

## What Is a Finalist?

Finalists are schools and districts selected by CEP evaluators on the basis of their strong written applications. In 2007, CEP chose 25 Finalists for site visits by two-person teams. The Blue Ribbon Panel faced an enormous challenge in selecting this year's 10 Winners from this excellent pool. The exemplary nature of the character education efforts of the other 15 Finalists merits the detailed descriptions that follow.



## Alhambra Elementary School District

Grades K–8, Public/Urban • Phoenix, Arizona

### Finding the Star within Each Child

Folks in the Alhambra Elementary School District feel a personal bond with school superintendent Dr. Jim Rice. A highly visible figure in each of the district's 15 schools, he knows most teachers by name and visits each of Alhambra's 800 classrooms at least once a year. What is even more amazing is that the other

principal do it. That's the way it works. Example, example, example."

If modeling of good character provides the strategy that has transformed the Alhambra district, the slogan, *Every child has a star within*, provides the philosophical base. The district's efforts to polish the star in every child have brought amazing results. Since the introduction of character education, four schools in the district have received Arizona's A+ School Award, two schools received Arizona's A+ Exemplary Program Award, and one school was honored as one of ten elementary schools in the nation to receive the Intel and Scholastic National School of Distinction Award. The usual obstacles, such as poverty, a high-crime location, and homelessness, have not stopped Alhambra's march to higher achievement.

When Alhambra received a \$25,000 grant seven years ago through the University of Arizona, it adopted the Character Counts framework to embed character development in the daily lives of its students and to make the six pillars of character (trustworthiness, fairness, caring, citizenship, respect, and responsibility) the foundation of learning. Over the last three years, the staff has received training in the Kagan Cooperative Learning Model that stresses interdependence, individual accountability, and equal participation. "It was easy to implement Kagan, because we already had character education in place," says Sevilla West principal Kathy Davis.

The district has been recognized as a model district for educating Latino students. Among its many successful practices are the Culture Club that explores different world cultures, the Men of Honor Club that supports service learning, and the CHA CHA program (Choosing High Achievement) that celebrates good citizenship by rewarding students who have done all their homework and have demonstrated good attendance.

Rice, who received Arizona's Superintendent of the Year Award in 2006, is quick to give credit to the district's teachers, who often come in early and stay late to tutor students. As one sixth-grade student put it, "Teachers help us learn, and they won't quit." As a result, Alhambra students won't quit either as they discover their inner stars.

#### REFERENCES

*CHARACTER COUNTS!* Los Angeles, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics. Web site: [www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org).

*Kagan Cooperative Learning Model*. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing. Web site: [www.kaganonline.com](http://www.kaganonline.com).

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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#### CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Alhambra

- Continuing improvement in student achievement, as measured by performance on the state AIMS test
- No incidents of bullying or weapons on campuses
- No students expelled from the district since the inception of the program

**Dr. James W. Rice**, Superintendent

administrators in this sprawling urban district that is home to more than 15,000 students seem to mirror Rice's personalized style. In fact, modeling good character is a clear expectation for all personnel. Sevilla School assistant principal Celia Waite sees it as the key to building relationships: "We walk the walk. It's the modeling of adults on campus that makes the difference. Many students don't have people in their lives to model good behavior." Jackie Doerr, the principal of Andalucia Primary, points to the strong power of example: "They see me do it. They see the assistant