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IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING TO SERVICE THE
WHOLE CHILD

Willard Willette
Educational Leadership

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Today's students are facing an overwhelming number of obstacles that hinder their emotional, social, and academic growth. As a principal, I recognized this growing burden my students were carrying. Such hindrances as a rise in gun violence, continued socioeconomic disadvantages, and countless other more personal obstacles and their effects on students were evident inside the school setting. Many of our students were traumatized by these life changing circumstances and then left clueless as to how to handle them or the challenges life may bring next. The adults in our school and many of the families did not have the skills to help or support students in this difficult journey. We were equipped to handle the academic portion, but we desired to help with social and emotional skills as well. We wanted to support the whole child development. This encounter led me down a road of questioning and discovery regarding how we as educators can equip staff to teach students the social and emotional skills they need to navigate the lifelong obstacles they may experience.

My experience as a principal and my desire to help the whole child develop led me to two primary research questions: How do schools implement an SEL-centered lens when preparing students for social and academic life? How do we address the SEL needs of students who may be entrenched in or be the product of high poverty/high crime areas as well as those who just may need help handling life's transitions? My journey of discovery led me to research D2SEL School, a small, private, suburban school and their implementation of SEL. I found D2SEL staff desired to support students socially, but SEL was not an administrative or schoolwide focus and little to no training was provided on SEL. There was a need for team building and collaboration among D2SEL staff to improve staff relations and support SEL implementation. My recommendation was the establishment of an SEL focus at D2SEL that includes SEL teams, team leaders, data collection, and ongoing professional and progress monitoring.

In order for students to be healthy emotionally and socially, educators must consider all factors needed to support the whole child in their development and growth. It is my hope that the journey of this dissertation and the interaction with D2SEL and the research will help clarify the need for social and emotional skills to support our students.

PREFACE

I have been in education for 21 years and have been serving as an elementary school principal for 10 years. I have worked in two different districts, both located in high poverty areas. Throughout my time as a teacher, I recognized many students did not have the skills to process the violence and poverty they experienced or deal with the effects of such a high level of daily exposure. With these experiences came different forms of trauma for each individual student. Because students could not fully express what they were feeling, their feelings usually manifested as some form of disruption. I saw the struggles students experienced in their attempt to focus on academics.

As a principal, I want to help my students and staff embrace social emotional skills as a means to not only help students now but equip them for the future. This desire to address every student's individual struggle and meet their individual needs with skills and strategies to support them socially, emotionally, and academically is what led me to the topic of this dissertation. I wanted to step out of my normal educational surroundings and experience within the public school arena. I wanted to conduct, as a leader, an evaluation of the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) and use the resulting data to devise a plan to support or improve the SEL skills for staff and students at D2SEL (a pseudonym), a state-recognized non-public school with close to half a century serving students from preschool to eighth grade in a suburban community outside of Chicago where I did my research. Wagner et al.'s (2005) 4Cs served as a foundation for the development of this level of change.

My experience in education and on this dissertation journey taught me the value of prioritizing student and staff needs, developing strong teams, and cultivating a shared

vision of responsibility for what we as a learning organization have committed to achieve. I have worked with great teachers and administrators whose knowledge, experience, and overall welcoming perspective made this dissertation journey memorable.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As educators continue to strive for greater academic achievement in the nation's school systems, it is becoming harder to agree on what strategies will best support student academic growth. The 21st century has revealed today's students are facing a broader range of obstacles that affect their ability to succeed academically. My first encounter with the obstacles today's students face was in 2011 at NS School (a pseudonym), which is located in a well-known African American area of Chicago where I experienced my first administrative role as principal.

The NS community has a rich history. It was once the heart of the Jewish community and there was a strong emphasis on education and family for the second half of the 20th century. Throughout the years, NS School transitioned from a family center to a community school. This transition occurred in the midst of a decline of its Jewish roots as members of the African American community began to move into the area. During the decades that followed, the NS community experienced a period of economic decline as community members and resources began to consistently depart this historic area. Unemployment increased substantially as a result of the closing of major community-based industries (Chicago Historical Society, 2005).

NS School, at the end of my tenure, consisted of roughly 280 students ranging from PreK to Grade 8. The poverty rate for students within NS School was over 90% and the community poverty rate was over 40%. The school mission included all stakeholders working together to build a community focused and child-centered school learning environment that will equip students to be positive contributors to their communities and

to excel both academically and socially. The objective was to equip students to overcome such obstacles as their current economic circumstances through social and academic development.

I first became active in addressing the many non-academic problems students faced as the principal at NS School. During the last 2 years of my tenure of my first principalship, an overwhelming number of shootings occurred within a two- to four-block radius around the school. We lost many current and past students, both male and female, as well as students' family members to the neighborhood violence. In the midst of this turmoil, I saw students come to school every day as if that violent world did not even exist. Many students escaped the neighborhood violence only to encounter drugs, poverty, and domestic violence in the sanctity of their own homes.

During this time, the City of Chicago was experiencing the highest level of violence in the last 20 years. There were more shooting-related homicides in Chicago than in the next four largest cities in the United States. The Chicago Police Department's (2019) *2017 Annual Report* indicated 769 people were killed in 2016, almost 90% ($n = 691$) of those homicides were the result of shootings, and 78% involved African American victims, offenders, and neighborhoods. This reflected a 58% increase from the previous 2015 data. This increase in homicides was the result of the increase in gun violence in Chicago. There was a 47% increase in gun violence resulting in 3,550 shootings with 4,331 shooting victims and 35% of the offenders were 21 years of age or lower (Chicago Police Department, 2019). Twelve percent or 33 of the 268 identified shooters were below the age of 17 or were school-age children. The NS police district was ranked among the top four districts in terms of shootings out of 25 police districts.

Nationally, results of a 2009 U.S. Department of Justice survey revealed 60% of children in the United States had been exposed, directly or indirectly, to some form of violence, whether in their homes, communities, or schools (Finkelhor et al., 2009). This included gun violence. An average of 3,000 children are killed and over 12,000 are wounded by guns and an estimated three million students witness gun violence each year (Everytown Research & Policy, 2019).

Purpose of the Program Evaluation

In the 2016 school year, we began to see an increase in student behaviors that went beyond the average disruption to the learning environment. Students were becoming more violent, angry, and disruptive during the school day. We even saw this behavior occurring among preschool and kindergarten students. Their acquisition of the knowledge and understanding they needed to process everyday life had been altered by the trauma of life outside of school. “The neurocognitive and social emotional skills integral to self-regulation undergird early learning and are likely to be compromised for children growing up in poverty and other adverse circumstances” (Blair & Raver, 2015, p. 713). At the same time we noticed an alarming lack of academic interest among NS students, especially middle schoolers. Students seemed disconnected from school and staff felt helpless to help them navigate their issues. A 2004 national sample survey conducted by CASEL indicated roughly 37% of close to 150,000 middle school to high school students reported not acquiring the social emotional skills they needed to maintain connectedness within the academic setting and only 29% reported having a school environment in which staff were equipped with the social emotional skills to support students (Durlak et al., 2011). The lack of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills such as empathy, conflict

resolution, and proper decision making resulted in decreases in positive behavior, school performance, and even personal health (Durlak et al., 2011).

I personally counseled students and parents during my tenure at NS School. I saw parents who had been evicted and were moving from shelter to shelter not knowing where the next meal would even come from for themselves or their children. I saw students try to fight against the racial and ethnic barriers created by relatives and even teachers or school staff holding certain mindsets and beliefs regarding behavior, poverty, and minorities. In the end, students found it easier to accept another's negative viewpoint than to contend with adults and society. This suppression of their true feelings and emotions caused a continued internal tug-of-war that often manifested as disruptions within the school environment.

We worked to bring resources and partnerships to the school and community to support students and families in dealing with life's obstacles. Our school counselor even spearheaded the creation of the Behavior Health Team (BHT), which consisted of various school staff members and external partners with the goal of exploring the internal struggles or needs of students referred by teachers or staff or those with recurrent behavior concerns and academic decline. Our external partners provided additional resources to support the health and emotional well-being of students and their families. As an educator and an administrator, I asked the question: How do we educate our students in the midst of the socioeconomic and violent obstacles they face in everyday life?

Socioeconomic status is one area that has been gaining more attention when it comes to educating students. The National Center for Education Statistics (McFarland et

al., 2018) reported 12.6 million school-age children (18% of children living in the United States) are living in poverty. These are children under the age of 18 years. The majority of children living in poverty are African American at 32%, closely followed by American Indians at 31% and Hispanic children at 25% (McFarland et al., 2018). The expectation for students to focus on academics when they experience hunger, inadequate shelter, and a lack of everyday resources is unrealistic. When these students are also exposed to domestic, gun, and other forms of violence, academics are the last thing on their minds. They are trying to survive. Through it all, the goal of educating our students has not wavered. We, as educators, find ourselves having to look at student achievement from a broader, more sensitive lens—the whole child lens. ASCD describes the education of the whole child as “an effort to transition schools and systems from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and life success for all children” (Griffith & Slade, 2018, p. 36).

The purpose of this evaluation was to explore and define some of the various factors that hinder students’ social emotional development within the learning environment. Leaders and others in the educational community are beginning to understand that in order to educate the whole child, we must be able to help students navigate adversity. I believe this evaluation is important because no two students or even adults experience life in the same way. Educators must understand this diversity of need and be equipped to train all stakeholders on how to support students’ SEL needs and even how to manage our own social emotional needs in order to focus on whole child development.

Rationale

When looking at poverty and academic factors, ASCD released findings connecting poverty and SEL (Economic Policy Institute, 2016). Their findings indicated that in high poverty areas there is a need for a greater focus on social skill related components within the literacy framework in order to support an increase in academic performance. Some examples of ways to support students are offering students more choice, tapping into their curiosity, and offering more opportunities to problem solve. Students also need to be given group work opportunities such as cooperative learning groups, project-based learning, and learning that provides critical thinking (Economic Policy Institute, 2016). These offer tailored learning that addresses the culture of the community and provides the opportunity for students to assess learning from a place of knowledge and experience while still offering social emotional support.

In the pursuit of equipping students to maneuver through life's challenges, educational leaders in the State of Illinois adopted Social Emotional Standards, intended to be applied with the Illinois Learning Standards, to help support school leaders in their endeavor to support students beyond just academics (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). The objective of this collaboration was to have the questions, processes, and proficiencies provided in the SEL standards mirror those provided in academic standards to result in the ability to apply the knowledge learned in everyday life and in support of academic advancement (CASEL, 2013).

My firsthand experience with the violence and poverty at NS School was the catalyst to my finding and implementing programs, such as SEL, that serve students not only in the area of academics, but that help address the barriers created through the trials

and traumas of life and equip students with the skills and tools they need to face and overcome life's challenges. My quest for answers inspired me to dive deeper into educators' willingness to implement SEL and their knowledge of its ability to support academic achievement.

My journey of inquiry took me to the other side of the educational spectrum to gain a different perspective. On the other side was D2SEL (a pseudonym), a state-recognized non-public school with close to half a century serving students from preschool to eighth grade in a suburban community outside of Chicago. In addition to providing students an education, D2SEL leaders believe strongly in instilling in students the components they need to be successful in life. The overall school goal is to provide a safe and child-centered environment. The focus within D2SEL is on spiritual and character development, which leads to excellence in education. This includes social and critical thinking skills as well as conflict resolution while cultivating unity in purpose, trusting relationships, and community relations. As a tuition-based school, D2SEL has encountered a significant decline in enrollment since the 2008 financial crisis. D2SEL lost one fifth of its population in each of the first 3 years following the 2008 crisis and an average of 11 students every year, leading to the current population of roughly 150 students.

As violence within the City of Chicago increased and leaders of public schools applied more focus on safer, more learning focused classroom environments, many parents of emotionally or behaviorally challenged students decided to seek smaller, more personal learning environments such as the one at D2SEL. With this transition came distinct, more serious and common disruptions to the learning environment at D2SEL.

Parents were concerned about the classroom disruptions and in need of skills to support the emotional behaviors their students were exhibiting outside the school. These external challenges led to a need to evaluate the use of the SEL program at D2SEL as its leaders desire to continue to educate and equip students for academia and life in general.

Goals

D2SEL leaders' desire to support all students inspired my evaluation of the use or need for social emotional strategies within the elementary school setting to support the academic environment. SEL was established as a means to build relationships within school communities that foster positive and productive learning environments through the use of communication, problem-solving skills, and the ability to effectively reflect on feelings and the effects of conflicts on all stakeholders. CASEL (n.d.) defines SEL as,

the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (para. 1)

The hope is to replace the remnants of the punitive system approach to disruptive student behavior that simply resulted in suspension, expulsion, or meaningless consequences without personal inquiry into the cause of the student disruption. Suspension and expulsion have been shown to harm the academic progress of the student and not support positive behavior. In 2015, developers of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) advocated against the overuse of disciplinary practices that keep students from the classroom as a way to support student learning (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The acquisition of SEL skills would provide adults with the tools to support students and

students with the lifelong skills to support social and academic success. The overarching belief is the ability to navigate life's obstacles and trauma will ultimately result in better student behavior and more academic focus.

Research Questions

SEL is important to study because there is a lack of research into PreK–8th grade schools through the lens of beliefs, trauma, and economic status. At D2SEL, a group of educators found themselves having to teach students who were escaping the violence of the city but bringing the effects into an unequipped environment. The question from my experience at NS School and my study of D2SEL became: How do schools implement an SEL-centered lens when preparing students for social and academic life? I wanted to know how to address the SEL needs of students who may be entrenched in or be the product of high poverty/high crime areas as well as those who just may need help handling life's transitions. Various cultural and personal experiences may mold our personal beliefs and possibly contribute to a lack of empathy toward the social and emotional needs of students and even our peers. These factors can work against academic and social advancement. I believe there has been a disconnect from the individuality of students, schools, and communities when it comes to SEL design and implementation.

Tatum (2015) gave the example of how a teacher understood the importance of students' identities over what the district recognized program for reading that failed to connect to the lives of his students. This teacher was aware of and empathetic to his students' lives within poverty-driven conditions. The teacher used this awareness to be sensitive to his text selection and instructional approach in order to develop rapport and support the individual needs of students through literature. This level of awareness of the

external non-school related factors that cause students to experience various traumas, such as gang pressure, divorce, death of a loved one, or the cultural differences between students/adults, is rooted in SEL. These skills, when properly implemented, counteract situations that may lead to division and contention, which are in opposition to academic learning.

I believe there is a direct connection between the establishment of proper social emotional implementation and academic success, especially among PreK–Grade 8 students. SEL skills include the ability to communicate in small groups and analyze situations to discover how they affected all involved, as well as implement problem-solving skills where all participants feel safe expressing their views or opinions and are able to critically think about outcomes and solutions outside their usual realm of reason. These are some of the same expectations for students found within the Common Core State Standards. The only difference is there is a greater focus on social skills to possibly promote better academic outcomes. My goal in conducting this program evaluation was to prompt those in the educational community to not choose the academic or social emotional perception but to merge them on behalf of the student's overall development. The SEL side of the overall curriculum addresses root causes of behavioral disruptions to the learning environment and the development of a more strategic analysis and exploration into the lives and experiences of students to address more individual needs.

The aligning of academic and social emotional resources will support the educational and overall community as a whole by increasing jobs and bringing more stability. With jobs and stability within the community comes an increased likelihood that the crime rate will decrease. These positive SEL-related outcomes would support the

development of solid academic and social emotional foundation for students to embrace learning, communication, and life skills. In the end, my hope in conducting this study was to bring awareness to the wide variety of emotional obstacles students face and persuade district leaders to invest in a deeper, more school/community tailored form of individualized school SEL planning and implementation.

I would like to educate teachers, parents, and community members on the SEL programs and strategies that provide students greater learning opportunities. I would like SEL implementation to start with teachers taking the time to teach SEL and own SEL skills and strategies as teachers. Teachers could take the practice back to the various school leadership teams as a strategy for supporting social and academic success across all elementary students. The goal is to equip students with alternative behaviors or responses to problems so they can enter the classroom ready to learn.

