Teacher Perceptions of Social-Emotional Learning Program Implementation and Sustainability in One School Division in Northern Virginia

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Abstract

In recent years, leaders in school divisions across the nation have begun to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula and programs explicitly within the academic day (DePaoli et al., 2017; Graczyk et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. To conduct the study, all elementary teachers in one school division, approximately 220 teachers, were invited to participate by completing a survey regarding their beliefs and perceptions of implementation. Respondents supplied data for the study by providing demographic information, responding to four open-ended questions, and answering 42 questions by indicating their perception on a 5-point scale. The survey received a 27% response rate. The collected data were analyzed using statistics of responses to generate response category means, compile the response rate of data for each question, and code emerging themes to inform findings.

Findings indicated the teachers felt it was the responsibility of all stakeholders to teach and model SEL for students. Most respondents, 85%, highly agreed with the belief that SEL practices promoted academic success by selecting almost always or always on the scaled response. Findings also indicated the teachers felt their building leadership did nothing to support SEL implementation, and further stipulated that more time and training were necessary to implement SEL successfully.

The findings led to three implications for school leadership. First, teachers should partner with all other staff members and adults in the learning community to model and deliver SEL instruction. Second, data analysis revealed school leadership should identify one SEL curriculum for the school to ensure consistency in training, monitoring, and implementation. Finally, school leaders should dedicate time in the school day for explicit SEL instruction.
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General Audience Abstract

In recent years, leaders in school divisions across the nation have begun to implement social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula and programs explicitly within the academic day (DePaoli et al., 2017; Graczyk et al., 2013; Oberle et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. To conduct the study, approximately 220 elementary teachers in one school division were invited to participate. The participant pool was sent a survey regarding teacher beliefs and perceptions of implementation. Respondents provided data for the study by providing demographic information, responding to four open-ended questions, and answering 42 questions by indicating their perception on a 5-point scale. The survey received a 27% response rate. The collected data were statistically analyzed to inform findings.

Findings indicated the teachers felt it was the responsibility of all stakeholders to teach and model SEL for students. Most respondents, 85%, highly agreed with the belief that SEL practices promoted academic success by selecting a 4 or 5 on the scaled response. Findings also indicated the teachers felt their building leadership did nothing to support SEL implementation, and further stipulated that more time and training were necessary to implement SEL successfully.

The findings led to three implications for school leadership. First, teachers should partner with all other staff members and adults in the learning community to model and deliver SEL instruction. Second, data analysis indicated school leadership should identify one SEL curriculum for the school to ensure consistency in training, monitoring, and implementation. Finally, school leaders should dedicate time in the school day for explicit SEL instruction.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children, Ansley and Graydon. You are my entire world, and I appreciate how you both found ways to be involved in my work. Thank you for cheering me on every step of the way and making even the most difficult elements of our journey to final defense fun. Beeps and Bubbers, I love you to infinity and beyond and to Pluto and back and then some more, more, more, and two loopy loops around Saturn. WE ARE GOING TO DISNEY WORLD!

I also dedicate this work to my parents. They were my champions throughout the entire journey to final defense, as they have been my entire life. No matter where I go, what I do, what decisions I make, I know my mama and daddy are there for it all. You are my biggest supporters. I love you both more than words, and I am so appreciative for all you have instilled in me. My successes are yours, and I hope I have made you proud.

This work is also dedicated to Dr. William Glenn. His distinct belief in me made me believe in myself. I am proud to be a small part of continuing the legacy and work of Dr. Glenn and keeping alive his fervent belief in the importance of equitable education for all. It is an honor to be part of his last cohort. In his legacy, I promise to continue to make learning a lifelong process, to be the advocate for all those around me, and to stand up for students and their community first.

And finally, Education is a life-long journey. Throughout mine I have been blessed to meet phenomenal educators and mentors that have pushed and challenged me beyond what I thought possible. I could never name all of the helpers that deserve their names here, though I must mention a few. Please know this work is also dedicated to many more than those I am about to list. Ms. Eleanor Dunn, thank you for seeing and awaking the teacher in me. Mr. Steve Vutsinas, thank you for your unwavering support to lead me on the path to beginning my beloved career. Dr. Thomas Taylor, you knew I would be here from my first year as a baby teacher and you have dared me to push the boundaries ever since. Dr. Eddy-Spicer; you made me believe for the first time I could be a mentor for others. Dr. Baptist, without whom I may not have even thought to look for the path to a terminal degree much less start it. Dr. Baptist, you are truly a treasure. Your thoughtful approach to sharing your knowledge and push to challenge myself have been the lifeblood of my degree work. I will never forget the weekend I asked you
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Acknowledgments

The research and writing process is not one that is ever complete. It evolves and meanders into something new with each article read, each time the researcher endeavors to understand the data collected, and with each link identified in the individual’s work to the works by others.

Going into this process, I thought I knew how to write and I assumed the research for dissertation was a “one and done” thing. I was wrong. The research study, and writing I undertook for my terminal degree, has lit a fire in me to do more. Always an advocate for public education and the society it serves, I now have a new tool in my box to move the needle for all students, educators, leaders, and communities. Learning never ends, and the writing will never stop.

These last three years have been an incredible journey only possible with the support and mentorship of a few key people.

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not to give up when I doubted myself. I heard you ask me to challenge myself to analyze the data differently and ask different questions when I mistakenly thought I had already done enough. I heard you tell me to keep it simple and to get out of my head when the answer was right in front of me. Finally, I used your resources from our two semesters together endlessly as a template to frame my research, study, and writing.
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Chapter I
Introduction

Defined as instruction designed to teach the five core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, social-emotional learning (SEL) is a necessary component of human development (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], n.d.-a). SEL drives how individuals understand themselves, interact with others, make good decisions, and facilitate communication (Newman & Moroney, 2019). A 2016 study conducted in an elementary school showed embedding the SEL curriculum into the academic day provides educators with a more authentic approach to teaching and learning (Harrington et al., 2016).

SEL curriculum has been shown to improve academic achievement (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2018; Newman & Moroney, 2019) by facilitating social-emotional development that fosters self-awareness, good decision making, and collaborative work (Durlak, 2020; Graczyk et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). Findings of a 2018 study showed SEL interventions predisposed students to achieve higher in reading, mathematics, and science when compared to traditional models of teaching and learning in the same subjects (Corcoran et al., 2018). Results of a 2011 meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs revealed significant improvements in students’ social and emotional skills that were reflected in an 11 percentile gain in achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Recent studies in public health have also indicated the inclusion of SEL in K–12 classrooms can influence students to be “more likely to be ready for college, succeed in their careers, have positive relationships and better mental health” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 13).

Student achievement is contingent upon the academic curriculum to which they are exposed and the school culture and relationships modeled and cultivated throughout the educational day (Corcoran et al., 2018; Moore, 2019). In recent years, leaders in school divisions across the nation have begun to include SEL as part of the academic day to facilitate improved self-awareness and similar attributes as a means to bolster student achievement (Corcoran et al., 2018; Moore, 2019). SEL has been shown to enable teachers to meet students as authentic and whole children and support academic learning (Gregory & Fergus, 2017) by targeting and
developing working memory through skill development in attention, executive function, response inhibition, and emotion regulation (CASEL, 2015; Low et al., 2019; Mahoney & Weissberg, 2018). With this information, leaders in school divisions across the nation have begun to include SEL alongside the content curriculum to mold students for success (Mahoney et al., 2017).

The intent to add a social-emotional curriculum alone is not enough to drive success in student outcomes. Organizational change, such as the one necessary to implement a new curriculum building-wide, requires that school leaders provide appropriate information, to include the rationale for change and instructions to explicitly state how the implementation will occur (Marion & Gonzalez, 2014). The process to create a unified vision, educate, strategize, monitor, and adapt is crucial to ensuring the success of program implementation (Ashkenas & Manville, 2019).

The implementation of SEL curriculum has been a popular addition to strategic plans across the nation. Division and school-based leaders who are interested in implementing an SEL curriculum in their schools have the task of including the initiative in their strategic plan to promote whole learning community participation in the curriculum implementation (Duke, 2015; Khalifa, 2019; Kotter, n.d.; Marion & Gonzalez, 2014; Pugh & Hickson, 2014; Thorton et al., 2019). As Khalifa (2019) stated in his work, leaders must understand how the program introduction aligns with community and division needs. To promote sustainable change, the reflection of the program in the strategic vision will potentially necessitate realignment and redefinition of the previous norms (Elias et al., 2006). A leadership protocol and an understanding of teachers’ perceptions and school cultures are important to support the fidelity and efficacy of implementation.

**Statement of the Problem**

An analysis of SEL implementation and sustainability through a literature review provided a thorough understanding of defining SEL, SEL programs, and the leadership necessary to set a course for implementation and sustainability. The review of literature also revealed the importance of teacher understanding and fidelity of implementation of programming to increase student achievement (Alisic, 2012; Beyda et al., 2002; Brunzell et al., 2018; Cooper et al., 2016;
Mayworm et al., 2016; Rainbolt et al., 2019). However, a gap was identified regarding teacher perceptions of their role in the implementation and sustainability of SEL curriculum.

The problem examined in this study is teachers’ perceptions of their role and the role of school leadership in SEL implementation and sustainability. The study was designed to identify teachers’ perceptions of SEL implementation and sustainability and provide school leaders with implications for improved practice. The selected school division was essential because of the identified achievement gaps of underperforming students predominantly identified as English language learners (ELLs) and as economically disadvantaged.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. The selected participant pool for the study was teachers from all elementary schools in one division in Northern Virginia. The study was designed to reveal teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness to deliver and monitor SEL instruction as well as the perceived needs for support for SEL sustainability in a school. Indicators of perceived needs came from participant responses to key questions within the survey. Findings can be used to inform the practices used by building and division leadership to promote appropriate and sustainable SEL instruction.

**Research Questions**

The study’s primary research question was: What are the perceptions of teachers of their role in SEL program implementation and sustainability? The following questions supported the main research question:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the support needed to implement and sustain the social-emotional learning program?
**Conceptual Framework**

New program implementation happens often in educational settings to bolster student achievement, though explicit detail to support teachers in understanding their role in the implementation process often is not given. To conduct this study, three conceptual frameworks were used as the foundational support: Kotter’s (n.d.) eight-step process for leading change and social-emotional learning. Surrounding the three frameworks is the overarching concept of teacher perceptions of their role in the process (see Figure 1). The goal of the study was to examine the perceptions of teachers who were expected to implement daily SEL instruction in all elementary schools in one division in Northern Virginia. The intended audience of the study was teachers and school leaders with general knowledge of SEL who were actively engaged in implementing SEL programing daily.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*

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**Teacher Perception**

SEL program implementation is only as strong as the fidelity of its implementation. David Yeager, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin who writes extensively about SEL, stated research has shown SEL must be integrated into the school day in all content areas and with consistency rather than applied as a lesson within one subject or within one part of the academic day, such as homeroom or advisory classes (Gewertz, 2020). Studies have shown SEL programs implemented with fidelity and proper planning have resulted
in improved academic achievement (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; NAESP, 2018; Newman & Moroney, 2019). Similarly, results of a study by Fray et al. (2019) demonstrated an increase in student belonging and achievement when SEL was included as part of the academic day. However, studies lack a focus on teacher perceptions of SEL and their role in the implementation and sustainability of SEL curricula. This study was designed to examine participants’ perceptions of SEL and their view of the role of SEL in teaching and learning through survey responses intended to gather quantitative and qualitative data to inform findings. Findings are reported through two conceptual frameworks.

**Kotter’s Eight-Step Model**

Kotter’s eight-step model for transformational change is a systematic and concise system that functions by considering one goal that is linearly monitored over a defined period of time (Thorton et al., 2019). The steps in Kotter’s model include creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision and initiatives, enlisting a volunteer army, enabling action by removing barriers, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration, and instituting change (Thorton et al., 2019). In a paper discussing Kotter’s model as a mechanism to successfully implement programing, Thorton et al. (2019) asserted leaders who listen carefully to stakeholders’ needs are enabled to pursue goal success. In another work discussing Kotter’s model, it was stated that when staff understands the new programming, they are much more likely to be excited about the program and less likely to think it will fail (Appelbaum et al., 2012). Using Kotter’s model as a framework for this study, the independent variable was the implementation of SEL programing and the dependent variable was teachers’ perceptions regarding their role in the work.

**Social-Emotional Learning**

The second conceptual framework was social-emotional learning. Leaders in school divisions across the United States have begun to implement SEL programing in their schools to promote discipline equity (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Mok, 2019; Osher et al., 2010; Stevenson & Markowitz, 2019), improve academic achievement (Mahoney et al., 2017; Mathewson, 2019; Mok, 2019; Newman & Moroney, 2019), and improve school culture (DePaoli et al., 2017; Donohoo et al., 2018; Leo & Wickenberg, 2013; Sandwick et al., 2019). A growing body of
research indicates the positive outcomes of student achievement with the addition of explicit SEL implementation.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this mixed method study that warrant defining as they relate to SEL implementation.


Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations

The influences involved in the study that the researcher cannot control are defined as limitations (Yin, 2014). Because the study was heavily based on using survey data to inform the findings, limitations of the work related to teacher participation and the level of honesty in answers recorded in the survey responses. Limitations also related to data interpretation versus the intention of the response. Another limitation was individual bias, both on the part of those completing the surveys and on the part of the researcher interpreting the results of the data collected.

Delimitations

Delimitations narrow the lens of a study to focus on a specific element (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the delimitation was the selection of one school division and the participant pool being narrowed to include only elementary teachers. The study also provided for teachers’ perspectives and not those of students, parents, leadership, or other stakeholders. Finally, the study data collection included only survey responses and did not include interviews or other methods to gain a deeper understanding.

Organization of the Study

This study of SEL is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 provided the rationale and purpose of the study, as well as an overview of the research question, definition of terms, limitations, delimitations, and how the study was organized. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive
review of the literature concerning SEL. Chapter 3 presents details of the research method, design, and the data collection process. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the data collected, the results from the study, and the data analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the findings, the implications of the findings, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter II
Literature Review

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was created to address the achievement gaps for minority and low socioeconomic students (LSES) across the nation (Paschall et al., 2018). The Act required school leaders to show their schools were making adequate yearly progress (AYP) through standardized data indicators (Harrington et al., 2016). To demonstrate AYP, NCLB mandated standardized testing (Cawthon et al., 2013; Harrington et al., 2016; Hauge et al., 2014; Hirn et al., 2018; Paschall et al., 2018) that pushed educators to use instructional time to deliver standards-based instruction (Fray et al., 2019; Zins & Elias, 2007). Accreditation pressures to meet AYP goals have traditionally prompted school leaders not to allocate instructional time for SEL (Fray et al., 2019). However, teaching academics without addressing social-emotional readiness and support has been shown to lead to persistent achievement gaps (Finnan, 2015; Graczyk et al., 2013; McKown et al., 2016; Moore, 2019).

In recent years, school leaders have recognized the importance and value of developing students’ social-emotional skills as a component of the academic learning day (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 3). Results of a national principal survey conducted in 2008 revealed “nearly all principals (98 percent) believe students from all types of backgrounds – both affluent and poor – would benefit from learning social and emotional skills in schools” (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 3). Implementing a curriculum intended to deliver SEL provides a supportive school environment that improves students’ attitudes about self, school, and others (CASEL, 2015). SEL curriculum is founded on five core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2015). The skills taught within SEL reduce problem outcomes such as negative behaviors and a lack of sense of belonging within the learning community (Greenberg et al., 2017), and positively affect academic achievement (Durlak, 2020; Mok, 2019; Newman & Moroney, 2019). Proponents of SEL have identified the narrow focus on academic achievement and the exclusion of social learning skills as responsible for the existing achievement gaps (Zins et al., 2004). A 2004 longitudinal study revealed there are two main ideas that influence student achievement gains. The first is a strategic focus on teaching and learning processes, and the second is a focus on improvement strategies within relationship building across the school community (Bryk, 2010). It is vital
school leaders ensure students’ cognitive growth is fostered alongside their social-emotional development to support academic growth (Durlak et al., 2011).

The purpose of this literature review is to examine SEL. The review introduces the historical context of SEL and transitions into SEL as defined in the modern curriculum. Next, the review moves to implementation studies within schools with a focus specifically on SEL from the lens of cultural equity, including the views and practices of teachers and school leaders. Curriculum implementation concludes with a review of SEL curriculum models. Criticism of SEL studies is shared before discussing school administrators’ role in the planning and implementation of SEL in a building. The chapter concludes with a summary.

**Historical Context of SEL**

The concept of a model to teach the whole child, not just the academic one, is not a new idea in the field of education. Education in the United States was instituted to teach academics and develop a “competent citizenry made up of independent and critical thinkers who could work effectively with others and contribute to a democratic society” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 16). In John Dewey’s work at the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in the late 1800s, he worked extensively to promote the instruction of students by making the curriculum relatable to their lives and communities (Wraga, 2020). This work provided the connection between academic learning and student relatability for students to conceptualize learning concepts.

In the early 1900s, Albert Bandura furthered the concept of how students internalize and build upon their learning through his research that indicated children do not merely imitate what they see or hear in the world around them but instead seek guidance to model appropriate expected behaviors (Kail, 2004). The emergence of the social cognitive theory that presented a new view of the limits of developing cognition by merely imitating adult modeling dispelled the notion of children as mimics. The idea also identified the correlation between self-awareness and decision making as a complex output of the three variables of representation, rewards, and punishment (Kail, 2004). The theory reflected the importance of enabling students to learn adaptability and motivation (Jackson, 2019) and promote positive self-awareness, problem-solving, and self-discipline (Osher et al., 2010). The social cognitive theory developed into an early understanding of SEL, fostering social-emotional awareness within self and as part of a societal group developed into sociocultural understanding.
Lev Vygotsky played a prominent role in the concept of social learning with his work in sociocultural theory (Berk & Petersen, 2003). Vygotsky proposed that society’s culture is transmitted to the next generation through “cooperative dialogue with more knowledgeable members of society,” in which the child, through social interaction, acquires knowledge and constructs meaning (Berk & Petersen, 2003, p. 23). More specifically, Vygotsky posited children’s social-emotional learning is “highly influenced by their cultural environments” (Castro-Olivo, 2014, p. 569). Vygotsky’s work has influenced the school climate by encouraging the support of inclusive practices and relationship building in the learning climate to enhance academic achievement (Evans & Lester, 2013).

In the 1960s, Dr. James Comer of the Yale School of Medicine’s Child Study Center developed a program called the Comer School Development Program to improve academic achievement by enhancing the psychosocial development of students (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011). In his work, Comer asserted that academic achievement and positive behavior improved when formal psychosocial education was included as part of the academic day (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Following Comer’s work, professors of psychology Dr. Weissberg and Dr. Shriver of Yale University created the K-12 New Haven Social Development Program that focused on developing students’ self-awareness and self-concept skills (Weissberg & Shriver, 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Their work was related to outcome-based education (Effrem & Robbins, 2019), defined as a concept that “grew out of Benjamin Bloom’s mastery learning concept” and asserted that “given sufficient time . . . all students can learn and succeed” (Esolen et al., 2016, p. 31). Weissberg also co-chaired the W.T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence to adopt SEL competencies that the committee thought should be formally taught in public schools (Effrem & Robbins, 2019).

Social-emotional education was first introduced as a standalone component of public school education following the writing of the “Dear Hillary” letter sent to then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton in 1992. When he was president in 1994, Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Based on outcome-based education goals, the Act required states to adopt National Educational Goals to receive federal funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Goal eight of the Act most closely aligns with SEL as defined today. It stated, “By the year 2020, every school will promote partnerships that will increase
parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994, Parental Participation section, para. 1).

The term “socioemotional learning” emerged in the same year, derived from a meeting hosted by the Fetzer Institute (CASEL, n.d.-a). The participants were child advocates, educators, and researchers who sought to create effective school programing for all students. When many programs partnered with public school education to address the prevention of drugs and violence in schools and educate about civics and morals, the meeting participants conceptualized the idea of providing a framework to coordinate all programs into one aligned concept (CASEL, n.d.-a). The framework leader, CASEL, was established in 1994 and began hosting conferences to promote the concept (CASEL, n.d.-a). A year later, an emphasis on SEL in public schools began to emerge as the focus of several publications. A large output of articles and books suggested there is a correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). As studies and publications increased in scope, the development of the 2002 NCLB Act reauthorized the previous standards to include SEL (Effrem & Robbins, 2019).

**Definition of SEL**

CASEL, a leading expert in SEL education, defines SEL as founded on five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, n.d.-a). Further, CASEL specifies SEL as an integral part of education and human development. 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, n.d.-a, para. 1)

Positive social behaviors, increasing care for others, taking responsibility for actions (Greenberg et al., 2003), and learning to integrate and apply emotional skills (Newman & Moroney, 2019) are the cornerstones of SEL education. Relationships matter between students and adults. SEL curriculum promotes relationship building and developing concern for others, thereby increasing decision-making skills and shared responsibility for students and the adults who work with them (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). By creating a shared vision and a values-based community within a school/school division, staff and students better understand each other and
can interact meaningfully from mutual understanding and a framework of enabling collaborative learning (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013).

The concept of SEL has evolved over the decades and continues to be broadly defined. Generally, the term is defined as “a set of social, emotional, behavioral, and character skills that support success in school, the workplace, relationships, and the community” (Fray et al., 2019, p. 2). After decades of research and study, many schools nationwide are implementing some type of SEL curriculum. A combined investment of $30 billion was reported to implement the SEL curriculum in K–12 schools by each state, federal, and local government in 2018 across the United States (Pioneer Institute, 2019). In its most authentic state, SEL promotes the ability for students to become individual learners able to both understand themselves as individuals who are conscious of needs and learning and awareness of their place in society and how their decision affects others around them (Galla & Wood, 2012; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Park et al., 2012).

SEL education is also designed to promote meeting students’ readiness level to identify supportive instruction as an avenue toward readiness for academic learning (Finnan, 2015). All students are measured by the same academic goals each year, but not all students arrive in the classroom with the same level of preparedness. Student readiness level is identified as a component of academic and social knowledge. McKown’s 2015 study supported the connection between school readiness and academic function and social hypothetical question responses found within SEL delivery (McKown et al., 2016). Further studies have demonstrated that students develop self-control and problem-solving skills, which correlate with positive prediction indicators of academic achievement in the secondary grades (McKown et al., 2016).

**SEL Implementation**

Over the 19th and 20th centuries, scholars have argued for the importance of including social development and individual development as a component of the educational system in the United States (Corcoran et al., 2018; Finnan, 2015; Moore, 2019). Using short-term goals, such as increasing core competency awareness and learning, the SEL curriculum is intended to improve attitudes about self and others to reduce problem behaviors, reduce stress, improve sense of belonging, and increase academic achievement (Corcoran et al., 2018). As SEL increases individual achievement, it also creates classrooms that function more effectively to drive student achievement by creating a space where students can focus their attention on
learning, navigating relationships, and persevering through challenges (NAESP, 2018). SEL has become recognized within the public education system as a component of the educational day (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Crosby et al., 2017; Finnan, 2015). The increased popularity of SEL in recent years is primarily due to the various studies that have positively linked relationship building and emotional maturity to academic achievement and success (Brennan, 2015; CASEL, n.d.-b; Crosby et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2003; Oberle et al., 2019; Swain-Bradway et al., 2015).

Several studies have shown students’ skills significantly increase when they understand their strengths and weaknesses, a core concept embodied in teaching self-awareness in a socio-emotional curriculum (Ahmed et al., 2020). Building upon the concept of self-awareness to recognize limitations and values enables students to self-manage and regulate emotions and behaviors, strengthening the idea of perseverance to work toward goals (Newman & Moroney, 2019). As a measure of the impact of SEL on the entire school day, results of a 2011 meta-analysis, inclusive of 213 school-based SEL programs that served 270,034 K–12 students, indicated “significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 405). In addition to increased social and self-awareness, studies have also indicated SEL delivery to be a component of academic improvement.

In 2004, Zins et al. found SEL programming positively influenced students’ connections within the school day and community. Researchers have also connected SEL implementation to increased achievement as a result of improved school attitudes (Hart & O’Reilly, 2018) and the confidence to try harder and persist through challenges (Newman & Moroney, 2019). In a 2018 study on the effect of the SEL curriculum on reading and math achievement, results showed “SEL interventions generally produced a positive effect for reading and mathematics” (Corcoran et al., 2018, p. 68). The analysis also showed prosocial behavior and academic achievement improved, as indicated by increased scores on achievement tests and student grades (Durlak et al., 2011). Several bodies of research support the findings of the analysis.

In their work, Zins and Elias (2007) wrote, “SEL is a unifying concept for organizing, coordinating, and integrating school-based prevention and promotion programs that minimizes fragmentation and reduces marginalization of those efforts” (p. 2). SEL teaches the competency skills that positively affect students’ ability to overcome challenges within their academic and
social lives. The curriculum promotes self-awareness, self-management, decision making, and relationship skills (Nickerson et al., 2019; Nowicki, 2018; Scully, 2015). SEL inclusion in the academic day fosters academic gains because it teaches students the skills they need to persevere through complex challenges while also promoting the confidence to reach out to others for support when needed (Serrano-Villar et al., 2017).

SEL provides access to the development of skills to navigate the social norms for all students to engage in a learning community (CASEL, n.d.-a; Graczyk et al., 2013). It positively influences student achievement by dispelling punitive practices that generally involve exclusionary consequences while promoting equality for all student groups (Serrano-Villar et al., 2017). There is little evidence to support the use of exclusionary discipline practices because they typically do not lead to long-term behavioral modifications and have been linked to antisocial behavior (Osher et al., 2010). Facilitating SEL practices within the school day supports decreasing the racial disparity in applying exclusionary discipline practices in response to student actions identified as negative behavior (Schiff, 2018).

