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Project description

Over the last twenty years, there has been growing interest and research done in how to explicitly teaching children social and emotional skills in the school setting. While the benefits of social emotional learning (SEL) and the development of SEL programs has been thoroughly explored, the research into creating the measurement tools to determine the efficacy of these initiatives has been lagging behind. The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding of how Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has approached its implementation of SEL. Illinois is one of four states to have free-standing SEL standards for K-12, and CPS has increasingly invested resources into implementing SEL. However, the process for how the district is measuring its progress related to SEL is not as clear. Using a mixed methods approach, I use both interviews from those within CPS as well as publicly available school data in order to better understand how SEL operates on both the district and school level, what metrics are currently being used to measure progress, and whether or not some of these measures are valid metrics to be using.

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Measuring What Counts:

The Implementation and Measurement of Social Emotional Learning in Chicago Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

Social emotional learning is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions”. While many evidence-based studies have shown that SEL programs in schools are linked to positive outcomes such as increased academic achievement, higher graduation rates, increased attendance, and decreased suspensions and disciplinary incidents, there is not as much research into how students’ social and emotional development and outcomes can be measured. The purpose of this research is to examine how Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district is implementing SEL and the metrics it is using both on the district level and school level to gauge the social and emotional skills of its students. This thesis will also make recommendations as to how CPS can improve its implementation efforts and build capacity around measurement that could inform future practices.

INTRODUCTION

Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Era of Accountability, the pendulum of American K-12 education has once again shifted from putting emphasis on standardized test-based accountability to focusing on educating the whole child, expanding the role of education beyond strictly academic content. Research has suggested that noncognitive factors, such as academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindset, learning strategies, and social skills, are key components in students' educational experience that not only affect their academic outcomes in the form of test scores, grades, and graduation rates but also future outcomes upon graduation (Farrington et al, 2012). One framework falling in the category of noncognitive factors that has gained traction in the last twenty years is social emotional learning (SEL).

Social emotional learning refers to the acquisition, development, and application of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are needed to identify and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2005; Dunsenbury, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al., 1997; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The framework for the competencies that are entailed in SEL differs depending on what social and emotional skills various organizations believe are most important. While the specific competencies may vary, nearly all frameworks incorporate competencies related to the self, others, and behavioral outcomes (Dunsenbury, 2014; West et al., 2017). For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the framework used by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and their five competencies of:

1. Self-awareness: Being familiar with one's own emotions, values, strengths, and limitations,
2. Self-management: Ability to cope with anxiety and stress, achieve goals, and manage one's emotions and behaviors,
3. Social awareness: Awareness of social norms, understanding the perspective of others, and building the capacity to feel empathy and compassion,
4. Relationship skills: Forming positive relationships, being able to effectively work in teams, and learning how to face and resolve conflict with others, and
5. Responsible decision making: Making ethical and constructive decisions about personal and social behavior in a way that considers the consequences from one's actions on the well being of oneself and others (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005; Dunsenbury, 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

Integrating SEL into a school goes beyond incorporating evidence-based SEL programs in classrooms; it is a framework that consolidates all classroom and school-wide programs under a common language towards a common goal. It sets the tone for what interactions between students and adults within a school will look like (Norris, 2003). There are two main educational strategies in SEL. The first is to teach and model social emotional skills, such as recognizing emotions, communication, and responsible decision making, for students through explicit instruction by trained teachers and school personnel. The second is to create a school environment or culture that is conducive to the social and emotional development of students, which includes creating positive learning environments, being clear on expectations, and building a sense of school community. In order for either of these prongs to be fulfilled, there must be buy in from educators, other school personnel, parents, and community leaders (Cervone and Cushman, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al, 1997; Norris, 2003).

Lately, the recognition of the importance of SEL as well as its demand has been growing among educators in the United States. In 2013, CASEL conducted a national survey on teachers' perspectives on SEL, which yielded three key findings. First, the survey found that teachers believe SEL for all students at all levels to be extremely important, with ninety-five percent of respondents agreeing that social emotional skills are teachable and benefit students from all backgrounds. Second, teachers believe SEL has lasting effects in the school setting, such as boosting academic performance, increasing student interest in learning, improving student behavior, preventing and reducing bullying, and improving school climate, as well as long term effects of preparing students for college and the workforce. Lastly, teachers identified key accelerators that would help in adopting SEL like school-wide programming to support SEL implementation, embedding SEL in student learning standards, improving and increasing professional development for SEL, and pushing for more involvement of parents and families (CASEL, 2013).

A more recent survey conducted by the Education Week Research Center (2015) of 562 educators across the nation found that two-thirds of respondents ranked SEL as very important to student achievement. Additionally, over three-quarters of respondents believed that teaching social and emotional skills to students is an effective way to reduce school discipline problems, improve student achievement,

and improve school climate. However, this same survey also found that despite strong support for SEL, a little under half of respondents said SEL received too little attention in their schools, and the most common challenge to SEL incorporation was limited time due to other issues taking priority. Like in the CASEL survey, respondents in this survey also indicated they would like more professional development in SEL.

In 1997, Maurice Elias and others formalized the field of SEL through their book *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning*, which posited the idea that the development of social and emotional skills and competencies would not only help students in their academic achievements but also in contexts outside of the classroom through fostering positive attitudes and behaviors (Elias et al, 1997). Since then, all fifty states have adopted social and emotional competence and growth standards for pre-K. However, despite the growing research on the beneficial effects school-wide SEL intervention can have on student outcomes in all levels of education, only four out of fifty states have explicit, free-standing SEL standards for K-12 education (CASEL, 2017). Furthermore, there is hesitation in measuring the social and emotional competence of students, and states are not yet willing to let their schools be held accountable for these measures despite the fact that they are closely linked to academic achievement and long-term success in life. Instead of measuring social emotional competencies directly, states are choosing to use proxy indicators such as chronic absenteeism and course rigor to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act requirement of having at least one school quality indicator of student success that is independent of test scores (Blad, 2017). While some states have included school climate into their accountability measures, school climate is only one part of the SEL framework and does not directly reflect whether schools are, indeed, helping their students develop social and emotional skills.

The purpose of this research is to look at the ways SEL can be measured in the context of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to further enhance its current implementation. Through my research, I will answer the following questions: 1. Can SEL competency and growth within students be measured? 2. How is SEL being implemented in CPS? 3. How is SEL implementation being measured in CPS? By the end, I will propose policy recommendations for how CPS could improve implementation and integration of SEL and build capacity around how to answer the question of measuring progress around SEL.

BACKGROUND

The Benefits of SEL

In a meta-study looking at 213 different studies on school-based, universal (or school-wide) SEL programs including 270,034 students from K-12, Durlak and others (2011) looked at the effect these programs had on six different outcomes: social and emotional skills, attitudes towards self and others, positive social behaviors, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance. The results showed that these SEL interventions significantly improved students' social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors and increased academic achievement by eleven percentage points. Students who received these interventions also had fewer conduct problems and lower levels of emotional distress compared to those in the control group. In terms of improving school climate, SEL has been effective in helping students manage their emotions and read social cues in ways that foster empathy, build social supports, and promote social problem-solving to prevent behaviors that escalate conflict, such as bullying and physical aggression (Brown et al, 2011; Espelage et al, 2013; & Smith and Low, 2013). Social emotional learning programs have also been linked to a decrease in arrests, reduction in recidivism, increase in school engagement, and increase in graduation rates (Heller et al., 2015). The effects of these SEL interventions not only provide significant outcomes immediately after intervention, but they also have long-lasting benefits, for these effects can remain significant years after the initial intervention (Greenberg et al., 2017).

In addition to benefits in behaviors, attitudes, and social and emotional development, SEL programs have also been shown to have significant economic returns. A cost-benefit analysis done by Columbia University looked at the economic returns of six SEL-intervention programs. In measuring costs, the report looked beyond just program budget, incorporating inputs and ingredients that would not normally be required in the absence of the program such as personnel training, materials, and equipment. Benefits were divided into three categories: immediate benefits (benefits during intervention), post-intervention benefits during youth (benefits after intervention while students are still in school), and post-intervention benefits during adulthood (benefits that last once students leave school). These benefits could range from prevention of substance abuse to reduction in youth delinquency to more favorable labor market outcomes. The results showed that these programs had an average of an eleven-to-one return, meaning that for every

dollar invested in the SEL program, there was a payoff of eleven dollars in social benefits (Belfield et al, 2015). In other words, even small investments in social emotional learning could yield benefits that far outweigh the costs.

The evidence shows that SEL has positive impacts on students mentally, emotionally, physically, and academically. The promising results from these studies have pushed educators and policymakers to start providing their own SEL programming within schools, but there are very few states, districts, and schools that track the growth of the social and emotional competencies of their students in a way that will allow teachers to identify what competencies are particularly underdeveloped within their students and which schools need more assistance in implementing their SEL programming.

Illinois as a Forerunner of SEL Standards

While NCLB is most well-known for increasing standardized testing as a form of high-stakes accountability, it also required schools to offer services such as development activities, drug prevention programs, and counseling to complement the academic curriculum. These programs needed to be evidence-based and prove to be effective in closing achievement gaps between high and low performing students, preventing at-risk youth from dropping out, and providing delinquent youth supports to continue their education (CASEL, 2003). Given these requirements, some states, including the state of Illinois, decided to incorporate SEL to meet the demands of this federal legislation.

Supporters of SEL have advocated for the creation of SEL learning standards, which are under the jurisdiction of each state. These learning standards would provide goals and benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do so that educators within that state can share a common language in communicating priorities regarding the social and emotional development of their students. In addition to being clearly worded and easy to understand, these standards must provide guidance on how adults in the school can support students through teaching practices, creating positive learning environments and school climates, and making instruction culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate (Dusenbury et al, 2014). States have taken three approaches in embedding SEL into their learning standards. The first approach is to integrate goals and benchmarks that are related to SEL into learning standards in other subjects such as Language Arts, Health, or Social Studies. The second approach has been the create free-

standing standards, or standards that are independent of other subject areas, for one or more dimensions of SEL. Finally, the last approach, and the one that CASEL prefers most, is to create free-standing SEL learning standards that incorporate all social and emotional dimensions (Dusenbury et al, 2011). While every state has SEL standards for pre-K, so far, only four states have adopted comprehensive, free-standing SEL standards for K-12. Other states have included some elements of SEL within other learning standards, but this approach tends to be scattered and lacking in comprehensiveness (CASEL, 2017; Dusenbury, 2014).

With the passage of Public Act 93-0495 in 2003, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) was required to “develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as a part of the Illinois Learning Standards” (Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003). As a result, educators, policy makers, and researchers came together to develop what is now known as the ISBE Social/Emotional Learning Standards. The framework of these standards consist of three overarching goals, three to four SEL learning standards within each goal for a total of ten learning standards, benchmarks divided by age groups within each of the learning standards, and performance descriptors for each of the benchmarks (“Design for Social and Emotional Learning Standards”). The goals and learning standards are broken down as follows:

Goals	Learning Standards
Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.	Identify and manage one’s emotions.
	Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
	Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.
Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.	Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
	Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
	Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
	Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.
Goal 3: Demonstrate decision making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.	Consider ethical, safety, and social factors in making decisions.
	Apply decision making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.
	Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.

*(ISBE Social/Emotional Learning Standards)

The five categories of benchmarks are early elementary, late elementary, middle school/junior high, early high school, and late high school. Within each of these benchmarks are performance descriptors that are designed to aid educators in incorporating SEL in designing their curriculum, classroom activities, and assessments in a way that aligns with the ISBE standards (“Social/Emotional Learning Standards”).

