

CHARACTER CORE

CHARACTER FOCUSED
APPROACH FRAMEWORK



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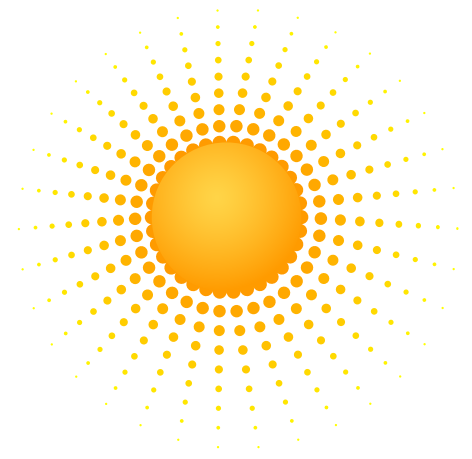
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ABOUT THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH FRAMEWORK

The Character Focused Approach Framework was created by the Character Core Team in WGU's Teachers College to cohesively guide all character work, as well as offer a viable model to other interested universities, schools, and professional settings. The Character Core team engaged in a comprehensive development, feedback, and review cycle with WGU faculty and staff and partners throughout the Kern Family Foundation Network. The Framework will continue to evolve as character work in the Teachers College advances.



WGU BACKGROUND

WGU's mission is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. Since its inception in 1997, WGU has prioritized learner success as the focus of its competency-based model. WGU uses key indicators to ensure that students are easily accessing WGU's education programs, completing their studies in

a reasonable timeframe, and attaining their degrees (WGU, 2021). For students to realize their dreams of degree completion and career advancement, WGU continually innovates to meet the needs of learners and employers alike by enabling better, faster, more flexible models for connecting talent with opportunity (DeMark, et al., 2022).

WGU is an online non-profit university comprised of four schools, Health, IT, Business, and the **largest Teachers College in the country** with approximately 38,000 active degree-seeking students and more than 70,000 degrees conferred to date to education alumni across the United States. WGU's commitment to holistic and healthy learning, leading, and teaching is reflected in university wide Leadership Principles, Cultural Beliefs, and a comprehensive Community of Care that takes a one-by-one approach to learner support (Appendix 1).



COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION AND FACULTY MODEL

WGU uses a **hybrid, competency-based education (CBE) model** that increases access to higher education through online course work and in-person professional learning experiences. WGU is committed to a competency-based model that truly serves students and graduates in obtaining the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions to be successful in their careers and pursuits. WGU has been a pioneer in competency-based, higher education with a national scope and integration of standards since its inception.

The underpinnings of WGU's competency-based educational model can be traced back over a century to the mastery-based models for learning which define and categorize the skills needed for mastering a given task (Bloom, 1956; 1968). WGU's model has transcended many of the obstacles associated with competency-based education by using a skills-based approach to define specific competencies and develop performance assessments to demonstrate each competency, offering monthly rolling enrollment, and providing individualized term pacing and support (Nodine, 2015). WGU's competency-based model defines the skills and competencies candidates must attain and assesses that attainment in multiple ways, at times convenient for students, in an affordable manner.

WGU uses a disaggregated faculty model with four types of faculty: Instructional, Evaluation, Mentoring, and Design. This separation of faculty roles is key to WGU's ability to provide on-demand, one-on-one faculty support together with continuous improvement in programs.



Instructional Faculty

Instructional faculty's sole responsibility is to support students with course content knowledge acquisition.



Evaluation Faculty

Evaluation faculty evaluate student assessments and provide feedback to ensure mastery.



Mentoring Faculty

Mentoring faculty support students from the time of enrollment through graduation with all other aspects of their experience to ensure they are successful in completing their courses and program.



Design Faculty

Design faculty designs and develops high-quality curriculum and assessments, ensuring the quality of what students are learning and the value of their degrees. Assessments that establish which students have achieved competency and which still need additional learning are central to WGU's competency-based education model.



WGU SKILLS LIBRARY

WGU utilizes a skills architecture process, where employer-valued, open skills are used to inform program development and decision making. WGU competencies and programs are tagged with workforce relevant skills data using WGU's Open Skills Library, which currently includes over 16,000 rich skills descriptors in content areas such as Information Systems Security, Value-Based Care, Curriculum and Instruction, Next Generation Teaching, Business Ethics, Social Emotional Learning, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

WGU skills architects source Rich Skills Descriptors from various databases of job profiles (e.g., Lightcast, Burning Glass), the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and industry/academic standards or frameworks housed in the Open Skills Management Tool (OpenSource@WGU, n.d.). The WGU Skills Library continually evolves and grows, including the publication of a Character Core Skills Collection. A dynamic skills relevancy metric is created to map all WGU programs and credentials with workforce relevant skills. The skills to workforce alignment allows prospective students to determine which WGU programs and educational pathways meet their objectives and ensures a strong return on education investment.

CHARACTER AT WGU TEACHERS COLLEGE

COALITION FOR HEALTHY LEARNING

WGU Teachers College is a founding member of the Coalition for Healthy Learning, a movement focused on research, policy, and practices that promote healthy learning environments to increase student and faculty success. **Healthy learning environments are safe environments that support the academic, physical, psychological, and social well-being of individuals and communities.** The Coalition for Healthy Learning and Healthy Learning Initiative in WGU Teachers College is composed of six primary, critical healthy-learning focus areas that are key drivers of student and faculty academic, professional, and personal success. These six pillars, while being powerful concepts individually, gain collective strength and create a thriving, healthy learning environment.

The six pillars of Healthy Learning at WGU are Character Core; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Social Emotional Learning (SEL); Mental Health; Basic Needs; and Professional Dispositions and Ethics.

The Coalition for Healthy Learning brings together and better integrates these related initiatives so that healthy learning environments can be intentionally designed, cultivated, and championed to (1) facilitate access learning environments to be more attractive to, and inspiring for, increasingly diverse students; (2) improve student success outcomes; and (3) help close attainment gaps.



