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Social Emotional Competence in School Leaders

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Social Emotional Competence in School Leaders

by

Melanie Sanders

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership,

School Counseling & Sport Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the little girls who are told they can achieve anything they dream. You can. You will. You must.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables and Figures	ix
Abstract	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
Problem Statement.....	13
Purpose Statement.....	14
Research Questions.....	14
Overview of Theoretical Framework.....	15
Overview of Methodology.....	17
Significance of the Research.....	18
Organization of the Study	19
Chapter Summary	19
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	20
Part 1: Social Emotional Learning.....	20
Origin and Definition of Social Emotional Learning	20
Benefits of Social Emotional Learning.....	26
Common Criticism of Social Emotional Learning	27
Social Emotional Competence of Adults in Schools	30
Part 2: Leadership and Social Emotional Competence.....	34
Leadership SEC in the Business World.....	34
Social Emotional Competence of School Leaders.....	35
International Studies.	36
Teacher Perception of Leader SEC.....	37
Self and others' ratings.	38
Programming for school leader SEL.....	39
Measurement of school leader SEC.....	41
The Prosocial Leader.	41

Preparation of School Leaders	42
Future Research and Practice.....	46
Chapter Summary	48
Chapter 3: Methodology	50
Research Questions.....	50
Research Design	51
Site Selection	53
SEL Context.....	54
Participant Selection	55
Data Collection	59
Quantitative.....	60
Qualitative.....	61
Data Analysis	63
Quantitative.....	63
Qualitative.....	64
Rigor	66
Researcher’s Journal	67
Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns	67
Researcher Positionality	68
Chapter Summary	70
Chapter 4: Results	71
Quantitative Results	71
Leader Self-Assessment.....	73
Faculty and Staff Survey Results	80
Connections between leaders’ and others’ ratings.....	87
Quantitative Results for Qualitative Participants.....	94
Qualitative Results	97
Mrs. Brown	98
Mr. Aaron.....	103
Mrs. Carter	107
Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results	112

Chapter 5: Discussion	117
Introduction.....	117
Summary of the study	118
Discussion.....	119
Self-Awareness as a relative strength.	119
Need for balance of work life with personal renewal time	121
The importance of relationships.....	123
<i>Relationships with faculty and staff</i>	124
<i>Strong Peer Support</i>	125
<i>Mentorship</i>	126
Implications	128
Implications for the assessment and measurement of social emotional competence.	128
Implications for school leader preparation.....	128
Implications for the professional learning of school leaders.	129
Limitations	131
Future Research	132
Conclusion	133
References	136
Appendix A	145
Appendix B	148

List of Tables and Figures

Table	Title of Table	Page Number
3.1	Demographics for Leaders and the Schools They Lead.....	55
3.2	SEL Dimensions and Skills included in the assessment.....	57
4.1	School Leader Self and Others' Ratings.....	72
4.2	Descriptive Statistics for Self-Awareness.....	73
4.3	Descriptive Statistics for Self-Management.....	75
4.4	Descriptive Statistics for Responsible Decision-Making.....	77
4.5	Descriptive Statistics for Social Awareness.....	78
4.6	Descriptive Statistics for Relationship Skills.....	79
4.7	Descriptive Statistics for Self-Awareness (Faculty/ Staff Ratings).....	81
4.8	Descriptive Statistics for Self-Management (Faculty/ Staff Ratings).....	82
4.9	Descriptive Statistics for Social Awareness (Faculty/ Staff Ratings).....	83
4.10	Descriptive Statistics for Relationship Skills (Faculty/ Staff Ratings).....	84
4.11	Descriptive Statistics for Respons. Decision-Making (Faculty/ Staff Ratings)....	86
4.12	Leader Group A.....	88
4.13	Leader Group B.....	89
4.14	Leader Group C.....	89
4.15	Leader Group D.....	90
4.16	Highest Rated Indicators by Leaders and Others.....	90
4.17	Lowest Rated Indicators by Leaders and Others.....	92
4.18	Self and Others' Ratings for Three Leaders Interviewed.....	113

4.19 Grouping of Related Indicators (SFA, RS, and RDM).....114

4.20 Grouping of Related Indicators (SA and SM).....115

List of figures

Figure	Title of Figure	Page Number
1.1	CASEL’s Widely Used Framework Identifies Five Core Competencies.....	16
2.1	Relationship of SEL and SEC.....	25
2.2	Three-component Framework for SEL.....	30
2.3	The Prosocial Classroom Model.....	33
2.4	The Prosocial Leader.....	42
3.1	Explanatory Sequential Design.....	53

Abstract

School principals are responsible for the recruitment and retention of effective teachers, leading the instructional program, maintaining the climate and culture of the building, ensuring school safety, and improving student achievement, among other things. Social emotional learning (SEL) has become an important part of K-12 education and has been found to improve climate and culture, student achievement, long term student outcomes, and many other benefits. Research has been conducted on many of the student outcomes associated with SEL but there is limited literature in the area of the social emotional competence (SEC) of adults who work in schools, particularly school leaders. In this explanatory sequential mixed methods study, the social emotional competence of school leaders was explored through leader self-assessment, comparing their results to the ratings of their subordinates, and then interviewing selected leaders regarding their beliefs about the relationship between social emotional competence and leadership, as well as how they explain their own ratings and the congruence or dissonance between how they rate themselves and others' ratings of them. Findings point to the importance of leaders' self-awareness of their social emotional skills, the significance of leaders' relationships with subordinates, peers, and mentors, and the need for leaders to prioritize a balance between their work and personal lives.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) is an important part of K-12 public education and is supported by several federal and state policies and standards (CASEL, 2021; Mahoney, Greenberg & Weissberg, 2020; Office of Early Learning, 2019). For example, Florida has adopted SEL standards for early learning with the goal for children to “expand their capacities to recognize and express their own feelings, and to understand and respond to the emotions of others.” (Office of Early Learning, 2019, Domain-Social and Emotional Development)

Attending to SEL has been shown to benefit students in many ways such as improved behavioral and academic outcomes as well as long-term effects including higher rates of employability and lower rates of involvement with the justice system (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, McGarrah, & Khan, 2019; Schonert- Reichl, 2017). However, little attention has been placed upon the impact of the social emotional competence of teachers and those in school leadership positions (Bower, O’Connor, Harris, & Frick, 2018; CASEL, 2021; Stillman, Stillman, Martinez, Freedman & Jensen, 2018).

Some researchers have examined the role of the adults who work in the school setting (e.g. teachers, paraprofessionals, assistant principals and principals) and how their own personal social emotional competence (SEC) can influence their ability to provide modeling and instruction of SEL priorities to their students (Allbright, et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Recommendations from the available literature include that school district leaders and policymakers should focus on adult SEC as a way of improving the social emotional competence of students, teachers, and the health of the entire organization (Allbright et al., 2019; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). For example, recent studies have examined the connection between school

leaders' SEC and outcomes such as school achievement, climate, and teacher satisfaction (Allbright et al., 2019; Grobler & Conley, 2013). Grobler and Conley (2013) assert "school leaders need to be aware of the emotions they are feeling as these emotions influence what they think, do and say" (p. 201).

The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a leader in research and practice in the area of social and emotional learning. Founded in 1994 by researchers in the fields of psychology and education, educators, and philanthropists, CASEL seeks to identify evidence-based programming for SEL, promote implementation in schools and districts, and conduct research that examines the effects of SEL curriculum in schools (CASEL, 2021). CASEL recognizes the influence that district and school leaders have on the implementation of K-12 SEL programs and has developed recommendations for assessment and professional development in order to improve the social emotional competence of school leaders (CASEL, 2021). For instance, CASEL recommends that leaders explore their own social emotional competence while making sure to model social and emotional skills for both staff and students. In their *Guide to Schoolwide SEL*, CASEL provides protocols and practices for leaders to use in staff meetings and throughout the day as they strive to develop the social and emotional capacity of all stakeholders in schools (CASEL, 2021).

Problem Statement

Although lead researchers in the field agree that social emotional competence of school leaders is important, there are few studies in the extant literature that seek to understand how school leaders view their own SEC in relation to their leadership skills. Scholars point out a need for further research that explores how leaders can learn more about their own SEC as well

as considering how teachers feel about how leaders' SEC and how it influences their overall leadership ability (Bower et al., 2018; Stillman et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine the relationship between how school-based leaders in the K-12 public school system rate their own social emotional competence and how ratings of each leader's faculty and staff compare. This study also seeks to understand how leaders explain the role their own social emotional competence plays in their leadership, how they perceive and make sense of the differences between their own ratings and the ratings of their subordinates, and explore the support and resources needed in order to grow their social emotional competence.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this research:

1. What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?
2. What do current K-12 faculty and staff report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their leaders' social emotional competence?
3. What specific dimensions of social emotional competence are similar and different between self and others' ratings?
4. How does a school leader's self-assessment of their social emotional competence compare to the ratings of their subordinates in the organization?
5. How do current K-12 school-based leaders describe the interaction between their own social emotional competence and their position of leadership within their buildings?

Learning more about school leaders' own perceptions of their competence in social emotional areas as well as their beliefs about how SEC affects overall leadership will help to inform future research and leadership practice.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Conceptual and theoretical frameworks are tools used to inform a study. A theoretical framework is the use of theory to guide studies and is considered to be a vital part of all research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Similarly, a conceptual framework serves as a visual picture of how the related concepts are organized in a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Both theoretical and conceptual frameworks inform the study through providing a lens through which the research will be conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Although there are many models of social emotional competence, this investigation used the framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (see Figure 1.1). As Figure 1.1 shows, in the center of the framework are core social and emotional skills or competencies, organized into five domains including self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness, that are linked to academic success and positive life outcomes (Osher, Kidron, Brackett, Dymnicki, Jones, & Weissberg, 2016). These domains consist of observable behaviors such as the ability to build and maintain relationships and make good decisions as well as internal processes such as self-awareness and social awareness (Osher et al., 2016). Two domains are oriented to the self (self-awareness and self-management), while two others are relational (social awareness and relationship skills), and the last is behavioral (responsible decision-making) (Osher et al., 2016).

Figure 1.1

CASEL's Widely Used Framework Identifies Five Core Competencies (CASEL, 2021)



CASEL's definition of each of the five core competencies are as follows,

Self-awareness is defined as the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.

Self-management is defined as the ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself.

Social Awareness is defined as the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Relationship Skills is defined as the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

Responsible Decision-making is defined as the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. (CASEL, 2020)

The study will also be guided by the theoretical framework of social learning theory that asserts, “social interactions, including role modeling, verbal instruction, and supervised feedback and support, influence the acquisition of new behavior” (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Gullotta, 2015, p. 24). The rationale for utilizing social learning theory is that SEL programming in schools is dependent on the adults (support staff, teachers, and administrators) who provide modeling of appropriate social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2015). Attending to students’ social and emotional skills without addressing adult SEL, and specifically the SEC of school leaders, may not deliver comprehensive, system-wide results (Bower et al., 2018; Jones & Cater, 2020). Furthermore, in his work with social learning theory, Bandura introduces the concept of “reciprocal determinism” which explains the learning of social skills as a bi-directional relationship. In schools, this theory can help explain the relationship between how students learn important social skills through modeling from peers and adults, by social experiences, and by direct instruction (Bandura, 1977; Osher et al., 2016; Paul, 2021).

Overview of Methodology

I have chosen to use an explanatory sequential mixed-methods for this investigation of school leader social emotional competence. I began with a quantitative survey of school leader social emotional competence followed by semi-structured interviews with some of the

participants in order to understand and explain the quantitative findings. First, school leaders were invited to complete a self-assessment of their social emotional competence based on the framework developed by CASEL. Leaders were surveyed using an adapted survey originally published by CASEL as a self-reflection tool for adult stakeholders working in schools. Next, the faculty and staff from each of the leaders' buildings were invited to rate the participants using the same indicators on the adapted CASEL survey. The final phase of the study involved interviews with selected school leaders to learn more about how they understand and explain the similarities and differences between the self- and others-ratings as well as gain a deep understanding of how leaders connect their own social emotional competence with their leadership abilities.

Significance of the Research

School leaders are faced with many decisions throughout each day. Research has shown that decision-making is influenced by feelings and emotions and so awareness of those emotions are critical for education professionals (Bower et al., 2018; Kaoun, 2019). For instance, one study examined the validity of leaders' self-ratings of their social and emotional skills when compared to the ratings of leaders by the faculty and staff they work with (Wang, Wilhite & Martino, 2015). This study found that when leaders and subordinates agreed on ratings of social emotional competence, leaders were also rated higher on transformational leadership skills, which are associated with effective leadership practices. Recommendations from this study include that both self-ratings and the ratings of others are important if leaders want to gain awareness of their perceived social emotional competence (Wang et al., 2015). Understanding how accurately leaders perceive their own social emotional competence as well as what supports

leaders may need in order to improve their SEC may be able to improve leadership in schools and inform leadership development programs and evaluation practices.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 of this dissertation will describe the review of literature on the topic of social emotional learning in schools and then specifically the research on school leaders' social emotional competence. The methods for the study are explained in Chapter 3 including a detailed description of the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach wherein school leaders' social emotional competence were explored through self-report and ratings of others as well as interviews with leaders. Results from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study will be reported in Chapter 4, as well as the findings from the integration of both phases of the investigation. Chapter 5 will contain a discussion of the themes that emerged from the findings as well as implications for future practice and research.

Chapter Summary

Social emotional learning has been shown to provide many benefits to students and schools as a whole (Jones et al, 2019; Stillman et al., 2018). Although the field of SEL is well researched, the topic of adult social emotional competence is less studied (Bower et al., 2018; Sanchez-Nunez, Patti & Holzer, 2015). Since building leaders set the tone for the culture and climate of schools and influence the academic as well as behavioral programs, it is important that their social and emotional skills are considered (Anderson, 2019; Bower et al., 2018). This study will explore the topic of social emotional competence of school leaders in K-12 public schools and will offer additional insight into how leaders make sense of the relationship between their social emotional skills and their ability to lead.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Part 1: Social Emotional Learning

Over the past twenty-five years, the term Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been on the forefront of discussions surrounding school improvement efforts. Many researchers and advocacy groups have researched the benefits of SEL for students and schools but the social and emotional competence of adults working in the schools is a less researched area (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Hanson-Peterson, Schonert-Reichl, & Smith, 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Further, the way in which a school leaders' own social and emotional competence can not only affect the implementation of SEL in schools but help or hinder their leadership ability is a topic that is emerging in research (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Grobler, 2014; Mahfouz, Greenberg, & Rodriguez, 2019). This review of literature begins with a brief history of social and emotional learning followed by information about how various authors and groups conceptualize the term. Next, research on both the benefits of SEL as well as common criticisms of the movement are presented. In addition to the research on SEL for students, the idea of adult SEL is explored in the existing literature. Additionally the relevant research on the connection between leadership and SEL/ SEC is examined. Finally, the review of literature turns to school leaders and how their own social emotional competence relates to their leadership skills and how it can be both assessed and improved.

Origin and Definition of Social Emotional Learning

With several similar concepts such as moral education, citizenship, and character education, spanning hundreds (even thousands) of years, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact

beginning of social and emotional learning (Nucci & Narvaez, 2014). A review of literature about social and emotional learning shows that the concept has roots in early philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle who both believed that a complete education included character development (Elias, Kranzler, Parker, Kash, & Weissberg, 2014; Nucci & Narvaez, 2014). For example, Wren (2014) points out that Aristotle, “went to great lengths to explain how moral teachers should use discipline, modeling, and consistent repetition to enable learners to acquire the right habits” (p. 20) Looking ahead, Charles Darwin began to write about emotions and the way the face, posture, and voice can communicate emotion (Ekman, 2009). His book, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, is considered to be the first study of emotion and the beginning of the field of psychology (Ekman, 2009). In the early 1900s, several philosophers including Thorndike, Dewey, and Addams all explored the concept of social intelligence or competence (Osher, Kidron, Brackett, Dymnicki, Jones, & Weissberg, 2016).

Throughout the last century, philosophers, educators, and researchers have grappled with the idea that, “as one of the primary cultural institutions responsible for transmitting information and values from one generation to the next, schools have typically been involved in attending to the social-emotional well-being and moral direction of their students, in addition to their intellectual achievements.” (Elias et al., 2014, p. 272) Schools have approached this endeavor through moral education, that has a basis in teaching values, and social emotional learning, that hones in on specific skills and attitudes needed for social success (Elias et al., 2014; Nucci & Narvaez, 2014). Additionally, schools have addressed the need for prevention and youth development through programming for specific issues such as bullying, drugs, sex education, and character education, just to name a few (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta,

2015). Often though, these attempts at building students' social, emotional, and overall life skills are not intentionally planned to coexist within the academic context and are ineffective and unsustainable (Durlak et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is noted by writers that "without strong leadership from district and school leaders, there is rarely effective staff development and support for quality implementation." (Durlak et al, 2015, p. 5)

The concept of social emotional learning evolved from the term "emotional intelligence" coined by researchers Mayer and Salovey in the 1990s (Elias et al., 2014). Later, both Goleman and Bar-On further explored the construct (Elias et al., 2014). In 1997, the Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), now the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, was founded by the Fetzer Institute with the purpose of promoting prosocial skills in preschool through high school (Durlak et al., 2015; Elias et al., 2014). Since then, CASEL has been a leader in research for social and emotional learning in schools. (Durlak et al., 2015; Elias et al., 2014)

In reviewing the literature about social emotional learning, it is clear that researchers have used varying language and definitions to conceptualize the idea of SEL. Maurice Elias, from Rutgers University and one of the founding fathers of the SEL movement in education, explains the connection between social emotional learning and emotional intelligence,

As we look into the details of what it means to think, feel, and act in context, we identify a number of competencies that have come to be labeled as social-emotional learning. They were not 'discovered' by Daniel Goleman and labeled as 'emotional intelligence' in 1995, and they were not 'discovered' by CASEL and labeled as 'social and emotional learning' in 1997. (Elias, 2019, p. 233).

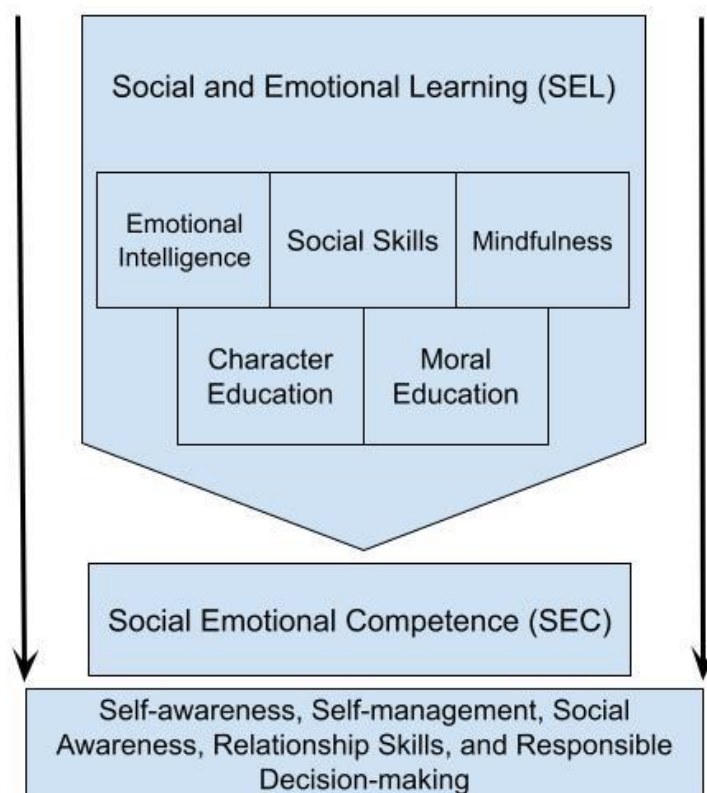
In other words, social and emotional learning is not a new concept; it has been in existence in several forms over hundreds (even thousands) of years.

However, there appear to be several different but somewhat overlapping positions. First, some researchers use the construct of emotional intelligence developed first by Mayer and Salovey and then expanded by Goleman which includes the four dimensions of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Grobler & Conley, 2013). Similarly, other researchers have adopted the CASEL framework for SEL, built upon Goleman's work, which includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016; Osher et al., 2016). According to the Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning, a person with self-awareness and self-management understands their own emotions, can identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and can persevere through challenges and practice delayed gratification (Durlak et al., 2014). The handbook names social awareness as the ability to understand social norms for acceptable behavior as well as the ability to identify needed resources in the community (Durlak et al., 2014). Relationship skills are explained as the ability to communicate clearly, cooperate with others, handle conflict effectively, and active listening while responsible decision-making is the skill of evaluating the consequences of decisions and considering self and others needs while doing so (Durlak et al., 2014). Yet other researchers discuss social and emotional skills in terms of mindfulness, (Dorman, 2015; Mahfouz, 2018; Reb, Chaturvedi, Narayanan, & Kudesia, 2019) which is defined as "an open, present-centered awareness and attention" (Reb et al., p. 745). Mindfulness practices can promote overall well-being and reduce stress for children and adults by

encouraging both self-awareness and self-regulation, both of which are important dimensions of social and emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2014).

