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Understanding The Perceived Impact Of Social And Emotional Learning Interventions On High School Student Success

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UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTERVENTIONS ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SUCCESS

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Abstract

Integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) skills into instructional practices and academic content has become a priority in many school districts (CASEL, 2018). While educators and clinical professionals alike have made strides in recognizing the importance of SEL, the level of implementation across districts varies greatly (CASEL, 2018). This qualitative program evaluation explored whether school staff at a public suburban high school in the Northeastern United States perceived the implementation of various interventions aimed at increasing SEL skills of students to be successful. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to identify which interventions had been implemented by a group of school professionals, the Intervention Team, and whether school staff perceived the implemented interventions to have positive, neutral, or negative impacts upon the SEL skills of students. Results indicated that 17 different interventions were mentioned at least once as being implemented by the Intervention Team over the course of interviews with eight participants. Interviewees expressed which interventions they felt positively impacted areas of social and emotional learning. Interviewees reported self-awareness to be positively impacted by six distinct interventions, self-management to be positively impacted by two distinct types of interventions, responsible decision- making to be positively impacted by four distinct types of interventions, and social awareness to be positively impacted by two types of interventions. Additionally, interventions perceived to have a negative impact were explored. Potential remedies to increase the likelihood of intervention success were also offered by staff.

Several areas in need of further study were identified based on the results of the present study. The specific impacts of SEL interventions upon those with mental health diagnoses and interventions implemented to target areas identified as weaknesses in social and emotional learning after assessment of social and emotional learning competency area skills in individuals are recommended areas of future study.

Keywords: Social and emotional learning, individualized interventions

DEDICATION

My work is dedicated to all of those who have inspired me upon this journey. I am thankful for those who have been supportive of my love for learning.

To my children, Isabella, Anthony, Brady, Addison, Elizabeth, and Alisha. It is for each of you that I strive to grow. You have made me stronger and more fulfilled than I could have ever imagined. Thank you for filling my heart with love. I love you to the moon and back!

To my rock, Matthew Houde. Thank you for being the one I can lean on for anything. Your journey of personal growth has inspired me and I have learned so much from your experiences-more than I could ever learn from any book. I look forward to continuing our journey together.

To my bonus children, Alyson and Cameron Houde. Thank you for adding so much love to my life and for being supportive of my dreams.

To my grandfather, Phil Barrows. I thought I should answer your question about being a professional student: I will be a lifelong learner, but I will not be in school forever because I have reached the end!

To all of the family, friends, colleagues, and my students who have been supportive along the way- I truly appreciate you!

In memory of my grandmother, Diana Vivian Barrows, who would have had the biggest party for me and was always my biggest cheerleader.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Origins of social and emotional learning (SEL) can be traced back as early as Ancient Greece (George Lucas Scholarly Foundation, 2011). Plato's writings about education in *The Republic* recommended a curriculum that included building moral judgment, character, and training in subject areas like science, math, and the arts (George Lucas Scholarly Foundation, 2011). In the early 20th century, John Dewey's philosophy on education encouraged educators to utilize a child-centered approach (Dewey, 1929.) Educators were urged to understand cultural and personal environments of each student (Dewey, 1929). Dewey felt that schools played a critical role in the building of character and skills like problem-solving and self-governance (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Between the years of 1968 and 1980, an intervention project conducted in Connecticut born from a time of civil unrest and racial tension across the nation brought ideas like educating the whole child to the forefront (Lessons for SEL, 2020). The project was led by Dr. James Comer and sought to improve outcomes for youth (Lessons for SEL, 2020). This work began with an exploration of how relationships across settings impact academic achievement (Lessons for SEL, 2020). Through the integration of social and academic learning, outcomes for the youth involved in the project led by Dr. Comer improved significantly and these findings were replicated across many schools (Lessons for SEL, 2020). Dr. Comer's landmark research led to further interest and inquiry into the topic that came to be known as SEL (Lessons for SEL, 2020).

Contemporary research on the topic of social and emotional learning (SEL) became a specific area of focus in education when the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning was formed in 1994 (CASEL, 2005). This group sought to incorporate SEL,

based on evidence, into pre-kindergarten through high school education (CASEL, 2005). According to Niemi (2020), the definition of SEL was recently updated:

> 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 (para. 3).

Niemi's (2020) definition of SEL in the context of public education and how SEL can be incorporated seamlessly into learning opportunities to promote positive youth outcomes is gaining clout across the United States.

Integrating SEL skills into instructional practices and academic content has become a priority in many school districts (CASEL, 2018). Integration of academic and SEL skills, according to CASEL (2018), occurs through encouraging academic interests, giving students a voice, making learning student-led and interactive, and integrating SEL and academics. While educators and clinical professionals alike have made strides in recognizing the importance of SEL, the level of implementation across districts varies greatly (CASEL, 2018). Some barriers to implementation are noted by Bailey et al. (2019) and these include limited buy-in, lack of integration into educational practices, difficulty with sustainability, and lack of resources, and poor fidelity or utilization of materials. Brann et al. (2020) noted that many schools have not opted to complete universal screening for SEL skills, despite the benefits of this practice in allocating resources appropriately. Redding and Walberg (2012) reminded schools that data collection is an essential part of SEL evaluation.

Jones and Brann et al. (2017) indicated that there is great variability in what types of SEL interventions are successful, who they work best for, and what types of conditions promote SEL.

Brann et al. (2019) noted the link between positive youth outcomes and SEL skills to be well-established. According to Taylor et al. (2017), few researchers have implemented interventions at the high school level, and out of those who have, few have found significant gains in skills for this population. Pawlo et al. (2019) noted that many students receiving SEL programming are struggling to gain new skills due to experiencing conditions of heightened emotionality.

Relevant research discussing SEL skills speaks to results after the implementation of specific, often manualized, group interventions (Cramer & Castro-Olivo, (2016); Nielsen et al., (2015); Taylor et al. (2017)). The present research study sought to identify the effectiveness of various interventions, as perceived by school staff, that can be delivered on an individual basis.

Definition of Key Terms

This section includes the terms utilized throughout the present study that are characteristic of the fields of SEL and education.

504 Plan. A 504 plan, as described under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, helps qualified individuals with one or more physical or mental impairments that limits life activities gain equal opportunities with reasonable accommodations by employers or organizations that receive federal funding (Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 2006, para.1-5).

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). An IEP is a plan or program specifically developed to support a child who has a documented disability receive instruction that is specialized, including related services (University of Washington, 2021).

Individual Support Program. (ISP). The Individual Support Program is a program comprised of students at a public high school serving grades nine through 12 in a suburban tri-town area in the Northeastern United States (according to the site's internal program description

in the program of studies). Students in this program may or may not have a 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) and all students in this program require a high level of adult guidance and support. Students in this program may have mental and behavioral health diagnoses and challenging life circumstances (according to the site's internal program description in the program of studies).

Intervention Team. This name serves as an alias for a school-based team consisting of a group of school staff and administrators that meets regularly and strives to provide personalized interventions to students on a referral basis with the goal of help increasing the chances that students will find success at school.

Social and emotional learning (SEL). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) defined social and emotional learning (SEL) by describing five areas of competency. These areas are identified to be self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). CASEL (2020) noted that SEL is the process by which people learn the skills within the five areas of competency.

Social and emotional success. The operational definition of social and emotional success in the context of the present study is increasing a student's ability to demonstrate skills in the five core competency areas described by CASEL (2020).

Self-awareness. CASEL (2020) identified self-awareness as having confidence and purpose while understanding the influence that personal values, emotions, and thoughts have upon behavior. Self-awareness is defined by Morin (2011) as being able to be the object of one's own attention reflected by actively storing information about the self.

Self-management. CASEL (2020) identified self-management as capacities for being motivated, managing stress, and delaying gratification to reach goals through successful management of behavior, thought, and emotion. Niu et al. (2018) noted performing small actions in one's own life and focusing on goals to be descriptive of self-management.

Social awareness. CASEL (2020) described social awareness as an understanding of others, including the ability to empathize and take the perspectives of those who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Benzel (2021) described social awareness as reacting to and comprehending appropriately interpersonal struggles as well as more broad societal problems.

Relationship skills. CASEL (2020) noted relationship skills to encompass the establishment and maintenance of supportive and healthy relationships while effectively navigating any potential relational challenges. Church and Clond (2019) stated that relationship skills include active listening, communication, and conflict resolution.

Responsible decision-making. CASEL (2020) qualified making positive choices related to social interactions and personal behavior as responsible decision-making. Responsible decision-making includes avoiding negative side effects of decisions and contributing to productive decision-making, according to Vriens and Achterbergh (2013).

Statement of the Problem

As of the year 2020, it was unknown by educators and administrators employed in a public suburban high school in the Northeastern United States whether the implementation of various interventions, including individual counseling, group counseling, executive functioning coaching, changes in course levels, changes in course teachers, changes in class schedules, increased meetings with guidance counselors, tutoring, increased adult support during the school day, participation in a scheduled intervention period each day, and reductions in course load

aimed at increasing SEL skills of students was successful. To explore this problem of practice, a qualitative program evaluation of the Intervention Team was conducted. The Intervention Team consists of approximately 12 members and includes guidance counselors, social workers, special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators. The Intervention Team implements additional interventions for students on a referral basis. Understanding the impact of the interventions implemented by the Intervention Team as perceived by school staff upon students' SEL skills can help to inform the Intervention Team as they implement future interventions to support student success.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Intervention Team on students' SEL skills as perceived by school staff. Maras et al. (2015) supported the importance of such research as the present research in their description of the implementation of a tiered intervention and prevention SEL program to support student needs. Maras et al. (2015) noted utilizing assessments of SEL data to inform future delivery of supports and interventions. Maras et al.'s (2015) model was followed through qualitative program evaluation to inform future SEL endeavors in the context of the present research. As noted by Jones and Doolittle (2017), SEL skills are paramount to success across the lifespan, which added increased purpose to the current research.

According to Hampel (2008), SEL skills promote psychological adjustment across the lifespan. Durlak (2015) indicated that SEL skills are essential for healthy schools. Additionally, Tan et al. (2018) indicated that there are diverse needs among students and that tailored programs that prioritize addressing the full spectrum of SEL needs should be implemented. Based on the

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information cited above, it was purposeful to evaluate the Intervention Team and the perceived effectiveness of its interventions.

Research Questions

This qualitative program evaluation explored the perceptions of school staff of the positive, negative, or neutral impacts of various SEL interventions implemented by the Intervention Team on students. This study sought to determine the impact of the interventions described as perceived by school staff on students' social and emotional success through exploration of the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of SEL interventions are implemented by the Intervention Team to support students?

RQ2: How do the implemented interventions impact SEL success (student self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills), if at all, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2a. How do the implemented interventions impact the self- awareness, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2b. How do the implemented interventions impact the self-management, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2c. How do the implemented interventions impact the responsible decision making, if at all, of the students as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2d. How do the implemented interventions impact the social awareness, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2e. How do the implemented interventions impact the relationship skills, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

Conceptual Framework

To better understand social and emotional learning (SEL) in the context of the Intervention Teams' efforts to support students, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's framework (2020) of SEL was utilized as a lens through which to comprehend the perceived impacts of implemented efforts. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) provided a framework to understand SEL across five areas of competency, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. By looking at the Intervention Team's efforts to intervene with student SEL skills and exploring through qualitative analysis how these interventions were perceived to impact, if at all, each of the core SEL competencies as defined by CASEL (2020), a better understanding of the effectiveness of the Intervention Team at implementing interventions increasing SEL skills was gained.

According to CASEL (2020), self-awareness is identified as the impact of one's inner thoughts, feelings, and values on one's behavior. Self-management is described as including regulation of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to work towards the individual's goals (CASEL, 2020). Social awareness is seen as understanding social and ethical behavioral norms, being able to understand the perspective of others, and being able to demonstrate empathy (CASEL, 2020). Relationship skills are identified as communicating clearly, listening to others, cooperating, solving conflict effectively, resisting peer pressure, and knowing when to access and provide help (CASEL, 2020). Finally, responsible decision-making can be described as one's ability to utilize learned social norms, including safety concerns and ethical standards, to make sound social and personal behavior choices (CASEL, 2020).

Categorizing the efforts put forth by the Intervention Team into the five areas of competency (CASEL, 2020) helped to provide context for understanding the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of implemented interventions in each area. This categorization of efforts supported the investigation of the problem of practice, shedding light upon whether the implementation of specific interventions aimed at increasing SEL skills were perceived to be having the intended impact in each of the core competency areas. Interpreting the impacts of interventions, as perceived by school staff, in each core competency area allowed a point of assessment to indicate whether the interventions were effective at increasing the intended skills.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

According to Daniel (2019), quality in qualitative work equates to rigor and is critical, especially when findings will be either utilized in practice or contributing to theory. To ensure the rigor of the present study, certain assumptions, limitations, and the scope of the research itself were identified. The first assumption of the current study was that students referred to the Intervention Team could benefit from further intervention within the context of their education. Maras et al. (2015) supported the need for a response to SEL that includes different tiers to address mental health needs. Maras et al.'s (2015) research suggested there is potential for students to benefit from further tiered interventions such as those received from the Intervention Team explored in the current research study. The second assumption was that the members of the Intervention Team possessed some level of awareness as to the overall SEL of students before and after implemented interventions. Previous research by Maras et al. (2015) identified the utilization of a multi-disciplinary team comparable to the Intervention Team in the current research study to support the delivery of SEL supports and interventions. Limitations of the present research include that transferability may be limited to schools with similar programs

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within the United States. Cook et al. (2015) remarked that universal approaches to prevention can fall short of addressing the wide range of mental health needs of students. Therefore, while certain approaches may work well in certain settings, there is no guarantee that approaches from the current study will suit all settings. The scope of this research study was limited to collecting Intervention Team impressions about the skills of students overall without utilizing data pertaining to specific students.

Rationale and Significance

Mahoney et al. (2018) described improvements in a wide range of behavioral and academic areas (positive social behaviors, lower levels of emotional distress, lower levels of conduct challenges, better academic performance including improved standardized test scores, better empathy and self-esteem) that are evident following interventions aimed at increasing SEL skills delivered in academic settings. Mahoney et al. (2018) indicated that increased positive attitudes towards one's self and others was a short-term outcome of SEL interventions that seems to be indicative of long-term outcomes of success in academics, better mental health, and more positive behavior. Due to the importance of education and the importance of SEL skills within the construct of education, the present study sought to evaluate the Intervention Team's perception of the effectiveness of the interventions the Intervention Team has put into place to increase student SEL skills. This researcher hoped that the present study would provide significant guidance to the members of the Intervention Team in understanding the perceived positive, negative, and neutral impacts of the implemented interventions and inform future decision-making regarding interventions to increase student success within the school. The results of this research may offer ideas for effective interventions for other programs serving similar populations.

Summary

Integrating SEL skills into instructional practices and academic content has become a priority in many school districts (CASEL, 2018). Brann et al. (2019) noted the link between positive youth outcomes and SEL skills to be well-established. Relevant research discussing SEL skills speaks to results after the implementation of specific, often manualized, group interventions (Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). Due to the importance of education and the importance of SEL skills within the construct of education, the present study sought to evaluate the Intervention Team's perception of the effectiveness of the interventions the Intervention Team puts in to place to increase student SEL and academic skills. The next chapter will contextualize the current research within the currently available literature and demonstrate common themes and methodology trends that are relevant to the present research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a term used to label a set of skills that includes a child's ability to effectively manage his or her emotions while demonstrating positive relational interactions (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Cook et al. (2015) identified SEL as a student-centered approach to the teaching of skills that regulate personal behavior and actions towards others grounded in cognitive-behavioral and social-cognitive theory. This type of learning helps increase success across life domains, including school success, having meaningful relationships, integrating oneself into a community, and being a meaningful contributor in the workplace (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Skills deemed necessary to be successful in these areas include the ability to maintain attention and problem solve, be socially aware, have a sense of competence and autonomy as related to the self, and have the ability to resolve conflicts while demonstrating empathy (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Research in the field of SEL has indicated great variability in what types of SEL interventions are successful, who they work best for, and what types of conditions promote SEL (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). According to Taylor et al. (2017), few researchers have implemented interventions at the high school level, and out of those who have, few have found significant gains in skills for this population. Cook et al. (2015) noted that it is difficult for educational leaders to decide which programs and practices to incorporate into their schools to create comprehensive systems of support for academics, behavior, and social and emotional needs. Cook et al. (2015) also identified that universal approaches to prevention can fall short of addressing the wide range of mental health needs of students. The operational definition of *academic and social and emotional success* in the context of the present study is demonstrated improvements in a student's ability to attend and participate in the classroom, comply with

school behavior expectations, and demonstrate increased SEL skills in the five core competency areas described by CASEL (2020).

Relevant research in 2021 addressing SEL skills most often details results after the implementation of specific, often manualized, whole school interventions. Whole school interventions were described by CASEL (2021) as involving the whole school community in the creation of learning environments that promote growth in academic and social and emotional skills through equitable, caring, and motivating school environments. Many of the interventions for the adolescent age group are comprised of elements that address empathy skills, and empathy is part of the core competencies of self-awareness and social awareness as described by CASEL (2020). Examples of manualized interventions for adolescents that addressed these competencies include: 4R's Program, Michigan Model for Health, Mind Up, Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, RULER, Second Step, Too Good for Violence, Anger Coping Program, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Malti et al., 2016). These interventions were specifically designed to promote SEL skills and reduce the risk of mental health related challenges in children and adolescents (Malti et al., 2016). These lessons were also implemented in the classroom or after school for children up to eighth grade (Malti et al., 2016).

