



RANDOM LAKE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Cultivating Character and Career Skills

In collaboration with



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Table of Contents

▶ Need for Character Education	3
○ Building a Foundation for Career and Life Readiness	
○ The Role of Character Traits in Success	
▶ The Genesis of UNYTUS	4-5
○ Origins and Mission of UNYTUS	
○ How UNYTUS Aligns with Modern Educational Needs	
▶ Adoption by Random Lake: A School's Commitment to Character	6-7
○ Welcoming UNYTUS	
○ Setting the Foundation for Lasting Change	
▶ The Journey with UNYTUS	8-9
○ How It All Began in the Classroom	
○ Milestones and Key Moments	
▶ A Proven Approach	10-11
○ Methodologies and Unique Strategies	
○ What Makes UNYTUS Effective	
▶ Impact in Action: The UNYTUS Difference	12-13
○ Transformation Expectations	
○ Empowering Students and Teachers for Lifelong Success	
▶ Key Takeaways	14-15
○ Major Insights and Practical Recommendations	
○ Looking forward: Strengthening the Path Together	
▶ Acknowledgments	16
○ Contributors and Collaborators	
○ Bibliography	
○ Supporting Materials	

Need for Character Education

Building a Foundation for Career and Life Readiness

Recognizing the need to prepare students for career and life challenges, the Random Lake School District emphasizes character education and career readiness beginning in elementary grades. By fostering resilience, empathy, and respect, students build essential skills to navigate real-world situations that extend beyond the classroom, with confidence and compassion.



The Role of Character Traits in Success

Qualities such as empathy and kindness are not only pillars of strong character, but are also highly valued in modern workplaces. By fostering these traits early on, character education sets students on a path toward personal fulfillment and professional success, preparing them not only to engage effectively in a diverse and interconnected world, but also to contribute positively to their communities.

The Genesis of UNYTUS

Origin and Mission of UNYTUS

Implementing the UNYTUS curriculum in the Random Lake School District was born as a shared vision between District Superintendent Dr. Michael Trimberger and UNYTUS co-founder Jit Sihra. Both recognize that students need more than academics—they need life skills to thrive in today's complex world. Meeting through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, where Dr. Trimberger co-chairs new career-readiness standards, the two aligned on Jit's vision to create an engaging character education program that fosters lifelong growth. Together, they envisioned a program that excites students and parents while inspiring meaningful learning.

“Post-COVID, many students lack basic character skills and UNYTUS superheroes model good behavior that students eagerly follow.”



Dr. Trimberger

Random Lake Superintendent

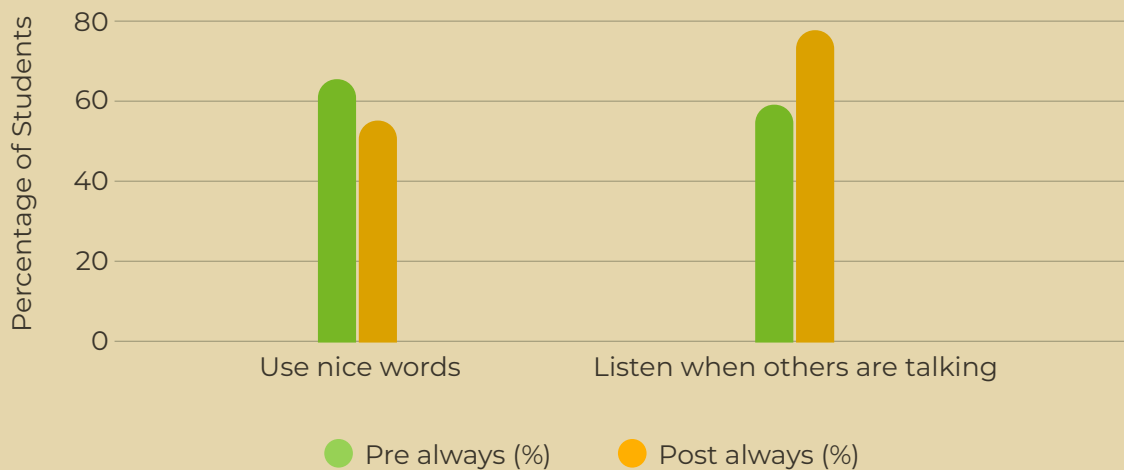


How UNYTUS Aligns with Modern Educational Needs

Impressed by Jit's vision for a program focused on resilience, empathy, and whole-child development. Dr. Trimmerger brought UNYTUS to Random Lake. Together, they crafted a superhero-themed approach that aligns with modern educational goals for career and life readiness. Celebrating students as heroes for demonstrating positive character traits, UNYTUS fosters engaging and motivating learning experiences.

