

A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STATE
STANDARDS: APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

by

Lisa A. Colapietro

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied social research study was to solve the problem of the omission of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards for a suburban middle school in southeastern Pennsylvania and to design training, if needed, to address the issue. An applied social research design using interviews, surveys, and documents was employed to inform the perceived problem. Interviews with teachers and administrators familiar with the school's curriculum and its development, a survey of the middle school teachers, and review of documents from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and Common Core State Standards informed the applied social research. The central research question guiding the study was: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved? Data were analyzed for codes and themes to develop training for teachers that use Common Core State Standards to address the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework identified in their course. The solutions identified were, improving the universal understanding of student need for SEL, requiring training for teachers for authentic implementation of SEL skills, and going beyond SEL and Common Core alignment to require stand-alone lessons in character education and development.

Keywords: adolescent, applied social research, Common Core State Standards, emotional intelligence, holistic education, social-emotional learning

Dedication

To those that have inspired, supported, and motivated me, this work is dedicated. There would be no need for a study of this nature if everyone was blessed with the love of a tribe of this kind. I promise to live the findings of this study and pay forward all you have given me to my students and most importantly my son, Brandon. I love you all. Thank you for showing me how to make the world a better place. In order of appearance:

Vito and Vicki Colapietro

Danielle Colapietro

Brandon Bryson

S. Grant Holmes, III

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Numerous people have encouraged, guided, and advised me in making the work required to develop a study of this nature possible. I have leaned on prayer, God's grace, and my loved ones' understanding as pillars. The fact that these gifts will remain even after this project is published will forever be acknowledged in my commitment to whole child education.

Table of Contents

Dedication	4
Acknowledgments	5
Table of Contents	6
List of Tables	10
List of Abbreviations	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	12
Overview	12
Background	13
Historical Context	14
Social Context	16
Theoretical Context	17
Problem Statement	18
Purpose Statement	19
Significance of the Study	19
Research Questions	21
Definitions	21
Summary	22
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Overview	24
Theoretical Framework	25
Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory	25

Miller’s Concept of Holistic Education	26
Related Literature	28
Social-Emotional Learning: Foundation and Purpose	28
SEL Development and Implementation	36
Impact and Implications of SEL: The Classroom and Beyond.....	45
Summary	53
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	54
Overview.....	54
Design	54
Research Questions.....	56
Setting	56
Participants.....	57
The Researcher’s Role	58
Procedures.....	60
Data Collection and Analysis	61
Interviews.....	61
Document Analysis	65
Survey	66
Ethical Considerations	72
Summary	73
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	75
Overview.....	75

Participants.....	75
Interview Participants.....	76
Survey Participants.....	76
Results.....	77
Sub-question 1.....	77
Sub-question 2.....	86
Sub-question 3.....	98
Discussion.....	101
Empirical Literature.....	102
Theoretical Literature.....	105
Sociocultural Theory.....	105
Holism.....	106
Summary.....	107
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	108
Overview.....	108
Restatement of the Problem.....	108
Proposed Solutions to the Central Question.....	109
Quantify Student Need for SEL.....	109
Go Beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development.....	112
Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills.....	114
Resources Needed.....	116

Time	116
Professional Development	117
Programming and Leadership	118
Funds Needed	119
Roles and Responsibilities	121
Timeline	123
Solution Implications	124
Evaluation Plan	127
Summary	130
REFERENCES.....	132
APPENDICES.....	156
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER	156
APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL LETTER.....	157
APPENDIX C: SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION REQUEST	158
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM	160
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION EMAIL	162
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE	163
APPENDIX G: WEB SURVEY DIRECTIONS	164
APPENDIX H: FACULTY SURVEY QUESTIONS	166
APPENDIX I: TIMELINE.....	170

List of Tables

Open and axial coding of Themes, Interview Participants	78
Frequency Codes, Interview Participants	81
Open and axial coding of Themes, Documents	86
Frequency of Codes, Documents	95
Teacher Responses to Likert-type Survey Questions	98

List of Abbreviations

Career education and work standards (CEWS)

Career ready skills (CRS)

Character education (CE)

Common core state standards (CCSS)

Emotional intelligence (EI)

Emotional quotient (EQ)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Institutional review board (IRB)

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

Positive behavior support (PBS)

Response to intervention (RTI)

Social-emotional character development (SECD)

Social-emotional learning (SEL)

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of Chapter One is to provide a framework for the proposed research. The researcher's goal was to solve the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in a middle school in southeastern Pennsylvania. Social-emotional learning (SEL) encompasses the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2010; Domitrovich et al., 2017). In December of 2018, The Federal Commission on School Safety (2018) made a clear call to action identifying character development, a component of purposeful SEL programs, as the first step in creating safer schools. Since 1852, children have been required to attend school to receive an education (Buddin & Croft, 2014) and school safety is necessary to learn (National Association of School Psychologists, n.d.).

Chapter One will provide an overview and framework for the research. This includes the background of the context of literature in which the research is founded, a statement of the problem as well as purpose for the study. The chapter will also identify the importance of the research for the defined audience, provide definitions specific to the key terms, and briefly introduce the research via the research questions specific to the data collecting procedures. SEL has the power to sustain the vibrancy and integrity of the public education requirement by addressing the education of the whole child. As the culture of the adolescent changes, the skills to navigate the setting need to be considered by academic decision makers to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Background

In October of 2018, the Pennsylvania Department of Education instituted Career Ready Skills (CRS) aligned to social-emotional learning. All domains complement the Career Education and Work Standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a). This was in response to the current trend in education to prepare learners for today's unique workforce and to create a learner profile reflective of what employers are seeking. In a 2006 report, The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management collaborated and conducted a study of the readiness of new entrants into the United States workforce compared to level of education. The report found that although core subject area content is fundamental in new entrant's ability to do the job, skills like teamwork and critical thinking are "very important" (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p. 9) for success to be realized.

Pennsylvania's recognition of the importance of 21st century skills aligns with the December 10, 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) signed into law by President Obama. The law requires public schools to "carry out other activities to improve students' safety and well-being, during and after the school day" (ESSA, 2015, p. 231). Although measurement of SEL is not mandatory, the skills learned are and can be realized within the current curriculum plans. The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires skills such as goal setting, self-managing behavior, building positive relationships, communicating clearly, and resolving conflicts effectively as requisites that promote success in school and beyond (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a). The background section provides a historical, social, and theoretical context related to the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework

aligned to CCSS. Existing research about the problem of practice is noted in relation to non-cognitive skill acquisition and its short and long-term effects in and out of the classroom.

Historical Context

In light of such contemporary tragedies as the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007, the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2012, and the more recent Parkland High School massacre in 2018, placing blame has shifted to a call for prevention. This is evidenced by policies such as zero tolerance that focus on youth violence and school safety in particular and has received a great deal of public attention (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). School safety and career readiness are supported by effective character development programs and SEL. With an increase of school violence in the past decade, along with the quickly changing landscape of the adolescent setting, the study of the problem and possible solutions is crucial (Flynn et al., 2018).

The holistic movement has increasingly become more mainstream in the past 40 years (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2016). Inspired by theorists such as Rousseau (from 18th century) and John Dewey, the holistic experience serves the 21st century learner who requires adaptable, sociable, and purposeful learning (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). During the 1970s, literature in science, philosophy, and cultural history provided a central concept to describe this way of understanding education as a perspective known as holism (Miller, 2000). Namely, holistic education provides a well-rounded curriculum and in turn a well-rounded student learning experience. Holistic education is defined as, “a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace” (Miller, 1995, p. 7).

Miller's (1995) philosophical foundations of education are grounded in the holistic vision needed in effective SEL programming. SEL emphasizes the education of the whole child as recognized by advocates for holistic education practices (Sax & Gialamas, 2017). Theorists such as Miller believe that standardized test scores are not the defining measurement of a person's intelligence and abilities. For example, Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti expressed the need for educating the whole person and educating the person within a whole. This further promoted a call to prepare learners for life in its entirety inclusive of the deepest aspects of living (Forbes, 2000). Strong leadership is required to ensure support of holistic endeavors that encourage SEL. Education change must be supported by a visionary that believes that schools are for more than academic learning. A leader who values human resources, communicating, and listening to all stakeholders while being proactive and taking risks is the description of successful leaders of educational change (Sax & Gialamas, 2017).

Additionally, research in the area of social-emotional learning involves a foundation and interest in emotional intelligence. Contemporary brain and behavioral sciences theorist Goleman (1995) encouraged study in the area of SEL implementation in all grades in all schools (Andrei et al., 2015; Costa & Faria, 2015). Goleman concluded that intelligence quotient (IQ) contributes, at most, 20% of the factors related to life success with other factors accounting for the remaining 80%. Goleman suggested that emotional intelligence (EI) may be more important for success than cognitive intelligence. There have been numerous studies on the importance of EI that reveal implications beyond the classroom as well. Interpersonal skills that support effective social interactions and relationships constitute a foundation for EI (Herpertz et al., 2016). The skills exercising EI can also be applied outside of a classroom, making the historical context of SEL multifaceted.

Social Context

The Career Education and Work Standards (CEWS), Chapter 4 of Title 22, is a section of the State Board of Education's regulations of required education for all students in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b). Since the 2018-19 school year, all Pennsylvania public schools were required to begin reporting evidence of CEWS implementation. With benchmarks in third, fifth, eighth, and 11th grades, schools are required to report evidence making the CEWS compulsory for all students in Pennsylvania. CRS complement the CEWS as well as the CCSS. The CRS continuum looks to identify self-awareness and self-management, establish and maintain relationships, and practice social problem-solving skills (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a).

In addition to public policy, studies have identified the role SEL has in public education. Critics of SEL see competencies such as respect and empathy open to interpretation, unable to be accurately measured, and a retreat from needed academic rigor (Balfanz & Whitehurst, 2019). Yet, SEL, as a component of education, not only increases academic performance, but it prepares students to meet the challenges of lifelong learning in a changing global society (Lindsay, 2013). Evidence-based SEL programs have been found to promote equity and diversity acceptance (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). While few could argue the importance of SEL competencies in contributing to personal effectiveness, some believe that school may not be the environment to teach such skills (Whitehurst, 2019).

The American Psychological Association (APA) recently outlined important principles from psychology in the context of pre-K to 12th grade classroom teaching and learning. Of the 20 principles, three are related to SEL. The APA stated: "Emotional well-being is integral to successful, everyday functioning in the classroom and influences academic performance and

learning. It is also important to interpersonal relationships, social development, and overall mental health” (Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015, p. 23). Other factors include motivation, best practices in classroom management, and assessment of student progress, all areas that benefit from effective SEL implementation. A strong foundation of psychological knowledge provided to educators of all levels of experience will help them “develop positive student-teacher relationships, improve overall student outcomes and potentially reduce teacher attrition” (Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015, p. 32).

Theoretical Context

The primary theory that drives this study is Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which reveals that learning is an inherently social process and children learn actively and through hands-on experiences. Through interacting with others, learning becomes integrated into an individual’s understanding of the world (Schunk, 2016). This interaction is directed by healthy social and emotional interactions. “Vygotsky shaped and gave the major impetus for the internalization model of development” (Daniels, 2016, p. 39). This internal need must be matched to external possibilities in what Vygotsky labeled the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The difference between what students are capable of doing independently, and what they can do with some help defines ZPD (Danish et al., 2016). This social theory is supported by holistic education.

Erik Erikson’s (1950) eight-stage psychosocial theory of development also drives this research. During each of Erikson’s eight development stages, two conflicting ideas must be resolved successfully in order for a person to become a confident, contributing member of society (Erikson, 1950). Failure to master these tasks leads to feelings of inadequacy, thus supporting an implementation of a SEL framework (McLean & Syed, 2015). The societal

implications of development revealed that cultures may need to resolve the stages in different ways based upon their cultural and survival needs (Schunk, 2016). This is important because adolescence is a time when young people begin to question self-identity because of the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that take place at this stage of development (Arnold, 2017). Erikson's psychosocial theory of development encourages the validity of social-emotional learning.

Problem Statement

The problem is there is a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS in a public middle school in southeastern Pennsylvania. School-based SEL programs are needed to improve a feeling of belonging and positive attitudes toward school and decrease rates of violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance use while improving academic performance (Parada, 2019). Contemporary research is narrow in addressing the problem with adolescent learners although, "there is a strong evidence base that suggests SEL programs can be part of the solution for enhancing students' social, personal and academic development" (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011, p. 3). However, no available research has been conducted to explore how to effectively implement SEL competencies within the CCSS at the middle school level.

Educational decision makers are tasked with focusing their attention on the skills and knowledge students actually require to prosper in all areas of development. With multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) becoming more prevalent, SEL is being recognized as a provision to help reinforce prosocial behaviors (Castillo et al., 2018). Additionally, a firm foundation in authentic social-emotional practices begins with all academic stakeholder support. Academic stakeholders in leadership positions need to be aware of the impact of SEL on the school's culture and climate as it can determine application of effective programming (DePaoli et al.,

2017). This applied social research study represents a methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). Triangulation provides credibility to the analysis as it combines multiple research methods to solve a problem of practice. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) reported on the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research and revealed that this approach is the most widely used mixed data analysis strategy in the social and behavioral sciences. This methodology is suitable for study of the problem.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied social research study is to solve the problem of the omission of a framework for social-emotional learning in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers with a proposed solution to the problem that is within the core curriculum. A multimethod design, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods, was utilized. The first approach to data collection was qualitative and in the form of interviews. The second approach to data collection was qualitative and in the form of document analysis. The third approach to data collection was a quantitative survey created by to elicit pertinent information for solving the perceived problem of practice. I, the researcher, sought to execute the findings of inquiry by synthesizing causes for the problem and consider strategies and professional development, if required, to aid in incorporating a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS at the middle-level school.

Significance of the Study

An extensive body of research supports integration of authentic social-emotional learning into curriculum that develops the whole child. As school districts systematically implement social and emotional learning in all aspects of their operations, integrating SEL with instructional practices and academic content has become a growing priority (CASEL, n.d.a). Social-emotional

learning has been gaining recognition in recent years as a possible solution to ensure that every child succeeds. Quality study in the area of middle school SEL instruction is narrow. Therefore, further research is necessary to identify sources that other researchers have used as well as allowing the researcher to see what came before, and what did and did not work for other analysts and their participants as well as to fill gaps in the literature. An in-depth knowledge of studies conducted about SEL is required before valid research can take place to ensure that the study is unique and purposeful.

In March of 2018, the Federal Commission on School Safety, led by the United States Secretary of Education, was established and produced a final report for the Federal Commission on School Safety. Prevention, the first of three sections of this report, revealed findings on how to make schools safe. The first recommendation was for state and local communities to “support character education programs and expand those already in existence using various federal or state funds” (School Safety, 2018, p. 19). This report, presented to the President of the United States, was informed by educational leaders alongside survivors of recent school violence events. Research, along with the first-hand accounts from survivors, contributed to the findings, supporting its validity. This report has propelled SEL to the forefront of academic decision makers’ consideration.

Specific stakeholders who will find this study significant are the educational decision makers in the district as well as students, teachers, and the community as a whole. Classrooms, schools, and communities that prioritize effective SEL programs require both adult and student buy-in to be purposeful, useful, and meaningful. Weaving character education into the daily fabric of learning has the power to shift thought and allow learners to realize their full potential. The skills fostered in SEL have the ability to prepare learners for the 21st century setting they

inhabit through practice in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Greenberg et al., 2017).

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved?

Sub-question 1: How would curriculum decision makers in an interview inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 2: How can documents of current programs and standards inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 3: How would middle school teachers in a quantitative survey inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Definitions

1. *Adolescent mind* - The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of the moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult (Erikson, 1950).
2. *Common Core State Standards* - The Common Core State Standards is a set of academic standards for what every student is expected to learn in each grade level, from kindergarten through high school. The CCSS cover math and English language arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

3. *Emotional intelligence* - The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically (Goleman, 1995).
4. *Emotional quotient* - A measurement of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).
5. *Holistic movement* - Concerns the development of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. It seeks to engage students in the teaching/learning process and encourages personal and collective responsibility (Miller, 1995).
6. *Intelligence quotient* - A measurement of intelligence (Goleman, 1995).
7. *Social-emotional learning* - The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.).

Summary

The fact that there is a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS in a public middle school in Southeastern Pennsylvania is a problem. Only 18 of 50 states have stated competencies of social-emotional curriculum in PreK-12 public schools, and Pennsylvania is addressing the needs with PA CRS (CASEL, n.d.a). Subsequently, limited research is available, especially in the area of adolescent development. Direct instruction of academics is standardized, but the majority of schools do not afford opportunities to educate the whole child inclusive of universal social-emotional learning, especially where many are in most need - middle school. It is important to study this issue because there is a positive correlation between emotional quotient

(EQ), quality of life, and career readiness. Social and emotional competencies are becoming requirements sought after by employers as much as, if not more than, job skill readiness. This issue can be addressed with teacher development in aligning and implementing a social-emotional framework within CCSS.

The background of the study, including the historical, theoretical, and social context were explained in Chapter One for the purpose of grounding the perceived problem in research. The problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to CCSS was introduced, along with the purpose of the study and its significance. With research finite in the field, further study is needed to articulate the perceived problem. The chapter also provided the research questions of the study as well as a list of terms with definitions applicable to the topic. The rationale and support necessary for the research and the determination of the proposed solution to the problem is presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two comprises the overview, theoretical framework, related literature, and information on SEL. SEL encompasses the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.). School-based SEL programs have the ability to improve attachment and attitudes toward school and decrease rates of violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance use while improving academic performance. “These positive findings appear to hold for children of diverse backgrounds from preschool through high school” (DePaoli et al., 2017, p. 8). Although a staple in preschool, SEL rarely makes an appearance after second grade. While conducting the research for this study, I noticed, over the past two decades, a decline in a student’s ability to cope with stress and express themselves appropriately according to their environment. Along with this inability, there has been an increased awareness of school violence. Several factors may contribute to this rise, including an escalation in the use of social media and a lack of access to mental health professionals (Bushman et al., 2016; Ferguson, et al., 2011; Grabow & Rose, 2018). Regardless of the cause, the effects are to be addressed in the search for finding a solution.

Public schools find success when they promote all aspects of a child’s development including academic, physical, social, and emotional (Wimmer & Draper, 2019). Holistic and whole child education need a place in public schools in order to provide a well-rounded curriculum and well-rounded student (Miller, 1995). SEL need not be a separate school subject,

but perhaps it should be better integrated and realized within after school programs, school-wide advisory programs, or the existing CCSS.

Theoretical Framework

Broader areas of knowledge are to be considered in a research study as a foundation to ground the perceived problem of practice. For a research study to be purposeful, sound theoretical assumptions can validate critics. However, identification of the theories supporting the research describes a behavior through a set of related concepts, assumptions, and generalizations (Joyner et al., 2013). The theories upon which this study is based are Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) sociocultural theory and Miller's (1995) concept of holistic education.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is the primary theory that framed this study. This theory reveals that learning is an inherently social process and that children learn actively and through hands-on experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Through interacting with others, learning is integrated into an individual's understanding of the world (Schunk, 2016). Learning is a social process, and aligning SEL to CCSS cultivates a community of learning. Vygotsky believed every function in the child's cultural development appears twice, initially on the social level followed by the individual level and applies to voluntary attention, logical memory, and the formation of concepts. Actual relationships between individuals is the origin of higher functionality (Vygotsky, 1978). This development of relationship skills is foundational to SEL.