Conclusion

There is a need for knowledge and training among educational stakeholders to recognize the differences in student circumstances, starting with the understanding of the obstacles set before elementary students and the wide scope of possible root causes for disruptions to academic learning and a lack of social skills. The integration of SEL with academic expectations through more specific individualized training will provide individualized learning paths to success. Students will understand how to solve problems and communicate effectively. When teachers and other stakeholders take the time to understand students as individual learners, both socially and academically, the end result is students experiencing greater learning and increased academic success.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

In this section, I explore research on SEL with a focus on factors contributing to academic success for students. First, I look at SEL, character development, and their combination into social emotional character development (SECD) as a means to service the whole child. Second, I examine three areas with the greatest hindrance to academic and whole child success: poverty, trauma, and adult beliefs. In this review, I provide a theoretical guide for addressing the whole child via social emotional programming that can be integrated into any educational community to promote the success of the whole child, including academic success.

SEL and SECD Servicing the Whole Child

Today's students face more obstacles, such as broken communities, and have a need for relevant skills to navigate a world that is becoming even more complex. In order for students to be prepared for the ever-changing world, they have to be taught the skills they need to be successful into adulthood. In 2006, Maurice Elias, Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University, along with fellow SEL researchers, used community and parent data to devise eight points children need to be successful in school and in the ever-changing world:

- Be fully literate and able to benefit from and make use of the power of written and spoken language, in various forms of media;
- Understand mathematics and science at levels that will prepare them for the world of the future and strengthen their ability to think critically, carefully, and creatively;

- Be good problem solvers;
- Take responsibility for their personal health and well-being;
- Develop effective social relationships, such as learning how to work in a group and how to understand and relate to others from different cultures and backgrounds;
- Be caring individuals with concern and respect for others;
- Understand how their society works and be prepared to take on the roles necessary for future progress; and
- Develop good character and make sound moral decisions.

Elias (2006) called these components “education of the whole child” (pp. 4-5). These components would eventually evolve into the foundation for SEL. Researchers concluded those in the educational community (i.e., educators, parents, legislators, and leaders within communities) needed these components to support a 21st century student.

However, the focus has been more on the academic component than the social emotional components though it has been shown that a lack of social emotional skills hinders academic performance (Trybus, 2015). Professor Jack Benninga, former Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of California, Fresno, and the 2012 recipient of the Sanford N. McDonnell Award for Lifetime Achievement in Character Education, indicated, in a 2013 interview, that character development, ethical behavior, and SEL have become casualties to the sole focus on increasing content knowledge. He articulated the belief that the application of knowledge is ethical and intellectual in that the same principles for teaching and learning to read and write, for example, can be used in making morally sound choices (Elias, 2014).

CASEL has emerged as a leader in the implementation of social emotional skills within schools. CASEL (2013) defines SEL as

the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (p. 4)

This definition was the result of input from various stakeholders in the child development field. CASEL was founded in 1994 by some of the same educational researchers. They wanted to explore the connection between emotional health and academic success. As one of the leading organizations in the field of social emotional learning and through nearly 25 years of SEL research, CASEL developed five core competencies that are instrumental in SEL implementation:

Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

Social awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and

ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others. (CASEL, 2013, p. 9)

Another component within SEL is character education. Kidron (2018) wrote, “Character education is the component of social and emotional learning that promotes core virtues, moral sensitivity, moral commitment, ethical reasoning, and personal growth aspirations” (para. 7). Character education is defined as an individual or group focused on deeply guarded beliefs or core values that are rooted in their ethical stand and compassion for right decision making. These deep-rooted values are ingrained in what an individual or group feels and thinks, and are represented in what they do (Character.org, n.d.). Character.org (n.d.) described its character education programing as based on 11 principles of character used throughout the country and internationally to help in the creation and embodiment of core values within a school or organization. These principles ensure the culture reflects the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the community while

being intentional in the pursuit of moral and ethical character development. This character education programming encourages self-motivation, involves families and communities as partners on the journey, and promotes shared leadership while using assessments to assess culture and climate, implementation, and continuous growth. The program provides ratings and offer suggestions for improvement for the organization in which they serve.

SEL and character education combine to form SECD. SEL promotes the acquisition of a set of skills regarding appropriate behaviors and character education complements SEL with its teaching of moral and performance character. Elias (2014) described this unification as follows: “SECD requires a combination of explicit skill instruction, clearly communicated values, a positive, safe, civil, supportive, and engaging culture and climate, and a coordinated developmental trajectory in which all these take place over time” (p .38). Schools of character provide, in addition to SEL, an approach that addresses the wide variety of needs of a community, school, and individual child. This includes specific skills and guided principles that service the whole child beyond, yet including, academics. Academics are not isolated but integrated. Dr. Marvin Berkowitz, world-renowned professor of character at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and author of over 90 publications on character, works with teachers and students to encourage the exploration and use of the character components within the core curriculum through authentic lessons that teach respect for others, self, and society as a whole (Berkowitz, 2008). The Child Development Project (CDP) is an example of such integration. This program is designed to encourage social, ethical, and intellectual development through educational core content exploration. Examples include a history

curriculum with a focus on human cruelty and a literature curriculum that centers on ethics. Values are not just taught but are rooted in understanding and responding appropriately to experiences (Schaps et al., 1993, p. 46).

SECD is used to teach students to navigate internal struggles while preparing them for an external multicultural and diverse world. There has been much discussion among researchers and within the educational community about the need and effectiveness of social emotional programs within the school setting but there is still a need for a whole school community approach in order to serve the whole child. This goes beyond the addition of an SEL curriculum to provide the foundation for pure fundamental SEL development in conjunction with the academic curriculum (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

ASCD is an organization that understands the coalition between academics and SEL that prepares the whole child (mentally, physically, emotionally, academically, culturally, etc.) for the continuously complex and changing world. ASCD promotes excellence in leadership, teaching, and learning. Its mission is to ensure educators have the tools to ensure every child is safe, supported, healthy, engaged, and challenged. The support for over 100,000 members across over 100 countries and their affiliation with over 60 like minded organizations is why ASCD created the Whole Child Initiative. The Whole Child Initiative came about in 2006, led by Dr. Gene Carter, then Executive Director at ASCD. Dr. Carter defined the mission of the Whole Child Initiative as,

to redefine the definition of a successful learner from one whose achievement is measured solely by academic tests to one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and

economic sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling. (Trybus, 2015, p. 6)

The overarching role of adults regarding the Whole Child Initiative was described by Slade and Griffith (2013) as follows: “ASCD’s whole child approach to education encourages administrators, policymakers, and educators to think more holistically and comprehensively about providing both academic and non-academic supports for students” (p. 22).

ASCD assesses the individual needs of a school, including the social emotional and character components, using a 50-indicator tool derived from its five whole child tenets (ASCD, n.d.) and Whole Child Framework (Griffith & Slade, 2018). Leaders of schools and communities can assess how well they are servicing students’ needs in reference to various areas of success:

- Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
- Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
- Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
- Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment. (ASCD, n.d., Whole Child Tenets section)

These whole child tenets embody the foundation of SEL and character education. They are designed to ensure the child understands how to live a healthy and long life, such as by making the right eating choices and understanding the effects of wrong choices on the body. They also support the development of personal character and moral decision making through an understanding of the self and others. The tenets are designed to ensure children know how to connect with people and their apparent differences from a place of acceptance while integrating academics, not as being superior over everyday needs, but as part of their overall growth and development as citizens. In fact, the social emotional and character development skills found in the whole child tenets help students focus more on academics because the external factors that cause distractions are more manageable by when students implement the skills taught within the tenets.

SEL and Poverty

The purpose of SEL is to support children and adults in making decisions, understanding and managing emotions, creating and accomplishing goals, demonstrating empathy, and forming and sustaining positive relationships (Durlak et al., 2011). The goal is for children to be able to navigate the obstacles set by life's circumstances that are often out of their control. One such area is low socioeconomic status, defined as being in the lowest economic and social position in reference to other persons or families in relation to income, education, occupation, and residency (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce, 2016). Poverty is a major socioeconomic issue within the United States, as of its 15 million children, 21% (3,150,000) live in families considered to be below the national poverty line (National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.).

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has identified negative changes that occur in the brains of children living in poverty (LeBlanc, 2016). Exposure to chronic stressors related to such things as overcrowding, parental absence due to having to work more than one job, noise, and closeness to violence affects students' ability to stay focused on academics and acquire language skills (LeBlanc, 2016).

McKenzie (2019) stated,

Stress causes our bodies to release a chemical called cortisol. The buildup of cortisol in our body results in sending weaker neuron signals to the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus. Both the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus are crucial for learning, cognition, and working memory. Recurring stress can result in shrinking of neurons in the frontal lobes of a child's brain. This area of the brain is responsible for the child's ability to make judgements, plan, and control impulsivity. (p. 22)

Children raised in poverty tend to face more short- and long-term obstacles. They tend to act out more in class and react impulsively as a result of chronic stress factors related to poverty that cause emotional and social struggles in and outside the classroom.

Homelessness is another component of poverty. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that children represent almost 25% of the homeless population, or roughly 2.5 million school-age students under the age of 18 years (Shankar-Brown, 2017). Students living in this level of poverty tend to have higher stress factors relating to their home atmosphere. They tend to live in neighborhoods prone to high levels of noise and violence. Their overall nutrition tends to be poor even to the point of overall hunger in some cases (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce,

2016). These factors increase their likelihood of unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and even suicide (Shankar-Brown, 2017). Researchers, when studying K–12 students, found an evident detachment of homeless students from their educational community that negatively affected their social emotional development. The students struggled to see the importance of education because it just was not important considering their current socioeconomic status and home environment (Shankar-Brown, 2017). These various conditions fall into the wide variety of concerns addressed with a whole child approach to SEL. These negative life circumstances have an immediate impact on a child’s ability to focus on academics (Trybus, 2015).

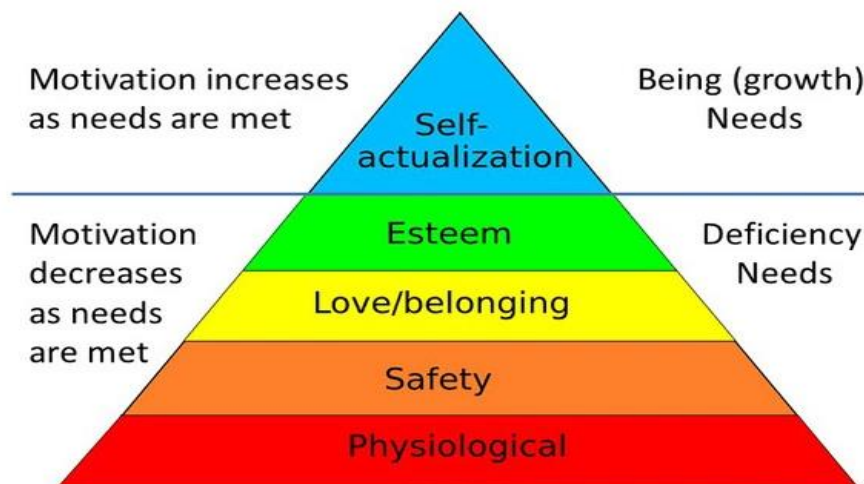
The Education & Workforce Development Taskforce (2016) presented a study by the Southern Education Foundation on poverty and education in which findings indicated numerous state policy-based efforts to reduce the stress factors associated with poverty-stricken families had little to no effect on these families. Studies have shown higher education can contribute to a less stressful, more healthy home environment (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce, 2016). Results of an Australian study conducted across 10 state schools with close to 200 participants showed the neighborhood played an influential role in whether or not students were motivated to continue their postsecondary pursuit of education (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce, 2016). Results also showed less impoverished neighborhoods often had higher levels of education and income, which brought about more resources and allowed for the possibility of more time and energy toward parental involvement. The late Dr. Jean Bethke Eishtain, former Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago and moral philosopher, political theorist, and theologian, described parenthood as an

ethical vocation. She believed the relationship between the parent and child provides an emotional importance that cannot be equaled by schools (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). Parental time spent encouraging students offsets the psychological and sociological obstacles of poverty on children academically (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). Though students experiencing some level of economic challenges seem to experience more challenges in their educational journey, Shankar-Brown (2017) reported “having to cope with numerous health problems and turbulent social issues puts students living in poverty and experiencing homelessness at an automatic disadvantage when it comes to educational achievement” (p. 82). Students want to be successful but are distracted by basic needs that take their focus from educational achievement.

Abraham Maslow, researcher and PhD in psychology who co-founded the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* in 1961 and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1969, created the hierarchy of needs based on his research of human motivation (McLeod, 2020). In his hierarchy of needs, he described two distinct groupings: deficiency needs and growth needs (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2020)



Maslow's hierarchy moves from physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem to the highest point of human motivation or the growth need, which is self-actualization. Maslow described the most basic level (i.e., physiological) as the need for food, water, warmth, and rest. Buck and Deutsch (2014) stated, "Merely working to exist is a struggle that many adults face when living in poverty" (p. 1141). These basic human needs are often every day uncertainties for those in poverty or who are homeless, especially school-age children. The stage just above but directly connected to the physiological stage is safety. This is the human need for security and to be safe from harm. According to Fredrick (2018), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported guns alone result in over 30,000 deaths per year in the United States, and most of these deaths occur in communities living at or below the poverty line. Maslow indicated that as the most basic needs (i.e., physiological and safety needs) are met, people tend to move up the list of needs toward growth/self-actualization or understanding personal potential and desiring personal growth. If we as educators are

going to see students meet their highest potential in life, we must address their most basic needs first. We must be equipped to navigate the many obstacles students face. Self-awareness and self-management are two of the five CASEL SEL framework areas that can make a difference for a child or family experiencing poverty. Self-awareness provides SEL strategies that help students identify with their emotions as they encounter stressors related to a lack of food, water, shelter, and even safety. It helps link these feelings to values and thoughts, which, in turn, allows for a positive growth mindset. This form of self-management provides a healthy outlet for negative behaviors that can stem from such stressful surroundings as homelessness and poverty. It also allows for the development of self-discipline, which promotes a healthy outlook on right and wrong behaviors. These help develop what are described as human strengths, as the main goal of character education is “to help students become ‘smart’ and ‘good’ or to develop in both intelligence and moral maturity” (Elias & Juan, 2020, p. 19). SEL and character education support the whole child approach to student growth and development.

The American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution convened a group of bipartisan experts who embarked on a plan to increase economic mobility and decrease poverty based on the use and implementation of the competencies found in SEL (CASEL, 2013). The plan consisted of a recommendation for SEL programs to be implemented as a crucial addition to the foundation of educating children. They felt previous efforts throughout the last 20 years or so have not emphasized the key components needed for education, family life, and employment, which are part of the core curriculum of SEL. The recommendation detailed state and federal execution of evidence-based SEL programs in PreK through Grade 12 and the development of SEL centers of excellence to

help serve the community and better support children from a whole child development approach (CASEL, 2013). In high poverty communities that have developed collaborative caring cultures where all stakeholders share the responsibility of using the whole child approach to address various forms of trauma, studies have shown success in terms of student overall growth (Anderson et al., 2015).

ASCD addressed poverty within education by releasing its three core modes model in 2016. The three modes were asking questions, using data, and building relationships. This model was designed for educators to have tools that would provide a level of understanding and equip them to look for and address signs of poverty and the traumatic symptoms that accompany it within the classroom setting (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce, 2016).

SEL and Trauma

The ASCD core modes for addressing poverty include asking questions, collecting and using data, and building relationships as a way of identifying signs that students have experienced some form of trauma (Education & Workforce Development Taskforce, 2016). Transforming Education (n.d.-b) defines trauma as,

an experience of one or more overwhelmingly stressful adverse events (or ACEs) where one's ability to cope is dramatically undermined. The event can be witnessed or experienced directly and can cause the person to have an extreme psychological and/or physiological response due to feeling terror and/or perceived helplessness. (p. 3)

Examples include, but are not limited to, exposure to loss, verbal or physical abuse, homelessness, and violence. Students who have been traumatized disassociate themselves

from the traumatic experience usually in the form of a violent outburst or disruptions. The disruptions can be a coping mechanism students use to isolate themselves from engaging the trauma again or even other people. Teachers often lack the proper training to recognize the signs or knowledge of the child's situation and diagnose this as defiant behavior and respond with redirection or punishment. This often serves as a retriggering of the traumatic memories (Anderson et al., 2015).

SEL and trauma-informed practices converge on many plains when it comes to servicing the needs of a child. They tend to differ when it comes to the depth of the stress exhibited by the child and the concentration of instruction needed to properly service the traumatized child. Experiences of violence and poverty are examples of possible childhood victimization but they only touch the surface of how much trauma students experience and the depth of the trauma tends to exceed just mere SEL implementation. The SEL support needs to be tailored to the specific needs of the traumatized individual. (Pawlo et al., 2019). The Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) approach offers one way of getting to the root of student trauma. Having its origin in analysis and providing intervention regarding individual behavior with developmental and intellectual disabilities, PBIS provides an intersection of SEL and character education. It facilitates teacher-led positive relationship building through a multi-tiered approach that can support individuals and groups in developing the skills needed to be resilient in their pursuit of persevering through their trauma (Elias & Juan, 2020).

