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BARRIERS TO STUDENT CONNECTEDNESS AND ENGAGEMENT: HOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AFFECTS STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Dominic M. Manola

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

August 14, 2019

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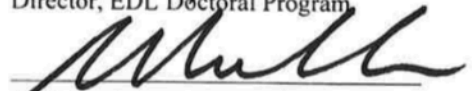Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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August 14, 2019
Date Approved

ABSTRACT

Today, as students prepare for post-secondary opportunities, a greater and greater

emphasis is placed on the importance of engaging learners both in and out of the classroom.

While many students are inclined to get involved, there is a growing number of young people

who face barriers that prevent them from connecting and engaging in the high school experience.

Importantly, socioeconomic status plays a key role in determining how engaged a student may

be, as well as serving as a key identifier in what must be addressed to ensure more young people

get involved in their academic and co-curricular learning. This study focuses on the role that

socioeconomic status plays in students perceived ability to connect and engage in their secondary

education, and proposes a policy where schools must include professional development and

training on teaching young people who come from poor backgrounds.

PREFACE

I am an administrator at H.C.O. High School, located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. Over the last five years, I have served in a variety of roles, and most recently assumed the role of Principal. When I first started at H.C.O., I served as the Activities Director, and I had the unique vantage point of students and their involvement in co-curricular opportunities. Quickly, what stood out to me was that a large percentage of our students involved in co-curriculars, which includes athletics and activities, came from similar backgrounds. Most were from middle-class families, performed well in their classes and were predominantly white. As my position shifted from solely overseeing Activities to getting involved in instructional programming, I began to see the same trend; students who were involved and seeing success in their classes tended to have similar backgrounds.

When faced with the important challenge of working to ensure as many students as possible would become engaged in co-curricular opportunities, it quickly became evident that I had to focus on the root causes of this 'gap'; what barriers are students facing that are preventing them from getting involved? My personal experiences and research leading to this study point to two key areas; socioeconomic status plays a crucial role in determining a student's opportunities to get involved and that race, in many ways, correlates closely with this status. While they are isolated factors, there are large connections between the two, particularly at H.C.O., where nearly half of all students who are Black come from poor households.

Knowing this, the purpose of this study then focuses on two elements. Initially, research was conducted to determine what role socioeconomic status plays in a student's perception on how they can engage in their school experience. During this research, a great deal of time was focused on the role that race has played throughout the 20th century, and how this closely

connects to socioeconomic status. Second, taking all of this into account, this study also focuses on the role of schools and how they can address students who are not as engaged or involved. Ultimately, this leads to the recommendation of requiring all schools to include required professional development and training focused on how to best address learners who come from diverse backgrounds.

As an educator and leader, I have seen first hand how economics effect student involvement and learning, and as such, this paper is advocating for schools and educators to look closely at their student population and use that information to make decisions that are in the best interests of all learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

that we all made and I am blessed and without words to express how thankful I am. It was not

always easy, but you never made it hard. Thank you.

DEDICATION

  To my wife Lauren, and our children Hope, Charlie and Oliver. This project represents all that we are trying to instill in our young family. It is our job to fight for everyone, to spread kindness, and to create opportunities for all to be successful. Thank you for pushing me to always contribute to these principles, and for inspiring me to learn always.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

H.C.O. High School, located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, has a proud tradition of being an extremely involved, community-oriented school. Consisting of one school made up of two campuses, H.C.O. brings together six different villages, encompassing a wide variety of cultures, diversity, backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. While these communities share a great deal of characteristics, they also differ in many ways, and H.C.O. High School has the privilege and responsibility to bring together students and families from these various backgrounds. Along with these six communities comes an abundance of feeder schools and districts, including five different middle schools.

While enrollment has declined over the past six years, numbers are still strong with over 2600 students broken into two campuses; a freshman-sophomore campus, which is home to grade 09 and 10 students, and a junior-senior Campus, which houses grade 11 and grade 12 students. Of those 2600 students, 18% qualify as low-income families, 10% have individualized education plans (IEP's), and 3% are considered English language learners (ELL), a 300% increase since 2013. Academically, H.C.O. High School offers 155 academic courses, 24 of which are Advanced Placement (AP). Additionally, there are 27 Illinois High School Athletic Association (IHSA) competitive sports programs, as well as over 45 extra-curricular clubs and activities students can get involved with. H.C.O. High School takes pride in the motto that "there is something for everyone."

Due to such varied communities, students and families enter H.C.O. High School from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of these factors include economic class, racial demographics, family dynamics, language skills, access to technology as well overall community demographics. As a result of these diverse socioeconomic factors, despite the incredible number

of offerings and supports available at H.C.O., there are many students and families who do not feel connected to the school. When students and families do not feel connected to the school, it is difficult for them to show growth and overall success throughout their time there. Joe B. Whitehead (2017), vice chancellor of Academic Affairs at North Carolina A&T State University, comments that this is a regular struggle for their University. As Whitehead states,

> While it doesn't come out in the data, many students who are lower on the socioeconomic scale would be more successful if they didn't have problems outside the classroom. We are looking for ways to make them feel at home, make them feel comfortable discussing issues that may be at play in their lives that are obstacles to their performing at a higher level. It could be a lack of study habits, but it could be that there is a family issue at home the student is worried about. In some cases, students are helping maintain the household while they are in school. All of these things play a role in their success. (as cited in Chiles, p. 3)

At H.C.O High School, the mission emphasizes that the "H.C.O. community will inspire in students a sense of personal responsibility and a passion for learning while challenging them to reach their full potential." This is further supported by the district's Strategic Plan, which is broken into five goals:

1. We will STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE in all of our programs and practices.
2. We will CONNECT WITH THE COMMUNITY to maximize family and community involvements
3. We will MAXIMIZE THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY to improve instruction, administration and communication.
4. We will SERVE AND SUPPORT STUDENTS to help them be successful.
5. We will ensure that each student has access to CHALLENGING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION in an active learning environment.

While all of these goals are crucial to overall success as a school, two of these strands in particular are extremely relevant to socioeconomic status and connectedness to the school. These include a focus on "connecting with the community to maximize family and community involvements" as well as to "serve and support students to help them be successful."

In my role of Instructional Innovation, I am charged with examining current practices and implementing change and new programs to promote growth within our school and community. As assistant principal, I undertake a variety of roles, all designed to support our staff and students instructionally and co-curricularly. Specifically, I work closely with the District Office to organize and design professional development opportunities that integrate technology into instruction, I coordinate a series of learning experiences for our staff and I oversee our entire Activities Department. Quickly, upon starting at H.C.O. High School in 2014, it was apparent that so much of my role connected to student engagement; the more students were involved in co-curriculars, the more involved they were academically. The more I could support teachers instructionally, the more successful students could be overall. Before long, I understood the importance of engaging learners in both of these areas. Further, I have learned in my five years experience as an administrator that in order to successfully implement any changes or new programs, there must be buy-in and connectedness between the school and our community. Without understanding, identifying and striving to address socioeconomic factors and how they affect assimilation into our school culture, effective change will be difficult to obtain. In particular, I intend to examine how our orientation programs, both for students and families as well as for our new staff, address these factors and what changes we can make to improve connectedness.

Purpose

We are constantly striving to improve communication, reach out to as many families as possible and leverage new methods and techniques to connect with our students and the community. On a regular basis, we offer communication methods such as our H.C.O. High School District website, our bi-weekly H.C.O. Link newsletter, our commitment to four different parent booster organizations and a growing presence on social media. While many of these methods continue to be effective, there is still number of students and families who enter H.C.O. and never truly feel connected to our school.

Nichols and Evans-Bell (as cited in Chiles, 2017) discuss this gap in connectedness and how it relates to a continued disparity in higher education, particularly between black and white students. Their study entitled "A Look at Black Student Success" concluded that "most of the nation's four-year public and private colleges and universities, a significant gap exists between the graduation rates of black students and white students" (p. 2). Students must feel connected to their schools in order for them to understand that success is attainable and that connectedness grows before students even begin high school, and has lasting effects well beyond high school graduation.

Orientations, both for students and families, as well as for new staff, are one crucial way to address the socioeconomic diversity and gaps in connectedness that exist in our schools. For this study, I intend to examine two main orientation programs offered at H.C.O. High School-Incoming Student Orientation and New Teacher Orientation-and how they accommodate these diverse needs.

Internally, we believe that our Incoming Student Orientation program is rather robust; students and families are invited to the school for an evening program in January prior to their

freshman year, as well as another evening event that takes place in May. Even before this, counselors and members of our Pupil Personnel Services team articulate with our feeder schools, discussing the needs of individual students and the registration process. In April, prior to beginning high school, incoming students and families are invited to our Spring Athletics and Activities Night, where all of our extra-curricular offerings are on display and coaches and sponsors are available for questions.

In the weeks leading up to the start of school, freshman students are then required to attend a half-day orientation program where they have the chance to meet some of their classmates, hear from different school leaders, receive their schedules, books, technology and ask questions as needed. The entire class is broken into four groups, so this program consists of about 150 incoming students at a time. That same week, incoming students and their families are invited to our annual Freshman Family BBQ, where we provide an opportunity to meet with counselors, mingle with teachers and administrators, a great meal and the evening is topped off with a pep rally aimed at kicking off the school year high in spirit.

Our New Teacher Orientation program consists of a one-day in-service, led by two assistant superintendents. During this day, our new staff have the opportunity to understand day to day operations, familiarize themselves with technology, processes, procedures and ask questions as needed. This occurs through a series of discussions and presentations throughout the day, where regularly, new staff members seem overwhelmed. Information provided includes payroll, insurance, benefits, building tours, technology overview, student information systems and several school processes. Union leadership has an opportunity to meet with the group, discussing their role in supporting members throughout the District, providing information about meetings, dues and processes. Recently, we have begun adding portions to this training that

include best practices, professional development discussions and the incorporation of instructional technology. Additionally, new teachers are provided a mentor who is assigned to work with our new staff throughout the first school year.

At the completion of this training and orientation, new staff meet monthly with our administration and a variety of their colleagues to discuss a range of topics throughout the school year. These topics include safety and security, classroom management, teacher observations and best practices, student support services and end of year reporting and entering grades. Nowhere, however, throughout the school year, is student connectedness and engagement discussed. Further, no information or resources are provided to teachers to help them understand the diverse backgrounds and cultures present at H.C.O., including barriers to student involvement.

As an administrator at H.C.O. High School, I have been very involved in our student orientation programs and have come to understand that they are crucial to the connectedness of our new students and families to our schools. Students are entering our school from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, yet we offer the same orientation program for all of our learners and their families. Our student orientation programs set the tone for the next four years of learning and involvement, offer opportunities for students to understand our goals, mission and vision as a school, collect their schedules, technology and materials and most importantly, provide them with a comfort level as they start this new stage in their lives.

Ultimately, if students do not feel connected to our school as individuals, teaching and learning will be adversely affected. Further, if we don't address these diverse socioeconomic needs from the onset of a student's experience at H.C.O. High School, the gap between student connectedness and our school will only grow larger. However, we must deliberately and consciously seek to understand and address these needs, careful to not allow our teachers and

students to fall into what Anyon (1980) calls the "hidden curriculum of work." Essentially, schools, often without realizing it, begin to prepare students differently based on their socioeconomic status (p. 13). Students then achieve this "self-fulfilling prophecy" and the cycle continues.

The purpose of this study is to identify strengths in our student orientation programs, as well as deficiencies which must be addressed in order to close the gap between students who are extremely connected to our school community and those who are not. In doing so, I will examine how socioeconomic status affects assimilation into the school culture. Stated differently, how do new students begin to feel connected to H.C.O., but also how does H.C.O. adapt to meet the needs of new students and families? Once an understanding has been gained, I will then propose changes to the district's orientation programs as well as ongoing communication methods designed to support the students who come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Rationale

On a regular basis, one can observe our minority population, in particular our African American students, seemingly disconnected from our school culture. Before and after school, groups of students isolate themselves according to their racial profiles. At lunch, African American students tend to sit with one another, while Latino students sit together, often separate from our White students. In her book "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria," author Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) elaborates on this:

> Walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunchtime and you will
> instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of
> Black students sitting together. Conversely, it could be pointed out that there are

many groups of White students sitting together as well, though people rarely comment on that. The question on the tip of everyone's tongue is "why are the Black kids sitting together?" Principals want to know, teachers want to know, White students want to know, and Black students who aren't sitting at the table want to know (p. 52).

Tatum poses the crucial question; why? I asked our night foreman, who spends his afternoons and evenings connecting with students who are still on campus, this same question. His response was almost immediate:

"A lot of the students who stick around after school have no place to go. I would consider these students at risk, sometimes they have no role models at home. It makes me sad, because we have so many clubs and activities taking place, yet many of our Black students don't want anything to do with them. I've asked them why they don't participate, and they have told me "because it's not cool." I don't know the best approach here (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Clearly, there are socioeconomic factors affecting the connectedness of students to our school culture. In order to best address these factors, as well as affect change that would truly begin to make an impact, I believe it crucial to evaluate our orientation programs, as these are imperative to the beginning of a student's high school experience. DeLamar and Brown (2016) point out that there are numerous studies that indicate just that; the transition from middle to high school is difficult for any student, but especially so for those who come from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds (pg. 37). If we can begin to address the connectedness gap from the beginning of students' high school experience, we will begin to see increased connectedness across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Personally, I am passionate about students and families connecting to our school community, largely because of my background in student activities. Serving as the Director of Student Activities for eight years, I saw first hand the impact that involvement had on students; those who were connected to the school and involved saw increased improvement academically, better behavior, attendance and even rates of college attendance. Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall and Gordon (2009) emphasize this, saying that family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of children's school success, according to more than 40 years of growing evidence (pg. 4). This is important to me because as educators, this overall success must be our goal. Therefore, I believe it's important to evaluate orientation programs because if we don't address these needs from the beginning, it becomes increasingly difficult to connect students to the school community once they begin to feel disconnected.

In today's education climate, there are several outside factors that must also be considered when understanding why evaluating our orientation programs is essential. Locally, with the implementation of Senate Bill 100 (SB100) in September of 2016, aimed at vastly limiting student suspensions, we have seen a large increase in the implementation of restorative justice practices and approaches throughout our schools. Moreover, nationally active Equal Opportunity Schools (EOS), has worked with schools from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to identify and target students who have not had "access to advanced placement classes" for a variety of reasons and works to enroll these students in those courses. Both this organization and the implementation of SB100 have been at the forefront of H.C.O. High School throughout the last five school years and are indicative of our growing need to continue addressing the disparities between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and how they connect to our school culture.

H.C.O. High School is always eager to bring together students, teachers, families and our community in as many ways as possible. Many of these stakeholders are extremely proud to be part of the "school family." This drive for an ever-increasing unity is central to the importance of ensuring that we reach as many students and families as possible in working to assimilate them into our school culture. In their study of Baltimore area public schools, Durham and Connolly (2016) found exactly this; schools connected to communities are able to "establish a network of partners and community resources to promote student achievement and family and community well-being" (pg. v). Our community and our school, like so many others, are vastly interconnected; our elected Board of Education supports our Superintendent who drives our vision and plans. Administrators work with teachers to ensure that teaching and learning is constantly at the forefront. Students and families come to H.C.O. offering a variety of skills and challenges. Their involvement is paramount to our shared success. That success is seen by a variety of stakeholders, including community members. The way our school is viewed by the community affects buy-in, support and even property values. Everything we do as a school is connected to all of our stakeholders and the educational community at large. This is why it is essential to ensure all of our students and families, regardless of socioeconomic status, feel connected to H.C.O. High School.

Goals

To gain an understanding of how socioeconomic status affects assimilation into the school culture, there are three goals of my evaluation of our orientation programs. They are:

1. Identify and understand the different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures that are prominent at H.C.O. High School and the needs of these groups.

2. Determine how our New Student and Family Orientation, as well as our New Teacher Orientation programs, address these needs and identify the deficiencies in these programs as they relate to assimilation into our culture

3. Propose additions and changes to our orientation programs to incorporate these understandings designed to increase connectedness amongst our diverse socioeconomic students.

As a result of this study, it is my hope that as a district, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures of our student body, identify needs and patterns, and begin addressing them. Once these themes become evident, we can begin to introduce practices and concepts into our orientation programs to address these needs from the moment students begin at H.C.O. High School. Additionally, we can equip teachers, through changes to our New Teacher orientation program, with the necessary information, background and "tools" to better reach all learners.

Finally, these goals relate to improved student learning because they address the larger purpose of education; meeting the basic needs of students and families to ensure they are set-up to be successful academically. If we don't address the various socioeconomic needs and backgrounds of our student body, any emphasis on teaching and learning is secondary. Once students and families feel connected to our school, they can focus on student learning and achievement. That is the intention of this study.

Research Questions

For this study, there will be three primary research questions, designed to explore socioeconomic status (SES) subgroups and their perceptions. These subgroups will include both a higher SES as well as a lower SES. The perception amongst leaders at H.C.O. High School is

such that many students are involved, regardless of their SES background. However, students have not been provided an opportunity to offer their input on how connected they feel. Therefore, this study will focus on the following research questions:

- To what degree do students and families from varying socioeconomic groups rate their level of their connectedness to the school community?
- What barriers are present for students and families who qualify as low-income that prevent these students from connecting with the school community?
- How do the district's orientation programs-both new teacher and new student-account for these identified barriers?
- What additions and changes can be implemented to break down these barriers?

Conclusion

H.C.O. High School is proud of a rich tradition of opportunities offered for students and families to get involved in all that a comprehensive high school has to offer. Curricularly and co-curricularly, opportunities exist to fit the interests and needs of many different students. However, like many schools, there continues to be a growing number of students who are seemingly disconnected from this culture and these opportunities. No matter how extensive our academic and extra-curricular offerings may be, we must continue to focus on the engagement of all of our students and families to ensure success is attainable no matter what someone's background may be. Bell (2011) demonstrates this clearly by describing that schools and education systems have "increasingly engaged in evidence-based approaches," looking at research and requiring accountability. However, as Bell continues, many studies continue to show the lack of positive impacts on connectedness, no matter how high the level of accountability may be. The challenge, perhaps most importantly, is connecting students to their

teachers and schools (p. 2). As a school and as a district, this must continue to be a priority. It is

the intent of this study to examine our current approaches, the perceptions of a varying

socioeconomic subgroups and recommendations that emerge to then implement changes to our

orientation processes-both for new students and new teachers-to address the needs of all of our

students.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

To best understand the interconnected roles of school connectedness, student engagement, student success, socioeconomic factors, and school orientation programs, it is important to identify and examine current research around these topics. This review of literature serves to examine the importance of each topic, as well as how each relates to and affects the others. Three core themes will be examined: school connectedness and culture, the importance of socioeconomic status and equality, and the value of high school orientation programs.

