

# Association of Character with Purpose, SEL Skills, and Climate

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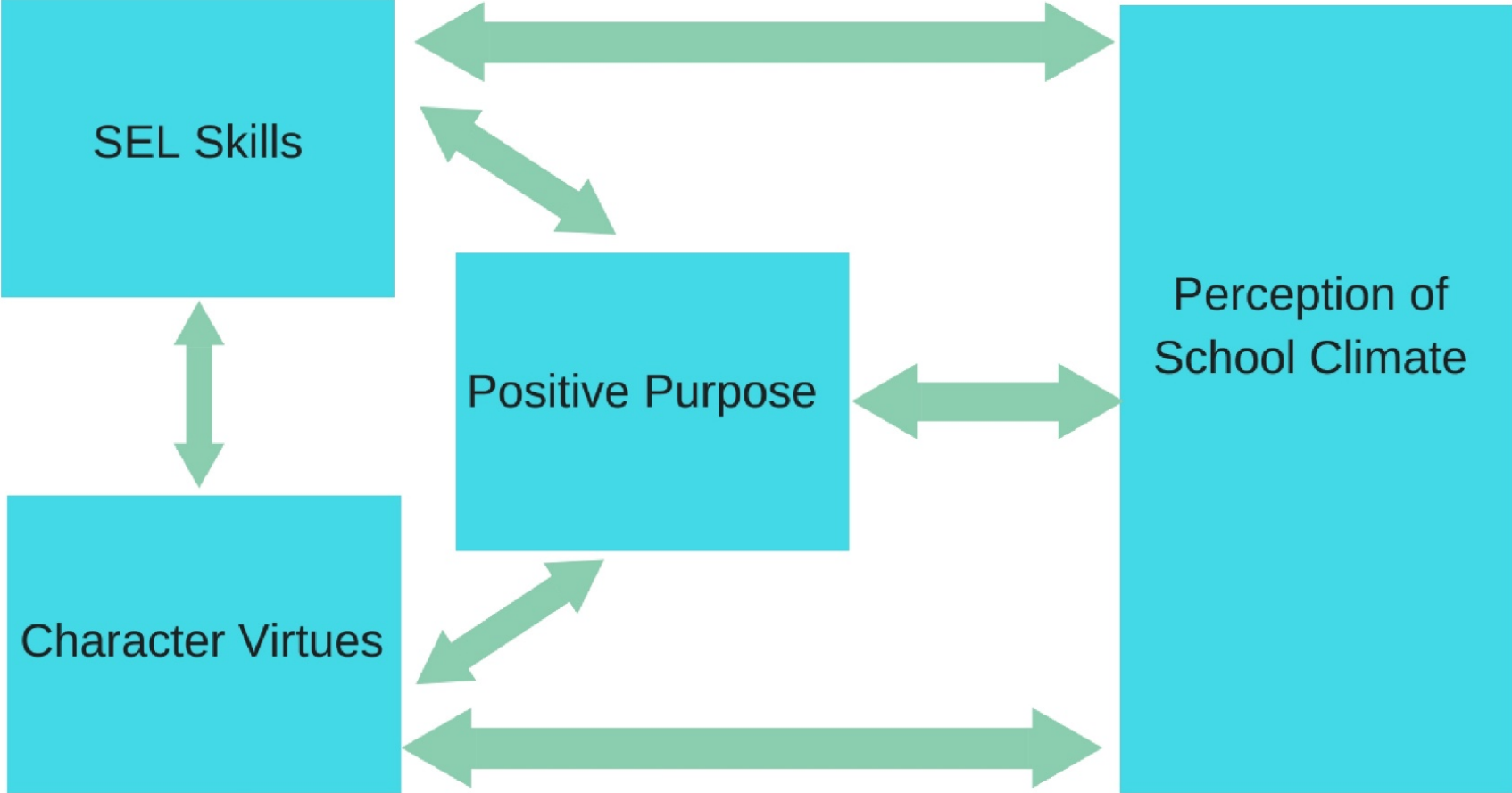
Esha Vaid, Arielle V. Linsky, Kun Su, Samuel J. Nayman

Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab ([www.secdlab.org](http://www.secdlab.org))

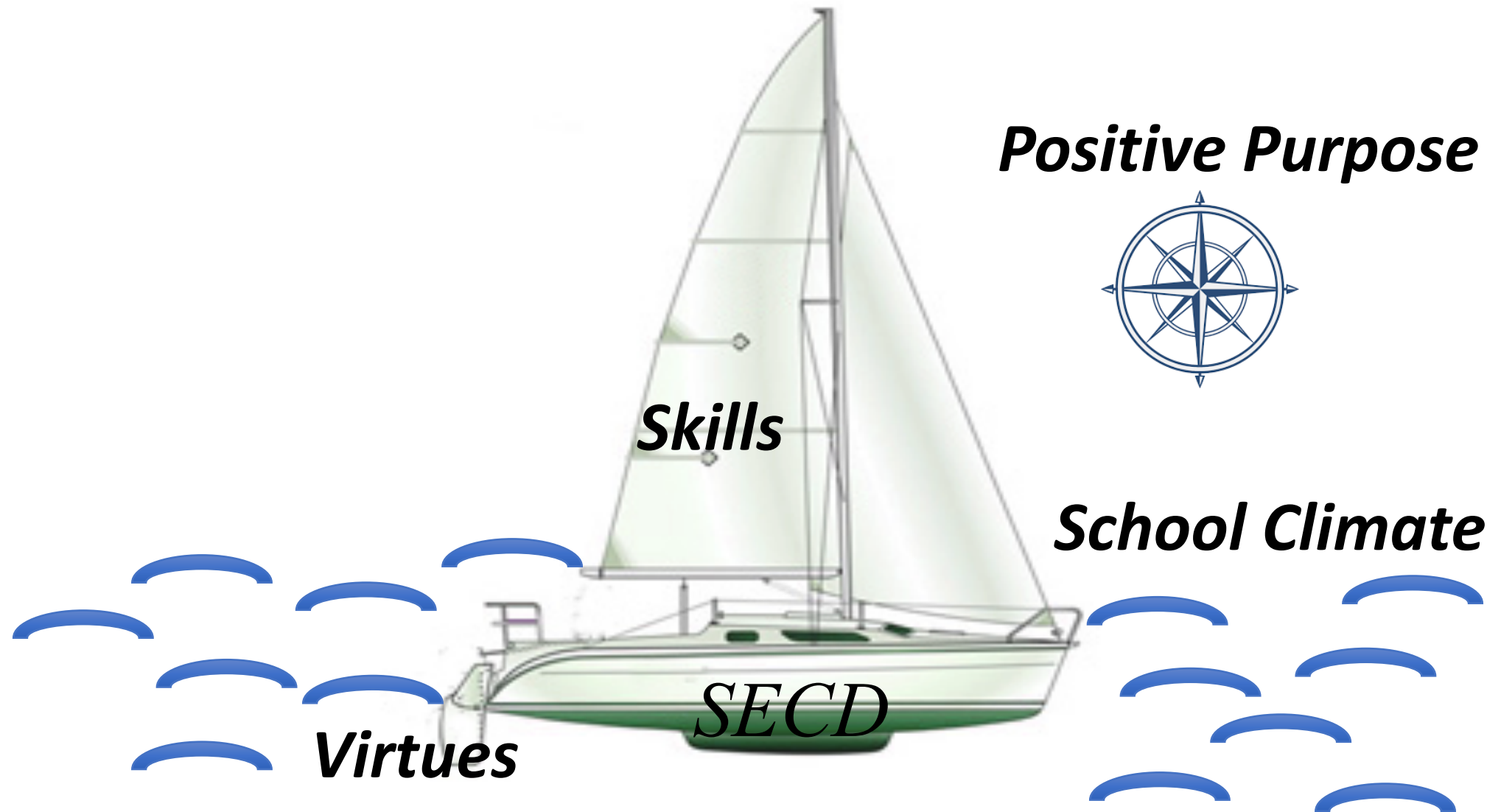