The Aspen Institute, along with several partners, have published an action guide titled “Integrating Social, Emotional and Academic Development” that details how schools can integrate the academic program with SEL (Sovde et al., 2019). Scholars assert that social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) “requires rethinking the school experience for students and adults so that social, emotional, and academic dimensions of learning are mutually reinforcing in practice, and infused into every aspect of the school and student experience” (Sovde et al., 2019, p. 2). Recommendations from the guide include prioritizing relationships between adults and students in schools, embedding SEL concepts and vocabulary into each and every day, and attending to the climate and culture of the school (Sovde et al., 2019). These ideas align with Elias who declared that “It will no longer be possible to discuss educational processes, pedagogy, curriculum and instruction, prevention, academic achievement, and culture and climate of schools without discussing social-emotional competencies (Elias, 2019, p. 233).

Based upon the available historical and recent literature and writings about the topic, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) appears to be the broad, overall name for a variety of competencies, skills, and concepts that would include elements of moral education, character education, emotional intelligence, social skills, and mindfulness (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Nucci & Navraez, 2014). Figure 1 (below) conceptualizes this relationship to show that social and emotional learning leads to social emotional competence. In other words, SEL refers to the active construction of social and emotional knowledge and skills, while SEC refers to the outcome.

Figure 2.1*Relationship of SEL and SEC*

Conversely, in the book, *“Handbook of Prosocial Education”*, the writers argue that the term “prosocial education” is more appropriate (Brown et al., 2012). They assert,

Several specific approaches to prosocial education have historically isolated themselves from each other, or, more damaging, they have disparaged each other’s efforts. Character educators, moral educators, and those advocating that schools focus on civic engagement, social-emotional learning, contemplative education, or other approaches have argued and

undercut each other; they've fought over what they saw as the small bits of turf and time in the school day not dedicated to academic learning. (Brown et al., 2012, p. 6)

In agreement, Allbright et al. (2019) cited the “lack of consensus around the definition of SEL” (p. 46) as a barrier to the work of improving SEL work in schools. For the purposes of this literature review, the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 2.1, serves as a mechanism for situating social emotional learning, as informed by the concepts of emotional intelligence, social skills, mindfulness, character education and moral education, with social emotional competence.

Benefits of Social Emotional Learning

Many researchers agree that attending to social emotional learning in schools yields positive benefits (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Research over the past two decades has indicated both short-term and long-term benefits for students and schools. Short-term benefits of student participation in evidence-based social emotional programming include substantial improvements in student behavior and overall attitude as well as increased academic achievement and decreased stress, especially in students with risk factors including academic or behavioral challenges and those from low socioeconomic background (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Jones, McGarrah & Kahn, 2019). Specifically, academic achievement has been shown to improve 11 percentile points, on average, in students who receive SEL instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2016)). Additionally, longer term benefits have been identified in the research including higher rates of high school graduation, more likely success in college, and the ability to find and keep work (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019). Strong social skills in children is also correlated to healthier adults, less substance abuse, and a reduced chance

of getting in trouble with the law (Durlak et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2019; Osher, et al. 2016). In addition to benefits to students, research shows that schools that focus on SEL have a stronger positive climate and less negative behavioral outcomes (Osher et al., 2016). Linda Darling-Hammond, who co-chairs the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, summarizes the benefits of SEL,

Decades of research confirm that students’ social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development are deeply intertwined and vital for student learning. When we help students to engage productively with one another, understand themselves and how they think, and better handle the stresses and challenges in their lives, we prepare them for success now and in the future. (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 5).

There is a consensus, among many in the field of education, that social emotional learning is a worthwhile endeavor. However, there are criticisms of the SEL field as well.

Common Criticism of Social Emotional Learning

Although many researchers and practitioners in the field of education agree that schools should attend to the social and emotional development of students, there are others who are critical of SEL programming (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). For example, there are some in the field of education who believe that SEL is both too ambiguous in its definition and overly popularized as a solution to problems in education (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). As is common with widely used terms, SEL can have different meanings for different people but Shriver & Weissberg (2020), both leaders in the field, write that the researchers and collaborators at CASEL are determined to provide guidance and resources to help clarify the definition and goals of SEL. In their paper “*A Response to Constructive*

Criticism of Social and Emotional Learning” the writers declare that “critics also warn that SEL has been overhyped and treated as a panacea for problems as varied as the achievement gap, low standardized test scores, racism, the school to prison pipeline, collapsing national values, violence, depression, anxiety, and more” (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020, p. 53). Although SEL programming may offer support with some of these critical issues, it should not be touted as a universal cure for these problems (Shriver & Weissberg, 2020). Gregory & Fergus (2017) point out another criticism of SEL, asserting that that SEL programming focuses too much on student behavior and not enough on the equity-oriented social emotional competencies of the adults who work with students. They give the examples of multi-tiered systems of support and restorative justice practices that focus solely on what students need to do to change behavior. Further, this research (2017) suggests that adults need to improve their own SEC in order to teach positive behavior and facilitate restorative conversations with students. In this same article, the researchers recognize CASEL’s framework for social emotional competencies but add that these competencies might be reconsidered in a way that will “make them more sensitive to the ways that culture, power, and privilege affect schools and students.” (p. 128) In order to increase equity-based practices, these scholars recommend that adults consider their own beliefs and biases as well as to consider socio-cultural norms that may not fit into the white, middle class values. Other researchers have also addressed the need for an equity based approach to SEL. Osher et al. (2016) discuss ways that the CASEL framework has been adapted in order to include cultural norms for First Alaskans and the Chinese. The adapted Chinese framework included competencies for both individuals and the collective group, an idea that is important to Chinese culture (Osher et al., 2016). In fact, CASEL has made an attempt to address this shortcoming by

recently updating their definition of Social and Emotional Learning to include “attention to how SEL affirms the identities, strengths and experiences of all children, including those who have been marginalized in our education systems” (CASEL, 2021). CASEL’s updated definition,

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities. (CASEL, 2021).

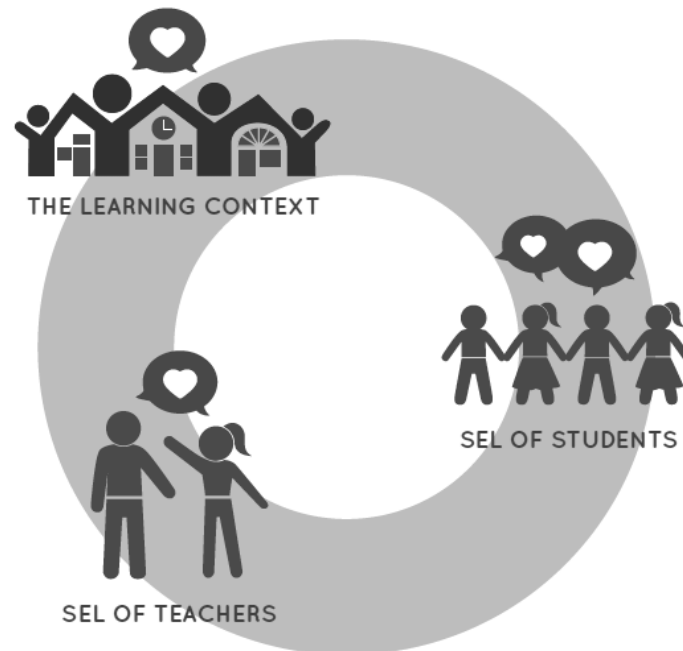
The updated definition speaks to CASEL’s commitment in using SEL to increase equity and opportunity for all. In support of the direction CASEL is moving, Elias (2019) recommends that schools should teach students how to utilize the social and emotional skills they learn “in the interest of human rights, equity, and social justice” (p. 243) in order to advocate for overall improvement in the conditions that hinder these concepts. In order for this to occur though, adults working in schools need to be knowledgeable and use SEL and SEC in their practice.

Social Emotional Competence of Adults in Schools

Researchers overwhelmingly agree that teacher quality is the most instrumental factor in student learning and determining overall success in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Sovde, 2019). As the field of social emotional learning has grown over the past two and a half decades, research has emerged that examines how the social emotional competence of teachers can influence implementation of SEL programming, student achievement, and overall classroom climate (Durlak et al., 2015; Hanson-Peterson, Schonert-Reichl, & Smith, 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Schonert-Reichl (2017), an applied developmental psychologist and professor who leads the SEL lab at the University of British Columbia, explains how teachers' own social emotional competence influences the quality of the learning environment as well as their ability to integrate SEL into the classroom. She asserts that each of the three dimensions of teacher SEL, student SEL, and the learning context are influenced by the other dimensions as shown in Figure 2.2 below (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). For example, when the learning context (environment) is warm, inviting, and supportive, students are more likely to learn the skills associated with strong social and emotional competence, which then leads to stronger student-teacher relationships and even better teacher retention (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). By contrast, when teachers do not have strong social and emotional skills themselves, they may not manage the learning environment in a way that supports student growth of both academic and SEL skills (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Figure 2.2

Three-component Framework for SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017)



Further, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) describe the characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers; they are aware of students' emotions, build strong relationships with their students, and have strong classroom management. Additionally, teachers with high levels of social and emotional competence influence student behavior and classroom climate since they are role models for prosocial communication and problem solving (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For instance, a teacher with high SEC understands that a student's potentially difficult behavior may stem from weak social skills and can provide individualized instruction and modeling of appropriate behavior instead of utilizing negative consequences (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, in a study of pre-service teachers' commitment to the profession, researchers found that pre-service teachers with higher emotional intelligence, as

measured by the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, were more committed to teaching and had a stronger self-efficacy (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014). Specifically, this research suggests that emotional intelligence through awareness of both self and others emotions are important in maintaining commitment, resilience, and wellbeing in the field of education (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014).

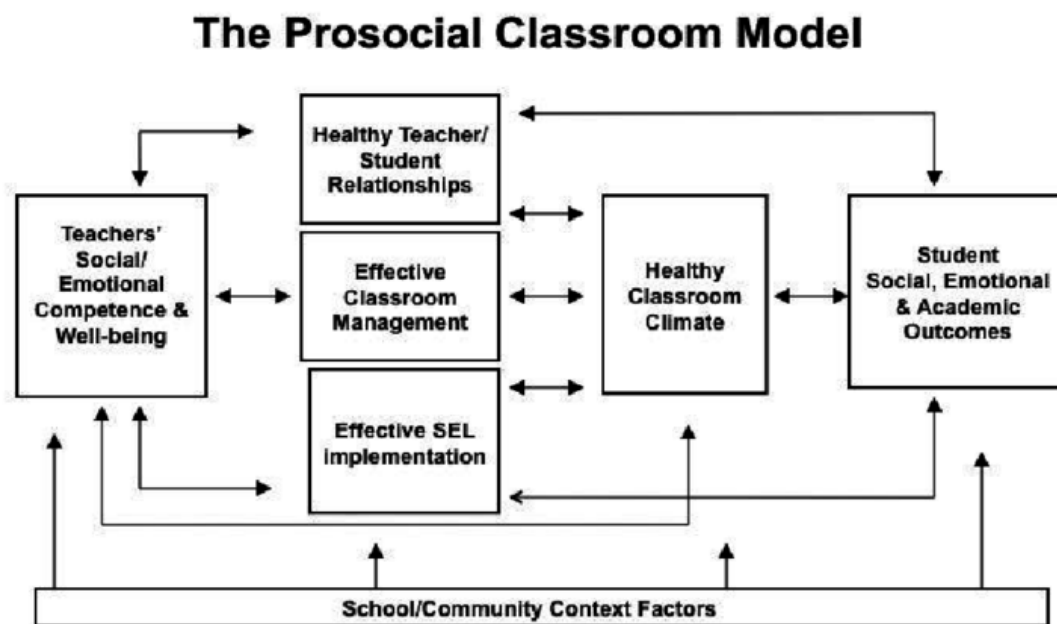
Most people inside and outside of the field of education agree that teaching is a stressful job (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014; Durlak et al., 2015). Teacher stress can impact their job satisfaction, teachers' ability to deliver strong instruction, and can affect student achievement (Durlak et al., 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Researchers have studied the link between teacher stress and student outcomes and have found that teachers who report high levels of stress have a larger number of students with mental health issues and behavioral problems (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Additionally, high levels of stress contributes to teachers leaving the field at an alarming rate (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Attending to teachers' social emotional wellbeing has been shown to reduce stress and to mitigate some of the negative impacts due to the emotional strain of teaching (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Acknowledging the importance of the social emotional competence of teachers, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) proposed The Prosocial Classroom Model (see Figure 3 below) that details the relationship between teacher SEC, classroom management, fidelity of implementation of a social emotional curriculum, and climate of the classroom. This model shows how building teacher social emotional competence creates a "healthy feedback loop" wherein the teachers' strong SEC influences effective SEL implementation, which then leads to student social,

emotional, and academic outcomes, that in turn helps to develop healthy teacher/ student relationships, ending the loop back with teacher wellbeing and competence in social and emotional skills (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For instance, according to the model, a teacher with strong and emotional competence, may also build better relationships with his/her students, manage the classroom effectively, and embed SEL skills into the academic program (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). All of those factors often lead to an overall healthy classroom climate that in turn leads to positive outcomes for students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When students are successful, relationships between teachers and students are strengthened, which helps maintain teacher wellbeing and SEC (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Figure 2.3.

The Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)



Elias et al. (2014) asserts that in addition to attending to teachers' social emotional competence, school leaders need to be taught more about how to develop their own SEC and how to infuse SEL throughout the school environment.

Part 2: Leadership and Social Emotional Competence

Leadership SEC in the Business World

There is limited empirical research about the influence of school leaders SEL on the school climate, teachers, and students. Therefore, I briefly review the literature related to this topic from other organizational literature below. Researchers in the fields of organizational leadership, business, human resources, and psychology have studied the behavior of leaders and specifically how their social emotional competence affects employees and the organization as a whole (Cherniss, Grimm, & Liataud, 2010; Oosten, McBride-Walker, & Taylor, 2019; Reb et al., 2018; Zammuner et al., 2013). For instance, Reb et al. (2018) conducted a study of how leader mindfulness correlates to the quality of leader-member exchange. The researchers found that leaders with strong skills in mindfulness had employees who performed better on the job and reported higher quality relationships with their bosses than leaders with weaker mindfulness (Reb et al., 2018). Another study used a 360-degree assessment of leader social emotional competence, rated by coworkers, and used the results to provide coaching for leaders in emotional and social intelligence (Oosten et al., 2019). 360 assessments provide an individual with information about how others in their organization rate their skills in specific areas (Oosten et al, 2019). The researchers suggest that high quality connections with a coach, who first helped the leader to develop a personal vision and then assisted the leader in identifying areas of

opportunity for improvement based upon the result of the 360-degree ratings, can help leaders to become more self-aware and more self-reflective (Oosten et al., 2019). Recommendations from several scholars indicate that training in social and emotional skills can improve a leader's overall social emotional competence (Cherniss et al., 2010; Zammuner et al., 2013). For instance, in a study of over 160 managers from 9 different companies, Cherniss et al. (2010) found that a two year training program that targeted social and emotional skills improved the SEC of the leaders as evidenced by ratings on a pre and post self-assessment as well as ratings by peers, subordinates, and their supervisor. These studies not only show the connection between leader SEC and other factors such as relationships with coworkers but also explain that social and emotional skills can be improved through coaching and training.

Social Emotional Competence of School Leaders

Building on the success and popularity of SEL programming in schools and the growing understanding of the importance of the social emotional competence of the adults who work with children, researchers have begun to study the role of school leaders' SEC when considering culture and climate, student achievement, retention of staff, and overall leader effectiveness (Grobler, 2014; Mahfouz et al., 2019; Patti et al., 2012). Researchers from the U.S. and around the world have utilized both quantitative and qualitative means and have examined school leader SEC through teacher perception as well as by leader self-report and this research suggests many implications for practice and future research (Grobler, 2014; Mahfouz et al., 2018; Patti et al., 2012). These studies point to the importance of school leaders' social emotional competence as they navigate the demands of the principalship while working to build relationships with their

faculty, staff, and students (Anderson, 2019; Bower, O'Connor, Harris, & Frick, 2018; Beck, 2014).

School leaders can influence the culture and climate of their school, have an impact on teacher retention and job satisfaction, as well as set the academic vision for teachers and students (Mahfouz et al., 2019). The job of a school principal has changed much over the last century; from primarily a disciplinarian and facilities manager to a true instructional leader who is also responsible for the well-being of students and staff. Accountability through standardized testing, discipline issues, social inequities, and school violence all add to the stress of the school leader and also point to the importance of SEL not only for students and teachers but also for administrators (Mahfouz et al, 2019).

International Studies. In reviewing the extant research on this topic, several international studies were found (Grobler, 2014; Tai & Kareem, 2018). Recognizing the importance of the school leader as an indirect factor in student achievement, one study out of South Africa examined how teachers perceive their leaders' emotional competence (Grobler, 2014). The over two thousand participants completed questionnaires that asked them to rate their leader's intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competence. Sample items included "demonstrate that they are aware of their own weaknesses" (intrapersonal) and "have the ability to handle difficult people with tact" (interpersonal) (Grobler, 2014, p. 877). The researcher found a strong two-way relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competence. In other words, the study showed that leaders who are self-aware and have high self-regulation of emotions will have better relationships and social skills (Grobler, 2014). In another study from Malaysia, researchers investigated the emotional intelligence of school

leaders of high performing, mediocre performing, and low performing schools (Tai & Kareem, 2018). After identifying schools for the study, the researchers surveyed over one hundred school leaders and over one thousand teachers associated with the leaders using the Principal Change Leadership Emotional Intelligence model that included dimensions of Emotional Perceiving and Expressing, Emotional Utilization, Emotional Understanding, and Emotional Regulation. Findings showed that leaders of high performing schools had overall higher emotional intelligence than those of mediocre or low performing schools (Tai & Kareem, 2018). The writers report,

The implication here was that school principals were emotionally self-aware and socially intelligent, and were able to accurately reason out their emotions, to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought, and to form judgements about their interpersonal and social interactions. Hence, school principals have the potential to influence the teachers' emotional states in the process of leading change. This finding suggests that school principals are in a position to craft out a conducive emotional environment that steers the challenges of school change positively. (Tai & Kareem, 2018, p. 79)

Although organizational structures of international schools may be different than American schools, these findings are relevant to a study on school leader SEC.

Teacher Perception of Leader SEC. Several studies have explored school leaders' social emotional competence through teacher perception. In their 2018 qualitative study, researchers Bower, O'Connor, Harris, & Frick asked teachers in a high performing district to explain how their leaders' SEC affected their ability to lead. Using Goleman's Emotional

Intelligence Theory, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, the researchers uncovered several themes. Participants reported that the most effective principals were transparent about their own weaknesses, exhibited stable moods, showed intentional thoughtfulness when decision-making, motivated their staff through positive praise, maintained strong relationships with students and staff, and displayed compassion and empathy (Bower et al, 2018). Another study that examined teacher perceptions of leader SEC, correlated the ratings of teachers with a measure of school climate (Anderson, 2019). The results showed that leaders with strong emotional management of others (motivating colleagues and helping people solve problems) and a high level of emotional self-control (controlling strong emotions), lead schools with a healthy climate (Anderson, 2019). Based upon this existing research, studies involving teacher perception of leader SEC show that self-regulation of emotions and the ability to motivate others are both important leadership competencies (Anderson, 2019; Bower et al., 2018).

Self and others' ratings. In their 2016 study of the relationship between the emotional competence of leaders and indicators of transformational leadership, Wang, Wilhite, and Martino compared self-ratings of school leaders with ratings from subordinates. This research revealed that when there is agreement between self-ratings of emotional competence and the ratings of others, “the self-ratings of emotional competence were strongly and significantly correlated with the self-ratings of transformational leadership” (Wang et al., 2016, p. 482). The researchers propose that leaders who under or overestimate their emotional competence or leadership skills would benefit from examining the differences between their self-ratings and those of others as well as exploring the reasons for such discrepancies (Wang et al, 2016). Likewise, Beck (2014)

used self-assessment as well as rating of colleagues to identify the leadership attributes associated with servant leadership. The comparison between the leaders' self-rating and the mean ratings of others was explored and the leaders with exemplary leadership ratings were interviewed (Beck, 2014). Findings from this study highlight the importance of a leaders' ability to self-reflect, build meaningful relationships, and exhibit self-awareness (Beck, 2104). In their study of SEL assessments, Stillman et al. (2018) also highlight the importance of leadership development that supports and encourages examination of both self and others ratings in order to "create a school culture where social and emotional skills, informed by data, are woven into the fabric of the school." (Stillman et al., 2018, p.86)

Programming for school leader SEL. Some researchers have studied the impact of specific training programs on the social emotional competence of school leaders. In her qualitative study of the impact of the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program, Mahfouz (2018) found that participants gained improved self-reflection skills, became more aware of the need for self-care, and paid more attention to relationships. School leaders who participated in the study reported increased efficacy in decision making and communication skills (Mahfouz, 2018). The author noted,

This study has shown that school leaders who experience mastery over social and emotional challenges display pro-social values: they respect their relationships with others, are able to regulate their emotions and behaviors even during challenging situations, demonstrate high self-awareness, and recognize other' emotions; such school leaders thus are ready to build strong supportive relationship and make decisions after taking others' needs into consideration. (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 613).