CASEL's Program Guide (2021) offered a list of 77 programs with pre- and post-test outcomes available that demonstrated effectiveness in increasing SEL skills. Of the 77 programs, 30 programs are able to be utilized with high school students (CASEL, 2021). Malti et al. (2016) pointed out the exclusion of programs related to pre-kindergarten and children older than grade eight in their research due to the lack of empirically supported programs in those age groups. Additionally, Malti et al. (2016) mentioned the exclusion of individualized interventions for children with psychopathology and deemed these to be beyond the scope of their analysis. Malti

et al. (2016) noted that individualization of interventions, beyond that of accounting for developmental differences within age groups, is necessary.

Greenberg et al. (2017) explained why schools are important for SEL skill development. Greenberg et al. (2017) noted that the promotion of SEL in schools lays the groundwork for problem prevention and positive outcome promotion in support of public health. Jones and Doolittle (2017) echoed these sentiments, stating they also believe schools to be the ideal place to intervene with a public health approach, which involves providing interventions to all instead of just those who seem to be most in need of support. Jones and Doolittle (2017) provided more support for this viewpoint by stating that, because children spend much of their time at school, SEL reduces the likelihood that they will experience behavioral or emotional complications in the future and increases the likelihood of academic achievements. Domitrovich et al. (2017) identified SEL competence as a critical factor in success in school and in life for all, inclusive of those experiencing risk factors like behavioral and emotional problems, economic disadvantages, or minority status. Domitrovich et al. (2017) also mentioned competence as offsetting the negative impacts of risk exposure. Ura et al. (2020) noted significantly improved academic outcomes and social and emotional learning outcomes after the implementation of SEL programming delivered through direct instruction. Taylor et al. (2017) named similar findings, with increased academic achievement post-intervention.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) provided a framework to understand SEL across five areas of competency including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. According to CASEL (2020), self-awareness is identified as understanding one's inner

thoughts, feelings, and values and how these impact behaviors. Self-management is described as including regulation of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to work towards the individual's goals (CASEL, 2020). Social awareness is seen as understanding social and ethical behavioral norms, being able to understand the perspective of others, and being (CASEL, 2020). Relationship skills are identified as communicating clearly, listening to others, cooperating, solving conflict effectively, resisting peer pressure, and knowing when to access and provide help (CASEL, 2020). Finally, responsible decision-making can be described as utilizing learned social norms, including safety concerns and ethical standards, to make sound social and personal behavior choices (CASEL, 2020). The five areas of competency identified within this framework may help to provide an understanding of how SEL needs can be supported to increase academic success and SEL for individuals in the school setting who are manifesting potential SEL challenges.

Jones and Doolittle (2017) provided additional insights into understanding SEL competencies. Jones and Doolittle (2017) divided SEL competencies into three types of competencies instead of the five developed by CASEL (2020). Jones and Doolittle (2017) noted *cognitive regulation* as the ability to attend to tasks, solve problems, plan, and make good choices among alternatives, including making the appropriate choice instead of the one that is preferred. *Emotional processes* refer to recognition, expression, and regulation of one's own emotions while also comprehending the emotions of others (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Finally, *social and interpersonal skills* are identified by Jones and Doolittle (2017) as the abilities to interact with others appropriately, navigate complexities of social situations, and interpret the behaviors of others with accuracy (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

Evidence implies that social and emotional learning (SEL) has come to the forefront in

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schools across the country. Cook et al. (2015) observed mental health in children and adolescents to be a growing concern across the nation and that schools have become a main resource in helping to promote well-being and prevent problems. Social and emotional learning and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) were documented by Cook et al. (2015) as evidence-based and widely accepted as universal prevention approaches to address student mental health. As evidence of the importance of SEL mounted, many more states established, and are establishing, standards for this type of learning. As of 2017, Jones and Doolittle (2017) noted four states as having established SEL standards across the kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum. According to information disseminated by Positive Action, Inc. (2021), 29 states have now provided SEL guidelines to educators. Due to an increased focus on and importance of SEL, it is worthwhile to evaluate programs that aim to increase skills in this area as was the purpose of the present study.

Review of the Literature

This literature review examines recent empirical and theoretical scholarly work from the field that focuses on social and emotional learning (SEL). The included literature comprises both recent sources, including meta-analyses, and relevant historical works from the last few decades that provide foundational knowledge for both research and theoretical underpinnings related to SEL. The rationale for including meta-analyses in this review is to decrease the likelihood that any individual study could exert too much influence within the field, as recommended by Yeager (2017). This review has revealed common themes and methodology trends that were explored in depth to facilitate a deeper understanding of past findings, results, and implications of both of these in the greater context of SEL. Themes that became apparent in the literature review include: (a)

SEL skills correlate with an increase in school success (Ura et al., 2020; Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021; Durlak et al., 2011), (b) familiarity within peer groups and familiarity of adults implementing interventions increases the likelihood of program success (Katz et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2015, Aidman & Price, 2018), (c) considerations related to adolescent development that contribute to the likelihood or unlikelihood of program success (Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Osher et al., 2016).

Social and Emotional Learning Skills and School Success

Review of the available literature indicated that the presence of more social and emotional (SEL) skills correlates with an increase in school success (Ura et al., 2020). In the context of the present research, the operational definition of academic and social and emotional success (i.e. school success) is demonstrated improvements in a student's ability to attend and participate in the classroom, comply with school behavior expectations, and demonstrate increased SEL skills in the five core competency areas described by CASEL (2020). Previous research demonstrated findings consistent with increases in these types of success. For instance, Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2021) investigated the implementation of a SEL and mindfulness-based intervention delivered by school counselors to 109 students in middle school and found significant intervention effects for those receiving the intervention in many areas, including academic achievement. Other areas with statistically significant positive impacts post-intervention included students' ability to tolerate stress, utilize executive functioning skills like organizing, planning, shifting, task monitoring, and social curiosity (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021).

Academic Achievement Post SEL Intervention

Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2021) utilized achievement tests to specifically measure the impacts of the SEL and mindfulness-based intervention on the achievement in the subject areas of social studies, English, and science. Scores in the subject of English increased by 4.73 points on average for those receiving the intervention, while those in the control condition experienced decreased scores by an average of 1.21 points (Lemberger- Truelove et al., 2021). Scores in the subject of science increased by an average of 4.49 points for those receiving the intervention, while those in the control condition experienced an average decrease of 3.02 points (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021). Scores in the subject of social studies increased by 6.0 points on average for those receiving the intervention, while those in the control condition experienced an average increase of 1.25 points in this subject area (Lemberger- Truelove et al., 2021). The evidence provided by Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2021) helps to support the idea that academic achievement is increased as a result of SEL interventions.

Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based universal social and emotional interventions. There were 270,034 total participants from kindergarten to high school. One of the hypotheses of this meta-analysis was that positive mean effects would be seen across a variety of skill, attitudinal, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Results indicated that academic achievement (grades) had a mean gain of 11%. A limitation of this meta-analysis is that follow up data on academic success was only available for 16% of the included studies. Durlak et al. (2011) concluded that achievement test outcomes were also improved. Because of the nature of a meta-analysis, which includes review of many studies at the same time, it can be concluded that SEL interventions have the potential to positively impact academic

achievement.

Low et al. (2019) examined the impact of a social and emotional learning curriculum on students' SEL and academic outcomes after two years of implementation. Teachers implemented the interventions and completed rating scales about student behavior (Low et al., 2019). Results indicated that skills for academic learning were increased post- intervention (Low et al., 2019). Additional gains for boys particularly included improvement in the areas of conduct and peer problems.

Taylor et al. (2017), conducted a meta-analysis of 82 school-based universal SEL programs for students from kindergarten to high school, including 38 studies that took place outside of the United States, with the main goal of filling in the research gap of not knowing what the follow up effects are after implementation of SEL programs. The results of the meta-analysis indicated an increase in academic achievement post-intervention.

Gained Skills Correlate with Decreased Internalizing and Externalizing Problems

Another component of the operational definition of *academic and social and emotional success* (i.e. school success) in the context of the present study is demonstrated improvements in a student's ability to attend and participate in the classroom and comply with school behavior expectations. Some challenges that impact students' ability to engage appropriately in the classroom and comply with school behavior expectations include internalizing and externalizing problems (Schleider et al., 2020). Sorrenti et al. (2019) indicated internalizing problems to include anxiety and depression and related symptoms, while externalizing problems include anger and aggression and related symptoms. Olivier et al. (2020) noted that students with internalizing or externalizing behavior challenges are at higher risk of not completing school or underachievement. Modecki et al. (2017) identified three skills they label as core skills for

prevention and reduction of externalizing behaviors in youth. They noted these three skills to be decision making, coping, and emotional regulation (Modecki et al., 2017).

Waschbusch et al. (2019) summarized the findings of school- based interventions focusing on behaviors considered to be aggressive or defiant. Results indicated that the outcome of these interventions included significant positive effects on both aggression and defiance. Interventions of higher quality were associated with larger effect sizes.

Taylor et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis and measured the outcomes of externalizing behaviors like violence, classroom disruption, non-compliance with rules or directives, bullying, and aggression after SEL interventions. Outcome measures related to later arrests demonstrated a significantly lower number for those who received SEL interventions (Taylor et al., 2017). A limitation of this meta-analysis was that three quarters of studies analyzed were based on self-report measures, and it is important to include perspectives of others when working with young people (Taylor et al., 2017).

Taylor et al. (2017) also measured the outcomes of internalizing factors like attitudes about self, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept in their meta-analysis of SEL interventions. They also measured emotional distress symptoms, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Taylor et al., 2017). Outcome measures taken up to 936 weeks (18 years) later indicated decreased presence of clinical disorders (like anxiety and depression) (Taylor et al., 2017).

Carroll et al. (2020) utilized a waitlist- control design to examine the impact of a SEL intervention program upon behavioral and emotional challenges. The intervention also examined the impact of the intervention program upon academic effort and achievement. There

were 854 participants in the study between 8-12 years of age. Carroll et al. (2020) described reduced internalizing and externalizing problems post- intervention. Additionally, Carroll et al. (2020) found significant increases in SEL competencies post- intervention.

Ghiroldi et al. (2020) implemented a 12-week school-based mindfulness intervention led by teachers utilizing a control group and intervention group to evaluate the effectiveness of this type of intervention on emotional and behavioral problems. Results indicated significant decreases in both internalizing and externalizing problems post- intervention. The effect size for externalizing behavior problems was small to medium, and the effect size for internalizing problems was small (Ghiroldi et al., 2020).

Lemberger et al. (2018) implemented a counselor-led intervention, called the Student Success Skills (SSS) program, with a group of 193 seventh grade students. This intervention focused on psychoeducational practices and utilized structured small-group activities to increase students' self-regulation, social skills, metacognitive skills, memory and learning strategies, and self-efficacy and optimism. Results of the study indicated improvement in the above-mentioned skill areas within groups sorted by initial performance levels (Lemberger et al., 2018).

Lemberger-Truelove et al. (2021) noted significant increases post-SEL and mindfulness-based intervention in the area of stress tolerance. All participants experienced a statistically significant increase in scores pre- to post-assessment, with a 5.5 point increase in skills on average. The control group experienced changes of less than 2 points on average (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2021). Lemberger- Truelove et al. (2021) also found that students increased their abilities in the area of executive functioning post-intervention as well. Students were able to better shift between tasks, organize and monitor their tasks, and inhibit distractions in the

environment with an average of 10.57 points gained post- intervention (Lemberger- Truelove et al., 2021).

In the work of Taylor et al. (2017), a meta-analysis of 82 school-based universal SEL programs for students from kindergarten to high school, outcomes included improved interpersonal skills and quality of relationships with peers and adults, self-control, problem-solving, and even investment in school. Post-intervention data was collected a minimum of six months after the intervention. Long-term outcomes of this intervention included an increase of 6% in high school graduation rates and college attendance up to 936 weeks (18 years) following the intervention (Taylor et al., 2017). Taylor et al.'s (2017) findings were beneficial to all demographic groups, including different races, socioeconomic statuses, and domestic and international school populations. Findings of the analysis indicated that enhanced skills, instead of attitudes, were a predictor of long-term follow-up effects. This is consistent with other literature (Domitrovich et al., 2016; Staley et al., 2016; Sorensen & Dodge, 2015) which also indicated that competencies like relational skills, self-regulation, and problem-solving assisted with positive behavior and academic performance.

The presented evidence suggested that implementation of SEL programming can correlate with decreased presence of internalizing and externalizing problems. Skills identified by Modecki et al. (2017) as key to prevention and reduction of externalizing behaviors of youth included decision making, coping, and emotional regulation. In the context of this qualitative program evaluation, the available literature supports exploring the utilization of SEL interventions to support various aspects of school success.

Familiarity of Peers and Adults as an Element to Increase SEL Intervention Success

This section discusses familiarity of peers and adults in the intervention environment as a trend in methodology that leads to an increase in SEL skills for adolescents. Particularly in the adolescent age group, certain types of interventions fare better than others (Yeager, 2017). The most salient identified trends in successful interventions within this age group included interventions being delivered by familiar adults, interventions delivered in groups of familiar peers, and interventions that are developmentally appropriate for adolescents (Yeager, 2017). Wu et al. (2021) noted that who delivers an SEL intervention impacts the effectiveness.

Katz et al. (2020) conducted a randomized controlled trial with 113 students who received a dialectical behavior therapy and mental health literacy intervention alongside their peers that was delivered by teachers. Teachers were given lesson plans and were given the freedom to differentiate lessons based on their students while maintaining program content (Katz et al., 2020). The outcome measures taken were related to coping skills, social supports, and self-concepts (Katz et al., 2020). Results of Katz et al.'s work (2020) indicated that there were significant gains for those receiving the intervention.

Nielsen et al. (2015) conducted an experiment implementing a whole school SEL intervention for ages 11-15 that focused on social actions, social skills, knowledge, and the meaning of social interactions and skills. Interventions were delivered by classroom teachers and a pre- and post-test design allowed for evaluation of the effectiveness (Nielsen et al., 2015). The intervention, called *Up*, included elements such as activities for students, skills training for staff, parent involvement, and also daily schoolwide initiatives (Nielsen et al., 2015). While there was no control group, the intervention showed a significant increase in the percentage of students who scored at a level considered to be highly competent post-intervention (Nielsen et al., 2015).

Notably, the students who received the intervention all had the same classmates and teacher from pre-kindergarten to grade nine (Nielsen et al., 2015). Therefore, the students receiving this SEL intervention were both with groups of familiar peers and were receiving the intervention from a familiar adult (Nielsen et al., 2015).

Aidman and Price (2018) discussed the implementation of the *Second Step* program in a middle school. The program consisted of 13-15 lessons that were about 50 minutes each and were implemented by classroom teachers to groups of familiar peers (Aidman & Price, 2018). Outcomes included 93% of the schools' teachers agreeing with the statement that "SEL lessons have made a positive difference in our school" (Aidman & Price, 2018, p. 32). Focus groups were also conducted after the implementation of the program and students indicated enjoying the teacher delivery of lessons because teachers added some personalization to the lessons (Aidman & Price, 2018).

Ohrt et al. (2020) researched the implementation of the Strong Teens SEL curriculum designed for high school students in an alternative high school setting. While this curriculum can be implemented by a teacher or counseling professional, doctoral students in the field of mental health were chosen as the implementers (Ohrt et al., 2020). While this program has previously been deemed effective in reducing difficult behaviors (Merrell et al., 2008) and increasing emotional management skills, problem-solving, and social skills (Merrell, 2010), it was not effective at creating statistically significant changes in the alternative high school setting (Ohrt et al., 2020). A potential contributing factor to the lack of statistically significant changes in this particular instance of implementation is the lack of familiarity with the adult implementer.

Green et al. (2021) described results from the implementation of the classroom-based Speaking to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK) Pre-Teen

Mentoring Curriculum. Green et al.'s (2021) study included 365 student participants randomly assigned to intervention or control conditions by classroom. Students in the intervention group classrooms experienced positive changes in the areas of curriculum content (large effect size), communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (medium and large effect size), emotional regulation (medium effect size), and resilience (medium effect size) (Green et al., 2021). Particularly, 78% of students receiving the intervention showed a positive change in communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (Green et al., 2021). Emotional regulation skills reflected positive changes for 69% of students (Green et al., 2021). Resiliency was found to have increased for 78% of students participating (Green et al., 2021). The study included measures of fidelity of delivery and quality of delivery (Green et al., 2021). Teachers delivered the intervention to groups of familiar peers in their classrooms (Green et al., 2021).

Claro et al. (2015) conducted research on the effects of implementing a school-based group intervention targeting maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation with 28 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 who were categorized as at risk of failure in school. The intervention group, made up of familiar peers from the same school, made significant gains in using adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Claro et al., 2015). This intervention specifically focused on high-risk adolescents who were enrolled in special education services, making this study especially relevant to the current program evaluation, which addressed the needs of students who are comparable to the population of Claro et al.'s (2015) work. Overall, the reviewed literature indicated the potential success of utilizing familiar adults to implement SEL lessons to groups of familiar peers.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Effective Interventions for Adolescents

SEL interventions appear to be most effective when the content of the program and method through which it is delivered are of a developmentally appropriate level for the population receiving the intervention (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Physical and neurological changes over the course of childhood development indicate when mastery of specific SEL skills is most important (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). As children mature, they experience more broad and diverse environments, giving environments outside of the home more influence than in early childhood (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). For adolescents, this means taking into account the adolescents' need for autonomy and respect as well as their point of view as they continue to transition to becoming an independent adult (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). While consideration of development is important, other considerations have been highlighted as well to keep in mind when creating developmentally appropriate programs for adolescents. For example, Durlak (2015) listed community characteristics, staff delivering the intervention, program features, professional development, and characteristics of the school in which the SEL program is to be implemented as the factors that determine whether an SEL program is successful. Osher et al. (2016) identified six key criteria for successful SEL programming including: (a) developmentally appropriate, (b) culturally relevant, (c) systemic, (d) comprehensive, (e) evidence-based and (f) forward thinking programming.

