

NATIONAL PROMISING PRACTICES

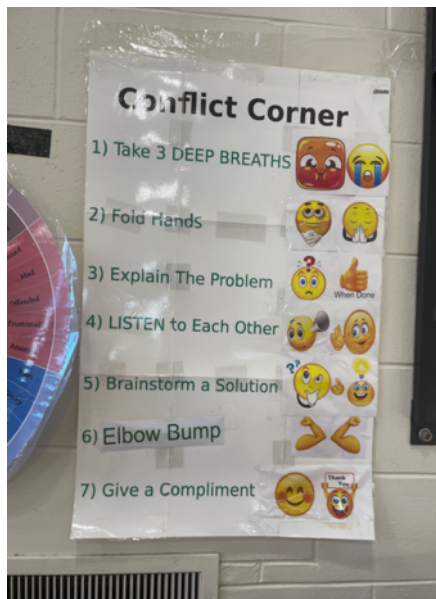
A Great Way to Start Your Character Journey!



One way for a school to begin or continue their character education journey is by identifying something that your school is doing that promotes good character. These practices can benefit multiple stakeholders in your school – students, staff, parents and community – and reflect on the school’s core values. Promising Practices can elevate relationship building, service learning, academic growth, improved

behavior, student voice and leadership, parent and community engagement, and help each student to feel like they belong. Schools in New Jersey continue to share what works in their schools by submitting applications for these practices and gaining national recognition for their work through Character.org, the national organization for character education. Once again in 2024, New Jersey led the nation in promising practices. We are proud of the work that our schools do to promote character strengths, social-emotional competencies, and a positive school culture and climate. Below you will find several examples of these best practices that are just a sample of the many practices that are enriching schools in New Jersey. Kudos to all of schools who have been recognized for their work in character education!

"The Conflict Corner" - Fort Dix Elementary School – Pemberton, NJ



Having a conflict corner in Ft. Dix Elementary School is crucial for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. Conflict resolution is a fundamental life skill, and providing students with a designated space to address and resolve conflicts teaches them valuable lessons in communication, empathy, and problem-solving. By having a dedicated area for conflict resolution, students learn to express their emotions constructively and manage conflicts peacefully, reducing the likelihood of escalating disputes or resorting to aggressive behavior. Moreover, the conflict corner serves as a



tangible reminder of the school's commitment to promoting positive relationships and a culture of respect. It empowers students to take ownership of their conflicts and equips them with the tools they need to navigate interpersonal challenges effectively, contributing to a harmonious school community where everyone feels valued and supported.

“Adopt the OBPD” – James McDivitt Elementary School – Old Bridge, NJ

Adopt the OBPD" is our school's way of showing our love, support, and appreciation for those who put our lives and safety before their own, by risking their lives daily, for each and every one of us. Our McDivitt Family and our PTA continuously work collaboratively each month to honor the OBPD. To show that we are thankful for their service to our school and our town, we have come together to make many beautiful gifts for them. We packed 130 Halloween candy bags with stickers that said, "Heroes Don't Always Wear Capes, They Wear Uniforms." We also created a Kudoboard link, which is an on line group card. McDivitt shared the link with all families, and community members.



Everyone wrote heartfelt messages, added photos, and students created beautiful drawings for them. A local Printing shop made the on line card into a vinyl banner. We presented it to the OBPD and it now hangs in the entranceway of the OBPD. McDivitt made survival kits for the OBPD, which contained items like a penny for good luck, a safety pin to remind them of all the safety they provide, a kiss to show they are loved, etc. Our students shared jokes and riddles via Flipgrid, to make the OBPD smile. We packed healthy snack baskets to keep in the OBPD lounge. Our school held a virtual Ornament Decorating Event and a Hearts for the OBPD event with the help of our PTA. With the help of our art teacher, we presented the OBPD with a hand painted picture of a tree, with leaves of each and every student's thumbprint in the school. The Old Bridge Police Department joins our students in volleyball, kickball, and field day. Our McDivitt Family supported the Old Bridge Police Department's Junior Unity Tour at school in partnership with the Mayor's Wellness campaign.

