

10-1-2004

Building Character Through 4-H School Partnerships

Sherry Nickles

Ohio State University Extension, nickles.1@osu.edu

Vicki Reed

Ohio State University Extension, reed.192@osu.edu

Rebecca J. Cropper

Ohio State University Extension, cropper.1@osu.edu

Kathryn J. Cox

Ohio State University Extension, cox.5@osu.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Nickles, S., Reed, V., Cropper, R. J., & Cox, K. J. (2004). Building Character Through 4-H School Partnerships. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(5), Article 23. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss5/23>

This Ideas at Work is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



October 2004 // Volume 42 // Number 5 // Ideas at Work // 5IAW4



PREVIOUS
ARTICLE



ISSUE
CONTENTS



NEXT
ARTICLE



0

Building Character Through 4-H School Partnerships

Abstract

Since 1997, Ohio 4-H has participated in the Ohio Partnership for Character Education (OPCE) and conducted successful 4-H school character education programs. Three programs are highlighted in this article, along with four recommendations for future 4-H school character education partnerships: youth character education should be a priority need in communities served by the partnership; schools should be open to partnerships with community organizations; the wealth of character education curricula should be reviewed to select resources which meet local needs; and funding for the continuation of successful pilot programs should be secured early.

Sherry Nickles

Wayne County OSU Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development
nickles.1@osu.edu

Vicki Reed

Muskingum County OSU Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development
reed.192@osu.edu

Rebecca J. Cropper

Brown County OSU Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development
cropper.1@osu.edu

Kathryn J. Cox

OSU Extension 4-H Specialist, Youth Development
cox.5@osu.edu

Ohio State University Extension
Columbus, Ohio

Background

In today's global society, it is important to help youth develop character. Since 1997, Ohio 4-H has participated as one of 16 partner organizations in the Ohio Partnership for Character Education (OPCE). Approximately \$12,000 was provided annually for 5 years through a Department of Education/OPCE grant to develop pilot 4-H character programs in target counties.

4-H professionals in three counties formed partnerships between 4-H and local schools to plan, conduct, and evaluate programs incorporating best practices identified in recent research for successful youth character development and 4-H school programming (DeBord, Martin, & Mallilo, 1996; Diem, 2001; Harms & Fritz, 2001; Locklear & Mustian, 1998; McDaniel, 1998; McNeely & Wells, 1997). This article shares program highlights and recommendations for developing future 4-H school character education partnerships.

Wayne County Character Education

Each year, approximately 3,000 1st through 4th graders participate in Character Counts! programs conducted through the Wayne 4-H school partnership. The 4-H agent trains 12 volunteer teachers annually to conduct programs in 18 elementary schools from October through March. Each month, teachers visit classrooms and facilitate experiential learning activities focused on a pillar of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. A decision-making and recognition program is held for all students in April. Evaluations indicate that 84% of

teachers believe the program teaches students concepts of being persons of good character and is of great immediate use.

To supplement the school program, the Extension Agent writes monthly character education newspaper columns and records radio programs. A monthly newsletter, *Parent's Pillar*, is also written and distributed to each student to take home to parents and caregivers. The FCS Agent also offers a program on teaching character at home to school parent organizations.

Muskingum County Character Education

Up to 600 youth annually have been involved in character education through Muskingum 4-H. Delivery methods, cooperating organizations, and schools vary, thus adding to overall awareness and success in reaching diverse audiences.

The primary focus of the Muskingum 4-H school partnership is building character with elementary youth. The 4-H Agent conducts in-services for teachers and administrators on Character Counts!. To support their work with students, the partnership provided character education materials through the county's 21 elementary school libraries and support for school character assemblies, student incentive programs, and other efforts.

In 2000, the program reached youth in eight additional schools in an expanded partnership with Muskingum Children's Services. Intervention specialists incorporated character education programming in individual and group work with at-risk youth and their parents.

A further expansion effort with Muskingum Behavioral Health involved middle and high school students in character education programming. Court-referred youth from two school districts were reached through weekend retreats and after school detention.

Brown County Character Education

Brown County 4-H school character education programs are conducted in five school systems by three program assistants funded by United Way. OPCE funds supported Character Counts! programming as part of a leadership skills program in which youth develop decision-making skills for being responsible, trusting, fair, caring, trustworthy citizens.

Character education is also incorporated into other 4-H school programs such as Kauffman 4-H Mini-Society, where students set up countries and businesses, and elect leaders to run their countries. Students define characteristics of strong leaders and, over the course of the program, demonstrate greater understanding of the importance of good character for effective leadership.

Twelve students in one junior high school were also trained in conflict mediation and established a mediation team to help peers deal with conflict. The team addressed character issues and integrated the six pillars into their resolution processes.

Recommendations For Developing 4-H School Character Education Partnerships

The results of these 4-H character education programs support McDaniel (1998) and DeBord, Martin, and Mallilo's (1996) findings that 4-H school partnerships have the potential to significantly affect youth character development. In addition to the recommendation that 4-H school partnerships should be developed elsewhere, lessons learned over the past 5 years provide the basis for four additional recommendations to enhance the potential success of such partnerships:

- Youth character education should be identified as an important need and high priority in communities served by the partnership. As a Character Counts! Coalition partner, 4-H is well-positioned to develop and deliver local character education programs. However, we also are well-positioned with programs related to a wide variety of other needs and topics. 4-H resources should be directed towards meeting high priority needs, and partnerships are most successful when all partners have shared goals and objectives.
- The school must be open to community partnerships. School administrators, including system superintendents and building principals, must fully support the 4-H school partnership. The degree to which school personnel view 4-H school partnerships as useful and relevant for achieving their educational mission relates directly to the success of the partnership and the outcomes and impacts achieved.
- There is a wealth of excellent character education material available. Partners should review and select those that best meet local needs as programs are planned each year.
- Funding and other support for the continuation of successful pilot programs should be openly discussed, planned for, and secured as early as possible. Reductions in on-going funding streams are often experienced by all partners simultaneously. Proactive, collaborative, and creative approaches are necessary in such situations for securing the resources needed for all partners to continue.

Acknowledgment

CHARACTER COUNTS!SM is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

References

DeBord, K., Martin, M., & Mallilo, T. (1996). Family, school, and community involvement in school-age child care programs: Best practices. *Journal of Extension*. 34(3). [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1996june/a3.html>

Diem, K. (2001). National 4-H school enrichment survey. *Journal of Extension*. 39(5). [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001october/rb6.html>

Harms, K., & Fritz, S. (2001). Internalization of character traits by those who teach Character Counts! *Journal of Extension*. 39(6) [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001december/a4.html>

Locklear, E. L., & Mustian, R. D. (1998). Extension-supported school-age child care programs benefit youth. *Journal of Extension*. 36(3) [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1998june/rb4.html>

McDaniel, A. K. (1998). Character education: Developing effective programs. *Journal of Extension*. 36(2) [On-Line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1998april/a3.html>

McNeely, N. N., & Wells, B. J. (1997). School enrichment: What factors attract elementary teachers to 4-H science curriculum? *Journal of Extension*. 35(6). [On-line]. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1997december/tt1.html>

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)