do with

the cash is more important than what we do with character. Let me be blunt and say that all the problems we face in our society are not monetary. Quite a few are moral.

We're going to be criticized for even suggesting that is really the core of the problem. But my friends, I'd rather be criticized for being honest with the real problems than for ignoring them. And I submit to you today that falling test scores, illegitimacy, drug and alcohol dependence, crime, and domestic violence are really symptoms of a crisis of integrity far more than just a crisis of cash....

Our rate of illegitimacy in Arkansas is too high. The fact is that 88 percent of the women who have a child out of wedlock and never finish high school will end up in poverty. And we will end up paying for them in welfare benefits. Interestingly enough, only 8 percent of women who finish high school, get married, and have a baby after the age of 20 will ever be in poverty. It seems to me that if we want a 92 percent success rate in dealing with some of the problems, let's make sure that our students finish school, let's make sure that they understand the responsibilities of a marriage, and let's make sure that they understand the responsibilities of bringing a child into this world. And that involves dealing with character.

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A young male is twice as likely to be involved in criminal activity if he has no father in the home and three times as likely to be involved in criminal activity if he comes from a neighborhood where the majority are single-parent families. It's costly, my friends, when we ignore this issue....

It can cost us as much as \$40,000 a year to take care of one juvenile who has fallen into delinquency...The cost of the state courts in the past decade has risen from \$6.2 million to \$17.2 million. The more crime we have, the more prison beds we have to create at a cost of about \$22,000 per bed—\$77 million more in prison expenditures in the past decade. All of that is money that ought to be, could be, should be going for better education, for better highways, for a better atmosphere that we could live in...The sad thing is that as long as we continue to spend money addressing the symptoms rather than addressing the root cause, we may always be thinking that it's just a matter of money when the truth is that it is also the matter of us taking the leadership and believing that integrity is important and it's got to start somewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Are we getting the picture of the great social cost for lack of character? Money that could be spent for bettering the life of citizens must be spent on those



who have not been trained in character.

In the early 1980s, two social scientists advocated what became known as the broken-window theory. They claimed that if a broken window was not fixed in a neighborhood, other windows in the neighborhood would likewise be smashed. Why? It sent a message that no one cared. This produced further vandalism and criminal-minded individuals would be attracted while law-abiding citizens would leave. The key was to immediately fix the broken window. Charles Colson in his book, *How Now Shall We Live?* cites what happened when New York City implemented the broken-window theory:<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1990s, New York Police Chief William Bratton took the broken-window theory to heart and persuaded New York's newly elected mayor and tough ex-prosecutor Rudolph Guiliani to give the theory a try. The order went out to police in Precincts 69 and 75 and to Brooklyn, where Officer Sal was stationed, to 'fix broken windows'—that is, to arrest petty offenders and clean up the neighborhoods. The police adopted a policy of zero tolerance for any violation of public order, and in the process they soon discovered that there is indeed a 'seamless web' between controlling petty crime and restraining major crime. Whereas before they had ignored turnstile

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jumping at subways, officers now nabbed the offenders, who, as often as not, turned out to be muggers. Whereas before they had turned a blind eye to minor traffic violations, they now stopped all traffic violators, which often led to the discovery of drugs and guns in the cars. They chased away loiterers and panhandlers, many of whom were drug dealers looking for a sale. In three years in Precinct 75, once one of the most dangerous places in America, the number of homicides dropped from 129 to 47.<sup>7</sup>

How many school problems would evaporate if administrators would insist that every student respects the rights of others and if “zero tolerance” would be implemented for misbehavior? That would send a strong message about the character virtue of respecting others.

Schools should also provide programs that every child, regardless of race or color, has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Standards for each grade should be implemented, materials should be provided that teach and encourage children to reach their full potential, and teachers should be evaluated on their teaching.

Those opposed to such programs would like to portray this as being judgmental and as forcing

one's beliefs on children. They present themselves as champions of being nonjudgmental and of supporting individual liberty. It's the exact opposite — this method creates an environment where *all* children can be taught the values of how they can become successful and enjoy their full liberty. Those opposed to training children in proper behavior, in their perverted view of liberty, allow children in undisciplined schools and permissive learning environments to fall further and further behind. The result? Today, America ranks close to the bottom in the industrialized world in educational achievement.

