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Learning in a Sanctuary City: Understanding How Sullivan High School's Newcomers Academy Uniquely Functions Within Chicago Public Schools

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Abstract

This qualitative research project aims to close the gap created by our country's physical distance to many newcomers' countries of origin as well as by our likely unfamiliarity with others' experiences due to cultural and language barriers. Drawing from conversations with 10 participants involved in education, ethnographic research, and refugee resettlement, four main findings were identified that serve to explain how Sullivan High School functions within the larger CPS system. Participants' personal sentiments offered explicit relationship-building strategies that prioritize trust, revealed a shared commitment to open-minded teaching and learning, recognized the value of newcomer students on a larger scale, and highlighted the important role external organizations play in students' lives. Overall, this research finds the need for a willingness to reevaluate current operations and duplicate models that have demonstrated success, adoption of personalized learning in pursuit of holistic evaluation of students, and increased transparency and communication at all levels of operation. Implementation of these three policy recommendations could enable schools to pursue greater goals for their students, which ultimately benefits communities at large.

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1. Introduction

Within the span of one decade, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, those internally displaced, and those displaced abroad has jumped from 38.5 million to 89.3 million. Recent statistics, which reflect the consequences of the war in Ukraine, estimate the events of 2022 have produced a record breaking global total of 100 million people forcibly displaced. In the past, the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR 2023) annual reports have wavered between 30 and 50 million. However, once trends and graphs are translated into and conceptualized as human lives affected, these seemingly distant quantitative measures cause an unnerving effect. While some may question how the city of Chicago can stand out as an ally in such a large-scale global issue, one need look no further than articles featured in local publications like the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun Times. In 2011, Fatima Omareign and her family of four were pushed out of their home during the Syrian civil war (Briscoe & Lourgos 2015). However, after a four year journey, Fatima found some peace in Chicago. Shortly after the United States military withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban took full control of the country, Siam Pasarly believed the safest decision would be to take the opportunity to resettle in Chicago alongside his wife and children (Malagón 2022). These stories demonstrate how Chicago is currently dedicated to providing aid. However, changes in presidential administrations and a lack of resources has left many city and state leaders ill-prepared to embrace the overwhelming amount of people that have been told they would be taken care of.

Although it has not received the same media attention as the city at large, Roger C. Sullivan High School, part of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district and tucked into Chicago's North Side neighborhood Rogers Park, has a longstanding reputation for welcoming newcomers amongst their larger population of local Chicago students. Given the unique makeup

of their student population, the issue at hand for schools like Sullivan spans far beyond test scores. The word 'family,' the first of Sullivan's four core values, hints at how the school differs from others solely in pursuit of meeting CPS academic standards and brings into question how schools, teachers, and other education practitioners care for their students, whether or not they are newcomers. After hearing about the unimaginable amount of conflict and violence displacing people around the world through the media, it can be easy to assume such events are far removed from our daily lives in the United States. Few would disagree with the fact that stories in the news are emblematic of much larger unresolved social issues, yet many fail to consider how their broader implications actively affect people much closer to their own communities than expected.

The lives of many Americans, although not forced to flee the country due to war, are impacted by racial discrimination, gun violence, and economic disparity, among many other societal harms, daily. This research aims to close the gap created by our country's physical distance to many newcomers' countries of origin as well as by our likely unfamiliarity with others' experiences due to cultural and language barriers. In order to mitigate feelings of resistance to the idea of building relationships and taking action from either side, I urge people to imagine a reality where individuals from every type of community approaches each interaction with the same level of compassion and desire to connect as students and teachers of Sullivan. As the feasibility of such an idyllic vision is difficult to predict, this study uses original qualitative research to answer the following questions: How does Sullivan High School function within the larger CPS system given the unique role it plays as Chicago's default newcomer center for immigrant and refugee students? What factors have the most impact on what such schools are capable of accomplishing? And what do stakeholders' experiences tell us about what should be the aims of places like Sullivan?

Chicago, along with cities like Los Angeles and New York City, has become known for its noble history participating in immigration intake. However, the vulnerabilities of sanctuary policies, which become evident when resources like housing are scarce, elicits much less nationwide attention. This reality poses an important question around the responsibility that comes with declaring sanctuary status that has yet to be formally addressed by politicians. Similarly, English as a Second Language (ESL) programs of the past seem to have taken attention away from the movement towards establishing more newcomer programs that set out to exceed the goals of more traditional bilingual-tailored curricula. In fact, educators of newcomer students often refer to their departments as ELL to emphasize the fact that many students speak more than one language prior to their arrival in the U.S., sometimes making English their third or fourth language. The unique quality newcomer programs bring to school districts are easily applaudable, but evidence of tokenism seems to hinder further expansion. So as to point out the implications each of these topics have had and will continue to have on Sullivan's success, I discuss the background of sanctuary cities and newcomer programs in detail.

To contextualize the work of the Newcomers Academy at Sullivan High School and programs similar to it, I then review existing academic research on the education of immigrant and refugee students in CPS and the world at large, identifying three main gaps in the literature. More specifically, there is an absence of research offering 1) the identification of actionable items, especially with respect to non-Spanish speaking English language learners, that help students overcome statistics and alleviate pressure on teachers to meet district-wide standards, 2) in-depth analyses of the key components of successful newcomer programs, and 3) a discussion of the ways in which stakeholders in and beyond the field of education contribute to dismantling negative stereotypes. By conducting my own qualitative research, I study each of these areas

empirically with the aim of formulating policy recommendations for both education stakeholders and school districts at large to adopt. After explaining the details of how I conduct my qualitative research, collecting data from a wide range of subjects involved in education, ethnographic research, and a combination of non-profit and volunteer work, I share an in-depth discussion of my findings from the interview process. Drawing from a total of 10 interviews, I found that many adults in and beyond the Sullivan community are aware of strategies to support and make up for the lack of coverage on programs uniquely designed to meet the needs of newcomer students. However, a handful of obstacles, in addition to those that already complicate faculty's ability to advocate for more resources in large school districts like CPS, limit the opportunity to share ideas already in practice and the ability to brainstorm new ones. Participants' personal sentiments offered explicit relationship-building strategies that prioritize trust and, accordingly, overcome statistics, reveal a shared commitment to open-minded teaching and learning, recognize the value of newcomer students on a larger scale, and highlight the important role both community-based and non-profit organizations play in students' lives.

Due to the fact that my own conclusions about the factors that impact schools like Sullivan stem from individuals' personal opinions and lived experiences, I make connections to previously mentioned literature and help readers navigate disagreeing sentiments whenever necessary. The paper concludes with several high-level policy recommendations rooted in the experiences of the participants, suggesting a need for 1) a willingness to reevaluate current operations and duplicate models that have demonstrated success, 2) adoption of personalized learning in pursuit of holistic evaluation of students, and 3) increased transparency and communication at all levels of operation.

2. History & Background

2.1 Chicago as a Sanctuary City

Across the country, there exist over 100 “sanctuary cities,” cities that limit, often by means of a resolution or ordinance, the participation of local officials in law enforcement of federal immigration law (O’Brien et. al. 2017, 4). Chicago, which has been recognized as a sanctuary city for over 40 years, remains at the forefront of these efforts to provide displaced persons with the shelter, protection, and resources required to build a new life in America. With a longstanding history as, what former Mayor Rahm Emanuel described, a “welcoming city” (City of Chicago 2022), Chicago continues to open its arms to immigrants and refugees. While sanctuary policies vary between state and municipal jurisdictions, former Mayor Lori Lightfoot has demonstrated her commitment to the inclusiveness and protection of all residents, regardless of their immigration status. Lightfoot’s decision to strengthen the existing ordinance in light of the increasing needs of families looking to resettle in Chicago consequently disabled cooperation between local police and federal immigration authorities (Tareen 2021).

In the fall of 2022, the city partnered with local advocacy programs and non-profit organizations in an effort to help the Venezuelan asylum seekers sent by Texas Governor Greg Abbott without notice. After witnessing communities across Illinois struggle to provide Afghan and Ukranian families with the resources they needed to recover and resettle, Governor J.B. Pritzker issued an emergency disaster proclamation encouraging and granting permission to the state to accelerate the procurement of transport, emergency housing, food, and health screenings on September 14, 2022. Accompanying the proclamation was a message from the Governor, reiterating Illinois's role as a safe haven: “Let me be clear: while other states may be treating these vulnerable families as pawns, here in Illinois, we are treating them as people" (Illinois

2022). Although such statements demonstrate how some political leaders are unafraid to push back on what they view as a blatant disregard of human rights by other state governments, recent delays in the resettlement process for large non-profit agencies have demonstrated how good intentions do not necessarily translate into beneficial outcomes for those on the receiving end of sanctuary policies.

Without sufficient resources, even the most well-intentioned politicians can fail to keep their promises. For example, the lack of access to affordable housing has proven to impact not only migrants' ability to resettle, but also local Chicagoans' ability to afford prices within their communities. In fact, based on a survey to gauge which areas voters are most concerned about in Chicago's 2023 municipal elections, WBEZ, Chicago Sun-Times, and the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics collaboratively discovered more than 23 percent of respondents wanted to know candidates' plans for creating more affordable housing (Keefe 2023). The most recent example of how politics around the city's resource allocation has overlapped, and perhaps even come into conflict, with its sanctuary policies involves the former James Wadsworth Elementary School located on Chicago's South Side. As a result of Rahm Emanuel's infamous mass school closure in 2013, which promised academic success to those forced to enroll in a new school, Wadsworth has been vacant for nearly a decade and requires countless infrastructure repairs. Unfortunately for families of Wadsworth, and the other 49 CPS schools located in predominantly Black neighborhoods that have been impacted by Emanuel's policy, the school closures resulted in lower test scores, high transfer rates for students who were physically relocated to welcome the influx of students from closed schools, and severed relationships between teachers, students, and parents (Gordon et. al. 2018). The outcomes of this aggressive attempt at education reform generated lasting frustration with and distrust in city officials. Since

Lightfoot decided to use the now loosely renovated Wadsworth as temporary housing to accommodate roughly 250 Venezuelan migrants after reaching maximum capacity in other resettlement locations, those feelings have only continued to grow.

Although 20th Ward Alderman Jeanette Taylor postponed the opening of the "shelter" in an attempt to gather more answers for her uninformed constituents, the city moved forward (Gettinger 2023). Several community members have expressed how much of the Woodlawn community's pushback is not rooted in "anti-migrant" or "Black vs. Brown" rhetoric (Khera 2023), rather, people are acknowledging how irresponsible it is to advertise that migrants are being welcomed, when the building remains in poor condition and the city continues to ignore the locals' ongoing cries for investment (Khera 2023; Malagón 2023). Evidently, whether or not the city has room to embrace more individuals has little effect on the strength of the city's commitment to maintaining their position in the larger partisan debate on immigration policy. Thus, the city's experience with obstacles in the resettlement process arising out of a lack of resources poses the question: Can Chicago continue to advertise its sanctuary status when it struggles to provide the services and support it promises to families seeking asylum?

2.2 Newcomer Programs

Over time, ESL programs in the United States have been developed to accommodate rising immigrant populations. However, the fact that the success of curricula specially tailored to teach nonnative English-speaking students depends on the level of said students' existing literacy skills and exposure to American culture, means these same programs do not always translate well for newcomers (Short 2002, 174). More prevalent in urban areas, like Chicago, than suburban neighborhoods, newcomer programs take into account a wider variety of students' positionality within the American education system with some having little to no English

proficiency, low literacy, or even limited access to schooling in the countries they have since left. Individual schools often have the flexibility to set their own supplementary goals, such as increasing parental involvement, but all newcomer programs mutually prioritize helping students navigate grade-level requirements so that they may graduate in a timely manner. In other words, the self-designation as a newcomer program does not necessarily guarantee the school will make students feel safe and confident in their learning. And the consequences of an unsuccessful program put the community at risk of moving further away from the ultimate goal of increasing access to education as advocates have found that "singling out specific student populations affects the entire school climate and has been shown to reduce attendance for all student groups" (Jodaitis 2017).

Even so, most of the resistance seems to have less to do with a critique about the effectiveness of such programs and much more to do with certain people's disapproval of educating children from other countries. To some, the benefits of schools like Sullivan may seem obvious, but newcomer programs, like many other forms of specialized education, continue to fight for resources and recognition. In 2002, the 12-year-old Bellagio Road Newcomer Center, was closed by the Los Angeles Board of Education, unable to justify paying for the $550,000 annual bus fees required by students without an alternative means of transportation and more focused on luring middle-class families away from private schools (Moore 2012). Accused of coddling their students to a point that led them to fail by district standards, Bellagio faced many of the same criticisms commonly shared by those in opposition of newcomer programs across the U.S.. According to New York City's Comptroller Brad Lander, last year's additional $12 million in funding granted to public schools that serve students, many of whom come from South American countries, living in temporary housing is well below the actual amount owed to these

unofficial newcomer schools (Zimmerman 2022). Evidently, because Los Angeles and New York, like Chicago, operate on sanctuary policies, the probability of newcomer programs lasting is dependent on buy-in from the community they are situated in and the policies and practices of those in charge.

Related to the growing debate about improving education for newcomers is the history of the sanctuary movement established in the 1980s. Described as “a coalition of religious congregations, local jurisdictions, [and] educational institutions…that commit to supporting immigrants, regardless of status” (Paik 2017), it was actually through this unofficial network of immigration advocates that the movement reached city and state policies. Although educators made up part of the grassroots effort to shield families from the threat of deportation, *Plyer v. Doe*, a 1982 landmark Supreme Court case that recognized the constitutional right of access to education for all K-12 students, including those who are undocumented, also served an important role in solidifying the relationship between *all* children and education. Certainly though, issues around equitable education still remain. The classroom has long been presumed to be a space offering safety and stability for all students, but there is a reason why Sullivan stands out among the sea of 635 schools that make up CPS. Dubbed ‘Refugee High’ shortly after the publication of author Elly Fishman’s article about the school in the *Chicago* magazine circulated throughout the school district, students have found their place at Sullivan since its founding in 1923, when many Irish and German immigrants enrolled upon their arrival in the U.S. (Fishman 2017). Several other schools within CPS are equipped to teach classes for English language learners (ELL) and a handful are known to be inviting to newcomer students, but few, if any, have a program as robust as Sullivan’s Newcomers Academy. Designed to meet the academic, social, and emotional

needs of their growing immigrant and refugee student population, Sullivan offers hope for other schools aspiring to accomplish the same goals.