In regards to developmentally appropriate SEL programming, Yeager (2017) identified that programs deemed to be effective make adolescents feel that adults and peers respect them, and through utilization of these programs the students are able to gain status and be admired by those whose opinions they hold in high esteem. The Institute of Medicine and National Research

Council's Committee on the Science of Adolescence (2011) identified four developmental tasks of adolescence to be:

> 1. "To stand out: to develop an identity and pursue autonomy;
>
> 2. To fit in; to find comfortable affiliations and gain acceptance from peers
>
> 3. To measure up: to develop competence and find ways to achieve, and
>
> 4. To take hold: to make commitments to particular goals, activities, and beliefs," (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council's Committee on the Science of Adolescence, 2011, p.48).

Yeager (2017) noted the importance of honoring the desire that adolescents have to achieve the above developmental tasks.

In regards to cultural relevance, the adults who deliver the program or are in the environment are an important part of its potential success (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Adults teaching the skills should be culturally sensitive, considering attitudes, behaviors, and values relevant to cultures (Osher et al., 2016). Jones and Doolittle (2017) suggested that adolescent intervention programs may be most effective when adults who deliver the program demonstrate understanding and respect related to the adolescent's viewpoint and need for autonomy instead of trying to control the situation. Yeager (2017) also identified increasing respect in the classroom environment as key in possibly altering internal traits in a positive manner and suggested future research measuring psychological environment and how to alter this. Gregory and Fergus (2017) offered that cultural and societal beliefs related to privilege and power need to be considered in regards to SEL efforts. According to Gregory and Fergus (2017), consideration of these belief systems is especially important when utilizing SEL interventions to reduce differences in student discipline.

Systemic and comprehensive approaches to SEL are noted to be ideal according to Osher et al. (2016). Osher et al. (2016) identified that aligning SEL with other school-based efforts and putting research into practice are two gaps in the research that should be further investigated. Yeager (2017) discussed three systemic models of intervention for consideration in the delivery of SEL programming for adolescents. The first model is the skills model and this, according to Yeager (2017), is based on the perspective that a child needs additional skills or that the current skills need to be reworked. Yeager (2017) referred to another model as the climate model. Yeager (2017) stated that this model focuses on making changes in the environment so that the emotional climate is more supportive and less negative. The third model is referred to as the mindsets model, and this model focuses on how environments can create certain belief systems (or mindsets) through socialization (Yeager, 2017). The mindsets lead to students utilizing (or not utilizing) skills that they have acquired (Yeager, 2017). Yeager (2017) observed that the skills model seemed to be least effective when implementing SEL interventions with adolescents. The climate model does not always translate outside of the setting where the affected climate exists (e.g. school translating to out of school) (Yeager, 2017). However, the mindsets model promotes internalized, lasting change due to its internal nature (Yeager, 2017). Therefore, a systemic and comprehensive approach delivered with a mindsets model may have the most propensity to be impactful upon SEL skills (Yeager, 2017).

Evidence-based SEL programming (Osher et al., 2016) is another important consideration in regards to the theoretical underpinnings of successful SEL interventions. CASEL's Program Guide (2021) offered a list of 77 programs with pre- and post-test outcomes available that demonstrated effectiveness in increasing SEL skills. Of the 77 programs listed, 30 programs are able to be utilized with high school students (CASEL, 2021). Forward thinking SEL

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programming, Osher et al. (2016) noted more student choice and voice, as well as service learning and discussing moral dilemmas, would be appropriate for high school age students learning SEL skills. Technology has also been incorporated into SEL interventions according to Osher et al. (2016).

Overall, considerations of the various aspects of SEL programming that relate to successful interventions for adolescents lead to a more focused view of which interventions are most likely to be successful. Yeager (2017) commented on commonalities among effective programming for adolescents, noting these programs work to change how adolescents view the world, as well as motivate adolescents to identify the values that matter to them as individuals. Across programs, researchers have noted that relationships between adolescents and adults are an important factor for SEL programming success (Osher et al., 2016; Yeager, 2017; Durlak et al., 2011; Ghiroldi et al., 2020).

Trends in Research, Gaps in Literature

Trends in SEL research emerge when surveying the body of available literature. Previous SEL research focused on whole school, manualized interventions (Low et al., 2016; Kasler & Elias, 2012; Espelage et al., 2015; Hampel et al., 2008). More recently, SEL literature has focused upon interventions with groups of students instead of entire schools (Lemberger-Truelove et al. 2021; Knight et al., 2019; Thayer et al., 2019). When considering SEL programming for schools, Lemberger- Truelove et al. (2021) reinforced that long-term benefits of increasing skills like responding to stress and executive functioning skills extend far beyond the classroom.

While many interventions are implemented on the premise that specific skills are taught, the outcomes measured are much broader, and most often those were not the direct targets of the

interventions (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). This program evaluation seeks to add to the present body of knowledge by qualitatively assessing the implementation of interventions that can be individualized to increase overall school success.

Summary

Social and emotional learning is the label used to identify a set of skills that have proven difficult to measure and have been identified as essential for life success (CASEL, 2018). While research in the field of SEL indicates a wide range of variability when looking at what types of interventions are effective for teaching these skills, certain characteristics of interventions emerge as most likely to lead to successful learning outcomes depending on the age and characteristics of the target population (Yeager et al., 2017). Review of the literature indicates that SEL skills correlated with an increase in school success. The operational definition of *academic and social and emotional success* in the context of the present study is demonstrated improvements in a student's ability to attend and participate in the classroom, comply with school behavior expectations, and demonstrate increased SEL skills in the five core competency areas described by CASEL (2020). Based on the available literature, familiarity of those receiving the intervention with the adult implementing the intervention as well as familiarity with the other peers receiving the intervention appears to correlate with an increase in intervention success (Wu et al., 2021; Nielsen et al., 2015). Also, programs for adolescents that consider adolescent development in how interventions are created and delivered are likely to be more successful (Yeager et al., 2017).

Available literature deems the integration of SEL skills into the context of school advantageous, increasing school success while also aligning with a public health approach (Jones & Doolittle, 2017, Greenberg et al., 2017). Malti et al. (2016) noted that individualization of

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interventions, beyond that of accounting for developmental differences within age groups, is necessary. The five areas of competency identified within this framework will help to provide an understanding of how SEL needs can be supported to increase academic success and SEL for individuals in the school setting who are manifesting potential SEL challenges (CASEL, 2020).

In summary, the researched and discussed components of successful SEL programming in the context of adolescent development were thoughtfully considered in the context of this qualitative program evaluation of the Intervention Team. Outcomes of the present study included additional knowledge as to which types of individualized SEL interventions were effective when implemented by the Intervention Team. This study sought to address a gap in the literature, bringing increased understanding as to how individualized interventions for adolescents with identified SEL challenges impact overall school success. This qualitative program evaluation explored the perceptions of school staff of the positive, negative, or neutral impacts of various SEL interventions implemented by the Intervention Team on students' social and emotional success.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Educators and administrators employed in a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States were facing the problem of being unsure whether the implementation of various interventions aimed at increasing social and emotional learning (SEL) skills of students was successful. The purpose of this qualitative program evaluation was to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions upon student SEL skills as perceived by school staff. To investigate this problem, research questions that investigated which types of interventions were being implemented and how the interventions were perceived to impact each component of SEL were explored.

Research Design

Extensive exploration of various methodologies led to the selection of qualitative program evaluation for the present study. Birdwell (2018) noted that program evaluation is an appropriate undertaking when there is a perception that a program could potentially be improved. A broader definition of evaluation as asserted by Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014) included the systematic evaluation of the merit, worth, significance, equity, probity, and/or safety of the program. According to Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014), evaluation of programs is key to affirming the value, progress, and accountability of good programs, while also providing insight as to whether an ineffective program should be terminated. Birdwell (2018) mentioned program evaluation in the context of educational programs can potentially impact both culture and climate in a positive manner for teachers and students. The rationale for utilizing a qualitative approach for this program evaluation was supported by the works of Roberts (2010) and Saldana (2018).

Roberts (2010) wrote that qualitative research is most appropriate for the exploration of people's experiences. The current study centered on understanding people's perceptions related

to impacts of SEL interventions. Qualitative methodology was also appropriate in the context of the present study because this type of research is often utilized to explore organizational processes without manipulating the environment (Roberts, 2010). While quantitative methods rely solely on structured data collection, qualitative approaches offer the opportunity to provide meaningful insights through empirical and systematic analysis and documentation, often leading to deeper understanding of how the studied program is working (Birdwell, 2018). Therefore, a qualitative program evaluation methodology aligned best with the purpose of the present study. The qualitative data collected through the methodology of this study was viewed in the context of the components of CASEL's (2005) SEL framework. After careful consideration of various methodologies, this study utilized elements of qualitative program evaluation to understand the perceived outcomes of SEL interventions and to explore the effectiveness of the Intervention Team.

Site Information and Demographics/Setting

This qualitative program evaluation took place in a public suburban regional secondary high school with a population of approximately 716 students in grades 9 through 12 in the Northeastern United States (according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website, 2021). According to the school website, approximately 92% of graduating students pursue post-secondary education. The school had 72 full- time teachers and 38 full- time paraprofessionals (according to the site's accreditation report located on its website). The school also had support staff, including three guidance counselors, two social workers, one speech and language pathologist, seven special education teachers, and a school psychologist. The school had two administrators including a principal and assistant principal at the time of this study.

A unique feature of this specific school site is that approximately 40 students with identified SEL needs are offered additional support in the Individual Support Program (ISP), as noted by the site's program description in its program of studies. The ISP program, according to the site's program description in its program of studies, is a supportive program that provides individualized instruction to students. This support is in the form of a directed study hall built into the students' schedule every other day or every day, depending on level of need. While attending this directed study hall, students receive individualized support related to planning and organization of schoolwork as well as support related to academic content (according to the site's program description in its program of studies). This type of support is not offered in traditional study hall environments, where students engage only in self-directed learning tasks (according to the site's internal program description documents). Additionally, students in the ISP are often supported by school social workers on an individual basis, depending a student's individual level of needs (according to the site's internal program description documents). While the ISP is run by two special education teachers, there are also paraprofessionals in the classroom who provide an additional layer of support (according to the site's internal program description documents). The ISP also offers a place for students with extenuating circumstances (recent behavioral or physical health hospitalizations, challenges with learning, or those who are experiencing a crisis of some kind) to learn while they are reintegrating into the classroom after an absence (according to the site's internal program description documents). Overall, the ISP seeks to meet the individualized needs of students in need of SEL support above and beyond that provided in a traditional classroom setting.

The Intervention Team exists to support students in obtaining interventions to assist with overall school success, including by providing access to the ISP. The Intervention Team consists

of a group of guidance counselors, social workers, special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators who offer a menu of additional support and interventions to students on a referral basis (according to the site's internal program description documents). Some of the supports include making course changes to ensure teacher-student compatibility, allowing students to enroll in online courses, giving students access to directed study halls within the ISP or another assisted setting, offering meetings with support staff on a one on one or group basis, and offering individualized modifications (access to teacher notes, quiet spaces for tests or quizzes, or more time in the ISP) to the school day. The data from the qualitative interviews with members of the Intervention Team in the context of the current study was collected with the goal of providing insight as to which interventions are generally perceived by staff to be effective at supporting SEL competencies. Permission to access the site was granted by the Superintendent, who is in charge of approving all research taking place within the school district. The researcher did not have any supervisory influence relative to participants in the study. The results of this study were made available to the school district upon completion of the research.

Participants and Sampling Method

Creswell (2015) identified documents and interviews as types of qualitative data utilized to address research questions. Based on the nature of the current study, purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al., 2016) was utilized, which involves utilizing information-rich sources. In the context of this study, information-rich sources were the responses from the semi-structured interviews with members of the Intervention Team. Benoot et al. (2016) noted that identifying the complexity of the concepts being studied in qualitative research is a strong argument for the utilization of purposeful sampling. Members of the Intervention Team are support staff, teachers, and administrators from the site. The constellation of members changes each year based on staff

schedules but always includes approximately 12 members. These members provided insight into the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions upon student SEL skills. Utilizing staff members from the Intervention Team is an example of purposeful sampling. The intent of utilizing purposeful sampling was to increase efficiency of validity (Palinkas et al., 2016). Creswell (2015) explained purposeful sampling as intentional selection of individuals or sites for the purpose of comprehending the central phenomenon.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Creswell (2015) noted the interview to be an advantageous form of qualitative data collection due to information being provided when direct observation of participants is not an option. Semi-structured interviews with members of the Intervention Team were utilized to collect data in the present study. Creswell (2015) noted that interviewers are better able to regulate the information received in the context of the semi-structured interview because specific questions can be asked to obtain specific information. One-on-one interviews, while time consuming, are seen as ideal so that participants can share ideas comfortably, are not hesitant to speak, and are articulate (Creswell, 2015) and were conducted as part of this research study.

According to Palinkas et al. (2016), semi-structured interviews should follow the funnel approach. This approach begins with broad questions related to the topic, and then narrows as the questions continue (Palinkas et al., 2016). The researcher utilized this approach during the semi-structured interviews. Creswell (2015) noted that asking open-ended questions to allow participants to voice their experiences is an important practice. This technique was also utilized throughout the administration of the semi-structured interviews. To promote organization of the data, Creswell's (2015) recommendation of transcribing the data collected during the interview was followed to facilitate ease of analysis.

Interview Protocol

Participants for this research were recruited via an email sent to each member of the Intervention Team's individual work email address. This email was approved by the University of New England, Institutional Research Board (IRB) prior to being disseminated by this researcher to the members of the Intervention Team. The email included contact information for the researcher for those who wished to participate. Potential participants who responded to the email affirmatively were then sent another email with available dates and times for the interview and they were asked to pick a time slot by responding to the email. Prior to the beginning of the semi-structured interview, each participant was asked to review an informational document, the "Participant Information Sheet". The interviews were conducted via an online platform, Zoom. Utilization of Zoom allowed for recording of the interview for ease of transcription. The participants were informed that their responses were being recorded. Following transcription of the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to review their responses (member checking) to ensure clarity of meaning. Member checking is more specifically defined as the researcher going back to participants to make sure the portrayals of participant voices are accurate (Candela, 2019). Participants were given the aforementioned definition of member checking to promote uniform understanding of the rationale for this aspect of the present research.

The purpose of this research study was described to each interviewee prior to conducting the interview. The participants were reminded that they had the right to discontinue the interview at any time. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and they were reminded that they could contact the researcher at any time with questions or concerns. Participants were also contacted for member checking upon transcription completion.

Member checking was described to participants as allowing participants to add to or clarify the meaning of their interview data after the interview (Birt et al., 2016). Birt et al. (2016) noted that member checking serves as a way to increase the validity in a qualitative research study that employs interviews. At the conclusion of this research study, participants were offered a copy of the final dissertation.

Development of the Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions were aimed at eliciting information that is related to answering the research questions. Participants were assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of this study and all names were redacted. The participants were asked to describe their role on the Intervention Team and their length of involvement with the team. Following collection of this basic information, each participant was asked to describe what types of interventions have been implemented by the Intervention Team to support students. This information was utilized to answer the first research question: *What types of SEL interventions are currently implemented by the Intervention Team to support students?* Next, participants were asked how they perceive the interventions implemented by the Intervention Team to impact students, noting whether they generally perceive these interventions to positively, negatively, or neutrally impact students. The questions that were posed next sought to identify the perceived impact of interventions upon students' self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness, and relationship skills. Standardized definitions of each of the components of SEL were read to participants to promote a uniform understanding of these components of SEL when collecting data. Prior to conducting the interviews, a colleague who was aware of the purpose of the present research reviewed the questions to ascertain whether the interview questions had a high likelihood of collecting appropriate information to achieve the purpose of the research study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed having a colleague who is aware of the current research review the proposed interview questions, a technique labeled peer examination, to support validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for each research question followed a similar coding and synthesis process. Creswell (2015) identified a process that included steps for qualitative data analysis. The steps are: collecting data, preparing data for analysis, reading through data to gain a general sense, coding the data, then coding for themes and for description simultaneously (Creswell, 2015). Collecting data was done via the semi-structured interview as discussed previously. Data was prepared for analysis by printing transcripts of each interview. Next, the researcher read through the transcripts to gain a general idea of the nature of the responses. The data was then coded, which resulted in the identification of emergent themes. Descriptive coding was utilized. Descriptive coding, according to Xu and Zammit (2020), involves utilizing a short phrase or word to describe the topic of a part of qualitative data.