Research clearly shows that overall, students connected to their school tend to perform better academically, are more involved in co-curriculars, and have greater social-emotional well-being. These numbers, though, are affected greatly by factors including socioeconomic status, equality, and orientation processes. Through this review of literature, the nature of these connections will be examined.

Researchers have long sought to identify the connection between school involvement and success. Gore, Thomas, Jones, Mahoney, Dukes, and Treadway (2016) look closely at this as they define school connectedness as "the degree to which a student participates in school extracurricular activities, or attending events hosted by the school. Inside the classroom, students can become involved in classroom discussions and form relationships with instructors and peers" (p. 160). This, they argue, is then linked to overall performance, continuing that "students who feel connected to their school have shown positive academic results, such as good grades, classroom participation, retention, and graduation" (p. 161). Edge (2009) supports this concept, describing that "student 'affiliation,' also referred to as 'engagement' or 'involvement,' with the

school is linked to student success, and a lack of affiliation is directly connected to students' reasons for dropping out of school" (p. 2).

The same argument can be made, Gore continues, about students who do not feel connected to school. If a student feels disconnected, or even "has a fear of being excluded," overall performance shows a dramatic decline (p. 160). Through the course of this study, a clear conclusion is that "the more students feel connected to their school, the less likely they will fear academic success" (p. 163). Therefore, as both Gore and Edge present, several strategies are crucial to connecting students with school. Early in her study, Edge (2009) even presents several strategies aimed at doing just that, strategies that he identifies as common in programs that are successful in strengthening student engagement (p. 2). These include:

- Smaller class sizes whenever possible

- High expectations of, and challenging classes for, students

- Focus on a positive classroom and school environment

- Increasing parental involvement whenever and however possible

- Community connections and partnerships, providing students with new opportunities in and out of the school

- Governmental advocacy, where school leaders advocate with local and state governments to make decisions that are best for their students (Gore, 2009, Chapter 1).

Through this review of literature, school connectedness and engagement will be examined, as will how factors such as socioeconomic status and successful student orientation programs affect overall student success and performance.

Student Connectedness and School Culture

    Student Connectedness and Sociocultural Factors

    Across many bodies of research, a pervasive theme is that the more students are connected to the school and school culture, the more successful they are overall. In other words, schools must always focus on ensuring they meet the needs of, and connect with, as many students and families as possible. Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, and Byrd (2016) examine the importance of school culture on student outcomes in their highly organized, quantitative study. They begin by describing the national context against which the research takes place, where high-stakes accountability continues to put public schools under great pressure to increase student achievement. Pressure is even greater, they argue, in high-poverty environments, as those schools are "impacted by multiple challenges, which serve to intensify the problem" (p. 114). Zylkiewicz-Plonska (2013) concurs, arguing that students' sociocultural context, especially that of minority students, plays a major role in student success and achievement. Building a framework, she adds that all learning, regardless of level and whether formal or informal, takes place in a larger sociocultural context.

    In 2009, the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion issued a study to assess the impact of sociocultural aspects of student learning, particularly mental health and well-being, on success. They described that students who feel connected to school are:

- More likely to attend school regularly, stay in school longer, and have higher grades and test scores.
- Less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or have sexual intercourse.

- Less likely to carry weapons, become involved in violence, or be injured from dangerous activities such as drinking and driving or not wearing seat belts.

- Less likely to have emotional problems, suffer from eating disorders, or experience suicidal thoughts or attempts. (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2009, p. 1)

Their argument is relatively simple: if students are connected to the school, they are much less likely to engage in risky behaviors, which often lead to lack of engagement, and to academic and social emotional struggles.

On a larger scale, Zylkiewicz-Plonska (2013) continues that specific sociocultural settings are the results of decades, even centuries, of global processes, such as Americanism, international trade, globalization, and proliferation of technology (p. 106). From Zylkiewicz-Plonska's examination of how sociocultural factors affect student learning, three main findings and conclusions can be drawn. Initially, she derived that culturally diverse classrooms increase student engagement and minority students' ability to assimilate (p. 104). The more culturally diverse a learning environment, the more it seemed students from diverse backgrounds could successfully assimilate into the culture. Further, she found that factors outside of school (sociocultural) largely impact classroom performance (p. 106). In many ways, educators have little or no control over these factors yet must overcome them. Finally, she concluded that the context for student learning and achievement must be rooted in socioeconomic factors (p. 109). In other words, without considering students' backgrounds and cultures, it is difficult to truly reach them as learners and to build relationships.

Urguhart (2012) looks at sociocultural context from a more global perspective, examining a specific high school for nearly 20 years. During this study, Goldwater High School evoked negative perceptions, and had low test scores and a disengaged student body. The study was conducted with an extremely diverse and transient population, with nearly 40% of the student body considered low-income learners (p. 19). To truly understand the issues at hand, Goldwater's principal, Mr. Andersen, collected data around a specific research question: how well is the school doing on purposeful collaboration according to four areas of purposeful communities (p. 20)?

Urguhart points out that upon collecting this information, Principal Andersen got right to work. Based on teacher ratings on issues in various subcategories, Andersen learned staff needed support in multiple areas. Primarily, he found teachers acknowledged that relationships are crucial yet did not always focus on them. Additionally, it became clear that many teachers had a narrow focus and that global perspective, transfer of learning, and diversity within the school remained areas of weakness for Goldwater High School. While these areas can be addressed, the data suggested that on a larger scale, the culture needed to shift from one of isolation to one of collaboration between the school and teachers at large.

How then, can educators address these sociocultural factors, over many of which they have little or no control? One common answer, a clear theme in the research, is centered around teacher characteristics and collaboration. Many studies look at characteristics of teachers and leaders who tend to yield high-performing students and schools. Ohlson et al. (2016) looked specifically at student behavior and suspension rates and found that teacher characteristics and leadership can lead to greater connectedness to the school (p. 120), which ultimately could lead to higher academic performance. It was noted that when teachers who share students collaborate

to meet students' needs, suspensions decreased 6.79% annually (p. 120). The less students are excluded from school, the more opportunity they have to engage in school culture and feel connected. Ohlson et al. replicated these findings in 50 public schools throughout the southeastern United States; the more teachers collaborate and work to engage their students, the more involved and successful the students.

Clearly, as the Ohlson (2016) study concurs, leadership has a great deal to do with the culture of the school, and they expressed hope that what matters more is what is happening within the school, not certifications or years of experience (p. 120). Further, they concluded there is a direct correlation between the importance of school culture and their relationship to student outcomes (p. 122). In other words, when students feel connected to the school and its culture, they tend to perform better.

Hughes and Pickeral (2013) support this and describe that a positive school climate "improves student achievement and a sense of belonging" (p. 1). Regarding leadership, they continue that in today's climate, "more than ever, school leaders need efficient, low-cost, and effective ways to boost school achievement. We know that important factors in a positive school climate are also significant mediators of learning: empowerment, authentic learning experiences, engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation" (p. 1). Contrarily, Huang and Eklund argue that family structure and socioeconomic status play important roles in success as well, writing that "student academic achievement has been found to vary among children from a variety of family structures and backgrounds" including "socioeconomic diversity" (p. 481). It is crucial that school leaders and educators are intentional in both their practices and development of a school culture that promotes a climate of success.

Understanding School Culture and Addressing It

Certainly, many factors must be considered when examining a school culture and to truly understand it. Many of these factors, particularly those that are sociocultural, are outside the control of school leaders and teachers. Nonetheless, it is imperative that schools make every effort possible to learn about these factors, about influences on school culture, and, ultimately, about what drives students to connect – or not – to the school. Yuen and Fong (2012) elaborate on this, writing that in many prominent countries throughout the world, "efforts have been made to identify components of exceptionality, such as intelligence, creativity, and personality, that may contribute to excellence." They continue, saying that the difference between successful school cultures and those in which students are less engaged comes down to a school's ability to understand how these attributes "interact with sociocultural factors within the total system" (p. 119). That total system is key; how do outside factors, including families, economics, society, and more, affect students within a particular school?

By and large, schools intend to connect with their families and communities. Rarely does a school mission not focus on building these connections. However, as Wegmann and Bowen (2010) identify in their research, "for many families and schools, building such relationships and opportunities for involvement is often more difficult than anticipated" (p. 7). Not surprisingly, students and families of all backgrounds want success to be realized in school. It is important, then, as Wegmann and Bowen continue, that schools build what they refer to as "cultural capital" (p. 7); schools serve their own best interests, which is typically student success, by building these relationships.

At times, they argue, "school connectedness is often viewed solely as the relationship that a student has with school. However, parents and families are essential partners in creating home-

school connections that truly foster student success. Families whose backgrounds do not match the traditional culture of the school may face challenges in forming school connections. When schools welcome all families, recognize their unique strengths, and truly collaborate, children have a much greater chance to achieve academic excellence" (p. 10). Connecting students and families to the school is never solely parents' responsibility. A purposeful partnership with students and families must be fostered by teachers and administrators.

Socioeconomic Status and Equality

Understanding and Addressing the Socioeconomic and Equality Gap in America

Knowing that socioeconomic status plays such an important role in student engagement and performance, it is important to examine the socioeconomic and equality gap that exists in the United States. This gap, often referred to as the "achievement gap," does not indicate that students simply are not connecting to their schools. The gap has far deeper meaning. Research indicates the gap is the result of years, centuries even, of failed practices and initiatives. In her research, Ginsberg (2012) closely examines different social contexts of the American education system and why, despite vast knowledge and resources available throughout the country, the United States is struggling both academically and socially. This is certainly evident at H.C.O., where despite numerous resources and supports available to all students, typically only some students – the same students repeatedly – access and use them. Along these lines, students from diverse backgrounds do tend to access these supports, but do so at a much lower rate. H.C.O. must address this.

Ginsberg argues that by many accounts, the first decade of the 21st century did not end well in American public education. As former President Barack Obama put it, "Fifty years later,

our generation's Sputnik moment is back. As it stands right now, America is in danger of falling behind" (p. 8). By 2010, we were bombarded with statistics indicating we were failing, and failing miserably (p. 9). Ginsberg outlines that according to No Child Left Behind Act regulations, nearly 82% of American schools were considered "failing" by 2012, and that by 2014, the country would fall extremely short of the 100% student proficiency goal (p. 8). It is within this framework that the author begins to ask the question "why?" Why, despite all opportunities available, are we still so far behind? Ginsberg then begins to examine the role of social interaction and assimilation in overall school performance and connectedness, arguing that this, perhaps even more so than intelligence, is the key factor in school performance.

For example, when discussing cultural identity, she argues that schools have been addressing the topic ineffectively. "The concept of cultural identity is not, in other words, as unitary and homogeneous as we present it in schools, even when we are trying to teach respect for it" (p. 12). When schools try to become more multicultural, they often simply reify cultural stereotypes and cling to "melting pot" pedagogies. Put in other words, schools have sought to teach underprivileged students to embrace, rather than challenge, "codes of power" (p. 13).

Bell (1980), a renowned Harvard Law School professor, goes back even further, offering commentary in 1980 on what he claimed was an interest-convergence "dilemma" that led to the landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education integration decision. This commentary was offered after Professor Herbert Wechsler delivered a speech at Harvard Law claiming Brown v. Board could be justified on the basis of "neutral" principle (p. 518). It was this framework in which this work is presented, and is clearly set against the tumultuous timeframe of the late 1950s through 1970s. Essentially, Bell argued, the case arbitrarily traded whites' rights not to associate with blacks in favor of blacks' rights to associate with whites (p. 518). The 1954 Brown v. Board

decision triggered a revolution of civil rights and called for equitable schools, yet by 1980, black students attending public schools were doing so racially isolated and inferiorly. This case, written in the context of the subsequent desegregation campaign after 1954, focuses largely on why it failed.

Additionally, Bell cites a variety of case law, including that from Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg (1971) and Milliken v. Bradley (1974), both cases arguing that local autonomy, where schools and districts wanted to maintain segregation, was not as important as "vital national tradition" (p. 526). The author uses these cases, and others, to discuss how integration was not the main focus. Rather, a nation wanted to maintain order and status quo, and in the midst of increasing calls for civil rights, integration was a mutual desire (p. 527).

Throughout Ginsberg's (2012) book are numerous accounts from students, educators, community members, leaders, and parents providing perspective on schools' inability to navigate major change. An example of this emerges from a discussion with an educational leader addressing a series of assumptions. One assumption posits that "the United States is a true meritocracy where individual hard work and willpower are all that are needed to overcome legal and structural inequalities." The interviewee quickly argues that most disadvantaged children, however, know, from years of experience, that this is "at best an oversimplification and often a downright lie." (p. 34).

Bell (1980) corroborates this. Most importantly, he argues that America does not work toward equality and bridging the economic and achievement gap because it is the right thing to do. He believes America does so because of "interest convergence." He even goes so far as to say that ending segregation was not the goal of Brown v. Board; rather, the real goal was economic equality. Professor Charles Black argues that the "equal protection clause of the 14th

amendment clearly bars racial segregation because segregation harms blacks and benefits whites in ways too numerous to cite" (p. 522). Furthermore, he makes the case that compliance after Brown v. Board did not come easy (p. 528), and when it did, it was because it served school or district interests. Finally, Bell uses case studies such as Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg (1971) and Milliken v. Bradley (1974) (p. 526) to illustrate multiple examples of "interest convergence" and how it, not equality, was the forefront of integration decisions. As a result, racial tensions and segregation remain today.

In 1966, as the civil rights movement continued to grow, the U.S. Congress, in conjunction with the Civil Rights Act, provided funding for James Coleman to complete a report on education equality. Coleman (1966), a University of Chicago researcher, set out to determine if students, regardless of socioeconomic status and race, had equal opportunities in schools. He and his colleagues looked at input, particularly resources and processes such as leadership and teaching. They also examined output, or student achievement (pp. 21-23), with a goal of determining whether a correlation exists between what districts put into their schools and overall student achievement. Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that white students generally had higher test scores than other racial groups and that socioeconomic status played a large role in this finding. Further, he described findings that students in lower achieving groups tended to come from homes in which parents had little to know formal education and low occupation levels (p. 23). Coleman's findings only deepen the trend that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were provided fewer resources and opportunities for success than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

How Socioeconomic Status Affects Student Learning

In their 2014 study, Diamond and Huguley examine how socioeconomic factors affect learning, specifically as related to culturally diverse groups of students. They begin by describing the theoretical framework of their research, indicating that recent studies suggest anti-achievement attitudes and behaviors specific to black students occur most commonly in integrated or predominantly white school contexts (p. 747). The authors reference additional frameworks, specifically citing the "oppositional culture argument" and acting "white" hypothesis (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986, as cited in Diamond and Huguley) to help set the stage for her study. Fordham and Ogbu emphasize that with such a cultural gap existing between black and white students, academic performance, unfortunately, becomes secondary to social and cultural factors.

Looking closely at this research, Diamond and Huguley offer that academic orientations do, in fact, have important consequences on academic performance (p. 760). Overall, a pervasive and emphasized theme was that on race alone, black students tended to perform as high as their white counterparts, regardless of the category or question at hand. This was true for students who aspire to higher education, in regard to academic behaviors, achievement, affect for school, peer pressure, and more (p. 761). However, when controlled for students' socioeconomic background, the gap grows dramatically between black and white students. In essence, as socioeconomic factors increasingly diverge between black and white students, the achievement gap expands.

Life for low-income families is unusually difficult as related to education because these families have many need and life situations families from higher socioeconomic classes rarely face and typically do not understand. Cedeno, Martinez-Arias, and Bueno (2016) address a misconception that the poor are typically "careless individuals, unproductive at work, neglect

health care, and spend too much" (p. 258). They continue that "an individual with few resources and insufficient external support who attempts to comply with the demands of family and the demands of financial obligations, faces a formidable task. Economic scarcity represents an important source of stress that limits choices and reduces the capacity to make effective decisions" (p. 258). Said differently, families and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are faced with difficult decisions, and, given time limitations all people face, are often forced to make decisions based on the need to survive, rather than on the desire to grow educationally.

Cedeno et al. (2016) discuss the difference between low-income and non-low-income families by focusing specifically on student attention spans. Students from low-income families, they conclude, deal with stress "detrimental for learning because it compromises executive functions such as problem-solving, decision-making, planning, working memory (i.e., a cognitive system closely linked to complex cognitive tasks involved in language comprehension, learning and reasoning), and attention (p. 260). This disadvantage starts at a young age, and as a result, students from low-income families are already significantly behind when starting elementary school.

Finally, yet importantly, Kim, Watkins, and Yoon (2016) confirmed the significant influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on achievement by examining standardized test scores in Illinois. They show that districts with higher socioeconomic statuses "experienced a higher percentage of advanced learners in all ISAT areas and at all grade levels" (p. 139). They tracked achievement trends for multiple years, and regularly, districts with higher income families scored better than those with larger low-income populations. This gap, they continued, only worsened as students got older, when beginning in Grade 5, a "dropping pattern emerged for low-income

districts, while the same pattern seemed to start later for high- and middle-income districts. After observing the lowest point on ISAT Math in Grade 5, districts started gaining more advanced learners every year, but the percentage and pace of increase was much lower in low-income districts (p. 139).

What Schools Must Do to Address Socioeconomic and Equality Gaps

In many ways, the most important way to address the socioeconomic and equality gap is to first understand it and to learn how it affects a given district. Initiatives, movements, and purposeful programs fail when leaders take an approach that might not address specific needs and sociocultural factors of a particular school. Ginsberg (2012) continues to address this, writing about a series of discussions and interviews, backed by education and academic statistics, that supports her finding that real growth or change in the U.S. education system will come only when socioeconomic and racial inequalities are addressed. She continues, adding that without examining and making efforts to learn about various cultures within a school, it would nearly be impossible to see any real progress (p. 122). Moreover, the book continues to argue that a series of "approaches" – project- and inquiry-based learning, collaboration, relevance, courageous conversations, and respect for diversity – is needed to address the growing gap within American schools (pp. 122-125).

Munoz, Clavijo, and Koven (1999) present a study that furthers this argument. Their study focuses on the limits of education reform when reform focuses solely on school variables, such as student achievement. The research confirms that non-school variables, such as socioeconomic status, play major roles in a student's education success. Education reforms that

claim to be successful should continue focusing efforts on non-school variables that affect student achievement as much as, if not more than, school variables (p. 29).