Similarly, in their case study research, Patti et al. (2012) found that school leaders who participated in a coaching program aimed at improving their social and emotional competence, reported stronger skills in several areas of SEC. The authors write,

With greater self and social awareness they manage conflict better and factor others' perspectives into their decision making processes. Self-aware and empathic administrative leaders tend to have better relationships with colleagues. They use more collaborative leadership strategies. As the coaching process develops, the changes demonstrate a shift from the individual leader to the whole organization. Furthermore, their vision for the organization is anchored in a positive school climate and culture. (Patti et al., 2012, p.269).

Implications and recommendations, based on these studies, include providing school leaders the time and space to engage in activities that teach them to reflect on their own social emotional competence as well as to build and participate in a supportive network of other leaders.

With the emergence of discussion about adult SEL in school, specifically the social and emotional competence of school leaders, some SEL programming is focusing on developing the social and emotional skills of all stakeholders in education. The 7 Mindsets program is a school-wide (and often district-wide) curriculum that begins with acknowledging the importance of adult SEL (7Mindsets, 2021). The program is made up of seven big ideas that are meant to build the social and emotional skills of both students and adults in schools. The 7 Mindsets are,

- Everything is Possible
- Passion First
- We Are Connected
- 100% Accountable
- Attitude of Gratitude
- Live to Give

- The Time is Now

The goals of the program are to promote skills in the five dimensions of SEL as defined by CASEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (7 Mindsets, 2021).

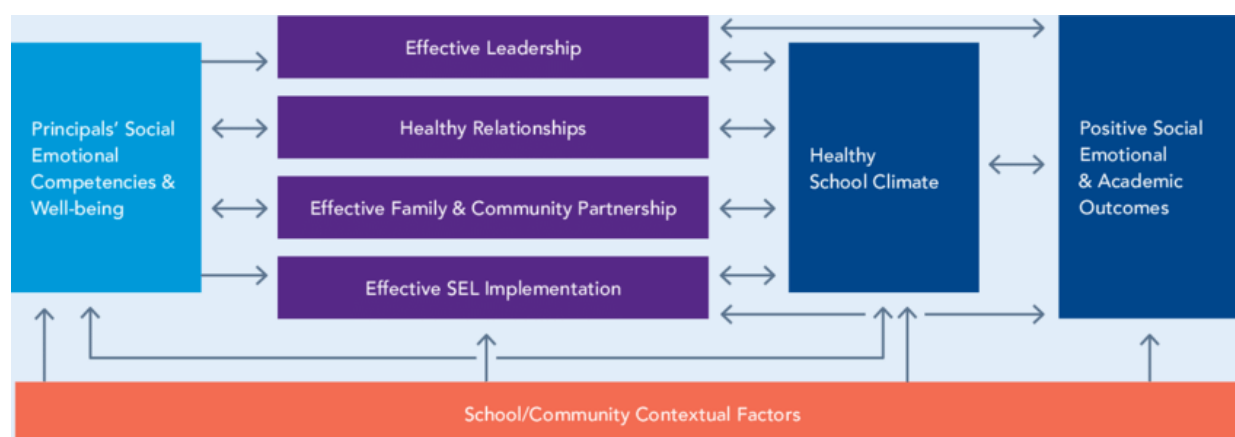
Measurement of school leader SEC. Researchers examining the social emotional competence of school leaders often turn to measures of emotional competence or emotional intelligence (Conte, 2005). The Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), developed by Boyatzis, Goleman, and their colleagues (Conte, 2005), measures four areas of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. Likewise, the MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) assesses four areas of emotional intelligence: perception of emotion, integration and assimilation of emotion, knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions (Conte, 2005). Not surprisingly, overall leaders rate themselves higher in social and emotional competence than co-workers or subordinates do (Zammuner et al., 2013) and some researchers have cautioned the use of assessments that utilize self-reporting due to the potential for inaccuracies (Jones et al., 2019). Additionally, some scholars have recommended that assessment of leader social and emotional skills include measurement from several sources, specifically gathering the perspectives of faculty and staff regarding their leader's SEC (Bower et al., 2018; Mahfouz, 2018; Wang et al., 2016).

The Prosocial Leader. A group of American researchers have developed a conceptual model, based upon the CASEL five competencies, that shows the relationship between school leaders' social emotional competence and the factors of effective leadership, family and

community partnerships, relationships, and SEL implementation (CASEL, 2021; Mahfouz et al., 2019). This model parallels Jennings and Greenberg’s prosocial classroom model and demonstrates how strong leader SEC influences a healthy school climate and student social emotional and academic outcomes (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Like the prosocial classroom model, the prosocial leader model shows a cyclical relationship. Based upon the research of several scholars, including Roger Weissberg who is one of the founding members of CASEL, this model highlights the importance of school leaders’ social and emotional competence as well as their overall well-being (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Figure 2.4

The Prosocial Leader (Mahfouz et al, 2019)



Much like the Prosocial Classroom model, this model demonstrates the healthy feedback loop that occurs when leaders have strong SEC (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Preparation of School Leaders

Several recent studies have explored the concept of building the social emotional competence of aspiring school leaders in order to best prepare them for the principalship (Sánchez-Núñez, Patti, & Holzer, 2015). For example, in their quasi-experimental study of 32

post-graduate aspiring school leaders, Sánchez-Núñez, Patti, & Holzer (2015) examined the effectiveness of a two year program that focused on improving emotional intelligence, along with other key leadership skills. In comparing pre- and post-test self-ratings, aspiring leaders improved in competencies of relationship management and social awareness as a result of the program (Sanchez-Nunez et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration adopted new professional standards for school leaders in 2015. The new standards were brought forth in order to guide the work of school leaders in the 21st century. The following excerpt from the standards elaborates on the need for new professional standards,

An expanding base of knowledge from research and practice shows that educational leaders exert influence on student achievement by creating challenging but also caring and supportive conditions conducive to each student's learning. They relentlessly develop and support teachers, create positive working conditions, effectively allocate resources, construct appropriate organizational policies and systems, and engage in other deep and meaningful work outside of the classroom that has a powerful impact on what happens inside it. Given this growing knowledge—and the changing demands of the job—educational leaders need new standards to guide their practice in directions that will be the most productive and beneficial to students. (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1)

Although the standards allude to the importance of student social and emotional development, the social emotional competence of school leaders is not addressed. In their brief titled, *Principals' Social and Emotional Competence*, Mahfouz, Greenberg and Rodriguez (2019) argue

that the lack of attention to school leader SEC in the new national standards is a “serious oversight.” (p. 10)

Similarly, the State of Florida has standards for school leaders that inform the learning opportunities for aspiring school leaders as well as guide the selection and evaluation of school leaders. These standards were amended in 2011 and have domains in student achievement, instructional leadership, organizational leadership, and professional and ethical behavior. Although the standards do not directly address the need for social and emotional competence, several of the indicators imply that leaders’ social emotional competence plays a role in their leadership. The standards mention the importance of building relationships with teachers and other stakeholders, making sound decisions, communicating vision, and empowering others, which are all social and emotional skills. For instance, within domain 3, “organizational leadership”, standard 7-e says that leaders need to develop “sustainable and supportive relationships between school leaders, parents, community, higher education and business leaders”, which directly relates to the CASEL social emotional dimension of relationship skills (CASEL, 2021; Florida Leadership Standards, 2011). Additionally, domain 4, “professional and ethical behavior”, standard 10-e implores that leaders demonstrate a “willingness to admit error and learn from it, which correlates to the CASEL social emotional competencies of self-awareness and self-management (CASEL, 2021; Florida Leadership Standards, 2011).

Even though studies have shown that social and emotional competence is important for school leaders and both national and state leadership standards imply that the skills needed for a strong SEC, “most principal preparation programs do not teach the skills necessary to help

principals regulate their emotions and effectively handle the stress they will encounter as school leaders” (Mahfouz et al., 2019). In Florida, there are two levels of school administrator certification. Level I certification, which allows educators to serve as assistant or vice principals requires a Master’s degree that includes completion of Florida’s Educational Leadership core curriculum which includes courses in each of the ten Florida Leadership Standards,

1. Instructional leadership,
2. Managing the learning environment,
3. Learning, accountability, and assessment,
4. Decision making strategies,
5. Technology,
6. Human resource development,
7. Ethical leadership,
8. Vision,
9. Community and stakeholder partnerships, and
10. Diversity (Florida Department of Education, 2021)

Like the Florida Leadership Standards, the Educational Leadership core curriculum contains concepts in line with the CASEL dimensions of social and emotional learning. Specifically, 2- managing the learning environment, 4- decision making strategies, 6- human resource development, 8- vision, and 9- community and stakeholder partnerships, are all areas that are connected to SEL skills. Additionally, educators seeking Level I certification also must pass the

Florida Educational Leadership Exam, made up of multiple choice questions and a written performance assessment in three areas: Instructional Leadership, Operational Leadership, and School Leadership. Level II certification, also known as “School Principal” certification requires potential school principals to take part in an approved program, usually sponsored by their school district (FLDOE, 2021). The state approved plan for the proposed site district for this study includes activities related to standards based instruction, evaluation, budgeting, and other leadership skills but does not directly address social and/or emotional skills needed for effective leadership. Writers report the lack of principal preparation programs that focus on social and emotional skills of potential school leaders (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Future Research and Practice

Prominent researchers in the field of social emotional learning and competence make recommendations for future studies and practice in order to promote leader SEC (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Mahfouz et al., 2019). Darling-Hammond offers this advice,

For social, emotional, and academic development to thrive in schools, teachers and administrators need to have emotional resources that allow them to be centered and practice self-care, as well as training and support to understand and model social and emotional skills, behaviors, knowledge, and beliefs for students (2019, p. 9).

Further, Jones et al. (2019) highlights the importance of researchers and practitioners working together in order to translate research into practical use. The authors cite CASEL’s work through the Collaborating Districts Initiative, where school district and CASEL researchers work together to test and refine SEL programming, as an example of such best practice (Jones et al, 2019). For

instance, the Palm Beach County school district in Florida, has partnered with CASEL through the CDI in order to develop and adopt SEL standards that are aligned to the CASEL competencies (CASEL, 2021). They have also worked to build an adult SEL learning platform that includes personalized and self-directed professional development that is aligned to their evaluation system (CASEL, 2021).

Researchers recommend that leadership development programs focus on skills associated with social and emotional competence such as self-awareness, active listening, effective communication, (Beck, 2014). Scholars agree that social and emotional skills can be developed through explicit instruction, coaching, mentoring, and self-reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kin & Kareem, 2018; Mahfouz et al., 2019). Programs are being developed to improve the social and emotional competence of school leaders through mindfulness-based interventions and training in emotional intelligence, but further studies are needed in order to determine their effectiveness (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

Additionally, since school leaders are usually teachers before becoming school administrators, it is important to include recommendations for pre-service teacher education and educator inservice. Hanson-Peterson and colleagues (2016) recommend that future research explore the connection between teachers' beliefs about social and emotional learning, their own self-efficacy in terms of social emotional competence, and their motivation to teach SEL concepts. Chestnut and Cullen recommend that teacher education programs develop skills and strategies to foster emotional intelligence in pre-service teachers. The writers also maintain that pre-service teachers "should be instructed on how to utilize these skills for interpersonal

exchanges, such as assessing the emotional states of both their students and themselves” (Chestnut & Cullen, 2014, p. 128).

Writers recommend that research also focus on SEL measurement tools in order to accurately assess the social and emotional skills of students, teachers, and school leaders (Allbright et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019) as well as the organizational readiness of schools seeking to improve social and emotional skills of stakeholders (Durlak et al., 2015). CASEL, through the Collaborating Districts Initiative, is currently developing assessment tools for teacher and leader SEC, implementation of SEL curriculum, and overall commitment to the promotion of social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2015). Although CASEL offers an adult reflection tool for social and emotional skills, there is no validated, comprehensive measure that addresses all five areas of social and emotional learning (CASEL, 2021).

Chapter Summary

Social and emotional learning has been part of schooling throughout time through the concepts of moral education, character education, and social skills, among other terms. Although the research about school leaders’ social and emotional competence is limited, the available literature consistently points to the importance of school leader SEC. For instance, a lack of cohesion in the field of SEL has hindered researchers and practitioners in making it a priority in education, but SEL remains a hot topic. Further, researchers agree that SEL benefits students and studies are beginning to focus on the importance of adult SEL. Although this review of the existing research on the topic of the social emotional competence of school leaders yields some recent empirical studies, there are very few investigations that compare leaders’ self-assessment with the ratings of teachers or other subordinates. Even fewer studies follow up with

interviews of school leaders in order to understand what they can learn from the ratings of others. The purpose of this study is to explore the social and emotional competence of leaders in K-12 public schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed a need for further research in the area of school leader social emotional competence. This study examined the social emotional competence of school leaders in hopes of filling the existing gap in literature in this area.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?
2. What do current K-12 faculty and staff report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their leaders' social emotional competence?
3. What specific dimensions of social emotional competence are similar and different between self and others' ratings?
4. How does a school leader's self-assessment of their social emotional competence compare to the ratings of their subordinates in the organization?
5. How do current K-12 school-based leaders describe the interaction between their own social emotional competence and their position of leadership within their buildings?

In order to answer all five of my research questions, it was necessary to employ a mixed-methods approach. Research questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 were answered through the quantitative data while research questions 1 and 5 were explored through the qualitative phase. Utilizing a purely quantitative approach would not only have failed to address all five research questions fully, but would also have not provided a deep understanding of the leaders' perceptions of the connection between their own self-report social and emotional competence and the ratings of their

subordinates. Conversely, a solely qualitative approach would not have provided the researcher with a measure of leader SEC that could be reported as a self-assessment and used for the ratings of subordinates. Further supporting a mixed methods approach, in their recommendations for assessing SEL, Jones et al. (2019) encouraged “obtaining multiple, convergent sources of measurement evidence for social-emotional skills should be sought in any SEL research endeavor.” (p. 139)

Research Design

I chose to use an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design for this study of school leaders’ social emotional competence. Mixed methods are used in order to integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research and to combine the understanding from both types of data in order to address research questions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). According to Creswell & Creswell, mixed methods research offers that “more insight into a problem is to be gained from mixing or integration of the quantitative and qualitative data” (2018, p. 213). Explanatory sequential design consists of two phases of the study, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative data and analysis thus informs the qualitative phase of the study that seeks to further explain the findings of the quantitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, I began with a quantitative survey of school leader social emotional competence followed by semi-structured interviews with some of the participants in order to more fully understand and explain the quantitative findings. Specifically, I first surveyed school leaders about their perception of their own social and emotional competence. Next, I invited each leaders’ faculty and staff to respond to the survey in regards to the leaders’ SEC. I compared the results of the survey before moving to the

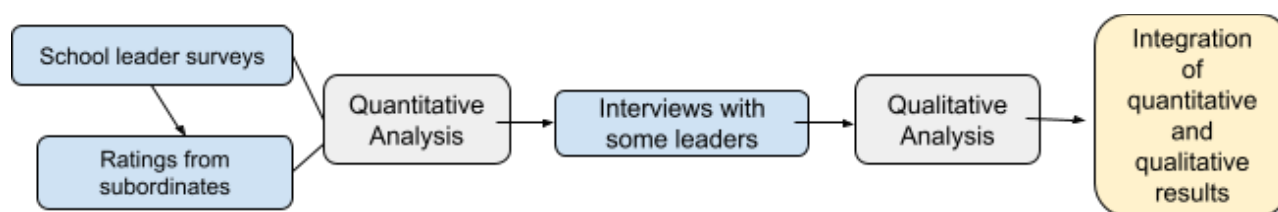
qualitative phase of the study. Finally, I followed up with interviews with selected school leaders in order to gain a better understanding of the results of the quantitative study. Researchers often use an explanatory sequential design when they want to gain a deeper understanding of a particular set of quantitative data and use the qualitative phase of the study to do so (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the interviews allowed me to better understand the results of the leaders' self-assessments and the similarities or differences between their own perception and that of others.

Explanatory sequential design has been used by some researchers in the field of education. In their mixed-methods study of the relationship between teacher leadership and campus culture, Harris and Kemp-Graham assert that the explanatory sequential method was beneficial since "the qualitative data provided a greater depth of knowledge related to participants' perceptions and opinions of teacher leadership capacity and campus culture that could not be ascertained from closed ended responses asked on the quantitative surveys" (2017, p. 52). Likewise, Beck (2014) used an explanatory sequential design in his mixed methods study of servant leadership. The author explained his reasoning for choosing an explanatory sequential design, "Given the complexities of leadership, quantitative results may be inadequate; therefore, qualitative data are needed to help explain initial quantitative data" (Beck, 2014, p. 302). In the present study, the explanatory sequential design will allow me to explore how school leaders rate their own SEC, compare their own ratings to those of their faculty and staff, and then learn more about how some leaders explain the relationship between their SEC and their ability to lead. In other words, the quantitative phase provides an opportunity for comparison of the leaders' self-assessment with the ratings of others while the qualitative phase offers a deeper understanding

of the leaders' thoughts, feelings, opinions, and their own self-reflection. Together, the quantitative and qualitative phases will yield a more complete understanding of leader SEC than is possible if only one method was chosen. Figure 1 below shows the explanatory sequential design applied to this study.

Figure 3.1

Explanatory Sequential Design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)



Research on assessing one's own social emotional competence shows that people do not always accurately report their own SEC (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). In fact, some researchers have found that people with higher emotional intelligence underestimate their skills while those with a lower emotional intelligence overestimate themselves (Brackett et al., 2006.) Thus, when considering the social and emotional competence of school leaders, it is important to not only utilize self-ratings but also assessment of their colleagues.

Site Selection

The site for this study was a high performing, medium sized school district in North Florida. The district has earned an A rating for the past 3 years and has been rated as an A or B since the inception of school grading, according to Florida's accountability system (Florida Department of Education, 2021). The school district was made up of just under 40,000 students and employed roughly 5,000 staff. The racial demographics of the students in the district

included approximately 61% Caucasian, 16% african-american, 13% Hispanic, 5% 2 or more races, and 2% Asian. The faculty and staff demographics included approximately 86% Caucasian, 6.6% african-american, 3.9% Hispanic, and 1.7% 2 or more races. The rate of students who are considered to be economically disadvantaged was approximately 43%, percentage of students with disabilities served in the district was approximately 22%, and the rate of Limited English Proficient students was 2.3% (Florida Department of Education, 2021). The most recent graduation rate was 93.4%. The district was made up of 43 schools including 27 elementary schools, 6 junior high schools, 7 high schools, one alternative school, and one virtual school. Each of the schools had a leadership team composed of a building principal, at least one assistant principal. In total the district had a total of approximately 200 school based leaders. I chose this site as it was the school district where I work and I had access to schools and leaders easily.

SEL Context. The selected district has published “social emotional priorities” and through the work of several departments, including the department of Climate and Culture as well as Exceptional Student Education, address SEL regularly. Additionally, they have adopted the 7 Mindsets curriculum which focuses on the social and emotional development of both students and adults (7 Mindsets, 2021). All school leaders were aware of the district’s SEL priorities and had access to the 7 Mindsets curriculum. Teachers throughout the site district incorporated 7 Mindsets lessons at least weekly and follow a district published schedule for introducing each of the mindsets. Furthermore, each week the department of Climate and Culture highlighted an area for adult SEL in the district’s weekly leadership newsletter. For

example in the month of February, leaders were encouraged to build and strengthen relationships by the giving and receiving of positive notes.

The districts' most recent climate surveys, completed by both students and adult personnel, revealed several opportunities for improvement in areas related to social and emotional skills. For example, the results from the student surveys showed that students in grades K-6 reported themselves as having strong skills in self-management. When given the prompt, "I am kind and respectful to people who disagree with me," 92% of 3rd-6th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. Students in high school rated themselves lower in that area, with only 79% of 9th-12th grade students agreeing or strongly agreeing. Results from the faculty/ staff survey show that approximately 90% of personnel report that, "I can clearly describe my feelings," which would fall into the self-awareness domain of the CASEL framework. In relation to the social and emotional competence of administrators, 87% of teachers and support staff reported that "My principal involves others to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome (of each situation) for key problems." The results of the climate survey show areas of both strength and opportunity in the site district, in regards to the social and emotional awareness of students, staff, and leaders.

Participant Selection

All 40 school principals employed in the site district were invited to participate in the quantitative phase of the study through email. For each of the school level leaders who opted in to the investigation, further participants (their subordinates) were invited to participate in the study as well. Both faculty (instructional) and staff (support) employees were invited to participate.