Elliott (2018) referred to coding as a way to map or index data in an effort to make sense of data to answer research questions. Codes are labels attached to data to give a symbolized meaning to the collected qualitative data (Elliott, 2018). First level coding was utilized in this research study to begin to summarize general ideas in the data as described by Elliott (2018). Second level coding was also utilized in the present study. This coding focuses on making inferences, including making inferences that extend beyond the concrete meaning of the data (Elliott, 2018). Creswell (2015) suggested that no matter how many pages of text data exist, utilization of a maximum of 30-50 codes initially and then paring these down to 20 codes, later turning them into approximately five to seven themes, seems to be most efficacious.

To answer the first research question, What types of SEL interventions are currently implemented by the Intervention Team to support students enrolled in the individual support program?, each participant was asked to describe the SEL interventions they have seen implemented by the Intervention Team. This information was compiled from all participants to provide an overview of the types of interventions typically implemented by the Intervention Team. The results were reported in a list with a short description for each intervention.

Answering the second research question, How do the implemented interventions impact SEL success as perceived by the Intervention team members?, involved exploring the interventions described in the first research question. The core competencies of SEL as proposed by CASEL (2005) were utilized to frame how the interventions were perceived by members of the Intervention Team to impact or not impact each of these competency areas when implemented. Analysis of which interventions were perceived by Intervention Team members to lead to which outcomes provided insight as to which interventions should be repeated to increase SEL success of the students referred to the Intervention Team.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), any type of research comes with limitations. Limitations are best defined as characteristics of the study that have the potential to impact findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Qualitative research designs come with some inherent limitations. The main limitation to qualitative research, according to Atieno (2009), is that in most circumstances, findings cannot be generalized to wider populations with the same fidelity that quantitative analyses typically can be. Because qualitative studies are not anticipated to be generalizable, focusing on the transferability to other settings is not likely to be a useful outcome for the obtained data (Atieno, 2009). Another limitation to be considered is that some

ambiguities exist inherently within human language, and this can sometimes color the analysis (Atieno, 2009). Making sure to present findings clearly in concise language, while also utilizing the strategy of member checking, helped to manage this limitation.

Qualitative data interpretation can be time consuming, especially in the case of analysis of interviews and other sources for common themes (Anderson, 2010; Creswell, 2015). The researcher set aside adequate time for data interpretation to help to overcome this potential obstacle. Difficulties in the visual display of qualitative data are another potential limitation of this type of methodology, according to Anderson (2010). The rigor of qualitative research is also more challenging to demonstrate, maintain, and assess (Anderson, 2010). Rigor in the present study came from comparison between individual interview data.

After considering the inherent limitations of qualitative research, it is important to consider the researcher and how they impact the research being done. This is especially important to consider as qualitative research lends itself to the potential for the influence of personal bias from the researcher (Anderson, 2010). This is seen as a limitation due to the potential to alter the responses of the participants (Anderson, 2010). To mitigate any potential personal bias this researcher relied on information from the data instead of personal interpretations (Anderson, 2010). Member checking also helped to ensure that responses of participants were not altered by researcher interpretation (Anderson, 2010).

Another potential limitation of qualitative research, as explained by Saunders et al. (2014), is maintaining confidentiality of the participants. Saunders et al. (2014) indicated that some in the field of qualitative research believe that true anonymity is never achievable because the research team has access to participant information. In the context of the current study, the identity of the participants was kept confidential by de-identifying any individually identifiable

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data provided during the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to facilitate communication of results and only the researcher had access to the data before it was de-identified.

Delimitations, described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) as choices made about the overall study design that support clarity of the conceptual boundaries of the study, were used to describe the scope of the present study and must be considered in context. The present study held the delimitation of the size of the potential number of participants. The number of participants was limited based upon the number of members of the Intervention Team who were able to participate from the pool of 12.

Generalizability, according to Smith (2018), is the extent to which results of research can be applied to other populations or different contexts. This was seen as a potential challenge in the current study due to the specificity of the program evaluation. However, Smith (2018) noted that while probabilistic generalizability is not feasible in qualitative research due to the lack of statistical data, naturalistic generalizability focuses on the potential for research to resonate with the reader's experiences. For instance, a reader of the present study with a program similar to the Intervention Team may be able to transfer some of the findings, making the findings useful in other educational settings.

Ethical Issues in the Present Study

Creswell (2015) identified ethical practices in all steps of the research process to be complex and a necessary primary consideration within any research. The burden falls upon the researcher to protect against any potential ethical issues when conducting research (Creswell, 2015). As noted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), the researcher is responsible to both inform and protect participants of any potential ethical issues. The various secondary school staff who

were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews were asked to voluntarily cooperate and were fully informed about the purpose of the present study. While no serious ethical threats were posed to the volunteering school staff, it was necessary to proactively establish safeguards to protect the rights of the participants.

Informed consent, namely verbal consent, was obtained from the adults participating in the semi-structured interviews. Every effort was made to support confidentiality of participants. Confidentiality was supported by keeping the names of individuals confidential by assigning pseudonyms and identifying characteristics of the organization were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned by the researcher to facilitate communication of obtained qualitative data. Potential unintended outcomes of participation in the present study included the participants wishing to make unexpected alterations to their practices, which could impact the minor children with whom they interact. Participants were encouraged to wait for the results of the present study and to consult with their supervisors prior to making any alterations in their professional practices.

Documents were another element of ethical consideration in the context of the present study. All documents generated as part of the present study were considered in the context of the social, political, and cultural climates of the study, its organization, and the participants. Any documents and notes pertaining to the present study were secured and protected to ensure confidentiality was maintained. Any printed documents were locked in a file cabinet, to which only the author of the present research study had access. Printed documents were destroyed after the final approval of this dissertation. Any electronic documents were stored on a password protected computer.

Conflict of Interest

In the context of qualitative research, namely the qualitative program evaluation methodology of the present study, conflict of interest is a consideration that must be carefully contemplated. Grundy et al. (2020) researched the scope of non-financial conflicts of interest and noted little consensus on the true meaning of this term, but that factors like experience or relationships fall under this umbrella. This researcher interacted with the teacher participants in the present study on a regular basis and therefore discussed any potential strong feelings or reactions that could impact the results of the present study with an expert in the field to minimize and maintain awareness of any potential conflicts of interest.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Trustworthiness**</p>

Trustworthiness in research is a term utilized by qualitative researchers to label the concept also known as validity (Creswell, 2015; Roberts, 2010). Connelly (2016) identified validity as assurance of quality of a study. Trustworthiness gives research credibility, allowing readers to trust the researcher's analysis of the data (Roberts, 2010). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) identified trustworthiness as how well evidence was provided by the researcher to represent reality. The construct of trustworthiness, according to Connelly (2016), includes specific criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these terms was important to consider in the context of the present study to fully explore the trustworthiness of the work at hand. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), this includes transferability across different contexts, populations, and situations. All of the above terms, when explored in the context of the present study, work together to create transparency. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) noted that transparency is of paramount importance when building credibility within research.

Credibility

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) explained credibility as the alignment between the perceptions of the participants and the portrayal of these perceptions by the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified credibility as how findings from research are or are not congruent with reality. Creswell (2015) noted credibility to be of utmost importance in qualitative research. Credibility is achieved when the researcher is able to effectively take into consideration and expatiate upon complexities that are present in a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2015) saw credibility to be acknowledging limitations of a study while also identifying biases and assumptions. The explanation of complex patterns, problems, and themes is at the crux of this construct (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

A strategy identified by Creswell (2015), that was employed by this researcher in the context of the present study to support credibility, was clarification of bias. This researcher was already familiar with IEP's and SEL interventions. To combat the potential for bias, the researcher utilized bracketing to contemplate thoughts around this. While Tufford and Newman (2010) indicated that bracketing is not associated with a uniform definition, they do note the purpose most commonly associated with the technique to be useful. Tufford and Newman (2010) identified one bracketing technique as writing memos as a way to sort out the ways in which the researcher interacts with the data. Bracketing in the form of writing memos was utilized in the present study.

Member checking, described by Birt et al. (2016) as potential activities that include returning of an interview transcript to interviewees and giving participants access to synthesized data, was also utilized in the present study. Creswell (2015) described member checking as a process through which the researcher can ask participants about whether the report is realistic

and complete. The purpose of this activity is to review for accuracy. The complex themes and

patterns that arise as the findings that emerge were carefully explained to support the credibility

of the present study as described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015).

Transferability

Transferability, the second term indicated in consideration of trustworthiness, is

identified as the usefulness of findings to people in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014).An

overarching goal of qualitative research is to provide context-relevant findings that can be

applied to related contexts in a meaningful way (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). This is described as

transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Creswell (2015) described the element of

transferability as including detailed procedural descriptions and thoroughly establishing the

context of a study. An important assertion made by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) is that the goal

of qualitative research is not to produce truths to apply to other situations but rather to transfer

context-relevant findings to broader contexts while maintaining richness. It is likely that the

findings of the present study are transferable to other settings with programs and populations

similar to those explored in the present study.

Transferability was supported in the present study by offering thick descriptions.

According to Ponterotto (2006), thick descriptions involve describing what is being observed or

witnessed in the context of the study. Ponterotto (2006) summarized the work of others

(Ryle,1971; Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989; Holloway, 1997; and Schwandt, 2001), offering five

essential components to thick description. These are: (a) describing and interpreting social

actions in the correct context, (b) capturing thoughts and emotions within social interactions, (c)

labeling motivations and intentions of social actions, (d) providing verisimilitude for the reader,

and (e) assuring the descriptions resonate with readers (Ponterotto, 2006). Detailed information provided within thick descriptions will allow for transferability.

Dependability

Dependability, yet another dimension of trustworthiness, is known to be the condition met when findings of a qualitative research study are able to be repeated and demonstrate consistency (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Dependability, according to Creswell (2015), allows for repetition of studies through utilization of overlapping methods and depth of methodological descriptions of procedural steps. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) identified dependability as an aspect of trustworthiness that lends the ability of the data to be stable and consistent over time. To support dependability an audit trail was created, noted by Roberts (2010) to be of use in supporting accuracy of data. This trail included detailed information as to how the data was collected and how the analysis was conducted. Additionally, records of notes and transcripts were maintained (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Connelly (2016), is explained as the extent to which findings hold consistency and replicability. Confirmability, another aspect of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2015), can demonstrate that the findings and interpretations in the present study were clearly extrapolated from the available data. Demonstrating how research conclusions have been reached supports confirmability in the present study. An important consideration in the area of confirmability is that researchers in qualitative studies do not claim to be objective, but rather the research results are not based on the bias and subjectiveness of the person conducting the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Exploration of how biases and prejudices impact data interpretation was addressed as this is a goal of confirmability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). To

support transparency and provide confirmability, being forthcoming in describing the decisions made throughout the research process is important (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

Reflexivity, described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) as the practice of maintaining awareness of the role of researcher and identifying the potential ways that personal assumptions and subjectivity impact the present study, was attended to throughout the course of this study. This researcher specifically focused on the potential impacts that her personal sociocultural background and beliefs could have on the entirety of the research process. Another important reflection related to reflexivity is that this process, as explained by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), is iterative, and the research process may impact the researcher as well as the researcher impacting the research process.

Purposeful sampling, noted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) to be important to transferability, took place in the context of the present study. Creswell (2015) identified purposeful sampling as an intentional selection of individuals or sites to propagate understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Information-rich data came from the members of the Intervention Team as they had the most knowledge and perceptions of the impact of the implemented strategies. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) noted the importance of utilizing information-rich data.

Summary

This qualitative program evaluation of the efficacy of the Intervention Team sought to answer two research questions related to the interventions implemented by the Intervention Team and the ability of these interventions to improve students' social and emotional learning success. Roberts (2010) wrote that qualitative research is most appropriate for the exploration of people's experiences. Semi-structured interviews with members of the Intervention Team provided a rich understanding of the experiences of interventions and their perceived positive, negative, or

neutral impacts upon student SEL. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), any type of research comes with limitations. The main limitation to qualitative research, according to Atieno (2009), is that in most circumstances, findings cannot be generalized to wider populations with the same fidelity that quantitative analyses typically can be. Data analysis was methodical and included coding as a way to map or index data in an effort to make sense of data to discover possible answers to research questions (Elliott, 2018). Potential ethical issues and conflicts of interest were explored and mitigated in the context of the present study. Overall, the researcher hoped to provide insights regarding the effectiveness of the Intervention Team through conducting this qualitative program evaluation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Intervention Team on students' SEL skills as perceived by school staff at a public suburban high school in the Northeastern United States. As noted by Jones and Doolittle (2017), SEL skills are paramount to success across the lifespan, which added increased purpose to this research study. Durlak (2015) indicated that SEL skills are essential for healthy schools. Based on the literature cited above, it was important to evaluate the Intervention Team and the perceived effectiveness of its interventions.

This qualitative program evaluation explored the perceptions of school staff regarding the positive, negative, or neutral impacts of various SEL interventions implemented by the Intervention Team on students. The research study sought to determine the perceived impact of the described interventions by school staff on students' social and emotional success through exploration of the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of SEL interventions have been implemented by the Intervention Team to support students?

RQ2: How do the implemented interventions impact SEL success (student self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills), if at all, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

> RQ2a. How do the implemented interventions impact the self- awareness, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

> RQ2b. How do the implemented interventions impact the self-management, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2c. How do the implemented interventions impact the responsible decision making, if at all, of the students as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2d. How do the implemented interventions impact the social awareness, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2e. How do the implemented interventions impact the relationship skills, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

Birdwell (2018) noted that program evaluation is an appropriate undertaking when there is a perception that a program could potentially be improved. According to Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014), evaluation of programs is key to affirming the value, progress, and accountability of good programs and also provides insight as to whether an ineffective program should be terminated. Birdwell (2018) mentioned that program evaluation in the context of educational programs can potentially impact both culture and climate in a positive manner for teachers and students. Qualitative data analysis was completed using manual coding of printed interview transcripts to report the findings of this study. This chapter is divided into sections covering topics including an overview of data collection and analysis, demographics of participants, historical underpinnings of the Intervention Program, and identification of themes and subthemes that emerged through the data analysis.

Permission for this study's methodology in its entirety was obtained from the University of New England's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning recruitment. Participants from a public suburban high school in the Northeastern United States were recruited via an email sent to each member of the Intervention Team's individual work email address. Eight participants out of 14 potential participants offered their time and participated in the present

study. Those who elected to participate were asked to review and verbally confirm their review of an informational document entitled the "Participant Information Sheet" prior to participating.

Interviews were conducted via an online platform, Zoom. Utilization of Zoom allowed for recording of the interview and for auto-transcription. The semi-structured interview began with questions related to each participant's role on the Intervention Team as well as their length of involvement with the team. Next, an open-ended question intended to elicit responses related to the answering of the first research question was asked. This question was: What types of interventions have you witnessed the [Intervention] Team implement? The next series of questions involved participants considering the components of the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning's (CASEL's) (2021) definition of SEL (self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making. social awareness, and relationship skills) and which interventions were perceived to impact each area and how they were perceived to impact each area as related to student success. The final portion of the interview asked participants to provide any ideas for interventions they felt the Intervention Team could potentially implement in the future to assist with student success.

The auto-transcription provided by Zoom was then proofread for editing purposes prior to being sent to participants via email for review. Personal identifying information was also removed from the transcripts at this time. The purpose of participant review (member checking) was to ensure clarity of meaning (Candela, 2019). Member checking is more specifically defined as the researcher going back to participants to make sure the portrayals of participant voices are accurate (Candela, 2019). Member checking was described to participants during the interview via Zoom and following the interview via email as allowing participants to add to or clarify the meaning of their interview data after the interview (Birt et al., 2016). Participants were given the

aforementioned definition of member checking to promote uniform understanding of this aspect

of the current research. One participant offered a minor revision of the emailed transcript.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant as a measure to protect privacy.

Analysis Method

The first step in analyzing the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews was

printing of the interview transcripts. Then, each interview was read through to gain a general

understanding of the content and an overall sense of participants' perceptions prior to any type of

coding taking place. Next, information pertaining to the research questions was highlighted in six

colors corresponding to each question or sub-question. Each mention of a possible intervention

(e.g. teacher level interventions, course changes, Intervention Block) was highlighted with the

same color (17 different colors were used) for ease of locating within the transcripts. The

highlighting was completed manually. Then, each of these highlighted mentions of interventions

was typed into a Microsoft Excel document and listed to promote organization. Descriptions of

the mentioned interventions offered by participants were then added to the Microsoft Excel

document under the corresponding intervention.

After highlighting, descriptive coding as described by Xu and Zammit (2020) was

utilized. Descriptive coding, according to Xu and Zammit (2020), involves utilizing a short

phrase or word to describe the topic of a part of qualitative data. This process, as applied to this

research study, involved finding short words or phrases to describe similar data. For example,

"teacher-level" was a code utilized to identify all interventions put into place by teachers in the

classroom during regularly scheduled class time. Next, more codes were utilized in another

review of the data to analyze connections between the prior codes. For example, teacher-level

codes together produced individual check-ins as another relevant code representing the idea that

multiple participants thought this type of intervention to be something that should be utilized. From this cluster of representative codes, the idea of teacher-level interventions and their similarities or differences could be gleaned. Participants were offered a copy of the final dissertation.

Presentation of Results and Findings

This section includes demographic information of the participants in this study. Additionally, the history of the Intervention Team and its purpose within the school is included. The various research questions are also discussed. Themes that arose from the data will also be recognized.

Participants

Eight participants out of 14 potential participants offered their time and participated in the present study. The participants included building administrators (2), special educators (2), support staff (1), and content area teachers (3). Table 1 details Intervention Team Member Pseudonym, Roles, and Experience. The shortest reported length of involvement with the Intervention Team was one school year. The study participants who had been involved with the Intervention Team for 14 years were involved with the team since its inception.