Value of High School Orientation Programs

Two fundamental issues must be understood in order to address them effectively. First, students who are connected to the school are more successful by many measures. And second, students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face challenges many of their peers do not. It is important for schools to understand these issues and to address them immediately. At the high school level, a successful transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9 is imperative, and more so for students from low-income families. Therefore, the third and final section of this review of literature will focus closely on the role of high school orientation programs as well as on elements that have led to student success.

Vaz et al. (2015) look closely at school belongingness and how it changes from primary school to secondary school, something seemingly few other studies have approached. Set against this context, the authors build a framework around the idea that during this transition, between ages 11 and 13, young people are extremely vulnerable, and the need to belong is extremely important to them. Yet, long before students transition to Grade 9, many secondary schools have failed to consider the impacts of primary schools on their sense of belongingness and connectedness.

Vaz et al. begin by describing that the feeling of "belongingness" represents an internal experience by which students gain a strong psychological connection. The authors continue, stating that students experiencing belongingness feel "personally accepted, respected, included, and supported (p. 2). The transition into secondary education involves coping with change in

school organizational structure, social hierarchies, and social role orientation (p. 2). Therefore, they add, at this point in their education, it is difficult for students to feel a belonging to their school culture, which in turns affects engagement, social interactions, and academic performance.

Understanding this, the "Crossing the Bridge Program" at Aiken University High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, developed a program based on the "realization that students must be present physically and emotionally" (p. 1). As Partners for Success (2017) describe, the goals of this program are straightforward: improve attendance, reduce disciplinary issues, and increase graduation rates. They aim to accomplish these goals by providing clear and purposeful support to freshmen. Understanding the importance of this mentorship, Aiken University High School has its incoming freshmen students spend two weeks prior to the start of school engaging in daily programs that "revolve around three learning strands: academic, social, and environmental" (p. 1). By engaging in these three strands, and understanding the importance of this transition, students and families indicate, regularly, feeling "Crossing the Bridge" helped them succeed in high school.

To quantify the importance of a successful high school orientation program, Vaz et al. organized a longitudinal study collecting data from 266 students from diverse cognitive and socioeconomic backgrounds as they transitioned from 152 primary schools to secondary schools. Their research is broken into two chronological data collection points: Time 1 (T1), which is time spent in primary schools, and Time 2 (T2), time spent in secondary schools. Students in this study ranged from ages 11 to 13, with 53.4% of participants being girls. Further, to remain eligible for the study, students had to be in attendance at least 80% of the time. Looking at the

socioeconomic breakdown of students studied, 58% were considered "mid range," 33% considered "high range," and 9% considered low range (p. 4).

Initially, findings indicated the sample's overall mean belongingness score was stable across the transition from primary to secondary school (p. 9). Further, there were no significant changes in student perceived social acceptance, competence, or affiliation from primary school (T1) to secondary school (T2). Data also found high stability of family demographics over time, and relative consistency between these two time periods. Therefore, they concluded, school belongingness was stable across the primary school-secondary school gap. Students who reported higher belongingness in T1 were more likely to report higher belongingness in T2 (p. 19).

Findings in this study indicate the importance for primary schools to "promote and assess school belongingness among students at an early age and provide secondary schools with an overview of students' belongingness profiles" (p. 19). Additionally, this study provides evidence that in secondary school, family factors do not influence school belongingness as much as people expect (p. 21). Without question, there are factors that must be addressed at the secondary level, but this study emphasizes the importance of addressing belongingness at a much earlier age. Further, it was found that student personal attributes such as social competence, appearance competence, and coping skills are closely related to school connectedness (p. 19).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) agree with these findings, but offer a unique perspective, positing that while parental involvement is important in schools, it is "motivated by two belief systems: role construction for involvement, and sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school" (p. 107). The concept of "role construction" is highly influenced by parents' beliefs about "what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education." They

continue that "role construction is shaped by expectations of individuals and groups important to the parent as well as individual experiences throughout their education" (p. 107). Therefore, so much of parents' role in their own children's education is based on the experiences they had as students themselves. If, as a student, they did not feel connected, they feel little motivation to connect to their children's school as a parent.

In addition to studies indicating the importance of student transition, numerous studies address the effect of family involvement, particularly when family engagement declines as children progress from middle to high school. Mac Iver et al. (2018) discuss this, describing that families become less engaged by Grade 9 "in areas that have high rates of unemployment and poverty" (p. 39). They continue, noting that "numerous studies have shown that ninth grade academic performance is critical for on-time and college-ready high school graduation" (p. 40). While there is a clear connection between passing ninth grade courses and graduation rates, Mac Iver et al. posit that "nevertheless, most high schools are not paying sufficient attention to this indicator or making the necessary interventions until results of research studies became widely disseminated" (p. 40).

To gain a deeper understanding of the extent to which students' "socioemotional well-being and academic adjustment changed as they moved from 8th to 9th grade," Benner, Boyle, and Bakhtiari (2017) examined student grades and found "adolescents' course grades declined significantly across the transition to high school and their feelings of loneliness significantly increased across this time period" (p. 2135). They provide this information as they talk about the importance of focusing on social-emotional well-being as students moved from Grade 8 into Grade 9. They present information that schools seeing high success rates among their Grade 9 students provide wide ranging social-emotional supports "most relevant to academic outcomes,

especially in relation to school engagement and attendance. Academic support, such as parents assisting their children with projects and discussing the importance of education, students studying together with their friends, or teachers providing educational enrichment activities, are all positively related to better academic performance and engagement" (p. 2138). Stoker, Liu, and Arellano (2017) agree and believe students who receive social-emotional supports and have "positive perceptions of most of the non-cognitive skills and school environments...were statistically significantly associated with their grade 9 outcomes" (p. 10).

Conclusion

School connectedness and culture, the importance of socioeconomic status and equality, and high school orientation programs, all play a vital role in students' education success. Often, bodies of literature associated with each of these areas are considered in isolation, yet all three topics are extremely important. There are vast bodies of research surrounding these three themes, all of which indicate a common understanding: students who are engaged and connected do better overall. Further, socioeconomic status plays a crucial role in students' ability to perform along with their peers. Therefore, it is more important than ever that schools understand this and address gaps during both orientation processes and the transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9.

A great deal of research argues the importance of school culture and how crucial it is in meeting the needs of students (Edge, 2009; Hughes et al., 2013). This is particularly important in areas of high poverty, where challenges are numerous and supports are limited (Ohlson et al., 2016; Zylkiewicz-Plonska, 2013). Therefore, an understanding of school culture must be present before shortcomings and areas of growth can be addressed (Yuen and Fong, 2012; Wegmann and Bowen, 2010). One important misconception and area of focus, when looking at how schools can

connect more students and families, is that school culture and connectedness are often viewed as responsibilities of the student and family. However, schools that concentrate on these see much greater rates of involvement and achievement (Wegmann and Bowen, 2010).

Looking at these challenges, it is important to understand the connection between socioeconomic status and school connectedness, which leads to overall success. Despite the vast resources and knowledge the United States has, we continue to struggle academically and socially. To understand why, it is critical that we examine the state of education and accountability as far back as the mid-20th century (Ginsberg, 2012; Bell, 1980). In looking at why the gap is so large and accountability nominally successful, which Bell (1980) refers to as the "interest-convergence dilemma" (p. 518), it is imperative to look at struggles and systems that have led to this. In many ways, districts wanted to maintain segregation and the status quo, even citing tradition (Bell, 1980; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1971; Milliken v. Bradley, 1974). Coleman et al. (1966) emphasize this in their study's conclusion that students with greater resources were more successful academically, and students from white families tend to have more resources (p. 23).

While there is evidence that race alone does not affect student performance (Diamond and Huguley, 2014; Cedeno et al., 2016), when studies are controlled for students' socioeconomic background, there is a large achievement and involvement gap between black and white students. This is attributed to the concept that, according to Cedeno et al. (2016), the poor tend to suffer from "economic scarcity" and are forced to make decisions based on needs and health, and not on supports for education (p. 258). This is still the case in Illinois, where Kim et al. (2016) analyzed standardized assessments throughout the state and found, definitively, that districts with lower rates of poverty outscore their counterparts almost exclusively (p. 139).

How can this be addressed? Schools and districts must first focus on causes of these gaps. As Noguera (2018) contends, equity goes beyond an achievement gap and must be addressed as both "an opportunity and expectations gap" (p. 10). If schools want to address equality and equity gaps that exist, they must look at the systems that created them in the first place (Munoz et al., 1999; Ginsberg, 2012). This goes directly to the root causes of gaps we see throughout the research; systems in place throughout U.S. history have created inequities and disparity. Districts and schools must first acknowledge this, and then, more importantly, make conscious efforts to create systems and programs to address opportunity and expectation gaps that exist.

Students' feelings of connectedness to the school environment start from the moment they begin at a new school. For high schoolers, connection is even more difficult, as the prime age range for optimum connection to schools, according to Vaz et al. (2015), is 11 to 13. Therefore, if students do not feel connected during middle school, it is even more difficult for high schools to make those connections (Partners for Success, 2017). Mac Iver et al. (2018) argue that the same holds true for academic achievement, saying that if students are not engaged in school by Grade 9, there are "much higher rates of poverty and unemployment post secondary education" (p. 39). This alone emphasizes the importance of a well-researched and -organized new student orientation process.

So much of engagement is tied to students' social-emotional well-being and adjustment, which are significant as they transition into high school. This is a crucial time, as research shows, for overall success and connectedness, and also a time when students need the widest array of emotional supports (Benner et al., 2017; Stoker et al., 2017). Ultimately, then, schools that focus on transition and social-emotional well-being, both at orientations and on a regular basis, are much better suited to connect students and families to the overall school environment.

While these bodies of research are extensive and thorough, examinations of the interconnected roles they play are limited. This study aims to address this gap in research and literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

All institutions, regardless of mission, background or purpose, must emphasize the importance of program evaluation. At the core of education are reflection and iteration, ongoing tenets that help guide the direction of districts and communities. Educators regularly stress the importance of ongoing assessment and feedback, looking at student performance and adjusting instruction based on what is observed or learned. However, institutions do not always follow a pattern of assessment and feedback, yet they should. Patton (2008) draws a powerful comparison regarding institutions' evaluation of their practices, stating that "programs, like airplanes, need all their parts to do what they're designed to do and accomplish what they're supposed to accomplish" (p. 308). He continues that implementation evaluation focuses on finding out if the program has all its parts, if the parts are functional, and if the program is operating as it's supposed to be operating" (p. 308). As a school, we are "supposed" to be preparing all learners to be successful within our school system, and beyond. That said, without proper evaluation plans and methods, we cannot fulfill this obligation entirely.

Regarding goals or programs being evaluated, Patton continues, positing that in "utilization focused evaluation, the primary intended users determine whose goals will be evaluated" and if "goal attainment" is the focus of the evaluation (p. 232). Once again, I believe the intended users of our organization would be our students and families. Certainly, as an administration, we work to guide direction, policies and programs within our district, but the goal has been, and always should be, student connectedness. This goal, which was the main focus of this study, is shared by our district and our students and families. The more

connectedness that can be achieved, the more success there will be for all stakeholders. To achieve this goal, I intended to evaluate two existing programs within our district: our new teacher orientation program, and our new student and family orientation program. Both programs are designed to prepare stakeholders to assimilate into our school district, and to create a sense of belonging. As an organization, how well are we using these programs to assimilate new members of our district? And what can we do differently to improve these programs? The goal of this study was to assess these questions.

Methodology

This study took a quantitative approach to examining student and family connectedness. Research was conducted using a statistical survey and existing school data on academic performance. Research participant groups were broken discreetly into two socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds: a "lower" SES group and a "higher" SES group. The threshold for the lower SES group was qualification, by students and families, for free and reduced status with the State of Illinois and our school district. The higher SES group consisted of students and families that do not qualify for this status.

Participants

For the quantitative data collection phase, phase one, participants included teachers, administrators, and students in Grades 9-12. Participants were asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous survey examining how they rate connectedness to the school, and to identify areas of need about which the school should be aware. Numbers of participants are:

- Teachers and support staff: approximately 180 teachers and staff will be asked to complete the survey tool.
- Grades 9-12 (ages 14-18) students: approximately 1,800 students from a higher SES, and approximately 400 students from a lower SES, will be asked to complete the survey tool.

I anticipated response rates of approximately 20% for faculty and 15% for students, based on surveys previously administered to these groups. The demographic breakdown of participants was:

- 65% of students are white
- 18% of students are Latino
- 9% of students are Asian
- 6% of students are black
- 95% of staff are white

(*Data collected from Illinois School Report Card, H.C.O. High School, 2018)

Quantitative research was centered on a variety of dependent variables, including perceptions of school connectedness and quantitative research findings. For my independent variable, socioeconomic status, research was broken into two groups: one consisted of a lower SES, and one consisted of a higher SES. Ideally, these groups were approximately the same size. SES was selected as the independent variable, as students from lower SES backgrounds tend to be less engaged in school culture than those from higher SES backgrounds. Sojourner and Kushner (1997) stress this more, describing that "economically deprived parents generally have few resources to provide an educational home environment that includes books, reference materials, and study space. Children who live in such 'pedagogically poor surroundings' can appear to be less intelligent than they actually are. Furthermore, children may appear to be low

achievers because measurement instruments used in determining intelligence and academic achievement are based on middle-class, mainstream values and language rather than on cognitive or intellectual functioning" (p. 7). Using information from various sources and data points, this study aimed to explore this discrepancy.

Data Gathering

Initially, existing data, both public and internal, was analyzed using H.C.O. High School's information system, identifying trends and patterns in academic achievement, involvement, and engagement. Once participants were identified, statistical surveys were presented to H.C.O. faculty and students. I alone will had access to survey responses and data. These were kept on a password-protected computer and hard drive, and all copies and results were destroyed at the completion of my research. For our faculty, informed consent existed directly on the electronic survey, which was administered via Google Docs (Appendix A). Regarding the student survey tool (Appendix B) and participation in the research, all students were emailed an invitation to participate. This is common practice within the H.C.O. school district, and students are familiar with taking surveys online. Several factors were considered when arranging for student research participants. Because the survey was anonymous, and questions asked were considered to be low-risk questions, in line with our Board of Education policy 7:15, students provided consent directly on the survey tool.

Ethical Considerations

Many ethical considerations were given to ensure the study protected those involved and provides a positive experience. Certainly, connectedness and socioeconomic status can be

sensitive topics, and the utmost care was given to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and trust.

Patton (2008) continues to discuss ethics by saying that program evaluation standards provide

general ethical guidance: "evaluation agreements should be in writing, rights of human subjects

should be protected, evaluators should protect human dignity, and assessments should be

complete and fair (p. 545). These were important aspects to bear in mind as I began my research,

and I was very purposeful and conscious of these. Moreover, having completed the CITI training

modules, I had a better understanding of how serious researchers must be, regardless of context

or situation. This is echoed by James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam (2008) who, in speaking

directly about purpose and of research, say ethics is the "tenet without which other components

do not stand" (p. 28). Among considerations presented in their work, they include ethical

considerations such as obtaining consent, working diligently to limit any harm, maintaining

confidentiality, employing valid and rigorous techniques, and exhibiting care for subjects (p. 28-

29). These aspects are of utmost importance, and I ensured my study was organized diligently so

all these considerations were at the forefront.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data will be analyzed using a variety of techniques. Primarily, for quantitative data

collected via electronic surveys, information will be examined using correlational analyses and T

Test methods, comparing how my independent variable groups – lower and higher SES families

– react to differing dependent variables, including perceptions of school connectedness. Data will

also be analyzed and broken down according to feeder schools, behavior and attendance records,

demographics, grade level, and overall engagement in school. To analyze quantitative research

collected, raw data will be entered into a statistical program and run against various models, including correlational analyses, T Tests, and regression analyses.

As educators, we are constantly assessing, evaluating, reflecting upon, and offering new approaches to many aspects of our schools and districts. Our stakeholders expect this, and it is our responsibility to provide organized and purposeful evaluations of these programs. It is our goal to provide a quality education to all learners while connecting students and families to our school community. This study will help illustrate whether we are meeting that goal. Further, information and data collected will provide powerful insight into H.C.O.'s existing programs – in this case new teacher and new student orientations – and offer recommendations on how we can better engage all students and families, and create a greater sense of connectedness. Through purposeful organization of research, a great deal of information and data will be available to inform our decisions and program modifications.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As-Is Analysis

In examining results of, and analyzing information and drawing conclusions from, this study, an important framework to consider is Wagner et al.'s emphasis on the "4 C's: competencies, conditions, culture, and context" (pp. 99-105). Essentially, they argue that systems, in this case a school, fit into these categories and that the system created is "perfectly designed to produce the results you're getting" (p. 106). Thus, it is imperative that leaders design systems in purposeful and deliberate ways according to these four factors, as they will play a crucial role in determining results and, ultimately, successes or lack thereof, and can serve as the foundation of change when applied properly. For this study, all four areas will be examined closely to determine key next steps.

As backdrop to Wagner et al.'s framework (2006), it is important to understand all 4 C's:

- **Competencies** – These can be defined as the "repertoire of skills and knowledge that influence student learning (p. 99). In other words, they are an organization's or school's soft and hard skills, which can affect teaching and learning. The stronger the competencies present, the more successful a school will be. In today's context, there tends to be greater emphasis on hard skills, such as test-taking, memorization, reproduction of processes, and preparation of students for what Digby (2016) refers to as "endurance trials that make students lift heavy academic loads" (p. 32) in AP classes. Softer skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, and even creativity, are often emphasized less as schools and educators prepare students for statewide assessments and ratings.

- **Conditions** – Wagner et al. define conditions as "the external architecture surrounding student learning, and tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (p. 101). Conditions could include community expectations and pressures, traditions, school day and bell structure, facilities, policies, laws, and student outcomes. Increasingly, schools in Chicago's northwest suburbs are subjected to conditions in which academic achievement is the primary focus, even above balance, engagement, and rest. Richard Weissbourd, in his 2011 article "The Over-pressured Student," elaborates on this, stating that while balance is important, "the fact remains: When it comes to academic achievement, many parents in upper- and middle-class communities have gone overboard. Parents are now going to legendary lengths to prime the mental engines of infants and even toddlers" (p. 23). Given this context, it is challenging to engage students, particularly at the high school level, in the importance of getting involved outside the classroom. At H.C.O., there are two main challenges when working to connect students to the broader culture. Primarily, involved students tend to be over-involved; they are stretched thin, as Weissbourd discusses, and simply do not have additional time to give. Secondly, and contrarily, many students are not involved because offerings and traditions at H.C.O. might not reflect their cultures and beliefs. As students change, schools must be able to adapt, and this includes evolving beliefs and norms.