Over the past four years, CPS, the nation's fourth largest school district (Vevea & Peña 2022), has expressed its mission to "provide a high quality education for every child, in every neighborhood" (Chicago Public Schools 2018, 13). A self-proclaimed "district on the rise," CPS leaders pride themselves on the observed improvements in student performance at all grade levels, including a 2018 graduation rate of 78.2% said to be driven by Latinx and Black students, who make up 46.7% and 36.6% of the overall student population respectively (Chicago Public Schools 2018, 7). While its commitment to equity is both admirable and necessary for the success of the two largest minority groups in the city of Chicago, in only two paragraphs of the entire five-year plan can one find the words 'refugee' and 'Newcomer Center.' While CPS has shown support for Sullivan's Newcomers Academy, it remains the only school with a social worker hired and curriculum uniquely designed to "meet the needs of a diverse student body through differentiated instructional methods" in the context of newcomer students. Thus, Sullivan's reputation as the district's standout "Refugee High" seems to reflect a box-checking practice unlikely to withstand potential budget cuts or changes in philosophy. For this reason, a thorough evaluation of unique schools, like Sullivan, is needed in order to recognize the contribution made to CPS beyond any individual schools' efficiency and economic value.

3. Literature Review

This section will review existing literature in an effort to situate Sullivan's work within the Chicago community and the U.S.. I have identified three main areas where my research can make a contribution. However, in order to appreciate how the research of others helps guide the direction of this paper and its aims, I find it necessary to first address the ways in which the

stated equity goals of CPS are not necessarily reflected in practice and how the history of access to education helps contextualize why that is the case.

Made evident by the absence of language related to newcomers in the CPS Five-Year Vision, the specific needs of schools like Sullivan that offer specialized resources for immigrant and refugee student populations are at risk of going unnoticed by the district's resource allocation processes (Kunichoff 2019). Some studies advocated for increased reliance on school-level analyses, as opposed to the default district-level, to identify resource disparities even before changes in leadership at CPS made progress more promising (Rubenstein 1998, 468). But issues with equity persist in the district (Lee & Lubienski 2017, 69), which serves a total of 322,106 students (CPS 2022), and in other states across the U.S. (Gonzales 2010, 473). Drawing from his cross-sectional examination of CPS resource allocations for a single year, Ross Rubenstein critiques CPS' history of adopting decentralization efforts. For, such efforts make minimal positive impact when schools are held accountable for their outcomes without being given the resources necessary to achieve those outcomes (Rubenstein 1998, 489). Economists like Eric Hanushek also contribute to circulating doubts, suggesting that while many practitioners now reject utilization of standardized test scores as a reliable measurement of the productivity and success of schools, the fundamental investment in education has potentially always been selfish. Even the landmark Supreme Court ruling of Plyler v. Doe, where Justice Brennan reasoned that education "provides the basic tools by which individuals might lead economically productive lives to the benefit of us all," makes it clear that, throughout history, advocates of equal access to education have ingeniously relied on the institution's relation to economic productivity (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts 1982). Rooted in the idea that schooling is "healthy, wealthy, and wise" for democracy and the economy, this detached motivation may explain why

some systems' reform efforts seem to perpetuate the problem of quantity over quality (Hanushek 1986, 1151; Reyes & Valencia 1993, 263-6; Antrop-González 2003, 243). And as schools strive to both broaden curriculum offerings and meet the demands of growing populations, students face the consequences of the country's unshakeable teacher shortage, most prevalent in high-poverty schools (García & Weiss 2019, 12). While these evaluations of urban school districts cannot provide definitive solutions to CPS' struggles, they offer an incentive to better understand how the composition of CPS uniquely affects each of its 635 schools.

With these details in mind the findings section proceeds to highlight the absence of 1) actionable items that help students overcome statistics and alleviate pressure on teachers to meet district-wide standards, 2) in-depth analyses of the key components of successful newcomer programs, and 3) a discussion of the ways in which stakeholders in and beyond the field of education contribute to dismantling negative stereotypes across existing literature.

3.1 The Obstacles of English Language Learners

One important factor guiding the advancement of education research focused on schools' impact on their communities is recognition of the value of capturing students' lived experiences. Still, case studies chronicling the stories of undocumented immigrant students (Gonzales 2010) and those tracking the educational trajectory of English language learners (ELL) (Gwyne et. al. 2012; de la Torre et. al. 2019) tend to exclude non-Hispanic immigrants and refugees from their main data collection. In 2012, one out of every seven students in CPS enrolled as an English learner (Gwyne et. al. 2012, 5) and they continue to be the fastest growing demographic of students in the United States, making up 22.4% of all the district's students. Considering nearly half (46.5%) of CPS' current student population are Latino, the decision to do so, for scholars

focusing on Chicago, is understandable. However, as the city reinforces sanctuary policies, the need for specialized teaching to accommodate students of all ages will only continue to grow.

When ELL students enter a predominantly English-speaking school, they must learn to speak, read, and write in a new language while trying to catch up with concepts in math, history, and science at the level of their native English-speaking peers. A study conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that Latino students who entered CPS as ELLs and obtained proficiency before sixth grade ultimately performed better than even some of their Latino classmates who have never been designated as an ELL (Gwyne et. al. 2012, 49). Conversely, a separate longitudinal study, constructing the majority of its conclusions based on the educational outcomes of Spanish speakers, found that students who did not demonstrate proficiency and entered the ninth grade as an ELL were less likely to be on-track to graduate (de la Torre et. al. 2019, 34). Although these results are not entirely holistic in that they do not take into account the socioeconomic and cultural factors that often put students without exposure to higher education opportunities at a disadvantage (Roderick et. al. 2008, 91), they do demonstrate how intervention at an early age has proved to be quite successful for helping students stay on track.

Unfortunately for the district, meeting the needs of their incoming immigrant and refugee students at the elementary level is not feasible at schools like Sullivan High School. With roughly 40 languages spoken—Spanish, Rohingya, Swahili, and Arabic to name a few—and more than 50 countries represented at Sullivan, students' educational backgrounds are sometimes unpredictable. Some researchers have labeled one subpopulation of ELLs, students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE), to prompt discussion about how SLIFE are required to meet grade-level expectations of the U.S. public school system despite possibly healing from exposure

to war, extreme poverty, or racism and discrimination (Decapua & Marshall 2011). As a result, when robust practices are not in place, an immense amount of pressure can be placed on teachers to correctly assign their students to the appropriate level of learning. Others remind readers that some refugee students come from countries where, even in the absence of war or violent politics, access to education is limited (Gahungu et. al. 2011, 5). As a result, the task of integrating students into the community becomes more challenging for counselors, teachers, and administrators. Evidently, there is a need for research to identify and evaluate the strategies schools like Sullivan High School utilize to develop comprehensive programs that help its students overcome the statistics that currently frame ELL-related discourse.

3.2 The Role of Education

In addition to the language barrier many immigrant and refugee students must learn to overcome when they first arrive in the United States, they are faced with the challenge of acclimating to an entirely new culture and may still be in need of support to recover from being persecuted for their race, religion, or political opinion (Magan and Padgett 2021). By examining how students, supported by the International Rescue Committee's Healing Classrooms Initiatives, perceive the role of schooling in their refugee or post conflict context lives, one piece of research found that high quality and relevant material is much more indicative of positive well-being than the number of students that attend schools (Winthrop & Kirk 2008). This finding brings attention to the ways in which the arguments that identify schooling as a source of stability and socialization heavily rely on the false or premature assumption that attendance can be equated to a supportive learning environment. In reality, families and children can be exposed to discriminatory practices, met with leaders attempting to discourage or delay enrollment, before they even step foot in the classroom (Booi et. al. 2016, 17). That is not to say, however,

that no school is able to foster a sense of community among its local and recently enrolled newcomers. In fact, for the majority of scholars engaged with the field of education, more specifically those who investigate its contribution to students' lives, there is no reason for debate. The idea that classrooms offer students an opportunity to gain a sense of belonging (Antrop-González 2003, 235) and escape from problems beyond their control, whether they inflict physical or emotional harm (Bloom 1995; Blitz et. al. 2020), is widely agreed upon. One alternative high school, founded in 1972 and designed specifically to meet the needs of the high dropout rates of Puerto Rican students in Chicago at the time, has been successful enough to exemplify the "school as sanctuary" concept (Antrop-González 2003).

While even in-depth qualitative research cannot generalize attitudes from the handful of perspectives they hear from, few question the conclusions of these studies, some of which draw from personal narratives. Beyond the obvious lure of improving one's academic performance, many understand schooling to provide a space for students to explore their identity relative to the surrounding student body (Adderley et. al. 2003, 196). In spite of the overwhelming optimism around the effects of schooling, conversations about programs serving immigrant and refugee students are limited to the potential positive impact on their academic achievement (Fuligni 2006), not their well-being. And those that do find potential for schooling to support students' well-being, emphasizing the importance of socializing with peers, showing and receiving respect, and having their agency recognized, only touch on classroom settings outside of the U.S. (Winthrop & Kirk 2008, 656). The absence of literature reporting such findings in this country may be a result of scholars' preferred focus or it may indicate a lack of case studies that exemplify the same commitment to creating a respectful and nurturing space Sullivan preaches. Based on the results of a comparative case study approach discussing the conditions of 14

different refugee-hosting nation states, one group of researchers goes as far as reconceptualizing refugee education to better "reflect how [they] are simultaneously embedded within multiple national contexts and to address the exclusions they face within each one" (Dryden-Peterson et. al. 1997). Importantly though, there is power to be recognized in immigrant and refugee students' stories. Carola Suárez-Orozoco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin, all of whom conducted the mixed-methods Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (LISA), are among the minority of scholars that remind their audience of the strengths—strong family ties and deep-seated beliefs in education—newcomers bring to the U.S. in addition to their stories of overcoming adversity (Suárez-Orozco et. al. 2009). Although this team of researchers captured the adaptation patterns of hundreds of students from five countries—Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico—over the course of five years, my research will take advantage of a more intimate interviewing process and contribute to their efforts by pinpointing what practices and people in the field of education promote newcomers' academic engagement and achievement and help them celebrate their culture and identity.

It is also important to note that an extensive case study on Sullivan has been done by author Elly Fishman's published book *Refugee High: Coming of Age in America*, which shared the interactions happening inside the classrooms of Sullivan and the walls of eight students' homes. Although Fishman's work certainly spearheaded the discussion of newcomer education in CPS and provides a level of insight into the lives of students often unattainable by "outsiders" of the district, she tells the story of her year-long stay at Sullivan through a journalistic lens. Drawing much more from observations of private conversations than interviews guided by policy-targeted questions, Fishman's book sacrifices the chance to provide recommendations and gather opinionated accounts from Sullivan's community. Focused on a time during the Trump

administration, Fishman's book pushes its readers to resist anti-immigrant rhetoric and consider the long lasting impact the decision to leave one's home country has. It was clear, however, that a part of faculties' experiences working with immigrant and refugee students still had to be told. For this reason, I decided to move forward with using Sullivan as the primary focus of my research, interviewing adults that played crucial roles in building the Newcomers Academy to better understand the mindset they adopted and risks they took to get them to where they are.

3.3 Bigger than Schools

Perhaps most important to note, one area of focus lacking in existing research is how the resettlement process that is inflicted on immigrant and refugee students transcends the field of education. Not all major cities function on the same set of sanctuary policies as Chicago, and even more reject the practice entirely. For policymakers and politicians, there remains a lingering concern to find a way to maximize the impact of available dollars for newcomers' resettlement in order to minimize the use of an already scarce amount of financial resources set aside for other vulnerable populations (Silverman 1993, 177). Although more Americans have learned to embrace all that immigrants offer, there is no shortage of people that continue traditions of passing judgment on anyone that simply speaks a language foreign to them (Roucek 1962, 226). Furthermore, there has been qualitative research that brings into light the Western frames of understanding what it means to be a refugee and the influence they have on refugees' own perception of themselves (Baak 2021). Suspected to be particularly harmful is the labeling of refugees once they have resettled, causing undying feelings of discomfort in the countries they eventually hope to, or already do, call home. Through this particular study, and by reflecting on previous projects documenting refugee experiences, Baak finds that the refugee label is not inherently problematic. However, the negative connotations it frequently carries in conversation

and socialization puts people at risk of being treated as foreign, helpless, and even lacking agency. Even as adults, immigrants and refugees deeply value community as it has the ability to break down the geographic barrier separating them from the cultural practices of their home (Magan and Padgett 2021).

Although much of the existing literature on the education practices related to immigrant and refugee students has both identified obstacles faced by most of the stakeholders involved and attempted to evaluate policy's impact, few provide concrete solutions for improving programs in place today. Moreover, the perspectives of relevant stakeholders, including teachers and students, are difficult to capture, and thus, rarely put into conversation with one another. This paper will rely on stakeholders' analysis of the programs they are involved in, effected by, or researching themselves, to identify some of the most pressing issues related to and the accomplishments achieved by newcomer centers as well as inform recommendations for future practice.

4. Methodology

This paper utilizes qualitative research, more specifically interview data collection, to further explore how Sullivan, which serves a unique subpopulation of Chicago, functions within the Chicago Public Schools district. Although every CPS school undergoes annual evaluations that produce data reflecting students' and teachers' performance, standardized test scores and GPA averages fall short of capturing people's lived experience. In any area of study, it is difficult to capture people's emotions and opinions. Gathering such valuable information in the context of education presents an additional challenge in that individuals are often reduced to how they fit into a large database of easily characterizable statistics rather than how their background, culture, and other factors related to identity offer a unique perspective on the school community in question. While simplification does promote an ease of understanding in some instances, in

others, it can dangerously ignore insights that reveal both strengths and weaknesses of a given policy or practice. Seeing that over 100 refugee students enrolled at Sullivan in their 2017-2018 school year, it seemed necessary to grant the school's faculty and administration the liberty to speak freely without having to worry about their individual opinions and experiences getting lost in a generalized narrative about Chicago Public Schools. One-on-one interviews allowed me to establish a personal connection with the participants, learn from those who have contributed to the growth of programs within the school, and gather the anecdotal evidence to responsibly guide and support my policy recommendations.

The recruiting process for this research took form in several stages. I first reached out to participants through purposive sampling. Because the research focuses on one particular CPS school, I suspected those directly involved in its processes would have the most to offer with respect to providing information about how the school functions, what factors dictate its success, and what strengths and weaknesses they have identified. Jennifer Ciok, who was assigned to Sullivan High School for five years (2015-2020) during her time as the Social Emotional Learning Manager for the non-profit New Root, formerly known as Umoja, kindly assisted me in the recruitment process of some participants. Ms. Ciok also assisted me in identifying some current teachers that would be able to speak about the ELL department specifically. Prior to concluding each of these interviews, I used the snowball sampling technique, asking all participants, who were willing and comfortable with doing so, to share information about the research to any stakeholders they deemed would be able to make a contribution.