This graph shows the impact of UNYTUS Kindness lessons on two behaviors:

Impact of Kindness Lessons on Key Behaviors



*These results are representations of Pre-Post unit surveys during pilot sessions.

1. **"Use nice words"**: A decline reflects increased self-awareness, as students reported that the unit helped them realize they were not as kind in their speech as they believed.
2. **"Listen when others are talking"**: An increase reflects increased comprehension, as students reported that the unit helped them understand that kind listening is as important as kind speaking.

Adoption by Random Lake: A School's Commitment to Character

Welcoming UNYTUS

Perhaps as a parent of a fifth grader, who spent much of his early elementary years learning virtually during Covid, Jit has seen first-hand the challenges children face post-Covid. She, like many others, believes that the pandemic amplified pre-existing social emotional concerns, especially as young people became more absorbed in technology and social media. In this way, many of them have lost touch with the foundational character traits necessary for becoming thriving 21st-century global citizens who exude empathy, respect, and kindness.

Dr. Trimberger recognizes these same concerns and believes UNYTUS can help. Confident in Rebecca Charbonneau's leadership as an Elementary School Principal, he championed her to roll out this initiative.



Setting the Foundation for Lasting Change

Mrs. Charbonneau integrated UNYTUS into daily life at Random Lake, ensuring character lessons fit seamlessly alongside academic priorities. “Character education builds lifelong skills,” she said. “I want our students to develop self-awareness, social consciousness, and positive behavior.”

With Dr. Trimmerger’s support, Mrs. Charbonneau created an environment where UNYTUS could thrive, organizing classroom visits and welcoming feedback. Teachers observed students actively participating, transforming classroom dynamics. Mrs. Charbonneau envisions UNYTUS as a lasting force for cultivating a compassionate culture that prepares students for life and future careers.

“Our work isn’t just about teaching; it’s about shaping students into compassionate, capable individuals who can succeed in life and in their careers.”

Mrs. Charbonneau
Random Lake Elementary Principal



The Journey with UNYTUS

How It All Began in the Classroom

First-grade teachers Amy Theis and Sierra Cashman enthusiastically embraced UNYTUS. They decorated their classrooms with materials to spark curiosity and engaged students with stories of superheroes and their global adventures. From day one, students began practicing kindness, responsibility, and empathy as concrete actions rather than abstract ideas. Amy and Sierra noted that before UNYTUS, students viewed these traits superficially. Through explicit teaching and real-life examples, students developed a deeper understanding of these qualities and their impact on others. They became more reflective, recognizing when they fell short and showing greater empathy for peers with diverse home lives. UNYTUS provided a shared foundation of expectations, fostering a cohesive and supportive classroom culture where students understood what was expected of them and others. This intentional focus on character education has transformed their classrooms into nurturing environments that prepare students for personal and social growth.

“Our students are beginning to reflect on these traits beyond a surface level. They’re understanding empathy and respect in real-life situations, which has led to more meaningful relationships and a greater sense of responsibility.”

Sierra Cashman
First Grade Teacher

Milestones and Key Moments

Amy and Sierra have both noticed significant shifts in student interactions and behaviors as they implement UNYTUS

“My students are making so much progress in their relationships with others. It feels more like a family here, where everyone knows they are valued.”

Amy Theis
First Grade Teacher



“Students who initially struggled with respect and responsibility are now taking more ownership of their actions. They’re learning to recognize how their choices affect their classmates and are using their words more effectively to express feelings and resolve conflicts.”

