EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taking RESPONSIBILITY

Standards for Ethical and Responsible Behavior in Maine Schools and Communities

www.state.me.us/education/cep/homepage.htm

"Children more times than not will do what they are shown and not what they are told."

16 year-old girl

"Ethics are really important to me because they help me make good decisions. It's really important for me to respect people and get that same kind of respect back."

A High School Sophomore

"You have to live them [values] in order to enforce them."

A Business Owner and Father of 1

"Respect is to honor or approve of others whether you like them or not."

Sixth grade student

"My generation and generations in the future need more role models. I think that if we had them we would not have half the problems we have."

Student interviewer

"Being ethical is not an event—it is who you are."

A High School Sophomore

"Instructors of youth in public or private institutions shall use their best endeavors to impress on the minds of the children and youth committed to their care and instruction the principles of morality and justice and a sacred regard for truth; love of country, humanity and a universal benevolence;... and to lead those under their care, as their ages and capacities admit, into a particular understanding of the tendency of such virtues to preserve and perfect a republican constitution, secure the blessings of liberty and to promote their future happiness."
Maine Law, 1821, as amended [Currently Title 20, Section 1221]

Statewide Standards for Behavior

"In consultation with organizations representing school boards, school administrators, teachers, parents and other interested local officials and community members, the commissioner shall develop statewide standards for responsible and ethical student behavior."

-enacted Public Law 1999, Chapter 351

Local Codes of Conduct

"With input from educators, administrators, parents, students and community members, each school board shall adopt a district-wide student code of conduct consistent with the statewide standards for student behavior developed under section 254, subsection 11. The student code of conduct must:
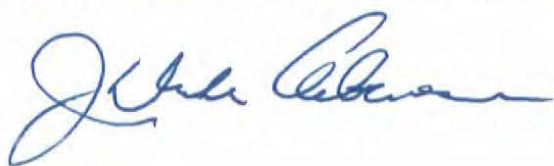
A. Define unacceptable student behavior;

B. Establish standards of student responsibility for behavior;

C. Prescribe consequences for violation of the student code of conduct, including first-time violations, when appropriate; ...

-Maine Statutes, Title 20-A, Section 1001(15): Adoption of student code of conduct (enacted Public Law 1999, Chapter 351)

A Message from the Commissioner of Education

It is with great enthusiasm that I endorse this report and the standards identified by the Commission. In this document, *Taking Responsibility*, the Commission has connected standards for ethical and responsible behavior to Maine's *Common Core of Learning* and the Guiding Principles of Maine's *Learning Results*, landmark documents that articulate the "ends" of learning - what students need to know, be able to do, and what attitudes they should reflect. This report identifies core principles and best practices for schools and communities to use in creating, practicing, enforcing, and assessing expectations for all students, enabling them to develop as ethical, responsible, and involved citizens. Further, this report defines the attributes of a healthy and sustainable process for schools and communities as they work collaboratively to develop their own core values and codes of conduct.

Now, communities across the state should work in earnest to mobilize their educators, school staff, students, parents, and citizens to adapt and implement these standards. The culture and climate of schools can begin to change immediately, if all involved make this commitment. Most importantly, this document is not for schools and educators alone. Community members and parents must actively engage in understanding and applying the guidance this report provides. Many communities have already begun, and we hope this document will energize and illuminate their efforts, and spark others to action.

J. Duke Albanese

A CALL TO ACTION

Maine Values

Maine is a unique and vital community. Underpinning this community has always been a profound sense of values. Civility, common-sense, frugality, responsibility, independence, integrity—these and other values are so important to our basic character that, though they have defined us in the eyes of the world, we scarcely ever remark upon them.

Our values have made Maine a truly special place to live and raise a family. Above all, we value our children. In 1999, Maine was named the best state in which to raise a child and was recognized as the top educational system in America.

Although Maine is still one of the safest places in America, teachers and students in our schools are telling us that irresponsible, disrespectful or violent behavior threatens their sense of personal safety or undermines their ability to teach and to learn. They see youth violence and vandalism, bomb threats, lack of respect for authority, bullying, an increase in hate crimes and bigotry, use of foul language, and self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse and suicide.