Teaching the core competencies enables students to develop “healthy self-esteem, self-control, empathy, social skills, and mortality” (Ahmed et al., 2020, p. 665). The addition of an SEL curriculum within the academic day has also been shown to “improve students’ competence, enhance their academic achievement, and make them less likely to experience future behavioral and emotional problems” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 13). School-based SEL is intentional in its design to facilitate relationships, academic achievement, and collaborative-forward thinking as a natural process that individuals acquire throughout their developmental processes.

**SEL Implementation Outcomes for Cultural Equality**

The achievement gap between minority and White students has been widely documented (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Good et al., 2010; Huang, 2017; Konstantopoulos et al., 2017; Paschall et al., 2018). Hispanic students and students identified as low socioeconomic students (LSES) are often identified as gap groups that underperform each year academically (Good et al., 2010; Henry et al., 2008; Paschall et al., 2018). Understanding why gaps exist will enable educators to work to close the achievement gaps by targeting shortcomings (Paschall et al., 2018).
Equity in access and rigor of education can be complicated by cultural differences between the educators and the students in the classroom (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). The population of minority students, often associated with poverty, is projected to continue to increase in America’s public schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). The 2020 U.S. Census data showed there was a 23% increase in the nation’s population identified as Hispanic or Latino since the year 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a). In contrast, the projection of individuals entering the teaching field will continue to be White females raised in middle-class homes (Kondor et al., 2019). In classrooms across the United States, 80% of teaching positions are filled by White educators, 7% by Black educators, and only 9% by Hispanic educators, as indicated in the 2015–2016 statistics presented by the National Center of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In schools that predominately serve minority students, it has been found that educators of the same race/ethnicity as their students will have a positive impact on student achievement and attitudes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Several studies have identified the achievement gap between minority and LSES students compared to non-minority or socioeconomically disadvantaged peers (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; McKown et al., 2016). Minority students have the highest drop-out rates and lowest graduation rates in U.S. schools. Hispanic students, for example, have been shown to receive a more insufficient quality educational experience compared to their White peers and other ethnic groups in multiple studies. This inequity is primarily because students from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to display behavior that is perceived as disrespectful or out of compliance with school expectations (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). As a result of these behaviors, disciplinary action creates a potential avenue of alienating minority students from the academic learning community (Garcia, 2015; Jacobsen et al., 2019; Moreno & Gaytán, 2013).

The inequity of access to education as a result of the disciplinary exclusion of minority students across the nation has created an avenue for lower achievement levels (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). One example is the U.S. Department of Education’s identification of the graduation rate of Hispanic students as the lowest among all ethnic groups for more than 2 decades in work published in 2011 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The low achievement of Hispanic students is particularly concerning, considering that the population is the fastest-growing population in the United States today (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).
SEL curriculum is designed to balance the accessibility of minority populations to belonging within the school community and relatable academic rigor by developing a sense of autonomy for students (Goodman & Klim Uzun, 2013). Studies have shown that when genuine caring and interest are delivered alongside academic support, minority families and students will adjust to the school environment and record higher academic achievement (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Valenzula, 1999). The relationship between school staff and students is essential. The findings of one study added to the literature that indicated students’ academic achievement and motivation are heavily “influenced by authentic relationships between teachers and students, a sense of belonging” (Garza & Soto Huerta, 2014, p. 134).

Post-Pandemic Learning

The Fall of 2021 ushered in returning more students and educators to their school buildings for the first time in a year and a half. After an extended period of time away from the classrooms for many, school leadership needed to plan for the social-emotional needs of their students and professional school staff (NAESP, 2018). The isolation experienced by the school community throughout the pandemic and virtual learning presented a crucial challenge in assessing student readiness and needs (Malcom, 2021; Morrissette, 2021; Pollock, 2020). The loneliness experienced by school staff and students during the pandemic lockdown was described in one study as “subjective unpleasant or undesirable awareness of the lack of depth and/or quality in one’s interpersonal relationships or connections” (Malcom, 2021, p. 251). Malcom (2021) further suggested the autonomy of the individual to partake in social behavior was effectively eliminated by the pandemic lockdowns. The isolation and inability to navigate social situations over the last year indicate that “SEL may be more important now than ever because it helps educators, families, and students manage stress, develop resilience, and maintain a sense of optimism” (Summers, 2020, p. 33).

SEL Programs

Many programs exist that are focused on the goal of implementing the SEL model. Generally, school leaders who have determined SEL curriculum inclusion would benefit students do not share a consensus on what curriculum should be used (Gewertz, 2020). CASEL offers a framework to evaluate programmatic needs and a guide to pinpoint the right-fit SEL program
Embedded within the grade level search, school leaders can further define program matches by using filters such as grade level(s), program approach, demographics, school characteristics, and other choices (CASEL, n.d.-a). Choosing the right program for a school or division is vital to ensure it meets the student population’s needs and the delivery method is appropriate based on teaching and learning needs. It aligns the work with school goals (CASEL, n.d.-a). The right-fit program is contingent upon several factors, such as population needs and financial feasibility.

Choosing the right SEL program for a school or division should be based on research pinpointing the population’s specific needs (Gewertz, 2020). To appropriately assess the SEL needs of a school or division, an inventory check is necessary to explicitly identify the right partnership between school needs and curriculum development goals (Gewertz, 2020). It is also important that a division allocates SEL curricula that correlate to school and student population needs rather than attempt to apply one curriculum across the K–12 grades (NAESP, 2018). In fact, David Yeager, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin and an author of a wealth of SEL resources and studies, stated, “Research is clear that SEL programs that work in elementary show effects that decline as kids get older . . . the reasons for social-emotional problems in kids are different from the reasons for adolescents” (Gewertz, 2020, Consider Your Population section, para. 5). SEL should be considered part of the everyday routine to include staff and students practicing self-awareness and relationships throughout the day in authentic moments that lead to SEL skill development (Brennan, 2015; CASEL, n.d.-b; Osher et al., 2010; Zins & Elias, 2007). Therefore, training must embody support and lessons throughout the year to best arm school staff with the ability to teach and model SEL competencies relative to the population (Gewertz, 2020).

The appropriate SEL curriculum is only as strong as the fidelity of its implementation. Yeager stated research has shown SEL must be integrated into the school day in all content areas and with consistency rather than applied as a lesson within one subject or one part of the academic day, such as homeroom or advisory classes (Gewertz, 2020). Many SEL curriculum sets are available to school divisions across the country. Student demographics, school characteristics, division size, and learning needs are how school leaders can pare down the most appropriate curriculum that correlates with the school goals (CASEL, n.d.-b).
SEL program choice can also be contingent on the costs associated with the program. The financial obligation to obtain the curriculum and any available supports, where indicated and available, range anywhere from free to thousands of dollars per year. School leaders are also inundated with advertisements and sales for SEL curriculum sets from various companies each year. The significant number of curricula combined with the costs and the often-overwhelming sales pitches can make determining which curriculum to apply within a student population and school complex (Gewertz, 2020). Two popular SEL programs that are available are Sanford Harmony and RethinkEd.

**Sanford Harmony**

Harmony is an SEL program intended to be delivered within K–6 schools as standalone lessons (CASEL, n.d.-b). Harmony breaks the curriculum into bands of grade levels, including PreK and K, first and second, and Grades 5 and 6, placing Grades 3 and 4 in bands alone (CASEL, n.d.-b). Sanford Harmony provides onsite training and train-the-trainer options (CASEL, 2013). Additionally, the company shares resources to encourage and support program sustainability, leadership cultivation to articulate the goals and application of the curriculum, and ambassadors to provide coaching and webinars through the academic year (CASEL, 2015). Two core components of the Harmony curriculum are “meet up” and “buddy-up,” intended to foster community and collaboration within the school culture (CASEL, n.d.-b).

**RethinkEd**

RethinkEd SEL curriculum, different from Harmony, is intended for K–12 application (RethinkEd, n.d.). The curriculum is meant to be comprehensive for all students by providing multi-tiered support and a lesson system supported by professional learning opportunities for school staff, progress monitoring tools, and student behavioral supports (Rethink Ed, n.d.). By fostering assessment prompts to deescalate problem behaviors, RethinkEd promotes positively phrased feedback to support student decision making in the future (Rethink Ed, n.d.).

**Criticism of SEL Findings**

It is essential to note the criticism of the SEL approach to present a well-rounded review. Critics of the model cite a lack of research support for SEL’s effectiveness (Pioneer Institute, 2019) and the validity of studies (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). SEL critics declare that no study
correlates curriculum implementation and achievement turnaround (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Criticism falls on Comer’s work in the 1960s, in which he suddenly dropped schools in the study and added new schools in their place when the original schools’ reporting did not support the study’s focus (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Comer indicated merely a third of the 650 schools studied could sustain implementation (O’Neil, 1997). However, the study continues to be a cornerstone of CASEL’s work to promote SEL (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011).

A meta-analysis conducted by Effrem and Robbins showed much of the SEL work they focused on had many limitations. Limitations included excluding an analysis post-SEL intervention or assessed skills as an implementation outcome (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). Further, a limitation identified consisted of the lack of a standardized measure of the effectiveness of SEL implementation in schools and the lack of rigorous research to show the role of SEL in developing students’ core competencies (Effrem & Robbins, 2019).

Criticism of SEL as a theoretical framework for educational programming is cited due to the lack of explicit evidence that SEL implementation indicated improvement (Pioneer Institute, 2019). Still, other critics cite contention with school agencies imposing concepts of the model citizen through SEL instruction because doing so can promote one culture over another (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).

SEL implementation and sustainability are significantly influenced by the understanding of school-based programming (Durlak, 2020). Much research has considered the influence of how interventions are implemented and sustained (Graczyk et al., 2013; Greenberg et al., 2017). Research findings indicated using research-based practices, maintaining accountability and assessment, working within a comprehensive approach, and planning with the future goal in mind are key to implementation success (Appelbaum et al., 2012; DeWitt, 2016; Greenberg et al., 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Finally, critics also point to the inappropriateness of a governmental agency, be it federal, state, or local, imposing its notion of what a citizen should be on K–12 youth (Pioneer Institute, 2019). This criticism of SEL goes hand-in-hand with the similar criticism that SEL can promote or demote one culture or another, as SEL can mean a variety of things to many people (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Still yet, SEL can be “overhyped” and treated as more important than the academic curriculum (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020).
School Administrator Role in SEL Implementation

In a recent CASEL study, the advocacy group found that 70% of school leaders and staff felt an SEL curriculum was critical, an increase from just 43% reporting the same 2 years prior (Gewertz, 2020). Khalifa (2019) noted “it is important for district and school leaders to remember that they wield considerable ‘administrative privilege’; if not mindful and crucially self-reflective, they will be unresponsive—and thus oppressive—towards community perspectives and needs” (p. 46). This notion aligns with the criticism shared previously that SEL can impose one cultural, ethnic, or other norm across the learning community (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). To integrate SEL within the framework of a learning community, a transformative leadership model is necessary because educational leaders must drive sustainable change by realigning structures and redefining the norms that define relationships (Elias et al., 2006).

Khalifa (2019) shared the work of Kotter in which the change process is expressed as beginning “with a sense that the status quo is not working” (p. 89). Kouzes and Posner (2003) wrote that “all of us are born leaders” (p. 13) and explained it is an often-shared misconception that good leaders are born and cannot be taught. The authors shared five practices that support exemplary leadership:

- Model the way – In this practice, leaders must clarify and define their values for stakeholders. The authors suggested the importance of knowing oneself, including values, before embarking successfully in the leadership of others. Further, the successful leader will support the community’s shared values while setting an example (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

- Inspire a shared vision – In this second practice, the authors highlighted the successful leader as one who can envision the future and generate authentic excitement for the future vision, thus inspiring a collective drive for imagining new possibilities. It is suggested the leader who showcases enthusiasm and excitement for the vision will find success in generating excitement and passion among stakeholders (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

- Challenge the process – The practice of challenging the process embodies the idea that innovation necessitates experimentation. Because experiments challenge the community’s norms, there must be a culture conducive to allowing stakeholders to
take intellectual risks and share new ideas. The practice further supports the importance of reflection and feedback, including identifying successes and failures to adjust experimentation, thus producing new processes that evoke higher success rates (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

- Enable others to act – The fourth practice builds upon the need for all members in the community to feel safe to take intellectual risks and conduct experiments outside of the norm by creating a culture of trust and building authentic relationships. As suggested by the fourth practice, the successful leader serves the needs of others above the self, thereby building trust. The authors concluded that trust and relationships create a system in which all participants want to do well and exceed expectations for the collective success of all (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). A successful leader maximizes the strength of their organization by bringing together individuals to support a collective vision and, thus, stronger focus through collaboration (DeWitt, 2016).