Of the 40 school principals from the site district who were invited to take part in the study, fifteen chose to participate by completing the school leader self-assessment. The demographics for each school leader participant and their corresponding school are located in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1

Demographics for Leaders and the Schools They Lead

Leader	Sex	Experience in School Leadership	School Level	Number of Faculty and Staff	Number of Faculty and Staff Who Responded	Percentage of Faculty and Staff Who Responded
1	F	13	Elementary	80	16	20%
2	F	12	Elementary*	65	10	15%
3	M	18	Secondary	140	6	4%
4	F	7	Elementary	73	11	15%
5	F	14	Elementary	120	26	21%
6	F	8	Secondary	74	7	9.5%
7	F	9	Secondary	150	35	23%
8	M	5	Secondary	125	29	23%
9	M	8	Secondary	75	13	17%
10	F	8	Elementary	108	5	4%
11	M	20	Elementary	118	14	11%
12	F	11	Secondary	209	24	11%
13	F	6	Elementary *	62	3	4%
14	F	8	Elementary	120	21	17.5%
15	F	6	Elementary *	104	16	15%

* denotes Title I school

Within the group of 15 leaders, there were 4 males and 11 females. The principals' level of formal leadership experience ranged from 5-20 years. The leader participants represented 6

secondary (junior high or high) schools and 9 elementary schools as well as three schools that qualify for Title I funding.

From the grouping of 15 leader participants, three were later chosen to participate in the qualitative portion of the study based on several factors. First, the percentage of responses from their faculty and staff were considered in order to have a valid sample of responses that would be used in order to guide the interview process. Additionally, leaders were considered who were also recently recognized by the site district superintendent as a school with a strong climate and culture as evidenced by the most recent results on the districts climate and culture surveys. Next, I examined the results of the leaders who met the first two factors and looked for leaders who appeared to report thoughtful self-assessments. For example, a leader who rated themselves as primarily 5s, may not have the self-awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in order to give an interesting and accurate interview. In the end, the three leaders who were chosen for the qualitative phase, all had faculty and staff participation over 17%, were all selected as leaders of schools with strong climate and culture by the site district, and each provided seemingly thoughtful self-ratings. Based on the factors listed above, I considered these leaders to be exemplars for the purpose of identifying leaders with strong social emotional competence. The group of leaders for the qualitative phase consisted of two females and one male principal and they represented two elementary schools and one high school.

The first leader who was interviewed was Leader 14 (referring to the quantitative leader data) who has been given the pseudonym, Mrs. Brown. At the time of the interview, she was finishing her first year as principal of a large elementary school and her 8th year in school leadership. Mrs. Brown began her educational career in another state and had previously held a

district leadership position in her former state. Before becoming a principal, Mrs. Brown served as an assistant principal in another elementary school within the site district.

Mrs. Brown's current assignment was principal of Middletown Elementary which was made up of over 1,000 students in kindergarten through 6th grade and employed approximately 120 faculty and staff members. Middletown Elementary was rated as an A school during the most recent school grades available from the state of Florida. Additionally the school was named a Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) Model school for the 2019/2020 school year. Mrs. Brown's school was also recently recognized as a school with a strong climate and culture according to the most recent climate survey administered by the district. Nearly all faculty and staff (99%) reported that they feel supported by Mrs. Brown and 100% of them agreed that she seeks the input of others when making decisions on the district culture and climate survey.

The second leader who was interviewed was Leader 8 (referring to the quantitative leader data) and was given the pseudonym, Mr. Aaron. He was completing his first year at a new school, a high school, which was his second principal assignment. Mr. Aaron had just finished his 5th official year in school administration, although he had prior leadership experience as an athletic director.

Mr. Aaron's current school, Central High, serves over 1,100 students in 9th through 12th grade and 125 faculty and staff members. The school was rated as B school during the most recent state grading data. Having recently been recognized by the Superintendent as a school with a strong climate and culture, the district climate and culture survey results revealed that his faculty and staff report that Central High is "good at teamwork, collaboration, and generates a

collegial atmosphere that inspires others” with over 88% of faculty and staff agreeing with that statement.

The third and final interview was with Leader 5 (referring to the quantitative leader data) who was given the pseudonym, Mrs. Carter. She was completing her fifth year in a large elementary school and her 15th year in school leadership. Having started her career in a neighboring district, Mrs. Carter had been in the site district for five years, all as principal at the same school, Riversedge Elementary.

Mrs. Carter’s current school was made up of approximately 800 students in pre-kindergarten through 6th grade and roughly 120 students. Riversedge Elementary is a high performing school and has been rated as an A school, according to Florida’s school grading system, every year since the inception of the program. Similarly to other leaders selected, Mrs. Carter and the school were recently recognized as a school with a strong climate and culture, according to the district’s most recent climate and culture survey. In fact, the results from the climate survey showed that her faculty and staff, as a whole, feel supported by their principal (over 95% agree) and they also report that she involves others when solving problems (over 97% agree.)

Data Collection

Data Collection occurred in two phases, as is practice with explanatory sequential studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phase I included quantitative surveys for both leaders and the corresponding faculty and staff from their school. Phase 2 consisted of qualitative interviews with selected leader participants. Data collection began in May of 2021 and continued throughout the summer of 2021.

Quantitative. School leader participants were asked to complete a self- assessment of their social emotional competence based upon the “Personal Assessment and Reflection Tool – SEL Competences for School Leaders, Staff and Adults” from CASEL (2021) using the online survey tool, Qualtrics. The original CASEL self-assessment tool consisted of 45 positive, first person statements organized by the five dimensions of social emotional learning and was developed with the purpose of serving as a formative tool for educators and school leaders to be reflective of their own SEC. CASEL offers the tool free on their website <https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/adult-sel-self-assessment/>. Each of the five dimensions of social emotional learning, includes several sub-skills related to that dimension. Table 3.2 below shows each of the SEL dimensions and sub-skills included in the measure.

Table 3.2

SEL Dimensions and Skills included in the assessment (CASEL, 2021)

Self- Awareness	Emotional Self-Awareness Accurate Self-Perception Self-Confidence Growth Mindset and Purpose
Self- Management	Self-Control Setting and Achieving Goals Adaptability Organizational Skills
Social Awareness	Empathy Respect for Others Appreciation of Diversity Organizational Awareness
Relationship Skills	Communication Building Relationships Conflict Management Teamwork and Collaboration

Responsible Decision-Making	Problem Identification and Situation Analysis Problem-Solving Evaluation and Reflection Personal, Moral, and Ethical Responsibility
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I adapted the choice of responses from “very easy, easy, difficult, very difficult” to a Likert-type scale 1-5 (with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”) in order to provide quantitative results. I also converted the original paper form to an online survey in Qualtrics for ease of delivery and to assist in analysis. The survey took approximately ten minutes to complete. After each school leader completed the self-assessment, the entire faculty and staff in their building were invited to complete the assessment concerning their leader’s social emotional competence. In order to ensure the highest level of participation possible, a second email reminder was sent out after a week to schools with low participation rates. No identifiable information were collected with the subordinates’ surveys.

I considered other measures but deemed them not appropriate to sufficiently answer the research questions. Since the CASEL framework guided this study, it was important that the assessment that was used included all five dimensions of social emotional learning as defined by CASEL.

Qualitative. In order to better understand the quantitative results, one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with three of the school leaders were also conducted. A semi-structured interview was appropriate for this study due to the flexibility of having both pre-planned questions and opportunities for the school leaders to discuss their understandings, beliefs, and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before each interview, the leader was given a copy of their own SEC self-assessment ratings as well as the mean of the ratings of their

subordinates noting specific indicators that showed relative congruence or dissonance. This enabled the leaders to reflect upon the quantitative data during the interview. The interview questions, based upon the research questions and the results from the self and others ratings, included the following prompts:

1. What is your opinion about the importance of your own social emotional competence in relation to your leadership position within your school?
2. (Referring to the self-assessment results) Please tell me about an indicator (or two) that you marked yourself lower on and why. Please tell me about an indicator (or two) that you rated yourself higher on and the reasons why.
3. (Referring to the self-assessment results) Indicator ___ showed the largest difference between yourself and others ratings. Why do you think that may be?
4. As a school-based leader, what support or resources do you need (or have needed in the past) in order to address areas of opportunity to improve your own social emotional competence?
5. Thinking about specific challenges of the past year and a half (referring to COVID-19 pandemic), how has your own social emotional competence intersected with the leadership of your school?

Interviews were conducted at each of the respective schools, in the privacy of the principals' office at a time that was convenient for each of them. I will took notes during each of the interviews as well as recorded each interview in order to transcribe and review as needed. Each of the participants were informed of the recording and their agreement with given in each case.

Interviews last between 20 and 30 minutes. Interviews were later be transcribed using an online transcription tool followed by a detailed review for accuracy.

Data Analysis

As common in explanatory sequential studies, analysis of the data occurred after each phase of data collection (first quantitative and then qualitative) and then ended with an integrative analysis which combined the themes from both phases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Quantitative. In order to answer the first four research questions, I analyzed the self-assessment data and the ratings of others using descriptive statistics including mean scores of each dimension of SEC, the means of each skill within each dimension of social emotional competence, and standard deviations. For each leader, every indicator rating was reported as both a self-rating as well as the mean of all subordinates' ratings for that specific leader. Self-reported strengths and weaknesses were reported as well as strengths and weaknesses for each leader as identified by other raters. Quantitative data were organized by the components of SEL as defined by CASEL. Research questions one through four were explored through quantitative analysis of the data.

RQ1- What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?

This research question was answered through the self-assessment ratings for each leader that will be reported as a numerical value between one and five, with one showing strong disagreement with the statement and 5 showing strong agreement with the indicator. I explored how the survey highlighted the relative strengths and weaknesses of leaders across the five dimensions of SEL using descriptive statistics.

RQ2- What do current K-12 faculty and staff report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their leaders' social emotional competence?

Research question two was answered through the comparison of the ratings of each school leader and the mean ratings of each leader's subordinates, which were both reported as numerical values between one and five. Ratings by the subordinates were reported using descriptive statistics and the mean of each dimension of SEL were compared to the leaders' self-rating.

RQ3- What specific dimensions of social emotional competence are similar and different between self and others' ratings?

This research question were addressed through an analysis of survey responses on each of the 45 specific indicators within the five dimensions of SEL. Specific skills that show agreement between the leaders and the faculty and staff participants as well as skills that indicate dissonance were reported.

RQ4- How does a school leader's self-assessment of their social emotional competence compare to the ratings of their subordinates in the organization?

This research question was address through an analysis of survey responses on each of the 45 specific skills within the five dimensions of SEL for the three leaders who participated in the interview phase of the investigation. Specific skills that show agreement and skills that indicate dissonance were be reported.

Qualitative. Qualitative data analysis was conducted through coding of school leader interviews. Responses from each interview were coded, using a priori codes, and arranged by themes, based upon the CASEL framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). A priori codes, also called predetermined codes, are coding themes that are created before data collection

and in this case are based upon the conceptual framework for the study, the CASEL five dimensions of social and emotional learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). For example, responses from each of the leader interviews were divided by the five dimensions of social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Responses were further categorized by whether the leader listed the dimension as a specific strength, an opportunity for self-reflection and potential improvement, or in relation to specific leadership practices. Research questions 1 and 5 were addressed through qualitative analysis of the data.

RQ 1- What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?

This research question was addressed in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. During the qualitative data analysis, interviews with each school leader were transcribed and then coded, based upon the five dimensions of SEL and then by whether they mention specific dimensions as strengths or weaknesses.

RQ 5- How do current K-12 school-based leaders describe the interaction between their own social emotional competence and their position of leadership within their buildings?

The final research question was explored in the qualitative data through analysis of the interview data. Using the coding scheme explained above, interview data was coded first by the dimension of SEL and then by the relationship between that dimension and their leadership ability/ skills.

After both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, an integrative, reflective analysis was conducted by considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings and culminating in overall themes that emerged from the study as a whole. First, I considered the themes that came

from the quantitative data analysis and that emerged as relative strengths, weaknesses, or areas with particular congruence or dissonance between leaders' and others' ratings. Next, I identified which of those ideas were also mentioned by leaders during the qualitative interviews. Lastly, I considered any common themes from the interviews that were not directly related to the indicators within the survey. In the end, several themes emerged that will be discussed fully in Chapter 5.

Rigor

According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), in “mixed methods studies, the researcher needs to establish the validity of the scores from the quantitative measures and to discuss the validity of the qualitative findings.” (p. 223) Since the quantitative data is primarily being used as a reflective tool for the school leaders, it was not necessary to assess the validity of tool itself. Considerations for ensuring trustworthiness of the qualitative data included providing consistency in the questioning during the interviews with each of the school leaders as well as using maximum variation in the participants (school leaders from various levels of K-12 education, with different levels of experience, and as well as both male and female participants) in this phase of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Additionally, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design provides a level of triangulation as it uses more than one source of data collection. (Merriam & Grenier, 2019) Triangulation of the data occurred by comparing quantitative findings, qualitative results, and then integrating the two together.

Further credibility of the study was enhanced by employing member checking where the transcripts from the interviews and results of the study were shared with the participants before

data analysis occurred, ensuring that participants had the opportunity to clarify their responses if needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The school leaders each acknowledged the transcripts but did not change or clarify any of their responses. Lastly, I utilized a peer reviewer throughout data collection and analysis of both phases in order to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The Director of Climate and Culture, who oversees the SEL work in the site district served as the peer reviewer throughout data collection and data analysis and provided support, wonderings, and advice.

Researcher's Journal

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I utilized a researcher's journal in order to create an audit trail that will include my procedures, reflections, wonderings, and experiences as a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Utilizing a researcher's journal enabled me to create transparency in my study and helped to ensure consistency of processes and reliability of results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout the investigation, the researcher's journal provided useful information and was utilized as a reference when synthesizing the findings.

Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns

Since this research concerns the topic of the social emotional competence of school leaders, there are inherent ethical concerns of confidentiality of the data and findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Throughout the investigation, I had several protections in place to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and the data collected. First, the research was conducted after I have received approval from the University of North Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and all UNF IRB policies and procedures were followed. As part of the IRB requirements, I

received a letter of support from the Superintendent of Schools in the site district, who supports study. Also, in line with IRB procedures, all participants were asked to complete a consent form that detailed the purpose of the study as well as listed the protections that will be in place (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data collected from the school leaders were kept confidential and reported findings do not name the leaders, but use pseudonyms instead. No identifiable information were collected in the subordinates' surveys. Furthermore, the ratings by the subordinates of school leaders are only reported as the mean, range, and standard deviation for each set of leader subordinates. This ensured that no individual participant can be identified by their school leader since the ratings of the leaders by the subordinates could potentially bring up sensitive topics such as opportunities for improvement on the part of the leader. All data was stored using a secured server as well as in a password protected digital file.

Researcher Positionality

As a district level employee and former school leader in the site district, I am aware of the biases I may have as a researcher. This study employed a qualitative phase and with all qualitative research, the “researcher affects and is affected by the research process” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249). First, I am passionate about the importance of school leaders' social and emotional competence. I believe that one cannot effectively lead others or create a strong, positive culture without the skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision making. I have worked with and for leaders who were not perceived to be strong in SEC and also have experienced dynamic leadership from some with strong social and emotional skills. Second, I have the experience of working alongside some of the participants in my work as a teacher, school leader, and now district administrator. Although

I am not the current direct supervisor of any of the participants, as a district leader, I recognize that I am in a position of power and influence over these school leaders.

I am aware that my experiences as a student and a teacher have influenced my belief in the importance of social emotional competence. Looking back on my own K-12 education, the educators that I learned the most from found a way to connect with me and to gain my trust. In retrospect, these teachers and leaders had strong SEC themselves, seeming to understand how they “came across” to students, used active listening, and kept their emotions in check. These educators served as strong role models for me as a student learning to manage my own social and emotional skills. As I transitioned into my role as a teacher, those models of strong SEC, which I experienced as a child and young adult, helped to shape my philosophy on how social and emotional skills impact me as an educator. During my years as a classroom teacher and behavior resource teacher, I strived to maintain awareness and management of my emotions and was keenly aware of how my own emotions affected my students and my relationships with colleagues. Unfortunately, in my early years as an educator, I did not have school leaders who I would report as having strong social and emotional competence. I experienced a principal who failed to build a rapport or relationship with me, another leader who did not seem to be aware of how she was perceived as she glanced at the clock during what was an important (for me) conversation, and a principal who did not manage their emotions well and frequently let her frustration and anger show. This lack of leader social and emotional competence left me feeling less than supported and seeking a change. I decided to pursue the coursework and certification in educational leadership with the hopes of someday becoming the leader that I needed as a young teacher. Luckily, my next two assignments were at schools with leaders who not only

seemed to be aware of the importance of their own emotions and social skills, but actively worked to provide opportunities for their staff to engage in self-reflection, relationship building, and overall collaboration. As I sought my first leadership position, I vowed to remember the role models as well as the non-examples of leadership I had been given. As a school leader for ten years and now as a district leader, my own social and emotional competence has always been something I am both proud of and always seeking to improve. I believe that leaders can and should consider how their own SEC affects their ability to lead effectively.

Chapter Summary

This explanatory sequential, mixed method study sought to better understand the social and emotional competence of school leaders, in one Florida district, through both self-assessment, ratings of others in their organizations, and through one-on-one interviews. Employing both quantitative and qualitative measures, I utilized CASEL's framework for social and emotional learning to guide this investigation.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to explore the congruence of principals' social emotional competence (SEC) between the principals' own ratings and those of their respective faculty and staff. Using CASEL's social and emotional learning framework (CASEL, 2021) to guide this investigation, leaders rated and described their own strengths and opportunities for improvement, while the faculty and staff of each leaders' school also had the opportunity to rate their principals' SEC. First, I will report the quantitative results for both leaders' self-ratings and then the ratings of the leaders' respective faculty and staff participants. Next, I will describe the results from the qualitative interviews before ending the chapter with an integration of the quantitative and qualitative results.

Quantitative Results

In order to answer the first two research questions, school leaders in the site district were given a self-assessment of their social emotional competence. After each principal completed the self-assessment, a similar survey was sent to their entire faculty and staff, asking them to rate the principal.

RQ1 - What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?

RQ2 – What do current K-12 faculty and staff report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their leaders' social emotional competence?

As part of the self-assessment of their own social emotional competence, each school principal rated themselves on a five point scale on forty-five statements that were designed to encourage reflection. As described in Chapter 3, the indicators are grouped by social and emotional skills

within the five components of SEL as identified by CASEL (CASEL, 2021.) For example, the component *Self-Awareness* contains indicators for the skills of Emotional Self-Awareness, Accurate Self-Perception, Self-Confidence, and Growth Mindset and Purpose. Table 4.1 contains the mean self -ratings as well as the mean ratings of others for each leader organized by the five components of social emotional competence as well as the overall mean (of all leaders) and standard deviation for component.

Table 4.1

School Leader Self and Others' Ratings

Leader	Self-Awareness		Self-Management		Social Awareness		Relationship Skills		Responsible Decision Making	
	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others
1	4.77	3.83	4.33	3.59	4.88	3.38	4.60	3.43	4.66	3.47
2	4.66	4.55	4.33	4.40	4.44	4.44	4.20	4.52	4.77	4.58
3	4.55	3.72	4.22	3.55	4.22	3.27	4.10	3.18	4.44	3.48
4	4.11	4.00	3.66	3.85	3.77	3.83	3.60	3.81	3.88	3.8
5	4.55	4.58	3.55	4.62	4.00	4.47	4.10	4.55	4.33	4.60
6	4.88	4.63	4.11	4.61	3.77	4.34	4.70	4.22	4.44	4.55
7	5.00	4.19	5.00	4.33	5.00	4.25	4.90	4.23	5.00	4.16
8	4.66	3.82	4.33	3.90	4.44	3.65	4.20	3.70	4.22	3.77
9	4.11	4.47	4.33	4.41	4.55	4.48	4.30	4.43	4.22	4.33
10	4.22	4.57	3.88	4.35	4.11	4.57	3.60	4.48	4.55	4.46
11	5.00	3.76	4.66	3.78	4.88	3.62	4.80	3.66	5.00	3.84
12	4.11	4.42	3.77	4.32	3.77	4.12	4.20	4.15	4.22	4.24

13	4.22	4.14	4.55	3.51	4.44	3.85	4.40	3.66	4.44	4.11
14	4.77	4.39	4.77	4.41	4.55	4.39	4.80	4.43	4.55	4.33
15	4.77	4.10	4.77	4.02	4.66	3.84	4.40	4.03	4.88	4.02
Mean across all leaders	4.55	4.20	4.28	4.18	4.36	4.06	4.32	4.08	4.50	4.12
SD	0.32	0.83	0.43	0.85	0.41	0.97	0.39	0.99	0.31	0.98

Leader Self-Assessment. When examining the leaders' self-ratings as a whole, the social emotional component with the highest mean rating was *Self-Awareness*, with a mean of 4.55, while the component with the overall lowest self-rating was *Self-Management*, with a mean of 4.28. In addition to having the lowest mean rating, the component of *Self-Management* also had the largest standard deviation, at 0.43, indicating it as the component with the greatest variability in the leaders' self-ratings. The component of *Responsible Decision-Making* had the smallest standard deviation, at 0.31, indicating that there was the least variability of leaders' self-rating within that component.

