

Hartington Public School

Grades K–12, Public/Rural • Hartington, Nebraska

A School with Pride and a Purpose

Hartington, Nebraska, is a storybook land, a pictorial delight set amid rolling hills and river valleys. The town's motto, *A Community with Pride and a Purpose*, also describes its school, a beautifully manicured complex that serves grades K–6 and 7–12 in two interconnected buildings. The schools have separate principals, guided by one superintendent; all administrators work closely together and enthusiastically embrace character education. A visitor can quickly sense the pride the students have in their school and in the close connections it has with the community.

The mission statement of Hartington Public School clearly defines its purpose: *to develop students of character while empowering them to achieve personal success in an ever-changing world*. High school principal Russell Flamig points out that all school goals and activities support the view that “personal success is not possible unless our students are first students of character.” The Character Counts curriculum and tenets serve as the framework for Hartington's systematic and developmental character education program. All elementary school students and their parents receive a homework folder printed with behavioral expectations and descriptions of the six pillars of character education, which are then reinforced in the classroom through examples. On the secondary level, students examine character from different perspectives as they assess actions portrayed in biographies, participate in literature discussions, and examine social issues.

Hartington's demonstration of good sportsmanship is legendary in northeastern Nebraska. Before every varsity competition, a Hartington student reads the

sportsmanship pledge. At the end of each home varsity game, Hartington's team awards a medal to a member of the opposing team who best exemplifies good sportsmanship. Countless letters from the opposing teams attest to the powerful effect of this tradition, and the Nebraska Department of Education has congratulated Hartington for “living and modeling” character.

In the elementary school, a weekly student of character receives the Subway Award and a certificate for a sub sandwich. The high school, in an effort to develop students' intrinsic motivation, has an award system that recognizes students “caught in the act” of good character. The Gotcha Good program, instituted last year, honors students behaving in ways that reflect good character.

Opportunities to serve others abound, and the school, a Nebraska pilot school for character education, encourages students to volunteer for many service projects. A recent survey indicates that 97 percent of the secondary students have participated in some type of community-service activity, and 36 percent of those students have been involved in at least six volunteer activities in the past two years. Activities run the gamut from providing help for faith, health, and civic organizations to coaching young athletes



CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Hartington

- Increasing satisfaction with school climate, as indicated by a six-year data comparison of the Character Development Survey responses of students, parents, and staff
- Community recognition of the positive impact of character education, as recorded in focus interviews conducted by the Nebraska Character Education Partnership
- Significant increase in secondary school volunteerism

Russell Flamig, High School Principal

and organizing competitions for altruistic causes. Laura Wiebelhaus, a 2007 Hartington graduate and winner of Nebraska's Female High School Heisman Award for academic performance, citizenship, and school/community involvement, states that Hartington's character education program taught her to work her hardest “in the classroom, in athletics, and in the community.” Wiebelhaus, like many of her peers, is living proof of Hartington's “pride and purpose.”

REFERENCE

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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