**Overview**

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is a year-long English Language Arts and character development program implemented in sixth and ninth grade classrooms in Boston and beyond. The programs are designed to meet Massachusetts state education standards and Boston’s city-wide learning standards, as well as strengthen students’ reading and writing skills, engage students in meaningful dialogue in the classroom and empower students to discover, then recognize, the role of courage in their lives and in their communities.

The organization was founded in 1991 to honor the life of Max Warburg, a courageous sixth-grader who maintained steadfast determination and heartfelt hope in the face of his battle with leukemia. His parents, Stephanie and Jonathan Warburg, felt Max’s story could be an example for other children. They worked with the Boston Public Schools and educators around the country to develop and implement The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum. Since the organization’s founding, the Courage Curriculum has positively impacted the academic performance of more than 100,000 sixth and ninth grade students in the Boston Public Schools and surrounding public, parochial, charter, pilot and private schools and religious academies.

**Programs**

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s sixth grade program, *Courage in My Life*, uses a layered approach to strengthen classroom work and develop essential reading, writing and critical thinking skills, to provide professional development and training opportunities for teachers, and to draw families and the larger community together for a culminating event that celebrates the outcomes of the program and the students’ efforts. *Courage in My Life* features six award-winning, age appropriate novels, which are accompanied by comprehensive teachers’ guides. Each of the six novels features a young person who demonstrates courage in one of its many forms. By connecting with Max’s story and the novels’ fictional characters, students begin to recognize courage in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s ninth grade program, *The Courage of My Convictions*, reinforces the themes and skills presented in the sixth grade curriculum, while examining the nature of courage and its connection to the use of thoughtful social action to produce change. Developed in partnership with Northeastern University’s School of Education, *The Courage of My Convictions* builds on the depth and structure of the sixth grade program and demonstrates to students that with careful examination and thoughtful response, they can facilitate change in the world around them.

Although the organization is intensively focused on classroom practice and teacher instruction, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum also disseminates its work on its website; in training institutes for teachers; in an annual publication of essays; and at an annual awards luncheon for Max Warburg Fellows.

The curriculum’s programs are successfully implemented in both traditional and non-traditional classrooms. The sixth and ninth grade teachers’ guides offer proven and practical activities and approaches; these guides were designed to empower teachers to use the curriculum to best meet the needs of their individual classrooms.

Participating teachers may choose to supplement the curriculum texts with other novels, poems and plays. In bilingual and ELL classrooms, teachers may elect to use the Spanish language version of the sixth-grade curriculum text *Taking Sides (Tomando Partido)*. The content of the lesson remains intact, while providing students the opportunity to work on language acquisition.

**Goals and Objectives**

The organization’s primary goals are to develop the essential literacy skills of students; to inspire participants to celebrate acts of moral courage in their own lives and in the lives of others in their community; to train and support teachers in the use of the curriculum to improve their own instruction; and to engage and inspire students to make meaningful connections to literature. By connecting Max’s story with award-winning, age-appropriate literature that emphasizes the theme of courage in the lives of children and young adults, students come to recognize and celebrate the role courage plays in their own lives. Our work with talented classroom teachers allows us to empower young people to continue to act courageously, to the benefit of their classmates, families, communities and themselves.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum evaluates the effectiveness of its programs by administering annual surveys to, and conducting exit interviews with participating educators, students and families. These post-program qualitative surveys, completed by teachers and parents or guardians, assess character gains, both in and out of school, as well as the implementation of the program and its helpfulness in classroom culture and the impact of the program at home and in the community. The success of the curriculum is also measured quantitatively based on participating teacher retention (i.e., the percentage of teachers who continue to teach the Courage Curriculum year after year), numbers of students submitting essays and the percentage of participating classrooms. The data collected is carefully distilled and analyzed and often factors heavily in any changes made to the curriculum.

To ensure that the curriculum stays relevant, current and effective, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum closely adheres to best practices in classroom instruction, as well as developments within the Boston Public Schools, and state and national education trends.

The Courage Curriculum works to support the current intervention plans being implemented by City of Boston and The Boston Public Schools. During the 2010-2011 academic year, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum will offer specific support to the Level 4 Underperforming Schools that currently participate in our programs, including the Henry Dearborn Middle School, Harbor Middle School and the Jeremiah E. Burke High School. The Courage Curriculum is actively engaged with Orchard Gardens K-8 School and English High School, both Level 4 schools, working to implement classroom programming and teacher training.

**Partnerships and Collaborations**

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has succeeded in fostering a 20-year partnership with The Boston Public Schools and The City of Boston. The Courage Curriculum has long maintained close ties with the Boston Public Schools and has established itself as a fixture within the communities it serves.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum was the first privately funded English Language Arts curriculum in Boston schools and is a national model for nonprofit-school collaborations. The Courage Curriculum has been particularly successful at developing and maintaining relationships with participating teachers, some of whom have taught the curriculum for more than 15 years. These teachers are powerful advocates for the Courage Curriculum’s programs.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, the Courage Curriculum will celebrate its 22nd anniversary year, demonstrating both its longevity and its ability to grow and adapt over time. The Courage Curriculum was first implemented as a pilot program in a small number of public middle schools in Boston. During the 2011-2012 academic year, nearly 100% of Boston’s sixth grade classrooms, as well as numerous pilot, charter, parochial and private schools participated in the *Courage in My Life* program. *The Courage of My Convictions*, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s ninth grade program, was piloted during the 2006-2007 academic year and is now taught in ten high schools in Boston and neighboring communities.