SIX PILLARS OF HEALTHY LEARNING AT WGU

- 1 CHARACTER CORE
- 2 DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION
- 3 SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING
- 4 MENTAL HEALTH
- 5 BASIC NEEDS
- 6 PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS & ETHICS

THE CHARACTER CORE PROJECT

Through a generous grant provided by the Kern Family Foundation, the Character Core team was created to advance character work in the Teachers College strategic roadmap, initiatives, and culture. WGU Teachers College's distinctive position and national scale provides a unique opportunity for graduates to create a profound and positive impact on education by promoting character in K-12, higher education, and workforce development. Recognizing the importance of graduating knowledgeable professionals who are also caring and ethically guided individuals who will positively impact their communities, the Teachers College has chosen to place an intentional focus on character. Research indicates the intentional focus and nurturing of character makes a positive impact on education and society (Arthur, 2003; Berkowitz, 2021; Lickona, 2004; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999).

The
Mission of the Character Core project is to catalyze healthy learning and working environments and thriving communities by prioritizing character and Character Qualities.

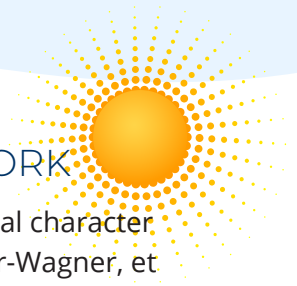
THE CHARACTER CORE SKILLS COLLECTION

In 2020, the Character Core team worked with a national group of character researchers, partners, and practitioners to create an extensive master list of character skills composed of 60 Character Categories and 511 Rich Skill Descriptors. A Character Core Skills Collection was created by selecting 28 Character Qualities and 170 Rich Skills Descriptors from the master list. The selected Qualities are aligned to existing WGU terminology, published practices, curriculum, and research in the field of character (Appendix 2). Twenty-two of the 28 Character Qualities directly align with WGU's Dispositions & Ethics, the DE&I, SEL, and Next Generation Teaching Skills Collections, and the WGU Character Professional Learning Micro-Credentials. An additional six unique Character Qualities were selected to provide depth and breadth to the Character Focused Approach (curiosity, gratitude, humility, patience, purpose, service).

The Character Core Skills Collection is published for public access to support character work at other institutions (WGU Skills Library, 2022).

The
Character Core Skills Collection is used to develop specific competencies to infuse character content into Teachers College degree programs and courses, create micro-credentials and professional learning for educational leaders and teachers, and guide the future of character work.

THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH FRAMEWORK



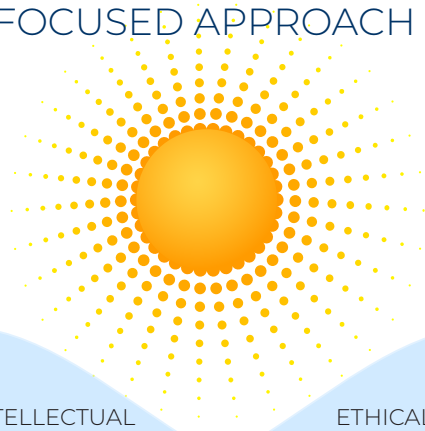
Using the WGU Character Core Skills Collection, together with other seminal character frameworks (Berkowitz, 2021; Character.org, 2021; Harrison, 2020; Tichnor-Wagner, et al. 2021; Arthur, et al., 2016), the Character Core team developed the Character Focused Approach. The Character Focused Approach aims to develop communities composed of learners, leaders, and teachers who are guided by positive Character Qualities, thus contributing to the collective wellbeing of the community. The Approach prioritizes creating healthy learning and working environments where all individuals feel a sense of belonging; where they are seen, heard, valued, and supported to thrive and reach their fullest potential. The Character Focused Approach is a college wide effort that strives to support healthy learning and working environments by intentionally promoting character throughout WGU's Teachers College, as well as offering a viable framework for K-12, higher education, and workforce communities.

The Character Focused Approach is foundational to the Next Generation Education model, a model that is grounded in the belief that the art and science of teaching, learning, and leading in education must continually evolve--become better and better with each subsequent generation.

In each step of education's evolution to "become better and better" the key character questions are asked: What leads to the greatest good? How can we thrive individually and collectively? This requires constant self-reflection, adaptation, and innovation, along with a steadfast dedication to character development and growth. When institutions and communities prioritize ethical procedures and systems, individuals are more fully supported in their own character development and thriving lives.

The Character Focused Approach includes the 28 Character Qualities and 170 Rich Skill Descriptors (Appendix 3) from the Character Core Skills Collection that are organized into four interconnected areas of Character; Community, Intellectual, Ethical, Performance (adapted from Jubilee Center, 2020; Shields, 2011). Character Qualities are traits or characteristics such as optimism, integrity, and patience that are developed over time through life experience and learning. The organization of Character Focus Qualities into the four areas of Character provides a general guideline. While the four areas of character serve as an organizational structure for the Character Qualities of the Character Focused Approach Framework, they are not fixed. For example, the Character Quality of critical thinking is listed under Intellectual Practice but may be considered Community or Performance character in certain circumstances or settings.

CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH FRAMEWORK



INTELLECTUAL

QUALITIES THAT SUPPORT INTELLECTUAL LEARNING AND GROWTH

Self Directed Learning
Intellectual Engagement
Critical Thinking
Curiosity
Humility
Patience

ETHICAL

QUALITIES THAT INFORM ETHICAL DECISION MAKING AND ACTIONS

Trustworthiness
Applied Ethics
Compassion
Empathy
Integrity
Justice

INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER

ETHICAL CHARACTER

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

PERFORMANCE CHARACTER

CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH

COMMUNITY

QUALITIES THAT SUPPORT HEALTHY LEARNING AND WORKING COMMUNITIES

Civic Engagement
Acceptance
Advocacy
Agency
Gratitude
Inclusion
Service
Teamwork

PERFORMANCE

QUALITIES THAT MOTIVATE EXCELLENCE IN ACHIEVING INTENTIONS AND GOALS AND PRACTICING COMMUNITY, INTELLECTUAL, AND ETHICAL CHARACTER

Educational Leadership
Reflective Practice
Courage
Creativity
Mindset
Optimism
Purpose
Resilience

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- PRINCIPLE 1** Prioritize character
- PRINCIPLE 2** Intentionally and holistically integrate character
- PRINCIPLE 3** Cultivate healthy learning and working environments
- PRINCIPLE 4** Value and include all community members in character initiatives
- PRINCIPLE 5** Share character learnings

Character Qualities are developed and practiced within working and learning environments, as well as life experiences and community interactions. Character Qualities are developed over time through strategies such as practice, modeling, habit formation, observation, reflection, and character literacy (Brant, Brooks, & Lamb, 2022). An intentional focus on developing Character Qualities in educational and workplace settings cultivates healthy learning and working environments where all individuals are supported to thrive.

