CEEA

Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment

# Description and Theory

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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. 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 an essential intermediate outcome 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 includes the following scales:

***1.1 Student Safety*** scale measures the frequencies of behaviors that make students feel unsafe, with items reverse-coded. Parallel scales are included in the CEEA Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***1.2 Faculty & Staff Support for and Engagement of Students*** scale measures staff practices providing support for and ensuring high engagement of students (caring, preventing negative interactions, trust, respect, high expectations, voice, etc). Parallel

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scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***1.3 Culture of Health and Life Balance*** scale measures student behaviors contributing to a healthy life style (middle/high level version only). Parallel scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***1.4 School Climate of Safety and Health Perceived by Parents*** scale measures parent perceptions of safety and healthy behaviors in the school.

## Intentional 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 the 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). Therefore, the construct of ***intentional school culture of excellence & ethics*** is measured by the scales listed below.

## Culture of Excellence: Academic Engagement and Support for Learning

***2.1 Culture of Excellence*** scale measures student behaviors indicative of student culture focused on high academic standards and continuous improvement, as well as development of competencies contributing to learning, such as managing priorities and tasks, goal-setting, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, etc. Parallel scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***2.2 Faculty & Staff Practices in Support of Learning and Academic Engagement*** scale measures faculty practices that set high academic norms, provide feedback for improvement, help students identify talents and work on challenges, as well as help develop specific competencies needed for learning, such as managing priorities and tasks, goal-setting, effective communication, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, etc. Parallel scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***2.3 School Culture of Academic Engagement Perceived by Parents*** scale measures parent perceptions of whether the school provides a rigorous academic curriculum, staff provide students with learning supports and help develop competencies needed for learning (collaboration, creativity, organizational skills, etc.).

***2.4 Learning Supports at Home*** scale measures the extent to which parents engage in practices that support their child's learning.


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## Culture of Ethics: Social Engagement and Support for Positive Behavior

***3.1 Culture of Ethics*** scale measures student behaviors indicative of positive and productive relationships, emotional intelligence, integrity, responsibility, as well as personal and collective responsibility for positive behaviors among classmates. Parallel scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***3.2 Faculty & Staff Practices in Support of Prosocial Behaviors*** scale measures faculty practices that provide positive behavior supports, positive role modeling, and development of competencies needed for positive social environment and engagement, such as ethical thinking, holding selves and others accountable, conflict resolution, leadership, etc. Parallel scales are included in the Student and Faculty/Staff surveys.

***3.3 School Culture of Prosocial Engagement Perceived by Parents*** scale measures parent perceptions of whether the school provides supports for positive behavior and social development of students.

***3.4 Social Engagement and Positive Behavior Supports at Home*** scale measures the extent to which parents engage in practices that support their child's social development and positive relationships with others.

## Professional Community and School/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 and staff 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/Staff Survey includes the following scales:

***4.1 Professional Community: Leadership Practices*** scale measures administrators' support for staff, staff professional development, staff involvement in school decision-making, etc.

***4.2 Professional Community: Faculty/Staff Beliefs and Practices*** scale measures the extent to which professional community members share high standards and engage in collaborative practices focused on personal and collective improvement of instruction, student engagement, and social development supports.

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 school/home partnership, the CEEA Survey measures ***School/Home Communication & Support***. This construct is assessed both via a scale on the Faculty/Staff Survey and through 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).

***4.3 Professional Community: School/Home Communication & Support*** scale measures faculty and staff efforts to partner with families in support of learning and prosocial development at home, and enhancing families' involvement with school and community activities.

***4.4 School Partnership with Parents in Support of Learning*** scale measures parent perceptions of the extent to which the school assists and enables parents to provide supports for learning at home (monitoring child's progress, input into homework, assistance with development of specific learning competencies, etc.).

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***4.5 School Partnership with Parents in Support of Social Development*** scale measures parent perceptions of the extent to which the school assists and enables parents to become engaged with school activities in support of student growth and to provide social supports at home.

***4.6 Parent Participation in School Activities*** scale measures the extent to which parents are involved in school activities, volunteer in the school, or use community resources in support of their child's development.

## THE INSTRUMENT

The Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment® 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 and practices 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 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 and compares cohort groups (i.e., a school's students, its faculty, its parents), and is not intended as a diagnostic tool for benchmarking individual growth.

## SURVEY HISTORY

*Culture of Excellence & Ethics Assessment* surveys were developed in 2009 by incorporating a range of items from the *Collective Responsibility for Excellence & Ethics* surveys (CREE, version 2.5). CREE surveys were used in several federally-funded research projects in 2005-2008. They included items and scales designed by the authors to measure school community and related constructs, used in earlier instruments and specific for this survey (Davidson and Khmelkov, 2002; Davidson and Khmelkov, 2003). CREE surveys also included several publicly available scales used in national and international studies—the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, see Adams and Wu, 2002) and the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS, see Burns et al., 2003).

The external scales in the CREE student survey measured constructs, such as Preference for Cooperative Learning (developed for PISA by Marsh et al., 1999), Preference for Competitive Learning (developed by Owens and Barnes, 1982, 1992), subject-specific Intrinsic Interest scales (adapted from Baumert et al., 1998, see also Peschar et al., 1999), and subject-specific Self-Efficacy scales (adapted from the original MSLQ, Pintrich et al., 1993). The external scales in CREE faculty/staff survey included Leadership scale from the Schools and Staffing survey (Tourkin et al, 2004), Teaching for Understanding scale (Khmelkov, Power, and Power, 2001; adapted from the original pool of items in Bidwell et all, 1997), Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scales (OSTES, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The data from external scales collected in 2005-2008 were used to demonstrate discriminant and convergent validity (cf.,Trochim & Donnelly, 2006) of the CREE-specific scales, including School Climate (student social health and safety, social capital generated in community by adults), Ethical Learning Community among students, Faculty/Staff Practices promoting community and development of student character competencies, and Professional Ethical Learning Community (see review and analysis results in Khmelkov and Davidson, 2008).

CEEA survey design started by developing a conceptual model and framework of school climate and culture (Khmelkov and Davidson, 2009-2011). A pool of over 200 items was generated in summer 2009 to measure the constructs identified in the CEEA model. This pool was based on the original scales and items in CREE 2.5, but was expanded to match the conceptual model. No items from external scales, used in CREE 2.5, were included in CEEA surveys. Through a series of discussions with practitioners and research experts about the face validity of the emerging measurement scales, the survey was narrowed to 110 items on the student survey and 139 items on the faculty/staff survey. This version of the survey was identified as 4.2.

After the psychometric analysis of CEEA 4.2 (available from the authors) demonstrated excellent properties, a decision was made to reduce the number of items to make the surveys shorter and more manageable for administration and review of the results.

Version 4.5 of the student and staff surveys differs from version 4.2 in the fact that one scale was removed from it—student self-efficacy beliefs about their competencies and staff perceptions of students demonstrating those competencies (28 items). In addition, 7 items were removed from the student culture of ethics, 1 item from staff practices, 2 items from health and life balance set, and 1 item from staff collegiate relationships scale.


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