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Increasing the Buy-In and Effectiveness of a Social and Emotional Learning Class Program in a Single Sex, Urban and Charter High School: Social and Emotional Learning Specialists and Student Perceptions of Its Implementation.

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INCREASING THE BUY-IN AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL LEARNING CLASS PROGRAM IN A SINGLE SEX, URBAN, AND
CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL: SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SPECIALIST AND
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION

by

Kizawanda A. Olowe

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National Louis University

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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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ABSTRACT

Social emotional learning has yet to be implemented in many schools in America.

Without adequate social and emotional skills, students struggle to navigate their academic and social environments. Students attending a single-sex, urban charter school

participated in focus groups and completed surveys about their perceptions of a social emotional learning program that was implemented during the 2015–2016 school year.

Social emotional learning facilitators completed surveys and participated in focus groups to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Graphs and themes based on the information gathered from the surveys, open-ended questions, and focus groups were used to analyze the data. Both students and SEL specialists reported that class sizes were too large, students should be given a letter grade, and that more buy-in was needed from various stakeholders. This data could be used to help implement SEL programs across the country. Students, parents, communities, and schools should benefit from having high-quality SEL programs implemented in schools. This movement could help bring about social change and equity in a number of schools across the country that struggle to meet student and community needs.

PREFACE

My passion for social and emotional learning began when I was in elementary school. As a child, I struggled to understand some of the social and emotional issues some of my peers were dealing with and did not know school social workers existed until I was in college. I attended Chicago Public Schools for elementary and high school and could have benefited from having a trained individual that could help me learn skills to navigate my academic and social environments.

After completing college and entering the field of education as a teacher, and then as a school social worker, I noted that students were dealing with a host of social and emotional issues that were interfering with their ability to thrive in school. After multiple attempts to shift paradigms about social emotional learning in schools, equip stakeholders with strategies, and provide services to help students reach their full-potential, I acknowledged that as the sole school social worker for over 1,900 students, I could not meet their needs by myself. District level administrators disregarded attempts to advocate for more positions, supports, and preventative services.

I realized that sustainable changes were more likely to occur if the Illinois State Board of Education enforced their 1 student to 350 school social work policy, social emotional learning standards, and reallocated funding so that schools could hire enough school social workers to provide evidenced-based services. My goal was to use my experiences and education to advocate for social emotional learning services in all schools across the state of Illinois. Hopefully, other states will acknowledge the outcomes, and implement services in their schools as well.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of my change leadership project was to determine the deviations needed to occur in the current social and emotional learning (SEL) program that would create more buy-in and produce more positive results. The SEL program had received an overhaul at the start of the 2015–2016 school year. Teachers who taught core content area courses were facilitating these SEL programs, and were expected to teach standards without professional development (PD), training, or supports. As a result of the action research I conducted during the 2014–2015 school year, the network decided to modify the program and staff it with individuals who have degrees and experience in a social work related field. In order to implement the program, I worked with a team of administrators to create systems that would transform how our students were educated in the SEL program. Just as Covey, Covey, Summers, and Hatch (2014) recommended, I recognized there was urgency for more social skills to be taught in schools.

Several issues arose since the program was revamped in August of 2015:

- Only 9 out of 11 of the SEL specialists had the necessary skill set and experience to implement the SEL program.
- The program administrator did not have an advanced degree or clinical license in a social work related field. The SEL specialists with advanced degrees, who wanted to obtain a license, were told that they would receive free supervision from the program administrator while working at the charter school. The SEL specialists reported that their current administrator did not have the necessary knowledge base to provide them with the collaboration required to help them increase their skill set.

- According to SEL specialists, program support from teachers and building administrators was lacking. Prior to this school year, teachers pulled students from the SEL program to take tests, receive tutoring, discuss personal problems, and work on other assignments (Olowe, 2017). Building administrators used the class time for assemblies, to collect compliance forms (health, lunch, etc.), and to facilitate presentations for incoming students. The lack of buy-in and education about the program led to these practices taking place and interrupting the learning environment.
- The class sizes were too large; most classes included over 20 students. The SEL specialists reported that it was difficult for them to create a therapeutic environment and implement lessons that provided opportunities for all students to participate in discussions.
- The SEL specialists were supposed to have PD workshops on a monthly basis that addressed best practices and the implementation of SEL standards in the academic environment. SEL specialists reported that they met periodically, but did not receive the training they were told they would receive during the interview process.
- Due to budget cuts and other funding issues, SEL specialists shared resources in each building. Some reported it was difficult to fully use the resources because they only had them in their possession for a short period of time.
- Students who took the course did not receive a letter grade or credit for the course. SEL specialists stated that it made their job more difficult, and some students

reported that the class is not important because they do not receive a grade and or credit for the course.

- Building administrators did not have a full understanding of how to support the implementation of SEL programs, or how they can have a positive impact on student academics, culture, and climate of the school. Due to a lack of training and experience with SEL standards, building administrators had a difficult time evaluating the SEL specialists and providing them with relevant feedback.

Implementing my program suggestions would create buy-in from SEL specialists, students, and administrators. Giving students a letter grade and credit for taking the class would help communicate the importance of the program to staff, students, and parents. I anticipated that students would engage in less off-task behaviors, participate in more class discussions, and implement SEL skills in their academic and social environments. The SEL specialists would receive relevant PD every month, and an administrator who has a clinical license and advanced degree in a social work related field.

SEL specialists would be educated about the positive impacts SEL has on the academic environment and the culture and climate in the school. A shared language would be created around SEL, and SEL specialists would implement some of the program components in their classes. More collaboration would take place between SEL Specialists, administrators, deans, and counselors.

Monthly meetings would be held during PD time to discuss and implement best practices that address topics such as bullying, teen depression, decision-making, self-esteem, goal setting, and creating safe spaces. SEL specialists would receive weekly or monthly clinical supervision

from the program administrator. The administrator would be highly qualified. Highly qualified educators should have at least a bachelor's degree, full state licensure, and prove they know the subject matter well (e, 2004). In addition, the administrator would be well versed in best practices and would be able to provide timely and relevant feedback about the creation and implementation of lesson plans.

Rationale

I drew upon my experiences as a high school teacher and licensed clinical social worker, which drove my exploration and examination of data. Currently, I am the Director of Specialized Services for a network of charter schools, located on the West and South Sides of Chicago. Prior to becoming a Director of Specialized Services, I worked as a general education high school teacher for eight years and a high school social worker for six years. While working as the sole social worker in a south suburban high school district, I supervised several interns and oversaw a caseload of 2,000 students. I wrote social developmental studies, managed various crises, served as the district's local educational agency, facilitated PD workshops for teachers and parents, and facilitated psycho-education for students so they could learn evidence-based strategies to circumnavigate their surroundings.

During my tenure as a school social worker and teacher, I realized that the social and emotional needs of the students in the school were not being met. While serving as the social worker, I hospitalized over 200 students because of homicidal or suicidal ideations. In addition, several students made threats to bring weapons to the school with the intention to cause bodily harm to staff and students. After students were stabilized in an in-patient facility, most would return to school emotionally inept. Students returning to school after a several day hiatus would

be presented with lower grades and a host of questions from staff members and peers about their untimely absence (Olowe, 2017).

Most students would not take their prescribed medications or follow-up with their therapeutic appointments, as a result of the stigma attached to being prescribed psychotropic medications (Olowe, 2017). Consequently, students would continue to display mental health issues that would impede their ability to access the general education curriculum. Students who lacked appropriate coping skills were more likely to engage in non-compliant behaviors that led to suspensions, absences, lower grades, substance abuse, and an increased high school drop-out rate. According to Elias (2006), when schools implement high-quality SEL programs with fidelity, student grades increase, problem behaviors decrease and the shifts have a positive impact on the school climate.

I chose to focus on implementation of the SEL program for my change plan because the program was not fully implemented as I had designed it. I wanted to discern what policies and procedures should be altered so the program can be implemented with fidelity. I wanted to gather qualitative and quantitative data to find out which components of the program impede the network's ability to gain buy-in from all stakeholders. I used the data to determine if the current program was meeting the social and emotional needs of our students across the network and to decide what type of action steps should be taken to alleviate current issues. Elias (2006) reported that SEL was sometimes a missing piece because it represented a part of education that linked academics with a specific set of skills that were necessary for individuals to succeed in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general.

Goals

SEL programs have the potential to elevate our students to an advanced level of academic achievement and overall attainment. The following goals would support the modified program to implement Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) SEL standards and the program with fidelity. The objectives would help stakeholders collect baseline data and determine if the program is meeting its intended outcomes.

- To create more teacher and administrative buy-in for the SEL Class program.
- To facilitate PD for all staff outlining the positive impacts that SEL programs have in schools.
- To create a system where the SEL specialists are meeting monthly with the counselors and other team members to discuss and implement evidence-based interventions for students.
- To add a letter grade and credits to the class so the network obtains more buy-in from all stakeholders.
- To decrease the class sizes from twenty-plus students to fifteen and eighteen students.
- To create a budget for and purchase more resources for the SEL program.
- To advocate for the hiring of an individual with an advanced degree in a social work related field and a clinical license granted by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation.
- To replace the two SEL Specialist without proper credentials with individuals with experience and a degree in a social work related field.

- To determine if students are being taught SEL standards and evidence-based strategies that will help them navigate their social and academic environments.

My change plan would determine which factors were negatively impacting buy-in from stakeholders, and ascertain if the SEL specialist was implementing the program with fidelity. According to the University of California, Los Angeles (2001), the reality for many large urban schools is that well over 50% of their students exhibit substantial learning, behavioral, and emotional problems. My goals would be to ensure the SEL program was being implemented with fidelity and that we had enough staff and student buy-in to sustain the program. The proposed program modifications, action research, framework, team, and resources would be accessible in the Google drive.

Staff buy-in was necessary to guide students through leadership. Student buy-in was necessary for them to learn social and emotional skills that would help them to enroll and persist in college. The SEL program was designed to create a sense of community, brotherhood, and help students learn academic, social, and emotional skills that will help them to thrive, make sound decisions, and become productive members of society.

Demographics

During the 2015–2016 school year, the charter school network educated 1,133 male students, 99% of the student population was African-American, 324 were freshman, 299 sophomores, 256 juniors and 254 were seniors. Ninety-two percent of the students qualified for the free and reduced lunch program, and the network had a medical compliance rate of 90.4%. Twenty-four percent of students had individualized education plans. The average ACT score was 17.4, with 100% of our graduating seniors accepted into four-year universities. The network

had a 94% freshman college enrollment rate. Overall, the network had a 94% student attendance rate and a 96% staff attendance rate. According to our 2015 School Quality Rating Report, two out of three of our schools were rated level 2+ schools; the third school had a rating of 2. The network's four-year cohort graduation rate was 52.63%.

All three charter schools served students in the high need communities in which they are located; 100% of the students live in an urban environment (Urban Prep Academies, 2014). The charter schools are non-selective schools; the schools do not require particular test scores, all students are admitted via lottery with no evaluation of test scores, academic achievement, or special needs.

The Chief Executive Officer and a group of African-American education, business, and civic leaders founded the nonprofit organization in 2002 (Urban Prep Academies, 2014). The organization opened the first charter school on the south side of Chicago in 2006. The mission of the network is to provide a comprehensive, high quality, college preparatory education that results in the graduates succeeding in college. The charter school has the ability to educate 1,600 students across the network, 100% of the charter schools graduates have been admitted to four-year universities.

Each student at the charter school attends a 45-minute SEL class every day from freshman to senior year. Each grade level has a framework and curriculum that was designed to equip students with a skill-set based on both their developmental and chronological ages. The charter school has grade level SEL specialists who loop with their students to ensure that each student has at least one adult in the building they can trust. In addition, all of the students matriculate through the program in cohorts.

The SEL program was designed to provide students with evidence-based strategies they can use to navigate their academic and social environments. Covey et al. (2014) stated that social and emotional skills could boost learning when integrated in the academic environment. The SEL specialists used the SEL standards outlined on the ISBE website to create and implement lessons. Each SEL specialist was given the autonomy to plan and implement lessons based on the academic, social, and emotional issues that the students in the class are presenting with at that time. SEL specialists collected base line data on the social and emotional status of the students. The information was used to create lesson plans and implement evidence-based strategies. The SEL program included a service learning project and academic grade check component built into the weekly curriculum.

The SEL program was reviewed during the 2014–2015 school year and revamped after my program evaluation. SEL specialists revealed they felt ill equipped to facilitate social emotional learning in a SEL class (Olowe, 2017). Students reported that they did not acquire a skill-set that helped to manage emotions, make sound decisions, and navigate their academic and social environment. I have used the data I collected to make modifications to the current SEL program.

SECTION 2: ASSESSING THE 4 Cs

I created my AS IS and TO BE charts, in order to analyze the SEL program at a network of charter schools in Chicago. The AS IS chart was used to look at the program in its current state and the TO BE chart was created after examining the data and 4 Cs. My 4 Cs framework was designed using Tony Wagner's *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Out Schools* (2006). I analyzed the context, conditions, competencies, and culture of the network SEL program.

Context

The network consists of three charter schools that educate an all male population from the inner city, 99% of the students are African-American and working at least two years below grade level. The network has a poverty rate, high staff turnover rate, and poor freshman cohort graduation rate. The SEL program was not fully implemented as the network intended. Students and SEL specialists were concerned about large class sizes, lack of buy-in from stakeholders, and nonexistent academic grade and credit for course completion.

After nine years of implementing the previous character education program, the network used data from a program evaluation that was completed during the 2014–2015 school year to overhaul the program. Both students and character education teachers reported that the program was ineffective and was not meeting its intended outcomes (Olowe, 2017). The network had a keen focus on academics, college acceptance, completion, and creating systems that would help students alter the trajectories of their lives as well as future generations. In order for the network to produce better academic and social outcomes, the SEL program would need to receive modifications so students realize the full benefits of participating in an SEL program.

