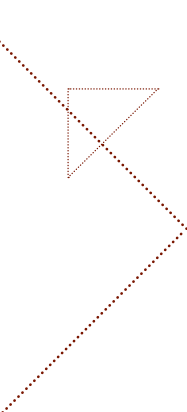


Social Emotional Learning in High School: How Three Urban High Schools Engage, Educate, and Empower Youth

Cross-Case Analysis

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with the assistance of Alethea Andree & Brandy P. Quinn





Suggested citation: Hamedani, M. G., Zheng, X., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., & Quinn, B. (2015). *Social emotional learning in high school: How three urban high schools engage, educate, and empower youth—Cross-case analysis*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all who contributed to this research and made the project possible. First, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the NoVo Foundation for supporting and funding this project. In particular, special thanks to Robert Sherman and Doris Lo for their thought partnership as we developed the project. Next, we would like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the schools that participated in this research—thank you for sharing your time, knowledge, and work with us. Special thanks to Headmaster Peggy Kemp and Carol Lazarus from Fenway High School; Principal Wanda Vazquez from El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice; and Principal Kathy Bieser from International School of the Americas. Many thanks to all of the administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and community partners who taught us much about each school community and shared their perspectives and experiences with our research team.

We want to thank our collaborators and research team—Jacqueline Ancess, Elisabeth Barnett, Jennifer Kim, Brandy Quinn, and Bethany Rogers—for their excellent work on the case studies and essential contributions to the project. Thanks also to Alethea Andree for her hard work and research assistance, Terrance Turner for his help with the project, and Janice Jackson and Jon Snyder for their feedback and support throughout the project. We also extend particular thanks to the SCOPE communications team, Barbara McKenna and Lauren Koch in particular, for working with us to share this work with a broad audience. Finally, a special thank you to the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University and the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University for their partnership in this work.

The research was conducted independently by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and does not represent the views of the sponsors.



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Project Background: Social Emotional Learning in Diverse High Schools Study

Overview

The psychological, social, and emotional aspects of education have enjoyed increased attention in recent years as oft-termed “noncognitive factors” and “soft skills” have gained traction in research, policy, and practice circles as major drivers of student achievement. Authors and journalists like Paul Tough have popularized the work of psychologists such as Angela Duckworth and Carol Dweck, whom, respectively, have shown how developing “grit” and a “growth mindset” positively impacts student performance (e.g., Dweck, 2006; Tough, 2012). In a similar vein, the powerful and lasting effects of brief social psychological interventions that help students succeed in school by bolstering their sense of belonging and alleviating the threat of pernicious stereotypes have captured the interest of the White House and other thought leaders in education (e.g., Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011). And a recent meta-analysis of more than 200 studies evaluating initiatives designed to teach social emotional skills to students found significant gains in healthy behavior, school safety, and academic achievement, providing a compelling evidence base for practitioners and policy makers (cf. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).



Current initiatives addressing state standards and school discipline further reinforce the need for this kind of psychological, social, and emotional work in education. The Common Core State Standards, for example, highlight how students' 21st century career and college readiness must now include other-oriented skills, like effective communication and collaboration, in addition to critical thinking and inquiry (e.g., National Research Council, 2012). Civil rights groups have raised concerns about the disproportionate impact zero-tolerance discipline policies have had on students of color, and the U.S. Department of Education has committed to intervening where high levels of suspensions and expulsions are keeping students out of school. In response, educators across the country are taking a more restorative approach to school discipline (e.g., Losen & Martinez, 2013; Mergler, Vargas, & Caldwell, 2014). For example, schools like those in Oakland, CA, are increasingly incorporating restorative practices, like mindfulness and reflection, to foster student mental health and safety as well as pave the path for productive conflict resolution.

Reflecting this recent focus on education's psychological side, a recent survey of educators by *Education Week* found that 87% of respondents identified student engagement and motivation as the most important factors influencing student achievement (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Likewise, another national survey found that 75% of teachers believe that supporting students' social and emotional needs will improve student success in school (Civic Enterprises, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013).

Despite these recent trends, supporting students socially and emotionally in school has frequently been called the “missing piece” in the accountability-driven practices and policies that are the legacy of No Child Left Behind and that dominate how schools operate today (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013; Cohen, 2006; Elias, 2009). Moreover, failing to meet students' psychological, social, and emotional needs will continue to fuel gaps in opportunity and achievement for students—in particular, low-income students and students of color—who are “not only left behind but are actively thrown overboard” by large, factory-model, one-size-fits-all high schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 643). While this “missing piece” is critical to providing students with an equitable education suited to today's world (Binkley et al., 2012; Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010; Elias, 2009; National Research Council, 2012; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013), more research is needed to better understand how schools can effectively implement and sustain practices that meet students' social and emotional needs, as well as provide them with the opportunity to learn adaptive skills and strategies to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. The growing field of social emotional learning, often referred to as “SEL,” aims to do just that across research, policy, and practice arenas.

Much of the existing research on social emotional learning, however, has focused on elementary and middle schools. This is likely because fostering the development of social emotional skills is often seen as part of the educational mission in earlier grades, social emotional initiatives have been easier to launch and implement in pri-

mary and middle school contexts, and scholarly and practical interest has centered around early intervention. As a result, little is known about what effective social emotional learning practice looks like at the high school level and throughout the later years of adolescence. Further, the intense emphasis of education policy has been on measurable academic outcomes, which has focused most high schools' attention on delivering increasing bodies of subject matter content to students in order to boost test scores, rather than on attending to the education of the "whole child."

There do exist some high schools, however, that have centered their work on developing young people as whole human beings who are socially and emotionally aware and skilled; who engage a growth mindset that enables them to persevere when challenged; who learn to be mindful, conscientious, and empowered; and who develop a sense of social responsibility about making positive contributions to their school community and the wider community beyond. We identified three such schools, which operate in very different contexts, and designed our study to address three open questions in research on social emotional learning:

1. How is effective social emotional learning practiced in high schools? In particular, what can we learn from high schools that have developed an explicit mission to prepare students to be personally and socially aware, skilled, and responsible?
2. How can social emotional learning strategies be tuned to meet the needs of students in diverse socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic schooling contexts?
3. How does a systemic, whole school approach to social emotional learning, in contrast to an interventionist or programmatic approach, function as a model of school-wide practice?

Through in-depth case studies of three urban, socioeconomically and racially diverse small public high schools—located in Boston, MA, Brooklyn, NY, and San Antonio, TX—a student survey, and a comparison of student survey results to a national sample of students, we investigated the ways in which these highly effective schools design, implement, and practice school-wide social emotional learning as well as how this focus on social emotional learning shapes students' educational experiences and outcomes. In particular, the schools we studied—which aim to engage and empower the student communities they serve—ground their educational approach in an expanded vision of social emotional learning that incorporates a social justice education perspective as essential to their practice.

Education Requires Psychological Resources

Providing all students with an equitable, high-quality education requires more than academic and economic resources alone can supply. While resources like skilled

teachers and adequate per pupil funding are certainly critical ingredients for students' opportunity to succeed in school (cf. Carter & Welner, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duncan & Murnane, 2011), they do not complete the recipe. Students also require psychological resources, such as the belief that achievement is possible for "someone like me" (e.g., Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006), the skills to persist in the face of challenge and failure (e.g., Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), the understanding that learning is a process of growth and change (e.g., Dweck, 2006), the chance to be motivated, engaged, and supported by their schools and the learning process (e.g., Carter, 2013; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000), and the benefit of supportive relationships, belonging, and community (e.g., Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Osterman, 2000; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). These resources are not additions—experiences that are positive for students to have but that are not necessary for the bottom line: academic performance. They are required for student success and achievement (cf. Aronson, 2002; Becker & Luthar, 2002; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; C. M. Steele, 2010; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994).

Further, research across fields reveals that gaps in educational opportunity experienced by students of color and students in low-income contexts can be reduced by understanding how students' psychological, social, and emotional needs are frequently unmet—and can be undermined—by their experiences in school and by intervening to meet those needs (cf. Becker & Luthar, 2002; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Carter, 2013; Farrington et al., 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Oyserman, 2013; C. M. Steele, 2010; Walton & Cohen, 2011). While psychological supports cannot replace the resource needs of high-poverty contexts, nor eliminate the cumulative effects of historical and systemic disadvantages, attention to these factors can serve to reframe students' perceptions of education and of themselves as learners; foster trust, safety, and community among students and adults in the school; reduce the threat of bias, stereotypes, and normative assumptions about students' potential and ability; and enable students to cultivate skills that render education meaningful and relevant—and achievement possible.

To close the opportunity gap, Boykin and Noguera (2011) argue, "We have to do more to address the context in which learning takes place" and understand how students experience their education (p. 141). Successfully closing the gap, therefore, will require strengthening students' engagement in the learning process; supporting their self-efficacy, self-regulated learning abilities, and incremental learning beliefs; and providing educational experiences that enable students to flourish by meeting their personal, relational, cultural, and cognitive needs (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). As Carter (2013) asserts, "We must comprehend why 'access' alone is not enough and why the social and cultural 'stuff' matter" (p. 155).

These kinds of social and psychological resources that students need to succeed in school go by many names—noncognitive skills, psychosocial factors, or social and

emotional needs, to name a few (see Farrington and colleagues [2012] for a detailed review). While there is a strong research base across fields supporting how and why these psychological resources matter in education, knowing that they matter is “not the same as knowing how to develop them in students” (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 5). What remains an open question is how to effectively equip students with psychological resources in practice, through the school environments they inhabit, their experiences in the classroom, and their interactions with peers and teachers.

Social Emotional Learning: Developing Psychological Resources in Practice

Researchers in the field of social emotional learning, commonly referred to as “SEL,” are currently gaining influence in education practice and policy circles as they examine what it takes to help students build and maintain psychological resources in practice by educating the “whole student.” The theoretical base for social emotional learning grows out of a diverse literature that spans research in developmental psychology, emotional intelligence, mental health and well-being, school-based promotion and prevention, and moral and character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Cohen, 2006; Elbertson et al., 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003; Humphrey, 2013; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Wahlberg, 2004). While derived from these fields, the focus of social emotional learning is distinct and centers on “the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors” (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004, p. 4).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)—one of the leading organizations in the field working to promote evidence-based social emotional learning in schools—further defines social emotional learning as, “the processes 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” (see Civic Enterprises et al., 2013, p. 16 for a recent publication; also Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004). Social emotional learning can apply to both students and adults in school settings and has been found to reliably produce significant gains in achievement for students as well as improvements in social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012; see also Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014, for a discussion of the importance of consistent practice and implementation in achievement gains). Moreover, leveraging the benefits of social emotional learning has been found to mitigate gaps in opportunity and achievement for low-income students and for students of color (Becker & Luthar, 2002; CASEL, 2007; Elias, 2009; Farrington et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2003).

Durlak and colleagues (2011) identify two main strategies for the practice of school-based social emotional learning: instructional and environmental approaches. An instructional approach to social emotional learning involves explicit instruction in “processing, integrating, and selectively applying social and emotional skills in developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate ways” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406). This kind of approach could involve, for example, a class or advisory period focused on teaching students conflict-resolution skills and having students practice applying those skills across relevant, real-life situations. An environmental approach entails fostering social emotional learning through “establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 407). This kind of approach, for example, could involve cultivating a respectful school climate by having community members articulate, commit to, and publically display a set of school norms that outline how students and adults in the school can engage in respectful interactions with one another.

Social emotional learning theory holds that, if schools effectively implement and apply these instructional and environmental strategies, students will develop greater attachment to school, engage in less risky behaviors, and gain more positive personal assets, which, in turn, will lead to better academic performance as well as personal and social success (CASEL, 2003; Humphrey, 2013). In other words, the practice of social emotional learning helps provide students with critical psychological resources that, in turn, support their ability to succeed in school both socially and academically. While social emotional learning is theorized to be most effective when schools employ both instructional and environmental approaches (Elbertson et al., 2010; Elias, 2009), most existing research tends to focus on testing the effects of school-based social emotional learning programs or interventions. Comprehensive or whole-school social emotional learning approaches, as well as studies that look at systemic, environmental, and ecological factors in providing effective social emotional learning for students, are relatively few in comparison (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Humphrey, 2013)¹.

Drawing on a wide survey of evidence-based research, CASEL has put forth a comprehensive definition of the social emotional skills and competencies that programs and schools should seek to develop among students through their practice (cf. Civic Enterprises et al., 2013 for a recent publication; also Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004). These skills and competencies frequently group into the following categories:

- **Self-awareness:** accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- **Self-management:** regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and

¹ See CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative (CASEL, n.d.a) for an example of this work.

monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.

- **Social awareness:** being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources.
- **Relationship skills:** establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed.
- **Responsible decision-making:** making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one's school and community.

This set of skills and competencies center around building students' self-awareness and other-awareness, as well as healthy relationship behaviors and community engagement. Notably, these skills and competencies overlap considerably with the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies that schools should seek to foster in students to provide an effective 21st century education—for example, collaborating effectively with others and recognizing and coordinating different viewpoints and perspectives (Binkley et al., 2012; National Research Council, 2012; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Soland, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2013).

Social Emotional Learning: What We Need To Know

The extant research on social emotional learning, while demonstrating its promise, also leaves a number of open questions. Issues around how to effectively design, implement, and test the effects of social emotional learning-based programming, as well as clarifying the relationships among social emotional skills and student outcomes, are certainly significant areas for future research (cf. Durlak et al., 2011; Elbertson et al., 2010; Farrington et al., 2012; Humphrey, 2013). In addition, a number of questions go beyond these general validation concerns. These areas of work include examining: how effective social emotional learning is successfully practiced in high school contexts; how social emotional learning can or should be tuned to meet the needs of low-income and racial and ethnic minority students engaged in diverse schooling contexts; and how might a systemic, comprehensive approach to social emotional learning—an approach that goes beyond programmatic or interventionist strategies alone—function as a model of school-wide practice?

What about social emotional learning in high schools?

The evidence base for social emotional learning largely comprises studies done with students in elementary and middle schools; high school contexts have been understudied. In Durlak and colleagues' (2011) recent meta-analysis of 213 universal, school-based, social emotional learning programs, for example, only 13% of the interventions in their sample were conducted with high school students. This lack of work on high schools is likely because social emotional learning initiatives have been easier to launch and deliver in primary and middle school contexts, given the structure of schools and the historical sense that helping students learn to understand and manage their emotions, get along with others, and be a responsible community member are part of the school mission for earlier grades. It may also derive from scholars' attention to early intervention and social and behavioral skills that are typically taught in an explicit manner with younger students (Farrington et al., 2012; Humphrey, 2013)

While high school initiatives exist, they are less common and have been more challenging to implement. This may be, in part, because of the departmentalized structures of high schools and the definition of teachers' jobs as conveying content in their subject areas rather than tending to students' inner lives and development. It may also be because many educators believe older students should have figured out how to comport themselves and take care of their own needs by the time they enter high school, despite evidence to the contrary. Finally, as we have noted, the intense emphasis of education policy has been on measurable academic outcomes, which has focused most high schools' attention on delivering increasing bodies of subject matter content to students in order to boost test scores, rather than on attending to educating the "whole child."

In sum, little is known about what effective social emotional learning practice looks like at the high school level and throughout the later years of adolescence, leaving a substantial gap in the literature that needs to be filled (cf. Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Humphrey 2013; Zins, Weissberg, et al., 2004; see Cervone & Cushman, 2014 for a recent exception). This matters for research, practice, and policy because high school students face different challenges, developmental transitions, risks, and school-based experiences. For example, social emotional learning in high schools may incorporate helping students successfully navigate the psychosocial experience of leaving school after graduation, including supporting students in career and college transitions.

Does social emotional learning work in the same way for students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds?

Another open question in the literature is how social emotional learning may be conceptualized and practiced differently to meet the needs of students in diverse sociocultural and economic contexts both in the United States and abroad. While researchers have acknowledged that social emotional learning-based strategies and

approaches should take these factors into account (Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Durlak et al., 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012), how such tuning can and should happen in practice has not been investigated in depth.

This leaves open a range of issues such as whether and how social emotional learning can be sensitive to non-Western, non-middle-class ways of being a self, engaging in relationships, and experiencing emotion; whether some approaches might inadvertently promote another kind of “deficit model” of low-income and racial and ethnic minority students by making narrow, normative assumptions about “correct” behavior or aiming to control or regulate students’ emotions and actions; whether some approaches might insufficiently account for the ways in which power, discrimination, bias, and other structural and contextual factors can differently influence students’ social and emotional experiences in school; and how approaches might incorporate a multicultural perspective that is asset-based, culturally relevant, and empowering (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Eamon, 2001; Ecclestone, 2007; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kozol, 2005; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Reyes, Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2013).

Just as schools can reproduce class-based and/or race/ethnicity-based hierarchies through reinforcing mainstream or dominant “codes, artifacts, language, practices, interactions, and styles” (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 373; see also Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nasir & Hand, 2006), and devaluing or failing to incorporate nondominant ones, mainstream conceptions of social emotional learning—without examining how these issues may be at play—could serve to do the same. For example, well-intentioned programs designed to help students in urban, high-poverty schools develop mindfulness and emotion-regulation skills to deal with frequent experiences of violence in their communities may also imply that these students lack the skills, fortitude, or social support to deal with these situations without outside intervention. While schools and teachers can play an important role in supporting students through these difficult experiences, they also need to be aware of the assets and adaptive coping strategies that students can, at the same time, bring to the table.

To address such concerns, several researchers have called for social emotional learning to incorporate a needs-driven perspective that is sensitive to sociocultural variation in social emotional learning conceptualizations, goals, and practices (e.g., Farrington et al., 2012; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Moreover, meeting the social and emotional needs of urban youth in American school settings—in particular, low-income students and racial and ethnic minority students—may be productively informed by educational practices that seek to engage and empower students who are often underserved or disadvantaged by the mainstream educational system (e.g., Boykin & Noguera, 2011; McCarty & Lee, 2014).

This perspective has led some educators to incorporate what is often termed “social justice education,” along with social emotional learning, into their framework for school design, although the two approaches are typically conceptualized independently. Social justice education encompasses “the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action” (Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2007, p. 57). The goal of social justice education is to enable students, teachers, and administrators to:

Develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems, and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and in the institutions and communities of which they are a part. (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 2)

While social emotional learning seeks to foster students’ capacity to know themselves, build and maintain supportive relationships, and participate in their school communities as socially responsible citizens, a social justice education perspective integrates a focus on students’ social and emotional needs with culturally-relevant, asset-based, identity-safe, and empowerment-oriented practice (cf. Adams et al., 2007; Carlisle et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Hackman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994a, 1995; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008; Paris & Alim, 2014; D.M. Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). Social justice education importantly seeks to bolster students’ sense of agency, leadership, and capacity to positively transform their own lives and the lives of others in their community, moving from awareness and understanding to agency and action (e.g., Ball, 2000; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2007; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012).

Educational approaches that meet many of the goals of social justice education can be found across several diverse research fields or practice areas such as: culturally responsive, culturally relevant, or culturally sustaining teaching, pedagogy, or schools (e.g., Ball, 2000; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Morrison et al., 2008; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Sleeter, 1996, 2011); multicultural education, critical education, antiracist education, and teaching for social justice (e.g., Adams et al., 2007; Au, 2009; Banks, 2007, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Freire, 2001/1970; Hackman, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994b; Noddings, 2005; North, 2006; Sleeter & Grant, 2009); civic engagement, critical citizenship, and youth organizing and activism (e.g., Cammarota, 2011; Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Flanagan, Syversten, & Wray-Lake, 2007; Ginwright & James, 2002; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004); service or community-engaged learning (e.g., Bertaux, Smythe, & Crable, 2012; Butin, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2007); and positive youth development, student agency, and student voice (e.g., Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Dukakis, London, McLaughlin, & Williamson, 2009; Larson, 2000; Mitra, 2004). The educational practices promoted in these fields seek

to affirm students' identities and backgrounds, empower students to understand how society is structured and why, provide students with the tools they need to become informed agents of change in their own lives, schools, local communities, and wider world and—through these processes—foster academic engagement and achievement.

While there are certainly significant distinctions among these literatures and educational practices, we propose that they share a common focus around building students' skills and competencies in the following key areas:

- **Interdependence:** seeing oneself as part of community; having a sense of shared fate and common destiny with others; recognizing how collective experiences shape individual lives.
- **Social responsibility:** understanding how one's actions impact others; treating others with respect; acting with ethical standards; maintaining relationships and connections.
- **Perspective-taking:** taking the perspective of and empathizing with others; coordinating others' points of view with one's own; recognizing factors that shape multiple perspectives.
- **Multicultural literacy:** recognizing and appreciating group similarities and differences; having a critical understanding of how identities and significant social categories of difference matter in everyday life and across social contexts; understanding experience through multicultural and equity-focused lenses; having an awareness of systems of privilege, power, and oppression.
- **Community engagement:** actively contributing to the well-being of one's community; understanding democratic principles and values, citizenship, and civic participation; having leadership, voice, and efficacy to be a change agent and organize for social action.

These social justice education skills and competencies serve to expand and enhance students' knowledge about themselves, understanding of others, and sense of social responsibility and agency to effect positive change in their own lives and in society.

This set of social justice skills overlaps with, but also extends beyond, how social emotional learning is typically conceptualized in current research and practice. While both social emotional learning and social justice education share a focus on fostering interdependence, social awareness, relationship skills, and social responsibility, social justice education importantly fosters a critical understanding of power, inequality, diversity, and difference and seeks to empower students to become leaders beyond their school walls—in their communities and in society (Adams et al., 2007; Carlisle et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrison et al., 2008). While

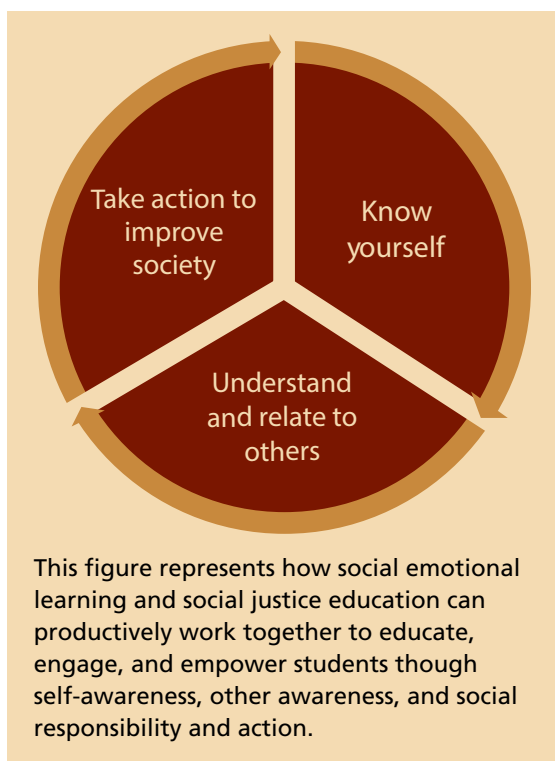
these approaches have been found to be particularly engaging and empowering for urban youth or students who are frequently disenfranchised by the mainstream educational system and society at large, they also hold the potential to prepare students from relatively privileged backgrounds for informed citizenship and leadership in today’s increasingly diverse and global world (cf. Adams et al., 2007; Banks, 2007). Developing these kinds of skills among students is not only important during their time in school, but also in preparing them for life, work, and citizenship in an equal and effective 21st century democratic society (Binkley et al., 2012; Cohen, 2006; Elias, 2009; Soland et al., 2013). A recent report by the Asia Society and RAND Corporation, for example, identified perspective-taking and multicultural literacy as interpersonal competencies necessary for success across today’s workforce (Soland et al., 2013).

Drawing on these theoretical and empirical insights, we ask whether an expanded conceptualization of social emotional learning—one that incorporates a social justice education perspective—might be a more complete, culturally responsive, and empowering route to its effective practice (Figure 1)?

What might a comprehensive, school-wide approach to social emotional learning look like?

Most existing research on social emotional learning takes a programmatic approach to intervention (Durlak et al., 2011; Humphrey, 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). While

Figure 1: Expanding how social emotional learning is conceptualized



understanding what it takes to design and implement an effective program is central to social emotional learning research, practice, and policy, one important concern is that social emotional learning programs are “rarely integrated into classrooms and schools in ways that are meaningful, sustained, and embedded in the day-to-day interactions of students, educators, and school staff” (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 3). In fact, it is not unusual for schools to implement a specific curriculum for social emotional learning during one part of the day, while other aspects of the school—such as teachers’ classroom management practices, school disciplinary policies, or lunchroom monitoring behaviors—are conducted in ways that send incompatible messages at other times in the day.

A systemic, whole-school approach to social emotional learning would instead

operate more like an ecological intervention. It would include programs or curricula that teach social emotional learning explicitly, but would also go beyond these methods to embed and reinforce social emotional learning throughout a school's climate and culture, design features and organizational structures, formal and informal practices, and interactions among students, teachers, and administrators (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, Solomon, & Lewis, 2000; Becker & Luthar, 2002; Cervone & Cushman, 2014; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Such an approach may also be more sensitive to the communities in which schools are situated, as well as better tailored to the backgrounds of students and teachers from those communities (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Farrington et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2003). In fact, although relatively uncommon today, social emotional learning is likely to yield the greatest benefit to students when practiced and reinforced in a comprehensive way (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; see also CASEL, 2013).

Learning From Successful Practice: Approach and Framework

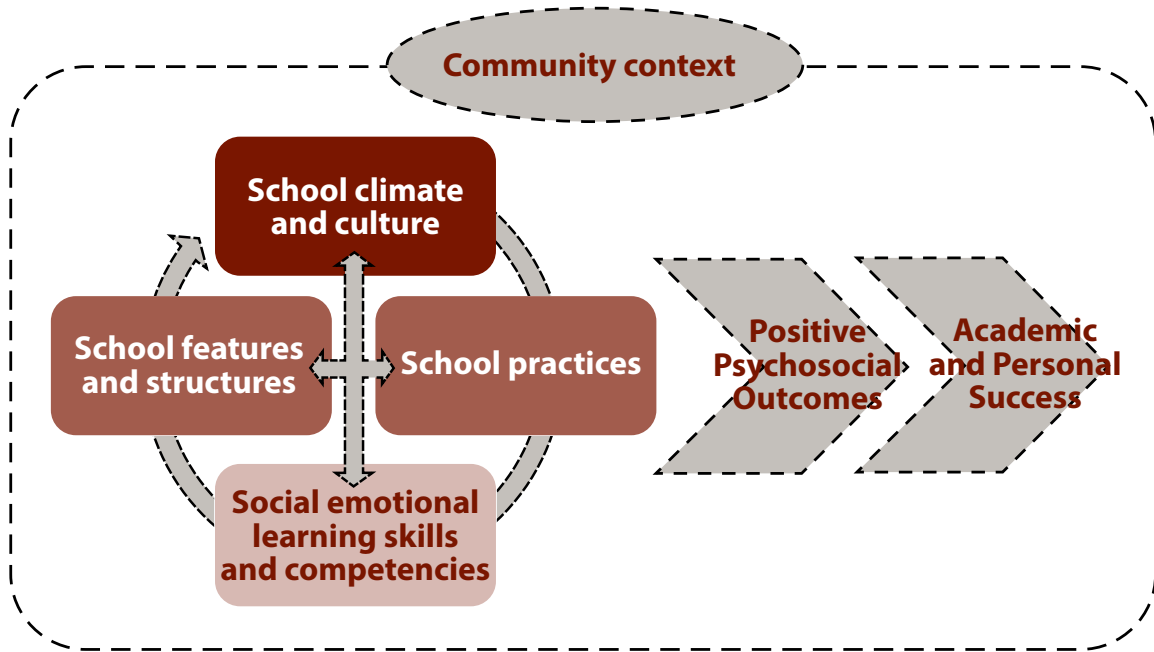
The present study takes up these questions and seeks to learn from successful high schools that serve urban youth of color and produce strong outcomes for their students through a whole-school, comprehensive practice of social emotional learning coupled with social justice education. Through in-depth case studies of three urban, socioeconomically and racially diverse small public high schools, a student survey, and a comparison of student survey results to a national sample of students, we investigated the ways in which these schools design, implement, and practice school-wide social emotional learning as well as how this focus on social emotional learning shapes students' educational experiences. In particular, the schools we studied—which aim to engage and empower the student communities they serve—ground their educational approach in an expanded vision of social emotional learning that includes social justice education as integral to their practice. We ask:

1. How is social emotional learning conceptualized and implemented at these high schools? How is it informed or shaped by a social justice education perspective?
2. How do these schools practice social emotional learning to meet the needs of their respective urban, diverse student communities and with what results?
3. How does effective social emotional learning practice shape students' educational experiences and provide them with critical psychological resources that foster personal, social, and academic success?

Using a theory-driven approach, we draw on an interdisciplinary ecological or sociocultural systems framework to reveal how key aspects of the schooling context—climate and culture, design features and organizational structures,

and formal and informal practices—are informed by social emotional learning and social justice education, foster students’ skills and competencies in these areas, interact to support students’ psychosocial needs, and contribute to students’ personal and academic success (cf. Bidwell, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cole, 1996; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Markus & Conner, 2013; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rogoff, 1995; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). In examining each school as a system, nested within a particular community context, we trace and map how social emotional learning is implemented and practiced across these key levels of the school (see Figure 2 for our conceptual model). Table 1 (page 15) includes definitions of school climate and culture, design features and organizational structures, and formal and informal practices as well as examples by school level category.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework: A sociocultural approach to studying schools’ social emotional learning practice



This figure represents our theoretical and conceptual approach to studying schools’ social emotional learning practice. We investigate how school climate and culture, design features and organizational structures, and formal and informal practices are informed by social emotional learning and social justice education, foster students’ skills and competencies in these areas, interact to support students’ psychosocial needs, and contribute to students’ personal and academic success.

Table 1: Key Levels of Schooling Contexts

Level of school system	Definition	Examples
School climate and culture	<i>A school's physical and social environment and the norms, values, and expectations that implicitly and explicitly structure that environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School mission and vision • Core values • Relationship norms and expectations
School features and structures	<i>School design features and organizational structures that shape how the school and its activities are organized</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory system • Counseling and support services • Community-based partnerships
School practices	<i>Formal and informal daily practices that reflect what people do, how they teach and learn, and how they participate in the school community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning strategies • School traditions and activities • Classroom participation practices

Notes: Definitions and examples derived from empirical and theoretical work on studying schools through an ecological, sociocultural, and/or organizational framework (cf. Bidwell, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cole, 1996; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Markus & Conner, 2013; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rogoff, 1995; Thapa et al., 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).



Methodology Overview

We employed a multi-method, multiple case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003, 2009, 2011; Stake, 1995) to investigate how three high schools that ground their educational practice in social emotional learning and social justice education support students' personal, social, and academic success. Qualitative data sources included: observations (e.g., of classrooms, student events, and faculty meetings), document analysis (e.g., of school websites, student handbooks, and course syllabi), and interviews and focus groups (with school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community partners). Quantitative data sources included publically available school record data (e.g., attendance rates, graduation rates, and state achievement test performance) and a survey of current students' educational experiences (e.g., perceptions of school climate, attitudes about learning, motivation for school, and attainment goals). The majority of the student survey items were drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002, 2004), which enabled us to compare the data from the student sample in our study to a national sample of high school students with similar school characteristics.

