

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

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Key Moral Capacities

1. Moral Literacy

What We Focus on Too Little:

2. Moral Identity: Moral Motivation/Moral dispositions
3. Moral Awareness/Circle of Concern
4. Managing Destructive Emotions
5. Moral Reasoning
6. Social and Emotional Skills that are Key to Moral Functioning
7. The Strength and Maturity of the Self

How much do kids and adults
prioritize caring?

Making Caring Common Survey

Method: Student survey, administered to 10,000+ middle & high school students in 33 schools, 2013-2014

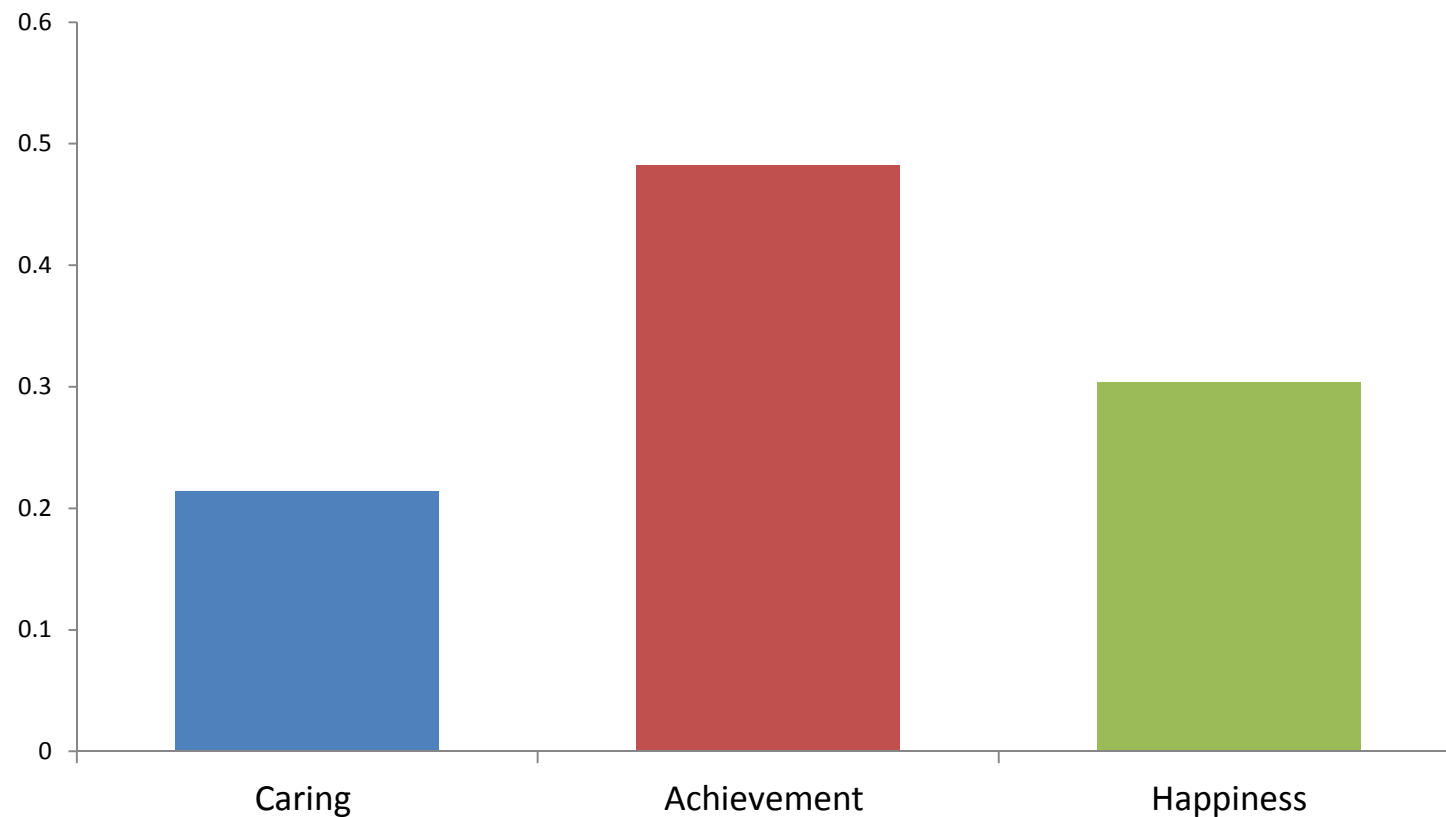
Level	#
Elementary	1
High	12
Middle and High	4
Middle	16