Ultimately, a total of 10 participants were recruited, five of whom represent the Sullivan community. Tony Smith, former History teacher and pioneer of the senior seminar program, Liz Bruss, former Chair of the Counseling Department, and Chad Thomas, former Principal, all

either retired or left Sullivan for other job opportunities. The remaining two participants from Sullivan include Joshua Zepeda, ELL Social Worker and EL Grade Level Lead, as well as Annmarie Handley, ELL English teacher. Not only do they provide a more up-to-date perspective on the status of Sullivan's programming, but their participation also enabled me to combine the experiences of those who worked strictly within the ELL department with faculty and administration that jointly engaged with the portion of the student body born and raised in Chicago—Mr. Smith, Ms. Bruss, and Mr. Thomas. Recognizing how valuable it would be to include the perspective of a school outside of CPS doing work similar to Sullivan, I also asked Ms. Ciok to help me connect with Mario Perez, co-founder and current Social Science teacher of District 214's Newcomer Center, located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Of the four remaining participants, Professor René Flores from the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology is the furthest removed from working directly with newcomer students. His research on the public's perceptions of undocumented immigrants in a variety of spaces, however, helps to explain why many of the educators included in this study are as committed to teaching their students as they are to teaching members of surrounding communities. Carolyn Monteagudo's role as a K-12 Case Management Lead at a large Chicago-based resettlement agency gives insight into non-profit involvement, and Anna Zonderman and Lisa Jenschke demonstrate what that kind of support looks like on a community-based level.

While it is preferable for all interviews to be conducted in-person, I recognized the added safety, security, and flexibility remote options provide, so all participants were given the choice to participate on Zoom or via phone call. Additionally, once the interview session began, participants were asked for permission to record audio and video of the meeting. Although all participants in this study agreed for release of their identity, requests of those who preferred to

remain anonymous would have been honored through the assignment of a pseudonym tailored to protect their identity to the degree they asked for. Depending on each interviewee's availability and the length of responses they chose to provide, the duration of each interview ranged from forty minutes to one hour and a half. Based on my experience with 10 participants, this range provided enough time to both gather contextual information about the participants and delve into their reflections and opinions. Prior to conducting the interviews, I developed two semi-structured interview guides, one for faculty and staff in schools and one for participants working in immigration research or resettlement, the latter of which was much shorter to allow for more in-depth questioning based on participants' expertise. Both guides included questions to prompt participants to share their experiences with and opinions about being a part of or interacting with a newcomer program, but the most valuable data came from impromptu follow-up questions. One that I decided to make permanent was, "Do you think any "prior" experience can prepare a principal/teacher for a student body as diverse as Sullivan's? Is there something distinct that sets some faculty/staff members apart from others?" After receiving such an honest and unexpected answer from my first interview subject, I decided to create an entire findings section related to participants' responses. For a detailed version of the guides, please refer to Appendix 2 and 3.

Although each of these participants provided a valuable contribution to my collection of data on the topic, there are some limitations that come with using lived experiences as the primary source of evidence. Each interviewee offered a unique perspective on the topic, oftentimes ones that could only be taken from an individual with their exact background, ideology, and set of experiences. In order to reduce the likelihood of biases dictating the direction of this research, the group of participants was carefully selected to represent a set of

different viewpoints. Nevertheless, it is both human nature and a valuable feature of this qualitative research for participants to factor in personal backgrounds when discussing opinions about topics as widely discussed as education policy in America. I proceeded with similar caution when making conclusions about identified themes across interviews as all participants made it explicitly clear that their views and responses to my questions were personal and do not necessarily reflect those of the larger organizations and institutions they are associated with.

5. Findings

Despite the fact that the participants in this study represent a variety of backgrounds, positionality, and experience with respect to the field of education, I have identified four ways in which the results of educators' policy implementation at Sullivan, and other newcomer programs, either affirm conclusions made by or address gaps identified in the existing research included in this paper's literature review. The findings sections that follow have been organized in the order the topics were introduced in the literature review.

The first section finds that, through prioritization of building trust through relationships, educators have both been able to overcome the statistics that inhibit the growth of English language learners and alleviate pressure on teachers to meet district-wide standards while evaluating students holistically. With the help of participants, particularly those who were once or still are teachers of newcomer students, this finding rectifies the lack of actionable items that address the obstacles the reliance on standardization practices have long created that existing research has identified. This paper's literature review also showed how researchers recognize education plays a role in newcomers' lives, but have not pinpointed exactly what components make newcomer programs successful. The next section reiterates the formative role education plays in newcomers' lives, suggesting how the mindset teachers choose to adopt has been

undervalued as a key component to the success of certain newcomer programs. By highlighting the steps educators have taken to shift harmful stereotypes, the third section tackles what results of existing research have revealed about how the ways in which society handles immigration and refugee resettlement cannot be viewed through an educational lens alone.

Through an initial overview of just a few participants' data, it quickly became clear that the community beyond school grounds determines the ultimate impact newcomer programs can have on students' lives. A fourth section, which touches on a topic unidentified in existing research, has been included as a result of more than half of the participants recommending I explore the role non-profit and community-based organizations play in the success of their newcomer program. Furthermore, the section provides insight into how families are supported in finding housing, securing a job, and accessing other basic services like healthcare. Altogether, these findings help to shape actionable policy recommendations for schools developing or hoping to establish their own newcomer program and demonstrate how learning from policies implemented within communities like Sullivan may be applicable to society at large. Please note, in the context of Sullivan, the terms 'Newcomers Academy' and 'ELL department' will be used interchangeably.

5.1 Building Trust, Overcoming Statistics

As previously mentioned in the discussion of the increasing need for newcomer programs dedicated to helping students navigate the inflexible American education system, standardization practices that plague many of the country's public school students can have even greater negative effects on English language learners (Gwyne et. al. 2012; de la Torre et. al. 2019; Decapua & Marshall 2011). This section begins with an evaluation of what Sullivan's educators first take into consideration when new students enter the program and how it relates to their overall

learning goals. It then continues into a discussion of how relationships within the school community determine the feasibility of functioning under a specialized system. While there is some variation in how teachers handle different situations, after just a few conversations with current and former faculty members, it became clear that every individual recognized strong relationships as the foundation required in order to pursue further goals in improving students' academic performance.

Prioritizing Students' Needs

The Common Core, a set of state standards all CPS school curricula are aligned with (CPS 2023), have long been advertised as a means to ensure an increase in students' post-secondary attainment as well as a way to boost the country's academic reputation compared to the rest of the world (Nelson 2015). As teachers are reminded of the grade-level specific learning goals laid out for math and language arts annually, the expectation for all students to perform has been criticized for sacrificing time to grasp concepts thoroughly in exchange for competitive standing and for imposing a new style of learning unfamiliar to many students' parents. Under the assumption that Sullivan's personalized learning approach to teaching was an act of resistance in response to being expected to holding their newcomer students to unreasonable standards, I asked teachers if they, as an unintended consequence of adopting an arguably more forgiving type of pedagogy, had to sacrifice the shared newcomer program mission to help ELL students reach the level of their native English-speaking peers in as little time as possible. With personalized learning curricula often criticized for falling short in academic rigor, Ms. Handley, the English teacher for Sullivan's ELL department, quickly clarified that Sullivan's classes are still 98% focused on academics. The Newcomers Academy is first and foremost part of a larger high school committed to supporting students' learning. Rather

than giving up on the possibility that newcomer students could eventually reach a point where the Common Core standards are realistic, the ELL team at Sullivan simply took a step back to reevaluate. In teaching, Ms. Handley relies on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

> It's basically a study of how people function as far as *not being able* to function at a higher level when your basic needs are not met. At the bottom is food and shelter and clothing. Then you can escalate into using your mind for other things. But if you don't have those things, even if you're capable of [conceiving of] those things, you can't [use your mind for learning]...That's the position our kids are in, and we have to address those needs before they're able to learn anything.

Unfortunately, sometimes, the basic needs Ms. Handley references are not even accessible to students born and raised in the U.S.. For this reason, Mr. Zepeda, Sullivan's ELL Social Worker and Grade Level Lead, partnered with a non-profit called the Chicago Refugee Coalition to open a resource center exclusively for students. Flipping the camera during our Zoom meeting, Mr. Zepeda gave an impromptu virtual tour of the free market situated in the back corner of the ELL office, "We have school supplies, kitchen supplies for families…Here's all of our canned food and then we have adult diapers, diapers for babies, tampons, pads…We have Black hair products, we have, you know, just general body wash and things like that." The list goes on. Although other schools or individual teachers within CPS are welcome to adopt personalized learning, formally defined as "a learner-driven instructional model that fosters 21st century skills by empowering every student to actively co-design their learning path, pace, and environment according to their individual strengths, needs, and interests" (CPS 2023), it is a type of pedagogy that requires a team of adults as attentive as those who make up Sullivan's ELL department to recognize that their students' needs transcend learning accommodations. Only then can teachers begin to think about how to continue to provide support in the classroom.

Best known for the role he played in pulling Sullivan out of academic probation and transforming the ELL department into the beacon of hope for newcomers it is now known as, Sullivan's former principal of nearly nine years, Mr. Thomas, shared that the newcomer program was modeled after special education (SPED) services. More specifically, inspired by the assignment of a case manager for SPED students, Mr. Thomas and Sarah Quintenz, the school's ELL Department Lead, believed newcomer students should also have access to a case manager, a social worker, and an individualized education plan customized with goals. Concern for serving the newcomer community has never been widespread enough to provide an incentive for CPS to develop a robust curriculum that could meet the needs of any type of language learner. Additionally, the circumstances newcomer students come from prior to resettlement is so far removed from typical programmatic considerations that it requires unprecedented levels of flexibility on the part of faculty and staff. According to Ms. Handley, "Some of the students come in with zero education, especially girls. They come in with absolutely nothing" and "[all of them] have been through so much, things that would make you crawl up in a little ball and cry somewhere." Thus, Ms. Quintenz developed a cohort model, described by Ms. Handley as similar to that of some European education systems:

> Basically, our kids are grouped according to language level, not grade…It doesn't matter what grade they're in, it matters where their language level lies from the WIDA screener, from initial contact, from what time of the school year they join, and where [we think] their language level seems to be. We are constantly flexible. We adjust to them instead of them adjusting to us…It makes a huge difference because we're creating that equity that everybody talks about…All the talk and all the literature is really nice, but we actually do it…Sarah created all of that so that our kids could start where they are. You're supposed to teach the child where they are, not where you wish they were...When I came in, we had zero curriculum, [Sarah] had spent her time designing the program, looking at the whole child, making sure she was the one that hired a social worker, just for our department.

Part of the appeal of the cohorts Ms. Handley raves about is related to one of Mr. Thomas's broader teaching philosophies, which views English skills as essential to having access to opportunities in the future. "If you were starting to pick up the language faster, we would move you [to the next cohort], we wouldn't wait a whole semester or a whole year to move you…Our goal was to get them into regular general education classes as fast as possible, to get them proficient in English as fast as possible. Because if you can read and write in English in America, you're gonna have a better chance of success in college, in your career, in life, everything." Research has proven that the longer students remain in ELL status, the less likely they are to be on-track to graduate (de la Torre et. al. 2019), which in turn, impacts what jobs are available to them in the future. Mr. Perez, current Social Science teacher of District 214's Newcomer Center, used the same rationality when coming up with the program's curriculum at its founding, saying, "We always thought, even if you learn basic English, you're going to have a better life than someone who's coming here and hasn't been accepted into a small learner program." To supplement the choice to divide students into cohorts, Ms. Handley has recently implemented a curriculum she first proposed in 2018, which she says consists of "primary goals that [the ELL department] determined are essential to learning any language…And then, of course, social-emotional goals…Even Common Core is included. We call that our lofty goal… So, we're still looking at the same goals as the rest of CPS. We're not treating them differently, we're just filling in the gaps." As it turns out, despite what outsiders may presume, the driving force behind the ELL department's efforts to transform the traditional bilingual programs for their students has never forced them to give up academic achievement. Instead, Sullivan's educators reevaluated which stage standards, like Common Core, should be emphasized and have never strayed too far

from the school's mission to provide students with the education that will enable them to become participatory citizens in the U.S.

Even so, the very holistic evaluation system the ELL department prides itself on has faced pushback and been forced to endure traditional CPS modes of operation that can inhibit further programmatic growth. Mr. Smith, a Sullivan history teacher for 33 years and a senior seminar advisor for seven before retiring, offers a particularly unique perspective as he attended Sullivan himself starting in his sophomore year of high school. Moreover, Mr. Smith never seemed to detach from the school after his own graduation. Having taken on a role as student teacher through a Loyola University Chicago program prior to securing a full-time job at Sullivan, Mr. Smith was able to speak both to Sullivan's past and present, recalling:

> We had two schools of thought…we had those that were what I call the intelligentsia. They were about rigor and academics and making those test scores. Then, the other group was like, "Hey, let's look at this from a holistic point of view." Yes, the test scores are important, but they're not the *most* important thing. And I think that's always the struggle… And you're going to have that no matter whether it's grammar school or high school, Catholic, private or public.

Even at a school as diverse as Sullivan, which has always been considered an immigration hub in Chicago, some faculty members struggle to see how helping to cultivate the parts of students that exist beyond quantitative evaluation can contribute to building a better learning environment for all. In the past, well before Mr. Thomas stepped in as principal in the 2013-2014 school year, Mr. Smith remembered the school's Socratic seminar program was considered Sullivan's anchor. Obedience guaranteed support for teachers by the administration, but deviation or disagreement put teachers at the risk of losing access to additional resources. Luckily for the ELL department, under Mr. Thomas's leadership, more money seemed to be directed your way so long as you had a substantive explanation for how you planned to use it. After all, in order to adjust to newcomer

students in the way Sarah's cohort model hoped to, ELL teachers needed the freedom to make decisions according to the makeup of their classroom.