Implementation of SEL in Chicago Public Schools

In addition to requiring the ISBE to create free-standing SEL standards, the Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003 also required the ISBE to provide classroom instruction and school-wide strategies for teaching social and emotional skills; create protocols for screening and assessing students who may have social, emotional, or mental health problems that could affect learning; establish partnerships with agencies and organizations within the community regarding students’ social and emotional development as well as mental health needs; and strengthen a system of referrals to provide clinical services for students in need through school-based intervention as well as services within the community.

As part of its strategy to integrate SEL, CPS uses a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) with three tiers. Tier I is universal, meaning that it involves all students through creating a climate conducive to learning through positive relationships and clear expectations of norms of behavior, teaching social emotional skills to students through explicit instruction on forming those relationships, making responsible decisions, and setting goals as well as integration of these skills into other curricula. This entails the use of universal SEL interventions such as Second Step, Restorative Conversations, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Tier II involves working with a smaller group of students; providing targeted support for at-risk students to de-escalate behavior problems, engaging these students in clinical group interventions addressing anger, trauma, and violence; and offering students the opportunity to use restorative practices to resolve conflicts instead of resorting to exclusionary disciplinary measures. Lastly, Tier III targets a few students with the highest levels of need. This involves individualized counseling to provide behavior strategies and more intensive intervention and monitoring (Hurwitz & Mashana).

In 2012, CPS partnered with CASEL to begin systematic implementation of SEL within its schools. By 2013, the district had renamed its Department of Youth Development and Positive Behavior Supports to the Office of Social and Emotional Learning (OSEL), which in 2015 consisted of thirty-four

members, fourteen of whom are network specialists assigned to each of the fourteen networks of schools within CPS. The OSEL works with schools in the district by introducing the SEL framework to schools, providing professional development for principals and teachers, and supporting schools in their implementation of Second Step, the evidence-based SEL curriculum of choice selected by the district in 2013 (“Case Study: Chicago Public Schools”, 2015). The OSEL’s goals include decreasing the use of suspensions and expulsions and instead increasing the use of restorative and corrective responses, strengthening the social, emotional, and behavioral factors in the MTSS, creating safe and supportive learning environments, and expanding strategies and implementation for universal social emotional instruction as well as evidence-based Tier II and Tier III interventions (Hurwitz & Mashana).

In the 2014-15 School Year, OSEL created the SEL Supportive Schools Certification, an acknowledgement of a school’s commitment to creating a safe, supportive learning environment that promotes fostering social and emotional skills within its students. This certification status (Exemplary, Established, Emerging, or Coming Soon) is displayed on each school’s CPS School Report Card, which can be viewed on the CPS website (“Supportive Schools Certification”). Schools must meet the following six criteria to be certified:

1. SEL is an explicit priority in the school’s Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). This plan is re-done every two years.
2. All staff are getting professional development related to SEL, and teachers specifically are getting SEL professional development three times a year.
3. There is time set aside for explicit SEL instruction.
4. There is a system in place for referrals and assigning students to tiers.
5. The school is collecting and using universal data for SEL and climate. This includes validated measures or measures that the school itself has created, such as a survey on students’ feelings of school connectedness or student-to-student relationships.
6. The school has more than one community partnership that is related to SEL. This could be the community organization providing SEL lessons to students or groups that do SEL workshops for educators or parents in the school.

As of 2017, fewer than 200 schools have earned a designation under this program (Mathewson, 2017).

However, despite the effort that CPS has made in systematically integrating and implementing SEL within the district, these initiatives have yet to reach low-income high schools, which is concerning since these

schools most likely need more social support and would benefit most from SEL integration (Kelleher, 2016).

Evaluation of SEL Within CPS

In addition to having standards, creating assessments that are aligned with those standards makes it more likely for schools to start incorporating these goals and benchmarks into their classrooms (Dusenbury, 2011). Making assessments of social emotional competencies a part of SEL implementation could help raise awareness of the important role that social and emotional competencies play in the classroom. However, according to a report by the American Institutes for Research (2015), institutions must consider the purpose, rigor, and practicality and burden before making the decision to include assessments of students' social and emotional skills. In the case of CPS, assessments of social and emotional development would be useful in accountability to ensure that the district's efforts in SEL are being translated into observable outcomes. Also, these results could serve the purpose of communicating to stakeholders, such as parents and the community, the need for SEL and inform educators and policymakers by providing feedback as to where improvement in performance is needed to further guide SEL intervention and implementation. In terms of rigor, since these assessments would be used to report district-wide trends, it would make sense to use a measure that has high levels of reliability and validity as well as using multiple forms of assessment to gauge students' social and emotional competence. Regarding the practicality of SEL implementation, CPS meets the requirements of having implemented SEL for a number of years now and having those initiatives serve a sizeable population of youth. These assessments would also not likely be very burdensome since CPS already has staff capacity and infrastructure in place for analyzing data collected on students as well as mediums for reporting the findings that come from that data. In other words, assessment of students' social and emotional skills and development is something that is well within the realm of possibility for CPS.

There are measures of implementation that are being used at the school level through the presence of SEL programming or certification status of schools, but I could not find measures being used on the individual level to evaluate whether the social and emotional competencies were indeed developing in the way the ISBE had laid out in their SEL Standards. In looking at the indicators used in CPS' School Quality

Rating Policy (SQRP), the closest indicators to students' social and emotional competence I could find was the 5Essentials School Climate Survey, attendance, and college persistence (School Quality Rating Policy Handbook, 2017). While these indicators may be related to and outcomes of SEL, they are not direct measures of students' social and emotional competencies themselves.

As a district in a state with free-standing SEL Learning Standards, CPS is in a unique position. Not only have the goals and expectations of SEL been clearly defined by the state for each level of development, but also CPS has dedicated itself to the implementation of SEL as a district-wide approach now for at least five years. Taken together, these facts suggest that CPS is at a stage where it is ready to start gauging the social and emotional competencies of its students to see if schools are indeed supporting students by teaching them the skills that have been outlined by the state. However, compared to the interest in SEL, the research behind measuring its effects on social and emotional skills has been sparse. Nevertheless, initial findings of studies looking at measures of social and emotional skill have proven to be promising, as will be discussed in the following section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trends in Measures of Social and Emotional Skills

Despite the purpose of SEL programs being to help develop social and emotional competencies within students, there is a disconnect between the goals that these programs proclaim and the measures used to determine their effectiveness. A study examining eleven different SEL interventions, including Second Step, found that the measurements used to gauge the effects of the program did not necessarily align with the skills the programs targeted (Jones et al, 2017). In the previously mentioned meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs, only thirty-two percent of studies measured social and emotional skills as an outcome at all (Durlak et al, 2011). Part of the reason behind the lagging development of measures of social emotional competencies is due to the fact that many SEL program evaluations focus more on proxy indicators of social emotional outcomes such as improved mental health or increases in attendance rather than the actual social emotional outcomes themselves (Humphrey et al, 2011). Additionally, while the framework and competencies of SEL are well defined, these definitions have not been used directly to

inform the development of assessments of social and emotional skills (Elliott et al, 2017). That is not to say, however, that it is impossible to measure the social and emotional functions of students.

There are four considerations one must take before using a measure to assess social and emotional skills: the difference between gauging typical and maximal behavior, whether the measure provides distinct and unique information among existing constructs of social and emotional skills, the scope and specificity of the measure, and who is providing the information for assessment (students, teachers, or parents). Of the measures that have been used to measure social and emotional skills in the research setting, few have been cited more than four times, and most of the measures that did meet this benchmark focused exclusively on social skills rather than emotional skills or both social and emotional skills (Humphrey et al 2011). Despite these shortcomings, the literature shows that there exist measures of social and emotional skills that have high internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and validity that are feasible for the purpose of research (Crowe et al, 2010).

In the field of education, there is yet to be a nationally accepted and uniform way of measuring social emotional competencies of students within and across schools. The survey conducted by the Education Week Research Center mentioned previously found that thirty percent of respondents indicated their school does not measure social and emotional learning. Of those who did indicate that their schools measured SEL, the most common methods of measurement were classroom observations by teachers and/or school administrators, surveys of students, and surveys of teachers. The survey found that these measures were most commonly used to identify students for specific interventions, inform training and/or professional development for teachers/administrators, and evaluate classroom or school-wide programs and approaches (Education Week Research Center, 2015). Measuring social and emotional skills as well as using these measures to inform decision making are still areas of research that need more exploration. Yet part of the inertia behind measuring these competencies that are known to be linked to academic and life success comes from concerns of bias these measures may have.

The Hesitation Behind Measuring Students' Social and Emotional Skills

Perhaps the most widely referenced paper related to cautioning educators and policymakers from measuring social and emotional outcomes is "Measurement Matters" by Duckworth and Yeager. In this

paper, the authors look at student self-reports, teacher questionnaires, and performance tasks, analyzing the limitations behind each of these assessments. There are three key biases that the authors identify that would compromise the reliability and validity of these measures. The first bias is reference bias, which refers to the idea that due to differences in norms across cultures, people may have different understandings of the same thing. For example, the option of “Rarely” in a survey could be interpreted differently by different people. The second bias is social desirability bias, or the inclination for people to answer in a way that reflects on them more favorably instead of answering truthfully. The last major bias is retrieval bias, or bias that comes from incomplete or inaccurate memory retrieval. In addition to these biases, there are concerns of whether students comprehend the question or task that is asked of them during these assessments, whether teachers are misinterpreting the behaviors of their students, and whether these assessments are limited only to the classroom setting (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015).

There is also a question of what roles these measures should play. Duckworth and Yeager caution against using SEL measures for purposes such as accountability and individual diagnoses due to the biases each instrument has, as mentioned above. To combat some of these biases, they recommend using a multi-method approach and using supplemental vignettes to reduce reference bias. Ultimately, however, they conclude that measures are not suited for between-school accountability judgments. Despite these concerns though, more recent studies have started to pilot SEL assessments, and the results suggest that these measures are ready to be applied to larger and more diverse environments.

Promising Pilots of SEL Measures

As mentioned before, one of the most common uses of SEL assessments is to identify at-risk students to provide early intervention. As such, Elliott et al (2017) created and piloted a teacher-completed measure of SEL, the Social and Emotional Learning Screening Assessment (SELA), that could be used for universal screening. SELA has two purposes: to identify students who would benefit from intervention to improve SEL skills, and to track the progress of students’ skill development during and after interventions. This screening tool differs from other screening assessments of SEL in that it is modeled directly after CASEL’s framework of the five competencies. The pilot, which involved 268 students from Australia, found that SELA did, indeed, align with CASEL’s framework, was easy and feasible for teachers to use,

showed the relationships among teacher-completed social behavior measures, had good internal reliability in rating, and could effectively identify at-risk students. While this assessment still needs further replication to test wider external validity, it does demonstrate that social emotional skills can be measured reliably and with validity through teacher reports.

Pilots of instruments to measure social and emotional skills beyond screening and on a more universal (i.e. not targeting specific students) level have also shown to be promising. Starting in 2013, the Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada also piloted their own social and emotional competence measure through their partnership with CASEL. This assessment took the form of a student self-report survey that was embedded into the online climate survey that students took at the end of every year and accompanied by a proctoring video explaining the purpose of the survey as well as the rights students had as participants of the survey. Over the next four years, the district used an iterative approach to identify and address measurement challenges and assess a large, diverse population of students with a variety of social and emotional competence. Like SELA, these measurements were used to identify at-risk students as well as guide future practice related to SEL within the district (Davidson et al, 2017).

