

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THE ELEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

Based in Washington, DC, the Character Education Partnership is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to fostering effective character education in our nation's schools (www.character.org).

The CEP offers 11 Principles of Effective Character Education that are the cornerstone of their philosophy. Each principle outlines vital character elements that should not be overlooked in education. The 11 Principles of Effective Character Education offer fundamental guidance for educators and community leaders to maximize their character education outcomes. Link Crew is an excellent example of character education at its best.

In 2009, **Susquehanna High School** in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania and in 2011, **Lindbergh High School** in St. Louis, MO were honored as a *Character Education Promising Practice* for transitions, both using Link Crew as a centerpiece, demonstrating an exemplary level of implementation of Character Education Partnership's 11 Principles.

Below, we delineate the eleven principles and describe how Link Crew meets these characteristics.

THE 11 PRINCIPLES OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

- 1. The school community promotes core ethical and performance values as the foundation of good character.**
- 2. The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.**
- 3. The school uses a comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach to character development.**

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THESE PRINCIPLES

Link Crew is intentional in its approach to improve overall school culture. Hundreds of schools have watched as their student bodies have become more connected, more spirited and kinder to each other. Ethical behavior is promoted and reinforced by trusted messengers: upperclassmen peers starting with orientation and continuing throughout the school year with Academic Follow Ups, Social Follow Ups and Leader-Initiated Contacts.

An intentional and proactive approach to the selection of Link Leaders ensures that students who would otherwise not socialize with each other a common purpose and a common goal, thus diminishing antagonism that might exist between these groups. Link Leaders are positive, natural leaders from a broad social cross-section so student leadership is shared by a variety of groups and the climate reflects the diversity of the school population.

The more connected students are to their new school, the better they will do in all the measures that are important in tracking their success: grades, test scores, attendance, and discipline. All these measures are positively affected when students are connected.

Academic Follow-Ups occur in a classroom setting; Link Leaders visit freshman classes to teach lessons on topics such as time management, goal setting, and peer pressure.

11 Principals of Character Education & Link Crew

Social Follow Ups are events organized by the Link Crew Coordinator team in which the freshmen and leaders attend fun school sponsored social events together.

“Leader Initiated Contacts” are proactive methods of fostering positive connections and ensuring that transitioning students stay on track.

4. The school creates a caring community.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

With Link Crew students are given the permission to care about each other and the structure in which to do it. By connecting juniors or seniors and freshmen with the structure and training to make the relationship meaningful students have the opportunity to focus on the important aspects of their lives.

Link Crew creates a structure that connects every incoming freshman with a caring upperclassman, a trusted source of safety, a well-trained upperclassman from their first moments at their school throughout the entire year.

5. The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

Link Crew trains juniors and seniors as leaders in personal responsibility, integrity and ethical behavior. Leaders are trained to take responsibility for and demonstrate positive action on behalf of individual students and the school as a whole.

Link Leaders are asked to care for all incoming freshmen for the entire year, supporting their academic, personal and social needs.

Leaders are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs in creating a community of care within the school. Each Link Leader is responsible for the support of 10 incoming freshmen and their academic, personal and social success at school.

6. The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them succeed.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

Schools that have implemented the LINK CREW transition program indicate that when freshmen connect with juniors or seniors in positive ways, schools can dramatically reduce truancies, dropouts, failing grades, hazing, harassment, disciplinary referrals and detentions. These initial indicators show that freshmen experience feelings of connection to school, develop trusted relationships with adults and feel part of the community as a whole because they have connected with juniors or seniors as mentors.

The LINK CREW program works because the Leaders not only help organize and guide the freshmen through orientation day, but they also help to facilitate a smooth transition both

socially and academically throughout the year. Using a series of social, academic and leader initiated interactions, the LINK CREW Leaders maintain contact with their freshman groups and mentor them throughout the year.

Academic Follow-Ups occur in a classroom setting; Link Leaders visit freshman classes to teach lessons on topics such as time management, goal setting, and peer pressure.

7. The school fosters students' self-motivation.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

Link Crew is a student-run, student-lead program. The goal is for the adult coordinators to simply provide the structure and the guidance for the Link Leaders to positively influence both freshmen as well as the rest of the school population. Adults recognize the value in their leaders because it would be literally impossible to run Link Crew without student leaders.

Link Crew enhances student responsibility and improves performance of both transitioning students and leaders. Academic follow-ups provide tools for academic success and support to low-achieving, underrepresented students ensuring that each incoming freshman is immediately connected with a trained student mentor interested in his/her success in high school. The peer mentorship model creates a connection that facilitates self-motivation for both the transitioning students and the leaders.

8. The school staff is an ethical learning community that shares responsibility for character education and adheres to the same core values that guide the students.

9. The school fosters shared leadership and long-range support of the character education initiative.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THESE PRINCIPLES:

Link Crew Coordinators provide positive, responsible behavior modeling for both the Link Leaders as well as the entire freshman class by investing their time and energy for the success of all students.

Because the Link Leaders are selected from a cross section of juniors and seniors, the positive experience trickles out to the many social groups around the school.

From the moment a student walks into freshman orientation, he/she is expected not only by the adults, but also by older peers to do well and contribute to the overall success of the school, as well as take responsibility for his/her own development.

10. The school engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE:

Link Crew schools across the United States and Canada, are connected to a community of engaged and dedicated educators through the Boomerang Project and the Boomerang Foundation. The foundation houses a unique, web-based community service program that engages school communities in service learning and volunteerism beyond the school walls.

The Boomerang Foundation community service tools are available to all Link Crew schools free of charge. This program enables students to search for volunteer opportunities, create individual project plans and professionally designed resumes. This program builds skills in community service, community engagement and fund raising allowing schools to connect with community partners and supporters.

Some of the outcomes experienced by Link Crew schools relative to community engagement, fundraising and marketing include:

- Contribution to future community strengthened
- Funding opportunities increased,
- Service Learning principles integrated into school community,
- Restored confidence in school as a positive participant in the community at large, and
- Improved sustainability of key school programs.

11. The school regularly assesses its culture and climate, the functioning of its staff as character educators, and the extent to which its students manifest good character.

HOW LINK CREW ALIGNS WITH THIS PRINCIPLE

Link Crew sets up a structure within a school for disseminating information and ensuring that the entire school community has the opportunity to engage in and support the school's defined mission and strategic goals.

With Link Crew, trained student leaders (juniors or seniors) are able to communicate and demonstrate the school's purpose and direction with and among those within the school population who might otherwise be disengaged: freshmen. Link Crew focuses the information dissemination process through the student-to-student connection both one on one and in small groups. This makes it far more likely that critical information is received and remembered by the entire school community: parents, students, staff.

Additionally, the Link Crew Leaders and Coordinators themselves become more committed to the beliefs, philosophy and learning results of the school via their roles as messengers.