Type	#
Charter	7
Public	21
Private	5

Region	#
East	14
Midwest	2
South-east	8
South-west	5
West	4

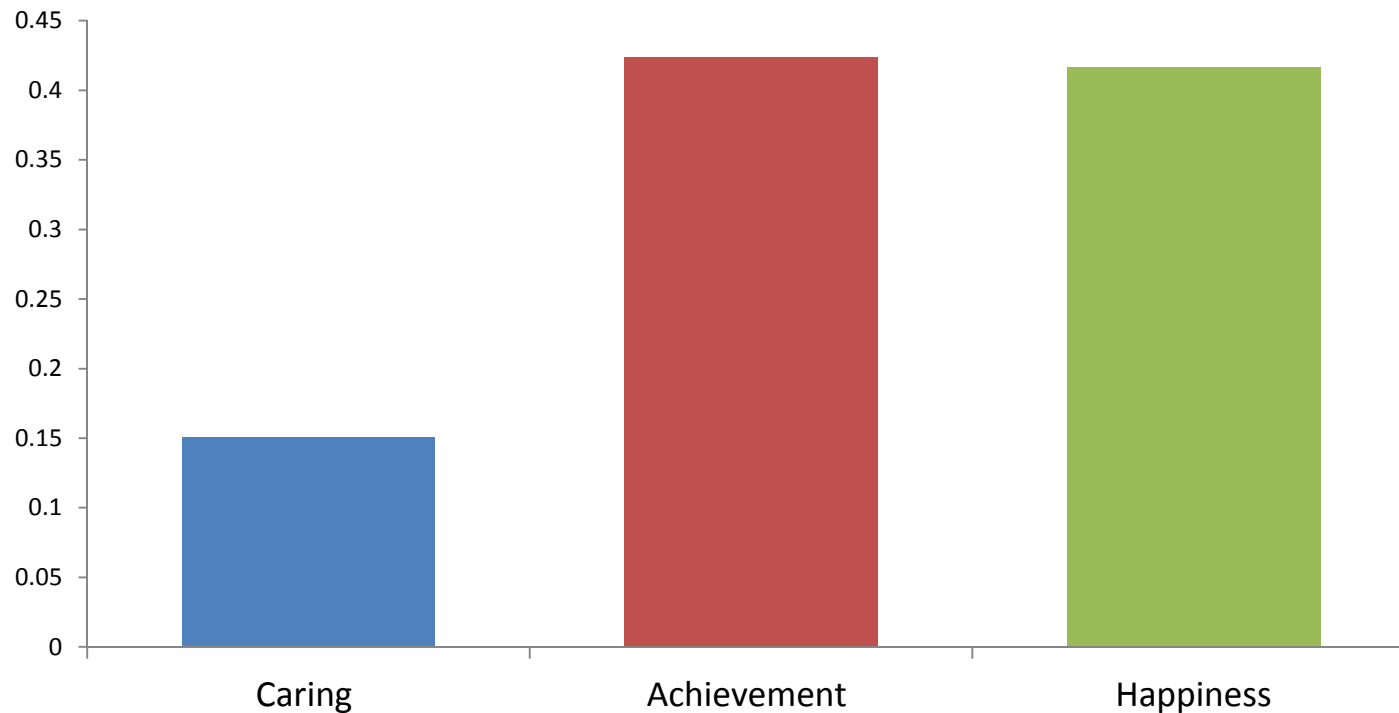
Student data: Caring vs. achievement and happiness

Proportion of Students Ranking Value First



Student data: Caring vs. achievement and happiness (cont.)

