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Advocating for a Safe and Supportive School Environment: A Policy Advocacy Document

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CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS WELCOMING TRANSITION PROGRAM:
PROGRAM EVALUATION

BUILDING COMMUNICATION AND TRUST IN A VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL
ORGANIZATION: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

ADVOCATING FOR A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:
A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Zipporah K. Hightower

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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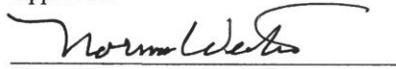
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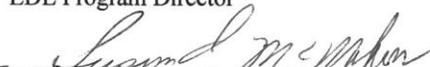
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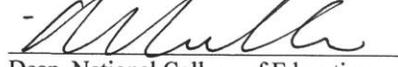
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A POLICY ADVOCATING FOR A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL

ENVIRONMENT: POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This proposed policy advocates for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to adopt the Safe and

Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan. This improvement plan would be

mandated for all schools that demonstrate low ratings on the 5Essentials Survey in the

area of supportive environment and do not show academic improvement. The city of

Chicago has implemented several projects to reform schools. The development of safe

and supportive school environments has not been one of these initiatives, although there

is ample data that identify which CPS schools have environments that are not conducive

to learning. There is also ample research that supports the academic gains made in

schools with positive learning environments regardless of family income levels.

PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

As a student, I recognized that I performed better socially and academically in schools that emphasized the importance of a safe and supportive environment in the classrooms and in common areas. In these schools, I felt safe so this allowed me to use my energy to learn new information and challenge myself to understand beyond what was in the text. Unfortunately, during 7th and 8th grade, I did not attend a school with a positive environment. As a student at this school, I was not challenged academically and managed to receive an in-school and out-of-school suspension because I did not feel safe and nurtured. I began to flourish again when I entered high school; only then did I realize how the various school cultures dictated my behavior.

In tackling the idea of a policy that I would recommend to a school district, I immediately thought about the violence occurring in some of Chicago's neighborhoods. This led me to research the schools in these areas. I learned that the University of Chicago's Chicago Consortium on School Research labeled several of the schools in these areas as "truly disadvantaged."

As I began to develop this policy, what I learned was that I had to focus most of my efforts on the needs of the school leaders who would develop and implement the policy. Originally, I thought I could leave the development of strategy just to the school principal. However, it became apparent based on questions I received from colleagues that I needed to give specific details on how to create such an environment and that the effort would require the investment of all school stakeholders.

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As I reflect on my experience as an education major, I recall one of the first

learning theories taught was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow suggested that

people require their physiological safety and belongingness needs (Maslow, 1943). This

theory shaped my belief that teachers and school leaders must be able to identify when a

student's basic needs are not being met because this will impede the student's ability to

experience success in school. The simplistic nature of this task minimizes its

effectiveness. Therefore, schools should ensure that all students feel safe, secure, and

welcomed when they enter the school building and throughout the day. Adults are

responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and supportive school environment.

My first teaching assignment with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was as a

math teacher at an Achievement Academy, a school created for 15 year old students who

had repeatedly failed the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). According to CPS Policy,

Achievement Academy placements shall be based on a student's age, record of

prior grade retention(s) and a determination as to appropriateness of placement.

The students described below shall be assigned to an Achievement Academy

when the placement is deemed appropriate by the Office of P–12 Management: 1.

Students who are 15 years old or will be 15 years old on or before September 1st

of the following school year; and/or 2. Students who have been previously

retained in the 7–8 grade cycle. (Chicago Public Schools [CPS], 2009, p. 5)

In 2006, CPS created Achievement Academies designed to offer intensive support

to students based on their deficiencies related to the instructional standards for students

with a pattern of failure. I created an environment that was safe and supportive for the students. This environment encouraged a level of trust that articulated to the students they would be successful due to my partnership with them that was aimed at ensuring this outcome. As a result, of my 116 students, 115 were successful by the end of the first semester. This was caused by deliberate actions taken to get to know each student academically and personally. Each child's assets were used to develop his or her areas of growth.

Lindsey, Karns, and Myatt (2010) explained cultural proficiency as an "asset-based approach" that begins with the premise that students from low-income and impoverished communities are educable, and it is our role as educators to find out how best to get the job done (p. 1). This approach fosters safety and security for students, allowing them to take the risks necessary to engage in positive interactions with classmates, such as peer tutoring and collegiality. Mason, Schroeter, Combs, and Washington (1992) (as cited in Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004) stated:

> There is also ample evidence that when students are placed higher, they rise to the
>
> challenge—for example, when students were placed in higher level math courses
>
> than they were qualified to be in on the basis of their scores, they performed better
>
> than comparable students in lower level classes. (p. 513)

As a principal, I set the conditions for students in a historically underperforming school to feel safe and supported by setting the expectation that positive relationships were built between, students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community. Teachers were coached to be culturally proficient educators. Lindsey, Martinez, and Lindsey (2007) explained that "culturally proficient coaching intends for the person being coached to be

educationally responsive to diverse populations of students" (p. 5). The teachers not only received coaching on how to lead culturally proficient classrooms, they also learned why it was important to build positive relationships with their students. Darling-Hammond (1997) explained the structures for caring.

> Relationships matter for learning. Students' trust in their teachers helps them develop the commitment and motivation needed to tackle challenging learning tasks. Teachers' connections to and understanding of their students help those students develop the commitment and capacity to surmount the hurdles that accompany ambitious learning. Key to the teacher-student connections are continuing relationships and mutual respect, conditions best supported in small school units. (p. 134)

Relationships were initially created between the teachers and students. However, for these relationships to create the bond needed to change the culture of the school, it was imperative that these extended beyond the walls of the building and penetrated the homes of the children by building strong relationships with their caregivers. In order to engage caregivers, the school created multiple opportunities throughout the school year for "gatherings." Block (2008) described these gatherings:

> [They were] something with more significance than the common sense of meeting. Leadership begins with understanding that every gathering is an opportunity to deepen accountability and commitment through engagement. Each gathering serves two functions: to address its stated purpose, its business issues; and to be an occasion for each person to decide to become engaged as an owner. (pp. 86–87)

The school hosted back-to-school events before the start of the school year, monthly parent/guardian meetings with the principal, planning meetings with school leadership, and social events such as skating, dances, art fairs, talent shows, and instructional seminars focused on the emphasis of education extending beyond the classroom. Students at every grade were offered after-school and weekend activities. These events and activities strengthened the bonds between the staff, students, caregivers, and the community.

As a result of these efforts, in 2011, the school ranked in first place across the district for achieving the greatest improvement in developing a safe and supportive school environment, according to the University of Chicago's 5Essentials Survey. Sparks (2011) shared highlights of this accomplishment:

> If demographics and academic achievement told the whole story, then the Mary McLeod Bethune School of Excellence on Chicago's west side would seem likely to be a pretty scary place, rather than being identified by CCSR [Consortium of Chicago School Research] as one of the district's safe schools. Since the school's takeover by the Chicago-based turnaround group the Academy of Urban School Leadership, the difference in climate is audible: quiet in the halls, soft-spoken teachers in the classrooms, with even kindergarteners and 1st graders enthusiastic but attentive. Principal Zipporah K. Hightower attributes the change to a schoolwide focus on staff getting to know all the students. (p. 13)

Not only did the school improve its safety rating, but the students' math scores increased over 30 points in the ISAT (Illinois State Assessment) exam in 2010. These scores were maintained over the three years Principal Hightower led the school.

When visiting a school, the first thing people experience is the relational climate of the building. People are able to sense whether or not the school is warm and inviting or cold and unwelcoming. The climate has a direct effect on its inhabitants. The climate dictates how people are treated, the level of care and passion that is infused in a person's work, and the willingness of teachers and staff to take risks, which could result in increased student achievement. Lemov (2010) suggested:

> Building a classroom culture that sustains and drives excellence requires mastering skills in five aspects of your relationship with students. These five aspects, or principals, are often confused and conflated. Many educators fail to consider the difference between them; others use the names indiscriminately or interchangeably. However, since you must be sure to make the most of all five in your classroom, it's worth taking a moment to distinguish them.
>
> - Discipline
> - Management
> - Control
> - Influence
> - Engagement (pp. 145–146)

From the lens of Lemov's (2010) five principles, educators identify patterns that emerge as they enter schools. Safe and supportive school environments are orderly and appear to have systems in place that minimized/eliminated chaos. Teachers in these

schools are more willing to collaborate and have students who tend to meet their growth expectations. These observations have shaped the understanding that a safe and supportive school environment is important. This is why I am advocating for any Chicago Public School, District 299, with low survey results on the 5Essentials survey in the area of Supportive Environment, be required to create a School Leadership Team (SLT) tasked with eradicating this issue within a two-year period of time. A low survey result is indicated by the largest number of respondents selecting disagree or strongly disagree to the survey question, thus indicating that the majority of respondents were dissatisfied.