When 40,000 Maine students were given the opportunity to voice their perceptions, the *Students Speak* survey found:

- 20% of students disagree with the statement, "I feel safe at school."
- Nearly 50% of students claim that other students say insulting or hurtful things to them.
- 40% of students disagree with the statement, "School rules are enforced fairly."
- 20% of students do not believe that teachers respect their thoughts or value their opinions.
- 45% of students disagree with the statement, "Students show respect for teachers."

-University of Maine College of Education and Human Development (2000).

Maine students in the elementary grades report that they are frequently teased and bullied. About 40% of Maine third-graders say that they had been called hurtful names, hit, or were kicked or pushed at least monthly or more frequently. (Maine Project Against Bullying). For some students, harassment worsens as they get older. Gay, lesbian and bisexual youths experience pervasive victimization both verbally and physically. (Maine Children's Alliance: 24).

Some of our youth are making bad decisions. They either lack basic values or fail to apply them. Although these negative behaviors are the exceptions, even a few such bad decisions severely disrupt our schools. In the face of such challenges, too often we grapple with how to punish misbehavior, while ignoring the issue of how to prevent it.

Our schools must prepare students for academic and professional success, but they also must prepare students for life. Graduating students must be able to live constructively in society, to deal with frustrations and challenges, to communicate, to coexist, to care, and to make tough decisions about what is right or wrong. Few would agree that our schools have succeeded if they produce students with academic knowledge but without the ability or the will to be responsible and ethical adults.

The challenge we address has many causes but only one path to a solution. All of us—students, educators, parents, and communities— must take responsibility in order to make change. Our schools are on the front lines, but they cannot do it alone. Only in partnership with parents and community—and, most importantly, with the students themselves—can our schools meet the challenge.

Some may ask, "Whose values will we teach?" The answer, we believe, is simple: "Maine's." Our personal values may be rooted in our unique experiences, but we share a common core. For our communities, for the larger Maine community, and for practically every community around the world, there is a core of ethical values that we can identify, without which our civility and our society cannot sustain themselves.

It is not enough for us to assume our common values—we must identify them, talk about them, and nurture them. Communities must set expectations and define core values. Schools must be empowered to teach, reinforce and nurture students in these basic values. Adults must model attitudes and behaviors that reflect those values. Students must hold themselves and their peers to high expectations, and be equipped with the skills to use these values to make good choices.

We have already taken the most important step: we have begun. The Maine Legislature has called for the development of "statewide standards for responsible and ethical student behavior."

The Legislature has also called for every community to translate these standards into codes of conduct. This community work must involve large numbers of citizens, students, and educators using these standards to create codes of conduct embodying both their shared expectations for attitudes and behavior, and the consequences of violating those expectations.

An Approach for Maine

Our path to a solution builds on the best of Maine and borrows from the best around the country and the world.

Two central points about our approach for Maine:

First, our approach describes a long-term process of change in attitudes, structures, and climate in our schools and communities. However, we believe that the changes we describe can have an immediate positive impact on how our schools look and feel and what happens there. Schools should expect and strive for some recognizable results now, even if—realistically—it may take time for this positive improvement to predominate.

Second, our approach emphasizes expectations and education, not simply strengthening the rigor of conventional punishments and discipline. Concrete consequences and discipline have an essential role in teaching and maintaining responsible behavior. Immediate intervention is the first step in preventing the continuation of unacceptable behavior. The disciplinary process itself must teach students to make better choices. It should not be an exercise in humiliation, hurt, or exclusion. We believe a successful approach for Maine:

- **Must be grounded in our history and our community.**
- **Must hear the voices of our students.**
- **Must be based in Maine's *Learning Results*.**
- **Must address the whole climate, and the systemic and structural issues in our schools and communities.**
- **Must empower educators, parents, community members, and especially students to expect, teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior and build on what is already working.**
- **Must be measured and evaluated.**

Ethics and Achievement

Student ethics, attitudes, behavior, and character are essential outcomes of our educational mission, and are indispensable to the achievement of the standards in Maine's *Learning Results*.

In 1996, the Maine Legislature adopted the *Learning Results* standards for all Maine students educated at public expense. The Guiding Principles of the *Learning Results* describe what every student should know and be able to do upon completion of a public education.

The Guiding Principles of Maine's *Learning Results* go beyond academic standards to address the personal capaci-

ties our youth will need to thrive in an increasingly complex society and economy. We cannot successfully educate students to be creative and practical problem solvers, responsible and involved citizens, and collaborative and quality workers without teaching the underpinnings of ethics and character.