From the school leaders' self-assessment, each of the 9 indicators within the component of *Self-Awareness* were examined using descriptive statistics. Table 4.2 shows each indicator along with the data for each.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within the component of Self-Awareness

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD	Range
	I can identify and name my emotions in the moment.	4.71	0.46	1

Emotional Self-Awareness	I use self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to my emotions and how my emotions impact me.	4.50	0.65	2
	I recognize when my emotions, thoughts, and biases influence my behavior and my reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively.	4.35	0.63	1
	I know and am realistic about my strengths and limitations.	4.57	0.51	1
Identity and Self-Knowledge	I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity is shaped by other people and my race, culture, experiences, and environments.	4.14	0.66	2
	I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity shapes my views, biases, and prejudices.	4.21	0.69	2
	I believe I will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed.	4.85	0.36	1
Growth Mindset and Purpose	I believe I can influence my own future and achieve my ambitions.	4.85	0.36	1
	I can see how I have a valuable role in my work, my family, and my community.	4.71	0.46	1

The two indicators within the component of *Self-Awareness* with the highest mean self-ratings were *I believe I will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed* (4.85) and *I believe I can influence my own future and achieve my ambitions*, (4.85) which both fell within the grouping of indicators titled “Growth Mindset and Purpose.” The same two indicators showed the smallest standard deviation (0.36) among leader self-ratings indicating that overall leaders reported this consistently as a strength. The two indicators within the component of *Self-Awareness* that were highest rated in the leaders’ self-assessment were *I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity is shaped by other people and my race, culture, experiences, and environments* (4.14) and *I recognize and reflect on ways in which my*

identity shapes my views, biases, and prejudices (4.21) which were both located in the “Identity and Self- Knowledge” set up SEL skills.

The component of *Self-Management* was rated by the leaders as the overall lowest social emotional competency with a mean of 4.28. This component also had the largest variance of self-ratings with a standard deviation of 0.43. Table 4.3 shows the mean, standard deviation and range of ratings for the indicators within the component of *Self-Management*.

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within the component of Self-Management

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD	Range
Managing Emotions	I find ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others.	4.07	0.73	2
	I can get through something even when I feel frustrated.	4.50	0.85	3
	I can calm myself when I feel stressed or nervous.	4.21	0.80	2
Motivation, Agency, and Goal- Setting	I hold high expectations that motivate me to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I lead.	4.71	0.46	1
	I take action and impact change on issues that are important to me and the larger community.	4.57	0.51	1
	I set measurable, challenging, and attainable goals and have clear steps in place to reach them.	4.21	0.69	2
Planning and Organization	I modify my plans in the face of new information and realities.	4.64	0.49	1
	When juggling multiple demands, I use strategies to regain focus and energy.	4.21	0.89	3
	I balance my work life with personal renewal time.	3.14	1.23	4

The indicator with the highest mean rating was *I hold high expectations that motivate me to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I lead* (4.71) which was in the skill grouping of “Motivation, Agency, and Goal-Setting.” The two lowest means came from the indicators *I find ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don’t negatively impact others* (4.07) and *I balance my work life with personal renewal time* (3.14.) Of the fifteen school principal participants, one answered “strongly disagree” (1) on the self-rating and four answered “disagree” (2) for the indicator *I balance my work life with personal renewal time*. Further, this indicator had the largest range (4) and the largest standard deviation (1.23) which shows that leaders varied significantly in their responses to this indicator.

The social emotional component of *Responsible Decision-Making* had the second highest mean (4.5) of self-ratings by the school leader participants. The indicator, *I help to make my personal and professional community a better place* (4.92), had the highest mean not only for the component of *Responsible Decision-Making* but also the highest self-rated mean across all five components of social emotional competence. There were four indicators within this component that were rated lower by the leaders. All four of the following indicators had a mean of 4.21: *I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems I see; I involve others who are impacted to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project; I involve others who are impacted to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems; and I take time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used*. Of those four indicators, the first one, *I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems I see*, offered the largest variability in ratings with a standard deviation of 0.89 and a range of 3. Table 4.4 contains each of the nine

indicators of *Responsible Decision-Making* along with the mean, standards deviation, and range for each.

Table 4.4

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Responsible Decision-Making

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD	Range
Problem Analysis	I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems I see.	4.21	0.89	3
	I recognize the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school community.	4.64	0.63	2
	I involve others who are impacted to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.	4.21	0.57	2
Identifying Solutions	I involve others who are impacted to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.	4.21	0.57	2
	I find practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.	4.57	0.64	2
	I consider how my choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people I serve and the community around them.	4.64	0.49	1
Reflection on Impact	I take time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used.	4.21	0.57	2
	I consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.	4.71	0.46	1
	I help to make my personal and professional community a better place.	4.92	0.26	1

The social and emotional component of *Social Awareness* had a mean rating by the school leaders of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.41 within the set of leader self-ratings. The indicator with the highest rated mean was *I show care for others when I see that they have been*

harmed in some way (4.64) that is in the “Empathy and Compassion” SEL skill grouping. The indicator with the lowest mean, *I ask others about their experience and perspective before offering my version of events* (4.07) which is in the SEL skill grouping of “Perspective Taking”, also had the largest standard deviation (0.91) and the largest range (3) within the component of *Social Awareness*. Table 4.5 shows each survey indicator from the Social Awareness component with the mean, standard deviation, and range for each.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Social Awareness

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD	Range
Empathy and Compassion	I can grasp a person’s perspective and feelings from verbal and nonverbal cues.	4.28	0.61	2
	I pay attention to the feelings of others and recognize how my words and behavior impact them.	4.42	0.64	2
	I show care for others when I see that they have been harmed in some way.	4.64	0.63	2
Perspective Taking	I work to learn about the experiences of people of different races, ethnicities, or cultures	4.21	0.69	2
	I learn from those who have different opinions than me.	4.35	0.49	1
	I ask others about their experience and perspective before offering my version of events.	4.07	0.91	3
Understanding social Context	I understand the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people.	4.14	0.53	2
	I appreciate and honor the cultural differences within my school community/ workplace.	4.57	0.51	1
	I recognize the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners.	4.42	0.64	2

Lastly, the component of *Relationship Skills* had a mean self-rating of 4.32. Table 4.6 contains each indicator within the component, along with the standard deviation and range for each.

Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Relationship Skills

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD	Range
Communication	I can stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning.	4.14	0.86	3
	I can articulate ideas that are important to me in ways that engage others.	4.28	0.61	2
	I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.	4.14	0.86	3
Building Relationships and Teamwork	I connect meaningfully with young people, their families, colleagues, and community members who are from a different race, culture, or socioeconomic background than I am.	4.35	0.63	2
	I get to know the people around me.	4.50	0.64	2
	I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere.	4.71	0.46	1
	I make sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas.	4.21	0.80	2
Conflict Management	When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective.	4.00	0.87	3
	I openly admit my mistakes to myself and other and work to make things right.	4.42	0.75	2
	I can work through my discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives.	4.35	0.49	1

Within this component, the indicator in which the school leaders rated themselves highest in was *I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere* (4.71) that was part of the group of skills titled “Building Relationships and Teamwork.” The second highest rated indicator was *I get to know the people around me* (4.50). Conversely, the indicator with the lowest mean rating was *When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective* (4.00) which also had the largest standard deviation (0.87) and range (3.) The next two lowest rated indicators, both from the skill grouping “Communication” were *I can stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning* and *I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members* which both had a mean rating of 4.14.

Faculty and Staff Survey Results. Referring back to Table 4.1, earlier in this chapter, for the overall faculty and staff ratings, including the mean ratings for each leader, by their faculty and staff, organized by the five components of social emotional competence. The results of the faculty and staff surveys show that overall, the leaders’ colleagues rated them highest in the social emotional component of *Self-Awareness* (4.20) and lowest in *Social Awareness* (4.06). *Self-Awareness* had the smallest standard deviation (0.83) showing the closest agreement in the ratings of the leaders’ faculty and staff while *Relationship Skills* had the largest standard deviation (0.99) which indicates the largest variance in ratings of others’. Overall, the standard deviations for the others’ ratings were higher than those of the leaders, showing a greater

variability in responses on the faculty and staff surveys. Additionally, the mean others' ratings for each component were consistently lower than the mean ratings of the leaders themselves.

Paralleling the leaders' self-ratings, the component of *Self-Awareness* was rated highest overall by the faculty and staff of the fifteen leaders. Table 4.7 shows each of the nine indicators within the component of *Self-Awareness*, organized by the corresponding SEL skill grouping, along with the mean and standard deviation for each.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Self-Awareness (Faculty/ Staff Ratings)

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD
	Leader can identify and name their emotions in the moment.	4.17	0.96
Emotional Self-Awareness	Leaders use self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to their emotions and how their emotions impact them.	4.09	1.04
	Leader recognizes when their emotions, thoughts, and biases influence their behavior and their reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively.	3.93	1.19
	Leader knows and is realistic about their strengths and limitations.	4.15	1.07
Identity and Self-Knowledge	Leader recognizes and reflect on ways in which their identity is shaped by other people and their race, culture, experiences, and environments.	4.01	1.03
	Leader recognizes and reflect on ways in which their identity shapes their views, biases, and prejudices.	4	1.05
Growth Mindset and Purpose	Leader believes they will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed.	4.47	0.87
	Leader believes they can influence their own future and achieve my ambitions.	4.5	0.76
	Leader can see how they have a valuable role in their work, their family, and their community.	4.5	0.84

Within the component of *Self-Awareness*, the three indicators in the “Growth Mindset and Purpose” skill grouping had the overall highest means. The same three indicators had the lowest standard deviations indicating that the faculty and staff who work with the school leaders agreed more closely on the rating of those indicators. Meanwhile, the indicator with the lowest mean was *Leader recognizes when their emotions, thoughts, and biases influence their behavior and their reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively* which is in the skill grouping of “Emotional Self-Awareness.” With a mean of 3.93, this indicator was one of the three lowest rated indicators of the 45 indicators in the faculty/ staff survey.

The second highest mean rating was in the social emotional component of *Self-Management* (4.18). Table 4.8 shows the mean and standard deviation of the faculty/ staff ratings for the indicators within the component of *Self-Management*.

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Self-Management (Faculty/ Staff ratings)

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD
Managing Emotions	Leader finds ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others.	4.01	1.15
	Leader can get through something even when they feel frustrated.	4.23	1.00
	Leader can calm myself when they feel stressed or nervous.	4.07	1.00
Motivation, Agency, and Goal- Setting	Leader holds high expectations that motivates them to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those they lead.	4.32	0.99
	Leader takes action and impact change on issues that are important to them and the larger community.	4.27	0.94
	Leader sets measurable, challenging, and attainable goals and have clear steps in place to reach them.	4.19	0.98

	Leader modifies their plans in the face of new information and realities.	4.22	1.06
Planning and Organization	When juggling multiple demands, leader uses strategies to regain focus and energy.	4.16	0.98
	Leader balances their work life with personal renewal time.	4.12	0.96

The indicator with the highest mean, as rated by the faculty and staff was *Leader holds high expectations that motivates them to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those they lead* (4.32) while the indicator with the lowest standard deviation, thus showing the closest agreement of the responses, was *Leader takes action and impact change on issues that are important to them and the larger community* (.94). Conversely, the indicator with the lowest overall mean, *Leader finds ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others* (4.01), also had the largest standard deviation (1.15) within the component of *Self-Management* which shows that participants varied more in their responses to that indicator than others in the same component.

The component of *Social Awareness* was rated by the colleagues of the leaders lowest overall with a mean of 4.06. Table 4.9 contains the mean and standard deviation for each indicator within the component of *Social Awareness*, organized by the SEL skill grouping.

Table 4.9

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Social Awareness (Faculty/ Staff ratings)

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD
Empathy and Compassion	Leader can grasp a person's perspective and feelings from verbal and nonverbal cues.	4.01	1.16
	Leader pays attention to the feelings of others and recognizes how their words and behavior impact them.	3.98	1.28

	Leader shows care for others when they see that they have been harmed in some way.	4.13	1.16
Perspective Taking	Leader works to learn about the experiences of people of different races, ethnicities, or cultures.	4.00	1.06
	Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them.	3.92	1.15
	Leader asks others about their experience and perspective before offering their version of events.	3.99	1.21
Understanding Social Context	Leader understands the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people.	3.93	1.09
	Leader appreciates and honors the cultural differences within their school community/ workplace.	4.19	1.03
	Leader recognizes the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners.	4.36	0.88

The indicator within the component of Social Awareness that was rated highest by the group of faculty and staff respondents was *Leader recognizes the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners* with a mean of 4.36. This indicator also had the smallest standard deviation (0.88) showing that the participants agreed more closely on this indicator than others within this component. The indicator with the lowest mean was *Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them* (3.92).

The social emotional component of *Relationship Skills* had a mean rating of 4.08 and was the second lowest rated component in the faculty and staff surveys. Table 4.10 shows each indicator within the component of *Relationship Skills* along with the mean and standard deviation for each.

Table 4.10

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Relationship Skills (Faculty and Staff Ratings)

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD
Communication	Leader can stay focused when listening to others and carefully considers their meaning.	4.11	1.11
	Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others.	4.25	1.00
	Leader can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.	3.97	1.11
Building Relationships and Teamwork	Leader connects meaningfully with young people, their families, colleagues, and community members who are from a different race, culture, or socioeconomic background than they are.	4.14	1.06
	Leader gets to know the people around them.	4.16	1.12
	Leader works well with others and generates a collegial atmosphere.	4.25	1.10
	Leader makes sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas.	4.04	1.22
Conflict Management	When leader is upset with someone, they talk to them about how they feel and listen to others' perspective.	3.88	1.21
	Leader openly admits their mistakes to them self and others and work to make things right.	4.03	1.16
	Leader can work through their discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives.	3.98	1.16

Within the component of *Relationship Skills*, the indicators of *Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others* and *Leader works well with others and generates a collegial atmosphere* shared the same rating as the highest mean (4.25). The first of these (*Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others*) also had the lowest standard deviation (1.00) for this component, showing that, as a whole, faculty and staff participants agree that their school principals are strong in the area of communication.

In contrast, the lowest rated indicator was *When leader is upset with someone, they talk to them about how they feel and listen to others' perspectives*, with a mean of 3.88, also had the second largest standard deviation (1.21) within this component showing a larger variance in participants' responses. That same indicator, that is in the SEL skill grouping of "Conflict Management" was the indicator with the overall lowest rating by the faculty and staff participants' about their school leaders. The indicator with the largest standard deviation in this section came from *Leader makes sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas* (1.22) which indicates that the faculty and staff participants varied more in their responses to that indicator.

Lastly, the component of *Responsible Decision-Making* had a mean of 4.12 as rated by the faculty and staff of the leaders. Table 4.11 contains the mean and standard deviation for each indicator within the component of *Responsible Decision-Making*, organized by the SEL skill groupings.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for each indicator within Responsible Decision-Making by Faculty/ Staff

SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator	Mean	SD
Problem Analysis	Leader gathers relevant information to explore the root causes of problems they see.	4.03	1.16
	Leader recognizes the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in their school community.	4.30	1.00
	Leader involves others who are impacted to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.	4.03	1.19
Identifying Solutions	Leader involves others who are impacted to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.	4.00	1.19

	Leader finds practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.	4.10	1.11
	Leader considers how their choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people they serve and the community around them.	4.10	1.13
Reflection on Impact	Leader takes time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used.	4.05	1.11
	Leader considers how their personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.	4.08	1.14
	Leader helps to make their personal and professional community a better place.	4.38	0.94

Contained within the component of *Responsible Decision Making*, the indicator with the highest mean was *Leader help to make their personal and professional community a better place* (4.38) which is part of the “Reflection on Impact” skill grouping. This indicator also showed the smallest standard deviation (0.94) indicating a stronger agreement among participant ratings than the other indicators in this section. The lowest mean was for the indicator *Leader involves others who are impacted to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems* (4.00).

Connections between leaders’ and others’ ratings. The results of the faculty and staff survey were compared to the principals’ self-ratings, in order to answer the next two research questions.

RQ3 - What specific dimensions of social emotional competence are similar and different between self and others’ ratings?

RQ4 - How does a school leader’s self-assessment of their social emotional competence compare to the ratings of their subordinates in the organization?

In examining the ratings of the leaders on the self-assessment and comparing them to the mean ratings of their faculty and staff, several groupings emerged. First, leaders 1, 3, 8, 13, and 15 had the largest differences between their own self-ratings and those of their colleagues. These leaders were consistently rated lower by their faculty and staff than they rated themselves. The component of *Social Awareness* had the largest mean difference between ratings. Table 4.12 shows Leader Group A, with self-ratings, the mean of faculty and staff ratings, and the difference between the two.

Table 4.12

Leader Group A

L	Self-Awareness			Self- Management			Social Awareness			Relationship Skills			Responsible Decision Making		
	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff
1	4.77	3.83	.94	4.33	3.59	.74	4.88	3.38	1.5	4.60	3.43	1.17	4.66	3.47	1.19
3	4.55	3.72	.83	4.22	3.55	.67	4.22	3.27	.95	4.10	3.18	.92	4.44	3.48	.96
8	4.66	3.82	.84	4.33	3.90	.43	4.44	3.65	.79	4.20	3.70	.50	4.22	3.77	.45
13	4.22	4.14	.08	4.55	3.51	1.04	4.44	3.85	.59	4.40	3.66	.74	4.44	4.11	.33
15	4.77	4.10	.67	4.77	4.02	.75	4.66	3.84	.82	4.40	4.03	.37	4.88	4.02	.86
Mean difference			.67			.72			.93			.74			.75

Next, leaders 2, 4, 5, 9, and 14 (shown in Table 4.13 below) had the most similar ratings between themselves and their faculty and staff raters. Within this group, there were a mixture of components that were rated higher by the leaders and some that were rated higher by others. The component of *Social Awareness* showed the closest alignment in leaders' and others' ratings while the component of *Self-Management* showed the largest dissonance between the two groups of raters.

Table 4.13*Leader Group B*

L	Self-Awareness			Self- Management			Social Awareness			Relationship Skills			Responsible Decision Making		
	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff
2	4.66	4.55	.11	4.33	4.40	.07*	4.44	4.44	0	4.20	4.52	.32*	4.77	4.58	.19
4	4.11	4.00	.11	3.66	3.85	.19*	3.77	3.83	.06*	3.60	3.81	.21*	3.88	3.8	.08
5	4.55	4.58	.03*	3.55	4.62	1.07*	4.00	4.47	.47*	4.10	4.55	.45*	4.33	4.60	.27*
9	4.11	4.47	.36*	4.33	4.41	.08*	4.55	4.48	.07	4.30	4.43	.13*	4.22	4.33	.11*
14	4.77	4.39	.38	4.77	4.41	.36	4.55	4.39	.16	4.80	4.43	.37	4.55	4.33	.22
Mean difference			.19			.35			.15			.29			.17

*Others rating is higher than leader's self-rating

Another grouping of leaders were, for the most part, rated higher by their colleagues than they rated themselves. Although there were exceptions in the components of *Self-Awareness*, *Relationship Skills*, and *Responsible Decision Making*, the ratings of others were higher for each of these three leaders in both *Self-Management* and *Social Awareness*. Leaders 6, 10, and 12 were all females. Table 4.14 shows leader group C and the mean ratings for leaders, others, and the difference between the two.

Table 4.14*Leader Group C*

L	Self-Awareness			Self- Management			Social Awareness			Relationship Skills			Responsible Decision Making		
	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff
6	4.88	4.63	.25	4.11	4.61	.50*	3.77	4.34	.57*	4.70	4.22	.48	4.44	4.55	.11*
10	4.22	4.57	.35*	3.88	4.35	.47*	4.11	4.57	.46*	3.60	4.48	.88*	4.55	4.46	.09
12	4.11	4.42	.32*	3.77	4.32	.55*	3.77	4.12	.35*	4.20	4.15	.05	4.22	4.24	.02*

*Others rating is higher than leader's self-rating

Lastly, there were two leaders (7 and 11) who not only rated themselves higher than their colleagues rated them, but they also rated themselves higher than any of the other leaders did. Both leaders rated themselves as a 5 on nearly every indicator on the survey, with leader 7 rating themselves slightly higher than leader 11. Along with Leader 1, Leader 11 had the largest difference between their own ratings and the ratings of their colleagues. Table 4.15 contains the data for the two leaders as well as the difference between the leaders own ratings and the mean ratings of the colleagues.

