

## Arlington Traditional School

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

### Counting by Threes for Success

When asked what is the best thing about Arlington Traditional School, a county-wide school of choice in the inner suburbs of Washington, D.C., third-grade teacher Rex Godwin responds, “There is more than one best thing about this school. The *three best things* are the triangle of parents, students, and staff that work together.” It is this highly collaborative nature that accounts for Arlington Traditional’s remarkable success and has made by-lottery admission to it such a coveted prize.

The school promotes the *ABC’s of Success* (academics, behavior, and character) as the framework for its philosophy, instruction, and school rituals. The six pillars from Character Counts serve to strengthen the “character” part of the ABC’s; however, it is the integration of the three aspects that shapes school culture and motivates students (many from homes that are economically disadvantaged or have limited English proficiency) to succeed academically. The school welcomes parents, and they, delighted that their children are attending such a

high-performing school, respond warmly. Communication with parents comes in many forms, and the monthly newsletter—which provides timely information on events, honor roll names, award winners, character education, and service projects and is replete



with student photographs—is an anticipated treat. Parents also sponsor drives to aid Arlington Traditional’s “sister” school, the Arlington Academy of Hope, founded by parent John Wanda in his native Uganda. Also, since every fourth and fifth grader learns to play a musical instrument, parents proudly attend their children’s recitals.

If there is any spirit that dominates Arlington Traditional, it is that of inclusion of all. Kindergarten teacher Jamie Hamilton says, “The development of a caring community and skills to make it a reality begins in kindergarten.” The faculty intentionally models these traits and deliberately works to develop them in their students through age-appropriate strategies. The school embraces diversity, evidenced in the observation of another kindergarten teacher, Lorraine Grady, who says the school focuses on “celebrating all the children’s gifts.” The school has had students who suffered from muscular dystrophy, brittle bone disease, and cancer. In each case, the counselor talked to the student body, gave them the facts, and then had the

affected child talk to the other students. This approach paved the way for acceptance and inclusion. Rich academic opportunities also abound for all students, and special needs students are mainstreamed. All students participate in the discussion of Great Books and can choose from a host of “specials” each day. The curriculum is rigorous, often incorporating character in literature discussions, science projects, and art lessons.

Parent volunteer Elena Manville says, “They never give up on a kid who’s struggling.” Moreover, many students also demonstrate this patience with their peers. Katie Aholt, fourth-grade teacher, reports how impressed she was with the way one of her students encouraged a boy who was having trouble with a particular academic element and helped him to succeed. Parent Tommy Lo reports that fifth graders “adopted” his daughter Savannah when they saw how anxious and shy she felt in kindergarten. When asked to describe Arlington Traditional School, third-grade teacher Elaine Rens responds, “This school is different from other schools. We really support each other, and parents support us.”

#### REFERENCE

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

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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#### THE PRINCIPAL’S CORNER:

Holly Hawthorne

##### ADVICE TO THOSE NEW TO CHARACTER EDUCATION:

*Good character doesn’t happen by chance. It happens by design! Effective character education will not happen overnight. Don’t expect instant success. Keep it simple. You need a clear vision about who and what you are, and about what your message is. Realize that you are what you teach, so model good character!*