Here are four keys to successful schools:

**1. Educational:** Insist that every child receive a proper education by providing appropriate teaching materials for every grade, eliminating automatic promotion, administering standards for every grade, and evaluating teachers.

**2. Disciplinary:** Insist that every school provide a disciplined learning environment so children are protected and can receive a proper education.

**3. Racial:** Create a learning atmosphere that treats all races the same, and provide resources so all children can reach their full potential.

**4. Moral:** Reject moral relativism by

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providing textbooks that teach the values that built our nation, and promote virtues that help children develop successful habits.

I could go into much detail about the educational, disciplinal, racial, and moral solutions. I addressed these issues in detail in the 335-page book I wrote: *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?* The book is available free on our website.<sup>8</sup> The book provides many principles for successful schools that are still applicable.

Our Founding Fathers built this nation because they believed in values. They did not believe in moral relativism. My hope is that Americans will wake up and return to our constitutional heritage. Imagine what would happen if educational leaders would implement these four steps for successful schools across America. I know there are strong forces opposed to these common-sense methods. It's much easier to take a permissive hands-off policy and let schools and children find their own way. Concerned individuals must insist that something be done that American schools can once again become models of achievement and promote the values that made our nation successful.

## Schools Making a Difference

But there are schools, principals, and teachers who

believe in values, and they are making a difference. Trevor Armbrister, in “Principals of Success,” reports that *Reader’s Digest* visited four schools “where inspired leadership, innovative programs and old-fashioned values have resulted in small miracles of achievement.” Here’s one report:

The 1650 students at Bennett-Kew and Kelso elementary school in Inglewood, Calif., are predominantly Hispanic and African American. Most of them are poor, and about half speak English as a second language. Still, they performed almost as well as affluent counterparts....

It wasn’t always this way. When Ichinaga became principal of Bennett in 1974, the school, near Los Angeles International Airport, was in chaos. There were few textbooks and no defined curriculum. Students did their own thing—and scored at the third percentile on state reading tests. According to Ichinaga, teachers shrugged, as if to say, “What did you expect?” ....

Ichinaga, who grew up in Hawaii, found a kindred spirit in Marjorie Thompson, a transplanted Kentuckian and principal of nearby Kelso Elementary. Together they rebelled against low expectations and fashionable educational trends.

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Resisting efforts to “dumb down” what they taught, both principals instituted a rigorous core curriculum centered on reading, writing and math. Convinced that reading was the critical skill for their kids, Ichinaga and Thompson began using a structured, phonics-based language-arts program called Open Court. The results have been impressive....

Ichinaga and Thompson also said no to social promotions, meaning they wouldn't allow failing kids to move automatically to the next grade....

It took years, but many Californians have come to agree that Ichinaga and Thompson were right about a lot of things. That includes former state school superintendent Bill Honig, who was calling the shots when “whole language” was adopted. “Many kids never learned to read,” he says. “To the extent whole language stood in many teachers’ minds for not teaching [basic] skills, it caused a lot of harm.”<sup>9</sup>

Notice these two principals “rebelled against low expectations” to “dumb down” the curriculum and instituted the time-tested method of phonics to teach reading. They also rejected the easy route of social promotions and applied “old-fashioned values” with a belief that all kids can learn.

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In *A Gift of Character: The Chattanooga Story*, Dr. Philip Fitch Vincent, Nancy Reed, and Dr. Jesse Register relate what happened when the Hamilton County School District, with 44 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, 10 high schools, and 9 special schools integrated character education into the school curriculum.

Before a character education program was implemented, they wanted to reject the failures of values clarification that morals are relative and the weaknesses of the self-esteem movement that promotes false hopes. The authors stated: "We must instill in students a knowledge and love of the good. We must develop rules and procedures to insure a good climate for learning. In short, a school must have standards, and values clarification provides none." Then the authors pointed out: "Next in training, we addressed the false promise of the self-esteem movement as a means to help students develop civic and virtuous traits. We recognized that *feeling* good is not the same as *being* good."<sup>10</sup> The school district established these principles:

1. Establishment of Rules and Procedures for behavior.
2. Cooperative Learning where students work together.
3. Teaching for Thinking so students use reasoning skills to develop character.
4. Reading for Character where students read

literature “that is worth reading and that provides strong examples of good character.”

