# INTEGRATING EQUITY IN CHICAGO'S SCHOOL QUALITY RATING POLICY (SQRP)

PPHA 34330: Attaining Equity in K-12

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# I.    Executive Summary

Annually all elementary schools in the Chicago Public School (CPS) receive a School Quality Rating (SQRP) and Accountability Status. Multiple criticisms have been provided to the current SQRP, including the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). The criticism includes calling the rating process has been called as a tool that reinforces segregation and poverty, its punitive measures, and its superficiality.[1] Building on these criticisms, CPS has launched a stakeholder engagement process to reform its current SQRP.

Based on SQRP results from 2017-2020 and public datasets made available by CPS, we're able to see evidence of its potential and its current drawbacks. First, despite a decreasing number of schools needing intensive support, 10-15% of schools within the CPS score rate level 2 or below. Second, there is a high and positive correlation between student's attendance and growth in NWEA reading and math scores. However, attendance has little ability to explain the variation of test scores, suggesting other measures that may influence student's test scores. Lastly, we've found that lower SQRP scores are more common in schools with a larger share of African American students.

To attain equity in Chicago elementary schools' several reforms could be made to SQRP indicators, methods of delivery, and actions taken from the measure. A list of policy recommendations is listed below:

1) To better aid the school in need, CPS could conduct qualitative interviews of schools experiencing the highest and lowest growth to disseminate success stories.
2) Integrate equity measures in SQRP tools, such as questions on a sense of safety, inclusive environment, diversity, and inclusion training for teachers, and provide demographic information.
3) Including students' social-emotional development measures can better predict students' long-term outcomes, such as high school completion and college enrolment.
4) Address the learning achievement gap caused by COVID-19 by providing tutoring or acceleration learning.

This proposal will list learnings from SQRP results in 2017-2020, elaborate the policy recommendation listed above, and steps to engage stakeholders involved in the reforms.

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[1] Chicago Teacher Union. What's the matter with SQ RP? https://www.ctulocal1.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/SQRP-fact-sheet.pdf
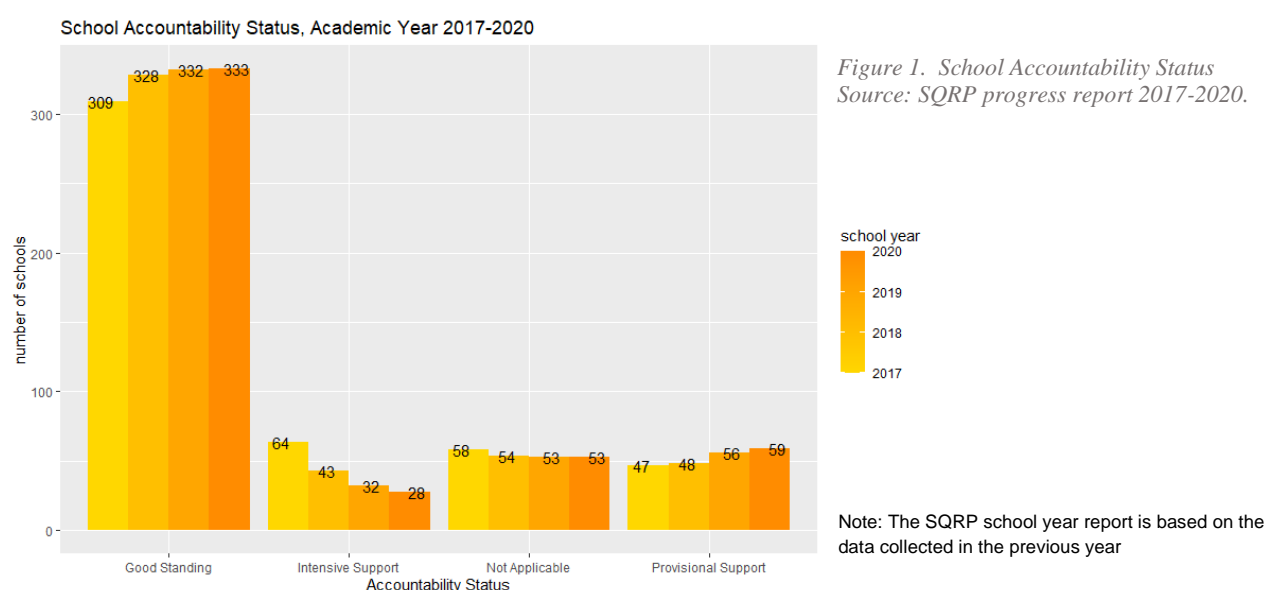
## II.    Background

