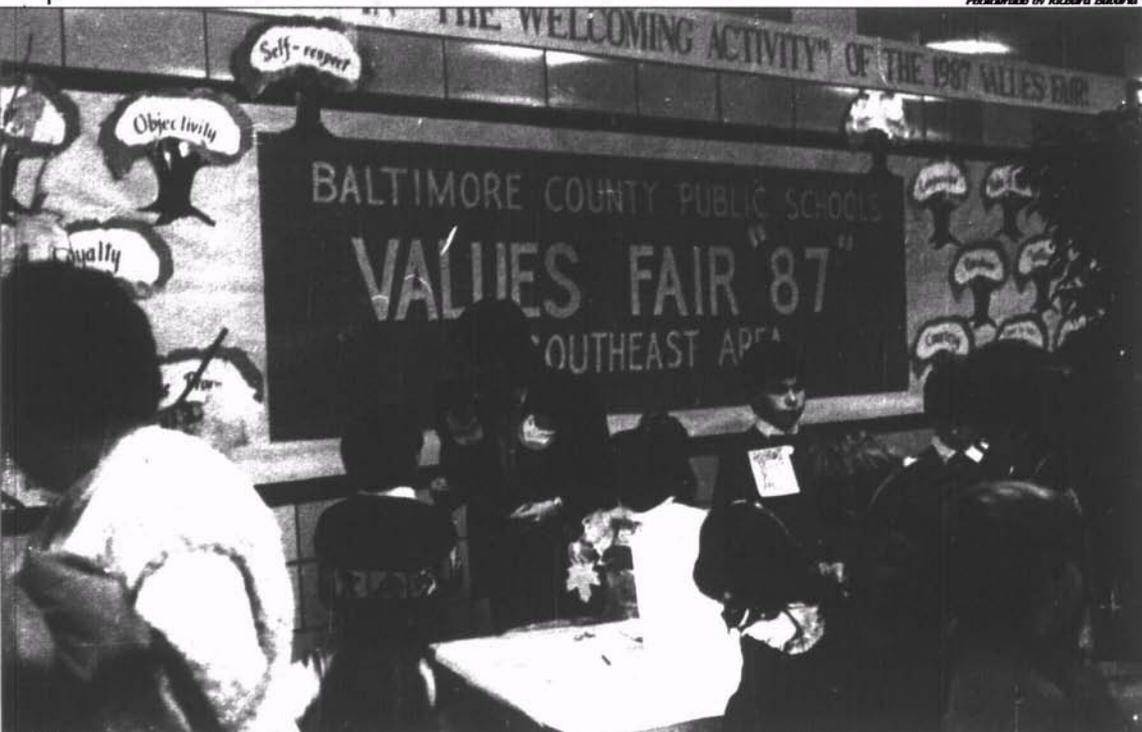


Developing a Community Consensus for Teaching Values

The old paternalistic consensus, with the same values espoused in home, church, and school, has disappeared; but pluralistic Baltimore County, Maryland, achieved agreement on a common core of values to be taught in its public schools.

Photographs by Richard Bavaria



The first Values Fair, sponsored by the PTA Council, attracted more than 1,000 participants and demonstrated to the community how student work could showcase common values.

In fall 1982, the Baltimore County (Maryland) Public Schools began a study of values education and ethical behavior. At that time, when Superintendent Robert Y. Dubel appointed a task force to "review our program in this vital area," he gave them free reign to determine scope and direction for the study. The task force, representing all geographic sections of the county, also reflected the diversity of the district in race, religion, age, income, education, and philosophy. Along with principals and central office staff, it included community leaders, two PTA Council executive board members, three representatives appointed by the teachers' association, and the president of the Baltimore County Student Council Association. The makeup of the task force was a critical factor in developing the community consensus that later led to the success of our values education program.

Baltimore County is a complex metropolitan jurisdiction surrounding Baltimore City, reaching to the Pennsylvania border, and sprawling over 610 square miles. The mix of people within its borders includes both urban and rural families, a 14 percent black population, an affluent and influential Jewish community, and a large steel-worker population, many recently unemployed. Most of the county's residents, however, are white middle class with no children in school. Traditionally, the community has participated actively in civic affairs, supported its schools, and demanded high standards of achievement.