A SEL framework needs to be lived and practiced. Vandervert (2017) supported Vygotsky's sociocultural theory with his writing of the importance of play in reference to brain development. Such play promotes social and emotional progress, as explained in the research, along with the connection between play and culture creation. Vygotsky (1978) discovered that

the practical thinking of a child is similar to adult thought in some instances and different in others, further emphasizing the dominant role of social experience in human development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's conclusions in *Mind in Society* are also examined and ultimately supported by Vandervert's (2017) reference to brain development.

Such beliefs about teaching and learning are grounded in a Vygotskian perspective. The core executive principle of Vygotskian the social co-constructivism viewpoint reveals an intimate relation between ways of thinking and language (Soysal & Radmard, 2017). Vygotsky (1962) posited that individuals' thinking systems identify language classifications. SEL is grounded in the ability of an individual to identify feelings, label them, and ultimately process them appropriately. Without a firm understanding of social constructivism, social-emotional learning research cannot reach its fullest potential.

Miller's Concept of Holistic Education

Another theory guiding this study is contemporary holistic education by Ronald Miller (1995). His concept of holistic education grounds research in the area of social-emotional learning (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Miller, 1995). Miller defined holistic education as "a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace" (Lauricella & MacAskill, 2015 p. 55). Miller's philosophical foundations of education foster the holistic vision needed in an effective SEL program. The holistic movement has become increasingly more mainstream and the holistic experience serves the 21st century learner (D'Olimpio & Teschers, 2016).

Opposing the view of conventional schooling is a criticism of holistic education. Miller believed that holism is a worldview grounded in spiritualism. Likewise, humanistic educators

who provide social and emotional foundations in their teachings support the requirement that is necessary for healthy human development (Miller, 1995). Social-emotional learning reinforces Ronald Miller's holistic vision.

Presently, schools are being required to develop learning environments that include the teaching of well-being, self-esteem, empathy, and social and emotional skills. Cheng and Zhang (2017) considered a student's cognitive style in the comparison of a holistic style and classroom learning behaviors. Holistic individuals focus first on achieving an overall understanding and building connections among components of knowledge and then considering parts and details, a theory also supported by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Cheng & Zhang, 2017; Ford & Chen, 2001). Holism is a call for connectedness and an intellectual effort to make the most of education that this applied social research looks to advance.

Consequently, the interpretive framework that led me to the choice of study is grounded in methodological beliefs. As a social constructivist, I considered ideas through interviews, surveys, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The worldview propelling the study is social constructivism because of the realization that background shapes understanding. Although critics argued that constructivism is difficult to specify, it is rooted in the collaborative nature of learning (Hay, 2016). The goal is to understand the adolescent need for social and emotional understanding through a teacher perspective and the participants must be allowed to create the meaning of a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A mixture of both behaviorist and cognitive ideals, constructivism is concerned with how students make sense of new material (Amineh & Asl, 2015). This combination represents the importance of whole child education and further supports the theoretical framework of the research and required advancement in the field of SEL.

Related Literature

Before valid research can take place to ensure that the study is unique and purposeful, an in-depth knowledge of prior research conducted about SEL is required. Few contemporary studies in the area of middle school SEL instruction were revealed, making the proposed research necessary. Additionally, a literature review is compulsory to identify sources that other researchers have used as well as to allow the researcher to see what came before and what did and did not work for other analysts and their participants. The following section provides an in-depth analysis of social-emotional learning, its development and implementation, and impact and implications in the classroom and beyond.

Social-Emotional Learning: Foundation and Purpose

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) detailed exactly what is to be included in the explanation of SEL competencies inclusive of teachers, students, and the learning context, in their derivation of a widely agreed upon definition. SEL is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

Domitrovich et al. (2017) are a few of the researchers who have been working in the field of SEL investigation, education, and writing, most notably for CASEL, the world's leading organization in promoting SEL in K-12 as an integrated approach with academics. The CASEL domains include knowledge, skills, and attitudes that comprise intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence (CASEL, n.d.b; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012), namely, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making

(Domitrovich et al., 2017). Ample research fully supports the need for SEL integration at every grade level and substantiates a call to action for all academic stakeholders (Lawson et al., 2018).

Leaders have also established that developing adolescents' social and emotional skills is a high priority. This is displayed by the recognition of the positive functions that emotions can serve. Dumitrescu (2015) touched upon these facets of adolescent behavior and development while emphasizing the importance of social and emotional guidance. For adolescents at the middle school level, cultivating a positive sense of identity at this stage of growth is crucial, especially in reference to future decisions in adulthood. Dumitrescu suggested that there are two concepts to establish: self-concept and self-esteem. Emotional skills are to be taught inclusive of self-awareness, self-management, empathy/social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2010; Dusenbury et al., 2018).

Some components of SEL competencies have found their way into most states in one way or another; however, room for improvement has been noted in all areas from development to implementation. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) produced a scan that included data from all 50 states and looked for programs that required direct instruction, not simply a recommended SEL course, revealing several gaps. Beland (2014) discovered that a school communication of SEL importance in various platforms is suggested for middle adolescents' growth, not only academically, but socially and emotionally as well. This information is impactful as it further illustrates a need for building a foundation for teachers that is practiced and educated in social-emotional competencies (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

Core components of SEL are the foundation of successful programming. Programs that are organized by the five SEL competencies can be compared; however, program selection is still hindered by lack of adopted standards (Lawson et al., 2018). Information aligned to other

reports and findings on the necessity of direct standards-based instruction in these much-needed proficiencies have also been reported. Hoffman (2017) supported these connections to adolescent need between creating caring school communities and the academic, social, and emotional development of adolescents. A positive correlation was also discovered between caring school communities and the practice of SEL (Hoffman, 2017).

Additionally, SEL emphasizes the education of the whole child and is recognized by advocates for holistic education practices. Kochhar-Bryant and Heishman (2010) outlined whole child education's focus on creating a new understanding of diversity found in a school setting and a reference to human development in various domains, from physical to moral. Maturation and experience foster language and mental abilities similar to a child's development in other domains, such as social, emotional, and ethical (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). A connection between establishing a baseline of transpersonal understanding, along with interpersonal reflection, was found to be crucial in fostering development of the whole child (Hunt, 2016).

This well-rounded approach to whole child education goes hand in hand with proponents of holistic education and transpersonal development inclusive of SEL (Hunt, 2016). These conclusions can be recognized through an effective SEL framework in practicing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Hunt explored transpersonal development with a focus on adolescents. Hunt looked to further synthesize ideas from Vygotsky and Piaget into a modern-day depiction of the adolescent learner and their struggle to feel a sense of belonging while Burroughs and Barkauskas (2017) suggested that ethics must also be addressed within social-emotional learning in order to make ethical decisions once students are able to decode emotions.

To advance whole child education efforts as supported by effective SEL implementation, Burroughs and Barkauskas (2017) reported on the association between SEL and ethics education. The authors supported the need to expand the concept of education to go beyond performance on standardized tests. Programming supported by a body of research that supports social and emotional learning makes significant contributions to re-envisioning the purpose and practice of education in schools, a vision studied by Vygotsky (Hunt, 2016). Ethical decision making must mirror the cultural setting of the student. This requires an understanding and appreciation for all ethnic traditions present in the school's environment (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017).

An area in need of further study is the role student diversity plays in effective SEL programming (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Self-awareness and social awareness are part of an authentic SEL program and can be taught with respect to diversity within the school. In research reporting the pillars of education, a weaving of academic and social-emotional values was revealed (UNESCO, 1996). Knowledge and understanding of self and others, the appreciation of the diversity of the human race, and an awareness of the similarities were identified as foundations of education. This was echoed at the inaugural Social and Emotional Learning Exchange in October 2019 when CASEL Vice President of Research, Robert Jagers (2019) called for, "a new generation of leaders" in SEL and equity. Thought leaders shared their perspectives revealing that there are four key elements to addressing equity – relationships, student voice, reflection on race and racism, and taking action (Jagers, 2019).

Other prosocial skills that require diverse understanding are the interdependence of humans and cooperative social behavior (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Additionally, respect of other people and their cultures and value systems, along with the capability of encountering others and resolving conflicts through dialogue and competency in working towards common

objectives (UNESCO, 1996) are required skills when considering the importance of diversity appreciation within SEL. Culturally responsive practices are foundational in public education (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Recognizing human's ultimate connectedness is central to both SEL and equity (Jagers, 2019).

A comprehensive approach to school safety includes authentic SEL alongside other measures to ensure security (Schwartz, 2019). Prevention methods in the form of character education programs are finding their way into schools across the country as the Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety (2018) recommended. This report, presented to the President of the United States, was informed by educational thought leaders alongside survivors of recent tragedies of school violence giving validity, along with first-hand accounts, to its findings. Thus, school safety is on the forefront of academic stakeholder concerns. Additionally, school readiness to implement procedures must occur before comprehensive school safety plans can realize success (Kingston et al., 2018).

Character education (CE) programs, like those fostered in SEL, are not standardized or researched to the depth of content standards; however, they are cited as the first recommendation for schools to support safer schools (Luna et al., 2019). With the call for CE programming support, SEL competencies provide evidence-based information especially at the middle school level, although further research is needed. With awareness of the benefits of a positive school climate and culture, educators are realizing the need for the skills practiced in authentic social-emotional teaching. VanAusdal (2019) revealed that more than 90% of teachers and principals want schools to make character education more of a priority. They understand that a foundation of belonging and connectedness is important for creating safer, more equitable environments where all students participate and achieve (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Prosocial skills of

self-awareness and responsible decision making are in demand when considering school safety as well as awareness of the benefits of a positive school climate and culture (VanAusdal, 2019).

A solid foundation in authentic social-emotional practices begins with support from all academic stakeholders. Research suggested that academic stakeholders in leadership positions need to be aware of the impact of SEL on the school's culture and climate as it can determine application of effective programming. Accordingly, DePaoli et al. (2017) prepared a report to illustrate the importance of a school leaders' commitment to nurturing students' full development. Support is needed for a program's success, and that often begins with the principal. DePaoli et al. found that, although school leaders believed there were benefits to SEL, they were unconvinced of its impact on academic achievement. Perhaps, a deeper understanding is needed on what effective SEL and SEL assessment means. To help advance SEL implementation, DePaoli et al. suggested that federal and state policymakers, as well as grant makers in education, will need to prioritize policies and funding for SEL training, implementation, and assessment. This prioritization cannot simply be a new vision statement; action must follow intent and this can be accomplished with research based SEL programming (Jagers, 2019).

Moreover, developing global citizens is a mission finding its way into public schools as the realization of the importance of whole child development grows (Fink & Gellar, 2016). However, the definition of a global citizen varies and must be agreed upon by all academic stakeholders inclusive of administration, faculty, support staff, and students as ambiguities in meaning exist. Fink and Geller look to the importance of integrating the CCSS and character education and found that success begins with educated leadership. Organizations dedicated to the advancement of whole child education, such as CASEL, character.org, and schoolclimate.org also revealed the ability effective SEL has on meeting CCSS. School leaders are expected to

facilitate the development of a school culture and climate, which provides inspiration and clear models of what excellence looks like throughout the curriculum and where every person in the school community can grow and develop (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). School leaders have been called upon to raise standardized test scores through effective implementation of the CCSS; however, an understanding that character education through SEL has the ability to further those efforts should propel character education to center stage (Mahoney et al., 2018).

School leaders who realize the importance of content standards in English and math inadvertently support SEL standardization that is yet to be realized in more than 65% of the United States. This was revealed through data that supports a foundation of a positive school culture and climate that includes high-quality teaching and learning, safety, relationships, learning environment, sense of community, and staff leadership and will lead to support for the CCSS (Fink & Geller, 2016). Global citizens can be cultivated in the nurturing, understanding, and supportive skills taught in SEL programs providing further argument for the significance of the proposed study.

An often overlooked academic stakeholder with a perspective on character education is the students schools serve. In a November 2018 report for CASEL, in collaboration with Civic and Hart Research & Associates, 1,300 high school students were surveyed to gain perspective on SEL (Niemi, 2019). From learning academic material to improved student-teacher relationships, the majority of the students surveyed believed participating in an SEL program would promote such efforts. Additional research also supported the students' call for SEL and character education programs and expressed that schools are not meeting the need (Niemi, 2019). Learners want direct instruction in self-regulation, dealing with difficult situations, and managing stress (DePaoli et al., 2018). Such instruction in middle and high school can contribute

to a needed change in the current epidemic of college dropouts where 56% of college students who start at a four-year college degree program drop out by year six of their college career (Winkle-Wagner, 2011).

Even with strong student endorsement from various stakeholders, the foundation and purpose of SEL requires policy support. Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) discussed policies that schools put into place that have either a positive or negative result. The promotion of positive behavior, social-emotional learning, a favorable school climate, and high expectations for student performance have been linked with learning and positive behavioral outcomes. Thus, school-wide incentive focused policies must be central to implementation (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Policy for a foundation of best practice in SEL has a place in a highly effective school looking to educate the whole child which is also supported in Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety (2018).

An additional area that lacks depth within the research on social-emotional learning is that of middle school level SEL. Main (2018) looked to illuminate the role of the middle school level educator. A common argument against SEL implementation is the time required in an already overcrowded curriculum. Embedded social-emotional practices may be the answer. Main's purpose was to prepare future teachers to teach with a social-emotional awareness. Further investigation on outcomes was suggested, which was a common theme found in the related literature. The need for teacher support for SEL in reference to instructor emotional quotient as also revealed in findings that looked to determine program success (Yoder & Nolan, 2018). However, the ability to appeal to the broader, holistic side of childhood development, instead of looking at schools' purpose to produce solely academically proficient students, would

provide an education that is geared toward the success of the whole child in preparedness for the entirety of life's challenges and demands (Miller, 1995).

An in-depth search of the role social-emotional learning plays in a middle school setting reveals little, providing additional purpose for the proposed applied social research. Studies on peer acceptance and bullying exist, however, direct application of SEL study is lacking (Davis et al., 2019). One widely used and CASEL-endorsed program is Second Step. Utilizing student self-reporting, the effects of the program revealed statistically significant results on the positive effects of the program (Espelage et al., 2015). The need for SEL and character education is being endorsed by the handful of programs becoming available and the current trend in SEL and character education conferences offered.

On October 2-4, 2019, more than 1,500 educators, researchers, policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, along with national and global leaders gathered for the inaugural Social and Emotional Learning Exchange, hosted by CASEL in Chicago, Illinois. CASEL brought together this wide range of SEL stakeholders to share cutting-edge research, innovative insights, and best practices to support an overarching goal: all students benefit from high-quality, effective, systemic SEL implementation. Thus, the surge in demand for whole child education was evident.

SEL Development and Implementation

A considerable volume of research recognizes the importance of social-emotional competencies. However, the authentic development and program implementation rate is not proportionate to the need for SEL advancement. Although much analysis supports whole child education, not all SEL programs have found success. Developing strategies to integrate it into all aspects of educational practice, including academic instruction and school climate, is an underpinning of SEL integration (Stillman et al., 2018). Various reasons that may contribute to

unsatisfactory results of SEL programming include lack of teacher buy-in, a negative school climate and culture, and decreased treatment integrity. Wigelsworth et al. (2016) explored reasons for possible failure for school-based social-emotional programs with the hope of identifying factors that hinder success. SEL interventions are numerous and not easily translated into the complex and diverse environments they are intended. Therefore, research supports a need for a clear vision aligned to reviewed and endorsed programs (Wigelsworth et al., 2016).

The development and implementation of social-emotional learning is not linear; however, successful SEL programs share certain attributes. Programs that promote mindfulness and emotional awareness are considered two such practices. Lawlor (2014) proposed that schools play a vital role in fostering student development, mindfulness-based practices such as those that foster resiliency, well-being, and focused attention, and are considered for school-based implementation. Data provided from the Lawlor's meta-analysis revealed that those who received mindfulness practice over three months showed a significant reduction in depression. This supports school-based mindfulness; however, in order for the mindfulness-based program to be effective, ongoing evaluation of the program must continue (Lawlor, 2014). Until SEL standardization and common assessments exist, its benefits are not easily measured, and growth cannot be easily reported.

Emotional awareness practices also reaped positive outcomes in Arguedas et al.'s (2016) research that looked to quantify results of students' perceptions after direct implementation of such practice. They concluded that emotional awareness had a positive correlation with students becoming more conscious of their situation, which in turn prompted them to change and adapt their behavior for the benefit of their group (Arguedas et al., 2016). This can be practiced both in and out of school (Devaney & Moroney, 2018). Moreover, it has been observed that learning

performance also improved in relation to their motivation, engagement and self-regulation. These competencies are fundamentals of authentic SEL programming.

Research provides recommendations for practitioners and policymakers related to SEL in out-of-school settings (Devaney & Moroney, 2018). Various studies have been conducted on school-wide programs. Hurd and Deutsch (2017) researched after-school programs that were focused on social and emotional learning. Their meta-analysis determined that an after-school program specifically geared to the direct instruction of social and emotional skills promoted several positive outcomes. Teacher attrition and funding are negatives that need to be addressed that inhibit any after school programs' effectiveness making authentic results difficult to report and therefore may be considered inconsequential in decision making (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).

Another study by Pregont and D'Erizans (2018) looked at the conceptualization of a school's advisory time to focus energy on SEL to improve teacher and student ownership of the school's culture. Key findings included a need for a teacher-friendly framework that ensured a consistent outcome and sustainability (Pregont & D'Erizans, 2018). Character Strong (n.d.) is one such program that utilizes work within an advisory period. The program is grounded in a proven process to shift the culture with implementation that cultivates clarity, competence, and consistency (Proctor et al., 2011). The eight-month program focuses on character development with lessons on patience, kindness, honesty, respect, selflessness, forgiveness, commitment, and humility, the principles of character as recognized by character.org, the leading organization promoting character development (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). The creation of a spiraling scope and sequence incorporating both big ideas and essential questions to meet the original goals of the advisory time was recommended. Research supports the idea that SEL programs are feasible and effective in a variety of educational settings (Mahoney et al., 2018).

SEL is also taking advantage of steady advancements in technology driven curriculum. D'Amico (2018) revealed findings in relation to a multimedia emotional intelligence tool used with eight to twelve-year-old learners. The tool's aim was to promote areas of emotional intelligence through various multimedia tools such as drawings, animations, music, sounds, and verbal instructions. This researcher concluded that utilizing technology to foster emotional intelligence can be effective given the culture of present-day learners (D'Amico, 2018). In reference to contemporary learners, utilizing gamification allows for increased engagement and learning (Su & Cheng, 2015). Emotional intelligence can be cultivated through authentic SEL development and implementation. Programs that take advantage of the adolescent landscape that includes technology have the advantage of greater success. Such education has the ability to increase emotional intelligence which has a direct positive effect on wellbeing (Martins et al., 2010). With this understanding, computer based SEL programs can flourish.

Also building on the routine use of multimedia platforms, the Character Strong (n.d.) program provides a sortable activity library, experiential activities that build community and empathy, as well as a tagged video library with synopsis and debrief questions for an inspirational or conversational media moment. Regular updates to the platform with current resources and tools found in education have the goal of making programs of this type authentic, engaging, and ultimately effective (Character Strong, n.d.). However, with the infancy of programs of this nature, little can be reported to prove effectiveness for the program itself and relies on proven research in the area of SEL and character development, most of which is centered on elementary implementation (Jones et al., 2017).

