

National Conference of State Legislatures Resolution in Support of the Efforts of Operation Respect Inc.

August 8, 2002

WHEREAS, NCSL joins the National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, American Association of School Administrators, Council of Great City Colleges of Education, National Education Association, Council of the Great City Schools, American School Counselors Association, National School Boards Association, National Middle School Association, and American Federation of Teachers in supporting efforts to “meet the crisis of violence head-on, while simultaneously addressing the academic needs of students, giving them the tools to become whole, productive human beings; responsible, humane, ethical, participating members of our democracy and our society;” and

WHEREAS, NCSL applauds the goals of Operation Respect and its efforts to work with state legislatures to ensure the health and well-being of the next generation of children;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, NCSL forwards Operation Respect’s proposals for state legislative action for review and consideration where appropriate by the 50 state legislatures, territories and commonwealths of the United States.

1. General Provisions

A. Legislators have an obligation to help our children acquire the skills they need to become productive and contributing members of our society. As part of this responsibility, we must encourage our schools to ensure that children are well trained in academic subjects and also given the social-emotional skills that build character and lay the foundation of good citizenship. Scholastic achievement must go hand-in-hand with the acquisition of traits such as honesty, cooperation, fairness, respect for others, kindness, trustworthiness, the ability to resolve conflict, and the insight to understand why such character traits are important.

B. The inclusion of research-based character education and social-emotional learning programs from preschool through high school improves students’ ability to learn.

Such programs help build safe, friendly and positive school climates, that allow teachers to excel and students to succeed academically. Additionally, such programs help build civil, caring and educated communities.

C. The failure to include character and social-emotional education learning programs leads to unacceptable consequences, including alienation among young people leading to physical and emotional violence, which injures students, teachers and communities. Neglect in this area impedes academic achievement and the future success of children as productive members of society.

2. Principles

For these reasons, NCSL encourages its members to work toward enactment of broader support for character education and social-emotional learning programs in schools as reflected by the following principles:

1. Building academic achievement on a foundation of character education and social-emotional learning benefits students for the rest of their lives and improves the communities in which they live.
2. These programs—if they are well-implemented, comprehensive and based on sound research—decrease the emotional and physical injury children suffer at school and in their community. They improve school climates and academic performance and reduce school truancy. They also diminish disruptive and dysfunctional behavior of at-risk students.
3. Individual states, communities, school districts and schools should strive to create or expand these programs within the framework of their own particular needs, concerns, standards and circumstances.
4. These programs that provide tools for positive, healthy social interactions should be integrated into the core curriculum, as well as other aspects of school life including before and after school programs, school-based mental health programs, and student support services.
5. These programs should be implemented, in coordination with community programs, on a year-round basis as part of a preventative strate-

gy, not introduced as short-term and reactive responses to specific problems or crises.

6. These programs should be continuously evaluated and improved through a process that stipulates and updates targeted goals based on the collection and assessment of data and a review of any changes in school circumstances and scientific advances in the field.

7. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities should be fostered whenever possible to design and implement the best kinds of learning practices and ensure that what is taught in school is reflected in the home environment.

8. Mentors and role models can be key components of successful programs. Teachers, administrators and other school personnel should model positive character traits so students can emulate their behavior.

9. A key to success is adequate, reliable and sustained funding for professional development to make sure that, where feasible: (1) Prospective teachers are trained in character education and social-emotional learning during pre-service education. (2) Practicing teachers who have received little or no training in this area are encouraged and supported in their efforts to secure such training. (3) Sufficient funds are made available to facilitate such training. (4) There is a sufficient number of trained and qualified school counselors to support and assist teachers and students in character education and social-emotional learning programs. (5) Schools and school districts develop their own internal capacity for such training.

10. States should provide opportunities and resources, including professional development, to schools and school districts that voluntarily choose to adopt these programs, concentrating especially on schools with low income populations, limited financial resources and/or underperforming schools.

11. Voluntary implementation of programs by local schools and school districts is preferable to implementation resulting from broad legal mandates. Therefore, decision-making authority should be placed in the hands of local boards of education and educators.

3. Proposals

Based on these principles and recognizing the unique circumstances of each state, NCSL encourages its members to promote adoption of some or all of the following proposals to implement character education and social-emotional learning in schools.

The implementation of character education and social-emotional learning as a companion to the academic achievement of children:

1. Provide that the legislature declares that a safe and civil environment in school is necessary for students to learn and achieve high academic standards. States are encouraged to review state laws and educational policies to ensure that such laws and policies support the creation and sustaining of safe and civil environments.
2. Strongly encourage state and local education officials, parent groups, teachers' organizations and others to introduce comprehensive character education and social-emotional learning programs in grades pre K-12 as necessary components of core school curricula. Qualified educators and school administrators should determine how to incorporate such program components into existing curricula and education standards, stipulate appropriate guidelines for their use and ensure that such efforts are carried out effectively.
3. Advisory groups of policymakers, teachers and other educators, school administrators, school counselors, parents, community members and others should be formed to choose programs tailored to fit their schools' needs.
4. Assist school districts in adding character education and social-emotional learning to core academic curricula by offering access to funding through voluntary application for (a) professional development for in-service teachers, particularly those with little or no training in this area; (b) development of a public awareness outreach component to inform schools on how to acquire related funds and services and (c) professional development that facilitates the training of teachers by other teachers. Application for this funding assistance should be contingent on a commitment from the school or district to implement such programs on a multi-year basis and a willingness to participate in evalua-

tion studies. Special assistance should be offered to help districts and/or schools with limited means apply for available funds either through their school district offices, colleges of education or other appropriate agencies.