Rutgers University

AERA 2018

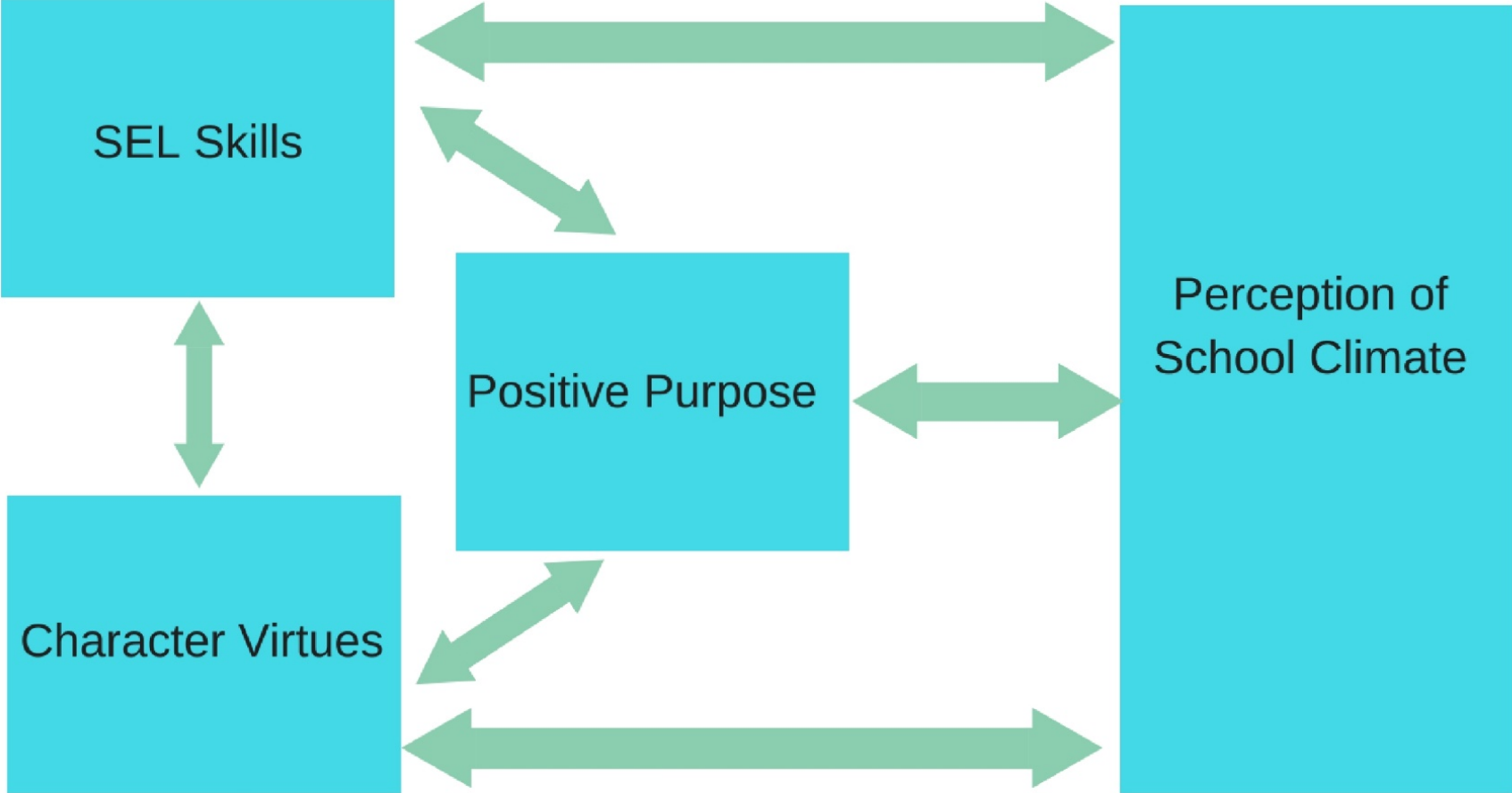
# Targets of SECD Approach to School Turnaround