“Building Imaginative Lifelong Learners with STEM” – James McDivitt Elementary School – Old Bridge, NJ



McDivitt's "Building Imaginative Lifelong Learners with STEM" offers all students, families, staff and community, multiple opportunities throughout the school year to participate in hands-on STEM activities that capture student interest, promotes curiosity, questions, imagination, creativity, risk taking, higher order thinking, as well as strengthen school, home, and community connections. By getting students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, real-world connections and applications are made. Character Education has

become both influential and vital to the positive culture and climate of McDivitt, and the success of our STEM journey. It is reflected in all we say, we do, and how we live. Our practice has encouraged all students of various abilities to participate. Teachers have high expectations, communicate their expectations, and students hold high expectations of

themselves. This practice allows all students to use their interests and talents to shine in different ways. Our students have become educational risk takers, have taken the lead role in their learning, and their confidence in themselves have increased greatly. Students are excited about learning, being a part of a team, and have a positive attitude about school. McDivitt is a diverse school, with children of all nationalities, and abilities. Our focus has always been the well-being of every child, and having them all feel successful and achieve success. We wanted to not only expose our students to STEM but also get them excited about it through hand-on, real-world activities. We also wanted to continue strengthening our home, school, and community connections.

Field Hockey “breakFEAST” – West Milford High School



As the head varsity field hockey coach and youth program coordinator, I work to make sure that the transmission is smooth from youth to the high school level. I tried to keep the youth players as involved as possible with my high school team. For example when we enter the county tournament I rotate youth athletes as ball girls and our high school team tries to get to as many youth games as possible to cheer them on. Last year we decided to do a team breakFEAST and all high school and youth athletes attended. It was a potluck style where everyone brought something for the breakfast. Then, and numbered everyone off one through 10 and mixed the levels together into 10 different teams. Once they were in their teams they created a children's story focusing on West Milford field hockey. Then we read the stories together and acted them out as we share them. It was a lot of fun to see the girls from different grade levels interact as well as create an original story and drawings. This is just one example of how we try to keep our levels connected and demonstrate to our youth level the type of team building activities that we do at the high school level.

A Pep Rally where EVERYONE belongs, is included, and is CELEBRATED!
West Milford High School



During our District-wide Week of Inclusion, West Milford High School took a pivot to our typical pep rally and decided to draw our student body's focus toward rooting on our Unified Sports Program. WM has a wide range of Unified activities across the district. Unified, simply put, is when students with and without disabilities compete and participate TOGETHER. We began, as we do most of our Pep Rallies, by recognizing our Winter Sports and highlighting some of the accomplishments of each team. Following the team announcements, the bagpipers and drum line led the WMHS Unified Basketball team into the gym. The select chorus sang the National Anthem and then WMHS Unified began their game to showcase a game in front of our ENTIRE SCHOOL. We invited our Macopin Middle School Unified teams, percussion, and clubs to join us for the event as well as our cross district level (pre-k - high school) Unified Cheer Club to cheer for the game. While our Unified cheerleaders partnered up with our Varsity

Cheerleaders we engaged in an incredibly competitive game where the student body excitedly cheered on their Unified peers! At half-time, our Varsity captains partnered with our middle school group for a shoot out so that they could also be celebrated. As we got into the second half of the game, you could hear the WMHS student body chanting things like "MVP" as our point-guard steals the ball or the entire crowd ROARING with pride and excitement as our captain shoots an almost half-court long three pointer! Student-athletes who do not always feel confident were being celebrated to bring the coaches and teachers in the room to tears. The entire event was nothing short of ELECTRIC. Every group of people felt invested in one another, the staff feedback was incredible, and as Head Coach, Kristi Clave said, she felt as though she was "living inside the end of a really good movie." The event was live-streamed for anyone in the district to watch - and boy, did they watch! Some classes even stopped instruction to watch the game.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT STARTING YOUR CHARACTER ED JOURNEY?

You can contact NJASECD for help by emailing us at njasecd@gmail.com or visiting our website at <http://www.njasecd.org>!

Here's a link to a video about Promising Practices! <https://www.njasecd.org/character-education-through-promising-practices/>