

Tell Me What You Really Think

A Report on the Schools of Integrity Project

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Executive Summary

Over the 18 months between spring 2005 and winter 2006, the Institute for Global Ethics visited exemplary independent high schools in both the U.S. and Canada. During the course of our study, we spoke to over 500 people, including students, faculty, administration, parents and trustees. Ten schools participated—their settings, size, demographics, and location varied widely. We deliberately sought a diverse group of schools to study in order to approximate the wide range of independent schools across the U.S. and Canada. The findings in this report are common to all these schools, despite their striking differences. We recognize that other independent schools across the U.S. and Canada—and indeed, around the world—are also dedicated to this kind of quality education. The schools in our study represent a small sample of a large and diverse set of schools.

The purpose of this study was to delineate school practices that balance academic rigor with attention to ethical development. Not surprisingly, all our findings relate to deliberate efforts to build trust within the school culture. Less predictably, each of these findings can be said to support a genuine examination of “truth”—of true relationships, of true understanding, of true intention—as essential to trust building and, consequently, to deep learning. Hence the title for this report; the adults working to provide quality education in these schools seem genuinely driven to learn what their students, colleagues, and leadership “really think” in an inspiring enterprise that can ultimately be described as a quest for the truth. This journey involves everyone in these schools, and promises to produce the “knowledgeable, compassionate citizens and effective leaders within a rapidly transforming world” espoused in the NAIS *Best Practice: Educating for Global Citizenship*.

Given the skeptical-at-best attitudes that today’s adolescents are reputed to hold toward adults, building trust would seem a formidable undertaking. Yet consistently, the schools we were fortunate enough to visit during this study were alive with positive attitude, enthusiasm, and joy. Far from feeling daunted by their task, the teachers, faculty, parents, and trustees with whom we met seem on fire about the mission and

promise of their learning environment. Likewise, we spoke to scores of young adults who, while sharp and sophisticated, well traveled and well read, rarely came across as cynical. Many described their learning experiences as deeply meaningful and look forward to leveraging this learning to contribute to a better world.

Hence, our strong interest is in not only describing common themes and practices across these schools, but in suggesting ways other schools might replicate them to move their own learning environment in the same direction. The 10 key findings from this project fit together and arise out of this essential commitment to building trust and truth-seeking.

1. *Cross-cutting dimension*: Attention to values and ethics permeate these learning environments at both the adult and the student level. If we want students to be *truly* good people, the climate of their learning environment—the “how we do things around here” of their school’s organizational culture—must clearly stem from and telegraph a platform of shared ethical values. However, while all the adults we met were clearly committed to promoting ethics and values, many of them could not point to a poster or recite an official “code of ethics” for their school. The more seamless, natural, and earnest the effort to seek “the good,” the more likely students will internalize this lifelong quest.
2. *Driver and connector*: Across participating schools, higher-order thinking skills are emphasized and deliberately linked to the moral realm. Values and ethics undergird critical thought by connecting “the personal” to the more academic topics and concepts. Deep critical thinking and learning take place as students are encouraged to articulate and test their true perceptions of the world, forming and defending authentic opinions.
3. *Fueling relationships*: The perceptions and opinions students volunteer will only be authentic in an environment where they feel trusted and can really speak their minds. Students in these schools develop trust through strong relationships with people who are committed to honest self-examination and try to model this quality in all their interactions.

4. *Culture of open feedback:* For adults to build these strong, successful relationships with students, the same high levels of trust must permeate faculty relationships. In the majority of these schools, teachers are clearly empowered to be bold learners. They speak their minds without reprisal, take different tacks without rebuke, take risks with support, and take feedback or criticism as an expression of caring.
5. *Trustees as keepers of the moral compass:* If there is a source from which trust most effectively evolves in a school, it may be from the body bearing the name. Despite a mostly behind-the-scenes role, in several cases, participating schools' trustees view their primary role as developing and sustaining the trust level of the school.
6. *Tone at the top:* The most important conduit for trust is the head of school. Students, faculty, trustees, and parents frequently refer to this important leadership feature. Throughout these cultures the ethical actions, decisions, and communication of the school head are noticed and appreciated.
7. *Tolerance for ambiguity:* Is trust conveyed simply through incantation of a philosophy? Not in these schools. Specific codes of ethics and values may or may not be articulated, but heads and other adults in the environment model and live "trust:" they trust their collaboration and processes, they trust that they'll sometimes get stuck and that they'll constantly have doubts, and they trust their personal ability to think things through and their personal commitment to see things through.
8. *Professional development from the ranks:* In many of these schools, teachers are expected to trust their professional judgment and to share it, just as they expect students to contribute their very best perceptions, opinions, and understanding. These educators readily build on colleagues' or students' learning in a creative synergy, rather than feeling competitive or defensive.
9. *Authentic student input:* Teachers and other adults naturally and expertly welcome serious student input in a variety of aspects of these school communities. They trust their students' ability to make good decisions.
10. *Growth, not punishment:* Disciplinary approaches are the most consistent area of student input across these schools. Students are trusted to provide effective feedback and consequences that educate, rather than punish, fellow students who have broken the rules.

The NAIS Perspective

By Patrick F. Bassett

President of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)

A theme of the National Association of Independent Schools is that “values are the value-added of an independent school education.” With the dramatic rise in the cost of an independent school education over the last decade, a new generation of parents has begun carefully calculating the RoI (“return on investment”) for many years of independent school tuition payments. Given that a seemingly increasing proportion of parents misguidedly measure that return on a single factor, acceptance into the parents’ very short list of acceptable colleges, this study is a timely and refreshing reaffirmation of the historic role of independent schools: to teach scholarship *and* character, “values as the value-added. From the very beginning of independent schools in America, the emphasis was on character development. The Phillips brothers who founded both Phillips Exeter Academy and Phillips Andover, expected that the teacher’s “attention to the disposition of the minds and morals of the youth under his charge will exceed every other care; well considering that, though goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble, yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous; and that both united form the noblest character. The first and principal object of this institution is the promotion of piety and virtue.”

The cross-cultural work of sociologist Anthony Campolo is instructive in this arena. He has noted that when Japanese mothers today are asked to finish the phrase, “I want my child to be...,” they inevitably answer “successful.” Campolo notes the heavy price Japanese youth have paid in a high-stakes culture where a narrow definition of success (admission to one of a handful of universities) is the only measurement of worth. When Campolo asked American mothers to complete the phrase, inevitably the answer was “I want my child to be...happy.” Have not American youth paid a heavy price as well for this absurdly simplistic but deeply embedded expectation of uninterrupted “happiness”? Surely the hedonistic impulses of youth are not held in check by the expectation of being happy all the time, and such an unrealistic and unachievable expectation leads often to its opposite condition, distress and unhappiness. Schools of integrity are founded and grounded in the assumption that the more sensible hope of parents would be indicated by completing the sentence thusly: “I want my child to be good.” “Goodness” in the sense of

striving for virtue, is, more than anything else, more clearly aligned with achieving success and happiness as side benefits: In fact, seeking happiness or success seldom produces either and almost never both. Seeking goodness, it turns out (from the longitudinal research on independent school grads - *School of Hope* and *Lives of Hope*, Douglas Heath) is aligned not only later in life with good character but also with happiness and success.

