

Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senate Bill 138

9/17/19

Thank you Chairman Olsen and committee members for holding a public hearing today on Senate Bill 138. The legislation before you will allow the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to administer grants to school districts who put a priority on character education.

Character education is a learning process that enables students and adults in a school community to understand, care about, and act on core ethical values. Values such as respect, justice, civic virtue, citizenship, and responsibility for self and others. Most of a young student's life is devoted to time in the classroom. This time in the classroom is a great opportunity to develop and reinforce the core values upon which character is formed.

In order to promote character education and incentivize schools to put resources into training its faculty, this bill provides funding to DPI to award grants for teachers and school leaders to participate in professional development training in character education. While this funding will not be enough to support full implementation of character education within districts, I feel that this legislation is a positive step in the right direction and will provide a strong incentive for school districts to develop a program within their districts.

Schools like Brown Deer Middle/High School and school districts like South Milwaukee have been named Wisconsin Schools of Character. As such, they have been recognized for their exemplary character education programs. Later today you will hear a few examples from school leaders on the importance of character education to developing the culture and community within their schools and districts. They have shown that the best way to implement character education is through a holistic approach that integrates character development into every aspect of school life.

I want to thank Representative Rodriguez and Senator Larson for their continued support and work on the bill. I would also like to thank the school personnel who were able to take time out of their schedules to speak to the positive impact character education has had on their schools and districts.

Thank you again committee members for holding a hearing today on SB 138.

I hope to have your support for SB 138.



CHRIS LARSON

STATE SENATOR

September 17, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Education
From: State Senator Chris Larson
Re: Senate Bill 138

Testimony of Sen. Larson in Support of Senate Bill 138

Chairman Olsen and members of the committee, thank you for giving Senate Bill 138 a public hearing and for giving me the opportunity to speak in favor of this proposal this morning.

This legislation offers our public schools an important tool in the education of our state's children. At the most basic level, character education creates a caring school community by emphasizing respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness, and perseverance. The legislation before you today offers an opportunity for our public school administrators, principals and teachers to engage in meaningful trainings on how best to incorporate virtuous characteristics in the classroom.

As our state continues to strive for the best citizenry possible, it makes sense to start early. Today, the committee will hear testimony from the Wisconsin Character Education Partnership as well as Brown Deer School District. I would also like to include that I represent the South Milwaukee School District, who through their knowledge and dedication to this program was named a National School of Character in 2017 and a State School District of Character in 2019.

Again, thank you Chairman Olsen and members of the committee for holding this hearing today.

WISCONSIN STATE CAPITOL
P.O. Box 7882 • MADISON, WISCONSIN 53707-7882
(608) 266-7505 • (800) 361-5487 • FAX: (608) 282-3547
SEN.LARSON@LEGIS.WI.GOV • SENATORCHRISLARSON.COM



JESSIE RODRIGUEZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

SB 138: Professional Development Training in Character Education
Testimony of State Representative Jessie Rodriguez
Senate Committee on Education
September 17, 2019

Good morning,

Committee Chairman Olsen and Senate education committee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 138, legislation that will allow for professional development training in character education for Wisconsin teachers.

Schools throughout the state are tasked with educating our children and teaching the skills needed to find a job, go to college and succeed in life after high school. From reading and writing, to math and science, they provide our students with vital life skills that will serve them long after graduation.

The purpose of Senate Bill 138 is to help equip teachers in each of our communities with the tools necessary to instill the best qualities in students with a specific focus on character. Character transcends across generations and encourages positive outcomes throughout life. Many of us learned what it means to be a person of good character from a young age. But not all students are afforded the same opportunities from a household with engaged parents.

Character education is a learning process for students and adults to develop and understand core ethical values rooted in four areas: respect, justice, civic virtue and citizenship, and responsibility for self and others.

This legislation requires the Department of Public Instruction to administer grants to give teachers the opportunity to receive professional development training in character education. Additionally, the bill allows teachers and school administrators to use character education training for professional development requirements.



JESSIE RODRIGUEZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Two school districts in Wisconsin have already taken the initiative and become leaders in character education. South Milwaukee Schools in my district and Brown Deer Middle and High Schools have proudly been recognized as Wisconsin Schools of Character. Both schools districts will serve as role models blazing the trail for the rest of our districts to follow.

Character education was once considered a core aspect of education in our country. This legislation places character back at the forefront of education and the first step to helping all children develop core values rooted in character that will encourage life-long growth as a person and student. I encourage your support for this legislation.

Thank you for your time.

