



Minnesota Character Council

# CHARACTER Connect

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## In This Issue

- Are You Encouraging Your Students to Strengthen Their Character Muscles?
- Classroom Enrichment Activity: Laws of Life Essay Contest
- How is Your School's Culture and Climate?

## Minnesota Character Council

Matt Bostrom  
 Michael Hartoonian  
 Suwana Kirkland  
 Todd Lefko  
 Bill Mittlefehldt  
 Todd Otis  
 Ambrose R. Russell  
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 Barbara Shin  
 Steve Young\*  
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The MCC is administered by Synergy & Leadership Exchange.

To learn more visit [www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council](http://www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council)

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## Are You Encouraging Your Students to Strengthen Their Character Muscles?

By Wendy Horbinski

One of the best opportunities that a school environment provides is multiple "fresh starts" throughout the academic year. Whether your calendar is divided into quarters, trimesters, or semesters, each of these "mini new year's" allows students and educators to assess progress, reflect on challenges, identify what is important to them, and set new goals for the upcoming term.

Although academic and career goals are important, oftentimes the difference between reaching a goal or not is the personal practices or daily habits one does or doesn't put in place. These practices and habits are our character in action, and just like academics, music or athletics, we can strengthen our character muscles too.

Character.org separates character development into four domains:

- **Moral Character:** the character strengths of honesty and integrity, caring and compassion, gratitude, and the courage to take initiative.
- **Performance Character:** the character strengths of self-discipline, responsibility, goal setting, and grit.
- **Intellectual Character:** the character strengths of curiosity, carefulness, intellectual autonomy, humility, open-mindedness, and critical thinking.
- **Civic Character:** the character strengths of fairness, respect, volunteering and contributing to the common good.



## Are You Encouraging Your Students to Exercise Their Character Muscles? . . . continued

As students set goals for the next term, challenge them to include a character goal. Here's a reflection question to consider asking your students: "If I could develop one character muscle in the next four months, which one would help me reach a personal goal I have set for myself?"

Pushing oneself to start a new habit or change a current habit can be hard. One key to success in achieving any goal is monitoring progress. A few ways to support your students in this journey:

- Have students visualize themselves achieving their goal.
- Show your students how they can develop record-keeping tools to monitor their progress.
- Provide students with time to reflect on their progress.
- Pair students and teach them how to give effective feedback as an accountability partner.
- Focus on the process over the outcome.
- Celebrate and reward growth along the way.
- Model these practices with the class by sharing your own goal.

Strengthening our character muscles builds a solid foundation for reaching other goals. Taking advantage of the "mini new year's" provided by your school calendar allows multiple repetitions to practice reviewing, reflecting, and refining goals, allowing students to reach even greater heights. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Sow a Thought and you Reap an Action; Sow an Act, and you Reap a Habit; Sow a Habit, and you Reap a Character; Sow a Character, and you Reap a Destiny."

*Wendy Horbinski is coordinator of the Laws of Life Essay Contest at Character.org. Until her recent retirement, Wendy was principal of Necedah Elementary school in Necedah, Wisconsin. She also served as Director of Curriculum and Instruction. This article was reprinted with permission from Character.org.*

### Classroom Enrichment Activity: Laws of Life Essay Contest



The Laws of Life Essay Contest encourages middle school and high school students to reflect and write about a core value that means the most to them — and why.

In a quick overview, the contest:

- Is open to students in grades 4-12, worldwide.
- Accepts 250-500 word essays on the online [submission portal](#).
- Is FREE to enter.
- Is open for entries through Thursday, March 21, 2024.
- Provides each student submitter with a certificate of participation.
- Recognizes the "Most Compelling" essays from three students in grades 4–8 and three students in grades 9–12 with a \$100.00 cash award for themselves and a \$100.00 cash donation to the charity of the student's choice. In addition, the writers and their essays are featured on the Character.org social media channels.

## How is Your School's Culture and Climate?

By Barb Bergseth

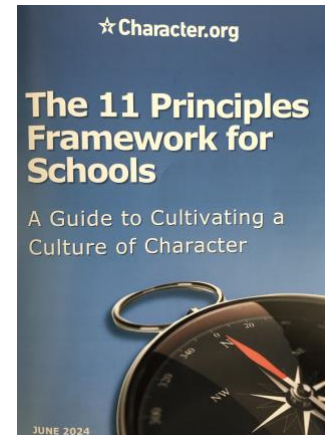
There is no "one size fits all" approach to developing a positive school climate and culture, so how do you know what you are doing is working?

The right assessment tool provides data that identifies what is working and those areas that need improvement.

Although it was developed as a guide to cultivate a culture of character, the *11 Principles Framework for Schools* includes a [self-assessment tool](#) that many schools use as a process for continuous improvement.

Trademarked by Character.org, the 11 Principles is an "evidence-informed framework based on decades of research and proven results that focuses on all aspects of school life, including culture and climate, social and emotional learning, student engagement, academic achievement, as well as teacher morale, and parent engagement." [Virtual and in-person workshops](#) are available to assist attendees in learning how to use the 11 Principles to create a culture of character in their classroom, school and district.

Character.org recently released a revised version of the 11 Principles guidebook. This document explains each principle and includes key indicators of what the principle should look like when fully implemented. It encourages schools to integrate a wide range of education approaches, including MTIS, PBIS, mental health and trauma-informed initiatives, responsive classrooms, restorative practices and other initiatives that focus on positive youth development. For an overview of the 11 Principles or to purchase the guidebook, visit <https://character.org/11-principles-in-schools/>.



The 11 Principles are also used as criteria for selection in Character.org's prestigious Schools of Character program. Schools and districts that have developed and implemented an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that embeds character into all aspects of school life can be certified at the state or national level. [Synergy & Leadership Exchange](#) is the state sponsor and works in partnership with Character.org to provide the program in Minnesota.

Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird,  
that cannot fly.

— *Langston Hughes*