

# Five of 10 'universals' chosen by school board

**BLAIR EDWARDS  
THIS WEEK**

Five down, five civic values to go.

The local public school board has identified responsibility, respect, integrity, courage and empathy as five of the 10 "universal" character traits it wants to teach to students.



**Dr. Avis Glaze**

These universals will help form the backbone of a new character education program to be used in area public schools to produce moral as well as intelligent citizens.

"Respect and responsibility were the top two," says board director **Dr. Avis Glaze**.

"They are fundamental for a good school."

The board will name the remaining five character traits within the next two weeks, says Dr. Glaze.

The character education program should be in place by September 2004, says Dr. Glaze.

Dr. Glaze announced the identified traits at a June 9 Rotary Club meeting.

Earlier this spring, the board hosted a series of character education forums at the Peterborough Naval Club that brought together more than 100 community leaders including MPPs, parents, politicians, doctors, and leaders from business, First Nations and religious communities. The board held its last forum June 5.

Morals are a learned behaviour, stresses Dr. Glaze, that must be introduced to, and nurtured in, students as social beings.

Teachers, parents and community members must provide a moral counterweight to negative influences such as television violence, she says.

Teaching empathy to students will help prevent bullying in schools, she notes, and lead to less school suspensions and discipline problems, higher scores on tests, happier school staff and a better school attendance.

"We're not where we would like to be — our children right now are average in the province," she says.

"They have to be better than average."

Dr. Glaze first introduced character education to Toronto, and Canada as well, in 2000, where she was associate director of the York Region District School Board.

That board set up meetings with community leaders and picked 10 character attributes that they wanted to see developed in students: respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, fairness, initiative, perseverance, integrity, courage and optimism.

"The universals," as Dr. Glaze describes them.

"These are the qualities we want. They're not caught. They're taught."

The program showed results within a year, she says, with improved student behaviour, an increase in school attendance and better grades.

It's interesting, she notes, that local community members chose attributes almost identical to those picked by the York community.

"It means to me that there is some common ground to what people want."

Once finalized, the list of "universals" will be presented to teachers, principals and school councils.

Posters will be created to promote them in the schools.

York's school board spent about \$50,000 to promote the program and train teaching staff. The local board anticipates spending less, said Dr. Glaze when she introduced the program to the community in April.

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