

# Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment™ Survey

## Conceptual Description

(version 4.2)

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### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A group's culture—including its values, norms, rules, and rituals—significantly influences the behavior of its members. Therefore, if schools wish to maximize their positive impact on student learning, character, conduct, or any other desirable outcome, they do well to take intentional steps to shape and assess their cultures.

Schools are complex ecological systems shaped by dynamic interactions between individuals and their context, exerting in turn powerful and dynamic influences on the process of teaching and learning and individual outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). These systems include a multitude of personal and professional relationships that exist among administration, teachers, staff, and students within schools, as well as between schools and families and the surrounding community (Gamoran et al., 2000). Taken together, these complex relationships constitute the core of the school community, and are manifested by the culture of the school. The CEEA Survey described here measures a number of theoretically and practically important aspects of school culture, enabling schools to benchmark and monitor their success in building the culture and competencies of excellence and ethics. (See Lickona & Davidson, 2005, for a discussion of the moral and performance character competencies needed for the pursuit of excellence and ethics.) The following sections present theoretical and research rationale for the selection of the specific aspects of school culture and climate and the scales that we included in the CEEA Survey.

### Safe, Supportive, and Engaging Climate

*Safety and order* are fundamental conditions for any effective learning or human growth to take place. Students exposed to high levels of peer cruelty and violence are less likely to engage in learning and succeed academically (Bowen and Bowen, 1999; Glew et al.,

2005). The social health and safety of the school, therefore, should be considered essential intermediate outcomes to be achieved in the beginning stage of school improvement efforts.

*Relationships of caring and trust* have also been consistently linked to improved student outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1997). The presence of such relationships may be especially salient for students coming from families or living in communities that are lacking to some degree in the support and care they are able to provide. Relationships of trust are also important for adults in the school (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

*Faculty engagement of students* can be defined in terms of high expectations. Research has long identified the role of high expectations on the part of both teachers and students in bringing about positive academic achievement outcomes (Sewell et al., 1969; Jenks et al., 1983). Some recent studies have even used the term “academic press,” defined as the extent to which teachers and students “experience a normative emphasis on academic success and conformity to specific standards of achievement” (Lee et al., 1999, p. 10; see also Schouse, 1996). Active investment in developing successful relationships with others in the school and achieving success in school activities is indicative of student engagement (Connell et al., 1995; Herman & Tucker, 2000). Lack of engagement, or alienation, tends to find expression in anti-social or anti-school behavior, such as tardiness, absenteeism, vandalism, or violence (Natriello, 1984), or disengagement from learning in the classroom (Yair, 2000). Adolescents, because of their growing need for autonomy, might be developmentally more likely to disengage from school than younger students (De Bruyn, 2005).

Thus, in order to learn and grow, students need to be engaged in learning in an environment of high support and high expectations, and school staff play an essential role by setting high expectations, providing a caring environment, and giving support for the varied needs of learners.

Based on these considerations, the CEEA instrument assesses two dimensions of social climate: (a) ***Student Safety*** (as perceived by students and by faculty) and (b) ***Faculty Support for & Engagement of Students*** (as perceived by students and by faculty).

## School Culture of Excellence & Ethics

The CEEA conceptual model argues that the two included aspects of school social climate—*social health and safety*, and *caring, trust, support, and engagement* of students in school activities—are necessary but not sufficient conditions for student academic learning and socio-moral development. A safe, supportive, and engaging climate certainly makes learning and development possible, but a school must also have worthy goals—namely, the pursuit of excellence and ethics—and effective practices for achieving those goals in order to maximize student success in school and beyond.

High expectations for success should not be limited to the domain of academic learning but should also govern all other aspects of school life including co-curricular activities, thus allowing for the pervasive integration of excellence and ethics (Berger, 2003; Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008). The CEEA model postulates that high expectations and shared norms for excellence and ethics should be all-encompassing, the very cornerstone of the school’s mission, identity, and sense of being a community in which every individual can achieve his or her potential (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Elbot & Fulton, 2008; Narvaez, 2010).

Lickona and Davidson (2005) argue that an Ethical Learning Community (ELC) is, therefore, a school community that both *supports* and *challenges*. Its members pursue the realization of their own potential for excellence and ethics *and* seek to bring out the best in every other person. Creating and sustaining an ELC broadens school efforts to go beyond the psychological assets of the individual, to include the assets of the culture in which the individual lives and dwells, the location where the psychological assets are developed.

The shared norms of this kind of school community are manifested in both youth-to-youth and in adult-to-youth behaviors. Staff practices toward students are especially important because adults’ policies, instructional methods, discipline and grading approaches, and personal interactions affect how students learn and develop socially (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1998; Kessler, 2001; Solomon, Watson, & Battistich, 2002; Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2010).

Guided by the abundant research demonstrating the impact of a cohesive school culture based on high expectations for both adults and students, and focused on promoting both academic achievement and socio-moral development, we have designed our CEEA Survey to include scales that measure the essential elements of such a culture, while

triangulating the results by collecting and comparing the responses from students and staff (and, optionally, from parents).

(A) ***Student Competencies of Excellence and Ethics*** assesses self-efficacy beliefs reported by students and perceptions of the same student competencies by faculty. This scale and its excellence/ethics subscales provide data indicative of both groups' beliefs about the extent to which students possess academic and socio-moral competencies. The parallel design of the items and the scales allows for a direct comparison of student self-assessment to the views of the teachers and staff.