Conditions

The network hired 11 SEL specialists to facilitate SEL in the classroom. Two of the campuses had four SEL specialists, and one campus had three specialists because of student enrollment. SEL specialists looped with their students as they matriculated through high school. The freshman SEL specialist becomes the sophomore SEL specialists the following school year, and so forth. Each SEL class had more than 20 kids in each class. The SEL specialists were not supervised; supervision requires someone with a degree in a counseling related field, and the supervisor did not hold an ISBE or Illinois Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (IDPR) license in a counseling field.

When the school year started, staff members were not educated about the goals and parameters of the modified SEL program. The SEL specialists participated in a three-day PD workshop that explained the goals of the programs, mission of the charter school, and program expectations. After that initial PD, SEL specialists did not participate in relevant PD. Furthermore, teachers, administrators, and other staff members were not given PD about the modified program and its intended goals.

SEL specialists were given access to resources located on a Google drive that was created the summer before the modified program was implemented. They were not given directions or support about how to use the drive to evaluate students, create lessons, and implement relevant lessons. The director of the program did not update the Google drive. The director neglected to facilitate relevant PDs for the SEL specialist or network staff. The program director and network should have provided more support for the SEL specialists so they were aware of expectations and the skills necessary to support student needs.

Competencies

The network interviewed over 20 candidates during the summer of 2015 to find individuals who had the disposition and skill-set to facilitate SEL in an academic setting on a daily basis. Nine of the 11 SEL specialists had bachelors or master's degree in a counseling related field. The network administrative team did not have backgrounds in counseling and lacked the necessary skill-set to leverage the SEL program in a way that would create a positive impact on the entire culture and climate of the school. The director of the program was a former principal and did not possess knowledge of evidence-based strategies that should be infused in the SEL lessons taught in the class. The SEL program supervisor did not have the capacity to facilitate SEL professional development workshops for the specialists. The individual did not have a degree or license in any counseling related field, they were unfamiliar with the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-5), therapeutic interventions, the Illinois Mental Health Code, and how to implement the ISBE SEL standards in an academic environment. PD meetings were held every Wednesday from 2:30–3:30 although the calendar stated that specialists were meeting from 2:30–4:30.

The specialists did not have the opportunity to attend building level PD workshops; the program supervisor pulled them every week for SEL workshops that did not provide strategies for implementation and student evaluation. The program supervisor gave each specialist an opportunity to discuss their concerns, but did not provide guidance and opportunities for the team to brainstorm solutions to problems. There was a lack of accountability and support for the program because an unskilled individual monitored it. The lack of relevant PD created frustration for the specialists, administrative team, and produced faulty systems.

Culture

The network did not embrace the modified SEL program. Specialists were teaching SEL in isolation. Staff members used the program time to have students make up tests, old assignments, receive tutoring, counseling services, and work on other social and academic projects. Collaboration between the teachers, administrators, and SEL specialists had not taken place. SEL specialists did not attend grade level meetings, so they did not have the opportunity to ascertain teacher concerns and discuss overall trends as it relates to the social and emotional development of students.

Data was not being collected during the class, and the school failed to use current data (freshman-on-track, attendance, ACT, discipline) to inform and monitor practices that were taking place in the classroom. There was a noted lack of teacher buy-in. Despite pushback from SEL specialists, staff members continued to pull students from classes for various reasons. Administrators, deans, school social workers, teachers, counselors, and case managers did not have conversations about how to transfer the skills learned in the SEL program to the overall school setting.

Some students did not buy-in to the program because they were given opportunities to sleep, play cards, and complete other tasks under the old model. The pass or fail grade also appeared to obstruct student and teacher perceptions about the program. Staff and students reported that the class could not be important if the network was not willing to give students a letter grade or academic credit. The SEL specialists' and students' concerns were addressed during the data analysis. The network disseminated a survey to all students and the specialists

instructing the program. Focus groups were used to obtain more detailed information so that the network could determine what steps should be taken to improve the program.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The SEL program was regarded as one of the principal courses at the charter school. The students attending the charter school came from low-income backgrounds. These students have entered high school several grades behind compared to their same age peers that attend some of the high achieving selective enrollment and suburban schools in the surrounding areas. The students in the network need more protective factors, social, and emotional skills that would enable them to escape poverty and all the ills that come with it. In order for evidence-based strategies to be imparted into our students, the network must have the right curriculum, specialists, PD, supervision, and staff buy-in.

The network used a mixed method approach during 2015–2016 school year to facilitate action research and update the feedback related to the SEL class. The network gathered the data using a number of research techniques. Several meetings were facilitated with network and school administrators to draft the student and teacher questions for the surveys and focus groups. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from students and specialists using a Constant Contact survey. Qualitative data was collected from student and SEL specialist focus groups that were facilitated across the network. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from students and SEL specialists.

A formative evaluation approach was used to gather information for the change plan. According to Patton (2008), formative evaluations focused on improving and enhancing programs. Data gathering techniques included both qualitative and quantitative data. The research design consisted of a survey and focus groups for students and SEL specialists. SEL

specialists were asked to respond to nine forced response questions and three open-ended questions. Students were given nine forced response questions and one open-ended question. Both SEL specialists and students had an opportunity to leave comments after each question. The forced response questions used a 4-point Likert Scale and one question asked the SEL specialists to determine the percentages of students that were engaged on a weekly basis.

Participants

Random assignment was used to choose students to participate in focus groups. Random assignment was used to choose students and character education teachers to participate in focus groups. Cherry (2017) defined random assignment as the use of chance procedures in psychology experiments. This approach enabled the researcher to ensure that each participant had the same opportunity to be assigned to any given group. Study participants were randomly assigned to different groups, such as the experimental group, or treatment group.

All 11 SEL specialists participated in the focus groups. Only one SEL teacher had teaching experience. At my request, a list of students enrolled in each SEL class was submitted to me via email. No more than one student was chosen from each SEL class. Because of my role in the schools, I had limited contact with the students; I was able to choose the students without having any knowledge of their personalities, grades, or experiences. If a student did not report to the focus group because of an absence, or because they did not want to participate, another random name was chosen from the class.

Data Collection

Data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative data methods. Each student enrolled in the SEL program was asked to complete the survey. Using Constant Contact, the

quantitative and portions of the qualitative data were collected using a survey that was disseminated to all students and SEL specialists. Collecting qualitative and quantitative data assisted in various aspects of the research process (Patton, 2008). The mixed-method design was used so both qualitative and quantitative data could be used to assess the context, culture, conditions, and competencies of the SEL program.

Quantitative Data Collection

I gathered the quantitative data using a survey from Constant Contact outlined in Appendices C and E. Students completed the survey during their SEL class and SEL specialists were asked to complete the survey during one of their preparation periods. Both students and SEL specialists were given one week to complete the voluntary survey. Students and SEL specialists responded to questions that used a 4-point Likert scale. All 11 SEL specialists and 824 of 1,133 students completed the Constant Contact survey; 100% of the SEL specialists responded to the survey and participated in the focus groups, and 72% of students responded to the survey.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data was collected during the three focus groups with SEL specialists, and four grade level focus groups with students, across the entire network. Five students from each grade level participated in the focus groups. Two personal counselors that worked in the network facilitated all focus groups. The focus groups were facilitated during the course of two weeks. All student focus groups were held during the first week, and the SEL specialists groups were completed during the second week. Appendixes D and F list the focus group questions group facilitators asked the participants. The researcher served as the note taker and gave each

participant a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Using a laptop computer, notes were taken using Microsoft Word.

Qualitative research methods were used to provide a means of capturing the complexity the participants' views and thoughts about the program (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Prior to each focus group, the note taker explained the purpose of the focus group, participating was voluntary and confidential, and students and SEL specialists could excuse themselves from the process at any time. Students were informed that no identifiers would be documented during the focus group data collection. The note taker typed responses and assigned each participant a code, so that names and other identifiers were omitted during the data collection process. During all of the focus groups, the participants' responses were documented using a Microsoft Word template.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data was analyzed with qualitative and quantitative methods. Baxter and Jack (2008) recognized we have to use multiple methods of collecting data. I analyzed the network's data that was collected during the 2015–2016 school year. The network surveyed students, SEL specialists, and convened focus groups for both students and specialists.

I reviewed the data and drew conclusions based on the information obtained from various stakeholders. Patton (2008) stated that rendering a judgment involves applying values to the data and interpreting the findings. I analyzed the data to determine what changes needed to be made to the SEL program. Patton (2008) stated that findings alone do not determine whether a result is good or bad. My role as an evaluation facilitator and evaluator helped me work with

my team to analyze and interpret the data and share my own perceptions about the findings. My goal was to examine and explore the data for relevance to my change leadership plan.

Qualitative Data Analysis

I evaluated the responses that were documented during the student and teacher focus groups at each campus. I compiled the information into themes and used the information to discern if the program was being implemented as intended. The narrative responses of the students and specialists were used to determine patterns and themes; these narratives were parsed from the open-ended questions in the survey and focus groups. Patton (2008) stated that numbers in isolation do not help researchers make evidence-based decisions. I analyzed the storylines to determine the factors that contributed to how students and SEL specialists perceive the implementation of the SEL classes across the network. The comprehensive data was analyzed to propose changes to the program.

Quantitative Data Analysis

I reviewed the percentage of participants who responded positively or negatively to closed and open-ended questions, as part of the quantitative data analysis. Patton (2008) specified that researchers should determine standards of desirability to establish if the program is considered highly effective, adequate, or inadequate. Taking Patton's advice, I used charts so the information was streamlined and easy to read. Patton (2008) stated that data should be organized in a sensible format so that decision makers can recognize patterns.

SECTION FOUR: RELEVANT LITERATURE

SEL programs teach students self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Didron, 2013). These skills helped students manage their emotions and develop healthy relationships with others. SEL programs that were implemented with fidelity taught students to make evidence-based decisions, and determine the consequences of their actions. These skills were determined important during adolescence and adulthood. SEL programs had lasting positive impacts on current and future generations. Students who participated in SEL programs had better outcomes than students who did not.

Dymnicki, Sambolt, and Didron (2013) stated that SEL skills were crucial for academic and lifelong success. Implementing high fidelity SEL programs throughout the network of schools would produce better outcomes for all stakeholders. SEL infused into a school's culture and climate helped to produce well-rounded individuals. Academic institutions had a responsibility to construct student learning so that students would be equipped with strategies that will help them compete in a global society. Student outcomes were securely attached to academic and emotional intelligence. The literature review outlined the purpose of SEL programs, program implementation, and outcomes.

Purpose of SEL Programs

SEL programs enabled the adolescents' transition into adulthood with the social and emotional intelligence to make good decisions, set goals, manage their emotions, sustain relationships, and make positive contributions to society. Goleman's (1995) research on emotional intelligence served as a catalyst for the SEL standards, the ISBE was expected to

implement these standards in schools across state. ISBE adopted SEL standards in 2004, and schools began to receive guidance and support for implementing the standards in 2007 (Zinsser & Dusenbury, 2015).

The SEL program used the SEL standards as a framework. Facilitators created and implemented lessons plans that infused the goals and benchmarks into the daily curriculum. SEL was the process of helping children and adults develop fundamental skills for life and effectiveness (CASEL, 2008). Schools who implemented SEL standards across the curriculum experienced fewer problems in the academic environment.

Goleman (1995) used the term *emotional malaise* to outline the numerous issues students across the country confront with in today's society. One of the goals of the SEL program was to equip students with a toolbox of evidence-based strategies to manage their emotions and make sound decisions. Goleman (1995) asserted that the most common cause of disability in teenagers is mental illness. Most schools across of America were dealing with students who have mental health issues.

As a school social worker, I worked with many students who had been hospitalized for having a DSM-5 diagnosis. Unfortunately, some would make several trips to residential treatment facilities during the school year. Emotional intelligence is said to be just as important, if not, more important than cognition (Goleman, 1995). I was able to address the needs of my students using both academic and social and emotional interventions. I facilitated psycho-education in many classrooms using academic strategies, role-plays, reflections, and therapeutic techniques to modify behaviors and teach students positive ways to cope.

SEL has become more important in society because of the breakdown in the nuclear family. Goleman (1995) suggested that there has been a tremendous erosion of the nuclear family, which has caused increased divorce rates, parents have less time for their children, and increased mobility. Shriver (2015) stated that the best SEL programs addressed issues around school climate, community engagement, staff development, and restorative justice. In order to change the culture and climate of the school, as well as teacher and student perceptions of the SEL classes, SEL would have to be infused into the entire school environment.

Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, and Hanson-Peterson (2017) built on Goleman's (1995) premise, as they recognized that SEL skills could be taught and measured, that they promoted positive development, reduced problem behaviors, and improved students' academic performance, citizenship, and health-related behaviors. They suggested such skills predicted important life outcomes, completing high school on time, obtaining a college degree, and securing stable employment. SEL promoted students' academic, life, and career success. Federal, state, and local policies would serve our nation's young people, to foster the programs that ensure the development of social, emotional, and academic growth.

Lindsay (2013) reported that academics and SEL should provide an essential part of any school curriculum. Goleman (1995) reported that schools are left as the one place communities can turn to for assistance with children's deficiencies in emotional and social competence. The SEL class was imperative because of the lack of support in many homes, the violence the students encounter in their communities, and the added stressors that are placed on many families in today's society.

