

RESEARCH SUMMARY JUNE 2015

A First Look at the 5Essentials in Illinois Schools



Joshua Klugman, Molly F. Gordon, Penny Bender Sebring, Susan E. Sporte



THE FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

- 1. Effective leadership** takes a strategic approach toward enhancing performance of the four other domains, while simultaneously nurturing the social relationships embedded in the everyday work of the school.
- 2. Collaborative teachers** obtain high quality professional development, embrace beliefs and values that reflect teacher responsibility for change, and participate in a school-based professional community focused on the core problems of improving teaching and learning.
- 3. Involved families** and communities are engaged in the work of strengthening student learning, with the assistance of outreach efforts by school staff.
- 4. Supportive environment** entails clear, fair, and consistently enforced expectations for student behavior. Teachers hold students to high expectations of academic achievement while also providing generous support.
- 5. Ambitious instruction** occurs when teachers move beyond the basic skills and ask students to do intellectually challenging work.

This report was produced by UChicago CCSR's publications and communications staff: Emily Krone, Director for Outreach and Communication; Bronwyn McDaniel, Senior Manager for Outreach and Communication; and Jessica Puller, Communications Specialist.

Graphic Design: Jeff Hall Design
Photography: Cover: Shutterstock; Cynthia Howe
Editing: Ann Lindner

Research Summary

Why are some schools able to thrive and produce strong student outcomes, while others struggle? To answer this question, researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) have surveyed teachers and students in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) since the 1990s, asking them about their schools' organizational climate and practices.

From these data, UChicago CCSR researchers concluded that five aspects of the schools' organization facilitate engaging instruction and learning. These five *essential supports* are effective leadership, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environments, and ambitious instruction.¹ Schools strong in these practice domains have been found to be much more likely than schools weak in these areas to see improvements in student outcomes, including attendance and learning gains.²

In 2013, for the first time, students (grades 6-12) and teachers throughout the state of Illinois—and not just CPS—took surveys measuring the essential supports in their schools. Ninety percent of schools throughout the state responded to the survey. In the surveys, teachers were asked for their perspectives on their school's leadership, professional community, and family involvement; and students for their views on their school's environment and instruction, and their community, which is part of family involvement.

Results of the survey allowed researchers at the UChicago CCSR to see the extent to which schools across the state are strong or weak in these essential supports and to better understand how the five essentials function in different community contexts across

Illinois. Specifically, UChicago CCSR researchers addressed two questions:

- 1. How do strength and weakness on the five essential supports vary according to urbanicity, size of school, and socioeconomic characteristics of school communities?** This question has crucial implications for policy and practice. Systematic differences in how schools perform on the essential supports suggest a need for extra resources and targeted efforts in certain locations or school types.
- 2. Are the five essential supports related to student outcomes like attendance rates, test scores, test score gains, and graduation rates in schools across Illinois?** Our data cannot determine whether the essential supports actually *influence* or *cause* better student outcomes. In other words, even if schools with strong essential supports have better student outcomes, we recognize there could be other plausible reasons for this, such as unmeasured policies or practices influencing student outcomes. Nonetheless, finding out whether there is a relationship between the five essential supports and student outcomes is an important first step.

¹ Bryk, A.S., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

² Bryk et al. (2010); Sebastian, J., & Allensworth, E. (2012). The influence of principal leadership on classroom instruction and student learning: A study of mediated pathways to learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 626-663.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY:

There are substantial differences among schools in the degree to which students and teachers report strength in the essential supports.

- A higher proportion of urban and suburban schools are strong in supportive environment and ambitious instruction, compared with schools in towns and rural areas. Significantly, these are also the two essentials that are most strongly related to improving test scores, suggesting that schools in towns and rural areas may need more support in these areas (see Figure 1).
- Teachers in CPS and rural schools are more likely to report having effective leaders, compared to teachers in schools located in other contexts.
- Schools serving students with socioeconomic disadvantages are less likely to be strong in the essential supports, compared to schools serving more affluent students.
- However, despite the fact that CPS schools serve student populations with high levels of poverty rates (the average CPS school has about 87 percent low-income students, while the average non-CPS urban school in Illinois has about 53 percent low-income students), CPS has a relatively high proportion of schools with strong effective leaders, supportive