In 2006, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum actively sought out a relationship with one of Boston’s premier universities in order to leverage academic resources, to provide participating students with access to the higher education experience, to connect teachers with high-quality professional development opportunities, and to engage college students in service learning at urban middle and high schools. The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum chose to partner with Northeastern University, renowned for its deep commitment and service to the communities targeted by the Courage Curriculum, and its urban, community-facing location in Boston’s South End and Lower Roxbury neighborhoods.

At Northeastern University, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is a founding partner in the university’s Stony Brook Initiative, a coalition of community organizations whose work serves the communities of Mission Hill, Roxbury, and the South End.

**Populations Served**

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum reaches more than 3,500 students in the Boston Public Schools and their families annually through its sixth and ninth grade programs. Program participants reflect Boston Public Schools’ enrollment population, with a demographic that is 39% Hispanic, 37% Black, 9% Asian, 13% Caucasian and 2% Multiracial. Approximately 74% of these students come from low-income households and qualify for free or reduced meals, while 38% do not speak English as a first language or have limited English proficiency.

The Courage Curriculum is also taught in local parochial, charter and private schools and religious academies throughout Boston and the surrounding communities. Additionally, students as far away as Thailand, India and the United Kingdom participate in the Courage Curriculum as individual educators become inspired by the program.

**Key Achievements**

Since the organization’s founding in 1991, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has positively impacted the lives of more than 100,000 young people and their families. Through the feedback surveys administered to parents and guardians at the close of each school year, parents and guardians have indicated increased family discussions about courage, newfound commitments to helping others and a greater sense of understanding and accomplishment in their child’s school work.

In 2009, the Courage Curriculum partnered with the Boston Public School’s Office of Family and Student Engagement on the Family Writing Project. The project, which encourages families to write together, uses previously published courage essays as discussion and writing prompts, particularly for the personal narrative portion. The Family Writing Project supplements the classroom lessons of the Courage Curriculum and links the student’s schoolwork with his or her home life, while encouraging family discussions about courage.

More than 900 students have had their essays on courage published in 19 volumes of *The Courage of Boston’s Children*, the signature publication of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s sixth grade program. The Courage Curriculum has been featured in academic journals and other publications positioning the program as a national model for character education programs and excellent school and community partnerships.

The Courage Curriculum is able to find innovative and creative ways of expanding its reach. In 2008, the Courage Curriculum formed a relationship with Cambium Learning Technologies to co-develop a website that distributes a condensed version of the program’s curriculum and teacher guides, along with a library of nearly 500 courage essays. The site and its contents are sent to more than 1,000 schools districts, many of which are located in New England. The Courage Curriculum and Cambium have also partnered to host a national essay contest for middle school students on the topic of courage.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has been recognized both locally and nationally for its work with urban schools. The organization has received numerous accolades, including the 2007 Special Award from National CrimeBeat, a charity of the High Sheriffs’ Association in the United Kingdom; the International Reading Association Program Excellence Award; and the Golden Globe New England Award for video teaching material.

**Board and Staff**

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is governed by a highly engaged volunteer Board of Trustees, staffed by two full-time employees and supported by an advisory board comprised of experts in the field of education and youth development. The governing bodies of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum reflect the character and diversity of the neighborhoods and communities served by the organization. The Courage Curriculum is further buoyed by its relationship with Northeastern University, where the organization has been in residence since 2006, and its membership in such professional coalitions as ArtWorks for Kids and the Stony Brook Initiative.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s Board of Trustees, is comprised of 20 volunteer members, led by an Executive Committee of Stephanie Warburg, Founder and President; Lee Sullivan, Treasurer; and Jenny T. McAullife, Secretary. Members represent diverse backgrounds and have experience in the fields of secondary education, pediatric medicine, film, banking and finance, and writing and publishing.

Elizabeth Evans, Executive Director, is responsible for program development and implementation, as well as managing the organization’s volunteer engagement, public involvement, and fundraising efforts. Ms. Evans is a graduate of Boston College and has extensive experience as a non-profit leader working to improve the lives of disadvantaged young people through curriculum development, in-school and after-school programming, and public/private partnerships.

Liz Connolly, Site Coordinator, is responsible for managing daily administrative operations as well as the office’s organization systems and communication campaigns. Ms. Connolly is a graduate of the University of Connecticut with experience in nonprofit program development and administration.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s Board of Trustees and staff are supported by a volunteer advisory board that is focused on evaluating viable options for program expansion and elevating The Courage Curriculum’s public profile.