SEL Program Implementation

Implementing a program required financial and human resources. Programs that were successful and yielded positive outcomes included several components that helped support implementation. Elksnin and Elksnin (2003) suggested that SEL programs should have a keen focus on emotional awareness, social skills, and interpersonal problem solving. High quality programs had a positive impact on academics and the school's culture and climate. In order to implement an evidence-based program, the network should adopt CASEL's School Theory of Action Framework (2017) that was outlined in the on-line document school-level SEL to implement SEL. The framework stated that schools should implement these guidelines when developing a SEL program:

- 1) Develop a vision that prioritizes academic, social, and emotional learning.
- 2) Conduct an SEL related resource and needs assessment to inform goals for school wide SEL.
- 3) Design and implement effective professional learning programs to build internal capacity for academic, social, and emotional learning.
- 4) Adopt and implement evidence-based programs for academic, social, and emotional learning across all grades.
- 5) Integrate SEL at all three levels of school functioning (curriculum and instruction, school wide practices and policies, family and community partnerships).
- 6) Establish processes to continuously improve academic, social, and emotional learning through inquiry and data collection.

Recommended action included hiring a trained individual who has at least a master's degree in a counseling related field. The individual should have experience working in schools and implementing SEL standards in classrooms, groups, and individual settings. The individual should have experience implementing programs and training staff, in order to achieve optimal success. Dymnicki et al. (2013) recognized SEL programs should include trained observers, videos of lessons being taught, teacher journals, student and teacher focus groups, and teacher and principal interviews. It was recommended that school staff should complete implementation checklists that describe what was covered in each program lesson.

Elias (2014) stated that SEL programs must be an integral part of education and that schools must understand the nature of the values within America today. School districts that invested in an evidence-based program can be implemented in all schools in the vicinity. Once a program was chosen, the program supervisor and SEL specialists should receive on-going training on ISBE SEL standards, program implementation, evaluation, and program support. High quality supervision and PD should be imbedded in all SEL programs.

Dusenbury, Calin, Domitrovich, and Weissberg (2015) stated that the school should revamp their organizational structures, operations, and academic, social and emotional learning goals when implementing SEL programs. Training sessions were most successful when they were ongoing, and teachers met once a month in grade level teams to discuss the social and emotional status of their students, classroom management, restorative justice practices, and the skills that they were embedding into their lesson plans. School data should be used to monitor academic progress, classroom disruptions, detentions, suspensions, and attendance.

Beland (2007) argued for SEL program components embedded into the school day, as schools increased social awareness, and school connectedness when training faculty members in building relationships and creating supportive learning environments. In the School-Connect program, teachers took time to find out about their students and help students find out about one another. Students created classroom guidelines for behavior, interviewed and introduced one another to the class, and interviewed their teachers to find out what they need from students in order to be effective teachers. Students shared what they needed from their teachers to learn effectively. In turn, teachers fostered discussion skills that helped students actively and respectfully listen to their peers.

SEL Outcomes

Goleman (1995) reported that people who are emotionally adept, who know how to manage their own feelings well, and who read and deal effectively with other people's feelings, had an advantage in every area in life. Infusing SEL into every aspect of school life helped students acquire skill-sets that would help them to persist and graduate from both high school and college. Dominguez and LaGue (2013) went a step further and suggested that educational success is dependent upon social and emotional competence. People who were proficient in SEL competencies were less likely to abuse substances, and were more likely to be productive members of society.

Researchers at CASEL (2008) advised that SEL implemented with fidelity and integrated into the framework of the school and community provided students with the skills they needed to be successful in various settings. Dominguez and LaGue (2013) defined SEL as the process in which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving to

achieve important life tasks. Students who had a difficult time regulating emotions tended to engage in socially unconventional behaviors.

I was able to witness the impact SEL had on the students and the school's climate and culture, while working as a school social worker. CASEL Researchers (2008) suggested that more than half of all lifetime cases of mental disorders begin at age 14, and three-quarters at age 24. Students who received SEL on a daily basis were better equipped to manage their emotions and make evidence-based decisions. SEL taught students the skills they needed to handle relationships and make ethical decisions.

Dymnicki et al. (2013) addressed bullying, substance abuse, and sexual harassment, which are considered rampant in society. They acknowledged that individuals who participated in SEL programs had improved SEL skills, attitudes towards self and others, social behavior, academic performance, reduced conduct problems, and emotional distress. The impact on academic performance translated to an 11-percentile point gain in students' achievement test scores.

Weissberg, Resnick, Payton, and O'Brien (2003) reported that high quality SEL programs facilitated on-site PD that included basic theoretical knowledge, modeling, practicing effective teaching methods, regular coaching, and constructive feedback from colleagues. My change leadership plan involved altering the leadership for the SEL Class. Unfortunately, the current supervisor did not have the capacity to provide support for the SEL class instructors or the rest of the stakeholders.

SEL programs that were implemented with fidelity also had a greater impact on the school's culture and climate, while yielding notable outcomes for SEL specialists. A positive

school climate was also associated with low teacher burnout and higher levels of job satisfaction. Collie, Shapka and Perry (2012) reported that SEL practices implemented in the school environment were negatively associated with teacher burnout, and positively associated with a commitment to their profession, job satisfaction, and student outcomes.

According to Evans, Murphy and Scourfield (2015), systematic reviews and meta-analysis within SEL programs had a definite impact on SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance of the students who are exposed to the training. SEL classes that were revamped offered students the benefits that had conclusive impact on the entire school community. Protheroe (2007) stated that Maslow's hierarchy of human needs suggested that students who have their needs of safety, belonging, self-esteem, and basic physiological needs met were in a better position to excel in their academic environments.

In sum, SEL programs that were implemented with fidelity and involved all stakeholders were able to advance students both emotionally and academically. The proposed changes to the SEL program would facilitate the adjustments required to enhance the entire student body and school environment.

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

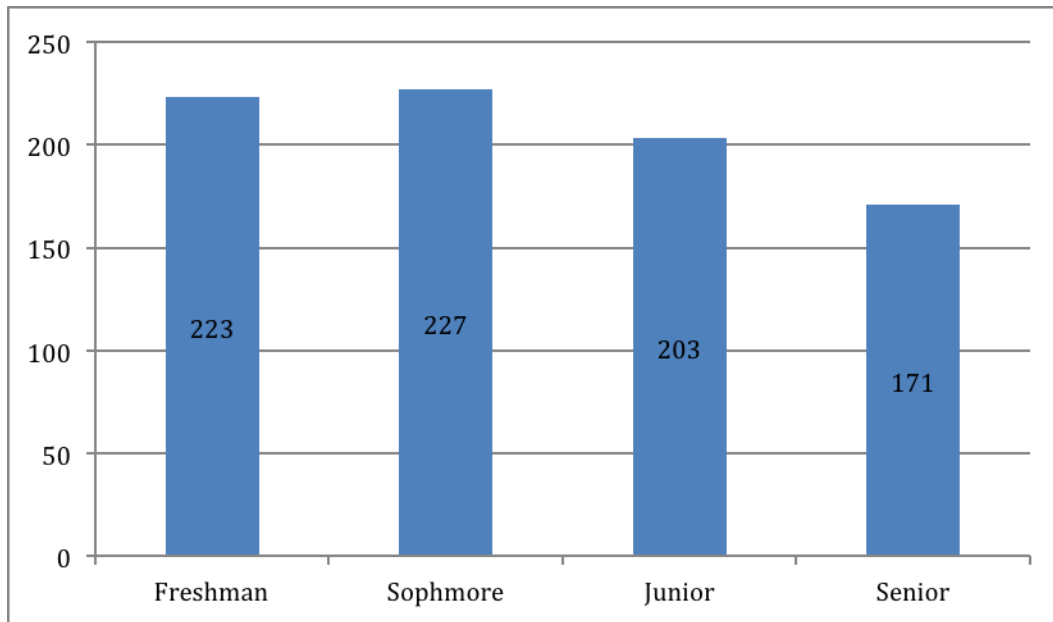
Quantitative Data Analysis

Appendix C was disseminated to students during the Pride Class over the course of one week. Out of 1,133 students enrolled in one of the three schools across the network, 824 students took the survey, 72% of the student population responded to the survey. The network employed 11 Pride leaders identified as SEL specialists during the 2015–2016 school year, 100% of the Pride leaders responded to the survey outlined in Appendix E.

Constant Contact Student Survey Results

Table 1

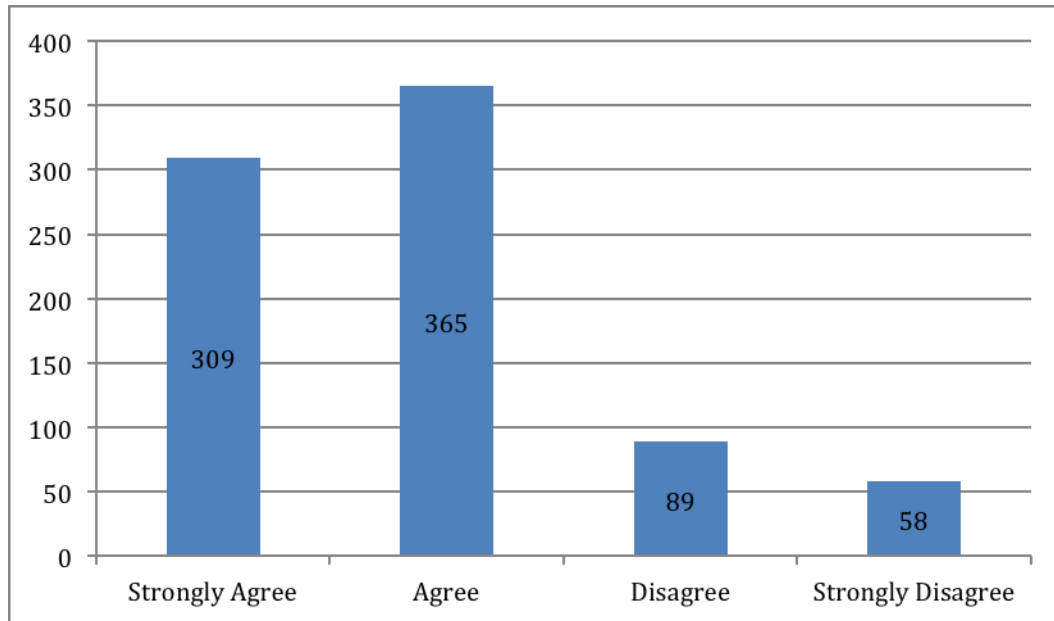
I am a _____.



All of the students who took the survey during the 2015–2016 school year responded to these questions, 28% of the respondents were freshmen, 27% sophomores, 24% were juniors, and 21% were seniors. The majority of responses were from the sophomore class, and the survey was disseminated to all three schools in the network.

Table 2

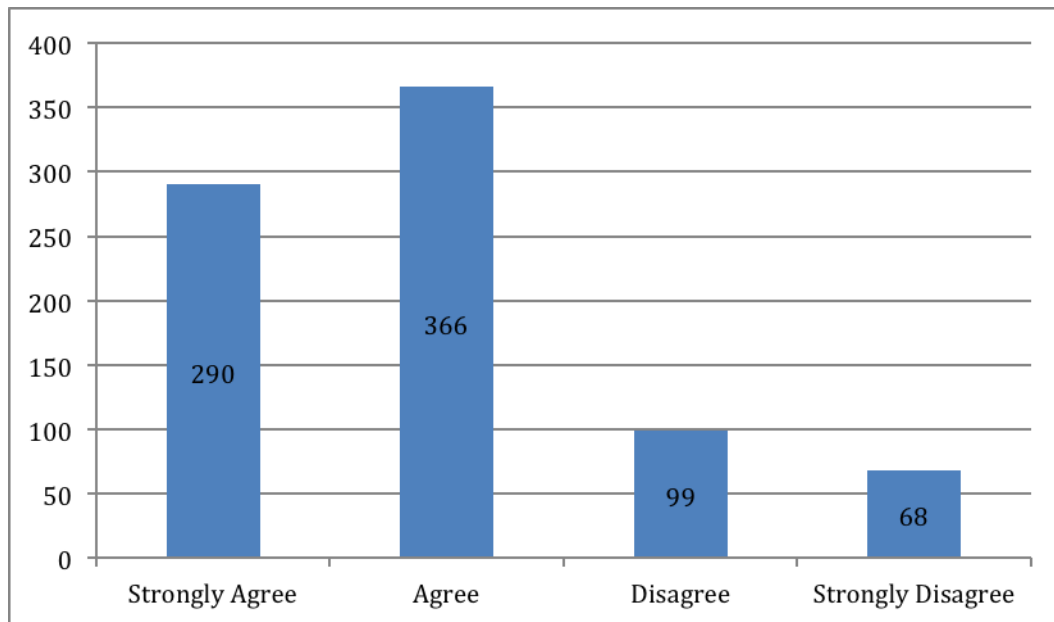
My Pride leader helps create a bond between my brothers and myself in Pride.



Eighty-two percent of the students reported that their Pride leader helped them to create a strong bond with their brothers. Seventeen percent reported that they did not believe their Pride leader helped to facilitate a bond with their peers in the SEL course. Three students did not respond to this question. Overwhelmingly, students felt that their Pride leader created an environment where they could build trusting and positive relationships with their peers in the same class.