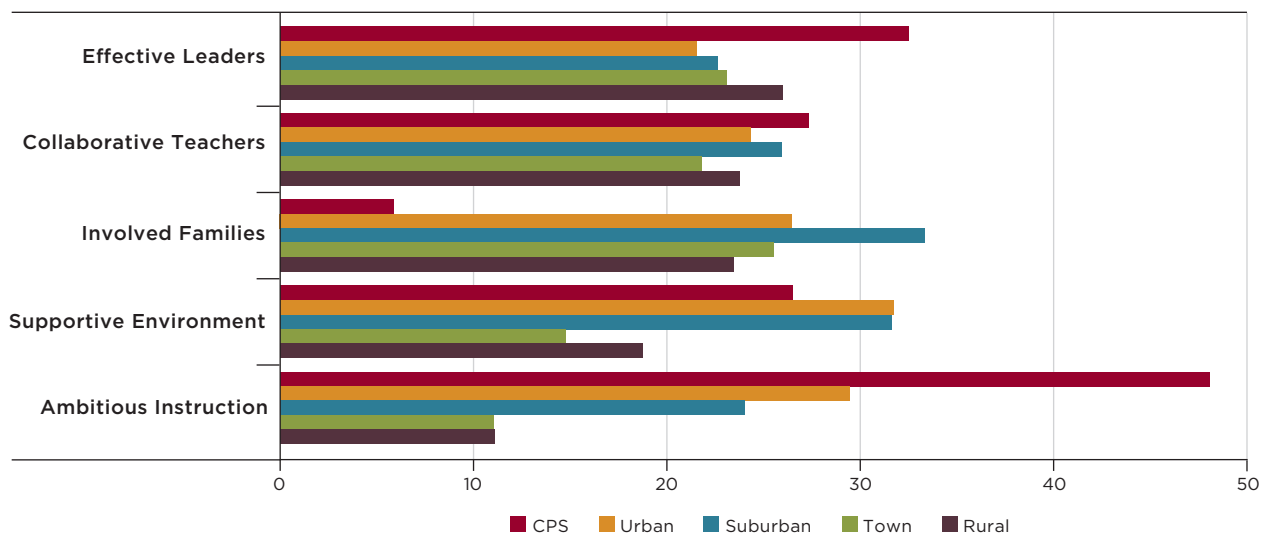
environment, and ambitious instruction, compared to schools located in other contexts across the state. Among CPS schools, however, we still see that schools serving disadvantaged students are less likely to be strong in the essential supports, compared to CPS schools serving fewer low-income students.

- We also found differences among schools based on their size. Smaller schools are more likely to have strong essentials than are larger schools, although the pattern is not as clear at the high school level.

In general, strength in the essential supports is related to better student outcomes. We help contextualize the size of this relationship by comparing it to the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage (a combination of the percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and community area poverty indicators) and various student outcomes. Typically, there is a substantial relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and academic outcomes, such as test scores and graduation. The relationships we report take into account that schools differ in demographics and resources.

Overall, for Illinois schools, the study finds strength in the essential supports is related to students' yearly gains on ISAT scores, the overall average ISAT scores of schools, attendance rates, high school graduation rates,

FIGURE 1
Strength in the Five Essentials Varies by Community Type: Instruction is Stronger in Towns and Suburbs, Rural and CPS Schools More Likely to Report Having Effective Leaders



Note: This figure includes all schools with data on at least three of the five essentials data in the state. This figure combines elementary and high schools. Chicago is not included in the urban category because we separated it out from other urban cities in our analysis.

and high school average ACT scores. However, some of these relationships are stronger than others, depending on the school context and the outcome being considered.

We focus on K-8, 6-8, and 9-12 schools. Because students in grades K-5 do not take the survey, we only have data on teacher survey responses for those schools. This means we are only able to measure three of the five essentials in K-5 schools (effective leaders, collaborative teachers, and involved families). Surveys of fourth- and fifth-graders are being piloted with the goal of having complete data for all schools in future years. For more information on survey data, as well as school types, see the full report at <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/first-look-5essentials-illinois-schools>.

- In elementary/middle schools, the essential supports are strongly related to ISAT gains (see Figure 2). For example, throughout Illinois, the relationship between the essential supports and ISAT reading gains is around 107 percent of the relationship between school socioeconomic disadvantage and ISAT reading gains (although the effect is a bit weaker in CPS schools). That is to say, the essential supports have an even stronger relationship to elementary ISAT gains than poverty. In contrast to their relationship with test score gains, the essential

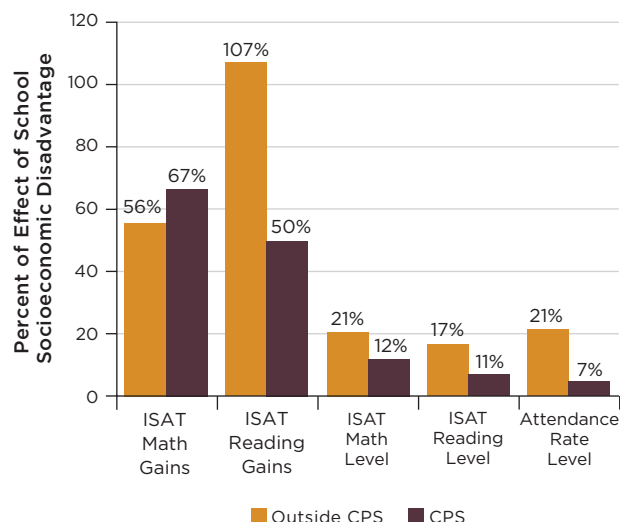
supports have weak associations with average test scores and average attendance (averaged over a three-year period). This is expected because ISAT levels reflect the cumulative influence of what students have learned in school and in the home throughout their entire lives, while ISAT gains reflect what the student has learned in the prior year, where the influence of school is relatively greater.