What independent schools manage so well is to hire as teachers and staff exemplars of the very virtues the school stands for, then give them license and freedom to teach scholarship and model character. What those very special independent schools, *schools of integrity*, do is well beyond that: these schools center their program on “what we stand for.” Such a deliberate and conscious posture by an entire institution is what distinguishes these schools, and holds them up as models for others.

Overview

By Dr. Rushworth M. Kidder
Founder and President, the Institute for Global Ethics

Ours is an age of inordinate moral confusion. Every day's headlines report big-picture dilemmas with no clear solution: international terrorism, regional warfare, global warming, energy shortages, corporate scandals, nuclear proliferation, endemic corruption.

At a more granular level, this bewilderment appears in a litany of national and local ethical lapses, where values are subverted, integrity is abandoned, and moral courage is given short shrift.

Little wonder, then, that parents are searching for schools where character matters, where values are in focus, and where moral reasoning and ethical behavior are central to the educational culture. Parents often find those qualities in the nation's private schools, so many of which are deliberately trying to achieve a culture of responsibility, respect, honesty, fairness. A central aspect of the appeal of private education—a key reason that parents willingly pay for an alternative to what, in North America, is available free in every community—lies in the commitment of private education to developing students of character.

That commitment is not easily maintained. As our nation emerges from several decades of determinedly values-neutral education, efforts to weave ethics and integrity into the fabric of education still meet skepticism. The arguments against it are as varied as they are trite. Aren't we already doing this? Isn't all ethics relative anyway? Are you saying my child is unethical? Are you trying to impose your values on my family? Whose values are you trying to teach, anyway?

If there is one characteristic that seems to unite students currently opting into private pre-collegiate education, it is that they and their parents have thought about these questions. So have the schools they patronize. While private educators would be the last to claim that they have found the infallible formula for educating students of integrity, they are the first to tell you that the quest is on their minds, that they are constantly looking for progress, and

that the game is very much worth the candle. The real question for them is not, "Should we be doing this?," but rather "How can we do it better?."

That was the question that impelled the Institute for Global Ethics to undertake this study. Working closely with the National Association of Independent Schools and the Canadian Association of Independent Schools, and funded by the John Templeton Foundation and The Esther A. and Joseph Klingenstein Fund, we set out to learn what constitutes "best practice" in North American private education in relation to teaching character and integrity. To do so, we closely examined 10 "schools of integrity"—institutions widely viewed by their peers as singularly effective in educating for character and ethics.

This study reports on our work. It condenses hours of on-site interviewing and piles of documentation into 10 key findings. It does not pretend to present the final word on the subject. But it lays out the broad headings under which, we think, the future directions of character education will develop both in the laboratory of private education and in the broad reaches of our public school systems. And it provides hallmarks and frameworks for educators looking for effective ways of educating students to address the moral perplexities of the 21st century.

Project Design and Report Structure

This report springs from a premise that we believe to be (in Thomas Jefferson's term) self-evident: that both academic and ethical preparation are essential to 21st century education, and that this dual emphasis contributes to more meaningful school experiences and more fulfilled and responsible citizens.

But how do rigorous independent high schools achieve balance between academic demands and the ethical development of their student population? The Institute for Global Ethics (IGE) has collaborated with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and with the Canadian Association of Independent schools (CAIS) to examine exemplary high schools and describe a clear set of replicable "best practices" that address this important balance.

After an advisory board for this project was formed early in 2005, NAIS and IGE staff canvassed NAIS and CAIS member associations to build a list of over 40 nominations for participating schools for the project. In consultation with the advisory board, schools were selected according to their academically rigorous learning environments (based on admissions requirements) and their strong commitment to the ethical development of their students (based on nominations from regional independent school associations). The high schools finally selected for this study were chosen to ensure a sample broadly representative of the demographics of NAIS membership, as follows:

- School size: Two of the schools have over 750 students, while two have fewer than 200. Sizes of the other eight fall between 200 and 700 students, most being around 400.
- Geography: We included schools from the South, East, Midwest, and West of the U.S., as well as two schools from Canada.
- Location: Two participating schools are in very rural settings, and two are located in very urban, downtown locations. The other participating schools were considered

suburban in either location of campus or of households served.

- Type: Six of these schools are day schools, while the other four have boarders.
- Student body: We visited four single-sex schools, and six coeducational schools. Four of our 10 participating schools would be considered diverse or very diverse, with at least 30 percent nonwhite students enrolled.

The schools chosen for this report were diverse in other ways as well. Some came from strong Christian traditions, while others were decidedly nondenominational. Some appeared most comfortable with strongly conservative or strongly liberal politics, while others appeared more centrist in their views. And while some had dress codes, students at others were indistinguishable from their peers in public schools.

In Round I of the project, Mirk visited five schools and spent two days at each school. Administrators at each school were invited to arrange a mix of interviews and focus groups that would best provide information about the school's culture and its balance of attention to both academic rigor and students' ethical development. At a minimum, each school provided opportunities to meet with trustees, heads, and other administrators, faculty, students, and parents. In some cases, more than one of these groups was made available. Schools were also invited to provide supportive portfolio materials to further describe the balance within its culture. Many schools provided historical materials and school policy manuals that illustrated an emphasis on both meeting academic standards and being a positive member of the school community. In addition, students and faculty at these five schools were asked to fill out written surveys about the culture and structures contributing to students' ethical development.

The data processed after Round I began to reveal some key findings common to all these schools, despite their demographic variety. In Round II, these key findings were further investigated at five other schools. In this case, Mirk spent one day at each of four sites, and conducted two hour-long interviews with the head and with one faculty member at the fifth school. Due to the low return rates for surveys in Round I, data was deemed inconclusive and surveys were not used for Round II. While Round II schools also provided

portfolio material, by far the most substantive information in this report comes from the extensive interviews and focus-group discussions carried out on site and face-to-face.

In anticipation of Round II opportunities for further study, we commissioned a *Literature Review of Research on Private Schools* from the Center for Research and Evaluation at the University of Maine. The review identified recent publications about, specifically, U.S. “private school processes that emphasize ethical values.” [pg.1] The reviewers note that while some qualitative data is available regarding school practices targeting ethical values and community service, “More research is needed to systematically collect such data, and to provide rich, detailed descriptions of school practices that support student learning in this area.” The *Schools of Integrity* project attempts to begin that process in a small way, by gathering and describing specific ideas from the 10 schools involved in our study. Our study is deliberately qualitative rather than quantitative. It seeks knowledgeable observation, and depends on accurate representation, of the ideas expressed by those interviewed. It does not rely on survey statistics or other quantitative investigations of school programming success. While we don’t presume that the ideas, structures, and practices that surfaced in these interviews are the only ways to comprehend the balance of academic rigor and ethical development that characterizes the nation’s “best practice” schools of integrity, this methodology has yielded rich insights into the kinds of cultures best suited to develop the complex interrelationships between the moral and intellectual lives of young people.

We look forward to continued efforts, as the literature review recommends, to gather data that will “provide evidence on the impacts and effectiveness of these school practices” by “collecting and comparing data before and after interventions, and either setting up a control group or carefully matching student and school characteristics to create matched comparison groups that do not participate in the intervention.”