Proportion of Students Ranking Value First for Other Students



Some youth are highly focused on their own happiness

- “It's important to focus on oneself over others.”
- “Happiness is my primary goal in life. Achievement and moral ‘goodness’ are only important if they make me happy.”
- “My first responsibility is to make sure that I am enjoying life. My second responsibility is that I do well and set myself up for future success. Caring for others is last because it does not effect me as much.”
- “If you are not happy, life is nothing. After that, you want to do well. And after that, expend any excess energy on others.”

The cost of subordinating caring

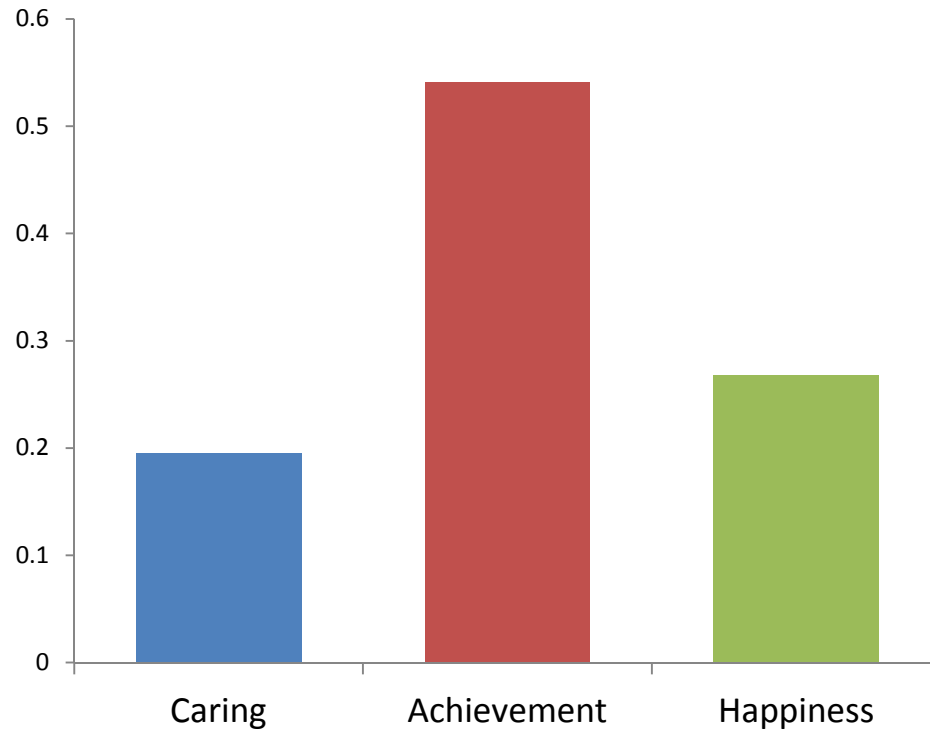
- When youth don't prioritize caring, the bar is lower for bullying, sexual harassment, and many other types of harm
- Youth may be less motivated to develop empathy and other SEL skills
- Youth may be less prepared to be constructive citizens who can put common good before their own

Gaps between adults' beliefs and youth's perceptions

- Studies show that parents and teachers from across ethnic groups *report* placing great importance on children being caring
- Most parents say they value their children's caring over their achievement (Suizzo, 2007)
- But many teens don't buy it: they view their parents & teachers as prioritizing achievement over goodness/caring
- There appears to be a gap between what parents and teachers *say* and what kids perceive