A national developmental victimization survey of over 2,000 children and caregivers was conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice regarding past-year exposure to crime and violence. The caregivers serviced children under 10 years of age and the

other participants were between 10 and 17 years of age. The U.S. Department of Justice researchers wanted to narrow their focus to five specific categories of crime: traditional crime, which consisted of murder, theft, rape, and other forms; child maltreatment; sibling and peer victimization; witnessed and indirect victimization; and sexual assault. Of the participants, 70% indicated experiencing some form of victimization over the previous year. Younger victims experienced, on average, at least three different types of victimization all on different occasions. A total of 30% of those surveyed said they witnessed or were indirectly the victim of one of the forms of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

Another national survey conducted by researchers at the U.S. Department of Justice, whose research focuses on the various negative lasting effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or potentially traumatic experiences, contained a focus on the consequences of three distinct categories of household dysfunction, neglect, and abuse and the long-term effects associated with these categories. In collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente, the U.S. Department of Justice researchers found these forms of child mistreatment had long-term effects on victims, including depression, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, life threatening obesity, and other reoccurring adult diseases (Finkelhor et al., 2009).

In an effort to offset the long-term effects of ACEs, the Center on Developing Child at Harvard University created a holistic approach to child health care called HOPE (Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences). Sege and Harper Browne (2017) stated,

The HOPE framework focuses on the need to actively promote positive childhood experiences that contribute to healthy development and well-being, as well as

preventing or mitigating the effect of ACEs and other negative social determinants. A sole focus on either adverse or positive childhood experiences is not sufficient to achieve improved learning, behavior, and physical and mental health outcomes. (p. S80)

Researchers at the Center on Developing Child at Harvard University believe in the importance of the relational development of the child with regard to society, community, and the self. There is also a belief that child and parent health are inseparable when it comes to the health of the child and the family (Sege & Harper Browne, 2017),

This ACE research supports the need for SEL training and sensitivity to help educators determine the needs of students and provide them with the SEL relationship skills to communicate with others and the character development skills to continue to make morally sound decisions. These skills help in the development of healthy relationships with people who can help students manage their emotions related to the traumatic experience and respond appropriately to those people and experiences that may remind them of the trauma. These skills transcend the momentary trauma and are applicable in navigating the long-term effects of trauma by servicing not only the whole child but the whole adult.

The Transforming Education (n.d.-a) team is a group of educational leaders whose mission is to partner “with school systems and other education-focused organizations to support educators in fostering the development of the whole child so that all students, particularly those from underserved populations, can thrive” (para. 1). The group developed five key trauma-informed SEL practices:

- Create predictable routines.

- Build strong & supportive relationships.
- Empower students' agency.
- Support the development of self-regulation skills.
- Provide opportunities to explore individual and community identities

(Transforming Education, n.d.-b).

These five variations to the already existing SEL skills are designed as an extension to address the deeper effects of trauma. School leaders and educators have to create predictable routines that support victims of trauma who tend to have overwhelming emotions connected to high stress triggers related to their individual trauma. Routines help them adjust to moving forward in the acquisition of SEL skills and strategies despite the traumatic experience. This can lead to the ability to attempt the development of strong supportive relationships. These variations in SEL include equipping adults with the knowledge and sensitivity to help the traumatized child in this adjustment. An example is focusing on strengths versus areas in need of growth and providing traumatized students with opportunities for positive self-reflection to combat the rejection associated with trauma. Through these adjustments, students will develop the skills to cope with, adjust to, and counteract the effects of adversities while exploring their own identities and the perspectives of others through various tailored activities that promote agency and civic engagement. The child is provided with a positive school environment and an opportunity to heal through SEL, which helps support their personal health and academic progression (Transforming Education, n.d.-b).

As part of a positive school environment, studies have confirmed that a healthy child (mentally and physically) tends to have good attendance and better focus or

concentration in school (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Collaboration among the educational community, public health sectors, and the community can lead to better long-term health, academic success, and overall well-being for students into adulthood through changing the negative perspectives of how to support students (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

Teacher Beliefs: A Need for SEL

Teachers are the facilitators of students' social emotional development. SEL provides the training and tools to improve teachers' social emotional competence and to support student development of SEL skills and strategies. Teachers model control, emotional expression, and communication regarding SEL behaviors daily (Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016). Professors Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley of the Center for Ethical Education at the University of Notre Dame said, "Teachers mold certain forms of social life within classrooms, and influence students' experience of community and school membership. Moral values saturate the daily life of classrooms" (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008, p. 156).

Socially and emotionally competent teachers understand the responsibility they carry into each class day and acknowledge their own emotional well-being and its influence on students, colleagues, and families. They exhibit strong self-management skills and use their emotions positively to encourage others to learn, while keeping sight of their own personal strengths and flaws. Socially and emotionally competent teachers are also socially and culturally aware of those around them. They understand and respect differences in perspective and endeavor to create relationships that support collaboration and problem solving (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Patricia Jennings and Jennifer Frank of Pennsylvania State University believe teachers need social emotional competencies in order to be successful with 21st century education expectations. Teachers with high self-awareness recognize their own emotions and can motivate students to learn through joy and enthusiasm. Teachers with high social awareness understand how their own emotions and those of their students' affect one another. These teachers have also developed strong relationship-building skills through mutual understanding with their students, the consideration of multiple perspectives during conflicts, and the ability to skillfully resolve disputes (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers model the SEL skills they teach, which is an indicator of their belief in the SEL process.

The use of the emotional management skills demonstrated in the SEL program not only benefits the students but the teachers as well. With an overall expectation to provide continuous improvement in learning for all students, teachers' awareness of their own emotional state is crucial in the development and modeling of good character and problem solving to support academic success. When teachers are stressed, there is a direct effect on their students. Teachers and nurses ranked the highest of all occupational groups, closely followed by doctors, on a 2017 Gallup Poll on occupational stress (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Low job autonomy among teachers increased by 26% over an 8-year period between 2004 and 2012. Teacher stressors include limited resources, teacher job requirements, teacher capabilities, and not feeling support from administration (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). A survey of 10,000 first-grade students showed there was a direct correlation between teachers' high stress levels and students' mental health issues. When teachers are stressed, students experience the weight of their pressure-filled

position. These teachers were found to be lacking some of essential resources and skills that would support them in their navigation of students' emotions and everyday teaching. The result was students fighting, exhibiting low self-esteem, and having an inability to express their emotions.

Many teachers, both experienced and first year, have indicating feeling they were not properly trained on mental health identification and management in the classroom. A National Council of Teacher Quality examination of close to 80 higher education establishments across 33 states and 119 teacher preparation programs revealed 97% of the programs provided classroom management coursework but none of the programs used the most recent and most effective research-based strategies for classroom management (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In another example, Schonert-Reichl (2017) explored national researchers' use of the U.S. News & World Report 2012 top 50 graduate level education programs for teachers. She looked at coursework offered in four areas related to student mental health: social development, managing behavior, emotional development, and abuse and neglect. She found behavior management was offered the most at roughly 56% in some way or fashion in course descriptions. On the opposite end of the spectrum was emotional development courses only being offered 17% of the time. Lang et al. (2016) stated,

Educational programs or courses that emphasize child development theory and research or developmentally appropriate practices may foster teacher's more modern and democratic views of children, which in turn, help teachers respond to children's challenging social and emotional displays in a more sensitive way. (p. 73)

The lack of up-to-date research-based strategies and proper training on emotional development offers a limited number of resources for servicing the whole child.

In addition to the lack of up-to-date research-based preservice training, teachers in high poverty schools often feel the stress of neighborhood violence, limited resources, below average work conditions, and students who have not had Maslow's first two human motivators met (i.e., food, shelter and safety; Buck & Deutsch, 2014). There are also negative perspectives developed about low-income schools regarding teachers' low expectations for student learning (Considine & Zappalà, 2002). A longitudinal study showed private tuition-based schools systematically had higher scores compared to low-income schools and teachers had higher expectations for students (Considine & Zappalà, 2002). SEL training not only provides teachers with the skills to support students' social emotional needs, it also provides teachers with another perspective for looking at the various emotional issues that arise within a classroom and how to maintain and even promote academic and social emotional success.

Some teachers have even chosen to leave the profession because of the stress and dissatisfaction associated with the inability to navigate the emotional and behavior disruptions in their classrooms. One study showed 35% of teachers who left the profession left because they felt they did not have the skills to navigate the emotional disruptions, behavioral disruptions, and conflicts of students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This can be interpreted as teachers spending more time trying to find ways to stop the disruptive behavior without proper knowledge and training around the issues students were facing than on instructing students on academic content. This prolonged struggle to

understand and receive the training needed to support their students became too much to bear and relief was not evident (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

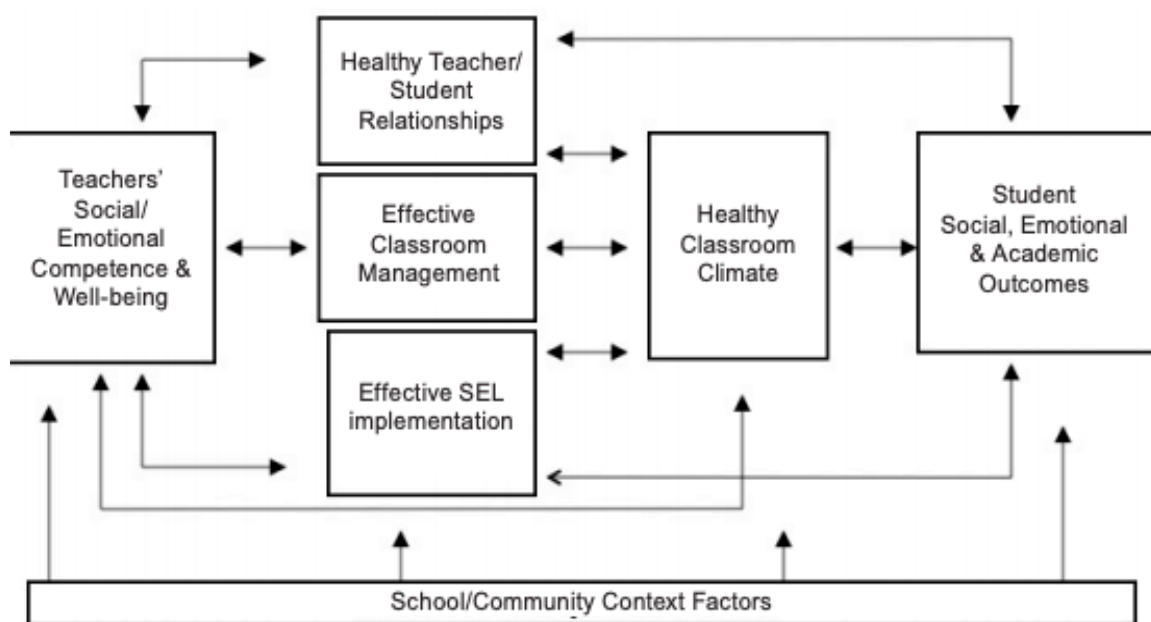
Leaders of higher education institutions are acknowledging the stress teachers are experiencing and are aiming to better equip teachers for the variety of emotional issues children bring to the learning environment. Leaders at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and San Jose State University have proposed to intentionally integrate SEL content into preservice courses for educators. The Center for Teaching the Whole Child at San Jose State has included SEL in its core courses, including the creation of a SEL observation tool for feedback and support around the use and implementation of SEL. The faculty of education at the UBC has created an SEL cohort within its year-long post baccalaureate teaching program as an option for all education students. The goal was to prepare teachers for the variety of classroom behaviors by providing them with the SEL skills they need to be successful and establishing their belief in the process of SEL.

Research has linked teacher beliefs within the classroom setting and their ability to ineffectively or effectively implement SEL within their classrooms (Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016). The emotion socialization practices of teachers, such as characterizing all students with the same problem, can hinder SEL implementation and student success. If a teacher is not sensitive to students' emotional condition or involved in students' emotional well-being, then the students will most likely show little improvement as far as their social competencies. Students will also internalize their emotions more and exhibit outward manifestations of their inner emotional conflict. This will lead to class disruption, work interruption, and a lack of academic stability (Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016).

Figure 2 shows the ideal map leading to positive social emotional and academic outcomes. This prosocial classroom model starts with the socially emotionally competent teacher. If the teacher is able to use SEL skills to manage their emotions and keep a healthy stress-free perspective, then they will create systems to effectively manage their classroom through building relationships, creating agency, and implementing the SEL skills students need to be successful. This creates a healthy classroom environment for all stakeholders and students and teachers are able to transfer these skills outside the classroom to their families and communities (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Figure 2

Prosocial Classroom Model (Schonert-Reichl, 2017)



Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many factors that hinder students from experiencing academic success. Leaders and educators within many schools and organizations have adopted the SEL approach to address the need to support the whole child. SEL skills

prepare students to compete socially and academically and provide teachers with the training and skills they need to have confidence in their classroom management abilities.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Research Design Overview

To determine the effectiveness and specific needs of an SEL program, an overall evaluation of the climate and stakeholders must take place. First, there must be a determination of implementation. Then, if there are components that are not active or if the program was not implemented, it is important to ensure the nature of the program is understood by those responsible for its implementation. Organizational failure, in most cases, is the result of a lack of execution and completion of plans (Patton, 2008). In order to ensure SEL is properly evaluated, I created questions for staff with the hope of understanding the nature of the program. Knowing the politics in operation helps an evaluator gather information that can be used in the creation of proper questions that will be essential in the program's adaptation and improvement. First, quantitative data were organized and analyzed for basic patterns and translated into user friendly language. Second, data were interpreted to determine their meaning and significance in reference to SEL and academic performance. The analysis and interpretations were then formulated into a judgment of the findings with recommendations for a specific design that fully uses SEL to benefit PreK–Grade 8 students as they navigate life and school. These recommendations will support continued academic success while answering the leading questions of this research.

The leading questions for this study were: How do schools implement an SEL-centered lens when preparing students for social and academic life? How do we address the SEL needs of students who may be entrenched in or be the product of high

poverty/high crime areas as well as those who just may need help handling life's transitions? I believe there has been a disconnect from the individuality of students, schools, and communities when it comes to SEL design and implementation. This study involved an analysis of school climate and staff perspectives to determine the best course of design for SEL that would support the whole child approach (i.e., academic, emotional, and character development) goals of a school and students. I believe such things as personal beliefs, levels of trauma, and economic status have been overlooked in the design of SEL programs. I conducted this holistic root cause analysis to help expose the need for specific personal design and individual accommodations.

Participants

The participants were administrators, teachers, and staff of D2SEL. The administrators were chosen because of their role as overseers and their responsibility in the implementation process. When evaluating the possible root causes of implementation inconsistencies using the mindsets and beliefs of stakeholders, it is important to start with those in charge. Teachers were chosen because they have direct contact with students and are directly responsible for any form of SEL implementation. There were 10 possible teacher responses to the survey. As with the administrators, it is important to understand or reveal any possible biases for a true evaluation of implementation and its effects on academic learning. I believe other staff members are vital as well in that they have more of an observer view of the everyday interactions within the school environment. In the pursuit of SEL implementation and its effectiveness in academic performance, it is important to consider all stakeholders and their views of the school, beliefs, and perspectives because of the effects they may have on our children. My hope was that this

study would reveal the need to properly consider the various stakeholders in reference to SEL, reveal any possible hindrances to student social and academic success, and enable me to properly formulate this information into a tailor-made plan for SEL and academic success for all students at D2SEL.

Data Gathering

I collected data using a Culture and Climate Survey (Appendix A) to assess the social emotional needs of students and staff at D2SEL. The survey contained three sections: school climate, student needs, and teacher/staff perspective. I used the section topics and questions from School-Connect.net to help tailor my specific survey. Questions were chosen based on their relevancy to assessing the social emotional needs of D2SEL. The responses were also revised and ‘No responses’ was added as a category. The number of questions varied within each equaling roughly 50 questions in all. The focus in the survey was on various aspects of the current culture, including behavior expectations, establishment of schoolwide expectations and professional development (PD), and overall buy-in to any behavior or SEL plans and their implementation status. The purpose was to assess the current status of the culture the SEL program was designed to support or change. I reviewed various forms of data such as SEL implementation monitoring and discipline referrals.

