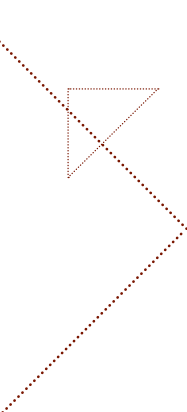


Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Learning at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice

Jacqueline Ancess and Bethany Rogers





This study was prepared with support from the NoVo Foundation. The authors gratefully acknowledge their support. A special thanks to the El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice community—in particular, Principal Wanda Vazquez—for making this research possible. The research was conducted independently by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and does not represent the views of the sponsors.

Suggested citation: Aness, J., & Rogers, B. (2015). *Social emotional learning and social justice learning at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

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Table of Contents

Project Overview.....	1
Social Emotional Learning in Diverse High Schools Study.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
Research Methodology.....	3
Resources.....	5
A Look Inside El Puente: Senior Praxis Seminar.....	6
School History and Context.....	9
Vision for Education: El Puente’s Approach to Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education.....	14
Social Emotional Learning: Educating Whole Human Beings.....	14
Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education: Embedded in a Community’s Sociopolitical Context.....	17
School Climate and Culture.....	19
Relationships as the Foundation for School as a Caring Community.....	20
The Role of Relationships in Community Responsibility.....	24
The Role of Relationships to Leverage Achievement.....	26
School Features and Structures.....	30
Academy Structure and Curriculum and Instructional Program.....	30
Advisory.....	32
School Size, Staff Roles, and Governance.....	32
Partnership with El Puente CBO.....	34
Integrated Arts Project Program.....	35
College Counseling Program.....	36
School Practices.....	41
Curriculum and Instructional Program.....	41
Graduation by Performance Assessment.....	45
Cultivating Student Voice.....	46
Holistic Approach to Failure.....	47
Restorative Justice.....	48
Town Hall Meetings.....	49
Helping Peers.....	50
Summary of Lessons Learned.....	51
Considerations and Challenges.....	53
Accountability and the Common Core.....	53
The Heart of Social Emotional Learning at El Puente.....	53
Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources.....	55
Appendix B: El Puente Freshman Orientation Conceptual Framework.....	58
Appendix C: Fly Girl Fest Agenda.....	59
References.....	60

Project Overview

Social Emotional Learning in Diverse High Schools Study

The psychological, social, and emotional aspects of education have enjoyed increased attention in recent years as oft-termed “non-cognitive factors” and “soft skills” have gained traction in research, policy, and practice circles as major drivers of student achievement. Despite this attention, the accountability-driven practices and policies that are the legacy of No Child Left Behind, and that still dominate the education world today, often leave them out of the picture. Further, 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 frequently underserved by the schools they attend. While critical to providing students with an equitable education suited to today’s world, 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 and emotional learning aims to do just that across research, policy, and practice arenas.

Much of the existing research on social and emotional learning, however, has focused on elementary and middle schools. This is likely because fostering the development of social and 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 primary 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 and 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, a student survey, and a comparison of student survey results to a national sample of students, this project investigates 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 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. This study was funded by the NoVo Foundation.

Research Questions

This case study is one of four reports—three case studies and a cross-case analysis—written by SCOPE on effective social emotional learning practice in diverse high schools. The reports investigate the following research questions, with the case studies focusing primarily on the first two questions and the cross-case report addressing all three:

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?

The high schools selected to participate in this 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).

Research Methodology

The researchers employed a multi-method, multiple case study research design. Schools were selected using a rigorous screening procedure that 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.

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 publicly 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, 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.

Table 1: Key Levels of Schooling Contexts

Level of school system	Definition	Examples
School climate & 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 • Expectations of graduates
School features & 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 • 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. See cross-case report for an extended discussion and reference list: <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1310>

Drawing on an ecological or sociocultural systems data analysis strategy, observations, interviews, focus groups, and document and artifact analyses centered on identifying how social emotional learning and social justice education were practiced across key levels of the school context: climate and culture, features and structures, and formal and informal practices (see Table 1, page 3).

Researchers also evaluated how social emotional learning and social justice education were conceptualized at each school and examined 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 Table 2).

Table 2: Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education Skills and Competencies

Social Emotional Learning Skills & Competencies	Social Justice Education Skills & Competencies
Self-awareness: accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.	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.
Self-management: regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.	Social responsibility: understanding how one’s actions impact others; treating others with respect; acting with ethical standards; maintaining relationships and connections.
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.	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.
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.	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.
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.	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 change agent and organize for social action.

Notes: Social emotional learning and social justice education skills and competencies. See cross-case report for an extended discussion and reference list: <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1310>

During the 2012–2013 academic year, the research team made site visits to each school and administered the student survey. 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; 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 administered the student survey during the winter and spring of 2013. Data analysis and supplemental data collection took place during the summer of 2013 through the fall of 2014.

The case studies have been verified with key members of each of the schools for factual accuracy. Additional detail about the data collection activities for this study can be found in Appendix A. More information on the study’s background, research design, and methodology can be found in the cross-case report main text and appendices.

Resources

Findings from the Social Emotional Learning in Diverse High Schools Study are published in three case studies, a cross-case report, a research brief, and a technical report. Visit <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1310> to view these products.

A Look Inside El Puente: Senior Praxis Seminar

Late spring sunshine illuminated an El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice classroom where the Senior Praxis Seminar met. Over the hum of a window unit air conditioner, humanities facilitator Carlos Rosello welcomed thirteen seniors—eight girls and five boys, all Latino—who filed into class. Chart paper covered the front wall of the classroom, bearing notes on “Stop and Frisk Myths” and “Stop and Frisk Facts,” gleaned from the New York Civil Liberties Union. The notes featured hypothetical scenarios, such as what to do if the police stop you or start to question you.

Gesturing to the notes, Rosello invoked the El Puente principle of “each one, teach one,” reminding students of their responsibility not only to learn, but also to share their knowledge with others in their community. He explained how some students in the class, as part of their class project, were preparing a workshop for freshmen on New York City’s Stop and Frisk policy, a law-enforcement strategy that has been found to disproportionately target and affect young men of color. Rosello encouraged the students to use the first few minutes of class to take down the notes: “You can take pictures, but I still want you to copy it. I don’t want you to forget it—someone’s life is at stake. The more you know, the more informed you are, the better the workshop will be.”



Rosello then opened the discussion by giving students “props” for making the school’s recent field day a success—organizing the event, collecting permissions, making sandwiches, wearing T-shirts, and being leaders. He took the opportunity to check in with each student: “Anyone want to say how [you] felt about yesterday’s [field day]?” He does not miss a student—he bantered with each, followed up on desultory responses, and focused students’ attention on “something really important” that happened in the tug-of-war between the sexes, which the women won:

What did the women do that the men didn’t do prior to the tug-of-war? Yeah, they made a plan, talked to each other. Kind of like when you work in life, [you] need your anchor. Who’s going to hold you after high school?... When things get tough, how you going to rebuild this network of support?

The rest of the class involved a conversation with some visitors—representatives from an organization called Justice Matters—and a run-through of the students’ Stop and Frisk workshop design. Rosello asked students to form a circle and introduce themselves to the Justice Matters representatives, offering not only their names, but also something unique about themselves. When it was their turn, the Justice Matters visitors presented and explained the focus of their organization’s work—racial justice—and their presence at El Puente. With introductions out of the way, Rosello turned to the group of students responsible for planning the Stop and Frisk workshop, to tell them it was their turn to present, and that the class, along with the Justice Matters representatives, would give them feedback.

An outgoing senior, who was set to attend State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz in the fall of 2013, plugged his computer into the projector in preparation for the presentation while Rosello reminded the students that they needed to focus on the content of the PowerPoint presentation. Before launching into the presentation, the student presenter provided some detail about what the workshop would look like overall. He explained that, ideally, the workshop would be held in the gym or auditorium, and be preceded by a flier to orient freshmen to the topic. When the freshmen entered the workshop, he went on, he and his co-organizers would play a video of a kid getting stopped and frisked, followed by an icebreaker activity that another senior on the team would lead. The icebreaker would survey freshmen students’ opinion of the police, perhaps posing the question, “Do I feel safe around the police?” After a brief presentation to convey some basic information, the freshmen would be separated into male and female groups for discussion. The wrap-up would leave them with questions to reflect on (e.g., what did you get from this, what did you learn?).

Rosello probed several of the group’s decisions and ideas for the overall format of the event before letting the student go ahead with the presentation that would take place toward the end of the freshman workshop. The student presenter went over

general facts, defining what Stop and Frisk is, who is involved, and how it affects students at El Puente. He went on: those who are stopped should remain calm and get the officer's badge number; they should remember to keep their hands to themselves and not run; and they should ask basic questions, such as "Why am I being detained?" and "Can I leave?" to make police aware that those stopped know their rights. The student presenter recommended the Stop and Frisk Watch app, produced by the New York Civil Liberties Union, which can record on a smartphone what transpires during a stop.

One of the Justice Matters representatives asked, "So, I reach for my phone?" A chorus of "no!" filled the room. The NYCLU app, it turned out, was marketed as a way for witnesses, not targets, to capture audio and video recordings of an encounter. At this point, Rosello broke in. "This is why I'm concerned about content—what are your rights? Like, consent to search. [You can] tell the cops, I do not consent to search." The class discussed having a vocabulary list, or set of terms, that students should know in the case of a stop.

Rosello, as well as the visitors from Justice Matters, provided feedback on the presentation: "I'm curious if you're planning an opportunity during the workshop to have genders speak to each other I should know how sisters are feeling about this." Rosello then ended the class, encouraging more recommendations for how to improve the workshop. He reminded the students, "Practice makes perfect.... We need to break it down more, understand more...*poco a poco* [little by little]." This was a first step in making it better.