### 2.1.  School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)

In November 2019, CPS began working with various stakeholders, community members, parents, and school leaders to renew its accountability system to evaluate public schools. Since 2013 elementary schools throughout the district are evaluated through the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP). Schools are assigned a rating from 1+ (the highest) to 3 (lowest) and an accountability status based on multiple factors such as attendance and test score growth. Obtaining a low rate and failure to improve substantially will provide the right for the district to order a new council election, fire staff, reconstitute or close the schools.[2]

The process of redesigning the SQRP aims to provide a complete picture of school performance, improve district capacity to support schools, provide clear information to the public, as well as evaluate and report district effectiveness. Having SQRP measures was deemed successful in increasing high schools' quality and supporting students' readiness to enroll in colleges. Reflecting the relevance of SQRP in high school, the CPS extended the accountability measure to assess and compare the quality of elementary schools.

Measuring and reporting a school's quality to parents provides the ability for parents to choose the best school to meet their child's needs and advocate for improvements. The coexistence between school rating and choice provides the incentives for schools to improve. Based on 2017-2020 data, most elementary schools under CPS are in good standing. The number of schools that need intensive support has also decreased.
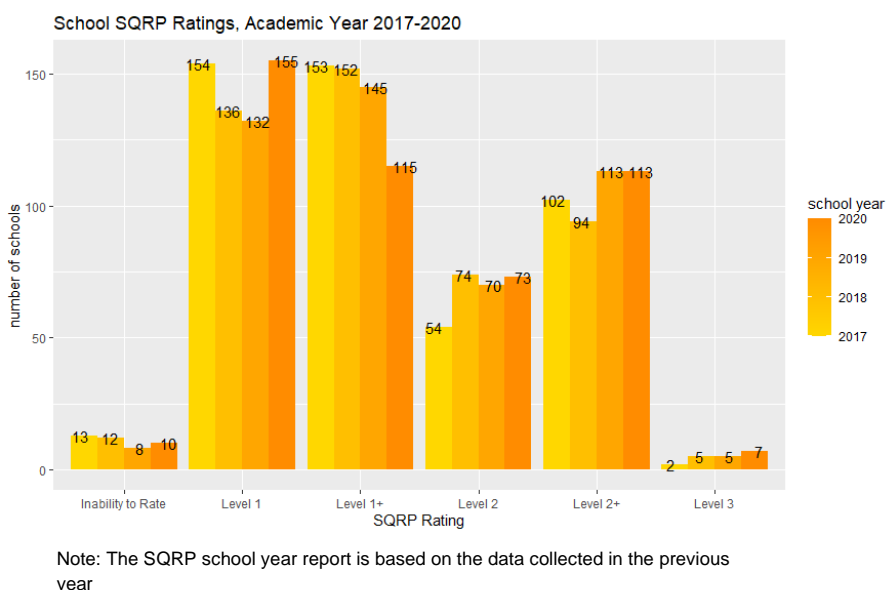


*Figure 1.  School Accountability Status*
*Source: SQRP progress report 2017-2020.*

Note: The SQRP school year report is based on the data collected in the previous year

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[2] CPS. (2019). School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) Handbook. https://www.cps.edu/globalassets/cps-pages/about/district-data/metrics/school-quality-rating-policy-sqrp/sqrp-handbook.pdf

## 2.2. Criticisms to current School Quality Rating Policy

*A punitive policy that leaves behind struggling schools*

When we look more closely at school's rating annually in the past four years, the number of schools that obtain level 3 ratings has only increased by a handful. However, level 2 schools have increased from 2017 to 2018, and the number has persisted in the past two years.



Note: The SQRP school year report is based on the data collected in the previous year

The CTU argues that although level 3 school identifies as needing intensive support, the CPS does not provide any additional support. Failing to increase the quality of school often leads to less enrolment the following year, less financial resources, and demoralized teachers, principals, and school administration. There are also negative consequences of labeling schools as a failure. Similar to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ranking schools as low quality or failing makes it harder for schools to attract and keep qualified teachers.[3] The policy could also push schools to remove students who are not doing well by excluding low-scoring from admission or encourage transfer or drop out. The consequence of low rating provides minimum to negative incentives for schools to improve.