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 138. My name is Mark Chapin and I am the principal of Meyer Middle School in River Falls. Meyer Middle School was recognized as a National School of Character in 2016. I also serve on the Wisconsin Character Education Partnerships Advisory Committee and most recently I earned my doctorate degree from Bethel University where I researched the character education change process and the role of principals in leading National Schools of Character. Through my literature review and my research I have become well acquainted with the topics of character education, leadership and organizational change. In my short time, I hope to share with you the research supporting the positive impact of character education along with one of the major keys to the successful implementation of effective character education which fundamentally begins with professional development for teachers, pupil service professionals, principals, and school district administrators.

Professional development *is* at the heart of Senate Bill 138.

My testimony will be a summary of the research found in the literature review of my dissertation and from my own research and experiences.

The moral and civic development of students has long been the aim of education (Elias, 1995; McClellan, 1999). However, high-stakes standardized testing has led to a narrowed focus on curriculum more easily measured (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Howard, Berkowitz, & Schaeffer 2004). In some cases, schools are dropping entire subject areas that are not being assessed on state measures in hopes of better results (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). However, achievement test scores predict only a small fraction of the variance in later-life success. Adolescent achievement test scores explain at most 15% of the variability in later-life earnings. A growing body of empirical research shows that character skills rival IQ in predicting educational attainment, labor market success, health, and criminality (Almlund et al., 2011; Heckman & Kautz, 2012, 2014).

Non-cognitive skills such as perseverance, a strong work ethic, self-control, attentiveness, self-efficacy, resilience to adversity, empathy, humility, tolerance of diverse opinions, and the ability to engage productively in society, are valued in the labor market, in school, and within our communities (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Heckman & Kautz, 2014). These skills enable people to shape their lives and to flourish (Heckman and Kautz, 2014). Character skills generate economic productivity and create social well-being. Character skills are malleable (Heckman & Kautz, 2014). Schools can influence and shape these non-cognitive skills through effective character education practices (Berkowitz, 2002).

Character education also produces a range of benefits that are linked to effective schooling (Benniga et al., 2006). Character education has been demonstrated in the research to have a positive impact on student behavior (Berkowitz & Bustamante, 2014; Bulach, 2002),

attendance, academic achievement (Benniga et al, 2006; Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014), and school climate (Elbot & Fulton, 2008; Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Character education, when implemented effectively is a comprehensive approach and requires attention at all facets of schooling including academics, discipline policies, governance structures, mission statements, and the overall culture (Berkowitz, 2011; Bulach, 2002; Elias, 2014). Character education is much more likely to work when it is well designed. Effective character education is built upon research-based principles within a meaningful, conceptual, and comprehensive framework (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Character education needs to be intentional and comprehensive. Sometimes it is intentional and rarely is it comprehensive. Therefore, professional development, focusing on research-based practices is critical to the effective implementation of character education.

Before I conclude I want to share two final thoughts:

First, I want to share with you my hope. And that is When our students graduate from high school and go onto technical school, the military or a four year degree and when they interview for their first job and their future employer asks the question: Why should we hire you? Our students can reflect on their character education experiences and opportunities and confidently and genuinely say, You should hire me because my moral and my performance character has made a positive impact on my home, school and community. Our students would be able to share specific examples of how they worked hard, persevered when it got tough, put the needs of others in front of their own, said please and thank you, worked well with others, served as a role model, made positive contributions in their community, demonstrated empathy and continue to strive to reach their potential through hard work and character. This is my hope.

Finally, I want to share with you a closing comment from a principal I interviewed from Missouri who lead a National School of Character. His story is not unique and echoes our experience in the School District of River Falls. He stated, "We paid very little money for the results we gained. It was really about just investing time and energy into a process."

Ultimately character education makes a positive impact in our schools and within our community by producing positive, responsible, and hardworking citizens at very low financial cost.

I want to thank you for this opportunity and would ask that you please consider the far reaching impact Senate Bill 138 will ultimately have in our schools, in our communities and the future success of our students. Thank you.

ELEVEN PRINCIPLES

Overview

The Character Education Partnership (CEP), a non-profit, non-sectarian national organization has developed eleven basic principles that can serve as criteria for schools to use in establishing character education programs.

The Eleven Principles provides a framework for establishing highly effective character education programs in schools. Understanding and using these principles helps schools: learn what character education is, how to identify a school environment that fosters character development in students, who must be involved in designing the character education program, and provides an evaluation component to assess a schools' character education program.

Training is available to help you and your staffs develop a deeper understanding of these principles and learn how to implement them in your school or district. CEP offers a one-day or two-day seminar on the Eleven Principles. This can be done for a school, a district, or in partnership with other districts. In addition, staff development can be customized for your needs.

For customized training, please contact Pam Woodard pamwoodard@yahoo.com.

What are the Eleven Principles?