The student self-report survey showed that though there was a ceiling effect for students with mid-to-high social emotional ability, the instrument had strong validity. By conducting focus groups with students, the researchers also found that students generally reacted positively to the survey, indicating that it made them feel like their voices were being heard as part of the school community. Additionally, the results showed that students typically agreed on what good and poor social emotional skills were, comprehended survey items, and preferred items involving hands-on sorting, which increased engagement. To complement the adoption of the social emotional competency measure, the district held a data symposium to involve students by having them reflect on both the climate survey and the SEL survey as well as offer input based on the results of the data.

While there is still much research that needs to be done in the field of measuring SEL, initial results are promising in terms of the unbiasedness, reliability, and validity of these tools. However, there is still the question of what role these measures should play within schools and districts.

SEL Being Used for Accountability: The CORE Districts

In 2013, the CORE Districts, a collaboration of eight districts in the state of California, obtained a waiver from the United States Department of Education that excused schools within those districts from the requirements of NCLB. Instead, this network created their own accountability system that complemented academic indicators with non-academic ones. The CORE Districts also redefined accountability to put more of an emphasis on using these indicators to foster support rather than blame. This was done by using these measures to pair schools that fell to the bottom of with high-performing schools serving a similar demographic to encourage the trade of techniques and strategies. As part of their non-academic approach, the CORE Districts included SEL through a yearly survey that would be used to track the effectiveness of SEL programs currently being used in schools (Blad, 2015).

The SEL framework that the CORE Districts use differs from CASEL’s framework in terms of the competencies that were chosen. The CORE Districts decided to include the following four competencies:

Growth Mindset	The belief that one’s abilities can grow with effort, that effort is a necessary part of success, that one can learn from criticism, and that one can persist in the face of setbacks
Self Efficacy	The belief in one’s own ability to succeed in reaching goals or achieving certain outcomes. The confidence in one’s ability to exert control over one’s own motivation, behavior, and environment
Self-Management	The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in difficult situations such as managing stress, delaying gratification, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals
Social Awareness	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports

*("CORE SEL Measures", 2017)

In order to measure these competencies, the CORE Districts created their own survey instruments that met the criteria of being: evidence-based; free to administer; practical, meaning being online or paper based and conducive to being incorporated into existing surveys; parsimonious, or having the fewest number of items without compromising validity; and strengths-based, or phrasing questions positively. The districts decided to use both student-self report surveys and teacher reports, despite the concerns that had been raised by Duckworth and Yeager. To account for potential biases, the surveys let students know their responses would be confidential and not affect their grades in any way to combat social-desirability bias, used anchoring vignettes to counter reference bias, and included demographic questions at the end of the

survey to prevent stereotype threat. Also, because CORE was still uncertain as to how reliable and valid these surveys would be, they gave little weight to the indicator so that it would only account for eight percent of the School Quality Improvement Index (Blad, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; & West et al., 2017). After conducting two pilot rounds in 2014 and 2015, West et al. (2017) conducted an analysis of the reliability and validity of these measures. This study found that there was high inter-scale reliability within the measures and that these measures were valid using school-level correlations between measures and multiple indicators of students' academic performance and behavior. Additionally, these pilot surveys showed no evidence for the presence of reference bias, perhaps an indication that the vignettes were successful in addressing that problem.

According to a brief released by the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) (2017), including measures of SEL has had many implications regarding school accountability and continuous improvement for the CORE Districts. First, because the SEL measures were shown to be reliable and valid and student self-reports were highly correlated with teacher reports, they were useful in identifying schools with below average and above average performance. Second, these measures identified which competencies specific schools scored highly on and which competencies on which some schools needed more work. This information is useful in making targeted decisions necessary for more effective supports. These measures of SEL also revealed dramatic gaps between subgroups within the same school. African American and Hispanic/Latino students tended to have the lowest levels of SEL, even after holding other demographic factors consistent. By measuring SEL, the CORE Districts are able to identify schools in which the gap in SEL between subgroups is pronounced and also determine which schools have been successful in closing that gap and explore the practices in place at those schools that could be more widely utilized. This finding also sparks the need for discussion on why these disparities in social emotional skills exists between students of certain groups as well as what policies and practices should take place to close that gap. Fourth, the school SEL measures have been shown to be predictive of academic outcomes, being useful as early indicators of academic progress in addition to information provided by administrative records. These measures give insight into how schools can contribute to their students' development outside of academics. Lastly, while including the SEL measures does not significantly change the rankings

of schools, it does change which schools are identified to be part of the bottom five percent. In other words, it is useful in identifying a new group of schools that are in need of improvement in areas other than academic achievement.

While the research is still in its early stages, the literature around developing tools to gauge social and emotional skills seems to suggest that these skills are measurable, and the instruments that have been constructed thus far have great potential. In the following sections, I will explore the way CPS has approached the implementation of SEL both on the district and school level. I will also examine what metrics actors within the district are currently using to measure SEL and whether or not these metrics are comparable to those presented in the literature.

METHODS

In order to get a better understanding of the way SEL is currently implemented and measured in the CPS context, I used a mixed-methods approach, which involved conducting interviews with those in CPS to collect qualitative data as well as utilizing publicly available school data provided by the district for my quantitative analysis.

Qualitative Methodology

Participants

Members of the CPS Central Office: I interviewed four people who work in the CPS Main Office. Three of the four individuals work directly in the OSEL as the Tier I SEL Support Manager and Network SEL Specialists¹ while the last participant is an SEL Specialist in the Personalized Learning Department. These individuals provided information on the district's approach in implementing SEL in schools as well as how the Central Office interacts with schools in establishing SEL supports.

School Administrators: In order for an SEL program to be measured, it must first be implemented, and in order for an SEL curriculum to be implemented in a school, there must be buy-in from the school leadership, who is the key actor in decision making on the school level. I interviewed a total of

¹ While the Network SEL Specialists technically work in Network Headquarters rather than the Central Office, I have included them as part of the central office because they do still report to the OSEL and to make a distinction between actors on the district level and actors on the school level.

five school administrators: three principals and two assistant principals. Four of the school administrators work at elementary schools while one works at a high school, which roughly reflects the ratio of district-run elementary schools to high schools in the district.

Procedures

As part of my research process, I created two semi-structured interviews intended to be used for those working in the OSEL and school administrators. Most interviews were conducted in-person and lasted around thirty minutes. In recruiting members of the CPS Central Office, I contacted Network SEL Specialists using a professional development flyer containing the emails of all thirteen specialists. Using snowball sampling, I had participants I had interviewed refer me to other potential participants, whether those participants be members of the Central Office or administrators of schools involved in SEL implementation.

For school administrators, I only interviewed and surveyed those who were involved in traditional, district-run, neighborhood elementary and high schools in CPS (i.e. excluding charter, corporate, and Options schools). These schools represent 500 of the 646 schools within the district, so they are the schools that most students within the district would be attending and the most representative of the students the district serves. I recruited most school administrators through mutual contacts within the University with the exception of one, who was referred to me by a Network SEL Specialist I had interviewed prior.

Measures

Members of the CPS Central Office: These interviews aimed at collecting data on three topics. The first topic of interest is the structure of the OSEL in terms of what positions exist within the department and what the hierarchy of these positions is. The next line of questioning has to do with the role the Central Office plays in implementation of SEL curricula in schools. This includes the resources SEL Network Specialists may be providing to district schools to facilitate SEL integration as well as the process of implementation and the specific challenges they have faced that are specific to the nature of their network or the schools they are working with. Lastly, I ask these participants about how SEL is measured in their network. This includes definitions for what social emotional competence and growth look like, what

metrics are being used in these measures, and what resources are available around measuring SEL implementation as well as the social and emotional competencies of students.

School Administrator Interview: The school administrator interviews have a similar structure to the Central Office interviews in terms of how SEL is implemented and measured in the context of their schools. One key difference between these interviews from the Central Office interviews, however, is that school administrators were asked what motivated their decision to bring SEL into their schools and make it an active part of their overall framework. Additionally, school administrators were asked to share their perceptions of their Network SEL Specialists and the nature of their interactions with those in the OSEL.

Quantitative Methodology: Publicly Available CPS School Data

As part of my analysis, I also used publically available school-level data from the CPS website. This data includes the SQRP ratings and scores for each school from the 2017-2018 school year. From this dataset, I only included schools that were within one of the thirteen networks, meaning that schools categorized as AUSL², charter, contract³, and ISP⁴ were excluded. In addition to the SQRP data, I also used individual school reports to collect more specific data on the status of a school's Supportive Schools Certification. Lastly, because many of the participants indicated that they used the 5Essentials Climate Survey in informing their SEL implementation, I accessed data available on www.cps.5-essentials.org/2016 to find schools' ratings on specific 5Essentials measures.

Using the data provided by CPS, I included background variables such as the network the schools were in, the school type (elementary or high school), and the SQRP rating for the 2017-2018 school year. In addition, I added data on the school's Supportive School Certification status (Exemplary, Established, Emerging, or Coming Soon), and specific measures from the 5Essentials School Climate Survey that would be indicative of an environment conducive to fostering social and emotional competencies. I included the subscale of Supportive Environment, which measures students' perceptions of the sense of safety and support they feel in the school (Bryk et al, 2010). I further disaggregated the Supportive Environment

² These are schools managed by the Academy for Urban School Leadership, which targets predominantly low-performing schools in the district.

³ Contract schools are schools managed by an external organization.

⁴ Independent School Principals (ISP) schools are afforded specific exemptions compared to the traditional neighborhood schools.

subscale, including the following three measures: “Peer Support for Academic Work,” or the demonstration of behaviors that lead to academic achievement that falls under the umbrella of self-management; “Safety,” which includes the sense of security students feel at school and around school; and “Student-Teacher Trust,” an indicator of the relationships and interactions between students and teachers. For high schools, the measure of “Schoolwide Future Orientation,” or the degree to which the school helps in planning life after graduation, replaces the measure of “Peer Support for Academic Work” (Bryk et al, 2010). In addition to measures within the Supportive Environment subscale, I included two other measures, “Teacher-Principal Trust” and “Teacher-Teacher Trust,” for, as mentioned before, SEL is something that is modeled, so adult relationships play an important role in shaping students’ social emotional development. Due to data accessibility, I was not able to obtain the most recent scores for all measures used in my analysis. The measures of “Teacher-Principal Trust,” “Teacher-Teacher Trust,” “Peer Support for Academic Work,” “Schoolwide Future Orientation,” and “Student-Teacher Trust” were all taken from the 2016-2017 school year. The rest of the measures were taken from the most recent iteration of the 5Essentials Survey.