Critical Issues

The Chicago Public Schools district has more than its share of underperforming schools on the south and west sides of the city. These schools' repeated history of failure on academic assessments has often mirrored their culture and climate. These schools are often faced with high turnover among teachers and staff. The adults work in isolation and low expectations have become acceptable. What educators are beginning to understand is that this should not be acceptable just because there are numerous examples of schools embedded in the middle of neighborhoods with low-income housing, under-employment, under-educated adults, predominantly minority populations, and high crime. Chenoweth and Theokas (2013) offered examples of two such schools and the values that led to their success:

> By first perception, it could be assumed that educational failure is relative to the demographics described. However, there is research that suggests this is simply not the case. For example, Principal John Capozzi at Elmont Memorial High

School in Nassau County, New York and Principal Terri Tomlinson at George

Hall Elementary School in Mobile, Alabama lead high achieving schools with a

high percentage of students in poverty share four characteristics.

1. Their beliefs about student potential drive their work.

2. They put instruction at the center of their managerial duties.

3. They focus on building the capacity of the adults in the building.

4. They monitor and evaluate what leads to success and what can be learned
   from failure.

The existence of such leaders—and their commonsense approaches to problem

solving—stands as a powerful argument that schools can do better not only for

their most vulnerable students but also for all students. (pp. 56–59)

These four values would not be considered earth shattering but simple best

practice. They also would not be considered new theories or new approaches to creating

safe and supportive schools that attain academic success. It should be further noted that

this research has been a focus of study for over 80 years. According to Jerald (2006),

sociologists recognized the importance of school culture as early as the 1930s, but

it wasn't until the late 1970s that educational researchers began to draw direct

links between the quality of a school's climate and its educational outcomes. Ron

Edmonds, often regarded as the father of the "effective schools" movement,

included "safe, orderly climate conducive to learning" on his influential list of

school-level factors associated with higher student achievement. "The school's

atmosphere is orderly without being rigid," he observed, "quiet without being

oppressive, and generally conducive to the instructional business at hand. (p. 1)

If the key to improving schools is to create a positive culture within the school, what is preventing this from happening and what then must we do to make it a priority? These are questions that have plagued me. My belief is that the adults in the building do not recognize that defining the culture is within their locus of control. Comparatively, in order to create a positive culture, the members of the organization must believe it is possible and create norms and expectations that reflect the desired state. This requires all members of the organization to analyze their current culture and their role within the cycle. Only then will they be able to identify the negative behaviors that enforce the undesired outcomes.

In "Safe, Secure, and Welcoming School Environments," the American Federation of Teachers (2013) described safe and supportive school environment as having:

> good anti-bullying policy that is practiced; school leadership (administrative) that supports staff, students, and parents; community/parental involvement; culture of cooperation—social and emotional skills modeled and taught; great school communication; safety committee made up of key stakeholders (union, public safety officials, parents, community, students, administrators, etc.); a safety/emergency preparedness plan in place; ongoing evaluation and practice of the plan; and early identification and intervention for students at risk. (p. 3)

Of the components identified by the American Federation of Teachers, there are a few that generate adaptive challenges: school leadership (administrative) that supports staff, students, and parent; community/parental involvement; and culture of cooperation—social and emotional skills modeled and taught. Heifetz, Grashow, and

Linsky (2009) described adaptive challenges as complex shifts in the organizational

landscape that require a complex response (p. 77). The other identified traits can be

construed as derivatives of the adaptive challenges. Hence, if the adaptive challenges are

grappled with, the other traits can be addressed during those development sessions.

School administrative leadership that supports staff, students, and parents

School leadership is one of the most important factors of a productive safe and

supportive school environment. The leader sets the vision for the school and monitors its

progress to goals. The vision must articulate the belief in the ability of every child.

Whitaker (2012) commented: "The more effective principals also insist on loyalty to

students. To a great principal, loyalty means making decisions based on what is best for

students. Moreover, they base their decisions on what is best for all of the students" (p.

77).

Whitaker's statement alludes to the need for the adults to be culturally proficient

and have a growth mindset. These two characteristics are essential for engaging in

efficacious practices within the school building. The conscious decision to have an

unwavering belief in what students are able to do forces teachers and leaders to do

whatever it takes to make this a reality. Weinstein et al. (2004) emphasized:

> An ecological theory of educational self-fulfilling prophecies suggest multiple
>
> and multilevel interventions for development of talent. The (leader's) vision is
>
> for a developmentally sensitive, culturally rich, intellectually challenging, and
>
> fluidly supportive educational system, fully aligned to promote positive self-
>
> fulfilling prophecies for all children. (p. 516)

In order for the school leader to accomplish these tasks he/she must believe that the school, community, staff, and students deserve better and recognize that it is their duty to accomplish this goal. It is even more important that the leader recognize they will not be able to lead this effort alone. They will need to inspire all stakeholders in making this charge their mission.

When conducting a longitudinal study on 5Essentials Survey results, Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu (2006) found:

> Principal leadership is a catalyst for change and a key driver of the development of the other essential supports. It is important to recognize the crucial role of the principal in stimulating and nurturing the other core supports. Deft leadership in turn stimulates and nourishes the development of the four other core organizational supports: parent-community ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, a student-centered learning climate, and ambitious instruction. (p. 30)

As the designer of this policy proposal, I recognize that the principal (school leader) is a critical factor in changing the school environment. However, although the leader is a critical lever for leading and implementing the school improvement initiatives, they cannot do it alone.

Community/parental involvement

Often times, school principals minimize the effectiveness of building a strong relationship with parents and the community. What they often fail to realize is that the students have a support system and these groups of people are essential to their success.

In low-income communities, the parents and community members are often marginalized and have not been acculturated on how to advocate on their student's behalf.

The principal does not consciously make the decision to shut out these important members of the school community. However, with so many competing priorities, they neglect the opportunities to take time for these relationships to be built, not recognizing that the time spent on building the relationships will assist them with the support and leverage they will need from the community when making significant improvements in students' achievement. Of the five essential supports for school improvement Bryk (2010) commented on the lack of relationships with parents and the community:

> Strong parent-community-school ties suggests a disconnect between local school professionals and the parents and community that a school is intended to serve is a persistent concern in many urban contexts. The absence of vital ties is a problem; their presence is a multifaceted resource for improvement. The quality of these ties links directly to students' motivation and school participant and can provide a critical resource for classrooms. (pp. 24–25)

School leaders must foster trust between the school, students, parents, and community. Trust is required for parents and the community to work collectively with the school to ensure that students are safe and supported. Tshannen-Moran (2004) contended that principals can help set the tone for trusting relationships with students and parents by engaging in proactive strategies to make positive connections with parents and support students into achieving success (p. 151). With this in mind, the leader must understand that trust is not built quickly. This process takes time, and much effort and

thought must be given to create opportunity for trust to be built. According to Bryk and

Schneider (2002),

> relational trust is not something that can be achieved simply through some
>
> workshop, retreat, or form of sensitivity training, although all of these can be
>
> helpful. Rather, relational trust is forged in daily social exchanges. Trust grows
>
> over time through exchange where the expectations held for others are validated
>
> in action. (p. 136)

Relational trust, as with any trust, is built through the consistent actions and

behaviors of all parties. Within the school setting, the principal, teachers, and staff can

decrease the amount of time it takes to build relational trust with students,

parents/guardians, and the community by being consistent in their language and

transparent with expectations. This requires the School Leadership Team to create

expectations that the staff adopts and follows at all times. The consistency in language

and demonstration of expectations will make all parties feel that they are treated fairly

due to the safe and supportive practices modeled.