Ethical Considerations

To adhere to ethical guidelines, the surveys remained anonymous. Participants had the option to not take the survey if desired. They were informed that the information was being collected to help in the support of school culture. Interested participants signed an informed consent. It was explained that their personal identity would not be used in

this research nor would there be any direct connection to their consent or their anonymous survey. All information collected was securely kept without identification marking.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data from the Culture and Climate Survey. The school-based data were used to support the development or refining of SEL practices within D2SEL. Academic components of the surveys were used to determine knowledge, alignment, and actual implementation of SEL and factors of SEL implementation that have a direct or indirect effect on school culture and purpose. In my analysis of the survey data, I explored areas of strength, need, and concern. The data may reflect hidden gems in reference to components that may propel the program into a more advanced implementation and support process to address a broader range of SEL support. Either way, the data served as a snapshot of the culture, staff, and students at D2SEL.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to discover the possible hindrances to SEL implementation and how to best support behavior and academic performance within an elementary school. In order to explore these areas, it was important to gain insight from all stakeholders involved in the program's implementation and success. Participants needed to be protected and feel comfortable with sharing vital information. The data needed to be organized, analyzed, and translated into language suitable for all participants to understand. Final determinations and recommendations needed to be collectively derived from the findings in order to properly design culture-based SEL programming,

provide adequate support, and monitor implementation focused on social and academic success for elementary school students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Findings

In this section, I explore the four areas of change in the form of the 4Cs: context, culture, competencies, and conditions (Wagner et al., 2005). I used the 4Cs to examine areas in which to implement systematic changes to support improvements in teaching and learning. Wagner et al.'s (2005) 4Cs enable an examination of the current state or "As Is" perspective and the transformation to the "To Be" perspective, or how the current state of a district or school can be improved.

The "As Is" approach provided an opportunity to assess the current status of SEL programming at D2SEL. To collect the data for this assessment, I administered a 52-question survey that required participants to circle the answer that best reflected their current position or knowledge of the question provided. Eleven of the 19 staff members at D2SEL took the overall survey (Appendix A). The survey consisted of three parts: assessing school climate, student needs, and teacher/staff perspective. The school climate section responses ranged from "very," meaning more than the best possible response provided, to "no" or "not/not at all," meaning the imposed question focus was not present at all. The answers representing "not less" than and "not more" than were based on the main topic of the question, which was represented by the specific focus adjective in a specific survey question. The adjectives used in this section were positive, supportive, enthusiastic, and respectful. For example, if the question read, "How positive are the attitudes of your colleagues?" then some answer choices were not positive, very little positivity, some positivity, positive (exactly the focus), or very positive (more than just

positive but overly positive). The word “exactly” is represented in the data charts as meaning the exact adjective, not less than or more than, because the adjective varied based on the question (Appendix A).

The student section of the survey focused on how well students display the various skills taught at D2SEL. Each question focused on a specific skill. Skills were represented in such questions as “How effective are students at getting along with others?” and “How effective are students at making safe and smart decisions?” Participant choices ranged from “not effective” to “very effective.” The final section, teacher/staff perspective, allowed teachers to assess their own comfortability, confidence, and effectiveness in various work-related topics. Again, the range, for example, would be from “not comfortable” to “very comfortable” with “comfortable,” in this case, being represented in the data chart as “exactly.” The option to choose “No Response” was also available to participants. The primary focus in this chapter is on the results of this three-part survey as a guide to understanding the current use of SEL at D2SEL.

Contexts

Wagner et al. (2005) defined context as “skill demands all students must meet to succeed as providers, learners and citizens and the particular aspirations, needs, and concerns of the families and community that the school or district serves” (p. 104). D2SEL is a state-recognized non-public school with over 40 years serving students from preschool to eighth grade in a small suburb of the City of Chicago. The D2SEL neighborhood pales in comparison in terms of size to its much larger counterpart of Chicago and neighborhoods like the one in which NS School is housed. Over its 40 plus years of providing education, D2SEL has transitioned to 99% African American though

the suburban city in which it is located has demographics of roughly 47% White, 35% Latino, and only 16% African American. African Americans make up the majority of the individual group poverty rate at 40% despite having the smallest demographic. Latinos make up 26% and Whites make up the remaining 20% of the D2SEL residents. Leaders at D2SEL, based on my personal experience and interactions, strive to maintain relevance in their pursuit of connecting to the needs of the community. In addition to providing students an education, D2SEL's leaders believe strongly in instilling the components needed for students to be successful in life, which are entrenched in the school goal of providing a safe and child-centered environment with a focus on spiritual and character development as well as excellence in education. D2SEL intertwines SEL training and character development skills with teaching centered on students' ability to make good and morally sound decisions and focus on treating others the way they should be treated and having respect for authority and classmates. This includes social and critical thinking skills and conflict resolution, all while cultivating unity in purpose, trusting relationships, and community relations. All are characteristics of SEL and character education.

As a tuition-based school, D2SEL encountered a significant decline in enrollment since the 2008 financial crisis. D2SEL lost one fifth of its population each of the first 3 years following the crisis and an average of 11 students every year, leading to the current population of roughly 150 students. Even though there was a decrease in overall enrollment, there was an increase in the number of students transitioning from Chicago in response to escalating gun violence and other violent acts. I also discovered in my interactions with staff that public school parents were opting for smaller, more character focused environments to help address the emotional or behavioral challenges exhibited

by students in response to the trials of living in inner city Chicago. Because D2SEL was built on the character and moral values of Christianity, many Christian and non-Christian families found D2SEL to be a great place to not only educate students but help them develop the skills needed to be productive citizens. With these transitions, D2SEL experienced more serious behavioral disruptions, especially from students transferring from the surrounding public schools. Parents were concerned about these classroom disruptions and were in need of skills to support the different emotional behaviors of their students. D2SEL's leader understood the need for more students to enroll in the school district and the importance of maintaining an environment that is conducive for learning. This meant acquiring the skills needed to teach all stakeholders to support the social, emotional, and behavioral concerns of students. These external challenges have had an internal effect as the desire to educate and equip students for life may cause D2SEL's leaders to revisit their approach and the implementation of state-mandated SEL.

Culture

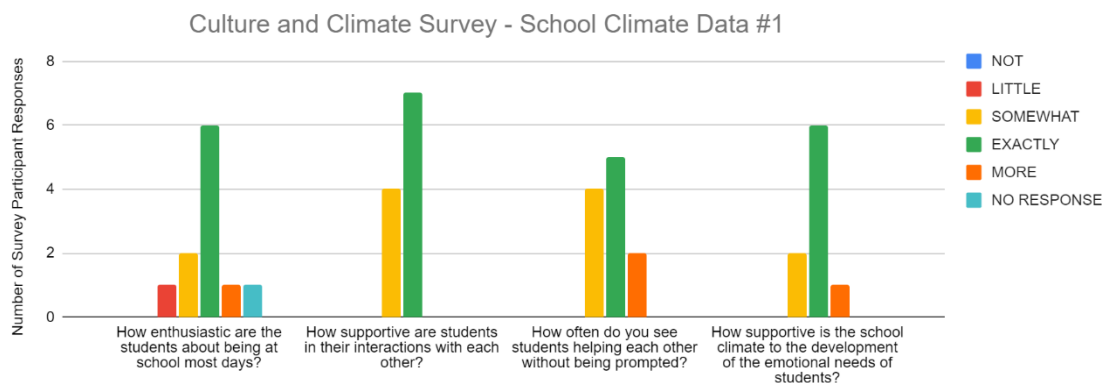
D2SEL appears to have a culture of isolation (Appendix B). Wagner et al. (2005) described culture as "the invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout a system" (p. 102). Many teachers and staff have worked at the school for many years and seen the demographic and economic transitions. At some point, this experience may have evolved into a belief that experience (i.e., the amount of time teaching) alone was enough to categorize one as an expert in teaching and learning. A belief that continual learning is not a necessity also emerged as a possible perception among teachers and staff. Teachers have an average of 10 years of experience but the majority of teachers have not pursued additional certification and, in some cases, have

only taken the required course to maintain their teaching certificate. I am unsure whether they are even conscious that their conversations and actions may send the message that continual learning is not important. Based on my personal experience, this could be the result of there being no evidence of administrative requirements for personal and institutional professional growth.

The National School Climate Center (n.d.) defines school climate as the character and quality of school life based on patterns displayed by students, parents, and school personnel. It reflects norms, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and structures within the school (National School Climate Center, n.d.). Figure 3 presents responses to survey questions with a focus on how staff believe students feel about school and one another.

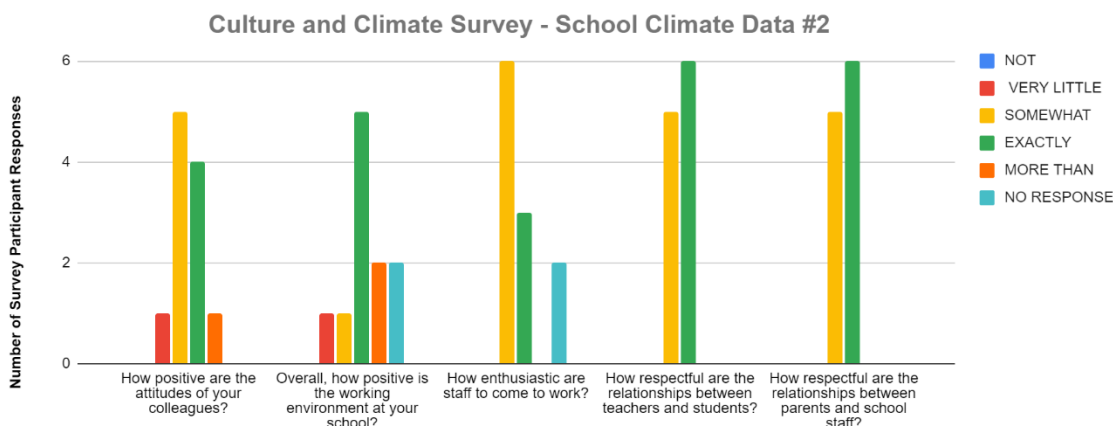
Figure 3

Culture and Climate Survey – School Climate Data #1



The first question related to how enthusiastic students are about being at school most days and 64% of the respondents said they believed students enjoy coming to school, which indicates the overall culture has qualities students enjoy and of which they want to be a part. This is supported by the next two questions that related to students' interactions

with one another. One question asked respondents how supportive students are in their interactions with each other. Supportive is defined as providing encouragement and emotional help (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Again, 64% of the respondents believed students encourage and support one another at D2SEL, whereas 36%, or the remainder of the respondents, believed there is some level of student-to-student support exhibited. The third question related to whether staff believe students are showing this support for one another without prompting. The results aligned with those for the first two questions in that the majority believed the helpful perspective of the students is of their own doing without prompting or persuasion. The fact that students want to come to school and that their interactions with one another are genuinely caring is indicative of a climate in which the emotional needs of students can be nurtured and developed. Responses to the final question included in Figure 3 support this climate and educational environment where, with intention, the individual social emotional needs of students can be nurtured and developed to support all students at D2SEL. The data in Figure 3 show the climate among students is good, though Figure 4, which presents responses to questions with a focus on teachers and staff, shows something different.

Figure 4*Culture and Climate Survey – School Climate Data #2*

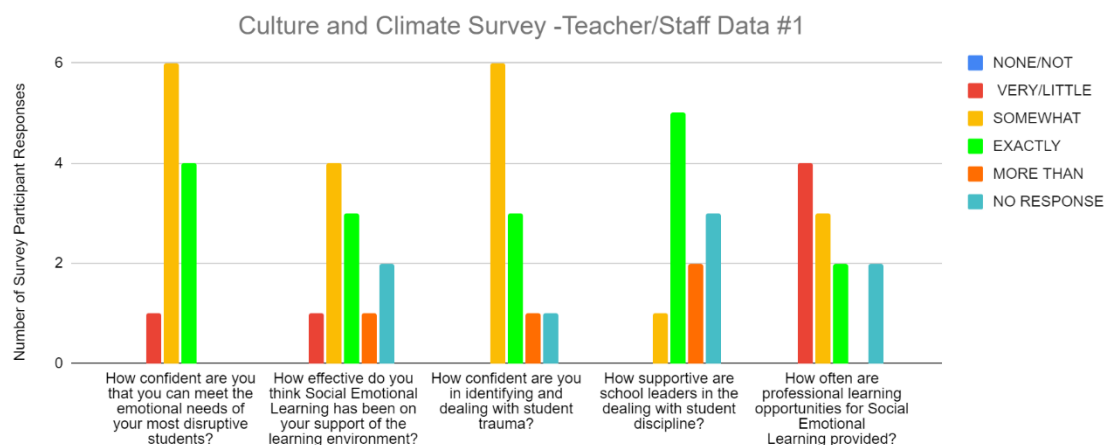
Concerns arise in the examination of teacher responses regarding staff interpersonal and personal relationships. The questions presented in Figure 4 focus more on the adult components of the environment versus the students. When looking at attitudes toward colleagues within D2SEL, over 50% (6 of 11) of the respondents perceive interaction to be only somewhat positive. One participant even indicated there is very little positivity about colleagues' attitudes. An attitude is defined as a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). When asked how enthusiastic staff are about coming to work, six of nine responses indicated staff are somewhat enthusiastic about coming to work. Two participants decided not to respond to the question. Considering this was one of the only questions within the entire survey to have a majority of participants indicate more "somewhat" than "exactly" or a majority, I wonder whether no response was a silent way of staying neutral in an area considered to reflect the leadership within the school and staff relations. It is important here to remember the majority of staff have at least 10 years at D2SEL. The fact that when staff were asked about relationships with

parents and relationships with students, a majority (6 of 11) for each question indicated the interactions are respectful and the remainder of respondents, again for both questions, said they are somewhat respectful could be interpreted as work relationship concerns among staff. There were no outliers that fell far below or far above. It is safe to imply that relationships are overall respectful between these two parties and staff. This shifts the focus primarily to the relationships of staff within the school work environment. What seemed to emerge is a contradiction between the environment described in relation to students versus the environment developed among staff. The response could be understood as a disconnection between administration and staff regarding defined expectations and PD or a lack of leadership and team building. The question posed in Figure 4 regarding the overall positivity of the school work environment showed most (7 of 11) indicated it was positive. Further examination of the question showed there is a clear difference in the overall work environment, which includes the interactions with parents and students, who look forward to school and exhibit some level of helpful and supportive interactions with fellow students versus the perceived interpersonal interactions of staff who have weathered the storm of a financial downturn. SEL can challenge adults to reflect on their work and their ability to collaborate to support the development of a culture of continuous learning.

Conditions

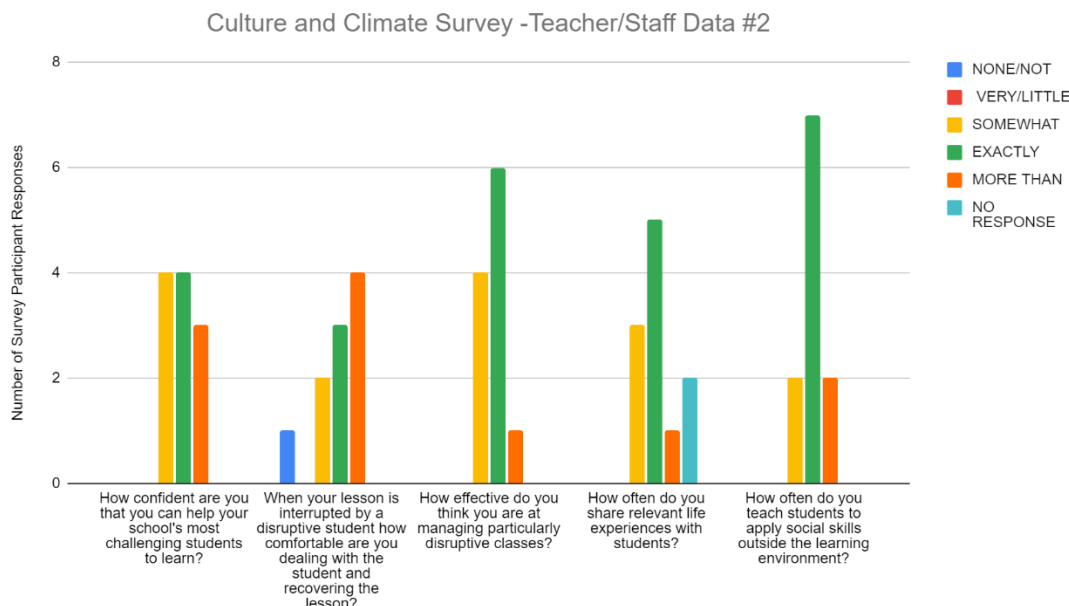
Wagner et al. (2005) indicated conditions are “the visible arrangements and allocations of time, space and money” (p. 102). D2SEL depends on tuition from parents to support the learning environment provided for students. During my interactions, I learned that the school receives limited to no federal and state resources. In light of the

2007–2008 financial crisis and the continual decline in enrollment, funds have been limited and staff have felt the effects within the school learning environment, as there have been pay cuts, decreased staff, and limited resources. Figure 5 shows a lack of schoolwide focus on PD to support teachers and staff in meeting the social emotional needs of students. One question in Figure 5 related to SEL PD opportunities. Only two of the 11 participants felt they had exposure to SEL opportunities. Four indicated very little opportunity was provided, three indicated some opportunity, and two did not respond. This question regarding SEL opportunity had the most negative response to any question on the survey. As mentioned previously and especially when looking at the pattern of “no responses” in a specific section of questioning, I found no consistent pattern of “no responses” even within somewhat related questions. In other words, the “no response” could be interpreted as an area in which a participant was either unsure or possibly did not want to respond to because of what may be perceived as an oppositional position to policy or leaders. Either way, it could be comprehended as limited to no clear SEL opportunities.