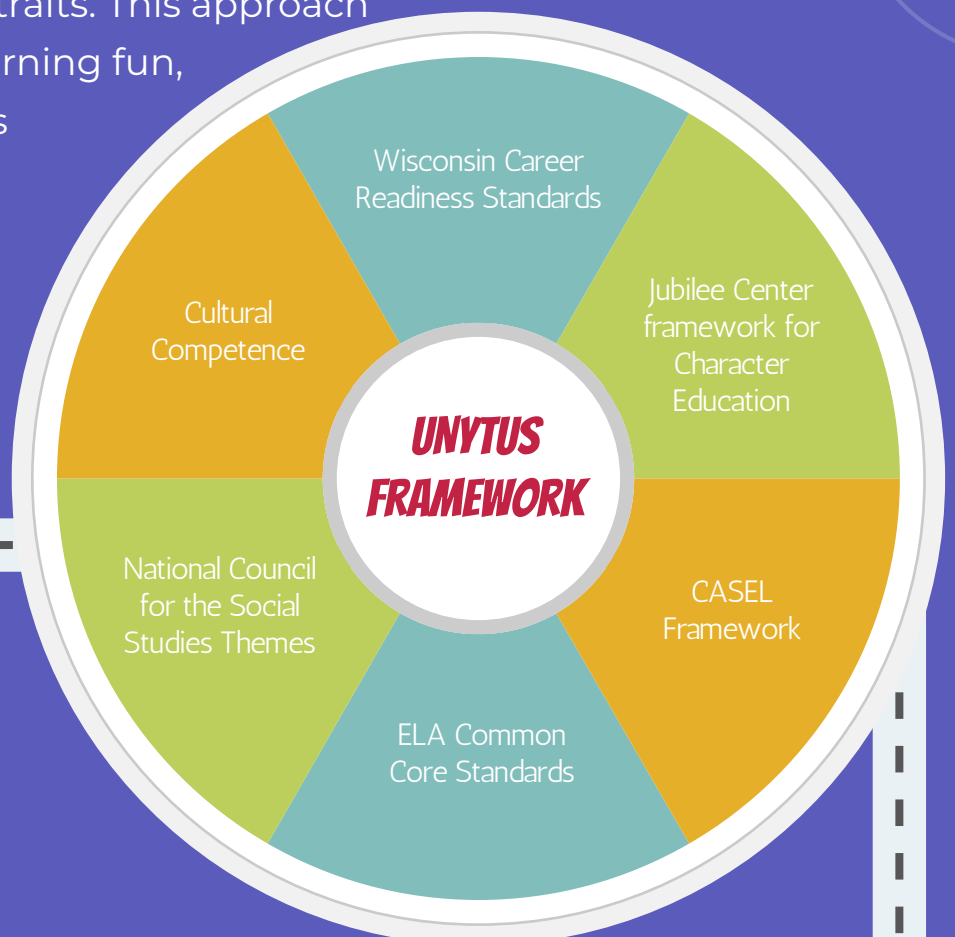
Sierra Cashman
First Grade Teacher

A Proven Approach

Methodologies and Unique Strategies

The UNYTUS curriculum, developed by Sherri Michalowski and Caroline Kuhnen, both veteran public school educators, is grounded in a vision that aligns character education with career and life readiness. "Our curriculum is framed by newly released Wisconsin Career Readiness Standards, Common Core, NCA social studies themes, and the CASEL framework." explains Sherri.

The program uses superheroes as a central theme to engage students, celebrating them as 'heroes' when they demonstrate positive character traits. This approach not only makes learning fun, but also empowers students to see themselves as capable of making a difference.



What Makes UNYTUS Effective

Piloting the program with dedicated first-grade teachers has provided valuable feedback to shape curriculum creation for young learners. This collaborative approach ensures that the curriculum is not only developmentally appropriate, but also reflects the real-life challenges, emotions, and ideas of the teachers who work directly with students. By involving educators in the design process, UNYTUS ensures that lessons feel authentic and aligned with classroom realities, fostering a connection between the curriculum and the teachers who deliver it.

“We want teachers to feel inspired to teach these lessons, not obligated.”