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# Constellation of Virtues Supporting Positive Purpose

- Responsible Diligence
- Helpful Generosity
- Optimistic Future-Mindedness
- Constructive Creativity
- Compassionate Forgiveness and Gratitude

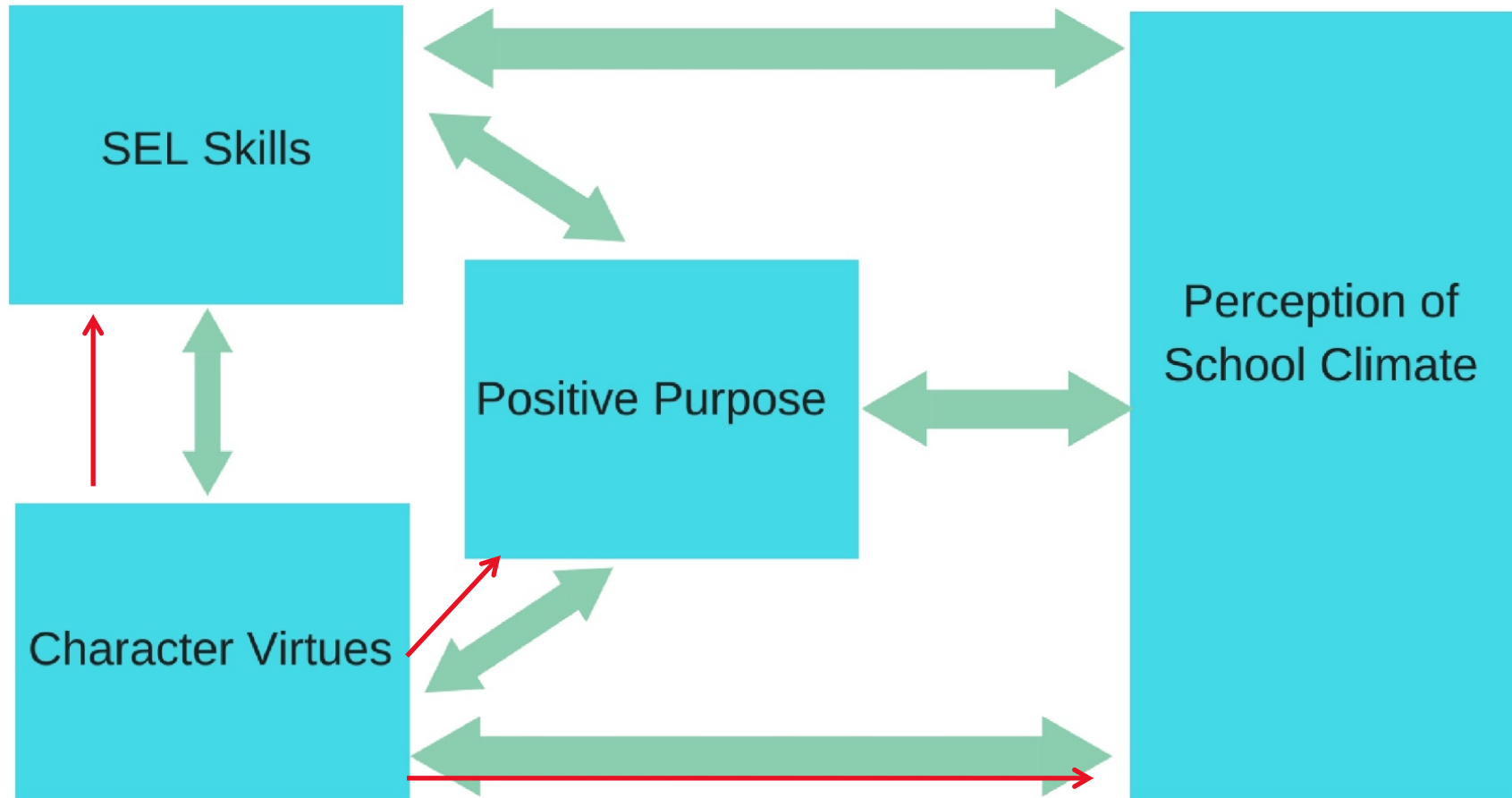


*See Hatchimonji,  
Linsky, & Elias (2017)  
for further explanation*

# Urban Middle Schools

- Schools:
  - Racial, socioeconomic, and gender disparities
  - Pressure to improve standardized test scores and reduce disparities
- Middle school students:
  - Developmental need to reflect on identity and life purpose
  - Increasing social, emotional, and cognitive skills

# Targets of SECD Approach to School Turnaround



# Hypotheses

Character virtues expected to be positively associated with:

- SEL Skills
- Sense of Purpose
- Perception of School Climate

(Each virtue alone and all virtues together)



# Virtue as a Moderator?

- Expected to find disparities in teacher-rated SEL skills by gender and race
- Moderating effect:
  - These disparities would exist at low levels of virtue but NOT at higher levels of the virtue

# Method

- Baseline assessment of MOSAIC Project
- 5 middle schools
- Student self-report surveys (Virtues\*, Purpose\*, Climate)
- Teacher-reported SEL skills (DESSA-Mini)

\*We can provide list of items for the virtues and purpose scale on request

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*Sample Characteristics*

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School Number	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Grade Level						