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[3] Hammond, L.D. (2007). Evaluating 'No Child Left Behind'. *The Nation May 2, 2007.*
https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/evaluating-no-child-left-behind/

*The inability for attendance and test scores to display the whole learning experience*

In the previous SQRP model, elementary schools' quality is measured through nine metrics which consist of, among others, test scores by 60 percent and attendance by 20 percent. A study conducted by Allensworth E. et al. (2014) found that attendance in middle school is stronger predictive of passing high school classes than test scores.[4]
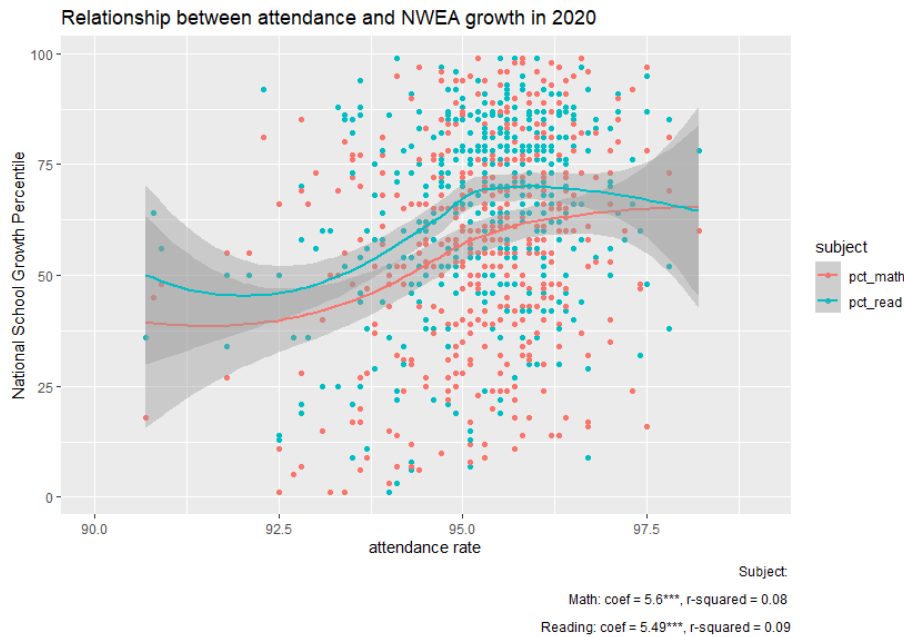
Relationship between attendance and NWEA growth in 2020



Math: coef = 5.6***, r-squared = 0.08
Reading: coef = 5.49***, r-squared = 0.09

*Figure 3. Attendance measure. Source: SQRP 2020 Results based on 2019-2020 data*

When we look at elementary school attendance on the percentile of NWEA growth in reading and math, there seems to be a strong positive correlation between the two variables. An increase in attendance rate by 1 percent among schools increases the school's percentile by 5 points in reading and math. Despite the strong correlation, attendance can only explain a small variation of the school's NWEA growth. Specifically, attendance can only explain the variation in NWEA growth percentile in math and reading by eight and nine percent, respectively. Such evidence suggests there are other factors that influence students' test scores.

Based on SQRP results alone, we cannot see the rate of chronic absence among students and whether schools provide efforts to reduce absence. Furthermore, higher attendance alone does not guarantee school inputs that can improve test scores—such as longer class time, smaller class size, high-quality teachers, a curriculum that challenges students, and a supportive learning environment.