Sherri Michalowski
Curriculum Designer

This partnership has confirmed that character education fosters a safe, inclusive environment where students feel respected, heard, and valued. Empowered by content they helped shape, teachers bring passion and creativity to their instruction, resulting in improved test scores, better attendance, and fewer discipline referrals among students."



Impact in Action: The UNYTUS Difference

Transformation Expectations

Research underscores the significant impact of social-emotional learning (SEL) on students' academic and personal development. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs¹ involving over 270,000 students found that participants vs non-participants demonstrated an 11 percentile-point gain in academic performance.

Hence, UNYTUS integrates SEL principles with character education and life readiness, emphasizing moral and ethical development during the formative elementary years. By nurturing these traits early, students enhance their emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills while building a strong moral foundation, which in turn fosters genuine personal and academic growth.

“With UNYTUS, we are incorporating career readiness and grade-level academic learning alongside character development, preparing students for success in school and beyond.”

Dr. Trimberger

Random Lake Superintendent

The UNYTUS program addresses rising mental health concerns among children, exacerbated post-pandemic. The CDC reported a 24% increase in mental health-related emergency visits for ages 5-11² and a 19% rise in national spending on school mental health services³. UNYTUS proactively fosters resilience, self-awareness, and belonging, supporting emotional well-being alongside academic and social growth.

Empowering Students and Teachers for Lifelong Success

Principal Mrs. Charbonneau is equally enthusiastic, observing how UNYTUS has strengthened classroom dynamics and student relationships. “The character superheroes integrated with career readiness standards are helping students build resilience and improve their mental health while preparing them for the demands of life and work,” she notes. Mrs. Charbonneau appreciates the program's commitment to equity, ensuring that all life-readiness conversations are inclusive, as emphasized in UNYTUS’ “We will” statements.



Together, Mrs. Charbonneau and Dr. Trimberger see UNYTUS as a transformative program that not only supports academic and career success, but also promotes a healthy school environment where students can thrive. Their shared vision is to make UNYTUS a cornerstone of early childhood education, helping students build character, readiness for life, and positive mental health.

Key Takeaways

Major Insights and Practical Recommendations

The journey at Random Lake is a testament to the transformative power of a school community dedicated to character and career readiness. Recognizing that students need more than academics to succeed, the district has embraced a vision that nurtures kindness, respect, empathy, and resilience, giving students the necessary skills to thrive as future citizens and contributors in an interconnected world.

With the newly expanded Wisconsin Career Readiness Standards, Random Lake is at the forefront, bringing career education into the elementary years for the first time. They understand that readiness for life and work starts early, in classrooms where students are empowered to collaborate, solve problems, and respect diverse perspectives.

“Career readiness is more than preparing students for jobs—it’s about building character, confidence, and a commitment to community.”

Dr. Trimberger

Random Lake Superintendent

Looking Forward: Strengthening the Path Together

Random Lake is not just implementing a program; it is creating a culture of lifelong learning, resilience, and readiness for the future. Educators are dedicated to continuing this work, refining their approach to meet students' needs while aligning with evolving standards. By laying a foundation for career readiness at an early age, Random Lake equips students with skills that will serve them throughout their lives.



Join The Movement

To schools across Wisconsin and beyond, Random Lake extends an invitation to join the movement to redefine readiness for life and work. UNYTUS has been a vital partner in this journey, making character and career readiness accessible and engaging for even the youngest students. Together, schools can become places of inspiration, nurturing compassionate, skilled, and resilient individuals prepared to face the world. Career readiness and character education can be a shared mission—a path forward for every child.

Acknowledgements

Contributors

Random Lake School District

Dr. Michael Trimberger – Superintendent

Mrs. Rebecca Charbonneau – Principal Elementary School

Mrs. Sierra Cashman – First Grade Teacher

Mrs. Amy Theis - First Grade Teacher

UNYTUS (Stratf LLC)

Mrs. Jit Sihra – Founder

Mrs. Sherri Michalowski – Curriculum Designer

Ms. Caroline Kuhnen – Curriculum Designer

Materials

- UNYTUS Brochure
- Unit Overview
- <https://unytus.com>

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