6 <sup>th</sup>	140	54	35	68	34	331
7 <sup>th</sup>	151	77	55	62	27	372
8 <sup>th</sup>	126	51	50	53	28	308
Meal Status						
Free or Reduced Lunch	263	147	92	128	77	707
Other Lunch	154	35	48	55	12	304
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	106	44	56	20	46	272
Latino	143	79	36	111	26	395
Asian	121	20	16	33	10	200
White	47	39	32	19	7	144
Gender						
Male	179	90	75	95	52	491
Female	238	92	65	88	37	520
Total	417	182	140	183	89	1011

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# Preliminary Analyses

*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

	M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Diligence	3.99 (0.71)	-	.36**	.14**	.45**	.48**	.51**	.31**	.20**
2. Gratitude	4.24 (0.67)		-	.25**	.29**	.36**	.44**	.35**	.15**
3. Forgiveness	2.91 (0.86)			-	.28**	.12**	.14**	.26**	.11**
4. Generosity	3.43 (0.82)				-	.27**	.30**	.27**	.18**
5. Future-Mindedness	4.64 (0.50)					-	.55**	.27**	.20**
6. Purpose	4.22 (0.75)						-	.37**	.07*
7. School Climate	3.43 (0.74)							-	.10**
8. SEL Skills	23.54 (7.10)								-

*Note.* Mean and Standard Deviations for Virtues (Diligence, Gratitude, Forgiveness, Generosity, and Future-Mindedness), Purpose, and School Climate represent the mean of the self-reported scale (all scales used a 5-point Likert scale); SEL Skills mean and standard deviation is mean of total score rated by teachers; Correlations represent bivariate correlations of total scores of all scales.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