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[4] Allensworth, E., Gwyne, J.A., de la Torre, M., and Moore, P. (2014). Looking forward to High School and College. *Uchicago Consortium on School Research Report.*
*https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/looking-forward-high-school-and-college-middle-grade-indicators-readiness-chicago*

*The policy highlights racial inequity*

*Figure 4. Relationship between share of African American Students and SQRP score.*



Relationship between share of African American Students and SQRP score

coeff = -0.547***, R square = 0.135
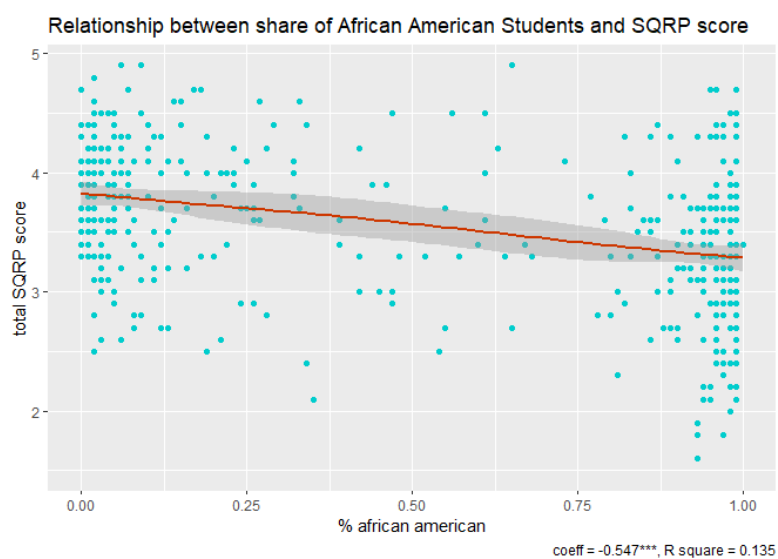
Source: SQRP 2020 Result and CPS racial ethnic demographic data

One key argument against the current SQRP highlights the racial achievement gap and further reinforces segregation. Based on the SQRP 2020 result, when combined with the school's demographic data, there is a strong negative correlation between the share of African American students with SQRP total score. The share of African American students explains a 13 percent variation in the total SQRP score, which could be considered large compared to other racial/ethnic backgrounds. A larger share of white students strongly correlates with a higher SQRP score, further highlighting the racial gap in the SQRP scoring system. In other words, schools with low SQRP scores are likely schools dominated by African Americans.

Table 1. Relationship between the share of race/ethnicity and SQRP total score

| Race/ethnicity | Coefficient | R-Square |
|---|---|---|
| **White** | 1.306*** | 0.12 |
| **African American** | -0.547*** | 0.13 |
| **Asian** | 2.189*** | 0.092 |
| **Hispanic** | 0.290*** | 0.029 |
| **Other** | 0.878 | 0.003 |

***statistical significance at $\alpha = 0$

While the solution to segregation may need to include broader reforms such as housing and better social protection programs, efforts have been made by the CPS. In the CPS Accountability Advisory Meetings to reform SQRP, ideas such as school climate and a safe and supportive environment for students to learn and grow have been mentioned.[5] The

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[5] CPS Accountability Group Meeting #3 Notes.

Advisory meeting has already highlighted the importance of creating a positive, caring, supporting, and safe environment that facilitates student learning. Ideally, these measures should already have been captured through the Five Essential surveys given to teachers and parents of students grade 4 to 12.

*Table 2. Results of School Climate through Five Essential Survey.*
Source: SQRP Results 2017-2020

| Results of Five Essential Survey | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Moderately Organized | 41 | 16 | 44 | 56 |
| Not Enough Data | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Not Yet Organized | 30 | 8 | 28 | 21 |
| Organized | 114 | 72 | 120 | 107 |
| Partially Organized | 39 | 17 | 43 | 49 |
| Well Organized | 251 | 172 | 236 | 237 |

In the past four years, most schools are categorized as "well organized" or "organized." Based on the measurement released by SQRP annually, schools have little information and incentives for school equity policies. To look at the school environment in detail, one could search for schools individually through the Illinois report card website, download an application or go to the five-essential website. Existing information for the public provides general information. An individual often will have to do multiple clicks in the five essential websites to know the breakdown for each indicator which may not be intuitive for parents. They would have to have a list of schools to look at individually. While in the perspective of school administration, the quantitative nature of the question also limits the information provided on what aspect of school environment policy is lacking to act.