When considering social-emotional learning implementation, fidelity and treatment integrity are to be considered. If programs are to be put in place to benefit students, support from

the faculty is required. Anyon et al. (2016) validated this point in their multimethod study of program fidelity reporting the existence of considerable differences between grade level implementation. Less fidelity among middle school teachers than elementary school teachers was discovered (Anyon et al., 2016). This mirrored results from other studies that have found teachers' perceptions of limited principal buy-in as a significant barrier to intervention adoption (Steele & Whitaker, 2019). The need for leadership support was reiterated.

Another area of growth needed in the field of SEL is research methods looking to reveal specific types of learners. One study that looked to build in the area was conducted by Motamedi et al. (2017) and revealed the undesirable effect on adolescent development in single parent homes. Its purpose was to develop an emotional intelligence training program and evaluate its effectiveness. This quasi-experimental research discovered that, after the training, adolescents were significantly higher in the area of emotional intelligence than the control group. The outcome of this study shows that a special focus needs to occur around adolescents of single parent homes to combat the negative behavior that can occur from their living situation. This study suggested that all people benefit from emotional information processing and management skills, especially adolescents of this type (Motamedi et al., 2017).

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform disclosed ways adolescents need to act independently yet also have the urgency to be accepted by peers. Strategies to engage this developmental age of learner were described with an emphasis on the importance of social, emotional, and physical development through a holistic lens. This research is important to the study because effective SEL must meet the needs of all learners in all stages of development. Adolescents are an audience often overlooked in relation to their extreme need to have direct instruction in social and emotional competencies (Maday, 2008).

Recognizing the importance of learning style to ensure every child succeeds, SEL can be woven into the daily fabric of the school. The promise of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is found in education today. As schools serve a student population with increasing needs across academics, behavior, and social-emotional development, tiered support frameworks like MTSS and response to intervention (RTI) are in place to meet the individual needs of every student. Research to produce “reliable human capital outputs while ensuring the promotion of socially just practices on campus” (Clark & Dockweiler, 2019, p. 3) can be found on the advancement of MTSS. Academic services are best layered to meet the needs of the students through SEL. Furthermore, MTSS provides prevention approaches in various manners including SEL (August et al., 2018). While mental health challenges remain frequently under identified, systems-level, school-wide mental health promotion and prevention efforts are critical (Flett & Hewitt, 2013). To recognize the diverse needs of students, a tiered system allows for unique interventions based on necessity. A three-tiered model conceptualizes the MTSS framework and provides layered interventions that begin with universal, school-wide programming and increase in intensity and differentiation depending on the students’ response to preceding interventions (August et al., 2018; Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). This differentiation meets the needs of the individual learner and allows for growth on a systematic platform.

In MTSS, Tier 1 interventions are employed school wide. This is where effective SEL instruction can be propagated. Regardless of risk level, all students benefit from universal classroom management expectations, along with awareness of school supports offered. Evidence based programs are foundational at this level of support. The development and validation of precision-based interventions for youth who experience social, emotional, and behavioral impairments and need additional support has been recognized as a current limitation in schools

(August et al., 2018). Character education programs inclusive of SEL are a response to the need and are considered in strategies for integrating mental health into schools via a multi-tiered system of support (Stephan et al., 2015).

Reactive strategies to negative student behavior, such as sending the student to the principal or assigning a detention, are common practices in the study site. A shift from a reactive to a proactive response may prevent negative behaviors from occurring. Proactive procedures like SEL have support from policymakers. Positive Behavior Support (PBS), first introduced in the 1990s by the United States Department of Education, has gained recognition as PBS emphasizes a prevention science approach by prioritizing decisions and actions that prevent the development of new problem behaviors and reduce the frequency, occurrence, intensity, and/or complexity of existing problem behaviors (Embry, 2004). As such, focus on teaching expected and appropriate social skills that represent and support academic and social success has the ability to reduce or even prevent undesirable behavior (Sugai et al., 2016). Attention to learning styles, cultural norms, and characteristics of students, family, and staff members serve the fidelity of such supports.

Furthermore, adult knowledge and behavior is vital to SEL implementation since adults provide an important context for students' SEL development as well as an opportunity to extend SEL beyond the school walls. Meria Castarphen (2019), superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, summed up why cultivating SEL among adults is so important stating, "If we just made sure that every student had one consistent, caring adult, we would be giving hope" (conference session). Focusing on adult SEL also communicates a key message that our students are not broken. Instead, school programming decision makers need to fix the systems in our schools and districts to ensure all students thrive. Academic stakeholders must know how important it is to

include community partners and families. By cultivating expertise in SEL among all the adults who impact students' lives, schools will provide a more supportive overall environment for student development and a consistent experience of SEL (Castarphen, 2019).

Even though benefits are becoming widely accepted, authentic and universal assessment has not kept pace. With much research available on the benefits of SEL, assessment practices research is not as prevalent (Frydenberg et al., 2017). This absence can be attributed to the omission of standards followed universally. With standardized implementation of SEL core competencies, whole child education and its assessment will be able to employ common assessment. With common assessment, rates of effectiveness can be studied. However, meaningful, measurable, and malleable goals must span over areas of thinking skills, behavior, and self-control. Schools have varied needs based on the ages of students and locations, making a common assessment difficult to create (Hoffman, 2017; McKown et al., 2013).

Effective SEL implementation must be accompanied by reliable and universal SEL assessments in tandem with an agreed upon definition of SEL. Without this commonality, gathering data to make informed decisions is difficult. One of the first problems is the creation of clear goals for SEL programs as they are pivotal in an effective planning and assessment. Although definitions vary subtly, most scholars agree that they must include an understanding of self-control skills applied to social situations as well as thinking and behavioral skills that influence a child's life outcome. Assessments, like goals, need to be meaningful, measurable, and malleable as well (McKown et al., 2013). Effective assessments of SEL will recognize the developing individual as skills change with age.

Lauricella and MacAskill's (2015) study revealed that the overwhelming majority of participants (70%) felt they would have had better success in college if holistic education was

provided in the K-12 system. As holism grounds SEL, these limitations in research become crucial to study. Building upon the advantages of holistic education and SEL implementation, Lauricella and MacAskill examined holistic education's importance and its principles in reference to post-secondary preparedness. With the regular institution of web-based tools, the setting of the learner has changed, and a proactive response is beneficial to the learner. A traditional understanding of what quality education looks like can be challenged (Lauricella & MacAskill, 2015).

Likewise, Humphrey et al. (2007) recognized that, although there is an increased interest in emotional intelligence, qualitative longitudinal study is limited. This may be due to a lack of agreed upon terminology and reporting infancy. Again, a need for further research was acknowledged. Rudge (2008) examined ideas advocated by the holistic education among four school movements: Waldorf, Montessori, Neo-humanist, and Reggio Emilia Schools. Of the eight holistic principles studied, three emerged as most conflicting in the school movements: human spirituality, reverence for life/nature, and democracy adding further literature to the body of support for SEL (Rudge, 2008) along with recommendations for further research.

As SEL gains recognition, the ability to study effects longitudinally has the capacity to emerge. In one of the few studies in this area, Berg and Aber (2015) revealed their findings on a three-year analysis of students from third through fifth grades. Among their goals of research was to discover if there was an impact of social-emotional programs on engagement and academic competence. Findings indicated that children who initially perceived their schools as having negative climates actually reported being more engaged after effective SEL programming was implemented (Berg & Aber, 2015). However, a similar study at the middle level is needed.

A positive move toward the need for CCSS and SEL integration has been under development since 2011 in a middle school just 20 miles away from the study site. The district has reported success by incorporating the CCSS and character through concentrated professional development in integrating the CCSS with corresponding character skills and documenting them in the curriculum. Suggestions for such integration calls on school leaders, elementary teachers, secondary teachers, school board members, parents, and university teacher preparation programs alike. However, without solid leadership that is willing to make SEL a priority, character education programs will experience a lower rate of success (Fink & Gellar, 2016). This district, in close proximity to the school being studied, has been committed to the association of a SEL framework aligned to the CCSS.

Impact and Implications of SEL: The Classroom and Beyond

Once a common framework is agreed upon and a program is instituted with fidelity, social-emotional learning has been found to reap benefits. Whether the implementation is school or district-wide, positive outcomes are being realized. Greenberg et al. (2017) looked at social and emotional learning as a public health approach to education. They reported that the long-term effects for students who participate in SEL programs are “more likely to be ready for college, succeed in their careers, have positive relationships and better mental health, and become engaged citizens” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 24). The researchers advocated for placing SEL in a larger public health framework with a desire to fully integrate universal SEL models with services at other tiers. Integration will provide schools a common framework to promote wellbeing and school success and to prevent mental-health disorders (Greenberg et al., 2017). This research is meeting a need for critics of SEL to see its programming beyond the soft skills practiced with a move to a more scientific lens.

Embedding social-emotional learning within the curriculum can be realized in various manners. Of the numerous benefits realized by whole child education, effective classroom management promotes social-emotional development. Korpershoek et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of various classroom management interventions and reported: “Focusing on the students’ social-emotional development appeared to have the largest contribution to the interventions’ effectiveness, in particular on the social-emotional outcomes” (p. 643). Effective classroom management is required to facilitate both academic and social-emotional learning. Interventions fostering a positive social-emotional outcome will have positive effects in the classroom, allowing for better attention to the academics necessary to meet the rigors of the 21st century classroom.

In continued research of SEL implementation, Moore McBride et al. (2016) studied the prevention of academic disengagement in middle-school programming. With limited research in this developmental phase, a need was realized for evidentiary support of specific program implementation. Although some success was realized with aligning lessons to existing school curriculum, further research was suggested as the results were not statistically significant in reference to the program being measured (Moore McBride et al., 2016). Consistently delivered programming over years of implementation is required to accurately measure program efficacy.

Successful implementation of character education found in authentic SEL programming has proven to provide more time spent learning, which is making an impact on students’ ability to participate in academics. Additionally, SEL-related reductions of negative behaviors, such as violence and acting out, can also help schools reduce the time and resources spent addressing disciplinary issues. Thus, SEL can ultimately contribute to a safe and positive school climate. Avoiding reactive responses to negative behaviors and promoting proactive SEL programs

allows for greater student engagement in academics, which translates into students performing better (Chung & McBride, 2015).

Eight in ten employers affirmed that social and emotional skills are the most important skills needed for success yet are the hardest skills to find. Higher-order cognitive and social-emotional skills are the greatest gaps employers perceive. These findings suggest the need to reconceptualize the public sector's role in preparing children for the future labor market (Cunningham & Villaseñor, 2016). Their report called for social-emotional instruction throughout a student's education. Hernandez-Gantes et al. (2018) acknowledged the investment benefits realized through sustainability of employees who are able to handle job-related challenges beyond skill requirements. This trend in business requirements will be realized by whole child education inclusive of social, emotional, and academic preparedness.

Further studies suggested the need for social-emotional literate employees and, when a systematic approach to SEL is implemented, students will be equipped to meet the need (Marczell-Szilágyi, 2017). With a reconceptualization of what quality education means, academic decision makers will have the ability to institute programming grounded in evidentiary support for whole child education. Stakeholders have to think differently about how to prepare and support the workforce (Williams-Lee, 2019). In a plenary session at the inaugural Social and Emotion Learning Exchange on "The Future of Work," representatives from the business, research, and education communities discussed the role SEL plays post high school. During this session, it was revealed that employers are increasingly focused on competency-based hiring and that SEL skills are recognized as assets that make for successful, long-term employees. A. Williams-Lee (2019), senior vice president of human resources and talent acquisition at Hyatt Hotels believe that SEL is important for those in leadership roles. "If we have leaders who do not

show social and emotional competencies, they will not be leaders for long” (conference session, October 3, 2019).

Comparatively, Guerra et al. (2014) concluded that the social-emotional skills employers’ value can best be taught when aligned with the ideal stage for each skill development. The authors also discovered that adolescence was the optimal stage for development of these skills. Effective program interventions at the right stage can guide policy makers to incorporate social-emotional learning into their school curriculum (Guerra et al., 2014). Academic stakeholders may miss the mark on providing a quality education that does not prepare students for the requirements of the workforce they will eventually enter. With research supporting the assertion that the development of noncognitive skills is best realized in adolescents, it can be concluded that SEL in middle school is required.

Businesses continue to recognize the importance of the effects of SEL as it translates to maximizing returns, attracting employees, and optimizing team performance. With a shift from the individual to the collective, businesses are seeing the benefits of practicing SEL in the workplace. Employers stress the value of noncognitive skills in the workplace, and evidence suggests that noncognitive skills are associated with higher productivity and earnings (Garcia, 2014). Non-job-specific skills are needed in effective education to meet employment initiatives and demands (Mourshed et al., 2013). Schools have a social responsibility to provide an education that will ensure employability as well as the ability to handle the stress and rigors of a profession (Garcia, 2014).

Klappa et al. (2017) provided a benefit-cost analysis of a long-term intervention on social and emotional learning in their research that looked to measure the benefits of SEL. There is evidence that the skills encouraged in authentic SEL serve as protective factors that support and

predict success in academics and in the labor market, as well as general well-being by helping students to achieve and develop to their full potential (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Klappa et al. also revealed that an indirect effect of developing students' social and emotional competencies, such as improved self-esteem and self-control, better social competencies, and strong self-awareness had the ability to result in less substance use. In this case, the benefit of SEL programming reduced the need for programs for mental illness, drug addiction, and may also help reduce crime.

The concept that investments in individuals can be mathematically measured based on the economic value they are able to contribute to society, or human capital theory, allows for SEL to be monetized. Choo (2018) discussed a reframing of education to consider the theory in relationship to schooling and economic growth. Although human capital theory has limitations, themes of teacher accountability, whole child education inclusive of SEL approaches, and time management emerged as needs (Choo, 2018). Deming (2017) argued that this monetization of student efforts and abilities in the area of SEL is revealed with social intelligence predicting team productivity. This supports the need for development of emotional quotient from an economic perspective (Hunter et al., 2018).

A meta-analysis of students who participated in SEL programs was produced by Weissberg and Cascarino (2013). They looked to contribute evidence to support a balance of academic learning with social and emotional learning in schools across the nation that will foster students possessing the basic competencies, work habits, and values for life beyond high school. Research provided information that the federal government is showing a growing interest in this area, realizing what school decision makers and teachers already know; direct instruction in SEL at all levels is essential (Cunningham & Villaseñor, 2016; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

In a rare longitudinal study, Duncan et al. (2017) reported the results over a five-year investigation on the effects of positive action programs and social-emotional character development (SECD) in correlation to their impact on behavioral trajectories during adolescence. A cluster-randomized trial was utilized with the hopeful outcome of these programs seeking an increase in positive behaviors and a decrease in problem behaviors, especially with high-risk and under-resourced youth. The data showed measurable growth in benefiting children's trajectories of SECD and cited evidence to support the positive effects of a holistic approach, especially to higher risk groups. Data revealed that, when programs of this nature are delivered universally and effectively, they will foster positive results. These findings support arguments for the effectiveness of SEL programs for improving adolescent behaviors (Duncan et al., 2017).

Additionally, the 2018 State Scorecard Scan by Dusenbury et al. (2018) measured the number of states that have developed policies and guidance to advance SEL over the past several years. An assessment as to whether SEL guideline documents and resources contained key components of high-quality SEL was determined by individual states. Although there has been an increase of state policies and guidance to support students' social and emotional development, it is not at a rate proportionate to what is necessary to meet the needs of modern-day adolescents (Dusenbury et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017). As of 2019, 18 states have adopted K-12 SEL competencies. However, these competencies are not standard from state to state, nor are they labeled specifically as a SEL framework. Pennsylvania for example, has adopted CRS that align with SEL, but they are not standardized, measured, or required by the state making the need for SEL alignment to the adopted CCSS necessary.

Numerous studies affirm a positive correlation between emotional comprehension and quality of life (Karim, & Shah, 2013). Elias et al. (2010) reported the need for collaboration at

the adolescent stage of development is vital as well as being a part of a classroom environment that is supportive, safe, and caring. While a small percentage of middle schools have tried various reforms and intervention curricula, programs are few. Middle schools and educational decision makers need to focus attention on the skills and understandings students really need to thrive in all areas of development promoting a holistic view of education and preparing youth for post-high school work (Elias et al., 2010).

A handful of CASEL endorsed programs are garnering desirable results as well. Top et al. (2016) investigated the effects of the widely recognized Second Step program in their longitudinal study. Students exposed to the program, “displayed higher achievement and fewer negative school behaviors than students in control schools across four school semesters” (Top et al., 2016, p. 41). These results support the positive benefits of one SEL program implemented with fidelity (Greenberg & Abenavoli, 2017; Low et al., 2015). However, due to the initial stages of the topic and the few quality programs available, research in the area is limited, providing further support for continued exploration.

When practical application of SEL is realized, the advantages are abundant. Mahoney et al. (2018) examined the positive outcomes offered by effective SEL implementation. A synthesis of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs revealed increased academic performance of SEL program participants that translated into an 11 percentile-point gain in achievement. This suggests that SEL programs tend to strengthen students’ academic success (Mahoney et al., 2018). This fact would help extinguish possible teacher concern of SEL taking away from CCSS. Analysis included positive connections between participation in universal, school based SEL programs and student academic performance over the short and long term (DePaoli et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2018). Accordingly, a need was determined for further study teacher preparation

programs and teacher SEL. In a 2017 meta-analysis of the follow-up effects of SEL, it was determined that there was a need for literature on the potential economic and societal return on investment for SEL programming to monetize benefits. This study further contributes evidence of the positive impact and implications of SEL in the classroom and beyond (Belfield et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017).

Hoedel and Lee (2018) studied the effects of a community's request for a prosocial focused education. Urged on by their legislatures and boards of education, many secondary schools in the United States have been searching for a comprehensive curriculum to include ethical decision making and leadership behavior throughout their student bodies (Davidson et al., 2008). Through their studies with comparison samples, the researchers concluded that character development and leadership programs are associated with a decrease of antisocial behaviors and advances in prosocial behavior and attitudes in schools and communities (Hoedel & Lee, 2018). This research supports the benefits of SEL; however, it is limited to high school students' attitudes and perceptions.

Jones and Kahn (2017) argued that integration of social, emotional, and academic development is imperative to effective learning environments and for adequately preparing children and youth for success in today's world. The complex global environment that students inhabit requires institution of a SEL framework a national concern. The main purpose of a school is to provide an opportunity for each learner develop academically, creatively, and morally. Making social and emotional development a priority has significant benefits for the well-being of our society, including implications for public health and economic growth (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). With intentionality and sustainability, SEL is the solution to creating an environment where every student succeeds.

Summary

Chapter Two comprised the theoretical framework, related literature, and information related to SEL advancements and drawbacks. Success of SEL has been revealed by numerous researchers referencing the importance of effective social-emotional programming. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. A positive impact can only be realized with a successful implementation strategy. The problem is only 18 of 50 states have articulated competencies of social-emotional curriculum in PreK-12 public schools. Therefore, limited research is available, especially in the field of adolescent development. Direct instruction of academics is standardized but schools do not afford opportunities to educate the whole child inclusive of universal social-emotional learning especially where many are in most need, middle school. It is important to study because there is a positive correlation between emotional quotient (EQ), quality of life, and career readiness. Research also suggests that social and emotional competencies are becoming requirements and sought after by employers as much, if not more than, job skill readiness. This issue can be addressed with teacher development in aligning and implementing a social-emotional framework within the CCSS.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this applied social research study is to solve the problem of the omission of a framework for social-emotional learning in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers a proposed solution to the problem within the core curriculum. For this study, SEL is inclusive of the acquisition and effective application of, “the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.). A multimethod design, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods, was utilized. The first and second approaches to data collection are qualitative in their analysis, taking the form of interviews and documents. The third approach to data collection is a quantitative survey generated by the researcher to elicit pertinent information for solving the perceived problem of practice. This chapter, by way of its proposed methods, is inclusive of the research design, procedures, and analysis for the multimethod research study. The researcher is looking to execute the findings of inquiry by synthesizing causes for the problem and to consider strategies and professional development, if needed, that may aid in incorporating a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS at the middle-level school.