5. Working with local school boards and educators, develop a standard for a minimum ratio of qualified school counselors to students that falls within state budgetary capacities.

6. Recommend that a significant amount of character education and social-emotional training course hours be included in the requirements and standards for teacher certification so that new teachers begin their careers understanding and appreciating the importance of instruction and classroom management techniques that enable them to infuse these concepts into their everyday work. Qualified educators should recommend how much education in this area should be required.

7. Support state legislation that bases eligibility for program funding for character education and social-emotional learning on proven models and designs that: (a) are comprehensive in their approach and include professional development for teachers, school counselors, and school administrators; (b) meet specified, comprehensive, research-based guidelines; and (c) involve parents, where feasible, with educators and administrators in all appropriate phases of the design, implementation and evaluation of such programs, and (d) focus special attention on schools with low income populations, limited financial resources and under-performing schools.

Addressing the specific needs of children exhibiting problem behaviors through the implementation of character education and social-emotional learning programs:

8. Identify training programs that extend beyond teachers to include administrators, professional school counselors, school nurses, health educators, pupil support personnel, law enforcement personnel, and others concerned with the safety and welfare of children. Such programs, incorporating the fundamentals of character education and social-emotional learning, should (a) address dysfunctional behavior among students and other potential sources of behavior disruptive to school settings; (b) develop intervention strategies for students who

are perpetrators or victims of disruptive or aggressive behavior, to prevent escalation of, and help eliminate, such behaviors and problems.

9. Working with the State Department of Education and others (including mental health professionals), encourage and assist school districts to develop school safety plans that include bullying prevention and conflict resolution programs that include training for teachers and other employees as well as counseling and special programs for bullies and their victims.

Assuring program sustainability:

10. Pursue new sources of funding for school safety and violence prevention programs including, but not limited to, state assistance grants, federal grants and initiatives, tobacco settlement money, special license plate fees, foundations and public/private partnerships among local agencies and businesses, and other innovative forms of funding.

11. Assure that the state develops appropriate mechanisms for meeting comprehensive goals based on sound research that can help assess and shape future programs.

A Joint Position of the National League of Cities–Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, Learning First Alliance, and National Collaboration for Youth

October 25, 2002

This school year, the odds are that over one-third of students do not have a safe place to go after school. Forty percent of middle and high school students feel unsafe traveling to and from school. Fewer than 50 percent of secondary school students receive support from three or more non-parent adults. Approximately 11 percent of 16-24 year olds are considered dropouts.

Changing these odds requires schools, social service agencies, and local governments to collaborate with families, faith-based organizations, and other community members. Because the lives of children and youth are greatly influenced by all of these sectors, all must be held accountable in providing America's youth the safe and supportive environments, the challenging experiences and opportunities, and the positive relationships necessary for achieving these outcomes. No one sector can do it alone.

Our three organizations call on leaders of the local municipal, education, and human service sectors to engage in discussions about the full range of positive outcomes each community wants for its youth, how to provide effective environments for youth before, during, and after school hours, and how to hold every sector accountable for its role in ensuring that the community's young people are successful.

There is now research-based agreement on key outcomes for youth, the key attributes that all youth settings should share, and the need for collaboration to achieve success. This research is synthesized in two reports. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* is a landmark analysis by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, and *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools* is a consensus report from the Learning First Alliance, a collaboration of the nation's leading education associations. These two recent research-based reports are a call to action for those who want to improve the odds of success for our children and youth.

These reports outline four key aspects of children and youth development: physical; intellectual; psychological/emotional; and social. Children and youth develop physi-

cally, intellectually, psychologically and socially, in school, at home, in community-based programs and agencies, in places of worship, and elsewhere in the community. Research indicates children and youth learn and develop best in settings that provide safety, supportive relationships, high expectations, positive social norms, appropriate structure, opportunities to build knowledge and skills, opportunities for service, and opportunities to belong.

Importantly, settings in which youth are successful also integrate family, school, and community efforts, which the National Research Council report defines as “concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school and community.” Achieving this integration requires overcoming the fragmented funding streams and the diverse professional cultures of schools, government, community organizations and other institutions with roles in helping children and youth succeed. Although all sectors influence child and youth development, educational institutions are most often held accountable for the successful development of young people. Yet, schools cannot and should not be expected to do this alone. No school district can by itself do all that needs to be done to improve our public schools - increase student achievement, reduce dropout rates, address the teacher shortage, and ensure students are ready to learn.