*Barriers to capture school quality during the pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought disruption to teaching, learning, and the ability for schools and districts to measure school quality. The Illinois State Board of Education announced a suspension of in-person teaching would impact multiple report card metrics it uses to measure both school and districts.[6] At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education also issued guidance to waive testing for 2019-2020 and conduct the standardized assessment in 2021.[7]

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[6] Illinois State Board of Education. (2020). Illinois Report Card Metrics Affected by COVID-19. https://www.isbe.net/Documents/IL-Report-Card-vers-B.pdf
[7] US Department of Education. Guidance for assessment, accountability and reporting system for 2020-2021 school year. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/stateletters/dcl-assessments-and-acct-022221.pdf

Capturing information through parent, teacher, and student surveys and academic tests on certain subjects may provide useful information for schools to prepare students' return to classrooms. However, these assessments should be conducted flexibly rather than as a tool to brand the school's quality. Researchers have reported learning loss and disparities among students' social-economic backgrounds driven by the pandemic based on multiple studies worldwide. Hamilton L.S. (2020) reports teachers experienced gaps in training to support groups such as students with disabilities or homeless students.[8]

# III. Proposed Improvements to the School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP)

## 3.1. Aiding the schools in need

As schools transition back to in-person learning, the pandemic has further highlighted the disparity of access to the education system. The district will have an important role in assisting struggling students and schools in adapting to the change. Learning from Denver's and New York Accountability systems, the district office informs all stakeholders on school performance and growth through a dashboard. The district plays a role in creating a continuous improvement learning system. Currently, multiple data are collected to measure school quality in Chicago's district. Using the available information, the district could play a leading role in spotting schools that have not experienced substantial improvement and display exponential growth.

Identifying top and bottom performance could be essential to understand the stumbling blocks to improve and learn potential innovations along the way. After identifying schools, qualitative surveys or focus group discussions could identify learnings. While innovation and change occur at the school level, districts play a mediating role to provide technical and financial resources to assist schools in following through with changes. For schools that are consistently level 2 and have been unable to improve due to the overarching sense of pessimism and distrust among colleagues, districts can play a mediating role. Distrust between teachers to learn from another, teachers with principals, and teachers with parents often impede improvements.

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[8] Hamilton, L.S., Kaufman, J., and Diliberti, M.K. (2020), Teaching and Leading Through a Pandemic: Key Findings from the American Educator Panels Spring 2020 COVID-19 Surveys. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA168-2.html.

Furthermore, parents need to hold the district accountable as much as schools for providing a positive learning environment for students. Assistance to help improve schools should be part of the district's key performance indicator.

## 3.2. Expanding indicators to include Social-Emotional Development

Schools' ability to promote hard work and social well-being has been found to improve short- and longer-run outcomes when studied in a high school setting. Using self-reported surveys in Chicago public schools, Jackson et al. (2020) found that schools that continuously improve their SED scores reduce arrest rates and increase high school completion and college-going.[9] The study use variables such as interpersonal skills, school connectedness, academic engagement, grit, and academic efforts as measures.

A shortcoming found by the study and could also occur when CPS scales similar policy to elementary school is the condition where nonresponse was higher for low achievers. If SED measures are collected through self-administered surveys, nonresponse from low achievers can result in an upward bias where schools are measured at a higher quality than reality. To increase response rates, school administrators should inform the purpose of conducting these surveys and how they plan to respond to the information gathered through the survey. The timing for conducting the surveys could also play an essential role in its completion rate. For example, the surveys could be administered prior to releasing report cards before students know their scores and influence the survey results.

When accountability measures focus on measures that support children to do well rather than the exams themselves, teachers and schools are rewarded when developing the whole child. Using SED also tackles the issue of curriculum narrowing. Teachers often feel the pressure to focus only on math and readings as the main subjects accounted for the accountability measures. A national representative survey for K – 12 teachers shows most teachers see social and emotional schools as most relevant in elementary schools and should be given greater emphases by the school.[10] Teachers at high-poverty schools are specifically convinced that social and emotional learning benefits can improve relationships between teachers and students and increase interest in learning.

[9] Jackson, C.K. Porter, S.C., Eeaston, J.Q., Blanchard, A. and Kiguel, S. (2020). School Effects on Socialemotional Development, School-Based Arrest and Educational Attainment. *AER Insights, 2020, 2(4) 491-508. https://doi.org/10.1257/aeri.20200029*

[10] Bridgeland, J., Bruce, M. and Hariharan, A. The Missing Piece: A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform School. Civic Enterprise. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558068.pdf

## 3.3. Integrating equity measures in SQRP tools

As previously mentioned, there are multiple sources of information that could potentially measure equity. However, due to the broad nature of the questions, some may not associate the issue with equity. For example, the indicator for supportive environment asks if teachers have high expectations for students and support; without disaggregating the data based on race and academic performance, we would not be able to see if there are differential treatments between students as inequity can extend to individual classrooms.