There is no doubt that Mr. Thomas, along with his expertise in education and administration, brought about the revival of Sullivan's spirit by recognizing a greater purpose for the ELL department and trusting in people like Sarah to execute what could have otherwise remained a fantasy. However, even Mr. Thomas's enthusiasm could not shield everyone from the limitation imposed on the school by a greater force, CPS data points. Among the group of participants willing to share their opinions, both positive and negative, Ms. Bruss, the former Chair of Sullivan's Counseling Department, was one of the most vocal about her frustrations with an undying reliance on data points in the district:

> I remember a specific conversation with our network post-secondary person who was like, "You know, your data is showing that more of your students should be going to these selective four-year schools. Why is your data so skewed to having so many students go to community college?" basically insinuating that we weren't doing enough to push our students to these four-year selective schools. And our reply was, first of all, some of these students just arrived maybe one or two years ago. A lot of times, they're coming from traumatic experiences that you cannot even imagine. If we told you about it, you would think that we're lying. And also, [many come] from cultures where it's not always the norm to just up and leave your entire family for four years and go live on campus.

While Sullivan's ELL department has always been familiar with the nuances of newcomers' educational trajectory, influenced by so many more factors than GPA and test scores, as well as their families level of comfort in adopting what is sometimes an entirely new cultural attitude towards education, the district continues to have the same expectations for Sullivan that it does for any other CPS high school. To insinuate that the only factor that could explain the large percentage of Sullivan's students enrolling in community college despite strong academic performance that could place them in selective four-year colleges reveals the district's failure to take into consideration the full history of newcomer students. On a positive note, Ms. Handley

explained that because the goal of Sullivan's personalized learning pedagogy is to create equity in education, CPS has expressed overwhelming approval "and that gives us the leverage we need to create different ways of teaching the content." Conversely, Ms. Bruss, who worked with a combination of Sullivan's newcomers and locals for the entirety of her career, has seen this appreciation for the pursuit of equity fades away in conversations around post-secondary education attainment and is an issue that persists for both populations of students.

> One data point they want you to track is every single scholarship dollar that comes in for your senior class. So, let's say you have applied to 10 different schools, and you got a $5,000 scholarship at every school. They want us to be able to say that [students] have been awarded $50,000 in scholarships. Well, yes, [they] have, but it's not like [they] get to use a total of $50,000 at whatever school [they're] going to. To me that's just such a bogus data point…Because if [their] college is still $50,000 and [they] were given a $5,000 scholarship, then where's that $45,000 coming from? You follow CPS on Twitter, and they're like, our students have been awarded, you know, $10 billion dollars in scholarship dollars. It's like, so what? How much did it actually cost them to go to school?

The truth of the matter is, newcomer or not, students are viewed as data points that reflect and dictate how money is spent. Strong data points suggest the district is meeting its goals and allows them to report hopeful statistics (Chicago Public Schools 2018). Regardless of how students and their families feel as active members of the community, executive leadership can report positive outcomes and secure investment to strengthen and expand an already extremely large district.

Although Sullivan's ELL curricula is purposeful in its attempt to view students as a whole person, it is also important to consider how other schools outside of CPS have tackled the same issues with a different strategy. In contrast to Sullivan's Newcomers Academy, which exists within a mainstream CPS high school setting, Mr. Perez from District 214 (D214) believes the success of their Newcomer Center lies in providing students with a space entirely separate from non-newcomers. In fact, the first director of D214's Newcomer Center embedded in the language

of the program application that he wanted it to be self-contained program avoid complications they witnessed come out of other programs, “like Sullivan, where you have a cohort of newcomer students with little acculturation, very little language proficiency, and who are new to the country but they're also embedded in mainstream high school, a comprehensive high school with 1000s of kids at a time, and they kind of move around in a small community…Why not have a launching pad that would absorb the kids culturally and linguistically?” To this, Mr. Thomas would likely respond with an explanation that advocates for both guarding students in their formal learning and pushing them out of their comfort zone in a way that more accurately resembles how they would be expected to interact with the world before and after school hours:

> The whole idea was that, sure, [the newcomer students] were in what we call sheltered instruction, which is [when] you're immersed in your English proficiency in some of the core content classes…but when you're outside of that and you're in the cafeteria or music class, you're with everyone. There was no, “One day you're leaving here and going to that place where they only speak English.” It was, “You get a place where you're safe to [speak English] and practice, but then you're gonna be thrown to the wolves” so to speak. But that's where good learning happens too, right?

Unafraid to liken the experience of entering a social setting in a language you are not well-versed in to being “thrown to the wolves,” Mr. Thomas demonstrates how firmly he believes in the subsequent advantages that, to him, are likely to come out of learning through instances of comfort and discomfort simultaneously. With most of the ELL department’s philosophy rooted in research that proves feeling a sense of belonging and control in a learning environment can significantly improve students’ mental health (Antrop-González 2003; Bloom 1995; Blitz et. al. 2020), Mr. Thomas defies expectations and pushes people to see the line between sheltering and inhibiting growth in the process of learning a new language. Although not all aspects of newcomer programs can be agreed upon, one indisputable characteristic, shared by both Sullivan

and D214, is an emphasis on developing trusting relationships between teachers, students, and their families.

Building Relationships

By testing out ways the program can mold to the unique groups of students from all over the world that arrive in the Fall and throughout the rest of the school year, Sullivan has gradually identified the areas in traditional schooling that can be reinvented. The social worker, Mr. Zepeda, that Ms. Quintenz eventually hired as one of many steps in developing the cohort model for newcomers was and still is the only social worker in all of CPS assigned to serve ELL students exclusively. Upon reflection, Mr. Zepeda described how his role as the newcomers' social worker is unique in more ways than one. While most school social workers are legally bound to implement service minutes in students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), used to ensure students who require specialized instruction are receiving the support they require, as early as the start of his application process, Mr. Zepeda was told, "You're just here to support the kids and their families." Having had prior experience teaching in Evanston, Mr. Zepeda believes, "[this structure] frees me up in a lot of ways to be able to just sit there and talk to parents who are struggling, who don't know what to do with their kid, whose kid doesn't want to go to school anymore." Although some students have to work through recovery from the consequences of war they experienced before arriving in Chicago, others, in the same kinds of scenarios Mr. Zepeda described, face problems that mirror those of many high school students and their parents. But what differs is the level of engagement Mr. Zepeda is both expected and able to have with the entire family. "You work with parents once in a while, but never this closely alongside them." In order to reach a point where moms feel comfortable enough to reach out via the Google Voice number Mr. Zepeda provides them with, building trust between all of those involved is crucial.

Building Relationships with Students

Sullivan faculty go about connecting with their students using different approaches and with different goals in mind. For teachers within the ELL department, the ability to connect with students not only increases the likelihood that they feel seen and heard (Winthrop & Kirk 2008), but it also promotes engagement with the material. For Ms. Handley, what directly follows meeting students' physiological needs is paying attention to how they interact physically and emotionally with new spaces:

> At the beginning of the year, when everything is terrifying, they can stay in their comfort zone. I let them sit where they want. I let them sit with their friends. I let them sit with people who speak the same language. And then as we learn more and more and more, I push a little bit more and a little bit more. And that's scaffolding. You want to set up a situation where a kid feels safe.

Mr. Thomas alluded to a similar approach when weighing in on his thoughts about how Sullivan encourages interactions between newcomers and the other students during lunch and extracurricular activities. Apparently though, even in the classroom, equipped with the staff, materials, and curriculum to foster a safe environment, Sullivan's teachers do not waste the opportunity to help the students expand their definitions of comfort throughout the school year. In agreement with this approach, Ms. Bruss has found that connecting with her students does not require much effort on her part beyond verbal communication:

> Frankly, [the key to building relationships] was just not talking to them like they were a child and talking to them like they were a person and had something to bring to the table and just kind of getting to know them personally before diving into the super heavy stuff. Sometimes the heavy stuff would come right away…It wasn't always that easy though. There are always kids who are just not interested. And then you just do what you can to find someone else who they are more willing to talk to.

Ms. Bruss sees these relationships as a requirement for her role as a counselor, reminding me that you can't have conversations about a student's inability to afford their dream school if you

haven't built a relationship with them first, “otherwise, you're just another person telling them that they don't have enough money to do what they want to do.” The incentive for Ms. Bruss to strengthen relationships with students is slightly different from teachers in that she uses the bond to hold discussions on personal matters such as students’ financial situations or post-secondary prospects in counseling meetings, but the experiences she has had mirror that of many other Sullivan faculty members. For some students, the connection is more instantaneous, requiring only a few meetings at most to build rapport. Mr. Smith found that, “Kids would open up to me once they got to know me…I was one of those go-to teachers who they felt comfortable to talk to. They would tell me things they wouldn’t normally [share] and I was able to direct them to people to assist them in the building because of it.” Possessing an approachable demeanor, Mr. Smith has leaned into his ability to form bonds with his students and never regarded the extra conversations he has had with them as a burden.

Although each student that Ms. Bruss, Mr. Smith, and the rest of Sullivan’s faculty interact with have their own triumphs and challenges to share, many of the newcomer students come to school carrying the weight of traumatic experiences as they go about their school day. Mr. Smith even admitted to having a hard time staying level headed during a conversation with a student from Iraq after hearing that “on the first day of school…and this is during the war…the school building got bombed. She had to make a decision whether she should stay on top of the roof of the school building or if she should jump, and she jumped. She broke some bones, of course, and broke her face, and has had reconstructive surgery over the years for that…I can't imagine as a five- or six-year-old child having to go through that on your first day of school…” In response to hearing stories and seeing opportunities for students to heal, faculty members do not shy away from relying on support from colleagues to initiate conversations. In fact, it has

reached a point where the decision to consult others is instinctive. Rather than assuming a position of helplessness in areas they may have less experience in handling, they embrace humility, they are aware of their own limitations, and they seek to identify other adults that have some other kind of expertise to offer. Perhaps most indicative of Sullivan's community's willingness to embrace their shortcomings is Mr. Zepeda's strategy to overcome a barrier to one specific language:

> I know a little bit of Arabic. I can read it, but I have no idea what I'm reading. It's kind of like how the kids are when they're in [cohort] 1B. They know the alphabet, they know how to sound out the words, but they have no idea what the words mean. That's me in Arabic. I put myself in those situations because I want to model what it's like to try to speak something that you don't know. And show them that, even as an adult, I'm trying to learn a new language, and I'm trying to speak it. And I'm gonna make mistakes. And it's okay. And you guys are gonna laugh at me. Right? Because it's okay for you to laugh at me. But I'll never laugh at you.

Rather than explicitly instructing his students not to fault others for their mistakes or aggressively correcting them for a simple misunderstanding, Mr. Zepeda, the ELL social worker not an English teacher, has led by example. He shows them what it means to be empathetic towards one another by asking the same from them as he continues to learn and practice Arabic. It may even be the case that the interactions that occur outside of formal lessons and counseling sessions help students recognize that they are seen. Mr. Zepeda remembered one situation that was particularly difficult to navigate:

> I had a kid…when he first came to Sullivan, he would curse out every damn teacher in his language and in English, once he learned curse words. And then one day he cursed out our school resource officer. And our resource officer was like, "Dude, you really need to think about your life and what you're doing because you do this to an officer in the street and you're going to get arrested. You're going to get hurt." [So, the three of us] talked about why he's acting this way…[We] made a plan for [him] to improve his behavior and…[to] just stop intimidating people and pushing people away from him…He's in college now studying business. And he came back [and said], "When I

> graduate with my business degree, I want to start a fund so that I can help students get scholarships…"

As demonstrated by this particular young man's desire to return to Sullivan and support current and future students in the same way Mr. Zepeda and his school resource officer supported him, the feelings of trust and mutual respect teachers work so hard to build in their relationships with students can also fortify feelings of respect between students. The ELL department was leading by example, teaching their first group of students to go through the revamped program what it means, and looks like, to give back. In an attempt to continue efforts to move away from punitive practices when addressing behavioral concerns, Ms. Handley found that when students were unable to focus during lessons and it clearly had to do with something beyond disinterest, boredom, or disrespect, she would ask:

> "Well, what do you need? Do you need just a minute? Do you need to put your head down? Do you need to go see the social worker? What can I do to help you?" ...We've learned to do it very quickly. So that I'll tell the [other] students, "Please be patient, I need to help this student." And they know, they're like, "Okay." Because they want to know that if they need help, they're gonna get it. And that's what makes the family thing. You know what I mean? That's what I didn't see in other schools and regular education. We didn't have that kind of trust and understanding as a group.

In a short amount of time, the teachers realized, through conscious perspective-taking, the rest of the class became very receptive to such gentle requests. After witnessing instances of their peers being offered help, even when not explicitly asked for, they knew that if they too needed help, they would receive it. This behavior is not unique to a select group of students. Mr. Zepeda can list out a number of students who reach out whenever he posts a picture of canned food or other donations being unloaded. The former soccer captain from Nepal wanted to organize a supply bank just for the team and a refugee from Burma reposted the image writing, "My school is always doing dope shit." When kids who have graduated stay connected with this type of

enthusiasm, it makes up for the time and effort it took to break down barriers. Now, the culture of asking for and receiving help survives by word of mouth. Mr. Thomas has noticed a few downsides to operating within such a small, tight-knit group of people, where feelings of trust surpass traditional social boundaries. “People would run to me and tell me too many things…All the problems became my problems.” And yet, the opportunities to collaborate with students in their education and personal growth seem to outweigh the added workload, as emotionally taxing and physically exhausting as it may be.

Building Relationships with Parents

In another discussion of how essential fostering relationships between teachers and students is in newcomer programs, Mr. Perez argued that the school’s relationship with parents is equally important. Having gone to school in the district himself, Mr. Perez described how his own decision to prioritize increasing communication and feelings of trust with the families of D214’s Newcomer Center was rooted in a personal experience :

> My parents hated going to events because they felt a chilling effect…You're looking at immigrants who don't speak English, and their nine-year-old translating for them. The registrar or the secretary would make my parents feel like crap sometimes in Chicago Public Schools. And so, my parents were like, “I'm not gonna go.” They rejected that paradigm. They rejected that imbalance of power immediately. And they only felt comfortable when they would get a phone call from a teacher that said, I want you to come, I want to tell you what your son or daughter is doing.

Unfortunately, the initial resistance Mr. Perez’s parents felt towards a system that has otherwise proven to be diminutive to immigrants is not unique to the time Mr. Perez was in grade school. The language barrier alone can push students and their families away from engaging with the program. Not only do such interactions leave some families feeling unsupported, but when their own child serves as the translator, they can be left feeling embarrassed or find the conversations uninformative. But because Mr. Perez was able to categorize the handful of times his parents *did*

feel comfortable, he tried to replicate that at D214. It was apparent that strategies appealing to "white mainstream middle class families" would not work. When D214's Newcomer Center was made up of just 40 to 50 kids, all of the teachers participated in a combined effort to visit each students' home at least once during the school year:

> And we always told them this is non-threatening… we don't want to see your paperwork, we're not here…to look around the apartment, we're not here to check up on you. We are here to let you know that we're invested in your child, to let you know that we're so invested in your child that we're on your couch at eight o'clock at night and visiting three other families after this. Sometimes it would be 15 to 20 minutes, sometimes it would be an hour, and sometimes it would turn into dinner. And it isn't really until your third dinner that night of Albanian dinner or Mexican dinner that you were kind of hurting to get home. But what it did is it humanized us and humanized the school.

