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Using Student Voice to Identify Promising Practices in Social Emotional Learning

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2021

APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Susan M. Ward-Roncalli as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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ABSTRACT

Promising Practices in Social Emotional Learning
By
Susan M. Ward-Roncalli

Claremont Graduate University: 2021

This qualitative study used responses to a large-scale survey on school experiences to identify schools where the students themselves reported above average scores on constructs of social emotional learning. The study looked at schools where the students reported above average results for several years in an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the policies and practices of these schools specifically related to providing social emotional supports to students?

2. How do leaders in these schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students? How do leaders assess their own perspectives, attitudes, decision-making and actions toward diverse student populations? To what do they attribute their schools' higher than average SEL scores?

3. What does an analysis of student responses in these schools show in terms of social emotional support provided by their schools? What do students report of their experience?

The study looked at schools where students reported above average positive responses to survey questions on four social emotional learning (SEL) constructs for 4 years. Of the 10 schools that qualified, four agreed to participate. In order to examine the policies and practices of these schools, the researcher analyzed public documents from each school and conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders.

The findings show that the administrators and teachers at the schools supported students' social emotional development by leveraging resources and acknowledging the need to promote equity. They incorporated SEL into the school culture through ongoing professional development, school wide practices, and intentional instruction in the competencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Urban school districts are struggling to create access and equity for all students, and social emotional indicators can be an essential component of solving this problem. Recent events have brought the need for SEL to the forefront. Advances in our understanding of the importance of inter-and intra-personal skills support the need for schools to address these skills. SEL refers to the processes that integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to increase one's awareness of self and of others, make responsible decisions, and manage one's own behavior (Elias et al., 1997). These intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies such as self-control and social competence underlie academic skills such as literacy and numeracy that educators are more used to measuring. According to a study by the Economic Policy Institute, "Multiple studies identifying the interdependence between cognitive and non-cognitive skills indicate that we may fail to boost cognitive skills unless we pay closer attention to non-cognitive skills" (Garcia & Weiss, 2016, p. 4).

Gaps between White/Asian students and students of color in SEL and academic achievement are both concerning. Closing the racial academic achievement gap is critical. Minorities, including African American and Latino students, earn standardized test scores that are much lower than those of White students. By the end of 12th grade, African American, Latino, and poor students of all races are 4 years behind their wealthier, predominantly White peers in reading and math (Green, 2008). Although it is necessary to incorporate an SEL perspective in order to provide all students with an equitable, high-quality education suited to today's world, it is particularly critical to closing the opportunity gap and understanding the crucial ways in which schools today frequently underserve students of color and low-income

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students (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015). In narrowing the gap in SEL, we may be able to address the gap in academics. The closure of schools in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by widespread social unrest, have made this issue even more critical.

Efforts to close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers, or between minority and non-minority students, have led to the development of classroom interventions and curricula to increase social emotional skills that are foundational for learning (Wenz-Gross et al., 2018). Such intervention programs focused on SEL are designed to facilitate this process in systematic and comprehensive ways within schools and districts (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2007). Cantor et al. (2019) contended that "children's development is nested within micro-ecological contexts as well as macro-ecological contexts. These contexts encompass relationships, environments, and societal structures" (p. 330). We must acknowledge these contexts and address any flaws in these structures. As Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) stated, "The movement to raise standards may fail if teachers are not supported to understand the connections among motivation, engagement, and student voice" (p. 33). Given the evidence suggesting that teaching social emotional skills may be one key to solving the persistent academic achievement gap, it is crucial that we understand how to do it well.

Recent research suggests that SEL successfully improves student achievement among English Language Learners (ELLs) and poor and minority students (Rutledge et al., 2015). Two meta-analyses have shown that increased competency in SEL can improve academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Given the potential benefits, particularly for students in vulnerable subgroups, it is imperative to look closely at these indicators, as well as how students and schools can be supported in developing the capacity to support these traits.

This study drew on an existing quantitative data set to conduct a qualitative multi-site case study, investigating schools where students in vulnerable subgroups reported higher than average skills in SEL. The study provides insight into the experiences of students and staff at these schools. The data utilized to determine the schools that were positive outliers came from the 2019 application of the School Experience Survey (SES), which is administered annually in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Of approximately 127,000 high school students in the district, about 102,000 responded to the survey in 2019, representing an overall return rate of 81% (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2019). One section of this survey focused on what social emotional skills high school students report that they do or do not have (Appendix A). This section of the survey is administered to students in districts across the state of California that are part of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE). Data reported by these districts examined in a Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) study show that social emotional competencies are an area of concern. This study found that there are statistically significant differences in the responses of students from different subgroups, which mirror academic achievement gaps between White and Asian students and Black and Latino students (Hough et al., 2017). In an analysis of this larger cross-district data set, researchers determined that student race/ethnicity is "consistently the strongest predictor of SEL reports" both within and between schools (Hough et al., 2017, p. 4).

The PACE study found that African American students and Hispanic/Latino students report the lowest levels of SEL, and differences between these groups persist even within schools. The data show that African American students report an SEL average score that is 0.27 standard deviations lower than among their White peers in the same school, and Hispanic/Latino students' scores are 0.24 lower than those of their White peers in the same school, even after

controlling for other demographic characteristics. African American students report particularly low levels of self-management and social awareness. Hispanic students report particularly low levels of growth mindset and self-efficacy (Hough et al., 2017).

Why are schools seeing these disparities? Some of these gaps are out of the schools' direct control. We know that development of students' social emotional skills begins in infancy and is influenced by context, including poverty and trauma, which may also vary significantly across racial/ethnic groups (Berliner, 2009; Nucci, 2016). However, there is also research showing that students' school realities differ by race/ethnicity, including inconsistencies in disciplinary practices and expectations for success (Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Okonofua et al., 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Warikoo & Carter, 2009; Watamura et al., 2011). These different experiences and treatment within schools could explain why African American students report low levels of self-management and social awareness, and why Hispanic/Latino students and students with disabilities report feeling less efficacious and confident about their success (Hough et al., 2017).

In a further analysis of these data, the researchers also identified a set of 10 high schools in LAUSD that achieved interesting results. The students at these 10 schools reported higher than average scores on the SEL constructs within the survey (Hough et al., 2017). Many of these schools have high populations of students of color. The authors of this study called for qualitative examination of practices within these schools. This finding inspired the current study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if high schools where students currently report higher than average scores for SEL have policies and practices in common. Given the importance of social emotional skills, it is crucial that we gain a better understanding of where

high school students stand with regard to mastering them. Using the voice of the students themselves provides us with a rich understanding of this topic. If our goal is for all students, including students of color and those who live in poverty, to do better academically, we need to look under the surface. What issues are preventing academic success? We need to examine and understand the skills that many in education presuppose all students have, skills that will have benefits beyond the classroom. We need to explicitly teach students the social emotional skills that will enable them to be healthy, academically successful, and employable. In order to do so, we must first understand what strategies seem to be effective in promoting these competencies, particularly in schools. How can we help all students to improve their social emotional skills when we do not fully understand what practices promote or foster them?

We know that SEL is important and that addressing these skills can improve long-term health outcomes, increase academic achievement, and increase both employability and financial security (Gabrieli et al., 2015). The PACE study helped us to understand that racial gaps in SEL parallel those in academic achievement (Hough et al., 2017). Some schools seem to have fostered these skills in underserved populations. The intent of this study was to try to understand the culture and practices of the schools identified that appear to be developing SEL effectively in all of their students. Understanding these practices may provide perspective for other educators hoping to address the issue of SEL. In examining successful cases, this study is partially based upon the work of Karin Chenoweth (2009a), who looked at schools that could serve as positive outliers and wrote about promising practices at those schools.

This study used results from studies conducted by PACE in collaboration with CORE[1]. Two recent PACE reports identified statistically significant gaps in school climate, culture, and

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[1] Founded in 1983, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is an independent, non-partisan research center based at Stanford University, the University of California – Davis, and the University of Southern California. PACE

SEL measures among racial/ethnic subgroups (Hough et al., 2017). These gaps were found in both a study that examined data from all CORE schools in all grade levels, as well as the responses of high school students in LAUSD. An additional finding of the PACE study showed that a set of schools had significantly higher than average percentages of positive responses. Many of the schools in this set have high percentages of minority students. There is compelling evidence showing the need for SEL, indicating that many high school students lack SEL competencies. There is also evidence that students in significant subgroups report more difficulty acquiring these skills. There is a need for research that shows how schools can serve minority students to help improve outcomes in this area. There are schools where students report higher than average responses in these areas. This study examined high schools identified as having above average student SEL scores.

There is a need for research to explore these schools and identify instructional practices or approaches that might affect a school's culture, climate, and SEL outcomes. This qualitative multi-site case study allowed for an exploration of the policies and practices at the identified schools in order to determine if said policies or practices seem to have resulted in the increase in social emotional skills among the students based upon the results of a survey taken by the students themselves. This study investigated schools where students perceive their own skills in SEL to be above the average of students across the district.

Research Questions

A recent PACE study led by Heather Hough (Hough et al., 2017) identified 10 schools in LAUSD where students reported higher than average scores in SEL. Building on the work of Hough and colleagues, this study identified schools where students reported higher than average scores in SEL consistently over a 4-year period. The PACE study used both SEL and climate/culture measures to determine the schools selected for the study whereas this study looked at students' perceptions of their own social emotional skills. My research questions related to policies and practices in these schools. Specifically:

1. What are the policies and practices of these schools specifically related to providing social emotional supports to students?

2. How do leaders in these schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students? How do leaders assess their own perspectives, attitudes, decision-making and actions toward diverse student populations? To what do they attribute their schools' higher than average SEL scores?

3. What does an analysis of student responses in these schools show in terms of social emotional support provided by their schools? What do students report of their experience?

Importance of the Study

As the second largest school district in the United States, the Los Angeles Unified School District is in a unique position to effect global change in education. The district serves over 600,000 students. Of these, 75.7% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Over 157,000 of the district's students are ELLs, and these students speak 94 languages other than English. In LAUSD, 73.4% of the students identify as Latino, 8.2% are African American, 10.5% are White,

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4.2% are Asian, and 3% are Filipino or Pacific Islander (LAUSD, 2019). According to data collected by the California Department of Education (CDE, 2019b), LAUSD students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged have higher dropout rates, lower test scores, and higher rates of suspension. Additionally, there are gaps between the academic performance of students of different racial/ethnic subgroups within the district.

Table 1 presents results of the California Smarter Balanced assessment for the 2018-2019 school year next to results for LAUSD. The numbers represent the percentage of students in each subgroup who met the standard for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, first for the entire state, and second for LAUSD. Although the statewide numbers are disturbing, the statistics for LAUSD are even more dismal, with all district subgroups performing below those at the state level. Only 35.98% of African American /Black students and 48.27% of Latino/Hispanic students met the standard in ELA and 12.87% of African American/Black students and 22.03% of Latino/Hispanic students met the standard in Mathematics in 2019 (CDE, 2019b).

Table 1

California State Smarter Balanced Test Scores 2018-2019: Percentage of 11th Grade Students Who Met Standard in CA and LAUSD

Race/Ethnicity

between Asian/White students and Black/Hispanic students (see Table 3). All subgroups have responded favorably to a reported district focus on Growth Mindset[2], yet there are still persistent gaps between subgroups in the other SEL constructs. Although all subgroups report low levels of self-efficacy, the gap between African American and Hispanic students and their White peers is statistically significant. The disparity between White students and their African American peers in social awareness is also disturbing. Although the differences in percentages appear to be small, the scale of the survey should be considered. A difference of 3% could represent over 3,500 students. They show similar findings to a PACE report, which found that African American and Hispanic students report lower social emotional skills compared to their peers, even within the same school (Hough et al., 2017). These data are concerning for many reasons. social emotional skills are predictive of future outcomes, including physical health, and they are also of particular importance to potential employers (Gabrieli et al., 2015).

Table 2

2018-2019 LAUSD School Experience Survey Data

Why do students need Social Emotional Competencies?

Lack of Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Life Skills

Low Academic Performance and Behavior Problems

Continued Poor Academic Performance
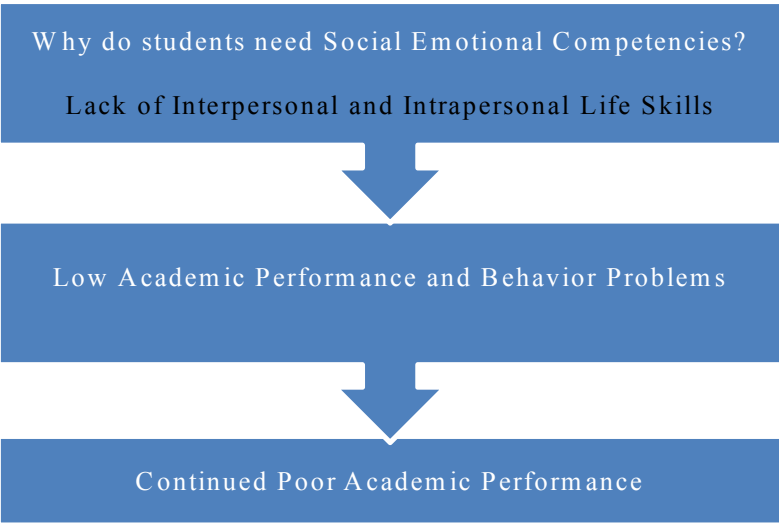
Collaborating States Initiative (CSI) provided some funding for states to pursue this work. California is one of these states. The CSI has grown significantly; a virtual meeting in July 2020 was attended by representatives from 30 states. In 2016, the CDE convened a committee to establish guiding principles for SEL for the state and create a bank of vetted resources to promote SEL in California. In March 2019, this group made recommendations regarding SEL to the state board of education. The group's work is also the basis for a statewide repository for best practices and resources supporting SEL in California (Appendix C).

In 2019, the State Superintendent, the President of the State Board of Education, and the Governor's wife, First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, established a workgroup to seek information about the state of SEL in California. This group convened stakeholders from across the state seeking to understand what students, parents, teachers, and community members understand and what they want to have happen around SEL. Some 600 stakeholders participated in a wiki-wisdom forum, and from these participants, 100 were invited to participate in a series of virtual convenings to propose recommendations regarding SEL. The results of both the wiki-wisdom and the convenings are being compiled into a report that will be sent to the State Superintendent, the President of the State Board of Education, and the First Partner. The CDE responded by re-establishing the State SEL team, with new members and a new focus. The team is tasked with providing guidance to the CDE on implementation and policy changes that need to happen for SEL to become a part of how education happens in California. Understanding which practices positively affect student achievement in this area is now more important than ever. This issue is at the forefront of current research and policy in education.

Summary

  This study utilized data from the LAUSD SES. The survey instrument was first used in 2008, but it has been changed several times. In 2014, in response to requirements from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Measure of School Quality and Student Success (SQSS), the SES was expanded to include SEL questions. Even though the information is publicly available, it is rarely utilized to effect change in district policy. Although the PACE study of the CORE data did use the SES data to find statistically significant gaps in response rates between subgroups, this analysis does not shed sufficient light on why these gaps occur or how they can be ameliorated. This study enhances the literature by adding a qualitative analysis to the quantitative data reported by Hough et al. (2017) in the PACE study. This analysis provides additional insight by trying to understand key practices at the school level. The policies or practices that are shared by these schools might be promising ones that could be used to effect change.

  In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature that supports the need to study SEL, and a description of the conceptual framework upon which the study is based. In subsequent chapters I then explain the methodology used for the study. The fourth chapter will provide the results of the study, and the fifth chapter offers a discussion of those results.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Organization of Literature Review

This chapter will provide the conceptual framework for the study and a review of the pertinent literature. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework. The review of the literature will further define and explain the significance of SEL and give historical context to the study of SEL, as well as an overview of recent trends in the research. Figure 3 delineates the content of this section. First, this chapter will give an overview of the history of SEL, detailing how educators and philosophers from Aristotle to Bloom have encouraged us to think of education holistically. This section will also explore recent research that examines the importance of SEL. The next section of this chapter will review recent advances in brain research that have demonstrated the importance of SEL. This section examines research on the impact of trauma on the brain. It will then explore research showing how the brain continues to grow and change throughout life, and that this neuroplasticity is crucial to utilizing SEL. The chapter will then address the various SEL frameworks that have been developed. As this field emerges, several different ways of organizing and naming these competencies must be understood. There has been increasing interest in SEL at the state level in California. The chapter will discuss contributions to the field by the CORE/PACE collaborative and two state-level documents that offer recommendations to guide the work in SEL. The chapter will then review research that supports the use of the student voice as the primary factor in determining the schools selected for this study. Lastly, literature that supports the researcher's choice of methodology—that is, the decision to highlight models of good practice—will be explored.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this section is to explain how research on SEL, childhood trauma, and promising practices formed the basis for this study. A review of research on SEL demonstrates that the development of social emotional competencies improves academic success (Durlak et al., 2011, 2015). Further, individuals with strong social emotional competence also demonstrate improved health and better life outcomes (Gabrieli et al., 2015). Students of color earn lower scores on standardized tests, and this academic achievement gap is mirrored by a gap between White students and students of color with regard to SEL (Hough et al., 2017). Out of school factors such as exposure to trauma contribute to these gaps (Felitti et al., 1998). These factors may contribute to the difficulty of designing effective academic interventions for these vulnerable populations. Some practices have been identified that have a positive impact on the academic outcomes of these populations (Chenoweth, 2009b). The motivation of the current study is to learn from such practices in the field of SEL.

There are some criticisms of Chenoweth's work and outlier studies in general. Some suggest that this methodology ignores the relationship between social class and achievement (Rowan et al., 1983). This concern should not be an issue in this study because 90% of the population in the study qualify for free or reduced lunch. The average annual income for the communities in which the schools are located is $16,728 below the average income for the state. Others worry that a type of selection bias might be the reason for success (Ralph & Fennessey, 1983). It is true that there are magnet schools on the campuses of the two comprehensive high schools in the study, and that the other two schools are pilot schools that students have chosen to attend. It is also true that the students in this study were not randomly assigned to their schools. However, 50% of the students in the study are enrolled in traditional high schools, which would

support the possibility that there is something causing the students to give positive responses on the school experience survey. At the same time, however, it is important to underscore that the results of the study cannot be interpreted as identifying causal relationships between school-based practices and students' SEL measures. Instead, the results may suggest promising relationships that can be pursued further with causal research designs in the future.

The study sought promising practices in SEL, practices that might help students to develop social emotional skills. As Bullough (2012) contended, "The quest for best practices in education needs to be tempered with the notion of better over best practice by maintaining the value of, and the need for, a greater place for outliers in research" (p. 355).

The schools in LAUSD where students report higher than average social emotional skills served as the basis for this study (Hough et al., 2017). Some of these schools have over 90% minority populations. This research sought to understand the policies and practices of these schools. By identifying possible models of promising practice, this study can help schools better understand how to meet the needs of diverse students. Figure 2 illustrates the key principles of the conceptual framework.