ANALYSIS

Qualitative Analysis

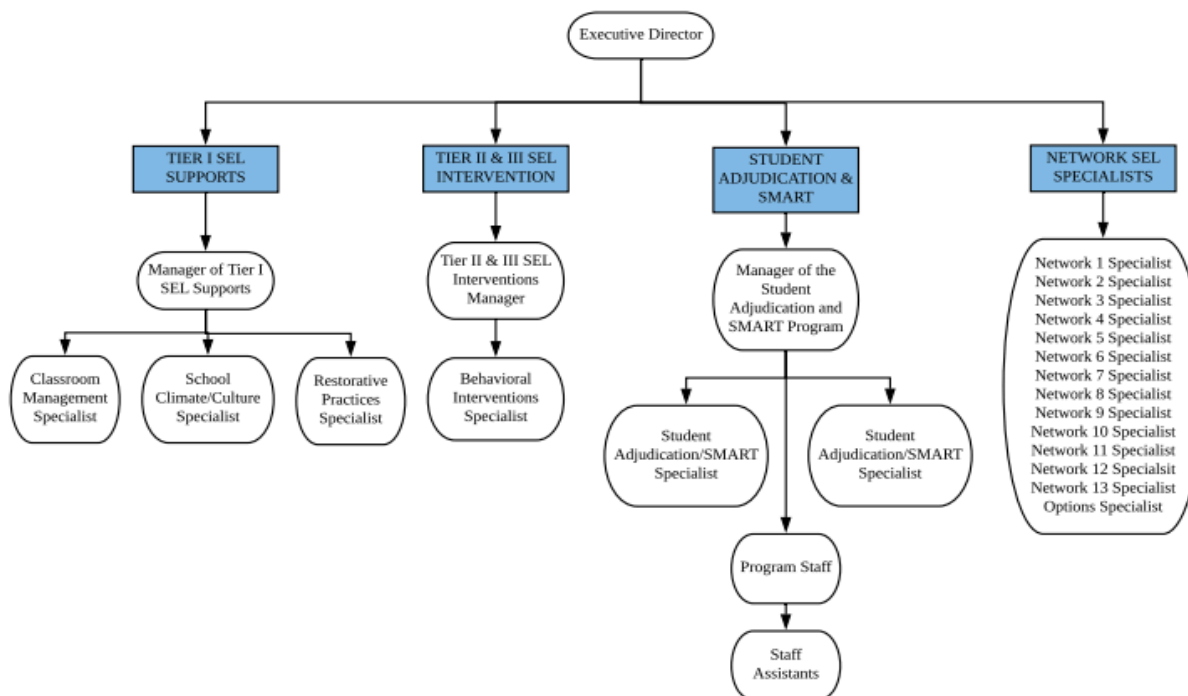
OSEL Specialists

Structure of the OSEL

There are four main branches that constitute the OSEL: Tier I SEL Supports, Tier II & III SEL Intervention, Student Adjudication and SMART program, and Network SEL Specialists. All branches report to the Executive Director, who is the head of the OSEL. Within the Tier I SEL Supports, there is the Manager of Tier I SEL Supports, Classroom Management Specialist, School Climate/Culture Specialist, and Restorative Practices Specialist. This branch works with meeting the SEL needs of a universal student population. The Tier II & III SEL Interventions branch, which focuses on supporting a targeted group of students, consists of the Tier II & III SEL Interventions Manager and the Behavioral Interventions Specialist. The Student Adjudication and SMART branch works with students who are expelled or close to being expelled and is made up of the Manager of the Student Adjudication and SMART program, two

Student Adjudication/SMART Specialists, SMART Program Staff, and Staff Assistants. Lastly, there are Network SEL Specialists for each of the thirteen networks in the district as well as an SEL Specialist for Options schools. These Network Specialists report to both the OSEL as well as their Network Chief.

Figure 1: Organization of the OSEL



Role of the OSEL and Network SEL Specialists in the Implementation of SEL

The main role of the Central Office is delivering resources and ideas to schools and showing them how to use them. This includes finding vendors who can provide SEL services to schools such as professional development for adults, keeping up with research in the field that could be disseminated to schools, and providing resources such as curricula, workbooks, toolkits, and guides. The role of the Central Office is not to mandate SEL implementation in schools. Rather, the district gives schools the choice as to whether or not they will use SEL as an approach and provides support to schools that do decide to implement.

The Network SEL Specialists in particular play an important role in helping educators in schools build the capacity necessary to implement SEL, especially since they spend much of their time working directly in school buildings. The specialists provide training for teachers, deans, principals, counselors, and social workers. This includes strategies related to classroom management and incorporating SEL into instruction. According to the Network Specialists, many teachers already include components of SEL

within their instruction, so then it becomes the job of the Specialist to focus teachers on making these efforts more intentional in their classrooms. In addition to providing direct instruction to staff, the Network Specialist can aid a school in building its own Climate and Culture Team or SEL Team, which entails working with either the principal or assistant principal. Depending on the network, Network Specialists are expected to visit two to three schools a day and attend monthly meetings with principals in the network as needed. For more targeted support or isolated incidents, schools can either reach out to their Network Specialist to receive specific coaching on issues such as restorative justice, or the Network Chief or principal could refer a specific school or teacher. In these cases, the Network Specialist either provides the coaching themselves or refers the school to an outside vendor. The Network Specialists are also a part of reviewing the evidence schools submit in gaining a Supportive Schools Certification. While final ratings are decided by those in the Central Office, the Network Specialist can look over the profile the school has submitted and offer advice as to how the school could strengthen their evidence or practices the school could engage in to meet requirements of the certification. Through working with the different schools in their network, Network Specialists categorize schools as being either “high touch” or “low touch/star” schools. Creating this distinction between schools allows the Network Specialist to identify schools that are in need of more intensive SEL supports. This also means that though schools may not be treated equally, the Network Specialist strives to treat schools equitably, prioritizing the schools that exhibit the greatest need.

Another important role the Network SEL Specialists play is creating Professional Learning Communities (PLC). This includes bringing together school leaders, counselors, or teachers across different schools to facilitate discussion around SEL. By doing so, educators are given a space in which to share challenges they are facing and strategies they are using that have been effective in the context of their school. At times, Network Specialists will organize school visits so that educators at one school can directly see for themselves how another school is approaching SEL implementation. The identification of “high-touch” and “low-touch” schools can be useful in creating these PLCs, for Network Specialists are then able to refer their “high-touch” schools to their “low-touch” counterparts. The Network Specialists themselves have their own PLC in which they meet every two weeks to discuss the work being done in

their networks, share strategies, and receive information from the Central Office that they could then bring back to their own networks.

However, there seem to be discrepancies within those in the central office as to what the roles of the OSEL and Network Specialists are. As one member of the OSEL pointed out, the role OSEL and Network Specialists play focus more on consultations for immediate problems, or “putting out fires” more so than supporting system improvements. While the Network Specialist and OSEL can try to help schools obtain Supportive Schools Certification, that is not their main purpose. Part of the reason for this has to do with the large caseloads that network specialists have. With the exception of the Personalized Learning SEL Specialist, each Network Specialist has around thirty to forty schools that they work with. An extra challenge is that these schools, though roughly grouped by location, can still be quite distant from each other. Both those in the Central Office, Network Specialists and SEL support managers alike, highlighted the challenge that having such a large caseload presented in terms of being able to prioritize SEL issues. By contrast, a Network Specialist I spoke with opposed the idea of “putting out fires” being her main role.

“Putting out fires is something that I can’t stand. When I teach, and I train people, I’m training them on a proactive, positive approach... I focus more on proactive strategies. I focus more on systemic ways to build a more positive culture and climate ... I do support putting out fires, and I think that I don’t have as many fires to put out since I am so focused on being proactive, on being preventive, with fires because just like the way I’m stressed and the anxiety can kick in, I’m sure that other people at the school level also have that feeling. That’s when some bad decisions are made on all parts.”

While the specific duties that the OSEL and Network Specialists are responsible for may be clear, it appears that members within the Central Office have different ideas as to what the purpose of their roles are. Some believe their role to be more reactive, responding to incidents as they arise, while others take a more proactive approach to curb the need for reactive action. These differences in the conception of the role of the Central Office could potentially lead to people taking varied approaches to how they implement SEL.

How Those in Central Office Measure SEL

The key metrics that the OSEL uses in measuring the effectiveness of SEL implementation are mostly measures on the school level. These include metrics such as discipline data, in-school and out-of-

school suspension rates, attendance rates, and results from the 5Essentials School Climate Survey. Another indicator of SEL progress that was mentioned by three of the four participants working in the Central Office was the number of schools receiving the Supportive Schools Certification. This includes both the number of schools that have submitted a portfolio to be considered for a rating as well as the number of schools that have qualified as being “Established” or “Exemplary.” A metric that Network Specialists specifically use is the number of schools turning to more restorative practices rather than punitive ones as well as the number of schools that are using explicit SEL curricula in their daily instruction. While these measures may act as indicators of whether an environment may be conducive to the development of social and emotional competencies, they are not necessarily indicative of whether or not students’ social and emotional skills have actually grown. The OSEL believes that it is the job of schools to come up with these kinds of measures, which is why it included the requirement of collecting and using universal data for SEL in the criteria for Supportive Schools Certification.

Currently, there is no standardized way of measuring social emotional competencies in CPS, and SEL is not included in a school’s SQRP rating. According to a member working in the OSEL, this decision to not make schools accountable for SEL was intentional, for the district wanted schools to buy into SEL implementation rather than force schools to enact it. However, this does not mean that everyone agrees with decision. As one Network SEL Specialist puts it:

“Now one thing that’s difficult is that SEL does not have a standardized assessment that schools are doing, the same way they have PSAT or NWEA⁵. They don’t have anything like that. So SEL, even though the state clearly indicates that these are standards that they are expected to teach, you still have schools that are not teaching these skills. Unfortunately, because we have schools that are not teaching these skills explicitly, you see schools where a lot of students are not connected to school. They are not able to be resilient and cope when a lot of things come their way because they don’t have the skill set that we would expect the schools to teach.”

In her opinion, having the district explicitly mandated SEL implementation and using an SEL assessment would push more schools to focus on teaching students these social emotional skills, which she believes to be a critical part of a student’s education.

⁵ The PSAT And NWEA are national standardized tests that are included in CPS schools’ SQRP ratings.

While most schools do not use competency-based measures to gauge social and emotional development and growth, a few schools within the district have begun to incorporate these metrics through Personalized Learning. By speaking with the Personalized Learning SEL Specialist, I learned that through a grant with PANORAMA, ten schools using Personalized Learning have also incorporated SEL as part of their framework, providing both student-self report assessments and teacher assessments that were explicitly competency-based. This is much closer to what the CORE Districts are doing in their schools, and though these Personalized Learning schools are currently part of a pilot group, the goal is to gradually scale up and expand these resources to the rest of the district.

School Administrators

Reasons for Implementing SEL

Most of the school administrators I had spoken with started implementing SEL fairly recently, within the last two or three years. When asking school administrators as to why they decided to bring SEL into their school, I found two major reasons. First, school leadership believed that this was an area of need their students had. Second, educators believed that SEL was mandated by the district. For most schools, it was a combination of these two reasons that motivated school administrators to incorporate SEL in their school. Across all interviews, members of the Central Office and school administrators alike, there was an agreement that schools should give students the skills and tools necessary deal with their emotions and express them in positive ways. The hope would be that by explicitly teaching students how to become self aware and empathetic, students would be able to make more responsible and positive decisions and better cope with the environment around them, which would also help in their ability to learn. As one principal put it:

“We are a school where the neighborhood experience has so much trauma. Our kids deal with trauma on an everyday basis. It has to a priority like math or English because if not, you can’t get to math and English before addressing the social emotional needs, so it’s a top priority like it is for reading and math for us.”

Three of the five school administrators I interviewed had joined their schools fairly recently, and these participants mentioned how they noticed a lack of support regarding students’ social and emotional needs when they started at their schools, which is why they decided to focus on this area. For example, one

principal mentions how she bought Second Step for her school without asking for a group decision because she felt that it was something her school needed. Two of the participants explicitly stated SEL was something that was district-mandated, which contributed to part of their reason for including it in their school. This finding is interesting in the light of the fact that members of the OSEL specifically stated that mandating SEL was not a part of their role. However, it does appear that believing that SEL was district-mandated alone was not the only factor contributing to these schools' decisions to implement, for they also mentioned the needs of their students as being foremost, especially considering the challenging social environment in which they are situated.