(B) ***Schoolmates' Behaviors of Excellence and Ethics*** assesses perceptions of peers by students and of students by faculty. This scale and its excellence/ethics subscales provide data indicative of the "peer culture" as manifested through their actions in the academic and socio-moral domains. The parallel design of the items and the scales allows for a direct comparison of student and staff perceptions. In addition, student perceptions of others/peers (scale B) can be compared to their perceptions of self (scale A).

(C) ***Faculty/Staff Practices Impacting the Character and Culture of Excellence & Ethics*** scale assesses faculty practices in teaching both academic and socio-moral competencies, perceived by students and self-reported by faculty. This scale and its excellence/ethics subscales provide data indicative of the extent to which faculty as a whole, through their teaching practices, intentionally focus on developing the school-culture assets and student competencies of excellence and ethics. The parallel design of the items and the scales allows for a direct comparison of student and staff views.

## Professional Community and School-to-Home Partnership

The culture of a school's professional community is another crucial aspect of the school's total culture and is therefore an important construct in the CEEA conceptual model. Research on the social organization of schools has shown that collegial relationships serve as a venue for sharing individual expertise when making decisions about curricular goals and seeking ways to improve instructional activities (Bidwell & Yasumoto, 1999). A strong professional community emerges when faculty share professional values, collectively focus on student learning, engage in collaborative professional learning and reflective dialogue, de-privatize practice, and exercise collective control over curricular and other decisions (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Louis et al., 1996; Secada and Adajian, 1997; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Professional learning

communities have been shown to be instrumental in efforts to improve schools and enhance student outcomes (Fullan, 1999; Langer, 2000; Newmann & Associates, 1996). Given this body of research on the importance of professional culture, the CEEA faculty survey includes scales that measure (a) **Leadership Practices** and (b) **Faculty/Staff Beliefs and Behaviors** that contribute to shaping an intentional culture of excellence and ethics in the school.

Finally, CEEA's conceptual model argues that parents and/or other adults in the families are a third stakeholder group whose role may be not only crucial for students' individual growth but can contribute to the culture of the school as a whole. Community and parent involvement in school decision-making processes, input into children's choices, and participation in school-related activities have been found to have a profound impact on the culture of schools and on student outcomes (Hill et al., 2004; McNeal, 1999; Yan & Lin, 2005). The National Network of Partnership Schools has conducted a series of studies on how family and community involvement contribute to student achievement and other indicators of success in school (see review in Epstein, 2005). Recognizing the importance of this construct, the CEEA Survey measures **School-to-Family and Family-to-School Communication & Support**. This construct is assessed both via a scale on the Faculty Survey and through a separate Parent Survey which allows for a complete triangulation of the data (i.e., comparing the results of the student, staff, and parent forms of the survey).

## THE INSTRUMENT

The *Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment*<sup>™</sup> Survey can be used for either a one-time assessment or over-time monitoring of the extent to which a school's culture manifests norms of excellence and ethics. To triangulate the information and explore similarities and differences in the views held by various stakeholders, the CEEA Survey is comprised of student, faculty/staff, and parent (optional) forms. This process of collecting information from all those engaged in the process of schooling and comparing and contrasting the results provides a 360-degree view of the issues being assessed.

The instrument is designed to produce data that describes groups (e.g., a school's students, its faculty, its parents) rather than data on individuals. Negatively worded items (e.g., "Most students in this school just do enough to get by") are reverse-coded for analysis, so that '5' always indicates the most positive attitude or belief, most frequent positive behavior, or absence of anti-social behavior, whereas '1' always

indicates the most negative attitudes/beliefs, lack of positive behavior, or most frequent anti-social behavior. Scale scores are computed as means of contributing items, so that their range and interpretation is the same as that of individual items (1 to 5).

## STUDENT AND FACULTY SURVEY SCALES

### 1. Student Character Competencies

#### 1.1 Competencies of Excellence

- 1.1.1 Competencies of Excellence Reported by Students
- 1.1.2 Student Competencies of Excellence Perceived by Faculty

#### 1.2 Competencies of Ethics

- 1.2.1 Competencies of Ethics Reported by Students
- 1.2.2 Competencies of Ethics Perceived by Faculty

### 2. School/Classroom Culture of Excellence and Ethics

#### 2.1 Culture of Excellence

- 2.1.1 Culture of Excellence Perceived by Students
- 2.1.2 Culture of Excellence Perceived by Faculty

#### 2.2 Culture of Ethics

- 2.2.1 Culture of Ethics Perceived by Students
- 2.2.2 Culture of Ethics Perceived by Faculty

#### 2.3 Culture of Health, Safety, and Life Balance

- 2.3.1 Health, Safety & Life Balance Perceived by Students
- 2.3.2 Health, Safety & Life Balance Perceived by Faculty

### 3. Faculty Practices Impacting Character & Culture

#### 3.1 Faculty Practices Impacting Excellence

- 3.1.1 Practices Impacting Excellence Reported by Faculty/Staff
- 3.1.2 Student Perceptions of Practices Impacting Excellence

#### 3.2 Faculty Practices Impacting Ethics

- 3.2.1 Practices Impacting Ethics Reported by Faculty/Staff
- 3.2.2 Student Perceptions of Practices Impacting Ethics

## 4. Safe, Supportive, and Engaging Climate

### 4.1 Student Safety

4.1.1 Student Safety Perceived by Students

4.1.2 Student Safety Perceived by Faculty

### 4.2 Faculty Support for & Engagement of Students

4.2.1 Faculty Support for & Engagement of Students Perceived by Students

4.2.2 Faculty Support for & Engagement of Students Reported by Faculty

## 5. Professional Ethical Learning Community

5.1 Leadership Practices

5.2 Faculty Beliefs & Behaviors

5.3 Home-School Communication & Support

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