

Policy Brief

Building Data Driven Capacity in OST Programs: NYU and CHCF Research Partnership

Overview

Emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL) as a foundation for students to succeed academically and provide skills that help them navigate relational challenges throughout their life has become more prominent in school-community models throughout the country. Most recently, in NYC, the Community and Renewal Schools initiatives have elevated the importance of social and emotional learning as a key component to interrupting the

enrichment and academic enhancement programs including drop-out prevention, family engagement, teen pregnancy prevention, youth leadership, career and college exposure and after school programming.

Research Objective

Social and emotional learning is a cornerstone of all CHCF's youth development programs. With a capacity building grant from the

The focus is on improving the ability of CHCF's after school team to measure SEL that is taking place in its programs and institute regular measures twice during every year forward for CHCF to gain a greater understanding of the youth they serve.

cycle of poverty by offsetting the challenges students face to achieving academic competencies in the classroom.

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. (CHCF) was founded in 1982 to give a voice to Latino children and families, and since 1992 has been partnering in K-12 schools to provide culturally relevant social and emotional supports in underserved communities through a variety of

American Educational Research Foundation, NYU partnered with CHCF to focus on improving the ability of CHCF's after school team to measure SEL. The grant assisted in instituting regular measures during every year going forward as a way to inform program design, better communicate student strengths and challenges to school partners and funders, understand program and school climate, and for CHCF to gain a greater

Social and Emotional Skills



CHCF's after school program incorporates the following opportunities for youth to gain and foster social and emotional skills:

- Activities that promote relationships with positive adult role models.
- Caring interactions with peers and adults.
- Development of teamwork skills.
- Awareness of and concern for their communities.
- Positive communication.

Activities for building SEL competencies of the CHCF staff include:

- Survey scale explanation meeting.
- Survey administration training.
- Survey administration onsite support.
- Survey reporting.
- Explanation meeting.

understanding of the youth they serve.

The organization benefited from this partnership in the following ways:

- Through this capacity building exercise, the organization was able to increase its ability to not only continue the measurement of SEL in its after school programs, but also move towards collecting relevant information about participants in all of its youth development programs, including youth leadership, teen pregnancy prevention, and career and

college exposure programs.

- CHCF was able to increase its capacity in using online data collection tools and evaluation tools, building and conducting surveys, and collecting relevant literature to support the practice.
- The project also helped the organization stay abreast on recent research and identify the best practices for social emotional learning, and utilize the information gained from the survey to inform program design and delivery.

Approach: How was the Study Conducted?

Key after school staff were trained by Dr. Edward Fergus and Dr. Mellie Torres (NYU) in May 2014 on the purpose of the social and emotional learning surveys, the importance and definition of social and emotional learning, and their role in implementing the surveys with the youth participants. Pilot surveys were conducted in June 2014 for youth in grades 4 through 8 in the two CHCF after school sites, PS 59 and PS/MS 279, in the Bronx.

Simultaneously, the organization made an investment in an online data collection and evaluation tool, Youthservices.net, which is used to collect attendance, as well as the social and emotional learning surveys and reports. It will also serve as an ongoing data collection and attendance tool in all its youth development programs going forward. The social and emotional learning scale used in the survey included

measures of educational beliefs, behavioral engagement, relational engagement, cognitive engagement, perceived safety, safety avoidance, and academic self-concept¹.

The research team conducted an extensive literature review of the work done on social and emotional learning. The literature review was divided into three main components, the importance of Social and Emotional Learning, strategies for program evaluation, and incorporation of the social and emotional measures into the after school programs.

¹ Explanations of scales are found in following publication: Fergus, E., Noguera, P. and Martin, M. (2014). Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Social and Emotional Learning Scale



The social and emotional learning scale used in the survey included measures of:

- Educational beliefs.
- Behavioral engagement.
- Relational engagement.
- Cognitive engagement.
- Perceived safety.
- Safety avoidance.
- Academic self-concept.

The literature review was divided into three main components:

- Identifying the importance of social and emotional learning.
- Strategies for program evaluation.
- How to incorporate the social and emotional measure into the after school programs.

Results: What did we learn?

By implementing the surveys in all youth development programs, CHCF will build a consistent level of knowledge about its participants that can be used to tell a story to partners, funders, and educators.

The survey results from both schools also pointed out key areas in which CHCF will increase attention. Some of the students from both sites have reported that they felt they were not treated respectfully by teachers during the school day. Another trend we identified at both sites is the correlation of students who reported they are unable to finish school work, and also responded that they disrupt the class. CHCF will work with its school partners to identify the deeper needs of these students.