Table 1

Intervention Team Member Pseudonyms, Roles, and Experience

Name	Building Role	Length of service in district	Years of experience total	Years on Intervention Team
Mark	Administrator	18	20	14
Vera	Administrator	3	13	3
Kara	Social Worker	10	21	8
Kim	Content Area Teacher	15	23	4
Greg	Content Area Teacher	15	21	4
Steve	Special Education Teacher	16	16	14
Sarah	Special Education Teacher	24	28	14
Susan	Content Area Teacher	20	20	4

History of the Intervention Team

        The history of the Intervention Team emerged as a theme from the interviews. To complement the history that was recounted by members, internal site documents (2017, p.1) were obtained that included the mission statement and established norms of the group. Table 2 details the mission statement and norms of the group corresponding to the site's internal documents (2017, p.1).

Table 2

Intervention Team Mission Statement and Norms

Mission Statement	The team will systematically identify at risk students, develop and provide teachers with appropriate tools for intervention, and monitor progress toward successful student learning in traditional and alternative settings with the (district) school community.
Established Norms	1. We expect disagreements with our colleagues; the dissonance is part of making sense of this complicated endeavor called education. We will disagree agreeably. 2. We will balance advocacy with inquiry; be as interested in the other perspectives as your own. Give others

	a chance to talk. Silence does not always mean agreement.
	3. We will start and end the meeting on time; we will assign follow up actions and responsibilities and will only meet when there is a meaningful agenda.
	4. We will use humor as appropriate to help us work better together.
	5. We will be responsible for examining all points of view before consensus is accepted.
	6. We will be fully "present" at the meeting by becoming familiar with the agenda before we arrive and by being attentive to the behaviors that affect physical and mental engagement.

Mark, a building administrator who created the Intervention Team, reported that the Intervention Team was initially a way to gatekeep the utilization of online classes for credit recovery. The online platform used by the school district was Gradpoint, described by Pearson (2017) as an online learning tool that provides standards-based curriculum. Steve, a special education teacher, mentioned "It really started as a pathway to alternative learning and that's when Gradpoint our online platform started, which was very simplistic back in the day." Mark

also reported that early in its history, the Intervention Team took on the role of meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), taking on the purpose of helping students find different pathways to achieving a diploma. Mark noted that a mission statement, "The team will systematically identify at risk students, develop and provide teachers with appropriate tools for intervention, and monitor progress toward successful student learning in traditional and alternative settings with the (district) school community" and norms were established for the group and it became a professional learning community.

Research Question One

Participants offered lists and descriptions of a variety of interventions, which formed the list and data related to the first research question, What types of SEL interventions have been implemented by the Intervention Team to support students? The identified interventions are first listed and then described below. Table 3 includes the names of the interventions, number of participants mentioning each intervention, the intervention delivery method, and the perceived pyramid tier each intervention fits into. Interventions were divided by this researcher's perception of which interventions fit into which blocks on the school's Pyramid of Intervention (see Figure 1), which was taken from the school's internal site documents (2017, p.4).

Table 3

Name of Intervention, Number of Participants Mentioning the Intervention, Intervention Delivery

Method, and Pyramid Tier

Name of Intervention	Number of Participants Who Mentioned the Intervention	Delivered During School	Pyramid Tier
Teacher level interventions	8	Yes	1
Intervention Block	8	Yes	1
Extra teacher support	8	No	2
Changing faculty to meet student academic needs	8	Yes	2
Course changes	8	Yes	2
Pass or fail grading	5	Yes	2
Gradpoint	8	Yes	3
Saturday school	6	No	2
Summer school	6	No	3
Winter school	4	No	3
Every other day schedules	6	Yes	2
Counseling	5	Yes	2
Referral for testing	4	Yes	3

Individual Support Program	8	Yes	3
Whole school letters	1	No	1
Credit cards	1	Yes	3
Data wall	1	Yes	3

Figure 1

Pyramid of Intervention
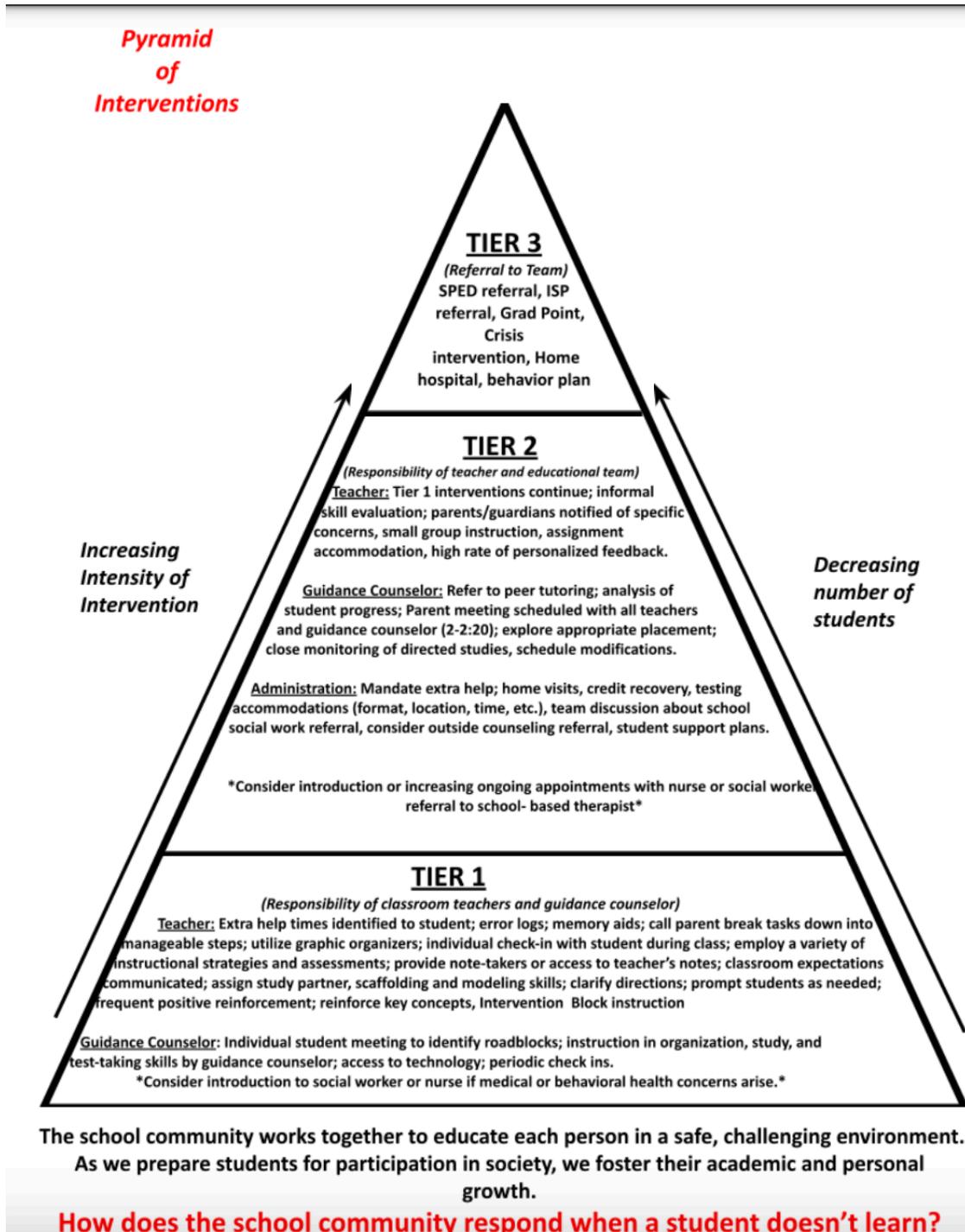
Note. Reprinted with permission. (Internal site documents, 2021, p.1).

Teacher-Level Interventions

Teacher-level interventions, identified by members of the Intervention Team as interventions delivered by the teacher in the regular classroom setting, were discussed by eight out of eight participants as the first way to intervene with students who are struggling. Suggested interventions were listed in two different documents found to be in existence. One of those documents is the Pyramid of Interventions as displayed in Figure 1. The other document is a list that is almost identical to the Pyramid of Interventions (internal site documents, 2008, p.1). This other internal site document (internal site documents, 2008, p.1) is not named and features three sub-categories (teacher initiatives, skill development, and teaching strategies) as a first level of teacher intervention. There are also check boxes for dates and comments to be input by classroom teachers to track interventions for individual students (internal site documents, 2008, p.1). Table 4 lists each sub-category from the unnamed document and the included interventions.

Table 4

Sub-categories of First Tier Teacher Interventions

Teacher initiatives	Calling parents, providing extra help, individual check-ins with students during class, class-wide incentive systems, clear classroom expectations, assigned study partners, frequent positive reinforcement, access to technology, and individual student meetings.

Skill Development	Error logs, memory aids, teaching relaxation strategies, breaking tasks down into manageable steps, utilizing graphic organizers, student self-reflection, and instruction in organization, study, and test-taking skills
Teaching Strategies	Employ a variety of instructional strategies and assessments, daily notebook checks, daily agenda checks, prompting students as needed, providing note-takers or access to teacher's notes, scaffolding and modeling skills, clarifying directions, and reinforcing key concepts.

The unnamed document included a next level of interventions to be utilized with students who continue to struggle after the first level of interventions. This level of interventions included responsibilities and interventions for teachers, an educational team, and administration. This document was mentioned by two participants as helpful in guiding which interventions should be done next when initial interventions were not found to be impactful. Table 5 includes teacher interventions, educational team responsibilities, and administration responsibilities at this next level of intervention that can also be found in the Pyramid of Interventions.

Table 5

Responsible Parties and Second Tier Interventions

Teacher Interventions	Informal skill evaluation, peer tutoring, behavior management, analysis of student progress, small group instruction, meeting with guidance to explore appropriate placement, accessing student cumulative record, testing accommodations (format, location, time, etc.), and giving a high rate of personalized feedback.
Educational Team	Close monitoring of directed studies and scheduling parent meetings
Administration	Mandating extra help and mandating Saturday school

According to an interviewee, if first and second tier interventions do not help students achieve success, a referral to the Intervention Team takes place at the third level of the Pyramid of Interventions. In the past, the Intervention Team has utilized "berry binders" to track the utilization and effectiveness of the above-listed first and second tier level interventions. Steve described these binders as:

A way for teachers to track interventions that they were using for kids. It was a binder with some suggested interventions. A way to track and monitor successful interventions and unsuccessful interventions and then it was available for us, as a committee, to say

hey we're noticing so and so is still struggling can you bring your berry binder to see

what worked and what didn't work.

One of the interviewees said, "But we tried to shift to an online system for berry binders where

we asked teachers to track the interventions in a Google Doc or Google Sheet." When asked

what happened to the tracking of these interventions, another participant stated, "Nothing gets

done unless someone owns it, and so nobody owned it, and so it just didn't continue, because

different things take priority." Other participants reported follow-through as key to making sure

interventions are successful.

Intervention Block

Intervention block, described as "a mentoring block" by Kara, is a schoolwide

intervention period that has provided specific support to students referred to the Intervention

Team. According to participants, students sign up to spend 45 minutes of their school day with a

specific teacher. Participants reported that students have a mentor who helps them select

appropriate places to spend this intervention period. For instance, a student who is struggling

with a math concept may schedule to spend the intervention block with their math teacher to

receive assistance with skills. Most teacher sessions are capped at 15 students so that more

individualized attention is available, as mentioned by participants. According to Sarah:

It's a great concept, I know some teachers do a great job with (the intervention block) and

other people just don't. I'm not sure the adults that we're matching them up with are fully

invested in and fully prepared to take on a kid with some social emotional needs.

Mark stated, "I think the [intervention block] is an awesome opportunity that's underutilized."

Steve also mentioned the intervention block as an intervention for kids needing extra help. Vera

noted, "We talk about [the intervention block] a lot and utilizing [the intervention block] for

students for targeted support and reassigning them different places." Overall, all eight participants mentioned the intervention block as a tool to support student success.

Extra Teacher Support

The intervention of extra teacher support was noted by eight out of eight participants to be another intervention that was frequently recommended by the Intervention Team. Some participants described dedicated teachers by name who make it a point to schedule extra time to work with students who have not successfully grasped content area information in the classroom. Participants reported many of these teachers offer their time outside of the school day as a courtesy to their students. Other participants mentioned extra teacher help in passing during their interview. Mark stated:

> A teacher works one on one with kids and we need more types of things like this. What
>
> [the teacher] does is create authentic learning opportunities for kids in science where you
>
> know that [the teacher] allows different ways to demonstrate their competencies. In fact
>
> it's an area where we recommend fewer online classes because when we utilize more
>
> creative problem solving it's all about relationships. You know it's [teacher name] giving
>
> up free time but [the teacher] developing relationships with kids so it's about finding
>
> those people that can do that it's not for everyone.

Kara also mentioned offering students more individual teacher support as an intervention recommended by the Intervention Team. Overall, the intervention of extra teacher support emerged as being perceived by interviewees to increase student success.

Changing Faculty to Meet Student Academic Needs

Changing faculty to meet student academic needs was another intervention sometimes initiated by the Intervention Team as reported by participants. Participants mentioned that one of

the types of teacher changes made was changing the students' directed study hall teacher. For instance, if a student is struggling with science and their science teacher had a directed study class when the student has a directed study class with another teacher, the choice was often made to change their study to be with their teacher to help with extra academic support. Greg stated, "I've seen kids change teachers, I've seen kids be moved into a certain teachers' class like when they have study when the teacher has a class to do that seeing classes be waived for students." Steve said, "Some of the interventions include a simple change of schedule by placing kids into directed studies with their content area teachers to receive direct instruction and focus on areas of need." Vera stated, "We have moved students from certain studies to be with different staff members for those study halls to have more targeted support." Another reason teachers have been changed, according to participants, is to promote student success in the classroom. For instance, if a student is not doing well in history class and is struggling to stay in the classroom for instruction but a former teacher with whom they had success has the same class and it would fit in the students' schedule, a change may be made. Steve stated:

> It's human nature that kids are going to get better with certain teachers than others, based on personalities and I just think kids are more apt to take a chance and maybe put themselves out there a little bit more if they feel comfortable within the classroom setting if they can build a relationship with the teacher.

Greg stated, "I think we do a really good job on [the Intervention Team] of matching people off properly and knowing who are the teachers to kind of avoid if possible." A perception offered by many interviewees was that changing faculty to meet student academic needs took many forms and tended to be perceived as beneficial for student success.

Course Changes

Participants gave examples of how course changes can be another intervention implemented by the Intervention Team. Course changes were described by participants as including changes of course level after the school's deadline and changing entire courses. If students struggle after the schoolwide level change deadline of November 1st listed in the Program of Studies and are referred to the Intervention Team, they are sometimes given the opportunity to move from an Advanced Placement (AP) or honors level course to the college prep level. Participants also described how courses can be entirely dropped if the course is not considered a graduation requirement and is causing a student undue stress. Occasionally, the Intervention Team will suggest that a student change to an online course instead of an in-person course. An interviewee described that students may be taken out of an in-person class in which they have a poor working relationship with the teacher and moved to an online version of that course or a similar course where they can complete the coursework in the classroom of a teacher with whom they have a positive relationship. Overall, course changes took a variety of forms as described by participants and were perceived by participants to have a positive impact on student success.

Pass or Fail Grading

Pass or fail grading was another intervention mentioned by members of the Intervention Team. Greg stated, "pass fail options for certain classes" occur in extenuating circumstances. The school's Program of Studies (2021) indicated that students at the school typically receive letter grades based off of numerical averages. According to participants, the Intervention Team may vote to support a student receiving pass or fail grades in one or more courses. It is important to note that per school policy (as noted by internal site documents), students were, at the time the

study was conducted, only allowed to receive pass or fail grades for one out of the four terms of the school year. Past reasons for approving pass or fail grading as described by participants included hospitalization for physical illness or mental health emergencies. Pass or fail grading was described by participants as a helpful intervention. One participant reflected that a reason this intervention may be useful is due to relief of the stress of numerical grades for students when students are experiencing other stressors.

Gradpoint

Gradpoint, described by Pearson (2017) as an online learning tool that provides standards-based curriculum, was another intervention that was mentioned by all participants as something put into place by the Intervention Team. Sarah stated, "You know Gradpoint saves a lot of kids from not graduating. It's one thing I don't think is a great intervention for everybody." The various uses of Gradpoint as recalled by participants included to recover credit needed for graduation, to allow a student to participate in a course not offered in person at the school, and to allow a student more flexible course options due to course conflicts or difficulties within the classroom environment. Steve said:

> We have done a lot that includes credit recovery, where a student would come in and we would tailor the curriculum to exactly what they need as a lot of the kids who might have failed a term or two or just struggled with particular concepts when they really do the whole course over again, we would target these areas to meet their needs.

Vera offered:

> So, historically and I don't think this is necessarily the right thing to do, I think that when a student has been a behavior concern or an attendance concern we end up putting them in a Gradpoint class and I don't think that really solves the issue but it gets the student to

the finish line, so it's half the battle, but it's not really helping the student develop the skills that they need to for self-management. Gradpoint doesn't always force the student to grow the way they need to.

Not all participants felt that utilization of Gradpoint had a positive impact on student success. Overall, Gradpoint's uses as described by participants mainly focus around credit recovery.

