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An Examination of the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Standards in Middle School

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An Examination of the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Standards in Middle School

by

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Abstract

In this mixed-methods study the researcher analyzed teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning and whether students in subgroup populations including Black students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) attained social and emotional competency at the same level as peers not in the aforementioned subgroups.

The researcher used the CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills) to define social and emotional learning data in the study. The researcher used descriptive statistics and a *t*-test from data collected in a student self-reported survey to determine whether subgroup populations achieved SEL competency at the same levels as students not in subgroups. The researcher found students who received IEP services achieved a statistically significant difference in achievement levels in two of the CASEL competencies in a self-reported SEL survey compared to students who did not receive IEP services. However, the researcher did not find statistically significant differences in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey of the social and emotional learning CASEL competencies between students on free and reduced lunch and students not receiving free and reduced lunch nor between Black students and students of all other races.

The researcher also conducted a thematic analysis and coding of answers from teacher interviews and open-ended questions on the surveys and conducted a descriptive analysis of the teacher survey answers from Likert-style survey questions. Data from the interviews and surveys provided a qualitative and descriptive analysis of staff attitudes and beliefs regarding social and emotional learning. Questions in the surveys and

interviews covered five topics: preparedness to teach SEL, perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, perceptions of subgroup needs and competency, teacher efficacy, and teacher implementation of SEL. Throughout the researcher's analysis, there were several themes that occurred in more than one research question, making them even stronger than if they had only occurred once. Based on these results, the researcher found teachers strongly believed 1) More training is needed about social and emotional learning, 2) Home life affects SEL skill development, and 3) Teachers felt they don't have enough time to teach social and emotional learning and the required curriculum. Based on these conclusions, the researcher recommended future social and emotional learning research centered around improved assessment tools for SEL in the educational setting and high quality SEL professional development for teachers.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) reached a turning point in the United States education system (Jones et al., 2017; Jones & Doolittle, 2017). What once began as an amalgamation of ideas to support student academic, social, and emotional development grew into a movement backed by research and curriculum that underscored the need for SEL in schools. As a result, interest in social and emotional learning has increased in schools, and the need for greater understanding and implementation of SEL has increased as well.

Compelling research demonstrated what parents always knew - the success of young people in school and beyond was inextricably linked to healthy social and emotional development. In fact, the National Academy of Sciences identified three domains of competence for 21st-century skills: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Students who demonstrated a sense of belonging and purpose, who worked well with classmates and peers to solve problems, who planned and set goals, and who persevered through challenges in addition to being literate, numerate, and versed in scientific concepts and ideas were more likely to maximize opportunities and reach full potential. Educators, too, understood the benefits of educating the whole child and called for more support and fewer barriers to making the vision a reality (Jones et al., 2017).

Indeed, teachers and administrators overwhelmingly supported SEL for student success as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) standards (Atwell et al., 2019; Bridgeland et al., 2013). Research on the topic

confirmed that well-implemented SEL programs not only improved student academic and behavioral outcomes but also prevented negative ones (Durlak et al., 2011).

Background of the Problem

The history of social and emotional learning is as old as the relationship that exists between teacher and pupil (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2021a). “The principles of SEL are present in every caring, collaborative relationship and live in the partnerships between students, schools, families, and communities throughout history. But the work of formalizing this field began more recently” (CASEL, 2021a, para. 5). Modern social and emotional learning was first piloted in the 1960s when Dr. James Comer founder of the Comer School Development Program in two of New Haven, Connecticut's poorest, lowest-achieving schools. The program worked with a team of educators and mental health workers to guide school decisions, ranging from academic and social programs to discipline policies. By the 1980s, both schools excelled academically and had fewer truancy and behavior problems, providing momentum for the SEL movement to follow in the 1990s (Edutopia, 2011).

In 1994, a group of experts, including researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates, met at the Fetzer Institute and introduced social and emotional learning as a “conceptual framework to promote the social, emotional, and academic competence of young people” (CASEL, 2021a; Weissberg et al., 2015, p. 5). The experts formed the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); a flagship for SEL research and promoting SEL in schools. CASEL’s website stated, “CASEL’s goal was, and still is, to establish high-quality, evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education” (CASEL, 2021a, para.10).

Since CASEL's inception, social and emotional learning has grown significantly in education. Schools across the country implemented SEL at a growing pace, and support for SEL grew among teachers, students, parents, and policymakers (CASEL, 2021a). The researcher hoped to provide insight into teacher perceptions of SEL and examine differences in SEL competence between subgroups+ populations and students not in subgroups.

Purpose of the Dissertation

In this mixed-methods study, the researcher analyzed social and emotional learning in middle school students. Specifically, the researcher examined teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning and whether students in subgroup populations attained social and emotional competency at the same level as peers not in subgroup populations. The researcher analyzed data about subgroups, including Black students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The researcher analyzed data collected in a district-approved SEL survey in a public midwestern middle school in a suburban area. The survey included all five areas of the CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills). Students who participated in the survey twice a year provided the school and district valuable information regarding student social and emotional learning skills. The survey included self-reported data, meaning students assessed their SEL skills in each CASEL competency by answering four to six questions for each CASEL competency and other broad questions regarding school climate and belonging. The researcher used secondary quantitative data to

determine whether subgroup populations achieved SEL competency at the same levels as students not in subgroups. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the results using a *t*-test to compare the difference between self-reported SEL scores in each of the CASEL domains between subgroup scores and non-subgroup scores.

The researcher also interviewed and surveyed teachers. Data from the interviews and surveys provided a qualitative and descriptive analysis of staff attitudes and beliefs regarding social and emotional learning. Questions in the surveys and interviews covered five topics: preparedness to teach SEL, perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, perceptions of subgroup needs and competency, teacher efficacy, and teacher implementation of SEL. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis of answers from the interviews and open-ended questions on the surveys and conducted a descriptive analysis of the survey answers from the Likert-style questions.

The researcher hoped to educate teachers and administrators about potential disparities in SEL achievement in SEL subgroups so educators can better plan and implement SEL learning. The researcher also hoped to provide administrators with insight into teachers' feelings about preparedness, efficacy, subgroup needs, and teacher implementation of social and emotional learning in the classroom.

Rationale

The prominent reason the researcher wanted to conduct this research was to contribute to the field of social and emotional learning and its development for middle school students. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher saw how relationships affected students and their ability to succeed at school. The researcher observed that when students felt disconnected from each other and from school, they had

significantly less motivation to complete schoolwork and often exhibited signs of depression. After this experience, the researcher wanted to learn more about this field and contribute to SEL research. In the researcher's study, she found evidence that supported the importance of SEL in the classroom. One research brief, "The evidence base for how we learn," issued by the Council of Distinguished Scientists of the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, claimed that "learning, by its very nature, is both social and emotional" (Berman et al., 2018, p.4).

Further research indicated SEL was not only a part of how we learn but also contributed positively to student behavioral and academic success. In a meta-analysis performed by Durlak et al. (2011),

> Results (based on 35–112 interventions depending on the outcome category) indicated that, compared to controls, students demonstrated enhanced SEL skills, attitudes, and positive social behaviors following intervention, and also demonstrated fewer conduct problems and had lower levels of emotional distress. (pp.10-11)

Research also indicated students in the same control group gained an average of 11% in academic achievement if the students participated in SEL instruction (Durlak et al., 2011). Additional research studies provided evidence on the relationship between SEL and student academic and social growth (Berman et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017). The research findings supported SEL in schools.

While there was a wealth of research about the positive effects of SEL programs, minimal research existed about subgroup populations and whether subgroups attained

social and emotional learning competency at the same level as students not in subgroups (Cipriano et al., 2021; West et al., 2020). In fact, Cipriano et al. (2021) stated,

> After reviewing 242 studies of elementary school SEL from 2008 through the end of 2020, we found that more than 75 percent of them make no mention whatsoever of students with disabilities, and fewer than 1 in 10 include students with disabilities in their analysis. Nearly 75 percent of studies do not report student race in their results, and only 1 of every 10 reports on the effect of SEL on students by racial or ethnic identity. (para. 10)

Data lacking information about race or disability status was especially troubling since "students today are more anxious, less connected, and more likely to have experienced trauma. . . And these experiences have been most profound for students marginalized by race, ethnicity, and ability" (Cipriano et al., 2021, para. 6). In fact, evidence that SEL competence is important for countering the negative effects of exposure to risk is what led some researchers to focus on social and emotional learning (Domitrovich et al., 2017). The researcher found that some researchers did study SEL and its implications for subgroup populations, but none replicated her research study exactly. Domitrovich et al. (2017) studied longitudinal research that stated findings regarding school-based SEL interventions and the effects on aggressive and disruptive behaviors. The five meta-analyses studied variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, location (rural/urban), risk, and socioeconomic status. The research found no statistically significant difference in the variables and social and emotional learning related to outcomes. These research studies included analysis by Barnes et al. (2017), Durlak et al. (2011), Garrard and Lispey (2007), Taylor et al. (2017), and Wilson and Lipsey (2007)

(Domitrovich et al., 2017). West et al. (2020) also studied SEL competency over two years in children in grades four through 12 by examining the SEL components of growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness and then compared results among subgroup populations, including gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. West et al. (2020) found only growth mindset increased throughout years of schooling, while self-efficacy, social awareness, and self-management all decreased after sixth grade. Variances in each component's strength existed between males and females, but students of color and lower socioeconomic status reported lower scores for each component (West et al., 2020).

Even though all the studies were about SEL and subgroup populations, the researcher could not find a study on all five CASEL domains in the research. West et al. (2020) examined two of the five domains but not all five CASEL competencies. The researcher studied five domains for two reasons: 1) CASEL competencies were used in the participating school district and self-reported by students' participation in the SEL survey, and 2) "The CASEL 5 addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlights examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (CASEL, 2021c, para. 5). The broad range of competencies were applicable across a wide range of school ages and communities. In fact,

> Many school districts, states, and countries have used the CASEL 5 to establish preschool to high school learning standards and competencies that articulate what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers. (CASEL, 2021c, para. 5)

The researcher found numerous studies whose authors noted teachers supported social and emotional learning (Bridgeland et al., 2013). In a national survey by CASEL, 93% of teachers felt SEL was very important or fairly important for students (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 3). In the same survey, "Nearly all teachers (95 percent) believed social and emotional skills are teachable and report that SEL will benefit students from all backgrounds, rich or poor (97 percent)" (Bridgeland et al., 2013. p. 4). The findings indicated teachers supported social and emotional learning. However, "The overwhelming majority (51-100%) of teacher education programs in 49 states did not address any of the five core Students' SEL dimensions" (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017, p. 11). Recommendations in the Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) report, "To reach the students, teach the teachers: A national scan of teacher preparation and social and emotional learning," included redesigning teacher certification policies so all teachers are prepared to teach SEL in the K-12 classroom. Another principal recommendation from Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) was the call for additional research. According to Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017), more research is needed to determine whether SEL training in teacher preparation programs is correlated with improvement in SEL and academic performance in students after teachers are working in the classroom. Additionally, more research is needed to determine if SEL programs for students also improve teachers' SEL competency (Schonert-Reichel et al., 2017).

In completing the study, the researcher hoped to add to the current literature regarding SEL. The researcher analyzed the teacher surveys and interviews to look for themes regarding preparedness to teach SEL, perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, perceptions of subgroup needs and competency, teacher efficacy, and teacher

implementation of SEL. In addition to contributing to knowledge about subgroup teacher attitudes and beliefs regarding SEL instruction, the researcher wanted to provide insight into subgroup competency in the five CASEL standards and how subgroup achievement in the CASEL competencies compares to achievement in students not in subgroups.

Null Hypotheses and Research Questions

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students with IEPs and the students without IEPs.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

RQ2a: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for Black students?

RQ2b: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students on free and reduced lunch?

RQ2c: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students with IEPs?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL?

Research Question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL?

Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

Brackett et al. (2017) examined several theoretical approaches to social and emotional learning, specifically the importance of theory relating to research and practices. Brackett et al. (2017) stated, "Theory serves as a practical guide and starting point to many endeavors. . . In other words, theory puts forth an explanation for why things are the way they are" (p. 21). Some researchers described social and emotional learning as a set of skills that impact achieving well-being and success throughout life. As a result, theories used to design and implement SEL should explain what influences optimal well-being and development. SEL implementation could affect several parts of students' learning experience including curriculum, teaching practices, or teaching environments (Brackett et al., 2017). In Brackett et al.'s writing, the researchers examined several different theories commonly used to inform SEL content and implementation, such as "systems theories, learning theories, child development theories, information-processing theories, and behavior change theories" (Brackett et al., 2017, p. 23). Each of the theories provided a different lens to view SEL implementation. For the study's purposes, the researcher focused on Social Learning Theory and Social Development Theory.

Psychologist Albert Bandura developed Social Learning Theory. Social Learning Theory relies on classical and operant conditioning principles but also emphasizes how

the subject's environment affects learning. Classical conditioning is known for associating response and stimuli, and operant conditioning is associated with rewards and punishment. Bandura's work combined some of these concepts with how subjects also observe and model the behavior of others and its effect on subsequent subject behavior (Psychology Today, n.d.). In short, "People learn by watching other people" (Psychology Today, n.d., para. 1). Regarding education, students copy the behavior of their teachers or classmates to seek approval, gain rewards, or attain social status. "Social learning theory is especially relevant for SEL program design because the success of any approach relies in large part on school administrators, teachers, and support staff" (Brackett et al., 2017, p. 24). Therefore, the success of any SEL program depends on its staff's modeling and implementation of SEL practices. In the study, the researcher examined teacher perceptions of SEL because of the importance of social learning theory and its impact on social and learning implementation.

Lev Vygotsky founded Social Development Theory, or Sociocultural Theory. Vygotsky's work emphasized the role of social interaction in learning. He believed strongly in the community's role in learning and does not believe that development must precede learning (as cited in McLeod, 2022). Instead, Vygotsky believed that "children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society" (McLeod, 2022, para. 2). Brackett et al. (2017) expanded on this when they said,

> The social development model suggests that social bonds between a child and a particular group, such as individuals at a school, encourage a child to act in

> accordance with the values, norms, and belief systems that are part of that group. (p. 26)

Both Social Development Theory and Social Learning Theory reinforce social and emotional learning skills in the classroom. Both theories rely on the importance of social interactions and the impact social skills have on learning. The researcher chose to use Social Development Theory and Social Learning Theory as the study's theoretical framework because they supported research regarding the importance of social interactions and their influence on SEL success with students.

Limitations

When conducting research, validity and reliability are the key factors in creating research instrumentation and analyzing results. Validity is the correctness of a researcher's inferences made based on their analysis. Reliability is the consistency of scores or answers from one instrument administration to another (Fraenkel et al., 2015). To address these factors, the researcher must acknowledge some limitations the research presented.

One limitation that could affect data results is whether all data collected from the survey and interview questions were reported honestly by both students and teachers. Since the researcher worked in the building where she conducted research with staff members, this could influence their honesty in answering the survey or interview questions. Some staff members may feel compelled to answer in a way that is pleasing to the researcher, even if their answers do not reflect their true feelings or beliefs. Students may have felt this same pressure when reporting their answers on the SEL survey given by the district. This phenomenon is known as Social Desirability Bias and is common in

survey research (Lavrakas, 2008). Fortunately, the researcher did not have a supervisory role in the school where she conducted the study, so she did not have authority over any staff members interviewed or surveyed. However, Social Desirability Bias could also affect students' self-reported SEL survey answers. Students may want school staff to perceive them as "well-behaved" or having another positive behavioral attribute.

In addition to Social Desirability Bias, another measurement problem in self-reported surveys is Reference Bias. Reference bias occurs when a survey asks respondents to self-report skills or personality traits, thereby comparing themselves to a standard or norm for that society. However, respondents may not all perceive the same definition for a particular personality trait or skill, invalidating the survey results (Heckman & Kautz, 2013). Reference Bias could affect student responses in the district-administered SEL survey used for secondary data collection since most of those statements are about self-reported personality characteristics or skills. In addition, Reference Bias could also affect teacher responses in survey or interview answers because they may not all have the same definition of what it means to "effectively" teach social and emotional learning. Both Social Desirability Bias and Reference Bias could affect the reliability of research analysis.

Additionally, it is important to address the uniqueness of the middle school learner and its implications on self-assessment. Adolescents at this age experience significant brain growth, second only to the early stages of life (Salyers & McKee, 2010). Middle schoolers' emotional and social skills also grow exponentially during this time. However, "Asking students, (third grade and up) to assess their own SEL presumes that they have the perspective-taking skills and self-awareness to accurately monitor their

own SEL and then accurately report it" (Elias, 2019, para.4). SEL skills often require personal interpretations that can be difficult for students, or teachers, to infer (Elias, 2019). Additionally, self-awareness may be inconsistent as middle schoolers sort out their values and belief systems. Middle schoolers are also more prone to peer influence, which can alter their self-perception (Farnsworth Finn, 2020). All these factors can lead to inaccurate self-assessment of SEL skills and could impact the overall validity and reliability of the student self-reported data used in the district SEL that the researcher analyzed to determine student SEL achievement.

The researcher used convenience sampling in this study due to the logistical efforts needed to complete this research. "Convenience sampling is the most common type of non-probability sampling, which focuses on gaining information from participants (the sample) who are 'convenient' for the researcher to access" (Qualtrics, 2022, para. 2). Convenience sampling is not usually regarded as the best way to conduct qualitative research and can limit the growth of the researcher (Saldaña, 2011). Convenience sampling can also lead to sampling bias, selection bias, an inability to generalize data, low external validity, and positivity bias (Qualtrics, 2022). However, convenience sampling was necessary due to the nature of dissertation research, including a lack of funding, the consent required to conduct research in an educational setting, and a finite time to conduct research.

The answers provided by the students in the SEL survey only represent the middle school where the researcher taught. This Midwestern, suburban middle school had a student population of 836 students where 13% of students represented a minority race, 12% were on Free and Reduced Lunch, and 17% received special education services

(based on 2020-21 school year data and data above .5 is rounded up to the next percentile). Due to the limited sample size, researchers cannot apply study results to the general population.

The answers provided by teachers during the interviews and survey were limited to the number of teachers willing to participate in the interviews and survey. This sample is not large enough to generalize to the broader teacher population; however, the researcher's study was limited by the number of teachers who participated in the research and its location.

Finally, in the teacher survey and interview questions, the researcher used the terms students of color and general population when describing groups of students. After completing the study, the researcher realized these terms were inaccurate in describing the groups of students identified in the study. Instead of students of color, the researcher should have used the more specific term Black students throughout the study since the student SEL survey separated answers into several different racial categories, including Black, White, Hispanic, or Bi-Racial. While this did not impact data collection from the student survey results, the teacher survey and interview questions should have used the specific racial category of Black students instead of students of color to more accurately compare teacher perceptions of subgroup population SEL competency with actual subgroup SEL competency. The term general population referred to anyone not in the specified subgroup analyzed; for example, when the researcher analyzed student survey data completed by Black students, the term general population referred to all other racial groups represented at the school. Later, the researcher realized she should have replaced the term general population with more specific subgroup descriptors such as students who

identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic, students not on free and reduced lunch, and students without IEPs. The term general population was not as clear as describing exactly which group of students the researcher was comparing with the subgroup data. Therefore, in the appendix, the researcher used the term general population since this accurately described the wording used during the study, but in the analysis, the researcher used clearer descriptors of students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic, students not on free and reduced lunch, and students without IEPs.

Definition of Terms

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) - "A nonprofit, nonpartisan leader in SEL . . . [CASEL works to] evaluate programming, curate research, inform legislation, and partner on implementation" (*Our Mission and Work*, 2021, para. 1).

"CASEL's mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school" (*Our Mission and Work*, 2021, para. 5).

Free and Reduced Lunch-

> A student from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty income threshold is eligible for free lunch. A student from a household with an income between 130 percent and up to 185 percent of the poverty threshold is eligible for reduced price lunch. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015, para. 3)

> The percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch is often used as a proxy measure for the percentage of students living in poverty. While the percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch can provide some information about relative poverty, it should not be confused with the actual percentage of students in poverty enrolled in school, (NCES, 2015, para. 1)

Individual Education Plan (IEP)- A legal document written for a child with a disability in the education setting that assesses the child's present academic and functional performance, creates measurable annual goals, identifies progress towards meeting these goals, provides a statement of special education services the child will receive, provides accommodations and modifications in the general education setting, and provides a statement of how much time the child will spend in the general education classroom (Sec. 300.320 Definition of Individualized Education Program, 2017).

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-

> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives. Our goal is to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all. We draw on 60 years of experience and insights to better prepare the world of tomorrow. Together with governments, policy makers and citizens, we work on establishing evidence-based international standards and finding solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges. From improving economic performance and creating jobs to fostering strong education and fighting international tax evasion, we provide a unique forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, exchange of experiences, best-practice sharing, and advice

on public policies and international standard-setting. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d., para. 1-2)

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)-

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial survey of 15-year-old students around the world that assesses the extent to which they have acquired the key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society. The assessment focuses on the core school subjects of reading, mathematics and science. Students' proficiency in an innovative domain is also assessed; in 2018, this domain was global competence. (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019, p. 1)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)-

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based, tiered framework for supporting *students*' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health. When implemented with fidelity, PBIS improves social emotional competence, academic success, and school climate. It also improves teacher health and wellbeing. It is a way to create positive, predictable, equitable and safe learning environments where everyone thrives. (Center on PBIS, 2022, para. 1)

Restorative Justice/Practices in Education-

Restorative Justice is grounded in indigenous teachings and points to a way of life experienced by pre-modern communities, such as the Māori and the Navajo. It was introduced into the Western judicial system as a response to crime and wrongdoing; it sought to meet the needs of those harmed, to repair the harm, and to restore relationships for all affected by an incident. As these practices were

> introduced into school settings, they initially emulated the processes used in correction facilities. These included restorative conversations, circles, and conferences in which those involved in a disciplinary incident worked with a structured set of questions to explore who was harmed and how to repair the harm. (Gregory & Evans, 2020, p. 3)

Subgroup- "In education, student subgroup generally refers to any group of students who share similar characteristics, such as gender identification, racial or ethnic identification, socioeconomic status, physical or learning disabilities, language abilities, or school-assigned classifications (e.g., special-education students)" (Student subgroup definition, 2015, para. 1).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)-

> SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, 2021, para. 3)

Summary

There is little doubt that social and emotional learning has grown significantly over the past few decades (CASEL, 2021a; Edutopia, 2011; Weissberg et al.; 2015). In this same time period, our youth were chronically disengaged from school (Klem & Connell, 2004) and mental health struggles, such as depression increased (CDC, n. d.). These mental health crises indicated our students needed support systems in place at school to help them succeed. Implementing a strong SEL program that addresses the

needs of all students, including students who are often marginalized in the education system, is an important part of the overall goal of educating students for the future. In the next chapter, the researcher examined the evolution of social and emotional learning, key definitions of SEL and CASEL, research that supported SEL implementation, criticism of SEL implementation, and the perspectives of various stakeholders regarding social and emotional learning.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

The researcher examined teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning (SEL) and analyzed whether students in subgroup populations achieved the same level of SEL competency as students not in subgroups. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the history of social and emotional learning, social and emotional learning, and the CASEL competencies, as well as discussed the need for social and emotional learning in schools, criticism of SEL, benefits of SEL, and included stakeholder perspectives of SEL. The researcher found overwhelming evidence to support the positive academic and social benefits of including SEL instruction in schools (Berman et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017). Researchers indicated that SEL interventions provided short and long-term positive effects on student well-being, such as mental health, socioeconomic status, academic success, and social skills (Hawkins et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017). Finally, the researcher found various stakeholders, such as educators, parents, and employers supported SEL implementation and interventions (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Phi Delta Kappan, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2016).