Emergence and Recent Research

Emergence of SEL

Preparing children to be responsible, productive, caring, and engaged citizens is a timeless pursuit that continues to be a goal of education today. It is, however, a relatively recent and still evolving area of study and practice, and it is the main challenge the SEL movement seeks to address (Humphrey, 2013). Ancient Greek philosophers understood that we must educate the whole child, and some 2,500 years later, we have returned to that understanding. When Plato wrote about education, he argued that a curriculum needed to include both academic

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Schools can affect this cycle

Students have varying

Study examined policies and

Out of school factors affect
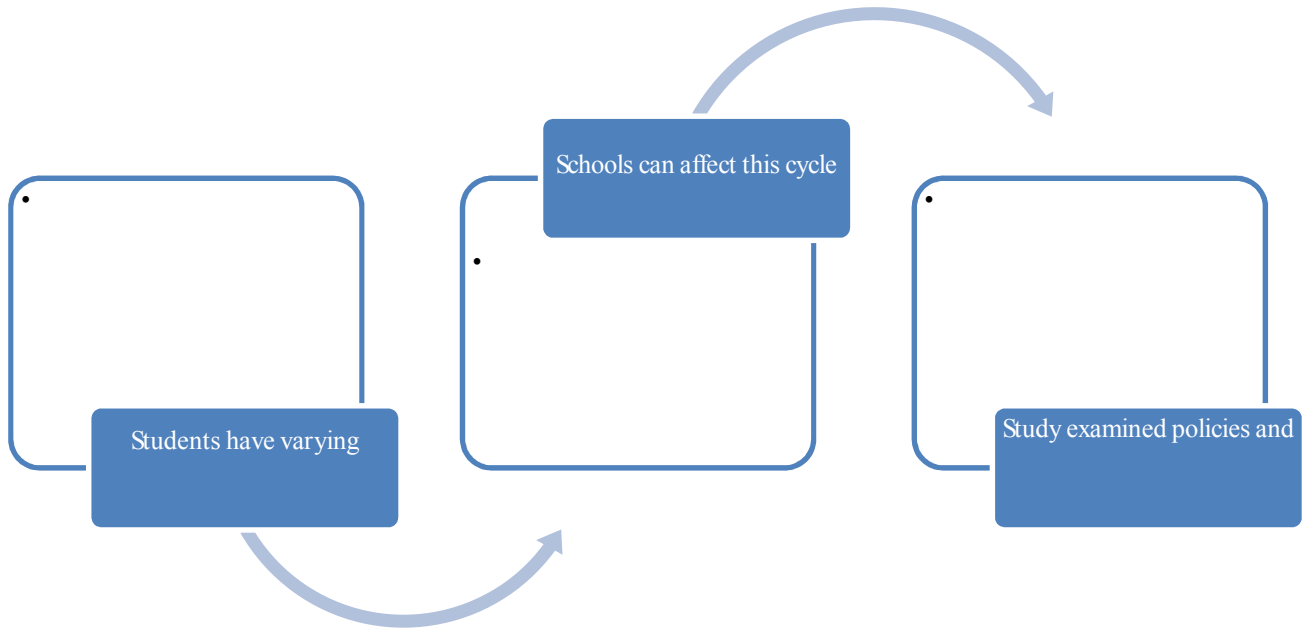
Social Emotional Learning: Emergence and Recent Research

Brain research supporting SEL

Naming and Organizing the SEL Competencies: Competing Frameworks

State Perspective: The PACE/CORE Collaborative Research and

Situating the Methodology

Dixon (2012) recounted the more recent history of SEL in his 2012 paper, "Educating the Emotions from Gradgrind to Goleman," tracing trends toward and away from including the non-academic domain in formal education. Prior to the 20th century, reason was often seen as being undermined by emotion. Nearly 100 years ago, John Dewey (1938) led a movement that attempted to steer education away from test-focused instruction and traditional curriculum. This Progressive Education movement emphasized critical thinking, experiential learning, and social skills, collaboration, and cooperation (Weare, 2004). Despite the fact that these more student-centered approaches were not put into practice very often or with fidelity, this movement planted the seeds for what would later become SEL (Hayes, 2006).

In the late 1960s, James Comer began piloting a program called the Comer School Development Program, which focused on two poor, low-achieving, predominantly African American elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut that had the worst attendance and the lowest academic achievement in the city. They recruited a team of stakeholders to attempt to address the issues they saw as the root of behaviors that were affecting the students' academic achievement. The results of the intervention were very positive and New Haven became a center for SEL research. This work included several researchers who would become key figures in the movement, such as Roger P. Weissberg, a professor of psychology at Yale, and Timothy Shriver, a Yale graduate and educator in New Haven public schools. Between 1987 and 1992, Weissberg and Shriver worked together to establish the K-12 New Haven Social Development Program (Humphrey, 2013). Much of the research done on this intervention would become the basis for later studies and the development of the theoretical basis of SEL.

By 1983, Howard Gardner (1983) had built upon this work when he published his work, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences,* which proposed a new way of looking at

intelligence. Gardner posited that the traditional method of measuring intelligence was inadequate in that people demonstrate strengths in different ways. This work was well received and widely read. Gardner, however, does have his detractors. Harry Morgan (1996) argued that there is no reason to separate intelligence into different types, asserting that these distinctions "bear striking resemblance to cognitive style constructs identified in unified theories of intelligence" (p. 6). Klein (1997) also disagreed with Gardner, positing that his theory of multiple intelligences means that people learn in a single way, and that considering "strategies that learners use in specific activities, and how they construct this knowledge, may prove more relevant to classroom practice" (p. 381). Salovey and Meyer (1990) also wrote about interpersonal skills and although their work was equally impressive, Gardner's work was far more popular (Humphrey, 2013). Despite his critics, Gardner's inclusion of existential and interpersonal intelligences in his work helped to set the stage for SEL.

In 1994, at a conference that addressed prevention and mental health issues, the Fetzer group met and began to discuss what would later be called SEL (McCombs, 2004). Those present at the conference were working on various projects to prevent violence and drug use in schools, encourage healthy choices and responsible behavior, and increase school-community connections (Durlak et al., 2015). Individuals at this conference went on to form CASEL, which stands for the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning. Nine CASEL collaborators coauthored *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators,* which was published by ASCD in 1997 (McCombs, 2004). This work also helped to establish the SEL field.

With support from Fetzer, in 1995 Daniel Goleman, a *New York Times* science reporter, wrote *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. This work argued that too

much emphasis was being placed on the intellectual at the expense of the affective dimension of personality (Goleman, 1995). Goleman's work also argued that the skills that make up emotional intelligence can be taught. Later, Massari (2011) would argue for explicit instruction of emotional intelligence in schools.

In 1997, the American Psychological Association (APA, 1997) proposed a set of principles intended to address issues in education. These principles were divided into four subsets: cognitive and metacognitive factors, motivational and affective factors, developmental and social factors, and individual differences factors. These 14 principles formed the basis for much of the work in SEL that followed. In 1997, research was published recognizing the importance of caring communities to nurture empathy and self-discipline, as well as the need for students to be active partners in education (Berreth & Berman, 1997; Elias et al., 1997).

Several recent publications have reignited an interest in SEL. In 2007 Carol Dweck published *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success,* which argued that our success can be influenced by how we think about our abilities. One year later, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) published *Outliers,* which explored factors that led to the success of individuals who were considered to be outstanding in their fields. Gladwell explored the combination of factors that seemed to lead to such success, and innate talent did not play the role that many believed it did. In *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance,* Angela Duckworth (2016) argued that perseverance is what chiefly drives success. In his 2013 work, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Paul Tough argued that skills like perseverance, curiosity, and self-control are more important for success than the more traditional thinking that some children were just born smart. In his follow up work, *Helping Children Succeed*, he took the next step and identified specific steps people can take to counter the effects of adversity by

building environments in which these skills can flourish (Tough, 2016). In 2016, Dweck updated her book to include a greater emphasis on the importance of the influence of adult attitudes in children's lives. Children, she argued, can move from a fixed to a growth mindset, but their parents and teachers must model this and establish conditions that allow it to happen. The work of Gladwell, Dweck, Tough, and Duckworth set the stage for our current understanding regarding the importance of teaching the skills that lead to success. These works have also brought SEL back to the forefront of public consciousness.

Recent Findings

There is a growing recognition at the local, state, and federal levels in the United States and around the world that schools must meet students' social and emotional developmental needs in order for effective teaching and learning to take place and for students to reach their full potential. Moreover, there is a growing body of research to support the use of SEL in schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Gabrieli et al., 2015; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). A 2019 study used the SEL survey questions that served as the basis for the current study to look at statewide outcomes. Using the first large-scale panel surveys of students on SEL to produce school-level value-added measures by grade for growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness, the study found substantive differences across schools in SEL growth, with magnitudes of differences similar to those for growth in academic achievement (Loeb et al., 2019). These findings support the importance of school-level practices.

Gabrieli et al.'s (2015) Ready to Be Counted was significant in that this white paper looked at the research base through the lens of the impact of social emotional skills on life outcomes. This paper links the findings from a number of pivotal studies conducted by economists, psychologists, physicians, and education researchers to a framework organized

around the domains of academics, career, and well-being. Each is supported here by many research studies. All the findings in this paper "exceed the standard tests of statistical significance rendering them worthy of publication in the scientific literature" (p. v).

Efforts to promote SEL in schools align with the views of leading economists who have been calling for a greater focus on what have been traditionally referred to as soft skills. According to Heckman and Kautz (2012), Nobel Laureate James Heckman wrote that the greatest returns on education investments can be achieved by addressing children's non-cognitive or social emotional skills, which give them social, emotional, and behavioral assets that benefit them later in life. Heckman and Kautz also argued that investing in emotional skills is a cost-effective approach to increasing the quality and productivity of the workforce through fostering workers' motivation, perseverance, and self-control.

Students with social emotional skills are better able to navigate both the academic world and the world of work (Gabrieli et al., 2015). For example, SEL programs have been shown to address student disengagement (McBride et al., 2016). Farrington et al. (2012) proposed that by helping students to improve non-cognitive skills, teachers can help to improve student learning. A literature review published in 2013 by the Institute of Education in London investigated eight factors that comprise non-cognitive skills that are thought to improve academic outcomes: self-perception, motivation, perseverance, self-control, meta-cognitive strategies, social competencies, resilience/coping, and creativity. The authors then looked at correlational evidence, malleability, and causal evidence for each factor. The review concluded that these factors are, for the most part, malleable, and improving students' abilities in these areas could improve academic outcomes overall (Gutman & Vorhaus, 2012). A 2012 study found that universal SEL programs had an overall positive impact on student behavior and adjustment

(Sklad et al., 2012). Similarly, a study published in 2011 found that explicit instruction in SEL benefited both the well-being and academic achievement of young children (Ashdown & Bernard, 2011). Addressing SEL is among the recommendations made by Newton and Burgess (2016) in their work about using evidence to improve decisions about education. Gabrieli et al.'s (2015) *Ready to Be Counted* offers another review of the research showing that non-cognitive skills are predictors of success in academics, career, and well-being. One of the studies that was examined in Gabrieli et al.'s work is Silva's (1990) Dunedin study, which examined life and health outcomes for a population over 15 years. This work showed that those with lower levels of non-cognitive skills had poorer life outcomes (Silva, 1990). Gabrieli et al.'s study, shared widely by Transforming Education (an organization in Boston that promotes SEL), was significant in that it made information about SEL research more accessible to educators and inspired renewed interest in the subject.

A recent significant shift has been the explicit recognition that SEL also addresses issues of equity. Transformative SEL is a form of SEL intended to promote equity and excellence among all stakeholders. It focuses on issues of race/ethnicity as a way to begin to address inequities. Transformative SEL is anchored in the concept of justice-oriented citizenship and looks at issues of culture, identity, agency, belonging, and engagement as relevant expressions of SEL competencies (Jagers et al., 2019).

Positive Youth Development

SEL is also grounded in the field of positive youth development in that both uphold the notion that the needs of youth must be addressed by creating environments or settings that promote outcomes like "school achievement, mutually supportive relationships with adults and peers, problem solving, and civic engagement" (Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 467). Efforts to

promote positive youth development are not aimed at reducing risk factors; rather, they are focused on enhancing skills, building assets, and promoting resilience to achieve positive outcomes (Catalano et al., 2002). In 2006, Benson introduced the 40 developmental assets concept in *All Kids Are Our Kids*. This work supported building non-academic strengths in children, investigating how the community could be engaged in fostering positive youth development. It also prompted readers to look at assets that could be developed, rather than searching for deficits that need to be addressed. Looking at assets rather than deficits is a way to reframe the conversation about improving educational outcomes (Harper, 2010).

SEL programming utilizes a skill-building, whole-child approach that is focused on cultivating assets, not on preventing problems. Negative school experiences lead many students to feel powerless over their own learning capacity or potential (Hatch, 2000; Ross & Broh, 2000) and have been shown to encourage students' disengagement from the academic realm (Midgley et al., 1996; Ross & Broh, 2000). Thus, simply raising academic standards without also attending to early adolescents' physical, social emotional, and instructional needs could be both unsuccessful and destructive (American Federation of Teachers, 1997). Ultimately, programs that rely entirely on increasing academic standards without paying parallel attention to social-emotional factors associated with achievement motivation and performance will be less likely to improve student achievement outcomes (Lee & Smith, 1999). Addressing the development of these skills is vital—in the absence of developing students as learners, other educational reform efforts are unlikely to succeed in increasing students' readiness for life after high school. The evidence that SEL is important for all students is clear and addressing this need in vulnerable populations is even more imperative.

Academic Achievement Gap

Students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often arrive in first grade with

limited learning support at home, and it may be difficult for them to catch up (Jencks & Phillips,

1998; Valencia & Suzuki, 2000). These initial gaps may contribute to the academic achievement

gaps seen in older students (Barton & Coley, 2009). This reality has focused public attention on

the need for school reform and created enormous pressure to develop programs that promote

achievement success among disadvantaged youth (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). This may be even

more important for disadvantaged adolescents whose need for a safe and supportive school

climate is more profound, considering that many of these students come from family

backgrounds and environments where such support may be deficient (Brookover et al., 1978;

Edmonds, 1979; Wang & Walberg, 1985). Children from lower socioeconomic status

backgrounds are at increased risk of experiencing stress and associated social emotional

difficulties and behavioral problems, which can undermine academic performance and lead to

school drop-out (Jencks & Philips, 1998). Evidence shows that relative to White students,

minority youth receive lower grades (Bokossa & Huang, 2001), score lower on standardized tests

of academic ability (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Levine & Eubanks, 1990; Witherspoon et al.,

1997), have higher rates of grade retention, and are disproportionately assigned to low-ability

groups in elementary and middle school and vocational tracks in high school (Dauber et al.,

1996; Oakes, 1995; White & Parham, 1990), revealing the seriousness of the achievement gap

between the test scores of both low-income and minority students and others. Gaps in executive

function skills among racial groups in elementary school may be a factor (Little, 2017). Theorists

have explored how a history of racial prejudice and daily experiences of discrimination

(Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978; Steinberg et al., 1992) cause many minority adolescents to

believe that hard work in school is irrelevant and that academic endeavors will have relatively little economic payoff (Midgley, 1993). SEL strategies that target executive function, self-efficacy, and growth mindset address these issues directly.

Educators must utilize developmentally appropriate SEL strategies in elementary school and beyond, including self-management and metacognitive strategies. Obstacles to academic achievement "cannot be blasted through with the usual tools of remediation but must be eroded persistently through a nurturing school culture and climate, and then bypassed by providing a solid emphasis on social emotional learning" (Elias et al., 2014, p. 1,022). Zins and Elias (2007) have found that teaching social emotional skills supports the learning of all students.

Since disparities in non-cognitive skills appear to correlate with the racial/ethnic gap in academic achievement, investments in these skills may help to reduce this gap. Recent research on students who participated in some form of SEL instruction has found both short-and long-term benefits in student outcomes. Among other benefits, this study showed that with an investment of less than 0.04% of their annual budget, students in four of eight districts showed improvement in GPA. The authors also indicated that the challenge for educators and policymakers continues remains to gain a better understand of the most effective strategies for implementation (Kendziora, 2016). Another study of schools in California showed positive outcomes for students in ELA and math when compared with matched controls, thus offering promising evidence of the efficacy of implementing SEL (McCart, 2020). We know that there is an academic achievement gap in education, and we know that non-cognitive skills are crucial to academic success, but we do not know enough about how to address the gap in non -cognitive skills.

Criticism of SEL

As the discussion of SEL became a part of national educational discourse, criticism also emerged. The evidence of the effectiveness of SEL is well-documented, and most criticism seems to be politically motivated. First, there are those who do not feel it is right for schools to speak with students about feelings. On the day that CASEL announced that eight states would be collaborating to promote SEL in their school systems, Evie Blad (2016) wrote an article praising the effort, and two political commentators, Jane Robbins and Joy Pullman, wrote about the dangers of SEL. Robbins (2016) warned her readers that schools are "assuming the right to substitute their authority for the parents' in children's most intimate and personal development" (p. 2). Pullman (2016) wrote that SEL is all about manipulating children psychologically and emotionally in order to push a certain political agenda. Articles like these would seem to be politically motivated, and do not even attempt to discuss the efficacy of SEL programming, but there are some academics who do. In two papers, Stearns (2016, 2018) has criticized SEL, specifically focusing on two SEL programs that she feels focus too strongly on positive emotions where the reality in many classrooms is that many students have strong negative emotions they do not how to process. Gillies (2011) took this criticism a step farther, suggesting that SEL programs are "not culturally responsive and appear to assume a white, privileged standpoint where there is no pedagogically acceptable language for voicing the fear, violence, hardship and racism that shaped the lives of the pupils in our research" (p. 188). Although Burroughs and Bakauskas (2017) do see benefit to SEL, they believe it has been conflated with ethical literacy. They view instruction in ethics as foundational to education, and therefore believe it should be considered as important as SEL.

Brain Research Supporting SEL: From ACES to fMRIs

Trauma and Neuroscience

Advances in many fields including neuroscience and psychology have moved the work in SEL forward over the last 15 years. We have learned that the brain continues to grow and change throughout life, and that this neuroplasticity is crucial to utilizing SEL to improve outcomes for students who have experienced trauma (Tovar-Moll & Lent, 2017). Research shows that explicit instruction in meta-cognition and guided practice with interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can change how people learn and interact with others (Zins et al., 2004). Research in neuroscience informs trauma-informed educational practices, and many students who have experienced trauma need to develop social emotional competencies (Carello & Butler, 2015). As the brain develops, neural pathways are created. These connections are shaped by experience over time (Fox et al., 2010).

Epigenetics, neural malleability, and neuroplasticity are all important components of a human development framework. Neural plasticity and malleability allow the brain to adapt continuously in response to experience (Cantor et al., 2019). Research demonstrates "the importance of socially triggered epigenetic contributions to brain development…learning indeed depends on how nature is nurtured" (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019, p. 185). There is increasing evidence that neuroplasticity is disrupted by stress; this disruption can be seen on both structural and molecular levels (Holmes & Wellman, 2009; Pittenger & Durnan, 2008). Stressful early experiences alter neural functioning and connectivity within and between the areas of the brain responsible for coordinating thoughts and actions and regulating the stress response. Stress causes the release of the neurotransmitter cortisol, and constant stress can cause what is known as the "cortisol cascade effect" (Carpenter et al., 2011, p. 370), which occurs when stress is

unresolved. Too much cortisol leads to mood and behavior issues, as well as disruptions in memory and recall. Childhood trauma was also found to be predictive of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Durlak et al., 2015). Links have also been established between childhood trauma and anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation, and depression (Binder, 2009; Heim et al., 2008; Krishnan & Nestler, 2008; Roy et al., 2010).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Early experiences shape a child's developing neurological and biological systems for better or worse, and the types of "stressful experiences that are endemic to families living in poverty can alter children's neurobiology in ways that undermine their health, their social competence, and their ability to succeed in school and in life" (R. Thompson, 2004, p. 45). Felitti et al.'s 1998 study found a strong relationship between exposure to abuse or dysfunction and multiple health risk factors later in life. The researchers developed the adverse childhood experience (ACE) questionnaire, determining that they could use the ACE score as a measure of cumulative childhood trauma. Researchers hypothesized a dose-response relationship of the ACE score to 18 selected outcomes, finding a convergence between epidemiological and neurobiological evidence of the effects of childhood trauma. A 2010 study found that stress caused lasting damage on a chromosomal level (Tyrka et al., 2010). Complex trauma affects children's development, specifically affecting executive functioning and creating academic challenges. ACEs that are prolonged and repeated tend to be correlated with more detrimental effects across multiple developmental domains. Trauma results in changes to the emotional processing areas of the brain in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for executive functioning (De Brito et al., 2013). Executive function encompasses a variety of skills responsible for self-regulation, goal setting and engagement. These disruptions span numerous

other cognitive skills, including sensory processing. Both hearing and vision can be also situationally compromised by trauma. For example, the primary auditory cortex, located in the temporal lobe of the brain, tends to have trouble processing auditory information in children who have experienced long-term or significant trauma (Ge et al., 2011). Children's occipital lobes are also sensitive to trauma, which might result in difficulties completing visual processing tasks (Mueller-Pfeiffer et al., 2013). Children who have experienced long-term trauma tend to have difficulty meeting academic and behavioral expectations in the classroom (Segal & Collin-Vézina, 2019). Toxic stress can be buffered by supportive relationships with caregivers; however, teachers and schools can promote this buffering by supporting students' physical and mental health (Murphey & Sacks, 2019). Therefore, early intervention that provides social emotional skill building is critical for children who have been exposed to ACEs.

Exposure to certain negative environments can also have an epigenetic impact; in other words, experiences can determine whether certain genes are expressed (Mehta et al., 2013). Thus, the damage caused by repeated exposure to stress can be passed down genetically (Franklin et al., 2010). This is yet another reason why early intervention is crucial.

Figure 4 shows how ACEs affect outcomes. It also shows places, at each segment or colored bar of the figure, where interventions could be utilized to stop the progression. Developing self-regulation and building problem-solving skills through the use of an SEL curriculum could serve this purpose (Chafouleas et al., 2016). School interventions that improve resilience by teaching empathy, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy are needed (Ijadi-Maghsoodi et al., 2017). According to Blair and Raver (2015), effective SEL programming influences the patterns of connections among brain areas, rewiring the brain to change behavior. What is being affected are the brain's limbic structures, amygdala, hippocampus, and

ventromedial cortex. These are the areas of the brain that process information and emotion and give rise to executive function. There is growing evidence that school based SEL programming can reduce the effects of ACEs by rebuilding and strengthening neural connections. It would be optimal, of course, to prevent ACEs entirely, but barring that possibility, early, evidence-based intervention is our best hope. Because of the plasticity of the developing brain and other biological systems, the neurobiological response to chronic stress can be buffered and even reversed (Thompson, 2004). Social emotional competencies play a role in determining both children's exposure to stress and their ability to respond to stress. This assertion is based on research in two areas: "1. Research linking environmental and cumulative stressors to children's biobehavioral systems and long term physical and mental health, and 2. the findings on the effects of SEL interventions" (Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 470). The very same reason why childhood trauma can wreak such havoc on the developing brain is also the factor that makes SEL the perfect intervention: neuroplasticity—the fact that repeated experiences shape the brain. "The more a child practices self-discipline, empathy, and cooperation, the stronger the underlying circuits become for these essential life skills" (Goleman, 2008, p. 9).