How youth perceive parents' priorities

Proportion of Students Ranking Value First for Parents



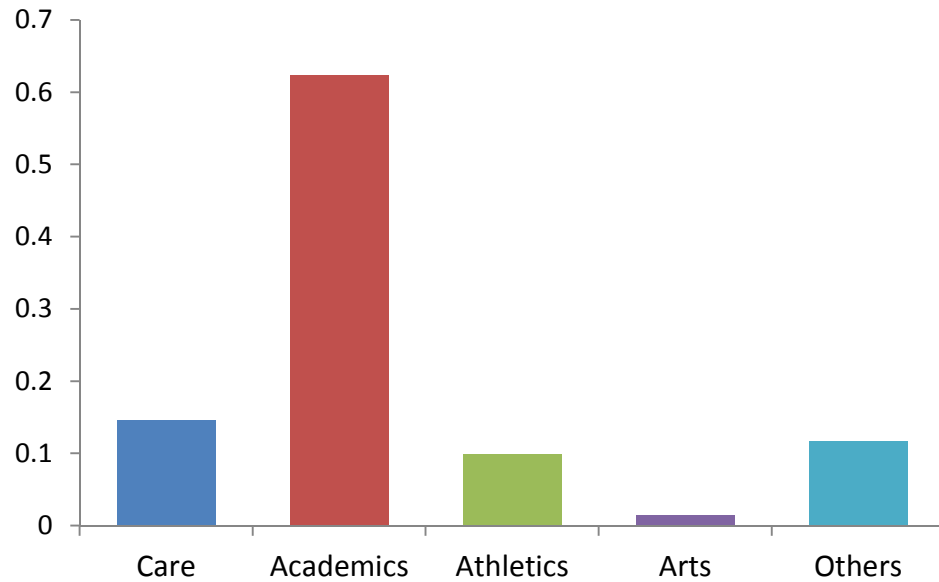
How youth perceive parents' priorities

Youth were **four times more likely to agree** than disagree with this statement on MCC Survey:

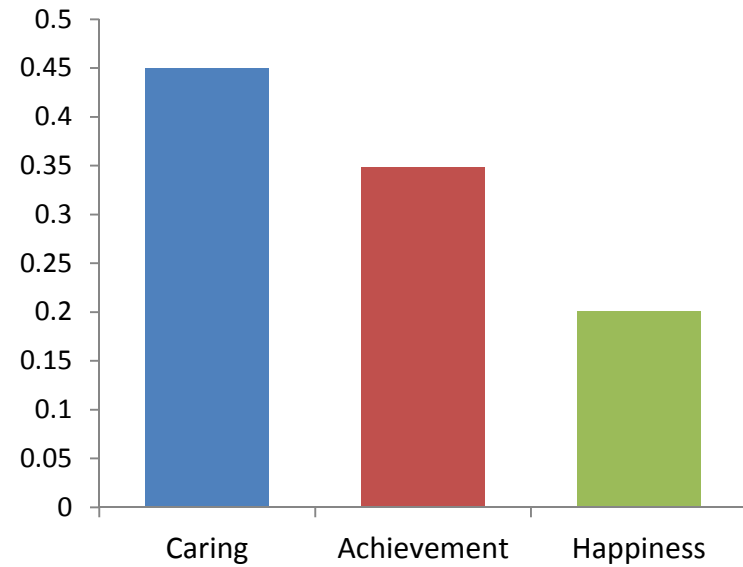
“[My parents] are prouder if I get good grades in my classes than if I’m a caring community member in class and school.”