History of SEL in Schools

The concepts of character education and morality date back many centuries. Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle debated morality, ethics, and virtue long before researchers created CASEL and the term social and emotional learning (Parry & Thorsrud, 2021). In many ways, Greek philosophers were the first to introduce character education as a meaningful part of education. Greek philosophers, specifically

Plato, noted character education as a meaningful part of a balanced education. “He proposed a holistic curriculum that requires a balance of training in physical education, the arts, math, science, character, and moral judgment. ‘By maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing, you produce citizens of good character,’" he explained (Edutopia, 2011, para. 5). While character development had always been part of schooling, researchers did not analyze modern social and emotional learning concepts until the 1960s. In the late 1960s, Dr. James Comer of the Yale School of Medicine’s Child Study Center piloted a program called the Comer School Development Program, which focused on two low-achieving schools in New Haven, Connecticut (CASEL, 2021a; Edutopia, 2011). Teachers, parents, administrators, and mental health workers collaborated to decide the structure of the schools and specifically focused on academics, social programs, or school procedures related to behavior issues. “By the early 1980s, academic performance at the two schools exceeded the national average, and truancy and behavior problems had declined, adding momentum to the nascent SEL movement” (Edutopia, 2011, paras. 8-9). As a result, New Haven became a hub for SEL development and key figures in the social and emotional learning movement, such as Roger P. Weissberg and Timothy Shriver. Weissberg and Shriver began working together to form the K-12 New Haven Social Development program (Edutopia, 2011), where educators employed SEL strategies across all K-12 grades (CASEL, 2021a).

Shortly thereafter, a project called the W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence was established and funded by the W. T. Grant Foundation and co-chaired by Weissberg and Maurice Elias (Edutopia, 2011). The founders brought together various experts to promote SEL in schools (CASEL, 2021a).

The group listed the emotional skills necessary for emotional competence as "identifying and labeling feelings, expressing feelings, assessing the intensity of feelings, managing feelings, delaying gratification, controlling impulses, and reducing stress" (Edutopia, 2011, para. 11).

This development in SEL led to further interest in the SEL movement, which reached a turning point in 1994 when a group of stakeholders, including educators, researchers, and child advocates met at the Fetzer Institute to discuss strategies to improve overall SEL competence in students (Weissberg et al., 2015). The Fetzer group introduced social and emotional learning as a framework to build young people's social, emotional, and academic skills while emphasizing school, family, and community collaboration to meet SEL and academic goals. The meeting attendees also launched the CASEL organization, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL's purpose was to encourage the exchange of "ideas regarding effective solutions to promote positive social, emotional, and behavioral development" (Elisa et al., 1997, p. viii). Individuals within the organization would lead the field in advancing SEL programming for kindergarten through high school grades (Weissberg et al., 2015).

In 1996, Roger P. Weissberg became the director of CASEL, and the organization moved to the University of Illinois at Chicago. Weissberg increased membership and influenced social and emotional learning by influencing policy legislation and working to incorporate SEL in schools nationally and worldwide (Edutopia, 2011). CASEL continued to lead SEL research and practice through its mission: "to help establish evidence-based SEL as an essential part of preschool through high school education" (2021a, para. 10) and its organizational goals: "to advance the science of SEL, expand

effective SEL practice, and improve federal and state policies that support broader implementation of evidence-based programming" (Weissberg et al., 2015, p. 5).

As recently as 2022, CASEL researchers found all 50 states had early childhood/PreK SEL competencies, and 27 states had free-standing k-12 SEL competencies. The report's authors also found that 44 states offered guidance to support SEL implementation, including general information and resources specific to each state. Furthermore, 39 states had specific websites dedicated to SEL (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022). In fact, Dermody and Dusenbury (2022) noted that SEL implementation increased since the pandemic. This could be due to the pandemic, the desire for a more equitable school system, or the need to prepare students for a rapidly changing world. Whatever the reasons, support for incorporating social and emotional learning into schools grew and helped students engage in meaningful SEL experiences, fulfilling CASEL's mission for all children.

Defining SEL

One of the challenges of Social and Emotional Learning is that the public did not agree on a central definition for this concept. Jones et al. (2017) stated that people define social and emotional development in several different ways: as character-building, as a set of tools for learning, as skills to promote resilience, or to promote neurocognitive skills (p. 5).

In the study, the researcher used the definition of Social and Emotional Learning provided by CASEL since this organization is a leader in the SEL field of research and advocacy. In addition, the data the researcher collected from students uses the CASEL framework in survey questions, so the researcher wanted to use CASEL's lens of SEL to

connect to the data analysis in this study. CASEL defines Social and Emotional Learning as

> The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, 2021c, para. 3)

A significant difference between SEL and character education was some character education approaches focused on developing morally responsible youth, not the social-emotional competencies defined by CASEL. As Elias et al. (1997) stated, "Character is defined as values in action; values refer to 'knowing the good.' In different families, communities, and cultural groups, there may be varying definitions of what is 'good'" (p. 32). Teaching morals and values raised concerns about whether teachers can change students' morals and values and whether character instruction is the responsibility of families or schools. Giving youth the knowledge and skills to become self-aware, develop relationships, and make responsible decisions to navigate life's challenges was the focus of SEL (Gulbrandson, 2018).

SEL was also different from positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), mindfulness programs, 21st century skills, restorative practices, or employable skills. While each program added value to schools, and some aspects could be used in teaching SEL, each program was separate unto itself. As Jones and Doolittle (2017) stated, "Each label draws from a slightly different theoretical perspective and draws upon a different set of research, and each has its own related fields and disciplines" (p. 3).

Jones and Doolittle (2017) described SEL as "a children's ability to learn about and manage their own emotions and interactions in ways that benefit themselves and others, and that help children and youth succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship" (p. 4).

According to researchers, SEL practices focused on the five core CASEL competencies and promoted sequenced, active, focused, and explicit instruction (Durlak, et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2017). To determine if SEL instruction occurred according to the criteria, Gulbrandson recommended looking for instruction aligned to specific standards:

> 1) Is there explicit teaching of specific skills in one or more of the five SEL competencies, such as identifying feelings, making friends, managing frustration, solving problems, or calming anger? . . . [and] 2) Is the focus on building, teaching, modeling, prompting, coaching for, and practicing skills, or is it only about building knowledge, explaining importance, and telling students what the core values are at the school? (Gulbrandson, K., 2018, p. 5)

In summary, the term social and emotional learning has taken on several meanings since the concept's inception (Jones et al., 2017). Some definitions were part of another framework and complemented SEL, such as mindfulness practices, but included a different theoretical approach. For the study, the researcher used CASEL's definition of social and emotional learning to clearly explain SEL and connect it to the data the researcher analyzed.

CASEL Standards

CASEL standards included five SEL skills, commonly called the CASEL 5: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2021c, para. 5).

The CASEL 5 can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts. Many school districts, states, and countries have used the CASEL 5 to establish preschool to high school learning standards and competencies that articulate what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, health, and wellness, and fulfilling careers (CASEL, 2021c, para. 5).

The CASEL framework is not an SEL curriculum. In fact, the authors of CASEL provided a list of many curriculums on their website. Still, they did not supply one for CASEL exclusively (CASEL, n.d.). Instead, schools that wanted to teach social and emotional learning created SEL lessons or used other SEL curriculums since CASEL did not provide this resource. Greenberg et al. (2017) defined the five CASEL competencies in *The Future of Children* and those definitions are listed here:

Table 1

Definitions of the CASEL 5 Competencies

CASEL Competency	Definition of Each Competency
Relationship Skills	Relationship skills give children the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships and to act in accordance with social norms. Competence in these skills involves communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed.

Responsible Decision- Making	Responsible decision-making requires the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions, whatever the setting. Competence in this area requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety, and the norms for risky behavior; to realistically evaluate the consequences of various actions; and to take the health and wellbeing of yourself and others into consideration.
Self-Awareness	Competence in self-awareness means understanding your own emotions, values, and personal goals. It includes accurately assessing your strengths and limitations, possessing a well-grounded sense of self efficacy and optimism, and having a growth mindset that you can learn through hard work. A high level of self-awareness requires the ability to recognize how your thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected to one another.
Self-Management	Competence in self-management requires skills and attitudes that help regulate emotions and behaviors. They include the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through challenges to achieve personal and educational goals.
Social Awareness	Competence in social awareness involves the ability to take the perspective of people with different backgrounds or from different cultures and to empathize and act with compassion toward others. It also involves understanding social norms for behavior and recognizing family, school, and community resources.

(Greenberg et al., 2017, pp. 14-15)

The five standards served as the foundation for CASEL social and emotional learning and were commonly depicted in the CASEL Wheel (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

CASEL Wheel

(CASEL, 2021c)

The framework's authors demonstrated the interconnectedness between classrooms, schools, families, and communities as opportunities for SEL inside and outside schools. The partnerships shown were critical in achieving authentic SEL experiences, systemic throughout a community, and went beyond just occurring in a singular classroom. Through partnerships, CASEL hoped to "foster youth voice, agency, and engagement; establish supportive classroom and school climates and approaches to discipline; enhance adult SEL competence; and establish authentic family and community partnerships" (CASEL, 2021c, para. 7).

Need for Social and Emotional Learning

CDC analysts (n.d.) noted children faced an unprecedented mental health crisis over the past decade. Despite youth risk behaviors trending positively, mental health in our adolescent population declined significantly (CDC, n.d.). In a report compiled by the CDC, risk behaviors such as sexual behavior and high-risk substance use were shown to decline from 2009-2019 (CDC, n.d.). Unfortunately, mental health and feelings of safety had declined during the same time. The CDC (n.d.) reported,

> A growing percentage of students surveyed reported that they did not go to school because of safety concerns. An increasing percentage of American youth felt sad or hopeless for at least two weeks to the degree that they could not engage in their usual activities. The percentage of students who seriously considered suicide or made a suicide plan also increased significantly in the last decade. These trends show that adolescents are critically in need of adult support in addressing safety and mental health issues, problems which are largely beyond an adolescent's control (CDC, n.d., p. 6).

Importantly, researchers collected before the beginning of 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Many adults were concerned with adolescent mental health during school lockdowns and missed life events such as graduation or prom; however, adolescent mental health was already in sharp decline before COVID-19. Unfortunately, the pandemic worsened the already declining mental health of teens in America. A New York Times survey of 362 school counselors found when counselors compared student behavior before the pandemic to after the height of the pandemic, 94%

stated their students showed higher anxiety and depression, 88% stated students had more trouble regulating emotions and almost 75% said students had more trouble solving problems with friends (Miller et al., 2022).

Furthermore, “only six of the 362 counselors said that behaviors and social-emotional skills were back to normal for their students’ age or that they hadn’t seen lagging skills this year” (Miller et al., 2022, para. 8). Student feelings about their own mental health and SEL skills mirror those of their counselors. In a survey of 1,022 secondary students, “44 percent reported that their level of social anxiety had increased since the pandemic. Forty-three percent reported a higher level of loneliness, and 37 percent said they felt less comfortable with physical contact like hugs from others their age” (Kurtz et al., 2021, p. 2).

While SEL and mental health are different, SEL can promote positive mental health in many ways. SEL cultivates important “protective factors” to buffer against mental health risks by promoting responsive relationships, emotionally safe environments, and skills development, (CASEL, 2021b, para. 1)

Mental health supports such as social and emotional learning are part of a broad spectrum of care, ranging from universal support and strategies to intensive intervention. Educators should use SEL as part of the universal, Tier 1 support system for students' overall health and well-being (CASEL, 2021b). However, only 29% of teachers say they have received mental health training (Schwartz, 2022). This data is troubling if schools will help tackle the current mental health crises like any other public health problem.

Greenberg et al. (2017) stated, “the ultimate goal of public health is to improve the general population’s wellbeing. That means preventing diseases, disorders, injuries,

and problem behaviors, and nurturing positive outcomes that improve quality of life" (p. 14). To this end, public health researchers and practitioners should study public health problems, target proactive solutions and reactive treatments, and disseminate interventions to the public. In many ways, schools are ideal places to support social and emotional learning. Most children attend school regularly and spend much of their time at school daily. School-based SEL interventions can improve academic, social, and emotional competence, making students more successful in school overall (Greenberg et al., 2017). Indeed, "evidence-based SEL interventions in all schools-that is, universal interventions-could substantially affect public health" (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 14). In addition to soaring mental health problems, students are engaged in school less as they move from elementary to high school, with 40% to 60% of students from all geographic areas becoming chronically disengaged from school (Klem & Connell, 2004). While social and emotional learning will not repair all students' engagement problems, studies have shown that building relationships with our students matters. In a study that measured student engagement and teacher support, researchers found

> Middle school students with high levels of teacher support were almost three times more likely to have high levels of engagement, and 74% less likely to feel disengaged, with 40% of supported students optimally engaged and only 8% disengaged. Middle school youth reporting low levels of teacher support were 68% more likely to be disengaged from school, an increase from 31% to 52% of the low-support students at risk levels on engagement. These youth also were 71% less likely to be

> engaged in school, a decrease in optimal levels from 14% to 4% of students. (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 7)

In addition to a lack of engagement and mental health struggles, data suggested that other countries worldwide outpaced the United States in high school and college graduation rates. The United States ranked 8th in high school completion and 10th in college completion compared to other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In addition, the United States is making smaller growth than other countries in high school graduation rates (OECD, 2021). PISA results reported United States academic stagnancy as compared to other countries. Of the 79 countries tested, the United States was 22nd when combining the mean scores of the three academic areas of the PISA tests (reading, mathematics, and science) (Armstrong & Richter, 2019). This data could be related to students' overall feeling of hope. According to 2018 PISA results, many disadvantaged students "hold lower ambitions than would be expected given their academic achievement. In the United States, one in nine high-achieving disadvantaged students – but 1 in 100 high-achieving advantaged students – do not expect to complete tertiary education" (OECD, 2019, p. 7).

PISA results also indicated teachers are struggling with classroom management and students suffer emotionally from poor interactions with other students. Bullying and classroom disruptions were both problems in U.S. classrooms. Students who completed the PISA survey indicated that "26% of students reported being bullied at least a few times a month" (OECD, 2019, p. 8). Bullying can lead to students skipping school more often than students who are not bullied. Students who felt valued at school were less likely to skip school and therefore more consistent instruction (OECD, 2019). In addition,

in the US, 22% of students reported in most or all lessons, the teacher must wait a long time for students to quiet down for instruction. Students who reported this scored 33 points lower than their peers who did not report such classroom disruption, even when accounting for socioeconomic status (OECD, 2019). SEL interventions could help create a stronger classroom structure and better relationships with peers, which could decrease both classroom management and bullying problems in our schools.

In addition, many students felt lonely at school or unsupported by their peers. “In the United States, 55% of students reported that their schoolmates co-operate with each other [OECD average: 62%] and 64% reported that they compete with each other [OECD average: 50%]” (OECD, 2019, p. 9). Furthermore, 24% of students surveyed in the 2018 PISA felt lonely at school, and only 61% felt satisfied with their lives (OECD, 2019). However, much like earlier data from the CDC, PISA results also indicated some positives for student outcomes. According to survey results, 93% of students in the United States “agreed that it is a good thing to help students who cannot defend themselves,” and “88% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they can usually find a way out of difficult situations” (OECD, 2019, pp. 8-9). Additionally, “Some 93% of students in the United States reported sometimes or always feeling happy” (OECD, 2019, p. 9). This statistic contradicts the 24% of students who felt lonely at school and only 61% feeling satisfied with their lives, but it does offer hope for overall teenage mental health in our country.

While not all research regarding mental health or academic achievement was negative, research indicated students in the United States would benefit from growth in academic, social, and emotional skills. SEL could support students in this endeavor. The

Council of Distinguished Educators asserted that social, emotional, and academic learning are intertwined, each supporting one another (Berman et al., 2018). The Council of Distinguished Educators stated that,

> The way teachers and administrators interact with students, facilitate relationships among students, and model positive relationship-building plays a critical role in students' sense of belonging, emotional safety, ability to collaborate with peers, and identities as learners. These attributes enable students to engage with rigorous academic content. (Berman et al., 2018, p. 6)

This statement was a call to action for educators nationwide to incorporate SEL as part of regular classroom instruction. Most importantly, the Council declared that social and emotional learning is connected to academic learning and that these entities are not separate. The Council of Distinguished Scientists stated, "decades of research . . . have illuminated that major domains of human development—social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, academic—are deeply intertwined in the brain and in behavior" (Jones & Kahn, 2017, p. 4).

Traditionally, teachers focused solely on academic subjects. The Council of Distinguished Educators and the Council of Distinguished Scientists invited us to consider social and emotional learning as part of student learning instead of an afterthought in education. This change in perspective could change how educators approach the fundamentals of structuring their classrooms and instruction.

Criticism of SEL

While interest in social and emotional learning has expanded, so has criticism. As Jones and Doolittle (2017) pointed out:

> The recent expansion in popular interest in SEL coexists with what might best be called a healthy skepticism about teaching social and emotional skills in schools. Despite considerable research suggesting that SEL is a vital component of academic achievement and later success in life, various stakeholders hold divergent and often incompatible views as to how or even whether SEL skills should be explicitly taught in schools. To further complicate matters, the existing evidence is somewhat conflicting: some studies find that interventions designed to teach and support SEL skills have positive effects, and others don't; some students seem to benefit more than others. (p. 4)

Skeptics have quickly discounted SEL benefits and opine their disgruntlement to the public. In Education Week, Finn (2017) wrote, "social-emotional learning does not seem intended to build character in any traditional sense, nor is it aimed at citizenship" (para. 12). In the National Review, Eden (2019) described SEL as the "latest education-policy fad — the Common Core of the latter half of this decade" (para. 2) and "NYC parents should be very concerned that SEL will prove to be a Trojan horse for delivering de Blasio's [NYC Mayor] hard-left ideology into elementary-school classrooms" (para. 13).

Effrem and Robbins stated, "SEL represents a dramatic departure from the traditional role of schools to build upon and deepen the American home's ethical and moral training" (p. 5). They go on to say that SEL should cease to continue in schools due to the "possibility of indoctrination and erosion of freedom of conscience via

government-established SEL norms for the attitudes, values, and beliefs of freeborn American citizens" (Effrem & Robbins, 2019, p. 32).

Such critiques are rooted in skepticism of SEL's value and a fear of "indoctrination" of a "hard-left ideology." However, the concepts of the CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills) are not political attributes or beliefs.

Benefits of Social and Emotional Learning

How social and emotional learning affects academic and behavioral outcomes for students. The Council of Distinguished Educators stated, "weaving together social, emotional, and academic development creates high-quality learning environments in schools and classrooms. In these environments, children can confidently do their best work because they interact with a cooperative and welcoming community of learners" (Berman et al., 2018, p. 4).

Research studies substantiated that social and emotional learning supports positive academic outcomes. One meta-analysis conducted by Payton et al. (2008) indicated that "SEL programs yielded multiple benefits in each review and were effective in both school and after-school settings and for students with and without behavioral and emotional problems" (p. 3). This meta-analysis researched 317 studies and involved 324,303 ethnically and racially diverse children from grades K-8 in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The study found,

> SEL programs improved students' social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, connection to school, positive social behavior, and academic performance; they also reduced students' conduct problems and

> emotional distress. . . In addition, SEL programming improved students' achievement test scores by 11 to 17 percentile points, indicating that they offer students a practical educational benefit. (Payton et al., 2008, p. 3)

Another key study by Durlak et al. (2011) also demonstrated a positive relationship between social and emotional learning and academic and social outcomes. This study was a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs in elementary and secondary schools involving more than 270,000 students using universal SEL practices (Durlak et al., 2011). "Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 3).

Durlak et al. (2011) expanded upon these findings here:

> Current findings document that SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems, and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades. (p. 15)

Additional findings from Durlak et al.'s (2011) study indicated that SEL instruction positively correlates with increased academic and social/emotional gains at all age levels (elementary, middle, and high school) and in urban, suburban, and rural settings (Durlak et al., 2011).

A long-term research project by the Seattle Social Development Project found that SEL instruction can have lasting effects on students who receive social development

instruction. Teachers and students were randomly assigned to classrooms that incorporated this social development management and instruction, and then researchers followed up with the students from these classes 15 years later. Students received either full-intervention instruction from first through sixth grade or late intervention instruction in only fifth and sixth grades. Both groups saw positive gains, although the full-intervention instruction saw greater lasting effects than the late-intervention group (Hawkins et al., 2008). "Summary indices revealed significantly better SES [socioeconomic status], mental health, and sexual health by age 27 years in those assigned to the SSDP full-intervention condition compared with those in the control group" (Hawkins et al., 2008, p. 7). This research showed that long-term intervention promoting social development can improve student outcomes and affect their adult lives long after the intervention ends (Hawkins et al., 2008).

Taylor et al. (2017) conducted long-term SEL research with comparable results. Taylor et al.'s meta-analysis involved over 97,000 kindergarten through high school students who received SEL instruction through universal SEL interventions. These students were economically and racially diverse and represented various ages (Taylor et al., 2017). Follow-up collected between 6 months to 18 years postintervention indicated "participants fared significantly better than controls in social-emotional skills, attitudes, and well-being indicators. Benefits were similar regardless of students' race, socioeconomic background, or school location" (Taylor et al., 2017, p. 1156).