Although the Character Focused Approach Framework is aligned with key domains such as SEL and DEI, it is not synonymous with them. Character Qualities are often interrelated and supported by DEI and SEL principles and skills. For example, the ability to engage in Intellectual Character and demonstrate a Character Quality such as patience is supported by applying the SEL skills of self-awareness and self-management. Community and Ethical Character Qualities such as advocacy, inclusion, and justice are deeply connected to DEI practices.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles are foundational to implementing the Character Focused Approach (Appendix 4). The Principles are informed by relevant character research (Arthur, 2019; Berkowitz, 2021; and Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2020) that include key concepts regarding character development: Character is pro-social, visible and observable, involves choice and conviction, and requires ongoing reflection and expression.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Prioritize Character



Intentionally and Holistically Integrate Character



Cultivate Healthy Learning and Working Environments



Value and Include All Community Members in Character Initiatives



Share Character Learnings

The Guiding Principles assist in the practical application of Character Qualities. The Guiding Principles may be used as reference points when developing character content, programs, and projects across various professional settings. See Appendix 5 for Examples of Character Promoting Activities in WGU Teachers College and Appendix 6 for more Examples of the Character Focused Approach in K-12, Higher Education, and Workforce Settings.

PRINCIPLE

1

How will we prioritize character and Character Qualities?

Prioritize Character

An educational leader creates a leadership team specifically charged with prioritizing school-wide character development.

A dean of a university creates an initiative for character professional learning for all faculty and staff.

A school board approves character integration as an annual school improvement goal.

PRINCIPLE

2

How will we holistically and intentionally integrate character and Character Qualities into all aspects of our working, learning, or living communities?

Intentionally and Holistically Integrate Character

A principal utilizes teamwork to review school policies and procedures and intentionally integrates inclusion, ethics, and justice.

An Employee Resource Group (ERG) hosts monthly conversations about character and intellectual engagement.

A teacher introduces gratitude journaling as a regular classroom practice.

PRINCIPLE

3

How will we cultivate healthy working and learning environments where Character Qualities are supported, developed, and demonstrated over time?

Cultivate Healthy Learning and Working Environments

An organization posts the Character Focus Qualities of critical thinking, curiosity, courage, and service in the common areas and consistently includes them in the organization's work, strategy, and decisions.

A new manager begins all staff meetings with a community building activity to foster collaboration and cooperation.

A university professor models compassion and empathy in everyday interactions with colleagues and students.

PRINCIPLE

4

How will we promote an asset-based and inclusive framework for character development, where all community members are empowered to model, teach, and practice character?

Value and Include All Community Members in Character Initiatives

A district superintendent uses educational leadership by including community members in creating workplace norms that reflect trustworthiness, integrity, and advocacy.

A teacher team creates school-wide enrichment activities focusing on the development of agency, empowering students to be active citizens advocating for equity in their school community and society.

A company encourages civic engagement by inviting staff to participate in community service projects that are meaningful to them.

PRINCIPLE

5

How will we share our character research and best practices with others to contribute to systems change?

Share Character Learnings

A university publishes research on the character content integration process they used to integrate character into courses.

An after-school program creates a digital resource of student and staff stories demonstrating perseverance and resilience.

A Department Chair serves their school-wide community by sharing the success of their character activities.

CHARACTER INTEGRATION

WGU's Teachers College integrates the Character Focused Approach into degree programs and Teachers College culture. Through professional learning opportunities and communities of practice, Teachers College faculty and staff are supported to include the Character Focused Approach into interactions and decisions across departments, teams, and individuals.

The Character Focused Approach Framework is integrated into several Teachers College courses and programs using a comprehensive development process. The WGU Unified Program Lifecycle provides a methodology for consistently integrating character into courses, programs, and projects across the Teachers College. Course competencies, activities, and assessments are created using the Character Core Qualities and their accompanying Rich Skills Descriptors. These Rich Skills Descriptors illustrate how Character Qualities may be developed, practiced, and assessed. For example, when integrating the Quality 'educational leadership' into a course the Rich Skill Descriptor, "Apply pedagogical strategies to improve students' social emotional skills, character, and academic learning" provides detailed guidance and informs the creation of the competency.

Integrating the Character Focused Approach framework into Teachers College courses and programs supports degree candidates in navigating complex and challenging professional and personal situations that require the skillful ability to thoughtfully weigh, consider, and decide which Character Qualities to use. Courses include activities and assessments where candidates practice, develop, and apply Character Qualities which provides opportunities for making the best ethical choices when the various Character Qualities may conflict (Jubilee Center, 2022). Through supporting graduates in carefully and wisely applying Character Qualities, they can create an impact for their schools, staff, and students in making character informed decisions and actions which support the care of self, others, and community.

CHARACTER CORE SHARED LANGUAGE

The following Character Core Shared Language supports the Character Focused Approach Framework. Shared language is embedded within WGU Teachers College curriculum, products, policies, and practices to create Healthy Learning environments for all individuals to rise and thrive. The creation of shared language includes analyzing and identifying how terms, vocabulary, and jargon are used within WGU Teachers College to enhance communication, collaboration and innovation. Developing shared language is an ongoing process that requires time, alignment, and intention.