- Encourage the heart – “Leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 19). The fifth practice encourages leaders to celebrate the successes of their constituents and their values and victories. Doing so creates a culture in which the celebration of one or few means wins for all (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

The indicator of successful program implementation is the sustainment of the change (Garvin & Roberto, 2005). Kotter defined transformational leadership within his eight-step model in his work in 1996 (Kotter & Cohen, 2012). The steps are intended to respond to needed change in a manner that is concise and systematic, as it can “drive change with a small, powerful core group,” function in a “traditional hierarchy,” and focus on one goal that is monitored linearly over a set period (Kotter, n.d., p. 8). The steps are comprehensive and create a thorough process for enacting change, cultivating collaborative work, and sustaining results.

- Create a sense of urgency – Creating a sense of urgency requires the leader to create an opportunity that appeals to the “heads and hearts” of the individuals within the learning community to “raise a large, urgent army of volunteers” (Kotter, n.d., p. 10). “ Leaders mobilize others to want to struggle for shared aspirations, and this means that, fundamentally, leadership is a relationship” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 26). The
successful change-agent leader will support others so they see the need for change and create a sense of urgency to act immediately to implement change (Pugh & Hickson, 2014).

- Build a guiding coalition – Kotter (n.d.) described the second step as a vital component to the overall success of obtaining a goal. Involving multiple groups within the learning community hierarchy is paramount to ensure all facets are represented. All levels of perspective are considered to design a synthesis that permits a different lens from which to work (Kotter, n.d.). The collaborative group that will fulfill the roles to enact change must hold enough power of influence to lead the effort while also having the relationships and collective community pull to encourage all to work toward change (Pugh & Hickson, 2014).

- Form a strategic vision and initiatives – The collaborative group must create a shared vision that will direct all efforts and be supported by strategic strategies to achieve success (Pugh & Hickson, 2014).

- Enlist a volunteer army – Change that is sustainable and authentic can only happen when the leader has cultivated a significant community to work toward the same vision or goal (Kotter, n.d.). The change will only be possible if as many community members are on board with the vision and plan as possible, both in acceptance of the shared vision and the strategy to achieve the vision success (Pugh & Hickson, 2014).

- Enable action by removing barriers – The leader must encourage innovation and experimentation by removing barriers that may undermine or seriously delay the vision and planned strategy (Pugh & Hickson, 2014).

- Generate short-term wins – While working through the vision strategy, the successful leader will create achievement goalposts throughout the timeline that are easily recognizable and celebrated, to include recognizing the individuals responsible for ensuring the achievement was met (Pugh & Hickson, 2014). Kotter placed great importance on “effective short-term wins” linked to the change initiative because he believed teacher motivation was crucial to the overall success of achieving the vision (Thorton et al., 2019).

- Sustain acceleration – Improvement should be continuous, and the strategy work should never claim short-term wins as an overall success. Instead, each short-term
success should drive continued monitoring and implementation of improved work toward the vision of change (Thorton et al., 2019).

- Institute change – Once the goal has been met and supported with the aligned data, the team can celebrate success (Thorton et al., 2019). Communicating the correlation between the new behaviors and the change that has occurred is vital to the sustainability of the new norms that are envisioned (Kotter, n.d.).

Presenting the implementation of a new curriculum will offer division and school leaders a significant challenge. Leaders should expect that some will be reluctant to the change. Altering building structures, systems, policies, and norms will cause expected disruption (Kotter, n.d.). Though all leaders have experienced challenges, according to Kouzes and Posner (2003), success will be largely dependent upon the leader’s “passion for learning to become the best leader” (p. 303). The authors shared that practice must be a commitment of a leader to be successful, and so too should the leader be deliberate in their work (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Leaders who are able to carefully listen to stakeholders’ needs are able to delegate responsibilities most appropriately to pursue goal success (Thorton et al., 2019). School improvement, and thus academic achievement and lowered instances of exclusionary discipline, can only be achieved by leaders who build the learning community’s capacity to collaboratively create and facilitate a continuous improvement framework (Thorton et al., 2019).

**Teacher Role in SEL Implementation**

The application of SEL in classrooms can positively influence academic success for students (CASEL, n.d.-c). Therefore, leaders of many schools and divisions have begun implementing SEL instruction within the academic day. To implement SEL with fidelity, it is important to consider the role of teachers in the instruction of SEL competencies (Zinsser et al., 2015).

Research conducted in 2009 showed several characteristics influence teachers’ implementation of SEL in the classroom. Though teacher perception of a lack of support had a negative impact on SEL application, positive teacher perceptions of administrative support and professional development or training to understand how to implement SEL instruction resulted in a positive impact (Ransford et al., 2009). Similarly, findings of a 2007 study regarding teacher perceptions of SEL implementation showed “teacher perceptions of their own capabilities were
influential regarding their attitudes about SEL and willingness to adopt the [curriculum] in the classroom” (Zolkoski et al., 2020, pp. 7–8). Additionally, findings in another study conducted in 2018 indicated “teachers’ perceptions of their emotional intelligence were positively related to their perceptions of comfort in implementing SEL and negatively related to their perceptions of commitment to importing SEL skills” (Poulou et al., 2018, p. 369).

The experiences teachers provide for students in the classroom and as part of the learning community can shift student behavioral and academic success (Merritt et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important teachers are provided the resources and support they need to offer relevant and rigorous experiences for students in their care. Of particular importance is the organization and delivery of professional learning opportunities when implementing new programs within a school (Penuel et al., 2007; Ransford et al., 2009). Specifically, teachers require training to provide direction for how to embed SEL instruction within content lesson plans (Burgin et al., 2021). Additionally, the teacher’s perception of professional development activities, as opposed to the actual facilitation of the activities, influences the success of the effectiveness (Penuel et al., 2007).

**Summary**

Federal acts, such as NCLB and ESSA, have created standardized mandates and high-stakes assessments to report student learning (Effrem & Robbins, 2019; Gagnon et al., 2017; Hirn et al., 2018; Paschall et al., 2018; Scully, 2015). As a result, school leaders often do not devote time to social-emotional development and learning, instead focusing the academic day on content standards and end-of-year (EOY) assessment preparedness (Finnan, 2015; Fray et al., 2019). Several studies have indicated focusing solely on academic learning has led to further widening of the academic achievement gaps, most notably for minority and LSES students (Garcia, 2015; Good et al., 2010; Huang, 2017; Paschall et al., 2018). SEL research indicates student success results when a model of social-emotional learning as a partner to academic education is used (Brennan, 2015; Corcoran et al., 2018; Moore, 2019; Zins & Elias, 2007). SEL supports students academically by teaching the skills of social-emotional education as part of five core competencies (CASEL, n.d.-a).

SEL has been a component within education since the inception of public schools to develop competent citizens who are contributing adults to the democratic society of the United
States (Greenberg et al., 2017). Throughout the 1900s, several theorists developed the social
cognitive theory (Kail, 2004) and furthered studies in psychosocial development (George Lucas
Educational Foundation, 2011). These developments served as the foundation for SEL
implemented in classrooms today.

The modern concept of SEL began through work undertaken in the mid-1990s and
further developed with the founding of CASEL in 1994 (CASEL, n.d.-a; Goals 2000: Educate
America Act, 1994). SEL is intended to narrow the achievement gaps between disadvantaged
and advantaged students by balancing the accessibility of academic content for all students
within the school community and making academic rigor relatable within a culturally responsive
instructional environment (Garza & Soto Huerta, 2014).

In the last 2 decades, the implementation of SEL studies indicated positive change within
the school day as indicated in improved successful social-emotional development, academic
achievement, positive behavior, and sense of belonging within the school community (Corcoran
et al., 2018; Finnan, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2017; Nickerson et al., 2019;
Osher et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2017). Though over 70% of school leaders agree that the SEL
curriculum is essential to implement (Gewertz, 2020), it is difficult to identify the appropriate
curriculum choice for a school population (CASEL, 2015). Critics of SEL research have noted
several studies had limitations in recording sustainability following the initial implementation
timeframe (Esolen et al., 2016) and lacked a standardized measure to gauge SEL implementation
effectiveness (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). However, a more significant body of research has
indicated, as stated in Summers’s findings, that SEL may be the most crucial component of the
school day because it creates a space for students to develop resilience and manage stress, and it
allows opportunities for optimism and shared goals (Summers, 2020). In a post-pandemic
learning space, school administrators will be tasked with bridging the isolation of virtual learning
(Malcom, 2021; Summers, 2020; “The Link Between SEL and Student Outcomes,” 2018) with
the development of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and
responsible decision making (CASEL, n.d.-a).

Consideration of the characteristics that likely influence teachers’ ability to implement
and sustain explicit SEL instruction will influence the effectiveness of the program in terms of
students’ achievement (Merritt et al., 2012). Components that influence teachers’ SEL
implementation include their perception of administrative support and their perception of
training (Burgin et al., 2021; Penuel et al., 2007). Teachers’ perceptions of their own abilities and understanding of SEL practices and instruction will influence the implementation and sustainability of SEL instruction for students (Poulou et al., 2018, p. 369). Teacher perceptions of the support, resources, and training they receive, as well as their own understanding regarding SEL competencies should be considered by school leaders when planning the implementation and sustainability of SEL programming.
Chapter III
Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed how SEL is defined and indicators of the effects of SEL on students’ sense of belonging, academic achievement, and social interactions. Chapter 2 also presented a review of the limitations of SEL in the educational setting. One limitation cited by critics of SEL is the validity of naming SEL as an indicator of student outcome changes during SEL treatment. A gap identified by the researcher in the literature review is the perceptions and viewpoints of educators’ role in delivering the SEL in their classrooms. This work was designed to add to the available literature by studying educators’ views.

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. The study was conducted in one school division in Northern Virginia. Study findings reflect their perception of their preparedness to deliver and monitor SEL instruction. The study also involved examining the perceived needs for support for SEL sustainability in a school. Indicators of perceived needs came from participants’ responses to key questions within the survey. Findings can be used to inform the practices used by building and division leadership to promote appropriate and sustainable SEL instruction.

Research Design

The design chosen for this work was the case study research design. The case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to determine the topic of interest and the manner in which to examine the research questions. Additionally, the chosen design is appropriate when asking “how” and “why” questions because doing so allows for a holistic study of real-world events (Yin, 2018). Further, the design is helpful to “understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to [the] case” (Yin, 2018, p. 15).

“Case studies have strong traditions in social and behavioral science research” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 10). The chosen methodology has an “intent to explore the general
complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the broad, varied perspectives or meanings that participants hold” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 133). In this study, the researcher wanted to learn more about teachers’ perceptions of SEL implementation and the needs for sustaining SEL. Teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in SEL implementation and sustainability were also considered. To study teacher perceptions of SEL, educators working with students in PreK through Grade 4 were invited to participate in the work in the identified school division (see Appendix A). Data were collected in a survey format (see Appendix B) to inform the researcher of participants’ perceptions of their role and the role of building leaders in SEL implementation and sustainability.

**Research Questions**

The study’s primary research question was: What are the perceptions of teachers of their role in SEL program implementation and sustainability? The following questions supported the main research question:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the support needed to implement and sustain the social-emotional learning program?

The research questions were answered via a participant survey designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data stood alone to answer the research questions and were examined according to the themes indicated by the collected qualitative data.

**Site and Sample Selection**

The literature reviewed for this study indicated the positive implications of SEL implementation in school divisions that serve LSES and underperforming students. The literature also pointed to a positive correlation between SEL implementation and improved achievement for students identified as English as a second language (ESOL). Therefore, the site selection for the study was an urban Title I school division in Northern Virginia that serves an LSES
community of predominantly ESOL students and reported low achievement rates as indicated by state assessments and graduation rates.

Site selection for this work was both purposeful and convenient. The study was purposeful because it involved gathering data within year zero of explicit SEL implementation in the division. The study was convenient because the researcher was a building administrator at the onset of the expectation and moved into division leadership just before the study data collection phase. Results were intended to directly inform division and building-level administrators of teacher perceptions of SEL implementation within all elementary schools within the division in which over 200 teachers serve over 3,000 students.

A survey was distributed to all elementary school teachers at each school in the selected division. The population set was approximately 200 teachers. Teachers were defined as educators in classroom teaching positions in PreK through Grade 4. Teachers were categorized as classroom content teachers or other teachers. Other teachers were defined as those who conducted lessons with students regularly in areas outside of the core content, such as music, health and physical education, or ESOL. Surveys were not sent to instructional assistants or support staff.

**Instrument Design**

Data to answer the research questions were collected via a survey created by CASEL titled the School-Based Staff SEL Implementation Survey (SIS; see Appendix B). The survey is a CASEL tool designed for school staff to complete in school settings to collect data about staff perceptions of SEL implementation (CASEL, 2022). The survey is also intended to be used as a research tool and has been scrutinized for reliability and validity (reliability and validity are discussed later in the chapter).