This research again indicated that SEL instruction has short-term and long-term implications for student success. This correlation indicated that social and emotional

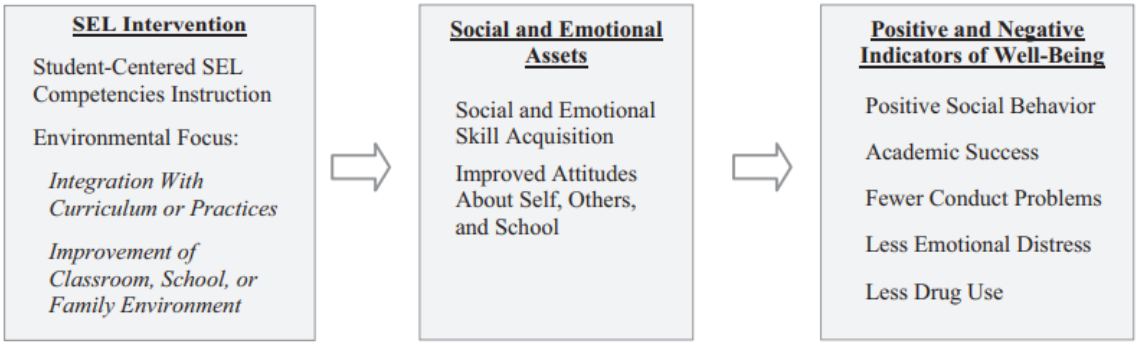
skills are necessary to succeed in school and as an adult later in life. In fact, Taylor et al. (2017) stated,

> that PYD [positive youth development] interventions were successful in improving young people's self-control, interpersonal skills, problem solving, the quality of their peer and adult relationships, commitment to schooling, and academic achievement. Although these examples of asset development are the key outcomes of interest for PYD, some interventions have also decreased substance use, risk taking, and problem behaviors. PYD interventions, therefore, appear to foster positive outcomes and also be able to protect against negative ones. (p. 1156-1157)

Taylor et al. (2017) demonstrated the SEL framework for positive outcomes using universal SEL interventions in this figure:

Figure 2

SEL Framework for Positive Youth Development



(Taylor et al., 2017, p. 1159)

Another analysis by Mahoney et al. (2018) combined SEL research from four meta-analyses, including Durlak et al. (2011), Sklad et al. (2012), Wiglesworth et al. (2016), and Taylor et al. (2017). Two of these studies, Durlak et al. (2011) and

Wiglesworth et al. (2016), focused on the short-term effects of SEL practices while Sklad et al. (2012) and Taylor et al. (2017) researched the long-term effects of SEL interventions. Notably, these studies occurred both in the United States and Europe. Combined, these results contained findings from 356 research studies for hundreds of thousands of students from kindergarten through twelfth grade (Mahoney et al., (2018). The reports Mahoney (2018) analyzed agreed that universal school SEL programs positively correlate with beneficial behavior, attitudes, emotions, and academic outcomes; furthermore, these outcomes are apparent immediately after the intervention and in follow-ups postintervention.

These meta-analyses strongly supported the need for teaching SEL skills to students. In summary, these studies examined hundreds of research studies with hundreds of thousands of students and concluded that social and emotional instruction positively affects students' academic and social lives. Students who receive high-quality, systemic SEL instruction are more likely to achieve academic success, experience fewer discipline problems, hold better attitudes about themselves, others, and school, attain higher socioeconomic status as an adult, and achieve improved mental health and overall well-being later in life (Durlak, 2011; Hawkins, 2008; Mahoney et al., 2018; Peyton, 2008; Taylor, 2017). This data proved both short-term and long-term benefits to social and emotional instruction. These skills are crucial for students to succeed, not just in the classroom but in life.

How SEL instruction affects teacher-student relationships. Researchers also pointed out teachers' need for strong social and emotional skills. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) stated teachers "set the tone of the classroom" and establish a classroom climate

that promotes positive relationships with students, intrinsic motivation, encourages cooperation, and models and coaches' respectful behavior and communication (p. 492).

Schonert-Reichl (2017) supported Jennings and Greenberg by affirming that Teachers are the engine that drives social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and practices in schools and classrooms, and their own social-emotional competence and wellbeing strongly influence their students. Classrooms with warm teacher-child relationships support deep learning and positive social and emotional development among students. (p. 137) OBJ

Merritt et al. (2012) researched how emotionally supportive teachers affect student outcomes and found that "results indicated higher teacher emotional support related to lower child aggression and higher behavioral self-control" (p. 141). Results were consistent regardless of sociodemographic risk factors and indicated there could be a relationship between teacher SEL skills and student SEL skills (Merritt et al., 2012). Ryan and Patrick (2001) supported the importance of a positive learning environment in their research regarding the outcomes of over 200 8th graders. "Teacher support, promoting interaction, and promoting mutual respect were related positively to social efficacy with teachers and peers, academic efficacy, and academic efficacy, and self-regulated learning, and related negatively to disruptive behavior" (Ryan & Patrick, 2001, p. 448). Results were similar across gender and race differences (Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

However, data showed that stress can affect teacher well-being and social-emotional competence, trickling down to students. "Sixty percent of teachers say they experience job-related stress frequently or always, according to a nationally

representative survey by the EdWeek Research Center conducted in July" (Will, 2021, para. 5). "And 41 percent of teachers said they feel like they're less effective at their job when they're stressed" (Will, 2021, para. 6). As Jennings & Greenberg (2009) described, ". . .burnout takes a serious toll on teachers, students, schools, districts, and communities. Burned-out teachers and the learning environments they create can have harmful effects on students, especially those who are at risk of mental health problems" (p. 492).

Unfortunately, these feelings can also alter student stress levels. Schonert-Reichl's (2017) research measuring the stress hormone cortisol in students showed that teachers with higher self-reported burnout symptoms could predict higher cortisol levels in students. Milkie and Warner's (2011) research examining the mental health of over 10,000 first graders indicated that children in negative learning environments have more learning problems, lower interpersonal skills, and other social problems, such as worse internalizing or externalizing problems. Based on these findings, Schonert-Reichl (2017) stated, "to successfully promote SEL, it's not enough to enhance teachers' knowledge of SEL alone. Teachers' own social and emotional competence and wellbeing appear to play a crucial role" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 142).

Jennings et al. (2017) supported this claim in their research about the impacts of the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. In this study of 224 teachers, the research team used a clustered randomized trial design to implement "a mindfulness-based professional development program designed to promote teachers' social and emotional competence and improve the quality of classroom interactions" (Jennings et al., 2017, p. 1). Researchers analyzed results using teacher self-report data

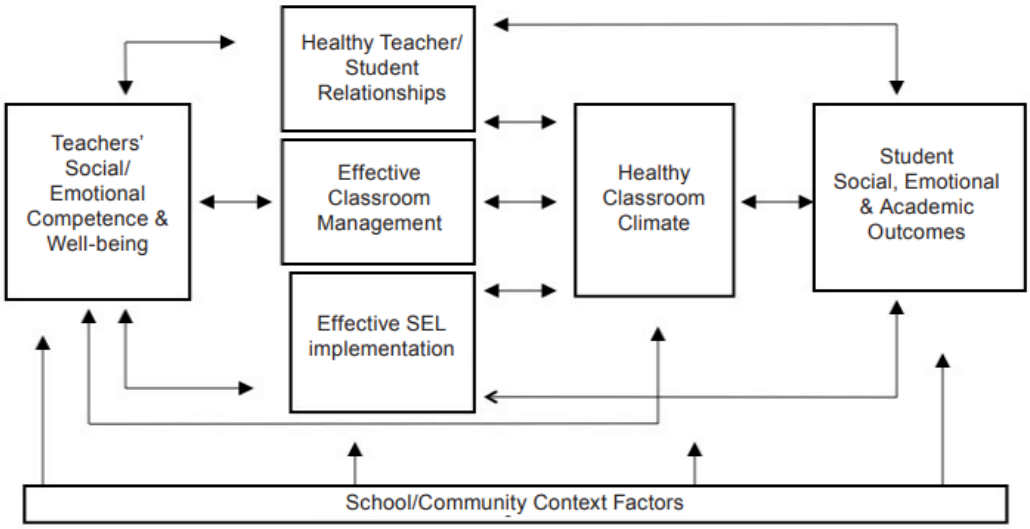
and teacher observations. Researchers found that teachers who received intervention through the CARE program reported a 14% improvement in their ability to regulate their emotions, an 11% increase in their overall mindfulness, a 7% reduction in their reported psychological distress, and an 8% reduction in their sense of time urgency in comparison to control subjects. Results also showed a 10% reduction in sleep disturbances and a 9% reduction in emotional exhaustion. Intervention teachers also showed more emotional support in the classroom for students throughout the school year than teachers in the control group (Jennings et al., 2017).

> The results suggest that efforts to foster teachers' social and emotional competences may have significant impacts on both the cost and quality of education. In the long run, reducing teacher stress and burnout may reduce costs associated with teacher absenteeism, turnover, and health care, as well as lead to gains in classroom interactions quality and supportive teacher-student relationships that promote student positive social and emotional and academic development. (Jennings et al., 2017, p. 16)

In the figure below, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) displayed this relationship between teachers' social and emotional competence and its effect on students. As Jennings and Greenberg (2009) demonstrated, the teacher's SEL competence directly affects student relationships, classroom management, and SEL instruction and indirectly affects the classroom climate and student social, emotional, and academic outcomes. In short, teachers with low social-emotional competence will negatively affect students, and teachers with high social-emotional competence are more likely to positively impact student SEL and academic outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Figure 3

The Prosocial Classroom Model



(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 494)

Systemic SEL Planning

Many researchers in the SEL field advocate for universal interventions regarding SEL teaching in schools. Teaching SEL universally in schools correlates with public health epidemiologist Geoffery Rose's "prevention paradox," which dictated that prevention strategies offering large health benefits might realize fewer benefits at an "individual level" (Raza et al., 2018, p. 1). The philosophy behind the prevention paradox is to treat the entire population as an individual patient (Raza et al., 2018). The prevention paradox asserts a "large number of individuals with less exposure to a risk factor generally would create more cases in absolute terms than a small number of individuals with higher level of exposure" (Raza et al., 2018, p. 2)

Greenberg et al. (2017) supported applying the prevention paradox to incorporating SEL into schools. They advocate for universal SEL interventions for all students, much like we advocate for using a seatbelt in driving a car, even though the risk

of a deadly crash is small (Greenberg et al., 2017). This philosophy requires educators to reimagine which students need SEL interventions. The Council of Distinguished Educators agreed with this change in perspective and pointed out that social, emotional, and academic development is for all students, not only those struggling at school. Educators should not use social and emotional learning as an intervention for trauma or poor behavior. Instead, it is a framework that all students benefit from, regardless of prior experiences or problems at school (Berman et al., 2018). Integrating SEL into academic experiences is, in part, "to create an inclusive environment where each student feels affirmed and valued, receiving the supports and developing the competencies to be successful" (Berman et al., 2018, p. 7). Under this philosophy, all students should learn SEL skills, no matter how small of a difference that learning may make in their SEL skill attainment. The prevention paradox implies that policies to prevent poor childhood and adolescent outcomes must apply the right strategies to succeed. That means multiple levels of intervention: universal interventions that focus on all the children and families in a school, selective interventions that focus on at-risk groups, indicated interventions that focus on children already showing early signs of trouble and treatment for children with formal diagnoses. (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 22)

In addition to universal strategies, researchers also supported universal SEL interventions in schools that involve systemic planning and implementation. Durlak et al. (2011) recommended SEL practices that use a "sequenced step-by-step training approach, use active forms of learning, focus sufficient time on skill development, and have explicit learning goals" (p. 6). This acronym was known as SAFE practices (Durlak et al., 2011). Indeed, in Durlak's groundbreaking study, SAFE practice and implementation problems

were two variables that moderated positive student outcomes regarding universal SEL instruction (Durlak et al., 2011). This suggested "that beneficial programs must be both well designed and well conducted" (Durlak et al., 2011, p.16). Schonert-Reichl (2017) also supported Durlak et al.'s (2011) philosophy in the statement below:

> To be effective, SEL skill development and interventions should occur in a safe, caring, supportive, participatory, and well-managed environment—that is, an environment that supports students' development and lets them practice the skills they learn. The learning context encompasses such factors as communication styles, performance expectations, classroom structures and rules, school organizational climate, commitment to academic success for all students, district policies, and parental and community involvement (pp. 2-3).

The Council of Distinguished Educators agreed with Schonert-Reichl and Durlak et al.'s (2011) support of universal SEL interventions. "Success depends upon consistent implementation, modeling by adults and peers, and professional development that deepens school staff's social and emotional skills" (Berman et al., 2018, p. 5). However, the Council of Distinguished Educators does not endorse explicit SEL instruction as teacher-led lectures. "Instead, it [SEL instruction] involves creative and engaging learning experiences such as role-playing, story writing, interactive discussions, and problem-solving real situations in the classroom or school environment" (Berman et al., 2018, pp. 12-13)

The Council of Distinguished Educators also recommended incorporating SEL instruction into all subject areas and engaging in service learning to promote empathy,

compassion, and responsibility (Berman et al., 2018, p. 14). Each subject provides unique opportunities for teaching SEL skills, and each teacher approaches this through the lens of their subject expertise. The same is also true for various community outreach and volunteer projects.

> These three strategies—explicit instruction, embedding social and emotional competencies within academic instruction, and community building—are mutually supportive. Applied together, they bring a positive and productive consistency to the culture and climate of the classroom and school. They also reflect a commitment to equity in education by supporting the growth and development of all students. Investing classroom time in all of these strategies yields significant dividends in the form of more efficient, effective, and equitable learning environments. (Berman et al., 2018, p. 15)

This research collectively advocated for SEL instruction that is both systematic and consistent in implementation. The CASEL wheel showed us that SEL practices are interconnected, from the classroom to the school to the home to the community (CASEL, 2021c). Such practices are crucial for social and emotional learning to be successful in schools.

Support for SEL in Secondary Schools

While elementary and preschool teachers have incorporated SEL skills in their teaching for years, many experts indicated that teachers should teach social and emotional skills at the secondary level. Teachers reported that while SEL occurs organically, there is a disconnection between the demand for SEL and school-wide

programming available to students. SEL programming decreased as students advanced through the grades: only 28 percent of high school teachers say it occurs school-wide, compared to 43 percent of middle school teachers and 49 percent of prekindergarten and elementary school teachers (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 8).

This data contrasts with what teachers wanted for students. When surveyed, 64% of middle school teachers wanted SEL skills written into state standards (Bridgeland et al., 2013). However, an EdWeek Poll in September 2021 found that school leaders at both the elementary and secondary levels reported an emphasis on SEL in comparable numbers. Unfortunately, the students in the same survey did not feel supported during the pandemic (Prothero, 2021). Approximately 33% "of students said their school had not provided them with the help or support they feel they needed over the course of the pandemic to improve on a range of skills central to social and emotional learning" (Prothero, 2021, para. 18).

Elias (1997) discussed the turbulent times that adolescence can bring to our youth. It is a time of intense physical changes when students often compare themselves to their peers and feel deficient. It is also a time of growth emotionally and cognitively. Abstract thinking develops, launching students into a new developmental stage. Additionally, students are focused on developing their identity and can be egocentric. Despite this focus on the "self," they also care a great deal about what "everyone" thinks (Elias, 1997). These changes lead to adolescents' intense emotions and behaviors during this time.

Prothero explained that the COVID-19 pandemic made school harder for students than normal. The past several years intensified difficult emotions for teenagers, and these

feelings trickled into our schools. Prothero explained this reality for students when he stated,

> Even in normal times, the journey through grades 6-12 can be fraught for students, but the pandemic has made it especially complicated as many are struggling with more anxiety, depression, grief, uncertainty, and loneliness. These emotions get in the way of students being able to process and learn new information—just as schools are pushing to make up for lost learning time. That's why experts in social-emotional learning and child development say the secondary school years are a crucial time to focus on teaching skills, such as responsible decision-making, emotional management, and nurturing relationships. (Prothero, 2021. paras. 2-3)

In addition, researchers should focus on how best to teach SEL skills to students in this age group. As Yeager (2017) pointed out, adolescent students are not elementary-age students, and we should not teach them SEL skills like we teach younger students. Yeager discussed three primary ways teachers instruct SEL skills: the skills model, the climate model, and the mindset model. In the skills model, the teacher instructs social and emotional learning skills to change student behavior or outcomes. Yeager cited many examples where this approach to changing behavior is ineffective in young adults. Studies on teen pregnancy prevention, smoking prevention, decreasing youth violence, and even cancer treatment adherence programs all show that the skills model of teaching does not change adolescent behavior. These programs used lessons that rely on direct instruction techniques, mentors, financial incentives, or advertising to persuade adolescent behavior. However, the results of each study were disappointing. SEL

programs using the skills model were less effective in older students than in younger students (Yeager, 2017). Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of SEL data stated that "students' mean age and program duration were significantly and negatively related to skill outcomes" (p. 12). Perhaps this is because educators try to teach SEL to adolescents the same way they instruct young children, despite adolescents' unique needs and development. Adolescents are interested in developing autonomy and a sense of self (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2011). One psychosocial theory by B. Bradford Brown suggested that adolescents must accomplish four psychosocial tasks. These are,

1. to stand out—to develop an identity and pursue autonomy,
2. to fit in—to find comfortable affiliations and gain acceptance from peers,
3. to measure up—to develop competence and find ways to achieve, and
4. to take hold—to make commitments to particular goals, activities, and beliefs.

(Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2011, p. 48)

When SEL programs honor adolescents' desire to achieve these tasks—that is, when they respect the kind of person an adolescent needs and wants to be—they can capture adolescents' motivation to change. When programs threaten that desire instead, they may not change behavior (Yeager, 2017, p. 76).

These unique characteristics in adolescents require educators to examine best practices when teaching SEL skills to this age group. Simply rebranding SEL content created for elementary students is not enough. Instead of using skill-based teaching methods for teaching SEL skills in middle and high schools, educators may want to consider methods that emphasize changing school climate or student mindsets (Yeager,

2017). Effective programs "find ways to motivate young people in terms of the values that matter most to them, and they try to change how young people see the world—their mindsets" (Yeager, 2017, p. 79). These programs take three approaches: "1. Creating a mindset that harnesses the adolescent desire for status and respect. 2. Creating a climate that's more respectful toward adolescents. 3. Creating a mindset that blunts the power of threats to peer status and respect (Yeager, 2017, pp. 82-83).

Therefore, SEL programs should not be implemented "like a mother telling them [adolescents] how to make their personal choices" (Yeager, 2017, p. 82). Instead, SEL programs for middle schoolers should encourage autonomy and contribution to the world they live in, work towards changing the overall school climate, and change mindsets. These programs are more likely to work than an elementary program that is solely skill-based. Most importantly, adults working with adolescents in this age group should remember that middle schoolers may not openly express their gratitude or support for SEL interventions the same way that younger students will. As Elias (1997) stated:

> Even though peer relationships are increasingly influential during the early adolescent years, adults must not be lulled into thinking that their influence as adult role models and guides is in any way diminished. What is most likely to occur is that children are more reluctant to admit or acknowledge this influence during the middle-school years than they might have just a few years earlier. Accordingly, providing support will often be quite thankless, and at times frustrating. Nonetheless, it can be a lifeline for youth who otherwise would derive most of their views from their peers. What adults can do to stimulate these children's social and

> emotional skills is to create environments where peers can relate to one another in positive, reflective, constructive ways, addressing important topics and questions about life in the community, social issues, the environment, rights and justice, or diversity. (pp. 39-40)

Analysis of Subgroup Populations

In education, we strive for the success of all students. As the Aspen Institute stated, "Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/ or family income" (The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017, p. 3). Schools strive for educational equity in all areas: academic success, discipline processes, emotional and social adjustment, and postsecondary outcomes.

However, subgroup populations are lagging in all these areas compared to their peers. "A growing body of research has shown that Black, Hispanic, and students whose parent's incomes are below the federal poverty threshold are disciplined more often and severely than their white peers or those with higher socioeconomic status" (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022, para. 1). The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights provided additional data regarding two of these subgroup populations. "In 2017-18, Black students received one or more in-school suspensions (31.4%) and one or more out-of-school suspensions (38.2%) at rates that were more than twice their share of total student enrollment (15.1%)" (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021, p. 16). Furthermore, "Students with disabilities served under IDEA

represented 13.2% of total student enrollment but received 20.5% of one or more in-school suspensions and 24.5% of one or more out-of-school suspensions" (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021, p. 18). These statistics demonstrated the stark differences in disciplinary practices between subgroup populations and students not in subgroups.

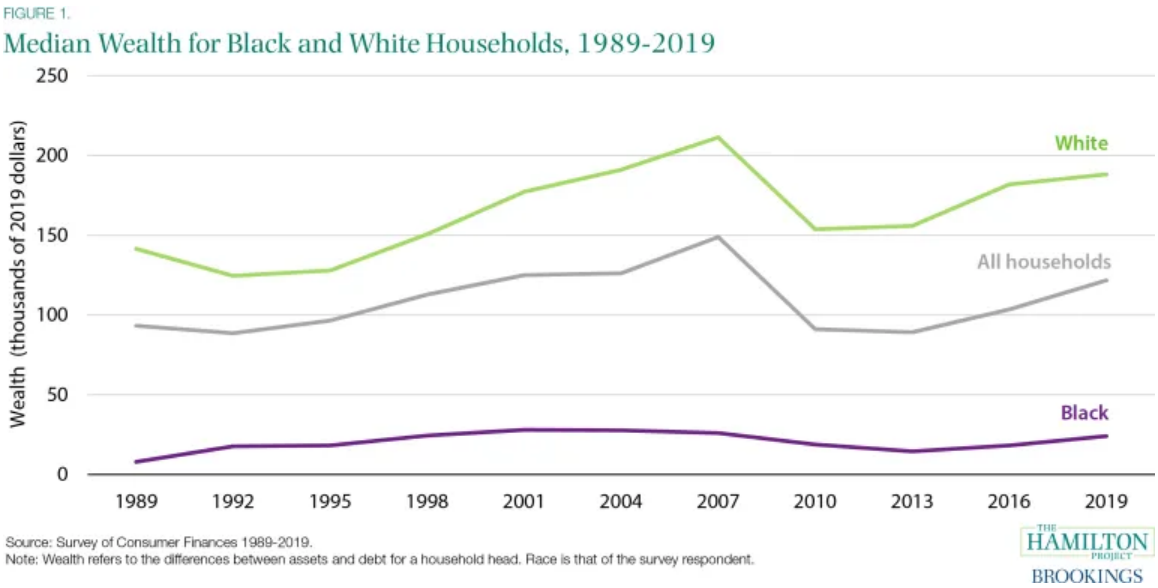
Finally, in an analysis supported by the National Institute of Mental Health (2022), researchers found that children in the Black/Hispanic poor and the Black nonpoor groups had significantly more teacher-identified behavioral problems than children in the White/Hispanic nonpoor group, even though the observation tool showed no differences in children's objective disruptive behavior. The findings suggested that racial bias in the interpretation and reporting of child behavior by childcare providers may occur as early as preschool. In addition, regardless of race, children in the lower socioeconomic status group received more childcare provider behavioral complaints than children in the Black nonpoor and the White/Hispanic nonpoor groups, even though researchers saw no objective differences in behavior between the groups (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022).

This data supported the claim that students in these three subgroups, Black students, students with disabilities, and students of low socioeconomic status, are disciplined disproportionately compared to their peers. The effects of this are beyond the scope of this research. Still, the research does point out the continued need for reflection among educators and the increased need for strong student-teacher relationships, especially in our subgroup populations. Unfortunately, the data regarding academic success in subgroup populations was like disciplinary data.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (n.d.) collected nationwide data demonstrating academic achievement disparities between subgroup populations. Data from public schools collected in 2019 showed that Black students, students who received special education services, and students who received free and reduced lunch lagged in many academic areas compared to their peers (National Assessment of Educational Progress, n.d.) Outcomes after high school graduation were also bleak for our students with disabilities, Black students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students with disabilities were less likely to enroll in post-secondary schooling and were less likely to complete a four-year degree program or technical school. They also earned less money per hour compared to their peers and were less likely to live independently and be married. Furthermore, young adults with disabilities were twice as likely to be arrested as their peers (Sanford et al., 2011). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019a) stated that graduation rates from first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year postsecondary institutions were significantly lower among Black students than all other racial groups, except American Indian/Alaska Native. Black adults were also less likely to amass as much wealth as their White peers (Moss et al., 2022). "In 2019 the *median* white household held $188,200 in wealth—7.8 times that of the typical Black household" (Moss et al., 2022, para. 4).