Other recent research on the brain demonstrates the close connection between emotions and learning. The use of functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) in brain research has allowed scientists to document what occurs in the brain while subjects are actively engaged in tasks. Studies utilizing this technique show that when subjects have positive emotions while learning, more of the parts of the brain that are responsible for memory and cognition are active. The stronger the positive emotions, the more brain activity was recorded. This close relationship makes addressing students' emotions in the classroom even more important. Another important finding is that the idea that certain parts of the brain are linked to specific functions is not

Early Death

Disease, Disability, &Social

Adoption of Health

Social, Emotional, &Cognitive Impairment

Disrupted Neurodevelopment

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Problems

-

categories. Because this study relied on an extant data set analyzed by PACE, the researcher used the constructs utilized in the LAUSD SES. However, it is important to note that there are several different perspectives regarding the naming and the organization of the skills identified by CORE as SEL. The way these skills are named and organized depends to some degree upon the focus of the individual of organization that is doing the naming or the categorization. Elizabeth Hagen (2015) discussed four frameworks that are useful to guide the discussion of the different ways that these skill sets are organized. More recently, Stephanie Jones (2018) led work to create a more comprehensive resource that compares SEL frameworks. The Taxonomy Project attempts to create greater precision and transparency in the field of SEL and facilitate more effective translation between research and practice. This project resulted in Explore SEL, a website designed to map the competencies and frameworks in the field of social and emotional learning. The Explore SEL website helps users to understand the different frameworks by providing graphic organizers that show relationships among them (Harvard Graduate School of Education, n.d.). Although the Taxonomy Project lists 37 frameworks, this study will review six frameworks most commonly used in the U.S. The interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that underlie the competencies are nearly the same, but each organization has named and organized them in a different way. The different lens through which each group looks at the competencies demonstrates the broad reach that improving student outcomes in this area has.

National Research Council

The 21st Century Competencies framework described in the National Research Council's report Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century includes three domains of competencies: cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. This framework intentionally uses the word competency in order to include both skills and

knowledge related to each domain. The cognitive domain focuses on reasoning and memory. Competencies in the interpersonal domain enable individuals to express ideas and understand what others are communicating. The intrapersonal domain focuses on competencies that help an individual manage emotions and behaviors toward the pursuit of goals and job-related competencies that go deeper and beyond knowledge content and basic academic skills (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). This group focused their framework around the world of work.

University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research published Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework in 2015. The report identifies three key factors—agency, integrated identity, and competencies—that are crucial to success. The first two factors identified seem more closely related to the field of psychology than education. The work further delineates four foundational components—self-regulation, knowledge and skills, mindsets, and values—upon which the development of the key factors depends (Nagaoka et al., 2015). This framework is interesting in that it identifies foundations upon which the competencies should be built.

Strive Together Cradle to Career Network

In recognizing the connection between building social emotional competencies and academic success, as well as the interest in the subject within the Network, the Strive Together Cradle to Career Network launched the Task Force on Measuring Social and Emotional Learning in early 2013. The Task Force was composed of representatives from the Network as well as experts in the field. Its charge was to determine a menu of social and emotional competencies that meet the following criteria: (a) are well related to achievement, (b) are malleable, and (c) that cradle-to-career partnerships can track and measure as part of their work.

It is important to note that the goal of the report did not include outcomes beyond academic student achievement (Strive Together, 2013b).

The Cradle to Career Network identified five competencies: academic self-efficacy, growth mindset or mastery orientation, grit or perseverance, emotional competence, self-regulated learning, and study skills (Strive Together, 2013a). Strive Together has done research on the malleability of social emotional competencies. The multi-volume document examines specific skills within each competency and maps them onto developmental stages. This organization added a new dimension to the literature by conducting extensive research regarding which competencies are most malleable at different ages (Strive Together, 2013b, 2013c). Although the three volumes of the document offer an extensive analysis of the five competencies that comprise their SEL framework, CASEL has the greatest reach in the SEL research community, and they have their own framework.

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)

Originally based at Yale, CASEL moved to the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1996 when Roger P. Weissberg became its director. In 2001, the board changed the name from the Comer School Development program to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning to reflect the new research in the field and to make sure that academics were a part of the conversation (CASEL [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning], n.d.).

CASEL focused on research that could build a body of data to convince schools and especially districts of SEL's efficacy to further the organization's mission, which is "to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education" (CASEL, n.d., para. 2). Unlike the Strive Network, CASEL's perspective is not focused solely on academic outcomes. CASEL also identifies five competencies, but they are more focused on the whole-child model. They

group the skills in the categories of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. CASEL also developed a protocol to evaluate programs that claim to be effective in promoting SEL. The information from this protocol has helped the researcher to consider the themes that emerged in the analysis of the documents and interview transcripts. For example, CASEL (2015) looks at whether programs include explicit instruction in social emotional competencies, and whether SEL is integrated into academic instruction. It also looks at whether SEL is part of the larger school context, and if it is part of teachers' instructional practice

The Aspen Institute: The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development called upon leaders from education, research, health, business, and the military to advance a broader vision of what successful education looks like, exploring how to integrate social, emotional, and academic development into the design and culture of schools, teaching, and learning. Although a variety of terms could be used, the Commission uses the term social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) because it emphasizes the need for schools to integrate the skills fully. The commission does not break SEL down into constructs; rather, it calls for the integration of the underlying skills identified by CASEL in order to improve students' employability. The goal is to:

> prepare students who—among other things—are able to connect with others, make responsible decisions, communicate, solve problems, think critically, be resilient, persevere, and work in teams—many of the same skills that employers tell us through surveys that they are looking for in their workforce. (Aspen Institute, 2018, p. 1)

The Commission emphasizes the economics of SEL, specifically mentioning that the return on investment in social and emotional programming and practices is estimated to be worth roughly $11 for every $1 spent. The Commission specifically calls out the skills that employers are looking for in their future workforce, which is a different perspective than that of CASEL or Strive. Another perspective is that of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE).

MESH/CORE Districts

This study will use the constructs established by the CORE districts as the basis for analysis. The California Office to Reform Education (CORE) collaborated with transforming Education to develop the Mindsets, Essential Skills, and Habits (MESH) framework. The CORE Districts have been working collaboratively for 6 years on a shared data system that helps them work within and across local districts to innovate, implement, and scale strategies that improve student outcomes. The CORE system focuses on academic outcomes alongside non-academic measures of student success, including chronic absenteeism, suspension/expulsion, students' social emotional skills, and school climate and culture. The survey used as a data source for this study divides the competencies into four categories: social awareness, self-efficacy, self-management, and growth mindset. Figure 5 summarizes the CORE SEL competencies:

behavior; and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports

(CORE Districts, n.d.).

The work of Carol Dweck (2006, 2010) influenced CORE's decision to include growth

mindset as one of the four competencies. Dweck's work demonstrated that teachers' practices

could directly influence student outcomes when they used strategies that encouraged students to

have a growth mindset. She found that praising students for effort rather than intelligence made a

difference. Figure 6 shows the results of one growth mindset study. In the study, Mueller and

Dweck (1998) praised one group of children for their intelligence and a second group for their

effort after taking a test. The group that was praised for effort significantly outperformed the

other group on subsequent tasks. Practices that involve a focus on process over product and how

to learn from mistakes are particularly impactful (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017).

Figure 6

Results of a Growth Mindset Study: Impact of Praise on Resilience After Failure

Note. Adapted from Introduction to Self-Management, by Transforming Education, 2014
(https://transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Introduction_to_Self-
Management_Handout_Final_CC.pdf). Copyright 2014 by the author.

CORE did not include grit because they contend that grit refers to perseverance and

sustained interest in long-term goals and comes from the same family of constructs as self-

management. Self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. In essence, they argue that grit is a longer-term measure of the same skills required for effective self-management. Self-management is both easier to measure and has a longer research base demonstrating that it is important in college, career, and life success (Moffitt et al., 2011). In addition, CORE cites Angela Duckworth and Stephanie Carlson's 2013 publication, which found that that of the various human traits that psychologists and economists study, self-management is the trait most reliably related to school success (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013). One aspect of self-management, self-control, has been linked to multiple long-term life outcomes. Figure 7 demonstrates the findings of a longitudinal study that followed cohorts to determine the impact of high versus low levels of self-control (Moffitt et al., 2011). As can be seen in the figure, those with poor self-management skills had significantly worse life outcomes.

CORE also chose the construct of social awareness, which CASEL also uses. As is evident in Figure 8, this construct as defined by CORE is composed of several sub-constructs, each of which can be developed though modeling and direct instruction.

Self-efficacy is the last construct CORE decided to include in the framework. Where one can witness a direct impact in growth mindset through the actions of adults, the impact of self-efficacy seems to be more difficult to measure. A complex construct that was first named by Bandura in the 1970s, research shows that self-efficacy influences academic motivation, learning, and achievement (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is the construct that shows the lowest scores among high school students, even at the schools identified as being positive outliers. Figure 9 shows the components of the construct identified by Transforming Education. Each of these components can be addressed in a classroom setting.

Emotional

Social Capital   S o c i a l   Perspective

Cultural

Figure 9

Components of Self-Efficacy Construct

CORE was also concerned with establishing a framework of competencies that would be practical to measure on a large scale. The majority of CORE's research in SEL was quantitative, using the results of the SES. Very little qualitative research has been conducted on the results of the survey. Although the survey is given to teachers, parents and students, the area of the survey that this research examined is the one in which students were asked about their strengths in the CORE competencies. The study used these results because rather than relying on adult impressions, they allow an examination of the students' voice and understanding of their skills in these areas.

The PACE CORE Collaborative SEL Research

Because the research done by PACE using the data from the CORE surveys inspired this study, it is necessary to review their recent findings. The school districts in the CORE collaborative, like many others, are trying to figure out how to make information gleaned from data more actionable at the school level (Farrell, 2015). Several papers have been published

utilizing the data set. A 2016 paper explored the successes of the collaboration, highlighting the benefits of being able to work with very different districts across the state and how doing so has enabled researchers to view success differently (Krachman et al., 2016). Another recent article explored the strategies utilized by the collaborative to develop the survey instrument and pilot test the items. It also detailed the reliability and validity evidence from the field test (West et al., 2018). The research done on the survey data initiated good conversations about ways to measure student growth that go beyond academic metrics. These quantitative studies also highlight the need for qualitative work to explore the findings of the work through a different lens. In 2018, Gehlbach and Hough published an analysis of the survey items and found that the questions were both valid and reliable.

State Guiding SEL Documents

In 2016, the CDE created the SEL State Team: a collaboration of 31 practitioners and experts from across California who worked together to create the SEL Guiding Principles. The principles were designed to outline, promote, and build on SEL practices critical for schools to support students. A sub-committee of this group also developed a Resource Guide: a collection of comprehensive, free resources aligned with the guiding principles.

The document outlines five guiding principles. Principle 1 recommends that California Adopt Whole Child Development as the Goal of Education. As a part of this principle, the team asked that SEL be embedded in and promoted across all education systems and structures and that diverse leadership teams be convened to help to bring about this change. This principle also mentions that both students and adults must have opportunities to practice social emotional skills, and that they should be integrated into academic content. Further, the principle states that a positive climate and culture, including student-centered discipline policies, are critical for SEL.

Principle 2 is *Commit to Equity*. In order to address the opportunity gap, opportunities to build social emotional skills must be offered to all students and the educator workforce should be representative of, and connected to, the student body. The principle also encourages the use of student voice and healing-informed practices. Principle 3, *Build Capacity*, recommends that the state build capacity around SEL, including crafting developmentally appropriate indicators and providing professional development (PD). Principle 4, *Partner with Families and Communities*, encourages partnering with families and community and ensuring that SEL is included in early education and expanded learning. The last principle, *Learn and Improve*, encourages being attentive to how SEL is measured and progress monitoring to ensure high quality implementation (CDE, 2018).

In 2018, Advance SEL in California was launched to understand challenges related to SEL implementation and gather community-developed recommendations to address those challenges. Two organizations, Beyond Differences and Education First, were tasked with leading the work. They interviewed state SEL leaders and experts and district leaders to gather an overall sense of California's SEL implementation challenges and opportunities and the work that was already happening. They then launched a 3-week crowdsourcing event and heard from over 600 stakeholders from across the state who joined a conversation about the role of SEL in their work, best practices, and implementation challenges. Next, they identified three district/county partners to co-design convenings and showcase their SEL work during the convenings. They hosted a series of three convenings for over 100 stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students to gather additional thoughts and ideas for how to advance SEL in California. They used this research to produce the Advance SEL report that outlines four broad recommendations.

The first recommendation was to make transformative SEL the cornerstone of California's education system. The group emphasized that equity must be a part of SEL and that SEL should be woven into daily practice in classrooms across the state. The second recommendation focused on providing PD and training in order to help adults develop their own social emotional skills to they might better teach these skills. The third recommendation asked the state to use qualitative and quantitative data and research and work to develop coherent efforts to bring SEL to every school. The final recommendation to invite, listen, and lift-up encouraged the state to include youth voice in decisions around education. Table 3 shows a comparison of the two state-level documents.

Table 3

California State Social Emotional Learning Guiding Documents

Guiding Principles

themselves. The study also utilized both document analysis and semi-structured interview protocols. School leaders from each site were interviewed. The following sections offer a review of literature that supports this methodological approach.

Student Voice

This study used the results of the LAUSD SES, specifically examining data showing high school students' perceptions of their own social emotional competencies. Although some might argue that this is a limitation, the literature suggests that youth voice should be an important component of educational practices. Adolescence is a challenging developmental period in a person's life, and society often thinks of adolescence as a disorder rather than a developmental stage (Finn, 2001). We tend to try to find things to do to teenagers to make them better, rather than trying to understand their frustrations. Research suggests that although control is always an issue, it is particularly challenging during the identity formation that goes on during the teen years (Eccles et al., 1993). Adolescents often rebel by changing their appearance or refusing to comply with societal norms to demonstrate that they have power over their own lives. Eccles et al.'s (1993) study suggests that as children move from elementary school to secondary school, they experience what she calls "stage fit environment mismatch" (Eccles, p. 90). Just as the students feel the need for more power and more control over decisions in their lives, the structure of what is expected of them in school moves in the opposite direction. They have less physical, social, and academic freedom in secondary school than they had in elementary school. At the same time, when they are becoming more capable of complex thought, much of what they are asked to do involves lower levels of cognition than was required of them in elementary school. As students move to secondary school just when they need to feel that they have control of their surroundings, they find that they have less control (Ozer & Wright, 2012). The transition to

secondary school has been linked to reductions in academic motivation (Eccles et al., 1993) and

an increase in challenges to psychological health (Galaif, 2007). During adolescence, students

need to feel that they have an appropriate level of control to motivate their learning (Eccles et al.,

1993).

Mitra (2007) has long been an advocate for student voice and encourages schools to

consider that "increasing student voice in schools broadens the notion of distributed leadership to

include considering young people themselves as capable and valuable members of a school

community" (p. 237). Mitra (2008) also expressed the potential of a school culture that includes

and values students' voices and experiences: "Partnering with students to identify school

problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique

knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate" (p. 253) Her

work encourages schools to utilize the perspective of students in school wide learning

communities (Mitra, 2001, 2008). This study used the perspective of Mitra's work by using what

students are saying about their own learning to inform practice. In her recent dissertation, Estrada

(2017) reminded us that "student voice is notoriously underutilized" (p. 11). Another study

discussed how school reform should address affective reforms or what they called the *paradigm

of the personal* in order to reconstruct the culture of urban schools. Friend and Caruthers (2012)

stated that attending to student voice can lead to *reculturing*, which they defined as

deconstructing existing beliefs and values and starting to shift the thinking of a school

community about the education of youth. The use of student voice in reculturing establishes a

counter-discourse to hegemonic teaching and elevates voice and otherness, allowing a critical

inquiry as to how mis/representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define otherness

as less than are actively learned, internalized, questioned, and/or transformed. Melissa Schlinger,

the Vice President, Programs & Practice at CASEL recently wrote about student voice. According to Schlinger, elevating student voice requires the promotion of students' social and emotional competence and an environment where adults listen to and value what students have to say. In listening to students, schools and districts can make informed choices about how to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of all learners (Schlinger, 2020).

Using the data from the student responses on the LAUSD SES gives voice to students' concerns, enabling us to understand the students' perspective on the SEL competencies that are so important to their success. When students indicate that they feel they have deficits or strengths in certain areas, we should use this data to move our practice forward. Because this study used student voice to find schools that seem to be using promising practices, the next section will examine literature that explores the use of this method in research.

Promising Practices

There are different opinions regarding the use of models of promising practice in research. Many educators use strategies to improve instruction based on recommendations from colleagues. These ideas may need to be adapted to work in different contexts, but the perspective of a successful colleague can be invaluable. Just as asking someone what works for them in a given situation is a way to obtain new ideas, research that explores models of good practice can also be helpful. Karin Chenoweth wrote It's Being Done in 2007. In this work she recounted the stories of schools that have vulnerable populations and succeed against the odds. Chenoweth has followed up on this work with several books and articles in which she has continued to investigate promising practices (Chenoweth, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2015, 2017). These success stories serve multiple purposes, including helping other educators to find strategies to help their students.

Some have been critical of this practice. The criticisms of this type of research fall into two main categories. Some feel that good research requires well-defined outcomes, and that this methodology does not use a proper scientific method, instead arguing that this methodology ignores the relationship between social class and achievement (Rowan et al., 1983). Others feel that research that holds up models of good practice can be used to blame teachers or administrators who do not achieve these results, or that such research could be used to support the idea that schools do not need any additional funding. These critics see models of good practice as being held up to show that it is possible to make gains without additional resources (Thruup, 1999). Teddlie and Reynolds (2001), however, disagree with these critiques, contending that many of these criticisms are based on overly simplistic readings of this work. They asserted that many of these researchers have reported the impact of social class on student achievement, instead of ignoring it, as implied by critics.

Searches for "Best Practices" or "Promising Practices" yield numerous articles where authors explore what worked for groups in various situations. This study looked specifically at schools that offer positive models and recognized that there are limitations to such an approach. Ralph and Fennessey (1983) contended that there is a type of selection bias in which well-resourced schools are more likely to use some sort of approach that is then considered to be the reason for success. This is a valid concern, because schools that select students based upon academic criteria or schools where students self-select to attend might have a student body that is more motivated. It is important to note that 50% of the students in the study attend traditional comprehensive high schools. Although the schools that participated in this study varied in size and structure, they did not have any additional funding; in fact, an average of 90.5% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and over 90% of the students are Black or Hispanic.

Although there are criticisms of this research strategy, many studies have supported it (Chenoweth, 2009). The participating schools provided a detailed account of their policies and practices. Having been told that their students were above the district average, they were happy to share their stories with the researcher. They also offered opinions—based on their own experiences in the schools—about what policies or practices contributed to their success. This study examined promising practices and searched for trends in these policies and strategies. The first person interviewed for each site was the school principal; therefore, examining recent trends in school leadership may help us to understand the importance of their perspective.

Leadership

Recent research on both leadership in general, and school leaders more specifically, shows that leaders who promote a positive culture and climate tend to achieve better results. Fullan (2010) stated that the "speed of quality change is embedded in the power of the principal helping to lead organization and system transformation" (p. 10). Leadership is an important variable in determining school outcomes (C. S. Thompson, 2017). School leaders who actively tolerate risk and support the development of teachers' capacity were found to be effective (Huggins et al., 2017). Engaging purposefully in distributed leadership also led to better outcomes for teachers and students (Cansoy, 2019; Park et al., 2019). Simply put, leaders who accept input from others when making decisions and work collaboratively can be viewed as practicing distributive leadership. Because this study made use of an extant data set that is based upon a survey, it may also be useful to examine literature related to the use and efficacy of surveys.

Surveys

In a review of literature about the use of surveys with respondents from multiple cultures, researchers raised some issues regarding the survey questions themselves. When administering surveys to participants from different cultures, both the wording and the scales used can influence the responses. Kemmelmeier (2016) found evidence that response style is related to the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism. This may have been a factor in the survey results this study examined because most of the participants are from cultures that lean toward collectivism. In contrast to individualistic cultures, collectivist cultures emphasize the needs and goals of the group as a whole as opposed to the needs and desires of the individual. In such cultures, relationships with other members of the group and the interconnectedness between people play a central role in each person's identity.