Not your typical senior course offering, the Senior Praxis Seminar supports learning and projects where students practice Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire's theory of "see, analyze, act." This Senior Praxis and its example of the student-devised, -organized and -conducted workshop on "Stop and Frisk," as well as the genial but firm, personalized facilitation practiced by Rosello, is but one useful illustration of how the interconnection of social emotional learning and social justice education shape the aims and practices of El Puente Academy. Curricular content focuses explicitly on social justice and its relevance in students' lives, while the carefully scaffolded and personalized pedagogical practice affords the development of student voice and agency. From Rosello's persistent efforts to draw on his relationship with each student to involve them, to the emphasis on cultivating responsibility among seniors for "educating" underclassmen in their community about a significant issue affecting their community, to the dedication of a course toward the development of students' critical acuties and actions on behalf of social justice, this vignette provides an apt example of how social emotional learning and social justice education is embedded in school life at El Puente.

School History and Context

In 1993, El Puente—the community-based organization (CBO)—founded El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice as part of the first wave of new, small public high schools that were created in New York City under the sponsorship of the Fund for Public Education (later New Visions for Public Schools). Understanding El Puente means understanding something about the unique character of the El Puente CBO and the Southside Williamsburg, Brooklyn community it primarily serves. Back in the 1940s, the neighborhood was a destination for Puerto Ricans who, drawn by jobs and the Great Migration, created a vibrant Latino community. But the neighborhood, nicknamed *Los Sures* (a Spanish translation for “Southside”), declined over the following decades, falling victim to lost industry and misguided urban renewal policies. By the early 1980s, the area was one of the “most violent” in the city, a “cesspool of gangs and drugs,” according to one journalist (Bontemps, 2013). Luis Garden Acosta, who cofounded the school along with Frances Lucerna and other local activists, created the El Puente CBO in 1982 not only as a bulwark against the tide of violence that swept the neighborhood in the 1970s and 80s, but also as a bridge of activism and community empowerment (*el puente* translates from Spanish to English as “the bridge”). In the words of the El Puente CBO’s executive director, Frances Lucerna—who also served as the founding principal of El Puente Academy—the El Puente CBO is:

A human rights organization for [the] purpose of nurturing young people for peace and justice. We honed the practice of supporting young people that honored them as human beings that took into account their spirit. This was the foundation of our process of relationship building with young people—spirits and souls [are] important for this journey we take together.

Indeed, in the decades since its inception, the El Puente CBO has joined with other community-based organizations 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. c).

El Puente Academy builds on this heritage. By its 10th year of operation, the El Puente CBO had seen the success of its 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. after-school program model: young people went through the program, passed the GED test, enrolled in college, graduated, and then entered the professions. When Lucerna and Acosta, El Puente CBO CEO, were offered the opportunity to start a school, they saw it as a unique chance to do something educationally different, based on the precepts of their successful after-school program model. Hector Calderon, the school’s second principal and a former art specialist at the El Puente CBO, explained that they wanted to “figure out what could be right, to imagine something different.” To Lucerna, it was

an act of self-determination—creating the school could effect positive change in the larger community:

Opening the school was motivated by right to self-determination, a poor Latino community’s right to self-determination. We were the second-poorest Congressional district in United States at the time. We had the worst schools, high violence, drugs. We saw schools that were destructive to students and their culture, their being—an assault on them. We decided to take back the community, invest in the community. We were community organizers and advocates, especially with regard to schools...

What they imagined, 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 teacher summed it up nicely, characterizing El Puente as “a social justice organization trying to do a school, not a school trying to do social justice.”

Both the motives and the personal histories of the founders influenced the character of the school. “Our own liberation was invested in doing this work,” explained Calderon. Lucerna and Acosta came from a tradition of liberation theology, which focuses on creating social change to liberate people from social, political, racial, and economic oppression. Acosta was a member of NYC Young Lords during the 1969–70 years, when the group led community organizing for Puerto Rican self-determination and opposed social inequality (Lee, 2009). Through all of these experiences, the founders grew to believe that self-determination and empowerment require membership and leadership from within the community, not reliance on the existing professional social service model, which Susan Sandler, an El Puente CBO Board Member, characterized as “professionals from outside the community providing services to a passive community of recipients.” As Hector Sanchez, a history facilitator at the school, summarized, “We are constant in that we are trying to nurture leaders in social justice” and thereby build the capacity of the neighborhood itself. Suggestive of that nurturing, coaching presence, teachers at El Puente are called “facilitators,” indicating what their role in the classroom should be and how it should operate. Students, facilitators, community members, and all staff are addressed by their first names, demonstrating the school’s commitment to close personal relationships and equality. Seventy-five percent of facilitators have been at the school for more than ten years.

Because of the school’s unique roots, there was “no separation between school and community as there usually is,” according to Lucerna, who added, “The faculty lived in the community and learning was connected to effecting change in the community.” As a result, El Puente did not become “schoolified,” explained Sandler. She emphasized, “They were able to keep the youth workers and staff who were at the

CBO,” thereby providing continuity and strengthening those connections. Because Lucerna had state certification in administration, she became the principal. Hector Calderon acquired his BA and became a teacher; he then obtained an administrator’s license to succeed Lucerna in the principalship. Indeed, as a measure of their commitment, several of the original teachers are still teaching or involved in support capacities at the school twenty years later. Today, the connection between El Puente Academy and the CBO remains very close. Lucerna meets weekly with the current principal, Wanda Vazquez, to work on continued development of the school and ways of sustaining their organizational partnership and infrastructure so that it models one institution, a joint school and CBO.

In 2008, El Puente Academy relocated to a Hasidic Jewish neighborhood in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, where it is housed in a small four-story building—a former Catholic school, which Lucerna actually attended as a child. The small corridors with classrooms on the second through fourth floors provide a sense of intimacy. Student work and school banners decorate the walls. Larger-than-life original murals of human rights activists, including Rosa Parks and Huey Newton, anchor the staircase landings. The office hums with students, facilitators, and staff passing in and out; everyone is greeted kindly, by name. There is a sense of liveliness as students change classes or anticipate after-school events and activities.

El Puente Academy serves an unscreened population of just under 220 students who are predominantly Latino and low-income (Table 3). Originally, students who enrolled at the school lived locally in the Williamsburg community. More recently,

as the local Latino population has declined and dispersed in the face of Williamsburg’s gentrification and the Hasidic community’s expansion, students also come from other neighborhoods in the city. About 90% of El Puente students have selected the school through New York City’s high school choice admission process; however, the New York City Department of Education assigns some students who did not get into their high school of choice to El Puente. Vazquez explained that, over time, those students who might at first be resistant to the school are changed by the time they graduate: “Staff works with them—owns them. [The attitude is:] ‘We accept you, as you are. You are ours.’”

Table 3. El Puente Student Demographics

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice 2012–2013 Demographics Grades 9–12	
Enrollment	219
Race/Ethnicity	--
African American	10%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	1%
Latino	87%
White	2%
Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch	83%
English Language Learners	19%
Special Education	23%
Gender	--
Female	53%
Male	47%

Source: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm>

The majority of incoming students underperform in literacy and math, with scores of 1 (below basic) and 2 (basic) on a scale where 4 indicates advanced and 3 proficient on New York State’s 8th grade math and literacy tests, and the school’s proportion of special education students (23% of the school’s population) and English language learners (19% of the school population) is higher than the city average across schools (New York City Department of Education, n.d.). Eighty-three percent of the population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. Nevertheless, across recent years, the school has achieved a four-year graduation rate that has exceeded 68%, and its five-year graduation rate has reached 80%—above the New York City district average (Table 4). As a member of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, El Puente students are exempt from all but the state’s English Regents exam (see Table 2 notes for more details about Regents exams). El Puente’s students, however, pass this exam at a higher rate than the district average.

Table 4. El Puente Student Performance Indicators Compared to District

Performance Indicator	El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice Grades 9–12				New York City Public Schools Grades 9–12			
	2008– 2009	2009– 2010	2010– 2011	2011– 2012	2008– 2009	2009– 2010	2010– 2011	2011– 2012
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: [Accountability/data/GraduationDropoutReports/default.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/GraduationDropoutReports/default.htm); schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm. Data represents past four years for which indicators are publicly 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, math, and 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 only to graduate. Students typically take the English Regents exam in 11th grade. Graduation rates are calculated by cohort. Cohort is defined as all students who first entered ninth grade four 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: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/data/stats/arreports.htm>; <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/>; <http://schools.nyc.gov/>

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 department’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. b). Although students tend not to be accepted at the four-year City University of New York (CUNY) colleges because they tend not to score high enough on the SATs, they are regularly accepted at a number of quality four-year private post-secondary institutions as well as colleges in the State University of New York (SUNY) system, where El Puente’s college counselor, Catherina Villafuerte, has established relationships and can make viable matches. Sixty percent of the 2014 graduating class were accepted to four-year colleges.

Vision for Education: El Puente’s Approach to Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education

As “a social justice organization trying to do a school,” El Puente explicitly regards promoting social justice and human development as the school’s *raison d’être*. Tug at these threads and the fabric of the school will unravel. The pursuit of social justice, human development, and “wholeness” requires the school to be institutionally responsive to students’ social and emotional development and sets the stage for social emotional learning. Through social emotional learning, the school aims to nurture students’ potential for self-determination and empowerment toward the end of bringing positive change, through social and political action, to their community. Put another way, social emotional learning is indistinguishable from the school’s broad, human development–inspired perspective on what it means to educate. Social emotional learning occurs at El Puente in response to the particular population of students served and is customized to fit their specific needs.