In the same way that an entirely new curriculum can be designed to mold to the needs of newcomers, strategies to build relationships with people unfamiliar with cultural norms very different from America's should be entirely geared towards the needs of the families. Unlike language learning in the classroom, both D214 and Sullivan have recognized that interactions with families is not the time for pushing people out of their comfort zone. For those who have never been exposed to the fear of deportation, requesting to visit a student's home without prefacing the visit's intentions can be an instant deterrent. Even in a sanctuary state like Illinois, the fear persists. Now that it is a graduation requirement, Ms. Bruss has experienced difficulty in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Beyond the fact that some seniors did not even know they were undocumented until filling out the form, more often than not, Ms. Bruss has to rely on the strength of her relationships with parents to explain, "this is an okay time to type in your social security number."

As the refugee and immigrant populations of Chicago continue to grow, sharing a meal in the home of their students is no longer feasible for even the self-contained Newcomer Center of

D214. Nevertheless, educators remain hopeful. Mr. Thomas mentioned that Sullivan came up with their own strategy to ensure parents were in contact with the same staff members whenever their child got into a fight or was dealing with an issue. Formally recognized by the community as the Kids We Love the Most Program, it assigned Sullivan's non-teaching staff—the counselors, the administration, and the dean—a list of 60 kids from the total student population, breaking it down so that each adult was responsible for two to three of those kids. Providing a more in depth explanation of what participation entailed, Mr. Thomas said, "instead of coming to the principal's office, they would go to that person…and that person would be the one that contacted the family and set up the parent conference. It was just an opportunity to build deeper relationships." Evidently, programs without the means to expand get created with the resources they do have available to them, especially when the practice serves to foster an environment where students and their parents feel safe and welcomed. One of the most important takeaways from this finding should be a realization that efforts to meet students where they are at and build relationships with them does not, and should not, stop at newcomer programs. In order to normalize community building and help newcomer programs gain the support required to continue such extensive practices, prioritization in these areas needs to exist district-wide.

5.2 More Than Just Good Intentions

Based on the earlier findings section, specialized curricula and relationships built on trust and mutual respect have proven to help students overcome dated systems and misguided statistics that either hinder their academic attainment (Decapua & Marshall 2011) or prevent them from engaging in a collaborative learning environment (Booi et. al. 2016). Still, the mindset required of people at the forefront of updating newcomer programs remains unidentified. While all of the participants combined represent different levels of exposure to the newcomer

experience prior to working in their respective schools and departments, they all approach their work with conviction and compassion, unafraid to advocate for their students even at the risk of overstepping. I begin this section by working through how and whether different participants' personal backgrounds have factored into their decisions to serve newcomer communities. I then discuss how, because good intentions do not guarantee impactful outcomes when implementing policies, the success of Sullivan, and even other aspiring programs, depends on faculty and staff buy-in.

Rooted in Compassion

Professor Flores, who teaches and conducts both computational regression-based and ethnographic research as a member of the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology, is not one to accept things at face-value. Wary of the "history of good intentions in terms of dealing with ethnic minorities," the primary focus of Professor Flores's work is studying how people make opinions about immigrants, specifically those who are undocumented, based on subjective elements. Not comfortable enough to make a concrete statement based on the little information he knew about Sullivan, he did share his initial reaction to the mission of the school's Newcomers Academy:

> I feel like if certain schools have programs designed to help integrate immigrants, that's telling you something about the school, that's telling you that there's an understanding that immigrants face unique challenges and you're trying to do something about that, that tells me that they have a proactive take on this.

Understanding *what* is being implemented addresses one concern. But Professor Flores has seen instances where the unadjusted ESL track, which is much more common in the U.S. than any aspect of Sullivan's own curricula, has given him reason to suspect that, in some settings, it has become a tool to keep students of different backgrounds apart. "In the past, even if you are proficient…they put you on the ESL track to [determine] whether you're going to be

intellectually challenged or motivated…there's always a risk." So, *who* is part of the implementation process and *how* it is being implemented can throw a well-intentioned seemingly benign policy entirely off course. At Sullivan, there is no clear prerequisite for the type of people the school attracts to work with its newcomer students. Ms. Bruss, for instance, had no knowledge of, let alone experience with counseling, the unique makeup of Sullivan's student body prior to working on campus:

> I grew up in Minnesota and I went to school in Wisconsin, where it was primarily white farmers. I'm not a farmer, but those were the kinds of families that went to the school that I went to. Moving to Chicago… I applied to Loyola because it was one of like three schools in the city that offered a school counseling program. This is gonna sound terrible, but I'll admit it because it was like 15 years ago at this point… One of the questions on my grad school application had something to do with social justice… and I remember having to Google what exactly social justice was. I had no idea. It was just not in my realm of what I dealt with or what my experience was…I had zero experience [with newcomers] coming into Sullivan and I made it into, I mean, it became a huge part of my life for 12 plus years.

Upon arrival, Ms. Bruss faced her own moment of culture shock, but the prospect of being trusted with a hands-on position within the counseling department was too great to allow lack of exposure to deter her from working with Sullivan's kids. And she was not alone. In contrast with several of the faculty members he oversaw during his time as principal, Mr. Thomas really only worked with CPS students in predominantly Black neighborhoods and had some experience in Little Village, a Mexican-American neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago, prior to arriving at Sullivan. In spite of the ways in which their personal backgrounds were far removed from that of their newcomer students, both Ms. Bruss and Mr. Thomas found themselves in leadership positions. For Ms. Bruss, part of the path to get there, required her to regularly check her own biases. She said, "Frankly, it was ignorance, and being able to accept that and be like, "Okay, I have no idea of what I'm getting into, so I'm going to learn as we're working our way through

it." This type of reflection is not easy for anyone to initiate themselves, but in doing so, Ms. Bruss positioned herself to be open-minded to new people, new cultures, and new policies. Mr. Thomas, on the other hand, drew parallels to the experiences he *did have* from his time as assistant principal of Harper High School. Harper was a formative experience for Mr. Thomas, but its location in Englewood, which he described as one of the most violent neighborhoods in America, meant that many of the kids he came to know personally were shot. Colloquially, Sullivan was the "Harper of the North" with a reputation of issuing 700 suspensions and 70 arrests in the 2011-2012 school year alone. Many people advised Mr. Thomas not to sign a contract with Sullivan and he himself even said it "probably should have been closed," but he saw a hidden potential in the students that others disregarded. Evidently, familiarity with newcomers was not a requirement for faculty and staff's motivation.

With that being said, teachers like Mr. Perez at D214 draw from an entirely different source of inspiration. When Mr. Perez and his colleagues first started the Newcomer Academy, he saw his own family history reflected in the lives of his students. "Our kids used to come from rural Mexico, I was basically receiving children that were like my parents [with] gaps in their formal education… They were here to learn English hoping to make a better life for themselves." Well aware that no immigrant story is exactly the same, Mr. Perez knew what the opportunity to provide education for their children meant for parents like his own. Even so, the following account from Mr. Zepeda reveals that one's motivation to teach or counsel newcomers does not, and should not, solely depend on the parallels they are able to make between their students and their relatives:

> For me, it helped that I am a child of immigrants. I am the child of a father whose family fled the Pinochet regime in Chile. I am the child of a mother who was a doctor in her country and then came here and was nothing. So I understand, from a very middle class perspective, what that looks like. I understand because these kids are my parents…and

> their parents are my grandparents… I think that helps, but I don't think you *need* that… Sit and listen and ask questions that are going to lead them to find whatever is right for them. Don't push your own agenda.

Seeing their own parents and grandparents lives in some students' experiences enables people like Mr. Perez and Zepeda to work with an additional layer of understanding. But in his interview, Professor Flores cautioned the possibility of a hypothetical situation occurring, where a teacher might "suspect that someone may be undocumented and think, "Why would I spend a lot of resources on these students?" Even in the case that this teacher is of a liberal mindset or trying to help, they might think, "Well, [this student] doesn't have documents. They won't be able to take advantage of any opportunities we have to offer them, so why should we invest in them? We have limited resources, so why not invest them in a place where they might be more versatile?" Careful not to pass judgements about the other participants without knowing all of the details of their programs, Professor Flores illustrates an eerily plausible suspicion of teachers' mindsets. Mr. Zepeda felt the need to clarify that although the part of his identity that connects him to an immigrant past is a strength, it cannot replace heightened sensitivity and compassion. Ms. Bruss, who is much more convinced that buy-in is more of an innate quality shared among teachers than Professor Flores and Mr. Zepeda, still feels inclined to back Mr. Zepeda's warnings about agenda-pushing:

> Nobody, hopefully nobody, becomes a teacher or a counselor that doesn't like kids, doesn't want the best for them, or doesn't want them to move on to bigger and better things. So, in all of your decisions, it shouldn't be what's best for the adults. It should always be what's best for the kids. And a lot of decisions, I think, not just at Sullivan, but just how CPS is run in particular, a lot of times it's what's best for adults.

Mr. Perez more explicitly added, "It's not about whether or not you can speak Spanish. Yeah, that was important for the demographics that we had early on, but you can be a native Spanish speaker, a bilingual person, and be the worst teacher ever." Mr. Smith, equally inspired to offer

students an experience that embodied the same “home feeling” as when he attended Sullivan as a high schooler, alluded to the idea that this tendency for adults to project their own beliefs and prioritize their own interests is not just a product of people capitalizing on the vulnerability of students, especially newcomers, when he said, “we had a series of principals that just couldn't quite get a good grasp on things [and were] manipulating the system a little bit too much… [We got] to the point where you have principals who seem like they're just showing up for the paycheck, and they don't really care about anything that goes on in the building.” During a period well before the establishment of Sullivan’s Newcomers Academy, administrators either did not share the same level of compassion as teachers like Mr. Smith from the start or the appeal of a higher salary was enough to compensate for pushing practices that may not have aligned with their beliefs.

Even in an environment as seemingly ideal as Sullivan, however, there is evidence that teachers’ initial levels of compassion when they join a newcomer program also play an important role in ensuring they do not leave as a result of burn-out. Schools in Illinois, and across the country, are struggling to stay afloat amidst teacher and staff shortages (García & Weiss 2019). Unsurprisingly, special education and bilingual positions have been the most impacted (Smylie 2023), with many schools forced to settle for less qualified candidates as a result. Mario Perez was challenged by the pandemic, and his decision to step down from his role as Coordinator and contribute as a Social Science teacher was rooted in the fact that, like the rest of the world, the community they built at D214 heavily relied on face-to-face interaction. He told me, “I wanted to get to know them again because I felt somewhat disconnected from their plight, their stories, and the nuance of what it meant to be a newcomer in this new educational setting, post pandemic.” In an effort to be completely transparent, Mr. Thomas also opened up to say, “I ended up leaving a

little bit before I wanted to leave…COVID is really what sent me back. We were on a certain trajectory and COVID just waylaid us all, and then I just didn't have anything left in the tank after that." Mr. Thomas, like Mr. Perez, has maintained some connection to the work he is most proud of, continuing to work with CPS principals as Director of Leader Engagement. Others, like Ms. Bruss, have broken ties with their former positions in a slightly more permanent fashion:

> One of the big reasons why I left Sullivan was because of the adults at Sullivan and we'll just say, the *lack* of family… I love the idea of it, [family as a core value], but I don't know that it was put into practice as much as I would have liked…I think it would also depend on who you ask…the ESL department I think very much follows the family thing.

Consistent with Ms. Bruss's view, Ms. Handley has said, "As a department, we talk so much that we're like a family. Sarah calls us a family. She's called us one ummah, which is Arabic for 'community.'" But even when the difference in culture between the Newcomers Academy and the rest of Sullivan's department was so apparent to the adults, in no way was the decision to leave easy for Ms. Bruss to make. Having seen the value of connecting with students throughout her career, in which she has only ever worked at Sullivan, it was almost impossible for Ms. Bruss to remove herself:

> There were so many times at Sullivan where I was like, "That's it. I'm leaving. I gotta get out of here." When I first started, for the first five-ish years or so, I was also the softball coach, the varsity softball coach. So, every single time I said, "Okay, I'm just gonna wait until *this* group of people graduate, and then I'm out of here," it was like, "Well, I gotta wait till my softball girls graduate." And then it happened again. It was just always the kids. Always. And certain groups of them that I had very strong relationships with were what would always keep me there.

Ms. Bruss possessed a level of dedication to her students and confidence that the services she could provide them with were helpful. But a school that named 'Family' one of its core values in Mr. Thomas's first few days working with the teaching staff still has its faults. The trauma that

teachers in newcomer programs are more predisposed to learning about can also contribute to feelings of hopelessness, an unfortunate truth made evident by Mr. Perez:

> Working at a newcomer center…you are in a world where you can suffer a lot of collateral trauma… Being the child of immigrants growing up in poverty in Chicago, a lot of things that my students will bring into the classroom can trigger some of my past. They can bring up things that can be very visceral for me. And so, I want to give them the help that they need. And I don't know that I always can at times. I'm limited, not just by resources, but by positionality and what I can do as an educator, a licensed educator…

Perhaps the adjustments made and required by newcomer students—specialized curricula, additional emotional support, and constant communication—consequently pull away from some of the support system that would otherwise be available for teachers. There is not enough information to conduct a constructive cost-benefit analysis of the practices Sullivan has implemented for its newcomers, but the compassion its faculty and staff mobilize around is certainly not immune to facing the repercussions of burn-out in teachers. Mr. Thomas, who does get to experience the familial community within the Newcomers Academy more frequently than Ms. Bruss, offered his definition for family:

> Families are messy. But because families are messy, they're probably the most vulnerable things that we have in our society. You have to accept someone's flaws more than you would accept someone's flaws that you work with. You have to accept them and care for them even when you don't want to accept them and care for them, because they're family. For me knowing that some of these kids' families weren't with them, knowing they were torn apart or had half here and half over there…and then [knowing] a lot of the regular Chicago kids had their families torn apart because of drugs or alcohol or gang violence, whatever it may be, we wanted to be that family at the school.