Report Structure

This report describes 10 ideas that, although to varying degrees and in a variety of forms, are common to each of the schools participating in this project. Each of these 10 findings forms a section of the report. Each of these sections is organized the same way:

- **Connection:** We identify the finding and its relevance to trust levels at the school.
- **Description:** We provide adult and student thinking about the finding and its importance to the educational experience.
- **Replication:** We provide the specific, practical essence of the finding that can be replicated in any other school context.

This report does not attribute quotations or ideas to individuals or schools, both to honor confidentiality and to avoid any appearance of favoritism. We recognize that ours is a limited sample and that many other independent high schools across the U.S. and Canada, and all over the world, are equally effective at inspiring a balance of academics and ethics in the lives of their young people. It is our hope that this report will shed light and provide support to this important endeavor.

Finding 1: Pervasive Attention to Ethics and Values

Across all the schools involved in our study, one message is consistent: anyone in the school community is expected to participate in ethical discourse and practice. The topic is not theoretical, nor is it reserved for philosophy class; it's a way of *doing* human existence. "I would say very few of our teachers see a distinction between ethics and education in their own subject or sport or area of activity," one teacher comments. "It's interwoven. It just comes through in everything you do."

Connection: This study reveals an overall picture of high trust levels within schools resulting from a clear appreciation for the role of ethics and values in building strong, positive learning communities. Adults in this study frequently describe expectations related to their students', their colleagues', and their own ethical behavior.

Description: "Take sports, for instance," a coach in one suburban school explains. "There are many opportunities for coaches and athletes to be unethical or to bend the rules in our favor, right? But I think as coaches modeling ethical behavior, it's rare that any of our athletes can say that we knowingly bent the rules or broke the rules. So as far as our athletes go, they get that modeling in spades."

Another coach at the same school asks, "What's our job as coaches? To love you [the athletes]. What's your job as athletes? To love each other."

In each of the schools we studied, the emphasis on ethics wasn't superficial or intermittent, but part and parcel of a collaborative, community-minded approach to getting an education. "It's not cutthroat—we feed off each other's success, and we push each other," one teacher remarks, referring not just to the students but to faculty and other adults at the school. "The underlying culture is that everybody is mentoring somebody else."

While maintaining academic standards and targets, the approach in these schools typically focuses on helping and supporting student success. An

emphasis on togetherness and community, a spirit of teamwork and triumph for each student and each student's group, the "all for one and one for all" loyalty that goes such a long way in the adolescent experience—these ingredients are constantly at play among students and adults. Adults and students notice the positive difference. When kids feel successful, they don't have to stand out for being "bad," explains one urban day-school teacher. "People don't need to cheat because teachers are always really helpful," a student remarks in comparing his current school experience to a previous one. Another student comments that in his other school, "I didn't talk. Here, I speak my mind." A teacher, lauding his present school's collegiality and lamenting the prevailing norm he'd previously experienced, notes that ultimately "we're all one," but that in many school settings "—we've just forgotten that we are [all one]."

Replication: These schools demonstrate that an emphasis on ethics can be stimulating, not daunting or boring. The opportunities to examine what's right and good can span the emotions from grim to amusing, and pursuit of the intellectual need not require separation from living and activity. "Seeking truth, seeking ideas is pervasive," says one faculty member. "Also, we emphasize *play* and being curious about life." At his rural boarding school, one student explains, "None of the teachers wants you up in your room holed up in your work."

In many of these environments, learning is increasingly individualized. One student observes, "Everybody understands that everybody has different balances. They focus on each of us creating our own individual education... They talk about *why* a lot."

"We get kids to investigate their own values—self reflection is explicitly taught," says a teacher at one school. At another, "There's a commitment to exposing kids to the contemplative life. We feel the need to cultivate reverence—[being] quiet before the great mysteries of life."

In each case, highly personal and personalized experiences are taking the place of one-size-fits-all approaches. Reflection is only a small part of this broad movement away from "standardized" approaches to learning. "[It's] not so much *exams*—it's more *assignments*," one student says in attempting to contrast her new school experience to her previous

one. Here, assignments designed to bring out the creativity and distinct critical thinking of each student have mostly replaced traditional exams. Faculty in these schools underscore the importance of particular, accurate planning for each individual learner, out of respect for each student and based on the increasingly discerning expertise of the teaching staff. In a previous school, one teacher notes, “The emphasis was on hiring masters and PhDs. The idea of ‘excellence’ translated into university degrees instead of teaching effectiveness.” In the learning environments we studied, by contrast, “teaching effectiveness” is shifting toward individualization as a specific teacher expertise. “Have each kid set goals that are attainable—use that to prove success,” one teacher recommends. Another remarks that “part of the way you avoid cheating is to set up assessments that are individualized. Standardized content is an invitation to cheat.”

Finding 2: Critical Thinking Skills Driving and Connecting Learning

Much class work observed or described in this study involves the development of critical thinking skills mostly through collective learning between students and teachers. Faculty model a passion for reasoning and for ongoing, highly collaborative work. This kind of learning is often blurred and gray, and can be trying. As one teacher explains, “Recently, I heard on the radio that ‘democracy is a noisy conversation.’ Well, teaching is messy and noisy—and what teacher wouldn’t want it to be that way?”

Connection: On the face of it, an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills would not seem to guarantee opportunities for ethical development. But unlike tasks of recall or identification (typically bound by prescribed answers), higher-order opportunities to analyze, to evaluate, or to create bring to the surface the diverse and singular thinking of each student, and throw wide open the path to “correct” or “true.” As one faculty member puts it, “The message is that the individual is valued, and that ‘I have confidence that you can figure this out.’”

Description: “Inference, hypothesis, deconstruction, differentiation, premise—each of these elements can have a variety of takes, not like a date or a fact,” one suburban day-school teacher explains in defense of these messier, sometimes less conclusive realms of learning. Another teacher notes that “We want these critical thinking skills raised to a conscious level: how to communicate, how to think, and how to discern. It pervades the culture that everyone has a voice and an analytical mind, and that learning is a path.”

The general approach to building students’ identity and ethics involves pressing them toward independent thought. “Critical thinking is a key component—teach them to think for themselves,” a teacher at a suburban boarding school advocates. In these successful learning environments, independent thought is clearly valued and standards for clear and conscientious reasoning are high. “The school permits discussion,” one student comments. “You

don’t have to agree, but you have to figure out what you believe.” “One way to describe the role of ethics, I guess, is as a link to reality,” one faculty member explains. Teachers indicate that investigating values and ethics stimulates rich, relevant, and personalized thinking and discussion, and sets up a strong synergy with academic goals. Instructors consistently insist on clear, substantive reasoning, and expect students to engage their minds not only in discerning *what is* but in justifying *what should be*. A teacher states with pride that “our kids are always questioning, ‘Why? Why? Why?’” Equally proud, a student echoes: “We’re taught to question everything.”

Replication: Class work that promotes interpretations and differences of opinion can sometimes challenge the comfort level of teachers. At the schools in this study, administrators describe building a love of critical thinking into the selection process for new teachers.

A school head at a suburban single-sex boarding school explains what she’s looking for in new teachers. “When hiring, I ask ‘What do you think we need our society’s leaders to be able to do?’ There are four specific areas I’m looking for in the answer, all of which I believe underpin the best learning our students can do. I’m looking for words like trustworthy, compassionate, discerning, critical thinkers.”