Social Emotional Learning: Educating Whole Human Beings

As Principal Vazquez described, El Puente’s idea of “educating” is not restricted to promoting academic growth alone, but rather encompasses the larger work of holistic youth development in context. This understanding of “education” as a larger task of human development springs directly from the school’s roots as a communi-



ty-based organization and the practices honed there for supporting and honoring young people “[because] spirits and souls are important for this journey we take together.” As Principal Vazquez observed, 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 concurred: “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.” As a result, social emotional learning at El Puente does not operate as a discrete practice or specific program to be implemented, but instead as a pervasive way of working that is built on the foundation of rich, strong relationships among those in the school.

In understanding their students as “whole human beings,” El Puente educators recognize the social, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being of students as conditions necessary for academic learning to take place. Part of the faculty’s charge is to help students see that connection and give students the tools they need to address their feelings productively, rather than counterproductively or destructively. This may involve students learning how to recognize their thoughts and feelings more clearly, cultivating relationship skills, helping to control stress, and managing inter- and intrapersonal conflict. As Assistant Principal Waleska Velez noted, many students come in “not knowing how to deal with issues they face.”

[The students] never learned to deal with [their] own emotions and that shows up in many ways [including] academics, interactions with one another. Here [at El Puente, we] pay very close attention to that, and try to help [students] deal with their emotions and learn how to confront the issues they are facing and really address what is happening with them, so they are able to function in the classroom and learn what [they] need to learn. If they are struggling with certain things and not able to concentrate, then they are not able to learn.

Because their approach insists on recognizing students as complex, multifaceted individuals, El Puente educators are powerfully attuned to their students and the sorts of experiences and challenges that accompany students to school.

El Puente’s approach to educating the students it serves acknowledges and affirms students’ cultural backgrounds, focuses on students’ assets and potential rather than their deficits, and makes connections to urban youth 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.” As a result, El Puente places a premium on building human capital within the community—an important reason the school was created. Indeed, learning at El Puente does not stop with the development of individual consciousness and students’ whole human identity; rather it uses these burgeoning understandings

to illuminate students' connections to their community. The idea is that students' recognition that they belong to a larger community and heritage will help them to better understand their own identities, as well as to appreciate their obligations and allegiance to that community. Students not only can bring who they are to school, they are also welcomed and encouraged to use school as a means of enriching their knowledge of themselves and their culture.

In fostering such awareness and perspectives in young people, particularly as they relate to community and justice, El Puente promotes a communitarian vision, in which education is a public good: the skills and habits cultivated not only benefit individuals, but also enrich the whole community, in stark contrast to the more market-based view of education as solely an individual benefit or good (Labaree, 1997). The resulting interdependence provides students a microcosm for seeing how their actions affect others and what it takes to maintain relationships. At the same time, the content of the curriculum introduces students to a larger picture, in which they can see themselves sharing the fate and common destiny of their local community and begin to understand how the actions of other dominant groups have constrained the opportunities of Latinos in the United States over time.

As one facilitator reminded us, “You need to focus on who your population is—oppression and liberation are essential to their [El Puente students'] story.” Because El Puente serves a community that has long suffered poverty and oppression, and because of the explicit social justice stance the school takes from the vantage point of a disenfranchised community, the interpretation of some skills and habits associated with social emotional learning and social justice education learning differ from more mainstream constructions. For instance, in mainstream conceptions of social emotional learning prevalent in the research community, “responsible decision making”—one of five key dimensions of social emotional learning—is defined as “the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others” (e.g., Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10). For the El Puente population, “responsible decision making” might, in fact, mean something different. It can require, for example, the contravening of existing social norms and ethics, or even the well-being of self, in the fight for social justice—just as the Civil Rights Movement required of its participants over forty years ago (see Watts & Flanagan, 2007, p. 782). Because students at El Puente are predominantly poor and Latino in a society characterized by growing inequality and, at best, ambivalent and unsettled about race, supporting students' social and emotional development needs to be socioculturally informed, relevant, and responsive.

Freire's concept of a “humanizing pedagogy” offers a philosophical map of El Puente's approach to education. Specifically, humanization is “the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative,

creative persons who participate in and with the world” (Freire as cited in Salazar, 2013, p. 126). Freirean pedagogy insists that educators “listen to their students and build on their knowledge and experiences in order to engage in contextualized, dynamic, and personalized educational approaches that further the goals of humanization and transformation,” explicitly arguing against the use of “reproducible technical concepts or universally applicable and decontextualized techniques, skills, or methods” (Salazar, 2013, p. 126; see also Aronowitz, 1993; Bartolomé, 1994; Brady, 1994; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Macedo, 1994; and Roberts, 2000). In adopting these precepts, the vision of education that the school offers provides an antidote to traditional notions of what it means to educate and to what end.

Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education: Embedded in a Community’s Sociopolitical Context

El Puente’s conceptualization of social justice education reflects a profound 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 from which El Puente draws students, and the wider world beyond students’ local contexts. Those injustices include experiences such as encountering the disproportionate impact of New York City’s Stop and Frisk policy, as discussed in the opening vignette, or the prevalence of redlining practices in the local community. Social injustice is not an abstraction at El Puente, but a powerful force that impacts its students and anchors the faculty’s commitment to their work.

As the school’s special education coordinator, Varuni Tiruchelvam, explained, “All the facilitators have an understanding of oppression and liberation in their own lives.” A key aspect of teachers’ identification with their students, then, lies in their common backgrounds and experiences of oppression—a critical distinguishing factor of the school. This is not an instance of adults from privileged backgrounds trying to “help at-risk students” through social justice education, but rather an indigenous movement to initiate students into a shared community with a common history, and to provide students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and agency to become leaders in that community. As El Puente CBO board member Sandler asserted, “Taking action is empowering.” Fostering empowerment or agency among students functions as a transformative antidote to the condition of disempowerment that inhibits students’ social, economic, and political mobility. Given the racial and political status and experiences of oppression that El Puente educators share with their students, their social justice teaching is akin to both a racial and political socialization, in which teachers “are interpreting” for their students “how the political order works for people ‘like us’” (Watts & Flanagan, 2007, p. 785).

Social justice education at El Puente requires the promotion of a critical and action-oriented stance toward addressing social injustice. Consequently, social justice

education as practiced at El Puente is not passive, but rather, engages students in knowledge production and social transformation. The curriculum and teaching help students to understand real-world issues and problems, and aid in developing students' critical capacities to act for change. As researchers Watts and Flanagan (2007) argue, "thoughtful interrogation of authority is essential to good citizenship..." (p. 782). But interrogation is not enough; students must use what they have learned to *act for change*. Here, El Puente educators again take heed of Freire and his philosophy of the "action-reflection cycle." As El Puente facilitator Rosello describes: "most important... you [the student] are an agent of change. [It's] theory having legs, Paulo [Freire] on praxis—we live that here."

Other staff also remarked on how El Puente's framework for social justice education is deeply indebted to Freire's work as well as to the influences of Theatre of the Oppressed—a theoretical framework and set of techniques developed by Brazilian artist and activist Augusto Boal—and liberation theology, all of which focus on creating social change to liberate people from social, political, racial, and economic oppression. Additionally, the ideals of the Young Lords shaped the early beliefs of school founders Lucerna and Acosta and tied them and the evolving philosophy of the school to an important historical tradition, represented in the Highlander Folk School (a social justice leadership training center) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, which worked to develop leadership among ordinary citizens committed to the Civil Rights Movement). In this tradition, self-determination and empowerment come about through membership and leadership from within the community: that is, such organizations strive to build grassroots-based agency aimed at changing the unequal power relations that lead to and perpetuate injustice in the community. At El Puente, the acquisition of self-determination and empowerment—seen, for instance, in students' access to higher education and the expected rewards of economic and social mobility that come from obtaining a college degree—does not mean that young people will leave or abandon the community, but rather that they will stay, give back, or lead for change from within the community. In this context, school reflects a movement for change, rather than the establishment's tool for social reproduction.

School Climate and Culture

Level of school system	Definition	El Puente 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• Use of relationships as an organizational principle for creating school as a caring community, building community responsibility, and leveraging achievement• Relationship norms and expectations

Social emotional learning and social justice education are an integral part of the El Puente Academy’s culture and climate, embedded in the school’s vision for education: “to make a student fully human, a whole human being,” and thereby enable that student to liberate him- or herself and transform the world. These purposes derive from the CBO’s goals of self-determination, liberation, empowerment, social justice, and honoring young people as human beings. A detailed expression of El Puente’s norms, values, and expectations can be found in the school’s mission statement, *Twelve Fundamental Principles, Community Norms, and Soul Standards*. The school’s vision—that becoming a whole human being combines self-awareness, social awareness, and self-actualization with responsibility to others, to one’s community, and to the world—identifies conditions and a set of indicators for social emotional learning and social justice education.

For example, the school’s mission statement spells out El Puente’s intentions as follows:

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.

Especially notable is an explicit articulation of the school’s perspective on humanity and learning, in which students are viewed holistically and learning is understood as a reciprocal, dynamic process that occurs by way of relationships. In its public form, El Puente’s mission statement is presented on a page that also lists structures, resources, and rituals/practices that the school relies on to operationalize its mission.

Building on fundamental ideas found in the mission statement, and borrowed from the principles that guide the CBO, the school's *Twelve Fundamental Principles* identify the following areas of focus to articulate and prioritize discrete aspects of the school's overall 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.