Figure 4

Median Wealth for Black and White Households (1989-2019)

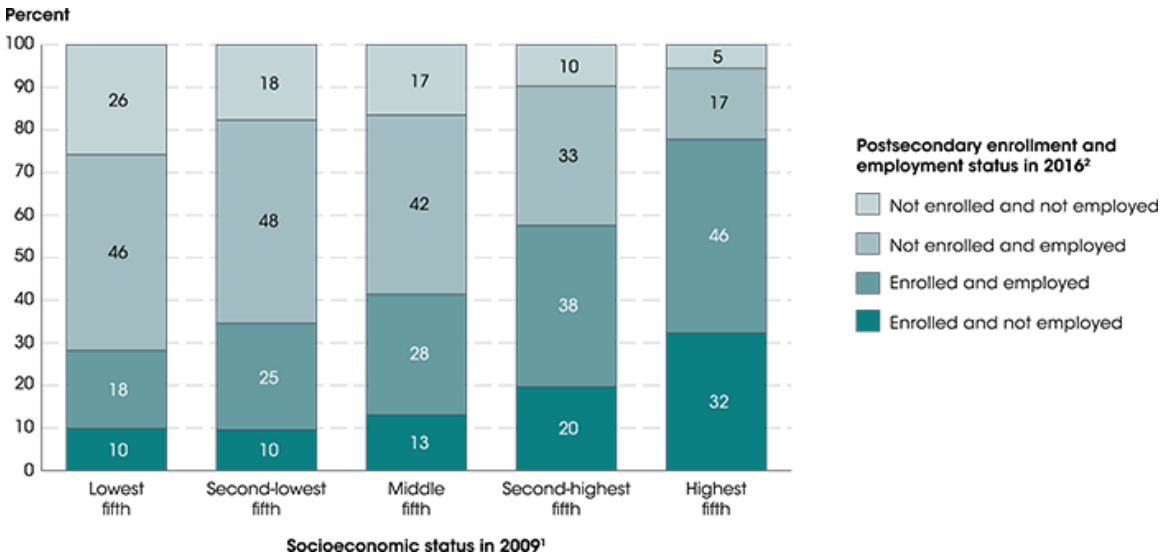


(Moss et al., 2022, para. 6)

The NCES (2019b) stated that students from the lowest fifth of the socioeconomic status group in 2009 were significantly more likely to be neither enrolled in postsecondary education nor employed three years after high school graduation than their high socioeconomic peers. There was also a large gap (78% versus 28%) between the highest and lowest socioeconomic groups enrolling in a postsecondary school (NCES, 2019b) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Postsecondary Enrollment and Employment Status (2016)



(NCES, 2019b, para. 5)

In addition, Harris and Kearney (2014) also stated that low socioeconomic status can lead to exposure to violence and higher incarceration rates. “In 2008, . . . the victimization rate for all personal crimes among individuals with family incomes of less than $15,000 was over three times the rate of individuals with family incomes of $75,000 or more” (Harris & Kearney, 2014, para. 4). These experiences have long-lasting effects on children and can lead to higher incidences of depression, anger, or aggressive behaviors (Harris & Kearney, 2014, para. 5).

> According to current projections, the U.S. will be a “minority-majority” nation in less than three decades. An increasing number of school-aged children and youth reside in poor or low-income families and communities. Racial/ethnic and class inequalities in education, health, and wealth compromise the life chances of these youth, which ultimately

> undermines the vitality of their communities and threatens the nation's security and productivity (Jagers et al., 2018, p. 2).

It is clear from the data examined in this section that there are significant well-being gaps in postsecondary life when comparing subgroup populations with students not in subgroups. Social and emotional learning can be a valuable tool in this regard. Addressing youth social and emotional learning can lead to authentic school-family-community partnerships, trusting and collaborative relationships between students and educators, rigorous and meaningful curriculum, and instruction that sets high standards and expectations for all students Social and emotional learning can also lead to policies and practices that ensure educators treat students fairly, and that all students have access to supportive learning environments, engage in high-quality educational opportunities and programs, and achieve excellent academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Paunesku, 2021, paras. 2-5). By focusing on SEL skill development, it is possible to impact the futures of students who might experience these negative outcomes.

Perspectives on Social and Emotional Learning

Educator beliefs about social and emotional learning. A major influence on social and emotional learning is what teachers believe about SEL. In a survey of over 600 teachers in 2013, CASEL found that teachers overwhelmingly supported SEL. When using CASEL's definition of SEL, 93% of teachers believed SEL is important for students in school. Furthermore, approximately eight in ten teachers believed SEL skills would impact students' abilities to graduate and improve academic performance (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Finally, "nearly all teachers (95 percent) believe social and emotional skills are teachable and report that SEL will benefit students from all

backgrounds, rich or poor (97 percent)" (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 5). In an Education Week Research Center survey, 78% of teachers agreed with the statement, "It is part of my job to help students develop strong social and emotional skills" (Schwartz, 2022, para. 14).

Survey data also showed that principals support SEL standards and teaching in schools. A 2019 survey showed that 87% of principals believe that state standards should probably or definitely explicitly include SEL standards (Atwell et al., 2019). Furthermore, 83% of principals feel it is very important for their schools to promote SEL skills (Atwell et al., 2019). Not surprisingly,

> Principals in districts that place a high emphasis on SEL report greater levels of success in developing students' social and emotional skills, as well as greater implementation across a host of benchmarks, including SEL integrated into curricula, all teachers being expected to teach SEL, having a SEL planning team in place to support SEL, and having a separate curriculum for teaching students social and emotional skills. These findings point to the important role districts play in school-level SEL implementation, as well as the need for additional district-level resources and collaborations to support SEL implementation. (Atwell, et al., 2019, p. 7)

Recent data also showed that 27 states adopted k-12 state standards (CASEL, 2022). Further research showed that policymakers started to include nonacademic indicators in school accountability. The "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), for example, requires states to incorporate an additional indicator of school quality or student

success (i.e., not based on math and reading test scores) into their school accountability systems" (West et al., 2020, p. 2).

However, "despite growing interest in SEL and ways to promote it in schools, SEL remains disconnected from important school policies like discipline practices, assessment for intervention and accountability purposes, and teacher professional development" (Jones & Doolittle, 2017, p. 7). While 88% of teachers surveyed reported that SEL instruction occurs in their schools, only 44% of teachers say their schools teach these skills in a schoolwide, programmatic way (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Teachers cited a lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school and a lack of training in SEL skills as two problems with SEL implementation (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Will, 2020). Only 40% of teachers surveyed by EdWeek felt they had adequate solutions and strategies to use when students do not have strong SEL skills (Schwartz, 2022). Furthermore, teachers cited the main challenges in implementing SEL practices as insufficient time to cover academic content and SEL content, lack of support from student's families, and inadequate training or professional development (Schwartz, 2022). Principals also felt their teachers were not prepared to implement SEL. An EdWeek survey revealed that school leaders felt that approximately half of their novice teachers were somewhat prepared or completely prepared to teach social and emotional learning compared with 91% being somewhat or completely prepared to teach academic subject matter (Will, 2020).

> Principals cite lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school, teachers not having enough time, lack of dedicated SEL funding streams, and teachers needing more training to support students' SEL skills

> development as the largest challenges to implementation. Schools with more low-income students are more likely to report significant challenges to implementing SEL. Significantly, schools with more than 80 percent of low-income students are more likely to cite a lack of needing additional SEL training, lack of prioritization at the district level, and teacher turnover to be significant challenges. These findings emphasize the need to ensure low-income schools are receiving the most intensive support to implement SEL programming. (Atwell et al., 2019, p. 7)

Parental Support for Social and Emotional Learning

Data demonstrated that parents also supported social and emotional learning. A Phi Delta Kappan survey (2017) stated that 82% of parents "say that it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills, such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent at solving problems" (p. 5). Impressively, when asked about aspects of school quality, interpersonal skills ranked significantly higher than standardized test scores (Phi Delta Kappan, 2017).

Figure 6

Aspects of School Quality

Aspects of school quality

National totals, 2017

	Extremely/very important %	Somewhat important %	Not so/not at all important %
Interpersonal skills	82	12	4
Technology & engineering classes	82	15	2
Advanced academic classes	76	19	2
Art & music classes	71	23	5
Extracurricular activities	70	25	4
Standardized tests	42	31	24

(Phi Delta Kappan, 2017, p. 25)

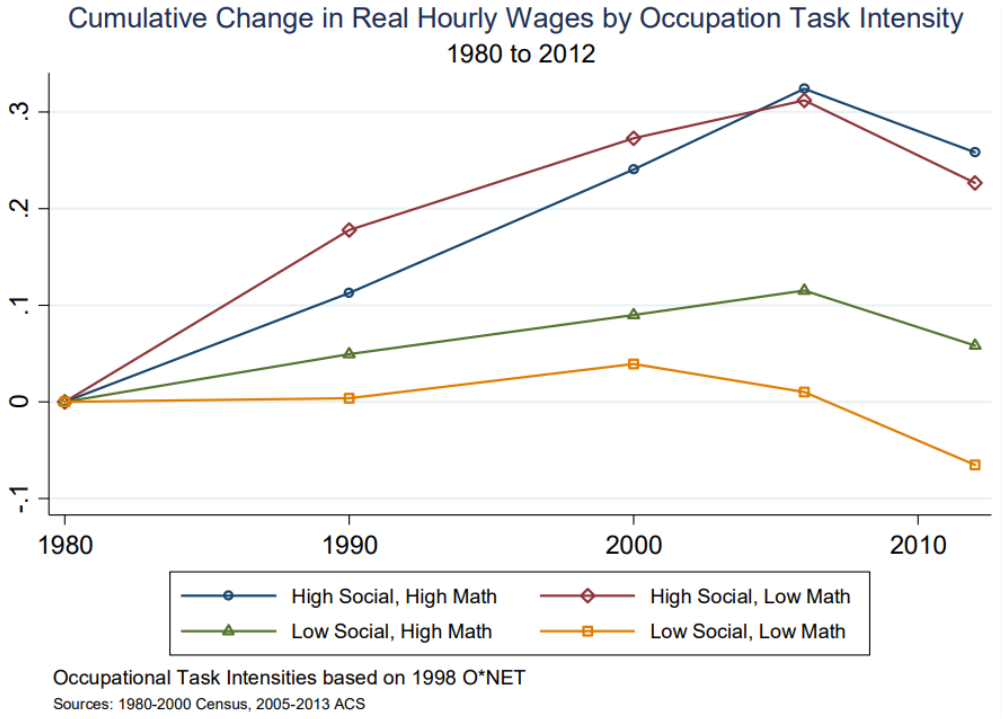
A McGraw Hill (2021) report also demonstrated parental support for SEL. McGraw Hill Education analyzed data from a 2021 Hanover survey among a national sample of teachers, parents, and administrators which showed that all three groups support SEL. In fact, 81% of parents reported that SEL is not emphasized as much as it should be (McGraw Hill, 2021).

SEL Skills in the Job Market

Research also indicated an increased need for social skills in 21st-century jobs. Deming's (2017) research found that between 1980 and 2012, social skill-intensive jobs grew by almost 12%, and wages also grew more rapidly in social skill-intensive jobs during this time.

Figure 7

Cumulative Change in Real Hourly Wages by Occupation Take Intensity (1980-2012)



(Deming, 2017, p. 44)

Deming (2017) also found adults with higher social skills are more likely to earn higher wages, particularly when Deming (2017) paired high social skills with high math skills. This change in labor needs evolved over the last few decades and is a change in the labor market compared to the 1980s and 1990s (Deming, 2017, p. 30).

Deming (2017) suggested part of the reason for this growth is that while computers have advanced, they still cannot replace human interaction. This research implies that social skills will always be needed in the labor market.

Data from the National Association for Colleges and Employers supported the idea that social and emotional skills are also employability skills. In NACE's Job Outlook 2022 survey, 97.7% of employers rated teamwork as very/extremely important in employee candidates, but only 77.5% of employers rated recent college graduates as very/extremely proficient in teamwork. Furthermore, NACE's survey revealed that employers' top five career competencies ranked in order are critical thinking, communication, teamwork, equity and inclusion, and professionalism. All five of the competencies outranked the technology competency. Furthermore, employers felt college students are much more adept at using technology than communicating well, working in a team, or thinking critically (Gray, 2021). This research demonstrated the need for SEL skills, particularly social SEL skills, in the workplace.

In a White Paper by Anderson and Gantz (2016) from the International Data Corporation (sponsored by Microsoft), the authors analyzed the skill requirements for over 76 million job postings in 2015 and identified the 20 most common skills needed for these positions. They used this research to forecast skills that will be most in demand by 2024. A little over half of these skills are considered soft skills; however, these skills are

predicted to be in high demand in jobs with high hiring growth and higher than median salaries (Anderson & Gantz, 2016).

The International Data Corporation also examined skill sets for "high opportunity positions." These positions are forecasted to incur above-average growth and above-average salaries during 2016-2024. Many skills needed to succeed in these high-opportunity positions could be considered social skills. These included oral and written communication skills, integrity, and being a self-starter/self-motivated (Anderson & Gantz, 2016).

The World Economic Forum (2016) published a paper detailing the importance of social and emotional skills in education and the job market. The World Economic Forum paper stated that students required 16 skills for 21st-century jobs, including SEL skills such as communication, collaboration, initiative, persistence, adaptability, and social and cultural awareness (World Economic Forum, 2016). This data demonstrated that social and emotional skills are an important part of the skills students need to succeed after graduating from K-12 schools. "SEL will prepare today's students for this evolving workplace, with consequent benefits for individuals, businesses, the economy and society" (World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 5).

Summary

The history of character development dates to ancient philosophers; however, the social and emotional learning movement did not expand in modern times until the 1960s when Dr. James Comer piloted the Comer School Development Program. Positive academic and social behavior results from the Comer School Development Program influenced further SEL development and research, eventually leading to the birth of the

CASEL organization. Research and SEL instruction continued to grow throughout the next several decades, leading to increased knowledge about SEL and SEL instruction (Edutopia, 2011; CASEL, 2021a). Researchers reported a positive relationship between SEL instruction in schools and increased social and academic skills (Berman et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2008; Klem & Connell, 2004; Mahoney et al., 2018; Payton et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017). Students who received SEL interventions demonstrated improved mental health, socioeconomic status, academic success, and social skills compared to control groups in multiple research studies (Hawkins et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017). Additionally, the researcher found educators, parents, and employers supported SEL implementation and interventions (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Phi Delta Kappan, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2016). In the next chapter, the researcher discusses the purpose of the study, the methodology, participants, site, reliability and validity, research questions and hypotheses, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Introduction

This mixed-methods study examined teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning and whether students in subgroup populations attained social and emotional competency at the same level as peers not in subgroups. The researcher became interested in this topic due to the COVID-19 pandemic when the researcher saw the importance of relationships between students and teachers. The researcher also wanted to examine teacher perceptions of SEL due to teachers' influence on all classroom learning aspects. The researcher analyzed quantitative data regarding subgroups, including Black students, students receiving Free and Reduced lunch, and students with IEPs. The researcher also analyzed qualitative and quantitative data from teacher surveys and qualitative data from teacher interviews. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the methodology, participants, research site, instrumentation, validity and reliability, research questions and hypotheses, data collection, analysis, reflexivity, and ethical considerations of the study. The researcher discussed why the mixed-methods design was chosen, how data was collected and analyzed, and how student and staff privacy was protected. In addition, the researcher described the participants and site demographics and how reflexivity influenced research results.

Methodology-Mixed Methods

The researcher used qualitative and quantitative data in the research design and data analysis. These two research methods offer different perspectives on data analysis. Furthermore, the researcher compiled data differently for each of these methods. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), quantitative researchers aim to "establish

relationships between variables and look for and sometimes explain the causes of such variables" (p. 10). However, qualitative researchers aim to understand "situations and events from the viewpoint of the participants" (Frankel et al., p. 10). The researcher used qualitative and quantitative data to provide diverse perspectives on social and emotional learning research. The researcher wanted to examine social and emotional learning through student achievement and teacher perspectives, which required qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The quantitative data the researcher examined analyzed if any relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables of the study. The independent variable in this research was the subgroup each student belongs to (Black students, students on Free and Reduced Lunch, and students with IEPs). The dependent variable in the research study was whether students of that subgroup achieved SEL competency at the same level as their peers. The researcher compared the SEL competency of these subgroups to the competency of students not in subgroups using a *t*-test. This statistical tool compared the mean scores of two populations to test a hypothesis. In this case, the researcher compared the mean score of the SEL competency between each subgroup and students not in the identified subgroup using the SEL survey scores from a self-report provided by the school district. The researcher used the entire student population when conducting this research; a sample was not used.

The researcher also examined teacher beliefs and attitudes regarding social and emotional learning in the research. Data was collected using a survey (Appendix A) and interview questions (Appendix B). Teacher survey answers were analyzed using inferential statistics such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. All the

descriptive statistics and measures of variability were calculated into graphs and tables shown in Chapter Four. Teacher surveys contained both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. The qualitative data the researcher examined is an analysis of teachers' interview answers and teacher survey questions that were open-ended. The researcher analyzed teacher interviews using thematic analysis and examined common themes, or lack thereof, to interview questions regarding social and emotional learning for students.

Participants

Participants were both students and teachers in the researcher's school. There were approximately 900 students at the school, and 793 took the SEL survey used to analyze data. Adult participants were also recruited from the researcher's workplace, a middle school with approximately 70 teachers on staff. The staff is predominantly White and ranges in experience from brand-new teachers to veteran teachers ready to retire. Fortunately, the researcher did not have a supervisory role in the school, so the researcher did not have authority over any staff members interviewed or surveyed.

Instructions in the survey indicated that only teachers were supposed to complete the survey; however, five adults who were not teachers filled it out. The researcher removed their results from the analysis. Additionally, 38 adults began the survey, but several did not complete it. After removing the teachers who did not complete the survey and the staff members who filled it out but were not teachers, 22 total teachers completed the survey. Of these 22 surveys, seven teachers also completed interviews for the study. These teachers ranged in experience, grade level, and subject area, which provided a variety of backgrounds and experiences; however, the group was mainly composed of Encore teachers and experienced teachers with more than 15 years of teaching

experience. Three of the teachers were Encore teachers, two were Language Arts teachers, one was a Science teacher, and one taught Special Education. In summary, 22 teachers completed the survey, and seven completed interviews for the study.

Site

The study took place in a public middle school, grades 6 through 8, in one of the largest school districts in the state. The district serviced over 20,000 students, and the middle school where the study occurred served approximately 900 students. The district is in the suburbs of a large city, and this school is on the edge of that suburb. The population is predominantly White and middle-class. According to the Missouri Department of Education website (n.d.), during the 2021-22 school year, 87% of the students at this school identified as White, 6% identified as Black, 3% identified as Hispanic, 3% identified as Multiracial, and 2% identified as Asian (percentages rounded to the nearest whole number) (para. 1). Additionally, in the 2021-22 school year, 9% of the student population received Free and Reduced Lunch services (para. 5).

Instrumentation; Validity and Reliability

The researcher collected data from teachers regarding teacher perceptions of SEL and SEL competencies among subgroup populations through survey and interview responses. The researcher created these survey and interview questions to answer the five research questions of the study (listed in the next section). The Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board and the dissertation committee reviewed and approved the survey and interview questions created by the researcher.

Reliability and validity are crucial to creating a research study with accurate, reproducible results (Saldaña, 2011). Validity is the construct of drawing accurate

conclusions to answer the study's research questions or hypotheses. This includes inferences the researcher made based on data they observed or analyzed. For a study to be valid, the information collected in the research must accurately answer the questions of the study (Fraenkel et al., 2012), "Reliability refers to the consistency of the scores obtained" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 154). In this study, the researcher examined potential problems that could decrease reliability or validity results, including Social Desirability Bias and Reference Bias.

Some staff members may feel compelled to answer in a way pleasing to the researcher, even if their answers do not reflect their true feelings or beliefs. This phenomenon is known as Social Desirability Bias and is common in survey research (Lavrakas, 2008). It is also possible that only teachers interested in SEL completed the survey or interviews. To reduce Social Desirability Bias, the researcher created questions in the survey and interviews that did not lead the participants to respond negatively or positively to the questions. The researcher also told the participants that she could restate questions or provide clarity about questions but would not discuss answers with participants to reduce influencing responses. In addition, the researcher was not in a supervisory role in the building where she researched, so participants did not feel pressure to fill out the survey or interviews as an employee of the researcher.

The social and emotional learning survey that the students take was created and administered by the school district (Appendix D). District officials created the survey and used SEL research to create the survey questions. Survey questions aligned with the CASEL competencies and additional questions about school climate and social support. The researcher used the secondary data from this survey to determine SEL competency in

three subgroup populations (Black students, students on Free and Reduced lunch, and students with IEPs) compared to students not in these subgroups. This school district administered this survey twice a year: once in the Fall and once in the Spring of each academic year. The researcher used data from the Fall 2022 survey for the research study. The data collected in this self-report survey could be affected by Reference Bias, which occurs when respondents report personality traits or skills that compare themselves with a standard or social norm (Heckman & Kautz, 2013). The researcher cannot change the student self-report survey used by the district, but the researcher noted as a limitation in the study. In addition, certain words in the teacher survey or interviews, such as what it means to "effectively" teach SEL could also suffer from Reference Bias since not everyone may have the same definition of "effectiveness." This is also a limitation of the study.

Finally, identifying social and emotional competency requires emotional maturity and nuance that not all middle schoolers have attained (Elias, 2019). Additionally, self-awareness may be inconsistent as middle schoolers identify their personal characteristics and moral judgment during this time. Middle schoolers are also more prone to peer influence, which can alter their self-perception (Farnsworth Finn, 2020). All these factors can lead to inaccurate self-assessment of SEL skills. This could impact the overall validity and reliability of the student self-reported data used in the

Research Questions/Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students with IEPs and the students without IEPs.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

Sub-Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students of color?

Sub-Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students on Free and Reduced lunch?

Sub-Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students with IEPs?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL?

Research Question 4: What are teachers' perceptions about their SEL teaching?

Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom?

Data Collection

The researcher received approval from the school district (Appendix E) and the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board to conduct research. After receiving approval, the researcher sent an email to staff at the school (Appendix C) asking them to

complete the survey. The survey asked staff members to indicate their role in the building, which grade level they taught, their subject area, years of experience, and questions aligned with the five research questions listed in the previous section. The survey used both Likert scale and open-ended questions to answer the researcher's questions. The researcher used a Qualtrics survey to gather information from staff members, and the survey was open for four weeks. The survey did not ask any identifying questions about the teachers. The researcher informed teachers who offered to complete an interview that she would record the interview via Zoom. The researcher recorded interviews over the next month after the survey closed.