Culture of cooperation—social and emotional skills modeled and taught

In schools with positive cultures, acceptable behaviors are explicitly taught in the

various locations of the school. This creates a sense of community with all stakeholders

understanding which display of behavior is acceptable and will support a positive

atmosphere. Cavanagh, Macfarlane, Glynn, and Macfarlane (2012) elaborated:

> Schools and classrooms that embody a culture of care, understand safety not only
>
> as freedom from harm but also as having the freedom to be whom and what we
>
> are. Being who and what we are within classrooms and schools implies being

able to maintain and enhance our ethnic and cultural knowledge and identities and values and beliefs while at the same time interacting peacefully with students and teachers from different ethnicities and cultures. (p. 445)

Many schools have adopted a Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) process to further their efforts with building a safe and supportive school environment (Office of Special Education Programs, 2015) This is a multi-tiered system of support that requires a school to define expectations, interventions, and supports for all priority groups within the school (i.e., diverse learners, English Language Learners, Early Childhood Education, ethnic groups, etc.). The focus on all priority groups ensures that all children's needs are met and expectations are appropriate.

<center>Recommended Policy</center>

The policy I recommend Chicago Public Schools to adopt is a Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan (SSSEIP). This policy would mandate that the principals of any school receiving below proficiency on the Safe Environment section of the My Voice, My School 5Essentials Survey and below proficiency on students' academic performance on the state assessment create a Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan to improve the climate and culture of their school. Each Chicago Public School receives a 5Essentials report year as part of its School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) (CPS, 2014). This document rates the schools in various areas of performance. However, there are no mandates or expectations regarding what the schools should do with this information.

The development of the SSSEIP would require the school principal to collaborate with all stakeholders (i.e. school leadership team, instructional leadership team, teachers,

<center>13</center>

teacher assistants, counselor(s), parents, and community). Student participation at the

high school level would be required whereas elementary student participation would be

encouraged. Sebring et al. (2006) asserted:

> In order to teach students, schools must minimize distractions and engage them in
>
> learning processes and activities. Without this, all other educational goals remain
>
> lofty rhetoric. The most basic requirement in this regard is a safe and orderly
>
> environment that is conducive to academic work. Concerns about safety and
>
> order are highly salient for students and their families in urban schools, where the
>
> crime rate is high and gangs are active in particular sections of the city. In
>
> addition, clear, fair, and consistently enforced expectations for student behavior
>
> ensure that students receive maximum instructional time. (p. 13)

Given the proposed policy requirement to create an SSSEIP, it is very important

to recognize that some schools may be low in more than one area of weakness identified

on their 5Essentials report; therefore, it would not be approved for them to address other

5Essentials while developing and implementing the SSEIP. This provision would

safeguard against schools attempting to focus improvement efforts in too many areas at

one time thus limiting improvements in any of the areas of needed improvement. The

"School Environment Matters: State Board of Education administers first Illinois

5Essentials Survey to help improve student learning" news release highlighted that,

> based on 20 years of research conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium
>
> on Chicago School Research in more than 400 schools, including Chicago Public
>
> Schools, the 5Essentials has been shown to be strongly predictive of school
>
> improvement. Schools strong in 3 to 5 of the Essentials are 10 times more likely

to improve student learning than schools weak in 3 to 5 of the Essentials. Those

differences remain true even after controlling for student and school

characteristics, including poverty, race, gender, and neighborhood characteristics.

Strength on components within the Essentials also correlates with increase teacher

retention, student attendance, college enrollment and high school graduation.

(Illinois State Board of Education, 2013, para. 7)

The goal of the proposed policy is to increase student achievement. Research has

proven that a safe and supportive environment wherein staff members have an efficacious

view of their students' abilities, staff are able to drive significant change. They are able

to build strong relational bonds that compel everyone to push for success.

Corbett, Wilson, and Williams (2002) observed a teacher insisting that students

complete every assignment.

According to students, they had to pass up going to free time after lunch, or

morning breaks, or special classes, or sometimes home until they finished. In

each case, however, a teacher was available to help explain the assignment and to

provide extra help, which is a critical aspect of "It's my job." Rarely were

students left without guidance to do a crucial learning activity. (p. 135)

The level of expectation on the part of the teacher acknowledges to the student the

teacher's commitment to their success and the expectation of completing assigned work.

The desired outcome would be that students incorporate these values into intrinsic

behaviors and grow the expectation that the teacher's role is to assist them with

navigating success.

Policy Effectiveness

The SSSEIP policy would require school leadership to understand and recognize the importance of a safe and supportive school environment and understand it is attainable in every school in every neighborhood. The policy would create a safe and supportive environment where all adults believe in the ability of all students and value partnerships with parents and community. Schools would come to the realization, while working collaboratively to create a positive school culture, that the benefits would be greater than just creating a safe and supportive school environment.

Jerald (2006) cited Russell Hobby, of Britain's Hay Group, as stating, "viewed more positively, culture can also be the ultimate form of 'capacity'—a reservoir of energy and wisdom to sustain motivation and co-operation, shape relationships and aspirations, and guide effective choices at every level of the school" (p. 2). As principals guide the committee to create a Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan, they would acknowledge their role in creating this type of school for students, teachers, parents, and the community. Habegger (2009) maintained: "The principal's role is to create a sense of belonging, provide directions, and path to success" (p. 46).

Through the implementation of this policy, it is expected that overtime, student achievement will increase across the city. These actions will lead to teachers restoring a sense of calm and high expectations for all children. Children will begin to adopt efficacious practices and recognize that their possibilities are limitless. The achievement gap would begin to close and educational equity would be realized.

SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

This analysis of need section will focus on the problem and the context. There are five disciplinary areas brought under analysis: education, economic, social, political, and moral and ethical. Each will be analyzed separately.

Educational Analysis

With a multitude of education reform efforts, over the past 32 years, there have been no significant improvements in minority student performance. Black students are also lagging behind White and Hispanic students with high school graduation rates. According to the Illinois Report Card (2015) for the 2014–2015 school year, the Summary ISAT achievement gap between Black and White subgroups in the area of reading was 31%. This was an increase from a 24% gap at the close of 2010. The achievement gap between Hispanic and White subgroups was 24% in the area of reading, which was a 2% increase gap from 2010 to 2014.

In an analysis of the achievement gap since the Coleman Report was presented to the then Secretary of Education T. H. Bell, Gamoran and Long (2006) reported the following regarding the achievement gap in 2006:

The declining achievement gaps, however modest, occurred during the 1970s and 1980s; during the 1990s, the Black-White gap actually increased and then dropped slightly at the close of the century. As of 2004, the gaps for 17-year-olds in math and reading and 13-year-olds in reading were larger than in 1990. (p. 5)

While minority students continue to academically fall behind their White counterparts, based on multiple reports, the crime rate, unemployment, and low college graduation rates for the minority children in Chicago are increasing. The Chicago Board

of Education has attempted to make strides by adopting the initiatives presented by federal and state legislatures: No Child Left Behind accountability model, School Improvement Grants (SIG) for low performing high schools, Race to the Top funds, Turnaround School initiative, and school consolidations just to name a few. Each of these initiatives described what to do when attempting to improve instruction. None of these initiatives focused on what type of culture is needed to support the academic success of schools that were predominantly minority. So now, instead of creating new initiatives that focus on what to do, it seems schools need to focus on how to drive student achievement by changing adults' mindsets on how to develop students who have a sense of belonging, have belief in their abilities, engage in academic work that pushes their thinking and grows their knowledge, and have a love of their heritage and culture. Students would understand their self-worth and create their desire to plan for their future, which would involve taking their education seriously.

Economic Analysis

Because the My Voice, My School 5Essentials Survey is administered to all schools in the City of Chicago District 299, implementation of this policy would incur no additional cost to the district for this process. This survey report is also generated by the state and embedded in the School Quality Rating Policy document that each school receives and is rated on. Thus, all reporting measures are available and accessible to each school principal. This information is also public knowledge.

The individual schools would incur some costs which would vary based on their implementation model. The most costly expense would be teachers' salaries, if professional development is conducted during non-work times. There would be some

costs that would vary based on a schools' decision to hire a consultant; however, this cost could be minimal if the principal and leadership team decided to lead the professional development for the school staff. Most schools would probably identify the need for resources such as professional books. There may be a need to hire some substitutes so staff members could observe schools that currently have supportive school environments and 5Essentials ratings of "Well Organized" or better.