The Eleven Principles

Principle 1:

Promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character

Character education holds that widely shared, pivotally important, core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others, form the basis of good character. A school committed to character development stands for these values (sometimes referred to as "virtues" or "character traits"), defines them in terms of behaviors that can be observed in the life of the school, models these values, studies and discusses them, uses them as the basis of human relations in the school, celebrates their manifestations in the school and community, and holds all school members accountable to standards of conduct consistent with the core values. In a school committed to developing character, these core values are treated as a matter of obligation, as having a claim on the conscience of the individual and community. Character education asserts that the validity of these values, and our responsibility to uphold them, derive from the fact that such values affirm our human dignity, promote the development and welfare of the individual person, serve the common good, meet the classical tests of reversibility (i.e., Would you want to be treated this way?) and universality (i.e., Would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?), and inform our rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. The school makes clear that these basic human values transcend religious and cultural differences, and express our common humanity.

Principle 2:

Defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior

Good character involves understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values. A holistic approach to character development therefore seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life. Students grow to understand core values by studying and discussing them, observing behavioral models, and resolving problems involving the values. Students learn to care about core values by developing empathy skills, forming caring relationships, helping to create community, hearing illustrative and inspirational stories, and reflecting on life experiences. And they learn to act upon core values by developing prosocial behaviors (e.g., communicating feelings, active listening, helping skills) and by repeatedly practicing these behaviors, especially in the context of relationships (e.g., through cross-age tutoring, mediating conflicts, community service). As children grow in character, they develop an increasingly refined understanding of the core values, a deeper commitment to living according to those values, and a stronger capacity and tendency to behave in accordance with them.

Principle 3:

Uses a comprehensive, intentional, proactive, and effective approach to character development

Schools committed to character development look at themselves through a moral lens to assess how virtually everything that goes on in school affects the character of students. A comprehensive approach uses all aspects of schooling as opportunities for character development. This includes what is sometimes called the hidden curriculum (e.g., school ceremonies and procedures; the teachers example; students relationships with teachers, other school staff, and each other; the instructional process; how student diversity is addressed; the assessment of learning; the management of the school environment; the discipline policy); the academic curriculum (i.e., core subjects, including the health curriculum); and extracurricular programs (i.e., sports teams, clubs, service projects, after-school care). "Stand alone" character education programs can be useful first steps or helpful elements of an ongoing effort but are not an adequate substitute for a holistic approach that integrates character development into every aspect of school life. Finally, rather than simply waiting for opportunities to arise, with an intentional and proactive approach, the school staff takes deliberate steps for developing character, drawing wherever possible on practices shown by research to be effective.

Principle 4:

Creates a caring school community

A school committed to character strives to become a microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society. It does this by creating a community that helps all its members form caring attachments to one another. This involves developing caring relationships among students (within and across grade levels), among staff, between students and staff, and between staff and families. These caring relationships foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person. All children and adolescents have needs for safety, belonging, and the experience of contributing, and they are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups that meet these needs. Likewise, if staff members and parents experience mutual respect, fairness, and cooperation in their relationships with each other, they are more likely to develop the capacity to promote those values in students. In a caring school community, the daily life of classrooms and all other parts of the school environment (e.g., the corridors, cafeteria, playground, school bus, front office, and teachers lounge) are imbued with a climate of concern and respect for others.

Principle 5:

Provides students with opportunities for moral action

In the ethical as in the intellectual domain, students are constructive learners; they learn best by doing. To develop good character, they need many and varied opportunities to apply values such as compassion, responsibility, and fairness in everyday interactions and discussions as well as through community service. By grappling with real-life challenges (e.g., how to divide the labor in a cooperative learning group, how to reach consensus in a class meeting, how to reduce fights on the playground, how to carry out a service learning project) and reflecting on these experiences, students develop practical understanding of the requirements of cooperating with others and giving of oneself. Through repeated moral experiences, students develop and practice the skills and behavioral habits that make up the action side of character.

Principle 6:

Includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed

When students succeed at the work of school and feel a sense of competence and autonomy, they are more likely to feel valued and cared about as persons. Because students come to school with diverse skills, interests and needs, an academic program that helps all students succeed will be one in which the content and pedagogy are sophisticated enough to engage all learners. This means providing a curriculum that is inherently interesting and meaningful to students. A meaningful curriculum includes active teaching and learning methods such as cooperative learning, problem-solving approaches, and experience-based projects. These approaches increase student autonomy by appealing to students interests, providing them with opportunities to think creatively and test their ideas, and fostering a sense of "voice and choice" having a say in decisions and plans that affect them. In addition, effective character educators look for the natural intersections between the academic content they wish to teach and the character qualities they wish to develop. These "character connections" can take many forms, such as addressing current ethical issues in science, debating historical practices and decisions, and discussing character traits and ethical dilemmas in literature. When teachers bring to the fore the character dimension of the curriculum, they enhance the relevance of subject matter to students natural interests and questions, and in the process, increase student engagement and achievement.