The Study as Community Dialogue

In the beginning, the task force invited leaders from the Baltimore metropolitan area to discuss their perspectives on values education. The first guests, headmasters of prestigious private schools, discussed the role of values in developing policies and procedures in their schools. For example, one observed, "If you want to know what your school values, look at what you give awards for in your June assembly." When they further explained

how independent schools have achieved an aura of clearly defined values, the task force realized that values can just as easily and openly be incorporated by public schools.

Another task force guest was a law school dean, who discussed ethics in the legal profession and related ideas for schools seeking to develop ethical behavior. Then the president of a large chain of department stores discussed shoplifting, internal theft, the work ethic, and the effect of all three on the business community and the economy. Later a former county executive, now a television news analyst, spoke about ethics in politics and in the media. As he described decision making in television programming, he urged parents and educators to recognize and influence the role of television in shaping the values of the young.

One of the most interesting sessions was a dialogue to clarify liberal and conservative thought within the community, featuring the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union and a fundamentalist minister. The minister posed a definitive and provocative question: "If you plan to teach values, who or what will be your

"If you want to know what your school values, look at what you give awards for in your June assembly."

moral example?" Although clearly differing, both agreed on the need to teach values in school.

The contributions and perspectives of these community leaders stimulated the moral imaginations of the task force and provided direction for the study. The leaders themselves were so intrigued with the mission and the processes of the group they continued to work with the school system in various ways. Later, when the report was published, they demonstrated considerable influence in support.

The study required wide reading and inspired extensive discussion and debate among members of the task force, who pondered such issues as the goals of the moral life and the means appropriate for achieving them.

Our study also encompassed a thorough analysis of current school policies and practices. The prekindergarten through grade 12 curriculum, for example, already contained references to values in every subject, although the word *values* was rarely used. The policy manual of the board also embodied strong implications for values, morals, and ethics. And the *Student Behavior Handbook* clearly defined student rights, along with unacceptable behaviors and their consequences, thus setting forth the system's concepts of right and wrong. And a survey of parents and teachers reinforced the idea that teachers *are* role models for their students and confirmed the support of parents for values education.

After long discussions in subsequent meetings, the committee reached agreement that the tenets of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights would be the basis for Baltimore County's values program, as a major source of a common core of values. Supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, the PTA, the teachers' association, church organizations, and other community groups—because this approach draws on our broad base of civic and human values without infringing upon or promoting religious teachings—this decision contributed decisively to the success of the program.

A Common Core of Values

The next major decision was whether to teach values in isolation or to incorporate values teaching into the entire school experience. We decided to infuse values into every aspect of the educational process. To explain this decision, the task force stated:

All education is infused with values. The ultimate goal of education is the positive influence of student behavior, and each student's values guide and help determine that behavior. In the process of teaching, the teacher's values are demonstrated to the students. In every class and throughout the school—indeed, throughout the school system—values are demonstrated through actions, procedures, policies, and attitudes of every individual from the

1. We strive to be the "best" as we pursue our "Challenge of Excellence."
2. We believe in the importance of public education to a democratic and pluralistic society.
3. We shape every program to provide and support instruction of our students to enable them to be educated and productive citizens in a democratic society.
4. We promote the work ethic, set high performance standards, and expect all employees and students to strive to be the best they can be.
5. We care for every student and encourage the building of self-esteem.
6. We care for each other and cooperate in pursuing the mission of the Baltimore County Public Schools.
6. We respect the worth of all individuals and vigorously address equity issues.
8. We build bridges with our community and assertively communicate our pride in the Baltimore County Public Schools.
9. We accept the responsibility of serving as role models in preserving and enhancing these precepts, beliefs, and values of the Baltimore County Public Schools.

Board of Education of Baltimore County
Towson, Maryland
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Fig. 1. Precepts, Beliefs, and Values of the Baltimore County Public Schools

Board of Education, to the superintendent and his staff, to the principal and teachers, to the cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and to the students.