The schools selected to participate in our study were: Fenway High School (Boston, MA), El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice (Brooklyn, NY), and International School of the Americas (San Antonio, TX). We employed a rigorous screening procedure to select the schools, which involved: nomination by a panel of experts in the fields of social emotional learning and social justice education, strong academic performance and attainment outcomes (compared to each school's district), and a selection interview with school leaders and teachers to confirm an explicit, well-established, school-wide focus on social emotional learning and social justice education. These school sites we selected also represent a range of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity among the student communities they serve, which provided us with the opportunity to investigate how these factors impact the school context and student experiences.

See Appendix A for additional detail on the school site selection process, study methods, qualitative data sources, and the student experience survey.

Models of Successful Practice: School Context, History, and Approach to Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education

Fenway High School: Social Emotional Learning as the Foundation for Social Justice

School Context and History

Fenway High School is a small, public high school located in Boston, MA. Founded in 1983, Fenway started out as program for at-risk students, which was housed within English High School in the Fenway neighborhood of Boston. The guiding philosophy of the program was that “all students can learn if they feel safe, are supported by close personal relationships with their teachers, and study a relevant, in-depth curriculum that stays in tune with research on human learning and development” (Fenway High School, n.d.c). Larry Myatt, founder and the first headmaster of Fenway, wanted the school to be a place where students were encouraged to work hard, be themselves, and experience greater educational opportunity than that which is typically afforded to low-income students of color in urban schooling contexts. In 1989, the Fenway program joined the Coalition of Essential Schools. Fenway’s approach and philosophy is aligned with the Coalition of Essential Schools’ Ten Common Principles, a set of research and practice-based guidelines designed to foster personalized, equitable, and academically challenging schools (Coalition of Essential Schools, n.d.).

In 1993, the Fenway program became a freestanding school within the Boston Public Schools system and soon after, in 1994, was awarded pilot status by the state. As a pilot school Fenway is part of the district, but has autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar, allowing for greater flexibility in how the school and its activities are organized. In 1995, the school established three houses, or cohorts of students, with each house linked to a community-based partner.

At Fenway, students participate in a four-year course of study that includes capstone projects and portfolios, structured supports, experiential education, and community service and senior internship requirements. A key part of the Fenway experience is “learning by doing,” with support from key community partners, like Boston’s Museum of Science and Blue Cross Blue Shield. These partners also participate on the Fenway Board, which governs the school and provides it with support, encouragement, resources, and advocacy.

Students must apply to be admitted to Fenway; the process, however, is designed to be inclusive and nonselective. The application process is meant to ensure that

students have thought about the unique features of the school and feel that the school is a good fit for them. Students from all middle schools in Boston are eligible to apply and are required to submit two teacher recommendations and respond to three essay questions during the middle of their eighth grade year. The essay prompts include: *What makes a good school? What makes a good student? Why do I want to come to Fenway?* These questions help provide school administrators and teachers with a sense of who students are and what they want in an education.

The school is committed to accepting a diverse class of students across skill levels (demarcated as high, medium, and low), which is built into the admissions process. Fenway works hard to outreach to students in advance of the admissions season, working carefully with the district, families, and students to ensure that interested applicants are not disadvantaged or left out by the process. Demand to attend Fenway, however, is high—in recent years Fenway has received more than 800 applications for 90 available spots in the ninth grade. To admit students, school staff sorts the applicants by race, gender, and skill level and selects a representative number of applicants from each pile. In the spring, approximately 150 students and families are invited to attend a meeting at the school; out of this 150, between 80 and 90 are accepted.

In the 2012–13 academic year, the primary year of the study, there were 320 students enrolled at Fenway (see Table 2). Of these, 67% were eligible for free or reduced lunch, 12% were English language learners, and 17% received special education services. The majority of students served by Fenway are African American (41%) and Latino (46%).

Many indicators point to the success of the school and its students (see Table 3, page 19). Fenway’s students had better attendance, performed better on state exams, graduated at higher rates, and were more likely to attend college than students in the district as a whole. Over the years, Fenway has received numerous awards and accolades and is widely seen as an exemplar of how to provide a high-quality education for students typically left behind by the urban public school system. For example, Fenway was one of the original 10 New American High Schools named by the U.S. Department of Education in 1996, it was named one of the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ (NASSP)

Table 2. Fenway Student Demographics

Fenway High School 2012–13 Demographics Grades 9–12	
Enrollment	320
Race/Ethnicity	--
African American	41%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	4%
Latino	46%
White	6%
Other	3%
Free or Reduced Lunch	67%
English Language Learners	12%
Special Education	17%
Gender	--
Female	53%
Male	47%

Source: Massachusetts DOE, n.d.

12 Breakthrough Schools in 2004, and it was ranked as a Bronze Medal school and listed as one of the country’s best high schools in 2014 by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Why social emotional learning and social justice?

Fenway’s approach to social emotional learning is shaped by the school’s commitment to social justice in two significant ways. First, the school seeks to increase educational opportunity for students who typically do not have access to high-quality public schools by fostering physical and emotional safety, developing close personal relationships among students, teachers, and administrators, and educating students with a relevant, challenging curriculum in which students receive the support they need to succeed. Fenway educators, some of whom have similar backgrounds to

Table 3. Fenway School Performance Indicators Compared to District

Performance Indicator	Fenway High School Grades 9–12				Boston Public Schools Grades 9–12			
	2008– 09	2009– 10	2010– 11	2011– 12	2008– 09	2009– 10	2010– 11	2011– 12
Attendance rate	94%	94%	94%	94%	86%	86%	85%	86%
Grade 10 ELA MCAS: Proficient	93%	75%	95%	91%	64%	60%	67%	73%
Grade 10 Mathematics MCAS: Proficient	84%	81%	84%	82%	62%	60%	62%	65%
4-year graduation rate	88%	90%	83%	88%	61%	63%	64%	66%
5-year graduation rate	92%	94%	90%	92%	67%	69%	71%	72%
Graduates attending college or university	76%	84%	77%	67%	63%	67%	66%	65%

Notes: Data represent past 4 years for which indicators are publically available for all schools in the study. Enrollment for Fenway High School was 290 for 2008–09, 289 for 2009–10, 290 for 2010–11, and 322 for 2011–12. Enrollment for Boston Public Schools was 13,567 for 2008–09, 13,514 for 2009–10, 13,474 for 2010–11, and 12,548 for 2011–12 and includes all public high schools housing grades 9–12 only. Attendance rate was calculated at the district level by averaging rates of all Boston Public High Schools with students in grades 9–12 only. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) measures performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards for all public school students, including alternate assessments for students with disabilities (MCAS-Alt) and first-year LEP students (MCAS English Language Arts) if needed. The ELA MCAS administered in Grade 10 contains language, reading, and composition components, and the Math MCAS administered in Grade 10 contains questions on number and quantity, algebra and functions, geometry, and statistics and probability. Students must score at least 240 (on a scale of 200–280) in order to be proficient. Only students enrolled for 2 full years in the school or district are included in the proficiency rates. Students must pass the grade 10 ELA and Math MCAS and one of the 4 high school science, technology, and engineering tests in order to qualify to graduate. Graduation rates are calculated by cohort. Cohort is defined as the number of first time entering ninth graders 4 years earlier, less transfers out, plus transfers in. Students who pass the GED test or earn a state Certificate of Attainment are not counted as graduates. Graduates attending college or university are defined as students attending either a 4-year or 2-year college. Source: Massachusetts DOE, n.d.

their students and some of whom do not, work hard to know their students and have a history of engaging in professional development that helps them to identify and learn to overcome race-, class-, or gender-based biases and prejudice. They hold themselves to high standards as educators, always pushing their team to provide high-quality educational experiences and support tuned to meet the needs of their student community. They consistently question and check in about whether students have what they need to be successful.

A critical part of that support is educating the “whole child.” This requires not only teaching the social emotional skills necessary for all students to successfully navigate the triumphs and challenges of school, college, career, and life, but also equipping their students in particular—students of color from low-income backgrounds who are often the first in their families to attend college—with the resources they need to achieve in high school and transition to college and life after Fenway. Fenway educators see the school itself as a tool for correcting injustice, opening the door to opportunity and providing students with the care, support, and agency they need to take advantage of those opportunities.

Fenway educators believe that connecting with students emotionally is the path to correcting injustice, and that social emotional learning makes this possible. Two staff members commented:

We understand that academics is important, but social emotional learning is essential to build a relationship with the students.... It’s about being respected, trusted, and liked—this changes their experiences and outcomes.

Some come in hungry. They may come in upset. If we get pissed off, nothing gets done. Instead we ask them how they’re doing and try to meet them where they are.

Others discussed the importance of advocating for students as part of Fenway’s social justice mission. One counselor noted that many students from advantaged or privileged backgrounds get a lot of help and support on their way to college from their parents. At Fenway, most students have few sources of help and practical know-how at home to help them prepare for college. School staff provides support for students and advocate for them to get into certain colleges where they might be more likely to do well and meet success.

Second, Fenway’s motto is to “Work Hard. Be Yourself. Do the Right Thing.” The school seeks to graduate students who are conscientious, engaged, and empowered to work for change—both for themselves and for others who experience injustice and inequality. Fenway educators believe that this awareness and empowerment begins with a strong social emotional foundation based on the close and caring

relationships that characterize the school community. As students progress through Fenway, this interdependence and commitment to community extends beyond the school walls, to the neighborhood, city, and wider world. Reflecting on how social emotional learning and social justice education converge at Fenway, a school counselor described:

There's a kid who's a real community activist—talk about social justice. He was a community organizer in Fenway, outside of Fenway. He went into college in New York City and was really honest about being around kids [very different from him].... How to find your place in that? How are you going to be the change on campus? They know how to do that because of their Fenway experience.

For students, their school's often explicit and ubiquitous commitment to social justice, engagement, and action helps model these ideas and behaviors as values as well as an end that can be achieved through hard work and passion.

As we will see in our in-depth exploration of Fenway's educational practice, social emotional learning and social justice education operate together and reinforce one another across the school's climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices in both explicit and subtle ways. There are also particular school features, structures, and practices that provide opportunities for targeted instruction on social emotional learning and social justice education skills.

For example, in advisory class, Fenway educators use a set of developmentally progressive questions to highlight particular social emotional and social justice skills and competencies at each grade level (see page 63). Students start out learning about who they are and what it means to be a member of a community, move on to reflecting on the impact that one desires to have on the world, and then progress to considering how to act to achieve that impact. In ninth grade, students practice self-awareness and social awareness skills in advisory as they learn stress-management strategies and set norms for a respectful school community; by 11th grade, they practice responsible decision-making as they set goals for college, as well as perspective-taking and multicultural literacy as they consider how to navigate new and unfamiliar contexts outside of their home community. Likewise, the school's relevant curriculum engages and empowers students through culturally relevant assignments that provide opportunities for both social emotional learning and social justice education. For example, in the ninth grade Foundations of Literacy class, students complete a memoir assignment in which they read writers of color and then write their own story (see page 85). As they work through this assignment, students reflect on their identity and its formation, as well as engage a critical perspective on society, as they develop their voice and share their story with teachers and peers.

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice: “A Social Justice Organization Trying to Do a School; Not a School Trying to Do Social Justice”

School Context and History

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice is a small public high school located in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. In 1993, the school was founded by a community-based organization (CBO) with the same name—the El Puente CBO—that serves the South Side community in Williamsburg. The school began as part of the small school movement in New York City. Luis Garden Acosta, Frances Lucerna, and other community leaders and activists had originally started the El Puente CBO to combat the violence and decline that the once vibrant Latino neighborhood experienced during the 1970s and 1980s. (*El Puente* translates from Spanish to English as “the bridge.”) The El Puente CBO partnered with other local efforts to improve and empower the neighborhood while, at the same time, “pioneering a national model for youth development within the context of overall community development” (El Puente, n.d.b).

By its 10th year, the El Puente CBO had developed a successful after-school program to help young people pass the GED test and enroll in college. Acosta and Lucerna saw the opportunity to turn this program into a school designed to serve the needs of students in their community. To Lucerna, founding the school was an act of self-determination with the potential to effect positive change in the larger community. What they had envisioned, explained Lucerna, was “something a school could be, a seamless institution, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. [providing] support and validation, an opportunity to honor the culture and history students bring.” A current facilitator—teachers at El Puente are called facilitators—aptly described the school as “a social justice organization trying to do a school; not a school trying to do social justice.” In 2008, El Puente Academy relocated to South Williamsburg and is now housed the former Catholic school that Lucerna herself attended as a child.

El Puente’s founders came to believe that self-determination and empowerment require membership and leadership from within the community, not reliance on a professional social service model, which an El Puente CBO board member characterized as “professionals from outside the community providing services to a passive community of recipients.” An El Puente facilitator emphasized, “We are constant in that we are trying to nurture leaders in social justice” and thereby build the capacity of the neighborhood itself.

El Puente Academy serves an unscreened population of just under 220 students who are predominantly Latino and low-income (Table 4, page 23). Originally, students who enrolled at the school lived locally; due to gentrification and other neighborhood changes, students now also come to El Puente from other locations. Approxi-

mately 90% of El Puente students select the school through New York City’s high school choice admission process. The 10% who do not initially choose El Puente are, as Principal Wanda Vazquez describes, generally changed by the time they graduate.

The majority of students entering El Puente underperform in literacy and math, with scores of 1 (below basic) and 2 (basic) on a scale where 3 indicates “proficient” and 4 “advanced” on New York State’s eighth grade math and literacy tests. Eighty-three percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the school’s proportion of special education students (23% of students) is high compared to most schools. The proportion of English language learners (19% of students) is also notably higher than the city average across schools (New York City DOE, n.d.a).

Despite the challenges faced by its student population, in recent years the school has achieved a 4-year graduation rate of 68% and above, and a 5-year graduation rate that has reached as high as 80%—exceeding New York City district averages (Table 5, page 24). As a member of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, which engages students in a set of project-based performance assessments, El Puente students are exempt from all state exams except for the English Regents, which they pass at a higher rate than the district average. In 2003, El Puente was first recognized as one of the New York City Department of Education’s “Schools of Excellence” and continues to receive an “A” grade on the DOE’s official report card.

The school’s four-year, college preparatory curriculum “promotes academic and intellectual mastery as well as holistic leadership development through a culturally relevant, standards-based curriculum that integrates community development projects” (El Puente, n.d.a). Students are regularly accepted at a number of high-quality, four-year private post-secondary institutions as well as colleges in the State University of New York (SUNY) system where the El Puente’s college counselor has established relationships and can help match students. Many graduates also attend community colleges, which are less expensive and allow them to attend part-time while working.

Table 4. El Puente Student Demographics

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice 2012–13 Demographics Grades 9–12	
Enrollment	219
Race/Ethnicity	--
African American	10%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	1%
Latino	87%
White	2%
Free or Reduced Lunch	83%
English Language Learners	19%
Special Education	23%
Gender	--
Female	53%
Male	47%

Source: New York City DOE, n.d.a.

Why social emotional learning and social justice?

Like Fenway, El Puente leverages social emotional learning and social justice education both to right injustice for the student population it serves and to empower its students to work for positive change in their own lives and for the good of their community. El Puente educators believe that meeting these goals requires a human-development perspective on education, viewing the academic, social, and emotional as necessarily interdependent. Moreover, El Puente’s approach to educating the students it serves acknowledges and affirms students’ cultural backgrounds, focuses on students’ assets and potential rather than deficits, and makes connections to urban youth culture. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s concept of a “humanizing pedagogy” offers a philosophical map of how El Puente conceptualizes the necessary links between social justice education and social emotional learning.

Table 5. El Puente School Performance Indicators Compared to District

Performance Indicator	El Puente Academy for Peace & Justice Grades 9–12				New York City Public Schools Grades 9–12			
	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Attendance rate	85%	87%	86%	81%	84%	85%	85%	85%
English Regents Exam: Score 65 or greater	78%	76%	87%	91%	70%	75%	76%	73%
4-year graduation rate	74%	68%	67%	68%	59%	61%	61%	60%
5-year graduation rate	77%	75%	80%	72%	68%	69%	70%	69%
NYC School Performance Grade	A	A	A	A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Notes: Data represent past 4 years for which indicators are publically available for all schools in the study. Enrollment for El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice was 176 for 2008–09, 197 for 2009–10, 200 for 2010–11, and 210 for 2011–12. Enrollment for New York City public schools was 278,580 for 2008–09, 282,310 for 2009–10, 280,030 for 2010–11, and 274,489 for 2011–12 and includes all public high schools housing grades 9–12 only. Attendance rate was calculated at the district level by averaging rates of all New York City public high schools with students in grades 9–12 only. The Regents exams test the high school level of the New York State English language arts curriculum in the areas of listening, reading, and writing. Students with severe cognitive disabilities take the New York State Alternate Assessments (NYSAA) instead. To earn a Regents diploma a student must earn at least 44 credits (each semester-long course is worth one credit), some of which are in specified subjects, and pass five Regents exams (English, global history, U.S. history, 1 math, and 1 science) with a score of at least 65 on a 100-point scale. El Puente is part of the New York Performance Standards Consortium; the school has a waiver to administer performance assessments instead of Regents exams. El Puente students are required to pass only the English Regents exam to graduate. Students typically take the English Regents exam in grade 11. Graduation rates are calculated by cohort. Cohort is defined as all students who first entered ninth grade 4 years earlier. Graduates are defined as students who earned either a Local or Regents diploma; students who earned a special education (IEP) diploma or passed the GED test are not counted as graduates.

Sources: New York City DOE, nd.a, n.d.b, n.d.c., New York State Office of Information and Reporting Services, n.d.

As Principal Vazquez described, the brain and spirit are “always one. If I’m going through a state of depression or having a bad week and can’t deal with my feelings, I can’t deal with the academics.” Another administrator agreed: “I don’t think we separate academic learning [from] being human, how I’m viewing the world, seeing the world, and my feelings and how we deal with those feelings.” Educators at El Puente seek to help students see these connections as well as provide students with the tools they need to address their feelings productively.

Social emotional learning at El Puente does not stop with students’ individual understanding of their personal experiences and identity; its educators use these understandings to highlight and reinforce students’ connections to their community. They believe that helping students recognize that they belong to a wider community and have a shared cultural heritage with members of that community will enable them to better understand their own identities and appreciate their obligations and allegiance to that community. Students not only can bring who they are to school, they also are welcomed and encouraged to use school as a means of enriching their knowledge of themselves and their culture. As founding principal Lucerna explained, “We do not follow a clinical model of problem and deficit, but focus on potential and empowerment of young people and community for self-determination.”

El Puente’s commitment to social justice reflects a deep and critical understanding of injustice as it has been, and continues to be, experienced by the El Puente community and individuals within that community, the wider Latino community in New York City, and the wider world beyond students’ local contexts. As the school’s special education coordinator explained, all facilitators “have an understanding of oppression and liberation in their own lives.” A key aspect of facilitators’ identification with their students lies in their common backgrounds and shared experiences of bias, discrimination, and injustice—a critical distinguishing factor of the school. This is not a situation where adults from outside of the community work to rescue “at-risk” students from communities different from their own. Rather, it is a home-grown educational approach designed to initiate students into a shared community with a common history, and to provide students with the necessary skills, knowledge, critical perspective, and agency to become leaders in that community. As one facilitator emphasized, “You need to focus on who your population is—oppression and liberation are essential to their [El Puente students’] story.”

As we will see in our in-depth exploration of the school’s educational practice, at El Puente, like Fenway, social emotional learning and social justice education operate together and reinforce one another across the school’s climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices in both explicit and subtle ways. There are also particular school features, structures, and practices that provide opportunities to target instruction around developing students’ social emotional and social justice skills and competencies.

El Puente, for example, organizes its student community into two academies: the Sankofa Academy, which includes students in ninth and 10th grade, and the Liberation Academy, which includes students in 11th and 12th grade (see page 61). Similar to how Fenway’s advisory curriculum is structured, El Puente’s academy system uses a set of developmentally progressive questions to frame the curriculum, map students’ developmental journey, and guide student learning. The questions are: Who am I? Who are we? What is the nature of the world around us? What can we do about it? Learning is not viewed as solely academic; all subjects provide opportunities to integrate and teach social emotional and social justice skills. The ninth grade pre-algebra math class, called Finance My Life, teaches mathematical content by personalizing that content and making it relevant to students’ lives (see page 88). For example, students engage in financial planning to analyze what it will cost to become financially independent whether they attend college or start working after high school. They also analyze indicators of social class used, for example, in public policy debates. Learning these skills and applying them to their own lives provides opportunities to teach and reinforce skills like self-awareness, social awareness, and responsible decision-making as well as social responsibility and multicultural literacy.

International School of the Americas: Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education for the 21st Century

School Context and History

International School of the Americas, also known as ISA, is a small, public magnet high school in the North East Independent School District (NEISD) located in the northern part of San Antonio, TX. ISA is colocated on the campus of Robert E. Lee High School—a large, comprehensive high school—with two other small magnet schools focused on STEM and the arts, respectively. Students take some of their classes, participate in cocurricular activities, and have lunch integrated with students from the other schools on the campus.

ISA’s current students inherit a history that combines a focus on small communities with the goal of fostering global citizenship. Like Fenway and El Puente, ISA developed in the midst of the small schools reform movement during the 1990s, which paralleled a growing recognition across society of globalization and human interconnectedness. Thomas Sergiovanni, the late professor of education at Trinity University (also in San Antonio), wrote extensively about the role of community and small school size in school reform (for example, see Sergiovanni, 1994). ISA opened in 1995 as an effort by a group of employees at Trinity University and NEISD to implement Sergiovanni’s thinking into practice at the high school level. ISA’s approach also depends on academic rigor, a relevant curriculum, and performance-based ways of assessing student progress. ISA also challenges its students to achieve a minimum grade of 80% in each of their courses by the year’s end—significantly higher than that required by the state—and supports students in meeting this standard when they need it.

Today, ISA combines a dual emphasis on a caring school community and high academic standards with a 21st century global focus that is inspired by and aligns with the goals of the Asia Society’s International Studies Schools Network (ISSN), of which ISA is a participating school (Asia Society, n.d.b). The 34 public schools in the ISSN, all located in the United States, are challenged with a mission “to develop college-ready, globally competent high school graduates” (Asia Society, n.d.b). The Asia Society credits ISA as the school that inspired the ISSN design, highlighting the “relationship-driven environment where all students are provided with an honors-level curriculum and the extra academic support required to succeed at this chal-

Table 6. ISA School Performance Indicators Compared to District

Performance Indicator	International School of the Americas Grades 9–12				North East Independent School District, San Antonio Grades 9–12			
	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Attendance rate	97%	96%	97%	97%	95%	94%	95%	95%
Gr 10 ELA TAKS: Met standard	99%	99%	98%	99%	94%	94%	93%	94%
Gr 10 Mathematics TAKS: Met standard	85%	87%	80%	85%	75%	81%	81%	78%
4-year graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	87%	87%	88%	89%
5-year graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	91%	91%	92%	92%
College-ready graduates	74%	83%	75%	80%	58%	60%	60%	65%

Notes: Data represent past 4 years for which indicators are publically available for all schools in the study. Enrollment for International School of the Americas was 464 for 2008–09; 458 for 2009–10; 461 for 2010–11; and 472 for 2011–12. Enrollment for North East Independent School District (NEISD) in San Antonio was 18,406 for 2008–09; 19,168 for 2009–10; 19,799 for 2010–11; and 20,203 for 2011–12, and includes all public high schools housing grades 9–12 only. Attendance rate was calculated at the district level by averaging rates of all NEISD public high schools with students in grades 9–12 only. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was a comprehensive testing program for public school students, directly linked to the state-mandated curriculum, administered to students in grades 3–11 from 2003 to 2011. For 2012, only students in grades 10 and 11 were administered the TAKS. The “percent met standard” on TAKS for each grade includes performance on the first administration of all TAKS tests, including TAKS-Accommodated (which has format accommodations like font size), TAKS-M (based on modified academic standards for special education students who meet certain requirements), and TAKS-Alt (based on alternate academic standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities). Students must pass the grade 11 (exit-level) TAKS in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies in order to be eligible to graduate. Graduation rates are calculated by cohort. Cohort is defined as the number of students who entered grade 9 in Texas public schools for the first time 4 years earlier, plus transfers who entered the school system in the grade level expected for the cohort, less students who cannot be tracked or left the school system for a reason other than graduating, passing the GED test, or dropping out. College-ready graduates met or exceeded the college-ready criteria in ELA and in mathematics on one of the following exams: 1) TAKS: 2200 scale score on exit-level TAKS in subject and a 3 on essay for ELA requirement; 2) SAT: 500 in Mathematics or Critical Reading and 1070 total; or 3) ACT: 19 in subject and 23 composite.

Source: Texas Education Agency [TEA], n.d.a, n.d.b.

lenge” as one of ISA’s primary characteristics, followed by emphasis on “real world application of the skills and content” (Asia Society, n.d.a).

ISA is consistently noted as a top high school in both the state and the nation. Children at Risk, a Texas-based research and advocacy group, recently named ISA the #2 high school in the greater San Antonio area (out of 65 high schools) and the #24 high school in the state of Texas (out of 1,171 high schools). *U.S. News & World Report* awarded ISA a Gold Medal and ranked the school #215 nationally in its 2013 rankings of U.S. high schools. ISA is a mentor school for the Coalition of Essential Schools and is also a past winner of the Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education. Students and their families also attest to ISA’s high-quality reputation. During the year of the study, nearly 300 students and their families submitted applications to be included in the admissions lottery for 120 spots in the incoming ninth grade class. ISA students overall performed better on state exams, graduated at higher rates, were more likely to be college-ready, and were more likely to attend college than students in the district as a whole (see Table 6, page 27).

ISA draws its students from more than 25 middle schools across San Antonio as well as a few schools from surrounding areas. Acceptance is determined by a lottery system; the school does not use achievement-based criteria for admission. During the 2012–13 school year, 465 students enrolled at ISA (Table 7). Of these, the majority of students who attend ISA were Latino (55%) and White (36%). Just under a quarter of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, reflecting a largely middle-class population of students. The school did not have any English language learners and the special education population was very small (2%). ISA also enrolled significantly more female than male students (60% vs. 40%).

ISA’s curriculum is structured around College Board Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement courses. AP courses are offered in: English language, English literature, U.S. history, U.S. government and politics, comparative

Table 7. ISA Student Demographics

International School of the Americas 2012–13 Demographics Grades 9–12	
Enrollment	465
Race/Ethnicity	--
African American	2%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	4%
Latino	55%
White	36%
Other	3%
Free or Reduced Lunch	23%
English Language Learners	0%
Special Education	2%
Gender	--
Female	60%
Male	40%

Sources: TEA, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c.

government and politics, world history, macroeconomics, calculus, biology, environmental science, physics, Spanish language, and Spanish literature. Gifted and Talented programs are offered in math and English. World languages (other than Spanish, Sign Language, and Japanese), athletics, band, choir, theater, debate, art, physical education, and career and technology courses are offered through Robert E. Lee High School. Due to ISA's 120-hour career exploration internship and portfolio requirement, many students have one "off campus" period in their senior schedule. Students are also required to complete 120 hours of community service during their time at ISA in order to graduate.

Why social emotional learning and social justice?

ISA challenges its students to consider what it means to act at one's fullest potential as a learner, leader, and global citizen. The school's approach to social emotional learning and social justice education centers on improving oneself through self-awareness and reflection as well as acting for the good of ever-broadening circles of others with whom the self is interconnected (e.g., one's school community, local community, and global community). ISA traces its founding to a white paper written by Sergioivanni, which outlines the educational model that inspired ISA:

The formula for quality is a simple one: demand a lot from students; love them at the same time; keep the scale down so that everyone knows each other, do only a few things, but do them well; link graduation to students being able to demonstrate that they have mastered essential skills; and share the burdens of leadership with teachers and students. If you want to teach students to use their minds well, make learning relevant, make learning real, make learning fun and give students a reason for learning. Place character development about all. Aim to graduate students who are competent, who know how to think, who care about others, and who are eager to accept the responsibility for active citizenship.

Relationships matter at ISA, as does educating students to be caring, engaged, socially responsible citizens who are equipped and willing to take action for the good of their community, both local and global.

While there is certainly overlap, the relationship between social emotional learning and social justice education at ISA also operates differently from Fenway and El Puente. ISA's population of students—while majority non-White and 55% Latino—come largely from middle-class families. ISA students are also more likely to have college-educated parents compared to their peers at Fenway and El Puente, who largely hail from low-income to poor communities. While all three schools leverage a strong foundation of social emotional learning to provide a high-quality education for their students, as well as connect students to the community and wider world beyond their school walls, ISA students are likely to confront fewer

obstacles to academic opportunity, agency, and empowerment in their own lives than their less affluent peers.

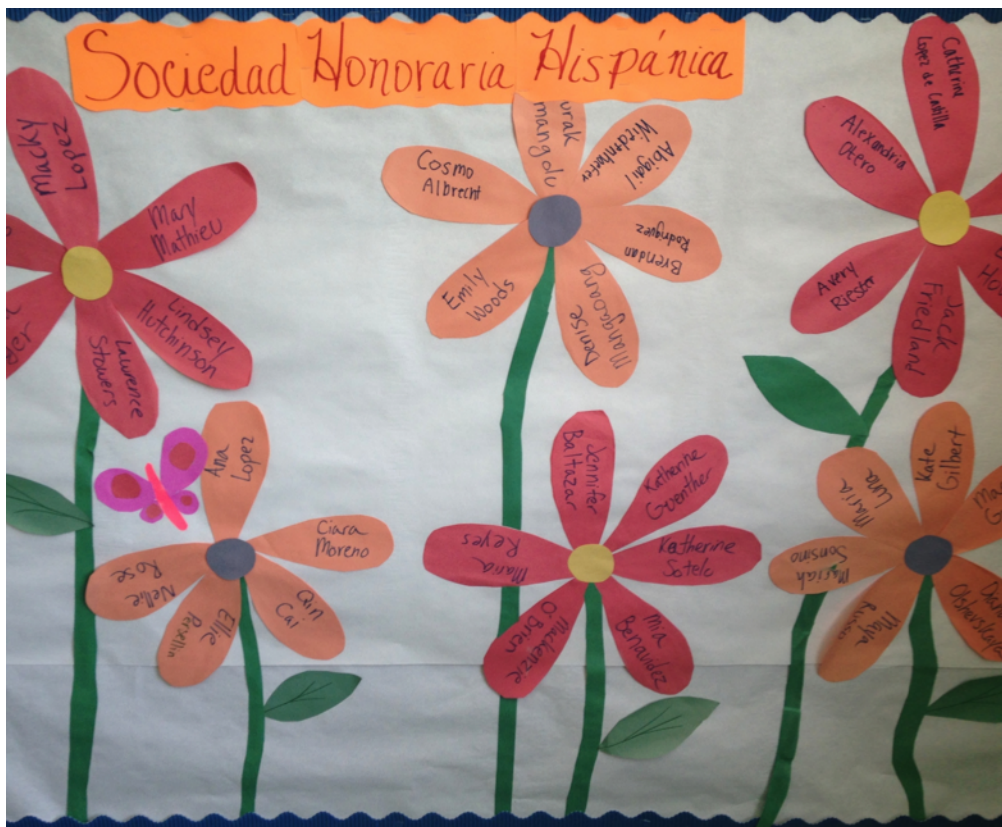
Rather than primarily seeking to correct injustice for the student population it serves, ISA has a strong focus on developing empathy for others and inspiring allyship, advocacy, and action for those who may come from different backgrounds or life circumstances from one's own. One teacher, for example, specifically described social responsibility and social justice as “being able to look at the world around you and see that possibly not everything is as it should be, and to feel responsibility for trying to rectify some of those situations.” Another claimed, “It's not just recognition of the injustice or the social dilemma, it is acting and how you act that is part of what citizenship in these United States means.”