Design

The researcher used an applied social research multimethod design with scientific methodology to develop information to help solve an immediate, yet usually persistent, social problem. Two major phases exist in the multimethod design: planning and execution (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The multimethod approach to data collection was appropriate as the researcher

sought to solve a problem and formulate a solution to address the problem. The intended audience of an applied social science researcher is often interested in speaking to a different audience from that of basic researchers. The hope is that the work will be used by administrators and policymakers to improve the way things are done (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). This multimethod design incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods, providing further efficacy. When mixed methods are used, the limitations of both qualitative and quantitative methods offset the weaknesses each design has when used in isolation (Joyner et al., 2013).

The first and second approaches to data collection were qualitative, in the form of interviews and documents. DeMarrais (2004) defined an interview as a means in which a researcher and participant take part in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study. The semi-structured interviews in the applied research study are guided by a list of questions yet flexibly worded for ease of conversational response (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called “material culture” in anthropology, constitute a particularly rich source of information (Patton, 2015, p. 376). For this study, records and documents were analyzed to understand and define programs, frameworks, and standards already in place at the school, state, and national levels. The third approach to data collection was a quantitative survey created by the researcher to elicit pertinent information for solving the problem of practice. An indirect rating task, in the form of a Likert scale, was analyzed to determine teacher perceptions and attitudes in relation to a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS. The researcher presents data using descriptive methods through simple statistics and graphic displays of measures of relative standing (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Research Questions

Central Question: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved?

Sub-question 1: How would curriculum decision makers in an interview inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 2: How can documents of current programs, frameworks, and standards inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 3: How would a quantitative survey for the middle school's teachers inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania?

Setting

The setting is a suburban middle school in a middle to middle-lower class area on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Approximately 3,300 students attend one of the five schools comprised of two elementary schools (grades K-3) that funnel into one grade 4/5 building, one middle school, and one high school. The district recently finished the process of adding a new building to meet the needs of the growing population. This junior middle school houses the district's fourth and fifth grade students. The site in this study will continue to educate adolescents in grades six through eight. This school district resides in a small town of 23,790 residents where 90% are Caucasian, 4% are Black, 2% are Hispanic, 2% are Asian, and 2% identify as other. Standardized test scores in the district are above the national average. The

publicly elected school board employs a central administration inclusive of a superintendent supported by an assistant superintendent, business manager, director of curriculum, and an assistant director of special education. The site of the study employs both a principal and assistant principal.

This site was chosen due to the accessibility the researcher has to the location. This school was willing to participate, making it an ideal site for the study. Currently, the middle school employs 33 core subject area teachers, not including special area teachers, such as physical education and computer technology. The interviewees were given the opportunity to develop a pseudonym or one was assigned to comply with confidentiality assurance as well as maintain trustworthiness (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The setting represents the population the researcher has perceived a problem existing as there is a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS. In 2011, only one state had K-12 SEL competencies/standards. Currently, 18 states are reporting SEL framework implementation, but, due to a lack of consistent language, standardization is not realized. Pennsylvania, the state where the school is located, represents one of the 18 states that has reported a framework; however, it is not required to be practiced or measured. In 2016, the state adopted K-2 standards for social-emotional learning, however this study looks to determine a need for standards for students in all years of public education, specifically in middle school (CASEL, n.d.b).

Participants

The participants were selected based on proximity of the researcher to the site and from a narrow pool of educators in this field who were available, had superintendent permission, and returned consent forms to participate. The participants represent a small, purposeful sample. The foci of the study were the director of curriculum, curriculum coordinator, school's administrator,

guidance counselor, and classroom teachers, with a minimum of five interviews and 15 survey participants. In purposeful sampling, the goal is to select participants who are likely to be “information-rich” with respect to the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2003, p. 178). This does not achieve population validity, yet it allows an in-depth understanding of the selected sample. Purposeful sampling also provides the researcher information from an intentionally formed group closest to the perceived problem of practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants are stakeholders directly involved with the problem of practice. Two teachers, one principal, a guidance counselor, and the curriculum director were interviewed for this study. For the quantitative portion of the study, the researcher administered a survey to the classroom teachers inclusive of the participants who took part in the interviews. The survey was offered to all faculty members with a minimum of 15 required to give consent by participating. This survey sample is large enough to make a reasonable interpretation of the data and allows for equitable coverage (Merriam, 2009).

The Researcher’s Role

The researcher’s motivation stems from dedicating much of her 20-year career to adolescent development as well as being a single mom of a pre-teen son. The researcher sees a need to educate the whole child, a perceived need overshadowed by school budgets and standardized tests. Having previously taught in the district, the relationship with the participants is familiar although the researcher was not working at the site studied. Researchers accept that everyone is inherently biased in worldviews, which ultimately influences how the methods are delivered and interpreted (Yin, 2014).

The researcher is a college student working in partial fulfillment of Doctor of Education in middle-level curriculum and instruction at Liberty University as a result of recognizing a need

in public education. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree with a K-12 reading specialist certification, and secondary English certification, the researcher is now working to increase her knowledge in her preferred field of study, social-emotional learning. The researcher has been teaching and working in the public-school system in Pennsylvania for 20 years inclusive of sixth grade core subjects, 10th-11th grade reading specialist, and 8th grade ELA instructor. She also holds certification in mindfulness, coaches both cross country and track, advises her school's community service organization, and has recently become certified in SEL leadership through Rutgers University.

The researcher has observed a decline in students' ability to process and articulate emotions effectively. The applied research design strives to inform the understanding of an issue with the intent of contributing to the solution (Bickman & Rog, 2009). As such, data collection and analysis procedures have human limitations but was driven by a need to educate the whole child. Bias and assumptions are based on human limitations that impact how the researcher views data and the research findings. These limitations include the researcher's in-depth work with adolescents utilizing a holistic approach. In light of the multimethod design, the researcher is most concerned with solving a perceived problem. This researcher's role on the data collection and data analysis procedures has bias as the researcher perceived a problem does exist. The multimethod design utilized in applied social research provided needed information to analyze and clarify a perceived problem of practice (Patton, 2015).

The researcher also holds a Christian worldview. Researching as a Christian will drive all decisions and actions. As a Christian, ideals are part of everyday practice and leaning on prayer, God's grace, and the Bible to guide and support is critical for a well-rounded biblical worldview and honest data collection and analysis. These principles support applied social research

practices. Key components of a Christian philosophy of education are continually studied, practiced, and exemplified in order to remain effective and nurture God's word and support purpose-driven research. Inclusive of the researcher's worldview is the understanding that bracketing must occur to support the validity of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Personal experiences, bias, and preconceived notions were not considered in the application and analysis in this study to the extent humanly possible. By identifying the personal experiences the researcher has with the topic studied, bracketing was employed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (see Appendix A), and procedures were followed to maintain ethics and ensure anonymity. Reporting must be honest and trustworthy in order to comply with ethical publishing practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The American Psychological Association's guidelines for permission needed to report was followed. After permission from the IRB was obtained, the process of collecting data began. Written permission to conduct the study was procured from the superintendent of the participating school (see Appendices B and C).

Next, participants for the study were elicited. For the interviews, the participants represent a purposeful sampling and were contacted first by telephone, leaving a voice message if necessary, then followed by an email. The researcher provided a clear and concise purpose for the interview along with expectations for the amount of time required to participate. Participants were required to sign a consent form to take part in the study (see Appendix D). The survey was sent by the superintendent of the school along with the researcher's purpose and contact

information (Appendix E). Finally, qualitative document analysis of relevant materials, such as the CCSS and the social-emotional framework, were analyzed with themes aggregated.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three data collection approaches are required for an applied dissertation. For this study, the first and second approaches to data collection were qualitative: interviews and documents. The third approach to data collection was quantitative: survey. Combining methods, or triangulation, strengthens a study. This applied social research study represents methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). Triangulation provides credibility to the analysis as it combines multiple research methods to solve a problem of practice (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Interviews

The first sub-question for this study explored how curriculum decision makers in an interview inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS in a middle school-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania. Five interviews were conducted, the minimum required for purposeful study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were semi-structured yet comfortable and were intended to illustrate the roles the curriculum coordinator, school's administrator, a guidance counselor, and two classroom teachers have in the school's curriculum development along with determining a perspective on social-emotional framework implementation. The interviews were conducted synchronously, recorded, and transcribed.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher signed the consent letter. Consent letters were sent prior to the interviews to allow interviewees time to review them and to formulate any questions or concerns. The researcher reminded the participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed. Confidentiality was reiterated and the participants were

informed that they could discontinue the interview at any point. Semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up questions if further information or clarification was required (Yin, 2014). This approach was appropriate for the research as it allowed participants the autonomy to specify their views in their own terms (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The interviews are also categorized as a focused interview as they lasted between 30 and 60 minutes each (Merton et al., 1990). The question responses were transcribed and categorized into themes. Each interview analysis was coded by the identification of notations that were accessed as needed in both the analysis and the write-up of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). Coding supports theme building and category construction (Saldaña, 2016). The interview questions (below and in Appendix F) were grounded in literature as detailed later in this section.

Questions:

1. Before we begin, tell me a little about yourself and what brought you to the education field.
2. What role do you have in curriculum development in this district?
3. Please detail your understanding of social-emotional learning.
4. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to understand and manage emotions.
5. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to set and achieve positive goals.
6. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to feel and show empathy for others.
7. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to establish and maintain positive relationships.

8. Please describe any observations of student ability to make responsible decisions.
9. Please give an example of an observation you have had outside of the classroom (i.e. in the hallways, cafeteria, school assemblies) where you have, or you have observed teachers require social-emotional learning practices such as self-awareness and relationship skills.
10. What role would you prefer to have, if any, in SEL integration to the Common Core Standards?
11. What are the perceived benefits of integrating a SEL framework into the Common Core Standards?
12. What are the perceived disadvantages of integrating a SEL framework into the Common Core Standards?
13. Describe your belief of SEL instruction/character education in middle school.

Interviews were recorded using Google Meet and immediately transcribed by hand in order to reinforce validity (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, the use of a back-up recording device (an iPhone or Chromebook) was in place. Notes taken during the interview were interpreted during document analysis. The researcher was looking for information to solve the problem as quality study in the area of middle school SEL instruction is narrow. Domitrovich et al. (2017) covered all aspects of social and emotional learning from research to practice and policy. Their findings supported the need for SEL integration at every grade level, providing a source for assimilation of research and proposed solutions the interview questions look to further inform.

The purpose of the first three questions was to find out more about the interviewees and to support a relaxed atmosphere. Such an atmosphere may promote valid and honest responses (Bickman & Rog, 2009). These questions were asked to determine the level of understanding of

the research topic and role in curriculum making decisions in the district and school of the interviewees. The ability of each respondent to understand the social-emotional framework determined the depth of understanding for the remainder of the interview.

Questions four through nine asked the interviewees to reflect on observations made in a classroom, or other learning environment, when working with students and represent each facet of the social-emotional learning definition (CASEL, n.d.a). Beland (2014) revealed that school communication of SEL importance in various platforms is suggested for middle school adolescents to continue to grow, not only academically, but socially and emotionally as well. The information presented aligns to other reports and findings on the necessity of direct standards-based instruction in these much-needed competencies. Hoffman (2017) also found connections between creating caring school communities and the academic, social, and emotional development of adolescents, further providing evidence that observations of positive goal setting and the ability to make responsible decisions is necessary.

Literature supports the importance of understanding curriculum decision makers' position on integrating SEL within the CCSS, which is reflected in the remaining questions (10 through 13). With the support of sound federal and state policies, district and school leaders, quality professional preparation and ongoing, embedded professional learning, it will be possible to enhance the positive development of many more students through SEL (Taylor et al., 2017). Successful implementation of an SEL framework is not linear nor is it mutually exclusive to any one academic stakeholder. Numerous programs have been authenticated to support curriculum decision makers in the selection of effective SEL frameworks (Turner et al., 2019). Also, all interview questions were open-ended and avoided dichotomous responses by requiring explanation. The researcher was looking to avoid narrow categorical thinking that does not

coincide with the complexity and richness of qualitative inquiry. Type III errors, getting the right answer to the wrong question, was avoided by the exclusion of yes/no style questions that did not require further explanation (Patton, 2015).

Finally, interview data were analyzed into themes. This process was done by reviewing all data and creating small categories of information (25-30 text segments) as a short list of tentative codes/categories to be narrowed down into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Tables were developed to present codes and themes. This process allowed the researcher to organize analyzed data into major ideas to be revealed in the dissertation. For qualitative research, coding of the interviews and document analysis were compared and put into categories or themes (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Document Analysis

The second sub-question for this study explores how documents of current programs and standards inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to the CCSS in a middle school-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania. To further gain a deeper understanding of select SEL programs, materials, research, and support data, publicly available documents were analyzed along with the already adopted CCSS. Explicit data collection plans informed by this type of information can take various forms (Yin, 2014, p. 101). Document analysis is a qualitative data collection strategy that attempts to obtain information readily available through Internet search.

For qualitative document analysis, a spiral approach was employed. Creswell and Poth (2018) revealed that analysis is not linear. From data collection to an account of the findings, steps were revisited, as needed. These data analysis spiral activities included management of the data, reading and memoing, describing and coding, developing and assessing interpretations, and

representing the data. This process allowed the researcher to organize analyzed data into major ideas to be represented in the dissertation's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher maintained a high level of objectivity and sensitivity in order for the document analysis results to be credible and valid (Bowen, 2009).

Explanation building was accomplished by comparing findings to the initial purpose of the study. In this case, data collected from documents were compared to the findings from the interviews and the internet survey, further synthesizing the qualitative and quantitative results. Bowen (2009) summed up the overall concept of document analysis as a process of "evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced, and understanding is developed" (p. 33). Major themes extrapolated during document analysis were compared and put into categories or themes much like the coding of the interviews (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Document collection plans included an analysis of the CCSS. The site being studied has adopted these English and math standards, which are used by the majority of states (Filippi & Hackmann, 2018). Pennsylvania's Career Education and Work Standards were also analyzed. CASEL collaborates with leading experts and supports districts, schools, and states nationwide to drive research, guide practice, and inform policy. The SEL framework provided by CASEL drives much of current social-emotional learning practice. Documents in the form of scans, public policy, and state resources were analyzed. This is an appropriate choice for the qualitative data analysis for the study as it adds to the strong analytic strategy provided by multimethod research (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Survey

The third sub-question for this study explored how quantitative survey data of middle school teachers would inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework

aligned to the CCSS in a middle school-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania. The proposed method used to deliver the questions to the subjects was supplied using a Google Form, a static web instrument. Manual scrolling was employed, allowing respondents to easily move forward or backward through questions. Allowing the subject to view the entire survey promoted survey completion as participants could easily monitor their own progress. The response style used with each question will be text-input fields (Bickman & Rog 2009). Due to the scale nature of the response, this style was most effective and encouraged authentic survey completion in order to elicit valuable feedback. Next, instructions used to explain how the survey should be completed were detailed yet concise. They were sent via email allowing for reply if further clarification was required. Finally, the submissions were collected via Google Form allowing for interpretation as results can be immediately summarized for analysis. Completion of the Likert scale confirmed consent to participate. The directions for this web survey are provided below and in Appendix G.

Directions: Please choose the opinion/attitude you feel most fits your current understanding.

Social-emotional learning is defined as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, n.d.a).

1. In my work with middle school students, I see a need for social-emotional instruction defined as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

___ Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

2. Social-emotional instruction promotes academic success.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

3. There are benefits of integrating social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

4. There are disadvantages with integrating social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

5. Social-emotional skills, such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, can be aligned to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

6. Social-emotional instruction is suited for integration in an ELA/Social Sciences course.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

7. Social-emotional instruction is suited for integration in a Math/Science course.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

8. Parents of middle school students would participate in social-emotional instruction such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness in community outreach programming.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

9. Administrators and academic decision makers of middle school students would support alignment of existing Common Core State Standards to include social-emotional instruction such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

10. Middle school students would willingly participate in social-emotional instruction such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

___ Agree

___ Strongly Agree

As with the interview questions, the survey was grounded in literature and was designed to reveal perceptions and attitudes in reference to the research question. This survey was used to gain insight using a Likert scale and was statistically analyzed for modes and medians (Boone & Boone, 2012). Questions one through four were intended to inform the need and perceived advantages and disadvantages of SEL integration. Various studies support SEL as a protective way to foster academic learning and to prevent problematic youth behaviors (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Reicher & Matischek-Jauk, 2018). The responses to questions five through seven are concerned with providing insight to the teachers' perception of the best fit for a SEL framework implementation and alignment (Martínez, 2016; Poulou, 2017). Unlike the interview, questions eight and ten respectively included perceived and anticipated attitudes of parents and students. Classroom teachers offer a unique perspective on these populations due to regular and consistent interaction (Jones et al., 2019). This afforded guidance in the application of a solution to the problem of practice.

The survey was sent to all classroom teachers in the middle school, minimum of 15 respondents were required to give consent in the form of their responses. This number of participants allows for a reasonable interpretation of the data. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are mathematical techniques for organizing and summarizing a numerical set of data (Gall et al., 2003). The researcher presented data using descriptive methods through simple statistics and graphic displays of measures of relative standing (Bickman & Rog, 2009). A determination of teacher attitudes and perceptions was

noted by the frequency of the various response choices. Counts are represented as mean, a measure of central tendency.

The interpretation of the mean was coded and compared to findings from the interviews and document analysis thus completing the triangulation of the data. Bickman and Rog (2009) described triangulation as parallel mixed analysis and is characteristic of extant educational research in which quantitative data are collected concurrently with qualitative data. The triangulation of data results in findings that are both robust and reliable (Rooshenas et al., 2019). The researcher's efforts were to provide valid and usable data to inform and solve a problem; triangulation supports that effort (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Building trust, being honest, and practicing integrity are foundations in ethical research practices. In order to protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used. Data collected electronically were password protected and all tangible data were and are kept locked in a filing cabinet in order to ensure privacy is maintained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical considerations to note research bias is provided to support trustworthiness of the study. The researcher also ensured that enough information is provided for the research to be replicated. This supports the study's dependability. Finally, the consent form addressed ethical considerations stating that the participants can revoke their consent at any time before publication. Such considerations prevent data falsification and establish further validity (Beardsley et al., 2019). The researcher looked to produce findings that are academically considered; therefore, a code of ethics was put in place, such as protection of participant identity and informed consent acquisition.

Additionally, the researcher recognized the challenge of avoiding the pitfalls of going native. The researcher is motivated to solve a perceived problem of practice where the problem

was observed; however, data collection is to remain free of bias to maintain ethics and quality. Therefore, the researcher remained in the role of data collector, not participant (Mills et al., 2010). Deception was also avoided by consistent review of consent with repeated confirmation of the ability to withdraw from the study. Participants will not be coerced, and no repercussions will occur as noted in the consent form that addresses ethical considerations stating that the participant can revoke their consent at any time before the publication (see Appendix D).