Asset Based

Views the diversity that students bring to the classroom, including culture, language, disability, socio-economic status, immigration status, and sexuality as characteristics that add value and strength to classrooms and communities (California Department of Education, 2021)

Character

A collection of qualities, habits, and patterns of interactions that, when used ethically, support individuals to thrive and contribute positively to the communities in which they live, learn, and work

Character Focused Approach

Community-wide effort that supports healthy learning and working environments by intentionally promoting character throughout K-12, higher education, and workforce communities

Character Qualities

Character traits or characteristics that are developed over time through life experience and learning; Character Focused Approach Qualities are representative of an organized group of Rich Skill Descriptors from the Character Core Skills Collection

Coalition for Healthy Learning

Provides institutional leaders, policy makers, and front-line educators with the tools, techniques, policies, and practices that they need to effectively inform and better integrate their healthy-learning-related innovations and help ensure their students can flourish on their education journeys

Competency-Based Education

Education model where program completion is based on the demonstration of mastery of specific skills, competencies, content, and curriculum within a course or degree program as measured by valid assessments

Dispositions

Consists of beliefs, values, and ethics addressing qualities of character, intellect, and care as part of the fabric of the education profession, comprise the habits built on professional action and ethical commitments underlying an educator's performance (Sockett, 2009)

Ethics

Well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific Character Qualities, also refers to the study and development of one's own ethical standards (Velasquez, 2010)

Healthy Learning Environment

Safe environment that supports the academic, physical, psychological, and social well-being of learners and staff utilizing the best practices of: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Character Core, Mental Health, and meeting Basic Needs

Next-Generation Education

Core belief that the art and science of teaching, learning, and leading in education must continually evolve, becoming better and better with each subsequent generation

Rich Skills Descriptor (RSD)

Skill statement and the associated metadata that allows for the interoperability of the skill across digital platforms

Skill

Word or short phrase that communicates discrete, discernable value that an individual can acquire or demonstrate

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APPENDIX 1.

WGU & TEACHERS COLLEGE CULTURE

WGU Mission

To change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity.

WGU Vision

To be the most innovative, student-centric university.

WGU Core Belief

We believe in the inherent worth and ability of every individual and in the transformative power of education.

Leadership Principles	Key Results	Cultural Beliefs
Student Obsession	Completion	One-by-One
Innovation	Return	Advance Equity
Learning	Equity	Aim True
Inspire & Develop		Own It
Urgency		Trust Generously
Courage		Engage Respectfully
Ownership		Achieve Together
Deliver Results		
Integrity		
Earn Trust		

WGU Promise

- We endeavor to make opportunities work for everyone by improving quality, access, and outcomes of education through diverse, innovative programs, systems, and technologies.
- We create meaningful, diverse, inclusive, and rewarding work experience to enable our learning and development as we become our better selves.

School of Education (SOE) Way

- We can change lives for the better by catalyzing next-generation teaching, learning, and leading across the education spectrum.
- To catalyze next-generation teaching, learning, and leading, our students need to experience next-generation teaching, learning, and leading.
- This transformative work needs a transformative work environment—we work to foster organizational services, systems, and culture that allow SOE team members and partners to do our good work in increasingly better ways.

Teachers College Character Core	WGU Office of DE&I	WGU Social Emotional Learning
Catalyze healthy learning and working environments and thriving communities by prioritizing character and Character Qualities.	Endeavoring to be the world’s most inclusive university.	Empower the WGU Learning Community by providing supportive pathways for connection, lifelong learning, and self-discovery.

APPENDIX 2.

SKILLS ALIGNMENT TO WGU FRAMEWORKS

		Character Skills Collection	DEI Skills Collection	WGU Dispositions	WGU Character Micro-Credentials	Next-Gen Skills Collection	SEL Skills Collection
STRONG ALIGNMENT	Critical Thinking	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Educational Leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Mindset	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Teamwork	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
MODERATE ALIGNMENT	Acceptance	✓	✓		✓		
	Advocacy	✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Agency	✓		✓		✓	✓
	Applied Ethics	✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Civic Engagement	✓	✓		✓		
	Compassion	✓	✓				✓
	Creativity	✓			✓		✓
	Empathy	✓	✓			✓	✓
	Inclusion	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Integrity	✓		✓		✓	

	Character Skills Collection	DEI Skills Collection	WGU Dispositions	WGU Character Micro-Credentials	Next-Gen Skills Collection	SEL Skills Collection
MODERATE ALIGNMENT ↑	Intellectual Engagement	✓	✓	✓		
	Justice	✓	✓		✓	
	Reflective Practice	✓	✓		✓	
	Resilience	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Self-Directed Learning	✓			✓	✓
	Trustworthiness	✓		✓		✓
LIMITED ALIGNMENT ↓	Courage	✓	✓			
	Optimism	✓				✓
	Curiosity	✓				
	Gratitude	✓				
	Humility	✓				
	Patience	✓				
	Purpose	✓				
	Service	✓				

APPENDIX 3.

CHARACTER CORE SKILLS COLLECTION: QUALITIES AND RICH SKILLS DESCRIPTORS

Definitions adapted from Lightcast

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance is the act of accepting something or someone.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Appreciate Diversity	Appreciate the richness of diversity, diverse ideas, and diverse communities
Free from Prejudice	Be free of prejudice and discrimination
Idea Exchange	Exchange ideas freely
Recognize Views of Others	Recognize that others will think differently and will hold different views, interests, and beliefs

ADVOCACY

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Constructive Response	Constructively respond to inequities and unjust practices
Inspire Community Voice	Inspire every member of a community to realize that they have a voice, that their voice matters, that it will be heard, and that it will make a difference
Speak Against Mistreatments	Speak out against the mistreatment and mis-care of others

Student Environment Creation	Create an environment where every student has a voice and that it will be heard
Student Opportunities for Leadership	Create opportunities for students to lead and make decisions
Student Rights Support	Support students to stand up for what is right
Support Voices of Others	Support others to have their voice heard