This emphasis at the top of Bloom’s Taxonomy also more effectively supports these schools’ goals of honoring and meeting the needs of each learner. Many of the schools we visited actively integrate examination of individual differences into class work. These examinations can cover a range of questions:

- What kind of learning style do I have, how does my mind best respond and how do I best present myself and my thinking?
- What belief system was I raised with, and, at this point, where do my sympathies lie among the many different viewpoints we have explored?
- What are my religious beliefs, my view of the cosmos and eternity?

Students at these schools seem very aware of the qualitative difference resulting from critical-thinking-based teaching approaches. “Even in normal history class you get, ‘what is the decision he *should* have made?’” One student explains, “You get a greater understanding of decisions.” Says an
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“It isn’t the teacher lecturing to us. The teacher poses the questions and we have at it—even in math!”

Assessing critical thinking skills is challenging, and doubly so when these skills are applied to ethics. Teachers in our study typically have specific criteria and means to judge levels of learning, and to communicate progress to students. Here are a few ideas:

- Ask students open questions that lead them to take a point of view and defend it. “Was the Roman Empire good for the advancement of mankind? Why or why not?”
- Teach respectful discourse skills and give students opportunities to practice verbalizing their opinions. “I disagree with you and here’s why,” or “I agree with you but you left out [this, this, and this].”
- Teach toward a range of cognitive skills, and be explicit: “I want to see you apply the facts, build a strong argument, connect your ideas to present and past class work, infer and interpret news and other sources to build your argument, and communicate that argument effectively.”

Finding 3: Relationships Fuel Learning and Ethical Development

Most educators know that strong, positive relationships promote learning. The schools in this study demonstrate appreciation and very deliberate consideration of this opportunity, recognizing it as pivotal to the interplay between academics and ethics.

Connection: Central to the attitudes we encountered in this study is the conviction that through deep trust, deep learning takes place. Our participating schools recognize that one key to building such trust is creating successful and authentic relationships—not just between adults and students, but between adults and other adults. The broad purpose of building such relationships, then, is to build the right learning environment—a process that involves all community members.

Description: From the adolescent point of view, strong relationships relate directly to feeling better about school and learning. “So many adults really care and ask you all the time how you’re doing,” one student at a rural boarding school laughs. “At first it’s unnerving!” A student at an urban day school concurs, “It’s not weird to be friends with your teachers.” Another student explains that “At [my previous] public school it’s kind of an ‘us/them’ situation—here it’s just ‘us’.”

When pressed to think about the connection between relationships and learning, many students allude to psychological safety in their remarks. Says one, “The teachers I appreciate the most—I tell them things I would never tell my parents.” And another adds simply, “They never give up on you.” Some students make the connection between this pervasive sense of caring and the resulting opportunity for personal growth. “[Teachers] let you be yourself—become yourself,” says one student at an urban day school.

This deliberate and avid focus on bringing out the individuality of each student results in part from faculty’s increasing expertise in adolescent development. As one program director at a suburban

day school notes, “Everything starts from understanding the developmental needs of kids.” In the case of his school, a concerted emphasis on reflection is specifically aimed at teenaged boys, and is based on current brain research. “Boys are so caught up,” he explains. “It’s a very self-absorbed time without long-range planning ability. So often, at age 13 to 15, we [adults] assume they can do what they really can’t. On average, it’s only by age 15 to 16 that boys can effectively think in the abstract.”

Many educators we met describe a focus on belonging and feeling a part of the school community as a good way of building the comfort and confidence that lead to strong relationships. The schools’ emphasis on varying needs, varying interests, and deliberate structures to connect students to other students and students to adults sends a deep message of respect and appreciation to individuals. Says one teacher, “I remember a kid saying to me when he graduated, ‘At this school, there’s a place for everyone. If you want to be a cool jock guy. If you want to be an art geek, you’re still cool.’ There’s no one who’s ‘cooler’ than anyone else. The kids respect each others’ accomplishments.”

The outcome to this focus is a community more dedicated to ethics—to doing the right thing. One student sounds almost sheepish in explaining why she’s so earnest about upholding the values of her school. “Teachers kinda’ care about you,” she says, “and you don’t want to disappoint them.” A faculty member seconds and extends the idea: “If [students] feel a part of the community, they’re less likely to cheat.”

The effects of these relationships can be a powerful force for ethical development. As one student remarks, “Teachers here aren’t afraid to talk. They can be friends; they aren’t disciplinarians. They’ve really helped me develop a conscience. I can hear a voice in my head [saying], ‘He wouldn’t do this.’”

Behind the scenes, however, it’s clear that learning to build these relationships takes courage, thought, and discipline. Attempts at relationships can backfire—and in the case of students, the results can be counterproductive and/or damaging.

“Kids can be confused between the friends vs. the professional thing, but *you* as teacher, must not be confused,” one experienced faculty member explains. “As the adult, you have to put certain pieces of yourself away, because even as you’re engaging a student, you’re first and foremost *servicing* him. You can’t be untrue to yourself, but you don’t have to and you shouldn’t give yourself over to them entirely. It’s difficult to describe. Teachers can really get caught when their validity rests on the opinion of the kids. It’s strange, but teachers shouldn’t look for personal fulfillment in these relationships. Sometimes you see that kind of thing and have to ask, ‘Whose needs are really being met?’”

Replication: Our participating schools are using several specific structures to build relationships between students and adults. Well-supervised and carefully constructed mentoring systems seem to go a long way in this regard. Older students are paired with incoming students to provide friendship and guidance, and specifically to acculturate the younger students. Mentors help new students learn to:

- Use daily planners and other organizational tools to make sense of new routines and expectations—a friendly process to increase comfort levels by reducing stress.
- Break down broad goals and tasks into doable steps. Mentors address a variety of other executive planning or “prefrontal” tasks that, as older students, they may well have already mastered while younger students are still in an emergent learning stage.
- Celebrate accomplishments, however small. Older students are trained to notice and underscore even seemingly incidental progress toward goals.
- Reflect. Older students are trained to provide perspective for new or younger students, as in “I remember this was hard at first, but now it’s easy.”

As the “new kids on the block,” students we talked to genuinely value their relationships with mentors. “You get very tight with that group,” one student explains. Another says, “You can always find someone to talk to in this school.”

Student-to-student mentoring programs are particularly effective in the realm of ethics and values, because both students are learning through the process. In the best, most carefully crafted programs, much thought has been put into how the program serves both the student “on the receiving end” and the mentors themselves. As one faculty member explains, “The great thing about [our] program is that you nominate yourself to engage in a two-year program of mentorship, leadership, and citizenship. [But] it’s not until you graduate that you find out whether you’ve fulfilled the candidacy requirements or not. The core of [the program] is the process of reflection on the activities. It’s not just the effectiveness, but the connection between your own integrity and the work you do.”

Some schools we visited engage in adult-student mentoring programs. In some instances, these programs involve a one-on-one approach, while in others, one mentor serves a group of students. Some schools use a combination of both one-to-one and group interactions. In all cases, the focus of the program is on building relationships and comfort levels to allow each student to trust the environment enough to be himself or herself. “We have one-on-one meetings with kids because what they want can be very different from what their parents want,” one faculty member explains. Another says just, “At the first of the year, I try to meet with each of my students to find out what’s scary.”