5. Service Learning where students are encouraged to help others both within and outside the school.<sup>11</sup>

They enlisted the representatives of the community and businesses, and sent 800 letters to ministers and religious youth leaders of various faiths inviting them to a meeting to discuss the district’s character initiative. They provided training for superintendents and their representatives, principals, guidance counselors, and teachers. Schools were encouraged to develop their own character education programs. The reports received from elementary, middle, and high schools showed some schools with a decrease in office referrals and suspensions up to 300%; less fighting, stealing, and other violent offenses; more lost items returned; and students eager to help teachers and others.

A school stated in its report: “Character education is not presented as a separate subject for our children to learn. The message of this curriculum is integrated throughout the day by all of the employees of the school, and our children are reminded of the character traits everywhere they go. Teachers include discussions and activities about character in every academic subject from reading to math to social studies.”<sup>12</sup>

This is an important point to those supporting character education. Character education should not be just an isolated lesson on a certain character trait;



character education should be a program that infiltrates the entire curriculum.

Another school noted: “We integrated character education into every aspect of our school. This integration included curriculum, music, guidance, library, cafeteria, physical education, programs, discipline plans, newsletters, and PTO meetings. Guest speakers have come, and entire assemblies have been devoted to character.”<sup>13</sup>

Character education works when proper values are stressed. Tim Stafford, in “Helping Johnny Be Good,” reports that San Marcos Junior High won the California Distinguished School Award. Ten years ago the school had a crisis: more than one out of five girls were pregnant. To counter this, San Marcos Junior High began a comprehensive character education program, including one of the first abstinence-based sex education programs and the “How to Be Successful” program. These programs were successful. Pregnancies decreased dramatically even though the student population increased. Skeptical teachers were won over after they witnessed the fruits of success from these programs.<sup>14</sup>

*U.S. News & World Report* in “Morality goes to schools” states about character education: “There’s no shortage of compelling testimonials. ‘It’s like night and day’ at the 30 Dallas public schools that instituted Character Counts! five years ago, says Linda Jones, who oversees the project at the Dallas Independent

School District. 'The whole emotional atmosphere of the building changes. It becomes a kinder, gentler place.' Other schools have seen fights and suspensions plummet."<sup>15</sup>

In "Character Education Is Back in Our Public Schools," Michael Josephson reported that "South Dakota State University surveyed 7,000 to 8,000 students and concluded" that Character Counts "helped cut crime, drug use, drinking, and other socially harmful activities sharply."<sup>16</sup>

## Actions by Educators

There are administrators, principals, guidance counselors, librarians, and teachers who believe in our heritage and value system and are alarmed at the deterioration of our schools. Individually they often feel helpless to change the entrenched relativistic bureaucracy. John Leo, in *U.S. News & World Report*, states this chilling fact: "A study by the Public Agenda research group found that only 7 percent of education professors think teachers should be conveyers of knowledge; 92 percent believe teachers should just 'enable students to learn on their own.' Hymowitz thinks anticulturalism explains why bad schools fight so tenaciously to hold on to failed programs: They are more deeply interested in ideology than in results."<sup>17</sup>

Yes, in spite of documented failure, there are powerful forces who cling to their ideology of

advocating the permissive route of leaving students to learn on their own and opposing teaching children successful values. Nevertheless, administrators, principals, guidance counselors, librarians, teachers, and parents need to speak out boldly and implement principles of educational success and moral virtues, even if it's just locally in their class or school. There are numerous resources for character education. At our website is information about character education organizations under "Free Resources." In addition, educators and concerned individuals need to become active and write to their organizations and other institutions when they promote values they deem inappropriate. We *must* let our voices be heard.

### **Actions by Parents**

One of the most important things parents can do is to discipline their children and train them in positive values, and not simply rely on the schools to do the job for them. Parents need to have moral standards and teach them to their children. Above all, parents need to "walk the talk." Children will imitate us regardless of how much we teach them otherwise. Today, parents must be extremely careful they don't succumb to the deadly moral standards that are so popularized on TV, in music, children's magazines, and our present culture of letting children be free to

develop their own values. Children need guidance; wise are those parents who supervise their children, provide positive materials, and take time to teach them successful virtues.

