



Character Building for School and Life
Feb/March 2010 Issue of Our Children

Character Counts – But Why?



Mark Twain once quipped that everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it. A similar statement can be made about character – we discuss it abstractly and declare that it’s important, but when it comes to explaining what this *really* means, we’re at a loss. What IS character? Why is it so important? How do we teach it?

At the National PTA, we have been stressing the importance of parental involvement and education for 114 years. But for our organization, “education” isn’t just about reading, writing, math and science. It’s a much broader term that also includes teachings related to patience, respect, honesty, integrity, loyalty, responsibility and more. All of these things make up a person’s character. Whenever a child sets foot in a classroom, he or she is learning the character-enhancing skills that will improve academic successes, yes, but also greatly improve success in life beyond the school grounds and well beyond their childhood.

Think about this: When you select your PTA leaders, for example, who has your vote? The person with the highest intellect? The nicest clothes? The strongest ambition? Or, is it someone who displays true character? I’d put my money on the latter. When it comes down to it, we all want nothing more than to be able to trust and rely on our peers, colleagues and leaders wholeheartedly, and this all begins with character development.

“The proper time to influence the character of a child is about 100 years before he’s born,” says early 20th century American playwright William R. Inge. Since none of us have time machines, we’ve got to make use of the present to bring character development to the forefront.

Now, the great thing about character is that anyone, anywhere can develop it. Character is not something you’re born with, it’s not a part of some pre-determined fate and it’s not a

permanent fixture. It knows no ethnic, emotional or geographical boundaries. Rather, character is *built*. It is malleable. It is nurtured.

As parents and PTA leaders who actively participate in our children's educations, part of our job is to help build and shape our children's character. The features in this issue of *Our Children* span many different topics – from the dismantling the gender biased “boys code” to musical theatre's impact on positive life choices – yet they all provide practical insight into how we must engage boys and girls in learning life skills that will help them in *and* out of the classroom.

By learning how to infuse character-building into the classroom, we are arming our children with a truly comprehensive education and fulfilling the mission of PTA. I encourage you to use the tools in this issue to help your children on the road to a successful life, and please feel free to reach out to me to share your additional comments, thoughts and ideas for how we can use the power of our organization to build character in the classroom and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles J. Saylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Charles J. “Chuck” Saylor
2009-2011 PTA National President