

# Collective Responsibility for Excellence and Ethics (CREE)

## version 2.7

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### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This instrument is aligned with several major constructs described in *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in Schools, Work, and Beyond* (Lickona and Davidson, 2005). The Smart & Good Schools framework proposes a definition of character as having two essential and interconnected parts: **performance character** and **moral character**. Performance character can be described as a “mastery orientation.” It consists of those qualities—including but not limited to diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity, and self-discipline—that are needed to realize one’s potential for excellence in any performance environment, such as academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace, and throughout life. Moral character is a “relational orientation.” It consists of those qualities— including but not limited to integrity, justice, caring, respect, and cooperation—that are needed for successful interpersonal relationships and ethical conduct. Moral character enables us to treat others—and ourselves—with respect and care and to act with integrity in our ethical lives. Moral character also has the important job of moderating our performance goals to honor the interests of others, to ensure that we do not violate moral values such as fairness, honesty, and caring in the pursuit of high performance.

This expanded understanding of character enables researchers and practitioners to address more effectively the question, “What’s the connection between character and academics?” Character has four important roles for character in academic life and work in general (Davidson, Lickona, and Khmelkov, 2008). First, students need performance character (initiative, self-discipline, perseverance, teamwork, etc.) in order to do their best academic work. Second, students develop their performance character from working hard and smart on their schoolwork. Third, students need moral character (respect, fairness, kindness, honesty, etc.) in order to create the relationships that make for a positive learning environment. Fourth, students develop moral character from their schoolwork—for example, by helping their peers to do their best work through constructive critique, studying ethical issues in the curriculum, and carrying out service learning projects that help solve real-world problems – and from being in a supportive environment.

The Smart & Good Schools framework also expands extant research on the social organizational characteristics of schools by introducing the constructs of an **Ethical Learning Community** and **Professional Ethical Learning Community**. Social organizational characteristics of schools include a multitude of personal and professional relationships that exist among administration, teachers, staff, and students within schools, as well as parents and members of the surrounding community (Gamoran et al, 2000). School/classroom climate is one essential aspect of school organization that is assessed in this instrument along the following two dimensions:

- Safety and order are fundamental conditions for any effective learning or human growth to take place. Social health and safety of the school, therefore, can be considered an intermediate outcome to be achieved in the beginning stage of program implementation or school improvement efforts.
- Relationships of caring and trust have also been consistently linked to improved student outcomes. Presence of such relationships may be especially salient for children coming from families or living in communities that are lacking in the extent of support and care they are able to provide. Relationships of trust are also important for adults in the school (Sebring and Bryk, 2000).

The Smart & Good model argues that these two aspects of the climate—social health and safety, caring and trust—are necessary conditions for success but they are not sufficient in and of themselves. A caring school community needs to be organized around a worthy goal, such as excellence and ethics, to fully realize its potential. Research has long identified the role of teachers' and students' high expectations for 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). High expectations for excellence need not be limited to the domain of academic learning but should govern all aspects of interpersonal relationships in schools. The Smart & Good model postulates that high expectations for excellence and ethics should become the cornerstone of the school mission, its identity, and sense of community.

The Ethical Learning Community (ELC) is, therefore, a community (classroom, advisory group, team, whole school) that both supports and challenges and whose 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 seeks to take character education beyond its focus on the psychological assets of the individual to the assets of the culture in which the individual lives and dwells, the location where the psychological assets are developed. By doing so, focus on ELC fulfills Kohlberg's exhortation to “change the life of the school as well as the development of the individual” (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). ELC seeks to create what Vygotsky (1978) called a zone of proximal development, defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Active investment and effort toward success of relationships with others in the school and

success in school activities is indicative of student engagement (Connell et al., 1995; Herman and Tucker, 2000). Lack of engagement, or alienation, is in turn indicative of 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 due to their growing need for autonomy might be developmentally more likely to disengage from school (De Bruyn, 2005). Thus, an Ethical Learning Community is a place where schools can intentionally and proactively structure opportunities for individuals to pursue their personal best through the assistance of teachers and peers and engage in productive relationships.