AGENCY

Agency is the abstract principle that autonomous beings are capable of acting by themselves.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Revise Personal Learning Plans	Revise a personal learning plan based on changing situations and goals
Student Empowerment to Advocate	Empower students to be active citizens advocating for equity in their school community and society
Student Empowerment for Change	Empower belief in students that they can effect positive change
Student Empowerment for Growth	Empower students to take responsibility for their own growth

APPLIED ETHICS

Applied ethics to real world problems.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Appropriate Emotions	Feel and express emotions appropriate to the situation
Do What is Right	Act to do the right thing for the benefit of others
Ethical Qualities Cultivation	Cultivate the qualities needed to be an ethical individual
Ethical Response Encouragement	Encourage others to act well in situations that require an ethical response
Proper Ethical Response	Act properly in situations that require an ethical response

Take Responsibility for Ethical Decision-Making	Take responsibility for one's own ethical decision-making
Well-Being Deliberation	Deliberate when considering well-being of others

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement or civic participation is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. Civic engagement includes communities working together or individuals working alone in both political and non-political actions to protect public values or make a change in a community.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Be an Active and Engaged Citizen	Be an active and engaged citizen in one's community
Community Betterment	Make the community better
Environment Creation	Create an environment of belonging for others
Service Commitment	Commit to actions that service the community or the larger world
World Betterment	Make the greater world better

COMPASSION

Compassion motivates people to go out of their way to relieve the physical, mental or emotional pains of others and themselves. Compassion is often regarded as being sensitive to the emotional aspects of the suffering of others.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Demonstrate Compassion for Students with Exceptionalities	Demonstrate kindness, caring, empathy, and a willingness to assist students, including those with exceptionalities
Exhibit Care	Exhibit care and concern for others
Show Kindness	Show sympathy, kindness, caring, and a willingness to help others
Use Compassion	Use compassion to solve problems

COURAGE

Courage is the choice and willingness to confront agony, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Act on Personal Conviction	Act on one's personal conviction regardless of consequences
Action Taken	Take action upon a valued goal or conviction regardless of popularity
Confrontation of One's Fear	Confront one's fears when following a course of actions
Do the Right Thing	Be brave enough to do the right thing regardless of how people will react
Recognize One's Fears	Recognize one's fears when following a course of action
Take Correct Action	Demonstrate courage in taking correct action

CREATIVITY

Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something somehow new and somehow valuable is formed. The created item may be intangible or a physical object.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Approach Problems	Approach problems with new and different perspectives, strategies, mindset, and data
Develop a Solution-Oriented Mindset	Develop a solution-oriented mindset by focusing on a solution and not a problem
Imagination for Creative Solutions	Use imagination to design creative solutions that are novel and useful
Solution Determination	Determine the appropriate solution to a problem by using a model to view a problem from several unique perspectives

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the analysis of facts to form a judgment. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Academic Argument Bias and Relevance Determination	Determine bias and relevance of academic arguments in relation to a particular issue
Apply Real World Logical Reasoning	Apply logical reasoning to a real-world problem-based inquiry
Ask Thoughtful Questions	Ask thoughtful questions to fully understand a topic, solution, conclusion, or approach to form a judgement.
Bias Source Identification	Identify potential sources of bias on an issue
Conclusion Evaluation	Evaluate how well reasoning supports a conclusion
Credible Sources Identification	Identify reliable and credible sources of information
Discussion of Dilemmas	Promote reasoning by discussing dilemmas related to social or school norms.
Environment Fostering	Foster an environment where critical thinking is habitually applied
Facts or Opinions	Distinguish fact from opinion
Teach Students to Learn	Teach students to learn by asking questions, reading, researching, experiencing, and experimenting

CURIOSITY

Curiosity is a quality related to inquisitive thinking such as exploration, investigation, and learning, evident by observation in humans and other animals. Curiosity is heavily associated with all aspects of human development, including the process of learning and desire to acquire new knowledge and skill.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Be Open to New Knowledge and Skill	Be open to new levels of knowledge or skills informed by new and different ideas.
Deepen Existing Knowledge and Skill	Be open to deepening existing knowledge or skill
Desire for Knowledge	Demonstrate the desire to acquire new information or knowledge
Discover New Information	Discover various information and resources on various developmental topics
Exploration of New Things	Explore something new out of interest
Opportunity to Learn Information	Create opportunities to learn new information about someone or something
Solution Recommendations	Recommend innovative and creative solutions

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Educational leadership is the process and skills of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Accommodate Diverse Views	Accommodate diverse views and perspectives
Be a Part of Ethical Leadership	Cultivate one's view of self as being a part of ethical leadership
Best Practices from Others	Seek out and learn from the best practice of others
Community Trust Building	Build a learning community of relational trust and collaboration
Caring and Ethical Culture	Promote a caring and ethical culture in staff and all stakeholders
Character Program Plan	Develop a Character Program plan
Character Program Vision	Create a vision for character

Collaboration for Evidence Based Decision Making	Collaborate with families, staff, and students for evidence-based decision making.
Courageous and Initiative-Taking Behaviors	Practice courageous, initiative-taking behaviors that compel others toward a common goal
Culture of Character Creation	Cultivate a culture encompassing character qualities
Culture of Care	Create a culture of a caring school community
Empowerment of Stakeholders in Character Programming	Empower all stakeholders in character programming
Ethical and Caring Adult Community	Cultivate an ethical and caring adult community in the school, with interpersonal trust
Families and Community in Building Character	Incorporate families and community members as partners in building character
Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills Usage	Use intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to proactively build a positive adult community and culture
Justice and Democratic Skills	Develop knowledge of justice and democratic skills and dispositions
Modification of Practices for Cultural Shift	Modify practices of a current school to change the culture of a school
Monitor Character Program Development	Monitor the development and implementation of character programming
Pedagogy of Empowerment	Cultivate a pedagogy of empowerment where all voices are heard and valued
Prioritization of Character Programs	Prioritize character programs and make it a school priority
Recognition of Shared Leadership	Recognize that leadership is shared among members of the larger community
Reflective Practice Collaboration	Collaborate with fellow educators and group leaders on reflective practice
Social Emotional Skill Development	Develop opportunities to encourage the social and emotional skills and mindsets individuals need to be successful socially and academically
Servant Leadership Skills	Demonstrate servant leadership skills
Skill Improvement Application	Apply pedagogical strategies to improve students' social emotional skills, character, and academic learning-to-learn skills
Student Engagement in Character Programming	Engage students in character programming