Table 3

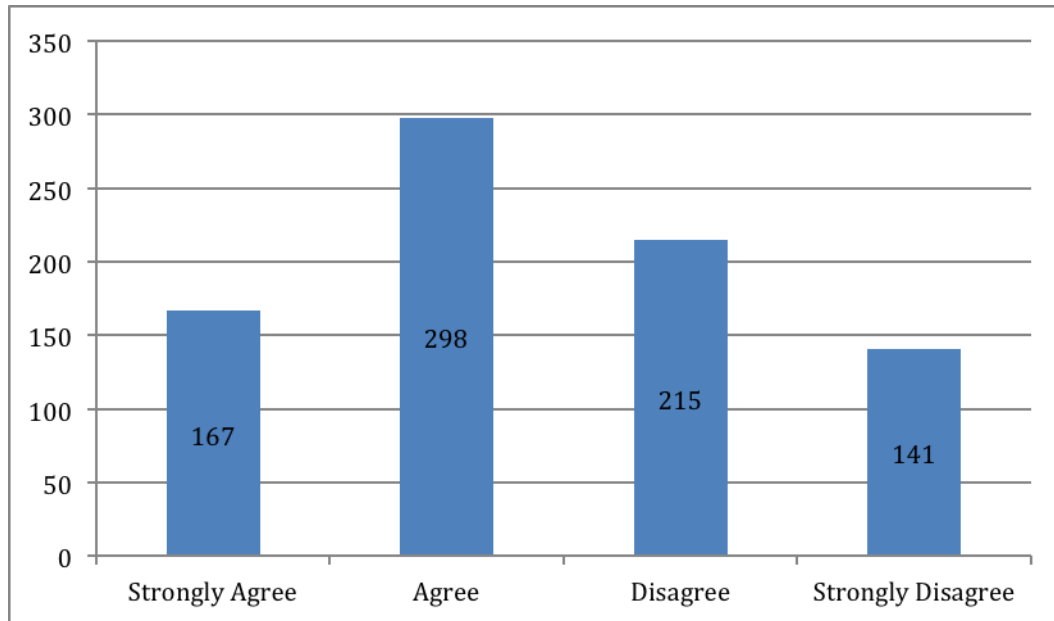
Pride is important because I have the opportunity to discuss issues related to my personal life and goals.



Seventy-eight percent of students reported that they were given an opportunity to discuss issues related to their personal life in their SEL course. Twenty percent disagreed with the statement. One student did not respond. Students found the SEL course valuable and that it gave them a safe environment to discuss their personal life and goals. The SEL specialist had the necessary skill-set that helped to craft an environment where students felt comfortable discussing life and personal goals.

Table 4

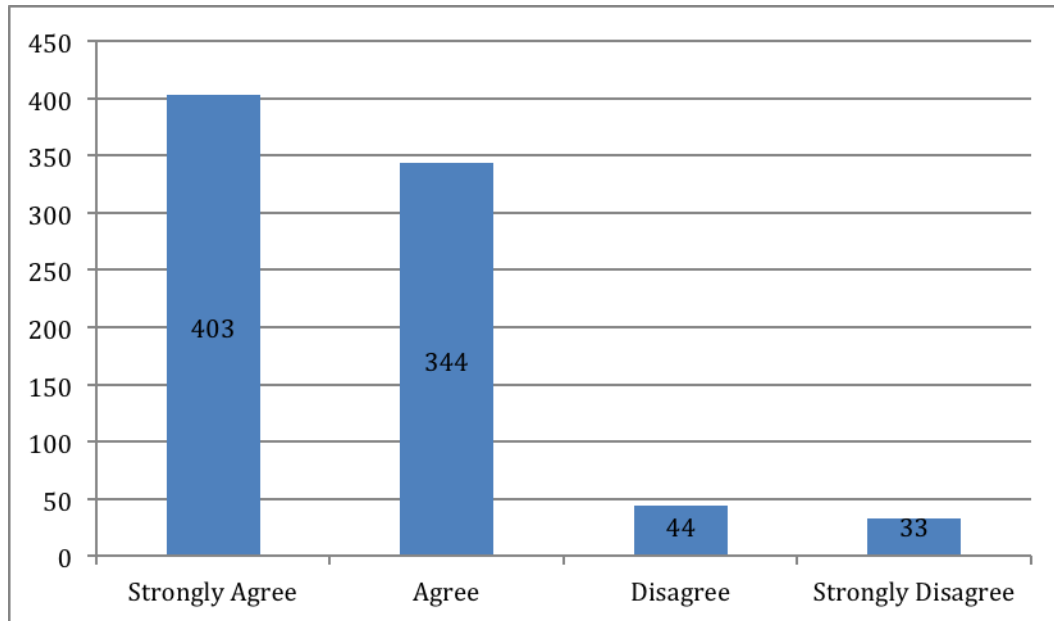
Pride is just as important as my academic classes.



Fifty-six percent of students reported that Pride is just as important as their academic courses, 43% did not agree, three students did not respond. Despite the fact that students do not receive a letter grade for Pride, the majority of students reported that the course was just as important as the courses that counted towards graduation and met college entrance requirements. This could be because students reported they had an outlet for discussing real world problems and learning evidence-based strategies that helped them to regulate their emotions and make better decisions.

Table 5

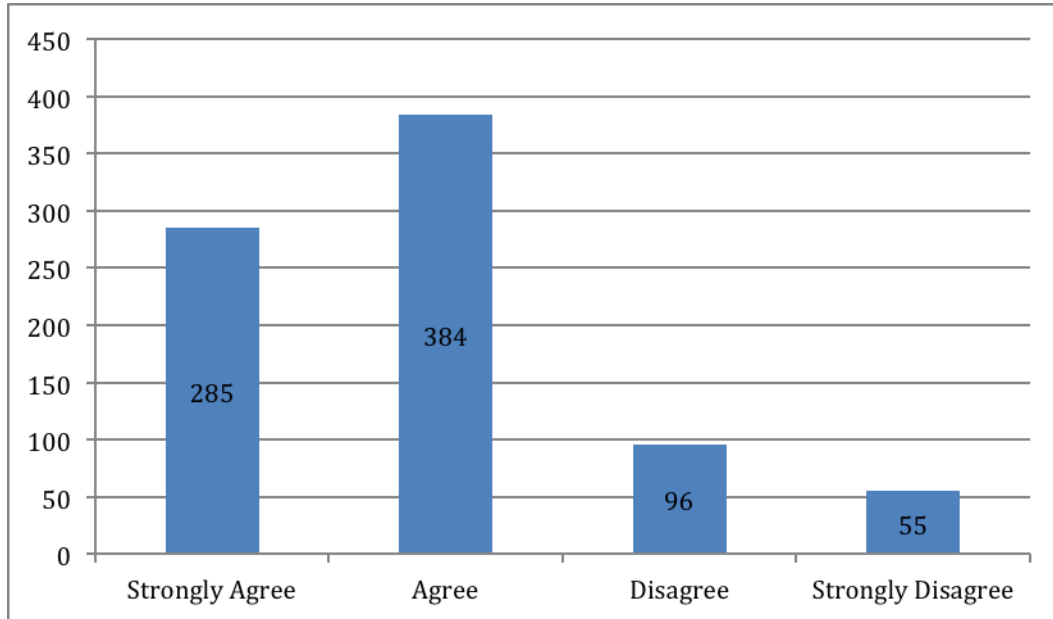
In Pride we discuss the importance of making good choices inside and outside of school.



Ninety percent of students reported that they discussed the importance of making good decisions during school and in the community, 9% disagreed with the statement. Students enrolled in the SEL course learned how to make responsible decisions. Responsible decision-making was one component of the five ISBE SEL standards, which the SEL specialists were using as a guide to create their lesson plans.

Table 6

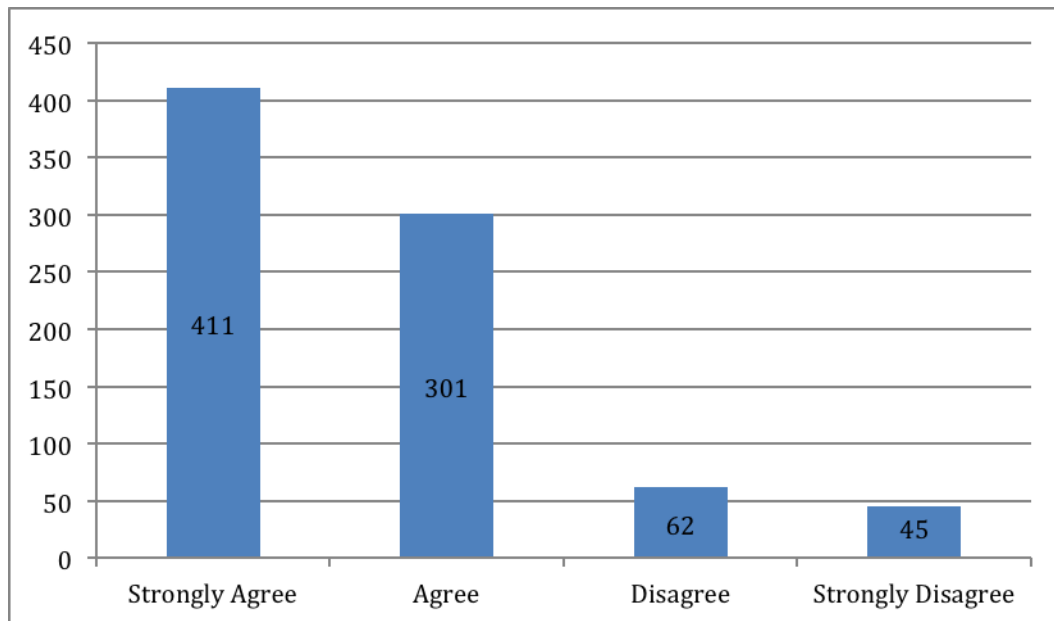
I have learned strategies in Pride that help me deal with challenges I face.



Eighty-one percent of students reported that the strategies they learned in Pride helped them to deal with the challenges they face, 18% stated that disagreed that the SEL course helped them to deal with personal challenges, four students did not respond to the question. Students reported that they had learned how use mindfulness, stress management, and other strategies to ascertain how they should make better decisions. Self-awareness was considered the ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This included accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a well grounded send of confidence and optimism (CASEL 2015). I believe that self-awareness, one component of the ISBE SEL standards helped facilitate this process.

Table 7

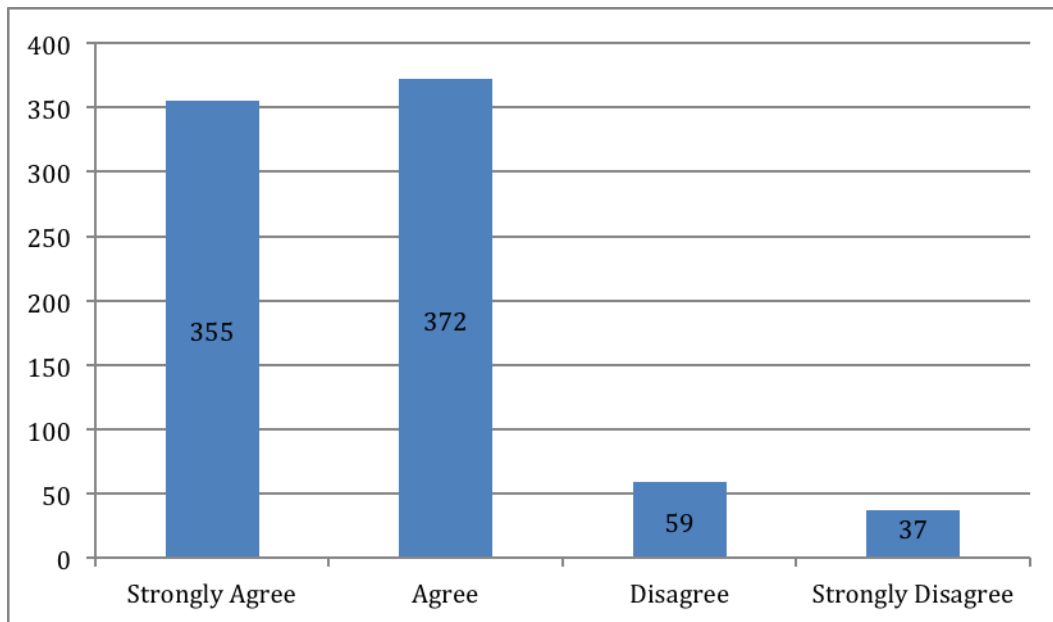
I trust my Pride leader.



When asked to respond to the question of trust, 86.9% of students reported that they trusted their SEL specialists, 13% reported they did not trust their Pride leader, five students did not respond. The SEL specialists were trained in assessing the social and emotional status of individuals and implement interventions to address their areas of deficit. One of the most important components of providing social and emotional support is the ability to establish a nurturing and professional relationship with the client. An overwhelming majority of students across the network reported that they trusted their SEL specialists and stated they felt they could discuss personal issues with their Pride leader and peers.

Table 8

My Pride leader leads discussions about school and non-school issues that my brothers and I may have.

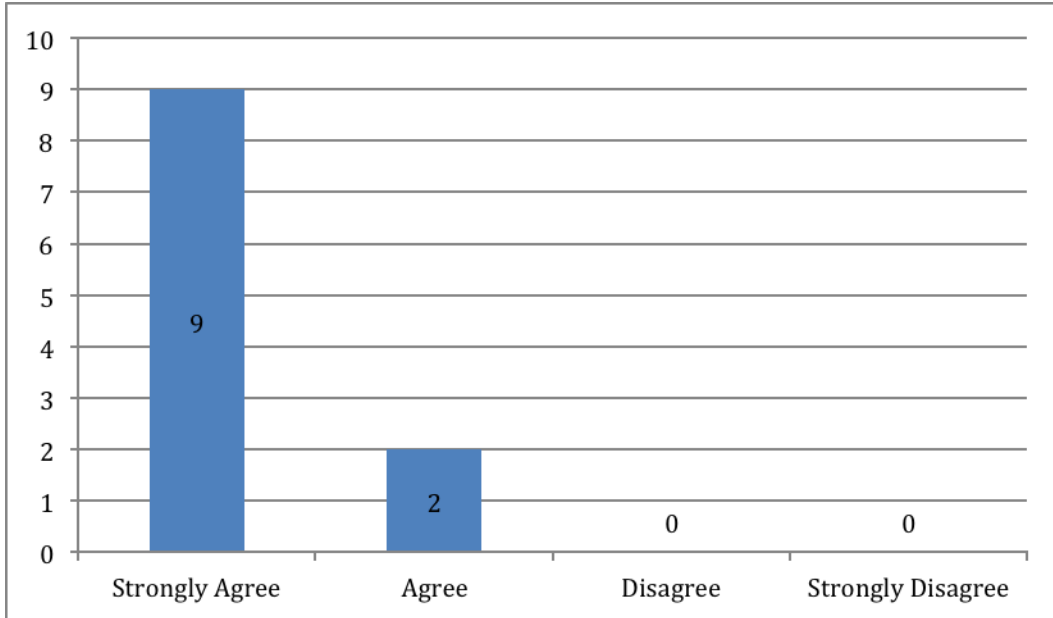


Eighty-eight percent of students reported that their Pride leader discussed issues they faced both in and outside of the school day, 11% of students reported that they disagreed with the statement, one student did not respond to the question. The students enrolled in the SEL program live in an urban area that is plagued with gangs, gun violence, and poverty. Students reported dealing with a myriad of academic as well as social and emotional issues that impact their ability to focus on the tasks at hand. The SEL specialists were aware of student concerns because of the formal and informal assessments they had the students participate in on a weekly basis. The assessments helped them adapt their instruction and interventions to meet the social and emotional needs of their students.