Relationships as the Foundation for School as a Caring Community

Relationships are a fundamental organizing principle of the school through which the school's core values and goals of wholeness, self-determination, liberation, leadership development, and community development are communicated and pursued, and they are a powerful mechanism for the enactment of social emotional learning and social justice education. The structure of El Puente Academy as a community nested in other communities—El Puente CBO and the Williamsburg Latino Community—is webbed with relationships—student–teacher relationships, student–peer relationships, teacher–peer relationships, administrator–teacher relationships, and staff–parent, and school- and student-CBO partner relationships. El Puente social worker, Gloria Diaz, commented, “We encourage students to develop relationships with teachers and administrators because this is the support system.” Social studies facilitator Christopher

Costello remarked that, “Every staff member knows every student’s name and their stories—it is [our] mode of operation.” Another El Puente facilitator pointed out, “We develop really great personal relationships [with our students].” According to college counselor Villafuerte, relationships make “students feel that they are important to the staff—they matter.” One student even characterized feeling the “love that Wanda [the principal] has for me.” According to El Puente CBO board member Sandler, where many schools tend to use the language of caring, El Puente is intentional in its use of the word “love,” which is stated in its mission and *Twelve Principles* as part of the creation of community, underscoring the nexus of community–school relationship attachments.

While caring relationships provide an important structure for student’s academic, personal, and social achievement, one teacher noted that El Puente also focuses on relationships because they form a foundation for the holistic development of young people and connect young people to a caring community: “It’s not about making everybody get 100s,” but rather, about extending oneself to the student, to “help him or her see who we are.” The teacher here invokes a collective—“we”—that is echoed by a colleague, who notes that teachers allow students “to see our side, our human side... That honesty with students allows us to be on the journey with them.”

This sense of interdependence and collectivity 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.” A veteran teacher went further, reiterating the commonalities and commitment that bind teachers to their students:

We [staff/teachers] grew up here. Telling students that we all suffer and feel pain—it is what you do with that [that matters]. What does the growing look like? We heal together—intellectual, body, and spirit must be fully developed to be free. What does freedom look like? Our whole school is doing that—we practice our mission.

Students concurred, describing a school experience defined by uniquely caring relationships with 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 safe, trusted, and cared for.

Parents echo the sentiment that the school is a caring community. 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.”

These strong relational bonds produce a sense of El Puente staff as “being there”—meaning staff accessibility, visibility, responsiveness, reliability, and social responsibility—for students as well as parents. One parent explained, “The college counselor and others have told him [her son] that if he needs them, they are there for him.” As another observed:

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.

Another explained:

Teachers reach out, ‘You can call me.’ You get teachers’ name and contact information and you can contact them any time to find out about your child’s progress. Staff is always there for the parents—the principal and assistant principal as well. They are all here to help the student. They go beyond than what a normal big school would do to help students.

One commented about Principal Vazquez: “The principal once said to me, ‘We will keep school open for a longer day. I would rather have the kids here than on [the] street.’ You don’t hear principals say that. My older son was in a big high school, and he got lost.”

The school’s *Community Norms* serve to set norms and expectations for how one should behave and interact with others as a member of the El Puente community.

Community Norms

- 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.

The *Community Norms* help to make important aspects of social emotional learning and social justice education explicit, promoting 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. The town hall meetings will be discussed later in the report.

The impact of caring relationships becomes apparent in comparisons of the school to a family. A staff member, who graduated from El Puente years earlier, 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].

One alumna we interviewed returned to El Puente as an intern after graduation from college and a brief career in the financial industry, in order to reconnect to values she found missing in her former career.

Parents also concur that the school is like a family. Says one: “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 said with delight, when she comes to the school, everyone knows *her* name, even students! The school’s parent coordinator, Andalina Capellan, 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 level of acceptance contributes to the high level of trust that, in turn, generates the sense of school as family.

Table 5. Student Perceptions of School Climate

How much do you agree with the following... (% agree)	El Puente N = 71	Comparison Schools N = 415	χ^2
Students and teachers get along	84.5	58.8	17.11***
The teaching is good	91.5	73.1	11.23***
Teachers are interested in students	87.3	68.8	10.17***
There is real school spirit	62.0	53.3	1.84
School rules are fair	66.2	47.4	8.51**
Everyone knows the school rules	84.5	82.6	0.16
I often feel put down by other students	20.0	17.7	0.22
I feel safe	83.1	79.2	0.57
Students are friends with others from different racial/ethnic backgrounds	88.7	89.3	0.02

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the El Puente 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.

When surveyed about their school’s climate, El Puente students strongly agreed that they were a part of a supportive community characterized by strong, caring relationships with their teachers—frequently at a significantly higher rate than students in the comparison school sample (Table 5, page 23). Further, when asked to provide three words to describe their school, students frequently said “caring,” “helpful,” and “different.”

The school’s powerful relationship strategy not only reflects its relentless commitment to students’ achievement and their social and emotional development, but also provides a formidable 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 developing its future leaders, is a conscious model of social awareness, of what giving back can look like, and how giving back also keeps them connected to their culture and values. Community is achieved through a common ethos, shared norms and experiences, mutual concern and support, and a sense of belonging, all of which occur through relationships.

The Role of Relationships in Community Responsibility

As students explore and understand themselves, developing self-awareness, they also begin to see themselves as part of a supportive school community where they are known and cared about, but where they also have a responsibility to others. The school’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, El Puente’s *Soul Standards* express a richer, more dimensioned conception of what the community wishes for its graduates to acquire through the developmental process of schooling:

Soul Standards

- 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 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.)

The list begins with the overt aim that students will become “an agent for social change through contributions to the community” and, in so doing, that they will situate themselves within the longer history of the movement for peace and justice. The *Soul Standards* also identify “praxis” as a key outcome: that is, El Puente seeks to teach students how to put theories they have learned—particularly, Freire’s theory of “See, Analyze, and Act”—into practice, allowing them to “reflect on self, learning and action and make meaningful changes based on that reflection.” The *Soul Standards* also recognize efficacy as an important desired objective, stating that students will demonstrate “an understanding that you are a person without limits and are masterful,” and suggesting that this efficacy will come about in part because of students’ commitment to their holistic development, including body, mind, spirit, and community. As Cammarota (2011, p. 829) observed, the kind of “personal development” outlined by the *Soul Standards* “requires a complete transformation of [the student’s] self and his or her place and role in society,” for a rich payoff:

Once a young person realizes his or her efficacy and ability to transform his or her own and others’ experiences for the better, he or she grows intellectually and acquires the confidence to handle a variety of challenges, including higher education, community activism, and organizational leadership.

The *Soul Standards* reiterate the school’s aim not only to remedy the educational injustice of failing schools but also to invest in the local community. The prevailing education establishment often defines successful schools as those that provide poor, marginalized, Latino and African American students with access to mainstream middle-class culture and, accordingly, tickets out of their communities. In contrast to this ethos of community abandonment, the *Soul Standards* define success for their graduates as those who remain proud members of their culture and community, and who give back by creating change to invigorate their community. This message of commitment and responsibility to the community, to one’s roots, and to voice over exit, is powerfully communicated in multiple ways—from alumni who return to mentor students as they prepare college applications to the 2013 *Three Kings Day Celebration* original musical theater event produced by El Puente CBO in collaboration with El Puente Academy staff and students.

Social studies facilitator Costello explained: “We emphasize that they are a community. That engenders accountability. They spend four 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,” goes a long way toward developing students’ abilities to be empathetic, take others’ perspectives or “walk in others’ shoes,” and to understand how their actions have an impact on others. El Puente educators draw on the well of rich relationships that emerge from the social emotional aspects of their teaching, and link them to community and the notion of collective struggle.

Being a socially responsible member of the community also requires a student “to be an advocate, not only for yourself, but for others.” Students noted that participation forms an important aspect of good citizenship at El Puente, as does the ability to share one’s own and hear others’ ideas and thoughts: where students “may put other students down in other schools, here they don’t.” Bearing this out, 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.”

As these examples indicate, social emotional learning and the relationships through which it operates at El Puente accrue value not only to the individuals involved, but also to the larger community of which they are a part. And here again, social emotional learning merges with its goals of social justice education. The foundation of caring relationships in a caring community provides students with opportunities to care and take responsibility for themselves and their community, to critically analyze the roots of injustice that so many students have experienced, and to work together on behalf of social change that leads to a more just society and emphasizes the value of community responsibility and engagement.

When asked about their motivation for attending school, El Puente students and students from the comparison sample were both likely to say that their schoolwork was engaging, that their parents wanted them to be successful in school, and that education is important for the future. El Puente students, however, were significantly more likely to say that their teachers expect them to succeed and that school is a place to meet friends (Table 6, page 27). El Puente students were also highly likely to agree that they go to school because they are a part of a caring, safe, supportive community where they can learn to make a difference, indicating the strength of El Puente’s social and emotional support and empowerment.

The Role of Relationships to Leverage Achievement

Another important aspect of El Puente’s culture and climate is that the school leverages the sense of community it carefully cultivates to inspire perseverance, a growth mindset, and a belief in one’s own efficacy and capacity for change among its students. The school seeks to instill the belief in students that “smart is something you get, not something you got,” as evidenced by El Puente’s freshman orientation framework (see Appendix B). Faculty explained how they develop, sustain, and use relationships with students to leverage growth, change, and persistence in the face of difficulty and failure. Special education facilitator Tiruchelvam 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.