Parents need to be concerned that the schools their children attend support character education. If they don't, become an active voice for character education: encourage the librarian to purchase character-building books, become active in PTA, speak to the principal, and write to the superintendent. Let your voice be heard.

## Men and Women of Action

What transpires in schools has repercussions far beyond classrooms; it affects every aspect of our national life. Every culture to survive must transmit its beliefs and values to the next generation. America, particularly the schools, has seriously departed from our historical beliefs and values and embraced an alien philosophy causing a crisis in our society.

Governor Mike Huckabee in his book, *Character Is the Issue*, stated:

There's a continuing debate about why American society has renounced its traditional standards of integrity. Many people agree that as a nation we once recognized a common standard and that somehow we've drifted away

from it. The “right thing” today is subjective, which has caused problems with everything from discipline in the schools to pornography on the Internet.

How did we move in one generation from a society with a shared, confident sense of right to a society of relativism and moral decay?

*No Single Answer*

The first step to answering that question is to admit there isn't just one answer....If any force is going to overcome a free, prosperous country like America, it won't happen all at once. America has a solid foundation of liberty, personal dignity, and opportunity. Anybody can rise above his social circumstances. There's no caste system. You don't have to be a member of nobility to get ahead.

The only way to destroy something with that kind of foundation is to chip away at it, one value at a time. Take away its heart and essence. Bring doubt to what used to be confidence, denial to what used to be faith, death to what was life. I think that is what has happened.

Contrast that of the Great Depression with the generation of today. During the Depression, people were poor, hungry, and out of work. Yet they didn't engage in the kind of gang violence

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we have in our schools today. Students weren't killing each other for a pair of shoes. Crime could easily have been justified by saying, "I'm hungry, and I don't have as much as you; therefore, I have a right to take what I can get." Dishonesty was still considered wrong, and thieves were despised.<sup>18</sup>

Then Governor Huckabee pointed out, "Public officials and the policies they set show how far we have drifted, one tiny step at a time."<sup>19</sup> That's the key to bringing America back to its foundational strength, "one step at a time," even if they are tiny steps.

Governor Huckabee put his words into action. He instituted character education in public schools to teach children "age-old manners such as manners and respect for others."<sup>20</sup>

What we have in America today is a clash of worldviews. We constantly witness the polarization in the arts, politics, business, media, and education. Do we believe in the moral absolutes that America was founded upon or moral relativism? For a bright future for America, both economically and socially, we need to return to our foundational roots and restore the principles that made our nation successful. Since our nation's future will be largely determined by how the upcoming generation is taught, an important place to start is by training our children with positive values.

I urge everyone to become involved in the education of children. It has been said, "What you put into the school will appear in the life of the people of the next generation." We *must* provide children with an education in keeping with the standards that have made our nation successful. We should never forget the future pain and suffering these children will encounter because of the destructive effects of their inadequate moral learning experience.

I want to also stress the social and economic impact when character is not a national priority. Taxpayers must pay billions of dollars because of lack of character training resulting in drug abuse, assault, robbery, rape, venereal diseases, illegitimate children, alcohol abuse, and other socially harmful activities. Money that could be much better spent on improving education, building safer highways, and providing better health care for the masses. Who will arise to call America back to her foundational strengths? The issues are clearly marked; the lines are drawn.

There is hope. On September 11, 2001, terrorists, in hopes of discouraging Americans, targeted our nation and with four planes flew into the World Trade Center, The Pentagon, and crashed into an open field and within a few hours murdered over 3,000 innocent people. That tragic event brought a new awakening to Americans. There is good and evil, and we as Americans have a value system that we're willing to defend. Nine days after the terrorists attack, Presi-

dent George W. Bush, addressing a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress put out this challenge:

Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children....I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them.

Let's hug our children and join the fight to uphold the values of America. We must not become discouraged over the entrenched bureaucracy or by their favorite attack of labeling opponents as bigoted and intolerant. We must not tolerate the idea that teaching character is unacceptable. Every small step in the right direction is a victory.

There is hope as parents, teachers, librarians, principals, superintendents, and those in authority insist our moral heritage and its values are taught in our schools. Everyone needs to be on the offensive and reject the relativistic philosophy; the future of our nation hinges on the values of its children.

Let each of us take the mantle of responsibility to transform American education into a system producing educated, moral citizens. Our action or inaction will determine what happens to our great nation.