Figure 5*Culture and Climate Survey – Teacher/Staff Data #1*

There is room for misconception based on limited knowledge of the lack of PD on SEL and its relationship to student disciplinary disruptions. This is clearly seen when comparing the questions found in Figure 6 to other questions in Figure 5. For example, when asked in Figure 5 about their confidence in meeting the emotional needs of disruptive students, an overwhelming majority (7 of 11) felt some level of uncertainty, which was in contrast to a similar Figure 6 question. The Figure 6 question related to staff's comfort in dealing with a disruptive student and recovering the class lesson after the disruption and another similar question asked how effective staff are at managing particularly disruptive classes. In both Figure 6 questions, an overwhelming seven of 11, including four within the seven who were "more than," were comfortable dealing with and recovering a lesson after a disruption. Yet, in referencing the lack of confidence in addressing social emotional needs, Figure 5's question showed a disconnection between behavioral disruptions and their importance to the long-term success of the students and classroom. It appears to be a perceived separation between disruptive behavior and

emotional need when that is more than likely not the case. The emotional need is usually the root cause of the disruptive behavior. Without root cause discovery, teachers address the surface manifestation, leaving the likelihood of repeated and even worse future behavior. This perceived confidence in the ability to quickly recover can indicate a deviation from traditional classroom management responsibility that requires an understanding of social emotional needs and disruptive behavior intervention based on my experience as a principal. The confidence could be more dependent on the ability to call for support, or even having the disruptive student removed, more than actually dealing with or attempting to solve the problem behind the disruptive behavior. This condition in theory is supported by another question in Figure 6 that asked how supportive school leaders are in dealing with discipline. Participants overwhelmingly (7 of 11) believed school leaders are supportive in disciplinary dealings with two of the seven indicating they are more than just supportive. This could support the disruptive behaviors being passed on to school leaders due to the lack of PD opportunity to learn about root causes of disruptive behavior and their connection to the social emotional needs of students.

Figure 6*Culture and Climate Survey – Teacher/Staff Data #2*

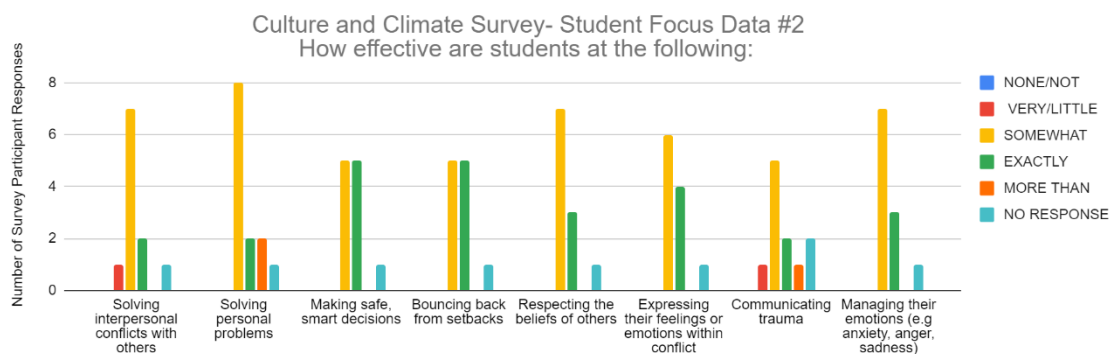
When asked in Figure 5 about the effectiveness of SEL as a support for the learning environment, four of 11 felt there is some level of support. Two did not respond. Again, this could be interpreted as lackluster conditions regarding the social emotional needs of students. It also shows the possible ignorance toward the coalition of social emotional and social skills in general as indicated in one Figure 6 question that asked how often staff teach students to apply social skills outside the learning environment. Here, nine of the 11 participants indicated they teach students to apply social skills outside the learning environment. The question remains whether it is being taught or not and if it is being taught a majority feel it does not support the learning environment.

Competencies

Wagner et al. (2005) described competencies as “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 102). D2SEL has dedicated teachers who

have shown, by their actions, a high level of commitment to the school. However, the limited knowledge of established expectations and procedures or PD by the administrators could be seen as a hindrance to the implementation of SEL or any worthwhile program. Even with knowledge of SEL or some level of implementation, there is still no clear allotted time, program, or plan for SEL based on my interactions. It is unclear what teachers really know or how to support their implementation of SEL instructional practices.

When evaluating student skill, Figures 7 and 8 show the student decision-making process, which may help fill in the gaps of what is possibly taught to students regarding social emotional skills. The assumption of skills being taught is based on the application of social skills outside the learning environment question found in a Figure 6 in which nine of the 11 participants said social skill application is taught often to students. Figure 7 seems to present a level of uncertainty among staff about some of the personal and interpersonal decision-making skills students have acquired. There were eight social emotional questions asked that are represented in Figure 7. These questions related to students' ability to solve personal and interpersonal problems and their ability to bounce back when they experience setbacks. Questions also covered their effectiveness in making safe and smart decisions, respecting the beliefs of others, and expressing and managing their emotions when experiencing a problem or conflict. For these eight questions, no participant indicated having students with high social skills. In fact, the average of all eight questions had at least seven of the 11 participants indicating students being "somewhat" able to apply SEL skills. This could be perceived as staff's uncertainty of what students have been taught or know about SEL skill application.

Figure 7*Culture and Climate Survey – Student Focus Data #2*

When it came to the following of school and classroom rules and procedures, the averages of those questions were just the opposite of the SEL questions. This shows students have the ability to apply the taught rules and procedures. One of the questions regarding rules and procedures was related to the application of these skills in real life. Here, participants felt students “somewhat” apply these skills in real life and are not confident in their application of these skills. Three participants decided not to answer, which can be interpreted as not knowing the answer or as indicating a lack of teaching of the skills in question. This question was the only one with expected application outside the learning environment of skills taught and applied in the learning environment. The question of whether there is a clear understanding of how to teach life application of skills, especially social emotional application, to students remains unanswered.

When comparing this result with the question in Figure 6 regarding the teaching of social skills outside the learning environment, again nine of the 11 participants indicated they teach social skills to students in contradiction to the Figure 7 question results that could be understood as an overall lack of social skill application of students within the eight SEL questions. This contradiction could be perceived as the uncertainty

of participants about the coalition between social skills and SEL. It is also safe to say there may be a disconnect between teaching everyday life application of social skills and how to effectively assess and evaluate students' use of these skills. This, in turn, supports the need for skill training or PD for staff on how to teach students the skills needed to apply and navigate life's challenges in and outside the learning environment.

Figure 8

Culture and Climate Survey – Student Focus Data #3

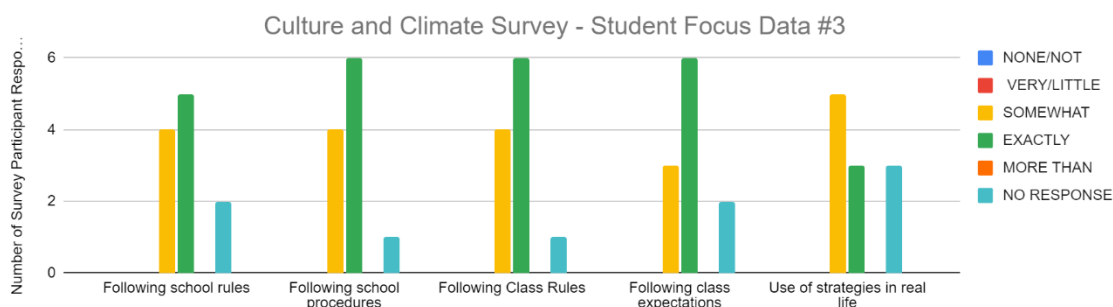


Figure 8 questions regarding school and classroom expectations, rules, and procedures can be interpreted as students' ability to understand what is presented, taught, and expected in the school or classroom and their inability to transition these skills effectively in the situations that involve their emotions, personal experiences like trauma, or communicating what they are feeling in order to find overall success in academic and in life. This lack of effective transitioning of skills is represented in the difference in responses between the first four questions and the last question of Figure 8. The difference in response is reflected in the "somewhat," "exactly," and "no response" changes. The fifth question, "Use of strategies in real life," has more "no response" and "somewhat" responses than the other four questions, which could be interpreted as doubt in students' ability to transition the skills exhibited in school to real life. I've learned as a principal that without trained teachers and taught skills, the social emotional need for this

internal navigation of external circumstances will cause students to miss out on the academic skills taught in the learning environment.

Interpretation

My analysis of D2SEL and teachers' use of SEL skills using the Wagner et al. (2005) framework revealed an unclear understanding on the part of teachers and staff of what SEL is and how to teach such skills to students for everyday life application. It could be interpreted that staff at D2SEL, including school leadership, have not had training on SEL and do not understand its connection to servicing disruptive students. Therefore, because there is a school environment with some character and SEL skills embedded in its creation and foundation, staff interpret that as having the necessary skills to teach students character and SEL application.

Judgments

In revisiting my research questions regarding how schools implement an SEL-centered lens to support social and academic development and addressing high needs students, I conclude that if school leadership is not investing in the training and continual PD of teachers, then the competencies needed to teach students to apply SEL skills in and beyond the school environment will be unclear and unproductive. The end result will be unmet social and academic needs. D2SEL's leaders and staff have not embraced SEL as providing students with life skills that support the individual student and overall learning environment emotionally and academically. Though there are indicators of character and SEL teaching, there are no indicators of student understanding or clear and consistent application. Based on my personal experience, social skill teaching appears to be based

on unspoken expectations rooted in what is embedded in the school's values without implementation, training, or follow up. Emotional skills seem to be absent.

Recommendations

Overall, the expectations within D2SEL for students and staff regarding SEL are unclear. What is needed is a clear and detailed connection between what is valued as a school and SEL best practices. Staff need to have a clear understanding of the Illinois SEL Standards, a clearly outlined SEL program, and clear definitions of roles and responsibilities regarding disciplinary procedures that support student application of SEL skills.

CHAPTER FIVE

To-Be Framework

The overall assessment based on Wagner et al.'s (2005) 4Cs indicates the context of continual external negative factors, over time, contributed to a culture of mere existence minus drive and student focus (Appendix C). There was a lack of adequate knowledge by all staff members on the fundamentals of student achievement with an emphasis on administration's lack of structure, procedures, and accountability. In the end, the conditions were not suitable for the implementation of SEL, the continuous improvement of instructional practices, or whole child (i.e., character, social emotional and academic) growth. Wagner et al. also asked the essential question: What would success look like if the problems identified in your "As Is" were solved? In my "To Be" portion, I present not only a plan for the implementation of SEL that supports teachers, students, and parents but also the development of best practice-based structures and procedures that will build and sustain academic success at D2SEL.

Context

As a school founded on the development of character and a desire to reach every student, it is crucial that clear procedures are put in place to academically and socially support all students transitioning to and currently enrolled in D2SEL. Not just because it is the morally sound thing to do but also because parents are investing their money in the D2SEL learning environment. They believe the founding principles and goals, in addition to the more intimate environment, will help their students develop socially and achieve academically.

This academic and emotional support will consist of a transition team whose responsibility will be to ensure students and parents understand D2SEL and D2SEL leaders and staff understand the students and their families. This team will be trained in SEL and be ready to support students beyond just their initial transfer. This academic and emotional support will be based on clear SEL structures and procedures based on best practices provided by CASEL through videos, blogs, and articles for parents on fostering social and emotional skills, including, but not limited to, kindness, gratitude, and persistence. To ensure consistent support to students and parents, the SEL team will provide parent and student quarterly workshops at the school which, in addition to the curriculum integration of SEL, will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to learn about and experience emotional and academic support.

Culture

D2SEL will have a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders centered on the success of all students. This collaboration will lead to clear and agreed upon core values reflective of the various stakeholders and exhibited in their daily decisions, conversations, and actions all being aligned with the fundamental truths upon which the school was founded. This will establish and redirect time and efforts toward continual school improvement, including the development of and integration of SEL into distinct priorities. From these priorities, there will be established roles and responsibilities, clear expectations, and a culture of accountability for academic and social emotional success for students by all D2SEL staff. This includes SEL as a support for classroom management. All staff will see themselves as lifelong learners, desiring, inquiring about, and collaborating on continued PD on such things as data analysis and

utilization, implementation monitoring and feedback, and strategic long-term planning. The desire for improvement and the implementation of best practices will become an unspoken yet demonstrated expectation.

Conditions

D2SEL will have conditions conducive for the continual learning of students and adults. The district and school leaders will budget and plan for ongoing PD and the acquisition of materials needed for the successful implementation of SEL and instructional support. Schedules will incorporate cross grade-level collaboration time with SEL minutes included in the agenda. The school disciplinary policy will be taught to all staff and implemented consistently. An SEL team consisting of various school stakeholders and referral systems will be created and will meet biweekly to support teachers using academic, disciplinary, and referral data to make informed decisions to support social and academic growth. This will help counter any inappropriate behavior and promote a wide range of supports for positive behavior (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). External coaches will be brought in once a quarter to provide PD for instruction and SEL. Internal leads will be trained and provide in-house monthly PD with grade-level check ins and scheduled informal observations with feedback geared toward support and growth. Administration will monitor the PD and provide coaching, both formally and informally.

Competencies

School leaders will be highly trained in the strategic planning needed to support continual SEL and academic improvement. This will include understanding structures, procedures, and systems that support the everyday functioning of the school. The

development of teams and team leaders who can be trained to maintain and develop grade-level and departmental systems that support the academic environment will be part of the strategic training plan. They will understand the importance of data and how to collect, analyze, and use data for strategic planning and next steps both in groups and schoolwide. This will include SEL, discipline, academic, attendance, and other data. These leaders will use current best practices in the development or acquisition of an evaluation system that can support teachers with area specific timely feedback and follow up. The leaders will be trained in the SEL implementation process and ensure staff is trained in these same procedures. They will develop a system of internal accountability for SEL and other academic supports and processes.

All D2SEL staff will be able to speak as experts on all SEL and academic implementation. They will support one another through collaborative program specific meetings with set goals, action steps, next steps, timelines, and progress monitoring. The results of these steps will be students who are able to develop healthy relationships, make sound decisions, set and achieve goals, and navigate the many challenges of life with the tools acquired in the SEL culture developed at D2SEL. It all starts with leadership embracing SEL. Wagner et al. (2005) said, “Leaders began to promote and model strong normative culture of respect, trust and accountability for learning” (p. 111). D2SEL’s leadership will establish themselves as change agents and advocates for student success.

Conclusion

Overall, staff and administration at D2SEL have not fully embraced SEL as a schoolwide practice. They do not have a clear understanding of SEL or a clear plan for its implementation. Wagner et al.’s (2005) 4Cs “To Be” helped paint a picture of what

D2SEL will look like with the proper implementation of SEL. The analysis of the survey data collected from staff provided a pattern for laying a clear foundation for SEL-centered change at D2SEL that will counteract the current “As Is.” In the next section, I present strategies to develop this clear and structured systematic foundation at D2SEL that will promote SEL skills to support students and staff in their pursuit of social and academic success.

