



Center for the 4th and 5th Rs
Respect and Responsibility

November 25, 2013

To whom it may concern:

For more than 40 years, my work as a developmental psychologist and educator has focused on helping teachers and parents develop good character in youth. For the past 20 years, I have directed the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) at the State University of New York at Cortland. It's been our privilege to know and work with Fred Sarkis, a wonderful human being who, with the help of some talented teachers, has created a wonderful character education program, *Yes Pa*, for middle school students.

We hold Fred's work and his personal character in such high esteem that we devoted most of an issue of our Center's newsletter, *The Fourth and Fifth Rs*, to telling the story of *Yes Pa*. That issue includes an article by psychologist Dr. Rob Ellis summarizing his evaluation study showing that 6th-graders who experienced the *Yes Pa* program were *six times* more likely than control group students to show gains in self-efficacy (the belief that they can, by the choices they make, affect their success in school and life). We regard that as solid empirical evidence of effectiveness.

There are lots of good character education materials, but what makes *Yes Pa* unique is the person behind it. Fred embodies the qualities of character we all want kids to develop: positive attitude, perseverance in the face of adversity, a sense of humor and humility, and the desire to give back to others. His life story, beginning in the Depression, makes these character lessons come alive and take root in the hearts and minds of students. They say things like, "Wow, that dude had a lot of problems, and he beat them all." "If Fred can do it, so can I." Said one father: "My kid never talked to me like he has since he started reading *Yes Pa*."

Yes Pa can also help to combat the bullying that has plagued so many of our schools. In telling his story, Fred recounts the teasing, exclusion, and other cruelty he experienced at the hands of schoolmates and how he overcame it—and even used it to motivate himself to study and excel in school. *Yes Pa* can help to empower kids who experience peer cruelty and encourage all students to take a stand against any kind of bullying in their school.

It's not surprising that to date nearly two thousand schools in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico have downloaded the *Yes Pa* materials. We hope many more will take advantage of this rich (and free) character education resource created by a most remarkable man and his colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Lickona".

Thomas Lickona, Ph.D.

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