In describing the ways in which they develop a social justice perspective among students, ISA educators frequently noted that it is done through broadening and expanding the circles of relationships of which one is a part. Many also described the ways in which particular social emotional skills—like self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills—become even more necessary when those with whom you are interacting come from different places and have backgrounds and experiences that diverge from your own. The issues of inequality or injustice that one is likely to encounter become even more multifaceted or complex across contexts—in particular, across cultural or national contexts. If one is going to be a socially responsible global citizen and work for positive social change, social emotional skills increase the likelihood that you will be able to create and maintain the kinds of respectful, empathetic relationships and the sense of interdependence that enable and inspire engagement and action.

As we will see in our in-depth exploration of the school's educational practice, at ISA, like Fenway and El Puente, social emotional learning and social justice education operate together and reinforce one another across the school's climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices in both explicit and subtle ways. There are also particular school features, structures, and practices that provide opportunities for targeted instruction on social emotional and social justice skills.

Advisory at ISA, for example, is one place where direct instruction on social emotional and social justice skills occurs. The curriculum works to first foster community-building and identity exploration before moving on to supporting students as they learn to engage constructively with larger circles of community beyond the school (see page 65). Since advisories at ISA include students from all grade levels, this progression within advisory occurs across the academic year rather than across grades. In the fall, advisory class provides lessons and experiences in which students work on defining community norms and values, as well as explore finding their particular place within the school community. Here, social emotional skill-building centers

on developing self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. As the year progresses, lessons and activities focus on reflection and developing a growth mindset, which enables students to practice cultivating self-management and responsible decision-making skills. The curriculum then shifts to having students look beyond themselves and their school as they prepare for and reflect on grade-level travel experiences and community service projects, which have an explicit social justice education focus and set of learning objectives. Here, students work on developing their sense of interdependence, perspective-taking skills, understanding of social awareness and social responsibility, and multicultural literacy (see page 77 for an extended discussion).



Social Emotional Learning Schools Provide Students with Key Psychological Resources They Need to Thrive in School

What is it like to attend a social emotional learning–focused high school like Fenway, El Puente, or ISA? How do students’ experiences at these schools compare to students’ experiences at other high schools? To answer these questions, we surveyed a sample of students at each school to gauge students’ attitudes about school, perceptions of school climate, motivation for attending school, attitudes about learning and achievement, life values, attainment expectations, and experiences of personal and academic support. In order to compare the data from the student sample in our study to a national sample of high school students with similar school characteristics, the majority of the student survey items were drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002). While the individual school case reports detail survey findings for each student sample, and compare students’ responses to a national comparison sample of students in urban, public high schools with similar socioeconomic profile, we combined the samples for the analyses presented here due to similar response patterns across samples for a more holistic look at student experiences. See Appendix A for additional detail on survey methods, sample selection and characteristics, and data analysis procedures.

Students in social emotional learning schools report a more positive, caring school climate and like school more

We found that students in social emotional learning or “SEL” schools, as noted in the table, report a more positive school climate and more positive relationships with teachers than students in the comparison schools sample (see Table 8, page 33). Ninety-four percent or more of students agree that students and teachers get along, that their teaching is good, that teachers are interested in students, that students feel safe, and that students are friends with others from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Further, more than 80% of students also agree that the school rules are fair, that they do not feel put down by other students, and that there is school spirit. On every item the differences between these schools and comparison schools are statistically significant, and, in nearly all cases, they are quite large.

We also found that while students in both social emotional learning schools and comparison schools desire to do well in school—approximately 90% of students in both samples say that getting good grades is very important to them—students in social emotional learning schools like school more (see Table 9, page 33). Students in social emotional learning schools were more likely to say that they like school “a great deal” than students in the national comparison sample (51.3% vs. 28.3%).

Students in social emotional learning schools report greater engagement in school and social emotional support

When asked about their motivations for attending school, both social emotional learning school and comparison school students agreed that school was important for their future (Table 10, page 34). Students in social emotional learning schools, however, were much more likely to say that they came to school because they were engaged in

Table 8. Student Perceptions of School Climate

How much do you agree with the following... (% agree)	SEL Schools N = 363	Comparison Schools N = 1933	χ^2
Students and teachers get along	95.3	66.0	126.90***
The teaching is good	97.0	77.8	72.17***
Teachers are interested in students	96.4	72.3	97.49***
There is real school spirit	82.4	63.9	46.79***
School rules are fair	84.2	50.0	143.99***
Everyone knows the school rules	90.0	80.1	20.14***
I often feel put down by other students	11.3	17.3	8.05**
I feel safe	94.2	81.8	34.72***
Students are friends with others from different racial/ethnic backgrounds	95.3	90.2	9.75**

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 100%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories: % agree, % disagree.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

Table 9. Extent to Which Students Like School and Want to Do Well

How much do you like school? (% response)	SEL Schools N = 359	Comparison Schools N = 2002	χ^2
Not at all	6.6	8.0	74.73***
Somewhat	42.1 ^a	63.7 ^b	
A great deal	51.3 ^a	28.3 ^b	
How important are good grades to you? (% response)	SEL Schools N = 359	Comparison Schools N = 2002	χ^2
Not at all	0.6	1.0	2.11
Somewhat	10.9	8.9	
A great deal	88.5	90.1	

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Letter superscripts indicate that simple effect is significant. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 99%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

Table 10. Student Motivation for Attending School

I go to school because... (% agree)	SEL Schools N = 358	Comparison Schools N = 1932	χ^2
Subjects I take are interesting and challenging	84.9	64.7	56.60***
I get satisfaction from schoolwork	88.3	69.7	52.29***
It's a place to meet friends	89.1	72.3	45.33***
My teachers expect me to succeed	95.8	66.7	124.60***
My parents expect me to succeed	97.5	93.1	9.98**
Education is important for getting a job later on	97.8	97.6	0.03
I'm learning skills I will need for a job	81.7	87.3	7.70**
<i>Follow-up question for SEL school sample only:</i> I go to school because... (% agree)	SEL Schools N = 358	Comparison Schools N = 1932	χ^2
I feel cared for	91.6	N/A	N/A
I'm part of a community	93.0		
I'm respected and valued	91.5		
School matters to me	94.1		
I can learn to make a difference	93.8		

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 98%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories: % agree, % disagree.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

their schoolwork, which they found interesting and challenging; that school was a place to see their friends; and that their teachers expected them to succeed (Table 10). In a follow-up question asked of students in our social emotional learning schools sample, students were also highly likely to agree—at a rate of 91% or above—that they are motivated to go to school because their social and emotional needs are supported. Students feel cared for, part of a community, respected and valued, like school is relevant, and that they can learn to make a difference with their education.

Students in social emotional learning schools feel efficacious and resilient, and demonstrate a growth mindset

Turning to attitudes about learning and achievement, students in social emotional learning schools—compared to their peers in the comparison schools sample—were much more likely to say that they felt efficacious, were resilient, and viewed themselves through a growth mindset (Table 11, page 35; cf. Dweck, 2006). Moreover, social emotional learning school students were significantly more likely to indicate that their teachers praised their effort than students in comparison schools—88.7% vs. 65.8%. These results suggest that students in social emotional learning schools are likely to see academic success as something that can be learned or developed over time, not as an attribute that they either have or lack.

Table 11. Students' Efficacy, Resilience, and Growth Mindset

How often do these things apply to you? (% often)	SEL Schools N = 362	Comparison Schools N = 1910	χ^2
When I sit down to learn something really hard, I can learn it.	79.3	57.0	55.81***
If I decide not to get any bad grades, I can really do it.	84.4	66.2	43.94***
If I want to learn something well, I can.	88.8	67.9	60.11***
When studying, I try to work as hard as possible.	73.7	59.8	23.23***
When studying, I put forth my best effort.	69.1	60.2	9.72**
When studying, I keep working even if the material is difficult.	71.2	53.9	35.11***
When studying, I try to do my best to acquire the knowledge and skills taught.	80.7	61.6	45.05***
How much do you agree with the following... (% agree)	SEL Schools N = 362	Comparison Schools N = 1910	χ^2
When I work hard, teachers praise my effort.	88.7	65.8	74.98***

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 97%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories: % often, % sometimes, % never; % agree, % disagree.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

Table 12. Students' Educational, Professional, and Community Values

How important are the following to you in your life? (% very important)	SEL Schools N = 357	Comparison Schools N = 1827	χ^2
Getting a good education	88.7	92.7	9.87**
Being successful in my line of work	89.3	91.9	5.68
Being able to give my children better opportunities than I had	83.1	89.8	13.31**
Helping other people in my community	61.0	47.9	20.35***
Working to correct social and economic inequality	52.8	27.4	100.91***
Being an active and informed citizen	65.5	55.3	13.36**
Supporting environmental causes	45.8	28.1	48.62***
Participation in volunteer or community service work during past 2 years (through school or outside of school; % response)	SEL Schools N = 362	Comparison Schools N = 1910	χ^2
Yes	91.9	51.9	196.58***

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 98%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories: % very important, % somewhat important, % not important.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

Students in social emotional learning schools are more likely to value helping others in their community and working to improve society

Turning next to students' life values, we found that students in both samples were likely to say that getting a good education and being successful in their work is important to them, along with giving their children better opportunities than they had; students in comparison schools sample indicated that these values were important to a somewhat higher degree than students in social emotional learning schools (Table 12, page 35). Students in social emotional learning schools, however, were much more likely to endorse making a difference, helping others, and acting for social change as key life values (Table 12, page 35). One source of this difference among students might be that students in social emotional learning schools tend to participate in volunteer or community work, either through or outside of their school, to a greater extent than students in comparison schools (91.9% vs. 51.9%). As we discuss later, students in social emotional learning schools have experience tackling social issues across their coursework and in school projects.

Students in social emotional learning schools have ambitious goals for higher education and are more likely to receive support for these goals

Finally, students were surveyed on their educational attainment expectations and the support that they receive to meet those expectations. While the majority of students in both samples expect to graduate from college, students in social emotional learning schools are more likely to expect to obtain a master's degree or other professional or advanced degree compared to students in the comparison schools sample (59.6% vs. 34.7%; see Table 13, page 37). Moreover, social emotional learning school students are significantly more likely to have received support in the college preparation process—in particular, from school counselors, teachers, parents, and peers—than students in the comparison schools sample. Students in the social emotional learning schools sample also reported discussing going to college with their parents more frequently than students in comparison schools (73.1% vs. 46.8%). We describe later the systems and practices these schools put in place that to enable students to gain supports that many would not have encountered in traditional schools.

Taken together, student survey results reveal that students in the social emotional learning schools we studied report more positive educational experiences; feel more connected to their schools; demonstrate higher levels of psychological and emotional support, engagement, and empowerment; and are more socially engaged compared to students in the comparison schools sample. While not a causal study, these findings suggest that social emotional learning school environments and practices hold

the potential to better equip students with critical psychological resources and social emotional supports that they need to feel like school is important, that they belong there, and that they can be successful.

To test whether these findings might be due to differences in school size—after all, the social emotional learning schools in our study are all small school environments—we stratified the national sample of comparison schools by the number of students served by each school. Variability in the sample enabled us to split the comparison sample into small (schools serving fewer than 1,000 students) vs. medium-to-large schools (schools serving more than 1,000 students). No significant differences in the pattern of results emerged, indicating that the social emotional learning school response patterns are not simply due to school size alone. See Appendix A for additional information on the school size analysis and other supplementary analyses.

Table 13. Students’ Educational Attainment Expectations and Support

As things stand now, how far in school do you think you’ll get? (% response)	SEL Schools N = 354	Comparison Schools N = 1935	χ^2
High school graduation or GED only	1.7 ^a	8.5 ^b	94.07***
Some college	3.1 ^a	9.6 ^b	
Graduate from college	29.7 ^a	35.3 ^b	
Obtain a master’s degree or more advanced degree	59.6 ^a	34.7 ^b	
Don’t know	5.9 ^a	11.9 ^b	
If planning to go to college, where have you gone for information? (mark all that apply; % response)	SEL Schools N = 354	Comparison Schools N = 1935	χ^2
School counselor	66.7	38.1	89.46***
Teacher	67.3	32.7	135.99***
Coach	11.9	7.7	6.12*
Parent	63.9	43.2	46.43***
Friend	52.0	38.8	19.4***
Sibling	34.3	25.5	10.37**
Other relative	33.9	26.3	7.84**
How often have you discussed the following with your parents or guardians? (% often)	SEL Schools N = 354	Comparison Schools N = 1935	χ^2
Going to college	73.1	46.8	79.32***

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Letter superscripts indicate that simple effect is significant. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the SEL schools sample across items was 96%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the greatest number of valid responses per sample across items. Response categories for last question in table: % often, % sometimes, % never.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors’ calculations.

Leveraging a Whole-School Approach to Social Emotional Learning Supports Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

Next, we examine how the schools in our study practice and implement social emotional learning through their climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices. Taking a sociocultural approach, we investigated how these key levels of the school context work together to support and mutually reinforce how social emotional learning takes place. In the sections that follow, we take a deep dive into the educational practice of Fenway, El Puente, and ISA to reveal common themes, and some important differences, in how the schools take a whole-school, comprehensive approach to social emotional learning, how they work to build students' social emotional and social justice skills and competencies, and how a social justice education perspective informs their practice.

Social Emotional Learning Through School Climate and Culture

Level of school system	Definition	Examples
School climate and culture	<i>A school's physical and social environment and the norms, values, and expectations that structure that environment.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School mission and vision• Core values• Relationship norms and expectations

The culture of a school, as well as the social and psychological climate that a school's culture shapes and supports, can be leveraged to create a positive school environment that values and fosters social emotional learning. Comer (2005) aptly summarizes the importance of school climate and culture in meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs:

We often forget that, for many children, academic learning is not a primary, natural, or valued task. It is the positive relationships and sense of belonging that a good school culture provides that give these children the comfort, confidence, competence, and motivation to learn. Many school leaders do not appreciate the fact that producing a good school culture, fostering healthy child and adolescent development, and promoting sound academic learning are interactive and mutually facilitating processes. (p. 758)

To examine the climate and culture of Fenway, El Puente, and ISA, we studied the schools' physical and social environments as well as the norms, values, and expectations that both implicitly and explicitly structure those environments. In particular,

we investigated how community norms and values were articulated and represented, shared ways in which adults and students in the school thought about and characterized their relationships with one another, and the meanings and expectations associated with being a member of the school community.

Social emotional learning is front and center

Social emotional learning does not happen behind the scenes at Fenway, El Puente, and ISA—it is front and center, highlighted in each school’s mission and vision, reinforced through each school community’s norms and values, and clearly articulated in expectations for students and graduates.

Fenway’s mission and Core Principles. Fenway’s mission is to create a socially and morally committed community of learners who value one another as individuals. To articulate how to actualize this mission, the school developed a set of *Core Principles* that guide the school’s goals and decision-making processes. These principles explicitly outline the school’s social emotional learning and social justice education objectives as they apply to both students and adults, stating that the Fenway community “persistently strives to”:

- Foster and perpetuate a strong sense of community at the school, and an understanding of Fenway’s core principles as the school grows and changes.
- Support the health and wellness of staff.
- Ensure that addressing the issues of race, class, and gender is central to Fenway life.
- Develop, communicate, and be guided by a small number of school-based priorities for each academic year.
- Ensure that students are vital participants in school decision-making.
- Ensure that faculty members are vital participants in school decision-making.
- Provide opportunities for staff and students to learn and grow together and to sustain deep intellectual and personal relationships.
- Assure that Fenway continues to be a school that offers physical, cultural, and intellectual safety and which stresses the ideas of social commitment and moral responsibility.
- Provide structures and experiences that encourage teachers to take a “whole student” approach in content teams and across disciplines.
- Ensure that every Fenway student participates in some form of physical activity.

The *Core Principles* highlight several key components of social emotional learning and social justice education. All community members, both adults and students, are seen as necessarily interdependent and responsible to one another, and are considered vital participants in the school’s decision-making processes. Health and wellness are cited as key values as well as part of cultivating social awareness, social responsibility, and multicultural literacy. A focus on relationships, safety, and growth is emphasized as well as taking a “whole student” approach to fostering students’ personal and academic success. Fenway as a school, therefore, exists to provide an educational experience for its students that is grounded in meeting students’ social and emotional needs.

El Puente’s mission, vision, and *Twelve Fundamental Principles*. El Puente’s vision—that becoming a whole human being integrates self-awareness, social awareness, and self-actualization with responsibility to others, one’s community, and to the world—identifies both what is needed for social emotional learning and social justice education to take place as well as what the outcomes of such an education should be for its students. Intended to target the whole school community, El Puente’s mission statement is:

The mission of El Puente Academy is to inspire and nurture leadership for peace and justice. We strive in all activities to create community, develop love and caring, achieve mastery and promote peace and justice. These goals are based on a view of human beings as holistic, thriving in collective self-help, seeking safety and requiring respect. In reaching for our major goals, we depend on a belief that individuals grow and move forward when they are focused on development, are mentored, are allowed to be creative and understand the importance of unity through diversity.

Building on these ideas, the school’s *Twelve Fundamental Principles* identify the following areas of focus needed to actualize the school’s mission:

1. *Development*: Liberate the power of our human potential.
2. *Unity through diversity*: Embrace who we are and affirm the many differences that strengthen and make our common humanity powerful.
3. *Mentoring*: Be bridges of growth and empowerment to each other.
4. *Respect*: Revere all life, our earth, and the spirit of the universe.
5. *Holism*: Thrive in the balance and unity of body, mind, spirit, and community.
6. *Mastery*: Be disciplined and strive for excellence for body, mind, spirit, and community.

7. *Safety*: Create relationships and environments free from physical, mental, and social harm.
8. *Creativity*: Be free to challenge what exists and explore a universe of beauty and possibility.
9. *Creating community*: Build bridges of personal relationships to advance the human condition wherever we are.
10. *Love and caring*: Nurture the life force of community by freely giving and sharing of ourselves for the good of others.
11. *Collective self-help*: Use the human power of relationships to build, thrive, and together, “boldly go where no one has gone before.”
12. *Peace and justice*: Rise up for human rights, beauty, harmony, and the celebration of the sacred.

Like Fenway’s mission and core principles, El Puente’s version is replete with social emotional learning and social justice education objectives, demonstrating the ways in which they are both central and mutually constituted at the school. El Puente places its objectives in the context of liberating the “power of our potential” for the student community it serves through safety, empowerment, and appreciation for humanizing the educational journey that the school wants to support its students in taking. Doing so requires an education that meets the needs of the “whole student” and supports students’ social and emotional development.

ISA’s mission, vision, and Graduate Profile. Like Fenway and El Puente, ISA’s mission statement targets all members of the school community, adults and students alike, and challenges them to recognize their essential interdependence with and social responsibility to one another as well as to wider circles of community of which they are a part. In order to meet this challenge, developing social emotional and social justice skills and competencies like self-, other-, and social awareness, as well as multicultural literacy and community engagement, are valued as necessary parts of the educational experience.

The mission of the International School of the Americas (ISA) is to challenge all members of the school community to consistently reflect on and question what it means to be acting at one’s fullest potential as a learner, leader, and global citizen. Students and teachers are asked to use their education to improve themselves, their school, and the local and global community.

ISA’s educational vision further details what it means to be the sort of school that accomplishes this kind of mission, prioritizing its work as an innovative 21st century school that promotes a multicultural, relevant, and socially engaged perspective. ISA envisions itself to be:

- A school of choice.
- A school in which learning does not take place solely within the walls of the classroom.
- An environment that nurtures a student’s uniqueness and individual potential.
- A place in which interactive telecommunications link students and teachers across the United States and across the world.
- An educational setting designed for immediate response to the rapidly changing needs of the international community.
- A community of learners where professional educators and business leaders work together to provide real-world experiences for students.
- An American classroom where students and teachers communicate in multiple languages and explore international cultures, issues, and languages.
- An academic program that stresses high standards in all areas and prepares students to live and learn in our global community.
- An instructional program where teachers, students, parents, and community members all share responsibility for students’ successes.

ISA’s *Graduate Profile* builds on its mission and vision by further articulating the school’s expectations for its graduates. Striving to cultivate life-long learners who are reflective and open to growth and change, the school highlights the need for key social emotional and social justice skills and competencies, such as interdependence, social awareness, social responsibility, and community engagement. It also emphasizes the value of skills like perspective-taking and self-management:

- The International School of the Americas pledges to graduate reflective, life-long learners, individuals who approach each new experience mindful of previous learning and open to the possibilities of new learning and growth.
- Life-long learners are conscientious citizens who actively participate in their local and global communities because they realize they are part of an interdependent world.
- Life-long learners are inquisitive and seek to investigate and make meaning of the world around them.
- Life-long learners recognize different perspectives and seek to understand the opinions, viewpoints and philosophies of others.

- Life-long learners actively engage in dialogue as a means of resolving conflict, recognizing that often the most positive outcomes are achieved through discussion and mutual agreement.
- Life-long learners are creative in their approach to solving problems; they rely on a wide array of background knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines and creatively combine that knowledge to generate new and productive outcomes.

Equipped with this knowledge and skills base, life-long learners are poised to be leaders and change agents in their spheres of influence.

Strong relationships and a respectful community characterize school culture

Strong relationships and a respectful, caring, and cohesive school community characterize school culture and set the stage for social emotional learning to take place. The schools foster social emotional learning through an intentional culture that socializes both students and adults as community members and fosters effective ways of interacting that are modeled by adults at the school.

Close relationships based on respect and trust characterize Fenway and ISA’s school cultures and are fostered through modeling and skill building. Strong relational ties and the respectful, caring ways in which adults and students at the schools relate to one another characterize Fenway and ISA’s school cultures. A counselor at Fenway described the school’s culture in the following way:

Our school culture—it’s hard to put your finger on it. I’ve worked in other Boston high schools and Fenway has such a unique school culture: really respectful, open-minded, phenomenal leadership and great staff, and the students are wise and thoughtful, and just good citizens. They have a good sense of what community means in a large and small sense.

We observed that respectful interactions were widely modeled by the school leadership and faculty, and were expected of students when interacting with adults as well as with one another. In classrooms, for example, we frequently observed a willingness to actively and attentively listen to others as well as high levels of respectful, yet comfortable, forms of interaction during instruction and student work time. As one counselor said, “There are high level expectations and high levels of empathy. That helps in that students feel respected.” Expressing a similar sentiment, one teacher commented, “Teachers and students [can step outside of] their roles. Students know me as a person and know things about me. We are interacting as humans and that changes things.” Here, social emotional learning opportunities take place as students learn the norms and expectations around how to interact with others as a member of the Fenway community and practice social awareness skills like taking the perspective of and empathizing with others across daily life at the school.

These respectful, caring relationships begin with those between teachers and the administration. There is a sense that everyone is on the same side, part of a purposeful community, and deeply invested in that community. We repeatedly heard about the extent to which adults in the school work hard because they believe in the importance of the Fenway mission and because they care about the students. As a result, students are consistently surrounded by school staff who are committed to helping them grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Two teachers commented:

There is shared responsibility for the school. The norm is that everyone volunteers and accepts responsibility.

Everyone strives to be a great person and a great educator. [Teachers] are constantly doing homework to learn more.

Building on these ideas, another teacher said, “To work here, you have to be part of that culture and come alive with it. I was an intern for 1 year, and I was able to see other teachers model that.” Fenway staff members tend to stay on, working at the school for many years, and say that they do not experience burn-out out because they philosophically believe in the culture of the school and feel like they are a part of something important.

We also saw examples of the schools intentionally setting aside time for students and teachers to build relationships and work on their relationship skills. At ISA, for example, a ninth grade teacher described how this takes place when students enter the school:

I think one of the things that make us different is that we spend the entire first week building relationships with our students. We have a summer assignment that is interdisciplinary, so that our kids coming from different campuses have a common experience. But then we take time outside of that to start letting them know what ISA is about. Just building the relationships. That’s one thing I’ve heard back from kids who have transferred in.

Classroom observations and focus groups at ISA provided ample evidence of the close relationships that both teachers and students described. Like at Fenway, interactions between students and teachers were consistently relaxed, friendly, and respectful. For example, when class periods began, we routinely heard teachers checking in with students about their lives and observed friendly banter and joking between them. We also observed students acting in respectful ways towards each other. For example, students at ISA typically work in groups or engage in whole class discussions. On more than one occasion, we witnessed more talkative students trying to restrain themselves from speaking first to give quieter students space and voice, demonstrating their social awareness and relationship skills in everyday interactions.

One ISA student described the way in which there is “something different” about ISA is in its combination of care, trust, and high standards:

I know [ISA is] not like most high schools, because I have friends that go to the different high schools around the district, and at ISA, the teachers expect more from you, and they trust you more, and they teach you more, and they care more.

This sentiment was echoed by a ninth grade teacher:

They know that we aren’t going to accept less from them. They may not be there skill-wise, because everyone comes in at a different skill [level], but they know we’re going to hold them to the fire, but we’re also going to love and help them get there. We’re not just going to let them suffer and feel like they are ailing alone.

A senior described teachers as “always there to help,” and “always very friendly.” A freshman echoed this, saying, “Whenever I need help or something, I’ll ask—they don’t mind. They want to help. They want to listen to what we are struggling with.” Another student, a recent immigrant to the United States, characterized student–teacher relationships at ISA as familial: “The teachers—you just ask them a question. It’s not like student–teacher relationships—[it’s] like they’re your family and you can always go and talk to them.” An ISA teacher further described:

I think probably the most important thing to know about [both social emotional learning and social justice education], but especially about the social emotional, is how do teachers go about establishing relationships with their students, and then how do they manage the establishment of relationships among the students? I think if somebody could come up with a formula for that, we’d solve all the world’s problems.

Close, caring relationships enable student success and support community empowerment at El Puente. Strong relationships between educators and students are also a key component of El Puente’s school culture and are seen as necessary to support students’ social, emotional, and academic development. The El Puente social worker commented, “We encourage students to develop relationships with teachers and administrators because this is the support system.” A facilitator elaborated, “Every staff member knows every student’s name and their stories—it is [our] mode of operation.” According to the college counselor, relationships make “Students feel that they are important to the staff—they matter.” This level of interdependence underscores teachers’ commitment to students and the school’s sense of community: “We [teachers/staff] are not going to give them any reason not to succeed within our walls.”

Students also described an educational experience defined by uniquely close and caring relationships with their peers and their teachers. They remarked that they felt safe “because the relationships you have with your peers and the facilitators is [sic] strong—they care about you, they want you to succeed.” Students claimed that “[El Puente] runs different[ly] from other schools. [It’s] about knowing you...[and getting] a positive, needed push from someone else, not just yourself, to excel.” As students see it, their school community’s desire for them to succeed, as well as its commitment to that success, constitutes caring and signals that they are valued.

Parents also identified close, caring relationships between students and teachers as a key characteristic of the school. One remarked, “The administrator works with students when they go through the peer pressure period. They talk to students as though they were their own children. Sometimes students can’t talk to parents; they talk to the teacher.” Another said, “Here they call if your child is absent. They want your child to move up and mature.”

Because of these strong relationships, students and parents see the El Puente staff as really “being there”—they are accessible, reliable, and responsible to the school community. One parent explained, “The college counselor and others have told him [her son] that if he needs them, they are there for him.” Another observed how these close relationships with students also extend to parents:

When we come to find out how our kids are doing, they [teachers] give us their email [addresses], and they always give us information to follow up. They are always there for us when we need them. They always respond when we contact them. We can always get information we need when we call.

The impact of caring relationships was apparent by the myriad ways in which respondents compared the school to a family. A current staff member, who is an El Puente graduate, described relationships at El Puente as:

Like being part of a family.... We are one, and we work together. I felt like I had an extension to my family. Students will say they have a “school mother” or “school brother.” They have a powerful relationship here that they will come back to, [that nurtures them].

Parents also agree that the school is like a family. One said: “I feel so happy my daughter is here. She is safe. They treat children like family. If something happens, they call me right away—like a family.” Another commented: “They know all the children by name.” Another parent expressed enthusiasm, saying that when she comes to the school, everyone knows her name, even students. The school’s parent coordinator explained that staff accepts students and families, “Where they are at. They are open to listen to what they have to say without judgment. We know the

community and don't judge." This open acceptance contributes to the high level of trust that, in turn, generates the sense of school as family.

The school's powerful focus on relationships not only reflects its strong commitment to student achievement and meeting students' social and emotional needs, but also provides a model of institutional and individual giving back, social responsibility, and community engagement. Teachers' intentional presence at the school, their choice to teach at El Puente as an act of contributing to the community, and commitment to developing its future citizens and leaders, is a conscious model of social awareness, of what giving back can look like, and how giving back also can keep you connected to your culture and values.

Students' psychological needs are not secondary to their academic needs

The culture at each school, and the climate it fosters, is designed to support students' psychological needs and sees them as necessarily interdependent with students' learning needs and potential for academic success. There is a strong focus on supporting student growth, reflection, resilience, and agency in a space of physical and emotional safety, respect, and belonging.

Fenway and El Puente foster growth and empowerment while providing support for particular challenges relevant to their student communities. At Fenway, the school culture works to continuously expose students to challenges that they can handle, celebrate when they succeed, and hold them accountable when needed. These experiences help students grow and develop a sense of empowerment around meeting personal and academic challenges. For example, new ninth graders begin the year—and commence their Fenway education—by going on a retreat to Thompson Island² where they experience life outdoors and encounter a variety of challenging physical and interpersonal situations. One teacher talked about pushing students to work with different peers during the retreat to set the stage for learning how to get along well with all kinds of people, an important part of their Fenway experience. The school works to provide the right amount of challenge and support to permit students to grow their skills in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, engaging in relationships, and responsible decision-making.

Fenway teachers and counselors talked about how they progressively encourage greater autonomy among their students while, at the same time, acknowledging and providing support for the particular challenges that their student community faces. Doing so effectively requires understanding how students' social emotional and academic needs are interconnected.

It's hard to get the right balance. How do you recognize students' pain and struggles and also push them to be intellectuals? Teachers have to

² Thompson Island is located in Boston Harbor, about 4 miles offshore. The island is managed by the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, a non-profit education organization.

do this every day.... You're trying to figure out what kids need. You seek the right balance—comforting and learning about Macbeth.

We want the students to be able to withstand a challenging college or work environment and follow their aspirations. Students might end up in an all-White college as a person of color. We need to teach students resilience over 4 years so they have choices.