Table 6. Students' Motivations for Attending School

I go to school because... (% agree)	El Puente N = 70	Comparison Schools N = 416	χ^2
Subjects I take are interesting and challenging	62.9	64.7	0.09
I get satisfaction from schoolwork	81.4	76.9	0.72
It's a place to meet friends	80.0	65.6	5.66*
My teachers expect me to succeed	97.1	67.7	25.71***
My parents expect me to succeed	97.1	94.2	1.03
Education is important for getting a job later on	94.3	97.1	1.48
<i>Follow-up question for El Puente sample only.</i> I go to school because... (% agree).	El Puente N = 70	Comparison Schools N = 416	χ^2
I feel cared for	81.4	N/A	N/A
I'm part of a community	77.1		
I'm respected and valued	81.4		
School matters to me	85.7		
I can learn to make a difference	87.1		

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the El Puente sample across items was 99%. 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.

Echoing that idea, Josie Mota-Gomez, 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 math facilitator Tina Lee, “Building relationships [is about] trusting each other to learn from each other.” The mutuality expressed here is an important indicator of the sense of community and a condition for change.

One student pointed out that El Puente differed from other schools “because of the amount of attention you get from teachers,” while another commented that the relationships with teachers were “different—they push you [because they] don’t want to see you fail.” Student comments indicate that teachers reliably back up these expectations with the support students need to succeed. They are not left to sink or swim. Another student described how “teachers helped with work. [They] asked if [you]

needed help when you are missing work.” In other words, the response to missing homework was supportive rather than punitive, but unequivocally designed to help students resolve whatever was impeding them and achieve a successful result.

A parent also articulated the school’s emphasis on “growth,” stating:

[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.

What we describe here is a particular model of perseverance in the face of obstacles, one that demonstrates how teacher empathy and laser-like determination transmitted through a network of sustained relationships can make resilience, rather than defeat, possible. It demonstrates that fostering student perseverance and a growth mindset does not occur in isolation; instead, it grows within a network of teacher perseverance.

El Puente students, compared to students in the comparison sample schools, were significantly more likely to say that they believed they could do well in school if they put their minds to it and that they are able to persist in the face of difficulty (Table 7, page 29). Moreover, they were significantly more likely to say that teachers praised their effort—a key component of fostering a growth mindset among students. While not statistically significant, likely due to the relatively small size of the El Puente student sample, survey trends also reveal that El Puente students overall feel highly efficacious and resilient—key psychological factors that foster academic success.

As this description of El Puente’s culture and climate reveals, the school’s intention to promote human wholeness requires both self-actualization and responsibility to others, to one’s community, and to the world. More specifically, these aspects of the school’s culture and climate connect features of social emotional learning and social justice education to the school’s notion of human wholeness: for example, self-awareness helps build self-acceptance and agency; self-management connects to the achievement of mastery; relationship skills support mentoring and emotional safety; and social responsibility is connected to social change. And finally, by identifying a framework, conditions, and indicators for social justice and social emotional learning, these artifacts offer a map and underlying key to the school’s features, structures, practices, rituals, and routines.

Table 7. Students' Efficacy, Resilience, and Growth Mindset

How often do these things apply to you? (% often)	El Puente N = 71	Comparison Schools N = 415	χ^2
When I sit down to learn something really hard, I can learn it.	72.5	57.3	5.28
If I decide not to get any bad grades, I can really do it.	81.2	64.3	7.25*
If I want to learn something well, I can.	78.3	69.0	5.81
When studying, I try to work as hard as possible.	71.0	63.6	2.33
When studying, I put forth my best effort.	73.9	66.4	3.23
When studying, I keep working even if the material is difficult.	66.7	49.6	6.85*
When studying, I try to do my best to acquire the knowledge and skills taught.	75.4	63.4	3.58
How much do you agree with the following ... (% agree)	El Puente N = 71	Comparison Schools N = 415	χ^2
When I work hard, teachers praise my effort.	83.1	67.4	7.07**

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the El Puente sample across items was 99%. 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.

School Features and Structures

Level of school system	Definition	El Puente 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">• Academy structures• Curriculum framework• Advisory system• Counseling and support services• Community partnerships

The school features and structures that operationalize social emotional learning and social justice education at El Puente are rooted in the idea of *school as a community* as well as the idea of *school in the community*, in this case, a community that has been disenfranchised.

Social emotional learning and social justice education values—including “community life” (Dewey, 1966/1916, p. 238), interdependence, social responsibility, community engagement, self and social awareness, and responsible decision-making—infuse El Puente’s academy structure and curriculum, instructional and advisory programs, staff roles and governance, partnership with the El Puente CBO, Integrated Arts Project, and college counseling program (see Figure 1). These features and structures, as well as school size, not only enable the development of social emotional learning and social justice education, but also function synergistically to create a culture of responsiveness to students’ social and emotional needs and support the school’s goal of education for human wholeness.

Academy Structure and Curriculum and Instructional Program

El Puente is organized to facilitate the educational and developmental journey that students are expected to take as members of the El Puente community. The school year is arranged by trimesters, and grades are divided into two academies: the

Figure 1: El Puente Features and Structures that Operationalize Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education

- Academy structure and curriculum and instructional program
- Advisory
- School size, staff roles, and governance
- Partnership with El Puente CBO
- Integrated Arts Project program
- College counseling program

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 questions frame the curriculum:

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

The questions reflect the school's emphasis on inquiry, identity, relationships, and action; practically, they frame the course of study across subjects for each grade. While each grade emphasizes one question, the earlier questions are often subsumed in later ones as students progress to their senior year. Specifically, in ninth and 10th grades, students explore their identity and culture 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?"—functions as a call to action, aiming to ensure that social emotional learning and social justice education result in individual and collective agency, empowerment, and responsibility both for oneself and one's community. Interviews revealed strong awareness on the part of students about the particulars of their community as well as their membership in and obligations to that 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 while providing opportunities for real-world, real-time application of social emotional learning and social justice education. For example, going back to one's roots 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. While social justice is taught explicitly through the curriculum and related community action experiences, as we will detail later in the study, it is also taught implicitly through modeling, in the caring relationships the school nurtures as well as in the way it is organized, operates, and conducts its daily business, through its rituals and routines. This is sometimes referred to as the "hidden curriculum." As a result, students have a 360-degree, 3-D social justice education experience.

Assistant Principal Velez 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.” Humanities facilitator Rosello described how social emotional learning and social justice education work together. In ninth grade, he said, “Consciousness needs to be nurtured. By 10th grade: ‘I know who I am. Now what?!’” Commenting on the experiences of the Sankofa (ninth and 10th grades) curriculum, one student said, “Basically, the curriculum is looking deep into your culture and history, through art and essays and presentations.” Another said, “We learn about [our] roots.” A third concurred, “[You] learn about your family, your history, where you come from.” Still another recognized that “[You are] learning something new about yourself.” A parent underscored her appreciation of such self-knowledge learning, 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. 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

The school’s advisory further supports and sustains this development of strong relationships and the feeling of family discussed earlier, by nesting another kind of family group within the school. All students belong to an advisory, which meets twice a week and focuses on life and relationships. At times advisories will engage in de-stressing activities and games, but also the serious business of analyzing relationships and their impact on students’ lives. For example, 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. As one of the facilitators explained, students need to have silence, space, and no distractions because, “We’re really digging deep.” The activity is followed by a circle discussion, where students share what they feel comfortable sharing. While advisory groups tend to be mixed-gender, the school 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 each other, the experience of code switching).

School Size, Staff Roles, and Governance

Although the school staff works in defined roles, such as college counselor or assistant principal, the boundaries for these roles are fluid and students consistently have access to all adults in the school. This is organizationally possible because of the school’s small size. One student pointed out, “The small population of students means every teacher has time for you.” A former El Puente graduate, Gloria Diaz, 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 humanities facilitator Rosello, because staff is “highly invested that everything runs smoothly for the learners.” Facilitators enjoy autonomy and ownership. As guidance counselor Mota-Gomez 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.

Like El Puente’s students, the school’s faculty and staff are also predominantly Latino; in fact, 30% are Latino males in a school system where only 3% of its employees are Latino males (Banks & Oliveira, 2011). As a sign of the school’s profound connection to its students and the students’ dedication to their community, there are a number of El Puente graduates who have returned to work at the school; for example, the school’s above-mentioned current social worker, Gloria Diaz.

Over and over again, El Puente stakeholders’ descriptions of interpersonal exchanges suggest that relations between adults and students at El Puente are different from those in typical schools. Too often, there is a great power imbalance where adults possess all of the authority and power, and students’ only choice is silence, compliance, and helplessness. At El Puente, there is continuous dialogue between students and school adults, which moderates feelings of powerlessness and helplessness and enables students to develop and assert agency for change—change in their behavior and in their community. As teachers and students work together to overcome obstacles to students’ achievement, they model collaborative perseverance, both teachers and students persevering in order for students to reach achievement goals. They embody collective responsibility and give reason to parents and students’ belief that El Puente teachers care about them and the school community.

Social justice aims shape facilitators’ views of themselves and of their roles. El Puente educators see themselves as, what Freire (1998) called, “political militant” teachers. As Freire memorably claimed on behalf of teachers:

We are political militants because we are teachers. Our job is not exhausted in the teaching of math, geography, syntax, [or] history. Our job implies that we teach these subjects with sobriety and competence, but it also requires our involvement in and dedication to overcoming social injustice.

The democratic power relationships among adults are reflected in El Puente’s consensus governance structure known as the Leadership Circle. The Leadership Circle consists of lead teachers and administrators, including former principals. All major initiatives and policies are discussed and collectively decided upon among this group of school leaders. Rosello 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. Mota-Gomez noted, “We have a vested interest in how the school is run—this is our home,” suggesting, along with Rosello, that El Puente’s collaborative governance system contributes to staff attachment, ownership, and investment in the school.