Liberty University's IRB calls for procedures to follow to maintain ethics and ensure anonymity. Moreover, the participants are considered collaborators in the research and were given an opportunity to review the transcribed data. The review further supported research validity and allowed the interviewees the ability to confirm compliance with the data collection (Merriam, 2009). The researcher also ensured that enough information was provided for the research to be replicated further supporting the study's dependability.

Summary

This chapter includes the design, research questions, setting, participants, researcher's role, procedures, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and summary. This study was conducted to solve the perceived problem by utilizing the already adopted CCSS to align a social-emotional framework in a middle school-level public school in Pennsylvania. These sections look to clarify the researcher's process and procedure for gathering and analyzing data. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) produced a scan that included data from all 50 states and looked for programs that required direct instruction, not simply a recommended SEL course. Although some components of SEL competencies found their way into most states in one way or another, room for improvement was noted in all areas. This information is impactful as it further

illustrates a need for building a foundation for teachers that is practiced and educated in social-emotional competencies, and that is what these methods were intended to discover.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied social research study was to solve the problem of the omission of a framework for SEL in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers a proposed solution to the problem within the core curriculum. Through a review of the literature, the researcher identified the fact that SEL is recommended by schools and businesses to produce career-ready individuals, however there is no framework required by the state as there is with math and other core content areas. Therefore, the central question that guided the research was: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved? Pennsylvania has adopted the CCSS in math and Language arts as well as career education and work standards. Career ready skills that articulate a social-emotional framework are suggested by the state but are not required or expressly aligned to standards already in place. This chapter is inclusive of information detailing the participants, results of the data collection organized by research question and corresponding themes, followed by a discussion and summary looking to clarify the perceived problem of practice.

Participants

This research utilized participants who have an intimate involvement with the site being studied and the population the research is looking to serve. The interviews reflected a purposeful sampling strategy that looked to inform perceived problem of practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview participants included faculty who have experience instituting CCSS in the classroom and curriculum decision makers in the district being studied.

Interview Participants

Five members of the site being studied were purposefully selected to be consulted in semi-structured interviews regarding experiences in curriculum development in the district. The participants included the district's assistant superintendent, the director of curriculum and instruction, the school's assistant principal, a classroom teacher, and the school's social worker. There were four female and one male participants with an average age of 45-years-old. The interview participants were all Caucasian. One of the interviewees has a doctorate in education and the other four have a master's degree, one of whom is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. The interview participants have an average of 18 years of experience in education. Throughout this research, each of the interview participants are referred by the pseudonyms interviewee one, interviewee two, interviewee three, interviewee four, and interviewee five.

Survey Participants

The survey participants for this research were purposefully selected as those who are classroom teachers at the study site. The faculty participant sample included 16 educators with an average age of 45-years-old of which nine were female and seven were male. As teachers in the middle school being studied, each of the participants had a minimum of a bachelor's degree level education with 12 having a master's degree. The survey participants were all Caucasian as no other ethnicity is represented in the faculty. Teachers were surveyed using an anonymous online instrument, which resulted in quantitative data displayed to reveal frequency of response. The quantitative data were provided in the form of scaled questions regarding the participants' perceptions and understandings of SEL and CCSS. For the reporting of these data, pseudonyms were not necessary as the responses were anonymous.

Results

Data for this research were collected through remote, semi-structured interviews with five academic informers at the site being studied along with surveys given to the school's faculty. Additionally, documents informing the research included CCSS in math and language arts, career education and work standards, and Pennsylvania's Career Ready Skills. The interview participants and documents were organized into themes which were then supported with the quantitative data represented by Likert-type survey results provided by the school's teachers. By applying open and axial coding techniques, the interview responses were coded for themes (Table 1). These themes were then itemized by frequency to determine the prevailing themes that impact sub-question one (Table 2). These results are identified to examine responses to the research sub-questions.

Sub-question 1

Sub-question one asked: How would curriculum decision makers in an interview inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania? Interviews were managed using the online platform Google Meet. Research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing protocol was followed by order of the state's Governor. The interviews were audio recorded and immediately transcribed to support accuracy. Transcriptions were sent to the interviewee for approval and content validation. The major themes that developed from the qualitative interview data include improving the universal understanding of student need for SEL, requiring training for teachers for authentic implementation of SEL skills, and going beyond SEL and CCSS alignment to require stand-alone lessons in character education and development.

Table 1

Open and axial coding of Themes, Interview Participants

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Examples of Participant Comments
<p>Middle school brains; wide spectrum from sixth through eighth grade; passive; overreact; need guidance and prompting; basic needs not being met; ability to adapt; executive functioning skills; lack of empathy; changing; wide range of abilities; self-confidence</p>	<p>Adolescent brains are unique and are still developing in the SEL competencies</p>	<p>“... all of those executive functioning skills are still developing in the adolescent brain.” (Interviewee Three)</p> <p>“They (students) have a way of identifying something’s going on internally and need to work through it but don’t know how.” (Interviewee Three)</p> <p>“Maybe because of their inability or fear of interactions and what possibly might come back on them, students don’t show empathy.” (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>“That critical time (adolescence) to know as my body changes, as my thoughts change, as my peer relationships change, what are some proactive options?” (Interviewee Five)</p>
<p>Struggle managing emotions; disproportionate reactions; difficulty maintain relationships; hard time controlling themselves; unable to see differences; Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs; students seek help; require small/short-term goals; constantly changing relationships; responsible decisions; sense of wellbeing; lack of empathy</p>	<p>Adolescents have difficulty managing social-emotional skills</p>	<p>“Maintaining relationships... I don’t know any students that I think is awesome at that or stable in the component.” (Interviewee One)</p> <p>“We’re saturated with that conversation of kids being picked on. That tells me that they don’t have the ability to look at somebody and appreciate and understand a difference without using it to ridicule.” (Interviewee Two)</p> <p>“I think kids nowadays, and this in again through my observations, have difficulty understanding what they are going through. They have a difficult time, not just identifying their emotions but managing them.” (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>“They (adolescents) are making abrupt decisions without thinking through the possible consequences. More now than</p>

		<p>what I've seen in the past. Whether it's a societal impact or something else entirely, I can't say, but it's definitely out there." (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>"One of the things that we've lost is the social interactions, those healthy, appropriate social interactions between people, and that's adults as well as kids." (Interviewee Four)</p>
<p>Modify and accommodate; supplement; real world equipped; direct instruction of SEL competencies; clear expectations; loss of social interactions; need for standardization; perceived importance of academic standards; find a balance</p>	<p>Common Core aligns with SEL competences (stand-alone lesson preference)</p>	<p>"It's more like supplementing it and while we are teaching characterization, why don't we talk about the kids' characters too." (Interviewee One)</p> <p>"When you integrate them (Common Core and SEL competences) you create a symmetry between academic expectations and internal skills necessary." (Interviewee Two)</p> <p>"You're standardizing it and at that point making it an essential component of instruction; that is the key to make sure that all teachers are seeing what is essential to a child's development." (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>"We definitely work, as a district and as individuals to try to teach those (SEL) skills. I would say it's not quite as effective as if it was a planned lesson though." (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>"I mean if you look at the standards for mathematical practice, those mirror almost what we hope to see in our resilient students. I do think there's a really nice marriage there." (Interviewee Five)</p>
<p>Students need prompting; ideas can coexist; care about wellbeing; teachers must promote a common language; alignment of language already in place;</p>	<p>Develop/practice a consistent language and behavioral expectations</p>	<p>"They fall into this crazy, reckless behavior and because of that, our administration made every teacher walk their class, single file and silent to and from lunch." (Interviewee One)</p>

<p>equip teachers with language; large group not as effective as small</p>		<p>“We need to show them how to navigate these places (hallways, cafeteria, auditorium) in the most respectful way possible because that’s a skill you need to learn moving forward.” (Interviewee Three)</p> <p>“If you standardized the skills you are making it an essential component of instruction and that is key to make sure that all teachers are seeing this as important.” (Interviewee Four)</p> <p>“I think what we've learned this year is that, well maybe not just this year, but we make a lot of assumptions about students' social and emotional learning about what competencies they do have about what they should be able to do.” (Interviewee Five)</p>
<p>Shift from content driven to whole child driven; time management; require students to navigate complex situations; undergraduate requirement; learning gap; teacher buy-in; not enough time; essential for instruction; part of teacher assessment</p>	<p>Pre-service through seasoned educator training requirement</p>	<p>“I don’t think it’s the school of training that all teachers go through.” (Interviewee Two)</p> <p>“Even the Governor says we need to do more in this arena and there are no disadvantages to integrating the two unless teachers aren’t equipped to do it.” (Interviewee Two)</p> <p>“All teachers knew how to prompt a change in behavior, or they would give an opportunity to stop and think. It allows for an increased opportunity to practice skills that you might learn in guidance, in class, or at home.” (Interviewee Three)</p> <p>“If you go into teaching, you might go into teaching because you have a passion about t a specific subject and it might not be in your comfort area to deal with social-emotional skills.” (Interviewee Three)</p>

Table 2

Frequency of Codes, Interview Participants

Codes	Frequency
Adolescent brains are unique and are still developing in the SEL competencies	28
Adolescents have difficulty managing social-emotional skills	38
Common Core aligns with SEL competences (stand-alone lesson preference)	42
Develop/practice a consistent language and behavioral expectations	24
Pre-service through seasoned educator training requirement	32

The collation of the five codes most frequently reported throughout the interviews were combined to reveal three main themes which represented the context of these codes. These themes were: improving the universal understanding of student need for SEL, requiring training for teachers for authentic implementation of SEL skills, and going beyond SEL and Common Core alignment to require stand-alone lessons in character education and development.

Theme #1: Quantify Student Need for SEL

Adolescent brains are distinctive, still developing, and often have difficulty managing social-emotional practices. The first two codes noted, adolescent brains are unique and are still developing in the SEL competencies, and adolescents have difficulty managing social-emotional skills, were merged to inform the first theme. The interviewees expressed their understanding that middle school students' brains are not fully developed. It was noted by four of the five interviewees that they have observed a wide range of student ability to understand and process emotions. Interviewee One commented: "But also being middle school and their brains are, I don't even know, a quarter of the way developed?" The fact was also illustrated by Interviewee Three when she stated, "A student's ability to understand and manage emotions must be looked

at knowing that all of those executive functioning skills are still developing in the adolescent brain.” Being aware of what student brains are capable of at this age is required to develop reasonable expectations for behavior. Measuring an adolescent’s baseline of SEL abilities allows for an opportunity for growth that is authentic and effective.

Each interviewee revealed observations of student need for SEL with a frequency of 38 responses through the interviews, the most recorded and coded. Considering the five SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, room for growth was noted in all areas. Interviewee One commented, “A lot of them (adolescents) almost have, maybe not toddler, but younger than their age reactions to whatever’s going on in their lives.” The sentiment was echoed in the observation made by Interviewee Two: “I’ve seen over-reactions to mismanagement of emotions, to very passive, internalized behavior, both of which have detrimental outcomes for those kids.” Self-management and goal setting were also recognized as areas for growth with adolescents as illustrated by Interviewee Four’s observation: “If they can’t achieve goals in a timely fashion, they give up on it.” Respondents noted an inability for adolescents to feel and show empathy for others as evidenced by Interviewee Two, who stated, “a kid’s inability to be empathetic and then target other kids, which is a lack of control, or empathy, or something of that nature. That’s what I see unfortunately.”

The student’s ability to establish positive relationships was observed to be an area of strength for the population being observed, however an inability to maintain those relationships was discovered. Interviewee Four stated, “Through social media, you’re starting to see those skills that we would typically expect for maintaining those relationships start to deteriorate.” This interviewee was the only one to mention social media in their observations of student ability

to establish and maintain positive relationships. Finally, positive observations were noted on student's ability to understand responsible decisions but an inability to model them. Interviewee Four stated:

I would say the majority of time, students, when they take the time, are able to point out what responsible decisions are. I think the issue that I see is either the inability or lack of desire to follow through and make those responsible decisions.

This observation is encouraging as foundational skills may be present that provide a foundation for SEL competencies to build upon and establish.

Theme #2: Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills

Having a consistent social-emotional language along with behavioral expectations that are clear and steadfast are the underpinning of authentic implementation of SEL skills. Teachers who are pre-service through those with teaching experience require training, as expressed by the interviewees. Combining the axial codes of develop/practice a consistent language and behavioral expectations along with pre-service through veteran educator training requirements, were combined to inform the second theme. Interviewees were asked about their observations of students in non-structured settings such as the cafeteria and the hallway. Interviewee Two revealed:

This might be not something that you want to hear, but my training is in behavior and restorative practices, which gets to the heart of social-emotional learning at the secondary level. I don't necessarily see them (teachers) requiring kids to navigate complex situations, to resolve misinterpretations or misunderstandings, to take ownership or accountability for the harm that they may have caused.

This observation was supported by all other respondents in their replies to the question about unstructured time in the middle school setting. However, it was noted by Interviewee Four that adverse cafeteria behavior, a perceived problem at the site being studied, is an issue in “most schools.”

Ensuring that teachers use a consistent language to reference social-emotional skills was established to be important by the interviewees. Interviewee Two shared:

One of the districts that I worked had, at their elementary level, a program that all students were taught. From the moment they entered kindergarten, the language was very consistent. All teachers knew the same words to prompt a change in behavior or to give an opportunity to stop and think. It allowed for an increased opportunity to practice those skills that you might learn.

Equipping educators with the tools needed for behavioral and emotional expectations was revealed to be important to those interviewed. Interviewee Five shared: “I do think the training that our (elementary) teachers got with Second Step and the very guided, scripted curriculum helped to build those skills.” The elementary schools in the district of the middle school being studied instituted a scripted SEL curriculum, Second Step in the 2019-20 school year. The infancy of implementation has not afforded data to support its value.

Theme #3: Go beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development

The code with the highest frequency, CCSS align with SEL competencies (stand-alone lesson preference) informs the last theme. Data from the qualitative interviews suggest that a SEL framework can and should be aligned to the already in place CCSS. However, all interviewees noted a preference for small group instruction of stand-alone lessons. Interviewee

Five stated, “The more we’re able to integrate good instructional practice, which isn’t just about teaching kids, it’s about knowing kids. It’s about understanding how the brain works. This is a whole child that we’re dealing with here.” Good instructional practices can be found in authentic SEL programming that utilizes standards defined by Pennsylvania’s Career Ready Skills. Conversely, concern was shown for the perceived teacher loss of academic time or having the impression that SEL is just something else teachers are required to do.

Interviewee Three identified, “I think there would have to be enough time and training to allow everyone to feel comfortable presenting the same material.” A similar concern noted by Interviewee One was, “I think a complaint would be that this is something else they have to learn or teach, and we don’t have time for that.” These possible setbacks to authentic SEL alignment and implementation can be addressed with proper planning and explicit procedures starting with pre-service teachers making a supportive SEL experience possible.

Aligning a social-emotional framework to the CCSS allows for consistency and a common foundation that is purposeful.

There’s a level of assurance that we’re taking what we know we have to do and embedding what some may or may not think is important to do. For me, it’s (an SEL framework) there; you can’t get away from it. (Interviewee Two)

The interviewee’s statement reveals a benefit to alignment. However, each interviewee determined a perceived need for SEL in isolation. Interviewee Five stated, “In a perfect world, teachers would feel confident that their role is beyond that of a content provider.” It can be surmised that academic decision makers at the site being studied believe in the importance of social-emotional learning.

Sub-question 2

Sub-question two asked: How can documents of current programs, frameworks, and standards inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania? For this study, the researcher analyzed the Pennsylvania CCSS in math and language arts. Both of these documents were adopted in March of 2014 and are the framework of what is to be learned by all students in Pennsylvania. Additionally, effective in the 2018-19 school year and beyond, the Career Education and Work Standards articulate portfolio requirements at various benchmarks with eighth grade, necessitating an individualized career plan and six pieces of evidence showing growth. Finally, Career Ready Skills were analyzed as they are aligned with, but do not duplicate Pennsylvania's CEW standards and are consistent with the intent of the Future Ready PA Index (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.c), which is a collection of progress measures used to more accurately report student learning, growth, and success in the classroom and beyond. These documents were examined under the lens of CASEL's SEL framework and organized by competency. Open and axial coding techniques were utilized for document analysis and were coded for themes (see Table 3). These themes were then itemized by frequency to determine the prevailing themes which impact sub-question two (see Table 4). These results are identified to examine documents against the themes developed by the interviews.

Table 3

Open and axial coding of Themes, Documents

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Examples of Standards
The ability to accurately recognize one's	Need for self-awareness (understand and	CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.G. "Write arguments to support claims. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to

<p>own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”</p>	<p>manage emotions) and its implementation</p>	<p>convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.H. “Introduce and state an opinion on a topic”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T. “With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed”</p> <p>CEWS 13.1. “Relate careers to personal interests, abilities, and aptitudes, create an individualized career; plan interests, abilities, and aptitudes; Choose personal electives and extracurricular activities based upon personal career interests, abilities and academic strengths”</p> <p>CEWS 13.3. “Determine attitudes and work habits that support career retention and advancement; Analyze the role of each participant’s contribution in a team setting; Explain and demonstrate conflict resolution skills”</p> <p>CEWS 13.4. “Evaluate how entrepreneurial character traits influence career opportunities”</p> <p>CRS 1. “Recognize and regulate emotions”</p>
<p>The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.</p>	<p>Self-management (set and achieve positive goals) purpose and need</p>	<p>CCSS-M M.P.1. “Understand the approaches of others to solving complex problems and identify correspondences between different approaches, analyze givens, constraints, relationships, and goals, make conjectures about the form and meaning of the solution and plan a solution pathway rather than simply jumping into a solution attempt”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.2. “Decontextualize—to abstract a given situation and represent it symbolically and manipulate the representing symbols as if they have a life of their own, without necessarily attending to their referents—and the ability to contextualize, to pause as needed during the</p>

		<p>manipulation process in order to probe into the referents for the symbols involved”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.4. “Maintain oversight of the process, while attending to the details and continually evaluate the reasonableness of intermediate results”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.N. “Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or character. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T. “With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed”</p> <p>CEWS 13.1. “Relate careers to personal interests, abilities, and aptitudes, create an individualized career; plan interests, abilities, and aptitudes; Choose personal electives and extracurricular activities based upon personal career interests, abilities and academic strengths”</p> <p>CEWS 13.2. “Explain, in the career acquisition process, the importance of the essential workplace skills/knowledge, such as: Commitment, Communication, Dependability, Personal initiative, Self-advocacy, Team building”</p> <p>CRS 1. “Recognize and regulate emotions”</p> <p>CRS 2. “Communicate and collaborate amongst diversity”</p>
<p>The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and</p>	<p>Social awareness (feel and show empathy for others) purpose and need</p>	<p>CCSS-M M.P.1. “Understand the approaches of others to solving complex problems and identify correspondences between different approaches, analyze givens, constraints, relationships, and goals, make conjectures about the form and meaning of the solution and plan a solution</p>