In many cases, adults serve as mentors for the same students throughout the years the students are enrolled. “Fit” is carefully examined in these cases, and if at any time it doesn’t serve the needs of the student, changes are made. Again, the key reason for this long-term commitment returns to building trust through orchestrated opportunities for identity-building and common purpose. It can be a tall order for some adults, but a great opportunity for personal and professional growth. One faculty member describes her experience sticking with a group over four years. “I decided that if we’re going to be together for four years, we’re going to have to be open and honest” she says, “and that it’s my responsibility to be provocative—to take the lead in being honest.”

Finding 4: Cultures of Trust Encourage Ongoing, Honest Feedback

Along with a major emphasis on adult-student relationships, each school in our study consistently pays attention to building trust among colleagues. Noticeable within this effort are structures and approaches that provide ongoing, honest feedback to practitioners.

Connection: “It’s critical to have *genuine* feedback,” one teacher declares. “Too many schools pay lip service.” At the schools we visited, in keeping with the ongoing theme of truth-seeking and trust, professional feedback is ongoing and open. While it can be critical, the spirit of “we’re all in this together” seems to mitigate hurt feelings and maximize purposeful energy. Feedback is valued and recognized as imperative to the culture of the school.

Description: Deliberate structures and routines, as well as a strong informal culture of open discourse, provide the space for this professional pondering and honest growth in the schools we visited. As one faculty member at a suburban day school explains, “We really try to be who we say we are. We address issues, and if we can’t, we find a process to address them.” Another teacher notes “There’s so much collegiality that I feel I’ll get the time and a straight answer. I never feel blown off by anyone.”

In many public and private schools these days, it’s not uncommon to observe a “code of silence” between professionals. This unwritten norm could be expressed as “I won’t comment on your teaching practices if you don’t comment on mine.” The resulting absence of genuine exchange makes offering feedback feel like a dangerous intrusion or affront. In contrast, at many of the schools we visited honest feedback is regularly and genuinely encouraged, and results in an atmosphere free of risk and full of inspiration and energy. Each professional is trusted to benefit from new opportunities for growth. The more direct collegial coaching is exchanged, the more those new to the school feel empowered by the culture. They’re clearly signaled

to speak their minds, and that their ideas and their professional progress are valued.

Adults caught up in growth and learning apparently inspire students to do the same. One parent’s comment demonstrates how the interactions of faculty radiate across the culture and to the students: “They have the courage to self-examine and they telegraph that,” he says. “A very prominent question from the adults is, ‘Are we being true about what we’re trying to accomplish?’ Not surprisingly, this is a place where [my son] could be who he is.”

An administrator puts the matter simply, in explaining how such cultures come about and why they’re so important to learning environments. Referring to the ongoing process of continuous improvement built into her school’s culture, she comments, “You can’t grow without feedback.”

Replication: Our schools used a wide variety of structures to promote communication among adults. Some prominent approaches include:

- Faculty meetings and other traditional settings devoted to “speaking your mind,” and other meetings focusing entirely on “what’s working.”
- Frequent examination of curriculum: “What’s being taught and why is it relevant? What else needs to be taught? What is no longer needed?”
- Teachers enlisted to design the student report card and portfolio system, presenting ideas and seeking feedback from other teachers.
- Dissolution of traditional subject area departments, because these build competition for resources instead of interdisciplinary collaboration and student-centered (rather than department oriented) communication.
- Teacher evaluation systems that include informal feedback, videotaping and feedback, as well as periodic peer review and periodic formal self-evaluation.
- Small faculty groups that mentor and support each other, meeting on a regular basis with “an obligation to listen to yourself and to listen to others” and to engage in “a process that leads to creative solutions.”
- A faculty that frequently weighs in on decisions that impact them or the direction of the school, so that it’s “rare that *one* person makes the decision.”

Finding 5: Trustees as Keepers of the Moral Compass

While many of the trustees we interviewed see their roles as “in the background”—not on the front lines of these exemplary schools—they do not minimize the importance of their jobs in developing cultures of integrity. They describe their purpose first and foremost as stewards of the school’s philosophy and vision. They depend on the school head as their connector between the ideal vision and the brass tacks of educating students of character.

Connection: If “everybody counts” in building positive school cultures, even behind-the-scenes roles provide a positive influence. Trustees we met are for the most part involved in their school because of an appreciation for the importance of ethical development, and they make decisions accordingly. They take the *trust* in their role seriously, as keepers of the school’s moral compass.

Description: At many of the exemplary schools we studied, trustees view themselves as the drivers behind an ethical culture, despite their distance from the actual operations of the school and direct interaction with students. In several cases, trustees describe past experiences when the school’s climate was not as ethical and attribute this shortfall to their own misguidance as trustees. Consistently, trustees describe administrative and academic issues as less central to their role and identity than issues of ethics and character.

Trustees look to the school head for both input and output in keeping the priorities straight at the school. Says one school head, “My trust from the board is amazing: they look to me for the truth [and]... the vision—knowing that we fail every day.” One trustee adds to the metaphor. “The school head,” he says “is like the North Pole of my moral compass.”

Despite their involvement in seemingly black-and-white tasks like fiduciary management and policy development, trustees report their roles as complex. They’re challenged with decision-making about often-ambiguous issues, where “one size fits all” or other formulas simply don’t apply. Dispelling the

impression he sometimes gets from others about the role of trustees, one says, “It’s not just, ‘Don’t lie, cheat, steal.’ We do a lot of work on gray areas.” And like all of us, they labor over the tough choices, and worry about the outcomes to their decisions. A trustee at a large rural boarding school puts this in a nutshell: “Ethical behavior is when it hurts.”

The importance of schools in teaching life lessons and furthering lofty ideals and principles—and the capacity of their particular school to do this successfully—is the predominate reason these trustees say they invest their time and energy this way. Indeed, several admitted to being alumni who were kicked out of their schools for various ethical lapses in their youth. This is precisely what leads them, later in life, to want to serve that school. In the long run, the early lessons—sometimes painful—in character and ethical development outweigh the academic training, and motivate them to serve and give back. As one trustee puts it, “You talk to alums, and they don’t talk about academics. They talk about *this*.”

Replication: Trustees recommend a number of practices that have, over the years, served them well as keepers of the moral compass. These vary from school to school, but all pivot around trust—both experiencing and contributing to trust, and arriving at trust through honest and arduous grappling.

- **Transparency:** Trustees at these exemplary schools want to work in the open and in the light, not behind closed doors. “We try to make sure nothing’s hidden. That’s *trust*.”
- **Sincerity:** Trustees who believe in ethics help develop ethical school values. “The institution is serious about this and we telegraph this. It’s the first thing the board asks about, the first thing on the strategic plan. Everybody talks about it constantly—values, values, values.”
- **Pragmatism:** The trustees we met were “roll-up-your-sleeves” groups who did not view their role as “back seat.” “Our responsibility is to *do* something,” one trustee said.
- **Communication:** Trustees want to know where their decision making has taken the school, and must therefore be prepared to listen—even to bad news. “Trustees have made it clear they really want to connect,” says a parent at one school. “They’re very open to listening to people—it comes through.”

- Alliance: One way to find out how policies and decision making impact the culture is to circulate within it and to invite real feedback. “Here the staff never feels nervous about trustees,” says one faculty member. “They’re clearly here to help us.”
- Inspiration: Those who want to build school cultures of integrity should and must leverage the support of the trustees. In most cases, the reasons for becoming a trustee stem more from ethical experiences in school than from academic ones, and trustees are likely to be strong champions of this direction. Without them, it will be difficult to make headway in a positive direction. As one school head asserts, “Any culture shift has to start at the trustee/board level.”