- **Culture** – Wagner et al. define culture as "shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning," along with "quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (p. 102). Essentially, culture is the shared vision and passions of an organization, and it dictates a great deal of practice and effectiveness. This is such an important aspect in schools and dictates a great deal of what

takes place. To create a shared culture throughout the district, leaders must clearly articulate their collective vision, and provide resources and support facilitating stakeholders' progress toward it. Looking closely at H.C.O., there is a culture of involvement, yet consistently a group of students is underrepresented in co-curriculars. While we continue to stress our value of school involvement, H.C.O. must continue examining our offerings and reflect upon how well they meet the culture of our changing student body.

- **Context** – This is defined by Wagner et al. as the "skill demands that all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners, and citizens, as well as the aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and communities a school serves" (p. 104). Overall, context describes what it means to be successful within and outside the school. Students though, often receive mixed messages. Schools ask students to get involved, inside and outside the classroom. Higher education puts an emphasis on academic performance and engagement. Parents want students to be well-rounded. Politt and Leichty (2017) expand on this as they describe the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, saying it "offers an important opportunity for principals to work directly with state and school district leaders to craft plans to deliver instruction, activities, and programming designed to provide a well-rounded and complete education to all students" (p. 4). As educators, we know we must help develop well-rounded students, but the context within which we work often makes this challenging.

Findings

Thorough examination and analysis of this study's findings yield two recurring themes. Regarding student and family connectedness, it becomes evident that H.C.O. faculty and staff perceive both low SES and non-low SES students to be more connected and engaged than students perceive their connectedness and engagement. Furthermore, in examining student connectedness, knowledge of resources, and feelings of perceived value at H.C.O., students from both low and non-low SES backgrounds report nearly identical levels of engagement. However, students considered low SES are involved in co-curriculars at nearly half the rate of non-low SES students. In other words, even though all H.C.O. students surveyed report similar levels of engagement and connectedness, there is a large discrepancy between those actually involved in co-curriculars and those not.

To begin data analysis, staff and student survey respondent demographics will be shared. This will be followed by discussion of student and family connectedness, student input and voice, communications at H.C.O., perceptions of orientation programs, and data on student involvement in co-curriculars. Data will be analyzed and compared according to three sub-groups that took part in the survey: faculty and staff, non-low SES students and low SES students.

Area 1 – Survey Participants

Forty-one faculty and staff participated: 11 core area teachers, 13 elective or special area teachers, seven administrators, and 10 staff from other areas within the school. This is represented as follows:
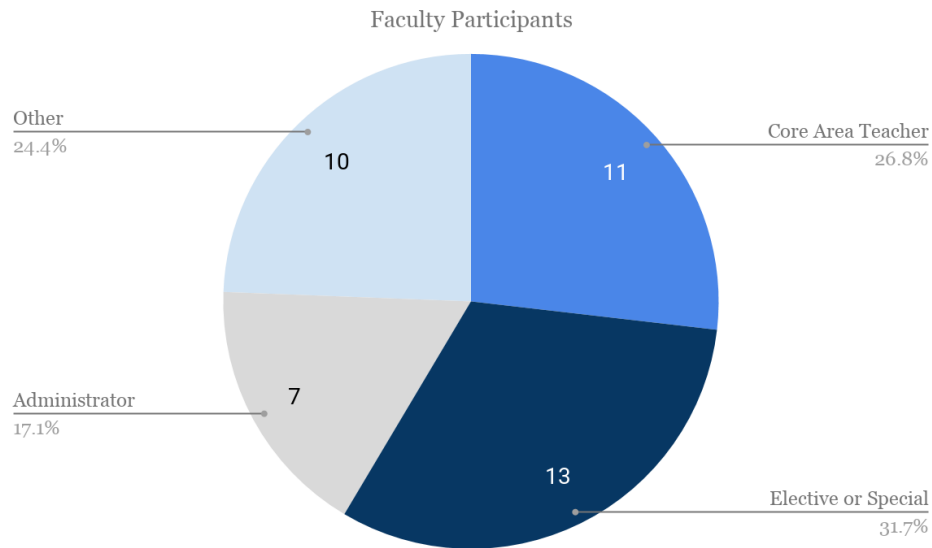
Figure 4A. Roles of faculty survey participants

The survey also indicated educators' experience levels, which ranged from less than one total year experience in education to more than 25 years. The majority of faculty completing the survey had between five and 10 years' experience, with a large percentage also having between 11 and 16 years. (See Appendix C, *Figure 4B.)*

In addition to faculty and staff, 341 students participated in this study, 307 of whom are from non-low socioeconomic statuses, and 34 of whom are considered low SES. This is represented below:
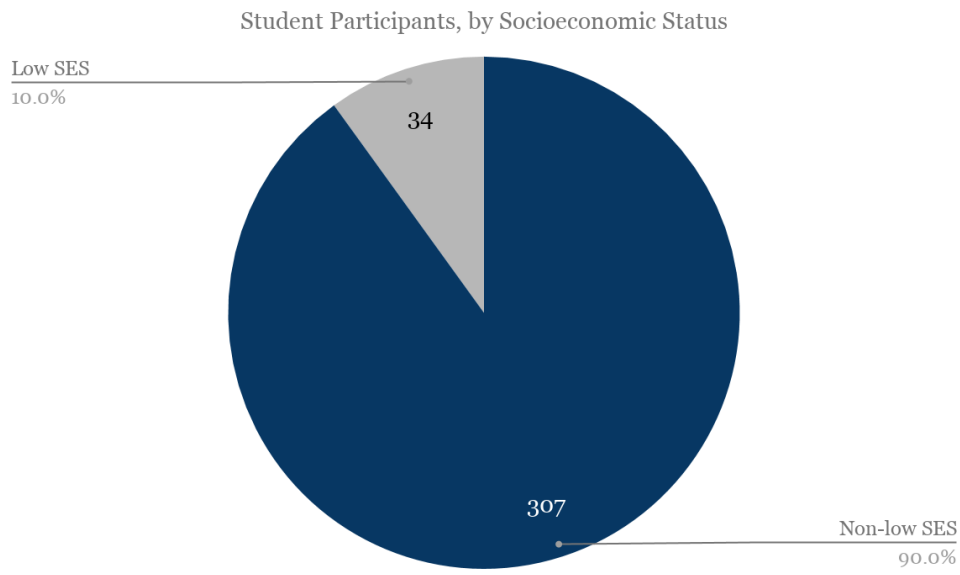
Figure 4B. Student survey participants by socioeconomic status

Students who participated in this survey represented all four grade levels at H.C.O. High School, Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. Of the non-low SES respondents, 25% were Grade 9, 18% were Grade 10, 19% were Grade 11, and 38% were Grade 12. Of those students considered low SES, 12% were Grade 9, 27% were Grade 10, 9% were Grade 11, and 53% were Grade 12. (See Appendix C, *Figure 4D.)*

Theme 1: Student and staff perceptions of connectedness

Area 2 – Student and Family Connectedness

To gain an understanding of student and faculty perception of connectedness to H.C.O., several questions were asked regarding ways in which students and faculty feel engaged, how well staff believe they know the student body, and how successfully the school communicates. First, all respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with this statement: students at H.C.O. feel connected. Interestingly, 63% of staff agreed with the statement, while only 49% of

non-low SES students agreed, and only 29% of low SES students agreed. Contrarily, nearly 60% of low SES students selected neutral as their level of agreement with this statement, while 30% of both non-low SES students and faculty participants rated this statement neutral. This is depicted below:
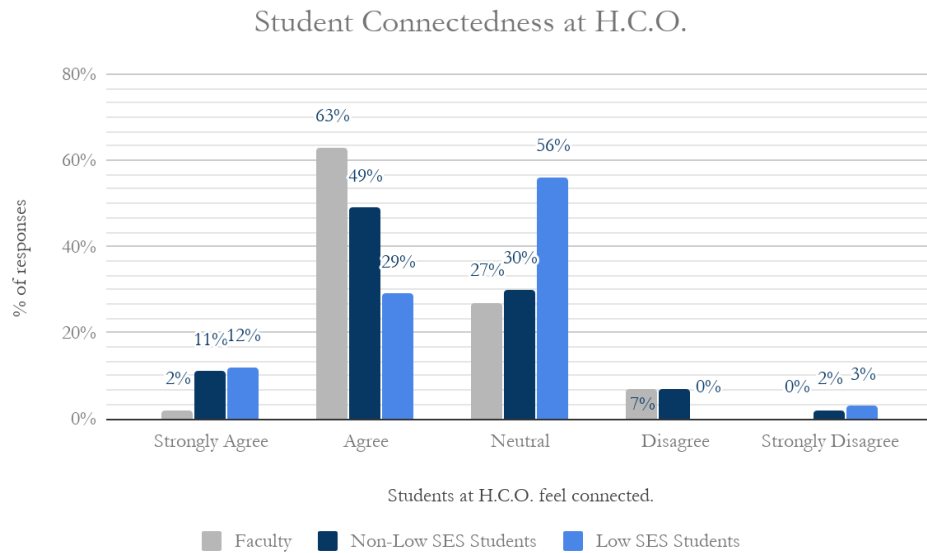
Figure 4C. Student connectedness at H.C.O.

Participants asked the same question regarding family connectedness at H.C.O. were in agreement far more. Faculty and staff reported approximately 50% agreement, while both student groups reported about 40% agreement. Between 37% and 47% of all three respondent groups reported as neutral. This is shown below:

Family Connectedness at H.C.O.
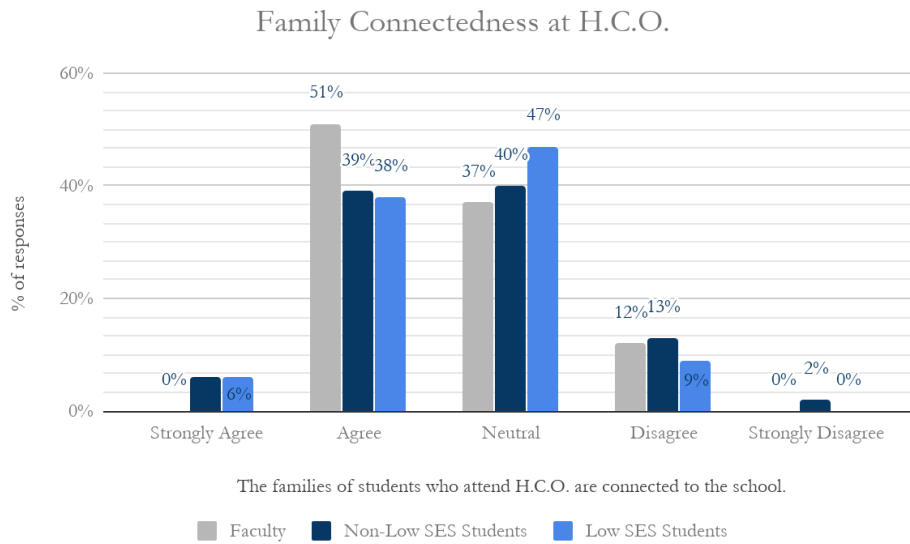
Figure 4D. Family connectedness at H.C.O.

To supplement the idea of connectedness for both students and families, respondents were asked to rate their perception of communications at H.C.O. Faculty and staff were asked to rate their agreement with this statement: H.C.O. communicates clearly with families. Discrepancies between student and staff responses emerged. Thirty-six percent of faculty reported they strongly agree with this statement, while approximately 17% of students reported the same. However, all three sub-groups reported that, for the most part, they agree with this statement. This is shown below:
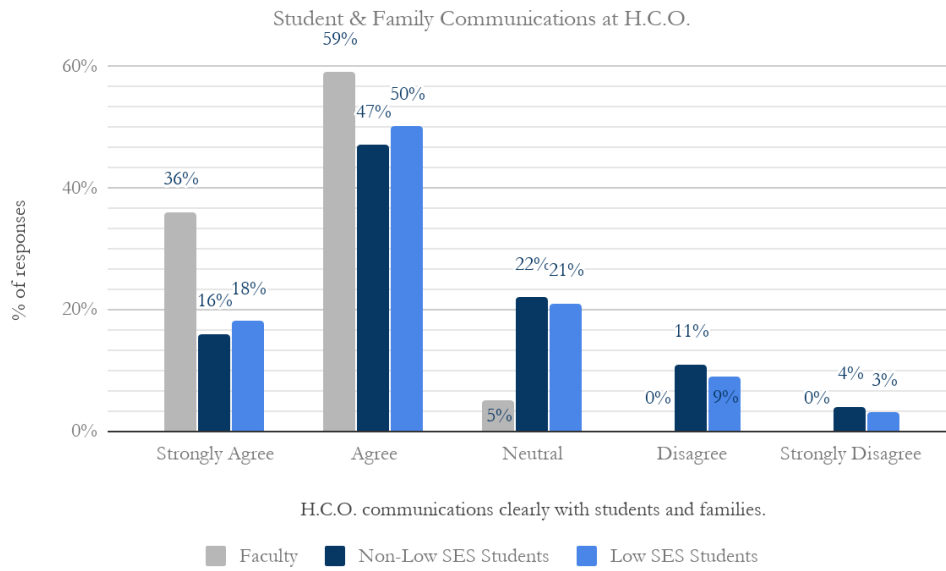
Figure 4E. Student and family communications at H.C.O.

Area 3 – Student and Family Input

In addition to examining communications at H.C.O. High School, it was important to gain an understanding of how students and staff perceive the value of student and family input at school. While there is mutual agreement that students and families have a say in curricular, co-curricular, and social-emotional offerings, there is some discrepancy among respondents related to feelings about whether student and family voices matter. As Figure 4H, below, shows, between 32% and 42% of respondents agree that H.C.O. students and families have a say in these areas, with low SES students reporting the highest level of agreement:
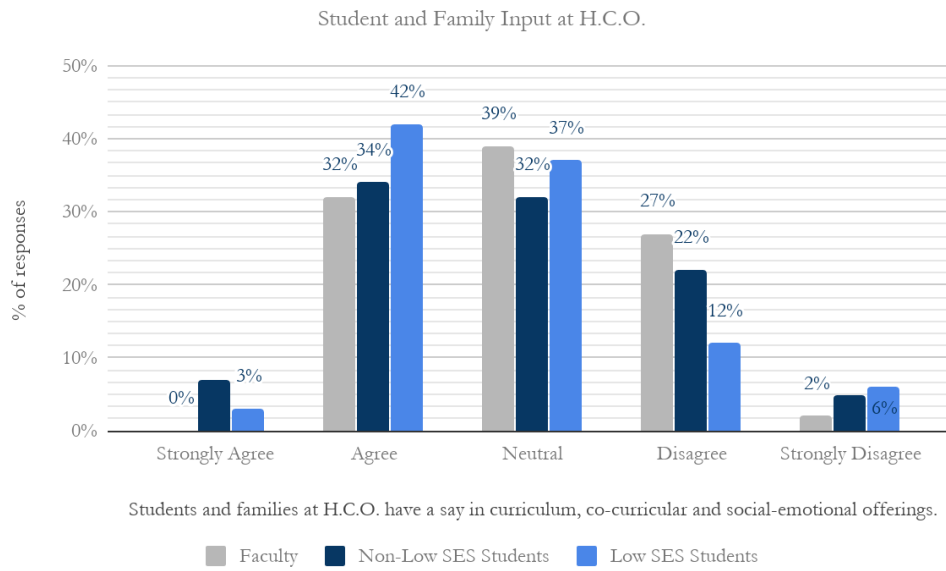
Figure 4F. Student and family input at H.C.O.

However, when it comes to students and families feeling they have a voice at H.C.O. there is far less agreement among respondents. More than 60% of faculty and staff agree that student and family opinions and voice matter at H.C.O, while only around 30% of students agree. Contrarily, nearly 30% of students are neutral in this area, compared to only 15% of staff. This is depicted below:
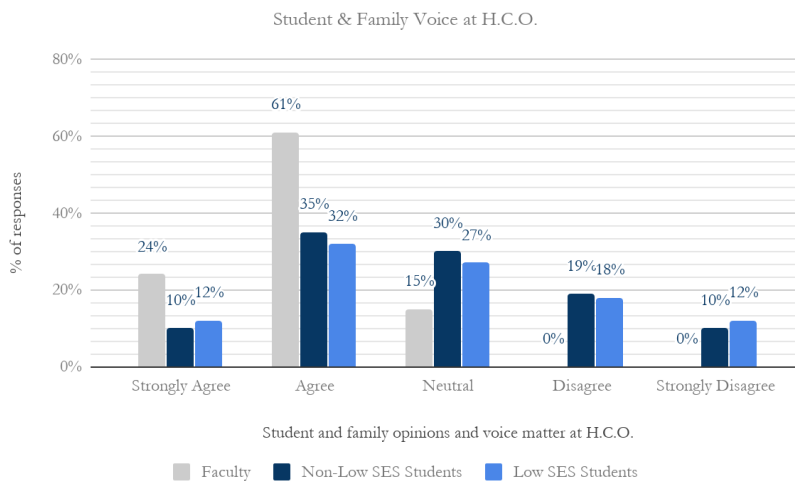
Figure 4G. Student and family voice at H.C.O.

Area 4 – Orientation Programs

Prior to beginning at H.C.O. High School, all students and staff take part in an orientation process aimed at acclimating new members of the school community, providing pertinent information, and ensuring a smooth start at the school. While both our faculty and new student orientation programs are positive, there are varying degrees of perception of program effectiveness. When asked if their orientation program prepared them to succeed at H.C.O., staff, non-low SES students and low SES students rated their levels of agreement differently, while their ratings of neutral were rather consistent. Forty-six percent of staff agreed their orientation program prepared them to succeed; the percentage of non-low SES students in agreement was 34, and the percentage for low SES students in agreement was 27. On the contrary, approximately 40% of all respondents – faculty and students – rated themselves as neutral when asked whether their orientation prepared them to be successful. This is depicted below:
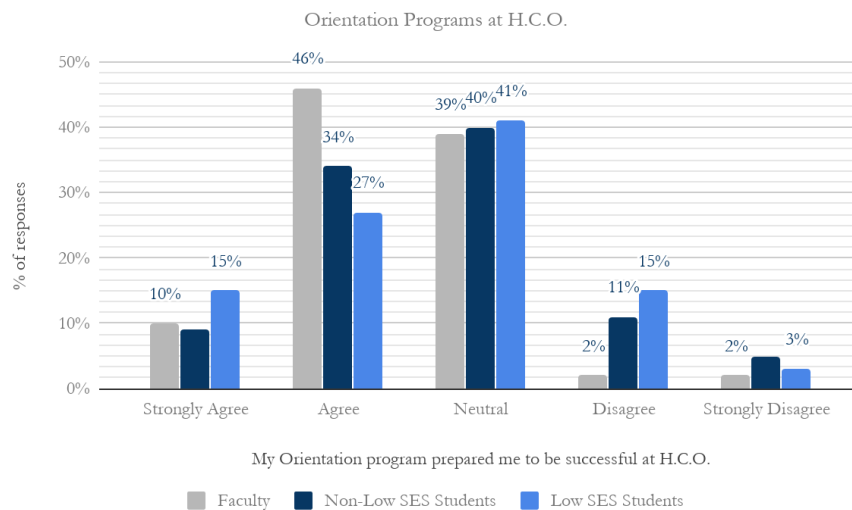
Figure 4H. Orientation programs at H.C.O.