The *Learning Results* builds on and follows the spirit of Maine's *Common Core of Learning* (1990). The *Common Core* addressed the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need, and identified Personal and Global Stewardship as one of four unifying categories that cut across individual academic disciplines. In rich language, the *Common Core* defined stewardship to include a capacity to:

- Accept responsibility for personal decisions and actions;
- Demonstrate academic honesty and respond to challenges with courage and integrity;
- Respect the human rights of all people; and
- Understand the ethical dimensions of citizenship, love, friendship, and parenting.

The *Learning Results* consists of content standards and performance indicators in eight academic content areas. The standards and indicators begin to implicitly define standards of ethical and responsible behavior. The specific skills and aptitudes described in the area of Career Preparation, Health and Physical Education, and Social Studies reflect responsibility, teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, stress management, community involvement, tolerance and inclusion, and more.

Learning Results Guiding Principles

Every student should be...

IV. A Responsible and Involved Citizen Who:

1. Recognizes the power of personal participation to affect the community and demonstrates participation skills;

2. Understands the importance of accepting responsibility for personal decisions and actions;

3. Knows the means of achieving personal and community health and well-being; and

4. Recognizes and understands the diverse nature of society.

Hallmarks of an Ethical and Responsible School Culture

The following Hallmarks are essential to the creation of a caring environment in which ethical and responsible behavior can take root and flourish. Ethical and responsible student behavior is the desired outcome. These Hallmarks are the characteristics of school culture—the structures, expectations and actions—that will lead to this outcome. They should guide the development of each local school district's code of conduct, and the actions necessary to support and enforce the codes. It is also important for communities to recognize that no single Hallmark stands alone. These Hallmarks are meant to function together and are all essential characteristics of an ethical and responsible school culture.

Core Values

A. Collectively identified core values are the cornerstone of all school and community efforts to create and sustain an ethical and responsible school culture.

Community Process and Participation

B. The entire community is welcomed and meaningfully involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

C. Students are welcomed and involved in the process of value identification, standard setting and the enforcement of standards.

Adult Roles and Responsibilities

D. There is an active and genuine partnership between schools and parents.

E. All adults who interact with students, in and out of school, strive to model and reinforce ethical and responsible behavior.

F. Teachers are authorized and expected to teach, model and enforce ethical and responsible behavior.

Integration and Inclusion

G. Efforts to promote ethical and responsible behavior are an integrated part of the school's curriculum and culture, and are not viewed as "extra."

H. Ethical and responsible student behavior is actively promoted and recognized.

I. Teaching and learning ethical and responsible behavior begins in early childhood.

J. Students apply and demonstrate principles of ethical and responsible behavior in the classroom and beyond the classroom.

Disciplinary Process

K. The disciplinary process is interventionist, inclusive, impartial, consistent, and educational.

Outcomes and Assessment

L. Outcomes are well-defined and assessed regularly.

For Sample Strategies associated with each Hallmark, view the full-length version of this report at www.state.me.us/education/cep/homepage.htm

Standards for Ethical and Responsible Behavior

CORE VALUES

AN ETHICAL PERSON IS...

Respect → *Respectful of Others and Self*

Honesty → *Honest in all Academic Endeavors and Interpersonal Relationships*

Compassion → *Compassionate in Dealing with the Limitations and Sufferings of Others*

Fairness → *Fair in Dealing With Others*

Responsibility → *Responsible for Personal Actions as an Individual and a Member of the Community*

Courage → *Courageous in the Face of Ethical Challenges*

A person who is RESPECTFUL of others and self

DOES...

- Appreciate and honor diversity.
- Tolerate views and beliefs that differ from personal views and beliefs.
- Support and contribute to healthful habits and safe environments for self and others.

"Respect is a unifying, universal value."

A High School Student

DOES NOT...

- Engage in harmful behavior such as substance abuse or sexual promiscuity.
- Participate in activities that have the potential to cause physical or emotional harm.
- Make derogatory statements about another's gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class, religion, disability, intellect or appearance.

A person who is HONEST in all academic endeavors and interpersonal relationships

DOES...

- Seek to speak the truth, respectfully.
- Understand the difference between collaboration and collusion.
- Recognize that trust is an essential component of all relationships, including relationships with peers, parents, teachers, and co-workers.