EMPATHY

Empathy is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference; the capacity to place oneself in another's position.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Actions and Feelings of Someone Else	Consider what one would do and feel if in the same situation as someone else
Consider Perspectives	Consider the perspectives of others
Feel and Express Joy	Feel and express joy for the success and happiness of others
Feelings of Others	Sense and consider the feelings of others
Understand Disagreement	Seek to understand all sides of a disagreement

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation and to return kindness.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Authentic Thankfulness	Be authentic in thankfulness toward people, experiences, and things
Express of Thankfulness in Life	Express a deep sense of thankfulness in life, and more specifically, taking the time to genuinely express thankfulness to others
General Appreciation	Show appreciation toward people, experiences, and things
Reflect on the Positive	Reflect on the positive in people, experiences, and things to cultivate gratitude

HUMILITY

Humility is the quality of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Accurate View of Self	Having an accurate view of one's talents and achievements
Evaluation of Accomplishments	Evaluate accomplishments accurately
Prioritization of Opportunities for Others	Provide opportunities to others to receive attention and recognition
Recognition of Self Limitations	Recognize the limitations of one's knowledge

INCLUSION

Inclusion is the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Empowerment of Student Identity	Empower students to bring their full identities to school
Environment of Respect and Compassion	Cultivate an environment where all are treated with respect and compassion
Environment of Student Belonging	Create an inclusive environment for students
Model Self Respect	Show students that they can trust that they will be respected for who they are
Promotion of Student Belonging	Promote a sense of belonging for students as a valued part of an inclusive learning community

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong ethical principles and values.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Cultivation of Integrity	Cultivate the characteristics of integrity
Motivate Others	Motivate others to do the right thing
Truthfulness in Word and Deed	Be truthful in word and deed

INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Intellectual Engagement is a personality construct referring to a person's enjoyment (or dislike) of intellectually demanding activities.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Academic Honesty	Promote academic honesty
Critical and Compassionate Reflection	Reflect critically and compassionately
Curious and Open-Minded Thinking	Be a critical thinker guided by curiosity and open-mindedness
Positive Quality of Mind and Character	Demonstrate a positive quality of mind and intellectual character
Right Actions	Distinguish the right action based upon knowledge, truth, and understanding
Structural Thinking on Class Inequality	Demonstrate structural thinking about class inequality
Student Self Improvement	Empower students to learn something new so they can self-improve

JUSTICE

Justice is “just behavior” or treatment, the quality of being fair and reasonable.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Avoidance of Bias Decisions	Avoid letting one’s personal feelings bias decisions about others
Be Open Minded	Be open minded and listen
Fairness Towards Others	Be fair towards others by honoring their rights and responsibilities
Justice and Fair Skills	Model skills associated with justice and fairness
Openness to Ideas and Perspectives	Be open to new perspectives and ideas through listening
Recognition of Community Good	Recognize what is good for the community
Treat Others Fairly	Treat others fairly and equitably

MINDSET

Mindset is a mental inclination, tendency or habit.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Belief in Improvement of Skills	Integrate the belief that through thoughts, behaviors, and language, one can develop and improve skills over time
Environment for Student Achievement	Cultivate an environment where students realize they can do more than they think is possible
Growth Mindset Application	Apply a growth mindset to academic, professional, or personal endeavors
Mindset Recognition	Recognize one’s own mindset as a contributing factor in academic, professional, and personal success
Setback and Feedback Opportunities	Take setbacks and feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow educator skills
Student Success Mindset	Help students develop a mindset for success in education, career, and life

Understand Skill Development	Demonstrate an understanding that one can develop and improve skills over time through thoughts, behaviors, and language
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OPTIMISM

Optimism is an attitude reflecting a belief or hope that the outcome of some specific endeavor, or outcomes in general, will be positive, favorable, and desirable.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Cultivate Positive Expectations	Cultivate positive expectations about the future
Demonstration of Optimism	Demonstrate optimism in any situation
Eliminate Negative Thought Patterns and Behaviors	Describe how to eliminate non-productive negative thought patterns behaviors
Student Positive Outlook Development	Develop in students a positive outlook and to approach life's opportunities and challenges with optimism and enthusiasm
Use Action Oriented Strength	Behave with an action-oriented strength involving agency, motivation, and confidence to achieve goals

PATIENCE

Patience is the ability to endure difficult circumstances. Patience may involve perseverance in the face of delay; tolerance of provocation without responding in disrespect/anger; or forbearance when under strain, especially when faced with longer-term difficulties.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Recognition of Other's Needs	Recognize that others may need more time or attention
Remain Calm in Delays	Remain calm when facing delays and challenges
Take Time	Take time and care in difficult situations

PURPOSE

Purpose is the reason for which something is done, created, or for which something exists. Purpose is a sense of resolve or determination.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Articulate Meaning	Articulate meaning in everyday life
Belief in a Purpose	Believe in a sense of purpose or meaning in life
Commit to Meaningful Contributions	Commit to making a meaningful contribution to the world
Student Meaning and Impact	Communicate to students how their work matters to their own learning and to the community

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Behavior Examination	Examine one's own behavior
Growth Goal Setting	Set realistic goals for growth and development using a reflective practice approach
Incorporate Knowledge Into Lessons	Incorporate the knowledge learned through reflection into lessons on a regular basis
New Learning Acquisition	Acquire new learnings through experience through new insights and perspectives of self and personal practice
Personal Bias Evaluation	Evaluate personal biases
Self Accountability	Take accountability for one's actions and behavior

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to cope mentally or emotionally with a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status quickly.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Develop Inner Strength and Courage	Develop inner strength and courage
Overcoming Adversity Support	Support others in overcoming adversity
Perseverance Support	Support perseverance through challenge or adversity
Teach Students on Inner Strength and Courage	Teach students how to develop and draw on inner strength and courage to overcome difficult experiences