What do you do about a failure in math? Do you give up or find ways to get better? You need to ask for help. Academic stamina is important.

One teacher, who also conducts research at the school, believes that only about a third of the students at Fenway do not have a psychological or physical issue. Meeting students' academic needs, therefore, necessarily requires understanding and addressing students' psychological, social, and emotional needs. She expressed:

There is too much going on for many kids. Academics are not at the forefront. Survival is. They get beaten up on the way home. Science fair projects can't go home. There is a huge amount of PTSD and undiagnosed depression. There are high levels of poverty—around 70%.

The following quote from the *Fenway Handbook*, by educator Theodore Sizer, further emphasizes this perspective: “If even one person in a school knows him/her well enough to care, a student's chances of success go up dramatically.”

Similarly, El Puente seeks to inspire perseverance, a growth mindset, and a belief in one's own efficacy and capacity for change among its students—academic success therefore requires social emotional learning and student empowerment. The school works to instill the belief in students that, “Smart is something you get, not something you got,” as evidenced by the freshman orientation framework (see Appendix B of the El Puente case study report to view the framework). Faculty members explained how they develop, sustain, and use relationships with students to leverage growth, change, and persistence in the face of difficulty and failure. The special education facilitator commented, “We meet the students where they are...we do not give up on them. We help them move from where they are...we hold them closer, we give them more and more support in different ways.” Student persistence, necessary to succeed at school tasks, is therefore reliant on teacher persistence.

Echoing that idea, a founding staff member and bilingual guidance counselor, said:

You need to have patience with the young people so that they get it—that they are not going to be allowed to fail. Meeting them where they

are at, at their level, [figuring out] how they learn best. [Then] they take on more challenges and start believing in themselves.

Another facilitator explained: “Failure is not an option. You will have a thousand conversations [with students] that will prevent failure.” According to a math facilitator, “Building relationships [is about] trusting each other to learn from each other.”

One student pointed out that El Puente is unique because teachers are “different—they push you [because they] don’t want to see you fail.” Students indicated that teachers reliably back up high expectations with the support that they need to succeed. Another student described how “teachers helped with work. [They] asked if [you] needed help when you are missing work.” The response to missing homework, for example, was supportive rather than punitive, but geared to help students resolve whatever was impeding them and achieve a successful result.

A parent also emphasized the school’s focus on “growth,” describing how students’ academic, social, and emotional learning go hand-in-hand:

[The school] is good because the teachers are there for the students. Students grow. They come in as babies. Each year they grow—they grow with teachers as well as with parents. They [teachers] show them how to be responsible—they show them that, “No, I can’t do it,” is not the answer. “You can do it.” Each year I seen [sic] my son grow, grow, grow! They focus on the students all year-round with the Saturday classes, night school, tutoring lunchtime and after school. They want students to achieve so that they are prepared for college and the real world. They teach them by having them do a lot of community work—internships, to understand that this is work—your duties, the hours you have to work.

An emphasis on reflection fosters self-awareness, self-management, and a growth mindset at ISA. ISA’s school culture also emphasizes growth—in particular, through reflection—which encourages metacognitive thought about one’s efforts and outcomes. Reflection at ISA can be applied to academic work (for students), pedagogical practice (for teachers), or relational skills and community dynamics (for all), and functions as a tool for self and community improvement. Reflection helps students develop a growth mindset in which they learn to view their own intelligence and abilities as malleable, improvable, and responsive to effort. It also fosters a safe learning environment for students because it allows for the interpretation of mistakes and failures as an essential part of the learning process. Reflective practice is made possible by the kind of safe, trusting, and caring relationships that the school supports.

This emphasis on growth and reflection is one key way in which ISA links students’ social, emotional, and academic needs. Since reflection often requires a risky sharing

and exposing of the self, reflecting in the context of caring relationships can mitigate this risk. A ninth grade teacher described faculty goals for developing this kind of reflective, growth-oriented mindset among students:

...It was part of our language all summer long with professional development. Not having years of experience I can't speak to whether it's always been this way, but it feels that it has always been a part—our goal for students—it was that word *iteration*. There is always that opportunity to continue improving on what you weren't successful with before. We don't want them to settle. It's, "Okay, you didn't do well on that test, maybe next time—no, no, no—let's go ahead and work on that now." That continual growth...

A senior confirmed that a focus on growth and reflection has been an ongoing part of her ISA experience; in particular, in fostering the development of self-awareness and self-management skills:

In English today, we were working on our posts for our DC project. I was going back on my [online portfolio] and looking at the past things I had done. It's pretty humorous, but it's also neat to see my essay from freshman year, and now I'm posting a new one senior year. Just to see the growth. I do think we learn from our mistakes, and I think ISA enforces that—to move forward, or if you do make a mistake or do something wrong, it's not the end of the world. We'll build on it and make it better. That's something I've seen in all of my classes, whether it's just correcting a test or going in for tutoring, or doing [online portfolio] posts every year.

We saw frequent examples of how reflection permeated the culture of the school and was valued across situations. In a ninth grade English class, for example, we watched a peer review process in which students worked together on improving written work. One partner read his or her work aloud, while the other partner was instructed to listen for "sentence sense." We saw several instances where students either changed something in their writing because of something their partner pointed out to them or changed something as a result of something they heard as they listened to their own work read aloud. In this observation as well as others, students demonstrated that they were comfortable showing their insecurities and mistakes, and were given multiple opportunities to bolster their self-awareness and self-management skills as they improved their work.

Clear norm setting fosters a safe school climate

One learning tool that the schools leverage to promote a trusting, safe, and supportive climate is explicit norm setting. While this takes place across situations and groups at each school—from relationship norms to working group expectations

to classroom norms—each school also articulates, posts, and promotes a set of comprehensive guidelines for interacting with community members that highlights self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, and responsible decision-making and social responsibility.

Fenway's Safety Guidelines. At Fenway, physical and emotional safety is seen as a pre-condition for social emotional and academic learning to take place, especially for at-risk students. Early in its history, the school developed a set of safety rules, or guidelines, to set norms and expectations for how students and adults in the school should interact with one another. The guidelines serve as a learning tool for developing social emotional skills among students and teachers, and also as a reminder that everyone is responsible for creating and maintaining a safe school environment. They are:

- *Try it on:* Listen to what someone has to say; hear them out before you respond. You don't always have to respond.
- *It's okay to disagree:* Have respect for different opinions. You don't have to agree with them.
- *No shame, blame, or attack:* Don't make others feel bad because they are honest about how they feel or what they need. No put-downs.
- *Take 100% responsibility:* Use "I" statements. Keep the focus on yourself and take 100% responsibility for what you are saying by using "I" statements. Start with "I think," "I feel," "I need." Don't say, "Other people think," or "Everyone says..."
- *Group confidentiality:* Do not take away or bring back information from the group. People can't be honest unless sessions are kept private.

How does the school animate these *Safety Guidelines* in students and adults' daily lives? According to a school administrator, it is mainly a result of using and expressing them every day and across different kinds of situations. The guidelines are posted in most classrooms, and shape the language that is used within the school community. For example, students will say, "I feel shame-blamed" or "I feel attacked" if they feel disrespected in some way to open a space for dialogue and understanding. This approach provides a space to develop empathy and perspective-taking skills that support, rather than shut down, relational ties among community members.

The *Safety Guidelines* are emphasized more frequently with new students as they are socialized to be members of the Fenway community. They are explained and referred to in the initial student orientation, early class trips and bonding experiences, and in advisory class. Teachers also remind themselves of the guidelines and refer to them in faculty meetings and when interacting with one another.



Fenway's *Safety Guidelines* communicate the importance of social emotional learning and also serve as a tool to foster it, especially the practice of social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They can also contribute to social justice education in that they involve fostering students' sense of community, social responsibility, capacity to take others' perspectives, and multicultural literacy.

El Puente's *Community Norms*. El Puente has also developed a set of *Community Norms* to make important aspects of social emotional learning and social justice education explicit and to foster positive behaviors that include respecting multiple perspectives, recognizing and appreciating individual similarities and differences, and understanding each person's essential interdependence with others. Such norms provide the parameters for classroom interaction and the school's town hall meetings, for example, which offer students a safe space to express their thoughts and concerns without judgment or ridicule. As they learn to enact these norms, students have opportunities to develop social emotional skills around self-awareness and interacting productively with others.

The school's *Community Norms* are:

- One mic[rophone].
- Agree to disagree.
- Respect yourself and others.

- Accept and celebrate our differences.
- Be on time.
- No food or drinks in classrooms.
- Work hard, work together, work to completion.

Like Fenway’s *Safety Guidelines*, El Puente’s *Community Norms* are also displayed prominently at the school and remind students that the school is a safe space that they are mutually responsible for creating and protecting.

ISA’s *Habits of Mind*. Similar to Fenway’s guidelines and El Puente’s norms, ISA’s *Habits of Mind* articulate some of the behavioral norms and expectations that characterize how a member of the ISA community should act. They are:

- *Collaboration and cooperation:* An ISA community member works toward the achievement of group goals; demonstrates effective interpersonal skills; contributes to group maintenance; and effectively performs a variety of roles within a group.
- *Inquiry:* An ISA community member shows intellectual curiosity and wonder; seeks clarity by asking thoughtful questions and seeking out answers; is aware of and uses necessary resources; collects feedback and data; predicts outcomes based on patterns in the feedback and data; and generates and maintains one’s own standards of evaluation.
- *Creative thinking:* An ISA community member generates problems to solutions using both creative and rational thought; is open-minded by giving consideration to all sides; generates new ways of viewing a situation.
- *Organization:* An ISA community member arrives on time for classes and events prepared for what is needed; makes effective plans with reasonable goals and objectives; and manages time so as to meet them.
- *Involvement and/or engagement:* An ISA community member takes the initiative to participate in the process of learning; remains attentive to the task at hand and engages intensely even when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent; takes a position when the situation warrants it; pushes the limits of one’s own knowledge and ability; and evaluates the effectiveness of one’s own actions.

The language of ISA’s *Habits of Mind* reference “ISA community members.” Like Fenway’s *Safety Guidelines* and El Puente’s *Community Norms*, it is not just students, but all members of the school community, who are expected to live up to

these expectations. Social emotional learning and social justice education learning goals are also prominent—there is a focus on fostering relationship skills, social awareness, interdependence, and social responsibility—and are seen as necessary for participating in and sustaining the ISA community.

An interdependent community requires empathy, social responsibility, and action

At Fenway, El Puente, and ISA, being an interdependent member of the community requires a commitment to stand up for one’s community and against injustice experienced by one’s community. This sense of social awareness, social responsibility, community engagement, agency, and empowerment are deeply embedded in each school’s culture. When a school’s culture—working together with key structures, features, and practices, as we will see later in the report—fosters experiences of voice, agency, and action for students who often do not have these experiences at traditional schools, they have a productive place to channel their energy and work for change. Left unsupported, this energy may manifest in feelings of anger or a sense of powerlessness that can lead students to disengage and disidentify from school as well as experience behavioral and disciplinary issues.

Fenway community members “stand up for social justice.” According to Fenway’s Principal Peggy Kemp, there is “an overarching belief that at Fenway you’ll stand up for social justice when needed.” This core idea is historically part of the school’s culture and was widely expressed by administrators, teachers, staff, and students. This belief was also evident across the school’s activities and curriculum, which we will return to later in the report, as well as in key moments when the community as a whole has risen up to protest an injustice. What is more, Fenway has a history of promoting student and faculty voice. While this can be uncomfortable at times, especially if it results in disagreements within the community or with the district, it is a foundation of the school’s sense of self and community.

There have been incidents in Fenway’s history where the school as a whole took action to address an injustice experienced by the community, and these moments are a significant part of Fenway’s collective story. Here is an example:

Several years ago, a beloved teacher at the school suddenly disappeared and no one knew what had happened. At first, the teacher did not want students at the school to know that he was being detained because of his undocumented status. Once they learned the reason behind his absence, school leaders felt that they needed to let students know why the teacher suddenly stopped coming to school. After students learned what happened, they began telling their stories and educating adults in the school from their own personal experiences about deportation. Students then decided to take action and started organizing to protest the teacher’s imprisonment and deportation. Due

to persistent lobbying by Fenway students and staff, the teacher was released after 4 months of detention.

Despite these efforts by the school community, a deportation date was set. As the date approached, a group of six students and several adults traveled to Washington, D.C., on the teacher's behalf. Then-Governor Mitt Romney and Massachusetts Senator John Kerry obtained a stay from Congress for 2 years, allowing the teacher to remain in the country and continue working at the school. The students' efforts were covered by national media outlets, such as Good Morning America. This story, however, does not have a happy ending. The teacher was later deported to Ivory Coast with no warning in 2008 and was not able to obtain a visa to return.

Interestingly, three members of that year's freshman class are currently back at Fenway in different roles (and are all college grads).

According to school leaders, stories from the school's history such as this one send a message to students that they have a voice—a message that is all too uncommonly heard and experienced in disenfranchised communities. Students are told that, “You have a right to have your voice heard; the school will support it.” Students also learn that it is important to stand up for what they believe in; further, they learn that taking action for social justice can make a difference and be effective. These experiences can help students develop a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy, rather than powerlessness and anger, which contributes to their ability to be effective advocates for themselves and for others.

El Puente's *Soul Standards* link interdependence, social responsibility, and self-determination. El Puente's *Soul Standards* articulate five aspirational goals, or desired outcomes for students. Unlike more conventional lists of academic knowledge, skills, or competencies for high school graduates, the school's *Soul Standards* communicate the competencies students will develop to become empowered and responsible members of their community:

- Becomes an agent for social change through contributions to the community.
- Demonstrates an understanding of her/his place in the history of the movement for peace and justice.
- Demonstrates ability to reflect on self, learning, and action and make meaningful changes based on that reflection. (Based on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theory of “See, Analyze, and Act.”)
- Demonstrates an understanding that you are a person without limits and are masterful. (Includes a reflection on mastery.)

- Demonstrates a commitment to holistic development of body, mind, spirit, and community. (This is wellness that includes health and goes well beyond it.)

El Puente's *Soul Standards* reiterate the school's aim not only to remedy the lack of education opportunity typically experienced by their student community, but also to invest in the local community. Schools that serve urban, low-income Latino and African American students are often considered successful when students are provided with access to mainstream middle-class culture and, accordingly, a way out of their communities. In contrast, El Puente's *Soul Standards* define success for their graduates as those who remain connected to their culture and community, and who give back by creating change to strengthen their community.

A facilitator explained, "We emphasize that they are a community. That engenders accountability. They spend 4 years considering the consequences of their actions to the community." Indeed, the relationships that El Puente educators cultivate with students, along with their willingness to "be on the journey with them," develop students' abilities to be empathetic, take others' perspectives or "walk in others' shoes," and to understand how their actions have an impact on others.

Being a socially responsible member of the community also requires students "to be an advocate, not only for yourself, but for others." Students noted that participation is an important aspect of good citizenship at El Puente, as is the ability to share one's own and hear others' ideas and thoughts. While students "may put other students down in other schools, here they don't." A senior who was interviewed remarked, "My thing is, one for all and all for one." He went on to say that he would like to see a 100% graduation rate at the school, and "[i]f that means taking time off working on my [own] portfolio and helping someone else, let it be."

A relevant education motivates students and engenders interdependence and community engagement at ISA. Like Fenway and El Puente, ISA values a relevant education in which students learn how to be leaders and change agents in their spheres of influence. While we will explore how this takes place and is reinforced later in the report, here we emphasize how ISA's focus on relevance serves as a motivational factor for students that contributes to the climate and culture of the school. Because students view their learning experiences as relevant to interpersonal, community, and global concerns, they are more likely to come to school, be engaged while they are there, and view their time in school as meaningful.

In describing the ISA, the school's website claims that attending the school typically appeals to students "who are curious about the world, who are independent thinkers, and who want to make change happen in their world" (North East Independent School District, n.d.). Students are encouraged to "join the global generation" by attending ISA. These claims reflect how the school consistently links students' educational experiences to what it will take to be an effective leader and change-maker

in today’s world, which requires an understanding of one’s place in the world, how one relates to others, and how to work for social change—a perspective that merges social emotional learning and social justice education. This approach promotes social emotional learning and social justice education at ISA by fostering a participatory school culture—students at ISA engage in school because what they learn is action-oriented and connected to real-world content, issues, and experiences—that motivates and empowers students.

Social Emotional Learning Through School Features and Structures

Level of school system	Definition	Examples
School features and structures	<i>School design features and organizational structures that shape how the school and its activities are organized</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory system • Counseling and support services • Community partnerships

Next, we investigated the ways in which Fenway, El Puente, and ISA’s school design features and organizational structures shape how the school and its activities are organized as well as make possible and reinforce key aspects of school climate and culture. In particular, we explored the ways in which the schools and their communities were arranged and identified particular features and structures that facilitate opportunities for social emotional learning and social justice education. While the schools we studied leverage many of the design features and organizational structures that characterize effective small schools (cf. Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002), they also importantly link these elements to their social emotional focus.

Small school size and opportunities for personalization work together to support an intimate environment where social awareness and relationship skills are necessary and social emotional learning can take place

Fenway, El Puente, and ISA are small schools—ISA, the largest, enrolls a little more than 450 students. A small school environment structurally allows for the opportunity to cultivate close relationships and requires the social emotional skills needed to get along with others—students and teachers work together in a close-knit community for 4 years, which functions most effectively when trusting, healthy relationships are sustained. Moreover, given the level of intimacy that teachers are able to develop with students, they play a large role in students’ lives and are able to deeply personalize how they engage and work with their students. As we will see throughout this section, the kind of teacher dedication and accessibility that make this level of personalization possible are further supported by additional school design features and organizational structures (e.g., “family” structures, course scheduling, and pupil load).

Fenway’s “smallness” supports an environment where deep connections and personalization can take place. Fenway enrolls about 320 students in grades 9–12, has a staff

of approximately 35 (including administrators, teachers, and counselors), and a 12:1 student–teacher ratio. Fenway’s “smallness” helps foster the close-knit relationships among students and adults that characterize the school’s culture and facilitates an intimate sense of community. In turn, this network of relationships and sense of community work together to create an environment in which deep personalization and meaningful connections become the norm. Fenway leadership, faculty, students, and community partners all emphasized the importance of the school’s small size in supporting student success and a safe, supportive school climate, as well as in helping students feel respected and valued.

There is closeness and familiarity among teachers and students across different grade levels. Students expressed, “All the teachers know us,” “They know our parents,” “They’re always checking in on us,” and “They even have students checking in on each other.” One student affectionately complained, “They were all in my business,” referring to how several of his teachers regularly asked about how things were going both at school and at home. Upperclassmen in particular highlighted the personalized attention they received at Fenway, connecting this attention to the school’s intimate community:

It’s a small school so you get one-on-one attention, and they push you to be a better student and have a career.

This school is fun, engaging, and empowering. It’s small so it’s fun. Everyone knows each other and interacts; no one disrespects each other.

There’s dedication. It’s small and focused. You have to be dedicated and on top of things, so you don’t slip, but teachers will be there to help you.

One freshman respondent explicitly emphasized the link between Fenway’s small school community and the personalized support he received from his teachers:

It’s a tough school, but they’re going to push you, even if you’re struggling. The community is small, but you want the attention. Most programs after and before school, like tutoring—most schools don’t do that. I can call my teachers. This year, the end of the term was coming, and I had a C. So I called my teacher and I didn’t think they’d pick up. And we talked for 10 minutes about my grade.

ISA’s small size and focus on relationships makes social awareness and interpersonal skills necessary. ISA is also a small school with a student population of 465. Given its size and intimacy, students develop and cultivate relationships with the same people—both other students and adults alike—over the course of 4 years, fostering social awareness and relationship skills as well as a strong sense of interdependence

and social responsibility to the school community. When asked how ISA helps students engage in relationships, one parent responded:

When [my son] has had some issue happen, we say, “Okay let’s figure—you have to figure this out. You’re going to be with these same kids for 4 years.... We’re going to figure it out in the best way—we may not love the person, but we are going to figure out how to be there every day and work with the person and smile when you’re there.”

Students are unable to simply find another group of friends to hang out with if they experience challenges in a relationship. They are in close contact for 4 years and need to learn how to get along with one another effectively. Echoing this perspective, one freshman said, “You just have to be careful and you have to be nice to everybody, because you are going to be stuck with these same people for 4 years, and you’re going to get to know them really well from all the [shared] projects.” Teachers, administrators, parents, and students all described ways in which ISA’s small size fostered these valuable life skills, important for students’ time at ISA and beyond.

By design, support for students comes from every adult in the ISA community, which works to reinforce the school’s relationship-oriented culture. In a handbook given to incoming ninth graders during orientation, for example, students are provided with their teacher’s names, email addresses, and cell phone numbers. They are also given tips on how to effectively approach and interact with teachers—and they are highly encouraged to do so.

Teacher accessibility supports social emotional learning in several mutually reinforcing ways. First, when teachers are accessible, strong relationships between students and teachers are possible and probable. Second, when students are able to ask for help from teachers, they are given opportunities to grow in self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills—they must know when and how to ask for help, how to respect personal boundaries, and how to receive and react to the help that they receive. While teachers can provide direct instruction in these areas, it is through their accessibility that students are given a safe way to repeatedly practice these skills. Here, personalization and social emotional learning opportunities go hand in hand.

During a faculty meeting, we heard a group of teachers talking about the large number of student phone calls that they received over spring break. In a similar vein, one freshman student described an evening conversation between one of her teachers and a group of students she was working with as they struggled with a required computer program. ISA teachers commonly use multiple online and social media platforms to keep in touch with students both academically and personally. Teachers are also widely available in person; they are frequently found in their classrooms at lunch and other break periods with students hanging out with them or taking the opportunity to get personalized help on assignments.

Adult roles are expanded to personalize relationships with students and meet the needs of El Puente’s small school community. Although members of El Puente’s staff work in defined roles, such as facilitator (teacher), college counselor, or assistant principal, the boundaries for these roles are fluid. These flexible boundaries are organizationally possible because of the school’s small size and level of intimacy across the school community. A former El Puente graduate, who now works as the school’s social worker, explained, “We do not compartmentalize roles of faculty.” Rather, faculty share work and tasks across these roles—for example, teachers do guidance. “Everyone here wears different hats,” added a facilitator, because staff are “highly invested that everything runs smoothly for the learners.” Another staff member explained, “Our principals have trusted us to take on what we have to and make it flourish.” El Puente is an organization that trusts educators to make decisions in the best interests of students and the school. As a result, there is strong buy-in from adults in the school, and students consistently have access to all adults in the school, know that they care, and receive personalized attention. One student pointed out, “The small population of students means every teacher has time for you.” This widespread, personalized attention serves to reinforce the close, caring relationships between teachers and students that are central to El Puente’s culture.

“Family” structures serve to further personalize relationships and map students’ developmental trajectory

Fenway and El Puente utilize house or academy structures, what we refer to here collectively as “family” structures, to further organize their small school communities. These structures provide additional opportunities to personalize relationships, foster social responsibility to one’s community, and map the developmental journey that students take through each school. At El Puente, the academy system also serves to organize the school curriculum around a set of developmentally progressive questions that link social emotional learning and social justice education, starting with students’ identity and self-awareness and moving to social responsibility and action.

Fenway uses a house system and cohort model to further foster and personalize relationships and support students’ development. Faculty and students at Fenway are organized around a cohort model in which the same group of students “loop” or remain with the same cluster of teachers from grades 9 to 11. Beyond the small size of the school as a whole, this structure provides an even stronger sense of community and gives all students a chance to be known personally by both other students and faculty. Students in each grade are placed into one of three heterogeneous houses—Omega, Crossroads, or Phoenix—where they remain from grades 9 to 11. In grade 12, students leave the comfort of their house and become part of the overall senior class cohort—here, students’ sense of independence is fostered as they prepare to transition to college. Seniors, however, still meet for advisory with their house, which helps to ease the transition to grade 12.

Each teacher belongs to a house, and three house teachers, one from each group, serve as house coordinators. The house coordinators sit on the school leadership team and work to facilitate communication among the houses. Faculty discussed how the house structure fosters the kind of close relationships that characterize the school’s culture:

The idea of cohort at Fenway is a big deal—this is your cohort for 3 years; these are your teachers. So we’re trying to foster community in the cohort so students can depend on each other emotionally, but also academically, holding each other accountable.

Students appreciate the opportunity to develop relationships not only with one another, but also with their teachers, over several years. One student described:

Like my classmate said, once you’re in senior year, you’re meeting new teachers, and that gives you a challenge because you have to build a connection with them, and how they grade, and what is their attitude. I love my senior teachers as [much as] my other teachers, even though [I’ve only known] them for a few months. But I’ve seen them throughout the year, so I go back to my freshman math teacher to help me in senior year. I do that with humanities too. This school is a family.

El Puente’s academy structure organizes students’ educational and developmental journey. El Puente is organized to facilitate the educational and developmental journey that students are expected to take as members of the El Puente community, reflecting how social emotional learning and social justice education objectives are seen as interdependent with academic learning. The school year is arranged by trimesters and grades are divided into two academies: the Sankofa Academy (for ninth and 10th grades) and the Liberation Academy (for 11th and 12th grades). *Sankofa*, a West African Akan word, means that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward. Four key questions frame the curriculum, organize students’ developmental journey, and set larger questions that frame student learning in the academies:

1. Who am I?
2. Who are we?
3. What is nature of the world around us?
4. What can we do about it?

Each grade sequentially focuses on one question, and the questions progressively build on one another to foster students’ social emotional and social justice development. In grades 9 and 10, students explore their identity and culture in courses and projects by pursuing the questions, “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” Students examine the third question—“What is the nature of the world around us?”—in 11th

grade, when they reflect on the local community and their place in it. The fourth question—“What can we do about it?”—frames students’ 12th grade inquiry and functions as a call to action through individual and collective agency, empowerment, and responsibility both for oneself and one’s community.

The trajectory of these questions—which takes students from self-identity, to community-identity, to critical analysis of the world, to acting for meaningful change—reflects the school’s priorities for social emotional learning and social justice education. Going back to one’s roots, for example, provides opportunities for the development of self- and other-awareness, interdependence, and multicultural literacy; liberation both creates opportunities for and supports the development of social responsibility and community engagement. The structural relationship between Sankofa and Liberation operationalizes El Puente’s belief that the school’s educational journey to justice must begin with the development of self-awareness and knowledge of one’s roots and history.

El Puente’s assistant principal pointed out that this set of anchor questions leads students to think about “how they can remediate some of the issues going on in their lives and the community.” Students also described their experiences with the questions, saying: “We learn about [our] roots,” “[You] learn about your family, your history, where you come from,” and “[You are] learning something new about yourself.” A parent underscored her appreciation for this process, observing, “The school teaches them about their own culture and other cultures in the world because parents don’t speak to the child about their own culture.” Connecting students to their culture provides a sense of community, which engenders accountability to others and fosters a sense of efficacy and empowerment. As one student put it: “In El Puente Academy, we rise and fall as a community. There is no division between us and our community.”

Advisory provides a regular time and place to focus on social emotional skill-building

While each school takes a whole-school approach to social emotional learning, advisory is a design feature that provides a regular time and place for direct instruction on social emotional skills. At Fenway and ISA, in particular, the advisory curriculum progressively links social emotional learning and social justice education objectives as students develop insight about themselves and how they are interdependent with others. The links between social emotional and academic learning are also reinforced.

Building social emotional and social justice skills at Fenway. At Fenway, the primary goals of advisory are to foster close, personal, and caring student–teacher and student–student relationships and to build students’ social, emotional, and academic skills and competencies. Advisory is also a place where social emotional and academic learning are linked as students learn to apply lessons across a variety of situa-

tions and challenges particular to school as well as life beyond school. Advisory is a key feature at Fenway, designed to develop a range of skills as students progress through grades 9–12.

Students remain with the same teacher and group of students for advisory during all 4 years of high school. The advisory class meets three times per week for 65 minutes, and addresses a range of topics, including peer relationships, health and safety, college prep, and career readiness. Key projects in students' 4-year course of study also occur through advisory (e.g., the community service requirement and Junior Review, which will be discussed later). Advisors are also the primary point persons at the school responsible for facilitating and maintaining communication with students' parents and guardians. Teachers at Fenway each serve as an advisor to approximately 25 students.

The advisory curriculum highlights progressive content areas at each grade level. Like the thematic curriculum questions that El Puente uses to anchor its academy system, Fenway employs a similar set of developmentally progressive questions that link social emotional learning and social justice education. The questions are:

- *Ninth grade:* What does it mean to be a member of the Fenway community? How can I be a successful student?
- *Tenth grade:* Who am I? How can I work to serve others?
- *Eleventh grade:* What is the nature of the world around us?
- *Twelfth grade:* What can we do about it?

The questions progress from learning about who you are and what it means to be a member of a community to reflecting on the impact that one desires to have on the world and how to act to achieve that impact.

The lower grade advisories are guided by the *Fenway Tool Kit*—a structured curriculum, developed by Fenway—designed around building skills to support academic and social learning (e.g., study skills, stress-reduction strategies, time-management skills, and school safety behaviors). As newcomers to the school, the ninth graders focus on the overall transition to Fenway. A counselor described how they use advisory to promote social emotional learning by teaching students effective strategies to handle stress and other conflicts:

We do conflict resolution and peer mediation. One of our safety guidelines is, “It’s okay to disagree.” We talk about, “What does that mean?” For example, a student may say, “My mom is getting on my nerves,” and we teach them to take deep breaths, self-control strategies, that it’s okay to disagree. And kids come back and say “I’ve used the peer mediation stuff!” They come back and communicate to us, and it’s nice.

The 10th grade advisory emphasizes “discovering who you are and then how you can serve others.” The 40-hour community service requirement for graduation, required by the school district, is introduced and explored during 10th grade advisory as students work on building the capacity to appreciate who they are and reflect on their identity formation as well as understand and respect differences in the perspectives, cultures, and life experiences of others.

The upper-grade advisories are designed to help students transition to life after Fenway, with a focus on college and career preparation. Preparation for the Junior Review capstone project is the main focus of the 11th grade advisory, in which students reflect on their work and growth over the past 2 years and identify and articulate college and career goals (the Junior Review process will be discussed in more detail later in the report). The main goal of the 12th grade advisory is “preparing for the future.” Students learn financial literacy skills and college transition skills such as “the realities of dorm life.” Since advisory is the only class in which the seniors return to their grades 9–11 house groups, it provides students with a familiar base during a year in which they are all members of one house for the first time and are focused on preparing for their transition from Fenway to college. It also provides a space where students can learn about what these transitions might be for students “like them”—i.e., students of color from low-income backgrounds who are often the first in their family to go to college—and develop tools and strategies to help them navigate what lies ahead.

These conversations and activities help to cultivate students’ perspective-taking skills, develop multicultural literacy, and ability to straddle multiple sociocultural contexts in an authentic way (cf. Carter, 2007). One counselor described:

The senior advisory, we talk a lot about being ready to deal with college in informal, unstructured ways. We try to talk to students, to prepare them for what to expect, especially when attending these smaller, White, liberal arts colleges. Students say the Fenway community has prepared them well, so they’re able to deal with it well. More of them have navigated these experiences of culture shock much more beautifully than I would have. A student is going to [a liberal arts college] and said, “There are White students everywhere, but I talked to some Fenway students there. I’m fine.” Our Fenway graduates are the best ambassadors for one another.