"I think respect and understanding is all we need. With those two qualities, all other issues needed for a good environment would fall in place."
A High School Sophomore

DOES NOT...

- Plagiarize the work of others, including fellow students, siblings, or parents.
- Engage in secretive, sneaky, fraudulent or manipulative behavior.
- Take or damage the property of others.

A person who is COMPASSIONATE in dealing with the limitations and sufferings of others

DOES...

- Treat all people with kindness.
- Possess an ability to empathize with fellow human beings.
- Lend a helping hand to those in need.

DOES NOT ...

- Tease or taunt those who are different.
- Seek to judge others, but rather seeks to understand others in terms of our common humanity.
- Seek to draw undue attention to another's shortcomings.

A person who is FAIR in dealing with others

DOES...

- Seek to strike a balance between the needs and desires of the individual and the needs and desires of the community.

- Understand the distinction between justice and vengeance.

- Treat others the way she or he would like to be treated.

DOES NOT...

- Engage in malicious criticism of others.

- Seek to steal from or cheat others.

- Attempt to further one's own interests or desires at the expense of another.

> *"Treat people like you want to be treated."*
> A Fifth Grade Student

A person who is RESPONSIBLE for personal actions as an individual and a member of the community

DOES...

- Acknowledge making a mistake.

- Accept the consequences of personal actions or failures to act.

- Report harmful or hateful behavior to a trustworthy authority figure.

DOES NOT...

- Evade the just consequences of personal actions.

- Seek to advance one's own interests or desires at the expense of the school or the larger community.

- Rationalize or make excuses for unacceptable behavior.

A person who is COURAGEOUS in the face of ethical challenges

DOES...

- The right thing even if it's not popular.

- Seek the advice and/or assistance of a trustworthy adult when making difficult decisions or when in a dangerous or troublesome situation.

- Hold high aspirations for self and community.

DOES NOT...

- Say, "I cannot", but instead says, "I will try," when faced with difficult challenges.

- Stand idly by while others engage in unethical or harmful behavior.

- Sacrifice aspirations when confronted by academic or ethical setbacks.

> *"...if there is some person getting really beaten up and stuff, help them and tell other people that you shouldn't do this or that."*
> An 8 Year -Old Child

A Process for Community Value Identification

It is essential that communities come together to identify those values that matter to them and then translate those values into standards of behavior.

The question, "Whose values will you teach?", often is posed when the issue of teaching values arises. Common values can be identified and embraced by a community; it is not difficult, in fact, to identify core values common to us all.

Core values, such as honesty and compassion, have repeatedly been found to transcend political ideologies, religious convictions, and cultural differences.

What kind of process can the community use to identify, define, and put values into action?

By engaging in a process that is deliberative and inclusive, students, school staff, and community members will develop a sense of ownership with respect to local codes of conduct. The result will be communities, schools, and students empowered to enforce the code, and committed to practicing it.

KEY FEATURES OF THE PROCESS

- The process is inclusive of all community stakeholders.
- The process is deliberative and cooperative, not oppositional.

GOALS OF THE PROCESS

- To identify shared community values;
- To define values in operational and behavioral dimensions; and
- To put values into action through agreed-upon strategies and tactics.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Objectively identify community members. Differences in lifestyles or politics are not a justification for exclusion from this process.

2. Convene a diverse and representative group of community members to discuss and identify community values and expectations for behavior.

3. Ask community members to imagine that the task is to choose a certain number of values to be engraved above the main entries of all local schools, as the values the community wants for itself and the schools' students.

4. As a large group, brainstorm as many values or qualities as possible that describe what it means to be a good person. Include everybody's ideas.

5. Ask each person to write a list of no more than eight values that he or she believes to be the most important. Ideally, these values would be distinct from each other and would represent only those qualities essential to being an ethical human being.

6. Divide into small groups where individuals can share their lists and collectively narrow the choices down to one list of no more than eight values that everyone agrees to.

7. Reconvene the large group and have each smaller group post its list on a wall. As a large group, work together until a single list has been agreed to. Remember, space over the entrance is limited, so the final list should have only 5 to 8 words. You will find that many of the values overlap and can be consolidated.

8. When a final list has been agreed on, develop and agree to several behavioral indicators as standards for each value. For example, how does an honest person behave? How does a respectful person behave?