Levels of SEL Implementation

The OSEL gives school leaders a great amount of discretion in terms of how they choose to implement SEL within their schools. As such, there was a wide variation of approaches among the different school administrators I spoke with in terms of what SEL looked like in their context. All participants agreed however, that one of the most important components of incorporating SEL was creating an environment in the school where students felt safe, accepted, supported, and heard. In the words of one principal:

“SEL implementation means trying to figure out what are the necessary ‘touches’ both from the side of the classroom teachers, support staff, and school clinicians to provide the necessary wraparound supports and services for students so that they feel as if the school is a safe space for them. And safe not necessarily looking at physical violence, but a space where they have voice, they feel as if they have people with shared experiences, the right diversity in ways in which everyone is accepted and their views are a part of the experience here and also the direction of movement of the school.”

The implementation of SEL goes beyond simply following an SEL curriculum; it is a commitment that is embedded in the practices and culture of the school. Implementation also tended to be a gradual process in all schools. Administrators would start by providing a curriculum or program without mandating teachers to use it at first. Then, depending on the success of the initiative, administrators intended to scale up these efforts and require that all teachers of all grade levels comply with the curriculum or program in the following year. Based on my discussion with school administrators, there appear to be three key levels on which SEL is addressed: teacher/staff capacity building, classroom practices, and school-wide supports.

A common theme that came up among the interviews was the need for adults in schools to model SEL for students. This includes having adults prioritizing the social and emotional needs of their students, providing tools and training in order to meet those needs, and creating strong student-adult and adult-adult relationships. As one participant put it:

“It starts with the teacher’s values and their beliefs about meeting kids where they’re at, and I’d say that our staff has high expectations for students and wants to meet them where they’re at and really values the whole child first and foremost. That foundation is just integral to any kind of SEL work.”

Once that commitment to students’ social and emotional development is established, school administrators work to build the capacity of their staff in a number of different ways. All the schools I spoke with provided some form of SEL-related professional development to their teachers, usually over the summer before the start of the school year. However, not as many schools provided SEL-related professional development during the school year, something that many school leaders admitted that they wish they could do more of. In one case, one principal mentioned that CPS had canceled their professional development days in the previous year, which prevented their staff from receiving the training she had hoped. Furthermore, the professional development offered by the OSEL tended to focus on introducing the SEL framework, classroom management strategies, and incorporating SEL into the curriculum. There is no professional development offered in terms of how to measure and collect data regarding SEL outcomes.

Another way in which school administrators try to build their teachers’ capacity is to look for resources outside of the school, whether that be through the Network SEL Specialist and the OSEL or through an outside organization or vendor such as CASEL, Positive Discipline, or Calm Classrooms. These resources can provide coaching to teachers through classroom observations or provide consulting regarding specific SEL-related areas such as classroom management and discipline and trauma-informed practices. One school in particular decided to build its staff capacity using the resources it already had in the building through creating a Google form for incident assistance to make it easier for teachers to ask for help. In addition to this form, they also started doing weekly Learning Walks, where teachers would sit in on others’ classroom and take notes on what they observe. The Google form and the Learning Walks are

examples of capacity-building practices that help staff build trust with one another as well as facilitate natural collaboration around SEL.

The level of implementation that arguably has the most direct effect on the most students would be the way SEL is incorporated into classroom practices. Three schools indicated that they used some form of explicit SEL curricula, the most common two being Second Step and Calm Classrooms. Even in schools that did not use scripted lessons, there were other ways in which the SEL framework manifested in the classroom. One strategy that is commonly used is using turn-and-talks during instruction to give more opportunities for social interactions between students. In the classroom, teachers could designate a peace corner, where students can go if they need a moment to relax or cool down, and these corners often either have activities such as coloring activities or books. Teachers could also incorporate aspects of journaling to get students to build their self-awareness skills and meaningfully reflect on themselves and their experiences. Many schools also required their teachers to start off the day with morning meetings or Pause, Own, Practice (POP) check-ins, where students could share how they are feeling to the rest of their classmates. This not only helps the student express their emotions, but it also acts as a way for the teacher to gauge where their students are at on any given day in order to help bring them to a place where they are able learn. For those working with students in the upper grades, SEL is something that is included in Advisory, where students meet with a teacher or counselor in a one-on-one or group setting to talk about their current situation and discuss plans regarding future decisions and goals. Many of the classroom practices focus on taking a proactive approach to meeting the social and emotional needs of students through consistent and explicit teaching as well as solutions to de-escalate problems before a strong reactive action is needed.

The last level of implementation is that of school-wide supports. School-wide supports refer to SEL strategies that schools employ outside of the classroom setting and can take two forms. The first form is through school organization and culture. Many of the schools I spoke with had created Climate and Culture Teams or SEL Teams made up of staff, not just teachers, that would identify what the social and emotional needs students have, set goals related to meeting those needs, and create a strategic plan to meet those goals. These initiatives usually are led by a point person, typically the assistant principal, principal, or a

counselor and are done on an opt-in basis, meaning that those on the team have demonstrated some degree of commitment to SEL by joining. Schools also use the SEL framework to set common expectations and use a common language regarding the acceptable norms and behaviors within the school, which applies to staff and students alike. For example, one school created a voice and behavior matrix in which voice levels and behaviors were defined for each of the different locations on campus, such as the bathrooms, hallways, and cafeteria. Through creating this matrix, the school had created a resource for setting expected conduct using language that students and adults in the building could all understand. The second form of school-wide supports include Tier II and Tier III interventions targeted at students with more intensive needs. This includes practices such as check in/check out's, Peer Councils, Restorative Justice practices, and individual/group counseling. In cases where the school does not have the resources to meet the needs of a student, they school will refer the student either to the OSEL or to an outside partner or vendor in order to get the appropriate supports for the student.

Perceptions of OSEL Specialists

As mentioned before, the OSEL and the Network SEL Specialists in particular are supposed to play a critical role in supporting schools during SEL implementation. The Network SEL Specialists I spoke to tended to seem themselves as having a positive relationship with schools because they saw themselves as being actively involved in bringing schools resources and information. Some of the schools I spoke to share this sentiment, mentioning how the Network Specialist spent a lot of time within the school and was helpful in brainstorming ideas and troubleshooting problems. One school in particular mentioned that having the Network Specialist bestowed more legitimacy to the initiatives the school was trying to push out compared to having someone within the school speaking on behalf of certain practices. However, not all school administrators shared this positive sentiment of the Network Specialist. As one school administrator said:

“I don't mean that, but they [referring to Network SEL Specialists] are not involved. They may push out information as it relates to district requests and/or communications, but I've not found either person - there have been two since me in this role - being overly helpful with things at a school level. They have a portfolio of whatever's in the network, so they differentiate based on need. And it could be that I haven't needed. The times I have asked for assistance, I don't know that it's been super helpful, but I understand what their role is, and it's really not meant to be at a school regularly.”

Another common reservation that school administrators had about their Network Specialist was that their Network Specialist always seemed very busy, which could be due to the fact that the Network Specialists are typically responsible for thirty to forty schools within their caseload. This makes it difficult for schools to get in contact with their Network Specialist in order to get consistent support, and some schools do not consider Network Specialist as an important resource in their SEL implementation.

How School Administrators Measure SEL

School administrators shared many of the metrics used by the OSEL when it came to measuring SEL outcomes such as discipline data, attendance rates, suspension rates, and the 5Essentials. As mentioned previously, one of the criteria to gain Supportive Schools Certification is for schools to collect and use universal data for SEL and school climate, which includes validated measures that the school itself has created regarding factors such as students' feelings of school connectedness or student-to-student relationships. Therefore, in addition to these measures mentioned above, many schools have also created their own internal forms of evaluation such a school-specific climate survey for staff and students, surveys for staff feedback regarding SEL, teacher evaluations, and student conduct. Members of the Climate and Culture/SEL teams typically generate the questions asked on these surveys, and for schools serving older students, students are also included in the process to create these measurement tools. Some schools mirror their climate survey off of the questions asked on the 5Essentials while others base their questions off of observations that students and staff may have had regarding SEL-related topics in the school. A few schools also mentioned using students' academic outcomes such as grades and GPA as a form of measuring SEL success, for they believe that meeting the social and emotional needs of students makes them more ready to learn, which in turn affects their academic outcomes.

“We really believe that our SEL work should have a direct impact on our academic outcomes. If students feel happy and supported at school, then they should do well at school. The question we're asking is ‘What is prohibiting this child from making gains academically?’”

Like those in the Central Office, schools also mentioned the Supportive Schools Certification as a metric for gauging SEL implementation. However, these two acting bodies differed greatly in terms of the weight they gave to this metric. From the perspective of those in the OSEL, the Supportive Schools

Certification was an important way to gauge the breadth and depth of SEL supports that schools in the district were providing for their students. Through the lens of school administrators, on the other hand, the emphasis given to the Supportive Schools Certification was more mixed. Some school administrators highly valued their Supportive Schools Certification rating, constantly trying to improve their profile in order to achieve higher certification. For other school administrators, however, the Supportive Schools Certification did not seem to take much of a priority. Three of the five school administrators I spoke with either did not mention the Supportive Schools Certification as an indicator of progress or were not aware of their school's Supportive Schools rating. Of those three, one participant did not know whether or not their school had sent in an application to be considered for a rating at all. This seems to suggest that there is a disconnect between the members of the OSEL and schools as to the significance of the Supportive Schools Certification as a way to measure the effectiveness of SEL implementation.

In most cases, the Climate and Culture/SEL team is responsible for the creation of measures and collection and analysis of the data. The team then reports their findings to the rest of the staff, using this data to inform instructional practices, identify what is working and what is not, collect staff input, and plan future professional development. School administrators also mentioned how this data is used to convince teachers who were not initially on board with SEL implementation that these supports are necessary to meet the needs of their students, thereby securing teacher buy-in. Some school administrators I spoke to also expressed interest in having more competency-based metrics for measuring students' social emotional skills as is being done in the CORE Districts and Personalized Learning schools. The main appeal to this kind of data is the ability to track pre-post results over time to measure improvement over the year.

Common Themes from Both the OSEL Specialists and School Administrators

The Role of the ILSBE SEL Standards

The degree to which the ILSBE SEL Standards played a role in SEL implementation varied depending on whom I spoke to. For those in on the district-level working in the OSEL, the state SEL standards played an important role guiding implementation and practice. This can be seen in the fact that the Supportive Schools Certification is directly based off the state SEL Standards. On the school level, however, this was not always the case. Schools seemed to be much more focused on either the district's

requirements around SEL and used the district's guidelines or the needs of their students to inform their practices rather than the state's standards. One principal even mentioned how they would not be surprised if there were teachers in her school who were not aware of these standards at all. Schools that did look to the state SEL Standards expressed that the standards are embedded in the discussion around the SEL curriculum they had. For the most part though, it appears that schools are putting the priorities that the district lays out over that of the state, and the state SEL Standards are most useful insofar as the district decides to adopt and act on them.

Buy-In

As mentioned before, CPS' approach to SEL is not one that relies on mandating implementation. As such, in order for SEL incorporation to take place, there must be buy-in. This buy-in occurs at two levels. First, the district must attempt to get schools to buy in, and second, once school leaders have decided to focus on SEL, they must get buy-in from the individual teachers within their school. This concept of buy-in is important for SEL, for those who do not believe that SEL is necessary will choose not to explicitly incorporate SEL into their curricula, even if there is an SEL plan that is being used within their school (Hanson-Peterson, Schonert-Reichle, & Smith, 2016). According to those I interviewed, the problem of buy-in is not one that has to do with educators denying that SEL is an important factor in a students' educational experience, which is consistent with the existing literature on educators' perspective on SEL. However, the challenge of time constraints makes it less likely that educators will give SEL high priority. The most common responses that the people I spoke with got when giving suggestions related to SEL were "There are too many things on my plate," or "That's one more thing to do." However, as one member from the OSEL put it:

"SEL is that plate. It is the foundation upon which other goals the school has are built upon. Therefore, it is aligned with the school's goals as well."

