

There's an old English idiom that suggests if one thinks about or looks at something with "rose-coloured glasses," he or she will think it is more pleasant than it really is. Members of the Bayless Junior High community won't be accused of wearing "rose-coloured glasses" when it comes to our faith in, and commitment to, quality character education and its tangible contributions to the collective confidence and culture of our school. While the strategies and methods by which we – faculty, staff and students alike – embed character education into our lessons and lives continue to evolve, our view of what our school can be has not changed. Our vision is framed by the understanding that relationships build trust and a caring community – our school's character education goals.

Bayless Junior High's core ethical values of *Respect and Responsibility* have grown into the mantra we call, "The Bayless Way: Respect yourself and take responsibility for your learning." Through advisory lessons, students have defined what these traits really mean in their daily lives, and student leadership is prevalent throughout BJHS. Our students lead instruction during advisory classes as well as discussion with their parents during student-led conferences. Students lead tours for their parents during the "Days of Our Lives" event as well as presentations for educators during the annual Character Education Conference. Our staff and students' understanding of *Respect and Responsibility* has helped us transition from discussions of moral behavior, to a call for personal action as it relates to issues including the perils of smoking, the use of controlled substances, suicide prevention and sexual integrity.

Our intentional approach to character development - grounded in data analysis - prevents us from viewing our work with "rose-coloured glasses." Rather, we look at our collective community through a moral lens which encourages fostering relationships of trust among our students, parents, faculty and staff. This vision helps us make the daily leaps of faith that enable us to empower one another to accomplish the school's mission of growing "... responsible citizens for a diverse society."

P1: In 2006, Dr. Thomas Lickona, renowned CE educator, visited our school and shared his insights regarding character education with teachers, parents and students, citing his published study, *Smart and Good High Schools*. During his visit, he challenged our community to reconsider our core values, resulting in a targeted analysis of and focus on just two: *Respect and Responsibility*. Further refinement occurred later that year as a result of BJHS's involvement in the St. Louis Rams' *Huddle Up for Advisory*. The CE team, including various representatives from our BJHS community, created the school's Touchstone, which is used as a reflective framework for discussions pertaining to expected behavior for all members of our community. The Touchstone is recited each morning to reinforce what we believe respectful and responsible behaviors represent: "*At Bayless Junior High, we take the high road. We take pride in our school. We use kind words and actions, listen thoughtfully, and stand up for ourselves and others. We show respect and take responsibility for our learning. We are Bayless Junior High!*" The Touchstone is posted in all classrooms, public areas, and the Board of Education received a presentation on its significance. This fall, our students further defined our core values by compiling respectful and responsible behaviors in their own words and posting these expectations throughout the school. Our core values can be seen on student-inspired posters and t-shirts, within Character Council lessons, and most importantly, demonstrated by our students as evidenced by significant progress on yearly school improvement progress reports, yearly CHARACTER*plus* surveys, and the Missouri School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) School Recognition Program.

P2: The BJHS community strives to provide ample opportunities for our community (students, parents, faculty and staff) to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life. Each morning BJHS begins with a *Project Wisdom* "thought for the day" which emphasizes the importance of being respectful and responsible. This is followed by the school-wide recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and the BJHS Touchstone. The staff was trained by

renowned CE educator Dr. Marvin Berkowitz on why and how to conduct Class Meetings that serve as an important element in our daily classes. Through work with the St. Louis Rams' *Huddle Up for Advisory*, teachers have been trained to incorporate team-building activities to build trust within and among the advisories. Students "loop" each year, remaining with the same advisor to promote the understanding that the advisors are the students' advocates. During Advisory and regular academic classes, teachers reinforce the Touchstone by teaching students the Boys' Town "*How-To's*," providing students with practice in how to listen, ask questions, take constructive criticism, and disagree respectfully. Acting upon the core values they are taught, our 8th Graders build relationships with 2nd Grade students through the cross-age mentoring program *Pony Pals*, a 2007 CEP "*Promising Practice*."

P3: BJHS uses an intentional, comprehensive approach toward our school's character development. BJHS has implemented the *CHARACTERplus Survey Process* to identify our strengths and areas for needed progress as indicated by staff, students, and parents and we use this information to create each annual School Improvement Plan. One of our strategies in this year's SIP states: "BJHS has modified existing advisory system and created the Character Council class to increase the student's sense of *Autonomy*, as defined by the *CHARACTERplus Survey*." As our teachers revise their curriculum, they look for opportunities to infuse character development. For example, CE lessons are included in a Technology Education unit where students seek to answer what power source (nuclear, coal, wind, or hydroelectric) is the most respectful and responsible in relation to neighboring communities and the environment. In 2008, BJHS received a CEP "*Promising Practice*" for Character in the Curriculum, recognizing a Communication Arts unit where 7th grade students learn the values of respect and responsibility through comprehensive study of the Civil Rights Movement.

P4: As mentioned previously, building trust and a caring school community are our CE goals and we have modified our existing advisory program to further support our student's learning.

During a typical week in Advisory, our students participate in one session dedicated to teambuilding, facilitated by the advisor. The most important aspect of this activity is the reflective time used to discuss why it is a valuable lesson and for students to express the connection between the activity and how relationships and trust are built. Two advisory sessions per week are Sustained Silent Reading days which support our school's curricular goal of improving student achievement through literacy. Advisory students also receive a CE lesson taught by two of their classmates who prepare for each week's lesson in our newly-created Character Council class. The final advisory day of the week is our Intramurals Day, where students learn appropriate ways to interact with teammates and opponents while providing an opportunity to take pride in themselves and their respective team's accomplishments. BJHS demonstrates that we care by participating with our kids in activities such as our annual Olympiad (Field Day), as well as attending training with them on subjects ranging from bullying to teenage depression and suicide. We are very proud that BJHS is the first school to be completely trained by Chad's Coalition in the SOS (Signs of Suicide) Curriculum. Everyone in our BJHS school community has learned to ACT (Acknowledge, Care and Tell) when they discover a friend or colleague struggling with thoughts of harming themselves.