Because this improvement plan would require the collaboration of staff, parents, community members, and possibly some students, a food budget may be needed to cover the cost of light refreshments at meetings. The estimated cost for this proposed initiative would be approximately $10,850 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Program Cost Analysis

Event	Professional Development for 30 teachers and 10 assistants at union contractual rate of $45 an hour for instructional staff, assistants are paid their hourly rate (estimated $20 per hour), and $39.11 an hours is paid to non-instructional staff; ($45 x 30 + $20 x 10) x 5 hours	Professional text for 40 school staff, with an estimated cost of $50	Substitute coverage for teachers to visit other schools would be approximately $120 per day as rates vary per substitute teacher ($120 x 5)	Food for after school and weekend meetings with parents and community members budgeted at a flat cost of $500
Cost estimate	$7,750 (if non-instructional staff are included the rate will increase by $195.55 per person)	$2000	$600	$500

The estimated cost for implementing this proposal is small in relation to the expected outcome. However, given that CPS is experiencing its greatest financial challenge ever with a reported $1 billion deficit, finding this money could seem insurmountable for schools. According to Roza (2010), "a highly functioning finance

system would promote continuous improvement by adapting the best insights about high-quality efficient services and discontinuing investments in efforts that do not yield the desired results" (p. 92). Based on Roza's suggestion, schools that must create the SSSEIP would also have to reprioritize funding allocations to ensure this policy is implemented with fidelity.

Social Analysis

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (n.d.) summary statistics on schools in various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic status (SES) classification groups identified 46 schools as Truly Disadvantaged and found the following community descriptors:

The communities of Truly Disadvantaged schools had the highest crime rates and the highest percentages of children who were abused or neglected. Residents of these communities were most likely to live in public housing and the least likely to attend church regularly or believe they could affect positive change in their community. Truly Disadvantaged schools were seven time more likely than better off, racially integrated schools, to stagnate in math and twice as likely to stagnate in reading. (p. 1)

The term "Truly Disadvantaged" schools is disturbing. However, the indicators identified for these types of schools in Sebring et al.'s (2006) Table 3.1 Summary Statistics on Schools in Various Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Status (SES) Classification Groups are unfortunately not surprising.

These schools' populations were 100% African-American, 96% low-income, 64% of male residents' ages 16–64 in the community were unemployed, $9,480 was

the median family income in block group and around the school, and 70% of

families below the poverty line in block group and around the school. (p. 34)

Based on these demographics, the students' families and communities stand in

stark contrast to the demographics of their teachers, support staff, and school leaders.

Hence, it is probable that there is a disconnection in relationship building,

communication, and common expectations.

Society interprets poverty in a variety of ways. The individualist perspective

holds that poverty is caused mainly by individual actions, such as lack of

persistence. In other words, people are lazy, unmotivated, and fail to work hard.

The individualistic perspective of society holds that we are the architects of our

own destinies. The contrasting structural perspective holds that poverty is created

and maintained by social and economic inequities. Prins and Schafft (2009, p.

2283) describe that "structural explanations attribute poverty to economic and

social structural factors such as job scarcity, low wages, weak social safety nets,

inadequate schools, and prejudice and discrimination." Such explanations for

poverty transcend urban and rural environments as well as racial and ethnic

boundaries. (Lindsey et al., 2010, pp. 16–17)

No matter how poverty is perceived by the stakeholders in the school, it is paramount that

neither excuses nor sympathetic behaviors prevail, thus limiting the possibilities of the

children by limiting the educational challenges of rigor.

As significant and concerning as the demographics of the Truly Disadvantaged

schools' areas are, their school leaders should follow the lead of Jerry Weast who made

significant progress with student achievement in the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. In this regard, Childress, Doyle, & Thomas (2009) reported:

> Weast and his team did not spend significant time planning to change things that were outside their sphere of influence. They acknowledged that they could not change their students' socioeconomic status but committed to changing school and district factors that were in their control. (p. 21)

This same philosophy must be adopted by the principal and passed on to the school staff. The adults in the school can only control what occurs in the school. They only monitor that the school's expectations related to the development of a safe and supportive school environment are being implemented and all stakeholders have had input into those expectations.

<div align="center">Political Analysis</div>

There are several views on the political aspect of under-achieving schools. Some political leaders would suggest that schools are underperforming because they are not receiving enough funding to improve the quality of education. The level of education of the teachers is often questioned in under-performing schools. Excuses as to why students in impoverished areas are not meeting academic thresholds are often dependent on the political climate. However, most recently, it seems that accountability has been the answer to both the Democratic and Republican parties. The Republicans focused their reform efforts on No Child Left Behind policy. The Democrats created the Common Core State Standards to raise the level of rigor on the assessments.

Ravitch (2010) argued: "Reformers like to say that poverty does not affect students' academic performance, but this is their wish, not reality. It is certainly true that

children who live in poverty can learn and excel. But the odds are against them" (pp.
256–257). This statement holds great truth but it is also quite dangerous because it gives
people an escape route when students do not perform well. It justifies how students from
a specific zip code are destined to live their entire life in poverty, which negates our
belief that education is the key for creating equity. Kunichoff (2012) posted a blog for
the Chicago Teachers Union that stated:

> Advocates have argued many CPS schools in low-income neighborhoods have
> disproportionately harsh disciplinary policies and have critiqued the district for
> suspending or expelling students for nonviolent infractions like being late or
> violating dress code. In 2011, CPS spent 15 times more on security guards in
> schools than on college and career counselors. The numbers, respectively, were
> $51.4 million compared to $3.5 million. (Safety section, para. 4)

These are issues that schools would be able to eliminate by creating in improvement plan
that focused on the development a safe and supportive school environment.

<div align="center">Moral and Ethical Analysis</div>

The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States passed the
governing of education to the individual states in the country by virtue of its omission in
the constitution. The Constitution of the State of Illinois states,

> A fundamental goal of the People of the State is the educational development of
> all persons to the limits of their capacities. The State shall provide for an efficient
> system of high quality public educational institutions and services. (Il. Const., art.
> X, § 1)

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Based on this law, it is incumbent upon government and education officials to ensure that the rights of its citizens are upheld. In reviewing the data for the schools in the City of Chicago, District 299, it is clear that the school system is not providing high quality public educational services for all persons. This is evidenced by the declining scores on state assessments in minority areas in Chicago, which mimic the educational performance of minorities around the country.

We not only have a constitutional responsibility, but a moral responsibility, to supply our students with a high quality public education that will prepare them for their future. In minority schools where this is not the reality, Payne (2008) suggested:

> It may well be that in the grip of test-score hysteria, we have begun to think of teaching too narrowly, giving short shrift to its social dimension. That social dimension may be more important than we think and more important to some populations than others. (p. 95)

Payne's statement gives pause to what is the variant between the educations of Whites in comparison to minority students. Could society truly believe that people of color are somehow educationally inferior, that their brains do not work? In pondering this question, it became quite relevant that cultures of different people define how they receive information. If this is indeed the case, are schools imparting information to minority students as if their cultural background is the same as that of White students? Are we dismissing what it means to be a country that prides itself on being a "melting-pot"? But, are we a melting pot? Do we expect people to shed their cultures and assume one premise of thought and acumen? It seems that this train of thought would be considered ridiculous and that what we as Americans take pride in is our diversity. So, if

this is indeed the case, school personnel have an ethical responsibility to become culturally competent about their students, parents, and the community in which they teach and receive a salary that justly compensates them for the education the children receive that will prepare them for college and careers.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized:

Relational trust foments a moral imperative to take on the hard work of school improvement. Teachers had a full-time job prior to reform. Most worked hard at their teaching, doing the best they could for as many students as they could. From a purely self-interested view point, it would seem quite reasonable for teachers to ask, "Why should we do this?" A context characterized by high relational trust provides an answer. In the end, reform is simply the right thing to do. (p. 123)

The proposed policy will require the school's stakeholders to reflect on the current state of the school's culture to determine how to improve supports for all students. This action should force conversations about values and beliefs, thus developing an environment that focuses on the specific needs of children. This open dialogue will set the stage for authentic conversation about teacher practice and will give way to an environment that not only supports the success of children but also the success of the adults (teachers, parents, and members of the community). In keeping with the sentiment expressed by Bryk and Schneider, the district should enact this policy because it is indeed the right thing to do.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

This section provides a detailed explanation of what this proposed policy advocates and discloses its goals and objectives. Three central questions are explored and discussed:

1. What are the policy's goals and objectives?

2. Whose needs, values, and preferences are being represented by the policy advocated.

3. On what basis are the goals and objectives validated to be appropriate and good?

Our country is grappling with low student achievement and pondering solutions that would resolve this issue. The Chicago Public Schools mirror the concerns of the country and those associated with them are searching for the answers. It is believed that one of the key solutions having proven results is being overlooked. Data show a direct correlation between student achievement and safe and supportive school environments. Thus, mandating the implementation of a school improvement plan that creates and sustains a safe and supportive school environment is essential for schools that have environments in direct opposition to this.