One Network Specialist mentioned how she would approach these kinds of responses by emphasizing how SEL instruction was something that was embedded and most likely something that teachers were already doing, not something extra. By doing so, she could guide her teachers to know how to enhance these practices to improve SEL integration.

“A lot of times, when you share something with a teacher, it’s like, ‘Ugh, one more thing to do.’ So coming from a teacher perspective, I was in a classroom for 16 years, so seeing teachers that are already doing things that are already listed, it’s like, ‘Oh, I’m already doing it.’ So it’s not anything that’s extra. They just need to know how to enhance it.”

School leaders seemed to use a similar approach by directing teachers to view their interactions with students with more intentionality and specificity to facilitate the social and emotional growth of their students. The Network Specialists also use site visits as a way for schools that are not yet integrating SEL to see schools that are exemplary in their implementation in hopes that these observations will convince the leadership at those other schools to consider incorporating SEL.

More specifically for school administrators, the issue of buying into SEL starts with the kind of staff who are in the school. As leaders, adults’ beliefs in SEL are factors that play into their decision to hire staff or let staff go. In the opinion of one school leader:

“You got to be on the right bus because this school is going to have SEL, and if you don’t see the value in it, you either keep that to yourself and do it, or they’ll have to work with me very directly. If you prioritize something as a leader, every morning announcement has it. Every time I’m in a classroom, I look for it. Every walk, through every dialogue – if it’s a priority, it gets addressed. Otherwise, it’s not a priority.”

By clearly expressing the school’s commitment to SEL, school leaders find that their staff either choose to also adopt that sentiment or decide to leave, in which case, the leader is given an opportunity to hire someone who does share this goal.

Data and measurement also play an important role in the discussion around buy-in, for both those in the Central Office and school administrators rely on data in order to demonstrate the need for SEL within the students they serve. Metrics such as attendance, discipline data, and suspension rates are used to make staff more aware of the social and emotional needs and trends within students. Through raising this awareness of students’ needs and the potential for an SEL framework in providing a solution to meeting those needs, supporters of SEL within the OSEL and schools are able to convince those around them who are initially resistant to prioritize SEL within their respective settings.

Challenges to Implementation

From my discussions with those in the OSEL and school administrators, I identified three key challenges to SEL implementation. The first barrier is the lack of SEL resources and supports for students

in higher grade levels. Programs such as Second Step and Positive Discipline are geared towards students in the K-8 range. Furthermore, the difference in scheduling between students in elementary schools versus students in high schools makes it more difficult to create time devoted explicitly to SEL since high school students typically do not have a homeroom that they return to multiple times throughout the day. Those in the OSEL are currently searching for resources that could be used in the high school setting, but compared to the work that has been done in the elementary setting, research in this area is sparse. Even within elementary schools, school administrators mentioned how certain programs such as Positive Discipline were extremely effective for their primary-age students but much less so for their middle grade students. In an attempt to find a solution to this barrier, the principal from the high school I spoke with is currently trying to develop and pilot an SEL course for their sophomores. However, the feasibility of this plan is greatly inhibited by the second obstacle: the lack of training and human capacity.

Earlier, it had been mentioned that building adult capacity around SEL was the foundation to any SEL implementation. However, for many schools, this foundation is one that is still lacking, making it difficult for these schools to build their staff's capacity while simultaneously providing supports for their students. In the words of one principal:

“I overestimated the training that teachers had had, either with SEL or just classroom management in general, so I’ve uncovered this semester is that teachers – there’s a lot of different visions for what education should be and what schools should be within this building. I didn’t realize that part of the issue was the lack of teacher training. I think a challenge here is bringing everyone together and saying SEL learning and support for kids is everyone’s job. It’s not, ‘You do this piece, you do this piece, you do this piece’. We’re all in this, for all of the kids all of the time.”

Many of the school leaders I spoke to mentioned that they would like more opportunities to receive professional development related to SEL to equip their staff with the right tools and training. The ability to provide this kind of professional development is also entangled in the issue of having the human capacity and time to provide these resources. As previously mentioned, Network SEL Specialists have been described as being stretched thin - both by school administrators and the specialists themselves - due to their large caseloads. This compounded with the time constraint creates a tradeoff that Network Specialists must make between creating system improvements related to SEL and dealing with individual incidents, or

“putting out fires,” as they arise. It must be noted that Network Specialists are not the only resource that school administrators turn to either. The school administrators I spoke with also expressed a desire to have more clinicians such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers to address pressing issues as they come up as well as developing curricula or programs that could benefit all students. The high school trying to create and pilot their SEL course is currently facing the obstacle of not having the human capacity necessary to scale up the initiative. In this case, expanding the training of current staff and having more on-staff clinicians in schools could potentially provide a solution to the previous barrier by creating a feasible resource for high schools.

The third and last challenge to SEL implementation is balancing the tradeoff between meeting the needs of a diverse student population and equity. Chicago Public Schools is a district serving students from very different backgrounds, meaning that there is a wide variety of needs as well. Some networks or schools may require trauma-informed practices while for others, a focus towards anxiety and depression is more appropriate. There is not only a wide variation in the types of supports or approaches that schools require but also in the degree or extent to which those supports are necessary. For this very reason, Network SEL Specialists have categorized schools within their district as “low-touch” or “high-touch” in order to differentiate need. However, while this may be the equitable approach that does not change the fact that many of the higher performing schools I spoke with felt that they were not being sufficiently supported. As one school administrator puts it:

“My school isn’t a great school of need, but there are issues. I don’t want to make it seem as though they’re not helping, but we aren’t as of a greater priority as some in the district. It’s just like a teacher. It’s the same exact thing. Some kids who are higher performing tend to get left alone because they’re not creating the issues. It’s the same with how network support happens. That’s just a fixed resource reality.”

Quantitative Analysis

Through interviews with actors within CPS, it became clear that the Supportive Schools Certification was an important metric in determining the level of progress the district was making in terms of implementing SEL. However, while the number of schools obtaining certification may be increasing, are these schools substantively different from schools that do not have certification? To answer this question, I

used publically available school-level data to compare schools with Supportive Schools Certification to those without. I assigned each Supportive Schools Certification status a numerical value, with 1 signifying the “Coming Soon” status and 4 signifying the “Exemplary” status. The measures from the 5Essentials were also converted to a 5-point scale, with “Very Weak” being a 1 and “Very Strong” being a 5.

Descriptive Statistics of Supportive Schools Certification

As can be seen in the Figure 2, most of the schools fall in the status of “Emerging,” meaning that most schools have submitted evidence to be considered for Supportive School Certification but fell short on the requisite number of criteria. Figure 3 shows the distribution of Supportive Schools ratings by SQRP score, which takes is a score comprised of a school’s academic growth among its students on certain standardized tests, the 5Essentials Climate Survey, student attendance rates, graduation rates, and students’ college and career readiness (CPS School Quality Rating Policy Handbook, 2017). Those rating Level 2+ and above tend to have higher proportions of schools at least applying to be considered for the Supportive Schools Certification. These categories also have approximately similar percentages of schools being rated as “Established” or “Exemplary.” Not a single school in the Level 3 category was ranked above “Emerging.”

Figure 2: Distribution of Supportive Schools Ratings

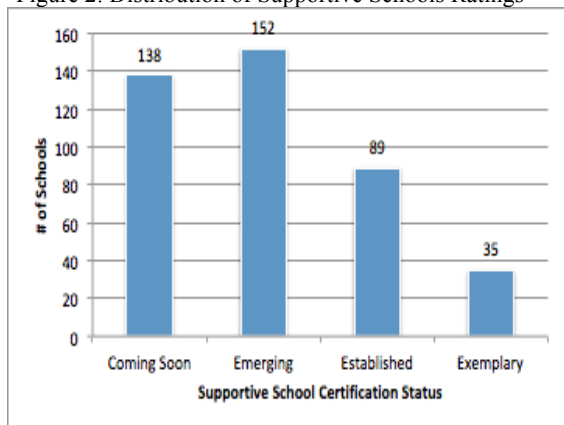
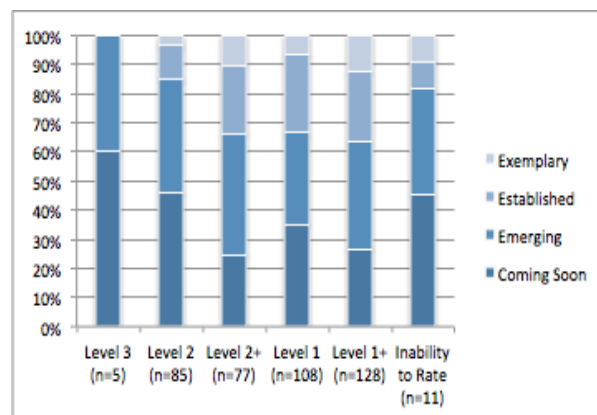


Figure 3: Distribution of Supportive Schools Rating by SQRP



By separating the data further by elementary school and high school, it becomes clear that more elementary schools have submitted evidence to be considered for Supportive School Certification both relatively and absolutely. Additionally, the number and proportion of elementary schools that have achieved a rating of “Exemplary” is much higher than that of high schools. This has been consistent with the challenge

mentioned earlier of there not being as many SEL resources for high schools compared to elementary schools.

Figure 4

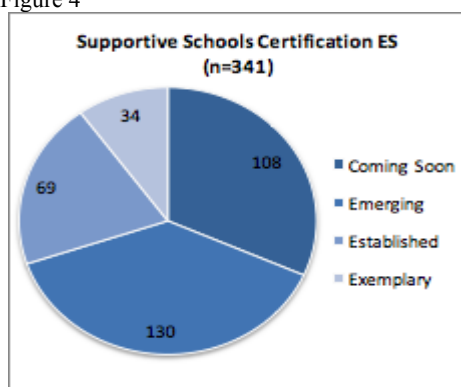
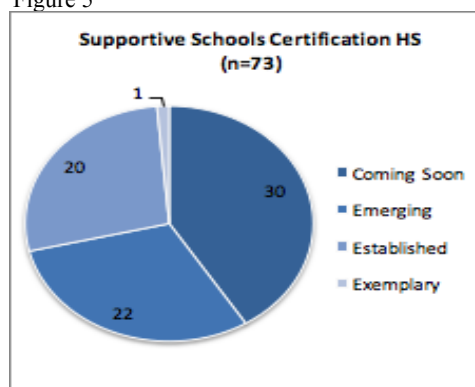