Partnership with El Puente CBO

The relationship between El Puente Academy and the El Puente CBO remains very close. School founder, former principal, and current El Puente CBO Executive Director Lucerna meets weekly with the current principal, 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 have participated in studies on social justice issues, such as local banks’ redlining practices as well as on asthma rates in the neighborhood, which resulted in changing local bank lending policies and broader awareness about asthma.

Given the caretaking, communitarian ethos encouraged by El Puente, it is not surprising that students at El Puente were more likely to have had opportunities to participate in activities that support their community than students in the comparison schools sample (72.9% vs. 46.0%; Table 8). While El Puente students might not likely use terminology such as “volunteer” or “community service”—most of their activities are seamlessly part of their perceived responsibilities (e.g., taking care of younger siblings, for instance, while parents are working or completing studies of the community that help to identify and resolve problems)—their activities are comparable to what is considered voluntarism and service.

Traditions and rituals that embody students’ history and culture, such as the community’s *Three Kings Day Celebration*, are sponsored by El Puente CBO and involve El Puente students and staff. A Christmas event that features an original drama with music and dance, the celebration also involves students from local elementary and

Table 8. Students’ Participation in Volunteer or Service Work

Participation in volunteer or community service work during past two years (through school or outside of school; % response)	El Puente N = 70	Comparison Schools N = 385	χ^2
Yes	72.9	46.0	17.12***

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate was 99%. Sample size provided in the table is based on the number of valid responses for this item.

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.



middle schools who partner with the CBO. The audience is comprised of community members of all ages; El Puente teachers also bring their families to the performance. Although Williamsburg's gentrification has priced some staff out of living in the community, out-of-school social relationships with each other and the CBO nonetheless continue.

Integrated Arts Project Program

The arts are one of El Puente's most important features for encouraging and enabling students to find their voice and explore their creativity. 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. (p. 2)

As Lucerna’s comments indicate, social emotional learning at El Puente is extended to include the development of imagination and soul, which give life and voice to important ideas—in particular, ideas related to social justice—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 organize the community for change.

The IAP unfolds with a design team that includes facilitators from diverse disciplines 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 world. In order to enact the project, the school block 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 also focus on the project.

The *IAP Handbook* describes how 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. The themes driving the initiative connect students to themselves, to their historical and cultural past, to their community, and to their future.

Past IAPs have included The Sugar Project, which was inspired by a Williamsburg 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 culminated 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 (see <http://vimeo.com/44318489> for examples).

College Counseling Program

The school’s college counseling program is a strong example of how social emotional learning and social justice education converge at El Puente. It is especially significant because access to and enrollment in higher education is our society’s primary pathway for social and economic mobility, for entrance into the middle class, and for the achievement of equality. Survey results revealed that while El Puente students had similar educational attainment expectations as students in the comparison schools sample, they were more likely to have received help and support from school counselors and teachers (Table 9).

Catherina Villafuerte, who directs and teaches in the school’s college counseling program, is present at the school three days per week. The program covers conventional college counseling activities, such as individual counseling sessions, SAT preparation, researching colleges and universities, visiting campuses, information on finances (e.g., credit cards, interest rates), financial aid and scholarship support, college fairs, parent conversations and workshops, and application assistance. The program also, however, includes features that respond to the particular context and needs of El Puente’s student population.

Where 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 and first year. The program even includes support for students who transition from a community college to a four-year college. This level of support is necessary because students’ socioeconomic and, in some cases, immigrant status in society imposes disadvantages on them. Villafuerte comments:

Parents are unable to give students resources and skills to navigate the college readiness field. [Students] need to get the practical knowledge

Table 9. Students’ Educational Attainment Expectations and Support

As things stand now, how far in school do you think you’ll get? (% response)	El Puente N = 70	Comparison Schools N = 393	χ^2
High school graduation or GED only	4.3	8.1	7.33
Some college	7.1	9.2	
Graduate from college	54.3	37.4	
Obtain a master’s degree or more advanced degree	25.7	33.8	
Don’t know	8.6	11.5	
If planning to go to college, where have you gone for information? Mark all that apply. (% response)	El Puente N = 70	Comparison Schools N = 393	χ^2
School counselor	47.5	30.1	7.08**
Teacher	55.7	31.0	13.74***
Coach	1.6	8.2	3.34
Parent	36.1	38.3	0.11
Friend	32.8	36.7	0.34
Sibling	18.0	24.4	1.15
Other relative	24.6	24.7	0.01

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Responses are valid percentages; the average response rate for the El Puente 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.

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.

Villafuerte works with students, for example, to help them understand why their transcripts and resumes are so important in 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 encounter them in person, but will, nonetheless, make important decisions about their lives. Consequently, these documents must be an impressive proxy for them. 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, Villafuerte organizes 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 making these moves prior to the fairs.

Student success—i.e., attending and graduating from college, getting a good job, and making a contribution to the community—of course requires academic skills, but academic skills alone are not enough. Therefore, 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. However, students also need emotional skills and power, contends Villafuerte. The latter, she says,

...comes from [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 help build students’ awareness, resilience, and emotional stamina, El Puente facilitators regularly share their own college experiences with students. Villafuerte 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 [admis-

sions]. 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, painful disparities deeply challenge them, even with this extensive preparation. Villafuerte 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 arena[s] 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.

Because, as Villafuerte points out, “We are diversity. [El Puente] students will be the diversity when they are on campus,” they encounter the complexities and contradictions of diversity. Villafuerte elaborated on the need for students to be able to navigate the issues of status and power related to diversity:

How will students make others respect you? In order for there to be diversity, there has to be respect for all, all voices must be at the table. If a particular voice is not at the table, then diversity is not complete. How does my student get to the table in a way that others do not feel coerced? [How do others] understand [that my student is] entitled to be at table? Everyone has to have an equal voice—not so now. [It is] not smart to pretend that we do have an equal voice. How to you make yourself an equal so that your voice is heard in a way that it is respected as equal? How do we give students the tools so that when they get to the table they can create allies? How do we get our diversity across so that we are equal? How do we build those bridges?

These issues and obstacles are significant for El Puente students, and supporting them to meet these challenges requires mediation so that they can find entry points into these new contexts that enable them to be effective. Villafuerte notes, “[Students] need help, to talk it through to navigate their feelings so that they don't act

out or make impetuous decisions.” 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, El Puente stays in touch through phone calls to students, which, Villafuerte explained, “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, Villafuerte 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. When a student at an elite northeastern liberal arts school wanted to transfer to community college, Villafuerte took a trip to the college to request that the student join two clubs. Several months later, she traveled back to the college to see that same student perform in a play.

“In order to be effective, they have to have a home,” said Villafuerte. 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.

The opportunities to give back that El Puente provides for alumni enable them, said Villafuerte, to “practice the muscle of leadership, so you can have the habit of doing it.” She sees this as a strategy to help students make themselves equal in an unequal environment. Alumni 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 on time-management strategies and discussions about topics such as health and hygiene (including safe sex, STDs, drinking, and partying), how to establish relationships with roommates, and how to interact with professors. They help seniors complete financial aid forms and college applications. One alumna who designed and will implement a summer bridge program with Villafuerte, claims, “If you do the social awareness and social justice piece, the kids come back to give back.”

School Practices

Level of school system	Definition	El Puente 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"> • Curriculum and instructional program • School traditions and activities • Student voice and support practices

El Puente’s climate and culture, as well as its features and structures, both foster and are supported by the school’s formal and informal everyday practices. In this section, we highlight particular school practices that support social emotional learning and social justice education at El Puente. These include: the school curriculum and instructional program, graduation by performance assessment, cultivating student voice, taking a holistic approach to failure, restorative justice, town hall meetings, and helping peers (see Figure 2).

Curriculum and Instructional Program

From content—the topics that students study across their coursework—to what students are asked to do with that content, social justice themes and their connection to social emotional learning weave through the curricula at El Puente. Several courses offered in 2011–2012 map directly onto the issue of social justice and injustice, including, *Two Americas*; *American Literature Revised*; *People’s History*; *Me, Myself, and Africa*; *Civil War to Civil Rights*; *American Dream Deferred*; and *Roots of Revolution*. Courses such as these connect social emotional learning and social justice education in meaningful ways.

The school’s activist, relevant 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:

Figure 2: El Puente’s Practices that Support Social Emotional Learning and Social Justice Education

- Curriculum and instructional program
 - Ninth grade pre-algebra: Finance My Life
 - 10th and 11th grade English language arts and social studies
 - 12th grade economics and government
 - Preparation for graduation portfolios
- Graduation by performance assessment
- Cultivating student voice
- Holistic approach to failure
 - Demystifying coursework
 - Leveraging nurturing relationships
 - Using a case approach
- Restorative justice
- Town hall meetings
- Helping peers

[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, it is not merely an academic exercise. As humanities facilitator Rosello 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.” Vazquez 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. How does it relate to us and our own community...?

Even more conventional courses, such as physics, include a social justice component that seeks 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.



Ninth Grade Pre-Algebra: Finance My Life

The ninth grade pre-algebra course, called Finance My Life, provides students with an introspective look at themselves as preparation for seeing 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 understandings requires students to engage in the pre-algebra mathematical operations, which they practice in a real-life, context-relevant way.

She also discussed how she intentionally “integrates more of a civics component [into math].” Throughout the course, for example, she asks students to look at social indicators of 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.”

10th and 11th Grade English Language Arts and Social Studies

“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 a window into a critical view of 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.