Finding 6: Tone at the Top—The School Head As Exemplar

Much has been made of leadership and its influence on organizational culture, and this message is certainly underscored in the schools we visited. Heads obviously have an enormous opportunity to set the priorities and tone of the school—and a daunting responsibility to do so. The school heads who seem most effective in this regard are the genuine truth-seekers. Those who view deep learning as life’s primary enterprise build commitment to ethics and values in everything they do.

Connection: According to our interviews and focus groups, the head of school position is the lynchpin for promoting trust within the school culture. As one student at a suburban day school explains, “The ethics and character of our headmaster (even though I don’t know him [personally]) are exactly what they expect us as students to have. He demonstrates all of the ethical values.” Commenting on the school head at a rural boarding school, a teacher remarks, “I’ve watched him. His ethics just filter down to the whole staff.”

Description: At the schools in this study, everybody seems to know where the head stands on issues, and where he or she will be when needed at a personal or political level. Responses—from both faculty and students in our focus groups and our early surveys-- consistently describe the head as a person of integrity. They also report a sense of strong support from the head, and a strong sense of resolve. Interestingly, even students who comment that they don’t have much personal connection to the school head, still describe him or her as having a high level of integrity. The moral tone does not necessarily come about through personal interactions, but still comes through loudly and clearly.

We asked about how these priorities get telegraphed. “Every closing ceremony, every speech, he talks about how there’s a privilege, an obligation to help others,” one teacher explains. “They’re challenged to go out and make a difference.” Another faculty member notes that “the leader is key. He’s in the dining hall, at the events, participating.”

Are speeches and participation at school functions enough to set the focus on building trust and on upholding values and ethics? We notice a strikingly consistent attitude toward power in the descriptions of heads of these exemplary schools. As one faculty member puts it, the head is “not into authoritarian stuff at all. [There’s an] effort to help people understand that power doesn’t come from position.” The head of an urban day school explains, “When I started out, I thought I had to be in control of everything. Now I get joy in watching people grow and make decisions.” A student at another school observes, “Instead of checking if you’re following the rules, he asks about your day.”

When heads describe how they achieve a less authoritarian, more collaborative and trusting role, they consistently bring up the students: “That’s the drug that keeps you here—seeing the development of the kids,” one comments. “I try to think of myself as an educator and as a parent,” another remarks. A faculty member adds, “When you watch the head, you know he is here to focus on the kids.”

Replication: The structures and practices that contribute to setting the tone largely relate to building collegiality and a sense of community.

- Promote access to the process for anyone impacted by the issue or decision. “Rarely is a decision made without consulting the staff.”
- Model and promote informal opportunities for professional growth. “Informal time is when collegiality develops, and students are always the focus.”
- Admit your own failings. “Own mistakes and be honest. None of us has the answer. We’re all learners.”
- Actively demonstrate an interest and confidence in moral reasoning. “There’s a path of logical reasoning that gets you to an ethical solution.”

- Decide on deepest priorities, and seek them actively and courageously: “It comes down to what does the head *want* when he walks down the hall. Do I care what the students think? Do I want them to be able to talk to me, and not be afraid of me?”
- Seek out the kind of adults you want in the culture. “[When hiring] I ask them to describe their understanding of discipline. I ask, ‘How do you integrate ethical j Page 17 solving into your class work?’”
- Get clear on the vision and values, and get good at communicating them. As one trustee put it, “The head has to have this clear and be able to articulate it to trustees.”
- Truly self-examine and align attitude with values. “Faculty members are not employees—they *are* the school. They have to be regarded with enormous respect because the life of the mind is such an extraordinary gift.”
- Invite feedback. “Involve a group to look for the underlying value system—what situations arose and how did [we] handle them?”

Finding 7: Tolerance for Ambiguity: “Doubt” is Not a Four-Letter Word

Across all the schools we studied, leaders, teachers, and students demonstrate a common zeal for new intellectual territory. While critical thinking often leads discussions in unpredicted directions, faculties embrace this opportunity instead of shying away. Teachers dedicated to truly participating as learners in their school community welcome this opportunity for discovery alongside their students.

Connection: Examining these exemplary schools leads to appreciating how vitally important it is for everyone in a school community to be an interested, active learner. Adults in these environments seem to seek new learning experiences wherever they pop up and from whatever the source. As a result, these schools are highly collaborative in feel and highly energetic in intellectual pursuits. Integrity of thought seems a consistent expectation of both students and adults.

Description: The schools we studied actively embrace opportunities to grapple with the gray areas of human existence. These schools are places where “uncertainty” is treated as an opportunity for learning, and where very little is reduced to a formula. This comfort level with ambiguity seems to promote or develop teachers who:

- Feel comfortable fielding and posing tough questions that may not have a clear answer—frequently from the realm of ethics.
- Welcome a variety of ideas, are happy to think outside the box, and model the active critical-thinking skills their students need to develop.
- Make conceptual connections across content areas, and encourage their students to do the same.
- Don’t shy from conflict, but rather enjoy muddling through opposing ideas and using reasoned judgment to determine an outcome.

As one faculty member at a suburban boarding school puts it: “There’s an acknowledgement that this work we’re doing is unbelievably messy. We learn to expose our human side to each other.”

Inherent to their success in addressing new, uncertain or unanticipated class work and discussion is a need for solid teacher competence. “It’s a school about devotion to a subject,” one faculty member explains in characterizing class work at an urban day school. “It’s a security in your knowledge of the topic. If you don’t have command of the discipline, you won’t feel comfortable leading students somewhere new.” One student remarks that “teaching’s not just their job—they *love* to teach and it shows.” Another notes that “our teachers are human—they don’t try to be above us. [But] they’re great minds, great thinkers.”

Replication: When queried about how to build comfort levels with ambiguity especially in class work, many leaders and experienced teachers described “sideways” approaches.

- Provide relaxed and real time-and-space opportunities for adult critical thinking. “I think the key ingredient here is *time*. We build in time to get together and chat ... or *not* chat.”
- Promote the questions you want students to hear. “Teachers are comfortable asking and thinking, ‘Why?’”
- Find the thinkers. “Teachers are selected for their ability to ask questions.”
- Expect higher-order thinking to ground real life. “The rule itself should answer the *why*. Everyone knows the *why* behind each rule.”
- Treat ambiguity as a positive. “I used to say I came from a black-and-white to a gray culture, but in fact, it’s so colorful!”
- Resist reducing to black-and-white or right-versus-wrong. “Authentic contemplation is very comfortable with complexity—it doesn’t flatten everything, doesn’t hammer everything down to dogma. It allows time [to ask], ‘What’s worth living for? Dying for?’”
- Make critical thinking conclusive. “‘It depends’ is not the answer to everything.”

Finding 8: Professional Development from the Ranks

At the schools we visited, teachers and administrators engage in both a lively examination of colleagues' choices and practices, and steady personal and professional reflection. Teachers themselves are the primary resource for professional learning growth.