The Chicago Public Schools need to adopt a policy requiring that all schools, where data show they are not meeting proficiency or better in developing a safe supportive school environment, create an improvement plan to increase the students, teachers, and parents expectations of the school environment as well as define expectations. The policy would clearly outline how the Safe and Supportive School

Environment Improvement Plan (SSSEIP) should be created in collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

The advocated policy would clearly state that the SSSEIP must be created in collaboration with stakeholders, specifically, the school principal, School Leadership Team (SLT), instructional leadership team, teacher assistants, counselor, parents, and community members. Students should be encouraged to participate, but this will not be mandated at the elementary school level. However, student participation would be expected at the high school level.

In the proceeding sections, a case will be made for how the proposed policy would support the improvement of student achievement in low-performing schools with challenging school environments.

<div align="center">Policy Goals and Objectives</div>

Chicago Public Schools currently administer an annual survey that determines if a school is proficient or better in its measurements for maintaining a safe and supportive school environment for its students, teachers, and parents. Despite the schools having the results of this survey, there is no policy that stipulates any actions must be taken by schools generating results that are subpar in the area of supportive environment.

Research not only suggests that students achieve better in schools where they do not feel their academic success is threatened, but it also shows the students in these schools are achieving regardless of their socio-economic status. Deal and Peterson (1999) (as cited in Jerald, 2006) suggested that a strong, positive culture serves several beneficial functions, such as:

- fostering effort and productivity,

- improving collegial and collaborative activities that in turn promote better communication and problem solving,

- supporting successful change and improvement efforts,

- building commitment and helping students and teachers identify with the school,

- amplifying the energy and motivation of staff members and students, and

- focusing attention and daily behavior on what is important and valued. (p. 2)

The objective of this policy is to have school principals' act on their survey results from the University of Chicago Consortium's 5Essentials survey. The results give a breakdown of how students, parents, and teachers perceive the school's environment. The overarching goal is to develop the belief in all stakeholders that their actions are a direct derivative of the environment as well as their students' experiences on a daily basis, thus helping them understand their direct impact on student achievement. The objective would also be to improve collaboration among all stakeholders in the school through the development of the SSSEIP. All stakeholders would work together to define the type of environment that would support the feelings of all students, teachers and parents that the school has a safe and supportive environment.

Block (2008) reflected on the kind of leadership that is needed to bring about communal transformation:

This is not an argument against leaders or leadership, only a desire to change the nature of our thinking. Communal transformation requires a certain kind of leadership, one that creates conditions where context shifts: from a place of fear and fault to one of gifts, generosity, and abundance; from belief in more laws and

oversight to a belief in social fabric and chosen accountability; from the

corporation and systems as central, to associational life as central; from a focus on

leaders to a focus on citizens, and from problems to possibilities. For this shift in

context to occur, we need leadership that supports a restorative path. Restoration

calls for us to deglamorize leadership and consider it a quality that exists in all

human beings. We need to simplify leadership and construct it so that it is

infinitely and universally available. (p. 85)

Block's position on the collaboration between the leader and community is why this

policy will only be successful if the school leader develops this school improvement plan

with its stakeholders. This may be a great idea, but it will not come to fruition if all

parties are not in agreement with the roles each must play.

<center>Needs, Values, and Preferences</center>

People need a safe and supportive environment where they are nurtured to be their

best. Recruiters emphasize the theory of good fit, meaning that a person seeking

employment should make sure the mission and vision of an organization is aligned to

their beliefs. Heathfield (2015) recommended:

To succeed in a job, an individual must share the prevailing values of his

colleagues and customers. Employees who fail to fit within the environment

generally leave to find a work environment or culture which is more congruent

with their own values and beliefs. ("Values, Beliefs, Outlook," para. 9)

In the case of students in CPS who attend their neighborhood school, there is no

opportunity to shop around for a best fit school. The school located within the student's

residential address boundary is the one they must attend unless there are opportunities

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where such child has been selected via lottery or test to attend a school outside of their attendance boundaries. Therefore, we must value every child's right to a "good" education by ensuring the school environment supports their ability to learn. Malone (2013) offered:

> Having access to disaggregate data has prompted educators to focus on how different groups of students are achieving in their schools. In many cases, this has led policymakers and educators to develop educational change efforts focused on improving educational experiences of low-income and racial minority students.
> (p. 66)

It should be implausible to do nothing about the state of the schools which our children attend when we have the data that identify their areas of need. Recognizing that the school principal's role is arduous, it is still unacceptable but not inconceivable, that many of them have not used the data to make the changes necessary to create a supportive school environment. Hence, the principal will need support in making this shift in their practice and the support needed to galvanize their stakeholders set and drive the initiatives necessary to impose sustainable change.

Goals and Objectives Appropriate and Good

As we consider the needs of students from birth to 21 years of age, not enforcing the expectation that their school's environment is supportive would be inexcusable. Hence, remaining silent when the data are apparent is unconscionable. For the good of the society, we must nurture the youngest of our community to ensure that we continue to progress because anything contrary to this action would support our demise.

Schools with high rates of drop outs, suspensions, and underperformance on academic measures are most frequently attributed to schools where students do not feel safe and supported. The climate of the school is not conducive to learning. There is typically greater value placed on enforcing disciplinary measures than curriculum and instruction.

The University of Chicago's Consortium referred to such schools as Truly Disadvantaged Schools. These schools are not the norm in geographic areas where the populations have moderate and high income levels. On the contrary, these schools mirror their communities. Hence, schools continue to reflect the cycle of economic disparity. There are variations to a statement that is theoretically profound which suggests that a student born in a certain zip code is destined to live an adult life that is deprived of economic success. The children in these zip codes are predetermined to receive poor educations, have a higher rate of incarceration, and make wages lower than that of the defined poverty rate.

The schools are not the cure for all social ills, but they are uniquely positioned to change the expectations of their students and parents related to educational expectations and opportunities. In order to shift the beliefs and outcomes of the schools, it will be necessary to open up the dialog between the school and its stakeholders. Recreating the climate of the school would be an excellent place to begin because it will create a common ground on which to build a high functioning learning environment.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

This policy argument section is a pro-and-con essay on the merit of the advocated policy, considering research findings, public and professional opinions, and other relevant factors. Surprisingly, it could be assumed that this policy would have no merit because there is no need to wonder which schools do not currently have a safe and supportive school environment. This information can be found by anyone with access to the Internet and a search engine because this is publicly available information. Every school within CPS is required to have its students in grades 6–12 as well as its parents, teachers, and staffs complete the 5Essentials Survey annually. The results of the survey are reported in the schools' School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP).

Argument (Pros)

Because there should be no surprise that every child deserves to learn in a safe and supportive school environment, the need to make an argument in favor of the proposed policy should not be necessary. However, to the contrary, there is a great majority of people who would argue that this reality is not possible in every school. If every CPS student is going to live the district's vision, which states that every Chicago Public Schools student in every neighborhood will be engaged in a rigorous, well-rounded instructional program and will graduate prepared for success in college, career, and life, it is imperative that we make the necessary shifts in adult behavior. The shift that is directly aligned to creating a safe and supportive school environment is the expectation that the adults can create a positive environment in which all students will be able to thrive.

An example of why all adult stakeholders are needed to make this shift to a safe and supportive environment may be found in the work of Ladson-Billings (2009). Ladson-Billings conducted research in schools with negative environments, and found these schools were focused on the deficits of the children and not the assets the children garnered. Moreover, within the confines of some of these buildings, there were teachers whose classrooms had safe and supportive environments and great things were happening inside their four walls. Despite these teachers proven outcomes, the beliefs and practices were not shared across the buildings and instead were considered an anomaly. The school environment was not reflective of the hope students found during this one year of their educational experience.

