What Administrators, Teachers & Students say about CHARACTER COUNTS!

“We have long known that CHARACTER COUNTS! works in creating healthier school cultures where teachers can focus on instruction and student achievement. We are delighted to have the research gained through a four-year study to support schools in their efforts to make Character Education a priority.”

Jim Vidak, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools (CA)

“Lincoln Elementary is the beating heart of our community. Of all the lessons our students learn here at Lincoln, none are more valuable or honorable than our celebrations of the great Pillars of Character.”

Kati Dias, first grade teacher, Lincoln Elementary School, Tulare, CA

“Donating money to an organization such as the American Cancer Society builds personal character because it feels like we can have an impact on someone else’s life in our world.”

Eric M., eighth grade student, Springville Union School, Springville, CA

“We use CHARACTER COUNTS! school-wide to assist with campus culture, sports, and after school programs.”

Lucy Van Scyoc, principal, Tulare Western High School, Tulare, CA

“A Message from Jim Vidak
Tulare County Superintendent of Schools

I knew CHARACTER COUNTS! was something special the first time I saw Michael Josephson interact with our court and community school students. It was magical to watch him develop their decision-making skills as he challenged them to explore positive options. The year was 1993.

I asked Michael to train all but one of our community school sites so we would have a control group to assess the program’s success. When the control group teachers saw what the CHARACTER COUNTS! program was doing for the students in the other schools, they begged to receive the training! As I watched the positive character growth in our court school students — kids who many felt would never change — it became obvious to me that this training should be available to everyone. Thus, the Tulare County Office of Education became the lead agency in this endeavor, hiring a full-time coordinator to assure the program reached throughout the county.

We have exceeded our goal of making Tulare County a CHARACTER COUNTS! community. As the demand for the Tulare County Office of Education’s expertise grows, our efforts are now making a difference in lives nationwide as others adopt our model program. Our trainer travels far and wide to help others with character education. It is with pride we share our success and help others bring CHARACTER COUNTS! to their schools and towns.

(photo above, l-r) Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak; Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute; and John Forenti, former CHARACTER COUNTS! coordinator for Tulare County stand in front of the Pillar Square Monument in Mooney Grove Park (Visalia, CA) at its dedication in April 1997.

About CHARACTER COUNTS!

CHARACTER COUNTS! improves the lives of the adults who teach it — and the communities that embrace it. CHARACTER COUNTS! gives kids a framework for ethical living. Simply put, we help kids make better choices to make everyone’s lives better.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is two things: an educational framework for teaching universal values and a national coalition of organizations that support each other. The result is a culture change in your school or youth-service program. CHARACTER COUNTS! is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and nonsectarian. It transcends cultural differences. It isn’t a curriculum, an add-on, an out-of-the-box program, or a quick-fix fad. It’s character education that works with your needs and preexisting programs. For more information, visit www.charactercounts.org.
Building Character: Over a 20-Year Journey

CHARACTER COUNTS! in Tulare County

From the Beginning
When CHARACTER COUNTS! was introduced in the Tulare County Office of Education's court schools program in 1994, no one could have predicted the impact it would have on Tulare County's youth. The program was so successful with students on probation that County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak committed his office to making the program available to school districts, service agencies, and other facets of the community. To insure the program reached all of the county's 47 school districts, Superintendent Vidak hired a full-time coordinator for the program in 1996. CHARACTER COUNTS! is now the main source for character education in Tulare County. Over 4,000 teachers, parents and community members have been trained in the program.

The response from the students of Tulare County has been phenomenal. During National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week in October 1996 and 1997, Kids of Character rallies held in Visalia's Sunkist Stadium brought together over 1,100 students at the first event and more than 4,000 at the second! Over 100 students were honored as “Kids of Character” in 1996 and twice that number in 1997. As a result of the vision of Superintendent Vidak, character education has become an integral part of the educational experience as evidenced by these events.

In 1998, districts began holding their own celebrations, while the Tulare County Office of Education continued its popular program that honored individual “Kids of Character.” A new partnership between the Tulare County Office of Education and the Visalia Times-Delta was established to co-sponsor the Kids of Character Awards. During the month of September, the Visalia Times-Delta prints nomination forms for the Kids of Character Award in its newspapers. Additionally, a mail distribution by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Office and an online version of the printed forms are used to collect thousands of nominations from throughout the county. All students nominated for the Kids of Character Award receive a CHARACTER COUNTS! certificate suitable for framing, a CHARACTER COUNTS! pencil, and a Tulare County CHARACTER COUNTS! school folder. In addition, their names appear in the Visalia Times-Delta and on the TCOE website during CHARACTER COUNTS! Week.

Since so many of our youth exhibit exceptional character, the Visalia Times-Delta interviews, photographs and shares the stories of one student every day during CHARACTER COUNTS! Week. To culminate the week, over 100 additional Tulare County students “walking the walk” of good character are highlighted in a two-page display featuring a picture and short narrative of each honoree. All of these activities show how Tulare County schools have set a standard for providing a solid character education framework.

The tradition of honoring students for their exemplary character has grown to more than ever imagined – more than 6,000 nominations a year are submitted to the CHARACTER COUNTS! Committee. Their selection process reveals students’ powerful stories of character that occur in homes, schools, and youth organizations.

In 2012, a new opportunity was unveiled to honor students who meet the standards of good decision-making and affect the lives of others. The Provident-Salierno Family Foundation has provided a perpetual fund for recognizing exemplary students of character. With this fund, the recognition process will extend not only selecting one winning story per pillar, but also adding 15 or more exemplary finalists. All selected students are invited to attend a CHARACTER COUNTS! reception in their honor and be recognized for their profound stories of character which pass the true test for heroic measures.

Moving Forward
With the guidance of the U.S. Department of Education’s Partnership in Character Education Program (PCEP), a comprehensive research study was conducted to test the impact of a fully-implemented character education program on enhancing a schools’ instructional environment and campus culture. With the assistance of 9,000 students and 25 schools in Tulare County, we put our commitment to character education to the test. After four years of testing, researchers concluded that Tulare County’s model for implementing CHARACTER COUNTS! met the federal standard with significant, positive results. The results reveal that character education proved to be a substantial contributor to making positive change on a school campus.

A sampling of the Tulare County study reveals that incidences of hitting others, mistreating others because he or she belongs to a different group and using racial slurs or insults were cut in half at a school site when a strategic character education plan was implemented using the CHARACTER COUNTS! Framework.

The success of TCOE’s CHARACTER COUNTS! program is evidenced in many ways. Perhaps the most impressive and visible is Pillar Square, which stands in the county’s most popular park as a symbol of Tulare County’s commitment to character education. The Tulare County Office of Education is justly proud of the difference CHARACTER COUNTS! is making. TCOE will continue its enthusiastic promotion of the program as part of its mission to uphold the philosophy that “building character is a lifelong personal and community effort.”