9. Identify potential outcomes that will result from consistently engaging in the behaviors just discussed. What are hallmarks of how an ethical and responsible school looks and feels—to students, to teachers, to parents, to the community?

10. Develop a community or school action plan. Share the recommendations with others and put the values into action. What practices will we adopt to achieve our goals: at home? at school? and in the community?

Everyone Taking Responsibility

This report is not just about teachers, or students, or parents. Rather, it is about community and people in a variety of roles working together to improve the culture in Maine schools. If you are still wondering, "What can I do?", and "What are my responsibilities?", here are just a few of the actions that each of us as individuals can take in our varied roles in our communities:

➤ School Boards

- Authorize teachers to teach community values and model ethical and responsible behavior through the inclusion of ethics in the curriculum and through support of staff with time and resources necessary to integrate this teaching.

- Evaluate discipline policies and make recommendations to ensure both that interventions exist to stop negative behaviors and protect the safety of students, and that an educational or restorative component connects discipline to values, accountability, and prevention.

- Support schools' efforts by developing partnerships with citizen groups and business owners in the community.

➤ Administrators

- Create and support student councils that are not merely tokens, but an integral and respected part of the school's decision–making process.
- Support teachers and staff in their teaching of community values and modeling ethical and responsible behavior by making a strong personal and professional commitment to these values and standards.
- Work as advocates to provide the time and resources for meaningful professional development in the area of values/character education.
- Promote meaningful recognition of teachers, staff, and students who exemplify community values and standards of ethical and responsible behavior.

➤ Teachers and Staff

- Model community values in all interactions with students, parents, fellow teachers, and other school staff, and expect the same in return.
- Use an integrative approach to teaching community values and standards for ethical and responsible behavior.
- Provide students with meaningful opportunities to apply values and standards for ethical and responsible behavior—both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Honor, inform and involve parents in their critical role in fostering ethical and responsible behavior in their children.
- Ensure the consistent and equitable application of discipline policies everywhere in the school environment.

➤ Students

- Recognize and act upon the opportunity to be a positive role model to others of all ages, and to intervene as a model when appropriate.
- Take opportunities to lead not just academically or athletically, but ethically as well.
- Identify and act upon ways to serve the school and the community.
- Accept the consequences of personal actions, especially if restoration for a victim or the community is necessary.

➤ Parents

- Model community values and standards of behavior in the home.
- Clearly communicate expectations and values to all children.
- Maintain involvement in and awareness of the activities of family members, especially those of children.
- Praise children and other family members, not only for achievement, but also for ethical and responsible behavior.

➤ Other Community Members

- Become a committed participant in the discussion and identification of community values and standards of behavior.
- Strive to model community core values and standards for behavior in personal and professional life.
- Consider serving as a mentor to students or volunteering time and expertise to a school.
- Offer recognition and praise to students, teachers, and other community members who exemplify and uphold community values and standards of behavior.

Changing Policy to Meet the Challenge

Education leaders and policy makers have a role to play; they also must take responsibility. Policies, programs, and resources must be coordinated to further and support the outcomes described in this report. Leaders and policymakers should:

- Use the legislative mandate for codes of conduct, and this report to spark extensive dialogue and real reforms in every community.

- Persist in and expand efforts to change the structures of schools to reflect a more democratic culture that is responsive to individualized learning needs.

- Partner with existing programs and initiatives that address school climate, violence prevention, intervention, and asset-building, to support the development of the whole child.

- Support training and development which equips all school staff to take action to support an ethical school culture.

- Establish outcome indicators and model assessment tools that schools can use to measure progress and test effectiveness.

Conclusion

Issues of ethics and behavior seem complex and daunting. Where do we begin? Can we achieve the ends we describe as right and good?

We know Maine communities can succeed in crafting thoughtful, consistent, coordinated efforts that will positively address behaviors and attitudes. We know because some Maine communities are already seeing success. These efforts will take time, commitment, resources, and hard work. It is the nature of education in a changing society that the work will never be done. But working together as a community, we can change our schools and communities into better places to live, learn, and work.

Commission for Ethical and Responsible Student Behavior

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"We become just by the practice of just action, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage."
-Aristotle

Additional copies of this Summary, or of the full text of *Taking Responsibility*, as well as resources, links and information are available from:

Character Education Partnership

www.state.me.us/education/cep/homepage.htm

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