Ladson-Billings (2009) observed and commented on the difference and similarity of two teachers:

On the surface, Ann Lewis and Julia Devereaux employ very different strategies to teach reading. In some ways, their differences represent the larger debate about literacy teaching that of whole language versus basal-text techniques. However, beneath the surface, at the personal ideological level, the differences between these instructional strategies lose meaning. Both teachers want their students to become literate. Both believe that their students are capable of high levels of literacy. (p. 126)

The belief these teachers had in their students encouraged the students to believe in themselves. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy that transcends previous expectations, thus nurturing student success. The experiences of the students in these teachers' classrooms are not atypical for children from homes with higher economic backgrounds

and parents that know their children can and will be educated to ensure their future success.

From an economic perspective, there is a great divide among the salary bands based on a person's level of education. The Institute of Education Sciences reported:

For young adults ages 25–34 who worked full time, year round, higher educational attainment was associated with higher median earnings; this pattern was consistent for 2000, 2003, and 2005 through 2013. For example, in 2013 median earnings for young adults with a bachelor's degree were $48,500, compared with $23,900 for those without a high school credential, $30,000 for those with a high school credential, and $37,500 for those with an associate's degree. In other words, young adults with a bachelor's degree earned more than twice as much as those without a high school credential (103 percent more), 62 percent more than young adult high school completers, and 29 percent more than associate's degree holders. Additionally, in 2013 median earnings for young adults with a master's or higher degree were $59,600, some 23 percent more than median earnings for young adults with a bachelor's degree. This pattern of higher earnings associated with higher levels of educational attainment also held for both males and females and across racial/ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, para. 3)

The mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, seems to understand these facts and has instituted a policy that any student who graduates from a CPS high school with a grade point average of B or better would receive free tuition at the City Colleges of Chicago.

This policy was enacted to increase the students' quality of life as an adult through an education.

Research suggests that high school graduation can be predicted by specific risk factors. According to the Center for Public Education (2007),

Dropouts are more likely to have struggled academically: Low grades, low test scores, Fs in English or math, falling behind in course credits, and being retained are associated with lower chances for graduation. Dropouts also are more likely to have shown signs of disengagement from school: High rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor classroom behavior, less participation in extracurricular activities, and bad relationships with teachers and peers all have been linked to lower chances for graduation. (para. 9)

Of the factors acknowledged by the Center of Public Education, bad relationships with teachers and peers is a factor that this policy would remedy. A supportive school environment would create structures that positively affect student-to-teacher relationships/partnership. The effects of these relationships would transform into positive peer-to-peer relationships because all parties would create expectations to attain the desired outcome, allowing for greater emphasis on academic advancement.

Subsequently, the SSSEIP policy should be adopted because a safe and supportive school environment supports critical thinking. Students who have positive interactions in a safe and supportive environment are more willing to take risks. This outcome is also plausible for teachers.

In *The Global Achievement Gap*, Wagner (2008) identified seven survival skills that children in the 21st century will need. The skills are: critical thinking and problem

solving, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and ability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, assessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination. Wagner (2008) asserted:

> Young people who want to earn more than minimum wage and who go out into the world without the new survival skills I've uncovered in my research are cripple for life; they are similarly unprepared to be active and informed citizens or to be adults who will continue to be stimulated by new information and ideas. (p. 14)

In order to prepare students for this level of development, they must be in an environment that allows children to think and explore. This level of development will not happen in chaotic environments. The most conducive environment to foster this level of mental capacity is in a safe and supportive environment.

<div align="center">Counter Argument (Cons)</div>

One con of implementing this policy would be that school leaders will need to drive this initiative, thus requiring them to have a strategic focus on school climate which may take their focus from instruction. In theory this may be true. However, the principal's laser focus on a safe and supportive school environment will encompass assessing the current state and culture within the classrooms, hence drawing a greater depth of data on teacher practice and student engagement.

Another concern is that school leaders would have to schedule and lead multiple meetings with various stakeholders, creating an unrealistic work-life balance. However, if these leaders understand the tenets of developing others, they will understand that several activities/events should be delegated. This will allow them to manage their

professional and personal expectations while making significant strides toward the desired goals and outcomes.

There may be a need to reallocate funds in order to implement the SSSEIP initiative. Currently, CPS is financially in deep debt, leaving schools to operate on less than ideal budgets. The upside to the shifting of funds is that, once the school environment is improved, funds that had been directed toward security and the costs related to enforcing penalties will be rerouted to instruction. Overall, there appears to be no reason to believe that implementing this policy would negatively impact school outcomes.

SECTION FIVE: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In this section, I will make the case for implementation of the advocated policy because it is administratively feasible. The implementation plan will be comprised of the following components:

- creating a vision for a safe and supportive school environment,

- developing an action plan for implementation, and

- establishing the progress monitoring protocols.

A school that is required to adopt the Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan policy will have two years to make significant improvements in its school environment. The following four stages will guide schools to successful implementation.

Create a Vision for a Safe and Supportive School Environment

In order to create a vision for a safe and supportive school environment, the principal will have to convene a committee that represents the diversity of the school. The committee should be comprised of all the roles in the school, ethnicities in the school, and the varying priority groups of the school (see Appendix C). Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) broadened school leadership to include all teachers:

> Through a leadership team approach, school leaders can promote all teachers as leaders by empowering their participation in school reform efforts, inspiring them to become competent in their practice, encouraging their collaboration, and creating partnerships both within and beyond the walls of the school for the benefit of all students. Educators can increase their productivity if they learn to work together as professionals within a community. (p. 39)

The school principal may designate a specific team or members of various school teams to gather data that impact the school's environment. Examples of the types of data needed are the following: Chicago Public Schools School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), attendance, discipline, on-track reporting data, summative quarterly grades, RTI/MTSS/PBIS reports, and state assessment scores. All appropriate data should be disaggregated by grade, ethnicity, low-income level, diverse learners, and English Language Learners to determine if any priority groups are being marginalized. This information must be shared with the SSSEIP committee as well as the subcommittees. Once the committee has reviewed all of the data, they will engage in a deeper dive into the data to determine if there is more information needed to conduct the analysis. This analysis will lead to determining the root causes of the school's current environment.

One of the norms of the committee must be to not place blame in regard to the data because some of the stakeholders on the committee may take offense. Placing blame could limit stakeholders' feeling of safety and support, which could impede their ability to add value to the group. Once the factors that have contributed to the school not being safe and supportive have been uncovered, the committee members can then begin to envision what a safe and supportive school environment would look and feel like, and they can begin to draft their vision statement.

It would benefit the principal to construct the mental model of a safe and supportive school environment the committee will work collectively to achieve. Senge (1990) defined mental models as,

> deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that
> influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Very often, we

are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior. Mental models of what can or cannot be done in different management settings are no less deeply entrenched. Many insights into new markets or outmoded organization practices fail to get put into practice because the conflict with powerful, tacit mental models. (p. 8)

The mental models must possess descriptive attributes that all stakeholders will be able to visualize, hence allowing the thoughts to manifest into reality. For example, the principal can share research articles that highlight schools having safe and supportive school environments as well as similar school and community demographics. The leader may also take the committee on visits to similar types of schools having positive environments so members can speak with these schools' stakeholders to learn how they were able to develop their positive cultures. They can also watch documentaries on positive school cultures and learn about the implications of not creating such a culture for students to feel safe and supportive (see Appendix A and Appendix B).

Once the committee members have a collective understanding of what is possible, and there is a shift in their values and beliefs and a deep acknowledgement of their current school state, they will be able to create a vision for their safe and supportive school environment. Reeves (2002) explained what gives value to a strategic plan:

The document itself does not fully reflect the value of the process; that lies in the communication, the linkages, and the focus provided by the process of collaborative data analysis and goal setting. Most strategic planning processes, says Sparks, confirm existing mental models by starting with a statement of belief

systems that yield some typically expected statement, such as "All children can learn." (p. 100)

The school principal must lead this subcommittee through each phase of the process suggested in this section before conversation regarding the development of the SSSEIP begins. It will be the principal's role to make clear and remain firm that a premature start to the discussion of the improvement plan could jeopardize its success because the members must be mentally ready to make the necessary shifts in beliefs and behaviors prior to creating a road map for the development of a safe and supportive school environment.