Constant Contact Pride Leader/Social Emotional specialists Survey Results

Table 9

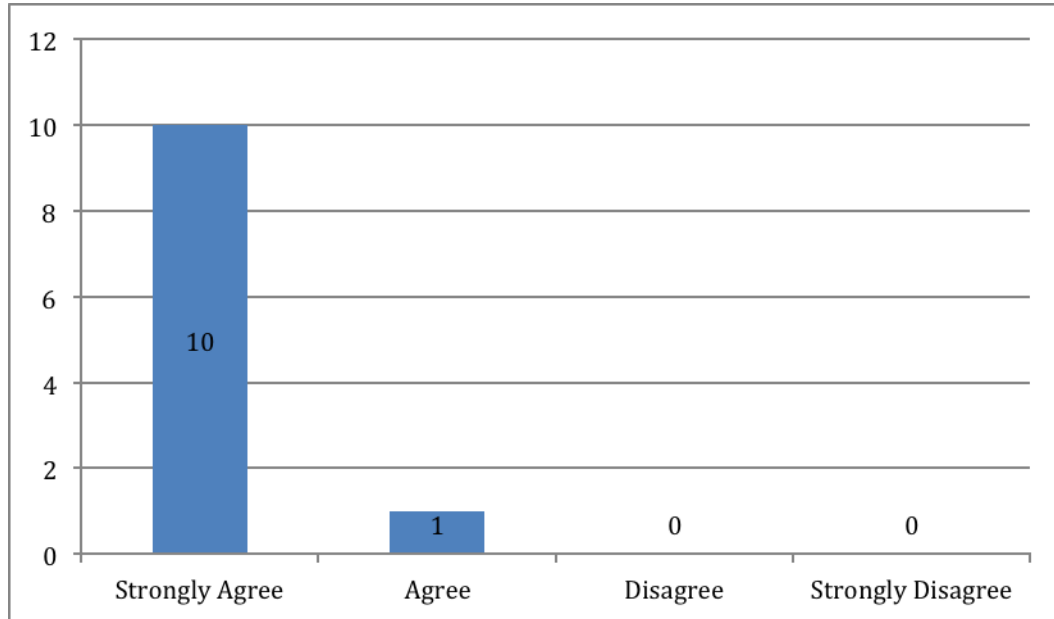
I understand the purpose of Pride.



One hundred percent of Pride leaders reported that they understood the purpose of the Pride program. Pride leaders stated that they understood the impact a well-rounded SEL program would have on student performance in school and their social and emotional well-being. This notion could be due to the fact that nine of 11 SEL specialists had a bachelors or master’s degree in a counseling related field.

Table 10

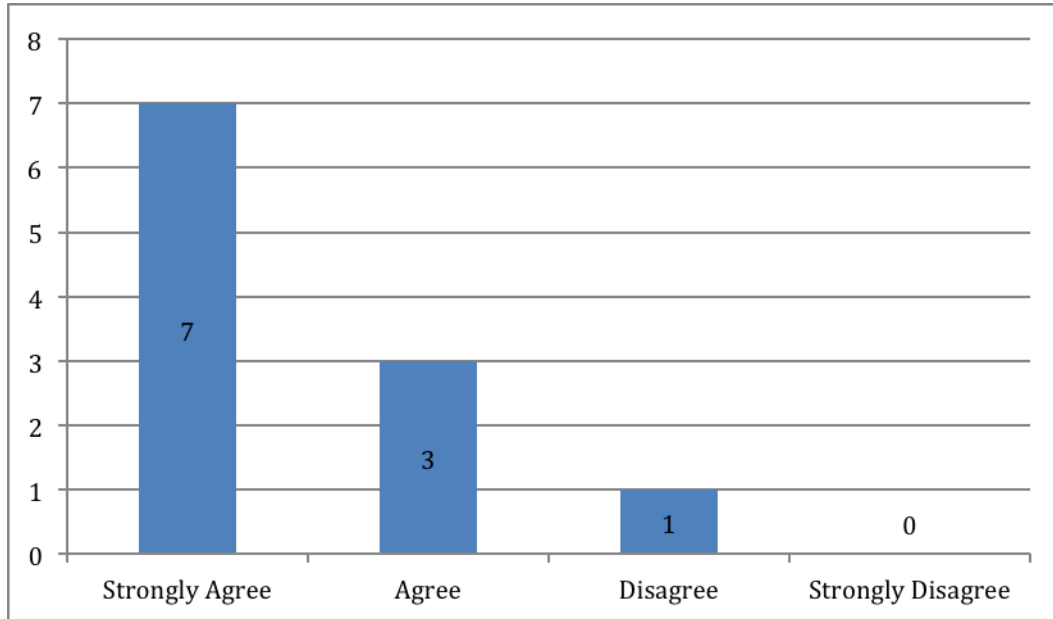
Pride is a necessary component of the Urban Prep experience.



One hundred percent of Pride leaders reported that Pride was an important component of the experience at the charter school. The network of three charter schools is unique because one of the school's founding principles was developing and enhancing relationships between teachers, and from peer to peer. The network was very intentional about designing the Pride program to incorporate time for students and staff to bond, discuss important issues, and teach the young men how to navigate their academic and social environment.

Table 11

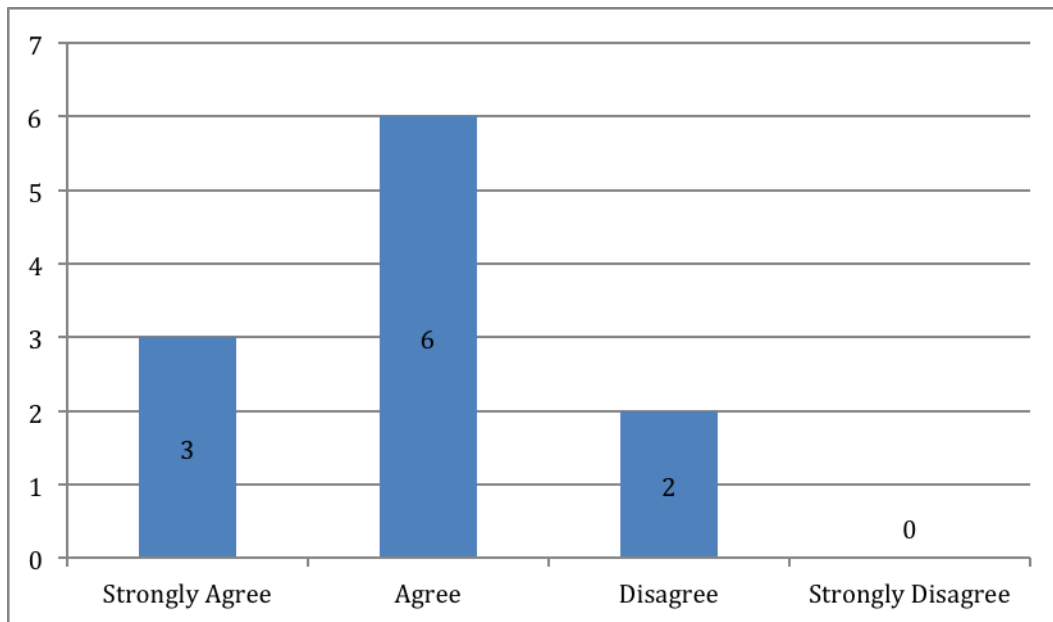
I use the ISBE SEL standards to create and implement lesson plans in Pride.



Ninety percent of the Pride leaders reported that that used the ISBE SEL standards to draft and implement lesson plans for the SEL course, one Pride leader reported that they did not use the standards. All SEL specialists were given a copy of the ISBE SEL standards before the school year started. The program supervisor and the individual who led the modification of the program facilitated a PD. The SEL standards were used as basis for lesson planning, and 81% of SEL specialists were already trained in the use and importance of the standards.

Table 12

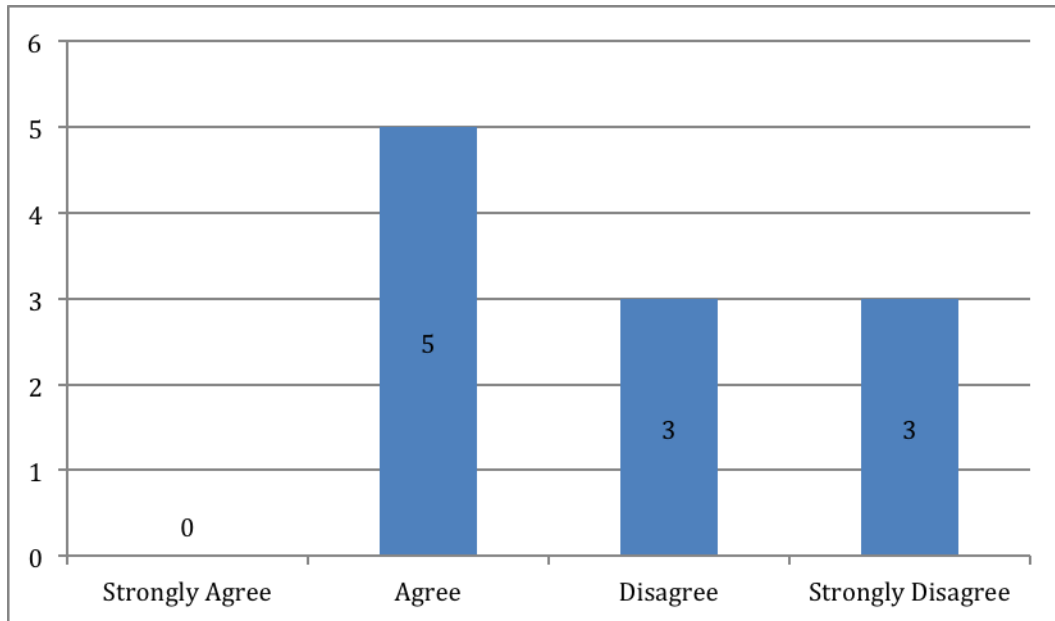
My students can verbalize and implement evidence-based strategies that will help them to navigate their academic and social environments.



Eighty-one percent of Pride leaders reported that their students were able to verbalize and implement evidence-based SEL strategies both in and out of school. Eighteen percent of Pride leaders stated that their students could not verbalize or infuse the strategies into their daily life.

Table 13

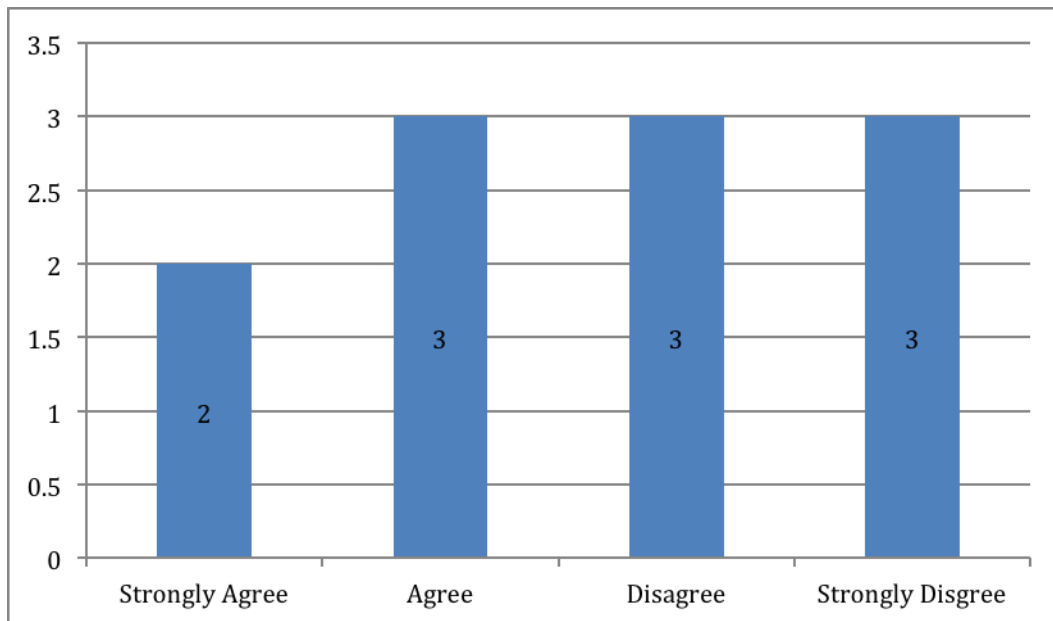
Urban Prep has equipped me with resources that help me facilitate the Pride program.