During Mr. Thomas's time as principal, he chose to face the realities of his students' situations head on. Given the unique position he had, overseeing *all* of Sullivan's students, he recognized that turning his head away from the newcomers to catch his breath would not grant a break from the hard truths. Instead, he would have found his "regular Chicago kids" in just as much need of

support. In this way, Sullivan has positioned itself to assume higher levels of responsibility to its students, parents, faculty, and staff than most CPS schools. Its challenge moving forward will be to find a way to balance allocating support to all members of its community, and at least ensure any new faculty and staff approach their work with the same compassion and buy-in the Newcomers Academy was built on.

Leading with Conviction

Without much of a need to weed through each of these participants' sentiments, it is clear that no matter what stage in their life faculty members join the newcomer programs at both Sullivan and D214, there is a shared interest in providing as many resources as possible to the kids in the way they will most effectively be received. And this was no coincidence according to Mr. Thomas, who "always tried to hire people that would bring their authentic self to the space… Sure, you need that x certification because that's what allows you to get the Carnegie Units…but we hired people that really had the desire to work with those communities… Heart is something that is a little harder to coach than strategy… You can switch out systems and structures, but you can't switch out good people." Although it may come second to the amount of compassion driving the success of newcomer programs, another characteristic shared by each of the participants involved in this line of work, and related to the value they place on building trust and fostering a sense of belonging for students, is their conviction. At Sullivan, their belief in the work of the ELL department is so strong that it has developed into a reality where teachers like Ms. Handley do not see a place for leniency with respect to the level of care people approach their work in the Newcomers Academy with:

> If you don't care about the person and you just care about the content, it won't work. Period…Not all teachers are in it for that reason and there's nothing wrong with that. There's absolutely nothing wrong with being passionate about your content. That makes

> you a good teacher in most instances, but not with these kids. These kids have gone through way too much for you to pretend that content is all they need.

The distinction she makes about not automatically assuming content-driven teachers are bad teachers is an important one, but her belief suggests the mindset required of faculty in the ELL department, one rooted in compassion for the students in every aspect, is not something that can be sacrificed. Mr. Zepeda seemed to share this sentiment by saying, "[If] you're just there to clock in and clock out, you're not gonna do anything. That's not what everybody signs up for and, you know, you have to respect that." At the same time, Mr. Smith pushed for an increased need for teachers struggling to make connections with students to persevere:

> A lot of people don't have that background and I'm not blaming them. But if they grew up in the all-white neighborhood, middle class, it's an adjustment. And I don't want them feeling like, "Oh, I can't do this job and I give up and I can't connect with the kids." They might be really good people that have a lot to share, they just need the little extra [exposure]… We're all in this together, we're trying to improve. And we can all do this, we can all improve.

Compassion, as Mr. Thomas previously explained, is not something that can be easily taught, but Mr. Smith imagines an alternative approach to bringing new educators into the field, where there is still an opportunity for people to leave if a certain program is not the right fit, but there is also room to improve. Admittedly, Mr. Smith proposes that leniency be granted to teachers without a certain cultural background, not necessarily those who are unconvinced by, for instance, Sullivan's specialized curricula. But even if one were to apply his rationality to scenarios involving misalignment in mindsets, even if a middle ground were achievable, I would argue all of these participants recognize that using newcomer students, and students in general, as a means to inform someone unwilling to adapt to a unique way of teaching and interacting is not a risk worth taking.

In 2013, at a public forum and debate held for principals up for contracts, Mr. Thomas made the statement, “If by the time my kid is a freshman in high school, I wouldn’t bring my own son or daughter to this school, then you should get rid of me.” Now that ten years have passed and his son is in the process of selecting a high school, he has shared that he would confidently send him there if they didn’t live an hour away. Before he was even hired, Mr. Thomas had confidence in himself as well as his plans for Sullivan, and his style of leadership made it easy to defy the norm:

> I've always been a bit of a, I don't know if rebel is the right word, a person that would take risks. In a political way, I run to fires, I don't run away from them. When something's wrong, I'm going towards it. I've always been that way. Probably [due to] my upbringing, failing a grade in school, [and] my life struggles as a person of disability, there came a point, an inflection in my life, where I decided that I was not going to be scared of the uncomfortable and I was not going to run from my fears.

Apparently, risk-taking is not entirely avoided in the context of Sullivan’s Newcomers Academy for fear of going up against an established opposition or putting forth a seemingly radical organizational change. Many faculty and staff members find themselves securing the needs of their students and push boundaries only in areas where the major consequences of acting against the wishes or instructions of others would not negatively impact the kids. Mr. Perez more explicitly stated, “If you're in this profession, you need to speak up, you need to find that platform and that voice. The alternative is that other people will find their voice and other people will advocate for things that may not benefit you and your students.” Mr. Perez proceeded to share how he juggles with the idea of an unfair distribution of powers, but notices how his unique position as a co-founder and tenured teacher ensures his voice will be heard:

> I'm not just going to be oppositional for the sake of being oppositional...I worry that I am too vocal…but I will speak up when it is something to do with the kids, I will speak up when I don't feel like my teachers are being supported. And I still call them my teachers

> while I'm sitting in the teacher lounge with them. And they still look to me because they have been working with me for so long.

The education system does not allow for every faculty and staff member to act on their conviction in the same way Mr. Thomas and Mr. Perez have and continue to, but different forms of the same determination exist in those who might hold positions with less authority. Prompted to think about how ongoing resource allocation problems within the district regularly impact the ELL department, Mr. Zepeda described how his approach to advocacy of his students' needs took form in prioritizing adaptation to the current situation:

> Have you ever broken something and don't have the right tool to fix it, but you have something similar or [something] that can bend into the right tool? That's what I do. Or, that's what I did at the beginning…We had a lot of students translating. Sometimes we'd have parents translate for other parents. And all of that is super, super unethical, but it's better than having no communication at all because leaving parents in the dark is so much worse than bringing somebody else into their situation…Inaction is not an option…I've completely changed my perspective on how to go about things while simultaneously advocating for being able to do it the right way…you can advocate all you want but when there's no money there's no money.

The availability of resources is something that continues to disproportionately affect specialized education and bilingual programs, forcing faculty and staff to make due with what they have. Despite their shortcomings, the mindset adopted and cultivated within Sullivan's and D214's newcomer programs should serve as a model for aspiring programs and prompt education institutions at large to aspire to achieve goals beyond the initial implementation of well-intentioned policies.

5.3 Recognition of Newcomers as a Value-Add

In 1995, when newcomer schools were being introduced to states like California, Texas, and Illinois, the proposal to allow students to stay for up to four years by a school opening in Queens, now known as Newcomers High School, was considered radical compared to the

one-year cap the Department of Education had prescribed (Belluck 1995). Concerns about isolation, segregation, and even discrimination against non-newcomer students bounced around, but people familiar with what newcomer schools in their area were really trying to accomplish were convinced that success was defined by the resources schools had. The resource problem is not one that can be resolved by the commitment to tailoring learning to students needs, building lasting relationships, and entering the space with compassion and conviction, all of which were mentioned in the earlier findings sections. But it is an issue that can be mitigated by addressing negative attitudes towards newcomers at large. During the 1990s, newcomer programs did not operate in the same way Sullivan or D214's Newcomer Center did. Nevertheless, for years, the lives of students once they leave school for the day have been impacted and newcomer programs' effort to engage with surrounding neighborhoods have been thwarted by the presence of people who continue to classify immigrants and refugees as 'other.' Thus, this section serves to identify how Sullivan's Newcomers Academy actively works on taking control of the newcomer narrative and showcasing their students' stories to bring more awareness to the population's needs.

Sullivan would not be as widely recognized in CPS as it is today if it had not been for former principal Thomas's efforts to bring attention to the unique nature of their work and its potential. But, in order to reach the point where they could recognize how much of a change in attitude towards newcomer programs was needed, Sullivan's faculty and staff first had to endure, first hand, the drawbacks of being under-valued to a greater degree than education already is from a budgetary standpoint. Given Chicago's size, it was not always feasible for students from, for example, the West Side to attend Sullivan. To resolve this, determined to be the newcomer center that could accept kids from across the city, Mr. Thomas worked through the bureaucratic

mayhem to make it so that if students did live in Little Village, distance would not be the reason they couldn't go to Sullivan because their public transportation fares would be covered annually. "We put it on the GoCPS application… so you could apply to come to our school and you would get in if you just applied. We just tried to cut down all the barriers that would not allow them to come…" The ways in which the district is set up to prevent students from having access to the schools like Sullivan that might better serve their needs are plainly visible from Mr. Thomas's anecdote on the limitations to school choice caused by transportation fees alone. To reiterate how difficult it is to evolve in the way Sullivan has over the past decade, unless someone in a position of power takes action, Mr. Zepeda shared details on how he secured his highly coveted role as social worker for the ELL department:

> My position doesn't exist anywhere else… And I've had other schools that are starting to experience huge waves of different immigrants and refugees reach out and be like, "How do we get one of you? Who do we have to reach out to?" Well, your principal has to open a position…you have to find it in your budget to pay somebody…Sullivan finds a way to pay me and one day, maybe they don't have the funding anymore… That's the reality. That's student-based budgeting.

Even Mr. Zepeda, who, based on other participants' opinions, is irreplaceable at Sullivan and has accomplished achievements that other schools dream of, stability is not guaranteed. Mr. Thomas clarified that CPS's student-based budgeting values the average student in the district at around $5,280. Laughing at the idea of calculating a students' worth he added, "but if you were to drive into the North Shore of Chicago or Evanston, every kid's about $18,000." The disparity is so blatantly for the public to see, yet no change occurs without value recognition. Unfortunately, Mr. Perez's efforts to push for the same resources that Sullivan has managed to attain, D214's Newcomer Center has not had that same luck. Despite the fact that Mr. Perez has witnessed verbal support from the board, he hasn't always seen it translate into commodities or resources

explaining how "for years, we have been asking for a social worker that was dedicated to just newcomers, students, ELL kids, to our kids…So, while we were supported in theory, I don't know that we always had everything we needed to be the best." In this way, it is worth acknowledging Sullivan's administration's choice to listen to what the ELL department was asking for. Still, time and time again, the underlying factor for this type of progress is value recognition. Another example brought up by Mr. Zepeda is the language line, which allows the school community to connect with a translator who can help communicate in any language of their choice within 15 minutes.

> I can't believe that CPS doesn't provide access to this resource for all schools. [CPS] requires schools to pay for their own access to a translation service or an interpreting service, so [the language line] comes out of our school budget. CPS isn't paying for that for everybody…And we use it way more than any other school in the district because most schools that would need it speak English and Spanish. And all of the resources that CPS creates are for English and Spanish bilingual programs. We're not that.

Because the languages Sullivan's students speak, the countries they come from, and the traumatic experiences they have endured continue to seem so far removed from issues most visible to CPS. In turn, the district does not care to understand how much Sullivan relies on the language line in the classroom, in counseling sessions, and in conversation with parents and, thus, continues to be perceived as an unjustified expense when there are free services like Google Translate, an app every Sullivan student is also equipped with on their phone. Ms. Bruss weighed in with her opinions on the current status of the district by saying, "when you think about the inequities in the education system, again, Sullivan is the only place I have to compare, but it's just insane."

These points of view work in harmony to communicate that what needs to be realized by the district is an outlook, which Mr. Thomas developed instantaneously upon his arrival in

Rogers Park during his first Summer as principal, cognisant of the contribution newcomer students make to the larger community:

> When I came to Sullivan, I remember meeting kids from all over the world. [There were] some kids from the Congo, some kids from Afghanistan, and I was a bit taken aback because I'd never been in a school with a refugee student… I also observed and heard a strong desire to learn, a strong desire to be a part of a community…I thought to myself, this is a value add, this is an asset. I thought if I can get their mindsets into regular everyday Chicago Public Schools kids, that's a win-win. [From] their global mindset…to their thirst for knowledge and desire to be a part of a community to their not-taking school for granted because some of their schools had been blown up… I saw that our school needed them and needed them for a lot of reasons—really to build a sense of belonging, community, and academic achievement.

Paying attention to the reasons Mr. Thomas saw a need for newcomer students, it becomes clear that everything Sullivan faculty and staff strive to exemplify for their students are qualities and characteristics Mr. Thomas saw in the newcomers from his first day. Although no participant formally made the following conclusion, the source of inspiration for Sullivan's ambitious pursuits has always been the best qualities of their students. The program essentially reciprocates what the students bring naturally, with no material resources in hand, creating a cyclical partnership between students and teachers. Not to be mistaken with leveraging one student group's background in the interest of another, Mr. Thomas saw ways in which the ELL department greatly benefitted from being situated within a larger CPS high school, especially with respect to practicing English and familiarizing themselves with American culture. Furthermore, many local Chicago students, especially those at Sullivan, exemplify resilience to their circumstances in their own ways. Mr. Smith, who was once among the pool of Sullivan's local Chicago students himself, developed a sincere appreciation for being exposed to the newcomer experience at a very young age:

> Being poor growing up in Chicago was interesting. Because on the North Side, everybody assumes everybody has money. It was good for me to make friends [from] all

> over the world… What was really interesting was, some of the families did very well in their home countries but, as you can imagine, coming here, they had to give up almost everything. And so they were in the category of being poor as well… I didn't have much of anything but I realized, I have a radio and they don't even have a radio… I had a TV, they don't even have a TV… It was really healthy for me to put that in perspective at a young age, because I was like, "How come we're so poor?" And then I realized, it's all relative, right?

Mr. Smith's background, which provokes a conversation about the complexities of race, culture, and socioeconomic class, makes it possible to imagine a future for Chicago where people have the space to gain a heightened sense of awareness and understanding of the different perspectives that make up their city at an early age. Not only does it dismantle stereotypes about different neighborhoods in Chicago, but it also proves a much more important takeaway can come out of interacting with people from communities one would not otherwise encounter. Unable to fit the mold of Chicago's North Side for reasons beyond his control, Mr. Smith could recognize the strength of his classmates, and now former students, as well as their ability to set aside conflicts that previously dictated the nature of their relationships. "A lot of them come from countries where they're taught to hate and they're friends with people they're taught to hate in their home country…that gives me hope." Newcomers' enthusiasm for learning and community-building is precisely what Mr. Thomas hoped to share with the city of Chicago, and the reason why he stressed the importance of taking control of the narrative about Sullivan to his faculty and staff. Mr. Zepeda recalled, "[Chad] would always talk to us about how we have to tell our story and we can't let other people tell our story."