Saturday School

Saturday school was another intervention that was recommended by the Intervention Team. Saturday school was reported by participants to have served a somewhat different purpose, mostly being utilized for students who needed to catch up on academic work. Sarah stated:

> Just getting to know kids who weren't in the ISP, you know, a lot of times they're frequent flyers. That's how I got to know a lot of kids who really needed help and you'd see them in the café or the hallway and you know you had a relationship with them. Not as a punitive intervention, kids just came in, and you know it really seemed to help. It really used to seem to affect their performance during the school day if they knew they had to come in on Saturday.

Greg, regarding Saturday school, said:

> I do think Saturday school in some cases has been effective for some kids who you know part of the problem is behavioral in class. I think that that's kind of a deterrent for some kids and start thinking about their choices and how they act and things like that.

Participants indicated Saturday school was recommended for a variety of reasons and that the ultimate goal of this intervention was to serve as another option to increase the likelihood of student success.

Summer School

Summer school was described by participants as a long-standing intervention that also helps students with credit recovery. Participants reported that students who failed a course for the year but were within 10 points of passing could participate to attempt to achieve a passing grade. This option, according to participants, helped students not have to repeat the same course the next academic year by allowing them to participate in other academic opportunities. The Intervention Team helped to decide who should be invited to participate in summer school.

Winter School

Winter school was another intervention reported by participants. Participants noted that this intervention helped students who have failed the first two terms of a course. Students were invited, according to participants, to stay after school and complete coursework to bring grades up to passing. The Intervention Team helped to decide which students should be invited to partake in this opportunity. Steve stated:

> The new intervention that we have implemented over the last two years is winter school. We've also had [the Intervention Team] be quite involved in preparing for summer school early on when we first started offering a summer program. However, now it's just kind of taking its own course we really do not need to spend as much time setting up the program and implementing it.

Winter school was reported by participants to be something that they think should continue, as it gave some students earlier opportunities to achieve passing grades and increase overall academic and social and emotional success.

Every Other Day Schedules

Student schedules at the high school level consist of classes that alternate on an every other day schedule. For instance, if a student had an English class on Monday, they would not have the class again until Wednesday. Interviewees spent time addressing the utilization of every other day schedules as an intervention. In this model, students needing four or fewer courses for graduation can attend classes every other day in the school building. On the days students spend out of the building, other opportunities like working at a job or exploring a career are offered. Three participants expressed concerns about every other day schedules. One participant expressed this viewpoint by when they said:

> What always worries me is something when the kids come in every other day. You see them less they develop less skills to cope with certain things. It's easier for us to manage, but, is it teaching the kid any skills?

Six out of eight participants mentioned every other day schedules over the course of their interviews as an intervention implemented by the Intervention Team, with mixed reviews on whether this intervention was helpful to students.

Referral to Counseling Services

The site at which the present study took place had two full time social workers on staff at the time this study was completed. The role of these social workers was to provide services to students to help with any stressors that may be impacting their ability to achieve school success. Some students were reported by participants to receive mandated counseling services as part of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) and other students were reported by participants to have received counseling services after being referred by teachers or the Intervention Team.

Greg described making a referral to counseling services as another intervention utilized by the Intervention Team. He stated:

> Some students you know could benefit from some sort of regular counseling, whether that be if they were required to see [someone] because you know their mental health just kind of prevents them from being successful in school and it's something you know that I see more and more of every year when we have these kids that just they're in a state where they just, it's really not their fault, they just can't be successful because of the state that they're in and as much as you want them to be in school, you kind of wonder is this even being productive for them to be here, so you know if there were some sort of way for them to be met with more regularly than just doing like special ed testing and things to have more of a counselor like that.

Kara mentioned referral "To myself or the other school social worker for a type of support service through counseling." Vera stated:

> Sometimes the intervention will be like [social workers] continue to work on this with this student they really need some you know, help building relationships with these people, etc., and friend groups and [social workers] tend to take the lead on that intervention.

Overall, five participants mentioned referrals to counseling as an intervention utilized by the Intervention Team to help support student success.

Referrals for Psychoeducational Testing

Making referrals for psychoeducational testing was mentioned by participants as a function of the Intervention Team. Psychoeducational testing, according to participants, is regularly utilized by the school district to investigate whether individual students are in need of

special education services. Kara said, "We've made decisions as to whether students should be referred for any type of testing." Kara described how teacher concerns about academic skills or emotional health and their impact on a student's ability to learn can trigger the Intervention Team to have consents for testing sent home. Once the students' family consents to testing, the district is able to begin the assessment process. Depending on the outcome of the testing, students may or may not be offered special education services. Referral for testing was an intervention considered by participants to be the third (highest) tier in the school's intervention pyramid.

Individual Support Program

The Individual Support Program (ISP) is a program that supports students with a high level of need for adult guidance and support (according to the site's internal program description in the program of studies, 2020). Students in this program may have mental and behavioral health diagnoses and challenging life circumstances (according to the site's internal program description in the program of studies, 2020). Students in this program may or may not have a 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP). The ISP was identified by Sarah as an intervention put into place to by the Intervention Team to help increase the likelihood of student success. Sarah stated:

> I always felt like ISP was the strongest intervention that we could have based on the fact that there is a relationship there and it's not just with the teacher it's with you know [paraprofessionals]. It's multifaced, it's academic support, it's relationships, it's seeing a bunch of different adults in the building who say hi to you during the day.

Mark stated: "We will often house a student with [ISP teacher]." Steve stated:

When I first started [as an ISP teacher] I had about five or six kids and they were in my

room all day taking five or six courses online. During this time, I was a

para[professional] running the Gradpoint program. Then as the years went on we kind of

grew into a little bit more than just credit recovery, as we started using the online

program for RTI [Response to Intervention] as well as enrichment.

The ISP was mentioned as an intervention recommended by the Intervention Team by eight out

of eight participants in the present study. All participants mentioned ISP more than once during

their interviews as an intervention helpful to increasing student success.

Infrequently Mentioned Interventions

The interventions mentioned thus far cover all interventions put into place by the

Intervention Team that were reported by more than one participant. A few interventions were

reported by only one participant and warrant comment. These interventions included one whole

school intervention, one intervention utilized with individual students, and a way to track student

interventions. The whole school intervention was referred to as a whole school letter. The

intervention reported as being utilized with individual students was referred to as credit cards.

The way to track student interventions was referred to as a data wall.

Whole School Letters. An intervention put into place by the Intervention Team that was

recalled by one participant, Mark, was referred to as whole school letters. Mark mentioned that

whole school letters were an intervention used by the Intervention Team in 2015. According to

him, each student in the entire student body was sent one of two letters. Mark described the

process as:

The first category was congratulations you're doing a great job. And we sent the same

form letter home to those kids, what do we classify as doing a great job it was you know

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grades are good, attendance is good, etc. And then on the back of the letter home, we had

a list of interventions that are available to kids for extra help, you know things, ways that

they could get help if they needed it. You know hey you're doing great now, but in the

event that you might need extra support here are 15 ways to get extra support and the

other half of the study body we sent a letter with hey it looks like you're struggling and

when you're in because you're struggling here are these interventions and here are ways

that you can access them immediately so I actually saved the documents, the letters, and

called it the good job letter and the bad job letter. You know you didn't say you're not

doing a good job, but we said, you know it appears that you're struggling in one or more

classes have you tried and then we listed the interventions, it was also hopefully landing

somewhere in the kitchen at home and a parent could look at it and see what was done.

Credit Cards. Credit cards were an intervention reported by one participant to be a

visual aid to students who were struggling to make academic progress. The participant said:

I created these five credit like credit cards and they were and every time the student

finished the course we ripped the credit card off the wall, and so it was like the student

was seeing their progress and was seeing how far they were coming. I think it really

helped their self-awareness, I think it helped with feeling pride and accomplishment

something that this student had never felt in their life. The student hadn't accomplished

anything to date, so there was like a real pride feature to call the credit cards, like rip it

yeah there you just got another credit card and then everything's five credits.

Data Wall. The creation of a data wall was reportedly something that helped the

Intervention Team to track interventions. One participant reported that this intervention consisted

of creating a pyramid with three tiers, each tier reflecting one of the tiers of intervention. Names

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of students were placed on tiers of the pyramid corresponding to the tier of intervention each student was perceived to be on. Student names were adjusted to different levels of the pyramid as needed, per interviewee report. Mark reflected:

> We had a pyramid of student names and they were all color coded and it mirrored the pyramid of interventions, we got so much pride when we moved kids down the pyramid we did so many good things.

While this method of tracking interventions and student progress was no longer in use at the time of the present study, Mark suggested potentially reinstating utilization of the data wall as a visual aid to help track student progress.

The named and described interventions are believed by this researcher to be the primarily utilized interventions offered by the Intervention Team after conducting comprehensive semi-structured interviews with participating members of the Intervention Team. However, it is important to recognize that each intervention is tailored to the needs of each referred student. Therefore, there may be more interventions that were provided for specific individuals that were not explicitly listed and described by interview participants. Overall, there seem to be a wealth and variety of available options to utilize to provide support to students in need.

Research Question Two

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews with participants served to respond to the second research question, How do the implemented interventions impact SEL success (student self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills), if at all, as perceived by the Intervention Team members? Participants were read definitions of each of the components of the CASEL (2020) model of social and emotional learning. Participants were asked which of the interventions implemented by the Intervention

Team they thought fit under each component of SEL. Next, they were asked how they thought interventions impacted these areas.

Self-Awareness

The first component of social and emotional learning that was addressed during the semi-structured interviews was self-awareness. Self-awareness was described to participants as the "Abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose" (CASEL, 2020). Participants were asked to consider what types of interventions put into place by the Intervention Team pertained to self-awareness, if any, and how the interventions were perceived by the interviewee to impact self-awareness.

Saturday School and Student Self-Awareness. Sarah reported that some of the questions asked to students who were mandated to attend Saturday school addressed self-awareness. She mentioned, "I had a question I'd ask there about how'd you get here. You know, to kind of have kids process a little bit about why they were there on Saturday morning." When asked how she felt this intervention impacted student self-awareness, she said, "It made them be just a little bit more aware of their part, that it wasn't just some administrator who was being mean and made them go." Participants perceived Saturday school to be an intervention that had a positive impact upon self-awareness.

Student Presentations to the Intervention Team and Student Self-Awareness. Mark reported a strategy he felt impacted student self-awareness that was implemented by the Intervention Team:

We've had students present their own cases to [the Intervention Team] over the years, where we've had them come in and address the panel and you know state their case, really I think it helps with their buy- in but I mean it's self-awareness. I think it's a really good strategy of support for a kid to be able to articulate to adults what's going wrong, why I need this intervention, and why I will follow through. I think it just adds a level of buy in that might not be there.

Credit Cards and Student Self-Awareness. Mark noted credit cards, as mentioned previously, to also have a perceived impact on self-awareness. He mentioned, "I think it really helped [the student's] own sense of self-awareness, I think it helped with feelings of pride and accomplishment, something that this student had never felt in [their] life."

Supportive Adults and Student Self-Awareness. Throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants mentioned the role of supportive adults in increasing student self-awareness. Participants felt that relationships with adults in the school building offered consistent opportunities to build self-awareness. Kara reflected:

I think definitely connecting them with support people in the building, whether it be through the guidance department, an individual teacher, or with a school social worker, or special ed liaison in ISP or learning center. It definitely provides more opportunities to help them become more self-aware of what their strengths and weaknesses are and what challenges they might be facing and then what types of things they can do to improve, to build those skills.

Kara did not note a specific intervention to be most effective in helping build student self-awareness and instead stated as most helpful to self-awareness:

Any type of intervention that we put into place in terms of where it's building some type

of relationship with an adult or numerous adults. I think ultimately that relationships and

having someone to go to help someone learn about themselves, that brings that self-

awareness.

Kim mentioned, "When someone pays attention to them and has a conversation and it's helping

the students reflect," as a role sometimes filled by supportive adults, which in turn helps to

increase student self-awareness. Kim also mentioned students recognizing, "If something is not

working, and why is it not working, and the student sees oh this change is to help me," with that

supportive adult as a component of interventions she perceives as helpful in increasing student

self-awareness. She noted some ways to help students reflect on self-awareness to include,

"Meeting with a social worker or a guidance counselor, reflecting they need to actively be doing

something."

Intervention Block and Student Self-Awareness. Intervention Block was mentioned as

a time of day that could be utilized to help build skills in the area of student self-awareness. Kara

offered:

Time spent with mentors during [Intervention Block] at times has provided an

opportunity to increase student self-awareness, based on if there are particular activities,

in addition to academic work that is being completed. We've had some times where

we've done different curriculums or things to focus in on understanding oneself and

strengths and weaknesses.

Vera said:

I think we could give those kids some guidance as to some of the [Intervention Blocks]

that are available and some of the clubs and activities we offer because I think some of

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these kids who are not self-aware are not going to advocate for themselves and seek those

opportunities out.

Vera's comment identified the potential for utilizing some of the existing clubs and activities to

increase student skills in the area of self-awareness.

Changing Faculty or Courses to Meet Student Academic Needs and Student Self

Awareness. Members of the Intervention Team who were interviewed mentioned changing

faculty or courses to meet student academic needs as another intervention to increase student

self-awareness. Steve said:

Self-awareness goes a long way. If a kid is not feeling comfortable or is in an

environment where they do not feel safe, they're not likely to speak out. They're not

likely to answer questions in class. They're not likely to advocate for themselves, so I

think it kind of trickles into a little bit more than just self-awareness. But I think the

biggest thing for that, with the [Intervention Team] is just to make sure these kids are

properly placed and that we've given them the support that they need to be successful.

Other members of the Intervention Team mentioned proper placement of students in regards to

appropriateness of their courses and the faculty teaching the course as key to affording students

the opportunity to increase self-awareness skills.

Self-Management

The next component of social and emotional learning that was explored with participants

through the semi-structured interview was self-management. Self-management was described to

participants utilizing the CASEL (2020, p.2) definition, "The abilities to manage one's own

emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and

aspirations." One participant, Greg, felt that all of the interventions implemented by the

Intervention Team sought to address self-management. He stated, "I think it is an underlying goal of all of the (Intervention Team) interventions to get them to focus in a little bit more and figure out, you know, what they need to do to be successful."

Self-management and student executive functioning. Kara felt as if interventions aimed at addressing executive functioning assisted with student self-management. She gave an example:

> I think when we refer to an executive function group or refer to some type of intervention with one of the counselors, if someone has been identified as somebody who is struggling because of their inability to manage their own emotions or the behaviors, it helps. I also think in terms of some of the things the school counselors do, like if something comes up and it's maybe more of a behavior that would be a disciplinary thing, maybe doing more of a restorative type approach to it so that they're learning something from it beyond just that there are consequences for behaviors.

Greg also mentioned interventions related to student executive functioning as impacting student self-management:

> I think that executive functioning group that [staff name] has is something that can be effective for some kids. [Staff member] holds those during [Intervention Block] and there are some kids that just organizationally are a mess and just need to you know have something like that available to them, so that's one that I think could be utilized a little bit more.

Self-Management and Relationships. Many of the interviewees discussed self-management skills being built through relationships rather than naming specific interventions that they felt directly increased this skill. For example, Steve recounted:

I think in terms of self- management, that goes back to building relationships with kids making them know that they could speak out freely in ISP. I think a lot of kids have trouble with this. We're very fortunate to have very supportive professionals in the building that help out these kids with self-management, but I really think that it comes down to the teacher, their classroom management style, whether they're willing to build a relationship with the kids that goes beyond academics.

Steve also mentioned interventions that help with self-management to be any in which, "A professional adult is there to kind of remind them that certain behaviors are not tolerated and should not happen in the classroom or anywhere else for that matter." Mark identified the ISP as a specific intervention that is most helpful in building self-management skills. He stated, "I think what truly works best in the case of self-management is we often will house a student with [ISP teacher names]." Mark added, "They need the adult connection." Vera offered school counseling as an intervention she believed to help increase self-management skills in students. She said, "School counselors will do a lot with self-management with students and sometimes that is the intervention that we build to increase those skills." Kim stated, "They need a lot of check-ins and a lot of accountability, it's helping the students learn how to do it on their own" when referring to students working to increase self-management skills. Overall, participants indicated relationships with supportive adults to be a common feature of interventions that have been perceived by interviewees to work to increase student self-management skills.

Responsible Decision- Making

The third area of social and emotional learning explored with interviewees was responsible decision making. CASEL (2020) defined responsible decision making as:

The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social

interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical

standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various

actions for personal, social, and collective well-being (CASEL, 2020, p.2).

Interviewees were asked what types of interventions put into place by the Intervention Team

pertained to responsible decision-making and which of these interventions were perceived to

increase responsible decision-making skills.

Responsible Decision-Making and Intervention Block. Mark identified the

Intervention Block as useful for building responsible decision-making skills. He noted that

students are able to choose which teachers they work with during this period of the day. Mark

said, "I think the [Intervention Block] is an awesome opportunity to build these skills that is

under-utilized." Mark elaborated and shared that students do not always take advantage of

choosing Intervention Block locations for themselves and instead allow their mentors to do so on

their behalf. Steve echoed Mark's sentiments about Intervention Block being a way for students

to increase responsible decision-making skills and mentioned helping students choose

Intervention Block teachers as a way to promote responsible decision-making skills.