Table 4.15

Leader Group D

L	Self-Awareness			Self- Management			Social Awareness			Relationship Skills			Responsible Decision Making		
	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff	Self	F/S	Diff
7	5.00	4.19	.81	5.00	4.33	.67	5.00	4.25	.75	4.90	4.23	.67	5.00	4.16	.84
11	5.00	3.76	1.24	4.66	3.78	.88	4.88	3.62	1.26	4.80	3.66	1.14	5.00	3.84	1.16

After examining the grouping of the leaders, I identified both the highest and lowest rated indicators that were agreed on by both groups of raters. Tables 4.16 and 4.17, below, identify the highest and lowest rated indicators for both leaders' and others' ratings as well as which SEL component they come from.

Table 4.16

Highest Rated Indicators by Leaders and Others

Leaders' Self-Assessment	Faculty/ Staff Surveys
I help to make my personal and professional community a better place. 4.92* RDM	Leader believes they can influence their own future and achieve their ambitions. 4.5* SFA

I believe I will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed. 4.85* SFA	Leader can see how they have a valuable role in their work, their family, and their community. 4.5* SFA
I believe I can influence my own future and achieve my ambitions. 4.85* SFA	Leader believes they will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed. 4.47* SFA
I can see how I have a valuable role in my work, my family, and my community. 4.71* SFA	Leader helps to make their personal and professional community a better place. 4.38* RDM
I can identify and name my emotions in the moment. 4.71 SFA	Leader recognizes the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners. 4.36 SLA
I hold high expectations that motivate me to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I lead. 4.71* SM	Leader holds high expectations that motivates them to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those they lead. 4.32* SM
I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere. 4.71*RS	Leader recognizes the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in their school community. 4.30 RDM
I consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others. 4.71 RDM	Leader takes action and impact change on issues that are important to them and the larger community. 4.27 SM
	Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others. 4.25 RS
	Leader works well with others and generates a collegial atmosphere. 4.25* RS

*denotes indicators that are in the highest rated means for both leaders' and others' ratings

SFA- Self-Awareness; SM- Self-Management; SLA- Social Awareness; RS- Relationship Skills; RDM- Responsible Decision-Making

As shown in Table 4.17, there were six indicators that were rated high for both leaders and their respective faculty and staff: *I (Leader) help(s) to make my (their) personal and*

professional community a better place; I (Leader) believe(s) I (they) will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed; I (Leader) believe(s) I (they) can influence my (their) own future and achieve my (their) ambitions.; I (Leader) can see how I (they) have a valuable role in my (their) work, my (their) family, and my (their) community.; I (Leader) hold(s) high expectations that motivate me (them) to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I (they) lead; and I (Leader) work(s) well with others and generate(s) a collegial atmosphere.

Similarly, there were four indicators that fell in the grouping of the lowest rated indicators in both the leaders' and others' results: *When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective.; I ask others about their experience and perspective before offering my version of events.; I understand the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people.; and I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.* Table 4.17 contains the lowest rated indicators for both leaders' and others' ratings.

Table 4.17

Lowest Rated Indicators by Leaders and Others

Leaders' Self-Assessment	Faculty/ Staff Surveys
I balance my work life with personal renewal time. 3.14 SM	When leader is upset with someone, they talk to them about how they feel and listen to others' perspective. 3.88* RS
When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective. 4.00* RS	Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them. 3.92 SA
I find ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others. 4.07 SM	Leader recognizes when their emotions, thoughts, and biases influence their behavior

I ask others about their experience and perspective before offering my version of events. 4.07* SFA	and their reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively. 3.93 SFA
I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity is shaped by other people and my race, culture, experiences, and environments. 4.14 SLA	Leader understands the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people. 3.93* SLA
I understand the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people. 4.14* SLA	Leader can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members. 3.97* RS
I can stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning. 4.14	Leader can work through their discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives. 3.98 RS
I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members. 4.14* RS	Leader pays attention to the feelings of others and recognizes how their words and behavior impact them. 3.98 SLA
	Leader asks others about their experience and perspective before offering their version of events. 3.99* SLA

*denotes indicators that are in the lowest rated means for both leaders' and others' ratings

SFA- Self-Awareness; SM- Self-Management; SLA- Social Awareness; RS- Relationship Skills; RDM- Responsible Decision-Making

Both the school principal participants as well as their colleagues rated *Self-Awareness* higher than the other components of social and emotional competence. Furthermore, within the component of *Self-Awareness*, both groups also rated the three indicators contained in the SEL skill grouping of "Growth Mindset and Purpose" as the strongest indicators. On the other hand, the two groups did not rate the same component as the lowest competency. Principals rated *Self-Management* lowest (4.28) while the faculty and staff participants rated the leaders as weaker in the competency of *Social Awareness* (4.06.) Also interesting is the component that showed the

largest dissonance between leaders' and others' overall ratings. Although not the lowest rated component for either group, the component of *Responsible Decision Making* revealed the largest difference in mean with a leader rating of 4.50 and an others' rating of 4.12 (See Table 4.1 earlier in Chapter 4.)

Looking at the congruence or dissonance between leaders' and others' ratings of specific indicators, the indicator with the greatest dissonance and the indicator with the most congruence both came from the component of *Self-Management*. The indicator of *I set (Leader sets) measurable, challenging, and attainable goals and have (has) clear steps in place to reach them* had the closest agreement between leaders and their colleagues with only a 0.02 difference in the means. Conversely, the indicator that reads *I can balance my work life with personal renewal time* had the greatest dissonance with 0.98 difference in the means of the leaders and colleagues and was the only indicator in the entire survey that was rated higher overall by the faculty and staff participants than by the leader participants.

Quantitative Results for Qualitative Participants

Three of the school leaders who participated in the quantitative phase were then chosen as participants for the qualitative portion of the investigation. The leaders were identified by having a high response rate on the faculty/ staff survey invitation as well as having been identified by the site district as a leader of a school with a strong culture and climate, according to the most recent culture and climate surveys administered by the district. A detailed description of each of the three leaders chosen for qualitative interview portion of the study is contained in Chapter 3.

Table 4.18 contains each of the three leaders' self-ratings and means of faculty and staff ratings, organized by SEC component.

Table 4.18

Self and Others' Ratings for the Three Leaders Who Were Interviewed

Leader	Self-Awareness		Self-Management		Social Awareness		Relationship Skills		Responsible Decision Making	
	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others
Mrs. Carter	4.55	4.58	3.55	4.62	4.00	4.47	4.10	4.55	4.33	4.60
Mr. Aaron	4.66	3.82	4.33	3.90	4.44	3.65	4.20	3.70	4.22	3.77
Mrs. Brown	4.77	4.39	4.77	4.41	4.55	4.39	4.80	4.43	4.55	4.33

Mrs. Brown (who was leader 14 in Table 4.1 of this chapter) rated herself highest in the area of *Relationship Skills* and lowest in the areas of *Social Awareness* and *Responsible Decision Making*. Her faculty and staff agreed that *Relationship Skills* were a strength, as they also rated her highest in that component. *Responsible Decision Making* was also rated as a relative weakness according to the faculty and staff surveys. Mrs. Brown was categorized with the group of leaders (see Table 4.14) that had the closest agreement between their own ratings and the ratings of others in their buildings. When reviewing the individual indicators from the survey, the indicator from the component of *Relationship Skills* that says *Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others* was rated highly by both Mrs. Brown and the faculty and staff at her school. On the other hand, the indicator *Leader takes time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used*, which is in the component of *Responsible Decision Making*, was one of the lowest rated indicators according to

Mrs. Brown's self-assessments as well as the faculty and staff survey. Interestingly, the indicator with the greatest dissonance between self and others' ratings was *Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them*, from the component of *Social Awareness*.

Mr. Aaron (leader 8 in Table 4.1 of this chapter) rated himself highest in the SEC component of *Self-Awareness* and lowest in the area of *Relationship Skills*. The faculty and staff at his school rated him highest in *Self-Management* and weakest in *Social Awareness*. Unlike the two other leaders chosen for the qualitative phase of the investigation, Mr. Aaron's results on the quantitative survey showed a larger dissonance between his self-ratings and the ratings of others. In examining the individual indicators from the survey, the indicator that read *Leader takes action and impacts change on issues that are important to them and the larger community*, located within the component of *Self-Management*, was rated highly by both Mr. Aaron and his colleagues. In contrast, *Leader stays focused when listening to others and carefully considers their meaning*, which is part of the component of *Relationship Skills*, was one of the lowest rated indicators by both Mr. Aaron and his faculty and staff. One of the indicators with the greatest difference between Mr. Aaron's self-rating and the mean rating of his faculty and staff was *Leader recognizes and reflects on ways in which their identity shapes their views, biases, and prejudices*.

Mrs. Carter (leader 5 in Table 4.1 of this chapter) also was included in the grouping of leaders who had the most congruence between their own ratings and the rating of their colleagues (see Table 4.14), but Mrs. Carter was consistently scored higher by her faculty and staff than she rated herself. One interesting thing about her results are the area that Mrs. Carter rated herself lowest in, *Self-Management*, was the highest rated component by her faculty and

staff. She rated herself highest in *Self Awareness*. Mrs. Carter's faculty and staff chose *Social Awareness* as a relative weakness. When looking at specific indicators on the survey, the indicator of *Leader works well with others and generates a collegial atmosphere*, which is in the component of *Relationship Skills*, was one of the highest rated indicators by both Mrs. Carter and her colleagues. Conversely, the indicator of *Leader asks others about their experience & perspective before offering their version of events*, within the component of *Social Awareness*, was one of the lowest rated by Mrs. Carter and the faculty and staff participants. Located within the component of *Self-Management*, the indicator *Leader balances their work life with personal renewal time*, showed the greatest difference between Mrs. Carter and her colleagues.

Qualitative Results

Phase 2 of this study included face-to-face interviews with three of the school leaders from Phase 1 of the study in order to answer two of my research questions. These principals and their school contexts were described briefly above.

RQ1 - What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?

RQ5 - How do current K-12 school-based leaders describe the interaction between their own social emotional competence and their position of leadership within their buildings?

Each of the leaders identified areas of social and emotional competence they considered to be personal strengths and relative weaknesses as well as discussed how their own SEC played a part in their leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, leaders shared the resources and supports that have assisted them in growing and maintaining their social and emotional skills.

Mrs. Brown. When asked about how Mrs. Brown described the importance of her own social, emotional competence in relation to her leadership, she responded about how her *Self-Awareness* and *Self-Management* intersect,

So I think it's critical that you are aware of what you're putting out because that sets the tone. So one of the things that's really important to me is being here and being here early and being present, having that door open. So I want to be the first person that people see in the morning. I just feel like that sets the tone if people come in. I need to be aware of that, if I have that door shut, that's setting a barrier. I need to be aware of that if I'm on the phone and I'm not able to smile and just have that pleasantry (with them.)

She further explained how she understands that her own self-management of emotions can affect both the faculty and staff at her school but also her students,

So I guess where that comes into my awareness of my social emotional is if I'm having a rough morning or I'm harried or, something's bothering me. I have to check that at the door and compartmentalize that because I know that people are going to be looking for that uplifting, smiling greeting, because a lot of times then they'll reflect that back. So maybe if they had been feeling crummy and I was feeling crummy and I've put that out there. And I wasn't aware of the fact that they were looking to me to set that tone that would just kind of cascade through and then end up with the kids.

The way in which Mrs. Brown answered, it is apparent that she recognizes the power and influence she has to set the tone of the climate of her school.

Mrs. Brown responded that one of her social emotional strengths is in the area of *Self-Awareness*. She specifically mentioned the third indicator on the survey which read, *I recognize*

when my emotions, thoughts, and biases influence my behavior and my reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively. She said:

Just the way that you present it is everything. So I think recognizing that you are, you're the point person for that and recognizing that there are times where you may not agree, or you may not a hundred percent buy into something, but you know, that it's part of the job, but you need to do it, but it's the way in which you do it. Your body language and the tone of voice and the eye contact and everything that goes along with it. People can tell whether or not you're being sincere or not. And so there's times when you have to fake it till you make it a little bit. But you have to do that, it is part of the deal. So, you know, there are times when I think you're exuding positivity and it's just sincere and honest and it's just through and through. And there are times when you have to say, you know, I need to get myself up to do this because it's something that I might get some push back on or it might be hard, but the way that I sell it, it's going to make a difference.

Mrs. Brown explained that this indicator is tested when she, as the principal, has to communicate about a new district initiative that she may not completely understand or agree with. She gave the example of how she is the point person at her school for the new English/ Language Arts standards and curriculum. Mrs. Brown said that the success of the initiative may be dependent on her "enthusiasm and positivity." She understands that it is her attitude and response to federal, state, and district initiatives that sets the tone for how her faculty and staff will react.

When asked to name an indicator that highlights an area of weakness or opportunity for her to grow, Mrs. Brown mentions the indicator from the component of *Self-Awareness, I*

recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity shapes my views, biases, and prejudices. She explained,

It's something that I've been working on as a leader; recognizing that not everyone is coming into a relationship or an interaction at the same place or with the same background experience that I am. I used to have very high expectations for everyone because I have high expectations for myself. It's not that I shouldn't have high expectations, but I think sometimes I was a little bit too critical or a little too judgmental with people because they didn't share that same sense of urgency and really it was not that they didn't think it was important. They were just coming at it from a different perspective than I was. That's something that I've been more aware of lately.

She said that time and experience have helped her to understand that “not everybody was coming from that same experience that I was coming from.” She shared that she felt like having prior experience in a “really urban, really, integrated environment” compared to the small town, rural feel of the site district, has given her a different experience than some others. Another weakness Mrs. Brown mentioned was her ability to balance her work and personal life. Referring to the indicator within the component of *Self-Management* that reads *I balance my work life with personal renewal time*, she said, “And so really last year, just between COVID, with the gym being closed and then stepping into this new role as principal, that definitely went by the wayside.”

One indicator, *Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them*, that is within the social emotional component of *Social Awareness*, was identified as the one with the great dissonance between Mrs. Brown's self-rating (5) and the mean rating of her faculty and

staff (3.95). When I asked Mrs. Brown to explore the suspected reasoning for this difference, she had trouble identifying why that might be. She pointed out that each of the other indicators within *Social Awareness* were rated higher (between 4.33 and 4.52) but she could not determine a potential reason why one was rated so much lower. Even with some wait time, Mrs. Brown ended with, “Like, what would that look like, I guess is what I’m wondering? I feel like I definitely want to reflect on that more.”

After discussing her thoughts about her own social emotional competence, I asked her about the resources she has needed presently or in the past in order to address areas of opportunity to improve her own SEC. She responded that having a strong peer group support system was vital to building and maintaining her social emotional competence,

Other principals. I was fortunate in that I came in with a pretty big cohort of new principals. So I wasn’t the only new kid on the block, which was really nice. There was a peer group there. And then some of those people that I came in with, I already had established relationships. Either I had already been an administrator with them. Some of them I’ve even co-taught in a classroom. So there were some people where I just had a very long trusting relationship with where I felt like they knew me on multiple levels as a teacher, as an educator, as a parent. So I trust them and their feedback.

The peer support group she mentions was an informal grouping of collegial friends that formed organically and not something that was designed by or organized by the district. Mrs. Brown shared that at times that peer support was as simple as a phone conversation on the way home while getting their input on the way something was handled.

Regarding how her social emotional competence came into play during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mrs. Brown talked about how she had to call on her skills in the components of *Relationship Skills* and *Responsible Decision Making* in order to navigate her position as a brand new principal during that time. She declared,

I walked into, I didn't know, a single child, single parent or single other adult. One of the first challenges I had was to build my smart restart plan. So I reached out to all the stakeholders, well the first thing I did was to have every team lead come and meet with me if they wanted to, I invited them individually just to kind of talk to me about them, tell me about their team, tell me what was important to them and kind of let me kind of hear their voice. And that was very helpful. I did the same thing with my CCEA (union) rep. I did the same thing with my head custodian with all of that. So then I said, I'd really like you to be a part of my task force I'm putting together. Then I asked like four parents. I kind of, I had to trust people. You know, because I didn't know them. So I looked at them in the eye and said look, I'm at a disadvantage. This is a really big job in it and it matters.

Because my number one job is to keep everybody here safe and so I have to get this right.

Mrs. Brown goes on to explain how she believes that entering the principalship during the pandemic accelerated the building of new relationships with her faculty and staff. She said, "I had conversations with people about their personal business. It probably would have taken three or four years to have otherwise." She gives examples such as the vulnerability her faculty and staff showed in sharing about personal struggles due to the pandemic or divulging health issues going on with themselves or their family. In this way, Mrs. Brown used the circumstances of the pandemic to build strong relationships with her new colleagues.

Mr. Aaron. The interview with Mr. Aaron started with asking him to explain his thoughts on the importance of his own SEC and how it affects his leadership. He responded, The principal is....I'm trying to get the best way of putting this, but the principal is the face of the school, the heart of the school, soul of the school. If I get on the morning announcements every morning, and it's (mumbles in a monotone voice); If I'm not able to convey the positive attitude and what we want to do; the high expectations we have. We're not going to see it in the school. The mood of the principal is the culture of the school.

Mr. Aaron's response indicates that he believes there is a connection between his social and emotional competence and the culture of his school. For instance, he believes that if he fails to lead with a positive attitude and a motivating personality, the teachers, staff, and students would eventually be affected. Based on his response, it seems that Mr. Aaron knows that high expectations starts with him.

When asked about what area he rated himself highest in, Mr. Aaron mentioned an indicator from the component of *Relationship Skills (I get to know the people around me.)* He said,

Leader gets to know the people around them. I think that's important. And I've worked in schools before where the principal, couldn't tell you the name of our daycare workers. At a former school I was at. You know, they used to make it a joke because she would try and get him to say her name and he wasn't able to respond. I think it's important that you try and....I want to know everyone's name. They have a stake in (this) high school. That they're important. I think it's important to try and get to know as many kids as possible. I

know when I was at (another school), I probably could tell you every kid on that campus.

I made it a point to meet them when they came in.

When he speaks of the importance of knowing peoples' names, it is clear that Mr. Aaron values the faculty and staff he works with, as well as the students, and seeks to build meaningful relationships with them. He understands that trust is built when relationships are authentic. Mr. Aaron mentioned several times how important it is to know and use people's names and to truly work to get to know them on a personal level. He says that he gets to know people by just being present and being interested in their lives.

After discussing what he believes are his strengths in regards to social and emotional competence, Mr. Aaron was asked to explain his opportunities for growth as he referred to his own self-rating from the quantitative phase of the study. Interestingly, even though the indicator that he felt was a strength came from the component of *Relationship Skills*, so did his self-reported weakness. Pointing to the indicator that read *I stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning*, Mr. Aaron described how active listening is difficult for him when he said,

It is easy to listen, jump to conclusions, and move on to the next fire, especially for me.

That's my personality. I'm always, I'm just moving. I'm trying to get things done as quickly as possible. I need to stop and listen. And that's something I'm trying to do a better job of. But I've got a ways to go.

Mr. Aaron's explanation shows that he is reflective about his own social emotional skills and has self-awareness of his relative weaknesses. He understands that, in light of his fast paced

personality, he can improve in the area of active listening. While discussing weaknesses, he also mentioned the indicator, *I balance my work life with personal renewal time*, when he said,

I think communication is a huge part of being a principal. I keep myself very open to communicate but that can be a fault. Because I'm getting a text at nine o'clock at night, a teacher who needs something and I'm (working) instead of spending that time with family.

He explains that balancing his time is something that he feels he is getting better at as he becomes more experienced but that it is a constant struggle.

I asked Mr. Aaron to discuss an indicator that was identified as having the greatest difference between his own and his colleagues' ratings, *Leader knows and is realistic about own strengths and limitations* which is in the component of *Self-Awareness*. Mr. Aaron rated himself a 5 for that indicator, which was a "strongly agree" for the statement, while his faculty and staff had a mean rating of 3.65. When I asked him why he thought the difference in ratings occurred, Mr. Aaron questioned the validity of asking others about that indicator. He said,

I think I can say for me personally, I know what areas I'm strong in and then what areas that I need to really work on. So I don't know how a person can look at me from the outside and know what's going on in my head and then be able to convey that within a survey.

After a pause, he agreed that perhaps he could be more vulnerable by asking some of his faculty and staff how they feel about his strengths and opportunities for improvement, is something he would consider.

When Mr. Aaron was asked to describe any support or resources that he has needed or currently needs in order to improve his own SEC, he mentioned the support of his peer group, similarly to Mrs. Brown. He explained,

I think the high school group... There's many of us that are in similar situations. We've got some new principals. We've all kind of come up together. So having that peer group to support each other compared to in the past when, in the past, it might've been that everyone is kind of competing against each other. And now we're going to a common goal. I think that's important. That we do have more of a collegial atmosphere as a group, the high school principals.

He acknowledges that collegial trust and common experiences and goals has brought them together. His response shows that Mr. Aaron feels that his relationships with fellow secondary principals is valuable to his social emotional competence.

Regarding how his social emotional competence was important during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Aaron spoke about starting a new principal assignment and having to build relationships during this challenging time. He said,

Relationship Skills... coming in, not knowing people. I couldn't just come in and make decisions about people without trying to gain relationships, trying to gain trust. And then just them understanding that I am here. It's my job to help you. If I help a teacher. You're gonna have a happy teacher. If you have happy teachers, you have happy students and then we have a happy school. So that was the biggest part of it. We're just digging in and making relationships. It's just, you know, building relationships to gain trust.