P5: BJHS provides our collective community with numerous opportunities for moral action. Missouri is the "Show-Me State" and accordingly, our students not only learn about character, they show it. For example, through participation with Youth Empowerment in Action (YEA), our students will create an educational marketing plan specific to our community to help raise awareness of the dangers of smoking. To promote individual ownership, each Advisory has researched and adopted a service-learning project to learn more about those in need, as well as to donate time, resources, and/or money to assist them.

P6: BJHS implements numerous strategies to accommodate the very diverse cultures, skills, interests, and needs of our students – and our efforts are paying off. For example, BJHS has

emerged as a regional leader in employing new techniques for high-quality instruction to our large ELL population. Using a two-year Federal grant, BJHS was one of only four schools in Missouri to pilot the Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP) and receive on-going specialized training that now forms the core of our professional development program. Recently, BJHS was instrumental in assisting the District in winning a \$1.5 million Federal Math and Science Grant, enabling all teachers in grades 6-12 to receive training in the SIOP Model. In light of BJHS's impressive academic gains using this model, the school was used as a case study for Pearson Academic Solutions (http://www.pearsoned.com/pr_2008/052308.htm). BJHS staff members have been featured in numerous local television newscasts and recently in the Cooperating School Districts Professional Development *Best Practices* video series, exemplifying differentiated instruction. Respecting the unique learning styles of all of our students, the *CARE Team* process has been created to proactively address the social, emotional, and educational needs of our students to ensure our students' success. This fall, a 90-minute block scheduling system was instituted and *READ 180* was added to our course offerings to assist students who are experiencing literacy development challenges.

P7: BJHS explicitly values good character for its own sake. We look for opportunities to celebrate the natural, beneficial consequences of acts of character, from how we acknowledge the efforts of our staff, to recognizing the good character of ourselves and others, to making wise choices regarding the types of foods and beverages we put into our bodies. Our school nurse helps students make sound decisions regarding their health by regularly creating informational posters and placing them where students are likely to read them – even in restroom stalls! When students are referred to the office for disciplinary concerns, they are first provided the opportunity to reflect upon how their actions were consistent with the BJHS Touchstone. The Office Referral Reflection asks students to reconsider their behavior and helps them process what they could do in the future to produce more positive results. Students also use the Referral

Reflection during discussions with the principal, making visits to the Principal's Office opportunities for "teachable moments."

P8: As our school's logo states, our school is one "*Where Character is a Team Effort!*" and the BJHS community works together to carry out our school-wide CE program. Our CE team includes students, parents, special education representatives, as well as members from our certified and classified staffs. We look for opportunities to combine our efforts to support our CE goals by using the filter, "How does a given initiative/program/event/policy contribute to our overall school CE program?" The newly-created Academic Integrity Committee is now considering classroom issues directly affecting student performance, including how we calculate student grades. Lively debate has ensued as we wrestle with the question: "When working with students, should BJHS teachers choose the most hurtful, unrecoverable end of the "F" scale – the zero (0%) – or the most constructive, recoverable end of the "F" range – (50%)?" Continuing education in CE also plays an important role at BJHS. The principal is a graduate of the region's Leadership Academy for Character Education and holds Advanced Certification in CE, and numerous members of the BJHS staff have earned, or are currently seeking, CE Certification.

P9: From the District's superintendent (who chairs the Superintendents' Committee for the CHARACTER*plus* organization) to our students, we are all involved in creating and maintaining a caring community and sharing the leadership roles that contribute to our efforts. BJHS recently hosted the Planning and Advisory Council meeting for CHARACTER*plus*, where our students participated in a lesson on the importance of *Character in the Workplace*. The Planning and Advisory Council is composed of a group of dedicated educators and business leaders from the St. Louis region and is headed by Sanford N. McDonnell, the founder of CHARACTER*plus*.

P10: BJHS's effective "TEAM (*Together Everyone Achieves More*)-Approach" engages families and community members as partners in our character-building effort. BJHS offers frequent Parent Night workshops to keep families informed on issues affecting their children,

including: Internet Safety, Bullying, Navigating the Teen Years, African-American Family Roundtable discussions and Multicultural Family Gatherings. Community organizations such as Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri provide on-going curriculum and instruction to assist our students with social skills and relationship development through our successful *Call Mentoring Program*.

P11: Data drives instruction at BJHS and, likewise, drives our CE program – and the data shows we are making significant, meaningful progress towards our CE goals. As evidenced by the Spring 2008 CHARACTER*plus Survey Process* results, parents have an 84.24% approval rating and “believe their children are getting a well-rounded and an excellent education.” Likewise, on the same survey, our students report a 31% increase in approval regarding their sense of “Autonomy and Influence.” Our students are performing well academically and are responding positively to our CE programs. For example, over the last four years, the cumulative number of failing grades has decreased by 63% and the average daily attendance is 94%. Despite an increasing enrollment, the school has witnessed an 11.4% decrease in office referrals and suspensions per-capita since 2005. Although BJHS did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Spring 2008 – unlike the previous four years – our Limited English Proficient students achieved AYP for the first time and recorded astonishing growth in the number of proficient/advanced scores in both Communication Arts (1,783% increase) and Mathematics (57.6% increase). Through our school's work with character education, we have discovered the key to inspiring lives of integrity. We've learned relationships build trust and the caring community known as Bayless Junior High School.