This study’s data collection procedures included survey responses. All surveys were delivered via Google Forms and results were analyzed with Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data, in the form of demographic responses at the conclusion of the survey, were input into a spreadsheet for statistical analysis. All data collection was password protected.
Instrument Validity and Reliability

Conducting research in a manner that is ethical ensures validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity requires the researcher to check for accuracy by employing valid protocols (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). For this work, the validity and reliability of the data collection method were determined by CASEL in collaboration with the American Institutes for Research (AIR). “The validity of a measurement tool simply means that it measures what it is developed to measure” (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2018, p. 4). The original protocol design of the survey included approximately 60 questions and was aligned to the school-level theory of action held by CASEL at the time of the study (CASEL, 2022). Content validity determination was based on creating questions aligned with the 10 indicators of high-quality SEL implementation that were reviewed by subject matter experts (see Figure 2). The survey was then given to approximately 1,200 school staff members in one school division in the Southeast United States. Survey responses were then used to “conduct reliability testing, factor analysis, and item response theory” (CASEL, 2022, p. 2). The research design protocol was used to limit internal validity concerns and to strengthen the reliability and validity of the survey.
The resulting survey tool was found to have strong reliability (Cronbach’s alpha > .80) with sufficient unidimensionality (explained variance <40%; unexplained variance < 10%; Bond & Fox, 2007; see Figure 3).
According to CASEL (2022),

The Caregiver Survey reliability and validity results can be applied to the following settings and participant groups . . . Settings: In-Person or Hybrid/Blended settings where teachers are teaching lessons in person/face-to-face with students . . . Participants: Caregivers of at least one student enrolled in a US public school . . . All caregivers must also be able to read and write in English if responding to the survey in its English version. The survey is also available in Spanish. (p. 3)
Internal validity threats can occur during the study treatment and the instrumentation used to conduct the work (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). One threat to the internal validity in this study was the level of SEL engagement and accountability upheld in each of the elementary buildings. Another threat related to how the participants perceived question response scaling concerning their perception monitoring.

The external validity threats in this work related to the sample characteristics, treatment variations, and stimulus characteristics (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2018). Though the study was open to all teachers serving students in PreK through Grade 4 in one division, it should be noted that the level of understanding of SEL may differ between buildings, as may the accountability measures of SEL implementation school-wide. The difference between buildings may occur because of differing school-based leadership, models for implementing explicit SEL daily, grade-level differences, and staff differences. Additionally, the treatment variations and stimulus characteristics across a school will differ depending on the staff implementing the SEL curriculum, the degree of SEL understanding on the part of staff, and the degree of preparation and monitoring of implementation by building leaders. The treatment variations included that though the division mandated SEL implementation in all classrooms each day, it did not develop or maintain an accountability record or provide scaling of effective versus ineffective implementation.

Data Collection Procedures

The instrument design to inform the study was a survey sent to all invited participants to complete. The study predominantly focused on a descriptive and statistical analysis of survey responses from teachers. The data were examined to identify themes and code data by identifying trends of teacher content level, years of teaching, and comfort level implementing SEL instruction. A survey protocol was used to measure individual teacher perceptions of SEL implementation and sustainability. Qualitative data responses were analyzed in Microsoft Excel and coded by building, grade level, and individual to examine trends. A quantitative data set derived from the survey Likert scaling was also developed to identify teacher perceptions.

To examine teacher perceptions of SEL implementation, participants were asked to complete quantitative and qualitative responses. Participants self-reported their perspectives through a survey to collect demographic data and open-ended question responses. Participants
were also asked to report responses on a Likert scale. Likert scaling is a widely used unidimensional scaling method that measures agreement with a particular idea (Trochim et al., 2016). Demographic and Likert scale responses represented the quantitative data component of data gathered. Open-ended responses were included as qualitative data collected to inform a response to the study’s research questions.

Survey administration began with an introductory email, to include the survey link, that was sent to all elementary teachers in the selected division. The email was blind copied to all participants. The email message was used to introduce the work, included the message found in Appendix A, and contained a clickable link that allowed access to the survey.

The email address of each respondent was collected by the survey to ensure each response could be determined to be a division elementary teacher and that no participant completed the survey more than one time. The message also informed participants that their email address and name would be used to identify the participant for the Amazon gift card raffle, should the respondent choose to participate. The email message provided an explanation of the detachment of the email addresses from the survey response data and participant name from the response data for those who participated in the gift card raffle.

Participants were informed that they could only complete the survey one time and the date the survey would close. Participants were not able to edit their responses once submitted, and no additional responses were collected once the survey closed.

Responses were collected via Google Forms on a Google Sheet. Once the survey closed, a secondary Google Sheet was created to disassociate any identifiable data, such as email addresses and names, from the survey data. The original sheet was used to randomly select winners of the Amazon gift cards. The second sheet was used to analyze the collected data. Both sheets were password protected and available only to the researcher. Reported data only originated from the second sheet that was scrubbed of all identifiable data.

The survey questions directly corresponded to data collection to answer the research questions. All questions, but a small section at the conclusion of the survey, were quantitative and each correlated to one of the three research questions (see Table 1).
Table 1

Alignment of Survey Questions with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question 1: What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning (SEL) program?</td>
<td>1. My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The SEL lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I act on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. My school provides me with the necessary support/resources on how to integrate SEL with academic content instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. I integrate SEL into my academic lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. My teaching practices make connections to my students’ lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. I seek input from families about how to best meet their students’ social and emotional needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. I communicate with my students’ families as a way to build positive relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. I involve my students’ families in meaningful decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Staff members at this school strive to promote students’ social and emotional competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. I prioritize promoting social and emotional competence in my students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ academic success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ civic</td>
<td>14. I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ civic engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement.</td>
<td>15. I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ career preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I plan on staying at my school in this role next year.</td>
<td>16. I plan on staying at my school in this role next year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. SEL has a clear benefit for students at this school.</td>
<td>17. SEL has a clear benefit for students at this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I feel excited to come to work each day.</td>
<td>18. I feel excited to come to work each day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of</td>
<td>20. At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the school and or classroom.</td>
<td>21. At this school, staff care about students’ feedback and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. At this school, staff care about students’ feedback and ideas.</td>
<td>22. At this school, staff incorporate students’ feedback/ideas into aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. At this school, staff incorporate students’ feedback/ideas into aspects of the</td>
<td>23. The culture at my school supports SEL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school and or classroom.</td>
<td>24. My school’s staff use shared agreements/norms for how we will all interact with our students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The culture at my school supports SEL.</td>
<td>25. Students feel comfortable talking to adults at this school about personal problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. My school’s staff use shared agreements/norms for how we will all interact</td>
<td>26. My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she interacts with staff in our school community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with our students.</td>
<td>27. *My school provides me with the necessary support/resources to better reflect on how my identities and experiences can shape my perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Students feel comfortable talking to adults at this school about personal</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research question</td>
<td>Survey questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My school’s disciplinary practices promote students’ social and emotional competencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I model problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their race/ethnicity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their family’s income level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their academic abilities or achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their past behavioral issues/ referrals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. *At this school, staff use a multi-tiered system of supports (such as MTSS or PBIS) to meet the social and emotional needs of all students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. *My school provides me with the necessary support on how to best implement SEL in the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Interdisciplinary teams work together to monitor students’ social and emotional development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. *At this school, community partnerships (such as businesses or community organizations, etc.) promote students’ social and emotional skill development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. *At this school, community partnerships support students and families during challenging times (such as school or life transitions, food insecurity, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. At this school, after-school programming and or extracurricular activities</td>
<td>39. At this school, after-school programming and or extracurricular activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. *My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals.</td>
<td>40. *My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. *My school communicates what data are collected on students’ social and</td>
<td>41. *My school communicates what data are collected on students’ social and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional skills.</td>
<td>emotional skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. *My school uses student data to better understand issues of equity.</td>
<td>42. *My school uses student data to better understand issues of equity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the conclusion of the survey, participants answered several qualitative demographic questions. The demographic question responses were used to organize qualitative responses for gender, years of experience, and ethnicity of participants where responses were given. The demographic questions were as follows:

1. This school year, what grade(s) do you teach?
2. How many years have you worked in education (in any role)?
3. Are you a member of your school’s SEL team?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your race or ethnicity?

Several approvals to collect data were sought. Following Internal Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study, approval to conduct the study and disseminate surveys to all selected participants was requested from the selected school division (see Appendix C and D).

Ethics, IRB, Approval, and Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the division, school site, and participants is an important study component. To protect the identity of all the settings and individuals, pseudonyms were used for all individuals and locations. Because the work involved human subjects, a required submission to the IRB was completed. The researcher completed training in human subjects (see Appendix E). IRB approval documentation is available as Appendix C. Approval to conduct the study in the selected school division is available in Appendix D with any details that would void
confidentiality, such as division or individual names, removed (Original documentation with all pertinent identifiable data will be kept in a locked cabinet with the research documents).

Participant surveys did not require the identification of a specific teacher. Still, they requested the staff member to classify themselves as a new teacher (0 to 4 years of experience in the classroom), mid-level teacher (5 to 10 years of experience in the classroom), or veteran teacher (11 or more years of experience in the classroom). A password-protected database was used to contain the dissertation, notes, and files. Backup copies of the work were kept in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher had access. The key for the cabinet was stored in a separate location to which only the researcher had access.

Participants had the ability to voluntarily include identifiable data to participate in a drawing for an Amazon gift card for $50 after submitting the complete survey. For those survey participants who chose to participate in the drawing, their identifiable data were not part of the data collection process or databases for the study. The identifiable data and the survey responses were kept separate.

**Data Analysis**

All data for this work were collected from survey responses and managed using Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, Google Forms, Google Sheets, and Google Documents. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data. Qualitative data were coded for themes and analyzed when combined within theme categories with statistical analysis of quantitative responses to identify trends where and if they existed.

Before analysis took place, all data were thoroughly examined to confirm input and site population representation accuracy. The data were separated by individual response profiles and grouped per building to create a site-based profile. The collected data were input into Google Survey by survey participants and Microsoft Excel by the researcher. The data output was examined to identify any outliers or abnormalities affecting the data set’s statistical analysis validity. All data were housed on a password-protected personal laptop and cloud-based storage system. Surveys did not allow for editing of responses or multiple responses by participants but enabled participants to retain a copy of their responses for their records.
Summary

Chapter 3 detailed the methodology used to conduct this study. The chapter began with an introduction of the topic of study as related to the literature review. Next, the purpose of the study was identified, followed by the research design. Also discussed in the chapter was a restatement of the research questions driving the work of this study and the site selection to include the chosen population. Next, the chapter presented details of the study instrument design, instrument validity, and the administration process of the survey. Finally, Chapter 3 identified the data collection, management, and analysis procedures. The next chapter presents the details of the data analysis and study findings.
Chapter IV
Presentation of Data and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. The selected participant pool for the study was teachers in all elementary schools in one division in Northern Virginia. A survey was used to address the focal question: What are the perceptions of teachers of their role in SEL program implementation and sustainability? It was also used to address the following three research questions:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the support needed to implement and sustain the social-emotional learning program?

Chapter 4 contains a summary of the data collected and the themes identified by analyzing the data collected through the survey.

Selected Pool of Participants

The selected pool of invited participants was approximately 220 elementary teachers in one school division. A total of 59 teachers participated in the study by completing the survey. Almost all the participants, 52 of the 59 respondents, reported identifying as female, three identified as male, no participants identified as a gender other than male or female, and four participants preferred not to say. Participants were also asked to identify their ethnicity. Responses indicated one participant identified as Asian, three as Black/African American, two Latino/a/x/Hispanic, one Indigenous/Native American, 46 White/Caucasian, one other, and five participants chose not to identify their ethnicity. Participants and their schools are shown in Table 2.
Table 2

*Participant School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant school</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All elementary schools in the division were represented in the respondent data. One school, School A, made up 33% of the respondent data. School D contributed 25% of the overall respondent data. Schools B and E each contributed 17% of the data. School C contributed 8% of the data collected. The number of respondents from each school was interesting as the number of contributions did not align with the number of teachers at each school, as one of the top contributors to the collected data was one of the smallest schools in the division with the smallest staff. The differences in respondent data from each building could be due to the amount of time or support given by the building principal. Each school’s staff were alerted to the study request from their principal until 1 week prior to the close of the survey when the researcher sent out the first of two reminders. It was noted in at least one building that staff had not received any notification of the survey until the first reminder was sent directly from the researcher.

Table 3 indicates the grade levels taught by each of the respondents in the study school year.

Table 3

*Grade Level Taught by Each Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level taught</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-kindergarten</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages equate to greater than 100% because teachers could select multiple grade levels.
Most of the respondents were kindergarten teachers, whereas the least number of respondents taught pre-kindergarten. The difference in these response rates is likely due to the lower number of pre-kindergarten teachers as compared to kindergarten teachers in the division. Otherwise, most grade levels, Grades 1 through 4, were presented generally equally. It is important to note that some teachers responding to the survey indicated they taught more than one grade level. Therefore, Table 3 represents all responses from each respondent.