Forty-five percent of Pride leaders stated that the network equipped them with resources that enabled them to create and implement lessons based on the ISBE SEL standards. Fifty-four percent of Pride leaders reported that they were ill equipped with resources that would assist them in implementing standards. The SEL specialists reported that they did not feel they had adequate resources to implement the ISBE SEL standards in the academic environment. Some specialists reported that they did not have projectors, classroom materials, and other activities to help facilitate SEL learning in the classroom.

Table 14

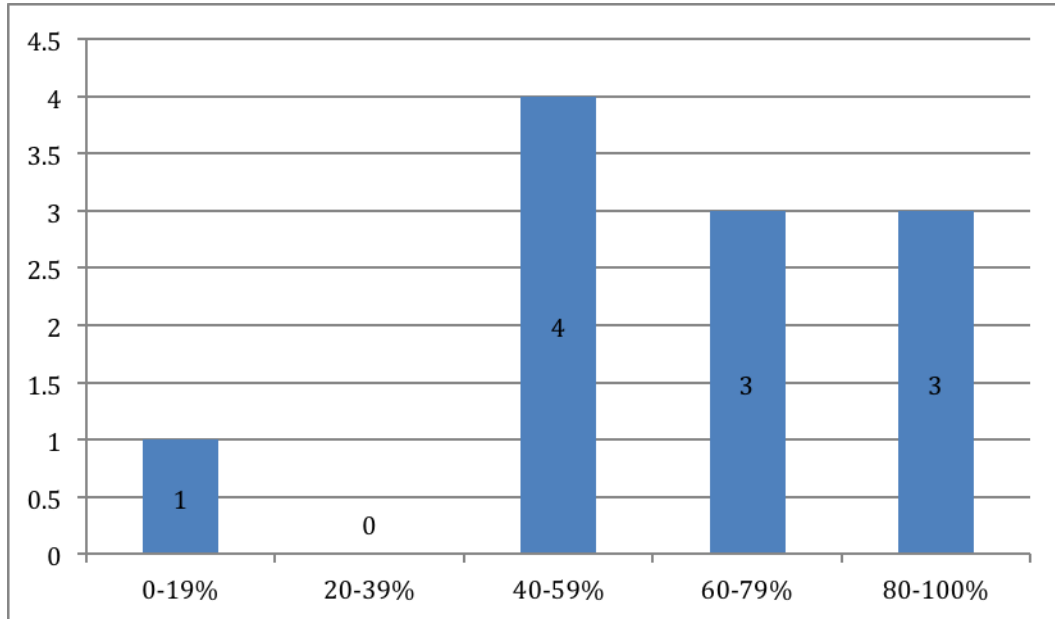
I use the Google drive to help facilitate instruction in Pride.



Forty-five percent of Pride leaders reported that they used the network created Google drive to help them plan and implement lessons in the SEL program. Fifty-four percent reported that they did not use the Google drive to help them plan lessons. The Google drive was created to give the SEL specialist a number of resources they could use to implement evidence-based lessons that were in sync with the ISBE SEL standards. Most specialists reported they used materials and other curriculums that they used in previous positions or in school to implement the standards. Others reported that they created tools that they felt were more useful with the African-American male population. The Google drive contained one evidence-based curriculum that SEL specialists used.

Table 15

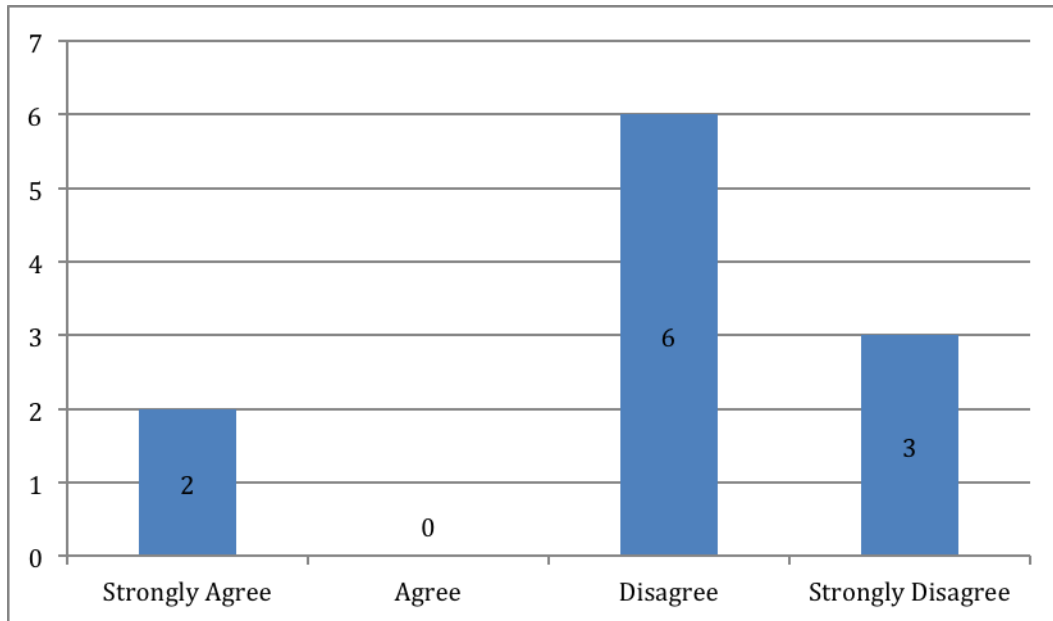
The following percentages of students are actively engaged in Pride on a daily basis.



Fifty-four percent of Pride leaders stated that 60–100% of their students were actively engaged in the SEL program on a daily basis, 36% reported that 40–59% of their students were engaged on a daily basis, and 9% reported that only about 19% of their students were participating in class on a daily basis. SEL specialists reported that their class sizes were too large and that it was difficult to create a therapeutic environment with more than 20 students in a class. Some reported that they needed more assistance with classroom management, more resources, and more relevant PD from the supervisor. SEL specialists shared that some students had not bought into the modified program.

Table 16

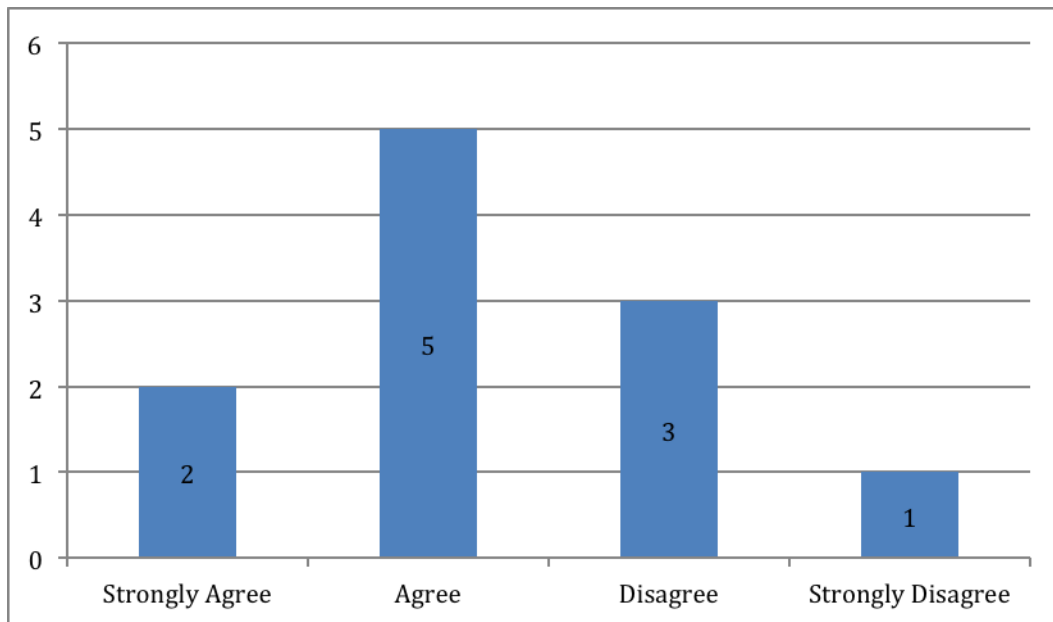
My colleagues support the Pride program and feel it is important for student growth.



Eighteen percent of Pride leaders reported that they felt that their colleagues supported the program and felt that it contributed to student success, 81% of Pride leaders disagreed with the statement. Nine out of 11 SEL specialists reported that their colleagues did not support the program, understand its importance, and impeded their ability to shift the paradigms of some students enrolled in the course. Faculty members who worked in the network prior to the program being modified used course time to tutor students, provide extended time for diverse learners, and work on school wide initiatives.

Table 17

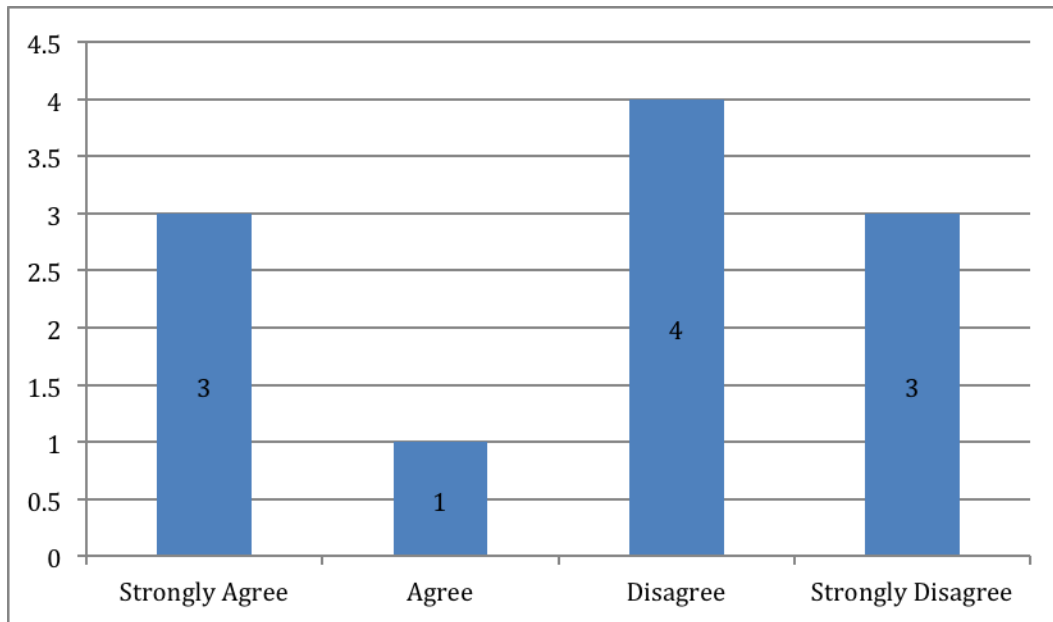
Building and network administrators support the Pride program and feel it is important for student growth.



Sixty-three percent of Pride leaders reported that building and network administrators supported the program and felt it contributed to student growth, 36% reported that they did not feel the administration supported the program or that it had a correlation with student growth. Seven out of 11 SEL specialists reported that they felt that the network and building level administrators supported the program. Four specialists disagreed. Specialists reported that they felt their supervisor did not have the training, licensure, or skill-set to help them implement the ISBE SEL standards in an academic environment. It was reported that PD was irrelevant and that the program supervisor did not plan any relevant activities or provide any clinical supervision to help them create action plans to address the social and emotional issues the students were presenting with during whole group instruction.

Table 18

Relevant learning experiences (professional development workshops, readings, team meetings, etc.) have been made available to me while working as a Pride leader, and have helped me to assess and provide classroom interventions for my students.



Thirty-six percent of Pride leaders reported that they had attended relevant PD workshops and meetings that helped to increase their knowledge about student interventions, 63% of Pride leaders reported that they did not attend relevant workshops that would help increase their knowledge about classroom interventions. SEL specialists reported that the majority of their PD consisted of the program supervisor instructing them to do whatever they thought was best. In addition, it was reported that the program supervisor informed the SEL specialists that administration did not support the program and that they could do whatever they wanted. Teacher Z stated that they were told that no one could tell them how to do their job and that they knew best.

Qualitative Data Analysis

A summary of the student survey and focus group data included the student perceptions of SEL specialist program implementation. The SEL program was revamped and implemented during the 2015–2016 school year. Eleven SEL specialists were hired during the summer of 2015. Nine out of the 11 that were employed had experience and a college degree in a counseling related field. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors had participated in a character education class for 1–3 years prior to the program being modified.

Taylor and Kilgus (2014) reported that schools that lack SEL programs are not equipping students with knowledge they need to thrive academically and develop emotional intelligence. Most students were excited about the new SEL Program and reported during the focus groups and on the survey that their SEL specialist was helping them to be a better-rounded person.

Student A said:

My pride teacher tells me how to have conversation with my brother to not have problems with my brothers.

Other students reported that they enjoyed the course and that they felt their specialist created an environment that was conducive to expressing your feeling and talking about your problems.

Student B reported:

Pride is always a safe space to express myself and we have the opportunity to speak our minds if something is bothering us.

In order for the program to grow, thrive, and reach its full potential, student buy-in should become a network priority, and systems have to be put in place so that students are aware of how SEL will have a positive impact on their lives.

Student C stated:

I like pride as the way it is because last year I didn't learn anything, we just sat in a class and did whatever we want.

Some students who participated in the class under the old model stated that the previous program model was better because they were allowed to work on other assignments or to do whatever they wanted to do.

Student D said:

Pride is useless now, pride use to help me stay organized and finish work or homework I needed to finish, now it just consistent of people talking or not talking about their emotions because they don't always want to talk about it.

Other students reported that they enjoyed having some discussions but still wanted to have more time to complete assignments during the class.

Student E reported:

Pride should go back to how it was when I was before my senior year. Pride should be an opportunity to have discussions and do homework.