At the school level, additional indicators that could be added as measurement could include the diversity of teachers, the conduct of diversity and inclusion training, and discipline practices in school. Having a diverse set of teachers and increasing the feeling of similarities between student and teachers is believed to impact students' academic and non-academic performance in school. Redding, C. (2019) conducted a study that shows that African American students score higher on achievement tests when assigned to African American teachers. However, the finding was less consistent for Latino students.[11] Having a shared background may improve teachers' understanding that they hold the same expectations for all students. Additional measures of teacher's diversity can incentivize schools to hire a more diverse staff and support teacher education program efforts to recruit and distribute teachers of color across schools.

Recruiting a more diverse teaching staff and allocating good quality teachers throughout the district may be a long-term policy that requires time to implement. The policy does not suggest replacing all current teachers in schools where it lacks diversity. In the short term, schools can be held accountable for conducting diversity and inclusion training for existing teachers. Ensuring teachers can communicate effectively with students and establish trust is a way for schools to build a safer environment for kids to thrive.

Setting an indicator for the number of teachers trained in combination to discipline practice can act as a proxy to understand if there are changes in teacher's behavior. Additionally, parent and student surveys also need to ask a more direct question to evaluate inequity. It is often the case that school discipline policies and punishment levels are disproportionally biased against black and brown children. Such disproportionality is one of the likely causes of the racial

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[11] Redding, C. (2019). A Teacher Like Me: A Review of the Effect of Student-Teacher Racial/Ethnic Matching on Teacher Perceptions of Students and Student Academic and Behavioral Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research August 2019, Vol 89, No. 4, 499-535.* DOI: 10.3102/0034654319853545

achievement gap as harsh discipline destroys students' trust in schools and teachers and students' self-esteem.[12]

### 3.4. Addressing the learning achievement gap caused by COVID-19

To understand the extent of impact from the disruption brought by COVID-19, schools would need to conduct a diagnostic test. Students would need to understand that the diagnostic is designed to inform the needs of each child. If schools and districts rely on high-stake measurement tools such as standardized testing in specific subjects, such tests can overwhelm children. Results of standardized testing to evaluate learning during the pandemic will only highlight opportunity gaps that put low-income students at a disadvantage. Previous studies on online learning show it is only effective if students have consistent internet access and when teachers are specifically trained to teach online.[13]

To tackle the learning achievement gap caused by the pandemic districts should provide additional resources for schools to provide tutoring. A meta-analysis of studies using randomized evaluations shows tutoring (supplemental one-on-one or small group instructions) as an effective method to help students learn.[14] The program is shown strongest among elementary school students. It is also more effective when teachers or paraprofessional tutors teach rather than volunteers or parent tutors. Alternatively, schools could provide extended learning time intervention staffed by qualified teachers.

Alternatively, acceleration programs outside school hours of targeted instructions can provide struggling students with assistance. The initiative could take form as a summer program or be implemented by extending the upcoming school year.[15] To begin, schools will need to identify students in need of assistance. Framing the program as acceleration rather than remedial learning that takes students out of the classroom would be key to ensure students are not labeled as underachievers. Low achieving students are often labeled when they are sorted based on talent. These labels are often built into their sense of self and performance patterns.[16]

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[12] Olou, I. (2018). So you want to talk about race. Seal Press.
[13] Garcia, E. and Weiss, E. (2020). COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and US education policy. *Economic Policy Institute. https://files.epi.org/pdf/205622.pdf*
[14] J-PAL Evidence Review. (2020). The transformative potential of tutoring for PreK12 learning outcomes: Learning from randomized evaluation.
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/Evidence-Review_The-Transformative-Potential-of-Tutoring.pdf
[15] Allensworth E. and Schartz N. (2020). School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss. *EdResearch for Recovery, June 2020. https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_1.pdf*
[16] Payne, C. (2008). So Much Reform, So Little Change. Cambridge: MA, Harvard Education Press. Pg. 26

A challenge to implement this initiative is an increased burden to teachers. Many have worked long hours to adapt to technology and the online learning environment. A supportive school environment built by positive relationships between teacher and students and between adults (teacher-parents, among teachers, and teacher-parents) will be crucial to students learning loss recovery. The lack of trust between adults and low mutual expectations are often social barriers to school change.[17] Providing additional incentives for teachers who conduct additional tutoring or hiring additional tutors are potential alternatives to ensure teachers are not overworked due to the proposal. The district can hire and allocate school staff members, undergraduate students in education, and service fellows for the program based on the number of students who needed support in each school.