Values education includes the study and practical application of ethics and conduct codes acceptable to society. It also includes the development of skills necessary to determine right from wrong, to understand consequences, and to make appropriate choices. It provides an opportunity to examine and revise the underlying principles which govern one's own conduct, choices, and attitudes. It recognizes that there are rarely simple answers to complex questions and respects each individual's right to privacy.

Concerned with the isolation of the younger generation from their families and from other traditional sources of values and using the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as the "moral example," the task force summarized their position with the following statement: "We have the responsibility of introducing to our students certain principles fundamental to a free society which cannot survive unless the values upon which it is grounded are fully comprehended and practiced by each succeeding generation." The task force listed "a common core" of values in a democratic and pluralistic society. They are:

compassion, courtesy, critical inquiry, due process, equality of opportunity, freedom of thought and action, honesty, human worth and dignity, integrity, justice, knowledge, loyalty, objectivity, order, patriotism, rational consent, reasoned argument, respect for others' rights, responsible citizen-



**CARING
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COURTESY**

ship, rule of law, self-respect, tolerance, and truth.

The task force also formulated goals for the outcomes of values education in terms of student behavior: students should be able to apply self-discipline, use rational processes, live constructively in a pluralistic society, and act in an ethical manner.

From the Study to the Schools

The Board of Education gave the study its full approval and endorsement. The next step was to decide how best to put the recommendations into practice. Since the greatest strength of the study was participation in it, the recommendations for implementation suggested that schools and central office do just that: participate in designing the implementation.

In other words, the task force said to the schools, "We studied values, and this is what we found. Now you study the issues, and see what you find." The report of the task force was to serve as a guide, but only that. Schools were encouraged to be creative and intense in their studies. Each of the 148 schools in Baltimore County was asked to appoint its own values committee, chaired by the principal and including staff, parents, community members, and students, where appropriate. Schools were given suggestions for conducting their studies so that they would be appropriate to their communities. Their conclusions would be put into action within each school.

The results have been remarkable. The school committees have involved over 2,000 people. In every building, prominent displays and announcements emphasize important values selected by that school. Every student, from the severely handicapped to the gifted and talented, participates in learning values in some way. School projects have addressed topics such as computer ethics in the schools, the role of coaches as examples for students, academic honesty in a highly competitive high school, and the search-for-truth incentive in science. Other results include the writing and performance of two operas based on

"The Constitution and the Bill of Rights are the basis for Baltimore County's values program."

fairy tales and values, poetry writing by teachers and students, families' writing together their analyses of selected values, and "culture night" to celebrate the variety of ethnic backgrounds within the school.

Community Acceptance

Strongly supported by the press, the Baltimore County values education program has been overwhelmingly accepted. The PTA Council, one of the program's staunchest supporters, cooperated with the school system to develop a brochure on the values education program. Copies are given to all parents, with appropriate follow-up by each local PTA. Entitled *Values Education in the Baltimore County Public Schools: Questions Parents Ask* (1987), the flyer affirms the primary responsibility of parents in the values education of their children and the effectiveness of the partnership of parents and schools. The PTA Council has also established a Values Fair series, which takes place annually in one of the five geographical areas of the county. Held in March 1987, the first drew more than 1,000 people in the southeastern portion of the county.

Another rewarding outcome of the study was a countywide conference on "Values Education and Ethics in the Workplace," sponsored jointly by the school system, the chamber of commerce, the county executive, and the PTA. The conference was so successful

that a second ethics conference is now being planned by a joint committee of businesspersons and educators.

The superintendent's recently issued statement entitled "Precepts, Beliefs, and Values in the Baltimore County Public Schools" is posted throughout the school system (fig. 1).

Elements of Success

The success of our efforts stems from six key elements, as follows:

- The task force was representative of the pluralistic community.

- The committee was given a broad charge and the freedom to explore the subject.

- The committee was given time and encouragement to examine issues in depth.

- The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights were selected as the basis for the values to be taught.

- Grassroots development of philosophy and direction occurred throughout the process, along with opportunities for creativity at the system level and at the school level.

- The report was highly visible in schools and in the community with comments invited throughout the county.

Our study of values education and ethical behavior has linked parents, schools, and the community in systematic examination of moral and ethical issues. It promises to strengthen the character of our students, which in turn will contribute to strengthening our free society. □

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