During the same time period the teacher survey was given, the school district also administered the student self-report SEL survey. The researcher used only secondary data from student SEL surveys. The survey contained 39 Likert scale questions covering school climate, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and social support. The district gave the survey in the Fall and Spring of each academic school year to students throughout the district. In addition, the district sends information to guardians about the survey content, and guardians can choose to prevent students from participating in the survey. During this school year, the guardians of 26 students did not allow them to take the survey. The researcher did not collect any primary data from the students and only analyzed student data from the research site. Teachers gave the survey in a core classroom and each team of teachers decided which class administered the survey. The district provided access to student survey results scrubbed of identifiable information. The researcher sorted this data by subgroup category and CASEL competency (self-awareness, social awareness, self-

management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). All data was stored on a secure computer and the researcher will delete it after three years.

Analysis

After collecting teacher survey data, the researcher used descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to interpret trends within teacher responses. The survey used Likert scale answers such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree and open-ended questions. The researcher developed survey questions to answer the five research questions of the study. There were 12 Likert scale questions and 11 open-ended questions. The researcher used Qualtrics to analyze answers using mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. In addition, the researcher looked for overall themes from teacher answers based on grade level, subject taught, or years of experience. The researcher also examined the answers for trends in each research question. The researcher also used thematic analysis to determine teacher beliefs and opinions in the survey's open-ended questions.

Teacher interviews consisted of 16 open-ended questions the researcher created to align with the research questions. The Rev speech-to-text service transcribed teachers' answers to the survey questions. The researcher analyzed the transcripts using thematic analysis and coding to look for similarities regarding teacher beliefs and opinions regarding social and emotional learning as they pertained to the research questions. The researcher also used coding when she analyzed teacher interviews and survey responses. Fraenkel et al. (2012) stated that coding is one of the prominent ways that researchers analyze data. "In general, codes are tags or labels for assigning meaning to chunks of

data. When coding a sentence or paragraph, the coder tries to capture succinctly the major idea brought out by the sentence or paragraph" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 436).

Researchers consider codes as usually single words or short phrases. Themes are generally longer phrases than codes and summarize a communication's apparent and underlying meaning. Themes can also be categorized into subgroups like codes as researchers define generalizations or commonalities with the data (Saldaña, 2011).

The researcher used student survey data to answer the three null hypotheses of the study. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation based on survey responses. Answers were also analyzed using a *t*-test to compare answers from each subgroup (Black students, students on Free and Reduced Lunch, and students with IEPs) to students not in these subgroups. Student answers were collected using a Likert Scale (Completely Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, and Completely Disagree). The survey organized answers by the five CASEL competencies and two additional sections regarding school climate and social support.

Reflexivity

"Reflexivity generally refers to the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research" (University of Warwick, 2022, para. 1). Reflexivity can interfere with research results if the researcher is not careful to make sure their own opinions are not influencing the outcome of the research. Reflexivity is particularly pertinent in qualitative research, where the researcher is directly involved in making inferences or drawing conclusions not based on numerical statistics (University of Melbourne, n.d.). It is also important to

consider when the researcher is deeply knowledgeable about the research content (University of Warwick, 2022). Researchers should be aware of these challenges and limit their influence on the research outcomes as much as possible. This requires careful consideration when conducting interviews, creating survey questions, observing participants, analyzing data for themes, or any other aspect of research that a researcher's opinions and knowledge could influence.

When the researcher constructed survey and interview questions, she carefully created questions that did not lead the participants to respond positively or negatively as much as possible. During the interviews, the researcher began each interview by stating she was going to ask a series of questions about social and emotional learning, and she could restate or rephrase a question, but she was not going to engage in conversation about the questions to limit any influence regarding the participant's answers. Awareness of reflexivity and its potential problems is the first step in ensuring that it does not affect research outcomes. To avoid the researcher's beliefs and knowledge influencing the research, the researcher was careful in both the construction of the survey and interview questions and how the researcher conducted data analysis of the qualitative data. These intentional actions improved the reliability of the data and research.

Ethical Considerations

One of the primary considerations of any research project should be the ethical ramifications of the research for the participants. Research participants should expect their identities to remain confidential, expect the research team to treat them with respect throughout the research process, and that no physical or psychological harm comes to the participants because of participating in the research project (Fraenkel, 2012). Risks for

participants in this study were minimal as participants would not complete a survey or interview on a regular day. Loss of confidentiality is a risk, but the researcher minimized this risk by storing all the information from the study on a password-protected computer only used by the researcher. The researcher will destroy information from this study after three years. The researcher made every effort to conceal the teachers' identities involved in the study and make the overall research process as simple as possible. While there is no direct benefit to the participants of this study, the researcher hoped to add to the wealth of research available by sharing information regarding teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning, as well as subgroup competency in SEL skills.

Summary

The researcher conducted this study to determine teacher perceptions about social and emotional learning, particularly in middle school subgroup populations, and to determine if subgroup populations attained social and emotional learning competency at the same level as their peers not in those subgroups. The researcher used qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze student surveys, teacher surveys, and teacher interviews. The risk to participants was minimal, and the researcher made every effort to conceal participant identities. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the methodology, participants, research site, instrumentation, validity and reliability, research questions and hypotheses, data collection, analysis, reflexivity, and ethical considerations of the study. In the next chapter, the researcher synthesized the data to provide answers to the null hypotheses and research questions. The researcher used thematic analysis, coding, descriptive statistics, and a *t*-test to analyze the data presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to determine any differences in social-emotional competency between subgroup populations and students not in the subgroups identified in the study and to gather data about teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning. The researcher analyzed secondary data from a student self-reported social and emotional survey and used a *t*-test to determine differences between social and emotional learning competency among Black students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, students with IEPs, and students not in those subgroups. In the teacher survey and interview questions, the term general population refers to anyone not in the specified subgroup analyzed; for example, when the researcher analyzed student survey data completed by Black students, the term general population refers to all other racial groups represented at the school. Later, the researcher realized she should have replaced the term general population with more specific subgroup descriptors such as students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic, students not on free and reduced lunch, and students without IEPs. The researcher analyzed teacher survey and interview answers to determine teacher perceptions about social and emotional learning in five categories: perceptions about SEL and student success, subgroup SEL needs and competency, teacher preparation of SEL skills, did teachers feel they could effectively teach SEL, and how teachers implemented SEL in the classroom. Analysis of the survey answers included descriptive statistics taken from the survey and thematic analysis of teacher answers to open-ended survey questions. The researcher also used thematic analysis and coding to analyze interview answers from seven teacher interviews.

Student Social and Emotional Competency Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students with IEPs and students without IEPs.

Teacher Perceptions of Social and Emotional Learning Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

RQ2a: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for Black students?

RQ2b: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students on free and reduced lunch?

RQ2c: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students with IEPs?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL?

Research Question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL?

Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom?

Student Survey Completed Fall 2022

In Fall 2022, there were 881 students enrolled in the school site, and 793 students filled out the self-reported social and emotional survey. Twenty students did not take the survey because the parents did not provide permission to participate, and the rest were either absent or unable to take the survey for another reason during the data collection time period. Of the 793 students who completed the survey, 42 students identified as Black, 94 students received free and reduced lunch, and 118 students received IEP services. In Spring 2023, the researcher initially accessed the survey data through the Datawise website of the researched school district but could not calculate statistics because the data was incomplete. After reaching out to the school district, the researcher was given raw data tables on the number of students who answered completely agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree to each question in the SEL survey. The researcher calculated the Likert scale answers on a five-point scale, with “Completely Agree” equaling a five, “Somewhat Agree” equaling a four, “Neither Agree nor Disagree” equaling a three, “Somewhat Disagree equaling a two, and “Completely Disagree” equaling a one. The researcher used an Excel spreadsheet to calculate the mean and standard deviation for each CASEL SEL competency: responsible decision-making, relationship skills, self-management, self-awareness, and social awareness.

Results

Quantitative survey data

Null hypothesis 1. The researcher conducted a t-test using two independent means to determine if a difference existed in social and emotional achievement levels based on the SEL survey results between students who identified as Black and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic. The researcher found the means of the CASEL competencies relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness by averaging the answers of a Likert scale survey created by the school district. (see Table 2) The researcher used the means, standard deviations, and sample size to determine the two-tailed t-test results. The researcher used a two-tailed test instead of a one-tailed test since the researcher compared the results between the two groups. The researcher used a significance level of .05, so the confidence interval was 95%. In the CASEL competencies relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness, the researcher found the t-test results were not statistically significant, and the p-value was too high to reject the null hypothesis in each competency. (see Table 2) Therefore, the researcher could not reject Null Hypothesis 1 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students who identified as Black and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Table 2

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and the students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Group	All Other Races		Black Students					Reject Null Hypothesis
	M	SD	M	SD	df	t	p	
Relationship Skills	4	1.09	4.2	.92	791	-1.17	.24	No
Responsible Decision-Making	4.17	.91	4.07	.94	791	.69	.49	No
Self-Awareness	4.11	.98	4.19	1.05	791	-.51	.61	No
Self-Management	3.99	.98	4.09	.97	791	-.64	.52	No
Social Awareness	4.39	.74	4.43	.78	791	-.34	.73	No

Null hypothesis 2. The researcher conducted a *t*-test using two independent means to determine if there was any difference in social and emotional achievement levels based on SEL survey results between students who received free and reduced lunch services and students who did not receive free and reduced lunch services. The researcher found the means of each CASEL competency by averaging the answers of a Likert scale survey created by the school district. (see Table 3) The researcher used the means, standard deviations, and sample size to determine the two-tailed *t*-test results. The researcher used a two-tailed test instead of a one-tailed test since the researcher was comparing results between the two groups. The researcher used a significance level of .05, so the confidence interval was 95%. In the CASEL competencies relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness the researcher found the *t*-test results were not statistically significant and the p-value was too high to reject the null hypothesis in each of these competencies. (see Table 3)

Therefore, the researcher could not reject Null Hypothesis 2 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students who received free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

Table 3

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

Group	Students Not Receiving Free and Reduced Lunch		Students Receiving Free and Reduced Lunch					Reject Null Hypothesis
	M	SD	M	SD	df	t	p	
Relationship Skills	4.12	.96	3.97	1.05	791	1.41	.16	No
Responsible Decision-Making	4.06	.91	4.01	.98	791	.5	.62	No
Self-Awareness	4.12	.97	4.01	1.08	791	1.02	.31	No
Self-Management	4.01	.96	3.86	1.05	791	1.4	.16	No
Social Awareness	4.4	.73	4.34	.82	791	.74	.46	No

Null hypothesis 3. The researcher conducted a *t*-test using two independent means to determine a difference in social and emotional achievement levels based on SEL survey results between students who received IEP services and students who did not receive IEP services. The researcher found the means of each CASEL competency by averaging the answers of a Likert scale survey created by the school district. (See Table 4) The researcher used the means, standard deviations, and sample size to determine the two-tailed *t*-test results. The researcher used a two-tailed test instead of a one-tailed test since the researcher compared the results between the two groups. The researcher used a significance level of .05, and the confidence interval was 95%. In the CASEL

competency relationship skills, a statistically significant difference existed between the subgroup of students who received IEP services versus students who did not receive IEP services. Therefore, the study showed that students without IEP services reported higher relationship skills than students with IEP services. In the CASEL competency responsible decision-making, there was no statistical difference in achievement levels between students who received IEP services and those who did not receive IEP services. In the CASEL competency self-awareness, there was no statistical difference in achievement levels between students who received IEP services and the students who did not receive IEP services. In the CASEL competency responsible self-management, there was no statistical difference in achievement levels between students who received IEP services and the students who did not receive IEP services. In the three CASEL competencies, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management, the researcher found no statistical significance in SEL competency. The *p*-value was higher than .05 and the researcher could not reject the null hypothesis in each of these competencies. In the CASEL competency social awareness, a statistically significant difference existed between the subgroup of students who received IEP services versus students who did not receive IEP services. In the study, students without IEP services reported higher social awareness skills than students with IEP services. (See Table 4) The researcher found students who received IEP services achieved a statistically significant difference in achievement levels in two of the CASEL competencies in a self-reported SEL survey compared to students who did not receive IEP services. Students who received IEP services reported lower relationship skills and social awareness compared to peers who did not receive IEP services. While not all five CASEL competencies showed a

statistically significant difference in SEL achievement levels between students who received IEP services and those who did not receive IEP services, evidence existed to reject Null Hypothesis 3 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported survey between students with IEPs and students without IEPs.

Table 4

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students with IEPs and the students without IEPs.

Group	Students Without IEPs		Students Receiving IEP Services					Reject Null Hypothesis
	M	SD	M	SD	Df	t	p	
Relationship Skills	4.1	.93	3.9	1.15	791	2.08	.04	Yes
Responsible Decision-Making	4.14	.9	4	1.05	791	1.52	.13	No
Self-Awareness	4.07	1.01	3.97	1.08	791	.98	.33	No
Self-Management	4.01	.97	3.86	1.11	791	1.52	.13	No
Social Awareness	4.42	.7	4.22	.95	791	2.7	.01	Yes

Qualitative Survey Data

The researcher sent a survey via Qualtrics to district staff in Fall 2022. The survey was available for four weeks, and 38 staff members began the survey. The researcher used a “staff all” email to send out the survey, but the instructions indicated only teachers should complete the survey. Despite the instructions for only teachers to complete the survey, some non-teaching staff filled out the survey too. Additionally, some staff began the survey but failed to complete it. The researcher deleted responses from non-teaching staff and surveys with incomplete responses. The researcher analyzed the remaining 22 survey answers using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Of the 22 teachers who

completed the survey, three teachers taught sixth grade, five of the teachers taught seventh grade, two of the teachers taught eighth grade, and 12 of the teachers taught multiple grade levels. Two of the teachers taught Language Arts, two of the teachers taught Math, four of the teachers taught Social Studies, two of the teachers taught Science, three of the teachers provided Special Education services, and nine of the teachers were "Encore" teachers and taught elective courses such as Music, Art, Theatre, FACS, STEM, Business, Foreign Language, or Material Processing. Two of the teachers had 1-5 years of teaching experience, four of the teachers had 6-10 years of teaching experience, five of the teachers had 11-15 years of teaching experience, six of the teachers had 16-20 years of teaching experience, three of the teachers had 21-25 years of teaching experience, and two of the teachers had 26-30 years of teaching experience. Based on the results, the researcher described 50% of the teachers who completed the survey as mid-career with 11-20 years of experience. The full retirement age in the researched state is considered 30 years of teaching (Eligibility and Calculations, 2023).

The researcher interviewed seven teachers who also completed the teacher survey. The teachers ranged in experience, grade level, and subject, which provided a variety of backgrounds and experiences; however, the group was mainly composed of Encore teachers and experienced teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience. The researcher asked questions from five categories: preparedness to teach SEL, perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, teacher perception of subgroup SEL needs, teacher ability to instruct SEL, and teacher implementation of SEL in the classroom. The researcher used coding and thematic analysis to analyze the study results.

Research question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success?

The researcher asked three interview questions, one open-ended survey question, and four Likert-scale survey questions to answer Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL? The researcher synthesized the results from the interview and survey answers, and three themes emerged from the data: 1) Social and emotional learning is important for student success, 2) Home life influences SEL skill attainment, and 3) Lack of time to teach social and emotional learning.

The researcher used a five-point Likert scale in the survey. The answers "Yes, I Strongly Agree" equaled a five-point score, "Yes, I Agree" equaled a four-point score, "Neutral" equaled a three-point score, "No, I Disagree" equaled a two-point score, and "No, I Strongly Disagree" equaled a one-point score. The researcher used the Likert point scoring to calculate the descriptive statistics of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. OBJ

Table 5

Teacher survey questions within the category of "Perceptions of SEL Impact on Students"

Teacher survey questions within the category of "Perceptions of SEL Impact on Students"	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Q1: Is SEL beneficial for all students?	4.32	4	4	.72
Q2: Does SEL impact student academic success?	4.5	5	5	.6
Q3: Does SEL impact student behavioral success?	4.5	5	5	.74
Q4: Should teachers be teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom on a regular basis?	3.68	4	4	.99

Theme 1: Social and emotional learning is important for student success.

Results from the Likert scale questions indicated many teachers felt that many teachers felt that SEL benefits all students and that social and emotional learning impacted student

academic and behavioral success. “Is SEL beneficial for all students?” received a mean score of 4.32 on the five-point Likert scale, and “Does SEL impact student academic success?” and “Does SEL impact student behavioral success?” each scored a mean of 4.5. Additionally, standard deviations for all three of the above-referenced questions were below one, which showed most teachers answered close to the mean. Furthermore, 19 teachers answered positively when asked, “Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?” in the open-ended survey question. However, the final question, “Should teachers be teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom on a regular basis?” scored a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of .99, meaning fewer teachers felt teachers should teach social and emotional learning in the classroom regularly. Using the data from these survey questions, the researcher determined that although teachers felt social and emotional learning was beneficial for students and impacted student academic and behavioral success, not all teachers believed social and emotional should be taught in the classroom regularly.

During the interviews, the researcher asked, “Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?” to determine teachers’ opinions on the importance of SEL competency for student success. This question could apply to either academic or behavioral success, as both are needed for success in school and post-secondary life. All the teachers the researcher interviewed agreed that social and emotional learning is important for student success. One teacher stated, ‘I would say that is probably the most important of perhaps anything else at school other than literal physical safety. . . if we were to say that SEL was not important and spend little than no time on it, I think students would suffer a lot on a personal level, and I think our

academics would follow in a big way.' Other teachers also referenced students' inability to focus on academics when they are in emotional strife: 'Kids who have deficits in those [SEL] areas struggle with relationships and they're kind of making sense of their own emotions. When those are in strife, it makes learning a whole lot harder, for sure.' and 'I keep going back . . . to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If you are not okay, me teaching you something. . . is not going to stick. Because that's not what you're worried about at that moment.' Additional comments supported the theme of poor emotional regulation getting in the way of learning: 'I wish it [SEL] were first and included every day for them, because their confidence in themselves and their ability to regulate themselves in the social-emotional way will open them up and put them in that right mindset to be able to learn' and 'physically they're [students] there, but mentally they're not, they're not engaged in the learning because something on the outside of school is affecting them or something within the school is affecting their learning.' Teachers agreed that social and emotional skills were important for student success, and most teachers cited poor SEL skills directly affecting students' ability to learn successfully in school.

The final survey question in the category of perceptions of SEL impact on students was, "Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?" Three teachers responded neutrally or negatively to this answer. Two teachers said, 'yes and no' and 'we give excuses rather than expectations.' Overwhelmingly, nineteen teachers responded positively to social and emotional learning being important for student success; however, the individual answers varied. Some teachers were enthusiastic in their support for teaching social and emotional learning, citing Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the need for students to feel 'safe' and

'supported.' Some teacher answers included 'Yes. All students should have the opportunity to build the knowledge and skills to have healthy identities, manage emotions, and set goals and steps to keep working toward achieving those goals' and 'It is absolutely of high importance. Social and emotional well-being take precedence to effective learning. If a child does not feel safe, supported, welcome, etc., they will not learn to their full potential.' Also, 'Yes. So many of these kids lack self and social awareness. Teachers have always been teaching this stuff! It just wasn't named' and 'Learning takes place when the mind is in the right place. If a student's mind is not focused on the task at hand learning becomes more difficult. If a student is worried or thinking about other things (ex. social and emotional issues) they most likely will not learn to their highest ability.' These teachers felt social and emotional learning was important for student success and fully supported teaching SEL in the classroom. However, some teachers who felt SEL was important for student success still had reservations about implementation in the classroom. Several teachers felt SEL should not be separate lessons or felt it was 'one more thing' to do. Teachers said, 'It has always been something that I have felt should be integrated into a normal flow of class when opportunities arise, instead of a separate curriculum that we are made to teach. When that happens, buy-in always feels scarce,' 'I feel it is important, but it is one more thing that I am expected to teach. I have very little training and do not feel confident in my ability to help students in this area,' and 'Yes, it is important, however, I should have gone to school to be a counselor instead of a history teacher since that is what our kids need instead of my content.' Teachers felt social and emotional learning was important, but they did not feel confident in their SEL teaching or felt it was something else on their

already full plate as an educator. These teachers may not implement SEL with fidelity in the classroom if they feel overwhelmed or underprepared.

Theme 2: Home life influences SEL skill attainment. The next question in this category was "What influences SEL skill attainment?" Five of the seven teachers interviewed mentioned the home environment as a primary influence on SEL skill attainment. The other two teachers spoke about teacher attitudes or capability and their effect on student SEL skills. One of these two teachers stated, 'If a teacher is not wholeheartedly behind it, students will read that and they're not going to participate either.' One teacher who pointed to the home environment as a main factor in SEL skill attainment said, 'home is a big factor. . . family perception of that value [in SEL skills] . . . that's going to be probably the biggest factor.' Other teachers pointed to the home and other influences outside the classroom including 'home, life, illness', 'things that have happened at home, things that have happened with their peers, things that have happened in other classes, things that have happened on social media', and 'anybody a child interacts with . . . families are first and then people they see at school, teachers, counselors, everybody, and then peers . . . students learn or don't learn to manage themselves . . . from home from us and from peers.' Most teachers agreed that the home environment is a primary factor influencing SEL skill attainment, but other influences included peers, teachers, and other factors outside of school, such as illness or hunger. However, the main theme of this question was the home environment had the biggest influence on SEL skill attainment.

Theme 3: Lack of time to teach social and emotional learning. The final question in this category was, "What negatives are there, if any, to implementing SEL in

the classroom?" Four of the seven teachers interviewed said lack of time was the most significant negative to implementing SEL in the classroom. Teachers referenced the stress of teaching the required curriculum and not having enough time to do anything else. Teachers said, 'with the curriculum for some people being so like crammed in anyway and so fast paced then the kids complaining about homework and being completely overscheduled . . . do you find time and then what gives way?' Other teachers said, 'Everybody's already strapped for time as teachers anyway. So, finding an extra time in anybody's day to make this happen is very hard to do' and 'Curriculum is usually the thing that you never have enough time for.' Another teacher agreed that 'some people would push back if they feel it is taking any instructional time, but personally I feel that as long as that's a reasonable amount of time . . . it is likely to give a positive net return because if students are . . . building up their . . . sense of social and emotional wellbeing, I think will pay off in the long run by avoiding future conflicts and problems that would burn through instructional time.' Another teacher responded that she saw no negatives to teaching SEL in the classroom and the final interviewee said, 'I think the hardest part about it is making it natural so that kids don't tune it out.' Therefore, the main theme of this question was a lack of time to teach the required curriculum while also including social and emotional learning. It is possible that teacher responses to the survey question "Should teachers be teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom on a regular basis?" could be linked to teacher responses about a lack of time to teach the required curriculum and social and emotional learning. This data showed that while teachers felt social and emotional learning was important to student academic and behavioral success, not all teachers were enthusiastic about its implementation in the classroom. This may

point to teachers feeling overwhelmed by their curriculum standards or feeling unprepared to teach SEL seamlessly in their content.