Several studies identified the presence of acquiescence response bias, which is the tendency for survey respondents to agree with statements regardless of their content. Acquiescence response bias could influence any question in which the response options involve confirming a statement, but it may present more of a problem with agree-disagree questions (Lavrakas, 2008). A high bias in responses to personally relevant items is found in cultures that place a high value on family collectivism (Smith, 2004). Because the majority of students in this study were Latino/x, it is important to note that this cultural group has been identified as valuing family collectivism. Hispanic Americans are also more likely to agree with survey items than European Americans (Marin et al., 1992).

The wording of questions is also subject to cultural bias because race/ethnicity appears to influence the interpretation of questions in the absence of specific cues in the question format about how to respond (Warnecke et al., 1997). A paper published by the CORE/PACE

collaborative provided an analysis of the questions in the SEL constructs of the SES. In addition

to establishing that the CORE SEL surveys have sound measurement properties, the Gehlbach

and Hough (2018) analysis demonstrated that the measures are related to other important factors.

They stated that "this domain may represent where the CORE SEL surveys have the strongest

evidence of validity" (p. 16). The CORE SEL scales are correlated with other, related measures;

that is, they "show substantial evidence of convergent validity" (p. 17). There is a strong

relationship between students' reports on the social emotional surveys and reports by teachers

and students about school climate and culture, connecting SEL to school-level practices that are

hypothesized to improve it. The analysis also provides evidence that connects students' self-

reports of their own SEL to teacher reports of their perception of each student's SEL.

Researchers working with the CORE data worked hard to establish predictive validity, showing

that the school-level SEL indicators are correlated with students' grade point average, math and

English test scores, suspension rates, and absence rates. However, the survey was used by the

entire district, which is mostly composed of students of color, and the responses of students at

the schools participating in the study were consistently above the district average.

Document Analysis and Data Saturation

Document analysis can be used in combination with other qualitative research methods to

ensure triangulation by examining data from different sources so that a researcher can

corroborate findings (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) suggested that document analysis can

provide data on context, and that documents can provide supplementary data and be used to

verify findings from other sources. Creswell (2013) described document analysis as a complex

process that involves identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, and relating these themes to

categories found in the literature. Bowen has suggested conducting a comparative analysis of the

The extant data set upon which this study relies[3] is a part of a large data set gathered annually by the CORE districts. As mentioned previously, CORE stands for the California Office to Reform Education. This organization developed the questions that comprise the SEL constructs on the SES that is used in LAUSD. The survey questions are administered to students in school districts across California. In 2017, researchers at PACE conducted several analyses using these data. The work of this team found statistically significant differences among students of differing racial groups in their responses to the questions on the SEL constructs. Across all CORE schools, the team found that that student race/ethnicity is consistently the strongest predictor of SEL and Climate/Culture (CC), reports among the available demographic measures, as well as that these differences persist within schools as well as between schools. To highlight how these gaps differ in LAUSD compared to other CORE districts, the report relates the gaps within schools, where a score of 0 indicates no difference between groups, comparing the within-school gaps in LAUSD to the within-school gaps in other CORE districts. In LAUSD, a notable gap in SEL occurs between Hispanic/Latino and White students (a difference of 0.30 standard deviations) even after controlling for other demographic characteristics. These gaps are similar in LAUSD and in other CORE districts. This finding provides additional support for this study.

These differences were found to hold true across and within schools (Hough et al., 2017). An analysis of this data inspired the methodology for this study. We know that students, particularly students of color, need these skills. We know that there is an academic achievement gap in education, and that non-cognitive skills are crucial to academic success, but we do not know enough about how to address the achievement gap in social emotional skills. We also know that there are schools where students feel that they have these skills; therefore, we need to investigate what is happening at these schools to determine if they are implementing policies or

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[3] The LAUSD SES data can be accessed and searched by visiting https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/14935

practices that might be replicated at other schools. This study examined those promising

practices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This section will discuss the research design, relate the design to the research questions, and identify the cases.

Research Design

This qualitative multi-site case study utilized three sources of data to triangulate the findings. These sources are the results of the SES disaggregated by subgroup for each school, an analysis of public documents from each site, and a series of interviews with teachers and school leaders at each school.

Document Analysis

Once the participating schools were identified, the researcher obtained documents that explored the climate and culture of each site. All documents used for the study were publicly available. Documents can help to provide background information and are often helpful in contextualizing research (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) also suggested that documents are "stable, 'non-reactive' data sources, meaning that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process" (p. 31).

As each document was analyzed, the researcher considered how the content of the document supports SEL. The California SEL Guiding Principles found in Appendix C facilitated this analysis. The researcher utilized techniques suggested by David Krathwohl (2004) when analyzing the documents, including looking for relationships and repetitions and making lists of tentative categories early in the process. The documents include mission and vision statements, the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), the school calendar, and the bell schedule. A school's mission and vision statements are often developed collaboratively with all stakeholders and reflect the values of the school. Because the SPSA is voted on by stakeholders (including

teachers, parents, classified staff, community members, and sometimes students), this document offers a sense of what the school values, what they feel are areas of growth, and where they feel that Title I monies should be spent to effect the greatest change at the school. Title I funds may be applied to pay for personnel, such as hiring teachers *off the norm*, meaning above the number the school is allotted given the number of students enrolled at norm day, in order to reduce class size. Schools may decide to supplement the number of days a school nurse is on site, or to pay for pupil service attendance (PSA) or psychiatric social worker (PSW) time on campus. Schools might instead decide to use their Title I funds to pay for after school or Saturday intervention classes.

How a school sets up the schedule for instruction is reflective of the school's values. The bell schedule also says a lot about a school community's values. Although all high schools are required to provide a minimum of instructional minutes per day, the way the day is broken up at a high school varies greatly from school to school and reflects the school's mission and values. A bell schedule could have any number of configurations besides the traditional six-period day that many schools use. A different bell schedule could mean more or fewer opportunities for intervention or enrichment during the school day. It might also allow for a homeroom or advisory period, which might enable more personalization. Opportunities for personalization can be part of a strategy to improve social awareness. Schools must provide 180 days of instruction, but there is some flexibility with regard to how the school calendar is set up. For example, a school can decide to purchase additional days of staff time to provide PD, or to provide time for school wide or grade-level specific retreats or events for students. These options might provide time for staff to collaborate before the start of the instructional year, or to reflect on progress at

the end of a semester. Student body activities may promote a sense of belonging and connection among the student body.

Additionally, the researcher treated the SES questions as a document for analysis. The language used in the questions on the SEL constructs was examined through the lens of cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2004; Robins et al., 2002) in an attempt to understand if word choice in the questions could have played a role in the survey results (Kemmelmeir, 2016; Warnecke et al., 1997).

Survey Results

In order to address the third research question—What does an analysis of student responses in these schools show in terms of social emotional support provided by their schools?—this study reviewed the district wide survey results in an attempt to understand the significance of the gaps between racial and ethnic groups as they relate to the literature on trauma. The researcher then examined student responses to the SEL constructs on the SES disaggregated by race/ethnicity for the participating schools. These results were compared with those of the disaggregated student responses at the district level. The purpose of this analysis was to attempt to understand any differences between what the students at the study schools reported regarding SEL outcomes as compared with the district averages for these same outcomes. This study sought to explain how policies and practices at the participating schools may explain why these students report higher outcomes in the area of SEL.

Interviews

The researcher conducted both face-to-face and virtual interviews with administrators and teacher leaders. Teacher leaders were identified by the school site administrators. Interview subjects included the union chapter chair, members of the instructional leadership team,

department chairpersons, program coordinators, and counselors. The researcher interviewed

multiple participants from each participating site. These interviews were semi-structured and

lasted from 30-85 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews with

administrators or other school leaders gathered data regarding how their school culture supports

SEL. Interviews with teachers who provide instruction and/or utilize curriculum that addresses

SEL competencies were conducted to understand how their classroom strategies support SEL.

Interview questions and how they relate to research questions are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Relationship Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Proposed Matrix of Methods, Interview Questions,
      and Research Questions

Sample for Interviews

The 2019-2020 school year was difficult for administrators in L.A. Unified. The district shifted to a Community of Schools model in order to allow for more local control. The district is divided into six local districts, and those six were sub-divided into 48 learning communities. A Community of Schools Administrator (COSA) was assigned to each of these learning communities and that individual was given some autonomy to develop improvement plans. School site administrators within each learning community were asked to participate in additional planning meetings and PD. In the midst of this change, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all school campuses in March of 2020. The original intent of this study was to recruit participants from 10 schools in the school district. The researcher e-mailed the principals of each of the 10 schools several times and followed up with repeated phone messages, but six of the schools did not respond at all. This is understandable considering the new COSA structure and the pandemic. Although the researcher made numerous attempts to reach administrators from all 10 of the identified schools, only four agreed to participate in the study. Although the lack of responses was discouraging, the researcher decided to restructure the study and recruit a larger number of interview subjects from each of the four participating schools. Additional potential interview participants were recommended by individuals whom the researcher had interviewed. These recommendations were based upon their opinion that speaking with these additional people would deepen the study by including diverse perspectives on the work in SEL. Speaking with a variety of staff at each site, including teachers from multiple departments, enabled the researcher to learn the story of SEL at each participating school.

Ethnic/Racial Composition of the Schools

Because the study sought to understand the relationship between students' self-reported social emotional skills and race/ethnicity, it is important to look at the numbers of both students and staff of color at the participating schools. Table 5 provides this data.

Table 5

Racial Ethnic Composition of Study Schools 2018-2019

School

schools. It is difficult to determine if these data had any impact on the results of the study, but it appears not to be the case.

Due to the pandemic, the researcher had to schedule virtual interviews with participants. Some of the subjects had to reschedule several times as we all adjusted to the use of technology in our homes. The researcher interviewed a total of 21 administrators, teachers, and program coordinators employed at the four schools in the study. Interviews ranged from 30-85 minutes. Some interviews were long because the subjects provided multiple anecdotes to support their responses. Participants were eager to assist with the study and most provided names of additional potential subjects. Table 6 shows the number of interview subjects by role at each site.

Table 6

Number of Interview Subjects by Role and School

Role

contribute to the success of the students in the area of SEL. The analysis was conducted to address the research questions as follows.

Research Questions

According to Lowe et al. (2018), theoretical saturation occurs when "additional data cannot further develop the qualitative theory derived from the data" (p. 192). It was this study's intention to achieve this goal by answering the following research questions through a triangulation of the data. The study was based upon a recent PACE study led by Heather Hough (Hough et al., 2017) that identified 10 high schools in LAUSD where students reported higher than average scores in SEL. The study used this model and added the dimension of selecting schools where students reported higher than district average scores in SEL for 3 of the last 4 years. The first research question—What are the policies and practices of these schools specifically related to providing social emotional supports? —was answered through document analysis and by analyzing the responses of school leaders and teachers. The second research question was, How do leaders in these schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students? How do leaders assess their own perspectives, attitudes, decision-making and actions toward diverse student populations? This question was addressed by interviewing administrators and school leaders at each participating school. The last question was, What does an analysis of these student responses show in terms of social emotional support provided for by their schools? What do students report of their experience, how do they respond? This question was addressed through an analysis of the student survey response data.

Cases

The PACE CORE study identified 10 schools that were positive outliers for SEL in LAUSD. The data used for the CORE/PACE study were a great starting point for this study, but

the list that the study generated was not appropriate for this study. The CORE PACE study calculated their list using a point system that included both SEL and school climate constructs. The CORE list also used results from the surveys given to all stakeholder groups. The authors of the study created an aggregate score for each school (Hough et al., 2017). They also used a data set that included data from all the CORE districts and based the averages on that larger data set. The researcher did not have access to these data. This study looked specifically at how students at the participating schools reported their own social emotional development. The CORE/PACE data are several years old, and many of the school leaders I wanted to interview at the schools on the original list have moved on to other positions. Additionally, using data that were publicly available made it possible for others to replicate my study.

For the aforementioned reasons, the researcher identified schools that were above the district average in the constructs of SEL for 3 of the previous 4 years. In order to create this list, the researcher used publicly available survey data tables. The survey data were filtered to exclude schools where there were concerns regarding survey administration. Some schools reported that the teachers read the questions out loud to their classes, and others reported that they called on students and read them the survey questions in order to obtain responses. Because the researcher could not find any specific protocol that was used in order to obtain these responses, these schools were not included in the study. In order to ensure that the responses were reflective of the student populations at the respective schools, the data were also filtered to exclude schools with a response rate of below 70%. The schools identified were above the district average in at least three of the four of the SEL constructs and were above average in these constructs for 3 of the previous 4 years ending in 2018-2019. Including the dimension of looking at the schools that remained above the district average for multiple years contributed to

the research on SEL. By selecting schools with consistent results for multiple years, the researcher hoped to highlight schools where the policies and practices have resulted in long-term positive outcomes. As mentioned previously, the researcher's attempts to contact all 10 schools were not successful. Four of the 10 schools did agree to participate in the study. Because the number of schools in the study was lower than originally anticipated, the researcher sought to deepen the work by interviewing additional subjects from each site. A comparison of the 10 identified schools and the four schools that participated is presented subsequently. At the request of the LAUSD Research and Reporting branch, the schools that agreed to participate in the study were de-identified, and pseudonyms were used for both the schools and the individuals who agree to be interviewed.

Because the original intent of the study was to include 10 schools, Table 7 includes demographic data for all of the schools invited to participate. All 10 of these schools met the criteria for the study; that is, the results of the SES showed that students had reported above district average in at least three of four SEL constructs for at least 3 of the last 4 years. The researcher looked at the composition of the larger set of schools to attempt to determine if the subset of schools that did agree to participate are a representative sample. Although the study schools range in size from 534 to 2,712 students, the non-participating schools range in size from 533 to 1,429 students, with four of the six schools enrolling over 1,000 students. Two of the six non-participating schools were in geographic regions were not represented by those in the study. The average percentage of students in the study schools who qualify for free or reduced lunch is 90.6% and the average at the non -participating schools is lower at 76.34%. The graduation rate for the non-participating schools is 96.6% and that of the study schools is not too different, 93.1%. The non-participating schools have an average of 73.9% Black and Hispanic students

versus the 90.3 of the study schools. Three of the non-participating schools are comprehensive high schools, one is a magnet school, and two are pilot schools. Two of the study schools are pilot schools and the two remaining schools are comprehensive high schools with small magnets on their campuses. Because the researcher was not able to include the six additional schools, it is unclear what the document analysis and interviews of these additional subjects would have added to the findings. Despite the variations described in this paragraph, the researcher believes that the study schools are representative of original 10 schools. Although it is impossible to ensure that the results of the study would not have been altered by their participation, the researcher believes that the findings of the study are valid.

Table 7

2018-2019 Demographics for LAUSD High Schools that Are Above Average on SEL Measures

School Name

color and White and Asian students with regard to SEL, yet the students at these schools are reporting above average skills in these areas. Additionally, the schools identified have an average graduation rate of above 90%, with all of the schools in the study showing a graduation rate at or above that of the district as a whole, which has an average graduation rate of 80%.

The schools are also located in different parts of Los Angeles. Two of the schools are in the same community in the northeast valley, one is farther west in the valley, and the last is in the south east of Los Angeles. Table 8 also shows demographic data for these communities. The communities participating in the study have an average of 57.5% of the population obtaining a high school diploma versus 83% for the state of California and 15.7% of the population obtaining a bachelor's degree versus 33% for the state. The average community income is calculated by dividing the income distribution into two equal parts: one half of the cases falling below the median income and one half above the median. The result is based on the distribution of the total number of households and families including those with no income. The average income in the communities of the participating schools is $54,500 versus $71,228 for the state[4].

These schools vary with respect to the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, the number of students enrolled, and the percentage of students who are Black or Hispanic. Purple H.S. is the most diverse of the schools in the study. The student population is 13.1% Asian, 4.8% Black, and 11.8% White. The other schools in the study report less than 2% of any race besides Hispanic. Red H.S. is the least diverse, reporting 98.4% of the student population as Hispanic. It is important to note that although Black students represent 8.2% of the population for the district, they make up only 1.95% of the study sample. The schools also vary in the way they are organized. Two of the schools in the study are pilot schools, one is a school

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[4] All demographic information for the schools under investigation were taken from sources that would break the participating institutions' confidentiality. Therefore, all such sources have been omitted intentionally.

with three small magnet schools and a traditional school on one campus, and the last is a

traditional comprehensive high school with one small magnet school on the campus. Pilot

schools are schools that applied for waivers through the Public School Choice program. These

schools exercise some autonomy over budget, staff selection, curriculum and assessment, PD,

school calendars, and governance. Students attending pilot schools come from the local

community. However, all the schools identified have a graduation rate well above that of the

district. This is another factor that calls for a closer examination of the policies and practices of

these schools[5].

Table 9 shows that the study schools have been above average on the SEL constructs of

the SES over the last 4 years. Table 10 shows the test results for students in the study schools and

the district as a whole. For the most part, schools in the study were above the district average in

the number of students who met or exceeded the standard for the CAASPP[6] assessment in the

spring. The only exceptions were the math scores for Blue H.S. and the 2017-2018 math score

for Green H.S. It is interesting to note that the ELA scores for three of the four schools were well

above the district average[7].

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[5]The Public School Choice process was managed through the Intensive Support and Innovation Division. The Public School Choice Initiative was supported by the Los Angeles Unified School District's Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. Approximately 52 "focus" schools (those in the bottom percentile of low performing LAUSD schools) and 42 newly established "relief" schools (new campuses built to ease overcrowding in schools that have been mostly operating on year-round calendars) participated in this process.
[6]The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System was established on January 1, 2014. The CAASPP System replaced the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. The Summative Assessments, which are delivered by computer, consist of two sections: a computer adaptive test and a performance task (PT) based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA and mathematics. The PTs are extended activities that measure a student's ability to integrate knowledge and skills across multiple standards—a key component of college and career readiness (CDE, 2020).
[7]All scores and statistics for the schools under investigation were taken from sources that would break the participating institutions' confidentiality. Therefore, all such sources have been omitted intentionally.

Table 8

2018 Demographic Data for Study Schools and Communities

School Name

Table 9

Study Schools Above the District Average on SEL Constructs of the School Experience Survey

new principal in 2017. Building relationships is a focus at the school. A staff member shared that she sees the school as "a loving and rigorous community." During the first week of school, students meet by grade level and do team building activities. They have a strong mentor program where upper-class students are paired with younger students to provide peer support. The school also has an advisory period that focuses on building SEL. The school funds a position that connects the in-school relationship building strategies with their expanded learning program. This individual also works with the principal to develop and deliver PD to improve staff understanding and implementation of SEL. The focus is on building support for students by connecting them with peers and caring adults. One of the interviewed teachers remarked, "Our students come to us with needs beyond the classroom, our mission is to satisfy those needs."

Green H.S.

Green H.S. is the oldest school in the study; it was founded more than 100 years ago. The school has over 2,500 students, 92.5% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school has a 95.3% Hispanic/Latino population and a 90.4% graduation rate. The campus has one small magnet, and there are several Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways that allow students to explore their passions. The school is very much a part of the community. Because it has been their high school for multiple generations, families feel connected to the school. There is a school wide focus on fostering community and providing support to students. The school has a team of teachers who work together to ensure that students who are falling behind receive counseling and resources. They also assist with PD. The principal's focus on building a culture of kindness and inclusion includes assemblies and lunchtime activities. There are monthly student-led campaigns to increase community and connection. Teachers also provide direct instruction in SEL in content classes. One teacher mentioned that the science department uses a

specific SEL protocol in the first week of all of their classes. When the teachers introduce the class to science equipment, they use an SEL activity. The students are given a flask that is meant to hold one ingredient and told to draw their own flask and fill it with representations of their own personality. They are then placed in what will be their lab groups and given a beaker that is used to mix ingredients. The group selects images from everyone's flask to create their group beaker. The group writes an explanation about how the characteristics of each person in the group will help them to be successful in their lab work throughout the year. The teacher explained that the whole department uses this strategy to integrate self-efficacy and social awareness into science content.

Purple H.S.

Purple H.S. opened in the early 1900s. The school serves over 2,700 students. The school has an 88.2% graduation rate and just over 67% of the students are Black or Hispanic. It also has a strong history in the community. The campus houses three magnets and a traditional school. The students who are not in the magnets may enroll in one of two academies. The students in the traditional school and the magnet students were not getting along before the current principal arrived. She used campus-wide community building activities to unite the school. Students who are struggling in middle school are programmed into double blocks for ELA and math when they arrive as ninth graders. In discussing the importance of making an effort to personalize education the principal stated, "In our Freshman academy we put the kids together-100 kids with three teachers; we went from 24% of kids becoming 10th graders to 68% in 4 years." One of the teachers interviewed said that because of the supports the school provides "it is harder for kids to fall off track."