## IV.  Stakeholder Analysis and Communication Plan

### Students

To implement the revised SQRP measures, students will be the main subjects of many measurement tools through tests and surveys and beneficiaries as schools improve over time. As students return to schools in the fall, they will face a diagnostic test, standardized exams, and a series of surveys throughout the year. In designing potential tools for the new SQRP, CPS should minimize overlap between the measured indicators and the tools. Reducing surveys, tests, and tools would not only benefit the district and school administrators but students at the receiving end of these tools.

Students who are of age should be informed of the purpose of the different tests and surveys. Understanding some tests is to better assist students instead of filtering students may remove some of the pressures from the different types of tests carried out by the district, state, and federal level.

### Parents

Parents play an essential role in advocating for changes and in supporting schools in implementing reforms. Results from SQRP are only helpful if the information that results from the measures are accessible and easy to understand not only for school administrators but also parents. Currently, parents can access multiple sites to obtain information on the quality of schools. However, it is less clear how often parents refer to these sources of information. Making SQRP accessible to parents will require the Advisory Board to engage parents. For

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[17] *Ibid, pg. 69.*

example, town hall meetings could be conducted to understand how parents define quality school and how they receive such information in the past. The forum could act as an avenue to inform parents of the new SQRP measures, how they will be implemented, and room for feedbacks.

By having parents understand their role in the new SQRP measures, for example, as survey recipients or as recipients of school's quality report cards, parents are aware of the higher expectations set on schools. The co-ownership over the program may be critical to ensure the program's sustainability, specifically in having parents fill out surveys and voice their concerns on school management or practices.

### *Principals and School Administrators*

The SQRP Advisory Board should engage Principals and School Administrators when determining useful indicators and survey questions to evaluate equity and school climate. Notably, as principals and school administrators will be the main actors that follow up with SQRP results, they would have a better idea of what kind of information would be useful.

Additionally, CPS should encourage principals and school administrators to capture the learning of the pandemic and assess the mental health of teachers to assist in informing the post-pandemic transition plans.

### *Teachers*

The Chicago Teachers Union is one of the main stakeholders who are against the current SQRP model. Engagement, a representative member of the CTU throughout the process of creating the new SQRP, would be beneficial to obtain their buy-in support. As many teachers strongly support social-emotional learning instead of standardized testing to measure the quality of schools, CPS should collaborate with CTU on SED measures and guidelines to adapt in classrooms.

## V. Timeline of Proposed Solutions

| 2021 | District | SQRP Advisory Board | School (Principal & Teachers) |
|---|---|---|---|
| June | Assess available measurement & learning over the pandemic.<br>- Prepare a timeline for interviews | Discuss indicators and plans to capture equity and SED measures within the advisory group. | Capture learnings during the pandemic |
| | Discuss alternative plans to capture school quality during online learning | | |
| July | Prepare Academic Diagnostic to prepare for student's return to in-person classes | Discuss learning of pandemic with the district office. | Open student enrolment |
| August | | Obtain input from stakeholders on indicators and survey plan to capture additional information for SQRP | Inform parents of in-person learning plans and upcoming assessments |
| September | | | Conduct a diagnostic assessment to students |
| October | - Pilot additional tutoring programs in selected schools to see potential impact.<br>-Evaluate learning achievement at the end of the semester. | Finalize new indicator and survey questions for the SQRP 3.0. | Conduct tutoring or accelerated learning. |
| November | | | |
| December | | | |
| 2022 | Integrate results of a survey into a dashboard and inform principals and school administrators to assist with reforms when necessary. | Announce the new SQRP policy to the public to obtain inputs. | Inform parents and students of the new SQRP policy and how the policy will influence the school. |