# Preliminary Analyses

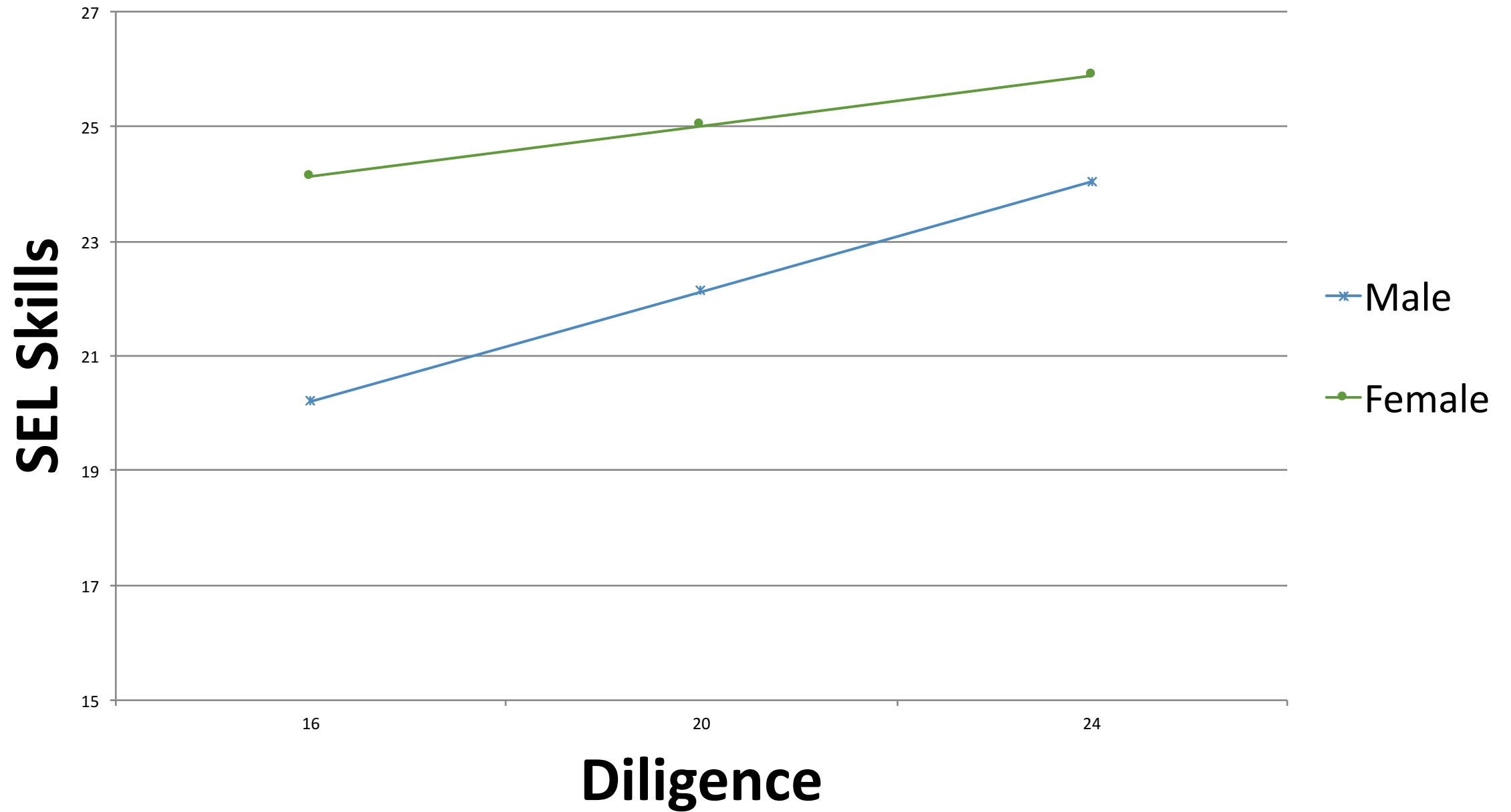
- What demographic factors were related to the DVs?
  - SEL Skills (teacher-ratings)
    - Race (Asian students higher than all other groups)
    - Gender (Female students higher than males)
    - Lunch Status (Free/Reduced Lunch lower than Other)
    - Grade Level (8<sup>th</sup> graders higher than other grade levels)