<center>Develop an Action Plan for Implementation</center>

Now that the SSSEIP committee members have identified their values and beliefs, have come to terms with the roles they have played in creating and nurturing the current school environment, and have created a vision for the expectations of a safe and supportive school environment, they are ready to proceed with developing the strategic plan. Bryk and Schneider (2002) affirmed the place of trust in the process:

> Given the asymmetry of power in urban school communities, the actions that
> principals take play a key role in developing and sustaining relational trust.
> Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge
> vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary
> actions. If principals couple this with a compelling school vision, and if their
> behavior can be understood as advancing this vision, their integrity is affirmed.
> Then, assuming principals are competent in the management of day-to-day school
> affairs, an overall ethos conducive to trust is likely to emerge. (p. 137)

The principal will have to guide the committee on how to proceed with working

with its subcommittees on the development of the strategic plan. Recall that the

committee is comprised of all of the internal and external subgroups that create the school

community. These committee members will be responsible for guiding their

subcommittees through the analysis of the data the SSSEIP committee previously

analyzed, challenge the findings, and make recommendations for creating a safe and

supportive school environment aligned to the proposed vision.

Because the principal will delegate this important leadership task to the

committee members, he or she must be very explicit about the expected outcomes for the

meetings. In order to ensure the subcommittees' effectiveness, the principal will need to

provide committee members with agendas that outline the objective of the meetings,

suggest activities and/or protocols for achieving the desired objectives, and provide

opportunities for the committee members to practice and ask questions prior to their

leading their team meetings. To aid in this readiness process, the appendix section of this

advocacy study includes: a sample of a suggested meeting agenda (see Appendix D), an

evaluation form for meetings (see Appendix E), a goals development template (see

Appendix F), a Responsible, Accountable, Consult, and Inform (RACI) chart (see

Appendix G), and a guide for data analysis (see Appendix C).

This level of detail will ensure that the committee members feel confident with

leading their teams and are also certain that everyone is aligned. Heifetz (1994)

explained what takes place during periods of change:

We look generally to our authorities for direction, protection, and order.

Direction may take the form of vision, goals, strategy, and technique, but on some

preconscious level, it may simply mean "finding the next feeding site."

Protection may take the form of negotiating a favorable and mutually beneficial

agreement with a competitor, but basically it connotes scanning the environment

for threats and mobilizing the response. Order consists of three things: orienting

people to their places and roles, controlling internal conflict, and establishing and

maintaining norms. (p. 69)

The principal should prioritize attending all of the subcommittee meetings to offer

protection, direction, and order. This will happen organically as the principal provides

guidance, clarity, understanding of District policy, and explains the subcommittees' role

in contributing to the development of a safe and supportive school environment. Heifetz

et al. (2009) detailed the principal's tasks:

Observe what is going on around you. Stay diagnostic even as you take action.

Develop more than one interpretation. Watch for patterns. Reality test your

interpretation when it is self-serving or close to your default. Debrief with

partners as often as you can to assess the information generated by your actions,

and the interventions of others in order to think through your next move. (p. 126)

Taking time to get the full view of the circumstances before taking action is often

difficult. However, acting in haste could potentially cause harm and set back to the

implementation plan. It will be important to recognize how people are adapting to the

ideology that the adults create in the school environment. People may covertly mask

their discontent with the changes. The leader will need to remain aware of unstated

concerns and discuss them openly so as to help their staff members advance on this

journey in a productive manner. Overlooking the warning signs would be detrimental to

their improvement. However, the principal will not lead the sessions because the peer-to-peer conversations regarding the team's values, beliefs, and expectations should nurture a more authentic conversation.

Based on the suggestions from the subcommittees, the SSSEIP team should have enough information to begin developing an action plan for creating a safe and supportive school environment. All iterations of the plan must be shared with the subcommittees for their input because they will play a critical role in successful implementation of the plan; this makes their approval of the plan a critical element of the process. It is suggested that the action plan have a Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan (see Appendix H).

<div align="center">Establish a Progress Monitoring Protocol</div>

Once all of the data have been analyzed, root causes identified, goals developed and expectations set, the final stage is to create a progress monitoring structure. If the implementation plan does not have a protocol for progress monitoring, there will be no way to measure success or recognize when changes are necessary. In this case, all of the activities, communications, and meetings would have served no purpose because people will return to business as usual and will continue to achieve the same unproductive results. The SSSEIP progress monitoring protocol should repeat the steps taken in the original development of the plan to quarterly monitor improvements. Repeating these steps emphasizes Conzemius and O'Neill's (2002) example of a school principal who is a systems thinker: "A systems thinker understands that in reality an action produces a result that in turn creates future problems and actions—with no beginning or end, only a constant dynamic interaction" (p. 181).

The plan would require the SSSEIP committee members to meet quarterly with current data that were reviewed in the initial phase. The members will compare the data to determine if they have made the improvements set in their goals. If the goals have been met, there is cause for celebration and cause to continue to implement their plan. If there are goals that have not been met, the committee members will need to work with their subcommittees to repeat the process of analyzing the data, determining next steps, and checking results. The teams should also note what they have learned.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

The policy assessment plan will monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes and results of the policy if it is implemented. The assessment plan also describes how individuals or groups who are responsible for the policy's implementation and administration will be held accountable and what report procedures will be followed. If this advocated policy is adopted, the Chicago Public Schools, District 299, will have to assign this plan to a district department for oversight. The primary components are the following:

- Performance Meetings

- Monitoring Implementations

Performance Meetings

Based on the structure of the Chicago Public Schools, the department that supports the principal managers should be responsible for monitoring the success of the plans to determine if the policy has benefited the district. Depending upon whether the proposed policy is adopted, it is recommended that the principal manager's initial meeting with the principal should focus on discussing the requirement of the Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan. During this meeting, both parties would review the policy and brainstorm about who the members of the SSSEIP committee should be or the types of people it should include.

The principal manager should also use this time to assess the principal's understanding of action research because a deep understanding of this process will be required. If the principal manager determines that the principal will need support with developing this skill set, the manager will have to coach the principal or identify someone

who is equipped to offer the level of support needed. For principals who require support, there will need to be more frequent check-ins scheduled for progress updates as well as visits to observe the SSSEIP committee meetings to ensure the principal is on track with developing a robust implementation plan.

Once the plan has been developed, the principal manager will need to convene a committee of Subject Matter Experts (SME) to review and approve the plan. If the plan is not approved, the specific details of the necessary changes that will have to be made are communicated to the principal. The principal will then return to the SSSEIP committee with the required changes and get their buy-in. After all of the required changes have been made, the plan will be approved and action steps will be taken for implementation of the plan.

The principal managers will then meet with their individual principals to set goals and define the measures of success for the overall improvements. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will need to be developed after the analysis of the data. All this will lead the manager and the principal to the development of systems and structures that will be sustainable over time. "KPI is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively a company is achieving key business objectives. Organizations use KPIs to evaluate their success in reaching targets" (Klipfolio, 2015, para. 1)

The principal manager and the principal will work together to develop the Key Performance Indicators that will be aligned with the goals identified in Safe and Supportive School Environment Improvement Plan. The progress monitoring of the KPIs should occur at each check-in meeting with the principal and principal manager. It is

strongly recommended that the appropriate SMEs be present to offer support and suggestions during these meetings.

<div align="center">Monitoring Implementation</div>

Monitoring the progress of the Safe and Supportive School Environment Implementation Plan (SSSEIP) will require several approaches. The principal manager and the principal will measure success from various viewpoints. The following questions should be considered when progress monitoring the SSSEIP:

- Did the team's root cause analysis identify the major issues associated with the negative effects of an unsafe and unsupportive school environment on student achievement?

- Have the data been monitored to determine if action plans are resulting in positive changes?

- Are the subgroups experiencing improvement that is sustainable and rooted in the analysis of reliable data?

- Are the SSSEIP committee members conducting routine meetings with the principal to share findings, actions, solutions, and suggestions for changes to the original plan?

- Does the SSSEIP committee have time on its agenda for each subgroup to report progress and request support for issues that have the subcommittees pondering next steps.

The principal managers will ultimately be held accountable for the outcomes of the SSSEIP due to their role as supervisors of the school principals.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

The summary impact statement was designed to be reflective in nature, envisioning the estimated consequences of implementing the advocated policy in the context intended. Research suggests that the school environment plays an important role in student academic success. For decades, this research has fundamentally been ignored. Educational leaders' decision to ignore the understanding that environment matters has had negative repercussions on students who attend schools that are not safe and supportive. The effects of this reality have resulted in high student dropout rates, low performance on summative assessments, and thousands of uneducated students, which all lead to high poverty and high rates of incarceration.