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Self-Directed Learning is the process through which an individual takes responsibility for their learning.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Demonstrate Initiative Toward Goals	Demonstrate initiative in the pursuit of lifelong self-improvement and professional growth
Employ Self-Directed Skill Advancement	Employ self-directed activities that promote advancement of skills and lifelong learning
Student Goal Setting Empowerment	Empower students to set goals and revise them
Student Learning Empowerment	Empower students to lead their own learning
Student Reflection Empowerment	Empower students to reflect on growth and challenges

SERVICE

Service is the contribution or function of serving the welfare of others.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Active Citizenship	Be an active citizen and participant in the community
Community Volunteering	Provide service through volunteering for the benefit of the community
Habit of Service Development	Develop a habit of service for others and the community
Helping the Community	Provide service through helping for the benefit of others in the community
Meaning and Purpose Construction	Construct meaning and purpose through service opportunities and the experience of helping others

TEAMWORK

Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient way. This concept is seen within the greater framework of a team, which is a group of interdependent individuals who work together towards a common goal.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Apply Interpersonal Communication in Team Settings	Apply effective interpersonal communication skills in a team environment
Apply Teamwork Principles and Skills	Apply teamwork principles and skills in team settings
Be Helpful	Be a helpful and contributing group and team member
Group Member Collaboration	Collaborate as a member of a group to attain agreement and a collective outcome
Model Positivity	Model positive values and behaviors that guide others to be their best and most successful selves
Motivate Team Members Toward Shared Goals	Motivate team members to work together towards the same goal

Promote Reflection and Contemplation	Promote group reflection and contemplation
Trust Creation	Create trust by providing and requesting open and honest feedback between team members

TRUSTWORTHINESS

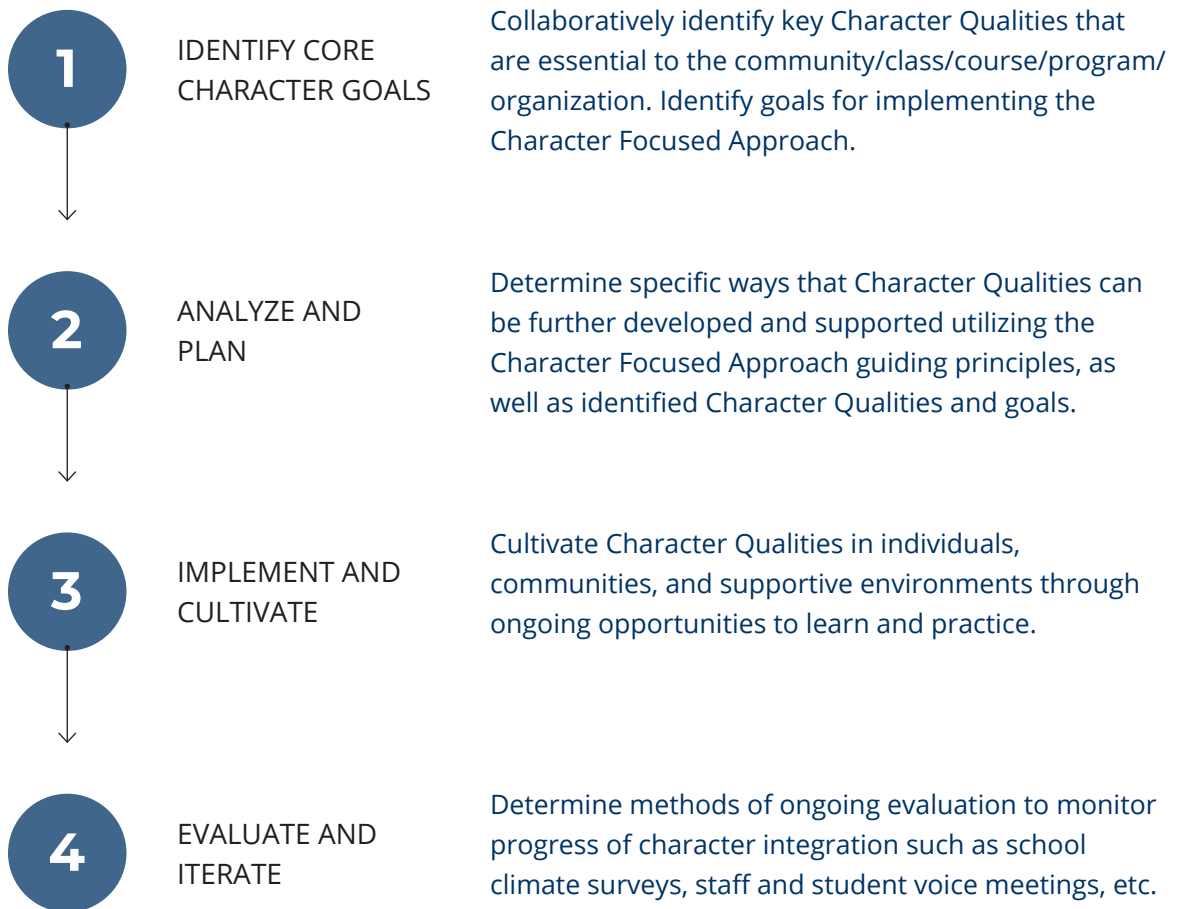
(Inspiring Trust, Confidence, Relationships Building & Management, Honesty, Interpersonal Communication)

Trustworthiness is the quality of being deserving of trust or confidence.

Rich Skill Descriptor Name	Rich Skill Descriptor
Be Authentic with Others	Be authentic with others
Build Relationships Based on Trust	Build relationships based on trust
Demonstrate Honor and Integrity	Demonstrate honor and integrity
Have Confidence in Others	Have confidence in others

APPENDIX 4.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH



APPENDIX 5.