The school also budgets for two school wide A-G counselor positions to target students who may be falling behind, and two Psychiatric Social Workers (PSWs) to work with students experiencing emotional problems. The principal noted, "We provide huge amounts of support; the counselors load here is 400, not the 600 or 800 it is at other schools."

There is a school wide culture that focuses on building relationships and promoting SEL practices in classrooms. Ongoing PD on SEL is provided. Another teacher spoke about the support she feels from her colleagues and the administration. The school uses community building circles in class and noted that they "have staff circles once a month, and at the end of the year we have a retreat-someplace really nice."

Red Pilot School

Founded in 2010, Red H.S. completed its first year in small bungalows on an existing campus. In 2012, the school was moved onto a new campus with two other pilot schools. The student population is 98.4% Hispanic; coincidentally, the school has a graduation rate of 96.1%, and 96.1% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Students in two of the three schools on this campus consistently report above average scores in SEL. According to the principal, the three core values of the school are building relationships, growth mindset, and being student-centered. The assistant principal stressed the importance of working with math teachers to help them incorporate growth mindset into instruction. He also sought out a school wide mindfulness program that could be used as a daily warm up activity, or as a part of the advisory program. When we spoke, he stressed the importance of providing support for his staff to develop self-care strategies. The school is in an under-resourced community, but one of the teachers interviewed mentioned that the campus is clean and well maintained. The teacher shared that the cleanliness of the campus is a reflection of the community that they have built, stating, "The students respect

the school, I think, because they know we respect them." The school is committed to ensuring that students succeed, and the teachers focus on establishing strong relationships with their students. The school uses an advisory period to promote connection and to teach SEL.

Summary

For this qualitative multi-site case study, the researcher based the sample on schools where the students reported above district average scores on constructs of SEL. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the schools in the study have any policies or practices in common that might have led to these positive outcomes. The four schools that participated in the study have both similarities and differences; they exist in different communities and serve different students. The schools all serve populations that are mostly Hispanic and receive free or reduced-price lunch. The researcher examined public documents and interviewed teachers and administrators at each site in order to obtain data for the study.

Positionality of Author

The researcher has a particular potential bias during this study. I am a 30-year veteran employee of the district under investigation. I was a classroom teacher who used instructional strategies and intentionally designed curriculum to teach social emotional competencies. I believe in the value of these competencies. My current position is with Division of Instruction helping to facilitate the use of SEL in the district at large. The position did provide me with access to the schools that I invited to participate in the study. I recognize that my personal and career experience has influenced my choice of topic; it is reflective of my personal commitments and passion. Despite my current position and my strong commitment to this topic, I was fully committed to the integrity of sound research practices.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study posed minimal risk of harm to the participants. LAUSD's SES is publicly available and has no identifying markers for individual students, thereby maintaining confidentiality and a degree of anonymity. The SES results upon which the selection of the invited schools was based are also publicly available. Information gathered about each school was garnered from school websites and other public documents. Interview participants were explicitly notified, both orally and in writing, that participation in any or all of the study was entirely voluntary. Any identifying data collected during the study will be kept confidential and secured in a locked area of the researcher's home office. Institutional Review Board approval, including the provision of consent forms for interviewees, was acquired from both Claremont Graduate University and LAUSD. The letter of notification to the participants regarding this requirement is included in Appendix D.

Summary

This multi-site case study utilized three sources of data to triangulate the findings. The study examined the student responses on a section of a survey that measured social emotional skills at schools that reported higher than average scores on these survey questions. It looked at documents from these schools, and interviewed teachers and school leaders at each site. The study used three data sources in order to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study, organized according to the research questions. The purpose of this study was to determine if schools where students reported above average scores on questions that measured the constructs of SEL had policies and practices in common. The majority of the students at the schools that participated in the study are students of color. This is significant because previous research found that students of color report lower scores on SEL constructs (Hough et al., 2017). The findings are based upon on analysis of the results of the SES, a survey administered annually by LAUSD, an analysis of publicly available documents about each school, and interviews conducted with school leaders from each site.

The researcher conducted interviews with all of the principals and assistant principals and/or program coordinators from each site. Additionally, the researcher was able to conduct interviews with several teachers representing different content areas at each school. Table 11 shows the cross section of staff interviewed. The administrators were all experienced educators with an average of 26 years of experience for the principals and 20 years for the assistant principals. The years of experience as school principals was also of interest. The principal of Red H.S. was a first-year principal. The principal of Blue H.S. was a principal for 3 years but had been at the site for 9 years. The principal of Purple H.S. led the school for 7 years. The principal of Green H.S. has been at the site for 23 years, and the principal for 6 years. The program coordinators had an average of 15 years of experience. The principals, assistant principals, and program coordinators were all experienced educators. The teachers ranged from a first-year teacher to a teacher with 20 years of experience, with an average of 12 years of experience. It is interesting to note that the teachers interviewed for the study from Red H.S. and Blue H.S. were,

on average, newer to the profession. The researcher did not obtain data for the whole staff for these schools, so this finding may not be an accurate reflection of the staff as a whole.

Table 11

Average and Range of Experience in Education of the Participants at the Study Sites

    Role

Bell Schedule Adapted

All four of the schools used their bell schedule to provide opportunities for students to connect with adults. Schools used advisory periods, teamed teachers, or double blocks so that teachers were able to spend more time with fewer students. An advisory is a class that functions as a way for students to have an adult with whom to check in on a regular basis. Many schools use advisory periods to provide test prep or college information. Some schools use the time to provide direct instruction in SEL. The groups meet two or three times a week for about 30 minutes. Both Blue and Purple H.S.s adapted the bell schedule so that students would have fewer different teachers to work with so that teachers and students could get to know each other better.

School Calendar Adapted

All four schools also promoted SEL through their school calendars. Three of the schools adapted their calendar to provide more time for teachers to learn and collaborate, and two of the schools used assemblies and extended lunch times to provide time for students to engage in SEL activities. At both Green and Purple H.S., the administration and leadership advisor organize lunchtime activities that promote SEL. Although many schools celebrate students with good grades or high grade point averages, Purple H.S. extends lunch to celebrate students who have shown improvement in academics to support an environment that promotes growth mindset. Green H.S. extends lunch once a month for a "No One Eats Alone" event. Students and teachers are encouraged to eat with students with whom they usually do not spend time. The principal emphasizes the importance of the ritual of sharing food to build community. Green H.S. has school wide assemblies that promote SEL twice a year. These assemblies are provided free of charge by the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation. The foundation also provides support for a student led club to promote inclusion and kindness activities throughout the school year. Purple

H.S. has school wide assemblies organized by students to promote self-efficacy. The principal feels that it is important for students to see other students as leaders.

At Blue H.S., the calendar includes time before academic instruction begins for students to get to know the staff and each other. The incoming ninth graders spend 3 days with each other, and then each grade level spends a day together. They repeat the process at the start of the second semester. The principal reflected on this practice by saying, "Let's put the important things first, let's make room for this before we get into academics, not only is it more effective, it makes a statement."

Professional Development Specific to SEL

All of the school leaders recognized the importance of PD and time for staff to collaborate. Red H.S. provided staff with a PD on mindfulness and resources to help the staff implement mindfulness practices to promote self-management. The Red H.S. principal indicated that the staff had received PD on growth mindset in prior years. They are still developing a plan to institute a self-efficacy and social awareness PD. Green H.S. provides time for teachers to work collaboratively to create intervention plans for students falling behind at each grading period. The calendar at Blue H.S. has also been adapted to allow for more of the staff to participate in PD on a weekly basis, including PD on SEL several times a year. One teacher at Blue H.S. said:

Ultimately, …you have to look at what you are spending your time on, what is your PD on, and when you have that space—the nonacademic space—with your kids, what are you doing with it? Because that tells me a lot about the values of your school. Don't tell me, show me, let me see what you do.

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The schools in the study recognize that if they want to promote SEL, they need to show that they value it, and they do so by allocating time for it. This is reflected in their bell schedules and school calendars.

Mission and Vision Statements

The mission and vision statements for the schools were different from each other. Those of Green and Purple H.S. were more traditional; in other words, they sounded much like mission statements of many comprehensive high schools. Both did include some wording that speaks to the use of SEL. Both mention effective communication and becoming productive members of the community. Red H.S.'s mission includes the phrases emotional intelligence, whole child, and interpersonal skills. Blue H.S. includes the phrase development of the complete individual and specifically identifies SEL as a school wide strategy. Despite these differences, all of the schools acknowledged the importance of addressing aspects of education besides the academic.

Single Plan for Student Achievement

An analysis of the SPSA for each site also yielded interesting findings. This plan is a document that represents a school's cycle of continuous improvement of student achievement. The annual process of developing, reviewing, and updating the SPSA includes a comprehensive review of data and the development of actions necessary to achieve school goals (CDE, 2019a). The plan is developed by a team and voted on by stakeholders including parents, teachers, and classified staff. The plan is reflective of the school's values because it determines how the school will use any supplemental funds. The SPSA documents for the participating schools reflected a commitment to SEL. Purple and Blue H.S. used the money to fund additional positions that were involved directly in SEL. Purple H.S. funded additional counselor positions in order to reduce the caseload of their counseling staff. Blue H.S. funds a coordinator position for an individual to

coordinate peer mentoring and facilitate PD for the staff. Green H.S. funded release time so that a team of teachers had a period off to work collaboratively to improve SEL at the site. The way the funds were deployed differed at each site, but the underlying theme that resources should be used to support SEL was common among the schools.

Interviews

In response to the question asking the subjects to share specific strategies that they implement with regard to SEL, there were also commonalities. Table 13 presents the strategies mentioned by interview subjects at multiple sites.

Table 13

Strategies Mentioned by Multiple Interview Subjects

Blue H.S. use programs that are provided by vendors, and Green H.S. partnered with an organization that provided SEL support for free. Teachers from all four schools mentioned lessons or activities that directly addressed SEL competencies. Interview subjects from all schools also mentioned that SEL was integrated into content instruction. A teacher at Red H.S. mentioned using mindfulness to center students at the beginning of class. A teacher at Blue H.S. mentioned that "students practice, not debating, but building on each other's ideas…and resolving conflicts in a respectful manner so that both sides are validated" to build student self-efficacy. Another teacher from Blue H.S. mentioned teaching empathy in discussion of stem cell usage in a biology class, "grounding the unit in, 'How would you feel if the person who needed the stem cell treatment was in your family?' Trying to ground the science content with real emotions and experiences."

Counseling and Academic Intervention

Three of the schools described specific intervention plans that involved both academic support and SEL based upon student grades at the 5, 10, 15, and 20-week marking periods. A Green H.S. program coordinator described teachers working collaboratively to review cumulative records and gather academic and anecdotal data for students in need of intervention. Every 5 weeks teachers meet with every student in their period 2 class who is struggling with behavior or any academic subject and help them to develop a plan. The teachers provide direct instruction in self-efficacy, self-management, and growth mindset during these meetings. Additionally, the teachers are able to identify students in need of additional support, and refer them for more intense academic support, or counseling if necessary. At Blue H.S. teachers "adopt" struggling students. Students identified as needing support are discussed during staff development meetings. Three students are assigned to each teacher and the teacher meets with

them before or after school. Additionally, once a month one of the PD sessions is dedicated to having lunch with the "adopted" students. Teachers at both sites described this as a way to ensure that no one has "slipped through the cracks."

Some strategies were only mentioned by some of the schools but were brought up by multiple subjects at each site. Three of the four schools specifically mentioned using restorative justice[8] practices. These practices included community building circles and healing circles, or scheduling meetings when students needed to repair harm that their words or actions had caused.

Staff Development

Participants from all of the schools referred to ongoing PD. All of the principals indicated that PD in SEL has to be ongoing. A program coordinator from Blue H.S. mentioned that the classroom assistants and expanded day staff also participated in learning about SEL. Schools provided PD in SEL, and they also integrated SEL into PD on other topics.

Elevating Student Voice

Three of the schools made direct mention of elevating student voice. A strategy used by three of the schools is a school wide analysis of the SES results. The survey asks students to report on both their perception of their social emotional skills and the climate and culture of their school. Staff also discuss the data disaggregated by sub-groups to help them to better target intervention. This information helps the faculty and staff to understand what students feel is working, and what school practices might need to be changed.

Two of the schools use student-to-student mentoring programs as a strategy to support SEL by increasing connectedness and student voice. Students at both Green H.S. and Purple H.S.

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[8] The LAUSD definition of Restorative Justice practices in the school setting is as follows: (a) Acknowledge that relationships are essential to building a successful school community; (b) Ensure equity of voice amongst all members of the community. Everyone is valued, everyone is heard; (c) Sets high expectations while offering supports, emphasizing doing things "with," not "to" or "for;" and (d) Build systems that address student misconduct and harm in a way that strengthens relationships and focuses on the harm done rather than only rule-breaking.

plan school wide SEL activities. Blue H.S. uses student voice to guide much of their work. A teacher at Blue H.S. noted, "One thing we do is we have a student steering committee." Two students are selected from each advisory class to be a part of the committee, which meets once a month during advisory and discusses what is going on at the school. This committee provides input on curricula, instruction, and PD.

School Wide Activities

School wide activities included assemblies, grade level picnics, and lunchtime activities like No One Eats Alone, a school wide activity where teachers and students are encouraged to eat their lunch with others and approach anyone sitting alone to ask if they can join them. It is a way to reach out to students who might be socially isolated. Schools also used school wide assemblies to build community.

Summary of RQ1

The study identified policies and practices that seem to support the use of SEL through document analysis and interviews. One strong commonality was the recognition that SEL requires resources, including time and money. The schools mentioned taking time to provide on PD, encouraging the use of instructional minutes, and school wide activities. The results also showed that the schools took time to listen to students, and to encourage students to help to lead the work in SEL. Schools also mentioned using funds to provide extra time and staff for SEL. Time and money are scarce commodities, so using them to support SEL shows that the schools seem to see value in the practices.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, How do leaders in these schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students? How do leaders assess their own

perspectives, attitudes, decision-making, and actions toward diverse student populations? To what do they attribute their schools' higher than average SEL scores?

Defining SEL

When asked to define SEL, interviewees offered a wide range of responses. All participants agreed that SEL is important, but understanding of the subject varied from person to person. The principal of Green H.S. responded, "SEL is everything in life that has nothing to do with English, History, Math and Science." A teacher at Red H.S. responded, "Those soft skills that students need," and a teacher at Blue H.S. said, "It is to humanize student experiences and give them the language and context to process their emotions." One factor that all four principals had in common was that they remembered that other district administrators had criticized them for investing too much time and effort in SEL. Others called their approach "too touchy feely" or "hippy dippy." All four principals also mentioned, with some satisfaction, that now they are being asked by these same peers to share these strategies.

Vision for Education

When asked about their vision for education, all respondents included words like belonging, connection, and safety. Several mentioned that they wanted schools to be places where students could realize their potential. One teacher at Purple H.S. said, "We want to create people who make humanistic decisions and rule with empathy." A program coordinator from Blue H.S. said that although her vision was constantly evolving, right now it included a "focus on personalization of learning and leveraging what we know to work about relationships." Another teacher from Blue H.S. mentioned self-actualization.

The principals at all four schools included aspects of SEL when they discussed their vision for education. The principal of Red H.S. wants to ensure that students learn to "advocate

for themselves and develop agency…it is important that students get the skills and have the tools so they can be healthy and kind human beings." The principal of Green H.S. emphasized that she wants her "teachers to have conversations with kids about being resilient." The principal of Purple H.S. said she wished that "ninth grade would have little to do with academics;" instead, she would want the focus to be on spending the time learning about having self-confidence and growth mindset and dealing with issues related to trauma. She also said,

> I have principal colleagues who ask why my school is so successful and they tell me they
> don't believe in touchy feely stuff and I say, well there you go! How can you not believe
> in…the well-being of a child?

SEL as a Priority for Leaders

SEL was universally recognized as a priority at the schools. Teachers from all four schools mentioned that their principals' leadership was critical to their students' success. A teacher from Blue H.S. recognized that the investment of both time and money in SEL is critical, and that investment is due to the leadership at the school. A teacher at Green H.S. said that the principal knows the community and understands that investing time and energy into promoting "kindness and connectedness…makes things work." A teacher from Purple H.S. believes that the leadership provided by the principal is one of the factors that has led to student success. They stated,

> I've never understood the importance of leadership before this principal…She knows
> how to make people work together and she knows, you know, around her, everybody's
> better…she's right there on the ground…talking to everyone as if they matter. So it's the
> first time in my life where I can see one person can really make such a big difference in
> an organization.

Another theme was that the principals encouraged teachers to use instructional minutes to address students' SEL needs. In addition to making changes to the schools' calendars and bell schedules, teachers at the study schools were encouraged to use practices like mindfulness and circles during class time. Study participants from three of the schools mentioned the use of circles in classes. A circle provides an opportunity for the whole class to see each other while they engage in community building activities. As the class gets to know each other, circle topics can range from a daily check in to discussion of conflicts that have arisen between students, or between students and teachers. At the study schools, circles were also used to include student voice in decisions related to the schools. A teacher from Blue H.S. said that people who visit the school are always surprised by how students are so familiar with the protocol that a teacher only has to say "circle up" and the class knows exactly what to do. Two of the schools also mentioned the use of circles for teachers as part of staff development. Teachers at all of the schools were encouraged by their principals to integrate SEL into content instruction.

Attributing Success

When asked why they thought that students at their site were above the district average in SEL, the replies were very thoughtful. One of the program coordinators at Blue H.S. said, "That is by design, we consciously developed this culture." A teacher from Purple H.S. said, "We invest in it. It is systemic." The principal of Red H.S. said, "We have taken SEL seriously since before we opened the school…our students know we care about them." However, she also stated that she struggled to get buy-in from some of her staff. She also spoke about how she planned to shift hiring practices including questions related to SEL in future interviews. Many of the teachers were not aware that their students were above the district average on the SEL constructs, but they were not surprised. The principal of Blue H.S. credited his school's restorative attitude

toward discipline as one of the factors, stating, "One reason is our practice of being patient with kids and saying-being very clear, 'this behavior is a result of something, it's not the problem.'" This philosophy was reflected in many of the interviews. Staff who were interviewed at the study schools understand the importance of not being reactive when students exhibit unwanted behaviors. They seem to understand that these behaviors are likely a result of either trauma from adverse childhood or community experiences, or students' basic physical needs not being met.

Students of Color

The interview questions also asked subjects to reflect on why students of color across the district do not usually seem to have the same level of SEL as White or Asian students. The main theme that emerged from the responses to this question was that students of color are subjected to institutional racism and, as a result, do not feel confident in their academic or SEL abilities. The responses mentioned traditional school as a factor that contributes to this phenomenon both in terms of curriculum and unconscious bias. A Green H.S. teacher remarked, "I think school culture plays a really big part in how students answer these [SES survey] questions." Another teacher from Green H.S. said that "there is an internal bias many adults in education still have." Several of the interview subjects believe that microaggressions in classrooms and on school campuses contribute to a lack of confidence in students of color, which may result in students not believing that they have the social emotional skills the survey asks about. A teacher from Purple H.S. said, "I think there is this self-categorizing that we're trying really hard to work against." The principal of Blue H.S. explained why he feels that many students of color do not respond positively to the SES question on SEL, stating, "That's what we taught them. I mean that's what society has taught them. That's what they watch in the news, and that's what they hear in public discourse, is that they are the problem."

The principal of Blue H.S. said that education should be "an opportunity for students to find their best selves." He wants his students to understand their own experiences and how they have shaped them. These statements are at the heart of this study: to gain an understanding of what might be happening at these schools that seems to be supporting students of color.

Respondents also felt that the media plays a part in this lack of confidence. One teacher stated, "The images in the media are a lot of middle- class White or Asian people going to university." Another said, "Representation is important, and so is lack of representation, deep in their subconscious, they don't believe they deserve good things." Still another said, "Look at the media and how American society has glorified white culture, students are bombarded with the histories of marginalization I think they internalize that." Staff at all of the schools also recognized that childhood trauma plays a role in SEL. In summary, multigenerational trauma and institutional racism were the themes that emerged in response to the question regarding why students of color do not respond as positively as White or Asian students to questions about SEL.

