

**Aventura City of Excellence School, (ACES)**  
**Character Education Initiatives**  
**Winner of 11 State and National Character Education Awards**

Stellar character education practices have earned Aventura City of Excellence School a spot as a National Finalist in the National Schools of Character competition and as a State School of Character winner for the past 2 years in a row. Additionally, ACES has received 7 National Promising Practices Awards.

Principal, Julie Alm said, "With our "Whole Child" approach, students discover at a very young age the importance of being socially responsible, caring and contributing citizens. ACES excels in student achievement, community involvement and innovative practices. We also make caring for our families and our students' individual needs" a top priority." Vice Principal, Daniel Sandberg agrees, "Achieving these awards is a huge honor. We're proud that our staff intentionally creates an environment that makes every student feel valued, compelled to learn and to give back to their community."

City Manager, Eric Soroka states, "With teamwork, anything is possible. The City of Aventura is pleased at how ACES administration, staff, students, families and the community have worked together to achieve such noteworthy accomplishments."

**4 Major National and State Awards 2007-2009**

- **2009 National School of Character Finalist Award**
- **2009 State School of Character Award**
- **2008 National School of Character Finalist Award**
- **2008 State School of Character Awards**

**In addition, ACES has won 7 National Promising Practices Awards for exemplary Character Education initiatives**

**2009 National Promising Practices Awards**

**ACES Engaging, Interactive Middle Math Program Mentors Elementary Students**

ACES middle and elementary school students join together to engage in challenging and interactive exercises on the math concept of Pi. The goal of the program is to motivate all learners through mentoring and diverse learning strategies that connect to ACES core values and academics. In preparation for the Pi Day event, all middle school math students research and create projects about Pi. On Pi Day, all elementary students are invited to visit the middle school math classes to see the older students' presentation of Pi projects. All students enjoy sharing a variety of special activities together to enrich and deepen students' understanding of Pi while encouraging students of different ages and cultures to work together collaboratively. Students experience a sense of accomplishment by gaining new academic and social skills as they experience a sense of cooperation, team work and unity by working together with others as their confidence grows.

## **Aventura City of Excellence School, ACES Students Engage in the “ART” of Building Character**

The “ART” of Building Character Program immerses ACES students in character building, cultural experiences that provide students with role models for ethics. Purposeful cultural experiences are woven throughout the curriculum, in all subject areas, for all the grades by a central theme of integrating values. The goal of the program is to give all students an opportunity to experience, appreciate, share, and express ACES 12 core values through the cultural arts. Administration and staff determine activities for the month and then prepare students for the upcoming events. Students get ready for the art form through discussions, class assignments, research, and by creating their own projects to share with their classes. Cultural experiences teach students important lessons on topics such as; diversity, conflict resolution, the law, government and the environment. Students are engaged as they develop specific approaches to deeds and actions. The “ART” of Building Character Program increases students’ enthusiasm and positively affects their moral development, behavior and confidence.

## **2008 National Promising Practices Awards ACES Middle School Leadership Speaker Series Demonstrates Values Impact Success**

Aventura City of Excellence School, (ACES) Middle School Leadership Speaker Series is designed to bring “Leading Entrepreneurs, business leaders and authors” to ACES in order to educate, motivate and inspire ACES Middle School Students as they contemplate their future. All leaders weave into their presentations the significant role that values have played in achieving their personal and professional success.

This program fosters family participation by giving parents an opportunity to share the speakers program with their children so that they can start the process of discussing “Career Choices” earlier. The topics are also relevant to the parents’ careers. Parents and students enjoy the opportunity to learn first-hand from leading professionals and to see how they have integrated values into their careers.

ACES Middle School Entrepreneurship Classes in partnership with Junior Achievement have students starting their own businesses, selecting products, selling stock to raise capital for their company, developing marketing plans, and working diligently to ensure their companies turn a profit. At the end of their projects, students take a portion of the money that their companies have raised and select charities to donate their company’s profits to. Students learn the values of team-work, cooperation, responsibility, tolerance and giving back to their community. The entire Middle School Leadership Series emphasizes that “Values Impact Success.”

## **Character Grows Daily at ACES Science Garden**

The basis of Science Garden Project is to encourage students of different cultural backgrounds, to work side by side collaboratively with each other, to work with the community by doing service learning projects, and to enhance the science program by engaging all learners. This project gives students the opportunity to learn through natural inquisition and interests. Teachers across the curriculum are recruited and all subjects are covered in this curriculum. 300 middle school students participate in some aspect of the garden, in experimentations and inquiry learning throughout the school year.

Partnerships are joined with businesses in the community; support is received by parents, teachers, administrators, and the City of Aventura. Middle Students are proud to share and show their work off to elementary students, to the staff, to their parents, and to the community. Character grows daily at ACES, with the right ingredients, just like the garden!