Principle 7:

Strives to foster students self motivation


Character is often defined as "doing the right thing when no one is looking." The best underlying ethical reason for following rules, for example, is respect for the rights and needs of others, not fear of punishment or desire for a reward. Similarly, we want students to be kind to others because of an inner belief that kindness is good and a desire to be a kind person. Growing in self-motivation is a developmental process that schools of character are careful not to undermine by excessive emphasis on extrinsic incentives. When such schools give appropriate social recognition for students prosocial actions (e.g., "Thank you for holding the door, that was a thoughtful thing to do.") or celebrate character through special awards (e.g., for outstanding school or community service), they keep the focus on character. Schools of character work with students to develop their understanding of rules, their awareness of how their behavior affects others, and the character strengths such as self-control, perspective taking, and conflict resolution skills needed to act responsibly in the future. Rather than settle for mere compliance, these schools seek to help students benefit from their mistakes by providing meaningful opportunities for reflection, problem solving, and restitution.

Principle 8:

Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students

All school staff - teachers, administrators, counselors, school psychologists, coaches, secretaries, cafeteria workers, playground aides, and bus drivers - need to be involved in learning about, discussing, and taking ownership of the character education effort. First and foremost, staff members assume this responsibility by modeling the core values in their own behavior and taking advantage of other opportunities to influence the students with whom they interact. Second, the same values and norms that govern the life of students serve to govern the collective life of adult members in the school community. Like students, adults grow in character by working collaboratively with each other and participating in decision-making that improves classrooms and school. They also benefit from extended staff development and opportunities to observe colleagues and then apply character development strategies in their own work with students. Third, a school that devotes time to staff reflection on moral matters helps to ensure that it operates with integrity. Through faculty meetings and smaller support groups, a reflective staff regularly asks questions such as:

- What character building experiences is the school already providing for its students?
- What negative moral experiences (e.g., peer cruelty, student cheating, adult disrespect of students, littering of the grounds) is the school currently failing to address?

- 
- And what important moral experiences (e.g., cooperative learning, school and community service, opportunities to learn about and interact with people from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds) is the school now omitting?
 - What school practices are at odds with its professed core values and desire to develop a caring school community? Reflection of this nature is an indispensable condition for developing the moral life of a school.

Principle 9:

Fosters shared moral leadership and long range support of the character education initiative

Schools that are engaged in effective character education have leaders (e.g., the principal, a lead teacher or counselor, a district administrator, or preferably a small group of such individuals) who champion the effort. At least initially, many schools and districts establish a character education committee often composed of staff, students, parents, and possibly community members that take responsibility for planning, implementation, and support. Over time, the regular governing bodies of the school or district may take on the functions of this committee. The leadership also takes steps to provide for the long-range support (e.g., adequate staff development, time to plan) of the character education initiative, including, ideally, support at the district and state levels. In addition, within the school students assume developmentally appropriate roles in leading the character education effort through class meetings, student government, peer mediation, cross-age tutoring, service clubs, task forces, and student-led initiatives.

Principle 10:

Engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort

Schools that reach out to families and include them in character-building efforts greatly enhance their chances for success with students. They take pains at every stage to communicate with families via newsletters, e-mails, family nights, and parent conferences about goals and activities regarding character education. To build greater trust between home and school, parents are represented on the character education committee. These schools also make a special effort to reach out to subgroups of parents who may not feel part of the school community. Finally, schools and families enhance the effectiveness of their partnership by recruiting the help of the wider community (i.e., businesses, youth organizations, religious institutions, the government, and the media) in promoting character development.

Principle 11:

Evaluates the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character

Effective character education must include an effort to assess progress. Three broad kinds of outcomes merit attention:

- **The character of the school:** To what extent is the school becoming a more caring community? This can be assessed, for example, with surveys that ask students to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements such as, "Students in this school (classroom) respect and care about each other," and "This school (classroom) is like a family."
- **The school staff's growth as character educators:** To what extent have adult staff, teaching faculty, administrators, and support personnel developed understandings of what they can do to foster character development? Personal commitment to doing so? Skills to carry it out? Consistent habits of acting upon their developing capacities as character educators?
- **Student character:** To what extent do students manifest understanding of, commitment to, and action upon the core ethical values? Schools can, for example, gather data on various character-related behaviors: Has student attendance gone up? Fights and suspensions gone down? Vandalism declined? Drug incidents diminished? Schools can also assess the three domains of character (knowing, feeling, and behaving) through anonymous questionnaires that measure student moral judgment (for example, "Is it wrong to cheat on a test?"), moral commitment ("Would you cheat if you were sure you wouldn't get caught?") and self-reported moral behavior ("How many times have you cheated on a test or major assignment in the past year?"). Such questionnaires can be administered at the beginning of a school's character initiative to get a baseline and again at later points to assess progress.