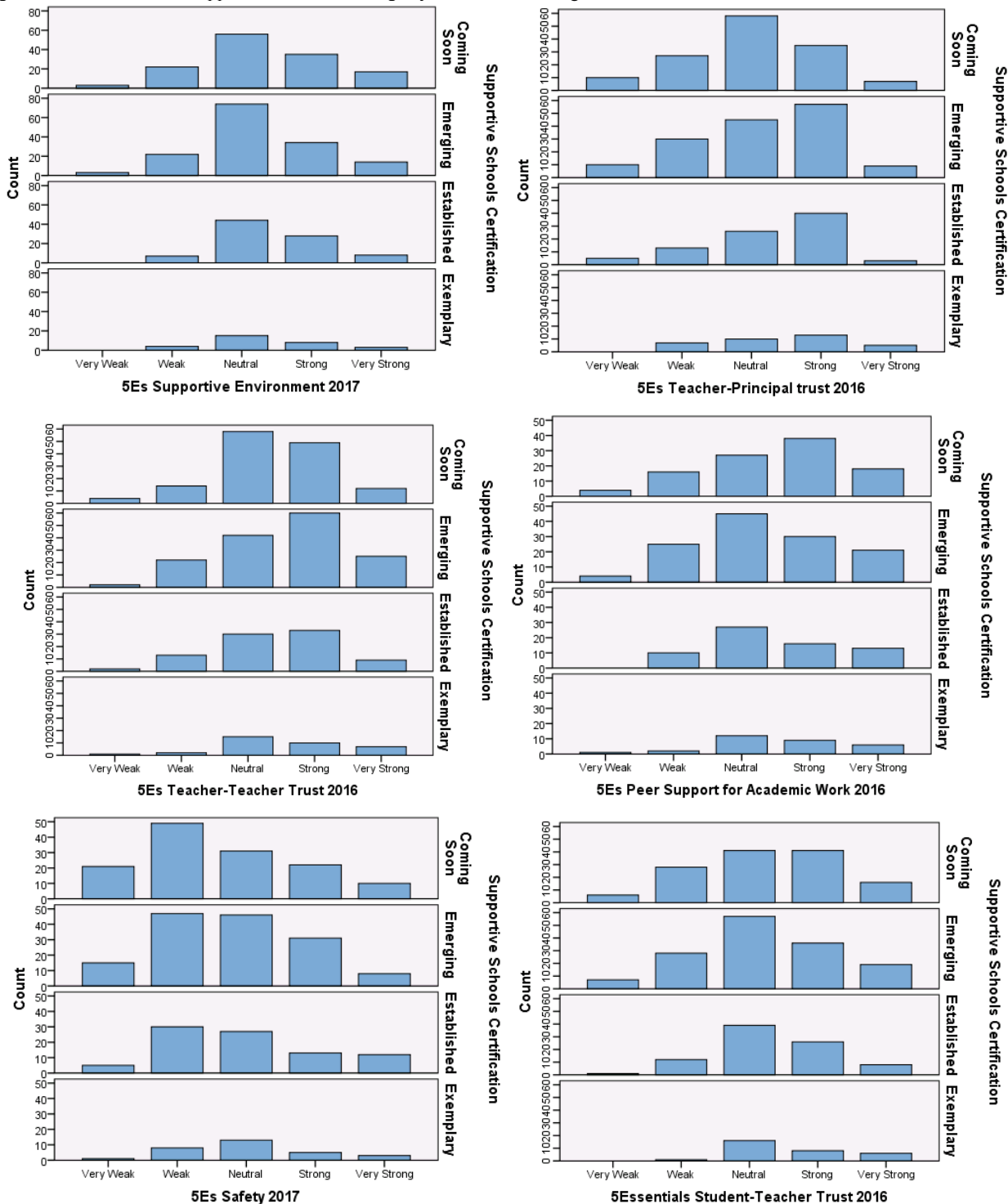
Figure 5



Distributions of Supportive Schools Certification on 5Essentials

Because many members of the OSEL and school leaders mentioned using the 5Essentials as another way to measure SEL within the school, I conducted a few analyses to see if there was a relationship between a school's outcome on their 5Essentials and their Supportive School Certification Status. Within each of the seven outcome variables taken from the 5Essentials (Supportive Environment, Teacher-Principal Trust, Teacher-Teacher Trust, Peer Support for Academic Work, Safety, Student-Teacher Trust, and Schoolwide Future Orientation), I grouped schools by their Supportive School Certification status to see if distributions of schools would look different depending on the school's certification status. If there were a difference between schools that were certified and schools that were not, one would expect to see the distribution skew more towards the left, or have higher frequencies of being weak on the measure, for schools that had the certification status of "Coming Soon" or "Emerging." Conversely, one would expect that schools with either "Established" or "Exemplary" status would have a distribution that was right-skewed, or higher numbers of schools with "Strong" or "Very Strong" responses on the 5Essentials. The distribution for "Schoolwide Future Orientation" was not included in the analysis, for this measure is only used for high schools, and only one high school has an "Exemplary" status, so there was not a fair comparison in the distributions.

Figure 6: Distributions of Supportive Schools Ratings by 5Essentials Ratings



From looking at Figure 6, one can see that while schools with “Established” or “Exemplary” status had fewer schools that were in the categories of “Very Weak” and “Weak,” there did not seem to be much of a difference in distribution in terms of the proportion of schools within each group that were in the “Strong” or “Very Strong” categories. Even for schools with “Exemplary” status, most schools in that group still fell within the category of “Neutral” on the different outcome variables, with the exception of “Teacher-Principal Trust.” Also, for the measures of “Teacher-Principal Trust” and “Teacher-Teacher Trust,” schools with the “Established” status had higher proportions of schools falling in the “Strong” category compared to schools with the “Exemplary” status. Furthermore, if a school were to achieve Supportive School Certification, especially if it were to achieve “Exemplary” status, one would expect that the school would not be categorized as “Very Weak” on any of the seven measures. However, with the exception of “Supportive Environments,” every measure had at least one school that was deemed “Established” or “Exemplary” have a rating of “Very Weak.”

Correlations Between Supportive Schools Certification and 5Essentials

After looking at the distributions between Supportive Schools Certification and 5Essentials outcomes, I ran a correlation matrix between the Supportive Schools Certification, SQRP rating, and 5Essentials measures to see if there was a significant relationship between these variables. The school’s Supportive Schools rating was significantly correlated with its SQRP rating, overall 5Essentials score, Teacher-Principal Trust, and Safety. Of these correlations, the SQRP rating had the strongest correlation while none of the measures from the 5Essentials exceeded 0.15, suggesting that while there may be a significant relationship between the Supportive Schools Certification and 5Essentials outcome, the relationship is fairly weak.

Table 1: Correlation matrix with all schools

		Correlations								
		Supportive Schools Certification	SQRP_2018	5Essentials Points	5Es Supportive Environment 2017	5Es Teacher-Principal trust 2016	5Es Teacher-Teacher Trust 2016	5Es Peer Support for Academic Work 2016	5Es Safety 2017	5Essentials Student-Teacher Trust 2016
Supportive Schools Certification	Pearson Correlation	1	.174**	.144**	.036	.129**	.038	.019	.125*	.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.003	.477	.009	.444	.728	.013	.126
	N	414	403	412	397	410	410	324	397	396

Considering that the Supportive Schools rating was most strongly correlated with the overall 5Essentials score compared to any of the other 5Essentials measures, there is a possibility that the Supportive Schools

Certification is measuring a school’s ability to organize rather than its ability to implement SEL or foster social emotional development in its students. Additionally, the fact that there a sizeable proportion of schools in the “Coming Soon” category that had scored “Strong” or “Very Strong” on each of the six 5Essentials variables from earlier suggests that there may be schools that do have socially and emotionally nurturing environments that did not see the need to submit a profile for Supportive Schools.

With this in mind, I filtered out schools that had not submitted a profile for the Supportive Schools Certification and ran the correlation again. This time, the only variables with which the Supportive Schools rating was significantly correlated with were the SQRP rating and Student-Teacher Trust, which did not have a significant correlation previously. This suggests that among schools that have submitted a profile to be considered for a Supportive Schools Certification, there was no significant relationship between the Supportive Schools Rating with the exception of the SQRP rating and Student-Teacher Trust.

Table 2: Correlation matrix excluding schools rated “Coming Soon”

		Correlations								
		Supportive Schools Certification	SQRP_2018	5Essentials Points	5Es Supportive Environment 2017	5Es Teacher-Principal trust 2016	5Es Teacher-Teacher Trust 2016	5Es Peer Support for Academic Work 2016	5Es Safety 2017	5Essentials Student-Teacher Trust 2016
Supportive Schools Certification	Pearson Correlation	1	.154*	.111	.077	.094	-.029	.096	.086	.122*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011	.066	.212	.121	.636	.154	.164	.049
	N	276	270	275	264	273	273	221	264	264

T-tests

The final analysis I conducted to determine the validity of the Supportive Schools Certification was a t-test to see if schools with Supportive Schools Certification had significantly different ratings on their 5Essentials when compared to schools without the certification. For this analysis, the Supportive Schools Certification variable was recoded so that it was a 0 if the school had a status of “Coming Soon” or “Emerging” and a 1 if the school had a status of “Established” or “Exemplary. There were significant differences in variance between schools that were rated “Coming Soon” or “Emerging” and “Established” or “Exemplary” in the overall 5Essentials score and Student-Teacher Trust. Schools that had not obtained an “Established” rating or higher significantly differed from schools that had in their overall 5Essentials score, Teacher-Principal Trust, and Safety.

Table 3: T-test with all rated schools

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
5Essentials Overall	Equal variances <u>not</u> assumed	3.848	.050*	2.640	271.196	.014*	.317
5Es Supportive Environment 2017	Equal variances assumed	1.768	.184	1.366	395	.173	.134
5Es Teacher-Principal Trust 2016	Equal variances assumed	.105	.746	2.104	408	.036*	.226
5Es Teacher-Teacher Trust 2016	Equal variances assumed	.011	.915	-2.56	408	.798	-.026
5Es Peer Support for Academic Work 2016	Equal variances assumed	1.111	.293	.941	322	.347	.120
5Es Safety 2017	Equal variances assumed	1.779	.183	2.178	395	.030*	.265
5Es Schoolwide Future Orientation	Equal variances assumed	1.600	.210	-1.267	70	.209	-.269
5Es Student-Teacher Trust 2016	Equal variances <u>not</u> assumed	4.802	.029*	1.648	261.375	.101	.169

* significant at the 0.05 level.

Once again, I filtered out schools that were rated “Coming Soon” to see if the Supportive Schools rating was a better measure for SEL implementation for schools that had submitted a profile. After excluding these schools, the analysis indicated that there were no significant differences on any of the measures between schools that were rated “Emerging” and schools that were rated “Established” or “Exemplary.”

Table 4: T-test excluding schools rated “Coming Soon”

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
5Essentials Overall	Equal variances assumed	1.939	.165	1.639	273	.102	.227
5Es Supportive Environment 2017	Equal variances assumed	.147	.701	1.623	263	.106	.170
5Es Teacher-Principal Trust 2016	Equal variances assumed	.307	.580	1.265	271	.207	.154
5Es Teacher-Teacher Trust 2016	Equal variances assumed	.221	.639	-.966	271	.335	-.114
5Es Peer Support for Academic Work 2016	Equal variances assumed	.505	.478	1.412	219	.159	.198
5Es Safety 2017	Equal variances assumed	.178	.673	1.401	262	.162	.187
5Es Schoolwide Future Orientation	Equal variances assumed	.131	.719	-1.355	41	.183	-.297
5Es Student-Teacher Trust 2016	Equal variances assumed	2.688	.102	1.523	262	.129	.184

Based on the differences in distributions on the 5Essentials, correlation matrix, and subsequent t-test, there is not much evidence to suggest that schools with Supportive Schools Certification are a valid measure to use in determining the progress of SEL implementation within the district, especially among schools that did submit a profile to receive a Supportive Schools rating.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Start Thinking About Measurement: Because the introduction of SEL is still fairly recent, many schools have focused on implementation. While this stage is important, it should not preclude educators from looking beyond to figure out how they will measure the effectiveness of their implementation efforts. Those in the OSEL and school administrators currently have been looking at indicators related to SEL such as attendance, discipline reports, and the 5Essentials School Climate Survey, but these indicators do not directly align with the goals, learning standards, benchmarks, and performance descriptors outlined by the ISBE. They do not directly measure whether or not students have achieved developmentally appropriate competencies in social and emotional skills. Educators who decide to measure SEL must first ask themselves what they hope to gain through implementation, what they define to be progress in their students and schools, and how they will measure that progress in valid and reliable ways. The development of the tools necessary to measure these social emotional competencies goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but the work being done in the Personalized Learning schools in creating SEL assessments is a step in the right direction. The work being done in the schools mentioned in the literature review may also shed some light on how CPS can approach the measurement of social and emotional skills in way that is grounded in research.

