For most of his 12 years, Asad Siddiqui has recognized the difference between right and wrong, honesty and dishonesty and good decisions and poor ones. The seventh grader from Ballwin says he can’t remember a time when his parents and his teachers weren’t guiding him—ever pushing him—toward the straight and narrow, even when it wasn’t the easiest path to take.

“They told me that that in any situation, there is always going to be more than one option,” Siddiqui said. “And it’s up to me to pick the right one.”

A new Better Business Bureau program brings real-life examples of ethical decision-making into classrooms. “In Pursuit of Ethics” operates in cooperation with EDUCATIONplus, whose mission is to develop positive character traits in young people.

Begun as a pilot project in 2012, BBB’s In Pursuit of Ethics is being considered or has already become a part of the curriculum in 46 schools in Missouri and Illinois. With financial assistance from its sponsors, BBB provides the program free to up to 100 schools that want to take advantage of this unique educational opportunity. “In Pursuit of Ethics is groundbreaking in its goal to bring thought-provoking debate about ethics into the classroom,” said Michelle L. Corey, BBB president and CEO. “Nothing quite like this has ever been undertaken. Administrators and teachers say it can help mold today’s students into strong ethical leaders of tomorrow.”

Originally developed by BBB Toledo, In Pursuit of Ethics uses six video modules to depict common-situations that call for making ethical decisions. At specific points in each video, students are asked which option he or she would take. Each option offers its own set of consequences or rewards.

In one scenario, students are given several possible actions to take when a young woman finds that a piece of jewelry inadvertently had been attached to a sweater she had purchased. In another, a student must determine whether to cheat on a test to get a grade that will keep her eligible for the school’s basketball team.

Suzanne Richardson, a counselor who recently took a job in Bayless School District after leaving Jefferson High School, said the high school began using In Pursuit of Ethics in freshmen classes two years ago to see how younger students responded. It was soon expanded to juniors and seniors.

“Sometimes it’s hard for kids to see beyond what they are having for lunch today,” Richardson said. “Ethics education pushes them to make choices and see how those choices directly affect their lives.”

Richardson said BBB and ethics education are a natural fit. “BBB’s mission is to have high morals and high values because they want those people making good choices.”

The program “makes (students) think deeper about who they are and what their choices are, and how they can become the best people they can be,” she says. It’s critical for people to be “both smart and good.”

Graybar, a BBB Accredited Business and a leading distributor of electrical, communications, data networking and security products, has undertaken sponsorship of In Pursuit of Ethics.

Lawrence Giglio, senior vice president of operations, said the program is an extension of Graybar’s sense of corporate responsibility.

“We are committed to telling the truth, doing what’s right, and treating others with respect and dignity,” Giglio said. Students, he said, are America’s future workers who will benefit “by being better able to understand the importance of ethics and how to make the right choices.”

The ethics program includes the video scenarios and a 49-page training manual put together by Dennis O’Brien, director of Non-Profit Advancement. BBB hired O’Brien to guide the program.

Studies show that while the overwhelming majority of teens believe that being a good person is more important than being rich, some students still admit dishonest or unethical behavior. A survey of high school students by the Josephson Institute shows that 21 percent of the students admitted stealing from a parent or another relative, 33 percent confessed to using the Internet to plagiarize a school assignment and nearly 60 percent (three in five students) said they had cheated on a test in the past year.

Craig Maxwell, principal of Parkway Southwest Middle School, said the district “wanted our students to wrestle with moral dilemmas. “It was hitting on some pretty heavy things,” he said. “And we want our students thinking through these things before they get into those situations.”

“The teachers loved it,” Maxwell said.

One video segment of the program deals with the options a young woman faces when she finds jewelry inadvertently attached to a sweater she bought.

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Much of the program fits perfectly into what teachers and administrators are trying to do in his district. Maxwell especially likes that the program actively promotes and encourages discussion and debate.

“They are not just sitting and watching,” he said. “They feel more actively engaged.”

BBB’s Corey said BBB is seeking more sponsors and more schools, businesses and institutions that believe in the importance of ethics, honesty and right choices.

“This is an enormous opportunity, not just for our region, but for our nation,” she said. “Ethics education is not a luxury, not an add-on, but a crucial part of making us a better people.”

Siddiqui, the seventh grader at Parkway Southwest Middle School, says the program can guide him and his fellow students to “stay true to ourselves.”

“Good ethics,” he said, “can help decide your future and your career. It helps shape who you are.”

BBB Helps Businesses Choose Charities the Smart Way

Companies that want to engage their employees in volunteer efforts or encourage donations to local charities have a valuable new resource: BBB’s online Guide to BBB Accredited Charities.

The guide, available on BBB’s website, lists more than 200 charities in eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois that have met BBB’s 20 Standards of Charity Accountability. BBB staff have reviewed each nonprofit’s financial statements, fund-raising materials, websites and annual reports. The charities also have responded to a detailed questionnaire.

“This new guide is a terrific resource for companies that want to support charities that are transparent and accountable to the donating public,” said Charity Review Director Carole Bellman. “By seeking out charities accredited by BBB, companies are strengthening the fabric of their local communities.”

Accredited Charities value their accreditation, much as BBB Accredited Businesses value theirs. A recent study by New York University showed that charities that meet BBB accreditation standards are more successful in fundraising. In a national sample, the study showed that charities that met BBB standards raised 8 percent more money than those who did not meet standards. Each Accredited Charity is listed by category, with links to its BBB Charity Review, its website, an email contact and telephone number. The listing also includes a brief statement of the charity’s mission. An alphabetical listing of the charities also is provided, and there is a link to a list of charities accredited by the National Wise Giving Alliance rather than a local BBB.

The guide is available at the following link:

http://go.bbb.org/1H2M4V

Businesses can search for BBB Reviews of individual charities by using the search box on the home page of BBB’s new website. Simply click on “charity,” then type the charity’s name into the box.

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