Connection: “Our system definitely fosters the belief that all individuals—students and faculty—are important,” one faculty member explains. “You’re rewarded for creative thought, just like you reward students.” Faculty report that being trusted to contribute to colleagues’ growth increases commitment and enthusiasm, and sets up a positive learning dynamic. Teachers are fired up by constant opportunities to learn from each other, to experiment and learn more, and to share this learning with others.

Description: In the schools we visited, a great deal of professional development takes place through structures that draw from individual teachers and contribute back to the whole. As one faculty member at a suburban boarding school explains, “It’s a 24-hour day, but I don’t resent that. I think [faculty] all feel protected, we all feel valued and that makes you want to give back. Everyone gets to feel what it’s like to be a teacher-leader at one time or another. We feel thrilled about being able to bring [a colleague] along, just as you would a student. We have friendships that cross lines—cross academic departments, cross age groups.”

In our observation, environments encouraging collaboration rather than competition are better at fostering this inspiring, positive feedback loop. The result is deeper expertise, deeper commitment to learning, and deeper trust in personal abilities and in the culture itself. Faculty report that this approach relies on commitment to truth-seeking; it’s a process of constant self-examination and progress. “A lot of schools think they’ve got it right—and they call that ‘tradition,’” one teacher muses. Another remarks that “continual evolution is a crucial part of who we are.”

Replication: The following structures or practices contribute to the ongoing professional growth of educators in many of these exemplary schools.

- Educators take responsibility. “When something isn’t working for kids, the question asked is, ‘What can you [the adult] do that might help this situation?’”
- Growth is an ongoing and shared responsibility. “At curriculum area meetings every month, professional development is always at least half the meeting. ‘What’s going on with electronic forums’ or ‘who knows about mind-mapping?’”
- Growth and learning takes time. “As with student learning, the key ingredient for effective professional development is time: ‘Time to get together [as faculty].’” Explains one teacher, in describing successful efforts of his school leadership, “The administration protects that time.”
- Faculty meetings are a source for learning and growth. “Faculty meetings are permeated with provocative questions, not nuts and bolts.”
- Cohorts provide support. Faculty form into small groups that stick together for years, to plan and carry out their professional growth together. “I want them to be reflective, to learn from each other, just the way we expect this of our students through collaborative or project-driven learning.”
- Mentorship is professional development. “We meet twice a month and just talk about what to do.”
- New faculty members are mentored as deliberately and with as much care as are students. “We have division heads who really believe in the educational process of *stumbling*. They nurture new faculty right from the start. [And they’re] very unambiguous in articulating what they believe.”
- Students remain the focus. “There are set things you learn to do with kids. Every week, we meet together *only* to talk about kids and issues. The format is loose: ‘Ok, who’s got kid issues?’”

Finding 9: Authentic Student Input

In all the schools we visited, there was a strong emphasis on hearing from and learning with students as integral drivers in school improvement. The sincere interest from adults results in strong student participation and collaboration across the school culture.

Connection: Most high school educators know that involving students in the school community builds their buy-in. But too often, students' roles are deliberately superficial and cosmetic, never really impacting on adult plans or decisions. The exemplary schools we studied view students as vital agents in school improvement, not as a means to the end of buy-in. They approach students with a genuine interest in their ideas. Students feel trusted and valued, as they contribute to the process of positively transforming their school.

Description: Faculty and administration often go to students first in forming plans and strategies for these schools. This is done thoughtfully, with attention to the balance between authentic roles for students and a respect for their development. Jobs and decisions are not casually foisted on youngsters so that adults can wash their hands of responsibilities. Students are carefully placed in positions of authority with adults ever present in the wings, and students do not become scapegoats if things go awry. The approach does not go unnoticed by students we met. "The key element of the school is that kids have ownership and are really listened to," a suburban boarding school student remarks. "You also have all the room in the world to succeed, and to fail." At an urban day school, a student notes, "Because it's a student-run system, everyone really respects it."

Authenticity takes all forms, and opportunities to develop it abound in a school setting. According to our observations at these exemplary schools, the key catalyst is trust, starting right at the classroom level. "I think you need to build an environment in which the [students] want to be authentic," says one teacher. "Ultimately, that builds on respect and tolerance. So you really need to have a classroom where the [students] know they're respected if

they're themselves." This kind of classroom can be intimidating, especially for old-school or brand new teachers. A veteran teacher at an urban day school comments, "It can be scary as staff, because you relinquish control but empower the kids." But no teacher we interviewed wistfully looks back on the days of didactic classroom instruction—the successes of collaboration and participation in these exemplary settings makes the case for change, especially when it comes to a focus on students' ethical development. "It seems to me if you want anyone to make choices that aren't self-centered," one teacher explains, "they have to feel part of the process."

Replication: The following structures and practices seem to contribute to an authentic student role at the schools we studied:

- Make sure each child has at least one leadership role. "They all give [in some way], so they all have a sense of belonging."
- Depend on students' perceptions and information. Students are invited to say, "Here's what we think is the state of the school," and, "Here are the opportunities we're missing."
- Let students be the messengers. In the case of upholding values to address behavior issues, students can effectively address issues before they become issues. "The idea is to be preventative, not reactionary."
- Let students tell the story. Older students educate new students formally and informally: they participate directly in the creative process of communicating "the way we do things here."
- Let students be the champions. Student-led assemblies sharpen the focus on the schools' priorities. Student-led parent conferences make learning more meaningful for everyone. "When you can take ownership in the school, you take it seriously."
- Explicitly align the right thing with the right reason. "We're not just about getting kids into college. [We talk to] ninth graders and build this notion that you are honest with yourself, others, and colleges. We work really hard with parents from the beginning to help them understand why the 'college pressure' is counter-productive."

Finding 10: Growth, Not Punishment

It comes as no surprise that these schools—so dedicated to ethics, reasoning, and learning—view poor choice-making as yet another opportunity for growth. Their disciplinary approaches serve as vibrant, literal enactments of the commitment to the values, community, and truth-seeking that this study examines.

Connection: Students are succinct about trust in these learning environments. “We’re given a lot of freedom, so you have to be ethical,” says one at a suburban boarding school. “[You have] freedom until trust is broken, then you get rules.” We noted motivation and pride in students’ attitudes to this approach. Many students mention the sharp contrast to more traditional discipline. In other schools, as one student notes, adults “assumed you were going to do something wrong, then increased responsibility if you didn’t. Here they assume you’re going to be responsible.”

Description: The schools we studied have developed processes to respond to wrongdoing that focus on learning rather than on punishment. All the schools in our study address disciplinary issues through a student-led and frequently student-elected council of some kind. Some of these judiciary boards are composed entirely of students. In other cases, adults also serve but are often out-numbered by the students.

Consistently, those interviewed describe these student roles as highly lauded and sought-after positions, and the student election as a process that generally works. That is, students elected are not necessarily the most outgoing or popular, but they tend to have reputations of high personal responsibility. Adults and students have similar explanations for this phenomenon. When facing a judicial board, students really want reasonable people listening to their case. They need people of integrity, not necessarily friends.

The judicial group recommends consequences to fit the crime, and students in several of these schools are tasked with designing creative community service-type activities that ensure the message hits

home. The point of discipline is learning. Students are held accountable for their behavior, but as one school head explains, “You punish the sin, not the sinner.” At another school, a faculty member comments, “We say from the beginning we’re open to making mistakes. We’re here to guide you. The idea isn’t to embarrass. It’s more, ‘What is the root cause?’” Another faculty member shrugs and smiles. “This is a laboratory,” he says, “We’re all making mistakes.”