While students develop their social emotional skills through the various projects, discussions, and interactions in advisory, there is also a range of social justice education opportunities for students. For example, students frequently talk about real-world current events and local community issues during advisory. This provides a regular space for rich conversations about how students understand the world and can make an impact through their actions. One student reflected on the “empowering” nature of having others who believe in what you can do.

We talk about what’s going on in the world. We have a chance to affect those things. I asked my teacher to see if we could do a senior trip to help [people affected by super storm] Sandy. It’s empowering that someone is listening to me and lets me feel like I can do it in the real world.

Additional detail on how Fenway provides direct instruction on social emotional skills and competencies as well as integrates social emotional learning with a social justice perspective can be found in the Fenway case study report. The case report also includes Fenway’s ninth grade advisory curriculum in Appendix B.

A place for direct instruction on social emotional skills at ISA. Advisory at ISA consists of a multigrade-level group of students and one teacher who meet together once a week for 25 minutes. Students stay with the same advisory teacher throughout all 4 years of high school, with a group of freshmen replacing the graduating seniors in the advisory group each year. The advisory curriculum is written by a team of teachers and supports social emotional learning and social justice education through activities and discussions that focus on the self and one’s interdependence with increasingly wider circles of community. The curriculum explicitly fosters school community building and identity exploration before moving on to supporting students as they learn to engage constructively with larger circles of community beyond the school. Advisory at ISA is also a space where students receive direct instruction on social emotional skills.

Students begin their advisory experience by reflecting on what it means to be a member of the ISA community, which encourages an understanding of the school’s culture, norms, and expectations. The curriculum provides ways for students to both understand what it means to be a community member and also find their own unique place within that community. Grouping practices within advisory create safe spaces for the work of building community norms, where the likelihood of each voice being heard is higher than it might be in a larger group. Within advisories, for example, students are organized into smaller “families” each with one student from each grade level. Families provide opportunities for students to experience a sense of belonging, and much of the later social emotional learning accomplished in advisories takes place within these smaller spaces of belonging. One freshman teacher described the peer support fostered in advisory as follows:

I think the powerful thing is that you have all grade levels. So to hear some of the upperclassmen tell the freshmen, “You know I felt that way too my freshman year,” or “Yeah, I used to do my homework the night before, but that’s not working. Here are some ideas.” Knowing that they have a support system with their peers as well—I think it’s important.

Having spent time defining community norms and creating a sense of belonging, the advisory curriculum then encourages teachers to engage students in multiple self-reflective activities, such as the “Give Yourself an ‘A’” activity, which often help students make connections between social emotional skills and academics. Students are asked to imagine that they earned an “A” in each of their courses, reflect on what would be required of them to earn that grade, and then communicate that information to themselves in a letter. To help encourage reflection, students are given prompts like, “What habits did you have to develop or overcome?” Teachers keep letters in order to deliver them to students later in the school year. Through activities like these, advisory becomes a tool for developing self-management and self-awareness competencies. One teacher spoke to the ways in which a recent advisory period focused on developing self-awareness through reflection:

We just kind of had a refresher of “How are you guys feeling? What are you seeing that you would like to get back to? What are you happy about that you’ve done?” It’s just an opportunity for them to see—these are some of the habits we created that we would like to change or get back to the way we were, or are these some of the habits we’ve created that we would like to continue on with.

In addition to cultivating a strong community and providing opportunities for students to better understand themselves, the advisory curriculum also encourages students to reflect on their participation in the broader community. Grade-level travel experiences centered on social justice themes (e.g., a junior year trip to Mobile, AL, focused on civil rights) are a concrete way in which ISA broadens circles of community for students. The advisory curriculum includes structured ways for students to reflect on their travel experiences before and after the trips, fostering social awareness, social responsibility, and multicultural literacy.

Advisory also facilitates students’ experiences of community and sense of interdependence by supporting their participation in service activities, like Global Youth Service Day, an internationally celebrated day of youth service to communities (Youth Service America, n.d.). Moving into the middle of the school year, the advisory curriculum includes time for students to consider and plan their participation in service projects. Beyond Global Youth Service Day, the advisory curriculum provides a space for students to track and discuss the community service hours they must complete as a part of their graduation requirements, as well as a supportive structure for other collaborative school activities, such as grade-level group projects.

While teachers expressed some ambivalence over the benefits of advisory in relation to other school features, structures, and practices that foster social emotional learning, they emphasized that the program helps to support community, create and strengthen relationships, and provide opportunities for students to work on building

social emotional skills and competencies. At ISA, however, advisory is not viewed as the only or primary space where social emotional learning takes place.

Additional detail on advisory at ISA can be found in the ISA case report. The case report also includes an example of the school's advisory curriculum in Appendix C.

A time and place for life and relationships at El Puente. By providing another small group opportunity for students and teachers to engage with one another on a regular basis, advisory further supports and sustains the development of strong relationships and the feeling of belonging to a family that are essential to El Puente's culture. All students belong to an advisory, which meets twice per week and focuses on the stuff of life and relationships. In advisory, students participate in de-stressing activities and games as well as facilitated activities in which they analyze relationships and their impact on students' lives. For example, in one such activity, facilitators walk students through the creation of a relationship map. In the process of creating and working through their map, students begin to see which relationships add value to their lives and which might not. One of the facilitators explained that students need to have silence, space, and no distractions during their time together in advisory, because "we're really digging deep." The activity is followed by a circle discussion, where students share their experiences and reactions. While advisory groups tend to be mixed-gender, the school also has an all-girls advisory that focuses on topics that affect young women in particular, such as self-esteem, body image, drug abuse, emotional needs, and the use of language (e.g., how they talk to and interact with one another, the experience of code-switching between different cultural contexts that they need to navigate in their lives).

Student support staff steward social emotional learning and facilitate critical life transitions for the student communities they serve

Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all have counseling staff dedicated to supporting students' psychological health and well-being; more important, however, these staff members are central to the life and culture of the school. They work to support the mental health of individual students and the student community as a whole, as well as provide critical social emotional support for students' impending transitions to college, career, and life after high school. The student support staff works closely with teachers, administrators, and parents, and links the social emotional and academic components of students' experiences. They also tailor their services to the student communities they serve, understanding sociocultural variation in both the challenges and opportunities that their students are likely to confront.

Fenway's student support staff: the "heart" of the school's social emotional work. Fenway's student support staff is at the heart of the school's explicit work to promote social emotional learning. This team of three is charged with supporting students' psychological well-being as well as that of the overall school community. This is accomplished in a number of ways, including individual counseling, running the ninth

grade advisories, monitoring the school climate, and mediating conflicts. According to a school administrator, Fenway’s student support staff has an essential role:

This group takes the lead when students are faced with something that triggers emotions or is a challenge. The team supports students. They counsel individually, or they work with a group of students; they identify what’s at the root of problems and help them process or resolve the problem. The hope is that students learn from the experience; that it’s not just about avoiding punishment. They try to help students to understand their triggers and help them develop more self-awareness.

According to the principal, the student support staff “takes the pulse of the culture of the school.” The counselors continuously monitor what is going on with and between individual students and teachers, as well as in the school community as a whole. They “go where the students are” and seek out what might be taking place—for example, in the halls or engaged in group activities—rather than waiting to be asked for help after the fact. They have an office that is centrally located on the main floor of the school. There are three desks, one for each counselor, and two doors “for easy escape” teased one staff member. There are also counseling rooms available for private talks.

Students go to the student support office when they are late, a teacher has sent them because of behavioral problems, or they just have a concern or seem to feel out of sorts. In other cases, there will be a particular incident that takes place, perhaps something that “breaks the trust” among the students in a grade. The counselors typically try to find out what is underlying the issue at hand. Rather than focusing on the manifestation—like disruptive behavior—they work to understand and address the underlying factors that may be at play in students’ lives.

To develop social awareness, interdependence, and social responsibility, and to foster responsible decision-making, the counselors often ask students to reflect on how their individual actions affect the community. They also maintain connections with external social services and contact them when necessary. Parents get to know the counselors well and often call on them for help or to learn more about what their child is experiencing. Sometimes parents will also request to bring the counselor into conversations with teachers, which take place frequently.

The student support staff also runs the ninth grade advisories for each of Fenway’s three houses, which helps them get to know students well and form connections that are sustained throughout students’ time at Fenway. Additionally, the counselors meet with each house’s teachers every week to talk about any emotional issues, which students might need to be checked on, or anything that is affecting the community as a whole. They work closely and seamlessly with teachers and administrators at the school.

Finally, the student support staff members serve as mediators. They intervene in difficulties between individuals or groups within the school, including helping students to advocate for themselves in dealing with teachers. One counselor said:

Students might be upset about something a teacher has done. The counselors talk with both parties and offer to mediate the situation. We want both sides to learn from one another. Usually both parties will agree to participate. We try to get the problem addressed before the week's end.

The school works to have in place a student support team who blends different strengths and perspectives. Of those currently in this role, one is a former student and teacher at the school, who has been with Fenway for 22 years. After graduating from the school, he returned several years later to teach humanities and elective subjects, such as business–technical writing and public speaking. He has served in a student support capacity for 15 years, and mentors the other student support staff and teachers. In discussing his role, he smiled and said, “There is a reason I’ve stayed here this long.” The other two counselors are former Fenway student–teacher interns. They are a diverse group in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and prior experience, and work closely together, consulting with each other frequently about difficult situations and offering each other a great deal of mutual support.

ISA’s counselor and ISA’s internship and service coordinator: connecting students’ social, emotional, and academic experiences. ISA’s full-time staff includes a school counselor and an internship and service coordinator. Both play a major role in supporting the social and emotional development of students, similar to Fenway’s student support team. The counselor facilitates social emotional learning by bringing a mental health perspective to students’ educational experiences. In discussing a case of school bullying, for example, the counselor described how addressing the conflict can attend to the social and emotional needs of both the victim and the aggressor, and that when this happens, the door is left open for future conversations and opportunities for growth for both parties. With this kind of restorative approach, a greater sense of community is developed, one in which there are pathways to right wrongs, make amends, and grow together without rejecting students or isolating them from the school community. We will discuss the schools’ restorative disciplinary practices in more detail later in the report.

The internship and service coordinator also devotes time to students’ social and emotional development. She told us that much of her job involves one-on-one conversations with students during which she helps them think about how to use their interests and passions to find an internship or service opportunity, or reflect on the successes and challenges they experience while participating in the opportunity.

There are multiple opportunities for social emotional learning in these situations, and without a dedicated support person in this role, many of these reflective, personalized conversations would not happen. ISA's pupil support personnel ensure that social emotional learning occurs in ways that are tailored to individual students' needs and experiences.

ISA's school counselor is also responsible for college advising. Students participate in large group sessions as well as one-on-one college counseling. True to ISA's whole-school focus on social emotional learning, the counselor told us that she often incorporates lessons about self-awareness into discussions about college preparation, application, and selection. For example, she encourages students to make sure they are challenging themselves or taking on an activity because something is important to them, not only to fulfill a college admissions requirement. Additionally, she told us that her discussions with parents about college preparation often focus on how to challenge and encourage their children to complete rigorous college requirements, but "not to an unhealthy extent."

El Puente's college counseling program: tailored to meet the needs of its student community. El Puente's college counseling program is another strong example of how social emotional, social justice, and academic learning converge and mutually support one another at the school. Given that access to and enrollment in higher education is a critical pathway for social and economic mobility, El Puente works hard to give its students access to these opportunities and support them during the critical transition to college. The program covers conventional college counseling activities, such as individual counseling sessions, SAT preparation, researching colleges and universities, campus visits, helping students provide personal and financial aid information, facilitating parent conversations and workshops, and providing application assistance. The program also includes a number of features that respond to the particular context and needs of El Puente's student population.

While most high school college counseling programs concentrate on students in 11th and 12th grade, El Puente's program begins in ninth grade and continues through students' transition to college as well as their first year of college. The program even includes support for students who transition from a community college to a 4-year college. This level of support is necessary because students' socioeconomic and, in some cases, immigrant status. The counselor commented:

Parents are unable to give students resources and skills to navigate the college readiness field. [Students] need to get the practical knowledge that middle and upper-middle class parents would give their children—giving kids an advantage, moving them from the conditions that disadvantage them in social and economic mobility, removing the factors that disadvantage them, teaching them the skills that can enable them to remove what is disadvantaging them.

The college counselor works with students, for example, to help them understand why their transcripts and resumes are so important for the college application process. She teaches them that these documents will create an impression of who they are for gatekeepers such as college admissions officers. These gatekeepers will not meet them in person, but will, nonetheless, make important decisions about their lives. She advises students on what courses they need for their transcripts to “look a certain way” to increase their advantage. She facilitates parent workshops on the college application process and on resume-building, so that parents understand the importance of students participating in summer and/or volunteer activities and support them in doing so. At El Puente’s college fairs, the counselor organizes activities like scavenger hunts where students are required to secure business cards from three college admissions officers. Students must practice self-management to overcome their anxiety around approaching a stranger as well as practice relationship and social skills, such as making eye contact, introducing themselves, and making requests. In class, students practice these actions prior to the fairs.

Through these experiences, El Puente students learn important social skills such as making eye contact, knowing appropriate ways to ask for help, and following up on that help. El Puente’s counselor also emphasized that students require the emotional skills and sense of confidence and power that they belong and deserve that help. She says this:

...comes from [having a] sense of who you are, and confidence, from emotional learning, understanding that you have the right to be there [i.e., college], that you can do it, that you bring something to the table. Emotional learning is understanding and feeling confident that you have a right to that help.

To build students’ awareness, resilience, and emotional stamina, El Puente facilitators regularly share their own college experiences with students. The counselor elaborated:

We discuss tools to navigate emotionally what students might confront regarding reactions about the legitimacy of their acceptance. They need to be aware of what social injustice is [in order to] combat it, for example, institutional racism, affirmative action, and legacy [admissions]. How do we embody social justice when we are out there? How do we soothe ourselves when we haven’t gotten social justice and still do social justice?... How do they feed their own souls so that they are effective in situations where people are not treated equally? It is about the social justice they do to themselves [so they] can still be whole. This is about how to navigate successfully in the new world.

Once students go to college, particularly when they leave New York City, they are often painfully challenged by the disparities they experience—even with the awareness and skills they have built up in high school. The counselor explained:

Once they leave their homogeneous environment and get to the outside world, they see their deficits. Students haven't competed in the world, in an arena bigger than their neighborhood and high school. They don't have a context in which to assess themselves and their capacities against the outside world. They think that the outside world will resemble here. They go into shock. They have to navigate that world—people with different values, microaggressions, and that takes a toll, [it] pulls on their emotional reserve.... They experience disappointments, for example, not being able to have a relationship with a Latino professor. They can be so overwhelmed with the social piece that they do not have the wherewithal to deal with other issues.

El Puente intervenes to help students build connections to their new environments while simultaneously providing them with opportunities to renew their relationship with their home community through leadership and giving-back activities. During students' first year of college, for example, the school stays in touch through phone calls to students, which “provide them with an outlet for their emotional distress.” When one student was thinking of leaving his competitive northeastern college after the first semester because he could not find friends or a community with whom he could identify, the counselor arranged for him to work with the admissions office to work on outreach to other minority students. Within a few months, he was applying to be an orientation counselor the next year and felt more engaged and connected. “In order to be effective, they have to have a home,” said the counselor. El Puente plays the role of being “there for them, to help them.”

They will have to struggle, but they can do it. We believe in their success.... When students discuss feeling the burden of knowing something is unfair and feeling unable to change it, we give [them] the knowledge that they are not the first and won't be the last to experience it, but together we can experience it differently.

El Puente also creates numerous opportunities for alumni to give back to their school community by helping younger students with the college process. Alumni, for example, are invited to return to participate in El Puente's Unity Day, an orientation day for incoming students that involves the entire school community. Alumni wear their college sweatshirts and discuss their experiences with current students. They facilitate workshops and help seniors complete financial aid forms and college applications. One alumna who designed and will implement a summer bridge program along with the college counselor claims, “If you do the social awareness and social justice piece, the kids come back to give back.”

Community-based partnerships, projects, and learning opportunities inspire responsibility, engagement, and action

Each school leverages community-based partnerships, programs, and activities to help students practice social emotional and social justice skills in real-world settings and situations, learn more about their community and their responsibility to that community, and inspire students to develop voice and agency to take action for positive social change. While Fenway and ISA rely on several key features and structures to accomplish these goals, El Puente primarily leverages its special relationship with the El Puente community-based organization (CBO) to engage and empower its student community. These school features and structures critically support Fenway, El Puente, and ISA’s capacities to foster experiences of voice, agency, and empowerment for their student communities and “back up” the ways in which these ideas are valued and promoted through each school’s culture.

Working in the community helps Fenway students feel responsible and empowered.

Fenway aims to “treat the city as a classroom” and develops partnerships with external organizations that are involved with local issues. School leaders noted that this is important and intentional because community-engaged learning opportunities help students understand that “the city is theirs” and that they are “valued members of the city of Boston,” experiences that can be relatively uncommon for the all too often disenfranchised student population whom they serve.

One example is the school’s relationship with Boston’s Museum of Science, which is Fenway’s oldest community partner—they have a 19-year relationship. Through this partnership, students from Fenway have broad access to the museum and participate in a wide range of activities that help to foster social emotional skills. For example, students experience interacting with both elementary school students and elderly persons through the museum’s Eye Opener program. Describing the program as very “multigenerational,” a Fenway administrator discussed the social emotional learning value of this experience:

Fenway students participate in the Eye Opener program, in which they are docents and exhibit guides along with older docents. The students show second graders around the museum with older docents. Through the interaction with the elderly docents, students develop a sense of presence and self.

Fenway’s annual science fair is also held at the museum. Twenty community members, representing a wide range of industries, are invited to serve as judges for the event. Preparing for and presenting at the science fair promote various social emotional competencies, such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. Students are expected to communicate in an effective manner with the judges and present their viewpoints to others who may be very unfamiliar to them or their topic of interest. These skills prepare students to successfully navigate and manage unfa-

miliar environments outside of school, especially those that may be intimidating or feel evaluative or high-stakes. A school administrator said,

Most of our students look adults in the eye, and are polite and respectful. This is not so common among teenagers. From the beginning, we had these expectations and practices (tied to the Coalition of Essential Schools) that students show mastery by talking through what they know.

A school administrator emphasized the “specialness” and “sense of community” tied to being at the museum.

The school–museum partnership also promotes increased racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity at the museum, where the majority of elderly volunteers and visitors are White and from middle- to upper-class backgrounds. The interaction between urban youth of color and elderly White volunteers and patrons provides a space for students to interact with people from these backgrounds, something that will become increasingly common for them as they move into college and work environments. In turn, volunteers and patrons at the museum have the chance to interact with urban youth, providing an opportunity to cross boundaries and break down stereotypes and biases. This social justice education lens is both present and intentional in the program, fostering multicultural literacy and perspective-taking for both students and the community members with whom they interact.

In addition to developing social emotional competencies, structured out-of-school experiences also help students to engage in social justice education opportunities that foster social responsibility and community engagement by exposing students to diverse settings and people. Students at Fenway learn about volunteering and being members of a larger community beyond their school early on, and formally explore and complete their 40-hour community service requirement in 10th grade through advisory. One teacher explained that importance of completing the community service component early on: “It models for students what we think is important—the idea of giving back exists in the school.”

Students volunteer with a wide range of community organizations, typically in the Boston area, including education organizations, community centers, and service organizations. Through these experiences, students learn how to contribute to their community and the value of having an impact on others. Students at Fenway have also taken community service further and traveled abroad to aid marginalized communities in the Dominican Republic and Honduras through study trips or summer opportunities.

Fenway students are also required to complete a 6-week, unpaid internship for a minimum of 18 hours during their senior year. The goal of the internship program

is to prepare students for life after high school. By the time students have completed their internships, the school principal wants students to know that “they are capable of moving on, that they’re prepared and trusted to enter a workplace and be independent, that they’re moving into adulthood.” Prior to finalizing internship assignments, “shadowing” opportunities are made available to students so they can familiarize themselves with different options. Industry representatives visit Fenway to talk about their job, and students choose where they want to “shadow.” A Fenway parent who had taken part in the career fair day enthusiastically shared how it was “special” to see Fenway students come to school in professional attire, armed with resumes and ready to ask questions about their future goals and careers.

As part of their senior portfolio, students give an oral presentation about their internship experience. They formally present to their peers and teachers; immediately after, the seniors break out into clusters and visit classrooms to present to the underclassmen. As Fenway students learn to manage and navigate real-life, work-based environments, they are given the opportunity to extend and apply their social emotional skills to novel contexts. Further, from a social justice education perspective, the internship provides another structure by which Fenway educators try to “even the playing field” for their students as they prepare for their transition to college and beyond.

El Puente Academy’s relationship with the El Puente CBO provides numerous opportunities for students to learn about and become actively engaged in their community. The relationship between El Puente Academy and the El Puente community-based organization (CBO) remains very close. School founder, former principal, and current El Puente CBO Executive Director Frances Lucerna meets weekly with El Puente’s principal, Wanda Vazquez, to work on school development and ways for the two organizations to sustain and formalize their partnership and infrastructure so that they work as one. This collaboration features community-based, real-world learning experiences initiated by the school as well as by the CBO. Students, for example, have participated in research-to-action campaigns on local banks’ red-lining practices as well as on asthma rates in the neighborhood, which resulted in changing local bank lending policies and raising awareness in the community about asthma.

Traditions and rituals that embody students’ history and culture are sponsored by El Puente CBO and involve El Puente students and staff. The Three Kings Celebration, a Christmas event that features an original drama with music and dance, also involves students from local elementary and middle schools that partner with the CBO. The audience comprises community members of all ages; El Puente teachers also bring their families to the performance.

The arts are one of El Puente’s most important features for encouraging and enabling students to find their voice, explore their creativity, and feel empowered. One of El Puente’s most significant activities that illustrates the school’s responsiveness to students’

intellectual, social, and emotional development, as well as its commitment to social justice education, is the Integrated Arts Project (IAP). As explained by Lucerna in the *Integrated Arts Project Handbook* (de Almeida, 2003), IAP is a vehicle for:

The social and personal transformation of young people into leaders [which] happens most profoundly through the creative process and engagement in the arts as a venue for social change.... The arts provide a safe space for young people to go within themselves to create a rich *inner life* that nurtures a powerful sense of self, the world and themselves in the world...the arts become a portal for young people to celebrate their creative power as human beings—to *have an affair with their souls*. Through the creative process, a young person can create an idea and explore the many different ways both individually and collectively to make it a reality. When driven by understanding and passion for human rights, the process of creating art becomes a powerful tool in the quest for social justice.

As Lucerna describes, social emotional learning at El Puente is extended to include the development of imagination and soul, which help students develop a powerful sense of self and agency that can be explored and enacted individually as well as collectively with members of one's community. The IAP provides students with the opportunity to identify, research, and analyze an issue affecting the community and, from the perspective of being an artist, create solutions that will motivate and organize the community for change.

The IAP begins with a design team comprising school facilitators and community activists who collaborate to brainstorm, explore, and design a half-year-long, arts-driven curriculum project rooted in issues critical to the community and the wider world. In order to enact the project, the school blocks schedules half a day per week to allow for mixed-grade, theme-based, team-taught classes—called Educational Opportunity classes—that focus on implementing the project. In addition, students are able to participate in after-school activities that also focus on the project.

The project culminates in “daylong seminars, workshops, and performances facilitated and performed by young people for the entire community and in some cases followed up by institutional campaigns” (de Almeida, 2003, p. 3). Students express their ideas through originally composed music, dance, drama, spoken word, and visual arts. IAP themes connect students to themselves, their historical and cultural past, their community, and their future.

Past IAPs have included The Sugar Project, which was inspired by a Williamsburg neighborhood landmark, the Domino Sugar factory. Through the integration of literature, history, government, and multiple art forms, students examined the history of sugar in the Americas, Africa, and Europe, focusing in particular on the

“cultures of resistance” of enslaved peoples in the Americas. The project concluded in an outdoor carnival performance. In 2012, students engaged in an investigation of the Latino Los Sures community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. They collaborated with community artists, activists, and residents to document the history, culture, and legacy of Los Sures. Their research activities included interviewing community residents, photographing the neighborhood, and collecting artifacts.

ISA leverages a global perspective to foster interdependence, perspective-taking, and community engagement. Like students at Fenway, ISA students are required to perform community service (ISA requires 120 hours) and complete a senior internship in order to graduate. While these experiences serve to foster important social emotional and social justice skills such as self-awareness, interdependence, social responsibility, and community engagement in real-world settings, ISA also employs features to support social emotional learning and social justice education through a global lens: a travel experience program and a student-run conference for Model United Nations San Antonio (MUNSA). These experiences seek to build empathy and the motivation to work for social change among ISA’s relatively advantaged, middle-class student community.

Relevance at ISA is often tied into the degree to which what is being learned is important for life as a global citizen and involves taking learning beyond the walls of the school. As such, each grade at ISA participates in a travel experience. Since ISA’s curriculum takes an international perspective and seeks to educate students to be socially responsible global citizens, the school believes that students need hands-on, real-world experiences interacting with other cultures and contexts. The freshman class, for example, takes a multiday trip to Heifer Ranch in rural Perryville, AR, where students learn about global social justice issues and community interdependence. Sophomores travel to Santa Fe, NM, where they learn about indigenous cultures in the United States. Juniors travel to Mobile, AL, to study the Civil Rights Movement, and seniors travel to Washington, DC, to study a social topic selected by their travel group. Teachers, students, and parents all discussed travel experiences as a key school feature through which social emotional learning and social justice education are promoted at ISA. Here, we highlight the freshman-year travel experience to illustrate how this takes place.

In the fall of the ninth grade year, ISA students travel to Heifer Ranch in Arkansas. During this trip, they learn about global issues of hunger and poverty and live in a simulated experience representing varying levels of poverty and food instability around the world.³ A freshmen focus group noted that this travel experience provided a way to really get to know their classmates while, at the same time, gave them an opportunity to start thinking about their own privilege relative to others in the world.

³ See Heifer International, n.d., for more information.

The Heifer trip supports social emotional learning primarily through the lessons of traveling with other people and working in groups. For example, one student said, “You had to put up with [your classmates’] crankiness. You’re hungry. You’re tired. You get to see the other side of people that you have never seen before.” All of the students participating in this focus group nodded in agreement and laughed as he said this. These kinds of experiences provide opportunities for students to practice skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills in situations quite different from what they regularly experience at school.

The content of the trip, on the other hand, is centered around educating students about global social justice issues, largely through developing a greater sense of social responsibility, interdependence, and understanding perspectives and experiences different from one’s own. Several students spoke to the ways in which these experiences helped them develop greater self-awareness and empathy:

I used to think I had it rough. Now whenever people say that I kind of get mad.

I was in the slums, so I had to wash dishes. I noticed how a lot of food was still on the plate. A lot of people were picky about it. When I came back...I dropped a fork [in a restaurant] and I was going to use it, and my dad was like, “No, see if a waiter can bring another one,” and I was like, “Do you know how much water they waste?”...If something small happens, it’s nothing compared to what other people are facing.

Don’t waste food. I had it well with my sleeping position—an actual house with bunk beds. I felt so awful because we started out with a lot of food, and we had a house, so we let people in our house to get warm.

Don’t take what you have for granted...our village got flooded, so they put caution tape all over, so we had to sit on a hill for hours...they got all our stuff and just threw it all over the place. After a while we went back, and then we went to a refugee camp that was down the hill.

Student comments about trips at the other grade levels followed a similar pattern. The actual experience of traveling together fostered social skills and competencies, while the content of the trips provided memorable opportunities for social justice education.

Parents also highlighted the benefits of ISA’s travel experience program. They spoke to the ways in which traveling with each other helped students to work in groups and develop their leadership capabilities:

The group dynamics push them into discovering their leadership capabilities and skills—you see it right from the start—they go to Heifer 2 months in...[They're] on the bus together, thrown into cooking together, building fires together....

Another parent continued, “It forces them to figure out how [working in small groups] is going to work for them.” Parents, like their children, saw the ways in which travel experiences support a number of social emotional skills as students are introduced to broadening circles of community.

ISA is also well known for its Model United Nations (MUN) conference, which is one of the largest student-run, high school MUN conferences in the world. MUN is a program through which students research a member nation of the United Nations and then attend a model convening of the United Nations acting as that nation. MUNSA—which stands for MUN “San Antonio”—is entirely run and staffed by ISA students, although students from other schools are invited, and attend, as delegates. ISA’s MUNSA program supports social emotional learning and social justice education for its students.

Freshmen at ISA take part in MUNSA by writing news articles about the convention, while sophomores are required to participate in MUNSA as delegates. Juniors and seniors participate in MUNSA on a voluntary basis, which the majority choose to do. At this level, students take on leadership roles in running the conference. Through participating in MUNSA at each grade level, all students take part in an extended educational experience that aims to broaden and deepen their sense of community, strengthen their perspective-taking skills, and cultivate an understanding of the global reach of social responsibility and multicultural literacy—critical to both ISA’s social emotional learning and social justice education goals.

The faculty coordinators for the MUNSA program described the ways in which it is a major community-building moment for ISA. Everyone is offered a way to contribute using his or her own gifts and talents, fostering whole-school participation and a sense of common purpose. In addition to the roles of committee chairs and delegates, students might be on the logistics crew, the news corps, security, or publications. In reference to these roles, one of the coordinators said: “To me, that’s an example of building in [to the ISA experience] the importance of community. Everybody’s a part of it. I think the kids that are running it know that they could not have done it without the other parts.”

For the leadership and logistics teams—comprising approximately 140 junior and senior students—the lessons of MUNSA become more about the lessons learned when taking on the responsibility of a major project where others depend on you. The responsibilities these student leaders take on are indeed significant, with approximately 60 of these students dedicating significant time to preparations prior to and

during the conference, and the rest responsible for logistics during the conference. If they are part of the secretariat (10 senior students), they not only plan the conference for 950 student participants from across Texas as well as schools in other states and Mexico, but some also take on the job of training sophomores to be delegates. When asked what the experience taught them, students noted, “how to handle stress well,” “how to manage my time,” “how to juggle responsibilities,” and “how it’s going to be in the future.” Each of these is an important social and emotional lesson in self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making because work and life, like the conference, can feel—as one student leader put it—“messy at times.”

To support students’ social and emotional needs, adults’ social, emotional, and professional needs must also be a priority

Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all recognize that in order to provide psychological resources and support to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their respective student communities, adults in the school must likewise be supported. Each school works to provide professional development, collaborative opportunities, and shared leadership structures to empower and support school staff. With this support, teachers have the time, space, and skills to develop close relationships with their students, provide personalized learning opportunities, and dedicate the care and energy they need to be an educator in these nontraditional school contexts.