Measurement and Data-Oriented SEL Workshops: Currently, the OSEL provides around ten different workshops related to educating teachers, administrators, and other school staff on the different SEL strategies in areas like classroom management, youth mental health, and strengthening SEL through instruction. These sessions also provide guides to specific SEL practices such as CHAMPS and Restorative Justice. However, there are currently no professional development workshops that focus on teaching educators how to measure SEL or develop their own data tools in order to do so. Considering that one of the six criteria for Supportive School Certification is to collect and use universal data for SEL and climate, giving educators the training on what data to collect and how to use that data to inform the SEL implementation would be beneficial to schools that are currently trying to integrate SEL. Some topics to cover could be how to use existing attendance and disciplinary data to convince teachers to buy into SEL

integration, how to create a climate survey that meets the needs of one's particular school, and how to use this data to inform future decision making processes related to SEL. These workshops would also be good opportunities for the OSEL to inform schools of the different tools and resources they could use to meet the Supportive Schools criteria. Additionally, creating these workshops may open an opportunity for the OSEL to connect with outside vendors that focus on the measurement aspect of SEL, not just program development, which would expand the district's own access to these resources.

Develop an SEL Course for High School Students: One of the challenges in the field of SEL other than creating measurement tools has been a lack of research on and resources for SEL in high schools. However, this does not necessarily preclude the district from creating its own resources for its upper level students. There are high schools within the district that are trying to develop an SEL course for their students, and the OSEL could aid these efforts by contributing to the funding necessary to develop these types of courses. The OSEL could allocate funding for the development of a high school SEL course and have schools apply for this grant. Part of the application process could include the school's plan of action, their expected expenses, and their evidence for how this course would align with the SEL standards set out by the state. The school(s) that is/are awarded this grant could then use the funds to develop their SEL course and pilot it. If the pilot proves to be effective, then the OSEL could bring this course to other high schools in the district and slowly scale up this resource.

Increase Funding to the OSEL to Build Capacity Around System Improvement: The introduction of the Network SEL Specialist position has greatly increased OSEL's ability to provide more direct access to resources to schools. However, because each Network Specialist has a caseload of thirty to forty schools, they have limited time they can spend with each school. Thus, schools have prioritized using the Network Specialists as consultants on immediate crises more so than as a resource for improving SEL implementation. If Network Specialists are using most of their time to "put out fires," then that takes away from time they could be using to give educators more instructional guidance and coaching on how to improve on a more deliberate and proactive fashion. The extra funding from either the district or the state could be used to hire more Network Specialists, counselors, and psychologists, particularly for networks

with a lot of schools or with high numbers of behavioral referrals. By increasing human resources, the Network Specialists within the OSEL will have a more manageable caseload, allowing them to provide more training during times that would have otherwise been used for crisis consultation. Additionally, this could also mean that the OSEL would be better able to support more “low touch” schools that are still trying to meet the needs of their students.

Create More Sustained and Focused Partnerships Between Schools: As mentioned before, part of the role of the Central Office is building Professional Learning Communities, or forums in which educators can meet to collaborate on SEL work being done in their schools. These interactions have a lot of potential in improving schools’ capacities to enhance their SEL implementation and can be done in a more sustained and focused manner to maximize impact. While school visits and monthly meetings of educators from all the schools in the network is a good starting point in creating the foundation for these PLCs, the OSEL could also take a more targeted approach by creating pairings between specific high and low SEL schools serving demographically similar student bodies. These schools are more likely to have shared experience, given the similarities in the communities they serve, so these high SEL schools may be a useful resource for a school with lower levels of SEL or is just starting to implement SEL. These pairings could be more formalized to last the duration of a school year so that schools are building meaningful relationships with each other in regards to SEL. These pairings could also prove to be a useful resource for Network SEL Specialists, for they may not have to become as involved with low SEL schools that are paired with high SEL schools, which would allow them to turn their focus on other schools within their network. The CORE Districts found this practice of pairing demographically similar high-SEL and low-SEL schools to be effective in their own implementation of SEL (West et al, 2017), so this is a method that CPS may benefit from as well.

Take Caution in Using the Supportive Schools Certification as a Measure: The Supportive Schools Certification may have been created to align with the SEL standards set out by the ISBE, but as validity analysis with the 5Essentials showed, it has very limited power in showing whether or not schools with certified status are significantly different from those without in terms of school climate. The Supportive

Schools Certification is a useful tool in incentivizing schools to start implementing SEL and be more intentional about the manner in which they implement, but it is still too early to say whether or not having this certification means that students' social and emotional needs are truly being met. Closely examining the validity of the surveys being used in the Personalized Learning schools may be a step in the right direction, and if these metrics are shown to be promising, perhaps the OSEL could start scaling up this measurement tool to schools that may not yet be Personalized Learning Schools.

CONCLUSION

The state of Illinois and Chicago Public Schools have been some of the forerunners championing the role SEL has in education. Through this thesis, I have taken a closer look at what implementation of SEL within CPS looks like from both the district and school levels. I have detailed the way the Central Office and educators within schools interact with each other, the resources available, and the challenges that each have faced in this ongoing process. Furthermore, I have shown the noticeable absence of measurement of students' social emotional competence and progress in implementation. While this may be due to the fact that implementation is still in the early stages for many schools within CPS, the district must start asking itself questions about how it is going to gauge the efficacy of its efforts during implementation as well as whether or not these efforts are meaningfully aligned with the standards set out by the state.

The literature around SEL suggests that the tools used to measure social and emotional competencies have not developed as quickly as the programs and interventions that have been created to foster that growth. However, initial research has shown that social and emotional skills can be measured both reliably and with validity. The nascent nature of these measures as well as the fact that SEL implementation is still in its early stages within CPS may make it unsuitable to use these measures as indicators of school quality or accountability for now, but they could still be useful in providing information on school improvement by indicating areas of strengths and weaknesses to better inform future implementation efforts.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

This study contained a few methodological constraints that limit the generalizability of its findings. Because I used snowball sampling in order to solicit interviews for both those in the OSEL as well as school administrators, there is a possibility that there could have been selection bias, for those who decided to take the time to speak with me could have been different from those who chose not to speak with me. Especially on the school level, it is possible that the school administrators I spoke with may be more committed to SEL than their counterparts in the district. Additionally, a majority of the school administrators I spoke with worked at schools that were rated at a Level 1 or higher, meaning that the insights they had and that I presented may not be as applicable to schools with lower SQRP ratings. Furthermore, there is one key group of actors that I was unable to speak with: teachers. Because teachers are typically the ones to deliver SEL content to students and the adults that students tend to spend the most time with at school, it would have been valuable to hear about their insights and perspectives around the way SEL is implemented and measured at their schools. Originally, I had designed a teacher survey in order to better understand teachers' awareness of SEL, commitment to SEL, and perceptions of SEL resources, but because there were low response rates, this portion of my design had to be excluded. As for quantitative limitations, I was unable to use the most current 5Essentials data for most of the specific measures within the survey, for this data was not available to me. This limitation has the potential to bias my findings if there is large variation in schools' 5Essentials ratings from year to year.

The work that is being done in the Personalized Learning schools within the district provides an opportunity for the district and the OSEL to examine how valid these competency-based measurement tools are in gauging students' social emotional development as well as the effectiveness of the schools' SEL implementation. Using other metrics such as attendance rates, behavior incidents, and 5Essentials measures could be useful for performing tests of concurrent and predictive validity. If these tests show that this measurement tool is reliable and valid, then the district could work to make this tool available to schools that are not currently Personalized Learning. This will not only give schools a resource to gauge their students' social and emotional development but also prime schools for Personalized Learning in the area of SEL, since the district has plans to expand Personalized Learning in the future.

On a broader level, there were a few related issues within the field of SEL that went beyond the scope of this paper but would still prove to be areas of further research. The first is developing evidence-based programs and strategies for students in upper grade levels, such as middle and high schools. Much of the research in SEL has been focused on the primary years, but SEL instruction is something that is needed throughout a student's entire schooling experience. Because high school is structured differently from elementary school and because high school students are at a different stage developmentally, there is a need for more explicit investigation into how high schools can adopt practices that effectively support the social and emotional needs of their students. The second area of interest that could use more research is building the social and emotional competencies of adults within the school. SEL is something that is not only explicitly taught but also directly modeled, so it is important for adults within the school to be able to be role models to the students. That requires these adults to be socially and emotionally competent themselves, which may or may not be true depending on the school. Research into how adults can not only incorporate SEL into their instruction but also how they can be socially and emotionally competent themselves as well as the policies that would be necessary for it would improve the way CPS and other districts facilitate the implementation of SEL.

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EDUCATION:

The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and minor in Statistics expected June 2018

Overall GPA: 3.82/4.00 Dean's Honors List 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017

EXPERIENCE:

YOUTH GUIDANCE, *Evaluation and Quality Improvement Data Assistant* June – August 2017

- Collected, cleaned, and analyzed Year-End survey data for multiple programs within the organization to generate internal and external reports. Tasks entailed tracking down surveys, matching pre-program evaluation results to post-program results using student ID, and creating subscales based on various items in the survey. Analysis included both descriptive statistics, correlations, and regressions
- Created school-level reports for the Becoming a Man (BAM) program for over 50 schools that presented data on students' aggregate progress throughout the program as well as student satisfaction
- Collected, cleaned, and analyzed Staff Survey data, which was filled out by staff members at Chicago Public Schools that partner with Youth Guidance. Generated a report of this detailing demographic data of the respondents, their responses to the quantitative items, and highlights from their qualitative responses.

OLD TOWN SCHOOL OF FOLK MUSIC, *Development Intern* June – August 2016

- Compiled reports of over 40 local nonprofit organizations detailing their fundraising events that the School could use as reference to plan their own fundraising events
- Conducted a half-year analysis using data from over 3,000 members, which included cross tabulating different variables such as location and membership level to find general trends within the data
- Worked with students in the multiple summer camp courses offered by the school, assisting teachers in guiding certain classes and aiding during the showcase performances at the end of each session
- Wrote seven articles for the quarterly donor newsletter, which involved interviewing coordinators from different departments to detail the programs offered by Old Town

OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL PUBLIC DEFENDER, *Clerk* July – September 2015

- Worked closely with attorneys and investigators of the Capital Habeas Unit to conduct legal research and proofread for multiple cases that would be presented to the federal courts
- Attended workshops regarding the structure and process of the federal courts as well as conduct and confidentiality in the legal setting
- Organized and cleaned FOIA documents from 2011 -2015 based on date received, organization of correspondence, and type of document (letter or a release)

ACTIVITIES:

UChicago Careers in Education Professions September 2015 – Present

- Participate in monthly workshops featuring members in all fields of the education community
- Attend treks to different institutions in education ranging from schools to research and policy institutions

Neighborhood Schools Program November 2015 – Present

- Volunteer at the Hyde Park Neighborhood Center three hours per week, supervising students during free play and snack time before sending them off to their activity stations
- Aid students with their homework, provide one-on-one tutoring on specific subjects for students who are in need of additional help, and work with students on scholarship and grant applications for high school

SKILLS:

Proficient in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, R programming, SPSS, Raiser's Edge, FileMaker Pro, Captricity, and Google Drive