Looking more closely at the concept of feeling prepared for success, students at H.C.O. were also asked about their ability to be successful. While the previous question focused specifically on the orientation program, the subsequent question was designed to understand students' overall perceptions of whether they were prepared to be successful upon starting school. Here, there was strong consistency among all students, with approximately 43% indicating they agree they were prepared to be successful when they began at H.C.O. This is shown below:
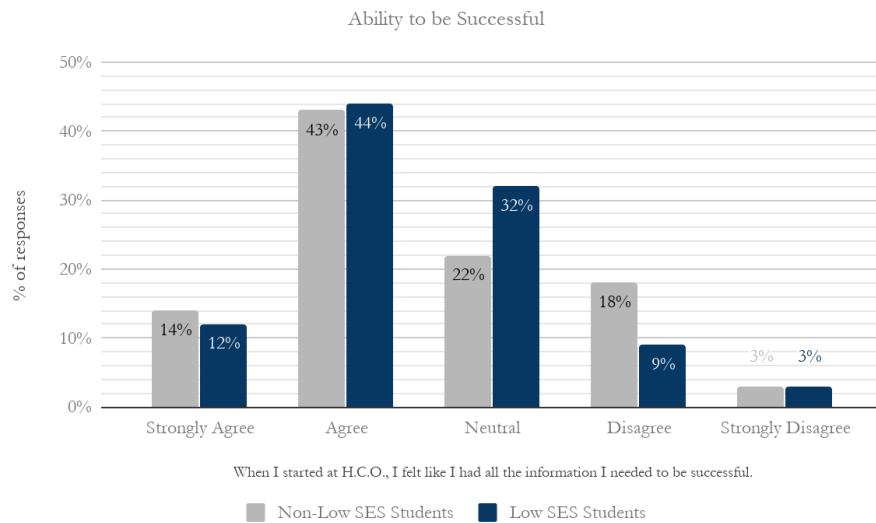
Figure 4I. Student ability to be successful

Theme 2: Student Involvement

Area 5 – Student Involvement

Finally, to understand student engagement and involvement as they relate to perceptions of connectedness to H.C.O., it is imperative to analyze rates of involvement of non-low and low SES students. Most notably, students from low SES backgrounds are involved in co-curricular activities at a significantly lower rate than students from non-low SES backgrounds. During this

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study, 84% of non-low SES students report being involved in a co-curricular activity, while only 55% of low SES students report being involved. (See Appendix C, *Figure 4L.)*

Interestingly, when asked about having knowledge of how to get involved, students from both socioeconomic backgrounds had nearly identical responses. In fact, 56% of all students agreed they had information needed to get involved; but again, students from low SES backgrounds actually get involved at a much lower rate. This is depicted below:
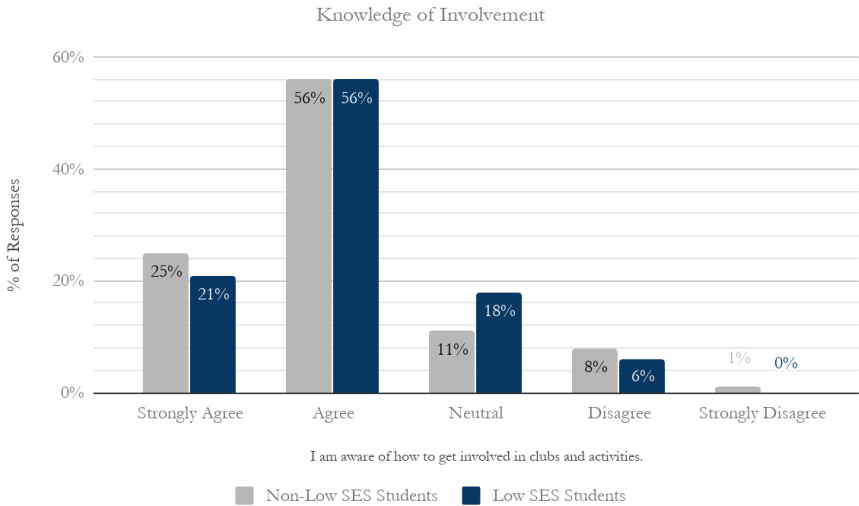
Figure 4J. Knowledge of involvement at H.C.O.

Interpretation

In looking closely at this data from both micro and macro levels, two major themes emerge. First, recall that there are several instances in which faculty and staff are asked to rate their perceptions of student engagement in a series of areas. In multiple instances, staff perceptions indicate a far higher agreement rate than the agreement rate indicated by students. This is present throughout the data and, in many ways, presents valuable insight into perceptions present in the school district. Consistently, faculty and staff feel our students and families are more connected, engaged, and feel valued at higher rates than our students indicate feeling.

Primarily, this can be seen when H.C.O. student and family connectedness is analyzed. In both scenarios, faculty and staff indicate they believe students and families feel connected at higher rates than students themselves indicate. There is even greater discrepancy between staff and low SES student perceptions, where students from low SES backgrounds rate their agreement on student and family connectedness far lower than the other two subgroups. The same variations are present when asked about communications at H.C.O., with staff reporting far higher levels of strong agreement than students. In fact, when asked about H.C.O. clearly communicating with families, faculty perceived school communications to be almost twice as successful as students. Continuing this trend, when asked about the value of student and family voice at H.C.O., once again, faculty and staff rated their agreement much higher than students. In this instance, faculty perceptions of agreement were nearly twice as high as those of both non-low and low SES students.

A second major theme present in the data is more striking: non-low and low SES H.C.O. students report nearly identical responses when asked about connectedness, knowledge of resources, communications, and feeling valued. Clearly, this is positive and affirms the effectiveness of H.C.O.'s efforts to include all students. However, despite reporting similar levels of connectedness, students from low SES backgrounds are involved in co-curriculars at a significantly lower rate than those from non-low SES backgrounds. Stated differently, even though low SES students feel valued and connected, they are not getting involved at the same rate as non-low SES students.

This is evident in data gleaned from a series of responses related to both student and family connectedness. Students from both socioeconomic backgrounds agree, at nearly the same rate, that students and families are connected to H.C.O. The same can be said for the way H.C.O.

communicates with families; students feel the school communicates clearly. Further, students believe they have a say in curricular, co-curricular, and social-emotional offerings, with students from low SES backgrounds reporting even higher levels of agreement than students from non-low SES backgrounds. The same holds true of feeling they have a voice at the school; students from both SES backgrounds rate nearly the same level of agreement. When asked about their ability to be successful at H.C.O., once again, students from both socioeconomic backgrounds are in agreement at nearly identical rates. However, despite perceiving connectedness, clear communications, and value at incredibly similar levels, students from a higher SES get involved in co-curriculars at a significantly higher rate than their low SES counterparts.

Results of this study pose an interesting question: why are students from low SES backgrounds, who report the same or higher levels of engagement, connectedness, and value, involved at a significantly lower rate than those from higher SES backgrounds? Payne (2005), a leading expert on the mindsets of poverty, provides insight into this phenomenon as she explains the "hidden rules among classes" (p. 37). According to Payne, three classes subject to these hidden rules: poverty, middle class, and wealth. As such, these groups perceive their needs very differently. In particular, when it comes to education, students raised in poverty "see it as valued and revered as abstract, but not as a reality." Middle class students, however, see education as "crucial for climbing the success ladder and making money" (pp. 42-43). This is emphasized as Payne discusses perceptions of "destiny," stating that students from lower SES backgrounds "believe in fate and cannot do much to mitigate chance." Students from the middle class, though, tend to believe destiny is about "choice, and that they can change the future with good choices now" (pp. 42-43). Both of these hidden rules provide important context and explanation of why students with lower SES backgrounds feel equally connected to their counterparts, yet are not as

actively involved. In many ways, lower SES students perceive their ability to pursue education, and their ability to adjust their futures, as being much more pre-determined, whereas students from higher SES backgrounds feel empowered to guide their futures. As an organization, H.C.O. must begin to acknowledge and address this.

Judgments

Returning to this study's primary research questions, participant responses and data gleaned from it provide important insight as well as answers to some questions. These primary research questions are:

- To what degree do students and families from varying socioeconomic groups rate their level of their connectedness to the school community?
- What barriers are present for students and families that qualify as low-income that prevent these students from connecting with the school community?
- How do the district's orientation programs – both new teacher and new student – account for these identified barriers?
- What additions and changes can be implemented to break down these barriers?

Data clearly illustrates the levels of engagement and connectedness reported by students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Most notably, students from both low and non-low SES backgrounds rate their level of connectedness very similarly, and in some cases, students from lower SES backgrounds rate their connectedness even higher than their counterparts. Knowing this, but also understanding that students from lower SES backgrounds are not as involved as those from higher SES backgrounds, H.C.O. is forced to begin examining the second research question, which asks about barriers students and families from lower SES backgrounds

face in relation to feeling connected to the school and getting involved. Interestingly though, the data shows students from lower SES backgrounds do feel connected; they simply are not as involved as their peers.

Looking closely at these results, and comparing them to student and faculty responses about orientations, particularly as they relate to the third research question, we are led to believe that while both new faculty and new student orientation programs are mildly successful, a large number of neutral agreement responses demonstrates the need to reexamine the structure, setup, and functions of these programs. Furthermore, data clearly illustrates that barriers exist between feeling connected and engaged and being involved. As a district, H.C.O. must continue to understand barriers that exist and ways in which they can be mitigated, and then it must implement plans to bridge the gap.

Recommendations

Looking specifically at H.C.O. High School, one group to be addressed, as related to new student orientation, is students not typically engaged in the school community. Generally, this orientation process is framed such that all students receive the same information and go through the same process. The first half of the program consists of a large group presentation, while the second half consists of all students receiving their materials, schedules, textbooks, technology, and physical education items. Little consideration is given to the fact that these large settings might be challenging for students already feeling overwhelmed. Further, many students' needs and interests vary from the norm, and this issue is not addressed. While our student and

community populations continue to change, our new student orientation program has stayed relatively consistent for many years.

Looking ahead, I would implement several changes to our new student orientation program, which would allow incoming students to acclimate to H.C.O. in a more intimate and deliberate manner. The current program runs approximately three hours, and students are placed in one of two large groups. As they arrive, half the group enters the auditorium, the other half enters the cafeteria. At the mid-point of orientation, students switch locations to complete the other half of the program. In the auditorium, the first hour is spent on staff and administrator introductions, daily school schedule information, technology orientation, and information about lunch, and before and after school. Regularly, students leave this portion of orientation seemingly overwhelmed and with many questions. In the cafeteria, the other group of students spends the first hour of orientation going from station to station, collecting many materials, including their school ID, textbooks, physical education uniform, technology device, and personal schedule. Once all materials are picked up, an overwhelming process for even experienced students, new students are left to find their own lockers, in which they can leave everything. It is not uncommon, however, to see multiple students leaving H.C.O. after orientation with all materials in hand, seeming to indicate they were unsuccessful in finding their lockers.

To create a more personal and connected experience for our new students at orientation, several changes should be made. These include implementation of small groups, with upper-class student leaders; a focused curriculum that addresses diverse cultures, backgrounds, and social-emotional supports; as well as opportunities for new students to meet a variety of their peers in a more intimate group setting, where they can ask questions, get to know one another, and form

relationships. Students at orientation would then, together, complete a building tour, pick up materials, and find their lockers. By providing an opportunity for students to work together in these small groups, I believe they would begin to build a foundation that will truly help them grow and connect to the school community as they begin their high school experience.

When examining our existing systems, as related to Wagner's "As-Is" framework (see Appendix D), consistent themes are prevalent throughout the "4 C's." To effect real change, it is imperative to understand these patterns, acknowledge their impact, and create viable plans for change. Looking closely at the competencies, conditions, culture, and contexts within the district, the most common theme is that students connected to the school community are more successful academically, co-curricularly, and social-emotionally.

Competencies within the district and community have traditionally been centered on a great deal of success both in and outside the classroom. Staff are seen as dedicated and committed, there are many resources, and the Board of Education is committed to ensuring programs are funded and supported. Examining the conditions, it is apparent there are many opportunities for involvement, yet consideration for underserved and minority students when planning for these opportunities can be improved. Further, the district's culture is one of tradition and success, touting both opportunities for students to get involved and clear communication with families. Year after year, the district receives accolades from various organizations, including the AP Honor Roll, being ranked "one of America's best schools" by *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*, and being named "one of America's most challenging high schools" by *The Washington Post*. Regularly, H.C.O. sends correspondences to families and community members discussing upcoming events, ways to get involved and give back, as well as ways to receive additional information. The district releases a bi-weekly newsletter, has a strong presence

on social media and collaborates with various community organizations, including the village in which it is located, to have a presence in its publications. However, many students do not get involved in co-curriculars, and a high number of these students are our underserved students. Finally, regarding context, students within the district are attempting to complete high school successfully within a political and social climate of increased school violence and mass protests, and in a society that must address racism and discrimination. This, combined with state guidelines under the Every Student Succeeds Act, (Malin, Bragg and Hackman, 2017), calls for schools to be evaluated based on connectedness and involvement, creating a context that can be extremely volatile. While there are many factors to consider, understanding our "As-Is" is an important first step to driving change.

As can be said with any important initiative or action plan, it is extremely important to involve various stakeholders in the planning and implementation process. This will be done, and done with focused and purposeful thought and action throughout this study and beyond. The intention is to include a diverse group of community members and stakeholders at multiple points. To begin, I have worked with the Board of Education, discussing the importance of examining our "As-Is," including identifying barriers to connectedness. During spring 2018, we collaborated on a program titled "H.C.O. 360°." Tenants of this ongoing action plan are three-fold: collect as much data and information about ways in which students and families are involved, as well as about barriers to this engagement; create an action team that will work toward increasing engagement and involvement; and acknowledge and celebrate growth and involvement. Throughout this program, and regarding involvement and engagement, three areas will be focused on: academics; co-curriculars such as clubs, activities, sports, and community service; and social-emotional well-being. Once data is formally collected, it will be used to guide

the processes. Additionally, we held a series of parent advisory meetings throughout the school year, during which we discussed involvement and ways in which we can work toward growing student and family engagement. Further, at a faculty meeting in April 2018, H.C.O. discussed the importance of connectedness and of identifying barriers preventing some students from getting involved. At the meeting, teachers worked in small groups to present barriers they have experienced in their careers, struggles or successes they have had, and anecdotal information about why some students simply do not engage. Most importantly, discussion centered on removing barriers and meeting the needs of all students.

Throughout this study, several themes emerged as a result of applying and analyzing Wagner's "4 C's." Initially, a common thread emerged between school connectedness and overall student success. What we are seeing at H.C.O. is that students involved in at least one co-curricular activity tend to have better attendance rates, fewer discipline issues, and a higher overall grade point average. Most recently, data has shown that approximately 1,700 of H.C.O.'s 2,650 students, approximately 64% of the student population, are engaged in at least one co-curricular. However, the district and Board of Education have committed to increasing the number of students involved every year. According to Sulkowski, Demaray, and Lazarus (2012), a "lack of school engagement negatively affects millions of students, and efforts to connect students to schools should be at the forefront of current initiatives to improve education" (p. 19). Essentially, students who are connected to the school community and culture are more successful academically, co-curricularly, and social-emotionally. Additionally, it has emerged that as a school community, there is a large focus on student involvement, but few purposeful efforts have been made to account for groups of students not engaged. As Mudge and Higgins (2011) articulate, "concerns regarding equity of access to educational opportunities across all groups

become an issue of importance for educators, administrators, and civic leaders" (p. 126).
Ultimately, this has provided an important understanding that as a school and community, we must take into account cultural and socioeconomic differences as we continue planning for and working to engage all families and students. Deliberately focusing on these factors will allow us to begin creating programs and opportunities for students and families less likely to be involved.

CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Envisioning the Success: To-Be

By understanding competencies, conditions, culture, and contexts currently within our district, we can begin creating a vision of what is "To-Be" as related to connectedness and involvement. Using key data points and input from various stakeholders, and through input and insights from project team members, it becomes apparent that in an ideal setting, our vision – our "To-Be" (see Appendix E) – is a district in which most, if not all, students and families feel engaged and connected to our school community. With deliberate, purposeful, and well-planned action, increased engagement and connectedness are possible, and change can be impactful. As students feel more and more connected, they will be more successful in multiple contexts, including in the "4 C's."

First, there would be significant growth in competencies within our district. We would continue to strongly emphasize academic and success, working toward more students enrolling in higher-level classes. Continued professional development opportunities, within and outside the district, would be offered. These would include local, national, and international conferences, at which the best and most up-to-date resources are available. Staff would challenge themselves to stay current on best practices, take risks, and try new approaches to learning and teaching. Opportunities for students would grow as well. Added to our robust advanced placement (AP) programs would be new pathways for learning. This could include a blended-learning program, using technology and online tools to supplement curricula and to break down traditional classroom "barriers" such as space and time constraints. Further, students would have opportunities to engage in dual-credit courses, taught in partnership with universities, completing

college-level, but non-AP, work and earning transferable college credit while still in high school. Additionally, staff would continue to be dedicated and our Board of Education would remain incredibly supportive of all opportunities, including new ideas.

Certainly, competency enhancements would lead to increased involvement and success, but there would also be increased focus on addressing needs of the whole student – a focus on engaging students curricularly, co-curricularly, and social-emotionally. This would begin by ensuring numerous data points are available and monitored; baseline information is collected; and ensuring focus on learning about student engagement, and addressing ways to improve it, is ongoing. By emphasizing these competencies, we will see increased student engagement, involvement, and overall success.