Research question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

The researcher asked four interview questions, one open-ended survey question, and four Likert-scale survey questions to answer Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency? The researcher synthesized the results from the interview and survey answers and three themes emerged from the data: 1) Subgroups had different SEL needs than students not in the identified subgroups, 2) Teachers needed more training to teach SEL to subgroups, and 3) Teachers were inconclusive in comparing competency between subgroups and students not in subgroups.

The researcher used a five-point Likert scale in which "Yes, I Strongly Agree" equaled a five-point score, "Yes, I Agree" equaled a four-point score, "Neutral" equaled a three-point score, "No, I Disagree" equaled a two-point score, and "No, I Strongly Disagree" equaled a one-point score. The researcher used the Likert point scoring to calculate the descriptive statistics of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.

Table 6

Teacher survey questions within the category of "Teacher Perceptions of Subgroup Needs"

Teacher survey questions within the category of "Teacher Perceptions of Subgroup Needs"	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Q1: Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide subgroups with positive SEL experiences?	4.23	4	5	.87
Q2: Do you feel subgroup populations such as students with IEPs achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL framework?	3	3	3	.87

Q3: Do you feel subgroup populations such as students on free and reduced lunch achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL framework?	2.95	3	2	.95
Q4: Do you feel subgroup populations such as students of color achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL framework?	3.12	3	3.2	.99

Theme 1: Subgroups had different SEL needs than students not in subgroups.

During the interviews, the researcher asked, "Do subgroup populations have different SEL needs than the general student population?" All seven teachers interviewed answered 'yes' to this question, and each teacher often cited a different subgroup as an example of why they believed subgroups have different SEL needs than their peers. Teachers discussed gifted students, students of low socioeconomic status, students of color, and students with disabilities as all examples of students with different SEL needs than students who were not part of subgroups. One teacher said, 'If a student is coming to school hungry for example, that may not be an immediate emotional thing, it's more physical. But that does change how they behave and how they interact with others at school. So, I think it can and often does become a social issue.' Another teacher said, 'I think that some of my other subgroups, like African Americans, I don't know all the ins and outs of that culture. So, I don't know that I'm fully addressing, or being empathetic, or thinking about all of the things I need to be thinking about with those subgroups.' Three teachers discussed students with educational disabilities as an example of students with different SEL needs than students not in subgroups. Teachers stated, 'Whether you're talking about kids with IEPs and their social piece where maybe they have a

language disability, they're going to struggle with that and have that piece that weighs on them socially because they struggle with the language, and emotionally because they feel bad because they struggle with the language and they don't have any friends', and 'especially when you're looking at disabilities, they are going to be much more, I guess, in need of those skills that don't come naturally to them.' One teacher also stated, 'Subgroups have different challenges, and different methods of living, and dealing, and socializing.' In this question, teachers interviewed by the researcher unanimously agreed that subgroups have different SEL needs.

Theme 2: Teachers need more training to teach SEL to subgroups. Results from the survey question "Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide subgroups with positive SEL experiences?" showed most teachers felt more training was necessary for this area. Teachers' answers to this question also correlated with an earlier question "Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide all students with positive SEL experiences?" In both instances, most teachers said additional training in SEL was necessary to provide students with positive SEL experiences. The mean, median, and mode were very similar for both questions; however, the standard deviation in the first question regarding additional training for "all" students was noticeably higher at 1.14 than additional training needed for positive SEL experiences for students in subgroup populations at .87. This indicated that there is more disagreement among teachers for needed additional training in SEL to create positive SEL experiences for all students than the need for additional training to create positive SEL experiences for students in subgroup populations.

Theme 3: Teachers were inconclusive in comparing competency between subgroups and students not in subgroups. Three survey questions asked teachers to reflect on whether students in subgroup populations achieved SEL competency at the same level as their peers not in subgroups. Results indicated that teachers felt "neutral" about these questions for each student subgroup population analyzed in this study. Therefore, teachers were unsure whether students with IEPs achieved SEL competency similar (or higher) than students without IEPs, students receiving free and reduced lunch achieved SEL competency similar (or higher) than students not receiving free and reduced lunch, or Black students achieved SEL competency similar (or higher) than all other race groups, as defined by the CASEL framework. In reflection, the researcher wished she had defined "students of color" more specifically in the survey to indicate only Black students. Results for all three subgroups were similar regarding teacher perceptions of SEL achievement; each mean was very close to 3, the median was 3 in each category, the mode was either 2 or 3, and the standard deviations were between .87 and .99. These results indicated most teachers are not as confident in SEL achievement in subgroup populations as they are in SEL achievement in all other student groups.

During the interviews, the researcher found that analysis was also inconclusive about teachers' perceptions of SEL attainment. The researcher asked teachers, "Do you think students with IEPs achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population? Why or why not?" One teacher said, 'yes, because they are just human sixth graders just like everyone else' and one teacher said 'No, they don't . . . Especially with reading social situations and being able to read a room when you walk into it and know that the unwritten rules are. A lot of black and white thinkers need to

know rules and there a lot of rules that are unwritten and just expected that we don't necessarily teach, and that puts them at a disadvantage.' However, the other five teachers all agreed the answer to this question was not simply yes or no. These five teachers all felt SEL skill attainment depends on the individual student and often why the child has an IEP. One teacher said, 'I think it's going to depend on the purpose of the IEP, where their deficit is. For me, I see a lot of kids with language delay. If that's where your issue is, that's much more likely to influence your communication skills interpersonally with other people if you're having a hard time communicating.' Two other teachers agreed that students with IEPs do not reach the same level of SEL skill attainment as students without IEPs but disagreed on the reasoning behind that skill deficit. One teacher said, 'I don't find it [SEL skills] linked to their writing, or reading, or math ability at all' while another teacher said, 'What I see frequently in my class is students with different types of learning disabilities . . . behind on reading, they are hindered in other aspects because of that. So, they often have lower confidence, they're more self-deprecating.' While not all teachers agreed on why students with IEPs might achieve lower SEL skill attainment, six out of the seven teachers felt it possible for students with IEPs to achieve similar SEL skills as their peers, depending on other factors such as what skills their IEP addressed. Only one teacher felt confident that students with IEPs achieved SEL skill attainment at the same level as students without IEPs.

The researcher also asked, "Specifically, do you think students on free and reduced lunch achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population? Why or why not?" The researcher could not find a theme based on the teachers' answers to this question. One teacher stated, 'I honestly have no idea which of

my kids are on the free and reduced list and which ones aren't, so I don't know.' Two teachers felt students on the free and reduced lunch program did not attain SEL skills at the same rate as their peers not on free and reduced lunch, two teachers felt SEL skill attainment depended on the child, and two teachers felt that coming from a lower socioeconomic background was not a hindrance to achieving SEL skill attainment. In fact, one teacher said, 'My experience is that [socioeconomic status] doesn't limit them just coming from maybe a poorer background. I've actually seen those kind of kids be more socially adept . . . If anything, I would say that's maybe at a slight advantage.' Another teacher who felt SEL skill attainment was possible for students on free and reduced lunch at the same level as their peers said 'Just because they may not have the finances to afford lunch doesn't mean their home life is worse, for all intended purposes, they're worse than somebody that is more affluent. They could actually be a happier child because they have a happier home.' However, another teacher said 'It would depend on the kid' but 'I think they have more things working against them possibly in a home situation. Because if you're having a kid whose parents are all stressed about money and they're hearing them fight about money every night . . . and they're not sleeping or they're not doing their homework because they're worried about mom and dad . . . they've got other things in their life that they have to get over in some way.' Two other teachers also referenced students on free and reduced lunch dealing with more stress at home or fitting in with friends as reasons these students may not attain SEL skill attainment at the same level as their peers not on free and reduced lunch. Teachers had a wide range of answers about this subgroup population. An equal number of teachers felt students on free and reduced lunch did not achieve SEL skill attainment at the same level

as students not on free and reduced lunch as students on free and reduced lunch did achieve SEL skill attainment at the level as students not on free and reduced lunch. The researcher could not develop a theme for this question since there was no clear majority in the teacher's answers.

Finally, the researcher asked, "Specifically, do you think students of color achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population?" Teachers did not unanimously agree about whether students of color achieved the same level of SEL skill attainment as students of all other races. One teacher felt students of color did not achieve SEL skill attainment at the same level as their peers who did not identify as students of color; she said, 'I would say in general, if I step back and I look at society and this area in particular with the challenges of race, I would say no.' Another teacher felt students of color could achieve SEL skills at the same level as all other students and said, 'I think they can, because these are still human skills.' However, four teachers felt it depended on external factors such as the home environment and whether students of color achieved SEL skill attainment as much as their peers. One of these teachers stated, 'It depends less on their race than it does on their background.' Another teacher supported this statement and said 'I still think that they can . . . I don't think it's a color thing. I don't think it's a free and reduced lunch thing. Although those things do weigh on those kids because they're in different cultures.' Another teacher stated, 'I think it more so comes back to environment, and I think that's possible in any family's space. It's more about engagement with your kids and structure or lack of structure that's given your kids.' The final teacher the researcher interviewed said, 'That seems like an unfair question, just in the sense that we have different cultural identities. We have a lot of

different cultural expectations and my cultural expectations versus other cultural expectations, they can be very different . . . So, I'm not sure I would put any kind of qualifier on social skills when it's dealing with different cultures or races.' The researcher found a small majority of teachers felt students of color could achieve SEL skills attainment at the same level as peers who did not identify as students of color depending on external factors such as the home environment and family influence.

However, prior analysis of student achievement in the student self-reported SEL survey administered by the school district does not support these teacher beliefs. The researchers' analysis of student SEL competency from these student survey results indicated no difference in SEL competency between students not in subgroups and students receiving free and reduced lunch or between students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic and Black students. However, there was evidence of SEL competency differences between students without IEPs and students receiving IEP services, specifically in the areas of relationship and social awareness. These results indicated teachers might have inaccurate perceptions of student SEL competency based on their race or socioeconomic status. Teachers may need more training to recognize their own biases and how those biases affect their interactions with students.

The final open-ended question of the survey asked teachers who believed there are differences in SEL achievement between the students not in subgroups and the student subgroup population to explain why they feel students achieve SEL competency at different levels between these two student groups. Four of the teachers responded that they were unsure about answering this question and four said there was no difference in SEL achievement between students in subgroup populations and students not in

subgroups. Several teachers pointed to the home environment or other outside influences that influenced SEL achievement for subgroup populations: ‘past history can’t be ignored - the environment that any student is raised in/goes to school in is going to impact their mental health,’ ‘they don’t have the support and modeling at home that is needed,’ ‘a student from a low-income family, for example, may be lacking full support of survival needs like getting enough food, and those needs will supersede SEL development,’ and ‘culture and family experience affects all students.’ Another theme the researcher found was teachers’ belief that students in subgroup populations often have more difficulties to overcome than students not in subgroup populations, making SEL achievement more difficult for students in a subgroup. Teachers said, ‘subgroups can have more stacked against them and a bigger hill to climb to reach the same level of competency. It takes more effort and longer time to address the specific subgroup challenges,’ ‘Students in certain subgroups may have to work through extra factors to reach SEL competency equal to that of their peers in the general population. A student from a low-income family, for example, may be lacking full support of survival needs like getting enough food, and those needs will supersede SEL development,’ ‘I feel that these subgroup populations achieve SEL competency at a different level than the general population because they have other challenges that create bigger gaps in SEL competency,’ and ‘In my experience, I have seen some students with IEP's sometimes struggle more with SEL competency. Depending on the IEP & the needs of the student, this can impact their social and emotional learning.’ In reflection, the researcher wished she had asked this question after each subgroup category to see if there are different teacher beliefs about why SEL deficiencies might exist depending on the subgroup discussed.

Research question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL?

The researcher asked three interview questions, two open-ended survey questions, and four Likert-scale survey questions to answer Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL? The researcher synthesized the results from the interview and survey answers and three themes emerged from the data: 1) Teachers received some training in SEL through the school district, 2) Teachers were inconclusive about their preparedness to teach social and emotional learning, and 3) More professional development training was needed in social and emotional learning.

The researcher used a five-point Likert scale in the survey. The answers "Yes, I Strongly Agree" equaled a five-point score, "Yes, I Agree" equaled a four-point score, "Neutral" equaled a three-point score, "No, I Disagree" equaled a two-point score, and "No, I Strongly Disagree" equaled a one-point score. The researcher used the Likert point scoring to calculate the descriptive statistics of mean, median, mode, and standard deviation.

Table 7

Teacher survey questions within the category of "Preparedness to Teach SEL"

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Q1: Do you feel comfortable explaining what social and emotional learning is to someone outside of education?	4.09	4	4	.61
Q2: Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide all students with positive SEL experiences?	4.18	4.5	5	1.14
Q3: Do you feel you can assess your own SEL skills as defined by CASEL?	3.82	4	4	.85
Q4: Do you feel you can assess student SEL skills as defined by CASEL?	3.41	4	4	.91

Theme 1: Teachers received some training in SEL through the school district. The first open-ended survey question regarding preparedness to teach social and

emotional learning was “What training did you receive to prepare you to teach SEL?” Teachers answered that professional development was the primary place they received SEL training. Teachers said professional development regarding SEL included in-service workshops by the school district, books, speakers, or other in-service learning. Sixteen teachers cited professional development directly in the answer regarding how teachers were prepared to teach SEL to students. Other answers included ‘on the job learning,’ ‘teaching experience,’ ‘additional off campus training,’ ‘extra courses taken online,’ and ‘independent research/reading.’ Two teachers received ‘little to none’ or ‘none’ regarding preparation to teach SEL. The descriptive statistics supported the answer because the mean, median, and mode for the question “Do you feel comfortable explaining what social and emotional learning is to someone outside of education?” were “Yes, I Agree” meaning many teachers felt prepared to describe social and emotional learning to others.

Teachers who participated in interviews also shared a consistent theme of receiving professional development as their primary training source in social and emotional learning. Six of the seven teachers cited professional development as their primary source of SEL training and only one teacher also stated receiving some training in their undergraduate degree. Teachers cited ‘staff meetings,’ ‘beginning of the school year stuff that our principal did,’ ‘last year’s professional development series,’ and ‘as a staff we had . . . CASEL presented to us’ as examples of professional development. Two teachers also referred to classroom experience or interacting with other staff as an additional source of social and emotional learning training. One teacher stated, ‘Really, I got into that social emotional piece through my social workers that I had that came into my room and I was watching them.’ Another teacher stated that the training he received

was ‘very short and there was not a whole lot to it’ so ‘most of my confidence or knowledge about this comes from . . . my experience speaking with other teachers, speaking with counselors, speaking with admins.’ Finally, one teacher said as ‘a classroom teacher I have not received any direct social-emotional classes.’ Therefore, while there was one outlier, most teachers felt they received some professional development through the school and gained knowledge from working with fellow school colleagues.

Theme 2: Teachers were inconclusive about their preparedness to teach social and emotional learning. In interviews, the researcher asked teachers “Do you feel prepared to teach the five core social and emotional competencies outlined by CASEL?” This question brought mixed results from the teachers’ answers: three teachers felt at least mostly prepared to teach social and emotional learning, one teacher felt only somewhat prepared to teach SEL, and three teachers did not feel prepared to teach SEL. One teacher who did not feel prepared to teach SEL said ‘I feel capable of doing it. However, I don’t have the structure, so I don’t feel prepared. No. . . .I would love to have more guidance from methods or strategies that have worked.’ Another teacher said, ‘Not explicitly no, because right now I could not tell you what all five of them are.’ Another teacher said, ‘I feel that we are superficially prepared, and then anything that we’ve picked up along our life, whether that be as a mother or teacher in the past. . .I feel like I would like to be better prepared.’ Another teacher who said she felt prepared to teach SEL also commented on previous experience influencing their confidence in teaching SEL; she said, ‘after teaching 24 years I feel like just my background knowledge of having worked with a wide range of kids over that period of time probably gave me more

tools than my training would have.' Another teacher cited personal experience with the CASEL standards as part of writing IEPs for students as why he felt prepared to teach the CASEL competencies. The researcher found that the wide range of comfort levels with teaching SEL did correlate with years of teaching experience; therefore, most of the teachers who felt prepared or somewhat prepared to teach SEL were teachers with more experience, while most of the teachers who felt unprepared to teach SEL had taught less than 15 years. There were two outliers, one less experienced teacher who still felt comfortable teaching SEL and one more experienced teacher who did not feel comfortable teaching SEL, but the relationship between more experienced teachers feeling more prepared to teach SEL was still prevalent. Several of these same teachers also cited professional and personal experience as part of the reason they felt comfortable teaching social and emotional learning. Based on these results, the researcher determined life experience may be a factor in teacher preparedness in teaching SEL in the classroom.

Descriptive statistics from the surveys supported the theme that teachers were inconclusive about their preparedness to teach social and emotional learning. The survey question "Do you feel comfortable explaining what social and emotional learning is to someone outside of education?" produced a mean score of 4.09 with a standard deviation of .61, meaning the majority of teachers feel comfortable explaining SEL to others. However, scores declined when the researcher asked teachers "Do you feel you can assess your own SEL skills as defined by CASEL?" and "Do you feel you can assess student SEL skills as defined by CASEL?" Teachers reported mean scores of 3.82 in assessing their SEL skills and 3.41 in assessing student SEL skills; both scores were closer to "Neutral" in the Likert scale. These answers demonstrated teachers felt

comfortable describing social and emotional learning but did not feel as confident assessing those skills in themselves or their students. Being able to assess SEL skills as defined by CASEL could help teachers feel better prepared to teach social and emotional learning. Therefore, teachers in both the surveys and interviews expressed mixed answers about feeling prepared to teach social and emotional learning.

Theme 3: More professional development training was needed in social and emotional learning. Most teachers who took the survey indicated they needed more professional development in social and emotional learning. Both the open-ended survey question and the descriptive statistics from the Likert scale demonstrated teachers wanted more professional development regarding social and emotional learning. The survey question "Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide all students with positive SEL experiences?" yielded a 4.18 mean score; however, the standard deviation of 1.14 tells us that while most teachers felt additional SEL training was necessary, there were a few teachers who felt it is not needed. In fact, 19 of 22 teachers answered "Yes, I Strongly Agree" or "Yes, I Agree" about needing additional SEL training while only three teachers answered "No, I Disagree" or "No, I Strongly Disagree.". Open-ended survey answers supported these answers. When asked, "What training do you still need, if any, to teach SEL confidently, 19 teachers cited specific requests for SEL training, such as more professional development. Specifically, teachers wanted additional activities, lesson plans, discussion questions, or deeper information about SEL. Teachers also asked for 'middle school strategies geared toward the specific age groups' and 'sharing ideas on how to build it in more naturally so kids don't roll their eyes.' Other answers included 'just more-reminders, examples, time, lessons appropriate for middle school,' 'activities,

discussion questions,' and "further in-depth information.' One teacher said, 'There should be ongoing training in this area. Not just meeting, but required PD.' Three teachers indicated they were 'not sure' what professional development they needed or that 'I do not believe I should be that person.' The researcher also asked teachers in interviews, "What additional training, if any, would be helpful to improve your social and emotional learning teaching?" One teacher cited more time gaining a deeper understanding of the CASEL competencies to gain confidence personally before trying to explain it to others. Another teacher stated he wanted specific training in 'dialectical behavior therapy' to help students achieve the best outcome possible for themselves. Five of the teachers stated they wanted more examples of SEL teaching and strategies to teach SEL. One teacher said, 'I think what would be most helpful would be strategies to make it less obvious to the kids, ways to make it more natural.' Another example included, 'I would like some additional examples of how I can incorporate that in my class every day because I try to embed it, but without calling it out specifically.' Three other teachers also described wanting examples of successful SEL teaching or sharing of teaching practices within their teams to improve SEL teaching. Therefore, most teachers would like additional examples of social and emotional lessons or teaching strategies to improve their own SEL teaching. None of the teachers interviewed said they did not want or need additional training to improve their SEL teaching skills.

Research question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL?

The researcher asked three interview questions and three open-ended survey questions to answer Research Question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL? The researcher synthesized the results from the interview and survey answers and

three themes emerged from the data: 1) SEL teaching could be better vs. It's going well, 2) SEL is positive for subgroup populations, and 3) SEL is positive for building relationships with students in subgroup populations.

Theme 1: SEL teaching could be better vs. It's going well. The researcher asked teachers "How do you feel about your SEL instruction?" This question was about teacher efficacy in SEL teaching. According to John Hattie, teacher efficacy "is the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students" and has a strong effect on student achievement (Visible Learning, 2018, para. 1). The researcher wanted to know if teachers felt they could positively affect students through SEL teaching. In survey responses, five teachers commented negatively about SEL instruction, and 10 teachers responded positively about their SEL instruction. Negative comments about SEL teaching included 'I do not feel qualified to teach SEL without more training,' 'I do not have all the information or time I need to be a counselor,' 'Not great, but the type of training we have been given has not helped,' 'Students need better coping skills, but as a teacher I don't want another things I'm expected to teach,' and 'I think it takes away from academic success.' Five teachers stated their SEL instruction was 'fine,' 'pretty good,' or 'positive,' while other teachers described in more detail their success or process for teaching social and emotional learning. One teacher stated ,'Fundamentally, I teach through a positive approach & try to reach students in a variety of ways through a differentiation of instruction.' Another teacher said, 'It is largely driven by example, almost never by "instruction." The most meaningful learning opportunities come from genuine interactions in my students' lives that either I witness, or they decide to share with me.' Additional positive comments about SEL teaching included teachers

supporting SEL instruction when they said ‘it is valuable’ or ‘it is needed. However, these comments didn’t describe the teachers’ feelings about their SEL instruction. Two of the teachers interviewed replied that they felt good about their SEL instruction, and five teachers felt their SEL instruction could be better. The five teachers who said they felt their instruction could be better stated, ‘some days it’s better than others,’ ‘I’m going to say it’s [SEL instruction] probably lacking because maybe I don’t embed it as much as I can,’ and ‘I don’t think it’s strong enough.’ These teachers cited a lack of time or knowledge as reasons why their SEL instruction was not as strong as it could be. One teacher said, ‘if we were to implement something school-wide in a more rigorous way to give this instruction and to really try to build self-awareness in these competencies, again, I feel that myself and I would guess likely most teachers need some additional training to do that system justice.’ The two teachers who felt positively about their SEL instruction stated, ‘I think it’s fairly well developed’ and ‘I feel pretty good about it. I try to do it often.’ One teacher described how she started each class with partner discussions or group discussions to build relationships with other students in the classroom. However, one of the teachers who felt strongly about her SEL instruction still commented ‘It would be really neat if I could learn how to do it right. If someone would give me strategies that work.’ Overall, the researcher found teachers felt SEL instruction could be stronger and more strategies to teach social and emotional learning would help teachers feel more confident in teaching this subject.