<p>cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.</p>		<p>pathway rather than simply jumping into a solution attempt”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.3. “Listen or read the arguments of others, decide whether they make sense, and ask useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.2.8.D. “Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints. Students read, understand, and respond to informational text—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on evidence”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.2.8.H. “Evaluate authors' arguments, reasoning, and specific claims for the soundness of the arguments and the relevance of the evidence”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.3.8.D. “Analyze how differences in the points of view of the audience or readers (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor. Students read and respond to works of literature—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.3.8.F. “Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative and connotative meanings and how they shape meaning and tone”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.G. “Write arguments to support claims. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.H. “Introduce and state an opinion on a topic”</p>
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		<p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.N. “Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T. “With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.5.8.B. “Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.5.8.C. “Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation”</p> <p>CEWS 13.3. “Determine attitudes and work habits that support career retention and advancement; Analyze the role of each participant’s contribution in a team setting; Explain and demonstrate conflict resolution skills”</p> <p>CEWS 13.4. “Evaluate how entrepreneurial character traits influence career opportunities”</p> <p>CRS 2. “Communicate and collaborate amongst diversity”</p> <p>CRS 3. “Demonstrate empathy and respectful choice”</p>
The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding	Implementation, need, and purpose of relationship skills (establish	CCSS-M M.P.2. “Decontextualize—to abstract a given situation and represent it symbolically and manipulate the representing symbols as if they have a life of their own, without necessarily

<p>relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.</p>	<p>and maintain positive relationships)</p>	<p>attending to their referents—and the ability to contextualize, to pause as needed during the manipulation process in order to probe into the referents for the symbols involved”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.3. “Listen or read the arguments of others, decide whether they make sense, and ask useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.3.8.D. “Analyze how differences in the points of view of the audience or readers (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor. Students read and respond to works of literature—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.3.8.F. “Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative and connotative meanings and how they shape meaning and tone”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T. “With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.5.8.B. “Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions”</p> <p>CEWS 13.2. “Explain, in the career acquisition process, the importance of the essential workplace skills/knowledge, such as: Commitment, Communication, Dependability, Personal initiative, Self-advocacy, Team building”</p>
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		<p>CEWS 13.3. “Determine attitudes and work habits that support career retention and advancement; Analyze the role of each participant’s contribution in a team setting; Explain and demonstrate conflict resolution skills”</p> <p>CRS 2. “Communicate and collaborate amongst diversity”</p>
<p>The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.</p>	<p>Responsible decision-making purpose and need</p>	<p>CCSS-M M.P.1. “Understand the approaches of others to solving complex problems and identify correspondences between different approaches, analyze givens, constraints, relationships, and goals, make conjectures about the form and meaning of the solution and plan a solution pathway rather than simply jumping into a solution attempt”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.2. “Decontextualize—to abstract a given situation and represent it symbolically and manipulate the representing symbols as if they have a life of their own, without necessarily attending to their referents—and the ability to contextualize, to pause as needed during the manipulation process in order to probe into the referents for the symbols involved”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.3. “Listen or read the arguments of others, decide whether they make sense, and ask useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments”</p> <p>CCSS-M M.P.4. “Maintain oversight of the process, while attending to the details and continually evaluate the reasonableness of intermediate results”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.2.8.H. “Evaluate authors' arguments, reasoning, and specific claims for the soundness of the arguments and the relevance of the evidence”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.3.8.F. “Analyze the influence of the words and phrases in a text including figurative and connotative meanings and how they shape meaning and tone”</p>

		<p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.G. “Write arguments to support claims. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.H. “Introduce and state an opinion on a topic”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T. “With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.5.8.B. “Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions”</p> <p>CCSS-ELA 1.5.8.C. “Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation”</p> <p>CEWS 13.1. “Relate careers to personal interests, abilities, and aptitudes, create an individualized career; plan interests, abilities, and aptitudes; Choose personal electives and extracurricular activities based upon personal career interests, abilities and academic strengths”</p> <p>CEWS 13.3. “Determine attitudes and work habits that support career retention and advancement; Analyze the role of each participant’s contribution in a team setting; Explain and demonstrate conflict resolution skills”</p> <p>CEWS 13.4. “Evaluate how entrepreneurial character traits influence career opportunities”</p>
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		CRS 3. “Demonstrate empathy and respectful choice”
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Table 4

Frequency of Codes, Documents

Codes	Frequency
Need for self-awareness (understand and manage emotions) and its implementation	7
Self-management (set and achieve positive goals) purpose and need	9
Social awareness (feel and show empathy for others) purpose and need	16
Implementation, need and purpose of relationship skills (establish and maintain positive relationships)	9
Responsible decision-making purpose and need	15

The five codes in Table 4 reflect the five SEL competencies as defined by CASEL based on purpose, need, and their implementation. With much overlap, the skills defined in an SEL framework are apparent in all documents analyzed with social awareness and responsible decision-making appearing most frequently.

Theme #1: Quantify Student Need for SEL

Although not explicitly verbatim, the CCSS do require learners to exercise social-emotional skills such as social awareness and responsible decision making. Additionally, as the interviewees observed, adolescent brains are unique, still developing, and often have difficulty managing social-emotional practices. The documents analyzed informed the research by providing standards in math, language arts, and career education and work that measure student ability to be future ready inclusive of social-emotional competencies. The documents informed that the student requirement of understanding and managing emotions can be found in seven different areas of the standards analyzed. For example, CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.G., which says “Write arguments to support claims. Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content,” is a call for

learners to foster their ability to understand themselves to inform an argument. CCSS-M M.P.1. ss a call for learners to practice responsible decision-making, skills governed by a successful SEL program. It says:

Understand the approaches of others to solving complex problems and identify correspondences between different approaches, analyze givens, constraints, relationships, and goals, make conjectures about the form and meaning of the solution and plan a solution pathway rather than simply jumping into a solution attempt.

The need for SEL practices is evidenced numerous times in all documents analyzed.

Theme #2: Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills

Providing training that explicitly reveals the SEL framework through the CCSS is informed by the document analysis. Pennsylvania has adopted Career Ready Standards that are in direct alignment with the CEWS and measure success skills. The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides various resources to implement the CEWS with the recognition of the CRS that look to measure student ability to foster interpersonal skills detailed in a social-emotional framework (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.b). Allowing educators to realign the work they are already doing with students to explicitly teach the newly adopted CEWS and CRS requires time, training, and resources.

Having an agreed upon language and behavioral expectations that are clear and consistent are foundational for authentic implementation of SEL skills and teachers who are pre-service through tenured require training. Providing educators with a clear purpose and the resources to accomplish alignment will promote success. Pennsylvania has adopted standards in all subject areas whether a standardized test to measure ability exists or not. Based on the alignment noted in math, language arts, and the CEWS, it is certain all subject areas have the capacity to

recognize social-emotional alignment if given the time and resources to do so. This alignment would promote a common language across all subject areas, one that nurtures the whole child and applies the findings of this research.

Theme #3: Go Beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development

Data from the qualitative interviews suggest that a SEL framework can and should be aligned to the already in place CCSS. However, all interviewees noted a preference of stand-alone lessons for small group instruction. The first step is to make the alignment visible. For example, when considering the five SEL competencies, multiple language arts and CEWS appear. An adolescent's ability to establish and maintain positive relationships can be measured within "With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed" (CCSS-ELA 1.4.8.T.). The work required in this standard allows the learner to practice fostering relationships. Making the work explicit through connecting the standard to the competency will promote SEL success.

The numerous examples from the analyzed documents revealed support for alignment to a social-emotional framework. However, as expressed by the interviewees, stand-alone lessons in SEL were a perceived need. CRS provide social-emotional learning progressions in the areas of self-awareness and self-management, establishing and maintaining relationships, and social problem solving (Pennsylvania Department of Education, n.d.a). The state's website provides a continuum and resources to implement and measure these pro-social abilities required in the classroom and beyond. Employability skills are also categorized within the framework. This provides a foundation to implement stand-alone lessons and to align CCSS to these life skills.

Sub-question 3

Sub-question three asks: How would a quantitative survey for the middle school’s teachers inform the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania? The survey respondents answered ten Likert-type questions related to experiences with CCSS and SEL where Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. These responses represent teacher perceptions of purpose, need, and implementation of SEL under the direction to “choose the opinion/attitude you feel most fits your current understandings,” followed by a definition of SEL provided by CASEL. Data were organized by respondent answer compared to a question code of need, purpose, implementation, and support (see Table 5). A mean value was calculated for each question and outliers were identified for consideration against other variables.

Table 5

Teacher Responses to Likert-type Survey Questions

Question Number/Code	Respondents															Mean	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O		P
1/Need	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4.5
2/Purpose	5	5	5	4	3	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4.5
3/Purpose	5	5	5	4	3	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	2	5	4	4	4.31
4/Implementation	1	1	1	4	3	1	2	3	1	2	2	1	3	2	2	4	2.93
5/Implementation	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	5	2	3	3.81
6/Implementation	4	5	5	4	2	5	2	2	5	4	4	5	3	5	3	4	3.88
7/Implementation	4	4	5	4	2	5	2	2	5	3	4	4	3	4	2	2	3.44
8/Need/Support	3	4	5	2	4	5	3	5	3	3	3	3	2	5	3	3	3.5
9/Need/Support	4	4	5	3	1	5	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	3.81
10Need/Support	4	4	5	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	3	3.38

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the Likert-type items. The ten questions represented various aspects of SEL coded as need, purpose, support, and implementation as perceived by the respondents. Question number four was a reverse-worded question, and the numbers were inverted for consistent analysis of means. The ordinal categorical data were analyzed to find the central tendency reported as the mean of the Likert scale data. Questions one, eight, nine, and ten revealed teacher perceptions of the need for SEL at the study site. Questions four through seven were to inform on how SEL could be integrated into the classroom. Questions two and three sought to measure teacher understanding for the purpose of SEL, and questions eight through ten revealed teacher attitudes about support for SEL from academic stakeholders, parents, and students respectively. The quantitative data presented by the teacher survey Likert-type responses were examined for correlations and implications against the themes provided by the stakeholder interviews and qualitative analysis of document data.

Theme #1: Quantify Student Need for SEL

A mean score was calculated to reveal teacher perception of a need for SEL at the study site as a 3.8 on the scale of one through five, with five corresponding to strongly agree by considering responses to questions one and eight through ten. Most specifically, the first question asked respondents to consider: “In my work with middle school students, I see a need for social-emotional instruction defined as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.” A mean score of 4.5 represents agree/strongly agree in this area providing further support for a need for a social-emotional framework in place at the site being studied.

Averaging the mean score of questions two and three revealed that respondents agreed on the purpose of SEL. This was determined by the mean score of 4.41 on teacher perception that

social-emotional instruction promotes academic success and that there are benefits of integrating social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness to existing CCSS. These data, along with the qualitative interviews and documents, support an understanding that adolescent brains are still developing and often have difficulty managing social-emotional practices. These measures of central tendency indicate the respondents agreed there is a need for SEL.

Theme #2: Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills

A mean of 3.5 demonstrates a neutral understanding on the implementation lens of social-emotional learning revealing to the researcher that training is required. Questions four through six looked to reveal the teacher perspective of how to best implement SEL. Question five asked: “Social-emotional skills, such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, can be aligned to existing Common Core State Standards.” With a mean score of 3.81, it can be determined that the respondents agreed that an SEL framework can be aligned to the CCSS.

Respondents revealed that they agreed more with language arts alignment than math with mean scores of 3.88 and 3.44 respectively. These questions measured perceptions of the respondents by asking level of agreement with social-emotional instruction being suited for integration in ELA/social sciences courses or math/science courses. Document analysis supports this perspective with a higher frequency of language arts standards aligning to SEL competencies than math standards. However, this neutral understanding of SEL implementation further confirms a need for having training on an agreed upon language and behavioral expectations that are measurable, clear, and consistent. These points are foundational for requiring authentic implementation of SEL skills for teachers that are pre-service through seasoned.

Theme #3: Go Beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development

Perceived support of SEL by students, parents, and administration averaged a score of 3.56 indicating a movement toward apparent support of SEL by academic stakeholders. Question eight informed parent support of SEL and CCSS alignment as perceived by the respondents with a mean score of 3.5. This neutral response indicates a possible need for community outreach for alignment to experience success. Question nine informed administrative support with a mean score of 3.81. This score along with the interviewee responses endorses academic decision maker support. Finally, respondents were asked their perception of student willingness to participate in SEL practices; a mean score of 3.38 resulted. This neutral response requires further data, perhaps from students, to make a final determination on student perception. Therefore, data from the quantitative survey suggest that a SEL framework can and should be aligned to the already in place CCSS. Considering survey data along with the qualitative pieces, a preference for small group instruction of stand-alone lessons can be concluded.

Discussion

An examination of the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two revealed strong correlations with existing perspectives and studies on whole child education and SEL. An in-depth literature review organized by SEL foundation and purpose, development and implementation, and impact and implications in the classroom and beyond, provide the backdrop to examine the themes that emerged from this study. The study's findings are also reviewed against sociocultural and holistic education theories.

Empirical Literature

In examining the results and developing themes that address the research question, three major concepts emerge. Each of these concepts, and their potential solutions, are supported through previous research.

Theme #1: Quantify Student Need for SEL

Adolescent brains are unique, still developing, and often have difficulty managing social-emotional practices. This study's findings support what empirical literature has corroborated: adolescents require specific skills to navigate and prosper during this unique stage of development. However, there is a gap in the literature. Contemporary research and theorists agree that SEL components promote life-ready skills. Sauve and Schonert-Reichl, (2019) posited that students thrive when their social-emotional development is nurtured. Additionally, there has also been a recent surge providing an ample amount of research on adolescent brain development (Goddings et al., 2019). These emerging findings promote a future of sufficient research that is currently missing in connecting these two components that this study looks to inform.

For adolescents at the middle school level, it is crucial to cultivate a positive sense of identity at this stage of growth, especially in reference to future decisions in adulthood. One of the few studies on adolescents and SEL found that there are two concepts to establish: self-concept and self-esteem (Dumitrescu, 2015). Pennsylvania's CRS identify self-awareness and self-management as components of recognizing and regulating emotions (Career Ready Skills, 2018). However, where and when this is supposed to be practiced and measured is not a requirement or explicitly identified. Aligning standards that already have a specific scope and sequence that are assessed state-wide would resolve this problem. CASEL reports that 18 of 50 states have articulated competencies of social-emotional curriculum in PreK-12 public schools.

Pennsylvania is addressing the needs with CRS. A SEL framework brief published in February 2019 found that 10 of the 14 states used the CASEL framework for SEL, while four states had state-specific frameworks for SEL that aligned with the CASEL framework. Currently, Pennsylvania is represented in one of the four states that has a state-specific framework (Dusenbury et al., 2019).

Even though Pennsylvania is represented as one of the 18 states addressing the SEL competencies, CRS are simply a step in the right direction. The need has been identified and competencies are in place to address SEL with a specific scope and sequence, but a requirement for alignment and assessment is missing. As long as educators do not see whole child education as a requirement, true growth cannot be measured, and students will not be given the opportunity to work toward their fullest potential. This study, along with the empirical literature, quantifies the need for SEL in adolescents; the next step is to make social-emotional proficiencies compulsory.

Theme #2: Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills

To shift the current educational value belief system, an agreed upon language and behavioral expectations that are clear and consistent are the basis for authentic implementation of any program. Ideally SEL skills and competencies are part of pre-service teacher training and reiterated throughout an educator's career. The data examined for this study reveals that the site is in need of training for authentic implementation of SEL skills beginning with an understanding of the adolescent brain. During adolescence, regions of the brain are maturing in the areas of emotional reward, sensitivity to social reputation, and higher-order thinking (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). This allows for new capacities for emotional regulation, in-depth interests, identity

development, long-term planning, and abstract thinking. Ensuring teachers have comprehensive understanding of the students' capabilities based on their natural physiology is essential.

Empirical literature provides much in the area of implementation science. How programs are successfully implemented has been studied to better understand how interventions are adopted, implemented, and spread (McKay, 2017). Once a program has been deemed necessary to implement, how educational changes are carried out must consider numerous variables. The school's setting, population, current building climate, and other relevant contextual factors must be considered. "New research has found that personal beliefs, behaviors, and values of people involved in implementing reforms can affect the quality of implementation and, therefore, the outcomes" (McKay, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, a thorough understanding that there are commonly used models of quality improvement in other fields that might have potential value in improving education systems would inform effective implementation (Nordstrum et al., 2017). Frequent review of literature in the field of SEL and implementation science that is disseminated to the faculty is another way to promote successful SEL programming.

Theme #3: Go beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development

Data from the qualitative interviews suggest that a SEL framework can and should be aligned to the already in place CCSS. The documents analyzed provided numerous examples of social-emotional competency and CCSS overlap. Once teachers are given the time and resources to align their content to SEL strategies, authentic whole child instruction can begin to take form. However, all interviewees noted a preference for small group instruction of stand-alone lessons.

Literature supports this theme. SEL opportunities can be offered as a teacher provided lesson, after school offerings, or can be extended to learning at home. Involving the families and

the community will only fortify efforts and support successful implementation. Each interviewee and the survey respondents supported the need for direct social-emotional instruction. Research supports the conceptualization of a school's advisory time to focus energy on SEL to improve teacher and student ownership of the school's culture (Pregont and D'Erizans, 2018). The vision touted by the site being studied includes providing a safe and supportive environment where all students can develop academically, socially, and emotionally through a relevant and rigorous curriculum that allows them to explore college and career pathways in order to become independent lifelong global learners. The call to action has been made; research supports such efforts; action must now follow.

Theoretical Literature

The results of this study support the theoretical literature grounding the research, a foundational part of its development. "Theory enables researchers to name what they observe, to understand and explain relationships, and to make sense of human interactions" (Kivunja, 2018, p. 46). This understanding increases the body of knowledge in the field and provides a basis for further theorization, research, and understanding. A mastery of theory is compulsory in the analysis of new data that is used to explain findings from a line of inquiry. Furthermore, in-depth exploration of theory allows for a tailored body of support that applied social research looks to encourage.

Sociocultural Theory

In analyzing the data collected to identify problems and formulate potential solutions, correlations with sociocultural theory are easily identified. Kapadia (2017) offered research that illustrated different meanings and interpretations of this developmental stage across cultures. Adolescent socialization was highlighted in the key aspects of, "autonomy, authority, and

interpersonal disagreement” (Kapadia, 2017, p. 47). Society will invariably make contributions to the development of humans. The culture an adolescent develops in will be directly reflected in their understandings of self, others, and society as a whole. The tools to manage and process those understandings is a component of authentic SEL programming and must be offered to adolescents.

The results of this study provided data that support the adolescent need for SEL. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory revealed that learning is a fundamentally social process. If learning is a social process, social-emotional learning must exist in school. Understanding why humans behave the way they do allows for deeper understanding of self, each other, and the world as a whole. Practice in self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in classrooms, schools, homes, and communities replicates sociocultural theory.

Holism

Holistic educational theory seamlessly aligns with whole child education and social-emotional learning. Holism is a call for connectedness and an intellectual effort to make the most of education that this applied social research looks to advance. Holistic principles can be found in various settings but not often afforded in a public education environment. Turtorean (2017) revealed research to support that changes are inevitable in education. However, the basic needs of students do not change. A holistic approach has the power to motivate learners by fostering a sense of well-being and belonging, two basic needs of individuals.

Learning is merged with experiences to create unique thoughts. Holistic education is a modern philosophy of learning focused on the whole person, not just segments of an individual. Based on the philosophies of Jan Christian Smuts and further Americanized by educational

thought leader Ronald Miller (2000), holistic education celebrates all aspects of developing the human experience. If education focuses solely on certain parts of learning deemed worthy by standardized testing, meaningful human growth is inconceivable. By practicing the theory of holistic education, a social-emotional framework aligned to pre-existing standards would promote whole child education and solidify the purpose of free and public schooling for all.