As inspiring as it was to hear about how Sullivan set out to be a model for a better world, immediate widespread and positive reception is hard to come by. Mr. Smith remembers that when Harold Washington, the first Black mayor of Chicago, took office in 1983, "there was a lot of pushback…a lot white teachers were upset and thinking that while Harold was Mayor, African

American people would inundate this area of Chicago and pretty much be the majority at Sullivan." Because of the work of faculty and staff since then, those attitudes no longer exist at Sullivan. The city, on the other hand, although fueled by progressive ideas, remains resistant to change. More recently, the Chicago Teachers Union has pushed for more sanctuary students to protect immigrant and refugee families who are undocumented or in the process of becoming U.S. residents only to be met with resistance from school officials who have decreased funds for positions newcomer programs and sanctuary schools desperately need (Cardona-Maguigad 2019). The reality of the situation is that not every school commands attention like Sullivan, which Mr. Thomas has shared is still met with people passing judgements, "I mean, ideally, we'd want all schools to be sanctuary schools and welcoming to newcomers…But even as a sanctuary city…when [newcomers] arrive here, people don't want them in their neighborhoods. And, I don't want to talk poorly about my colleagues at other schools, but that's what we were hearing from our families…I wasn't going to allow that in my four walls. That wasn't going to be the story that we had at Sullivan." Based on his research, what Professor Flores had to say about the detriment of stereotypes about newcomers, particularly undocumented immigrants, plainly communicated how easy it is for people to reach conclusions about individuals without ever speaking to them and how easily such conclusions can spread and escalate to consequences:

> I mean, at the end of the day, these "labels," they have a legal dimension and a social dimension. The legal dimension is constructed through the legal system where the state essentially decides who is undocumented and who is not. That's a very complicated process… People fall in and out of legal statuses. But there's also a social dimension that is based on stereotypes. It's basically based on people making a judgment call about who is undocumented, who is illegal from their perspective, who's been verified… For these labels to be consequential, you do not need ill-will. You do not need someone saying, "I don't like undocumented folk because they are violating the rules." You don't need that. For this label to be consequential, you just need for the stereotype to be around and for people to say, "Listen, I don't want to get in trouble."

Through an evaluation of people's perception toward undocumented immigrants, Professor Flores has identified that disinterest in getting involved with an issue people may even consider an important human rights cause, is enough for the scattered newcomer programs that strive to resolve society's problems to be left empty-handed. Even so, the story behind newcomer programs will always exemplify instances of human resilience, and Mr. Perez and his colleagues at D214's Newcomer Center continue to ask the questions that will help them create a new narrative of what it means to be a newcomer:

> How do you win the public relations fight? How do you win that campaign when the community is very purple—red and blue? And, you have people that will respond after articles come out in the Daily Herald about us, a successful program that's working with immigrants…and say, "Why are they here? Why are we giving them medications? Why are we giving them iPads?"

If Sullivan experiences a negative reaction from the blue city of Chicago, it is not hard to recognize how D214's location in the northwest suburbs of Chicago further complicates their fight for acceptance. Professor Flores is the first to point out how the dissemination of labels and stereotypes works against vulnerable communities. He also often talks about how "the media plays a role in amplifying stereotypes, cementing them to the point that they become part of our cultural DNA." Surprisingly though, he has hope for the success of newcomer efforts and believes, "stereotypes are very powerful, but they are not written in stone…[Stereotypes] are really not as rigid as we think they are." In other words, stereotypes have a life cycle, but it is one that can only be initiated by the community.

In order to redirect people's attention away from the areas of weakness people often suspect from newcomer programs and towards their unique strengths, part of the strategy Mr. Perez and his colleagues have utilized lies in publicizing the characteristics of newcomer programs that fulfill the public's expectations of academic success:

> All of the teachers at the newcomer center were hired based on their credentials being strong because we don't want the academic integrity of the program to be questioned. Just because the kids are learning English doesn't mean that they're stupid. It doesn't mean that they're delayed, it just means that they're learning English.

This strategy, much less appealing for those that find students' stories inspirational, necessarily prioritizes taking away any advantage in the debate skeptics may assume possession of. Until parts of the educational experiences are authentically recognized for the contributions they make to students as a whole person, a school that only exhibits high levels of compassion does not entice funders and officials to invest in its mission. Still, Mr. Perez and his colleagues will continue to tell the stories of families with the hopes of getting people to see past the 10,000 people crossing the border every day. "We're here and the kids are here. We see each other. And it's a matter of making sure that you know, we're promoting ourselves in a way that dispels any misperceptions of what the kids are doing here."

In my interviews with all of the participants, it was clear that all of the faculty and staff were trying to show the sides of their students that get lost in the coverage of the war in Ukraine or the violence in Venezuela. With D214 receiving more students from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Honduras, and Guatemala, it would be nearly impossible to hire a perfectly curated cohort of adults with exposure to each of these countries and cultures. Newcomer programs' first introduction to their students is also through the media and Mr. Perez said, "Anything that you see on the news happening internationally right now, our program is usually about six months to a year from receiving those political refugees, those economic refugees." Nothing about the newcomer experience has ever been predictable or consistent, but students are able to learn the language and become working members of American society. That is exactly what must be recognized in the U.S, and these educators know it. Mr. Thomas was proud to learn this was the case with the majority of the adults in the building who worked entirely separate from the ELL

department, but even if they hadn't, opposing attitudes wouldn't have deterred him from inviting Elly Fishman in to write her book *Refugee High*:

> When the book was coming out and it got released, I had some worries that the staff would get jealous of the ELL teachers and the Newcomers Academy and have this sort of divide because adults are nasty. I thought they might say, "Why did they write a book about you? What about my class of all 'regular students' that have horrible, challenging lives?" But you know, sometimes you have to make a decision about what's going to be better, not just for the school, but better for our society. I feel like the immigrant refugee story is not a story that has often been told in a positive light. And so I felt that the sacrifices that we would have to make internally were better and more important for society. There's just a lot of misinformation about immigrant people and refugee families and things like that…We need those stories… Even though it's about Sullivan, when people read it, I thought that it was more important than Sullivan…

Without anyone to intervene in the spread of misinformation Mr. Thomas refers to, the consequences suspected to occur could not only lead to a lost lesson for society, but also to the deterioration of newcomers' sense of perception of *themselves*. In line with the small amount of existing research on the adverse effects of the refugee label (Baak 2021) discussed earlier in this paper's literature review, Professor Flores asks people to consider how unchecked narratives can significantly affect an individual's entire identity:

> We know that identity is very powerful, right? It shapes the kinds of things that you think someone like you can accomplish. It shapes the kinds of claims you think you can make from authority… If you think that you're suspected of being undocumented, if you feel like other folks think that you are illegal, it might also shape your own sense of self. It might shape how you interact with others and your own sense of what is possible given your life circumstances.

In an earlier findings section, a statement from Ms. Bruss was included to reveal how, without trusting relationships, the conversations she has with students regarding their finances would paint her out to be "just another person telling them that they don't have enough money to do what they want to do." Even more worrisome is an outcome where labels and stereotypes assigned by the community begin to reach newcomer students and cause them to develop

feelings of self-doubt and deprecation. Professor Flores suggested what might need to be considered is promotion of an entirely different type of citizenship, one focused on political engagement:

> Right now, we live in a system where we are bombarded by all these messages, and we don't have the skill nor the energy to sift through all of that and try to decipher what is right and what is wrong. In order to do that, you need to have an engaged citizenry—people that care about what's going on, that want to ask the questions, that have the skill to process information in a more critical way…

Encouraged by a culture of consumption, it seems as though Americans have become more prone to taking in information without separating opinion from facts. Only moderately familiar with the work being done by Sullivan, Professor Flores sees the potential for change so long as people become more self-sufficient in the way they process information. Even by accepting things passively, people can perpetuate the harmful myths claiming immigrants are stealing American jobs when in actuality, so many students have shared with their teachers that situations in their home country were so bad that their parents felt they had no other choice but to leave. For the sake of newcomer students and communities susceptible to unjust criticism in general, we cannot afford to be disengaged.

5.4 Access to and Collaboration with External Organizations

As impossible as it would be to accomplish a true sanctuary city without the emotional investment of surrounding communities, newcomer programs also depend on the external support of indirectly affiliated organizations. No matter how robust their specialized education programs may be, this is a shared opinion of many of the teachers working with immigrant and refugee students in need of support that spans far beyond the reach of any high school. Despite working in an already underfunded area of education in the midst of the country's worst teacher shortages (García & Weiss 2019), few of Sullivan's faculty could resist requesting there be

increased recognition for outside organizations that contribute to spreading the school's impact. Mr. Smith even went as far as saying he felt blessed every time he engaged with members outside of the immediate Sullivan community.

Among other non-profits, RefugeeOne and Heartland Alliance are some of the largest organizations that provide resettlement services in the Chicagoland area. Fortunately, Carolyn Monteagudo was able to speak from her experience as a former employee of RefugeeOne and the current K-12 Case Management Lead at Heartland Alliance's Refugee and Immigrant Community Services (RICS) program. In charge of school enrollment, Ms. Monteagudo found it necessary to mention that there were two main restrictions to school enrollment. Enrollment 1) had to occur within 30 days upon arrival, the grace period granted by the U.S. government and 2) was often dependent on where agencies could find affordable housing for families. To further elaborate on the inconsistencies within her line of work, Ms. Monteagudo shared:

> Agencies don't get a whole lot of notice when families are coming. Sometimes we get a month, sometimes we get a week. It depends on how many arrivals we're getting. Sometimes we'll get these crazy big waves of arrivals, sometimes we'll only have one family here and there… I feel like it's either crazy busy, or it's a little bit slower… But when we had the big wave of Afghan arrivals, it was kind of all hands on deck… Some families, when they arrived, because there were so many, had to stay in hotel housing… There were a handful of families I couldn't enroll until they were living in their neighborhood. Because [school placement is] all based on your address.

Such restrictions helped illustrate the limitations that present themselves before students are even able to open the door to their new school. The unpredictable nature of the resettlement process shows flexibility is required of the organizations and the reality of the process, out of the hands of most stakeholders involved, helps to reiterate just how important the makeup of the school environment is by the time students are able to enroll. With little time to acclimate to their new home prior to enrollment in what is oftentimes their neighborhood school. In the early stages,

Ms. Monteagudo makes an effort to show the parents and their kids how to get to school, but even her desire to ensure families find the right fit does not permit her to take time away from supporting the countless other families she is assigned to. Thus, Sullivan's attention to detail has been enough for it to stand out to Ms. Monteagudo as a thoughtful collaborator:

> Sullivan is a very welcoming school, they always have space for our kids, and they always welcome them with open arms and do whatever they can. They're definitely the most flexible school that I work with…They provide free bus cards for all four years for our kids, whereas a lot of CPS high schools will provide free bus cards for like one year. Little things like that that [Sullivan] does to break barriers for families are super helpful…A lot of the teachers at the schools that we work with are amazing, and super understanding and are also working within this flawed system. I don't think there's anyone to blame besides these more systemic structures.

Bus fare may be recognized as a minor inconvenience to some, but to Ms. Monteagudo, it allows her to grant families some freedom of choice in an otherwise highly restrictive process. Most Chicago locals are not even given school choice under the conditions of CPS. Evidently, as much as resettlement agencies work to ensure families are comfortable, they forfeit control when it comes to the children's educational experience. Necessities like securing housing must be prioritized, which means placement will always be first and foremost dependent on location. Ms. Monteagudo mentioned how, because other nearby schools are attempting to build newcomer centers, she can make suggestions based on English fluency and academic rigor, but it is most comforting to know Sullivan takes care of their students.

Few can match the level of commitment Sullivan's most passionate teachers put into their work with students, but the volunteers of the Hyde Park Refugee Project come close. Initially underestimated by RefugeeOne, which expressed its concerns about forming a partnership with a group of people so far from their offices, the Hyde Park Refugee Project managed to establish itself as a co-sponsorship group, which grants families with the benefits of the major resettlement

agencies without the risk of dampening real human interactions as a result of policies put in place to maintain professionalism. The advantages of being able to build more personable relationships have been made clear by Sullivan's teachers, but community-based groups need to determine when it is worth sacrificing the spending power that comes with operating in accordance with larger organization policies. Ms. Monteagudo brought up an important point related to the feasibility of expanding the reach of resettlement agencies on the North Side:

> I would love to see more expansion throughout the city, but it's really difficult when you are trying to have these centralized locations for agencies. You don't want families too far from the agency in case they need to come into the office for whatever reason. You also want them to be living with certain communities where they'll at least feel comfortable with familiar grocery stores…and on top of that, you need housing that is available and affordable for families…Building a community takes a lot of time.

Although large resettlement agencies see many families and don't always have the opportunity to foster long-term connections, there are some obvious benefits to being in such close proximity to an entire neighborhood that can serve as the single source of familiarity through shared language and food. Curious as to why the founder, Dorothy Pytel, decided to situate the project in Hyde Park as opposed to utilizing the resources in place on the North Side, I asked Anna Zonderman and Lisa Jenschke, two of the Hyde Park Refugee Project's four co-directors, about the advantages of broadening the scope of newcomer resettlement in Chicago. More specifically, I posited the question, "When you look at places like the North Side, which seem to offer very robust programs to help families, do you have to justify helping them find a place in a community where you know does not have the same highly specialized resources built-in for them?" Without hesitation, Ms. Zonderman, having experienced the struggle to secure funding, spoke highly of the way in which people have compensated for the lack of a robust refugee community in Hyde Park by showing a willingness to contribute in the whatever way they can:

> We've gotten introduced to people and resources that are on the South Side that have always existed but weren't necessarily connected with refugee resettlement. As we've had to seek out this kind of support for all the things that our families need help with, we've learned that there's a lot going on that does make [Hyde Park] an equally accessible place. One of our families who arrived last fall had a kid with an eye condition that she was born with…She, among other things, really needed new glasses, and just could not see anything at all. We really wanted to get her new glasses before she started school, but it was taking a while for their health insurance to get processed, so we reached out to one of the glasses shops in Hyde Park. And as it happens, one of their optometrists was married to a guy who served in Afghanistan in the Marines. And they were like, "Of course, we'll do this and we'll do it for free. No problem." I mean, you can't make that stuff up.

Although this particular anecdote speaks to the kindness of people who have witnessed the greater social ills forcing families out of their homes first-hand, those with a personal connection, familial or experiential, to the refugee crisis are by no means the only people who have demonstrated a desire to help. According to Ms. Jenschke, "the reason for starting the Hyde Park Refugee project was really because there was a group of interested people on the South Side who wanted to do the work," and that reason has continued to draw in volunteers for the program's now seven years of operation. Whether or not larger organizations' lack of consideration to expand has occurred a result of the city's highly segregated dispersal of different racial and ethnic communities, the general consensus at the Hyde Park Refugee Project is that, at least on a neighborhood level, other parts of Chicago should not be overlooked because they do not carry the same reputation as, for example, Rogers Park.

