

INTRODUCTION

Educating the mind without educating the heart is not education at all.

—Aristotle

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to create a menace to society.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Utility: We provide a basic overview of the mission and purpose of this Guide.

Key Takeaway and Reflection Points:

- Educators have long been dedicated to the mission of promoting student success in school and life.
- Student success stems from intellectual and academic prowess in combination with an array of behaviors described by SEL skills and character attributes.
- These types of behaviors have long been recognized by educators as important, as is clear based on the long history of having behavioral feedback provided on the “the other side of the report card.”

IN THIS SECTION

Educators in schools across the nation collectively interact with millions of students every day. Each student is on a trajectory that will shape and influence the type of citizen he or she will eventually become. After each school day of overflowing responsibilities and endless additional hours of planning, we spend our nights contemplating to what end our hard work is leading our students and how we can reach goals more efficiently. The current educational climate also raises questions about whether our focus on preparing students for academic tests is balanced with preparing them for the tests of life.

Knowing that it is impossible to describe each student’s academic life fully, it is therefore desirable to provide the most essential feedback on student progress in school in a realistic way. Report cards are perhaps the most widely used method of feedback, with subject area grades long representing the top priority of schools: academic achievement. Historically, we also have had “the other side of the report card,” onto which we have recorded comments relevant to character, motivation, preparation, and more. The presence of these comments is a testament to educators who recognize the essential role of behavior in both achievement and student growth. The gifts of individual students, including their academic abilities, personality, character, and skills of relating and interacting, combine with complexity and emerge and develop inevitably in the school environment. It is intuitive as well as grounded in research that these skills relate to how a student functions both inside and outside of school.

Our report cards frame essential, multiyear conversations between students and teachers, teachers and parents, and parents and students. Some of the most important of these conversations, particularly for parents and guardians who are not as closely attuned to schools' academic rigors, revolve around “the other side of the report card.” We must ask ourselves if current comment systems address the behaviors most worth talking about, that is, those most essential to promote and best aligned with our ultimate goal of educating the future citizens of our society.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has conducted systematic research through collaboration with a multitude of school districts throughout the nation to explore this exact question. Which behaviors are most essential for students to develop and display in order to best learn as they grow into young adults? Through this research, they have found that there are specific social-emotional skills composing five major areas that improve academic achievement, increase positive behaviors (e.g., attitude toward school), and decrease negative behaviors (e.g., bullying and truancy) (see <http://www.casel.org/library/2014/1/29/meta-analysis-of-school-based-universal-interventions>). Referred to as the CASEL 5, the skill areas are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

At the same time, Paul Tough, in his influential book *How Children Succeed*, reports on a parallel set of efforts to recognize that aspects of character—such as, responsibility, leadership, caring, and grit—also matter for student success in school and life. Conversations about character also have a place on “the other side of the report card” as they stem from one of the most universal questions parents have when they come into a school to meet with teachers: Is my son or daughter a “good child”? Parallel to the work of CASEL, Character.org has been at the forefront of other educational organizations focusing on the development of students' character. Among the commonly agreed-upon dimensions of character strengths, drawn largely from the work cited by Tough, are grit, gratitude, responsibility, optimism, zest, and temperance (self-control). These dimensions also have been the focus of research illustrating their relevance to academic and life success (see the Resources section following Chapter 8 for research on social-emotional learning [SEL] and character).

This Guide provides educators with the tools and guidance to adapt current report card comment systems to include aspects of social-emotional competencies and character development that they deem most important. The process of schools and/or districts deciding on the specific content and format of “the other side of the report card” is a powerful vehicle for creating greater cohesion and intentionality within school systems. It creates a connection with systematic efforts to build students' social-emotional skills and character as well as opportunities for new and valuable conversations involving educators, students, and parents. Additionally, it fosters the conditions essential for academic success and college, career, and citizenship preparation.