Most importantly, there will be clear focus on cultural differences and needs within the district when considering planning, opportunities, and offerings. Added to the emphasis on higher level classes will be a great push for student involvement in all facets of school life. One way this will occur is by providing students from diverse backgrounds opportunity to share their voices through activities such as additional chances to meet with district leaders and administrators, input on surveys, and ongoing discussions with various school leaders. Immediately, students from diverse backgrounds will be asked to join numerous decision-making committees focused on curriculum, co-curriculars, textbooks, technology, and the school building and grounds. By simply heeding input from H.C.O.'s diverse student body, cultural differences will be taken into account. Moreover, we would move to add student representatives to our Board of Education. While students would be non-voting members, they would gain opportunity to provide input on all issues before the Board, which has not been standard practice. Regarding staff, hiring people representative of our student demographics is being emphasized

and achieved through activity such as recruiting at job fairs traditionally not attended, collaborating with universities to identify strong candidates who are graduating, and working as a district to maintain focus on this important aspect.

Culture, already an extremely strong area, will see growth as well. We will continue to emphasize a culture in which getting involved and being connected to the school community are the norm. From the outset of their H.C.O. experience, students and staff will learn about the importance and power of connecting and engaging at school. At their initial orientation, new staff will receive information about our students, their interests, barriers we have encountered, and ways in which to connect with a diverse student population. Orientation will also include tours of neighborhoods throughout the district, enabling staff to see areas from which our diverse student body comes. Also, new-staff meetings throughout the school year will provide a forum for ongoing conversation around students' cultures, challenges, and successes.

We will use opportunities such as our new student and family orientations, as well as our new staff orientation, to emphasize the importance of connecting and engaging, and to discuss ways in which to get involved. This is crucial, as currently, all orientations focus on information rather than on vision. At events including two incoming freshmen gatherings in spring, prior to enrollment; a spring co-curricular fair; and a welcome-back barbeque in August, staff from various areas of the school will be able to share their stories and emphasize the importance of getting involved. This, combined with our focus on growing involvement and engagement – as we know involved students are more successful – is an important communication to our families and students. Creating this culture from the moment students and families first enter the school community is essential, and we will achieve this.

Finally, while contexts in which we operate will largely stay the same, we will work to grow in this area as well. As state and federal guidelines look to evaluate school performance, indicators such as the Every Student Succeeds Act, continue to emphasize the importance of measures beyond academic performance. Operating within this context only emphasizes that students and families must be fully engaged in our school community. We will continue a deliberate push to support the whole child, including a student's academics, involvement, and social-emotional well-being. Outside the school, communities and workplaces are eager for students who leave Grade 12 ready to take part in the workforce. And as a district, we must ensure students are prepared for whatever context is most appropriate for them, including post-secondary education and the workforce. Thus, it is imperative that we continue to foster relationships and connections with our community, which can provide countless resources and opportunities for our students. To build and maintain these relationships, we will attend, on a regular basis, meetings with village leaders, businesses, community organizations, and more. In doing so, we will understand their needs while identifying opportunities for our students. Certainly, these opportunities can include internship and work opportunities, which are important; however, they address just one facet. By better understanding community and local businesses' needs, we can develop and refine programs to meet these needs, simultaneously preparing students for the context into which they will graduate and providing them opportunities to serve, volunteer, and give back in ways not available to them in the past.

Conclusion

Wagner et al. emphasize that "your system – any system – is perfectly designed to produce the results you are getting" (p. 106). In other words, your "As-Is" yields exactly the

results it is supposed to produce. Organizations must look closely at the system as it exists, understanding its competencies, conditions, culture, and contexts, and then begin to examine how to effect real change. Once a district knows where it stands, it can begin to create a plan to make meaningful enhancements, borne of purposeful and deliberate information gathering, stakeholder input, and action planning. Ultimately, this leads to what Wagner refers to as your "To-Be," or your transformation. Using all this information, it becomes possible to look at strategies, actions, and processes to begin implementing real change.

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

All organizations, whether implicitly or explicitly, have an expectation of growth and improvement. Those better adept at understanding their culture and addressing this need are typically more successful overall. This is the basis of work by Wagner et al. (2006) on the 4 C's: competencies, conditions, culture, and context (pp. 99-105). Essentially, they posit that to create sustained and long-lasting change, an organization must first understand how the 4 C's relate to it, then it must begin imagining what could be, and most importantly, how to get there. In this study, these are referred to as the "As-Is" and the "To-Be," respectively.

By many measures, H.C.O. is a highly successful school district; stakeholders are extremely competent in helping students achieve solid academic performance, in developing community relationships, and in fostering academic and involvement growth. The district works diligently to foster an environment in which people feel free to take risks, and to provide opportunities for many students. The culture is such that striving toward success is a constant, and the community and families served expect high performance. This culture is set against a backdrop of a growing gap in performance among students from diverse racial and economic backgrounds, and with differing social-emotional challenges. Since H.C.O. enjoys much success and is backed by an extremely supportive community, the most difficult challenge is, perhaps, communicating the importance of shifting from the current state, the "As-Is," to what could be, the "To-Be." Heifetz (2009) concurs, discussing what he calls the "illusion of the broken system." He elaborates, noting there is a myth that "drives many change initiatives to the ground; that organizations need to change because they are broken" (p. 17). At H.C.O., considered successful by many stakeholders, this myth exists. In examining data collected in this study, and

in identifying key areas of growth, H.C.O. will be prepared to take crucial steps to move from the "As-Is" to the "To-Be."

When imagining what could be for H.C.O., it is important to look beyond the present state. What could be? How much stronger could the district become? What makes H.C.O. unique and stand out? This "To-Be" should drive the vision and focus of the district. Moving toward this enhanced state, H.C.O. would focus first on growing competencies within the district: increased performance by all student groups, further professional development, and a fully connected student body. In the realm of conditions, H.C.O. continues to emphasize acceptance, involvement, and risk-taking. Teachers, students, and families all feel both connected and involved. Culturally, teachers have clear understanding of students' and families' needs, work to meet those needs, and provide ever-growing opportunities for the student body. Lastly, H.C.O. operates in a context in which many norms and practices of high-performing and highly engaging schools are found and fostered.

To begin achieving the "To-Be," three major areas must be addressed. First, data collection facilitating better understanding of school perceptions and engagement factors must continue. Why are certain students more engaged than others? Why are students who feel similarly connected involved at different rates? What prevents students from being involved? What stops families from feeling connected to the school? By understanding answers to these questions and in collecting data to inform decision making, progress can be made. Next, data on these factors must inform how a subsequent culture at H.C.O. is built. This can begin by examining and retooling the new student and new teacher orientation programs. Both faculty and students rated these programs as neutral, indicating they viewed them as minimally effective. Updates and modifications to both programs must be made to achieve change and growth desired

at H.C.O. Finally, H.C.O.'s new teacher orientation program must provide new staff with

information pertaining to the diverse backgrounds and cultures within the student population,

and to barriers that have prevented certain students from engaging. Concurrently, new staff

should be provided with professional development opportunities and resources needed to address

these barriers.

Strategies and Actions

To best address needs identified through this study at H.C.O., three strategies and

associated action plans should be implemented. This chart provides an overview:

Strategy	Action Plan
1) Collect data to better understand perceptions and engagement factors at school.	• Faculty meeting discussions on barriers to engagement • Implementation of 5Labs software • Regular collection and review of data to address issues of concern, such as engagement, behavior, attendance, etc. • Implementation of engagement survey at beginning of school year and in January 2019 • Complete round-tables with parents via principal's Parent Advisory committee • Complete round-table discussions with students via principal's Student Advisory Panel
2) Begin addressing this culture at new student orientation and at incoming family nights.	• Rebuild freshmen orientation to include smaller groups, incorporating SEL, school culture, technology, and day-to-day information • Deliver presentations during lunch periods, early in the school year, discussing the importance of culture, engagement, and involvement at school • At Incoming Family Nights in January and May 2019, emphasize ways in which students and families can get involved and receive information, including district communication overviews, preference, and expectations
3) Provide information for new teachers about our students' cultures and barriers to connectedness we find.	• Provide PD centered on breaking down these barriers and encouraging sustained involvement • At New Teacher Orientation, provide background information on student cultures, backgrounds, and neighborhoods; include tours and visits to communities • Discuss barriers realized through research at New Teacher Orientation, presenting both barriers and strategies successful in mitigating these challenges

The first strategy H.C.O. must focus on to achieve the "To-Be," and which is paramount to the success of subsequent strategies, is continued dedication to collecting data and better understanding perceptions of engagement within the district. Stallings (1977) likens this important process to staging a play, describing that "understanding all components are necessary to understand a play." Similarly, to comprehend all that takes place in a school, it is necessary to learn about and focus on "as many aspects as possible" (p. 3). By understanding students' needs, and barriers that prevent involvement, H.C.O. can create action plans to bridge the gap. To accomplish this, several action steps are identified: implementing a faculty meeting to discuss barriers to engagement; implementing data collation software that allows leaders to quickly analyze student involvement data at both micro and macro levels; and regularly collecting and reviewing data related to engagement, behavior, attendance, and more. Furthermore, community members, parents, faculty, and students should be engaged in ongoing discussions regarding what H.C.O. does well and how it can improve.

Along with data collection, a second strategy key to achieving the "To-Be" is addressing barriers identified at new student orientations and incoming family nights. Once barriers have been identified, it is important to address them immediately upon new families beginning within the district. Therefore, several action steps are proposed, including, primarily, a complete rebuild of H.C.O.'s freshman orientation program. The revamped program would find small groups of students discussing topics including social-emotional relationships, school culture, technology, and day-to-day information. Additionally, early in the school year, students would take part in lunch-period presentations addressing the importance of school culture, involvement, and engagement. How, when, and where students and families receive information about how to get involved would also be emphasized. Increased district communications, emphasis on

involvement during incoming parent nights, and clearly communicated expectations provide just some opportunities for communication emphasis.

Lastly, a strategy important to H.C.O.'s success and growth is providing new teachers with information and resources relevant to the diverse backgrounds and cultures of the student body. As Rodriguez and Lamm (2016) describe, "although there is a desire and need to produce culturally competent students, universities still lack sufficient cultural diversity education" (p. 107). This only solidifies the need for districts to focus on providing teachers with these important skills through both information at New Teacher Orientation and consistent professional development opportunities. Action steps would include providing ongoing access to professional development centered on breaking down barriers; encouraging sustained involvement; and providing clear information at staff orientation on student backgrounds, cultures, and neighborhoods. This would then be supplemented by discussing barriers realized within the district with all staff, both at New Teacher Orientation and through a series of faculty meetings and discussions.

At its core, H.C.O. is an outstanding district that engages students, families, and faculty in many ways. Through this study, it is clear that all stakeholders are committed to success. However, like any organization, H.C.O. can make meaningful improvements in many areas. At H.C.O., as this study has identified, there is still progress to be made in engaging students from low SES backgrounds in co-curricular involvement. Many students surveyed feel connected, engaged, and valued, yet they are not as involved as their non-low SES peers. By understanding this discrepancy, and examining how it fits into the "4 C's," the district can begin to address key strategies and action steps to increase involvement, connectedness, and ultimately, overall

success at H.C.O. Strategies presented in this chapter outline work toward this progress, and little

by little, the district will see growth.

CHAPTER SEVEN: POLICY ADVOCACY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Given the extensive information collected at H.C.O. High School related to how socioeconomic status affects perceptions of student engagement, involvement, and value, it is important to examine policies and practices that can create meaningful change. Hanson, Bangert, and Ruff (2016) note this, saying "the mindset of the organization has consequences for the behaviors and perceptions of the group and the individuals of the group." They continue that the well-being and success of the organization "depends on the alignment of the system's goals" (p. 226). In other words, a school must constantly assess its values and practices if it is to advance. Both new students and new teachers at H.C.O. take part in productive and purposeful orientation programs.

As with any organization, there is always room for growth and improvement at H.C.O., particularly when persistent perceptions and trends indicate enhancements are warranted. Specifically, at H.C.O. it is evident students from lower SES backgrounds are involved at lower rates and perform at lower levels than their non-low SES peers. This is consistent both curricularly and co-curricularly. However, this gap in performance, and the social and cultural implications that exist around these gaps, are not addressed as teachers and students first begin at H.C.O.

The Illinois Administrative Code exists to provide guidance and expectations around many aspects of education. In particular, Title 23 of the Code focuses on "education and cultural resources," and specifically, Chapter I, Part 65, addresses "new teacher induction and mentoring" program specifications (see Appendix E). Within this section are several program specifications schools must adhere to when developing new teacher orientation programs. These include

"mentoring for beginning teachers, professional development, formative assessment of beginning teachers' practice, and standards of quality" (Illinois Administrative Code, 65.130, 2018). The section also addresses the continuum of teacher development, communication and mentorship expectations, teacher assessment methods, and retention information and practices.

While this administrative code is thorough and practical, it intentionally leaves many specific requirements to schools and districts. Moreover, contents of the Code closely align with many indications gleaned from H.C.O. High School data, most notably the need for a research-based and thorough new teacher orientation program. However, the Code lacks specific guidance on addressing an area of importance for many schools: the effect of socioeconomic status and culture on student performance. Torff and Sessions (2009) provide an interesting perspective, sharing that a correlation exists between professional development and a district's overall socioeconomics. They note that teachers from low-income areas were found to be less supportive of professional development aimed at teaching diverse students, "indicating a need for additional efforts and resources" (p. 73). As such, it is important to consider adding such language to this code to ensure all schools address the needs of all students.

Policy Statement

Therefore, it is recommended that the following specification be added to Illinois Administrative Code, Section 65.130:

Each new teacher orientation program shall incorporate:

Training and programming to address social and cultural identity, relevance, and awareness within the school setting. This will include an overview of school and district demographic breakdown, including racial and socioeconomic status make-up.

Several arguments advocate for adding these guidelines. Mac Iver et al. (2018) contend, and Benner et al. (2017) concur, that without purposeful professional development and discussion around student engagement, as related to demographics, academic performance declines significantly by the end of high school. From research completed in these areas, two themes persisted and confirmed the need for this new policy. First, a disconnect emerged between how our staff perceive student engagement and how students feel. Faculty and staff survey responses indicate school personnel perceive student engagement, and feelings of connectedness and value, at much higher rates than students' responses indicate.

Second, the study identified that students from both low and non-low SES backgrounds perceive their own feelings of connectedness, engagement, and value nearly identically. While this is encouraging for H.C.O., what is unique is that despite reporting incredibly similar levels of connectedness, students from lower SES backgrounds are involved in co-curriculars at half the rate of their non-low SES peers. Therefore, even though students from low SES backgrounds feel engaged and connected, they are not getting nearly as involved as their counterparts.

Research clearly shows H.C.O. needs a comprehensive approach to teachers and staff addressing social and cultural awareness within the school, and several bodies of research further advocate for this. As discussed in the review of literature, the school must address two areas related to student connectedness and engagement: effects of socioeconomic status on student performance, and the importance of quality new student and teacher orientation programs.

Ginsberg (2012) studies this thoroughly, discussing how schools often "teach underprivileged students to embrace 'cultural norms' at the school, rather than adapting to the needs of the students" (p. 13). Numerous studies support the argument that students from lower SES backgrounds perform at lower levels co-curricularly and academically than their non-low SES peers. Dauter and Olivieri (2018) present evidence to support this, showing that "students from across the nation from low-income families, by and large, perform well below their peers from higher income backgrounds, a pattern which holds across states and over time" (p. 10).

Looking specifically at H.C.O. High School, this pattern holds true. Students from low SES backgrounds, statistically, are involved in co-curriculars at half the rate of students from non-low SES backgrounds. Close examination of data from H.C.O.'s School Information System reveals these students have the highest rates of involvement in football, marching band, Spanish Club, and wrestling.

This same gap is evident academically, in both English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics. In looking specifically at ELA and all Grade 11 students, 49% scored at a level considered meeting or exceeding standards. When broken down by race, however, the numbers decrease; only 31% of Black students and only 26% of Latino students meet or exceed standards. The biggest gap is present in students considered low-income, only 19% of whom meet or exceed standards. In looking at mathematics scores, the same trends and gaps exist. Of all Grade 11 students, 49% scored at meets or exceeds expectations. Comparatively, only 28% of both Black and Latino students hit this threshold, while only 26% of students from low-income backgrounds scored meets or exceeds. This is shown below:

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Grade 11 SAT Meets/Exceeds Scores, by Demographic

━━ % Meets/Exceeds ELA   ━━ % Meets/Exceeds Math
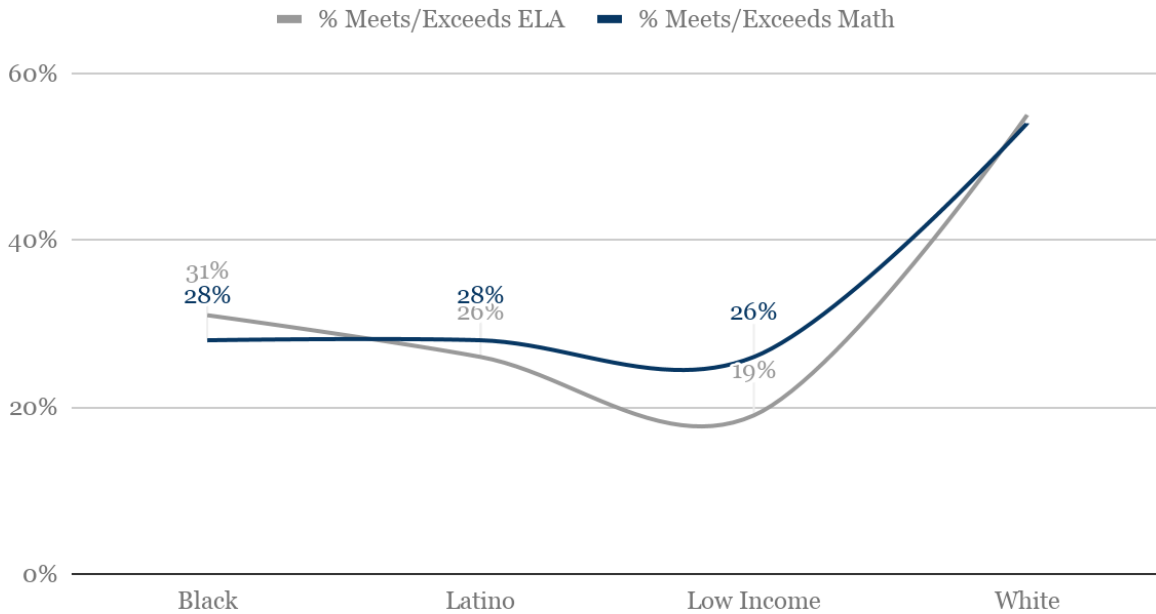
Figure 7A. 2018 Grade 11 SAT English Language Arts and Math Meets/Exceed Scores, by demographic, H.C.O. High School

Given that H.C.O. sees consistent gaps in engagement, involvement, and academic and co-curricular performance, it must ensure all teachers are aware of cultural and social differences within the school and know best practices for approaching these differences. Including such a requirement for new teacher orientation programs would ensure that all teachers, regardless of assignment, are familiar with unique school and district student and family needs.