# Preliminary Analyses

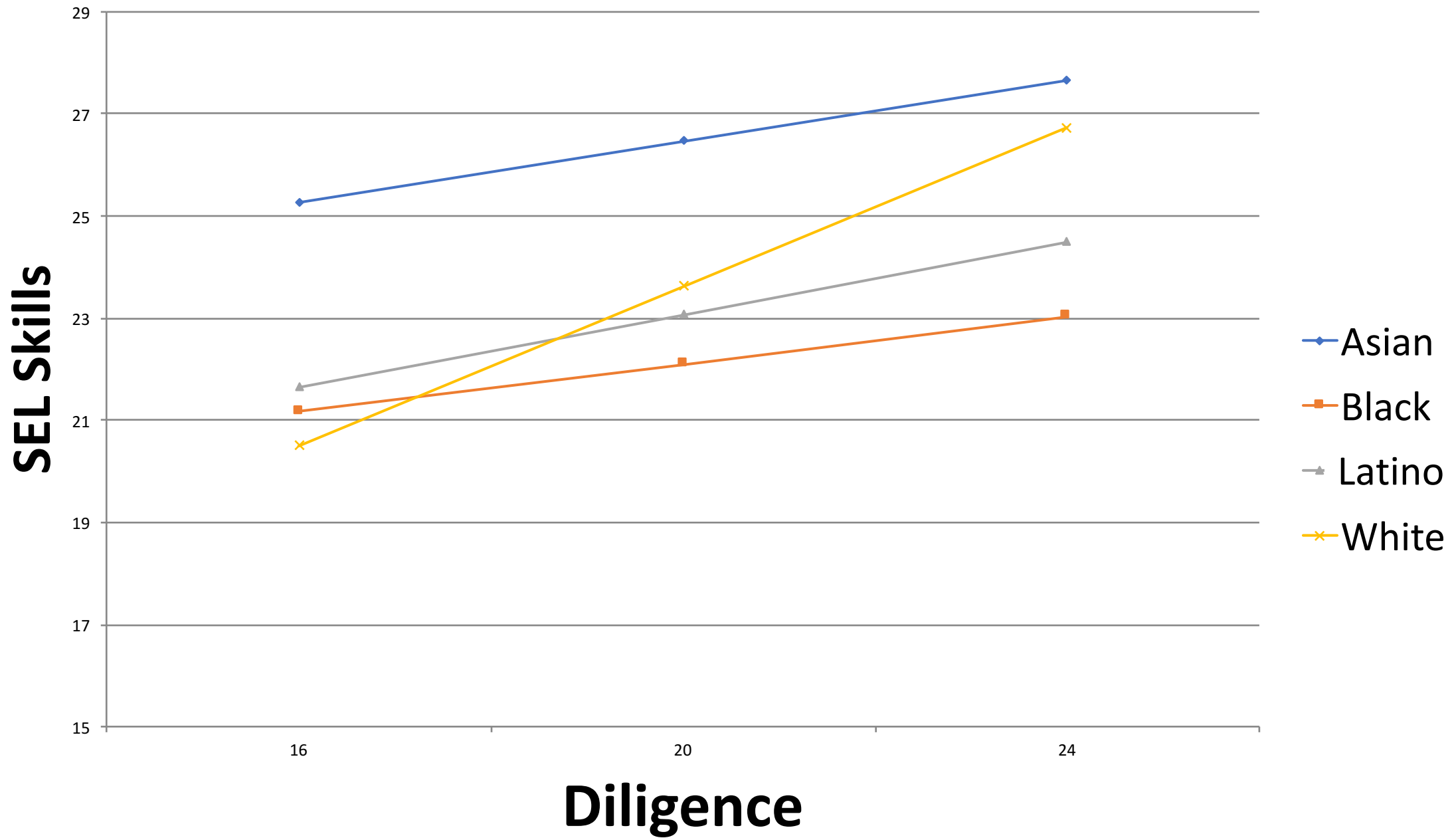
- What demographic factors were related to the DVs?
  - Sense of Purpose (self-report)
    - Grade level (6<sup>th</sup> graders highest, 8<sup>th</sup> graders lowest)
  - Perception of School Climate (self-report)
    - Race (Black students lower than Asian and Latino)
    - Grade level (6<sup>th</sup> graders higher than other grade levels, 8<sup>th</sup> graders lowest)