Fenway uses a community of practice model and shared leadership structure to support the social, emotional, and professional needs of school staff and administrators. Fenway currently houses 27 faculty members, including the student support staff, and seven administrators. The shared leadership and collaboration among adults in the school is an important feature that contributes to the effective implementation of the school’s social emotional learning and social justice education strategies. It also prioritizes the importance of supporting the social and emotional needs of adults in the school. The majority of the additional external funds raised for the school, about 90%, are applied to “human capital” to provide opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

At Fenway, faculty work together using a community of practice model, which sets the foundation for shared leadership, collaboration, and social emotional support. Administrators and faculty formally meet and collaborate for 4 hours per week at content and house meetings. As a Boston pilot school, when Fenway teachers are hired, they formally agree to meet for extra hours, which is meant to establish teacher commitment and ownership from the start of their Fenway careers. School leaders emphasized the importance of collaboration among faculty: “Collaboration means that no one is working in isolation; teachers are able to plan and share and think, and be accountable for themselves and each other. This makes a huge difference.”

The leadership sees teacher satisfaction as closely linked to teacher retention, which in turn, provides students with stability in their learning and development. Nota-

bly, the turnover rate at Fenway is very low. School administrators believe that it is critical to allow teachers to develop clear ownership and to encourage their sense of professionalism. The principal noted that during the beginning of the school year, she was concerned that teachers were feeling particularly stressed. However, at the faculty retreat, “Everyone came and shared, and it’s about really seeing that you can make a difference. This keeps everyone focused.”

Administrators and faculty expressed both professional and personal satisfaction about working at Fenway, and, most important, the impact they were having on the academic and social emotional learning of their students:

Although pilot schools took away power from unions and took away contracts, they retained pay and pension and enable faculty to have their own say in their work. You can work beyond the school day and not feel frowned on. There’s a group of people to trust, and you feel—I’m having an impact. Teachers feel satisfied in their work and enjoy their work.

You’ll find that all teachers feel really lucky to work here. It’s amazing and says something about the school. It’s not perfect. We’ve had our fair share of problems and ups and downs, but we handle these well. It’s not a utopia, but the overriding sense is—I am someone who makes a difference. We know we’re making a difference.

This is the best thing and hardest thing I’ve done.

Fenway leadership also ensures that faculty members are “vital participants” in school decision-making. The school leadership team consists of eight people, including the principal, assistant principal, the three house coordinators, one student support team member, the special education coordinator, and the development director. At the leadership team meeting we observed, one of the teachers, as opposed to an administrator, facilitated the agenda items. Decisions to be made, even something as minor as posting flyers, were presented by the principal to the team.

Teachers clearly have “voice” at Fenway, which grows out of the support they both give and receive. This helps them to take pride in what they do as teaching professionals, and in turn, feel a “sense of value” in their work and “give voice” to the students in their classrooms. This sentiment was widely shared among teachers and staff.

In a lot of places, there are divides. We don’t feel that here. Teachers and administrators are on the same team. There is a community-oriented environment here.

[The principal] has an open-door policy. Sometimes there are 30 plus people complaining, and she listens with grace. She doesn't let things slide. She can tell you what you need to do or change without feeling reprimanded. She honors and appreciates the work we do. We're respected as people first. Our sense of peace of mind and stability play a role in how we serve the kids.

There's a public perception that teachers and management clash all the time. You wouldn't necessarily know, if you were in the room, who was on what side. [The principal] does a masterful job of maintaining that atmosphere, and so does [the assistant principal].

ISA's professional development program supports collaboration and reflection for teachers and school staff. While many forms of professional development take place at ISA, the Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) model structures how it takes place. CFGs at ISA involve groups of six to eight educator colleagues who participate in monthly meetings organized around protocols that enable them to engage in dialogue about student work and professional practice. CFGs contribute to social emotional learning for adults at ISA in much the same way as grade-level teaming, by providing a resource through which teachers and administrators can form better relationships with one another and with their students and build their skills. In addition, the working relationships that teachers develop in CFGs serve as models to students of strong working relationships and how to engage in self-awareness and self-management through reflection.

Principal Kathy Bieser described how participating in CFGs builds self-awareness for faculty:

Every 3 weeks the teachers will work—as well as myself—in cross-disciplinary, cross-grade level CFGs facilitated by teacher leaders on the campus. In that setting especially, when teachers bring their work and bring their students' work—and hear other perspectives on that. I think in many ways it builds their own self-awareness of who they are as a teacher and the assumptions that they bring to the table.

We were able to see ISA's professional development at work during our observation of an early morning faculty meeting. During this meeting, Principal Bieser led the faculty in a small group conversation protocol focused on a shared text, Tony Wagner's book *Creating Innovators*. In both the small group and large group interactions, we heard teachers think together about the ways in which they support their students. Together they struggled with how to achieve a balance between support and care of their students, and the right amount of "push" to give them at the same time. Teachers offered creative ways of thinking about the issue, including viewing their work as a Venn diagram of sorts between teaching, parenting, and mentoring.

Strong relationships and reflection are modeled by ISA’s leadership, which creates an environment where teachers and other staff feel comfortable and where leadership and responsibility for the school is shared. Many teachers spoke of the ongoing availability and willingness to help on the part of key administrators. One told us, “I know I can go into Kathy’s [Bieser] or [the assistant principal’s] office any time of day and talk something through, early in the morning, late at night, weekends... it’s very much being open to conversations.” Teachers across our interviews and focus groups echoed these words. By providing this model, Principal Bieser “gives permission” to the rest of the ISA community to take the risks necessary to create a community characterized by relationships, reflection, and relevancy—the core of social emotional learning at ISA.

ISA is also a professional development school for local Trinity University. ISA has had a close relationship with Trinity University since its founding—Sergiovanni was a Trinity professor—and helps train intern teachers from Trinity’s Master of Arts in Teaching program. The program is unique because of the length of time that interns spend on the campus—almost the entire year—and because of the degree to which interns are integrated into the life of the school. Interns and administrators both told us about the significant number of ISA’s teaching faculty who have graduated from the Trinity program.

This partnership with Trinity University contributes to social emotional learning and social justice education at ISA in several ways. First, much of ISA’s professional development emerges from opportunities created through the partnership. Second, the embedded nature of the intern program means that a significant number of new teachers at ISA are immersed in ISA’s commitment to community and socialized into ISA’s culture before they formally begin their career at the school. One of the interns talked about how he and the other interns developed a common professional language through their integration into the ISA community.

El Puente’s administrators and teachers live their democratic values by governing the school through a leadership circle. The democratic power relationships among adults at El Puente, important to the school’s social justice values and culture, are reflected in the school’s consensus governance structure known as the Leadership Circle. The Leadership Circle consists of lead teachers and administrators, including former principals, and members of the El Puente community-based organization. All major initiatives and policies are discussed and collectively decided upon among this group of school leaders. A facilitator described the equitable distribution of power in the Leadership Circle:

We discuss issues that come up in school and how we can approach them; how we can keep [the] ship running. We are trying to figure out what to do by problem-solving. When we present to the larger community, we have a solid foundation on how to tackle issues.

Although membership in the Leadership Circle is open to all, the invitation to join is an honor. Another staff member noted, “We have a vested interest in how the school is run—this is our home,” suggesting that El Puente’s collaborative governance system contributes to staff attachment, ownership, and investment in the school and community.

Social Emotional Learning Through School Practices

Level of school system	Definition	Examples
School practices	<i>Formal and informal daily practices that reflect what people do, how they teach and learn, and how they participate in the school community.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning strategies • School traditions and activities • Classroom participation practices

Finally, we investigated the ways in which Fenway, El Puente, and ISA’s everyday practices live within and animate school features and structures, as well as reflect and reinforce important aspects of school culture and climate. In particular, we studied the ways in which the schools’ formal and informal daily practices reflect what people do, how they teach and learn, and how school community members participate in school life.

Curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning with academics through both content—what students learn—and process—how they learn it

Fenway, El Puente, and ISA’s curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning and social justice education with academics and foster the application of social emotional and social justice skills across subjects and situations. Course topics and assignments are designed to be relevant and engaging, while instructional practices foster student reflection, resilience, growth, agency, and empowerment.

Fenway weaves social, emotional, and academic learning together, and with social justice education, through courses, teaching and learning practices, and learning expectations.

Interdisciplinary humanities curriculum. Fenway’s interdisciplinary humanities curriculum rotates on a 3-year cycle so that all students in grades 9–11 address the same historical periods, social and political issues, and literary themes at the same time. Each year, course content across grade levels is organized around a theme or “essential question,” such as: “What does it mean to be human?” or “How do you

do the right thing in the face of injustice?” Course content primarily focuses on the history and development of American society, and students explore their own cultural roots, as well as those of others, through course activities and research projects.

The ninth grade Foundations of Literacy class is a reading and writing workshop in which students learn to read and write for a variety of purposes as they are exposed to and study different genres, from poetry to the novel to memoir. The course incorporates relevant, culturally responsive assignments and engages students through critical perspective that challenges them to understand how power is given to and taken from individuals and groups in society. Throughout the course, for example, students consider the following focal questions in relation to the use of language: “How are different languages and dialects positioned in our society?” and “How does language use relate to power and access?” They also explore how race, class, gender, and religion are constructed through texts as they learn the foundations of reading and writing.

A key assignment that contributes to social emotional learning and social justice education is the memoir project. Students first read *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, a boy’s memoir about growing up in Spanish Harlem. After reading and analyzing the book, students are required to write their own memoir. Students follow a common outline, which delineates the chapters that students work on each week. The chapter names are: Neighborhood, Family, Identity Testimonies, Identity, and Loss. Students work on revisions throughout the writing process, and are given the opportunity to present and share an excerpt from their memoir once the project is complete. Teachers also participate in this assignment to share their stories and build trust with students.

This experience enables students to reflect on their identity and its formation; it is also a way for them to share who they are with their teacher and peers. The memoirs are kept in their portfolio for Junior Review. A teacher noted:

Students are dealing with so many things. Some carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders. [Writing the memoir] can be therapeutic for them. And it helps them to build relationships with one another because they read them to one another. We had a few girls who lost their fathers and others didn’t know about it until their shared their writings. And so it helps them to find support in one another.

The assignment gives students a chance to grow socially and emotionally, especially with regard to self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills. Students have the opportunity to reflect on and make sense of their lives and how their experiences and identities have been shaped by key contexts, events, and sociocultural factors—insights central to both social emotional learning and social justice education.

Humanities classes also help provide students with the critical language and lenses to understand, analyze, and take action around social justice issues. One teacher said:

Every day is about how to approach the world in a way that makes it a better, more equitable place. We are always looking at the curriculum and finding points of reference that connect with the current day. We look at both historical social justice and current issues. In a unit on the foundation of the country, students address the question of whether [Thomas] Jefferson should be considered as a hero or a hypocrite. Similar questions are developed for all units.

Further, students are expected not only to think and analyze from a social justice perspective, but also to learn to take action and work for social change. In past humanities classes, students have worked for change as part of their coursework on a wide range of issues. For example, students have written letters to politicians to advocate for local issues, participated in park cleanups, run public information sessions on the sex trade, and conducted research on the ethnic studies ban in Arizona. Fenway has developed its humanities curriculum through collaborations with the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning—an organization affiliated with the City University of New York (CUNY) that challenges traditional ways people learn about the past and our nation’s history—and Facing History and Ourselves—a Boston-area organization that provides learning resources explicitly intended to combat racism, anti-Semitism, and prejudice.

Ventures courses. Fenway’s Ventures courses take place in 11th and 12th grade and teach students “how to interact effectively with adults in the workplace and to find the resources they need for success in college or in a chosen field of work” (Fenway High School, n.d.a). These courses, required of all students, are conducted in partnership with one of Fenway’s community partners, Blue Cross Blue Shield, which sends volunteers to the school to facilitate the Ventures classes. Students learn about basic financial and business concepts, participate in an internship, and develop a business plan. During junior year, students give their “pitch” each week as they refine it for a final presentation to a panel of judges from the local business community. In addition, as discussed previously, seniors participate in a 6-week internship in a real job setting. The classes are designed to help students develop “initiative, resourcefulness, communication, and problem-solving skills, respect for others, self-discipline, and self-confidence” (Conley, 2010, p. 147). These learning goals overlap considerably with key social emotional skills and help facilitate the transition to college and career for Fenway students, many of whom are first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds.

Unsung Voices elective. A teacher at Fenway developed the Unsung Voices course to offer students the opportunity to learn about the diversity of LGBT history and encourage questions and reflection. This course offers a different way to look at

LGBT issues, promotes understanding for Fenway’s LGBT community members, and engages students in social awareness and multicultural literacy. An example of a question discussed in the class is: Why is being gay and gay marriage a “White issue”? On the day we visited the class, students were learning about Bayard Rustin, a gay African American who was a leader in the nonviolent Civil Rights movement. The class viewed a film on the subject and talked about the challenges that Rustin experienced as a gay civil rights leader in the 1940s and 1950s. Other topics covered in the class include: biographies of famous LGBT people, LGBT issues in the hip hop community, sexuality norms among athletes, coming out in African American and Latino communities, marriage and family, and gay culture. While this course provides ample opportunity to engage students around this timely social justice issue, it also tailors its content to the student population by focusing on how LGBT issues importantly intersect with race and ethnicity.

Instructional practices. Common instructional practices are used in classrooms across Fenway to foster social emotional learning and social justice education. Fenway has developed a set of key *Habits of Mind* that guide the learning process of students and the pedagogical approach of teachers. The *Habits of Mind* are prominently displayed on posters throughout the school and in classrooms. They are:

- *Perspective*: What points of view are given?
- *Evidence*: What proof is there?
- *Relevance*: Why is it important?
- *Connection*: How are things related?
- *Supposition*: What if...?

Perspective, relevance, and connection—in particular—overlap with social emotional and social justice skills and students are given the opportunity to apply these skills across different course content areas and learning experiences.

Students are also encouraged to relate to coursework through the widespread use of relevant, engaging activities and assignments that draw on social emotional skills. For example, during a humanities class we observed, students were discussing *The Odyssey*. That day’s class assignment called for students to take on the role of one of the characters in the book and confront Odysseus as if they were on a talk show. Students were asked to consider the feelings of the characters; in particular, whether they would feel disappointed or hurt by the Odysseus character. Students rehearsed with a peer who provided feedback about the presentation and evaluated one another using a rubric, emphasizing perspective-taking and relationship skills.

Fenway also has two rubrics for “21st Century Learning Expectations” that are designed to enable educators to comprehensively assess social emotional learning and social justice education: one is focused on *social* learning and the other on

civic learning. Examples of these rubrics are included in Appendices C and D of the Fenway case report. The social learning rubric tracks students' skill levels in: collaboration, diversity, work ethic, respect, and responsibility/self-management. The civic learning rubric tracks students' skill levels in: community involvement, civic responsibility, integrity, diversity, and global citizenship. Both rubrics merge social emotional and social justice skills and competencies, mapping the developmental trajectory as students learn and master them.

El Puente fosters student agency and empowerment across the curriculum through social emotional learning and social justice education content and practice.

Social emotional learning, social justice education, and student agency across the curriculum. Social justice themes and their connection to social emotional learning are found throughout El Puente's relevant and personalized curriculum. The school's approach to curriculum encourages students to make personal emotional connections and develop agency for the social justice issues they study as well as encounter in their lives. Principal Vazquez explained, "[It] giv[es] them opportunities to find their niche, or ways to be engaged, or make their contributions. For some students, it may be getting out there and organizing and for others, it's painting a mural."

When students write research papers, for example, the learning opportunity is not viewed as solely academic. As a facilitator commented, students are "not just writing formulaic essays, but conducting research that leads to change. Not just for your life, but for the community and others involved... Most important thing [is that] you are an agent of change." El Puente's principal added:

Social justice learning allows students not only to learn about historical implications of slavery or poverty or any of these issues that have plagued our communities, but also bring back the connection to my life, my community, what still plagues us, and what we can do about it.

Even more traditional courses, such as physics, include a social justice component designed to empower students and provide them with the experience of giving back to the community. When students in a recent physics course built race cars for a class project, they brought the cars to a local elementary school to teach the younger students about the physics of building vehicles and then raced the cars along with them afterward.

The school's ninth grade pre-algebra course, called Finance My Life, provides students with opportunities for self-reflection as they learn more about the world around them. The math facilitator who designed and teaches Finance My Life describes the course as "math through the lens of personal perspective." In the course, the students decide what they want to do after they graduate from high school and then analyze what their decision means for their financial future. Students who

want to enter the workforce after graduation can see the challenges posed by that decision. For example, they look through help-wanted ads with the goal of becoming financially independent, and many find that they cannot earn enough money to survive without a college degree. They search through *The New York Times* rental apartment ads and realize that jobs requiring only a high school diploma will not likely pay enough for the apartment they want. Students who view themselves as college bound are able to see some of the challenges of that decision. For example, without a scholarship, they will have to apply for loans, and then they will have student loan debt to repay. Achieving these kinds of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills requires students to practice pre-algebra in a real-life, context-relevant way. Students learn that they need the math skills and the information that they can provide to make informed decisions about their future.

The facilitator also discussed how she intentionally “integrates more of a civics component [into math].” Throughout the course, for example, she asks students to analyze indicators of social class: “There is a lot of opportunity to discuss inequities in society. [There are] lots of mathematical equations for inequality,” she said. “Our math is rooted in the context of financial math, but there are explicit activities that guide discussion and further research and learning to get [students] toward social justice learning.”

The “American Dream,” a particularly powerful metaphor for immigrant populations, is a prominent theme in the 10th and 11th grade English language arts and social studies curriculum. The study of texts by Latino authors such as Junot Diaz’s *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, or the comparison of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s American classic *The Great Gatsby* to *Bodega Dreams*, a contemporary Latino counterpart written by Ernesto Quiñonez, an Ecuadorian born, American Latino writer, encourages students to examine what the American Dream is and whether everyone has access to it. The approach provides students with the opportunity to take a reflective look at American society. Students determine whether characters are able to achieve the American Dream, what kinds of obstacles they encounter, and, if they do not achieve the American Dream, why not. Activities like these enable students to cultivate their social awareness, perspective-taking, and multicultural literacy skills.

The syllabus for El Puente’s Economics and Government course, designed for 12th graders, requires students to explore “the political and socioeconomic structures of the United States and the neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn” (Costello, 2012). In the course, students “analyze socioeconomic changes in the U.S. society and compare them to current trends in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.” In the 2012 academic year, students analyzed the platforms of the U.S. presidential candidates to determine which platform, and candidate, would best serve Williamsburg residents. They were expected to use these data for a neighborhood project as well as a senior portfolio task. Among the essential questions examined were those with social justice implications for students’ lives as well as for the local and wider communities:

- How will Williamsburg, Brooklyn “look or feel” if current trends continue?
- Who are the [political] representatives of Williamsburg, Brooklyn?
- How are the issues/topics of Williamsburg related to the national issues?
- Should a government ever be allowed to break their [sic] own laws? If so, when?

These kinds of course activities enable students to connect social awareness and responsible decision-making to social responsibility and community engagement, using an important social and political event that will impact their lives and the lives of those in their community.

Cultivating student voice. The cultivation and expression of student voice is a practice that supports social emotional learning and social justice education at El Puente by empowering students and developing their sense of agency. The discovery of voice, which includes both self-awareness and social awareness at El Puente, is both powerful and empowering; in particular, for the school’s student population. The ninth and 10th grade Sankofa Academy, discussed earlier, focuses on the questions: “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” One goal of the Sankofa Academy is to help students find and develop their voice by encouraging them to learn about themselves, their families, their histories, and their culture. As one student put it, “This is what the school does—it tells you, helps you find out who you are, who you can be in the future.” Another student said that the most important thing he learned was, “I own the creed to my own destiny, and I take that wherever I want.”

Empowering students and developing their capacity for leadership are core goals of an El Puente education. One of the primary reasons for the El Puente community-based organization’s investment in creating a school was to develop both voice and respect for diverse perspectives among youth in the community. As one student put it, “Leadership is big principle here. They want us to be leaders to help the community.” Having a voice means participation “so that your ideas can be heard.” It also means being open-minded: “If two people have different ideas, every idea gets heard, and it’s something to think about. You will never get shut down.” A humanities facilitator further pointed out that facilitators too emphasize voice and perspective-taking in their relationships and in their teaching: “We work hard to understand the idea of perspective: to view the world through their [students’] own and others’ eyes.”

ISA emphasizes reflective practice and growth across students’ learning experiences.

ISA students follow an Advanced Placement course of study and are challenged to achieve “mastery”—otherwise known as the 80% standard—in each of their courses by the end of the school year. As a part of ISA’s strategy to support students in meet-

ing this goal, they must assess and evaluate students in an incremental way to determine the degree to which they are making progress towards mastery in their courses, performance outcomes in each discipline, and the *Graduate Profile* described earlier. As we have seen, students at ISA are immersed in an environment where they are consistently asked to reflect on themselves in a way that will lead to positive growth and change. One teacher articulated how teachers at ISA facilitate the type of reflection that is encouraged in their interactions with students:

We have so many conversations with kids when they are not where they need to be as a student—where they need to be emotionally. Because we have a strong relationship we can have a frank conversation—“How’s it going?” Come up with a plan. Talk about how you best work in the class, where you need to sit. We are very comfortable making individual student plans, making exceptions. The kids can approach us, so there’s a comfort level with that.

Another teacher described how he spent the class session after students completed a major project presentation by encouraging them to think through their experiences giving the presentations—what they could have done better, what they did well, etc. We heard about and observed many instances of this type of conversational reflection during our visits to ISA—this practice is integrated across formal and informal teaching and learning opportunities at the school.

Collaborative, project-based learning teaches social emotional skills and fosters social awareness and engagement

The schools use project-based learning as a space for students to practice social emotional skills as they work in groups and in the community. Importantly, these experiential learning opportunities help build relationships between students and among students and teachers, enable students to practice collaboration and relationship skills, promote social awareness and interdependence, and foster community engagement.

Project Week at Fenway fosters collaboration among teachers and students and supports community engagement. Project Week, an annual school-wide activity at Fenway, takes place outside of the school and beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom. Regular classes are suspended, and the school is “out and about in the community” for a week. During this period, Fenway faculty and students explore a particular topic and engage in experiential learning and activities available to them in the city. Teachers organize activities and generate focal topics in collaboration with students. According to the *Fenway Project Week* brochure (Fenway High School, n.d.b), the primary goals of this special week of activities are to:

- Remove boundaries between students and teachers in common learning experiences.

- Expand students’ geographic sense as well as their sense of place in the community.
- Connect students to business, government, non-profits, and cultural institutions in the Boston area.
- Make practical the learning that has gone on in the classroom and reinforce the connection between “school work” and “real-world work.”

The program is financially supported through private funds and is made possible by collaborations with local community organizations. Some of the topics explored in the past include food and culture, fitness, biking, animal rights, homelessness, Boston tourism, photography, and music production. A culminating final project display is prepared by each group, and shared with the entire school community on the last day of project week, which is held in an outdoor public space or at a local college. As students and faculty engage with one another and the community, they become more socially aware, develop a sense of their place in the local community, and hone their group work skills.

Fenway’s Project Week was suspended for a brief period of time, partially due to Boston’s standardized testing period that also takes place in the spring. It was revived, however, as school leaders emphasized the critical learning that occurs for students and the school community as a whole, and argued that MCAS test scores could be monitored and maintained to ensure that students were adequately prepared for the exam. As one school leader put it:

We had long debate about it. We feel it’s very important for students to learn in a variety of ways, and to learn about the city and the world, and experience interactions with people.... Project Week makes a difference because it lets kids feel they are valued, because they get to interact with adults and are learning together. If I’m allowed to think in creative ways, I’m more motivated for learning. Rather than drill, drill, drill. The attitude students feel about school—if they’re valued, and it’s enjoyable, then it will impact studies. We have fun stuff, but we have high expectations, and do well on the MCAS, aided by our supports program.

Collaborative, project-based learning at ISA teaches social emotional skills, provides a context for reflective practice, and promotes social justice education. ISA students repeatedly told us about how they work in groups for just about everything they do. Moreover, each year students participate in a large-scale, grade-level collaborative project. These projects are typically completed across more than one academic subject, with students working both within and outside of class time to complete the projects. Project groups tend to range between 4 and 6 students. Each year, the projects include a specific focus on an issue of injustice or community need.

During ninth grade, for example, students work together on a Make a Difference project and on a Global Environmental Problems project. The Make a Difference project asks students to research a particular problem or social issue with a group, present what they learned, and implement a service or social change action related to the issue. The Global Environmental Problems project requires students to conduct research and participate in a policy debate about the problem. Sophomores research a culture in danger of extinction and create a persuasive speech and a visual display to educate others about that culture and the challenges that its members are facing. Parents and other community visitors (e.g., district administrators and staff) are invited to the school to attend students' group presentations and vote on the group that they think should receive a monetary donation to a cause that would assist people of the culture the winning group researched. Juniors study the Civil Rights Movement and how it connects to a contemporary social justice issue. They then present their findings to parents and other community members and include recommendations for how to respond to the injustice they identified as part of their work. Finally, seniors work in groups to identify a question that they want to investigate as a part of their travel experience trip to Washington, DC. Last year, upon returning from the trip, seniors created a public service announcement that incorporated what they learned about their question with San Antonio's development goals for SA2020—an initiative that articulates a comprehensive, collective vision for the city and its future—linking national and local perspectives.

A sophomore spoke generally about the collaborative, project-based work that is common at ISA:

We always have projects that seem to be structured enough to where it gives us a good rubric, but good and flexible so we can make it our own. And then they always seem to kind of have this thing where we have to figure it out on our own. They kind of help us, but we really have to find things out and find how other things work. We have to learn how to work with people a lot.

Collaborative, project-based work provides students with the opportunity to practice a number of social emotional skills, for the reasons this student listed. First, projects have guidelines, but still require student groups to “find things out,” fostering students' capacities to work together and rely on one another. They also foster effort, iterative learning, and a growth mindset. Group projects, like the majority of work in the “real” world, requires all of the skills that social emotional learning targets; in the structured situation of a school project, however, students can both learn and practice these skills with support, feedback, and room for improvement in a low-stakes setting.

Collaborative projects also provide a context for teachers to encourage reflective practices among their students. In a classroom discussion for an elective course on

cross-cultural understanding⁴, we observed a group of students who were preparing for a video conference call with students in Jordan. As we watched students work, we saw several intentional strategies to encourage reflective thinking about the world and what it means to be an educated global citizen. For example, students created KWL charts (KWL stands for “Already Know,” “Want to Know,” and “Learn”) and the teacher helped guide them through a process of crafting questions that took into account the culture of the students with whom they would conference. During this process, we heard each small group ask questions along the lines of: “We think this is important, but will [the students in Jordan] think this is important?”

Collaborative projects also provide opportunities for social justice education, largely through the topics or content of the projects. In all projects at ISA, students research real-world issues reflecting ISA’s core value of relevance. The real-world issues that students engage with reliably include dimensions of justice and injustice, and, in this way, students are made more aware of the problems and injustices of the world through their projects. For some, what they initially learn through a project becomes a personal passion. A junior, for example, recalled his sophomore project experience for us:

Experiences at ISA have really allowed me—have given me the resources to see if [the global community is] what I’m interested in, and as a result, I am. One of the main things that really contributed to that was last year—we did something called Advocacy Fair where we were assigned to a culture that was an almost extinct culture in some way. My group focused on the Tofa people and how their language was becoming extinct, and for some reason I got really into that project, and right after that, I did research even after the actual fair happened. I got really interested in the language preservation and about extinction of cultures, and for some reason it kind of triggered something inside of me. It makes me think it’s possibly something I would like to at least study, after graduation.

For this student, the sophomore project not only developed social and ethical awareness and a desire to take action, but it also increased his sense of self-awareness, social responsibility, and multicultural literacy. His comments were echoed by several of his classmates, many of whom traced their interest in something they wanted to pursue in the future to something they had first learned about during one of their projects.

⁴ As part of the elective, students participate in Youth Talk, a virtual exchange program sponsored through the Global Nomads division of Bridges of Understanding—a non-profit group working to foster stronger relationships between the U.S. and the Arab world—that pairs students in the United States with students in the Middle East and North Africa to build cultural awareness and foster global citizenship (Global Nomads Group, 2013).

We also observed Junior Civil Rights Project presentations during a parent night event that took place when we visited the school. The presentations we saw applied the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement to contemporary issues ranging from immigration to the rights of the mentally ill. Students drew on research conducted during their junior year travel experience to Mobile, AL, to study the Civil Rights Movement, as well as classroom and textual references and scholarly research.

Students were organized into groups for the Civil Rights Project through their English classes. The purpose of the project was explained to them as follows in the project outline:

During your Junior year at ISA, we explore the changes the United States has undergone as we, the people, sought to make changes for the betterment of all. Our travel experience gives you a first-hand look at some of the most emotional and powerful moments in our American history.

Using what they have learned in the classroom and through the school's travel experiences, students were tasked with creating a multimedia presentation that included the following components:

- Articulate the specifics of the injustice, e.g., events, key participants, and timelines;
- Articulate how particular individual(s) responded to the injustice (Who were those individuals? Why were they involved? What effect did their responses have?);
- Articulate how groups within American society responded, including responses of action and inaction (What groups within our society surfaced? Why were those groups involved? What effect did that group's response have? Did their response conflict with other group responses?);
- Explain the current status of that injustice and its place in today's issues (What have we learned about the history of civil rights in America, and how can we apply it to modern issues?);
- And express the personal perspectives of each of your group's members on the injustice.

These components ask students to demonstrate a wide range of social emotional and social justice learning skills while connecting a pivotal moment in American history to their own lives, contemporary struggles for justice, and current issues and debates (see Appendix D in the ISA case report for an example of the media project rubric).

Performance-based assessments foster reflection, resilience, responsibility, and a growth mindset

Fenway's Junior Review, El Puente's practice of graduating students by performance assessment, and ISA's portfolio process and practice of student-led conferences provide opportunities for students to reflect on and demonstrate their academic progress while understanding the social emotional journey that it took to get there. These learning experiences foster reflection, build resilience and responsibility, show students that they have great potential to grow and change over time, and empower students with the information and agency they need to make thoughtful, informed decisions about the future.

Fenway students practice self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills during Junior Review. The Junior Review process is an important rite of passage at Fenway, providing students with the chance to reflect on their own progress during their first 3 years at the school in a structured way and to request admission to the senior class. The process is managed through the 11th grade advisory. Students develop a portfolio and presentation that reviews their personal learning and growth during their time at Fenway. The review includes an essay about their experiences in each subject area along with evidence of their accomplishments, such as completed papers and projects. There is also a segment in which they research, and then develop, future college and career plans. Essays are reviewed and rewritten until they are highly polished, which emphasizes the importance of revision, reflection, and a growth mindset. The culminating presentation is a time of celebration with parents, teachers, and classmates in attendance. It is about the students, but it is also about their team.

In a Junior Review final presentation, for example, a student might start off by sharing his grades and reflecting on how he has improved over time as well as which subjects, on the other hand, have grown more difficult. He then discusses what he has learned about his academic strengths and challenges—such as writing and research skills vs. time-management skills—as well as personal strengths and challenges—such as being social and helpful to others vs. being too social and sometimes losing focus. After stepping back and assessing his growth over time, as well as walking the audience through an example of how he persevered through a nearly-disastrous science project, he reflects on the future rather than the past by sharing his likes and dislikes (not working in an office and making a difference), career goals (being a teacher), and excitement and fears about college (great academic reputation vs. lack of diversity). He then shares his goals and challenges for the rest of his time at Fenway—such as looking forward to his senior internship but worrying about time-management issues as he focuses more on the college application process. He then gives props to his team—his family, best friends, and advisory teacher. Through reflection and a focus on growth, a student has the chance to step back and analyze his academic development while both connecting it to his social emotional development and strengthening his self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills as he practices them and plans for the future.

