

## *Teaching with Character and Links Crew*

### **About the project ...**

There were two components to the Upper Grand DSB project – one focused on supporting staff (Teaching with Character) and one on supporting students (Links Crew). Together, they provided staff and students with opportunities to authentically embed character development in daily teaching and learning activities and practices.

*Teaching with Character* supports and extends school environments in which the board character traits are known and lived by everyone. The project provides support to administrators in guiding teachers through reflective processes based on solution-focused case studies relating to character traits. Teachers are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of the traits through professional dialogue and the use of support materials that were distributed throughout the system in the 2008–09 year. To extend the learning, a large group presentation with a character theme was held for all board staff and workshops for teachers were held on PD Days, after school and at the August 2010 Learning Fair. A teacher resource focused on the character traits was also created and shared at the workshops and with other boards at a spring regional conference.

*Links Crew* is a program based on the belief that students helping each other leads to enhanced success for all. Senior students are trained as mentors to Grade 9 students to help them make a successful transition to high school and discover what it takes to be successful both academically and socially. These leaders facilitate activities to develop both character and the student as a learner. A Student Links Conference gives the leaders the opportunity to work with other link leaders from across the board to increase their leadership skills and further impact the culture and students at their home schools.

### **Impact on student learning and school culture ...**

- The focus on character as a lens for decision-making and problem-solving has built awareness about the positive impact that a positive climate for working and learning has on student learning and achievement.
- Through their experiential learning opportunities to develop leadership skills, the leaders' ability to facilitate mentor groups was enhanced.
- Student leaders connected with other leaders across the board and province, which provided them with ideas to take back to their own schools.
- *Links Crew* students returned to their schools from the conference with a greater ability to model excellence in the board's character traits.

### **Lessons learned for moving forward ...**

- Character development is embedded in many other initiatives – French language, First Nations, Inuit and Métis, safe schools, environmental and inclusive education and student engagement/student success.
- There is a growing awareness of the importance of educating the head, heart and hands (cognitive, social and emotional development of children and youth) to maximize student achievement. *Students Walk with Character* is the theme of next year's plan.
- The Character Education Subcommittee will make concrete links between equity issues and the board character traits and will share strategies for using character initiatives as a springboard for equity education at family of schools meetings.
- There will be a continued focus on developing student leadership and using student voice to inform school practices.
- Best practice sharing opportunities for school character education leaders will continue; this is a strong request from teachers.