

# OPINION

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## Character counts today, as always, and as never before

### Your Turn

Scott Raecker, Arthur Schwartz and Matt Davidson  
 Guest columnists

The third week in October is recognized around the world through a series of celebrations and events highlighting the shared belief that character counts.

Every year millions of youth across America participate. No matter age, occupation, state in life, or political or religious affiliation, Character Counts Week highlights the power of character when we strive to know the good, love the good, and do the good.

We write to affirm what is abundantly clear in 2020: Character counts today, as it always has. And yet today we assert that character counts perhaps as never before in American history as we find ourselves in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, financial uncertainty, racial tensions, and a politically divisive environment heightened by the upcoming presidential election.

The importance of character is timeless. But the science of character is contemporary. Great advances have been

made to understand, develop, and assess character's impact through diverse networks including character education, research on organizational culture, moral development, positive psychology, and social-emotional learning. When we say character counts in 2020, here is a sample of what we mean:

*Performance character* counts in 2020 because the excellence demonstrated by our health care providers, the flexibility and persistence of our educators, and the collaboration of those seeking a solution to COVID-19 has never mattered more.

*Moral character* counts in 2020 because the greatness of our nation depends on the goodness of our nation. Moral values like trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and justice are needed across America as we seek understanding and equitable resolution to countless issues.

*Intellectual character* counts in 2020 because now is the time when we must demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and ingenuity. We cannot solve today's problems by creating echo cham-

bers that reinforce potentially wrong solutions. Now is the time for rigorous thinking and vigorous debate that seeks elegant solutions drawn from the diversity of perspectives and experiences.

*Civic character* counts in 2020 because of the many challenges in perspective and strategy before our electorate. The diversity of opinions, passionate expression, deep engagement — even the animosity — is in fact, a gift and privilege of our democracy. Apathy and cynicism must be avoided. Public servants at every level must demonstrate ethical leadership, character competencies, and a commitment to civility, a strength of character positioned at the foundation of citizenship.

Now is the time to reinvest in the seedbeds of character. Parents who are our children's first character educators, who in these days are challenged in new, different, and more difficult ways, must strive to raise children of character. We should empower educators to create a safe, supportive, and engaging learning experience — whether online or in-person — that cultivates character as the

foundation for educational achievement and preparation for life. We need to call on corporate leaders to put values into action to find novel, sustainable solutions to today's challenges. Religious, civic and community leaders must be models and instruments of faith, hope, and love. And public servants must focus on service above self, solidarity over division, and civility over animosity.

Our organizations stand aligned in our continued essential work to transform lives and strengthen communities through the power of character. Today we call on every American to join us as we put character into action, striving each day to know, love, and do the good, and apologizing and recommitting in the moments where we fail or fall.

Character is power. Character counts today, as always, and as never before.

*J. Scott Raecker is executive director of the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, global home of CHARACTER COUNTS! Arthur Schwartz is president of Character.org. Matt Davidson is president of the Excellence with Integrity Institute.*