Students take a great deal of pride in completing this landmark formative assessment. During our visits to Fenway, we had the opportunity to meet with students who had recently completed their Junior Review. They described it as a very personal, yet public, process. They talked about the growth that they had experienced by participating in Junior Review, emphasizing the social emotional learning that had taken place. One student summed up lessons learned: “I learned the importance of people around me. I like to work on my own, but you always are going to need back up through life. People are here for me.”

Graduating by performance assessment at El Puente builds students’ skills in self-awareness, self-management, perseverance, and having a growth mindset. In New York State, students must pass a series of tests call Regents Exams in order to graduate from high school and obtain a diploma. Because El Puente belongs to the New York Performance Standards Consortium—a network of 28 New York State high schools, the majority of which are in New York City, that subscribes to portfolio performance assessment as a means of graduation—El Puente students are exempt from all but one of the Regents exams, the English exam. Instead, they earn their high school diploma by demonstrating proficiency across a range of portfolio presentations that provide opportunities for revision and reflection.

The portfolio assessment system requires students to produce a series of literary essays that demonstrate analytic thinking, show high-level conceptual thinking through problem-solving in mathematics, demonstrate their understanding of the scientific method through original science experiments, and use convincing arguments and evidence in research papers. The assignments are aligned with graduation-level standards. Since these high-stakes performance assessments are long-term tasks, the completion of which requires multiple revisions and practice, including oral presentations and defenses, they provide students with an authentic experience in self-management, perseverance, and using a growth mindset.

Because portfolio tasks can be customized, students’ research projects can be designed to address social justice issues in the community. Graduation portfolio research papers that students complete in 12th grade, for example, can be an inquiry into a community issue, such as Williamsburg’s gentrification and its effects on current residents living in poverty, or a senior math portfolio project on water use and waste can include a focus on the responsibility of Americans to conserve water to “help the environment.” In addition to identifying issues related to water access and use, students must demonstrate their mathematics knowledge in their analysis of the social justice implications of the study findings and in the recommendations they make, which must be based on data. In this case, students had to preform statistical analyses and then apply a valid research methodology (i.e., conducting a survey and analyzing the data).

In one graduation math portfolio research paper—titled *What Do People Know and Feel About Water Usage?*—a student explained how the survey for her project utilized closed- and open-ended questions, who comprised the survey sample (local middle school students), defined statistical terms (mean, median, and mode), and discussed the limitations of using averages, correlations, and scatter plots as methods of analysis as well as other limitations of her study (e.g., she did not use a random sample of survey participants). In addition to the paper text, the student included charts and graphs to convey questionnaire responses, disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity. After a close examination of a dataset, the student demonstrated an understanding of the complexities in remedying social problems. Although a high percentage of respondents cared that one-eighth of the world’s population does not have access to safe water and believe that water should be conserved, she wondered whether they would actually implement a recommended solution. Ultimately, she hypothesized, respondents were not as interested in the solution as much as they “care that water can be saved” in general. She further questioned whether there is a cause-and-effect relationship between paying for water and conserving it, and noted the financial challenges that can subvert the implementation of water conservation solutions. Finally, she recommended that schools be required to teach environmental education to raise awareness and inspire action to “save the environment.”

Reflective assessments at ISA bolster self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making through experiences of growth and resilience. The portfolio process is a formal, long-term example of how reflection is built into the students’ educational experience at ISA. As part of the portfolio process, students think and write about their own progress towards meeting the standards in the *Graduate Profile* and practicing the *Habits of Mind*, described earlier. Student-led conferences, where students lead their parents and teachers in a conversation about their progress, are another formalized opportunity for self-directed reflection.

Student portfolios. ISA students collect their work and reflections on their progress toward performance outcomes—which include the school’s *Graduate Profile* and *Habits of Mind*—in an online portfolio that they refer to as their “edublog.” The portfolio also offers a forum for faculty and parents to interact with students and respond to these examples and reflections. The juniors and seniors we spoke with expressed mixed feelings about the portfolio, but in general, comments centered on themes like, “Sometimes I don’t want to do it, or I get behind, but when I do take the time to look over everything I’ve done, I learn a lot.” Overall, students get why the process benefits them and why it matters even if keeping the portfolio up-to-date is not the most “fun” task.

The portfolio process supports social emotional learning because it puts emphasis on self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making through reflection, resilience, and a growth mindset. Because students constantly reflect on who they are as learners as a part of the portfolio process, they begin to learn what

works and does not work for them in different learning contexts, and see patterns of positive and negative consequences for the decisions they make. As the portfolio requires students to assess themselves by the community commitments we described in the beginning of this report, it also asks students to reflect on what it means to be an interdependent, socially responsible member of the school community.

Student-led conferences. ISA also requires students to lead conferences to discuss their academic progress with their parents and all of the teachers on their grade-level team. This is different from traditional parent–teacher conferences in several ways. First, the onus of responsibility is placed on the student, and second, all of the student’s teachers are involved in the same conversation. Student-led conferences serve many of the same social emotional learning goals as the portfolio process. The conference experience also serves to build the relationships and growth mindset that are foundational to a safe and caring learning environment; they also offer opportunities to develop self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills. Additionally, because of their conversational nature and the involvement of key stakeholders, student conferences also provide opportunities to develop relationship skills and practice those skills during discussions and interactions that might, at times, be difficult or feel high-stakes. As with portfolios, the metacognitive aspects of student-led conferences offer many opportunities for self-focused social emotional learning, but the relational nature of these conferences open up additional pathways to the interpersonal and other-oriented aspects of social emotional learning.

Restorative disciplinary practices preserve relationships, foster responsibility, and respect students’ dignity

Even when disciplinary action is needed, Fenway, El Puente, and ISA draw on their social emotional learning and social justice education perspectives to provide opportunities for students to practice social emotional skills and remain part of the community. Restorative practices rely on developing both students’ sense of personal responsibility as well as their essential interdependence with and responsibility to others.

Discipline at Fenway is about learning, practicing responsibility for oneself and others, and fostering interdependence. Fenway’s disciplinary practices aim to provide students with a voice and strategies and steps to handle issues and conflicts in a productive way. Self-described as “primarily focused on social emotional issues,” the student support staff works to ensure that all sides of the story, including those of the student, teacher, or others involved, are considered during the dispute-resolution process. If a student is having a bad day or is being resistant, the “understood protocol” is that the student can take the initiative to leave the classroom and go talk with a counselor. A teacher also may instruct the student to do so. A counselor then meets with the student, and they work to resolve the issue by the end of day. This approach is rooted in self-efficacy support and mediation processes that help to bolster students’ social emotional competencies, like self-management and responsible decision-making, and is designed to be respectful and preventative.

According to the student support staff, rather than being simply punitive, this type of disciplinary practice aims to promote student learning. It helps students make sense of the situation and not react before assessing what happened. Students learn to become both self-aware and socially aware as they reflect on the impact of their actions—for example, they fill out a “student perspective form” in which they are asked to describe why they are in student support and reflect on the role they played in the situation as well as what they could do differently next time. Further, by meeting with a counselor, a third party to the situation, and talking through the problem, students learn to practice mediation, relationship management, and, ultimately, self-management. A counselor explained the benefits of these practices:

We want to make sure teachers and students respect each other—it’s nothing personal. We’re trying to make connections with students, try not to embarrass students, create allies with them so they can trust you. So we may focus on that in professional development sessions... Trust is important. We advise—do activities with them, trying to break down barriers. Stay after school sometimes. So it’s not us versus them in classroom.

Failure is not an option when you are part of El Puente’s community. As discussed previously, facilitators at El Puente draw on their strong and supportive relationships with students to safeguard against failure. One parent commented, for example, “[There are] no excuses for not turning in work.” Another parent’s comments demonstrate how the relationship between teacher and student works:

If there was something that was missing, the teacher stayed on him [his child]. “You signed a contract and this is what you are supposed to do. *I teach you, and you give me work to show me what I taught you.*” Not like, “If you didn’t do that, you fail.” These teachers don’t believe in failing.

Building on this perspective, the school employs a case approach for students who are struggling academically, which explicitly draws on a holistic perspective of students’ lives, including the interaction between students’ social and emotional needs and academic success. The staff first seeks out the root causes. As Principal Vazquez explains: “Home issue? Academic issue? Transportation issue?” They then develop an action plan that involves students, family, counselors, and facilitators. Part of the approach is getting to know student as holistically as possible, including the student’s interests and how the student becomes engaged. As Principal Vazquez puts it, the process helps everyone “to know their lives.” A facilitator asserted that the case system’s communal experience produces more effective solutions:

Because we [school administrators, facilitators, and counselors] have meetings on individual students, we can tailor our work to that indi-

vidual student. If a kid is going through something or has deficiencies, we know we need to spend more time with this student, because we are aware they need special attention. We can make that adjustment because we are not having to figure that out on our own. Sharing helps us to find common threads, identify the best strategies.

The school may provide extra tutoring or counseling, or apply tools for family check-ins, so parents are informed about their child's progress. Sometimes the school assigns a student a "go-to" person, someone with whom the student checks in at the start and the end of each day and who is there to help as needed. This way, students know for certain that there is one person they can go to, rely on, and feel comfortable with.

Further, El Puente's student discipline practices—like those at Fenway—derive from the perspective that infractions are not isolated or private acts that bring harm only to those directly involved, but are harmful to the community. In addressing discipline issues, students are first asked reflect on what they did and how their acts affected others and the community. This is to help them understand that they are part of a community—that they do not stand alone—and that they have a responsibility to their community. The school social worker explained:

We want to encourage reparation and reflection rather than punishment. We encourage them [students] to talk to someone and use their relationships, to change their behavior. We do many mediations and have conversations about what to do as an adult.

Students are then provided with the opportunity to repair the damage they did to the community by doing something positive for the community. The reflection and reparation process may include peer mediation, teacher mediation, and discussion to encourage responsibility and change in the student's behavior.

Among the strategies used to deal with discipline issues at El Puente is the Holistic Individualized Process (HIP). Instead of a traditional counseling or a deficits-correction approach to students' struggles, the HIP engages students in a process of reflection to set goals and develop an action plan to achieve the goals (De Jesus, 2003). Staff will explore with students the underlying causes of their behavior and help them set goals and strategies for moderating it, so that students feel empowered to engage their potential and change themselves, rather than feel diminished or humiliated by punishment. In this way, students learn and practice self-management, relationship skills, and social responsibility, and the school, instead of playing the traditional role of the disciplinary enforcer, can provide opportunities for discipline to support students' growth and development.

These practices provide powerful opportunities for social emotional learning and personal growth, as well as the development of self-awareness, social awareness, and

community responsibility. Through such practices, the school encourages students to adopt socially constructive norms, such as talking to someone and using their relationships, rather than destructive ones, such as acting out or accepting failure. Further, the school demonstrates how a responsible public institution behaves by acknowledging students' needs and adolescent regressions and transgressions in a context where there are effective models to address their concerns and opportunities to right wrongs.

At ISA, discipline is grounded in relationships. Similar to Fenway and El Puente, ISA's approach to discipline is grounded in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The assistant principal described his perception of the ways in which many high schools address inappropriate student behavior with in-school suspension (ISS), but said this is a last resort at ISA. He continued:

We don't want to put them in ISS because that takes them away from instruction, so we'll have them come up on Saturday, or we'll have them come up early in the morning or at lunch—take their time away and do something that is more instructive. Like, I try to get to the bottom of why they might have done something inappropriate. Like, what can they do to make up for what they did? If they have created a breach in a relationship with a teacher, what can they do to make it right?

When discipline is grounded in the real needs of relationships, as with the approach described by ISA's assistant principal, its goals are restorative and supportive rather than harsh and punitive. Making amends for mistakes or misbehavior is yet another opportunity for reflection, learning, and growth. As ISA's assistant principal describes, this helps students develop self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills necessary for a more respectful and just school environment.

School traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities build community, honor students, and support voice and agency

Formal and informal school traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities support students' social and emotional needs by building community, honoring students and families, and fostering student voice and agency. From orientation activities that initiate students and families into the school community, to practices that celebrate student achievements, to clubs and activities that give students time and place to share their cultures and their struggles, social emotional support is both broad and tailored to the needs of each community. These kinds of practices importantly work to reinforce and make everyday a school culture of engagement and empowerment as well as complement and support school features and structures that are set up to organize these kinds of experiences on a larger scale.

Orientation practices initiate students and families into the school community and culture, build relationships, and foster social responsibility.

Fenway's orientation practices. Fenway's orientation practices for new students provide an opportunity for the school to communicate the importance of, as well as its expectations around, what it means to be a member of the Fenway community and its network of interdependent relationships. These practices serve to socialize students, and families, to the Fenway culture and community as well as emphasize the school's focus on social emotional learning and social justice education.

During the summer, a 2-day orientation is held at Fenway for incoming ninth graders. At the orientation, students are introduced to the mission and culture of the school, and, as one student support coordinator stated, "Students begin to learn to reflect about themselves and how they interact with others." Thus, social emotional skill-building takes place before students formally start at Fenway.

Two weeks after the start of the school year, new students participate in a community-building activity, similar to an Outward Bound experience. They travel to Thompson Island for 2 days to camp and participate in leadership-building activities. The school leaders acknowledge that students "face a lot of challenges" and encounter "novel experiences," and emphasized the importance of the trip in helping the ninth graders get to know one another and their teachers.

Community-building at Fenway. There is also a focus on school-wide community-building on the first day of school each year at Fenway. Faculty groups partner to design learning exercises and collaborate with seniors to facilitate breakout discussion groups across each of the school's houses. A theme or essential question drives the day's activities and changes from year to year. Then, throughout the school year, that question or theme is integrated into classrooms discussions across subjects (e.g., *How do you do the right thing in the face of injustice?*). The upperclassmen are charged with serving as role models to the new students, to provide explicit training on Fenway's practices and expectations. One teacher reflected on the value of the first-day assembly, which kicks off the rest of the day's activities:

I like that in the beginning of year, the first day of school is like a full-day assembly—it's not a welcome back of logistics about books or classes. It's about—we're going to talk about a topic. I get to work with kids that I may not teach. We're having the opportunity to meet each other. It may not be related to what I teach, but we're talking about our opinions.

We spoke to a group of parents about the ways in which the school incorporates families into the Fenway community. They indicated that family engagement starts when students first apply for admission and continues to build. Parents talked about

ongoing opportunities to be involved at the school, such as attending Junior Review and the quarterly honors assemblies. They also indicated that the school staff is understanding of the demands and constraints parents experience, especially considering the community population Fenway primarily serves. They felt that the school made efforts to keep them informed about their children’s progress as well as the challenges they are facing. They also highlighted the ways that teachers hold the students to high standards while also providing ongoing support that nurtures caring relationships.

Building community at ISA. ISA also works to build community for all people connected to the school, and is especially mindful to incorporate parents into that community. Two examples that are designed to incorporate ISA parents are report card pick-up nights, where parents come to school to pick up their child’s report card and participate in an open-house style activities, and *Hot Diggity Doo Dah*, a community event that takes place at the beginning of the academic year.

Hot Diggity Doo Dah is part family BBQ—ISA is in Texas, after all—and part parent and student orientation. While all ISA families are invited to participate, and most do, parents of incoming ninth grade students in particular are given a chance to get to know other ISA parents and learn more about the school and its community. Freshmen also get to know each other and have the opportunity to interact with more senior students. During the school year, ISA also hosts three report card pick-up nights, also known as parent nights. These events provide regular opportunities for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to be in the same place and communicate about what is happening at the school. The events also keep everyone in the loop about students’ progress and performance, and demonstrate to students that they are supported across their home and school lives.

We saw these community-building activities in action when we attended a parent night at the school. Parent turnout is extremely high for these events, and parents and teachers were often seen talking with each other in a relaxed and friendly manner. To confirm the parent perception that they are really “known” by ISA staff, we observed several conversations where it was clear that a teacher or administrator clearly knew who a parent’s child was without any prompting and had particular conversation topics in mind when they interacted. Interactions were clearly deep and meaningful, not superficial and cursory.

The parents that we spoke with described the ways in which they felt like valued members of the ISA community. Parents, quite simply, appreciated that they were known and intentionally integrated into the school community. One parent of a junior student remarked that when one walks into ISA, “Everyone knows who you are—they know who your children are...the teachers all know you.” She continued, “It’s nice to feel that your child is noticed and that they know who your child really is.” Another parent immediately followed that with, “[At ISA] you’re not just a number.”

El Puente's Unity Day and community responsibility. At El Puente, Unity Day, which functions as an orientation and initiation for incoming students, comprises student-led workshops and student performances. During Unity Day, El Puente's social worker explained, "Upperclassmen take [younger] students into the community to see different sites of El Puente [showing] that they are part of a community." A school leader described, "Students transform classrooms into portals of spiritual growth... Young people take ownership and leadership" by developing particular themes for each of the day's workshops, which address issues related to social justice, culture, and nationality. There is always a workshop for freshmen on the origins of the school, which helps induct and introduce them to the El Puente community.

This kind of community responsibility and call for students to improve their community are evident even in what seem to be everyday kinds of activities, such as peer tutoring and mentoring fellow students. Many students, for example, tutor peers in certain subject areas or in English language learning. In the school's mentor program, each senior student takes on two younger mentees, to "take it [support] to the next level," said one student. Mentors have taken mentees to college fairs, hung out with them socially, checked up on their grades, and asked if they needed help with their schoolwork. Sometimes, community responsibility is simply one person responding to another's need. While adults in the school certainly take responsibility for students, these kinds of practices work to ensure that students also take responsibility for one another.

Practices that honor students and give them voice celebrate student success and agency as well as foster community responsibility and support.

Celebrating student achievement at Fenway. An important part of the Fenway culture is recognizing and honoring students when they do well. An honor roll assembly, for example, is held every quarter to celebrate students who received As and Bs (honors) and those who received all As (highest honors). The assembly that we observed took place in the school's packed auditorium, which included the whole school community and students' families. The crowd was amped up as one of the student support counselors opened the event and worked up the audience. Students from each of the school's three houses were then recognized in turn. House teachers called the students to the stage individually, often sharing a story about them or some detail about their personal relationship. They expressed deep pride in the students' accomplishments, which was echoed by the community as they cheered the students on. At Fenway, it is an intentional practice to publically celebrate students' academic success as students learn to value their own achievements as well as those of their peers. This is clearly enhanced by their emotional connection to the school, to their peers, and to their teachers.

Honoring students and marking transitions at ISA. At ISA, examples of honoring students include the Opening Ceremony, which marks the opening of the school

year and initiates freshman into the ISA community, and the Junior Rite of Passage, which happens in May of junior year and marks the transition juniors make as they become the senior leaders in the ISA community. Like Fenway, ISA works to acknowledge and celebrate significant transitions for its students as they progress through their school journey.

Several students and teachers described the way in which ninth graders are introduced to the school during the Opening Ceremony assembly. The following exchange among a group of teachers describes the experience:

It's a tradition to begin the school year with an opening ceremony with the entire student body and all the teachers. The freshman class goes in last. Everyone is in the auditorium; we are all holding the freshmen out. When the freshmen walk in to go to their seats, the entire auditorium goes crazy. Ninth graders are looking around wondering who they are clapping for. It's a physical and emotional first time that they are with the school, and I think it's powerful.

My daughter went here, and I remember the first day of her freshman year she came home and told me about that—how everyone clapped. How she thought it was different.

Rather than feeling like you are the freshmen [with everyone] waiting to give you a hard time, you are welcomed. It's a huge welcome. As a first-year teacher... I was in tears. It was the coolest thing I've seen, to see all of these kids. They were excited about it. It wasn't—it is something that the upperclassmen are really excited to do. They are excited to welcome the freshmen, they are excited for them to be here, and I think that's a really good tone to start with.

In some ways, teachers, many of whom who had at taught at other high schools or remembered their own high school experiences, were able to articulate that this welcome constituted “something different” about ISA. From day one, students are made to feel welcome, cared for, and part of an intentional community. Additionally, older students have the chance to step back into the shoes of being new and to respond in a way that honors that perspective. While each of these serves a community-building purpose for ISA, they also provide opportunities for social emotional support and engagement, showing students what it means to be a member of the ISA community.

During the Junior Rite of Passage, students present symbolic “gifts” to the school, such as the gift of reflection or the gift of dance. In other words, they present the ways in which they will draw on their own skills and talents to be leaders and showcase those skills and talents to the school. The students also choose one teacher from each of their freshman, sophomore, and junior years to speak to them about their

identity as a class, as well as what leadership will mean for their class. A teacher from the senior team then welcomes them to their senior year and the leadership role that they will take on—both at the school and for themselves—from that point forward.

Supporting student voice and agency at El Puente’s town halls. Town hall meetings provide a gathering space for faculty and students to voice their concerns about existing practices and issues and to make recommendations for constructive change. These gatherings demonstrate the relationship between empowerment and community change and exemplify social responsibility and community engagement by staff and students alike. Advisors help students prepare for these meetings in advance during advisory, encouraging students to discuss issues they have with teachers, classes, or peers and to consider how to present such issues respectfully and constructively. Advisors inform students about the presentation procedures such as *one mic* (i.e., one speaker at a time). Students then write their talking points in advance, a practice that enables them to examine and reflect on their thoughts and feelings as well as find ways to publicly express them that will be productive for themselves and the community.

El Puente’s assistant principal recounted one case in which students were able to constructively and respectfully tell one teacher that they wanted their tests returned sooner than she had been returning them. In another case, students were able to express their objection to peers’ pejorative language about gay individuals. In order to ensure that all students have voice at a town hall meeting, students might be asked to record their issues on chart paper or use a strategy such as pass-the-ball to include everyone in the dialogue. Because town halls require students to navigate the relationship between their self-interest and their community’s needs, they provide an opportunity for students to learn about the relationship between individual good and common good, and practice their skills navigating this often complex dynamic. It also builds students’ confidence in voicing their ideas and concerns and effecting change in their school community.

Clubs and activities enable students to acknowledge their cultures and provide support around common issues and transitional or novel experiences.

There are several student groups and clubs at Fenway that are specifically designed to foster students’ social emotional learning by providing a space for young men and women of color to support one another and learn strategies to deal with issues that they are likely to confront as young adults. The organizations described below are all gender-specific.

- ***Boys to Men:*** This group was started in 1995 and encourages students to think about what it means to be a man. The curriculum, developed by the school counselors, focuses on team-building, trust, and honest discussion. Older boys are encouraged to talk

openly with the younger ones in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. Participating in the club helps students realize that they are not alone in their experiences in dealing with girlfriends, sibling rivalry, families, and other relationship and life challenges. The counselor said:

The older guys share strategies. Do your work first, so [your mom] doesn't say anything. Do the dishes first so she doesn't bother you. I say as a brother, me and my brothers struggled with dealing with mom too! So when they hear these stories, they make connections, and don't feel alone.

- ***Sister to Sister***: Girls meet weekly to discuss topics that affect young women in society today and that are significant in their own lives. The group is facilitated by a humanities teacher and a student support counselor. Members also get involved in a range of community-based activities, such as doing public education about health and partnering with outside organizations on special projects. They have an annual out of state weekend retreat, which provides a chance to see and understand more of the world. The trip blends learning, time to get to know each other, and social activities such as shopping.
- ***MORE (Men Organized, Responsible, and Educated)***: This group, facilitated by a math teacher, highlights gaining maturity and learning how to deal with the world through taking on leadership roles, understanding the etiquette called for to interact with diverse kinds of people in different situations, and becoming comfortable speaking in public. Students focus on going to college and the skills they will need when they are on their own, including code-switching and straddling multiple worlds. They go on college tours each year as well as hold dinners to practice how to interact in a “professional” manner. The group also helps strengthen the relationships with adults in their lives. The faculty advisor said:

It breaks down barriers too. They get to see you outside of school, so you're not just a disciplinarian or educator, but someone that's approachable. We laughed at dinner, told stories... And we support them in everything, even if they are in the wrong. If they have to go to court, we're there. We try to be consistent with them. So they know someone's on their side. We're not saying what they did is okay—just trying to be authentic with them.

Likewise, at El Puente, multiple traditions and rituals, sometimes referred to as “special arts and culture days,” provide diverse opportunities for students to honor their culture and find and express their voice. Fly Girl Fest and Unity Day (mentioned previously), for example, are El Puente traditions that, as one facilitator said, give “young people time in a structured way to have revelations.” Principal Vazquez herself founded Fly Girl Fest 8 years ago, which is a full-day event designed to honor and celebrate women. Female staff members facilitate several advisories focused on young women’s issues; they, along with several student groups, organize and lead workshops, provide sacred healing spaces, and participate in performances for the community during the event (see Appendix C in the El Puente case report for a sample Fly Girl Fest agenda). Last spring, in 2014, the Fly Girl Fest theme was “Women Around the World.” Participants celebrated the female spirit with a variety of performances through dance, spoken word, and music. Fly Girl Fest themes draw on common issues that women and women of color share, both positive and negative, and educate both women and men alike about women’s issues and empowerment in the community and around the world.



Discussion

Summary of Findings: Learning from Successful Practice

The present study investigated how three highly effective, small public high schools take a whole-school, social emotional approach to engaging, educating, and empowering their students and, in doing so, work to provide their students with both the psychological and academic resources they need to belong and succeed in school. In particular, the schools in our study—which aim to engage and empower the student communities they serve—ground their educational approach in an expanded vision of social emotional learning that incorporates a social justice education perspective as essential to their practice. Taking both a qualitative deep dive into each school’s practice, as well as surveying students about their experiences at these schools and comparing their responses to a national sample of students, we examined the ways in which these schools design, implement, and practice school-based social emotional learning as well as how this focus on social emotional learning shapes how students experience school.

How does a social justice education perspective inform social emotional learning?

First, we asked how Fenway High School, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, and International School of the Americas (ISA) approach social emotional learning and how a social justice education perspective informs how they conceptualize and practice social emotional learning. We found that:

- The schools work to increase educational opportunity for students who do not typically have access to high-quality public schools or who are frequently underserved by traditional schools—i.e., students of color from low-income backgrounds who are often the first in their families to go to college. This is particularly true at Fenway and El Puente, where students from backgrounds like these are the majority of the population; at ISA, these students are a smaller, but also significant, share of the population. Educators at these schools believe that providing this kind of education for their students is an act of social justice itself.
- All three schools seek to educate the “whole student” by providing a physically and emotionally safe learning environment, developing close and caring relationships among all members of the school community; challenging students with an engaging, relevant, culturally responsive, and high-quality curriculum; providing community engaged learning opportunities; and supporting students through critical transitions into college and career. Doing so requires viewing the academic, social, and emotional aspects of schooling as necessarily interdependent with one another as well as with the aims of social justice education.

- The schools work to prepare and graduate students who are socially aware, skilled, responsible, and empowered to stand up to injustice and work for positive change in their own lives and for the lives of others. Building students' social emotional and social justice awareness, skills, and competencies work together to engage and empower students as well as foster academic success and achievement.
 - Fenway designs educational experiences that teach students the tools and confidence needed to lead and take action. Fenway educators believe that this kind of awareness and empowerment requires skill-building opportunities tuned to meet the needs of their student community.
 - El Puente's approach is grounded in acknowledging and affirming students' cultural backgrounds and identities as well as building their capacity for self-determination. It focuses on developing students' assets and potential rather than educating based on their deficits, connects students to their local community, and inspires social engagement.
 - ISA challenges its students to consider what it means to act at one's fullest potential as a learner, leader, and global citizen. The school's approach to social emotional learning and social justice education centers on improving oneself through self-awareness and reflection as well as acting for the good of ever-broadening circles of others with whom the self is interconnected. Rather than seeking to combat powerlessness and disenfranchisement among its student community—which is relatively more affluent compared to the Fenway and El Puente student communities—ISA focuses on developing empathy for others and inspiring allyship, advocacy, and action.

What are students' experiences like at these social emotional learning schools?

Next, using a student survey, we assessed what students' experiences were like at these social emotional learning schools. Compared to students in a sample of national comparison schools, we found that students in the social emotional learning schools:

- **Reported a more positive, caring school climate and liked school more.** Students in social emotional learning schools reported a more positive school climate and strong relationships with teachers compared to students in the national comparison sample. They were also more likely to agree that they are a part of a caring, respectful, diverse community where teachers value students and where students feel safe and supported.
- **Reported greater engagement in school and social emotional support.** Students in social emotional learning schools, compared to students in the national comparison schools, were more likely to say that they came to school because they were engaged in their schoolwork, that school was a place to see their friends,

and that their teachers expected them to succeed. They were also highly likely to report that they were motivated to come to school because their social and emotional needs were supported—students felt cared for, part of a community, respected and valued, like school is relevant, and that they were learning to make a difference with their education.

- **Felt efficacious and resilient as well as demonstrated a growth mindset.** Students in social emotional learning schools were more likely to say that they felt efficacious, were resilient, and viewed themselves through a growth mindset than students in national comparison schools. They were also significantly more likely to say that their teachers praised their effort—encouraging a growth mindset—compared to students in the national comparison sample.
- **Were more likely to value helping others in their community and working to improve society.** Students in social emotional learning schools were more likely to endorse making a difference, helping others, and acting for social change as key life values. They were also much more likely to have experience participating in volunteer or community work, indicating an experiential source for this difference.
- **Have ambitious goals for higher education and were more likely to receive support for these goals.** Finally, we found that students in social emotional learning schools had higher educational attainment expectations—i.e., they were more likely to expect to obtain a master’s or other professional or advanced degree—and were significantly more likely to report receiving support in the college preparation process from school counselors, teachers, parents, and peers than students in national comparison schools.

Taken together, student survey results revealed that students in the social emotional learning schools we studied reported more positive educational experiences; felt more connected to their schools; demonstrated higher levels of psychological and emotional support, engagement, and empowerment; and were more socially engaged than students in the comparison schools sample. While not a causal study, these findings suggest that social emotional learning school environments and practices hold the potential to better equip students with critical psychological resources and social emotional supports that they need to feel like school is important, that they belong there, and that they can be successful.

How do these high schools practice social emotional learning?

Finally, we examined how these high schools implement and engage in social emotional learning through their climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices, describing how the schools take a whole-school, comprehensive approach to social emotional learning and how a social justice education perspective informs their practice. We investigated how these key levels of the school context worked together to support and mutually reinforce how

social emotional learning takes place. We also examined how the schools practice social emotional learning to meet the particular needs of their urban, diverse student communities.