Theme 2: SEL is positive for subgroup populations. The next open-ended question in the survey was, “How has your SEL instruction impacted your students of subgroup populations, if at all?” Five teachers stated they were ‘unsure’ or do not know if

their SEL instruction impacted students of subgroup populations. One teacher said, 'I don't see an impact.' Nine teachers stated positive comments about SEL instruction impacting students of subgroup populations including, 'My SEL instruction has helped students feel like they have a safe place to belong,' 'Overall I would say it has improved some relationships with some students,' 'I think by treating students as consistent as possible, it has had a positive impact on subgroups as well as the general population,' 'they feel better in the classroom,' 'I think students know that I care about their wellbeing,' 'fosters relationships in the classroom,' and 'Students have become more aware of themselves and how to manage their situations in a more positive manner'. The remaining eight comments described SEL teaching strategies or commented on the importance of SEL teaching but did not state opinions about how teachers felt about their SEL teaching. Examples of these remaining eight comments included, 'I try to infuse the SEL and CASEL competencies in my instruction,' 'Hopefully, but we need to do it this year,' and 'Hopefully, the instruction provided an opportunity for students to interact with classmates positively.' The next question the researcher asked was "How has your SEL instruction impacted students of subgroup populations, if at all?" Teachers agreed that their SEL instruction positively impacted students of subgroup populations; although some teachers felt their SEL instruction needed to improve to help these students more. One teacher succinctly stated, 'Is there progress? Yes. Is it perfect? Absolutely not.' Another teacher agreed and said, 'am I saying that we're at a hundred percent or I'm at a hundred percent? No, I can still grow with this.' Teachers who felt they could do better reaching subgroup populations also commented that they had more success with certain groups of students than others. One teacher cited more success with students with IEPs

than students of color. Another teacher commented she felt more successful with sixth graders than eighth graders. However, three teachers were confident in their SEL instruction and its effect on subgroup populations. One teacher said, 'I think the trust that I build in this classroom is pretty good. . . because I have kids that are more willing to take risks and feel comfortable in there, but they would not do that in math or science.' Another teacher discussed the impact of fostering a growth mindset with students and how he saw 'a huge impact on them, school and after.' Another teacher discussed how he strived to make his content accessible for all students, particularly minority populations that are often underrepresented in his subject area. Overall, the researcher found teachers believed their SEL instruction was beneficial for students of subgroup populations. However, teachers varied in how successful they felt their SEL instruction impacted subgroups and which subgroups each teacher felt they were most successful in teaching social and emotional learning.

Theme 3: SEL is positive for building relationships with students in subgroup populations. The final question for this research question was, "How has your SEL instruction impacted your relationship with students in subgroup populations, if at all?" In the survey, three teachers stated they were unsure how SEL instruction impacted relationships with students in subgroup populations. One teacher stated, 'I don't see an impact.' One teacher said, 'I don't think it's specifically changed the way I teach' and another said 'limited.' However, the other 17 responses supported SEL instruction and its impact on the teacher-student relationship. Examples of these positive responses about teacher-student relationships included, 'My SEL instruction has allowed students in subgroup populations to trust me and to come to me when they need a word of

encouragement or advice,' 'My relationships have improved with students by focusing on their individual needs and situations,' 'I have connected with students that have been withdrawn in the past,' and 'Builds a stronger relationship and the students know I care how they do, now and in the future.' One teacher also stated, 'Some students over time have seen a different side of me. It has allowed themselves to open up a bit more then they normally would.' One teacher also said, 'I feel as if I have given a safe space for those that think and express themselves differently than the "norm". We celebrate differences on a daily basis to help do this.' These statements indicated a strong tie between social and emotional instruction and improved student-teacher relationships. In the interviews, four teachers responded they could see a strong positive correlation between their SEL instruction and their relationships with students in subgroup populations. Several teachers referred to establishing trusting relationships with students as essential to their success in developing positive relationships with students. One teacher said, 'they know that I care about them . . . so I feel like I have a really good relationship with all my kids.' Another teacher said, 'definitely they [students in subgroup populations] trust me more.' Two other teachers referred to being an ally for students in subgroup populations. 'I have at least sometimes been able to make them feel like they belong more at school' one teacher said. Another stated, 'I think it has shown subgroup students that they have an ally that's a grown up. That in this class, I can take that extra bit of time and give it to them and feature them in a positive light.' Two teachers who did not respond confidently about their SEL teaching said they hoped their SEL instruction had positively impacted their relationship with students in subgroup populations. Teachers said, 'Hopefully I'm a little closer to them. I understand them.' and

'I hope they feel comfortable.' None of the teachers interviewed felt SEL instruction had negatively impacted their relationship with students in subgroup populations and most teachers felt it had positively impacted their relationship with these students. All the teachers the researcher interviewed spoke positively about SEL instruction and building relationships with students. Overall, the researcher found that most teachers feel SEL instruction positively impacts student-teacher relationships, specifically between students in subgroup populations and the teacher.

Research question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom?

The researcher asked three interview questions and four open-ended survey questions to answer Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom? The researcher synthesized the results from the interview and survey answers and two themes emerged from the data: 1) Most teachers spent less than one hour per week implementing SEL in the classroom, 2) There is not enough time to teach the required curriculum and social and emotional learning, 3) Teachers incorporated SEL instruction by embedding SEL activities into their current classroom norms and curriculum, and 4) Teachers needed more collaboration, best practices, and PLC support to implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible.

Theme 1: Teachers spend less than one hour per week implementing SEL in the classroom. The first survey question answering Research Question 5 asked teachers "How much time do you spend on average teaching social and emotional learning in your classroom in a typical class per week?" Three teachers indicated they teach SEL for 5-10 minutes or less per week. Five teachers indicated they integrate SEL teaching in their lessons where appropriate or try to build connections with students at the beginning or

end of class. Two teachers said they spent 20 minutes a week on average on social and emotional learning; two other teachers said they spent less than one hour a week, and one more teacher said 60 minutes per week. Additional answers indicated some teachers taught SEL 'once' or not at all. One teacher who taught SEL more frequently stated 'about 1-2 hours a week talking but all day building those relationships and offering help.' The researcher found that there was a significant difference between the teachers who did not teach SEL at all each week and the teachers implementing SEL 60 minutes or more each week. However, the overall theme was most teachers instructed SEL 5-10 minutes a week and many teachers spent less than one hour per week on SEL instruction. In reflection, the researcher wished the answer was written as a multiple-choice question with time ranges for better analysis.

The next open-ended survey question asked teachers to describe how much time teachers should spend on teaching social and emotional learning weekly. These answers supported teachers' actual implementation of SEL as most teachers felt SEL instruction should be less than one hour per week, and this corresponded with the amount of time teachers reported spending on SEL instruction in the classroom weekly. Five of the 22 teachers surveyed stated SEL instruction should occur for 1 hour or more weekly. One teacher stated, 'I honestly believe it should depend on the students. Some weeks 5 minutes a day meets the needs of our students and some weeks more time is required. Building relationships with students allows me to adjust and implement more or less SEL time, depending on their needs.' Another teacher said, 'Not sure but at least 20-25 minutes' weekly.' Three teachers indicated they were not sure about the amount of time that should be used to teach SEL. Five teachers indicated they did not think any

instructional time should be spent on teaching social and emotional learning. Some teacher comments included ‘I don't know that actual instructional time should be used for social and emotional learning. I feel like teachers can make meaningful connections with their students and meet them where they are as I mentioned above,’ and ‘I do not believe that explicit instruction would result in significant change. Teachers should always seek to understand their students in the time they spend with them and offer guidance when appropriate.’ Two teachers indicated that SEL should take a few minutes per class. The researcher found that teachers answered with a wide range to this question; however, results indicated most teachers felt SEL instruction should be less than one hour a week or were not sure how much time teachers should spend on social and emotional learning. Again, after reflection, the researcher wished this question was multiple choice with time ranges instead of open-ended to allow for descriptive statistical analysis.

Theme 2: There is not enough time to teach the required curriculum and social and emotional learning. The next open-ended survey question asked teachers, “Do you feel you have enough time to teach the required curriculum and implement SEL effectively?” Overwhelmingly, teachers indicated they lack enough time to teach the required curriculum and implement SEL effectively. Of the 22 teachers surveyed, 17 teachers stated they do not have enough time to teach SEL effectively and teach their curriculum. Two of those teachers indicated they did not feel they had enough time to teach the required curriculum by itself. Other responses included, ‘For me, this is less about having time specifically for SEL and more about having more time for planning in general. I find that my best academic activities allow students to incorporate their personalities and individual skills, which often allows for more clear observation of SEL

competencies or lack thereof,' and 'For most students but not this with higher needs.' Only one teacher responded in the survey that there was enough time to teach the required curriculum and social and emotional learning.

The researcher also asked teachers, "Do you feel you have enough time to teach the required curriculum and implement SEL effectively?" in interviews. Five teachers stated they did not have enough time to teach their required curriculum and SEL while two teachers felt they did have time to do both. The two teachers who did feel they had enough time to teach their required curriculum and teach SEL effectively were both part of the Encore team and both stated their curriculum goals were broader and easily achievable in the space of a school year. One teacher said, 'Yes, and part of that is because I feel our current World Language program in middle school is generous with teacher time because of the nature of the curriculum that we're supposed to cover and the amount of time we have to do it. But I would assume that most teachers are not in that same boat.' The other Encore teacher said 'For me, yeah. It's great. I have such a broad curriculum. My essential outcomes are super broad. I can get there any way that I want.' However, at the other end of the spectrum, some teachers felt there was no way they could teach both the required curriculum and SEL effectively because their curriculums are full of content. One teacher said, 'Absolutely not. I don't have enough time to do one of those things [teach curriculum or SEL] . . . I don't have enough time for everything else I am supposed to be doing.' Another teacher who agreed that he did not have time to teach both the required curriculum and SEL said, 'No. I think that is, again, one of those things where you have all of these demands and you know that this is really great, but our bosses are saying, "This is the more important," and until we're getting that message that

"This is just as important." I don't think we're going to see a lot of teachers be able to find the time or really even make the time.' Most teachers felt they did not have the time to teach SEL and the required curriculum effectively and the amount of content in their curriculum directly influenced their feelings about having enough time to teach SEL.

Theme 3: Teachers incorporated SEL instruction by embedding SEL activities into their current classroom norms and curriculum. The final open-ended survey question asked teachers to share how they incorporated SEL instruction into their classrooms. Answers to this question in the survey varied, but most teachers cited relationship-building activities that were part of the classroom structure. Some examples of specific SEL instruction included 'Question of the day, student check-ins, self-reflection and goal setting,' 'At the beginning of my lesson with a discussion or an activity,' 'Through the use of videos, personal stories, and student stories,' 'Starting each class with 3 sets of partner rotations and discussions. Stopping to reset each activity if negativity takes over and talking about how to fix what went wrong,' 'Relationship building, game days, relaxation before class starts, self-care GPS time,' 'through writing, literature, student conferencing, and partner work,' 'daily do's, journals, group discussions,' and 'I used to try to give a weekly survey as a check in with the students. This allowed me to see their highs and lows for the week. This time allowed them to check-in for themselves as well.' Some examples of informal relationship building included 'Through lesson or as opportunities present themselves,' 'I believe it happens naturally during the instruction,' 'simple advice for struggling students,' 'through informal chats during class, while speaking about homework, behavior, etc.,' and 'I do not have specific activities but I try and connect with each student on a weekly basis.'

The researcher found the variety in teacher answers demonstrated the varying comfort levels with SEL instruction and the creativity teachers had when planning instruction. Some teachers were intentional in their SEL planning and implementation, and some teachers only used SEL skills when talking to students informally.

The researcher also asked the teachers interviewed, "How do you incorporate SEL into your classroom instruction right now?" The teachers interviewed also felt they implemented SEL practices by embedding this instruction in their current classroom curriculum and norms. Five of the seven teachers said they incorporated SEL instruction by embedding it in their curriculum instruction or through classroom norms. Two Language Arts teachers interviewed pointed to using books and writing to embed SEL instruction. One teacher discussed embedding SEL through classroom expectations and norms while another said, 'I'm just trying to embed it and call certain things along the way. . . I need to probably embed this in more.' Another teacher said 'SEL instruction is not something that I sit down in my lesson plans for the coming weeks and say, when am I going to work in X or Y SEL competency? As I mentioned before, it's some that I am constantly looking for opportunities in . . . over the years of teaching, when I reflect, I realize that the most valuable moments for my students and usually for me are the moments that probably have little to nothing to do with the actual curriculum and had to do with a moment of growth or a moment of appreciation, a moment of understanding on a human level.' Two other teachers spoke about teaching SEL skills directly but in different ways. One Special School District teacher said that he teaches a social skills class, so most of the curriculum is about teaching SEL skills, but that when he is a resource teacher in a room, he cannot impact the lessons since he is not the lead teacher.

Another teacher spoke about several specific ways she incorporates relationship building in her lessons, including group discussions, ‘Fun Fridays’ where they play games, and establishing and reinforcing an accepting environment with no negativity. None of the teachers interviewed said they did not incorporate SEL instruction at all in the classroom, but most said they did so through embedding it in curriculum instruction or classroom norms and not direct instruction.

Theme 4: Teachers needed more collaboration, best practices, and PLC support to implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible.

The final interview question asked teachers, “What supports do you need to feel you can implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible?” Six of the seven teachers pointed to needing more collaboration with other staff members, more best practices examples or lesson examples, and more training. Teachers said, ‘I need more training. And I would appreciate more than anything more training within or alongside our curriculum’ and ‘Some form or professional development yearly because it’s always changing.’ Teachers wanting more collaboration said, ‘I would like to hear more ways teachers have done it successfully and felt good about it. . . I’d like to hear more of how it’s worked through a kids’ lens and through teachers’ lenses’ and ‘I think just good examples in our content area would be super helpful and time to collaborate so that we’re not spinning our wheels by ourselves.’ Another teacher said, ‘I would need to be really connected to the counselors and the social workers. In a way that I would need them to steer me in the right direction for the types of activities that work for whatever subgroups I have. . . And then resources. . . like specific lesson plans and ideas that work. . . Extra funds for things, and projects, and trips, and explorations that might do them

good. I think it would do these kids a lot of good to take field trips out of our zone and into other areas.' Most teachers wanted more best practices for teaching SEL, training, or collaboration time with other staff members including PLC members or counseling staff. However, one teacher said, 'I almost want the mandate [to teach SEL]. When it was part of my TEI, it's like I would pull this crazy stuff in and pull up these random teams together because my biggest gap was the social piece.' While this teacher's response was an outlier, it still demonstrated a desire to teach SEL effectively and find new ways to incorporate SEL in classroom instruction. In reflection, the researchers wished she had asked this same question on the survey to support answers to this theme further.

Summary

Chapter Four analyzed quantitative and qualitative research findings to determine any differences in social-emotional competency between subgroup populations and students not in subgroups and to gather data about teacher perceptions of social and learning. The researcher analyzed secondary data from a student self-reported social and emotional survey and used a *t*-test to determine differences between social and emotional learning competency among Black students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, students with IEPs, and students not in the identified subgroups. The researcher found students who received IEP services achieved a statistically significant difference in achievement levels in two of the CASEL competencies in a self-reported SEL survey compared to students who did not receive IEP services. Therefore, the researcher rejected Null Hypothesis 3 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported survey between students with IEPs and students without IEPs. However, the researcher did not find statistically significant differences in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL

survey of the social and emotional learning CASEL competencies between students on free and reduced lunch and students not receiving free and reduced lunch nor between Black students and students of all other races. Therefore, the researcher was not able to reject Null Hypothesis 1 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic or Null Hypothesis 2 of no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not receiving free and reduced lunch.

The researcher also analyzed teacher surveys and interviews to answer five research questions regarding teacher perceptions of SEL teaching. The survey contained both Likert-style questions and open-ended questions. Therefore, the researcher used descriptive statistics, coding, and thematic analysis to analyze teaching answers to the survey. The researcher used thematic analysis and coding to analyze teacher responses to interview questions. The researcher used some of the open-ended questions from the survey in the interviews, but the interview contained additional open-ended questions that were not in the survey. The researcher found similarities and discrepancies between answers in the surveys and answers from the interviews. The researcher analyzed these results further in Chapter Five. Chapter Five included a discussion of the researcher's quantitative and qualitative findings, how the results are aligned with current research, and recommendations for teaching social and emotional learning in the future to middle school students.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine social and emotional learning in middle school students and teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning. The researcher analyzed whether students in subgroup populations, including Black students, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) reached social and emotional competency at the same level as peers not in those subgroups using secondary quantitative data from a student self-reported survey given created by the school district where the researcher conducted the study. The researcher analyzed the data from 793 students to answer null hypotheses one through three using a *t*-test to compare the social and emotional learning competency between different student subgroups and students not in subgroup populations. The researcher also analyzed responses from seven teacher interviews and 22 teacher survey responses to answer Research Questions one through five. The researcher used coding and thematic analysis to find themes regarding teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning on student success, subgroup social and emotional learning needs and competency, preparedness to teach social and emotional learning, if teachers felt they could teach social and emotional learning effectively, and how teachers implemented social and emotional learning in the classroom.

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between Black students and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students receiving free and reduced lunch services and students not `receiving free and reduced lunch.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in achievement levels in a self-reported SEL survey between students with IEPs and students without IEPs.

The researcher also used descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation to analyze teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning through a researcher-created survey and interviews. Twenty-two teachers answered the survey, and seven teachers completed an interview. The survey contained both open-ended and Likert-scale questions.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

RQ2a: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for Black students?

RQ2b: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students on free and reduced lunch?

RQ2c: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students with IEPs?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL?

Research Question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL?

Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom?

Summary of Student Social and Emotional Competency by Subgroup Population

The researcher used a *t*-test between two independent means to find if a difference existed in social and emotional achievement levels between three subgroup populations and all students who were not in that subgroup. The three subgroups examined in the study were students who identified as Black and students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic, students on free and reduced lunch and students not on free and reduced lunch, and students with IEPs and students without IEPs. The researcher analyzed social and emotional skills according to the CASEL competencies using results from a self-reported student survey given by the school district where the researcher worked. After analyzing the data provided by the school district's SEL survey, the researcher could not reject null hypotheses one or two but did reject null hypothesis three which demonstrated some differences in social and emotional learning achievement levels between students with IEPs and those without IEPs. Survey results showed students without IEP services reported higher relationship skills and social awareness than students with IEP services. No other subgroup in the study showed a statistically significant difference in social and emotional skills compared to all other students not in that subgroup, and only two of the five CASEL competencies showed a statistically significant difference between students with IEPs and students without IEPs.

Summary of Teacher Perceptions of Social and Emotional Learning

Research question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success? The researcher used descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis to determine themes for research question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of SEL on student success? After analyzing the data, the researcher determined three themes for this

research question: 1) Social and emotional learning is important for student success, 2) Home life influences SEL skill attainment, and 3) Lack of time to teach social and emotional learning. Most teachers felt social and emotional learning was important for student success based on both survey and interview responses. Questions 1 (Is SEL beneficial for all students?), 2 (Does SEL impact student academic success?), and 3 (Does SEL impact student behavioral success?) all received high mean scores, which indicated that teachers do believe SEL is important for student success. In fact, 19-21 teachers answered "Yes, I Agree" or "Yes, I Strongly Agree" to these questions. Furthermore, 19 teachers answered positively when asked, "Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?" The teachers who participated in interviews also unanimously agreed that social and emotional learning is important for student success. However, teachers disagreed more on teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom regularly. Several teachers pointed to this being 'one more thing' to do, and fewer teachers responded positively on the Likert scale Question 4 (Should teachers be teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom on a regular basis?). This data demonstrated that teachers felt social and emotional learning was important for student success but did not always feel teachers should implement it regularly in the classroom.

The researcher also asked teachers who participated in interviews to reflect on what influenced social and emotional skill attainment and to explain why teachers would choose not to include SEL in their instruction. Five of the seven teachers said that the home environment impacted SEL skill attainment, and several teachers felt that lack of time was the main reason not to teach social and emotional learning in the classroom. The

researcher wondered if teachers feeling there was not enough time to teach SEL may be a reason that some teachers also said SEL should not be taught regularly in the classroom. Teachers may feel they do not have enough time to teach social and emotional learning which also leads to not wanting to implement SEL lessons regularly in the classroom. After accessing the data, the researcher thought the original survey question that asked teachers if they should be teaching SEL consistently in the classroom should have been an open-ended question that would follow up with asking teachers why they believe SEL should or should not be implemented regularly in the classroom. If the researcher knew why teachers thought SEL should not occur in the classroom regularly, the researcher could correlate this data with the interview question that asked what negatives there were to implementing SEL in the classroom.

Research question 2: What are teachers' perceptions about subgroup SEL needs and competency?

RQ2a: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for Black students?

RQ2b: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students on free and reduced lunch?

RQ2c: What are teachers' perceptions about SEL needs and competency for students with IEPs?

The researcher synthesized results from the survey and interviews to determine teachers' overall perceptions of subgroup needs regarding social and emotional learning. The researcher found three themes for this research question: 1) Subgroups had different SEL needs than students not in the identified subgroup populations, 2) Teachers needed

more training to teach SEL to subgroups, and 3) Teachers were inconclusive in comparing competency between subgroups and students not in subgroup populations.

After analyzing survey results, the researcher found teachers felt additional training was necessary to provide subgroups with positive SEL experiences. In the interviews, the researcher found teachers unanimously felt subgroup populations had different SEL needs than students not in subgroups. However, teachers did not feel that students in the subgroups of students with IEPs, students receiving free and reduced lunch, and Black students achieved SEL competency similar to (or higher than) students not in those identified subgroups. In each subgroup category, teachers indicated a mean score of "neutral" in the survey when asked about SEL competency for each of the subgroups analyzed in the study, with a standard deviation of less than one for each question. These results demonstrated teachers' perceptions of subgroup SEL achievement as being potentially lower than students not in these subgroups. In the interviews, most teachers felt students with IEPs might achieve SEL skill attainment at the same level as their peers, but it depended on what educational or social skills their IEP addressed. Five of the seven teachers the researcher interviewed would not commit to answering clearly yes or no to whether students with IEPs achieved the same level of SEL skill attainment as students without IEPs. Teachers disagreed whether students on free and reduced lunch achieved the same level of SEL skills attainment as students not receiving free and reduced lunch. The results from this question were inconclusive, and the researcher could not identify a theme based on the teachers' answers to this question. Teachers were also inconclusive about whether or not students of color achieved the same level of SEL skill attainment as students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic; however,

the researcher found there was a slight majority of teachers who felt students of color could achieve SEL skill attainment at the same level as their peers but it depended on their home environment and family. These answers were supported further by comments in the open-ended survey question that asked teachers to explain why there might be differences in SEL competency between students in subgroup populations and students not in subgroups. Teachers often pointed to environmental factors outside of school and student's individual needs as the primary reasons subgroups might achieve SEL competency lower than students not in the identified subgroups. Home life affecting SEL skills attainment was also a theme in Research Question 1, which means teachers strongly believe the home environment affects student SEL skills attainment. The researcher synthesized these results and found most teachers believed subgroup populations might achieve lower SEL competency than other students because their home environment and students' strengths and weaknesses impact SEL competency.