Responsible Decision-Making and Gradpoint. Kara stated when asked what

interventions could increase responsible decision-making skills, "Doing online learning when it

is something that's more independent that we recommend out of the [Intervention Team] would

do that because they're kind of forced to have to make decisions independently, self-motivate."

Two other participants noted Gradpoint to be an intervention that helped increase student

responsible decision-making due to the independent nature of the online courses.

Responsible Decision-Making and Student Choices. Interviewees noted various opportunities that students have to make choices and felt that students having choices led to the potential to grow in the area of responsible decision-making. Mark mentioned, "Part of responsible decision making is ultimately the students'. It includes students having more ownership, more decision making." Mark referenced the choices related to course selection and community opportunities that increase during junior and senior year of high school as chances to support students making responsible decisions. Mark referred to "Building the value and the worth for them" as important to helping students make responsible decisions. Vera mentioned meeting with students as another opportunity to build responsible decision-making skills:

> We typically will meet with students, even before they make it to the [Intervention Team] agenda, and we say look we can give you all of these options but if you're not going to buy into any of them there's no point in us doing that. So I think we let students sometimes dictate the path that we pursue with them, because then they have ownership of that, and so I think that's a big step in the right direction. Sometimes that's enough for them to make progress because they had a choice in the path that they're going down.

Kim offered:

> I think asking them what their goals are and then we work backwards to how do you reach your goal. I think they need to have some choices in that if you need to do a certain thing in one month, do you want to work on this twice or three times a week, give them some choices and let them know that we would help them.

Responsible Decision-Making and Relationships. Kara reiterated the importance of relationships and noted how she felt relationships impact the skill area of responsible decision-making. She said:

I hate to always keep going to the same thing, but I do think again that skill is something

that gets developed through the different relationships that we refer the kids to. So, any

services that involved relationships, whether it be with a support staff or a teacher or

different things like that. It's through interactions, role modeling of that, and everything,

that I actually think builds some of the responsible decision-making if the kids are

struggling in that area and challenged in that area.

Overall, interviewees noted multiple types of interventions, including Gradpoint, choices around

course selection and Intervention Block, and interactions with adults, as perceived to increase

responsible decision-making skills in students.

Social Awareness

Social awareness was the next component of social and emotional learning explored with

participants. Social awareness was defined to participants as:

The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those

from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel

compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in

different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports,

(CASEL, 2020).

Mark commented:

I think that [the Intervention Team] helps identify the kids that struggle with self-

awareness but I don't think that they implement interventions to help. Many of the kids

who come through [the Intervention Team] really struggle in this area, I mean really

struggle.

Steve reported:

> I try to make them socially aware when I try to recommend things like, you know, speak
> up when things are inappropriate that are being said. I try to talk to them about it, make
> them try to understand it, but I still think we have a long way to go with social awareness.

Sarah stated:

> In making the choices they make in their unstructured time they are telling us they need
> adults, they need spaces, they need, you know, to feel safe, to be self-aware. They need
> someone to say hi to them in the morning, you know.

Kara offered, "I think this comes back to the mentoring and enrichment block in terms of different opportunities to teach these skills, referring certain kids to certain lessons." Steve said, "I really think we're trying as a school, and I think we're trying as a district to be more sensitive to students' needs."

Relationship Skills

Relationship skills was the last area of social and emotional learning that was addressed over the course of the semi-structured interview. Relationship skills were described to participants as:

> The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to
> effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the
> capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to
> problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing
> social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help
> when needed, (CASEL, 2020).

Mark noted "A lot of one on one with kids" as a helpful component of interventions that were perceived to increase relationship skills. Steve mentioned, "Without relationships, kids will not give you their best. Teachers say to me, 'Oh how'd you get them to work?' I was like, well, I just asked."

Relationship Skills and Personalized Relationships with Teachers and Intervention Block Mentors. Interviewees mentioned personalized relationships as perceived to be helpful when building relationship skills in students. Personalized relationships, as described by interviewees, were relationships where students felt connected to adults in the school building. Mark said, "They need the adult connection." Steve offered an example:

> A lot of times I have kids that don't want to let a teacher [teacher name] down, which I really appreciate because I think by building these relationships with the kids and being able to talk to them on their level they realize that it is not always about school work and academics. Relationship building will help me become a better teacher if I can get to know them on a personal level, their interests, and what makes them tick, as well as what their home life looks like, which is obviously a huge piece.

Kim identified that "Meeting with the teacher during [Intervention Block] and developing that relationship" had been perceived by her to be helpful in increasing student relationship skills. Vera felt that Intervention Block was a good opportunity for students to build personalized relationships with mentors. She mentioned, "I think we talked a lot about [Intervention Block] and building that relationship with the mentor just to give students another familiar face." Greg said, "We can work out a lot of the issues before they even get outside this classroom," when discussing his personalized relationships with his students.

Relationship Skills and Helping Relationships. Vera spoke of the role of helping relationships in increasing relationship skills. She said, "A lot of this is done through our social workers and guidance, but social workers definitely are the place where I think these things happen so sometimes these skills are built when social workers are working with these students." Greg remarked, "Not all but most of your problems that you will ever have can be solved by having good relationships with the people, the stakeholders, like not only your students, but the SPED department, the counseling department." Mark said, in reference to counseling relationships, "Those are relationships and kids appreciate those and they understand those." Kim noted, "I feel like social workers do a lot of that, helping with relationship skills."

Overall Beliefs About Relationships and Student Success. Steve's final comment about relationships was, "I firmly believe that the number one thing more than knowing your curriculum or pedagogy whatever it may be, I think relationship building with kids is the number one route to success in getting through to these kids." Sarah offered her beliefs about interventions and stated:

> Interventions only work when the adults who deliver them actually care about the kids who are there and that's not going to happen all the time. You just learn you learn along the way what's going to work for a kid and what isn't. You can have the best strategy in the whole world, but if the kid's not going to buy in, you make it work by finding out how to build those relationships. I mean I knew which teachers my kids needed to have and I'd say well this kid is not going to work with this teacher, so why are we going to knowingly push a kid into a teacher's classroom where it's not going to work now.

Greg shared the advice he gives to new teachers:

I tell it to young teachers all the time to forget about your lesson plan, forget about all

this other stuff, and worry about building relationships with your kids because that that's

going to make life so much easier. And be open with parents and things like that you

know. If you have good relationships with your students you're going to have success

with most of them, and I mean it's not hard to see who doesn't have good relationships

with their students around here. They butt heads with kids over little things.

Steve said:

I think you need to find out what makes these kids tick, what are some of the challenges

they are facing, how can you help them, then I believe you are going to ultimately help

them learn at a higher level. If you know how they learn and if you know what challenges

they're facing, you are apt to be more successful in the classroom.

Kara mentioned, "Definitely I'm a strong believer that the relationship is basically the first key

element for anything that the kids do here at the school." Overall, participants recognized

relationships as a key component of overall student success as well as intervention success.

Interventions Perceived to Have a Negative Impact

Over the course of the semi-structured interviews, no interviewees offered interventions

they felt had a neutral impact on students' academic and social and emotional success. However,

when asked if they perceived any interventions to have a negative impact on student academic

and social and emotional learning success, some interviewees offered more information. A

participant offered:

Some of the interventions the [Intervention Team] has done have been to remove kids

from settings and I think that if we could do more to try to keep kids in their setting and

to develop some skills. Or, instead, going way back we tried working through difficult

environments but it's difficult with relationships with teachers or peers.

Another participant mentioned:

 So, historically and I don't think this is necessarily the right thing to do, I think that

when a student has been a behavior concern or an attendance concern we end up putting

them in a Gradpoint class. I don't think that really solves the issue but it gets the student

to the finish line, so it's half the battle. But, it's not really helping the student develop the

skills that they need for self-management.

A participant pointed out:

 Some of these kids who are not self-aware, are not going to advocate for themselves and

seek those opportunities out, so I think it goes beyond academics and we would need to

help a student find where they belong. I think we could use the [Intervention Team] to

talk about what clubs and organizations, [Intervention Blocks], etc. do we have that

would fit the student to help them grow as a person to make them a little more self-aware

and become a better part of the community. I think we could do a better job of promoting

what we have based on students' personalities and their needs.

 Vera added, "Like if a student advocates for themselves and wanting a grad point class we've

explored that but that's really just them advocating for themselves we're not really supporting

them being more self-aware." While many of the interventions reported over the course of the

semi-structured interviews were perceived by staff to be positive, the above-mentioned

interventions were perceived to have a negative impact upon students' academic and social and

emotional success.

Perceived Barriers to Successful Interventions

Some interviewees mentioned school staff as a barrier to successful interventions. Steve noted:

We have some really great teachers in the building, however not all of them are very supportive and personable with the kids and tend to be very just straight ahead and focused on the curriculum, and not really veering off that path. I think some teachers still don't really see what a lot of these kids need within the classroom as well as outside of it.

Mark reported, "We try things, and then we don't sustain things. Nothing gets done at [school name] unless someone owns it." Mark also said, "We often get a lot of good people here with a lot of great ideas but [district] lacks follow through." Steve also offered:

I think right now we still don't have 100% buy in with teachers in terms of what a students' needs are and what we are trying to accomplish and the flexibility in terms of work completion that we ask for from them. Some are very good about it, others are still hesitant. Some seem to be stuck in their rigid ways where they don't want to budge, they don't want to be flexible. My question is are we really helping kids at that point if we're not willing to change our thoughts and methods and work with kids to help them find success.

Another area for potential improvement was noted by Kara:

I feel as though we're kind of limited on what we can like what options we have to refer them from the [Intervention Team] for interventions so much of the time I think a lot of the interventions are just so individualized versus like a school community.

Lack of data collection was also reported as a perceived barrier to successful interventions. Sarah stated, "We also need to measure." Mark said, "If we could somehow link our own research, like our kids, that would be great."

Potential Remedies to Barriers to Intervention Success

Some remedies were offered for the perceived barriers to successful interventions. Kara said:

> If we could really focus more on the preventatives versus the reactive, like we're looking at those kids because they're already struggling, versus identifying certain challenges that could be in place at the beginning and what can we do to try to build those skills so that they have them, so maybe they never get referred.

Mark mentioned staff training, "I think some strong professional development on RTI would really go a long way with our staff." He also offered, "I think a presentation and then like the principal saying I support this, this is allowed. Like some of our teachers don't think it's even allowed and are very stuck in the old traditional ways to help kids." Sarah said, "I like to think that interventions that the [Intervention Team] could find could go beyond two o'clock."

> Mark noted:
>
> I think what I've always said is what's good for one is good for all. Even if we're talking about you know, career interest inventories or you know learning profiles or things like it can be done for all. The issue, we would need to resolve is, we would need buy in from the staff to implement across the board.

Table 6 summarizes the perceptions of interviewees regarding which interventions address which areas of social and emotional learning.

Table 6

Social and Emotional Learning Component and Related Interventions as Perceived by

Interviewees

Self-awareness	Saturday school, student presentations to the Intervention Team, credit cards, relationships with supportive adults, intervention block, changing faculty or courses to meet student academic needs
Self-management	Executive functioning interventions, relationships
Responsible decision-making	Intervention Block, Gradpoint, student choices, relationships
Social awareness	Mentoring, Intervention Block
Relationship skills	Personalized relationships with teachers and intervention block mentors, helping relationships

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Intervention Team on students' SEL skills as perceived by school staff. As of the year 2020, it was unknown by educators and administrators employed in a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States whether the implementation of various interventions, aimed at increasing the SEL and

academic skills of students, was successful. Results indicated that 17 different interventions were mentioned at least once as being implemented by the Intervention Team over the course of interviews with eight participants. These interventions are listed in Figure 3. Interviewees then expressed which interventions they felt positively impacted which areas of social and emotional learning, displayed in Table 6. Additionally, interventions perceived to have a negative impact were explored. Potential remedies to increase the likelihood of intervention success were also offered by staff.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative program evaluation was to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Intervention Team on students' SEL skills as perceived by school staff. As of the year 2020, it was unknown by educators and administrators employed in a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States whether the implementation of various interventions aimed at increasing the SEL and academic skills of students was successful. Participants were asked questions during individual semi-structured interviews in hopes of providing insight into the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of SEL interventions are implemented by the Intervention Team to support students?

RQ2: How do the implemented interventions impact SEL success (student self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills), if at all, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2a. How do the implemented interventions impact the self- awareness, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2b. How do the implemented interventions impact the self-management, if at all, of students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2c. How do the implemented interventions impact the responsible decision making, if at all, of the students as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2d. How do the implemented interventions impact the social awareness, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

RQ2e. How do the implemented interventions impact the relationship skills, if at all, of the students, as perceived by the Intervention Team members?

Results indicated that 17 different interventions were mentioned at least once as being implemented by the Intervention Team over the course of interviews with eight participants. Participants perceived the interventions of Saturday school, student presentations to the Intervention Team, credit cards, relationships with supportive adults, Intervention Block, and changing faculty or courses to meet student academic needs as having had a positive impact in the area of self-awareness. Participants perceived executive functioning interventions and relationships to have a positive impact on self-management. Intervention Block, Gradpoint, student choices, and relationships were perceived by participants to have a positive impact on responsible decision-making. Mentoring and the Intervention Block were perceived to have a positive impact on social awareness. Finally, participants perceived relationship skills to be positively impacted by personalized relationships with teachers and Intervention Block mentors and helping relationships.

Participants perceived some interventions as having a negative impact on students' social and emotional learning and academic success. These interventions included any intervention that removed a student from a specific setting instead of teaching a student the skills they needed to remain in the setting. An example of this is moving students with a behavior or attendance concern to a Gradpoint class. Participants also offered some perceived barriers to successful interventions. Some interviewees noted school staff and lack of buy-in being barriers. Others noted lack of follow through and lack of data collection as barriers. Another perceived barrier was the lack of school community approaches to increasing student social and emotional learning and academic success. The participants thoughtfully expressed potential remedies to the

perceived barriers to intervention success. These included focusing on being preventative versus reactive, as well as offering increased professional development opportunities to increase staff buy-in and knowledge of current successful intervention strategies to utilize in the classroom.

It is important to note one discrepancy that is considered a limitation by this researcher. This discrepancy became apparent while interpreting the results of the present study. When asked to list interventions implemented by the Intervention Team, interviewees did not explicitly list all of the interventions they later reported when exploring specific components of the Collaborative for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020) model of social and emotional learning. A potential reason for this was that the interviewees did not think of some of the specific interventions in each area until the areas were defined in the context of the semi-structured interviews. This is viewed as a limitation by this researcher because not all interventions listed by participants were sorted into specific categories of social and emotional competencies by participants.

Interpretation and Importance of Findings

To better understand social and emotional learning (SEL) in the context of the Intervention Teams' efforts to support students, the CASEL framework (2020) of SEL was utilized as a lens through which to comprehend the perceived impacts of implemented efforts. The five areas of competency as described by CASEL (2020) included self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. By looking at the interviewees' perceptions of the Intervention Team's efforts to intervene with student SEL skills, a better understanding of the perceived effectiveness of the Intervention Team at implementing interventions increasing SEL and academic skills was gained.

The importance of understanding the perceived effectiveness of the Intervention Team at implementing interventions that increase SEL and academic skills is that if interventions are perceived to be effective at increasing skills, there may be a benefit to repeating the interventions. Additionally, if a student is perceived to be struggling in a specific area of SEL, interventions perceived by interviewees to increase skills in that area could potentially prove to be helpful. At the time of this research study, there was no available outcome data related to pre- and post-intervention implementation.

Self-Awareness

Participants reported positive perceptions of the interventions of Saturday school, student presentations to the Intervention Team, credit cards, relationships with supportive adults, Intervention Block, and changing faculty or courses to meet student academic needs as having had a positive impact in the area of self-awareness. This means that participants perceived these interventions as improving students' ability to identify the impact of one's inner thoughts, feelings, and values on one's behavior (CASEL, 2020). An example of the perceived positive impact of Saturday school is that a participant reported asking questions to students about why they were at Saturday school and that these reflective questions were perceived by the participant to have a positive impact on students' ability to identify and reflect upon thoughts about their own behavior. The implications of this finding include those students perceived to have weaknesses in the area of self-awareness may benefit from the above-named interventions.

Self-Management

Participants reported positive perceptions of interventions including executive functioning interventions and relationships as helpful to increasing student social and emotional learning and academic success. This means that participants perceived these interventions as

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improving students' ability to regulate thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to work towards the individual's goals (CASEL, 2020). Greg, a participant who is a content teacher, mentioned executive functioning group work with the school psychologist as being perceived to positively impact students' abilities to regulate their behaviors around planning to complete school work effectively. Therefore, the above-named interventions may positively impact students who are perceived to be struggling with self-management.

Social Awareness

Participants reported positive perceptions of the impact of interventions including mentoring and the Intervention Block on student's social awareness. This means that participants perceived these interventions to improve students' understanding of social and ethical behavioral norms and also the perspective of others, including demonstrating empathy (CASEL, 2020). Sarah, an interviewee, reported that students receiving support in the ISP often practiced social interactions during the Intervention Block and she perceived these interactions to increase students' self-awareness. Overall, students who are perceived to be struggling with social awareness may benefit from the previously named interventions.

Responsible Decision-Making

Participants reported perceiving Intervention Block, Gradpoint, student choices, and relationships as positively impacting students' responsible decision-making. This means participants felt as if these interventions helped to improve student abilities to utilize learned social norms, including safety concerns and ethical standards, to make sound social and personal behavior choices (CASEL, 2020). Multiple participants reported Gradpoint as being perceived to have a positive impact on students' responsible decision-making. Participants indicated that students must manage completing the course work on their own, which gave students

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opportunities to learn how to and execute responsible decisions. Overall, participants perceived these interventions as possibly benefitting students who are to be struggling in the area of responsible decision-making.