The dominant focus of these judicial boards is evidence of progress, particularly heightened awareness about how individual choices impact the school at large. Students mention that frequently the group asks “how a disciplinary measure affects the community...how it instills morals and ethics and establishes a real community.”

At several schools, students and faculty mentioned being more interested in progress made than in the original wrongdoing. “It’s really about what you do when it’s time to face the music,” one faculty member explains. “We’re forgiving, but we look for the act of taking responsibility, stepping forward and being honest when they’ve made a mistake.” Another teacher notes that “our honor code is like moral guidelines for life. It’s not so much what you’ve done, but how you respond—what that choice brings out about your character. We emphasize that you have to be responsible for your own actions. If you’re willing to change, you’ll get support.”

Interestingly, rules and regulations play a role of varying prominence from campus to campus in this study. At some, there is a strong emphasis on kinds of infractions, associated demerits, and the system of enforcement, all of which strongly feature in students’ descriptions of the way their school works. At others, rules form a background framework and students hardly mention them. “It’s subtle but powerful: the school doesn’t have a lot of rules,” one head explains. “We give students minimal structure and let them deal with it.”

But in all cases, the disciplinary process is grounded in moral reasoning and sensible, caring response. “[We] want it to be a discussion,” one teacher explains. “If you make a mistake, it’s *always* an educational conversation.” No wonder students describe their judicial process enthusiastically rather than cynically. One student volunteers, “I think I’ve become more

reasonable here. I've become stronger in my decision-making [because of the emphasis on reasoning]." Another remarks, "I feel safe here. You know they're just looking out for you."

Replication: The following are some specific practices or recommendations about approaches to discipline from the schools we studied:

- Make sure procedures align with the school's underlying values. "Everything is a message: the processes you set up, they're a message."
- Invest up front. "We take a lot of time educating those coming in."
- Make the process reliable. "We've worked hard to establish a very systematic process—a predictable process becomes more of an educational tool."
- Build relationships in advance of problems. "I'm an administrator, but I teach classes and I really wouldn't have it any other way. I build a relationship in the classroom *before* there might be a need to come before me as administrator."
- Take responsibility for complexity. "You just can't allow teachers to become mechanical about discipline—you have to remind them it's not a mechanical process."
- Uphold principles, not just rulebooks. "I almost always ask, 'What is the most appropriate consequence' rather than thinking black and white. If the goal really is always to educate the student, then you want a constitution, not a manual in a school—so there's room for gray and 'case by case.'"

Summary of Replicable Practices

The following is a list of the many replicable practices from this report. Practices are categorized according to key findings described in this report.

1. Make ethics and values a cross-cutting dimension of school culture:

- Emphasize *play*.
- Recognize and embrace the individuality of learners.
- Ask “why” as often as possible.
- Explicitly teach self-reflection.
- Encourage personalized learning experiences in place of “one size fits all.”
- Plan carefully for each individual learner.
- Avoid standardized content—it’s an invitation to cheat.

2. Promote critical thinking at every opportunity:

- Actively integrate examination of individual differences
- Ask “What is the decision s/he *should* have made?” whenever possible.
- Avoid lecturing. Pose questions.
- Ask students open questions that lead them to make a point of view and defend it.
- Build criteria into how students build a point of view: Do they use the material and learning to defend their point of view?
- Teach discourse skills and help students verbalize their opinions.
- Teach toward a range of cognitive skills, and be explicit.
- Avoid squeezing 21st century learning into 20th century assessment traditions.

3. Build relationships to build trust:

- Implement student mentoring programs to help new students learn to:
 - Make sense of daily routine and expectations and reduce stress.
 - Break down broad goals and tasks into doable steps.
 - Celebrate accomplishments, however small.
- Reflect and provide perspective for new or younger students.

- Create mentoring programs that pair adults and students over four years.
- Deliberately build reflection into the mentoring program.
- Hold one-on-one meetings with each incoming student—without parents on hand.
- Share personal hobbies and interests with students to foster relationships.
- Promote service learning, community service days, and other events that emphasize generosity.
- Consider formalizing the signing of a school code of ethics for all students and adults.

4. Promote a culture of open feedback:

- Devote faculty meetings and other settings to “speaking your mind.”
- Frequently reexamine curriculum.
- Enlist teachers to design the student report card and portfolio system.
- Include informal feedback, videotaping and feedback, peer review and formal self-evaluation in the teacher evaluation process.
- Set up small faculty groups to mentor and support each other, meeting on a regular basis.
- Expect faculty to weigh in on decisions that impact them or the direction of the school.
- Reduce bureaucracy through whole-faculty focus on substantive leadership issues.
- Encourage teacher freedom and autonomy through direct communication and ongoing self-examination.

5. Engage trustees in a focus on trust:

- Promote transparency by working in the open and not behind closed doors.
- Telegraph serious commitment to school cultures of integrity by modeling sincerity, compassion, and other core ethical values. Find opportunities to demonstrate these values in interactions with others.
- Seek constant outward/inward communication with other school stakeholders and use these opportunities to forward the vision of the school.
- Line up plenty of opportunities to circulate and meaningfully connect with students and faculty.
- Become the source and springboard for positive change: “Any culture shift has to start at the trustee/board level.”

6. Establish the tone at the top:

- Promote access to process for anyone impacted by an issue or decision.
- Model and promote informal opportunities for professional growth.
- Admit your own failings.
- Actively demonstrate an interest and confidence in moral reasoning.
- Decide on deepest priorities. Seek them actively and courageously.
- Explain and seek the kind of adults you want in the culture.
- Get clear on the vision and values, and get good at communicating them.
- Truly self-examine and align attitude with values.
- Invite feedback.

7. Promote tolerance for ambiguity:

- Provide relaxed and real time-and-space opportunities for adult critical thinking.
- Promote the questions you want students to hear.
- Find the thinkers.
- Expect higher order thinking to ground real life.
- Treat ambiguity as a positive.
- Resist reducing to black-and-white.
- Make critical thinking conclusive.

8. Draw from the ranks for professional development:

- Encourage educators to take responsibility for teaching each other.
- Make professional growth an ongoing and shared responsibility.
- Provide the quality time that growth and learning take.
- Make faculty meetings a consistent source for learning and growth.

- Organize cohorts to provide formal professional support.
- Urge teachers to develop curricula that speak to their passions.
- Organize student mentorship so that it feeds professional development.
- Recognize adult mentorship as professional development.
- Mentor new faculty as deliberately and with as much care as students.
- Always keep the focus on students.

9. Trust students with authentic input:

- Make sure each child has at least one leadership role.
- Draw on students' perceptions and information regarding the state of the school.
- Let students be the messengers for upholding values and ethics.
- Let students tell the story about "the way we do things here."
- Let students be the champions for school priorities like ethical development.
- Explicitly align the right thing with the right reason.

10. Make mistakes an opportunity for growth, not punishment:

- Make sure procedures align with the school's underlying values.
- Invest up front in educating newcomers.
- Make the process reliable and systematic.
- Build relationships in advance of problems.
- Take responsibility for complexity and avoid mechanical discipline.
- Uphold a constitution, not a manual, leaving room for gray and "case by case."