Extant research on social organization of schools has also shown that collegiate 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, deprivatize practice, and exercise collective control over curricular and other decisions (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Louis et al., 1996; Secada and Adajian, 1997; Talbert and 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 and Associates, 1996). The Smart & Good framework expands the concept of professional learning communities to include an explicit and integrated focus on both excellence and ethics shared by the members of a Professional Ethical Learning Community (PELC). A key distinguishing construct of a PELC is the sense of **collective responsibility for excellence and ethics** that permeates all collegiate relationships and interactions in the Smart & Good school.

Finally, community and parent involvement in school decision-making processes, input into children's choices, and participation in school-related activities has been found to have a profound impact on the social organization of schools and on student outcomes (Hill et al., 2004; McNeal, 1999; Yan and Lin, 2005). 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). School-to-family and family-to-school engagement, and especially practices relevant to performance character and moral character and to establishing a wider Ethical Learning Community, is assessed via an optional Parent Survey.

Other theoretical components of the Smart & Good Schools framework include the following pedagogical strategies:

**Self-Study**—engaging students in assessing their strengths and areas for growth in performance character and moral character, setting goals for improvement, and monitoring their progress. The goal of Self-Study as a pedagogical strategy is student engagement and personalization; it seeks to move the locus of control from outside of the individual to inside the individual. Research on achievement motivation suggests that an ego (or performance) orientation is one where a person is motivated to show competence in relation to others by showing superiority (e.g., by winning, getting the most right, being able to list the most kind things done to others), whereas with a task (or learning) orientation, the person competes against self-referenced personal achievement (e.g., a

better time than before, more right on this test than last time, fewer unnecessary interruptions of the class today than yesterday). In addition to facilitating numerous positive performance outcomes (academic, athletic, and other), a task orientation tends to promote self-reflection and awareness, to support strong intrinsic motivation, and to reduce helpless response to failure (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Nicholls, 1984; Nicholls, 1992).

Other-Study—learning from exemplars of performance character and moral character by analyzing and emulating their pathways to success. Other-Study builds upon social-cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1991) which “focuses on the ways in which individuals learn from others and their surroundings—including the mechanisms of modeling, imitation, and social reinforcement” (Lapsley, 1996, p. 193). The Other-Study process helps students understand, internalize, and master the requisite skills for reproducing high levels of excellence and ethics in their own lives. Other-Study isn’t just a strategy for studying people as models; it also serves as a powerful model for studying products of excellence and ethics.

Public Performance/Presentation and the Culture of Critique—using public performances and presentations as experiential learning and authentic assessment of students’ performance character and moral character. Public performance/presentation functions pedagogically as both experiential learning (Kolb, 1983) and authentic assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1993). For example, service learning provides a public performance activity that offers students a chance to “exercise” moral character as they serve others. It gives them an opportunity to practice moral character “in the real world.” Ron Berger (2003) makes a strong case for a classroom culture where students have to regularly present their work to peers and where their peers expect them to do their best. Every student wants to fit in, and if the peer norm is to do your best work, students will strive to fit in to that culture.

Whereas self-study, other-study, and public performance/culture of critique are not explicitly measured as a separate construct by the CREE survey instrument, multiple individual items in experiences and practices scales are aligned with these key pedagogical strategies. In addition, the **CREE Classroom Observation Form** (CREE\_COF) is available for collecting qualitative data on the various components of the Smart & Good Schools framework, including specific pedagogical practices (4 KEYS) described above.

## THE INSTRUMENT

The *Collective Responsibility for Excellence and Ethics* survey can be used for either a one-time assessment or over-time monitoring of various aspects of the ethical learning community in schools and the development of the performance and moral character in youth. To triangulate the information and explore similarities and differences in the views of character development held by various stakeholders, CREE 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 capture group differences and not intended as a diagnostic tool for individuals. Negatively worded items 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).