*Summary of Variance in DV Explained by Regression Models*

Dependent Variable	Virtue	Step One (Demographics) R <sup>2</sup>	Step Two (Virtue) Δ R <sup>2</sup>
Teacher-Rated SEL Skills	Diligence	.14	.03
	Gratitude	.14	.02
	Forgiveness	.14	.02
	Generosity	.14	.01
	Future-Mindedness	.14	.03
	All Five Virtues	.14	.05
Purpose	Diligence	.04	.24
	Gratitude	.04	.18
	Forgiveness	.04	.02
	Generosity	.04	.10
	Future-Mindedness	.04	.33
	All Five Virtues	.04	.41
School Climate	Diligence	.08	.09
	Gratitude	.08	.10
	Forgiveness	.08	.05
	Generosity	.08	.07
	Future-Mindedness	.08	.06
	All Five Virtues	.08	.17





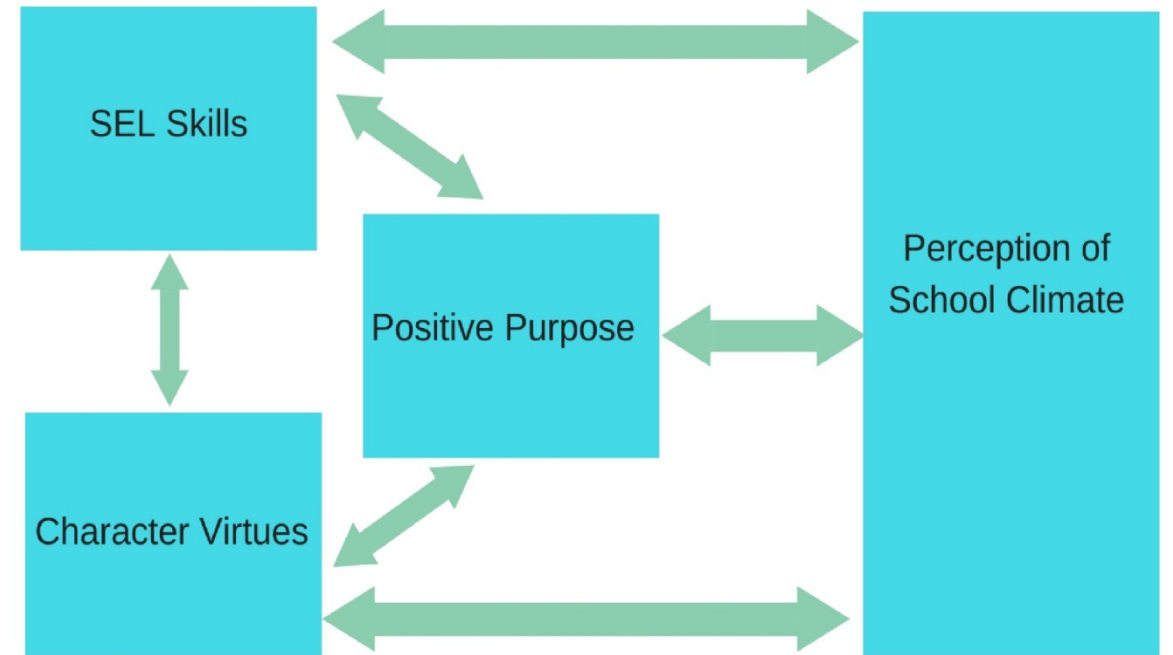


# Limitations and Future Directions

- Student-Report (Single-informant, Social desirability bias, Skew)
- School-level differences
- Cross-sectional
- Need to test additional parts of the model
- Follow up on interaction findings

# Summary

- We explored relationships among the targets of the SECD approach to school turnaround
- Five supporting virtues were positively associated with:
  - SEL Skills
  - Sense of Purpose
  - Perception of School Climate
- Virtue moderated teacher-rated SEL skills for male and White students only



# Thank you!

- John Templeton Foundation
- SECD Lab
- MOSAIC Advisory Group

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**Write down three  
take-aways on one  
index card.**