In 10th grade, students put a number of prominent historical figures—such as Christopher Columbus—on trial and decide whether their actions were just. Assistant Principal Velez explained, “They have lawyers and prosecutors and then a jury decides” the verdict. Such activities provide students with opportunities to explore social justice issues from multiple perspectives and at the same time examine the dilemmas confronting people in various historical eras and the roles played by significant individuals in addressing them.

12th Grade Economics and Government

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 2012, students were asked to analyze 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 and 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?

The macro- and microperspectives of Costello's curriculum are another demonstration of the convergence of social emotional learning and social justice learning.

Preparation for Graduation Portfolios

Eleventh grade courses, in which students explore the nature of the world around them, also focus on preparing students for the graduation portfolios they will complete in 12th grade. In preparing students to develop a proposal for their 12th grade science portfolios, for example, science facilitator Norma McCarthy explained that senior projects must address how students will help the community; in particular, how they will put what they research and what they learn into action. When discussing the projects in class, she raised issues to illuminate the inequality that exists in poor communities by providing an example for students: “Our tomatoes come from California. If they came from here, there would be less pollution.” She broached questions for further exploration: “How can we create gardens in our homes so we can grow our own food, or part of it? How does that affect us economically at home?” She commented, “They are learning what is really happening in the community.” She elaborated:

We talk about fertilizer and what is organic food. Students did research on how many organic stores are in this neighborhood [and found that there are] only two. We are a poor community. Why is organic food so expensive, compared to regular food in supermarkets? Does that mean we cannot eat healthy? [We look at this] relationship when we get to math. We may do a topic on organic food in the neighborhood, or do surveys on how much people know, and whether they know of stores [that sell organic food]. It's easier for [our students], but how many people in the community have that knowledge? [Then, students] make recommendations at the end... A lot of [the students] thought their garbage was going to the landfill in Staten Island, or maybe upstate. We started asking questions [about] where does their garbage end up. They found out it went to Ohio, West Virginia, and North Carolina. They searched online, and learned of the practice of transferring garbage from one city to other places, which is a big waste of energy, and contributes to pollution of other places. This evolved into a project: Trash into Treasure, in which students composted to develop rich soil for growing food.

Graduation by Performance Assessment

In New York State, students must pass a series of tests called Regents Exams in order to graduate from high school and obtain a diploma. As mentioned earlier, because El Puente belongs to the New York Performance Standards Consortium—a network of 28 New York State high schools that subscribes to portfolio performance assessment as a means of graduation (the majority of schools are in New York City)—El Puente students are exempt from all but one of the Regents exams, the English exam. Instead, they graduate from high school by demonstrating proficiency across a range of portfolio presentations that encourage 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 deploy convincing arguments and evidence in research papers, all in alignment 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 time management, perseverance and growth.

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 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 ethnicity/race. After a close examination of a data set, 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.”

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. The discovery of voice, a manifestation of both self-awareness and social awareness at El Puente, is powerful and empowering; particularly for students who may well have grown up feeling disenfranchised as members of disempowered groups with little social and political capital. The ninth and 10th grade Sankofa Academy, as discussed previously, 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 CBO’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 [a] 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.” Social studies facilitator Costello 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.”

Multiple traditions and rituals, sometimes referred to as “special arts and culture days,” also provide diverse opportunities for students to find and express their voice. *Fly Girl Fest* and *Unity Day*, for example, are El Puente traditions that, as one facilitator said, give “young people time in a structured way to have revelations.” Principal Vazquez founded *Fly Girl Fest* eight years ago as a full day event 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 for a sample *Fly Girl Fest* agenda).

Unity Day, which functions as an orientation and initiation for incoming students, features student-led workshops and student performances. During *Unity Day*, Diaz explained, “Upperclassmen take [younger] students into the community to see different sites of El Puente [showing] that they are part of a community.” “Students transform classrooms into portals of spiritual growth,” explained Calderon. “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.

Holistic Approach to Failure

At El Puente, students believe that the school and their teachers want them to succeed, not fail. This belief is supported by a number of practices that incorporate a holistic approach to school failure, including demystifying coursework, leveraging nurturing relationships, and employing a case approach to struggling students. These practices provide a multiple levels of social and emotional support for students, and are informed by a social justice education perspective.

Demystifying Coursework

All teachers produce a course syllabus that provides students with the access and knowledge needed in order to succeed, including: course expectations, mastery targets, essential questions, grading policy, and teacher contact information. Such transparency demystifies course and teachers’ expectations for students by making explicit what students need to do to pass courses and accumulate the credits required for graduation. This transparency is fairness in action, as all students have the same information. The practices model professional and institutional responsibility as well the school’s commitment to fairness, equality, and opportunity.

Leveraging Nurturing Relationships

Teachers 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.” Another parent confirmed that teachers stay on students until they complete their assignments. These interactions demonstrate the relationship between teacher persistence and commitment and student productivity.

Using a Case Approach

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." Costello 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 individual 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.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an approach to school discipline that emphasizes reparation rather than punishment. It provides opportunities for students to develop awareness of themselves and their needs, and recognize the impact of their behavior and actions on the community, as well as the social responsibility of reparation. El Puente's student discipline practices 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. Indeed, infractions at El Puente are viewed as acts against 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). In lieu 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 El Puente, instead of playing the traditional role of coercive compliance enforcer, can create opportunities for discipline to support students' growth and development.

These just-in-time practices provide powerful opportunities for social emotional learning and growth, for self- and social awareness as well as 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. 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.

Town Hall Meetings

Town hall meetings provide a gathering space for faculty and students, either altogether or by advisory or grade level, to voice their concerns about existing practices and issues and make recommendations for constructive change. As such, these meetings 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 their advisories, encouraging students to discuss issues they have with teachers, classes, or peers, and think about 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.

Assistant Principal Velez 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 some 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 opportunities for them to learn about the dialectic between the individual and common good, and exercise their skills as participants in this dialogue.

Helping Peers

Community responsibility and the call for students to improve the community are manifest even in what appears to be everyday activities organic to the school's culture, 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: as one student recalled, "When I am working on a portfolio and am asked to help another student—most of the time I will help." 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.

Summary of Lessons Learned

Social emotional teaching and learning are embedded in El Puente’s vision, beliefs, and assumptions regarding the purpose of education and, as a result, in the school culture and organization. Although El Puente’s embedded approach to social emotional learning eschews discrete, add-on programs, there are, integrated into the school, explicit programmatic features, practices, and structures that facilitate social emotional learning that may provide useful lessons for schools, districts, policy makers, and other education stakeholders.

1. The purpose of education at El Puente is to support young people to become whole human beings committed to and working for liberation, self-determination, peace, and justice as leaders in their local community and the wider world. In order to achieve the goal of wholeness, the school acknowledges, takes responsibility for, and is responsive to the social and emotional aspects of human nature and development, and provides regular opportunities for social emotional teaching and learning so that it is omnipresent in the dailiness of school life. This omnipresence takes form in El Puente’s conception of school as a community and its communitarian organization that uses teacher–student, peer, and community relationships as powerful structures for social emotional teaching and learning to productively address student stress, academic struggle, conflict, anger, depression, confidence, mind-set, diverse perspectives, agency, and adolescent emotional turbulence. El Puente’s close affiliation with its eponymous CBO fosters social emotional learning by providing students with opportunities to connect emotionally and historically with and take pride in their ethnic identity.



2. Particular programmatic features that support social emotional learning include the school's curricular framework, Integrated Arts Project, and college counseling program. Structured around four essential questions, the curricular framework engages students in an inquiry that moves them from self-identity, to community-identity, to critical analysis of the world, to acting for meaningful change, and provides opportunities for the development of self- and other-awareness, interdependence, agency, social responsibility, and community engagement. The Integrated Arts Project, a collaboration with the El Puente CBO, engages students in a creative process where they can imagine themselves, their community, and the world as other than what is, express their voice, and thus liberate themselves from existing societal and self-imposed constraints. The college counseling program addresses pre-college, transition-to-college, and in-college issues to ensure that students persist, especially during those transitions when they are vulnerable to the challenges encountered in entering the main-stream culture.

3. School practices that provide opportunities for social emotional learning include culturally responsive curriculum, performance assessment, student voice initiatives such as restorative justice and town hall meetings, peer support, and supports for struggling students. Culturally responsive curriculum includes courses that enable students to develop self- and other awareness by examining perspectives that correspond to issues in their lives, such as American Literature Revised; People's History; Me, Myself, and Africa; and Finance My Life (pre-algebra). Performance assessments provide students with opportunities for in-depth research projects that address community responsibility, where they demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of issues important to the community as well as valid and reliable research methods. Restorative justice emphasizes community reparation rather than punishment in response to school discipline. Students are helped to reflect on the impact their behavior has on their community and what they need to do restore it. Strategies such as peer mediation, extensive conversations with teachers, interventions, and town hall meetings help students problem-solve to find productive ways of expressing and addressing their frustrations and anger. El Puente's case approach to investigate student problems helps faculty to collectively identify and implement strategies and interventions to support social emotional learning.

Considerations and Challenges

Accountability and the Common Core

During the Michael Bloomberg administration as mayor, New York City’s Department of Education introduced new accountability conceptions and measures for schools, teachers, and students at a rapid pace, which meant that schools and their faculties had to cope with a wave of new, quickly changing procedures, expectations and, of course, paperwork. Because many of these procedures were tied to high-stakes outcomes, El Puente administrators and teachers had to divert time and attention from their primary mission in order to accommodate these new demands, which—in their “one size fits all” form—did not account for the unique, innovative work done by schools such as El Puente. The result has been a ratcheting up of both work and pressure among faculty and staff, particularly in the role of the principal. Indeed, El Puente’s principal had to seek a workable space between what she knows to be the historical heart and soul of the school’s work and the increasingly onerous requirements of a larger educational system, in thrall to an accountability regime poorly designed to assess the multifaceted aspects of learning that are hard to measure, but about which the El Puente community cares deeply.