- At the high school level, strength in the essential supports is modestly related to better student outcomes (attendance rates, ACT scores, graduation rates). The relationship is much stronger in CPS schools. For example, in the rest of Illinois, the relationship between the essential supports and graduation rates is around 21 percent of the relationship between school socioeconomic disadvantage and graduation rates, while it is 63 percent in CPS.

The essential supports with the strongest associations with student outcomes are supportive environment and ambitious instruction (see Figure 4).

- The relationship between supportive environment and student outcomes is, on average, at least 40 percent of the size of the relationship between school socioeconomic disadvantage and student outcomes.

FIGURE 2
Strength in Essential Supports Has Especially Strong Relationships With ISAT Gains Throughout Illinois, but Not Other Elementary School Outcomes



Note: K-5 schools excluded.

FIGURE 3
Strength in Essential Supports Has Weak Relationships With High School Outcomes Throughout Illinois, Except for CPS

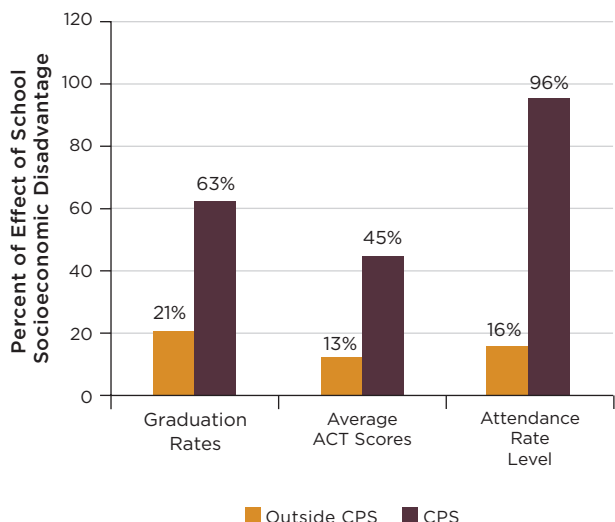
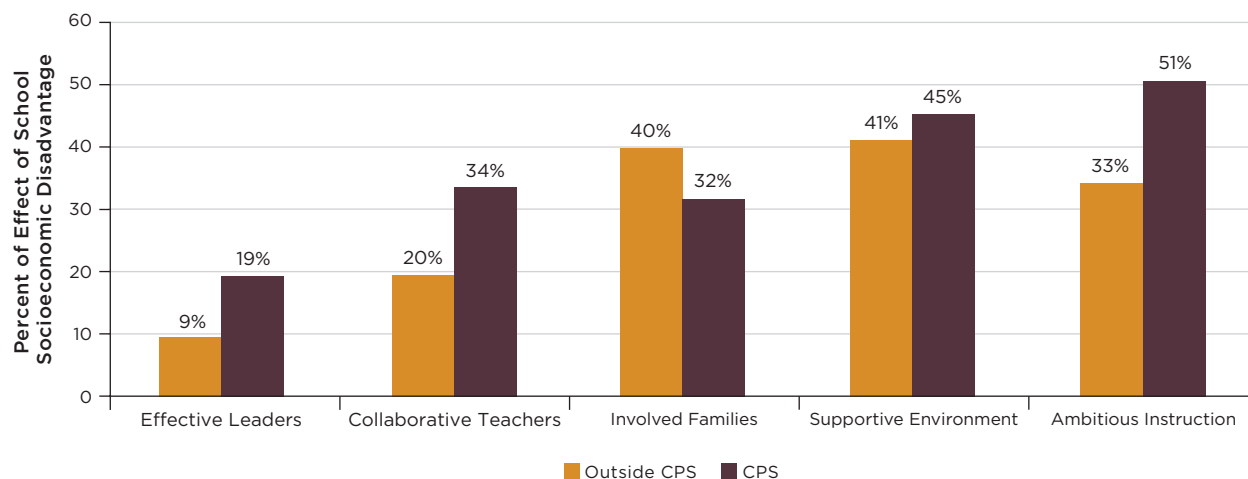


FIGURE 4

The Essential Supports With the Strongest Relationships With Student Outcomes are Supportive Environment and Ambitious Instruction



Note: Strength of relationships averaged across different outcomes. K-5 schools excluded.