As student performance and perception data and research support the claim that socioeconomic status has a major effect on student performance, it is incumbent upon schools and districts to examine ways in which they can effectively address performance gaps. These includes thorough review of new student and new teacher orientation programs, both of which have been subjects of extensive research. According to Rogers, Cross, Gresalfi, Trauth-Nare, and Buck (2011), there are "various sources that can influence how teachers build their knowledge

for teaching and their discipline, none the least of which is teacher orientation" (p. 896). In many

ways, new teacher orientation programs are crucial to new staff members' success, playing a

major role in setting expectations, and in introducing practices and approaches. It is also

imperative that these orientations address correlations between socioeconomic status and overall

performance. Teachers must understand that social and cultural awareness, connections, and

relevance largely impact their overall effectiveness, and this should be addressed from the first

moments they begin at a school.

Analysis of Needs

It is important to understand several implications of adding to Illinois Administrative

Code, Section 65.130. Without considering the policy addition's impact, positive or otherwise, it

would be difficult to foster significant buy-in and support needed for the proposal to succeed. It

is crucial to perform six analyses to determine whether the policy addition should be

implemented. By closely examining results of education, economic, social, political, legal, and

moral analyses, short- and long-term effects of policy change will become more evident.

Education Analysis

The fundamental purpose of public education, as outlined in Article X of the 1970 Illinois

Constitution, is to provide equitable schooling for all students. As Article X states, "a

fundamental goal of the People of the State is the educational development of all persons to the

limit of their capacities" (part 1). It is fair to say all decisions made within a school and district

are designed with students' best interests in mind. However, many compounding factors force

leaders to make decisions that have implications for students, families, and communities. The ultimate goal is to provide a strong education, no matter a student's background. Increasingly, students enter school behind academically, socially, and economically, and students from a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to succeed. Cedeno, Martinez-Arias, and Bueno (2016) attribute this to the fact that "socioeconomic status plays a critical role in the development of the competencies which are central to school attainment and success" (p. 259). Schools, then, must have clear understanding of their own student demographics, and then discuss, understand, and provide resources to teachers to best address this gap.

Our very approach to education must change; by requiring schools' new teacher orientations to discuss student demographics and breakdowns, and also to provide resources and development opportunities to best support students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, we can begin to shift our approach. Schools must still focus on teaching and learning, but they must add to their focus to address student needs and backgrounds. As socioeconomic gaps continue to grow, schools cannot focus solely on instruction and assessment. If they do, more and more students will be further behind. Rather, schools must understand that student success and performance, both in- and outside the classroom, are tied to family socioeconomic status, and without addressing this connection, students will continue to struggle.

It can be argued that schools that address the needs of students outside the classroom through social-emotional supports, financial resources, and mental health awareness, see greater increase in overall student performance and well-being. Locally, this is evident in two prominent school districts. Both Oak Park and River Forest High School, in Oak Park, IL, and Evanston Township High School, in Evanston, IL, have decreased the "achievement gap" while embracing growing diversity and under high rates of poverty. When using School Report Card data and

comparing these districts to similar districts in the area, student SAT scores by demographic are counter to the trend H.C.O. sees. Students from low-income homes who attend these two high schools perform at the same level or higher than their non-low-income counterparts (School Report Card Data, 2018).

Ultimately, education analysis of this proposal reveals two things: schools that respond to the growing number of low-income students, understand their student populations, and prepare new staff members to best work with these students will see increased success. Conversely, schools that fail to recognize this important demographic and do not prepare current and new staff accordingly will see little growth of these students and of students overall.

Economic Analysis

It is importance to examine this policy recommendation through both micro- and macroeconomic lenses. At the school level, the proposed policy addition could result in increased costs to the district. Should the policy addition become a requirement, student demographics would need to be analyzed, and data prepared for presentation to administration and then to new staff. The policy recommendation then calls for related training and supports. Thus, costs would be incurred as districts work to implement professional development resources for new staff and, ideally, for staff as a whole. No matter the level of professional development offered, schools would incur costs as a result of this policy.

While analyzing student demographics, and implementing training and supports related to serving students from low-income backgrounds, would add potential costs to schools, districts would incur more major costs because of macro-level implications. According to Prall (2014), students from low-income backgrounds are entering U.S. schools at increasing rates (p. 1). This

is certainly true at H.C.O. As such, schools must first acknowledge this and then begin implementing strategies and practices for working with these students. While implementation comes with financial implications, schools that struggle to address this growing trend and population will likely be forced to provide more in-depth, and no doubt more costly, interventions and supports at some point.

In many ways, this cycle has already persisted, as Illinois schools' overall performance is rated based on results of standardized exams. While levels of expected growth continue to increase, levels of performance by minority students, particularly by those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, continue to decrease. This is seen at H.C.O., as evidenced by 2018 Grade 11 SAT scores (see figures 7A and 7B). As a result of this growing gap in performance, schools are looking to implement large-scale professional development programs and interventions. Lindvall (2017) discusses such a program, designed to raise achievement in mathematics specifically, saying that "school leaders in several countries are under growing pressure to improve students' learning," and as such there is an "educational reform movement to move away from traditional textbook instruction to more inquiry-based approaches to teaching" (p. 1,282). While these programs may be effective in raising student achievement, they come at much higher costs to schools and districts and systematic approaches to addressing students with poverty, which is the root of this policy proposal.

Social Analysis

Overall, adding to Illinois Administrative Code, Section 65.130, would be met with positive support and approval from communities and schools throughout the state. In general, people want to do good, especially when it involves students. As this policy is designed to

address the needs of poorer students, most individuals and organizations would see it as positive. That said, some groups and individuals believe schools should not be responsible for addressing student needs, in particular socioeconomic needs, outside the classroom. They would argue families and communities should offer such support so schools can focus solely on education.

Some also feel the policy could have adverse social effects on other students, arguing that in spending time and resources on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, students from middle- and higher-class families could receive less attention or support. This phenomenon is often seen when time and resources are at stake. Calabrese and Marcus (1994) describe this as the "return to scarcity," which they believe is applicable to "all components of contemporary society: federal and state government, businesses, schools, and social agencies" (p. 83). Accurate or not, this perception can present a social struggle in terms of advocacy for the policy. The same can be said for overall rigor in the classroom; as more students have increased opportunities for higher level classes, would some community members and parents perceive the overall learning environment in such classes as focusing on lower-level students? Although studies show providing opportunities for diverse students in higher level classes does not alter overall school success, the community may perceive otherwise. In fact, Meusch (2010) presses that "socioeconomic integration is an effective and constitutional alternative that happens to generate both economic and racial diversity – ensuring that all students have an equal educational opportunity" (p. 1,359).

An additional social implication of this policy centers on a philosophical discussion occurring in many communities addressing who is responsible for providing social, economic, and emotional supports for students and families. Is it the school? Or is it the family? Many individuals feel schools' primary role is to educate students. Rebell (2018) supports this claim,

discussing that "schools must create environments that respect and harness both pluralism and individualism while adopting practices that promote both" (p. 19). He believes, and many agree, then, that families are responsible for maintaining the well-being of their own children. Conversely, many believe schools serve as the center of the community, offering not only academic, but social, emotional, and if needed, economic support. Researchers from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (2018) firmly support this claim, laying a framework based on their work that shows "inclusive community and school partnerships help strengthen schools and create meaningful relationships between key stakeholders. When schools and communities work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Partnerships can serve to strengthen, support, and transform individual partners, resulting in improved program quality and more efficient use of resources" (p. 4). This policy is at the center of this argument, pushing that schools must take on the responsibility of addressing student needs beyond the classroom, with the understanding that in doing so, students will be more successful in school and beyond.

Political Analysis

This topic and the proposal to add to Illinois Administrative Code, Section 65.130 could be polarizing politically. At its core, the policy presents an age-old debate: should government have more or less control? At one end of the political spectrum is the argument that government should have the ability to mandate certain requirements, as well as approaches to ensure equality for all individuals, in this case, students. On the end, many people feel government should have less control, as local organizations, such as schools, know what is best for their stakeholders and how to best meet their needs. Regularly, the question of government control leads to heated and contentious debate and disagreement.

Along with debate on government control is political challenge related to fundamental issues and beliefs around poverty. Most importantly is this question: who is at fault for families being poor? Is it families themselves, or is it the political and social systems to which they must adhere? White (2009) addresses this, stating that "challenging assumptions and beliefs about structural causes of poverty is essential to creating a sense of safety for low-income children dealing with poverty" (p. 2). Those who believe families are responsible for their own actions and opportunities would argue there is no need for schools to require training such as that being proposed, nor is there need to provide support for teachers educating students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. On the other hand, those who believe some families have greater opportunities than others would be extremely supportive of a policy requiring schools to address this growing gap within schools. In many ways, White makes the case that regardless of what causes poverty, schools must be willing to address it to see any real growth.

Examining this topic from a purely geographic standpoint, political implications would include requiring resources and support for all schools, no matter the socioeconomic breakdown of the district and community. Illinois, like many states, has a wide variety of economic zones. Many areas and communities are wealthy, many are solidly middle class, and still more are poor and lower class. According to the Illinois Department of Commerce (2018), many strong economic zones are located in the north and northeast parts of the state and, as areas near Chicago, tend to be more affluent. Likewise, many central and southern zones of the state struggle economically. Politically, it could be argued that such a policy would benefit Illinois' poorer communities only. Thus, why would the policy be required for all schools? Perhaps the biggest challenge with this argument is that demographics within schools and communities

change regularly. Including such a policy in the Illinois Administrative Code could ensure all students are provided resources and supports they need.

Legal Analysis

From a purely legal perspective, there are limited concerns and issues with this policy recommendation. Overall, there are far greater implications socially and politically than there are legally. However, understanding the political landscape when proposing policy change to legislators and representatives is important. The challenge with any policy change or requirement is to gain buy-in from local representatives serving various interested parties. Convincing these individuals to take up this policy would be the greatest challenge. From there, economic, social, and political issues would need to be addressed. Carrasquillo, Rodriguez, and Kaplan (2014) discuss this in great detail, outlining that in order for any mandate to be effective, policy makers and advocates must first "create a movement of individuals who are strong supporters of the requirement, and who will meet on a regular basis, to move the policy forward" (p. 89). This could include local leaders, district leaders, parents, and even community members. Without such a movement and strong supporters, however, any mandate would struggle to be successful.

Legally, the policy recommendation is written such that while required, schools and districts would have flexibility to design supports and resources that best meet their needs. This allows for various interpretations of the policy and for numerous ways in which to meet it. One important consideration would focus on schools that fail to implement such a policy. Suchman (2012) studied this dilemma in her dissertation, writing that "failure to meet state mandates comes with such consequences that these schools may be forced to choose between radically morphing to survive or maintaining integrity and possibly closing" (p. 84). While this seems like

a strong reaction, it signifies the weight of state mandates and implications that come with not meeting them. However, as Suchman continues, "if the regulatory climate becomes less standardized and more qualitative, these schools could be forerunners in meeting revised mandates" (p. 85). In other words, there is a balance between enforcing mandates and letting schools have a certain level of autonomy. While this specific policy recommendation does call for an additional requirement for all schools, the hope is that schools would have the ability to meet the requirement according to their own needs, with input regional offices of education.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

Fundamentally, schools must be committed to meeting the needs of all of students. As educators and leaders, our responsibility is to identify areas in which we must improve. Looking specifically at H.C.O., it is evident a large gap exists between low SES students and those from non-low SES homes. This gap persists across overall academic performance, involvement in co-curriculars, and perceptions of connectedness. Therefore, it is crucial to address these gaps and ways in which to best to support all students and all schools. Morally and ethically, these gaps must be identified as well as addressed. This policy recommendation does just that.

When looking at the issue of poverty through different lenses, numerous beliefs emerge about responsibilities associated with it, what should be done about it, and best supports to offer. Politically, the question relates to who is responsible for the cycle of poverty, and how can it be broken. Socially, many individuals believe in the importance of helping those less fortunate, but struggle knowing this might mean fewer resources for others. Economically, families that are poor have a much more difficult time obtaining supports and resources than those from high socioeconomic backgrounds. These debates can go on and on.

Schools, ultimately, must be the force that helps "level the playing field." This is what

Walker and Cormier (2014) call the "normed-opportunity paradigm," discussing the four

components needed to meet the needs of all students: "sharing student culture, allowing students

to lead, discerning hidden talents, and refraining from moral judgment" (p. 38). Educators and

leaders must put aside their economic, political, social, and legal views to realize that, most

importantly, schools exist to meet the needs of all their students. It is our moral and ethical

obligation to do so. This policy is designed to ensure all schools do their part to provide

opportunities for their poor and low-socioeconomic students and families to be successful.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

When implementing any new policy, practice, or procedure, numerous implications for

stakeholders must be considered. This holds true with the policy recommendation of requiring

new teachers in Illinois to be provided with demographic information, training, and resources.

Overall, this policy would be received positively by most, as it aims to support students from

diverse backgrounds. In fact, by many measures, it would create additional student and staff

relationships, which could also lead to greater school-family relationships. By being aware of

this demographic and knowing best practices for working with students from it, teachers and

staff could be more successful and develop deeper and more productive relationships. Further,

students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who tend to be involved far less than their

peers, would be more likely to engage with their teachers, school, and community as a result of

these efforts. Klesse and D'Onofrio (2000) explain this more, stating "students involved in

activities often experience heightened interest in academic courses, have a platform on which to

practice leadership skills, have opportunities to socialize with students and interact with teachers outside the classroom, are recognized for their involvement, and achievement and have a healthy use of their leisure time" (p. 8).

While most responses to this policy recommendation would be positive, some negative community sentiment could exist and have adverse effects on teacher and school relationships as a result of what would be perceived as "scarcity of resources." In other words, many parents and families believe that because every school's money and resources are finite, the more allocated to supporting certain students, the less allocated for other – possibly their own – children. If one group gains, another has to lose. This is particularly true for smaller, rural districts, as Petersen (2018) contends. She writes that "when it comes to providing advanced academic services, small towns share many challenges: too few specialized teachers, spotty internet access, underfunded districts, a lack of access to rigorous academic content" (p. 37) On the contrary, Jackson, Fitzpatrick, Alazemi, and Rude (2018) talk about the importance of ensuring students have resources they need, arguing that "the most important aspect of education is its focus on the specialized learning needs and educational outcomes of its students, and that since inclusion is less an issue of instruction and more an issue of setting, it should not drive educational practice" (p. 12). Of course, leaders work extremely hard to ensure that all student needs are met, but this perception would be a challenge and could have implications for community and school relationships.

In addition to considering implications for student, family, and staff relationships, implications for the community and community organizations must be considered as this policy is debated. Schools can offer many resources, but students spend only part of their day at school. If schools can leverage their partnerships with community groups, their students would see more

success in various areas. Additionally, the more consistency students and families encounter between school and community, the more likely they are to be involved and connected, and to feel supported. As a result, these groups would continue to feel valued and look to continue engaging with the school and families.

Conclusion

At the core of education is the tenet that schools and districts should work to meet the needs of all students. Despite the strength of existing programs and overall success a school realizes, there is always room for growth and improvement. Looking at H.C.O., it is evident that the biggest factor affecting student involvement and achievement is socioeconomic status. This permeates rates of involvement in co-curriculars and levels at which Grade 11 students meet or exceed expectations on standardized tests. Given this, it is only logical that faculty and staff, at both H.C.O. and beyond, be aware of school demographics, as well as ways in which they can address student needs and best support them.

This has led to examining requirements for new teacher orientation in Illinois. While Illinois Administrative Code calls for an extensive orientation process, the Code does not address how demographics, resources, and supports can be used to help students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, it is recommended that policy be added to the Illinois Administrative Code requiring all schools to include information, resources, and training that will better equip new teachers and staff to work with students from low socioeconomic statuses.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the United States, perhaps even globally, it would be difficult to find a scenario in which students engaged in the school culture, and involved curricularly and co-curricularly, were not more successful than those less engaged and involved. This is well-supported by much research, and Alvarez-Bell, Wirtz, and Bian (2017) concur that the more students felt "excitement toward learning, the greater their perceptions that educational interactions were helpful, and the more fascinated they reported being by the course content, the more they judged themselves as having gained higher-order thinking skills, work-related competencies, group skills, and self-directed learning skills" (p. 140). To most school leaders and teachers, this is simply second nature.

Not surprisingly, this is the case at H.C.O. High School, in Chicago's western suburbs, where students who are more involved perform better academically, behaviorally, and socially-emotionally. This theme – the more students get involved, the more successful they are – is pervasive throughout this study. Perhaps most unique to this study is the finding that one variable in particular has far greater impact on student involvement than others: socioeconomic status.

To better understand student involvement and connectedness, as well as ways in which H.C.O. can better support all students and staff, stakeholders had an opportunity to offer their perceptions of connectedness through surveys, the ultimate purpose of which was to answer four key questions:

- To what degree do students and families from varying socioeconomic groups rate their level of their connectedness to the school community?

- What barriers are present for students and families that qualify as low-income that prevent these students from connecting with the school community?

- How do the district's orientation programs – both new teacher and new student – account for these identified barriers?

- What additions and changes can be implemented to break down these barriers?

While staff as a whole had the opportunity to respond to a series of questions centered around these themes, students were subtly divided by socioeconomic status, a variable they were unaware of. This provided a clear picture of how perceptions of connectedness and involvement vary by this demographic.

Not surprisingly, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were found to be involved in co-curriculars at half the rate of their non-low socioeconomic status peers. This same trend holds true in the classroom, as students who fall below the poverty line perform well below those above it. What is unique, though, is the finding that students from low-income homes report they feel as connected, valued, and important as their peers, a perception echoed by H.C.O. faculty and staff. However, the same students reporting feeling as connected and valued as their non-low-socioeconomic-status peers, are extremely under-involved. This is a powerful finding, and one that has important implications for H.C.O. and beyond.