## **2007 National Promising Practices Awards**

### **ACES Community Care Program Provides Opportunities for Moral Action**

The ACES Community Care Outreach Program seeks to engage students in projects that impact the world around them. Each day ACES students are reminded, via the morning news show, that "Excellence is the Expectation, not the Exception." Students serve as role models for each other as they practice living the school's 12 core values, which are communicated and reinforced in the AM Show and in monthly programs. Through student-selected service projects, ACES celebrates their commitment to values by launching fundraisers to aid Cystic Fibrosis, Diabetics in Africa, hurricane survivors, JAFCO, the Good Samaritan Peace Day Project, Strides for Safety, Breast Cancer, Food for the Poor, The Smile Train, The Marlins Community Foundation and the Children's Cancer Caring Center.

ACES participates with the City of Aventura in International Peace Day, Founder's Day, the Dare Program, Arbor Day Celebration, and in the Thanksgiving Food Drive. ACES contributes to Aventura Marketing Council events such as the "Aventura Mall Freedom Walk" program designed to bring awareness to 9/11 and to soldiers overseas. Guests from the community are invited to speak at ACES for special occasions; such as the Holocaust Remembrance Day, African American History Month, Women's History Month, Career Day, and International Peace Day and for ACES Author Series.

The ACES community experiences a sense of unity and pride for their efforts as they strive to be socially responsible and "make a difference."

## **2006 National Promising Practices Awards**

### **ACES Human Rights Curriculum**

The Human Rights curriculum was created to recognize the functions and significance of human rights on local, national and global levels. Students identify with the needs and nature of human rights as they relate to the individual, to our society, and to the nations of our world. Sixth Grade Language Arts teachers implement this program integrating the goals and objectives of ACES Character Education Program, in order to demonstrate and integrate behavior, ethical issues, the objectives of Sunshine State Standards and Grade Level Expectations in the state of Florida. The course applies an array of hands-on learning; with writing assignments, community service involvement, technology-based activities such as KidBiz3000<sup>3</sup>, utilization of the United Nations educational publications, and community educational experts to teach human rights perspectives. The Human Rights program is designed to give ACES Students a clear understanding and sensitivity to the rights and responsibilities of citizens, governments, and nations.

## **2005 National Promising Practices Awards**

### **Knock-Your-Socks-Off Parenting Workshops**

One of the greatest challenges to the success of character education initiatives is creating a bridge between school and home. Aventura City of Excellence School has solved this problem by offering Living Values “*Knock-Your-Socks-Off*” Parent Workshops that involve parents in the character-building mission of the school. In 90-minute workshops each month, parents become acquainted with the 12 universal values in which their children are immersed at school. The school holds the workshops in the morning. Parents have an opportunity to “experience” the values through a series of reflections, discussions, and sharing activities. The “*Knock-Your-Socks-Off*” approach to parenting focuses on communication and thinking skills while reinforcing the parent’s role as the primary communicator of values. It changes the parent’s role from that of judge to that of a loving, peaceful communicator.

### **Additional Character Education Initiatives:**

#### **ACES International Peace Day**

International Peace Day is an exciting holiday at Aventura City of Excellence School, (ACES) celebrated on 9/21. Weeks of preparation culminate in a beautifully, well orchestrated ceremony, bringing together ACES students, families, City of Aventura Officials, Values Volunteers and Community members to focus on the value of Peace and ACES consistent commitment to “Give Back” to help those less fortunate.

#### **The India Letter Exchange**

ACES 4<sup>th</sup> grade students participate in an International Letter Writing Exchange with students in India. A special ceremony takes place when the letters come back and ACES students get an opportunity to share a lesson on India culture, geography, values and food, while enjoying hearing from their far-away pen pals.

#### **ACES Cuddly Characters Teach Values and Journal Writing Skills**

Over the course of the year, ACES, students become pretty attached to ACES Character Values stuffed animal friends. The cuddly characters are named for each of ACES 12 Core Values. Media studies teaches students about our values and students get to check out a stuffed friend and journal, care for the animal overnight and write about what the value means to them in the journal. What better way to honor our furry Value friends than by placing them in a caring and loving home-FOREVER at the end of the school year? During Media class, students were told that that our furry friends are retiring for end of the school year. Students were instructed to write an essay/adoption application as to why they would be the best candidate to adopt a friend. After the applications were reviewed, the chosen families were notified and given certificates confirming the adoptions. Next school year, ACES will have a new set of animals and writing Journals.

#### **ACES Reading Buddies Mentoring Program**

Reading Buddies” is a mentoring program in which a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student is paired with a kindergartener for various reading activities. The main activity is “buddy reading”, where the students read books to each other. Other activities include art projects, the making of books, journaling, and visiting the library together. The benefits of this program are innumerable. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students feel motivated to read aloud because they feel confident

when reading to a younger and less skilled reader. The kindergarteners have the opportunity to hear how an older student sounds and how a fluent reader reads. The kindergarteners in turn have the opportunity to practice their “budding” reading skills and social skills are a benefit as well. Reading buddies create a bond with each other and even find themselves choosing books that their “buddy” would like when visiting the school library!

### **The City of Aventura Veteran’s Day and the Aventura Marketing Council Freedom Walk 9/11**

ACES students participate with the City of Aventura, the Aventura Marketing Council and community members to honor our soldiers. As students share meaningful experiences, they also demonstrate their appreciation for those that have helped to serve our country and community.