Gaps in perceptions of school adults' priorities

Proportion of Students Ranking Value First for Adults at School

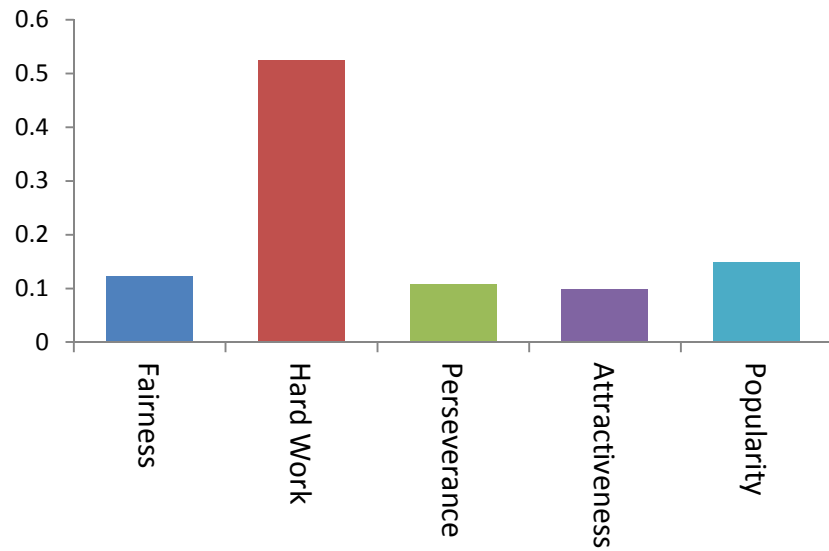


Proportion of School Adults Ranking Value First

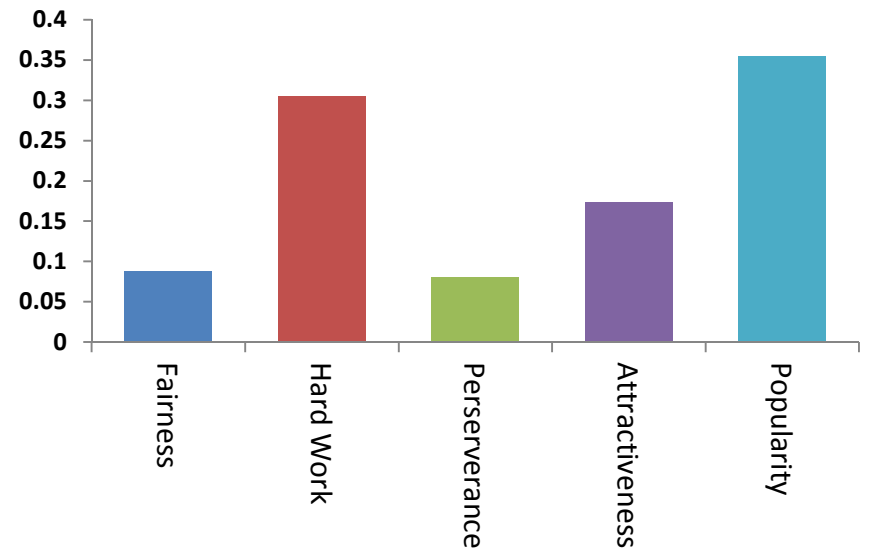


Student data: Performance values over moral values

Proportion of Students Ranking Value First



Proportion of Students Ranking Value First for Other Students



Caring is still important but **secondary**

- 47% of **youth** rank caring second when asked to rank happiness, achievement, and caring
- 45% of youth think that their **parents** would rank caring second when asked the same question
- **Many youth** act altruistically
 - 38% would “definitely” and 48% would “probably” tutor a friend
 - 15% would “definitely” and 45% would “probably” volunteer on a Saturday to help out at a school event

Some youth are highly focused on caring

- “If I am a good person who cares about others, then in my mind I am already happy.”
- “I'd rather be a good person who is respectful of everyone than someone who is doing good in school and being disrespectful.”
- “I like to help others. Sometimes I help others to the point where I don't even get enough time to help myself.”

Problem may be tacit daily messages

- Parents' day-to-day messages may stress achievement & happiness over caring
- For example:
 - Treating children's peers as competitors
 - Failing to give other kids credit for their achievements
 - Not expecting kids to reach out to friendless kids
 - Missing opportunities to write thank you notes

The irony

All the focus on happiness may be children less happy

All the focus on achievement may not be increasing achievement in affluent communities
(Luthar)

Important individual and race, class, culture differences

Meaning of achievement and hard work:

- For many youth, achievement and hard work have a clear moral purpose: supporting their communities, honoring their parents, defying stereotypes.

Important caveats

- Preliminary analysis; not a random sample
- We're for happiness and achievement, too!
- Happiness, achievement, and caring/ethics are certainly not mutually exclusive

For More Information

Making Caring Common:

www.gse.harvard.edu/mcc