He then elaborates that his strategy for building relationships was about, “Being present is a lot of it. And then asking ‘what can I do to help?’ ‘What are some things I can do?’ ‘How can I help?’ Getting to know the people around me.” Thus, many of Mr. Aaron’s beliefs centered on developing relationships and being present for this faculty and staff especially during times of crisis. He understands that if he displays weak social emotional competence, over time, teachers’ job satisfaction can decline which in turn can affect the quality of the students’ education.

Mrs. Carter. At the beginning of the interview, Mrs. Carter was asked about how she sees a connection between her own social emotional competence and her ability to lead. She said,

Well, I think that talking about relationship skills and talking about self-awareness, you have to be right with yourself right before you can go on and expect that from your staff. So, I've always had a big thing about culture and relationships. But knowing, being aware of what's going on around me, being aware of like little things, like teachers and staff who have things going on in their own lives. You know, like personal things, whether it's good, bad, or other. Vacations they've been on, things going on with our kids, like being, like having that awareness, but also the awareness of how I'm impacting them. And then just really focusing on building those relationships, but I think it all comes back to what we kind of tell the teachers. You have to take care of yourself and make sure you're in the right focus in their frame of mind before they can take care of other people. And again, like a constant reflection of what I have done that's impacting other people in a positive or negative way. What are my actions? What actions, things that I've said, what

I've done. How's that impacting the teachers and staff, because that's ultimately impacting the children.

Her response shows how she understands her impact as the leader of the building and can connect how her social and emotional skills can directly affect the teachers which then indirectly impacts students and the school as a whole.

When asked to consider her strengths, Mrs. Carter refers to the indicator from the component of *Self-Awareness: I know and am realistic about my strengths and limitations* when she says,

I do know my areas of strength but I also am very open to what I just don't know. And I'm not afraid to ask questions. I think you have to ask them to the right people. People that won't judge you, you know, your circle of people you trust. But I very much feel like if you ask me, I can tell you what I'm not good at. But then I need to surround myself with people who are better in that area.

She said it is easier for her to ask for help when she has relational trust with her colleagues.

Mrs. Carter went on to discuss how she does not feel strong in the area of technology but that she uses her staff who are strong in technology to help her. She said that she has trusting relationships with her teachers and that when it comes to technology, they can “laugh together” about weakness in that area.

After discussing what she felt were her strengths, Mrs. Carter was asked to explain the areas that are weaknesses or opportunities for improvement regarding her SEC. She mentioned a specific indicator from the component of *Self-Management* that read, *I find ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others*. She explained,

Like sometimes I feel like if I'm having a bad day, sometimes I let that get in the way of things. You could probably ask like some of the people, and I have to constantly kind of check myself on that. You know how it is. You've walked through the door and like, you've just argued with your kids all the way to school.....your own personal children. When you get here and you're like stressed, snapping at people and I have to kind of like put myself back in check. Sometimes I think that's probably like, you know, because at the end of the day, like it is impacting them and it will affect the kids negatively. I mean, I don't think I do that bad, I just, I think sometimes I let my emotions get the best of me.

Mrs. Carter's awareness that she cannot always manage her emotions in a way that does not impact others in a negative way, shows her ability for self-reflection. She says what helps her "put herself back in check" is the realizations that 750 students and over 100 faculty and staff depend on her daily and need her to "be her best." Additionally, Mrs. Carter spoke about the indicator *I can balance my work life with personal renewal time as another relative weakness for her*. She said,

I think that's something we all struggle in. And this is something I've improved upon a lot. When I first started as a principal, you know, it was like constant 24 7 all the time. On my phone, all that. It was all about that. But I've realized over the years, you have to balance. Again, it goes back to if you don't have yourself right, and you don't take the time to disconnect and de-stress yourself, you're not going to be any good for the people that you're working with. I think I've gotten better in that area, but that's always something that I think they'll always struggle with just given my personality. I'm trying to make that balance.

Her response shows that she understands the connection between her own personal well-being and the affect it can have on the people she works with. She knows that if her own mental and emotional health is not at an optimal level, she will not be able to lead the large school effectively.

When it was time to discuss an indicator that showed that greatest difference between her own self-rating and the mean rating of her colleagues, Mrs. Carter's was the only one of the leaders whose identified indicator was rated higher by her faculty and staff than by herself.. Mrs. Carter rated herself on the indicator, *I balance my work life with personal renewal time*, from the component of *Self-Management*, as a 2 (disagree) while the mean rating by her faculty and staff was 4.65 on the concurrent indicator (*Leader balances their work life with personal renewal time*.) When she was asked to explore the reason why, she communicated that she thinks that her faculty and staff see her being a mom and must believe she does a good job at balance work and home. She also said that she promotes her faculty and staff to have a good balance between home and work and so maybe perhaps that figure since she tells them to do it, she must be good at it. For example, Mrs. Carter said,

Probably because I preach it all the time. I preach it to them and again, I think I've improved in this area and they probably see me a lot, like having to run to get a kid here or there, or like having to go during the day and grab somebody. They see me with my daughter here. So I think that maybe they see the balancing.

Mrs. Carter mentioned that the dissonance comes from the fact that she knows all of the work she does at home and so she rated herself lower in that area. She said, "They don't see you at

home when I have my computer out for three hours. Those sorts of things that I'm constantly doing like having texts come in and all that part that they don't see.”

Next, Mrs. Carter described what resources she has needed in the past or currently needs in order to address opportunities for improvement in her SEC. She mentioned several things that she felt were important such as opportunities for professional learning about mental health, peer and mentor relationships, and district wide wellness events. Mrs. Carter said that in looking back on her early years as a principal, she wished that the district she was in at the time had utilized experienced principals to mentor new leaders. She explained,

Like having somebody that you can be paired with, that's had the experience that can say “This too shall pass.” Right? When you're so fixated on all these things. Your emotions are running high, and you're trying to regulate that and you're trying to run a school and you're trying to do all these things. To just kind of give you like a little bit of a perspective, almost like that wisdom from like the experience that they have as being an administrator.

She said that having someone to talk to and ask for advice who understands the role, but who is not her evaluator, is priceless. Mrs. Carter continued by discussing how important it is to address health and wellness for herself and her colleagues. She added, “Everything we do personally affects what we do professionally. As much as we try to leave it all at the door”

Regarding how her leadership was tested during the COVID-19 pandemic and how her social emotional competence was needed in order to navigate that unprecedented time for educators, Mrs. Carter spoke about how she felt that the pandemic gave her a renewed sense of empathy. She explained,

I think it's given me a greater sense of empathy for people, and patience. Because I was about out of empathy. You do this for so long and you've heard everyone's sad dog story. I think it's given me more patience. Helping me to be more empathetic with people's situations.

She went on to describe how the pandemic forced her to “find creative ways” to maintain existing relationships and to communicate with her staff. Instead of face-to-face meetings, she and her administrative team held virtual faculty meetings, prioritizing “having cameras on” so everyone could see each other's' face and made sure to make phone contact with each member of the school staff in order to have “human interaction” often.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The quantitative phase of this investigation highlighted indicators of social emotional competence rated by both leaders and the faculty and staff from their schools. Additionally, qualitative interviews provided a deeper understanding of three leaders own self-assessment as well as their reflections about the ratings of others. Several connections emerged from the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the investigation.

First, based upon both the quantitative and qualitative findings, the social emotional component of *Self-Awareness* was shown to be a relative strength for participants. The component of Self-Awareness was made up of the SEL skill groupings titled “Emotional Self-Awareness”, “Identity and Self-Knowledge”, and “Growth Mindset and Purpose.” Growth mindset was the skill grouping with the highest ratings by both the leaders and the faculty and staff participants and the indicators within that component were rated among the highest in the survey. In addition to the quantitative findings in this area, each of the leaders portrayed a strong

sense of growth mindset as they discussed their own social emotional competence during the interview phase. They demonstrated their belief in continuous improvement and the ability to learn and grow when they said things like “I’m working on that” or “I’ve come a long way with that.”

Next, the indicator with the lowest rating from the leader participants was *I balance work life with personal renewal time*. The mean self-rating was 3.14 and as mentioned earlier, this was the only indicator rated overall higher by the faculty and staff than by leaders themselves. During the qualitative phase of the study, this indicator was mentioned by all three leaders who were interviewed as a weakness for them. Each of the three leaders communicated that even though they viewed it as a relative weakness, they were constantly striving to improve in that area. It was also evident that the leaders believed that they had the power to better balance their busy positions as principals with their families and personal lives even though it is not easy to do so. All three leaders discussed how time and experience helped them to grow in the area of balancing work and personal responsibilities.

Further, there are a group of indicators from the survey which were rated highly by both leaders and faculty and staff participants while also being mentioned (although not explicitly in all cases) by each of the leaders who were interviewed. Each of these three indicators come from a different component of SEL, but together they hint to the importance of a leader’s ability to see how the building and maintaining of relationships can affect the organizational culture. Table 4.19 shows these three indicators (in both forms from the leader survey and the faculty/ staff survey.)

Table 4.19

Grouping of Related Indicators (Self-Awareness, Relationship Skill, and Decision-Making)

SEL Component	SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator from the Leaders' Self-Assessment	Indicator from the Faculty/ Staff Surveys
Responsible Decision-Making	Reflection on Impact	I help to make my personal and professional community a better place. 4.92	Leader helps to make their personal and professional community a better place. 4.38
Self-Awareness	Growth Mindset and Purpose	I can see how I have a valuable role in my work, my family, and my community. 4.71	Leader can see how they have a valuable role in their work, their family, and their community. 4.5
Relationship Skills	Building Relationships and Teamwork	I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere. 4.71	Leader works well with others and generates a collegial atmosphere. 4.25

All three of the leaders who were interviewed mentioned these ideas in their own words. Mrs. Brown showed that she understood this connection when she said,

When I was going to get my own school, that I wanted it to be a place where we worked collaboratively, that it was a positive place. It was a place that was about kids. That it was a place where there was high expectations for everyone and, and there was a place for everyone. And I realized that all those opportunities and challenges made me ready to be able to do that. So it was just like a mindset thing.

Similarly, Mr. Aaron explained the connection by saying, "It's my job to help you. If I help a teacher. You're gonna have a happy teacher. If you have happy teachers, you have happy students and then we have a happy school." Lastly, Mrs. Carter echoed a similar belief when she

said she tries to consider, “What actions, things that I've said, what I've done. How's that impacting the teachers and staff, because that's ultimately impacting the children.”

Additionally, there were another group of indicators, also rated highly by both leaders and others that were also described by the leaders during the interviews in the qualitative phase. Table 4.20 contains each of the three indicators as well as the component and skill grouping they belong to. Although only two of the indicators are from the same SEL component and skill grouping, they all point to leaders’ ability to seek continuous improvement which is connected to growth mindset. These indicators also point to the connection between *Self-Awareness* and *Self-Management*; leaders first need to be aware of areas of opportunity in order to improve upon them.

Table 4.20

Grouping of Related Indicators (Self-Awareness and Self-Management)

SEL Component	SEL Skill Grouping	Indicator from the Leaders’ Self-Assessment	Indicator from the Faculty/ Staff Surveys
Self-Awareness	Growth Mindset and Purpose	I believe I will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed. 4.85	Leader believes they will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed. 4.47
Self-Awareness	Growth Mindset and Purpose	I believe I can influence my own future and achieve my ambitions. 4.85	Leader believes they can influence their own future and achieve their ambitions. 4.5
Self-Management	Motivation, Agency, and Goal-Setting	I hold high expectations that motivate me to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I lead. 4.71	Leader holds high expectations that motivates them to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those they lead. 4.32

During the interviews, each of the three leaders eluded to beliefs and practices that are in line with these indicators. For example, when discussing her weaknesses, Mrs. Brown used the phrase “I’m working on this” several times, indicating that she believes that she can improve in those areas. Mr. Aaron also spoke in a way that shows he believes in his ability to improve. When discussing his weaknesses, he used phrases like “I’ve gotten better with that throughout my career” and “And that’s something I’m trying to do a better job of.” In a similar fashion, Mrs. Carter used phrases that show her growth mindset such as “this is something I’ve improved upon a lot” and “I will be the first one to admit when I don’t know how to do something like technology is not my thing. So, I will always ask for help.” All three leaders made it clear that they are not satisfied with the status quo and that even though something may be a relative weakness, they plan to continue working toward it.

This chapter presented the findings of this explanatory sequential mixed methods investigation of school leaders’ social emotional competence. Results showed that overall, most leaders in this study rated themselves higher than faculty and staff do. When analyzing responses for each of the 45 indicators along with the qualitative interviews from phase 2, several themes emerged around how leaders identify their own social emotional strengths and weaknesses and what resources they have and need in order to grow and maintain their social emotional competence. Chapter 5 will explore and discuss these themes in depth and will connect them to the extant literature on the subject of leader social emotional competence.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) has cemented a place in K-12 education over the past thirty years and has made its way into state and national standards and policies (Durlak et al., 2015; Jones & Cater, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2020). A focus on SEL aims to improve social and emotional competencies for both students and adults including the capacities to understand and manage emotions, set and accomplish goals, exhibit empathy, build trusting relationships, and generate responsible decisions (Mahoney et al., 2020). Research has emerged that focuses on the methods to teach children effective social and emotional skills but little research exists about the importance of the social emotional competence of school leaders (Allbright et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2015; Mahfouz et al., 2019). There is a need to explore the SEC of school leaders and how it can affect the ability to lead SEL work in their schools as well as effectively lead teachers and manage the overall running of the buildings (Jones and Cater, 2020; Stillman et al., 2018). In her essay titled, “Principals Need Social-Emotional Support, Too”, Superville (2021) writes,

And the principal’s responsibilities—attending to students’ academic and social-emotional well-being; building relationships with staff, students, parents, and the broader community; engendering trust with stakeholders; making sound management decisions while also juggling their personal lives—demonstrate that they’re prime candidates who would benefit from a firm understanding and practice of SEL (p. 2).

Superville’s explanation as to why we need to attend to the social emotional well-being of school leaders is compelling and is in line with the work of scholars and researchers alike (Bower et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2015; Mahfouz, 2018; Mahfouz & Richardson, 2020). For example, in her

2018 study, Mahfouz found that training in mindfulness, awareness, and emotion skills assisted school leaders in becoming better at regulating their own emotions and solving complex problems. Leaders from that study also reported that their newfound social emotional competence improved morale and efficacy of both students and staff (Mahfouz, 2018).

Summary of the study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how school leaders makes sense of the process of self-assessment of their own SEC, considering the ratings of their colleagues, and to explore the supports and resources leaders need in order to improve and maintain social emotional skills. Although there is ample research in the area of social emotional learning, there is limited literature to guide the work of building and maintaining strong social emotional competence in school leaders.

This explanatory sequential, mixed-method study sought to examine school leaders' self-assessment of their social emotional competence using a self-assessment tool adapted from the CASEL framework. In addition to their own self-ratings, the study additionally explored the ratings of each school leaders' faculty and staff. Lastly, three of the leaders were chosen to be interviewed in order to better understand the quantitative data. This chapter includes discussion of findings that address each of the research questions:

1. What do current K-12 school-based leaders report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their own social emotional competence?
2. What do current K-12 faculty and staff report as relative strengths and weaknesses in their leaders' social emotional competence?

3. What specific dimensions of social emotional competence are similar and different between self and others' ratings?
4. How does a school leader's self-assessment of their social emotional competence compare to the ratings of their subordinates in the organization?
5. How do current K-12 school-based leaders describe the interaction between their own social emotional competence and their position of leadership within their buildings?

Discussion

The salient findings in this investigation can be organized into five key themes: (a) self-awareness as an overall strength; (b) the balance of work life with personal renewal time as an opportunity for improvement; (c) the importance of relationships with faculty and staff; (d) how strong peer support is vital for school leaders; and (e) the importance of mentorship by an experienced, non-evaluative colleague. Each of these themes are discussed below and connected to the available existing literature.

Self-Awareness as a relative strength. Throughout the study, it became evident that the component of Self-Awareness was a self-reported strength of leaders and was also rated highest by the faculty and staff participants. Leaders who were interviewed during the qualitative phase of the study also mirrored Self-Awareness as a strong suit. For instance, Mrs. Brown said, "So I think it's critical that you are aware of what you're putting out because that sets

the tone.” Along the same line, Mr. Aaron said, “The mood of the principal is the culture of the school.”

The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines self-awareness as: The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. CASEL lists skills associated with self-awareness as:

- Integrating personal and social identities
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Identifying one’s emotions
- Demonstrating honesty and integrity
- Linking feelings, values, and thoughts
- Examining prejudices and biases
- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Having a growth mindset
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose (CASEL, 2021)

The data from the survey and the subsequent interviews specifically showed specific strengths in the skills of identifying one’s emotions, having a growth mindset, and developing interests and a sense of purpose.

In his 2021 qualitative study of the skills principals require in order to navigate the demands of their ever-changing job, Wang named self-awareness as one of the dimensions identified by leaders as critical for their success. Although Wang’s study did not utilize the CASEL framework, there were similarities in some of the terms and skills mentioned. Results of his investigation show that self-awareness skills including emotional management, self-

reflection, being mindful, having a positive attitude, and innovative thinking helps leaders to be successful. Wang asserts that self-reflection is a critical factor in self-awareness and that principals need time in order to effectively self-reflect (Wang, 2021). This idea connects to the indicator from the survey used in the present study that reads *I (Leader) use(s) self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to my (their) emotions and how my (their) emotions impact me (them)* which was rated highly by both leaders (mean of 4.5) and faculty and staff (mean of 4.09) participants. Additionally, Patti and colleagues (2012) wrote that the level of self-awareness and self-reflection affect leaders' ability to build trusting relationships with students and staff as well as the ability to make sound decisions, showing a relationship between several of the SEL components. The notion that self-awareness can be a catalyst for improving and maintaining the other four SEL components is echoed by Bower et al. (2018) who reported that publicly acknowledging strengths and opportunities for improvement helps to build trusting relationships. In other words, attending to the SEL component of Self-Awareness in school leaders may be a good starting point for developing strong social emotional competence. Being able to name one's own emotions as well as reflecting on how those emotions can affect both one's self and others is vital for leaders hoping to build their social and emotional skills. Without self-awareness of their own social emotional competence, it would be difficult to address the other areas such as self-management and relationship skills.

Need for balance of work life with personal renewal time. The results of this investigation showed that the balance of work life with personal renewal time as an area of opportunity for growth. The indicator within the component of *Self-Management* that read "*I (Leader) can balance work life with personal renewal time*" was the lowest rated indicator by the

fifteen leader participants and was mentioned by all three of the leaders who were interviewed as an area they need to improve upon. The leaders all reported that they were continuously working on finding balance and they each showed that they understood how lack of balance on their part could affect their staff and the school as a whole. Mrs. Carter shared, “if you don’t have yourself right, and you don’t take the time to disconnect and destress yourself, you’re not going to be any good for the people that you’re working with.”

As mentioned above, work life balance is contained within the component of *Self-Management* on the survey. CASEL defines self-management as: The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation and agency, to accomplish personal and collective goals, and other skills such as:

- Managing one’s emotions
- Identifying and using stress management strategies
- Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation
- Setting personal and collective goals
- Using planning and organizational skills
- Showing the courage to take initiative
- Demonstrating personal and collective agency (CASEL, 2021)

Within the component of *Self-Management*, the current investigation showed weakness in the area of work life balance which most closely aligns to the skills of “exhibiting self-discipline” and “using planning and organizational skills” in the above list. The other skills within the component of *Self-Management* were mostly in line with mean ratings of other indicators that

showed agreement with the positively worded statements. It is interesting to note that while leaders consistently rated their *Self-Awareness* as a relative strength, they rated their *Self-Management* as an opportunity for improvement. In other words, they seem to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but have a more difficult time managing those areas in need of balance or improvement.

The findings from this investigation, showing that work life balance is a relative weakness for school leaders, mirror the extant literature. In their 2019 article titled “Social Emotional Learning for Principals”, researchers Mark Greenberg and Julia Mahfouz discuss how principals are “overworked and overloaded” and argue that school principals work more hours than managers in other sectors. They warn that if school districts and state do not begin to attend to the emotional well-being of school leaders, not only will it affect principals’ job satisfaction and retention but can also affect teachers, students, and the overall school climate negatively (Mahfouz, Greenberg, & Rodriguez, 2019). Likewise, Wang (2021) asserts that “without awareness of principals’ social, emotional, and practical needs, the continued work intensification will subsequently affect the health and well-being of principals, schools, and the overall education system.” (p. 421)

The importance of relationships. Three interrelated themes in the area of *Relationship Skills* emerged from this research. Through both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data, the results revealed: (1) the importance of building and maintaining relationships with faculty and staff, (2) having strong peer relationships and support, and (3) the significance of engaging in relationships with mentors. CASEL defines this SEL component as: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings

with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the proficiency to communicate clearly, listen actively, work collaboratively and cooperatively to problem solve and handle conflict effectively, and other skills such as:

- Communicating effectively
- Developing positive relationships
- Demonstrating cultural competency
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- Resolving conflicts constructively
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Showing leadership in groups
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed
- Standing up for the rights of others (CASEL, 2021)

The quantitative phase of the study revealed particular strength in the indicators of *I get to know the people around me* and *I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere* which can both correlate to the skill “Developing positive relationships” in the above list. Conversely, the indicator that was rated lowest by the leaders’ faculty and staff was within the component of *Relationship Skills, When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective*, which indicates the potential of conflict management as a potential area of opportunity for building leader SEC.