Supporting Students of Color

Participants were also asked what they do to support SEL and how they support the learning of students of color. Here many of the responses were about how they supported students by addressing both trauma and institutional racism. School leaders at both Purple and Blue H.S. mentioned teaching about trauma and resilience. Several spoke about providing lessons to build resilience. The Green H.S. principal said, "We know these kids come from tough situations, many of the families are gang affiliated, but maybe that toughness helps them to build resilience." A Blue H.S. teacher said, "We need to let them know that it is Ok that what happened to them hurts, sometimes they don't want to show vulnerability." That teacher went on to explain that the staff at the school share their stories and their vulnerabilities in an attempt to

normalize talking about such subjects. They want students to know that trauma is common, and that overcoming it is possible. Another Blue H.S. teacher shared that he and his colleagues know that their students can be successful, stating, "All of us are committed to putting in the work that it takes to get our students to see themselves the way we see them." A teacher from Purple H.S. discussed building self-efficacy by providing students with multiple types of support, noting, "I think it is about teaching them to look for layers of support." A Blue H.S. program coordinator mentioned that "part of our mission is to increase our students' social capital."

Helping students to build SEL so they can be successful despite overt and covert racism is another theme that emerged. In addition to building students' social emotional skills, the schools also felt that curricular choices were important. Science teachers from two of the schools spoke about including the accomplishments of scientists of color in their courses. A social studies teacher emphasized, "We don't use a Eurocentric curriculum…we celebrate histories of color." A teacher at Purple H.S. discussed a department wide push to teach Math Mindsets as a part of mathematics instruction at the school. She mentioned that students often come into math classes feeling that they cannot learn the concepts. The department teaches Math Mindsets, which promotes growth mindset and self-efficacy as a part of their math classes. She said, "Mistakes are great,… it's all about inquiry. It's about depth and not speed." A biology teacher at Blue H.S. discussed his Trauma Unit, which teaches the students about the cognitive impacts of trauma and how this might lead to difficulties in school. The unit provides space for students to reflect on their own trauma and helps students to see that "they can overcome these challenges through science." In addition to addressing issues of race through the content of their classes, explicitly modeling anti-racist behavior was mentioned. One respondent said, "I mind my space

as a White person in groups – making sure that I'm elevating other people's voices, creating space, and giving opportunity – so that students can see those around me elevated."

Summary of RQ2

The study found some parallels in the way that leaders at the study schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students. They all spoke about the importance of SEL and thought of it as a foundational practice. They saw SEL as a way to meet the needs of the whole child and as a key component to support academic development. Leaders also shared that they see SEL as way to develop efficacy in students of color who need to learn to navigate a system that puts them at a disadvantage. Leaders recognized that they needed to acknowledge that students of color need support to be successful in spite of this system and used SEL to provide that support.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, What does an analysis of student responses in these schools show in terms of social emotional support provided by their schools? What do students report of their experience?

Survey Concerns

An additional concern of the study was whether the SEL questions on the SES were valid and reliable as a source of data. Before discussing the results of the survey, it will be helpful to understand the research that went into attempting to ensure that the survey items are valid and reliable. Initially, the researcher was curious as to whether the wording of the questions on the SES caused the gap in SEL between White and Asian students and students of color. Some questions include wording that could be seen as culturally biased. As mentioned previously, a CORE/PACE analysis of the survey items by Gehlbach and Hough was published in 2018.

Because this document provides a thorough analysis of the survey items, it will be useful to discuss it here. According to Gehlbach and Hough, "In order for a survey to demonstrate validity, different subgroups of students need to interpret and react to the same items in the same way" (p. 6). Samples of the questions that were of concern are presented in Table 14 Threats to validity could occur if the questions have different meanings for different respondents. The researcher had concerns that the questions may lack some sensitivity to the culture and social circumstances of the students responding to the questions. As noted in Gehlbach and Hough's analysis of the survey, "Items or scales with cultural bias would likely cause problems with measurement invariance, if students in different racial groups interpret questions differently based on cultural norms or experiences" (p. 11).

Table 14

LAUSD SES Questions That Were of Concern

Construct

awareness question might elicit a negative response due to the use of the word respectful, because some students feel that respect should only be given when it is reciprocal. The average responses of students of color across the CORE districts were lower than those of White and Asian students at the same schools; the average responses of students of color in the participating schools were, in many cases, higher than the average responses of White or Asian students, but it did not seem that the wording of the questions alone had an impact on the survey results for students of color (Gehlbach & Hough, 2018).

Gehlbach and Hough's (2018) paper on the survey items provides a thorough analysis of concerns regarding validity and reliability. CORE conducted a series of pilot tests with students and interviews with educators to assess the face validity of their measures. This practice allowed the team designing the survey to address potential issues related to content validity, face validity, the representativeness of items, and best practices in wording items at the beginning of the process. Because survey administration takes place in a diverse context, the team wanted to ensure that there was no evidence of measurement invariance and that students in all contexts would interpret and respond to the questions in the same way. Measurement invariance demonstrates that the same construct is being interpreted the same way by respondents from different cultures or genders. They wanted to be sure that different responses reflect real differences in the underlying constructs, not just different interpretations of the questions. To be sure of this fact the team has conducted substantial measurement invariance testing. They used a differential item functioning (DIF) analysis and tested for differences in student performance by gender and by race at different grade levels; as a result, CORE can make a strong case that their scales engender consistent responding by different groups on specific items (Meyer et al., 2018). The authors do acknowledge that this does not rule out the possibility that certain groups (e.g.,

African American, Latinx, or female students) might answer the survey questions differently based on differences in interpretation or perspective. A cultural or societal bias in their survey responses could result in students responding differently to every item in a construct, which would still represent a threat to validity (Gehlbach & Hough, 2018). This finding has important implications for this study. Students of color across the district report responses that indicate lower levels of social emotional skills to the questions on the SEL constructs, but students of color at the four study schools report responses that indicate above average social emotional skills. The researcher hypothesized that the reason the students of color at the schools in the study responded to the SEL items positively might be related to the SEL support at their schools, and the results seem to bear this out.

Table 15, placed here and presented earlier as Table 2 on page 9, shows the results of the district SES. When the results of the 2018-2019 SES are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, there are differences between how the different race/ethnic groups identified perceive their SEL. As mentioned previously, the district put tremendous effort into increasing growth mindset across the district. This involved a push to provide PD in growth mindset, as well as a shift by teachers that may have resulted from the information about growth mindset that appeared in both traditional and social media. Another contributing factor may have been the district's decision to follow the guidance of the CORE data collaborative and change the wording of the survey questions in the growth mindset construct of the SES in 2018. Prior to 2018, the questions were worded as double negatives, which caused confusion, particularly among younger students. This change may be reflected in the jump between the 2017 and 2018 administration of the survey. The results for this construct depicted in Table 16 are reflective of the shift, with a district

average of 71% of high school level students demonstrating growth mindset, and only slight

differences among the subgroups.

Table 15

2018-2019 LAUSD School Experience Survey Data

participating in the study have reported above average scores on the constructs of SEL over time. Looking at 4 years of data may indicate that the policies and practices at these schools seem to have a consistent impact on students' SEL (see Table 17).

Table 17

Study Schools Above the District Average on SEL Constructs of the School Experience Survey

Table 19

Study Schools, School Experience Survey Social Emotional Learning Disaggregated 2018-2019

Results

School

growth mindset and self-management. Blue H.S. students reported above average scores in all constructs for the fourth year in a row. The most important results show an 11% difference between this school and the district average in self-efficacy and 12% between the school and the district average for Hispanic/Latino students. Green H.S. students reported results above the district average on all four constructs. Their Black and White students were 11% above the district average for self-efficacy. Their Hispanic/Latino students were 4% above the district average for Hispanic Latino students in all four constructs. Purple H.S. was above the district average on all four constructs. Although their Hispanic/Latino students' results were 2% below the district average for Hispanic/Latino students, they were at or above this average in the other three constructs. The Black students at this school reported at or above the district average for their subgroup in all four constructs.

Looking at the data on the SES for the study schools disaggregated by grade level allows us to consider the information through a different lens. Table 20 shows the percentage of students at the study schools who responded positively to the SEL questions on the SES disaggregated by grade level. The table also shows the district average for the same data disaggregated by grade level. Although students across the district did show growth between ninth and 12th grade on all of the constructs, the growth was small and might be explained by maturity. Students at Blue H.S. improved in all four constructs; they showed an average growth of 14.75 percentage points, with the biggest gain in social awareness. This is interesting because social awareness is an area that the policies and practices at the school strongly support. Students at Purple H.S. also showed growth in all four constructs, with an average gain of 6.25 percentage points. Green H.S. students only showed growth in two of the constructs, but the growth in these two was greater than the district average. Red H.S., which was still struggling when the survey

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was administered, only showed growth in self -efficacy, and it was the same growth

demonstrated by the district average. It is important to note that these data do not reflect growth

in a single group of students, that is, the increases do not imply growth over time for individual

students. It is still interesting to note that the growth demonstrated by these cohorts of students

was larger than the growth of the cohorts in the district as a whole. Although these data only

capture one administration of the survey, it is interesting to consider the possible relation

between the growth across the grade levels and the support provided by the study schools.

Table 20

2018 Student Reponses to SEL Construct Questions on SES Disaggregated by Grade Level

School

their educational experience. Meaningful reform, or *reculturing* of schools requires that educators develop a deeper understanding of what works for students (Friend & Caruthers, 2012; Mitra, 2008).

Summary of RQ3

An analysis of the SES shows that the results of the survey appear to be both valid and reliable. This being the case, the fact that there is a difference between how students of color on average versus students of color at the district schools report their social emotional skills is significant. It seems that the SEL support provided by the study schools improves student outcomes in SEL. Students at the study schools reported above average results on the SES questions on the SES consistently over the last 4 years. Additionally, cohorts of students at the study schools seem to have larger than average gains in SEL compared to those gains seen on average in the district.

Chapter Summary

As depicted in Figure 10, several themes emerged from the study. The study schools provide direct instruction in SEL. This instruction is provided in advisory periods or is a part of regular instruction. The schools all prioritized positive relationships with adults and peers. The teachers and school leaders mentioned how important it was that the students feel connections with them and with their peers. The schools all used student voice to inform their practices around SEL. All used data from the SES in PD to inform instruction. With the support of school leaders, the teachers integrated SEL into academic instruction, making connections between the SEL competencies and academic content wherever possible. All schools made an effort to provide a supportive learning environment, utilizing restorative discipline practices. The schools recognized the need for trauma-informed practice to counter not only adverse experiences in the

home, but also the issues of inequity that their students face in their communities. Schools

addressed the needs of students of color by acknowledging the impact of racial inequality and

providing students with skills and strategies to address it.

Figure 10

Components of a Comprehensive SEL Program

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter will provide a summary and discussion of the study's findings by research question and discuss any unanticipated results found. It will then discuss the implications of the findings for both policy and practice, as well as for research and theory. The chapter will then summarize areas for future research.

Summary and Discussion of Results

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, what are the policies and practices of these schools specifically related to providing social emotional supports to students? The data from both document analysis and interviews show that the study schools have several policies and practices in common. School personnel demonstrated monetary commitment to and emphasis on the practices. SEL was not considered an additional burden, but rather of key importance for supporting student academics and well-being.

Theme 1 Make SEL a Priority. First, administrators made SEL a priority at their schools and supported teachers in implementation. Because schools are always struggling to find time and money, the fact that these schools have leveraged resources to support SEL is important. SEL was part of the school budget plan, and staff time and resources were allocated to ensure that it happened. PD on SEL to build teacher and staff capacity was ongoing and integrated into other topics all year. Teachers understood the importance of SEL. Because of their training and support, teachers provided direct instruction in SEL and integrated SEL into content instruction.

Theme 2: Build School Community. Second, activities to build school community for staff were present at all sites. These were not add-on programs or a fad; rather, they were built

into ongoing PD and reflective of values the leaders had declared. School leaders recognized the importance of providing support to staff to work on their own SEL. The schools worked to elevate student voice and build school wide community. To varying degrees, the leaders at the study schools provided opportunities for the teachers and staff to build community through retreats and staff circles throughout the year. The schools addressed adult SEL by providing both PD and opportunities for all adults on campus to develop their own SEL competencies.

Theme 3 Acknowledge Student Voice. Third, the study schools acknowledged the importance of student voice. Student voice is used to not only inform the adults' actions, but also empower students to lead the work with their peers. In addition, staff on campus recognize the power of not simply encouraging student voice but making it an integral part of the school decision-making process in regard to instructional practice, intervention, and curricular choices. The staff at each school was familiar with the results of the SES because PD time was allotted for this analysis. Students were active in promoting SEL among their peers through leading assemblies or peer mentoring programs. Students at Blue H.S. were also asked to provide feedback regarding school policy, instructional practice, and curricular choices. Practices at Blue H.S. moved toward what Friend and Caruthers (2012) called reculturing by using school policy and instructional practices to establish a counter-discourse to hegemonic teaching and elevate voice.

Theme 4: Acknowledge and Address Trauma. Fourth, participants at all four schools acknowledged the damage that childhood trauma causes. SEL is not seen as a burden, but rather as a valuable tool that allows school staff to speak to and analyze with students the experiences they and their communities experience. It became a way to help students understand the world and their role in dealing with these very real influences on their lives. Again, SEL was not used

to determine deficits, but rather to build on existing assets to empower students. As a result, the schools understand the need for SEL. Because they understand that ACEs influence children's ability to self-regulate, they understand the importance of teaching self-management skills. Discipline policy at the schools reflects the belief that students need to learn and practice these skills. When behaviors that disrupt instruction happen, these policies allow adults to provide support to help students to understand the source of the behavior. These policies also help teachers and staff to understand their own role in these incidents. School staff recognize the importance of co-regulation and modeling. If adults expect students to stay calm, they must model non-reactive behavior and practice strategies to de-escalate situations that could result in negative behaviors. The schools also acknowledged that the self-efficacy of students of color was affected by adverse community experiences and institutional racism. Lastly, rather than simply acknowledging that systemic racism exists, the schools sought to help the students understand its impact and learn how to address the effects of racism.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, How do leaders in these schools describe their approach to providing social emotional support for their students? How do leaders assess their own perspectives, attitudes, decision-making and actions toward diverse student populations? To what do they attribute their schools' higher than average SEL scores?

Theme 1: Leaders Acknowledge Importance of SEL. Leaders at each of the schools described SEL as critical, identifying it as being fundamental to what they did as leaders. Interviews with school administrators showed that deliberate decisions to elevate SEL were the result of the leaders' vision for education. The administrators felt that their acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by students of color contributed to their decisions to allocate resources for

SEL. Further, they felt that the policies and practices that shaped the climate and culture of their schools contributed to their students reporting above average scores in SEL.

Theme 2: Understanding the Systemic Nature of Racism. Teachers and principals at each school believe that students of color have internalized beliefs about their ability to succeed and that this impacts their performance at school. They acknowledged that students of color have grown up in a system that makes it necessary for SEL to be supported explicitly in order for them to be successful and talked about intentionally building resilience in these students. The schools demonstrated a commitment to equity and, to varying degrees, practiced transformative SEL. They use restorative practices instead of traditional discipline. They understand that traditional authoritarian disciplinary practices only exacerbate the issues that their students are facing. They provide instruction and practice in the skills that underlie the SEL competencies. Acknowledging that students had internalized this perception and understanding these dynamics allowed the schools to create environments that counteract these perceptions and build students' social emotional skills These schools deliberately target these needs and used SEL to understand these needs. They did not blame students or see them as not having assets. They felt their role was to expand the awareness of what they are managing and be able to mitigate these additional stressors.

Another aspect of this theme was the work the schools did to increase student agency. They talked about the need to build agency in students of color. The schools provide a supportive environment and direct instruction in SEL in order ensure that their students are successful. The principal of Blue H.S. summed up what the researcher learned from school leaders nicely:

Here is what say to students. We—societally—have taken choices away from you, but here's the secret, …there are some tools to work through a system that's trying to get in

your way. We want them to understand the tools that have been used against them. It gives them a greater capacity, moving forward, as students of color all of our students, undocumented, queer, I'd like them to leave our school with the tools to combat the things that have been in their way.

It is extremely clear that the leaders in this school acknowledge institutional racism, the students' internalization of negative stereotypes, and the belief that they could and should address it. Rather than dismissing it as an unavoidable fact of life, they embraced it as an imperative mission in their work as educators, and more importantly in establishing effective school cultures for the students they serve. Leaders at each of the study schools saw SEL as a way to address the needs they recognize in their students and their staff that are not met with a more traditional approach.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, What does an analysis of student responses in these schools show in terms of social emotional support provided by their schools? What do students report of their experience? This study was conducted because the researcher noticed that the students at some schools did not follow the pattern across the district of students of color reporting lower social emotional skills than White or Asian students. The students at these schools appear to have the social emotional skills that their peers at other sites seem to lack. Further, the researcher also looked at the standardized test results for the study schools and found that there were also patterns of higher academic achievement at the sites. We know that student self-efficacy affects academic outcomes, and we also know that students with good self-management skills are more likely to succeed in school. It seems that the positive outcomes in SEL resulted from the positive

school culture and specific support provided by the study schools, which perhaps translated to an increase in academic achievement.

It is also important to note that the researcher looked at results for these schools over time and found that the results held steady for several years. The schools in the study were above the district average on all or most of the SEL constructs measured for several years of surveys. The culture that developed at these sites was a result of an ongoing commitment to SEL. Not only do students at the study schools report having stronger social emotional skills, but also the difference between the reported skills of ninth grade and 12th grade students at the study schools was greater than the district average. As seen in Table 17, students in the study schools showed greater growth in their self-reported social emotional skills across grade levels than the district average for these results. Of particular note was the growth in social awareness at three of the study schools where results on this construct grew an average of 12 points versus the district average of 5.

The research looked at the wording of the questions on the survey and found that although the questions were found to be both valid and reliable, they pointed out a deeper issue. Students of color at most schools reported lower social emotional skills. They do not feel that they have the skills that the SES measures. The question is why? Do they report not having them because they have internalized the perception that they do not have them? One theme that the interview participants brought up was their feeling that students' self-perception was shaped by the messages they received both in school and through the media. They all mentioned wanting to provide students with support to counter this message. The data show that this support appears to have a positive impact on the students' social emotional skills. What does become clear from these results is that schools can have a strong influence on how students perceive themselves.

Research supports the connection between SEL and academic and other life outcomes, indicating that improved social emotional skills lead to both better academic outcomes and more positive life results.

Given the potential benefits, particularly for students in vulnerable subgroups, it is imperative to continue to investigate how students and schools can be supported in developing the capacity to support these traits. This study looked at schools where students perceive their own skills in SEL to be above the average of students across the district over several years. It allowed for an exploration of the policies and practices at the identified schools to determine if these policies or practices increased students' social emotional skills. Ninety percent of the students at the schools in this study were students of color, and 90% qualify for reduced or free lunch. The average household income in their communities was $17,000 below the average for the state. By all accounts, these students would be predicted to be struggling, yet they were not. The students at these schools had test scores that were above the district and state average in ELA and the schools have a 90% graduation rate. The schools demonstrated a commitment to providing SEL support to their students through specific and consistent policies and practices. The role of student voice was critical here. The study schools used student voice to guide their practice. The difference between the district wide results of the SES and the results at the study schools helps us to understand how the impact of race must be addressed at our schools. The district wide results show that students of color see themselves differently. The experience of students of color as *other*, as different from the dominant European American, culture seems to influence their self-perception. Teachers at the study schools spoke of how their students were constantly surrounded by negative and distorted images of themselves. Rather than teach these students to acculturate, they instead sought to teach them to understand the impact of these

experiences. The teachers and school leaders used SEL to counter the students' internal narratives and build their sense of agency, identity, and belonging.

Discussion of Unexpected Findings

The study also provided some unexpected findings. The results support the recommendations of two state-level SEL guidance documents. The connection between cultural proficiency and SEL also became more evident as this study progressed. Each of these findings is elaborated further subsequently.

The researcher did not anticipate that the results of the study would support two recent state-level documents that were produced to provide statewide guidance with regard to SEL. As mentioned previously, in 2016, a group of stakeholders was tasked by the CDE to provide guidance as to how the state should proceed with regard to SEL. As discussed in Chapter 2, the result of that work was a document that identified what the CDE accepted as Guiding Principles for SEL (see Appendix B; CDE, 2018). In 2019, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the President of the California State School Board, and the First Partner revisited this work and asked two educational consulting firms to produce a report that reflected both the state of SEL in California and stakeholder recommendations for where the work should go (see Appendix C). The recommendations of the Advance SEL in CA were also discussed previously.

The findings of this study align with these documents. The first three guiding principles and the corresponding Advance SEL recommendations are reflected in this study. Policy that enables districts and schools to use funds to support whole child education, including SEL, should be implemented. This study found that a focus on aspects of education beyond pure academics seemed to improve SEL outcomes. Educators must also recognize that equity must be addressed and the voices of all stakeholders, including students, must be included in decisions

around education. The schools that were above the district average in SEL all focused on equity and lifting up student voice. The findings support the notion that we should work to build the SEL capacity of adults and students. All four schools were intentional in providing PD on SEL to their teachers and providing explicit instruction in SEL to their students.