The adoption of the SSSEIP gives us an opportunity to have significant impact on students' academic accomplishments. Dweck (2006) presented an overview of Jaime Escalante's and Marva Collins' teaching style that created a positive atmosphere for students. In regard to Escalante's accomplishments, Dweck observed:

> Most of the Garfield students earned test grades that were high enough to gain them college credits. In the whole country that year, only a few hundred Mexican American students passed the test at this level. This means there is a lot of intelligence out there being wasted by underestimating students' potential to develop. (p. 64)

Dweck offered the following observation about Collins:

> Collins maintained an extremely nurturing atmosphere. A very strict and disciplined one, but a loving one. Realizing that her students were coming from teachers who made a career of telling them what was wrong with them, she

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quickly made known her complete commitment to them as her students and as

people. (p. 198)

Both Jaime Escalante and Marva Collins had a growth mindset. They believed in

the possibilities of their students which led to academic achievements that had never been

reached by these priority groups—Mexican American and African American students.

These same kinds of achievement can be realized in Chicago Public Schools. We only

need to change the mindset of the adults that will manifest in the development of a safe

and supportive school environment where adults are pushing students to be their best and

demonstrating high expectations for all.

<div align="center">Appropriate and Best Policy</div>

Because the SSSEIP is a district plan, it will impact multiple schools

simultaneously. This policy will accomplish the galvanizing of stakeholders around a

common mission, setting high expectations for student achievement, improving

communication among school teams, and increasing students' academic achievement.

Potentially, a positive change in the school's environment may not only improve the

students' academics, but it may have a direct impact on the school's surrounding area as

people begin to realize, through example, that children possess the potential for success,

thereby indicating that the members of the community are also capable of academic

achievement. This reality will not manifest overnight, but it will penetrate the beliefs of

its internal and external stakeholders, one person at a time. An additional reason why this

is the most appropriate and best policy is that its initial cost is relatively low and can lead

to cost savings over the long term because disciplinary initiatives will be reduced, thus

decreasing the need for and, therefore, the cost of this area of support.

Values at the Center of the Policy

The school staff and community are at the center of this advocated policy. The CPS school staffs' salary levels suggest that these persons are middle class. Their quality of life differs greatly from that of their low-income students and families, as identified by the indicators of the community where Truly Disadvantaged Schools are located. This kind of disconnect fuels the beliefs that support low expectations and students' inability to succeed. The cycle of student underachievement only gives credence to staff members' beliefs. This proposed policy will make school staff members revisit their values and beliefs and come to terms with the damage these have caused. The restructuring of expectations for students will then blossom into a safe and supportive school environment wherein students are successful.

Parents and community members' values are also at the center of this policy. People who have been disenfranchised over a long period of time come to accept this as normal. Because there are few examples that demonstrate possibilities that contradict the norm, disenfranchisement is typically considered to be their fate in life. For the most part, people become conditioned in a cycle of hopelessness. Over time, these beliefs become a part of their values. Again, the SSSEIP will challenge the values of the parents and the community and begin to change their mindset regarding what is possible, thus changing for the better the expectations they have of their students.

Implementation of the Policy is Consistent With the Vision

The SSSEIP envisions that low-income, high-poverty demographic schools will have students reading and doing mathematics at or above grade level. In order to accomplish this goal, the adults will need mindsets to evolve that accept these

possibilities and implement actions to accomplish these outcomes. The reality of this change will not only change the expectations of the school community, but it will change each individual. This improvement plan has the potential to institutionalize hope where it had been lost.

Needs and Concerns of all Stakeholders are Sufficiently Included

The major stakeholders in this advocated policy are students, staff, and the community.

Students

The students' needs and concerns will be addressed with the adoption of this SSSEIP policy. The concern regarding the lack of safety and support in some schools is what will drive the policy. Only the schools where the 5Essentials Survey reviewed the negative state of the school will be required to develop and implement an improvement plan. The actions identified for the implementation of the improvement plan are rooted in the students' data. The data are delineated by the various priority groups in the school to ensure that every student's needs will be met.

Teachers, staff, parents, and the community

The policy requires that the SSSEIP have representation from the teachers, staff, parents, and the community. The protocols for the development of the improvement plan will require all identified parties to review the school's current state, be educated on how similar types of schools are able to create and maintain safe and supportive environments, and finally, progress through the stages of developing actions to create such an environment. Throughout this process, the teachers, staff, parents, and the community will be able to share their concerns for both the current environment and the needs they

have that must be met if they are to create a positive school environment. All of these

needs and concerns will be taken into consideration, and the majority of the problems

stemming from them will be resolved throughout the development of the plan.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Data Sets

School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)

- http://cps.edu/Performance/Pages/PerformancePolicy.aspx

- http://cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx

- http://cps.edu/Schools/Find_a_school/Pages/findaschool.aspx

Attendance

On-track data

Summative student grade reports (quarterly)

State Assessment Reports

RTI/MTSS Reports

PBIS Report

*Note: all data should be disaggregated by priority groups.

APPENDIX B

Sample Articles and Videos for Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment

Articles

https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/research-articles-and-papers-the-role-of-supportive-school-environments-in-promoting-academic-success

http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109003/chapters/Fostering-a-Healthy,-Safe,-and-Supportive-Learning-Environment@-How-HP~HP-Schools-Do-It.aspx

http://www.learningfirst.org/issues/safeschools

Videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDIS1q1daI4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaYex2HkaHY

http://www.ted.com/talks/geoffrey_canada_our_failing_schools_enough_is_enough

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_how_to_escape_education_s_death_valley

APPENDIX C

SSSEIP Team Member Chart (sample)

SSSEIP Team Members (Team should represent: various roles, ethnicity, and priority groups within the school):
Vision: (Desired outcome)
Data reviewed: (list all school data that was reviewed)
Goals: (list all of the desired outcomes are SMART Goals*)

*Conzemius & O'Neill (2002) SMART goals are strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound. (p. 4)

APPENDIX D

Meeting Agenda Template (sample)

Facilitator:

Timekeeper (keep time for each section of agenda; ensure meeting starts and ends on time):

Recorder (capture detailed notes):

Process Observer (observe meeting and note what works and what can be done better):

Other (role not specified):

Purpose of Meeting (objective):

Attendance (list all in attendance):

Time	Topic	Responsible	Outcome
10 min	Team Builder	Team member	Get to know team to better understand what drives their values and beliefs
5 min	Review Agenda	Facilitator	Set direction
30 min	Analyze Data	Team member	Determine possible problems based on data and brainstorm potential solutions
15 min	Next Steps	All	Create points for next agenda; subcommittee agenda
5 min	Process Observer	Team member	Give feedback regarding effectiveness of meeting and suggestions for improvements
5 min	Meeting Evaluation	All	Team gives formal feedback on meeting

APPENDIX E

Meeting Evaluation (sample)

Date:	Purpose:			
Evaluation Question	Yes	No	Explain	
What the purpose of the meeting clear?				
Was the purpose of the meeting accomplished?				
Did the protocols used during the meeting support the desired outcomes?				
Was time managed efficiently?				
What suggestions do you have to improve the SSSEIP meetings?				

APPENDIX F

Goal Development Template

SMART Goal*	Actions	Responsible	Progress Monitoring System

*Conzemius & O'Neill (2002) SMART goals are strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound. (p. 4)

APPENDIX G

RACI Matrix Chart*

Activity	Date of Completion	Responsible	Accountable	Consult	Inform	Notes
Review data	09/23/20XX	Principal	Team member A	Principal Manager	Parent Committee	

*RACI Matrix, clarifies roles and responsibilities, making sure that nothing falls through the cracks. http://racichart.org/

APPENDIX H

School Improvement Plan Template (Word document for planning only)

Section I-A Data & Analysis - Report Card Data

Data - **What do your School Report Card data tell you about student performance in your school? What areas of weakness are indicated by these data? What areas of strength are indicated?**

```
[empty text box]
```

Factors - **What factors are likely to have contributed to these results? Consider both external and internal factors to the school.**

```
[empty text box]
```

Conclusions - **What do these factors imply for next steps in improvement planning? (Responses will be carried forward to Part D in the on-line templates.)**

```
[empty text box]
```

School Improvement Plan Template (Word document for planning only)
http://www.isbe.net/sos/word/eplan_school_template.doc