Although the SEL specialist dealt with resistance, most students understood the importance of the program and the skills the specialists were attempting to impart in students.

Student F stated:

Well in the current status quo, PRIDE has been given an overhaul, one that seems to be moving for a better PRIDE class program. One thing that will always be of concern is student engagement and topic discussion. I am aware, as I am sure you all are aware, sometimes my brothers just do not want to engage in discussions or seem intent on disrupting the class. Well there is not much we can do for that right now as many habits and ideals are ingrained in my brothers and only positive reinforcement can help them develop healthier attitudes and adjust behaviors. I would say the trajectory PRIDE is currently heading in is great and focuses the aim of PRIDE with a much-needed intensity.

Taylor and Kilgus (2014) advised that SEL competencies are essential to adolescent development. Overall, students reported that their SEL specialists were having a positive impact on their lives, and that the modified program was helping them to reach their academic goals and establish and maintain relationships with others.

Student G stated:

Pride teaches us how to use integrity inside and outside of school.

The modified program was met with both resistance and acceptance. Students reported that they were learning useful skills they could use to help them accomplish their goals. Student H surmised that the program could be further developed if all students recognized how powerful the course could be if student participation increased.

Student H stated:

We can improve pride by just being open about our issues and discussions so that we can share more of our emotions.

Student Views on the Importance of SEL Program

Students acknowledged how influential the SEL Program was in their lives. When asked what was working well in the program, students responded with a number of insights.

Student I recounted:

I have learned to build a better relationship with all the brothers and make people feel comfortable both in and out of school.

Student J asserted:

I have learned basic life skills, to be able to cope in certain situations, speaking skills, and how to deal with different situations when you encounter them.

The remodeled program provided students with an opportunity to express their feelings and obtain support from their SEL specialists and peers.

Student K said:

My class is a place where you can come and tell someone about your problems you may be having and you know your words won't leak out.

Most SEL specialist working within the program entered with prior knowledge about how to create a safe space for students, build relationships, and teach the ISBE SEL standards. This past knowledge helped create a more peaceful and therapeutic environment that led to students sharing their thoughts, feelings, and obstacles.

Student L expressed:

The class allows us to share our conflicts in life and it teaches us to become the best person we can be.

Student M stated:

Things like the Maslow theory or social and emotional thinking are examples of the activities we do that help us make good choices.

Students were able to verbalize the benefits they've received from participating in the SEL program. The SEL specialists were normalizing the importance of self-awareness and self-management, two key components of the ISBE SEL standards.

The student qualitative data pointed out some pitfalls of the program.

Student N reported:

The class is too big and I just be tired, I don't want to talk a lot.

The large class sizes were having a negative impact on some student's ability to interact with all of their peers in the class. Some students did not get an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings about topics presented within the allotted time period, because of the 45-minute class period.

Student O stated:

I am wasting 45-minutes for a class that is not going to affect my GPA, I am not going to get an F, I could be putting my energy into a lot of other things.

Numerous students reported being concerned about the lack of a letter grade for the SEL course. Some students stated that if the class were important, the network would give them an opportunity to obtain a letter grade and credit.

Student P declared:

I get upset when my PL gives us work to do, I don't want to do work they give us, I can do my homework or because I don't have to do it, it does not affect my grades or GPA.

Both students and SEL specialists stated that some students were reluctant to complete class assignments and assessments because they could spend the time working on assignments for classes that were more academic and counted towards graduation. Students reported that the class sizes were too big and that a lack of a letter grade that factored into their GPA diminished their commitment to the course.

Student Reports of SEL Outcomes

All students in attendance at the charter school were enrolled in the SEL class. Students were able to articulate what they had learned in the class during the focus groups and on the survey. Students were able to describe the skills they were learning in the SEL class and how they utilized them in their academic and social environments.

Student Q stated:

We discuss real life situations in pride to help us get ready for the real world.

Student R said:

I've learned that fighting is not always the way to solve things and our pride teacher helped us through that.

Student S reported:

My pride leader has helped me with painful issues mentally and emotionally.

Goleman (1995) stated that emotional lessons could be entwined into the culture and climate of the school through modifying discipline procedures and implementing student supports. Student T stated:

The stuff I learn in this class helps me control my emotions and not get into fights. Right now or in the future whichever comes first, I can count on the skills I learned in pride.

Students were able to identify skills and strategies that their SEL specialist taught them in class. They reported that they were able to manage their emotions and avoid conflicts because of the skills they learned in class. The program gave students the means to transfer the skills they learned in the SEL class to their other courses and the outside world.

Student U stated:

We read the new Jim Crow in pride and it helped us understand the world; the pride leader gave us that book. It gave me a different way of acting in public and going about life.

Numerous students echoed that they were learning skills they could use both in and out of school. Taylor and Kilgus (2014) observed that improvements in student social-emotional competencies improved school climate and broader school functioning. Student V stated that his SEL class was just as important as his other courses.

Student V said:

You can do your homework at home, you cannot get those skills at home, you can discuss topics you don't feel comfortable taking about with your parents, some people don't have a male role model.

Goleman (1995) reported that the key to social ability is empathy, which is a component of the ISBE SEL standards. The program should focus on students learning and implementing skills.

Summary of SEL Specialists Survey and Focus Group Data

The implementation of the revamped SEL program was met with resistance from both teachers and students. The SEL specialists across the network expressed concerns about program buy-in from their colleagues, students, and some administrators.

Teacher A stated:

I have received a lack of support from my colleagues and administration. Students have had the permission from other teachers to stay in their class without my permission.

Students have told me that teachers have said that this class is not real or important.

Taylor and Kilgus (2014) stated that principal leadership was essential to considering and adopting SEL programs. Everyone in the school should be on board, administrators should carefully consider how SEL might be emphasized and integrated within their current school structure. SEL programs helped prevent and reduce risky and violent behaviors in schools and optimized students' academic success.

Teacher B reported:

Very few people are unaware of the current purpose of the pride classes and don't bother to ask. Students continue to be called out of class or don't come at all because they are being held after class by a teacher.

Goleman (1995) recognized that the ability to control urges, complete homework, finish a job and get up in the morning is a component of emotional intelligence. Students from all schools needed these skills to be success in life.

Teacher C noted:

I do not believe all my colleagues support the Pride program. I believe that they are not informed on what we do. Some tell students that this class does not count.

Teachers also reported that their class sizes were too large and that it was difficult to impart the skills because some students did not feel that the course was valuable because they were not receiving a letter grade.

Teacher D stated:

Principally, I believe Pride should be a graded course. Again, I am not advocating for a grade for the purpose of negatively impacting students' academic performance if they receive low grades, but because I believe it would be helpful in engaging more students. I have spoken to several students, and those who consistently refuse to complete their work state that they do not take Pride work seriously because it does not go towards their GPA. Students who are the most engaged in class are able to see value in the material, past the grade. However, in order to also reach those students who are primarily motivated by grades, it would help to have the course graded.

Teacher E reported:

I just think we need to balance out classes, 20 students is okay. I want to continue to teach all of my students in my grade level.

Teacher F said:

Kids told me you do all this work and your grade was not even on the report card, now it is just P or F, no one told us. Kids like to see the grade level. It's not one sound one voice.

Teacher G stated:

My greatest challenge is being able to get a large return on assignments given in class, as well as, for homework. Because students see no tangible benefit to the assignments given, they often will not complete them. However, the assignments are given to the students to help them further process the information learned in class, demonstrate full knowledge of the material, and (hopefully) gain some insight into their own experiences.

Also, having vast changes to my classroom size is principally challenging. During first semester, a therapeutic environment in Pride was successfully established. In their class periods, students processed their thoughts and emotions, grief & loss, trauma, etc., and felt comfortable enough to be opened and honest. Returning second semester and having vast changes to their safe space completely disrupted the therapeutic environment that it took so long to establish, as you now have individuals in the room who were not a part of the building stages.

SEL Specialists Professional Development and Resources

SEL specialists reported that the network and supervisor did not provide them with adequate resources or PD workshops that helped them to implement evidence-based practices. There were noted concerns about the types of PD they attended during the implementation year of the modified program. Specialists reported that the supervisor-facilitated meetings were a waste of time and that they did not receive adequate supervision that would count towards obtaining counseling license with the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDPR) to meet the needs of their students.

Teacher H stated:

I don't have a projector; I don't even have a clock. When we first asked for supplies, people looked at us, and said that they did not know if supplies were for us. We did not get to have mailbox until December, the information was not privileged to us, admin rights not privileged for us.

Teacher I said:

I don't really feel as though enough resources were given to the Pride leaders to use within the classroom. The Pride leaders in each grade level connect and try to share the resources that we have with other so that the program is consistent among the corresponding grade level.

Teacher J reported:

More clinical supervision and critical thoughts about the realities and problems we face as Pride leaders. We need support and effective solutions.

Teacher K noted:

The idea that we, as Pride leaders, are the specialists was not proper preparation. We needed more support with classroom management techniques that could have made Pride the same as other classes, but unique.

Teacher L conveyed:

We need tailored PD for us, we are clinicians in classroom, not teachers, and I have yet to attend a PD to learn how to be a clinician in the classroom. It is challenging to figure out what interventions work. We have to be able to feel we have opportunities for growth.

Interpretation

Prior to network implementation of the SEL program, students reported that they were playing cards, trasketball, sleeping, talking to peers, and completing assignments for other classes (Olowe, 2017). The current data from SEL specialists and students summarizes the reality that students have learned the ISBE SEL standards, and evidence-based strategies to cultivate their emotional intelligence. Students reported that they had learned how to relate to

others, acknowledge and process their emotions, focus on academics, and use their decision-making skills to avoid physical altercations. SEL specialists reported that the SEL course was important for student development, and that their students were engaged and learning strategies that helped them to maneuver their academic and social surroundings.

I delineated data wherein students and SEL specialists had concerns about program implementation. Students and SEL specialists reported that there were too many students in some of the classes. The large class sizes had a negative impact on the culture and climate of the learning environment. SEL specialists reported that large class sizes impeded their ability to implement lessons and create a therapeutic environment that was conducive to implementing SEL standards in an academic environment. Students stated that it was difficult to engage in the environment when class sizes were large; the classroom was wrought with distractions and unsteady relationships.

The SEL specialists who reported having concerns implementing the standards may have been the two individuals who do not have degrees or experience in a counseling related field. The lack of a letter grade and relevant PD opportunities for specialists and staff appeared to devalue the program and create inquiries about its value. Both SEL specialists and students reported that all stakeholders would take the class more seriously if a letter grade was granted for student work and participation. The network should focus on program implementation, how the students are assessed, PD for all stakeholders, and funding to provide adequate resources for the program.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

If my proposed changes were made, the network would see decreased disciplinary referrals and increased student retention, attendance, grades, test scores, on-task behaviors, college persistence, and graduation. The network would also have more freshmen that are on-track after their first year of high school. The SEL program would have a positive impact on the culture and climate of the school. Lastly, every student in the school would have at least one adult they could talk to about academic and personal issues.

Context

The SEL program was modified because our students were not receiving enough social and emotional support to help them overcome the adversities they face on a daily basis. Goleman (1995) stated that the most common cause of disability among teenagers is mental illness. The goal of the program was to equip our young men with a toolbox of evidence-based strategies that will help them to become emotionally intelligent and reach their full potential. Students who learned how to make sound decisions and manage their emotions would have better relationships and obtain more success in life.

Conditions

SEL specialists would be given an opportunity to have weekly meetings with the deans and administrators to discuss how student behaviors are impacting student performance in the academic environment. I determined the class sizes were too large; we had more than 20 students in most classes. Smaller class sizes would help the SEL specialists create a more therapeutic environment. While working with administrators, department chairs, counselors,

social workers, and school psychologists, SEL specialists would have an opportunity to aggregate student data to determine if the network needs to modify the curriculum.

The team would review grades, discipline, attendance, and freshmen-on-track data. The stakeholders would work as a team to create more systematic interventions that would be implemented both inside and outside of the character education program. The team would be given PD time at least once a month to analyze data and modify the curriculum in real time. The building leaders would spend more time working with SEL specialists and observing their classrooms. Lastly, the classes were graded as pass or fail. Students would now be given a letter grade for the class. It would count towards their GPA and graduation requirements. The credit and letter grade would help students and other faculty members to take the course seriously.

Competencies

We would have an IDPR licensed director over the program that has an advanced degree in a counseling related field. The individual would also have experience implementing the ISBE SEL standards in a classroom environment. Goleman (1995) stated that academic intelligence does not equip individuals with the emotional capabilities required to deal with turmoil or life's vicissitudes. In order for the specialists to gain the skills they would need to properly instruct the students, they should receive PD from a supervisor that is knowledgeable about SEL standards and their implementation in the academic environment.

The director of the program would be well versed in therapeutic techniques and the impact of trauma on youth. Prior to the modification, students used the class as a free period and teachers and other staff members regularly pulled students from the class for various reasons. Individuals with advanced degrees in counseling, psychology, and social work were hired to

teach the ISBE SEL standards to our students. After revamping the program, we no longer use random teachers to instruct the program. SEL specialists would be given at least one day every two months to attend relevant PDs facilitated through outside agencies and bring the information back to share with the team.

The PDs would be data driven and based on student needs. At least one SEL specialist at each campus would be sent to a local professional conference in the area of counseling, social work, and psychology. The licensed director would be able to provide clinical supervision to the specialist to help them further develop their skill set and obtain IDPR licenses.

Culture

The teachers and students in the network would buy into the program and stop using program time to take tests for other classes, facilitate individual counseling services, and tutor students. In order to help facilitate this change, a SEL specialist would facilitate a PD at each site that outlines the goals and purpose of the program. Teachers would have an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the ISBE SEL standards. Schools that teach students to be hopeful and optimistic have students that work harder, obtain better grades, and comply with school policies. Goleman (1995) stated that students should be taught to be hopeful and optimistic because they are predictor of success.