The researcher did not anticipate the inextricable connection between cultural proficiency and SEL. Cultural proficiency is defined as "the policies and practices of an organization or the values and behaviors of an individual that enable that agency or person to interact effectively in a diverse environment" (Lindsey et al., 2018, p.16). Cantor et al. (2019) posited that cultural competence and responsiveness can address the impacts of institutionalized racism, discrimination, and inequality; promote the development of positive mindsets and behaviors; and build self-efficacy in all students, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. SEL provides tools to address cultural proficiency in schools. By integrating SEL practices into classrooms and schools, teachers and other staff can develop more trusting and supportive relationships with their students. SEL also can help adults reflect on their own social and emotional competencies and the different ways in which they engage with students. Practices that develop the SEL construct of social awareness also support cultural proficiency.

The pandemic and social unrest in 2020 have made the need to address issues of equity and social justice even more critical. Teachers and leaders at the study schools made explicit reference to utilizing SEL to level the playing field for students of color. What has emerged is the need to ensure that we are not using a deficit lens to identify what social emotional skills students of color are lacking, but rather understanding the proficiency that school personnel require in order to address these issues in the school environment. SEL becomes the fulcrum of understanding the student experience, identifying needs, and providing support for students

experiencing inequity. It is a purposeful tool in switching from deficit-focused thinking to acknowledging assets and restructuring beliefs and behaviors to truly and effectively educate students of color.

Implications for Practice and Policy

SEL is a rapidly expanding field, with many voices, researchers, and perspectives seeking to understand and build practical applications in the field. There is a need to separate what is merely fashionable, or conceivably profitable, from the factors and practices that truly have an impact on student achievement. What has become clear is that the focus on SEL is appropriate and relevant, and it is also important to understand the conditions in which it flourishes. This study aimed to go directly to the source itself: student voice. This study used student self-reported scores on the SES to understand if there were schools excelling in SEL work. Finding such cases, the study examined what the school teams at these sites were doing to support their students. The results of this study support the use of the policies and practices employed by these schools. This study highlighted the influence and power of adults on school campuses to actually establish transformative SEL school communities. This study adds to the literature on SEL. The research looked at longitudinal data, examining schools where students reported above average results on a survey of social emotional skills over several consecutive years. Additionally, the study was able to take a deeper look at the relationship between student race and student perception of social emotional skills.

Implications for Research and Theory

The following are some of the observations from this study that have implications for research and theory. The school staff teams in this study alluded to a strong link among transformative SEL practices and social justice, access and equity, and cultural proficiency. It

might be beneficial to look as these all of these practices as part of transformative SEL rather than separate sets of strategies to improve student outcomes.

SEL is a set of skills that educators verbalize, practice, and support through their beliefs, everyday actions, and practices. SEL should not be thought of as an individualized intervention to address student deficits, but as a universal practice for all students. As such, districts should ensure that all teachers and staff are familiar with SEL. Districts should also consider adopting SEL curricula to provide direct instruction in social emotional skills. They should provide PD opportunities to ensure that teachers understand the connections among work in equity, cultural proficiency, and SE. PD should also include a deep understanding of how to integrate SEL into content instruction. SEL is not one more item on the plate, it is the plate; it is a way to ensure that all educators understand the significance of placing Maslow before Bloom. We must first address student's physical and emotional needs of before we can expect them to be ready to learn. This study suggests several specific areas, detailed subsequently, that should be considered in order to address students' social emotional needs. The conclusions of this study have serious implications for school systems, university programs, districts, and schools.

Resources

Participating schools all prioritized SEL by leveraging resources to support it. In order to for a comprehensive SEL program to work, schools and districts must devote both time and money. Time and funding must be allocated for PD, SEL instruction, and assessment. In addition, there should be infrastructure investment in building understanding across school districts how the investment in SEL is supporting academic and learning outcomes. Essentially, SEL is not another task teachers need to complete, but rather how we as a educational system must support the development of our students? Are our policies and approaches conducive to

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building these skills? Building this understanding takes time, commitment, and allotted fiscal resources. Untangled the beliefs and assumptions that built the current inequitable structures requires investment.

Pre-Service and In-Service Professional Development

As our understanding of SEL grows, there is a need for SEL to be seen as a foundational knowledge for educators, administrators, and school personnel. It must be a focus and specific emphasis in university course work, credentialing, and induction programs, and in ongoing in-service PD. Particularly because this is an ever-growing field, with understanding being built literally year-by-year, if not day-by-day, it must be the focus of ongoing inquiry. As the field adopts more SEL practices, our understanding of what works, for whom, under what conditions also grows. In the field, educators must become part of this dialogue and central to the ongoing transformation required of today's schools. The relationship between academic/learning outcomes has to be understood and delineated clearly not only for teachers, but also for school leaders and support personnel. All personnel who provide educational services need foundational training, particularly those making decisions regarding policies and practices at schools. The schools in the study prioritized ongoing PD in SEL. Institutions providing teacher and administrative credentialing courses of study might consider incorporating coursework that develops an understanding of trauma informed practices and SEL into their programs. Districts and schools should integrate learning about SEL into their ongoing PD plans.

School Climate and Culture

Discipline policy and school activities at the study schools reflected an understanding of the importance of the impact of climate and culture on student learning. Schools should implement restorative practices and discipline policies that recognize that behaviors that interrupt

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learning are often a result of students' physical or emotional needs not being met. School activities that lift up student voice and encourage a sense of belonging should be prioritized. Schools and school systems that aspire to ensure their students thrive must address the root causes of disruptive behaviors. Emphasizing social emotional skills is a preventive measure and provides true alternatives to punitive and punishment-geared practices. SEL provides students tools to express, acknowledge, and, if necessary, manage their emotions. It also provides school leaders the opportunities to assess and understand the implications of traditional discipline practices and inform new policies and practices. Understanding the role of SEL in school/system wide development allows of the establishment of preventive and fostering practices rather than reactive models of student discipline.

SEL Integration and Direct Instruction

Teachers at the students' schools provided direct instruction in SEL competencies and integrate it into their core content instruction. Seeing SEL as a nice add on, something to address if time permits within the instructional day, is a belief that needs to be challenged. SEL is an essential element of academic success that helps foster the skills students need to learn and thrive Teachers need support, guidance, and further training in creating opportunities within the classroom to cultivate students' inter- and intrapersonal skills on a regular basis. Doing so will allow for the building or rebuilding of neural pathways that develop executive function during the school day. Potentially, it could provide an opportunity for such healing on a daily basis. In addition, school administrators, coaches, paraprofessionals to develop an understanding of how to support this integration, and the daily classroom behaviors which support this work. This works toward the acknowledgement that a student's SEL development is crucial to their academic growth.

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System-Wide Integration and Assessment

The schools in the study used the data from the SES as a part of a cycle of continuous improvement. Educators tend to value what they measure. Districts and schools should require that students' social emotional skills be assessed at least once a year. These assessments should not be used as a weapon to criticize students or schools for deficits, but as a way to build assets so that this information might inform practice. Figure 10, presented in the previous chapter, reflect the recommendations for a comprehensive SEL program based upon the findings of this study. The components build upon each other and the program is intended to be cyclical in nature, with an analysis of SEL assessments informing ongoing PD (See Figure 10).

Figure 10

Components of a Comprehensive SEL Program
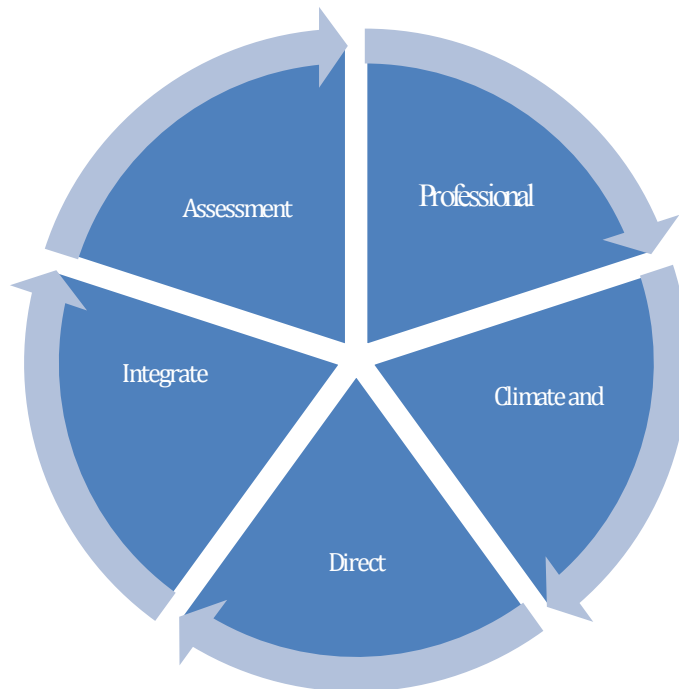
Limitations of Study

The research design has some limitations. The researcher did not specifically write the quantitative question items, so the phrasing of these survey items was determined by the CORE data collaborative. The questions were tested rigorously to ensure both reliability and validity (Gehlbach & Hough, 2018). Because the data set is extant, the researcher had no control as to how the surveys were administered at the school sites, and it is not clear if all students understood the questions in the same way. Because the schools asked to participate in this study

were selected based upon this data obtained through the SES, this could be a concern. The researcher did exclude schools where the survey was administered to less than 70% of the students. The position that the researcher holds in the district could have presented a limitation to this study, but the researcher did not work directly with any of the interview subjects during the time of the study. The practices identified in this study seem to lead to better outcomes in SEL, but it is important to note that no specific causal relationship was established.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of the study could lead to additional research in several areas. As mentioned in the literature review, some question the use of models of good practice or outliers as a sound research method (Thrupp, 1999). The schools in this study were above the district average in SEL, but there are also schools where students report outcomes that fall significantly below the district average. Perhaps schools that have average or lower results on the survey for social emotional skills should be studied to determine if the policies and practices at such schools differ from those used at the schools in this study.

The study relied on the voluntary participation and willingness of interviewees to share their accounts of the school practices. The interviewees who agreed to participate were not equally knowledgeable of or articulate about the subject of the study. They were passionate about the SEL work they were doing with their students, but perhaps additional research could look at teachers who identify as experts in the field of SEL.

The study found that the leaders at the schools understood the value of SEL and elevated its use at their sites. Additional research might try to gain additional understandings in this area. How does understanding SEL inform school leaders and their practices? How does understanding SEL inform decision-making practices and policies on a school site? What are the

implications for district support of administrators? What are the implications for administrator preparation programs?

The research also found that teachers at the study schools used SEL in their instructional practices, and in their curricular decisions. Further research might examine these additional questions. What are the implications for teacher support and PD? What are the implications for teacher preparation programs? What might the implications be for teacher retention?

Although the results of the SES are disaggregated by different subgroups, this study focused on differences between White and Asian students and other students of color. Future studies might examine SEL outcomes for other vulnerable subgroups such as foster youth, English learners, students in special education, and LGBTQ youth, as well as SEL outcomes for boys versus girls at different grade levels or grade spans.

Summary and Conclusions

Urban school districts continue to struggle to create access and equity, and social emotional indicators are an essential component of solving this problem. Given the unprecedented events of 2020 and 2021, meeting the needs of vulnerable student populations is even more critical. SEL is emerging as an area of focus for educators who are committed to addressing issues of equity and access. Although SEL's genesis stems from concerns of mental and physical health, it has slowly and deliberately begun to expose fissures in the understanding of instructional policies and practices. At the onset SEL appeared to be a helpful tool that could be added to school practices. Some school or districts adopted practices that encouraged connection, whereas others purchased curricula developed by private companies. These disparate pieces are not enough. We need to develop a broad understanding of the multidimensionality of SEL. It is not just a program, nor is it just a shift in school climate. SEL is not an add-on that

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educators may attend to if they can. SEL is a perspective that needs to be embedded and explored through direct instruction, integrated curricular activities, assessment, intervention, and discipline policies. The field of SEL is now establishing itself as a central tenet that must inform and be fully integrated into everyday thinking and behavior in school communities.

It was the intent of this study to focus on what works, for whom, from the student's perspective. Students' voices resonate clearly, because they are the ones who are most affected, and they must be heard as SEL moves forward. Results of the study revealed what adults can do and are doing to make education work for all students. What has become abundantly clear is that the adults on these campuses have made a commitment to understanding the forces that are creating the inequity, without blaming students. They concentrated on examining the assumptions, beliefs, policies, and practices they were unwittingly using, and adjusting, if not completely redrafting, the approach to their work.

As the field continues to expand and grow, hopefully my study will allow us to understand the multidimensionality of SEL. The conclusions of this study reemphasize the need to focus on student voice and academic outcomes. According to respondents, by embracing SEL, policies and practices were changed, which altered the culture of their schools. SEL has truly transformative capabilities, if employed by educators that have both will and the drive. Changing the trajectory for vulnerable students can and is being done, as evidenced by the schools in this study. If educators truly wish to close the achievement gap, creating flourishing healthy school communities and helping students realize their place in the world, it can, has, and should be done. All that is needed is the will and the targeted use of resources to make it happen for all students.

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APPENDIX A

Los Angeles Unified School District

2015-2020 School Experience Survey: Secondary Students,

Social Emotional Learning Constructs

First, we'd like to learn more about your behavior, experiences, and attitudes related to school. Please answer how often you did the following during the past 30 days.
During the last 30 days

APPENDIX B

California's Social Emotional Learning Guiding Principles
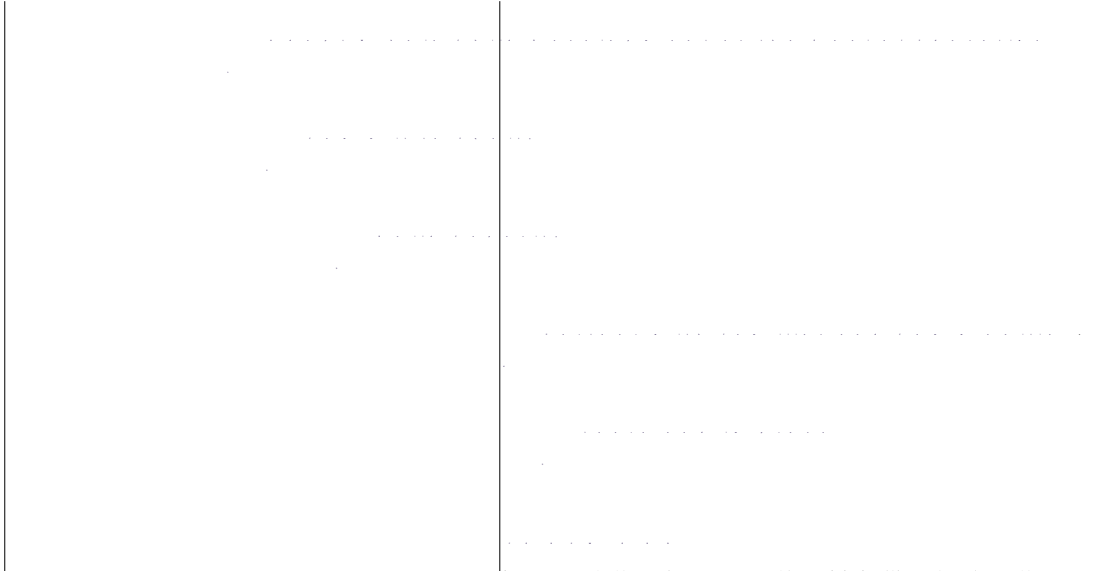
INTRODUCTION

To achieve the California Department of Education's mission and vision, our schools must support every child's unique journey to fulfill their potential by providing:

- an equitable, culturally responsive education,
- academic, social, and emotional learning, and
- safe, engaging, inclusive environment.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social and emotional learning 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." Importantly, all learning is contextual and relationship- driven and SEL can serve as a lever to enhance equity, build positive climate and culture, and foster a sense of belonging among all community members.

The following Guiding Principles are designed to build on the implicit and explicit SEL practices already happening in many schools and to promote the intentional use of evidence and research-based practices to guide decision-making.

These Guiding Principles seek to empower local stakeholders to continue to advance SEL in ways that meet the needs of their specific contexts and populations.

1 Adopt Whole Child Development as the Goal of Education

Take a systems approach to promoting student academic, social, and emotional learning, physical well-being, and college, career, and civic life readiness. [5] Name SEL as not a "nice to have," but a "must have" to ensure student success in school, work, and community.

A. Systems change:
- Embed and promote SEL across all education and youth development systems and structures, including but not limited to: vision statements, strategic plans, budgetary decisions, staffing, professional learning, school-wide policies, curricular adoption criteria, instructional practices, and instructional quality assessments. [6]

B. Diverse and inclusive leadership teams:
- Systems change is most effectively driven by bringing together educator, student, family and community member representatives of varied gender, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. [7]

C. Social and emotional skills development:
- Students and adults must have opportunities to practice, demonstrate, and reinforce social and emotional skills within the context of supportive relationships. [8] Additionally, social and emotional skills instruction and integration into academic content areas contribute to a comprehensive approach. [9]

D. Student-centered discipline policies and practices:
- Discipline policies that are aligned with promoting social and emotional growth, as opposed to punishment and exclusion, have been shown to yield the strongest student outcomes, while offering the opportunity to repair harm and build community. [10, 11, 12]

E. Climate and culture:
- SEL and school climate are interrelated and reciprocal. A positive school climate and culture can be developed when community members are building strong social and emotional skills. [13, 14]

2 Commit to Equity

All students must have opportunities to build SEL skills and receive an assets-based educational experience that is personalized, culturally relevant and responsive, and intentionally addresses racism and implicit bias. Use practices that build on the existing strengths of students, educators, families, and communities.

A. Address the opportunity gap:

- Opportunities to build SEL skills must be offered to all students and not be determined by race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, socioeconomic status, documentation status, and/or ZIP code.

B. Ensure representation:

- When the educator workforce is representative of, and connected to, the student body, academic, social, and emotional outcomes improve for students. [15, 16, 17]

C. Student and adult-led:

- SEL efforts are most effective when schools are participatory and engaging and diverse student voices are included in decision-making and improvement efforts. [18, 19]

D. Healing-informed:

- Educational experiences must seek to counteract the institutional and structural biases and related traumas that often drive inequitable outcomes for students. [20]

3 Build Capacity

Build the capacity of both students and adults through an intentional focus on relationship-centered learning environments and by offering research-based learning experiences that cultivate core social and emotional competencies. [21, 22]

A. Positive relationships and belonging:

- To cultivate resilience to adversity and build the foundation for social and emotional growth, ensure every student and adult feels that they belong, have value, and have a network of caring peers to rely on. [23, 24, 25, 26]

B. Student and adult competencies

- Identify specific, research-based social and emotional competencies to address, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible-decision making, or related pro-social mindsets and affective skills. Ensure common definitions of competencies are used. [27]

C. Developmental standards:

- To bring intentionality to practice, identify SEL teaching and learning standards or indicators that are responsive to student strengths and needs. [28]

D. Pre-service training and ongoing professional learning:

- Schools of education and ongoing professional learning should address student social and emotional development as well as personal growth strategies, including addressing bias, among those working with children, such as educators and other adult staff. [29, 30]

4 Partner with Families and Community

Maximize the resources of the entire school community, including expanded learning opportunities, early learning and care programs, and family and community partnerships, to advance SEL and student well-being. [31]

A. Family engagement:
- Provide families with options for meaningful contributions to, and participation in, their child's learning experience to build respectful, mutually beneficial relationships. [32, 33]

B. Expanded learning:
- Establish shared goals across all youth serving settings, such as after school programs and summer learning programs, to leverage capacity and increase shared responsibility for positive student outcomes. [34]

C. Early learning:
- Consider the inclusion of early learning and care programs as SEL systems are developed. [35, 36]

D. Community partnerships:
- Address the basic needs of students and families, including social and emotional well-being, through partnerships with community-based organizations and other local stakeholders. [37, 38]

5 Learn and Improve

Adopt continuous improvement practices and use evidence to guide decision-making while aiming to enhance the quality of student social and emotional learning opportunities. Use data to inform improvement of instructional and school practices, not for accountability purposes. [39, 40]

A. Implementation plans and progress monitoring:
- To drive high quality implementation, conduct comprehensive planning, monitor implementation, and adopt policies and practices which highlight places where additional resources or supports are most necessary. [41]

B. Measurement:
- Educators working to improve students' social and emotional skills should track linked outcomes such as school climate and the quality and quantity of opportunities for students to learn and practice social and emotional skill building in both the school day and expanded learning settings. Educators that choose to directly assess students' social and emotional skills should use evidence-based, improvement-focused tools. [42]

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California's Social and Emotional Learning
Guiding Principles

