

Arlington Traditional School

Grades PreK–5, Public/Urban • Arlington, Virginia • Arlington Public Schools

ABC's of Success

“We believe that great schools don’t happen by chance; they happen by design,” states Holly Hawthorne, the energetic principal of Arlington Traditional School, an elementary school of choice located in the inner suburbs of Washington, D.C. About a dozen years ago, the school adopted *ABC's of Success* (in reference to **a**cademics, **b**ehavior, and **c**haracter) as its mantra. Today, the *ABC's of Success* underpin everything that happens at the school. They shape instruction, curriculum, student behavior, school climate, and community outreach. By espousing the six pillars of Character Counts (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship) and highlighting these values, the school helps students strengthen the bond between ethical behavior and academic success.

Arlington Traditional, which draws students from each of the diverse neighborhoods in Arlington County, is highly desirable because it emphasizes character development and academic achievement. Families apply for admission to the kindergarten program, and each kindergarten class is chosen through a formal

lottery process. When there are openings in other grades, students are placed from a waiting list. Parents often say that gaining admission to this prestigious school is tantamount to “winning the lottery.”

Students meet the challenge of high academic expectations, and they experience success in a caring environment that is free from distractions. A visitor can easily find tangible proof of the students’ strong sense of responsibility and the school-wide emphasis on making personal connections. Fourth graders, for example, work diligently with at-risk kindergarteners; and fifth graders, who serve as the school Safety Patrol, walk the younger children to the bus at the end of every day. The librarian sponsors Literary Lunches in which students bring their lunches to the library and read books together. When Peter, a fifth grader, was asked what he had learned about character at Arlington Traditional School, he immediately responded, “Taking care of one person, and that person is you.” In essence, the school aims to develop the students’ intrinsic motivation so they will follow the *ABC's of Success* when no one is watching.

Friday afternoon school assemblies reflect the ways in which *ABC's of Success* has been embedded into school life. Every week, the student body gathers as a family, wearing blue and gold colors, for a one-hour program to recognize the good deeds of students; to celebrate birthdays and team or individual achievements; and to enjoy class plays that demonstrate academic or character lessons.

Opportunities for helping others extend far beyond the school boundaries. When parent John Wanda founded the Arlington Academy for Hope in his native Uganda, school staff and families provided resources and support. The school’s

CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Arlington Traditional

- Consistently high student achievement on all local, state, and national assessments
- National No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Award, 2004
- National Parent Involvement School of Excellence designation, 2006

Holly Hawthorne, Principal

principal and teachers traveled to Africa during their summer breaks to teach at the school. Arlington Traditional students write to pen pals abroad, share experiences at Friday assemblies, and learn about one another’s culture.

Arlington Traditional School, which has earned recognition for its rigorous academic curriculum and high scholastic achievement, remains focused on helping individual children reach their potential to become competent persons of character. Fourth grader Sophie sums up the care and concern of adults here: “There are lots of people you can go to if you have a problem.”

REFERENCE

CHARACTER COUNTS! Los Angeles, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics. Web site: www.charactercounts.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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