Relationship Skills

Participants reported perceiving personalized relationships with teachers, Intervention Block mentors, and helping relationships as positively impacting students' relationship skills. This means participants felt as if these interventions helped to improve students' abilities to communicate clearly, listen to others, cooperate, solve conflict effectively, resist peer pressure, and know when to access and provide help (CASEL, 2020). An example of personalized relationships with teachers was given when Greg indicated that a specific teacher often spends time with students one on one during after school hours to help them learn curriculum they are struggling with. Greg perceived students to be successful as a result of this intervention. Therefore, students perceived to be struggling with relationship skills may benefit from the intervention of receiving personalized relationships and Intervention Block mentors, as well as the intervention of having helping relationships.

The interpretation of the findings related to students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills is important because of the associations between these skills and school success. As noted by Mahoney et al. (2018), improvements in a wide range of behavioral and academic areas (positive social behaviors, lower levels of emotional distress, lower levels of conduct challenges, better academic performance including improved standardized test scores, better empathy, and self-esteem) are evident following interventions aimed at increasing SEL skills delivered in academic settings. Domitrovich et al. (2017) identified SEL competence as a critical factor in success in school and

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throughout life, and that these skills are especially important for those experiencing risk factors like behavioral and emotional problems and economic disadvantages. Domitrovich et al. (2017) also mentioned SEL competence as offsetting the negative impacts of risk exposure. Ura et al. (2020) noted significantly improved academic outcomes and social and emotional learning outcomes after the implementation of SEL programming delivered through direct instruction. Taylor et al. (2017) named similar findings with increased academic achievement post-intervention. Therefore, the Intervention Team at a public high school in the Northeastern United States may help to increase students' academic and social and emotional learning skills by implementing interventions perceived to positively impact student self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that the core competency areas of social and emotional learning as described by CASEL (2020) can be impacted positively by school-based interventions. These findings may be of use on many levels. First, these findings may be useful to individual students who are struggling to obtain academic and social and emotional success. Malti et al. (2016) noted that individualization of interventions beyond that of accounting for developmental differences within age groups is necessary. If interventions from the present study that are perceived to have a positive impact in areas of social and emotional learning that individual students are perceived to be struggling in are implemented, individual students may be able to find more academic and social and emotional learning success. For example, interviewees perceived changing faculty or courses to meet student needs as a way to increase student self-awareness. Making changes so that students feel comfortable in the environment they are in was perceived to give students more opportunities to feel they could speak freely, becoming more

self-aware. Some support exists in the literature for utilizing data to make decisions about individualized interventions. Bruhn et al. (2020) utilized data- based individualization to make decisions about behavioral interventions and their success. Students exhibiting challenging behaviors utilized a self-monitoring intervention that was technology-based and alterations to interventions were made based upon data (Bruhn et al., 2020). Results indicated significant improvements in positive behaviors (Bruhn et al., 2020). Little literature exists on these types of specific individual interventions, which was part of the rationale of the present study.

The results of this study may also be useful on a larger scale. For instance, group interventions or programming in areas of social and emotional learning may increase the academic and social and emotional learning of groups of students simultaneously. Claro et al. (2015) provided a model for considering the potential effectiveness of implementing small group social and emotional learning interventions. Claro et al. (2015) investigated the effects of implementing a school-based group intervention targeting maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation with 28 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17. The intervention group was made up of familiar peers from the same school who were categorized as being at risk of failure and were enrolled in special education services (Claro et al., 2015). This group made significant gains in using adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Claro et al., 2015). Participants in the present study perceived the students referred to the Intervention Team as being at high risk of failure and participants noted a portion of those who were referred to the Intervention Team to be enrolled in special education services. Claro et al.'s (2015) work is especially relevant to the present study due to these similarities. Therefore, the interventions perceived to have a positive impact in the present study may potentially have a positive impact when delivered in a group setting. An example of group programming perceived by participants to be effective at increasing

social and emotional learning skills in the present study was an executive functioning group. This group intervention was perceived to increase skills in the area of self-management by helping students manage their own emotions or behaviors. There is a possibility that some of the interventions that were perceived by participants to increase student social and emotional learning skills in the present study may be applicable to school wide social and emotional learning interventions that aim to increase competencies for all students. It is likely that all of these levels of interventions may have some success as there is evidence for such success in the body of available relevant literature.

CASEL (2021) offered a list of 77 programs with pre- and post-test outcomes available that demonstrated effectiveness in increasing SEL skills. Of the 77 programs, 30 programs were able to be utilized with high school students at the time this study was conducted (CASEL, 2021). Jones and Doolittle (2017) stated they believe schools to be the ideal place to intervene with a public health approach involving providing interventions to all instead of just those who seem to be most in need of support. Taylor et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 82 school-based universal SEL programs for students from kindergarten to high school including 38 studies that took place outside of the United States with the main goal of filling in the research gap of not knowing what the follow up effects are after implementation of SEL programs. The results of the meta-analysis indicated an increase in academic achievement post-intervention Taylor et al., 2017). Therefore, the interventions perceived to be helpful at increasing social and emotional learning skills in the present study may have value in the context of a school- based intervention. After considering the various levels of implication for the present study and how the findings may be applied at multiple levels (individual, small group, whole school), this researcher believes further implementation of the interventions perceived to be effective at

increasing student skills may be worthwhile.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations for action can be made. The first recommendation for action is for the Intervention Team to implement interventions perceived to have a positive effect on specific SEL competency areas for those students perceived to be struggling in those areas. Additionally, the Intervention Team should begin to collect data about interventions that are implemented and the impacts of these interventions. Suggested data could include academic grades pre- and post- intervention, as well as the number of behavioral incidents and presence or absence at school. Another recommendation for action is that a tool to assess student social and emotional competencies could be implemented. Utilizing this type of tool could help to proactively identify students who could benefit from social and emotional learning interventions to increase their skills.

There are benefits to stakeholders based on the results of this study and recommendations for action. Students may benefit from the continued implementation of interventions perceived to have a positive impact. Students may also benefit from data collection related to interventions because data will help to show the impact of interventions on individual students including additional areas for growth. Utilization of a tool to assess student social and emotional competencies could allow for proactive learning of skills in deficit areas. Stakeholders including Intervention Team members, teachers, administrators, and parents or guardians of students who receive interventions may benefit from increased overall academic and social and emotional skills within the students demonstrated through achievement and behavioral compliance. The school district as a stakeholder may experience fewer costs related to reactive supports for students by understanding what works for students experiencing skill deficits in the area of social

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and emotional learning. Results of the present study will be disseminated to the district level administrators and building level administrators who will then be able to choose how to share the results with the other stakeholders.

Recommendations for Further Study

Several areas in need of further study have been identified. This researcher was unable to locate literature related to specific impacts of SEL interventions upon those with mental health diagnoses. Due to the prevalence of mental health diagnoses in children, this research is likely to be a worthwhile contribution to the field. Also, this researcher was unable to identify literature related to interventions implemented to target areas identified as weaknesses in social and emotional learning after assessment of social and emotional learning competency area skills in individuals. It is likely that this would prove to be a worthwhile area of study due to the need for social and emotional learning skills across the lifespan. While much literature exists related to whole school interventions, the mentioned recommendations for further study may offer additional insight into social and emotional learning.

Conclusion

The present study was significant because it achieved its purpose of increasing the understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Intervention Team on students' SEL skills as perceived by school staff. As of the year 2020, it was unknown by educators and administrators employed in a suburban high school in the Northeastern United States whether the implementation of various interventions aimed at increasing the SEL and academic skills of students was successful. Results indicated that 17 different interventions were mentioned at least once as being implemented by the Intervention Team over the course of interviews with eight participants. Review of relevant

literature in the field indicated the potential promise of social and emotional learning

interventions in increasing academic and social and emotional success.

Participants perceived various interventions as having had a positive impact on student

self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and

relationship skills. Results revealed that addressing the specific impacts of SEL interventions

upon those with mental health diagnoses and assessment of social and emotional learning

competency in individuals are likely to be worthwhile areas of study due to the need for social

and emotional learning skills across the lifespan. While much literature exists related to whole

school interventions, the mentioned recommendations for further study may offer additional

insight into social and emotional learning. This study demonstrated the perceived potential for

social and emotional learning interventions to impact overall academic success.

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Appendix A

District Site Approval

██
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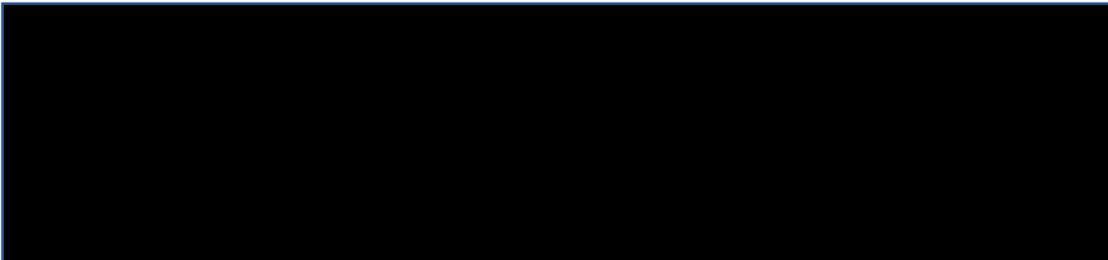
August 19, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Michelle Wright has my permission to interview staff and collect documents as part of a program evaluation of the ██ as part of her doctoral work at the University of New England. No identifying school district information or student data will be disseminated as part of this research. A final copy of the research will be given to the district.

Respectfully,

████████████████████
Superintendent of Schools

Appendix B

IRB Approval

UNE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Institutional Review Board
Julie Longua Peterson, Chair

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207) 602-2244 T
(207) 602-5905 F

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

DATE OF LETTER: January 17, 2022

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Michelle Wright
FACULTY ADVISOR: Ian Menchini, EdD

PROJECT NUMBER: 1121-10
PROJECT TITLE: Understanding the Perceived Impacts of Social and Emotional Learning Interventions on High School Student Success
SUBMISSION TYPE: Exempt Project
SUBMISSION DATE: 11/23/2021

ACTION: Determination of Exempt Status
DECISION DATE: 1/17/2022

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Best Regards,

Bob Kennedy, MS
Director, Research Integrity

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate

Semi-Structured Interview Participant Invitation

Dear <First Name>:

I am writing to ask for your participation in a semi-structured interview about your participation as a staff member on the Pathways to Success intervention team.

The purpose of this interview is to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of interventions recommended by the Pathways Team upon students' SEL skills and overall academic success. An understanding of which interventions may be helpful in increasing skills may help the Pathways Team to increase their rate of success at implementing effective interventions.

The semi-structured interviews will take approximately one to two hours and will be conducted outside of the contractual school day. The information gained from the interviews will be coded for themes and a copy of the final report will be given to all participants. The outcome of this project will be increasing insight as to which interventions work best in the context of the Pathways Team to support student SEL and academic success.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and none of the responses will be connected to identifying information.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may opt out of any question during the interview. All of your responses will be kept confidential.

Please respond to mwright12@une.edu to accept or decline this invitation.

Thank you for your consideration in providing this important feedback to help our students.

Sincerely,

Michelle Wright, SSW, LMHC
Doctoral Candidate, University of New England

Appendix D

Consent for Participation in Research

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Understanding the Impact of Social and Emotional Learning Interventions on High School Student Success

Principal Investigator: Michelle Wright

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of the proposed study is to provide an increased understanding of the perceived positive, negative, or neutral impact of social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions recommended by the Intervention Team upon students' academic and SEL success.

Who will be in this study?
Participants will be members of the Intervention Team who have volunteered their time to help offer feedback about the efficacy of interventions put into place by the Team.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about interventions implemented by the Intervention Team and how you think these interventions positively, negatively, or neutrally, impacted student success. You will be asked to review notes from your interview to make sure that the researcher's interpretations of your words are accurate.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?
There are no known risks inherent to participation at this time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

The benefit of taking part in this study includes the ability to process which interventions have made observable differences in student success. A benefit to the Intervention Team overall is that having this type of information will help provide insight as to which interventions should be implemented in the future to increase overall student success.

What will it cost me?
The interview process may take approximately one to two hours of your generously donated time.

How will my privacy be protected?
No identifying information from staff will be utilized in the reporting of the findings.

How will my data be kept confidential?
Your data will be kept on an encrypted, password protected computer and any physical notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Michelle Wright.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?
- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Michelle Wright and she can be contacted at mwright12@une.edu.

- For more information regarding this study, please contact Dr. Ian Menchini at imenchini@une.edu.

  - If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Michelle Wright at mwright12@une.edu.

  - If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?
- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____

- **Participant's Statement**

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

_____   _____
Participant's signature or   Date
Legally authorized representative

_____
Printed name

- **Researcher's Statement**

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

_____   _____
Researcher's signature   Date

_____

Printed name

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your role on the [Intervention] Team.
2. Please tell me about what you think the strengths and weaknesses of the [Intervention] Team are.
3. What types of interventions have you witnessed the [Intervention] Team implement?
4. As you know, the purpose of the current research is to evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions implemented by the [Intervention] Team to help students achieve academic and social and emotional success. Please consider 'academic and social and emotional success' to be increasing a student's ability to attend and participate in the classroom, and to increase compliance with school behavior, demonstrating increased SEL skills in the classroom, in the five core competency areas described by CASEL (2005). I am now going to explore the five core competency areas with you.
5. Self-awareness is defined by CASEL as the "abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose". What types of interventions put into place by the [Intervention] Team do you think pertain to self-awareness?
   a. What types of interventions pertaining to self-awareness do you think have helped students achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
   b. What types of interventions pertaining to self-awareness do you think have hindered students' ability to achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
   c. What other interventions do you think may be helpful for the [Intervention] Team to implement to support students' self-awareness and why do you think these may be helpful?
   d. Examples of self-awareness for any follow-up questions:
      i. Integrating personal and social identities
      ii. Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
      iii. Identifying one's emotions
      iv. Demonstrating honesty and integrity
      v. Linking feelings, values, and thoughts
      vi. Examining prejudices and biases
      vii. Experiencing self-efficacy
      viii. Having a growth mindset
      ix. Developing interests and a sense of purpose

6. Self-management is defined by CASEL as, "The abilities to manage one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations." What types of interventions put into place by the [Intervention] Team do you think pertain to self-management?
    a. What types of interventions pertaining to self-management do you think have helped students achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
    b. What types of interventions pertaining to self-management do you think have hindered students' ability to achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
    c. What other interventions do you think may be helpful for the [Intervention] Team to implement to support students' self-management and why do you think these may be helpful?
    d. Examples of self-management for any follow-up questions:
        i.   Managing one's emotions
        ii.   Identifying and using stress management strategies
        iii. Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation
        iv.   Setting personal and collective goals
        v.   Using planning and organizational skills
        vi.   Showing the courage to take initiative
        vii. Demonstrating personal and collective agency
7. Responsible decision-making is defined by CASEL as, "The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being." What types of interventions put into place by the [Intervention] Team do you think pertain to responsible decision-making?
    a. What types of interventions pertaining to responsible decision- making do you think have helped students achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
    b. What types of interventions pertaining to responsible decision-making do you think have hindered students' ability to achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
    c. What other interventions do you think may be helpful for the [Intervention] Team to implement to support students' responsible decision-making and why do you think these may be helpful?
    d. Examples of responsible decision-making for any follow-up questions:
        i.   Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
        ii.   Learning how to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts
        iii. Identifying solutions for personal and social problems

      iv.   Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions

      v.   Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside and outside of school

      vi.   Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being

      vii.   Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

8. Relationship skills are defined by CASEL as, "The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed." What types of interventions put into place by the [Intervention] Team do you think pertain to relationship skills?

   a. What types of interventions pertaining to relationship skills do you think have helped students achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?

   b. What types of interventions pertaining to relationship skills do you think have hindered students' ability to achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?

   c. What other interventions do you think may be helpful for the [Intervention] Team to implement to support students' relationship skills and why do you think these may be helpful?

   d. Examples of relationship skills for any follow-up questions:

      i.   Communicating effectively

      ii.   Developing positive relationships

      iii.   Demonstrating cultural competency

      iv.   Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving

      v.   Resolving conflicts constructively

      vi.   Resisting negative social pressure

      vii.   Showing leadership in groups

      viii.   Seeking or offering support and help when needed

      ix.   Standing up for the rights of others

9. Social awareness, according to CASEL, includes, "The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports." What types of interventions put into place by the [Intervention] Team do you think pertain to social awareness?

a. What types of interventions pertaining to social awareness do you think have helped students achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
b. What types of interventions pertaining to social awareness do you think have hindered students' ability to achieve academic and social and emotional success, if any?
c. What other interventions do you think may be helpful for the [Intervention] Team to implement to support students' social awareness and why do you think these may be helpful?
d. Examples of social awareness skills for any follow-up questions:
      i. Taking others' perspectives
     ii. Recognizing strengths in others
    iii. Demonstrating empathy and compassion
     iv. Showing concern for the feelings of others
      v. Understanding and expressing gratitude
     vi. Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
    vii. Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
   viii. Understanding the influences of organizations and systems on behavior
10. Is there any other input you'd like to share regarding the current research project?