CHAPTER SIX

Strategies and Actions

The implementation of an SEL program that is an integral part of overall learning establishes an environment that supports the development of the whole child. ASCD (n.d.) indicated, “A whole child approach to education will develop and prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of today and tomorrow by addressing students’ comprehensive needs through the shared responsibility of students, families, schools, and communities” (The ASCD Whole Child Approach section, para. 1). SEL structures need to be established to equip and support staff and other stakeholders with strategies to best serve all students, including those who may have been experiencing some form of emotional difficulty. In order to lay this foundation for SEL and the whole child development approach, I detail six strategies as presented in my Strategies in Action Chart (Appendix D).

Strategies and Actions

First, leaders of D2SEL must establish and prioritize an SEL program. In choosing the program that best fits the needs of D2SEL, it will be important to conduct a stakeholder SEL needs assessment. Various surveys can be used to assess mindsets, skills, attitudes, and feelings within different situations and settings. Results will provide an overview that can be applied to the various tools and resources that will support the emotional well-being of all students. It is important to survey the other stakeholders (i.e., staff, parents, and even community members) in order to help students apply skills to everyday life and to equip all stakeholders in their efforts to support students (CASEL, 2019). The stakeholder survey results can be used to determine the best SEL program and

curriculum to service the needs of D2SEL students and families. D2SEL leaders must also prioritize funding for SEL. As a private tuition-based school that has experienced continued declines in student enrollment, grant exploration and fundraising should be used in the acquisition of funds for the SEL program in addition to the possibility of reallocating funds toward SEL. There are also online curriculums that can offset the full purchase cost or can be used for middle school students. In an attempt to offset the cost, SEL leaders can take on the responsibility of attending external SEL PD and conferences to bring back resources to staff and families as a way to lead the implementation process and monitor its progress.

The second strategy is the creation of an SEL team. After the prioritization and establishment of a SEL program, it is important to create a team that will represent and support staff in their use of SEL strategies. This team should include administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents. At least one stakeholder representative should be present to ensure each stakeholder group has a voice in the SEL creation and implementation process. The team's job is to review data related to the needs of students and families and ensure decisions are centered on these needs during the implementation. A transition team or process would provide an additional SEL-centered step to the overall school enrollment process. This team would not only support the review of the academic, attendance, and behavioral data provided in the transfer in process, it would evaluate the SEL needs of students through an SEL entry survey and personal needs interview. The purpose of this transition team would be to help assess the social emotional needs of students and their families and provide SEL-centered support to teachers, students, and families as they transition into D2SEL. These data would be used to assess the

adjustment of students and families over time with a 2 week and first quarter interview and review of various student-centered data sources such as attendance, grades, and disciplinary data. There would also be a monthly check in with the family in the form of a survey or team member phone call home to assess the family's adjustment and their perspective on their student's adjustment to D2SEL.

Strategy three is the creation of a culture of collaboration and teamwork. Culture is defined as the collection of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). D2SEL's overall mission contains a focus on character development with teaching centered on students' ability to develop relationships and to make good and morally sound decisions while having respect for authority and classmates. D2SEL's leaders must allocate PD time focused on team and relationship building. This time should focus on getting to know one another and how "who they are" fits into the D2SEL mission and vision and can support one another in supporting the whole child development of their students. SEL skills will support this development for the adults as well as the students. D2SEL must move from an individualist culture (viewing stakeholders independent of others and valuing their personal freedom) to a collectivist culture (viewing themselves as connected to others and valuing the interest and duty of the whole; Poulou et al., 2018). The overall mission of D2SEL is the development of the whole child, including moral character, social skills, and academic excellence. If that is to be accomplished, it is crucial to develop a connected and supportive work environment free of individual perspectives that reinforce a culture of isolation and complete independence from the growth of the vision of D2SEL. Van Lankveld et al.'s (2016) research on the development of teacher identity

showed collaborative work environments that were perceived by teachers as collegial and supportive enhanced teacher identity. Teachers embraced the team concept, demonstrated value in teaching, had the ability to hash out educational topics with colleagues, and provided one another emotional and practical support. There must also be time for collaboration in order to cultivate the team or collectivist mindset among staff in D2SEL. D2SEL's leaders must prioritize the integration of this time as a representation of the mission and as support for staff. There should be weekly planning times during which teachers and staff can compare concepts, review data, and share strategies that support overall improvement for all stakeholders. "Planning meetings that include educators across subjects and departments, and professional development to support educators' own social-emotional competencies and well-being, can help educators collaborate and develop trust" (Flook, 2019, p. 4). PD should include tasks and activities that provide opportunities for staff to collaborate with other staff members with whom they may not usually have an opportunity to work. This will help develop healthy work relationships while promoting the team concept at D2SEL. The responsibility to create this collaborative, supportive, and focused environment starts with the leader—the principal or supervisor. There is a need for a cultural shift, which represents an adaptive leadership challenge. Adaptive leadership is described as the ability to mobilize people around systematic change that presents challenges yet thrives in the midst of them (Heifetz et al., 2009). The leader must not only lead the change but recognize what is the priority and what can be shelved in this change process. The leader must be connected to the people they are leading in order to recognize what is too much at this time as well as when there needs to be responsibility and leadership among the staff to lead to a change movement.

If collaboration, team building, and SEL are going to be successful, teachers must embrace and lead the charge. The leader must ensure the training and resources needed are provided to teachers to implement SEL together and see success.

The fourth strategy is to define and establish schoolwide disciplinary procedures, protocols, and data collection. As D2SEL is a faith-based private school, leaders should filter their disciplinary process through their vision to develop good moral character. A clear definition of good moral character and what it specifically looks like as a D2SEL student is the first step. From this definition, there should be clear rules and expectations for D2SEL students regarding school behavior. The rules and regulations should be discussed and taught to staff and students. One study on the impact of school rules and regulations on students' perceptions toward promoting good behavior showed,

improvement in students' awareness of school rules and regulations would enhance their perception toward promoting good behavior because when students have enough understanding of school rules and regulations, they can behave well, and this offers a good learning environment. (Fekadu, 2019, p. 210)

These school rules should have stakeholder input but should still be centered on the foundational values of D2SEL. Stakeholder input would support the team concept and give a voice to those who are part of the D2SEL community. There needs to be a clear procedural process for classroom or school behavioral disruptions. A former research associate with the School Improvement Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and author/coauthor of more than 70 publications over the last 25 years stressed the importance of

clear and broad-based rules. Rules, sanctions, and procedures are developed with input from students, are clearly specified, and are made known to everyone in the school. Researchers have found that student participation in developing and reviewing school discipline programs creates a sense of ownership and belongingness. Widespread dissemination of clearly stated rules and procedures, moreover, assures that all students and staff understand what is and is not acceptable. (Cotton, 1990, p. 12)

For example, there may be a one- to three-step process teachers or staff must complete before administration will become involved. There must be a system for collecting behavioral data that can be used to support the individual student and teacher both in the short and long term with SEL strategies. It is important to track schoolwide behavioral data. The creation of a team such as the BHT is suggested. A team such as this would focus regularly on disciplinary or behavioral data and review these data biweekly to look for school trends such as location, time, or days of the week where specific referrals occur or even specific students or staff with whom such referrals occur. The purpose is to use these data to strategize on how to best provide SEL support to the teachers, classrooms, or students most in need of intervention. This BHT, or something similar, would be an extension of the SEL team.

The fifth strategy is to budget for SEL-related PD and create a calendar of these PDs. This preplanning will support the importance of SEL at D2SEL. Again, because of budgetary concerns based on the decline in enrollment and the need to service a variety of students with different emotional experiences and needs, it is important to develop leaders who can become in-house experts. Some of those leaders will sit on the School

Leadership Team, the Behavioral Health Team, or the Social Emotional Learning Team. They all need to be trained on leadership and the team concept as well as SEL. This will support ongoing PD and coaching based on SEL strategies and best practices. The first step is to provide leaders with SEL training. They should be sent to conferences and workshops with the expectation that they will bring information and resources back to D2SEL. There has to then be a foundational PD that introduces SEL and the various programs available to stakeholders. The next PD would introduce the chosen curriculum for SEL and how to integrate it into everyday instructional practices. As part of the development of the team and collaboration process at D2SEL, it is important to discuss the data and other parts of the decision-making process with stakeholders. There also has to be PD on the coalition of the redefined behavioral/disciplinary structures and SEL. Staff need to understand that as part of the D2SEL mission is to develop character and good moral decision making, data will be used to provide SEL support to improve behavior and create the type of character described in the foundational values of D2SEL. The calendar will have the foundational PDs on SEL (1 day), discipline redefining (2 hours), and team building (2 hours) in the beginning of the year PD days. Monthly SEL staff-led PD and quarterly PDs that encompass teambuilding and SEL best practices should also be added to the calendar. The addition of weekly collaboration time including behavior and SEL check ins will support the continued development of the SEL-centered lens.

Finally, the implementation of SEL and the creation of SEL-related teams, procedures, and leaders will all lay the foundation for short- and long-term planning. The

use of academic, behavioral, and other forms of school and family data will help leaders plan out the quarterly monitoring and progress of SEL at D2SEL.

Conclusion

Overall, in order to support the implementation of SEL at D2SEL, the program must be prioritized by administrators and leaders. Time and money must be allocated to SEL and SEL-related areas in order to provide the training and resources to successfully implement such a program and support students, staff, and families. Progress monitoring, accountability, and continual planning are essential components to the coalition of data, teams, and PD for the servicing of the whole child at D2SEL.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Implications and Policy Recommendations

D2SEL has endured economic, social, and cultural change in its endeavor to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment for all students. Their goal is to remain focused on character and academic development. As with any level of change, there is the possibility of growth or the lack thereof within the institution implementing change. The development of social emotional skills alongside academic learning has arisen as a focal point in the development of the whole child.

The Illinois Social Emotional Standards were created in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495, which required that the Illinois State Board of Education (n.d.) “develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards” (para. 2). These standards, like their counterpart, the Illinois Learning Standards, are clear expectations all students in grades K–12 must acquire and master subsequently throughout the various grade levels. Like the Illinois Learning Standards, these skills are required for students to be college and career ready. This means they have not only acquired the academic conceptual knowledge needed but have developed the skills detailed in the following three social emotional goals:

- Goal 1 - self-awareness and self-management
- Goal 2 - social awareness and interpersonal
- Goal 3 - decision-making skills and responsible behavior (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.)

Policy Statement

Through my evaluation of D2SEL's SEL program, I found the lack of consistent SEL implementation or SEL-based PD within D2SEL and an overall lack of SEL knowledge among all stakeholders to be the primary source of teacher frustration and lack of effectiveness when dealing with the social emotional concerns of D2SEL students. It was not given equal value or prioritization as the Illinois Learning Standards despite research from CASEL, a research-based source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based SEL for over 2 decades. CASEL indicates the benefits of implementation of an SEL program for adults and students include increased academic outcomes and improved behaviors, a positive long-term and global impact both academic and emotional, a 10% return on investment, reduction in poverty, increased economic mobility, and enriched lifetime outcomes (CASEL, n.d.).

I am suggesting D2SEL leaders adopt a policy in alignment with the 2003 Children's Mental Health Act, which mandates the integration of social and emotional development within the learning environment. The policy must provide guidance for teaching and assessing SEL skills and a system of rules and procedures that will aid in the response to student SEL or mental health needs. SEL should have the same level of importance from the perspective of money allocation, PD opportunity, and progress monitoring. This policy must ensure an established curriculum with online access, ongoing PD, the development of leadership and team building components that focus on SEL, and the creation of school/district goals and worthy targets.

Analysis of Needs

The problem stems from the lack of effective understanding of SEL and its benefits for academics, environment, and culture. Understanding starts with an adoption of the Illinois Social Emotional Standards and how they align with the Illinois Learning Standards and what that looks like for an individual school or district. The ESSA offers an opportunity to rethink the goals and policies that have limited public education in the development of the whole child. Under this law, education leaders, such as those at D2SEL, have greater flexibility in the redefining of student success and the creation of their own systems and programs to meet the needs of the whole child, including their academic and emotional development. There is currently nothing sustainable in reference to ongoing SEL implementation and there is a need for student support. D2SEL has been unable to address the needs of all students, including those transferring in from public schools with social emotional needs. In my personal experience as a principal, parents express the need for support with social emotional needs. There needs to be greater compliance with what has been established for school improvement and greater ownership for private school communities through understanding, development, and accountability to service the ever-changing needs of their school community. I am proposing D2SEL leaders adopt an established SEL program that will provide all stakeholders (i.e., staff, students, family, and community) support, training, and resources on SEL. With this foundation, I am proposing a system of implementation and accountability equal to or greater than that expected of public schools. Throughout the following sections, I analyze this needs assessment from six perspectives: educational, economic, social, political, legal, and moral and ethical.

Educational Analysis

SEL programs contain a focus on the development of three interconnected skills regarded as crucial to academic performance: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. These competencies are especially important in meeting the demand for more rigorous critical thinking skills in order to compete with the College and Career readiness standards provided by the U. S. Department of Education. Students are more susceptible to frustration (emotional) when they lack communication and collaboration skills in today's academic classroom. SEL programs help reconstruct schools into successful learning environments through a holistic, support oriented approach that encourages children to flourish by equipping them with vital social skills. These SEL programs support all stakeholders in social emotional development by teaching empathy and how to be an active contributor to today's children's social emotional growth as a conduit to academic improvement. Such skills as critical thinking, problem solving, and respectful disagreement help in the creation of an environment conducive for academic advancement (Second Step, n.d.). The ability to self-manage thoughts, feelings, and behaviors has been supported by research as a contributing factor to academic achievement and is the foundation of SEL (Vega, 2017).

SEL intervention program studies have shown academic performance increased by 11 percentile points in comparison to students not participating in SEL intervention programs (CASEL, n.d.). There is a reduction in misbehavior, which allows for more academic instruction and less need for management within the classroom. There was also evidence found in these studies to indicate SEL skills support the positive processing of

relationships and emotions, thereby strengthening the bonds between peers, teachers, and families who serve as major academic encouragers (Durlak et al., 2011).

Economic Analysis

Traditionally, D2SEL has provided very little SEL programming. New policy advocacy for SEL would provide leadership foundational training and PD on SEL team building. This would lead to the creation of SEL teams consisting of primary, intermediate, and upper teams. Each would have a team lead that would be a part of the SEL Schoolwide Implementation and Monitoring Team. This team would also include the principal/superintendent and the Assistant Principal/counselor.

From an economic vantage point, the official leadership training would cost \$1,200 yearly. This includes lodging, airfare, and a 3-day conference for the SEL program lead at D2SEL. Because of budgetary concerns, it would be the responsibility of the SEL leader to bring back the information for internal PD. There are countless resources available online at casel.org that can support SEL leaders that are free or cost effective. The D2SEL SEL policy would need to prioritize their institute days. D2SEL currently only has 5 full days for the year. No time is currently allocated for SEL, but it is recommended that a minimum of 2 days be solely dedicated to teacher and staff development on schoolwide SEL implementation and monitoring. This will allow for additional time while helping leaders to be prepared for additional PD. This would incur no additional cost for substitute teachers and they would still be counted within the required school days for the state. Additional time for grade-level teams can be allocated once a week for 35 minutes to support progress monitoring and SEL implementation and monitoring goals and next steps. This would be at no cost to the school.

Research has shown there are long-term economic benefits of SEL embedded intervention programs. Damon E. Jones, PhD, Research Assistant Professor of Health and Human Development at the Prevention Research Center for the Promotion of Human Development, Pennsylvania State University, stated, “Schools are a primary setting in which children first learn to negotiate complex social relations with peers and have the opportunity to build the essential skills that will allow them to be productive members of society” (Jones, 2016, para. 2). School-based SEL interventions have proven to have a variety of short- and long-term results. Short-term effects include social emotional competence, disciplinary referrals, decrease in hostility, fewer classroom disturbances, connecting and relating to peers, and academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). This adolescent intervention has proven to be an advantage to society in the long term.