Further, the mandated Common Core State Standards, which have been implemented at the behest of the state and district, introduced aims and emphases that in some ways conflict and compete with the school’s implementation of its values and mission. In particular, as Calderon, El Puente’s second principal, points out, the Common Core’s attempts to reduce assignments involving narrative writing essentially work toward eliminating space for students to engage their personal narrative. This, in turn, undermines the empowerment students experience when they “reclaim their own voice,” something that is particularly important to traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised segments of our society whose voices have historically been suppressed. Under the Common Core as it was being implemented during the Bloomberg administration, there was less opportunity for students to explore and discover that voice, and hence, less opportunity for the transformation, empowerment, and wholeness that El Puente aims to effect.

Since the new Bill de Blasio city administration is permitting schools to seek waivers from onerous regulations that they can demonstrate are obstructing their implementation of effective, school-based initiatives, El Puente may be in for some relief.

The Heart of Social Emotional Learning at El Puente

At El Puente, social emotional learning is undertaken to interrupt the status quo, especially the embedded injustices around race and class that characterize contemporary American society. While taxonomies of social emotional learning put forth

by some research and practice communities feature concepts of personal and community agency necessary for such interruption and change, they often lack the ideals and language of power relations, empowerment, and agency that animate social emotional learning at El Puente. They are typically not built upon a foundation of social justice and do not recognize structural inequalities embedded in society; thus they can lead to a deficit perspective of students, something that El Puente quite consciously rejects. Such social emotional learning conceptions are more consistent with a social reproduction perspective, which has as its purpose the creation of “a good student, citizen, and worker... [to] provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores” (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 10). In this vision, social emotional learning becomes a behavior-management response to correct students’ implied shortcomings. It becomes an effort to “create good students” out of ones deemed bad and to produce “fewer conduct problems,” all without any recognition or acknowledgement of the effects of the social context on students’ lives or the need to address that.

While El Puente identifies self-awareness and social responsibility as key components of social emotional learning—similar to mainstream conceptions, for example—their aim in promoting these traits is to create personal liberation, local leadership, and grassroots social change that will increase human rights and equality. At El Puente, social emotional learning is grounded not only in understanding the effects of the social context on students’ lives, but is also utilized to realize the radical role education and schools can play to help students change—in fact, liberate—their lives.

With the persistence and expansion of inequality and injustice in society today, schools such as El Puente—where the culture embraces and is responsive to students’ particular social emotional and social justice needs—offer a much needed antidote to the messages of mainstream society, where African American and Latino children from low-income families face a profoundly uneven playing field, manifested in higher incarceration rates, higher unemployment rates, and lower income rates. As El Puente’s conception and practice of social emotional learning and social justice education reveals, helping students to navigate a system that often profoundly disadvantages them does not mean that the system itself is off the hook. Instead, El Puente’s approach to and practice of education presents a critical opportunity for young people to develop and prepare to take on those larger battles.

Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources

The case study employs mixed methods with multiple sources of data. Table 10 summarizes the qualitative data sources for this study. They include: interviews and focus groups (with school administrators, teachers, students, parents, 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). We interviewed the lead administrator multiple times as well as other key informants (e.g., school founders, veteran teachers); talked with diverse groups of students and parents, as well as interviewed community partners (e.g., board members or community partner organization representatives); and targeted newer and veteran teachers as well as students across grade levels. Beyond observations of instruction, professional learning, and governance, we observed key school events and activities that were concurrent with site visits.

We also surveyed a sample of 10th and 12th grade students (N = 71) to gauge students' attitudes about school, perceptions of school climate, motivation for at-

Table 10: Qualitative Data Sources

Data Sources	Description	Quantity
Interviews and Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants: students, teachers, administrators, counselors, community partners, founders, and parents • Interviews recorded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45–120 minutes in duration • 9 total sessions • 26 individuals participated
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonparticipant observations of class periods, school-wide and community events, student presentations, and staff meetings • Both formal and informal events and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45–90 minutes in duration • 10 total sessions • Medium to large group activities
Documents and Artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School documents: e.g., academic program overview, arts program handbook, event fliers, newsletters, calendar and schedules • Classroom documents: e.g., course syllabi, evaluation rubrics, samples of student work • Websites: e.g., school site, community partner site, district profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 print and online documents

tending 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), sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, for two main reasons. First, to examine how students' experiences at this social emotional learning-focused high school compare to students in other high schools, members of the research team identified a national dataset that assessed constructs of interest to the current study and had publicly available data for students in the dataset. Second, using schools in the ELS: 2002 dataset, members of the research team identified a set of school-level variables to create a sample of national comparison schools with similar school characteristics to El Puente. 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 El Puente's the free/reduced lunch range percentage (i.e., the indicator was 76–100%). A total of 21 schools in the dataset met these criteria, which yielded a sample of 439 students. See Table 11 (following page) for demographic information for both samples.

Students in the El Puente sample were more likely to be Latino and somewhat less likely to have fathers or male guardians with college or advanced degrees than students in the ELS: 2002 sample.

Students in the El Puente 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 for students in this sample was 61%. Out of 71 respondents, 42 were in 10th grade and 22 were in 12th grade; 7 participants declined to state their grade.

We compared survey responses from students in the El Puente school 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 El Puente sample was 56–100% and 53–95% 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.

Table 11: Demographics for El Puente and National Comparison Schools Survey Samples

Demographics	El Puente	Comparison Schools
Sample size	71	439
Number of schools	1	21
Gender (%)		
Female	58.5	54.5
Male	41.5	45.5
Student race/ethnicity (%)		
Latino	89.1	45.1
African American	6.2	36.4
Asian	1.6	9.1
White	1.6	5.7
Other	1.5	3.7
Mother/Female guardian education (%)		
No high school diploma	34.4	26.8
High school diploma/Some college	37.5	40.6
College degree	10.9	11.0
Advanced degree	3.1	7.2
Don't know/doesn't apply	14.1	14.4
Father/Male guardian education (%)		
No high school diploma	25.0	25.3
High school diploma/Some college	42.5	36.0
College degree	2.5	10.6
Advanced degree	0.0	6.6
Don't know/doesn't apply	30.0	21.5
Free or reduced-priced lunch* (%)	83.0	76.0–100.0

Notes: The ELS:2002 data we use for this study was collected when students were in either 10th grade (ELS:2002 first survey administration) or 12th grade (ELS:2002 second follow-up survey administration), depending on question availability. Demographics 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.

Appendix B: El Puente Freshman Orientation Conceptual Framework

Freshman Orientation Conceptual Framework

BELIEF

This Orientation is rooted in the belief that smart is something you get, not something you got. This flies in the face of the belief system of many educators and students. We work to cultivate development. **Development is the process of getting better, stronger and smarter at anything you do.** In the context of school, it means the achievement of successive, targeted learning outcomes. The process of development can be summarized in this way: **Confidence+Effective Effort=Success.**

HABITS/ PRACTICES

Highly successful people share habits that allow them to be effective in whatever they do. Habits are things we do repeatedly without really thinking about it. In the same way we want to promote success habits that are on autopilot in our students. Those habits are:

1. Be Proactive
2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put First things first
4. Think Win-Win
5. Seek to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergize
7. Sharpen the Saw

SKILLS

As part of the orientation, we want to provide tools/strategies for our students to experience success in our classes. The goal in this section is to show students what effective effort looks like. We will focus on three areas: Reading, Writing, and note-taking. In Reading we will ask students to take a reading survey. Then go over strategies to identify the main ideas in a text supporting ideas. Another aspect will be how to deconstruct any text to derive its meaning. In writing we will go over the writing process. In note-taking, we will go over "The Harvard Method."

Appendix C: Fly Girl Fest Agenda



Fly Girl Fest 2012	9:00-9:45	9:45-10:15	10:15-10:45	10:45-11:15	11:15-11:45	11:45- 12:15	12:15-12:45
Group I Jon A Nina, Eric, Quincy	Framing the Day 404	Body Image 203	Herstory 206	Queens Moon Café 305	Soul Spa 401	Q & A Closing	Lunch
Group II Quincy Janet, Paula, Ana	Framing the Day 404	Soul Spa 401	People's History 303	Body Image 203	Herstory 206	Q & A Closing	Lunch

Body Image

Who do you see when you look in the mirror? What is the connection between body image and self-image? How can a young woman's dream of herself include a positive idea about her own self-worth and beauty? In this room we will participate in a thoughtful question-and-answer session that attempts to answer these questions and many others. We will take what we've learned through our discussion to put away negative ideas about ourselves and celebrate the positive through a self-affirming "runway" walk.

People's History of Los Sures

Come celebrate the People's History of Los Sures. Hear of the struggles and dreams of the people of Los Sures and have a chance to share your own dreams and future vision of your community.

Herstory

Where History meets Herstory; Join the Flyest El Puente Sisters as they breathe life into stories and pay homage to the legacies of those who came before and those who shine with us.

Queens Moon Café

Join the El Puente Poets as they celebrate the power of the spoken word in our Open Mike Room.

Soul Spa

Breathe, relax, and free yourself!!! A full-body experience—come learn what natural ingredients help condition your face, skin, and hair. What scents relax you? What scents motivate your creativity? Leave with a recipe book and an aromatherapy sample.

I'm Coming Out, I Want the World to Know

Dreaming of a world where I am free to be me—LGBTQ Alliance students facilitate a discussion based on a short documentary on the full impact of coming out.

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