Interestingly, and again, not entirely surprisingly, there is a correlation between students from low-income households and overall academic performance and student learning. On 2018 SAT scores, low-income Grade 11 students were the lowest performing subgroup in terms of overall scores, English/-language arts reading and writing, and mathematics. In examining Grade 11 students' scores, black students performed lower than this student demographic overall, Latino students scored below Black students, and students from low-income households scored

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lower than all three groups (H.C.O. School Report Card data, 2018). What becomes clear is that H.C.O. High School, like many schools, has an overall gap in involvement and engagement among students. This is pervasive academically as well as co-curricularly, and ultimately comes down to one important variable: socioeconomic status.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to closely examine H.C.O. High School's new student and new teacher orientation programs to determine if students and staff felt these programs prepared them to connect with the school culture and engage curricularly and co-curricularly. Two main aspects were examined through a series of surveys: how students and staff perceive student connectedness to the school, and how H.C.O. orientation programs address areas in which students might not feel as connected. It was important to evaluate these aspects from various perspectives, and in doing so, important information on how orientation programs could address identified gaps was gleaned. Luet, Morettini, and Vernon-Dotson (2018) provide insight into this, saying that "due to changing demographics, teachers are increasingly working in classrooms with students whose racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds differ from their own" (p. 161). As a result, perceptions of need and connectedness, whether implicitly or explicitly, tend to vary.

By looking closely at these two aspects, it became evident that while many students feel connected to school and valued, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are half as likely to get involved in co-curricular offerings as their peers. This correlates directly to academic performance, as the low-income subgroup of students was the most underperforming. This

research process has provided clear insight into student involvement and perceptions, and into areas that must be addressed to ensure more students feel connected and engaged and, ultimately, can be more successful.

Once student and staff perceptions of connectedness were evaluated, along with perceptions of H.C.O.'s orientation programs, it became imperative to begin looking at an organizational plan to tackle the findings. In addition to analyzing research provided by this study, H.C.O. was examined closely to assess the district's current state, or its "As-Is." Key findings of this process, organized according to Wagner's (2012) "4 C's" – context, conditions, competencies, and culture – were that the school is strong, and has a proud tradition of success and involvement, along with tremendous community support. The school offers countless offerings in- and outside the classroom; has many high-performing students, both academically and co-curricularly; and has committed and caring staff. By many measures, H.C.O. should be considered an extremely strong school community. However, in examining results of student and staff surveys, growth opportunities and gaps in achievement became apparent. Certainly, H.C.O. is a successful school, but areas must be addressed so all students can realize the same level of success.

In looking closely and critically at the district's current state, the idea of what H.C.O. could become lingered. Using the "4 C's" context, a "To-Be" analysis was completed, identifying possibilities for the district, should an organizational plan be implemented. The analysis determined "whole child" care, including academic, involvement, and social-emotional supports, could greatly help under-engaged or under-performing students realize more success.

Robertson (2018) completely supports this finding, talking about the importance of educators "focusing on whole child development and thoughtfully preparing children to be future

citizens (p. 8). In doing so, cultural differences and awareness are taken into account when considering programming and offerings, and teachers receive training and resources to support students from various backgrounds, particularly low-socioeconomic-status homes. This also means district leadership must continue focusing on increasing connectedness and on addressing the needs of minority and low-income students.

Knowing all this, a series of strategies and actions addressing the need to connect students from different backgrounds to the school culture and community has been proposed. The plan is three-fold: collect and analyze data on an ongoing basis, address the importance of connectedness and involvement with new and current students and families, and provide resources for new staff during the orientation process. These recommendations are the direct result of an extensive study of H.C.O.

The district would be remiss in not emphasizing ongoing and thorough data collection and analysis. This includes discussions as a staff, implementation of data analysis tools and software, regular survey administration, and ongoing discussions with students, families and community members. To ensure these strategies are effective, they must be evaluated regularly, and leadership must maintain clear focus on them.

While ongoing data collection is important, a second strategy will help begin addressing gaps identified through this research. This strategy and associated action plan involve addressing the low SES culture at new student orientations and family nights. Most importantly, H.C.O.'s freshman orientation program must be rebuilt to engage students in small group discussion and activities, where they connect with upperclassmen from the outset of their high school experience. These discussions and activities must center around involvement, opportunities to connect, and resources available to all students. Once orientation is complete, it is important to

continue providing these supports and continue the conversation, perhaps through a series of lunchtime presentations, early in the school year, focused on involvement, supports, and school culture. This same emphasis must be communicated at Incoming Family Night events that take place twice each spring. As with data collection, connectedness and supports must remain top-of-mind. In addition, they must be at the forefront of student communications.

To ensure all changes are implemented effectively, perhaps most important is providing supports and resources to staff so they feel prepared to address gaps identified by the research. Thus, the third strategy and action plan designed to meet the needs of H.C.O. students focus on new staff orientation. Several aspects must be addressed, including providing professional development opportunities focused on breaking down barriers and encouraging sustained involvement; discussing real-time H.C.O. student demographics., including those related to students' cultures and backgrounds; and collaborating on best-practices to address barriers identified through this study. Without these important steps and additions, it would be difficult to realize any real progress for students and families.

Understanding that socioeconomic status is at the core of student involvement, engagement, and ultimately, success, it is only appropriate that schools closely examine their demographics and provide resources teachers need to support a diverse student population. Therefore, the final phase of this study presents an argument for advocacy of a policy that requires all Illinois schools to acknowledge student demographics during new teacher orientation, and to provide training and resources related to working with students from low-income backgrounds. Current Illinois Administrative Code requires schools to provide an extensive new teacher orientation program centered on understanding school resources and providing mentorship. Absent from this requirement, though, is acknowledgement of variations

among the student population and how they affect teaching, learning, and involvement. Using this study as the basis of the argument, it is recommended that the Illinois Administrative Code, 65.130, be amended to include a requirement that each new teacher orientation program incorporate training and programming designed to address social and cultural identity, awareness, and relevance. In amending the code, it will be ensured that schools have meaningful discussions about student success, roles race and socioeconomics play, and ways in which they can better meet the needs of all students.

Leadership Lessons

Examining and reflecting upon this research study has allowed me to look closely at my own leadership style, as well as at approaches and practices I can take to better my school, my community, and myself. Taking into account H.C.O. High School's strengths, challenges, and opportunities, I believe I can focus on five key leadership lessons:

- To implement any real effective change, it is imperative first to understand an organization's culture, context, conditions, and climate (Wagner 2012).
- To best implement effective change, a leader must be adaptive (Heifetz 2009).
- Relationships, above all else, are crucial.
- Professional development is an essential component of implementing change.
- Successful leaders not only have a vision, but can design steps and plans to support it (Heifetz 2009).

To effectively lead in any district, it is imperative to understand Wagner's 4 C's: culture, context, conditions, and climate. So many factors can influence change and leadership; thus, being unaware of challenges one is facing can make for a difficult tenure. In the case of H.C.O., understanding the "As-Is" is important to effecting positive change. With knowledge of existing strengths, stakeholders are better prepared to embrace new ideas and programs. Without such knowledge, any leader would struggle when presenting change. I believe that as a leader, I can create positive change only after I fully understand the 4 C's and their impact on one another.

Implementing long-lasting and true change is also predicated on following Heifetz's lessons of adaptive leadership and principles. His work describes steps of change as "observe, interpret, intervene" (p. 32). In other words, it is important to regularly observe and learn, challenge these observations to understand what they mean, and then implement change. This cyclical process repeats, never concluding as long as one intends to effect change. I firmly believe this is an important lesson. Change is ongoing, never-ending, and must always be evaluated. Through Heifetz's framework, this study identified a need H.C.O. must be willing to address. Though an "intervention" has been proposed, it is only the beginning. Change, whether at H.C.O. or elsewhere, is ongoing and must be evaluated continuously.

Moreover, within the school community it is crucial to develop relationships with all stakeholders, including staff, teachers, administrators, board members, parents, students, and community members. Should any leader expect to realize any significant change, these relationships are imperative. Bouchamma and Brie (2014) emphasize the importance of this belief when describing the role of a school leader in the community. They list six essential actions: have clear, effective communication; support active collaboration among members; provide coaching; be a change agent and conflict mediator; and show creativity and courage that

facilitate innovation and growth within the community (p. 82). In keeping these in focus, I feel I can be even more successful and effect more positive change.

I have also learned that professional development is crucial to implementation and success of any substantial change. Cwikla (2002) supports this claim, discussing that research clearly indicates the need for purposeful professional development and learning goals for teachers (p. 3). Teachers must feel they are supported in taking part in these opportunities, and leaders should seek and communicate as many opportunities as possible. Additionally, the more capacity leaders build within their staff to promote growth and learning opportunities, the greater the return for the entire school community. In many ways, this applies to the idea of a new teacher orientation model that promotes training and resources centered on culturally relevant teaching and learning. The more teachers feel supported in this capacity, the more effective they can become within and outside the classroom. This would have tremendous impact on engagement of students throughout the building.

Lastly, I have come to believe that truly exceptional leaders are able to effectively articulate their vision with all stakeholders and to work with all groups to move an organization forward. I have learned from this study, and through a great deal of the work in this program, that these are not easy tasks. For any change to take hold, leaders must clearly articulate needs and steps toward desired outcomes; more importantly, they must foster buy-in and support for the change. In other words, they must ensure stakeholders understand "why" any given program or idea is being put forth. If staff members, students, and community members do not support why change is being proposed, they will rarely support it. Regarding community input, Molina Costa (2014) concurs, writing that "critics have argued that assuming that people from very different backgrounds and resources representing diverse and even competing interests can reach

consensus over planning decisions ignores the structural inequalities generated by neoliberal political economy" (p. 294). There are countless varied interests within the community, and it is important to acknowledge community diversity before implementing major change.

Conclusion

Educators and leaders want to do great things for students and communities. Arguably, that is why most enter the field. Education as a whole, though, is traditionally slow to change. Leaders striving to do good must be willing to be agents of change they believe can do good. At H.C.O. High School, many great things take place. Yet clearly, a great deal of work remains to be done. We believe all students should have equal opportunities to learn and get involved, but as this study shows, H.C.O. experiences a gap, not unlike many other schools. Students from low-income backgrounds and students who have fewer opportunities are involved at lower rates and perform below their peers from other demographic groups. Understanding this is not groundbreaking; recognizing it is an issue that must be addressed and setting in motion plans to address it, is groundbreaking. That is exactly what I have set out to do. Through many months of observation, research, learning, discussing, and planning, I know the time to be the difference has come. The time to create change is here. Today, as I conclude this study, I begin a new journey. Today, I am ready to do what is right for students.

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Background Information

1. Role
    a. Content Area Teacher
    b. Support Teacher
    c. Elective or Special Area Teacher
    d. Administrator
    e. Other
2. Department
    a. English
    b. Math
    c. Social Studies
    d. Science
    e. PE/Driver's Education/Health
    f. Business
    g. Art
    h. Family and Consumer Science
    i. Music
    j. Industrial Technology
    k. World Languages
3. Years of Teaching Experience
    a. Less than 1
    b. 1-4
    c. 5-10
    d. 11-16
    e. 17-25 years
    f. More than 25
4. Years at Lake Park High School
    a. 0-1
    b. 2-4
    c. 5-9
    d. 10-20
    e. 21 or more

Survey Questions

Connectedness
1. Students at Lake Park are connected to the school.
2. Families with students at Lake Park are connected to the school.
3. Lake Park provides opportunities for students to feel connected to the school.
4. Lake Park provides opportunities for families to feel connected to the school.
5. Lake Park students and families have a say in curriculum, programming, and co-curricular offerings.

Communication
1. Lake Park communicates clearly with students and families.
2. Lake Park provides enough information to keep families aware of what is taking place at school.
3. Student and family opinions and voice matter at Lake Park.
4. Students or families with a problem or concern, would be listened to.
5. Students and families are aware of how to get needed resources or support.

Orientations and Preparation
1. Lake Park's New Teacher Orientation program and meetings prepared me to enter my role here.
2. Students and families are aware of how to get involved in clubs and activities.
3. When I started at Lake Park, I was comfortable knowing what was expected of me.
4. When I started at Lake Park, I felt I had information needed to be successful.
5. Lake Park prepares students and families for their next step(s) in education.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH SURVEY, STUDENT

Background Information

1. Grade Level
   a. 9
   b. 10
   c. 11
   d. 12
2. Feeder School
   a. Roselle Middle School
   b. Peacock Middle School
   c. Medinah Middle School
   d. Springwood Middle School
   e. Westfield Middle School
   f. St. Walter Catholic School
   g. Other
3. Do you participate in any co-curricular activities?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure
4. If you do participate in any co-curricular activities, in how many do you participate?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5 or more
5. Did you attend your Freshmen Orientation Program when you were an incoming ninth grader?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

Survey Questions

Connectedness
1. Students at Lake Park are connected to the school.
2. Families with students at Lake Park are connected to the school.
3. Lake Park provides opportunities for students to feel connected to the school.
4. Lake Park provides opportunities for families to feel connected to the school.
5. Students at Lake Park have a say in curriculum, programming, and co-curricular offerings.

Communication
1. Lake Park communicates clearly with students and families.
2. Lake Park provides enough information so that I am aware of what is taking place at school.
3. My opinion and voice matter at Lake Park.
4. If I have a problem or concern, I believe I would be listened to.
5. I am aware of how to get resources or support I need.

Orientations and Preparation
1. Lake Park's freshman orientation prepared me to enter high school.
2. I am aware of how to get involved in clubs and activities.
3. When I started at Lake Park, I knew what was expected from me.
4. When I started at Lake Park, I felt I had information needed to be successful.
5. Lake Park prepares me for my next step in education.

Figure 4B. Education experience level of faculty participants

Figure 4D. Grade level survey distribution by percentage.

Co-Curricular Involvement, by SES

Figure 4L. Co-Curricular involvement by socioeconomic status

APPENDIX D: AS-IS ANALYSIS

As-Is Analysis, 2.12.2018
EDL 605
Dominic Manola

Context
- Large scale political and social protests taking place throughout the country to address racism & discrimination
- Research shows that students who are connected to school perform better during and after high school
- State guidelines (ESSA) place emphasis on connectedness

Culture
- There are many opportunities to get involved, but no all students do
- Our minority population is underrepresented in co-curriculars
- Specific clubs exist to address this gap, but are limited (Heritage Club, Diversity Club)
- Our High School is a traditional, somewhat prominent school in the western suburbs of Chicago

Conditions
- There are many offerings for engagement, yet many or traditional to a suburban high school with limited consideration for cultural differences
- Approximately 19% of students are free and reduced, while nearly 80% come from above the poverty line
- There is a large emphasis on the college path, as well as AP and higher level classes
- Staff demographics do not match those of the students

While many students and families engage in the school community, there are still several that do not. How can we improve this?

Competencies
- Very successful emphasis on success in the classroom and taking higher level classes
- Dedicated and caring staff, committed to student success
- Board of Education committed to funding programs and co-curriculars
- High access to technology and resources
- Attendance and behavior policies in place to address absenteeism
- District leadership & Board of Ed interested in increasing connectedness

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APPENDIX E: TO-BE ANALYSIS

To-Be Analysis, 3.7.2018
EDL 605
Dominic Manola

Context
- State guidelines (ESSA) are allowing for indicators to rate "school success" that are outside of simply academic achievement
- There is a push for the "whole-child," including academics, involvement and social-emotional learning and well being
- Communities and society are looking for more students prepared to join a variety of workforces.

Culture
- There is a culture where getting involved and connected to the school community is the norm.
- From the beginning of their experience with the high school, incoming students and families believe in the power of connecting to our school community.
- Students are eager to jump in and get involved.
- New teachers are trained with information and school best practices designed to be inclusive and connect as many students as possible.

Conditions
- Cultural differences are taken into account when considering programming, opportunities and offerings.
- Emphasis on high level courses remains, however there is a push for involvement across the school, not simply academics.
- Students who come from diverse backgrounds will have a greater voice in offerings and ways to connect.
- Staff demographics will continue to reflect student demographics at a greater level.

> **While many students and families engage in the school community, there are still several that do not. How can we improve this?**

Competencies
- Very successful emphasis on success in the classroom and taking higher level classes
- Dedicated and caring staff, committed to student success
- Board of Education committed to funding programs and co-curriculars
- High access to technology and resources
- Attendance and behavior policies in place to address absenteeism
- District leadership & Board of Ed interested in increasing connectedness by implementing Lancers 360 plan, focusing on academics, co-curriculars and SEL.

APPENDIX F: ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 65.130

New Teacher Induction and Mentoring

TITLE 23: EDUCATION AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
SUBTITLE A: EDUCATION
CHAPTER I: ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
SUBCHAPTER b: PERSONNEL
PART 65 NEW TEACHER INDUCTION AND MENTORING
SECTION 65.130 PROGRAM SPECIFICATIONS

Section 65.130 Program Specifications

    a)   Each program supported with grant funds under this Subpart B shall incorporate:

        1)   mentoring for beginning teachers that is provided by experienced teachers who have received training to equip them for this role;

        2)   professional development for recipient teachers, mentors, and administrators who have roles in the program;

        3)   formative assessment of beginning teachers' practice with respect to the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards and the content-area standards relevant to their respective fields of assignment; and

        4)   the Illinois Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Beginning Teacher Induction Programs. (See Appendix A of this Part.)

    b)   Each program shall serve no fewer than 10 beginning teachers. If fewer than 10 teachers are proposed to be served, the applicant may either:

        1)   participate in a beginning teacher induction program as part of a joint application; or

        2)   provide in its application a specific rationale for the reduction that demonstrates that the applicant has sufficient resources, in addition to funding received under this Subpart B, and adequate personnel to continue

the program and provide each beginning teacher with adequate attention and support comparable to what would be provided in a larger program.

c)   Each beginning teacher shall have, at the time he or she begins the program, less than two years' teaching experience and hold a professional educator license endorsed for early childhood, elementary, secondary, special K-12, or special preschool-age 21 issued pursuant to Article 21B of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/Art. 21B]. An individual seeking a professional educator license under the provisions of Section 21B-35 of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/21B-35] and holding an educator license with stipulations endorsed for provisional educator in early childhood, elementary, secondary, special K-12, or special preschool-age 21 also may participate if he or she has less than two years' teaching experience.

d)   Subject to the exceptions of this subsection (d), each program shall be designed to ensure that each beginning teacher spends no less than 40 hours with the mentor assigned, including both classroom observation of the beginning teacher by the mentor and other interactions between these individuals.

   1)   During a teacher's first year of the program, at least 30 hours of contact between the teacher and mentor shall be face to face, either one on one or in another configuration, and the remaining interactions may be through electronic means, such as web-based applications, telephone, or video.

   2)   During a teacher's second year of the program, a minimum of 30 hours of contact is required, of which at least 20 hours shall be face to face.

e)   Each program shall provide for the development of an individual learning plan for each beginning teacher served and for the provision of professional development that is directly related to the needs identified in the individual learning plan.

(Source: Amended at 37 Ill. Reg. 15925, effective September 27, 2013)