Students in both schools have shown an interest in the after school program hosted by CHCF. The students at both sites responded positively that adults working in CHCF programs showed confidence in them. The majority of students at both sites demonstrated interest in learning new things. Most of the students seemed socially active and comfortable with making new friends. Some key findings that stood out from the surveys and are summarized below.

Educational belief

An interesting observation we noticed is that students from both schools showed a keen interest in learning, yet are skeptical that education can improve outcomes for poor people in American society or that education can

Students in both schools have responded positively to the adults in CHCF's after-school program. 93.3% of the participants from PS/MS 279 and 87.1% from PS 59 responded that adults in the after school program care about their future.

ensure the success of these children. For example, only 38.4% of the participants from PS 59 agreed that education is the key to success in the future.

Behavioral engagement and Self-Responsibility

Participants from both schools not only showed positive behavioral engagement but also had positive self-concept. 70.6% participants from MS 279 and 74.3% from PS 59 reported that they make friends easily. Similarly, 62.6% of the participants from MS 279 and 59.0% from PS 59 responded that they would take the initiative to meet new people. Most of the students also responded that they were self-reliant, a positive thinker and care about others. 82.1% of the participants from PS 59 and 70.6% from PS/MS 279 responded that they take responsibility for their actions all or most of the time.

Relational engagement

Responses from the students from both school showed that they have developed a strong connection with the adults in the after school program. 93.3% of the participants from PS/MS 279 and 87.1% from PS 59 responded that adults in the after school program care about their future.

Cognitive engagement

The majority of participants responded that they had clear goals and were focused. They showed a keen interest in learning and did not give up on difficult lessons. 92% of the participants from PS/MS 279 and 97.4% from PS 59 responded that they appreciated when the adults in the after school program helped them think critically. The majority of the students responded that they considered themselves a smart person. 64.1% of participants from PS 59 and 77.4% from PS/MS 279 also self-reported that they were curious to learn.

Academic self-concept

The survey results reflected that most of the students reported they were performing well academically. For example, 87.2% of the total participants in PS 59 and 98.7% of the total participants in PS/MS 279 responded that they were able to finish the schoolwork assigned to them and the same percentage of students also self-reported that they paid attention in the class.

Conclusion

The results of the SEL survey tells the story of the current program participants, and cannot be used to draw any conclusions about the impact of the respondents' participation in CHCF's programs without a comparison group of respondents who do not participate in the program.

CHCF and NYU are hoping to implement this research evaluation as a next step

in program design and an impact study. The results from these surveys have allowed us to identify the common trends in both sites as well as identify the different areas of SEL that needs more attention in each site. The analysis for the survey for each school will allow intervention to be designed specifically to the SEL needs of the participants. CHCF and its school based partners will use the responses to these surveys to inform holistic SEL practices that support participants' growth and academic performance, and design culturally appropriate and responsive programming that meets the unique needs of the diverse program population.

Implications for the Future and Recommendations

The results from the surveys confirm the commitment to move this research a step further. We plan to conduct the surveys again in May and June 2015 to compare the results to the original survey in November 2014 in order to measure any difference in SEL for individual participants. This will also allow us to further create a link between the academic success and SEL, as we will be able to access student report cards at the end of the year.

Going forward, we aim to address the seeming lack of connection between academic success and social and emotional learning as expressed by the students' self-reports on this survey at both sites. Our motive is to further build social and

emotional learning capacity of our students so that they can not only exceed academically but also are successful in their life. CHCF has intentionally increased family engagement in academic programming at both sites as a means to combat ambivalence we see in the responses to question connecting school success and life achievement.

We have provided exposure to professionals from

Building the capacity of community based organizations to capture information about program participants is a critical step towards validating the quality of programming.

diverse backgrounds, which has been part of the curriculum for 6th to 8th grade students at PS/MS 279 since the implementation of the survey in November. At PS 59, CHCF staff have met with parents at parent-teacher conferences to connect them with the STEM activities the students participate in during the program, and provide tools and free educational apps they can download on their smartphones or tablets to further reinforce the learning at home.

At PS/MS 279 a group of parents participated in a series of workshops designed to inform Latino parents about the ways in which they can better support their children's education, and how to truly partner with the school in their child's academic success.

Recommendations

Building the capacity of community based organizations to capture information about program participants is a critical

step towards validating the quality of programming. CHCF is committed to institutionalizing the process of collecting indicators of success that both inform program staff about the participants and provide context for program design and implementation. Additionally, the process of strategically collecting data on indicators CHCF determines as important elevates the capacity of staff and managers and builds in a confidence that the program's impact is measurable and actual.

CHCF is taking this process as a first step towards creating model programs, as it intends to use the data collected in after school and other programs to validate its intervention and the positive impact of its programs.



**The Committee for
Hispanic Children
and Families, Inc.**