With respect to the school environment, Ms. Jenschke, who started as a volunteer tutor at the Hyde Park Refugee Program before assuming her role as co-director, was able to elaborate on the ways in which conditions in Hyde Park differ from those on the North Side. In agreement with how Mr. Thomas, Ms. Handley, and Mr. Perez all valued learning English in the resettlement process, Ms. Jenschke felt "education was going to be really important for the long-term success of the families, and that the more English they understood, and the better the

kids were able to do in school, the better the outcomes for their whole family." Unfortunately, schools like Ray Elementary, located within blocks of the University of Chicago's campus, either do not share the same philosophy or are forced to prioritize other areas equally in need of funding. Ms. Jenschke shared that Ray has lost the teacher, who she worked with closely to start an after-school program, and "Ray has not replaced the ELL teacher, so they don't have an ELL program there even though they have a large number of kids who are ELLs. And the other neighboring schools that we have a lot of kids at…they also don't have any ELL teacher." To this point, the favorability of helping families resettle in the North Side, where schools like Sullivan are geographically closer, is made clear. The bus fares Sullivan covers for its students farther away do not necessarily make it realistic to travel to the opposite end of the city or solve the problem for families with children in grade school.

Even so, the problem will only persist if people continue to subscribe to the idea that only the schools and agencies located on the North Side should be reevaluating their systems to tailor services to the needs of an incoming population. For Ms. Jenschke, a need for support so clearly exists on a larger scale:

> Working in the schools, I think we [at the Hyde Park Refugee Project] really saw that there are so many more families in the community that need every one of these things. They need help with accessing public benefits, they need help getting to the doctor, they need help getting their kids after-school homework support…It's just a whole list of stuff. I guess that's kind of like my soapbox… I love what we're doing for these families, but it has really opened my eyes about how much more is needed in our communities.

In addition to the way in which schools like Sullivan depend on collaboration with external organizations to help their students attain basic necessities like housing, the perspectives of the people involved, especially those that are able to build relationships with family on a personal level, help highlight how struggles faced throughout the resettlement process are just as apparent

in other communities. While many organizations exist and advocate for local communities, they, like Chicago's growing refugee population, are often denied access to support in schools, work places, and beyond.

6. Policy Recommendations

Close analysis of each stakeholder's experience interacting with and developing a deeper understanding of Chicago's newcomers through teaching, counseling, and research, has revealed significant overlap with respect to identifying what high-level policies can be implemented to help new and existing newcomer programs. My findings have led me to formulate three recommendations that directly respond to the most pressing issues identified in the conversations about working with newcomers in CPS included in this paper, but they can also be applied to the field of education more broadly. None of these recommendations should be considered under the assumption that the education of the larger U.S. population cannot also benefit from their application. The unpredictable nature of any student body makes it difficult to streamline and claim overarching solutions, however, the way in which each of the interview subjects featured in this paper observe, admire, and critique current systems is open-minded and adaptable.

First, made evident by participants' statements about how a teacher with compassion can, and often does, turn out to be more of an asset than one solely with shiny credentials, there is a need for teachers, administrators, and school district leaders alike to be willing to admit to shortcomings and duplicate existing models that have demonstrated success. While a belief in the strategy in place is crucial, once its failure to address a given problem is widely recognized, there reaches a point when forcing it into practice can only be more detrimental. History has proven it is difficult for individuals to admit fault, especially in situations where the consequences of their actions most significantly impact those with a total lack of control, but Mr. Smith believes,

“When you make mistakes, it's okay. Let's correct it. Let's move on. And know that you're gonna make mistakes and not give up.” To prove this sentiment is not tainted by Mr. Smith’s own bias towards the success of his former school’s programming, it is worth noting how people like Professor Flores value recognizing what has been proven to work in broader contexts:

> There's a lot of things we can learn from other places…In Canada, they really don't have such a strong assimilation model. They actually encourage immigrants to maintain their traditions and their ethnic customs. So, you have immigrants who remain involved in ethnic associations and become engaged politically and that pulls them into the political landscape. You have all these associations of immigrants that come together, they have resources and they are accepted by the state partners. As a result of that, they are politically empowered. They invite candidates from the left, from the right, from the center… I'm not saying that Canada is a perfect place. But I think there are things that we can learn from them here and there.

It is not as simple as picking up the policy developed within a particular context and expecting it to work just as efficiently in another. Compared to a school on the West or South Side, Sullivan has the advantage of being situated in Rogers Park. But other schools certainly make up for what Sullivan is not able to offer its students. Part of the redesign process that so many participants advocated for also requires individuals to reflect on their contributions and decide whether they believe their perspective can be leveraged to continue to advance their mission as the community evolves. Mr. Perez shared more about the reasoning behind his ultimate decision to step away from administrative work at D214 when he said, “In order for the program to start to meet the needs of 150 plus students and become something different than I was involved in early on. I thought, ‘I probably need to be somewhere else.’” This is not at all to say enforcing complete disinvolvement from those who have dedicated a certain number of years to one school is the solution. After all, Mr. Perez continues to teach at D214’s Newcomer Center. To step back, though, is to exemplify thoughtful consideration of a program or school’s future and even

express confidence in the individuals that will assume control of the work. And each of the participants have demonstrated how that can ultimately save the future of a program.

Second, if schools hope to provide newcomer students with the space to learn and grow, they must at least consider adopting aspects of personalized learning that allow for students' performance to be evaluated more holistically. Given the inherent flexibility of the particular personalized learning model Sullivan's ELL department pride themselves on, where teachers meet students where they are at, it would be irresponsible for other schools trying to create their own version of the Newcomers Academy not to implement that same pedagogy. Research has made clear that personalized learning is not for every student. It is not even for every newcomer student. However, too often overlooked because of the assumption that it is incompatible with academic rigor, personalized learning is not applauded enough for its ability to compensate for the ways in which most schools, English fluency aside, are geared towards students without learning disabilities or limited education. Many of the benefits personalized learning were highlighted in my findings, particularly in the interviews with Ms. Handley, but others, like Ms. Monteagudo, who works directly with newcomer students, sees how widespread adoption could also impact the enrollment process for the better:

> I wish it was more flexible. I think our families bring a lot to the table, and I don't think that those are necessarily reflected academically within credits, and within this very rigid structure of receiving credits… At least in my opinion, I think that education plays a really big role, but it's not super inclusive of our students. Let's say they did complete some years of high school and they have a transcript, but some of those credits don't transfer. Now they actually need two more years of high school, and it's really disappointing for a lot of our kids who have done the work. For whatever reason, it's not deemed good enough within the American school system.

Drawing from her time spent at resettlement agencies, Ms. Monteagudo later shared that the prioritization of students as people that personalized learning lends itself to is what she imagines

will help break the current understanding of what learning looks like, which works against many students, newcomers or not.

My last recommendation asks for administrative figures to increase communication with stakeholders. In a school environment, the top down approach of instruction guarantees teachers, who most frequently engage with students and their parents, will be left unheard. While such an operation may seem ideal for school districts as large as CPS, it makes it exceedingly difficult for teachers to find their footing, especially during a period where they are most susceptible to feeling the lack of support geared towards them in the education system and burning out. Ms. Bruss was able to speak about Sullivan's administration's tendency to neglect the importance of communication from a very unique perspective:

> I think especially as I was there longer and longer and kind of shifted roles, I mean, I was always a counselor, but I think I had become somewhat of an administrative figure in the building, so I was often privy to certain information. I would even say sometimes to our administration, "Why don't you tell people that that's why you made that decision, like, that makes so much sense." Because instead, people are coming up with their own narratives that are oftentimes very negative, and then they're spreading that around, and it's bringing down overall morale in the building.

As Ms. Bruss has pointed out, lack of an effort to be transparent with those responsible for carrying out the decisions the administration makes cannot be the default for administration if there is any hope for improvement. Even if they are not able to be involved in the decision-making process, it is irresponsible to exclude them from hearing the various conversations taking place as it consequently makes room for the community to jump to conclusions and entertain hypotheticals. Effective advocacy should not have to solely depend on the personality type of teachers, new and old. Rather, the current vertical system should be reorganized in a way that stakeholders have an opportunity to be heard. No school, whether or not they serve a particularly vulnerable population like Sullivan, can afford to lose their teachers.

And according to participants, a conscious effort to increase communication at all levels is a reasonable step to mitigate tension and foster collaboration.

7. Conclusion

It is evident that Roger C. Sullivan is an especially unique school, one that deserves to be recognized for its accomplishments in introducing inventive ELL curricula, encouraging students of various backgrounds to embrace their differences and also see common ground, and committing itself to serving a population of people that have been turned away for reasons not limited to political unrest, religious persecution, and economic instability. Sullivan is also the token newcomer center for CPS. But it does not have to be.

Having a unique student population, relative to the majority of the district, should not be viewed as a prerequisite for appreciating those who teach and lead them with compassion and conviction. It *should* be valued for the ways it reinforces, and arguably fulfills, the city's promises to those in need of sanctuary, but this celebration should not detract from other schools' hope to provide the same for students in their community. Surely, the same eagerness to be a part of this work that has been demonstrated by the community members the Hyde Park Refugee Project has relied upon exists in other neighborhoods scattered across the city. For this reason, this city should take advantage of changing attitudes and shifting demographics. Moreover, newcomers' status as refugees and immigrants is important, but it is only one aspect of their identity upon arrival in a new place and one that some even wish to shed once they start to consider their new country home or gain a sense of comfort having lived there for several years (Baak 2021). Labels that assume unfamiliarity can distract from the similarities many newcomers actually share with students local to Chicago. Learning with a language barrier and growing accustomed to a new culture add an additional layer of complexity to one's educational

experience, but most high school students are comparably navigating complex social dynamics, overcoming potential learning disabilities, and building new relationships. Too many factors in this world are out of our control that we must be willing to learn from the perseverance exhibited by Sullivan's students and also recognize how it is exemplified by so many other communities in our neighborhoods, cities, and states. For too long, investment in the development of education spaces has been ignored, or, at the very least, understated.

Due to my position as a researcher on the outside of the newcomer experience, this paper is limited in its ability to draw conclusions about the needs of newcomers and their families. Active and retired faculty and staff have helped me identify what kind of support systems seem to be most applicable in situations of resettlement, but I do not deny that students and their parents have been left out of the equation. My hope is for students, like those at Sullivan, to feel empowered in their experience and share the story with complete authority over how it is told. Rather than give up on the potential for a district that serves 322,106 of the city's students, let us imagine how each school can pursue greater goals and how each community can help to achieve them.

8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Participant Table

Participant	**Affiliated Organization(s)***	**Position(s)**	**Date of Interview**
Mario Perez	District 214 Newcomer Center Program	Co-Founder / Social Science Teacher / *Former* Director & Coordinator	1/5/2023
Anthony 'Tony' Smith	Roger C. Sullivan High School	*Retired* History Teacher & Senior Seminar Advisor	1/9/2023
Joshua Zepeda	Roger C. Sullivan High School	ELL Social Worker / EL Grade Level Lead	1/11/2023
Liz Bruss	Roger C. Sullivan High School	*Former* Counseling Department Chair	1/12/2023
René Flores	The University of Chicago Department of Sociology	Associate Professor	1/15/2023
Annmarie Handley	Roger C. Sullivan High School	ELL English Teacher	1/20/2023
Chad Thomas	Chicago Public Schools: Principal Quality / Roger C. Sullivan High School	Director of Leader Engagement / *Former* Principal	1/25/2023
Anna Zonderman	Hyde Park Refugee Project / UChicago Medicine Comprehensive Care Program	Co-Director / Social Worker	1/29/2023
Lisa Jenschke	Hyde Park Refugee Project	Co-Director / Artist	1/31/2023
Carolyn Monteagudo	Heartland Alliance: Refugee and Immigrant Community Services (RICS)	K-12 Case Management Lead	2/1/2023

**Statements included in this research paper are personal to each interview subject and none should be interpreted as the message or opinion of the organizations and institutions they are associated with*

Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for School Faculty/Staff

- To start, please share a brief description about your relationship to Sullivan High School.
    - What is your position at/in relation to Sullivan? How long have you been in this position?
    - Were you a part of the Newcomer's Academy implementation process?
        - If so, how?
    - When did you first learn about the school? Have you worked in educational spaces that serve immigrant and refugee communities like Sullivan?
        - If so, please describe your experience in that environment and explain how it compares to the work you are presently engaged in?
        - If not, please describe your experience in that environment and explain how it compares to the work you are presently engaged in?
        - What are the strengths and weaknesses of each learning environment? What made you identify them as such?
- How has your experience been as an active member of the community?
- Can you describe students' relationships with faculty/staff at Sullivan?
- Can you describe teachers' relationships with other members of faculty/staff?
    - Where/when do you feel the sense of community is strongest?
- Do you think any "prior" experience can prepare a principal/teacher for a student body as diverse as Sullivan's? Is there something distinct that sets some faculty/staff members from others?
- To what degree are faculty and staff required or encouraged to collaborate with outside organizations?
- How would you define the mission of Sullivan? Do you align with that mission?
    - If not/not entirely, what would you change?
- It is my understanding that CPS holds all the schools within its district to the same standards, do you feel as though students in the Newcomer's Academy are at a disadvantage because of that?
    - Why or why not?
- Do you feel as though you are equipped with the necessary resources to tackle the goals you/the school have set?
    - If so, what resources do you consider most crucial?
    - If not, what resources would you most wish to have access to?
        - Is the lack of resources rooted in a lack of funding? Why or why not?
- What do you believe is the most crucial factor in a schools'/programs' success?
- Have you expressed recommendations, if you have any, with those in leadership positions?
    - Are there any ideas you would like to convey now?

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Experts in Immigration/Resettlement

- To start, please share how you are involved in either the field of education or a field related to immigration.
- What is your knowledge of Sullivan High School or places that offer a newcomers academy like it?
    - Does its presence in the CPS district make you hopeful?
        - Why or why not?
- *If an expert in immigration policy/research*, what role does education play in U.S. immigration policy?
    - What experience/research led you to form this conclusion?
- *If an expert in education*, do you believe more schools like Sullivan should exist?
    - If so, do you think this would be a feasible undertaking for the CPS district?
- Do you believe the attitudes of the city's residents must align with its school district?
    - If so, is this the case in Chicago?
    - If no, why not?
- Have you expressed recommendations, specific to your area of expertise, that you might have developed over time to the public?
    - Are there any ideas you would like to convey now?

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