Table 4 represents the number of years of teaching experience each respondent reported as of the study school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in education</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+ years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most survey respondents, 50%, were veteran teachers with 11 or more years in the classroom as a teacher. Respondents who reported being in the classroom for 5 to 10 years made up 36% of the respondent pool. Finally, 14% of the respondents reported being new teachers in years zero through four of their careers.

Finally, participants were asked if they participated in their school’s SEL team. Survey responses indicated 36 participants answered no (61%), seven participants answered yes (12%), and 16 participants responded that their school did not have an SEL team (27%).

Explanation of Data

Participants were asked to respond to a survey that focused on identifying teacher perceptions of their role and the role of school leaders in the implementation and sustainability of SEL. Most of the questions were close-ended. Participants responded to each question via Likert scale responses of 1 (never), 2 (hardly ever), 3 (sometimes), 4 (most of the time), or 5 (always). Four questions on the survey were open-ended questions to solicit short answer responses. Response data for the open-ended questions were thematically analyzed to identify emerging themes that are reported later in this chapter. To determine the emerging themes, all responses were first coded through notes taken in separate cells of an Excel spreadsheet in a model
consistent with Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) qualitative data analysis process. In their book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Merriam and Tisdell wrote that by synthesizing all notes taken from responses into common categories or themes the data “capture some recurring pattern that cuts across [the] data” (p. 207).

The Likert scale responses were consistent throughout all questions that encompassed the quantitative portion of the survey. The 42 questions were separated into nine separate categories pertaining to SEL implementation and sustainability in schools. The categories were SEL Instruction (six questions), Engagement and Climate (six questions), Staff Learning and Modeling (three questions), Supportive Discipline (six questions), Continuum of Supports (three questions), Family Partnership (three questions), Community Partnership (three questions), Data Reflection (three questions), and Workplace Perception (nine questions).

The survey was sent to approximately 220 elementary teachers in one school division in Northern Virginia. An email was sent to the selected participant pool with an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The survey was open for responses for 2 weeks. Following the initial email, two reminders were sent prior to the survey closing. A total of 59 teachers responded to the survey, which represented a 27% response rate.

Participants were asked to respond to their perception of SEL day-to-day practices in their schools. Participants were told there were no right or wrong answers and were then provided with a definition of SEL and briefed on the role of SEL in the lives of students. The survey questions then began for respondents. The means of each of the nine reporting categories that used Likert scale responses, in which questions were grouped, are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Means of Each Survey Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question category</th>
<th>$M$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEL Instruction</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and Climate</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Learning and Modeling</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Discipline</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuum of Integrated Supports</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Partnership</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Partnership</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Reflection</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Perceptions</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overall mean for the survey categories was 3.49, demonstrating the overall perception of SEL in schools, as indicated by participants, was sometimes. The categories with the highest means, demonstrating a tendency toward the next scale of most of the time, were Supportive Discipline, Family Partnership, and Workplace Perception. A category reported as hardly ever overall was Data Reflection, though Community Partnership leaned on the minimal side of sometimes moving toward hardly ever. SEL Instruction, Engagement and Climate, and Continuum of Integrated Support all fell in the sometimes response scale.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question in this study was: What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program? Respondents were asked two open-ended questions and 21 close-ended questions to answer this question.

The first open-ended question was: What is your understanding of the term social-emotional learning? Thematic analysis of the responses revealed four emerging themes. Table 6 presents the themes from the data analysis and the number of participants who mentioned them in their responses.

**Table 6**

*Open-Ended Question 1 Emerging Theme by Number and Percentage of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Emotions (Teaching &amp; identifying)</th>
<th>Social interaction</th>
<th>Self-regulating</th>
<th>Academic content partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your understanding of the term social-emotional learning?</td>
<td>39 66%</td>
<td>31 53%</td>
<td>22 37%</td>
<td>16 27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Two of the 59 participants did not answer the question. Further, some participants mentioned several themes whereas others mentioned only one or none.*

Most respondents defined SEL as a mechanism to learn about emotions or feelings in the capacity of each understanding, identifying, and regulating them. An example of defining SEL as a method to learn about one’s emotions was demonstrated in one participant’s response that stated, “Helping students understand how to process their emotions and social challenges in a healthy way.” Another respondent responded to the question by stating, “SEL is a way of
teaching students to manage and understand their emotional/social selves.” Some participants defined SEL as both a way of understanding emotions and bridging that understanding into relationship facilities with statements such as “[SEL is] helping students understand their emotions and create empathy.”

Just over half of the respondents defined SEL as a component of teaching and modeling social interactions. Many mentioned the teaching and understanding of empathy as a major component of successful relationship building and sustainability. A participant shared, “My understanding is the teaching and modeling positive interpersonal relationships; identifying and expressing emotions; good citizenship skills; sharing; friendship; etc.”

A third theme emerged from the responses regarding SEL as a model to teach students how to self-regulate. Responses included examples such as managing conflict and the ability to calm high emotions when necessary. One respondent shared, “[SEL is] emotional regulation to help deal with difficult situations appropriately.”

Finally, a fourth emerging theme discussed by 16 participants, or 27% of the respondents, was SEL as an important component of successful academic learning. One participant wrote, “Students’ emotional needs must be met before they are prepared to learn. In addition, students need to be taught and shown models of ways to interact with others in positive and negative ways.”

When coding for emerging themes, some outliers were presented in the data as well. Several participants defined SEL as a behavioral framework for discipline or classroom management. One participant chose not to define SEL, sharing instead:

I chose not to define this term for myself . . . I wish there were some way for education to stop moving in the direction of assuming that to teach students, we need to believe that equity is attainable and that we as educators should take on this role. I am willing to share my thoughts on this subject, but I believe that ship has sailed, and my comments would not be wanted or considered.

The participant quoted above responded as if SEL was viewed as an equity measure.

A second open-ended question was presented on the survey to answer the first research question. In the data analysis, four emerging themes were identified in the response data for the second open-ended question: In your opinion, who should be responsible for teaching social-
emotional learning? Table 7 indicates the themes from the data analysis and the number of participants who mentioned each in their responses.

Table 7

*Open-Ended Question 2 Emerging Theme by Number and Percentage of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All school staff and families</th>
<th>Teachers only</th>
<th>School counselors only</th>
<th>Parents or guardians only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, who should be responsible for teaching social-emotional learning?</td>
<td>33 n 56%</td>
<td>16 n 27%</td>
<td>15 n 25</td>
<td>2 n 3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Some participants noted two categories. Any participants who noted “all staff members” were placed in “all school staff and families” coding. Two participants did not respond to the question.*

In the analysis for the second open-ended question, any responses that included “everyone,” “all staff,” “all stakeholders,” or the like were coded as “All School Staff and Families” as the assumption of the response data was that the participants were thinking school-based only. Participants who responded with specific stakeholders such as “teachers and counselor” were coded separately within the two themes. Interestingly, only two responses indicated SEL was the responsibility of parents or guardians only. Similarly, only two responses indicated students as part of the learning and modeling of SEL in classrooms and the school.

Quantitative data were also analyzed to answer the first research question. Table 8 outlines the question and response data.
TABLE 8

Research Question 1 Participant Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The SEL lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.</td>
<td>4 5%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
<td>19 32%</td>
<td>18 31%</td>
<td>10 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I act on them.</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>11 19%</td>
<td>26 44%</td>
<td>20 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I integrate SEL into my academic lesson plans.</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>14 24%</td>
<td>23 39%</td>
<td>14 24%</td>
<td>6 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teaching practices make connections to my students’ lives.</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>6 10%</td>
<td>27 46%</td>
<td>24 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>11 19%</td>
<td>19 32%</td>
<td>20 34%</td>
<td>7 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, staff care about students’ feedback and ideas.</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td>5 9%</td>
<td>10 16%</td>
<td>24 41%</td>
<td>19 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, staff incorporate students’ feedback/ideas into aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>5 9%</td>
<td>18 31%</td>
<td>25 42%</td>
<td>8 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel comfortable talking to adults at this school about personal problems.</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>5 9%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
<td>32 54%</td>
<td>13 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I model problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts.</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>6 10%</td>
<td>25 42%</td>
<td>24 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek input from families about how to best meet their students’ social and emotional needs.</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>4 7%</td>
<td>18 31%</td>
<td>20 34%</td>
<td>14 24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I communicate with my students’ families as a way to build positive relationships.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I involve my students’ families in meaningful decision making.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members at this school strive to promote students’ social and emotional competence.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prioritize promoting social and emotional competence in my students.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ academic success.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ civic engagement.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ career preparation.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan on staying at my school in this role next year.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL has a clear benefit for students at this school.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel excited to come to work each day.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel frustrated by my job.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To understand participants’ perceptions of the teacher’s role, the researcher sought to understand how teachers defined SEL. In this study, most teachers responded to “What is your understanding of the term social-emotional learning?” with four main response themes. Surveyed teachers shared that SEL was the teaching and identification of emotions, the teaching and modeling of social interaction, and the concept of self-regulation, and aligned the importance of SEL as a partner to success in academics.

A second open-ended question asked respondents to share who should be responsible for teaching SEL. Over half of the surveyed teachers, or 56%, felt all adults, including all building staff, families, and the community, were responsible for SEL, whereas 27% of the respondents felt teachers were responsible. These responses indicate the responding teachers felt it was their role to teach and model SEL concepts for the students in their classroom.

Responses to the close-ended questions showed most respondents rated a 4, or almost always, in response to acting on SEL opportunities in the classroom to learn and practice social competencies. Teachers also felt their teaching practices connected to their students’ lives, that students took an active role in improving aspects of the school and classroom, and that staff cared about and acted on student feedback. Similarly, teachers responded that they modeled problem-solving strategies to include modeling conflict resolution and felt their role also included connection with families and colleagues to meet students’ needs. It was noted that 42% of the teachers strongly felt they prioritized promoting SEL in their classrooms.

Respondents were asked to respond to their beliefs regarding SEL in their classrooms. In each of these questions, over 40% of the participants chose a 5, indicating always, in response to their belief that social-emotional competence is related to academic success, civic engagement, and career preparation.

Just under half of the survey respondents, 47%, felt SEL has a clear benefit for students, and 50% felt social-emotional competence related positively to academic success. However, only 10% of the respondents shared they always incorporated SEL in their academic lesson plans. Regarding the perceived role teachers felt they had in implementing SEL practices in their classroom, a majority of the participants in the study felt their teaching practice incorporated SEL almost always. Additionally, they sometimes solicited communication with families to build positive relationships, and they almost always modeled SEL practices for students while
teaching. Finally, most respondents shared staff at their school almost always promoted social-emotional competence in their school.

**Research Question 2**

An open-ended question was presented on the survey to answer the second research question: What are teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program? Data analysis identified three emerging themes in the response data for the first open-ended question: What has your building administration done to help you teach social-emotional learning competencies? Table 9 indicates the themes from the data analysis and the number of participants who mentioned them in their responses.

**Table 9**

*Open-Ended Question 3 Emerging Theme by Number of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One introduction training or nothing</th>
<th>Provided some training</th>
<th>Adopted curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What has your building administration done to help you teach social-emotional learning competencies?</td>
<td>29 49%</td>
<td>16 27%</td>
<td>11 19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost half of the respondents, 49%, felt as though their building leadership provided no training or resources or provided one introductory training at the beginning of the year without monitoring or continued professional development or check-in. One such respondent wrote, “Beyond the beginning of the year training modules, there hasn’t been much follow through.” Another group of respondents, 27%, shared they felt as though their administration provided some training throughout the year. One noted, “[The principal] has worked hard to help us become more social-emotional aware ourselves so we can better understand how important it really is.” Finally, the last emerging theme identified in the response data was that 19% of respondents felt their building leaders applied a consistent curriculum, Sanford Harmony, throughout the building. However, several respondents also noted nothing beyond a program overview and materials was provided. One response stated:
They have bought an SEL program that includes videos with worksheets for students to complete once a week. This program takes 15–45 minutes a week, depending on the grade, but does not engage students or help them truly learn SEL. Due to the other curriculum standards and extra pull-out supports, we do not have enough time to complete these tasks that many students see as extra work but do not reference outside of this time. Many teachers don’t do these activities and try to do positive reinforcement with logical consequences on their own. Every classroom and teacher handles things differently with no true school-wide PBIS.

Table 10 presents the data identified from the responses indicated on a Likert scale to answer the quantitative survey questions regarding the second research question.