Summary

This study looked to inform and understand a perceived problem of practice. The central question that guided the research was: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved? This study confirms that a solution is needed at the study site. The major themes that were established from the data include improving the universal understanding of student need for SEL, requiring training for teachers for authentic implementation of SEL skills, and going beyond SEL and CCSS alignment to require stand-alone lessons in character education and development. This study sheds new light on solving the problem with a focus on adolescents. The outcomes of this research support the conclusions drawn from both the empirical literature and theoretical literature that there is a need and numerous benefits to whole child education and social-emotional learning especially in a middle school setting.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this applied social research study was to solve the problem of the omission of a framework for social-emotional learning in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers a proposed solution to the problem within the core curriculum. Although the state provides CRS that mirror ideologies of a SEL framework, they are neither aligned nor are the skills assessed. In this chapter, the researcher details the problems identified through the research and proposes solutions to these problems. Solutions include quantifying the student need for SEL, going beyond CCSS alignment to require stand-alone lessons in character development and instituting training for teachers for authentic implementation of SEL skills. The chapter takes into account the resources and funds needed to implement solutions, the roles and responsibilities of those involved, and a proposed timeline needed to satisfy the problem. The researcher identified potential social implications, and an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the solutions to the problem.

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this applied social research study was to solve the problem of the omission of a framework for SEL in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers a proposed solution to the problem within the core curriculum. The researcher perceived a problem of practice as a veteran middle school educator and realized that a gap in the literature exists addressing SEL instruction within CCSS specifically at the middle level. Additionally, a shift is apparent in public education to address the whole child, not just how they perform in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). A growing body of evidence supports the positive outcome that SEL has both academically and

economically (Kautz et al., 2014). Life success skills, like those practiced in SEL, are critical to success in school, work, and daily existence. The data collected in this study support a need for SEL; however, simply aligning skills to the CCSS may not be enough. Through the interviews and teacher surveys, a sentiment for support of stand-alone character development lessons was consistently conveyed. Until resources are provided and measured to practice skills such as self-awareness and responsible decision making, a public school's purpose cannot be truly realized.

Proposed Solutions to the Central Question

To propose a solution to the central question driving the research, the researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The central research question was: How can the problem of having a lack of a social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved? Five interviews were conducted with academic decision makers at the study site, various documents were analyzed, and a survey was administered to gain teacher perspectives on SEL and its implications. Using the themes developed from the data, a solution is described and goals are explained driven by considerations from the literature review. Quantifying student need for SEL, going beyond CCSS alignment of a framework to instruct stand-alone lessons, and making iterative teacher training mandatory is explored. Finally, how the problem will be addressed through the solution is rationalized.

Quantify Student Need for SEL

The need for SEL is apparent based upon empirical literature, educational theory, and the results from this study. To make this requirement visible to academic stakeholders, various instruments can be used to meet the needs of diverse audiences. The success of an SEL framework aligned to the CCSS lies in ensuring all those associated with a student's learning

understand SEL's importance. This can be accomplished in various ways and delivered to administrators, teachers, parents, and students. A top-down approach is proposed to ensure the effective implementation of any initiative. Acquiring administrative support is the first step in quantifying the student need for SEL.

The academic decision makers at the site being studied have already realized the importance of whole child education. This fact is evidenced in the site's vision statement which calls for social-emotional growth, and from interviews conducted by the researcher. When asked about integrating CCSS with an SEL framework, Interviewee Two, a district administrator stated, "Quite frankly, I'm more interested in them being equipped for the real world with the skills that will prove them successful or not." The administrator's sentiment was echoed by all interviewees who represent academic decision makers in the district. Creating a caring classroom and school community lies with administrative efforts to promote such practices (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Leadership must be leveraged for successful SEL programming.

With the encouragement of administration, teachers can become involved and feel supported. "Educators are the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in classrooms and schools" (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019, p. 282). Utilizing professional in-service time will allow a message of importance to be delivered by administration. The development of a common SEL language must have teacher support along with a critical understanding of the research and the school's vision. Various manners to deliver development can be instituted such as utilization of professional learning communities, a school-wide informational SEL website, daily positive affirmations, regular staff emotional check-ins, and school-wide faculty in-service. A guest speaker equipped to deliver an educated message supporting SEL may also provide much needed

teacher motivation. To further quantify the need for students SEL, teacher SEL must become a priority for decision makers as well.

Once administration and faculty understanding has been achieved, parents and the community can be brought into the fold. Providing parents with the knowledge of SEL's positive effects, along with the clear articulation of the school's vision, leads to further support and the ultimate success of whole child education. Affording parents an opportunity to voice concerns and providing tools to help support SEL efforts is important. With an SEL leader in place, holding a town hall style meeting that is recorded with optional virtual attendance for ease of participation and reference can occur. An agenda can be shared to cover all aspects of SEL integration to involve families and the community prior to the meeting on the district's website. The creation of a family SEL site inclusive of objectives and SEL materials brings transparency to the initiative. Making the intentions of SEL evident to families in the district also allows for at-home extension.

Most importantly, the need for SEL lies with the students it looks to serve. Once all stakeholder understanding is realized, students can begin to experience character education as a part of their academic plan. A focus on creating supportive school and classroom contexts that address students' academic success and social and emotional competence is increasingly recognized as foundational to the promotion of positive mental health and school success (Domitrovich et al., 2017). An item on the faculty survey (Appendix H) looked to inform on teacher perception of the students' willingness to participate in character education programming. Receiving a mean score of 3.38 on the Likert-type scale revealed a neutral attitude of agreement. Further data must be collected to better understand student perception from that students themselves. Empirical literature supports student willingness to practice SEL related

skills. Students have a basic need to feel safe, both physically and emotionally. Students want to resolve conflicts collaboratively and have their lived experience honored (Dolan-Sandrino & Guerci, 2018). The objectives of character education meet these needs.

The problem of a lack of a visible SEL framework at the site studied will be addressed through the quantifying of student need. Informing administrators, teachers, parents, and students on the purpose of SEL and its intentions must be clear and effectively managed. The adolescent brain must be understood, and developmental needs reiterated, in order for a growth mindset to be supported. Continual articulation of adolescent needs and abilities is part of a school culture that supports whole child education, and the consistent practice of pro social skills with the purpose of fostering a positive school climate supports such efforts.

Go Beyond Common Core Alignment to Require Stand-Alone Lessons in Character Education and Development

Research supports the implementation of interventions that address risk behaviors at the start of adolescence to be of particular importance (Hawkins et al., 2013). With a foundation of understanding the adolescent brain's capabilities, teachers delivering SEL competencies can do so with a common purpose and content clarity. Making the student need for SEL, and highlighting standards that are already being practiced that foster success skills, will empower educators to go beyond CCSS alignment and institute stand-alone lessons in character education and development making its purpose and implications visible to administration, parents, and students.

One way to go beyond CCSS and SEL alignment is to incorporate SEL as a part of teaching practices. This can be accomplished in numerous manners, such as assigning small group work to reinforce individual and collective responsibility during a lesson. Students can

understand the positive and negative consequences of the way they participate with others who may think or learn differently, which promotes self and social awareness. Simply greeting students as they enter the classroom promotes social-emotional competencies by allowing the student to feel seen and cared for. Actively listening to students and checking back on the conversation fosters a trusting and supportive relationship. Such a relationship promotes students' positive behaviors and ability to learn information. Even though integrating SEL into academic instruction can be done, bringing awareness to the teaching practices already in place will garner support for whole child education.

Environments that promote SEL must exist outside of the classroom as well. The school's culture and climate must be one that models social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness. A discipline policy that requires self-regulation and endorses restorative practices supports schoolwide SEL. Time and space for support of adult SEL through mindfulness practices and team building will help sustain a character development program. Not only do the students deserve opportunities to develop outside of CCSS, teachers need time to practice personal growth with SEL as well.

The problem of a lack of a practiced SEL framework at the site being studied can be addressed through the teaching of lessons independent of CCSS. Many evidence-based and promising SEL programs and strategies are available for educators, but classroom-based approaches alone may not suffice. Policies that support the alignment and integration of SEL across the classroom, school, and district levels are vital to social and emotional learning (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). The equity of authentic SEL outcomes is measurable, however,

consideration for the audience receiving the information must be in tandem with how to best deliver and reinforce the information for the specific population.

Require Training for Teachers for Authentic Implementation of SEL Skills

In any given school year, students spend the majority of their waking hours with teachers, coaches, and various support staff. Therefore, educators are not only the mouthpiece of SEL for students but considering their social-emotional well-being must occur. Teacher understanding and attitudes will be reflected in their delivery. Knowing what SEL is, why it is important, and how it connects to academic success is essential in effective teacher training. However, efforts to improve teachers' knowledge about SEL alone are not sufficient for successful SEL implementation. Educator's own social and emotional competence and well-being play a crucial role in influencing the infusion of SEL into classrooms and schools (Jones et al., 2013). Supporting and encouraging a well-trained educator will be the definitive piece to purposeful SEL programming.

Directing teachers in the same manner, effective student implementation would occur and promotes program success. Results for the faculty survey showed that those responding strongly agree with the student need for SEL practices, as indicated by a mean of 4.5. Comparatively, respondents also strongly agreed, shown by a mean score of 4.5, that SEL practices promote academic success. Data support the idea that teachers at the study site perceive a need and recognize the benefits of SEL. An effective plan to institute SEL practices can meet that need. Various delivery methods can be utilized such as self-directed learning and small group work along with time to reflect, practice mindfulness, and journal. Interviewee Three noted, "If you go into teaching, it might be because you have a passion about a specific subject and it might not be in your comfort area to deal with those social-emotional issues that they might need assistance

with.” Honoring the comfort level of those overseeing character development lessons promotes mirroring the same with their students.

Training can only take place after resources are vetted, assembled, and ready to be delivered. To gain a better understanding of the culture of the faculty, a survey can be delivered to inform on an understanding of SEL readiness and willingness to deliver authentic SEL strategies. The results would look to better understand the needs and background knowledge of the teachers. Learning styles can be considered, and an action plan can take effect to reveal short and long-term objectives of SEL at the site being studied. Respecting the work that has been done with CCSS and revealing SEL alignment will give comfort to those concerned with change, lack of time, and resources. An SEL framework aligned to the CCSS is foundational in the promotion of teacher-driven lessons in character development, a need expressed through this study’s qualitative findings.

The problem of a lack of a SEL framework implemented at the site being studied will be addressed through iterative teacher training, a component vital to effective implementation. A common theme among successful SEL programs is the inclusion of adequate teacher training. Several SEL programs and approaches explicitly target teacher pedagogy to create and promote learning environments that foster student attachment to school, motivation to learn, and school success (Zins et al. 2004). To measure training effectiveness, incorporating SEL practices in teacher observations will shape the needs of future teacher training as well as provide an authentic check point of implementation. Moreover, forming professional learning communities that are tasked with character development practices delivered by an SEL leader, honors teacher concerns by focusing on the person responsible for the delivery of character education and in turn supports a growth mindset.

Resources Needed

The resources needed to generate the solution is reflected in the level of importance implementation has to the school. With the positive effects of SEL becoming more and more prevalent, funding from the school board, grants, and even local businesses can support efforts to bring character education to the site being studied. CASEL endorses program approaches measured using the acronym SAFE, which incorporates four elements. Approaches that are sequenced providing connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development, active in forms of learning to help students master new skills and attitudes, focused on developing personal and social skills, and explicit targeting of specific social and emotional skills informs the resources required (CASEL, n.d.c). CASEL also provides a guide for schoolwide implementation that is intentional and collaborative. For a program to satisfy these elements guided by CASEL recommendations, time, faculty development, and programming instituted under the guidance of an SEL leader is recommended.

Time

A schoolwide approach to SEL relies on the ongoing, collaborative effort of all staff, teachers, students, families, out-of-school time partners, and the community (CASEL, n.d.c). In order for the benefits of character development to be realized by all, time is needed. A scope and sequence of long-term implementation, along with multiple touch points, requires in-depth planning, taking into consideration available resources and materials. A three-year implementation plan affords time for data to be collected and growth to be measured with validity, however five years in preferable. Implementation begins with forming a diverse and representative SEL team ideally guided by a well-informed leader. The team and leader would be

responsible for fostering SEL awareness to all stakeholders and opening up lines of communication within the community.

Once foundational support is established a plan can be created to assess the needs and resources to develop an SEL implementation plan with clear goals, action steps, and assigned ownership. The next step will be to strengthen adult SEL by cultivating a community of adults who engage in their own social and emotional learning, collaborate on strategies for promoting SEL, and model SEL throughout the school (Wiener & Pimentel, 2017). With these focus areas in place, SEL promotion can begin. The team can develop an approach for supporting students' social and emotional learning that addresses all aspects of student life inclusive of school, activities, and homelife. Finally, continuous improvement must be practiced. With the establishment of a structured, ongoing process to collect, reflect on, and use implementation and outcome data to inform school-level decisions and drive improvements to SEL implementation, the solution can be lived. Focusing time and development on SEL implementation is a needed component to a social-emotional framework that meets the needs of all academic stakeholders.

Professional Development

Successful SEL implementation depends on how well staff work together to facilitate SEL instruction, foster a positive school community, and model social and emotional competence. This calls on schools to focus on adults' professional growth as educators as well as their own social and emotional learning (Jones et al., 2017). Starting small with information and resources provided to teachers can move into direct development provided by a program leader. Additionally, development can be lived through site visits of schools that already implement SEL into the curriculum. Staff buy-in is the most important factor for successful implementation. Time must be taken to ensure staff are invested into why it is important to focus on the whole

child. Teachers must understand the potential benefits to SEL that can be realized through increased academic achievement and stronger classroom management skills. A classroom that focuses on the whole child is one that can deliver content material that nurtures the learner allowing for better academic retention (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

An implementation plan will also look to go beyond faculty development to include support staff such as administrative assistants, lunch providers, custodial staff, and bus drivers. Providing staff time to reflect on personal, social, and emotional competencies further develops capacity for supporting SEL in peers and students. Opportunities must be set up for structures such as professional learning communities or peer mentoring for staff to collaborate on how to hone their strategies for promoting schoolwide SEL. Finally, staff must be supported in modeling SEL competencies, mindsets, and skills throughout the school community with students, students' families, community partners, and one another (CASEL, n.d.a). Tools and resources easily accessible for immediate use inclusive of a library of ice breakers, acquaintance activities, and brain breaks will promote community within the classroom and develops a learner's character contributions.

Programming and Leadership

Numerous programs exist to support authentic SEL implementation. A leader tasked with program investigation and assessment is ideal. With administrator and teachers' academic delivery requirements already strained, the hire of a SEL leader helps bolster a program's success. The core of SEL implementation is promoting students' social and emotional learning throughout the school day and creating a partnership with families and the community. Foundational support, planning, and strengthening adult SEL are in service of creating a school community that promotes students' social, emotional, and academic learning (CASEL, n.d.a).

This may require more than a single program or teaching method. Student learning is influenced by their interactions across many settings. Promoting student SEL requires thoughtful coordination of strategies that reach across classrooms to all areas of the school, homes, and communities.

Schools can align school climate, programs, and practices to promote SEL for students. Students can develop social and emotional competencies through multiple avenues (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Recognition and respect for individual background, skills, and abilities are essential for any material to be learned. Supportive classroom environments that provide opportunities for both explicit SEL skill instruction, as well as integration of SEL throughout all instruction, must be part of a SEL plan. Fostering academic growth mindsets and aligning the CCSS to a SEL framework also promotes the initiative. Additionally, creating partnerships with families and the community will further support program success. Communication with the purpose of informing and supporting all academic stakeholders is part of a productive approach to SEL framework alignment to meet the needs of whole child education.

Funds Needed

Funds needed to make whole child education a reality varies by the amount of time given to measure growth and the school's commitment to the process. SEL programs inclusive of free-standing lessons, surveys to measure growth, and online tools to promote success are available and may incur a cost. However, if time is provided, a SEL leader can develop programming specific to the faculty and students it will serve. Of the proposed solutions to the central problem, many do not require any additional funding, however a few of the solutions will require additional budgetary considerations. Funding can be generated from a range of sources including grants, local, state, federal funds, and even through fundraising.

As an action plan for school wide SEL implementation is developed, it is important to consider what resources are needed to move the work forward. Creating a budget for the proposed solution helps ensure that resources are identified, prioritized, and funded. By dedicating resources to SEL, the school also sends a message to all stakeholders that SEL is a priority. The school's existing budget and resources provide a starting point for funding capacity. Identifying any resources allocated to SEL and whole child education affords a possible source of revenue. There may be funding that can be reallocated from programs and initiatives that may no longer serve the vision of the school. Possible sources of revenue and potential barriers to those resources include obtaining funding sources in a timely fashion. If a program of cost is determined to be the best manner to incorporate SEL competencies, funds for adequate training and materials must be obtained before a program can begin. This may require alterations to the suggested timeline.

Once a budget is generated, resources can be prioritized. Employing a highly trained SEL leader takes precedence in solving the problem of a lack of a social-emotional framework at the site being studied. Salary and benefits must be accounted for in the hiring of additional staff. The district's professional agreement affords a teacher with beginning at step one on the pay scale with a master's degree an annual salary of \$52,612. Providing stipends for SEL team members to attend trainings as well as expenditures related to travel and registration fees are an additional cost to consider. Currently, the hourly rate for professional employees in the district outside of regular duties is \$37.19. Professional learning providers and SEL program fees vary as well as assessment tools to measure fidelity and SEL growth for both staff and students. Panorama for Education, an assessment provider, offers some free tools to measure SEL. However, full access to the data allowing for specific skill assessment as well as recommendations and growth

measures comes at a cost.

The effectiveness of the SEL leader determines budgetary requirements. Training faculty during the school day, requires a budgetary consideration for a substitute. However, if training and programming can be generated by the SEL leader during prescribed faculty in service time, additional funds will not be required. An effective leader can be tasked with all phases of successful SEL implementation. However, if hiring of a new staff member is not afforded, a pre-packaged program may still produce positive outcomes and accomplish the solutions proposed through the findings. Presently, Second Step, the program currently practiced in the district's first through fifth grade has an annual licensing cost of \$719 per grade for their online curriculum. The cost for the CharacterStrong advisory curriculum is \$3999 annually, with an optional leadership curriculum priced at \$999. This program also offers, for a fee, online professional development and various other tools to promote whole child education.

Roles and Responsibilities

To spearhead and implement the solution, it is recommended that a highly skilled leader be appointed to encourage success of SEL implementation. This SEL leader would form and inform a team of coaching staff to support the initiative. The primary function of the SEL leader would be to collect and analyze SEL data to promote successful character development at the site being studied. Other functions would include providing continued development and support for SEL in the building with efforts to involve families and the community. An effective leader will also continually familiarize stakeholders with existing best practices and continue personal professional development to remain current and informed. Additionally, the leader may provide training that meets the various learning styles of the faculty and support staff.

The SEL team, or character coaches, informed by data provided by the SEL leader, will

be tasked with creating and developing a shared vision along with approving a yearlong SEL implementation plan and budget generated by the leader. Needs, current level of understanding, and concerns related to SEL and its implementation, will be provided by the results from the survey given to administration, teachers, and students. Additionally, strengthening adult SEL and promoting SEL for students are central elements of the implementation plan that need to be considered by the SEL team coaches. The SEL leader will be required to provide continual training for the team so they too can stay up-to-date and well informed.