Achieving successful outcomes and ensuring that students are in good schools-and positive after-school and summer settings-are the shared responsibilities of many partners, including elected officials at all levels of government, leaders of community-based organizations, and social service agencies. Schools play a central role in building stable communities and improving outcomes for our young people. The quality of public schools and the other supports for young people are closely linked to the long-term prospects of our communities. They are critical to young people’s future success as citizens, parents and productive members of our economy.

This is not uncharted territory. Already, municipal leaders and broad-based community coalitions around the nation are mounting collaborative, community-wide strategies to transform schools into centers of community life. Where communities band together to create these opportunities for youth, their young people will be better prepared to enter adulthood with the knowledge, skills, and character to be productive members of our diverse and democratic society. Communities that do this are taking school-government-community partnerships from “nice to do” to “essential for success.”

The evidence is clear about the kinds of opportunities and settings that enable chil-

dren to be successful. Beginning discussions around these issues is only the first step. In order to translate conversations into strategies and actions, communities should develop and pursue a long-term commitment to the goal of safe and supportive learning communities that foster all aspects of child and youth development. Communities should define their outcomes, develop and implement measures and indicators to monitor their progress toward achieving those outcomes, and use their data to improve their community and school programs. Finally, all stakeholders must hold themselves publicly accountable for improving the odds for their children and the community.

We counsel that changing the odds for our children and youth requires intentionality of effort and longterm commitment. Success is not dependent solely on boosting test scores or the effectiveness of a youth program or the strength of a parent involvement strategy. It is about all those things and more. It is about sharing responsibility and accountability for all children and youth in our communities.

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Learning First Alliance, founded in 1997, is a permanent partnership of leading education organizations working together to improve student learning. The Alliance members are: the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Commission of the States, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, National PTA and the National School Boards Association. (For more information, go to www.learningfirst.org)

National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) is an association of more than forty leading national nonprofit providers and supporters of youth development programs. Most of these "household names" of youth services have local affiliates or branches that serve particular communities and neighborhoods within them. Together, the members of the NCY and their affiliates reach tens of millions of children and youth in virtually every community in America. They are bound together by a shared commitment to provide a united voice for and with youth; to improve the conditions for young people in America; and to help young people reach their potential and become caring and responsible adults. (For more information, go to www.nydic.org)

National League of Cities (NLC) is the oldest and largest national organization rep-

representing municipal governments throughout the United States. With a membership of 1,800 cities and towns, as well as 49 state associations, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for 18,000 U.S. cities that serve 225 million people across the U.S. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the NLC, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city council members, and other local leaders can play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

The Institute is a national resource, providing **guidance and assistance** to municipal officials, compiling and disseminating **information** on promising strategies and best practices, building **networks** of local officials working on similar issues and concerns, and conducting **research** on the key challenges facing municipalities in these core program areas. It collaborates with a broad range of national partners and works with the nation's 49 state municipal leagues to reach local officials in up to 18,000 cities and towns across America. (For more information, go to www.nlc.org/iyef)

Resources for Communities

Learning First Alliance. *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools*. November 2001.

Ordering Information

ASCD Stock No. 301279

Contact the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development at 1-800-933-ASCD (2723) extension 2 or, in the Washington, DC, metro area, (703) 578-9600. You may mail your order to ASCD, P.O. Box 79760, Baltimore, MD 21279-0760 or order from the ASCD web site at www.ascd.org.

National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations. *After School Collaboration: When It Works-Why It Works, A Literature Review*. 2001.

Ordering Information

Obtain order form at www.nydic.org, click on "Publications," and follow instructions or phone (202) 347-2080, ext. 19.

National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations. *Dimensions of School/Community Collaboration: What It Takes to Make Collaboration Work*. September 2002.

Ordering Information

Obtain order form at www.nydic.org, click on "Publications," and follow instructions

or phone (202) 347-2080, ext. 19.

National League of Cities. *Improving Public Schools* Action Kit. 2002.

To receive a free copy of the Improving Public Schools action kit, leave a detailed message at 202/626-3014 or e-mail reid@nlc.org. The action kit may also be downloaded in PDF format from NLC's web site at www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/waterfall1.pdf

National League of Cities. *Expanding Afterschool Opportunities* Action Kit. 2001

To receive a free copy of the Improving Public Schools action kit, leave a detailed message at 202/626-3014 or e-mail reid@nlc.org. The action kit may also be downloaded in PDF format from NLC'S web site at: www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/afterschool.pdf

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, Eds. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002.

Ordering Information

Contact the National Academy Press at 1-800-624-6242 or, in the Washington, DC, metro area, (202) 334-3313. You may also mail requests to the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Box 285, Washington, DC 20055, or go to www.nap.edu/books/0309072751/html.

Coalition for Community Schools. The Coalition for Community Schools works toward improving education and helping students learn and grow while supporting and strengthening their families and communities. Go to www.communityschools.org.