



## BEYOND THE NUMBERS CONVENING 2014

*Breakout Session Summary*

### Non-Cognitive Student Achievement Outcomes

#### A Deeper Dive into What We Know and Where the Research will Take Us

Non-cognitive factors, such as socio-emotional and behavioral skills, are strongly linked to student achievement outcomes. As students progress to higher grades, skills like perseverance, social abilities, and strategy receive less focus in the classroom. Data collected from students and teachers that addresses student behavior both during and after school is necessary to provide a holistic view. This session examines the challenges of measuring non-cognitive factors for students and classrooms, as well as incorporating these into accountability systems so that teachers can develop classroom strategies to increase focus on non-cognitive skills.

At the district level, **SDP Fellow Anthony Sims, performance management associate at Prince George's County Public Schools System**, began this work by first visiting schools to listen to teachers and students, to better understand the reasons students may not be learning. Often, "teachers identify parents who don't value education and a perceived lack of motivation on the part of students that includes failing to complete homework assignment; but, students do not consider parents to be a factor," Sims noted. The idea that parents are a key contributor to student failure is often unsupported by Sims' research. In fact, many parents want their students to succeed. The solution lies in a virtuous cycle of strengthened academic competencies, improved student achievement, and strengthened affective (non-cognitive) competencies. Sims reminded us that "affective skills, such as perseverance, social capital, and belief in one's ability, help students to develop academic skills." Therefore, schools need to recognize where students are with respect to cognitive skills and grade-specific curricular demands, and then support them in taking risks.

**SDP Faculty Advisor Jenny Nagaoka, deputy director at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR)**, shared much of the research she has led to better understand socio-emotional and behavioral predictors of academic achievement. Specifically, she asks "what traits in high school are required to succeed in college?" While test scores measure content knowledge and academic skills, academic grades (e.g., "A", "B", "F") measure noncognitive factors that are as important to long-term academic success. The research Nagaoka has led has helped her to identify "five important socio-emotional and behavioral categories: academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills." According to a 2012 report from CCSR, improving academic behaviors and building perseverance among students is the best mechanism for improving student grades. Context also plays a crucial role in building academic mindsets and learning strategies. "Kids work really hard at something they're interested in, and can show very different levels of engagement in different classes or with different teachers," Nagaoka finds.

Additionally, the *Becoming Effective Learners* survey development project will examine effective classroom strategies for improving students' socio-emotional behaviors. Other investigations are looking at the role of exposures and opportunities afforded to students, the natural development trajectory of these factors, and the role of family and extracurricular activities. Nagaoka ended by stating: "We need to become much more mindful of what students are experiencing outside of school as well as inside of school."

To complete the session, **Noah Bookman, chief accountability officer for the California Office to Reform Education (CORE)**, shared the CORE's Social Emotional Learning Strategy. The efforts examine student learning in math and ELA, while connecting measurable achievement trends to social and emotional skills. Focusing on these skills, "we have examined 4-, 5-, and 6-year cohort graduation rates and the persistence of middle schoolers into 10th grade," Bookman shared. By better understanding how these quantifiable outcomes are influenced by "non-cognitive" factors, CORE districts will be much more effective in intervening on behalf of students to ensure that they remain on-track to academic success. CORE hopes to build these indicators into their larger accountability framework but understand the tension in providing this information for purposes of continuous improvement versus accountability.

Adding to the discussion, participants asked panelists to consider what non-cognitive skills teachers need to have to be effective? Sims responded, "teachers need to be reflective about their practice." Education agency leaders must therefore provide teachers with opportunities to engage in reflection so that they "take risks" in ways that positively influence students' self-perceptions and socio-emotional attitudes and behaviors.