Character & Values — Why this matters

We believe character education rooted in a clear set of shared values gives children, especially boys in the early elementary years, the practice and language they need to grow into kind, resilient, responsible people. Our Values-in-Action and Little Leaders, Big Values programs are intentionally simple, consistent, and school-wide so children encounter the same expectations, vocabulary, and celebrations whether they're in homeroom, specials, or the playground.

What the Research Says

SEL and Character Boost Learning

- Large reviews of hundreds of studies show social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve social skills, reduce behavior problems, and even raise academic achievement by about 11 percentile points (Greenberg, 2023; Djamnezhad et al., 2021).

Early Years Are a Window of Opportunity

- PreK–2 is when skills like cooperation, self-control, and empathy are forming most rapidly. SEL programs in preschool and kindergarten show big gains in behavior, classroom adaptation, and long-term academic success (Hosokawa et al., 2024).

Supporting Boys' Development

- On average, boys enter school with lower self-regulation and social skills than girls. Without support, these gaps can widen. SEL instruction helps close this gap by teaching concrete skills like naming feelings, practicing persistence, and following routines (Zhu et al., 2021).

Values Need Practice, Not Just Talk

- Children learn values best when they practice them and reflect on them. Guided discussions and activities help students translate abstract ideas (like honesty or integrity) into everyday choices (Muthukrishnan & Huah, 2023).

Recognition Works—When Paired with Teaching

- Praise, stickers, and points are powerful when they highlight specific behaviors children have been taught ("I like how you shared your ball"). Recognition makes learning visible and helps habits stick—especially when paired with modeling and reflection (Hogg et al., 2024; Rosenshine, 2012).

Equity and Consistency Matter

- Reward systems must be fair. Research warns that biased or inconsistent praise can create inequities. The solution: clear criteria, consistent teaching, and monitoring to ensure all children are celebrated (Schoneveld & Brummelman, 2023).

What parents can expect

- A predictable, positive system: simple recognition (stickers → bracelets → pins for PreK–1; tickets/points and grade goals for 2–5) tied to eight shared values so children learn the language and actions we expect.

- Instruction + recognition: teachers explicitly teach the value of the month, model behaviors, provide practice opportunities, and acknowledge real moments when students show the value.

- A focus on skill-building, not just rewards: recognitions are used to teach and reinforce habits (self-control, honesty, perseverance), not to bribe behavior.

Questions, misconceptions, and honest caveats

- "Is this just rewards and stickers?" No. Stickers and tickets are tools to make learning visible and immediate; the program centers instruction, modeling, and reflection. That said, if recognition becomes the only strategy we use (no teaching or adult modeling), it won't stick. We must pair celebration with instruction and scaffolded support.

- "Will boys be pigeonholed or labeled?" We avoid one-size labels. Research shows group trends (e.g., boys may more often struggle with early self-regulation), but our practice is individual: we teach skills for everyone, watch data for disproportionality, and provide additional supports when needed.

- "Could competition or inequity emerge?" Any point system can unintentionally over-reward some students. That's why we: (a) track data across groups (grade, classroom, demographics), (b) emphasize class/grade collective goals, and (c) celebrate small, frequent wins so quieter students are seen.

- "Will adults be consistent?" Program impact comes from adult practice. We prioritize teacher training, shared routines, and clear escalation pathways so responses are consistent and restorative rather than punitive.

How we'll know it's working

- Short term: more frequent, specific praise; visible examples of values in classrooms and specials; fewer minor disruptions because students have the vocabulary and routines to self-regulate.

- Medium term: improved classroom climate, stronger peer relationships, and steady progress on grade-level point goals and homeroom trackers.

- Long term: children who use value language naturally, demonstrate better self-regulation, and transfer skills across settings academic, social, and at home.

If you have questions, concerns, or examples from home you want us to know about, please reach out, this partnership is essential. We're committed to doing this work carefully, equitably, and with the best evidence we can access.