Research Question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL? The researcher used descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis to determine themes for research question 3: What are teachers' perceptions about preparedness to teach SEL? After analyzing the data, the researcher determined three themes for this research question: 1) Teachers received some training in SEL through the school district, 2) Teachers were inconclusive about their preparedness to teach social and emotional learning, and 3) More professional development training was needed in social and emotional learning.

The researcher found that most teachers had received some social and emotional learning training through professional development provided by the school district.

Sixteen of the 22 teachers who took the survey and six of the seven teachers interviewed cited professional development as one source of training in social and emotional learning. Teachers also cited teacher interactions with other colleagues as another way they learned about social and emotional learning. However, teachers disagreed on whether or not they felt prepared to teach social and emotional learning. Descriptive statistics showed that teachers were closer to "Neutral" about assessing their own SEL skills or their students' SEL skills than in other questions despite most teachers feeling comfortable explaining SEL to others outside of education. Teachers also responded with various answers in interviews when the researcher asked, "Do you feel prepared to teach the five core social and emotional competencies outlined by CASEL?" Since there was not a clear majority of teachers' answers to this question during interviews, the researcher determined that teachers were inconclusive about their preparedness to teach social and emotional learning. However, teachers were clearer about their desire to receive more professional development in social and emotional learning. All seven teachers interviewed stated they wanted additional training to teach social and emotional learning, and most cited additional examples of lessons or strategies as the primary type of training they wanted to receive. In the survey, 19 teachers specifically stated wanting more professional development or training in SEL. Furthermore, the survey question "Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide all students with positive SEL experiences?" yielded a 4.18 mean score. The results from this section demonstrated that teachers have received some training in social and emotional learning. Still, not all teachers felt prepared to teach SEL, and teachers overwhelmingly wanted more training in teaching SEL in the classroom.

Research Question 4: Do teachers feel they can effectively teach SEL? Research question four was about the teacher's ability to teach social and emotional learning and its impact on subgroup populations. The researcher wanted to find out how confident teachers were in their own SEL teaching and how their SEL teaching impacted students in subgroup populations. One theme that emerged from teacher responses was that teachers fell into two categories when asked how they felt about their social and emotional teaching: teachers either felt their social and emotional teaching was going well or could use improvement. This answer was similar to results from a survey by EdWeek that said only 40% of teachers surveyed felt they had adequate solutions and strategies to use when students do not have strong SEL skills (Schwartz, 2022). Some teachers cited lack of time or training as reasons they did not feel confident in their SEL teaching. This theme showed that teachers are not consistent in their efficacy in their ability to teach social and emotional learning. Another theme was that teachers felt that their social and emotional instruction had positively affected their students of subgroup populations to varying degrees, some positively and some with continuing room for improvement. The final theme was that most teachers felt their SEL instruction had positively impacted their relationships with students in subgroup populations. Or that teachers were not sure if their SEL instruction had positively impacted student relationships, but they hoped the SEL instruction had positively impacted these students. Research covered in Chapter Two that stated social and emotional learning can positively affect teacher-student relationships also supported answers from this theme (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Merritt et al., 2012; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Based on thematic analysis, the researcher found teachers wanted to improve their

SEL instruction, but they also felt their SEL instruction positively impacted students in subgroup populations and their relationships with those students.

Research Question 5: How are teachers implementing SEL in the classroom? The final Research Question asked teachers to reflect on how they implemented social and emotional learning in the classroom. As Jennings and Frank (2017) stated, "Programs that are implemented well are more likely to produce their intended results, and teachers are more likely to implement evidence-based program with greater quality when they receive pre-implementation training." (p. 424). Therefore, the quality of implementation significantly affects the outcomes of any prescribed program. To answer Research Question 5, the researcher asked teachers how much time they spent on SEL instruction, if they felt they had enough time to teach social and emotional learning and the required curriculum, how they implemented SEL instruction in their classrooms, and what supports they needed to feel they could implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible. The researcher found a wide variety in teacher responses to questions regarding how much time teachers spend on SEL weekly and how much time teachers should spend on SEL weekly. Overall, results indicated that most teachers spent less than one hour on SEL weekly in their classrooms and that most teachers felt less than one hour should be spent on SEL weekly. However, the researcher found teachers agreed that they did not have enough time to teach social and emotional learning and their required curriculum. Since teachers did not feel they had enough time to teach both social and emotional learning and the required curriculum, the researcher felt there was a correlation between the amount of time teachers spent teaching SEL and the fact that most teachers did not feel they had enough time to teach SEL. One key

theme in this question was that teachers who felt they already had a compact curriculum felt they could not teach both SEL and their curriculum. However, teachers who felt their curriculum was broader and more open-ended felt they had time to teach SEL while also accomplishing their required curriculum. The researcher also found that teachers felt they implemented social and emotional learning by embedding it into their teaching practice through classroom norms or by using the curriculum. Teachers shared many creative and varied ways to incorporate social and emotional learning in their instruction in both the surveys and interviews. This ingenuity demonstrated teachers' ability to adapt social and emotional learning to each person's classroom and curriculum. Most teachers also agreed that they needed more collaboration, best practices, and PLC support to implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the student survey data, the researcher recommended additional learning strategies be put in place for students with IEPs regarding SEL competencies relationship skills and social awareness. These two competencies are complementary and are the building blocks for creating meaningful relationships with others and working cooperatively with colleagues. As the researcher discussed in Chapter Two, students with disabilities experienced several quality-of-life disadvantages upon high school graduation compared to their peers. Students with disabilities were less likely to enroll in post-secondary schooling, less likely to complete a four-year degree program or technical school, were earning less money per hour compared to their peers, were twice as likely to be arrested compared to their peers and were less likely to live independently or be married (Sanford et al., 2011). To close the gaps in post-secondary success between

students with IEPs and students without IEPs, educators and parents should work together to improve SEL competency with these students. Parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, and behavioral specialists should work together to explicitly instruct students about social awareness and relationship skills to improve outcomes for these students both during K-12 education and after. Teachers should create a screening process to determine who needs this instruction as not every student with an IEP will need intense instruction in both social awareness and relationship skills. However, study results showed that some students need this instruction to improve their SEL skills to the same level as their peers.

The researcher found this study also enforced current research about teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning. The first theme, teachers believed social and emotional learning is important for student success, was also present in multiple research studies discussed in Chapter Two (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Schwartz, 2022). The third theme, teachers felt there was not enough time to teach social and emotional learning, was also present in the research discussed in Chapter Two (Schwartz, 2022). Based on teacher interviews and surveys from this study and others, the researcher recommended continued training in social and emotional learning that would incorporate SEL teaching into current curriculum standards without taking away instructional time. Since teachers said that social and emotional learning is important for students but that they do not have enough time to teach it, professional development should focus on ways to help teachers incorporate SEL without feeling like they are sacrificing curriculum content to do so. Additionally, since the second theme of the study was that students' home life influences SEL skill attainment, the researcher recommended that teachers and

principals reach out to students' guardians at home to encourage them to be part of the social and emotional learning process. Social and emotional instruction at home could include SEL activities that promote role-playing or problem-solving between students and guardians. This could improve student social and emotional skills with minimal teacher preparation and strengthen the school-home connection. These recommendations could solve two problems the researcher discussed in Chapter Two about SEL implementation: 1) lack of reinforcement of SEL skills outside of school and 2) lack of teacher training in SEL skills (Bridgeland et al., 2013, Will, 2020).

Based on the teachers' responses in the surveys and interviews regarding subgroup social and emotional learning competency, the researcher recommended that school districts provide more training to teachers about teaching social and emotional learning to student subgroups. This is important because teachers indicated that subgroups had different SEL needs than students not in subgroups, but teachers were inconclusive about whether students in subgroup populations attained social and emotional competency at the same level as students not in the identified subgroup populations. However, the study's student SEL survey results showed there are no SEL skill differences between students not receiving free and reduced lunch and students receiving free and reduced lunch or students who identified as White, Asian, Bi-Racial, or Hispanic and Black students. These findings demonstrated that teachers may have prejudices about student subgroups regarding SEL skill attainment. This is supported by research discussed in Chapter Two which showed students in subgroups are disproportionately disciplined for behaviors compared to students not in subgroup populations (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022; U.S. Department of Education

Office for Civil Rights, 2021). These results indicated teachers may need further professional development in teaching social-emotional learning to subgroups, as well as training about diversity and cultural competency.

Based on the interview and survey responses regarding teacher preparedness to teach social and emotional learning, the researcher also recommended that teachers receive more training in social and emotional in both undergraduate teacher training programs and during in-service teacher professional development. Teacher responses in the study showed that teachers had received some training on social and emotional learning in their workplace but that most teachers wanted more professional development to strengthen their SEL skills. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) conducted a study of the coursework and standards for teacher preparation programs in the 50 states in America that showed “the promotion of the SEL competencies of teachers is given little emphasis in state-level teacher education program standards” and “few state-level standards for teacher education programs have a comprehensive focus on promoting students’ SEL competencies” (pp. 413-414). Schonert-Reichl et al.'s study confirms that most teachers do not learn about teaching social and emotional learning skills to students until after they graduate and are already teaching in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher recommended that states begin requiring teacher preparation programs to include coursework on social and emotional learning and its implementation in the classroom. Incorporating social and emotional learning coursework that educates teachers about SEL and provides opportunities for the application of SEL skills can help educators’ and students’ SEL skills development (Schonert-Reich et al., 2017). In addition to pre-service social and emotional learning experiences, the researcher also recommended changes in

SEL professional development practices for teachers. Jennings and Frank (2017) recommend professional development in social and emotional learning that is provided over an extended period and encourages teacher collaboration instead of short, one-day PD formats. Glickman et al. (2018) also encouraged a variety of professional development formats that move away from the traditional one-day or one-time workshop that has been customary practice in the past. The researcher recommended using a skill development program to help teachers implement social and emotional learning. According to Glickman et al. (2018), a skill development program "consists of several workshops over a period of months, and classroom coaching between workshops to assist teachers in transforming new skills to their daily teaching" (p. 329). A skill development program could help teachers expand their current SEL skills to feel comfortable weaving SEL practices into lessons and develop stand-alone SEL lessons.

Based on teacher answers to research question four, the researcher recommended additional training to help all teachers improve their efficacy in social and emotional teaching. Data from the study showed that some teachers felt confident in their SEL teaching, but not all teachers had strong teacher efficacy in social and emotional learning. Since Hattie's research indicated teacher efficacy is important to student success (Visible Learning, 2018), teacher efficacy is important in teaching all areas of student achievement, including social and emotional learning. Teachers again mentioned that lack of training and time were reasons why they did not feel confident about their social and emotional learning teaching. The researcher recommended in research question 1, research question 2, and research question 3 that teachers needed additional professional development to improve teacher efficacy in teaching social and emotional development

to improve SEL student outcomes. Professional development could also help teachers find ways to incorporate social and emotional learning into the classroom without taking away time from teaching the required curriculum.

Finally, the researcher also recommended that schools spend additional time training teachers on how to incorporate social and emotional learning practices into their current teaching practices. While teachers showed creativity and commitment in their current practices at the time of the study, teachers also specifically cited wanting more collaboration with other educators, PLC support, and best practices training to continue improving SEL instruction. In research discussed in Chapter Two, Berman et al. (2018) stated, "Success [of SEL] depends upon consistent implementation, modeling by adults and peers, and professional development that deepens school staff's social and emotional skills" (p. 5). Berman et al. (2018) go on to endorse SEL instruction that includes "explicit instruction, embedding social and emotional competencies within academic instruction, and community building" (p.15). These are the same strategies teachers cited when they discussed teacher implementation of social and emotional learning in their classrooms. Most teachers are ready to take the next step in deepening their SEL instruction so they can seamlessly embed SEL practices without feeling they are giving up too much curricular time.

Recommendations for Future Social and Emotional Research SEL Skills Assessment Tools in the Educational Setting

After reviewing current research and the study's results, the researcher recommended that future research in social and emotional learning include research about assessing SEL skills in the educational setting. Schools should also use SEL assessments

to show students' SEL strengths and weaknesses and help educators make decisions that drive SEL instruction and implementation to improve students' overall social, emotional, and academic outcomes. However, educators must first decide among several common options for SEL assessment including informant ratings, direct assessment, observation, and interviews. Due to time constraints, rating systems are all popular choices for assessing SEL skills in schools; however, direct assessments, observations, and interviews can all be valuable tools for assessing SEL skills, but the implementation of these tools is problematic, due to the time it takes to administer these types of assessments (Denham, 2017). Therefore, the researcher recommended that researchers develop strong SEL assessment tools that schools can use to accurately assess student SEL skills and be implemented efficiently so teachers do not lose substantial amounts of curriculum time in the classroom.

Social and Emotional Learning Professional Development for Teachers

The researcher also recommended more social and emotional research regarding effective teacher professional development programs. While many SEL curriculums are available, teachers need access to high-quality social and emotional professional development for their own SEL skills and best practices on how to incorporate SEL teaching into their classrooms. Teachers consistently asked for more professional development regarding social and emotional learning throughout the study, showing that teachers strongly want more guidance in this area. Research in the education field indicated that teacher efficacy (Visible Learning, 2018) and consistent implementation are crucial for student success (Berman et al., 2018). For teacher efficacy and consistent implementation to occur, high-quality professional development must occur so teachers

can gain confidence in teaching social and emotional learning with fidelity. More research should focus on developing long-term SEL training to improve teachers' instruction, so all students can benefit from social and emotional learning (Glickman et al., 2018; Jennings & Frank, 2017).

Conclusion

Social and emotional learning has grown significantly in education over the past few decades. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher witnessed how profound SEL skills were for both teachers and students during online learning and while communities were shut down. This experience led the researcher to study students' social and emotional learning and teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning. The researcher studied social and emotional learning at the middle school level in subgroup populations and determined that students with IEPs scored lower in the CASEL competencies of relationship skills and social awareness than students without IEPs. However, Black students and students on free and reduced lunch did not score lower on CASEL social and emotional competencies than students not in those subgroups. The researcher also studied teacher perceptions of social and emotional learning regarding preparedness to teach SEL, perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, perceptions of subgroup needs and competency, teacher efficacy, and teacher implementation of SEL, and found many themes regarding the research questions in the study. After analyzing teacher responses to interview and survey questions, the researcher found teachers were inconclusive about SEL competency among Black students' SEL and students on free and reduced lunch. These results mean that teachers may have unfounded negative perceptions of subgroup social and emotional achievement. Throughout the researcher's

analysis, several other themes occurred in more than one research question, making them even stronger than if they had only occurred once. Based on these results, the researcher found teachers strongly believed, 1) More training is needed in social and emotional learning, 2) Home life affects SEL skill development, and 3) Teachers felt they do not have enough time to teach social and emotional learning and the required curriculum. Based on these conclusions, the researcher recommended future social and emotional learning research centered around improved assessment tools for SEL in the educational setting and high-quality SEL professional development for teachers. The researcher hoped that this study's findings could enhance social and emotional learning for students to improve long-term outcomes for all students. She also hoped to provide insights into teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning, which would help teachers and administrators seek meaningful ways to improve teacher implementation and self-efficacy regarding social and emotional teaching.

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Appendix A

Teacher Survey Questions:

What is your role in the building (Teacher, Other)
Grade Level (6, 7, 8, multiple)
Subject (Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, PE, Elective, SSD)
Years teaching (1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31+)

Answered with Likert Scale Unless Otherwise Indicated
Scale Used: Yes, I Strongly Agree, Yes, I Agree, Neutral, No, I Disagree, No, I Strongly Disagree

Preparedness to teach SEL
Do you feel comfortable explaining what social and emotional learning is to someone outside of education?
Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide all students with positive SEL experiences?
Do you feel you can assess your own SEL skills as defined by CASEL?
Do you feel you can assess student SEL skills as defined by CASEL?
Open-Ended:
What training did you receive to prepare you to teach SEL?
What training do you still need, if any, to teach SEL confidently?

Perception of SEL effectiveness/impact
Is SEL beneficial for all students?
Does SEL impact student academic success?
Does SEL impact student behavioral success?
Should teachers be teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom on a regular basis?
Open-Ended: Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?

Perceptions of Subgroup Needs
Do you feel additional training is necessary to provide subgroups with positive SEL experiences?
Do you feel subgroup populations such as students with IEPs achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL framework?
Do you feel subgroup populations such as students on free and reduced lunch achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL frameworks?
Do you feel subgroup populations such as students of color achieve SEL competency similar (or higher) than the general population, as defined by the CASEL framework?
Open-ended: If you feel any subgroup populations achieve SEL competency at a different level than the general population, please explain why you think this happens.

Teacher Ability
Open Ended:
How do you feel about your SEL instruction?
How has your SEL instruction impacted your students of subgroup populations, if at all?
How has your SEL instruction impacted your relationship with students in subgroup populations, if at all?

Teacher Implementation

Open-Ended:

How much time do you spend on average teaching social and emotional learning in your classroom in a typical class per week?

How much time do you think teachers should spend each week implementing social and emotional learning weekly?

Do you feel you have enough time to teach the required curriculum and implement SEL effectively?

How do you incorporate SEL into your classroom instruction right now?

Last Question: Would you be willing to participate in a 20-30 minute interview?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions:

Preparedness to teach SEL
What training, if any, did you receive to prepare you for teaching SEL?
Do you feel prepared to teach the five core social and emotional competencies outlined by CASEL? Why or why not?
What additional training, if any, would be helpful to improve your SEL teaching?

Perception of SEL effectiveness/impact
Do you feel social and emotional learning is important for student success? Why or why not?
What influences SEL skill attainment?
What negatives are there, if any, to implementing SEL in the classroom?

Perceptions of Subgroup Needs
Do subgroup populations have different SEL needs than the general student population? Why or why not?
Specifically, do you think students with IEPs achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population? Why or why not?
Specifically, do you think students on free and reduced lunch achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population? Why or why not?
Specifically, do you think students of color achieve the same level of SEL skill attainment as students in the general population? Why or why not?

Teacher Ability
How do you feel about your SEL instruction?
How has your SEL instruction impacted your students of subgroup populations, if at all?
How has your SEL instruction impacted your relationship with students in subgroup populations, if at all?

Teacher Implementation
How do you incorporate SEL into your classroom instruction right now?
Do you feel you have enough time to teach the required curriculum and implement SEL effectively?
What supports do you need to feel you can implement social and emotional learning at the highest level possible?

Appendix C

Email to Teachers Regarding Social and Emotional Learning Survey:

Hello,

I am writing to ask if you would participate in a survey regarding Social and Emotional Learning. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University, and I am studying teacher attitudes and beliefs regarding SEL and its impact on subgroup populations. I am asking that only teachers complete this survey since my research focuses on teacher perceptions of SEL.

The attached survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation in the survey is completely voluntary and you may stop the survey at any time. The research gathered from this survey will be confidential and no identifying information will be asked on the survey.

I hope to use research gathered from this survey to guide teachers and administrators in determining subgroup needs and achievement levels regarding social and emotional learning. I also hope to provide insight into teacher preparedness to teach SEL, teacher perception of SEL effectiveness/impact, teacher perceptions of subgroup needs and competency, teacher Efficacy, and teacher implementation of SEL.

If you have any questions, you may contact the dissertation chair, Dr. Roger Nasser at rnasser@lindenwood.edu or myself at cramernicole@rsdmo.org.

Sincerely,

Nicole Cramer

Appendix D

Student Self-Reported Social and Emotional Learning Survey Questions

SEL Survey questions	Domain	5	4	3	2	1
Each Student has an equal opportunity to learn and succeed in school.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
Adults in the building encourage students to respect themselves and others.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
Regardless of background, every student has the same chance to succeed.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I feel diversity is valued at our school.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I believe I'm treated fairly at my school.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I feel teachers understand the way I learn.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I feel teachers value different opinions and views in their classrooms.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
My teachers believe that I will be successful.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I have a leadership role in my school.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I feel safe at school.	Climate	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I feel hopeful about my future.	Self Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know of 3 things I do well.	Self Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am happy with who I am.	Self Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can explain my feelings to others.	Self Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

I can tell when I'm stressed out.	Self Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can tell when I'm making good choices.	Self Management	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I follow through on my responsibilities for school.	Self Management	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I set academic goals for school.	Self Management	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have healthy strategies I know how to use when I feel stressed.	Self Management	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I respect others for who they are, even if they are different than me.	Social Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I can tell when someone is upset.	Social Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I try to support others when they are struggling.	Social Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I like to celebrate the success of those around me.	Social Awareness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel comfortable talking with students who are not my closest friends.	Relationship Skills	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel comfortable working in a team with other students.	Relationship Skills	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have friends at school.	Relationship Skills	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know how to appropriately handle a conflict with others.	Relationship Skills	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am able to make responsible decisions when I'm with other students.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never
I am able to wait for an appropriate time to share out my ideas in classes.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never
I think about how my choices impact others.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never

I am able to pay attention in class.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never
I am able to tell the truth even though it may be hard.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never
I know strategies to calm myself down when upset.	Responsible Decision-Making	Almost Always	Most of the Time	Half of the Time	Some of the Time	Almost Never
At my school adults value my opinion.	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Adults at school care about me.	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have felt supported when I have needed help.	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel like I belong at school.	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When I have a need, I can talk to at least one trusted adult at school	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel the adults at my school help me to do my best.	Social Support	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Appendix E

Email from School District Authorizing Consent for Research

Dear Ms. Cramer,

We have reviewed your application to perform research and the associated documentation in support of your application with researching *Social and emotional Learning and the Middle School Learner: An examination of the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Standards in the Middle School Population*. As Director of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment for the Rockwood School District, I hereby express Rockwood's interest in supporting your research endeavor.

Your process explains that you will take required precautions to protect student, parent, staff and school confidentiality and there will be no interference with the normal instructional time offered to students to conduct this research. Participants for the teacher interviews are on a voluntary basis and will be recruited through your invitations. Rockwood's Research, Evaluation and Assessment department will provide you with the necessary SEL data to ensure all personal identifiable information is removed from the dataset. Once you are ready for SEL survey results, please reach out to the department with a list of specific fields needed to be included in the data.

In accordance with this approval, Rockwood will be notified of any major changes to the study. Should Rockwood's interests change, we are free to withdraw our consent at any time. Lastly, as part of Rockwood's research application approval, the researcher agrees to destroy all associated data with personally identifiable information and submit the results of the research once the project is completed.

If I can be of further assistance, please let me know. Good luck in your research investigation.

Glenn
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Glenn Hancock
Director of Research Evaluation and Assessment

Vitae

Nicole Cramer

Nicole Cramer began her teaching career as an elementary strings specialist. After teaching elementary strings, she transferred to a teaching position at the middle school level, where she taught during the completion of this study. Mrs. Cramer has served in various leadership roles throughout her career as a teacher, including curriculum writing, Middle School Edit committee member, Encore team leader, NEA executive board member, and various committees at the building and district level.

Mrs. Cramer received her Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and her Master of Education from Lindenwood University. During her time at SIUE, she obtained Suzuki certification in Violin Books 1-8. Mrs. Cramer is also a National Board-Certified Teacher.