The Seattle Development Project, whose goal is to support the development of social and emotional skills among elementary and middle school students, estimated there is a long-term economic benefit of over \$2,500 per student when SEL interventions are implemented (Jones, 2016). Some of the benefits that carry on as students transition into young adulthood are reduced crime, less substance abuse, and improved mental and emotional health. In 2020, the average state spent over \$200,000 per year or over \$500 per day to incarcerate a young person, up over 40% from 2014, according to the Justice Policy Institute (2016), a national nonprofit organization using research to bring about justice reform. In a 2008 study on the effectiveness and economic benefits of school-based programs using such skills as self-management and social skills to combat substance abuse, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Substance Abuse and Prevention (SAMHSA) found that for every dollar committed to

prevention and intervention programs, there was a long-term return of \$18 (Miller & Hendrie, 2008). This investment would be roughly over \$1.3 billion in savings between state and local governments due to school-based SEL intervention (Miller & Hendrie, 2008).

Social Analysis

SEL is grounded in the social development of the child but is also dependent on the social understanding and awareness of the adults involved in the overall growth of children. CASEL (2013) describes SEL as children and adults learning and having the ability to “effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions” (p. 4). It is then imperative that, in the implementation of an established and research-based SEL program such as Second Step (n.d.), teachers and staff are provided the necessary resources and training to navigate the social emotional minefield found in the midst of an ever-changing school dynamic.

SEL in D2SEL starts with the understanding when it relates to today’s children, that you don’t know what they have experienced. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network was established in 2000 as part of the Children’s Health Act. Its mission is to create high standards of care through increased availability of services for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events. Traumatic events can be anything from physical, sexual, or psychological abuse to family or community violence. Trauma can be the sudden or violent loss of a loved one or serious accidents to life threatening illness.

Children who experience traumatic occurrences suffer child traumatic stress. They have been exposed to one or more traumas and develop reactions that have a negative effect on the normality of their everyday lives after the traumatic experience. It is imperative that D2SEL's SEL policy equip teachers and staff to recognize the effects of trauma in the process of providing services for all the needs of students. Below are some of the trauma-related statistics that support the need for awareness and training versus assumption:

- 60% of adults report experiencing abuse or other difficult family circumstances during childhood.
- More than 60% of youth age 17 and younger have been exposed to crime, violence and abuse either directly or indirectly.
- 26% of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four.
- 1 in 5 children witnessed violence in their family or the neighborhood during the previous year.
- Nearly 14% of children repeatedly experienced maltreatment by a caregiver, including nearly 4% who experienced physical abuse.
- More than 13% of children reported being physically bullied, while more than 1 in 3 said they had been emotionally bullied.
- In one year, 39% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 reported witnessing violence, 17% reported being a victim of physical assault and 8% reported being the victim of sexual assault. (Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County, n.d.)

It is important to understand the cultural and social change D2SEL has experienced throughout the years and currently. Social emotional skills would support teachers, staff, students, and parents who are in need of support in the transition from possible trauma related to inner city violence to a major loss or transition at home. Teachers have to be trained to relate, be sensitive, and be patient with students, staff, and parents in D2SEL. SEL can be used to build teachers' capacity to prepare students for social changes in life.

Political and Legal Analysis

Policy should be essential in moving efforts to support the whole learner from the back seat to the front seat in mainstream education. The role of policy within this educational framework should be to guide and support how the PreK–12 education ecosystem connects and operates regarding SEL and academic growth and development. Educators should feel supported in making social emotional changes to instruction, classroom organization, partnerships, and school climate as well as confident that proper oversight is taking place. Policy should be aligned with state legislatively approved and mandated standards for SEL implementation as well as inspire families and students with a voice in what is implemented within their school or district. They should be assured that the decisions made are in the best interest of their children, families, and the community. As part of the development and implementation of SEL in D2SEL, D2SEL leaders have taken the recommendations provided by the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2018), whose mission is to foster in children the knowledge, skills, and character that will enable them to make better lives in a better country. The recommendations are as follows:

- Set a clear vision that broadens the definition of student success to prioritize the whole child
- Transform learning settings so they are safe and supportive for all young people
- Change instruction to teach students social, emotional, and cognitive skills; embed these skills in academics and in schoolwide practices
- Build adult expertise in child development
- Align resources and leverage partners in the community to address the whole child
- Forge closer connections between research and practice by shifting the paradigm for how research gets done (Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018, p. 33)

It is vital that the number 1 political players in a district, members of the Board of Education, understand the importance of the whole child versus the ever-changing political landscape that differs from election to election. The one thing that remains the same is the struggles children face and the need for political advocates who understand the law of influence and what is important. The Board has the ability to establish policy that lays a clear vision for equality among learning and a focus on emotional standards as well as equality among those students who are in need of additional social emotional support. They can apply research best practices in the creation process to ensure staff are comfortable with the training and implementation process, which would support the progress monitoring as more than just an implementation check by using political positioning to support D2SEL's educational community and their children. As elected

officials and representatives of the community, it is their job to implement what is established by the laws and mandates of the state to improve school culture, transform instruction, and build the capacity of teachers to reflect the rudiments of whole child development through the intertwining of SEL into the mainstream educational framework.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

The moral and ethical component of my policy is the foundation of D2SEL's mission, vision, and goals. SEL is embedded in the school's creation but there are no tangible components that align it to the state's SEL expectations, are measurable, and can be progress monitored for success. Leaders of D2SEL, a private institution founded on faith-based beliefs, have a moral obligation to adhere to their foundational principles and the laws of the state.

The character development component of SEL has lasting effects on the individual, community, future career, relationships, and decisions of students exposed to SEL programming (Elias & Juan, 2020). This development starts from the early years of ethical and moral skills embedded in SEL skills. The *American Journal of Public Health* indicates there are a great number of associations between SEL skills taught starting in kindergarten and the likelihood of not receiving public assistance as an adult or being involved with police before becoming an adult or ever spending time in some form of detention center (Jones, 2016). This indicates there are positive long-term effects of SEL programming exposure regarding moral and ethical decision making. SEL has been found to have positive results for young adults regarding academics, social behavior, emotional distress, and resistance to drug use according to numerous research studies done with

thousands of young adults (Character.org, n.d.). This is because SEL has four components taught in its character education: (a) moral sensitivity, which focuses on compassion, fairness, and responsibility; (b) moral commitment, which teaches one to identify with moral values and stand on them, despite any fear acceptance or rejection; (c) ethical reasoning, which focuses on decisions and the consequences of those decisions that support the development of a safe and supportive school climate that is conducive to learning; and (d) personal growth, meaning perseverance, purpose, and resourcefulness support an individual's personal goal evaluation and communication with others on how to stay focused on accomplishing them. These skills should be not only embedded in the foundation of D2SEL, they should be an integral part of the creation of the D2SEL policy that ensures generations of moral sound decision makers and model citizens of the world.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

Staff and community relationships will benefit from the SEL policy because it will lay a clear map for district/school expectations for the implementation of a proven SEL program that will address the needs of all stakeholders. My research shows over 50% of staff indicated a lack of knowledge or training regarding social emotional development. They also indicated in the surveys how they like the overall culture and students. The key component that brings the need to the forefront is the escalation in violence within the city that causes parents to bring students to the suburbs. Suburban boards, administrators, and teachers need to be equipped to service students' social emotional needs whether they are violence centered or not. They need a proven SEL partner that can provide the staff and community with training and ongoing support around violence and other SEL stakeholder needs. Understanding and preparation are

morale boosters within a school or district because they enable the focus to be on teaching and learning. This policy will bring unity to the district and all its stakeholders around whole student growth.

In conclusion, D2SEL is in need of a policy that supports SEL implementation and monitoring. It should be aligned to the Illinois State Standards and established with a set curriculum, leadership development, ongoing collaborative training, and a progress monitoring tool. This policy should require SEL partners to provide continuous relevant PD that addresses the ever changing needs of the D2SEL community. The SEL policy should have equal importance to learning standards in order to support the development of the whole child at D2SEL. It should be aligned to the moral and ethical values established since 1973 in the development of morally sound, fair, compassionate learners who become the same kind of adults. The external SEL program and partner should understand the importance of character development at D2SEL. In that, D2SEL will see increased academic and social development and a decrease in social emotional confusion. It is my belief that if a policy is established that includes clear guidelines aligned to the Illinois SEL Standards and a clear implementation vision for D2SEL, leaders of D2SEL will be able to implement a SEL program to service the school community. Figure 9 provides a proposed budgetary example based on some reputable SEL program pricing. It factors in the previous budgetary concerns of D2SEL, appropriate materials for instructors and students, SEL leader and teacher PD, and online interaction and resources.

Figure 9*SEL Implementation Budget Plan*

Cost for (SEL) Program:	
<u>Leaders</u>	
Leadership Institute (3days)	\$695
Principal or AP/Counselor Attends (Summer)	
Additional Principal Tool Kit	\$49
<u>Early Learning (Pre-K)</u>	
Early Learning (Pre-K) Kit	\$459
Child Protection Unit	\$209
<u>Grades K-5</u>	
Grades K-5 Unit	\$4529
+Bully Prevention Unit	
+Child Protection Unit	
<u>Middle School Grades 6-8</u>	
6-8 Licenses (1yr) + Principal Kit	\$2749
+All School Access	
6th grade packet -	\$219
7th grade packet -	\$219
8th grade packet -	\$219
6 Grade Poster set (3)	\$28
7-8 Grade Poster Set (4)	\$36
<hr/>	
D2SEL (SEL PROGRAM)	\$9411

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

I have always had a passion for those students whose life experiences have caused a hindrance in their social and academic growth. Whether I was working as a teacher or an administrator, within my 21 years in education, I have always believed in teaching students to navigate these challenges and in equipping adults to support students' social and academic growth. All too often educators are focused on purely academics and have not considered the development of the whole child, which includes social emotional growth as well as academic growth. My personal experience with students who wanted to be successful but did not know how to deal with emotional challenges and teachers and staff who wanted to help but did not have the skills to help is what motivated me to write my dissertation on SEL and its support of the learning environment. The proper implementation of SEL in the school environment supports all stakeholders in the development of such skills as social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, relationship building, and responsible decision making (CASEL, n.d.). These SEL skills help in understanding the role such things as trauma, socioeconomic status, and the personal beliefs of educators affect how and whether we are truly able to provide students with tools for success in school and in life.

Discussion

This dissertation journey started with my desire to study SEL and how it supported the academic success of students, but as my journey continued, I found a much broader lens that really focused on the development of the child in terms of health, social skills, and academics, or the "whole child" approach. I envisioned surveying D2SEL's

implementation of SEL programming and presenting my case on how students living in poverty benefit the most from SEL. Though this perspective remained relevant, the obstacles took on larger, more personal positions. The child in need extended past just the impoverished but took on the face of personal trauma and added a pursuit to truly service every child's social emotional need beyond just academics, the school, or their current situation. Overall, I discovered that even with the best efforts, without SEL understanding and training, there is limited to no effectiveness. The fact is teachers at D2SEL had limited understanding of what SEL entails and therefore the implementation of SEL was ineffective. Though there were foundational components of whole child development at D2SEL, the absence of an official SEL program and general collaboration among staff taught me the importance of building that strong informed foundation, with its systems and leaders, that will support the implementation process of SEL. As a result of this evaluation process, I understand how to provide the institutional systems that will start the process of building a schoolwide culture that supports SEL, academia, and the "whole child" success of all students.

My focus in this dissertation was to look at the external and internal factors that, whether intentional or not, become an integral part of the child development process. My new understanding of such organizations as ASCD and their goal to integrate SEL into the everyday academic content areas and skills supports a much broader look at each individual student developing the skills they need for social and academic success. I also uncovered the character development component embedded in SEL that supports the overall decision-making process into adulthood.

My D2SEL journey taught me the importance of school vision, training, and collaboration when it comes to implementing SEL to support the servicing of the whole child. The organizational change plan focused on building the teams, resources, and training that provided a foundation for success in the acquiring of an SEL program at D2SEL. To offset the need for clarification on what SEL is and how it works, the suggested action would be the adoption of an SEL program that supports the D2SEL population. The identification of leaders within D2SEL who will partner with the SEL program-based training would support continual training and development at D2SEL. This supports the development of a culture of collaboration and teamwork where all participate, contribute, and take on responsibility for the SEL goals established at D2SEL. This use of SEL training is twofold. It not only supports the equipping of staff to teach and support students, but the SEL strategies apply to the staff as well. They support the building of adult teams and the development of healthy relationships among staff. The SEL team will implement and model the expected behavior and lead the analysis of various data sources that support progress monitoring of SEL. They will support and promote continued SEL and counteract the culture of isolation and lack of leaders. The vision for data-driven decision making, the implementation of a best practice-based SEL program at D2SEL, and a clear plan for all stages of training, review, and “next steps” supports a clear focus on laying the foundation to support the whole child.

The suggested policy recommendation further supports the need for the adoption of an established SEL program to address the current limited understanding and implementation of SEL. This policy also supports the building of foundational systems that provide direction/vision and promote leadership development and collaboration

among staff. This recommendation should be adopted by D2SEL in order to establish a clear SEL foundation that supports the continued development of staff on SEL best practices and equips staff to administer SEL strategies to students. This policy recommendation can be summed up in four foundational steps toward full implementation:

1. Establish an SEL team and leaders who represent D2SEL as a whole. Assign responsibilities for certain groups and their continued receipt of SEL content, training, and collaboration opportunities.
2. Establish an SEL program for D2SEL. Choose, administer, and analyze student and stakeholder needs data. Evaluate needs assessments based on established SEL programs that are aligned to the state SEL standards. Choose the program that best fits the needs and budget of D2SEL.
3. Budget for SEL program and ongoing PD. Create a budget based on chosen established SEL program and PD provided by or in alignment with the program. Budget for SEL leadership development in order to provide ongoing development for D2SEL staff.
4. Long-term planning. Assign team and collaboration time on the D2SEL school year calendar and within schedules that coincide with leadership development in order to maintain ongoing relevant PD and accountability for the content of PD. Embed times for progress monitoring, feedback, and adjustments to the implementation plan.

The acceptance and adoption of the recommended policy for SEL and the participation, establishment, and development of internal leaders to support this vision of

implementation are a representation of D2SEL leaders being resonant leaders. These types of leaders are not afraid to explore uncharted territories. They inspire people and move their organizations through bold calculated moves to improve their organizations. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) stated, “Leaders who can create resonance are people who either intuitively understand or have worked hard to develop emotional intelligence- namely, the competencies of self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, and relationship management” (p. 4). D2SEL leadership, in embracing and adopting the recommended policy on SEL, will exhibit SEL’s core characteristics and prioritize students through the budgeting and focus on SEL.

Leadership Lessons

As a result of this dissertation journey, I feel I have matured as a leader. My initial perspective was grounded only in my educational leadership experience as a public school principal. I understood the need to provide emotional support for my students and how SEL would support them socially but I was limited in my outlook. One of the first things I learned was the importance of implementing whole system change and how the leader should have the ability to navigate a variety of areas when spearheading change. D2SEL’s leaders have to take the initiative to present and help establish an SEL program as a foundation to build a culture of whole child support and development. I now understand whole system change starts with Wagner et al.’s (2005) Three Phases of Whole System Change. Phase #1 was my guiding lesson with my D2SEL leadership journey. Phase #1 has three distinct steps a leader must embark on to see the level of change needed for “actual” change:

- Develop a shared and informed understanding of the need and urgency for undertaking change;
- The changing world and how all educators in the system will need to take responsibility for preparing students to succeed in it; and
- The ways that educators will need to work differently with each other to fulfill these responsibilities (Wagner et al., 2005, pp. 133–134).

The development of a shared and informed understanding of the need and the instilling of a sense of urgency when implementing whole system change really stood out to me as a leader as I evaluated D2SEL. Wagner et al. (2005) emphasized, “Very effective schools and districts consistently have high degrees of purpose and focus, engagement, and collaboration, particularly around learning, teaching and instructional leadership” (p. 74). I learned the success of students hinges on recognizing all obstacles that hinder the child, teacher, and institution from ensuring academic and social success now and in the long term. That means for D2SEL a clear assessment of need, clear focus, and shared responsibility and collaboration. This all starts with an adaptive leader willing to be the catalyst to change in order to see this system emerge from the dust of recalibration to a whole child—health, social, and academic—lens for D2SEL.

The second bullet point of Wagner et al.’s (2005) Three Phases of Whole System Change helped me understand that though the leader must spearhead this change, it is not a solo mission. The responsibility for change must be shared with those educators embedded in the current system and there must be collaboration to ensure students are equipped for success. For D2SEL, this will require the development of leaders to support the implementation of SEL and the development of systems, data sources, and times to

meet and discuss the data for the purpose of ongoing PD, training, and progress monitoring. Wagner et al. described this as horizontal accountability. This level of accountability is rooted in the relationships established as colleagues committed to a shared purpose and mutual respect for one another versus vertical accountability, which is needed but more centered on the compliance portion over the discussion, voice, and input of those invested in the systemic change. For D2SEL, as a leader, I recognized the history of isolation, limited collaboration, and limited leadership left SEL unclear and the prospects of its implementation non-existent. Change starts with an understanding of the roles and responsibilities each individual has in the implementation of change, or for D2SEL, the implementation of SEL.