The SEL program could help facilitate a culture of optimism, particularly when the standards were infused into the culture and climate of the school. SEL specialists can help teachers learn strategies they can infuse into the school on an everyday basis. Teachers would also be invited to visit the character education program during one of their prep periods.

Teachers would have the opportunity to learn more about the program and the positive impact it can have on their classroom environment and the overall culture and climate of the school.

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

SEL specialists felt ill equipped to address all of the issues that students are grappling with. Students reported that class sizes were too large, and that the lack of a letter grade and academic credit had decreased program buy-in. Wagner and Kegan (2006) suggested that all stakeholders acknowledge the urgency for change, and those roles should be adapted to support student success. The following strategies should be implemented to provide support for the SEL specialists, staff, and demonstrate the importance of SEL programs:

- The network should hire an individual who has a master's degree in a counseling related field, Illinois Department of Professional and Financial Regulation license, and experience supervising counselors, psychologists, or social workers in an academic environment.
- The network should replace the two individuals with backgrounds in various areas with individuals who are already trained and familiar with the SEL standards and therapeutic interventions.
- The network should write a grant or use network resources to purchase an evidence-based high school SEL program that comes with training for network staff and SEL specialists.
- Staff should participate in PD at the beginning of each school year to facilitate education about the SEL program, staff expectations, and how to implement the program into the culture and climate of every classroom in the building. In addition, staff should participate in at least three PD workshops each year about the ISBE SEL

standards, the SEL program, and how to implement the principles throughout the entire network.

- SEL specialists should receive PD twice a month on classroom management, therapeutic interventions that work in academic environments and how to use data to support instruction and implement interventions.
- In conjunction with the SEL specialists, program supervisor, and building leaders, an evidence-based evaluation tool should be developed and utilized to improve services and provide relevant feedback to specialists.
- A standards-based grading system should be created for SEL programs that would be in line with the ISBE SEL standards to determine if students have met benchmarks and goals. Students would receive a letter grade based on their ability to demonstrate and implement standards throughout the school environment.

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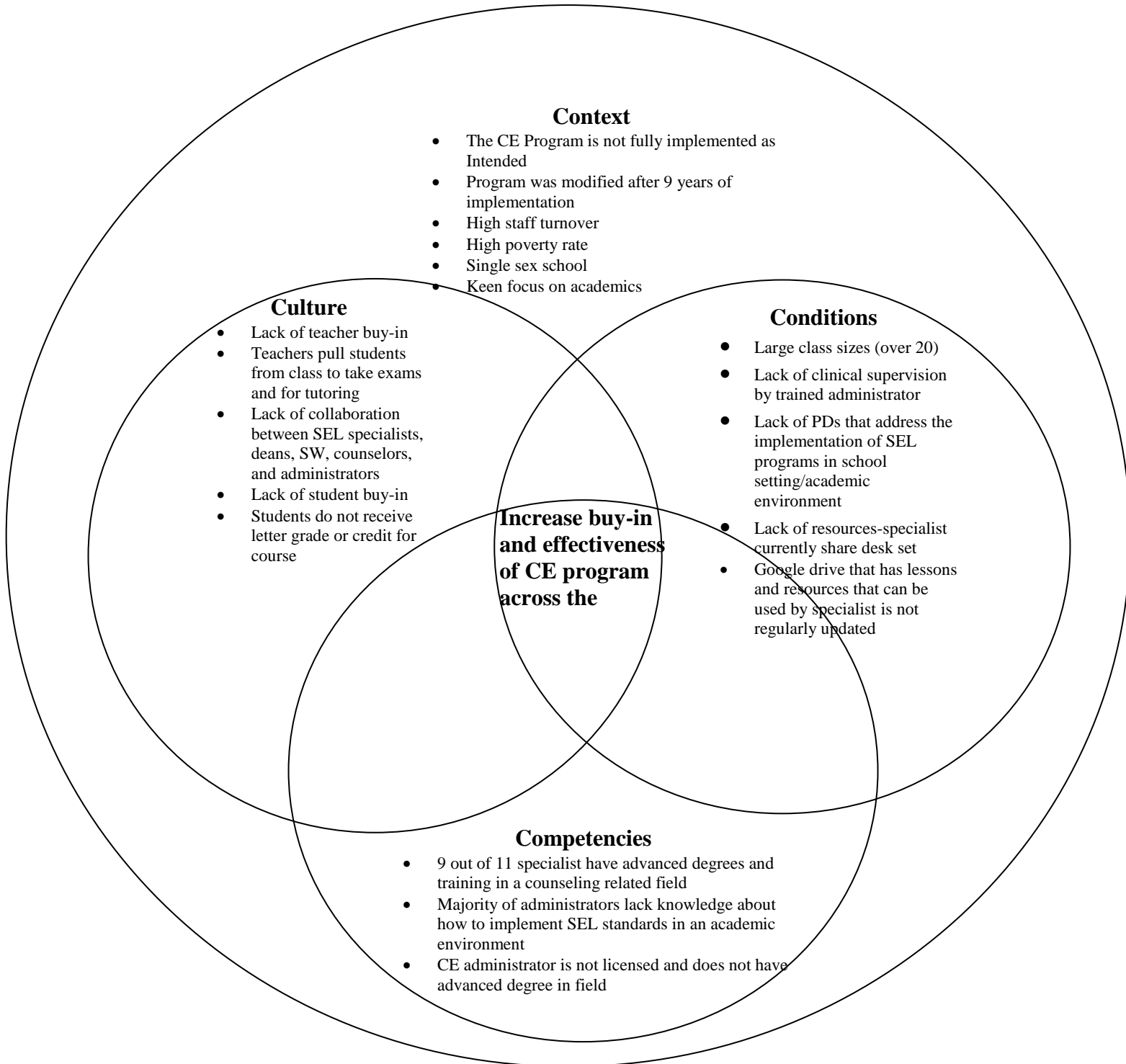
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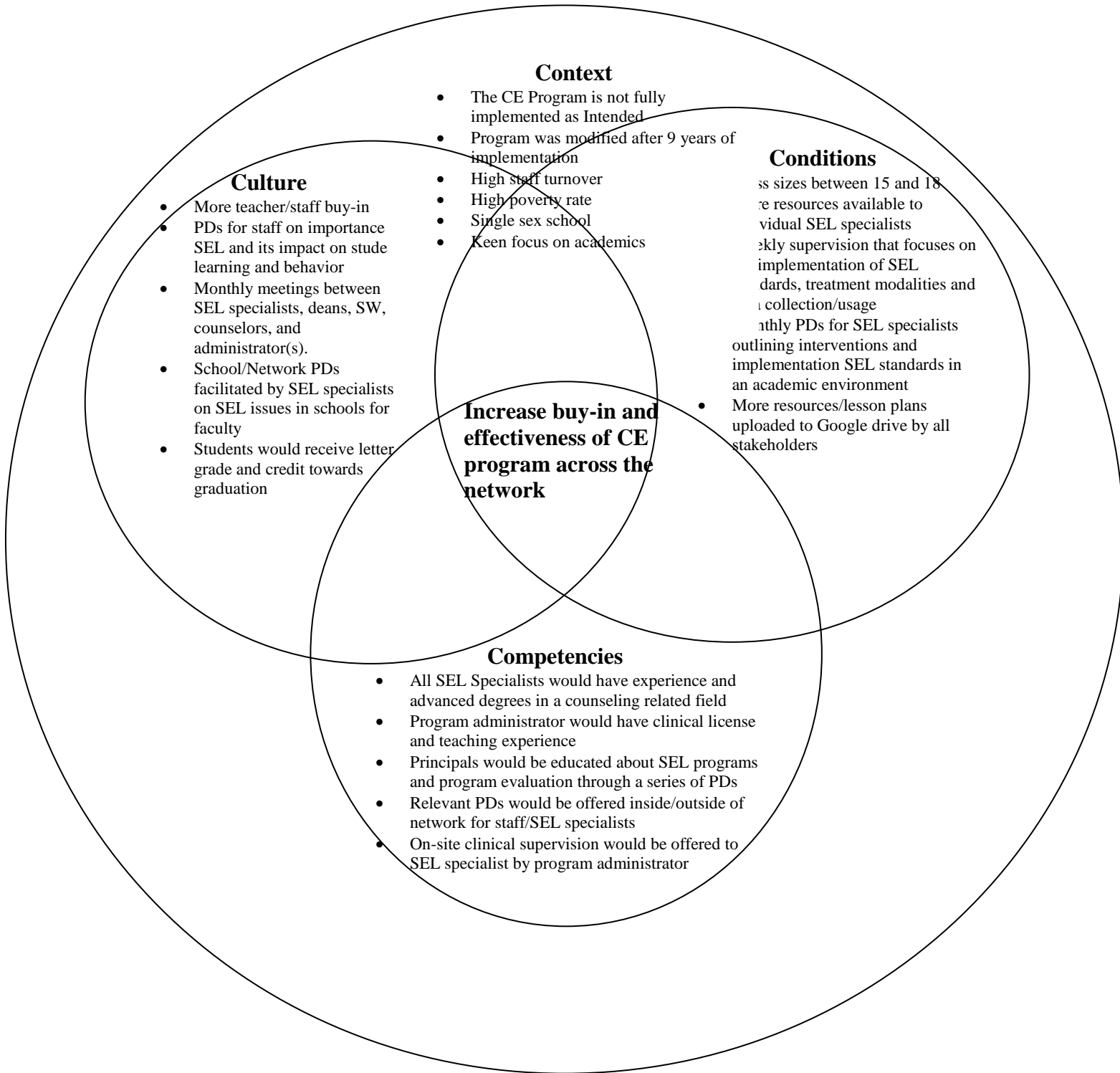
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Appendix A: “As IS” 4 C’s Analysis for SEL Program



Appendix B: To-Be 4 C's Analysis for SEL Program



Appendix C: SEL Student Survey

1. I am a student at the _____ Campus.
Englewood
West
Bronzeville
2. I am a _____.
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
3. My Pride leader helps create a bond between my brothers and myself in Pride.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
4. Pride is important because I have the opportunity to discuss issues related to my personal life and goals.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
5. Pride is just as important as my academic classes.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
6. In Pride we discuss the importance of making good choices inside and outside of school.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
7. I have learned strategies in Pride that help me deal with challenges that I face.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

8. I trust my Pride leader.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

9. My Pride leader leads discussion about school and non-school issues that my brothers and I may have.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

10. How can we improve Pride to better meet the needs of you and your brothers?

Appendix D: SEL Class Focus Group Questions

1. What is the goal of Pride class?
2. What do you like most about Pride?
3. What do you like least?
4. 81.1% of your peers reported that they have a special bond with their brothers in their Pride class, how does your Pride leader help facilitate and strengthen that bond?
5. 81.7% of your peers reported that they have learned some strategies to help them deal with the problems they face. What types of strategies have you learned from your Pride leader?
6. What type of impact has Pride had on your academic classes?
7. How does Pride this year differ from Pride in the past? (only for 10th through 12th graders)
8. If you could change one thing about pride, what would you change?
9. 86.3% of your peers reported that they trust their Pride leader. How did your Pride leader build trust with you?
10. How is Pride different from your academic classes?
11. Do you have any additional information you would like to add about the Pride Program?

Appendix E: SEL Specialists Survey

1. I understand the purpose of Pride.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
2. Pride is a necessary component of the Urban Prep experience.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
3. I use the ISBE SEL standards to create and implement lesson plans in Pride.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
4. My students can verbalize and implement evidence-based strategies that will help them to navigate their academic and social environments.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
Text box: How do you know?
5. Urban Prep has equipped me with resources that help me to facilitate the Pride program.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
6. I use the goggle drive to help facilitate instruction in Pride.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

7. The following percentages of students are actively engaged in Pride on a daily basis.
 - 0-19%
 - 20-39%
 - 40-59%
 - 60-79%
 - 80-100%

8. My colleagues support the Pride program and feel it is important for student growth.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

9. Building and network administrators support the Pride program and feel it is important for student growth.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

10. Relevant learning experiences (professional development workshops, readings, team meetings, etc.) have been made available to me while working as a Pride leader, and have helped me to assess and provide classroom interventions for my students.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

11. What do you like most about serving as a Pride leader?
12. What are your greatest challenges?
13. What changes would you make to our Pride program to increase its effectiveness?

Appendix F: SEL Specialists Focus Group Questions

1. How would you characterize your experience as SEL Specialists at Urban Prep? What have been your highs and lows?
2. What do you think UP needs to do to retain SEL Specialists?
3. 54% of SEL Specialists reported having a lack of resources. What specific types of resources would help you to implement SEL standards in your classroom?
4. 45% of SEL Specialists reported that they use the Google drive to plan lessons for Pride. How can UP make the Google drive more relevant to the lessons you plan each day? What information would you like to see on the Google drive? If you do not use the Google drive, what resources and/or information have you used to plan lessons?
5. 54% of SEL Specialists reported that 60% to 100% of the Pride students are actively engaged in class on a daily basis. How can UP help SEL Specialists gain more buy-in from students in Pride?
6. 81% of SEL Specialists reported that 81.7% of their colleagues do not support the Pride Program. Why do you think your colleagues are not supporting the program? What do you think the team can do to gain more buy-in?
7. 63% of SEL Specialists reported that they felt that the administrative team supported the Pride program. What types of support have you received? What additional supports would you like to have from administrators?
8. What types of professional development opportunities do you feel you need to be a more successful SEL Specialists?
9. What evidence allows you to determine the effectiveness of Pride?
10. What guidelines do you use to determine which students need to be referred to the personal counselor for services?
11. If you could change one thing about the Pride program, what would you change?