Taking a look at *school climate and culture*—a school’s physical and social environment and the norms, values, and expectations that implicitly and explicitly structure that environment—we found that:

- **Social emotional learning is front and center.** Social emotional learning does not happen behind the scenes at Fenway, El Puente, and ISA—it is front and center, highlighted in each school’s mission and vision, reinforced through each school community’s norms and values, and clearly articulated in expectations for students and graduates.
- **Strong relationships and a respectful community characterize school culture.** Strong relationships and a respectful, caring, and cohesive school community characterize school culture and set the stage for social and emotional learning to take place. The schools foster social emotional learning through an intentional culture that socializes both students and adults as community members and fosters effective ways of interacting that are modeled by adults at the school.
- **Students’ psychological needs are not secondary to their academic needs.** The culture at each school, and the climate it fosters, is designed to support students’ psychological needs and sees them as necessarily interdependent with students’ learning needs and potential for academic success. There is a strong focus on supporting student growth, reflection, resilience, and agency in a space of physical and emotional safety, respect, and belonging.
- **Clear norm setting fosters a safe school climate.** One learning tool that the schools leverage to promote a trusting, safe, and supportive climate is explicit norm setting. While this takes place across situations and groups at each school—from relationship norms to working group expectations to classroom norms—each school also articulates, posts, and promotes a set of comprehensive guidelines for interacting with community members that highlights self-awareness and self-management, social awareness and relationship skills, and responsible decision-making and social responsibility.
- **An interdependent community requires empathy, social responsibility, and action.** At Fenway, El Puente, and ISA, being an interdependent member of the community requires a commitment to stand up for one’s community and against injustice experienced by one’s community. This sense of social awareness, social responsibility, community engagement, agency, and empowerment are deeply embedded in each school’s culture. When a school’s culture fosters experiences of voice, agency, and action for students—in particular, for low-income students and students of color who often do not have these experiences at traditional

schools—they have a productive place to channel their energy and work for change. Left unsupported, this energy may manifest in feelings of anger or a sense of powerlessness that can lead students to disengage from and disidentify with school as well as experience behavioral and disciplinary issues.

Turning next to *school features and structures*—school design features and organizational structures that shape how the school and its activities are organized—we found that:

- **Small school size and opportunities for personalization work together to support an intimate environment where social awareness and relationship skills are necessary and social emotional learning can take place.** A small school environment structurally allows for the opportunity to cultivate close relationships and requires the social emotional skills needed to get along with others—students and teachers work together in a close-knit community for 4 years, which functions most effectively when trusting, healthy relationships are sustained. Moreover, given the level of intimacy that teachers are able to develop with students, they play a large role in students’ lives and are able to deeply personalize how they engage and work with their students. As the points below detail, the kind of teacher dedication and accessibility that make this level of personalization possible are further supported by other school design features and organizational structures (e.g., “family” structures, course scheduling, and pupil load).
- **“Family” structures serve to further personalize relationships and map students’ developmental trajectory.** Fenway and El Puente utilize house or academy structures, what we refer to here collectively as “family” structures, to further organize their small school communities. These structures provide additional opportunities to personalize relationships, foster social responsibility to one’s community, and map the developmental journey that students take through each school. At El Puente, the academy system also serves to organize the school curriculum around a set of developmentally progressive questions that link social emotional learning and social justice education, starting with students’ identity and self-awareness and moving to social responsibility and action.
- **Advisory provides a regular time and place to focus on social emotional skill-building.** While each school takes a whole-school approach to social emotional learning, advisory is a design feature that provides a regular time and place for direct instruction on social emotional skills. At Fenway and ISA, in particular, the advisory curriculum progressively links social emotional learning and social justice education objectives as students develop insight about themselves and how they are interdependent with others. The links between social emotional and academic learning are also reinforced.
- **Student support staff steward social emotional learning and facilitate critical life transitions for the student communities they serve.** Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all have counseling staff dedicated to supporting students’ psychological health and

well-being; more important, however, these staff members are central to the life and culture of the school. They work to support the mental health of individual students and the student community as a whole, as well as provide critical social emotional support for students' impending transitions to college, career, and life after high school. The student support teams work closely with teachers, administrators, and families, and link the social emotional and academic components of students' experiences. They also tailor their services to the student communities they serve, understanding sociocultural variation in both the challenges and opportunities that their students are likely to confront.

- **Community-based partnerships, projects, and learning opportunities inspire responsibility, engagement, and action.** Each school leverages community-based partnerships, programs, and activities to help students practice social emotional and social justice skills in real-world settings and situations, learn more about their community and their responsibility to that community, and inspire students to develop voice and agency to take action for positive social change. While Fenway and ISA rely on several key features and structures to accomplish these goals, El Puente primarily leverages its special relationship with the El Puente community-based organization to engage and empower its student community. These school features and structures critically support Fenway, El Puente, and ISA's capacities to foster experiences of voice, agency, and empowerment for their student communities and "back up" the ways in which these ideas are valued and promoted through each school's culture.
- **To support students' social and emotional needs, adults' social, emotional, and professional needs must also be a priority.** Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all recognize that in order to provide psychological resources and support to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their respective student communities, adults in the school must likewise be supported. Each school works to provide professional development, collaborative opportunities, and shared leadership structures to empower and support school staff. With this support, teachers have the time, space, and skills to develop close relationships with their students, provide personalized learning opportunities, and dedicate the care and energy they need to be an educator in these nontraditional school contexts.

Finally, taking a look at school practices—formal and informal daily practices that reflect what people do, how they teach and learn, and how they participate in the school community—we found that:

- **Curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning with academics through both content—what students learn—and process—how they learn it.** Fenway, El Puente, and ISA's curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning and social justice education with academics and foster the application of social emotional and social justice skills

across subjects and situations. Course topics and assignments are designed to be relevant and engaging, while instructional practices foster student reflection, resilience, a growth mindset, agency, and empowerment.

- **Collaborative, project-based learning teaches social emotional skills and fosters social awareness and engagement.** The schools use project-based learning as a space for students to practice social emotional skills as they work in groups and in the community. Importantly, these experiential learning opportunities help build relationships between students and among students and teachers, enable students to practice collaboration and relationship skills, promote social awareness and interdependence, and foster community engagement.
- **Performance-based assessments foster reflection, resilience, responsibility, and a growth mindset.** Fenway’s Junior Review, El Puente’s practice of graduating students by performance assessment, and ISA’s portfolio process and practice of student-led conferences provide opportunities for students to reflect on and demonstrate their academic progress while understanding the social emotional journey that it took to get there. These learning experiences foster reflection, build resilience and responsibility, show students that they have great potential to grow and change over time, and empower students with the information and agency they need to make thoughtful, informed decisions about the future.
- **Restorative disciplinary practices preserve relationships, foster responsibility, and respect students’ dignity.** Even when disciplinary action is needed, Fenway, El Puente, and ISA draw on their social emotional learning and social justice education perspectives to provide opportunities for students to practice social emotional skills and remain part of the community. Restorative practices rely both on developing students’ sense of personal responsibility as well as their essential interdependence with and responsibility to others.
- **School traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities build community, honor students, and support voice and agency.** Formal and informal school traditions, rituals, clubs, and activities support students’ social and emotional needs by building community, honoring students and families, and fostering student voice and agency. From orientation activities that initiate students and families into the school community, to practices that celebrate student achievements, to clubs and activities that give students time and place to share their cultures and their struggles, social emotional support is both broad and tailored to the needs of each community. These kinds of practices importantly work to reinforce and make everyday a school culture of engagement and empowerment as well as complement and support school features and structures that are set up to organize these kinds of experiences on a larger scale.
 - Orientation practices initiate students and families into the school community and culture, build relationships, and foster social responsibility.

Notably, students' families are considered key members of the school community and are treated as partners in their children's education.

- Practices that honor students and give them voice celebrate student success and agency as well as foster community responsibility and support.
- Clubs and activities enable students to acknowledge their cultures and provide support around common issues and transitional or novel experiences.

Lessons for Social Emotional Learning Research

Social emotional learning in high school: Adopting a developmental perspective

Our findings underscore the need for researchers to better understand what it takes to conceptualize, implement, and practice effective social emotional learning in high school contexts (cf. Durlak et al., 2011, Farrington et al., 2012; Humphrey, 2013; Zins, Weissberg, et al., 2004). Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all seek to educate the “whole child”—successfully doing so requires understanding which social and emotional needs, challenges, and opportunities for growth can and should be targeted along students' educational and developmental journeys. Effective social emotional learning in high school will benefit from incorporating a developmental perspective that aligns its practice with the processes of growth and transition that accompany adolescence (cf. Comer, 2005; Eccles, 2009; Kuhn & Franklin, 2008; Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006).

Fenway and El Puente, for example, map students' social emotional developmental trajectory onto the ways in which their advisory classes and academy system, respectively, are organized. As students progress from ninth through 12th grade, focal themes inform learning both inside and outside of the classroom and progressively build on one another as students increasingly develop and master key self- and other-oriented knowledge and skills and build their capacity as leaders and agents of change. From focusing on self-discovery and identity in early years, to supporting students in identifying future goals and the tools and skills needed to reach them in later years, students' social emotional learning opportunities are aligned, by design, with critical transitions that they will experience as they move through high school, graduation, and beyond. Thus, a social emotional approach to education entails a developmental approach to education.

Moreover, the ways in which students learn, apply, and refine social emotional skills evolve as students progress through high school, encounter novel situations, and prepare for college, career, and life beyond school. While learning how to resolve conflicts with peers, teachers, and families may be critical in ninth and 10th grade as students learn social awareness and relationships skills, for example, students in 11th and 12th grade need to learn how to build on these skills and apply them to conflicts that may arise in different kinds of relationships—like those

with coworkers and roommates—and in new situations—like moving away from one’s home and community to attend college. Further, skills like self-management may encompass experiences like learning how to manage one’s time and stress in ninth grade as students take on high school-level courses and assignments. Yet by 11th grade, self-management may importantly include managing anxiety around the college application process and setting goals for life after high school. While a focus on college, career, and life after high school can take place in elementary and middle school contexts—as in college prep academies, for example—these critical transitions take on a different reality and require increased social emotional support as students experience them in real time.

Social emotional learning across diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic schooling contexts

Our findings also highlight the need for research on social emotional learning to: 1) better theorize how social emotional learning can and should be conceptualized and practiced to most effectively meet the needs of students from different backgrounds and engaged in diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic schooling contexts and 2) better understand how to leverage the practice of social emotional learning to engage, educate, and empower students who are frequently underserved, and often profoundly “left behind,” by the mainstream educational system. In applying a social justice education perspective to social emotional learning, the schools that we document here intentionally tune their practice to meet the needs of their respective student communities and employ an expanded conceptualization of social emotional learning that works to empower students to be agents of change in their own lives, for their communities, and for society at large.

Across each school’s social emotional learning practice, we observed the powerful—and sometimes subtle—ways in which this sociocultural tuning takes place. Below are some examples from our findings:

- Fenway, El Puente, and ISA all place addressing issues of inequality and injustice, both within and outside of their school walls, front and center in their missions, visions, core principles, and graduate profiles. These powerful articulations of each school’s educational goals shape the culture and climate of the school and outline what it means to be a member of the school community. Educators also work to create a culture in which school community members, adults and students alike, understand their essential interdependence with other another and the social responsibility that this interdependence requires.
- In viewing students’ academic and psychological needs as inseparable, educators at each school also understand how this relationship works for their particular community of students. Developing students’ self-awareness and self-management skills to persevere in the face of failure, for example, can lead to different strategies for success. At Fenway and El Puente, which serve primarily low-income students of color, this entails teachers developing strong relation-

ships with students and showing them repeatedly that they believe in them, that they belong, and that they will not give up on them. From the schools' perspective, failure is not the result of a student's poor self-regulation or individual effort; rather failure results from a lack of support, know-how, and engagement. At ISA, where the student community has had relatively greater access to support and know-how, developing students' perseverance skills may instead entail providing a safe space for students to learn that failure is a normal and valuable part of the learning process and does not indicate that they do not have what it takes to achieve. Teaching students how to approach learning through a growth mindset can alleviate the anxiety and disidentification that can result from negative achievement experiences, but the source of that anxiety and disidentification can vary across contexts.

- School mental health and college counseling services are tailored to meet the needs of the student communities they serve, understanding sociocultural variation in both the challenges and opportunities that their students are likely to confront. El Puente's college counseling program, for example, goes above and beyond providing traditional college counseling services to provide their students—many of whom are the first in their family to attend college—with the psychological resources and know-how to transition into the world of higher education. This involves features like starting counseling in ninth grade, providing counseling for families and involving them in the college preparation process, extending counseling into students' first year of college, and providing multiple opportunities for students to practice their code-switching and multicultural straddling skills as they prepare for this critical transition.
- Community-based partnerships, programs, and learning opportunities empower students to develop voice and agency to take action for positive social change and practice leadership skills in real-world settings. At Fenway and El Puente, these experiences show students that they belong to a community and can be leaders that inspire change in their community. At ISA, school activities and programs increase students' interdependence with those both within and beyond their local community, develop perspective-taking skills and empathy with those who come from different backgrounds and contexts, and inspire community engagement and acting for change.
- Curricular design, instructional practices, and performance-based assessments are culturally responsive, highlight students' assets rather than their deficits, and provide numerous opportunities for students to develop voice and agency. They are also relevant and engaging. Students have the opportunity to see that academic learning is not divorced from who they are and what they bring to the table as people and as learners. These practices also show that teachers care about who students are, understand where they come from, and care that their education is meaningful and connected to their lives.

- At Fenway, students read writers of color in their humanities courses and consider focal questions such as how language use relates to power and access in society or how race, class, gender, and religion are constructed in texts. In ninth grade, they write and share their own memoirs, reflecting on their identity and developing self-awareness and social awareness skills.
- At El Puente, graduation portfolio research papers can be personalized and relevant. A student's math portfolio research paper, for example, explored attitudes about water usage in her community and included designing and conducting a survey, analyzing the survey data with statistical tests, and making recommendations based on the results. Assignments like these provide opportunities for social awareness, social responsibility, and community engagement along with demonstrating academic mastery.

While the present study provides initial support for how sociocultural variation in effective social emotional learning practice can take place in three exemplary high schools, future work should investigate more broadly how a needs-driven perspective (cf. Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Farrington et al., 2012; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012) can operate across different kinds of schools, communities, and grade levels as well as examine more in depth how various methods of sociocultural tuning influence student experiences and outcomes.

Social emotional learning through a whole-school approach

Finally, our findings illustrate what a whole-school, comprehensive approach to social emotional learning can offer in contrast to program-based interventions. While programmatic interventions may lend themselves more easily to experimental evaluation, as well as be more straightforward for traditional schools to insert into their ongoing activities and programs, they are rarely embedded into the life of schools in meaningful and sustained ways and, thus, may have limited potential to positively affect student outcomes and experiences (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). While relatively uncommon at present, social emotional learning is likely to offer the greatest benefit to students when practiced and reinforced in a comprehensive way (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; see also CASEL, 2013) that, at least, incorporates both instructional and environmental approaches (Elbertson et al., 2010; Elias, 2009).

From our in-depth look at Fenway, El Puente, and ISA's whole-school approaches to social emotional learning, we saw that attention to students' social and emotional needs, as well as opportunities for learning and skill development, were both coherently distributed and mutually constituted across key levels of the school—culture and climate, features and structures, and formal and informal practices. We found that each school employed both instructional strategies (e.g., building specific relationship skills in advisory) and environmental strategies (e.g., fostering a positive school climate through caring relationships) to support students' learning, growth,

and development. We also found that responsibility for students' social and emotional development was not limited to the domain of mental health counselors or program coordinators—all teachers, administrators, and school staff both owned and oriented their work around this critical responsibility.

We also observed that social emotional learning was not meant for students alone. In order to provide the psychological resources and support necessary to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students, supporting the social and emotional needs of school staff was also a priority. From community of practice models to professional development opportunities to antibias training, social emotional support and skill development was also practiced for teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school staff members. While a relatively new direction in the field, researchers are increasingly turning their attention toward examining and documenting how the social and emotional needs of adults in schools can be fostered and developed as well as how teacher preparation programs can integrate a focus on social emotional teaching and learning (e.g., Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010; Chang, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2013).

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

As the psychological, social, and emotional aspects of education receive increased attention in policy and practice circles, there is growing opportunity to more fully integrate a developmental, whole-child perspective into how we teach students and prepare teachers.

On the policy side⁵, there are several pieces of legislation at the federal level that seek to provide resources for social emotional learning, prepare and support teachers and education leaders, make available more funding to schools and researchers, and prioritize social emotional learning implementation. The Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2015, recent versions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization bills adopted by the House and Senate, the Education Sciences Reform Act, and the Higher Education Act include such policy innovations (CASEL, n.d.b).

At the state level, a number of states are incorporating social and emotional learning standards into career and college standards in the Common Core as well as standards for the preparation of teachers and administrators. States and districts are exploring how social emotional learning practices can transform school disciplinary practices by creating alternatives to suspension and expulsion and their disproportionate effects on students of color.

⁵ As See CASEL, n.d.b, for a more detailed discussion of policy recommendations.

Looking across our findings and current research trends, we provide the following recommendations for practitioners and policy makers:

- **Erase the cognitive/noncognitive divide in education.** Successfully educating all students requires both academic and psychological resources—the research is abundant and models of effective practice are increasing. Academic, social, and emotional factors are essentially interwoven and mutually interdependent, and should not be considered in isolation from one another. Such factors are critical to all students’ opportunity to learn, but also matter in particular ways for students of color and students in low-income contexts.
- **Leverage a “whole-child” perspective on student development.** Failure to overcome the cognitive/noncognitive divide in education practice and policy will lead to innovations and strategies that are, ultimately, suboptimal. Education more broadly, and social and emotional learning in particular, also needs to align with students’ key developmental pathways—physical (including brain development), social/interactive, psycho-emotional, ethical, linguistic, and cognitive/intellectual (cf. Comer, 2005)—that evolve through their elementary, middle school, and high school years.
- **Engage systemic, whole-school change.** Integrating social emotional learning into schools and curricula will fail to be maximally effective if done by inserting isolated programs into factory-model high schools that continue to underserve and disadvantage many students. Social emotional learning will be most effective when practiced and implemented comprehensively and coherently across key levels of the school—climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices—as well as when its practice is supported by districts.
- **Teach social emotional skills explicitly and ensure that they are reflected and reinforced by school practices.** While a whole-school approach to social emotional learning is necessary, schools should also set aside a time and place to focus explicitly on social and emotional skill-building. Schools can do this by locating a place in the curriculum, possibly in advisory class, where students and teachers can develop and practice key skills and competencies. It is critical, however, that these skills are represented and reinforced throughout the rest of the school environment, are modeled by adults in the school, and are used outside of the school context and applied to novel experiences.
- **Include a social emotional perspective in curricular and assessment policies.** Students are motivated, engaged, and responsible when their education is connected to who they are and what they care about. Curricula should be relevant, real world, and socially oriented. Assessment practices should reinforce the development of social emotional skills, enable students to apply what they learn in relevant ways, and reflect the ways in which learning is collaborative and interactional.

- **Establish approaches to discipline through practices that preserve relationships, respect dignity, and provide psychological support.** Common approaches to student discipline isolate students from their peers and teachers, expel students from the school community, offer little opportunity for students to learn from and make amends for their actions, and fail to provide psychological and emotional support. Moreover, students of color and students in poverty are disproportionately affected by harsh or zero-tolerance policies, fueling the school-to-prison pipeline, which do nothing to address the chronic stressors that often result in behavioral issues for this population of students. A social emotional perspective on student discipline offers alternative, restorative strategies that are effective and keep students in school.
- **Enable educators to become psychological, as well as academic, experts.** Pre-service teacher training programs, as well as teacher and administrator certification requirements and continuing education opportunities, need to provide educators with the skills they need to cultivate classrooms and schools that support students' psychological, social, and emotional needs along with their academic needs. To serve students well, this requires increased expertise in social emotional learning and child development. To support educators themselves, this requires social emotional skill-building and support for teachers and other educators throughout their careers as they work to meet the ever more challenging demands of today's schools.



Conclusion

This research underscores how meeting students' psychological, social, and emotional needs is not simply an add-on to the academic goal of education. The psychological side of learning is already powerfully interdependent with the academic—what matters is whether schools leverage these connections to educate the “whole child” and provide students with the psychological resources that they need to succeed in school. Social emotional learning offers an effective way to both meet students' psychological, social, emotional, and academic needs as well as prepare students to be personally and socially aware, skilled, and responsible to themselves and to their community.

As our findings show, taking a social emotional approach to education will be most effective when these strategies are developmentally informed, practiced through both whole-school implementation and direct instruction, and grounded in the needs of diverse student communities. Further, while incorporating a social emotional learning perspective is necessary to provide all students with an equitable, high-quality education suited to today's world, it is particularly critical to closing the opportunity gap and understanding the crucial ways in which schools today frequently under-serve students of color and low-income students. While psychological resources cannot replace the material resource needs of schools, they are a vital part of the opportunity equation.

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Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources

School Selection: Models of Successful Practice

The three schools we selected to participate in the study were: Fenway High School (Boston, MA), El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice (Brooklyn, NY), and International School of the Americas (San Antonio, TX). We used a rigorous screening procedure to select the schools, which involved both a quantitative assessment of each school’s demographics and performance indicators as well as a qualitative assessment of each school’s commitment to and practice of social emotional learning and social justice education. We used a three-step process to identify schools:

1. First, we conducted interviews with 10 experts in the fields of social emotional learning and social justice education. The experts were either academics or professionals who worked for leading research, practice, and policy organizations. These experts were asked to nominate schools for the study using the following criteria: schools with an explicit, well-established, school-wide focus on social emotional learning and social justice education; nonselective schools serving students in grades 9–12, excluding continuation and court schools; and schools known for fostering high levels of achievement relative to the student populations that they served. Schools were considered exemplars or models of successful practice by the panel of experts.
2. The nomination process resulted in an initial sample of 18 high schools nationwide; several schools were nominated multiple times by the panel of experts. We then created profiles for this sample of schools, which included the following quantitative and qualitative information:
 - a. Quantitative: attendance, graduation, attrition, and college-going rates; college-prep course and/or AP course enrollment; performance on state achievement tests; student enrollment and demographic data. All data were publically available.
 - b. Qualitative: school mission, vision, and educational approach; course of study, extracurricular activities, community-engaged learning activities, student support services, and other features; and admissions procedures. This information was gathered through online research and information requested from schools (e.g., school brochures).

After creating the school profiles, we narrowed the sample by identifying the schools that had strong achievement outcomes, demonstrated a commitment to social emotional learning and social justice education throughout the school’s practice, were either public or public charter schools located in urban environments, and served student communities with a range of socioeconomic and

racial/ethnic diversity. All schools served at least 50% students of color and had 20% or more students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. This process resulted in 7 schools; each school received an invitation to participate in the study if it met our qualifying criteria after a selection interview with our research team.

3. Finally, we conducted selection interviews by phone with school leaders and teachers to better understand how social emotional learning and social justice education were conceptualized, implemented, and practiced at each school. During these interviews, we investigated how social emotional learning and social justice education were fostered and sustained through each school's culture and climate, features and structures, and formal and informal practices. We probed further to learn more detail about how social emotional learning shaped both student and adult experiences at each school, how social emotional learning and social justice education were practiced both within and across grade levels, and how each school conceptualized key social emotional and social justice skills and competencies and supported them through a variety of teaching and learning opportunities (see pages 5–7 for a discussion of these key skills and competencies).

As a result of this final, qualitative assessment process, we selected three schools for the study, taking into account geographic variation, similarities and differences among school models, and diversity in the student communities served by each school (in terms of students' socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds).

Study Methods

During the 2012–13 academic year, the research team made site visits to each school and administered the student survey. Data analysis and supplemental data collection took place during the summer of 2013 through the fall of 2014. Members of the research team conducted off-site phone interviews with school leaders and teachers, participated in intensive site visits to each school for a total of 4–6 days per site, and worked closely with teachers and school leaders to collect pertinent documents, schedule interviews and focus groups with school personnel as well as students, parents, and community partners, and administer the student survey during the winter and spring of 2013. The sections below provide more information about the qualitative data collected across school sites and the quantitative data collected in the survey of student experiences.

Qualitative Data Sources: Analysis of School Practices

Table 14 on page 134 summarizes the qualitative data sources collected across schools in the study. They include: interviews and focus groups (with school administrators, teachers, students, parents/families, and community partners), observations (e.g., of classrooms, student events, and faculty meetings), and document analysis (e.g., of

school websites, student handbooks, and course syllabi). At each school, we interviewed the lead administrator multiple times as well as other key informants (e.g., school founders, veteran teachers). We talked with diverse groups of students, parents/families, as well as interviewed community partners (e.g., board members or community partner organization representatives). We targeted newer and veteran teachers as well as students across grade levels. Beyond observations of instruction, professional learning, and governance, we also observed key school events and activities, such as report card pick-up night and Junior Civil Rights Project presentations at ISA.

Table 14: Qualitative Data Sources Across Schools

Data Sources	Description	Quantity
Interviews and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: students, teachers, administrators, counselors, community partners, and parents/families • Interviews and focus groups recorded • Full and targeted transcription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30–120 minutes in duration • 52 total sessions • 122 participants
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonparticipant observations of class periods, student presentations, staff meetings, school and community events, board meetings • Both formal and informal events and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20–90 minutes in duration • 45 total sessions • Medium-to-large group activities
Documents and artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School documents: e.g., school reports, accreditation documents, student and parent handbooks, program handbooks, school brochures, school program briefs, event flyers, newsletters, calendars and schedules • Classroom documents: e.g., assessment rubrics, course syllabi, lesson plans, project plans, assignment outlines and prompts, assignment worksheets, examples of student work • Websites: e.g., school site, district profile, community partner or partner organization sites, student portfolios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95 print and online documents

Protocols for observations, interviews, and focus groups with school staff and community partners, as well as qualitative data analysis strategy, centered around identifying how social emotional learning and social justice education were practiced across school climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices; evaluating how each school conceptualized, implemented, and practiced social emotional learning and social justice education; and examining how key social emotional learning and social justice education skills and competencies prevalent in the literature both converged with and diverged from each school's understanding and practice (see pages 8–12 for a discussion of these key skills and competencies). Focus groups and interviews with students and parents focused on their experiences with the school and with specific activities and events. We also tailored protocols to the role of the respondent as well as the context of the school.

After the primary site visits were complete, the research team organized and coded the data thematically and identified areas for further examination and analysis. We then wrote in-depth case studies of each school site, conducting follow-up conversations and research as needed. After the individual school case studies were complete, they were checked with key staff members at each school for accuracy and factual information and updated to reflect feedback. Finally, we conducted the cross-case analysis by analyzing the individual cases for similarities and differences across themes and data sources (cf. Yin, 2003, 2009, 2011).

Quantitative Data Sources: Student Experience Survey

We surveyed a sample of 10th and 12th grade students at each school (N = 363) to gauge students' attitudes about school, perceptions of school climate, motivation for attending school, attitudes about learning and achievement, life values, attainment expectations, and experiences of personal and academic support. The majority of survey items were drawn from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002) for two main reasons (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002, 2004). First, to examine how students' experiences in social emotional learning-focused high schools compare to students in other high schools, we identified a national dataset that assessed constructs of interest to the current study and had publically available data for students in the dataset. Second, using schools in the ELS: 2002 dataset, we identified a set of school-level variables to create a sample of national comparison schools with similar school characteristics to the schools in our study. Schools were selected to be in the national comparison sample if they met the following criteria: 1) the school was located in an urban environment; 2) the school was a public school; and 3) the school free/reduced lunch percentage matched the free/reduced lunch range percentage for the three social emotional learning schools in the current study (i.e., the indicator was 21% or higher). A total of 100 schools in the dataset met these criteria, which yielded a sample of 2063 students. See Table 15 on page 136 for demographic information for both samples.

Students in our sample, referred to as the social emotional learning schools, or “SEL schools sample,” were more likely to be female, Latino, and have college-educated parents than students in the ELS: 2002 sample.

Table 15: Demographics for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Schools and National Comparison Schools Survey Samples

Demographics	SEL Schools	Comparison Schools
Sample size	363	2063
Number of schools	3	100
Gender (%)		
Female	61.0	52.0
Male	39.0	48.0
Student race/ethnicity (%)		
Latino	62.0	31.0
White	21.0	19.0
African American	12.0	28.0
Asian	3.0	17.0
Other	2.0	5.0
Mother/Female guardian education (%)		
No high school diploma	14.5	24.3
High school diploma/Some college	33.9	41.6
College degree	19.4	11.3
Advanced degree	26.7	7.7
Don't know/doesn't apply	5.5	15.1
Father/Male guardian education (%)		
No high school diploma	11.4	21.5
High school diploma/Some college	33.5	39.0
College degree	16.2	11.2
Advanced degree	26.1	7.7
Don't know/doesn't apply	12.9	20.6
Free or reduced lunch* (%)	23.0–83.0	21.0–100.0

Notes: The ELS: 2002 data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002, 2004) we use for this study were collected when students were in either 10th grade (ELS: 2002 first survey administration) or 12th grade (ELS: 2002 second follow-up survey administration in 2004), depending on question availability. Demographics are based on 10th grade survey administration. * = school-level, rather than individual-level, demographic indicator.

Sources: SEL schools sample collected by authors; comparison schools sample drawn from ELS: 2002 dataset, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002; authors' calculations.

Students in the SEL schools sample responded to 20 survey questions, most of which had multiple subitems per question. The majority of questions were drawn from either the first administration of the ELS: 2002 student survey or the second administration of the ELS: 2002 student survey, conducted during a follow-up study in 2004. We added a small number of our own items to probe students further on their social emotional learning experiences. The survey was administered in group sessions during the school day in the spring of 2013, and was completed online using the Qualtrics online survey tool. The response rate per school for students in our sample was: 66% for Fenway High School, 61% for El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, and 86% for International School of the Americas (ISA), with an average response rate of 71%. Out of 363 respondents, 184 were in 10th grade and 150 were in 12th grade; 29 participants declined to state their grade.

We compared survey responses from students in our SEL schools sample to students in the national comparison schools sample by analyzing the percentage of valid responses with a chi-square test of independence to test for equity of proportions. The valid response range for schools in the SEL schools sample was 75–100% and 58–97% for schools in the national comparison sample. A Pearson’s chi-square test determined whether there was a statistical difference between the two groups of respondents, and we report both the chi-square value and *p* value in the text. A *p* value of < 0.05 indicates a statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level. When comparing items with more than two categories, a z-test of column proportions was conducted along with the chi-square to test for simple effects.

We also conducted several supplementary analyses. First, to test for effects of school size, we stratified the national sample of comparison schools by the number of students served by each school. Variability in the sample enabled us to split the comparison sample into small (schools serving fewer than 1,000 students) vs. medium-to-large schools (schools serving more than 1,000 students). There were 12 small schools in the ELS: 2002 dataset, yielding a sample of 219 students and 63 medium-to-large schools, yielding a sample of 1,337 students⁶. Second, we compared the students in our SEL schools sample to all high school students in the ELS: 2002 dataset to test whether the pattern of effects we observed held if we looked at a broader sample of schools and students. Finally, we compared students within the SEL schools sample by grade level to examine whether 10th vs. 12th grade students reported different school experiences. None of these supplemental analyses demonstrated significant differences in students’ response patterns, indicating that our initial pattern of effects holds across these variables.

⁶ As In the ELS: 2002 dataset, school size data were available for 75 schools out of the 100 schools selected for the national comparison sample. The 25 schools that were not included when testing for effects of school size had missing data.

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