**Table 10**

*Research Question 2 Participant Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture at my school supports SEL.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s staff use shared agreements/norms for how we will all interact with our students.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she interacts with staff in our school community.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s disciplinary practices promote students’ social and emotional competencies.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 10 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their race/ethnicity.</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>16 27%</td>
<td>34 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their family’s income level.</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>3 5%</td>
<td>15 25%</td>
<td>35 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their academic abilities or achievement.</td>
<td>2 3%</td>
<td>5 9%</td>
<td>12 20%</td>
<td>21 36%</td>
<td>19 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their past behavioral issues/referrals.</td>
<td>4 7%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
<td>15 25%</td>
<td>22 37%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary teams work together to monitor students’ social and emotional development.</td>
<td>10 17%</td>
<td>15 25%</td>
<td>20 34%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
<td>5 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals.</td>
<td>11 19%</td>
<td>10 17%</td>
<td>19 32%</td>
<td>11 19%</td>
<td>8 14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 represents the data findings to answer Research Question 2 regarding the respondent teachers’ perceptions of the role of their building leadership in the implementation of SEL. When asked about the school, 46% of the respondents indicated their school used an SEL program almost always or always. Additionally, 58% of the respondents indicated their school culture almost always or always supported SEL, and 41% indicated their school staff almost always or always used shared agreements or norms for how all staff interacted with students. Respondents were next asked if they felt their school leadership modeled SEL competencies.
when interacting with school staff. In response, 51% responded almost always or always, whereas only 25% responded never or hardly ever. Respondents were next asked to rate the disciplinary practices at their school. Data indicated 80% of the respondents felt disciplinary practices were applied equally across all students almost always or always, 17% felt discipline was equally applied to all students, and 12% felt discipline was applied equally never or hardly ever. Next, response data indicated 42% of the teachers surveyed felt SEL goals and progress were never or hardly ever communicated, 34% felt discipline was equally applied to all students, and 12% felt it was almost always or always. Finally, 36% of the respondents indicated their school never or hardly ever used student data to understand equity issues. In comparison, 32% felt their school sometimes did, and 32% felt their school almost always used student data to inform on equity issues.

**Research Question 3**

An open-ended question was presented on the survey to answer the third research question: What are teachers’ perceptions of the support needed to implement and sustain the social-emotional learning program? In the data analysis, three emerging themes were identified in the response data for the first open-ended question: What other things do you think need to take place or change to prepare you to implement adequate social-emotional learning in your classroom? Table 11 indicates the themes from the data analysis and the number of participants that mentioned them in their responses.

**Table 11**

*Open-Ended Question 4 Emerging Theme by Percentage of Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Theme</th>
<th>Ongoing training and monitoring</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Set curriculum/lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What other things do you think need to take place or change to enable you to be prepared to implement adequate social-emotional learning in your classroom?</td>
<td>21 36%</td>
<td>13 22%</td>
<td>9 15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the survey participants, 36% felt more training was necessary for SEL to be successful. Additionally, 22% felt SEL was not successful in their building because either time
was not appropriated for the lessons or time had been taken away in comparison to previous years. Finally, 15% of respondents cited the need for a set curriculum and lessons to be in place to alleviate additional planning needs and to provide consistency throughout the building. In addition to the three emerging themes captured in the response data, one other sub-theme was that 8% of participants felt collegial dialogue was necessary to promote successful SEL implementation and sustainability in a manner that was conducive to a best practice approach and consistency. Finally, 12% of the survey respondents responded “I don’t know,” “NA,” or “Nothing for me.”

Table 12 indicates the data collected on the survey to respond to the third research question. The table indicates both the number and the percentage of each Likert scale response per question.

Table 12
Research Question 3 Participant Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Hardly Ever</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school provides me with the necessary support/resources on how to integrate SEL with academic content instruction.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school provides me with the necessary support/resources to better reflect on how my identities and experiences can shape my perspectives.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 12 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, staff use a multi-tiered system of supports (such as MTSS or PBIS) to meet the social and emotional needs of all students.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school provides me with the necessary support on how to best implement SEL in the classroom.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, community partnerships (such as businesses or community organizations, etc.) promote students’ social and emotional skill development.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, community partnerships support students and families during challenging times (such as school or life transitions, food insecurity, etc.).</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this school, after-school programming and or extracurricular activities share our SEL initiatives/language.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school communicates what data are collected on students’ social and emotional skills.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 indicates the data collected regarding the final research question to identify the supports and resources respondents felt they had in their schools. Data indicated 42% of the respondents felt they never or hardly ever were provided with the necessary support or resources and 25% felt they almost always or always were provided the needed resources. Conversely, when asked to report about the provision of necessary resources to implement SEL in the
classroom, 46% of the respondents indicated they almost always or always were provided, 34% indicated they never or hardly ever were, and 20% indicated they were sometimes provided with support and resources. Regarding the respondents’ schools providing necessary support to reflect on practices to shape perspectives and delivery of SEL competencies, 42% reported sometimes, 29% reported never or hardly ever, and 29% reported almost always or always. Respondents were asked about community partnerships to promote and support student achievement, to which 39% responded almost always or always, 32% reported sometimes, and 29% responded that the community never or hardly ever was involved in student support. Finally, 71% felt multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) were used almost always or always to meet students’ emotional needs, 17% felt their school sometimes used MTSS, and 12% felt their school never or hardly ever supported students’ emotional needs via an MTSS model.

Summary of Data

This study of teacher perceptions of their role and the role of their building leadership in the implementation and sustainability of SEL in their buildings involved a mixed method survey that covered nine categories of SEL. Data were collected via a survey sent to approximately 220 elementary teachers in one division. A total of 59 participants responded to the survey, yielding a 27% response rate. In response to Research Question 1 regarding teachers’ perceptions of their role in SEL implementation and sustainability, respondents identified themselves as part of the larger adult responsibility set for SEL implantation. They overwhelmingly responded that SEL is an important component of academic success and achievement. In response to Research Question 2, respondents shared that though most teachers indicated in the open-ended responses that their building leadership did very little to monitor or continue professional development regarding SEL implementation, they also felt rules were applied equitability across all student groups and the school culture supported SEL practices. Still, leadership only sometimes communicated SEL goal progress or used student data to understand equity issues. In response to Research Question 3, respondents identified the need for initial or additional training, protected time to implement SEL, and the need to adopt a curriculum for SEL, though they also felt their school always used MTSS to meet the social and emotional needs of students. Chapter 5 provides the research findings, implications, and conclusions.
Chapter V

Findings, Implications, and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. The study was conducted in one division in Northern Virginia. The study findings reflect their perceptions of their preparedness to deliver and monitor SEL instruction. The study also involved examining the perceived needs for support for SEL sustainability in a school. Indicators of perceived needs came from participant responses to key questions within the survey. Findings can be used to inform the practices used by building and division leadership to promote appropriate and sustainable SEL instruction. The data were collected to answer the question: What are the perceptions of teachers of their role in SEL program implementation and sustainability? To answer the focal question, three research questions were posed:

1. What are teachers’ perceptions of their role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
2. What are teachers’ perceptions of school leadership’s role in implementing and sustaining the social-emotional learning program?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the support needed to implement and sustain the social-emotional learning program?

Summary of Findings

According to the data presented in Chapter 4, teachers perceived it is their role to teach SEL and they overwhelmingly believed SEL practices promote students’ academic success. The data also reflected that though most teachers felt their building leadership usually modeled SEL practices, they also felt communication surrounding consistent SEL goals and SEL data being used to promote student success was only undertaken sometimes. Finally, the teachers identified a need for continuous and consistent training on how to implement SEL in academic content, and indicated time was necessary to be defined for SEL instruction. Chapter 5 outlines the findings derived from the descriptive and thematic statistics resulting from the analysis of the survey data in which 59 participants responded of approximately 220 teachers invited to do so. Data analysis led to four findings, as well as suggestions for future studies and personal reflection.
Finding 1

Teachers Reported Teaching Social-Emotional Competencies is the Responsibility of All Stakeholders (Including Students, Teachers, and Families)

As indicated in Table 7, in the open-ended responses, 66% of the survey participants identified all stakeholders as being responsible for SEL implementation and sustainability in their schools, whereas 27% of respondents felt the responsibility for teaching SEL was solely on teachers. Table 8 indicated the responses from respondents to questions presented with a Likert scale response. As such, 34% of the respondents shared they communicated with families consistently to best meet students’ social-emotional needs and 46% indicated they involved their students’ families in meaningful decision making. Finally, 66% of the respondents indicated staff in their school almost always or always strived to promote SEL.

SEL instruction within the academic day as a partner learning model alongside subject content is a component of supporting student achievement (Finnan, 2015; Graczyk et al., 2013; McKown et al., 2016; Moore, 2019). The implementation of an SEL curriculum in classrooms provides a supporting learning environment that improves students’ attitudes about themselves, their schools, and others around them. In an article published in 2020, researchers indicated the promotion of SEL in a school depended heavily on teachers, but stated teachers often have difficulty when it comes to how to implement SEL in their content curriculum (Ferreira et al., 2020). This research finding mirrored the data collection findings of this study regarding teachers’ perceptions of their importance in the implementation of SEL but their overall concern of lacking the support and resources to appropriately use SEL in their academic content areas.

Finding 2

Teachers Defined Their Role in Social-Emotional Learning as the Teaching and Modeling of Identifying Emotions and Social Interaction Skills

Data collected to inform the study included an open-ended question that asked respondents to report their understanding of SEL. Responses to the question were indicated in Table 6. In response to the question, 66% of the survey respondents indicated they defined SEL as the teaching and modeling of emotions, and 53% of respondents indicated they defined SEL as the teaching and modeling of social interaction skills. In response to Likert scale questions indicated in Table 8, 47% of the teachers responded that they provided opportunities to practice
social and emotional skills almost always or always, 32% stated sometimes, and only 22% stated they never or hardly ever offered opportunities to practice social and emotional skills with students. Additionally, 46% of the respondents shared they almost always or always used opportunities to teach social and emotional skills when they arose, 19% said they sometimes seized the opportunities, and only 3% said they never or hardly ever acted on opportunities.

CASEL (n.d.-a) defines SEL broadly as an “integral part of education and human development” (para. 1) but describes core concepts such as managing emotions, empathy for others, and maintaining supportive relationships. To date, little training is provided for teachers regarding how to support students in developing their emotions (Zinsser et al., 2015). However, research supports the importance of understanding how to develop goals at a grade-specific level to support students’ development of emotional regulation and needs (Burgin et al., 2021).

Finding 3

Teachers Reported Their Building Leadership did Little to Support SEL Implementation in Their School Beyond Initial Training at the Beginning of the Year

Table 9 indicated the respondent data for an open-ended question that asked, “What has your building administration done to help you teach social-emotional learning competencies?” In response, 49% of the teachers surveyed identified their building administration did nothing to consistently support SEL implementation in their classrooms, 27% felt no training was provided at all, and 19% shared they had no curriculum or lessons provided for them. Table 10 indicated the Likert scale responses regarding building leadership support and role in the implementation of SEL. Over half of the respondents, 58% of the teachers surveyed, felt their school culture supported SEL competencies, and an average mean of 50% responded always to equity of discipline practices for all students. However, 59% of the respondents felt their building leadership never or sometimes modeled SEL practices in interactions with staff. Finally, 76% of the respondents shared that their school never or sometimes communicated SEL goals and progress on goals. In comparison, 32% felt their school usually or always used student data to better understand equity issues.

Teachers’ perceptions regarding the amount and type of training they received throughout the year, more than the actual training activities and planning, will indicate implementation success or challenge (Penuel et al., 2007). Several studies have underscored the importance of a positive perception of administrator support for the successful implementation of SEL in the
classroom (Burgin et al., 2021; Merritt et al., 2012; Penuel et al., 2007; Poulou et al., 2018; Zolkoski et al., 2020). Similarly, in Kotter’s eight-step framework, he shared the importance of building a coalition in which all levels of perspectives are considered, and all are part of a collaborative group that pulls together to encourage work toward change (Thornton et al., 2019).

**Finding 4**

**Teachers Reported They Did Not Have Adequate Supports or Resources to Implement and Sustain SEL in Their Classrooms Each Day**

In this study, 42% of the respondents shared that their school never or hardly ever provided the necessary support or resources to integrate SEL with academic content instruction. Similarly, 34% of the respondents shared they never or hardly ever were offered resources or support on how to best implement SEL in the classroom, and 29% of the responses indicated never or hardly ever regarding being provided with support or resources to reflect on how teachers’ own identities and experiences could help shape their perspective. There is a need for consistent and appropriate training to adequately apply SEL implementation in their school and classrooms. Finally, 22% of the survey participants shared that dedicated time they did not presently have was necessary to implement and sustain SEL every day.

A 2017 study underscored the importance of leadership support in the successful implementation of SEL. The study findings indicated “principals and teachers attempting to implement SEL are well supported by their district leadership, they have better outcomes” (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 2). Another study indicated the improvement of SEL implementation was highlighted by the need for high-quality professional development, follow-up support, and support by school leadership consistently throughout the school year (Morrison et al., 2019).