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APPENDIX C

Advance SEL in California
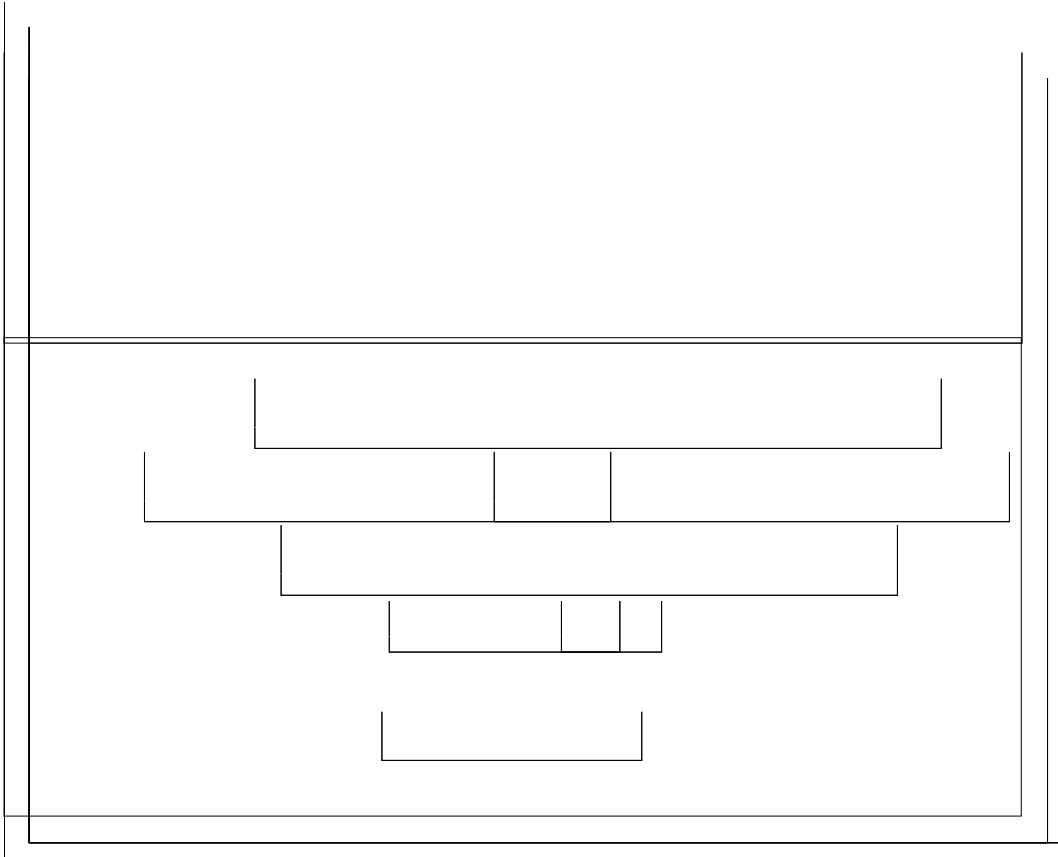
Our work comes at a critical time of change in American history, challenging us to seize the moment and make good on our promises to improve the lives of _all_ students in California

The Challenge: Unprecedented levels of trauma and social upheaval

Our children are facing unprecedented levels of trauma and social upheaval in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the national consciousness raising and civil unrest around the ongoing crisis of racism. Necessary stay-at-home orders and social distancing practices are forcing educators, schools, districts and states to rethink fundamental structures of schooling, throwing into sharp relief the inequities already inherent in the way we educate our children. Families are facing upheavals in childcare, needing to educate their children at home and trying to negotiate an unclear landscape for returning to school in the fall.

The Opportunity: Prioritize SEL with a clear racial and social justice focus

educationfirst

2

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California can lead the country by harnessing this challenge as an opportunity to prioritize social and emotional learning (SEL), integrating SEL more fully into its education system and supports for all students. We have leaders who support this work and we have already taken some steps towards implementation of SEL across the state. But more needs to be done to integrate SEL throughout the system and build a coherent framework defined by clear goals, aligned funding and policies, equitable and diverse stakeholder engagement and adult capacity building. SEL has always been important. The needs of the moment create urgency to advance it much further than we yet have.

Advance SEL in California launched to understand challenges related to SEL implementation and gather communitydeveloped recommendations to address those challenges

Project Goal

3

educationfirst

Education First and Beyond Differences, supported by a generous grant from the Marin Community Foundation, partnered to support widespread stakeholder engagement in conversations about how to spur action on social and emotional learning (SEL) in California. **Our goal was to hear perspectives on SEL from educators and other community stakeholders across the state, to provide leaders and the field with a clear picture of priorities and actionable recommendations for advancing SEL, building on an established foundation.**

BEYOND DIFFERENCES

California Department of EDUCATION

Project **Partners**

Office of Governor
Office of the First Partner

The project engaged nearly 800 diverse California education

These sources informed the recommendations in this report

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stakeholders to gather perspectives on SEL practices, needs and goals

Stakeholder Interviews	We interviewed 18 educators, district	We launched a threeweek	July 2020
January 2020 We interviewed 10 state SEL leaders and SEL experts to gather an overall sense of CA's SEL implementation challenges and opportunities. **Community Partners** *January-May 2020*	leaders and community partners in five districts/counties in California to learn more about their SEL work. We identified three district/county partners to co-design our convenings and showcase their SEL work during the convenings. **WikiWisdom** **Crowdsourcing** *May-June 2020*	crowdsourcing event and heard from over 600 teachers, administrators, district leaders, board members, counselors and parents from across the state who joined a conversation about the role of SEL in their work, best practices and implementation challenges – see that report here. **Convening Series**	We hosted a series of three convenings for over 100 teachers, parents, students, school and district administrators, County Education leaders, state leaders, community members and SEL experts, to gather responses to the WikiWisdom report and additional thinking and ideas for how to advance SEL in California.

See appendix for list of interviewees

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We also reached out to the general public via social media campaign to gather input

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Social media engagement overview

Social media campaign overview. Followers and Engagement

Social Media Channel	Followers	Engagement
Facebook	218	548 Likes, Comments, and Shares
Twitter	260	895 Likes, 332 Retweets (w/o comments)
Instagram	263	721 Likes, 108 Comments

Campaign Reach Facebook: 16,456

Campaign Impressions Twitter: 153,450

Campaign Reach Instagram: 10,107

Total Likes: 1,926
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter

Total Comments: 168
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter

Total Shares: 552
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter

Social Media Campaign: Advance SEL in CA

Twitter is undoubtedly the best performer of engagement for the campaign. Instagram and Facebook served as spaces for WildWisdom/Convening participants, and social media audience, to share meaningful stories and successes about personal/school/community efforts to advance Social and Emotional Learning in California.

Social Engagement
Twitter: 44%
Instagram: 32%
Facebook: 24%

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See full social media report here.

The resounding message we heard: SEL is more important than ever – and racial equity must be part of those SEL conversations

The findings in this report are grounded in what we heard from nearly 2,000 educators, students, parents, and other stakeholders throughout this project. As COVID unfolded, these voices spoke with increasing urgency: SEL is more important than ever.

"We will not be returning to "normal" and we shouldn't. "Normal" was not accessible or equitable for everyone before COVID-19 and George Floyd's death. Education systems have a responsibility to adapt to the changing society. Social emotional learning can lead the way to this new world of inclusivity and belonging for all."

the new world that is unfolding before us.

rare opportunity to seize this moment to promote the understanding of schools as more than academic institutions."

"While we deplore the tragedies that have stemmed from both the virus and racism, we also see this time as a

Source of quotes: WhiWisdom report Advancing SEL Amid a Pandemic and a National Awakening to Systemic Racism

With new leaders championing education, California is well positioned to take action on SEL

Tony Thurmond was sworn in as the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction in January 2019. He took over a department filled with leaders in the Educator Excellence and Equity and the Expanded Learning Divisions committed to advancing SEL in the state.

With **Linda Darling-Hammond** as president of the State Board of Education, California has a leading national expert in the science of

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learning and development, and strong advocate for SEL, with a vision for creating equitable and empowering education for all of its children.

Office of the Governor Governor Gavin Newsom was sworn as the 40th Governor of California in January 2019 and is publicly committed to addressing inequities in

Office of the First

artner

California's public education system.

First Partner **Jennifer Siebel Newsom** is dedicated to breaking down barriers for our youth and supporting whole child development.

There is an opportunity to build on the momentum of new leadership and further signal SEL as a priority for the state

Recognizing the importance of SEL, California has worked to expand and prioritize SEL in schools

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Eight school districts, belonging to the CORE launched Expanded waiver from the USED which led them to develop a measurement system that includes survey-based measures of SEL

Partnership for Children & Youth Collaborating Learning 360°/365, which works with school districts to plan and implement SEL conditions to encourage and across the school day, afterschool and summer

California joined CASEL's adopted by the States Initiative, which helps SEAs create healthy lifestyles equip educators to promote SEL

The CDE SEL State The Health Team publishes California's Social and Emotional Learning Guiding Principles The CDE SEL State Team publishes Social and Emotional Learning in California: A Guide to Resources

CDE Initiatives & Guidance
CA Policy
District Initiative(s)
Field Initiative(s)

Framework is districts, receive a State Board of Education and focuses on and emotional wellbeing in students

ie California Department of Education (CDE) releases *California Preschool Learning Foundations* (Volume 1), which focuses on social and development of young children

healthy lifestyles four domains crucial for the learning and development as one of

| '02 | '08 | '11 | '13 | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 | '19 |

Proposition 49 passed the After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program helping to establish will expanded learning programs across the state; other areas,

Local Control Funding Formula passes, and all districts are required to produce a Local Control and Accountability Plan which must address,

CDE releases *A Blueprint for Great Schools Version 2.0*—the state's strategic plan for education—which explicitly mentions SEL as a priority; the California Scale-Up MTSS Statewide (SUMS) Initiative programs provide an opportunity to promote SEL

CDE awarded Orange County Department of Education a large grant to implement MTSS statewide which became emphasize restorative justice and SEL expanded learning school climate

Orange and Butte which established counties announced a pilot program to develop a training curriculum that among

Oakland Unified School District and Sacramento City Unified School District join CASEL's Collaborating Districts Initiative, school districts across the nation systematically integrate SEL into their work

Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, communicates intent to create interventions around adverse childhood experiences, and which helps create trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed education programs

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Although the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the SEL landscape

CDE launches a counseling coalition where counseling groups provide ad-hoc triage for students.

The 2020-21 state budget includes $5.3B in Learning Loss Mitigation funds for LEAs and $45M for county offices of education to potentially support a pilot SEL capacity-building training model.

The 2020 California MTSS Professional Learning Institute, part of the California Scale-Up MTSS Statewide (SUMS) Initiative, is cancelled due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 HITS

| Jan '20 | Feb '20 | Mar '20 | Apr '20 | May '20 | Jun '20 | July '20 | Aug '20 | Future |

LOCKDOWN / SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDERS ISSUED AROUND THE COUNTRY; SCHOOLS BEGIN SHUTTING DOWN

CDE launches a handful of campaigns that push for implicit bias training for adults and changing the narrative of cultural stereotypes that negatively impact students.

CDE recruits and selects members for State SEL 2.0 team to identify and disseminate best practices to provide social and emotional supports for students and educators, including practices to support one another during physical distancing.

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n California, with a focus on immediate needs

California has also enacted policies and initiatives that impact SEL at the state and local levels and the non-profit sector provides substantial support for policy, advocacy and programs

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Guidance and initiatives from the CDE advancing SEL

State policy advancing SEL

County and district visions and initiatives for SEL

Organizations that are working in policy, providing support, or engaged in program delivery

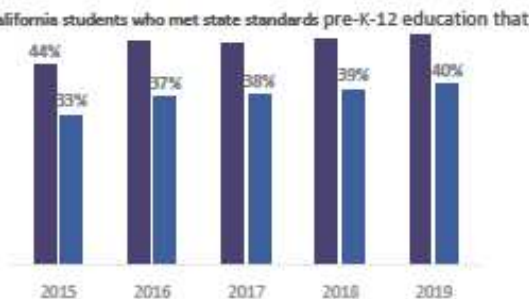Note: Picture is from EdSource and shows fifth-graders at Haight Elementary School in Alameda Unified School District.

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By deeply integrating SEL into the student experience statewide, California could raise student performance and reduce risk for failure

When SEL programming is implemented well, it raises student performance and reduces risk for failure. It leads to higher academic achievement, better social-emotional skills, improved attitudes about self, others and school, and positive classroom behavior.

The majority of California's students taking assessments are falling behind state standards—about half of students are behind in reading and only 4 in 10 students are proficient in math.

"Social, emotional, and academic development is an essential part of pre-K-12 education that can transform schools into places that foster academic excellence, collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, empathy and respect, civic engagement, and other skills and dispositions needed for success in the 21st Century."

Percentage of California students who met state standards

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	44%	49%	49%	50%	51%
	33%	37%	38%	39%	40%

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■ English ■ Math

Note: The chart above shows how well students are meeting grade-level standards on the English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments. The assessments are taken annually by students in grades 3-8 and grade 11, and therefore, only account for how "three million students are doing on the standards. Source(s): CalMatters (2019), Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011), The Aspen Institute (2017).

Unprecedented challenges demand bold action now, even though we are without perfect blueprints for the best next steps

Research suggests we are at risk for unprecedented levels of trauma and ongoing social and emotional problems

- A national survey, fielded by America's Promise Alliance and released in June 2020, suggested that only weeks into the pandemic **"students are experiencing a collective trauma."**

- We know from research on trauma and from the science of learning and development that **failure to attend to the wellbeing of children—and adults—will put children at wide scale risk for immediate and long term social, emotional and psychological harm**, and will inhibit learning and development.

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- Educators, parents and students across the state told us that **SEL is more important than ever to their well-being and their ability to learn and thrive**, even through these difficult times.

Our recommendations are designed to help California move on the opportunity and the challenge of advancing transformative SEL for all students starting now.

"Disasters last a really long time in the lives of children."
- Alice Fothergill, *The Children of Katrina*

Source(s): International Transformational Resilience Coalition (2020); The Lancet Psychiatry (2020); The Atlantic (2020).

Stakeholders agreed on four high-priority recommendations to advance SEL across the state

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Recommendation #1

5 strategies

Support recovery *now* and success in the *future* by making Transformative SEL the cornerstone of California's education system.

Recommendation #2

3 strategies

Emphasize training, support and development of the adults in the system from the beginning.

Recommendation #3

2 strategies

Work together coherently both within and between systems; Align SEL efforts at and between the state-, county-, and district-levels.

Recommendation #4

4 strategies

Invite, listen and lift-up.

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Recommendation #1: Support recovery *now* and success in the *future* by making Transformative SEL the cornerstone of California's education system

Our students, educators and families are experiencing **unprecedented challenges** – pandemic, historic racial inequities, increased economic pressure and social isolation – all at one time. When schools reopen – regardless of whether they are virtual or in-person – **reconnection, belonging, understanding and support will be even more critical** to helping them **recover** *now* and to ensuring their success as learners this year and well into the *future*.

"Why would we think students will thrive if their social and emotional needs aren't met? As an adult, I don't thrive if my social and emotional needs aren't met." – *WikiWisdom report*

"The death of George Floyd reminds us of the critical importance of having an SEL framework that leans into students' experiences, affirms students' identities and looks to build environments of trust and belonging that support inquiry, equity, problem solving, advocacy and curiosity. Our children and youth have the blueprint. They bring cultural richness and valuable experiences into our classrooms that can help us build positive school environments and school conditions for all. In fact, they show us time and time again tremendous examples of brilliance, resilience, determination, critical problem solving and the consideration of multiple perspectives." – *WikiWisdom report*

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ecommendation #2: Emphasize training, support and evelopment of the adults in the system from the eginning

A hard-learned lesson learned from SEL efforts over the past 30 years: developing adult SEL skills in those responsible for supporting students is crucial. The path to student wellbeing and readiness to learn is through the adults who interact with them. Counties, districts and schools must support and invest in adult health and well-being, and the development of adult social and emotional competencies, bias awareness, and understanding of trauma-informed and culturally-responsive practices, in order to create the culture, climate and relationships that enable effective learning and development for all students.

own understanding of SEL evolves so that, SEL becomes more and more the "how" we engage in content standards.

content standards." – *Convening Participant*

"I am most excited about the professional development on SEL for all staff admin, teachers and classified. I think it would be great if it is a requirement statewide." – *Convening Participant*

Click here to see the full recommendation with strategies and suggested actions

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| Rec #1 |
| Rec #2 |
| Rec #3 |
| Rec #4 |

"SEL is not just for students. It is for adults as well. We must first focus on

adult wellbeing so that the adults can focus on student wellbeing." – *Convening Participant*

Recommendation #3: Work together coherently: Align SEL efforts at the state-, county-, and district-levels

Too often, an alphabet soup of programs, frameworks and approaches exist in parallel, often duplicating efforts or working at cross purposes. In a time of crisis and scarce resources, and to drive long term sustainability, greater coherence can help focus communication and systems integration, reduce redundancies, and create stronger alignment across programs and funding streams. This can increase capacity and to scale SEL across the state without imposing a "one size fits all" approach. Explore working with the state MTSS lead (Orange County Office of Education) to implement this recommendation.

"[It's important] to work to ensure that SEL is reflected in our policies and practices and that it
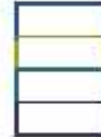
"[We need] districtwide coherence – horizontally and vertically – a common language, approaches, etc." – *Convening Participant*

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is clearly called out." – *Convening Participant*

"SEL standards that are developmentally appropriate to complement academic standards would support full integration." – *Convening Participant*

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Recommendation #4: Invite, listen and lift-up

Rec #1
Rec #2
Rec #3
Rec #4

Engage students, families, educators and community partners - with particular attention to **empowering underrepresented voices** - earlier in the process to identify challenges and **co-design**

elevating student voice and agency as well as taking an asset-based approach on their experiences during the twin **SEL solutions** in their schools.

crises." – *Convening Participant*

"Partnering with parents is the key. We also held parent classes to teach the parents the same curriculum that we are teaching the students. This way everyone is using the same language and is aware of what the signs or signals mean. This also bridges the home to school connection." – *WikiWisdom report*

"Listening to the students' perspective more, including the the conversation about their own experiences." – *Convening Participant*

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Our Advance SEL partners strongly support this work and plan to embed these recommendations into their ongoing conversations and planning at the state level

- We recognize that our state and nation are in a moment of economic recession and dwindling budgets. However, **the state's 2020-21 budget does include $5.3B for LEAs and $45M for County Offices of Education to potentially support much of the work outlined in these recommendations.**

- **The California Department of Education's State SEL Team 2.0**, a cross-section of stakeholders and practitioners tasked with amplifying SEL best practices, will **examine these recommendations over the coming year and identify an implementation timeline.**

These recommendations represent a commitment among leaders across the system to an ongoing, collaborative process on behalf of California's 6.2 million students - to continue

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seeking and identifying new or existing resources that support this work in the months and years ahead, and to seize opportunities that can be implemented now.

Our recommendations come at a **moment of unparalleled challenges for all school communities** across the state.

The **strategies and suggested actions target every level of the system** and include suggestions that can **inspire action now and over the long-term.**

We hope that educators, parents and students will **take up these suggestions in whatever way you can**, using what is available to you to **We must do it now.** benefit students the most. **We owe it to our students.**

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This is a beginning, not the end

Beyond Differences and the **SEL Alliance for CA** will take over the **#AdvanceSELinCA social media accounts** to continue the conversations and highlight student, parent and educator voices in this work.

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Visit Advance SEL in California on Social Media!

Twitter: @AdvanceSELinCA

Instagram: @AdvanceSELinCA

Facebook: @Advance Social Emotional Learning in California

See social media pages: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook

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Thank you!
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APPENDIX D

Letter to Participants

Date

Dear_____

Congratulations! Your school has been identified as an institution which demonstrated positive results on the school experience survey. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral research in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University. My research will be done under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Luschei. This letter will give you more information about the study.

Recent research tells us that students' social emotional skills are important for and predictive of academic success and positive life outcomes. Students of color tend to have lower SEL outcomes. The intent of my study is to examine practices at schools with significant minority populations where the student school experience survey results on the social emotional learning constructs were above the district average.

The study will focus on your school's ability to positively impact the social emotional development of students. I believe that because of your position at the school, you are best suited to speak to the success of your institution in this area.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve of interview of approximately **30-45 minutes** in length to take place at a mutually agreed upon location. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Interviews will take place after school/work hours. All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study. With your permission, however, anonymous quotations may be used. Only the researcher associated with the study will have access to the names associated with the transcripts. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in the study. I would like to assure you that the study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through IRB at Claremont Graduate University and the Research Unit at LAUSD. Of course, the final decision to participate in the study is up to you.

I hope that the results of the study are a benefit to the District, encouraging other schools to positively impact the social emotional development of their students. If you have additional questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in making a decision regarding participation, please contact me at ███████████ or by e-mail at ███████ ██████████. I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Ward-Roncalli, Doctoral Student, Claremont Graduate University.

APPENDIX E

Claremont Graduate University IRB Approval

Andrew Conway,
IRB Chair

APPENDIX F

LAUSD IRB Approval