Another responsibility of the SEL leader will be to practice continued improvement measures. Framing issues, leading difficult conversations, and facilitating problem solving is a component of the iterative process of program implementation and leadership. Overcoming obstacles and identifying concepts that increase program effectiveness are a part of the process. Regular team meetings to discuss concerns and ways to keep the staff and students motivated are key focus points for improvement. It is also important to remain honest and transparent in the continual revisiting and refining of the yearlong SEL implementation plan. A strong vision will drive the purpose of the SEL leader and team of character coaches.

Teachers serve a vital role in SEL implementation. Low burden SEL practices show appreciation for the many responsibilities teachers already have. Lessons that are easy to implement and readily accessible can be provided through purchased programs or by the SEL leader. The research supports the value of adequate teacher training and generating motivation for SEL integration. A well-informed staff will be inspired to see the positive results character education can have on students, the school's culture, and themselves. Visible connections to SEL and rigorous academic standards have the power to promote teacher support (Hillary & Ross, 2017). Through professional development, teachers will cultivate their ability to recognize and

connect practices and standards they are already addressing and begin to highlight CRS and SEL competencies.

Timeline

Ideally, a program will begin at a natural starting point, such as the beginning of a school year or after a long break. To realize the advantages of any initiative, several years are required to accurately measure success and to allow for adjustments if needed. The timeline (see Appendix I) begins with building foundational support and forming an SEL team. Garnering school board and administrative support before the 2020-21 school year will allow time to hire a SEL leader to select or generate as well as advise on needs for a character development program. It will also be the leader's responsibility to develop a yearlong SEL implementation plan and budget. The next step will be to form and inform a carefully chosen team to cultivate faculty commitment. This team will also be tasked with creating a shared vision and further developing the yearlong plan to implement SEL.

The vision and yearlong plan will be constructed from pre-program data on attendance, behavior, and standardized test scores as well as a SEL perception survey for administration, staff, parents, and students. With these data, the team can determine the lesson delivery method to best make the vision a reality. Initially, this can be SEL framework alignment and recognition of character driven teaching strategies. Student and staff needs and time will determine an option for lessons taught in isolation. The lesson delivery method will steer the SEL leader's organization of resources and materials as well as focus on SEL standards to implement and measure. All staff training that makes the purpose of SEL and program requirements accessible inclusive of the vision, lesson delivery, and resources/materials available is the next step to implementation. As teachers become familiar with their roles and required procedures, buy-in

can be created with student leaders by teaching specific ways that they can be role models to other students.

Next, strengthening adult SEL can be followed by promoting SEL for students. Continued improvement must be practiced through a deliberate and structured process to address problems of practice and improve outcomes. This can be accomplished by walk through fidelity checks by the SEL leader during program implementation along with regular SEL checks of student and teacher perception of the program designed to measure program effects and articulate needed improvements. Teacher SEL practices during professional learning communities, along with professional development to review the vision statement and SEL progress, must occur at a natural mid-point of implementation. Ideally, administrators would teach lessons once a week in different classrooms to help them be in touch with what is being taught. At the end of the first year of implementation, providing both a student and staff perception and growth survey will support evaluation plans. Post-program data on attendance, behavior, and standardized test scores to compare to pre-program data can be gathered and adjustments made based on the data and survey feedback will allow for continued improvement and refinement. At this point, the SEL leader can prepare for the following school year by reviewing highlights and areas of growth needed along with continued professional development to include the identification and application of growth standards for student SEL.

Solution Implications

The implications of the proposed solutions to the problem of practice have both positive and potentially negative effects. Fidelity, authenticity, and integrity of implementation are obligations that must be met to properly experience the numerous positive implications SEL has academically, economically, and personally. Administrative support must be steadfast, and

teachers must be empowered to administer SEL for students to reap the rewards of a school focused on whole child education. When information is clearly presented on a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely, the solutions offered can result in success.

SEL improves academic outcomes and future wellness and prepares learners for success in life (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Compelling evidence produced by Durlak et al. (2011) looked to define the importance of SEL programs in promoting students' social emotional competence and academic achievement. The researchers' meta-analysis of 213 school based, universal SEL programs involving 270,034 students from kindergarten through high school was compared to students who did not receive an SEL programming. Significant improvements were shown socially and academically along with fewer conduct problems and students reporting less emotional distress. Furthermore, "SEL students outperformed non SEL students on indices of academic achievement by 11-percentile points" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 7). These results provide strong empirical evidence for the value of SEL programs in fostering students' social and emotional skills and also disputes that claim that taking time to promote students' SEL would be detrimental to academic achievement (Sauve & Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

Recently, Taylor et al., (2017) conducted a systematic review that looked to reveal evidence on the long-term effectiveness of SEL programming and whether positive student outcomes were a result. For effectiveness to be monetized, the review addressed a critical question regarding the cost-benefit of investment in SEL programs. This information has the power to inform upon the allocation of resources for SEL in school budgets. Results were reported on the effects of 82 school-based, universal SEL programs involving 97,406 ethnically and socio-demographically diverse K-12 students in both urban and rural settings that had been published by 2014. Results demonstrated that students who had received an SEL intervention

continued to show increases in social-emotional skills, positive behaviors, and academic achievement and decreases in conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use up to almost four years after program completion in contrast to students who did not receive an SEL intervention (Taylor, et al., 2017). Empirical literature supports the effectiveness and positive outcomes of SEL programming on students' social, emotional, and academic development.

SEL builds on work in child development, classroom management, prevention, and emerging knowledge about the role of the brain in self-awareness, empathy, and social-cognitive growth (Weissberg et al., 2015). However, negative outcomes may occur if programs are not ethically instituted. This concern was shared by Interviewee Two who considered the only possible disadvantage to aligning a SEL framework to CCSS was unless, "teachers aren't equipped to do it." Disadvantages to SEL alignment may arise if the resources and funds needed, along with well-defined roles and responsibilities, are not followed. Continual evaluation and adjustment to the timeline authenticates the initiative and recognizes the possibility of unforeseen obstacles. Lawlor (2014) suggested that SEL implementation is not linear; however, adhering to practices in mindfulness and growth mindsets must remain constant. If character development is not instituted with fidelity, the program will not be successful. Goals must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Inconsistent or ineffective implementation of SEL programming has been found to promote undesirable outcomes, such as negative effects on staff morale and student engagement (Kress & Elias, 2019).

The various stakeholders addressed in this study include administrators, faculty, parents, and students. Administrative commitment to whole child education is the first recommendation. Support is built upon making the need for SEL apparent to all stakeholders while soliciting questions and feedback. Advances in neuroscience demonstrate that emotion and learning are

mutually dependent. As University of Southern California neuroscientist Immordino-Yang (2015) noted, “It is neurobiologically impossible to build memories, engage complex thoughts, or make meaningful decisions without emotion” (p. 18). Once research in this area is appreciated, administrative support must also come in the form of time, professional development, and leadership allocations so awareness can move into action.

Negative attitudes may arise with a school’s culture that does not commit the time it takes to make meaningful change. Therefore, teacher perception must be frequently measured, and program requirements constantly practiced. Publication of the vision and implementation timeline gives value to the process. It is essential for teachers to realize the significance of administrative checks, various monitoring tools, and SEL leader feedback of competencies in practice. A commitment to adult SEL is also an important recommendation for teachers. Furthermore, an open line of communication with families encourages a holistic and integrated approach to SEL implementation that can lead to success and can sideline pitfalls. With adult stakeholders informed and equipped, the benefits of SEL can be introduced to students this study looked to serve. Generating enthusiasm for character education can be garnered through increased observation of pro social behaviors and their positive effects. A negative school climate has the ability to become positive through student commitment to exercising skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.a). There will be hurdles, but a leader’s drive to persevere along with teacher and student commitment to SEL, will make whole child education possible.

Evaluation Plan

To integrate SEL into the school community, tools, structures, and systems must be

established. Based on the state's provided CRS continuum, students must be afforded the opportunity for feedback on growth within the SEL competencies. A SEL leader-developed rubric with annual growth measures from sixth through eighth grade can be added to the student profile. Additionally, evaluation of program effectiveness from the perspective of the teachers and students can be gathered from a web-based Likert-type survey. Finally, administrative observations will provide further data to evaluate the proposed solution to the problem detailed in this study.

Ideally, the SEL leader would not only create a rubric to measure growth in SEL competencies but would also be afforded the time to work one-on-one with students to assess growth and set goals. However, in order for all students to have their growth addressed regularly, teachers would be responsible for reporting student progress. This can be done electronically, allowing for ease of access and housing of data. The rubric can also be scheduled to be included with mid-year and end-year report cards, providing communication to parents on their child's progress. If time does not allow for semi-annual feedback, students can be measured on their abilities as they exit the middle school before going to the high school. In the area of self-awareness for example, students can be measured by their ability to recognize and accurately label emotions, identify at least one area of emotional challenge and speak about it appropriately when asked, and recognize situations that may pose emotional challenges and identify the feelings that accompany them when asked. This detailed description allows students to be aware of expectations in this competency as they move to the high school.

A second step in the evaluation plan is a low-burden web-based survey. In using a platform such as Google Forms, both teachers and students can be easily measured on their perception of program effectiveness. If funds allow, SEL assessments can be purchased. This

would allow for ease of reporting and promotes data that can be used to drive decisions. A vision for ethical, strength-based measurement is the starting point that is usable and practical (Franklin et al., 2019). A final step to the evaluation plan would be measured by administrative evaluations. These can be done as part of annual classroom observations and measured by benchmarks provided before observation and assessment. To bring the vision of the school into focus, staff must be clear on expectations and how they will be measured.

Purposeful decisions the researcher made to define the boundaries of the study include the setting and central research question. The site was chosen to define the scope and focus of the study. It was selected based upon a perceived problem of practice at the school by the researcher. The researcher identified a problem at the site and formulated a research question based upon the problem. The rationalization for this delimitation was to better understand a specific site, its population, and whether the need for SEL was based on emotion or data inspired by theoretical and empirical literature. In light of the multimethod design, the researcher is most concerned with solving a perceived problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Also, the design utilized in applied social research provides needed information to “illuminate an inquiry question” (Patton, 2015, p. 316). The multimethod design is also a delimitation due to its ability to support validity through triangulation (Rooshenas et al., 2019).

Limitations of the study that cannot be controlled include the design, analysis, and sample measured. This role on the data collection and data analysis procedures has bias as the researcher has perceived a problem does exist, which results in human limitation. Also, results do not take into account faculty that did not respond to the survey or academic decision makers who were not interviewed. In consideration of the survey and interview questions, item nonresponse was not a limitation. However, the problem of nonresponse needs to be noted as a

limitation when applying and making inferences based on this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research project was generated to partially satisfy academic degree requirements. With more time and funding, the researcher can go beyond the limitations to include data across multiple middle schools and include student data to better inform results. However, in consideration of the findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, further research is recommended. Future research to help solve the problem will add to a deeper understanding of how to address the adolescent need for SEL.

Summary

A growth mindset must be in place to address the multidimensional needs of students beyond IQ to include exercises to promote EQ. If academic decision makers consider the skills they utilize to navigate their career and everyday life, this call to action will take form and students will be given the opportunity to grow socially, emotionally, physically, and academically within the walls of a school building. Shifting the culture to include SEL within the CCSS allows for a low-burden manner to inject social-emotional practices into what is already being done in the classroom allowing educators to realign, not reinvent the wheel. A move from insights to action must materialize quickly before more lives are lost to school violence and suicide. Benefits of SEL are similar regardless of students' race, socioeconomic background, or school location making equity in education possible (Taylor et al., 2017). Research reveals that 90% of parents believe that schools have a role in reinforcing life success skills for their children (Kautz et al., 2014). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, students believe that having access to SEL programming would enhance their educational experience, provide access to needed emotional management strategies, and promote attendance (Hawkins et al., 2013). Social capacity resources are provided by the state and given the time and means necessary for

authentic implementation, whole child education can become a priority not only at the site being studied, but nationwide making a kindness culture a reality. The question of whether SEL has a place in public education should no longer be a question. This research goes beyond an explanation of need and provides answers to how and where whole child education can find its place in our schools' culture. A nation at risk has the power to become a nation of hope.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



April 7, 2020

Lisa Colapietro
Bunnie Claxton

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-86 A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Lisa Colapietro, Bunnie Claxton:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL LETTER

[REDACTED] SCHOOL DISTRICT

[REDACTED]
Superintendent of Schools

[REDACTED]
Assistant Superintendent

January 2, 2020

Lisa Colapietro, Liberty University Researcher
2008 Hayward Avenue
Pennsburg, PA 18073

Dear Lisa Colapietro:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our faculty/staff and invite them to participate in your study. I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Superintendent
[REDACTED] School District

[REDACTED] DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTER
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C: SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION REQUEST

January 6, 2020

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Dr. [REDACTED]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Middle-Level Instruction and Curriculum. The title of my research project is A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY and the purpose of my research is to solve the problem of the omission of a framework of social-emotional learning in a public middle school in Pennsylvania and to provide academic decision makers a proposed solution to the problem within the core curriculum.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in your school district and would need to contact members of your staff to invite them to participate in my research study. I am also requesting permission to access and utilize student test data/records if need is determined. Participants will be emailed the attached survey as well as requests to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time before publication.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely, Lisa Colapietro, Liberty University Researcher

January 6, 2020

Lisa Colapietro, Liberty University Researcher

2008 Hayward Avenue

Pennsburg, PA 18073

Dear Lisa Colapietro:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our faculty/staff and invite them to participate in your study as well as receive and utilize archival data for your research study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY

Lisa A. Colapietro
Liberty University
School of Education

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The goal of the applied research study is to solve the problem of the omission of a framework of social-emotional learning in public middle schools in Pennsylvania and to design, if needed, training for educators to address the problem within the core curriculum. You are eligible to participate in this research because you are 18 year of age or older, a curriculum coordinator, school's administrator, guidance counselor, or a classroom teacher at the Upper Perkiomen School District. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa Colapietro, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to answer the question, how can the problem of no social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a recorded interview. It will last approximately an hour.
2. Review the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy and clarify any points you deem necessary to ensure validity. This will last approximately 30 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include alignment of a social-emotional framework to the already adopted Common Core State Standards. Such alignment will promote whole child education and address perceived problems with student ability to process emotions and set positive goals.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Liberty University IRB-FY19-20-86 Approved on 4-7-2020
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- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: You may contact Lisa Colapietro at 484-614-0151 or lcolapietro@liberty.edu any time you have questions about the research. The researcher's faculty mentor is Dr. Bunnie Claxton, and you may contact her at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Liberty University IRB-FY19-20-86 Approved on 4-7-2020
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APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION EMAIL

January 6, 2020

[REDACTED]
Director of Curriculum and Instruction
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

As an academic stakeholder in the setting being studied, you are being asked to participate in an interview. It should take approximately 30-45 minutes for you to complete the interview. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, review and complete the consent document. The researcher will contact you via phone to schedule an interview at your earliest convenience.

The consent document is attached to this letter in order to participate in the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Lisa A. Colapietro
Liberty University Researcher

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

1. Before we begin, tell me a little about yourself and what brought you to the education field.
2. What role do you have in curriculum development in this district?
3. Please detail your understanding of social-emotional learning.
4. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to understand and manage emotions.
5. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to set and achieve positive goals.
6. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to feel and show empathy for others.
7. Please describe any observations you have seen with student ability to establish and maintain positive relationships.
8. Please describe any observations of student ability to make responsible decisions.
9. Please give an example of an observation you have had outside of the classroom (i.e. in the hallways, cafeteria, school assemblies) where you have, or you have observed teachers require social-emotional learning practices such as self-awareness and relationship skills.
10. What role would you prefer to have, if any, in SEL integration to the Common Core Standards?
11. What are the perceived benefits of integrating a SEL framework into the Common Core Standards?
12. What are the perceived disadvantages of integrating a SEL framework into the Common Core Standards?

APPENDIX G: WEB SURVEY DIRECTIONS

A SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FRAMEWORK ALIGNED TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS: AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY

Lisa A. Colapietro
Liberty University
School of Education

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The goal of the applied research study is to solve the problem of the omission of a framework of social-emotional learning in public middle schools in Pennsylvania and to design, if needed, training for educators to address the problem within the core curriculum. As a current educator (a curriculum coordinator, administrator, guidance counselor, or classroom teacher) in the site being studied, you are eligible to participate in this research because you are 18 year of age or older, and a classroom teacher at the Upper Perkiomen School District. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa Colapietro, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to answer the question, how can the problem of no social-emotional framework aligned to Common Core State Standards in a middle-level public school in southeastern Pennsylvania be solved?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I ask you to:

1. Complete the web survey. This should take no longer than ten minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include alignment of a social-emotional framework to the already adopted Common Core State Standards. Such alignment will promote whole child education and address perceived problems with student ability to process emotions and set positive goals.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Survey responses will be anonymous. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Liberty University
IRB-FY19-20-86
Approved on 4-7-2020

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please simply close your browser or close the webpage without submitting the survey. .

Contacts and Questions: You may contact Lisa Colapietro at 484-614-0151 or lcolapietro@liberty.edu any time you have questions about the research. The researcher's faculty mentor is Dr. Bunnie Claxton, and you may contact her at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: Please click the provided link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read and understood the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Liberty University
IRB-FY19-20-86
Approved on 4-7-2020

APPENDIX H: FACULTY SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. In my work with middle school students, I see a need for social-emotional instruction defined as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

2. Social-emotional instruction promotes academic success.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

3. There are benefits of integrating social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

4. There are disadvantages with integrating social-emotional skills such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

5. Social-emotional skills, such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, can be aligned to existing Common Core State Standards.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

6. Social-emotional instruction is suited for integration in an ELA/Social Sciences course.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

7. Social-emotional instruction is suited for integration in a Math/Science course.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

8. Parents of middle school students would participate in social-emotional instruction such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness in community outreach programming.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

9. Administrators and academic decision makers of middle school students would support alignment of existing Common Core State Standards to include social-emotional instruction such

as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

___ Strongly Disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neutral

___ Agree

___ Strongly Agree

10. Middle school students would willingly participate in social-emotional instruction such as practices in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness, to existing Common Core State Standards.

___ Strongly Disagree

___ Disagree

___ Neutral

___ Agree

___ Strongly Agree

APPENDIX I: TIMELINE

- Before the 2020-2021 school year, garner school board and administrative support
 1. Hire a SEL leader to select and advise a character development program
 2. Form and inform a carefully chosen team to cultivate faculty commitment
- Beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, gather pre-program data on attendance, behavior, and standardized test scores
- Offer a pre-program SEL perception survey for administration, staff, parents, and students
- Based on the survey, SEL team determines the vision of the program and the lesson delivery method to help make the vision a reality
- SEL leader organizes resources and materials
- Team creates SEL focus standards to implement and measure that are specific to the site
- All staff training making the purpose of SEL and program requirements accessible inclusive of the vision, lesson delivery, and resources/materials available
- Create buy-in with student leaders and give specific ways that they can be role models to other students
 1. Walk through fidelity checks by SEL leader during program implementation
 2. Teacher SEL practices during professional learning communities
 3. Regular SEL checks of student and teacher perception of the program and its effects to inform needed improvements
 4. Administration teaches lessons once a week/month in different classrooms to be in touch with what is being taught
 5. Mid-session professional development to review vision statement

6. Student and staff perception/growth survey
 7. Gather post-program data on attendance, behavior, and standardized test scores to compare to pre-program data
 8. Make adjustments based on the data and survey feedback to continue improvement
 9. Prepare for the following school year by reviewing highlights and areas of growth needed along with continued professional development
- Repeat items 1-9 for a minimum of three years but preferably five years