



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

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What strategies can school district’s use to engage their community in developing Life-Ready students?

The Orting School District believes that the important work of developing the life-ready skills of their students means endowing them with strong character traits such as patience, humility and forgiveness – *and recognizing those traits in others*. They also believe that implementing a wraparound approach by engaging the community in their work is the best way to empower students with the confidence and social and emotional skills they will need for success in the future. The district implemented the following strategies during their first year of a character development focus to involve students, staff, and community. What began as an intentional focus on a character trait each month to drive that work has evolved into a community wide movement called #OrtingCares.

Strategy 1: Focus on one character trait per month as a community

This work began at the district kick-off event in August where the school district took on commitment in September in front of the entire staff and community leaders. They shared plans to encourage the community to take a monthly Dare to Care around a character trait and to share their stories on social media with the hashtag #OrtingCares. They also planted a seed for community leaders in attendance by sharing their hope that the community would join them in fostering this life readiness vision – helping a culture of caring live and breathe throughout Orting.

Strategy 2: Partner with community groups to “sponsor” monthly character traits

As they transitioned into October, they Orting Valley Senior Center to join them in patience and daring the community to spend someone that they normally wouldn’t Orting High School students accepted the visiting the senior center and engaging in conversation with the community seniors. meet and greet was over, beautiful new had formed and the high schoolers could be stating how much they enjoyed the and wanted to go back to volunteer.



invited the presenting time with interact with. dare by authentic When the relationships overheard experience

November brought humility and a partnership with Orting Valley Fire and Rescue to highlight humility. Area firefighters visited the elementary schools to talk about humility and even provided some fun examples of what humility looks like for the youngest learners. Then, something magical happened. In January and without being asked, the City of Orting used a sign they own along the main road that welcomes people to the town to share

January's character trait message of Kindness! The work had begun its transition from district-led to community-led.

The work continued to flourish into the spring when the local teen center, The Haven, partnered on Respect, Orting Police Department partnered on Honesty, and the local Lion's Club partnered on Forgiveness, *some of them reaching out to engage in this work!* #OrtingCares popped up in a community newsletter and the city continued to share the monthly character trait and dare to care on the town's welcome sign.

Strategy 3: Develop a communications plan

Consistent messaging was key. The district created a digital and print flyer each month to announce the character trait, community partner and monthly Dare to Care. This flyer was distributed on social media, in district newsletters, brought to district and community events, and displayed throughout district facilities. Community partners also shared the flyer on their mediums, and with the help of the district, many created additional content such as short videos or photos to further promote the message. The hashtag created, #OrtingCares, served as a platform for anyone in the community to share stories of care and strong character.

Strategy 4: Calendar intentional touch-points throughout the year for students and staff

In addition to community involvement, they wanted to provide their staff and students with the tools to advocate for this work. To do this, they scheduled numerous workshops with John Norlin from CharacterStrong to help their students and staff make connections between strong character, strong community, and life readiness. Upon visiting schools, they witnessed elementary teachers talking about character traits during story time, middle-schoolers writing commitment contracts to tie themselves to a character goal, and high schoolers hanging inspirational signs all over school.

Strategy 5: Host a community celebration and awards event

The district hosted an event for the entire community called Caring Connections to celebrate the shared culture of caring work. At the event, students presented how they were implementing strong character in Orting and people from all across Orting who had embodied the highlighted character traits were recognized by community leaders.

Strategy 6: Find and share opportunities to celebrate each other

The district looked for opportunities to share examples of caring in Orting. When the fire department joined students to build a new sleigh to accept food donations in the annual Christmas parade, the district shared the story. When Mayor and district leadership cooked pancake breakfast for city public works and district facilities and transportation employees to say "thank you" for their hard work during some extremely inclement weather, the district shared the story. When Orting High School students organized a very special Easter egg hunt, hanging over 825 personalized paper eggs up around school to individually recognize the uniqueness and strength of every student and staff member, the district shared the story. Creating and sharing specific examples of real people in the community positively contributing to the culture of caring served as inspiration for others to get involved.

What started out as district-led work is now community inclusive because of student and staff led work, community partnerships, consistent messaging that have lent “teeth” to the mission. The district and community are already looking ahead to next year, where they will continue to build on the foundation that has been put in place to nurture this culture of caring so that all students graduate ready for college, careers, and life!

This article was written by:

Dr. Marci Shepard, Superintendent, Orting School District

shepardm@orting.wednet.edu

Tara Long, Communications Coordinator, Orting School District

LongT@orting.wednet.edu

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