This leads me into the last bullet point of Phase #3 and the most crucial of the three, which is the understanding of how things must be done differently in order to fulfill the new responsibilities and ownership adopted in this change process. As a leader, that means the implementation of horizontal and vertical accountability. Though acting as a critical and shared participant in the understanding and implementation of the plan, the leader must also be able to see the big picture to ensure the organization actually implements the plan. They ensure there is accountability to the plan and that there is time for the leader to see what is working and not working, which is not always clear horizontally or in the midst of the change. This progress monitoring helps ensure continuous productive implementation. For D2SEL, that means the leader ensures others are held accountable to their roles within the implementation of SEL. Teachers and staff must be held accountable for the teaching of SEL to students. It also means ensuring collaboration time, funds, ongoing PD, and resources are available to implement the SEL

program successfully while still partaking in the overall learning process with the staff. Wagner et al. (2005) stated, “Where there is growing trust, the quality of discourse increases, again helping stimulate greater engagement and real collaboration” (p. 150). As a leader, I learned this level of change is difficult from the leader on down. But, the more collaboration around focused change occurs, the more beliefs, misconceptions, and misunderstandings can be brought to the table for discussion and processing. These hidden hindrances no longer have the power to stagnate or divide the partakers of this collaborative process but are able to be sorted, extracted, or adjusted to support the change process, which for D2SEL is the full implementation of SEL to support whole child development.

Conclusion

As I mull over this dissertation journey, I cannot help but appreciate the new learning, experience, and maturity I gained as an educator and leader. My mission to see our students equipped with the skills they need to navigate the many obstacles in their social, academic, and even life long journey has only been fortified with the vast research and experts who have contributed to my greater understanding and this dissertation. Frederick Douglass, the former slave who became a prominent activist, author, and public speaker in the 1800s, said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken adults” (Mapp & Gabel, 2019, p. 145). As leaders, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to educate the next generation and to prepare them for this world and the world to come. As I continue my current journey as a public school principal, I plan on revisiting my utilization of Wagner et al.’s (2005) Three Phases of Whole System Change with my school. I now have a greater understanding of a shared sense of urgency,

responsibility, and the need to do things differently when servicing the whole child. I want my staff, especially my leaders, to communicate and exhibit the same universal message daily. This means revisiting professional development to ensure it is relevant in servicing the needs of our community. It also means holding one another accountable to monitor our process and progress to not take the same approach to whole child growth but collectively come up with different more inclusive ways to see our students grow in all areas including SEL. With that, it is my hope that the research and perspectives presented in my journey will encourage and inform others of the need to view our roles from the position of teachers of “lifelong learning.” This means equipping our staff, colleagues, parents, students, and community with information about the obstacles the next generation will face and the role we all play in equipping these students to navigate them to experience overall success in life.

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Appendix A
Culture and Climate Survey

(all surveys are anonymous)

Social Emotional Needs Assessment					
School Climate					
<i>Please circle the one answer that best applies to the question or statement</i>					
<i>How enthusiastic are the students about being at school most days?</i>	no enthusiasm	very little enthusiasm	somewhat enthusiastic	enthusiastic	very enthusiastic
<i>How positive are the attitudes of your colleagues?</i>	not positive	very little positivity	some positivity	positive	very positive
<i>How supportive are students in their interactions with each other?</i>	not supportive	very little support	some support	supportive	very supportive
<i>How respectful are the relationships between teachers and students?</i>	not respectful	very little respect	some respect	respectful	very respectful
<i>How respectful are the relationships between parents and school staff?</i>	not respectful	very little respect	some respect	respectful	very respectful
<i>How often do you see students helping each other without being prompted?</i>	not at all	not often	sometimes	often	very often

<i>Overall, how positive is the working environment at your school?</i>	not positive at all	very little positivity	somewhat positive	positive	very positive
<i>How enthusiastic are staff to come to work?</i>	no enthusiasm	Very little enthusiasm	somewhat enthusiastic	enthusiastic	very enthusiastic
<i>How supportive is the school climate to the development of the emotional needs of students?</i>	not supportive at all	very little support	somewhat supportive	supportive	very supportive

<p style="text-align: center;">Students Check (X) the one that applies to the questions:</p>					
How effective are students at the following skills:	not effective at all	not very effective	somewhat effective	effective	very effective
<i>Participating in discussions and activities</i>					
<i>Getting along with other students</i>					
<i>Showing respect toward teachers</i>					
<i>Being attentive in class</i>					
<i>Working effectively in groups</i>					
<i>Being supportive and showing empathy toward other students</i>					

<i>Exhibiting a positive attitude toward school and learning</i>					
<i>Organizing their school work</i>					
<i>Studying effectively and preparing for tests</i>					
<i>Managing their time</i>					
<i>Managing their emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger, sadness)</i>					
<i>Solving interpersonal conflicts with others</i>					
<i>Solving personal problems</i>					
<i>Making safe, smart decisions</i>					
<i>Bouncing back from setbacks</i>					
<i>Setting and achieving goals</i>					
<i>Showing interest in lesson topics</i>					
<i>Exhibiting engagement in lesson topics</i>					
<i>Understanding of essential questions</i>					
<i>Following class rules</i>					

<i>Following class expectations</i>					
<i>At meeting lesson objectives</i>					
<i>Use strategies in real life</i>					
<i>Following school rules</i>					
<i>Following school procedures</i>					
<i>Respecting the beliefs of others</i>					
<i>Expressing their feelings or emotions within conflict</i>					
<i>Communicating trauma</i>					

Teachers/Staff					
<i>How confident are you that you can help your school's most challenging students to learn?</i>	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident
<i>When one of your teaching strategies fails to work for a group of students, how easily can you think of another</i>	not easy at all	very little ease	somewhat easy	easy	very easy

<i>approach to try?</i>					
<i>When your lesson is interrupted by a disruptive student how comfortable are you dealing with the student and recovering the lesson?</i>	not comfortable at all	very little comfort	somewhat comfortable	comfortable	very comfortable

If a parent were upset about something in your class, how confident are you that you could have a productive conversation with this parent?	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident
How effective do you think you are at managing particularly disruptive classes?	not effective at all	not very effective	somewhat effective	effective	very effective
How confident are you that you can meet the emotional needs of your most	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident

disruptive students?					
How effective do you think Social Emotional Learning has been on your support of the learning environment?	not effective at all	not very effective	somewhat effective	effective	very effective
How confident are you that you can engage students who typically are not motivated?	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident
How clearly can you explain the most complicated content to your students?	not clear at all	with limited clarity	somewhat clear	clearly	very clearly
How confident are you that you can meet the learning needs of your most advanced students?	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident
How confident are you in identifying and dealing with student trauma?	not confident at all	very little confidence	some confidence	confident	very confident

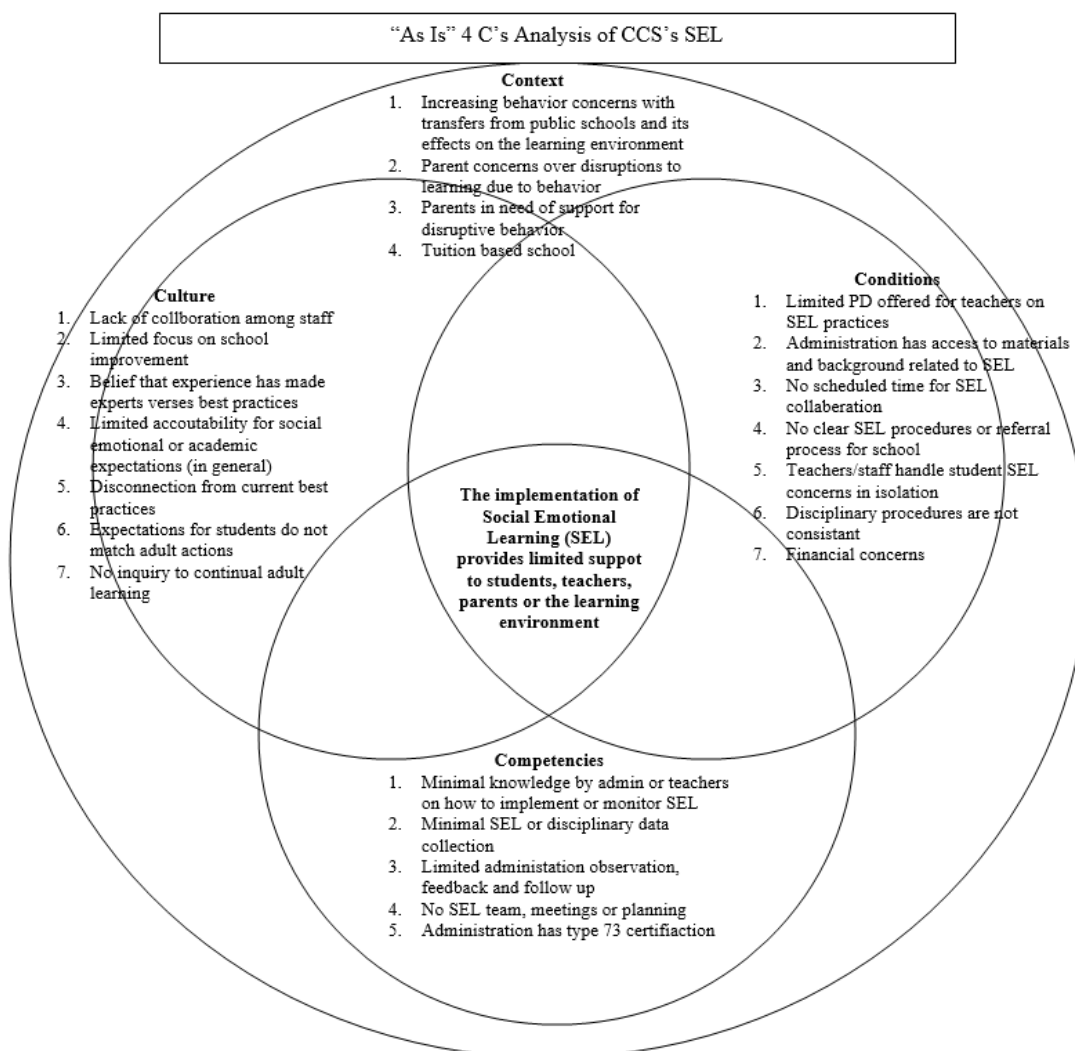
How often do you share relevant life experiences with students	not ever	not that often	sometimes	often	most of the time
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How often do you teach students to apply social skills outside the learning environment?	not ever	not that often	sometimes	often	most of the time
How supportive are school leaders in the dealing with student discipline?	Not supportive at all	not very supportive	Somewhat supportive	supportive	very supportive
How often are professional learning opportunities for Social Emotional Learning provided?	not ever	not that often	somewhat supportive	supportive	very supportive

Thank you for your participation.

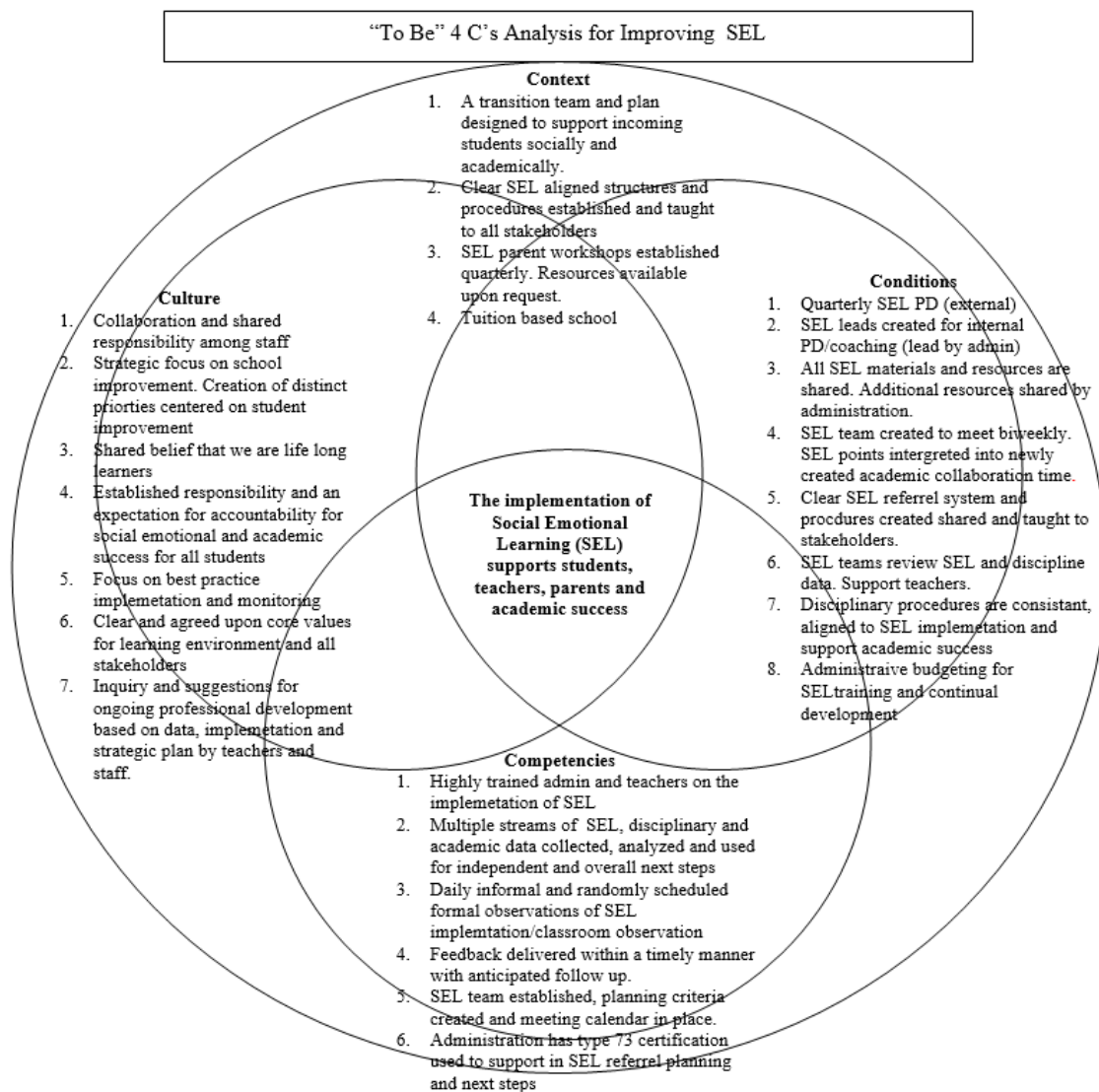
Appendix B

“As Is” 4 Cs



Appendix C:

“To Be” 4 Cs



Appendix D
Strategies in Action

<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
Establish and prioritize an SEL program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a survey of student, staff, and parent SEL needs • Allocate/fundraise money for SEL • Establish SEL leaders • Choose a curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear assessment of SEL needs and how to support SEL implementation
Create an SEL team and transition team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an SEL team consisting of various stakeholders to support and guide staff in the SEL implementation • Create a transition team to evaluate students transferring in through SEL and academic lens for supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific teams established to address D2SEL SEL needs and support academic success
Create a culture of collaboration and teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey staff on collaboration and teamwork • Provide PD for staff on team building and self-care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear foundation on how to work together
Define and establish schoolwide disciplinary procedures, protocols, and data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit foundational core values and align and establish disciplinary structures/procedures • Establish a BHT (Behavioral Health Team) to review discipline for SEL support • Establish disciplinary data collection to be reviewed by BHT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear disciplinary behavior rules, expectations, and guidelines for supporting stakeholders
Budget and establish calendar for SEL-related PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PD on leadership development • PD on SEL (foundational) • PD on SEL and instructional integration • PD on collaboration and team building • PD on the coalition between behavior procedures and SEL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear plan for PD based on needs and continual improvement of staff

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create calendar of PD and team meetings time	
Develop long- and short-term goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use academic, behavior, and SEL data to set goals for continued implementation and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear goals to assess and progress monitor for SEL and academic aligned improvement