4

- The relationship between ambitious instruction and student outcomes is about 33 percent of the size of the relationship between school socioeconomic disadvantage and student outcomes throughout Illinois, except in CPS, where it is about 50 percent.

Interpretive Summary

This preliminary investigation shows differences in strength of the essentials, depending on school context, and that strength in the essential supports is related to better student outcomes across the state, especially in elementary schools.

As the state provides resources to schools and districts, it is important to address disparities in students' access to well-organized schools. While policymakers and practitioners have highlighted disparities in access to schools where students have strong levels of achievement, the results from the statewide 5Essentials survey also reveal the extent to which students differ in their access to schools with strong climates.

- The smaller proportion of strong essential supports found in schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities is cause for concern.
- The urban-rural disparities in supportive environment

and ambitious instruction are also concerning. Students in these schools experience less teacher and peer support for academic achievement and less pedagogy emphasizing the application of knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills.

- Schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities and rural schools are especially at risk of having lower student outcomes.³ UChicago CCSR work in the Chicago context indicates such schools' chances of improvement are greater if they have strong essential supports.⁴

Our understanding of the essential supports' relationships with student outcomes in districts outside Chicago is incomplete. More years of data on the essential supports and student outcomes will be needed to test for the essential supports' influence on student outcomes. Future research should also investigate why the essential supports have substantial associations in high schools in CPS, but minimal associations in high schools outside of CPS.

Although the study's findings about the relationships between the essential supports and student outcomes are preliminary, they are encouraging. More research could substantiate these initial findings.

³ Logan, J.R., Minca, E., & Adar, S. (2012). The geography of inequality: Why separate means unequal in American public schools. *Sociology of Education*, 85(3), 287-301; Roscigno,

V.J., Tomaskovic-Devey, D., & Crowley, M. (2006). Education and the inequalities of place. *Social Forces*, 84(4), 2121-2145.

⁴ Bryk et al. (2010).

CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH

Directors

ELAINE M. ALLENSWORTH

Lewis-Sebring Director

EMILY KRONE

*Director for Outreach
and Communication*

JENNY NAGAOKA

Deputy Director

MELISSA RODERICK

*Senior Director
Hermon Dunlap Smith
Professor
School of Social Service
Administration*

PENNY BENDER SEBRING

Co-Founder

SUSAN E. SPORTE

*Director for Research
Operations*

MARISA DE LA TORRE

*Director for Internal
Research Capacity*

Steering Committee

KATHLEEN ST. LOUIS

CALIENTO

*Co-Chair
Spark, Chicago*

KIM ZALENT

*Co-Chair
Business and Professional
People for the Public Interest*

Ex-Officio Members

SARA RAY STOELINGA

Urban Education Institute

Institutional Members

JOHN R. BARKER

Chicago Public Schools

CLARICE BERRY

*Chicago Principals and
Administrators Association*

AARTI DHUPELIA

Chicago Public Schools

KAREN G.J. LEWIS

Chicago Teachers Union

SHERRY J. ULERY

Chicago Public Schools

Individual Members

VERONICA ANDERSON

Communications Consultant

JOANNA BROWN

*Logan Square
Neighborhood Association*

CATHERINE DEUTSCH

*Illinois Network of
Charter Schools*

RAQUEL FARMER-HINTON

*University of Wisconsin,
Milwaukee*

KIRABO JACKSON

Northwestern University

CHRIS JONES

*Stephen T. Mather
High School*

DENNIS LACEWELL

*Urban Prep Charter Academy
for Young Men*

LILA LEFF

*Umoja Student
Development Corporation*

RUANDA GARTH

MCCULLOUGH

*Young Women's
Leadership Academy*

LUISIANA MELÉNDEZ

Erikson Institute

CRISTINA PACIONE-ZAYAS

Latino Policy Forum

PAIGE PONDER

One Million Degrees

LUIS R. SORIA

Chicago Public Schools

BRIAN SPITTLE

DePaul University

MATTHEW STAGNER

*Mathematica Policy
Research*

AMY TREADWELL

Chicago New Teacher Center

ERIN UNANDER

Al Raby High School

ARIE J. VAN DER PLOEG

*American Institutes for
Research (Retired)*

UCHICAGOCCSR

THE UNIVERSITY
OF CHICAGO
CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO
SCHOOL RESEARCH

1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637
T 773-702-3364
F 773-702-2010

ccsr.uchicago.edu

OUR MISSION The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR) conducts research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners as we support the search for solutions to the problems of school reform. UChicago CCSR encourages the use of research in policy action and improvement of practice, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for school reform by identifying what matters for student success and school improvement, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

UEI URBAN
EDUCATION
INSTITUTE