**Implications for Practice**

This study involved identifying teachers’ perceptions regarding their role and the role of their building leadership in the implementation and sustainability of SEL. The findings indicated that though the majority of the respondents felt SEL instruction was critical to their students’ academic success, they felt their building administration did little to provide adequate training, time, or resources and support to implement SEL.
School and division leaders can use the findings of this study when planning for the implementation of SEL practices that will be sustainable. The implications are briefly outlined and summarized here.

*Implication 1*

**Teachers should continue to partner with other stakeholders in the school learning community to deliver instruction and modeling of social-emotional competencies for students.** The data compiled from survey participants reflected the care staff have for students’ feedback and ideas, input sought from families regarding decision making, and building positive relationships to consistently promote student achievement as a unified team. Combined with the implications below, the gap identified in the data between teachers’ perceptions of their role and their needs from leadership and additional support could create a well-implemented and sustainable SEL program. This implication is associated with Findings 1 and 2.

*Implication 2*

**School leaders should select a curriculum and training framework for consistency in the implementation, monitoring, and application of student data.** Respondents reported that though a curriculum was purchased for all schools to use with their students, they felt they were not adequately trained. Teachers also reported that for those schools that did include periodic professional development opportunities to support SEL implementation or dialogue around the plan at staff meetings, monitoring of the effectiveness of practices was not undertaken. Further, respondents indicated consistency throughout their building was not a priority but should be a consideration for fidelity of implementation across all classrooms. This implication is associated with Findings 2 and 4.

*Implication 3*

**School leaders should place dedicated time in their master schedule for daily SEL implementation.** Study participants indicated they did not have dedicated time to deliver instruction meaningfully. Respondents indicated they felt building leadership placed importance on academics above SEL lessons and often did not make time for SEL instruction despite mandating teachers to implement explicit SEL instruction daily. Further, teachers reported they did not have dedicated time to plan lessons. Without consistent curriculum training and
monitoring, they felt overwhelmed by the mandate to add SEL programing to instructional planning and delivery. This implication is associated with Findings 3 and 4.

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of their role, as well as the role of school leadership, in the implementation and sustainability of an SEL curriculum. All division elementary schools were included in the data collection. Additionally, only teachers were included in the selected participant pool that was invited to respond to a largely quantitative study. Future researchers may want to include interviews with teachers and with building leadership following data analysis of survey responses to increase data input and type. Another component to future work is to add a survey for school leaders to collect their perceptions using the same or similar questions to analyze consistencies and differences between teacher and leader respondents. Future attention is needed to understand school leadership’s perception of their role in the implementation and sustainability of SEL in their school.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 5 included a summary of findings, outlined implications for school leaders, and provided suggestions for future research based on the analysis of collected data. Survey respondents were consistent regarding the perceived teacher role in SEL implementation and sustainability. Further, the data consistently indicated the teachers largely felt unsupported by their building leadership in the delivery or offering of consistent training, dedicated implementation time in the school day, or the delivery of appropriate supports and resources. School and division leaders should consider how these findings could support framework planning to include curriculum identification, dedicated procedures for SEL implementation, and how student data are used to continually deliver instruction for student achievement.

**Personal Reflections**

This study was conducted following the shutdown and virtual implementation of instruction for one and a half school years prior to the study year. As such, my focus in designing this study was to understand how the expectation of daily SEL instruction was perceived by teachers already feeling the overwhelming stress of filling in the instructional gaps they felt students began the year with when returning in person in the Fall of 2021. I feel as though my
findings indicated teacher frustration in being asked to do “one more thing.” One respondent explicitly shared this frustration in response to “What other things do you think need to take place or change to enable you to be prepared to implement adequate social-emotional learning in your classroom?” by saying:

Like most teachers we will sit through training regardless of our personal or group beliefs. We have been trained to follow the crowd and not make waves to not draw attention to ourselves. That is not a safe place for a teacher to stand alone. Because teachers described the SEL training as taking place at the beginning of the year only, without continued training throughout the year, SEL was largely not effectively implemented with fidelity at all schools.

This study revealed the large gap between teachers’ perceptions and my personal understanding of the perceptions of division leadership, school leadership, and the community. The findings of this study support the need for authentic collaboration and conversation between all stakeholders to provide an appropriate and consistent framework for SEL practice. It has underscored, for me, the importance of school leaders consistently monitoring implementation and support needs throughout the year not only to best understand perceptions and needs but also to demonstrate the importance of the implementation request.
References


65


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https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2016.1196364


Newman, J., & Moroney, D. (2019). Reading between the lines of social and emotional learning: Discover what SEL is all about and why it’s important to consider when designing and implementing teen services. *Young Adult Library Services, 17*(2), 16–21.


Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in the Study Email

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Explicit Social-Emotional Learning Implementation and Sustainability in MCPS (IRB#22-316)

Body of Message:

My name is Mandy Zayatz, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study to examine the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of a social-emotional learning (SEL) program in all elementary schools in one division in Virginia. As an elementary teacher in the division this year, the school year 2021-2022, I am interested in your perception of your role, your school leader’s role, and your resource needs for the explicit SEL instruction you are required to conduct every day.

The study was conducted via responses collected by survey. The survey will collect responses for two weeks or 14 days. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes for you to complete. Survey response data is confidential.

Attached is an information sheet explaining your rights and any risks regarding this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Please contact me by replying to this email or call me at 757-373-3862 with any questions.

Thank you,

Mandy Zayatz
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
mzayatz@vt.edu
757-373-3862
Appendix B

Study Survey

School-based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation

Spring 2022

Dear Elementary Teacher,

We invite you to take this survey so that a study, conducted to gain a better understanding of your experiences and perceptions of social-emotional learning (SEL) as a staff member, can be done. We are interested in learning more about the day-to-day SEL practices at your school, and your thoughts and ideas about them. Please answer to the best of your ability; there is no right or wrong answer.

What is Social-emotional Learning (SEL)?
Social-emotional learning (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.

Schools play an important role in supporting young people’s social and emotional development. Districts and schools engage in many different practices to grow and develop students and staff member’s social and emotional competencies to help them be successful. Broad areas of social and emotional competence are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Your input is critical, and we appreciate your careful, honest responses. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Your privacy is important to us, and your responses will be kept confidential.

At the conclusion of the survey you will have the opportunity to participate in a raffle for an Amazon gift card in the amount of $50.00. One gift card will be raffled per 100 responses. The gift card entry responses will be confidential and not included in the data collection material utilized in to determine study results.

If you have any questions about the survey, you may contact the researcher by emailing mzayatz@vt.edu.

Sincerely

Amanda (Mandy) Zayatz
Doctoral Candidate
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
**Directions:** Please respond to the statements below as honestly and completely as possible; there are no right or wrong answers. If you are unsure about a question, please respond in a manner that most closely reflects your experiences.

How often has each of the following occurred over the summer and/or so far this school year?

### SEL Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Statement</strong></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school uses an SEL program or approach to promote students’ social and emotional competence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The SEL lessons in my class provide opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When opportunities arise for my students to learn/practice social and emotional competencies, I act on them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My school provides me with the necessary support/resources on how to integrate SEL with academic content instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I integrate SEL into my academic lesson plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My teaching practices make connections to my students’ lives.</td>
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</table>

### Youth Voice, Engagement, and Supportive Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Statement</strong></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this school, students take an active role in working to improve aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
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<td>At this school, staff care about students’ feedback and ideas.</td>
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<td>At this school, staff incorporate students’ feedback/ideas into aspects of the school and or classroom.</td>
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<td>The culture at my school supports SEL.</td>
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<td>My school’s staff use shared agreements/norms(^1) for how we will all interact with our students.</td>
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<td>Students feel comfortable talking to adults at this school about personal problems.</td>
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\(^1\) Shared agreements/norms are statements or routines the school community has determined together about how they will relate and interact with one another.
How often has each of the following occurred over the summer and/or so far this school year?

### Staff Learning and Modeling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have participated in professional learning on how my interactions with students can promote their social and emotional competence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My principal models social and emotional competence in the way he/she interacts with staff in our school community.</td>
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<td>My school provides me with the necessary support/resources to better reflect on how my identities and experiences can shape my perspectives.</td>
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</table>

### Supportive Discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school’s disciplinary practices promote students’ social and emotional competencies.</td>
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<td>I model problem-solving strategies that students can use to resolve conflicts.</td>
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<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their race/ethnicity.</td>
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<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their family’s income level.</td>
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<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their academic abilities or achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My school’s rules are applied equally to all students, no matter their past behavioral issues/referrals.</td>
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</table>
How often has each of the following occurred over the summer and/or so far this school year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continuum of Integrated Supports</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>I’m unsure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this school, staff use a multi-tiered system of supports (such as MTSS or PBIS) to meet the social and emotional needs of all students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My school provides me with the necessary support on how to best implement SEL in the classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary teams work together to monitor students’ social and emotional development.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Family Partnership</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I seek input from families about how to best meet their students’ social and emotional needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I communicate with my students’ families as a way to build positive relationships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I involve my students’ families in meaningful decision making.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Community Partnership</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>I’m unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this school, community partnerships (such as businesses or community organizations, etc.) promote students’ social and emotional skill development.</td>
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<td>At this school, community partnerships support students and families during challenging times (such as school or life transitions, food insecurity, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>At this school, after-school programming and or extracurricular activities share our SEL initiatives/language.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How often has each of the following occurred over the summer and/or so far this school year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflecting on Data</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Hardly ever</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school communicates our SEL goals and our progress on these goals.</td>
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<td>My school communicates what data are collected on students’ social and emotional skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My school uses student data to better understand issues of equity.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Perceptions</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff members at this school strive to promote students’ social and emotional competence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I prioritize promoting social and emotional competence in my students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ academic success.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ civic engagement.²</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students’ career preparation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I plan on staying at my school in this role next year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEL has a clear benefit for students at this school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel excited to come to work each day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel frustrated by my job.</td>
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</table>

² Civic engagement encompasses the lessons that teach students how to analyze issues in the world around them that affect their lives, develop an understanding of how they can make a difference, and learn how to work with others to create solutions. Civic education prepares students to be tomorrow’s engaged citizens.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree or Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Learning will have a positive effect on our school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our school is in need of Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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<td>School leadership is effectively supporting Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>School leaders are providing effective models for Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>The vision of Social-Emotional Learning implementation and sustainability is very clear to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>My colleagues embrace Social-Emotional Learning implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel I have the resources and time to make the changes necessary to implement Social-Emotional Learning in the school day</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am recognized for my work in delivery of Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am often encouraged by school leaders in my work to implement Social-Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Learning has become part of our school climate and norms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9) This school year, what grade(s) do you teach? (Select all that apply)

- Pre-kindergarten
- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4

10) How many years have you worked in education (in any role)?

- 0-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11+ years

11) Are you a member of your school’s SEL team?

- Yes
- No
- We do not have a SEL team at my school

12) What is your gender?

- I identify as a woman
- I do not identify as a woman or a man
- I prefer not to say
13) What is your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply).

- Asian/Asian American
- Black/African American
- Latino/a/x/Hispanic
- Indigenous/Native American
- White/Caucasian
- Other: _______________________________
- I prefer not to say

Thank you for taking our survey! Your response is very important to us.
Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter to Conduct Study

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 27, 2022
TO: Ted S Price, Amanda Collins Zayatz
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Instruction in All Elementary Schools in One Division in Virginia

IRB NUMBER: 22-316

Effective April 26, 2022, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)
Protocol Determination Date: April 26, 2022

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.
Appendix D
Approval to Conduct Study in Selected School Division

April 27, 2022

Ms. Amanda (Mandy) Zayatz
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
mzayatz@vt.edu
757-373-3862

Dear Ms. Zayatz,

Thank you for sharing your defense proposal titled, *Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Instruction in all Elementary Schools in One Division in Virginia.* [Redacted] will support Dr. Price and Mandy Zayatz in the recruitment of elementary teachers for participation in their research to understand teacher perception of their role in the implementation and sustainability of SEL curriculum. [Redacted] Public Schools appreciates the value of educational research and underscores the condition of anonymity for our division and teachers in the published work.

To conduct the study, the researchers have presented a survey that will accept responses from the selected participant pool for two weeks or 14 days. Once the survey closes, the data set will be examined by first validating responses were completed by elementary teachers in the division. Data analysis will begin once any identifiable markers are removed, with a mixed-method approach. Likert Scaled responses will be statistically analyzed, and qualitative data will be coded for themes. Final data output and reporting, as a final defense, will take place in June 2022.

Again, [Redacted] Public Schools supports this doctoral research proposal following the procedures outlined in the submitted proposal with the condition of complete anonymity and removal of descriptors that would identify our school division or teachers from the published work. Congratulations on your academic achievements.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
Director of Assessment and Accountability
[Redacted] Public Schools
Appendix E
Certificate of Training Completion to Conduct Research

This is to certify that:

Amanda Zayatz

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w64a42304-eced-4a34-93e7-594be773de85-33252600