EXAMPLES OF CHARACTER PROMOTING ACTIVITIES IN WGU TEACHERS COLLEGE

The Character Focused Approach in WGU Teachers College

Examples of Character Promoting Activities Within
Community, Intellectual, Ethical, and Performance Character

Character Promoting Activities	Community Character	Intellectual Character	Ethical Character	Performance Character
Use WGU's Character Core Skills Collection to incorporate character qualities into Teachers College courses and programs		✓		✓
Frame problem solving through a character lens, allowing staff and learners to introduce and discuss problems of practice and use responsible and ethical decision making	✓	✓	✓	✓
Staff lead Solver Circles - problem solving discussions at college level conferences	✓	✓		✓
Rotate facilitation role in team meetings and intentionally incorporate ethical decision making in team discussions	✓		✓	
Invite learners to lead group study sessions and online discussions	✓	✓		✓
Employee Resources Groups (e.g., Disability, Ebony, Indigenous, LatinX, Military, Parents, Pan-Asian, Pride, Silver, Women, Silver, Wellness)	✓		✓	
WGU Cares - Employee-led initiative connecting WGU staff to volunteer and philanthropic opportunities	✓			

APPENDIX 6.

EXAMPLES OF THE CHARACTER FOCUSED APPROACH IN K-12, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND WORKFORCE SETTINGS

Principle 1. Prioritize Character

Key Question: How will we prioritize the holistic and intentional integration of Character Qualities into all aspects of our working, learning, or living community?

- Define key Character Qualities and values by using a collaborative process and create action plans specific to ways of integrating these qualities into the organization policies and procedures (inclusion, educational leadership).
- Create a vision for character that is aligned with the organization's mission and systematically integrate it into specific practices within the organization to shape the character culture of the entire community (service, gratitude, etc.).
- Self-reflect on Character Quality strengths and opportunities, in order to create a personal character vision statement.
- Create a professional growth plan focusing on developing as a leader of character (educational leadership, applied ethics, etc.).
- Create a classroom plan and timeline focused on character implementation that includes defining and sustaining the understanding of Character Qualities and integrating character development content.

Principle 2. Intentionally and Holistically Integrate Character

Key Question: How will we holistically and intentionally integrate character and Character Qualities into all aspects of our working, learning, or living communities?

- Regularly include character prompts into team meeting discussions. For example: Which Character Qualities would help this current project succeed? Which Character Qualities do you want to bring into your work week? How did your focus Quality go last week (courage, applied ethics, reflective practice, etc.)?
- Integrate character content and practices into classroom and school norms and curriculum to foster a classroom and school community of character (acceptance, inclusion).

- Conduct a character curriculum analysis to identify which Character Qualities are included and where others may be integrated (purpose, justice, etc.).
- Design a lesson that focuses on a specific Character Quality, including an engaging activity that develops students' knowledge and understanding (trustworthiness, intellectual engagement, etc.).
- Read stories or watch inspirational movies that demonstrate the power of perseverance and resilience.

Principle 3. Cultivate Healthy Learning and Working Environments

Key Question: How will we cultivate healthy working and learning environments where Character Qualities are supported, developed, and demonstrated over time?

- Conduct ongoing school or workplace reflections/surveys/meetings to identify which character qualities are known, evident and implemented throughout the organization (critical thinking, intellectual engagement, educational leadership). Celebrate successes and take deliberate, transparent, and ongoing action to address areas of improvement (applied ethics).
- Create an environment of belonging and empowerment by involving students in creating classroom norms and agreements using character qualities that are important to them.
- Create a safe classroom and school environment for students and staff by using community circle meetings where members discuss their lives, learnings and growth in a supportive environment (acceptance, curiosity, empathy, compassion, justice).
- Implement activities that encourage individuals to identify their personal character strengths, determine ways to utilize them on a regular basis, and reflect on the impact of intentionally using these character strengths (reflective practice).
- Post character qualities such as inclusion, teamwork, and service in common areas and provide ongoing opportunities for staff/students to brainstorm how to integrate the qualities into organizational procedures and individual's daily work.
- Engage in reflective practice activities during staff meetings and encourage individuals and teams to reflect on the progress of character initiatives. What is working? What are obstacles, what needs to change? Are we becoming the organization and people we want to be?
- Address inequity and bias within workplace hiring practices by using the character qualities of integrity, justice, advocacy, and civic engagement.

Principle 4. Value and Include All Community Members in Character Initiatives

Key Question: How will we promote an asset-based and inclusive framework for character development, where all community members are empowered to model, teach and practice Character Qualities?

- Establish an inclusive classroom and school environment with a shared vision focused on character qualities where all students and staff feel heard, valued, empowered, and responsible for developing character.
- Include all community members to create a character vision statement.
- Promote a collective space and opportunities for individuals to contribute to a framework for the teaching and learning of character qualities.
- Build an asset-based approach into school-wide lesson plan delivery expectations to ensure the approach is being used on a regular basis.
- Invite a variety of stakeholders to create a character integration plan.
- Ask students to create shared classroom guidelines and make classroom posters of the guidelines. At open house night, students share the posters with caregivers and parents and ask them to contribute more ideas. Throughout the school day, the shared guidelines are referenced and incorporated into lessons.
- Establish Morning Meetings.
- Engage students in a course activity to identify their purpose for pursuing their chosen degree. Students then can create a vision and action plan of how to incorporate ethics into their student activities and future career.
- Ask faculty and students to analyze current course content to determine where they may intentionally integrate the character qualities of compassion, gratitude, and justice into the curriculum (critical thinking, intellectual engagement, inclusion, reflective practice, creativity, advocacy).

Principle 5. Share Character Learnings

Key Question: How will we share our character research and best practices with others to contribute to systems change?

- Invite faculty to share research on successful character initiatives with other teams across the university (critical thinking, intellectual engagement, advocacy, educational leadership).
- Share practical classroom and school practices and content with other schools and education colleagues.
- Conduct and contribute to the body of research supporting character in university and workplace settings.
- Showcase character initiatives, opportunities, and activities inside and outside the workplace.
- Publish a guidebook of best practices for collaborative cross-cultural teamwork to accomplish an organization's mission and purpose (advocacy, courage, optimism, service).

CHARACTER
CORE