Relationships with faculty and staff. Leaders with strong social emotional competence prioritize the relationships they have with the faculty and staff in their schools (Mahfouz, 2018.) The quantitative and qualitative results from this study point to an importance in building and

maintaining strong relationships between leaders and their subordinates. Several indicators on the survey addressed this topic and the building of relationships with their faculty and staff was mentioned by all three of the leaders during the interview portion of the study. The significance of relationships with their faculty and staff were evident when the leaders said things like, “we still had to maintain those relationships” or “I want to know everyone’s name.”

In their chapter “Developing Socially, Emotionally, and Cognitively Competent School Leaders and Learning Communities” in the *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and Practice*, Patti, Senge, Madrazo, and Stern (2015) argue that simple relationships are not enough; leaders should strive for generative relationships with stakeholders in order to “create new and better ideas and solutions about teaching and learning” (p. 443). The writers go on to give examples of how generative relationships can exist in inquiry groups or professional learning communities where professionals examine student work, explore relevant research, celebrate successes, and problem-solve together (Patti et al., 2015). The importance of school leaders building relationships with their faculty and staff is echoed by several other researchers (Bower et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2019).

Strong Peer Support. Having a strong peer support system is a theme that emerged during this investigation and it supported by the existing literature (Mahfouz, 2018). Although the survey did not explicitly include indicators about leaders having strong peer support, within the component of *Relationship Skills*, there are several indicators that may address this idea including *I can articulate ideas that are important to me in ways that engage others* and *I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere*. Additionally, all three leaders who were interviewed explained having a strong peer support group as a resource that helped them to build

and maintain strong SECs. For instance, Mr. Aaron referenced “the high school group” of principals, Mrs. Brown discussed how she leaned on peers often, and Mrs. Carter spoke about how important peer relationships had been to her as she navigated the principalship. These data highlighted the supports and needs leaders have and how embracing a network to confide in and reach out to as needed is critical to their own mental health and social emotional competence.

The existing literature supports the idea that school leaders’ social emotional competence can be supported by peer groups. Supportive peer networks can be beneficial for school leaders since they can encourage risk-taking and self-reflection (Patti et al, 2015). Other researchers who study the social emotional competence of school leaders write about the role that peer-to-peer relationships can play in supporting and growing leaders’ SEC and recommend more work to be done in this area (Mahfouz, 2018; Mahfouz, Greenberg, & Rodriguez, 2019). For example, school administrators who have participated in group training sessions with other leaders have reported that peer support provides an “open environment in which they could share their thoughts and feelings without being judged.” (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 613) Likewise, an action guide for integrating social, emotional and academic development contains a recommendation to increase opportunities for peer to peer collaborative relationships and provide time for educators to explore strengths and opportunities to improve social and emotional skills (Sovde et al., 2019).

Mentorship. The idea of mentorship being an important part of school leaders’ social emotional learning, was discussed by all three school leaders during the interview process. The survey itself did not explicitly mention mentorship but the indicators of *I use self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to my emotions and how my emotions impact me; I recognize when my emotions, thoughts, and biases influence my behavior and my reactions to*

people and situations, both negatively and positively; and I know and am realistic about my own strengths and limitations from the component of *Self-Awareness* can be interpreted to include the relationship between leaders and mentors. Furthermore, the following indicators from the component of *Responsible Decision-Making* can also be associated with a mentorship relationship: *I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems I see; I recognize the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school community; I involve others who are impacted to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project; and I involve others who are impacted to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.* As mentioned by the qualitative leader participants, the site district pairs new principal with a veteran leader to serve as a mentor for that leader. Additionally, the senior leaders at the district level provide informal mentorship and coaching through frequent school visits and weekly phone calls.

Although the topic of building school leaders' social emotional competence is still emerging among researchers, several scholars and studies recommend the utilization of coaching and/or mentoring in order to build strong leader SEC (Greenberg et al., 2019; Patti et al., 2012; Superville, 2021). Research on mentorship through a high-quality coaching relationship has shown that self-awareness and self-reflection is improved when leaders engage in such relationships with coaches or mentors (Van Oosten, McBride-Walker, & Taylor, 2019). Similarly, Patti et al. (2012) found that coaching relationships aided in leaders' ability to be reflective of their social emotional skills as well as developing new skills to become better decision-makers. Both studies highlighted the importance of establishing trust between the

mentor and mentee as well as a form of planning or problem-solving in order to strategically address areas of opportunity (Patti et al., 2012; Van Oosten et al., 2019).

Implications

Implications for the assessment and measurement of social emotional competence.

In order to successfully attend to the social emotional competence of school leaders, it will be necessary for schools to be able to accurately and efficiently measure the social emotional competence of leaders, as well as provide an avenue for leaders to solicit ratings from other stakeholders such as teachers, support staff, parents, and district level administrators. Although there are measures designed to assess some of the constructs within the CASEL framework, there is no single, validated assessment tool for adults who work in schools (Stillman et al., 2018). Research organizations such as CASEL should consider developing an assessment tool to measure the social emotional competence of school leaders (Stillman et al., 2018). Zhao offers that although CASEL's five competencies are broad, much of the empirical evidence cited by advocates of SEL may not actually measure those five constructs but instead measure the growth or learning from a specific program used to teach social emotional skills. Additionally, some scholars specifically mention the importance of developing assessments that can be used by various stakeholders (leader, teachers, students, even parents) in order to triangulate SEC data to improve school cultures (Mahfouz, 2018; Stillman et al., 2018). Valid assessment measures will be crucial in determining the effectiveness of any proposed interventions or resources (mentioned below) to support leader SEC.

Implications for school leader preparation. Teachers hoping to move into school administration usually participate in both graduate level coursework and district-initiated

programming in hopes of preparing them for a position of leadership within the school system. One often overlooked component of this initial training for school leaders is their social emotional competence. (Greenberg et al., 2019; Sánchez-Núñez, Patti, & Holzer, 2015) Studies have been conducted on the level of social emotional competence and overall well-being aspiring school leaders have at the onset of their leadership training (Mahfouz & Richardson, 2020) and they suggest that pre-service school leaders “may be entering the profession without solid skills to handle their own wellbeing” (p. 20) and that due to a lack of attention placed on the social emotional well-being of teachers, “pre-service school leaders may have already developed poor coping mechanisms that might follow them into the principalship.” (p. 20) Programs for school leader preparation need to be redesigned to include courses that will help build strong social emotional competencies in potential leaders since it is noted that few, if any, principal preparation programs contain a focus on SECs (Mahfouz et al., 2019). State departments of education and university programs should ensure that social emotional skills are addressed in leadership standards and coursework.

Implications for the professional learning of school leaders. Findings from this study, including interview responses from the school leaders, support the need for professional learning opportunities for adults who work in schools, especially those in leadership positions, in order to further develop their social and emotional competencies. Each of the school leaders interviewed named professional learning opportunities as a resource they needed in order to improve and maintain their social emotional skills. Scholars have recommended that schools consider leadership development programs that focus on building social emotional competence, utilize peer support groups where leaders can collaborate on best social and emotional practices,

and strengthen mentoring relationships between leaders and more seasoned leaders (Mahoney et al., 2020; Stillman et al., 2018). Instead of one time trainings or conferences, programs to further develop leaders' social emotional competence need to be on-going and job-embedded (Bower et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2019). These opportunities need to be designed to both improve leaders' own SEC and their ability to lead SEL efforts in their schools with students and teachers (Bower et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2019). Existing programs that have been researched and attributed to positive outcomes in adult SEC are the CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) mindfulness program as well as the RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions) approach (Elias, 2019; Mahfouz & Richardson, 2020). These evidence based practices are school-wide programs aimed at attending to the social emotional well-being of students and adults alike.

School districts also need to be intentional about providing the time and space for leaders to participate in peer support groups. Often such pairings or groupings occur naturally but districts should not assume that all leaders have such a peer support system. Instead, districts should plan for this needed support. Superville (2021) recommends that school districts "Think about organizing groups of like-minded or similarly situated principals. For example, those leading elementary or Title I schools can help their peers with on-the-job challenges and reduce isolation." (p. 4) Additionally, school districts should strengthen mentoring experiences with school leaders where "veteran principals can help support or guide current early-career school leaders with stress management, coping strategies, and self-care." (Superville, 2021, p. 4) Perhaps, highly effective leaders who have been identified as having strong social emotional

competence, through district climate survey data or assessments validated to measure social emotional competence, should be tasked with mentoring new or less competent school leaders.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current investigation that should be addressed. First, the survey tool itself is limited in its capacity to offer generalizable findings due to the lack of construct validity. As mentioned earlier, the survey tool, originally developed by CASEL as a tool for self-reflection, was adapted in order to use with both leaders and their faculty and staff. Although the CASEL survey contains indicators with constructs that they have used to define and explain social emotional competence, due to the survey's lack of validated psychometric properties, we cannot be sure that the indicators effectively measure the skills CASEL claims they do. In their 2020 study of the beliefs and attitudes of leaders toward social and emotional learning, Jones and Cater acknowledge that school leaders have varying levels of understanding of concepts within social emotional learning and that the field lack well-defined constructs. This makes measurement in any form (quantitative or qualitative) difficult. Therefore, better instrumentation and research designs that measure leaders' social emotional competence and the effects of potential training, could address this limitation in future studies.

Second, this investigation took place in one medium-sized school district in Florida and only explored the social emotional competence of fifteen leaders. The findings and any potential themes can only be generalized to the context of the site district. A larger scale study that incorporates leaders from around the country and who represent a variety of social, cultural, and racial groups would provide a broader understanding of the social emotional needs of school

leaders. School leaders' professional lives and emotions are complex and cannot be understood by one small study.

Lastly, no attention was placed on disaggregating the findings by whether the school leaders were male or female, by experience, school context and status (e.g., Title I status, demographics, size), or by the amount of training the leader may have been given in social emotional learning. Understanding more about leaders' past experiences regarding social and emotional skills, would give the researcher valuable context in which to guide an investigation.

Future Research

The results of this study offer several topics for potential future research. First, I chose to examine leaders further (as part of the qualitative phase of the study) who were exemplars within the site district in terms of leading schools with strong climate and culture but it would be interesting to study the social emotional competence of leaders who are not considered to be strong in this area. In addition to specifically examining exemplary leaders as well as leaders who are not as strong in SEC, future research should ensure that there are ample participants from diverse racial and cultural groups.

Additionally, research should be done on what specific trainings or experiences have helped exemplary competent leaders to gain strong social emotional skills. This could be accomplished through a multi-year study that follows aspiring leaders throughout their preparation and early leadership career while collecting data throughout using self-reported ratings, ratings of others, as well as interviews with leaders to determine what resources or experiences, such as professional learning sessions or mentoring relationships, help leaders to

build and maintain SECs. Again, any quantitative research in this area would need to utilize improved assessment tools with validated psychometric properties.

Another potential area for future studies, is to focus on the areas that showed the greatest dissonance between leaders' and others' ratings. Two of the three leaders who were interviewed during the qualitative phase of the study had trouble naming examples or potential reasons for dissonance in ratings between themselves and their faculty and staff. These leaders were able to discuss their own self-reported strengths and weakness with ease, but struggled when faced with an area identified as a relative weakness by their colleagues. Future studies could incorporate short response items on the surveys in order for raters to explain the reasoning for their ratings. Understanding why a colleague rated a leader a particular way, may help the leader to make sense of the data and assist in their efforts to improve their own social emotional competence.

Conclusion

Through this investigation, I sought to better understand how school leaders rated and explained their own social emotional competence, how their faculty and staff rated school leaders' SEC, and what leaders could learn from comparing their own ratings with the rating of others. Additionally, I wanted to discover what school leaders listed as critical resources that assisted them in building and maintaining strong social emotional competence. Findings support the importance of leaders' self-awareness of emotions as well as the significance of relationships with others.

Echoing the model of The Prosocial Leader (Greenberg et al., 2019), discussed in Chapter 2, the results of this investigation point to the positive feedback loop that occurs when leaders have competence in social and emotional skills. Leaders with strong SECs are more

effective leaders, have healthier relationships with stakeholders, and lead schools that are primed to implement SEL initiatives with students and adults. Those factors lead to an overall healthy school culture which then contributes to positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes. In closing the loop, when school principals with strong SECs operate successful schools, it leads to their continued self-efficacy, strengthened social emotional competence and overall well-being (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Likewise, researchers like Mark Brackett, from Yale's Center on Emotional Intelligence, agree with the concept of the circular nature of the effects of leader SEC. Brackett and Patti, along with colleagues, (2012) note that leaders, "with greater self and social awareness, they manage conflict better and factor others' perspectives into their decision-making processes. Self-aware and empathetic administrative leaders tend to have better relationships with colleagues." (p. 269)

Although many agree that attending to the social emotional competence and well-being of school leaders is an important factor in recruiting and retaining quality leaders in education, I would be remiss if I did not address concerns about "Social Emotional Learning" itself. As I described in the review of literature in Chapter 2, some scholars assert that advocates of SEL have gone too far in promising that SEL can improve achievement, student behavior, and attempt to sell it as "a panacea for all that ails the schools." (Zhoa, 2020) Critics of SEL also contend that there is a lack of consensus about what skills and attributes actually make up social emotional learning and propose that attempting to measure something that is not well defined is problematic in itself (Zhoa, 2020). They argue that many unrelated topics (growth mindset, restorative justice, anti-bullying) are often lumped together and called SEL and that the research base is made up of a conglomeration of isolated studies (Zhoa, 2020). Even though critics make

several valid points and we should exercise caution when touting the benefits of SEL, I maintain that paying attention to the social emotional competence of school leaders is worthwhile.

This study, along with the available extant research, although not abundant, suggests that attending to the social emotional well-being of school leaders is a valuable endeavor and should be studied further. This investigation adds to the limited literature in the area of school leaders' social emotional competence and gives practitioners and researchers meaningful information about what next steps may be possible in order to ensure school leaders are prepared for the essential work they do.

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Appendix A

Leader Self-Assessment

Please read each indicator and rate yourself using the following scale:

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Self-Awareness		1	2	3	4	5
EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS	I can identify and name my emotions in the moment.					
	I use self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to my emotions and how my emotions impact me.					
	I recognize when my emotions, thoughts, and biases influence my behavior and my reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively.					
IDENTITY AND SELF KNOWLEDGE	I know and am realistic about my strengths and limitations.					
	I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity is shaped by other people and my race, culture, experiences, and environments.					
	I recognize and reflect on ways in which my identity shapes my views, biases, and prejudices.					
GROWTH MINDSET AND PURPOSE	I believe I will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed.					
	I believe I can influence my own future and achieve my ambitions.					
	I can see how I have a valuable role in my work, my family, and my community.					

Self-Management		1	2	3	4	5
MANAGING EMOTIONS	I find ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others.					
	I can get through something even when I feel frustrated.					
	I can calm myself when I feel stressed or nervous.					
MOTIVATION, AGENCY, AND GOAL-SETTING	I hold high expectations that motivate me to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those I lead.					
	I take action and impact change on issues that are important to me and the larger community.					
	I set measurable, challenging, and attainable goals and have clear steps in place to reach them.					
PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION	I modify my plans in the face of new information and realities.					
	When juggling multiple demands, I use strategies to regain focus and energy.					
	I balance my work life with personal renewal time.					

Social Awareness		1	2	3	4	5
EMPATHY AND COMPASSION	I can grasp a person's perspective and feelings from verbal and nonverbal cues.					
	I pay attention to the feelings of others and recognize how my words and behavior impact them.					
	I show care for others when I see that they have been harmed in some way.					
PERSPECTIVE TAKING	I work to learn about the experiences of people of different races, ethnicities, or cultures.					
	I learn from those who have different opinions than me.					
	I ask others about their experience & perspective before offering my version of events.					
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CONTEXT	I understand the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people.					
	I appreciate and honor the cultural differences within my school community/workplace.					
	I recognize the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners.					

Relationship Skills		1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	I stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning.					
	I can articulate ideas that are important to me in ways that engage others.					
	I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.					
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TEAMWORK	I connect meaningfully with young people, their families, colleagues, and community members who are from a different race, culture, or socioeconomic background than I am.					
	I get to know the people around me.					
	I work well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere.					
	I make sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas.					
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective.					
	I openly admit my mistakes to myself and others and work to make things right.					
	I can work through my discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives.					

Responsible Decision-Making		1	2	3	4	5
PROBLEM ANALYSIS	I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems I see.					
	I recognize the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school community.					

	I involve others who are impacted* to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.					
IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS	I involve others who are impacted* to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.					
	I find practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.					
	I consider how my choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people I serve and the community around them.					
REFLECTION ON IMPACT	I take time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used.					
	I consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.					
	I help to make my personal and professional community a better place.					

Appendix B

Faculty and Staff Survey

Please read each indicator and rate your school principal using the following scale:

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Self-Awareness		1	2	3	4	5
EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS	Leader can identify and name their emotions in the moment.					
	Leader uses self-reflection to understand the factors that contribute to their emotions and how their emotions impact them.					
	Leader recognizes when their emotions, thoughts, and biases influence their behavior and their reactions to people and situations, both negatively and positively.					
IDENTITY AND SELF KNOWLEDGE	Leader knows and is realistic about their strengths and limitations.					
	Leader recognizes and reflect on ways in which their identity is shaped by other people and their race, culture, experiences, and environments.					
	Leader recognizes and reflect on ways in which their identity shapes their views, biases, and prejudices.					
GROWTH MINDSET AND PURPOSE	Leader believes they will continue to learn and develop skills to better support all young people to succeed.					
	Leader believes they can influence their own future and achieve their ambitions.					
	Leader can see how they have a valuable role in their work, family, and community.					

Self-Management		1	2	3	4	5
MANAGING EMOTIONS	Leader finds ways to manage strong emotions in ways that don't negatively impact others.					
	Leader can get through something even when they feel frustrated.					
	Leader can calm them self when they feel stressed or nervous.					
MOTIVATION, AGENCY, AND GOAL-SETTING	Leader holds high expectations that motivate them to seek self-improvement and encourage growth in those they lead.					
	Leader takes action and impact change on issues that are important to them and the larger community.					
	Leader sets measurable, challenging, and attainable goals and has clear steps in place to reach them.					
PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION	Leader modifies their plans in the face of new information and realities.					
	When juggling multiple demands, leader uses strategies to regain focus and energy.					

	Leader balances their work life with personal renewal time.					
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Social Awareness		1	2	3	4	5
EMPATHY AND COMPASSION	Leader can grasp a person's perspective and feelings from verbal and nonverbal cues.					
	Leader pays attention to the feelings of others and recognize how their words and behavior impact others.					
	Leader shows care for others when they see that they have been harmed in some way.					
PERSPECTIVE TAKING	Leader works to learn about the experiences of people of different races, ethnicities, or cultures.					
	Leader learns from those who have different opinions than them.					
	Leader asks others about their experience & perspective before offering their version of events.					
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CONTEXT	Leader understands the systemic, historical, and organizational forces that operate among people.					
	Leader appreciates and honor the cultural differences within their school community/workplace.					
	Leader recognizes the strengths of young people and their families and view them as partners.					

Relationship Skills		1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	Leader stays focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning.					
	Leader can articulate ideas that are important to them in ways that engage others.					
	Leader can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.					
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TEAMWORK	Leader connects meaningfully with young people, their families, colleagues, and community members who are from a different race, culture, or socioeconomic background than I am.					
	Leader gets to know the people around them.					
	Leader works well with others and generate a collegial atmosphere.					
	Leader makes sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas.					
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	When leader is upset with someone, they talk to them about how they feel and listen to their perspective.					
	Leader openly admits their mistakes to them self and others and work to make things right.					
	Leader can work through their discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives.					

Responsible Decision-Making		1	2	3	4	5
PROBLEM ANALYSIS	Leader gathers relevant information to explore the root causes of problems they see.					
	Leader recognizes the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in their school community.					
	Leader involves others who are impacted* to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.					
IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS	Leader involves others who are impacted* to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.					
	Leader finds practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.					
	Leader considers how their choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people they serve and the community around them.					
REFLECTION ON IMPACT	Leader takes time for self-reflection & group reflection on progress toward goals & the process used.					
	Leader considers how their personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.					
	Leader helps to make their personal and professional community a better place.					