The instrument is designed to measure not only the school *outcomes*—student performance and moral character—but also school *inputs* in character development, in other words, school and classroom academic and social climate and culture, intentional and unintentional practices of faculty, staff, and parents, as well as student own behaviors, experiences and interactions with peers and adults that impact their learning and socio-moral development. The version of the instrument labeled “short” has been reduced in length from the “long” version to include key items from most scales (about 60% of the total). The short form allows for broad scope of assessment combined with ease of administration without sacrificing the validity or reliability. As such, this instrument is well-suited for initial needs assessment, as well as for formative evaluation and providing feedback to all the stakeholders. The long form is standard and provides for a more in-depth examination of various items contributing to the constructs of interest in this instrument.

The **CREE Student Form** measures:

- 1) *School/Classroom Climate*: a) *Social Health and Safety*, measuring the extent to which students feel safe in the school, as opposed to being exposed to disruptive behavior or incidents of peer cruelty or violence, and b) *Social Capital* generated in the classroom/school community by adults.
- 2) *Ethical Learning Community*, conceptualized as (a) acceptance of differences in schoolmates and attachment to the classroom/school community, (b) collective responsibility for classroom/school community, or courage and commitment to challenge others to be and to do their best.
- 3) *Experiences of Learning the Strengths of Character*, focusing on student perceptions of the opportunities created by adults in the school and arising through interactions with schoolmates in which youth develop performance character—such strengths of character as diligent and capable performer and lifelong learner and critical thinker—and moral character—such strengths of

character as socially and emotionally skilled person, ethical thinker, respectful and responsible moral agent, contributing community member and democratic citizen.

4) *Performance Character and Moral Character*, conceptualized as (a) commitment and self-discipline of individuals to challenge themselves to do their best work, to strive for excellence, and to improve their knowledge, attitude, and skills in any performance environment, such as academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace, and throughout life; and (b) commitment and self-discipline of individuals to challenge themselves to be their best ethical selves, to strive to do the right thing, to be responsible members of various social groups—in the classroom, on the playing field, and so on.

The **CREE Faculty/Staff Form** measures:

1) *School/Classroom Climate (long form only)*: a) *Social Health and Safety*, measuring the extent to which students feel safe in the school, as opposed to being exposed to disruptive behavior or incidents of peer cruelty or violence, and b) *Social Capital* generated in the classroom/school community by adults.

2) *Professional Ethical Learning Community*, measuring faculty and staff perceptions of colleagues' commitment to explicit and integrated focus on excellence and ethics for students and for themselves, including evidence of such approaches as developing shared purpose and identity, aligning practices with desired outcomes, having a voice and taking a stand, grappling with tough issues, practicing personal responsibility for continuous self-improvement and collective responsibility for excellence and ethics.

3) *Assessment of the Ethical Learning Community*—parallel to student reports of (a) acceptance of differences in schoolmates and attachment to the classroom/school community, and (b) collective responsibility, or courage and commitment to challenge others to be and to do their best.

4) *Teaching the Strengths of Character*—faculty and staff practices promoting performance character, conceptualized as focus on such strengths of character as diligent and capable performer and lifelong learner and critical thinker, and practices promoting moral character, conceptualized as focus on development of such strengths of character as socially and emotionally skilled person, ethical thinker, respectful and responsible moral agent, contributing community member and democratic citizen.

5) *Assessments of Student Performance and Moral Character*—parallel to student own reports of their corresponding behavior.

The optional **CREE Parent Form** measures:

- 1) *School-Family Partnership*—conceptualized as (a) parents’ (other adults’ in the family) perceptions of school’s efforts to educate and involve parents in teaching performance and moral character, to communicate with parents about their children’s learning and to involve parents in decision-making and volunteering at the school and community, and (b) parents own actions initiating communication with the school, volunteering at the school, participating in decision-making about school issues, and participating in community life.
- 2) *Parent Practices Promoting Performance Character and Moral Character*—conceptualized as parents’ (other adults’ in the family) focus on development of performance and moral character in their children.
- 3) *School Focus on Excellence and Ethics*—parents’ perceptions of school efforts to build the ethical learning community in the school and develop students’ performance and moral character.

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