

Community of Caring (Kennedy Foundation)

“The success of this program within our school district has spread to many areas in the province of Alberta ... Records of school suspensions, bullying and other violent behaviours have decreased in one year. The amount of parental involvement, student attendance in school and the number of service learning experiences has all increased. Academically, students improved in the areas of social studies and language arts. We feel that providing students with the opportunity to discuss values in the classroom, particularly how they relate to the curriculum, and practicing these values on a daily basis has had a profound positive impact on the school culture and its climate.”

– Cheryl McInnes
Consultant, Community of Caring
Calgary Catholic Separate School District

The Community of Caring is a program developed by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation under the direction of Eunice Kennedy Shriver. This values-based approach to positive decision making has been adopted by almost 1,000 schools in the United States and Canada.

Based on the core values of caring, respect, responsibility, trust and family, the Community of Caring school framework provides strategies for creating a caring and respectful inclusive school environment. Students learn to avoid risk-taking behaviour through responsible decision making and thoughtful planning for the future. Students observe caring and responsible behaviour modelled by the parents, teachers, school staff and community leaders who are involved in the program.

The goal is to create an inclusive school culture where all school community members feel safe and cared for. The outcomes include reduced destructive behaviour such as teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, vandalism, early school-leaving and truancy.

In a Community of Caring school, academics, athletics and the fine arts are important but relationships within the school community are equally important.

The components of a Community of Caring school include a comprehensive action plan developed by a coordinating committee and lead teacher/site facilitator. Following a needs assessment of its school culture, each school develops its initiatives by:

- modelling the five core values and integrating them into regular classroom learning activities and the life of the school as a whole
- providing opportunities for student leadership through forums, cross-grade groups, learning circles, class meetings and activities that encourage them to help each other
- building relationships through family and community involvement
- using service learning and community service to help students grow and strengthen their character
- supporting teachers through staff development and ongoing support.

A Community of Caring school clearly articulates the essence of Catholic education. The Vatican Council II (1965) stated: “What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.” This spiritual process enhances and supports two fundamental objectives: humanizing education and professionalizing the teaching role.

Related Web site

www.communityofcaring.org