

<b>Location</b>	<b>Washington, D.C.</b>
<b>School Type</b>	<b>Charter</b>
<b>School Size</b>	<b>Small (~ 300 students and parents, 80 staff members)</b>
<b>Demographics</b>	Diverse (9% Hispanic, 62% African-American, 3% Asian and 17% Caucasian)

## Two Rivers Public Charter School: Making a Habit of Social-Emotional Learning

### Summary

How do you promote social learning when academic needs are frequently pushed as first priority? When [Two Rivers Public Charter School](#), a PreK-8 school located in Washington, D.C., opened in the fall of 2004, it boasted a mission, in part, to develop responsible and compassionate members of society with social and cognitive skills to succeed in high school and beyond. Receiving praise from all corners including, former Mayor Adrian Fenty and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Two Rivers balanced academic rigor with social-emotional growth. To ensure they were fulfilling this promise, Two Rivers first administered the [Comprehensive School Climate Inventory](#) (CSCI) in 2009 to its founding grades. As Two Rivers expanded and continued use of the CSCI, their overall scores demonstrated the realization of their mission through a strong culture. Though the school had few negative scores, patterns of vulnerability were seen in the central dimensions of [Social-Emotional Security and Physical Security](#) indicating students were feeling challenged regarding verbal abuse, teasing and harassment.



With this finding, integrating character education into every classroom became the heart of the action planning phase. The result? A [school-wide character education campaign](#) positioned as a central component of school life with dedicated time scheduled for professional development to fully enhance the social-emotional curriculum.

### Character Education Campaign

After looking at several social-emotional character education models, Two Rivers adapted a model already planted at the middle school called [Scholarly Habits](#). Scholarly Habits pushes a moral code of conduct educating the whole child. The social program nurtures healthy habits of [perseverance, responsibility and collaboration](#) to create successful and productive students-inside and outside of the classroom. [Laura Lorenzen, Director of Student Support](#), spearheaded the latest 2012 CSCI administration and noted the need for early intervention. She says, “It’s never too early to teach lessons of empathy and responsibility. By communicating these expectations explicitly, we’re reaching students

across all classrooms.” With a clear vision for social growth, Two Rivers launched their campaign with three steps:

### Step 1: Define and Communicate Scholarly Habits

To cultivate positive interactions and experiences, students understand and take ownership of “I” statements:

- **I work hard:** focus on perseverance to illustrate students have the capacity to grow, better their outcomes and gain deeper understanding of their abilities through effort and risk taking
- **I am a team player:** defines how actions impact others and the importance of collaboration
- **I am responsible and independent:** stresses thoughtful behavior regarding work produced and personal role in success and failure
- **I care for our community:** acts of compassion, empathy and generosity showing how to make our school community a better place for each other (treating the belongings of others with care, maintaining common space, etc.)

### Step 2: Co-lead the effort with students and staff

During Two Rivers’ three week staff orientation prior to the start of the 2013-14 school year, culture building became a key focus of professional development, with an emphasis on exploring the Scholarly Habits and how these bring Two Rivers’ mission to life. Staff members spent time developing lesson plans and class projects to build the framework of Scholarly Habits answering: **what they mean, why are they important, how they will be consistently implemented.**

They dedicated the first six weeks of the 2013 academic year to introducing the Habits at the classroom level. In the Middle School, daily advisory (Crew) time was devoted to explicit discussions about how to live each Habit as an individual and as a school community. The **student-crew leader (teacher)**

**ratio of 12:1** provided a safe space to collect honest feedback, engage ideas, and brainstorm projects to promote awareness. During weekly community meetings, **each Scholarly Habit was highlighted through role playing and other initiatives.**

“It’s never too early to teach lessons of empathy and responsibility.”  
– Laura Lorenzen

In the Elementary School, teachers incorporated learning about the Scholarly Habits in developmentally appropriate ways. **In 1<sup>st</sup> grade, for example, students drew pictures of the Scholarly Habits, while 4<sup>th</sup> graders made posters reflecting what the Scholarly Habits look and sound like in action.** Lessons include not only academic learning targets, but also Scholarly Habits learning targets. A challenging math problem-based task might include as a target “I persevere when work gets challenging” -- one of the “I Work Hard” habits -- while a lesson requiring students to work in small groups might have a target of “I use complex communication to collaborate with others” -- one of the “I am a Team Player” habits.

### Step 3: Recognize and reward good works

To reinforce consistent messaging, **Two Rivers Middle School enacted CIAs (Caught the Act) to connect classroom lessons with real-time situations** by immediately recognizing students who exhibit behaviors that exemplify a scholarly habit. At community meetings, students who earned a CIA are recognized and

have the opportunity to earn rewards such as a dress down day or choosing the theme for spirit week. "CIAs demonstrate deep understanding of the Habits. Students are invested-there's a real excitement about bringing these core values to life," Laura says.

**Also, students who model the Scholarly Habits earn leadership roles within the school.** Students in grades 4-8 are invited to apply for Student Ambassador positions, serving as a link between the school and community. Dozens of students apply for these select positions for the opportunity to give tours to visiting dignitaries, represent Two Rivers at Open Houses and community functions, and serve as mentors to new students.

## **A Positive Shift**

While it is too early to quantitatively measure the success of this character education campaign, a shift in the emotion and response to Scholarly Habits is evident. Students are developing a deeper understanding of positive ways to relate to one another and how their individual actions affect the community as a whole. We look forward to continuing work with Two Rivers Charter and seeing how they are able to grow this model of character education.

**To learn more about how your school can benefit from the CSCI, visit:**  
**[www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php](http://www.schoolclimate.org/programs/csci.php). [\\*School Climate Dimension Definitions](#)**